

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE

LOK SABHA
STARRED QUESTION No. *395
TO BE ANSWERED ON 19.07.2019

Decline in Population of Vultures

*395. SHRI BIDYUT BARAN MAHATO:
SHRI GAJANAN KIRTIKAR:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE be pleased to state:

- (a) whether the Government has carried out any survey on species of vultures and if so, the details of the said survey;
- (b) whether the population of certain species of vultures has declined more than 90 percent in many parts of the country, if so, the details thereof and the reasons for the same;
- (c) whether any Vulture Breeding Centres have been set up by the Government in collaboration with State Governments which are working for its conservation in the country;
- (d) if so, the details thereof along with the Central financial assistance sanctioned for the purpose during each of the last three years and the current year; and
- (e) the other steps taken/being taken by the Government for protection and conservation of species of vultures?

ANSWER

MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE
(SHRI PRAKASH JAVADEKAR)

(a), (b), (c), (d) and (e)

A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PARTS (a), (b), (c) (d) and (e) OF THE LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. *395 REGARDING DECLINE IN POPULATION OF VULTURES RAISED BY SHRI BIDYUT BARAN MAHATO AND SHRI GAJANAN KIRTIKAR DUE FOR REPLY ON 19.07.2019.

- (a) & (b) Nation-wide vulture surveys are carried out by Bombay Natural Society (BNHS) every four year sponsored by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and the Forest Departments of various States since 1990. The surveys are carried out mainly for three species of critically endangered resident Gyps vultures, White-backed Vulture, Long-billed Vulture and Slender-billed Vulture. These three species were very common in the Country with an estimated population of 40 million in early eighties. Based on the latest survey carried out in the year 2015 and the results published in 2017, there were about 6000 White-backed Vultures, 12000 Long-billed Vultures and 1000 Slender-billed Vultures.

There has been a sharp decline in the vulture populations. The crash in population was first noticed in the mid nineties and by 2007, there was a 99% decline in the population of three resident Gyps species of vulture. By the year 2011, the population though very small appeared to be establishing but during the year 2015, it was noticed that the White-backed Vulture population was still stable but was still declining for Long-billed Vulture.

The major cause of mortality of vultures was found to be the veterinary non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug 'Diclofenac', given to cattle in pain and inflammation. The 'Diclofenac' was found to be extremely toxic to vultures and causes renal failure. The Government of India banned the veterinary use of the drug in the year 2006 which was Gazetted in the year 2008 but the misuse of the multi-dose vials of human formulation of the drug in treating cattle was still causing mortality in vulture. The Government of India in the year 2015 imposed a restriction and directed that only vials of 3 ML of 'Diclofenac' could be used for human consumption instead of 30 ML earlier.

- (c) & (d) For *Ex-situ* conservation of vultures, eight (08) Vulture Conservation Breeding Centres were established in the different States of the country.

Four of the centres, Pinjore in Haryana (established in 2004), Rajabhatkhawa (established in 2006) in West Bengal, Rani in Assam (established in 2009) and Kerwa near Bhopal (established in 2008) are managed by respective State Forest Departments with support from Bombay Natural History Society and Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

Four more centres i.e. Junagarh in Gujarat (established 2006), Nandankanan in Odisha (established 2006), Hyderabad in Telangana (established 2006) and Muta

in Ranchi are established in the State Zoos and are being run by State Forest Department with support from Central Zoo Authority (CZA) of MoEF&CC and technical support from Bombay Natural History Society.

The Ministry has been providing financial support for the Vulture Conservation to different States under the Recovery Programme for Vultures under the Component “Recovery programme for saving critically endangered species and habitats” of CSS-Development of Wildlife Habitats.

Year-wise details of funds (Rs Lakh) released for Vulture conservation is as follows:

(Amount Rs. in lakhs)

S.No	States	FY 2016-17	FY 2017-18	FY 2018-19	Current FY 2019-20
i	Punjab	-	-	-	-
ii	Haryana	116.0472	181.4448	122.304	-
iii.	Kerala	16.58	21.792	25.498	-
iv.	West Bengal	-	79.44	110.04	-
v.	Uttarakhand	-	580.23	-	-

The Ministry has sanctioned a project to Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI), Uttar Pradesh titled “Assessing the safety to vulture (*Gyps spp.*) of non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID’s) in veterinary use in India”. The total project cost is Rs. 2.71 Cr for a period of 3 years. The project is being implemented by IVRI in collaboration with Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). An amount of Rs. 30.00 lakh has been released to IVRI as part of the installment during the FY 2018-19.

- (e) The steps taken by Government for protection and conservation of Vultures in the country includes:
- i. Protection status of White backed, Long Billed and Slender Billed Vultures has been upgraded from Schedule IV to Schedule I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
 - ii. To conserve the remnant population of vultures in the country and also to facilitate the reintroduction of vultures into the wild from Vulture Conservation Breeding Centres (VCBCs), attempts are being made to create Vulture Safe Zones in the areas where there are vulture populations. The area in a radius of 100 km around the VCBCs is made secure by community participation by ensuring that there is no use of vulture toxic veterinary NSAID’s, there is enough food and habitat and there is no other threat to vultures. This is done by targeted advocacy and awareness programme.

- iii. There are eight (08) identified vulture safe zones in the Country which includes Pinjore in Haryana, Rajabhatkhawa in West Bengal, around Majuli Island in Assam, Bukswaha in Bundelkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Dudhwa National Park and Katerniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary in Uttar Pradesh, Hazaribagh in Jharkhand, Central Gujarat and Saurashtra in Gujarat.
- iv. The Ministry has also taken initiatives to strengthen the mass education and awareness for vulture conservation in the Country.
- v. The Government of India has formulated a National Action Plan (2006) on Vulture Conservation. The Action Plan provides for strategies, actions for containing the decline of vulture population through *ex-situ*, *in-situ* vulture conservation.
- vi. The Government of India banned the veterinary use of the drug 'Diclofenac' which was found to be the cause of vulture mortality and crash in vulture population.
- vii. The Government of India also restricted the packaging size of the human formulation of the diclofenac drug to 3ml in July 2015 to prevent the misuse of multi-dose vials available in 30 ml presentation in treating cattle.
- viii. Department of forests of all states/UTs has been requested to constitute a Monitoring committee for vulture conservation with a view to implement the Action Plan, 2006 and for recovery of existing vulture sites.
- ix. The Ministry has initiated the Vulture reintroduction programme. As part of it, two Himalayan Griffon Vultures were released from the Vulture Breeding Centre, Pinjore, Haryana in the year 2016.
- x. The Ministry has reconstituted the "National Vulture Recovery Committee" to oversee and guide vulture conservation and recovery efforts at the National Level.
- xi. Testing of "Non Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs" (NSAID's) on Vultures (*Gyps spp.*) is being carried out by Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI), Uttar Pradesh with support from the Ministry and BNHS.
