

## MEDIA RELEASE

**For immediate use**

### **World Migratory Bird Day 2015: Energy – make it bird-friendly!**

Johannesburg, 8 May 2015:

Migratory birds are a good reminder of our connectedness and of our shared responsibility to protect life on Earth. Each year, migratory birds make the trek from their wintering grounds (usually in the south) to their breeding grounds (usually in the north), and back again<sup>1</sup>. These journeys can cover thousands of kilometres<sup>2</sup>. The survival of these intrepid travellers relies on the cooperation of multiple countries, as these birds require intact and safe habitats at their destinations, as well as at stop-over sites along the way. Through working together, people in apparently disconnected parts of the world continue to enjoy the beauty of migratory birds and benefit from the ecosystem services<sup>3</sup> that they provide.

World Migratory Bird Day<sup>4</sup> is a worldwide initiative to inspire the conservation of migratory birds and their habitats. This annual event will be held from 9-10 May, to coincide with the return of southern hemisphere birds to their northern hemisphere breeding grounds. This year, BirdLife South Africa and the Department of Environmental Affairs have decided to recognise the official Day, but will also celebrate the return of these birds to our shores at the end of October. BirdLife South Africa looks forward to partnering with other BirdLife organisations in southern Africa, South America and Australasia to make this a truly hemisphere-wide event.

The theme of this year's World Migratory Bird Day is "Energy – make it bird-friendly!", a fitting theme given that minimising and managing the impacts of global climate change is another shared global responsibility.

The effects of climate change on birds and biodiversity are already being observed. For example, some species of migrating birds are responding by changing the timing of their migration<sup>5</sup>. Global climate change and an ever-increasing demand for energy mean that expanding renewable energy production is both necessary and desirable.

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<sup>1</sup>There are many different migratory patterns; some species follow different routes.

<sup>2</sup>Birds usually migrate to find the best ecological conditions for feeding, breeding and raising their young. Migration is triggered by changes in season. For example, when conditions at breeding sites become unfavourable, migratory birds fly to regions where conditions for feeding are better.

<sup>3</sup>Many migratory birds are predators and play a crucial role in the balance of ecosystems. Many are also important cultural symbols.

<sup>4</sup>Launched in 2006 - World Migratory Bird Day is a campaign organized by two international wildlife treaties administered by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) - the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), and the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA). World Migratory Bird Day is also supported by a growing number of partners. For more information visit <http://worldmigratorybirdday.org>.

<sup>5</sup>For example, Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) have been reported to arrive at their European breeding grounds earlier, coinciding with the increasingly early onset of spring.

While the reduction in carbon dioxide emissions associated with renewable energy benefits migrating birds, interactions with energy infrastructure may also have negative implications for some migrating species. Migrating birds may collide with, or be electrocuted by, power lines. Energy infrastructure can also cause mortality, habitat loss or displace birds. It is therefore important that energy technologies are deployed with proper planning, design and risk assessment.

The conservation of birds, including migratory birds, needs to be considered in all phases and at all scales of energy development. World Migratory Bird Day 2015 therefore aims to highlight the importance of deploying energy technologies in a way that prevents, minimizes and mitigates impacts on migratory birds and their habitats

### *Energy and migrating birds in South Africa*

More than 100 migratory bird species have been recorded in South Africa, including species that migrate within Africa (intra-African migrants) and species that migrate longer distances between our country and northern Europe and Asia (Palearctic migrants). Some of these, for example White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*), Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*), Booted Eagle (*Hieraaetus pennatus*), Lesser and Greater Flamingo (*Phoeniconaias minor* and *Phoenicopterus roseus*), as well as some waterbirds may be vulnerable to the impacts of wind farms and other energy infrastructure.

“Placing energy infrastructure such as wind farms within migratory bottlenecks or flyways (areas where migratory bird movements are concentrated) can be disastrous for migratory birds”, says Samantha Ralston, Birds and Renewable Energy Manager at BirdLife South Africa, a position sponsored by Investec Corporate and Institutional Banking. “Fortunately, South Africa is at the end of the migratory path; this means that that migratory birds generally disperse and we do not observe the migratory bottle-necks that occur in some other parts of the world. However, we still have a global responsibility to protect migratory birds and the careful location of wind farms and other infrastructure remains critical”.

BirdLife South Africa works with government, industry, bird specialists and environmental consultants to ensure that the impacts of renewable energy on birds, including migratory birds, are minimised. They help guide the appropriate location of wind farms and ensure that the impacts are adequately assessed and monitored.

“We understand that our quest for sustainable energy should always recognise the broader context of sustainable development, in its widest sense”, said Johan van den Berg, CEO of the South African Wind Energy Association (“SAWEA”). We thus work to maintain robust standards in the siting and building of wind farms and support the important work of Birdlife South Africa and an expert custodian in this field.”

“While the focus is often on energy infrastructure, energy can affect migratory birds in other ways” reminds Simon Gear, BirdLife South Africa’s Policy and Advocacy Manager. “South Africa is still heavily reliant on coal for energy generation, and prospecting and mining for this resource is a major environmental threat. Many mining and prospecting applications fall within ecologically sensitive areas that are important habitat for birds, including migratory species” he notes, an important reminder that energy will only be truly sustainable if it takes biodiversity into account throughout its lifecycle, and at multiple scales.

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**Notes to Editors:**

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**About Birdlife South Africa**

The vision of BirdLife South Africa is to promote the conservation, research, understanding, observation of and enjoyment of natural birds, and their habitats. BirdLife South Africa supports renewable energy production, but BirdLife South Africa is the largest non-profit bird conservation organization in the country. It relies on donor funding and financial support from the public to carry out its critical conservation work.

Energy facilities can have unintended negative impacts on avifauna. BirdLife South Africa's Birds and Renewable Energy Manager, a position sponsored by Investec Capital Markets. BirdLife South Africa works with Government and Industry to support the responsible development of a renewable energy industry in South Africa. In partnership with the Endangered Wildlife Trust, BLSA has developed Best Practice Guidelines for Avian Monitoring and Impact Mitigation at Proposed Wind Energy Development Sites. These guidelines are based on international best practice and are a key resource used to help minimise the impact of renewable energy developments on birds and their habitats. For more information, visit [www.birdlife.org.za](http://www.birdlife.org.za).

**About Investec Corporate and Institutional Banking**

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**About the South African Wind Energy Association:**

SAWEA is the not-for-profit, industry organisation representing the wind industry in South Africa. Their members include both national and international entities active in the entire wind energy supply chain. See [www.sawea.org.za](http://www.sawea.org.za).

**Additional World Migratory Bird Day resources**

Additional information and resources, including posters and royalty free images, can be found at [www.worldmigratorybirdday.org](http://www.worldmigratorybirdday.org).