

Governments set to adopt new guidelines on power line threats to migratory birds

Title

Delegates at the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), in Bergen, Norway are poised to adopt new guidelines on how to avoid birds being killed by power line collisions and electrocutions. The Guidelines on How to Avoid or Mitigate the Impact of Electricity Power Grids on Migratory Birds in the African-Eurasian Region are a set of concrete recommendations for governments, power companies and conservation organisations. They are based on a major study reviewing the impacts of electricity power grids on birds in the African-Eurasian region, and how best to minimise these. The review shows that in the African-Eurasian region alone, hundreds of thousands of birds die annually from electrocution, and tens of millions of birds from collision with power lines. For some large, slow reproducing bird species which migrate across this region, the death toll is causing population declines, and may lead to local or regional extinctions. "Protecting birds from existing or planned power lines is a global issue and it's vital that best practice, innovations and experience are shared", said Leon Bennun, BirdLife International's Director of Science. "Migratory birds ignore national boundaries, so their future depends on international action to minimise the risks caused by electricity networks that cross flyways. With major expansion of electricity infrastructure ongoing across the world, the adoption of these guidelines by CMS is very timely." BirdLife has a long track record in this area, with earlier guidelines compiled or supported by NABU (BirdLife Partner in Germany), BirdLife Partner organisations and were major contributors to the review and guidelines providing research, recommendations and practical mitigation measures. . For example, in South Africa, 11-15% of Ludwig's Bustards *Neotis ludwigii* die annually in collisions with the growing number of power lines. Research by BirdLife South Africa's Executive Director Mark Anderson during the early 2000s showed that every kilometre of power line in the eastern Karoo kills one Ludwig's Bustard per year. Because of the rapid decline in population caused by these collisions, Ludwig's Bustard was uplisted from Least Concern to Endangered in 2010. Information provided to the review by BirdLife Finland, based on analysis of Finnish Ringing Centre data, revealed that 46% of all ringed birds that died of electrocution between 1980 and 2003 were Eagle Owls *Bubo bubo*, 22% Ural Owls *Strix uralensis*, and 11% Tawny Owls *Strix aluco*. The review describes an EU-LIFE project launched by BSPB (BirdLife Bulgaria) in 2010 to mitigate collisions and electrocution of birds in the Bourgas wetlands area, which includes a number of Important Bird Areas. Project activities include identification of dangerous power lines within one kilometre of the lakes, and insulation of dangerous poles.

Meanwhile, BirdLife data, and tools developed by BirdLife, are being used to prepare national ?conflict hotspot maps? by combining information on the national power line network, Important Bird Areas (IBAs), and data on the locations of critical sites for collision-susceptible species derived from the Critical Site Network (CSN) Tool, which was developed by BirdLife and Wetlands International as part of the UNEP-funded Wings Over Wetlands Project.