

## **Project Update: May 2010**

The purpose of the project is multi-fold:

1. Provide Diclofenac-free food to vultures in a secure and undisturbed location.
2. Create awareness among local inhabitants about the need to conserve vultures through publications and education programmes.
3. Work with veterinarians to prevent the use and diversion of human Diclofenac for treatment of cattle.
4. Conduct regular vulture census in the region.

### *Feeding Sites*

For the past 4 months, Nature Club Surat has been assisted by grant received from Rufford. The primary utilization of the grant has been for providing Diclofenac-free food. The carcass is collected from cattle owners or farms, once we have thoroughly ascertained that the animal was not treated with Diclofenac. In order to ensure that this is the case, the club has conducted awareness programmes at all the major cattle farms around Surat. The cattle owners report death of any cattle at their farm and the club arranges to move the carcass to the feeding site. By having numerous farms on its contact list, the club ensures that the carcasses are available on a daily basis. The carcass is typically collected at dawn and moved to the feeding site at around 11:00 AM. The vultures have now become familiar with the feeding site and arrive early, expecting the feed. Once the carcass is unloaded and the vehicle moves away, the vultures start approaching the carcass. The feeding exercise is thus accomplished. On average, 60 vultures are observed at the feeding site.

The programme is now being extended to other sites as well. We recently extended the programme to Valsad, around 90 km away. The carcass was transported from Surat and the feeding site was tried out on a pilot basis for 3 days. About 40 vultures came to this feeding site.

According to earlier records, only 18 vultures were recorded in this area. We are making efforts to extend this programme to other sites in Gujarat as well.

### *Awareness Programmes*

The awareness programmes are primarily conducted in schools and villages where the vultures nest or roost. The programme is currently conducted in 12 schools of this area and consists of:

- a. Presentations and awareness seminars.
- b. Field trips to vulture sites.
- c. Involving teachers and local residents.

The details of the conducted programmes are provided below:

2nd January 2010: Vulture Watch Programme was arranged with the students of Navchetan School, Junagam. Ten students of Eco club and a teacher Mr. Satishbhai participated in this programme. We visited vultures' roosting and nesting sites in Junagam, Rajgari and Suwali. The school students showed good interest in vultures. They showed us four new vultures' nests. During this site visit programme we found three dead white-rumped vultures *Gyps*

*bengalensis* (two at Junagam and one at Suwali village). In Limbadi Falia of Junagam village one dead white-rumped vulture was on the palm tree and another was on the ground at same place; one adult was found dead in the nest in Suwali village. This programme was very successful and now students are interested in conducting a regular watch on vultures around them. We tried to send one dead body of white-rumped Vulture to the Vulture Care and Breeding Centre (VCBC), Pinjore for biological analysis but unfortunately no courier agency is ready to deliver this specimen.

3rd January 2010: Vulture feeding site visit - 12 members have participated in the Vulture Watch Programme at a vulture feeding site in Hazira. We observed 65 vultures.

5th January 2010: Vulture feeding site visit - Mr & Mrs Michelle have been birding in Gujarat for several years and this time they specially came to see the vultures at Nature Club Surat's vulture feeding site and observed 52 vultures.

8th January 2010: A workshop on 'Injured Birds during Kite Flying Festival' was arranged jointly by Veer Narmad South Gujarat University (VNSGU) and the Forest Department, Gujarat State. We were invited to give a presentation on 'The Effect of Kite Flying Festival on Vultures' and was presented by Dhiraj Shetty, Volunteer of Nature Club Surat.

22nd January 2010: An awareness programme on vultures and snakes was arranged in Uttari Buniyadi Ashram Shala of Variav-Tadwadi with the help of Mr Pravin Boricha. Our volunteers explained about various species of snakes, first aid, blind beliefs and shown live specimens. After this snake show 'The Vanishing Vulture' film was shown to them and we explained the current situation of vultures and they gave the surety to convey the same message among the veterinarians and shepherds in their nearby area.

26th January 2010: Nav Chetan School of Junagam village have participated in a child congress science fair and prepared a project on 'Let's Save Vultures' with help of Nature Club Surat - this project was selected to the national level. On the occasion of Republic Day, the school appreciated the Nature Club Surat work on vulture conservation and the great support to take a project on national level.

Nature Club Surat has started a vulture feeding site at Hazira with the support of Forest Department, Gujarat State. We have dumped carcasses 23 times during January 2010 and this tough task is initiatively taken by Mr. Pravin Boricha and his team. We have observed on average 57 vultures in January.

#### *Medical Alternative to Diclofenac*

The club has conducted meetings with veterinarians in South Gujarat to ensure the use of alternatives to Diclofenac. The club supplies veterinarians with Meloxicam at subsidized rates.