

Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

Half Year Report Form

Project Title	Conservation of critically endangered <i>Gyps</i> spp. vultures in India
Country	India
Organisation	Zoological Society of London
Project Ref. No.	162/10/013
Report date	October 2002

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months against the agreed baseline timetable for the project.

In May, Andrew Cunningham & Jemima Parry-Jones (Director, National Birds of Prey Centre, U.K.) ran a training workshop on the care, husbandry and management of captive vultures and on basic techniques for diagnostic sample collection. This workshop was attended by eight trainees: three BNHS staff employed to run and manage the Vulture Care Centre, two other BNHS staff involved in the vulture conservation project and three local Haryana Forestry Department staff. The latter attended as they may become involved in running the Vulture Centre in the long-term.

Over the past six-month period, much of the time of project employees in India has been taken up with conducting repeat nation-wide surveys of *Gyps* spp. populations. These were conducted from May to July and covered approximately 11,000 kilometres. At the time of writing, the results of the surveys are being analysed, but initial indications are that the white-backed vulture population has continued to decline dramatically throughout its range in India.

In September, the ZSL held a Scientific Symposium on the Vulture Declines in South Asia, at which the current Darwin Project was highlighted in talks by Andrew Cunningham (ZSL) and Debbie Pain (RSPB). A press release on the project was sent out to coincide with the Symposium and resulted in articles being published in *The Guardian* and *New Scientist on-line*.

Unfortunately, the cause of the vulture declines has not yet been determined. This is proving to be far more intractable a problem than we had originally anticipated. We were, therefore, extremely pleased to obtain permission to submit diagnostic samples to the CSIRO Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL) and a further £[redacted] was raised from the ZSL & RSPB to pay for diagnostic work at AAHL. Andrew Cunningham (funded by the RSPB) visited AAHL in July in order to guide the diagnostic work on these samples. During this visit, support in-kind for future diagnostic work on vulture samples was obtained from AAHL. Support has also been obtained from Synermed, a company that manufactures biochemistry analysers. This company has donated a £[redacted] machine plus technical support to the project. The machine will be sited in the laboratory at the Vulture Care Centre and will greatly improve our ability to determine a clinical definition of the disease process, which is causing the high vulture mortality and declines.

Due to staffing problems (see below), only one sick vulture was caught for study at the Vulture Care Centre during the reporting period.

One paper is currently in press with the journal *Biological Conservation*. A second paper has recently been submitted to the journal, *Animal Conservation*. Finally, agreement was finalised for a television documentary company to film the vulture project. This will take place in January 2003.

Although outside the current reporting period, it should be noted that in early November a wildlife veterinarian (Romain Pizzi) started a 6-month visit from the U.K. to the Vulture Care Centre. This visit is in a voluntary capacity, with expenses covered by ZSL. The aim of the visit is to help to improve the

clinical and post-mortem diagnostic investigations, to complete the setting-up of the diagnostic laboratory at the Centre and to train BNHS staff further in vulture husbandry and diagnostic techniques, including use of the new Synermed biochemistry analyser.

Other developments include £[REDACTED] funding secured from the British High Commission, New Delhi, to pay for satellite tracking of Eurasian griffon (*Gyps fulvus*) vultures in India. Eurasian griffons overwinter in India. Their summer breeding sites are unknown, but are likely to be to the north and west of India and these birds are, therefore, likely conduits for the spread of the vulture mortality factor out of India.

Finally, a pre-proposal has been submitted to the latest funding round of the Darwin Initiative to expand on the work of the current project, with the primary aim of detecting and mitigating the effects of the spread of the mortality factor into other range countries of the *Gyps* genus of vultures.

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?

With the siting of the Vulture Care Centre in Pinjore, Haryana instead of in Bharatpur, Rajasthan (as originally planned), several BNHS field staff central to the project decided not to translocate to Pinjore. This has meant that time has been taken up finding replacement staff local to Pinjore, during which time some of the work plan (primarily monitoring vulture colonies and catching sick vultures) has been held up. The staffing situation has now been rectified and we are hopeful that the work plan will soon be back on course.

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

None

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