

Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

Half Year Report Form

Project Title	Conservation actions to secure the recovery of <i>Gyps</i> species vultures
Country	India and Nepal (with additional work in Cambodia, Myanmar and South Africa)
Organisation	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Project Ref. No.	162/12/027
Report date	31/10/2007

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months against the agreed baseline timetable for the project (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up).

The Darwin Post-Project began in June 2007. In early July two successful meetings were held with partner organisations in Nepal and India. The meeting in India consisted of four staff from the RSPB (Richard Cuthbert, Chris Bowden, Debbie Pain and Rhys Green) along with project partners from the Bombay Natural History Society (including Asad Rahmani (BNHS director), Vibhu Prakash (BNHS Principal Scientist) and Nita Shah (head of vulture advocacy programme)) and from the Indian Veterinary Research Institute (Devendra Swarup, Head Division of Medicine, IVRI). The meeting help formalise the ongoing structure of the BNHS vulture programme, staff pay structures, new work areas and new collaborations between the RSPB, BNHS and IVRI. Areas of responsibility and plans for the coming two years were agreed. The second meeting involved Richard Cuthbert and partners at Bird Conservation Nepal, and again a timetable and work plan for the coming two years was agreed.

Further meetings to discuss vulture conservation have also recently been undertaken between the RSPB and Zoological Society of London, the RSPB and BirdLife International in Southeast Asia, and between the RSPB, ZSL, IUCN and representatives of the pharmaceutical industry (all took place in August).

MOUs have now been signed and money transferred to BNHS and BCN for areas of work in the coming year, and an additional two MOUs have been agreed between collaborating organisations in South Africa (working on safety testing alternative drugs to diclofenac). An additional two MOUs will be agreed between BNHS and BCN before the end of this financial year.

Following these agreements work on in-situ conservation efforts have continued in Nepal and two new field staff have been recruited by BCN to work on the vulture project focusing on community conservation initiatives in the south of the country. News of this work has just (29/10/2007) been reported on Yahoo's news service:

http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20071030/sc_afp/nepalconservationenvironmentwildlife_071030030431:ylt=AgAHPCPLFAvTPBDBrPaydZXPOrgF

Within India fieldworkers have begun sampling carcasses of cattle to measure levels of contamination by diclofenac and other veterinary medicines. Sampling has been completed in two of eight states. Progress at the vulture breeding centre in Haryana and West Bengal has been hampered by flooding due to unusually heavy monsoon rains, with the Haryana centre particularly badly affected. The BNHS staff ensured all the vultures were safe during this period, however the heavy floods has delayed the construction of some breeding aviaries for this season.

During April to June 2007 a nationwide road survey of vultures in India was completed as part of the previous Darwin project (surveys were planned for 2006). Four teams surveyed vultures over 5000 km of roads, across eastern, western and central India, repeating the same route as surveys originally undertaken in 1929-94, 2000, 2002 and 2003. These results have been analysed and written up for

publication in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society (*Recent changes in populations of resident Gyps vultures in India (submitted)* Prakash, V., Green, R.E., Pain D.J, Ranade, S. P., Saravanan S., Prakash, N, Venkitachalam, R., Cuthbert R., Rahmani A. R., Cunningham A. A.). The paper reports that numbers of Oriental white-backed vultures have now declined by over 99.9% since 1992, while long-billed and slender-billed vultures have declined by 96.8% of the same period. There is no evidence that declines in numbers of Oriental white-backed vultures are slowing (with annual declines of around 48%) and the situation for the species in the wild is grave.

Analysis of satellite tracking data from 3 vultures tagged in Nepal has unexpectedly shown that these birds (all Oriental white-backed vultures) unexpectedly made large movements during their non-breeding season, moving hundreds of miles and in to areas of north-east India. In contrast, during the breeding season these birds remained close to the breeding colonies and in areas where in-situ conservation efforts have been focused. The large non-breeding movements of these birds indicates that efforts to control diclofenac use and promote safe food resources in the breeding season will only protect birds for around 6-months a year, and cannot safeguard them when they move in to unprotected areas: calling in to question the long-term benefits of some in-situ conservation efforts.

Safety testing work has recently (mid-October) begun in South Africa to establish if another veterinary non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) is of low toxicity to vultures, and can be used as a second alternative to help replace diclofenac in South Asia. Initial results are positive, however three more phases of testing are required to fully establish the safety of the drug before any recommendations can be made.

The project website has been regularly updated and reports of the floods and other news is available at www.vulturerescue.org

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will effect the budget and timetable of project activities. Have any of these issues been discussed with the Department and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

The one major delay encountered has been to start on the training element for the testing of diclofenac in cattle carcasses. Previously this work has been undertaken at the University of Aberdeen, however a major aim of the project is for Indian institutions (in particular the Indian Veterinary Research Institute in partnership with BNHS) to monitor diclofenac levels within India. Establishing a new technique and a whole new level of collaboration with an organisation is difficult within India, and the training scheduled for October is now planned for February 2008. While this delay is unfortunate it has not slowed the overall carcass sampling project, as fieldwork has continued throughout the period when training was planned.

3. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

The potential timing of training in the diclofenac monitoring methods in India may create some difficulties with transferring the full extent of the first years budget within this financial year, as there is comparatively little time between completing the training and the end of March 2008. Because we are keen to test the accuracy and reliability of these methods before transferring the full equipment costs for the project, this money may need to be transferred in the following financial year. We will notify the Darwin Initiative at the earliest opportunity if this needs to take place.

Please send your **completed form by 31 October each year**