



# BirdLife South Africa joins the world to celebrate World Wetlands Day

Title World Wetlands Day celebrations remain a permanent fixture on the annual BirdLife South Africa (BLSA) calendar of events and this year BirdLife South Africa staff teamed up in different parts of the country to celebrate World Wetlands Day (WWD) 2012. The Conservation team (represented by Hanneline Smit and David Maphisa) celebrated the day at the Ingula site near Van Reenen where Eskom is building the Ingula Pumped Storage Scheme. As part of the World Wetlands Day celebrations, an evening programme was hosted by the Ingula Partnership at the Ladysmith High School where Hanneline Smit in her welcoming speech, expanded on the conservation focus through the Ingula Partnership. David hereafter entertained the pupils with a talk on wetland conservation. It was encouraging to share in the participation of the Ladysmith School pupils, through submissions of photos and poetry to a creative competition 'Conservation - good and bad aspects?'. The World Wetlands Day celebration was ended with a Wetlands walk at the Ingula upper site on Saturday 4 February, in which more than 110 people participated including the pupils from the Ladysmith High School and the local community of Van Reenen. The school pupils had a good time and learnt about their surrounding environment. BirdLife South Africa recently developed a Tourism Plan for the Mpumalanga Lakes District in Chrissiesmeer (Mpumalanga) and this presented an excellent platform for the WWD 2012 activities in the Chrissie Pans IBA. BirdLife South Africa (represented by Charmaine Uys), the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and Working for Wetlands: Eastern Wetlands Rehabilitation (EWR) organized the day's events. First they visited Njomane Primary School, where they gave a talk on the value of wetlands, sang a song about water, showed the learners some water invertebrates from Lake Chrissie, and handed out old issues of Africa Birds & Birding magazines. The joy and excitement from these kids was moving and made the team's efforts worthwhile! They then spent the afternoon with the EcoClub learners from Lake Chrissie Secondary School. Again they spoke about WWD, wetland values and conservation. EWR gave an inspiring talk on rehabilitation methods and job opportunities in wetland rehabilitation. They then all walked down to the KwaChibikhulu township wetland, where they did a mini South African Scoring System (mini-SASS) wetland health evaluation, seeing what little creatures live in the wetland compared to Lake Chrissie. This was a valuable practical lesson for the learners, relevant to their life sciences curriculum. After a litter clean-up in the wetland, they ended with lunch and a quiz (to reinforce important lessons for WWD). Thanks to Working for Wetlands for sponsoring hotdogs and cold drinks. The World Wetlands Day events in Chrissiesmeer were proudly sponsored by AECID. World Wetlands Day has been commemorated on 2 February every year since 1997. The global theme for 2012 is

Wetlands and Tourism. This theme is linked to the broader theme for the Ramsar Convention's 11th Conference of the Parties (COP 11), which is Wetlands, Tourism and Recreation. COP 11 will take place in June 2012 in Romania. We have witnessed how wetland tourism benefits people and wildlife in this country. Wetland tourism has not only created a stronger economy for our country, but has led to the promotion of sustainable livelihoods and thriving ecosystems. Tourism needs to be managed carefully in order to ensure that impacts from tourism do not jeopardize the very resources that tourists are coming to see. To date, the Ramsar Convention has not placed any specific focus on wetlands and tourism and with the upcoming Conference of Parties 11; the time has come to turn our attention to this important issue.