

A fate of a carcass in a natural forest

Many of us do not realize how important an animal carcass in a natural forest is for wild scavenging animals. Carcass in the wild provides key food resources for wild scavengers (Selva et al. 2005). This report presents a situation where wild scavengers feed on the remains of a tiger kill (a horse carcass) in Phrumsengla National Park (27.43389N, 90.83833E), at an elevation of



A Wild Boar pulls apart the flesh of the carcass while Large-billed Crows feed on the ectoparasites. © Phrumsengla National Park (PNP).



Large-billed Crows feed on the carcass of the horse. © Phrumsengla National Park (PNP).

2,664m. The carcass was left untouched in the forest from 29 March to 06 April 2018 to examine what type of wild scavengers feed on it, using a camera trap. The camera trap (Cuddeback Digital) was fixed on a live tree to systematically record the activities of the animal species visiting the carcass. Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos* was the first to detect and feed on the carcass

followed by a solitary Wild Boar *Sus scrofa*, Asian Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*, and Himalayan Griffon Vulture *Gyps himalayensis*. The Large-billed Crows found the thick skin of the carcass hard to penetrate with their beaks. Therefore, they started feeding through the puncture marks left on the neck of the carcass by the tiger. That source of



An Asian Red Fox appears at the site but retreats from the carcass. © Phrumsengla National Park (PNP).

Highlight



A Himalayan Griffon Vulture lands at the site and feeds on the carcass. A Large-billed Crow sits on its back and feeds on the ectoparasites on the vulture's body. © Phrumsengla National Park (PNP).

feeding, however, was insufficient for the large flock of Large-billed Crows. They flew back soon after sunset. At the onset of night, a solitary Wild Boar came in and spotted the carcass. It approached the carcass, bite and tore the abdominal parts apart, and fed on the carcass. The next morning, the Large-billed Crows made their way to the carcass and found it easier to feed on the

opened carcass. A few minutes after the Wild Boar went out of the scene, the large flock of Large-billed Crows flushed in and completed their feeding. On the second night, an Asian Red Fox marched in, sniffed the carcass, but retreated.

The next day, again, the same solitary Wild Boar stepped in, bit and pulled the skin apart, exposing fresh meat of the carcass. Thereafter, the flock of crows fed on the



Himalayan Griffon Vultures land in a flock at the site and finishes off the carcass. © Phrumsengla National Park (PNP).

carcass alongwith the boar. The boar was found busy feeding on the flesh while the crows engaged themselves feeding on the ectoparasites found on the boar and on the carcass. Amidst this feeding spree, a solitary Himalayan Griffon Vulture landed near the carcass and started feeding alongside the flock of crows. The crows boldly sat on the back of the vulture and started to feed on the ectoparasites on its body. After a few



The Wild Boar comes in, monitors the remains of the carcass and leaves. © Phrumsengla National Park (PNP).

minutes, the vulture flew away. The crows were still found feeding on the exposed carcass left by the vulture. Once again, the boar came in, rolled back the carcass, and started feeding on it. This action further provided easy food access to the crows.

The next day, a flock of Himalayan Griffon Vultures landed at the carcass site and started feeding on the carcass along with the crows. It was observed that the crows were found perched on the back of griffons, feeding on the ectoparasites on their bodies. Bigger openings were made on the carcass by the boar, which the flocks of vulture and crows benefited from. The whole carcass was eaten up within seven days by the continuous feeding of the boar, crows, and vultures. The boar was the last to visit and leave the carcass.

From the above observation, we must understand that there is strong inter-specific mutualism in feeding among Wild Boars, Large-billed Crows, and Himalayan Griffon Vultures in a natural forest ecosystem. There may be so many such close interactions of feedings in the wild which we might have not personally sighted. Therefore, any dead animal or kill would be vital for wild animals as a food source. With this understanding, we must encourage our local community to avoid consuming or poisoning carcasses to prevent the killing of other animals in the wild. In this case, Himalayan Griffon was one of the

large scavenging birds who fed large portion of carcass. The Himalayan Griffon Vulture is known to use its energetically soaring flight to travel long distances from nests and roosts in search of carcasses (Houston 1974). This bird is listed as Near Threatened in the world (BirdLife International 2017). Poisoning carcasses would pose serious threats to its survival in the wild. Nature take its own course in disposing off carcasses.

References

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