

Vulture Conservation Update from Pakistan

Uzma Khan *

WWF – Pakistan developed a conservation project to save the Oriental White-backed Vulture from extinction. It is working in close collaboration with the Punjab Wildlife and Parks Department (PWPd) and recommendations have gone to declare 154 sq. km area that is strong hold of White-backed vultures at Toawala near Multan as a protected area. Moreover, another intermittent vulture breeding site Rangpur anal comprising an area of 124 sq. km on the west bank of the River Chanab is also under consideration as vulture reserve by PWPd. Furthermore, the Federal Ministry of Environment is in a dialogue with the Ministry of Health to ban Diclofenac.

WWF – Pakistan is leading the *Gyps* Vulture Restoration Project and working closely with the Hawk Conservancy Trust, UK to develop the captive breeding facility. The consultant of this project Mr. Campbell Murn visited WWF-Pakistan in March 2005 and helped, selected the appropriate site for this project at Changa Manga forest, which is a cultivated forest 60km away from the Lahore City centre. Campbell also helped in designing the facility. Environment Agency, Abu Dhabi (EAAD) has provided the seed funding of 50 K USD to develop this breeding facility. Opportunities for additional funding are explored and continuously tapped.

WWF – Pakistan is currently finalizing the contractor to begin the phase one of the construction work of the breeding facility which at this stage would comprise of an aviary with office space, staff accommodation on side and a paddock to house livestock. It is aimed that the facility will be ready in March 2006 to house the founder population of *Gyps bengalensis* collected during coming breeding season. The Peregrine Fund will provide technical expertise in capturing and transferring of nestlings to the facility in Changa Manga.

The core facility staff will be hired by WWF – Pakistan, these positions include two aviary supervisors, one veterinarian, one food supervisor. These positions will be supervised by the Project Manager, who will provide updates to DG Wildlife and Parks and DG WWF – Pakistan. The support staff will be provided by the Punjab Wildlife and Park Department.

The Hawk Conservancy Trust is going to provide trainings to the staff, the Trust will support the core facility staff to get hands on experience of working with raptors at the trust and have offered to support the associated costs. The Trust is partner of WWF Pakistan in capacity building and fundraising.

WWF Pakistan is also monitoring wild populations of vulture species, recently the organization arranged a survey of Griffon and Cinerous vultures in the Balochistan Province. The survey showed that the populations of these species have declined and birds were not observed in areas where they were previously reported. Currently, we are collaborating with the local universities in Balochistan to monitor these populations with the support from WWF Pakistan. For further information contact: Manager, *Gyps* Vulture Restoration Project, WWF – Pakistan, Email: ukhan@wwf.org.pk

* Manager, *Gyps* Vulture Restoration Project, WWF - Pakistan, Email: ukhan@wwf.org.pk

Volunteers needed

The Chiroptera Conservation and Information Network of South Asia (CCINSA) along with Dr. Shahroukh Mistry, USA, have embarked on a project that involves identification and monitoring of fruit bat (*Pteropus giganteus*) colonies/roosts all over South Asia. The project will be an ongoing one with regular monitoring of colonies to understand the dynamics, population trends and various other aspects of the region's largest bats.

If you or any one of your colleagues or friends are interested in joining this exciting project, please write with your name, address, occupation, interest in this subject, and the geographical area you would like to participate in monitoring fruit bats. We already have a few volunteers who have started work in different parts of South Asia. South Asia is a large region and we need many more people. Write to us at the earliest to be part of this long-term, first of its kind project:

Ptero Count

Sanjay Molur / Sally Walker / Sripathi Kandula (Scientific Chair), CCINSA
Zoo Outreach Organisation, 29-1 Bharathi Colony, Peelamedu, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu 641004, India
Email: herpinvert@vsnl.com, zooreach@vsnl.com