

# Carcass Data Collection and Reporting Protocol

## WCS Field Veterinary Program Congo – Gabon

### 1. Introduction

The collection of mortality data in various species is important for determining background or baseline mortality in a population. Future determinations of the severity – or even the presence – of a disease outbreak will be based in the previously-collected baseline data.

Though our primary focus is on great apes and the risk of Ebola virus, we are interested in this background data on many more species in the great apes' ecosystem. Mortality in some of those species may indicate a threat to the health of the great apes. For example, the appearance of one or multiple non-great ape large mammal carcasses may also be an indication of an Ebola or anthrax outbreak. It may also be an indication of a disease entity which does not necessarily pose a risk to great apes, but does to other species, such as the *Stomoxys* fly- associated of large ungulates reported by Elkan et al in the late 1990's. In addition, avian mortality has become of great interest, given the fear of highly-pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). Reporting of avian mortality will help with FVP's GAINS program; monitoring of wild avian populations for the presence of HPAI.

All carcasses found – whether in the forest, along roads, wherever – are to be treated as a potential infectious disease risk to humans. Regardless of the suspected cause of death, no carcass is to be handled without the necessary precautions.

### 2. What to do if you find a carcass in the forest.

If a carcass is found in the forest:

- 1) **DO NOT touch** the carcass.
- 2) **DO NOT move** the carcass.
- 3) **DO NOT burn or bury** the carcass.
- 4) **RECORD** the following information:
  - What animal species was encountered?
  - How old was the carcass?
  - Is there a clear or likely cause of death (e.g. gunshot wound, snare)?
  - In what type of forest/terrain was the carcass located?
  - What was the GPS point location of the carcass?
  - Were other animals in the area or in contact with the carcass?
  - Were any other carcasses found?
- 5) **INFORM** the **Primary Contact** person for your region, as per the Carcass Communications Protocol. Rapid reporting is paramount in order to permit sampling of the carcass by a sampling team.



### 3. Data Collection

As mentioned above, information on any vertebrate species is desirable. Recognizing, however, that there are limitations in each site's ability to handle the volume of data, we are requesting that mortality data be recorded in view of the following priorities:

- Great apes
- Non-great ape other large mammal (buffalo, elephant, bushpig)
- Other mammals and birds
- Other vertebrates

### 4. Reporting

#### a. Routine Reporting

Data on all carcasses should be reported to FVP on a monthly basis, if possible. This can be in the form of a simple spreadsheet sent as an e-mail attachment, which will be combined from all WCS-Congo sites into a central spreadsheet for future analysis.

A **Primary Contact** person will be determined at each WCS-Congo site (see the Carcass Urgent Reporting List). Anyone finding a carcass should report it to the Primary Contact person.

#### b. Urgent Reporting

In certain cases, the presence of a carcass must be reported rapidly, specifically in the following cases:

1. Any great ape carcass
2. Any fresh large mammal carcass
3. Multiple carcasses of any species in a given day or week
4. Any unusual trends, as determined by the Primary Contact person (see below)

In any of the above cases, field sites should implement the Urgent Reporting Protocol. Following this protocol, the Primary Contact person contacts rapidly, by whatever means available, the **Secondary Contacts**, including:

- 1) Field Veterinary Program veterinarian,
- 2) WCS-Congo Country Director,
- 3) the Conservateur of their protected area, if applicable,
- 4) the Sous-Prefet of the area in which the carcass was found

The delicacy of the issue of Ebola virus cannot be over-emphasized. We must be very careful how we report carcasses, particularly when government entities are involved. We must be very careful to avoid stating or implying that an animal died of Ebola virus infection or that the presence of a carcass is indicative of an Ebola virus outbreak. A carcass found in just that – a carcass. When reporting to the Secondary Contacts, the Primary Contact should stick to the facts, providing the data, location, species, etc. only. Anything else may tend to cause undue

concern among people or may even be interpreted as an attempt by WCS to create panic for ulterior motives. Reports of carcasses should not be discussed outside of the official channels for the same reasons.

## **5. Sampling**

Once notified of the presence of a carcass, the FVP veterinarian, in consultation with the Primary Contact person, field site direction and park staff, decide whether to mobilize a sampling team. If such is necessary, but an FVP team is not available, another carcass sampling-trained person may be asked to sample the carcass. For safety reasons, only individuals who have attended the carcass sampling or previous necropsy training should collect samples. Specific protocols are described elsewhere.