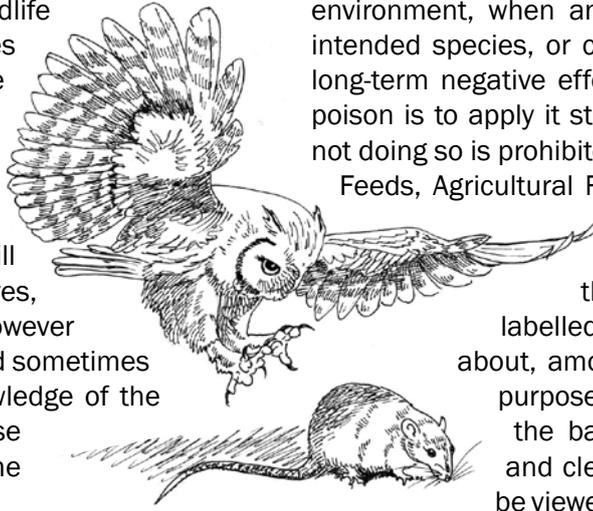


Raptors and poisons

The Endangered Wildlife Trust's Wildlife Conflict Prevention Group estimates that hundreds of thousands of birds are poisoned every year. Surveys indicate that many poisonings are deliberate, either for human consumption or because birds are perceived to be pests that damage crops and kill livestock. Countless cranes, vultures, raptors and garden birds are however poisoned without ever being eaten, and sometimes without the poisoner having any knowledge of the bird's presence. Here it is the abuse and misuse of poisons that causes the environmental damage.



environment, when an overdose kills far more than the intended species, or contaminates the environment, with long-term negative effects. The golden rule for using any poison is to apply it strictly according to the label. In fact, not doing so is prohibited by law under the Fertilizers, Farm Feeds, Agricultural Remedies and Stock Remedies Act, 1947 (Act No. 36 of 1947).

Fortunately, the Act also states that the product should be clearly labelled. The label must contain information about, amongst others: the toxicity group, the purpose for which the product is registered, the batch number and registration date, and clear instructions for use. The Act can be viewed on the Department of Agriculture's website at <http://www.nda.agric.za>.

An outline on how raptors are affected by poisons in South Africa follows:

Deliberate poisoning

Eagles are reviled by some farmers because they are capable of killing lambs and goat kids. These birds can cause real damage to a small-stock farmer if the stock is not managed carefully, and poison is an apparently easy solution. Deliberate poisoning however does not solve the problem for the farmer. When a resident predator is killed, a niche is created, giving inexperienced raptors and other predators, which are more likely to attack livestock, an opportunity to hunt. Vultures, sometimes tarred with the same brush as eagles, are particularly vulnerable to the deliberate poisoning of carcasses. They flock around a carcass in large numbers, and subsequently there are occasions when many die during a single poisoning incident.



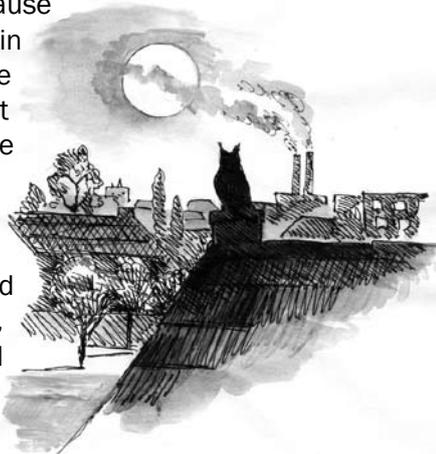
While death is perhaps just a part of life, the impact that poison abuse and misuse has on raptors is unsustainable. Landowners are critical to the prevention of bird poisonings, as agricultural land and private game reserves support large numbers of wild birds. Urban pesticide misuse and abuse can however also threaten birds such as Barn Owls and Peregrine Falcons. Suburban gardens are not isolated units, but instead are components of a much bigger ecosystem that is able to support a healthy wild bird population. Thus each individual landowner and homeowner can contribute to the health of the environment.

The golden rule when using pesticides remains: use it only as directed on the label, use it only for the purpose for which it was intended, and use it only as a last resort.

The Wildlife Conflict Prevention Group operates a helpline to advise on poisons and wildlife conflict management issues. The Group also manages a database of wildlife poisoning incidents and welcomes public participation in this programme.

Accidental poisonings of untargeted species

Even in urban areas birds are at risk of accidental poisoning. In the average suburban house, rats often find an opportune home with an abundance of food, water and shelter. Spotted Eagle-Owls are well adapted to these surroundings, finding the readily available prey equally opportune. Using a rodenticide that can cause secondary poisoning in owls will eliminate one of the few natural pest control agents left in the suburbs.



Poison misuse

Humans, creative and resourceful by nature, are always trying to find quicker, better, faster ways to cope with their problems. Logic says that if a pesticide and water mixture of 1:3, for example, works well, then a ratio of 2:3 will work even better. This rationale is often applied with dire consequences for the

Text by Hayley Komen; illustrations by Maggie Newman; BoPWG leaflet project coordinated by Mark D. Anderson; layout by Africa4U



For further information, contact:

Nashua Pesticides Helpline: 082 802 6223

Wildlife Conflict Management Helpline: 082 463 4104

Wildlife Poison Incidents reporting: 011 486 1102

Website: www.ewt.org.za/wcpwg

Tel. +27-(0)11-4861102; Fax. +27-(0)11-4861506

Birds of Prey Working Group:

E-mail: andreb@ewt.org.za (André Botha) or bopwg@ewt.org.za (Erika Belz)