

For Immediate Release

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JRS Supports Prize Competition to Reward African Biodiversity Data Sharing

SEATTLE, Washington – May 16, 2017 -- The JRS Biodiversity Foundation today announced a new \$250,000 grant to the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) to motivate the mobilization of biodiversity data in Africa. The award will support the *African Biodiversity Challenge: Unlocking Data for Sustainable Development*, a competition that will offer prizes to three African countries that establish national partnerships to publish and share biodiversity data.

Africa boasts a substantial share of Earth's biodiversity; one-fifth of the world's mammal species, and one-quarter of the world's bird species live on the continent. Despite this, data from Africa are dramatically underrepresented in the world's freely-available biodiversity facility. As of July 2016, fewer than 4% of the total species occurrence records that have been published through the Global Biodiversity Information Facility, GBIF, are of African species, and 51% of those records are published by non-African institutions.

The African Biodiversity Challenge will support African countries to mobilize biodiversity data in support of sustainable development. SANBI will select three countries from a pool of applicants to participate in the challenge. Each country will assemble teams of partners, and work with SANBI to build a customized roadmap for assembling, digitizing, cleaning, and publishing data that today exist on paper, or are confined to specialized or localized specimen collections or databases. By providing training and technical support, the challenge process will equip partners in each country to undertake independent data mobilization, and will award the country that publishes the most new biodiversity data with a cash prize: US\$30,000 for first, US\$20,000 for second, and US\$10,000 for third place. Through specialized Biodiversity Information Management Forums (BIMFs), the project aims to galvanize emerging biodiversity informatics networks into a continental community of practice.

The current lack of data availability impedes efforts to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of Africa's natural resources by the continent's policymakers, and is often attributed to insufficient capacity, and weak incentives. Information on the current and historic distributions of plants and animals is essential to sustainable development and can be used to, for example, predict range potentials of invasive species, identify high-risk areas for zoonotic disease transmission, and inform protected area expansion strategies. The challenge will thus seek to prioritize the mobilization of policy-relevant data to build a business case around the importance of biodiversity information.

Through increased visibility of, and investment in, shared biodiversity data, SANBI hopes the African Biodiversity Challenge will not only directly result in a greater availability of information about the continent's incredibly rich flora and fauna, but also catalyze similar efforts in other African countries. The goal is to facilitate sustainable development on a continent in the midst of profound socio-economic change.

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The project will be led by Matthew Child, Biodiversity Informatics Project Coordinator at SANBI, and builds on a previous successful, JRS-funded project aimed at increasing the availability of African biodiversity information.

See "[South African National Biodiversity Institute \(2016\) – The African Biodiversity Challenge: Unlocking Data for Sustainable Development](#)" and SANBI's [African Biodiversity Challenge](#) home page.

About the JRS Biodiversity Foundation – The mission of the JRS Biodiversity Foundation is to enhance knowledge and promote the understanding of biological diversity for the benefit and sustainability of life on earth. Founded in 2004, the JRS Biodiversity Foundation supports biodiversity data and knowledge tools that are used to preserve biodiversity in developing economies where biodiversity is most threatened. The foundation has awarded \$15.2M in grants since 2007. Visit online at <http://www.jrsbiodiversity.org>

About the South African National Biodiversity Institute – SANBI is a parastatal organization formed by national mandate in 2004, to explore, reveal, celebrate, and champion the exceptional richness of South African biodiversity. SANBI leads and coordinates research, and monitors and reports on the state of biodiversity in South Africa. The institute provides knowledge and information, gives planning and policy advice, and pilots best-practice management models in partnership with stakeholders. The Biodiversity Information and Planning Directorate at SANBI aims to mobilize and publish biodiversity information so that it is freely available to users. Visit online at <http://www.sanbi.org>

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