



WESSA-Lowveld Newsflash

February 2026

National Wetlands Week, 2 to 6 February 2026
and

*The WESSA-Lowveld INaturalist Frogging Event,
13th February 2026, 7 to 9pm*

NATIONAL WETLANDS DAY, 2 FEBRUARY 2026

Wetland is defined in SA as land which is transitional between terrestrial and aquatic systems where the water table is usually at or near the surface, or the land is periodically covered with shallow water, and which under normal circumstances supports or would support vegetation typically adapted to life in saturated soil. As one can see from the definition, despite our low, annual average rainfall of approx. 460mm, compared to the World average of 860mm (the published figures for both do vary!), vast tracks of land in SA can probably be defined as wetland. Added to this, even land areas that appear at any one time not to be wetland, may well be wetland, and it takes an examination of the soil at approx. up to 50cm depth and also, but not always, the presence of hydrophytes (water-loving plants) to determine that. Hence the landscape (the geology, and associated bedrock and geomorphological processes), which is transitional between terrestrial and aquatic systems; the presence of water (soils are grey or black, may have a 'muddy' smell of lack of oxygen and even 'bad eggs', and even be mottled with red or black 'spots'), where the water table is usually at or near the surface, or the land is periodically covered with shallow water; and

vegetation, typically adapted to life in saturated soil; are important considerations in the identifying of wetlands (Lloyd, Muller, Linström, Grundling, Pretorius, Grundling, and Smit-Robinson (2025)).

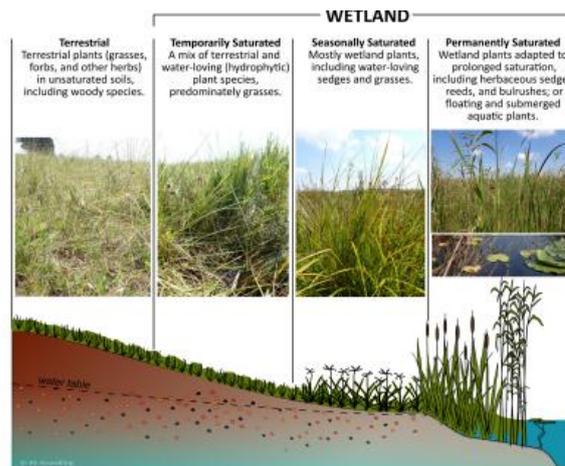


Figure 1.1: Wetlands are transitional between terrestrial, dry land to aquatic, wet areas characterised by distinct wet zones, and associated plant communities adapted to tolerating different levels of soil saturation. The water table fluctuates to create mottles in the soil profile. Photos: Kyle Lloyd.

After Lloyd et al (2025)

The latest National Biodiversity Assessment (NBA) was published very recently in 2025, and is a very impressive document clearly stating where SA's ecosystems stand in their present status as functioning systems, the threats and the way forward in improving and protecting them. As one would expect, given the interconnectedness within the water cycle, one cannot, at least separate freshwater and estuarine ecosystems. Hence the new WESSA ecosystems and biodiversity focus entitled, "From Catchment to Coast", or Source, to Sea, to Source!

The NBA paints a rather grim picture of the state of SA's estuaries, rivers and wetlands, stating that they remain highly threatened and under-protected (established), despite providing a host of important ecosystem services that are vital to people. Estuaries, rivers and wetlands in South Africa are more threatened than ecosystems in other biomes. Over 90% of estuarine ecosystem types are threatened and less than 10% are Well Protected. Over 60% of river and wetland types are threatened, while less than 10% are Well Protected. Shocking! The ecosystems face multiple pressures from altered water flows, pollution, land-use changes, poor land management and biological invasions. Barriers (roads, in-stream structures) and commercial forestry further alter stream flow, groundwater recharge and hydrology of rivers and wetlands. In estuaries, the availability of cheap gill nets from online retailers has led to an increase in illegal fishing, especially in KwaZulu-Natal. This indiscriminate fishing method impacts many biota, such as sharks, rays, invertebrates, birds, turtles, terrapins and crocodiles, beyond just the targeted fish species. Freshwater ecosystems and estuaries are complex and do not respond linearly to pressures. Achieving biodiversity conservation and socio-economic benefits will depend on innovative, integrated management of these ecosystems that combines regulatory enforcement with empowered community stewardship.

WESSA–Lowveld INaturalist Frogging Event, Friday 13 February 2026

Join our organised teams:

- (a) **White River Nature Reserve; contact Dr Jacoba Dongo (082 418 1843) or Dr Llewellyn Taylor (076 413 9566),**
- (b) **White River Country Estate; contact Dr Jeremy Anderson (083 285 5669),**
- (c) **ReCover Wild Ecosystem Restoration Project, KLIPINNIBOS Farm, Schoemanskloof; contact Ms Lisa Harris Steyn (083 758 7765,**
- (d) **Or create your own,**

and spend some time after dark on Friday 13th February at a wetland, stream or river nearby, or your garden, from 7 to 9pm, or any other time on the day! Read the notes below first, and record the sound, or photograph the frogs you hear or see during the evening, for example, from 7pm to 9pm.

For those taking part at the White River Nature Reserve, meet at the White River Rugby Club at 18:15, or at the latest 18:30 at the White River Shooting Club. There will be a briefing, and then the group will proceed down to the old bird hide and dam in the White River Nature Reserve.

Contact Dr Anderson or Ms Harris Steyn for arrangements at the WRCE or KLIPINNIBOS.

However, “tracking frogs” at night requires **extreme patience**, and a **slow, noiseless, stealth-like approach**. The little critters have the annoying habit of shutting up before you get near to them. And then there is a sudden, rapid escape, in the form of a herculean jump, using every advantage that their urostyle (fused backbone) and long, muscular legs, affords them, or deep-dip into the pond. Of course, groping and stumbling around in the dark and quagmire-like ground and plant-infested environment, also requires the right equipment and behaviour.

- (1) A **bright headlamp** is best (a torch will do) and **gumboots**, or fishing waders, are essential.
- (2) It is best to approach frogs **from in the water**, not along or from the bank, as they tend to jump from bank to water, and probably less so from water to bank!
- (3) **Aim the light on the area** where the call comes from and keep it there. **Approach slowly.**
- (4) Please be mindful of other local inhabitants, likes snakes. Given the actual environment, it is not a bad idea to **carry a basic medical kit** for falls, scratches, or other unforeseen health happenings.

(5) If you must examine the frog closely, for example to observe its underside, ensure your hands are very clean, and definitely wet. Handling them may harm their very thin and delicate skin (they breathe through their skin too) and break the protective mucoid (slimy) coat. **Gently does it, cupped hands, no squeezing!**

(6) The best time for frogging is immediately after rains, as the amphibians go excitedly about their business when it is wet all over the place! A special find would be the unique, endemic Rain Frog, and their fossorial habit of living most of their lives underground. When they do emerge, they don't hop, they walk or run, given their "bloated" bodies and short legs.



Photo 217133918, (c) Dylan Leonard. INaturalist
Bushveld Rain Frog, *Breviceps adspersus*

So when you hear the call, record it on your phone. If you are able to get to the frog, photograph it. Then, and if you haven't yet, **join INaturalist after the event**, and add the following community projects to your personal profile:

(a) White River Urban and Peri-urban Wildlife: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/white-river-urban-and-peri-urban-wildlife>

(b) Wildlife and Environment Society of S.A.: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/wildlife-and-environment-society-of-s-a>

(c) ReCover Wild Ecosystem Restoration Project: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/recover-wild-ecosystem-restoration-project>

If you are in the White River region, load the observations onto (a). If you are elsewhere in SA, load it onto (b), or if you are in the region of KLIPINNIBOS FARM, load the observations onto (c).

WESSA-Lowveld will scan the three community projects for observations on frogs loaded onto the platforms on Friday 13th after the event, and generate a report, which we will share subsequent to the event.

Have fun chasing after (quietly, slowly) frogs on Friday night 13th February!

Dr Llewellyn Taylor

WESSA-Lowveld Chairman

WESSA Board Member

Cell 076 413 9566

References

Lloyd, K.J., Muller, M., Linström, A., Grundling, P-L., Pretorius, L., Grundling, R.E. & Smit-Robinson, H.A. 2025. Best Practice Guidelines for High-Elevation Wetland and Peatland Management in Southern Africa, Version 1. BirdLife South Africa, Johannesburg.

If you are not a member of WESSA, consider joining the oldest (100th year this year) Conservation Society in SA, today! Go to <https://www.wessa.org.za/>, learn about the society and its activities, find one of the membership options at <https://www.wessa.org.za/membership/>, and join!