



The **Year of Special Days 2015** has been developed through WESSA Share-Net, a project of WESSA. The booklet supports educators and community leaders to make links between environmental days in the 2015 calendar and **environmental learning in the school curriculum**.

The first **Year of Special Days** was compiled in 1995 by Kate Davies from the Diocese of Umzimvubu, near Kokstad, as her final assignment for the Gold Fields Participatory Course in Environmental Education.

Since then, the booklet has been annually updated and expanded with contributions from people around South Africa and has even been adapted for several other countries in southern Africa.

#### HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

The **Year of Special Days 2015** is designed to help educators **plan school assemblies and learning activities**. Each page provides just enough information to launch learners and educators on a quest to find out more! Possible activities for each Special Day include inviting a **guest speaker** to assembly, planning **active learning** in line with the **curriculum**, or whole class/school **activities around a chosen theme**.

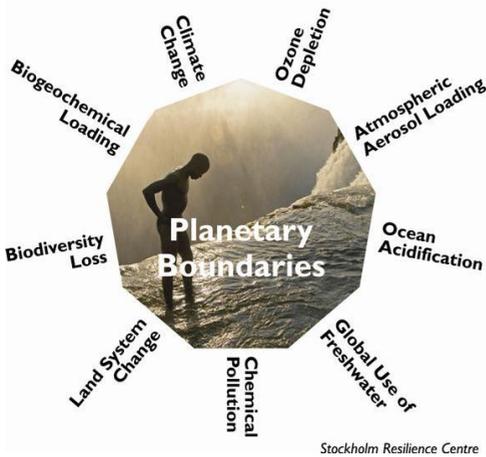
For planning the school calendar, the centre page is a **2015 calendar** showing the commemorative days outlined in this booklet. A single page is allocated to each Special Day and includes:

- Interesting background **information** on the day
- ? A **guiding question** to stimulate further enquiry
-  **Contact details** to obtain more information
-  References to WESSA Share-Net and other **materials** that can support learning
- WWW** Useful **website** addresses

On the back cover, titles of other WESSA Share-Net learning support materials are listed.

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# STEPPING UP TO SUSTAINABLE LIVING – WHAT CAN WE DO?



Human activities have placed increasing pressure on Earth. To continue to live and operate safely, humanity has to stay within critical boundaries in the Earth's environment, and respect the nature of the planet's climatic, geophysical, atmospheric and ecological processes, says Johan Rockström, Director of the Stockholm Resilience Centre. He warns that exceeding planetary boundaries (see figure to the left) may be devastating for humanity, but if we respect them, we should

have a bright future for centuries ahead.

Scientists have attempted to quantify the safe biophysical boundaries within which the Earth, and everything on it, will flourish. Outside these parameters, they believe, the Earth cannot function in a stable state. The scientists first identified the Earth System processes and potential biophysical thresholds, which, if crossed, could generate unacceptable environmental change for humanity. They have then proposed the boundaries that should be respected in order to reduce the risk of crossing these thresholds.

The nine boundaries identified are climate change, stratospheric ozone, land use change, freshwater use, biological diversity, ocean acidification, nitrogen and phosphorus inputs to the biosphere and oceans, aerosol loading and chemical pollution. The study suggests that three of these boundaries (climate change, biological diversity and nitrogen input to the biosphere) have already been crossed. Boundaries are inter-connected — crossing one boundary may seriously threaten the ability to stay within safe levels of the others.

So today, as never before, we need to consider the impact of our daily actions. We need to seriously think about our lifestyles and the choices we make when engaging in activities that could impact on our planet's life support systems.

# **2015 UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL YEARS OF:**

- ~ SOILS**
- ~ LIGHT AND LIGHT-BASED TECHNOLOGIES**

**2015 ~ International Year of Soils (IYS).** Soil is a finite natural resource and is non-renewable on a human time scale. Soils are the foundation for food, animal feed, fuel and natural fibre production, the supply of clean water, nutrient cycling and a range of ecosystem functions. The area of fertile soils covering the world's surface is limited and increasingly subject to degradation, poor management and loss to urbanization. Increased awareness of the life-supporting functions of soil is called for if this trend is to be reversed and so enable the levels of food production necessary to meet the demands of population levels predicted for 2050.

The International Year of Soils 2015 (IYS) will serve as a platform for raising awareness on the importance of sustainable soil management as the basis for food systems, fuel and fibre production, essential ecosystem functions and ultimately allow for a better adaptation to climate change for present and future generations.

## **2015 ~ International Year of Light and Light-based Technologies (IYL).**

The International Year of Light and Light-based Technologies 2015 commemorates the achievements of light science, its applications, and its contributions to humankind.

In proclaiming an International Year focusing on the topic of light science and its applications, the United Nations has recognized the importance of raising global awareness of how light-based technologies promote sustainable development and provide solutions to global challenges in energy, education, agriculture and health. Indeed, the resolution was adopted as part of a more general Agenda item on science and technology for development. This International Year will bring together many different stakeholders including UNESCO, scientific societies and unions, educational and research institutions, technology platforms, non-profit organisations and private sector partners to promote and celebrate the significance of light and its applications during 2015.

# WORLD WETLANDS DAY ~ 2 FEBRUARY

***“Wetlands for Our Future – Join us!”***

Wetlands are often thought of only in terms of their hydrological importance, but they also hold great cultural significance. Many cultures have developed traditional practices and belief systems for regulating the use of wetlands to protect these valuable ecosystems.

Wetlands are also known as vleis, bogs, swamps, marshes or sponges. They are regarded as some of the most productive ecosystems in the world because they serve as sponges that regulate river flow, they provide habitats for a variety of plant and animal species and they help to absorb silt and cleanse water of pollutants.

Wetlands are at risk due to practices of draining the land for alternative use. Construction of dams, removal of plants, waste water pumped into the wetland by industries, seepage of agricultural fertilisers and mining are all threats to these sensitive ecosystems.

2 February is the anniversary of the signing of the Ramsar Convention in 1971. The Convention took place in the Iranian city of Ramsar and is an inter-governmental treaty to promote national action and international co-operation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. There are presently 168 Contracting Parties to the Convention with 2187 wetland sites covering over 208 million hectares.

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## ? **Have you investigated the disappearing wetlands in your area? How can you stop this from happening?**



Stanley Tshitwamulomoni, Ramsar Communication Education Participation Awareness Focal Point, South Africa. Dept. of Environmental Affairs. E-mail: StanleyT@environment.gov.za



*Wetlands Pack; Vlei and Marsh Wetlands; Wetlands and People; How Wet is a Wetland?; SWAP Starter Kit; miniSASS sheets.*

**WWW** [www.ramsar.org](http://www.ramsar.org)

# INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY ~ 21 FEBRUARY

*"Let us all join forces to promote linguistic diversity and multilingualism as a key element in our efforts to build a better world and a life of dignity for all."*

*United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Message for International Mother Language Day 2014*

Over 3 000 of the approximately 6 900 languages spoken in the world are under threat, endangered or dying out. The past three centuries have seen languages die out and disappear at a dramatic rate. A language is considered 'endangered' when at least 30% of the community's children no longer learn it. Mandarin Chinese is the most widely spoken world language, with over a billion speakers. Ter Sami was traditionally spoken in the Kola Peninsula in Russia. In 2012, the number of Ter Sami speakers had dropped to two elders, making it the least spoken language in the world.

In Africa, there is little known about linguistics and many of its governments encourage the use of the major African languages, such as Swahili (East Africa) or even colonial languages. Other factors leading to the loss of native tongues is the break-up or translocation of a community where individuals or smaller groups find themselves in different cultural and linguistic environments. Languages may also be affected by the encroachment of a more dominant culture and adults encourage their children to learn the 'new' language especially if it means an opportunity for employment. This situation is also worsened when authorities discourage the use of native languages in the local community, local schools and the media.

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**? Which southern African language is most under threat? Is anything being done to ensure that it does not disappear?**



*Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing.* 2001. By Stephen A. Wurm.

*The Languages of the World.* 2002. By Kenneth Katzner.

**WWW** [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_Mother\\_Language\\_Day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Mother_Language_Day)

# LEAP DAY FOR FROGS (SA) ~ 28 FEBRUARY

Amphibians are currently the most threatened class of vertebrate on Earth, with 32% of species Red Listed as Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable.

In South Africa, the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) aims to address a growing need for the involvement of the non-governmental sector in frog conservation. This will be done by implementing specific conservation actions to address direct threats to amphibian species and protect critical amphibian habitats; supporting relevant research projects focused on critical knowledge gaps in amphibian conservation; and by raising awareness regarding amphibians in a South African context.

Although small and seldom seen, frogs are important in many ways:

- amphibians are crucial in the food-chain through their role as both predator and prey;
- they consume vast numbers of insects (including pests and disease vectors such as mosquitoes) and provide food to a wide range of animals;
- as tadpoles, they have an important function in keeping waterways clean by feeding on algae.

They are good bio-indicators, due to their biphasic life cycles and sensitive skins - the fact that one third of all species are threatened should be an important warning to humans that our global environment is in jeopardy. Some species provide important human medicines from skin secretions.

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**?      When did you last hear a chorus of frogs? What could be the reason why this is becoming a rare sound?**



Jeanne Tarrant, Endangered Wildlife Trust, Threatened Amphibian Programme. E-mail [jeannet@ewt.org.za](mailto:jeannet@ewt.org.za)



*Enviro Facts 40 (Frogs); Guidebook to Lesotho's Fauna: Amphibians.*

**WWW** [www.leapdayforfrogs.org.za/index.html](http://www.leapdayforfrogs.org.za/index.html)

# MEATOUT DAY ~ 20 MARCH

Meatout Day is an international observance encouraging people to start enjoying a wholesome, non-violent diet of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Meatout Day started in the United States in 1985 and has now become an annual campaign, celebrated and observed in many countries around the world. Meatout Day is co-ordinated each year, on or around 20 March, by the Farm Animal Rights Movement (FARM), a non-profit public interest organisation. FARM advocates plant-based (vegan) diets to save animals, protect the planet and improve health.

Vegan diets (sometimes called strict or pure vegetarian diets) are a subset of vegetarian diets, which are credited with lowering the risk of colon cancer, heart attacks, high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, prostate cancer, and strokes. Properly planned vegan diets are healthy and have been found to satisfy nutritional needs. However, poorly planned vegan diets can be low in levels of calcium, iodine, vitamin B<sub>12</sub> and vitamin D. Vegans are therefore encouraged to plan their diet and take dietary supplements, as appropriate.

What is the connection between our diet and global warming? Animal agriculture produces more greenhouse gas emissions than cars. Cows raised for beef and dairy emit massive amounts of nitrous oxide and methane. Nearly half of the world's grains and soybeans are fed to animals, which puts a huge strain on land resources, as more and more space is required to grow food to feed the animals, that are in turn eaten by humans.

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**? How could your environmental footprint be reduced if you cut down on your meat consumption or adopted a vegetarian diet?**



*Eating for the Earth and My Carbon Footprint (auditing our electricity, travel, water use, waste and food).*

**WWW** [www.meatout.org](http://www.meatout.org); and [www.fao.org/docrep/010/a0701e/a0701e00.HTM](http://www.fao.org/docrep/010/a0701e/a0701e00.HTM) (Livestock's Long Shadow. United Nations FAO Report)

# **HUMAN RIGHTS DAY (SA) ~ 21 MARCH**

## **INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION ~ 21 MARCH**

# **HUMAN RIGHTS DAY ~ 10 DECEMBER**

Human Rights Day (SA) commemorates the "Sharpeville Massacre" on 21 March 1960. A large group of people took part in a campaign to resist unjust apartheid laws which forced all black people to carry Pass Books. Failure to produce the book on demand by police was a punishable offence. Campaigners gathered at police stations in townships near Johannesburg where they were dispersed by police. At the Sharpeville Police Station a scuffle broke out. Part of a wire fence was trampled, allowing the crowd to move forward. The police opened fire, apparently without having been given an order to do so. Sixty-nine people were killed and 180 wounded.

Human Rights Day is a reminder of how undemocratic systems of government and abuse of authority can lead to injustice, oppression and violence. As citizens of a democratic country, we must ensure that basic human rights are never eroded.

The United Nations (of which South Africa is a member state) emphasises that human rights are for all people, regardless of race, colour, gender, language, political opinion, sexual orientation, national origin, property, birth, health or other status. The South African Constitution states that one of our basic human rights is access to a clean and healthy environment. As responsible citizens, we need to ensure that these rights are respected by finding ways, no matter how small, to improve the quality of people's lives.

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### **? What are basic human rights? Who is entitled to them?**

 South African Human Rights Commission. Braampark Forum 3, 33 Hoofd Street, Braamfontein. Tel: (011) 877 3600.  
E-mail: [info@sahrc.org.za](mailto:info@sahrc.org.za). Website: [www.sahrc.org.za](http://www.sahrc.org.za)

 *Environment and Methods: a brief look at a developing picture of better and more varied ways of doing EE and The Environment, Development and Environmental Education.*

**WWW** [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org) and [www.sahrc.org.za](http://www.sahrc.org.za)

# WORLD WATER DAY ~ 22 MARCH

## "Water and Sustainable Development"

World Water Day was declared an international day in 1992 by the United Nations General Assembly and was first celebrated in 1993.

Each year, World Water Day highlights a specific aspect of freshwater. Under the theme 'Water and Sustainable Development', the year 2015 provides an important opportunity to consolidate and build upon the previous World Water Days to highlight water's role in the sustainable development agenda.

What could a global water goal lead to? Healthy people, increased prosperity, equitable societies, protected ecosystems and resilient communities through:

1. universal access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, improving water quality and raising service standards;
2. the sustainable use and development of water resources, increasing and sharing the available benefits;
3. robust and effective governance with more effective institutions and administrative systems;
4. improved water quality and wastewater management taking account of environmental limits; and
5. reduced risk of water-related disasters to protect vulnerable groups and minimize risks.

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**? Think of three actions you could take to reduce your water consumption, then work out how much water could be saved.**

 Department: Water and Sanitation. Private Bag X313, Pretoria, 0001. Toll free number (enquiries) 0800 200 200.

 *Hands-On: Stream and Pond Life; Wetlands and People; SWAP Starter Kit; Water is life! A teacher's handbook; Enviro Facts; My Carbon Footprint; and Water Lesson Plans for Grades R-12.*

**WWW** [www.dwa.gov.za](http://www.dwa.gov.za) and [www.unwater.org](http://www.unwater.org)

# WORLD METEOROLOGICAL DAY ~ 23 MARCH

In 1960, it was decided by the World Meteorological Organisation that 23 March should be celebrated as World Meteorological Day because, on this day in 1950, the World Meteorological Convention was held. The day is celebrated by focusing on an annual theme that is of current interest and is related to weather, climate and water issues.

The purpose of the day is to bring attention to the important role that meteorology and meteorological services play in the general welfare of humankind. Climatological data can assist when planning for building constructions, agriculture, forestry and can forecast weather that may have devastating effects and cost the country millions of rands each year.

People have altered atmospheric conditions through agricultural and industrial developments. The burning of wood and fossil fuels, such as oil and coal, increase carbon dioxide levels which contribute to global warming and hence enhance the greenhouse effect. The acidity of rain and river water is altered by sulphur dioxide and nitrous oxides which pass through the atmosphere and cause changes in the soil chemistry. This, in turn, affects plant and animal life.

We are reminded of our dependency on water, air and weather patterns and for the need to consider the environmental impact we have on these natural resources.

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**? It is said that climate change will affect our weather patterns. How will your area be affected, and what risk-management strategies could be implemented?**



For more information about the weather, contact the South African Weather Service: 012 367 6000



*Enviro Facts; The Greenhouse Effect: a teacher's manual; Equipment for Measuring Weather Conditions; Puzzling Climate Change: A start-up pack of pictures.*

**WWW** <http://www.wmo.int> and [www.weathersa.co.za](http://www.weathersa.co.za)

# EARTH HOUR ~ 28 MARCH

The very first Earth Hour occurred when, in 2007, as a response to an initiative of the Sydney Morning Herald and WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature), 2.2 million residents of Sydney, Australia, turned off their lights for one hour to raise awareness regarding the need to take action against climate change.

This initiative has since grown and is now the single, largest, symbolic mass participation in the world. In 2014, over 700 cities, towns and municipalities in 162 countries took part! You can support this initiative to bring about meaningful action against climate change by taking part, and you can register as a participant and receive interesting information, videos, and stories on the website [www.earthhour.org](http://www.earthhour.org)

Earth Hour is just the beginning! You've shown the planet you care by turning your lights out for one hour. So what's next? Two simple tips to help reduce wasteful energy consumption throughout the year are:

1. **Reduce electricity use:** Switch to LED light bulbs in your home. And going solar is easier than ever. Solar panel prices have dropped 80% since 2008.
2. **Reduce carbon emissions from transportation:** Make greener transportation choices. Many of the small trips folks make by car could be accomplished on foot or by bike. If you live in a city, take public transportation more often. If you don't live in a place with public transportation, consider a switch to a hybrid or electric vehicle.

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## ? **What is the global impact of switching off all lights for one hour?**



WWF South Africa. 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Bridge House, Boundary Terraces, Mariendahl Lane, Newlands, Cape Town, 7700.  
Website: [www.wwf.org.za](http://www.wwf.org.za)



*Enviro Facts; The Greenhouse Effect: a teacher's manual; Puzzling Climate Change: A start-up pack of pictures; My Carbon Footprint (auditing our electricity, travel, water use, waste and food).*

**WWW** [www.earthhour.org](http://www.earthhour.org); and [www.wwf.org.za](http://www.wwf.org.za)

# **FAMILY DAY (SA) ~ 6 APRIL**

## **INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FAMILIES ~ 15 MAY**

Family Day falls on the Monday after Easter Sunday and is a time to celebrate or relax with family and friends. Another day to celebrate the importance of the family unit is International Day of Families which occurs on 15 May each year. The first annual observance of this day took place in 1994 and this was the same year the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed as the International Year of the Family.

A family's role is to educate, protect, nourish and support its members, enabling them to function both dependently and independently of each other and in social situations.

Children learn values, morals and social behaviour within their family units and these will guide them through life. The basis of all relationships is also formed within a family and it is here where children learn to communicate and interact with one another as well as with the world around them.

At present, society is affected by instability, economic hardship and violence. All of these hinder the family's ability to fulfill the most basic needs for its members and it is this breakdown of family life that fuels insecurity and uncertainty within society.

*"If tolerance, respect and equity permeate family life, they will translate into values that shape societies, nations and the world."*

*Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations.*

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### **? What benefits do you have through belonging to a family?**

 Family and Marriage Society of South Africa (FAMSA). PO Box 2800, Kempton Park, 1620. Tel: (011) 975 7106/7.  
E-mail: [national@famsa.org.za](mailto:national@famsa.org.za); Website: [www.famsa.org.za](http://www.famsa.org.za)

 *Household Environmental Management.*

**WWW** [www.un.org/en/events/familyday/](http://www.un.org/en/events/familyday/)

# WORLD HEALTH DAY ~ 7 APRIL

In 1945 diplomats from a range of countries formed the United Nations. One of the organisations formed was the United Nations Economic and Social Council, which first met in 1946. During this meeting, there were calls for the establishment of an organisation in the United Nations, which would be dedicated to health issues.

The new organisation would carry on the work of the Office International d'Hygiène Publique (the International Office for Public Hygiene) and the health units of the League of Nations. These organisations were established in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but were overburdened by the huge health consequences of the aftermath of World War I and were unable to function effectively when World War II started. It would also carry on the work of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, which provided medical aid to millions of people in the aftermath of the devastating military action in Europe during the last part of World War II.

The World Health Organisation was founded on 7 April 1948. Since then, the organisation has carried out a huge amount of valuable work, including the global eradication of smallpox and the implementation of a wide range of public health strategies. Now, 193 countries are members and the organisation is still working to improve many aspects of health around the world.

At the First World Health Assembly in 1948, delegates called for a World Health Day to mark the anniversary of the founding of the World Health Organisation. This has been held on 7 April every year since 1950. The day is used to draw attention to particular priorities in global health.

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? **The 2014 Ebola crisis highlighted the necessity of all nations working together to minimize health threats. Can you think of ways to prevent such a crisis in future?**



Department: Health. Website: [www.health.gov.za](http://www.health.gov.za)



*Learning Support Materials for Rural Health and Sanitation and Hands-On: Common Household Life.*

**WWW** <http://www.who.int/campaigns/en/>

# WORLD DAYS OF ACTIONS ~ 20-26 APRIL

*World Days of Action (WDA)* is an initiative of the Foundation for Environmental Education's (FEE) Eco-Schools programme and designed to empower students to be the change our sustainable world needs by engaging them in fun, action-oriented learning.

The idea behind *World Days of Action* is to show that students are leading the way. It also enables students to work more actively together in all parts of the world.

*World Days of Action* is held in the southern hemisphere in April and includes Earth Day.

Since the first WDA, on 7 November 2012, 774 252 students from 27 countries have participated.

Every year, schools are encouraged to engage in the annual campaign and come up with inspiring actions.

All schools who join the WDA receive a participation certificate.

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**? What inspiring actions has your class or school come up with this year?**



WESSA Eco-Schools, PO Box 394, Howick, 3290. Tel (033) 3303931 ext 2145. E-mail: [ecoschools@wessa.co.za](mailto:ecoschools@wessa.co.za)  
Website: [www.wessa.org.za](http://www.wessa.org.za)



*Learning Support Materials for Rural Health and Sanitation and Hands-On: Common Household Life.*

**WWW** <http://eco-schools-projects.org/wda/>

# EARTH DAY ~ 22 APRIL

The 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Earth Day will be celebrated in 2015. This day marks an opportunity for volunteers to initiate actions towards a sustainable future. For over four years, A Billion Acts of Green® has been building commitments by individuals, organisations, businesses and governments to protect the planet, inspiring and rewarding both simple individual acts and larger organisational initiatives that reduce carbon emissions and support sustainability. Taken together, these small actions add up. And A Billion Acts of Green® has become the largest environmental service campaign in the world. Volunteers may join the *Green Generation* and register on the website [www.earthday.org/takeaction](http://www.earthday.org/takeaction).

On 22 April 1970, approximately 20 million Americans supported and celebrated the first Earth Day and today it is celebrated worldwide, forming a global network that works towards environmental protection in communities, regions and around the world. More than 22 000 organisations in 192 countries around the world participate in Earth Day activities. In 1990 Earth Day had an enormous effect on recycling efforts worldwide and assisted in leading the way to the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

Earth Day is a global attempt for international co-operation to address issues such as global warming, toxic waste, destruction of rainforests, expanding deserts and ocean pollution. Individuals and organisations are encouraged to use Earth Day to take environmental action in their area.

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## ? **Think of three things that you can do to reduce your environmental footprint. Then do them!**

 Earthlife Africa. PO Box 32131, Braamfontein, 2107. Tel (011) 339 3662.

 *Environment and Methods: A brief look at a developing picture of better and more varied ways of doing EE; Enviro Picture Building games and puzzles; My Carbon Footprint (auditing our electricity, travel, water use, waste and food).*

**WWW** [www.earthday.org](http://www.earthday.org) and <http://www.earthday.org/takeaction/>

# FREEDOM DAY (SA) ~ 27 APRIL

This day is to commemorate the first democratic elections held in South Africa on 27 April 1994. History was made when all South Africans over the age of 18 were allowed to vote for a new democratic government. The election was hailed as a miracle because, in spite of the long history of institutionalised discrimination and oppression of non-whites, voting took place in a spirit of spontaneous goodwill without violence or bloodshed.

Since that turning point, the path to our new democracy has not always been smooth. On Freedom Day we celebrate the miracle of our nation's change of heart, remembering always that there can be no freedom without responsibility - responsibility to care for our families, our communities and our land.

From the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, everyone has the right:

- a) to an environment that is not harmful to their health or wellbeing; and
- b) to have an environment protected, for the benefit of recent and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures that -
  - i) prevent pollution and ecological degradation;
  - ii) promote conservation; and
  - iii) secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources.

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## ? What does 'freedom' mean to you? Is 'freedom' the same for everybody?

 Street Law (South Africa) National Office. University of KwaZulu-Natal, King George V Avenue, Durban, 4001. Tel: (031) 260 1291. Fax: (031) 260 1540. E-mail: [info@streetlaw.org.za](mailto:info@streetlaw.org.za)

 *Enviro Clubs Action Pack.*

**WWW** <http://www.gov.za/node/63>

# WORKERS' DAY ~ 1 MAY

In Medieval Europe, the first day in May was celebrated as a general holiday to herald the coming of Spring. With the onset of the Industrial Age, workers had to struggle against terrible working conditions, until they were able to form trade unions.

During the 1880s, workers under the influence of the Socialists, used the existing holiday as a day to celebrate workers' solidarity. In 1890, Workers' Day was recognised internationally for the first time in industrialised countries but it has only been observed in South Africa since 1904. It became an official public holiday in South Africa after the first democratic elections in 1994.

The international trade union movement has supported the struggles of workers worldwide to organise their own unions to fight against exploitation and a better life for workers. Now there is a day which reaffirms workers' rights to join together to promote their own welfare in a world which is often dominated by the rich and the powerful. Trade unions are an important feature of any democracy.

Workers' Day reminds us that all people who work deserve a fair wage and decent working conditions. It also reminds us of the importance of establishing justice and a sense of responsibility and caring in the workplace.

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## ? **What is the employment percentage of your nearest city?**



Department: Labour. Private Bag X117, Pretoria, 0001.  
Tel: (012) 309 4000. Fax: (012) 320 2059.  
E-mail [webmaster@labour.gov.za](mailto:webmaster@labour.gov.za)



*Eco-Office Kit.*

**WWW** [www.labour.gov.za](http://www.labour.gov.za)

# INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM DAY ~ 18 MAY

## *“Museums for a sustainable society”*

Every year, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) chooses a theme for International Museum Day concerning an issue that affects the international museum community. In 2015, the event will celebrate the theme: *Museums for a sustainable society*.

One of the most important challenges shared by people all over the world is to adapt to new ways of living and developing within the limits of nature. This transition towards a sustainable society requires inventing new methods of thinking and acting. The theme *Museums for a sustainable society* recognises the role of museums for communicating, transmitting and raising public awareness about the need for a society that is less wasteful, more co-operative and uses resources in a way that respects the living systems.

Bringing museums to the forefront of this model of a sustainable society, this year's theme for International Museum Day aims to foster awareness among the whole society about the current consequences of human action on our planet and the absolute necessity of changing the economic and social model. The ICOM established International Museum Day in 1977 to increase public awareness of the role of museums in the development of society. Momentum has been rising ever since. In recent years, International Museum Day has been experiencing its highest involvement with almost 35 000 museums that organise activities in more than 143 countries.

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**? Visit your nearest museum and consider how your life today is connected to the past.**

 South African Museums Association (SAMA). 3 Davann Court, 50 Bellair Road, Vredehoek, Cape Town, 8001. Tel: (021) 461 2315. Fax: 086 695 6595. E-mail: SAMuseums@gmail.com

 *Indigenous Knowledge Series.*

**WWW** <http://imd.icom.museum>

# INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY~ 22 MAY

The term biological diversity, or biodiversity, is given to the variety of plant and animal life, and micro-organisms, on Earth and the different ecosystems in which they live. The biodiversity we see today is the result of the natural process that has taken place over many years and which has caused changes, such as weathering and adaptation of the landscape and its inhabitants. The rate at which this natural process takes place is increased by human activities and it is this unnatural increase that can have harmful effects on our biophysical environment.

There are more than 1.7 million species that have been discovered and named and scientists think that there are millions more we don't know about. Over time, many species of plants and animals have evolved to depend on one another. For example, some plants can only be pollinated by a certain kind of bird or insect. In relationships like these, if one species becomes extinct, the other species could too. The complex relationships between species are often disturbed when organisms are transported to new places or a new element is introduced (for example, chemicals from pesticides).

Here are a couple of tips regarding biodiversity:

- Never introduce an invasive plant species into an area it does not naturally exist.
- Never release your exotic pets into the wild.
- Plant only indigenous species.
- Avoid using pesticides or chemicals in your garden. Use natural methods of pest control instead.

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## ? **What is the theme for the 2015 International Day for Biological Diversity? What activities can you plan around this theme?**

 Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity.  
E-mail: [secretariat@cbd.int](mailto:secretariat@cbd.int); Website: [www.cbd.int](http://www.cbd.int)

 *Hands-On Series; Enviro Facts.*

**WWW** <http://www.cbd.int/> and [www.gbif.org](http://www.gbif.org)

# WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY ~ 5 JUNE

World Environment Day was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1972 to mark the opening of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. This conference resulted in the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

People have the most impact on our environment. The nature and extent of this impact depends on factors such as the type of economic activity, distribution of wealth and resources, cultural values and lifestyles.

World Environment Day aims to encourage people to become active supporters of sustainable and equitable living, to promote awareness and an understanding that communities play a central role in changing attitudes towards environmental issues, and to develop partnerships that will ensure all nations and people enjoy a safer and more fulfilling future.

In many countries, activities on this day include the signing of petitions that can lead to the establishment of permanent political action taken by governments to commit themselves to caring for the environment.

Celebrate World Environment Day by appreciating this unique planet and make a conscious effort to practice energy-saving techniques, walk or cycle to work, recycle, re-use, support fresh produce markets, avoid environmentally hazardous goods or wasteful packaging and ensure a healthy and well-balanced lifestyle.

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**? Make a list of things you have recycled in the past week. Could you improve on that next week? How?**

 Department of Environmental Affairs. Private Bag X447, Pretoria, 0001. Tel: (012) 310 3911. Website: [www.environment.gov.za](http://www.environment.gov.za)  
Hotline for environmental crimes and incidents: 0800 205 005

 *Environment and Methods; Enviro Picture Building games and puzzles; Eco Puzzles; My Carbon Footprint (auditing our electricity, travel, water use, waste and food).*

**WWW** [www.unep.org](http://www.unep.org)

# WORLD OCEANS DAY ~ 8 JUNE

*"We have to ensure that oceans continue to meet our needs without compromising those of future generations. They regulate the planet's climate and are a significant source of nutrition. Their surface provides essential passage for global trade, while their depths hold current and future solutions to humanity's energy needs."*

*United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon*

The concept for a "World Oceans Day" was first proposed in 1992 by the Government of Canada at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. As a result of a United Nations General Assembly resolution passed in December 2008, World Oceans Day is now officially recognised by the United Nations as 8 June each year.

Everyone can help protect the world's oceans. Small changes we make in our everyday lives can add up and have a big positive impact on the health of the seas. By taking *The 7 Cs Pledge* and committing to make a real difference we can protect the ocean, its incredible inhabitants, and even our own community. There are many challenges facing our oceans right now including climate change, pollution, and overfishing, but these challenges are not insurmountable. The term "Seven Seas" has been used for centuries as a general description for all the oceans of the world. *The 7 Cs Pledge* uses this play on words to help us all remember how each of us can make decisions in our daily lives for the benefit of our planet's future.

I promise to Commit to making a real difference; Conserve in my home; Consume consciously; Communicate my interests and concerns; Challenge myself daily; Connect in my community; and, Celebrate our oceans.

Source: *The Ocean Project* – see website details below.

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## ? **What are some of the land-based activities that can cause coastal and marine pollution?**



*The Treasure Chest: An educator's guide; Science on Sea Grades 7-12: An Educator's resource for physical and natural sciences; Enviro Facts; Hands-On Coastal Series; Beginners Guide to Marine Reptile Life of southern Africa.*

**WWW** <http://theoceanproject.org>

# YOUTH DAY (SA) ~ 16 JUNE

## INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY ~ 12 AUGUST

In 1975, protests began in African schools when the previous Bantu Education Department stated that Afrikaans had to be used on an equal basis with English as a language of instruction in secondary schools. This, however, was symptomatic of the broader problem of the unjust Bantu education system, characterised by separate schools, universities, inadequate classroom facilities and poorly trained teachers.

On 16 June 1976, more than 20 000 learners from Soweto, outside Johannesburg, began a protest march. With the intervention of the police, violence broke out and on this day and during the following few weeks, approximately 700 people, many of whom were youths, were killed and property was destroyed. It took another 14 years of struggle before the system of apartheid was finally abolished but the youth of South Africa had played an important role in the struggle for this costly freedom.

Youth Day, previously known as Soweto Day, commemorates the contribution the youth has made to the democracy of South Africa and to reaffirm the rights of children and youth to education, food, health and a safe and secure home and school environment.

On 17 December 1999 the United Nations General Assembly endorsed the recommendation made by the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth, that 12 August be declared International Youth Day.

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**? You don't need to be an adult to have a positive impact on your world. Think of ways the youth in society can influence those around them.**



Scouts South Africa National Office. PO Box 374, Newlands, 7725. Tel: 086 072 6887. E-mail: info@scouts.org.za



*United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.*

**WWW** <http://social.un.org/index/Youth.aspx> and [www.scouts.org.za](http://www.scouts.org.za)

# WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT ~ 17 JUNE

Approximately 1.5 billion people globally depend on degrading areas for their livelihoods, and nearly half of the world's very poor (42%) live in degraded areas, making them some of the most insecure places in the world.

While these regions may seem far away to those of us who live in cities or developed countries, the effects of their suffering ripple across the globe. It is estimated that by 2020 some 60 million people will migrate from desertified areas in sub-Saharan Africa towards Northern Africa and Europe.

In 1994, the United Nations General Assembly declared 17 June the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought to promote public awareness of the issue, and the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa.

To assist in combating the problem of desertification and drought, this day aims to promote awareness of the effects of drought, the impact desertification has on the Earth and to encourage the need for global co-operation, and the education of communities to address these problems and find solutions.

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## ? **What plants can be used as pioneer species to rehabilitate degraded land?**

 Food & Trees for Africa. 94 Bessemer Street, Wendywood, 2144. Tel: (011) 656 9802. Fax: 086 547 1258. E-mail: [info@trees.org.za](mailto:info@trees.org.za); Website: [www.trees.co.za](http://www.trees.co.za)

 *Enviro Facts; Greening SA schools (teachers support pack for indigenous gardening); Indigenous Knowledge Series: Soil Conservation through Indigenous Knowledge Practices in Swaziland.*

**WWW** [www.undp.org/drylands/](http://www.undp.org/drylands/) and [www.unccd.int](http://www.unccd.int)

# WORLD POPULATION DAY ~ 11 JULY

The world population is the total number of living humans on Earth. It is estimated that the world population reached one billion for the first time in 1804. It was another 123 years before it reached two billion in 1927, but it took only 33 years to reach three billion in 1960. Thereafter, the global population reached four billion in 1974, five billion in 1987, six billion in 1999 and, seven billion in October 2011. As of 2013, it is estimated at 7.178 billion by the United States Census Bureau (USCB).

Approximately 26.3% of the global population is aged under 15, while 65.9% is aged 15–64 and 7.9% is aged 65 or over. The global median age was 30.4 years in 2012, and is expected to rise to 37.9 years by 2050.

The global average life expectancy is 67.07 years, with women living an average of 69 years and men approximately 65 years. In 2010, the global fertility rate was estimated at 2.52 children per woman.

As the world population continues to grow, it has had profound implications for development, sustainability, urbanisation and access to health services.

In 1989, in its decision 89/46, the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme recommended that, in order to focus attention on the urgency and importance of population issues in the context of overall development plans and programmes and the need to find solutions for these issues, 11 July should be observed by the international community as World Population Day.

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? **Debate the pros and cons of population control.**

 United Nations Population. Website: [www.unfpa.org](http://www.unfpa.org)

 *Enviro Facts.*

**WWW** [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_population](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_population) and [www.unfpa.org](http://www.unfpa.org)

# NATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY (SA) ~ 9 AUGUST

On 9 August 1956 approximately 20 000 women, from all walks of life, participated in a march outside the Union Buildings in Pretoria. It was probably the single most famous protest by women to have taken place in the history of South Africa. The Union Building site was chosen because of its historical significance in the development of the apartheid struggle.

Women were opposing the law which forced the black population to carry a pass (or document) with them at all times to permit them entering a 'white area'. "You strike the women, you strike the rock", was chanted during the protest and this gave strength to South African women who suffered from exploitation and discrimination during the apartheid era.

Programmes such as Violence against Women and others have been established as a result of this march and the determination of women countrywide.

On National Women's Day 2000, the Women's Monument at the Union Buildings was unveiled to recognise women's contribution towards gender equity and human rights for all. In many parts of South Africa, women still bear the brunt of extreme poverty, abuse, over-exploitation, oppression and great suffering, yet they are still the "rock" upon which family life and our society depends.

On National Women's Day all women are affirmed, their courage and sacrifices over the ages acknowledged, and their aspirations and achievements applauded.

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**? Throughout history, South African women have made major contributions to the success of our country. Which woman, or group of women, are you aware of who have made an impact?**

 Commission for Gender Equality (CGE). Website: [www.cge.org.za](http://www.cge.org.za)

**WWW** [www.cge.org.za](http://www.cge.org.za) and [www.wlce.co.za](http://www.wlce.co.za)

# WORLD LION DAY ~ 10 AUGUST

The lion (*Panthera leo*) is one of the four big cats in the genus *Panthera* and a member of the family *Felidae*. Wild lions currently exist in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia (where an endangered remnant population resides in Gir Forest National Park in India) while other types of lions disappeared from North Africa and Southwest Asia in historic times.

Until the late Pleistocene, about 10 000 years ago, the lion was the most widespread large land mammal after humans. They were found in most of Africa, across Eurasia from western Europe to India, and in the Americas from the Yukon to Peru.

The lion is a vulnerable species, having seen a major population decline in its African range of 30–50% during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Lion populations are untenable outside designated reserves and national parks. Although the cause of the decline is not fully understood, habitat loss and conflicts with humans are currently the greatest causes of concern. Within Africa, the West African lion population is particularly endangered.

World Lion Day aims to raise awareness of the lions and lionesses of the world. This celebration of the animal kingdom's most beautiful and fearsome creature was founded by Big Cat Rescue, the world's largest accredited sanctuary dedicated to big cats. 10 August is a day for people to come together from across the world to pay tribute to the mighty lion in as many ways as possible. The lion is an enduring symbol across nations and has fascinated people throughout the millennia. To lose such a species would be to lose a significant part of our global heritage.

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**?** **How closely related is your domestic cat to *Panthera leo*, the lion?**

 *An introduction to the Larger Mammals of Namibia; Hands-On: Life around a Waterhole.*

**WWW** <http://www.daysoftheyear.com/days/lion-day>;  
[www.worldlionday.com](http://www.worldlionday.com)

# WORLD ELEPHANT DAY ~ 12 AUGUST

*We admire elephants in part because they demonstrate what we consider the finest human traits: empathy, self-awareness, and social intelligence. But the way we treat them puts on display the very worst of human behaviour."*

*Graydon Carter, Editor of Vanity Fair*

On 12 August 2012, the inaugural World Elephant Day was launched to bring attention to the urgent plight of Asian and African elephants. The elephant is loved, revered and respected by people and cultures around the world, yet we balance on the brink of seeing the last of this magnificent creature.

The escalation of poaching, habitat loss, human-elephant conflict and mistreatment in captivity are just some of the threats to both African and Asian elephants.

The African elephant (Forest and Savannah) is threatened with 470 000 to 690 000 remaining worldwide. Working towards better protection for wild elephants, improving enforcement policies to prevent the illegal poaching and trade of ivory, conserving elephant habitats, better treatment for captive elephants, and when appropriate, reintroducing captive elephants into natural, protected sanctuaries are the goals that numerous elephant conservation organisations are focusing on around the world.

World Elephant Day asks you to experience elephants in non-exploitive and sustainable environments where elephants can thrive under care and protection.

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**? How did the expression 'An elephant never forgets' originate? What human practices would an elephant choose to forget?**



*An Introduction to the Larger Mammals of Namibia; Enviro Facts: Elephants.*

**WWW** <http://worlddelephantday.org/about>





# NATIONAL ARBOR WEEK ~ 1-7 SEPTEMBER

National Arbor Week is a special week that has been set aside for the planting and caring of trees. Arbor Day originated in Switzerland during the 15<sup>th</sup> century to raise awareness amongst people about the importance of trees. In South Africa, Arbor Day started in 1983 and in 1997 it was extended to a National Arbor Week. In South Africa, National Arbor Week falls in the first week of September.

Every South African Arbor Week celebration highlights at least two specific trees - one common and one or two rare species. In 2015, these are *Combretum krausii* (*Forest bushwillow, Bosvaderlandswilg*) (common) and *Heteromorpha arborescens* (*Parsley tree, Wildepieterseliebos*) (rare, uncommon).

People have depended on trees through the ages. They offer shelter and shade, are a source of food, fuel, medicine, timber, and also have numerous other uses. They are essential for replenishing our oxygen supply and taking in the atmosphere's carbon dioxide, a contributor to the greenhouse effect. They prevent soil erosion by binding the soil with their roots and add nutrients to the soil with their leaf litter.

Arbor Week celebrations intend to promote a better understanding of trees, in particular indigenous trees; encourage the planting of trees and greening activities within communities; highlight the importance of trees for a sustainable future and the role trees play in the livelihoods of people and their environment; and raise awareness amongst South Africans about greening initiatives.

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## ? List all the ways in which trees contribute to life on Earth.



Food & Trees for Africa. 94 Bessemer Street, Wendywood, 2144.  
Tel: (011) 656 9802. Fax: 086 547 1258. E-mail: info@trees.org.za;  
Website: www.trees.co.za



*Hands-On: A Forest Community, Trees of Umgeni Valley; Teachers Guides : Arbor Day, Forest Fun; A Tale of our Tree World; Enviro Facts; Hand Print booklets: Planting Mother-tree Seedlings.*

**WWW** [www.plantzafrica.com](http://www.plantzafrica.com); [www.daff.gov.za](http://www.daff.gov.za) and [www.trees.co.za](http://www.trees.co.za)

# CASUAL DAY ~ 4 SEPTEMBER

All South Africans are encouraged to get involved in the country's principle fundraising project for people with disabilities by celebrating Casual Day.

Casual Day started in 1995 and is a project of the National Council for Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa (NCPDPSA).

This event is held on the first Friday of September each year and people are asked to wear something different - something formal, casual or funky - and the official Casual Day sticker in support of the disabled. Casual Day is the day to show that each one of us can make a difference.

Funds are raised for the disabled through the sale of the official Casual Day sticker and the intention of this day is also to increase the public's awareness of issues surrounding disability.

Since Casual Day started in 1995, millions of rands have been raised. By supporting this day you will be contributing to a worthy charity and it is a fun and easy way of making a difference.

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## ? **How does your community support disabled people?**



The National Council for Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa. 82 Andries Pretorius Road, Edenvale, Eastleigh, 1609. Tel: (011) 452 2774. Fax: (011) 452 6583.  
E-mail: [nationaloffice@ncppdsa.org.za](mailto:nationaloffice@ncppdsa.org.za)  
Website: [www.ncppdsa.org.za](http://www.ncppdsa.org.za)

**WWW** [www.casualday.co.za](http://www.casualday.co.za)

# INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY ~ 8 SEPTEMBER

*By 2015, the target year for Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals, two thirds of adults and three-quarters of youth in sub-Saharan Africa are expected to be able to read and write.*

*UNESCO Institute of Statistics, Adult and Youth Literacy*

Literacy has been described as the ability to read for knowledge, write coherently and think critically about the written word.

Since its foundation in 1946, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has been at the forefront of global literacy efforts and is dedicated to keeping literacy high on national, regional and international agendas. However, with some 774 million adults lacking minimum literacy skills, literacy for all remains an elusive target.

Amongst youth, 123 million are illiterate of which 76 million are female. Even though the size of the global illiterate population is shrinking, the female proportion has remained virtually steady at 63-64%.

It is our role to remind authorities at international and national levels to strengthen local capacity and support community initiatives.

International Literacy Day is an occasion to celebrate the importance literacy has on individuals, communities and societies worldwide. It also provides the opportunity to encourage those whose illiteracy currently excludes them from full participation in society.

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? **How do you think that 'reading' the environment, understanding ecosystems and following sustainable practices can be a form of literacy?**

 READ Educational Trust. PO Box 30994, Braamfontein, 2017.  
Tel: (011) 496 3322. E-mail: [info@read.co.za](mailto:info@read.co.za)

 *Indigenous Knowledge Series; Enviro Facts; A Tale of our Tree World.*

**WWW** [www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org) and [www.read.org.za](http://www.read.org.za)

# NATIONAL CLEAN-UP WEEK ~ 14-19 SEPTEMBER

## RECYCLING DAY SOUTH AFRICA ~ 18 SEPTEMBER

South Africa's first National Clean-Up Week was launched in 1999 by the Plastics Federation of South Africa (the Plastics Industries Enviromark) and Pick 'n Pay. It is held every year in the week preceding the International Coastal Clean-up.

It brought together under one umbrella, organisations that are already actively involved in environmental campaigns, as well as community groups and schools to 'clean-up' beaches, waterways, parks, streets, local communities and schools.

During this week, all South Africans are urged to do something towards cleaning their local community. The focus of an individual clean-up may vary and will depend on issues pertaining to a particular community. Examples of clean-ups in the past include litter picking, the clearing of illegal dumping and competitions with a clean-up theme. An important part of the clean-up is to include a component to ensure that the benefits of the clean-up are sustained. This may take the form of an education campaign or ensuring that local facilities for cleansing are in order.

In 2010, the Plastics Federation of South Africa's Enviromark initiated an annual recycling day for South Africa. Recycling Day South Africa encourages South Africans to recycle at home, school and at work and buy products made with recycled material. This day occurs during National Clean-Up Week and aims to increase awareness by educating the community about the social, environmental and economic benefits of recycling.

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### ? **What are ways that we can recycle our household waste or better still, cut down on our household waste?**



Douw Steyn, Director Sustainability, Plastics SA.  
Tel: (011) 653 4794. Cell: 083 301 8157. Fax: 086 158 313.  
E-mail: [douw.steyn@plasticssa.co.za](mailto:douw.steyn@plasticssa.co.za)



*Enviro Facts.*

**WWW** [www.cleanup-sa.co.za](http://www.cleanup-sa.co.za) and [www.recyclingday-sa.co.za](http://www.recyclingday-sa.co.za)

# INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE OZONE LAYER ~ 16 SEPTEMBER

*"Extraordinary challenges require extraordinary responses. A generation ago, the world's nations agreed to act definitively to protect the ozone layer, initiating an inter-governmental process that blazed new trails. "*

*United Nations Secretary-General's Message on 16 September 2013*

The Montreal Protocol was adopted on 16 September 1987 when governments agreed to co-operate in phasing out chemicals that deplete the ozone layer.

This invisible layer in the atmosphere protects the Earth from harmful ultra-violet rays from the sun. Should these ultra-violet rays reach Earth by passing through the thinning ozone layer, skin cancer and damage to crops will increase. Ozone depleting substances such as chloro-fluorocarbons (CFCs), hydro-fluoro-carbons, methyl bromide, to mention a few, are pollutants used all over the world. There has been an attempt by manufacturers of products releasing these pollutants to produce 'ozone friendly' products. These pollutants are emitted from products such as refrigerators, air conditioners, spray cans, agricultural products and pesticides.

By observing this day, we are reminded of the necessity to live in ways that do not contribute to the depletion of this vital and essential layer of atmosphere that shields the Earth. It also gives individuals and organisations time to reflect on what progress has taken place to combat this environmental threat.

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**?** **Investigate whether legislation to protect the ozone layer, such as the banning of CFC's, has had any effect.**



*Enviro Facts; Puzzling Climate Change: A start-up pack of pictures; My Carbon Footprint (auditing our electricity, travel, water use, waste and food).*

**WWW** <http://ozone.unep.org/en/>

# INTERNATIONAL COASTAL CLEAN-UP ~ 19 SEPTEMBER

## 2<sup>ND</sup> AFRICAN MARINE DEBRIS SUMMIT ~ 4-5 JUNE

On the third Saturday of September each year, more than 700 000 volunteers in 120 countries around the world take part in the world's biggest clean-up. 2015 marks the 30<sup>th</sup> annual International Coastal Clean-up (ICC) when people head to the beaches and begin removing debris from shorelines, waterways and oceans.

Each year there is a vast increase in the number of marine animals injured or entangled in debris found in the oceans. Turtles mistake floating bags as food and thousands of seals, whales, dolphins, sharks and birds die from entanglement in fishing line and other waste. The aim of the clean-up is to remove debris from all bodies of water; to collect valuable information about debris; to heighten public awareness of the causes of litter and debris; to make a positive change; and, to promote water pollution prevention efforts worldwide.

With its great lake areas and waterways, as well as the islands in the Indian, Atlantic and Southern Atlantic Oceans, Africa can play an important role in reducing the amount of manmade material finding its way to the sea. A unified plan to tackle the problem is through a summit which is to be held in Cape Town on the 4 and 5 June 2015 in conjunction with UNEP and the Department of Environmental Affairs.

The aim is to establish a southern African network and work towards increased research and awareness raising of the issue as well as actions to reduce marine debris. For more information on the summit, please contact John at [john.kieser@plasticssa.co.za](mailto:john.kieser@plasticssa.co.za)

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? **Can you think of any item of waste that will not, eventually, end up in one of the world's oceans?**



Douw Steyn, Director Sustainability, Plastics SA. Tel: (011) 653 4794. Cell: 083 301 8157. E-mail: [douw.steyn@plasticssa.co.za](mailto:douw.steyn@plasticssa.co.za)



*Hands-On Coastal Library; Waste Resource Pack; Hands-On: Stream and Pond Life; A Beginner's Guide: Seaweeds (algae); A Beginner's Guide: Some Common Waterbirds and Marine Reptile Life of southern Africa.*

WWW [www.oceanconservancy.org](http://www.oceanconservancy.org)

# INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE ~ 21 SEPTEMBER

In 1981, the United Nations General Assembly declared that the opening day of its regular session in September "shall be officially dedicated and observed as the International Day of Peace and shall be devoted to commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace both within and among all nations and peoples" (resolution 36/67). It was in 2001 that the United Nations General Assembly adopted a new resolution stating 21 September will mark the International Day of Peace.

The marking of this day is intended to have the entire world observe a day of peace and non-violence and all organisations and individuals are encouraged to observe this day in an appropriate manner.

Anyone, anywhere can celebrate the International Day of Peace. It can be as simple as lighting a candle at noon, sitting in silent meditation, or doing a good deed for someone you don't know. Or it can involve getting your co-workers, organisation, community or government engaged in a large event. When millions of people in all parts of the world come together for one day of peace, the impact is immense and does make a difference!

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? **Debate whether you think that we are justified in spending enormous amounts of money on weapons of war, rather than on rehabilitating degraded ecosystems.**

 The World Peace Prayer Society. 26 Benton Road, Wasaic, New York 12592 USA. E-mail: [info@worldpeace.org](mailto:info@worldpeace.org)  
Website: [www.worldpeace.org](http://www.worldpeace.org)

**WWW** [www.worldpeacenewsletter.com](http://www.worldpeacenewsletter.com) and  
[www.internationaldayofpeace.org/](http://www.internationaldayofpeace.org/)

# ZERO EMISSIONS DAY ~ 21 SEPTEMBER

On 21 March 2008, a website calling for a global moratorium on fossil fuel combustion on 21 September was launched from Sealevel in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The message, "Giving our planet one day off a year", was simple, yet profound.

The initial inspiration for this happened about 20 years earlier. One day Ken Wallace of Sealevel Special Projects, was strolling his newborn daughter past an idling truck parked – driverless – by the neighbourhood pizzeria. This truck in combination with the surrounding unrelenting traffic swirling by, gave rise to a strange epiphany: "Stopping all this for a bit would be most excellent for our world altogether." The notion was that stopping, resting, recharging and reflecting was no doubt a mechanism built into many world cultures and traditions. It is no longer a question of choice, as it seems that indeed, all systems might now be in jeopardy if we fail to comply with this timeless wisdom.

In 2015, the world can go back to square one – for one day. On 21 September everyone can take a break, and give the world a break.

ZeDay Guidelines are simple:

1. Don't use or burn oil or gas or coal.
2. Minimize (or eliminate) your use of electricity generated by fossil fuels.
3. Don't put anyone in harm's way. All essential and emergency services operate normally.
4. Do your best, have fun, enjoy the day!

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? **Lights on, electric toothbrush buzzing, shower emitting hot water. Stop! Think! How else could you live your life today?**



*My Carbon Footprint (auditing our electricity, travel, water use, waste and food).*

**WWW** <http://zeroemissionsday.org/about.htm>

# WORLD RHINO DAY ~ 22 September

World Rhino Day brings non-government organisations, zoos, rhino sanctuaries, and concerned citizens across the globe together to raise awareness and funds for the five species of rhinoceros - all of which are under threat from the illegal rhino horn trade.

Rhinoceros horns, unlike those of other horned mammals (which have a bony core), only consist of keratin. Rhinoceros horns are currently used mainly in traditional Asian medicines. The southern white rhino is a major conservation success – but with only four animals remaining, the northern white rhino is very close to disappearing from the wild.

In an effort to save the planet's rhinos, World Rhino Day was initiated by WWF in 2010 and has since become a global phenomenon. Despite this, South Africa had, by September 2014, already lost over 700 rhinos alone, with slaughter figures increasing daily. Coupled with the increasing poaching figure comes the question – why after all this, are we still losing more rhino than ever? Sadly, few people realize the challenges facing those on the frontlines – including, having inadequate resources and thousands of kilometres to patrol, with little to no idea of where the poachers plan to hit next.

World Rhino Day celebrates all five species of rhino and works to eliminate the demand for rhino horn by highlighting efforts to debunk the medicinal myths about rhino horn.

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? **The case of the poacher is hotly debated. Can a government be held responsible for not ensuring jobs for the masses?**

 WESSA Rhino Initiative. Tel (033) 330 3931 ext 2146 or 079 5044 296. Website: [www.wessa.org.za](http://www.wessa.org.za)

 *Hands-On: Life around the waterhole; Enviro Facts: Rhinos.*

**WWW** [www.worldrhinoday.org](http://www.worldrhinoday.org)

## HERITAGE DAY (SA) ~ 24 SEPTEMBER

Heritage Day commemorates the World Heritage Convention signed in 1972. The mission of the Heritage Convention is for countries to:

- conserve the natural and cultural heritage in their territories, and
- encourage states to nominate sites within their territories for inclusion on the World Heritage List.

In South Africa, its significance is to recognise various aspects of South African culture which include creative expression, historical inheritance, language, culturally specific food and the land in which we live.

Natural and cultural heritage include monuments, architectural works, sculpture and painting, structures of an archeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and groups of buildings. Also included are sites of outstanding universal value from an historical, aesthetic, and ethnological point of view to geological and physiographic formations and natural sites.

Of the 1 007 cultural and natural properties forming part of the World Heritage List, which the World Heritage Committee considers as having outstanding universal value, eight can be found in South Africa.

The need to acknowledge this rich and varied cultural heritage is knowing that it has profound power to help build our nation.

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? **Name South Africa's World Heritage Sites and state where they are found.**

 South African Heritage Resources Agency. 111 Harrington Street, Cape Town, 8001. Tel: (021) 462 4502. Fax: (021) 462 4509. E-mail: [info@sahra.org.za](mailto:info@sahra.org.za); Website: [www.sahra.org.za](http://www.sahra.org.za)

 *Indigenous Knowledge Series.*

**WWW** <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list>

# **WORLD TOURISM DAY ~ 27 SEPTEMBER**

## ***"One billion tourists, one billion opportunities"***

*"I urge tourism establishments to cut consumption and improve waste management and I call on individuals to play their part by making environmentally conscious choices when they travel".*

*United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, message for World Tourism Day 2013*

World Tourism Day, celebrated every year on 27 September, is a global observance to highlight tourism's social, cultural, political and economic value. Tourism has experienced continued growth and deeper diversification to become one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. Modern tourism is closely linked to development and includes more new destinations for tourists. These dynamics turned tourism into a key driver for socio-economic progress. Tourism has become one of the major players in international commerce, and represents at the same time one of the main income sources for many developing countries.

The World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) decided to institute World Tourism Day, which was first celebrated on 27 September 1980. 27 September was chosen as the date for World Tourism Day because the date co-incided with an important milestone in world tourism: the anniversary of the adoption of the UNWTO Statutes on 27 September 1970.

Eco-tourism involves creating a tourist industry which will help the economy of a country by creating jobs while promoting the sustainable use of natural resources. Tourists may visit areas to see and photograph wildlife and scenic beauty. However, the numbers of tourists and methods of approach in the tourism industry must be carefully monitored to maintain the spirit and natural status of an area and avoid disturbing both wildlife and ecosystems.

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**? Our world is becoming more cyber-orientated. Do you think cyber-holidays may become a thing of the future, as we strive to decrease our carbon footprint?**



Tourism KwaZulu-Natal. PO Box 2516, Durban, 4000.  
Tel: (031) 366 7500. Fax: (031) 305 6693.  
E-mail: [info@zulu.org.za](mailto:info@zulu.org.za); Website: [www.zulu.org.za](http://www.zulu.org.za)

**WWW** [www2.unwto.org/](http://www2.unwto.org/)

# WORLD ANIMAL DAY ~ 4 OCTOBER

World Animal Day takes place every year on 4 October. Animal welfare groups, sanctuaries and individuals throughout the world hold special events to heighten public awareness of animal issues and to encourage people to think about how we as humans relate to animals.

The mission statement of World Animal Day is:

- to celebrate animal life in all its forms;
- to celebrate humankind's relationship with the animal kingdom;
- to acknowledge the diverse roles that animals play in our lives from being our companions, supporting and helping us, to bringing a sense of wonder into our lives;
- to acknowledge and be thankful for the way in which animals enrich our lives.

World Animal Day was started in 1931 at a convention of ecologists in Florence as a way of highlighting the plight of endangered species. Since then it has grown to encompass all kinds of animal life and is widely celebrated in countries throughout the world. 4 October was chosen as World Animal Day as it is the Feast Day of St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals.

It is intended as a day of celebration for anyone in the world who cares about animals. It is not restricted to any one nationality, creed, religion, political belief or ideology.

You do not have to be an activist, you just have to care! Buy a few tins of animal food for your local SPCA, make a small donation to an animal charity, plant a shrub that will attract butterflies and birds to your garden - the possibilities are endless.

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**? Do animals have rights? Make a list of animal rights, and find out whether institutions (circuses, zoos) in your area are abiding by those rules. Do something about it if you find they are not.**

**☎** National Council of SPCAs. PO Box 1320, Alberton, 1450.  
Tel: (011) 907 3590. Fax: (011) 907 4013.  
E-mail: [nspca@nspca.co.za](mailto:nspca@nspca.co.za)

**WWW** [www.worldanimalday.org.uk](http://www.worldanimalday.org.uk) and [www.animalsmatter.org](http://www.animalsmatter.org)

# WORLD TEACHERS' DAY ~ 5 October

World Teachers' Day, held annually on 5 October since 1994, commemorates teachers' organisations worldwide. Its aim is to mobilise support for teachers and to ensure that the needs of future generations will continue to be met by teachers.

The supply of teachers is failing to keep pace with the demand for primary education. According to the latest UNESCO Institute For Statistics data, the world needs to create 1.7 million new teaching posts by 2015 to reach Universal Primary Education. In addition, 5.1 million teachers are expected to leave the profession and must be replaced.

In total, 6.8 million teachers worldwide will be needed to ensure every child's right to basic education!

World Teachers' Day celebrates the role teachers play in providing quality education at all levels. This enables children and adults of all ages to learn to take part in, and contribute to, their local community and global society.

Over 100 countries observe World Teachers' Day. The efforts of Education International and its 401 member organisations in 171 countries, have contributed to this widely spread recognition. Every year, Education International launches a public awareness campaign to highlight the contributions of the teaching profession.

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**? What actions could you take to show your appreciation to your own teacher and teachers in your school? Speak to your teacher today about the challenges of teaching.**

 Department: Basic Education. Private Bag X895, Pretoria, 0001.  
Website: [www.education.gov.za](http://www.education.gov.za)

 *Lesson Planning for a Healthy Environment; Enabling EE Processes in Teacher Education; Learners, learning and teacher-learner relationships; Teacher Education Workbook for Environment and Sustainability Education in Southern Africa.*

**WWW** <http://www.worldteachersday.org/map/>

# NATIONAL MARINE WEEK ~ OCTOBER\*

Celebrations around our marine life have taken place each year since 1988 as government endeavors to create public awareness on marine conservation issues and remind South Africans of our spectacular ocean heritage that provides employment and recreational opportunities for all.

South Africa boasts a coastline of over 3 000 kilometers which stretches from the Orange River in the west to Kosi Bay in the east. The oceans along this coastline are rich in marine life and support many different marine ecosystems.

Great demand is put on our marine life by commercial fisheries, fishermen, and for recreational purposes such as the collection of marine creatures for fish tanks. These factors and the increase of marine pollution cause the decline of many species and it is our duty, as humans, to make sure such resources are not overexploited resulting in total destruction and possible extinction.

To acknowledge this special week, we can learn more about our fragile oceans and its inhabitants in order to help conserve and utilise this natural resource in a more sustainable manner.

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**? As a consumer of fish, do you have and follow the recommendations in the WWF SASSI (Southern African Sustainable Seafood Initiative) guide?**

 You can check on the conservation status of any fish, by texting its name to 079 4998795.

 *Enviro Facts; Beginner's Guide: Common Marine Fish, Seaweeds (algae); Hands-On: East Coast Reefs, East Coast Sandy Shores, East Coast Dune Plants, East Coast Estuaries and Mangroves, East Coast Rocky Shores, Marine Reptile Life of southern Africa.*

**WWW** [www.wwfsassi.co.za](http://www.wwfsassi.co.za) and [www.msc.org](http://www.msc.org)

\* National Marine Week usually falls in the second week of October. Please contact the Department of Environmental Affairs: Oceans and Coasts on 012-399 9000 in 2015 for confirmation of exact dates.

# WORLD HABITAT DAY ~ 5 OCTOBER

World Habitat Day is celebrated on the first Monday of October and is a reminder to us of the importance of maintaining a balance within our social, political, economic and biophysical environment.

For our survival and for the well-being of our planet, we must ensure that the different natural habitats are conserved so that species and biodiversity (the complete variety of all living things) are maintained.

Communities of plants and animals live in habitats that are specific to their living requirements and are determined by environmental conditions. The survival of many species of flora and fauna rests on the careful management of these habitats. Some of these communities and/or individual species are under major threat as they are affected by the drainage of wetlands, damming of rivers, and agricultural and urban development.

Government departments, non-governmental organisations, businesses, local authorities and schools are all encouraged to work together on issues such as global warming, air pollution, poverty and other environmental concerns. The need to realise the importance of working together as a community to raise awareness about such issues, is essential.

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## ? **In what ways could we improve our 'habitat' to make it more environmentally sustainable?**



Department: Environmental Affairs (DEA). Private Bag X447, Pretoria, 0001. Tel: (012) 310 3911. Hotline for tip-offs to report environmental crimes: 0800 205 005



*Eco Puzzles; Enviro Facts; Hands-On and Beginners' Guides.*

**WWW** [www.unhabitat.org](http://www.unhabitat.org)

# NATIONAL WEEDBUSTER WEEK ~ OCTOBER\*

The Working for Water Programme is a multi-departmental alien clearing initiative led by the Department of Water Affairs. It is the Programme's intention that by the year 2020, substantial control over invading alien plants (IAPs) in South Africa will have taken place in order to contribute to economic empowerment, social equity and ecological integrity. Invasive alien species are causing billions of rands worth of damage to South Africa's economy each year, and are the single largest threat to the country's biodiversity. IAPs pose a direct threat not only to biodiversity, but also to water security, the ecological functioning of natural systems and the productive use of land. They intensify the impact of fires and floods and increase soil erosion. IAPs can divert enormous amounts of water from more productive uses and invasive aquatic plants, such as water hyacinth, affect agriculture, fisheries, transport, recreation and water supply.

National Weedbuster Week aims to raise awareness and increase public understanding about the problems alien plants cause; help the public make the connection between gardening and agricultural practices and potential land and environmental degradation; provide the public with the information and skills required to play a responsible role in the sustainable use of land and water resources and ultimately make the necessary changes in behaviour to help the environment; and, foster community ownership of problems resulting in acceptance and support for alien plant management projects.

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## ? **What effect do invasive alien plants have on biodiversity? What action could you take to reduce the number of IAPs in your area?**



Department: Water and Sanitation, Working for Water Programme. Website: [www.dwa.gov.za/wfw/](http://www.dwa.gov.za/wfw/)



*Hack Attack Pack: making sure your school is free of invader plants; Catchment Action: 28 Alien Plant Invaders in KZN.*

**WWW** [www.dwa.gov.za/wfw/](http://www.dwa.gov.za/wfw/); <http://invasives.org.za> and <http://www.sana.co.za/alien-invasive-plants/>

\* National Weedbuster Week usually falls in the first or second week of October. Please contact the Working for Water Programme (website above) in 2015 for confirmation of dates.

# AFRICAN PENGUIN AWARENESS DAY ~ 10 OCTOBER\*

The African Penguin (*Spheniscus demersus*), is also known as the Black-footed Penguin. Because of its call, which sounds like a braying donkey, this penguin used to be called the Jackass Penguin.

The African Penguin is so named because it is the only species of penguin that breeds in Africa and it is endemic to the south-west coast. There are various colonies between Namibia and Port Elizabeth, the largest of which can be found on Dreyer Island, near Kleinbaai.

Unfortunately, due to egg harvesting, guano harvesting (collection of bird droppings for fertilizer), disease, pressure from commercial fishing, and oil pollution on their food supply, African Penguin populations have rapidly declined and the bird is now listed as "vulnerable to extinction". One hundred years ago, it was estimated that the African Penguin numbered 4 million - today there are only around 56 000 breeding pairs left.

African Penguin Awareness Day is an international SANCCOB (Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds) initiative to raise awareness around the plight of this delightful bird. The University of Cape Town's Avian Demography Unit have shown that SANCCOB's rehabilitation efforts have meant that the penguin populations are as much as 19% higher than they would have been, had action not been taken. Since 1968 this organisation has treated more than 90 000 birds.

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## ? **What marine life does the African Penguin depend on and how is its habitat being protected?**



SANCCOB, PO Box 11116, Bloubaai, 7443. Tel: (021) 557 6155. Fax: (021) 557 8804. E-mail: [info@sanccob.co.za](mailto:info@sanccob.co.za)

**WWW** [www.africanpenguin.co.za/](http://www.africanpenguin.co.za/) and [www.sanccob.co.za/](http://www.sanccob.co.za/)

\* Date may change. Please contact SANCCOB (website: [www.sanccob.co.za](http://www.sanccob.co.za) or e-mail [info@sanccob.co.za](mailto:info@sanccob.co.za)) in 2015 to confirm date.

# WORLD FOOD DAY ~ 16 OCTOBER

## “Food safety”

This World Food Day marks the date of the founding of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) on 16 October 1945. In 1980, the United Nations General Assembly initiated the day by stating that 'food is a requisite for human survival and well-being and a fundamental human necessity'.

FAO's three main goals are:

- the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition;
- the elimination of poverty and the driving forward of economic and social progress for all; and,
- the sustainable management and utilization of natural resources, including land, water, air, climate and genetic factors for the benefit of present and future generations.

Did you know?

- 842 million people in the world do not have enough to eat. This number has fallen by 17% since 1990.
- Asia has the largest number of hungry people (over 500 million) but sub-Saharan Africa has the highest prevalence (24.8% of population).
- If women farmers had the same access to resources as men, the number of hungry in the world could be reduced by 150 million.

Consumers are encouraged to become more aware of the social, economic and environmental cost of food production and to practice healthier and more sustainable eating habits.

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### ? **Does your community have initiatives in place for what is likely to become a survival issue – feeding the hungry?**

 Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.  
PO Box 13782, The Tramshed, Pretoria, 0126. Tel: (012) 354 8540.  
E-mail: [FAO-ZA@fao.org](mailto:FAO-ZA@fao.org)

 *Enviro Facts; Health Gardening: a guide to growing food for life; How to make a trench garden; How to build a chicken tractor; Nutrition in schools: a teacher's guide; Eating for the Earth.*

# INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY ~ 17 OCTOBER

The day was first observed in 1987. The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the observance of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty in 1992, in Resolution 47/196.

Nearly a billion people entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century unable to read a book or sign their names; 1 billion children live in poverty (1 in 2 children in the world); some 1.1 billion people have inadequate access to water; 2.6 billion people lack basic sanitation; for the 1.9 billion children from the developing world, there are 640 million without adequate shelter (1 in 3); and 270 million have no access to health services (1 in 7).

It is difficult to comprehend this in a world of great wealth, of scientific and technological advancement and in a world in which people are more aware of how others live. Yet, it is still a disturbing reality.

The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty encourages authorities at all levels to promote, as appropriate in the national context, activities that will aid in combating poverty and destitution.

Many individuals and governments have different views on how poverty should be alleviated, but most agree that the poor should be given access to resources and education in order to improve their quality of life in sustainable ways.

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## ? **In what ways are people living in poverty affected by climate change?**

 Food & Trees for Africa. PO Box 2035, Gallo Manor, 2052.  
Tel: (011) 656 9802. Fax: (086) 547 1258. E-mail: info@trees.org.za

Food and Agriculture (FAO) Representation in South Africa.  
Metro Park Building, 351 Schoeman Street, Pretoria, 0001. Tel:  
(012) 354 8540. E-mail: FAO-ZA@fao.org

 Rethinking Poverty: UN Report on the World Social Situation 2010.

**WWW** [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org) and <http://www.un.org/en/events/povertyday/>

# DISARMAMENT WEEK ~ 24-30 OCTOBER

*"The world is over-armed and peace is under-funded".*

*United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon*

Disarmament Week begins on the anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. Since the United Nations commencement in 1945, they have supported disarmament and arms control issues. It was in 1995 that governments and non-governmental organisations were approached by the United Nations to continue to assist in the struggle against weapons. It aims to highlight the danger of the arms race, propagate the need for its cessation and increase public understanding of the urgent tasks of disarmament.

Worldwide there are threats of war and in many countries there is civil war. Although families have the right to safety, it is not a safe solution to own a weapon and countries are not more secure through increased militarisation. When we develop our potential and human dignity, and when nations learn to solve their differences peacefully, the safety needs of the community and individuals will be met without armed conflict.

Wars are not only financially costly but also environmentally and socially costly. The money spent on weapons could be used more sensibly by making contributions towards the upliftment of communities and moving towards a more sustainable lifestyle.

*"Our hard-won political freedom will mean nothing unless we have freedom from violence, freedom from fear ..."* Former President, Nelson Mandela (1918-2013).

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## ? **Aside from arms, what other warfare exists?**



Gun Free South Africa (GFSA). PO Box 12988, Mowbray, 7705.  
Website: [www.gunfreesa.org.za](http://www.gunfreesa.org.za); Claire Taylor: 072 341 3898  
[claire@gfsa.org.za](mailto:claire@gfsa.org.za) Fax: 086 545 0094

**WWW** [www.un.org/disarmament/](http://www.un.org/disarmament/)

# UNIVERSAL CHILDREN'S DAY ~ 20 NOVEMBER

*"We were all children once. And we all share the desire for the well-being for our children, which has always been and will continue to be the most universally cherished aspiration of humankind."*

*We the Children: End-decade review of the follow-up to the World Summit for Children Report of the Secretary-General (2001)*

Universal Children's Day marks the day in which the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. It was in 1954 that all countries were approached by the United Nations to observe a Universal Children's Day, promoting the welfare of children around the world.

Children represent the future of all countries around the world. It is the duty of parents, governing bodies, governments and non-governmental organisations to ensure that the safety and the rights of children are considered and met.

The environment in which we live requires careful management and respect in order for future generations to benefit from the Earth's resources and maintain a sustainable way of living. Children need to learn, from a young age, about the importance of being environmentally literate and responsible citizens so that they can grow up to enjoy a decent quality of life.

Universal Children's Day is an excellent opportunity to encourage and empower our children to tread lightly on the Earth.

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? **Choose 3 countries. Find out the similarities and differences in the lifestyles of the children in those countries. Look at things like education, home-life, access to Internet and food.**

 WESSA Eco-Schools South Africa. PO Box 394, Howick, 3290. Tel (033) 330 3931 ext 2145. E-mail: [ecoschools@wessa.co.za](mailto:ecoschools@wessa.co.za)

 *United Nations: Declaration of the Rights of the Child. 1959.*  
*United Nations: Convention on the Rights of the Child. 1989.*

**WWW** [www.un.org/en/events/childrenday/](http://www.un.org/en/events/childrenday/)

# BUY NOTHING DAY ~ 28 NOVEMBER

Did you know? Developed countries - only 20% of the world population - are consuming over 80% of the Earth's natural resources, causing a disproportionate level of environmental damage, and an unfair distribution of wealth!

“Buy Nothing Day is your special day to unshop, unspend and unwind. Relax and do nothing for the economy and for yourself - at least for a single day”.

Buy Nothing Day was started by Adbusters in the early 1990s and has since grown into an international event celebrated in more than 65 countries. It is a simple idea, which challenges consumer culture by asking us to switch off from shopping for a day. Their aim is to question existing power structures and encourage consumer lifestyle changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Buy Nothing Day, celebrated on the last Saturday in November, challenges us to avoid participating in the economy. We should bear in mind that it is not only when we take cash from our wallets to pay for goods, that we are spending money, but also when we make a cell phone call, use electricity or water in our homes, or drive our cars.

Many people are beginning to realise that the population explosion, coupled with our consumerist lifestyles are putting unnecessary pressure on our planet's dwindling resources, only to produce an enormous amount of waste that is difficult and costly to dispose of. This situation is not sustainable.

If we are to make lifestyle changes that reduce our environmental footprint, we need to think and reflect on how we, as consumers, are adding to the problem, and come up with creative ways in which we can live on this planet in a more sustainable manner.

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**?      Keep a log of how many 'transactions' involving money you make in a day. Assess the impact these transactions may have on the environment.**

**WWW** [www.buynothingday.co.uk](http://www.buynothingday.co.uk)

# BIRDING BIG DAY (SA) ~ 28 NOVEMBER

Birds belong to the class Aves and, of the higher vertebrates, they are the most studied, the most easily seen and accessible, the most melodious and many think, the most beautiful animals on Earth.

Fish are the only other vertebrates that have a higher number of species than birds. There are approximately 10 000 species of bird distributed over most of the Earth. They are found in forests, deserts, mountains and prairies, and on lakes, rivers and oceans. A few species have even visited the North Pole and one, a skua, was seen at the South Pole! Some birds dive to depths greater than 45m to prey on aquatic life while others live in caves and in this total darkness are able to find their way around by echo-location.

South Africa is richly endowed with a diversity of approximately 890 different bird species.

In recognition of our bird heritage, BirdLife South Africa co-ordinates Birding Big Day. Birding Big Day is a competition open to everyone with the aim of seeing how many birds can be spotted on that day, within a radius of 50km. Prizes are awarded to the team who spots the highest numbers.

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## ? **What different roles are performed by birds in an ecosystem in/around your school or home?**

 BirdLife South Africa, PO Box 515, Randburg, 2125. Tel: (011) 789 1122. Fax: (011) 789 5188. E-mail [info@birdlife.org.za](mailto:info@birdlife.org.za)

 *A Beginner's Guide: Some Common Waterbirds; Beginners Guide: Owls; Hadedda Island Curriculum Pack.*

**WWW** [www.birdlife.org.za](http://www.birdlife.org.za)

# WORLD AIDS DAY ~ 1 DECEMBER

The World Health Organisation declared 1 December 1988 World AIDS Day in recognition of the deep concern about the pandemic proportions of the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

Globally, an estimated 34 million people have HIV (the Human Immunodeficiency Virus). It is a virus which attacks the body's immune system — the body's defence against diseases. More than 35 million people have died from the virus, making it one of the most destructive pandemics in history.

The HI virus that causes AIDS disables the immune system by destroying the T4-lymphocytes (white blood cells) that help 'killer' lymphocytes attack invaders. HIV weakens the body's natural defences against infection, making those people with the virus less able to fight the organisms that cause infection and disease. It is only once people with HIV begin to show signs of having one or more infections that they are said to have AIDS.

Sadly, AIDS sufferers are often rejected by society at a time when they most need physical, medical, emotional and spiritual support.

Some facts about HIV:

- Over 90% of people with HIV were infected through sexual contact.
- You can now get tested for HIV using a saliva sample.
- HIV is not passed on through spitting, biting or sharing utensils.
- Only 1% of babies born to HIV positive mothers have HIV.
- You can get the results of an HIV test in just 15-20 minutes.
- There is no vaccine and no cure for HIV.

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? **Although AIDS has become very common, it is still surrounded by silence. What are the implications of 'keeping quiet?'**



*The AIDS Healers: a compilation of AIDS-related stories with grammatical and comprehension exercises.*

**WWW** [www.worldaidsday.org](http://www.worldaidsday.org) and [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)

# INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ~ 3 DECEMBER

In 1992, 3 December was declared the International Day for Persons with Disabilities by the United Nations General Assembly. This followed the conclusion of the United Nations Decade of Disabled People which ran from 1983-1992.

Initially, the day was proclaimed to commemorate the anniversary of the General Assembly's adoption of the World Programme of Action concerning Persons with Disabilities. The day also aimed to promote an understanding about disability issues and to increase awareness of the importance of including disabled persons in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.

Some 10% of the world's population live with a disability. They are the world's largest minority, and some 80% of them live in developing countries. Among the world's poorest people, 20% have some kind of disability. Women and girls with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to abuse. Persons with disabilities are more likely to be victims of violence or rape, and are less likely to obtain police intervention, legal protection or preventive care. Some 30% of street youths have some kind of disability, and in developing countries, 90% of children with disabilities do not attend school. People are often unaware of the great number of persons living with disabilities and the challenges they face.

The International Day of Persons with Disabilities aims to promote an understanding of disability issues and mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. It also seeks to increase awareness of gains to be derived from the inclusion of persons with disabilities in every aspect of life.

Awareness initiatives of this day should be supported and agreed upon by people with disabilities.

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**? Look around you. Are people with disabilities able to access your area without assistance? If not, lobby for lifts, ramps and disabled facilities.**

# INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN DAY ~ 11 DECEMBER

The International Year of Mountains was launched at the headquarters of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on 11 December 2001. This observance, which is celebrated annually, as from 2003, aims to draw attention to the important roles that mountainous regions play in water, recreation and food supply.

Mountains cover about 27% of the world's surface and provide sustenance and wellbeing to 720 million people. Mountains are the water towers of the world – providing freshwater to at least half of the world's people. However, mountains are also high-risk environments; avalanches, landslides, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and glacial lake outburst floods threaten life in mountain regions and surrounding areas. Mountains play an important role in influencing global and regional climates and weather conditions.

The sustainable development and protection of mountain regions and the improvement of local livelihoods should be at the core of mountain legislation. Such legislation needs to address the protection of ethnic minorities and the cultural heritage of mountain people, and to recognize community-based property rights. Many mountain ranges are transboundary, so sustainable mountain development requires international co-operation.

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**?** **When last did you taste and drink water at its source? What did it taste of?**



Mountain Club of South Africa.  
Website: <http://cen.mcsa.org.za/>



*Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World.*

**WWW** <http://www.fao.org/forestry/internationalmountainday/en/>

## **DAY OF RECONCILIATION (SA) ~ 16 DECEMBER**

On 16 December 1838, a group of Voortrekkers defeated the Zulu army at the battle of Blood River. This battle was the climax of many battles that had been fought between the two armies as a result of land disputes and failed negotiations. In preparation for the battle, the Voortrekkers took a vow before God stating that, should they defeat the Zulu army, they would build a church and they, and their descendants, would celebrate the day as a day of thanksgiving for their victory. It was then known as the Day of the Covenant and later the Day of the Vow.

With the advent of democracy in South Africa, 16 December remained a public holiday but was renamed the Day of Reconciliation.

It was also on this day in 1961 that Umkhonto we Sizwe, the liberation army of the ANC, launched its first military acts of sabotage against the apartheid government. This day was celebrated by supporters of the liberation, as the beginning of their armed struggle.

On 16 December 2013, the unveiling of the statue of former President Nelson Mandela (1918-2013) took place at the Union Buildings in Pretoria. While the statue is a monument dedicated to the life of former President Nelson Mandela and his contribution to freedom and reconciliation in South Africa, it is also a collective memorial to the struggles and sacrifice that millions of South Africans made so that our country could be free and her citizens live in peace and prosperity.

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**?**      **Is South Africa unique in having a 'Day of Reconciliation'?**

**WWW** <http://www.gov.za/node/63>

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