

A campaign to save African Vultures in the wake of new poisoning incidents

Title

“I want African Vultures ALIVE – not DEAD”. This was the headline message for the African vulture campaign initiated at the BirdLife World Congress held in Ottawa, Canada, in June 2013.

It resonated very well with the 600 delegates and most people stopped by to take pictures next to a banner that boldly proclaimed this message. As we speak, this message is spreading like wildfire in the social media and beyond. One of the highly esteemed delegates who lent her support to the campaign to halt the desecration of vultures was none other than the Patron of BirdLife International, Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado.

Image not found

http://www.birdlife.org/uk/media/press/press_releases/2013/06/PrincessTakamado.org **Princess Takamado of Japan (Honorary President of BirdLife) likes vultures alive!**

In Africa they are also of cultural value to many communities, and they have an important eco-tourism value.

But why would anyone want these creatures alive, as they are often portrayed as ugly scavengers?

Vultures play an extremely important role in nature. They keep natural and man-made habitats free of carcasses, waste and even human excrement. This way, they limit the spread of diseases, such as anthrax and botulism, a rare disease that causes paralysis.

Still, why this particular concern about African vultures, now? The African continent supports eleven species of vulture, of which eight are confined to the continent.

The main threats to vultures in Africa include poisoning, loss of preferred habitat, persecution for various uses including traditional medicine, disturbance at breeding sites, declining food availability and collision with energy infrastructure such as wind turbines. In West Africa for example, comparisons of censuses conducted by Jean-Marc Thiollay in the early 1970s and then repeated in the early 2000s, found that four large vulture species decreased dramatically (98%) outside protected areas in four countries.

Poisoning incidences are also being increasingly reported elsewhere in Africa. In July 2013 alone, two known poisoning incidents decimated a large number of vultures in southern Africa. An estimated 400 to 600 vultures were found dead near an elephant carcass in Caprivi, Namibia, poisoned by poachers who laced the carcass with a chemical. This was an intentional attempt to kill vultures, because vultures congregate around carcasses and are therefore often used by law enforcers as an indication of poaching activity.

In another incident, about 50 vultures were found dead in a farm in Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa. Several sheep carcasses found on site were suspected of having been intentionally poisoned in order to control jackal predation on new-born lambs.

The generally negative public perception towards vultures worsens the situation by making it difficult to convince people that the decline of vulture populations will have negative implications on their lives, such as loss of environmental cleaning services and loss of income from tourism. Unfortunately this negative attitude permeates society at all levels at local, national and international levels and it has been a challenge to convince governments, donors and industries to support vulture conservation.

Achilles Byaruhanga of Nature Uganda (BirdLife in Uganda) likes vultures alive!

The BirdLife Africa Partnership, together with

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<http://www.birdlife.org/community/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/AB-218x300.jpg>

collaborators, especially through the IUCN Vulture Specialist Group, is taking action to address the looming African vulture crises.

Priority actions include: first, research and monitoring to produce evidence to persuade government and industry to change their practices and commit resources to vulture conservation.

Secondly, map areas where vultures are found and the threats they face. Mapping will enable identification and protection of 'vulture hotspots', including vulture breeding colonies.

Thirdly, educate people – including donors and decision-makers - and change their perceptions about vultures.

Fourthly, support local conservation action, and encourage workers from different areas of the continent to network and share experiences.

We need your support to stem the threats to African vultures!

Please share this article with your network of friends, take action for your local vultures, or make a donation at www.justgiving.com/africanvultures.

THANK YOU!