

PROTECTING OUR WETLANDS: INGULA'S BEDFORD WETLAND

Ingula has around 2000 ha of wetlands in its care and 8 000 hectares of farmland surrounding the upper wetland. It is home to a very special bird, found in only nine places in South Africa – the White-winged Flufftail. This specialised wetland bird is critically endangered and the major reason for its status is habitat destruction. They need clean undisturbed wetlands in which to breed and feed successfully.



White-winged Flufftail

What is a wetland?

A wetland is an area of land that is waterlogged, either permanently or seasonally. Lakes, rivers, ponds, marshes, swamps, peatlands, mangrove forests, salt pans, sandy beaches, and coral reefs are all examples of wetlands.

A major factor that distinguishes a wetland from other land forms or water bodies is the characteristic of vegetation that is adapted to its unique soil conditions. Wetlands are very unique biomes in that they are terrestrial habitats that are permanently or seasonally inundated with water. Thus they can be viewed as terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems converging. One of their key characteristics of wetlands that makes them easily identifiable is the presence of aquatic plant life, specifically adapted to survive in the unique soil conditions. Wetlands include bogs, swamps and marshes and deltas. They are often located near large bodies of water like lakes and rivers and can be found throughout the world.



Bedford Wetland

These unique characteristics that make up the wetland biome make it a very important habitat for an array of important species.

These areas are thus particularly important for the conservation of biodiversity and ecology. Wetlands are important for a number of species who are solely dependent on the wetland biome itself, such as the White-winged Flufftail.



Annual wetlands walk

Why do they need protection?

Wetland ecosystems are part of our natural wealth. Sadly, worldwide, they are under threat from human settlement, drainage for agricultural land, pollution and other destructive forces. Wetlands provide important “ecosystem services” such as flood control, groundwater replenishment, sediment and nutrient retention, and water purification. They are reservoirs of biodiversity and are often used for recreation and tourism.

With increasing global pressure on water resources and the threats posed by climate change, the need to maximise these benefits has never been greater or more urgent. It is estimated that by 2025 around 1, 8 billion people will be living in regions with absolute water scarcity, and two-thirds of the world population could be experiencing water-stress. Wetlands are, therefore, the earth's natural water infrastructure, providing a clean source and store of freshwater. Their loss and degradation directly impact water supply issues and compromise human well-being. Using our wetlands wisely is an essential to ensure a sustainable water supply into the future.

The **Ingula Visitors Centre** conducts tours of Ingula including the conservation area on weekdays. Presentations can also be given off-site. Bookings in advance are essential.
Contact: Tel 036 3423236. Email: ingulavisitorscentre@eskom.co.za

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