

POSITION STATEMENT

Lead Ammunition

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Lead is a toxic heavy metal that, due to its indiscriminate and unregulated use, has become pervasive in the environment. Lead acts as a non-specific poison, and serves no known biological function in any living organism. Even in small quantities, lead poisoning may result in a multi-systemic disease that could negatively impact an organism's neurological and skeletal development, foraging ability and reproductive success.

Old World vulture populations are declining at an unprecedented rate with poisoning, including secondary lead poisoning, cited as the single most important cause of vulture mortalities in Africa. Lead poisoning is known to be prevalent in southern Africa's Gyps and Bearded vulture populations. Research has shown that levels of lead poisoning in vultures increase during the hunting season, is significantly more prevalent in vultures (i.e. obligate scavengers) than in facultative or non-scavenging raptors, and (in some instances) reflect levels that can only be induced by metallic lead fragments. As vultures' scavenging lifestyle can predispose them to carcasses shot with lead ammunition, researchers concluded this to be the likely source of lead poisoning in vultures.

BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA POSITION STATEMENT

BirdLife South Africa recognises the detrimental impact lead has on all African wildlife, especially obligate scavengers such as vultures. BirdLife South Africa also recognises the threat that fragments of lead, embedded in game meat shot with lead ammunition, poses to human welfare.

BirdLife South Africa supports the replacement of lead ammunition with lead-free (non-toxic) alternatives, regarding it as an important aspect of all ethical hunting and culling operations.

BirdLife South Africa promotes the implementation of supplementary feeding sites using carcasses that have not been shot with lead ammunition, and are free of Non-steroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs) and

other chemicals that are harmful to vultures.

BirdLife South Africa promotes the feeding of livestock and game carcasses and offal (from animals shot with lead-free ammunition) to scavengers such as vultures, as it could provide these endangered species with an important source of food. We advise against the burial of heads (or flesh removed around the wound tract) of animals shot with lead ammunition, as this may have toxic consequences for other biodiversity.

BirdLife South Africa recognises that the removal of lead ammunition requires broad-scale collaboration between conservationists, ammunition manufacturers and users of lead ammunition.