Citizen scientists contributing to biodiversity records and monitoring in selected rural areas of Mopani and Sekhukhune, Limpopo Province

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In South Africa, development is seen as a key driver to address poverty, inequality and unemployment and is therefore facilitated to boost economic growth. Historically, development was concentrated in the urban and peri urban areas, thus making economic resources available to the minority living in such areas, excluding the majorities in rural areas. In an attempt to redress this, strategies like the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme are in place to foster rural economic transformation and potential habitat altering projects are planned in the rural areas. The implications thereof, include altering the environment and introducing new biodiversity pressures which could potentially impact on ecosystem functions providing essential ecosystem services like production of clean water, erosion control, clean air production and carbon storage in areas previously not at risk. Environmental practitiners are therefore faced with a huge responsibility to advice on environmentally responsible development and if necessary put conservation measures in place to mitigate impacts. They may also need to formulate systems to rapidly protect threatened species and ecosystems and to measure conservation initiative effectiveness. The above listed is only feasible with the availability of good species and ecosystem foundational data or Essential Biodiversity Variables (EBVs). Historical records for most EBVs in South Africa, are biased towards easy to access and tourist attraction areas, making it difficult to plan effective environmentally sensitive development in many deep rural areas. There is therefore an urgent need to have informative EBVs for under collected areas that are targeted for development. Furthermore it is critical to target species or groups that can serve to give early warning signals for ecological degradation. Bird diversity is a good surrogate for overall biodiversity. Bird data will be collected and used to infer the state of biodiversity in the study area