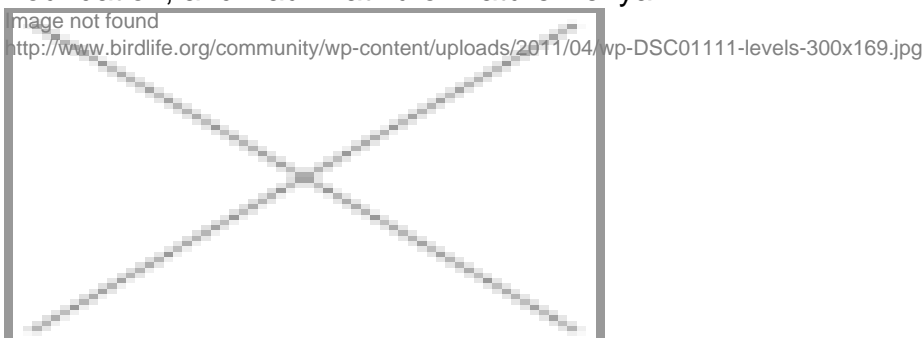


Proud moment as BirdLife Partnership in Africa launches Local Conservation Groups report

The BirdLife Partners in Africa have published a report on their experience of working with Local Conservation Groups (called Site Support Groups ? SSGs in Africa). Launched at a colourful ceremony in Kinangop, Kenya, the report underlines the principle that biodiversity conservation must coincide with sustainable natural resource management for the benefit of the local people. Members of the local community and other Kenyan SSGs, plus other NGOs and Government and donor representatives, were among those who attended the ceremony. Since the late 1990s, BirdLife has been nurturing and networking grassroots groups across the continent, working at Important Bird Areas (IBAs, -sites of global biodiversity conservation importance selected using standardised scientific criteria based on key bird species). Owing to its rich biodiversity, Africa boasts at least 1230 IBAs. The SSGs comprise dedicated individuals at the local level who volunteer their time and resources for the promotion of conservation and sustainable development at IBAs, and are part of national networks supported by the BirdLife Partners. [Click here to download the report](#) ?The report provides information on the characteristics and properties of the SSGs active in Africa, which should serve as an important baseline for measuring future progress of BirdLife International?s work in this area?, said Dr. Hazell Shokellu Thompson, lead author of the report and currently BirdLife?s Assistant Director for Partnership, Capacity and Communities. The launch ceremony was attended by the current members of the BirdLife Africa Regional Committee, chaired by Mourad Amari of AAO in Tunisia, and Mark Anderson of BirdLife South Africa as the Vice-chairman. Other members of the Africa Regional Committee present were Chipangura Chirara of BirdLife Zimbabwe, Emmanuel Obot of Nigeria Conservation Foundation, and Paul Matiku of Nature Kenya.



BirdLife Africa Regional Committee chair, Mourad Amari of AAO in Tunisia, hands a copy of the report to Mr. Kariuki Muchiri, the local Councillor (Antoinette Otieno)

Nature Kenya has been at the forefront of developing the SSG approach, and the Executive Director, Paul Matiku, was excited that the launch of this report took place in Kenya and at Kinangop Plateau, which hosts one of the oldest SSGs in Kenya and in Africa. This occasion was also used to launch the third nature reserve for the Sharpe's Longclaw, established by Nature Kenya and World Land Trust (WLT) at Leleshwa. With generous support from the Jensen Foundation, Netherlands Committee of IUCN and the World Land Trust, Nature Kenya has been purchasing land for the establishment of community-managed nature reserves, to demonstrate sustainable land-use that protects biodiversity as well as benefitting local community livelihoods. BirdLife does not advocate any one model of local involvement in IBA conservation, but encourages the kind of diversity which reflects the richness of the BirdLife Partnership's membership, and the diversity of social, economic, cultural and political conditions where BirdLife works. The SSGs are actively involved in a wide range of conservation activities which include research and monitoring, education and awareness, and development of site-specific solutions that combine conservation with sustainable livelihoods. By the end of 2010 there were 211 SSGs spread throughout the 23 African countries that comprise the BirdLife Africa Partnership. "There is a conscious recognition that successful conservation needs the wholehearted support of local people, and that they should be fully engaged in the process at all stages. The conservation approaches of the past which promoted exclusion of local people are no longer relevant - they turned potential conservation allies into adversaries, to the detriment of the biodiversity value of the sites", said Mr Mourad Amari. Dr. Julius Arinaitwe, Regional Director for BirdLife Africa, said: "BirdLife has developed a suite of tools to assist Partners and SSGs in their work, including the Site Support Group Capacity Assessment Tool (CAT), guidelines for SSG collaboration at the grassroots level, and guidelines for monitoring the socio-economic impacts of projects at IBAs. Through the SSG approach, BirdLife is keen to see appropriate institutions built, networked, capacitated and promoted for the benefit of both people and biodiversity, in as many African countries as possible." The SSG review report provides some recommendations including the need to improve the legal status of the SSGs to enhance their legal entity and foster empowerment, the need for strategic plans for development of these structures at all levels, and improved data management for site conservation. Mr Wachira Kariuki, who spoke on behalf of the Friends of Kinangop Plateau SSG, said: "The production and launch of this report is a proud moment for the Friends of Kinangop Plateau SSG. We have shown over the past 15 years that by working together, we can safeguard the natural resources for the benefit of our children." BirdLife is grateful to the Aage V. Jensen Charity Foundation for supporting the production and launch of this review report, as well as the work by BirdLife Partners in Africa in setting up and developing the capacity of SSGs. For further information, please kindly contact: julius.arinaitwe@birdlife.org