



Summary updates April 2015 from around the world of vultures & VSG activities

The 6th September 2014 saw the celebration of the 6th **International Vulture Awareness Day** with 28 countries and 160 organisations registering on the event's website www.vultureday.org and working towards creating greater awareness of these birds and the challenges they face. More details on activities of the individual partners can be found on the website. [Start planning your 2015 events now!](#)

The second meeting of the CMS Raptors MoU Technical Advisory Group took place in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. from 16th-19th March 2015. Most significantly, a special Working Group was established for the conservation of vultures across the Africa-Eurasian flyway. It will focus on coordinating and promoting the conservation, monitoring, research and awareness-raising.. A particular objective of the group was to forge closer working ties with the IUCN SSC VSG and its members.

Diclofenac in Europe – As requested by the European Commission, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) published their long-awaited technical position on the vulture-killing drug diclofenac in December – they confirm that veterinary diclofenac represents a real risk to European vultures, and therefore that a number of risk management measures should be taken to avoid the poisoning of vultures, including more regulation, veterinary controls, better labeling and information and/or a ban of the drug. The EMA's remit and position recognises that only a ban reduces the risks to zero, but it is now up to the EU Commission to decide whether they will start a formal referral process and it seems likely that action may only come after dead vultures are found in the field conclusively poisoned by diclofenac. Veterinary diclofenac is already approved for sale in 5 EU countries, including Italy and crucially Spain, which holds 90% of all European vultures. It is marketed by the Italian company FATRO, which used loopholes in the EU risk assessment guidelines for veterinary drugs to get it approved in Italy and Spain, in spite of the solid body of evidence about its impacts on vultures and other wildlife. The Spanish Govt. also held a meeting with Local Govts and conservation community experts which resulted in a detailed internal report that concluded that risks are lower than in Asia and that the EMA position should be adhered to. Diclofenac already caused catastrophic declines of three resident South Asian vulture species, including 99.9% decline of *Gyps bengalensis* previously thought to be the most abundant large raptor in the world. See [#banvetdiclofenac!](#) www.4vultures.org and www.birdlife.org for updates etc. (Note VSG prompted high level letters from IUCN's SSC to EU Commissioners highlighting this topic)

Windfarms: A major increase in windfarm proposals is underway particularly across Asia, Africa and the Middle East which is likely to affect vulture populations. There is an immediate need to refine the pre and post construction impact studies to minimise the potential effects for vultures of wind farms.

Africa: A Workshop about vultures in **South Africa** took place on 6th-7th Nov 2014 at VulPro facilities near Pretoria. There was also a workshop for the Bearded Vulture South African group. A national action planning workshop took place in Harare, **Zimbabwe** on the 26th and 27th March 2015. Earlier in 2014 (March), based on a review of various documents the BirdLife Africa Partnership Secretariat, a draft "Action framework for vultures in Africa" was shared and since then 14 African national BirdLife Partners have indicated that vultures are part of their planned activities and priorities, reflecting growing international awareness and concern for Africa's vultures and growing momentum for addressing this. At the CMS meeting, plans for a second Pan African Vulture Summit were put forward which will hopefully take place in **Senegal** Oct 2016 linked to the Pan African Orn. Congress.

Asia: The SAVE consortium met in Dhaka, **Bangladesh** in November 2014, updating the new 'Blueprint' Recovery Plan document and the report with updated priorities and version of the Blueprint is available under latest news: www.save-vultures.org The meeting was notable in that the Chief Guest, Bangladesh Finance Minister endorsed SAVE priorities, and most notably the banning of ketoprofen. The first Vulture Safe Zone was also formally recognised by Govt. at the meeting.

In **India**, the eagerly awaited ban of multidose vials of human diclofenac is apparently close but has not yet come through. The need for vulture safety-testing of all similar (NSAID) veterinary products is also something that has become top priority and final approval/funding from the Indian Government is eagerly awaited. Conservation breeding figures for the Endangered Gyps species were again up on previous years in India (over 120 have now been raised in total), and there was the first successful fledgling for **Nepal**. First releases back to the wild are tentatively planned for 2016. Three acute poisoning events in Assam already in 2015 is a worrying sign that such poisoning aimed at large carnivores/dogs is also a growing issue in Asia. Further details and updates on www.save-vultures.org

Europe: See diclofenac heading above. Annual Meeting of the Vulture Group "Groupe Vautour" took place in the pre Alpes (Baronnies), **France** 24th-26th October 2014. Also in France, IBM annual meeting of the Bearded Vulture reintroduction and Monitoring programme took place 8th-9th Oct 2014. A national Action Plan for Egyptian Vulture was produced for France Mar 2015, and an international action plan for this species will be an output of a meeting to be held in **Bulgaria** in July as part of the LIFE+ project there. A paper was published on the first case of a Eurasian Griffon found in Southern **Spain** apparently dying because NSAID (Flunixin) showing similar symptoms to diclofenac poisoning.

Americas: the South American Andean Condor Conference will take place in coming weeks. Annual trapping and testing of California Condors from the Arizona and Utah flock revealed a substantial decrease in the percentage of birds with toxic blood-lead levels, the lowest in nearly a decade. The decline is a significant improvement over the previous year, which was the second worst year on record for lead exposure and condor deaths since reintroduction in Arizona began in 1996. Results (Sept 2013-Feb 2014) show 16% of birds trapped and tested revealed blood-lead levels indicating extreme exposure, compared with 42% of birds the previous season, & the number of birds treated with lead-reducing chelation therapy was just 11 birds, compared with 28 the previous season.

Utah recorded its first wild-hatched California Condor chick in 2014, being raised by an adult pair in a nest cave in Zion National Park - it was found by following radio and Global Positioning System signals from transmitters mounted on the chick's parents.

Volume 66 of **Vulture News** was published in July 2014 and contains articles on topics such as vultures and lightning-struck carcasses, urban development and vultures in El Salvador and the principle of subspecies in vultures. The contents list and individual articles are available from the editor, Campbell Murn campbell@hawkconservancy.org who will also be pleased to receive submissions for the journal and for offers to act as South Asia correspondent (duties are primarily to solicit appropriate material from the region). Vulture News also warmly welcomes Dr Darcy Ogada as Associate Editor. A new online presence and information portal for the journal incorporating open access of all archived and future volumes is currently under development. We look forward to Vulture News being completely accessible to all readers sometime in 2015.

Chris Bowden

Andre Botha

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

chris.bowden@rspb.org.uk

andreb@ewt.org.za

African Regional Co-chairs: Munir Virani, Kariuki Ndangamba

European Regional Co-chairs: Alvaro Camina, Jose Tavares

Additional contributions: Rick Watson