

PRESS RELEASE | Evergem, 1 April 2021



Elia makes overhead line in Ghent Canal Zone visible to birds

- Natuurpunt and Elia join forces to make overhead lines more visible to birds
- Natuurpunt study shows increased risk on approximately 6% of all overhead lines in Belgium
- Overhead line in Evergem one of riskiest to birds, now fitted with bird markers over a distance of one kilometre

Evergem - 1 April 2021 - Bird markers have been installed on the overhead line by the R4 road in Evergem to ensure birds can see it better and collide with it less often. Elia, the operator of the Belgian high-voltage grid, installed the markers following a Natuurpunt study that showed that many birds were colliding with this overhead line. Belgium has more than 5,600 kilometres of overhead electricity connections, of which 325 kilometres pose an increased risk to birds. Elia has already installed markers on a total of 50 kilometres. Initial monitoring by Natuurpunt shows that the number of birds injured and killed from collisions has dropped drastically since the markers were installed.

Natuurpunt and Elia have been working together since 2012 to see how the overhead line could be made more visible to birds so that they could see it in time and avoid colliding with it. Elia commissioned a risk analysis of its entire high-voltage grid. That analysis, updated in 2021, reveals that 325 of the 5,600 km of overhead lines in Belgium (5.8% of the total network) pose a high risk to birds. Scientific research shows that the number of injured and killed birds decreases sharply after the markers have been installed, sometimes by more than 90%.

Since installing markers on high-risk overhead lines sharply reduces the number of dead and injured birds, we are pleased that Elia is working on the line in Evergem and we hope Elia will continue its efforts.

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Dominique Verbelen, Natuurpunt

In the risk atlas, the Rodenhuize-Eeklo-Noord line is now red at Hoogstraat in Evergem. The Ghent Canal Zone attracts a lot of water birds. Measurements taken by Natuurpunt show that many birds collide with this overhead line and do not survive. The overhead line runs perpendicular to the flight movements of mainly gulls that travel between the Kluizen reservoir (west of the line), where they sleep, and the Ghent-Terneuzen canal and harbour docks (east of the line), where they find food during the day.



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The section below the high-voltage line was checked 105 times over six months. Forty-one dead birds were found, divided among 16 species, including 9 common gulls, 7 city pigeons, 3 lapwings and 3 gadwalls. Several injured birds were also found. More details about the monitoring efforts can be found in [this report](#).

Bird markers make overhead lines visible to birds

Elia had planned to install markers on the overhead line but for the work to proceed safely, the overhead lines had to first be de-energised. No electricity may flow through the wires during the work. During that period, the electricity is diverted to other connections. That may sound simple but it requires a lot of preparation.

” *Thanks to our collaboration with Natuurpunt, we can limit the impact of our infrastructure on the environment. After installing nearly 200 bird markers, we will continue to monitor the line to map out the effect of marking the lines. We are very hopeful based on the results of other such projects.* “

Ilse Tant, Chief Community Relations Officer

In recent years, Elia has installed markers on more than 50 km of overhead lines that are at high risk of collision. Another important kilometre was added with the installation of markers in Evergem. The best type of bird marker depends on the type of line and the specific analysis. On this particular line, we used 'curlicues' (also called 'pigtales') that are twisted around the electrical wires.

About Elia Group

One of Europe's top five players

Elia Group is active in electricity transmission. We ensure that generation and consumption are balanced around the clock, supplying 30 million end users with electricity. With subsidiaries in Belgium (Elia) and the north and east of Germany (50Hertz), we operate 19,271 km of high-voltage connections. As such, our group is one of Europe's top 5. With a reliability level of 99.999%, we give society a robust power grid, which is important for socio-economic prosperity. We also aspire to be a catalyst for a successful energy transition towards a reliable, sustainable and affordable energy system.

We make the energy transition happen

By expanding international high-voltage connections and integrating ever-increasing amounts of renewable energy generation, Elia Group promotes both the integration of the European energy market and the decarbonisation of our society. At the same time, Elia Group is innovating its operational systems and developing market products so that new technologies and market parties can access our grid, thus making the energy transition happen.

In the interest of society

As a key player in the energy system, Elia Group is committed to working in the interest of society. We respond to the rapidly changing energy mix, i.e. the increase in renewable energy, and constantly adapt our transmission grid. We also ensure that investments are made on time and within budget, with a maximum focus on safety. When we carry out our projects, we manage stakeholders proactively by establishing two-way communication with all affected parties very early on in the development process. We also offer our expertise to our sector and relevant authorities to build the energy system of the future.

International focus

In addition to its activities as a transmission system operator, Elia Group provides various consulting services to international customers through its subsidiary Elia Grid International (EGI). Elia is also part of the Nemo Link consortium that operates the first subsea electrical interconnector between Belgium and the UK.

Elia Group is a listed holding company whose core shareholder is the municipal holding company Publi-T.

More information: elia.be & eliagroup.eu

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