



SUSTAINING A HEALTHY PLANET REQUIRES ALL OUR EFFORTS THIS INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR BIOLOGICAL BIODIVERSITY

21st May 2015

Start

Can the planet still bear the growing human population and sustain plant and animal species to the benefit of all? With only one planet and limited natural resources available for the survival of all living creatures, including seven billion people worldwide, the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) calls on all South Africans to join us in marking this *International Day for Biological Diversity* on 22 May 2015. The over exploitation and uneven use of our natural resources is a major threat to our biodiversity.

Despite the declining rate of our biodiversity, South Africa remains one of the countries with high levels of biodiversity. South Africa occupies only 2% of the world's land surface area and yet is home to 10% of the world's plant species and 7% of its reptile, bird and mammal species. Our oceans are home to about 10 000 life forms representing 16% of the world's marine wildlife. Our country ranks as one of the top birding destinations in the world and is a sanctuary to more than 9000 plants species and home to the magnificent Big Five, a big draw card for our tourism.

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), globally about one third of all known species are threatened with extinction. That includes 29% of all amphibians, 21% of all mammals and 12% of all birds. If we do not address the threats to biodiversity, we could be facing another mass extinction with dire consequences to the environment, economy, human health and our livelihoods.

In line with the *International Day for Biological Diversity* 2015 theme "Sustainable Development", there is a growing need for business, civil society and governments around the world to manage and protect the natural capital on which we all depend.

As one of South Africa's leading biodiversity conservation organisations, the EWT is aware of the importance of integrating the conservation of species, habitats and ecosystem processes and we therefore focus much of our work on protecting both threatened species and habitats. The species we work with often act as indicators of the health of the ecosystems in which they occur. Successful conservation thus means protecting the habitats that support species – including human beings – and in this way entire ecosystems reap the benefits of our work.

To highlight *International Day for Biological Diversity* and raise awareness of the declining state of our biodiversity and the need to reverse this trend, the EWT will be facilitating awareness sessions and events.

The EWT will take part in the clearing of Alien Invasive Species in the Modderfontein Reserve on 22 May from 10:00 AM and will use this as platform to raise awareness and teach local learners about the importance of sustaining our biodiversity. Other activities will include bird watching and guided walks. For more information please contact Rachel Serakawana on rachels@ewt.org.za

"Alien plants are renowned for their efficient root systems that out compete our indigenous species for resources such as water. Alien Invasive Plants take over natural ecosystems and habitats, thus affecting the existence of both our flora and fauna. The alien plants are detrimental to biodiversity, loss of habitat and displace indigenous animals leading to local extinction. The loss of nesting, feeding and breeding areas impacts on the productivity and succession of individual species" remarked Boaz Tsebe, The EWT's Urban Conservation Manager.

He continued, "The Modderfontein Reserve not only protects the indigenous fauna and flora in the area, but also provides an attractive open space within the urban fabric, where Johannesburg residents can come and enjoy its natural beauty without travelling too far from home." The reserve is open to the public and operates from 06:00-18:00 daily. The entrance fee is R30 per adult and R15 for kids and pensioners. Bookings can be made at info@modderfonteinreserve.co.za or 079 519 1589.

The EWT's Threatened Grasslands Species Program will be presenting to the KZN Hunting and Advisory committee, on 22 May, on the plight of the Oribi in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and also share how the EWT's is addressing this. Oribi are Endangered in South Africa and regularly fall prey to packs of illegal hunting dogs because of their size and their instinct to hide rather than run away from predators. For more information please contact Samson Phakhati on samsonp@ewt.org.za.

The EWT's Threatened Grassland Species Programme is part of the Oribi Working Group, a multi-disciplinary formation which includes representatives from Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (EKZNW), NCT Forestry, University of KwaZulu Natal and Landowners. Its core function is around ensuring the long term survival of Oribi (*Ourebia ourebi*) through working with landowners and the general public in creating awareness about Oribi requirements and the threats which have lead to local extinctions.

Dr Ian Little, EWT's Threatened Grassland Species Programme says, "The important aspect to remember is that the extinction of a species in itself may not be of significance but the loss of each species is a symptom of the over-arching breakdown of the systems on which the earth requires to sustain life, including humans. An analogy could be the detection of a small malignant lump on a human body, the lump in itself is treatable and may not be of concern but it is a sign of imbalance and disease that if untreated will result in systematic failure."

The EWT's African Crane Conservation Programme will be holding an awareness sessions with learners from GoxHill Primary,Thukeyama Primary,and Camanga Primary in the Underberg district on the 26th and 27th of May. The sessions will focus on the imporatnce of catchments and wetlands.

The EWT urges South Africans to reclaim their passion and zeal for our natural heritage and start to reduce, re-use and recycle our natural resources to protect our precious biodiversity.

End.

Contacts:

Boaz Tsebe

Urban Conservation Programme Manager: Modderfontein Reserve

Endangered Wildlife Trust

Tel: +27 11 372 3600/+27 79 519 1589

boazt@ewt.org.za

and

Dr Ian Little
Threatened Grassland Species Programme Manager
Endangered Wildlife Trust
Tel: + 27 33 330 6982 /C + 27 84 240 7341
Email: ianl@ewt.org.za

and

Lillian Mlambo
Communications Manager
Endangered Wildlife Trust
Tel: +27 11 372 3600
lillianm@ewt.org.za