



## THE ENDANGERED WILDLIFE TRUST CALLS FOR SOUTH AFRICANS TO CELEBRATE BIODIVERSITY DAY

22<sup>nd</sup> May 2012

*Start*

Marine Diversity is the theme for 2012's Biodiversity Day and the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) calls on South Africans to celebrate the glorious diversity of life on our planet and the ways in which all forms of life are crucial to our survival as the human race.

Biodiversity refers to the full range and diversity of all living organisms in terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems, and the ecological processes that occur between them. It is the genes, species (plants and animals), ecosystems and the ecological and evolutionary processes that allow these elements of biodiversity to persist. This rich biodiversity underpins the ecosystem services that benefit people, through, for example the provision of services and goods such as clean air, water, food, medicine and fibre, as well as more complex services that regulate and mitigate our climate, protect us from natural disaster and provide us with a rich heritage of nature-based cultural traditions.

South Africa is among the most biodiverse countries in the world and is equally blessed with a rich diversity of cultural heritage, which is integrally linked to our natural world through our history, our evolution, our development, our livelihoods and our unique South African way of life. 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. We are the only country in the world to contain a floral kingdom fully within our own borders and the Cape Floral Kingdom is home to over 9 000 plant species.

"Our oceans are home to approximately 10 000 marine fish and invertebrates species, representing 23 % of the world's marine species. The country's situation at the Southern tip of Africa, together with the dynamic oceanographic conditions, has created a huge diversity of marine habitats enabling distinct species and communities to evolve. It was recently estimated that 13 % of the marine fish species, and 36 % of the marine invertebrate species that are found along the South African coastline occur only in our waters. Of concern however is the fact that of our 34 marine biozones, 65% are threatened, with 12% being Critically Endangered, 15% Endangered and 38% Vulnerable. Stocks of eleven of our line fish species are considered collapsed and while 21.5% of our coastline is in Marine Protected Areas, only 9% is fully protected as no-take zones," commented Anthony Bernard, Programme Manager of the EWT's Source to Sea Programme.

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The Endangered Wildlife Trust is a non-profit, public benefit organisation dedicated to conserving species and ecosystems in southern Africa to the benefit of all people.

**NPO Number:** 015-502, **PBO number:** 930 001 777, **Member of IUCN** - The International Union for Conservation of Nature  
The Endangered Wildlife Trust is US 501(c)(3) compliant under **US IRS Registration number:** EMP98-0586801.



Said Yolán Friedmann, CEO of the EWT: “Most people are aware of the alarming rate at which our planet continues to lose precious biodiversity despite the commitments made by the signatories to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2002 to reverse this trend. We remain a country with extraordinarily high levels of biodiversity but need a much greater commitment to conserving it and honouring our obligations to both the Convention as well as our people. Underpinning our ability to reverse the ongoing loss of biodiversity is not necessarily the strength of our legal regime or our enforcement agencies, but the passion and zeal for our natural heritage, which we South Africans need to reclaim.”

Biodiversity conservation requires a holistic approach in order to reap true successes. Therefore, the EWT focuses on identifying key factors threatening biodiversity and developing mitigating measures to reduce these. Through a broad spectrum of partnerships and networks we develop innovative best practice that supports sustainable development whilst reducing negative environmental impacts and through our more than 80 field based projects, we promote harmonious co-existence and sustainable living for both people and development.

“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 ecosystems and we therefore focus much of our work on protecting both threatened species and habitats. The species on which we work 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,” continued Bernard.

Biodiversity has, in the last decade, moved from the fringes of conservation into the very centre of political and socio-economic discussion and concern. Reality is dawning that for many businesses to remain competitive they must identify the natural resources on which they depend and the resulting impacts of their operations, present and future, and then skilfully manage and protect this vital natural capital to remain functional and profitable.

“It is now essential for businesses to mainstream biodiversity concerns into the organisations’ objectives and processes. The move from a reactive to a proactive approach in order to manage the relationship between a company with the natural capital on which they depend, is critical and becoming a strategic imperative. It also presents a competitive advantage, as the management of the natural capital should not only be regarded as a source of business risk but also of opportunities,” stated Dr Marie Parramon-Gurney, the EWT’s Head of Sustainability and Development.

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Make sure to take this day to celebrate our biodiversity and reflect on how we can all do our bit for Biodiversity Conservation. Find out how you can do your part to preserve our water and marine resources by visiting the EWT's website at [www.ewt.org.za](http://www.ewt.org.za)

For further information on biodiversity and our Source to Sea Programme please contact Anthony Bernard [anthonyb@ewt.org.za](mailto:anthonyb@ewt.org.za)

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