Vulture updates No 21 - October 2024 - Around the World of Vultures & VSG activities

The recently refreshed International Vulture Awareness Day (IVAD) website with new resources and logo may have helped increase engagement this year, as always focused on the first Saturday of September (7 Sept 2024), but activities spanned August to the end of September. Over 119 registered events were recorded on the IVAD website, from at least 39 countries, but we know there were actually many more. From IVAD hashtag, Facebook and other social media (e.g. 41.2K on Instagram alone) we know that a further 25.5K people were reached.

Volume 85 of our VSG journal, Vulture News has been published online, and includes articles from the USA, Uzbekistan, Mozambique, Nepal, and Senegal. We take this opportunity to once again thank Louis Phipps for his excellent tenure as Vulture News Editor, and welcome Volen Arkumarev to the role. Authors who wish to submit manuscripts and other contributions for future editions, can do so via the editor's email address: iucnvulturenews@gmail.com.

Two wider-ranging papers were formally published: In August Frank & Sudarshan's paper was published showing half a million human deaths linked to the disappearance of vultures in India, the 4 million hits in just a few days of publication illustrate the level of attention this can draw to the keystone value of vultures and a New York Times article. Another wide-ranging paper led by Sophie Cook on the NSAIDs threat to vultures and how current regulation across Asia, Africa and Europe is failing to protect them was published in July. Collectively, these two papers have brought a new momentum to resolving drugs regulation challenges (see Asia roundup below) drawing upon CMS and wider support.

No vultures are currently proposed for review in the latest forum of IUCN red list reviews but can be proposed via the BirdLife channel here. In VSG Newsletter 20, we mentioned our collaboration with the IUCN SSC Bustard Specialist Group - they are currently looking for new members who are knowledgeable about bustards especially in Africa. If you (or anyone in your network) are interested, please contact them directly.

Asia Roundup:

South & SE Asia: An important meeting held in Gujarat, **India** by the Birdwatching Conservation Society of Gujarat, called for action to regulate veterinary drugs before they are licensed. 300 participants gathered for 27 presentations plus posters as an IVAD-registered event. The meeting attended by state Govt, IVRI, SAVE, CMS and 20+ organisations received regional TV and national media coverage and may lead to a stronger India vulture network. The SAVE annual open day meeting (held earlier this year) prompted a summary SAVE report for the region which was distributed widely. Note that the next face to face meeting of SAVE will be held in mid-February 2025 in Cambodia, hosted by the Cambodia Vulture Working Group. As for across the world, there was a huge collective set of IVAD activities in September, which are summarised here for the SAVE partners/region (**Pakistan/India/Nepal/Bangladesh/Cambodia**) but extended throughout Asia.

Nepal formally declared every District of the country to be 'diclofenac-free' in Nov. 2023, a huge achievement that has taken 17 years to confirm, and a result of extensive efforts from Govt, NGOs and

community-level work. The most recent Kathmandu valley Diclofenac-free declaration completed included signed commitments by the Veterinary Hospital and Livestock Service Expert Center under Provincial Government. Nest monitoring, also led by BCN in **Nepal** showed ongoing increases – 658 of the 711 vulture nests observed were WRV, with healthy success rates of over 70%. That total includes 20 nests with at least one individual of captive origin now breeding in the wild, and 5 of those were captive-bred rather than captive-reared. These nests of released birds also retained the 70% success-rate. Nepal road transect surveys recorded 782 vultures of six species, including 338 WRV – indicating an ongoing increase in this rapidly increasing population. Tracking of Egyptian vultures (EVs) began in Nepal, with 5 EVs tagged in September in a collaboration between SAVE, RSPB, Bird Conservation Nepal, Central Asian Vultures Project and the Biodiversity Research Institute, IMIB and funded by The Rufford Foundation. This is the first time individuals of the *ginginianus* subspecies have been tagged. The project has also begun a systematic census of EVs in Nepal. In **Bangladesh**, following the 2021 national ban on ketoprofen, the undercover pharmacy survey of 2023-2024 shows a significant reduction in its sale, dropping from 46.67% to just 0.8% in 2024. Among safe drugs, tolfenamic acid has now become the predominant drug, rising from 26.6% to 36.4%, while meloxicam is available at 24.6% making the overall percentage of safe drugs in the market 61%. Among the harmful drugs, no diclofenac was found in the latest survey, however, flunixin has increased to 31%, signalling a need for continued monitoring. For the 2024-2025 breeding season, seven nests have been observed in their early stages. The 2023-2024 breeding season had a success rate of 77.77% over nine nests. Following a poisoning incident of 12 vultures (including one satellite-tagged) in 2023, a poison bait survey was initiated from July 2024 to better understand community use of poison baits and their knowledge of vultures. So far, 17.2% of the planned survey has been completed, with responses from 86 individuals in areas near two Vulture Safe Zones in Sylhet and Khulna regions. This year, 3 White-rumped Vultures (WRVs) were tagged in **Bangladesh**: two from Rema and one from Khulna. The WRV released from Khulna travelled around 2,200 km west into Jharkhand, **India**, where it was rescued from Konar Lake by the Indian Forest Department and later re-released. It has since moved back toward east into West Bengal. Additionally, a juvenile WRV rescued from the nest in Rema was tagged and has travelled 562 km since its release including neighbouring Indian state, Tripura. These two individuals again confirmed the transboundary travelling of WRV which was first identified during 2022 tagged WRV movements. A total of 22 vultures were rescued, rehabilitated, and released during the 2023-2024 period from **Bangladesh**. Three rescued Himalayan Griffons were also satellite tagged and have successfully migrated toward **China**.

In **India,** the breeding programmes continue to increase numbers of White-rumped, Indian and Slender-billed vultures (WRV, IV, SBV) to over 800 birds, primarily through the centres in Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Assam and West Bengal. These are run by BNHS together with the state Forest departments although West Bengal state Forest Department recently took on full management responsibility for the centre in Rajabhatkhawa/Buxa Tiger Reserve. Initiatives for further government breeding centres have progressed including a new facility at Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh where 6 Red-headed vultures (RHV) are now held (5 females and 1 male), run by Uttar Pradesh Forest Department. The UP Chief Minister inaugurated the centre on 6 September. Twenty WRV were also reportedly sent from the Haryana breeding centre to a new zoo (Vantara) in Jamnagar, Gujarat in April. Trial releases have progressed this year with ten birds released in July and August in two Madhya Pradesh Tiger Reserves (WRV & IV), with all birds being GSM-tagged and monitored. This remains on a trial basis as toxic NSAID availability and use in the surrounding areas remains worryingly high despite the drug bans. (This is unlike the situation in **Nepal** where vulture-safe drugs, meloxicam and tolfenamic acid are almost exclusively used by vets and farmers), A publication updating veterinary NSAID availability across Asian countries is in preparation using under-cover pharmacy survey data from multiple SAVE and other partners, which will clarify the situation further.

Central Asia: In **Kyrgyzstan** in May, NABU Kyrgyzstan hosted a vulture conservation training workshop led by the Central Asian Vultures Project CAVP), also attended by the Ornithological Society of Kyrgyzstan (OSKG). Activities included research presentations, monitoring techniques and data collection protocols, and searching for vulture nests in the Kara Kuzhur and Kara Saz valleys. CAVP also organised a workshop supported by the Ministry of Ecology of **Uzbekistan** on vulture trapping, tagging and monitoring in July/August, (13 participants) from Uzbekistan, **Kazakhstan**, **Kyrgyzstan** and **Tajikistan**. 4 EVs were tagged, and counts made at two congregation sites in the south of the country. In **Kazakhstan**, 1 juvenile EV was GPS tagged, bringing the total of 7 EVs tagged in the country over the last two years. In addition, this year 10 EV chicks were ringed. Five juvenile CVs were fitted with GPS tags for the first time in Central Asia at the end of July – 3 in **Kazakhstan** by the Centre for the Study and Conservation of Biodiversity (BRCC), and two in **Uzbekistan** by the CAVP.

West Asia/Middle East: The Environment Society of Oman completed EV breeding surveys in two sessions on Masirah Island, **Oman** in 2024. The aim was to repeat the 2012 survey, where a high density of breeding pairs was recorded. The team monitored c.70 territories, 58 of which were occupied. 41 pairs were observed to breed successfully and 18 chicks were recorded. Compared to 2012, the overall population seems to be stable, despite the closure of the main dumpsite on the island. The team also recorded high incidence of trios. The first IVAD event in the **United Arab Emirates** (UAE) was organised in the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve (DDCR) with the cooperation of the IUCN-VSG member Dr. P. Azmanis. The event took place in the interactive DDCR Visitor Centre, attended by 60 people with two presentations on vulture conservation worldwide (Dr. Azmanis) and long-term vulture monitoring in DDCR (Officer B.Roy), including school children, members of the local birdwatching community and scientists of the Dubai Municipality. Likely to be repeated in future, there was coverage in local UAE press. In **Türkiye**, a significant study on the population and breeding success over a decade in Ankara's Beypazarı was published. Encouragingly, the breeding numbers had increased to 90 pairs. Another study, conducted by Doğa Derneği's Conservation Manager, Şafak Arslan identified the largest CV breeding colony in Türkiye—60 breeding pairs in the Köroğlu Mountains Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) in Bolu. A new breeding area for CV was also discovered in Erzurum, eastern Türkiye, where nests were found in wild pear (Pyrus sp.) trees. These findings have provided fresh insights into CV breeding habitats in Türkiye. In 2021, Doğa Derneği initiated research in Mersin, southern Türkiye, identified as a new breeding ground for EVs. Initial surveys recorded 8 active nests and 13 potential ones. Through collaboration with local shepherds, the number of known active nests increased, and by 2024, 31 active nests were being monitored. A paper published in 2024 compiled the findings for EVs across Türkiye, highlighting significant gaps in knowledge. After longer term efforts, Doğa Derneği achieved the first large-scale insulation of power lines in Türkiye, through the EgyptianVultureNewLIFE project. At critical stopover points along the migration routes of EVs, 40 km of hazardous power lines were partially insulated, and 348 power poles were isolated. Doğa Derneği has also pioneered the "Shepherd Network Model" as part of its community-based conservation efforts. This network, comprising over 100 members, including shepherds, village leaders, and local stakeholders, has become a powerful conservation tool. The network facilitates the rapid dissemination of critical information about vultures, the identification of new nests, and swift responses to emerging threats. In **Saudi Arabia** a new KBA was confirmed based on global criteria, of which LFV was a key qualifying species The site is within the Prince Mohammed bin Salman Royal Reserve where a conservation and monitoring plan is being developed for LFV. The same reserve also confirmed and documented breeding colonies of Eurasian Griffon vultures (GV). In **Armenia**, 1 BV, 3 EVs and 2 CVs were GPS/GSM tagged during the summer of 2024 by NABU Armenia as part of their raptor conservation programme.

European Round-up:

Regarding NSAIDs in veterinary use, a new initiative has been put forward in Spain to test the safety of flunixin on non-releasable GVs - flunixin has been implicated in the deaths of a number of wild and captive vultures already, but without such controlled information, regulation seems unlikely.

Bearded Vulture (BV): 53 chicks hatched in total within the Bearded Vulture EAZA EEP captive breeding programme: 44 of them fledged: 24 were released in Europe and 20 will remain within EEP for breeding purposes. This has been the best year ever in the BV captive breeding programme, the result of considerable investment in the management of the network and in facilities. The EEP also celebrated the Richard Faust Centre in Haringsee, Austria breaking the world record for the highest-ever number of BV chicks produced in a single breeding season - with 18 eggs laid of which 15 chicks hatched. Record numbers were also recorded for the Guadalentin Breeding Centre managed by VCF with 12 eggs laid and 11 chicks successfully hatched. In Vallcalent Breeding Unit the first chick from wild Pyrenean bloodlines hatched in captivity after several years of unsuccessful trials.
BV 'Rei del Causse' was found debilitated in Poznan, Poland in May, perching on a private house window. The bird was rescued by Poznan Zoo and nursed back to health. At the end of July, it was released again in Grands Causses National Park, France, where it was first released in 2022. This is the second time in two years that this bird has needed to be rescued from outside the release area. Lastly, wind turbines claimed another victim in Europe: the BV Masìa died colliding with them in Castellòn, Spain. This is the third fatal collision in Europe since 2021.

(Eurasian) Griffon Vulture (GV): Of the 15 GV released from the acclimatisation aviary in southern **Sardinia** at the beginning of April by LIFE Safe for Vultures, 3 died trying to cross the Mediterranean towards Sicily. The remaining ones are doing well and exploring the island, staying mostly near the feeding stations and aviary. The same aviary is now occupied by 22 GVs donated by the Junta de Extremadura. They will be released in the autumn, and the objective is to establish a new breeding nucleus in Southern Sardinia, to expand the population – the northern (original) nucleus is doing well, with the population doubling in the last few years due to conservation efforts. During the first half of May, the LIFE 'Safe for Vultures' held a two-day training workshop on investigation of wildlife crime and an international conference on the legal framework of wildlife protection with a special focus on a regional law proposal for Sardinia. In addition, the project contributed to the establishment of a farm feeding station on Asinara Island, NW Sardinia, the first of its kind within an Italian National Park. In early 2024 a small colony of GVs was discovered in Parnitha NP, **Greece**, and a pair attempted to breed after the last record 70 years ago. The FWFF team informed Dr R. Tsiakiris that a tagged female individual was expressing nesting/brooding behavior. The AHF Field team, who has observed the vulture colony already since May 2023, under the guidance of Dr Tsiakiris was monitoring and patrolling the area to reduce possible disturbance. In **Croatia**, LIFE SUPport celebrates successes in GV conservation with a record number of nesting pairs, and the release of 8 GVs rehabilitated by Beli Vulture Rescue Centre. Three of them have been ringed and equipped with GPS transmitters. Sadly, **Cyprus** has seen 4 electrocution incidents: 2 at the beginning of May on the same electricity poles that killed another GV two years ago, and 2 more in August.

Cinereous Vulture (CV): LIFE Aegypius Return inaugurated the acclimatisation aviary in Fornos within the Duoro International NP, **Portugal**. The first four CVs are already there, awaiting release in the autumn. This is the first time that soft release technique has been applied in Portugal. Life Aegypius Return also organised its third update meeting in the Tejo International NP. The meeting attracted 40 international participants and signalled a new phase for the project, more dedicated to habitat management. In July, a fifth Portuguese CV colony was discovered in Vidigueira. By the end of August, 19 CV chicks had been tagged in the five breeding colonies existing in Portugal in 2024. The Breeding population has again increased this year and totals 110 pairs, up from only 40 two years ago. In the last two years, the LIFE Aegypius Return project has tagged 34 CV chicks in total. One CV chick was tagged in **Georgia** at the end of July, by SABUKO professionals with a VCF GPS tag. In 2024, **Bulgaria** had its best breeding season for CVs since their reintroduction in 2018, with approx 20 pairs and 5 chicks were tagged and fledged. Six CVs have been brought to Bulgaria from Spain for release in Spring 2025 as part of the Rhodope Mountains rewilding landscape project. A Vulture Festival in Madzharovo celebrated the beginning of the new EU LIFE Rhodope Vulture project alongside IVAD at the Vulture Centre.

Egyptian Vulture (EV): In Bulgaria, 6 EVs have been released from the acclimatisation aviary: 3 of them were captive-bred from Prague and Ostrava Zoos, the other three hatched in the wild very late in the 2023

breeding season and were raised in captivity by the Green Balkans Wildlife Rescue Centre team. The BSPB/BirdLife Bulgaria team recorded the first increase in population for 40 years, with 35 occupied EV territories. The success of the EV Reinforcement Programme was presented at the EAZA Conservation Forum. 2024 is the 12th consecutive year for the EV nest guarding campaign in the Eastern Rhodopes, and 14th year of the live EV nest webcam. . Captive-bred EVs bred succesfully in the wild in Bulgaria for the first time. A female named 'Zara' raised one chick and her sister named 'Izi' has successfully bred with a wild male 'Lucky', and raised two chicks. They have now been tagged: this is the first time an entire EV family can be tracked using GPS! Sadly, it's not all good news though, as Ferdinand the EV was electrocuted by an unsecured utility pole. However, an electric company insulated dangerous pylons at a newly established congregation site in South Bulgaria. An article on the EV in the Balkans was published in Ubuntu Magazine, and also features an introduction to the Central Asian Vultures project. Greece welcomes the first EV chick to hatch in Meteora since 2018. A lonely male living there for the past six years finally found a mate, verified by Dr R. Tsiakiris (Forestry Direction of Epirus/West Macedonia), Dr K. Stara (University of Ioannina) and Dr. P. Azmanis (IUCN-VSG/Association of Hellenic Falconry & Conservation of Birds of Prey-AHF). The Hellenic Ornithological Society successfully tagged the chick with a transmitter before fledging. An additional solitary adult was seen 25 km from the known territory. Lastly, an EV breeding pair has returned to Sardinia for their 2024 breeding season. The chick is healthy and has now fledged.

Africa Round-up: *Compiled by Darcy Ogada*

African Vulture SAFE produced a new communications toolkit ahead of IVAD, including guidance for educators and interpreters.

West Africa: In **Benin,** Abiola Sylvestre Chaffra continues research on vultures in fetish markets with support from Hawkwatch International. In Ghana, Samuel Boakye Yiadom is completing his master's thesis on Hooded Vultures (HV) in four urban areas (publication forthcoming). In **Togo,** Linn-Erni Mikégraba Kaboumba and Yendoubouam Kourdjouak continue to monitor slaughterhouses and work with authorities to protect HVs (publication forthcoming). In **Gambia, Guinea-Bissau** and **Senegal** work continues in engaging communities and traditional healers to explore solutions to the use of vulture parts. Similar approaches are being used across the three countries in order to design a robust social marketing strategy. In **Nigeria,** Akinleye Isaac Oyegbami and Mary Oluwaseun Adeyinka are conducting vulture conservation awareness efforts, including a television interview for IVAD. Also a one-day workshop was organised for the southwest representatives of the National Association of Nigeria Traditional Medicine Practitioners (NANTMP). The National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency were also engaged in this workshop. The engagement was aimed at discussing and adopting measures to address the threats contributing to the decline in the vulture population, in particular, addressing the demand for vultures in traditional medicine practice. The workshop highlighted promoting plant-based alternatives as alternatives to vulture bodyparts. Vulture population monitoring was completed in Awka-etiti, a remaining vulture area in SE Nigeria.

East Africa: Kenya launched its 10-year updated action plan for vulture conservation and recovery in September. The plan was led by experts from Kenya Wildlife Service, The Peregrine Fund (TPF), Nature Kenya and National Museums of Kenya. It was endorsed by the VSG. The Coexistence Co-op is a partnership between TPF and Lion Landscapes. TPF's role is conducting community-based Coexistence Trainings, which aim to prevent human-carnivore conflict that can lead to wildlife poisoning incident, focusing on improving livestock husbandry and particularly training people to build improved bomas (livestock corrals). This started in 2018 and the first assessment of the number of improved bomas built by communities revealed a total of 98 in 2019. As of September 2024, communities have built 2000 improved bomas, an average of >300% increase per year. In **Chad,** Djekadjim Djekillamber has received training from Dr. Chaffra and others through an exchange visit and began vulture work at 10 slaughterhouses in N'Djamena. In **Mozambique,** the Endangered Wildlife Trust is now partnered with the Mohamed bin Zayed Raptor Conservation Fund to continue White-headed Vulture (WHV) focused research and conservation

efforts in Gorongosa NP. The team met in the park in July 2024 and successfully deployed GPS units on four WHVs. Park-wide breeding surveys were also conducted. 1259 household interviews were conducted in communities adjacent to PAs in western **Tanzania**, where tagged vultures have been poisoned in links to human-wildlife conflict. North Carolina Zoo (NCZ) and Lion Landscapes (LL) are delivering training to some of these community members in the Hazards of Pesticides to Human Health, Environment and Wildlife, including understanding the ecological value of vultures' ecosystem services, expanding on the work of TPF in **Kenya**. There are now 12 White-backed vultures (WBVs) tagged across Ruaha-Rungwa, **Tanzania** (4 tagged by WCS, 7 tagged by NCZ/LL). Later this year, a further 20 tags will be deployed in southern Tanzania in a collaboration between NCZ, WCS, LL, and Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS). 9 tags (7 WBV, 1 Lappet-faced vulture (LFV) and 1 Rüppell's vulture (RV)) were deployed in northern Tanzania by NCZ in collaboration with TAWIRI, Grumeti Fund and FZS. A mortality alert in NW Serengeti lead to the discovery of a poisoning linked to the trade in vulture parts, resulting in 108 vulture deaths. This is the third known mass poisoning in the Serengeti in the past 2 years (Feb 2023, Feb 2024, June 2024). Research is needed into the demand and markets of the vulture trade in Tanzania and whether it is national or international. Poison response training was conducted by NCZ, hosted and funded by Freidkin Conservation fund, with 29 participants. Tanzanian MSc student Edward Swai will be studying invertebrate scavenger community ecology and its interaction with vertebrate scavengers, particularly vultures. By comparison, **Zambia** has a relatively lower poisoning risk, with no deaths or poisoning events recorded in 2024. NCZ continues to monitor 23 vultures tagged in Kafue, North Luangwa and Victoria Falls. The annual standardised monitoring transects in October will be conducted by BirdWatch Zambia who were trained by a NCZ team in 2023 and will be funded to continue the monitoring in Kafue and expanding to protected areas in Kafue Flats, an important part of the greater Kafue ecosystem.

Southern Africa: In **South Africa,** VulPro has collaborated on the publication of three scientific papers, addressing the effects of lead on avian thermoregulation, the role of tracking data for migratory birds, and the validation of the Lead Care II System for Cape vultures. In partnership with Wild and Free Wildlife Rehab, VulPro rescued 19 White-backed vultures from a poisoning incident in Marloth Park, successfully rehabilitating and releasing 17 of them. Since the beginning of 2024 they have admitted 91 injured birds, with a 37% success rate for release. The expansion of their captive breeding programme has led to a 15.7% increase in breeding pairs compared to 2023. Community outreach efforts included facility tours for over 300 visitors, presentations to 1,700 local schoolchildren, and external talks. It is now possible to view the breeding activities of a BV pair in the Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains of southern Africa, live on Nestflix, thanks to the BV Recovery Programme. Six eggs were harvested by the BV Breeding programme achieving the target of 32 founder stock whose offspring will supply a future reintroduction programme. Belief-based use work in **Zimbabwe**, continued engaging healers in key towns. Market surveys identified stakeholders for education and awareness, journalist meetings in 5 cities/towns. A timely poisoning case, with people caught and arrested selling vulture heads to healers, traders or end-users at a market, helped illustrate the point!

North & Northeast Africa: In January, AAO/BirdLife in **Tunisia** reported an EV held illegally in a zoo in Gafsa (South-East Tunisia) to the Tunisian forestry and wildlife authorities. The bird was confiscated and entrusted to another organisation for recovery and release. A new breeding pair of EV in the Le Kef region (NW Tunisia) returned to its breeding site for the third year. In 2022, the pair successfully raised a chick. Last year, breeding success was uncertain with competition with other birds of prey and common ravens breeding in the same cliff a concern. One RV was tagged with a VCF GPS transmitter at Jbel Moussa, **Morocco** by the Vulture Recovery Centre (CRV Jbel Moussa). The vulture crossed the Gibraltar Strait to Portugal, and was in **Spain** by the end of July.

North American Round-up: *Compiled by Zoey Greenberg*

The California Condor (CC) vaccine trial project for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) is completed and US Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) has begun vaccinating CCs. Condor recovery program partners participated at International Vulture Awareness Day (IVAD) at Lost Angeles Zoo (LAZ) and Santa

Barbara Zoo by providing information to the public on condor recovery and non-lead ammunition through Non-lead.org booth at the LAZ day. Peregrine Fund President and CEO and CC captive propagation specialists gave a talk and Q & A on their long-term experience as participants in the CC recovery program. An update on the CC recovery program can be found here. On September 28th, The Peregrine Fund (PF) in partnership with the Bureau of Land Management and cooperators in the Southwest Condor Working Group released 4 CCs to the wild at Vermilion Cliffs National Monument, AZ on National Public Lands Day. This was the first of 3 fall releases that will add a total of 12 condors to the southwest population. There are a number of additional captive bred CC releases planned for this fall in North America: FWS will release 11 in southern California from Bitter Creek National wildlife refuge, Ventana Wildlife Service and Pinnacles National Park will release 12 in Central CA from their two release sites, the Yurok Tribe will release 7 in Northern CA from their release site, and the Baja field program has released two captive bred juveniles from Chapultepec Zoo. In total, 44 birds will be released in 2024. Four additional captive bred birds will be held back for future captive breeding. The Arizona-Utah population was hit particularly hard in 2023 and early 2024, first by HPAI, then by an unusually high number of lead poisoning deaths. Currently, there are approx. 85 individuals in Arizona and Utah. There are 48 individuals in the Baja California population. Baja's second oldest female passed away at age 24. The cause of her death remains unknown. A 4-year-old wild-hatched condor also died after becoming trapped in the netting of the release pen. No additional CCs have tested positive for HPAI to date. Wild, free flying CCs continue to be vaccinated opportunistically, and all captive-bred pre-release birds will be vaccinated against HPAI prior to release. Lead poisoning continues to represent the highest known cause of mortality in the wild CC population.

Collaborative research involving the US Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Wildlife Services, and National Wildlife Research Center and Purdue University led to a recent publication on scavenging patterns for both American Black Vultures (ABVs) and Turkey Vultures (TVs). Researchers validated the idea that vultures prefer tissues that are easy to access and contain high nutrient contents. Authors also demonstrated that criteria commonly used to identify livestock depredation by ABVs has the potential to only document vulture presence and not livestock predation. Researchers from Mississippi State Univ. (MSU) have studies underway, and several manuscripts submitted for peer review on the movements of translocated ABVs, the microbiome of ABVs, and transmittable diseases. Ongoing work focuses on estimating state-wide population estimates and demographics of ABVs and TVs in Mississippi as well as assessments of landscape features most relevant to their occurrence by season. Recently initiated efforts on trapping and tagging ABVs in Alabama and Tennessee are underway with cooperation and assistance from the USDA and the Tennessee Valley Authority. This work is to gain understanding of vulture distributions in the Tennessee River Valley and develop means to mitigate human-wildlife conflict relative to these birds, utility infrastructure, and public land use. Presentations associated with this work were given to local school groups in celebration of IVAD. Hawk Mountain Sanctuary (HMS) is satellite tracking 13 TVs and 2 ABVs. They monitored 12 ABV nests in Pennsylvania (PA) in 2023; 2 of the nests were in caves (50% success) and 9 were in human-made structures (78% success). Seven ABV nestlings were wing-tagged in 2024. Shaver's Creek Environmental Center in central PA has hosted 4 vulture education events since March including a spring festival celebrating the return of migratory vultures, free weekend programming aimed at increasing conservation action for vultures, and book events related to Vulture, the Private Life of an Unloved Bird by Katie Fallon, with associated IVAD activities.

South & Central America Round-up: *Compiled by Zoey Greenberg & Sergio Lambertucci*

The Fundación Condor Andino (FCA) in **Ecuador** analyzed the influence of carcass size on the species richness and abundance in scavenging assemblages dominated by American Black Vultures (ABVs), Turkey Vultures (TVs), and King Vultures (KVs) in lowland dry forests. They also tagged an Andean Condor (AC) nestling, evaluated the parental care of 3 AC pairs, and systematically monitored at least 8 active AC nests. FCA also conducted a webinar for IVAD including 7 scientific vulture ecology and conservation talks. Parrado et al. 2024 proposed a spatial road map to define where and how to implement conservation actions for AC conservation in **Colombia.** For this they used a systematic planning tool, spatial explicit models and risk areas analysis for the species to define Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs) in Colombia. Their results

suggested that only 30% for PCAs are inside PAs and 30% correspond to medium and high risk because of the human footprint index.

In **Perú,** as part of a project on the ecology and conservation of the AC, a team from the Univ. of San Agustín, Arequipa, conducted surveys in the Sondondo Valley which has the largest AC population in the country. Their aim was twofold: to capture and tag ACs with GPS transmitters, and to obtain information on the cultural perception of the AC. Surveys of AC presence were conducted in the Colca Valley. Biological samples were also collected there for trophic ecology and population genetic studies. TV and ABV samples were also gathered for future genetic analyses.

In **Chile**, 3 rehabilitated ACs were released in Feb 2024 in Patagonia NP and another three are projected to be released in Nov. in the center of the country. All released ACs are equipped with satellite transmitters for permanent monitoring, which is part of a collaborative work between the foundations Filantropía Cortés Solari, Rewilding Chile, and AvesChile. Regular monitoring of the use of landfills by ACs continues, ongoing since 2005. A recent article suggests that Central Chile is a previously unknown nonbreeding area for the migratory population of TVs that breeds in the northwestern Argentine Patagonia. Researchers discovered this by integrating 5 years of satellite-tracking data, citizen science databases, and classical raptor monitoring techniques.

The Center for the Study and Conservation of Birds of Prey in **Argentina** (CECARA) started a national vulture monitoring program last year, with funding from Hawk Mountain Sanctuary (HMS) and the Raptor Research Foundation (RRF). They monitored 16 ABV nests (75% success) in La Pampa, Mendoza and Santa Fe provinces, and wing-tagged 12 fledglings. All nests except two were on human-made structures. They monitored 2 TV nests (50% success), both of them in La Pampa province, and they wing-tagged 2 fledglings. Additionally, they captured and wing-tagged 3 TV adults during this time. This year, they are monitoring 10 ABV active nests. The National Zoo of **Chile**, in collaboration with the AC Foundation of **Ecuador** and the Chilean Condor Research and Conservation Group (GICCA), is leading an important project to rehabilitate and reintroduce an AC found in the Atacama region in May 2024. Originally fitted with a satellite transmitter in **Argentina**, the bird will be relocated to its natural habitat with a new satellite transmitter to continue monitoring its behaviour.

Vanesa Astore, Exec Dir. of the Argentine AC Conservation Program (PCCA), has provided updates on a comprehensive AC conservation plan coordinated by Ecoparque de Bs As and Fundación Bioandina **Argentina** (FBA): This plan is conducted with the support of the 14 provinces with AC distribution in the country, and these teams have been developing the ENCT (National Strategy against the use of Toxic Bait) in Argentina since 2019. This was an initiative declared of federal environmental interest by the Federal Environment Council (COFEMA, Resolution 390/2019). Within the framework of ENCT, emergency intervention kits are delivered with biosecurity elements, sample collection and sanitation for cases of wildlife poisoning; training courses are provided to technicians to operate under a unified action protocol; scientific, cultural and educational exhibitions are generated; toxicological studies are carried out, and an SOS Condor program is carried out to assist in the rescue of AC. Since the inception of ENCT, cases of AC poisoning in Argentina have decreased significantly. 82 births have been recorded through the breeding program. The continuity of the rescue and rehabilitation program has allowed the teams to assist 463 individual ACs, including individuals shot, injured in traps, poisoned by toxic bait, poisoned by lead, or electrocuted. To handle rescues, they work in a network with the country's environmental authorities: the National Gendarmerie, the Rural Police, APN, Aerolíneas Argentinas and with support of national and international institutions.

The PCCA has 4 rescue centers that work in human isolation: Ecoparque Bs As, Bioparque Temaikèn, SOS Acción Salvaje and Fundación Cullunche, where it is possible to care for ACs that require prolonged rehabilitation treatments. Through the breeding and rescue program, 248 ACs have been released in South America. 69 of these were reintroduced, starting in 2003, on the Atlantic coast of Patagonia, where the species was extinct for more than a century. So far 10 births have been recorded. For their study and field

monitoring, the PCCA uses various identification systems that include the application of microchips, radio transmitters and satellite transmission. Considering the enormous flight capacity of the AC, these teams continue to strengthen the SCCN Program (Condor Sanctuaries for the Conservation of Nature), an initiative considered of federal interest by COFEMA (Res. 386/2018), adding protected natural areas, provincial and private, which already make up a biological corridor of 69,184 km2 for conservation. Training courses for park rangers and technicians, simultaneous population censuses and educational programs are also being carried out. Considering the ancestral relationship of the AC with the native cultures, at each stage of the PCCA spiritual leaders are included to carry out millenary ceremonies that consecrate the conservation of the AC.

And finally…

A recent paper tested whether language models can distinguish accurate information from misinformation, sensationalised, or fake content. Using ChatGPT and Microsoft Bing, to fact-check fake news about animals, and particularly vultures they found that the models determined that vultures pose no measurable risk to humans or livestock, whilst some large carnivores are more dangerous to livestock. Such accurate risk assessments/models could help promote coexistence between humans and wildlife.

Do let us know if you receive this newsletter indirectly and wish to be added to the circulation list.
Do please send items for inclusion ahead of the next edition in September. Or submit longer articles to the editor of the VSG journal, Vulture News. Reminder that the VSG's journal *Vulture News* including back copies is available free online – do read it!

Chris Bowden
chris.bowden@rspb.org.uk

Andre Botha
andreb@ewt.org.za

Co-chairs: Vulture Specialist Group, IUCN Species Survival Commission

Editor & Asia: Chris Bowden
African Regional Co-chair: Darcy Ogada
European Regional Co-chairs: José Tavares, Vladimir Dobrev
Latin America Regional Chair: Sergio Lambertucci
North America Co-Chair: Evan Buechley (Americas Compiler: Zoey Greenberg)
Editor Vulture News: Dr Louis Phipps/Volen Arkumarev
VSG Admin/Newsletter Assistant: Cat Taras

Additional newsletter contributions:

A B M Sarowar Alam (Dipu), Nico Arcilla, Şafak Arslan, Panagiotis Azmanis, Ankit Joshi, Krishna Bhusal, Rebecca Bishop, Enrica Calò, Alyona Kaptyonkina, Corinne Kendall, Sonja Krueger, Fadzai Matsvimbo, Rabab Al Lawati, Kerri Wolter, Ibrahim Al Hasani, Mimi Kessler, Claudia Feltrup-Azafzaf.