AFRICAN RAPTORS

May, 2014 **No. 4**

EDITORIAL

It has been some time since the third edition of this newsletter came out, and during the hiatus, the situation for our raptors has deteriorated markedly. The need for sharing information on the plight of Africa's birds of prey, and successful conservation action to mitigate threats has never been greater. In particular, poisoning continues to devastate our vulture populations, killing hundreds of birds at a time. As disturbing as this wanton slaughter, is the apathy and lack of concern shown by the public. Lalah and Otieno in Kenya have stated that "researchers and conservationists who have been witness to the misuse and abuse of carbofuran (in particular) are baffled by the muted response so far", and I couldn't agree more. When a dozen vultures were poisoned in Botswana last year, I told people that if they had been elephants, the news would have made world headlines. Since then, ten elephants were poisoned with cyanide in Zimbabwe, with hardly a murmur from the public. What will it take to jolt us out of our lethargy?

For these reasons, I felt it imperative to revive the African Raptor newsletter. Since this was prompted by the current spate of poisonings in the region, it is inevitable that this edition focuses on poisoning and as such does not contain much good news for raptors. In my view, the highlight of this issue is the poison-pen article on pages 6 and 7 submitted by an anonymous contributor. It is a poison-pen article with a difference – the poison in the pen is carbofuran, and the article is anything but libellous—it is painfully factual. Read it and see what you think. The newsletter also contains some international and local raptor news, past, present and future.

Due to a space constraint I've had to hold some articles for number 5; however, readers are still welcome to submit their articles, notes, field observations and raptor snippets by August, please, for inclusion.

Pete Hancock
Editor

VULTURE NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

The IUCN Vulture Specialist Group update on the world of vultures

Diclofenac in Europe.

Perhaps the most disturbing new development has been the news that despite the well-known dangers of diclofenac, it has been licensed for veterinary use first in Italy and now Spain. Attention to stop this had previously focussed on Asia where the catastrophic vulture population declines have been shown to be mainly due to this drug, and also in Africa where it had threatened to take hold. Unfortunately this has quietly happened in Europe where major *Gyps* vulture populations occur, and threatens to undermine the work elsewhere if this is not reversed quickly. Work by the BirdLife International Policy Office in Brussels is underway to prompt action through the European Union, and also by SEO and LIPU (the BirdLife partners in Spain and Italy) and by the Vulture Conservation Foundation which has been very prominent in co-ordinating action (see box below for link). There has also been an online petition (see link in box below) and with new evidence emerging that even *Aquila* eagles are susceptible to diclofenac poisoning there may be justification for calling for a world-wide veterinary ban including the Americas where diclofenac has been licensed for many years. The news has prompted further vigilance and it now emerges that the drug has also been licensed in Turkey, Serbia and Kazakhstan. The VSG is involved in reacting to this news.

www.4vultures.org/our-work/campaigning-to-ban-diclofenac-in-europe/
www.change.org/petitions/janez-poto%C4%8Dnik-european-union-diclofenac-the-vulture-killing-drug-is-now-available-on-eu-market

Adult Lappet-faced Vulture arrives at nest with nesting material (Photo: Lyn Francey)

The IUCN Vulture Specialist Group update on the world of vultures

VULTURE NEWS CONTD.

Raptors MOU

The Technical Advisory Group of the Convention on Migratory Species met for the first time in Edinburgh, Scotland, in late January 2014 to draft a working strategy and identify priority areas and focal raptor species. The VSG was well represented by four of its members who ensured that vultures were firmly placed on the agenda and became an integral part of the work activities of the Raptors MOU. The CMS supports the need for greater co-operation with regard to conservation action including highly mobile species such as vultures and aims to facilitate this through a variety of actions. Specific threats were discussed and task teams appointed to address the key ones and to implement the actions necessary to better conserve migratory raptors across their flyways. As active participant in these activities, the VSG will also work towards achieving its own objectives with this wider support network of partners than before.

Africa Roundup

The poisoning of Africa's vultures continues to escalate with large-scale losses from single incidents having been recorded from Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe in the last 12 months. In an attempt to better co-ordinate efforts to combat this threat in southern Africa, a workshop will be held near Etosha National Park in Namibia on 20th May, 2014. This is part of the 10th Annual Conference of the Birds of Prey Programme of the Endangered Wildlife Trust. People interested in attending should contact Rebecca Mabuza at rebeccam@ewt.co.za

Europe Roundup

An international workshop between 7th and 11th April, 2014, was

The immature White-headed Vulture has a black head (Photo: Pete Hancock)

VULTURE NEWS CONTD.

organised by the Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF), Junta de Andalusia and Working Dogs for Conservation on poison and vultures. It was held in Ronda (Andalusia, Spain) involving attendees from Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Namibia and South Africa. This included a review of the situation in Africa, and how Andalusia has developed its anti-poison campaign, as well as police forensic and practical necropsies — see report on page 13 of this newsletter.

Andalusian government data show that of 7,270 fatalities caused by collisions with wind farms in southern Spain between 1998 and 2013, 1,490 were Griffon vultures. There is now concern regarding Cinereous Vulture declines in Corsica — Parc Regional du Corse and VCF are investigating the potential reasons including food shortages, genetic issues or interspecific competition. By contrast, 2013 was the best year for the species in Extremadura (western Spain) with 873 breeding pairs. Trends appear similar in other parts of Spain, including the successful reintroduction project in Catalonia where there were exchanges of individuals with the Massif Central, France. The Balkan Vulture Action Plan (BVAP), co-ordinated by VCF, established its first Griffon Vulture breeding pairs at reintroduction sites in Stara Planina Mountain and neighbouring Macedonia. Transport of Spanish Griffons to the Balkans and Italy continues. Captive breeding of Bearded Vultures within the EEP had lower breeding success in 2014 compared with previous years which will affect release plans. Zoo populations on the other hand have had better results.

Material compiled by Chris Bowden and Andre Botha, co-chairs of the VSG.

The IUCN Vulture Specialist Group update on the world of vultures

A Secretarybird brings nesting material to its mate on the nest (Photo: Lyn Francey)

In Malawi, vulture populations are plummeting

LOCAL NEWS: MALAWI

In Malawi, vultures are known as the 'masters of the skies'. Palm-nut, Hooded, White-backed, Lappet-faced and White-headed vultures are the species that have been found in Malawi.

However, despite providing their free 'cleaning services' to the ecosystem, vultures are increasingly facing human-induced threats. According to Alphipus Lipiya, Park Manager of Kasungu National Park, this park hosted many vultures in the 1980s. But poachers hated them because the birds gave them and their kill away to patrolling rangers. The poachers decided to avenge, and started systematically poisoning by lacing their kills, deliberately left behind, with chemicals such as Temik or Logo (Dimethoate). Coupled with a scarcity of prey and habitat loss, this led to a population crash of vultures in the park. It is now three years since a vulture was last seen in Kasungu National Park.

In a recent country-wide survey conducted by the Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi, only the Palm-nut, the White-backed and the Lappet-faced vultures were recorded – painting a grim picture of their conservation status in the country. Threats facing vultures in other parts of Africa include poisoning using Carbofuran, and electrocution by power lines. Deliberate killing for use in traditional medicines has also been recorded in some parts of Africa, including in Malawi.

Samuel Kamoto, Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi (from BirdLife Africa Partnership e-bulletin no. 29, December, 2011)

LOCAL NEWS: BOTSWANA

A new NGO, **Raptors Botswana**, has been registered to ensure the long-term survival of all raptors in Botswana and southern Africa.

Raptors Botswana aims to achieve its objective by:

- conducting applied research on raptors and the threats they face;
- undertaking targeted advocacy and conservation action;
- Creating a general public awareness of the importance of raptors in Botswana.

Raptors Botswana focuses its activities on globally threatened raptors and important raptor habitats.

Anybody who would like to contribute to raptor conservation in Botswana, please contact us, all assistance is welcome. Raptor conservation is the responsibility of everyone.

Contact e-mail: vulturesinbots@hotmail.co.uk

Raptors Botswana
RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION

FEATURE: CARBOFURAN

Carbofuran is a systemic agricultural insecticide which is widely used (illegally) for poisoning wildlife throughout the world.

- Carbofuran is primarily manufactured by FMC in Philadelphia, USA, but is banned from use in the USA. It is also banned in the European Union and Canada.
- It is also made in India and China.
- Carbofuran has been used illegally for killing wildlife for over five decades, throughout Africa and many other countries *e.g.* there are documented cases from Greece, Spain, Croatia, India and elsewhere.
- Carbofuran (and other carbamates) liberate methyl isocyanate (MIC) inside the organism. MIC is the industrial compound that was released into the air in 1984 in Bhopal (India) and caused the death of between 3,000 and 15,000 people and injured over half a million others.
- Carbofuran has the unpleasant distinction of being so hazardous to wildlife that it cannot be used on crops (even according to prescription) without causing mortality to wildlife.
- There is a documented case of raptors dying after eating waterfowl that had been killed by Carbofuran up to seven months after its application to the fields.
- Carbofuran is non-selective, killing a broad spectrum of invertebrates, birds and mammals. Birds in particular are unable to detoxify Carbofuran before succumbing.
- In comparison with other pesticides, Carbofuran has one of the highest recorded toxicities to birds of any insecticide registered worldwide (and this for a pesticide used ostensibly to kill insects).
- Death from Carbofuran is typically very rapid *i.e.* from 9 to 18 minutes. When vultures are poisoned, they are commonly found adjacent to, or in close proximity to the baited material. Birds can die so quickly that they are discovered with poisoned ingesta in the mouth.
- Vultures are usually the most numerous unintentional victims of Carbofuran poisoning due to their being obligate scavengers relying on carrion, and the fact that some species are gregarious.
- Carbofuran is illegally used for 'pesticide hunting' of birds in some countries.
- An asprin-sized tablet of Carbofuran contains enough toxin to kill over 20,000 sparrow-sized birds.
- Carbofuran is relatively soluble in water, and so can

Carbofuran is the number one poison used to kill African raptors

Carbofuran is available over the counter (or through the back door). It looks like harmless washing powder

CARBOFURAN CONTD.

Carbofuran is classified by the WHO as extremely toxic to humans. Fatal doses can be absorbed through the skin and by inhalation.

contaminate aquatic ecosystems.

- Once Carbofuran enters the food chain, other animals are under threat of secondary poisoning *i.e.* a raptor consuming a passerine that was killed after eating granular Carbofuran will also die. The raptor need not consume the whole carcass to obtain a fatal dose of the poison.
- Some of the degradation products formed when Carbofuran breaks down are equally toxic.
- Carbofuran stocks were bought back from Kenya by FMC in 2009 — it is not banned in Kenya *per se*. The buy-back followed adverse publicity of lion poisonings.
- Carbofuran was patented in 1965 and introduced to the market in 1967 under the brand name Furadan by FMC. FMC is still the major manufacturer of Carbofuran but it is also made in other countries *e.g.* in South Africa, by Sanachem (Pty) Ltd who call it by the trade name Terrafuran.
- In the US, prior to banning of Carbofuran, the manufacturer's label stated "Keep out of areas inhabited by fish, birds and wildlife as this product is highly toxic to such animals". This is one of the reasons why it is believed that Carbofuran cannot be safely used without negative impacts on non-target organisms, even when following the label religiously.
- "There are no known conditions under which Carbofuran can be used without resulting in unreasonable adverse effects on non-target organisms". US FWS study.

RECOMMENDED READING

CARBOFURAN AND WILDLIFE POISONING: Global Perspectives and Forensic Approaches. Edited by Ngaio Richards. Published 2012 by John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

This book should be read by every responsible person, and especially policy-makers, researchers, farmers, conservationists, forensic practitioners and law-enforcement agents.

It is illegal to repackage Carbofuran into unlabelled plastic bags as shown here.

PHOTO

Lappet-faced Vulture

GALLERY

research in Botswana

ANOTHER VALUABLE RESOURCE

Every conservationist in Africa should have a copy of Darcy Ogada's recent paper "The power of poison: pesticide poisoning of Africa's wildlife". After reading it, they should repackage the information for decision-makers and politicians in their country in order to ensure that this important information reaches the relevant audience. An abstract of the paper is produced below, and a pdf version of the full paper can be obtained from Pete Hancock (see p. 16 for his address). It is OK to pass the information on to colleagues, but the emphasis should not be on 'preaching to the converted'. The Minister of Agriculture, the head of the Veterinary Department, the head of the Pest Control Products Board (or equivalent) and the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture should be targeted and convinced that a serious problem exists. **If the current situation in regard to vulture poisoning continues, it is not unreasonable to predict that most African vulture species will become extinct in the short-term.** Many of the pesticides currently in use are not just a threat to vultures but are generally harmful and persist in the environment for extended periods. There is little doubt that future generations will find our use of these dangerous substances difficult to understand when the evidence for their negative impacts is so clear.

Darcy Ogada is affiliated to the Peregrine Fund and National Museums of Kenya

Repackage this information to make it easily accessible to decision-makers and politicians.

The power of poison: pesticide poisoning of Africa's wildlife by D Ogada
Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences 2014: 1—20.

Abstract: Poisons have long been used to kill wildlife throughout the world. An evolution has occurred from the use of plant- and animal-based toxins to synthetic pesticides to kill wildlife, a method that is silent, cheap, easy, and effective. The use of pesticides to poison wildlife began in southern Africa, and predator populations were widely targeted and eliminated. A steep increase has recently been observed in the intensity of wildlife poisonings, with corresponding population declines. However, the majority of poisonings go unrecorded. Under national laws it is illegal to hunt wildlife using poisons in 83% of African countries. Pesticide regulations are inadequate, and enforcement of existing legislation is poor. Few countries have forensic field protocols, and most lack storage and testing facilities. Methods used to poison wildlife include baiting carcasses, soaking grains in pesticide solution, mixing pesticides to form salt licks, and tainting waterholes. Carbofuran is the most widely abused pesticide in Africa. Common reasons for poisoning are control of damage-causing animals, harvesting fish and bushmeat, harvesting animals for traditional medicines, poaching for wildlife products, and killing wildlife sentinels (*e.g.*, vultures because their aerial circling alerts authorities to poachers' activities). Populations of scavengers, particularly vultures, have been decimated by poisoning. Recommendations include banning pesticides, improving pesticide regulations and controlling distribution, better enforcement and stiffer penalties for offenders, increasing international support and awareness, and developing regional pesticide centres.

UPCOMING VULTURE SEMINAR

VulPro in South Africa is organising a vulture seminar **'Looking Towards the Future'**, to be held on Thursday and Friday, November 6th and 7th, 2014.

This will be a gathering of scientific and conservation-minded professionals and landowners whose work focuses on southern African vultures species. This workshop will be a great learning opportunity, a venue for the exchange of ideas, and will set in motion conservation actions for the benefit of all vulture species.

The 1½ day seminar will include presentations on topics such as wind-farm development, power line collision mitigation, vulture restaurant management protocols, generating direct farmer involvement in vulture conservation, veterinary drug use, captive breeding and rehabilitation.

For more information: kerri.wolter@gmail.com

The Hooded Vulture is now categorised as Endangered due to population declines (Photo: M Kamakama)

ARTICLES FOR VULTURE NEWS

Submit your articles to Vulture News

Please submit your articles to Vulture News, official journal of the IUCN Vulture Specialist Group. Articles can cover any aspect of vulture research, conservation, observation or commentary. Specifically the second edition of the journal for 2014 will focus on Hooded Vultures. All previous issues of Vulture News are still being digitised, and will be made available online in the future. The journal is also planning to change its current website such that it will offer complete access to archived and recent editions, and be a portal for finding out more about the Specialist Group.

Contact: campbell@hawkconservancy.org

Conservation action needs to be based on sound scientific facts.

PhD STUDY ON LAPPET-FACED VULTURES

Beckie Garbett is conducting a study on Lappet-Faced Vultures in Botswana to produce information on their general ecology and key threats; with a particular focus on their conservation status, spatial use, nesting behaviours and survival rates, and quantification of threats. Lappet-faced Vultures are currently understudied with relatively little knowledge of this species in Botswana. They are classified as 'Vulnerable' by the IUCN, although their estimated global population numbers are the lowest out of all the vulture species in southern Africa.

Such studies are imperative in order to accurately assess their status and continued survival potential in the face of current mortality threats such as the devastating episodes of carcass poisoning which are being witnessed throughout southern Africa. We have already found Lappet-faced Vultures in Botswana to move way beyond the distances we initially expected; they regularly travel across borders into South Africa and Namibia and can move distances of up to 800 kilometres in one day. This highlights their vulnerability to the full range of human induced threats which

exist across southern Africa and also for the necessity of studies which will help us to understand and protect these magnificent and important birds.

Photo shows Beckie releasing a White-backed Vulture caught as by-catch during capture of Lappet-faced Vultures.

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON POISON AND AFRICAN VULTURES

Widespread, increasing and mostly illegal use of poison is decimating African vulture populations, precipitating a biodiversity crisis with as yet uncharted human health consequences — conclude members of African, American and European organizations during a multi-national workshop in Spain.

"Poisoning is the number one threat to Africa's vultures"

7th May 2014. Africa is home to 11 of the 23 species of vultures worldwide. Once common and widespread across the continent, vultures are undergoing unprecedented declines in Africa — four species are now considered globally Endangered and at risk of extinction, and three more are listed as Vulnerable, according to the IUCN Red List of Species. Poisoning is the number one threat to Africa's vultures.

Rates of decline and causes of poisoning differ across the continent — in southern and eastern Africa vultures die after eating carcasses of intentionally poisoned animals. These situations arise for example when poachers use poisons to kill native African wildlife including rhino and elephants, when feral domestic dog populations are the subject of a concerted poisoning campaign, or native carnivores such as jackals and hyaenas are targeted with poisons. In addition, poachers will kill vultures directly since their conspicuous presence can attract the attention of law enforcement agents. In certain regions of Africa, vultures are deliberately killed for food, for the traditional medicine trade, and as a result of direct persecution.

Whatever the means and the drivers, the situation is now critical — vultures are declining across the African continent, largely at a dramatic rate — decreases of up to 97% for some species have been detected in West Africa in just over three decades, while 50 to 60% rates of decline have been measured in the savannahs of East and southern Africa. This continent is quickly losing its vultures, and with them the critical and highly efficient ecosystem services they provide. Without scavengers, carcasses are left to rot, disease spreads among other animals, sanitation decreases in and around villages and stray dog populations rise in tandem with associated cases of human injuries and fatal rabies incidences.

Vultures are considered protected species in most African countries, and many have enacted legislation that criminalises the use of poison to kill wildlife.

POISON AND AFRICAN VULTURES CONTD.

"It is shocking that nobody seems to be worried about the massive vulture decline we are now witnessing across Africa"

Unfortunately, contradictory agricultural and pest control regulations, poor awareness, lack of enforcement, and poor or inconsistent diagnostic capabilities usually mean that vulture poisoning often remains under-reported and under-investigated with conviction and even indictments rare. Some African countries have no laws to protect vultures from poisoning or direct persecution.

"Vultures are magnificent birds that provide a major service to African society by cleaning up dead animals and helping to prevent the spread of diseases. If they disappear, Africa will face an ecological catastrophe", explained Andre Botha, the chairperson of the IUCN Vulture Specialist Group, and Manager of the Birds of Prey Programme in South Africa.

Faced with this huge wildlife and human crisis, a number of wildlife, vulture and poison experts gathered recently in a meeting in southern Spain, co-sponsored by the Junta de Andalusia, Vulture Conservation Foundation and Working Dogs for Conservation to evaluate the issue, exchange views, mobilize capacity and expertise and plan ahead.

Darcy Ogada, a Kenya-based conservationist from The Peregrine Fund stated "In India, the almost complete disappearance of vultures has resulted in a strong increase of the feral dog population and associated rabies incidence, which has been estimated to have cost US$34 billion in human health costs alone. It is shocking that nobody seems to be worried about the massive vulture decline we are now witnessing across Africa".

Poisoning is an ingrained, pervasive practice, incorporated even into food

Hooded Vultures are susceptible to poisoning despite being at the bottom of the vulture hierarchy

POISON AND AFRICAN VULTURES CONTD.

"Saving African vultures will require enforcement of policies on an continental scale"

gathering in some parts of Africa. These practices and the poisoning of vultures for consumption by local people also pose significant — but as yet undocumented — human health risks, while sanitation around villages often deteriorates without these scavengers. "Quantifying the potential human health impacts of the vulture crisis, and also estimating the real value of vultures within the African ecosystem is a priority" commented Ralph Buij, a researcher formerly based in Cameroon.

In some countries where vulture populations are still relatively strong, such as Ethiopia, other threats are looming. "Strychnine is increasingly used by municipalities against feral dogs, and other undetermined poisons, including pesticides, are used to kill hyenas and jackals. Our rich vulture populations are at serious risk when they consume poisoned carcasses" said Yilma Abebe, project leader of the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society.

The experts identified building/strengthening needed capacity while gathering more information as immediate priorities — with the aim of increased detection and better documentation of poisoning events, increased sampling and analysis to determine the causes of poisoning, and gaining a better understanding of the sociological drivers that are contributing to the increase in poisoning incidents. "It is critical that African governments become actively involved in this issue. Saving African vultures will require enforcement of policies on a continental scale. Science and documentation of poisoning will support recovery, but it will be the people of Africa and their governments that ultimately save the African vultures" concluded Moses Selebatso from Raptors Botswana.

The workshop closed with a set of relevant conclusions, products and next steps. Above all, it produced a consensual alert from participants from 12 countries: **without rapid and effective action, Africa will soon lose these critical keystone species.**

GOOD NEWS FOR RAPTORS

Is there any good news for the conservation of raptors in Africa?

This is the shortest article in the newsletter. There doesn't appear to be much good news for raptors at present. During compilation of this issue of the newsletter, I searched far and wide for even a snippet of good news, but without any success. In fact, the general environmental picture looks bleak, with major disruptions taking place to the ecological integrity of the planet *e.g.* the widespread destruction of bees and other pollinators.

If you know of any real improvements to the conservation status of Africa's raptors, please submit an article for the next issue of the newsletter (see contact details overleaf).

Contact us

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

This pre-adult Bateleur is estimated to be about six or seven years of age following the age determination system developed by Rick Watson (Bokmakierie 39 (2): 37-39). Photo: Pete Hancock.

PHOTOGRAPHERS, please send in your photos to be used in future editions of this newsletter.

The editor would like to thank the following for making their pics available for this newsletter:
Lyn Francey
Rebecca Garbett
Ken Oake

CONTACT DETAILS

Newsletter

Please send your news items, short notes and interesting field observations to Pete Hancock
E-mail: birdlifemaun@gmail.com

Website

Visit the African Raptor website
http://www.africanraptors.org
To post your information on the website, contact Munir Virani
E-mail: tpf@africaonline.co.ke