

# Darwin Initiative: Half Year Report

(due 31 October 2009)

<b>Project Ref. No.</b>	EIDPO022
<b>Project Title</b>	Conservation actions to secure the recovery of Gyps species vultures
<b>Country(ies)</b>	India and Nepal
<b>UK Organisation</b>	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
<b>Collaborator(s)</b>	Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN), Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI), Zoological Society of London (ZSL), International Centre for Birds of Prey (ICBP)
<b>Project Leader</b>	Dr Richard Cuthbert (RSPB)
<b>Report date</b>	31 October 2009
<b>Report No.</b>	Half year report number 3
<b>Project website</b>	<a href="http://www.vulturerescue.org">www.vulturerescue.org</a>

## **1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – September) 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).**

New staff recruited within India (Dr Puja Basu and Dr Bhriugu Kumar Neog) to undertake carcass sampling (in addition to other essential vulture work) have successfully collected over 300 carcass samples from Punjab and West Bengal. These samples have been delivered to the IVRI, where they have already been extracted prior to analysis for diclofenac. The 1250 samples collected in 2008 were all extracted at IVRI and duplicate samples were delivered to Spain, to be analysed using a verified method for detecting nine different NSAIDs. Monitoring of NSAIDs sold in pharmacies has continued in both Nepal and India. A recent survey of 125 agro vets in Nepal, revealed that 12 shops were still selling diclofenac, and only 2 agro vets were unaware of the impact of diclofenac on vultures. Nine technical seminars have been delivered to veterinary professionals in Nepal, with over 400 participants (and 273 vets) in attendance.

Recent training workshops have been run within India, led by ZSL, ICBP and RSPB to improve the captive management of vultures at the breeding centre. A training workshop on incubation is currently underway at the Pinjore centre, organised by ICBP and RSPB. ZSL are planning a visit to Nepal's breeding centre in November 2009, to undertake essential training on captive husbandry and management. Visits to the UK and Spain were made by two of the project's staff from Nepal. BCN Field Biologist Tulsi Ram Subedi received one of the 25 places on the Second Darwin Scholarship Programme, run by the Field Studies Council in August 2009. BCN Vulture Officer Anand Chaudhary presented talks on Nepal's vulture programme at the annual meeting of the Raptor Research Foundation, held in Scotland in September, as well as attending and speaking at the Eagle Conservation Alliance meeting in Spain in early October.

Work on the four in-situ conservation sites in Nepal has continued, with a new emphasis to promote these as "Vulture Safe Zones". Training of local groups to monitor of vulture numbers and NSAIDs within these sites has been successfully given to 6 local groups. In-situ conservation efforts within Gujarat, continue but in the face of continued steep declines in vulture numbers. BNHS have recruited a new field biologist to help oversee the colony monitoring and in-situ conservation efforts in Gujarat.

Recent research work has uncovered some problems with the manufacture of Asian brands of meloxicam (products cause short-term pain in injected animals), and revealed that issues of how the drugs are manufactured in Asia are responsible for these problems. We are working in with experts from Boehringer Ingelheim (the pharmaceutical company that developed meloxicam in Europe) to help guide Indian and Nepalese companies on how meloxicam can be

correctly formulated.

Analysis of colony counts within Nepal from the last 8 years has revealed that rates of decline in Nepal have averaged 17-21% a year over this period. At sites where local conservation activities has been initiated, populations have grown at an average annual rate of 20% since the initiation of conservation actions in 2005/06. These increases are likely to be a result of immigration as well as recruitment. Population modelling, based upon the foraging behaviour of satellite tagged vultures, indicate that vulture safe zones will need a radius of around 100 km in order to provide sufficiently large areas to support a self-sustaining population.

Preparation of Nepal's 6-monthly vulture newsletter are underway, although delayed from the original timetable of June of this year. The first newsletter is currently being finalised and format agreed with the printers.

**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 affect the budget and timetable of project activities.**

The main difficulty encountered in the last 6 months has been with the running of the diclofenac testing procedures using the ELISA methodology. This aspect of the work programme had previously been delayed due to problems ordering and importing the correct equipment. All 1250 carcass samples have been extracted at IVRI (and duplicates sent to Spain), however after successfully running 300 samples with the ELISA, the procedure stopped working in June of this year. The extreme monsoon temperatures at this time may have been responsible for the problem. New ELISA anti-bodies and equipment was ordered to set up the apparatus again. Despite these steps, technical difficulties are still being encountered. If reliable analysis using an ELISA method proves impossible, then the project will need to investigate other options in order to succeed with monitoring of carcasses within India and Nepal. Any new approach will have to be made beyond the end of this Darwin project and the RSPB and partners will seek new funds to enable this to occur.

Carcass sampling within Nepal has been slow to take off, as the absence of large carcass dumps makes collecting large numbers of samples difficult to achieve and means that cattle skimmers need to be individually recruited to the programme in order to obtain liver samples. Efforts to expand the network of skimmers (who are each paid a small fee) are being continued.

Some issues have arisen with raising funds for and the management of the new breeding centre in Nepal. Meetings between project partners in Nepal, and with the RSPB and ZSL are underway to resolve these problems and provide a firmer commitment to the breeding centre.

**Have any of these issues been discussed with the Darwin Secretariat and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?**

These are new issues that have been raised have all arisen in the last four months of the project, and as we are still working to try to overcome these difficulties the issues have not been raised with the Darwin Secretariat prior to this report. Problems with the ELISA methodology have now caused delays in the project's original schedule and work plan, as has been previously raised with the Darwin Secretariat and with the extension of the project.

**Discussed with the DI Secretariat:** No            **no/yes, in..... (month/yr)**

**Changes to the project schedule/workplan:**    **no/yes, in.....(month/yr)**

**3. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to Darwin's management, monitoring, or financial procedures? No**