

INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT IN RENEWABLE ENERGY: SAFEGUARDING MIGRATING BIRDS ALONG THE RED SEA/RIFT VALLEY FLYWAY

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The cumulative effects of power lines and wind turbines along the migration routes of soaring birds can threaten entire bird populations. International Financial Institutions (IFIs) have a key role to play in mitigating harm in many countries along these routes, since they invest in renewable energy. The Migratory Soaring Birds Project is working with the IFIs to incorporate biodiversity concerns into their safeguard policies and guidelines.

This factsheet focuses on achievements, at the intergovernmental level, of the IFIs and their investments. Biodiversity mainstreaming at the national level is covered by the factsheet on Egypt's renewable energy sector.

THE VULNERABILITY OF SOARING BIRDS

At the end of the European summer, two million soaring birds¹ head south towards Africa. Their route, along the Red Sea/Rift Valley flyway, is the second most important flyway for soaring birds in the world. Conservation effort is focussing on 37 species, including raptors, storks, pelicans and cranes. Five of the 37 are globally threatened.

The flyway is essential to the birds' survival, but areas along it are also vital for human populations and host a growing concentration of infrastructure. Poorly sited energy development threatens soaring birds, especially at migratory bottlenecks, through collisions with wind turbines and electrocution on power lines. Many of these birds are long lived with slow reproduction rates, so their populations are particularly vulnerable to such stresses.

All countries along the Rift Valley fall under the UN 'developing economy' category, and are potential recipients of international and/or regional investments for national growth, including through credits for energy infrastructure development. International Financial Institutions (IFIs) have a significant role in providing financial and technical support, so it is vital that they have robust environmental policies for sustainable development, setting standards and principles for environment protection.

¹ Soaring birds are land birds, such as cranes and vultures, which sustain flight for long periods without flapping their wings. These birds rely on warm air currents over land to glide, and this creates bottlenecks and narrow flight corridors in certain areas.

Through the Migratory Soaring Birds (MSB) Project, BirdLife International is working with a range of stakeholders in the energy sector, including the IFIs. The Project is financed by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and supported by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and it works in 11 countries along the flyway from Syria to Ethiopia. It aims to mainstream migratory soaring bird considerations into agriculture, energy, hunting, tourism and waste management. These sectors pose the greatest risk to safe migration, but could benefit from the birds.

MAKING THE CASE; TAKING ACTION

Some of the IFIs were unaware of the adverse impacts of their well-intentioned investments in renewable energy, and lacked resources and procedures for Environmental Strategic Impact Assessments (ESIAs) to identify and address risks to birds along the flyway. BirdLife International and its national Partners began Project activities by building relationships and developing trust with IFIs.

The IFIs were presented with robust evidence of the national, regional and international environmental impacts of their investments. This evidence drew on the most up-to-date technical and scientific information on migrating birds, including data from surveys and monitoring in affected countries, and from the IUCN Red List of threatened bird species. This demonstrated the need for appropriate investment decisions, and avoiding conflicts between energy development and conservation, including by involving and consulting BirdLife.

The evidence was backed up by Project developed guidance and tools relating to wind farms and power lines. The MSB Project customised these for donors and investors as well as for other stakeholders such as governments, civil society and giving technical guidance to developers. Guidance address the potential impacts on birds, the need for strategic planning, and the role of IFIs in ensuring biodiversity concerns are taken into consideration. Guidance also includes practical steps that can be taken before developments (during wind farm planning), as well as during construction and operation.

A Soaring Birds Sensitivity Map, a tool also developed by the Project, gives investors and others information on the distribution of birds and the most vulnerable areas along the flyway. This map can be used as a support tool to identify potential bird risks in site selection.



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The MSB Project assigned staff in the region to establish key contacts in the IFIs and national agencies, to assist with Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA), and review proposed and existing investment projects. IFI energy conferences and environmental policy reviews provided critical opportunities for the MSB Project to engage in discussion and influence decisions; for example, the review process of the environmental safeguards policies and standards of the World Bank Group.

COMMON GROUND; SHARED COMMITMENTS

The MSB Project and the IFIs found common ground in shared commitments to renewable energy and environmental sustainability. It was clear to the IFIs that working with the Project would make a vital contribution to their internationally agreed biodiversity conservation goals.

The IFIs and donor organisations are committed to consider actions that support sustainability through, for instance, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the associated Accra Agenda for Action. They have equally committed to promote a harmonised approach to environmental assessments, addressing global environmental issues, and deepening their engagement with civil society.

An example of how the IFIs approach environmental sustainability is provided by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) Safeguard Policy, which encompasses a set of Performance Standards (PS) on social and environmental risk. These Standards address, for instance, the need for comprehensive Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs) (PS1), and for adherence to the mitigation hierarchy, which has the starting objective of avoiding harm to biodiversity (PS6).

STRONGER SAFEGUARDS, GLOBAL TO LOCAL

As a result of the Project team interventions, the World Bank Group (an IFI) updated and expanded its Environmental Health and Safety Guidelines on adverse impacts of wind energy on birds. These are in place, and apply to all five members of the World Bank Group, including the International Finance Corporation (IFC). The Guidelines cover risks such as collisions and habitat degradation, as well as concerns about turbine location, migration routes and other elements related to biodiversity. This document also promotes MSB Project tools, including the Soaring Bird Sensitivity Map, to help with the selection of sites for development.

There is also progress in project implementation with the IFIs addressing the negative impacts of poorly planned investments. By way of illustration, the IFC is investing in four

new wind farm developments in the Tafila region, Jordan. BirdLife has been invited to join the advisory committee of the Cumulative Effects Assessment (CEA), and a number of its recommendations have been taken up, including more stringent standards for operating processes.

COLLABORATING FOR SUCCESS: IN SUMMARY

Although it has not been yet possible to track the impact of the new safeguards and guidance on bird populations, these are still major achievements at the international policy level of the decision-making chain. Examples of international policy compliances include the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Ramsar Convention on the Convention on Migratory Species, both calling for the conservation and wise use of biodiversity. The MSB Project team is currently a major player and adviser on the impacts of energy development on migratory birds in the region, and has been participating in national and regional discussions around new investments.

BirdLife's strong scientific reputation, combined with global reach through its national Partners, helped to develop trust with IFIs. This paved the way to greater awareness of the impacts of investments on migratory soaring birds, and working together to mitigate them. Coupling advocacy with practical solutions, including the development of groundbreaking tools and guidance, proved to be a major factor in success. This resulted in very positive changes as IFIs reduced the unintended adverse impacts of their lending.

More information at:

- www.migratorysoaringbirds.undp.birdlife.org/en/project
- www.migratorysoaringbirds.undp.birdlife.org/en/sectors/energy/wind-energy-toc
- www.ifc.org/ehsguidelines

Factsheets:

- Balancing hunting culture and nature conservation in Syria and Lebanon.

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