



CELEBRATING WATER. CELEBRATING LIFE

22nd May 2013

Start

Water is life and not a single living organism on earth could survive without it. Rivers form the lifeblood of our existence and protecting these crucial ecosystems is becoming more and more critical as economic development and growing populations require increasing amounts of water. Throughout southern Africa, freshwater ecosystems are under severe pressure with more than 80% of South Africa's rivers being threatened. On International Biodiversity Day the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) urges all South Africans to celebrate this precious and scarce source of life and take urgent, personal action to preserve it.

"Freshwater biodiversity is the over-riding conservation priority during the International Decade for Action. The theme for the decade – spanning from 2005 to 2015 – is *Water for Life*. The United Nations has proclaimed May 22 'International Day for Biological Diversity' to increase awareness of biodiversity issues. The theme for 2013 is Water and Biodiversity and was chosen to coincide with the United Nations designation of 2013 as the International Year of Water Co-operation," commented Bridget Corrigan, Manager of the EWT's Source to Sea Programme.

Over 10 000 fish species live in fresh water while goods and services derived from inland waters, such as food and drinking water, water filtration and flood control, have an estimated global value of several trillion US\$.

"Within South Africa, a systematic assessment of river biodiversity found that 84% of river ecosystems are threatened, with 54% critically endangered. Only 16 of the 112 main river ecosystems are moderately to well represented within protected areas and, as a result, South Africa's river ecosystems are under more pressure than its terrestrial ecosystems," said Garth Barnes, WESSA Conservation Director.

To highlight the declining state of our freshwater systems and the need to reverse this trend, the EWT will be facilitating three events taking place in the Magliesberg in the North-West Province, the Groot Marico in the North-West Province, and Howick in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). The details for all planned activities are as follows:

- The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), and the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) are coming together to raise awareness and teach local learners about the

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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.



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importance of aquatic biodiversity and its link to the protection of our water resources. This event, hosted by Happy Acres Environmental Education Camp in Magaliesberg, celebrates the *Water and Biodiversity-themed International Day for Biological Diversity* and showcases the importance of building the capacity of future leaders to understand the significance of our country's water resources. The learners, drawn from Eco-schools in the vicinity, will use Mini-SASS, a low technology, freely available water biomonitoring tool that can be used by any age group without the need for a laboratory, to test the water of the Magalies River. Mini-SASS enhances learners' environmental education capabilities, while providing scientifically robust water quality data, thereby empowering learners to deepen their knowledge of aquatic biodiversity while contributing to a body of knowledge about our country's river health.

- Mmutlwa wa Noko, the EWT 's community based partner on the Crocodile-Marico Catchment Conservation project, will be hosting a community information day in Groot Marico, along the flagship Marico River to highlight the importance of the system and water resource to the traditional communities. Officials from the Department of Water Affairs will participate to get a sense of the water issues experienced by the community in this conservation-priority catchment.
- The EWT's Threatened Grassland Species Programme, headed by Dr Ian Little, is hosting a landowner engagement and feedback day for farmers who have Oribi on their land. The Oribi, a small antelope occurring throughout the eastern grasslands of South Africa, has been classified as Endangered because of its rapid decline in recent years. The eastern grasslands are the water catchments of our country and Oribi are thus species flagships for water conservation. The landowner engagement will be held in Howick, KZN, at the Karkloof Country Club from 09h00 to 13h00.

For further information about the Source to Sea Programme please contact Bridget on bridgetc@ewt.org.za. The EWT Healthy Rivers Project is funded by the Elizabeth Wakeman Henderson Charitable Foundation and Rand Merchant Bank. For more information about WESSA and their projects, contact Garth Barnes on gbarnes@wessanorth.co.za.

For further information about the Threatened Grassland Species Programme please contact Dr Little on ianl@ewt.org.za. The Threatened Grassland Species Programme's Oribi Working Group is supported by Rand Merchant Bank, Mondi Ltd, Mazda Wildlife Fund, Farmers Agri-care and NCT Forestry Co-operative Limited.

End

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