

Project Update April 2024

I am reaching out to provide an update on my ongoing PhD research project on vultures across Nigeria, which has been progressing significantly thanks to the support from Rufford Small Grants.

Research Progress:

Our fieldwork has been conducted across various states in Nigeria, with vulture counts and non-intrusive feather sampling for chemical analysis. We have successfully completed the dry season sampling in north-central (Plateau State), northeastern (Taraba), and northwestern (Kano) Nigeria. We are already moving to sample southeast (Anambra), southwest (Ekiti), and south (Cross River) states to complete this dry season phase and to begin the rainy season surveys when the rain continue in earnest.

Insightful Findings:

The research has yielded insightful revelations about the true population status and conservation needs of vultures. We have documented locations and communities where vultures thrive, which will be very useful for future conservation actions.

Taraba State:

Ibi LGA: While searching for vultures, we spotted a healthy group of hooded vultures feeding on a cow carcass. we plan to return next week to try and observe them again.

Wukari LGA: Competition for carrion was fierce at the slaughterhouse, with over 25 pied crows dominating the area and displacing hooded vultures and other birds such as, green wood hoopoe, and crows such as piacpiacs.

Gassol LGA: Interviews with butchers revealed a decline in vulture sightings due to past poisoning incidents. Locals suggested that vultures might be transmitting information about dangerous areas to avoid to their offspring. This is a potential topic for further research in future.

Jalingo: The slaughterhouse here had a high number of lizards competing with vultures for scraps. Over 200 lizards were sighted feeding on scraps of meat at the slaughter house. They have been observed to be another newly found set of formidable competitors, capable of depleting food that vultures could utilised.

Serti, Gashaka LGA: Vultures were spotted at the slaughterhouse, although their numbers were lower than what locals remembered. Interviews suggested that vultures prefer areas with cattle herds where they face less competition and found more food from the cattle's afterbirths, and dead bodies since the herdsmen don't eat dead animals that were not slaughtered before death.

Kano State:

Despite a week-long survey across five LGAs, no free-living vultures were observed. Evidence of vulture trade was uncovered, with traders selling both dead and

captive vultures in coordinated secrecy. The vultures are trapped and sold illegally at high prices.

Plateau State:

Vultures were sighted in three locations across five LGAs. We were able to collect vulture feather samples. Twelve vultures were observed and a vulture nest was also found.

Challenges and Adaptations:

The current low currency value and inflation in the country has affected the reality of work in relation with the budget. We also encountered some security challenges which were overcome without problems.

Project Expansion:

Considering these challenges and the current economic climate in Nigeria, which has affected our budget due to low currency value and high inflation rates, I have secured additional funding from Agnes-Bayer. This has enabled us to add two more team members and expand our research scope to include an ethno-ornithological survey, investigating community beliefs that support vulture survival. We believe this aspect is important for replicating vulture-friendly practices in other regions.

Additional Research Components:

We are also introducing road transect surveys to assess vulture disappearance and collecting food samples from foraging sites for a comprehensive understanding of chemical contaminants affecting vultures.

Funding Transparency:

The additional funding from Agnes-Bayer complements the Rufford grant, allowing us to extend our research beyond the initial one-year period. We have established clear modalities to differentiate each sponsor's contributions, ensuring transparency and proper acknowledgment in our publications.