



STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

ASTON AND WANDA TO HELP MAKE WIND FARMS SAFER

12th November 2015

Start

Eskom in partnership with the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) and Bioinsight South Africa has deployed two carcass detection dogs, Aston and Wanda in an attempt to increase the safety of wind farms for birds and other wildlife in the long run.

The detection dogs will use their keen senses of smell to improve the estimations of wildlife fatalities during operational monitoring and is a measure that goes above and beyond the industry minimum standard. This is the first project of its kind in South Africa and will be carried out according to a rigorous protocol in order to deliver scientifically justifiable results. Aston and Wanda, the two Belgian Malinois selected for the work, have been specifically conditioned to detect birds and bats and have been on site since early November.

The dogs will work alongside the human carcass searchers to assist in areas where vegetation is particularly dense and at the same time measure efficiency of the current search methodology. Unlike humans, a dog's detection ability is independent of carcass visibility and carcasses can be detected in various states of decomposition.

“Similar work in Europe has illustrated that sniffer dogs can increase detection rates from 30% to over 90% and they may also decrease the time it takes to search each turbine. No such study has however been conducted in South Africa and we look forward to having local results to which specialists and developers can refer” said Constant Hoogstad Manager, the EWT's Wildlife and Energy Programme Manager.

Operational monitoring on Wind Energy Facilities (WEFs) is a Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) requirement on all sites currently operational in South Africa. Although the requirement to undertake this monitoring is stipulated by DEA, the monitoring protocol is not laid out and most developers turn to the *'Endangered Wildlife Trust/BirdLife SA Best practice guidelines'* to design the programme. Operational monitoring is necessary to determine the actual impacts of the WEF, whether additional mitigation is required at the WEF, and to improve future assessments.

Part of this process includes carcass searches underneath turbines, to quantify the actual mortality rate of birds and bats. This work presents massive challenges as search plot size, vegetation, substrate, fences, weather, searcher efficiency and carcass removal rates are all variables and limitations that must be considered during the final mortality estimate. Human searchers have a carcass detection accuracy of 3/10 on average while most carcasses disappear completely from the veldt within five to seven days. This often results in questionable mortality estimations and crucial data not being recorded such as species, age, sex and nature of injury.

The Eskom/EWT partnership hopes to replicate this work across different habitats in the future which may assist other projects in designing operational protocols of their own where habitat provides a challenge to conventional carcass detection methods. Determining the true impact of renewable energy remains a priority

for the Eskom/EWT partnership and deploying detection dogs at Sere is moving us one step closer to understanding this complex issue.

Please visit www.ewt.org.za or contact WEP Manager Constant Hoogstad (constanth@ewt.org.za) for more information about the Eskom/EWT Partnership and the Wildlife and Energy Programme.

High Res Images Available on Request:



Captions: (Left) Aston and (right) Wanda, the two Belgian Malinois who have been assigned to detect carcasses at Wind Energy Facilities with Dog handler Fransisco Cervantes from Bioinsight.

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