

European vultures' altered behaviour

Europe's last remaining populations of griffon vultures (*Gyps fulvus*) in Spain and southern France have taken to

Killing livestock, according to the many reports received by authorities. This has provoked discontent and incurred vengeance from some farmers. The alarming departure of the vultures from their normal role as carrion scavengers seems to stem from an increased competition for food resources, which may be caused by changes to European sanitary and conservation policies.

There were 1,165 reported cases of griffon vultures killing domestic livestock in 2006–10 in northern Spain alone, with compensation to farmers costing almost €65,000 (US\$350,000). Unofficial control by poisoning killed 243 griffon vultures in the same period — an ill-conceived action, given that these and other avian scavengers are already severely threatened in Europe.

Changes to European sanitary legislation introduced in 2002 to help combat the spread of bovine spongiform encephalopathy coincided with the introduction of new regulations for animal husbandry, such that any livestock carcasses were collected from farms and destroyed. The combined effects of less carrion and an increase in the griffon-vulture population in Europe may be to blame for the present situation.

Efforts to resolve this conflict are constrained by a lack of solid scientific data, not helped by mounting public alarm and political pressure. Sanitary and other authorities must work with farmers, scientists and conservation groups to produce guidelines to solve the problem in both the short and the long term.

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