

# The Konkan Vulture Project: Monitoring and Awareness Drives at Identified Vulture Feeding Grounds

Progress Report

January – June 2016



## Background

In India nine species of vultures are reported<sup>1</sup>. Of these, two species i.e. *Gyps bengalensis* and *Gyps indicus* are reported in Konkan region.<sup>2</sup> World over, the population of these two species has drastically declined in the last two decades.<sup>3,4</sup> These two species have lost almost 92% of the population in the last two decades. Therefore these two species are categorized as Critically Endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.<sup>5,6</sup>

Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra (SNM) is implementing the Konkan Vulture Project from January 2016. It is a continuation of our earlier work over last four years that included intensive survey in Konkan region (Map 1 and 2) in 2013-15 to locate vulture nesting/colonies. In this survey it was found that there are just 6 vulture nesting sites/colonies in Konkan region (Table 1).

Table 1: Vulture nesting status in Konkan region of Maharashtra as of June 2016

Vulture species	District	Village	No. of nests	About nesting site
White Backed Vulture ( <i>Gyps bengalensis</i> )	Raigad	Shrivardhan	28	All nests on private coconut plantation.
	Raigad	Chirgaon	20	Nesting on Mango trees. At least 4 trees have more than 1 nest. Village has carcass dumping practice.
Long Billed Vulture ( <i>Gyps indicus</i> )	Raigad	Nanemachi	5	All sites are in WG region. All villages have carcass dumping practice.
	Raigad	Ranawadi	3	
	Raigad	Patnus	15	
	Ratnagiri	Vihali	6	
Total			<b>77</b>	

<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, 2006. Action Plan for Vulture Conservation in India. Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India

<sup>2</sup> Birdlife International Avibase - Bird Checklists of the World - Konkan Coast and nearby areas, Online: <http://avibase.bsc-eoc.org/checklist.jsp?region=INswmh07&list=howardmoore>. Accessed on 28 October 2014

<sup>3</sup> Cuthbert, R., Green, R. E., Ranade, S., Saravanan, S., Pain, D. J., Prakash, V., & Cunningham, A. A. (2006). Rapid population declines of Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) and red-headed vulture (*Sarcogyps calvus*) in India. *Animal Conservation*, 9(3), 349-354.

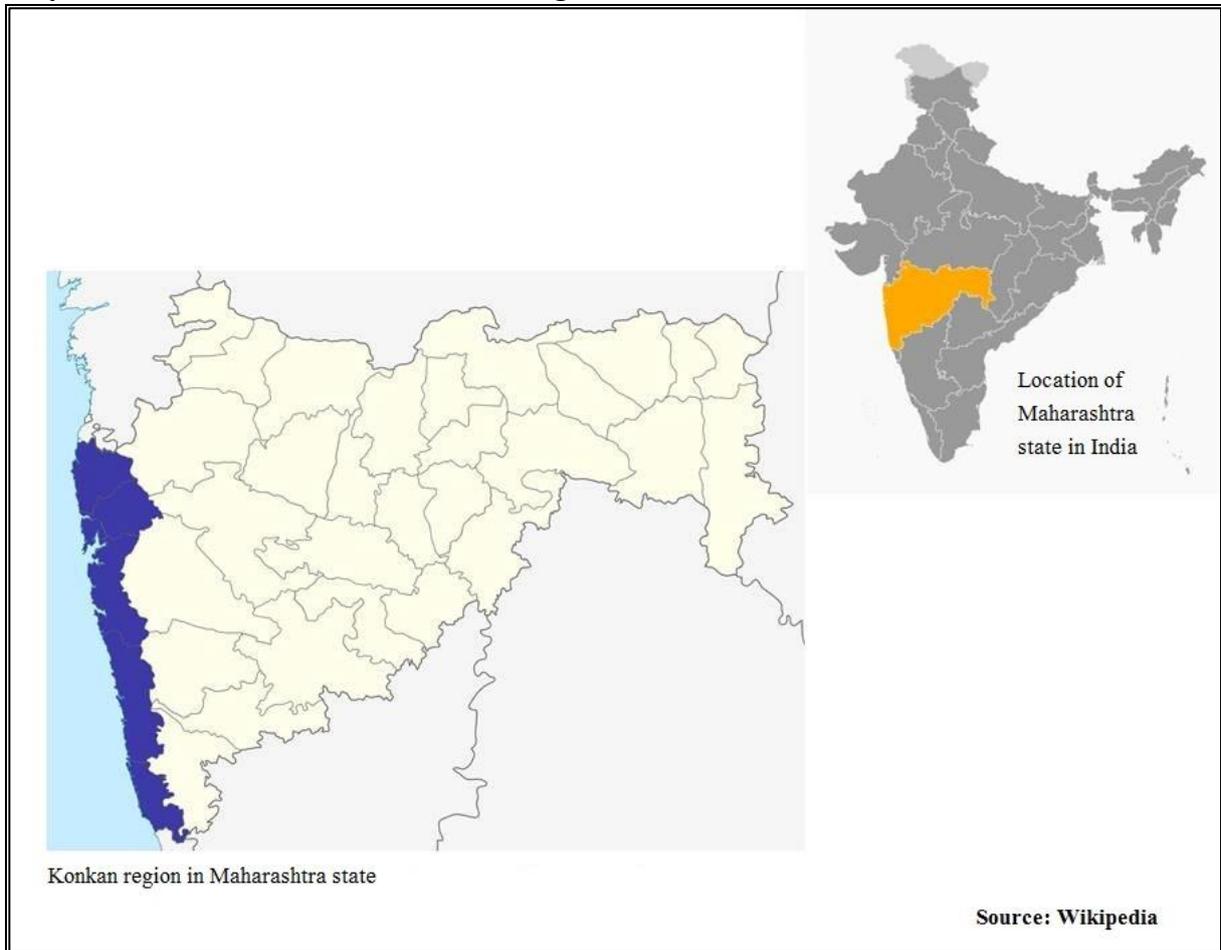
<sup>4</sup> Taggart, M. A., Cuthbert, R., Das, D., Sashikumar, C., Pain, D. J., Green, R. E., & Meharg, A. A. (2007). Diclofenac disposition in Indian cow and goat with reference to *Gyps* vulture population declines. *Environmental Pollution*, 147(1), 60-65.

<sup>5</sup> BirdLife International. 2015. *Gyps bengalensis*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2015: e.T22695194A79395731. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2015-4.RLTS.T22695194A79395731.en>. Downloaded on 09 July 2016.

<sup>6</sup> BirdLife International. 2015. *Gyps indicus*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2015: e.T22729731A79451078. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2015-4.RLTS.T22729731A79451078.en>. Downloaded on 09 July 2016.

In brief, the Long-billed vultures are reported to nest in the rocky escarpments at Ranawadi and Nanemachi (both in Raigad district) while the White-backed vultures nest at Shrivardhan, Chirgaon, Patnus (all three in Raigad district) and Vihali (in Ratnagiri district) (Map 1 and 2).

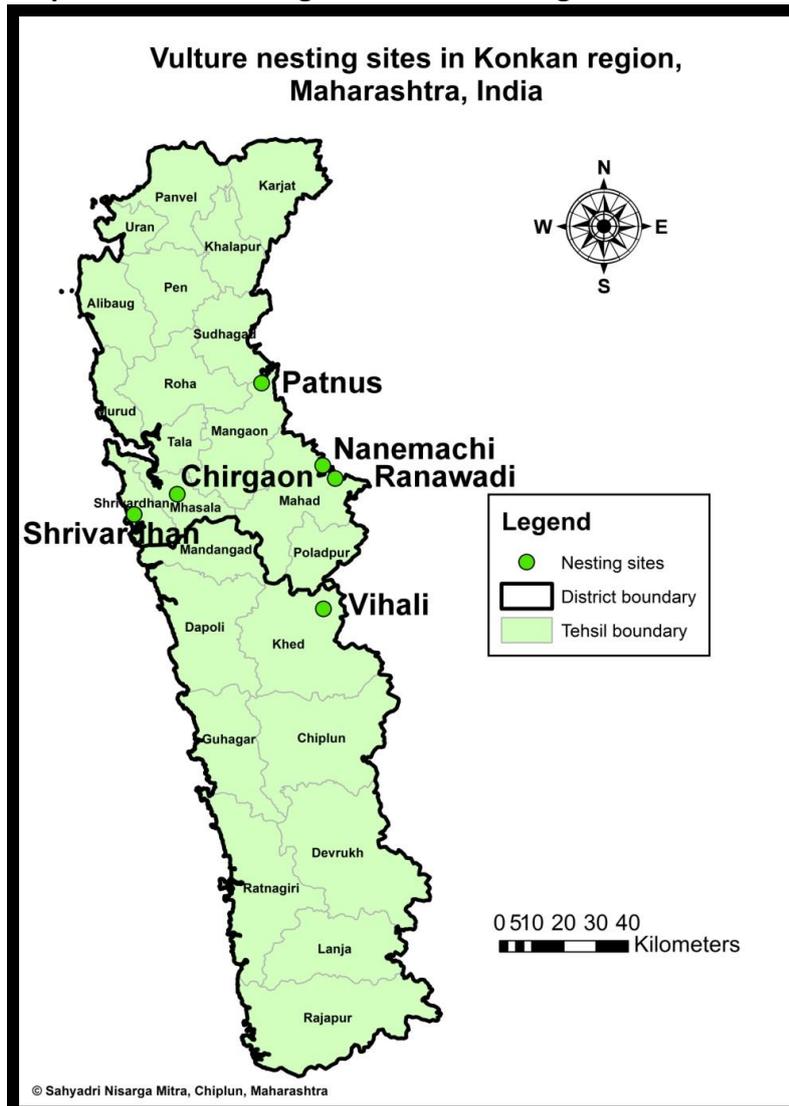
**Map 1: Maharashtra state and Konkan region**



**Objectives of the Konkan Vulture Project**

Monitoring of vulture feeding grounds with the help of local community rangers  
Conduct awareness drives on diclofenac free cattle and vulture conservation with the help of Animal Husbandry Department in and around 9 vulture feeding grounds  
Ensure higher number of villagers use vulture safe carcass dumping ground

**Map 2: Vulture nesting sites in Konkan region**



### **Work update (January to June 2016)**

SNM has identified local community members to work as community rangers. These rangers regularly monitor the dead cattle dumping and number of vultures, if any, sighted at these locations. We envisage presenting primary analysis of this information in later part of the project.

We have conducted community level meetings at these locations to discuss vulture conservation and possible community action to strengthen vulture conservation by not opting for medicines having diclofenac as one of the ingredients. We have distributed cattle health card in these villages. This card is developed by SNM in consultation with veterinary practitioners. The cattle owner should insist to the veterinarian attending the sick cattle to fill up the card. This card is a tool to monitor medicines being administered in these villages. At the same time, veterinary staff in these locations is sensitized through one to one meetings, about importance of the health card and importance of diclofenac free cattle in vulture conservation.

During the community meetings, vulture conservation awareness literature (information pamphlets in Marathi (local language)) is distributed as a regular practice.

### **Field conditions and their implications**

It is observed that vulture nesting/colonies are benefitted by open carcass dumping being practiced by the villagers nearby these locations. We have identified 12 such locations for monitoring. Out of these, five are reported to have open dumping of carcass and also to be nesting locations. The remaining seven are reported to have open dumping of carcass only. However at these seven locations sighting of the vultures is slightly frequent than rest of Konkan region. Description of these 12 locations is provided in table 2.

It is observed that open dumping of carcass is of two types. The first is dumping of the dead cattle at random location, within the boundary of the village but far from the human habitation. The other type is dumping at a specific location within the village boundary (Refer table 2).

At the feeding locations wherein dumping of carcass is done at a specific location, it is comparatively easier to monitor number of dead animals being discarded and number of vultures feeding on them. However, it is somewhat difficult in the locations where the dead cattle are discarded at random. Therefore it is also difficult to monitor number of vultures visiting these locations.

### **Plan for further action (July to November 2016)**

- Continue monitoring of the dead cattle dumping locations with help of the community rangers
- Analysis of data and preparation of information dissemination material based on it.
- Conduct community meetings at all field locations to convey and sensitize about importance of dumping of dead cattle at one location instead of random disposal.
- Awareness campaign on diclofenac free cattle.

Table 2: Vulture feeding locations and their description

SN	Village	District	Whether nesting location?	Whether open dumping of carcass?	Whether open dumping is at a particular location or random?	Remark
1	Chirgaon	Raigad	Y	Y	Particular location	This location is organized recently through SNM and Forest Department initiative. It is not fenced
2	Ranawadi	Raigad	Y	Y	Random	--
3	Nanemachi	Raigad	Y	Y	Random	--
4	Patnus	Raigad	Y	Y	Random	--
5	Gothe	Ratnagiri	N	Y	Random	--
6	Borkhat	Ratnagiri	N	Y	Particular location	Dumping location is traditional. It is not fenced.
7	Kalkavane	Ratnagiri	N	Y	Particular location	There are three traditional dumping locations. Two of them have stone wall enclosure and one has chain link fencing sponsored by the forest department
8	Devare	Ratnagiri	N	Y	Random	--
9	Chinchghar	Ratnagiri	N	Y	Random	--
10	Kangavai	Ratnagiri	N	Y	Random	--
11	Sukondi	Ratnagiri	N	Y	Particular location (O) fence	This location is organized recently through SNM and Forest Department initiative. It is not fenced
12	Vihali	Ratnagiri	Y	Y	Random	

## Photos



Photo 1: Informal discussion with community members at vil. Gothe



Photo 2: Discussion with senior community members at vil. Borkhat



Photo 3: Distribution of pamphlets on vulture conservation during community meeting at vil. Gothe



Photo 4: Carcass dumping enclosure at vil. Kalkavne