



KEY NOTES ON HIMALAYAN GRIFFON VULTURES (HGV) *GYPES HIMALAYENSIS* IN BAIDRINATH, NANDADEVI BIOSPHERE RESERVE, WESTERN HIMALAYS, UTTRAKHAND, INDIA.

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ABSTRACT:

Populations of Himalayan griffon vultures is believed to be stable and it is categorised as near threatened bird by IUCN. It is a resident bird and locally migrate within the periphery resident region. A visit was made during April 2017 to Baidrinath shrine area and valley of flower national park region. Most observation were done on endemic birds to the region. In open sky observation were done on raptors, Red kite Tibetan crows, and Himalayan Griffon Vultures *G. himalayensis*. Here are sittings of 4 flying vultures in the visited area like Baidrinath, Govind ghat and Valley of Flower national park core area under Nandadevi Biosphere reserve in Utrkhand. The vulture population is still in threat in Indian subcontinent as the population is threatened due to the effect of diclofenac compound from food chain and affecting breeding. Vultures are critically endangered species listed under the Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972, and hence should be given equal level of protection like tigers.

KEYWORDS:

HIMALAYAN GRIFFON VULTURES, NANDADEVI BIOSPHERE, WESTERN HIMALAYAS, BAIDRINATH.

INTRODUCTION:

The Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis* is a poorly known vulture, formerly accepted as resident or migrating only attitudinally within Sino-Himalaya and Central Asia (Thiollay 1994, Grimmett et al. 1999, Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001). The Himalayan vulture (*Gyps himalayensis*) or Himalayan griffon vulture is an Old World vulture native to the Himalayas and the adjoining Tibetan Plateau. There are about 23 species of vultures in world and out of which 9 species are seen in Indian subcontinent. and India had millions of vultures in mid-1980s but sweeping population drops between 1996 and 2007 saw 99% of these vulture populations vanish. Because of such extensive and speedy population declines, all three vulture species were listed as Near Threatened by the IUCN in 2000.

This vulture has now also been found in continental South-East Asia (e.g. Wells 1999, Robson 2002, Gilbert et al. 2006). Since 1979, over 30 instances have been reported in Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore (e.g. Lim 1998, Wells 1999, Robson 2002, Gilbert et al. 2006, Tordoff et al. in press), with recent anecdotal evidence of occurrence in neighbouring north-west Indonesia (K. C. Tsang in litt. 2008).

Himalayan Griffon is the largest Asian Gyps vulture (Thiollay 1994) and second largest regional raptor after the Cinereous (Monk) Vulture *Aegypius monachus*. Its main geographical range consists of the high uplands of central and southern Asia, from Kazakhstan and Afghanistan in the west through the Altai and Tien Shan ranges, Tibetan plateau and Himalayas east to western China (Yunnan,

Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia) and Mongolia (Ali 1962, Ali and Ripley 1968, Meyer de Schauensee 1984, Inskipp and Inskipp 1985, Knystautas 1993, Thiollay 1994, Grimmett et al. 1999, MacKinnon and Phillipps 2000, Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001). According to latitude, breeding occurs at elevations of between 600 and 4,500 m. Foraging birds are seen as high as 5,000 m or more and nonbreeding altitudinal migrants spend the boreal winter down to plains level, having been recorded as low as 175 m near Bharatpur, eastern Rajasthan, India, immediately south of the Himalayas (Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001). As with other Gyps vultures, Himalayan Griffons are mainly specialists on large mammal (including livestock) carrion, their food being found visually while soaring, either directly or by monitoring other scavenging birds, e.g., other vultures and corvids. Their large body-size confers feeding dominance over other vulture species in mixed gatherings at a carcass, except in the presence of Cinereous Vulture (Thiollay 1994, Grimmett et al. 1999, Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001).

Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis* feeding on needles of Chir pine *Pinus roxburghii* at about 08:55 hrs, along one of the monitoring trails between Dhauldhar and Badni village by my colleague Vidyadhara and Sabyasachi, the Badni being situated around 15 km from Deoprayag town. The altitude of the trail ranged between 1038–1088 m. The vegetation was mainly Chir-pine mixed with scrub, with species like *Cordia myxa*, *Lantana camara*, and *Carrisa* sp. On that particular morning, they saw a vulture perched on top of a chir pine at about 10–12 m from them on the trek. As the day was clear with no mist in the air and the

morning sun was behind us, we had a clear view of the vulture (Atkore and Dasgupta, 2006). In Himalayan vultures, unusual behaviour of feeding on tender needles of pine (*Pinus roxburghii*) is recorded. This vegetative matter may help in the procurement of nutrient supplement and roughage that aid in process of digestion.

The study area was taken for vulture observation are back site of Badrinath shrine area, both ice capped an bare rocky landscapes in around the shrine area. Govinda gahat, Valley of flower (VOF) national park area of Chamoli district of Uttarakhand state.

STUDY AREA:

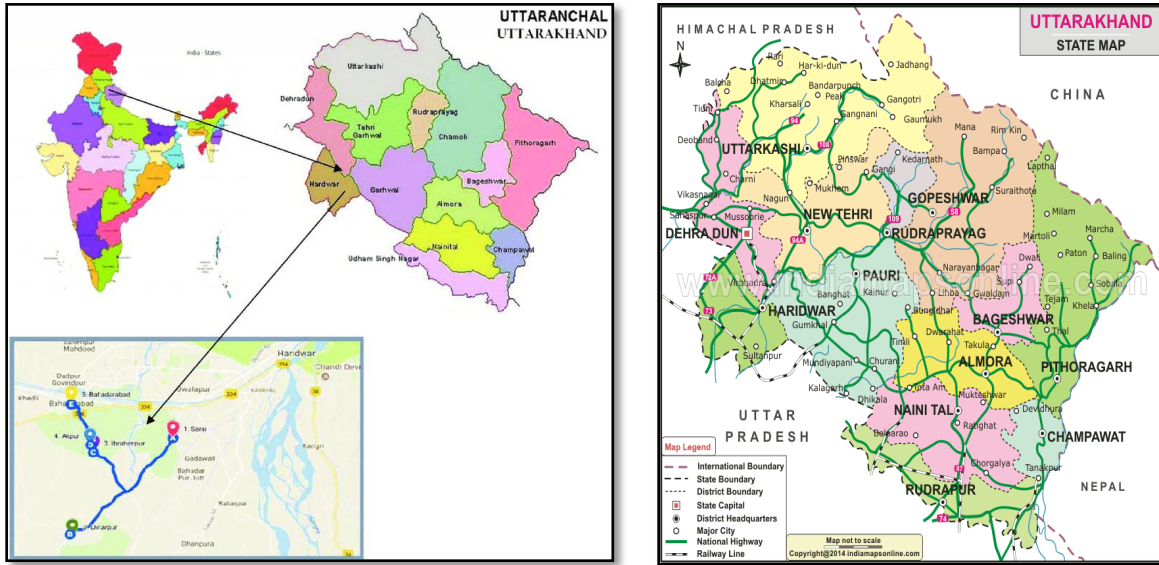


FIG- 1 MAP OF UTTRAKHAND SHOWING HARIDWAR AREA AND CHAMOLI DISTRICT.



PHOTO- 1 OVERAL LANDSCAPE OF THE SITE NEAR BAIDRINATH HIMALAYAN. DURING SUMMER THE ICE COVER SEEN OVER THE TOP BARE ROCKS , THE AMOUNT OF ICE COVER INCREASES AT NIGHT AND SOME PARTS SEEN BY MELTING ICE CAPS DURING DAY HOURS. DURING THE WINTER ENTIRE BAIDRINATH SHRINE ARE COVERED WITH SNOW AND HIMALAYAN VULTURES SHORTLY MIGRATE DESCENDING THE LOWER HIMALAYAS.

METHODOLOGY:

Open eye observations were done in around 1 hour

interval of time and scan the horizon sky in around. If

some bird species including the biggest Himalayan Griffon Vultures are seen , photography was done with aid of Cannon DSLR- 1100 D camera with lenses 250 mm with auto focus mode. Different activities like hoovering, gliding and landing over rocky mountain cervices is also observed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

In the lower Himalayan regions and terai arc regions Himalayan vultures are reported frequently by researchers and forest field staff in uttrakhanda and Uttarpradesh. The vultures are seen in Haridwar, Rahaji National Park, Pilbhit, and Katarniaghat sanctuaries. The Egyptian vultures are commonly seen in Katarniaghat wildlife sanctuary of Uttar Pradesh. The Himalayan Griffon vultures are also reported and observed by me at Panna

tiger reserve. Here this vulture is seen in rock clefts and gorges area. The nests are also reported in hill clefts and juveniles are seen indicating breeding in the natural habitat.

However, the vultures are are not reported earlier in snowclad area of upper Himalayas over 3200meter elevation. The day temperature in the month of April was around 6- 26 degree Celsius to a maximum of 30 degrees Celsius and in night there is snow fall in upper mountain caps ranging 1000 meter higher to the shrine area , the HGV can bear so much cold at night failing from -6 degree Celsius to 7 degree Celsius. However the vultures are not seen roosting over ice cover and seen near bare rocks near to ice cover area.

THE FOLLOWING TABLE SHOWS THE NUMBERS AND ACTIVITY OF VULTURE IN BAIDRINATH AREA.

Sl No	Site / place of Occurence	Ground elevation of the landscape in MSL	Activity of vultures
1	West of Baidrinath shrine area	3400m	1 vulture Flying over 600meter over snow covered ranges
2	West of Baidrinath shrine area	3200m	1 vulture landed over bald rocky ranges in no snow cover area
3	Govind ghat area	3000m	1 vulture Gliding overhead
4	Valley of Flower National park Central area	3500m	1 vulture gliding in jigh sky appx height 1600m above ground of VOF area



PHOTO- 2. ICE CAPPED HIMALAYAS JUST BEHIND WEST OF THE BAIDRINATH SHRINE AREA. ELEVATION APPROX. 4000-4200M.



PHOTO-3. HGV HOOVERING OVER ICE FALLEN AREA THROUGH CLOUDS AND MIST IN BAIDRINATH AREA (ELEVATION APPROX. 3400M)



PHOTO-4 HGV. SHORING FOR LANDING IN HILL TOWARDS A ROOSTING SITE WEST OF BAIDRINSTH TEMPLE



PHOTO-5 HGV.LANDING TOWARDS A ROOSTING SITE NEAR BAIDRINSTH TEMPLE SITE- WESTERN CORNER WITHOUT HUMAN MOVEMENT AREA. ROCKY LANDSCAPE WITH SCRUB VEGETATION AND WITHOUT ICE DEPOSITS.

CONSERVATION ISSUES:

The global conservation status category of the Himalayan Griffon was Least Concern (IUCN 2007) and presently Near Threatened NT (IUCN 2015), although difficulty of access to much of its mountainous range renders population surveys difficult. Unlike other highly threatened Gyps spp. of South and South-East Asia (Pain et al. 2003, Oaks et al. 2004), it is not regarded as seriously exposed to diclofenac poisoning, though this may not apply to the dispersers reaching South-East Asia. What proportion of the total annual production of young fledged these dispersers represent are unknown? The high rate of capture of weakened birds as they move south suggests independently that many or most of these immatures will not make a return journey and hence are lost to the breeding population. The breeding hill clefts in panna tiger reserve are seen with juvenile griffon vultures with parent vultures indicating breeding in temperate plains in winters. The vultures seen in kattarniaghat wildlife sanctuary is fully protected no harm in any means was

noticed. it seen other vultures in communal feed ground of caracass dumping site in pastures/ open phantas. A tiger kill (sambar caracass) seen surrounded by Himalayan griffon vultures) lied in the trail of Katarniaghat wildlife sanctuary near boat Ghat during 2007 Survey, Das, (U.K., J. Setty and V. Srivatava ,2019).

ABBREVIATIONS:

HGV- Himalayan griffon vulture., VOF- Valley of Flower National park , NBR- Nandadevi Biosphere Reserve. IUCN- International Union or Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. WPA- Indian wildlife protection Act 1972.

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