

VULTURE CONSERVATION PLAN TARGETS DRUG

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Drugs make their way into the vulture's system as they feed on carcasses.

The National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has cleared a plan for conserving vultures. Saliiently, the drugs that are used to treat cattle and known to poison vultures will be banned by the Drugs Controller General of India. Diclofenac, a drug used to treat cattle, was linked to kidney failure in vultures and a decline in the bird's population. Though the drug was banned in 2006, it is reportedly still available for use.

A study by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds' Centre for Conservation Science found that along with Diclofenac, there were several other drugs that were potentially toxic to vultures being used by vets for treating cattle. The drugs make their way into the vulture's system as they feed on carcasses.

The long-billed vulture (*Gyps indicus*) and the slender-billed (*G. tenuirostris*) had declined by 97%, while the white-rumped (*G. bengalensis*) declined nearly 99% between 1992 and 2007, according to an earlier estimate by the BNHS.

The 'Action Plan for Vulture Conservation 2020-2025' also proposes to establish Vulture Conservation Breeding Centres in Uttar Pradesh, Tripura, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. There would also be a conservation breeding programme for the red-headed vulture and Egyptian vulture, and at least one "Vulture Safe Zone" in every State for the conservation of the remnant populations.

There would be four rescue centres in different geographical areas: Pinjore in north India, Bhopal in central India, Guwahati in northeast India and Hyderabad in south India, as well as regular surveys to track population numbers, the plan envisages.

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