

## Himalayan Griffon Vulture [UPSC Notes]

Species in news is an important part of the UPSC syllabus. Questions have been asked in past years based on species that made headlines, especially species found in India. It is a part of the environment and ecology section of the GS Paper 3 of the [IAS exam](#).

### Himalayan Griffon Vulture

The Himalayan Vulture or Himalayan Griffon Vulture is an old-world vulture. It is one of the two largest old-world vultures and true raptors.



*Image Source - The Indian Express*

- Old world vultures are vultures that are found in the old world, i.e., the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa, and belong to the family Accipitridae.
- The Himalayan Griffon Vulture can live up to 40 - 45 years of age.
- It has dark brown greater covert feathers and pale blue facial skin. The wing and tail feathers are dark and feathers on the body have pale shaft streaks.

## Himalayan Griffon Vulture Distribution

The Himalayan Griffon Vulture mainly lives in the higher regions of the Himalayas and the Tibetan plateau at an elevation range of 1,200 - 5,500 metres. Their large wingspan helps these vultures to soar high in the sky searching for carcasses on the ground. It is a documented fact that by feeding on the carcasses, vultures prevent diseases from spreading to humans.

- It is found in Mongolia, China, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

### IUCN Status -

- It is listed as Near Threatened (NT) by the [IUCN](#) (International Union for Conservation of Nature).

### *Species of Vultures in India*

Nine species of vultures are recorded in India.

1. Oriental White Backed Vulture (OWBV)
  2. Long Billed Vulture (LBV)
  3. Slender Billed Vulture (SBV)
  4. Himalayan Vulture (HV)
  5. Eurasian Griffon (EG)
  6. Red Headed Vulture (RHV)
  7. Egyptian Vulture (EV)
  8. Bearded Vulture (BV)
  9. Cinereous Vulture (CV)
- According to the IUCN Red Data Book, four species OWBV, LBV, SBV, & RHV are Critically Endangered whereas EV is endangered, HV, CV and BV are Near Threatened (NT).

### **Diclofenac - veterinary nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID)**

The use of the anti-inflammatory drug Diclofenac has caused a steep decline in the population of vultures in the country. Diclofenac causes the deposition of uric acid in the visceral organs, leading to the sudden death of vultures.

- Three of India's vulture species of the genus 'Gyps'— the long-billed (*Gyps indicus*) and the slender-billed (*G. tenuirostris*) had declined by 97%, while the white-backed (*G. bengalensis*)

declined by nearly 99% between 1992 and 2007, according to an earlier estimate by the BNHS (Bombay Natural History Society).

- A study by the BNHS and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds' Centre for Conservation Science found that along with Diclofenac, there were several other drugs that were potentially toxic to vultures, being used by vets for treating cattle. The drugs make their way into the vulture's system as they feed on carcasses.
- Though Diclofenac was banned in 2006, it is reportedly still available for use.

### **Vulture Action Plan 2020 - 25**

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) launched a Vulture Action Plan 2020-25 for the conservation of vultures in the country.

The ministry has been carrying out a conservation project for vultures since 2006, the plan is to now extend the project to 2025 to not just halt the decline but to actively increase the vulture numbers in India.

### **The important objectives of the Action Plan for Vulture Conservation (APVC) 2020-25 are-**

- Preventing the poisoning of the principal food of vultures, the cattle carcasses with NSAIDs
- Carrying out safety testing of veterinary NSAIDs on vultures.
- Removal of drugs by DCGI ([Drugs Controller General of India](#)) from veterinary use if it is found to be toxic to vultures.
- Establishing additional Conservation Breeding Centres in the country along with Vulture Conservation Centres.
- Four rescue centres to cater to injured and sick vultures have been proposed from different geographical areas - Pinjore in the north, Bhopal in Central India, Guwahati in Northeast India and Hyderabad in South India.

## **UPSC Questions related to Himalayan Griffon Vulture**

### **Q. Is Himalayan vulture endangered?**

Ans. The Himalayan Vulture is denoted 'Near Threatened' in the IUCN Red List.

### **Q. How many species of vultures are found in India?**

Ans. There are nine vulture species found in India.

### **Q. What is the role of vultures in the ecosystem?**

Ans. They are nature's most efficient scavengers and help in preventing the outbreak of epidemics by cleaning the carcasses.