



Summary updates April 2014 from around the world of vultures & VSG activities

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 focused on Asia where the catastrophic vulture population declines have been shown to be mainly due to this drug, and also on Africa where it had also 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 European Union, and also by SEO and LIPU the respective BirdLife Partners in Spain and Italy, and by the Vulture Conservation Foundation which has been very prominent in coordinating action - see www.4vultures.org/our-work/campaigning-to-ban-diclofenac-in-europe/ There has also been an online petition www.change.org/petitions/janez-poto%C4%8Dnik-european-union-diclofenac-the-vulture-killing-drug-is-now-available-on-eu-market 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 in several South American countries. The news has prompted further vigilance and it now emerges that the drug has also been licensed for veterinary use in Turkey, Serbia and Kazakhstan! Several VSG members have already been heavily involved in preparing information to react to this news.

The Raptors MoU Technical Advisory Group of CMS 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 cooperation 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 continue to escalate with large-scale losses from single incidents having been recorded from Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa in the last 12 months. In an attempt to better coordinate efforts to combat this threat in southern Africa, a workshop will be held near the Etosha National Park in Namibia on the 20th of May 2014. This is part of the 10th Annual Conference of the Birds of Prey Programme of the Endangered Wildlife Trust. Members interested in attending should contact Rebecca Mabuza at rebeccam@ewt.org.za

Asia Roundup – The main progress across South Asia has been that diclofenac levels in cattle carcasses continued to gradually decline, but other untested (for safety to vultures) drugs are increasing. The SAVE consortium met in West Bengal, India in November 2013 and updated priorities and progress www.save-vultures.org/save_latestnews.html#3rdsavereport . It also developed a 'Blueprint for the recovery of threatened Gyps vultures' for the region up to 2025 http://www.save-vultures.org/save_latestnews.html#blueprint . The Regional Steering Committee also met in March 2014 and has now convened national recovery committees for each of the four South Asian countries. It is hoped these will develop national action plans using and developing the new Blueprint document as a basis. Priority actions identified are to establish a safety-testing protocol that links directly to the

licensing of veterinary drugs, as well as seeking a ban of multidose human diclofenac vials which are still being widely abused by vets as the main convenient source of the drug. One outstanding development is the first major vulture project for Bangladesh was initiated in March, funded by World Bank and run by IUCN Bangladesh. Further details and updates on www.save-vultures.org

Americas Roundup [contributed by Sergio Lambertucci & Keith Bildstein] - The Worldwide Raptor conference 20-24 October 2013, in San Carlos de Bariloche, Argentina was attended by 200 delegates representing 30 countries. Round tables included one for the Andean condor populations and significantly a group was created for research and conservation of the species. The first action will be coordinating a survey of much of its range. The Comahue University project since the meeting has tagged 20 Andean condors. In **North America** the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Penn, USA, continued satellite tagging of Turkey Vultures, and in 2013 a family of four birds (meridionalis race) from Saskatchewan, Canada, were tracked to Costa Rica (both juveniles) and Colombia and Venezuela (the adults). Two septentrionalis race tagged in northern Pennsylvania overwintered in peninsula Florida, and six tagged in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona (aura race) overwintered in Arizona, Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and central Panama. More tagging is planned for 2014 for Arizona, Argentina, and Canada. See www.movebank.org. For California condors, lead poisoning remains an ongoing threat to the successful reintroduction programme, and there is a tissue sampling programme from both Turkey and Black Vultures in an effort to monitor this as well as advocacy to address the threat.

Europe Roundup – An International Workshop 7th-11th April 2014 coordinated by Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF) on poison and vultures was held in Ronda (Andalusia, Spain) involving attendees from Ethiopia, Botswana, Kenya, Namibia & 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 - a report will be made available. Andalusian Government data shows 1,490 Griffon vultures of 7,270 fatalities, collided with wind farms in Southern Spain between 1998-2013. There is new 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 (W 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) www.balkanvultures.net/ coordinated by VCF, established its first Griffon vulture breeding pairs at reintroduction sites in Stara Planina Mountain and neighboring 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. See: http://www.habichtskauz.at/hkdb/newsletter_vorschau.php?nlnum=67%3Cbr%20/%3E.

The official journal of the specialist group, **Vulture News**, has recently issued a call for submissions. Articles on all aspects of vulture research, conservation, observation and commentary are welcome. Please contact the editor - Campbell Murn campbell@hawkconservancy.org – to either submit your article or discuss a potential submission. Specifically, the second edition of the journal for 2014 will be a special issue on Hooded Vultures. Potential contributors of articles on this species are requested to contact Campbell quickly. The ambitious project of making all previous editions of Vulture News available online and open access is still in progress, and we hope to make major progress on this during 2014. Finally, the journal is 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.

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