

Egyptian Vulture status in Africa

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Monitoring of Egyptian Vultures in the Sahel: overview of results for Niger

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Niger is a landlocked country of West Africa located in the transition zone between the Sahelo-Sudanian range and the Sahara Desert. Due to the variability of its ecosystems, it is home to a wide variety of fauna and flora. Out of the 11 African vulture species, eight can be observed in Niger and six are resident: White-headed Vulture (*Trigonoceps occipitalis*), Hooded Vulture (*Necrosyrtes monachus*), White-backed Vulture (*Gyps africanus*), Rüppell's Vulture (*Gyps rueppelli*), Lappet-faced Vulture (*Torgos tracheliotos*) and Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*). But unfortunately, we registered a progressive decline of the vulture population in the region.

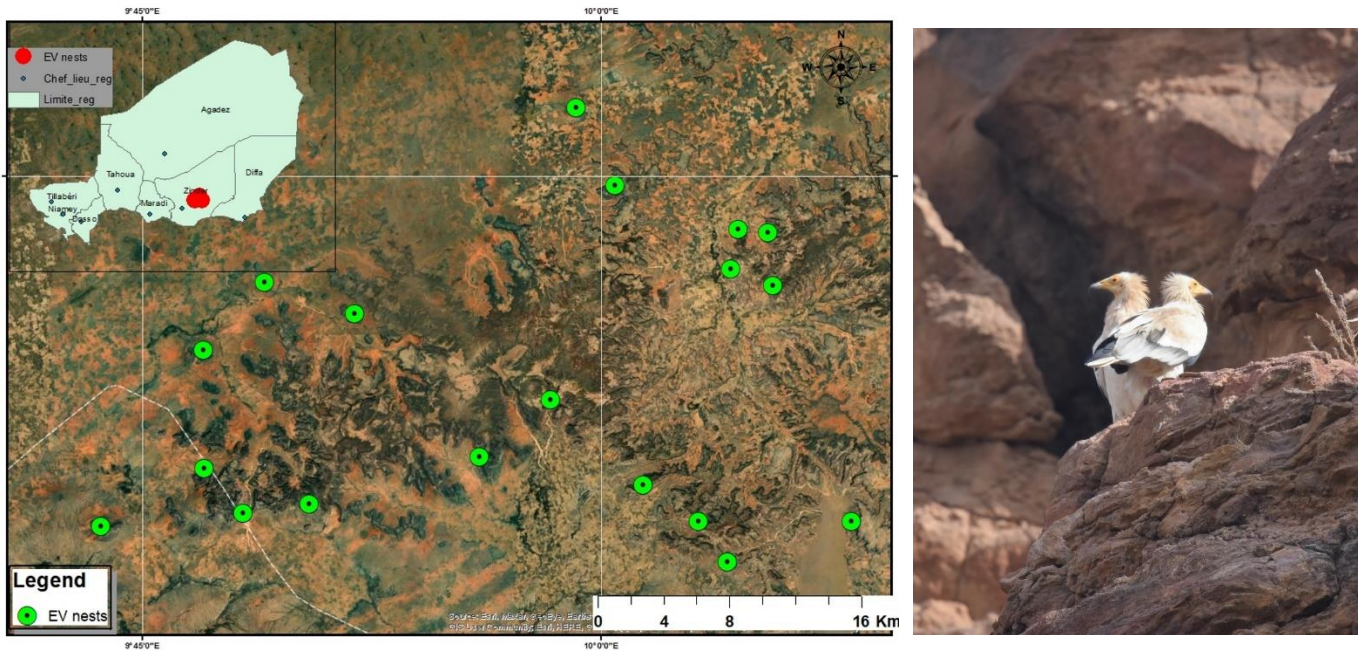
Amongst these plummeting vulture species is the Egyptian Vulture (EV) - easily identifiable by its small size and white plumage as an adult - which is listed as Endangered by the IUCN's Red List since 2007.

Monitoring activities on the EV started in Koutous Massif in southern Niger in 2014, with the Paschalis case, a young EV equipped with a transmitter in Greece and killed during its first migration, in Niger. The first nests were identified in 2015 and since then with the help of locals, regular monitoring is carried out. With the start the EV New LIFE project in 2018, activities were intensified in order to deepen our knowledge on the species and its environment so that relevant conservation measure could be implemented. Additional resources were deployed within the project to improve EV monitoring in Niger, among which a joint mission with the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB) was organized in February 2020 to meet this goal.

The Koutous Massif plays an important role in the distribution of EV as it is both a wintering area for birds coming from Europe and a habitat for some resident individuals. Regular monitoring missions led by the wildlife authorities and the NGO SaharaConservation have enriched the knowledge of their distribution in the country. As data were collected in the field, the methodology was refined to collect as much information as possible and to assess the breeding success of these threatened species at these key breeding sites but also throughout the country.

Despite being under law protection, a survey carried out by the SaharaConservation Niger team emerged that the illegal killing due to belief-based use should be currently considered as the main threat for the EV and other vultures in Niger. This misuse exerts a strong pressure on the already relatively weakened vulture populations.

After several years of monitoring, we have collected consequent information on the nesting of vultures in Niger, their key distribution areas in the country to inform sound measures for their conservation. Next steps would benefit of joint work with neighbouring countries, especially Chad and Nigeria, to fight against illegal killing of vultures in the region.



Peer-reviewed research derived from the abstract:

Pourchier, C., Moussa A.R, Arkumarev, V. 2023. Status of vultures in the Koutous Massif, Niger. *Acta Zoologica Bulgarica*, Suppl 17, in press.

Egyptian Vulture status in Ethiopia

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Ethiopia holds some residents and the largest congregation of wintering Egyptian Vultures (EV) in East Africa making the country the strong hold for the wintering species. Historically, wintering EVs used to roost in large number on telegraph pylons along the old Ethio-Djibouti railways between Dire Dawa and the border of Djibouti. After 36 years Sigismondi and Politano (1996) reported that a total of 1,473 wintering EVs were roosting on 75 km of power lines in the Afar region. Arkumarev, *et al.* (2014) indicated that a total of 1,424 in 2009, 1,400 in 2010 and 1082 in 2013 wintering EVs were counted along the main Ethio-Djibouti road in a wider area. Survey conducted in 2019 and 2020 by EV New LIFE Project teams counted a total of 1,644 in 2019 and 1,484 in 2020 wintering EVs respectively, which is a bit higher than the previous counts. A similar survey conducted by EWNHS and EV New LIFE project teams in December 2022 counted a total of 1947 wintering Egyptian vultures along the same route. This large discrepancy may be due to double count of non-territorial "floating" bird may contributed for double count as the counting takes more days or birds that used roost along the Serdo-

Mekele road may be changed their previous roosting sites to the safest sites in Afar related to war in the northern parts that caused disturbance due to continued fierce fighting along their roosting sites for almost two years. Still Ethiopia can be considered the most important wintering ground of EV in east Africa, underlining its importance in conservation of the species. In 2019, 15 EVs were tagged with GPS transmitters in Metehara and Logia, by January 2022, 8 of these birds had evidently died and 7 further birds have disappeared and may be dead with 60% of the birds disappearing in Ethiopia. Power lines and illegal poisoning were identified as the main causes of mortality. Along 227 km of surveyed power lines in Ethiopia we found 0.15 vulture carcasses per km. Ethiopia is growing as a leader of energy sector in Sub-Saharan region with a highly dangerous design and likely to cause high mortality of birds. 95% of the respondents in Somali region use poison chemicals against carnivores and nearly 50% of the respondents (70) admitted use of poisoning to tackle the problem with the carnivores in Afar and Oromia. EWNHS is working with Power companies and signed MoU with Ethiopian Electric Utility and Ethiopian Electric Power to reduce the mortality of EVs and other migratory soaring birds due to power generation and power supply (wind turbine collision and electrocution) along the flyway. The retrofitting materials and diverters were already handed over to Ethiopian Electric Utility to insulate the identified dangerous power lines to minimize the risk of electrocution and collision at Metehara and Loigia. Awareness creation was given to local communities, schools, selected offices and rangers to engage in conservation of vultures. General public was reached through mass media. Great Ethiopian Run was sponsored and used as a channel to widely spread the conservation message about bird-safe energy infrastructure. Printed materials such as leaflet, banners, billboard, mascot, some giveaway materials were distributed during the main event to increase visibility.



Agrochemical used for poisoning

Poisoned carcass left for the target carnivore



Death of untargeted vulture (Alolobad) Death of the targeted carnivore

Peer-reviewed research derived from the abstract:

Arkumareva, V., Dobрева, V., Abebeb, Y.D., Popgeorgieva, G. and Nikolov, S.C. (2014). Congregations of wintering Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* in Afar, Ethiopia: present status and implications for conservation, *Ostrich: Journal of African Ornithology*, 85(2): 139-145.

Oppel, S., Ruffo, A. D., Bakari, S., Tesfaye, M., Mengistu, S., Wondafrash, M., Endris, A., Pourchier, C., Ngari, A., Arkumarev, V., and Nikolov, S. C. (2022) Pursuit of ‘sustainable’ development may contribute to vulture crisis in East Africa. *Bird Conservation International*, 32(2): 173-187. doi:10.1017/S0959270921000307.

Tackling direct persecution of vultures in West Africa through coordinated collaboration

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Over the last 50 years, populations of African vultures have declined by 80-97% across the continent, with West Africa seeing some of the steepest declines, especially outside of protected areas. These declines are primarily driven by human activities – either indirectly or directly with the top two threats being killing for belief-based use and unintentional poisoning. Given the porous borders and transboundary nature of these threats, a group of experts from the IUCN Vulture Specialist Group and BirdLife International felt the need for a subregional action plan with both short- and long-term actions to address these declines. This talk will provide an overview of the situation in West Africa as well as the key outcomes from an action planning workshop organized by Nigeria Conservation Foundation and BirdLife International, facilitated by IUCN Conservation Specialist Group and sponsored by Egyptian Vulture New LIFE project and CMS Raptors MOU.



Human Activities are greatly impacting West Africa’s Vultures
Range of indirect and direct means of persecution documented which vary from country to country, however, primary persecution related to the species appears to be for belief-based use

Coordinated Collaboration
The scale of the problem requires multidisciplinary collaborative efforts supported by long-term funding





Action Planning
35 participants from 13 different countries participated in a 3-day workshop to review threat assessment, draft 20-year vision, 6-year action plan, and governance structure
