

# Studying and safeguarding the vulnerable red lark

## Lisa Isaacs

A TEAM of experts will conduct a research project to conserve, protect and better understand the vulnerable red lark bird species in light of the potential expansion of renewable energy facilities in the Northern Cape.

The Fitz Patrick Institute of African Ornithology, based at UCT's Department of Biological Sciences, has received funding from Kangnas Wind Farm in support of the red lark research project.

The team, headed by Robin Colyn of environmental organisation BirdLife SA, will head off to the Northern Cape to gather data on the red lark: its current status, occurrence, habitat preferences and threats.

As an endemic species, red lark are one of the only species solely confined to the Northern Cape. The species is currently listed as globally vulnerable under the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

"This collective effort will help both our research and the renewable energy sector to better understand any possible



**FACT-FINDING MISSION:** A team of experts will conduct a research project to conserve, protect and better understand the vulnerable red lark bird species.

*Picture: BRENTON GEACH*

impact and help us to identify, if any, the safeguards that are necessary," Colyn said.

The greatest threat to bird species was climate change, the researchers said.

Climate change models predicted that temperatures

would increase and rainfall would decrease sharply in arid areas such as Bushmanland. Droughts were expected to become more severe.

The associated changes in vegetation, food availability, habitat, predators, parasites

and diseases may have marked effects on range-restricted, habitat-specific, resident species such as the red lark, research conducted in 1993 and 2004 found.

Reyburn Hendricks, the director of H1 Holdings, a share-

holder in Kangnas Wind Farm, said studies such as this along with other reputable research contributed to the environmentally sustainable development of wind energy in the country, and would facilitate the compilation of species conservation plans and mitigating actions, should it be required.

The study would produce a number of valuable outputs including an up-to-date distribution map and population estimate for the red lark; a map identifying priority areas for active conservation management; recommendations for optimal habitat management to benefit the species; and peer-reviewed scientific papers describing the probable effects of wind and solar energy on the species, including potential cumulative impacts of different development scenarios.

"The areas surrounding the wind farm will provide optimal sites for field studies, while the wind farm itself could also provide further insight into the potential relationship exhibited between the red lark and renewable energy development," Colyn said.