



31 October 2017

## Hope soars for imperilled vultures

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The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) is honoured to have played a key role in bringing hope to threatened vultures around the world, as a new and far-reaching global plan is put in place to protect these iconic birds in 128 countries.

Vultures are under immense pressure from a range of human activities. These threats have resulted in a rapid decline in Africa and Asia particularly, where most of these spectacular birds are now listed as Critically Endangered. But the 124 conservation actions contained in the newly-adopted and exciting [Multi-species Action Plan](#) (Vulture MsAP) mean that there is light at the end of the tunnel for Old World vultures.

The EWT has been working tirelessly to drive the development of this global plan, and at the recent Conference of the Parties (COP12) to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the Vulture MsAP was formally adopted. The adoption of this global plan will drive concerted conservation action to address the negative trends in vulture populations, where in some instances we have lost in excess of 95% of some species over the last 20 years, mostly due to human-induced threats. The Vulture MsAP promotes the implementation of 124 different conservation actions across the globe designed to help populations to recover to sustainable levels. These include policy and legislative changes, research and monitoring, education and awareness, and several on-the-ground actions. Of these 124 actions, 12 have been identified as critical, and immediate implementation is essential. These include:

- Establishing protocols and training and supporting relevant agency staff (conservation, rangers, police and judiciary) to rapidly respond to poisoning incidents including sharing of best practices.
- Prohibiting or withdrawing veterinary use of diclofenac, ketoprofen and aceclofenac for the treatment of livestock and substituting it with readily available safe alternatives, such as meloxicam in all Vulture MsAP range states.

- For new and existing energy infrastructure, promoting the implementation of CMS guidelines by phasing out energy infrastructure designs that pose electrocution risk to vultures and other birds, and advocating retro-fitting with known bird-friendly designs within current maintenance schedules.
- Conducting a census in 2018-2019 and a census in 2028-2029 of all species to monitor the population size, breeding productivity, distribution and trends across the Vulture MsAP range.

André Botha, the EWT's resident vulture expert with more than 15 years' experience in this field, was appointed Overarching Coordinator of the Vulture MsAP in August 2016. He has worked closely with the CMS Raptors MoU, BirdLife International, the Vulture Conservation Foundation, and members of the Vulture Specialist Group of the IUCN, to develop this roadmap for the conservation of 15 species of Old World vultures. Now that the plan has been adopted by COP12, these actions, and others, can get underway in the 128 vulture range states that are affected. André says, "This is where the real work starts. The plan was just the first step, but the declines are still happening and now we need to implement. This is a 12-year plan, and the reality is that if we don't implement within that time frame, the likelihood of extinction of many of these species is extremely high. A plan such as this gives us great hope that that terrible scenario can be avoided."

A number of other proposals relating to vultures were also tabled at COP12, including the up-listing of ten species of African and Asian vultures to CMS Appendix 1, which is made up of species that have been assessed as being in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of their range. In more good news for vultures, all the proposals to up-list these species were approved. The species affected are:

1. Whited-headed Vulture
2. Hooded Vulture
3. White-backed Vulture
4. Cape Vulture
5. Rüppell's Vulture
6. Red-headed Vulture
7. White-rumped Vulture
8. Indian Vulture
9. Slender-billed Vulture
10. Lappet-faced Vulture

This up-listing provides these imperilled vultures with greater protection in their range states. Parties to the CMS are committed to strictly protecting species on Appendix 1 by prohibiting the removal of these species, conserving and, where possible, restoring their habitats, preventing, removing or mitigating obstacles to their migration, and controlling other factors that might endanger them.

The EWT is honoured to have played a key role in this essential conservation work for these iconic birds and remains committed to saving our scavengers.

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## **Contacts**

André Botha  
 Manager: Special Projects

Endangered Wildlife Trust

Tel: +27 82 962 5725

[andreb@ewt.org.za](mailto:andreb@ewt.org.za)

Belinda Glenn

Marketing and Communications Manager

Endangered Wildlife Trust

Tel: +27 87 021 0398

[belindag@ewt.org.za](mailto:belindag@ewt.org.za)