

# Guidelines for custodianship in South Africa

Rewarding conservation friendly farming



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# Guidelines for custodianship in South Africa

## Rewarding Conservation friendly farming

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## Introduction

The South African constitution (Section 24) recognises the direct relationship between the health and well-being of humankind and the persistence of the natural environment and the biodiversity therein. It is on these grounds that a constitutional duty is placed on the State (and all spheres of government therein) to take reasonable steps, in their current functions as well as future plans, to prevent environmental degradation, promote conservation and ensure sustainable development. In addition, it must be highlighted that the burden of responsibility is also on the landowners / land users as well, who undertake individual land use to ensure a livelihood whilst contributing to the greater common good, or alternatively not impacting on the greater common good of other individuals.

The biological diversity of South Africa is currently inadequately safeguarded, particularly the threatened and endemic species, their habitat and associated ecosystem services. Lack of overall resources has limited the ability of the state to acquire critical land that should be formally protected, with effective natural resource management being hampered by reduced operating budgets. This results in the need for alternative means of securing biological diversity within communal and privately owned properties. The conservation of biological diversity outside of protected areas relies purely on the commitment and actions of private and communal landowners. While the introduction of biodiversity stewardship has provided a key tool for securing habitat outside of existing reserves there is still a need for the recognition of the actions taken by members of the public in support of the conservation of species on privately and communally owned land and the encouragement of further actions of this kind by the community at large. This formal recognition need not necessarily be a precursor to formal stewardship agreements nor should it be an alternative, it should be considered as an additional motivation working in conjunction with the overall goal of conserving biodiversity.



## What is custodianship?

Custodianship is the formal recognition given to individuals of the public at large in acknowledgement of their voluntary commitment to conservation. To date custodianship has been species focussed with individuals being recognised for their commitment to the conservation of species on their land. Individuals are recognised through nomination by either conservation officials or fellow landowners. The nomination is then verified in terms of ensuring that those individuals do in fact contribute in the required ways to the conservation of the species in question. Currently there are two levels of acknowledgement, the first is a certificate and the second a custodian board which can optionally be mounted at the property entrance. The former can be considered as a precursor to the latter but can also be awarded to individuals who contribute to the conservation of the species in question but are not necessarily land owners. Like natural heritage sites, RAMSAR sites and Important Bird Areas are recognitions of the biodiversity value of specific areas, this is a recognition of the conservation efforts of specific individuals.

While the recognition of custodians is guided by specific criteria, there is no associated legally binding agreement and no future requirements of the landowner over and above the request and encouragement to continue conserving their natural heritage in the way they have done thus far in order to receive this prestigious recognition. With the ultimate hope that the actions of these dedicated landowners will positively influence their neighbours and communities at large for the overall conservation of biological diversity and its associated resources.

## Brief History

Custodianship began in South Africa in the early to mid 1990s. The existing custodianship programmes are managed separately and are all species specific with the possible exception of the existing crane custodians which covers any one or all three of South Africa's crane species. The other existing species custodian programmes include the Oribi, Blue Swallow and Riverine Rabbit programmes with an associated habitat recognition programme for Cheetahs by the name of the Cheetah Friendly Areas programme. These are all currently run and managed under the auspices of the Endangered Wildlife Trust but this does not mean that similar custodianship programmes could or should not be developed by other NGOs or similar conservation authorities. Currently there are over 300 recognised custodians, with sign boards, across South Africa. These custodians have received recognition for their conservation efforts over the last twenty years, some more recently than others. While the administering authorities or programmes attempt to keep close contact with all of these landowners this is not always possible. Further, a number of these individuals have sold their properties or changed land use practices. In the existing custodianship structure there is no protocol for updating or re-assessing the status or maintenance of these recognitions. Some of the sign boards are over 15 years old and show signs of bleaching and general weather wear. It is for these reasons that a new guideline for the issuing of such custodianship recognition is now needed.

## Who is eligible?

The first level is the certificate of recognition. These certificates are issued to any individual, community or company who has shown commitment to the conservation of a species or its habitat. These certificates are issued by the overseeing conservation body and can be issued to anyone regardless of whether they own property or indeed have the respective threatened species on their land. Certificates are usually given prior to recognition as official custodians but there is no set procedure. Certificates are once off and anyone is ultimately eligible.

Custodian boards are issued to individuals who own or manage land on which the relevant threatened or endemic species occurs. Only those individuals who directly contribute to the conservation of the relevant species and its habitat are eligible for a custodian board. The board recognises the individual's conservation efforts and is displayed (optionally) at the entrance to the relevant property where these outstanding conservation efforts are being implemented. Custodians are usually nominated by a conservation official or their peers but, in exceptional circumstances, landowners can request custodianship status in which case their management practices and conservation ethics will be assessed by one of the relevant conservation extension officers according to the specific criteria outlined for the species in question. The number of awards per year is dictated by the capacity of the issuing authority, it is recommended that no more than ten be issued per year.

## Existing custodians

Existing custodians will be contacted and assessed purely to ensure that they still warrant custodianship, still adhere to their conservation ethics, still have populations of the species in question and indeed still wish to be recognised as custodians. All those individuals who are still eligible and willing to continue with this programme will be issued with the new custodian boards. These new boards have expiry dates. The purpose of the expiry dates is to encourage conservation officials to remain in contact with custodians and more importantly to ensure that old, faded boards are regularly replaced and that existing boards are still relevant.

## Custodianship going forward

The main purpose of this document is to introduce the new process of custodianship to the South African public and to those implementing this tool. The key changes from the old custodianship process are the expansion from a two tiered award system to a three tiered system where landowners are eligible for an overarching acknowledgement as Conservation Champions. This third tier acknowledges landowners who know exemplary ethics in terms of conservation management and are recognised as leaders and act as role models in their communities in terms of their overall commitment to conservation on their land, over and above taking care of key species. The only other over-arching adjustment is that the new custodianship boards will be dated and thus issued for a five year period. This ensures that the recognition and communication between the issuing authority and awardees are maintained, it also ensures that the boards are not left to deteriorate through weather damage over many years.

The initial issuing of custodian boards should be a rigorous process underpinned by an initial nomination followed up by site assessments guided by set criteria. This should ensure that only deserving landowners receive this prestigious acknowledgement. It needs to be made clear that this is an award for the way that landowners have behaved and not a declaration of future intent. It is hoped that this recognition alone will encourage good and even improved conservation practice going forward. Follow up replacement of boards will be based on the same criteria but rather than a formal audit boards will automatically be replaced after a basic site visit to assess status quo or possible recommendation for upgrade to Conservation Champion in which the relevant formal criteria will again be addressed and applied.

Certificates and custodian boards should be presented to recipients before their peers at formal gatherings such as a farmers day or report back meeting.

## Recommended board design

Each species custodian board will follow a uniform theme in order to maintain continuity across the national custodianship programme. The issuing authority can be recognised by the use of their logo on the board and the species that it refers to by the species name and picture on the board. Other logo's such as partner provincial authority, partner NGOs and donor may optionally be added to the board. The donor logo should be limited to the sponsor of the production of the actual boards and not all the donors of the issuing authority.

Conservation Champion boards should be kept uniform in appearance and only differ in the logo of the issuing authority. These boards should be placed above the species custodian board and should display the name of conservation champion in question. Should the person be a stand-alone conservation champion (ie does not have any of the species custodian species on their land) then the board should include supporter logo's and issuing authority contact details.



Figure 1. An example of a species custodian board with explanations of the components within and the added conservation champion section above.



Figure 2. Conservation champion board if not associated with a species custodianship.

## Criteria for selecting awardees

Criteria for issuing certificates and custodian boards are dependent on the species in question and should be formally developed and agreed upon by the issuing authority prior to the role-out of these new custodianship awards. The criteria should be clearly stipulated and unambiguous, this should recognise the commitments and contributions made by an individual or nominated party to the conservation of a species and should be nominated by either a conservation official or relevant stakeholder. This nomination should then be assessed by the issuing authority and should be agreed by unanimous vote to avoid controversy or prejudice. These criteria should be transparent and available to the public within the website link provided on the board.

The criteria for conservation champions should include over-arching conservation ethics and only true conservation champions who are real and recognised role models for conservation as a whole within their communities should be eligible. This level of recognition should be accompanied by suitable media acknowledgement of the individuals conservation efforts and their considerable voluntary contribution to the conservation of our natural heritage.

## Custodianship Awards / Levels

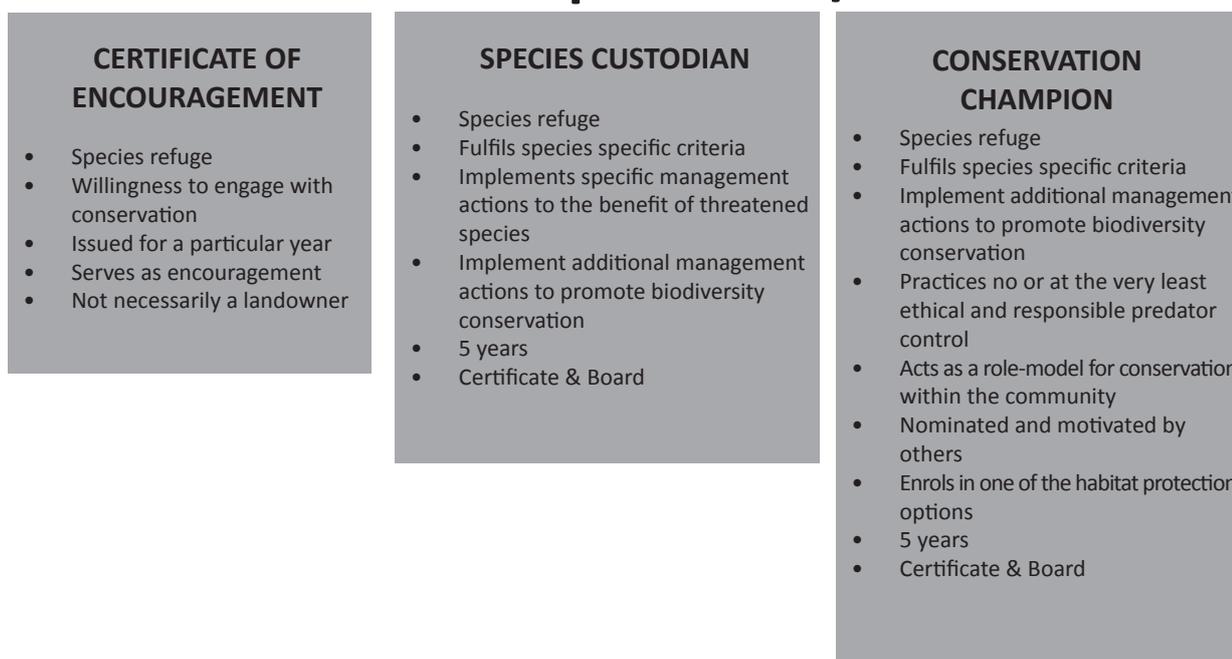


Figure 2. Basic over-arching criteria for each of the three levels of recognition.

## Guidelines for criteria

### Species Custodian

- Presence of wild population of the relevant species on the property subjected to minimal threats and present in a wild unrestricted state.
- Management of the habitat proactively for the benefit of the species (including burning and grazing practices where applicable)
- Actively address threats including general disturbance
- Willingness to report incidents and supply survey data (where applicable)
- Responsible and minimal use of only legal agro chemicals
- Education of staff in terms of the conservation of the relevant species
- Make a positive contribution to the conservation of the species and awareness for this
- Willingness to communicate and co-operate with conservation professionals in terms of suggestions towards improving current practices

### Conservation Champion

- Must qualify for all of the criteria relevant for a species custodian but can stand alone (ie does not need to be a specific species custodian to be recognised as a conservation champion but should care for all threatened species within his/her property in the manner of a species custodian)
- Willingness and track record of going the extra mile to conserve biodiversity
- Proven track record of conservation efforts beyond day-to-day management on their property
- Recognition by the community as a role-model for conservation
- No transgression of environmental laws

## Sign board ownership

The cost of the boards and their erection should be covered by the issuing authority, this can and should be covered through the sourcing of sponsor to cover the costs of production and erection in exchange for branding on these boards. These partnership contribute to the intention of maintaining objective recognition and multiple stakeholder investment in the process.

Custodian boards will remain under the ownership of the issuing authority. This will require the signing of a short formal agreement which should revolve around the ownership of the board alone and should not dictate the conservation actions going forward. It is important for issuing authorities to remember that custodianship is the recognition and acknowledgement of voluntary good practices and not a means of stipulating future behaviour. In instances where properties are sold, the new owner should be approached in the hopes that they will continue with the ethical management in line with the former recipient. Should the issuing authority be satisfied that the new owner is willing to comply then the board may remain for the remainder of that 5 year agreement, after which this should be re-assessed as stated above. This applies only to the species custodian boards. Conservation champion boards do not get passed on to the new owner as this prestigious recognition needs to be a earned over time.

In the rare instances where management or conservation practices for which the recognition was awarded are compromised and where the awardee is not willing to re-adjust their management to address the transgression then the board can be retracted. It is hoped that this will not be required and will be treated as a last resort.



# Annexure 1: Existing criteria for Endangered Wildlife Trust custodian programmes



## CRANE CUSTODIANS

A landowner / property manager should comply with the following criteria to earn a Crane Custodian Board for the property :

1. Crane Custodians should have a significant proportion of a crane population present on their property, e.g. :

- Have a pair of Wattled Cranes, either breeding or feeding.
- Breeding pair of Blue Cranes.
- Breeding pairs of any crane species of conservation significance to the species (i.e. several pairs of Crowned Crane breeding in a wetland).
- Flocks of any species of crane present during all or part of the year.

2. Management

Crane Custodians must actively contribute to crane conservation by encouraging “crane friendly” farm / property management, which allows the cranes co-existence on the property.

This includes :

### *Wetland management*

Wetlands should be managed so as to enhance their suitability for cranes. Burning must be performed in such a manner that it does not affect the breeding of the cranes. This can be done in the following way :

### *Wattled Crane :*

- inspect the vlei before burning for Wattled Crane breeding activity,
- If Wattled Cranes are breeding, then the following must be done
- If sitting on eggs, call the The Endangered Wildlife Trust’s African Crane Conservation Programme 033-330 6982 or email crane@ewt.org.za for access to the portable incubator, as these eggs must be incubated whilst the vlei is burnt,

OR

- If the Wattled Crane pair has an unfledged chick, then the chick must be caught and held in a dark box whilst the vlei is burnt and then returned to the parents before it gets dark. (contact the The Endangered Wildlife Trust’s African Crane Conservation Programme 033-330 6982 or email crane@ewt.org.za for assistance).

### *Suitable wetland habitat management*

- Perform suitable management of wetlands not currently used by cranes but what could potentially be crane habitat, e.g. rehabilitation of wetland.

- Initiate suitable crane habitat construction to attempt to develop suitable crane habitat, especially wetland habitat.

#### *Grassland management*

Grasslands should be managed to enhance their productivity and encourage their suitability for cranes, especially Blue Cranes. If Blue Cranes are sitting on eggs when grasslands need to be burnt, see above for details on management required.

#### *Use of Agrochemicals*

Agrochemicals should be used in the most responsible manner, using the following as guidelines :

- Contact the Poisoning Working Group to find out details concerning bird friendly chemicals.
- Read label for toxic effects.
- Keep all chemicals well labelled and locked away in a secure store room.
- Use the correct dosages for the chemicals on application.
- Use to correct clothes.
- Report any crane mortalities through suspected poisoning.

#### *Powerlines*

- Report any powerline collisions or electrocution to the Eskom / EWT powerline project (0860 535 111)
- Encourage Eskom staff to rectify any hazardous powerline situations

#### *Capture of Cranes from the wild*

- Under no circumstances should cranes be removed from the wild for keeping in captivity as pets or breeding
- Educate farm staff on the penalties of removing cranes from the wild for food or to sell.
- Contact the KZN Crane Foundation for any injured birds on the property for capture and rehab.
- All these birds will be rehabilitated and released back onto the property.

#### *3. Landowner Attitude*

- The Crane Custodian should have an excellent “Crane Friendly” attitude and should be willing to carry out management recommendations to enhance crane populations.

## **DRYLANDS CUSTODIANS**

### **Background**

Successful conservation of the Riverine Rabbit depends largely on the conservation of its unique riparian habitat in the Nama- and Little Karoo. Riverine Rabbits occur primarily on farmlands, so the sustainable land use management and success of the farm as an enterprise is essential to the survival of the rabbits.

- Riparian Habitat must meet optimal structural criteria such as having sufficient dense, tall bush for rabbit cover, including species such as kriedoring (*Lycium* spp), rivierdraaibos (*Triptris spinescens*) and gannabos (*Salsola* spp.).
- Riverine Rabbits are particularly vulnerable to predation (by natural predators as well as domestic dogs) where overgrazing and degradation has led to lower bush density.
- Species diversity must be maintained to ensure that the variety of plant species utilised for food and shelter by Riverine Rabbits, such as gannabos (*Salsola* spp.), inkbos (*Bassia* spp), mesems, grasses and bierbos (*Preronia* spp.) are present in the habitat.
- Riverine Rabbits are an indicator species, as such where they no longer occur in their natural distribution range, this most often indicates injudicious management of riparian ecosystems.
- Injudicious management of riparian ecosystems goes hand in hand with the loss of water resources because catchment areas no longer function optimally.
- Riparian ecosystem services include: prevention of erosion; managing floods; promoting water infiltration, thus supplementing underground water; important grazing during the dry season.

## Management Guidelines for Riverine Rabbit Conservancies

Part of the management strategy to achieve the aims of the Conservancy is to set guidelines for sustainable land management to the benefit of the landowner and the environment. Each conservancy member is subject to these guidelines. These guidelines can be adapted and amended as necessary to improve the sustainable management of the conservancy's natural resources.

“sustainable”, in relation to the use of a biological resource, means the use of such resource in a way and at a rate that -

(a) would not lead to its long-term decline;

(b) would not disrupt the ecological integrity of the ecosystem in which it occurs; and

(c) would ensure its continued use to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations of people;

(Northern Cape Nature Conservation Bill 2009)



### *Veld management and sustainability*

- All members undertake to adapt their farming practices and activities to ensure the sustainable management of Riverine Rabbit habitat as well as the rest of the natural environment.
- Riverine Rabbit habitat will be managed to maintain optimal structure, species diversity and ground cover.
- Monitoring will be carried out every three years to assess the condition of the riparian habitat and grazing management adjusted accordingly.
- Biodiversity corridors, consisting of contiguous riparian vegetation will be maintained at all times in the riparian areas. Members undertake to become involved in regional corridors where applicable.
- Members undertake to maintain at least 20m of habitat between agricultural lands; and between roads and lands.
- No development is allowed along the one-in-ten year flood-line of a river or stream, or within 32 m of the bank of a river or stream where the flood-line is unknown (National Water Act 36 of 1998).
- Attempts will be made, to rehabilitate degraded riparian habitat, including old lands, in order to create corridors.
- The collection of firewood in Riverine Rabbit habitat is prohibited. Alternative resources must be provided where necessary.

### *Managing dogs*

- Dogs are prohibited in the veld with particular emphasis on riparian areas. The exception is trained sheep dogs, on condition that they are at all times under the supervision of trustworthy staff. Using dogs to hunt Riverine Rabbits and other protected species is prohibited by law.
- Hunting dogs are prohibited in the riparian areas. The risk to Riverine Rabbits is too high, and the disturbance caused by dogs is highly undesirable.
- All dogs must be caged, chained or otherwise confined at night to prevent hunting. Dogs may not be allowed out of the yard during the day unless under supervision.

- Emphasis is placed on the management of dogs on farms, rather than breed or numbers of dogs. However, numbers do need to be kept in check as fewer dogs should be easier to manage.

#### *Managing damage-causing animals*

- Conservancy members must keep themselves informed of the legal requirements pertaining to damage-causing animals and act within the law at all times.
- Management methods used must not have a negative impact on sensitive populations of non-target species, or any other negative ecological implications. In cases where methods may have possible negative ecological implications, members undertake to use these as judiciously as possible.
- Members undertake to apply all reasonable measures to prevent livestock losses to damage-causing animals before undertaking lethal controls. All non-lethal options available must be explored. Lethal control measures that can impact other species should be the last resort.
- The use of gin-traps (leg hold or foothold trap) must meet the requirements of the Northern Cape laws. Furthermore:
  - Gin-traps are prohibited in riparian areas due to the unacceptably high risk to Riverine Rabbits.
  - Gin-traps may only be used by trained workers (in possession of a competency certificate).
  - A gin-trap register must be kept by the farmer to ensure control over the placement and kill-rate of gin traps at all times.
- Special emphasis should be placed on the maintenance of healthy populations of the natural prey species of the local predators. Members should strive to maintain a natural balance in nature, thus minimizing the potential conflict related to stock predation.
- The use of poison to control problem-causing animals is against the law. Only the use of poison collars, with the required permit, is allowed in the Northern Cape.
- The use of snares is prohibited by law.

#### *Contribution to research*

- Members undertake, where possible, to be involved in conservation initiatives such as veld assessments and monitoring Riverine Rabbits in their habitat.
- Members undertake to report all observations of Riverine Rabbits, including:
  1. Where (road number, GPS coordinates where possible, a detailed description so that the place can be located again);
  2. Description of the surroundings;
  3. The time and date the observation was made;
  4. Contact details of the person reporting the observation.



# THREATENED GRASSLANDS CUSTODIANS

## Oribi Custodians



*The purpose of the Oribi Custodian Programme is threefold:*

- Firstly to recognize and show appreciation to those landowners / managers who have actively participated in and contributed to the conservation of oribi and its grassland habitat in KwaZulu-Natal,
- Secondly, to encourage a wider awareness of oribi conservation issues within communities responsible for our oribi populations, and to encourage further participation in oribi conservation amongst other landowners / managers who may have oribi and / or suitable grassland habitat on their properties,
- And thirdly, to create a greater awareness of the oribi and its importance, amongst residents and visitors to the area, neighbouring communities as well as passing motorists and tourists.

The Oribi Working Group Committee will review awards of oribi custodianship on an annual basis.

### *Criteria for becoming an Oribi Custodian*

In order for a landowner to “qualify” or “earn” custodianship, the following criteria should be closely followed (but should also be used as a guideline):

- Must have oribi present on the property.
- Must implement management practices on the property that encourage oribi to remain and possibly increase in population size.

*This must include, where applicable, the following:*

- Maintenance of suitable areas of natural grasslands on the property for oribi.
- Implementation of a sustainable grassland management programme which allows both long grass for cover and short grass for foraging, and utilizing mowing, cattle grazing and mosaic burning as management tools (refer to the Management chapter of this plan).
- Removal / control of encroaching alien vegetation and problem indigenous plants on grassland areas.
- Modification of internal fences to allow oribi to move freely between camps, and external fences (where-ever practicable) to allow them to move between properties.
- Maintenance of corridors of suitable habitat and of adequate dimensions between habitat fragments.
- Control of movement and behaviour of all domestic dogs on the property i.e. the landowner should either not allow dogs to be kept on the property, or all dogs should be prevented from roaming freely on the farm (including the landowner’s dogs).
- Conducting of hunts in an ethical manner, controlled by the landowner, and with permits issued by the provincial authority (refer also to the Legal Hunting of Oribi section in this plan).
- Following of correct authorization procedures prior to any change in land-use where habitat alteration is involved.

*Adhere to the conditions of capture and translocation.*

- Oribi may only be captured and translocated by appropriately trained and experienced personnel, and in accordance with conditions laid down in the Oribi Conservation Plan.
- Landowners must show a willingness to adapt agricultural practices to allow oribi to flourish, rather than translocating them to alternate sites,
- Landowners must adhere to the genetic principles of translocation (see Genetics and Translocation section in the Management chapter, page 8 of the plan).
- All oribi translocations must be performed with the primary focus being the conservation of the oribi antelope.

*Make a positive contribution to the conservation of the oribi.*

This could include:

- Monitoring the population status of oribi annually on their properties.
- Creating awareness about the oribi amongst neighbouring landowners.
- Participating in conservancies or biospheres for the benefit of oribi populations.
- Rehabilitation of transformed grassland areas back to their natural state.

*Custodians should have an excellent “Oribi-Friendly” attitude and should be willing to:*

- Maintain a good working relationship with the Oribi Working Group,
- Report regularly to the Oribi Working Group on the progress and status of the oribi on the property,
- Inform and involve the Oribi Working Group of any proposed developments that may impact on the oribi,
- Carry out management recommendations that will enhance / benefit oribi populations.

## Blue Swallow Custodians



*The purpose of the Blue Swallow custodian programme is threefold:*

- Firstly to recognize and show appreciation to those landowners/ managers who have actively participated in and contributed to the conservation of the Blue Swallow and its grassland habitat in KwaZulu-Natal,
- Secondly, to encourage further participation in Blue Swallow conservation amongst other landowners/ managers who may have Blue Swallows and / or suitable grassland habitat on their properties,
- And thirdly, to create a greater awareness of the Blue Swallow and its importance, amongst residents and visitors to the area, neighbouring communities as well as passing motorists and tourists.

*Criteria for becoming a Blue Swallow Custodian*

In order for a landowner to “qualify” or “earn” custodianship, the following criteria should be closely followed:

- Have Blue Swallows breeding on the property.
- Implement management practices that encourage Blue Swallows to return year after year, for example:
  1. Implementation of a sustainable grassland management programme which allows the harmonious co-existence of the necessary farming

- practices as well as Blue Swallows (and possibly other fauna and flora) on the property,
2. Maintenance of high basal cover and short sward height (< 50cm) in grassland areas supporting Blue Swallows, through either one or more of the following: burning, grazing or mowing,
  3. Maintenance of existing breeding holes i.e. ensuring entrances to holes remain free of overgrown vegetation, opening up silted / collapsed holes etc.
  4. Removal / control of encroaching alien vegetation on grassland areas and breeding sites.
- Make positive contributions to the conservation of the Blue Swallow, for example:
    1. Monitoring the breeding progress of Blue Swallows on the property,
    2. Digging of artificial holes (when necessary) to encourage further breeding on the property,
    3. Creating awareness about the Blue Swallow amongst neighbouring landowners,
    4. Rehabilitation of transformed grassland areas back to their natural state.
  - Custodians should have an excellent “Blue Swallow-Friendly” attitude and should be willing to:
    1. Report regularly to the KZN Programme coordinator on the progress and status of the Blue Swallows on the property,
    2. Inform and involve the KZN Programme coordinator of any proposed developments that may impact on the Blue Swallows,
    3. Be willing to carry out management recommendations that will enhance / benefit Blue Swallow populations.