

Demand for vultures in West Africa threatens Central African populations

Conservationists warn that vulture populations in central African countries like Chad are increasingly at risk due to belief-based use in Nigeria and Benin.

Abiola Sylvestre Chaffra, a research fellow at the International Bird Conservation Partnership, told Mongabay he was out in Chad, photographing vultures, when a man offered to help him capture the birds. Vultures love donkey meat, the man said. All Chaffra had to do was buy a donkey and leave its poisoned carcass in the open. The man told Chaffra he had helped many people catch vultures this way.

In West African countries like Nigeria and Benin, vultures are poached both alive and dead for beliefs that they bring luck, success or protection against witchcraft. Vulture parts, including head and feet, eggs and nests, are also used. This demand is now reaching vulture populations in Central Africa.



A juvenile hooded vulture for sale at a market in Benin. Image courtesy of Abiola Sylvestre Chaffra.

In a [recent paper](#), researchers detailed how critically endangered [hooded vultures](#) (*Necrosyrtes monachus*) were absent around most slaughterhouses and landfill sites they visited near N'Djamena, Chad's capital.

"That doesn't really make sense, because there's a ton of food," said study co-author Nico Arcilla, president of the International Bird Conservation Partnership. Nearly half the local residents interviewed by the researchers said they knew of recent poisoning incidents in the area, and more than one-third stated they were aware of poachers from countries such as Nigeria, Niger, Benin and Cameroon trapping or killing vultures.

"The driver appears to be coming from West Africa, and it generally seems to point back to Benin or Nigeria," Arcilla said. Belief-based use practices appear to be largely absent in Chad, she added.

In another [study](#), led by Chaffra, surveys in Benin's traditional markets found that while most vultures on sale originated from other West African countries, such as Ghana, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Niger, there were also birds from Cameroon and Gabon. Another [2025](#)

[market survey](#) in Benin found a small number of birds sourced from Cameroon. A 2014 [paper](#) revealed that vulture parts on sale in Nigeria were sourced from as far as Sudan.

"In several cases, trade appears to cross national borders, highlighting the need for regional cooperation to better understand and combat these networks," Chaffra said.

Darcy Ogada, program director at The Peregrine Fund who wasn't involved in the research, said it isn't surprising the supply chain is very far-reaching since vultures in West Africa have become scarce.

"That should raise the alarm," Ogada added. "It's going to keep moving to where populations are relatively much better."

Arcilla said that awareness-raising in communities, law enforcement, and conservation efforts are urgently needed, targeting both natural and urban areas where vultures persist.

"It is also necessary to continue research into supply chains and to promote sustainable alternatives in order to reduce demand for vultures and their parts," Chaffra said.

Banner image: A pair of hooded vultures. Image by Nico Arcilla.

