Short Report on Spring Research Findings from Suez, Egypt

TECHNICAL REPORT

Under action A3 of the Egyptian Vulture New LIFE project

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**Background:**

In March, Egyptian Vultures cross Egypt on their migration journey. Suez is known to be an important area for migrating Egyptian Vultures\(^1\)\(^2\). NCE planned a research trip to collect data on the effects of identified threats (electrocution, collision and poisoning) on migrating Egyptian Vulture populations that cross Suez. Areas along the project area that could potentially be hot spots (distribution lines near areas with farmland, dumps, water) were mapped along the project area (map 1). The team planned to do line surveys of distribution lines along these hot spots as well as conduct interviews with farmers, locals and government officials in the area. Unfortunately, due to the “Dragon Storm\(^3\)” that hit Egypt and the subsequent outbreak and restriction due to COVID-19, the research trip was cut short and fewer data was collected.

**Findings:**

In the short time we were on the field, we managed to visit dumps, water treatment plants, sit with local government officials and build Map 1. For a few days, we managed to do some line-surveys of distribution lines and enter data on the 123Survey. We also conducted some interviews\(^4\). Excitingly, two members of NCE were also able to spot Egyptian Vultures in two different locations (Sokhna, and 40 km from Ras Gharib).

The most meaningful outcome, in that short time, was an understanding of poisons used to control for feral dogs and crows (an invasive species in Suez that occupy the area in very large numbers and pose a nuisance to locals, especially farmers). According to interviews with local government officials and the local veterinary authorities, the General Organization for Veterinary Services

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\(^4\) [https://my.pcloud.com/publink/show?code=XZmaMkz3Tbg8xHqbbBlvdolx9ThKWe5iX](https://my.pcloud.com/publink/show?code=XZmaMkz3Tbg8xHqbbBlvdolx9ThKWe5iX)
(GOVS) headquartered in Cairo, distributes to Suez (and other governorates around Egypt) quantities of Strychnine to control stray populations. The local veterinary authorities do the poisoning while the local cleaning municipalities remove the poisoned corpses from the streets.

There are two ways bodies get disposed of: a) the bodies are taken off the streets by the government to an official burial site. Any dead animal bodies are buried on an identified hill separate from everything else and/or burned. In Suez (as in most other places) both happen. Burning is a way to make space for newer bodies. b) the government is not proactive about removing the dead bodies, so they end up being removed by the trash collectors and dumped in the general trash dump to then be separated by the workers (if not yet decomposed) at the dump and taken to the hill to be buried.

Suez’s main trash dump is an open-air dump. Garbage disposal is definitely an issue, especially with organic waste. People interviewed confessed to discarding their dead livestock in open spaces and relying on crows to eat them instead of disposing of them through the city burial site. The team encountered a lot of livestock corpses and bones during our short time in the field. The veterinary clinic in the area where there was dead livestock out in the open did not have any of the VMPs that are known to be poisonous to vultures. As suspected from the desk-research, when asked about Diclofenac the person working at the clinic (who was not a veterinarian) mentioned that it is often bought from "human-pharmacies." The clinic sometimes asks people to go to pharmacies to buy human-medicine for their animals and then try to guide the livestock owner with dosage.

On the same note, farmers and others who want to control stray populations without involving the government, use Lannat or Methomyl as their poisoning method. Methomyl or Lannate, despite being extremely poisonous, is allowed to circulate in the country as per the Ministry of Agriculture. It is an insecticide that the government prescribes to control for Spodoptera littoralis which threatens crops like Alfalfa (commonly grown in the areas of Suez we surveyed) and tomatoes. Therefore, individuals can easily buy it from most agricultural supply stores. The Lannat sold in Egyptian markets is imported from China and the US.

At some points, before the 2011 revolution, Lannate was also used to control for Crow populations though crow poisoning has stopped in recent years due to local advocacy and fear of crows and their ability to take revenge. At the time, egg yolk was mainly used to poison them, though some people also recalled using chicken heads (similar to poisoning dogs).
Conclusion:
Conditions in Suez make the threat of poisoning very likely. Further investigation is warranted to better understand what VMPs are used on the livestock discarded openly by farmers. Government and policy level advocacy to ameliorate the methods used to control for feral populations is also needed especially in Suez where the number of stray dogs is especially high. The local government officials interviewed expressed a desire for a population control method other than Strychnine since it is highly poisonous. To come up with a viable alternative, partners along the flyway (like SPNL in Lebanon6) who are similarly struggling with their government’s methods of population control could collaborate on research and advocacy plans.