

IUCN Species Survival Commission:

Vulture Specialist Group

Aim: The IUCN SSC Vulture Specialist Group aims to advocate and create greater awareness of the plight of vultures and coordinate effective conservation activities to their benefit.

The Vulture Specialist Group will support and work closely with BirdLife International as the Red List Authority for birds, but with particular reference to the global status of Vultures.

Key activities/Outputs:

Conservation and management:

- Identify and communicate information about emerging threats to vultures globally
- Promote the use of appropriate mitigation measures to address threats where possible
- Facilitate the sharing of expertise and knowledge between regions where appropriate
- Support CITES, at national and international level, in vulture-related issues

Research and monitoring:

- Conduct and promote scientific research on ecology and habitat use by vultures to support management decisions regarding the conservation of these
- Promote and encourage sustained population monitoring at key sites for vultures using appropriate monitoring methods
- Identify gaps in knowledge and promote applied research into such species, threats or habitats where appropriate

Dissemination and Communication:

- Promote and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise with regard to vultures and their conservation
- Use *Vulture News* as the official print journal for the Vulture Specialist Group to disseminate information about vultures and their conservation
- Make available published and unpublished information about vultures on a website
- Ensure that the wider public and interest groups receive regular information and updates on the conservation of vultures

Partnership and Advocacy:

- Work with governments, research institutions, conservation organisations and communities to develop and implement effective conservation measures
- Support and promote the conservation of vultures through the International Vulture Awareness Day working with its partner organisations

For more details contact either of the Vulture Specialist Group Co-chairs:

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Vulture updates - March 2017 - Around the World of Vultures & VSG activities

The CMS Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Old World Vultures (Vulture MsAP): The first draft was distributed to the MsAP Steering Committee and the Raptors MoU Technical Advisory Group in January 2017, following three regional workshops involving more than 175 vulture experts, which were held in Dakar, Senegal (Africa), Monfrague, Spain (Europe and Central Asia) and Mumbai, India (Asia). The final regional workshop (Middle East) was held in Sharjah, UAE, which was followed by an Overarching Workshop in Toledo, Spain. Following these workshops, a second draft was distributed in March for 30 days public consultation. The final draft was submitted to the CMS Scientific Council in May, after which it was published on the COP12 website. The MsAP will now be considered for adoption in Manila in the Philippines in October 2017. Once adopted, the real challenge begins in terms of implementation of the plan across all 124 range states.

The **Flyway Action Plan** (in English, Russian, and French) for the

Conservation of the Balkan and Central Asian Populations of the **Egyptian Vulture (EVFAP)** was sent for public consultation in January and was updated inclusion in the MsAP.

African roundup:

The CMS Africa Regional MsAP workshop took place from 18–21 October 2016 in Dakar, Senegal. A total of 45 participants from 28 countries (19 African countries) from North, East, South and West Africa were represented – a broader representation than at the previous (PAVS) meeting. Central Africa remains a gap. Participants were from a range of research institutions, Universities, NGOs and Government. The workshop was facilitated by Chris Bowden and the main focus was identifying and prioritising the major threats facing all African vultures. The outputs were incorporated into the MsAP drafts.

Predicting vulture strongholds:

Predictive models for all ten African species were completed in a project led by Alterra, Wageningen

University with many collaborators. The modelling component was undertaken by Habitat Info and includes layers of habitat suitability, threats and vulture distribution. Maps generated by this project are incorporated in the MsAP.

Indigenous Vulture Monitoring Project, Ghana: The first phase of this project led by Justus Deikumah has recently concluded. The project increased awareness and education about vultures, recorded baseline data on populations and identified threats, particularly to Hooded Vultures. The team conducted several public seminars and training workshops, including many radio and TV awareness programmes. Future plans include using tracking units to study range expansion and movements of Hooded and White-backed vultures.

Zambia piloting Vulture Safe Zones: BirdWatch Zambia is adapting the Vulture Safe Zone concept (from south Asia) to provide safe havens for vultures from the relevant threats in Zambia. Engagement with land owners of five farms located within the Chisamba IBA is a key element and through this, securing 15,000ha where food sources are safe for vultures.

Ten vultures (9 White-backed & 1 White-headed) were tagged in **Tanzania** in 2016 (by WCS & N Carolina Zoo) along with population monitoring in Katavi and Ruaha National Parks. In 2017 an awareness-raising campaign in southern Tanzania began, plus refresher training for rangers in poisoning intervention.

Vulture migration monitoring 2016 in Morocco: A raptor census was coordinated during the northwards migration period on the southern shore of the Strait of Gibraltar, Morocco. Over 24000 raptors were counted, of which over 2800 were four vulture species: Rüppell's, Griffon, Cinereous and Egyptian. The census results have been published online by GREPOM member Rachid El Khamlichi.

Poisoning training in Botswana, Zimbabwe and Kenya: In an effort to tackle the recognised priority threat of poisoning in East & southern Africa, Fondation Segre launched a training programme in January 2016 and has a second phase in 2017. The project covers Chobe District in Botswana, Masai Mara in Kenya and Hwange NP in Zimbabwe. The trainings aim to effectively set a response protocol in

place to deal with illegal wildlife poisoning incidents. Workshops included reviewing the local poisoning context, policy and legislation, protocols and a practical session to demonstrate how to handle a poisoning crime scene. The most recent sessions took place in the Masai Mara, Kenya (14-17 November) and brought together 32 institutions, and 37 participants. It was organised in collaboration with Mara Lions, The Peregrine Fund, Endangered Wildlife Trust, BirdLife International and Nature Kenya.

Asian roundup:

The **MsAP regional meeting for Asia** was held in Mumbai immediately after the SAVE meeting in November 2016. As with the other regional workshops, the main focus was on identifying threats, and broadened the remit on all nine species from the focus on the Critically Endangered Gyps vultures already covered by SAVE, and also including a wider array of countries (from Iran to Thailand, China and Cambodia). The outputs are incorporated to the main MsAP document.

The 6th **Annual SAVE meeting** (November 27-28) stepped up a gear on tackling the NSAIDs issues,

devoting a full day to an ‘NSAIDs Alert Symposium’ which, significantly, was attended by senior drug authority officials of Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Dossiers have been compiled for four toxic veterinary NSAIDs by SAVE and were released at the meeting. Attendance was slightly higher than previous meetings and included six delegates by live Skype link from Pakistan. The Blueprint action plan was updated together with the SAVE priorities, which were separated for south Asia and south-east Asia. The report and updated Blueprint can be downloaded.

The **release programme for endangered species in India** has been held up by satellite tagging permissions, although these seem set to go ahead in the near future.

In **Nepal**, however, release plans for six female White-rumped Vultures from the breeding centre have been formally approved by Government and tagging permissions are now in place, including for tagging some wild birds. This is set to go ahead in the very near future.

In **Bangladesh**, the Government has taken exemplary steps in banning aceclofenac and ketoprofen from

both Vulture Safe Zones, with Health Ministry action to implement this in January. It is hoped this will develop into a National measure for wider replication in the neighbouring countries.

Middle East: Four Egyptian Vultures (2 adult, 2 sub-adult and satellite-tagged by the Environment Agency, Abu Dhabi) from Jebel Hafeet in Al Ain have occasionally crossed into nearby Oman. None has so far shown any long distance movement.

European roundup:

Cinereous vulture: The Andalucía action plan was made public in September by the regional government of Andalucía and in December, seven rehabilitated birds were handed to the Vulture Conservation Foundation for release in the reintroduction project in France.

By January, a total of seven **Griffon Vultures** – (four adults, three juveniles) - and 11 Cinereous Vultures had been fitted with PTTs in the last few months by the LIFE Re Vultures team, to study their dispersal and movements, and identify threats.

The results of an exhaustive breeding census of **Egyptian Vultures** in the transboundary Douro canyon – from 2016 by teams from the ICNF (the Portuguese Nature Conservation Agency) and the Arribes del Duero Natural Park, revealed that there are 135 pairs of Egyptian Vultures along the International Douro and its tributaries. Also, the survey of Egyptian Vulture in France in 2016 was published by Erick Kobierzycki, who is responsible for the Pyrenees action plan for the species, coordinated by LPO.

In Spain, the first ever **Bearded Vulture** since their extinction in the mid-1980s has hatched in the wild in Andalucía in January. Also, breeding has begun in the National Park of Picos de Europa (Asturias), after an absence of 50 years. The pair – a wild bird of Pyrenean origin and another one reintroduced locally, is now incubating.

Poisoning documented in Portugal:

As part of the LIFE RUPIS project, the Portuguese Nature Conservation Agency (ICNF) compiled all known cases of poisoning that occurred on the Portuguese side of the transboundary protected area between 1994 and the present (area covered 95,000ha).

Americas roundup:

North America: During the 2016 breeding season, The Peregrine Fund suspected three **California Condor** nests with chicks in the northern Arizona and southern Utah region. Two of the three nests could be visually inspected, but the third was located too deep into the Grand Canyon to be able to see - but the parent pair's behaviour gave good indication that they were tending a chick. Of the two visually monitored nests, one, located at Vermilion Cliffs National Monument in Arizona, fledged a chick that was later captured, vaccinated, and tagged. The other nest, located in

Zion National Park in Utah, had a healthy chick, but unfortunately the chick disappeared without trace after a particularly bad storm. The annual trapping season is just finishing, checking the health and lead levels of each bird trapped. The next public release of California Condors at Vermilion Cliffs National Monument is scheduled for National Public Lands Day, September 30, 2017 - details will be online over the coming months.

South America: No major events or updates reported since the last newsletter.

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