

# POSITION STATEMENT

## Impact of an increased number of Pied Crows on South Africa's biodiversity

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is an increasing public perception that Pied Crow *Corvus albus* populations are increasing and expanding their range. The Southern African Bird Atlas Project 2 (SABAP2) data supports this and show increased reporting rates in the southwestern region of South Africa over the last decade, with landowners reporting large flocks of Pied Crows as regular occurrences in areas of the Northern and Western Cape. Human population growth and expansion, climate change, an expanding electricity grid, increasing access to human waste, and extensive road networks have all been identified as potential drivers of this apparently growing and spreading population (Cunningham et al. 2016, Joseph et al. 2017, Dean et al. 2018). Coinciding with this, there has been an increase in concern and anecdotal reports of the following suggested impacts of increases in Pied Crows:

- Livelihoods affected through increased stock losses caused by the predation of new-born livestock.
- A reduction in the reproductive success of threatened raptor species due to competition for prey and/or nesting locations, mobbing raptors during hunting and direct mortality of nestlings and fledglings.
- Increased mortality rates and reduced reproductive success in smaller passerine due to predation of adults, juveniles and eggs.
- Impacts on other components of biodiversity, including increased predation levels on small reptiles such as tortoises and lizards, small mammals, and amphibians.

### BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA POSITION STATEMENT

BirdLife South Africa recognises the potential threat of an increasing number of Pied Crows and other corvid species on indigenous fauna and livestock.

In acknowledging these potential threats, BirdLife South Africa supports the need for urgent scientific research. This research should verify the presence of these threats and quantify the degree to which they impact indigenous fauna and human livelihoods.

Currently these suggested threats are based on an increasing number of anecdotal reports and sightings across the country of Pied Crows engaged in the above-mentioned behaviours. There is however currently insufficient reliable evidence to either quantify the perceived impacts of crows in South Africa, or to justify the institution of a large-scale control programme.

While a comprehensive review of crow impacts on bird populations globally suggests that a proliferation of crows has a minimal impact on bird populations (Madden et al. 2015), a significant number of credible studies do provide clear evidence that, under some circumstances, crows can cause significant biodiversity loss (Kristan & Boarman 2003, Daly et al. 2019, Krüger et al. 2018).

Internationally, many crow control or eradication programmes have been conducted and some have shown success (Suliman et al. 2011). However, a common conclusion was that determining and controlling the anthropogenic drivers of crow population growth, rather than the crows themselves, is a more efficient way of dealing with the problem (Preininger et al. 2019). Therefore, careful investigation of how humans have influenced the expansion of both crow distributions and their numbers need to be conducted to best evaluate the causes of these potential problems and to develop effective solutions.

BirdLife South Africa reserves action on this issue until adequate scientific evidence demonstrates the need for appropriate action for threatened species and a full and balanced appraisal of this perceived threat has been completed.

BirdLife South Africa does not currently support the control of indigenous corvid species and condemns the use of poisons, in any manner, to kill crows. Using poison has far reaching knock-on effects on non-target species.

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## REFERENCES

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