



Addressing the problem of vulture electrocutions in South Africa

16 May 2016

Start

Since early 2016, the Eskom/Endangered Wildlife Trust strategic partnership has seen an increase in the number of powerline mortalities being reported by members of the public. This escalation in reporting gives rise to a growing concern over the number of vultures being electrocuted on electrical infrastructure across southern Africa. Vultures are especially vulnerable to powerline electrocution due to their large wingspans, heavy bodies and gregarious nature. When combined with contributing factors like treeless environments that force birds to sit on electricity poles, wet feathers which increase conductivity, sunning behaviour, artificially supplied food sources (such as vulture restaurants) and a concentration of carcasses often located in close proximity to power lines, vultures are the birds that are at highest risk from powerline electrocutions.

Recently a number of vulture incidents have been reported in the southern Free State. The latest incident was reported by a farmer between Aliwal North and Reddersburg. He discovered a number of vultures lying under the powerlines on his farm, and notified the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) who immediately sent out field worker, Ronelle Visagie, to investigate the incident. Amongst the mortalities, Ronelle also found an injured bird which was transported overnight by the Eskom/EWT partnership field workers to the VulPro vulture rehabilitation centre near Hartbeespoort Dam, North-West Province.

“Most powerlines built before the 1990s were not subject to environmental impact assessments and the structures were not designed to be bird friendly. This means that we are sitting with thousands of kilometres of power lines across South Africa which are extremely dangerous to birds. Eskom’s biggest challenge is to ensure that these old designs are phased out as soon as possible and that all new power lines being erected are bird friendly” said Constant Hoogstad – Manager of the EWT’s Wildlife and Energy Programme.

Eskom takes the electrocution of birds on powerlines extremely seriously and over the past few days Eskom has already started to mitigate powerlines in the area that have been identified as areas of concern, and has arranged emergency mitigation measures to address these particularly troublesome powerlines. During the last financial year Eskom changed more than 1,215 poles to bird friendly, insulated 63 transformers/strain poles, fitted 724 spans with bird flight diverters which amounted to more than 12,108 units.

While progress has been made in the past to reduce bird electrocutions, the increasing number of reported incidents signals a need for a step change. Eskom has identified high risk areas through the use of bird sensitivity maps developed by the EWT and Eskom Research to better inform Eskom where to proactively mitigate powerlines. Eskom is strategically committed to both proactively and reactively deal with bird interactions on powerlines. Eskom and the EWT will be engaging closely with other interested and affected stakeholders to ensure that the issue of bird electrocutions is addressed appropriately.

To continue to assist in decreasing the number of bird mortalities on powerline infrastructure, the EWT would like to encourage members of the public to report any wildlife and powerlines incidents to wep@ewt.org.za , 011-372-3600 or 0860-111-535.

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

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*Photos available on request.