Vulture updates No 17 – October 2022 - Around the World of Vultures & VSG activities

If you receive this newsletter directly via email (now over 800 requested), you are on the VSG mailing list, and we are happy from now on to refer to you as **'Friends of the Vulture Specialist Group'**. Although note this doesn't make you formally members of the group, but we hope this goes some way to recognising your interest and support for the vulture cause. For those interested to become formally invited members of the group, please first consult guidelines on the VSG website. If you are already a full member, we are aware that some of you have struggled to register your membership via the SSC portal, and if you are among those 30 not yet fully registered/renewed, or unsure about it, please do contact Commissions@iucn.org requesting further guidance. Further updates on **VSG** composition - we are pleased to welcome Mohamed Henriques as regional co-chair for Africa, and finally, our VSG Co-chair Chris Bowden was awarded an MBE in the queen's UK birthday honours list in June for his contribution to vulture conservation and services to the environment.

A wider **alert for vigilance** comes from VSG member Olivier Duriez in France - to look out across Eurasia and Africa in case of mortality events or unusual immobility of adult birds being observed through observation or tracking data. In spring 2022 an unexpected outbreak of avian flu (Highly Pathogenic lineage H5N1) struck French and Spanish populations of Eurasian Griffon vultures (GV), with the first cases detected almost simultaneously on 1st May in Spanish rehab centres and 6th May in wild vultures in France (Pyrenees, Massif Central and Alps). 11 dead vultures (adults and chicks) collected showed positive H5N1 tests. GPS-tagged adult GVs revealed unusual immobility periods of 6 days on average. Besides immobility, neurological clinical signs involved posture and balance issues. Chick mortality reached 70-80% at colonies surveyed, probably the combined effect of disease and starvation when parents are sick. Analysis of tracheal swabs and blood samples for trapped adult birds revealed between 5-50% of birds had been contaminated (antibodies detected) in May while there was no virus actively circulating in June-July (PCR negative). Something to beware of as migratory vultures disperse this winter?

The 14th **International Vulture Awareness Day (IVAD**) on 3rd Sept, engaged at least 82 organisations from 31 countries registered events on the IVAD website. Mexico and Panama registered events for the first time this year and thanks to all VSG members and others who supported and participated. The many highlights included scavenger hunts, vulture-inspired visual art and poetry, extra flying demonstrations at collections with vultures across the world, guided walks in national parks and the GPS tagging and release of vultures rescued from a recent mass poisoning event. More details here, and summarised here, for SAVE Partners in South Asia here, for multiple European events, the OSME blog here describes events in Socotra (Yemen)… just a few examples from around the world.

Upcoming Meetings: The Andean Condor conference will be held in Quito 23-28 Oct. The 15th Pan-African Ornithological Congress 21st-26th of Nov 2022 at Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe includes 4 symposia and one round-table discussion dedicated to vultures. The RRF Annual Conference Oct 4-8 is in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. A West Africa vultures planning workshop focusing on Belief-based use will be held in Nigeria also in Oct with projected outputs by Dec, and the Egyptian Vulture (EV) open online meeting in 8-9 Nov (more details below). Finally, the SAVE open day online meeting will be on 24th Jan 2023, with an in-person meeting planned in the terai of Nepal in mid-March.

Vol 82 of our open access journal ‘**Vulture News**’ has articles, reports and observations from across the globe. In this edition topics include flight patterns of American Black Vultures (ABV) near airports in Brazil; a lack of vultures along transects in northern Nigeria; nocturnal activity of Eurasian Griffon Vultures (GV) in Bulgaria; frog-eating Hooded Vultures (HV); an unusual sighting and saga of a Cinereous Vulture (CV) in S India; and a report of community engagement in vulture conservation in Niger. Also reviews of two children's books and a summary of a thesis on Egyptian Vultures (EV). Please refer to the author guidelines on the website and submit your articles, short communications, reports, interesting observations or commentaries to iucnvulturenews@gmail.com. We also include citations or summaries of recent vulture-related theses or dissertations. Other notable publications with **global perspectives** include one that explores through a global review, vulture exposure to veterinary pharmaceuticals and their impact on the birds as well as the key actions needed to mitigate this global and increasing threat. Another explores the ecosystem services through vultures globally by removing dead animals thereby the source of greenhouse gases (e.g., CH4 and CO2), as well as reducing the need for alternative methods of carcass disposal such as rendering, burial or composting – with further greenhouse gas consequences. Tracking data was modelled to define space utilisation and consequent conservation measures, and in another study to explore the implications for ‘vulture safe zone’ definition. One more study used stable isotopes to investigate vulture dietary composition.

Africa Round-up:

North Africa: Nature Conservation Egypt’s (NCE) vulture conservation programme established the fundamentals of a long-term raptor migration monitoring programme, counting 1,257 EV during the inaugural spring raptor migration counts carried out at a key bottleneck site, Galala in **Egypt**. A Griffon vulture (GV) was rescued and rehabilitated, assisting with collaborations with the Galala University, but more significant was that NCE through efficient advocacy and investigations efforts managed to trigger the shutdown of one of the largest wildlife markets in Egypt where many threatened species including vultures were traded.

West Africa: Ph.D. student Asso Armel and colleagues have been identifying threats and conservation actions needed in **Ivory Coast**. During investigations in fetish markets and slaughterhouses in the main cities, they found a total absence of vultures in almost all slaughterhouses. Guards reported that vultures had been killed by shooting and poisoning by hunters and local residents. In **Benin,** Hooded Vulture (HV) monitoring work conducted by SOS Savane-ONG with support from the African Bird Club, in the northern towns bordering the Pendjari National Parks, identified 11 nest sites in 6 of the 13 communes surveyed. 143 HVs were counted, but the species remains to be confirmed in Kandi, Karimama and Malanville towns, where they previously existed. To mitigate human pressures, conservation activities are being implemented, namely the installation of feeding stations within a highly secure area, environmental education in local schools, awareness among local communities and the involvement of political and administrative authorities during workshops dedicated to vultures. In **Senegal, The Gambia & Guinea-Bissau**, Andre Botha of the Vultures for Africa Programme of the EWT conducted 12 Wildlife Poisoning Response Training Workshops to 315 learners in May 2022, the first such in-person training conducted in these countries. This was in partnership with local BirdLife Partners, BirdLife Africa Secretariat, VCF and Junta Andalusia. Further awareness efforts were carried out by ODZH and WABSA. Veronica Dandzo-Adzagudu completed a population assessment of Rueppell’s Vulture (RV) in Mole NP, **Ghana** with HawkWatch Int. & Wilson Orn. Soc. support although only one immature RV was actually recorded. Potential threats to vultures in the area are belief-based use and poisoning from veterinary acaricide drugs and DDT used as pesticide on farms. A vulture awareness campaign targeted 410 local people, including 60 students from two community schools who are excited to join school-based vulture clubs. IBCP is working with colleagues in Ghana, **Togo,** and **Benin** to investigate the conservation status of vultures and drivers of their declines. Mole NP provides nesting habitat for 3 critically endangered vultures that have disappeared from much of the surrounding region. The team has not found any CR vultures in any protected area in Togo, where small populations of HV may be restricted to urban areas with outdoor slaughterhouses, apparently their main food source since most large mammalian wildlife disappeared. HV’s close association with people makes them highly vulnerable to trappers who use meat embedded with fish hooks or treated with tobacco, which

temporarily incapacitates the birds, allowing them to be killed for fetish trade. The **Nigerian** Conservation Foundation (NCF) started community work to protect vultures in the few places they can still be found in the country. A Vulture Monitoring Network was set up by NCF in **Nigeria**: 40 volunteers from two communities hosting Vulture Safe Zones were trained in vulture identification, monitoring, reporting of threats etc. A new set of national celebrities joined the Save Vulture & Wildlife campaign of NCF as ambassadors of conservation messages. WMBD 2021 was celebrated by NCF and Nigerian schools by inter-school debates and drawing competitions dedicated to vulture conservation. Meanwhile SCF continues to local community awareness work for vulture conservation in **Niger**.

East Africa: EWT (A Botha) trained local partners in safe trapping, handling and harnessing of vultures for the purpose of satellite tracking. Since Mar 2022 75 satellite PTTs were deployed on vultures in known knowledge-gap areas of **Uganda**, **Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia & Zimbabwe**. Data received will be used in an integrated early warning system to help early detection of poisoning incidents. In **Kenya**, The Peregrine Fund's Coexistence Co-op continues their conflict and poisoning prevention training and at the request of a lion NGO have started a train-the-trainers and mentoring approach in **Tanzania**. In a first, the team conducted multiple trainings in **Somali** communities along the eastern border of Kenya. Preparations are nearly complete for a 5-day Wildlife Toxicology Workshop for advanced training of KWS vets in clinical interventions to save poisoned vultures, as well as technicians from 7 Kenyan laboratories learning advanced methods for testing poisoned wildlife samples. The intersection between these two groups will be a key topic of discussion. In Tanzania, the NCZ Vulture Program has completed 237 km of dry season road transect surveys in Nyerere NP. Abundance across the last 5 years shows a continued decline of White-backed vultures (WBV). In 2022, five mortalities were recorded among 13 tagged vultures in S Tanzania, including three retaliatory poisonings and two from unknown causes. There was another presumed mortality, where neither bird nor unit was retrieved, but the last known location was at a poaching site. An increase in vulture heads being removed has been observed, and more understanding of this is needed. Eleven active nests of tagged vultures were recorded (10 WBV and one White-headed vulture(WHV)). NCZ conducted poisoning response training with 35 village game scouts and three Lion Landscapes staff in the buffer zone of Ruaha NP (co-funded and hosted by the S Tanzania Elephant Program), an area known for poisoning and poaching. A process for developing a National Vulture Action Plan with Tanzanian wildlife authorities was initiated as part of an AZA SAFE grant. The NCZ Vulture Program, in conjunction with NCZ's UNITE community program in **Uganda**, also deployed satellite units on 2 WBVs in Queen Elizabeth NP, Uganda. One bird has an active nest, and to date, both birds have remained within the area. **Ethiopian** federal govt officials, the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority, NGOs and chemical value chain stakeholders gathered in Addis Ababa to provide inputs to a Report on Agrochemicals and VMPs use in Ethiopia - commissioned by the EWNHS. This highlighted the issues and impact of wildlife poisoning in Ethiopia and targets policy makers to better regulate these chemicals and devise appropriate disposal mechanisms for carcasses and poisoning response mechanisms in protected areas. Furthermore, EWNHS also completed education programmes in 2 schools reaching 70 students. A new project funded by the Darwin Initiative started ' Vultures soaring over the Mara-Serengeti landscape' with aims to work with communities on both sides of the Mara-Serengeti transboundary area to understand and address the causes of poisoning that threaten vultures in this landscape.

Southern Africa: The Southern African Bearded Vulture (BV) Recovery Programme undertook a Population Viability Analysis for the species in southern Africa. This process was facilitated by the IUCN SSC Conservation Planning Specialist Group. The optimum interaction of in- and ex-situ work required to address the population decline was determined. In order to achieve the Recovery Strategy's goals of >32 birds in the captive founder population, a harvest target of 6 eggs annually for the next 3 years was set. The BV Breeding Programme 'Bred 4 the Wild' harvested 5 eggs during this year's breeding season. Monitoring of additional nest sites was hampered by continuous poor weather in the narrow window available for monitoring breeding attempts. Five workshops in the Gonarezhou NP, **Zimbabwe**, delivered by A. Botha from EWT, trained >200 people with support from USAID-VukaNow Project and the Gonarezhou Conservation Trust. BirdLife Zimbabwe continued vulture awareness campaigns, also conducting anti-poisoning response training. They also engage traditional healers through meetings and workshops generating positive engagement. The Species Conservation for the NPO, Wildlife ACT, in **South Africa** have reported steep declines in the northern vulture breeding cluster of Kwa Zulu Natal, Zululand - since

2012 nest counts dropped by over 75%, including local extinction of breeding White-Headed Vultures (WHV). Lappet-faced (LFV) pairs nesting declined from 10 in 2012 to 2 in 2021. This reduction can be attributed to increased intentional poisoning - across Zululand, between 2019-2022 there were responses to 18 poisoning events with 204 dead vultures recorded, (194 White-Backed Vultures (WBV)). Demand is for local belief-based 'medicines' and is met through lacing stolen sheep, cows or poached wildlife with carbamates and organophosphates. Zululand Vulture Project, Wildlife ACT and partners have been engaging with stakeholders to limit the use of poison and through more awareness of the value of vultures, rapid response to decontaminate sites, and thorough working with the Stock Theft Unit to gather viable evidence for judicial processes. BirdWatch Zambia conducted another round of training for wildlife rangers and a community around Kafue National Park, **Zambia**. In addition, to better understand vulture movement in Zambia, 18 birds have been tagged in different parts of the country thanks to Caring for Conservation in conjunction with EWT. Furthermore, Earth Ranger has been rolled out in Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe to better track efforts on the ground including vulture monitoring, community engagement and response to poisoning. The NCZ Vulture Program (Zambia) received a mortality alert from a Kafue-tagged WBV in northern **Botswana** in March – although neither bird nor unit could be retrieved, this area is known for poaching activities. Five satellite units were deployed on WBV in central Kafue NP, totalling eight active units. Another eight deployments are planned for October 2022 in southern and northern Kafue. Movement patterns have highlighted and confirmed important corridors to the broader 520,000 km^2 Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KZAZ TFCA), with birds frequently ranging to northern Botswana and **Namibia.** Three tagged birds have active nests in central Kafue. Also in Zambia, through a partnership with MoveApps and Earth Ranger, NCZ has developed an automated real-time system to detect illegal activities via vulture movements.

ASIA Round-up:

South & SE Asia: Population trends from BCN **Nepal** road transect surveys continued to show gradual steady increases and these have endorsed the decision by the National Vulture Recovery Committee and SAVE in proceeding/agreeing to release the remaining captive WRV population held in Nepal and closing the breeding programme. This allows focus on ongoing vulture safe zones, population and tagged bird monitoring and advocacy measures. Some fascinating WRV movements and further breeding successes were documented and significantly, the two captive-reared released WRVs that successfully bred in the wild last year again bred successfully, and a third 12 year old released bird paired up with a wild WRV and bred successfully at a colony not previously known about, 190km west of the release site. There was further outcry regarding the active SBV nest near Pokhara that was felled for road widening despite efforts and later objections to stop it. Sad news from **India** was that vulture conservation stalwart Dr Ram Jakati passed away in June having played a pivotal role in the establishment of the BNHS breeding and conservation programme, and recognised through the awarded of the RSPB medal two years ago. Tamil Nadu state Government continues to lead the way within India by actively prosecuting offending manufacturers and suppliers of diclofenac in vials larger than 3ml, and there are recent indications that Tamil Nadu is taking up state level bans of other toxic drugs ahead of national bans being imposed. In addition, in Oct a dedicated Tamil Nadu Vulture Committee was formed. Interestingly, a Delhi High Court case is underway (next hearing Dec) challenging the federal government for not implementing the agreed measures to ban or remove known vulture toxic drugs – most notably aceclofenac, nimesulide and ketoprofen from veterinary use. Articles on this are increasing the pressure, (here is a very clear-speaking example!) and the court case is a welcome step, but no action from the Government has yet materialised. A further paper on aceclofenac converting to diclofenac in buffalos will be publicised on the SAVE website imminently (check soon for this) adding further pressure for overdue legislation specifically on that drug. Meanwhile there were occasional poison-baits incidents reported from Assam and elsewhere, but fortunately none lately involving very large numbers of birds. A tagging training workshop was held at Pinjore, Haryana in October using immature captive birds at the breeding centre, and this also established measurements for a range of WRV, LBV and SBV. Further tagging training is planned by SAVE in 2023, using the Thoracic X-hatch method as standard and being successfully used both in India and **Bangladesh**, where further training sessions were held in Oct. These build on the 2019 VSG workshop outputs summarised in the Vulture News paper. Several significant, often high-level events in Bangladesh, Nepal, **Pakistan, Cambodia** and **Myanmar** were

mainly linked to IVAD in Sept. 15 birds of 3 species were meanwhile tagged in Madhya Pradesh, **India** and a tagging study in Gujarat has just published exciting findings on movements of 1-2 individuals of 6 species there. 5 GSM-tagged WRVs are also being closely monitored in a PhD study in Himachal Pradesh. There has been very little wild vulture tagging up to now in India, partly due to official restrictions (and high costs), so these studies are a welcome advance. Meanwhile SAVE is recommending wild vulture GSM tagging in future release areas as an effective way to monitor wild bird survival rates, and potentially justify releases. This utilises tagging data/survival rates information to verify Vulture Safe Zones as being safe enough subject to annual survival results of sufficient wild birds being >90%. Recent pharmacy survey results from several Indian states however indicate that toxic NSAIDs remain in very frequent use and these will be reported further in the upcoming SAVE report.

West & Central Asia: An immature Himalayan Griffon (HG) was confirmed 12 Sept 2022, the fifth recorded for **Iran** - at Hezar-Masjed, Razavi Khorasan Province, NE Iran. Two separate Egyptian Vulture (EV) teams were active this breeding season in **Uzbekistan** and **Kazakhstan**. The Central Asian Vultures team tagged 5 EV (immatures and subadults) with GPS/GSM transmitters in southern Uzbekistan - the first in Central Asia. The team also did monitoring of the breeding population in Central Kyzylkum desert, and dumpsite counts in the south of the country discovering large congregations (350-400) in two locations, underlining the importance of the region for EV. The project team of the Biodiversity Research & Conservation Center Community Trust (BRCC) in Kazakhstan of Nurlan Ongarbayev led by Igor Karyakin and Genrietta Pulikova tagged 6 juveniles in the Karatau mountains, southern Kazakhstan and monitored the breeding population. These are the first EVs to be tagged in Kazakhstan and with others tagged in Central Asia (n=14) and will provide important information on migration routes, wintering grounds and the threats for the species along the Central Asian Flyway. Follow the birds on the Project website. The project is supported by OSME, Oriental Bird Club, Hawk Conservancy Trust, Institute of Zoology - Academy of Sciences, Rep of Uzbekistan, state committee for Ecology & Environmental Protection, Rep of Uzbekistan. RSCN and Irbid electricity joined efforts to insulate hazardous powerlines in the El Ekaider landfill area, north **Jordan** ahead of the 2022 autumn EV migration. RSCN also held a national workshop on the toxic effects of diclofenac use on vultures which aimed to conceptualise various measures that would halt the decline of the local and migrant vulture population, engaging the relevant Jordanian agencies. These important conservation activities are pilots and demonstrate good practice not only for Jordan but also for the region. A paper was published about the breeding biology of the EV in the Beypazari area, **Turkey**. Interviews held by DD with local stakeholders revealed that illegal shooting might be an underestimated threat for EV in Turkey. Educational activities about vultures were implemented with schools in Mersin, and DD held a panel and gallery themed "Nomads and Egyptian Vultures" at Mersin Univ. involving over 200 students. Nature Iraq initiated an EV-conservation project in **Iraq**. SSCW and the management team of the Abu Qubais Protected Area celebrated WMBD 2021 to raise public awareness on migratory birds and the EV, and the threats they face in **Syria** and along the flyway. School with No Walls is an environmental education program led by SPNL in **Lebanon** providing tailor-made packages for schools and local community interested groups, which in 2022 included lectures on vultures and involved over 600 students. Socotra (**Yemen**) supports an internationally important EV population so the agreed intention to produce an EV Action Plan for the island is very welcome. This comes on the back of various Socotra awareness events for IVAD. The Environment Society of **Oman** (ESO) continued its work on LFV and EV funded by the Disney CF. New LFV nests were found, and productivity data collected. Eggs were lost (disappeared or destroyed) from a number of nests. Four LFV chicks were fitted with GPS-GSM transmitters. One died on the nest from unknown causes. This is not the first nestling to die just prior to fledging. The other tagged birds have dispersed and seem to be doing well. But a LFV was found moribund in the field (poisoning?), was rehabilitated and released with a tracking device. Also, young vultures have been turning up for sale on the internet. Some have been successfully confiscated by the Environment Authority and will be released. In Sept 2022, ESO in collaboration with the Envt Authority, hosted international vulture experts, together with key stakeholders across Oman to discuss vulture and raptor-focused conservation within the Sultanate. 74 participants, representing over 19 different organizations (Government and non-government) came together to explore the role that Oman can play in the conservation of these endangered species. The workshop participants and organisers agreed on the importance of drafting a national action plan for the conservation of raptors, a process to be coordinated with various stakeholders. A birdwatching

trip to Al Multaqah Landfill was organized with some of the participants, and four captive LFVs (ringed and fitted with satellite tags) were also released back into the wild. Updates can be followed here. Despite the losses of eggs and nestlings recorded, Oman holds more LFV than anticipated and ESO is also pushing a public awareness campaign.

Europe Round-up:

The TAG of EAZA (European Zoos) is developing best practice husbandry guidelines for GV, WBV and RV but these are being merged and updated to be widely available in one document. It will be very useful for enclosure design, and includes detailed information on biology, feeding, welfare, health and breeding. It goes further with recommendations for all species held in European zoos, having global relevance and we will update once finalised. The Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF) produced a report updating vulture population estimates across Europe and adjacent Mediterranean countries. The report also assesses the conservation status of vulture species and provides recommendations to help ensure their recovery. In most of Europe, vulture populations showed positive trends. However, the recovery of the EV seems to have stalled in several countries. The report includes Rüppell's Vulture (RV) as the fifth European vulture species – which is significant since it is 'Critically Endangered' due to trends in Africa, whilst its range is expanding in Southern Europe. The report highlights the need to improve vulture monitoring and conservation actions especially in several Mediterranean countries hosting important breeding vulture populations of vultures but with emerging threats. For

Fighting Threats: A systematic review evaluated the causes of morbidity and mortality of vultures in the wild, pointing out the key threats these birds face worldwide and how poisoning is the main threat in Europe and elsewhere. A BalkanDetox LIFE study evaluated the scale and scope of the biggest threat, illegal wildlife poisoning, between 2000 and 2020 across seven Balkan countries. It determined that 465 vultures perished in the Balkan Peninsula due to poisoning and estimates that a further 115 vultures are being poisoned and killed annually across the Balkans considering that less than 20% of poisoning incidents are discovered and documented. A single poisoning incident can cause major consequences, eg 4 CVs died after feeding on poisoned dog carcasses in Bulgaria. Three of these came from Spain having been released in Bulgaria in the hope they would breed in the future. The fourth victim was 'Minchev-Boev', the first chick that hatched and fledged in Bulgaria in nearly three decades. In Cyprus, another mass mortality event, again caused by poisoning, killed at least three GVs, including one adult bird and two chicks. The Cypriot population also recently lost GV 'Nepheli' due to electrocution, leaving the species' small and vulnerable population in an even more dire position. The Wildlife Crime Academy strives to combat the illegal use of poison baits and other serious wildlife crimes in Europe and beyond by training competent professionals to effectively investigate and manage wildlife crime incidents in their respective countries. The second cohort with professionals from 13 countries participated in the Level 1 course in May 2022 and will continue with Level 2 in early October. These best-practice experiences from Spain and Europe have also been shared in Guinea-Bissau, where over 2000 HV were poisoned due to belief-based use. Finally, the development of wind farms in unsuitable locations are becoming a growing problem, threatening vultures and other bird species. A recent victim was a CV in the Greek Rhodopes that fatally collided with a wind turbine.

Bearded Vulture (BV), the breeding season in captivity has again been a busy one – the ultimate goal to maximise chick production and support the restoration in the wild. Several captive pairs have produced their first clutch and a chick, and some successfully reared their own offspring. In total, 46 breeding pairs laid 72 eggs, of which 45 were fertile. Of those, 34 chicks hatched and 27 survived. 14 of those were ultimately released into the wild – 2 in the Grands Causses, 2 in Maestrazgo, 4 in Andalusia, 2 in the Baronnies, 2 in Corsica and 2 in Bavaria. The rest of the birds were integrated to the captive breeding programme. Some well-known individuals continue to surprise and captivate with their behaviour and movements. 'Eglazine' is one of those, recently returning to the Netherlands. Even though wandering is normal for young individuals of this species, there are no previous records of a BV making such a journey to north western Europe twice. In early Oct 2021 the International simultaneous BV count took place –giving an improved estimate of absolute numbers for several regions. Involving over 1000 observers, 960 BV observations were logged. The Alpine population was estimated at 284-381 individuals. The small population of the Massif Central, France is estimated at 7-13. Around 7 have been estimated in the Aude region of the French Pyrenees. In Spain, outside of the Pyrenees, BV populations were estimated at 3-4 individuals in Maestrazgo

and 21-33 in Andalusia/Rioja. Do get involved in the next citizen science counts on 8 Oct 2022 across the Alps, the Massif Central in France, Aude in the French Pyrenees, Andalusia and Maestrazgo in Spain and Bulgaria. Another event celebrating the species, the Annual BV Meeting 2022 is planned for November in Italy and registrations are now open. A reintroduced female and unidentified male BV laid an egg in Vercors that hatched and fledged, a significant milestone, and result of reintroduction efforts since 2010 – this is the first time they bred there since 1870! Andalusia also saw positive developments with 'Esperanza', the first wild-hatched BV in the region since the reintroduction project started to build a nest. More good news came from Spain, this time from a natural recolonisation event – a BV pair attempted to breed in La Rioja, 70 years after its extinction. Info Gipeto (n. 38) news bulletin summarises the latest conservation activities implemented and outcomes achieved in 2021 as part of the international BV reintroduction efforts.

Egyptian Vulture (EV): An International EV Online Conference with wide participation including Africa, Middle East and Asia will be held on 8-9 November (for updates check the webpage) and welcomes registrations. Annual breeding monitoring of EVs in the Balkans in 2022 continued to show signs of stabilisation. A record number of 56 EVs (various ages) was counted during the annual Balkan pre-migration count. Reinforcement programme continues with six EVs released this year. For the first ever time in the Balkans, a captive-bred and released EV formed a pair in the wild. The first specialist course in **Bulgaria** for qualification and capacity building of state institutions against the use of poisons in the wild was held by BSPB. New guidelines on how to minimise disturbance on cliff-nesting birds by climbers was developed through collaboration between BSPB and the Bulgarian Climbing and Mountain Federation. Annual report on the results from anti-poison dog units of HOS and WWF in 2021 was produced for **Greece**. A Wildlife-crime webinar was held by MES with stakeholders in **North Macedonia**. New supplementary feeding sites were established by AOS in south Albania and by BSPB in north-eastern Bulgaria. Murals to raise the public awareness on EV were created in tourist sites in Kalampaka and Konitsa in Greece, Albania and North Macedonia. The EV was a flagship of the Zagori Mountain Running 2022 and Mill of the Elves events co-organised by HOS. The EV was the focus of environmental-educational activities implemented in Meteora, Kefalovriso and in Thrace (**Greece**). The young vulture-conservation ambassadors from the Conservation Youth Club of Gjirokastra conducted public awareness-raising activities in Gjirokastra, **Albania**. New postage stamps depicting EV were issued in Albania. EV was in the focus of events in **Bulgaria** on the occasion of WMBD 2022. A spectacular celebration of IVAD 2022 was held by MES, municipality and local community in Demir Kapija, **North Macedonia**, involving murals creation, lectures dedicated to vulture conservation, promotion of local wine with an EV on the label, plus traditional dances and other attractions. The migration routes of individual EVs returning from Africa were tracked with GPS technology and revealing unusual fascinating details for the species. Follow the autumn migration journey, with the first GPS-tracked EVs already reaching Africa. A milestone for the efforts occurred in 2022 - the first time in Europe, a captive-bred EV released in Italy has paired with a wild bird. A bird in the Balkans has also followed suit: captive-bred EV 'Boyana' found a partner, and together they occupied a breeding territory in the Eastern Rhodopes, Bulgaria. The project responsible for the above success, EV New LIFE, has released six more captive-bred EVs into the wild in 2022 using the delayed-release method, consolidating restocking actions in the Balkans. More exciting news came from the **Canary Islands:** the LIFE EV Project monitoring estimated over 400 individuals, a significant milestone following serious population declines a few decades ago. Finally, studies of collision hotspots and ethno-ornithology of the EV along its flyway were published.

Eurasian Griffon Vulture (GV): A report shares the outcomes achieved and actions implemented in the 12th year of the Kresna Gorge GV reintroduction programme in **Bulgaria,** discussing the releases, breeding results, exchange of birds between colonies and conservation measures. This year, the natal GV population in the Eastern Rhodopes, Bulgaria, comprised 111 occupied territories and 76 hatched chicks out of 101 incubating pairs. In **Sardinia,** two more captive-bred GVs arrived on the island and will be part of the LIFE safe for Vultures restocking efforts. The reinforcement of the local population started years ago with the LIFE Under Griffon Wings project, with most of the 60 released GVs coming from **Spain**. Three 'Spanish' GVs have paired up with a Sardinian partner and successfully bred in 2022. In **Cyprus,** the LIFE with Vultures project strives to prevent the extinction of the vulnerable GV population, by addressing the main threats. The project raised capacities among competent authorities with the organisation of a wildlife crime workshop and welcomed the first anti-poison dog units to help combat vultures' biggest

threat.
Cinereous Vulture (CV): The breeding in Kotel in 2021 established CV as a breeding species in Bulgaria for the first time in decades since it went extinct. A report looked at the 2021 releases, breeding attempts and other conservation achievements that became a reality thanks to the Vultures Back to LIFE reintroduction project. The favourable breeding outcomes continued in 2022 with the first breeding in the Western Balkan Mountains in 60-70 years. The project team tagged the chick in the nest with a GPS transmitter and have been closely tracking her movements since fledging. The project team was busy with the latest transportation of Spanish CVs for reintroduction in Bulgaria and the final releases when the project finished at the end of the summer. One more rescued and rehabilitated CV was marked with a GPS transmitter in Portugal. These efforts are significant since the species went extinct and naturally recolonised the country, with several Spanish birds settling in different colonies. The species is considered Critically Endangered in Portugal, adding profile to these efforts. 17 CVs destined to support reintroductions in Bulgaria, were transported from Spain to an adaptation aviary hosted by BSPB in rewilding landscape of the Rhodope Mountains, Bulgaria.

North America Round-up: The California Condor (CC) population in Baja California, **Mexico** now has 40 birds in the wild and 7 in captivity. 2 captive-bred birds were imported from the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance in May and 2 more are expected to be transferred to the release site this year. In June the Chapultepec Zoo in Mexico City transferred 4 CC to the Parque Nacional Sierra de San Pedro Mártir. All 6 condors are expected to be released this year. According to field observations and GPS data 8 breeding pairs within the Baja population engaged in nesting activity this year of which 3 pairs lost an egg. One of the successful female breeders is missing and presumed to be dead. The wild Baja population currently has 13 adult females of which 9 are known to have a mate. In the **USA** in July the Yurok Tribe released the first 4 condors at a new Pacific Northwest (PNW) release site in Redwood National and State Parks/Yurok ancestral lands. All birds are doing well. 4 additional captive-bred juveniles will be released later this month for a total of 8 wild birds in the PNW. 14 more captive-bred juveniles will be released in Central and S California this fall. 12 will also be released in Northern Arizona this fall/winter. Key publications relevant to CCs include: demographic implications of lead poisoning for eagles across North America and toward scoping reviews of individual bird species. Researchers from Mississippi State Univ. are studying the spatial ecology of American Black Vultures (ABV) and Turkey Vultures (TV), how their anatomy and ecology influences microbial communities on and within their bodies, and how both species redistribute elements derived from anthropogenic sources. Their research also focuses on how movement and resource use influence the potential of New World vultures to transmit disease, particularly avian pox. Anyone with photographic records of either species presenting with pox can email scott.rush@mmstate.edu. Collaborative research involving the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has resulted in published studies on the following topics: Cannibalism in ABV, spatial risk modelling of cattle depredation in the midwestern U.S., regurgitated food pellets as a source of DNA for molecular ecology studies, and diets of both ABV and TV in South Carolina. Researchers are also investigating the effectiveness of inflatable scarecrows as ABV deterrents. Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Birds of the World ABV species account has been updated.

South America Round-up: The IV International Congress for the Conservation of the Andean Condor (AC) will take place in Quito, **Ecuador** 24-29, Oct. 2022. This is being organised by the AC Working Group of Ecuador through its institutional members, the AC Foundation and the Zoological Foundation of Ecuador. The congress will focus on *ex situ and in situ* conservation/research, education and communication, and vulture conservation threats and mitigation strategies. Here for more information. The Neotropical Foundation is working on the AC Conservation Plan 2021-2035 for **Colombia**, with the support of Parex Resources Colombia. This plan will define the work and conservation roadmap for the species for the next 15 years. In Jan 2022, with the support of the Assoc of Autonomous Corporations of Colombia, ASOCARs and Fundacion Neotropical, the Condor Network was formed, with the aim of addressing AC emergencies within Colombia. In **Peru,** a campaign by several condor experts initiated a project to trap and tag AC in the Peruvian coastline of San Fernando. This team also collected samples for AC dietary and toxicological studies from this remote area. The same team collected samples from the mountain area of the

Ades in Pampa de Galera. In the Colca region interviews to understand people´s perceptions of condors also took place during this semester. One AC was found dead during the austral summer and plastic debris found in its digestive system could be the cause. Peruvian and Argentinean researchers are working on plastic ingestion and diet analysis in AC from remote areas of Peru. An immature female AC was rehabilitated, tagged with a GPS transmitter, and released on 8 Sept 2022 in central **Bolivia**, after it had been saved from an aggressive pack of domestic dogs; highlighting dogs as a source of stress, but also as a mortality cause for AC in that part of the Andes. **Argentina**'s green hydrogen project including the construction of a multibillion-dollar plant threatens AC and other vultures, indigenous land rights and the natural environment. Australia's Fortescue announced plans to invest $8.4bn in a green hydrogen project near the town of Sierra Grande, in the south of Rio Negro Province. It would involve constructing a huge wind park, power transmission lines, a hydrogen production plant, and port infrastructure. The move triggered alarm bells among biologists, since building a wind farm there would be sure to cause serious AC mortality. A survey and sampling of ABVs feeding in rubbish dumps is being used to evaluate influenza virus and other zoonotic pathogens. In **Chile**, the Group for the Research and Conservation of the AC (GICCA) together with the Friends of the Condor Corporation, are collaborating in the creation of the Municipal Nature Reserve "Mirador de cóndores". This is located in the commune of Cajón del Maipo, Central Chile, and the aim is to implement a Tourism Management Plan there. Unregulated tourism (national and foreign tourists) has significantly increased since 2016, and many visitors and photographers come dangerously close to wild condors on the cliffs. This Reserve will set a precedent in environmental education and sustainable tourism in the community in the Santiago mountain range, which can be replicated in other places. During August, the "Faro del Sur Wind Farm" project was presented to the Environmental Assessment System (SEA), which includes the installation of 65 wind turbines located in the heart of Chilean Patagonia. This opens the door to several similar projects currently under evaluation for the generation of electricity and green hydrogen. The project could significantly impact AC and other flying fauna due to risks of collision with wind turbine blades. This project, along with other parks planned in the region, would put the southernmost AC populations at risk, being located on flight routes and near major AC communal roosts in the Magallanes region.

If you receive this newsletter indirectly and wish to be added to the circulation list, request chris.bowden@rspb.org.uk. Do send items for inclusion ahead of the next edition in February, and our thanks to everyone who sent items included here..

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