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Hazardous power line removed by Eskom to protect Endangered Crane species

Start

As South Africa's electricity needs continue to grow, power lines and other accompanying electrical infrastructure are expanding daily. Eskom and the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) formalised their long-standing relationship by entering into a partnership in 1996 to address the problem of wildlife interactions with electrical infrastructure in a systematic manner on a national basis, and to establish an integrated management system to minimise negative interactions. Negative interactions between wildlife and electricity structures take on different forms including electrocution on electrical infrastructure and collision with power lines.

The Eskom/EWT Partnership has developed an incident management system (database) with various key performance indicators that help to track the status and progress of incident investigations and incident recommendation reports, as well as the implementation of these recommendations. With over 500,000 km of power lines in the country, it is inevitable that collisions and electrocutions will occur that will result in mortalities. The database includes over 2,900 incidents involving Eskom power lines, most of which were of mortalities on smaller distribution lines. With an average of around 1.8 individual animals per incident, nearly 5,500 individual mortalities have been added to the database over the past 21 years. Over 95% of these were birds, including 141 different species, and vultures and cranes comprise 25% and 24%, respectively, of all power line mortalities registered on the database. Crane species are heavily impacted as they often fly in low-light conditions when the line is less visible.

“Without landowners reporting wildlife incidents and high-risk areas, the partnership is unable to take steps to remedy the situation. Landowners play a vital role in this process as they are the custodians of their land on which the vegetation and the species that are dependent on it need to survive”, said Matthew Becker, EWT Field Officer. In the last year, there has been a push for a more proactive approach through identifying problem areas and structures through modelling exercises to use a targeted mitigation approach. Late last year a landowner near Hilton, KwaZulu-Natal, contacted the EWT to report an incident involving a Grey Crowned Crane (*Balearica regulorum*) that collided with an overhead Eskom line. The Grey Crowned Crane is an Endangered species and thus every individual is crucial to the population. Field officers went out with Eskom representatives to assess the line and compile a field investigation report.

After deliberations, recommendations, meetings and assessments between the landowners, Eskom and the EWT, the section of power line was removed by the Eskom team, returning the site partially to its original state. This was a major breakthrough for the Endangered birds, eliminating the risk of collisions in future.

“Another area has been made safe by the Eskom/EWT partnership and landowners. Great thanks must go to the landowners that reported the incident to the EWT, and to Eskom, specifically the KZN operating unit, for the quick response and determination to work together to safeguard the area for threatened species. This truly is conservation in action”, said Constant Hoogstad, Manager of the EWT’s Wildlife and Energy Programme.

The Eskom/EWT partnership would like to encourage landowners and members of the public to report wildlife and power line interactions and high-risk areas of concern. The importance of the public reporting incidents and high-risk areas cannot be emphasised enough, as it enables the EWT and Eskom to quickly remedy the situation. Any wildlife and power line related incidents or areas of concern should be reported to reduce the impact on our country’s wildlife. Please send information to wep@ewt.org.za or call (011) 372-3600 / Toll Free: 0860-111-535.

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