

Summary updates April 2015 for vultures and VSG activities

The 6th September 2014 saw the celebration of the 6th **International Vulture Awareness Day** with 28 countries and 160 organisations registering on the event's website www.vultureday.org and working towards creating greater awareness of these birds and the challenges they face. More details on activities of the individual partners can be found on the website.

The second meeting of the CMS Raptors MoU Technical Advisory Group took place in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. from 16th-19th March 2015. Most significantly, a special Working Group was established for the conservation of vultures across the Africa-Eurasian flyway. It will focus on coordinating and promoting the conservation, monitoring, research and awareness-raising. A particular objective of the group was to forge closer working ties with the IUCN SSC VSG and its members.

Diclofenac in Europe

As requested by the European Commission, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) published their long-awaited technical position on the vulture-

killing drug diclofenac in December – they confirm that veterinary diclofenac represents a real risk to European vultures, and therefore that a number of risk management measures should be taken to avoid the poisoning of vultures, including more regulation, veterinary controls, better labelling and information and/or a ban of the drug. The EMA's remit and position recognises that only a ban reduces the risks to zero, but it is now up to the EU Commission to decide whether they will start a formal referral process and it seems likely that action may only come after dead vultures are found in the field conclusively poisoned by diclofenac. Veterinary diclofenac is already approved for sale in five EU countries, including Italy and crucially Spain, which holds 90% of all European vultures. It is marketed by the Italian company FATRO, which used loopholes in the EU risk assessment guidelines for veterinary drugs to get it approved in Italy and Spain, in spite of the solid body of evidence about its impacts on vultures and other wildlife. The Spanish Govt. also held a meeting with Local Govt. and conservation community experts, which resulted

in a detailed internal report that concluded that risks are lower than in Asia and that the EMA position should be adhered to. Diclofenac already caused catastrophic declines of three resident South Asian vulture species, including 99.9% decline of *Gyps bengalensis* previously thought to be the most abundant large raptor in the world. See #banvetdiclofenac! www.4vultures.org and www.birdlife.org for updates etc. (Note VSG prompted high level letters from IUCN's SSC to EU Commissioners highlighting this topic)

Windfarms

A major increase in windfarm proposals is underway particularly across Asia, Africa and the Middle East which is likely to affect vulture populations. There is an immediate need to refine the pre- and post-construction impact studies to minimise the potential effects on vultures from wind farms.

Africa

A Workshop about vultures in **South Africa** took place on 6th-7th Nov 2014 at VulPro facilities near Pretoria. There was also a workshop

for the Bearded Vulture South African group.

A national action planning workshop took place in Harare, **Zimbabwe** on the 26th and 27th March 2015. Earlier in 2014 (March), based on a review of various documents the BirdLife Africa Partnership Secretariat, a draft "Action framework for vultures in Africa" was shared and since then 14 African national BirdLife Partners have indicated that vultures are part of their planned activities and priorities, reflecting growing international awareness and concern for Africa's vultures and growing momentum for addressing this. At the CMS meeting, plans for a second Pan African Vulture Summit were put forward which will hopefully take place in **Senegal** Oct 2016 linked to the Pan African Ornithological Congress.

Asia

The SAVE consortium met in Dhaka, **Bangladesh** in November 2014, updating the new 'Blueprint' Recovery Plan document. The report with updated priorities and version of the Blueprint is available under latest news: www.save-vultures.org The meeting was notable in that the Chief Guest, Bangladesh Finance

Minister endorsed SAVE priorities, and most notably the banning of ketoprofen. The first Vulture Safe Zone in Bangladesh was also formally recognised by Government at the meeting.

In **India**, the eagerly awaited ban of multi-dose vials of human

diclofenac is apparently close but has not yet come through. The need for vulture safety-testing of all similar (NSAID) veterinary products is also something that has become top priority and final approval/funding from the Indian Government is eagerly awaited.


