FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COLLISON COURSE: TWIN VULTURE FATALITIES EXPOSE SYSTEMIC THREAT OF WIND ENERGY TO AFRICA'S CRITICALLY ENDANGERED SCAVENGERS

SENSITIVE CONTENT: This report includes graphic documentation of power infrastructure-related wildlife incidents.

The cost of South Africa's transition to renewable energy has taken a visceral and devastating turn. Within a 10-day period, two separate incidents at a wind energy facility have left the conservation community reeling after two Critically Endangered Lappet-faced Vultures were killed in collisions with turbines. In both cases, the sheer force of the fast-moving blades resulted in the birds being split in half.

These incidents are not isolated. They reflect a broader, systemic risk embedded in current renewable energy planning and infrastructure rollout. With as few as 160 mature Lappet-faced Vultures remaining in South Africa, current mortality levels are biologically unsustainable. Under NEMBA, this level of ongoing loss may be interpreted as undermining statutory obligations to prevent species decline and extinction.

Recent remains of two Lappet-faced Vultures discovered after fatal collisions, sliced in half by the turbine blades. The severity of the injuries illustrates the catastrophic impact of turbine collisions on large-bodied, soaring birds. Source: Mora Ecological Services incident reports

Deadly turbines and the hidden threat of electrical infrastructure

Unfortunately, these deaths are not isolated accidents, but are part of a much larger and more alarming national trend. National data from 2020 through 2025 reveals that 191 vultures were recorded dead or injured from wind energy infrastructure-related collisions across South Africa. While infrastructure developments are vital for our planet's energy transition, they represent one of the most significant and growing threats to vulture populations globally.

This escalating toll highlights a fundamental conflict between the rapid expansion of wind energy and the biological realities of the species sharing these skies. With a blind spot in their forward vision and a large wingspan that limits rapid manoeuvrability, vultures are physically ill-equipped to avoid turbine blades moving at tip speeds exceeding 250 km/h.

The transition to wind energy does not just involve turbines; it requires a massive expansion of the electrical grid to transport power from remote, wind-rich areas to urban centres. For vultures, this adds two more lethal variables to the equation.

While Vulpro recorded 72 birds affected by power infrastructure incidents in 2025, this figure likely underestimates the true scale of the issue, as the comprehensive national data resides with Eskom. Even so, it is a sobering number, especially when you consider that these are only the cases we know about. Many more vultures and other raptor species likely fall in remote areas and go unreported, their stories never reaching our database.

Tracking data reveals a spatial crisis

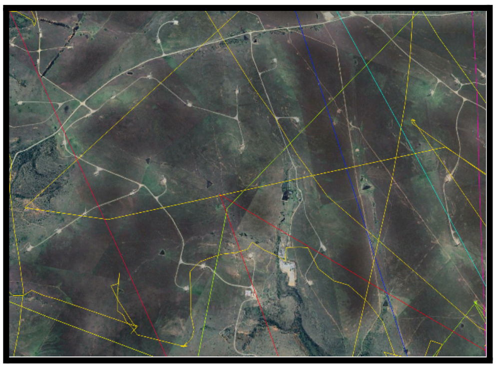
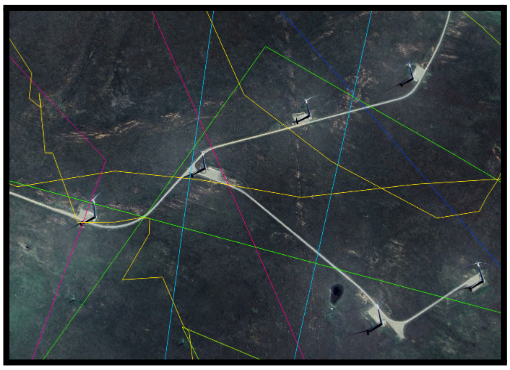
The systemic nature of this threat is further evidenced by GPS tracking data from Vulpro's Cape Vulture research, which indicates that wind energy development and vulture ecology are currently on a collision course.

Vulpro's extensive telemetry data confirms that vultures rely on consistent flight corridors along ridgelines and thermal systems, areas that are also preferentially selected for wind energy development.

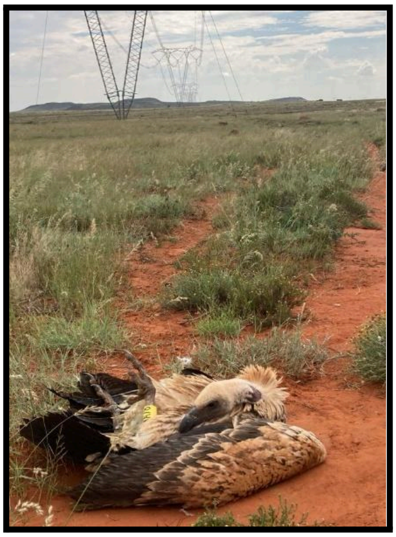
The resulting conflict is neither incidental nor unavoidable. It is predictable, measurable, and preventable.

Many of these wind energy facilities represent a fundamental failure of the environmental authorisation process, as they should never have been approved for construction in such ecologically sensitive corridors.

By ignoring the primary conservation principle of avoidance, the current system has allowed for the permanent industrialisation of habitats where the mathematical risk of extinction was a predictable certainty from the outset.

Vulpro telemetry data of Cape Vulture flight paths over two small cross-sections of just one wind farm in the Eastern Cape. Left shows a 6 km cross-section of Cape Vulture flight paths through wind energy infrastructure over a 50-day period through to mid-April 2026. Right shows a 2 km cross-section of Cape Vulture flight paths on another section of the same wind farm over the same period



The industrialisation of the sky leaves a trail of broken bodies in its wake. These images document the visceral cost of South Africa's energy expansion: vultures charred by high-voltage electrocution and others shattered by wire collisions. For those that do not die instantly, 'survival' is often a different tragedy. Severe electrical burns *and broken wings frequently lead to necessary amputations, creating a growing population of 'permanent residents' at rehabilitation centres*

The fragmented remains of a Cape Vulture found severed into four parts, a devastating testament to the high-impact nature of turbine collisions. Source: Mora Ecological Services incident reports

Ecological and public health implications

The ecological significance of these losses cannot be overstated. Vultures play a vital ecological role in limiting the spread of zoonotic diseases through carcass removal.

The recent fatalities highlight critical shortcomings:

- Inadequate site selection in high-risk ecological corridors.
- Over-reliance on post-construction monitoring, rather than prevention.
- Delayed mitigation measures following confirmed fatalities.
- Unclear accountability during infrastructure ownership transitions (e.g., developer to Eskom).

These gaps result in avoidable and ongoing losses of protected species.

Vultures have exceptionally low reproductive rates, producing just one egg per breeding season, while chicks can take up to a year to fledge. As a result, the loss of even a single breeding adult can jeopardise the survival of an entire local population.

When two healthy adults are killed within a single week, it represents a direct and permanent reduction in the species' reproductive potential. At these critically low numbers, the mathematical reality is stark: South Africa's Lappet-faced Vultures cannot sustain the 'incidental' mortality rates currently being recorded at wind energy facilities without facing a total population collapse.

When the cumulative toll of energy infrastructure is added to existing threats such as poisoning and habitat loss, it creates a crisis that hinders the species' ability to recover.

We cannot claim to be saving the planet if we are standing by as its most vital scavengers are sliced in half by the very machines built to protect the environment. Unless immediate corrective action takes place, these machines and associated infrastructure will continue to send our vultures into extinction.

ENDS

Note to editors:

Since 2007, Vulpro has been at the forefront of southern Africa's vulture conservation through a multifaceted science driven approach, including a captive breeding programme for population supplementation, monitoring of over 30 breeding colonies and sites across southern Africa, research on movement patterns and threat mitigation, educational outreach to over 15 000 community members annually, powerline surveys and advocacy for bird-friendly infrastructure and rehabilitation of injured and poisoned vultures.

The organisation maintains Africa's largest vulture rehabilitation and breeding facility, which has become increasingly vital as wild populations continue to face mounting threats.

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