



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use

BirdLife South Africa guidelines to help reduce the impact of solar energy on birds

Johannesburg, 23 November 2012: BirdLife South Africa has developed guidelines to ensure that the generation of electricity from solar energy does not negatively impact on South Africa's birds. The guidelines, which are designed to minimise the impact on birds of Solar Facilities and Associated Infrastructure in South Africa, can be downloaded from: <http://www.birdlife.org.za/conservation/birds-and-wind-energy>.

BirdLife South Africa's peer-reviewed guidelines summarise the likely impacts of solar energy facilities on birds and suggest measures that can be implemented to reduce or prevent these impacts. A key recommendation is that a bird specialist should be consulted in the environmental impact assessment process for almost all proposed solar energy facilities. The guidelines also encourage developers to monitor the solar energy facility after construction to develop a better understanding of the impacts.

"We need renewable energy in South Africa," said Samantha Ralston, Birds and Renewable Energy Manger for BirdLife South Africa (sponsored by Investec Capital Markets), "but solar energy, at the scale planned for South Africa, could cause the rapid alteration of large areas of habitat and may represent a new threat to some species. BirdLife South Africa would like to encourage and support the solar energy industry to properly assess and manage these impacts."

Solar energy is renewable and more environmentally friendly than energy from non-renewable sources such as coal-fired power stations, but solar farms can still be environmentally damaging. Solar farms typically cover large areas and if incorrectly located, could displace or exclude threatened, rare, endemic, or range-restricted bird species from important habitats. Associated infrastructure can also cause disturbance and sometimes mortality. An important principle of the guidelines is to encourage the thorough assessment and mitigation of the potential impacts of solar farms on birds.

There are two types of solar power generation: Solar photovoltaic and Concentrated Solar Power. Photovoltaic electricity generation uses solar panels to turn solar radiation directly into electricity. At Concentrated Solar Power plants sunlight is reflected off a series of panels and concentrated onto a central receiver tower and standby focal points. The resulting heat from the reflected rays is used to raise steam to drive

turbines and generators. Concentrated Solar Power plants can have additional negative impacts on birds as birds can become disorientated by the reflective surfaces and fly into infrastructure, or they can be burned if they fly close to the central receiving tower. When evaporation ponds are associated with the Concentrated Solar Power plants, these should be closed to ensure that birds are not attracted to this new water habitat, drown or are poisoned by traces of chemicals in the waste water.

At this stage 1450 MW Photovoltaic and 200 MW Concentrated Solar Power has been allocated in the first two bidding windows the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producers Procurement Programme.

Solar energy generally requires approximately 3-4 hectares per megawatt.

BirdLife South Africa supports the responsible development of a renewable energy industry in South Africa. BirdLife South Africa's Birds and Renewable Energy work is sponsored by Investec Capital Markets.

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Notes to Editors:

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About BirdLife South Africa

- The vision of BirdLife South Africa is to promote the conservation, research, understanding, observation of and enjoyment of natural birds, and their habitats.
- BirdLife South Africa supports renewable energy production, but renewable energy facilities can have unintended negative impacts on avifauna. BirdLife South Africa's Birds and Renewable Energy Manager, a position sponsored by Investec Capital Markets, works with government and industry to minimise the impact of renewable energy developments on birds and their habitats.
- South Africa has 844 bird species, of which 65 species only occur here and 125 (15%) are listed in The Eskom Red Data Book of Birds of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland (Barnes 2000). With one of the highest levels of bird endemism in the world, South Africa has an important obligation to ensure their survival.
- BirdLife South Africa is the largest non-profit bird conservation organization in the country. It 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