

Mass dog poisoning operation in Addis Ababa can have severe repercussions on vulture populations

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Following the report on <http://www.theafricareport.com/East-Horn-Africa/ethiopia-mass-dog-killing-concerns-hit-addis-ababa.html> and leads on discussion groups of mass dog killing in Addis Ababa from Anteneh Shimelis, I have attempted to verify the news.

I have been able to visit the veterinary office of the Addis Ababa Agriculture Office. I was also able to locate and talk a number of relevant persons in two Sub-city councils, a health office and an office that collects solid wastes in connection with the killing and removal of dog carcasses.

I can confirm that the issue of mass killing of dogs is true and is being done in connection with the growing opinion of Addis Ababa becoming a regional Capital, seat of AU (African Union) and several other international organisations. On the other hand the mass killing of dogs is associated with the potential and growing concern of the risk of rabies to society. Mass killing of dogs is headed by vet officers but is carried out by a committee. The committee is composed of a member from the

health office, a vet (that gives out the poison to the dogs), a police officer, solid waste disposal team, a communications officer and a person from town's trade and industry office. The funds for the removal of dogs are issued by the Addis Ababa City Administration and given directly to Addis Ababa City Agriculture office. The Vet administers Strychnine to dogs by putting the poison on meat. The dog can die immediately or sometimes it happens that the dog can run away and is found the next day. A large dump truck follows the person (s) administering the poison and pick dead dogs on to the truck. Incidentally, the operation is carried out at midnight and is completed before dawn. A dump truck, which is owned by the Sub-city solid waste disposal office, takes the dead dogs and dumps them at the city dump. Dogs that haven't died on the spot

will be reported the next day by a follow up team and collected the next day.

Is the report true?

Yes there is mass killing of dogs and until April 2013 they have reached the 12,000 mark.

Is it true that dog carcasses are strewn all over the city?

No. There is no sign of dogs killed by poison strewn around in the city. I have checked a number of possible places and have also cross-checked with others. All dead dogs, it seems are removed to the dump site. I am not sure what happens to dogs that escape and there seems to be a gap here. I am not all too sure that every dog is collected especially if it escapes. It appears that some dogs can escape after being poisoned and die without being collected.

Can carcasses of dogs pose a threat to vultures and other raptors in Addis?

Definitely! Dog carcasses are just dumped at the city dump after being mixed with other garbage. The city dump (which is actually now in the city proper) is used by

all kinds of raptors every day. The most common vultures are Hooded, followed by White-backed. There are also fair number of Thick-billed Ravens, Tawny Eagles, Steppe Eagles, Marabou Storks, Yellow-billed Kites and Pied Crow. Other birds associated with the dump include Sacred and Wattled Ibises. I had a chance to ask the office in charge of collecting garbage (and dead dogs) and they told me that there is no system in place for burying the dead dogs. These are left to rot in the open. All this is in the face of the raptors that use the dump as a feeding site not to speak of human beings that collect decaying food from the dump. One reason given is that the City Administration has not provided a place for disposing city garbage outside the delimited area. When it comes to burying carcasses, it requires a cost and no one at present is ready or willing to cover such costs of excavating and physically moving carcasses for burial.

Discussing the risks involved with a health office in one of the Sub-city areas, they appeared remotely aware of the situation and surprisingly not even alarmed by the dangers to human beings and wildlife. This is a cause for alarm!

Over the years, I have noted that numbers of Hooded and

Thick-billed Ravens have sharply decreased in Addis. In October 2005, I counted 235 Hooded Vultures, 52 White-backed Vultures, 135 Thick-billed Ravens, 12 Tawny Eagles and at least 32 Marabou Storks. There were hundreds of Yellow-billed Kites at the time. These numbers seem to be replaced by lots of Kites and Pied Crows at the moment. Very few Hooded Vultures are seen nowadays, and not in the numbers seen in the past.

What are the solutions?

I have tried to hold fruitful discussions with the Addis Ababa City Agriculture Office especially

with Dr Tadesse Kebede. Dr Tadesse is the head Veterinarian at this office who is dealing with the dog kill. There is consensus that we need to work hand in hand to create awareness of the dire situation. We have a shared concern that it is necessary to act as quickly as possible on this matter. The carcasses of dogs need to be buried and there is a need for space to do this. I will be bringing the matter up to the City Council next to see if there is a way to put aside a plot of land. The biggest worry is that they will not be ready to cover the costs of burying the dogs. A further step is to raise awareness of the issue through one of the more popular newspapers circulating in the country.
