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**BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA**  
**GUIDE TRAINING PROJECT - LIMPOPO**

Funded by

**SWISS-SOUTH AFRICAN CO-OPERATION INITIATIVE (SSACI)**

**Project Evaluation: Final Report**

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May 2010

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## OVERVIEW

BirdLife South Africa seeks to promote the conservation of birds and their habitats. An important component of this vision is to promote and develop South Africa's potential as an avitourism destination. This creates opportunities for local communities to benefit from conservation-related activities, and therefore participate in the protection and conservation of local natural assets.

SSACI's overall objective is *"to advance education opportunities for disadvantaged young South Africans in order to enable them to obtain employment."* SSACI also gives priority to fostering micro-enterprises, recognising these as the most rapidly-growing sector of the South African economy, with the highest rate of growth in employment. SSACI has supported projects seeking to assist specifically youth in rural or peri-urban areas, where there are few job opportunities and high dependence on social grants, with enterprise development.<sup>1</sup>

Between January 2008 and March 2010, BirdLife South Africa received financial assistance from SSACI to train 20 bird guides from communities in the Soutpansberg, Waterberg and Nylsvley districts of Limpopo province, and to establish them as self-employed tour guides in local bird habitats. Funding was also made available to upgrade the infrastructure at two campsites in Venda so that they could be added to a birding route under development.

This report is the outcome of a summative evaluation of the project. It seeks also to extract information and lessons that can inform the design and implementation of future development projects of a similar nature.

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<sup>1</sup> The evaluator has conducted evaluations of two of these types of project, one with Thembaletu Home-based care in the Nkomazi region of Eastern Mpumalanga, and the other a micro-enterprise development project in Harrismith, both in 2008.

## THE PROJECT CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

### SSACI's GOALS

SSACI's principal goal is to promote the social and economic development of South Africa's youth. Its major focus is on assisting young people (18-35) in getting sustainable long-term employment.

South Africa's rate of youth unemployment is among the highest in the world. With 65% of youth under 24 unemployed, it is "*in a league of its own*"<sup>2</sup>.

To achieve its goals, SSACI has identified sectors of the economy which are growing, and offer job opportunities from that growth. These sectors offer relatively low barriers to entry so that, with some training, young people can access them, and still have opportunities for advancement. Tourism is one such sector.

SSACI also supports the development of a vibrant micro-enterprise sector in the country, recognising that, despite the obstacles young people face in starting up and running their own businesses, these enterprises offer significant opportunities for employment.

The difficulties associated with it are myriad, largely related to a lack of technical skills, work and life experience, access to networks and capital. Nevertheless, self-employment in a micro-enterprise is often the only option young people have if they are to enter the working world, even if it only serves to facilitate a better pathway to employment in the formal sector.<sup>3</sup>

Urban areas are not the only focus of SSACI's support. In rural areas, unemployment rates may be roughly the same as in urban areas, but the

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<sup>2</sup> Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE); "*South Africa's Door Knockers: Young people and unemployment in metropolitan South Africa*"; CDE In Depth, no 9, July 2008, p18

<sup>3</sup> SSACI, *Supporting Youth Entrepreneurship in South Africa*, 2005

numbers of people who have given up looking for work is 50% higher.<sup>4</sup> SSACI was considering options for rural youth support when it met up with BirdLife South Africa (BLSA).

## **BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA**

BirdLife South Africa (BLSA) is a non-profit, public benefit environmental organisation. A partner of BirdLife International, the mission of BirdLife South Africa is to promote the enjoyment, conservation, study and understanding of wild birds and their habitats.

## **AVITOURISM**

The mission of BirdLife South Africa's Avitourism Division is to develop South Africa as the world's leading birding destination for the benefit of birds, their habitats and communities through responsible avitourism.<sup>5</sup> It creates the opportunities for communities to engage with birds and birding by training people from the communities to act as local guides, and provides infrastructure and support to them so that ultimately communities will derive financial benefits and therefore participate in conservation. The use of community guides is desirable as they have proven to be effective environmental stewards.

The avitourism division has developed a network of Birding Routes through South Africa's best birding areas. Each route has provided mentoring and capacity-building within a manageable area for guides to learn their trade. Each area has a reasonable subset of birds and birding destinations. Spin-off benefits are the encouragement of responsible eco-tourism, and promotion of South Africa as a prime tourism and birding destination.

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<sup>4</sup> CDE; "South Africa's Door Knockers: Young people and unemployment in metropolitan South Africa"; CDE In Depth, no 9, July 2008 p18

<sup>5</sup> Information obtained from [www.birdlife.org.sa](http://www.birdlife.org.sa)

The local guide training initiative has had some success. Successful guides have been trained in the birding routes of Mpumalanga, KwaZulu Natal, the Western Cape and Limpopo. To date, over 100 local community members across South Africa have been trained.

### **The Economic Potential of Avitourism in South Africa**

Avitourism is a small niche market, but one with high growth potential. Research conducted for the Department of Trade and Industry in 2009 estimates the total size of South Africa's current avitourism market at between 21 000 and 40 000 tourists per annum.<sup>6</sup>

Domestic tourists make up the bulk of this figure, both in numbers and in contribution to overall revenue. At the upper end of estimates, there are approximately between 13 000 and 24 000 domestic avitourists annually, spending between R482m and R890m annually. The 8 000 to 16 000 international avitourists spend between R309m and R618m annually. *“Collectively these avitourists spend an estimated R972m to R1,725bn on birding trips, support services and equipments annually”*<sup>7</sup>. The research suggests that up to R47m is spent annually on tour guides.

Avitourists are *“typically well-educated, have high levels of ecological knowledge and greater awareness of conservation issues”*. They also spend more than tourists in other niche markets.

Given the current size of the overall spend on tour guides, and under-use of community guides, expanding the opportunities and usage of community bird guides carries the potential for significant economic benefit to previously disadvantaged people and communities. This is manifested in increased

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<sup>6</sup> The Dti; (2009) *Avitourism in South Africa: Opportunities and Recommendations Final Version*; November 2009; Kaiser and Associates; Anchor Environmental; ED/GE Tourism Solutions

<sup>7</sup> The Dti; (2009) *Avitourism in South Africa: Opportunities and Recommendations Final Version*; November 2009; Kaiser and Associates; Anchor Environmental; ED/GE Tourism Solutions (p9)

incomes, enterprise development, capacity building, and a sense of empowerment and self-worth.

## **ORIGINS OF THE SSACI-BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA AVITOURISM PROJECT**

A visit to Eshowe, on the Zululand Birding Route, where people from local communities had been trained, and were operating successfully as freelance guides, impressed SSACI.

The Zululand Bird Route, established in 1997, was the first avitourism development for BLSA. It has played an important conservation role in the area, and demonstrated that birding tourism can generate income for bird destinations and the local communities. It has been successful in that it has been able to engage a wide network of stakeholders in both the public and private sector, and has trained over 35 local guides from rural communities across the region, who now have an income and a career path.<sup>8</sup>

BirdLife SA's proposal to train and support local guides on their newly established Greater Limpopo Birding Routes was therefore attractive to SSACI in terms of its own goals. It was involved in a growth sector, tourism, focused on rural youth in one of the poorest provinces in the country, and aimed to assist young people with economic opportunity in their own local communities.

Limpopo Province faces serious social and development challenges. It has an unemployment rate of 48.8%. Women head more than half of all households, and almost 4.6% of households are headed by young people under 19.<sup>9</sup> It has huge reserves of agriculture, mining, conservation and tourism resources.

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<sup>8</sup> BirdLife South Africa (2007), *The Zululand Birding Route 10 year Experience*

<sup>9</sup> Limpopo Department of Health and Social Development (undated); *State of the Province Whole Report*; accessed from [www.dhsd.limpopo.gov.za](http://www.dhsd.limpopo.gov.za) on 19 April 2010

## **THE GREATER LIMPOPO BIRDING ROUTES**

The Limpopo Province offers one of the most exciting birding destinations in South Africa. It is home to a great variety of species in diverse habitats. It has three national parks and numerous provincial and municipal reserves within its borders, as well as a large number of private reserves.

The Greater Limpopo Birding Route is newer than the Zululand Birding Route, and therefore not as developed. It covers a vast area, and consists of the Soutpansberg–Limpopo Birding Route, the Capricorn-Letaba Birding Route and the Waterberg-Nylsvley Birding Route.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT**

The Project Description, attached to the agreement signed by SSACI and BirdLife South Africa, lists the outputs and activities of the project as:

1. To train 20 tour guides (10 each year) to the THETA Level 2 standards for “*conducting a guided birding experience in a limited geographical area*” to offer tours along 8 -10 birding routes in Limpopo. This training will comprise:
  - A 30-day residential training course at BirdLife South Africa’s Wakkerstroom Tourism Centre, covering birds and their habitats, tour-guiding, first aid, communication and basic business skills.
  - A three-month practical internship at a birding site.
  - Assessment and registration as an official guide by DEAT and Limpopo Parks and Tourism.
  - Quarterly workshops and monitoring visits by BLSA in 2008 and 2009.
2. To develop basic facilities (paths, hides and campsites) along the Golwe and Gundani routes in Venda as well as one or two routes to be identified in the Waterberg and Soutpansberg districts.
3. To market the routes and its guides to established tour companies and networks.

4. To consult with local and provincial conservation authorities with a view to developing tourism infrastructure.

An action plan designed to achieve these outcomes lists eight specific objectives for the project:

Objective 1	Selection of local bird guide training candidates.
Objective 2	Training of guides.
Objective 3	Maximise operational situation of guides.
Objective 4	Develop relationships with local and provincial conservation authorities.
Objective 5	Guide mentorship.
Objective 6	Marketing of routes and local bird guides.
Objective 7	Monitoring and evaluation.
Objective 8	Development of birding route “product”.

SSACI added an additional training component to the programme, namely life skills and HIV/AIDS.

At the outset, SSACI made certain assumptions about the project<sup>10</sup>:

1. BirdLife South Africa was an established non-government organisation with an existing tourist base. Thus extensive marketing of the guides was expected from them.
2. The project was a public-private partnership in an area of strategic importance to the economic development and conservation authorities in the province. There would, therefore be extensive support for the project by municipal and provincial line and tourism departments.
3. Young people would be willing and able to be freelance guides.
4. Selection of people to participate as guides was meant to be primarily from the local communities surrounding selected bird sites.

As will be shown, some of these initial outcomes and objectives changed during the course of the project as a response to events on the ground. The evaluation will also revisit the above assumptions.

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Thantshi Masitara (SSACI) on 12 March 2010

## THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The evaluation report seeks to answer four key questions:

- 1. Did the implementer (BirdLife South Africa) do what it said it was going to do?** This involved verifying that the required inputs were provided as per the Project Description.
- 2. Did the implementer do it well?** This involved an appraisal of the quality of project management, trainee recruitment, selection, training, post-training support, and engagement with the relevant local authorities.
- 3. Have those inputs led to the desired outputs?** This required an assessment of whether the activities and outputs anticipated in the Project Description were achieved.
- 4. What can SSACI, BirdLife South Africa and government tourism bodies learn from this experience?** This involved an overall assessment of the overall project, its strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures, and how these could be used in the planning and implementation of similar projects in the future.

## A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

This evaluation report is based on:

- A review of project documentation, including project reports, correspondence, and an Interim Project Report prepared by Ashwell Glasson of BirdLife South Africa in October 2009.
- In-depth, face-to-face interviews with BirdLife South Africa and SSACI staff involved in the project.
- In-depth, face-to-face interviews with a sample of trainee bird guides.
- Telephonic interviews with a sample of trainee bird guides who could not be interviewed face-to-face.
- Telephonic interviews with staff involved in the infrastructure development of Golwe and Gundani campsites.

- In-depth, face-to-face interviews with two of the mentors, one of whom is a successful award-winning guide, and the other with the wife of the original project manager who passed away tragically during the course of the project.
- Internet-based background research.

BirdLife South Africa personnel interviewed were Martin Taylor, manager of the Avitourism Division, and Brenden Pienaar, manager of the Kruger to Canyons Birding Route, and mentor to one of the participants. Lisa Martus, who was involved in the project through her late husband, Ben de Boer, and David Letsoalo were interviewed. David, a product of BirdLife South Africa's avitourism Bird Guide Training Programme, is a successful bird guide in his own right, and mentored a number of the project trainee guides. Telephonic interviews were held with Christopher Nethonzhe, an established bird guide and manager of Golwe camp, and Robert Buitenwerf who was asked to assist with the camp development after Ben de Boer's death. Christopher Nethonzhe is also a successful product of BirdLife South Africa's bird guide training programme.

### **The sample of project trainees**

Obtaining the sample necessitated reviewing the activities of each participant. This was done using the project documentation, and drew on discussions with BirdLife South Africa staff and other people involved in the project.

Of the total number of 20 trainees who were initially involved, the evaluation reached 13 (65%). Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 4 (20%) of the trainees. A further one was scheduled, but did not take place. The trainee was not able to meet with the evaluator at the scheduled time due to heavy rain in the area. The face-to-face interviews were weighted towards those trainees still involved in guiding activities.

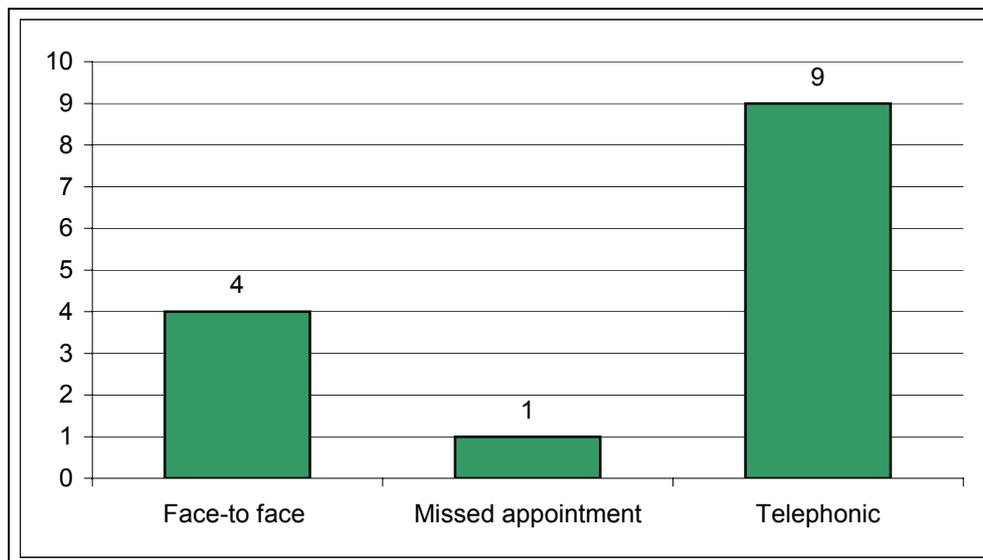
Telephonic interviews were held with 9 trainees. By their nature, these could not be as in-depth as the face-to-face ones, and essentially tried to establish

or verify what had happened to the trainees, what challenges they had faced, and what they were currently doing.

Attempts were made to contact almost all of the trainees telephonically, and where possible, by e-mail. These were not always successful as some numbers had been disconnected, trainees did not always have access to the Internet, or people were not available. Attempts were also made to contact a cross-section of trainees, some employed, some not, and some doing bird guiding and some not.

A breakdown of the sample is shown below:

**Figure 1: Participation of Trainees in Evaluation Sample**



The full list of participants is shown in Appendix A.

Information about the project trainees interviewed was collated into brief vignettes or sketches. A sketch has also been written up of David Letsoalo who, while not one of the trainees, is an established, award-winning bird guide. David, who was involved in various aspects of this project, was trained through BirdLife South Africa's avitourism guide programme.

His experiences provide useful comparisons, and some insight when assessing the progress of the trainee guides on this project. These sketches,

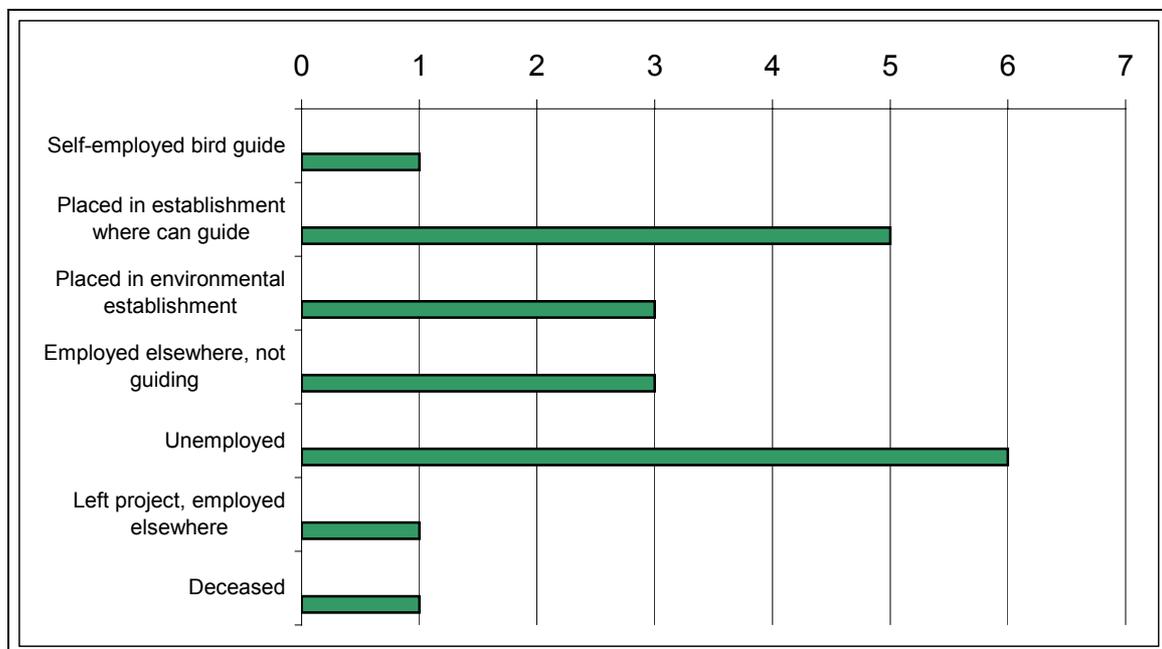
and the interview guides used for discussions and interviews with trainees and project staff are available as appendices at the back of the report.

# THE FINDINGS

## 1. Employment in Bird Guiding after the Project

By the time the project ended in March 2010, six participants were still actively pursuing bird guiding. Only one of these had achieved the original aim of the project, of being a self-employed guide. Reasons for this, and how the model was adapted, will be outlined in more detail further on. Figure 2 presents the activities of the original 20 participants at the end of the project.

**Figure 2 : Post-project Employment of Trainees**



The only self-employed guide is Lucas Namanyane, who operates at Nyslvley Nature Reserve.

Trainees who, as a result of the project, were placed in establishments where they can do types of work complementary to their birding are Idah Lesufi at Sefapane Lodge in Phalaborwa, Paul Nkhumane at Kurisa Moya, and Joel Sithole at Timbavati (Joel obtained his position himself). Jeremia Raseala and Moses Maponya were working for Thabametsi Adventure Tours before they

were recruited, and are still there hoping to add bird guiding to their existing repertoire of activities.

Thuseni Sigwadi is the manager of Tshulu Wilderness Camp. Prior to the project he was working there as a volunteer, now he is a paid employee. Boaz Tsebe and Lizzy Makgamatha, who also trained as nature guides, are doing environmental education at Lapalala Wilderness School. None of these three have sufficient time at present for bird guiding.

Trainees who have found other employment, unrelated to bird guiding, are Stephens Ramavhale, Sello Bethuel Morudu, and Kaiser Ndlovu. Stephens is working temporarily in the Eastern Cape with an uncle, who has a construction contract with Eskom. Sello works for UTi Pharma, a pharmaceutical distribution company in Johannesburg. Kaiser has recently found an internship position with the Department of Education in Hazyview. All three would love to still be doing bird guiding, but could not earn sufficient income from it, and needed to find better income generating options.

Andries Maseho, Charles Mashilo, Sydwell Mkhari, Masindi Ratshilavhi, Philip Hlungwane and Jomo Jeremia Ubisse are unemployed.

Jack Makokga works as a teacher at Stanford Lake College in Lydenburg and did not complete the project. Thabang Malete died tragically.

## **2. The Model – Independent Bird Guides**

Halfway through the project, the model of developing self-employed guides changed. Participants needed to earn an income, and were not yet in a position to do that as bird guides. Many of the trainees lacked the background knowledge, the experience, the access to reserves where they could practice regularly, and the ability to market themselves sufficiently to be able to earn a living independently. They were still too new to bird guiding, and too far away from regular mentoring and marketing support. Their locations were also sometimes too far away from the main areas birders visit.

In recognition of these issues, the model changed halfway through the project. It then tried to assist trainee guides to become employable at birder friendly establishments where they have some security of employment and support for their guiding activities.

In some cases this was successful. Idah Lesufi, for example, was placed at Sefapane Lodge as a receptionist after she went on a hospitality training course. If Masindi Ratshilavhi, based near Pafuri, had had some additional training, she might have been able to find a placement.

Lucas Namanyane, the only independent guide in emerging from the group, studied conservation and had conservation work experience. Lucas works out of Nylsvley, an important wetland which attracts lots of visitors.

As a municipal reserve, he was able to go there to practise regularly, and had a lot of contact with his first mentor, Ben de Boer. He has an outgoing personality and enjoys the freedom and independence associated with being self-employed. He still, however, needs an intermediary to negotiate with provincial authorities, lodges and to co-ordinate marketing efforts.

Even David Letsoalo, the country's most successful local guide, finds it beneficial to be attached to an establishment even though he could operate successfully, independently.

Seasonality plays a role in the ability of people to earn a living independently. The project did not account for the fact that winter months tend to be less busy in avitourism. In a good month, Lucas can earn between R4 500 and R5 000, while in quiet months it can be only about R1 800. Having complementary skills to make them more employable can thus assist new guides to overcome this.

### **3. Project Management and the Passing of Ben de Boer**

Personnel and project management issues adversely affected the project.

The passing away of Ben de Boer in August 2009 was the most significant of these, and perhaps ultimately affected the project outcomes. All respondents interviewed, be they trainee guides, mentors, or staff of BirdLife South Africa, acknowledge the critical role he played in interacting with the guides, birder friendly establishments, lodges and other important role-players in the project. His death left gaps, although BirdLife South Africa tried to fill these with various other people. For some of the time, however, the project was being implemented without a project manager. This caused the project to lose momentum.

The adverse worldwide economic situation resulted in funding difficulties for BirdLife South Africa in 2009. This compounded the human resources issues already facing the project. BirdLife South Africa's major funder, Rio Thinto cut 15 000 jobs worldwide. BirdLife South Africa, whose avitourism division staff went from 12 to 3 people in 2009, sorely felt the effect. In the same year, the training manager at BirdLife South Africa resigned leaving a further gap in the project, which was eventually filled on a short-term basis by Ashwell Glasson.<sup>11</sup> This meant, however, that the mentoring, assessment and moderation of the guides was delayed.

These events affected BirdLife South Africa's ability to give all aspects of the project sufficient attention. David Letsoalo and Brenden Pienaar filled some of the mentoring functions for the project. Robert Buitenwerf assisted with the infrastructure development of the campsite. Overall co-ordination became Martin Taylor's responsibility, but he was operating from Durban. BirdLife South Africa continued with their route marketing, but marketing of the guides, and liaison with provincial and municipal authorities to get their assistance, seemed to fall by the wayside after Ben's death.

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Martin Taylor, BirdLife South Africa Avitourism Division Manager, 16 March 2010

A dispute between SSACI and BirdLife South Africa over the disbursement of the penultimate and final funding instalments, and in turn from BirdLife South Africa head office to the project team, affected the ability of the project team to operate within a positive cash flow. This affected the work on the ground, both by Ben de Boer before he passed away, and other project activities subsequent to that, such as the campsite developments. It has also adversely affected the cash flow within BirdLife South Africa.

The main issue of contention appears to be the management fee. The project budget attached to the agreement signed by SSACI and BirdLife South Africa included a fee for *“all managerial, administrative and other expenditure, which may be incurred by BLSA in the course of managing the project”*.

In May 2008, SSACI met with Ben de Boer to discuss the inadequacy of the amount budgeted for travel given the large distances the project required him to travel. At this meeting, the parties agreed that the management fee could be used for that purpose.

That reallocation did not happen from Birdlife South Africa’s head office, and in the interests of keeping the project going, the budget was re-organised to allocate a lesser amount to infrastructure and marketing, and more to travel.<sup>12</sup> It was specifically stated that the management fee had to be used for this project only, and needed to be specifically accounted for in financial reports.

In October 2009, SSACI requested BirdLife South Africa to address the issue urgently. To date, SSACI feels it has still not received adequate accounting for the management fee, and the matter remains unresolved. The amount outstanding is R260 000.

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<sup>12</sup> Feedback from Ken Duncan, SSACI CEO; and Letter from Ken Duncan to Ben de Boer, 17 July 2009

#### 4. Criteria for Selection and Recruitment

The criteria used to select trainees for the project were that they must be:<sup>13</sup>

- Between 18 and 25.
- From disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Unemployed or under-employed.
- Have a matric certificate or prove competence in reading and writing.
- Have good English skills.
- Be a good 'people person' enjoy interacting with people.
- Have an interest in nature, the environment, guiding or the tourism industry.

Links with a mentor or accommodation establishment were not criteria at the outset, but were stated as preferable.

In the absence of any detailed feedback from Ben on the recruitment process, it is difficult to establish exactly how it took place. Responses from BirdLife South Africa staff, mentors and trainees suggest that different processes took place for the two groups.

For the first group, Ben used his contacts and approached communities around important birding areas and asked them to recommend people. He also approached bird clubs and prominent people in birding in the province.

Once the difficulties with placing people and assigning mentors became apparent, the approach changed for the second group. Lodges and bird friendly establishments were asked to recommend people that their staff might know.

The trainees were drawn from all around the province.

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<sup>13</sup> Obtained from report from BirdLife South Africa to SSACI (undated)

Not many of the trainees grew up with conservation experience. Many of their early exposure to birds related to myths about them, or to trying to kill them with catapults.

Family exposure to birding and conservation is helpful, but not essential. Some of the trainees, such as Paul, Lucas, and Bethuel were exposed to birding and conservation through family members. Lucas, who is able to operate independently, studied conservation, and worked in the field before the project. Paul works at Kurisa Moya Nature Lodge, and is progressing well with his birding. Bethuel, who had great potential as a bird guide, left the programme due to difficulties with one of the reserve managers where he was operating. David Letsoalo, the established guide, developed an interest on his own, and was supported by one of his employers.

## **5. Location**

The Greater Limpopo Birding Route covers a huge area, and actually incorporates three routes, as described earlier. Since the route is newer, and not as developed, as the Zululand Birding Route for example, not all sites see large volumes of birders. There are established sites, like Nylsvley and the Magoebaskloof area, which are easily accessible and attract a lot of visitors. Others are more remote and less attractive. Birders in sufficient numbers are not always willing to drive through rural areas to places like Venda and Giyani, despite the excellent birding there.

As sites like Golwe and Gundani develop, and begin to be better known and visited, this may start to change. It is true that good local guides eventually attract birders to their areas, as David Letsoalo does. This requires expertise from the guides, who may have found some rare birds that people are willing to travel to see, and their ability to market this to birders. Trainee guides are not yet developed enough to be able to offer the product or the marketing.

Trainee guides need to operate in established areas where there will be sufficient clients for them to interact with. They also need to be closer to

people who can mentor them regularly. Those located in more remote areas have found it far more difficult. The guides who have been successful are those closest to Nylsvley (Lucas), the Magoebaskloof area (Paul, Jeremia and Moses) and Phalaborwa and the Kruger National Park (Idah).

The habitats of the areas differ. Places like Mafefe, where Idah Lesufi was based initially, are beautiful and offer good species. Not many birders, however, visit the area as the mountainous terrain can be dangerous to go walking in. The Waterberg, where Paul Nkhumane comes from, is very beautiful, but people do not go there specifically as it does not offer special birds. Both Paul and Idah have gained far more experience since they moved to other areas.

## **6. Access to Reserves**

Easy access to reserves and good birding areas is essential for trainee guides, for two reasons. Firstly, they need a place they can enter freely to do the practical part of their training and gain experience. Secondly, once they gain experience, they need to be able to take clients to those places.

In Limpopo, access is a complex issue. Many of the good birding areas are on privately-owned reserves. For those placed at private birder-friendly establishments like Paul, Moses, Jeremia and Idah, this does not present a problem. Paul's ability to go birding improved greatly when he moved from the Waterberg to Kurisa Moya Nature Reserve.

For others, however, to be able to use private areas sufficiently, trainees need to develop a good relationship with the owners and to negotiate use. For some of the project trainees this usage was limited. Kaiser Ndlovu had this difficulty at Manyeleti Private Reserve. Joel Sithole, at Timbavati, is able to go birding often, but because prospective clients can't just go into the reserve, he can't take people independently.

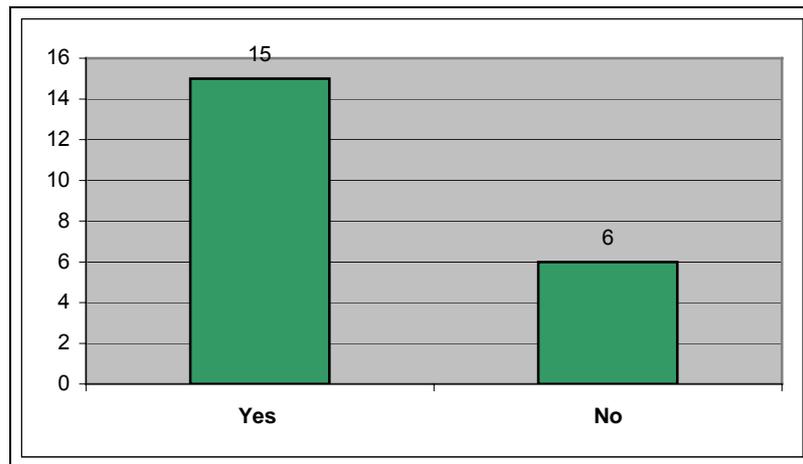
There are excellent government-owned, and community-owned birding areas in the province. Unfortunately, access to municipal, provincial or community-owned reserves has also proved complex, and adversely affected some of the trainees. Charles (Sammy) Mashilo found it difficult to access the community-owned Masebe Reserve, and remains unemployed. Bethuel Morudu was unable to resolve problems with the manager of Blouberg Nature Reserve and left. Lucas, based at Nylsvley, is not in a position to negotiate better terms of operation with Limpopo Tourism and Parks authorities.

To navigate relationships, and ensure sufficient access to public and privately-owned reserves, trainees need contacts and assistance from the provincial and municipal authorities responsible for conservation, tourism or local economic development. Their lack of any presence in the project meant that there was no-one in the public sector who could address these problems or facilitate solutions. Ben tried to use his contacts, and develop links with the relevant authorities to do this, but after his death there was almost no engagement from them at all.

## **7. Training**

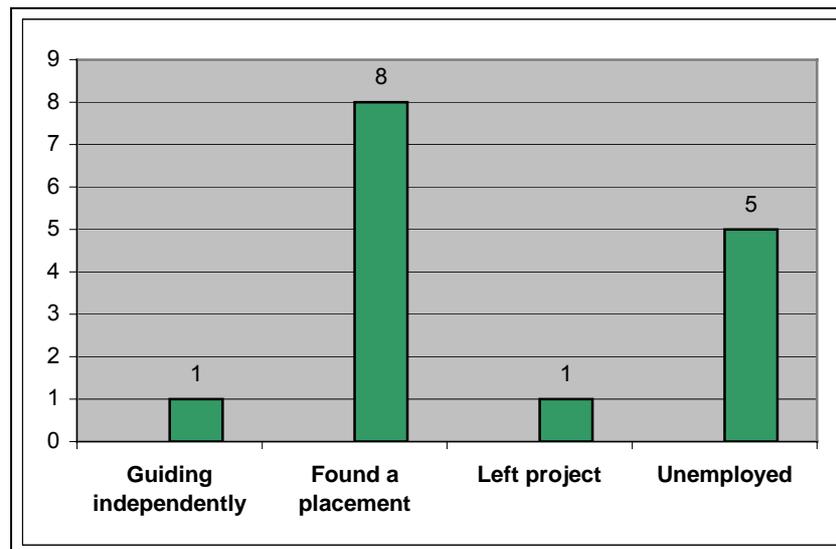
All 20 trainees selected for the project went on the bird guide training programme, accredited by THETA for NQF Level 2. The Level 2 qualification enables trainees to provide guiding in their local areas. Of those 20, 15 achieved their qualification by the end of the project, shown in the figure below.

**Figure 3: Participants Who Achieved THETA Level 2 Qualification**



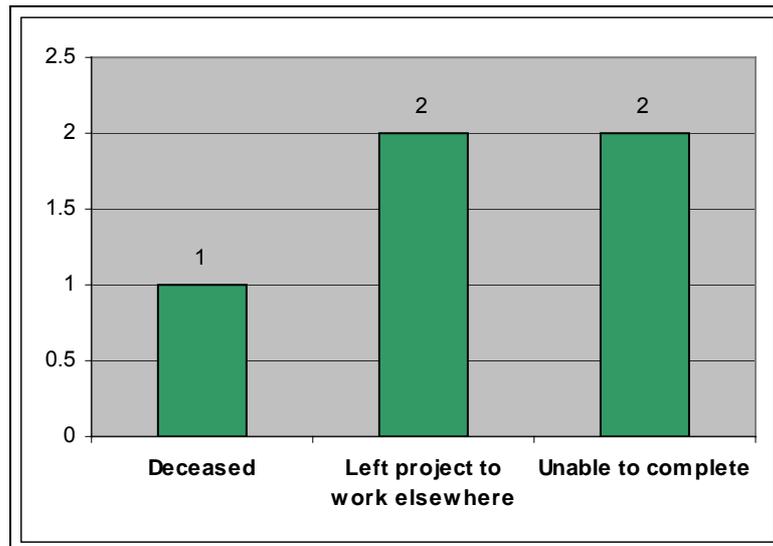
The following diagrams illustrate what happened to those who achieved their qualifications, and who did not respectively.

**Figure 4: Trainees who Achieved Qualification**



Of those who completed their qualification, 1 is guiding independently, 8 have found some form of placement in a birding, conservation or tourism establishment, 1 left the programme to work elsewhere, and 5 remain unemployed. Of those who did not, two left the programme to work elsewhere (Jack Makgoka and Stephans Ramavhale), 1 died, and 2 (Kaiser Ndlovu and Sydwell Mkhari) were unable to complete their qualification. Subsequent to the project ending, Kaiser found a position as an intern with the Department of Education.

**Figure 5: Trainees who did not Achieve Qualification**



Trainees enjoyed the training, and found it useful and practical. In addition to the birding information, there were inputs on financial management, communication with clients, and marketing. It had a large practical component, which trainees needed to do in the field. For some, like Kaiser Ndlovu, in Giyani, it was difficult to get enough of that experience. Significant mentoring was also needed to get trainees through the qualification process. Ben's death left a gap there, which others like David Letsoalo and Brenden Pienaar were brought in to fill.

Workshops on specific topics like the one held at Kurisa Moya, helped the inexperienced guides mingle with and learn from the more experienced ones.

Perhaps more emphasis could have been placed on entrepreneurship and marketing, but even if there was, other factors have been noted as significant obstacles to the attainment of the original goals.

The lifeskills and HIV/AIDS training was well received. Moses Maponya feels *“able to communicate more openly with people after going on the HIV/AIDS course”*. Idah Lesufi learned that she *“must take care of herself as a woman, to be able to take initiative...to be responsible.”*

After the original model changed to assist people become more employable, three (Idah, Thabang and Charles) were sent on hospitality training at the Hospitality Youth Initiative in Grahamstown. This has benefited only Idah thus far. She now works as a receptionist at Sefapane Lodge. Thabang was tragically killed, and Charles is still unemployed.

BirdLife South Africa is currently negotiating with &Beyond Africa (formerly CC Africa), which owns up-market private reserves like Phinda and Londolozi, for further training of BirdLife South Africa's bird guides. This would open up further opportunities for guides with entry-level qualification such those as achieved on the project.

## **8. Resources for Trainee Guides**

The project initially equipped the trainee guides with binoculars and bird guides. Guides have found that these binoculars need to be serviced regularly. In some cases they were losing focus already.

To operate effectively, guides also need:

- Access to the Internet to post information on relevant birding sites, like SA Birdnet, about where they have been birding and what they have seen. The Internet an important marketing tool for a bird guide, to which not all trainees have access. Lucas accesses the Internet from his cellphone, which he finds very expensive. Idah has a laptop, arranged by BirdLife South Africa, and she accesses the Internet from Sefapane Lodge. She has created her own Facebook group called "We Love Birds".
- The right clothing and boots for a field guide which are practical and durable, and which enable them to always look presentable to clients.
- Assistance with a marketing strategy and marketing tools, such as business cards. Trainees have found this difficult at this stage.
- Access to technology, such as a certain type of MP3 player, that will record birdcalls, and a small camera to take photographs. These would assist with bird identification, and help guides confirm what they have seen.

## 9. Mentoring

Mentoring emerged as one of the most important inputs necessary for the successful development of trainee guides. The training itself is not enough.

Mentoring offered by the project was uneven. Ideally, trainees should be assigned to local mentors before completing the training course. This did not happen in the project. Ben found that the distances and locations involved, and the fact that most trainees did not have placement first, made it difficult to assign mentors to trainees. Mentoring of trainees was very dependent on Ben.

He was an effective mentor who inspired those he mentored. Ben helped Lucas to “*realise what was inside him*” and to motivate him. Apart from going birding, he and Idah “*talked a lot. He was there just to listen every time I had something to talk about. He was very supportive, like a father to me*”.

Before he passed away, he took a lot of the mentoring upon himself. He was, however, too far away to offer this consistently to all trainees. By the time a more formal mentoring approach was introduced to assist the trainees to obtain their qualifications, too much time had elapsed for them to get sufficient mentoring.

The evidence shows that the trainees who have been more successful as bird guides tended to be reasonably close to where Ben was, or where there was a strong local mentor. Paul works with David Letsoalo at Kurisa Moya. Paul himself acts as a mentor, and is not that far from Moses and Jeremia at Thabametsi Adventure Tours. Idah is able to see Brenden Pienaar very often in Phalaborwa.

The Ben de Boer Trust has been set up to offer assistance to local guides on an ongoing basis.

## **10. Involvement of Provincial and Municipal Authorities**

An initial project assumption was that relevant provincial departments, such as Limpopo Tourism and Parks, and local authorities, would be engaged fully with the project and with the Limpopo Birding Routes. The project was, after all, helping these authorities to achieve their stated development goals. They have not, however, done anything to enable greater progress.

As shown earlier, a key role the relevant authorities could have played in the project was acting as an intermediary between the project, and the management of reserves, to ensure that trainees got sufficient access and support from them.

BirdLife South Africa's December 2008 report details the efforts Ben de Boer made with local authorities to explain the project and enlist their support. These included the Local Economic Development officers in the Waterberg, Capricorn, Mopani and Vhembe districts. These efforts have borne very little fruit.

## **11. Marketing**

Marketing of the birding routes has taken place throughout the project. BLSA's Avitourism Division completed its website ([www.birdingroutes.co.za](http://www.birdingroutes.co.za)), which includes the Limpopo Birding Route. Marketing has been of the route as a whole, rather than of individual guides. Details of the guides participating in the project are scheduled to be included once they receive their THETA certification. The trainees were included on a map and pamphlet on the route, and in a booklet. The campsite developments have been included on the website.

## **12. The Campsite Developments – Golwe and Gundani**

Infrastructure development at two campsites was included in the project as part of the development of the birding route. This was to encourage visitors to

more remote areas of the province, where there are excellent bird varieties. It is hoped this will generate more income for their surrounding communities, who in turn, will be encouraged to participate in the conservation of the habitats. A substantial portion of the project budget was allocated to this, about 30% of the total.

Golwe campsite has been part of the birding route since 2006, and has generated about R1 200 per month for the community. Gundani had generated about R400 per month, and needed an improved water supply and repairs to its ablution block in particular.

Golwe and Gundani are both owned by their surrounding communities. Christopher Nethonze, a local bird guide trained by BLSA, manages Golwe, which is owned by the Vurivhurhi community. Christopher is well supported by the community, who have declared the area protected land. They do not allow their cattle onto it, or collect firewood there. Christopher was very involved in the development of the camps, and worked with both Ben, and then with Robert Buitenwerf who was assigned to assist him after Ben passed away.

Achievements relating to the campsite developments were:

- The erection of permanent East African style tents at Golwe, and installation of a solar power system. A brick building for use as a reception area, office and workspace for community projects has been partially completed.
- The equipping of the tents with items made largely by members of the community, such as linen, towels, bedding, grass mats and decorations. The tents are also fully equipped with cutlery, crockery, pots, a gel stove and braai.
- The use of community members' skills for aspects of the project where possible, such as construction. If at all possible, local products were sourced. Local community projects made some of the furniture. Where necessary, other things had to be bought from further afield.

- Permanent tents were also erected at Gundani, and hot and cold water supply and ablution facilities have been improved.

Major challenges relating to the campsite development were:

- The remote location, which sometimes made communication difficult. It was also sometimes difficult to get services and contractors there. Things do not happen quickly in such areas.
- Not that much had been done by the time Robert Buitenwerf got involved.
- Communication with the community committee at Gundani was difficult. There were five or six women involved in the committee. It was sometimes difficult to negotiate with them. Christopher Nethonzhe was brought into assist with that.
- Getting funds released by BirdLife South Africa head office to pay for the upgrading. This became a form of vicious circle that ultimately impacted on the smooth progress of this aspect of the project.<sup>14</sup> BLSA head office did not want to release funding to the project until they received it from SSACI. SSACI, in turn, wanted to see progress on the agreed objectives until they released funding.

By the time the project ended, however, the infrastructure developments were complete, with the exception of an office for Christopher.

It is too early to say if there has been increased use of the facilities by birders. The tents only opened in December. Christopher believes that with more exposure and marketing, it will happen.

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Martin Taylor, 16 March 2010

## CONCLUSIONS

We now turn to address the evaluation questions outlined earlier on in the report.

### **1. Did the implementer (BirdLife South Africa) do what it said it was going to do?**

In terms of the required project inputs, based on a review of project documentation and interviews with the relevant people involved in the project, the evaluation can confirm that BirdLife South Africa has done what it set out to do in terms of its expected activities. It has:

- Trained 20 trainee bird guides. Fifteen of these have been assessed as competent on the NQF Level 2 Programme accredited by the THETA.
- Facilitated practical internships at birding sites where possible. Where it has not been possible, BirdLife South Africa has assisted the trainee guides so that they could be assessed.
- Held workshops for trainees. Monitoring visits were not held as frequently as quarterly for each trainee.
- Developed facilities at Golwe and Gundani campsites in Venda.
- Marketed the routes and its guides to established tour companies and operators.
- Consulted with local and provincial conservation authorities with a view to developing tourism infrastructure.

No guides are as yet registered as tour guides with the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism. Those that were assessed as competent have been issued with their Letters of Competency while their portfolios of evidence have been submitted to the THETA. Following approval by the THETA, the guides will be able to register with the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism.

BirdLife South Africa completed these tasks despite considerable project management difficulties, largely related to the passing away of the original project manager, and the radical downsizing of staff in the Avitourism Division.

Project records, and records of spending were easily available and accurate, even though the project management changed during the course of the project. The table of project expenditure in BirdLife South Africa's final report to SSACI shows that the project was completed with R18 951.96 remaining from the total budget of R860 000. BirdLife South Africa has requested permission from SSACI to use this remaining amount to complete the construction of the office at Golwe, and is awaiting a response.

The line items are reasonably consistent overall between what was in the budget and what was spent, although within sections, funding between line items has been shifted in some cases. For example, less was spent on the guide training courses than anticipated, but it was made up with overspending on workshops and mentoring. The campsite development under spent by R34 651.48. That surplus was used to cover the small deficits that occurred elsewhere. With the increase in fuel prices, transport costs were higher than anticipated.

The outstanding issue in relation to the project budget and expenditure is the one referred to earlier, that is the dispute between SSACI and BirdLife South Africa about the management fee.

## **2. Did the Implementer do it well?**

The project has been successful in assisting remote campsites like Golwe and Gundani become more attractive destinations on the Limpopo Birding Route. How they will be marketed, and whether the numbers of visitors will grow remains to be seen.

BirdLife South Africa will continue to market these destinations, and will seek assistance from local authorities, as well as the Tourism Enterprise

Partnership (TEP) to assist the local communities. It is, however, particularly important that the community owners of the campsites, with the assistance of BirdLife South Africa, develop their own marketing skills and take ownership of their product.

The project has not been as successful in assisting people to increase their revenue by becoming freelance guides. There is still a lot to be done in that regard, but it is possible that this will still be achieved in the longer term.

To be able to operate independently guides need experience, exposure to the market, and some background in conservation issues. They need to be able to add value to a birding experience as they are dealing with a clientèle that is generally educated and well informed. Very few of the guides selected were able to combine these.

### **Recruitment and selection**

The recruitment of the right kinds of candidates was in some ways constrained by the agreed project criteria, the large area from which trainees were drawn, and the lack of local mentors on the ground.

It may have been possible to find more people with some background and experience if the age limit for the project had been higher, or if the project was open to people already in some form of employment. Those seem to be BirdLife South Africa's preferred criteria. In other avitourism guide training initiatives they have approached establishments to train staff already there. In this project, SSACI wanted to assist those who did not have those opportunities.

SSACI's own research shows that the most suitable candidate for start-up training for entrepreneurial success fall into the 24-36 age group<sup>15</sup>. Yet there was a concern that if the project identified slightly older people with some background in the required areas, they would already be employed.

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<sup>15</sup> SSACI, *Supporting Youth Entrepreneurship in South Africa*, 2005, p5

The selection criteria of BirdLife South Africa and SSACI were therefore not sufficiently aligned to ensure that the candidates with the best chances of success were selected.

### **Training and mentoring of project participants**

The training component was completed, and well-received by the participants. It does, however require a great deal of practical work by the trainee guides.

As project manager, and cognisant of the difficulties facing the guides on the ground, Ben undertook a great deal of the project-related activities on his own. Once he was no longer there, and having to deal with their own human resource constraints, BirdLife South Africa made great efforts to fill the gaps. Mentoring and training were two of those gaps.

BirdLife South Africa subsequently focused a lot of attention on helping trainees through the assessment process, and was successful with 15 of them. Part of this involved mentoring of trainees by established bird guides. This was helpful for the guides in completing their assessments, but happened too late in the programme.

As noted earlier, mentoring of trainees was uneven. In cases where participants were close to local mentors, and Ben in particular, it played an important role in their development. Where they were not, the absence of mentoring was one reason that candidates struggled.

Given the importance of this activity, perhaps in the planning stages of the project more of the budget should have been allocated for it.

### **Placement**

Placement of trainees in locations where their guiding activities could be maximised was not as successful as the project would have wished. The

project tried hard to do this, and when it became apparent that guides would need additional skills, it did try to equip trainees with these.

Once again, the project context played an important role. Here, issues like access to reserves, and location of trainees in areas with sufficient tourists were apparent. More refined application of selection criteria could assist to minimise these issues in the future.

In the meantime, BirdLife South Africa is still committed to assisting the guides, even after the project has ended. BirdLife South Africa is continuing with guide mentoring by working with BirdLife Polokwane and local stakeholders to revive the Greater Limpopo Birding Route Association. A guide mentoring workshop is being held at Polokwane Nature Reserve from 13-15 July 2010. It is anticipated that the Association will play an active role in facilitating the mentoring, and hopefully the placement, of local guides.

In addition to the Association, the Ben de Boer Trust is expected to play this role when it is fully established. Interviews with trainees, even those not working or working elsewhere, show that many of them are still in touch with people associated with the project. Through the Association, BirdLife South Africa hopes to maintain these links and facilitate the ongoing development of these guides.

### **Involvement of Local and Provincial Authorities**

The project was unable to establish and develop the important linkages it was hoped would ultimately benefit the project beneficiaries. BirdLife South Africa has experienced similar problems across the country, not only in Limpopo.<sup>16</sup>

Local economic development officials in various municipalities, and Limpopo Tourism and Parks, could have played an important role in ensuring the success of the project by:

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<sup>16</sup> Feedback, Martin Taylor, 21 May 2010

- Mediating where necessary between reserves (be they publicly, privately or community-owned) and trainee guides who were having difficulty obtaining sufficient access to them.
- Providing funding for additional development of the routes, marketing and mentoring.

This could have assisted in providing for the long-term sustainability of the project so that development of the guides is not the sole responsibility of BirdLife South Africa. It could also have helped the trainees to integrate into other related developments in the province, and opened up additional opportunities for them.

Ben tried hard to establish relationships with the relevant authorities in the province, and it is disappointing that nothing has come of them. According to Lisa Martus<sup>17</sup>, his wife, there had been some tentative responses to his proposals at the time of his death, but nothing has happened.

Martin Taylor has subsequently met with the CEO of Limpopo Tourism and Parks, and with the Phalaborwa Foundation, with a view to facilitating greater involvement of the relevant authorities in the Greater Limpopo Birding Routes, and in the development of the guides.

### **3. Have those inputs led to the desired outputs?**

The stated objective of training 20 bird guides from communities in the Soutpansberg, Waterberg and Nylsvley districts, and establishing them as self-employed tour guides on local trails, has not been met.

Only one person, Lucas, has been able to do that. He still, however, needs assistance if he is to grow.

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<sup>17</sup> Interview, Lisa Martus, 8 April 2010

Halfway through the project, the difficulties in meeting this objective were realised, and the model was adapted to assist people to become employable while still being able to guide. This has had slightly better results.

Five young people have been employed in establishments from where they can guide, and three others are working in environmental establishments. In the long-term as they gain experience and exposure, they may well become independent guides.

Four participants have found employment elsewhere, one passed away and six are unemployed. Thus of the original 20, only 30% are still involved in birding. If one includes Thuseni, Boaz and Lizzy, who work in conservation education, it is 45% who are involved in birding or related conservation activities.

It must be noted that had Ben de Boer not passed away, the project may have had very different outcomes.

From a conservation point of view, the project has also had benefits. Since the training, there are more local guides in the area. This has created contacts for national guides who visit some of the areas to look for specific species and find birding spots. Once a species has been identified, people can then be enlisted in conservation efforts.

All of the trainee guides take their interest in birds and nature back into their communities, whether they are working as guides or not. This may not have any effect in the short-term, but over the long-term, it will encourage people to take an interest in the natural assets around them and ultimately participate in their preservation.

Conservation works in surrounding communities when they see the economic benefits of it. The community around Golwe has seen this. It is too early to assess whether the infrastructure development of the campsites has resulted in a greater volume of visitors and income. Those involved believe that it will.

The project has served to enhance the development of the Limpopo Birding Routes. Marketing was not a big component of the project, accounting for only 4% of the total budget. Now that more of the building blocks are in place, namely more local guides, and better developed birding areas, BirdLife South Africa needs to play their part in attracting more birders to the Greater Limpopo Birding routes. More focused marketing of the routes, the campsites, the guides, and their birder friendly establishments is needed.

At one end of the marketing spectrum, the Avitourism division has recognised that a key to their growth is increasing the size of the avitourism market. They have put plans in place to do that, particularly through Internet marketing. At the other end of the spectrum, the bird guides need a strategy that will help them market themselves individually, and as part of the broader route.

Guides need their own business cards, they need a website, or they need to be included on the sites of lodges and other places where they are operating. Ben was trying to do that, but it has not happened yet. Permission is being sought from the THETA to upload the contact details of the guides onto BirdLife South Africa's website. Their promotional material needs to be left in different areas, so that establishments can recommend different guides to clients as they move around looking for birds.

#### **4. What can a) SSACI, b) BirdLife South Africa and c) government tourism bodies learn from this experience**

##### **The Model**

One of SSACI's initial assumptions about the project was that young people would be willing and able to be freelance guides. This was based on its encounter with the Zululand Birding Route. It is difficult to say exactly why it worked there and not in Limpopo, but there are some circumstances in Limpopo, which are quite different to those in KwaZulu Natal. Some of the reasons may be:

- The Zululand Birding Route is much older and more established than the Limpopo routes. It has been around for at least 13 years. The

guides there are well known, and have benefited from an established marketing strategy. People also use them as additional security when they go birding in those areas.

- Access to reserves for birding is not an issue for the guides there. The land is all owned by the province and local authorities. Guides can come and go as they please. In Limpopo, as we have seen, many of the good areas are in private reserves and not easily accessible. There are also access problems on many of the municipal and provincial reserves as well.
- The Zululand Birding Route was able to engage successfully with a wide range of stakeholders, from local and provincial government to the private sector. One of the most disappointing aspects of this project was the lack of engagement of municipal and provincial line departments in Limpopo, and Limpopo Tourism and Parks.

The project's initial primary goal was to assist with the development of young people who would operate independently as bird guides.

For this to happen successfully, certain factors need to exist in combination with each other. These include:

- A background and experience in conservation.
- Sufficient, the right kind, and regular mentoring.
- The right kind of personality to communicate with clients, lodges and to market themselves. Personality is a key issue for independent guides. They need to be able to communicate easily in English, and have confidence to market themselves. The training did address communication issues, but it will take most of the trainees time and practice to gain confidence.
- Reliability and consistency in dealing with clients.
- Basic business skills, and understanding of issues like pricing.
- An established market. It is very difficult for new guides to establish themselves in areas that are still being developed, or where people are not going in reasonable numbers. The avitourism market, although potentially lucrative, is a particularly small one.

- Access to birding sites and reserves.
- Some kind of income, or safety net, in the meantime, until generating sufficiently. At this stage, guiding is not an activity that can easily be sustained on its own. It takes time and a great deal of mentoring for a trainee guide to emerge sufficiently finished to operate independently. Many of the young people on the project had an immediate need to earn an income, and so had to look for alternatives.

That only one person achieved the goal on this project suggests strongly that it is too ambitious a goal for an entry-level guide. Some of the guides trained may yet achieve it, but they are not there yet. Self-employment may be the next stage for them.

In the meantime, guides need to be empowered with other skills that could be complementary to their placement, such as chef or hospitality training. Those could add value to the establishment.

### **Selection Criteria**

To achieve better results in a project like this, selection criteria for participants need to be revisited. These need to take particular cognisance of the critical role of mentoring and placement, as shown in this evaluation.

Trainees should have:

- A reasonably good level of literacy, probably matric, with an ability to communicate in English.
- A definite interest in birding and nature.
- Placement at a birder friendly establishment or as a research assistant associated with an academic institution or a government department.
- A mentor committed to working with that person.

Those without one, or preferably both, of the last two should not go for training. Without those, it becomes very difficult for them to make a living, and

they ultimately have to go back to finding another source of income. Ideally, they should go through a period of mentoring even before going on a training course.

Many lodges and institutions have guides or assistants who need training. This may not meet target of previously unemployed people, but perhaps the long-term benefits should outweigh that consideration. The lodge benefits because their staff get training they would not have had, and the project benefits as it ensures that trainees have a base for operating, and will be retained in the system. An agreement would need to be structured between the lodge and the trainee to ensure that they get sufficient time for guiding. Working in a lodge gives trainees exposure to dealing with clients, and interacting with guests. It would be hard for a young guide working independently to get that kind of exposure.

## FINAL COMMENTS

BirdLife South Africa is an organisation dedicated to the enjoyment, conservation, study and understanding of wild birds and their habitats. Their focus is not necessarily on enterprise development. They undertook the project diligently, and brought their passion for the environment to bear on their work here. This had a great impact on the trainee guides who joined the project.

In terms of the specific quantitative outcomes required by the project, it has not delivered what was required. Had the operating environment, and circumstances around the project, been different, it may have. Nevertheless, from a qualitative point of view, it has changed people's lives and left most of them better off than they were before. One person is guiding independently, while eight others have found a place in a tourism or environmental establishment.

For those people, the project has greatly enhanced their future prospects, even if their incomes are small now. They are working, doing what they love, have a direction, and have the possibilities of an exciting career path.

Idah Lesufi believes that she is succeeding already. *"I think often about where I would be without SSACI. Where I come from everyone of my age has children, is not educated, can't speak English...every time I go home, I remember if SSACI was not here to teach me all that I know about my body, about how to behave as a girl, and taking responsibility for my own future, I don't know where I would be. Especially as I grew up without having parents, you grow up not knowing much about yourself."*

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## ABBREVIATIONS

BLSA..... BirdLife South Africa  
DEAT ..... Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism  
THETA..... Tourism and Hospitality Education and Training Authority

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: SSACI – BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

Name	Place and Nature of Work	THETA Level 2 Qualification	Participation in Evaluation
Lucas Thotswane Namanyane	Freelancer – based at Nyslvley	Yes	Face-to-face interview
Idah Lesufi	Receptionist, bird guide at Sefapane Lodge, Phalaborwa	Yes	Face-to-face interview
Paul Nkhumane	Bird Guide and maintenance at Kurisa Moya	Yes	Face-to-face interview
Jeremia Raseala	Conducts canopy tours at Thabametsi Adventures	Yes	Unable to attend interview
Moses Maponya	Conducts canopy tours at Thabametsi Adventures	Yes	Face-to-face interview
Joel Sithole	Timbavati	Yes	Telephone interview
Boaz Tsebe	Environmental education for schools, Lapalala Wilderness School	Yes	Unable to contact
Lizzy Makgamatha	Environmental education for schools, Lapalala Wilderness School	Yes	Telephone interview
Thuseni Sigwadi	Manager, Tshulu Wilderness Camp	Yes	Telephone interview
Sello Bethuel Morudu	UTi Pharma, Johannesburg. Left programme Jan 09	Yes	Telephone interview
Stephens Ramavhale	E Cape, working on construction contract for Eskom.	No	Telephone interview
Kaiser Ndlovu	Intern for Department of Education, Hazyview	No	Telephone interview
Jack Makokga	Stanford Lake College, Lydenburg. Left programme	No	Unable to contact
Andries Maseho	Unemployed	Yes	Unable to contact
Charles Mashilo	Unemployed, Mokopane	Yes	Telephone interview
Sydwel Mkhari	Unemployed, Giyani	No	Telephone interview
Masindi Ratshilavhi	Unemployed, near Pafuri	Yes	Telephone interview
Philip Hlungwane	Unemployed	Yes	Did not contact
Jomo Ubisse	Unemployed	Yes	Unable to contact
Thabang Malete	Deceased	No	

## **APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDES**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE: SSACI, BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA**

- 1. Please outline the background to the project, and what assumptions you had at the outset.**
- 2. What were the challenges from your point of view?** (Probe issues around freelance work, the self-employment aspect of the project, involvement of government agencies; issues relating to project management.)
- 3. What were the selection criteria for the project? Were they appropriate for this kind of project? What should they be in the future?** (Probe age, background in a conservation-related field, whether birding too specialised for this.)
- 4. How did recruitment take place, and how were areas of trainees' operation selected?**
- 5. Can you describe the types of training offered, and discuss the issues around that.** (Probe what worked and what did not.)
- 6. Mentoring. What was intended, and how did it work out?** (Probe how they were identified and matched with trainees. Did they have any sort of structured programme to follow? How did they know what was expected? How often did they see the participants?). **How should this be done in the future?**
- 7. Can you discuss the original intended model of self-employment of guides. How realistic was this? What are the challenges for this type of approach?** (Probe – what do people need to be able to operate successfully as freelancers? Was it the right approach to pursue at the outset? What alternatives could be explored for something like this? For example – placing participants as learners with particular lodges, or finding employment agreements for them first. Would employers have gone for that? Why did it work in other places like the Zululand Birding Route?)
- 8. How did the model change during the course of the project? What were the results of this change?**
- 9. With the knowledge you have gained, what would be a more appropriate or achievable model?** (In other words how should a similar project be structured in the future?) **What are the key issues necessary for success?**
- 10. Can you describe the marketing of the guides, campsite and routes that took place during the course of the project?**

**11. Were the project outcomes satisfactory from your point of view? Expand. What still needs to be done to achieve that?**

**12. What worked about the project, what did not?** (If not already answered). Also probe scale – would it have been better if confined to one or two places? Would it be possible to implement projects like that?

**For BirdLife South Africa:**

**13. Please outline what happened with the Golwe and Gundani Campsites. What were the opportunities the project offered, what were the challenges?**

**14. How have the surrounding communities been involved?**

**15. How have the numbers of visitors changed as a result of the infrastructure developments?**

**16. What challenges still remain?**

## **INTERVIEW GUIDE: PROJECT PARTICIPANTS: FACE-TO-FACE**

### **1. Background Information – Bird Guiding**

- 1.1 Can you please tell us what you are doing at the moment (in relation to bird guiding)? In what capacity are you working as a bird guide? (Check whether freelancing, fully employed doing something else; how they structure their bird guiding activities?)
- 1.2 How did you become interested in this type of activity? Was there anyone else in your family or close to you who enjoyed birding? (Probe how long they have been doing it.)
- 1.3 Before this project, what exposure did you have to bird guiding, conservation or any related types of activities? (Birding, tour-guiding etc). How did you get involved in these types of things?

### **2. Background Information – Personal**

- 2.1 Can you please tell us a little about yourself and your family? Where do you come from? (Probe for some family background, what parents or family members do, who works, some detail of the area, how they survive etc. Note age, gender, highest level of education, whether they have studied anything etc, previous work experience.)
- 2.2 What were you doing before you joined the project?

### **3. The SSACI-BirdLife South Africa Project**

#### **Recruitment and Selection**

- 3.1 How did you hear about the avitourism project?
- 3.2 How were you chosen to join the project? (Probe who selected them, what steps they had to follow, what were the criteria etc.)

#### **Training**

- 3.3 Can you describe what you learned on the training courses?
- 3.4 Describe the process you had to follow to get your qualification.
- 3.5 What were the best parts? What could have been better?
- 3.6 What did you learn about yourself?
- 3.7 Was there anything you think you needed to know that was not covered?

#### **Mentoring**

- 3.8 Can you describe the mentoring you received from the programme? (Probe for as much detail as possible – is it structured/ how often they speak or meet.)
- 3.9 How were you assigned to a mentor? Briefly describe the relationship you have with your mentor.
- 3.10 What did you expect from your mentor, and vice versa? Were these expectations met?
- 3.11 Who do you go to when you need assistance?

#### **4. Outcomes**

- 4.1 What are you doing now as a result of the training and mentoring you received?
- 4.2 What kind of resources do you need to operate as a bird guide? (Freelance or employed – probe things like equipment, technology – cell phone, email, transport etc.)
- 4.3 How does the environment help or hinder you? (probe access to reserves etc.)
- 4.4 Can you describe whether your relationship with local communities either helps or hinders your birding activities?
- 4.5 How do you market yourself and your services? How could you improve this?
- 4.6 What kinds of links do you have with established bird clubs or mainstream tour organisations? How could you improve these?
- 4.7 What have you learnt about being self-employed or freelancing. Did your training cover any of the issues? (Probe what the issues are – marketing, seasonality etc.)
- 4.8 What are you planning for the future?
- 4.9 Do you think you would like to be a freelance guide in the future? If so, what would assist you to realise that?

#### **5. General**

- 5.1 How do you think the project could be improved or changed to achieve better results?

## **INTERVIEW GUIDE: PROJECT PARTICIPANTS: TELEPHONIC**

1. Can you please tell me about what you are doing now?
2. How long have you been doing this?
3. How is bird guiding included in this?
4. Can you tell me a bit about your experiences of the project? (Probe training, mentoring etc.)
5. What were the challenges?
6. How were you able to do practical work in birding? (Probe access to places to bird, visitors coming etc.)
7. Would you go back to it?

## **INTERVIEW GUIDE : MENTORS**

### **1. SSACI-BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA PROJECT**

- 1.1 Please can you outline your role in the SSACI-BirdLife South Africa Project?
- 2.1 Who were the guides you mentored?
- 2.2 How did you go about the mentoring process? Was it structured/unstructured; did you have regular sessions etc?
- 2.3 What are some of the successes your trainees have experienced?
- 2.4 What are the difficulties or constraints they face?
- 2.5 What do you think they will need to be successful freelance guides?
- 2.6 If you had to help redesign the project, what would you do the same, and what would you do differently?

### **2. OWN BACKGROUND**

You are a successful freelance guide – almost the example of what the project was trying to replicate.

- 2.1 Can you give me your story about how you got there? (Probe background, where come from, family, work experience, education, training, age, mentoring etc.)
- 2.2 How do you operate as a guide? (probe whether freelance or employed.)
- 2.3 How do you market yourself?
- 2.4 What are your future plans?
- 2.5 How do you think that someone who wants to be a bird guide can emulate what you have done? (Also probe what they need, who can help them, and relationships with local communities, bird clubs, niche tour operators etc.)

## **APPENDIX C – PARTICIPANT SKETCHES**

### **Lucas Thotswane Namanyane – Freelance Guide, Nylsvley Nature Reserve**

Lucas Namanyane works as a freelance guide, based at the Nylsvley Nature Reserve. He has been birding on a full-time basis for the last two years. He is 26 years old.

Lucas likes to infuse his birding activities with local Sepedi myths about birds, and writes poetry. He recently received a request from a publisher to assist with translating bird names into Sepedi. From time to time a member of the Witwatersrand Bird Club approaches him to assist with research.

#### **Background and Experience**

Lucas has always been interested in birding. As a child he learned a great deal from his grandfather and grandfather's brother. After completing matric, he studied conservation at the Tshwane University of Technology.

Before joining the SSACI-BirdLife South Africa project, he worked for the Limpopo Tourism and Parks Board on a contract basis. According to Lucas, his contract ended at the same time that the project started. It seems that his employment there did not end happily, and there was some bad feeling between him and Limpopo Parks and Tourism.

Lucas is fortunate that he does not have to support his family. His father is a leatherworker in Johannesburg.

#### **The SSACI-BirdLife South Africa Project**

Lucas heard about the project through a woman named Sarah, at Friends of Nylsvley. She suggested he apply, so he did. His application was accepted. That was the entire selection process for Lucas.

On the training programme, a lot of birding content was covered. Trainees worked very hard, about 12 hours per day. A small component on how to handle finances was included in the programme. Lucas feels that that section was not specific enough. It dealt with common ways of saving money. Some people on the course did not see its relevance at the time, as they were not earning anything. The training did not offer enough on how to market oneself.

Although it was covered, Lucas would have like to learn more about costing and pricing of services. His fees are determined by the environment and the services he offers.

To improve the training, perhaps different sites could have been used. This would have enabled Lucas to learn more about a diversity of sites, as there are different birds in different environments.

Lucas benefited greatly from Ben de Boer's mentoring. Ben helped motivate him, and to realise his potential, "*what was inside*" him. They were very close, "*everything I do, everything it's about Ben*". He gave him the confidence to succeed with what he was trying to do.

Lucas spoke to Ben every week or every second week. Ben sometimes visited, and brought clients with him. He also sent people from Limpopo Tourism and Parks to see Lucas.

After Ben's death, Martin Taylor and Ashwell Glasson assisted with mentoring. David Letsoalo has helped him, particularly where he was having some problems with bird identification. Lucas has not established a close relationship with any of the other mentors.

## **Successes and Challenges**

In a good month, Lucas can earn between R4 500 and R5 000, but a slow month can yield only about R1 800. When busy, Lucas may take out between four and seven groups per month, with an average of four people in each group. Birding is a seasonal activity. In July and August, Lucas does not have many customers, which is when he encourages school groups.

Lucas has links with established bird organisations like Friends of Nylsvley, and BirdLife South Africa. They are his main sources of referrals. He gets some work from Limpopo Tourism and Parks, but not a great deal. This is starting to improve.

It is difficult for him to negotiate a better working relationship with Limpopo Tourism and Parks as they do not have a good history. He is working on improving his links with other lodges in the area, and with the broader community, but he needs access to transport to realise the benefits of those links.

Working alone is Lucas's biggest challenge as a freelancer. He often feels isolated from others, and needs the input and encouragement one might get from colleagues. Lucas keenly felt the loss of Ben de Boer as project manager.

Although Lucas has shown himself to be very resourceful, he feels that he might be doing much better if there was someone to co-ordinate marketing activities between himself and other guides in different areas, and to negotiate with provincial authorities, lodges and birding establishments nearby. He tries to keep in contact with some of the other trainees from the project.

## **Resources**

According to Lucas, a successful freelance guide needs a computer and Internet access. Binoculars need to be checked and serviced every two years. Use of more advanced technology would be useful. Lucas needs a sound recorder (a type of MP3 player) to record birdcalls and small camera to prove he has seen certain birds. He uses his cellphone to access the Internet, but finds it very expensive. Most trainees on the project do not have easy access to a computer and the Internet. A cellphone with a memory card, which will connect to a birding computer programme, will also be helpful.

Lucas needs business cards, but has none as they are too expensive for him to have made.

## **Access to Birding Areas**

There does not seem to be any recognition of mutual benefits from a reciprocal relationship on the part of the management of Nylsvley Nature Reserve. For example, although he can get access to the Reserve as it is public land, he can't sit with clients at the restaurant unless he eats there. It is slowly getting better, but Lucas feels that since he brings people to the reserve and to the restaurant, and is doing marketing for them, he should be getting some benefits. One of these would be accommodation in the reserve. Presently, he has to travel from far to get to the reserve. Again, he believes an intermediary would be more successful at negotiating with Limpopo Tourism and Parks than he would.

## **The Future**

It would help Lucas if the Limpopo Bird Route itself was better developed and co-ordinated, and if there was more networking with other guides. They would then be able to promote each other to clients in different areas. This seemed to be Ben's vision and what he was working on. According to Lucas, BirdLife South Africa is trying to do that but it's not that successful yet. Hopefully it will improve over time. Limpopo Tourism is not doing that.

To achieve greater success, Lucas feels that he needs accommodation nearby, and broadening of his knowledge of the wetlands. He would ultimately like to buy a car. This would enable him to take visitors further afield and to different bird habitats.

## **Paul Nkhumane – Kurisa Moya**

Paul Nkhumane is employed at Kurisa Moya, a nature lodge near Magoebaskloof, doing birding for about 80% of the time, and maintenance for the rest, depending on the season. His maintenance work involves a variety of work such as building, plumbing, fixing geysers etc. He is 27 years old.

### **Background and Experience**

Paul comes from the Waterberg region. He started at Kurisa Moya in February 2009. The Waterberg area has a completely different habitat to the Magoebaskloof area, and therefore has different bird varieties. There is bushveld there rather than forest, and Paul was finding it difficult to identify birds there.

Before he came to Kurisa Moya, Paul worked in Johannesburg for his cousin as a driver, and for his uncle who owns a tavern, as a cashier. Paul is an enterprising young man, and has some business interests in the Waterberg, which are run by his younger brother. He is a photographer, and takes videos of weddings and other large events. He also sells ice cream, and fruit. He helps his brother with these, but they are not large enough to support both of them.

Paul completed his matric in 2004. He did a two-week leadership management course through THETA, but did not get a certificate. He also did a three-month computer course. He is still not completely comfortable with a computer, and is still learning.

When he was a child, Paul's father worked as a game ranger at Touchstone Lodge, a private game reserve in the Waterberg. He encouraged him to read wildlife books and about nature in general. This stimulated Paul's interest in birds.

### **The SSACI-BirdLife South Africa Experience**

Paul heard about the project from his father, who is now the estate manager at Lindani, a private nature reserve. At the time, Paul was in Johannesburg, but his father called him to meet with Ben de Boer and be interviewed for the programme.

Paul was very happy with the training he received on the SSACI programme. It taught him a lot. He learned how to identify birds, and how to communicate with people. There was a component that dealt with working for oneself.

Paul liked the practical work the best. The training was hard work. They went out birding in the morning, then had theory, and then went out again in the late afternoon. He learned about working in groups.

He made friends with others on the programme, and acts as a mentor to two of the guides from the second group, Jeremiah and Moses.

Ben de Boer and David Letsoalo mentored Paul. That started when he came to Kurisa Moya. Mentoring taught Paul how to identify birds, and about nature in general. He has also learned about insects and how to catch snakes.

### **Successes and Challenges**

Paul had to learn quickly. Shortly after joining Kurisa Moya, about a month after the training, David Letsoalo had a serious car accident. Paul had to step in suddenly and take out a group of very experienced birders. He was scared as he hadn't gone with clients into the forest on his own before. The experience taught him that he has the capacity to do this kind of work. Now he thinks he is doing well.

### **Resources**

At the start of the programme, Paul wanted to be an independent guide but he didn't know how to go about it. Marketing and business skills are very important. He believes that in the current environment, bird guiding will not be sufficient as an income-generating activity.

To be able to operate as a bird guide, Paul maintains that one needs:

- To improve bird guide skills by doing lots of practical work and going on outings. One therefore needs regular access to good birding areas.
- Binoculars and a bird book. They got binoculars from SSACI but the ones his group got were not very good ones.
- To be able to market oneself. Since being based at Kurisa Moya, Lisa Martus, the owner, does Paul's marketing as part of the general marketing of the lodge. She has encouraged him to write a report that she posts on the SA Birdnet website whenever Paul goes birding.

### **The Future**

Paul, like the other people at Kurisa Moya, is a member of a bird club, but the nearest one is in Polokwane. They do not really go to the meetings, but do go on the outings. Paul is going to be doing research with a local expert, Dr Derek Engelbrecht, on robins. He is well known and Paul believes he will learn a lot from him.

If Paul was not at Kurisa Moya, he would try to market himself to lodges in the Waterberg area. The problem there is that although it is beautiful, there are no special birds in that area and people do not go there specifically. Far more birders come to the Magoebaskloof area.

In the future, Paul would like to own his own company that takes international clients to different types of habitat. Initially, it would just be him, but when the time comes he would hire others. For that he needs a 4 x 4 vehicle, and a laptop with access to the Internet. He has been saving diligently for a car, and is well on the way to achieving that particular goal.

## **Moses Maponya – Thabametsi Adventure Tours**

Moses works for Thabametsi Adventures as an adventure guide. He takes people on canopy tours of the Groot Letaba Gorge, where they slide from platform to platform. He also takes people abseiling and quadbiking, and does adventure challenges and team-building activities for school groups and companies. Moses is 23 years old.

He has worked there for one year and two months. As yet he has not taken people out birding, but on the canopy tours he points out various birds to the clients. Some clients are interested in the different birds and bird calls, and try to identify bird calls.

### **Background and Experience**

Moses did not pass his matric and wrote it again by correspondence. He is still waiting for the results.

While at school, a friend, Jack Makokga, who was working at the Adventure Centre at Stanford Lake College, came to his school and recruited him to do mountain bike racing. (Jack was one of the trainees on the bird guide programme, but did not continue guiding.) Through Jack, Moses also got involved in adventure challenge races. He has a certificate and two bronze medals for adventure challenges.

Moses got into birding through someone at another school he attended, in Apel, Julius Makgoba, who was teaching himself birding. In his adventure challenges, Moses had to know about many things relating to nature, such as birds, grasses and snakes. Moses chose the birding aspects and went to Julius and asked him to teach him about birds.

Before he joined Thabametsi Adventures, Moses worked temporarily at Stanford Lake College. He came to Thabametsi Adventures inquiring about part-time training. At that time he had no qualifications, but he left his contact details. They contacted him, trained him, and he worked there temporarily. When that finished, he went home and got involved in a youth centre near Haenertsberg, teaching marimbas to schools in the area.

Shortly afterwards, Thabametsi Adventures offered him a full-time job. He still helps at the youth centre.

### **The SSACI-BirdLife South Africa Project**

Ben de Boer contacted the owner of Thabametsi Adventure Tours to see if he had any people interested in going on a birding course. Moses, and a colleague, Jeremia, were both interested, and the owner allowed them both to join the programme.

Moses says he is very shy, and used to like to keep secrets. He says he is able to communicate more openly with people after going on the HIV/AIDS course, facilitated by Jayesh. He still finds it quite difficult, but it has got easier for him. He has learned to work with groups, and to look people in the eye when talking to them.

There was a financial management component on the training. They did learn about pricing, and working out income and expenses, but Moses feels that it was not enough.

Moses passed his assessment. His mentor is Paul Nkhumane from nearby Kurisa Moya.

Moses goes birding with Paul to Mamabolo Grassland, Tzaneen Dam Wall, and Woodbush. He speaks to Paul fairly often. Paul also assists with bird identification. Moses also phones David Letsoalo when he needs help with bird identification. Around the Thabametsi area, he goes birding with Jerry, who also trained as a bird guide.

### **Resources**

To be able to guide effectively, Moses needs binoculars, a birding book or field guide, a small type of MP3 (called a PDA) which can record bird calls, and store maps etc.

### **The Future**

Moses thinks he could freelance eventually, but he does not want to charge clients until he feels ready. He does have a contact in Tzaneen who wants to refer clients to him. Moses will do this for him without charging him. He has not tried to contact other lodges in the area. He is not sure how he would go about being a freelancer. His birding activities were intended to complement what he was already doing at Thabametsi Adventure Tours.

## **Idah Lesufi – Sefapane Lodge, Phalaborwa**

Idah Lesufi is 22 years old. She works as a receptionist at Sefapane Lodge in Phalaborwa, and does her birding activities on a part-time basis. Thus far she has only taken guests birding in the vicinity of the lodge, where there is a rich array of bird life.

Sefapane Lodge organised and paid for Idah to do a field guide training course. Idah is going to a driving school after work so that she will get her driver's licence. Once she gets her driver's licence, and passes the nature guide course, she will use a vehicle from the lodge, and take people on excursions to the Kruger National Park, about 1km away. She will be able to show visitors birds and animals.

The Lodge also offers guests River Safaris to the Olifants River, and to Blyde River Canyon. One the way there are many bird varieties to be seen. Idah will be able to do those excursions for the lodge as well.

### **Background and Experience**

While at school, Idah attended a career guidance talk. The speaker from the University of Limpopo told the students that when choosing a career, they needed to choose something they loved, so that they will be enthusiastic about their work. Idah realised that she loves travelling. A school trip to the Blyde River Canyon awakened her interest in animals, and in nature in general. She wanted to do anything related to the tourism industry.

Idah has had a difficult life. She believes that her experiences have made her stronger. An orphan, Idah received a grant from the government until she was 18. Her sister saved it so that she could study. After completing matric she started a travel and tourism course, but there was not enough money for her to complete it after she turned 18. Her sister worked in a taxi rank, cooking food, to support them. However, she passed away at the age of 26 that year and Idah could not continue studying.

A cousin then took her to Johannesburg to stay with him. That did not work out as her cousin's wife did not really want her there. Idah decided to go back to Mafefe to spend time with her sick grandmother. Her grandmother, who has sugar diabetes and high blood pressure, lives with Idah's nephew.

That was when Idah met Ben de Boer.

A man in her community in Mafefe gave Idah a pamphlet about the programme. She wrote an essay on why she was interested in the tourism industry and why her problems meant that she could not continue pursuing her career. She sent that with her CV. There were many people called for an interview with Ben, but she was chosen.

Before this Idah did not know much about birds, except that owls were associated with witchcraft. She also has a memory of herself and her nephew breaking a swallow's nest, and her mother beating them about it. That memory makes Idah smile as it reminds her that her mother actually loved birds.

### **The SSACI–BirdLife South Africa Project**

After the BirdLife South Africa training, Idah got a temporary, weekend job at Stanford Lake College near Magoebaskloof, and used her earnings to fund a course in computer literacy.

On the birding course, Idah learned about identifying birds, and how to love and appreciate nature more. She loved learning about the importance of the trees, the history of the area, and about its local myths.

As well as bird guide training, Idah attended a month-long hospitality training course in Grahamstown with the Hospitality Youth Initiative, another initiative supported by SSACI.

The hospitality course taught Idah many skills relating to guests, and how to behave and present herself. About herself, Idah learned that she must take care of herself as a woman, to be able to take initiative when she needs to, to be responsible. In general she believes all the training helped her to be a better person.

After that, Ben facilitated Idah's joining Sefapane Lodge to do her hospitality internship, and bird guiding.

Idah met many people who were able to teach her what she needs to know. The programme offered her the education her family could not afford to give her. Idah now knows that she has a future.

Idah supports her grandmother and nephew at home, and visits when she can.

Ben de Boer was Idah's mentor on the programme before he passed away. More recently, since she came to Sefapane her mentor has been Brenden Pienaar, the manager of the BirdLife South Africa Kruger to Canyons bird route.

Ben de Boer had a profound influence on Idah. Apart from going birding, "*We talked a lot, and he was there just to listen every time I had something to talk about. He was very supportive, like a father to me.*"

Now if she needs assistance, Brenden helps her. They meet almost every week. They go into the Kruger Park, and they go into the surrounding communities to teach schoolchildren about nature and conservation.

Brenden is helping Idah with marketing. Last month he wrote an article about Idah doing birding at Sefapane in a local newspaper, the Morula Gazette.

### **Access to Birding Areas**

In the Phalaborwa area there are many bird varieties so it is easy to go birding. This was not the case in Mafefe, where she comes from. There are also many bird habitats there, but mostly water birds and little brown birds. Not many birders visit that area as it is dangerous to go walking in the mountains there.

### **Resources**

Idah has Internet access, and recently joined a chatroom about birding activities, "Birding and Birds". Idah also created her own Facebook group called "We Love Birds".

### **The Future**

Idah loves both hospitality work and nature and bird guiding. She loves working at reception as it gives her an opportunity to talk to guests and get their impressions of the country. Almost 90% of Sefapane's guests are international visitors.

At present, Idah wants to get used to taking people out birding or looking at nature and animals. She would like to know more and gain confidence doing that, and then will decide what she wants to do in the future.

The project has been very good for Idah. She believes that she is succeeding already. *"I think often about where I would be without SSACI. Where I come from everyone of my age has children, is not educated, can't speak English...every time I go home, I remember if SSACI was not here to teach me all that I know about my body, about how to behave as a girl, and taking responsibility for my own future, I don't know where I would be. Especially as I grew up without having parents, you grow up not knowing much about yourself."*

## **Joel Sithole – Timbavati**

Joel Sithole is 24 years old, and does his birding at Timbavati Game Reserve, near the Kruger National Park. In return for taking high school and primary school students out birding Joel gets accommodation in the reserve, and certain allowances. He started there in August 2009.

### **Background and Experience**

Before the project started, Joel worked as a waiter in Polokwane. The SSACI project was not his first exposure to bird guiding and nature.

After he completed his grade 12, Joel received a bursary from Timbavati to attend the Southern Africa Wildlife College near Hoedspruit. At the end of that he delivered a personal message of thanks to one of the owners at Timbavati.

He then did freelance work with Joe and Lisa Grosel, well-known birders in the area, and took groups to the Kruger National Park. He did this until their company closed.

### **The SSACI-BirdLife South Africa Project**

Joe Grosel introduced him to the SSACI-BirdLife South Africa project. Joel loved the training, but returned to Polokwane afterwards. He was mentored by David Letsoalo. They only went out birding once, before the assessment. Since then he has obtained help from a researcher at Timbavati.

The project helped him to realise what he was able to do, and to develop his personal skills. Joel arranged his own placement by contacting the person at Timbavati who had organised his previous bursary, and who still had his details.

### **Access**

While it is easy for him to go birding whenever he wishes, Timbavati is privately owned, so people can't just come on to the reserve to go birding whenever they want to. Joel is sometimes able to use a vehicle from the lodge to take people out.

### **The Future**

Joel used to get freelance work from private contacts, and believes that he will ultimately be able to do so again. To be a successful freelance guide, one needs experience, exposure to other guides, and to meet new people.

### **Stephens Ramavhale – Eastern Cape, Construction**

Stephens is working in the Eastern Cape with an uncle who is doing a construction job on contract for Eskom. He went there as he was unable to find work or a placement as a bird guide, and needed to earn an income.

Since going to the Eastern Cape, he has been in contact with an established birder, Joe Grosel, who is trying to find him a placement if a post becomes available, even in the Eastern Cape.

Before the project, Stephens was doing guiding on his own. He was working as a game guide and research assistant at Mogalakwena River Lodge, a privately owned reserve about 80km from the Botswana border. He believed that the Lodge would support his birding activities. Unfortunately Stephens left as he had a dispute with the owners about his working conditions.

### **Thuseni Sigwadi – Manager, Tshulu Wilderness Camp**

Thuseni is 27 years old, and is the manager of Tshulu Wilderness Camp, owned by the HaMakuya community in rural Venda. He has a degree in environmental science from the University of Venda.

Before he joined the BirdLife South Africa programme, Thuseni was a volunteer there. He now manages the camp and arranges home stays in the community for visitors.

Thuseni enjoyed the training, loves bird guiding and passed the assessment, but finds it difficult to do much birding where he is. His mentor was Ben de Boer, and after he passed away, another successful local guide, Christopher Nethonzhe, mentored him.

The area needs much more marketing as a bird destination if it is to attract more visitors.

### **Lizzy Makgamatha – Environmental Education, Lapalala Wilderness School**

Lizzy Makgamatha is 25 years old. She is employed full-time at Lapalala Wilderness School teaching children about the environment. She has been there for about a year.

Lizzy enjoyed the bird guide training, and also did a course in environmental education in Hoedspruit. She also attended an additional workshop at Kurisa Moya. Ben de Boer was her mentor before he passed away, and since then she has been mentored by Jayesh, and Andre from BirdLife South Africa.

She ultimately would like to be an independent guide, but knows that she will have to start marketing herself. She plans to start by talking to people at the reserve where she works.

### **Sello Bethuel Morudu – UTi Pharma**

Bethuel is 28 years old. He did not complete the project, and has been working at UTi Pharma, a pharmaceutical distribution company in Johannesburg, since January 2009.

Bethuel left the programme because he had a clash with the manager of Blouberg Nature Reserve, which he used as his base. Bethuel had located a rare Ruppel Vulture there. Blouberg is a government reserve, but Bethuel feels the manager did not treat him well. He allowed him to come onto the reserve, but provided no assistance, and expected him to walk alone, even though there were wild animals there.

As a child, Bethuel used to kill birds. His father introduced him to the bush, and he became more interested in looking at and identifying them. Bethuel used to go birding with someone in his village, which is near the Blouberg Reserve. Blouberg Reserve has the largest Cape Vulture colony in the world. He used a gate on the side of his village to access the reserve to go birding.

Before the programme, Bethuel was a student. He studied Human Resources at Capricorn College in Polokwane. He has not yet completed this.

Bethuel's father knew Ben de Boer who asked if Bethuel was interested in becoming a bird guide. He was interviewed, and selected.

Bethuel loved the training. After the training, he asked the manager of the reserve if he could go and practise in the reserve. Bethuel feels that the manager blamed him unfairly for things that happened, for example, if something disappeared.

Ben de Boer was Bethuel's only mentor, although he left the programme before he passed away. He left because he was discouraged by the manager

of the Blouberg Reserve, and felt pressured to earn an income. Bethuel would go back to birding if he was offered a job

### **Kaiser Ndlovu – Department of Education, Hazyview**

Kaiser is 25 years old. He was unemployed until very recently, when he obtained an internship position with the Department of Education in Hazyview. This position has nothing to do with birding.

He was previously based in Bushbuckridge, but had no placement or mentor to guide him. He did not complete his assessment. He has recently spoken to BirdLife South Africa, who has promised to try to help him.

Although there are places to go birding close by, like Manyeleti, they are private reserves. If it was a municipal reserve he would be able to go birding regularly, but Kaiser has to negotiate access with private reserves. He found that difficult, and did not complete his assessment.

Kaiser heard about the programme through his brother, who was a colleague of Ben de Boer. Since Ben passed away, he has seen David Letsoalo once, but since then has been on his own.

He has started teaching children in the community about birding, and would love to get more involved in that. He has tried to link up with game lodges to offer bird-guiding services, and would still like to do guiding on weekends, now that he is working.

### **Masindi Ratshilavhi – Unemployed, Pafuri**

Masindi is 23 years old. She has a problem with her eyesight, but still passed her assessment. She has no placement, is unemployed, and is studying at Thohoyandou College.

She is located in a remote area, which does not see a lot of visitors. David visited her once, and they discussed her doing a computer or receptionist course, but he has been unable to get back to her since.

### **Sydwell Mkhari – Unemployed, Giyani**

Sydwell is 26 years old. He is based in Giyani and is unemployed.

He is not doing much birding in the area. There are not that many lodges around Giyani, although Phalaborwa, the Kruger National Park and Venda are not that far away.

Sydwell did not complete his assessment, and maintains that he is still waiting for BirdLife South Africa to get in touch with him about what to do next. He has tried to market himself to various organisations and lodges, hoping to get clients for bird guiding, but he has not been successful as yet.

Sydwell is frustrated at his lack of progress as a bird guide and has enrolled in a course in hospitality and tourism through the Limpopo Department of Health and Social Development.

### **Charles Mashilo – Unemployed, Mokopane**

Charles is 28 years old, lives in Mokopane and is unemployed. He very much wants to be a bird guide, but cannot manage as a freelancer and has not found a placement. He also attended the Hospitality Youth Initiative training.

He finds it difficult to take people out birding as there are not many people coming to the Mokopane area, and he has no transport to go elsewhere.

There is a community-owned reserve near where he lives, called the Masebe Reserve, but it is not easily accessible to him. At the outset of the project, it was hoped that he would be able to act as a guide on the trail there, but it seems that the community does not want to support him as they are afraid he will take income away from them. He needs to take a taxi to get there, and they want him to pay an entrance fee each time he goes to the reserve.

## David Letsoalo – Award-winning Bird Guide

*David Letsoalo is one of the most successful guides to emerge from BirdLife South Africa's avitourism Guide Development Programme. He has won the Eagle Award for being the best local guide in South Africa. Although not one of the trainees on this particular project, he was involved in some aspects and assisted with the mentoring of some of the participants.*

*Based at Kurisa Moya Nature Reserve where he is employed as the assistant manager, he does bird guiding when he has bookings. He has been so successful that he has been approached by Bushnell Optics, a manufacturer of binoculars, to endorse their products.*

*His story is included here as he is an example of what the project was hoping to achieve, and may yet accomplish in the future.*

David is currently the Assistant Manager at Kurisa Moya Nature Lodge, and does bird guiding when he has bookings. He has been guiding in the area for more than three years. His guiding activities are not confined to Kurisa Moya, he does guiding throughout the Limpopo Province, and also the Kruger National Park.

During his busy times, he can get bookings up to four times a week. Clients vary between single people, couples or groups. Clients find him on the website of Kurisa Moya, BirdlifeTravel, and BirdLife South Africa. He knows many birds, and is fortunate to be able to go birding in a variety of different places and habitats.

David has a reciprocal relationship with Kurisa Moya. Kurisa Moya does marketing for him, and he gives them a contribution from his freelance activities. As his name and reputation as a bird guide has spread, he has brought people to the lodge.

David also does mentoring, research, and can guide clients on village tours.

### **Background and Experience**

David's first interaction with birds when he was young was trying to kill them with a catapult.

With his family unable to support him, David did not complete his schooling. He became a motor mechanic. He wanted to start his own workshop, but that did not work out. Before finding work as a pottery assistant, he worked as a groundsman. It was then that he started to develop his interest in birds.

## **Development as a bird guide**

As he was showing an interest, his employer at the pottery studio bought him a bird book and he started going out birding by himself. He eventually began inviting local schools to accompany him, as it sometimes got boring to go out on his own in the field. He joined a bird club in the area, and started attending talks on topics of interest to birders. There he met someone called Steven Evans, from BirdLife South Africa, who offered him the opportunity to go on a bird guiding course in Wakkerstroom. After the course, he came back and made sure he was able to implement what he learned on the course.

After the training with BirdLife South Africa in October, David was advised to write an article about the training he attended in Wakkerstroom, what birds people could expect to see, and what he was hoping to achieve. He wrote the article in late November, and had his first booking in December. He wasn't that confident yet, but the clients were impressed. Those clients wrote an article for BirdLife South Africa about their experiences with David. David also wrote a newsletter article about it.

David recognised that he himself was his product. He consulted with different owners in the area to see how he could market himself. He made sure that he was always presentable to clients. He used the Africa Birds and Birding newsletter to write articles about what he was doing and seeing in the area. That's how he started attracting clients.

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) assigned Duan Biggs, an established bird guide, to mentor David for almost three years. The mentoring gave him lots of motivation.

Duan visited David about once every three months over the three-year period. They talked about David's ambitions, challenges, and strategies to overcome these challenges. It helped David as they would go over the plans he had made and they could see if he had overcome some of them. It also helped with bird identification, as each time Duan visited it would be for at least two days and they would go out birding. David obtained references from him, advice on what books to get, and whom he should consult to help with bird identification.

After that, his guiding activities grew and he was forced to make a choice between guiding and pottery, as he found he did not have the time to do the latter properly. He found employment at Black Forest Mountain Lodge in Haenertsberg as a bird guide and eco-tourism developer.

David has done a lot in conservation.

The Haenertsberg Development Foundation had by then decided to run environmental education at schools in the area. David already had a relationship with the schools, and got a three-month contract to guide learners on identifying grasses and plants in the grasslands. A year later, in 2004, he was made node co-ordinator for the area for the Eco Schools project.

Eco Schools is a programme practised in 47 countries worldwide, and is funded by the WWF. They look at environmental challenges like erosion, the greening of schools, water and so on, and try to develop sustainable solutions for the schools in the area.

### **To Emulate His Experiences**

David believes that new guides need to be mentored in their areas of operation. Linkages with an experienced guide are critical. They often need help with bird identification, and should be encouraged to do research in their area. They also need motivation.

Their training is good and offers many opportunities, but if they are not mentored and given encouragement by someone with a knowledge of birds, it is not enough.

Mentoring on this project was not enough. The project needs to strike a balance between having enough help, and also allowing the guides sufficient time to start experiencing their own challenges. Ideally, mentoring should be structured and occur every three months for a year and a half to two years.

The Ben de Boer Trust has been set up to help develop the local guides in Limpopo, and hopefully that will facilitate more systematic mentoring. It will also assist with specialist training. At present the Trust is still tied up with administrative requirements. David is a Trustee, and worked very closely with Ben de Boer, who was his friend and employer. Ben was dedicated to improving the lives of rural people. They saw each other every day.

At the start of their careers, guides need to be placed in an area where there is opportunity for them to earn while they are learning. Guiding itself is not sufficient. Additional skills, such as hospitality skills, will make people more employable. They should then have a structured agreement with the establishment to ensure that are able to still do bird guiding.

Young guides need assistance with pricing so that they do not overprice themselves initially. They need to be able to increase their rates in accordance with their knowledge and experience, and the value they add as a guide.