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REPORT FROM THE COORDINATING UNIT OF THE RAPTORS MOU ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COP12 RESOLUTION AND DECISIONS ON THE CONSERVATION OF AFRICAN-EURASIAN VULTURES

(Prepared by the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU)

Summary

CMS Resolution 11.14 on the Programme of Work on Migratory Birds and Flyways established a mandate to develop a conservation action plan for all African-Eurasian Vultures under the auspices of the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU. The Multi-Species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures (Vulture MsAP) was developed in the triennium following COP11 (November 2014) and subsequently adopted at CMS COP12 in October 2017 by means of CMS Resolution 12.10.

The present document reports on developments since the 3rd Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council (ScC-SC3) held in May/June 2018, fulfilling a requirement of CMS Decision 12.39.

REPORT FROM THE COORDINATING UNIT OF THE RAPTORS MOU ON IMPLEMENTATION OF COP12 RESOLUTION AND DECISIONS ON THE CONSERVATION OF AFRICAN-EURASIAN VULTURES

Background

1. CMS Resolution 11.14 on the *Programme of Work on Migratory Birds and Flyways* established a mandate to develop a conservation action plan for all African-Eurasian Vultures (except Palm-nut Vulture (*Gypohierax angolensis*)), under the auspices of the Coordinating Unit of the CMS Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia (Raptors MOU). The [Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures](#) (Vulture MsAP) was developed in the triennium following COP11 (November 2014) and subsequently adopted at CMS COP12 in October 2017 by means of [CMS Resolution 12.10](#).
2. According to CMS Decision 12.39, '[t]he Secretariat, through the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors Memorandum of Understanding, shall report to the next Meeting of Signatories of the CMS Raptors Memorandum of Understanding and subsequent meetings of the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council'. This report fulfils this requirement.
3. Operational paragraph 5 of Resolution 12.10 '[r]equests the Secretariat, through the Coordinating Unit of Raptors MOU, to facilitate continuation of the Vulture Working Group and its associated structures (Vulture Steering Group and proposed Regional Implementation Committees) and team of coordinators, including by continuing to encourage engagement, communication, cooperation and collaboration between the stakeholders, by means of (regional) meetings and workshops, subject to the availability of funds'. The Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU has undertaken a number of key actions to promote and facilitate resource mobilization for the implementation of the Vulture MsAP (see Annex I). However, to date, funding has not been forthcoming from CMS Parties but is urgently required to support these coordination roles.
4. As an interim measure, the organizations (mentioned below) that hosted the five coordinators during the preparation of the Vulture MsAP generously agreed to continue to support these roles on a voluntary basis, but obviously with significantly reduced capacity. Accordingly, André Botha (Endangered Wildlife - Trust South Africa) continued as Acting Overarching Coordinator; Jovan Andevski (Vulture Conservation Foundation) continued as Acting Coordinator for Europe and Central Asia; Chris Bowden (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) continued as Acting Regional Coordinator for the rest of Asia; Rebeccai Garbutt (BirdLife International - Africa, replaced Masumi Gudka in 2018) continued as Acting Regional Coordinator for Africa; and Mohammed Shobrak (Saudi Wildlife Authority) continued as Acting Regional Coordinator for the Middle East. The Vulture MsAP Coordination Team, established to support implementation of the Vulture MsAP, includes the aforementioned Acting Coordinators plus: Roger Safford (BirdLife International), José Tavares (Vulture Conservation Foundation), Nicola Crockford (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds), and Anne Thieme and Nick P. Williams (Coordinating Unit of the CMS Raptors MOU).

Progress

5. In April 2018, the Vulture MsAP Coordination Team was invited to lead a one-day session to promote the CMS Vulture MsAP at the [Global Summit for the Flyways](#), convened by BirdLife International and hosted by the International Fund for Houdara Conservation in Abu Dhabi, UAE. In an effort to offer attractive funding opportunities at different levels of support, a suite of 11 Flagship Project Proposals was developed and launched at this event. Delegates reinforced the importance of the Vulture MsAP and highlighted the need for a 'community of implementers' bringing together all stakeholders. There was a particular urgency to put in place

rapid response mechanisms for communities and governments to jointly tackle the threat of poison baits, and safety testing for veterinary pharmaceuticals to reduce this proven risk. The concept of ‘Vulture Safe Zones’ was considered crucial in South Asia; with similar, appropriately-adapted landscape approaches showing great promise in other regions, particularly Africa. More information on the declaration and outcomes can be found at Annex II to this report and [online](#).

6. Over a period of nine months (January – September 2018), Nottingham Trent University in the United Kingdom undertook a Pilot Study ‘*Evaluating the ecosystem services provided by Old World Vultures: determining their role in sustainable futures for African and Eurasian environments*’. This research effort was aimed to begin addressing a key knowledge gap identified in the Vulture MsAP. The results were presented as a Poster Paper at the [Pathways Europe 2018 Conference](#), held in Goslar, Germany in September 2018. This is just one of many examples where partners and stakeholders are actively utilising the Vulture MsAP to guide development of their research and conservation activities.
7. In September 2018, the Coordinating Unit recruited via open competition a professional consultant (David Pritchard), initially for a period of 12 months, but which is being extended a further six months (until March 2020), to lead the development of a **Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP)** for the Vulture MsAP. A voluntary contribution generously granted by Switzerland met a significant proportion of the consultancy costs required for this piece of work. A first draft SIP was circulated to the Vulture MsAP Coordination Team for review in July 2019. Among other things, the draft reflects the current status of all known relevant planned or intended activities that may contribute to the achievement of the goals of the Vulture MsAP, highlighting some particularly important or prominent examples for development, collaboration and support (see Tables below).

Table 1: Volume of reported existing and planned activity against each VMsAP Objective

Vulture MsAP Objective	Number of existing activity items listed	Number of planned activity items listed	Total
1. Reducing mortality from unintentional poisoning	● (22)	● (32)	● (54)
2. Minimising mortality from non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)	● (20)	● (16)	● (36)
3. Phasing out lead ammunition	● (9)	● (4)	● (13)
4. Reducing and eventually halting trade in vulture parts for belief-based use	● (4)	● (1)	● (5)
5. Reducing and eventually halting “sentinel poisoning” by poachers	● (4)	● (1)	● (5)
6. Reducing mortality from electrocution by energy infrastructure	● (21)	● (25)	● (46)
7. Reducing mortality from collisions involving energy infrastructure	● (7)	● (20)	● (27)
8. Ensuring availability of safe food	● (18)	● (36)	● (54)
9. Ensuring availability of suitable habitat	● (3)	● (24)	● (27)
10. Reducing direct persecution and disturbance	● (4)	● (11)	● (15)
11. Cross-cutting actions addressing knowledge gaps	● (75)	● (71)	● (146)
12. Promotion and implementation of the Vulture MsAP	● (20)	● (30)	● (50)

Number of activities (included above) that are defined as 'Essential' in the Vulture MsAP Framework for Action	● (38)	● (46)	● (84)
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Table 2: Volume of reported existing and planned activity in each region

Region	Number of existing activity items listed	Number of planned activity items listed	Total
Africa	● (127)	● (90)	● (217)
Asia	● (26)	● (36)	● (62)
Europe	● (77)	● (84)	● (161)
Middle East	● (7)	● (3)	● (10)
Multi-region	● (11)	● (17)	● (28)

8. The raw data for the above tabular summaries were gathered via an analysis of the results of a Questionnaire survey that was circulated in February 2018 to all 128 Range States covered by the Vulture MsAP. The Coordinating Unit received 97 completed Questionnaires (from 56 Range States): 31 from Africa, 14 from Asia, 35 from Europe and 17 from the Middle East.
9. The [3rd Meeting of the Technical Advisory Group](#) to the Raptors MOU (TAG3), held from 12 – 14 December 2018, was graciously sponsored and hosted at Sempach, Switzerland by the Federal Office for the Environment and Swiss Ornithological Institute, respectively. At that event, Mr. Pritchard introduced the approach adopted and outlined progress in developing the SIP for the Vulture MsAP. TAG members provided valuable feedback to enhance the development of the SIP.
10. The Coordinating Unit contributed to an outline proposal seeking EU LIFE funding for a EUR 5 million project to conserve the Egyptian Vulture along its Western flyway, submitted to the European Commission in June 2018 by the lead partner, Vulture Conservation Foundation. Unfortunately, the Commission’s assessment of the proposal fell just short of the required threshold. However, further work was invested to enhance the proposal which was re-submitted in June 2019. A decision on the success or otherwise of the funding bid is expected from the Commission in late October 2019.
11. In August 2019, the Vulture MsAP Coordination Team, led by BirdLife International, hosted a side-event entitled *Saving Africa’s Vultures: Threats Posed by the Illegal Wildlife Trade* at the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora \(CITES\) COP18](#) held in Geneva, Switzerland. Ms Melanie Virtue, Head of the Aquatic Species Team at the CMS Secretariat, gave a presentation on the Vulture MsAP on behalf of the Coordinating Unit. A proposal ([CoP18 Doc. 97](#)) concerning West African vulture trade and conservation management had been submitted by three African countries (Burkina Faso, Niger and Senegal); seven CITES Decisions as shown in the summary record ([CoP18 Com. I Rec. 6](#)) were adopted at plenary.
12. As a key component to the ongoing EU LIFE funded project to conserve the Egyptian Vulture along its Eastern flyway, led by BirdLife Bulgaria, the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU financially supported the [European Vulture Conference](#), organized by the Vulture Conservation Foundation and held from 1 – 4 October 2019 in Albufeira, Portugal. The event included a plenary session dedicated to promoting implementation of the Vulture MsAP. Together with other members of the Vulture MsAP Coordination Team, the session included an overview presentation about the Vulture MsAP and progress on implementation, as well as

short reports from the four acting Regional Coordinators. The session was attended by over 80 participants and concluded with a facilitated Q & A discussion.

Next steps

13. A revised draft of the SIP was circulated for further comments to the Vulture MsAP Coordination Team in October 2019. The Coordinating Unit aims to finalise, publish and circulate the SIP by the end of 2019 to all Range States covered by the Vulture MsAP.
14. Funding is urgently required from CMS Parties to support efforts to coordinate effective implementation of the CMS Vulture MsAP over the next decade. The existing Vulture MsAP Coordination Team is currently functioning on a largely voluntary basis which severely limits its activities and outputs. The Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU has undertaken a number of actions to promote and facilitate resource mobilization to implement the Vulture MsAP (see Annex I). However, to date, funding has not been forthcoming from CMS Parties.

Annex I

15. List of 12 key actions undertaken by the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU to promote and facilitate resource mobilization for the implementation of the Vulture MsAP.

Annex II

16. [Outcomes for vulture conservation](#) from the [Global Summit for the Flyways](#), convened by BirdLife International and hosted by the International Fund for Houbara Conservation in Abu Dhabi, UAE from 23 – 26 April 2018.

Annex I

List of 12 key actions undertaken by the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU to promote and facilitate resource mobilization to implement the Vulture MsAP

#	Description of Key Actions	Timing
1	Development of a clear and comprehensive Vulture MsAP which highlights the critical conservation actions, including proposed coordination framework, that require funding.	2015 - 2017
2	Preparation and circulation of background technical papers to CMS Parties which resulted in the listing of 10 vulture species on CMS Appendix I at CMS COP12 in November 2017.	2016 - 2017
3	Drafting and promoting adoption of CMS Resolution 12.10 at COP12 which “[...] <i>urges Parties, non-Party Range States and stakeholders and invites United Nations Environment Programme and other relevant international organizations, bilateral and multilateral donors to work collaboratively to immediately begin to mobilize the considerable resources required to fully implement the Vulture MsAP</i> ”.	Nov 2017
4	Inclusion in the presentation that introduced Resolution 12.10 at CMS COP12 a specific plea to CMS Parties highlighting the urgent need for resources to effectively coordinate implementation of the Vulture MsAP.	Nov 2017
5	Active negotiation with BirdLife International, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Vulture Conservation Foundation and Endangered Wildlife Trust (South Africa) to maintain their commitment to the Vulture MsAP Coordination Team in a voluntary capacity until funds are secured.	2017 - present
6	Development of partnerships with key NGOs to submit two major funding proposals to the European Commission (EC) seeking support from its LIFE Programme; the Egyptian Vulture Eastern Flyway Proposal of EUR 5.6M was accepted and is now underway; the Egyptian Vulture Western Flyway Proposal of EUR 5M was rejected in 2018 but was re-submitted in June 2019 - now awaiting a final decision from the EC.	2015 - present
7	Active communication and promotion of the Vulture MsAP via several email transmissions with contacts in all 128 Range States covered by the Vulture MsAP, including specific requests for financial support.	2017 - present
8	Development and promulgation, including at the <i>Global Summit for the Flyways</i> in Abu Dhabi in April 2018, of a suite of Flagship Project Proposals which offer discrete funding opportunities at different levels.	2017 - 2018
9	Highlighting the plight of vulture populations and promotion of the Vulture MsAP in eight separate Raptors MoU webstories since 2017.	2017 - present
10	Publicising and promoting implementation of the Vulture MsAP at a side-event at the CITES COP18 in Switzerland in August 2019, and also at the European Vulture Conference in Portugal in October 2019.	2019
11	Collaboration with the CMS Fundraising Officer to ensure the inclusion of the Vulture MsAP in their annual (?) ‘call’ to CMS Parties in 2018 (but we have not been consulted in 2019!).	2018
12	Informally approaching a number of government representatives of CMS Parties and/or Signatories to the Raptors MoU seeking support.	Since 2017

Annex II



GLOBAL FLYWAYS SUMMIT, APRIL 23-26 2018

Implementing the Vulture Multi-species Action Plan

The conservation status of African-Eurasian vultures has seen major changes for the worse in recent years. Implementation or expansion of effective conservation action is urgently needed across the range of these birds, as a top global priority for bird conservation.

The **CMS Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures** (Vulture MsAP), adopted by CMS Parties in 2017, provides an agreed framework for actions to halt the current population declines in all the 15 Old World vulture species.

Successful recovery programmes in Europe (where vultures are generally increasing and recolonising former range), and some important progress with tackling threats in South Asia, demonstrate effective conservation action for vultures and recognition of the many socio-economic benefits associated with healthy vulture populations. This session therefore aimed to advance implementation of the CMS Vulture MsAP by, first, cementing alliances and donor or policy support for implementation of essential MsAP activities and, second, promoting the adoption of landscape approaches to threat reduction for vulture conservation.

Outcomes of the session

1. The Summit affirmed and reinforced the importance of the immediate, sustained and comprehensive **implementation of the CMS Vulture MsAP** in all its components.
2. A **well-coordinated 'community of implementers'** is needed to bring together all stakeholders, including Governments, conservationists, protected area managers, livestock breeders, hunters and veterinarians, drawing on synergies between them, including for example veterinary pharmaceutical and agrochemical companies and those involved in anti-poaching efforts for elephants and conservation of carnivores affected by poisoning.
3. Effective coordination of implementation of any species action plans is crucial if opportunities are to be maximised. This is all the more true for the Vulture MsAP, as it covers so many species, threats and range states; **resources to support coordination** are urgently needed.
4. **Eleven 'Flagship projects'** were identified to support the future



Photo Lappet-faced Vulture Ecoprints/Shutterstock

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A Summit for the Flyways

Outcomes

implementation of key parts of the MsAP, as cost-effective priorities that should urgently be funded, with a range of activity types, scales and budgets.

- Six projects to facilitate implementation of the MsAP across all range states: a communications tool kit, a Vulture MsAP online tool, guidance on developing National or Regional Vulture Conservation Strategies and establishing Vulture Safe Zones, establishment of an international framework for coordination of implementation, and a Total Economic Evaluation of the ecosystem services provided by Old World vultures.
- Four projects to reduce critical threats: development of rapid response systems to stop vulture poisoning in Africa and Europe, combating the trade in vultures and their body parts for belief-based use in Africa, safety-testing veterinary NSAIDs on vultures, and mapping the sensitivity of vultures (among other large birds) to energy infrastructure.
- One project along two flyways, to serve as models for multi-country and -regional action for vultures: conservation of the Egyptian Vulture along its Western and Eastern Flyways.

This list is not exhaustive, and many other valuable projects could be proposed. Such donor-funded projects are essential, for example in trialling solutions and removing technical barriers to implementation. They should be designed also to contribute towards long-term solutions to the challenges of vulture conservation focused on **long-term engagement and commitment of the private sector and Government while mobilising local communities**.

5. To tackle the threat of **poison baits, Rapid Response Mechanisms and Protocols** involving local communities and Governments (including enforcement agencies and veterinary authorities) have proven to be an effective and practical response and are needed, especially in Africa and Europe, where these threats are most acute. Actions to tackle underlying drivers of poisoning, especially human-wildlife conflict and the ivory trade in Africa, are also being implemented but are still more challenging and, particularly for elephant poaching, not achievable by conservation actions focused only on the vultures; see Outcome 2 above.
6. **Safety testing for veterinary pharmaceuticals**, especially non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), is urgently needed to effectively manage and reduce the proven risk to vultures that these drugs present. Drugs found or known to be toxic to vultures should be prohibited or withdrawn for the treatment of livestock, and substituted with readily available safe alternatives. Immediate support and/or implementation of these actions by both national and multilateral (e.g. EU) institutions is essential.

The summit was pleased to hear from Portugal that the national parliament had just voted for a resolution not to approve the veterinary use of diclofenac (an NSAID known to be toxic to

vultures), and that the professional veterinary body had stated that it opposes licensing. It is hoped that full prohibition will follow and that other countries will follow this lead.

7. **Lead toxicity** caused by the ingestion of ammunition fragments in carcasses and offal is a well-documented threat to scavenging birds world-wide. The urgency to implement the Vulture MsAP objective 'to ensure that CMS Resolution 11.15 on the phasing out the use of **lead ammunition by hunters** is fully implemented' was further emphasised by a recently published study from Africa (since the adoption of the Resolution and the Vulture MsAP) showing a high incidence of elevated lead levels in living vultures, affecting around one third of those tested, and clear evidence of an association with recreational hunting.
8. **Vulture Safe Zones** form a crucial landscape approach to vulture conservation which has been defined in South Asia. The concept builds on successful efforts to remove vulture-toxic veterinary pharmaceuticals from vulture habitat in that region, in order to allow the recovery and in some cases high profile reintroduction of vulture populations. Management of Vulture Safe Zones is now beginning to include tackling other threats to vultures.
9. **Landscape approaches** to vulture conservation are shaped by environmental, social and economic factors which vary by region. Appropriately adapted models based on South Asian Vulture Safe Zones show great promise and could be applied in other regions, particularly Africa. A trial of such a landscape approach in Zambia has adopted a community-based and landowner management model in response to a wider and different range of threats and has proven attractive to local and national stakeholders. Additional approaches to combating poisoning in Southern Africa and Kenya provide more models. Further development of such approaches in Africa is strongly recommended. In Europe, by contrast, implementing and enforcing existing national policies and using regional legislative frameworks (e.g. EU Birds and Habitats Directives, the EU Natura 2000 network, veterinary legislation and regulation on the disposal of livestock carcasses) may be sufficient.
10. Vultures are also seriously threatened by mortality caused by collision and electrocution with **power transmission and energy generation infrastructure**. Many of the outcomes of the Summit session on mainstreaming flyway conservation into these sectors are directly relevant to vulture conservation as set out in the Vulture MsAP, and should be considered among the vulture conservation outcomes of the Summit.
11. **High ecosystem service values of vultures** are widely recognised and not in doubt, but studies are needed to quantify and promote them. In particular, there is a need to identify where and to what extent vulture conservation leads to 'win-win' situations in which human societies also benefit.

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