



Oudtshoorn

Funding of just more than R3m was granted to the South African Ostrich Business Chamber from the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund (NLDTF). These funds will be utilised to further expand the services of the Industry's Biodiversity Unit, who is also striving to establish a balance in the between conservation and utilisation of the natural environment in our biodiversity-rich Klein Karoo.

"The R3.1m that will be received over a period of three years from the NLDTF and will enable the continuation of the original project that started in 2007," explains Anita Wheeler, project co-ordinator. "The challenges are mainly to rehabilitate veld that has been damaged by breeding ostriches in critically engendered areas, as well as to introduce and/or apply sustainable veld management methods to landowners in these areas."

"Over time, large areas of veld degraded to such an extent that the biodiversity of the natural vegetation is now in serious danger."

Overstocking occurs in the ostrich industry, as it does in any other livestock industry. "Farmers say that, given the current economic climate (drought, strong ZAR) it is not economically viable to stock less ostriches on their land.

The project promotes farming methods that are viable both economically and ecologically.

One example of a sustainable farming method is the small camp system. One male and two female ostriches are kept in a small camp of a quarter hectare for eight months of the breeding season. For the rest of the year the males and females are kept in separate feeding camps to rest and recover until the next breeding season.

The benefits of the small camp system are improved monitoring of the females' breeding success, identification of excellent breeding males and effective feeding of the ostriches. "It just doesn't make sense to breed with ostriches and not be aware of unproductive males or females."

"It is a long term investment to create a balance between conservation and utilisation which will ensure that the Klein Karoo does not lose its unique character and that it will be preserved for generations."

The NLDTF funding will inter alia be used to establish a unit that will be able to answer all questions about biodiversity in the industry, and also to specifically focus on raising awareness about the sensitivity of our area and the sustainability of the ostrich industry. "It is crucial to place the importance of conservation to the farmer, next to that of utilisation."