



This paper was provided to the Joint Committee for decision/discussion or information. Please refer to the minutes of the meeting for Committee's position on the paper.

To view other Joint Committee papers and minutes visit <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-2671>

To find out more about JNCC visit <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-1729>

JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

RAPTORS IN GUINEA: AN EXAMPLE OF JNCC'S GLOBAL OUTREACH WORK

Paper by Vin Fleming and Alison Littlewood

1. Introduction

- 1.1 JNCC acts as the UK Scientific Authority with respect to fauna for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). This requires us to provide scientific advice to Defra to inform their decisions on licences for the import and export of animal specimens listed on the appendices of the Convention. JNCC is required to make 'non-detriment findings' on the import of any CITES-listed specimen, to ensure that trade into the European Community (EC) through the UK is not detrimental to the survival of the species concerned. If we are not able to make a finding of non-detriment, then we recommend refusal of any import application. Through procedures under EC CITES Regulations, such a refusal may result, following consultation with the country concerned, in a formal import suspension into the EC of the species-country combination under question.
- 1.2 In theory, the country of export should provide an informed opinion on non-detriment, but in practice they are frequently unable to do so due to limitations of capacity, resources and information. The lack of information also severely hampers JNCC's ability to make robust non-detriment findings. Whilst we are able to refuse applications under such conditions of uncertainty, accumulating more and more import suspensions into the EC is hardly an aid to the effective implementation of the Convention and its goal of sustainable trade.
- 1.3 JNCC has not, traditionally, used its resources to support research to enhance the scientific basis for non-detriment findings for species imported into the UK from third countries. Rather, commissioned research in support of CITES has focused on the production of checklists or on studies of technical issues. However, over the period 2005-06, JNCC and Defra jointly supported a study into the status of raptors in Guinea which were subject to international trade to the EC. This paper:
 - i. outlines the rationale and objectives for this study;
 - ii. summarises the conclusions and outputs from the work; and

- iii. suggests criteria for future engagement in similar studies to support the implementation of CITES and other multilateral environmental agreements.

2. Background to the Guinea study

- 2.1 In the last ten years Guinea has emerged as a significant exporter of live wild birds to the UK and the EC, both in terms of volume and the range of species traded. The project focused on diurnal raptors because this was a group of birds that were appearing more regularly in trade, for which the UK was one of the primary destinations in the EC, and which, because of their typically low densities and productivity, may be more vulnerable to the impacts of harvest for trade than other groups of birds. Moreover, increasing numbers of these species were becoming subject to import suspensions into the EC because of the absence of reliable assessments of sustainability.
- 2.2 The project was conceived in response to these growing concerns and in recognition of the importance that Guinea places on the continuing trade in its natural resources and its desire for any such trade to be sustainable. The project (which was initiated prior to the current EC avian influenza import restrictions on captive birds from third countries¹) aimed to assist the CITES Authorities of both the EC and Guinea to share a common and improved understanding of the current status in Guinea of those birds (particularly diurnal raptors) found in trade, and for which quantitative information is currently lacking (and so an assessment of sustainability is not currently possible).
- 2.3 More specifically this project was intended to enable JNCC, in its role as the UK CITES Scientific Authority for fauna to ensure that Defra (as the UK CITES Management Authority) is provided with authoritative, evidence-based, scientific advice on CITES licence applications.
- 2.4 To meet these requirements, the study focused on obtaining data on the distribution and relative abundance of diurnal raptors by undertaking targeted surveys, supplemented by reviews of available literature. The aim was to use this information to develop recommendations concerning the future management of raptors in Guinea, with regards to whether existing export quota levels are acceptable and what measures would need to be implemented to ensure future sustainable exploitation

¹ A temporary ban on imports of captive birds from outside of the EU was agreed on 25 October 2005 at the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health (SCoFAH). At a meeting of SCoFAH on 5 February 2007, Member States endorsed a Commission Decision to extend the ban on EU imports of live captive birds other than poultry. It was agreed that the import ban would remain in place until 30 June 2007. From 1 July 2007, new rules will come into effect indefinitely; these will still ban imports of wild-caught birds but will allow imports of captive-bred birds from approved breeding establishments in some countries outside the EU.

- 2.5 Additionally, at the request of representatives from the Department for Water and Forest (DNEF – Direction Nationale des Eaux et Forêts) in Guinea, the project included an element of capacity building for Guinean CITES and veterinary officials responsible for enforcing wildlife laws, to ensure better regulation of trade in the long term.

3. Study results

- 3.1 Fauna and Flora International were contracted to carry out the study. The literature review found no publications directly relating to the status of raptors in the country. Counts from slow-moving vehicles, supplemented by spot counts and foot transects, were used to provide indices of relative abundance for raptors through a large part of Guinea. Road-based transects totalling 3,635 km were undertaken, distributed *pro rata* between the various regions and habitat types of Guinea. In all, 2,792 individual raptors of 47 species (76% of the regional total) were recorded; for all these species, abundance indices are now available. In addition, the results have enabled a provisional status and assessment report on raptors in Guinea to be produced, including maps of distribution (see sample species account in Annex 1).
- 3.2 An assessment of trade in raptors through Guinea was undertaken, and training and workshops were provided to assist the Guinean CITES and veterinary authorities and the bird traders themselves to better identify, handle and care for raptors in trade.
- 3.3 Outputs from the study will include two JNCC reports and a further publication on the status and distribution of raptors in Guinea (also containing suggestions for sustainable quotas for any trade), with follow-up scientific papers. In order to increase the value of these publications to the predominantly francophone countries of west Africa, we plan to publish these in French as well as English.

4. Benefits derived from the project

Direct benefits

- 4.1 Whilst the restrictions on imports of captive birds, introduced to counter the risks associated with avian influenza, have meant that the UK is unlikely to be the recipient of commercial consignments of wild birds from Guinea in the foreseeable future, the study has nonetheless been a valuable exercise. It has provided, for the first time, good quantitative and distribution data on an element of Guinea's avifauna which is subject to exploitation for international trade.
- 4.2 Trade in wild birds from Guinea to other parts of the world, notably Japan, continues, and it is hoped that the outputs from this project will provide the Guinean Scientific Authority with the tools they need to provide evidence-based advice to their Management Authority on CITES export licence applications and

to establish conservative export quotas for those species that can sustain some trade.

- 4.3 In addition, the capacity of the CITES and other relevant authorities in Guinea to manage the bird trade in the longer term has been strengthened significantly by introducing better handling and identification techniques for captive raptors, rapid but rigorous raptor survey techniques (which can be used to monitor trends in populations over time), and a better understanding of which species do, and do not, occur in the country.
- 4.4 The project has also made a valuable and cost-effective contribution to the understanding of the ornithology of a region of Africa that is poorly known at present. Moreover, the results provide information on migratory African-Eurasian raptors in the country, data on which may contribute to an agreement which is currently being negotiated under the umbrella of the Convention on Migratory Species.

Indirect benefits

- 4.5 In November 2006 the Republic of Guinea designated a specially protected area for vultures, the first of its kind in Africa². The ‘vulture sanctuary’ consists of approximately 450,000 hectares in the Fouta Djallon Highlands, a region that holds a significant proportion of west Africa’s vultures. The survey data from this project helped to identify this area and, by contributing to a wider West African raptor census (co-ordinated by Afrique Nature International, Fauna and Flora International and BirdLife partners), helped to demonstrate the serious regional decline in vultures.
- 4.6 JNCC has built useful collaborative working partnerships with a west African country, not unlike a twinning arrangement, that can be developed in the future in relation to other work under JNCC’s Global Advice and Global Impacts programmes.

5. JNCC s future engagement in similar projects

- 5.1 Needless to say, there are potentially numerous cases where information on CITES-listed species is poor and where capacity in an exporting country could be enhanced. JNCC has limited resources and, if we are to engage in similar projects in future, we will need to focus on those areas that are most relevant to our strategic objectives and which provide us with direct benefits that could not be achieved in other ways. It is also vital that the exporting country is keen to collaborate and support any study – enabling an improved and shared understanding of an issue should be a common goal.

² http://www.birdlife.org/news/news/2007/01/vulture_sanctuary.html

- 5.2 Whilst this paper has focused on outreach work in relation to CITES, such an approach may also have merit with respect to other multilateral environmental agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity. Indeed, JNCC staff have recently participated in workshops, funded by Defra and others, to promote the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation and the ecosystem approach (in China, Montserrat, Thailand and, imminently, in Viet Nam). Such work has the potential to achieve significant gains for global nature conservation and so contribute to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) target to significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010.
- 5.3 The following are suggested as guidelines to inform JNCC's future engagement in such projects. It is proposed that candidate projects should:
- i. be focused on geographical areas and/or taxa where there is the potential to make the greatest gains for nature conservation;
 - ii. address issues where the UK has a significant influence (e.g. where we are a major importer of CITES-listed specimens);
 - iii. provide benefits for collaborating countries (e.g. by sharing UK experience and helping to build capacity) as well as for JNCC;
 - iv. be able to lever funding from partners and so provide good value for money for JNCC;
 - v. be cost-effective, e.g. undertaking field-based studies only if reviews of literature indicate no alternative, existing sources of information;
 - vi. support other processes, where relevant, such as recommendations arising from the CITES significant trade review (a mechanism, supported by sanctions, by which recommendations can be made to countries to improve the sustainability of their export trade).

Annex 1. Draft sample species account from status and assessment report

English name: **Rüppell's Griffon Vulture**
 French name: Vautour de Rüppell
 Scientific name: *Gyps rueppellii*

IUCN Red Book Category: Least Concern (LC).
 CITES Appendix: Annex II.
 EU Regulations: Annex B (corresponds to other species of Annex II and some species representing ecological threats – known as invasive species).
 Guinea Regulations: List A (species fully protected throughout the national territory).

Main identification tips: In the wild: very large size diurnal raptor (90 cm height, 241 cm wingspan). Large dark vulture with a scaling aspect of cream colour. It has a very long neck and a typical yellow beak. The collar and underparts of the legs are white.
 In captivity: Very large vulture with yellow beak and yellow eyes. The blue-grey neck is bare with no feathers.

Survey data: Overall: 1.0 ± 1.9 ind./100 km (8 squares: 2.9 ± 2.1)
 Rural areas: 1.4 individuals/100 km
 Protected areas: not observed

Other regional data: Thiollay: Rural areas: 2.5 ± 1.3 individuals/100 km;
 significant decline Protected areas: 2.8 ± 0.0 individuals/100 km

CEPF: Rural areas: 0.7 individuals/100 km
 Protected areas: 2.9 individuals/100 km

Distribution in Guinea:

The Rüppell's Griffon Vulture was among the most frequently sighted species during the survey (ranked 7th in relative abundance but this large gliding raptor is more easy to detect than other species). It was recorded exclusively in rural areas in 8 squares (like other vultures, it was not sighted in any of the protected areas surveyed). It was sighted a few times on the fringe of Guinean towns in contrast to what was observed during other regional surveys. It is mostly present in *la Moyenne Guinée* and in the north of *la Haute Guinée* (also in the far north of *Guinée Maritime*). In comparison with the regional surveys, it would seem, overall, to be less abundant in Guinea (1.0 ± 1.9 individuals/100 km) than in the rest of the West Africa (2.5 ± 1.3 individuals/100 km). It should be noted however, that the Fouta Djallon Massif would seem to constitute the main refuge for this vulture in Guinea (and also one of its main refuges in the West African sub-region).

National conservation status: - Resident species relatively common.
Proposed for regional threat assessment: - Vulnerable (VU).
Proposed harvest quota: - no take should be authorised.

Justification(s):

- this raptor has experienced a major and generalised decline at the regional level;
- the species is very easy to catch in large number depending on needs;
- the species is in high demand for export (captive individuals found with bird traders) / 6th mostly sought after species for trade from Guinea;
- European Union import suspension;
- wild harvest quotas in Guinea were for 60 live specimens in 2005;
- species fully protected in Guinea.

Gyps rueppellii

