



NORMS AND STANDARDS FOR RAPTOR RINGING, MARKING AND TRACKING

19th May 2015

Start

South Africa's raptors are important environmental indicators and monitoring of, and research into several species helps to improve our knowledge and inform conservation decision-making. Given the growing interest in raptor ringing, marking and tracking in South Africa, the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) and BirdLife South Africa are of the opinion that the current approach to these activities should be reviewed. Information obtained through the tracking of birds with satellite and other sophisticated tracking devices can provide answers to important research questions that can ultimately contribute to their conservation. This will provide conservationists and decision-makers with a better understanding of movements of birds which can help inform placement of wind turbines and other infrastructure which can pose a significant risk to some bird species.

Handling birds and attaching devices to them can, however, pose inherent risks for the individual birds. These risks must be minimised, and must be justified in terms of the expected science and conservation outcomes for the species from the deployment. The ad hoc fitment of tracking devices where the research questions are unclear is considered to be unethical.

A workshop to discuss the requirements to undertake these ringing, marking and tracking activities was therefore recently held at Ithala Game Reserve, KwaZulu-Natal, and co-hosted by the EWT's Birds of Prey Programme and BirdLife South Africa's Terrestrial Bird Conservation Programme. The outcomes of the discussions will provide guidelines in terms of ensuring a more rigorous approach with regard to the training of researchers and the permitting of projects which involves these activities.

The South African Bird Ringing Unit (SAFRING) keeps a record of all bird ringing undertaken in the country. A "ringing" qualification is also granted through SAFRING following a rigorous training process. All ringing, marking and tracking projects have to comply with the relevant legislation which is ultimately controlled by the provincial nature conservation ordinances.

The meeting was of the opinion that, for all projects involving marking and tracking, the granting of provincial permits should be subject to ethical approval by a relevant ethics committee. The workshop participants also agreed to the establishment of a committee to oversee projects which involve this work, following the example of the British Ornithological Trust, UK. The advisory committee will comprise representatives from relevant organisations, such as SAFRING, South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), BirdLife South Africa and the EWT.

It was further suggested that norms and standards should be developed to provide clear guidance on the sharing of marking and tracking data as well as the storage of such information in a central database. Researchers and specialists are also encouraged to share the lessons they have learnt from their work. This would improve tracking methods and techniques, thus minimising impacts on birds during future studies.

The EWT, BirdLife South Africa and SAFRING acknowledge the importance of bird ringing, tagging and tracking. These technologies are amongst the most important and powerful tools in recent ornithology providing key information which informs conservation decisions.

End.

Contact: Dr Hanneline Smit-Robinson:
BirdLife South Africa,
Terrestrial Bird Conservation Programme Manager
conservation@birdlife.org.za
Tel +27 11 789 1122

and

André Botha:
Endangered Wildlife Trust
Birds of Prey Programme Manager
andreb@ewt.org.za
Tel +27 11 372 3600

and

Lillian Mlambo
Communications Manager
Endangered Wildlife Trust
lillianm@ewt.org.za
Tel +27 11 372 3600

Notes for Editors:

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) is a non-governmental, non-profit, conservation organisation, founded in 1973 and operating throughout southern and parts of East Africa. The EWT conserves

threatened species and ecosystems in southern Africa by initiating research and conservation action programmes, implementing projects which mitigate threats facing species diversity and supporting sustainable natural resource management. The EWT furthermore communicates the principles of sustainable living through awareness programmes to the broadest possible constituency for the benefit of the region. The EWT has developed a unique operational structure through which the mission and objectives of the EWT can be achieved. For more information visit www.ewt.org.za or www.facebook.com/EndangeredWildlifeTrust.

BirdLife South Africa is the local country partner of BirdLife International. BirdLife International is the world's largest nature conservation Partnership with more than 120 BirdLife Partners worldwide and growing, with almost 11 million supporters, 7000 local conservation groups and 7400 staff. Find out more at www.birdlife.org or www.facebook.com/BirdLifeInternational

The vision of BirdLife South Africa is to promote the conservation, research, understanding, observation and enjoyment of natural birds and their habitats. BirdLife South Africa is the largest non-profit bird conservation organisation in the country, and relies on donor funding and financial support from the public to carry out its critical conservation work. For more information, visit www.birdlife.org.za. BirdLife South Africa endeavours to lead the way in implementing ethical tracking studies in a way that underpins our mission of protecting wild birds and their habitats.

SAFRING, the South African Bird Ringing Unit, administers bird ringing in southern Africa, supplying rings, ringing equipment and services to volunteer and professional ringers in South Africa and neighbouring countries. SAFRING is a project of the Animal Demography Unit, based at the University of Cape Town. All ringing records are curated by SAFRING. SAFRING has a strict code of ethics to ensure the safety of birds handled.

SAFRING communicates with ringers and interested parties through an online newsletter, Afring News, and by maintaining a list server. SAFRING holds national training courses. SAFRING liaises with the provinces who have the responsibility of issuing permits. Visit <http://safring.adu.org.za> for regular news on bird ringing and to report ring recoveries.