

Rio Tinto



# The BirdLife International

Rio Tinto Partnership

# “Our partnership with Rio Tinto is fuelled by mutually held objectives of integrating biodiversity conservation into core business practices.”

Mike Rands, director and chief executive, BirdLife International

**Focusing on mutually held objectives**, the partnership between BirdLife International and Rio Tinto has contributed to the global transition to sustainable development. Since its establishment in 2001, the partnership has enabled both organisations to deliver outcomes that neither could have achieved as effectively when working alone.

BirdLife International is a global alliance of conservation organisations working together for the world’s birds and people. With partner organisations in 110 countries, BirdLife works to conserve birds and other biodiversity, and improve the quality of life for people. BirdLife’s scientific expertise and global biodiversity databases enable it to identify global conservation priorities relevant to Rio Tinto operations. Furthermore, through its global partnership and grassroots networks, BirdLife is well positioned to identify and develop local conservation initiatives between Rio Tinto business units and local partners. Rio Tinto has a presence in more than 40 countries.

## **The partnership achieves biodiversity conservation through:**

- Promoting interest in birds as a gateway to wider awareness of the environment, through annual birdwatching events at Rio Tinto operations.
- Identifying and developing conservation projects relevant to mining operations and to BirdLife partners.
- Implementing Rio Tinto’s biodiversity strategy among Rio Tinto business units.
- Advancing the debate on corporate responsibility by demonstrating the partnership’s achievements through global outreach work.

**Birdwatching events** are an opportunity for Rio Tinto employees, families and members of the local community to share their enjoyment of birds. This annual activity grew from 21 events with 330 participants in 2000, to 44 events with more than 4,000 participants in 13 countries, in 2007. At some Rio Tinto operations, Birdwatch events form part of long term environmental monitoring programmes.

Cover: American Avocets *Recurvirostra americana* breed in association with marshes and saline lakes in the west of North America.

The events also help Rio Tinto business units showcase their environmental and biodiversity management work, and provide educational and recreational opportunities for local communities and employees. From BirdLife's perspective, they provide an initial vehicle for relationship building, and can act as a springboard for the identification and development of collaborative conservation projects.

**Conservation projects** aim to contribute to bird and biodiversity conservation globally by developing collaborative initiatives locally. The most successful projects are those that develop strategic initiatives and broker interest from all sectors of civil society. These include wildlife education programmes in Zimbabwe, ecotourism and sustainable livelihood initiatives in South Africa, and engagement in land use planning that met the needs of the mine and wildlife in the US.

**Rio Tinto's goal is to have a "net positive impact" on biodiversity.** This means minimising the impacts of its business and contributing to biodiversity conservation to ensure a region ultimately benefits as a result of the company's presence.

BirdLife recognises this position as a landmark commitment by a mining company towards biodiversity conservation. BirdLife is assisting Rio Tinto to implement its biodiversity strategy at priority operations by:

- Designing and planning mitigation measures.
- Developing and testing a methodology for "offsetting" unavoidable residual impacts on biodiversity.
- Developing performance measures.

The annual Rio Tinto Birdwatch Event brings together employees, family members and local communities to enjoy and learn about birds and the environment.

**Global outreach work** demonstrates the potential benefits of cross sector partnerships and advocates best practice for biodiversity management across the global mining sector. The Rio Tinto – BirdLife partnership has attracted considerable interest from other resource companies, government agencies and NGOs, and the partners are responding to this interest by sharing lessons learned through workshops, study visits and by publishing articles.

### **From Zululand and Kruger-to-Canyons to Kakadu, Australia: extending the Birding Route model**

In South Africa, the outstanding success of the Zululand Birding Route, a product of Rio Tinto's Richards Bay Minerals – BirdLife South Africa partnership, created a model for sustainable livelihood development and biodiversity conservation. It is being extended to a number of locations throughout the country. In 2007, a partnership was developed between Rio Tinto's Palabora Mining Company and BirdLife to establish the Kruger-to-Canyons Birding Route. In this region, covering the Kruger National Park and wider area, integrating community development and nature conservation is crucial. In Australia, Birds Australia partnered with Rio Tinto's Energy Resources of Australia (ERA) to develop a birding route in the Kakadu region of Australia's Northern Territory.



## Direct payments for conservation in Madagascar

Asity Madagascar (the BirdLife Affiliate) and Rio Tinto's ilmenite mining project are collaborating to conserve the Tsitongambarika forests in southeastern Madagascar. These forests harbour a number of newly discovered plant and animal species known nowhere else on earth. Unfortunately, such forests are gradually being cleared for cultivation, driven by poverty and food insecurity among local communities. In response, the project is employing an innovative approach to conservation – direct payments – which delivers development benefits to local communities in return for improved forest protection.

The project is empowering local communities with the necessary skills, information and incentives to make decisions resulting in more sustainable uses of the forest, while providing them with livelihood alternatives to cultivation.

Looking to the future, BirdLife, Asity and Rio Tinto Madagascar are engaging with other stakeholders to plan and realise an integrated programme of conservation and sustainable development for the Tsitongambarika forests, including the designation of a community co-managed protected area. It is intended that this programme will help establish Tsitongambarika as one of a suite of “biodiversity offsets” for the ilmenite operation – an “offset” being a conservation action designed to compensate for the unavoidable impacts on biodiversity caused by development.

Learn more at  
[www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org)  
[www.riotinto.com](http://www.riotinto.com)

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