



## **Vulture updates No 12 - March 2020 - Around the World of Vultures & VSG activities**

Wow, a lot has happened in six months (now dominated by Covid-19) - this newsletter continues to expand through your growing contributions, activities and events. We've witnessed the most appalling scale of Hooded Vulture (HV) poisoning events with over 1,166 deaths in Guinea Bissau, West Africa, which is still unravelling as we finalise this newsletter (see West Africa section below). Vultures were highly prominent at the CMS CoP in Feb 2020 in Gujarat, India, with several vulture side events, and important new CMS text agreed in the [preventing poisoning text](#) covering both [poison-baits](#) and [NSAIDs issues](#). The finalised resolutions will appear [here](#). By Sept 2019 some [key decisions](#) were [adopted by CITES](#) explicitly referring to the Vulture MsAP and the [threat posed to vultures by trade](#) in West Africa, and belief-based use.

VSG now has its own functioning [website](#), (which we will be expanding) and we posted our first position [statement on the role of vultures in human health](#), which we hope provides helpful clarification, and can be a useful format for other topics. We've already received constructive comments and plan to update the statement further. Formal VSG membership reached 110, but over 700 have now requested to receive this newsletter directly which has an even wider reach through IUCN and other linked networks.

**Africa Round-up:** The [Pan-African Ornithological Congress](#) is scheduled in Zimbabwe from 16-20 Nov 2020. There will be two vulture-related symposiums: 1) The CMS Vulture MsAP: Implementation in sub-Saharan Africa - an assessment of progress, organised by Andre Botha and 2) Poison Response Training for Bird Conservation: Developing Best Practices, organised by Corinne Kendall. Abstract deadline is 30 June. But note the RRF has already [rescheduled its Idaho meeting](#) with high vulture content for 2021 which may also apply to PAOC.

**West Africa:** We were alerted by VSG member Mohamed Henriques to a major poisoning event of Hooded Vultures (HV) in **Guinea Bissau** (a recent paper showed as a stronghold for this CR species with [43,000 pop estimate](#)) in late Feb 2020. Although it appeared to be a poison-bait incident, it has become clear that it involves multiple poisoning events, and probably with a belief-based use motivation (at least 200 have been found with heads removed). The devastating approximate total of 1,166 dead HVs since Feb was mainly from the first few days. Deaths have been concentrated in the Eastern part of the country, namely Bambadinca, Bafatá and Gabú, with lower mortality events in various other sectors. Information now emerging indicates that dead vultures had also been reported on at least 5 other occasions since Sept 2019 (these are not included in the total!) and the incidents have continued more recently with 120 casualties in Gabú during the second week of March 2020. VSG, BirdLife and VCF have immediately written formal letters to the Government, and efforts in-country have been a major team effort involving NGOs led by [ODZH \(Organização para a Defesa e Desenvolvimento das Zonas Húmidas na Guiné-Bissau\)](#) and also Ministries of Public Health, Agriculture and Forestry, the Secretary of State for the Env't, [IBAP \(Instituto da Biodiversidade e das Áreas Protegidas\)](#), the Governor of Bafatá, with support of [FAO Guinea Bissau](#) and the [FAO-ECTAD](#) in Accra-Ghana to swiftly address this incident. BirdLife have provided resources for follow-up and samples have recently been transported to a laboratory in Portugal for analyses. Further evidence is emerging of high demand for vulture body parts from neighbouring countries (and potentially other countries further afield) is driving cross-border trade. There are also reports of high in-country demand for vulture heads for belief-based use in relation to the current internal political disputes. Investigations proceed with limited resources and operational difficulties exacerbated by the political crisis and covid-19 pandemic outbreak. VCF have engaged strongly and published [news updates with details here](#) and BirdLife

will feature the event in their next Africa Newsletter [here](#).

Reasons for HV declines in **Sierra Leone** are thought to include the cutting down of big silk-cotton trees, along with high voltage power lines, and dwindling food sources. In Freetown, Musa Kimbo et al. are observing roosting and feeding sites, tracking population size. In **The Gambia** there are ongoing, country-wide transect surveys of the status & distribution of eight vulture species using road & boat surveys. Results of HV surveys along regular coastal routes apparently show a major increase of numbers. There are plans for a short film 'Dining Out at The Beach & Bush' illustrating the feeding ecology & diet diversity of hooded vultures. In line with IVAD 2019, "[Save the Egyptian Vulture from Extinction](#)" message was spread to [2,500,000 people](#) in the form of six advert boards installed by the [NCF](#) on the major route to the main Abuja Airport in **Nigeria**. Additionally, a [cycling event](#) was organized under the flyway campaign "A Mile for the Egyptian Vulture" calling on people to stop killing of vultures, desist from use in belief-based practices and halt sales of their parts. [NCF](#) is also [working directly with traditional healers in Nigeria](#) to reduce the pressure on belief-base use of vultures and illegal wildlife killing. In **Niger**, during the National Assembly's plenary session held in Niamey Oct 2019, parliamentarians unanimously adopted a [bill to punish offenses relating to the trade in endangered fauna and flora in Niger](#). This is a major and significant step, with special relevance to mitigate the problem of belief-based use of vultures. At the end of 2019, the [SCF](#) started an [environmental educational programme with schools in Kéllé region, Niger](#), focusing on awareness-raising for vultures and other emblematic species in the country.

**East Africa:** In southern **Kenya** at least 17 White-backed Vultures died near Amboseli NP – but thanks to the rapid response by Nature Kenya, The Peregrine Fund, Kenya WS and others, one individual was rescued, treated and released. A number of other poisoning incidents have occurred in this region in recent months. In northern **Kenya**, The Peregrine Fund's Coexistence Co-op Project has trained 1,300 people in the dangers of poisoning plus 735 trained in building predator-proof bomas (livestock corrals) since 2018. A number of human behavioural changes have resulted and more than 130 new bomas have been built by trainees. As a result there were no incidents of vulture poisoning in Laikipia County (8,700 km<sup>2</sup>) during 2019. In 2020 a 10-day regional workshop is planned to improve forensic capacity to detect poisons, increase capacity in wildlife toxicology, and to train field-based personnel in collecting, storing and transporting poisoned wildlife samples. North Carolina Zoo is continuing to monitor 26 satellite tagged vultures in southern **Tanzania**. There were no confirmed mortalities or poisoning in Ruaha NP in 2019. However, there have now been two cases of poisoning related to bushmeat snaring in Selous Game Reserve and 2019 counts were considerably lower than in 2018. To address the threat of poisoning, 50 rangers were given poison-response training in Sept 2019. In **Ethiopia** a joint expedition was started in June 2019 by [EWNHS/BirdLife Ethiopia](#) and [BirdLife Africa](#), held in the regions of Metahara, Awash, Dire Dawa, Aisya, Gewane, Samera and Said. The aim was to build [understanding on the threats to vultures](#). In Dec 2019, [eight more Egyptian vultures \(EV\) were tagged with solar-powered GSM/GPS transmitters](#) in Ethiopia to study the mortality factors in the wintering grounds. [Explicit study on bird mortality due to electrocution and collisions](#) with low and medium voltage power lines was done in Oromia and Afar regions in 2019. Along 218.64 km transects, 10 EVs and 26 other vultures were found. One of the tagged EVs by [RSCN](#) in Jordan was poisoned in Somali region, Ethiopia and the *in situ* visit revealed the use of poison due to human-carnivore conflict locally is more severe than expected ([see here](#)). Different [events](#), including [WMBD](#), were held at local level in [Eastern Oromia](#) and [Afar](#) to raise the awareness and sensitise the local stakeholders on the ecosystems role of vultures. Also in **Ethiopia**, HawkWatch International is continuing regular vulture counts at 7 abattoirs around Addis Ababa. They've also initiated monitoring of a wind farm in the Rift Valley to document potential collision risk of soaring birds, primarily vultures. Analyses underway include identifying vulture distributions and priority conservation areas, patterns in scavenger foraging ecology at abattoirs, and carrion removal rates by avian and mammalian scavengers. Seven adult EVs were fitted with satellite tags in **Djibouti** in Feb 2020. [Indications so far](#) are that many/all may be resident, suggesting that Djibouti is a stronghold for EV. Surveys of medium-voltage electricity distribution lines suggest that the pole designs used throughout Djibouti are rather safe. Animal husbandry practice feedback suggests that NSAID risk is likely low.

**Southern Africa:** Rochelle Mphethle (Raptors**Botswana**) conducted 985 km of road surveys in SW Botswana observed 274 raptors. In the 2019 breeding season at Moremi Gorge, 3 fledged Cape Vulture chicks were found with wing deformities compared to 12 in 2018. The supplementary bone provision efforts

appear to have helped the situation. Moses Selebatso continued lectures on agri-chemical training at the Botswana Agric Univ (BUAN). 17 White-backed Vultures (WBV) died in central Botswana from a poisoning incident targeting hyena and jackals – [BirdLife Botswana](#) and [Dept of Wildlife National Parks](#) are working together to curb increasing poisoning. The Dept Forest Resources & Wildlife Management (Nat Univ. Science Technology, **Zimbabwe**) is working with partners on a project in the Midlands region to assess breeding success of WBVs on private farmlands. The project is in its 6th year and a student is analysing the conservation opportunities, mapping vulture threats with a view to developing Vulture Safe Zones in these areas. 52 WBVs died after feeding on a cow carcass laced with poison targeting feral dogs in Central **Zimbabwe** in Jan 2020. Thanks to the efforts of local farmers, [BirdLife Zimbabwe](#) staff and [ZimParks](#) staff, 15 WBVs were saved and taken for treatment at [Kamfinsa Vet Surgery](#) and later for rehabilitation, to [Kuimbi Shiri Bird Sanctuary](#) where they were released. Northern Kruger NP also suffered a major poisoning incident in Feb 2020 with 26 vultures of at least 2 species, 3 Tawny Eagles an African Lion and a Leopard were poisoned. Intervention by the [EWT](#), working with Moholoholo Rehabilitation Centre resulted in another 24 vultures and a Tawny Eagle being taken in for treatment for 2 weeks and released when fully recovered. EWT also initiated a collaborative project with BirdLife South Africa, South African Nat. Parks, Hawk Mountain, the Kruger-to-Canyons Biosphere Region and others to establish Vulture Safe Zones across important vulture breeding and foraging sites in **South Africa**. Goals include monitoring nest density and breeding success of HV, CV & and White-backed Vultures, implementing Poison Intervention Training and vulture-awareness activities, encouraging the use of non-leaded ammunition, and organising events for IVAD. The project in the Lowveld is focused on a significant local breeding population of HV (approx. 30 pairs). There was a significant [publication on](#) vulture supplementary feeding sites and their impact in **South Africa**

**North Africa:** A survey of BV in **Morocco**'s High Atlas in 2019 found 5-11 birds (Dutch Birding 41). In **Egypt** a major [legislative analysis was undertaken](#) and [report](#) produced on the pesticides and veterinary products (with emphasis on NSAIDs) dangerous for vultures in Egypt, which was compiled by [NCE](#).

**Asia Round-up:** The annual SAVE meeting was [held in Nov 2019](#) in **India**, where regional priorities and the [latest Blueprint](#) were updated, and this resulted in the comprehensive [120 page report](#) of updates (as well as a [summary version](#)). The recent success of imposing a veterinary diclofenac ban in **Cambodia** is being followed up by the Cambodia Vulture Working Group with plans for monitoring the implementation. Meanwhile the population monitoring there (see 9<sup>th</sup> [SAVE report](#)) shows a worrying trend of slow population declines. Two poison-response training workshops were held in March 2020, the first in Asia, with WCS, BirdLife **Cambodia** and RSPB support - in the two remaining vulture strongholds. Two WRVs were GPS tagged by [Risingphoenix](#), also using Andre Botha's experience. Preliminary feedback suggests they are already revealing new areas in **Laos** that may be important, but we await details. The **Myanmar** Vulture Working Group (MVWG) is actively carrying out surveys of birds and NSAIDs. But a key step following meetings of MVWG with Government has been the adoption in Jan 2020 of the updated and greatly enhanced [Vulture Conservation Action Plan Myanmar](#) which extends to 2025. In **Bangladesh**, steps towards removal of ketoprofen from veterinary use continue to advance, with the greater engagement of the Ministry of Livestock, as well and Min of Env't and the **Bangladesh** National Vulture Recovery Committee. Bans in the two VSZs are anticipated to extend nationally in the coming year following a number of high profile meetings. Cattle carcass sampling for NSAIDs has advanced with support from EVI (Scotland) and will be reported in the coming year. Habitat protection and conservation of nesting and roosting sites has seen breeding success rise to 57%, and there are currently 12 active nests in VSZ 1 and around five nests in VSZ 2. The current population of WRV is currently stable at 260 individuals in **Bangladesh** (details in 9<sup>th</sup> [SAVE report](#)). Once again HGs have been brought to a rescue centre mainly from northern Bangladesh – 25 HGs this winter, and one CV. These will be released back into the wild in April 2020. In **Nepal**, a further (third release) [13 WRVs were released in Oct 2019](#) near Chitwan – 6 captive reared and 7 captive bred with further harnessing training of the team. As with previous releases, the birds have been fitted with GPS telemetry tags, and more wild birds were tagged bringing the total to 30 tagged wild birds. Movements and updates of the birds are [reported here](#). A children's book, '[Friendship at the Feeding Station](#)' featuring a vulture (WRV) and a Steppe Eagle in **Nepal** was published to help improve the image of vultures.

In **India** important progress of the IVRI/BNHS team's work safety-testing the veterinary NSAID, tolfenamic acid, which now looks likely to be a second safe alternative to diclofenac. An announcement and report is eagerly awaited with worldwide implications for veterinarians and vultures. The **India** conservation breeding programmes continue to produce over 60 offspring per year, and new colony aviaries have been added with mainly state government support to increase capacity in West Bengal, Assam and Haryana. Releases meanwhile have [reached the next stage in West Bengal](#) where 5 rehabilitated HGs were released, 2 of which were satellite tagged. The Haryana initial release of 8 tagged WRVs was due for March 2020, but has so far been delayed due to pandemic issues. Finally, an 8-page **India vultures policy summary** was agreed by Indian SAVE partners and provides welcome focus on the national priorities as well as clarifying key facts. In **Pakistan**, there were worrying reports of very high veterinary diclofenac availability and use in AJK, but also new hopes of work starting to address this and surveys in the area (WWF Pakistan). The breeding centre at Changamanga fledged two WRVs in 2019, and there are plans to push for stronger NSAIDs regulations. **Pakistan** government has also agreed to take on the rotating chair of the inter-governmental Regional Steering Committee.

**China** – In Yunnan Province, a report (during the height of the Wuhan coronavirus restrictions) on 3 Feb 2020 [via CCTV](#) of 61 **Himalayan Vultures** (26 still alive) that had apparently been trapped with nets by local people. Countless vulture parts were found (claws, feathers, neck, meat etc.) at the suspect's residence, and apparently prepared for sale as handicrafts, specimens, food and medicine. Note according to Chinese law, the penalty for such activity is up to 10 years in prison. An NGO [report](#) based on 100,000 internet questionnaires found that 11.8% of Chinese people have participated in wildlife consumption, and 32% have witnessed some form of wildlife consumption. Prof. MaMing of Xinjiang Inst of Ecology CAS edited and published the [latest raptor book](#) in a China Forestry Publishing House series: "The **Cinereous Vulture**" which compiles information from 4 NSFC projects. The research team involved covered the Tianshan, Altay and Kunlun Mountains, the Taklimakan Desert, the Qinghai Tibet Plateau, the Qiangtang area, and diverse habitats across West China. It includes satellite tracking and infra-red camera monitoring results, from over 20 years monitoring, and the first such studies in **China**.

**Middle East: Oman**, [Nine resident EVs are still being tracked](#) and breeding in Oman and **Iran**. There is [field work and public education about EVs on Oman's Masirah Island](#) (second highest EV breeding density in the world) planned for this spring. Searches for breeding LFV are underway, with plans for satellite tagging juveniles this year. The banning of diclofenac has moved up the governmental chain, and hopes are building for the issuance of the ministerial decree that will ban it formally. Imports of diclofenac have already stopped, so a ban is effectively in place. There have also been a number of electrocutions noted but no assessment of the extent of the issue. More details in [SAVE report p.76](#). Confirmation from **Iran** that the veterinary diclofenac ban imposed there in 2017 is so far holding firm, although one toxic NSAID, carprofen is becoming popular there. Also that some NSAIDs monitoring is planned (from [SAVE report p.74](#)), Steps were taken in **Yemen**, and specifically in **Socotra** to ensure diclofenac is not used in veterinary practice, and work by the UNE-GEF conservation team has shown the highest density of EV anywhere, and a population of 1,900 ([SAVE report p.76](#)). In **Turkey**, a [survey of bird mortality caused by hazardous powerlines](#) was conducted in Adana and Mersin regions by [Doga Dernegi](#) and Akademia Consulting Co. Ltd during late 2019. Among the victims, two EVs were found electrocuted. Over [900 Egyptian vultures](#) were counted migrating south in 2019 by the [Sarimazi Raptor Count](#). In **Jordan**, in Nov 2019, 167 cyclists from different organisations completed a 200 km "[Dead2Red](#)" race - the biggest cycling event in Jordan, as part of an awareness campaign for EV along its flyway, run by [RSCN](#) and [BirdLife Middle East \(video\)](#). A digital board showing an EV and the message '[Be Our Guest](#)' was displayed by [RSCN](#) for two weeks in Dec 2019 at the main arrival hall of Queen Alia International Airport, **Jordan**, reaching about 382,000 people. In **Syria**, [SSCW held an event in line with WMBD](#) raising awareness on the ecosystem role of vultures and the threat of illegal killing of these (and many other) birds in the country. Finally, in the Negev, **Israel**, a videocam of breeding GV's can [be accessed here and includes livestream](#).

**European Round-up:** A new **Bearded Vulture** (BV) record was broken in the Alps, with 53 pairs in the wild fledging a record number of young. Some of the nests have live cams, so you can watch [eg this one in the Italian Alps](#). One was [reported to be the highest ever bearded vulture nest](#). There were cases of trios,

[like this one in Écrins, France](#). The annual BV meeting was held in **Andorra** in Nov 2019, attended by 100+ and conclusions reported [here](#). The [breeding season started in early October](#), with [egg laying starting in Dec](#), and [the first chick hatched in Jan](#). See a [film on captive-breeding of Bearded vultures here](#). [Support and collaboration from zoos](#) is important for the programme. The 2019 (captive) breeding season improved to 42 pairs producing 67 eggs of which 36 hatched and 30 survived. Of these 22 were released: 9 in Andalusia, **Spain** (where 4 pairs already breed in the wild), 9 in the framework of the [LIFE GypConnect](#), connecting the Alpine and Pyrenean populations (5 in the Grands Causses, 2 in the Vercors and 2 in the Baronnies, **France**), 2 in **Corsica** and 2 in Maestrazgo (Spain). Details [here for the work in Baronnies by 'Vautours en Baronnies'](#). Unfortunately, 3 of the 5 birds released in the Grands Causses died later in the year. One collided and was electrocuted by a power line despite visual systems designed to help birds avoid this. The project newsletter is available on: [LIFE GypConnect Website](#) in French. To enhance the breeding, 11 birds were relocated within Europe, aiming to form 6 new breeding pairs and 1 foster pair. To address transportation challenges and diseases risks for BVs, VCF with zoos support has produced guidance documents in several [languages here](#), and more details on veterinary advances [here](#).

The **Cinereous vulture** reintroduction project in **Bulgaria** (part of [Vultures Back To LIFE](#) project) brought 10 more birds to Bulgaria from rehabilitation centres in **Spain** for their release in 2020. The project released 16 birds in 2019 in Bulgaria - 4 captive-bred, and 12 wild-origin. Some, like '[Barnabe](#)' [didn't make it \(broken wing/collision\)](#), but most are doing [fine and ranging](#) widely. The population in **Spain** increased from 250 pairs in the 1980s to 3000 pairs currently, and it also recolonized **Portugal**, where [birds are being tagged](#), including [nestlings](#).

A 40-author paper using data of 94 GPS-tracked **Egyptian Vultures** (EV) involving 31 organisations, [was published](#). The study reveals flexibility of migration routes and highlights key threats encompassing over 40 countries concerned. Birds returning to Europe include [several tagged 3 years ago in the Rupis project in Portugal/Spain](#). A [paper](#) on diet was published. The most important roost site for this species in the Iberian peninsula is now [threatened by wind farm construction in Zaragoza, Spain](#) – you can sign a petition. Experimental testing of different release methodologies for captive-bred EV [is ongoing in Bulgaria](#), within the [Egyptian Vulture New LIFE](#) project. Results are preliminary, but suggest that delayed release offers better chances of success. The project [has also tagged new EVs in the wintering area in Ethiopia](#) helping understand the threats there. A [comprehensive study about the breeding phenology of this species in the Balkans](#) was also published. In **Italy** the [LIFE Egyptian Vulture project](#) led by ISPRA is also releasing captive-bred EVs – [one wintered but died in Sicily](#). In **Albania**: The [AOS](#) successfully lobbied for [amendments in Albanian Law on the Protection of Fauna](#) recognising intentional poisoning not only as an administrative offense but punishable by prison or a heavy fine. To strengthen this achievement, and emphasise the scale and underlying causes to the authorities, a [national workshop was held in Tirana](#) in Jan 2020. To mitigate the use of poison baits, following the good example of **Greece**, the [PPNEA initiated a network of local caretakers around the Egyptian Vulture territories](#). Two supplementary feeding stations were established in Southern Albania to reduce the risk of poisoning accidents (see [here](#)). [Environmental-education activities](#) aiming the raise the awareness on vultures started in the [schools in Gjirokastrer region](#), the EV core area in **Albania**. Alternative approaches, such as [marathon running at local and national events \(video\)](#), were also used to sensitise the public about the alarming status of the vultures in the country. MES organized a [pilot training seminar in Skopje, North Macedonia](#) in Dec 2019, aiming at increasing the capacity of the national government institutions to deal with the problem of illegal wildlife trade. The new platform of the smartphone application [SmartBirds](#) for data collection on the threats for wildlife was presented and the new version of the handbook "[How to Prevent Trafficking in Protected Bird Species](#)" adapted to North Macedonia was launched. In **Greece**, an [interview-based study on the impact of dangerous VMPs](#) for vultures was conducted. [WWF Greece](#) organized an [assembly of all pupils from schools of Thrace](#) supporting the conservation of EVs and helping in the campaign against the use of poison baits ([video](#)). The "[Egyptian Vulture Student Action Team](#)" maintained by [HOS](#) in Trikala, Kalampaka and Ioannina is growing with over 1,200 members. A [documentary](#) on the status EVs in Greece was released. In **Bulgaria**, the [National Anti-poison Strategy](#) is in process of development. Also a [report](#) was produced on the results from the experimental restocking programme of Egyptian Vultures so far (2018-2019). [The breeding phenology of EVs in Bulgaria](#) through trail camera surveys over the last 8 years. In Oct, 420 Bulgarian children ran a mile in the National Stadium to support EV conservation along its flyway ([video](#)).

**Eurasian Griffon vultures** (GV) populations continue to increase in Europe. **Spain** has 30,000 pairs, in **France** the species has successfully [recolonised all the southern part of the country](#). Further East the census from last year's [breeding population in the eastern Rhodopes reached 100 pairs](#), a new maximum. The LIFE Re Vultures programme is [also reintroducing wild ungulates](#), as part of a rewilding approach, to restore the vulture food chains, and [establishing supplementary feeding sites](#). GVs in Europe are partial migrants, and in the Balkans individuals were recorded [moving from Israel to the Alps and then back to Greece](#). The [Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds](#) coordinated the annual [GV census in the Balkans](#) within the LIFE Re-Vultures project in Nov 2019. Teams counted 564-571 in total (336 **Bulgaria**, 80-87 **Greece**, 122 **Serbia**, 26 **North Macedonia**). A new project ([LIFE with Vultures](#)) started in **Cyprus** to try to boost the [island's small and endangered population](#), currently only about 20 individuals. Another island population – in **Sardinia**, is doing much better, with the help of [LIFE Under Griffon Wings](#). Led by Sassari University, the project aims to improve food availability, establishing a network of farm feeding stations that are managed by the livestock breeders themselves, and to tackle illegal wildlife poisoning. The project is also translocating birds from wildlife rehabilitation centres in Spain - up until now 62 birds were successfully transported. A research [project has been initiated](#) to study interspecific interactions between GV and CV on Mallorca, **Spain** where GV recolonised a few years ago, and now shares the island with the healthy CV population there. A [study](#) compares the anatomy and foraging strategies of 3 vulture species. [Another study suggests](#) survival rates of adult GV were lower in landscapes that are more modified by human activities. Europe's fifth vulture species, **Rueppell's Vulture** was officially recognised in the Andalusia species list, now that observations are regular there, and this year [two birds are trying to breed in two mixed-species pairs with GVs!](#)

**Poison-baits** issue in Europe: this remains the major issue in Europe and indeed worldwide. [10+ GVs were killed near the largest colony on mainland Greece](#). Other poisoning events occurred in [Bulgaria](#), [in Serbia](#), and [in Croatia](#). Poisoning is often associated with human-wildlife conflict, [and a lot of work is going into mediating this, eg see here in Greece](#), to avoid poison being needed. Many European countries are implementing anti-poisoning programmes and strategies, which are producing results. This includes major efforts in the Balkans, where several projects aim to recover depleted vulture populations – it includes establishing national working groups, eg [in Albania](#), and [in Bulgaria](#), inclusive of all relevant stakeholders, and crucially government agencies. In **Spain**, where anti-poisoning programmes are well established, the situation is getting better, but mortality continues – [like this CV](#). The challenge there is more to get this recognised as a serious offense by the law-courts – so getting an [exemplary fine and prison sentence in this grave incident](#) was welcomed. Media and awareness campaigns – [like this one](#), are also important. And dogs play a part too – in Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece or Bulgaria, among other countries, dogs are used – read more [here](#). **Collision and electrocution** is also an important mortality factor, [killing for example this CV in Spain](#), tagged by GREFA. The importance of monitoring the causes of vulture deaths to determine threats and address them is key. Most projects rightly prioritise necropsy of dead birds and toxicological analyses. Whenever possible, a **lead** test is carried out on the liver, as **lead poisoning** is a silent and almost certainly underestimated threat. In 2019, a GV in Spain had 469.65 mg lead/kg in its liver, which is the highest value recorded. The X-ray did not reveal any fracture or shotgun pellet, but the dosage suggests that the vulture died from lead poisoning. The origin of lead is unknown, but the most common cause is the ingestion of whole pellets of lead ammunition present in the carcass of game species, consumed by scavengers. Convincing hunters to use lead-free ammunition is a priority as the CMS resolutions above suggest. Meanwhile, we anticipate publication of NSAIDs monitoring in Spain in the near future. A welcome children's book, '[Mort](#)' was published to help improve the image of vultures.

**North America Round-up:** The Peregrine Fund has been releasing California condors (CC) into the wild since 1966, and July in 2019 the 1000<sup>th</sup> CC was released, bringing the total count for free-flying CCs to 337, with 181 additional birds in captivity. There are now more wild birds than captive. In addition to their recovery efforts, the Peregrine Fund, in partnership with the Oregon Zoo and Inst for Wildlife Studies, continues to run the [North American Non-Lead Partnership](#). This project “seeks to expand the coalition of hunters, anglers, and other conservationists dedicated to improving ecosystem and wildlife health by choosing non-lead options”. The project is evolving to change attitudes on both local and regional scales. The Ventana Wildlife Society in Monterey California (VWS), partnered with Pinnacles National Park (PNP) aims to monitor the population growth, scavenging habits, and nesting success of CC in the wild. VWS runs

a free non-lead ammunition program to encourage local hunters and ranchers switch to non-lead ammunition, thereby reducing lead exposure for CC and other wildlife. This free program is in its 7<sup>th</sup> year and is currently the only one of its kind in the state of California. The current CC populations in California consists of [a southern flock](#) managed by the U.S Fish & Wildlife Service, and [a central flock](#) managed by VWS and PNP. Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, located in central Pennsylvania, is working with former trainee graduates and colleagues to conduct vulture road surveys throughout the Americas, including routes in **Argentina, Panama, Patagonia**, and nine within the **United States**. These routes will soon receive follow-up surveys for the purpose of calculating general population trends for winter/summer populations in those regions. The sanctuary continues to monitor Turkey vulture (TV) and Black vulture (BV) nests in Pennsylvania, as well as study movement ecology of new world vultures. New transmitters will be deployed in Arizona and New York during 2020. Hawk Mountain vulture education efforts include creating BV education materials to address landowner-vulture conflicts, and a Raptor Field Techniques course led in the Fall of 2019 that highlighted vulture tagging protocols. Hawk Mountain partners with colleagues and former trainees in South Africa, The Gambia, Zimbabwe and Europe to study vulture populations and promote their conservation.

**South America Round-up:** From Nov 25-28th 2019, the III International Andean Condor Conference was held in Valledupar, **Colombia**, with presentations of more than 40 researchers from South, North America and Spain together with rural and indigenous communities. The conference highlighted the need for common condor conservation policies and programs for all Andean countries, and for more studies of population status, condor-human conflict and the health of wild populations. The meeting and subsequent work of the “Condor Group” developed a proposal to change the IUCN classification of Andean condors (AC) based on their generation length, low demography in some regions and the high observed mortality rates associated with pesticide and lead poisoning, persecution, collision with infrastructure, etc. In **Colombia**, [Fundación Neotropical](#) associate to national and international alliances began in Jan 2019 an AC satellite tracking program, which already collects new and surprising information nationally for AC movements and is identifying important conservation areas. In **Argentina** a PhD thesis on BV use of rubbish dumps and exposure to lead was defended. The WCS-coordinated International Priority Setting Exercise for the AC was finalised and will soon be made available. A [recent study](#) done in **Patagonia** shows that AC may experience health issues when exposed to volcanic eruptions, however these are usually temporary. [Other article](#) highlighter the potential role of Biosphere reserves for immature AC. Finally, a [demographic analysis](#) of condors and vultures suggest that dietary plasticity of extant vulture lineages allowed them to thrive despite historical environmental changes.

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**Chris Bowden**  
[chris.bowden@rspb.org.uk](mailto:chris.bowden@rspb.org.uk)

**Andre Botha**  
[andreb@ewt.org.za](mailto:andreb@ewt.org.za)

**Co-chairs: Vulture Specialist Group, IUCN Species Survival Commission**

**Editor & Asia:** Chris Bowden

**African Regional Co-chair:** Darcy Ogada

**European Regional Co-chair:** José Tavares

**America Regional Co-chairs : North America:** Keith Bildstein, **Latin America:** Sergio Lambertucci

**Additional contributions:** Stoyan Nikolov, A B M Sarowar Alam, Sakib Ahmed, Roller Ma Ming, Mike McGrady, Zoey Greenberg

**Editor Vulture News:** Campbell Murn

**VSG Admin Assistant:** Lesley Jerome