



ACTIVIST RIDES 1 800KMS FOR THE PLIGHT OF THE BLUE SWALLOW

Start

Chris Wyatt, 25 year old musician from Howick in KwaZulu Natal, will be cycling a staggering 1 800kms in order to bring attention to the plight of the Blue Swallow *Hirundo atrocaerulea*. The local Blue Swallow population is facing a risk of certain extinction if both their breeding and non-breeding habitats cannot be urgently secured. Wyatt's journey began in Howick on the 12th of May and he will be riding up through the Golden Gate area, down to West side of Lesotho, through to George and then on to Cape Town where the ride will end.

According to Dr. Ian Little, Programme Manager of the Endangered Wildlife Trust's (EWT) Threatened Grassland Species Programme, "Loss of suitable habitat is the primary cause of Blue Swallow's population decline, however causes for recent continued declines are uncertain. Four known regional populations of Blue Swallow have already gone extinct in South Africa in the past decade. This includes a breeding population that was in the Kaapsehoop region, which was once recognised as a Blue Swallow Natural Heritage site.

The South African population currently consists of fewer than 38 known breeding pairs, with less than five remaining in Mpumalanga and 35 in KwaZulu-Natal. These alarming numbers resulted in the South African population of this small, charming little bird being listed in the Eskom Red Data Book of Birds of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland as *Critically Endangered*, and the population has continued to decline since this listing was recorded. The total global population is thought to number about 1000 breeding pairs but these data are however currently under review by the newly instated International Blue Swallow Working Group. In South Africa, the breeding population is monitored as part of a long-term project run by the EWT's Threatened Grassland Species Programme. Long-term monitoring is essential to determine population trends and thus, provide valuable information to conservation authorities in order to inform grassland management decisions.

Said Wyatt: "I want to accomplish something great, something bigger than myself and for more than myself and what better quest to rally behind than the one of saving this amazing species from extinction. I hope that by undertaking this ride I can attract real attention to the plight of the species and the valuable work that the EWT is doing to reverse the rapid decline and likely extinction of the South African population of the Blue Swallow."

Once this solitary ride to Cape Town is completed Wyatt and a team of like minded activists will be cycling from South Africa to Uganda, following the Blue Swallow migration route, in order to further highlight the plight of the species.

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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
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Little and his team at the EWT have also discovered that the number of breeding pairs continues to decline regardless of how many fledglings are produced each year. “We currently have no idea as to the survival rate of these fledglings. In order to gain a better understanding of the mortality rates of these birds we have begun to conduct research utilising microchip technology. We started PIT-tagging the fledglings in November 2011. PIT-tags – or Passive Integrated Transponders – allow us to monitor the juvenile survival rate and reproductive success, among other important conservation related questions, of the birds. We will only start receiving results when the birds return from their winter migration next summer.”

The Blue Swallow will be completely extinct in South Africa within the next decade if radical intervention does not take place. We need to immediately focus our attention on the conservation of this species’ habitat in conjunction with urgent, in-depth research into the further causes of the species population decline. This is the only way we will be able to pull the Blue Swallow from the brink of extinction in our country.

If you would like to become an activist for the Blue Swallow register yourself on GivenGain at www.givengain.com or contact Dr Little on ianl@ewt.org.za or Vanessa Du Plessis, EWT’s Head of Business Development and Funding on vanessab@ewt.org.za

End

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