

Indwe Environment Club working for cranes

Wakkerstroom is one of the places in South Africa with three kinds of cranes i.e. Blue, Wattled and Crowned cranes. On the 25th of March 2008 members of Indwe Environment Club got their hands dirty designing the crane feeding site for the wintering cranes. They started by clearing the invasive plants next to the Crane Hide which is the most famous bird hide in Wakkerstroom. The next step will be to set up crane decoys that will attract the cranes into their feeding site. Not only the cranes will benefit but other bird species like francolins and Cape Long Claws.



Listening To The Kliptown Community

The team conducted semi-structured interviews with local people from Kliptown who are using the wetlands for different reasons. Among them were Cattle- Goats- Sheep- and Pig farmers, local hunters and a Sangoma. The main objective of the research was to find out how local people use the natural resources from the wetland. The interviews were conducted using a research method called 'Participatory Rural Appraisals' (PRA). Various interactive tools are used giving the community members opportunity to illustrate their current resource use trends and express their concerns around the resource or their access to the wetland.



We found out that all of the resource users depend on the wetland for the grass and water for their livestock; that security of their livestock is a problem; and that farming is what they grew up doing and is all they know.

The Sangomas like to conduct rituals and collect some of their medicine in the wetland. Some of the challenges were mismanagement of the wetland where there is unnecessary burning and stealing of the livestock by local people. The follow up meeting will focus on the formation of relevant user group associations and a representative Kliptown Wetland Management Forum as there is a need to have a relevant structure for user groups to engage decision makers.

Resource Users From Esizameleni Participated In A P.R.A. Workshop



The Participatory Rural Appraisal workshop was held on the 25—26 of March in the BirdLife South Africa Centre in Wakkerstroom. The main aim of the workshop was to empower participants with knowledge and skills of engaging local resource user groups in decision making processes. Other participants were from Soweto—Kliptown (Gauteng) and Cata (Eastern Cape).

On the 28th of March 2008 the participants went to ESizameleni Community Hall where they were joined by cattle grazers, hunters, medicinal plant gatherers, reeds harvesters, and vegetable growers. Mr. Isaac Nkosi who is an agricultural representative for ward 5 stated that the workshop has been an eye opener to them. Follow up workshops shall be conducted in due course with the local resource user groups.

EVENTS

Cata get their 'Parrots in Row' for Cape Parrot Counting Day

This year's Cape Parrot Counting Day was different in Cata. For the first time, Cata community members have been involved in the counting and they did not let the bad weather to stop them. The weather on day one was cold, raining and windy, and the only people you could see in the streets were our counting team. There were 3 teams allocated to 3 patches of the forest in Cata. On day two the weather was no different except there was no rain. The teams gathered at 05h30 in the dark. The dedication was incredible. Why would community members show such commitment in bad weather and no payment? One community member said *"I was very interested in how this counting is done because I know it was not going to be easy to catch these birds and count them, and I was curious about the bird and what it looks like. I also wanted to know why BLSA is so interested in this bird. When the first group of birds noisily emerged from the forest and I was told that these were parrots, I suddenly realize that these are the same sounds from the forest nearby my house. When I saw them I knew these birds, I see them often especially during yellowwood season. Now that I have been involved in the counting I am developing a passion for Cape Parrots."*



National Bird Week

Monde also organised community events to celebrate National Bird Week. The events saw 45 community members participate in two days of celebrations and events. Day one consisted of presentations and a theatre production by the local youth about the importance of birds. Monde also made a presentation about the Owl and its myths and importance's. The community was encouraged to talk about their feelings regarding owls, and Monde was there to provide information about the true character of the bird and its importance in managing rodents. Day two saw three teams of adults and school learners head into the forest to see who could identify the most birds. The winning team got caps and Sasol bird field guides. Fun was had by all and it is becoming more and more noticeable how consciousness about birds is on the rise among the Cata people.

Wakkerstroom Celebrates World Migratory Birds Day

On the 10th May, the Hansco hosted World Migratory Day at the BLSA Wakkerstroom Tourism center. The event invited the Indwe Environment Club, Uthaka High School and educators. The day consisted of an ice breaker, Hansco explaining the purpose of WMBD, a presentation about the Mpumalanga Birding Route, a slide presentation about grasslands and water birds, a presentation on the importance of the local wetland, and a site visit to the Fluff tail hide to watch and talk about migratory water birds and the flyway conservation approach.

The local youth have been one of the Division's greatest assets, and Hansco has seen this potential. Hansco has been instrumental in guiding the Indwe Environmental Club, a volunteer group of concerned youth from eSizamaleni who and has been working with BLSA on various environmental projects, e.g. alien plant eradication around our hides. Hansco has also started working with school groups using the WESSA Eco-School programme to spread the environmental word.



Newsletter written and compiled by Daniel Marnewick, Monde Ntshudu & Hansco Banda—Community Based Conservation Division, BirdLife South Africa. E-mail: community@birdlife.org.za



**Newsletter of the
Community Based Conservation Division,
Soweto Project Site**

April 2008

LISTENING TO THE COMMUNITY

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On the 8th May the Community Based Conservation and Environmental Education Divisions celebrated National Bird Week with 80 learners, 10 community members, a story teller and a Sangoma at Nkathuto primary school in Dube. The celebration began by a welcoming from the educator Mrs. Tshidi Tekane who is coordinating the Eco-School programme. BLSA gave a 10 minutes video clip on owls narrated by Dr. Gerhard Verdoorn. The school's Eco-Club showcased an entertaining drama on the issues local people associate with owls, followed by our guest speaker of the day Murrice Slotar (Witwatersrand Bird Club) who presented a slide show on all 12 owls, their behavior, breeding time and life cycle. Martin (Soweto site manager) made a presentation about the community based conservation project, after which the Soweto Kliptown Youth did a 'conscious poem' about nature conservation, which was followed by a story teller, Bongani, who told a story about why owls fly by night. Makhosi, a local Sangoma lady, spoke about the importance of conserving owls and how Sangomas use owls to heal strokes and other diseases. The event was a huge success and ended with all the attendees receiving Sasol bird fair T-shirts, fridge magnets, and the school receiving Owl manuals from Murrice and four Robert's Bird guides from BLSA.

CELEBRATING NATIONAL BIRD WEEK



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Local Swazi Chief a pro-conservationist

A humble, down to earth, visionary, focused and principled traditional leader, that is how you can describe the Wakkerstroom District Swazi Chief. Chief Ndabazwe Shabalala is a traditional leader for amaDlangampisi Tribal Authority. He is of Royal Swazi blood with a very strong bond to the King Mswati III of the Swaziland Kingdom. Hansco Banda had been lobbying and engaging the chief in conservation issues and challenges facing the Wakkerstroom District.

Chief Ndabazwe has instructed the amaDlangampisi Tribal Authority to include Verraux (Black) Eagle on their letterhead in order to show his nation's support for nature conservation. During his recent meeting with Hansco he stated that a nation who does not conserve and preserve its natural resources is doomed to extinct. He strongly believes that the human race is the product of nature and its complicated processes. That was a very positive, emotional and optimistic statement from Chief Ndabazwe.

The Chief has pledged his full support for the local conservation initiatives for the sake of the endangered biodiversity and future generations.



Photo: Chief Ndabazwe Shabalala and Hansco Banda (BLSA community conservation Wakkerstroom Site manager)

Cata establishes its first ever Eco-Club

The 9th of August 2008 saw the formation and election of Ikhwezi Lentaba Eco-Club Committee. The club's main purpose will be heightening awareness about the environment and working towards building a new society of 'eco-warriors'. This eco-club will be engaging different age groups in the community in recycling, rehabilitating the river catchments, removing alien invasive trees and other environment related activities. Although the club will be run by youth, the elders have vowed to support this initiative. Everyone in a meeting felt that currently there are no environmental initiatives in the village and since nature provides for the community, the community needs to do something to show that they appreciate the this relationship and they will do this for present and future generations. A learner from local High School said "We have always taken our environment for granted, but now we can see how important our environment is to us. Different from urban residents we can still cook our food without having to buy electricity or paraffin whereas they have to pay to cook. Another reason I decide to be involved in this club is that I was involved in Cape Parrot Counting Day and the identification of different bird species that occur in our forest and had a lot of fun and wanted to do this more often".

BirdLife South Africa has been able to send one community member on the Bird Guide Training Course and given out 13 field guide books to learners who took part in the bird identification activity (this was all possible through funds from the Darwin Initiative). The eco-club meeting indicated that bird identification will be part of their activities with the help of newly trained bird guide.



Photo 1 Eco-club members



Photo 2 Eco-club Committee members

The club had the blessings of East London Museum's Educational Officer who has already given the club some ideas on activities and will be linking this club with other eco-clubs in the region to share information, knowledge and experiences. The driving force of this club will be 4 elected members of the committee (shown on the picture 2).

From BirdLife South Africa Community Based Conservation we wish Ikhwezi Lentaba Eco-Club all the success.



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Community Based Conservation - Empowering local people for local conservation and benefit sharing

Newsletter Issue 4, November 2008

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Greetings from the Editor/Division Manager

This has been a productive year for us and so not to steal the limelight from any of our achievements, this end of year newsletter is a bit longer. This year saw the community based conservation projects really come into their own. The trick with our community work, and what we believe makes it effective and hard hitting, is that it is very intensive and needs to adhere to the principles of sociology or anthropology (depending on which discipline you follow). A lot of time initial is spent understanding the people you work with and becoming a trusted member of that community. It reminds me of the anthropological adage:

‘Every North American tee-pee consists of five family members, namely the father, the mother, two children and an anthropologist.’

The division’s project site staff have not only become integrated in their respective communities, they have also become mentors to the youth, ‘partners’ in small community businesses, conservation practitioners, mediators and true community icons. Of course they were not able to please everyone and hence they also made enemies in a certain mining company and of corrupt officials.

Accolades for 2008 must go to Monde Ntshudu, Martin Ramothibe, Hansco Banda and Xolani Ngebenza for their outstanding work. Next year will be even more exciting as we see continued benefits rolling out for both the people and birds.

1. Communities Take Responsibility for their IBAs

a. **Wakkerstroom livestock owners shaping their destiny** by Hansco Banda

Sixty-six livestock owners attended BirdLife South Africa meeting organised for African livestock owners with the aim of forming an inclusive and democratic association. Hansco Banda presided over a tense and a slightly emotional meeting. The attendants listened attentively as Hansco presented to them BirdLife's findings about challenges facing livestock owners regarding grazing within Wakkerstroom municipal land.

Hansco urged the livestock owners to become organized and unite so as to resolve their challenges in an amicable manner. The meeting agreed unanimously to form a livestock owners association. Six individuals were elected to form Uthaka Livestock Owners Association's management committee. "This is the dawn of a new era and a sign of hope for the destitute residents of Wakkerstroom to shape a common destiny ever since 1994.": commented Mr. Isaac Nkosi who is the newly elected management committee member.

There is a continuous influx of people from surrounding rural areas to Wakkerstroom municipal land with their livestock. Hansco believes that the newly formed association is the vehicle to address grazing and environmental challenges and the degradation caused by overgrazing around Wakkerstroom.

b. **Participatory Forest Management for Cape Parrots** by Monde Ntshudu

In August a group of stakeholders came together to elect Steering Committee Members for Participatory Forest Management (PFM) in the Cata forests, part of the Amothole Mistbelt IBA. The PFM includes communities in the management of state owned forest or community owned forest (as in the case of the Cata community). The stakeholders included representatives from DWAF, Rance Timbers, Opstel, the Communal Property Association and Community members. This meeting felt it was high time that all forest users do something about the state of the forest since there was no representative body to take up or address forest use concerns.

Everyone agreed that the forest is being utilized unsustainably and that impacts negatively on the habitat of the different wildlife species, most importantly the endangered Cape Parrot, *Poicephalus robustus*. There are currently fewer than 1,200 birds left in the wild. Key threats are habitat destruction, seasonal depletion of food sources, low suitable nest-site availability, illegal trapping for trade and disease. The PFM agreed that in order to manage and save Cape Parrots and other wild life in Cata, proper management measures need to be developed and implemented. The meeting therefore elected a Steering Committee which will be the driving force on developing the plan.

"This PFM Management Plan will be our tool to protect the Cape Parrot habitat and therefore enabling them to breed without interference, and it is also good that this management plan will be available in our own language" according to the recently trained local Bird Guide.



2. Trees of Hope in Kliptown

 by Martin Ramothibe

The BLSA Community Based Conservation and Education Divisions celebrated Arbor day with Lilydale and Nka thuto primary schools, where some 120 people participated and planted 20 trees. Learners performed a drama on the importance and function of trees. A



further 16 trees were planted in the Kliptown community where about 40 people participated. This BLSA project will continue planting more trees in the community as part of our community conservation projects and contributing towards reaching Joburg City's target of planting a million trees by 2009.

3. **Young Birding Ambassadors in Soweto** by Martin Ramothibe

Ubuntu Eco- Club have been involved in raising awareness around the importance of conserving the wetland and birds in Soweto-Kliptown for the past four years. Twelve of the members underwent training on the basics of bird guiding. The club is busy developing a birding trail along the Klipspruit wetland which links Freedom Square to Thokhoza park where visitors will also get the opportunity to see some of Soweto's heritage sites such as Walter Sisulu and one of the oldest churches in Soweto known as Regina Namunde. Every Saturday the club has a 'culture of birding' walk along the wetlands recording and monitoring bird species. Recently the club has managed to plant 30 indigenous trees along the wetland to mark the Heritage-Birding trail. They are ready to take any interested local and international tourists on the walking trail.



4. **Vegetables for Food and Money**

a. Turning a Dumping Site into a Food Garden by Martin Ramothibe



Through the support of the BLSA Community Based Conservation project, members of the Kliptown community have joined together to develop food gardens on an existing dumping site in Kliptown- Soweto. This dumping site lies between the wetland and railway line. The vegetable growers are called Kgothlang Community Gardens which consist of eight local people. The group will be supported in terms of gardening tools and advice on how to manage the gardens and market their products. Some of them are already selling to local people. In schools like Nkathuto and Lakeview we have also developed food gardens and they are selling vegetables to local people.

b. Cata home gardens go Organic by Monde Ntshudu

The high price of food, taxi fares and energy are severely affecting poor, rural communities. Most families in Cata rely on pension grants to keep them going during the month and this is not enough. They have food gardens but insects seem to be a problem and there is no money for pesticides. BirdLife South Africa and Border Rural Committee partnered and called in the expertise of Earth Harmony Innovators who have done extensive work on organic farming in rural Transkei.



Before BLSA and BRC intervened most of the households had already given up home gardening and so the introduction of the organic vegetables workshop brought hope back to them. The workshop covered theoretical and practical methods on how to protect plants from insect damage, the value of weeds in building soil fertility, making compost heaps, the use of herbs for healing, ways of working with nature such as harvesting rainwater instead of letting it run etc.

The value of this is that they don't have to spend a cent in doing this. With recent rains in the Eastern Cape their gardens are looking good. The participants said this about the workshop: "We will not only apply these methods in our gardens but will share what we learnt with people in our village. We will work with nature and show respect for life. We will keep our homestead tidy as we collect tins, bones, etc to use in planting cycles. We thank BirdLife South Africa and Border Rural Committee that now we don't have to buy vegetables and so we can save money for other things and sell our very healthy vegetables to people who don't have time to plant vegetables. We realize now how important it is to work with the environment not against it. This improves the health and energy of the area the same way as we felt positive in the forest."

5. Money Money Money \$\$\$

The results speak for themselves... this year the division established 18 community owned small business enterprises, with a total of 108 direct beneficiaries (excluding family members) who earned R110,000 this year (mostly in the last half of the year). These businesses vary in size, but all contribute to the conservation of the natural habitat. Soon you will be able to view all the products and services offered by these projects on our website (see below).

a. Fighting Poverty in Informal Settlements by Martin Ramothibe

Masithandane Women's project is based in Soweto-Kliptown and is a initiative of the BLSA Community Based Conservation project. Ten women have undergone bead work training in order to make birds with beads. The group has sold some of their products to local and international tourists such as NBA players (USA). The group can design and make beaded goods and traditional clothes for different cultures. They are looking for more support in terms of marketing, resources and management if any one/corporate would like to support the group with resources.



b. BirdLife South Africa for the people by Hansco Banda

As you approach the village of Wakkerstroom you wonder as to what the ordinary people do to survive and to maintain their families. There are no industries and the majority of the people depend on agriculture as their means of survival. The majority of the economically active people is swallowed up by big cities like Johannesburg for employment while others are employed in the farming sector around Wakkerstroom.

That is the reason why the Community Based Conservation Division has a mandate to initiate and support any kind of income generating activity that will improve the socio-economic status of the previously disadvantaged Wakkerstroom community. To date, 8 income generating activities have been initiated and supported by BirdLife, namely community bird guides, poultry, grass and reeds, beadwork, community vegetable garden, medicinal plants harvesters, bird carving and traditional dancers' projects. Most of these community projects have business plans, constitutions and bank accounts. Recently BirdLife supported

Igugulethu Community Vegetable Garden Project with start up capital and irrigation material which costed in the region of R40 000.

At an open day that was organized by AmaJuba hospital in Volksrust, the Community Based Conservation Division displayed and marketed products that are produced by its initiated community projects.



“BirdLife South Africa has an obligation to play a role in reducing poverty levels through conservation.” commented Hansco Banda who is the Wakkerstroom Project Site Manager for BLSA.

6. Visit our Website

The Division has revamped its webpage and you can now meet the team, read about our vision and projects, do a virtual tour of our sites, see the products the communities produce and begin to appreciate the conservation impact that such intensive community projects can deliver. Please visit us at www.blsacommunityconservation.org.za or follow the community conservation links on www.birdlife.org.za

7. BirdLife Membership

BirdLife SA is currently on a membership drive and we encourage you to apply for membership on the BirdLife SA website www.birdlife.org.za and discover the benefits of supporting one of the top conservation organizations in the country.

The Fast and the Featherless by Daniel Marnewick



They are Fast, they are Featherless and they are Fearless. Like true hybrid cyclist-birders, they do it standing up, sitting down, uphill, downhill, in the rain or scorching heat - but always with binos around the neck and saddle between the legs... and of course in the name of birds. If reading that tired you out, then you will understand the lengths that BirdLife’s newly inaugurated The Fast & the Featherless cycling team is willing to cycle to raise funds for BirdLife’s conservation work. We have entered the toughest, longest, hardest races and we asking people to sponsor our efforts, either by per/km or lump sum donation. We are also looking for corporates to be a brand sponsor for a year.

So far the team has sweated in some four tough races, namely Dirty Harry, Crater Cruise (2 days), 94.7 mountain bike and road races among others, tallying almost 400km per person. Our last race for the year will be the grueling Sabie Experience middle of December, which will see 8 team members riding four days through the mountainous Sabie forests covering 250kms.

Support our dedicated team of riders and make our blood, sweat and tears worth the effort by sponsoring us at www.birdlife.org.za and click on the Fast&Featherless tab down the left.



8. Thanking Our Funders

As always, none of our work would be possible without our funders. So a big Thank You to:



Thanks very much for reading this newsletter and until next time enjoy your birding! We wish you all a relaxing and safe holiday and festive season.

To unsubscribe send the word unsubscribe to community@birdlife.org.za



Wakkerstroom stakeholder meeting

HOW COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IS AFFECTED BY IMMINENT THREATS

‘Community development’, ‘job creation’ and ‘poverty alleviation’ are some of the buzzwords bandied about by politicians and large organisations. These are undoubtedly critical issues in South Africa and should be prioritised if we are to create a socially and economically stable country. Over the past decade, the conservation industry has become one that seeks to make environmental change meaningful to social development and vice versa. Unfortunately, other industries or specific organisations have abused these priority issues to drive their own agendas.

Despite the strides made by government to provide basic services, the social demography of most big cities and small towns remains unchanged. Wealthier, predominantly white South Africans live in open, well-maintained suburbs, while poorer, predominantly black South Africans live in underdeveloped townships. A small place such as Wakkerstroom is an example of this: the town centre and farmlands host whites, while the majority of the community, who are poorer blacks, live in a confined township on its outskirts.

Poverty is associated with many social characteristics, but the two most prominent are desperation for work and poor levels of education. These communities are, therefore, targets for those industries that need to consult the community about expansion projects from which they will profit, and developers often use statements such as ‘job creation’ as the drawcard for the ‘public participatory process’. Of course, not everyone who

lives in an impoverished community is ignorant but, even to local government, economic development is critical and may overshadow the cost to or impact on the environment.

The Luneberg/Wakkerstroom area is presently facing just such a threat. A mining company is planning to mine for coal on the outskirts of the town. This company promises jobs, social upliftment and little impact on the environment. After serious interrogation of the project, BirdLife South Africa and other stakeholders are not convinced that any of these promises can realistically be met. We believe that the Luneberg/Wakkerstroom community will suffer socially and environmentally if mining is allowed, as avitourism and agriculture form the basis of the region’s economic activity.

BirdLife South Africa is utilising the strong local tourism industry to link community development to the conservation of the area. This mostly involves promoting the area as a tourist destination but, more importantly, ensuring that the impoverished community in the Wakkerstroom area receives a fair proportion of the direct economic benefits.

After working actively with members of the eSizamaleni community, many of these community members have been showing prowess when it comes to engaging the mining company, demonstrating that they will not be bought by a promise of jobs or money.

GRASSLANDS

now you see them,
now you don't

Grasslands are an important part of our existence in South Africa because, apart from supporting significant biodiversity, they are also water catchment areas. Unfortunately, they are one of the most threatened biomes in the country because of poor veld-management practices, such as overgrazing or over-burning, commercial deforestation, and alien invasive vegetation.

Grasslands are a particularly important habitat for birds, and an astonishing 14 species that occur in these areas appear on the Red Data list. These include Wattled and Blue cranes, Rudd’s and Botha’s larks, Yellow-breasted Pipit and Blue Swallow.

Here are some sobering facts that highlight the need for grassland protection:

30 per cent of the grassland biome has been irreversibly transformed

Only 1.9 per cent of the grassland biome is formally protected

Of the 80 vegetation types found in grassland, two are listed as Critically Endangered, 18 as Endangered and 27 as Vulnerable

Help conserve this precious biome by getting involved in campaigns such as the one recently formed to prevent mining in the grasslands near Wakkerstroom. For more information, contact Neil Smith on conservation@birdlife.org.za

NEIL SMITH

Besides the debate on the need for energy versus that to conserve biodiversity, there is also a necessity to show that conservation (of which ecotourism is a component) is a better long-term development option than, for example, mining. BirdLife South Africa intends using the Luneberg/Wakkerstroom mining issue to prove that community development linked

to conservation can indeed provide sustainable economic growth into the long-term future.

DANIEL MARNEWICK



FIGHTING POVERTY!

Project empowers women



Members of the Masithandaneni Women's Project show off their beautiful products.

Photo by Happy Baloyi

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By **HAPPY BALOYI**
A GROUP of unemployed women have found ways to fight hunger and poverty.

The Masithandaneni Women's Project formed their own business to generate an income.

When they started late last year, they wanted to bring people who had moved to the cities and forgotten their African culture back to their communities.

This group of eight motivated women design and run their traditional business at Kliptown Youth Centre in Soweto.

They design and make beaded goods and traditional clothes for different cultures such as *Mgaxo*, *Cimbi*, and *Mhengele*.

The People's Paper spoke to project leader Annah

Mathebula (54). She said the team never studied at an art school but are naturally talented.

Annah said she started doing beadwork and designing traditional garments when she was young.

"People encouraged me to take what I was doing further. Today, I lead a successful project where we make and sell beaded bags, traditional attire, necklaces and shoes."

She added that Masithandaneni Women's Project designs goods for many different cultures in South Africa.

They sell to the community and to tourists.

They are proud mothers who can put food on the table, and send their kids to school with pride.

For more information call them at 076 281 1069.

FLYWAY CONSERVATION

The Wings Over Wetlands (WOW) project is the largest international wetland and waterbird conservation initiative in the Africa-Eurasia region. The project is a partnership among international conservation organisations and national governments that aims to improve and conserve healthy, viable populations of African-Eurasian migratory waterbirds. This will be achieved by assisting a wide range of partners to conserve the key critical wetland areas



Wakkerstroom site manager Hansco Banda addressed the conference in the Netherlands.

needed by these birds to complete their annual migrations, by improving international cooperation and by building local professional capacity.

The area covered by this initiative includes all 119 range states of the UNEP-administered African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA), which covers Africa, Europe, south-west Asia, Greenland and the Canadian archipelago.

WOW is a joint effort between Wetlands International and BirdLife International, supported by the UNEP-GEF (Global Environment Facility), the government of Germany and other donors and partners. The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) has been engaged to support its implementation, and the WOW team operates in close coordination with the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, UNEP-WCMC

and many local partners along the African-Eurasian flyways.

A new web portal is being developed by the WOW technical team. This will provide access to information on over 400 migratory waterbird species, as well as their migration routes and the key wetland sites they use in the African-Eurasian region. Once developed, the Critical Sites Network (CSN) Tool will unify the conservation efforts of countries along the entire flyway by providing the improved data access needed for focused wetland and waterbird conservation.

WOW supports field projects in 11 wetland areas in 12 countries. These projects focus on conservation issues, such as community mobilisation, management planning, ecotourism, field research, wetland restoration, control of invasive species, transboundary management, education and alternative livelihoods. WOW demonstration projects are active in Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal/The Gambia, South Africa (at Wakkerstroom), Tanzania, Turkey and Yemen.

Objectives of South Africa's Wakkerstroom demonstration site:

GOAL To conserve the Wakkerstroom wetland by maximising biodiversity and the development of ecotourism to benefit local communities.

OUTCOME 1 Promoting and developing ecotourism to achieve an increase in visitor numbers and income flows to local people.

OUTCOME 2 Establishing a secure winter feeding site for the Blue and Grey Crowned cranes, and outreach for local farmers.

OUTCOME 3 Maximising the potential of the site as an ecotourism attraction by raising awareness of the local population and improving the habitat of waterbirds.

For more information, visit www.wingsoverwetlands.org or contact Hansco Banda (site manager) wakkerstroom@birdlife.org.za or Daniel Marnewick (division manager) community@birdlife.org.za

DANIEL MARNEWICK

Partners in Action

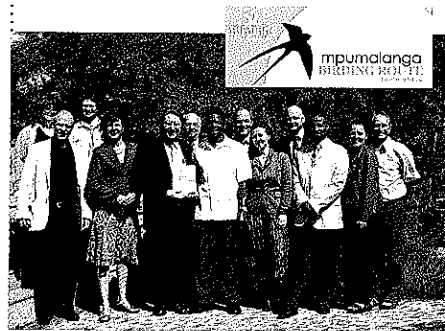
North-Rhine Westphalia (NRW) in Germany and South Africa's Mpumalanga have been working together as twin provinces since 1995. In 2001, the Mpumalanga Forum was founded to offer a platform for NGOs in NRW to exchange mutual information with similar organisations in its twin province. This year, a delegation of civil society members from NRW visited Mpumalanga from 11-19 May. The attending conservation NGO was Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU), a BirdLife International partner in Germany.

NABU arranged a meeting with the NRW-based InWent-Capacity Building International, a non-profit organisation dedicated to human resource development. InWent is keen to fund an important component of the Mpumalanga Birding Route project at Wakkerstroom – the promotion of the conservation of wild birds and their habitats by giving the communities in areas in which the route is situated an opportunity to experience the economic value of the birds.

A meeting was also held between NABU, BirdLife SA and the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA). The cooperation between the MTPA and BirdLife South Africa is vital to ensure that conservation areas are managed properly, and that opportunities are created for local communities to become involved in tourism and conservation.

NIKKI MCCARTNEY

MANAGER: MPUMALANGA BIRDING ROUTE

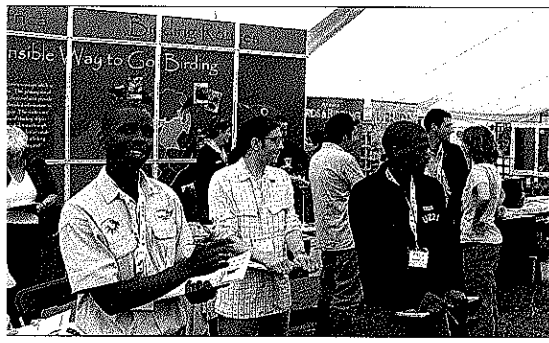


Werner Schroeder (NABU) and Nikki McCartney (BirdLife SA) with the North-Rhine Westphalia delegation, and Thato wa Magogodi and Charles Magagula of the Mpumalanga Provincial Government.

wings over wetlands
The UNEP-GEF African-Eurasian Flyways Project



The opportunity of a lifetime



Innocent Mzindle at the British Bird Fair.

On 13 August 2008, Impendulo Innocent Mzindle realised a life-long dream when he boarded a flight to England to attend the British Bird Fair. This is one of the world's biggest and most popular bird fairs, with more than 20 000 people attending.

Innocent attended the fair as a representative of BLSA and the Southern KZN Birding Route, which is funded by the SappiWWF Tree Routes Partnership. Says Duncan Pritchard, Avitourism Manager for BLSA, 'I believe that it is vital for the BirdLife South Africa-trained community guides to attend international bird fairs, not only to gain exposure to the international market, but also to experience first-hand what an inbound birding tourist would go through when travelling to South Africa.'

Innocent gained useful insights into the worldwide birding market, and these will

give him important skills to improve his services locally.

Matthew Drew, Project Manager of the Southern KZN Birding Route, believes that BLSA has succeeded in developing guides such as Innocent, who now has a far greater chance of becoming a sustainable tourism and conservation entrepreneur. This vision for modern conservation and responsible tourism accords with the vision of BLSA's Avitourism Division and that of the SappiWWF Tree Routes Partnership, namely, linking sustainable broad-based economic development to the environment.

To book Innocent's services as a guide, contact Matthew Drew on tel. 082 325 3514 or BirdLife Travel on 082 777 7202.

Innocent comments on his experience: 'As a guide, it is very beneficial to attend the fairs and meet international tour operators. In terms of doing business, it is good as you need to describe your country to people from all over the world. I can recommend it to other guides as it really opens your eyes. The best thing for me was representing BirdLife South Africa - I felt like I was a part of the team and I was an ambassador for South Africa.'

CATA ESTABLISHES AN ECO-CLUB

The inaugural meeting of the Ikhwezi Lentaba Eco-Club took place in the Cata community in the Eastern Cape on 9 August 2008. The club's main purpose will be to raise awareness about the environment and to work towards building a new society of 'eco-warriors'. It will be involved in recycling, rehabilitating the river-catchment area, removing invasive alien trees and other environment-related activities. The club, which has chosen the Cape Parrot as its emblem, will be run by young people, but has the support of the elders in the community.

A local high-school pupil said, 'We have always taken our environment for granted, but now we can see how important it is to us. Another reason I decided to join this club is that I was involved in the Cape Parrot Counting Day and the identification of different bird species that occur in our forest, where I had a lot of fun and wanted to do it more often.'

The club has the backing of East London Museum's Educational Officer, who will be linking it with others in the region to share information, knowledge and experiences.

MONDE NTSHUDU

Swazi Chief supports conservation in Wakkerstroom

Down-to-earth, focused and principled is how one could best describe Wakkerstroom District's Swazi Chief, Ndabazwe Shabalala (below, left), a traditional leader for the amaDlangampisi Tribal Authority. He is of Royal Swazi blood and has close ties to Swazi King Mswati III. Hansco Banda (below, right), BLSA community conservation site manager for Wakkerstroom, has been lobbying and engaging the chief in the local conservation issues and challenges, such as mining, that face the Wakkerstroom District.

Chief Ndabazwe, who has instructed the Tribal Authority to incorporate a Verreux's Eagle on its letterhead to demonstrate Swaziland's support for conservation, recently stated that a nation that does not safeguard its natural resources is doomed to extinction. He strongly believes that the human race is inextricably bound to nature. The chief has pledged his full support for the local conservation initiatives, which are working towards biodiversity and saving endangered species for future generations.

For more information about the environmental challenges facing Wakkerstroom, visit www.birdlife.org.za

HANSCO BANDA

