

## International Vulture Awareness Day (IVAD) - 2016

### Conservational efforts to protect Vultures

Scavenging is a feeding behaviour of an animal to feed on dead animal or plant materials. Scavengers play an important role in an ecosystem by clearing out the dead animal or plant materials. Scavenging birds like vultures are mostly bare headed, with long beak and strong mandibular muscles to tear open the flesh.

Vultures toes are weak, poorly padded and have only slightly curved talons. The toes and tarsi are featherless, thus helping in quick cleanup after feeding. Being scavengers, vultures need not catch and kill its prey. Their large feet provide them balance while feeding. Some of the vultures fall under IUCN Threatened category.

In India, nine different species of vultures are found viz., Red-headed vulture (*Sarcogyps calvus*), Cinereous vulture (*Aegypius monachus*), Griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), Himalayan Griffon vulture (*Gyps himalayensis*), Long-billed vulture (*Gyps indicus*), Slender-billed vulture (*Gyps tenuirostris*), White-backed vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*), Bearded vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*) and Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*). All these species were



**Students participating in Rangoli competition at RSC, Aliganj Lucknow**

previously found in Uttar Pradesh but now only eight species are found excluding Bearded vulture.

Vultures are declining faster than any other bird in India. The breeding population of vulture is facing numerous threats. Main threats to the vulture population are illegal use of Diclofenac (though it was banned in 2006), habitat destruction or loss, competitors and food scarcity. Along with these threats some other threats like road kill, electrocution etc. are also responsible for their population decline.

At present mass awareness about their conservation is very much needed to avoid extinction. For the same, various national and international organizations, NGOs and communities are working



**Painting competition on vultures at Regional Science City**

and create awareness in the locals for the vulture conservation.

The Biodiversity and Wildlife Conservation, Department of Zoology, University of Lucknow is working and participating continuously from 2009 onwards for vulture conservation. Scholars are doing research concerning the conservation of vultures. Lab is organizing various training and mass awareness programs since 2009 and contributing in species conservation.

Every year on International Vulture Awareness Day, we organize different competitions and awareness rally in the city to create awareness among locals and specially school children about the importance of vulture in our ecosystem and how to contribute for their conservation. Loss of vultures is an irreplaceable loss in food chain.

Various competitions like open quiz, debate, arts competition, rangoli competition etc. were organized for school children.

Awareness vehicle was sent to different cities having potential vulture sites and volunteers created



**Vulture Awareness among school children's in Raibareilly through pamphlets**



**Awareness through pamphlets on vultures among school students in Deogarh, Lalitpur**

awareness among locals about different types of vultures found in that locality and how to conserve them by way of organizing workshops, distributing fliers and banners.

Various workshops were also organized along with the forest officials every year to aware the officials about identification and conservation of vultures in their respective habitats.

#### **Vulture Restaurant**

A vulture restaurant supplements the vultures with natural food supplies in an undisturbed area. Dead cattle are placed at a designated dining place where vultures come to feed. These restaurants generally attract most species of vultures.

Along with all these efforts our lab also established one vulture restaurant in Lalitpur district of Uttar Pradesh with the help of the Forest department. At present there are several big projects going on to conserve vultures being funded by Government as well as NGOs. The food availability for vultures is quite altered today than it was in the past. Therefore use of supplementary feeding sites for vultures (also known as "vulture restaurants") is widely accredited as a significant tool to aid with the provision of an ample, safe and consistent source of food for these master scavengers. Vulture restaurant not only help survival of the species but also helps in several other ways to flourish the local communities by increasing revenue mostly by ecotourism.

This year in 2016 IVAD was celebrated by Biodiversity & Wildlife Conservation lab, Department of Zoology, University of Lucknow. A mass awareness campaign was launched in Unnao, Moth, Jhansi, Lalitpur, Gonda, Suhelwa, Maharajganj, Basti, Lucknow. More than 100 schools and colleges could be reached by providing vulture kits. On 3 September 2016 more than 250 schools and colleges students participated in quiz, painting and Rangoli competitions on vultures at Regional Science City, Aliganj, Lucknow. In the same sequence competitions have also been organised in Bipin Bihari P.G. College Jhansi. Same awareness drive has been

launched at Bhimtal, Uttarakhand in association with Butterfly Research Centre, Bhimtal. **Submitted by**  
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#### **International Vulture Awareness Day (IVAD) celebration in rural schools in Jhansi and Tikamgarh, India**

To dedicate a day to the ecologically important vultures, Birds of Prey in South Africa and Hawk Conservancy Trust in England started IVAD on the first Saturday of September in 2009. More than 90 organizations celebrated IVAD on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2016 all over the World. Indian Biodiversity Conservation Society (IBCS) also joined the initiatives to create awareness for vulture conservation. The events were formulated to form a milestone basis for the implementation of conservation programs in the community, with a more effective conservation of vulture colonies in Maror (Tikamgarh, Madhya Pradesh) and Babina (Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh). Local community plays a key role in conservation of any species. Community-based conservation (CBC), as a means of achieving integrated conservation and development, has emerged as the central exemplar among national and international organizations as well as NGOs. The school teachers were approached because they are vital in taking the message to the future generation. Teachers play an important role in moulding the minds of the students. The impact is long lasting and helps the students to know about



**Children participating in plantation for promoting conservation of Large trees for nesting by vultures**

various aspects of vultures at a wider platform. This is important because educated people show a greater positive approach towards vulture conservation. It is important to aware the younger generation about the plight of vultures and to make them understand the ecological and environmental value of vulture species. For this it is utmost imperative to make contact with the teachers. To create awareness amongst the school children various awareness programmes were organized in Shaskiye Madhyamik Shala and Shaskiye Prathamik Shala Maror on 3 September 2016. School Principal, Devendra Singh Yadav and the school staff (Ram Kishan Ahirwar, Ved Prakash Mishra, Mahesh Kumar Dave, Hari Shankar Kaushik, Nand Kumar Prajapati, Mangal Singh Yadav, Brijesh Yadav, Rohit Yadav and Harish Ahirwar) co-





**Lecture on Vulture species and initiatives for their conservation**

operated in the event with appreciable zeal. The students also participated in the plantation of trees on which the vultures construct nests such as Peepal. The students were asked to observe the vultures in their area and not to disturb any vulture while feeding on carcasses near the village. The purpose was to make the students know about vultures in Maror and involve them in their conservation. Apart from participating in the competitions organized for them, they also wrote slogans and important information on the walls of their houses. They did this to create awareness among each and every person around them. This will be continued even after IVAD. The information will be beneficial in attracting the people of not only Maror but also others who visit Maror. Such initiatives will involve more people in conservation of vultures by sensitizing them towards the declining population of vultures. In JVM Modern Inter College, Babina a drawing competition was organized for students of class 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>. More than 500 students participated in the



**Felicitating winners of drawing competition on Vultures**

event. The students were felicitated on 3 September. Education is a fundamental part of vulture conservation. Using different tools to raise awareness, education and communication play a significant role in bettering the understanding among the students about the importance of conserving vultures "the best Scavengers" and their habitat. An important lecture on "Vultures: Our Ecological Friends" was delivered while the Prize distribution ceremony. The Principal of the school, Sharma further instructed the students to participate actively in awareness events. The IVAD in these two rural sites was celebrated with the collaboration of Forest Office, Jhansi and M.P. State Biodiversity Board, Bhopal. Volunteers (Abhishek Namdev, Arima Singh, Sachin K Maheswari, B.S. Kushwaha, Daya Sagar).

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**Colour illustration by students of the IVA Day**

