PRESS RELEASE

SOS: Griffon Vultures in Cyprus dying one by one

Nicosia, 29 February 2016

Seven Griffon Vultures *Gyps fulvus* met a tragic end, three of which were birds that were released in Cyprus in the framework of the successful GYPAS project which was carried out under the 'Cross Border Cooperation Programme Greece-Cyprus 2007-2013', while the remaining three were birds from the extremely small Cyprus population and one that was born at the Limassol Zoo and released. The birds were found dead in Paramali/Sterakovou area in the Limassol region in the last few weeks and were collected by the Game and Fauna Service and were sent for post-mortem examinations by the Veterinary Services.

Based on what we know so far, the most probable cause of death is poisoning, however, the exact cause has not been established yet even though the first deaths have been reported almost a month ago. There are three possible reasons as to why this may have happened. The first possibility is death by primary poisoning, meaning the birds may have eaten poisoned bait, which is unlikely. The second possibility is death by secondary poisoning, meaning the birds have eaten an animal who had eaten something with poison (e.g. an animal who ate rodenticide). The third possibility is that the birds have eaten an animal which had been treated with non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), which are extremely toxic for all Vultures and are the main cause of the serious population decline (by 99%) of three Vulture species of the *Gyps* genus during the 1990s in India and whose population have still not recovered.

BirdLife Cyprus Executive Director stated that '*BirdLife Cyprus is calling upon the competent authorities, the Game and Fauna Service and the Veterinary Services to address these incidents as very urgent and extremely important and to carry out all necessary analyses and tests in order to establish the cause of death. If this continues then the entire population of Griffon Vulture in Cyprus will collapse. Establishing the cause of death is the only way to find a way to deal with this serious problem'.*

BirdLife Cyprus has since day one expressed to the competent authorities its willingness to cooperate and assist in the investigation of this case and offered to contribute to any expenses for the tests that need to be done in order to establish the cause of death. It's worth noting that in some EU countries and in Israel there is vast experience and expertise in dealing with such matters which in this case should be taken advantage of.

There is a very real danger that all efforts made as part of the GYPAS project for the strengthening of the Griffon Vulture population in Cyprus under the 'Cross Border Cooperation Programme Greece-Cyprus 2007-2013', with participation of the Game and Fauna Service, BirdLife Cyprus and Department of Forests in Cyprus, will end up in vain. The matter is very urgent and needs to be treated as such by all key stakeholders.

ENDS

P.O.Box 12026, 2340, Nicosia, Cyprus, Tel.: +357-22455072, Fax: +357-22455073
Email: birdlifecyprus@birdlifecyprus.org.cy • http://www.birdlifecyprus.org

For further information please contact:
Natalie Stylianou, Media Officer 22455072/99522826, natalie.stylianou@birdlifecyprus.org.cy

Notes to the editors:

1) **BirdLife Cyprus** is a registered, non-governmental, not for profit organisation (NGO) that dedicates itself to the conservation of wild birds and their habitats in Cyprus. It was formed in 2003 through the merge of the two Cyprus Ornithological Societies and now has offices in Strakka, Nicosia comprised by professional staff. http://www.birdlifecyprus.org/

2) **Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)**, such as Diclofenac, have proved to be extremely toxic even in small quantities for all vultures of the *Gyps* genus when these birds feed on an animal which was treated with these drugs. Upon consumption, these drugs cause Visceral Gout to the birds and death. The populations of three *Gyps* species, *Gyps bengalensis*, *Gyps indicus* and *Gyps himalayensis* collapsed in the 1990s in the Indian subcontinent due to Diclofenac licensing for veterinary use. These vultures were considered the most numerous vultures in the world and in the 1980s for example, *Gyps bengalensis* numbered about 80 million birds. The populations of all three species in the 1990s declined by 99%, the fastest collapse of species ever recorded. As a result, the three species are now classified as Critically Endangered according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, with only a few thousands remaining.

Meanwhile, extensive research on the subject by partnerships between governmental and non-governmental bodies have proved that apart from Diclofenac, there is a series of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs which have the same toxic effect on vultures causing their death. These drugs are Ketoprofen and Nimesulide. There are also serious doubts about the safety of Carprofen, Flunixin, Ibuprofen, Indometacin and Naproxen. The only drug to date which has been proven to be safe is Meloxicam.
http://www.save-vultures.org/save_conservationstory_diagnosingtheproblem.html