

## The BirdLife International - Rio Tinto partnership



### Finding mutually held objectives

“BirdLife represents a strong force for an enthusiastic and committed conservation effort. Our partnership with Rio Tinto is fuelled by mutually held objectives of integrating biodiversity conservation into core business practices and the breadth of projects developed is a measure of its own success.”

Mike Rands, director and chief executive, BirdLife International

In 2001, BirdLife International and Rio Tinto formed a partnership to achieve mutually held goals of biodiversity conservation within the context of the global transition to sustainable development.

BirdLife International is a global alliance of conservation organisations working together for the world's birds and people. With partner organisations in over 100 countries, BirdLife is working to conserve birds and other wildlife (biodiversity), and improve the quality of life for people. Rio Tinto is also global, with a presence in more than 40 countries. Group businesses therefore have a conservation partner available for project development in their own country, meshing together the two organisations at both the local and global level.

The partnership achieves biodiversity conservation through several activities:

- Promotion of an interest in birds as a gateway to awareness of the environment, including annual birdwatching events at Rio Tinto operations.
- Identification and development of conservation projects relevant to mining operations.
- Global outreach, advancing the debate on corporate responsibility through demonstration of the partnership's successes.

**Birdwatching events**, held annually, are an opportunity for Rio Tinto employees, families and members of the local community to share their enjoyment of birds. The birdwatching events have grown from 21 events in the pilot year (2000) with 330 participants, to

42 events with 1,800 participants in 2003. In 2003, participants recorded an outstanding 1,189 species in the Americas, southern Africa, Madagascar, the UK, India, Australia, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia. At some Rio Tinto operations, these events form part of the operation's long term environmental monitoring programmes. In local communities, they raise awareness of biodiversity, provide learning tools in schools, and act as a communication springboard in the identification and development of biodiversity projects.

**Biodiversity projects** aim to contribute to bird and biodiversity conservation globally by recognising opportunities for developing collaborative initiatives locally. Ventures include the facilitation and development of ecotourism businesses in South Africa, the protection of Damara terns in Namibia, school wildlife education projects in Zimbabwe, biodiversity site identification and nature centres in the US, and a survey of bird diversity relevant to Rio Tinto sites in Australia.

### Developing ecotourism at Richards Bay

BirdLife South Africa and Richards Bay Minerals (Rio Tinto 50 per cent interest) have worked together since 2001 to develop birdwatching tourism along the Zululand Birding Route. This is being facilitated through the training of local guides and the development of tourism infrastructure. The programme has created a number of sustainable, community based businesses within the impoverished communities of KwaZulu-Natal which simultaneously fulfil the objectives of biodiversity conservation, sustainable development and poverty reduction.

Over 30 local birdwatching guides have been trained by BirdLife South Africa and now make their living from eco-tourism, creating economic benefits in local communities. Local government has become involved, making conservation policy changes in recognition of the significance of birds in people's livelihoods. For example, the Richards Bay municipality declared a wetland as a conservation amenity area and handed it over to the Richards Bay ecotourism project.

### Protecting the rare Damara tern

The most important breeding colony of this rare seabird is found at Caution Reef on the Namibian coast, southern Africa, near the mining operations of Rio Tinto's Rössing Uranium. Tern nests were commonly destroyed by off road vehicles driving recklessly over the dunes. The Namibian Ministry of Environment and Tourism implemented a fencing programme in October 2000 to protect the Caution Reef colony. Rössing supported the project as it was clearly a prominent biodiversity issue within some of its key communities. Over 30 kilometres of fencing now prevents uncontrolled access to most core breeding areas in the dunes. A public education campaign includes 56 signs posted around the fence, indicating the area's conservation status. Success of the project was marked by a 30 per cent decline in hatching losses in 2002, with no losses in fully enclosed areas.

### The Madison Valley "Important Bird Area" (IBA)

As part of BirdLife's IBA programme, Montana Audubon, Madison Valley Ranchlands Group and Luzenac America, Rio Tinto's talc subsidiary, teamed together to assess the biodiversity of Madison Valley in Montana, US. Luzenac America operates the Yellowstone talc mine in the Madison Valley and processes the mineral at several state mills. Bird surveys were conducted in the riverine habitat of the Madison Valley for two seasons. Survey leader Jeff Marks of Montana Audubon said, "The valley provides important breeding habitat for several key conservation species in Montana, such as bald eagle, red-naped sapsucker, and willow flycatcher. It is also a critical habitat for migrating common loons". The surveys will provide support for recognition of the valley as an official Important Bird Area in Montana.

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Red-winged parrot (above) and Banded Stilt (below), as seen during a Rio Tinto birdwatching event.



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