



Memorandum of Understanding
on the Conservation of
Migratory Birds of Prey in
Africa and Eurasia

Distribution: General

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REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VULTURE MSAP

Prepared by Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU

1. In November 2014, at 11th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP11) in Ecuador, CMS Parties adopted Resolution 11.14 - Programme of Work on Migratory Birds and Flyways. This Resolution established the mandate to develop a Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures (Vulture MsAP), under the auspices of the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU. The mission was to bring together representatives of Range States, partners and other stakeholders, to develop a coordinated international Action Plan for submission to the 12th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP12) to CMS in October 2017.

2. The second Meeting of Signatories (MOS2) to the Raptors MOU, held in Norway in October 2015, formally recognized all Old World vultures (except the Palm-nut Vulture) as migratory species by listing them in Annex 1 of the Raptors MOU. Furthermore, MOS2 tasked the TAG to support the Coordinating Unit in facilitating development of a Vulture MsAP, encompassing all 15 species of Old World vultures that are obligate scavengers: Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus*, Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, Red-headed Vulture *Sarcogyps calvus*, White-headed Vulture *Trigonoceps occipitalis*, Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus*, Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis*, White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*, White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus*, Indian Vulture *Gyps indicus*, Slender-billed Vulture *Gyps tenuirostris*, Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres*, Rüppell's Vulture *Gyps rueppelli*, Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*, Cinereous Vulture *Aegyptius monachus*, and Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotus*.

3. In February 2016, following consultation with the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) Vulture Specialist Group, BirdLife International, the Vulture Conservation Foundation and other specialists, the Coordinating Unit published a Project Charter for the development of the Vulture MsAP. The overall aim was to develop a comprehensive strategic action plan encompassing the whole geographic ranges of 15 species of Old World vultures to promote concerted, collaborative and coordinated international conservation actions. The objectives are to rapidly halt current population declines in all 15 species covered by the Vulture MsAP; to reverse recent population trends to bring the conservation status of each species back to a favourable level; and, to provide conservation management guidelines applicable to all Range States covered by the Vulture MsAP.

4. The Project Charter was circulated to all the Range States, partners and other stakeholders, calling for nominations to establish a Vulture Working Group and for funding support. Nearly 60 nominations were received for the Vulture Working Group; and Switzerland generously stepped forward to offer financial support to develop the Vulture MsAP during 2016 and 2017. These resources complemented core funding for the Coordinating Unit, already provided by Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi, on behalf of the Government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

5. The development of the Vulture MsAP was overseen by the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU, in partnership with BirdLife International, the Vulture Conservation Foundation and the IUCN

SSC Vulture Specialist Group, supported by members of the Vulture Working Group, its Vulture Steering Group and in particular the Overarching Coordinator and three Regional Coordinators covering Africa, Asia (excluding Central Asia) and Europe (including Central Asia). Separate Small Scale Funding Agreements were signed with BirdLife International and the Vulture Conservation Foundation to provide regional and overarching coordination for the development of the Vulture MsAP.

6. To elaborate the regional components of the Vulture MsAP, four regional workshops were held in Dakar, Senegal (October 2016) covering Africa; in Extremadura, Spain (October 2016) covering Europe and Central Asia; in Mumbai, India (November 2016) covering Asia; and in Sharjah, UAE (February 2017) covering the Middle East. A fifth Overarching Workshop in Toledo, Spain (February 2017) brought these components together into a comprehensive Vulture MsAP. Special thanks to the Governments of India, Senegal, Spain and UAE (represented by Environment and Protected Areas Authority of the Emirate of Sharjah) for supporting the hosting of these workshops.

7. A first consolidated draft of the Vulture MsAP, incorporating the four regional components, was published in mid-February 2017. It was circulated for review to 50 specialists, including TAG members, in advance of the Overarching Workshop held in Toledo, Spain in February 2017 (coorganized by SEO/BirdLife Spain). Participants at this concluding Workshop reviewed the first draft of the Vulture MsAP, elaborated certain key strategic components of the MsAP which had not been collectively considered at the Regional Workshops, and also successfully engendered additional multi-lateral support.

8. A month-long public consultation exercise on the second draft of the Vulture MsAP was launched in mid-March 2017, with the aim of reaching out even further by inviting comments and improvements from anyone who recognized the importance of vultures and the critical need to conserve them. Almost 60 responses were received, raising over 250 issues for consideration. Each response was carefully reviewed and, where appropriate, integrated into a final version of the Vulture MsAP, which was submitted to the CMS Secretariat in May 2017, in time for tabling at the Second Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council (July 2017).

9. The Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council endorsed the Vulture MsAP and recommended it for adoption at CMS COP12. The Vulture MsAP¹ was subsequently adopted by COP12 in Manila in October 2017, by means of Resolution 12.10² on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Vultures.

10. The Vulture MsAP was developed in a transparent, collaborative and consultative manner, engaging government officials in all 128 Range States covered by the plan, and including vulture specialists, conservationists, partner organizations, stakeholders and the general public. It presents the most up-to-date information on the distribution, status and population trends of the 15 species of Old World vulture, gathered from a wide range of sources including published literature, over 150 questionnaires completed by officials and vulture experts, participative workshops involving more than 200 people and a month-long public consultation exercise on the second draft of the document, which was circulated by the Coordinating Unit to over 1,000 contacts via email.

11. All known threats to vultures are presented and reviewed in the Vulture MsAP, including at regional and species levels. The drivers behind these threats are also considered. To address these threats, 12 Objectives are listed in the Vulture MsAP followed by a Framework of Actions that sets out 124 activities that need to be implemented to meet these challenges.

12. The various key stakeholders, including their respective roles in achieving the 12 Objectives, are listed in the Vulture MsAP, alongside policy opportunities and barriers to effect wide-scale changes.

¹ <https://cms.int/raptors/en/publication/multi-species-action-plan-protect-african-urasian-vultures-vulture-msap>

² <https://www.cms.int/en/document/conservation-african-urasian-vultures-0>

An overview of international conventions, agreements, and policies presented in the Vulture MsAP also provide context in terms of existing structures and possible synergies that can be used to support and assist in achieving the overall goal of the Vulture MsAP.

13. The Vulture MsAP contains information on the proposed structure, approach and resources required for its successful implementation. Furthermore, it provides guidance on the monitoring, evaluation and review processes to be followed during the 12-year implementation period. It also outlines key components that should be included in communications and fundraising and resource mobilization plans to promote and garner support for the plan from governments in the Range States and other target audiences.

14. The Plan also contains information on, or links to, existing plans and policies focused on relevant threats, individual species or groups of species (including through links presented in Annexes). Two of these documents were developed concurrently with the Vulture MsAP and were also subject to extensive consultation, including to the public. These are the *Flyway Action Plan for the Conservation of the Balkan and Central Asian Populations of the Egyptian Vulture* (Annex 4 to the Vulture MsAP), and *Flyway Action Plan for the Conservation of the Cinereous Vulture* (Annex 5 to the Vulture MsAP). Finally, a *Blueprint for the Recovery of Asia's Critically Endangered Gyps Vultures* is included as Annex 6 to the Vulture MsAP. It was developed by the Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction (SAVE) consortium and is annually updated by SAVE members. The Blueprint provides clear guidance in terms of regional vulture conservation; the recommended actions in the Vulture MsAP reflect this.

15. 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'*. Funding is urgently required to support these Coordinator roles.

16. As an interim measure, three of the organizations³ that hosted the original Coordinators generously agreed to continue to support these roles, but with significantly reduced capacity. Accordingly, André Botha continues as Acting Overarching Coordinator; Jovan Andevski continues as Acting Coordinator for Europe and Central Asia; and, Chris Bowden continues as Acting Regional Coordinator for the rest of Asia. In addition, Mohammed Shobrak (on behalf of Saudi Wildlife Authority) agreed to act as the Regional Coordinator for the Middle East. The 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 Jenny Renell and Nick P. Williams (Coordinating Unit of the CMS Raptors MOU).

17. In February 2018, the Coordinating Unit wrote to all 128 Range States covered by the Vulture MsAP, members of the Vulture Working Group, other stakeholders and interested parties inviting contributions via an online Questionnaire in both English and French. The aim of this Questionnaire was to gather information to provide a concise but comprehensive update on conservation activities completed within the previous 12 months, or planned over the next three years (2018–2020) for any of the 15 species of Old World vultures covered by the Vulture MsAP. More than 100 responses were received, which are now being analysed. The results will be used to inform development of a draft Vulture MsAP Strategic Implementation Plan 2018-20.

18. In April 2018, the Coordination Team were invited to lead a one-day session to promote the Vulture MsAP at the Global Summit for the Flyways, convened by BirdLife International in Abu Dhabi,

³ Endangered Wildlife Trust (South Africa), Vulture Conservation Foundation (Switzerland); and, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (UK).

UAE. A suite of Flagship Project Proposals was launched at this event. These proposals that will also be integrated into the planned Vulture MsAP Strategic Implementation Plan 2018-20.

19. 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’*. The results were presented as a Poster Paper (see separate Annex 1 to this meeting document) at the Pathways Europe 2018 Conference, held in Goslar, Germany in September 2018. In addition, several partners and stakeholders are actively developing project-funding proposals aimed at implementing various aspects of the Vulture MsAP.

20. In September 2018, the Coordinating Unit recruited a professional consultant, Dave Pritchard, to lead the development of the Strategic Implementation Plan for the Vulture MsAP. A voluntary contribution generously granted by Switzerland will meet a significant proportion of the consultancy costs required for this piece of work. At TAG3, Mr. Pritchard will introduce the approach adopted and outline progress in developing the Strategic Implementation Plan for the Vulture MsAP.

21. The Coordinating Unit contributed to an outline proposal seeking EU LIFE funding for EUR 5 million project on the Egyptian Vulture (western flyway) conservation, submitted by the lead partner, Vulture Conservation Foundation, to the European Commission in June 2018. Unfortunately, the Commission’s assessment of the proposal fell just short of the threshold so we now need to reflect on this outcome with partners to decide whether or not to amend the proposal for resubmission in April 2019.

22. The Coordinating Unit submitted written reports on the Vulture MsAP to the third Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council in May-June 2018⁴, and to the 48th Meeting of the CMS Standing Committee in October 2018⁵.

Action requested

TAG is requested to take note of this report and is invited to provide ideas and constructive feedback on how to further promote effective implementation of the Vulture MsAP.

⁴ <https://www.cms.int/en/document/report-form-secretariat-implementation-cop12-resolution-and-decisions-conservation-african>

⁵ <https://www.cms.int/en/document/implementation-programme-work-2018-2020> , pp.26-27.