



Eastern Cape



KwaZulu-Natal



Lowveld



Northern Areas & Free State



Western & Northern Cape

Wessalife Bulletin
May – June 2020



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NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY Greetings to all our members from the WESSA Regions Membership team. We hope you are safe and coping as well as possible in these unprecedented times, and that you will find this Bulletin informative and uplifting. The global Covid-19 pandemic is leading to daunting economic, social, and psychological challenges and, in addition to health concerns, many in South Africa and the world are struggling to survive, people are losing their jobs, and businesses are having to close. Changes to every aspect of life are now a reality we must come to terms with, and we will need all our imagination and resourcefulness to make the best of things and continue with our work.

Although it is a stressful time, it is also a time of opportunity and new perspectives; a time to appreciate the truly important things in life; a time to be grateful and give back; and a time to help our communities and each other. Through **Local Initiatives For the Environment (WESSA life)**, we aim to stay the course and expand our community-based environmental work. This means taking measures to streamline and simplify our membership structure while becoming as internet-based as possible in respect of connecting and communicating with our members. This will ensure both safety and convenience for all concerned, save costs, and have less impact on the environment. **See details of changes on page two.**

Once lockdown restrictions have eased, we hope to begin holding events and working in the field again, using a gradual approach while making sure all necessary precautions are taken in line with government and medical recommendations. In order to continue making a meaningful contribution to conservation in a post-pandemic world, we will need as much support as possible and would therefore be most grateful if you could renew your membership. Any donations would also be very much appreciated. In addition, we welcome suggestions and encourage collaboration to find ways in which to navigate these difficult and uncertain times.

REGIONAL TRANSITION Over the past year, we have been transitioning to a largely regionally managed membership. Via the Wessalife portal, www.wessalife.org.za many aspects of membership have been automated and regional coordinators now have access to online records and other resources to facilitate the overall administration of membership. We are continuing to develop the portal so that members will be able to manage their own profiles, sign up to events and engage more with their region.

REGIONAL CONTACT DETAILS

REGION	PHONE	EMAIL	PAYMENTS, INFO & INQUIRIES
Eastern Cape	082 875 4210	ec.chair@wessalife.org.za	membership@wessalife.org.za
KwaZulu-Natal	083 630 5380	kzn.chair@wessalife.org.za	Fax to email: 086 519 2018
Lowveld	083 285 5669	lv.chair@wessalife.org.za	www.wessalife.org.za
Northern Areas & Free State	083 444 7649	nar.chair@wessalife.org.za	
Western & Northern Cape	083 441 0028	wc.chair@wessalife.org.za	

Please ensure we have your correct email & cell phone on record. This is vital to enable us to stay in touch!



WESSA Membership June 2020

The following provides details of the changes that will be implemented from June 2020. This is necessary to streamline and simplify membership, save costs, reduce our impact on the environment, and adapt to new realities resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Print magazines African Wildlife & Environment | EnviroKids: Over the past few years, it has become progressively more difficult to cover the costs of printing and posting thousands of magazines. We have continued providing this service to our members against the odds. However, with current developments, this is no longer possible and we must now advise all members currently subscribed to *African Wildlife* that **Issue 75** – which has been waiting to be posted once the lockdown is relaxed – will be the final issue in print form. Fortunately, we introduced a digital version of *African Wildlife* in August 2018 so it will continue to be published but in digital format. Our new fee structure below reflects these changes. Sadly, earlier this year, a decision was also taken to discontinue *EnviroKids* in its present form, with the final issue being 40.4 in the last quarter of 2019. To thank you for your support over the years, all members with email will receive a **free digital copy of African Wildlife issue 75**.

Life members & emails: Life members will also be sent a digital *African Wildlife* for which **we require an email address**. In the case of many Life members, we do not have one on record. If you have an email (or access to one) please provide this as soon as possible. In the times we are in, an email – or some other means of electronic communication – is essential. SMS or WhatsApp could also help so, if possible, please provide a cell phone number.

Refunds: Active members subscribed to **Levels A B C and D | Schools Level S1-3** are entitled to a pro-rata refund for the magazine portion of the membership fees they have paid. Members who have signed up for *African Wildlife* in the second quarter of 2020 or, in the case of *EnviroKids* Jan-May 2020, will be due a full refund. We realise that many members have long enjoyed receiving their hard copy magazine, especially our older members, and we very much regret that we can no longer maintain this service. We sincerely apologise for any inconvenience this may cause and hope you will understand the circumstances that have led to these difficult decisions. Unclaimed refunds will go towards supporting *African Wildlife*. Please contact us for more details, or if you have any queries.

EARTH CARER MEMBERSHIP: GENERAL & SCHOOLS FROM JUNE 2020		
OPTION	AMT	DETAILS
EC01 Standard	360	Membership & African Wildlife
EC02 Discounted	290	Membership & African Wildlife: Schools Under 25 & over 60
EC03 Basic	230	Membership only
EC04 Special Sponsor	2500	Donation with complimentary membership & African Wildlife
EC05 Supporter	Free	Active volunteer

All members receive:

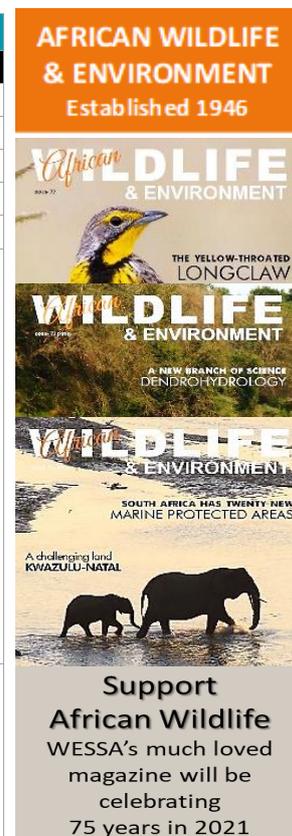
- Membership certificate
- Quarterly digital African Wildlife, WESSA's in-house magazine (excluding Basic level)
- Activity newsflashes & e-newsletters
- S18A Tax Receipt for additional donations

In addition:

- **School Members** qualify for discounted membership and use of the WESSA School Member logo.
- **Special Sponsors Members** receive an S18A Tax Receipt for the full amount of their contribution plus complimentary membership, quarterly issues of digital African Wildlife and Certificate of Appreciation.

Supporters receive: Letter of Acknowledgment | Activity newsflashes & newsletters.

BANK ACCOUNT DETAILS
Bank: First National Bank **Account Name:** WESSA Membership
Branch & Code: Howick 22-07-25 **Account Number:** 62 219 969 732
Reference: Surname & Initials + MB number if existing member
Online payments: www.wessalife.org.za



WESSA members work to:

- Protect and conserve natural habitats and biodiversity
- Engage with individuals and communities to enable them to live more sustainably
- Create opportunities for social and economic upliftment through enviro education
- Collaborate and network with groups and organisations with similar objectives
- Raise awareness and promote public participation around key environmental issues

The Great Pause

With humans in lockdown, animals come out and pollution clears



During the lockdown, shark nets along KwaZulu-Natal's coastlines have been lifted, allowing marine animals like turtles, sharks, whales and dolphins to move freely. Above: Durban's deserted beach front with dolphins cavorting close to shore. (Photo via social media, 30 March 2020.)



Without having to contend with the all-pervasive presence of humans, wildlife around the world has been making an amazing comeback. Although the pandemic is having serious impacts from a human perspective, it's become clear there have been major benefits for nature. With reduced levels of pollution and spaces now empty of humans, animals have been able to move around freely in a way that has not been possible for a very long time.

Here in South Africa, endangered African penguins were seen wandering in the deserted streets of Simon's Town: [Watch video](#), and in Langebaan, residents were treated to a rare scene with thousands of birds, in numbers never seen before, feeding off sardines close to shore. [Watch video](#) filmed by a local resident from Paradise Beach.



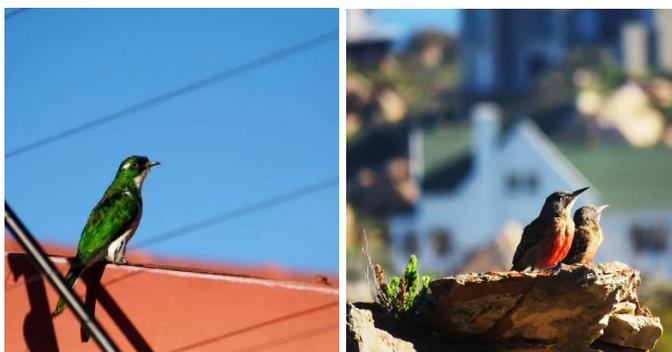
Elsewhere, critically endangered [Gangetic river dolphins](#) are now visible in the Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary (VGDS), Bihar while in [Brazil, India, Thailand and Florida](#), endangered sea turtles are making nests and baby turtles are hatching in record numbers. [Report via: Coastwatch KZN](#)

50th Anniversary of Earth Day, 22 April 2020

"There's no doubt that we're able to hear more birds – and from further away." – Jessleena Suri, PhD candidate

"In view of Earth Day and its mission, there is a silver lining to the COVID-19 crisis. If we can have this level of global response to what is a relatively minor challenge ... if we can take that and apply that to what is really a significant challenge to biodiversity on the planet – the climate crisis – then perhaps we can actually band together to do something that really is going to change the way we live on this planet." – Prof. Peter Ryan, University of Cape Town

The 50th anniversary of Earth Day was commemorated on 22 April 2020. In this [article](#) from the University of Cape Town News titled *Earth Day 2020: Birds, lockdown and cause to pause*, UCT ornithologists Professor Peter Ryan and PhD candidate Jessleena Suri talk about resurgent birdlife in urban and suburban areas in the wake of the nationwide lockdown. They also discuss research in isolation, saying the lockdown has been like a large-scale natural experiment.



“All over the globe, the 50th anniversary of Earth Day is being commemorated in lockdown conditions. With climate action as this year’s International Earth Day theme, it’s ironic that enforced isolation has given humanity cause to pause and put a much greater dent in global carbon emissions than any climate accord has achieved. As a result, people are noticing birdlife in their surroundings, neighbourhoods and gardens as never before, as well as small mammals – genets, caracals, mongooses and otters – are being seen more frequently in now tranquil urban

environments. So has reduced noise pollution and traffic brought more birdlife to urban and suburban areas? While the signals for small mammals may be clearer, they’re more opaque for birds, says Professor Ryan in an interview with CapeTalk’s Lester Kiewit on 20 April ...

“Jessleena Suri was meant to spend the months of March and April conducting bird surveys throughout Cape Town. But while the lockdown interfered with her own fieldwork, it allowed her to cast the net wider and gain virtual access to people’s gardens all over the country. Her lockdown garden survey went online at the start of the lockdown and is harnessing data from birders in their gardens all over South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe. Along with providing some basic information about their gardens, participants are asked to conduct weekly 10-minute bird counts from the same spot. Counts done between dawn and 10h00 are the most valuable as this is when bird activity is highest.”

Go to: urbanbirds.sa@gmail.com to contribute to this work. **Read full article.** **Photos:** Left: Klaas’s Cuckoo, Mowbray by Kervin Prayag | Right: Ground Woodpecker, Betty’s Bay by Nick Fordyce.

A rare glimpse of a low-carbon future “The COVID-19 pandemic has caused industrial activity to shut down and cancelled flights and other journeys, slashing greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution around the world. If there is something positive to take from this terrible crisis, it could be that it’s offered a taste of the air we might breathe in a low-carbon future. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that about **4.2 million people die** each year from ailments caused by ambient (outdoor) air pollution, and that more than 80% of people living in urban areas are exposed to air quality levels that exceed safe limits. The situation is worse in low-income countries, where 98% of cities fail to meet WHO air quality standards. With the global lockdown, measurements from the European Space Agency’s Sentinel-5P satellite show that, during late January and early February 2020, levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) over cities and industrial areas in Asia and Europe were lower than in the same period in 2019 by as much as 40% ... In a sense, we are conducting the largest ever global air pollution experiment. Over a relatively short period of time, we’re turning off major air pollutant sources in industry and transport.” **Read full article.**



The question is, how do we retain the silver lining? “If Covid-19 is a visible, viciously virulent, insanely infectious pandemic, killing swiftly and mercilessly, air pollution is its invisible, non-communicable evil twin, killing unhurriedly under the radar but equally ruthlessly ... According to **World Health Organisation estimates**, air pollution causes around 7 million premature deaths globally per annum. As at 30 April, Covid-19 had caused the deaths of 227 051 individuals ... Meanwhile, there is another brighter, more aesthetic connection between Covid-19 and air pollution. A silver lining, if you will. This one involves stopping the human race in its thoughtless tracks via lockdowns across airsheds, across geographical, political and social boundaries – and it is this: We’re suddenly seeing clear, blue skies, and breathing clean outdoor air, even in our densest cities and towns; experiencing hidden beauty – spectacular views which were always there, just shrouded in thick, unhealthy smog. All at once, the air smells fresh, fragrant. Without micropollutants

occluding its rays, sunlight dazzles. Birdsong is back. Animals, big and small, rare bird sightings, even fish – dolphin tales abound – all creatures, which had retreated due to the relentless advance of man’s economic progress and greed, are returning to habitats they were forced to abandon as lockdowns cage humans, limiting their encroachments. Water bodies are turning blue again, rippling clean, without chemicals frothing at their edges, reflecting limpid, cerulean skies. The night sky has turned magical, with faraway stars glittering gloriously, their luminosity unhindered by a haze of pollutants. Across the earth, people witnessed the 8 April supermoon, its pink luminescence clearly visible without any telescopic aid, glowing and smiling at an earth that looked like it was healing ... The question is, however, how do we retain the silver lining even after the Covid-inspired dark cloud rolls away? The only way to sustainably reduce emissions is not through painful lockdowns, but by putting the right energy and climate-related policies in place ...” **Read full article** **Photo:** School children protest against alarming levels of pollution in New Delhi.

The Pandemic is a Portal



“What is this thing that has happened to us? It’s a virus, yes. In and of itself it holds no moral brief. Whatever it is, coronavirus has made the mighty kneel and brought the world to a halt like nothing else could. Our minds are still racing back and forth, longing for a return to ‘normality’, trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. But the rupture exists. And in the midst of this terrible despair, it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normality.”

“Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.” [Watch Arundhati Roy reading from her essay](#)



VEGETABLES & HERBS THAT CAN BE GROWN FROM SCRAPS

- Potatoes
- Sweet Potatoes
- Onions, Garlic, Leeks and Shallots
- Celery
- Bulb Fennel
- Carrots, Turnips, Parsnips, Beets & other Root Crops
- Lettuce and other Leafy Greens
- Cabbages
- Basil, Mint, Coriander & Other Herbs



Victory Gardens

During both World Wars, people in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia were encouraged to plant Victory Gardens. By May 1943, there were 18 million Victory Gardens in the US – from suburban backyards to small city plots – while in the UK, allotments numbered 1.4 million in rural, suburban and urban areas from backyards to apartment-building rooftops, Hyde Park to Buckingham Palace. These food gardens not only supplemented food rations but were a boost to morale as they helped people feel empowered as well as being rewarded by the harvest they produced.



Creating a vegetable garden is a way to make a difference on a small patch of earth and gives us a sense of control in an uncertain world. Having a vegetable garden also means less trips to the grocery store, saves money, and is an excellent form of exercise. There’s lots of advice on the internet on how to establish a food garden. Online courses are also available. With Zoom, it’s more than possible for experienced gardeners to share their knowledge and encourage others to **Get Going with Food Growing!** 



Ubuntu Project: Backyard Food Gardens Mushroom in South Africa Vusi Shongwe, Mpumalanga MEC for Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs, has called on every household to start cultivating backyard vegetable gardens for planting. Shongwe plans to engage all municipalities to look at making vacant land (in each ward) available for communities to plough: *“We are going to revive that programme and where possible, we will donate seeds and working tools. Every municipal ward must have a vegetable garden to feed those who cannot afford food. We must resuscitate the spirit of being self-reliant among our people. While we fight the Covid-19 virus and other deadly diseases on one hand, we must also fight hunger and starvation aggressively because our communities can also die from malnutrition.”* **Read articles:** [SA People](#) | [The Mpumalanga News](#) **Photo:** Agroecologist, food activist and seed saver Tim Abaa is making fresh produce boxes available.



22 MAY INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY 2020

Our solutions are in nature More and more, research is indicating that humanity’s destruction of biodiversity is creating the conditions for new viruses and diseases such as Covid-19 to arise – with profound health

and economic impacts across the world in both rich and poor countries. Increasingly, we are being forced to recognise that human wellbeing is connected to the wellbeing of all living things and entire ecosystems. **Read article:** [Is our destruction of nature responsible for Covid-19?](#)

“We invade tropical forests and other wild landscapes, which harbour so many species of animals and plants – and within those creatures, so many unknown viruses. We cut the trees; we kill the animals or cage them and send them to markets. We disrupt ecosystems, and we shake viruses loose from their natural hosts. When that happens, they need a new host. Often, we are it.” – David Quammen, author of [Spillover: Animal Infections and the Next Pandemic](#) published in 2012.

Download & print [biodiversity colouring page](#). You can also cut out the pieces to make a simple puzzle for younger children.

25 MAY AFRICA DAY 2020 The Covid-19 pandemic is having a focusing effect. Before it struck, we knew what we had to do but a lack of political will, imagination and vested interests has continually thwarted meaningful action in tackling climate change. Now is the time, faced with this terrible crisis, to undertake what previously seemed impossible so that South Africa, together with other African countries, can begin working towards a brighter future – **a Just Transition** that will serve and uplift all the people of Africa.

“A Just Transition secures the future and livelihoods of workers and their communities in the transition to a low-carbon economy. It is based on a social dialogue between workers and their unions, employers, government and communities. A plan for a Just Transition provides and guarantees better and decent jobs, social protection, more training opportunities and greater job security for all workers affected by global warming and climate change policies.” – International Trade Union Confederation.

Read: [The History of Africa Day](#) **Watch:** 2019 presentation by Prof. Mark Swilling [Unlocking a just energy transition for South Africa](#)

SPECIAL AWARENESS DAYS JUN-AUG 2020

JUNE

- 01 National Children’s Day
- 03 World Bicycle Day
- 05 World Environment Day
- 05 World Day against Illegal Fishing
- 08 World Oceans Day
- 12 World Day Against Child Labour
- 16 Youth Day (SA)
- 17 Combat Desertification and Drought Day
- 20 World Refugee Day
- 27 Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Day

JULY

- 04 International Day of Cooperatives
- 11 World Population Day
- 14 Shark Awareness Day
- 15 World Youth Skills Day
- 18 Mandela Day
- 26 International Mangroves Day

AUGUST

- 09 National Women’s Day (SA)
- 09 World Indigenous Peoples Day
- 10 World Lion Day
- 12 World Elephant Day
- 12 International Youth Day
- 19 World Humanitarian Day
- 29 International Day against Nuclear Testing
- 31 African Traditional Medicine Day

