



STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

MONITORING BIODIVERSITY IMPACTS AT SERE WIND FARM KICKS OFF THIS NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT MONTH

8th June 2015

Start

June, which is National Environmental Month, marks the start of an in-depth biodiversity impact monitoring at Eskom's flagship wind energy facility, Sere, near Koekenaap in the Western Cape. Sere became fully operational in March this year and Eskom has partnered with the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) and BirdLife South Africa to conduct the biodiversity assessments.

The negative impacts of wind energy developments on bird and bat populations was recognised as a potential risk at Eskom wind energy facilities. The time is now opportune to quantify these impacts and to confirm whether the current mitigation measures are effective. Evidence and information obtained at this site will help to determine further efforts required to mitigate the impacts of wind farms on birds in South Africa.

The monitoring will consist of daily walked transects underneath wind turbines, covering distances in excess of 35 km per day. Staff have been recruited from local communities and trained as carcass searchers. Further skills development includes data entry, camera trapping and learning the ins and outs of a GPS, to name but a few. Staff have also been trained to handle and preserve any carcasses located during searches, so that these may be analysed by bird and bat specialists at a later stage.

"The environmental authorisation requirement to monitor the impact of associated infrastructure such as roads, substations and power lines will be a critical component for consideration, and data collected in this respect will be forwarded to the EWT's Wildlife and Transport Programme and the EWT's Wildlife and Energy Programme. By involving a variety of specialists, unique wildlife challenges on site will be addressed individually and applicable mitigation measures will be field tested in order to minimise impacts" said Kishalyn Chetty, Environmental Advisor from Eskom's Environmental Department.

All operational monitoring work will be conducted in accordance with the *BirdLife South Africa / Endangered Wildlife Trust Best-Practice Guidelines for assessing and monitoring the impact of wind-energy facilities on birds in southern Africa*. Operational monitoring at wind energy facilities is a fairly recent activity in the South African context, and all practical experience gained at Sere will be used to update and improve the existing guidelines. "The guidelines are only a minimum requirement but Eskom has also donated 10 state-of-the-art camera traps for use during the study. These valuable

tools will be used to determine which scavengers are present on site and assist analysts in determining carcass removal rates, thus enabling a more accurate quantification of impacts” said Lourens Leeuwener, Eskom/EWT partnership Renewable Energy Project manager.

“Finding renewable energy sources that have zero impact on the environment has turned out to be a near impossible task. Renewable energy may have a negative impact on the environment but this can be managed if site specific information is available. The looming energy crisis in South Africa is a reality faced by all and finding sustainable solutions will be the key to a balanced energy mix in the country. The Eskom/EWT Partnership hopes to add value by improving our understanding of the impacts of wind energy and in doing so, promoting the use of sustainable renewable energy technology” said Constant Hoogstad, EWT's Wildlife and Energy Programme Manager.

“Monitoring the environmental impacts at wind farms is critical as this allows us to make scientifically defensible recommendations that will help increase the sustainability of renewable energy in South Africa. We are really pleased that Eskom is stepping up to the challenge and we look forward to learning from this partnership” said Samantha Ralston-Paton, Birds and Renewable Energy Manager at BirdLife South Africa.

Please visit www.ewt.org.za or contact WEP Manager Constant Hoogstad (constanth@ewt.org.za) for more information about the Eskom/BirdLife South Africa/EWT Partnership and the Wildlife and Energy Programme.

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Notes for Editors

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) is a non-governmental, non-profit, conservation organisation, founded in 1973 and operating throughout southern and parts of East Africa. The EWT conserves threatened species and ecosystems in southern Africa by initiating research and conservation action programmes, implementing projects which mitigate threats facing species diversity and supporting

sustainable natural resource management. The EWT furthermore communicates the principles of sustainable living through awareness programmes to the broadest possible constituency for the benefit of the region. The EWT has developed a unique operational structure through which the mission and objectives of the EWT can be achieved. For more information visit www.ewt.org.za or www.facebook.com/EndangeredWildlifeTrust.

BirdLife South Africa is the local country partner of BirdLife International. BirdLife International is the world's largest nature conservation Partnership with more than 120 BirdLife Partners worldwide and growing, with almost 11 million supporters, 7000 local conservation groups and 7400 staff. Find out more at www.birdlife.org or www.facebook.com/BirdLifeInternational

The vision of BirdLife South Africa is to promote the conservation, research, understanding, observation and enjoyment of natural birds and their habitats. BirdLife South Africa is the largest non-profit bird conservation organisation in the country, and relies on donor funding and financial support from the public to carry out its critical conservation work. For more information, visit www.birdlife.org.za. BirdLife South Africa endeavours to lead the way in implementing ethical tracking studies in a way that underpins our mission of protecting wild birds and their habitats.