

# Biodiversity and wine making in South Africa

Biodiversity is the term used to describe the biological diversity of plants, animals and ecosystems in an area.

Preserving biodiversity means preserving balance, as all elements continue naturally within their environment.

There are complex relationships between flora and fauna, and between ecosystems on land and water. There are also little-understood relationships between different species, and even between genetically different organisms within the same species. Disturb the balance of any of these living things and ecosystems, and the results can be unpredictable.

The Cape Floral Kingdom is one of the richest plant kingdoms on earth. It also happens to be the place where 90% of South African wine is produced. This has caused concern in groups like the South African Botanical Society and Conservation International. Investigation revealed that the agricultural activity, plus urban development and its accompanying introduction of invasive alien species, has put this important region under threat. Already the area has lost over 90% of its indigenous renosterveld and lowfeld fynbos ecosystems, and some of the succulent karoo is disappearing.

To stop the destruction of the plant kingdom's natural biodiversity, a groundbreaking project has been created. Since most of the land is privately owned, it has been essential that conservation efforts include the cooperation of landowners. The result is WWF's Biodiversity and Wine Initiative (BWI).

The programme aims to prevent further habitat loss, to ensure some land is set aside for existing habitats and to encourage habitat friendly farming practices. The benefits to South Africa's biodiversity are obvious. Local wine producers also benefit by having the competitive advantage of a conservationist claim. Finally, retailers selling BWI vineyard wines can encourage eco-ethical purchasing within this important product category.