

## Project Update: July 2017

In this update I am going to report about the findings from the two field visits; preliminary survey and summer survey. The project has targeted the following activities to date:

- 1) Preliminary field visit.
- 2) To make a summer survey.
- 3) Interaction with local communities.

### 1. Preliminary Field Visit

Two days' preliminary field visit was done during May 2017 (7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>). This visit was made in coordination with Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN) during the period of the National Highway Transect Vulture Survey, 2017. Two field biologist from BCN; Ishwori Chaudhari and Ankit Joshi trained me about the field survey method of raptors in hilly terrain.

### 2. Summer Survey

Summer survey was carried out in June 2017 following the road transects of the accessible area a vehicle. This survey was conducted in assistant with Prateek Pandey and Chiranjeevi Khanal (both are the final year students of BSc Forestry). Absolute count of vultures was done sighted along the road transects and recorded in the field sheet. Additionally, we also scanned the possible area from some vantage points. The identified species of vultures were categorised as adult, sub-adult, juvenile and unidentified. Similar type of categorisation was followed during the highway transect survey of vultures in Nepal by BCN. We used the information provided in the field guide book named "Birds of Nepal" (Grimmett *et al.*, 2003) for the confirmation of each individual's category. Geographic location of the sighting point was taken with hand held GPS (Garmin Etrex 10). Another same type of GPS was used to record the track we followed. We also made a record of habitats where vultures were sighted.

All together we sighted 36 individuals of four different vulture species (35 identified and one unidentified). The details of each identified vulture species is presented in the Table (1). All individuals sighted were found to be soaring around the different habitats (forest, urban area and village area).

Table 1: Vultures of Different Life Stages Recorded in Salyan District during Summer Survey 2017

Species	Number of each species in all transects				Total
	Adult	Sub-adult	Juvenile	Unidentified	
Egyptian Vulture	10	2	0	0	12
Red-headed Vulture	5	0	0	1	6
Himalayan Griffon	12	1	0	0	13
Bearded Vulture	4	0	0	0	4
Unidentified				1	1
Total	32	3		1	36

The area covered during the survey and vultures' sighting sites is depicted in Figure 1.

# Vulture Sighting Distribution in Salyan District, Nepal

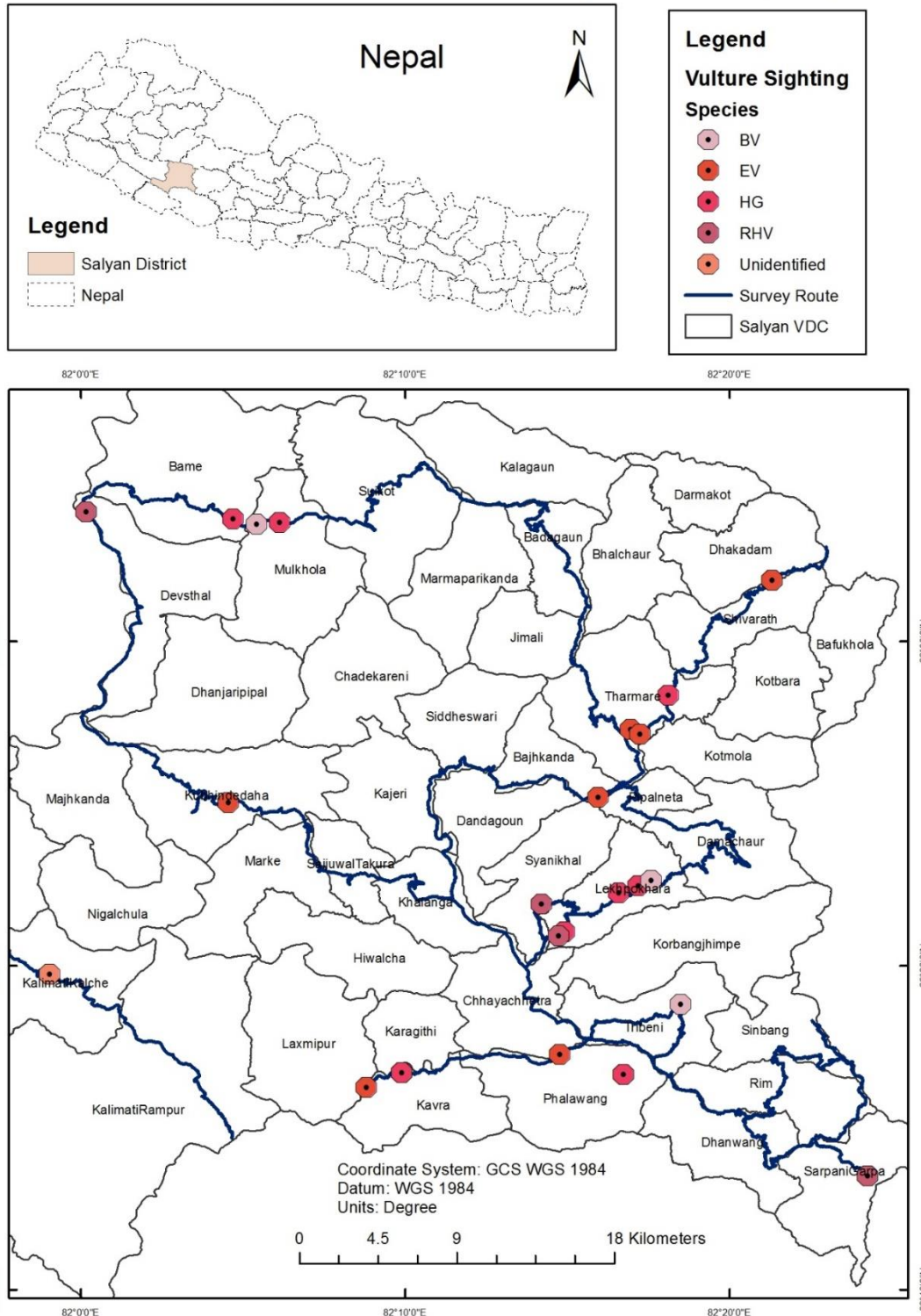


Figure 1: Sighting distribution map of different vulture species during June, 2017 in Salyan District, Nepal. Legend acronyms; BV – Bearded Vulture, HG – Himalayan Griffon, RHV – Red-headed Vulture, EV – Egyptian Vulture.

### 3. Interaction with Local People

When vulture was sighted around the settlement areas we made a short interaction with local teachers, youths, elites and social workers. It was helpful to know the nesting

sites of vultures if any presence over there. Also, we were able to know how people distinguish vultures from other raptors, how frequently vultures used to visit those areas, the peoples' impression of their general trend of population; increasing or decreasing and the perceived local reason for their disappearance. We came to know that local people are used to categorise raptors as "carcass eating vultures" and "hen and pullet eating vultures"; the former term was used to call for the real vulture species while the latter one was used for the hunting birds (kite, eagle, falcon). People have provided a local name to each vulture species found over there which is different from our own native (Nepali) name. Table 2 provides the detail information in regard to this.

Table 2: Vultures of Salyan: Scientific, Common English, Common Nepali and Confined Name in

Scientific Name	Common English Name	Common Nepali Name	Local Name	Reason behind the Local Name
<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>	Bearded Vulture	Hardfore giddha	Hade giddha	Its feeding behavior
<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	Egyptian Vulture	Seto giddha	Guiye giddha	Its availability in dumping sites
<i>Sacrogyps calvus</i>	Red headed Vulture	Sun giddha	Bhale giddha	Presence of wattles like in hen
<i>Gyps himalayansis</i>	Himalayan Griffon	Himali giddha	-	-

All respondent responses indicated that vultures were very sparse in their locality in comparison to 10 to 15 years before. Most of them said that in the past they used to see hundreds of vultures feeding carcasses along the river, stream and pasture areas. Being surprised they also add in their statement that all of a sudden vulture have been moved away from here and asked me cross question; where are they gone? Do you know? One of the respondent from Bame VDC replied me that a decade ago, he had found 10 to 12 vultures found dead after feeding the carcass of buffalo flooded by Bheri river. Showing towards a cliff in front of his house he claimed that many vultures used to live in those cliffs during winter season and flew away after 10 to 15 days. But now that cliff is almost unoccupied. We have found a nest (species is unconfirmed) in the same cliff. People said that the change in disposal practice of dead livestock in their locality might be the major reason of for decreased sighting of vultures in their locality. Some people also added that disturbance in their habitat (cliff) because of road construction might be another reason for their vanishing. Some people also predicted that the medicine provided to livestock might also have bad effect to vultures; however, they were not sure on their statement as they have not listened to any news in regard to this.

After gathering local knowledge about vultures from each respondent we provided them the actual reason behind the catastrophic declination of vultures in the world. We explained to them how diclofenac leads vulture toward the mouth of death and then requested them to throw their dead livestock in open fields, far from human settlements, only if they were not provided any kind of veterinary drugs before their death.



Fig 2: An adult Himalayan Griffon soaring in sky captured at Damachaur VDC



Figure 3: Interaction with one of the local pastoralist



Figure 4: A portion of study area showing the road transect surveyed



Figure 5: Discussing about different vulture species found in Nepal with local people at the vulture sighting point