Vultures- Bringing them back from the brink of extinction

CONSERVATION BREEDING PROGRAM –A PERSPECIVE

Sachin Ranade

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vulture character Jatayu in the epic story of Ramayana. No doubt its huge wing span, powerful beak and

strong talons made it a strong candidate for a heroin the holy drama.

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Indian culture, we unfortunately forgot the Jatayu from Ramayana who sacrificed himself protecting Sita. It

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messenger of death. Talking particularly in case of Indian Customs and Culture- we have left behind many

blind faiths and have changed a lot! We are the best practitioners of reforms and equality. Education,

gender equality and medicine are a few areas worth mentioning in which we are working and achieving

great results. We need to rediscover our generous and friendly relation with wildlife!

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science, it appears to be the core of our life. Thanks to our school education - everyone knows that in

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oxygen we breathe. Almost each and every component of our

natural world is important and VULTURE is not an exception!

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populations at Keoladeo National Park in Rajasthan, we realized

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absence of these nature's sweeper army was realized by the

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ISSN: 0528-9122Cheetal Vol 56 No. 1 (2019)

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Indirectly it reduces chances of disease and spread of diseases for

which it does not charge a single rupee! Thus vultures are friends

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In the last two decades the vultures declined drastically and

scientists found its cause of death –'diclofenac' the widely used

pain killer in cattle. This drug was widely used in cattle as well as in

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'Visceral Gout' affecting vital organs and the vulture dies a painful death. In this way, more than 99% of

vultures died in India and now three Gyps species of vultures- Long-billed, Slender-billed and White-

backed vulture are on the verge of extinction. The ill effect is not restricted in these species only but also

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The vultures are slow breeders. It takes almost five years for a vulture to mature and then each year, each

pair of vulture lays single egg. If unfortunately, the egg fails to hatch, then the whole year turns out to be a

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species of vultures. In these breeding facilities, vultures are reared

and bred, so as to increase the population. The vultures born in

captivity would be released back to the places where the natural

vulture populations existed previously.

There are four Vulture Conservation Breeding Centers in India: at

Pinjore in Haryana, at Buxa tiger Reserve in West Bengal and at

Rani, Kamrup district in Assam and in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.

The centre at Pinjore was established in2001 as Vulture Care

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Setting up a breeding centre needs aviaries and birds. We have to construct aviaries for vultures that are

scientific and fulfill the basic requirements of vultures.

First of all, the perimeter of the area where the breeding centre is established was demarcated by electric

fence which also keeps wild and domestic animals away. Being an elephant prone area, it was a necessary

appliance. Step by step, the aviaries for vultures were developed. As per their use, the aviaries (houses

where vultures are kept) are named as- nursery, holding, hospital and colony aviary. We currently have five

small aviaries and a huge colony aviary at Rani. The colony is the aviary that is mainly used for maintaining

breeding birds and keeping them as wild as they exist in nature. A Closed Circuit Television Camera

installed in the colony aviary serves to monitor the vultures and their activities without disturbing them.

To establish a Vulture breeding centre, one needs the stock birds. The main challenge was to collect

vultures from the wild. We collected young vultures as well as received rescued vultures from all over the

state. A mathematical model shows that at least fifty birds of each species are required for a healthy

growing population. Two species of vultures- the White-backed and Slender-billed vultures are kept at Rani

for breeding purposes as they are naturally distributed in north east. On arriving to the breeding centre, the

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that gives the individual vulture a unique identification number for lifelong. The new vultures are

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where they can flap fly, stay in flock, feed together

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success is growing steady and successfully. The first successful breeding certainly has given immense

confidence to all of us and all nature lovers. Currently the VCBC houses 118 vultures out of which 46 are

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