



**GLOBAL FLYWAYS SUMMIT, APRIL 23-26 2018**

# Implementing the Vulture Multi-species Action Plan

**T**he conservation status of African-Eurasian vultures has seen major changes for the worse in recent years. Implementation or expansion of effective conservation action is urgently needed across the range of these birds, as a top global priority for bird conservation.

The **CMS Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures** (Vulture MsAP), adopted by CMS Parties in 2017, provides an agreed framework for actions to halt the current population declines in all the 15 Old World vulture species.

Successful recovery programmes in Europe (where vultures are generally increasing and recolonising former range), and some important progress with tackling threats in South Asia, demonstrate effective conservation action for vultures and recognition of the many socio-economic benefits associated with healthy vulture populations. This session therefore aimed to advance implementation of the CMS Vulture MsAP by, first, cementing alliances and donor or policy support for implementation of essential MsAP activities and, second, promoting the adoption of landscape approaches to threat reduction for vulture conservation.

### Outcomes of the session

1. The Summit affirmed and reinforced the importance of the immediate, sustained and comprehensive **implementation of the CMS Vulture MsAP** in all its components.
2. A **well-coordinated 'community of implementers'** is needed to bring together all stakeholders, including Governments, conservationists, protected area managers, livestock breeders, hunters and veterinarians, drawing on synergies between them, including for example veterinary pharmaceutical and agrochemical companies and those involved in anti-poaching efforts for elephants and conservation of carnivores affected by poisoning.
3. Effective coordination of implementation of any species action plans is crucial if opportunities are to be maximised. This is all the more true for the Vulture MsAP, as it covers so many species, threats and range states; **resources to support coordination** are urgently needed.
4. **Eleven 'Flagship projects'** were identified to support the future



Photo Lappet-faced Vulture Ecoprints/Shutterstock

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# A Summit for the Flyways Outcomes

implementation of key parts of the MsAP, as cost-effective priorities that should urgently be funded, with a range of activity types, scales and budgets.

- Six projects to facilitate implementation of the MsAP across all range states: a communications tool kit, a Vulture MsAP online tool, guidance on developing National or Regional Vulture Conservation Strategies and establishing Vulture Safe Zones, establishment of an international framework for coordination of implementation, and a Total Economic Evaluation of the ecosystem services provided by Old World vultures.
- Four projects to reduce critical threats: development of rapid response systems to stop vulture poisoning in Africa and Europe, combating the trade in vultures and their body parts for belief-based use in Africa, safety-testing veterinary NSAIDs on vultures, and mapping the sensitivity of vultures (among other large birds) to energy infrastructure.
- One project along two flyways, to serve as models for multi-country and -regional action for vultures: conservation of the Egyptian Vulture along its Western and Eastern Flyways.

This list is not exhaustive, and many other valuable projects could be proposed. Such donor-funded projects are essential, for example in trialling solutions and removing technical barriers to implementation. They should be designed also to contribute towards long-term solutions to the challenges of vulture conservation focused on **long-term engagement and commitment of the private sector and Government while mobilising local communities**.

5. To tackle the threat of **poison baits, Rapid Response Mechanisms and Protocols** involving local communities and Governments (including enforcement agencies and veterinary authorities) have proven to be an effective and practical response and are needed, especially in Africa and Europe, where these threats are most acute. Actions to tackle underlying drivers of poisoning, especially human-wildlife conflict and the ivory trade in Africa, are also being implemented but are still more challenging and, particularly for elephant poaching, not achievable by conservation actions focused only on the vultures; see Outcome 2 above.
6. **Safety testing for veterinary pharmaceuticals**, especially non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), is urgently needed to effectively manage and reduce the proven risk to vultures that these drugs present. Drugs found or known to be toxic to vultures should be prohibited or withdrawn for the treatment of livestock, and substituted with readily available safe alternatives. Immediate support and/or implementation of these actions by both national and multilateral (e.g. EU) institutions is essential.

The summit was pleased to hear from Portugal that the national parliament had just voted for a resolution not to approve the veterinary use of diclofenac (an NSAID known to be toxic to

vultures), and that the professional veterinary body had stated that it opposes licensing. It is hoped that full prohibition will follow and that other countries will follow this lead.

7. **Lead toxicity** caused by the ingestion of ammunition fragments in carcasses and offal is a well-documented threat to scavenging birds world-wide. The urgency to implement the Vulture MsAP objective 'to ensure that CMS Resolution 11.15 on the phasing out the use of **lead ammunition by hunters** is fully implemented' was further emphasised by a recently published study from Africa (since the adoption of the Resolution and the Vulture MsAP) showing a high incidence of elevated lead levels in living vultures, affecting around one third of those tested, and clear evidence of an association with recreational hunting.
8. **Vulture Safe Zones** form a crucial landscape approach to vulture conservation which has been defined in South Asia. The concept builds on successful efforts to remove vulture-toxic veterinary pharmaceuticals from vulture habitat in that region, in order to allow the recovery and in some cases high profile reintroduction of vulture populations. Management of Vulture Safe Zones is now beginning to include tackling other threats to vultures.
9. **Landscape approaches** to vulture conservation are shaped by environmental, social and economic factors which vary by region. Appropriately adapted models based on South Asian Vulture Safe Zones show great promise and could be applied in other regions, particularly Africa. A trial of such a landscape approach in Zambia has adopted a community-based and landowner management model in response to a wider and different range of threats and has proven attractive to local and national stakeholders. Additional approaches to combating poisoning in Southern Africa and Kenya provide more models. Further development of such approaches in Africa is strongly recommended. In Europe, by contrast, implementing and enforcing existing national policies and using regional legislative frameworks (e.g. EU Birds and Habitats Directives, the EU Natura 2000 network, veterinary legislation and regulation on the disposal of livestock carcasses) may be sufficient.
10. Vultures are also seriously threatened by mortality caused by collision and electrocution with **power transmission and energy generation infrastructure**. Many of the outcomes of the Summit session on mainstreaming flyway conservation into these sectors are directly relevant to vulture conservation as set out in the Vulture MsAP, and should be considered among the vulture conservation outcomes of the Summit.
11. **High ecosystem service values of vultures** are widely recognised and not in doubt, but studies are needed to quantify and promote them. In particular, there is a need to identify where and to what extent vulture conservation leads to 'win-win' situations in which human societies also benefit.

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