

Arusha: BirdLife International and its Partnership Network in East Africa, have made the first step towards establishing the East Africa Wildlife Poisoning Response Network (EAWPRN) to tackle wildlife poisoning in the region, following a workshop held in Arusha, from 13th – 14th June 2023.

Wildlife poisoning is a significant threat to vultures and other raptors, in East Africa and elsewhere, accounting for about 61% of vulture deaths across Africa. While vultures play a vital role in our environment keeping it free of decaying carcasses, these majestic birds have experienced catastrophic declines around the world, with populations of all African vulture species plummeting by 70-97% over the last 50 years driven by poisoning, belief-based use, electrocutions, and collision with power infrastructure among others.



A dead poisoned vulture © Munir-Virani

The workshop which brought together 21 delegates from Tanzania, Uganda, and Rwanda. is part of BirdLife and partners work to protect vultures through direct conservation actions, influencing policy and raising awareness about the plight of vultures, where notable progress has been achieved.

“The East Africa Wildlife Poisoning Response Network is a crucial initiative in safeguarding wildlife and addressing the threats posed by wildlife poisoning. By promoting collaboration, capacity building, and research, the network will push towards the conservation of vultures and other wildlife and maintain the ecological balance in East Africa”, said Fadzai Matsvimbo, Preventing Extinction Programme Coordinator, Africa at BirdLife International.

To combat this threat, BirdLife partners have implemented various measures, including training community volunteers, rangers, and authorities on how to respond to poisoning incidents. In Southern Africa, the BirdLife Partnership network is also facilitating the establishment of Vulture Safe Zones (VSZs) that provide areas free from threats like poisoning and electrocution, specifically designed to protect vultures in their most vulnerable habitats.

EAWPRN brings together a wide range of stakeholders, including BirdLife Partners, raptor conservation experts, species conservation groups, and protected area management organizations in the region.



Participants at the EAWPRN Workshop © Vincent Onyango

“Due to fragmented efforts and limited coordination between stakeholders, some countries lack the specialized training, resources, and capacity required to effectively respond to wildlife poisoning incidents. Therefore, there is need for a coordinated and effective response to mitigate the impacts of wildlife poisoning incidents in East Africa”, said Emmanuel Mgimwa, Executive Director, Nature Tanzania.

Establishing the EAWPRN marks a significant step towards safeguarding the region’s rich biodiversity. It is envisaged that the Network will provide a platform for knowledge sharing and foster joint efforts in reducing wildlife mortality resulting from poisoning incidents, in addition to developing a road map on how the network can influence policy and advocacy in relation to wildlife poisoning in the sub-region. Further, it will aim to leverage the diverse expertise and resources of these stakeholders to make a lasting difference.

During the workshop, a draft framework was also created to enhance coordination of the EAWPRN.