New publication on ingestion of anthropogenic material by turkey vultures in the Falklands

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First published 25th July 2016

A new study by SAERI was recently published in the journal Polar Biology presenting the first results on the amount of human rubbish ingested by turkey vultures in the Falkland Islands, in particular plastic. The paper is entitled "Anthropogenic debris in the diet of turkey vultures (*Cathartes aura*) in a remote and low populated South Atlantic island".

Turkey vultures at the Stanley open rubbish tip (photo: Amélie Augé)

The abstract of the paper is: "*Plastic pollution is becoming an increasing issue for wildlife throughout the world. Even remote areas with relatively little human activity are affected. The Falkland Islands are a South Atlantic archipelago with a small human population (<3,000), mostly concentrated in one town, Stanley. One hundred regurgitated pellets from turkey vultures (Cathartes aura) were collected in Stanley in July and August 2015 to investigate the diet and amount of anthropogenic debris (human-made artificial products) ingested. The frequency of occurrence of anthropogenic debris was 58% of pellets for plastic, 25% for glass, 23% for paper, 21% for aluminium, and 3% for fabric. Aside from anthropogenic debris the majority of pellets were made of sheep wool (on average 29% of the volume), feathers (19%) and vegetation (18%). On average, when present, anthropogenic debris corresponded to 16.1% of the mass of each pellet, equivalent to 1.6g. The turkey vultures are known to feed in the open-air rubbish dump near the town. This study highlights that they ingest significant amounts of anthropogenic debris. Further investigations should be undertaken to monitor and identify potential health effects. Other birds also use the dump and may be affected. Even in such remote sparsely-populated islands, pollution may be a significant issue. Rubbish management could be put in place to limit birds from feeding at the dumps. A low human population density may not indicate low pollution impacts on wildlife and the environment and should be investigated further in the Falkland Islands and at other remote islands.*"

A piece was published in the local newspaper (the Penguin News) last Friday about the results and is available online.

For a full copy of the paper: email info@saeri.ac.fk