

Feral Dogs Emerge as Major Threat to Vultures

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Environment

Why in News?

Recently, a study highlighted that feral dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*) are actively displacing threatened vulture species at open cattle carcass dumping grounds in Rajasthan's Thar Desert.

Key Findings

Aspect	Key Research Insights
Disruption of Feeding Routines	- Vultures spend roughly half as long feeding on carcasses at open, un-fenced dumping sites compared to dog-free protected enclosures. - Packs of aggressive stray dogs' mob and chase down landing vultures, forcing birds to abandon meals or restrict feeding to short, high-stress windows.
Historical Irony & Vulture-Dog Vacuum	- The crash of Indian Gyps vulture populations in the 1990s (caused by veterinary Diclofenac poisoning) left an ecological void in carcass disposal. - Unclaimed livestock remains led to a surge in feral dog populations, which now actively block the recovery of surviving and migratory vulture species.
Affected Species	Threatens resident critically endangered species (White-rumped Vulture, Indian Vulture, Long-billed Vulture) as well as endangered/migratory raptors (Egyptian Vulture, Steppe Eagle) that rely on desert carcass dumps like Jorbeer (Bikaner) during winter.
Secondary Threat Vectors	Direct Physical Attacks- Dogs frequently attack grounded or heavy-laden birds attempting to take off. Pathogen Transmission - Feral packs act as reservoirs for Canine Distemper Virus (CDV), Canine Parvovirus (CPV), and Rabies, posing biosecurity risks to desert wildlife (e.g., Desert Fox, Chinkara, Great Indian Bustard).

Strategic Significance

- Highlights the imperative for integrated municipal solid waste and livestock carcass management in eco-sensitive zones, combining humane dog population management with carcass fencing.
- Emphasizes the need to establish **fenced "vulture restaurants"** and dog-proof feeding stations to provide safe, diclofenac-free, and competition-free food sources.
- Demonstrates how unmanaged domestic/feral predators act as invasive drivers of biodiversity decline, directly challenging ground-nesting and scavenging wildlife across arid ecosystems.



Reference

[The Hindu | Feral dogs](#)