

WORKSHOP ON
**“VULTURE CONSERVATION ISSUES IN
UTTARAKHAND”**



**04 SEPTEMBER 2021
INTERNATIONAL VULTURE AWARENESS DAY**



DOON UNIVERSITY, DEHRADUN, UTTARAKHAND.

**WORKSHOP REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2021**

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SUMMARY

A workshop was held in Dehraun, Uttarakhand on 4th September 2021 on the occasion of International Vulture Awareness Day. The workshop, hosted by The School of Environment and Natural Resources of Doon University with technical support of HISER Society, brought together 30 PG Students, Research Scholars and Experts working on Conservation of Vultures in Uttarakhand. The workshop successfully harnessed the enthusiasm and experience of participants and reached wide-ranging consensus.

The ongoing study on vultures is being conducted by research scholars of Doon University since 2014. This workshop was next in the series of workshops organized in the University on Vulture Conservation in Uttarakhand. The previous one was an “International Workshop on Trans boundary Issues in Vulture Conservation” that was held in April 2019.

The participants were given new information and data about the state of the vulture population, the risks they face, and the best conservation strategy. Participants' enthusiasm and experience were successfully channeled, and a broad consensus was formed.

More information is available on: <https://hisersociety.org/raptor-conservation/>



Figure 1 : Himalayan Vultures © Sunny Joshi

BACKGROUND

Drastic decline of vulture population in the Indian sub-continent in 1990s is a well-known fact, and the Diclofenac poisoning was found the single most responsible factor behind this issue (Oaks et al., 2004; Prakash et al., 2012; Birdlife International, 2013). Veterinary use of Diclofenac has been banned in India since 2006 and large vials of human use diclofenac since 2015 in India. However, human use diclofenac are still being used in veterinary treatment. Along with use of Non-Steroidal Anti Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs), various other threats such as electrocution (Ogada et al., 2011; Saran & Purohit, 2012), habitat destruction including climate change are also recognized threats vulture species.

Mr. Khima Nand Balodi (PhD Scholar, Doon University) started working on research and conservation projects on Vultures in 2014. Later, his studies were funded by prominent International Organizations such as The Rufford Foundation, Oriental Bird Club and The MBZ Species Conservation Fund. Mr. Balodi was awarded the prestigious “Future Conservationist Award -2016” by Conservation Leadership Programme (CLP) for his research and conservation work in Uttarakhand. Later, he was joined by Ms. Himani Singh Khati (a Doon University Alumni, Currently a Researcher in Wildlife Institute of India), Sunny Joshi (PhD Scholar, Doon University) and they have carry forwarded their work as a team till date., while receiving International Awards and Research Grants from The MBZ Species Conservation Fund and HawkWatch International.

During this study, all 9 species that are reported from the Indian Subcontinent were reported in Uttarakhand, making the state extremely important for conservation of these Critically Endangered (CR) and Endangered (EN) species. Therefore, a need for dissemination of knowledge about these species was felt. This workshop was planned in January 2021 and was supposed to happen in March 2021, but due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, it could not be done.

This workshop was used as a medium to disseminate knowledge about vultures, their role in the ecosystem, the global decline in their population and the issues faced during the conservation efforts with the PG Students of Doon University, Researchers and Staff.

This report of the workshop is structured as follows:

- The workshop programme is attached as Annex A.
- A full list of participants is attached as Annex B.
- A record of the workshop proceedings is attached as Annex C.
- Photographs from the Workshop are attached as Annex D.

ANNEX A – WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

- 11:30 – Registration
- 12:00 – Background, Introduction, Workshop Objectives and Ground Rules
- 12:15 – Welcome and Opening Address by Mr. Sunny Joshi
(PhD Scholar, Doon University).
- 12:20 – Keynote Speaker – Dr. Suneet Naithani
- 12:45 – Detailed Talk by on Vultures by Mr. Khima Nand Balodi
(PhD Scholar Doon University, Gram Pradhan – Barangal, Almora.)
- 1:15 – Short Break
- 1:30 – Powerpoint Presentation by Himani Singh Khati
(Researcher, Wildlife Institute of India).
- 2:00 – Results
- 2:15 – Group Discussion, Q&A Session
- 3:00 – Closing Remarks, Vote of Thanks, Way Forward

ANNEX B – LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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30.	Dr. Suneet Naithani	Doon University	suneetnaithani@gmail.com

ANNEX C – WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS

Sunny Joshi started the program by welcoming all the participants, the keynote speaker – Dr. Suneet Naithani with Co-speakers – Khima Nand Balodi and Himani Singh Khati. He gave an introduction about the International Vulture Awareness Day and congratulated all for the same and then invited Dr. Naithani for his speech.

Dr. Suneet Naithani the keynote speaker of the workshop started his speech by telling the story of the mythological character “Jatayu” from Ramayana and how important his role was in the story arc. He related it with the role played by the vultures as scavengers in the ecosystem, like how Jatayu has to fight the evil to protect the good, in the same manner, vultures remove the evils (in the form of dead and decaying animals) from our environment by consuming them. He also talked about how the conversion of open scrublands for developmental activities has led to the habitat loss of these birds of prey. The decline in habitats or fragmentation of the habitats has caused the shrinking of their flying range, ultimately severely limiting their habitat.

Khima Nand Balodi who has been working on the conservation of vultures in Uttarakhand for several years, talked about the ecosystem services provided by the vultures, various stakeholders and issues that have developed in the absence of vultures. He also mentioned how the Vulture Conservation Programme started in Uttarakhand. He said, with the joint effort of his team and volunteers they have reported 9 species of vultures in Uttarakhand. He emphasized that an extensive conservation action drive with the help of government line departments, NGOs and stakeholders is required to ensure the survival of these severely threatened birds. He explained how several threats have loomed over these species, such as:

- The toxic pharmaceutical drugs like diclofenac have caused a sharp decline in the population among the vultures.
- Poisoning of the dead cattle and livestock by villagers as an intentional measure to take revenge by the villagers has led to a decrease in the population of vultures.
- Electrocution of vultures due to high tension transmission wires present nearby their feeding areas.
- Lack of coordination between different government departments and policy makers.
- Lack of awareness among local people about the conservation of vultures.

He also talked about an innovative step taken by his Gram Panchayat for a safe vulture feeding site named as Vulture Restaurant, where it is ensured that diclofenac free carcasses are fed to the vultures that are also away from power transmission lines.

Himani Singh Khati, researcher from Wildlife Institute of India gave an informative presentation about different vulture species in Uttarakhand, their history, ecological role and threats faced by them. Her presentation included photos from their field work, which helped the audience grasp the situation more clearly. She also discussed how vulture mortality caused by electricity transmission lines has become a big problem in recent years, as well as the steps her team has done to alleviate the threat thus far. For example, carcass dumping sites may be relocated.

Sunny Joshi explained how the declining populations of vultures are having an impact on cultural practices of some communities. Like, The Parsi Community, who used to offer their dead to the vultures (dead bodies are placed over a tower called The Tower of Silence). But the vanishing populations of vultures are causing a threat to their culture. Same can be observed in some Buddhist cultures too.

After that, there was a Q/A session in which the participants raised their doubts and questions which were well answered by the experts. Sunny Joshi, in his closing remarks, underlined that Uttarakhand, particularly the Terai Region, is a great habitat for vultures, and that if the dangers described above are addressed, it can serve as a nursery for the recovery of the world vulture population in the wild. He also stressed the importance of increasing public awareness about vulture conservation issues in Uttarakhand.

ANNEX D – PHOTOGRAPHS



Figure 2: Dr Suneet Naithani, Keynote Speaker



Figure 3: Workshop Participants



Figure 4: Khima Nand Balodi, Vulture Expert



Figure 5: Workshop Participants



Figure 6: Workshop Participants



Figure 7: Electrocuted Vultures Info graphic



Figure 8: Electrocutation of Vultures

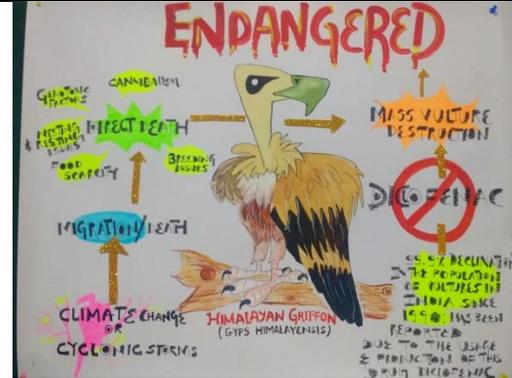


Figure 9: Vulture Info graphic



Figure 10: Cinereous Vulture



Figure 11: Egyptian Vulture



Figure 12: Workshop Management Team



Figure 13: Workshop Participants

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First of all, we would like to acknowledge Prof. Surekha Dangwal – Vice Chancellor, Doon University and Prof. Kusum Arunachalam – HOD, School of Environment and Natural Resources for their permission to organize the workshop on such a short notice and their moral support. We would like to acknowledge Dr. Suneet Naithani for his vision and guidance for organizing this workshop. We are grateful to Mr. Khima Nand Balodi, Gram Pradhan – Barangal, for sharing his expertise on vultures of Uttarakhand. We would like to thank Ms. Himani Singh Khati for her insightful presentation on vultures, along with all the volunteers and participants in the workshop. At the end, we would like to thank Ms. Nidhi Bhatt for her help in compiling this report and Ambika Thakur for designing the Vulture T-shirt.

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FURTHER READINGS

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Thank You



Figure 14: © Ambika Thakur