



FACTSHEET

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Species

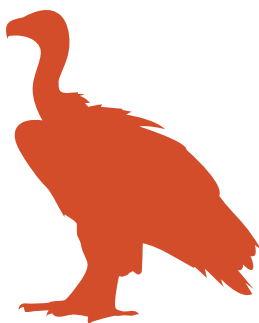
Conservation of the Gyps Vulture



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Donor: Environment Agency Abu Dhabi, The Hawk Conservancy Trust, Punjab Wildlife Department, US Fish and Wildlife Service, WWF-US, The Peregrine Fund, WWF-Pakistan's Small Grants Programme

Duration: 2005 - Present



The white-backed vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*) population has declined by more than 99 percent in Pakistan, India and Nepal since the early 1990s, and it is now classified as *critically endangered* by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Diclofenac Sodium, a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID), used in livestock, is the main cause of mortality and leads to kidney failure in the species. Vultures are ecologically important as they consume dead animals and clean the environment. WWF-Pakistan has been working on the conservation of vultures since 2005, through different projects.

Gyps Vulture Crisis Project (GVCP)

Initiated in 2001 by The Peregrine Fund, Ornithological Society of Pakistan and Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan the project collected field data on the white-backed vulture decline between 2001 to 2003. Pakistan showed a 50 percent annual decrease in the white-backed vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*) and three colonies vanished completely in this period with populations of 421, 445 and 758 pairs in Taunsa, Toawala and Changa Manga respectively.

Gyps Vulture Restoration Project (GVRP)

Vultures are a regional priority species of the Global Programme Framework of the WWF Network. WWF-Pakistan, in partnership with The Punjab Wildlife and Parks Department, launched the *Gyps Vulture Restoration Project* in 2005. One of the biggest successes of this project has been lobbying to ban the drug Diclofenac Sodium which was effectively banned in September 2006 by the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Environment.

The project has developed extensive techniques to save the vulture population and WWF-Pakistan has established a Vulture Conservation Centre in the Changa Manga Forest, 80 km southwest of Lahore.

The facility's main objective is to retain the current population of vultures along with a captive breeding programme in order to increase their population. The purpose-built aviary was set up with The Hawk Conservancy Trust (HCT) as technical partner on land provided by The Punjab Wildlife and Parks Department since 2005. The Environment Agency, Abu Dhabi provided seed funding necessary for construction and HCT continues to act as the main donor for the running of the facility since 2007. WWF-US carried out a survey in conjunction with WWF-Pakistan and supported the effective lobbying against the use and distribution of Diclofenac Sodium by veterinarian and pharmaceutical companies.

The aviary can house up to 30 birds that are fed a healthy diet of donkeys and goats. The project tries to feed the birds a varied diet and goats consumed are organically reared on the project site. Once breeding reaches a level where the species can sustain a safe population, the birds will be released into the wild. The gender of vultures is determined genetically after which they are ring tagged for identification to monitor their behaviour. Birds are also implanted with microchips imbedded in their skin for identification purposes.

Vulture Safe Zone Project (VSZP)

The Vulture Safe Zone Project aims for *in-situ* conservation of the white-backed vulture and long-billed vulture in Nagar Parkar, Sindh. It focuses on the eradication of Diclofenac Sodium usage and enhancing the availability, usage and improvement in the formulation of the alternate safe drug Meloxicam by lobbying with pharmaceutical companies, veterinarians and relevant government departments and enhancing the local community's awareness levels.

Under this project two comprehensive Gyps vulture population assessment surveys have been conducted in 2012 and 2013 showing an increase in the active nest counts of the white-backed vulture.

A local Community Based Organization (CBO), Parkar Foundation, was established in village *Malji Jo Wandio* near white-backed vulture breeding colonies. This CBO aims to conserve local biodiversity with community participation and awareness raising initiatives such as the distribution of education and awareness material in the Sindhi language. The project has maintained livestock and carcass availability records at the Vulture Safe Zone since 2012 but vultures have reportedly not been seen eating the carcasses. Free livestock de-worming camps have also been organized in collaboration with ICI-Pakistan for local communities and information on better animal husbandry practices provided.



WWF-Pakistan Species Goal

To conserve the minimum viable populations of selected indigenous, endemic and/or keystone species.



Threats

- Ketoprofen and Aceclofenac
Recent research has indicated that drugs such as Ketoprofen and Aceclofenac are also fatal to vultures in a similar manner as Diclofenac Sodium because they metabolize in the body in the same way.
- Decreased Availability of Carcasses
According to a study of the Wildlife Trust of India in 2009, the changes in the human consumption and processing of dead livestock and non-target poisoning might be a contributing reason for decline in the vulture population.

Diclofenac Sodium

Diclofenac Sodium, a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID), is used as a pain killer for livestock and is the main cause of mortality in Gyps vultures. When vultures fed on carcasses of animals injected with Diclofenac Sodium, they develop kidney failure and ultimately visceral gout which led to their mortality. A study in Nepal has indicated that the majority of people do not link Diclofenac use to a decline in vulture populations, which has led to slower uptake of the alternate Meloxicam.

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|  | <p>Why we are here: To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.</p> |
| | <p> www.wwfpak.org info@wwf.org.pk  WWFPak  WWFPak </p> |