



**VSG Newsletter No 20: May 2024**

**Around the World of Vultures & VSG activities**

The second [European Vulture Conference](#) organised by VCF took place in Cáceres, Spain, Nov 14-17 2023, and despite the obvious European focus, included presentations and representatives from vulture conservation projects around the world, including many VSG members. It was undoubtedly the largest meeting (350 registrations) of vulture expertise to date and included a VSG round table session among the impressive agenda of 130 presentations plus 60 posters.

The report on the [Mid-term Implementation Review](#) of the [CMS Vulture MsAP](#) was tabled at a side-event at CMS COP14 which was held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February 2024. Five members of VSG were present and coordinated the event together with the Coordinating Unit of the CMS Raptors MoU. Regional mid-term review summaries are being prepared such as [this one for South Asia](#). More to follow.

Following the adoption of amendments to Resolution 12.10 and Decisions (please see [COP14/Doc.28.6/Rev.1](#)), the CMS Raptors MoU aim to reconstitute the CMS Vulture Working Group and will soon circulate an invitation to Range States and other Stakeholders to nominate members to serve on this group.

The VSG has agreed to endorse the first **Vultures of the Americas Symposium** and the 5th International Congress of the Andean Condor that will be held in Sucre, Bolivia 15-23 March 2025. This will also include discussions on the drafting of a Multi-species Action Plan for New World Vultures. Members will be provided with more information in our next newsletter. The [IUCN SSC Bustard Specialist Group](#) approached the VSG to advise and assist on the drafting of a multi-species action plan for this group of birds. We look forward to assisting where possible.

We are delighted to announce and welcome [Volen Arkumarev](#) as editor of our journal *Vulture News* with immediate effect. Volen will be supported by long-standing assistant editor [Darcy Ogada](#) as well as [Adrián Naveda-Rodríguez](#), the latter particularly for submissions from the Americas. Authors who wish to submit manuscripts and other contributions can continue to do so via [iucnvulturenews@gmail.com](mailto:iucnvulturenews@gmail.com), the editor's e-mail address.

**Africa Round-up:** *Compiled by Darcy Ogada*

**West Africa:** The eagerly awaited [West African Vulture Conservation Action Plan](#) was launched at a side-event at CMS COP14 in Uzbekistan (Feb 2024 – see above) is already [published in English](#) – with versions in French and Portuguese soon to be available. An important [paper](#) showed ongoing decreasing trends for HV in nationwide road counts in **Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger**, using (where possible) the same routes and methods as counts conducted in 1969–1973 and 2003–2004 (46–50 years later). In **Sierra Leone**, Musa Kimbo completed his 12 months of surveys for Hooded vultures (HV) at one dump site in Freetown and a study (Kimbo, Reading & Barlow) in press. In the **Gambia**, Russell Cryer and Clive Barlow are compiling a comprehensive report on HVs, using data from the past [two decades](#). Preliminary results suggest a further population increase in the coastal population, and stability in the east. In east Gambia, near Sabi, Asaph Brouhaugh recorded and photographed a record number of Eurasian griffon vultures (EGV) for sub-Saharan Africa in Feb-March 2024 (report in prep). [IBCP](#) continues [work](#) with West Africa colleagues to research and protect critically endangered vultures in urban centres of **Ghana**, as well as in [Mole NP](#). In **Togo** the IBCP team [monitors vultures](#) at slaughterhouses and works with Togolese authorities to protect the last remaining vultures in the country. In **Benin**, SOS Savane [continues work](#) to research and protect vultures in the north of the country, while in the south of the country, Dr. Abiola Sylvestre Chaffra has been conducting vulture research and conservation with support from IBCP and [Hawkwatch International](#).

**East Africa:** In Dec 2023, **Tanzania**'s first Conservation and Management Plan for Vultures was completed and launched at the [Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute's biannual conference](#), funded by North Carolina Zoo ([NCZ](#)) via a [SAFE grant](#), and co-developed with [TAWIRI](#). It is currently awaiting final signature from the minister. Vulture deaths have been recorded on the edges of the Lukwati-Piti Game Reserves, linked to retaliatory poisoning against hyena and increasing settlement of the area which is likely to increase the frequency of human-wildlife conflict and poisoning. NCZ is mapping settlements and conducting in-depth interviews to increase understanding and developing training materials around the hazards of pesticides, to be rolled-out in the latter half of 2024, building from experience from NCZ's [UNITE program](#) in **Uganda**, The Peregrine Fund's [work](#) in **Kenya** and [Lion Landscapes \(LL\)](#) in **Tanzania**. Additional tags will be added to the 3 functional satellite units in southern Tanzania later in 2024, and at least 5 tags will be deployed in northern Tanzania by NCZ and TAWIRI. [Vainess Laizer](#) is continuing nest monitoring in the Serengeti, and beginning a PhD later this year, supported by NCZ and the [Grumeti Fund](#). She was recently [interviewed by WildLabs](#) about her vulture conservation work. **Kenya**'s Multi-species Action Plan for Vultures (2024-2034) is nearing completion and should be launched soon. [The Peregrine Fund](#) has initiated ranger trainings for raptor identification, including vultures, to aid long-term monitoring efforts in northern Kenya in collaboration with local conservancies. Three successful two-day training sessions have concluded and monitoring data will be shared via Earth Ranger. Kenya Wildlife Service and Kenya Forest Service rangers will also be trained in future. [Sahara Conservation](#), with the assistance of the Endangered Wildlife Trust's [Vultures for Africa Programme](#), deployed the first satellite tracking units for **Chad** on Rüppell's (RV) and Lappet-faced Vultures (LFV) at the Ouadi Rimé-Ouadi Achim Fauna Reserve in Feb/March 2024.

**Southern Africa:** The proposal for the inclusion of the Southern African population of the Bearded Vulture (BV) *Gypaetus barbatus meridionalis* in Appendix I of the CMS Convention (see [COP14 Document: COP14/Doc.31.4.8](#)) was successfully adopted during COP14. The **South**

African Department of Fisheries, Forestry and the Env't officially published the [Multi-species Biodiversity Management Plan for Vultures in South Africa](#) on 18 March 2024. In early March 2024, [86 vultures](#), plus other raptor species and wildlife were poisoned in the Kruger NP when a snared buffalo carcass was laced with poison. The [BV Recovery Programme](#) in southern Africa has recently updated the camera and associated equipment for a [video livestream](#) installed on a BV nest in the Drakensberg mountains. In **Zambia**, standardised annual vulture monitoring transects were conducted in Kafue NP in Nov by a team from NCZ and BirdWatch Zambia ([BWZ](#)), supported by African Parks. 310 km of transects showed vulture abundance remains stable (cf 2016, 2021 & 2022). NCZ trained BWZ to continue these annual transects. Across 4 vulture projects in Zambia, there is a strong collaborative partnership, collating a wealth of information from 60 active units, to inform monitoring across all major ecosystems. 5 satellite units were deployed in N Luangwa and 2 in Nsumbu NP in Oct 2023 (NCZ, [FZS](#) and [Caring for Conservation](#)) and 5 satellite units in southern [Kafue](#) in Nov 2023. A poisoning event detected from a tagged vulture in Oct near Kafue Flats highlighted poisoning threats from human-wildlife conflict. 19 vultures died, linked to domestic dogs harassing/killing sheep on a private fenced farm. Bait was laced with an organophosphate (monocrotophos). After discussion with the farmer, decontamination was conducted. BirdWatch Zambia will focus educational activities in this area.

**North & Northeast Africa:** A summary from new VSG member Rachid El Khamlichi in **Morocco** suggests the situation for EGV is improving, following the instigation of an EVG reintroduction programme in N Morocco since 2020 led by the national agency for Water and Forests and the association [AMPOVIS](#): In 2023, 4 pairs bred in the wild, (1 successful) and in 2024, 7 pairs were successful in 2 cases. The species had become extinct as a breeder since the 1980s. The [CRV Jbel Moussa](#) (Rehab centre) treated over 250 vultures 2020-23 among 26 birds of prey in total and the adjacent Jbel Moussa vulture restaurant was visited by over 25,000 vultures in that period (EGV, EV, RV, WBV). 32 RV & 3 WBV have been fitted with GPS transmitters. 73 EGV, 2 CV & 180 RVs were marked with wing tags and PVC rings. 1 HV was also tagged with a PVC ring (1<sup>st</sup> record for Western Palaearctic).

### **Asia Roundup:**

**South & SE Asia:** The annual online SAVE Open Day event in Feb 2024 attracted over 200 participants, with several significant updates and presentations, mainly from the SAVE region, with key contributions from Iran and Israel (see below). Open Day presentations are [available here](#). Four pivotal papers were already published in 2024, documenting key progress and other information. The resident vulture declines in **India** have [stabilised at the new low](#) remnant population levels according to standardised road transects carried out across 9,000km of N and central India, and published by [BNHS](#), although alarmingly, the national trends from corrected eBird data suggest ongoing declines still. This is in contrast to continued increases (latest is not yet formally published) reported at the SAVE meeting by [BCN](#) in neighbouring **Nepal**, where toxic NSAID usage by vets is far lower, and standardised road transects are repeated annually. Formalising Nepal bans of other toxic NSAIDs such as nimesulide is awaited but hopefully imminent. Tracking data [published for 99 satellite-tagged](#) wild and released White-rumped Vultures (WRV) in S Nepal shows high survival rates of wild birds, and provides valuable

information on mortality causes. With no NSAID-related or poison bait deaths detected for these closely monitored birds, the genuinely safe habitat in Nepal's Vulture Safe Zone continues to be confirmed. WRV tagging work extended to ten wild birds in Shuklaphanta NP in SW Nepal as part of a new BCN VSZ initiative there, and for the first time in South Asia, 10 Slender-billed Vultures (SBV) were also satellite tagged in various locations and are being closely monitored. In 2022/23 season, 626 vulture nests of 6 species were monitored (569 of which were WRV) with a 71% success rate overall. 12 of the released tagged captive-origin vultures attempted breeding in the wild, 7 of which successfully fledged chicks! Meanwhile, back in neighbouring **India**, there was [encouraging news](#) in March that the Technical Drugs Advisory Board has recommended the veterinary ban of nimesulide, which has now become more popular in some parts of the country. But such a step is still eagerly awaited, despite the further [important publication](#) by [IVRI](#) and BNHS further demonstrating nimesulide's toxicity. One more important paper was from NCBS investigating the diet of resident *Gyps* vultures across India based upon food species identification from faecal DNA. The [published findings](#) were that domestic ungulates were the main food in most areas, even from within tiger reserves, which has important implications for where planned releases of some of the 800 captive birds in breeding centres which can obviously still face high risks of NSAID contamination. The Vulture Conservation Breeding Centres in India collectively fledged 66 vultures by mid-2023, raising numbers over 800 individuals of the three resident *Gyps* species held in captivity. This included the first successful double-clutching at the Bhopal centre, an Indian Vulture (IV). One of the reintroduced WRV from the West Bengal programme bred successfully in the wild successfully fledging a chick. 10 WRV and 10 IV were transferred from the Haryana centre to Maharashtra where there are plans for translocations following release guidelines being developed by the Govt's Wildlife Institute of India. In Rajasthan, an ATREE PhD study by Chetan Misher of potential competition between feral dogs and vultures was reported at the SAVE Open Day, whilst also in Rajasthan a major new study of scavengers and carcass dumps led by Wildlife Institute of India and Rajasthan Forest Dept involving vulture satellite tracking is due to start in April 2024. In **South India**, a coordinated vulture survey was successfully completed in Dec 2023, between Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala and results will be compiled documenting baseline and future trends. In NW **Pakistan**, WWF Pakistan pharmacy surveys found no veterinary diclofenac, but human diclofenac (less than 3 ml) were offered at 25% of visited pharmacies. There is growing engagement by the authorities and hopes that the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan will regulate other toxic drugs in the near future. The monitoring trends for wild populations however are mixed, with WRV trends still declining. In **Bangladesh** where toxic NSAID ketoprofen was banned nationally in 2021, undercover pharmacy surveys showed that its use has already reduced significantly by 2023 and even further in 2024 whilst the second safe drug, tolfenamic acid is already increasing in its place. However, there are now signs that flunixin, which has been found to be toxic to wild vultures in Spain, is also increasing in the market. The first WRV was tagged in 2023, and after demonstrating transboundary movements into Tripura, India, it was found dead in an otherwise undetected poison baits incident within Bangladesh. This prompted IUCN Bangladesh and Forest Dept awareness efforts in the area. A vulture population survey was conducted across Bangladesh, resulting in a revised White-rumped Vulture population estimate of 248 individuals. During the 2022-2023 nesting season, a

total of 18 nests were observed, of which 13 were successful (72%). In the 2023-2024 winter period, 22 Himalayan Griffons were rehabilitated for release, having been picked up weak, and three of them were satellite tagged on release. Despite national security concerns, **Myanmar** SAVE partners held township-level meetings in Oct 2023 in order to work towards the establishment of Myanmar's first 100km radius provisional Vulture Safe Zone, centred on Tong San Kha village - a key vulture food supply source near Indawgyi Lake, Kachin State. Meetings involved Government agencies Indawgyi Wildlife Sanctuary and Veterinary Department plus Myanmar Vulture Working Group members and closely aligned Inn Chit Thu Association (for youth community ecotourism etc) in Mohnyin. Acknowledging that diclofenac has been confirmed as widely available to veterinary practitioners, initiatives have begun involving regional government Forest and Veterinary agencies to reduce diclofenac use through promoting meloxicam in targeted vulture strongholds e.g. in the Mohnyin area. Pharmacy training to community-based Animal Health Workers around Indawgyi supported by the Deputy Dir of Livestock Breeding Veterinary Dept and Myanmar's Veterinary Association took place in Oct 2023 in Mohnyin area of Kachin State. Over 200 bottles of injectable meloxicam have been supplied to veterinary services between the three key vulture states since 2021. There was also new published [confirmation of](#) White rumped Vulture breeding in the Shan highlands. More funding is needed to scale up activities. The **Cambodia** Govt formally recognised the Cambodia Vulture Working Group (CVWG), the SAVE Core Partner, in July 2023, with the Chair being taken on by H.E Kim Nong, DG, General Dept of Administration for Nature Conservation and Protection (Min of Env). The CVWG also expanded to include Rising Phoenix. Coordinated feeding site surveys showed vulture population stability (132 vultures) following earlier declines up to 2018. Nesting platforms were trialled with 21 now in place in Siem Pang, with one SBV pair already using them. Satellite-tagging was extended to all three species (6 WRV, 2 SBV, 3 RHV were tagged, in addition to the 2 WRV tagged in 2020). These helped with nest locating, which found 30 nests in total! This work was also published early 2024. Twelve (more than known before) of the WRV nests located were found at the recently rediscovered colony location nearby in **Laos**. And the Chulalongkorn Univ Veterinary Conference, held in Bangkok, **Thailand** devoted 25 Apr 2024 to vulture conservation, with focus on RHV. Presentations covered vulture conservation across Asia and in Thailand, as well as the successful breeding of RHV in captivity in Thailand and at Parco Natura in **Italy**. A key presentation described the recent genome sequencing of the RHV, a collaboration between Chulalongkorn Univ and Thailand's National Biobank. A small group, including overseas delegates, visited the off-show breeding facilities in Nakhorn Ratchasima at Korat Zoo, allowing Thai and Italian conservationists to compare practical notes and build collaborative links. Finally, for those in the **UK** in July, note there will be a [SAVE](#) stand at this year's [Global BirdFair](#) 12-14 July – do visit it!

**Central Asia:** The catastrophic decline of the EGV population in the Karatau Mountains, **Kazakhstan** (mentioned in the previous newsletter) was [published](#). Abundance and distribution of EVs in **Kazakhstan** [has been estimated](#): Confirming 185 sites in breeding biotopes were identified within KZ, including 163 occupied breeding territories. Of these, 33 breeding territories are within the Aral-Caspian region, 91 in Karatau and adjacent territories, and 39 in SE Kazakhstan. The [first tracking results](#) for 6 juvenile EVs tagged in Karatau in 2022 are now

available with all birds successfully reaching their wintering grounds in the Indus basin of **Pakistan** and **India**. The [Central Asian Vultures project](#) with the [Biodiversity Research and Conservation Center](#) presented results from a study on the migration routes of the EV from Central Asia and the decline of EGV in Kazakhstan at the Nov European vulture conference. In addition, [a report](#) summarizing work between 2021-2023 in **Uzbekistan** was published. The team is starting a new project in 2024 in **Kazakhstan** and **Uzbekistan**, which will study the scale and the distribution of wildlife poisoning and veterinary NSAIDs use in both countries. During the CMS COP14 in Samarkand, team members met Central Asia delegates to initiate new vulture conservation partnerships across the region. Between 9-21 April 2024 a joint expedition between NABU branch **Armenia** and the BSPB/ BirdLife Bulgaria was undertaken in N Armenia to locate and map previously unknown pairs of EVs, EGVs, BVs and other species eg Golden eagle. The expedition is part of the work of [NABU Armenia](#) on vultures in the country.

**West Asia/Middle East:** In the **UAE**, two vulture restaurants (VRs) are currently operational, and monitored, for 10 and 2 years respectively. The latter is along the border with Oman. In both areas Dr. Azmanis (VSG member) is providing scientific training/guidance. The restaurants regularly attract adult and immature LFV & EV as well as juvenile and immature CV and EGV. The restaurants are being monitored both visually by experienced personnel as well as with trail cameras. A network of enthusiast volunteers and birders assist in the verification of tagged individuals. Dr Azmanis closely collaborates with Dr McGrady within the LFV project in Oman as well as with UAE contacts planning two more vulture restaurants to build a VR and observers network. There are plans with local authorities to implement a capture/tagging/ringing/sampling programme following up and implementing MsAP priorities. One of the EV tagged by the [Central Asian Vultures project](#) in 2023, “Alay”, had spent the winter in **Saudi Arabia** but unfortunately in early Jan 2024 [it was found electrocuted](#) near Al Qunfudhah. A high profile Protected Areas meeting ([HIMA 2024](#)) was held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in Apr 2024, convened by the [National Centre for Wildlife](#), which included a prominent two hour vulture [event](#) where the urgency of a national veterinary diclofenac ban was highlighted by invited delegates from RSPB/VSG, Chris Bowden, CMS Raptors MoU Head Umberto Gallo-Orsi, and Dr Mohammed Shobrak. This raises hopes that Saudi Arabia may follow Oman’s initiative to instigate such a ban in the region, with diclofenac currently used widely in veterinary practice, and this is being followed up with approaches to [WHO](#) and [WOAH](#) to help implement the [CMS resolution on NSAIDs](#). The Environment Society of **Oman (ESO)** keeps receiving sporadic sightings of LFV nests around the Hajar Mountains, and although no breeding survey has been organised in the 2023/2024 season, all sightings have been logged on an ESO database. ESO completed the first round of [EV breeding surveys on Masirah](#) Island, and a repeat of the [2012 survey](#) showing a high density of breeding pairs on the island. The team checked 58 territories in 8 days and noted that at least two territories were occupied by trios. Territorial pairs have slightly declined, possibly due to lowered food availability after the partial closure of the main dumpsite. [A study](#) of resource use by EVs in Oman in order to mitigate electrocution risk was published in March 2024. In **Iran**, there came confirmation from Dr Alireza Hashemi that the veterinary diclofenac ban declared in 2016 has been upheld successfully, and also that there are new initiatives underway for EV, mainly in the coastal belt. Tracking in **Israel** led by Nili Anglister demonstrated how diligent tracking and immediate followup to retrieve carcasses and trace food sources confirmed that diclofenac and flunixin are important threats (talk available [here](#)).

## **North American Round-up:** *Compiled by Zoey Greenburg*

By the end of 2023, the world population of California Condors (CCs) stands at 561 according to US Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS). This breaks down to 344 free flying, 14 wild chicks fledged, 27 captive-bred released to the wild, and the captive population of 217. No captive-bred birds were released into the southwestern flock in 2023 due to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), which emerged during spring of 2023, when it killed 21 CCs from the southwestern U.S. population, (c. 20% of the flock). 14 of the losses were of breeding age, with 11 being known breeders. For a PDF of the full CC 2023 update [email](#) Steve Kirkland at FWS. The remaining flock is now 87 free flying individuals. In response FWS with collaborators was granted authorization by the Dept Agriculture to conduct a safety and efficacy [vaccination trial](#) on captive CCs and American Black Vultures (ABVs), and 17 captive-bred [CCs were vaccinated and released](#). This protocol will be continued over the coming 2 years. Vaccinations of wild CC populations is planned to start during 2024, continuing into the future. HPAI surveillance by The Peregrine Fund has indicated that there have likely been no additional cases of HPAI, and no additional HPAI cases have been observed through field observations so far. From 1992 through 2023, there have been 137 confirmed CC deaths due to lead poisoning in the global free flying population. In 2022 there were 44 deaths in the free flying CC population; 8 due to lead poisoning and 21 to HPAI. Other confirmed causes of death included shooting, trauma, and rodenticide poisoning. The northern California population of CCs is managed by the Yurok Tribe Wildlife Dept. To date, there have been no deaths in the CA population since the first releases there 2 years ago. 1 bird has needed chelation treatment and 4 birds had elevated lead levels >10 mg/dl. Interestingly, 1 female CC from the central CA flock has moved to join the southern CA flock. The Baja California flock, **Mexico**, is currently 50. 1 adult male from this population was recently declared dead after being missing for a year. 2 from the Chapultepec Zoo will be released spring of 2024. 3 CCs fledged from wild nests from 2023 breeding season, with 2 of them resighted recently. 4 breeding pairs have been confirmed nesting in 2024. For ABVs and Turkey Vultures (TVs), researchers investigated the effectiveness of inflatable scarecrows at 13 human-vulture conflict sites in southeastern **USA**. The scarecrows reduced vulture abundance by 82% during a 17-day treatment period and by 48% during a 21 day treatment periods. The researchers recommend use of inflatable scarecrows for reducing vulture-human conflict where conflict is spatially restricted (eg parking lots) and where there are stable surfaces for scarecrow deployment. Researchers from Mississippi State Univ. (MSU) have studies underway on the movements of translocated ABVs, the microbiome of ABVs, and transmittable diseases among ABVs. Relevant publications include [intraspecific competition between migratory and resident TVs](#) and the first report of [conspecific nest destruction in ABVs](#). Hawk Mountain Sanctuary (HMS) is satellite tracking 13 TVs and 2 ABVs. Also monitored 13 ABV nests in Pennsylvania (PA) in 2023; 4 of the nests were in caves (25% success) and 9 were in human-made structures (67% success). 7 ABV nestlings were wing-tagged in 2023. HMS and collaborators completed a second round of vulture road surveys at sites in **Canada, Venezuela, Uruguay**, and in the **USA**. Replicated surveys over 20 years for assessment of population shifts. In 2020 there was a localized mortality event for ABVs in SE PA and W New Jersey and Dr. Erica Miller leading the autopsies said: “A new Bandavirus was found in all of the vultures that died with large spleens in 2020, and in none of the vultures that died with traumatic injuries that year or in subsequent years. Bandaviruses are single-stranded RNA viruses, usually transmitted by ticks. The most closely related virus is known as “Hunter Island Virus, found in albatross in

Australia. The most closely related Bandavirus in USA is Heartland Virus, which has caused illness in humans in the Midwest, Northeast and Southern USA”

### **South America Round-up:** *Compiled by Sergio Lambertucci*

Andean Condor (AC) sightings in Santander, **Colombia** are becoming more frequent. In mid-2023, with the permanent monitoring carried out by the Parque Jaime Duque Foundation (PJDF), there was a simultaneous record of 29 AC, significant considering its CR status nationally. The Peasant Association jointly with the Condor (ACAMCO) promoted by PJDF, [won the BIBO Awards](#) in Colombia in 2023, in the category of “Community Care of Biodiversity.” The work aims to improve productive practices in Almorzadero moorland towards coexistence with the condor: conservation must go hand in hand with the community. In Dec 2023, during a meeting attended by representatives from Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Argentina, the Corporación Autónoma Regional de Santander (CAS) launched the Emergency Care Network for AC in San Gil. Subsequently, in Feb 2024, the Cooperation Agreement for the Colombian NE was signed, committing to address emergencies related to this species. This agreement includes the Corporation, Academy, Municipalities, Firefighters, Ministry of Health and Onegés. An expedition was conducted in the Department of Ayacucho, **Peru** during Nov and Dec 2023 as part of a project on the ecology and conservation of AC. Locations visited were in the Pampa Galeras National Reserve and the Sondondo Valley, which has the largest AC population in Peru. The team tried to capture ACs to tag them with GPS transmitters, but the attempts were unsuccessful. It will continue in May 2024. A nest of AC was discovered in Dec 2023 in an inter-Andean valley in Ayacucho, located in the Andean-coastal biological corridor between San Fernando and Pampa Galeras National Reserves. The nest contained a female chick that was approximately three weeks old. This is only the third report of such a nest in Peru and the first in Andean ecosystems in almost 40 years. The nest is still being monitored. In **Ecuador**, the AC Foundation satellite tagged 7 King Vultures (KV) to examine their habitat requirements. They also began long-term systematic monitoring of at least 10 active AC nests to evaluate parental care, breeding success, and nesting phenology of the species. One of the monitored nests belongs to a female AC, tagged in 2014. The group GICCA (Grupo de Investigación y Conservación del Cóndor Andino) is carrying out regular monitoring of the AC population in Arica, Parinacota and Magallanes regions of **Chile**. It is also working on a technical document assessing the problems of wind farms for AC with recommendations for monitoring designs and mitigation measures in the Magellan region. In **Argentina**, epidemiological surveillance got underway this semester in Patagonia to detect vultures infected with H5N1, and this work was combined with evaluations of other zoonotic pathogens such as *Chlamydia psittaci* and *Salmonella spp.* Several camera trap projects are currently studying carcass consumption and related potential ecosystem services provided by vultures in different regions of Patagonia. Also, monitoring and evaluating metal concentrations from vulture feathers is underway in several regions of Argentina. Also, monitoring and evaluating metal concentrations from vulture feathers has been from diverse regions of Argentina.

### **European Round-up:** *Compiled by Vladimir Dobrev*

An International Workshop on the Rüppell’s Vulture (RV), organised by Cátedra UNIA-IUCN is taking place now in Málaga, **Spain** 13-15 May 2024. Otherwise, perhaps the biggest headlines



have been the positive population trends in **Bulgaria** (see below) for several species. There was also a Dec conference in **Serbia** [International conference on “Vultures’ return to the Balkan Mountains”](#). **Fighting Threats:** In **Italy**, The *Enrico Caffi* Bergamo Museum of Natural Sciences held a [national conference](#) on the impact of lead on avian fauna, including vultures on 2 Dec 2023. [Albanian Ornithological Society](#) trained 40 participants from key state institutions in wildlife crime investigation as part of the [BalkanDetox](#) LIFE project.

**Bearded Vulture (BV):** The BV EEP released [updated guidelines](#) for captive breeding. Preliminary [results are available](#) from 2023’s International BV Observation Days, from between 14-22 Oct 2023: 1120 observers counted 617 BVs across 254 of 679 sites in 8 countries. The first captive BV chick of 2024 [hatched on 25 Jan](#) at the Richard Faust Zentrum in **Austria**. In Sept, filmmaker Lizzie Daly released [VULTURE: The Story of the BV](#), including footage from VCF’s [Specialised EEP BV Breeding Units in Spain](#). Sad news in Jan, ‘Roc Genèse’, the [first wild-hatched BV tagged in the French Pyrenees](#) was [found dead](#). Movements news this winter: BV ‘Nepomuk’ [has been observed in the Eastern Italian Alps and Slovenia](#) and an unknown juvenile BV was [seen in Norway](#)! The BV LIFE project aiming to bring BVs back to **Bulgaria** and the **Balkans** [has a new website](#) and the project team [held a meeting](#) in March, including visits to Kresna Gorge and Pirin National Park. In Dec, a [young male BV](#) joined the captive breeding programme at Green Balkans Wildlife Rescue Centre in **Bulgaria** from the [Owl and Bird of Prey Centre Haringsee](#) in **Austria**. In March 2024, a pair of BVs at the Green Balkans Wildlife Rescue Centre [laid an egg](#). LIFE Gyprescue has a new [YouTube channel](#) showcasing the BVs of Corsica.

**(Eurasian) Griffon Vulture (EGV):** A record [20 pairs of CV and over 200 of EGV](#) were reported in **Bulgaria** in 2024. This followed on from [849 EGVs counted in the Balkan Peninsula as a whole](#). The EGV population surge [set a new record for Bulgaria](#). A Record 138 pairs of EGVs were [counted in the Eastern Rhodopes](#) in Feb 2024. One EGV from Bulgaria was [released on a Greek Island](#) in Feb. In Dec 2023, Zoo [Berlin joined EGV](#) Reintroduction Programme in Bulgaria. ‘Plamuk’ returned to Bulgaria in Nov 2023 and there were results reported from a wider EGV [census](#). For the first time [Stara Zagora Zoo hatched an EGV](#), and in Mar 2024 the chick was [returned to its parents](#).

**Cinereous Vulture (CV):** In 2023, after the [first year](#) of the LIFE Aegyptius Return (LAR) project, CV population in **Portugal** has [doubled from 40 to 80 pairs](#). LAR partners prepared for the 2024 breeding season by [repairing and installing new nesting platforms](#), even adding a [vulture sculpture](#) to encourage the CVs to nest! Breeding is already off to a promising start, with partner Palombar having discovered a [fourth pair of breeding CVs](#) in Douro, the country’s smallest CV colony, as well as confirming successful egg-laying of the three established pairs. ‘Aravil’, the first CV tagged in Portugal 13 years ago, [was recaptured and fitted with a GPS transmitter](#) in Dec. 49 Portuguese law enforcement officers were [trained in rescuing and handling CVs](#) in Jan. New [artificial nest platforms](#) have also been built in the Iberian Highlands of **Spain**, and [two rehabilitated CVs](#) have been added to Rewilding Spain’s release programme for 2024. Green Balkans has published a [technical report](#) on CV conservation in **Bulgaria** in 2022-3. **Bulgaria** had further progress, with [13 CVs tagged with GPS/GSM transmitters](#) ahead of their [release in the Eastern Rhodopes](#) in Nov. BSPB were thrilled to report in Feb that two pairs of CVs from the 2022 release cohort [occupied nests in the Eastern Rhodopes](#) - first for 31

years! Also in Bulgaria – Green Balkans reported the [first nesting of CVs in the Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park](#) in 100 years and the [first nesting of CVs in Sine Kamani NP](#) in nearly 60 years! Feb also saw the [first Bulgarian CV eggs](#) of the season in the Balkan Mountains. In March, the [first 9 CVs](#) of the LAR for the BV project (which includes CVs) were brought to the Kresna Gorge area from Spain, and have been tagged ahead of release. Green Balkans have released [graphs of nesting behaviours](#) of two pairs of CVs in Kotelsko. In Apr, [CV chicks are hatching](#) in Kotel and Vratsa-Ponor. A female CV released in 2023 had a [Christmas vacation](#) in Greece. ‘[Fremuth](#)’ the CV visited **Austria** in March, before being [rescued](#) in **Romania** in Apr after being found in poor condition. ‘[Tewes](#)’ the CV is currently visiting **Italy**. ‘[Lyubomiren](#)’ the CV has kept his travels within **Bulgaria**, but has been demonstrating the links between the colonies in the Balkan mountains and those in the Eastern Rhodopes.

**Egyptian Vulture (EV):** The EV reinforcement programme in **Bulgaria** [added 3 more birds](#) to the wild population and 3 earlier released captive-bred EVs paired up and occupied breeding territories in 2023 in the Eastern Rhodopes. Two further EVs were released through ‘delayed release’ in Bulgaria in 2023. All the results from the reinforcement program in Bulgaria were published in an [annual report](#). By late March 2024 the [adaptation aviary](#) was completed and by early April [6 new young EVs](#) were admitted in the ‘EV school’ in Bulgaria. Three of these young vultures had been rescued from their nests in Bulgaria last year and were kept in the WRBC while the other three are captive-bred and [donated](#) by Prague Zoo and Ostrava Zoo in the **Czech Republic**. Also, Antonin Vaidl from Prague Zoo reported in late 2023 that [3 of the 5 birds](#) that were transported from **Lebanon** to Prague Zoo in 2022 have found partners and are ready to breed as part of the EV breeding programme. [A paper](#) published in *Animal Conservation* demonstrates stability of the Balkans population, responding to conservation activities which include the migration route of the species. In addition, the [proceedings](#) from the Global EV Online Conference held 8-9 Nov 2022 under the EV New LIFE (LIFE16 NAT/BG/000874) project were published in [Vulture news](#) and several selected papers as a [supplement 17](#) of the peer-reviewed journal Acta Zoologica Bulgarica. An adult EV tagged in **Bulgaria** [died during](#) its migration in Saudi Arabia in early spring, 2024. Research on the [EVs of the island of Masirah, Oman](#), as part of a project led by the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) was carried out in Feb 2024 to compare numbers between 2012 and now. The [online streaming](#) camera at an EV nest in **Bulgaria** will be active here during the 2024 season again. More updates from Europe in Newsletter 21.

## **Vulture Extras!**

We are pleased to highlight [free online download of the Vulture Special edition](#) of *Hornbill*, with 22 articles from Asia (many on Vulture Safe Zones) and from further afield and thanks to BNHS for making this resource available.

Finally... do start planning your Sept [International Vulture Awareness Day](#) events if you haven't already? and do [register them](#) on the weblink, however great or small the event.

[Let us know](#) if you receive this newsletter indirectly & wish to be added to circulation list.

Please **send items for inclusion** ahead of the next edition **by 15 Sept.** Or submit longer articles [to the editor](#) of the VSG journal, Vulture News. Reminder that the VSG's journal [Vulture News including back copies is available free](#) online – do read it!



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