Diclofenac Threat to Vultures

Why in news?

\n\n

The 104 birds bred at Rani, Assam face a serious threat by Diclofenac drug used in cattle.

\n\n

How is vulture population in India?

\n\n

\n
- India hosts 9 vulture species, 5 of them the highly endangered Gyps species.
\n
- Assam is naturally a suitable habitat for vultures.
\n
- It is home to 6 species, including winter visitors from the Himalayas — the Himalayan and Eurasian griffons.
\n
- The Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC) in Assam at Rani, Guwahati has 104 vultures, brought in as chicks.
\n
- It has 30 adults and sub-adults: all oriental white-backed and slender-billed.
\n
- These are 2 of the 6 species found in Assam that are old enough to be set free.
\n

\n\n

\n
- The vulture population in Assam is presently battling toxic chemicals in livestock carcasses, due to Diclofenac use.
\n

\n\n

How does diclofenac affect vultures?

\n\n

\n
- Diclofenac is a painkiller, usually injected to cattle.
\n

\n\n

\n
- The digestive system of vultures is so evolved.
\n
- This makes it possible to tolerate bacteria and natural toxins in putrefying meat.
\n
- But they are vulnerable to chemicals such as diclofenac.
\n
- Diclofenac present in the carcasses of cattle, injected as a painkiller, finds way into the vulture.
\n

\n\n



\n\n

What are the challenges in eradication?

\n\n

\n
- **Diclofenac** - Diclofenac for veterinary use was banned in 2005 but it was continued to be made for humans.
\n
- BNHS pressured the government into banning the vials (containers) of 30 ml or more in 2015.
\n
- Humans need 3-5 ml while only 30 ml or more works for cows.
\n
- But untrained veterinarians use the 30 ml vials for veterinary use, with fatal consequences for vultures.
\n
- The last of the 2015 stocks of the big vials expire by December 2018.
\n
- This is thus delaying the freedom (release) for adult vultures being reared in captivity in the State.
\n
- **Pesticides** - Even after the expiry of diclofenac stocks, there is no guarantee that the birds will be safe.
\n

- The rampant use of pesticides by farmers and more than 70,000 tea gardens is another concern.
  \n
- Villagers generally poison carcass of dead animals with pesticides to kill dogs, jackals and leopards that are a danger to livestock.
  \n
- Unfortunately, vultures that feed on these carcasses become the unintended victims.
  \n
- Recently, around 30 vultures, most of them Himalayan griffons, died in Assam, after feeding on the poisoned carcass of a goat.
  \n

\n\n

\n

- **Life cycle** - Vultures take time to mature, pair for life, breed once a year, and live up to 70 years.
  \n
- This extended cycle make captive breeding efforts challenging.
  \n

\n\n

What are the efforts to address this?

\n\n

\n

- The VCBC takes various efforts to save the birds by reducing their exposure to the fatal drug.
  \n
- Mutton is the only food given at the VCBC and goats are kept for 10-12 days before the feeding.
  \n
- This is to ensure that traces of any toxic painkiller or other chemicals are flushed out.
  \n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n\n

Quick Fact

\n\n

VCBCs

\n\n

\n
- The VCBCs are set up by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) in association with State Forest Departments.
\n
- The Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC) in Assam is at Rani, about 30 km west of Guwahati.
\n
- It is one of the 4 Vulture Conservation Breeding Centres in India.
\n
- The other three are in Pinjore (Haryana), Buxa (West Bengal), Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh).
\n

\n

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering