Vulture Specialist Group *IUCN Species Survival Commission*

Vulture Newsletter No 6. - March 2017 - Around the World of Vultures & VSG activities

Updates dominated by the latest on the CMS Multi-Species Action plan, the related Europe, Africa, Asia & Middle East meetings, NSAIDs Alert and SAVE meetings in South Asia and much more.

The CMS Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Old World Vultures (Vulture MsAP): The first draft was distributed to the MsAP Steering Committee and the Raptors MoU Technical Advisory Group in late January 2017. This followed three regional workshops involving more than 175 vulture experts, many of them members of the VSG, which were held in Dakar, Senegal (Africa), Monfrague, Spain (Europe and Central Asia) and Mumbai, India (Asia). The final regional workshop (Middle East) was held in Sharjah, UAE in early February and this was immediately followed by an Overarching Workshop in Toledo, Spain the week after. The overarching meeting took the process to planning the implementation of the MsAP and to resource mobilisation and ensuring the engagement with the range-state governments for implementation. Following these workshops, and incorporating feedback, a second draft MsAP was distributed in March for 30 days public consultation and this is now available on the CMS Raptors MoU website – Please read and SEND COMMENTS to andreb@ewt.org.za by 16 April. Following this, a final draft will be submitted to the CMS Scientific Council for consideration in May, after which it will be published on the COP12 website and considered for adoption in Manila in the Philippines in October 2017. Once adopted, the real challenge begins in terms of implementation of the plan across all 124 range states. We hope and expect all VSG members (at least those in the old world) will proactively participate in commenting, as well as the many who participated in person at the meetings.

The **Flyway Action Plan** (in English, Russian, French) for the Conservation of the Balkan and Central Asian Populations of the **Egyptian Vulture (EVFAP)** went out for public consultation late January and is now being updated for finalising. This process and document is one of the key building blocks for the MsAP.

African roundup:

The CMS Africa Regional MsAP workshop (which incorporated the second Pan African meeting) took place from 18–21 October 2016 in Dakar, Senegal. A total of 45 participants from 28 countries (19 African countries) from the four regions, North, East, South and West were represented. Representation was therefore distinctly wider than at the previous (PAVS) meeting. Central Africa was the biggest remaining gap. Participants were from a range of research institutions, Universities, NGO's and Government. The workshop was facilitated by Chris Bowden, and the main focus was identifying and prioritising the major threats facing all African vultures and although the outputs are incorporated within the draft document, they are also available as an Africa report (see above).
Predicting vulture strongholds: Predictive models for all ten African species are nearing completion for a project led by Alterra, Wageningen University, involving many collaborators with the modelling component undertaken by 'Habitat Info'. The modelling layers will include habitat suitability, threats and vulture distribution. Maps generated by this project will be incorporated to the MsAP.
Indigenous Vulture Monitoring Project, Ghana: The first phase of this project led by Justus Deikumah has recently concluded. The project increased awareness and education about vultures, recorded baseline data on populations, and identified threats particularly to Hooded Vultures. The team conducted several public seminars and training workshops, including many radio and TV

awareness programmes. Future plans include using tracking units to study range expansion and movements of Hooded and White-backed vultures.
Zambia piloting Vulture Safe Zones: BirdWatch Zambia is adapting the Vulture Safe Zone concept (from South Asia) to provide safe havens for vultures from the relevant threats in Zambia. Engagement with land owners of five farms located within the Chisamba IBA is a key element and through this, securing 15,000ha where food sources are safe for vultures. More details: Here.
VulPro a short documentary was produced and made available.
Ten vultures (9 White-backed & 1 White-headed) were tagged in **Tanzania** in 2016 (by WCS & N Carolina Zoo) along with population montoring in Katavi and Ruaha National Park. In 2017 an awareness-raising campaign in southern Tanzania begins plus refresher training for rangers in poisoning intervention.
Vulture migration monitoring 2016 in Morocco: A raptor census was coordinated during the northwards migration period on the southern shore of the Strait of Gibraltar, Morocco. Over 24000 raptors were counted, of which over 2800 were four vulture speies: Rüppell's, Griffon, Cinereous and Egyptian. The census results have been published online by GREPOM member Rachid El Khamlichi.
Poisoning training in Botswana, Zimbabwe and Kenya: In an effort to tackle the recognised priority threat of poisoning in East & Southern Africa, Fondation Segre launched a training programme in January 2016 and has a second phase in 2017. The project covers Chobe District in Botswana, Masai Mara in Kenya and Hwange NP in Zimbabwe. The trainings aims to effectively set a response protocol in place to deal with illegal wildlife poisoning incidents. Workshops included reviewing the local poisoning context, policy and legislation, protocols and a practical session to demonstrate how to handle a poisoning crime scene. The most recent sessions took place in Kenya14-17 November, in the Masai Mara, bringing together 32 institutions, and 37 participants. It was organised in collaboration with Mara Lions, The Peregrine Fund, Endangered Wildlife Trust, BirdLife International and Nature Kenya. More details: here.

Asian roundup:

The **MsAP regional meeting for Asia** was held in Mumbai immediately after the SAVE meeting in November. As with the other regional workshops, the main focus was on identifying threats, and broadened the remit on all nine species from the focus on the Critically Endangered Gyps vultures already covered by SAVE, and also including a wider array of countries (from Iran to Thailand, China and Cambodia). The outputs are incorporated to the main MsAP document.
The 6th **Annual SAVE meeting** (November 27-28) stepped up a gear on tackling the NSAIDs issues, devoting a full day to an 'NSAIDs Alert Symposium', which, significantly, was attended by senior drug authorities officials of Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Dossiers have been compiled for four toxic veterinary NSAIDs by SAVE and were released at the meeting Attendance was slightly higher than previous meetings, and included six delegates by live Skype link from Pakistan. The Blueprint action plan was updated together with the SAVE priorities, which were separated for South Asia and South East Asia. The report and updated Blueprint can be downloaded.
The **release programme for endangered species in India** has been held up by satellite tagging permissions, although these seem set to go ahead in the near future.
In **Nepal,** however, the release plans for six female white-rumped vultures from the breeding centre have been formally approved by Government and tagging permissions are now in place, including for tagging some wild birds. This is set to go ahead in the very near future.
In **Bangladesh,** the Government has taken exemplary steps banning aceclofenac and ketoprofen from both Vulture Safe Zones, with Health Ministry action to implement this in January. It is hoped this will develop into a National measure for wider replication in the neighbouring countries.

Middle East: Four Egyptian Vultures (2 adult, 2 subadult) Ptt (tagged by Environment Agency, Abu Dhabi) around Jebel Hafeet in Al Ain. have occasionally cross into nearby Oman, but none has so far shown any long distance movement.

European roundup:
Cinereous vulture: The Andalucía action plan was made public in September by the regional government of Andalucía and in December, **7** rehabilitated birds, were handed to the Vulture Conservation Foundation for release in the reintroduction project in France.
By January, a total of 7 **griffon vultures** – (4 adults, 3 juveniles) - and 11 black vultures had been fitted with Ptts in the last few months by the LIFE Re Vultures team, to study their dispersal and movements, and identify threats.
The results of the exhaustive breeding census of **Egyptian vultures** in the transboundary Douro canyon – from 2016 by teams from the ICNF, the Portuguese nature conservation agency, and from the Arribes del Duero Natural Park, revealed that there are 135 pairs of Egyptian vultures along the International Douro and its tributaries. Also, the survey of Egyptian vulture in France for 2016 was published by Erick Kobierzycki, who is responsible for the Pyrenees action plan for the species, coordinated by LPO.
In Spain, the first ever **bearded vulture** since their extinction in the mid 1980s has hatched in the wild in Andalusia in January. Also, breeding has begun in the National Park of Picos de Europa (Asturias), after a 50 years' absence. The pair – a wild bird of Pyrenean origin and another one reintroduced locally, is now incubating.
Poisoning documented in Portugal: As part of the LIFE RUPIS project, the Portuguese nature conservation agency (ICNF) compiled all known cases of poisoning that occurred in the Portuguese side of the transboundary protected area between 1994 and the present (area covered 95,000ha).

Americas roundup:

North America: During the 2016 breeding season, The Peregrine Fund suspected three **California Condor** nests with chicks in the northern Arizona and southern Utah region. Two of the three nests could be visually inspected, but the third was located too deep into the Grand Canyon to be able to see - but the parent pair's behaviour gave good indication that they were tending a chick. Of the two visually monitored nests, one, located at Vermilion Cliffs National Monument in Arizona, fledged a chick that was later captured, vaccinated, and tagged. The other nest, located in Zion National Park in Utah, had a healthy chick, but unfortunately the chick disappeared without trace after a particularly bad storm. The annual trapping season is just finishing, checking the health and lead levels of each bird trapped. The next public release of California Condors at Vermilion Cliffs National Monument is scheduled for National Public Lands Day, September 30, 2017 -details will be online here over the coming months.

South America: No major events or updates reported since the last newsletter

Do let us know if you receive this newsletter indirectly and would like to be added to the mailing list, and send us any potential contributions for the next one before 30th September. Finally a reminder to plan and register your 3 September 2017 **IVAD** events, however great or small!

Chris Bowden
chris.bowden@rspb.org.uk

Andre Botha
andreb@ewt.org.za

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

African Regional Co-chairs: Darcy Ogada, Masumi Gudka
European Regional Co-chair: Jose Tavares
Latin America Regional Co-chair: Sergio Lambertucci
Editor Vulture News: Campbell Murn
Additional contributions: Lesley Jerome (VSG Admin assistant), Kerri Wolter, Rick Watson, Chris Parish, Shahid Bashir Khan.