



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

Distribution: General
UNEP/CMS/Raptors/TAG4/Doc.3.6

2 November 2021

Fourth Meeting of the Technical Advisory Group | Online, 13-15 December 2021

REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VULTURE MULTI-SPECIES ACTION PLAN

Prepared by the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU

Introduction

1. The Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures (Vulture MsAP) was adopted by the 12th Conference of Parties to CMS (COP12) in October 2017, by means of Resolution 12.10¹ on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Vultures.
2. The Vulture MsAP provides a strategic conservation plan covering the geographic ranges of all 15 species of migratory African-Eurasian ("Old World") vultures and promotes concerted, collaborative and coordinated international actions to save vultures species from further decline and extinction. All known threats to these 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. The actions require involvement and collaboration between a large range of stakeholders from governments, conservationists and partner organisations to the general public.
3. 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 is envisioned that the plan should be reviewed and updated every six years with a mid-term review in 2023 and a final review in 2029. 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.
4. 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 with 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.

¹ <https://www.cms.int/en/document/conservation-african-eurasian-vultures-0>

5. Since its adoption and publication, the Vulture MsAP has been read 2,265 times and was cited in 48 published peer-reviewed articles focused on vultures and their conservation with a research rating of 43.7 according to the on-line tracking service ResearchGate².

Vulture MsAP Coordination

6. Operational paragraph 5 of CMS Resolution 12.10 “requests 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”. To date, funding has not been received to support these Coordinator roles.

7. 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. The Coordinating Unit has been facilitating the work of the Vulture MsAP Coordination Team whose members include:

- André Botha (Endangered Wildlife Trust) as Acting Overarching Coordinator;
- Jovan Andevski (Vulture Conservation Foundation) as Acting Coordinator for Europe and Central Asia;
- Chris Bowden (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) as Acting Regional Coordinator for the rest of Asia;
- Mohammed Shobrak who agreed to act as the Regional Coordinator for the Middle East;
- Roger Safford (BirdLife International);
- José Tavares (Vulture Conservation Foundation); and
- Nicola Crockford (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds).

Vulture MsAP Implementation

8. The Vulture MsAP Strategic Implementation Plan was published by the Coordinating Unit in February 2020 with the generous support from the Federal Office for the Environment of the Government of Switzerland. The plan contains an inventory of activities to date, as reported through stakeholder surveys and consultations over the past two years. At the same time, the document provides a roadmap of concrete priorities for delivering the agreed framework including 11 flagship projects, a signpost to relevant cooperation opportunities, and added impetus for mobilizing resources and support.

9. The titles of the 11 proposed flagship projects are as follows:

- 1) Developing rapid response systems to stop vulture poisoning.
- 2) Combatting the trade in threatened vultures and their parts for belief-based use.
- 3) Conservation of the Egyptian Vulture along the Western and Eastern Flyways.
- 4) Converting the Vulture MsAP into an interactive online tool.
- 5) Evaluating the Total Economic Value of Old World Vultures and determining their role in sustainable futures.
- 6) Creating a Vulture MsAP communications toolkit.
- 7) Guidance on developing national (or regional) Vulture Conservation Strategies.

² https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323343298_Multi-species_Action_Plan_to_Conserve_African-Eurasian_Vultures_Vulture_MsAP

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

- 8) Safety testing veterinary non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) on vultures.
- 9) Establishing an international framework for coordination.
- 10) Sensitivity mapping of energy infrastructure.
- 11) Guidance on establishing Vulture Safe Zones.

10. Overall, a vast range of projects and activities are underway in different regions and are contributing to the Vulture MsAP's implementation (data has been recorded for 76 out of 124 activities listed in the Vulture MsAP), while other proposals are being developed on a continuing basis. Most ongoing activities focus on research and monitoring, and activities relating to poisoning, energy infrastructure and food supply issues are also prominent. Actions addressing belief-based use, sentinel poisoning, lead ammunition, habitat protection/management, disturbance and persecution appear less frequently. Of the actions identified in the Vulture MsAP as "essential" or "critical" priorities, those that involve government-level actions for legislation, policy and regulation have seen a lower level of implementation than those involving field or community-based action. In terms of geographical differences, Africa and Europe have proportionately more activities underway or planned than other regions.

11. Following the mass poisoning event in Guinea Bissau in February 2020, and in connection with flagship project 1, the Coordinating Unit and the Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF) collaborated to develop a training workshop for the relevant authorities in Guinea Bissau. The workshop is scheduled for December 2021 and will focus on improving the preparedness of the institutions within Guinea Bissau to respond to and ultimately prevent, further wildlife poisoning incidents. The workshop will also develop a draft Vulture Conservation Action Plan for Guinea Bissau.

12. Flagship project 2, and objective 4 of the Vulture MsAP aim to reduce and eventually to halt the trade in vulture parts for belief-based use. A number of Decisions (18.186-192)⁴ were adopted at CITES CoP18 in 2019, with the aim of increasing understanding of the threats posed to West African vultures and identifying actions to stop declines and allow population recovery. In particular, Decision 18.190 called for the Animals Committee (AC) to establish a working group on West African vultures to provide relevant recommendations.

13. In response to this, and to facilitate the work of the working group, the Coordinating Unit and CITES Secretariat commissioned UNEP – WCMC to undertake a review of trade and sentinel poisoning for West African Vultures, focusing on the six key species highlighted in Decision 18.188: Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), White-headed vulture (*Trigonoceps occipitalis*), hooded vulture (*Necrosyrtes monachus*), White-backed vulture (*Gyps africanus*), Rüppell's vulture (*Gyps rueppelli*) and Lappet-faced vulture (*Torgos tracheliotos*). The report highlighted key gaps in knowledge related to this trade of vultures and their parts, and made recommendations for the Animals Committee to consider. The Coordinating Unit participated in the 31st meeting of the Animals Committee and facilitated the drafting of proposed decisions for the 19th Meeting of the CITES Standing Committee.

14. Following the mass-poisoning incident in Guinea-Bissau in 2020, and in support of the above initiative, the IUCN SSC Vulture Specialist Group (VSG) embarked on a process to engage with its membership in West Africa towards the drafting of a specific multi-stakeholder strategy to combat and reduce the impact of belief-based use on the remaining vulture populations in West Africa. The IUCN Conservation Planning Specialist Group has agreed to assist with this process and is taking it forward in consultation with an initial core group of VSG members based in at least seven of the range states known to be most severely affected by this trade. The next steps include a much wider consultation and engagement with relevant stakeholders and the strategy should be completed by mid-2022.

15. Flagship project 3 is currently being addressed through the Egyptian Vulture New LIFE project entitled "Urgent Actions to Strengthen the Balkan Population of the Egyptian Vulture and Secure Its

⁴ <https://cites.org/eng/dec/index.php/42077>

Flyway” in which the Raptors MOU is an associated beneficiary. As part of the project, at the European Vulture Conference organized by VCF and held from 1 – 4 October 2019 in Albufeira, Portugal, members of the steering group lead a plenary session together with the Coordinating Unit dedicated to promoting implementation of the Vulture MsAP. 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. Furthermore, a workshop was organised in Jordan on 24 – 28 October 2021 with the financial support of the Raptors MOU aimed at developing a road map to address illegal killing of migratory birds in the Middle East, as many vultures are illegally killed in the region.

16. To address flagship project 8 and objective 2 of the Vulture MsAP on minimising the mortality of vultures due to veterinary use of Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) a working group on NSAIDs was set up by the Raptors MOU Technical Advisory Group (TAG) during its intersessional meeting on 13 April 2021. The working group has developed a questionnaire on the use of, and licensing status of veterinary NSAIDs that has been sent to Raptors MOU Signatories and Range States. Following the information gathered through the questionnaire, a webinar will be organised to raise awareness of the issue with key stakeholders. A fact sheet on NSAIDs and their impact on vultures and some other scavenging raptors is also under development for use in outreach.

17. In addition, during the 13th CMS Conference of the Parties in Gandhinagar, India in February 2020, members of the Vulture MsAP Coordination Team lead two side events: "Vultures are still dying from poisoning, but the Vulture MsAP is working" to reiterate the priorities from the Vulture MsAP and to review the progress in the fight against the use of poison baits and sentinel poisoning of vultures; and "Veterinary drugs and the Vulture MsAP: A call for wider action" to highlight the growing importance of the threat of NSAIDs on vulture populations and to encourage the prompt implementation of Vulture MsAP actions.

18. Important gaps remain, including the lack of a fully functioning framework to coordinate the Vulture MsAP's implementation and its mid-term review expected in 2023. As time goes on, the lack of sufficient coordination capacity may become an increasingly limiting factor on what can be achieved, given the strategic scale of the agenda at stake. There is therefore the need to fundraise to secure enough financial resources to (a) support coordination and (b) support implementation of the Vulture MsAP and the flagship projects. In addition, the lack of awareness and support for the plan across some parts of the Vulture MsAP Range is a challenge that still needs to be addressed.

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.