

## ***Guinea vulture sanctuary a first in Africa***

***Anon.***

Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire – 20 November 2006 – The Republic of Guinea has just created the first vulture sanctuary in Africa. This new protected area of approximately 450,000 ha in the Fouta Djallon Highlands has been established to conserve one of the few remaining vulture populations in West Africa.

The populations of the six vulture species found in this huge area have almost totally collapsed. According to Guy Rondeau, co-ordinator of the raptor conservation programme set up by the NGO ***Africa Nature International***, “Vultures are vanishing from the skies of West Africa primarily because of human persecution, through slaughter for traditional medicine and fetishism and hunting for bushmeat. Indirect poisoning from poisoned carcasses used by livestock herders seeking to control problem animals (jackals, lions, hyenas, etc.) is also responsible for a significant share in the drastic decline in numbers”. Other likely contributing factors are the acute shortage of carcasses largely because of the almost complete disappearance of large game in West Africa combined with more effective animal husbandry practices resulting in healthier livestock. The role of diclofenac, the anti-inflammatory drug used in veterinary medicine that was responsible for the vulture crash in South Asia, is also under investigation.

Recent surveys confirming the

seriousness of the regional decline have also located a few rare relict vulture populations in Guinea, Mali and Gambia, whose numbers are also dwindling. Under the ***Duga*** Programme (from “vulture” in Bambara), the regional West African vulture conservation programme established by ***Africa Nature International***, in co-operation with the NGOs ***Fauna and Flora International*** (FFI) and the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT – Birds of Prey Working Group) and in collaboration with ***Guinée Écologie***, the member country NGO of the ***BirdLife International*** African Partnership network in Guinea, the priority is to stabilize the populations in these rural refuges, which are not currently protected.

Accordingly, Guinea, which is home to the main relict population in the subregion, established the first sanctuary in Africa specifically for the protection of vultures during September 2006. “Because West African societies set such store culturally by these giants of the air, the sanctuary has been particularly welcomed by local communities, especially since they have been intimately involved in establishing it and setting its boundaries”, stated Dr Daniel Pouakouyou, FFI programme manager.

“The aim of the Fouta Djallon vulture sanctuary and those planned for Mali and Gambia, is to conserve these relict populations, with a view to eventually

rebuilding the regional populations” said André Botha, EWT - Birds of Prey Working Group’s Manager. In addition to the conservation actions planned for the sanctuary (protection, vulture restaurants, population monitoring, research), national information and education campaigns will be launched to address the recurrent problems of persecution and poisoning.

According to Christine Sagno, Director General, *Water and Forests* in Guinea, “the vulture sanctuary, which aims to maintain the vultures’ important role of disease control and prevent the loss of certain touchstones and taboos for local communities, is a primary component of the Integrated Management of the Natural Resources of the Fouta Djallon Highlands Project (GEF-FAO) managed by the African Union”.

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