



## BirdLife South Africa

### **Position Statement on the development of Wind Energy facilities in Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas**

Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) are sites that are critical for the long-term survival of bird species. While BirdLife South Africa supports the responsible development of renewable energy, in most instances the development of wind farms within IBAs is likely to be undesirable. Where wind farms are considered within, or near to, IBAs we encourage the consideration of alternative sites, and recommend particularly rigorous avifaunal impact assessments. The burden of proof must be on demonstrating that the proposed wind farm will not impact on IBA trigger species and/or their habitats.

#### **Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas**

- The IBA Programme is one of BirdLife International's most important conservation initiatives.
- IBAs are a network of sites that are critical for the long-term survival of bird species.
- IBAs are globally significant areas for bird conservation and are identified through multi-stakeholder processes, using standardised, quantitative and scientifically agreed criteria relating to the presence of IBA "trigger species".

#### **Compatibility of wind energy with IBAs**

- BirdLife South Africa supports the responsible development of renewable energy in South Africa, but wind energy can pose a potential threat to the IBA and the trigger species in the IBA.
- Trigger species may collide with the wind turbines and associated infrastructure, and/or birds and their habitats may be negatively affected by activities associated with the construction and operation of wind energy facilities.
- IBAs were not delineated with the specific aim of guiding the location of wind farms:
  - o Not all IBA trigger species are equally vulnerable to the effects of wind energy, or they may only be vulnerable in specific parts of the IBA. In some places, IBAs may be inadequate (too small) to protect trigger species that are vulnerable to the impacts of wind energy. For example, excluding wind farms from the Colleywobbles Vulture Colony IBA will not be enough to protect the globally threatened Cape Vultures that nest and roost in the IBA from the effects of wind energy. Some IBAs are very large, due to the high number of IBA trigger species found across an extensive area. Many of these trigger species are habitat specialists, or use vast areas for foraging, roosting and breeding. Some species are nomadic or migratory. It is this extensive

movement of the birds that may make them vulnerable to wind farms. However, under some circumstances it may be possible to locate a small number of wind turbines within some larger IBAs, without causing significant negative effects.

### **Assessing the effects**

- Given the global conservation importance of IBAs, BirdLife South Africa is of the opinion that, in the absence of information demonstrating otherwise, the development of wind energy facilities within or relatively close to IBAs should be assumed to pose a significant threat to these habitats and/or the species they support.
- Maintaining habitat and species integrity within IBAs is of utmost importance. First and foremost, alternative sites outside of the IBA should be explored.
- If development is still contemplated within an IBA, the following questions must be considered: a) will the development impact IBA trigger species or their habitats?, and b) what is the risk of cumulative negative impacts on the IBA?
- The burden of proof must be that any proposed development (including associated infrastructure, e.g. transmission lines) will not negatively affect the conservation value of the area. For wind energy developments, this will require dialogue with BirdLife South Africa, as well as research and monitoring beyond the minimum assessment procedures outlined in the EWT and BirdLife South Africa's Best Practice Guidelines for Birds and Wind Energy.
- BirdLife South Africa will be in the position to provide guidance regarding any bird issues or screening of proposed development sites, within or outside IBAs. Therefore, we encourage all the developers to communicate early with us when developing a plan of study. This will help to ensure that wind farms are located in areas where potential conflicts with birds can be minimised.
- For more information about wind energy facilities and IBAs, visit our website: [www.birdlife.org.za](http://www.birdlife.org.za).