

# Status, research and conservation of vultures in Oman

**Dr Mike McGrady**  
Raptor Biologist

**Vulture Multi-species Action Plan**

# Acknowledgements

- ESO
- MECA
- Shell Oman
- Shell Marketing Oman
- Greater Los Angeles Zoo Association
- International Avian Research
- Sultan Qaboos University
- Volunteers



International  
Avian Research



Vulture Multi-species Action Plan

# Vultures in Oman

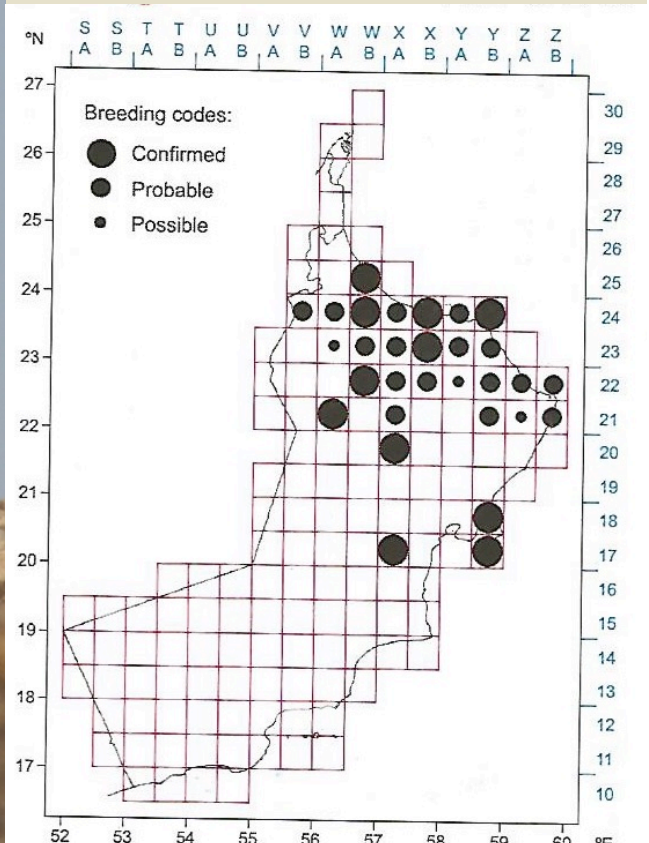


- Four species
  - Egyptian vulture (resident and visitors from farther north, EN)
  - Lappet faced vulture (resident, EN)
  - Eurasian griffon (occasional winter visitor, LC)
  - Cinereous vulture (occasional winter visitor, NT)
- Oman is a stronghold\* for Egyptian vulture and Lappet faced vulture



Vul

lan





# Status - Egyptian vulture



- Seemingly “healthy” resident population of unknown size. Apparently more than published estimates. Population trend unknown.
  - 12 pairs on Masirah (Griffiths & Rogers 1975, Rogers 1988). 65-80 pairs on the island, 260 - 386 individuals (Angelov et al. 2013)
  - 100 pairs nationwide (Jennings 2010).
- Reproductive rates largely unknown, except single year on Masirah (Angelov et al. 2013).
  - Laid between October and March (n=25), possibly at other times. Mostly January and February.
  - 0.46 fledglings/occupied territory, 0.82 fledglings/breeding pair, and 1.13 fledglings/successful pair. Juveniles seen during summer in northern Oman.
- Large wintering population... thousands
- Poor public image

## Status - Lappet-faced vulture

- Unknown population size.
- Probably declining (moderate?).
- Perhaps 6-10 nest sites recorded, some produced chicks recently.
- Records of 30+ birds in north central Oman in winter, also 30+ birds near Salah.
- Perhaps some new data from survey on Golden Eagles.

## Status - Lappet-faced vulture

- Unknown population size.
- Probably declining (moderate?).
- Perhaps 6-10 nest sites recorded, some produced chicks recently.
- Records of 30+ birds in north central Oman in winter, also 30+ birds near Salah.
- Perhaps some new data from survey on Golden Eagles.



# Oman as a vulture stronghold\*

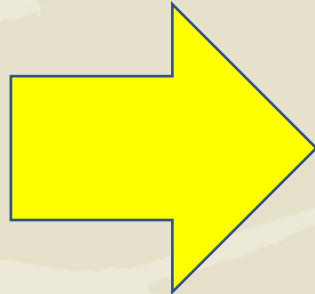
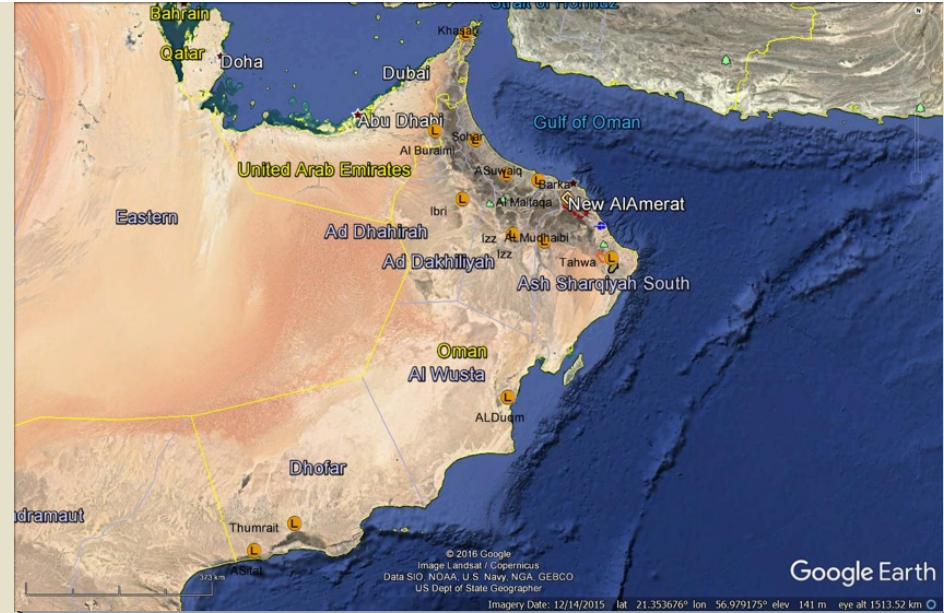
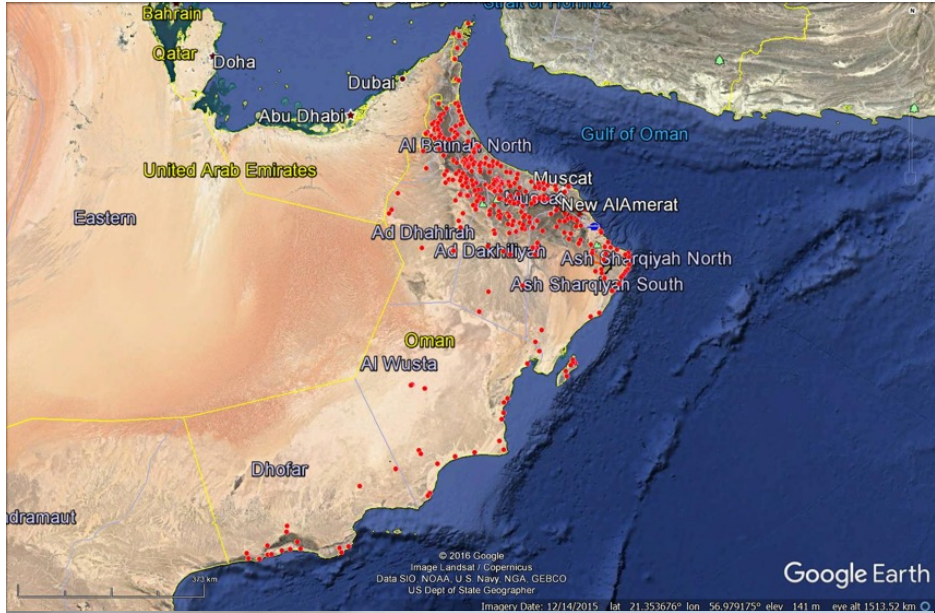
- A relative “stronghold” for breeding Egyptian and Lappet-faced vultures.
- Relatively safe wintering area for northern Egyptian vultures and other migratory scavenging birds, most of which are also of conservation concern.
- Safe dwelling area for sub-adult migratory Egyptian vulture.



# Threats to vultures in Oman

- Electrocutions
- Accidental poisonings
- Low-level persecution
- \*changing waste management





speci

# Research in Oman



- Angelov, I., Yotsova, T., Sarrouf, M. & McGrady, M. J. 2013. **Large increase of the Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* population on Masirah Island, Oman.** *Sandgrouse* 33: 140-152.
- Al Fazari, W. A. & McGrady, M.J. 2016. **Counts of Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* and other avian scavengers at Muscat's municipal landfill, Oman, November 2013–March 2015.** *Sandgrouse* 38: 99-105.
- Al Bulushi, A., Al Harthi, S., Al Farsi, G., Al Araimi, J., Al Humaidi, J. 2013. **Apparent increases in Egyptian vulture populations in the Sultanate of Oman.** *Phoenix*.
- ESO supported counts at rubbish dumps in northern Oman.
- Tracking of scavenging birds via satellite. <http://egyptianvultureoman.blogspot.co.at/>

Vulture Multi-species Action Plan

# Angelov et al. (2013)

## ESO gets grant to research vultures on Masirah Island



By A Staff Reporter

MUSCAT — The Environment Society of Oman was recently awarded the Hima Fund to conduct a research project on the Egyptian vulture in Oman.

Hima Fund is a regional fund, established to provide grants to conserve important Bird Areas (IBAs) in the Middle East. Hima is a traditional system of land designation and customary practice and aims for the protection of land, and the sustainable use of natural resources by the local communities.

Masirah Island has been designated an IBA in 2001 and is home to numerous bird species, both resident and migratory. The island is an important site for wintering and migrating waterbirds in the Middle East.

The Egyptian Vulture or *Neophron percnopterus*, is believed to be an abundant passage migrant and winter visitor to Oman and the Island, and a resident over the summer season.

It is listed as an endangered species on the IUCN Red List (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) and is a priority for conservation work.

Despite its delicate status, no studies have ever been

conducted on that species in Oman.

For that purpose, the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) teamed up with experts from the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB) to survey the Egyptian vulture population on Masirah Island.

The survey will identify the number of vultures and breeding pairs, count the number of nests and estimate the incubation success in each nest. Surveys will also be conducted around the dumpsites of Muscat which represents a main feeding area for the bird.

Besides the scientific aspect of the project, a questionnaire will also be conducted with local communities to identify the main threats facing the bird, typically being electrocution, intoxication and hunting.

Through this project, carried for a period of 11 months, the society will seek to understand the status of the existing Egyptian vultures population in Oman to support any conservation action.

Few challenges are expected to be faced throughout the project as 'the bird is not very popular on the Island of Masirah as its local name, Al Rakhma, is often used as an offense among the local population' says project manager Maia Sarrouf.



# Angelov et al. (2013)



## Egyptian vultures thrive on Masirah Island: Study

Staff Reporter

OMAN TRIBUNE

**MUSCAT** Preliminary findings from a study conducted by the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) about the Egyptian vulture population in Oman show that the endangered species is flourishing on Masirah Island. The first-of-its-kind study programme in Oman, which started in February, includes three field surveys to gather previously unavailable information on the population of the Egyptian vulture.

The preliminary results, taken from the first two field surveys in February and May in Masirah, show the species is flourishing on the island. A total of 52 occupied breeding territories – or nests – were found, most of them north of the island on high cliffs within a 10km range of the municipal dump, a preferred habitat for the scavenger species. The study recorded 39 pairs with measured breeding success, raising expectations for the island colony.

"The initial results show there is hope for the endangered species in the habitat provided for them on Masirah," Maia Sarrouf, project manager, ESO, said. "The third stage of the study in October will examine their population in more detail. We are expanding field studies to around 10 dump sites around Muscat. This is an encouraging beginning, but there is work to be done. The next stages will suggest conservation measures and ways to raise local knowledge and awareness on the bird."

Bulgarian ornithologist Ivaylo Angelov, a consultant for ESO on the study, said, "Just 20,000-30,000 Egyptian vultures are left in the world today, and the species has seen significant decline in Europe, West Africa and India. As scavengers, vultures prey on dead animals which can make them susceptible to poisoning, although shooting and electrocution are also causes for its decline. The study gives a great start to a wider programme of work to record this Omani population."



- 65-80 Egyptian vulture pairs on the island (> 4x previous estimate)
- 260 - 386 individuals
- Distributed across the island, but mostly in the north.
- Second most densely populated area in the world!

Al Fazari & McGrady (2016)

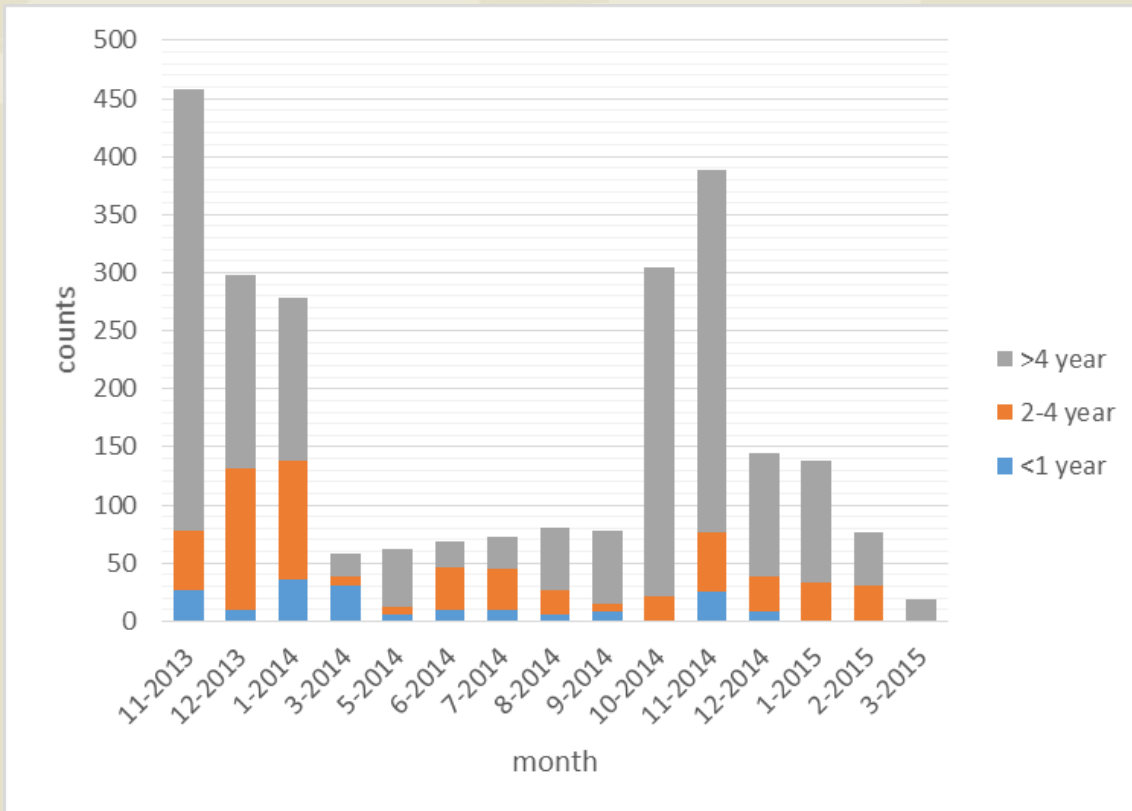


Vulture Multi-spec





# Al Fazari & McGrady (2016)



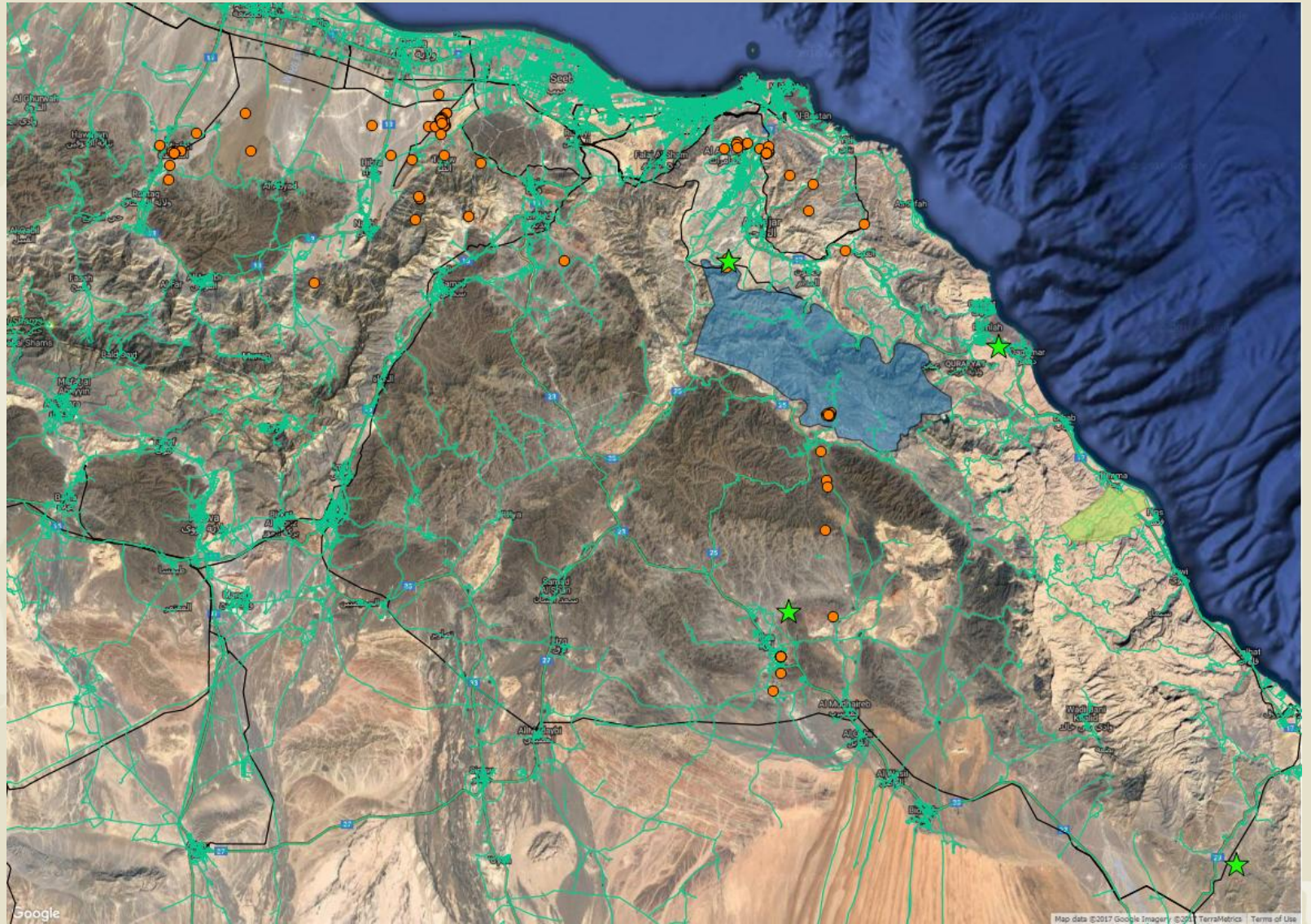
- Maximum of 458 Egyptian Vultures
- On average 216 in winter and 72 during summer
- Adults were most common age class, comprising on average 67% of all vultures.
- Upgrades in waste disposal in Oman need not have a negative impact on scavenging birds.
- Government and waste management companies can play a significant role in conserving scavenging birds while realizing human health benefits of improved waste disposal.

# Satellite radio tracking (2015-



143581

10 Jan -4 Feb 2015



Vulture

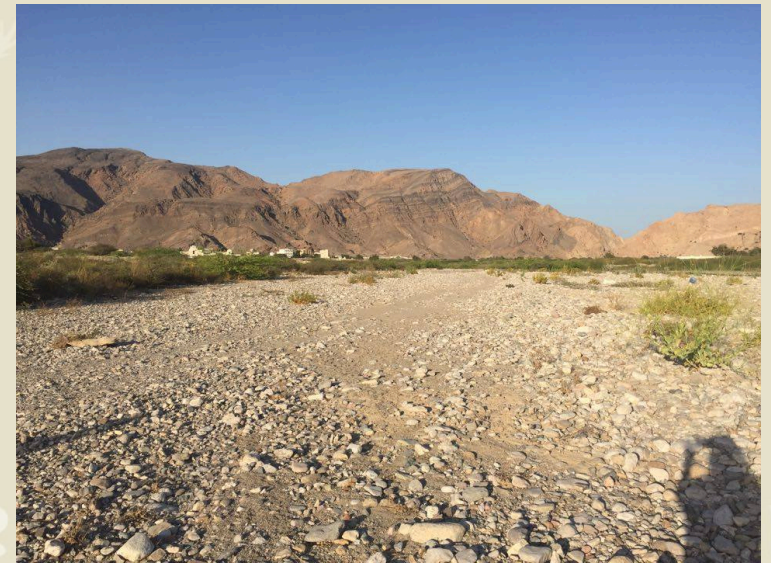




# Vulture Multi-species Action Plan







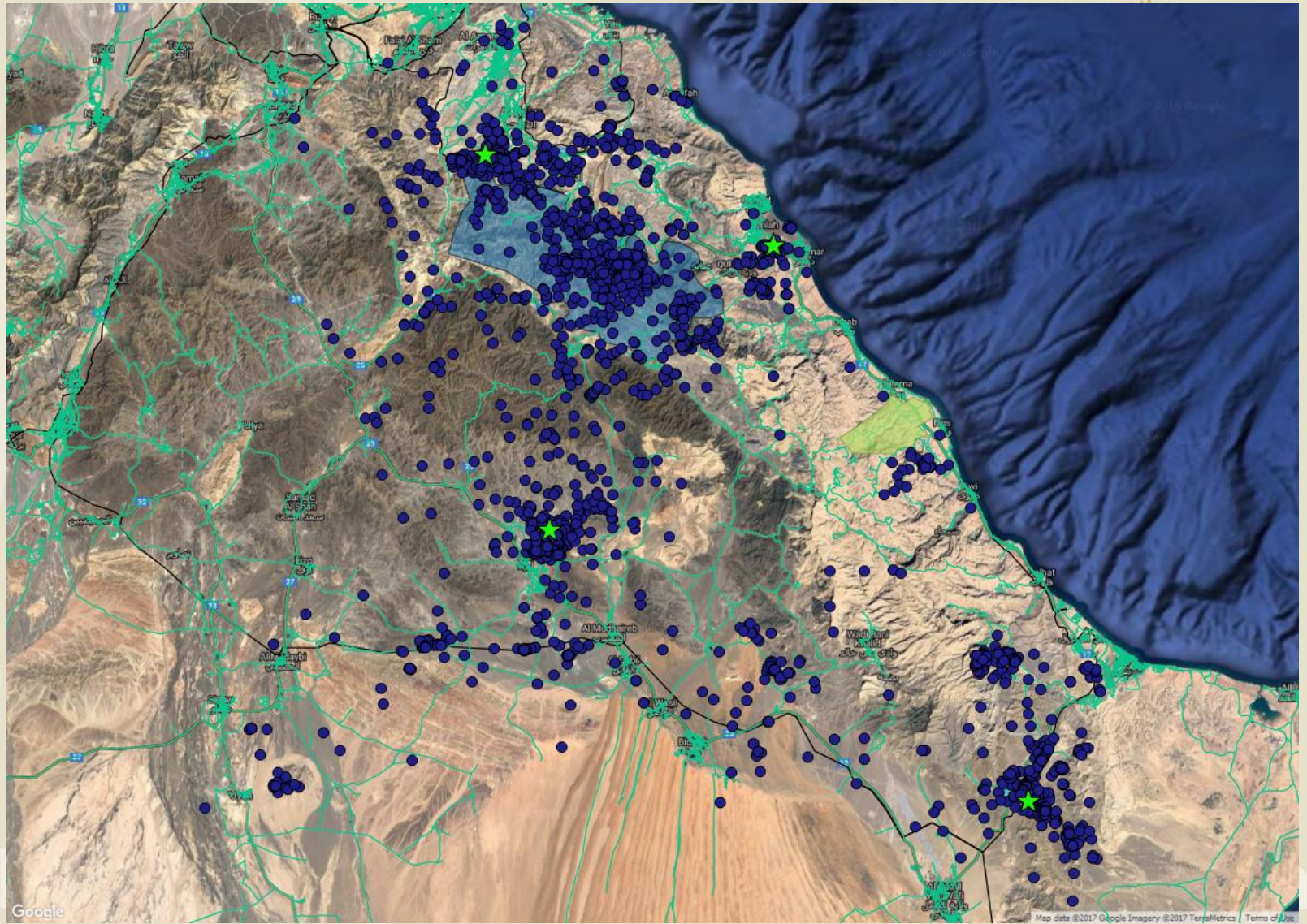
Vulture Multi-specie

n



80

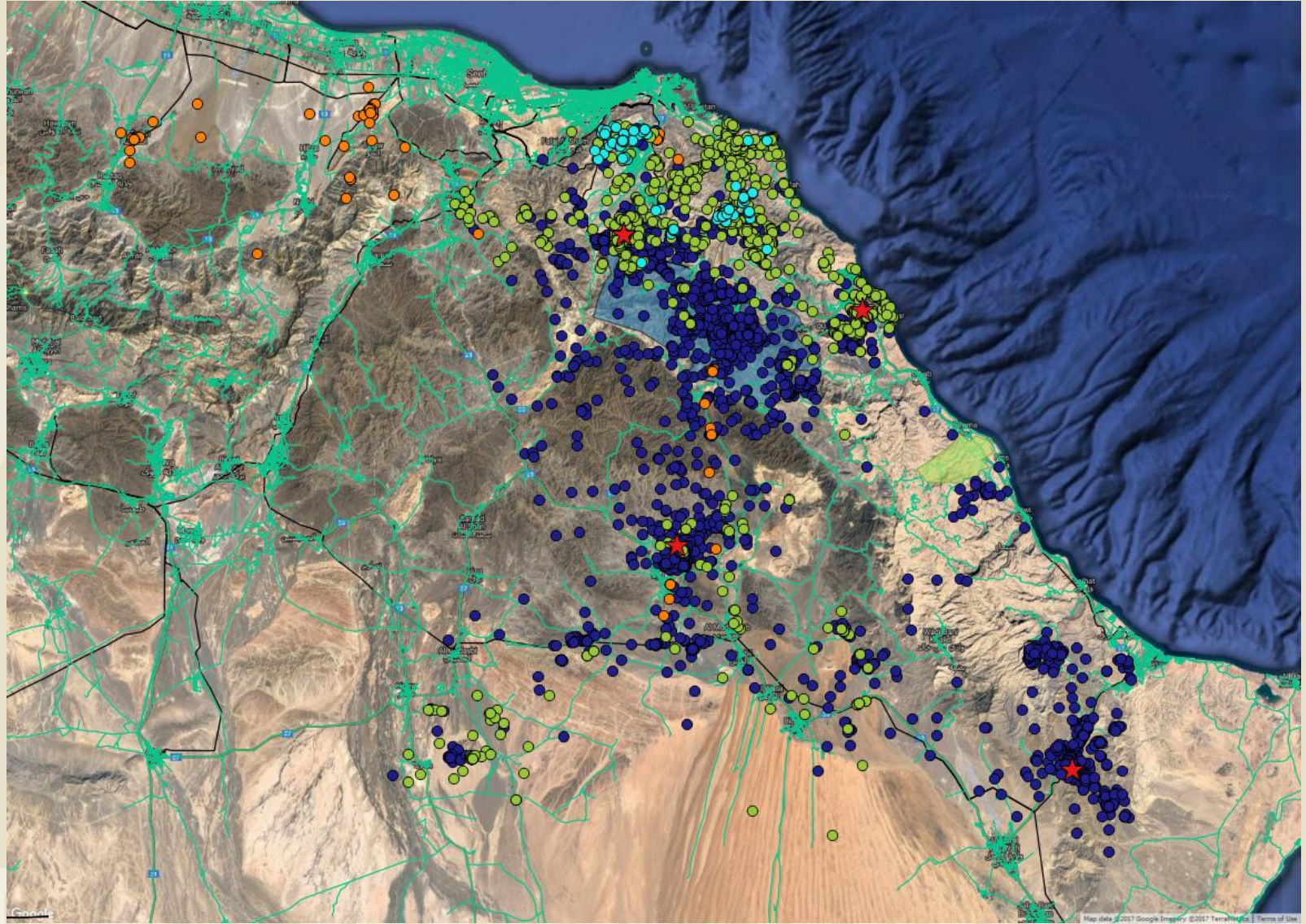
11 Jan – 31 Dec  
2016



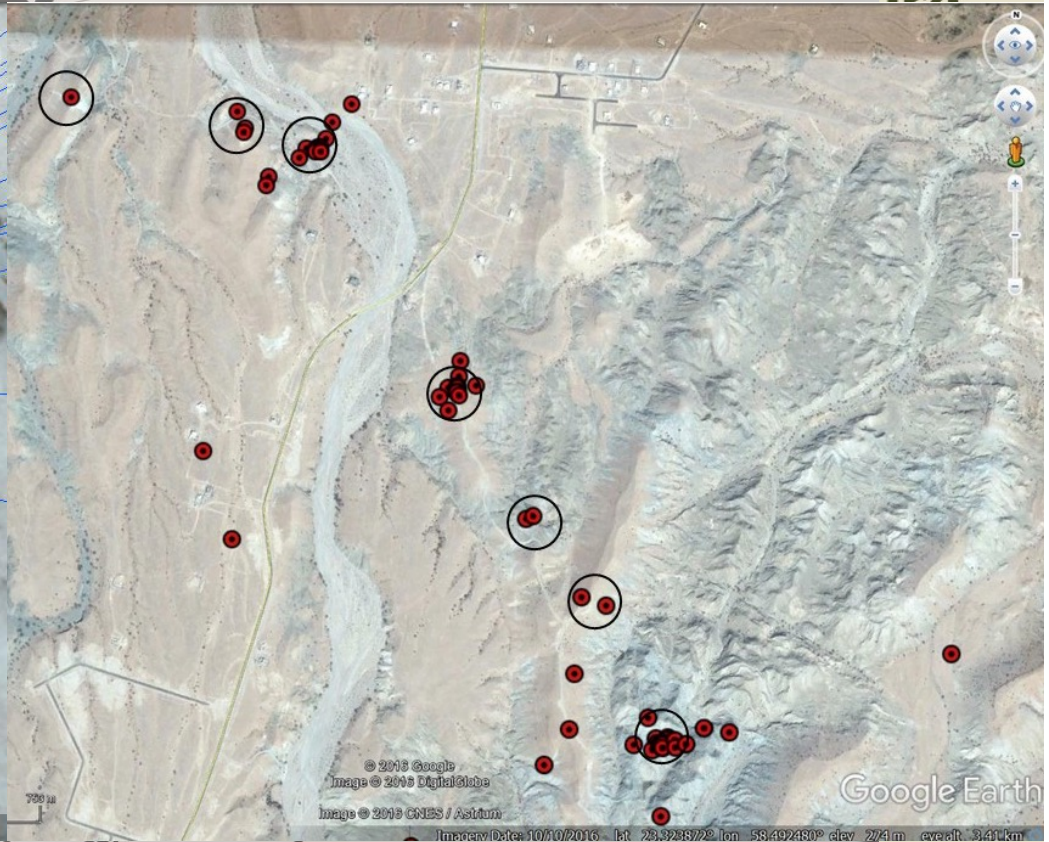
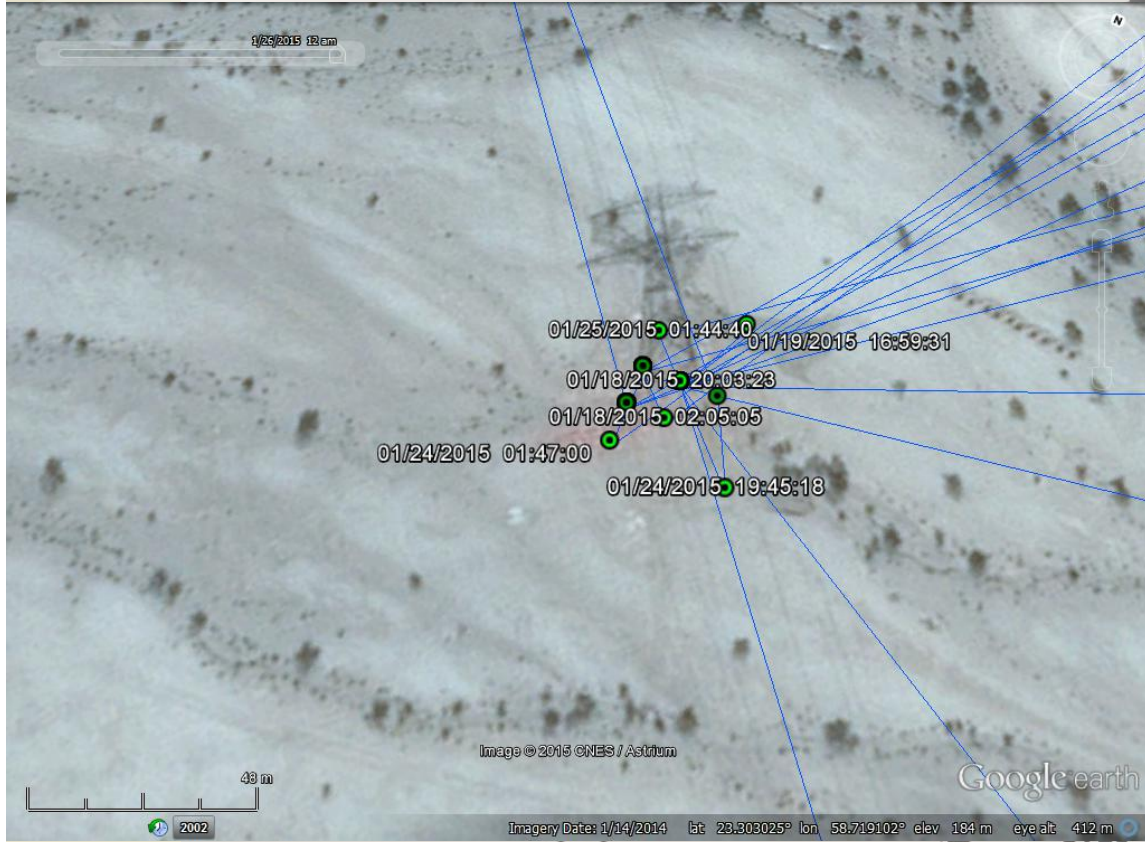
Vulture

# 4 vultures

2-2015  
2-2016



Vulture

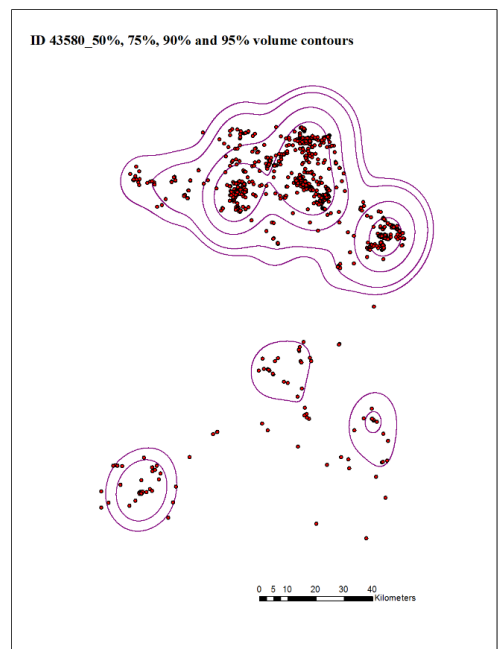




# Vulture Multi-species Action Plan

# What next?

- Tracking of more scavenging birds
- Analyses of the data from tracked birds
  - Rubbish dumps
  - Electricity infrastructure
- Data from electricity companies on incidents
- Possible outcomes
  - Sensitivity map for vultures as a tool for conservation
  - Advice to electricity companies
    - Prioritize high risk areas for remedial action
    - Cost-effective solutions for existing and new power lines
  - Understanding effects of improving waste management
- Develop vulture restaurants



Vulture Multi-species Act



Thank you

Thank you

Thank you

Thank you

Where's the food?