POSITION STATEMENT
Fireworks

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Fireworks are known to have detrimental effects on both wild and domestic animals, particularly those inhabiting natural habitats. Fireworks can result in displacement and/or fatalities of animals and their use should be discouraged, particularly near natural habitats.

BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA POSITION STATEMENT

BirdLife South Africa (BLSA) opposes the use of fireworks under all circumstances. Studies have shown that fireworks cause birds to take flight from their night-time roosts often leading to collisions with buildings, advertisement boards, trees and other structures which are hidden by the lack of light. These collisions can cause serious injury to the birds and often result in fatalities. In Arkansas, USA, an illegal 2010 New Year's Eve fireworks display resulted in the deaths of over 5000 Red-winged Blackbirds (Agelaius phoeniceus) due to collisions. A 2008 Californian commission found that 4th of July fireworks had also caused seabirds to abandon their nests. Fireworks can also lead to the ignition of accidental fires that may cause damage to habitats used by wildlife.

Effects of fireworks on birds include:

- Heightened stress levels and panicked responses to loud noise stimuli resulting in unexpected physiological and energetic costs for the bird.
- Disturbance during night-time roosting resulting in birds taking flight and risking collision with terrestrial infrastructure.
- Displacement of birds from their established territories.
- Abandonment of nests leading to failed breeding after exposure to fireworks.
- Exposure to toxic gases released by fireworks including sulfur dioxide and nitric oxide.
- Risk of poisoning from abandoned fireworks casings after detonation.
- Risk of entanglement, particularly of waterbirds, in remnants of fireworks which land in wetlands. Seabirds face the same risk with debris landing in the ocean.

BLSA recognises that there exist cultural reasons for the responsible use of fireworks in certain instances. When used for these reasons, every precaution must be taken to avoid the deployment of fireworks, particularly in the proximity of any natural areas. Any person or group partaking in the deployment fireworks, should ensure that they follow the legislated guidelines set out in the Explosives Act No.26 of 1956 and take note of the municipal bylaws in their area. Those wishing to participate in fireworks activities should consult their local authority as it is unlawful to discharge any firework in any building, on any public thoroughfare or in any public place or resort without prior written permission (Section 10.34). BLSA supports the reporting of illegal fireworks activities to the South African Police Service.

BirdLife SOUTH AFRICA
Giving Conservation Wings