

# SUSPECTED POISONING KILLS 100 VULTURES

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A study found that the population of Himalayan griffon declined by 99.9%.

At least 100 vultures — all Himalayan griffons — died of suspected poisoning in Assam.

State Forest Department officials said the carcasses were found on a paddy field in the Chhaygaon area of Kamrup district, about 45 km west of Guwahati.

The area is close to a village where at least 10 endangered vultures died after feeding on a pesticide-laced cattle carcass in February 2020.

“We rushed to the spot after receiving information. No fewer than 100 vultures had died by then. We managed to save 12 vultures and a steppe eagle, also a scavenger,” Sachin Ranade of the Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre at Rani, near Guwahati, told *The Hindu* .

## Poisoned carcass

Dimpi Bora, Divisional Forest Officer, said some bones of a goat were found near the carcasses of the vultures. “We suspect the vultures died after feeding on the poisoned carcass of the goat, but the cause of death can be ascertained after an autopsy report,” she said.

“It is high time the police investigated and punished the culprits behind such cases of poisoning. This has been happening for the past 12-15 years but no action is taken either by the police or the Forest Department,” wildlife activist Moley Baruah said.

A fortnight ago, more than 30 vultures were found dead after feeding on a poisoned carcass of a cow in Dibrugarh district of eastern Assam. Officials found some villagers had poisoned the carcass to get rid of stray dogs.

In February 2021, four Himalayan griffons were found dead in the Dhakuakhana area of Lakhimpur district. The carcasses were found near a dead cow.

## Steep decline

In January that year, poisoned carcasses of two cows claimed the lives of 23 vultures in the Dhola area of Tinsukia district in eastern Assam. These vultures belonged to the oriental white-backed and slender-billed species.

A study by the Bombay Natural History Society and other organisations in the 1990s found that the population of the Gyps group — Himalayan griffon, white-backed and slender-billed are among its members — in India and Nepal declined from about 40 million by 99.9% in just two decades.

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