



## **ENDANGERED CAPE VULTURES ELECTROCUTED IN ELLIOT, EASTERN CAPE ON ESKOM POWERLINES**

*30 March 2016*

*Start*

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) appreciates the reporting of an incident by Walter Naser -CEO of African Vultures- over this past Easter weekend, of approximately 49 Cape Griffons that were electrocuted in various locations in Elliot in the Eastern Cape. The EWT relies on the reports of conservation and birding enthusiasts in order to identify problem power lines around South Africa, and had already initiated a response under the Eskom/EWT Partnership by Easter Monday in order to address this devastating situation.

Energy and communications infrastructure such as telephone lines, cell phone towers, power lines, power stations, wind turbines, and pipe lines represent an important and often negative interface between man and wildlife. These structures are often tall (standing out in any landscape) and linear (crossing vast distances), increasing the opportunity for wildlife interactions.

Many bird species are affected by power lines including the Cape Griffon. Since 1996, 1 262 vulture mortalities have been recorded in the Eskom/EWT Central Incident Register. Prior to this incident, the most heavily impacted species being the Cape Griffon with 774 mortalities being recorded; 637 of which were electrocutions, 132 collision incidents and 5 resulting from unknown causes. Due to their large wingspans, heavy bodies and gregarious nature, vultures are among one of the most high-risk bird groups when it comes to mortality on Eskom infrastructure.

The Eskom/EWT Partnership was established in 1996, as a global first, to address wildlife interactions on electrical infrastructure. All incidents that are reported to the partnership are recorded in the national incident register which is currently the only such register in the world. The register allows for monitoring the trends in wildlife mortalities on Eskom's infrastructure and action to then be taken. Mortalities are reported by landowners, the EWT's volunteer network, the public and Eskom staff. Once a mortality is reported, an EWT fieldworker or Eskom staff member will visit the incident location to compile a detailed report of all the relevant information. This information is then used by the EWT to develop recommendations for solutions implemented by Eskom, at the incident site in order to prevent recurring negative interactions. The EWT then works with Eskom to ensure that the mitigation is undertaken, and conducts an independent annual audit on randomly selected mitigation sites.

Most powerlines built before the 1990s were not subject to environmental impact assessments and the structures were not designed to be bird friendly, which has resulted in a network of lines across the country that pose a significant threat to a number of bird species.

To address the aforementioned problem, Eskom's Biodiversity Standard was developed more than 10 years ago to ensure that all new powerlines are designed to be bird friendly. In order for a power line to be designated 'bird friendly' it must not be possible for birds with large wingspans like vultures to breach the gap between 2 live conductors or between live and earth phases. In order to mitigate for this risk, an array of mitigation measures, products and methods were developed by Eskom, the EWT and local suppliers.

Since the establishment of the incident register by the EWT and Eskom, 2 609 incidents have been reported to the EWT most of which have resulted in mitigation work being undertaken. Over the last financial year, over 100 individual recommendations were issued by the EWT to Eskom for mitigation measures to be implemented. 88.23% of recommendations received from the EWT have been closed by Eskom within 4 months.

Tragically, none of the nine provinces in South Africa are immune to vulture mortalities. It is evident that most interactions which occur result in the death of more than one vulture. The most vulture interactions have been recorded in the North-West Province (163 reports totalling 374 individuals). The large number of protected areas, the limited availability of trees (for perching), less competition for food from scavengers/predators and the numerous vulture colonies distributed throughout the province may be contributing to these high numbers.

The EWT welcomes all reports on wildlife mortalities and potential areas of concern related to any and all Eskom infrastructure and urges the public to contact us on: 0860111535

*End.*

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