

Media release

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Environmental Investment Fund (EIF) Namibia: "Flight Paths for Wetland Flagships" Project

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Flamingos tracked by satellite to identify "hotspots" for conservation action

Three flamingos have been successfully fitted with sophisticated GPS satellite tracking devices at Mile 4 Saltworks, Swakopmund over the past month. This milestone initiative is a key component of an innovative project to track the flight paths of flagship wetland bird species in order to address major conservation issues.

Large, charismatic birds such as flamingos and cranes are universally regarded as flagships for the conservation of wetland habitats. Unfortunately, these species cannot be confined to protected areas. Nomadic migratory species often encounter threats in unprotected areas, including collisions with overhead lines or snaring/hunting. As an aid to mitigating these problems, there is a need to determine the flight paths of such species so that potentially problematic areas can be identified and targeted for further conservation action.

The "Flight paths for wetland flagships" Project was initiated in 2012 by the NamPower/Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF) Strategic Partnership, in cooperation with the Namibia Crane and Wetlands Working Group. The project is funded by the Environmental Investment Fund (EIF) of Namibia, the Nedbank Go Green Fund and the above Partnership. Other collaborators include the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and many other organisations and individual supporters, both local and international. The project seeks to accomplish its aims by tracking the flight paths of Greater Flamingo and Lesser Flamingo, and Blue Crane – all on the Red List; monitoring their numbers (and breeding success); investigating the mitigation of power lines on documented flamingo flight paths; and publicising the results to promote awareness of the plight of such flagship species. In so doing, the results will have a ripple effect on environmental conservation in a broader sense, to the benefit of all inter-dependent wetland species, habitats and their human communities.

An adult Greater Flamingo was captured on 9 January 2013 at the Mile 4 Saltworks near Swakopmund and fitted with a battery-powered GPS Platform Terminal Transmitter (PTT). A second

adult was fitted with a solar-powered GPS PTT on 11 January, and an adult Lesser Flamingo with the latter type of device on 17 January. Transmitters of different designs, with different duty cycles, are being tested for optimum efficiency. The birds were also ringed with a green plastic band with a unique code (i.e. NFX, NFF and NFZ). Subsequent re-sightings of the birds in the same area indicated that they were in good health. The devices are now transmitting signals with detailed information that is picked up by satellite and relayed by *Collecte Localisation Satellites* (CLS/Argos) in France, and downloaded regularly on the internet. The latest GPS positions indicate that the birds are still on the salt pans at Mile 4 Saltworks but, as many flamingos are already showing signs of migrating inland to breed during the rainy season, larger-scale movements are anticipated in the near future. It is hoped that the flight paths that emerge will indicate focal areas for addressing potential interactions between flamingos and overhead lines.

The project funders and partners, the many supporters and especially the flamingo capture team are all thanked for their invaluable contributions. Further information is available on websites www.nnf.org.na/nampowerproject/hm; www.nnf.org.na/CRANES.htm; www.eifnamibia.com.

Some of the latest data obtained for three flamingos fitted with satellite tracking devices, showing their positions at Mile 4 Saltworks, Swakopmund (based on a Google map compiled by John Mendelsohn: Raison).

