

On the road to a common ground for Ethiopia's energy plans and conservation of migratory soaring birds

Title

Stakeholders from Ethiopia's energy sector and civil society organisations recently discussed the common need to promote renewable energy while ensuring that considerations of the risks to migratory soaring birds are made during the planning and operational processes of wind, solar and transmission lines developments. This was during a workshop held in Addis Ababa on 12-13 November 2012 under the auspices of the BirdLife International/UNDP/GEF “*Mainstreaming Conservation of Migratory Soaring Birds into Key Productive Sectors along the Rift Valley / Red Sea Flyway*” project and hosted by the Ethiopia Wildlife and Natural History Society (EWNHS, BirdLife in Ethiopia). Over 30 participants from across government, energy sector, conservation organisations and environmental regulations agencies learnt of the ambitious development plans for renewable energy and grid development in Ethiopia.

“The presence of a big delegation at this workshop from government agencies led by H.E the State Minister for Water and Energy is a clear manifestation of the commitment, desire and will by the government to work together with us to promote green energy and sustainable development that takes into consideration environmental and biodiversity conservation concerns” Ato Mengistu Wondafrash, the Chief Executive Officer of Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society – (BirdLife in Ethiopia)

They were also informed of the country's importance for migratory soaring birds using the Rift Valley/ Red Sea Flyway, along which over 1.5 million migratory soaring birds pass twice a year. The workshop presented a set of tools developed by the Migratory Soaring Birds (MSB) project to aid the energy sector in understanding potential impacts on bird populations and ways to minimise these impacts. Renewable energy has the potential to deliver truly green development, but if developments are inappropriately placed they can have significant negative effects.

Guidance for the wind and solar renewable energy sectors and related power line development were presented, which if adopted could mitigate against risks to migratory species. Further guidance highlighted the integral role that Strategic Environmental

Assessment (SEA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has in appropriate siting of renewable energy developments and the need to consider birds and biodiversity within these assessments. A sensitivity mapping tool developed by BirdLife was presented. It will aid government and the energy sector in considering threats to MSBs along the flyway when siting wind farms and other structures and help in identifying areas to avoid. The workshop was officially opened by H.E Eng. Wondimu Tekle, State Minister for the Ministry of Water and Energy who stressed the need for striking a balance between development and biodiversity conservation and explained the various efforts the government is putting in place to adopt green economy to spur economic growth and reduce greenhouse emissions. As a signatory to the Convention on Migratory Species among other international agreements, the Minister emphasised the government's commitment



Workshop participants with Guest of Honour H.E Eng. Wondimu Tekle, State Minister, Ministry of Water and Energy
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“As a signatory to the Convention on Migratory Species among other Multilateral Environmental Agreements, Ethiopia has national commitments to safeguard environment and biodiversity and in order to reduce negative impacts, Environmental Impact Assessment is therefore part and parcel of any energy development” H.E Eng. Wondimu Tekle, State Minister, Water and Energy

and obligations to safeguard flora and fauna especially considering the importance of Ethiopia on the Rift Valley/Red Sea Flyway. A field trip to the Adama I Wind Farm 100km East of Addis Ababa gave participants an opportunity to understand the wind farm operations and the importance of siting developments in a way that will reduce risks to birds. Energy is a sector undergoing unprecedented growth in the region and is expected to increase as economies develop and people gain greater access. This increase if not planned in a strategic way poses a significant threat to migratory birds. This may be through loss of habitat, the creation of barriers to movement and direct mortality from collisions with energy infrastructure and electrocutions. This workshop enabled many stakeholders to come together to discuss ways in delivering renewable energy which is truly green and integrates birds and biodiversity concerns.

“This workshop showed the common bond that should exist between the MSB project and the Ethiopian government to ensuring development of sustainable renewable energy in Ethiopia. This can only be true if impacts upon migrating soaring birds are considered in all aspects of the development processes. The positive response from the governments shows Ethiopia's

ambition to lead the green economy in the horn of Africa” said Marcus Kohler, the Senior Programme Manager, Global Flyways Programme at BirdLife International

The workshop was funded through the BirdLife/UNDP/GEF Migratory Soaring Bird project. The project is mainstreaming conservation of soaring birds within five sectors (Energy, Waste Management, Agriculture, Hunting and Tourism) within 11 countries along the Rift Valley/ Red Sea flyway. It is also developing tools and guidance material for developers, decision makers, policy makers, donors and investors in all sectors. For further details contact: George Eshiamwata, Regional Flyway Officer - Africa BirdLife International / UNDP/GEF Migratory Soaring Birds Project E-mail: george.eshiamwata@birdlife.org
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