Declining vulture population

What is the issue?

With India losing more than 95% of its vulture population between 1990s and mid-2000s, the country requires urgent conservation efforts to save vultures from becoming extinct

What about the population of vultures in India?

- There are nine recorded species of vultures in India
- 4 critically endangered and 1 endangered

Why is vulture population so significant?

- Vultures clear the carcasses of dead animals (nature's cleanup crew) playing crucial role in maintaining health of the ecosystem
- Vultures have a highly acidic stomach that helps them kill disease-causing bacteria
- Reduces the health hazards associated with feral dogs that consume carcasses

What is the reason for the decline in vulture population?

- Use of the drug "**Diclofenac**" as a pain reliever in cattle results in kidney failure and death of vultures
- Myths about its medicinal healing powers results in poaching
- Quarrying and blasting of stones where vultures nest results in decline
- Power lines are killing vultures in some areas

What efforts have been taken for their conservation?

National Efforts

- India banned diclofenac for veterinary use in 2006
- Action Plan for Vulture Conservation 2020-25 was released by MoEFCC
- Vulture Conservation Breeding Programme (VCBP) was established by Central Zoo Authority and Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) for captive breeding
- Vulture Safe Zones are declared when no toxic drugs are found in

undercover pharmacy and cattle carcass surveys for two consecutive years

- The Ministry also plans on carrying out safety testing of available Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) on vulture
- Vulture restaurant has been established at Phansad wildlife sanctuary near Murud in Maharashtra

International Efforts

- Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction (SAVE) – A consortium of like-minded, regional and international organizations for conservation of south Asia's vultures

Nationwide vulture survey is held once in four years

Source: The Hindu, The Indian Express

Quickfacts

Vulture

- Family - Accipitridae - members include eagles, hawks and kites
- Type - Scavengers (consume dead organisms)
- Average lifespan – 10 to 30 years in the wild
- Reproduction - Slow breeders
- Communication - Vultures don't have a voice box. They communicate via grunts and hisses
- Unlike other raptors, vultures have weak legs and claws

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