

# **Vulture Conservation Project by Nature Club Surat**

## **“Vulture Culture” in NCS**

From last decade, all nature lovers and environmentalist, in the whole world are very much concern & worried about a very serious issue of enormous declination in Vulture population in India & subcontinents. Lots of efforts have been putting up by many governmental & non-governmental organizations in India, which are still not enough. Here I would like to draw attention to mammoth efforts of dedicated volunteers from Nature Club Surat, working days & nights to save our last & the important elements in food chain.

Vulture conservation project is one of the major projects started by Nature Club Surat in the year of 2005. The project proposal was put up in 2004 and the fieldwork started in January 2005. This project was based on 6 simple & basic steps like,

- 1.) Observation in regions where these birds are found, study their activities & collect appropriate useful data.
- 2.) Check the data & Plan as per the study that what are the steps to be taken in direction of conservation.
- 3.) Act as per the plan & situation to carry out direct & indirect efforts.
- 4.) Check out-put, and make sure that all the efforts putting up by the volunteers is on the right path.
- 5.) Contact experts and take corrective Steps if required as per their experience.
- 6.) Continue above 5 steps during through out the project.

‘Vulture Team’ of NCS (Nature Club Surat) started their fieldwork from local areas to collect proper data of Vultures. Hazira (one of the biggest industrial areas of India), in Surat district is one of the three places in Gujarat where the vultures breed regularly since a long time. Vulture team explored the huge area of Hazira; first of all they located nesting and rusting places there and set them on GPS (Global Positioning System). Some of the useful observation that we got were as under,

### Observations on Vultures

- 01 White beck Vultures used tall palm trees with lots of leaves for nesting or roosting.
- 02 It was noticed that trees used for their roosting or nesting, the leaves were whitish in color and bend more than the others.
- 03 The colors of the leaves were due to the droppings of the birds and

the bend is due to its weight.

- 04 It was very difficult to notice the nest as it was well hidden. Nests were made on the base, intersection of trunk and the leaves so one could easily mistake it for debris of the palm. But the color of the leaves and shape were an indication for their roosting or nesting.
- 05 They broke the splinters of the palm leaves to make a good sitting place.
- 06 In most of the trees, it was observed that reef heron shared the nesting site. In many cases it was like an extension of the main nest. Like an anti-room next to main bedroom.
- 07 Sitting side by side near the nest vulture and reef heron made very odd pair. They seem to enjoy the company very well.
- 08 The parents brought the meals well hidden in their body. On arrival one could see nothing in their beak. Then they made some vomiting type action in front of the chick. Meat pieces have come out of their beak and that was well received by the chick.
- 09 Roosting and nesting tree were different and they were near by not like other birds.
- 10 Parent or adult vultures were found to roost in the standing position folding their neck behind its body.
- 11 Chicks rested in the nest like a hen. One of the chicks was as big as an adult (I thought so) but in the evening it was found that it was still a chick as it sat in the nest like a hen and others went to other tree to rest.
- 12 For roosting in the night they preferred groups. Saw nine to ten birds in the same palm.
- 13 Very few birds preferred to sit or three together for roosting, on close observation it was found that their chick was very small.
- 14 Chicks not sub-adults had feathers in their neck.

Then we started searching for the places where most of the Vultures land for the food, & found that 'Panjarapor' and its waste disposal area is the favorable for Vultures. So we arranged meeting with so many veterinary doctors and 'Panjarapor' to avoid the use of Diclofenec-the killer drug for Vultures. Not only this, NCS wrote letters to most of the 'Panjarapor' in the whole India in three different languages, their local language, Hindi and in English, describing the effect of this killer drug with all the color photographs. NCS got good enough positive reply from many of them & today they are not using Diclofenec drug as a painkiller for the cattle.

One day we got good news that this Diclofenec drug is officially banned in India, & its use on cattle is strictly prohibited. Our Volunteers visited all the drug shops in Surat district and the near by cities who were selling Diclofenec, and stopped them by showing

the news paper cut outs and photographs as well. Today most of the panjarapore's and their veterinary doctors have stopped using this drug and have accepted Maloxicam, an alternative drug.

Along with all these activities few of our volunteers started the awareness programs in the villages near to the nesting place of vultures. As a part of this awareness program, many small-small activities were carried out, like bird watching trips for local schools of the villages, slide shows and photography exhibitions, film shows, puppet shows related to Vulture's information. We have developed many products and literatures like t-shirts & caps with a logo and slogan of Vulture Conservation Project & distributed in respected areas. Local people now have started realizing the fact that Vultures are important for their own & they must help NCS in their task.

Results started coming very fast, local school kids started noticing routing of vultures and they started informing us if they find any threat to any nest or they find any injured birds around their area. By the time numbers of volunteers have also doubled in this project & enthusiasm reached the pick. So after such good response from Surat city, and increased numbers of volunteers, we decided to move out of our region and work for other places in Gujarat where noticeable vulture population is in existence.

We came to know about a place named Mahuva-a small town near by Bhavnagar city by Miss Ruchi Dave. We found that members of Flamingo Nature Club and some individual activist like Dr. Ddiya, Dr. Gadhavi & Mr. Dhadhal were already doing their job and collected some valuable data of vulture population in their area. To study the condition senior volunteers from Nature Club Surat & Bird Conservation Society of Gujarat organized a meeting come short survey in Mahuva. Finally it was decided that NCS take initiative to give financial support for monitoring and awareness program under the banner of "VULTURE CELL" there. For regular monitoring of vultures in that area a local dedicated volunteer Mr. Haka Makvana was engaged in the job on fulltime basis. Very soon Nature Club Surat arranged closed circuit cameras, which were placed on 60 ft high tress for continual monitoring of vulture activities.

On observation it was found that one of the vultures always stayed near the nest, while the other was away. The parents made relay baby-sitting as the crows disturbed the chick. Parents brought a good amount of food in their neck *ponch*, while giving to the chick crows stole some of it. So the crows were always near the nest to get the meat. Some times they kicked the chicks out of their nest if the parents were not around, the reason for the relay baby-sitting. So if one of the parents is dead all family go with it. If one parent is dead the other will wait near the nest for it to return, on failing, it dies of starvation and chick may die of starvation or killed by the crows. After certain period of time Deep Freezer was made available in Mahuva to preserve dead vulture sample till it is sent for the lab investigation. & Mean time the same awareness activities like in Surat city were carried out in Mahuva with some local help.

It was enough data on hand till date and it was a time for hard-core direct action towards this noble efforts. On one fine day, Mr. Snehal Patel's fruitful brain got an idea of a

feeding site for Vulture where they can get Diclofenec free food. All of our vulture team members welcomed the thought with a great enthusiasm, but the problem was how to execute the idea of 'Feeding site' for vultures?

First of all we started with convincing local village people to stop Diclofenec drug as a painkiller for their cattle, and at the same time arranged so many meeting with veterinary doctors visiting local villages regularly. We showed them fact file of vanishing Vultures and shocked them by the figures, so they readily got agreed to avoid the killer drug. But they had a question of high cost of the alternative drug called Maloxicam. Even for us high cost of the drug was a problem, but some how we arranged some donation and started giving high cost Maloxicam drug at reduced cost, as chipper as Diclofenec. And along with all these activities we also started talking with solid waste dumping site of 'Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC)', from where we can get dead bodies of cows and buffalos dead in road accidents. But we make sure that the dead body is at least 4 to 5 days old so that the effect of Diclofenec drug is almost nil and it's safe for Vultures to eat.

By this way now we were regularly getting food for Vultures, and you will not believe that force of dedicated volunteers here carried out all the operations. Volunteers go to the solid waste site to take dead cattle as per the criteria, and contact the person who does skinning. After that the carcasses are taken to the feeding site, and all these activities are done at the middle of the night so that no local people get any problems. Hats off to all the volunteers for doing all these.

Working in local villages came out as a very bright result, veterinary doctors has stopped using Diclofenec and have started using Maloxicam if place of it, as they are getting it on the same reduced rates. By this way we started getting cattle 100% Diclofenec free from many villages. Local people understood about the project and came to know about many facts related to the issue. Previously villagers around the Suratcity had to spare around 700 to 800 Rs. If any of their cattle dies, and now they do not have to. The professional fellow who does skinning to get his bread-butter is also now happy from all these and our feeding site started running very smoothly this way.

These all activities have become routine by the time, and enthusiasm of volunteers reached on pick and all of they have been doing it with full of their soul. Every day when one of the volunteers reaches to the site he started finding more then 50 vultures there, and he circulates the short message service to all other volunteers to make them happier. Out put of the feeding site was damn remarkable on this stage. After some time when our jeep used to reach the vulture-feeding site, vultures used to wait for them on the ground and some times they starts walking along with the jeep trailer besides it, and start eating form the jeep trailer only. The seam used to be unbelievable.

Till date this work is still running very nicely by our volunteers, and they are happy to do it. And work is going on even very smoothly and betters everyday then before. We are trying to propagate our message and work everywhere in Gujarat and India. After seeing our work and efforts, we are now getting Meloxichem in reduced rates which we are

dispatching in so many places in Gujarat like Mahuva, Kodinar, Kacchha, etc. and planning to do it in all our the India.

I am really very thankful to all the volunteers here in Nature Club Surat who are rolling the ball in a great manner and doing a great work of Vulture Conservation Project.

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Volunteer of Nature Club Surat