

## PROTECTING OUR WETLANDS: INGULA'S BEDFORD WETLAND

Ingula has over 8000 hectares land in its care and around 2000 hectares of this is wetlands. 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. The pristine status of Ingula wetland gained its Ramsar certification in March 2021. Ramsar is the world convention for the protection of wetlands and this means that our wetland and the Ingula Nature Reserve is globally recognised.



### 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.



Annual wetlands walk



Bedford Wetland

A major factor that distinguishes a wetland from other landforms or water bodies is the characteristic of vegetation that is adapted to its unique soil conditions. Wetlands are 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 the 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.

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 several species who are solely dependent on the wetland biome itself, such as the White-winged Flufftail.

### 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.



White-winged Flufftail



Bubbling Kassina

### Ingula Visitors Centre

The Ingula Visitors Centre conducts tours of the site and conservation area on weekdays. Presentations can also be given off-site and online via MS Teams. Booking in advance is essential.

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**Produced by: Peaking Visitors Centre  
GI 0002 Revision 3 (June 2024)**

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