

Project Update May 2024

Project Summary

White-backed Vulture (WbV) is listed as critically endangered in the IUCN Red List. Poisoning and habitat loss caused by human activity are major risks to WbV. The Maswa Game Reserve (MGR) has been supporting WbV's activities. Despite its importance in vulture conservation LGCA is threatened by human activities, and there are no on-going initiatives to protect WbV's habitat in LGCA. As a result, this study aims at enhancing the conservation of WbV in LGCA through assessing WbV's habitat selection and community attitude on the species which will be used to raise initiatives to conserve WbV in the area.

Since the issuance of Rufford Small Grant Project Grant Fund to date the following has been done:

1. Permit application

Permit to conduct Research in Maswa Game Reserve has been successful applied from Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute (TAWIRI) and Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH), the permit has been approved. Meanwhile, the permit to implement project in schools and villages adjacent to Maswa Game Reserve has been applied from Simiyu Regional office as well as Meatu and Maswa District Council. Permit provided allows implementation of research and relevant activities from April 2024 to May, 2025. There was a delay in getting research permit due to the change of study from Loliondo Game Controlled Area (LCCA) to Maswa Game Reserve as instructed by Tanzania Wildlife Research institute (TAWIRI) which caused the delay of field activities.

2. Field tools and gear preparation

Important tools and field gears were prepared including

1. Buying crucial gears such as one camera, one GPS, two binoculars, one computer, three raincoats, batteries and printing 118 t-shirts.
2. Preparation of Focus Group Discussion guide and questionnaires to be used in collecting social data.

3. Data collection

Three days (23rd to 25th April) were used to introduce the project to local government authorities specifically Simiyu region and Meatu District. Then, 12 days were employed on collection data regarding the attitude of local community on Vultures. The following were done:

1. Three Focus Group Discussion with elders aged 40 years and above. They were conducted in three villages which are close to Maswa Game Reserve namely, Mwagidalala, Mwanyahina and Buganza. (See figure 1)



Figure 1: Focusing Group Discussion with Elders in Buganza, Mwajidalala and Nyamhina Villages found in Meatu District.

All elders who took part in Focus Group discussion were trained on value of vultures, threats facing them, and they were given post-training questionnaire to assess their responses after training. (see figure 2)



Figure 2: Group photo after training and post training questionnaire.

2. Visited three Primary Schools namely: Mwanyahina, Busia and Mwajidalala. 15 pupils aged 9 to 16 years from each school were given a pre-training questionnaire, followed by a training on Vultures and at the end they were given a post-training questionnaire. This will be used to assess the understanding and attitude of pupils on vultures before and after the training. (See figure 3 to 5).



Figure 3: Training pupils on vultures and their values



Figure 4: Guiding students to conduct pre and post training questionnaire



Figure 5: Group photos with pupils after the training and attempting questionnaire.

3. Discussion with environmental teachers on each school on how training students will be engaged to raise awareness on the value of Vultures to the rest of students.

4. Ecological Data Collection

Ecological data on the white- backed Vultures' habitat selection has not been collected yet because of massive rain which has made most road inaccessible including ones heading to Maswa Game Reserve. There is ongoing communication with Maswa Game Reserve Authority regarding the accessibility of road circuit in the reserve.

Challenges encountered

1. Delay of research permit which caused the delay of field activities.
2. Heavy rainfall which made some areas inaccessible, especially the Maswa Game Reserve and caused failure of collecting ecological data timely.
3. The challenge of travelling from one village to another, given the considerable distance and lack of reliable distance.