



MEDIA RELEASE

“PLACE OF BIRDS” RECEIVES GENEROUS CONTRIBUTION

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Phalaborwa: Atmei Construction (Pty) Ltd. has generously donated an informative roadside sign and site indicator for the breeding pair of Taita Falcons at the JG Strydom tunnel along BirdLife South Africa's Kruger to Canyons Birding Route. The R527 road which meanders along the Abel Erasmus Pass and through the JG Strydom tunnel down towards the Lowveld offers some of the best raptor birding along the Kruger to Canyons Birding Route. The many lay byes near the tunnel also offer excellent opportunities to scan the surrounding cliffs and forest for special birds. In the early-1990s, Dylan Smith surprisingly reported a pair of Taita Falcons at this exact position and Dave Rushworth subsequently discovered that these small raptors were breeding on the cliffs above the road.

The discovery of the Taita Falcons was an unanticipated but extremely welcome event due to the fact that there were few places in southern Africa where they could be seen with such relative ease. Recent research has shown that there are a few pairs of Taita Falcons nesting on inaccessible cliffs along this stretch of the Drakensberg Mountains. Realising the vulnerability of the nest, in 1996 Dave Rushworth recruited Michael Kumako to guard the nest site. Michael had all of the right credentials for this task, as he is from the local community, he is a self-taught and knowledgeable bird-watcher. Michael consequently underwent training through the BirdLife South Africa bird guide training programme in Wakkerstroom in 2001, and upon his return started pointing out the Taita Falcons to passing motorists and birders. “I enjoy my work so much, I do not want to work anywhere else” Michael confirmed last week.

As Michael realised the benefit of marketing to his newly created profession, he painted the words “Place of Birds” on a large rock nearby the falcons’ roosting site. In order to help Michael and the Kruger to Canyons Birding Route with marketing and to create more awareness and a better understanding of these rare Taita Falcons, Justin Bode from Atmei Construction (Pty) Ltd. has generously sponsored an extremely informative sign and Taita Falcon site indicator. “The sign will soon replace Michael’s entrepreneurial, but less aesthetically-pleasing paint job on the large rock which will be removed” said Brenden Pienaar the Project Manager of the Kruger to Canyons Birding Route.

BirdLife South Africa would like to thank Justin Bode and Atmei Construction for their valuable contribution to the Kruger to Canyons Birding Route and the conservation of the Taita Falcon.

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