

Workshop on the illegal use of poison baits in the Balkans

Papingo, Epirus, 25-26 May 2015

Workshop Outcomes

The Workshop on the illegal use of poison baits in the Balkans took place in Papingo (Epirus, Greece) on the 25-26 May 2015. It was organized in the framework of the LIFE+ project “The Return of the Neophron” (LIFE10 NAT/BG/000152) by the Hellenic Ornithological Society, together with WWF-Greece and the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds.

The Workshop brought together environmental NGOs from different Balkan countries, UK and Spain, and local and regional authorities from Epirus. Its aims were to promote the exchange the existing know-how on the matter of illegal use of poison baits among Balkan countries, as well as to increase the awareness on this huge conservation problem among the Greek authorities.

General issues raised regarding the tackling of Illegal Use of Poison Baits

- ✓ The use of poison baits has been identified as the main responsible for the decrease and regional extinction of all four vulture species in the Balkans chiefly during the period 1950-1980.
- ✓ In the present time, the use of poison baits has been identified as the main threat for the survival of the last pairs of Egyptian vultures in Greece and FYROM. In Bulgaria, poison is also a threat but the incorrect use and use of illegal pesticides in crops appears to be a greater threat. The same applies for Turkey where land use changes are believed to be an even more important threat than poisoning. It would be advisable for Albania to further investigate into the matter. UK has made critical steps in the last years, but nevertheless still faces several cases per year of illegal poisoning. Spain has invested the largest amount of resources and made great progress to reduce the use of poison but nevertheless, the practice has not been eliminated.
- ✓ There is a common responsibility amongst the Balkan countries holding the last individuals of Egyptian vultures of the Balkans, as these birds migrate, breed and move amongst these countries regardless of borders. Thus, these countries should work in a coordinated and cooperative manner.
- ✓ The conflict between humans and predators has been identified as the main motive to use poison, but it is not the only one and these may vary amongst regions and countries. However, the use of poison baits to control the populations of feral dogs was also identified as a common practice amongst Balkan countries.

- ✓ The resolution of the human-predator conflict should be treated as a top priority to progress towards the solution of the illegal use of poison baits.
- ✓ All Balkan countries are aware of the existence of a black market of illegal pesticides. Toxicological analyses carried out have revealed the frequent use of these pesticides in poison baits (e.g. carbofuran, endosulfan).
- ✓ There is a need for more and verified data on poison events to estimate the extent of the use of poison so as to use this information to lobby against public authorities.
- ✓ When addressing the problem of poison all stakeholders should be engaged. Top priority are the relevant public authorities, without their participation the problem cannot be successfully solved.
- ✓ There is a need to raise people's awareness on the consequences of the use of poison as well as the importance of vultures and their role as "cleaners" of the environment.
- ✓ A clear legal framework establishing responsibilities and a systematic mechanism to persecute the illegal use of poison is needed in all countries. This will help to build strong cases in court.
- ✓ It is essential to change people's perception of poison and make them see it as a crime. For this, it is vital that more poison cases are prosecuted in court.

Best practices:

- ✓ Each country should have a standard protocol of action, where all implicated agencies and bodies know their specific role and responsibilities. This should be established with the help of a clear legal framework.
- ✓ Drafting of national and Balkan Strategies against the use of poison baits. The latter will help to join and coordinate efforts among the Balkan countries.
- ✓ Each country should keep a Data Base recording all poison cases detected. This DB should be linked to a map identifying poison hot-spots.
- ✓ Data collected on poison events should be used also to inform the communities and lobby public authorities.
- ✓ Build trust with all stakeholders, especially those in rural areas suffering from human-predator conflict.
- ✓ Engage with local communities and authorities clearly explaining the consequences of the use of poison in wildlife and public health.
- ✓ Emphasise how environmental protection can yield economic benefits (eg. eco-tourism and ecosystem services) and how, in the contrary, illegal activities may detract from the economic value of an area.
- ✓ Preventive methods against predation should be promoted (use of selected races and properly trained sheepdogs, use of electric fencing, etc).
- ✓ Compensations for the loss of livestock to predators should be implemented in all countries.
- ✓ Conditions and paperwork to receive compensations for the loss of livestock to predators should be made more flexible and easier to access.
- ✓ Law enforcement authorities should have proper equipment, training and knowledge on how to deal with poison cases. The creation of a body specifically to manage poison cases would be highly recommendable.

- ✓ Authorities should have available budget to cover their needs to tackle this problem.
- ✓ Municipalities should put into practice effective management of feral dogs.
- ✓ Laws regarding the use of ID microchips for dogs should be enforced with fines for those who don't follow it.
- ✓ The use of innovative tools such as Dog Units trained to find poison baits are highly recommendable.
- ✓ Create in each country a national electronic register of all pesticides (e-prescription), sold to professional farmers recording client's name, product purchased, quantity, and use. Ideally this should be extended also to amateurs.
- ✓ A network of feeding places should be operating in all Balkan countries.

Conclusions:

Most of the work is still to be done in the Balkan countries, although each country has made progresses in different areas, there are still many best practices that need to be implemented and expertise to be exchanged and gained. The main problem detected is the lack of awareness and interest from the competent authorities and other relevant stakeholders. Thus, insufficient engagement and commitment from the public authorities seems to be the main constraint in all countries, which in turn affects law enforcement due to reduced capacity and resources, and lack of public awareness. Any future actions should focus on dealing the aforementioned issues and strive to actively involve all key stakeholders.

Networking and exchanging of existing know-how is essential among all countries facing this obsolete practice.

**Workshop on
the illegal use of poison baits in the Balkans**

List of participants (25th May 2015)

No	Name	Organization	e-mail
1	Itri Levent Erkol	DD	levent.erkol@dogadernegi.org
2	Guy Shorrock	RSPB	guy.shorrock@rspb.org.uk
3	Iordanka Goranova	BSPB	iordanka.goranova@bspb.org
4	Vladimir Dobrev	BSPB	vladimir.dobrev@bspb.org
5	Nikolay Terziev	BSPB	yeremya@abu.bg
6	Stoyan Nikolov	BSPB	stoyan.nikolov@bspb.org
7	Tasos Bounas	HOS	tasosbounas@gmail.com
8	Konstantina Ntemiri	HOS	kntemiri@ornithologiki.gr
9	Haritakis Papaioannou	HOS	haritakis1000@hotmail.com
10	Victoria Saravia	HOS	vsaravia@ornithologiki.gr
11	Roula Trigou	HOS	rtrigou@ornithologiki.gr
12	Dimitris Vavylis	HOS	vavylis@yahoo.gr
13	Oresta Saliaj	PPNEA	o.saliaj@ppnea.org
14	Denada Zia	PPNEA	denadazia@gmail.com
15	Ergis Topi	PPNEA	ergistopi@live.co.uk
16	Jovan Andevski	VCF	j.andevski@4vultures.org
17	Elzbieta Kret	WWF-Greece	e.kret@wwf.gr
18	Theodora Skartsi	WWF-Greece	d.skartsi@wwf.gr
19	Kostas Giovas	Callisto	ktziovas@gmail.com
20	Litsa Koletsou	Grevena Development Agency	angre@angre.gr
21	Chrysoula Kritharioti	Grevena Development Agency	ckritharioti@gmail.com
22	Athanasios Korakis	M.B. Vikos Aaos and Pindos NP	akorakis@hotmail.com