

Eskom's Ingula plant declared a nature reserve

Eskom's Ingula Pumped Storage Scheme and its associated land has been declared as a nature reserve.



Image source: www.birdlife.org.za

“The Ingula Nature Reserve is Eskom’s third nature reserve following the Koeberg Nature Reserve and the Majuba Nature Reserve, all declared in terms of the National Environmental Management Protected Areas Act, Act 57 of 2003,” said Eskom on Sunday, 3 June.

Located on the cross-border of the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal, Ingula is Africa’s newest and largest pumped storage scheme and the 14th largest pumped storage scheme in the world.

The plant is in operation to meet the demand for South Africa’s peaking electricity generating capacity.

During the environmental impact assessment process in 1999, it was found that the site selected for proposed construction housed many threatened species, including the critically endangered bird species, the White-Winged Flufftail and an extensive wetland of over 2 500 hectares.

This discovery led some non-profit organisations to call for the scrapping of the plans to build the Ingula Pumped Storage Scheme in this area. Following closer investigation by all parties, it was found that the habitat would not be affected by the construction of dams, plant and associated infrastructure.

It was then that Eskom entered into negotiations with the opposing NPOs, BirdLife South Africa and Middelpunt Wetland Trust. There was a realisation that the environment as a whole would stand to gain more if Eskom and the NGOs were to

work together on driving the environmental aspects of the project. As a result of this, the Ingula Partnership was formed in 2003.

“The Ingula Pumped Storage Scheme has been built in the High Altitude Grassland ecosystem, a severely threatened system in South Africa with less than 2% under any formal protection.

“The area has over 350 bird species, three of which are critically endangered and there is also an abundance of other wildlife including the threatened Oribi, Grey Rhebok and Steenbok, making the site an incredibly vital biodiversity area for conservation,” said Eskom.

The power utility has the responsibility to protect, manage and mitigate the impact of its activities on the biodiversity of any land on which it operates.

“In line with Eskom’s strategic biodiversity mandate and in consultation with the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal, authorities - supported by BirdLife South Africa, Middelpunt Wetlands Trust and Conservation Outcomes - Eskom was able to declare 7,637 hectares of land as the Ingula Nature Reserve,” Eskom said.

The utility’s environmental manager, Deidre Herbst, said the declaration of the nature reserve is a proud moment for the utility.

“The declaration of the nature reserve is one of many successful milestones in the conservation of the Ingula site, which demonstrates how successful partnerships can be when there is commitment from the leadership of all partners supported by the efforts of many passionate individuals on the ground.

“The Ingula conservation efforts and the partnership is an international flagship from which many other utilities around the world can learn,” Herbst said.

Ingula is an IsiNguni word that means ‘froth on top of fresh milk’.

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