

## Poisoning of seventeen Eurasian Griffions by carbofuran on the Island of Rab, Croatia, in December 2004

Gordana Pavokovic & Goran Susic

On 17 December 2004 on the Island of Rab, we found ten dead Eurasian Griffions *Gyps fulvus* (six adults, two subadults and two juveniles) and one adult bird which was alive, but in very bad condition (Figure 1). Since three birds had holes in the back of their necks, which looked like gunshot wounds, we assumed that the birds had been shot. The dead birds were transported to the Veterinary Faculty in Zagreb and

the surviving bird was taken to ECCIB's recovery centre. The conclusion after the veterinary autopsy was that the birds had been poisoned. The carcasses were x-rayed, but the x-rays did not reveal the presence of any lead bullets (besides one bird, which the pathologist assumed was an old bullet). The bird that had been found alive with the ten dead Eurasian Griffions died after two days.



Figure 1. Some of the poisoned vultures.

Although we highlighted the problem of illegal poisoning more than eight years ago, now after this poisoning incident, followed by an extensive media campaign, the police has started a detailed investigation, the first such investigation for the poisoning of a protected species in Croatia. The incident was reported to governmental representatives, members of the Balkan Vultures Project, the Eurasian Griffon Vulture Working Group (EGVWG), and other representatives of associations and institutions who work on raptor conservation.

Public pressure, following extensive media coverage, prompted the police investigation. The police searched the area where the eleven Eurasian Griffons had been poisoned and found another six dead griffons, dead sheep, and two dead Common Buzzards *Buteo buteo*. They were found a distance of up to 200 m from the first group of birds.

In the bodies of three other Griffon Vulture, old lead bullets were revealed by x-rays. Although these were not lethal shots, the fact is that hunters do shoot Griffon Vultures in Croatia. Therefore the total number of birds that were killed during the poisoning incident was two Common Buzzards and 17 Eurasian Griffons. Toxicological tests showed that

the poison was Carbofuran (carbamate). The police formed a team of eight experienced criminologists and within two weeks found the person (Milan Rukavina) who had laced the sheep carcass with poison. The police found a supply of Carbofuran in the house of the culprit. He had the poison illegally, as he was not a crop farmer. Carbofuran was also found in the homes of five other local shepherds and they will also be prosecuted. The state attorney decided to start a detailed investigation of the incident, in order to collect more evidence against the culprit for the court case. The assessed damage is around one million kuna (c. 133,000 EUR), and the culprit could be imprisoned for up to ten years.

Milan Rukavina placed the poison on the sheep carcass because he and other shepherds in the area have lost many sheep due to depredations by recently introduced jackal *Canis aureus* and wild boar *Sus scrofa*. The common practice to attempt to solve the problem is to poison the predators. Hunters brought these mammalian species to the Kvarner Islands and refuse to remove them. These mammals are killing sheep and the desperate shepherds are helpless.

We have requested the Ministry of Culture, Department for Nature Protection, to start an anti-poisoning campaign.

**Keywords:** Poisoning, mortality, conservation, Island of Rab, Croatia. Eurasian Griffon *Gyps fulvus*, *Canis aureus*, *Sus scrofa*.

**Authors' addresses:** Gordana Pavokovic, Brace Bacica 34, HR-51000 Rijeka, Croatia; E-mail address: [gogapa@inet.hr](mailto:gogapa@inet.hr); Goran Susic, Ornithological station Cres, Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Beli 4, HR-51559 Beli, Croatia.