



7 May 2020

### **The Endangered Wildlife Trust celebrates World Migratory Bird Day 2020**

*Start*

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) will be celebrating and supporting World Migratory Bird Day on 9 May 2020. The theme of this year's celebrations is *Birds connect our world* and it was chosen to highlight the importance of conserving and restoring the ecological connectivity and integrity of ecosystems that support the systems that are essential to sustain migratory birds across their flyways. André Botha, manager of the EWT's Vultures for Africa Programme, explains: "At a time when global air travel by man has, to a large extent, come to a standstill due to COVID-19 restrictions, the annual migration of millions of birds across the world continued uninterrupted during March and April. These flights are not without challenges, with a range of potential threats impacting many individuals who undertake these arduous journeys twice a year, often between hemispheres, continents, and at a more local level. The migrations do, however, illustrate the connectivity of habitats used by these migrants across flyways, and the need for coordinated conservation action along these, irrespective of international boundaries."

To celebrate World Migratory Bird Day, the EWT will be hosting a Wild Chat webinar on Friday, 8 May 2020, at 11:00 (GMT+2), entitled [Craniacs! Everything you want to know about cranes](#). You can also follow our social media on Saturday, 9 May, where we will be sharing fun activities for the whole family, such as lessons on how to fold Origami cranes, as well as more information on the amazing feat that is bird migration.

The EWT has been involved in the Migratory Kestrel Project since the early 2000s, and also partnered with researchers from Germany and Hungary in the trapping and fitting of satellite tracking to the first Amur Falcons whose migratory movements were tracked after being trapped by volunteers at Newcastle in 2010. Another sample was tracked in India in 2016, and one of the females from this sample has just completed her eighth non-stop migratory flight of about 4,500-5,000km across the Indian Ocean between Africa and India since being tracked. Another individual completed this crossing in mid-March this year, departing on 21 March and arriving in eastern India on 26 March, having covered 4,800km in just five days. From here, the Amur Falcons still need to fly around the Himalayas to their breeding grounds in eastern China and Mongolia, a total distance from their wintering grounds in southern Africa of as much as 13,000km! These birds will again make the journey south in October/November to over-winter back here during our summer.

These birds not only travel extraordinary distances, they also face immense challenges. During the recent African summer months, many volunteer observers noted a significant decline in the number of some migratory species, such as Amur- and Red-footed Falcons and White Storks, that were present in the region compared to previous years. This can possibly be ascribed to the massive Brown Locust eruptions that were observed over large parts of east Africa that likely provided an abundance of food and resulted in many birds remaining up there rather than moving all the way to southern Africa. However, the extensive control measures, such as the aerial spraying of chemicals to kill locust flocks, implemented by authorities in the affected areas, raise concerns about possible large-scale poisoning of these species in such areas when they consume insects that were killed by these measures. The above is an example of the range of threats faced by birds while on migration and illustrates the need for coordinated and concerted conservation action across the flyway.

In collaboration with the Wageningen University and the Peregrine Fund, the EWT is also currently undertaking novel research to understand the breeding and migratory ecology in the intra-African migrant, the Wahlberg's Eagle. Very little is known about this migratory eagle and our research is geared to identify the important flight pathways, overwintering, breeding and stopover sites used by the species so that we can develop and implement conservation action to protect these sites. To date, nine individuals from have been fitted with GPS tracking units. The four birds that the EWT GPS-tagged in South Africa undertake a round trip of over 10,000 km every year from their overwintering grounds in Chad and South Sudan to their summer breeding sites in South Africa.

The EWT has multiple programmes that work on migratory species, including the Birds of Prey, Vultures for Africa and African Crane Conservation programmes. Although South Africa's cranes are non-migratory, this is not the case for most of the world's 15 crane species. Our range of projects and partnerships, across a variety of countries in Africa, enables us to contribute to conservation initiatives in some key areas along major migratory flyways on the continent. While most of the migratory bird species that occur in southern Africa have by now departed north to their breeding or wintering grounds, it is still important for us to observe this day and support the need to conserve them and the habitats that they are dependent on.

### **About the Endangered Wildlife Trust**

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) has worked tirelessly for close to 50 years to save wildlife and habitats, with our vision being a world in which both humans and wildlife prosper in harmony with nature. From the smallest frog, to the majestic rhino; from sweeping grasslands to arid drylands; from our shorelines to winding rivers: the EWT is working with you, to protect our world.

The EWT's team of field-based specialists works across southern and East Africa, where committed conservation action is needed the most. Working with our partners, including businesses and governments, the EWT is at the forefront of conducting applied research, supporting community conservation and livelihoods, training and building capacity, addressing human wildlife conflict, monitoring threatened species and establishing safe spaces for wildlife range expansion.

A beacon of hope for Africa's wildlife, landscapes and communities, the EWT is protecting forever, together. Find out more at [www.ewt.org.za](http://www.ewt.org.za)

**Contacts**

Belinda Glenn

Marketing and Communications Manager

Endangered Wildlife Trust

[belindag@ewt.org.za](mailto:belindag@ewt.org.za)