

White-rumped Vulture nestling predation by stray dog in Madhya Pradesh, India



Stray dog (puppy) feeding on a White-rumped Vulture chick in Hinota Village, in Chandla Tehsil of Chhatarpur District, Madhya Pradesh, India.

IUCN Status: Critically Endangered (BirdLife International 2020).

Aves [Class of birds]

Accipitriformes [Order of includes most of the diurnal birds of prey]

Accipitridae [hawks, eagles, kites, harriers, and Old World vultures]

Gyps bengalensis [White-rumped Vulture]

Species described by Gmelin in 1788

Global Distribution: White-rumped Vulture occurs in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and southern Vietnam. It formerly occurred in southern China and Malaysia but is now extinct in those countries. It has also been found in southern and central Afghanistan, mostly in the southern area but has also been sighted in the central part of Afghanistan.

Indian Distribution: Was very common on the Indian subcontinent.

Population size: 2,500–9,999 (Birdlife International 2020).

White-rumped Vultures are often found in cities, towns and villages, near human habitation. They occur in temperate areas, mostly in plains and occasionally in hilly regions. *Gyps bengalensis* is generally found in open areas and fields enclosing scattered trees. This species qualifies as **Critically Endangered** because it has suffered an extremely rapid population decline primarily as a result of feeding on carcasses of animals treated with the veterinary drug Diclofenac.

The White-rumped Vulture (WRV) was one of the most common bird of prey in the Indian subcontinent (Huston 1985). The population of the WRV and other resident *Gyps* vulture species has declined very rapidly since the mid-1990s across the Indian subcontinent (Prakash 1999; Gilbert et al. 2006; Prakash et al. 2007; Chaudhary et al. 2012). The rate of decline in the population of WRV has exceeded 99.9% in India (Prakash et al. 2007) and the species is classified as Critically Endangered (BirdLife International 2020). Predation on nestlings of Old World vultures is reported very scantily (Brown & Amadon 1968; Mundy 1982). Only very sporadic observations have been made on the predation on fledglings by mammalian species (Rodriguez & Balcells 1968; Donazar & Ceballos 1988). In this note, we report the stray dog's predation on fledgling of WRV in Hinota Village located in Chandla Tehsil of Chhatarpur District, Madhya Pradesh, India.

On 26 February 2018, while monitoring WRV nesting colony in Hinota Village, we observed a stray dog (puppy) feeding on the chick of WRV under the nesting tree and when we approached nearer to see the chick, it was already dead. In that nesting colony a total of 30 chicks were observed from 2017 to 2018 breeding season. A similar kind of observation was made by Samson et al. (2016) who reported Wild Boar predation on WRV chick in Jagalikedavu nesting areas of Sigur Plateau, Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, Tamil Nadu. In Bulgaria, Stoyanov & Stefanov (1993) reported 10 incidents of Egyptian Vulture chick predation in the nesting area by Golden Eagle, Eagle Owl, Jackal, Red Fox, and Wolves and also 12

unsuccessful attempts by Golden Eagles and Common Raven. All of these observations have been reported in the nesting habitat of WRV and Egyptian Vulture. In WRV, there is extensive parental care shown and the chicks are fully grown and independent within 5–6 months of nursing and fledge thereafter (Narajii 2006). WRV is a highly social bird and builds its nests near the human settlements (Narajii 2006). The population of WRV crashed by 99.9% in India due to the severe effects of Diclofenac, a NSAID used to treat cattle (Prakash et al. 2007). Currently, the estimated population of vulture in India is 2,500–9,999 individuals (Birdlife International 2020).

In India, vulture conservation effort is highly prioritized and captive breeding programmes for WRV are going on that look forward to release them back into the wild. In the present scenario there is a very small population of wild vultures breeding in certain areas of India. During the breeding season, effective monitoring of colonies especially the ones situated near to human habitation is extremely important for successful breeding in their natural habitat (Samson & Ramakrishnan 2020).

It is very important to record the observation of feeding of stray dogs on WRV chicks in the natural habitat, even though it is an opportunistic one, should be scientifically documented for future reference (Samson et al. 2016). It's necessary to identify the breeding colonies and effective monitoring is highly required especially in breeding seasons.

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