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MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate use

Poisoning of vultures by South African farmers

Johannesburg, 21 October 2014:

BirdLife South Africa has noted with concern the light sentence of a R20 000 fine and 1 year in prison (of which R10 000 and the prison sentence was suspended for 5 years) handed down to Armand Aucamp of the Eastern Cape. Mr Aucamp was convicted after killing 46 Cape Vultures in December last year, using a sheep's carcass laced with a powerful insecticide. It is BirdLife South Africa's view that such a fine is insufficient punishment for the cynical and clearly negligent behaviour displayed by Mr Aucamp.

Farmers have a responsibility to be aware of the unintended consequences of their actions when attempting to deal with threats to their flocks from vagrant dogs, as was the case in this crime. Poison is an extremely dangerous, negligent and harmful response to any predatory threat to livestock or as pest control as it kills indiscriminately.

BirdLife South Africa calls on any farmers (or any South Africans) who are dealing with such issues to please call our offices on 011 789 1122 to receive advice on the most effective ways to protect their flocks in a manner that does not put South Africa's wild bird and animal populations at risk.

In addition, if anyone is aware of such an event being planned or of having already taken place, please contact the Environmental Crimes and Incidents Hotline on 0800 205 005 to report it.

This event is only one of a number of recent incidents where large numbers of vultures have been killed in poisoning incidents in South Africa.

For more information, images or interviews please contact:

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Notes for Editors

- 1.) BirdLife South Africa is the local country partner of BirdLife International. BirdLife International is the world's largest nature conservation Partnership with more than 120 BirdLife partners worldwide and growing, with almost 11million supporters, 7000 local conservation groups and 7400 staff. Find out more at www.birdlife.org or www.facebook.com/BirdLifeInternational.
- 2.) The vision of BirdLife South Africa is to promote the conservation, research, understanding, observation and enjoyment of natural birds and their habitats. BirdLife South Africa is the largest non-profit bird conservation organisation in the country, and relies on donor funding and financial support from the public to carry out its critical conservation work. For more information, visit www.birdlife.org.za.
- 3.) Vultures are often accidentally poisoned by farmers targeting animals that prey on their livestock. Poachers also have a role to play, as they poison carcasses to kill vultures, to ensure that vultures do not circle above these carcasses, alerting rangers of the poaching event that took place. Recent news reports contain multiple examples of deliberate and accidental poisoning such as the up to 600 vultures found deliberately poisoned in the Kwando region in northern Namibia and 60 dead vultures which were found on a farm in the Swartberg area of KwaZulu-Natal.
- 4.) Seven of the 11 vulture species that occur in Africa are listed on the IUCN Red List and these species are facing a complexity of multiple threats. Worryingly, five of these species joined the Red List of threatened species only in the last seven years.
- 5.) Threats to African vultures include deliberate and accidental poisoning, habitat loss and persecution for body parts to be used in traditional medicine.
- 6.) The Cape Vulture, which is only found in southern Africa (endemic to the region) will be listed as Endangered in the updated *The Eskom Red Data Book of birds of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland*. The reason for the uplisting is a decrease in size of breeding population implying a decrease of at least >50% over the past three generations. There are only 9 400 mature individuals / 4 700 pairs remaining globally, which are under enormous pressure from the threats listed above and more recently, the possibility of wind farms being developed in the mountains of Lesotho and the Eastern Cape. The southern node of the Cape Vulture population is centred on the Drakensberg Mountains and comprises 44% of the South African and Lesotho population, and 41% of the global population.