Poisoning of vultures and other wildlife in East Africa (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda)

Darcy Ogada and Martin Odino
Biggest challenges

Poisons are cheap and easily accessed and the most cryptic of killers

If there are not concerned individuals on the ground, poisoning is overlooked.

The vast majority of poisoning in East Africa goes undetected.
Legislation

In all East African countries using poisons to hunt wildlife is illegal

Kenya: hunting is illegal, the use of poisons to kill problem animals is illegal

Tanzania: possession of poison with intention is an offence
Poisoning hotspots in East Africa
Pesticides used

Carbamates
Carbofuran
Carbosulfan

Acaricide
Amitraz

Pyrethroid
Cyhalothrin

Alkaloid
Strychnine – suspected for feral dogs
Human-wildlife conflict

Method: baiting carcasses or other food sources, e.g. pumpkins, watermelons, maize cobs

Species most targeted include:
- Bees
- Hyenas
- Lions
- Birds of prey – eagles, kites, sparrowhawks
- Elephants
- Crocodiles
- Otters
- Rodents

Most affected include:
- Vultures
- Medium to small carnivores: jackals, mongoose, small cats, monitor lizards
- Tawny Eagles
May 2009
Masai Mara Reserve, Kenya
36 vultures and a pride of 5 lions found poisoned by tourists at a cow carcass
suspect carbosulfan
January 2011
Chyulu Hills, Tanzanian-side
1 adult lion
Carbofuran
Teeth and claws removed to sell to tourists
Tomato laced with furadan to kill rodents and mousebirds
For food

Methods used for birds: soaking rice grains, baiting snails

Species most targeted:
Birds in rice schemes including, ducks, geese, doves, storks, widowbirds, weavers, godwits

Methods used for fish: pouring pesticides into lake and churning with boat engine

Fish through mainly localised fishing for tilapia in Lake Victoria

Other species affected:
Otters, crustaceans, dragonflies
Open-billed storks
Doves
Control of feral dogs

Methods used:
Baiting carcasses

Species affected:
Black kites
Crows
Marabou storks
Hooded vultures
Pet dogs
Use of vultures in traditional medicine

Roasted vulture heads
Maswa Game Reserve
Tanzania

**Methods used:** baiting carcasses
Prevention

Difficult but most realistic chances of success

Control of feral dogs because it is typically controlled by local authorities, i.e. the veterinary department
Obstacles to testing samples

1) Getting reports and samples from the field

2) Getting samples to testing facilities and under cold storage

3) Expense

4) If government wildlife authority tests samples, getting the results
Testing facilities

Local universities
Pros:
1) will usually agree to do testing
2) No hidden agenda
Cons:
1) often not cost effective to test single or small samples

Government labs
Pros:
1) Can test single or small samples
Cons:
1) Difficult to know methods used and if they are using latest equipment
2) Can refuse to test samples, or charge exorbitant rates
3) May have hidden agenda, i.e. can you trust the results?
“If at first you don’t succeed, take a nap.
When life gives you lemons, take a nap.
When the going gets tough, take a nap.”