

Media release: Immediate



Cape Vulture breeding colony: Over 302 Cape vultures breeding on the cliffs of the Msikaba River Gorge were monitored during recent environmental monitoring programme initiated by SANRAL.

SANRAL monitors Cape Vulture colony

Port Elizabeth, 18 September 2017: Recent environmental monitoring related to the construction of the Msikaba and Mtentu bridge haul roads found no evidence of disturbance to the Msikaba Cape Vulture Colony, the South African National Roads Agency SOC Ltd (SANRAL) announced today.

As part of the environmental requirements for the N2 Wild Coast road project (N2WC) SANRAL recently conducted a vulture monitoring programme to monitor the impact of the construction of the haul roads on the Msikaba Vulture colony.

In 2015 the Cape Vulture, which is endemic to southern Africa, was listed as a regionally endangered species. The Msikaba Vulture colony is one of the primary conservation



priorities for Cape Vultures in the Eastern Cape with approximately 170 to 190 pairs regularly nesting on the cliffs of the Msikaba River Gorge.

Ornithologists were appointed to monitor the reaction of the vulture colony to controlled rock cutting explosion taking place on the haul road construction sites some 12 to 13km away. This monitoring allowed SANRAL to assess the potential impact of the construction on the vultures during breeding season and ensure that any negative impact was prevented. If discernible negative effects were observed, no further blasting would have been allowed during the breeding season of March to July every year.

“On the day prior to blasting, vulture counts were conducted at half hourly intervals from the vulture viewing platform located directly opposite the colony to determine the number of birds perched on the cliffs and flying above or in front of the colony. This helped to establish a baseline of the vulture activity. Counts were then repeated on the day when blasting took place,” said Vusi Mona, SANRAL's Communications Manager.



View from the vulture viewing platform opposite the Msikaba Vulture Colony.

The initial blast took place at the Mtentu haul road site which is situated 12.8km north of the vulture colony.



“When compared to the observations of the baseline study, there was no difference between the vultures’ general activities before, during and after the blasting. The vulture colony did not react in any way whatsoever to the blasting,” Mona said.

Similar observations were made during the remaining five blasts at the Mtentu site and the two blasts at the Msikaba site – situated 12km west of the vulture colony.

As a result, the monitoring programme determined that the blasting activities that took place on the Mtentu and Msikaba haul road sites have to date not had any noticeable negative effect on the breeding Cape Vulture colony.

“The vulture colony is exposed to various audible anthropogenic disturbances that range from low flying helicopters and microlight aircraft to gunshots fired in the gorge below. Neither the blasts nor the other audible disturbances seemed to affect the vulture in any way,” Mona added.

“We are pleased to note that although Cape Vultures can be susceptible to disturbances at breeding colonies, there was no evidence of negative reaction to the haul road construction activities. While we will continue to monitor from time to time we are reassured that there are also unlikely to be any major disturbances from the construction activities on the bridges or the N2 Wild Coast Highway over the next few years,” Mona concluded.

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