

Report on the Workshop on 'Current Status of Vultures in Gujarat' held on 19th September 2004 at Anand.

Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat

Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat organized a workshop on, "Current Status of Vultures in Gujarat" at B. A. College of Agriculture auditorium, Anand on 19th September, 2004. Dr. B. M. Parasharya, Hon. Secretary of the Society welcomed the guests and briefed the gathering about the activities of the Society and the objectives of the workshop. Dr. Bakul Trivedi, Hon. joint secretary introduced the guests, and briefly narrated the profiles of three ornithologists Shri Lavkumar Khacher, Shri M.K. Himmatsinhji and Shri Lalsinh Raol who were then duly felicitated by the Society for their contribution to the bird conservation movement in the State. Shri Khacher and Shri Raol who incidentally are the President and Vice President of the Society blessed the house and shared their reminiscences of birdwatching days with the audience.

The Workshop was inaugurated by Prof. M. C. Varshneya, Honorable Vice Chancellor, Anand Agricultural University. He pointed out the association of Vultures with Indian society since the days of Ramayana, citing the example of 'JATAYU'. An updated compilation, 'A Checklist of the Birds of Gujarat' prepared by Drs. B. M. Parasharya, C. K. Borad and D. N. Rank was released at this function. This is the first document of its kind, which enlists all the species and subspecies of the birds recorded from Gujarat state with their standardized English, scientific and Gujarati names. This will prove to be a great help to the birdwatchers of the state and the country.

Speaking at this occasion, Dr. R. B. Shukla, Director of Animal Husbandry said that recently State Government has put up restrictions on the use of 'Diclofenac' drug in treating sick animals with meager chances of recovery from the ailment and no hopes for survival. Recent findings have shown that when the Vultures consume very low dose of this drug in the form of residues from the carcasses of dead animals, they show the symptoms of visceral gout and kidney failure and ultimately die. Gujarat is the first state to issue such instructions to the veterinarians for the conservation of this species. Shri Pradeep Khanna, Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) said that this workshop should help us to determine status of the Vultures in our State, identify various threats and workout strategy for their conservation.

The Workshop was attended by eminent Ornithologists / Scientists from prestigious institutions like, Bombay Natural History Society, Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology, Royal Society for Protection of Birds, U. K. and Anand Agricultural University. State Government officials like Director, Animal Husbandry, Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) and other senior officers of the Forest Department also remained present and gave their valuable suggestions and inputs. The workshop received an overwhelming response and was attended by about 300 delegates from the State. This is probably the first occasion in Gujarat when such a large number of birdwatchers gathered at one place and perhaps in the country also especially to discuss Vulture conservation issue. More than 200 photographs of Vultures by well-known wildlife photographers of the state were also exhibited in the premises.

Deliberations went on for the whole day, with presentations by birdwatchers from different regions of the State on the status of Vultures in the respective areas of the State and probable reasons of their decline. Possible conservation strategies, captive breeding necessities, etc. were discussed during open house session.

Dr. Vibhu Prakash (BNHS) in the beginning intricately explained Vulture identification in the field. During the deliberations, Chris Bowden (RSPB) opined that 'Diclofenac'- a veterinary drug is the major factor responsible for Vulture population decline and should be totally removed from the system. Dr. Bowden also emphasized the need for captive breeding programme and gave details of the initiatives taken up by BNHS and RSPB for Vulture conservation through establishment of 'Vulture Care and Breeding Center' at Pinjor, Haryana. Drs. D. N. Rank and. R. H. Sabapara of Anand Agricultural University and State Animal Husbandry Department respectively, presented detailed analysis of all available data and showed that decline in Vulture population was noticed from several parts of Gujarat state, much before the introduction of 'Diclofenac' in 1996. Moreover, today the Vultures are still surviving in the areas where a large number of veterinary practitioners are concentrated and 'Diclofenac' use is at its maximum. Also very less percentage of cattle population receives veterinary services and so is spared from exposure to 'Diclofenac'. Their situation analysis suggested that 'Diclofenac' use can not be the only factor responsible for Vulture decline in Gujarat. Many other birdwatchers – to name few- Dr. Lalitha Vijayan, Shri. S. N. Varu, Shri Ashwin Pomal, Shri Devji Dhamecha, Shri Jaydev Nansey, Shri R. V. Assari, Dr. Piyush. Matalia, Dr. I. R. Gadhvi, Shri Kartik Shastri etc. were of the opinion that non-availability of food, competition for food with other animals and man, destruction of safe nesting sites, poisoning and shooting of Vultures near airports are equally serious threats to their population.

In the plenary session it was resolved that:

1. Since, the populations of different species of Vultures were already in decline even before the drug 'Diclofenac' was introduced; this chemical alone can not be the only factor responsible for the population decline of Vultures. Further scientific studies on 'Diclofenac' in Indian context are urgently required. The problem should be addressed in totality rather than isolating only one factor as the cause of Vulture decline.
2. Food and nesting sites may be ensured to the Vultures where they are existing now. If necessary, artificial feeding and nesting sites may be created.
3. Since the Vultures are surviving in small patches having different threats, area specific conservation strategies-taking into account those as suggested by the presenters may be designed.
4. For regular monitoring of Vulture population, BCSG has

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International Elephant Research Symposium, Fort Worth, Texas, USA December 2-5, 2004

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(Web supplement)

International elephant research symposium organised by the International Elephant Foundation, was conducted in the city of Fort Worth, Texas, USA from December 2-5, 2004. The venue of the seminar was the Radisson Plaza Hotel. Altogether 30 papers were presented orally and five papers as posters. The symposium icebreaker was held on the evening of Thursday, December 2nd at 5.30 pm. After a brief opening remarks, the symposium started on the 3rd December at 8.30 AM and the presentations continued up to 6 PM. Same schedule was followed on the next day also. About seventy delegates participated in the symposium from different countries including India and Sri Lanka. Majority of the papers were dealing with captive management and veterinary aspects of Asian and African elephants. Research on human-elephant conflict being undertaken in the Asian and African countries formed another topic of the discussion. Five oral papers were dealing with genetics and demographics of elephants, 9 papers dealt with veterinary medicine, 5 papers were on the reproductive aspects, 4 papers on behavioural aspects, 5 papers on the development of calf and management and 6 papers were on *in situ* conservation and management problems of elephants.

Four delegates from India participated in the symposium and three papers were orally presented by the Indian delegates. The paper presented by me was jointly authored with Dr. G. Christopher; a former Research Fellow of Kerala Forest Research Institute, was based on a project work completed in the Kerala Forest Research Institute in 1996. The paper was entitled "*Man-elephant conflict in the southern Western Ghats: a case study from the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary, Kerala, India.*" The paper dealt with the details of human-elephant conflict occurring in the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary and the mitigation measures practiced. The paper was well received and some points were clarified by the delegates.

Mr. Vijay D. Anand *et al.*, who was representing the A Rocha India, Bangalore presented a paper entitled "*Understanding the habitat usage pattern of the Asian elephant (Elephas maximus) and the resultant human elephant interaction through rapid trail and village surveys. An experience from Bannerghatta National Park and its environs, Southern India.*" Another oral presentation from India was by Dr. Bhupen Sarma and S.C. Pathak representing Dept. of Surgery and Radiology, College of Veterinary Sciences, Assam Agricultural University, Guahatti, Assam. The paper was entitled "*Atipamezole as reversal agent to medetomidine-Ketamine anaesthesia in Asian elephants.*"

A paper presented by Rasmussen, L.E.L. *et al.* entitled "*Translation of basic behavioural and chemical signal research into a practical repellent system for the Asian elephant*" showed a new approach to long-term resolution aspects of human-elephant conflict. The system uses both olfactory chemicals and physical barriers to stop elephants from entering crop fields and controlled experiments have proved the efficiency of the system. This system has good potential in controlling the movement of elephants in the

wild and in captivity (Fig. 1^w). The system prepared by Rasmussen is said to be very efficient for preventing elephant passage through an area. It works both mechanically and by chemical means. More trials are needed to ascertain its efficiency and its viability in the patchy forest areas of India and about the cost effectiveness. After the presentations, a visit to the Fort Worth Zoo was also organized and the whole programme was spread over three days.

The symposium was attended by the board members of the International elephant Foundation and its President Mr. Michael Fouraker, Director of the Fort Worth Zoo also. The symposium was well organised and all the presentations kept high standard. By attending the symposium, an opportunity was obtained to meet the prominent elephant researchers of Asian and African countries. It also gave an opportunity to familiarise to the veterinary and captive management practices of the Asian and African elephants in USA. The city was in Christmas celebrations mood during the period and all the streets and buildings were decorated with lights and other decorations. The travel support and assistance for participation was provided by the International Elephant Foundation, Azle, Texas 76098, USA through a Fellowship.

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^w See figure in the web supplement at www.zoosprint.org

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launched 'Vulture Monitoring Programme'. Prescribed proforma for the data collection was circulated for the same. A systematic status survey is urgently warranted which can be collectively done by the State Forest Department and NGOs

5. Since all scavengers including Vultures are important in our environment, all concerned should work for the protection and increase in their population.
6. The favored niches of Vultures need to be identified and protected.
7. The house expressed gratitude for to the Dept. of Animal husbandry for declaring moratorium on the use of 'Diclofenac' for treating cattle.
8. All panjarapoles should be listed and kept under watch for Vulture population monitoring.
9. Dead bodies of Vultures should be sent to the institutions like one at Pinjore and to SACON for research. Procedure should be made easier to facilitate the same.
10. A chronicle on Vulture may be published by BCSG under 'Vulture Monitoring Programme'
11. Like Vultures an eye should be kept on other so called 'Common Birds', by the birdwatcher community before it is too late.