

What does the **B** stand for?

This is the BirdLife SA alphabet. We want to know what the **B** stands for ...

A is for **Avitourism**. The best tourists to attract to your country, they have high incomes, high discretionary expenditure – and spend it in the right places, rural areas rather than resorts. BirdLife SA is helping to attract these high worth individuals to our country.

B

C is for **Conservation**, and BLSA **clubs**, which have 5431 members. With our members help we are conserving the Bald Ibis, Cape Parrot and have an internationally acclaimed marine conservation scheme saving thousands of Petrels and Albatrosses. Then there is a special focus on our **Community Conservation** division, involving communities in sustainable use of natural resources. And the **Clear Channel Bird Reserve** in the heart of Bryanston on the William Nicol, a new bird reserve managed by BirdLife SA next to St Stithians School.

D is for **development** of bird routes, of people, of habitats, or programmes to protect birds, of academic research, of databases. All in every day's work at BirdLife SA.

E is for the **Eco-schools** project. Or **Environmental Impact Assessments**, at places like Roodekrans, Nylsvley, Chrissiesmeer and La Mercy – how will each of these developments affect the birdlife? BLSA helps determine this and thereby formulate government policy.

F is for **Finance**, without which little gets done. BLSA needs money to do all that it does. This year we raised too little. Help us. Even if it is just a little left in your will, so your grandchildren can enjoy the birds you have enjoyed. Make BLSA a beneficiary and your gift will last forever.

G is for **Goals**: conserving birds and their habitat, raising awareness, identifying and saving endangered species. It is also for Garden birds, the prime reason many people become passionate about birds. BirdLife SA helps to make sure they'll still be there for future generations.

H is for the **Habitat** protection programme. Loss of habitat is probably the most important reason for declining species numbers. BLSA is working 24/7 to conserve habitat wherever possible. But we need your help. H is also for Hunting Regulations. Protected species need protection from hunting, and hunters need education and awareness to keep wingbirds sustainable. Who does this? You guessed it.

I is for **IBAs** which are Important Bird Areas. From learning at a training workshop in Kenya to getting SA's 122 IBAs ready for the flood of 2010, when the world's top journalists arrive to cover soccer and will be invited to spend a day at any IBA at BirdLife's expense, there is much to do. We want to guarantee the writers they'd have a better time watching birds for a morning than watching Bafana Bafana ... practice. Then there is the I for **Invasive species management**, where BLSA is committed to eradicating the messy alien House Crow which supplants our local crow.

J is for **Juveniles**, the ones pictured in all the bird books that look different from adults, and the human ones we need to attract to birding so they are taught to love the environment, protect the habitat, and perhaps become ornithologists **when** they fledge.

K is for **Knowledge**, for that is what most birders seek to gain from BirdLife SA. About themselves, about the environment, about conservation, about protection, and yes, about birds.

L is for **Lifer**, bird talk for the first time you see a new bird. Some birders are "twitchers" and count the species they see each time, while others merely like to watch, or conserve, or research. All are birders, all intent on conservation, protection and delight in birdlife.

- M** is for **Membership**. Are you one? If not, as they say in Parliament, why not? You can join right now by telephoning 011 789-1122 or to get information on where to find your nearest BLSA bird club which will welcome you like a lost chick, give you loads of information, invite you to join their guided outings or suggest some tips on how to go it alone if that is your preference. Joining BirdLife SA is your first step to helping conserve and protect South Africa's special birdlife.
- N** is for **National Bird Week**. Hundreds of thousands of children and millions of South Africans are involved in this week in which schools focus on our bird life with lessons and practical assignments. Who organizes it? BirdLife SA, of course.
- O** is for BirdLife SA's famous **Owl Awards**, given long before Harry Potter was even a thought in J K Rowling's head. They go to people who do something special for birds. You could earn one someday.
- P** is for **Pesticide** policy. How to destroy the old ones without damaging the environment. Which ones are "good" pesticides? How to prosecute those who won't listen, how to remove those which pollute the environment, killing our birds, fish, plants. BLSA is not just involved, it leads the charge with experts like BirdLife CEO Gerhard Verdoorn. And of course P is for **Penguin**, BirdLife SA's Bird of the Year 2007
- Q** is for **Questions**, like "What bird is this?" or "How do we feed the owlet we found?" which get answered daily on the BirdLife SA website, or by patient staff answering telephone queries. OK then, sometimes not so patient if the caller can't distinguish a sparrow from an Ostrich.
- R** is for birding **Routes**. Some really exciting developments have seen new birding routes developed in southern KZN, Greater Limpopo, Kruger-to-Canyons, Soutpansberg, the Diamond Route, Northern Cape. Now who do you think helped to do all this..?
- S** is for **SAFRing**, which rings birds with colour-coded rings so their activities, flyways, breeding patterns and populations can be monitored to allow better protection and for the sake of scientific research. It is a wonderful project, always under-funded.
- T** is for **Training**. Bird guides by the score (and at an ever increasing sophistication), coastal management staff in the Eastern Cape, Free State officials on wildlife poisoning. Training never stops but is vital. If you think their education is expensive, consider the cost of ignorance.

U is for the **University** of Cape Town’s Percy Fitzpatrick Institute and its Avian Demography Unit, or UCT’s Fitztitute’s ADU, to make it less of a mouthful. This is Southern Africa’s premier research unit for ornithologists, producing scores of PhDs and housing the biggest open bird book library in the world. Now who would they be associated with? Good guess! And BLSA is in turn associated with BirdLife International.

V is for **Vultures**, of which South Africa has many species, but BirdLife SA is fortunate in having a world expert on Vultures, Dr Gerhard Verdoorn, as its CEO. Listen to him describe vulture behaviour as a corporate entity and you will not only laugh, you will never forget it.

W is for **Wakkerstroom** (and Water birds). It is time to “skrik wakker” and visit one of SA’s many top birding destinations, this one only a few hours from Johannesburg. BLSA has a centre there and can provide a trained guide to find and identify some of the 400-odd species resident in this special place. Of course if you’d rather do it yourself you are welcome, but do remember who helped to conserve this priceless wetland with its three rare specials: Rudd’s Lark, Botha’s Lark and Yellow Wagtail.

X is for that **eXtraordinary** new place to go to see birds. It marks the spot where you will get a “lifer” – that elusive bird you have always wanted to spot – or where you will discover a new bird, or a new **eXperience**, or even a new person, courtesy of BirdLife SA.

Y is for **Why?** Why should you be a member of BirdLife? What does BirdLife do? Some of the many things are listed above, and if you are interested in conservation, identification, research, scientific study, observation or simply the enjoyment of birds, join now.

Z is for that place where birds are kept in captivity, but also for the many **Zoologists** employed by conservation organizations, like BirdLife SA, to help us conserve, observe, deserve and serve our magnificent bird life.

by Peter Sullivan, Chairperson, BLSA