SABAP2 BENEFITS BIRD CONSERVATION

One of the main aims of the Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP) is to map the distributions of birds in southern Africa and track how these are changing. However, mapping bird distributions is only one step in the process to conserve birds and their habitats. To drive effective conservation actions, the data must be analysed and made available to conservationists and this is done in various ways.

Red listing assesses the extinction risk for each species. For birds, this process is managed on behalf of the IUCN by the BirdLife partnership. In 2015, BirdLife South Africa published the regional red list for the birds of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland, based in large part on the comparison between SABAP1 and SABAP2 data. Red list assessments are extremely important for determining conservation priorities and they feed directly into regional and global conservation decisions.

Conservation must be proactive and develop tools to guide land-use management. South Africa has excellent environmental legislation, which includes the use of Critical Biodiversity Area (CBA) maps. As the name suggests, these maps highlight areas that are crucial for conservation, an especially important consideration in a mega-diverse country like South Africa. By ensuring that the habitats used by threatened birds are included on these maps, we can ensure that birds are not negatively impacted by unsuitable developments.

Deciding which areas are critical for threatened birds relies on combining data from SABAP2 with fine-scale 'Habitat Suitability Models'. The sensitive areas identified are then included in the CBA maps and the National Environmental Screening Tool (*https://screening.environment.gov.za/screeningtool/*). BirdLife South Africa recently developed habitat maps for 38 threatened bird species and more species maps will be generated in 2021. When the footprint of a potential development overlaps with one of these layers, it will raise red flags that will have to be considered in the Environmental Impact Assessment. SABAP2 data were also crucial to identify the locations of Key Biodiversity Areas, a new global standard to map priority areas for the conservation of all biodiversity.

Birders benefit from SABAP2 data because they provide up-to-date distributional information for field guides and other bird books. Birders can also create their own checklists of the species found in a given area by visiting the SABAP2 website.

In addition, educating the conservationists of the future is an important conservation 'action'. Many postgraduate students analyse SABAP data as part of their studies and atlas data are often used to initiate academic research. More than 200 scientific papers have been published since the launch of SABAP in 1990. These papers cover a wide variety of topics, from changes in species distributions to threat assessment. A full list of papers using SABAP data is available at *http://sabap2.birdmap.africa/media/bibliography*

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SABAP2 data for the Martial Eagle are used to inform conservation planning in South Africa, in so doing contributing to the species' conservation.

The SABAP2 Steering Committee thanks every atlaser who has submitted data to SABAP2 – your efforts really help make a difference. We also thank every student, data analyst, GIS specialist or conservation planner who transforms the data into useful information and maps that can be used to conserve the wonderful diversity of birds we have in Africa.

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