Project Progress Report as of 24.03.2025

Project Title: **Initiatives to Conserve the White-backed Vultures, a Case of Maswa Game Reserve (MGR) – Tanzania**

Project ID: **41744-1**

Project Summary

The White-backed Vulture (***Gyps africanus***) is listed as critically endangered on the IUCN Red List. Major threats to this species include poisoning and habitat loss due to human activities. The Maswa Game Reserve (MGR) plays a crucial role in supporting vulture populations. However, increasing human activities threaten its ecological integrity, and there are currently insufficient ongoing conservation initiatives in Maswa Game Reserve. This study aims to enhance vulture conservation in MGR by assessing habitat selection and community attitudes toward vultures. The findings will be used to develop conservation strategies for this critical species.

Progress Report: Ecological Data Collection on Vultures Habitat Selection in Maswa Game Reserve

Introduction

The second phase of ecological data collection for the Initiative to Conserve the White-backed Vulture was conducted in Maswa Game Reserve over a period of eight (8) days, from **4th to 11th March 2025**. This phase, focused on assessing vulture species composition, habitat selection across different vegetation types, and factors influencing their habitat preferences. This report outlines progress made during this phase, including survey methodology, key findings, and initial observations.

Objectives

- Identification of vulture species and their abundance across the survey area.

- Assessment of factors influencing vulture distribution.
- Observation of time-based activity patterns of vultures during the survey.

Methodology

The survey was conducted over eight (8) days, from 4th to 11th March 2025. Surveys were carried out for at least eight hours daily, between 07:15 and 18:00 hours, to capture variations in vulture activity patterns. Survey Approach involved a combination of the Road Transect Method and the Point Count Method. Observations were made while driving along roads in the study area. When vultures were spotted, the team stopped, exited the vehicle, and observed the birds from a distance to accurately identify species. Systematic surveys were conducted across varied vegetation types to capture habitat variation. Carcass availability and wildlife presence, particularly wildebeest, were documented due to their significant contribution to vulture food sources.

Key Findings

- Vulture Species Composition: A total of 93 vultures were recorded, including 15 Rüppell's Griffon Vultures (***Gyps rueppelli***) and 78 White-backed Vultures (***Gyps africanus***).
- Carcass and Wildebeest Availability: A total of 40 carcasses were observed during the survey period, and large herds of wildebeests were present across the reserve.
- Temporal Patterns: Vultures were observed consistently during the morning hours (shortly after 07:30) and late afternoon (around 17:30), suggesting peak activity times related to scavenging and soaring conditions.
- Habitat and Vegetation: Vultures were detected across diverse vegetation types, with a high preference for open wooded grasslands, which offered trees for roosting and visibility to spot carcasses.

Preliminary Analysis and Interpretation

- Increased Vulture Abundance: Compared to the first phase conducted in October 2024, where only six vultures were spotted, there was a notable increase in vulture numbers during the second phase (93 individuals). This increase aligns with the availability of food sources from wildebeest carcasses.
- Species Dominance: White-backed Vultures were the dominant species, indicating their adaptive feeding behavior and reliance on migratory herbivore carcasses.
- Temporal Activity: Vultures exhibited distinct activity patterns. In the morning, they were mostly observed soaring and scanning for food, while in the late afternoon, they were commonly seen perching on trees.

Challenges and Limitations

- Weather Dynamics: Although the rainy season began shortly after the survey, dry conditions prevailed during fieldwork, limiting observations of vultures during active rainfall periods.
- Access to Remote Areas: Some dense vegetation zones were inaccessible, which may have resulted in undercounting vultures in less visible habitats.

Next Steps and Recommendations

- Analysis and Final Report Preparation: Conduct an in-depth analysis and prepare the final report.
- Community Engagement: Develop a long-term vulture conservation plan by engaging communities adjacent to Maswa Game Reserve and collaborating with game rangers.

Conclusion

The second phase of the vulture survey in Maswa Game Reserve has provided valuable insights into seasonal variations in vulture populations, emphasizing the critical role of wildebeest migration in sustaining scavenger species. These findings will guide future conservation initiatives and support long-term monitoring of vulture populations within the reserve.

Appendix

Photo

Photo	**Credit**
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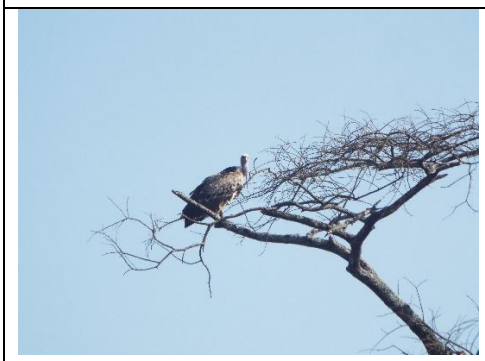
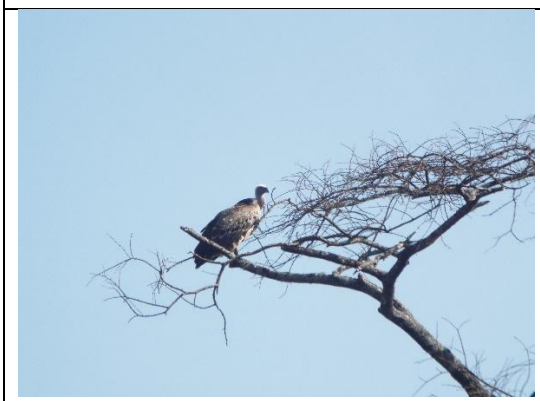
	Lucia Reveliani
	Lucia Reveliani

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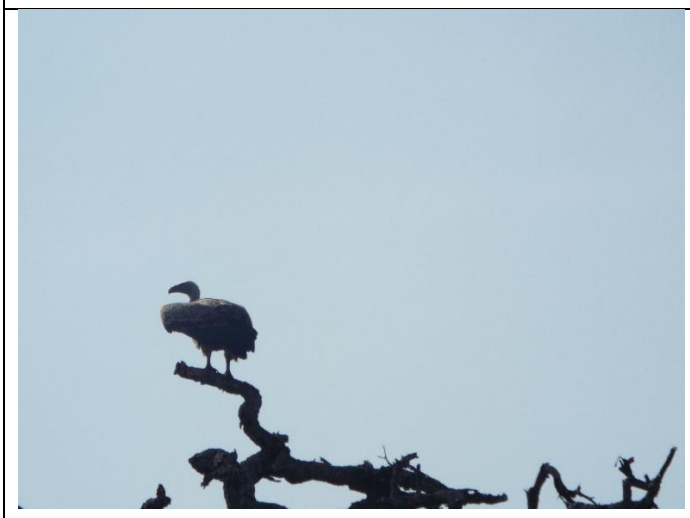	Lucia Reveliani
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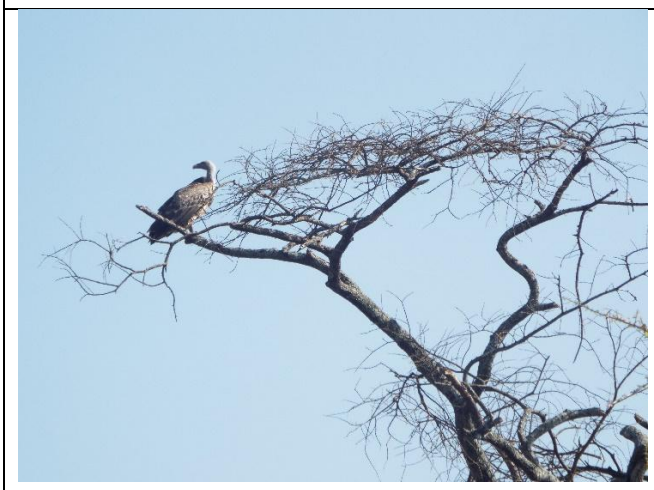	Lucia Reveliani
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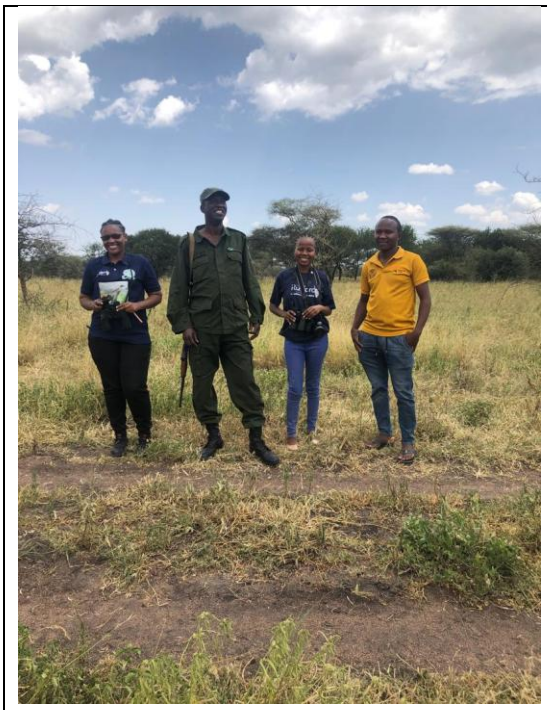	Mfaume Mfaume