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Stop bird poisoning : BirdLife calls upon the European Commission to show leadership at Quito Conference today. Time to ban diclofenac and lead ammunitions

Crucial negotiations are taking place today in Quito, Ecuador, at the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), where countries are trying to reach agreement on a global commitment to stop poisoning of birds.

The “Guidelines to prevent poisoning of migratory birds”[1] addresses key threats to birds and other wildlife such as pesticides, use of poison baits, use of veterinary drugs, use of lead ammunition etc.

The two main contentious issues are an attempt to ban the use of lead ammunition and of the veterinary use of the drug diclofenac, a product highly toxic to vultures and eagles.

“We expect the EU to show leadership championing a complete ban on both the use of toxic ammunition and on the veterinary use of diclofenac – stated Ariel Brunner, Head of EU Policy at BirdLife Europe - in both cases non-toxic alternatives are readily available and nothing can justify the continued use of dangerous substances”. Lead is a toxic metal which is dangerous to humans and birds alike. It has been removed from paint and petrol, but is still pumped out into the environment in the form of ammunition used by millions of hunters across the world. Last month, 30 eminent European wildlife and human health experts issued a statement summarising the overwhelming evidence of harm from lead and calling for a phase out of lead ammunition[2]. This follows a similar statement from American scientists.

Some countries are already leading the way: for example Denmark banned the use of lead gunshot for all shooting as long ago as 1996. Danish hunters are fully supportive and the sport has experienced no decline as a result of the ban.

The anti-inflammatory drug diclofenac is extremely toxic to vultures and eagles. Its use on cattle almost wiped out the South Asian populations of vultures in the 90’s and has recently been found to affect eagles too. Birds are poisoned when they scavenge on dead domestic animals previously treated. It has now been banned in India, Pakistan and Nepal, but is now readily available bot in the EU and in several African countries where there is a concrete risk of repeating the south Asia catastrophe. The loss of vultures in India, has not only brought magnificent species to the brink of extinction, it has also had huge health and economic impacts as unconsumed carcasses have led to an explosion in population of stray dogs and triggered a rabies epidemic. The EU plays a crucial role in the CMS and adoption of a strong document is vitally dependent on the position taken by the EU.

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BirdLife Europe is a Partnership of nature conservation organisations in 49 countries, including all EU Member States, and a leader in bird conservation. Through its unique local to global approach BirdLife Europe delivers high impact and long term conservation for the benefit of nature and people.

NOTES

[1] http://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/document/COP11_Doc_23_1_2_Bird_Poisoning_Review_%26_Guidelines_E_0.pdf

[2] <http://www.zoo.cam.ac.uk/departments/conservation-science/European-Statement-9>

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