Summary Report of 9th Annual Meeting of Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction

4-6th November 2019
Pinjore, India

1. About SAVE and this report

The SAVE consortium, originally of fourteen (now 24) organisations was formally established in February 2011 under the banner 'Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction' (SAVE). These organisations have the common understanding to agree, prioritise and help implement the actions required to conserve Asia's Endangered vultures, based on sound scientific grounds. The annual meeting serves to review, report against, and update the regional Blueprint for the Recovery of Asia's Globally Threatened Vultures. This report presents the updated priorities (pp.4-5) and the refreshed Blueprint document (p. 88) (Note this now covers all Asia's Globally Threatened Vulture species, although the main focus remains the three Critically Endangered, resident Gyps species) together with all the background information that has resulted in this updated version.

The annual reporting process presented in this report, uses the agreed actions defined in the 'Blueprint Recovery Plan for Asia's Globally Threatened Vultures' by country, and has this process has been carried out each year since 2014 when the Blueprint was initiated. SAVE Partners (and others carrying out relevant actions addressing Blueprint activities) have provided their updates, and highlighted their concerns. Note that each action for each country has been assessed as Green (On Track), Yellow (Some Concerns) or Red (Behind Schedule). These colour codes have been agreed in full consultation with all SAVE Partners for last year. Participants have had the opportunity to comment both during the meeting and by correspondence on a circulated draft. We have compiled summary tables of these flags (traffic lights) for each activity, and by country, and also present those from last year for comparison (pp 11-12). The full report is available online and on request via email, which lists the major details and updates from 2019 for each.

The top agreed SAVE priorities (p4) for conserving South Asian vultures are revised annually, along with the separate list for SE Asia priorities (p5), where the main threats are recognised as being quite different. These priorities are reflected in more detail within the Blueprint document.

Opening of the 9th Annual SAVE meeting with pre-release of an important pharmacy surveys paper. Senior representation of IVRI, Indian state Governments (Chief Wildlife Wardens and PCCFs) of Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Haryana with SAVE Chairman.

9th SAVE Meeting and Acknowledgements

We warmly thank our hosts, the Bombay Natural History Society staff team at the Jatayu Conservation Breeding Centre, Pinjore. Vibhu and Nikita Prakash kindly organised all ground arrangements with support from the Haryana State Government as well as the manager and staff of Timber Trail, Parwanoo allowing the meeting to progress smoothly.

The RSPB provided the main financial support including travel costs for those unable to support themselves, which allowed the meeting to take place. Both RSPB and BNHS assisted with travel logistics and bookings. We take this opportunity to warmly thank all donors on the SAVE website during the past year who have generously contributed their support during the year. Unfortunately we did not receive any external grants or contributions for this year's meeting but appreciate those participants who supported their own travel costs and hotel bill from their own organisations or pockets. This was very helpful.

The programme and attendees (Appendix 3, Appendix 4) was carried out over 5-6 November 2019. SAVE Associate POJ produced two excellent video clips of the meeting with interviews: https://youtu.be/juNIxRcoQpY https://youtu.be/YTuKlu-3A5c

Finally, thanks to all contributors, especially those partners who supplied the main reports and indeed carried out the enormous body of work. Also to the growing number of new contributors, including for the first time from the Middle East, and to Mary Davies for additional and invaluable support in preparing the report.

Chris Bowden,
SAVE Programme Manager
SAVE Report Compiler

Chairman Prof Rhys Green Prof Vinny Naidoo (Pretoria Univ) Dr Chandra Mohan (IVRI)

M Abdur Rahman
MEFCC Bangladesh

Jemima Parry Jones
ICBP

Ngwe Lwin Cambodia
FFI/CVWG

[photos Chris Bowden/RSPB]

2. Updated priorities for Asian vulture conservation in 2020

2.1 Vulture Conservation Priorities for South Asia 2020

- Veterinary licences to be withdrawn for drugs known to be toxic to vultures: aceclofenac (a pro-drug for diclofenac), ketoprofen, nimesulide, flunixin & carprofen - based on good existing evidence that these NSAIDs are unsafe for vultures
- Develop an effective system for the regulation of veterinary drugs, based upon safety-testing on vultures - and continue this for all current painkillers (NSAIDs) and for all potential new ones entering veterinary practice.
- Evaluate safety to vultures of nimesulide in India as a priority, closely followed by other emerging veterinary NSAIDs.
- Identify additional vulture safe NSAIDs (alternatives for vets) and publicise such findings and promote existing known vulture-safe NSAIDS.
- Major efforts urgently needed to address the immediate and increasing gap in funding for vulture conservation which now jeopardises the programme.
- Promotion of network and approach of 'Vulture Safe Zones' across South Asia with expansion to include trans-boundary cooperative efforts.
- Maintain the existing vulture conservation breeding programmes throughout South Asia.
- Secure a safe environment for further soft releases of captive vultures at identified sites (100km radius) in Nepal and for first soft releases in India, requiring satellite monitoring of the released birds.
- Develop national reporting systems for as many vulture deaths as possible, from any cause, with written recording and data storage protocols and pathways for immediate transportation and reliable tissue analysis throughout the SAVE region.
- Trial poison-bait response training and awareness workshops for identified key areas within the region. These will aim to improve the recording and documentation of poisoning incidents and increase the accessibility of data on poisoning incidents.
- Use the Convention of Migratory Species' Vulture Multi-species Action Plan as a tool to promote these SAVE priority actions and engage with governments and to approach CMS for funding.
- Closely support National Vulture Recovery Committees and the Regional Steering Committee (RSC) in order to facilitate the urgent implementation of the 2012 Delhi Regional Agreement and SAVE priorities.

2.1 Vulture Conservation Priorities for South East Asia 2020

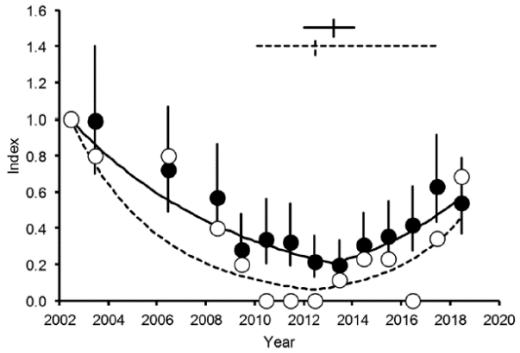
- Implementation of a high profile anti-poisoning campaign (across Cambodia)
- Trial poison-bait response training and awareness workshops for identified key areas within the region.
- More effective law enforcement within protected sites to halt forest conversion and hunting (targeted law enforcement patrols and nest guardians) to protect priority vulture nesting areas.
- Effective spatial planning to retain the priority forest areas for vulture conservation, ensuring strong environmental impact assessments are carried out to prevent detrimental regional development projects (Cambodia).
- Effective implementation of Cambodia's veterinary diclofenac ban.
- Seek a veterinary diclofenac ban for Myanmar through awareness raising and advocacy.
- Programme of undercover pharmacy surveys to determine NSAID availability and usage trends.
- Vulture restaurants continue to be maintained at four priority sites (Cambodia) to continue population monitoring.
- Develop Vulture Safe Zone concept for Cambodia and Myanmar. Improve quantification of population impact of poisoning and other significant threats on important vulture populations in Cambodia through better data collection and analysis.
- Establish baseline vulture monitoring data for Kachin (at VSZ) and Shan States.
- Improve funding situation for vulture priorities in both countries.
- Tagging of white-rumped vultures (in Cambodia) particularly to help locate breeding sites and understand movements.
- Closely support Cambodian Vulture Recovery Committee's involvement with the Regional Steering Committee (RSC) in order to facilitate the urgent implementation of SAVE priorities.

[photo: Chris Bowden/RSPB]

3. Overview of updates since 8th SAVE meeting

3.1 Outstanding achievements/updates of 2019

- **The Cambodia Government declared a veterinary diclofenac ban** with immediate effect on 31 July 2019. This prompt action follows the discovery of veterinary use in 2018, and an approach by the SAVE Partner, Cambodia Vulture Working Group using SAVE dossiers and inputs.
- The **positive vulture population trend in Nepal** was published in Bird Conservation International and publicised reinforcing the Vulture Safe Zone approach and diclofenac removal as the key steps needed.



- The **Bangladesh Government ban of ketoprofen and aceclofenac** was earlier declared by the Forest Department in the two VSZs but a Govt meeting called by the Livestock Department (in June) has brought crucial engagement needed for the implementation of this (Formerly only FD but this means it should really happen!).
- Successful completion of phase 2 **Tolfenamic Acid safety testing** tentatively suggests that this NSAID may be safe for vultures!
- Further steps were taken to address **aceclofenac threat in India** (additional letters from senior levels in two states to the central Govt drug controller general) but it remains unclear how close we are to a nationwide ban.

- **Releases** of 10 captive-reared and then 8 captive-bred white-rumped vultures **in Nepal** have been successful so far although there have been three fatalities and an apparent outbreak of an unknown disease. A further nine tagged wild WRVs are ranging widely with no mortalities so far.
- A further **13 white-rumped vultures** were released in **Nepal** in October 2019 – 6 captive reared and 7 captive bred. As with previous releases, the birds have been fitted with GPS telemetry tags.

[photos: Bird Conservation Nepal]

- Plans for the first India releases (Haryana & West Bengal) are progressing, satellite tags are now in hand, and the potential for huge profile.
- Construction of one urgently needed colony aviary in the **Assam** centre is nearing completion and a second one also finally underway.
- Methodology for harnessing vultures (to carry satellite tags) was developed with expert input, and an international workshop with key world tagging experts was carried out in August 2019 at ICBP, UK, in conjunction with the IUCN Vulture Specialist Group and significant refinements discussed and are being documented.

- **Indian Government** support for the breeding and release programme was received via BNHS but mainly at the very end of the Financial Year. This was very substantial for Haryana, and full costs covered for the West Bengal centre. **Madhya Pradesh** was also covered although no sign of an urgently needed aviary there. This represented an increase in support for Haryana (although significant sanctioned costs couldn't be fully mobilised), but for **West Bengal** Rajabhatkhawa breeding centre, this is a spectacular increase in government support! It also included construction of two urgently needed colony aviaries in West Bengal. The **Assam** breeding centre remains 100% dependent on external RSPB funds however which is a major concern.
- Growing SAVE engagement in the **Middle East**: Initial moves in **Oman** for a veterinary diclofenac ban using SAVE support gives new hope that this may set an important example if a ban can be achieved. **Saudi Arabia** is meanwhile progressing a similar measure, while initiatives in **Socotra/Yemen** are reported for the first time.
- Our contacts in **Iran** have shown that the veterinary diclofenac ban imposed there in 2015 is holding up very effectively.

3.2 Emerging concerns

- **Nimesulide and aceclofenac** veterinary use is apparently **increasing** in parts of India (also ketoprofen use is high in Bangladesh) and other untested drugs coming into veterinary use. There are further worrying indications across India of increased availability and use especially of nimesulide.
- **IVRI safety-testing in India** is now progressing, but only slowly. It's unclear how this can be speeded up, and risks lagging behind the changing trends in veterinary drug uptake.
- The breeding/release programme in **Assam** remains fully dependent on RSPB support which raises increasing concerns of sustainability.

Safety-testing work by IVRI/BNHS team
[photo Chris Bowden/RSPB]

3.3 The SAVE Blueprint (Action Plan to 2025)

Originally developed in Feb 2014 and updated at the 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th SAVE meetings is being used as widely as ever and is now formally endorsed and linked to the Convention of Migratory Species (CMS) Vultures Multi-species Action Plan, adopted in November 2017. The latest updated Blueprint version (Annex 3) has a slightly changed format and now also reflects the date by which we expect activities to have been achieved.

3.4 Changes regarding SAVE Partners since 8th SAVE meeting (see also 3.6 below)

SAVE Chairman
Professor **Rhys Green** since 8th annual SAVE meeting.

FACC Chairman
Uddin Ishtiaq Ahmad agreed to take on the FACC Chairing role at the 8th meeting, with emphasis on fundraising has called two Skype meetings so far this year (Feb & June 2019). FACC National focal points were agreed and participated from 5 of the 6 countries and minutes circulated. Note there are provisional plans to subdivide the responsibilities during 2020, separating the Fundraising from the Advocacy and Communications – this will be announced as appropriate via the website

TAC Chairman
Jemima Parry-Jones and **Vibhu Prakash** are Co-chairs.

TAC membership additions
Vinny Naidoo Dean, Faculty of Veterinary Sciences, University of Pretoria has been actively associated with SAVE and NSAIDs vulture work since 2004.

Chandra Mohan S. – Indian Veterinary Research Institute, Izatnagar, UP. India – leading the IVRI NSAIDs vulture safety testing work.
Andrew Routh is now Head Veterinarian, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, reappointed to the TAC and is as active as ever for SAVE.

Board Representatives remain as before with two changes earlier in 2019:

- Ms **Jo Gilbert** has replaced Ms Clare Stringer as RSPB Board Member. Jo is Deputy Director, Conservation Programmes at RSPB, and this will be her first SAVE meeting. Clare has returned to her native New Zealand and sadly has departed RSPB.
- Mr **Yajna Nath Dahal**, Member Secretary of NTNC replaces Govinda Gajurel who has now retired. Mr Dahal sent his apologies for the 9th meeting and was represented by Mr Ram Kumar Aryal Project Chief from BCC-Chitwan

3.5 New SAVE Partners added during 2019

Neo Human Foundation, of Jharkhand, India has had a long association with SAVE and contributed reports and presentations at previous SAVE meetings. NHF was formally approved and welcomed as a new member in August 2019, and Director Satya Prakash attended the 9th meeting. There is a report of 2019 activities in Section 7 of this report below.

3.6 Website: www.save-vultures.org donations, and SAVE presence at the UK Birdwatching Fair

There were some issues accessing website content (mainly in March/April, but again in July/August) especially for those on weaker internet platforms. It emerged that to resolve this, the outsourced service team, 'Boldlight' requested significant funds (up to £5,000), which included some training in uploading etc. Although Chris Bowden (RSPB) continues overall management of the SAVE website, significant support from Irene Sabiniarz has been crucial and Mary Davies of RSPB is now stepping up to support this and other communications work for the coming year.

SAVE button donations this year have been few. The website issues have hindered in this respect we believe.

For the first time, SAVE manned a stand at the UK Birdwatching Fair, taking advantage of several Partners visiting for a Vulture harnessing workshop which was timed to coincide the same week. The stand was popular and fundraising helped to cover costs, but 80 requests for news/updates via email demonstrate the positive awareness and interest in SAVE's work from the UK and international community [see SAVE website news link]

[photos Chris Bowden/RSPB]

4. Progress Summary (traffic lights) for all Blueprint activities

4.1 Status of SAVE Blueprint Actions by November 2019

Progress against SAVE objectives (Blueprint actions) during 2019

Note the **Green (on track), Yellow (some concerns) Red (Behind Schedule), white (not yet started/applicable)** & Grey (completed) colour codes indicate SAVE's assessment of the progress of each activity

Advocacy		Captive Breeding		Vulture Safe Zones (VSZ)		VSZ Monitoring		Research & Monitoring		Fundraising	Cambodia	Myanmar
AD1	India	CB1	India	VS1	completed	ZM1	India	RM1	India	FR1	CAM1	MYA1
	B'desh		SAVE	VS2	India		Nepal		Nepal		CAM2	MYA2
	P'stan	CB2	India	VS3	India		P'stan		SAVE		CAM3	MYA3
	Nepal		SAVE	VS4	India		B'desh	RM2	India		CAM4	MYA4
	Cambodia	CB3	India	VS5	India		Cambodia	RM3	Nepal		CAM5	MYA5
	Myanmar		SAVE	VS6	Nepal		Myanmar	RM4	P'stan		CAM6	MYA6
AD2	SAVE	CB4	P'stan	VS7	Nepal	ZM2	India		B'desh		CAM7	
	India	CB5	Nepal	VS8	P'stan		Nepal		Cambodia		CAM8	
	B'desh		SAVE	VS9	P'stan	ZM3	P'stan		Myanmar			
	P'stan	CB6	India	VS10	n/a until 2022	ZM4	Nepal	RM5	Nepal			
	Nepal	CB7	B'desh	VS11	P'stan		India		India			
	Cam	CB8	India	VS12	P'stan		B'desh	RM6	India			
	Myanmar		SAVE	VS13	Nepal		P'stan		Nepal			
AD3+4	SAVE				P'stan		Myanmar		B'desh			
	India			VS14	Completed 2014		Cambodia		P'stan			
	B'desh			VS15	B'desh		Myanmar		Cambodia			
	P'stan			VS16	Cam	ZM5	India	RM7	India			
	Nepal			VS17	Cam		B'desh	RM8	India			
	Cambodia			VS18	Myanmar		P'stan		Nepal			
	Myanmar			VS19	Myanmar		Nepal		B'desh			
AD5	SAVE			VS20	India		Cambodia	RM9	P'stan			
	India						Myanmar	RM10	SAVE			
AD6	SAVE							RM11	SAVE			
	India											
	B'desh											
	Pakistan											
	Nepal											
	Cambodia											
	Myanmar											
AD7	SAVE											
AD8	India											
	B'desh											
	P'stan											
	Nepal											
	Cambodia											
	Myanmar											
AD9	SAVE											
	India											
	B'desh											
	Myanmar											
AD10	SAVE											

5. 2019 Composition of the SAVE Partnership

Website: www.save-vultures.org

Chair: Professor Rhys Green. Cambridge University Professor of Conservation Science.

The SAVE programme is coordinated by **Programme Manager** Chris Bowden, RSPB.

Core Partners (Board) - Bird Conservation Nepal, BNHS India, Bangladesh National Vulture Recovery Committee, Cambodia Vulture Working Group, Hawk Conservancy Trust, International Centre for Birds of Prey, National Trust for Nature Conservation Nepal, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and WWF Pakistan.

BCN ICBP NTNC Pakistan

Project Partners – Zoological Society of London, Wildlife Conservation Society, The Peregrine Fund, BirdLife Cambodia, Myanmar Vulture Working Group.

Project Partners (**Research & Govt.) –** Indian Veterinary Research Institute, Bangladesh Forest Department, Department of National Parks & Wildlife Conservation (Nepal), Environmental Research Institute (UK), VULPRO & University of Pretoria (both South Africa).

Key Supporting Agencies to SAVE objectives

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (India)
Pakistan Forest Department
Forest Department, People's Republic of Bangladesh
Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation, Nepal
Ministry of Agriculture Forestry & Fisheries (Cambodia)
Haryana State Forest Department
West Bengal Forest Department
Assam Forest Department
Madhya Pradesh Forest Department
Central Zoo Authority (India)
Nepal Department of National Parks & Wildlife Conservation
Forestry, Wildlife & Fisheries department, Punjab Province
IUCN Bangladesh Country Office

SAVE Associates – Arulagam, Corbett Foundation, Neo Human Foundation, Prokriti O Jibon.

SAVE meets to review priorities each year, and has two sub-committees, which report to these meetings. The current composition of these sub-committees is as follows:

SAVE Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)
Jemima Parry-Jones (Co-chair) - World expert raptor captive breeding & raptor biology
Vibhu Prakash (Co-chair) - Principal Scientist BNHS and renowned raptor biologist
Mohini Saini – Principal Scientist, Wildlife Section at Indian Vet Research Institute
Monirul Khan – Assoc Professor, Dept Zoology, Jahangirnagar Univ., Bangladesh
John Mallord – Senior Conservation Scientist, RSPB Centre for Conservation Science, UK
Mark Taggart – Snr Scientist, NSAIDs expert, Univ of Highland & Islands, UK
Krishna Bhusal – Vulture Conservation Programme Officer, Bird Conservation Nepal
Campbell Murn – Head Conservation & Research, Hawk Conservancy Trust (UK)
Chris Parish – Director California Condor reintroduction, The Peregrine Fund (USA)
Nic Masters – Head of Veterinary Services, ZSL & London Zoo

Andrew Routh – Head Veterinarian, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust
Chiranjibi Prasad Pokheral - Project Chief of NTNC's Biodiversity Conservation Centre, Nepal
ABM Sarowar Dipu – IUCN Bangladesh & BNVRC
Vinny Naidoo – Dean, Univ Pretoria, South Africa
Chandra Mohan –Indian Veterinary Research Institute.
Rhys Green. Cambridge University Professor of Conservation Science

SAVE Fundraising, Advocacy and Communications Committee (FACC)
Uddin Ishtiaq Ahmad (Chair) – IUCN Bangladesh Country Rep, CCF B'desh Forest Dept. (retired)
Ram Jakati – Director Indira Gandhi Nati Forest Academy (retired)
Homi Khusrokhan – President of BNHS India
Devendra Swarup – Director IVRI (retired) & NSAIDs & veterinary expert
BC Choudhury – Senior Scientist at Wildlife Institute of India (retired)
Nick Lindsay – Head of International Zoo Programmes, ZSL (retired)
Paul Insua-Cao – Partner Support, RSPB (UK)
Anil Sharma – Principal Scientist, Centre Wildlife Cons, Mangt & Disease Surveillance, IVRI (retired)
Enam Ul Haque – Founder Bangladesh Bird Club
Ishana Thapa – CEO BCN
Sarita Jnawali – National Trust for Nature Conservation, Nepal
Naiky Ny – BirdLife Cambodia
Anuj Jain – Programmes & Fundraising, BirdLife International Asia Secretariat
M. Jamshed Chaudhry – WWF Pakistan
Deepak Apte – Director BNHS
Thiri Dae We Aung – Director BANCA, Myanmar
Chris Bowden – Globally Threatened Species Officer & Vulture Programme Manager, RSPB

Past Chairs
Prof Ian Newton (2011-2015)
Prof David Houston (2015-2018)

For more details, full report or queries, check/contact:

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