

Progress Report

Strengthening the local communities for in-situ conservation of critically endangered vultures in western mid-hills of Nepal



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Rationale and Objectives of the Project

Four species of vulture have been listed as critically endangered and one species as endangered due to rapid population decline within a short period. Veterinary use of diclofenac is now widely accepted as the main cause of dramatic decline in vulture numbers in South Asia. Although diclofenac is legally ban for its production and use in veterinary purpose, illegal use of human diclofenac in livestock treatment is still a serious problem.

In Arghakhanchi, ecological monitoring of globally threatened vultures has been completed and the area declared as veterinary diclofenac free zone by local government authorities under Rufford Small Grant project. The vulture breeding sites are within community forest thus there is urgency to strengthen their capacity to conduct vulture conservation activities locally. Further to it the study recommended need to institutionalize vulture conservation activities through including in their forest operation plan for sustainable conservation. Non-registered vet practitioners in the remote village are still unaware of the vulture conservation message and there are chances of illegal use of diclofenac in livestock treatment. This projects aims to extend its coverage in adjoining mid hill range where a new nest of Red-headed Vulture has been recorded recently. Nest of this vulture species has been recorded after a gap of more than ten years in Nepal. Many people are not aware about the role of vulture and its population decline in this newly explored site; due to which this project is focused in community and school children awareness and advocacy work with vet practitioners.



Major Activities and Result

Survey and Ecological Monitoring

In order to study the breeding ecology, nests were counted. The nest occupancy, breeding status and general behavior were recorded. Observations were made from the ground without disturbing the vultures. Monitoring of each nest was done to assess the nest status and breeding success for the breeding season 2014-15. Following Postupalsky (1974), an active nest was defined as a nest in which eggs had been laid, whereas an occupied nest is one in which an egg need not have been laid, but a minimum of nest building must have taken place. A nest from which a chick fledged is termed as productive or successful. Breeding success of vultures was calculated by following formula:-

$$\text{Breeding Success} = \frac{\text{No of productive nest}}{\text{No of active nest}} \times 100$$

Fourteen active nests of White-rumped Vulture were recorded and monitored in the *Pinus roxburghii* tree in Garta Khahare Khola community forest, Khahare Khola community forest and Garlam forest of Argha, Arghakhanchi. Out of 14 active nests of White-rumped Vulture, 9 nests were successful to fledge their chicks producing the breeding success result 64.28% for this breeding season.



Five active nests of Egyptian Vulture were monitored in all over the Arghakhanchi district. Out of the five active nests four nests were successful and the breeding success is 80% for this breeding season.

Thirty four active nests of Himalayan Griffon were monitored in Gherabhir cliff of Arghakhanchi. Out of 34 active nests 25 nests were successful and the breeding success is 73.52% for this breeding season.

Single nest of Bearded Vulture was monitored in Gherabhir, Arghakhanchi for this breeding season which became successful with 100% breeding success.

One nest of Red-headed Vulture was monitored in Kartike community forest, Baughapokharathok, Palpa and another one nest was monitored in Dharampani, Tansen, Palpa. Two nests were successful for this breeding season.

District Level Stakeholder Meeting in Arghakhanchi

One day district level stakeholder interaction meeting had been organized at Sandhikharka, Arghakhanchi on 20 April 2015. The programme was organized by threatened vulture's nesting site community forest

Garta Kharekhola CF with support of this project. The programme aimed to familiarize the district level stakeholders on the status and conservation of vultures



in Arghakhanchi and in the country. Presentation were made on the status and importance of vulture, conservation approach and the role of stakeholders and local communities to safeguard them from verge of extinction. Ram Narayan Mandal, Chief at District Livestock Service Office, Arghakhanchi presented the Diclofenac effect for catastrophic vulture population decline and highlighted on safe alternative Meloxicam. Chief guest District Forest Officer Krishna Prasad Dhakal, Assistant Chief District Officer Khagendra Paudel, Yog Prasad Kharel, Chief at District Agriculture Office, Binod Gaire, president of NEVLA, Ramchandra Pokhrel, FECOFUN, Dhan Bahadur Thapa, District Police Office, Narayan Pokhrel, Sandhikharka Municipality, Political Leaders, Journalist and other from related bodies disseminates their speech on Vulture Conservation Agenda and give feedback for future conservation work. Altogether 45 individuals were participated in the programme representing district level government agencies, community forests, Veterinary Pharmacies, local conservation clubs, teachers and social activist.

Community Training on Vulture Safe Zone Management

In a bid to stop the dramatic decline of vultures in Nepal, a two-day training programme on vulture conservation and management was organized on 11th & 12th June 2015 in Tansen, Palpa.



This project partially supported the training programme. The training was highly useful and effective in bringing the vulture conservation activists from all over the country to the project site. Major discussions of the training were centered on strengthening community for vulture conservation, how to remove the killer drug diclofenac from the

environment, way forward on sustainable management of Vulture Safe Feeding Sites and manage the data on vulture monitoring in Nepal. 24 persons representing 14 community based organizations from 12 districts of lowland and mid-hills of western Nepal used the opportunity to discuss on vulture conservation issues at local level and strategies for future actions on vulture conservation in Nepal. Vulture experts from Bird Conservation Nepal facilitated the training. The community focal persons who had been working in vulture conservation especially in grass root level were awarded recognizing their contribution in conservation. Nepal has piloted the concept of 'Vulture Safe Zone' and the first of its kind in the world has been established in the western Terai and Mid-Hills of Nepal.

Incorporation of Vulture Conservation agenda in community forest operation plan

One day interaction workshop was organized at the office of Adheri Chharchhare Community Forest User Groups, Madanpokhara, Palpa to incorporate vulture and other biodiversity conservation activities in community forest operation plan on 19 March 2015. The workshop discussed and finalized a list of activities for conservation of



vultures and other biodiversity to include in community forest operation plan. During the workshop Mr. Prakash Lamsal chief at District Forest Office, Palpa agreed that the list of activities for the conservation of vultures and other biodiversity needs to be included in operation plan. 148 participants were participated during the workshop representing from District Livestock Service Office, Palpa, District Agricultural Development Office, Palpa, political leaders, journalists, social activists, community forest user group members and local people.

Vet Practitioners training in Arghakhanchi and Palpa

One day training to vet practitioners was organized in collaboration with District Livestock Service Office, Palpa on 28 July 2015. 32 individuals participated on training among which 26 persons were unregistered veterinary practitioners. In the training highlighted cause of vulture population decline and veterinary role to stop illegal use of diclofenac in cattle treatment. In the training also participated from Nepal Para-veterinary and Livestock Association district chapter of Palpa. Dr. Tulsi Ram Bhandari, chief at DLSO, Palpa commitment to participant on agenda No Diclofenac: Yes Vulture.

Similar training program was also organized in Sandhikharka, Arghakhanchi. The training was facilitated by Dr. Aryan Mandal, Chief at District Livestock Service Office, Arghakhanchi who highlighted on Diclofenac toxicity to vultures and its alternative. Dil Bahadur Ranabhat president of White-rumped Vulture nesting site community forest briefed on ecological role and status of vulture. Altogether 46 individuals participated representing unregistered vet practitioner, veterinary pharmacies owners and Livestock Service Center and Livestock Service Office staffs.



Community Awareness in Arghakhanchi and Palpa

Vulture conservation interaction and community awareness program has been completed in White-rumped Vulture nesting site Khaireni community forest Rampur, Palpa on 1st June 2015. In the program Tulsi Ram Bhandari chief of District Livestock Service Office, Palpa, Jyoti Prasad Koirala assistant forest officer at District Forest Office, Palpa highlighted on vulture population collapse and community role in conservation. Altogether 31 participants were participated in the program representing vet practitioners, community forest user groups, farmers, local club and mother group. In the program Khaireni Community Forest User Groups, Rampur, Palpa committed to include vulture conservation activities in their forest operation plan from this year.

Similarly another community awareness program was organized in Red-headed Vulture nesting site Kartike community forest Luhung, Palpa on 27 July 2015. Altogether 111 participants were participated in the program representing local government authorities, political leaders, vet community, community forest user groups, teachers, local club and mother group.

Vulture Conservation Message through Local Radio in Arghakhanchi and Palpa

Vulture conservation message were broadcasted through radio programme for six months from Community Radio Madanpokhara, Palpa 106.3 Mhz (www.radiomadanpokhara.org.np) and Community Radio Arghakhanchi, Arghakhanchi 105.8 Mhz (www.arghakhanchi.com) for half an hour of every week. People of rural and remote area of western mid hill were benefitted by this radio program for vulture conservation. District level stakeholders like chiefs and representatives from District Forest Office, District Livestock Service Office, District Development Office, Veterinary Association and conservationists were interviewed on the vulture conservation agenda through these radio programs and the interview were broadcasted.

School Education and Conservation Campaigns

School is knowledge generating house that may impact directly to change the attitude of society via light of education. Thus to familiarize the school children and teachers with vulture conservation issues in Nepal and its ecological role in nature; School Education Program had been lunched selecting Ten secondary and higher secondary school in the vicinity of vulture nesting site of Arghakhanchi and Palpa. Altogether 332 students and 28 teachers enthusiastically participated in these events and the posters and fliers with key message of vulture conservation

were distributed among them. BCN staffs and local vulture conservation partners facilitate the program.



The detail of school education campaign is listed below:-

S. N	Name of Schools	No .of Students	No. of Teachers	Address	Date
1	Ganga Higher Secondary School	115	9	Rampur, Palpa	1 June 2015
2	Lumbini Higher Secondary School	76	5	Luhang, Palpa	30 July 2015
3	Sarbodaya Higher Secondary School	82	3	Baughapokharathok, Palpa	30 July 2015
4	Tribhuwan Higher Secondary School	74	6	Argali, Palpa	31 July 2015
5	Laxmi Higher Secondary School	93	2	Bandipokhara, Palpa	31 July 2015