

If you would like to help save Asian vultures or for more information about Vulture Safe Havens please contact:

David Agombar on 01767 680551,
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or write to David Agombar, RSPB, The Lodge,
Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL, United Kingdom.



The RSPB speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment. Nature is amazing – help us keep it that way.

www.rspb.org.uk



The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) is a BirdLife International partner and leads the work in India to help save vultures.



Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN) is a BirdLife International partner and leads the work in Nepal to help save vultures.

The RSPB, BNHS and BCN work as part of SAVE to protect Asia's vultures.



SAVE is a partnership of organisations committed to co-ordinating and driving forward the international conservation effort to save three species of Gyps vulture.

Front cover image by Tony Heald (naturepl.com)
The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076,
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Space to survive

Three species of vulture are on the brink of extinction. But with your help, they can be saved.



nature's voice





Masters of the sky

Vultures are magnificent birds of prey. To see one floating effortlessly in a windless sky is an unforgettable experience. A vast silhouette, soaring with surprising elegance and grace. They fly high, riding the thermals and using their phenomenal eyesight to search over miles for food.

When on the ground and feeding in huge, squabbling groups, 200 vultures can strip an animal carcass to the bone in less than half an hour. Their effectiveness and speed in cleaning up carrion and waste, that would otherwise rot and spread disease, is astonishing and unparalleled – nature's very own waste disposal.

In the early 1990s, tens of millions of Oriental white-backed, slender-billed and long-billed vultures dominated the skies of South Asia. But then suddenly, and without warning, these birds began to disappear.

Vanishing vultures

Over the last twenty years, Oriental white-backed, slender-billed and long-billed vultures have all suffered unprecedented declines of more than 97%. Tens of millions of vultures have simply gone.

Once the most numerous of the three species, a staggering 99.9% of the Oriental white-backed vulture population has already been lost.

They are critically endangered and, without help, will soon be gone forever.

“ The crisis facing vultures is one of the worst in the natural world. Since the declines of these birds were first noticed, the speed at which they have gone is terrifying – and these birds played such an important role in cleaning up carcasses and the environment. ”

Chris Bowden, RSPB Vulture Programme Manager

Silent killer

Intensive research has shown that an anti-inflammatory drug called diclofenac is to blame. Used to treat cattle across Asia, diclofenac causes kidney failure in vultures. If they feed on the carcass of an animal that has died within a few days of being treated with the drug, they are almost certain to die. Tragically, as they commonly feed in groups, just one carcass containing diclofenac can kill many vultures. There is no longer safety in numbers.





Reasons to care

From a conservation perspective, vultures have to be saved. The fact that we are already close to losing the entire population of three species of these magnificent creatures is motive enough. But there are other reasons to care about the fate of vultures.

- **Health and environment:** With the decline in vultures comes an increase in animal carcasses just left lying around to rot. With far fewer vultures to compete with for food, numbers of feral dogs have also increased. 97% of all rabies cases occur as a result of dog bites, so this is an extremely worrying trend. India already suffers from the highest number of reported rabies cases anywhere in the world.
- **Economic:** Without vultures, life is much harder for local hide and bone-collectors, who rely on cleaned carcasses in order to earn a living. And because cattle owners now often have to pay to have carcasses buried or burnt, they are suffering from an increase to their costs.
- **Culture:** These birds are entwined in the fabric of everyday life in South Asia. Man and vultures have lived alongside each other for centuries. Without vultures to consume the body, the Parsi community are unable to carry out their traditional sky burials at “Towers of Silence”.



Vulture declines are a human problem too

“ Vultures used to strip carcasses clean in just a few minutes, but now they rot and smell for days bringing more disease risks. Dog numbers are increasing near the village carcass dumps and are becoming a risk too, especially to women and children. Dog bites are dangerous. People become ill and sometimes die from them. ”

Nanak Sharma,
cattle farmer from
Bhuriyon village, Rajasthan

Steps toward hope

South Asia's vultures can be brought back from the brink of extinction, but only with your help. The work already undertaken by members of the SAVE consortium and with support from local people and government, show that amazing things are possible.

- **The manufacture and import of diclofenac** has now been banned in most of South Asia and a safe alternative called meloxicam is being promoted.
- **Special vulture breeding centres** have been established in Haryana, West Bengal and Assam, as well as one in Nepal. All three species have now bred successfully for the first time in captivity, with growing numbers of chicks each year.
- **Vulture advocacy** and education programmes are raising awareness of the plight of these birds and gaining even greater support for conservation of the species at a local level.

“ The outlawing of veterinary use of diclofenac, and the first ever captive breeding of all three vulture species, mean we can start to hope that they may not be lost forever. ”

Dr Asad Rahmani, Director of Bombay Natural History Society

The next step: Vulture Safe Havens

If dwindling populations of wild vultures are to survive, and crucially if reintroductions of birds raised in captivity are to succeed, the next step on this tough journey has to be providing safe areas for them in the wild. They need protected places to feed, to grow and eventually – it is hoped – start to regain their numbers.

Vulture Safe Havens will each cover an area of 30,000 km². They will only be declared safe for vultures if there is no diclofenac in use within the 100 km radius, and if over 800 samples taken from cattle carcasses in the area, over two years of testing, have no diclofenac present.

Once identified, Safe Havens will be carefully managed and monitored to ensure they remain diclofenac-free. Key to this will be the employment of a dedicated team for each one, to deliver:

- regular carcass testing within the Safe Haven area;
- vital contact and awareness work with state officials, vets, drug distributors, local farmers and veterinary colleges in the area;
- surveys of vulture populations within each 100 km radius and annual nest counts;
- in the early stages, provision of diclofenac-free prey to encourage wild vultures to stay within the Vulture Safe Haven.





Will you help save Asian vultures?

We need to create Vulture Safe Havens across South Asia, and **we need to start now**. It will take planning, investment, time and continued passion.

And it can't be done without your help.

£25,000 will enable a Vulture Safe Haven to be established and monitored for a whole year. This includes:

- the salaries of a Vulture Team Coordinator and at least three support and field-based staff, including a trained biologist and a community mobiliser;
- four motorbikes or one vehicle (dependent on area) and a GPS system for locating survey sites;
- a laptop computer for survey data and binoculars for monitoring;
- an annual supply of 500 – 1,000 dipsticks for diclofenac testing on cattle carcasses;
- equipment for slide show and video presentations and printed materials, for vulture advocacy programmes.

By sponsoring a Vulture Safe Haven, you will give these birds a protected space in which to live and re-establish.

£25,000 will give them a vital new chance to survive.

If you would like to sponsor or support a Vulture Safe Haven please complete this form and return it to:

**David Agombar, Major Donors Manager
RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy,
Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL
United Kingdom**

Alternatively, please contact David Agombar on 01767 680551 or email: david.agombar@rspb.org.uk

With your help, there is hope for vultures. **Thank you**

I wish to sponsor a Vulture Safe Haven

I will make a gift of £25,000

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If you would like to receive e-mails about our conservation, campaigning and fundraising work, please enter your e-mail address here:

