

## **Project Update: November 2023**

### Objectives achieved:

- Investigate the perceptions of local communities on hooded vulture population trends and its conservation evidence.

Fully achieved.

The objective related to surveys among local communities has been successfully achieved. A total of 439 individuals were interviewed in Kandi, Banikoara, Malanville, and Karimama, the primary target municipalities of our study. Participants encompassed various age groups, socio-linguistic backgrounds, occupations, and genders. As outlined in the project, the surveys focused on assessing community perceptions, knowledge of the hooded vulture, its uses, various threats, as well as population trends and occurrences. They also explored the attitudes of local communities toward the hooded vulture and their behavioural intentions regarding its conservation.

- Kickstarting awareness campaigns with an impromptu vulture awareness caravan on International Vulture Awareness Day.

While this pre-awareness activity was not initially slated for execution in early September 2023 as per our project timeline, we proactively orchestrated a vulture awareness campaign featuring a walking caravan in the city of Kandi. Recognising the global significance of the 2nd and 3rd of September 2023 as dedicated days for vulture awareness worldwide, we organised a walking caravan as an initiative to inform and engage diverse audiences on various aspects of vultures ranging from their unique characteristics and the challenges, they encounter to ongoing conservation programmes and protective. Seizing this opportune moment, we leveraged the occasion to conduct an environmental education session for children, turning an unplanned opportunity into a meaningful contribution to vulture conservation.

### Outcomes:

**a).** The outcomes of our project highlight the strong knowledge and perception among respondents regarding hooded vulture, its threats, and potential uses, coupled with a positive perception of conservation efforts in these areas. However, a notable negative correlation was identified between attitudes and support for conservation, whereas knowledge emerged as a significant influencer of respondent's intentions to support vulture conservation. This suggests that, despite the majority of respondents expressing positive attitudes and willingness to protect the hooded vulture, approximately around 30% harbour unfavorable perceptions, leading to a lack of favorable behavioral intentions for its conservation. The next phase of our project will prioritise an awareness session aimed to enhancing community knowledge, fostering positive attitudes toward conservation, and promoting behavioral changes crucial for the successful conservation of the hooded vulture in Benin.

**b).** Our study brought to light a decline in the hooded vulture population around the W transboundary Biosphere Reserve as indicated by the local ecological knowledge of the respondents. Poaching, habitat loss and nesting site reduction emerged as significant factors influencing changes in hooded vulture occurrence and population in the study area. Climate changes, natural mortality, and migration were not deemed significant drivers of these changes, although migration exhibited a moderate impact

on occurrence changes. This indicates the critical importance of addressing poaching, and habitat loss in conservation of hooded vulture. Awareness programmes will strategically target these threats to ensure the survival of the species.

**c).** Respondents residing in closer proximity to the protected areas demonstrated a higher likelihood of affirming the occurrence of hooded vultures in their region and reported increased abundances of these birds. This indicates the pivotal role that local communities, especially those residing near the reserve may play in the conservation and protection of hooded vultures. Conservation strategies should therefore center on engaging these communities and reinforcing their involvement in preserving hooded vulture populations.

#### Difficulties:

Reflecting on the project's trajectory, we fortunately did not encounter significant difficulties during the first phase. However, some potential study villages pose accessibility challenges due to inadequate road infrastructure or the absence crossings. Nonetheless, this obstacle adeptly navigated by leveraging local artisanal means, thereby ensuring the smooth continuation of our project activities.

#### Benefiting the community:

The active involvement of local communities stands as a cornerstone of our project, with surveys conducted directly within their midst. Residents were not only urged but warmly welcomed to contribute their local ecological knowledge regarding the hooded vulture. In most cases, a shared understanding prevails regarding the pivotal role of this species, not only in maintaining ecological balance but also in enriching their cultural and traditional fabric.

Expressions of gratitude and nostalgia reverberated during interactions with respondents:

*"We are delighted to see your commitment to safeguarding the hooded vulture. In our earlier years, these birds were a familiar presence, nesting in the large trees around our homes. They were valued for their role as efficient environmental cleaners. However, it's disheartening to note that today, their presence has significantly diminished, and we rarely encounter them, even in our fields."*, said some respondents.

Moreover, the impact of our awareness caravan extended far beyond mere data collection. Children, youth, and adults alike were reached, educated, and inspired about the challenges surrounding hooded vulture conservation.

#### Next steps:

Local communities raising awareness and school outreach.



Photo 1: Image illustrating an interview session in the commune of Kandi. The respondent points to the Hooded Vulture to attest to their knowledge of the species.

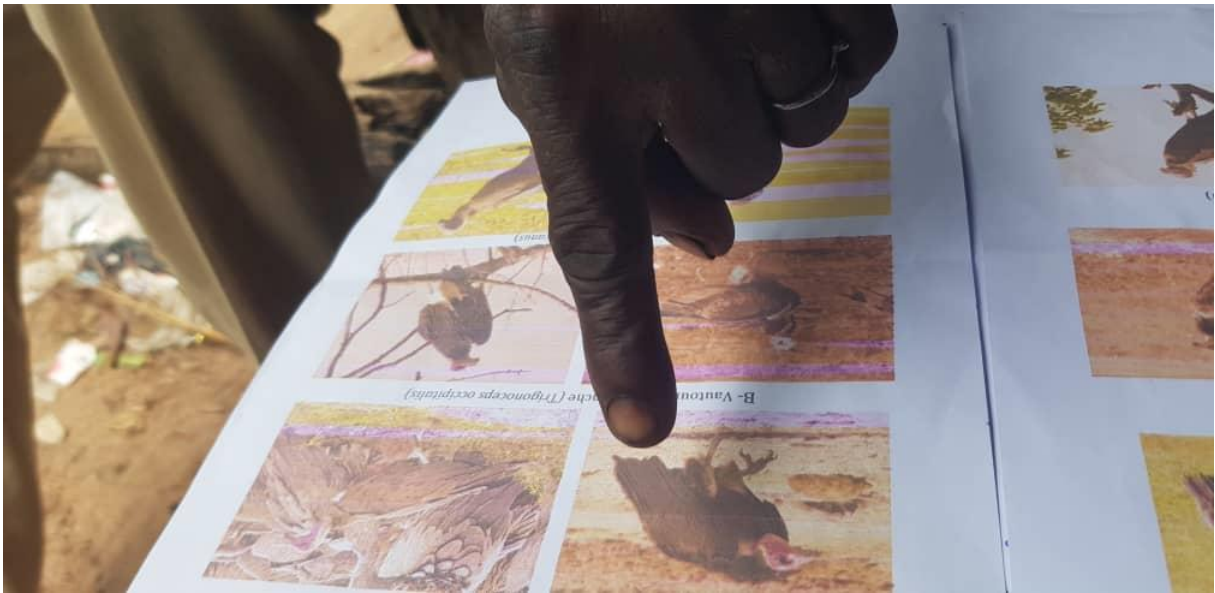


Photo 2: Image illustrating an interview session in the commune of Karimama. The respondent points to the Hooded Vulture to attest to their knowledge of the species.





Photo 3: Carcass of a Hooded Vulture for sale in a local market in the commune of Banikoara.



Photo 4: Children carrying awareness signs for the conservation of Hooded Vultures at General Education College 1 in Kandi.





Photo 6: An image capturing a scene from the caravan, featuring individuals equipped with awareness tools, passionately advocating and enlightening the communities of Kandi about the significance of Hooded Vulture conservation.



Photo 7: Children showing concern about the conservation of vultures by holding signs that say "**Sannu Sannu, su noma nenuna, su kayabere kunusikagi**" (Greetings, we are here to protect the vultures) and "**Iri ma yeberɛku foaba**" (We must protect them).