

CEPF SMALL GRANT FINAL PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT

I. BASIC DATA

Organization Legal Name: Afrique Nature International

Project Title (as stated in the grant agreement): West African Vulture Survey (Ghana-Guinea-Togo)

Implementation Partners for This Project:

Project Dates (as stated in the grant agreement): March 1, 2005 – June 30, 2005

Date of Report (month/year): June 2005

II. OPENING REMARKS

Provide any opening remarks that may assist in the review of this report.

In West Africa, vulture populations have decreased drastically over the last 30 years. The extent of the decreases in abundance indices found in the raptor survey carried out in 1969-1973 and 2003-2004 in the savannas of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger is evidence of a real decline across all species of vulture, affecting both those that were abundant and those that were uncommon. The West African vulture decline is on the same scale as the one presently observed in South Asia.

Afrique Nature International, with its West African Raptor Center (WARC), along with the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle – France (MNHN), has been responsible for alerting the scientific community about the alarming and general vulture decline happening in West Africa. Afrique Nature International has prepared a "Regional Vulture Alert" that will be disseminated, with support by major environmental NGOs, towards governmental departments, regional agencies, universities, local NGOs, etc. to explain the magnitude of this decline and the serious consequences of the vulture disappearance on the ecosystems, the public health, and the rural economy. Our organization is also conducting the *African Vulture Cooperative Assessment Initiative* involving vulture specialists across the continent and abroad to assemble available actualized data that will permit the BirdLife's Global Species Programme to urgently reevaluate the IUCN Red List categories of the African endemic and near-endemic vulture species, especially in the view of the populations collapse happening across West Africa. Furthermore, Afrique Nature International is also actively involved in the monitoring of the regional raptors and, with partners from Southern and Eastern Africa, is participating in the creation of the panafrikan vulture monitoring program.

Afrique Nature International is presently establishing the *Duga - West African Vulture Conservation Program* that has for goal to prevent the extinction of the West African vultures – nature "cleaners" and global bioindicators. This program aims to maintain the important "epidemiologic cul-de-sac" role filled by these scavengers (function vital for the rural economy and wildlife) and to avoid the loss of specific milestones and taboos essential for the sustainable management of natural resources by the local communities. The Duga Program is also seeking, in the search of durability of its action, to raise the commitment level of the regional scientists in raptor conservation. The Duga program has for objectives to (a) ameliorate, based on the special relationship linking West African societies to vultures, the public information (urban and rural) on the important role played by the necrophage raptors and on the actual vulture decline and its consequences, (b) to carry out the West African vulture populations monitoring and to determine

the main factors responsible for the decline, and (c) to realize urgent conservation measures to avoid the extinction of the relic populations so vultures could continue to perform their important prophylaxis role.

In order to have a better understanding of the situation across West Africa and to get the most extensive regional coverage relating to this vulture decline, especially in the guineo-sudanese savannas belt bordering the Upper Guinea forests, the project focused on monitoring activities in the northern half of Ghana, Guinea and Togo, countries included in the CEPF hotspot portfolio. Additional countries of this biome were also covered with additional funding, namely Senegal and Gambia, where Dr Thiollay also collected vulture data using the same methodology in the 1970s. Furthermore, for logistic reasons (and also as to bypass the instable Côte d'Ivoire on our way from Ghana to Guinea), parts of southern Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger were driven and surveyed at the same occasion.

III. NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

1. What was the initial objective of this project?

The project had for main objectives: (i) to complete our comprehension of the regional vulture decline (historic, rate, trend), (ii) to determine the main factors responsible, and (iii) to establish, for the West African sub-region, the base of the panafrican vulture monitoring program. Furthermore, the following results were expected: (a) a comprehensive coverage of the West African vulture species' ranges as to improve the description of the regional vulture decline, (b) the establishment of an extensive regional network of road transects to be used in the frame of the panafrican vulture monitoring program, and (c) the training of two biologists in raptor surveying and monitoring techniques.

2. Did the objectives of your project change during implementation? If so, please explain why and how.

The objectives did not change. However, since additional funding could be secured, the spatial scope of the survey was increased with other contiguous countries added (Senegal and Gambia). This permitted a better regional coverage and improved opportunities for the training activities.

3. How was your project successful in achieving the expected objectives?

The survey was conducted as planned. In the hotspot countries (including the neighbouring segments used for logistic reasons), a total of 4,400 km of roads were surveyed (together with 482 km in protected areas). With the addition of Senegambia, some 5,570 km were covered in total. Of these, 2,938 km of the same road segments were surveyed in the 1970s by Dr Thiollay, so direct comparison can be obtained for these specific sectors.

In the context of the establishment, in the West African sub-region, of the base of the panafrican vulture monitoring program, a network of 11,883 km of road transects have now been set-up and monitored, using the same protocol, in 2003-2004-2005 across the vultures ranges. This network is being integrated to the Southern Africa system, and with

the less extensive Eastern Africa set-up, and is a major contribution to the realization of this ambitious and important continental initiative.

During the survey, monitoring of muti markets (for vulture parts) could be done on an irregular basis in the main cities crossed, as time allowed. These visits were mostly made for training purposes so the trainees, within their respective NGOs, could eventually carry on investigation as to estimate the impact of this trade. Additionally, again mostly for training purposes, some limited investigations about the potential use of the veterinary Diclofenac drug, considered as the main cause of the catastrophic South Asia vulture decline, was conducted (mostly in the form of interviews with government officials, aid agencies, etc.).

The training of the two regional ornithologists from Guinée-Ecology and SOS-Forêts (both national NGOs members of the BirdLife African Partnership) went very well. In fact, training, initially planned for one trainee at a time, for half the survey length each, was realized for both together for the entire study duration. It can be noted that the trainees showed great aptitude in raptor identification and in learning monitoring techniques. Their enthusiasm and commitment for the study was totally genuine and played a great part in the success of the project. A training certificate was delivered to the trainees jointly by Afrique Nature International and the Africa Division of BirdLife International.

Concerning the investigations relating to the extent, causes, and trends of the regional vulture decline, the data analysis is still underway. Dr Thiollay's data is also being used to establish the scale of the decline of these new areas surveyed. It might be noted that the regional trainees are closely associated to this analytic process. A scientific publication on the survey results is being written (co-authored by the project leader and the regional trainees) for submission to the *Vulture News* journal, along other specific notes to conservation journals.

4. Did your team experience any disappointments or failures during implementation? If so, please explain and comment on how the team addressed these disappointments and/or failures.

The survey could be implemented without any special difficulties. The only element was that the selected Ghanaian trainee (from Ghana Wildlife Society, BirdLife partner) could not join the survey team at the last minute, so a replacement had to be found very quickly (an ornithologist from the Côte d'Ivoire SOS-Forêts NGO / BirdLife partner). Also, Dr Thiollay, who has planned to come for the Guinea segment of the survey, could not make it due to other commitments.

5. Describe any positive or negative lessons learned from this project that would be useful to share with other organizations interested in implementing a similar project.

- Positive: The training of regional ornithologists to the difficult and often considered off-putting raptor identification techniques has proven very rewarding. The two biologists trained are now among the very few Africans competent in raptor work. However, training must be completed and followed by related activities if interest and capacities are to be maintained.

- Positive: The association with BirdLife national partners in the co-realization of the survey contributed to the enhancement of regional capacities in raptor monitoring. Further actions in raptor and vulture conservation in the region must be done with their collaboration – involving also the other regional BirdLife partners.
- Positive: Most government agencies were informed about this study and their collaboration and support were always highly constructive. Now that the research activities are well underway and the monitoring network completed (and that the regional states will soon be conscious with the coming “Vulture Alert”), the subsequent conservation actions must integrate more intimately the government structures, especially for the creation of the planned vulture restaurants and sanctuaries in the selected priority countries.
- Negative: As the format of the survey did not allow for more in-depth inquiries, investigations about the potential use of the veterinary Diclofenac drug could not be conducted as integrally planned. More structured explorations should be done with the help of the partners NGOs as it is important to rapidly determine if this medication is regularly used in West Africa to treat livestock.

6. Describe any follow-up activities related to this project.

In the short-term, as a direct result of the project:

- Disseminate the “Regional Vulture Alert”.
- Urgently establish a regional enquiry protocol to determine if Diclofenac, or other related non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs), are used in West Africa.
- Establish “vulture restaurants” in selected sites to assist declining vulture populations and to provide trapping facilities (necessary, by example, for ringing/tagging or installing PTTs on vultures).
- Conduct the survey of the regional muti markets selling vulture parts.
- Initiate a regional study about the cultural and sociological roles played by the vulture in West African traditional and modern societies.
- Publish an article on the general raptor situation in West Africa with Dr Thiollay.
- Along the press releases distributed and in preparation, propose features about the West African Vulture Decline to *Africa - Birds & Birding* (discussions underway) and to *World BirdWatch*.
- Reassess the global conservation status of the endemic and near-endemic African vulture species, considering the large-scale West African decline.

As for the field conservation actions:

- Create a regional education vulture program based on the special relationship between vulture and West African societies (re the above study on the cultural and sociological roles played by the vulture in West Africa).
- Explore the possibility to create “vulture sanctuaries” in sensible sectors.
- Initiate vulture breeding-colony monitoring (Rüppell’s Griffon Vulture), especially in the Gourma (Mali) and the Arli and W NP (Burkina Faso, Niger).
- Redo the vulture surveys of the monitoring setup every two years (including parts of Nigeria and Mauritania).

7. Please provide any additional information to assist CEPF in understanding any other aspects of your completed project.

Surveying materials purchased with CEPF funding were donated to the trained national raptor biologists (binocular (1), telescopes & tripods (2), identification guide (1)).

Of the eight countries concerned by the survey, visas were provided by their respective embassy in Canada, once the goal of the project was explained, as a courtesy by all, except one. It must be specified that all responsible approached in these embassies recognized that vultures were disappearing in their countries and that something should be done about it, considering their importance for the tradition and for the ecosystems.

IV. ADDITIONAL FUNDING

Provide details of any additional donors who supported this project and any funding secured for the project as a result of the CEPF grant or success of the project.

Donor	Type of Funding*	Amount	Notes
IRD (<i>Institut de recherche pour le développement – France</i>)	A	300,000 FCFA	For the Senegambia segment of the 4x4 rental fees.

****Additional funding should be reported using the following categories:***

- A** *Project co-financing (Other donors contribute to the direct costs of this CEPF project)*
- B** *Complementary funding (Other donors contribute to partner organizations that are working on a project linked with this CEPF project)*
- C** *Grantee and Partner leveraging (Other donors contribute to your organization or a partner organization as a direct result of successes with this CEPF project.)*

D Regional/Portfolio leveraging (Other donors make large investments in a region because of CEPF investment or successes related to this project.)

Provide details of whether this project will continue in the future and if so, how any additional funding already secured or fundraising plans will help ensure its sustainability.

Until recently, the harsh vulture decline in West Africa was very little known. The South Asia vulture decline, affecting three *gyps* species, now critically endangered, focalized most energy and eclipsed other vulture related crisis around the globe. However, the decline in West Africa is as pronounced and is affecting, here, all vulture species (not “only” *gyps* vultures), for a geographic area of the same scale. It is now important that the scientific and conservation community be concerned about this new crisis that could be connected, in many ways, to the South Asia decline.

With CEPF support, this new survey could be made possible and will allow to better document this vulture decline, and hopefully, to determine the main cause(s). With now a complete regional vision of the population crashes, new indices are now available and are being exploited to identify the factor(s) responsible. Further priority actions are to be realized in this respect, and we believe that fundraising will be possible as more people will soon be aware of this serious environmental problem and conservation challenge, especially with the publication of the surveys’ results and the dissemination of the “Regional Vulture Alert”.

V. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Additional funding will be required to tackle the priority actions, especially the realization of the regional enquiry on NSAIDs, the establishment of “vulture restaurants” and “vulture sanctuaries”, and the realization of a regional study about the cultural and sociological roles played by the vulture in West Africa. Funding will also be necessary for the creation and realization of the regional education vulture program. Also, funds must be secured for the regular two-year interval vulture surveys.

VI. INFORMATION SHARING

CEPF aims to increase sharing of experiences, lessons learned and results among our grant recipients and the wider conservation and donor communities. One way we do this is by making the text of final project completion reports available on our Web site, www.cepf.net, and by marketing these reports in our newsletter and other communications. Please indicate whether you would agree to publicly sharing your final project report with others in this way.

Yes _____

No _____

If yes, please also complete the following:

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