

Egyptian Vulture Online Conference Roundtable Sessions

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Trapping and tagging techniques and building capacity in these methods

*Chairs: Volen Arkumarev**

*Correspondence: volen.arkumarev@bspb.org

Trapping

Different methods of trapping Egyptian Vultures (EV) were discussed and experience shared.

In Bulgaria, EVs were successfully trapped by using whoosh net, walk-in trap and leg-hold traps. The whoosh net trapping was successful at a vulture feeding station, frequently visited by local breeding pairs. Regarding the walk-in trap the EVs started entering into it two years after it had been installed. The trap was not removed from the feeding station, which was regularly visited by a large number of vultures. It took them long to get used to the trap and start feeding inside, for which the presence of released captive-born individuals helped. The benefit of this trapping technique is that more individuals can be trapped at once, but the challenge is that it takes long time and requires specific setting.

Whoosh nets were also successfully deployed in Turkey. The net used was 15x8 m and allowed few individuals to be trapped at a time. EVs do not try to escape when they are covered by the net.

In Israel, EVs are trapped in a big cage with a small opening on the top so the birds can enter the cage but cannot go out. Food is set around the cage and on top of it. A few captive individuals are placed inside the cage to attract the wild specimens. A cannon net (20x12 m) was also used and four individuals were trapped after few days of effort. However, only young vultures were caught as the adults were avoiding the trapping area.

In Ethiopia and Turkey, EVs were trapped with leg-hold traps. The advantage of these traps is that they can be fully covered with soil/sand so that birds cannot see them at all. However, the main disadvantage of this trapping method is that it is not selective, so frequently other birds and even mammals can be trapped.

In Oman and Djibouti, few EVs were trapped with nooses, located at the feeding congregation sites. The same method was tested on a feeding station in Bulgaria for a week but with no success.

Trapping with Eagle Owls as decoys and Dho-gaza net has been tried in Spain but was not successful for EVs.

Tagging

Different techniques have been used to tag EVs. The most common are backpack harness and leg-loop harness. Ewan Weston shared a video tutorials for attaching transmitters using leg-loop harness with silicon ribbon (see [LINK1](#) and [LINK2](#)).

In Bulgaria and Greece backpack harness was used in the past but there were two cases in which after some years flying with the tags two individuals managed to break one of the Teflon straps and the tags were hanging on the bird. After these cases only leg-loop harness was used. All participants in the roundtable shared and agreed that the leg-loop harness seems to be safer for the birds and also agreed that the attachment of the transmitter is easier and much faster. Therefore, leg-loop is the recommended

tagging technique for EVs. The Vultures Specialist Group (VSG) published in Vulture News in 2019 a Practical guide to methods for attaching transmitters on vultures which is available at this [link](#).

Considerations and conclusions:

- Whoosh net, cannon net, walk-in trap and leg-hold traps are proven to be successful methods for trapping EVs
- Trapping of adults is not recommended in the spring before the breeding season to avoid adverse effect on breeding. The adult EVs are difficult to trap as they are more careful.
- In general, the species is very cautious and trapping takes time and effort. Trapping at feeding sites which vultures are used to is generally easier as they are less cautious.
- Trapping is most successful in the early morning or late afternoon when vultures are more active and feeding.
- The use of captive-birds to attract wild individuals is an advantage.
- The tagging of EVs should be done by experienced staff or experts and in accordance to the Practical Guide developed by the VSG.



Photo: Clementine Bougain

The impact and use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs

Chairs: Chris Bowden and Mary Davies*

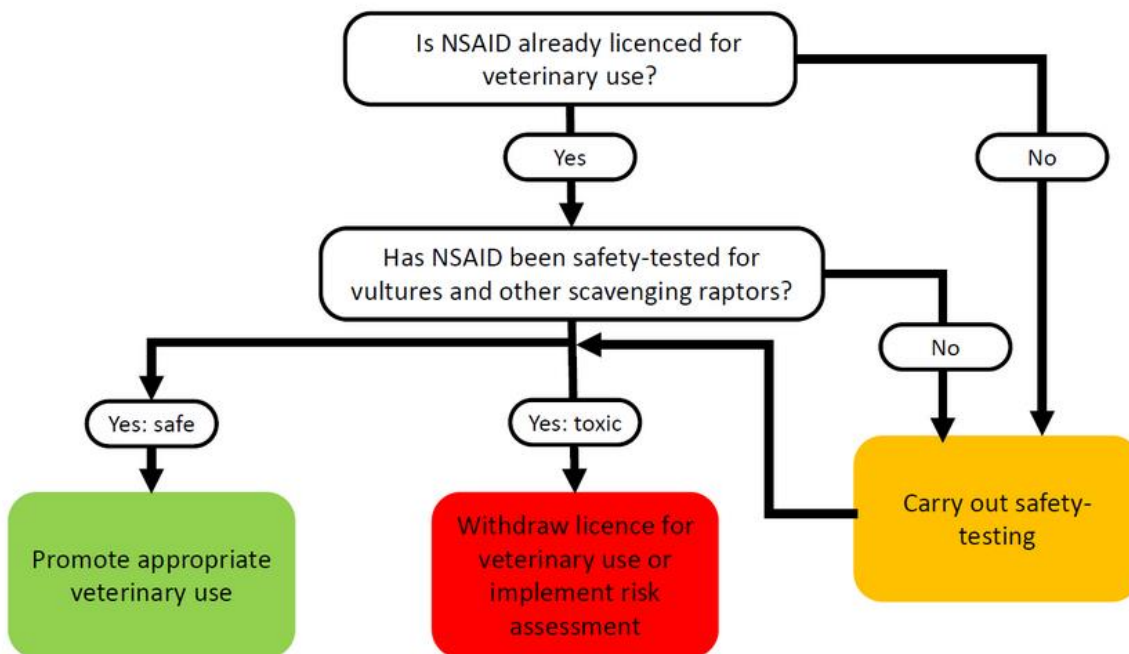
*Correspondence: chris.bowden@rspb.org

The main topic discussed was the use and impact of toxic Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), specifically: Is it a priority to ban diclofenac in your country/region? Is there knowledge of the prevalence of diclofenac in your country? Can pharmacy surveys/ carcass testing be carried out to accumulate data on the prevalence? Is safety testing needed for Egyptian vulture (EV)? If so, can this be progressed? Can this be facilitated?

National approaches were discussed specifically in relation to progress in the Middle East (diclofenac ban in Oman, Saudi Arabia taking measures, progress in Jordan) but in-country evidence of impact is often requested and used as an excuse not to advance bans. Similarly, in Bulgaria proof of impact is requested but difficult to evidence so used as a way to postpone action.

Safety testing was discussed (EV susceptibility to diclofenac is not fully documented) but it was felt there is no need to test live birds as the evidence is already out there. Also testing for NSAIDs poisoning is a specialist activity so not routinely carried out so difficult to evidence. It was agreed there would be value in doing a gap analysis to say where testing potentially could be needed. Evidence exists for some species already and so it would make sense to see where the gaps are i.e. look at range maps.

There is a need to think more regionally, not just nationally, to test and provide evidence and to understand the impact at a regional level. There is much evidence from other countries: Saudi Arabia, Syria, Jordan and so international collaboration is needed from e.g. CMS, IUCN etc. Additionally a detailed economic survey is needed for using alternatives to negotiate with the private sector (two alternatives safe drugs are available -meloxicam and tolfenamic acid). CMS have established a formal working group on NSAIDs but more can be done. A [CMS factsheet on NSAIDs](#) is now available.



The threat of poisoning (including feral dogs)

Chairs: Dobromir Dobrev, Ivaylo Angelov and Victoria Saravia Mullin

*Correspondence: ivaylo.d.angelov@gmail.com

Poisoning is one of the main threats for the Egyptian vulture (EV) across the whole of its range. Both intentional (usually with pesticides) and unintentional poisoning (with diclofenac, lead, etc.) affect the species in different ways and have diverse impacts that vary among countries. In the Balkans, poisoning by means of poison baits, particularly due to human-wildlife conflict, has been discussed quite intensely in the last 10 years or more. However, the problems caused by the use of poison to control feral dogs particularly at rubbish dumps has been understudied globally. In order to address the issue of rabies directly linked to the presence of large number of feral dogs, municipalities in different countries throughout the species range (Asia, Middle East, Africa) are culling dogs using poison; these dogs are either directly culled at the rubbish dumps or are disposed of there. It is well documented that EVs congregate at rubbish dumps, and therefore it is important to assess their numbers at these concentrations and the possible impact that culling of dogs with poison may have on EV populations.

Experience and management of the problem varies from country to country. For instance in Israel the vaccination of feral dogs against rabies is organized by the government, and legal rubbish dumps are correctly managed with waste being immediately covered so it is not available for scavengers. Strict regulations apply also to dog owners, while benefits are given to dog owners who neuter them. However, people still try to cull feral dogs at illegal rubbish dumps by means of poison. With 45,000 feral dogs in the Negev desert and animal welfare organizations demanding more protection for pets, the threat of poisoning for the EV is significant. One of the proposed solutions is to create more supplementary feeding stations so birds go there instead of using the rubbish dumps. In the case of Albania, culling of dogs with poison has been known to be organized by municipalities, who then dispose of the carcasses at the rubbish dumps frequently visited by EVs breeding locally. The solution here has come when conservation NGOs effectively informed the municipalities of the threat, who in turn proceeded to bury the culled dogs. In Greece, numbers of feral dogs are increasing despite the strict animal welfare laws recently approved, mainly due to lack of law enforcement. Work must be done at the source of the dogs (owners), as culling of dogs once they are feral is an unpopular method.

In order to address this threat, work at two levels was proposed: a) to mitigate the conflict reducing the numbers of feral dogs at rubbish dumps (methods suggested varied from fencing to the production of guidelines for rubbish dump workers); b) to increase legal enforcement, authorities need to be informed of the problem so that they are more committed to enforce the laws and implement any legal alternative methods available.

Finally, in order to assess the threat for EVs of feral dogs and dog culling at rubbish dumps it was proposed that a common approach in all countries should be followed, implementing these steps: 1) Mapping of congregations of EVs at rubbish dumps, 2) Development of common protocols to implement actions at these sites, and 3) Monitoring of results.



Photo: Lubomir Peske

Central Asian Flyway

*Chair: Vladimir Dobrev**

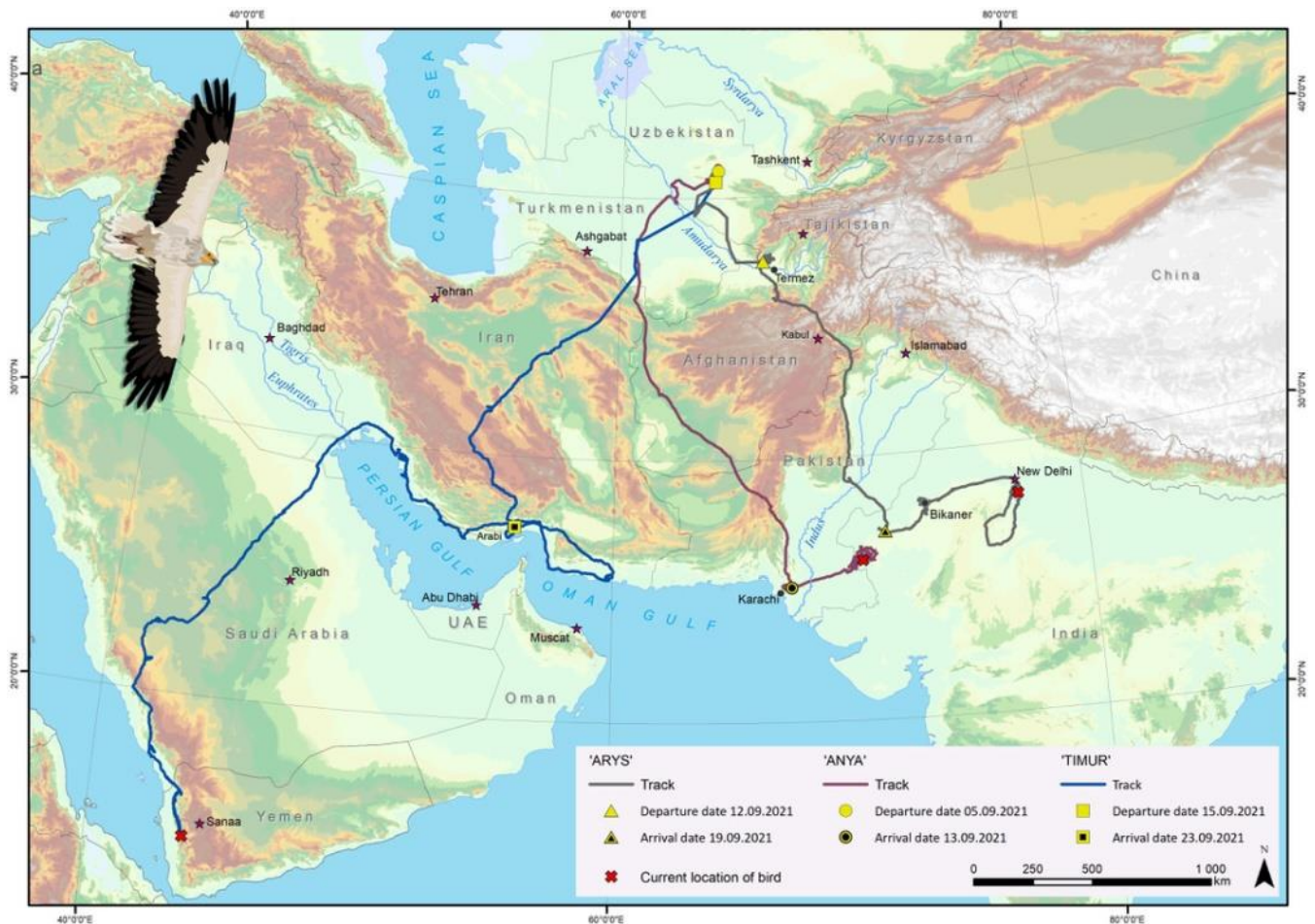
*Correspondence: vladimir.dobrev@bspb.org

The Egyptian Vulture (EV) on the Central Asian Flyway (CAF) has been poorly studied with very little known about the threats. During the last few decades, very little and non-systematic work has been done in Central Asian countries. In contrast to the Eastern Mediterranean Flyway, no projects trying to address threats or implement conservation activities are present along the CAF. Thus, if a significant proportion of the EV population that migrates along CAF remains understudied and neglected, this could undermine the efforts done in the rest of the EV's range. Hence, the aim of the roundtable was to identify the reasons for this gap and to suggest ideas for future work along the CAF.

The main problems identified during the discussion were of different nature – from the lack of communication and collaboration between stakeholders resulting in a lack of projects, to the challenge to work in such vast area that the CAF covers. In addition, the socio-political context of the region most probably contributes to the lack of enough funding opportunities that can support the research and conservation work across the CAF. However recently, two small projects have started to operate in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, presenting the first international collaboration in the region for the EV. This work also includes India - the main wintering site for the EV along the CAF.

Once the main obstacles were identified, possible solutions and further steps were suggested. There is a need to improve the communication and networking between experts and local organizations through mailing lists, online meetings, and various events. This could enhance the development of large international projects. Another opportunity recognised in this direction was the Eastern African Eurasian Flyway initiative of BirdLife International, which could help local partners to build-up collaborations towards projects focused on the EV and other endangered migratory birds along the CAF.

In conclusion, to study and conserve the EV along the CAF efficiently, we need to substantially improve communication and networking between stakeholders, establish strong partnerships and develop regional conservation projects. This is the only way to identify and address threats, as well as to apply the best conservation practices from elsewhere.



Tracks from individuals fitted with satellite transmitters in 2021 in Uzbekistan

BirdLife International's Eastern African-Eurasian Flyway exercise: opportunities for collaborative working

*Chair: Stoyan Nikolov**

*Correspondence: stoyan.nikolov@bspb.org

Through this exercise of BirdLife International (BLI) we aim to analyse the needs, options and interest for stronger collaboration of BLI partners (and close allies) to conserve migratory birds in the eastern part of the African-Eurasian Flyway (hereinafter referred to as Eastern African-Eurasian Flyway, EAEF). The first step is to assess the available information on migratory birds, what different organisations are doing, and determine how to add value and ensure the biggest impact for finite conservation investment.

The geographic range includes Europe (Central, Eastern part, and Scandinavia), Asia (Central Asia, Caucasian region, and the Middle East), Africa (Northeast Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa) and some of the Indian Ocean islands. Under focus will be all migratory bird species using the EAEF, but conservation priority will be given to the IUCN Red List globally threatened birds and up to ten flagship species will be selected primarily for communication purposes.

The major potential threats to be addressed are: illegal killing of birds (illegal shooting, trapping, trade, poisoning, nest robbing), unsustainable hunting (for food or sport and trapping for the cage-bird trade), collision and electrocution with energy infrastructure (wind farms and power lines), habitat loss and degradation in different landscapes (unsustainable land use, intensification in agriculture and aquaculture, infrastructure development, etc.), and other threats (pollution, climate change, severe weather conditions, avian diseases, etc.).

Information will be collected via a questionnaire containing eight questions and requiring 1-2 days to be completed. At this preparatory stage, the role of the partners and allies will be to serve as focal points to provide all information needed in consultation with relevant stakeholders. Only one questionnaire per country will be collected.

The EAEF initiative is not restricted to BLI partners, especially in countries where the local capacity is low or there is no BLI partner.

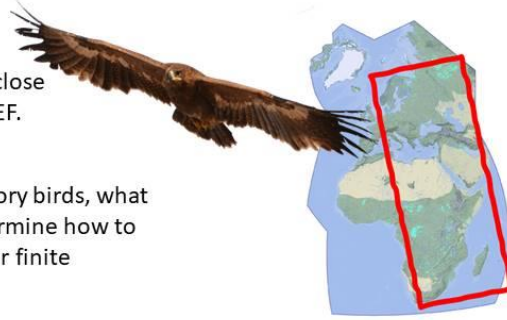
Eastern African-Eurasian Flyway (EAEF): Assessment of Conservation Priorities

Objective

Analyse the needs, options and interest for stronger collaboration of BLI partners and close allies to conserve migratory birds along EAEF.

First step

Assess the available information on migratory birds, what different organisations are doing, and determine how to add value and ensure the biggest impact for finite conservation investment.



Timetable 2023

Milestones	March	April	May	June
EAEF Questionnaire developed and shared	█			
Feedback from partners and allies received		█		
Explanatory EAEF Webinar held			█	
Public consultation on draft EAEF Assessment			█	
Final EAEF Report ready				█



Establishing Vulture Safe Zones

*Chairs: Salisha Chandra and Mary Davies**

*Correspondence: mary.davies@rspb.org.uk

The Vulture Safe Zone (VSZ) approach was discussed, particularly focusing on: Is the VSZ approach applicable to the Egyptian Vulture (EV)? What are the opportunities or drawbacks? Experiences from other VSZ projects and the local factors that may alter the approach.

A VSZ was originally envisaged as 30,000 square km based on vulture range in Asia, centered on an existing colony or where releases could happen. This is large enough to fulfil the needs of vultures in terms of breeding, roosting and feeding, but small enough so that conservation action can be focused. The main issue in Asia was to stop the use of diclofenac, and this required advocacy and education actions. The VSZ approach can be modified depending on the circumstances e.g. in Bangladesh other Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) were addressed. The creation of a VSZ is achieved in a piecemeal way: pharmacy by pharmacy, community by community, joining up districts.

The approach has been adapted to Africa, being most successful in Southern Africa where a VSZ is a farm or block of private land. The West African approach is a bit different, involving local efforts for implementation, and facing local challenges. As mentioned, the approach differs from area to area. In Pakistan the approach has been focused on the EV. Once the VSZ is already established, the efforts are

focused on working with farmers and communities, delivering education and awareness raising actions. The EV migrates from Uzbekistan through the Pakistani VSZ, and there are also breeding EV populations there.

Opportunities/ drawbacks: focusing on feeding sites (rubbish dumps) is a challenge but also an opportunity. Identifying the major threats is of key importance e.g. in South Asia initial focus was on NSAIDs but now other threats have been revealed too. For the EV, the VSZ could be renamed Vulture Safe *Breeding Zone* with feeding sites included, and main efforts dedicated to anti-poisoning activities. Potentially the VSZ approach could target both breeding sites and important stop-over sites along the flyway with emphasis on the threats management.

The consensus was that VSZ is a good approach for the EV. This will be led by selecting key sites on migration where work can be focused, with link to BirdLife’s VSZ guiding principles.



Photo: NCF
