

Seaward – Your Greatest Asset

Passionate about wildlife and conservation, we at The LionHeart Experience have turned our focus into fighting for the last pieces of heaven in the urban areas. This is what brought us into Seaward Estate this spring. Having worked in Zimbali for many years on threatened and protected species, we knew of Seaward next door, but had absolutely no idea what was hidden just on the other side of the fence!



Stunning forest scenes in the heart of Ballito, hiding mysteries and secrets, that we hope to uncover!

Andrew met us and took us for a walk into the greenbelt. We were immediately amazed at the wetlands on the property, and, as we walked around the Estate, each new habitat got us more and more excited about what potential the Seaward residents' 'back garden' may have with regard to rare and protected species! Not only is there wetland, but there is coastal dune forest, small patches of grassland, and pristine swamp forest (a very rare habitat type).

It's like a hidden gem, a best kept secret, and as we entered this beautiful and enchanting forest, the haunting calls of a black sparrowhawk pair and their wailing juvenile greeted us. This finally revealed an answer we have been seeking for many years. We have been monitoring black sparrowhawks in Zimbali for ages, knowing that they breed very close, but we knew the nest was not in Zimbali. It is now pretty evident that the nest belongs to you! It's in Seaward! This was only a few minutes into our visit. Imagine what could be found with much more time to search this magic forest.

To add to this magic, we then had a palmnut vulture fly over the forest, all the while, this swamp forest had me drooling with excitement, particularly wondering if the extremely rare swamp forest orchid *Platylepis glandulosa* may be in there. It must be, surely?! And what other rare species may

be in there?



A beautiful adult palmnut vulture, in search of its favourite food, the fruit of the Raffia Palm, and the very rare and delicate swamp forest orchid *Platylepis glandulosa*

As we continued, the tracks in the sand told us stories. We are both qualified trails guides, where understanding tracks are crucial (particularly so you don't die by walking into a sleeping buffalo, or a leopard with cubs), but tracks also reveal the secrets of the more elusive species that are roaming around at night in the forests. We were able to confirm that Seaward is home to rusty-spotted genets, water mongooses and bushbuck. It would be fantastic to determine what else may be in the area, as well as gain an understanding of how these populations are doing.



Elusive creatures like the water mongoose and rusty-spotted genet find homes in Seaward

The beautiful forest is likely to have incredible and possibly endangered birds too. We have been running a Spotted Ground Thrush Monitoring Project in the area, trying to establish more data on this rare and endangered species, estimated as potentially having less than 1000 birds left in SA. We believe this forest may provide habitat for this species, but that would require returning in the winter months to establish that. The forest also provides a safe haven for other breath-taking birds

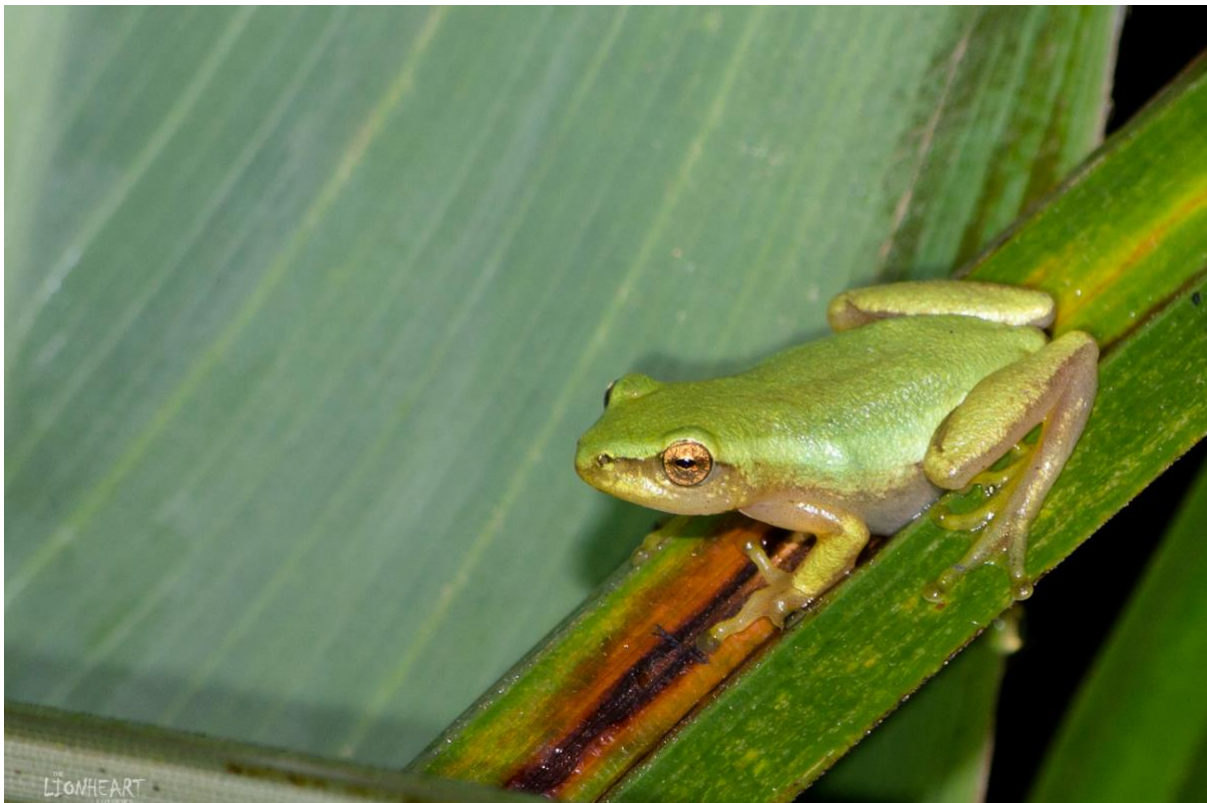
like the Narina Trogon, as well as the threatened crowned eagles that we have dedicated much of our lives to protecting.



The gorgeous narina trogon, a juvenile crowned eagle, and perhaps the endangered ground thrush, may all rely on Seaward's forests for safe refuge

Another surprise came in the form of an old giant, a large Macaranga Tree along the swamp forest watercourse. There are not a huge amount of these in the area, due to previous deforestation, logging, sugarcane farms etc, so this was a nice find, and a hopeful sign that perhaps some of this area may have been relatively untouched for quite some time.

The wetlands are likely to have amazing frogs, and perhaps, just perhaps, another big moment can come for Seaward, if we find a specific endangered frog there, it can be added as the 39th known site for this frog on the planet. Let's see what the future holds.



The Picker's reed frog is known from less than 40 wetlands on the whole planet

It was just a short visit for us, but that was enough to realise that this is a precious little piece of heaven, one that is well worth protecting. With all the rapid development happening on earth now,

especially outside of protected areas, there is going to come a time when anyone with access to a beautiful piece of natural forest will be envied, as there may not be too much of it left someday. This, in our opinion, this is Seaward's greatest asset!