

Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species

Half Year Report Form

Project Title	Prediction and management of <i>Gyps</i> vulture declines
Country	India, Nepal, Georgia, South Africa, Kazakhstan
Organisation	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Project Ref. No.	162/12/027
Report date	15/11/2004

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).

Two peer reviewed articles have recently been published:

Shultz, S., Baral, H.S., Charman, S., Cunningham, A.A., Das, D., Ghalsasi, G.R., Goudar, M.S., Green, R.E., Jones, A., Nighth, P., Pain, D.J., & Prakash, V. (2004) Diclofenac poisoning is widespread in declining vulture populations across the Indian subcontinent. *Proc.Royal Soc.London B*.suppl. DOI: 10.1098/rsbl.2004.0223

Green, R.E., Ian Newton, I., Shultz, S., Baral, H.S., Cunningham, A.A., Gilbert, M., Pain, D.J., & Prakash, V. (2004) Diclofenac poisoning as a cause of vulture population declines across the Indian subcontinent. *Journal of Applied Ecology* 41: 793-800.

Considerable publicity has resulted from the publication of these papers (particularly Green *et al.* 2004). This publicity includes an interview with Rhys Green on BBC Radio 4 Today Programme (7:00 am on Friday 1st October 2004, and at 7:40 on BBC Asia network), the BBC's science online website (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/3708078.stm), Asia Pacific News for the 1st October (http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_asiapacific/view/109481/1/.html), Yahoo news 1st October (http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=story&cid=1539&ncid=1539&e=7&u=/afp/20041001/sc_afp/environment_species_041001001013) and Medical News Today (<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/medicalnews.php?newsid=14326#>).

Two additional papers are in prep on population declines in *Gyps* and other scavenging species. One further paper has been written and will shortly be submitted detailing the migration route of *Gyps fulvus* and *Gyps himalayensis* from Northern India (Shultz, S., Pain, D.J., Cunningham, A.A. & Prakash, V. *in prep.* Long distance migration in Asian *Gyps fulvus* and *G. himalayensis* and the potential risks for exposure to diclofenac poisoning in the Indian subcontinent). This last piece of research was jointly funded by the UK High Commission in India and the RSPB.

Testing of *Gyps africanus* to diclofenac in South Africa has shown them to be at least as sensitive as the Asian *Gyps* species and preliminary testing of *Gyps fulvus* in Spain suggests that this species is also as sensitive. Safety testing of meloxicam as an alternative to diclofenac is currently underway in South Africa as a most urgent research priority.

We are in regular contact with both state and central government in India over issues arising from this project. This includes a meeting convened by the Indian central government (20th April 2004) between the pharmaceutical industry and conservation organisations, which was attended by Dr Deborah Pain (RSPB). Following a request from state and central governments to the Bombay Natural History Society we have submitted a report summarising initial results on the safety testing of alternatives to diclofenac. As a result of the work undertaken by this project the State Government of Gujarat has stopped the state supported purchase of diclofenac for veterinary use: the first Indian State to make such a move.

The profile and scope of the project has been raised considerably through a vulture appeal fund launched in the RSPB Birds magazine and the RSPB website (<http://www.rspb.org.uk/international/vultures/index.asp>). The RSPB has committed considerable funds towards captive breeding in India, and the employment of two full-time staff (1 based in India and 1 in the UK) to undertake advocacy in India and to manage advocacy and conservation action in relation to the captive breeding program.

Three *Gyps fulvus* were captured in Georgia and fitted with satellite-transmitters, data will be obtained on the migration route of these birds over the winter.

The project website has been updated and the report from the vulture recovery plan workshop is now available on line (<http://www.vulturedeclines.org/page2.html>).

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?

Kazakhstan- Five birds were scheduled to be trapped and fitted with satellite transmitters between May-July 2004. Due to logistic and personnel issues, these birds were not trapped. These tags have been returned to the UK and it is planned that two tags will be deployed on vultures in Cambodia, with the remaining tags deployed in India.

Nepal- Permissions have not yet been obtained for the captive breeding centre in Nepal and it is unclear whether political instability will ultimately delay or prevent the construction of a captive breeding centre. Permission has been obtained for alternate breeding centres in India and it may be necessary to move the location of the proposed centre. A decision regarding these events will be made in early December, following a visit by Andrew Cunningham to Nepal in mid-November.

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

Recent discoveries of *Gyps bengalensis* and *Gyps tenuirostris* in South-east Asia (Cambodia and Myanmar) indicate the potential for important populations of these species in this region. Investigating the size of these populations, determining (through satellite tracking) whether they are migratory or resident, and protecting these populations is a priority for the future. Cooperative discussions have been established with WCS-Cambodia, BirdLife International Indochina and WWF Cambodia to continue work in this region, and the RSPB will be committing two satellite tags to track birds in this region.

From 28 September there will be a change in project staff. The project manager will now be Richard Cuthbert rather than Susanne Shultz. Deborah Pain remains the project leader.

Please send your **completed form by 31 October each year per email** to Stefanie Halfmann, Darwin Initiative M&E Project Manager, Email: stefanie.halfmann@ed.ac.uk