

# Vulture Conservation in Kangra (HP)

2004-15



## RECOVERY OF WHITE RUMPED VULTURES (*Gyps bengalensis*) IN KANGRA DIST. HP

The regular observations on forest birding in Distt. Kangra of Himachal Pradesh during 2003-04, has revealed that the population of this master bird, was dwindling in district Kangra in the forests, situated in the western boundary of Himachal Pradesh adjoining Punjab state, between 30° 22' 40" to 33° 12' 40" North Latitude and 75° 45' 55" to 79° 04' 20" East Longitude and hence was decided to be taken up for conservation. Hence, the count of the nesting's of these birds was taken up in 2004-05 in Distt. Kangra as a measure to prepare a scientific plan for the recovery of these birds in wild.

The white-rumped vulture is a typical, medium-sized vulture, with a un feathered head and neck, very broad wings, and short tail feathers. It is much smaller than the Eurasian Griffon. It has a white neck ruff. The adult's have whitish back, rump, and under wing coverts contrast with the otherwise dark plumage. The body is black and the secondaries are silvery grey. The head is tinged in pink and bill is silvery with dark ceres. The nostril openings are slit-like. Juveniles are largely dark and take about four or five years to acquire the adult plumage. In flight, the adults show a dark leading edge of the wing and have a white wing-lining on the underside. The under tail coverts are black. This is the smallest of the *Gyps* vultures, but is still a very large bird. It weighs 3.5-7.5 kg, measures 75-93 cm in length, and has a wingspan of 1.92-2.6 m

This vulture builds its nests on the tall trees, often near to habitations in northern and central India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Southeast Asia, laying one egg per nest. Birds form nests numbering from 3-30 in each roosting colony spread over over 5 to 20 ha extent of open chir pine forests in Kangra. The nests are made with the pine needles and branches. The birds are breeding in the branched tall old trees of chir pine (*Pinus roxburgii*) and therefore, such trees are being protected to maintain the habitat. The population is mostly resident. Like other vultures it is a scavenger, feeding mostly from carcasses of dead animals, thus is ecologically very important to maintain the hygiene of the forests. It often moves in flocks and at one time, it was the most abundant of all the vultures in India.

The first observations on vulture were started in 2003-04, where only 26 nests of *Gyps bengalensis* were observed during 2004-05, which has now reached to an incredible figure of 288 during 2014-15, after serious conservation efforts by the wildlife wing of Himachal, in all these years over nearly a decade. 288 no of nests of this endangered species are believed to indicate optimistically there are a minimum of 576 adults of White backed Vultures, which is a healthy sign for this master bird and their numbers, are ever increasing year after year. More specifically, during last year 259 fledglings (a young bird just fledged) have been recorded in these nests indicating 89% successful hatching. Similar such conservation efforts are also on, in the adjoining states like Haryana, and the results are much more promising in Himachal Pradesh in wild during the last decade with little budgeting.

Now, the sighting of big flocks of this master bird is common in different parts of Kangra Distt, and birds in flocks up to 175 have been recorded around dumping sites of carcass, where locals dump carcasses after de-skinning of the dead domestic animals.

These master birds are observed to have been breeding in 35 to 46 colonies in Kangra District on very old straight trees of *chil* (*Pinus roxburgii*) growing on mild slopes in Shivalik hills, hence, the retention of these dead and dry standing trees has become important as these birds are using such trees for roosting and their surveillance. In the past, such breeding sites were under threat due to timber exploitation and resin tapping, by the state corporation, which is now stopped from these forests, to protect the Vultures. It is observed that some times, the young ones remain unattended during the nights as their parents remain out on one reason or the other.

In the neighboring countries, i.e. in Nepal also a dramatic decline of two species, *G. bengalensis* and *G. tenuirostris* was reported, since mid 1990s and the rate of decline within a decade was estimated at 90-95% (Nepal Country Report, 2006), thus the conservation efforts of these Species has attained prominence in Himachal too. Wildlife wing has planned to go for a systematic counting of this species along with other prominent Species like western tragopan, cheer pheasants, monals and other important Himalayan avi-fauna, from this year onwards for which nominal funds have been earmarked and will continue in the next 8 to 10 years. The Wildlife wing is likely to get the results of abundance of these Species by next year after full counting of the master bird.

In Bangladesh, the *Gyps bengalensis* is threatened and *Gyps. indicus* & *Gyps fulvus* are now rare (Bangladesh Country Report, 2006). Historically no estimation of this Species has been carried out or reported in Himachal Pradesh, in the past, but B.N.H.S. in mid 1980s has estimated presence of up to 15-17 of this Species per sq. km in India. Survey also revealed that the behavior of the vultures seen in Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur in Rajasthan was also observed in other parts including the state, indicating the prevalence of Neck-drooping.

To explore the reasons for this phenomenon, the postmortem of some of the dead vultures were carried out in Bharatpur, revealed the presence of visceral gout, an accumulation of uric acid within tissues, and caused due to inadvertent consumption of diclofenanac drug present in the carcass of the dead domestic animals, which were administered diclofenac while ill. Recent survey in India, Pakistan and Nepal has shown that the decline in three species is over 97%, over a period of 10 years. Mainly three species of vultures namely, white backed vulture (*G. bengalensis*), slender billed vulture (*G. tenuirostris*) and the long billed vultures (*G. indicus*) have declined dramatically.

The dooms day for this master bird is now a distant myth in the state in the wake of serious conservation efforts carried out in the last decade by the wildlife wing”, by facilitating the natural breeding of the bird by creating congenial environment for their nesting in the wild and thus has brought new hopes for survival and flourishing of this species. “The forests, where nesting is taking place have been closed for commercial activities and no marking is carried out in these areas besides

creating artificial water bodies in the vicinity and encouraging the cobblers to leave the dead carcass of the animals in the closed areas created by the department, by paying incentives has yielded good results". A number of sites have been recorded in the district where vultures are breeding without any perceptible difficulty.

No. of nests of *Gyps bengalensis* and their fledglings recorded in the entire Distt., since 2004-05 is as follows:-

S.No.	Year	Nests	Fledglings
1	2004-05	26	23
2	2005-06	32	30
3	2006-07	33	31
4	2007-08	52	43
5	2008-09	60	55
6	2009-10	88	86
7	2010-11	206	171
8	2011-12	293	205
9	2012-13	271	234
10	2013-14	274	241
11	2014-15	288	259

The experiments of conservation breeding of vultures in wild in Distt. Kangra is recorded as one of the unique and most successful experiments in the region as far as the in-situ breeding of White rumped Vulture is concerned in contrary to the opinion in general, that there is hardly any breeding in wild and the species is on the verge of extinction due to high mortalities due to use of diclofenace or for any other reason. "The actual numbers of the Species will be known next year when the estimation of numbers of this Species is carried out scientifically in the entire state".

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	White rumped Vulture Breeding Record of Distt.Kangra During Year 2014-15					
S.N.	Name of Division	Name of Range	Name of Beat	Name of Place	2014-15	
					Nests	Fledglings
1	Dehra	Nagrota-Surian	Khuman	Bateharh 1st	23	21
2				Bateharh IIInd	5	5
3				Lalpur	29	24
4			Bilaspur	Jallakh-Chellian	0	0
5			Masroor	Jani-Masroor	26	25
6		Jawalaji	Surani	Lambi-Patti	2	2
7	Dharamshala	Lapiana	Pandwar	Branj-Sirmani 1st	1	1
8			Pandwar	Branj-Sirmani IIInd	17	15
9			Kotru	Dramman Behra	15	14
10			Harnera	Harnera	15	15
11			Harnera	Dodaduari (Raltunga)	7	7
12			Pandwar	Pandwar	16	15
13			Lanj	Palothar	9	8
14			Boar-Kooalu	Gobinanda	3	3
15			Mallan	Aerla	Chorrey Chakke	22
16		Kandi		Palra	10	10
17		Danoa		Sapri	2	0
18		Sarhood		Touru Dhank	0	0
19		Pathiar		Permeere da balad	6	5
19 A		Kangra	Daulatpur	Kail	0	0
20			Gheena	Gheena 1st	12	11
21			Gheena	Gheena IIInd	0	0
22		Shahpur	Salol	Salol	0	0
23			Minjgranh	Siunpad	0	0
24			Tiara	Tiara Dhank	0	0
25	Salol		Salol Dhank	0	0	
26	Nurpur	Kotla	Anuhi	Anuhi	0	0
27			Bhali	Bhali 1st	2	2
28			Bhali	Bhali IIInd Jol)	7	5
29			Bhali	32 Meel	2	2
29 A			Bhali IIIrd	Phalota	19	17
30			Ambal	Kalduan (Theru)	3	2
31			Batuhi	Khuban (Batuhi)	5	3
32			Mastgarh	Kothibanda	0	0
33			Mastgarh	Mastgarh	6	6
34			Mastgarh	Pedian	0	0
35		Nurpur	Tattal	Bassa	5	4
36			Tattal	Jounta	0	0



37			Kherian	Kadroh	19	17
38		Jawali	Junat	Chandveh	0	0
39			Junat	Junat	0	0
40		Rey	Khatiar	Katrah	0	0
41			Khatiar	Khatiar	0	0
42	<b>Palampur</b>	Baijnath	Baijnath	Ghatta	0	0
43			Sansal	Panjyala	0	0
44		Palampur	Paror	Paror	0	0
					<b>288</b>	<b>259</b>
		<b>Abstract</b>				
	<b>S.No</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>No of Nest</b>	<b>No. of Fledglings</b>		
	<b>1</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>259</b>		



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