

Press Release

Satellite Telemetry of "Vultures" in Gujarat State

Recently, the Central Government had released an action plan for the conservation of vultures for the year 2020-2025. It was released on 12th November 2020 in the memory of India's one of the best ornithologists, Padma Vibhushan Dr. Sálim Ali. It was the 124th birth anniversary of the 'Birdman'. The Gujarat Forest Department has also taken a unique scientific step in this regard, where a total of 6 (six) vultures have been tagged with solar-powered satellite tags. It is important to note that two White-rumped Vultures (WRV), three Long-billed Vultures (LBV), and one King Vulture (KV) has been tagged.

A total of 9 (nine) species of vultures are found in India, out of which eight species are recorded in the Gujarat state, off which four are resident and four are migratory. According to a study conducted between 1992 and 2007, a sharp decline of 99.9% in WRV's population and 95% in the population of other 'gyps' vultures was observed. Owing to this catastrophic decline, different species of vultures are listed under 'Critically Endangered' or other 'Threatened' categories by IUCN.

According to the report published in the year 2019, it is estimated that there are a total of 352 WRV and 285 LBV in the Gujarat state. Of which, about 45% of WRVs are found in Saurashtra where the population of Bhavnagar district, especially in the Mahuva region is believed to be stable since 2012. At present, about 52% of LBV's total population, is found in the Saurashtra region, especially in the Junagadh district.

Considering the sharp decline in the vulture population and focusing on its conservation; it is important to have in-depth scientific information about its feeding sites, migration routes and general height at which they fly, preferred roosting and breeding sites, etc. Therefore, a project on tagging vultures with satellite tags was started by the Wildlife Division, Sasan-Gir, Forest Department, Gujarat State with the approval of the Central Government. Under this project, in-depth discussions were held with international experts on the tagging of vultures and as per their guidance, six vultures were tagged with solar-powered tags, suitable for vultures.

The exercise of tagging was carried out at Sasan and Mahuva region between 12th October to 12th November 2020. Firstly, a precise and in-depth survey was carried out with the experts, and then the vultures were captured with the help of experienced and skilled trappers. Proper methodology and safety measures were followed during the tagging work. This work may provide authentic scientific information about various unknown facts about the vultures; the importance and necessity of such information are also mentioned in the action plan issued by the MoEFCC. With the help of this tagging work, information about the local migration and other movements, habitat preferences, territory, etc. can be ascertained. Such scientific information may play a significant role to plan the future conservation work of these species.

The entire exercise was carried out under the direction and guidance of Shri Shyamal Tikadar, IFS, PCCF (Wildlife) & CWLW, Gujarat State, Shri D.T. Vasavada, IFS, CCF Wildlife Circle, Junagadh, and supervision of Dr. Mohan Ram, IFS, DCF, Wildlife Division, Sasan-Gir, Gujarat. Mr. Devesh Gadhvi from The Corbett Foundation, an ornithologist having experience in tagging work, was also involved as an expert. Dr. Indra Gadhvi, Honorary Wildlife Warden of Bhavnagar district, and Dr. P. P. Dodia who has worked on the vultures in the Mahuva area were also involved as local experts during the work. From the Wildlife Division, Sasan-Gir; the Range Forest Officers,

Press Release

experienced wildlife veterinarian and local field staff had also worked and participated in the tagging work. The scientific documentation of the tagging was carried out by Dr. Dhawal Mehta and Shri Karshan Vala who are associated with the research work of the Wildlife Division, Sasan-Gir.

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Images of the vulture tagging work

Press Release



Images of the time the vultures were released after tagging.
