



Activity report – Semester 1, 2024

Halting the decline of vultures in West & Central Africa



Information on the document

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Cover picture: Rüppell's vultures photographed during monitoring in Ouadi Rimé - Ouadi Achim Faunal Reserve (OROAFR) in May 2024.

This document provides **a summary of the main achievements over the last 6 months of the vulture program** implemented by Sahara Conservation, in collaboration with local collaborators in Niger and in Chad. The main area of implementation are the Gadabeji Biosphere Reserve (GBR) and the Koutous massif in Niger, and the Ouadi Rimé - Ouadi Achim Faunal Reserve (OROAFR) in Chad.

Within this conservation program, activities were organized around two main objectives: Monitor and improve our knowledge on vulture population in Chad and Niger, protect the remaining vulture populations and fight against the main threats.

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What we aim to accomplish

The context

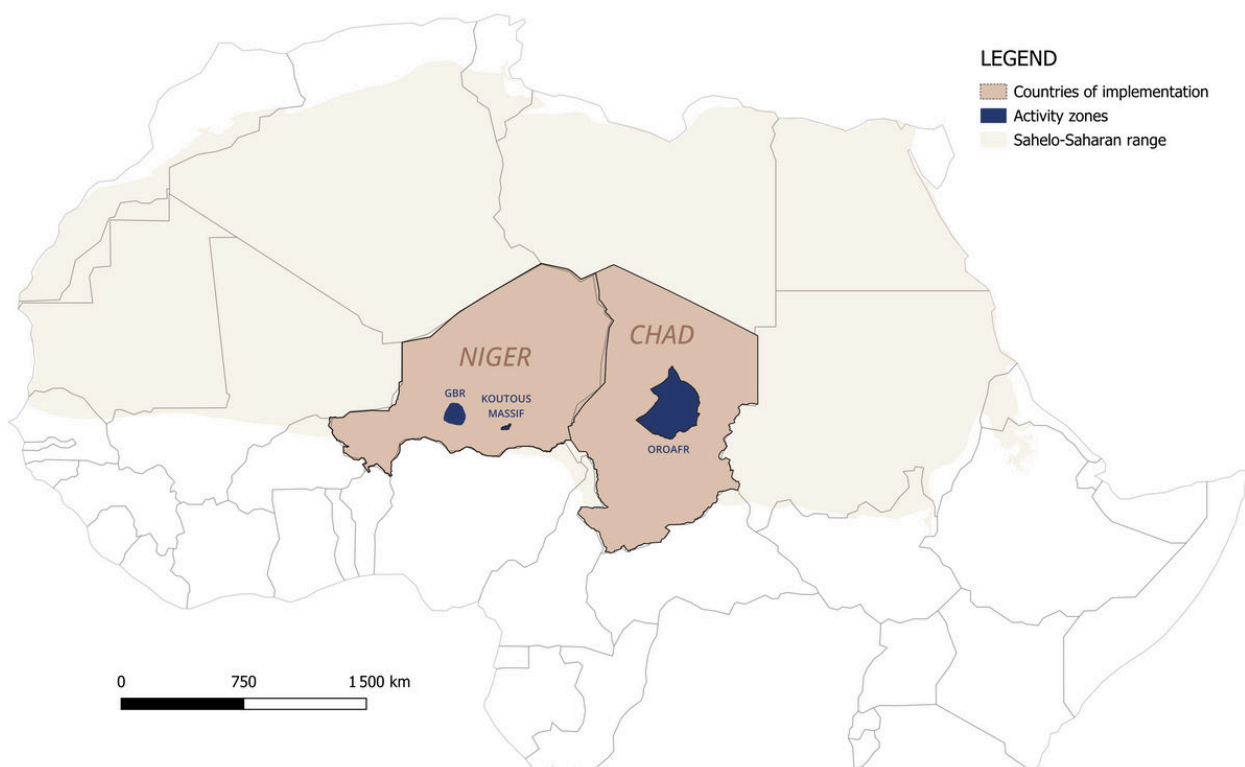
As scavengers, vultures play an unparalleled role in maintaining healthy ecosystems. By efficiently consuming carrion, vultures: help control the spread of diseases and of facultative scavenger species that may be detrimental to wildlife, humans, and livestock; increase the decomposition rate of carcasses positively affecting transmission of nutrients to the soil. Yet, they are among the species most threatened with extinction, with African vultures being the most endangered groups of birds in the world.

Throughout Africa, vultures have declined drastically over the last decades, with the highest rates of decline in West Africa. One of the major drivers for this decline is the illegal taking of vultures for belief-based use (wide range of medical and personal uses, such as treatment of insanity, stroke, against evil spirits, for gambling, for luck).

Recent studies have identified the Niger stronghold and the Chad basin area as the largest aggregations of vulture habitats in West Africa supporting significant populations of highly threatened vulture species.

Our objectives

Vulture populations in Chad and Niger are potentially uniquely placed to implement effective conservation program based on: 1. monitoring to address the knowledge gap, 2. sensitization in the local and surrounding communities where vultures occur to demonstrate socio-economic benefits of vulture conservation to local communities 3. building capacities and awareness raising of main stakeholders involved in vulture trafficking and belief-based use.



What we achieved

55 active nests monitored :

41 in Chad:

18 *Torgos tracheliotos*

23 *Gyps rueppelli*

14 in Niger:

6 *Gyps rueppelli*

7 *Neophron*

percnopterus

1 *Trigonoceps occipitalis*

18 chicks produced*

7 in Chad :

6 *Torgos tracheliotos*

1 *Gyps rueppelli*

11 in Niger :

6 *Gyps rueppelli*

5 *Neophron*

percnopterus

3 vultures tagged

with satellite GPS

transmitters in Chad

625 members from

local communities

directly involved in

sensitization

campaigns in Niger

23 environmental

officers benefited

from capacity

building on vultures

196 stakeholders

(hunters and

tradipraccionners)

engaged in awarness

raising activities in

Niger

Over **60 000** people

around the world

heard about our work

through our social

media channels.

3 presentations

sharing our work and

approach at the

international meeting

of the Sahel & Sahara

Interest Group

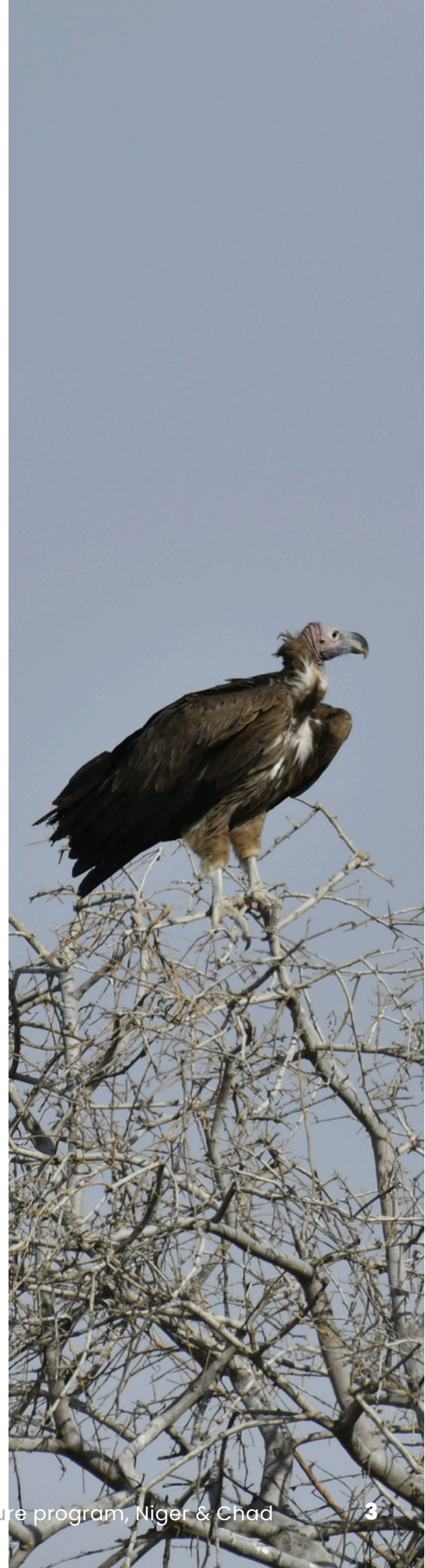
1 Participation to the

Rüppell Vulture

Specialist Group

workshop

*includes only the chicks that, according to observations, survived

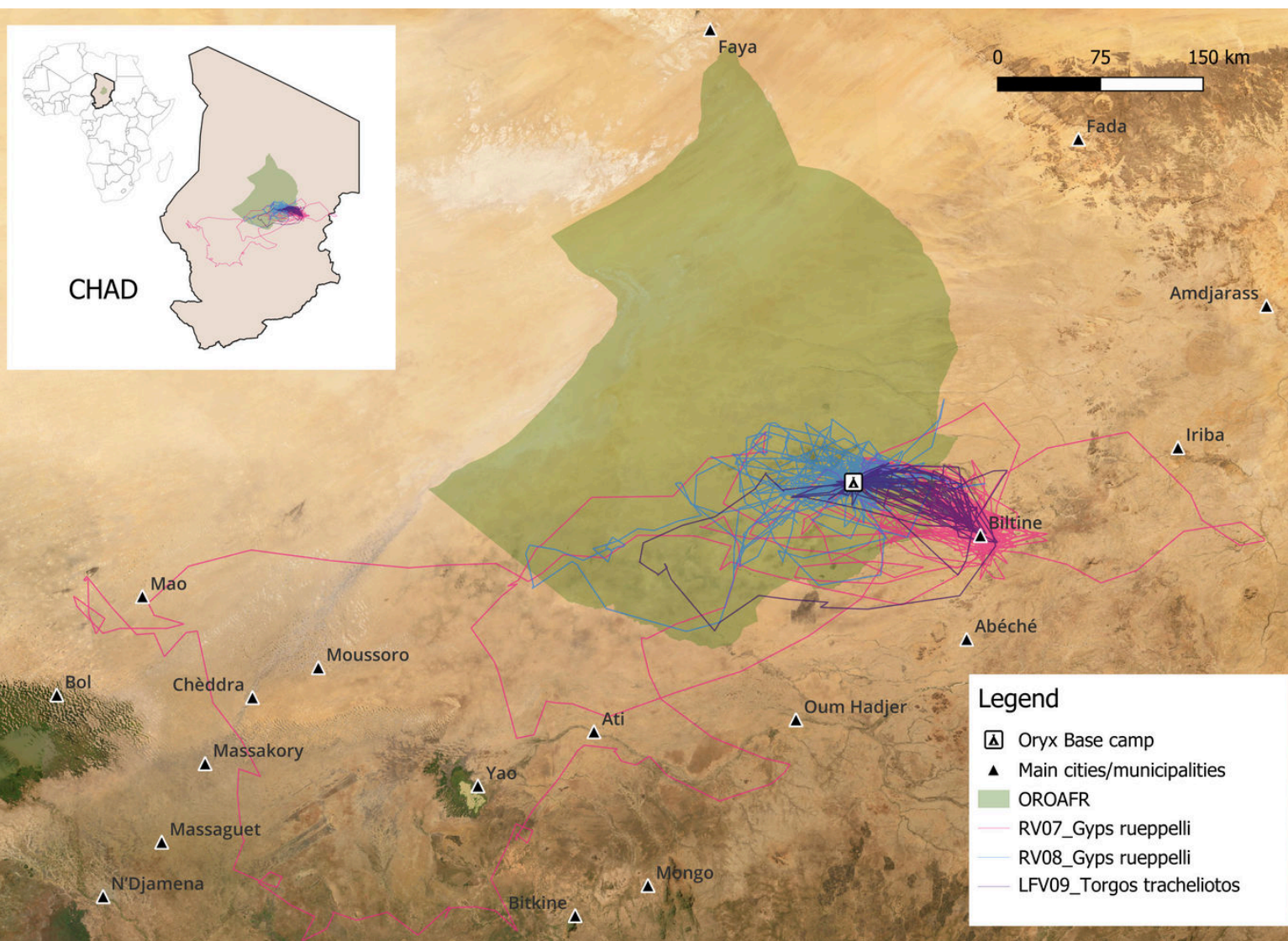


Beyond the birds

We encourage knowledge, interest and collaboration

- **Our vulture dedicated team has increased** as we welcomed two new collaborators (Ali and Mourtala, cf. They make it possible on the ground)
- **Expanded engagement for vultures in Niger** was witnessed as we broaden our work with various stakeholders (hunters, tradipractionners, local communities, etc.)
- **Capacity sharing on vultures** (including on the different species, their roles, status and threats, monitoring methods and handling techniques) was organized in the OROAFR with Sahara Conservation team (21 participants) and a vulture expert, André Botha (cf. They make it possible on the ground).
- **Close monitoring of Rüppell's and Lappet-faced vulture nests**, was initiated in the OROAFR, providing crucial insights for the conservation of the species.
- **Unprecedented data is being collected** thanks to the three satellite transmitters deployed in March this year on two adult Rüppell's vultures and one sub-adult Lappet-faced vulture.

Map: Movements of the three tagged vultures in OROAFR from June to March 2024



We work for the promotion and long-term sustainability of our action

- **The project's visibility and reach were enhanced** with dedicated communications through Sahara Conservation channels (social media, activity reports, etc.) and at events, improving its recognition among targeted public.
- **Our program activities and achievements were shared** to an international audience of over 80 participants at the Sahel & Sahara Interest Group (SSIG) meeting in Morocco.
- The participation of our field team to the SSIG meeting was the opportunity to **cultivate their enthusiasm** by sharing with fellow conservationists **strengthening the links with partners**.
- The opportunity to raise interest and pave the ground to **develop and encourage investment in the region** was enhanced.



Picture: Participants at the SSIG meeting in Agadir, Morocco, in May 2024. Sahara Conservation team members attended the meeting and delivered three presentations on vulture activities and results to the 80 attendees. Date: May 2024

Challenges

The lack of resources and capacity is still the biggest challenge to an effective protection of vultures in the region. Our team is devoted to the program and if progresses are being made, it is crucial to pursue the work in order to have a significant impact on vulture populations in the short and longer term. The main challenges faced this semester were the following:

The low breeding success observed in OROAFR. For the first time, a close monitoring of the nests in OROAFR was established, starting from December 2023 until the end of the breeding season in May 2024. If the number of active nests is significantly higher than in Niger, the breeding success was relatively low (6% for Rüppell's vultures and 33% for Lappet-faced in OROAFR against 100% for cliff breeding Rüppell's vultures and 71% for Egyptian vultures in Koutous massif, Niger). Further studies will be needed to help us understand this issue, and eventually set up dedicated conservation actions.

The need to increase our understanding of vulture populations. For the first time in the region, vultures were fit with satellite tags in the framework of this program. If 10 tags were purchased, only three could be deployed due to field constraints. Increasing the number of tagged vultures should enable us to upgrade the data collected, and thus effectively improve our knowledge on the species. Another tagging mission is being planned and will take place before the end of the year.



Picture: Handling a sub-adult Lappet-faced vulture during tagging and ringing in OROAFR, Chad. Data on the bird's measurements and blood samples were also collected. Date: March 2024

They make it possible on the ground

Abdoul Razack Moussa Zabeirou – Sahara Conservation country representative in Niger, coordinates field activities in the country.

Abdoul Razakou Mahamadou – Project assistant, in charge of vulture monitoring in Niger and sensitization work.

Abba Mamane – Field officer in the Koutous massif in Niger, leads sensitization campaigns in the region and support vulture monitoring.

Taboye Abdelkerim Ben – Head of the monitoring team in Chad, leads the monitoring field work in OROAFR.

Ali Mahamat– Field monitoring officer, in charge of vulture monitoring work in OROAFR.

With the support of Tim Wachter– Senior biologist, Zoological Society of London, conducting field work in OROAFR.

The support teams in Niger and Chad that provide assistance with accounting, administration and logistics for field missions.

The coordinating team in Paris (Cloé Pourchier and Violeta Barrios) provided crucial assistance on coordinating the activities, the administrative, financial and reporting side of the operations, as well as in fundraising.

Special thank you to **André Botha**, Vulture Program manager at the Endangered Wildlife Trust and co-chair of the IUCN Vulture Specialist Group for his expertise, to **all the other team members** for their occasional participation and support, and to the **authorities and all the people from the local communities** who significantly help make this initiative a success.

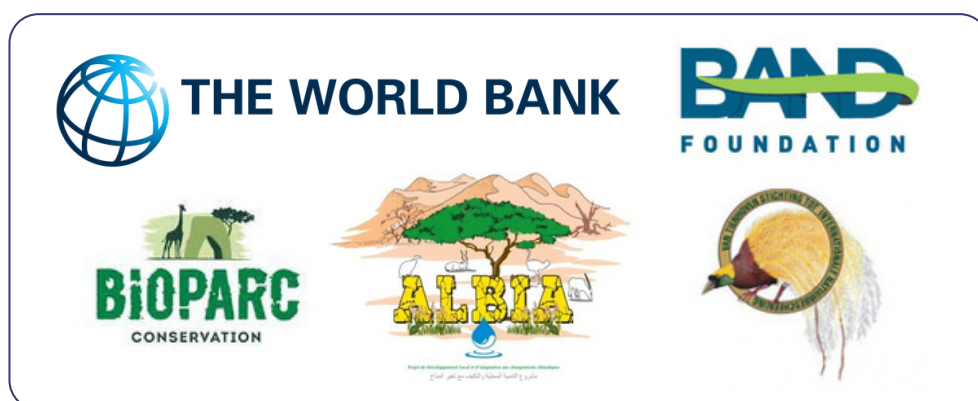


Thank you

Funding from your organization helps to achieve the overall goal of preserving African vulture species in the wild. By preserving vultures, we highly contribute to healthier ecosystems. It contributes to support Sahara Conservation's vision of a Sahara where ecological processes function naturally; a Sahara that benefits all its inhabitants and where support for its conservation comes from stakeholders across all sectors of society.

Despite challenges faced, progress have been made over the semester.

Together we make a difference, and our team is dedicated to pursuing its efforts for the wildlife and the people of the Sahelo-Saharan landscape.



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