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### **New online database could reduce poisonous threat to vultures**

The use of poisons to kill wildlife in Africa has rapidly accelerated over the past decade, and is having a devastating effect on the populations of many species. The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) has been working on wildlife poisoning issues for over twenty years and has noted a rapid escalation in the use of poisons on recent years for various reasons. These include the use of poisons to target specific species with such as elephants that provide high-value by-products for trade, or Leopards or monkeys that cause damage to domestic livestock or crops. We also note with concern, the use of poisons for wildlife that provide a food source such as game birds.

Due to the indiscriminate nature of poisons, most of which are highly toxic pesticides, there are almost always unintentional consequences that affect a broad range of terrestrial and aquatic species and often this includes human beings. Vultures are being the most severely afflicted, as they are typically the first to arrive at a poisoned carcass, and they feed in large numbers.

The EWT has been collecting data on wildlife poisoning since 1995 and has now joined forces with [The Peregrine Fund](#) to assess the scope and impact of this critical threat to vultures and other wildlife species across Africa. In partnership with the [Vulture Specialist Group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission](#), we have collated all historical and current incidents of wildlife poisoning into the [African Wildlife Poisoning Database](#) or AWPDP, which will be launched on 2 September 2017 to mark International Vulture Awareness Day.

So far, this database contains records of 272 poisoning incidents that have killed over 8,000 animals of 40 different species, from 15 countries. Although records of poisoning date back to 1961, in the past decade there has been a sharp escalation in poisoning incidents, with most of the deaths occurring during this time. Aside from vultures, species affected range from large carnivores, such as lions, Leopards, and hyaenas, to elephants, impalas, cranes, and storks. However, by far the most deaths are of vultures, comprising ten different species, including two species that migrate to Africa from Europe.

Poisoning is the most significant threat to vultures in Africa and Eurasia and, over the last 30 years, has contributed to declines in excess of 80% in some African species. Currently, the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species lists four species of African vulture as Critically Endangered and three species as Endangered. The AWPDP will contribute to gathering better information on wildlife poisoning incidents, as well as on the drivers of wildlife poisoning.

Darcy Ogada, Assistant Director of Africa Programs for The Peregrine Fund explains, “Wildlife poisoning in Africa has reached epic proportions and one would be hard pressed to find a group of species that is not affected. The AWPDP is an essential tool for documenting this silent crime that kills not only wildlife, but domestic animals including cows, sheep, goats and dogs, as well as contaminating the environment, particularly water sources.”

To allow greater access to this information, and increased publicity for this very serious threat facing Africa’s wildlife, as well as its people and livestock, the EWT and The Peregrine Fund have collaborated with the Gadfly Project, to develop an online version of the [AWPDP](#). This database allows registered members of the public, conservationists, and wildlife veterinarians, across Africa, to input information into the database through a mobile app. [The Gadfly Project](#) is a social enterprise software developer located in Maryland, USA. Its core mission is the development of web applications and websites for socially, economically, and environmentally conscious organisations.

Dr Lizanne Roxburgh, EWT Senior Scientist, adds, “Conservation starts and ends with data. Effective action can only be taken if we understand where poisoning incidents occur, what species are affected and what the reasons are for the poisoning. The AWPDP already contributes significantly to our understanding of the situation in southern and East Africa and, as it grows, we will better understand the situation in other parts of Africa, and be able to take action on the ground to prevent future wildlife deaths.”

The AWPDP is designed to facilitate simple, effective capture of relevant data, either by using a mobile device at a wildlife poisoning incident, or by inputting data via the website. Users can access basic information on poisoning incidents and mortalities, and view these on a map of Africa. In some cases, data about a poisoning incident may be considered sensitive and will not be shared without the consent of the submitting person or organisation.

Established by the EWT in 2009, [International Vulture Awareness Day](#) is celebrated on the first Saturday in September every year, to create awareness about this ecologically vital group of birds that face a range of threats worldwide. Populations of many species are under pressure and some species face extinction if we do not take action to stop poisoning. By launching the AWPDP on this International Vulture Awareness Day, we aim to promote the submission of relevant information on wildlife poisoning incidents among participants and supporters of this global event.

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