

WCC-2012-Rec-141-EN

Conservation of *Gyps* vulture species in South Asia

RECOGNIZING that vultures are specialized scavengers that play a crucial role in ridding the environment of dead animals that would otherwise rot and cause disease, support higher numbers of feral dogs, causing increased health risks (including rabies), and disposal problems and other costs to both humans and the environment;

RECOGNIZING that the Long-billed (*Gyps indicus*), Slender-billed (*G. tenuirostris*) and White-rumped (*G. bengalensis*) Vultures, endemic to Asia, have declined by more than 99% during the last 20 years in South Asia (more than 99.9% in the case of *G. bengalensis*) and that populations are now at very low levels in South and Southeast Asia;

NOTING that BirdLife International and IUCN list these species as Critically Endangered, the highest threat category, mainly based on the continuing precipitous population declines in all populations;

FURTHER NOTING that historically these *Gyps* species of vultures were common to very common in their range countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, India, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand and Vietnam);

RECALLING that vultures are an integral part of the cultures in all South Asian countries and play an important ecological role by cleaning up livestock carcasses;

FURTHER RECALLING that sufficient habitat is present in most of the range countries for the vulture populations to re-colonize and allow them to recover;

NOTING that these massive declines of vultures are unequivocally caused primarily by a single human activity and could be reversed;

AWARE of the fact that veterinary use of diclofenac started in India in 1993 and in Pakistan in 1998 and, within a very short time, massive deaths of vultures were noted in both countries and across South Asia;

NOTING that studies, published in the journal *Nature*, prove that the massive declines in the population of vultures in South Asia is mainly due to their exposure to the non-steroid anti-inflammatory drug diclofenac in livestock carcasses (*Nature* 427, 630–633);

ACKNOWLEDGING that the range countries have taken measures to protect vultures by banning the use and sale of veterinary formulations of diclofenac, and also including these species in protected species lists;

ALSO ACKNOWLEDGING that diclofenac prevalence in cattle carcasses has been substantially reduced, but remains at very dangerous levels indicating that human formulations are being widely used for veterinary purposes and that other painkiller drugs known to be both dangerous or untested for safety with respect to vultures are now increasing in veterinary practice;

FURTHER ACKNOWLEDGING the Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction 'SAVE' consortium partners, Bombay Natural History Society, State Government Forest Departments of Haryana, West Bengal, Assam, and Central Zoo Authority supported vulture breeding facilities, Indian Veterinary Research Institute, Wildlife Institute of India (India), Punjab Wildlife and Parks Department and Sindh Wildlife Department, WWF Pakistan (Pakistan), Bird Conservation Nepal, National Trust for Nature Conservation and Department

of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) (Nepal), have been making substantial progress with identifying and addressing the main conservation priorities;

CONGRATULATING the Governments of India, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the Darwin Initiative (UK Government), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, WWF Pakistan, Central Zoo Authority, The Peregrine Fund, BirdLife International, Zoological Society of London, National Birds of Prey Trust (UK), the Hawk Conservancy Trust (UK), IUCN, the Rufford Foundation, Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund, Oriental Bird Club and Save our Species (SOS), and others, for continuing to support and fund vulture recovery initiatives in India, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and other countries; and

FURTHER CONGRATULATING the Governments of India, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh on adoption of the Regional Vulture Declaration signed in Delhi, 4 May 2012, along with the formation of the Regional Steering Committee;

The World Conservation Congress, at its session in Jeju, Republic of Korea, 6–15 September 2012:

1. CALLS ON Gyps Vulture range States to begin action immediately to strengthen measures to reduce diclofenac availability, most immediately by prevention of injectable human diclofenac being packaged and sold in multidose vials larger than 3 ml;
2. ALSO CALLS ON Gyps Vulture range States to support a safety-testing protocol for all veterinary painkillers, and for this to be a requirement before licenses are granted to manufacture, retail or use these drugs within the region for veterinary purposes;
3. CALLS FOR the creation of multiple 'Vulture Safe Zones' (areas of 100 km radius, by working intensively through dedicated awareness work to achieve and demonstrate that cattle carcasses are free from diclofenac and other drugs toxic to vultures) in all South Asian countries as part of the wider advocacy effort and specifically to provide safe areas in which to release the captive birds;
4. REQUESTS Gyps Vulture range States to develop and update national vulture recovery plans, and ensure their implementation, including conservation breeding and release; and
5. URGES the Gyps Vulture range States, along with national and international NGOs, especially SAVE Partners and governments, to give special support, technical and financial, to enable the implementation and updating of the South Asian Vulture Recovery Plan.