

A reality that has to be changed

Vultures were plentiful a decade ago, and we saw them everywhere around us. Unfortunately their numbers rapidly decreased and today the Gyps species of vultures are threatened with extinction.

The decline of the vultures is the fastest decline in the history of any species in the world. The Bombay Natural History Society urges the Government of India to immediately ban the veterinary use of the drug Diclofenac to save the remaining vultures from total extinction.

What is happening to the vultures?

- Diclofenac was introduced into Indian veterinary market as recently as over a decade ago.
- Recent published findings of the BNHS, the RSPB, and the ZSL which concurred with the Peregrine Funds (USA) provided strong evidence based on sound experimental design that the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory veterinary drug (NSAID). The diclofenac is the prime cause for the crisis of the declined vulture populations.
- The veterinary diclofenac is in heavy use in the livestock sector (Buffalos, Cattle, Sheep, and Goat).
- In the course of treatment, if the cattle dies, and the vultures scavenge on these, it leads to the dehydration, visceral gout, and kidney failure in vultures within a few days.
- Experimentally it is established that even if less than 1% carcasses contains diclofenac, it can lead to such a drastic decline. The grim picture is that over 10% of the carcasses have prevalence of diclofenac.
- India, Nepal, and Pakistan have lost over 95% of the vulture population.
- The rapid decline in the vulture populations necessitated the scientific intervention.

Vulture Conservation Action

- The catastrophic decline led the World Conservation Union (IUCN), in the year 2000, to list the three Gyps species vultures, as critically endangered, which is the highest category of endangerment.
- In 2002, all the three vulture species were categorised under 'Schedule I' of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act.
- It is imperative to undertake an immediate conservation action with a comprehensively designed species recovery plan, and the only solution being, vulture conservation breeding in a diclofenac—free environment.
- Meloxicam is the substitute to diclofenac. The results for the safety testing and efficacy of Meloxicam show it as promising alternative to diclofenac.

Vulture Conservation Research Agencies

- Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), Poultry Diagnostics Research Centre (PDRC), Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI), Royal Society for Protection of Birds-UK (RSPB), Zoological Society of London (ZSL), and Peregrine Funds (USA) are the organizations working for vulture conservation and research in India.

Advocacy and Public Awareness Efforts and Achievements

- Countrywide awareness was generated amongst the State Government Veterinary Sectors, which led Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttaranchal and Punjab to immediately respond to the ban of diclofenac use.
- The committee chaired by Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, issued directives for phasing out the diclofenac in India. (March 17, 2005).
- Radio and Television spots broadcast in vernacular languages in the vulture range states of India.
- Vulture puppetry show for the awareness in rural communities, decision makers, and veterinarians.
- Collaborative efforts with Earth Matters Foundation, in making conservation film on Vultures, "The Vanishing Vultures," with eminent film maker, Mike Pandey.