

Wakkerstroom, South Africa

Title

Background

Wakkerstroom and its surroundings are located in the Mpumalanga Province in South Africa and hold all three of South Africa's crane species, including important numbers of Wattled Crane *Bugeranus carunculatus*. The neighbouring Heyshope Dam holds vast numbers of at least 52 species of resident, migratory and nomadic waterbirds. Regular counts indicate that this dam could hold up to 100,000 individuals.

Why it is important

Wakkerstroom forms part of the Grassland IBA which is one of the most important biodiversity areas in South Africa. This IBA contains a Ramsar site and has two pending Ramsar applications. The area is very important from a water production perspective in South Africa and is the source of major river systems. A significant proportion of South Africa's globally threatened White-winged Flufftail *Sarothura ayresi* is found in this area.

Threat

Open cast coal mining remains the bigger threat to this IBA and to water security for South Africa. In 2008 the Wakkerstroom/Luneburg area and its associated activities came under threat from a coal and tarbanite mining bid by DMC Coal Mining (Pty) Ltd. The proposed footprint of the prospecting application totalled 20,000 hectares of pristine grasslands and included two registered nature reserves.

Campaign strategies

- Formation of an NGO coalition.
- Public awareness campaign (nationally and internationally).
- Judicial Review application to the High Court.
- Obtaining formal protection for the threatened areas.

Campaign outcomes

- DMC Coal Mining (Pty) Ltd. Relinquished their prospecting rights over the 20,000 hectares in early 2010 and reimbursed the coalition for time and legal costs incurred in campaigning against the mining threat.
- In September 2010, the area under threat became the first Protected Environment in South Africa called the Kwamand-langampisi Protected Environment.