

Project Update: September 2023

Egyptian vulture (EV) *Neophorn percnopterus* is the smallest vulture having declining population across its range. IUCN has categorised the Egyptian vulture as endangered globally. Understanding the factors like breeding season length, clutch size and mortality rate affecting the breeding behaviour are very crucial while developing conservation management plans for the rare and endangered species. The project aims to study the breeding biology of the Egyptian vulture in Pokhara valley with good sample numbers, as well as quantify the threats through questionnaire survey and initiate conservation activities for their conservation.

Works Completed till September 2023

- 1. Nest Site Exploration (March- April)**
- 2. Breeding Biology Study (March- August)**
 - Nest building and copulation.
 - Incubation.
 - Chick- rearing.
 - Fledging.
- 3. Bird Research Techniques training to undergraduate (September)**

Details

1. Nest site exploration (March- April)

All together 22 previously explored nesting sites as well as other possible nesting cliffs of Egyptian vulture was surveyed thoroughly so as to determine the active nests of EV in and around Pokhara valley of Nepal. Among the predetermined nesting sites, only 14 territories were occupied by the breeding pair of Egyptian vultures while one new nesting site was explored later.

2. Breeding Biology study (March- August)

a. Nest building and copulation

The nest building and copulation activities of Egyptian vulture were studied only in five nests. Except five pairs, other pairs of EV were already incubating when we started the nest site exploration in March. As per the European findings, EV there use to build nest in late March and early April, which contrast to our finding. So, we were unable to monitor the nest building activities on the other five nests as planned for the project.



Figure: Team leader Mr. Milan Baral exploring nesting sites of EV.



Figures: EV carrying nesting materials (left), EV pair guarding nest during nest preparation (right)

b. Incubation

Incubation stage was studied in 10 nests as proposed in the project. The study was conducted from 6am to 6pm; each nest being monitored for at least 4 days.



Figures: Field assistant Mr. Mohan Buccha monitoring nest during incubation (left), male EV incubating in nest (right).

c. Chick- rearing

Chick- rearing period was monitored in six nests only. As all other explored nests were already failed after the incubation period. Each nest was monitored for at least 7 days from 6am to 6pm.



Figures: Field assistant Ms. Jyoti Sharma monitoring nest during chick- rearing stage (left), EV (female) feeding food to chick (right).

d. Fledging

Fledging was successful in five nests only. Chick from one nest fell off the cliff and was rescued along with the rescue team of Pokhara Bird Society.



Figure: Chick of EV felled from the nest before fledging.

3. Bird Research Techniques Training (September)

The training was conducted in the DEAN Hall of Institute of Forestry, Pokhara in collaboration with the student union (ANNFSU) of the campus. The student union facilitated the selection of trainees as well as coordination of the training hall. The training was scheduled on the first day of International Vulture Awareness Week- 2023, so as to make the programme fruitful to the students and impactful to the conservationists.

In the training, basic identification techniques on raptors, ecology of raptors, research techniques (methods, data analysis, research design) and scientific writing techniques (proposal development and report writing) were discussed. On the portion of raptors, session was more focused on the vultures; their identifying characteristics on different plumages and stages (juvenile, sub- adult and adult). Altogether 45 undergraduate students were present in the programme. Considering the feedback, the session was successful in imprinting the knowledge of raptors, bird research techniques and scientific writing skills to the trainees.



Figure: Team leader Mr. Milan Baral delivering during the training.

Activities to be done:

- Questionnaire survey.
- Stakeholder meeting.
- Conservation awareness and school teaching.