

Vulture Action Plan 2020-25

November 18, 2020

In news

Recently, the Union Minister for Environment, Forests and Climate Change launched a Vulture Action Plan 2020-25 for the conservation of vultures in the country.

Causes of decline in vulture population

The crash in vulture populations came into limelight in the mid-90s, and in 2004 the cause of the crash was established as diclofenac – a veterinary nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) used to treat pain and inflammatory diseases such as gout – in carcasses that vultures would feed off.

Previous vulture action plan

- The ministry has been carrying out a conservation project for vultures since 2006, the plan is to now extend the project to 2025 to not just halt the decline but to actively increase the vulture numbers in India.
- The ministry has now also launched conservation plans for the red-headed and Egyptian vultures, with breeding programmes for both.

Important objectives for the Action Plan for Vulture Conservation 2020-2025 (APVC) are:

- **Prevent the poisoning of the principal food of vultures, the cattle carcasses, with veterinary Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)**, by ensuring that sale of veterinary NSAIDs is regulated and is disbursed only on prescription and by ensuring that treatment of livestock is done only by qualified veterinarians.
- **Carry out safety testing of available molecules of veterinary NSAIDs on vultures.** The new molecules should be introduced in the market only after they are proved

- to be safe following safety testing on vultures.
- **The Drugs Controller General of India must institute a system that automatically removes a drug from veterinary use if it is found to be toxic to vultures.** Such a system would ensure that drugs **other than diclofenac that are toxic to vultures like aceclofenac and ketoprofen are banned for veterinary use.**
- There is a need to **establish additional Conservation Breeding Centres in the country.** Currently, there are 8 Vulture Conservation Breeding Centres in different parts of the country. While the primary focus of these centres is breeding of vultures, they also serve as Vulture Conservation Centres.

BIRD'S EYE VIEW


9 RECORDED SPECIES:
Oriental white-backed, long-billed, slender-billed, Himalayan, red-headed, Egyptian, bearded, cinereous and the Eurasian Griffon.

(4 CRITICALLY ENDANGERED, 1 ENDANGERED, 3 NEAR THREATENED)

THE CRISIS:
A massive dip in vulture populations came into limelight in the mid-90s, and in 2004 the cause of the crash was established as diclofenac, a veterinary nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug.

WHAT NEXT AFTER 2006 PROJECT:

- Testing of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs on vultures, development of new NSAIDs
- Covering two more species in the breeding programme that earlier focussed on 3 critically endangered species
- Additional conservation breeding centres and four rescue centres planned across India
- Nationwide vulture survey once in four years



Rescue centres

- **Four rescue centres** have been proposed for different geographical areas like **Pinjore in the north, Bhopal in Central India, Guwahati in Northeast India and Hyderabad in South India.**
- The centres will be established 5km from the breeding centres such that veterinary expertise of the breeding centres could be utilized for treatment of sick and injured birds.
- **There are currently no dedicated vulture rescue centres to treat vultures that get injured in accidents** and fall sick by unintentional poisoning.
- Rescue centres will help in saving these vultures, and these could become part of the breeding programme or

safety testing projects.

Other announcements

- The action plan aims to carry forth what has already been set in motion by ensuring that sale of veterinary NSAIDs is regulated and livestock are treated only by qualified veterinarians.
- The Ministry also plans on carrying out safety testing of available NSAIDs on vultures and to develop new ones which do not affect vultures.
- Additional Conservation Breeding Centres are also being planned across the country, along with Vulture Conservation Centres with samples and information collected from the wild analysed and stored at these centres – one each in Uttar Pradesh, Tripura, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

Vulture species in India

There are nine recorded species of vultures in India – the Oriental white-backed (critically-endangered), long-billed(critically-endangered), slender-billed(critically-endangered), Himalayan, red-headed(critically-endangered), Egyptian vulture(endangered), bearded(near threatened), cinereous(near threatened) and the Eurasian Griffon.