



UNEP/CMS OFFICE – ABU DHABI

United Arab Emirates

The Interim Coordinating Unit for the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia (Raptors MoU)

PRESS RELEASE

1 September 2012

International Vulture Awareness Day

Abu Dhabi, UAE, 1 September 2012: Around the world, countries from Canada to Germany and India are holding activities to contribute to International Vulture Awareness Day (IVAD) which takes place today. Vultures are easily recognizable birds, with a long history of importance to many cultures including the ancient Egyptians, Romans, Tibetan Buddhists and Zoroastrians. As scavengers who feed primarily on carrion (animals which are already dead), vultures are associated not only with death but also with renewal.

Vultures worldwide are experiencing rapid population decline for several reasons, including poisoning (most notably through the use of Diclofenac, a drug used to treat livestock which is toxic to vultures, but also from lead and pesticide poisoning), electrocution from power lines, lack of food, and habitat loss.

International Vulture Awareness Day aims to raise awareness amongst the public about the need to conserve vultures. For example, a novel educational tool with conservation benefits which will be showcased in some locations for IVAD is the 'Vulture restaurant'. These 'restaurants' provide carcasses free from contamination for vultures to consume, ideally in an area with habitat suitable for breeding and nesting, where visitors can observe their feeding behaviour.

In fact, the feeding habits of vultures provide vital services to their environment. Vultures are able to spot carcasses from great distances, and, with their typically impressive wingspan, can fly far to locate food. Their highly acidic stomachs kill dangerous bacteria found in carrion. If vultures did not perform this service, carcasses might pollute water sources or attract other scavengers such as crows, rats and feral dogs, which are more likely to spread disease from carrion to domestic animals and local human populations. Several vulture species are monogamous and mate for life, raising only one or two chicks per breeding season which are cared for by both parents.

As vultures cross territorial boundaries, joint international planning is required to address threats and reverse declines effectively. The Memorandum of Understanding on African-Eurasian Migratory Birds of Prey (Raptors MoU) concluded under the UNEP Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) covers three species of vulture: the Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), Eurasian Griffon (*Gyps fulvus*) and Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*). The status of the Egyptian Vulture is classed by the IUCN Red List as Endangered while the Eurasian Griffon is listed as Near Threatened and the Cinereous Vulture is of Least Concern. The MoU aims to bring countries together to encourage the design and implementation of measures leading to improved conservation for over 70 birds of prey species.

To actively promote the conservation of Egyptian Vultures, the Interim Coordinating Unit (ICU) of the Raptors MoU is poised to sign an agreement with The Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB), a partner of BirdLife International. The one-year project will build local capacity by delivering field skills



training to selected personnel from Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Sudan. These individuals will then undertake fieldwork to gather data to improve understanding and protection of Egyptian Vultures on their wintering grounds in Central and Eastern Africa.

Note to editors:

International Vulture Awareness Day

International Vulture Awareness Day was created through cooperative efforts by the Birds of Prey Programme, South Africa and the Hawk Conservancy Trust, England. Their local Vulture Awareness Days grew into an international event aimed at increasing awareness of vulture conservation.

For more information and a list of registered IVAD events, please visit

<http://www.vultureday.org/2012/index.php>

<http://vultureday.wikispaces.com/> .

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) works for the conservation of a wide array of endangered migratory animals worldwide through the negotiation and implementation of agreements and action plans. CMS, which acts under the auspices of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), is a rapidly expanding global biodiversity convention with special expertise in the field of migratory species. At present, there are 117 Parties to the Convention.

<http://www.cms.int>

The UNEP/CMS Office - Abu Dhabi oversees the implementation of two agreements – the UNEP/CMS Memorandum of Understanding on African-Eurasian Migratory Birds of Prey (Raptors MoU), and Dugongs and their habitats throughout their range. The Raptors MoU, administered by an Interim Coordinating Unit (ICU), came into force on 1 November 2008, extends to cover 130 Range Countries, and already has 40 Signatories and 3 Cooperating Partners (BirdLife International, International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey, and the CMS Secretariat). The UNEP/CMS Office - Abu Dhabi is hosted by the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi on behalf of the Government of the United Arab Emirates.

Current Signatories to the UNEP/CMS Raptors MoU to date are: Angola, Armenia, Belgium, Burundi, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, European Union, Finland, France, Gambia, Germany, Ghana, Guinea, Hungary, Italy, Kenya, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mali, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Nepal, Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Portugal, Romania, Senegal, Slovak Republic, South Africa, Sudan, Togo, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and Yemen.

For more information on the UNEP/CMS Raptors MoU please visit:

<http://www.cms.int/species/raptors>

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