

**A Report on Death of Vultures
at Disangmukh, Sivasagar, Assam**

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Mr. Pranab Goswami

Mr. Hiren Dutta

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Mr. Pranjal Borah

Ms. Bijoyinee Sarma



Photo: Mr. Mridu Paban Phukan

Introduction

By the 1990s, the conservation world realised that the three *Gyps* species of vultures viz. White-backed, Long-billed and Slender-billed vulture were slowly disappearing from SE Asia. The population crash was estimated to be more than 95% over the last two decades and recovering their population is a global endeavour. The principal cause of vulture population decline was attributed to poisoning by diclofenac residues in livestock carcasses. To safeguard the remaining population of vultures, a conservation breeding program was started in India in 2004 and also banned the veterinary use of diclofenac in 2006.

Among the 16 species of old world vultures, 9 species are recorded in India. Red-headed vulture, Himalayan Griffon, Slender-billed vulture and White-backed vulture are found in Assam. Pesticide poisoning is becoming a major conservation threat to vultures in Assam. These poisonings are usually due to communities attempting to tackle livestock predation by wild carnivores and feral dogs. More than 200 vultures were killed by pesticide poisoning alone in Sivasagar district of Assam between March 2018 to April 2019.

On 21 April, 2020, altogether 32 vultures were found poisoned in the Lepai pathar of Disangmukh area in Sivasagar district of Assam. Nineteen of them including 17 Slender-billed and two White-backed vultures died in this incident.



Figure-1. Photograph of White-backed vulture and Slender-billed vulture. (Photo Courtesy: Mr Mridu Paban Phukan)

Case study on the death of vultures at Dichangmukh in Sivasagar district of Assam

On 21 April, 2020, at least 32 vultures were reportedly poisoned, found next to a cattle carcass on a paddy field at Lepai village in Disangmukh located in Sivasagar district of Assam. 19 among them were found dead and the rest 13 were in critical condition and brought them for treatment. Among the death vultures 17 were Slender-billed, two White-backed vultures. Preliminary investigations were done by forest officials led by DFO-Sivasagar. Initial investigations suspected that poisoning was the cause of deaths. The samples were collected and sent it to the forensic lab for investigation. No one has been arrested till in connection with this incident.



Figure-2. Photographs of death vultures lying in the paddy field at Lepai village, Disangmukh in Sivasagar village, Assam, India. (Photo courtesy: Mr. Hiren Dutta)

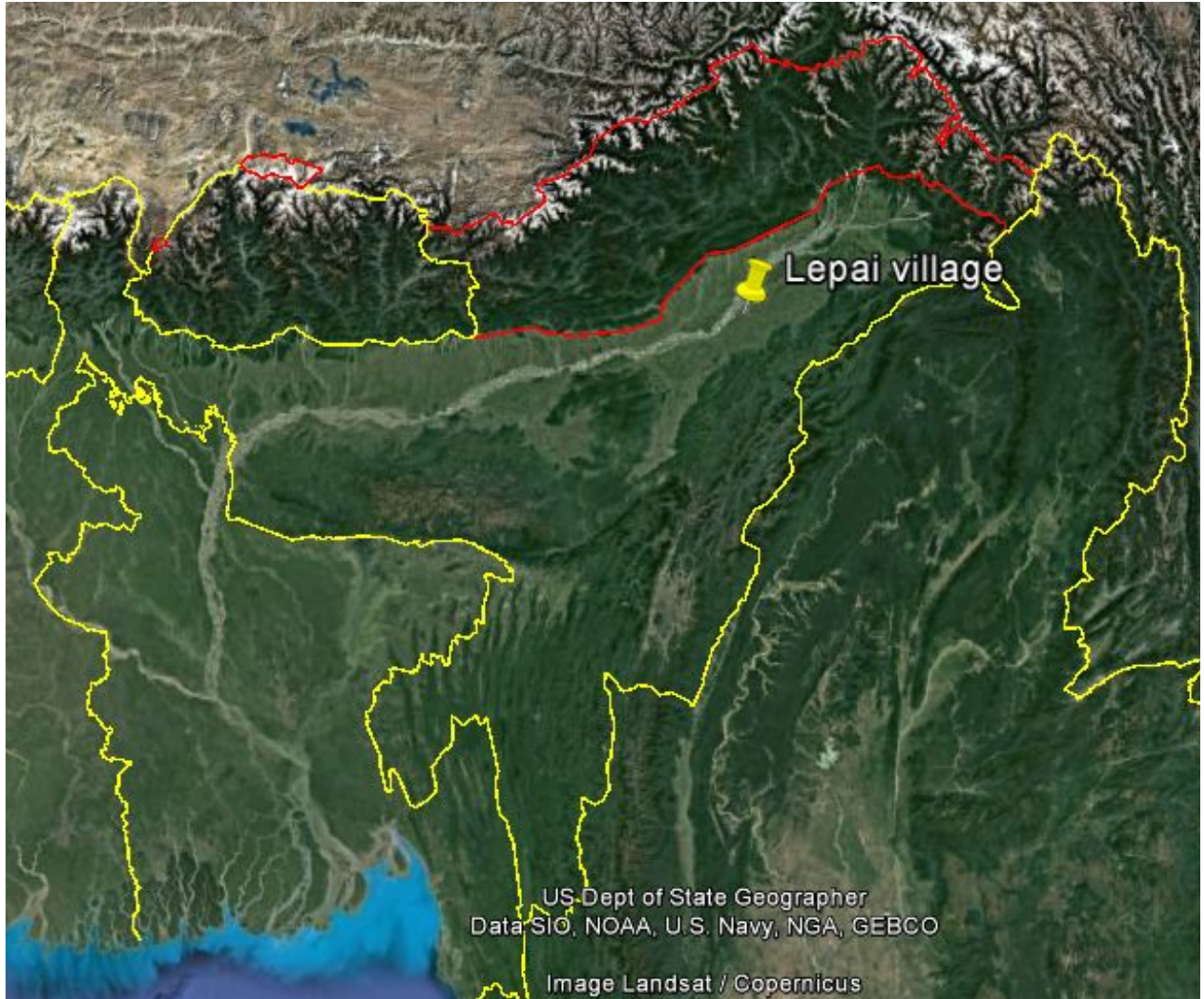


Figure-3. Map showing the place of incident, Lepai village located in Disangmukh in Sivasagar village, Assam, India. (Photo courtesy: Mr. Hiren Dutta)

It was reported that a cow calf was killed by a pack of feral dogs and in retaliation the owner intentionally poisoned the carcass to kill the dogs. The ill fated vultures consume the carcass at around in the afternoon hours and immediately fall seriously ill. After getting information the local forest department rushed to the place. According to the DFO-Sivasagar, because of stormy weather, it takes time to reach the place.

The dead vultures' carcasses were disposed of by the forest staff in the paddy field after thorough investigation.

Mr. Hiren Dutta, member of Aaranyak and a local birdwatcher from Sivasagar district informed that similar incidents were frequently happening in the area. More than 150 vultures were reportedly killed due to pesticide poisoning over the last three years in the same district.



Figure-4. Photographs of dead vultures arranged to be buried in the paddy field at Lepai village, Disangmukh in Sivasagar village, Assam, India. (Photo courtesy: Mr. Hiren Dutta)

However, atropine sulphate, an antidote against poisoning, was administered to the rest of the 13 surviving vultures. The health of these vultures are improving.



Figure-5. Surviving vultures kept in an isolation room for further treatment. (Photo courtesy: Mr. Mridu Paban Phukan)

Increasing feral dog population is becoming a potential driver for carcass poisoning in Sivasagar district of Assam. They often attack domestic livestock grazing on large paddy fields located sometime far apart from the households. In many incidents, they seriously injured the cattle which finally led to death. But because of the alertness of the owner or other villagers they failed to consume. The villagers use poison to control them from predation. As these poisoning carcasses continuously kill vultures in Assam, therefore fighting against poisoning is urgent.



A short interview on pesticide poisoning in Sivasagar district is available on below URL
<https://www.facebook.com/dipankar.lahkar.18/videos/2905519696196368/>



Figure-6. Photograph of death vultures in the paddy field at Lepai village, Disangmukh in Sivasagar village, Assam, India. (Photo courtesy: Mr. Hiren Dutta)

Conclusion

1. We expressed our deep concern such unnatural death of vultures, repeatedly in the Brahmaputra Valley.
2. It is one of the major causes of sinking of vulture population in the region.
3. Therefore, it is crucial to remove such poisoning threats to ensure that vulture population recovers and gets an opportunity to stabilize.
4. We suggest that concerned authorities take all necessary steps to investigate and build a strong case to punish the culprits to deter such acts of carcass poisoning.
5. We would like to suggest to identify the drivers (social, psychological, economic) of such poisoning so that strategic awareness and sensitization programmes can be designed and implemented.
6. It is also crucial to design a strategy to stop illegal sale of such pesticides so that access to pesticide can be made restricted.
7. We recommend strong community based vulture conservation in the Brahmaputra valley involving all stakeholders including the cattle owners.
8. We recommend that stakeholders engage in creating awareness about vulture conservation which is focused on an issue and target audiences.

Reference

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Amar Asom:

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দিচাংমুখৰ লেপাহি গাঁৱত ১৯টা শগুণৰ কৰুণ মৃত্যু

১২টা অসুস্থ শগুণৰ চিকিৎসাৰ ব্যৱস্থা বন বিভাগৰ মৃত গৰু পোৱালীৰ বিযাক্ত মঙহ খাই মৃত্যু প্ৰকৃতিৰ জামাদাৰ



ডিমৌৰ প্ৰতিবেদক, ২১ এপ্রিল ১ পুনৰ ৰাজ্যত শগুণৰ মৃত্যু। এইবাৰ কৰুণভাৱে মৃত্যু হ'ল ১৯টা প্ৰকৃতিৰ জামাদাৰ। শিৱসাগৰ জিলাৰ দিচাংমুখ লেপাহি গাঁৱৰ জোলাটোপত আজি ১৯টা শগুণ মৃত অৱস্থাত উদ্ধাৰ হয় আৰু ১২টা অসুস্থ অৱস্থাত উদ্ধাৰ কৰে বন বিভাগে। ইতিমধ্যে অসুস্থ ১২টা শগুণ ডিমৌৰ চৰ'ওয়াস্থিত বগু বন বিষয়াৰ কাৰ্যালয়ত থোৱা হৈছে আৰু বন বিভাগৰ লোকে পৰিচৰ্যা কৰি সুস্থ কৰি তুলিবৰ বাবে প্ৰচেষ্টা অৱ্যাহত ৰাখিছে। বন বিভাগৰ শিৱসাগৰ জিলা কাৰ্যালয়ৰ এগৰাকী বিষয়া মুৰিন আলীয়ে জানিবলৈ দিয়া অনুসৰি আজি প্ৰায় দুইবজাত স্থানীয় লোকে শগুণ মৃত্যু হৈ থকাৰ বিষয়ে বন বিভাগক সন্ধানত কৰে। পিছত শিৱসাগৰ কমান্ডলিক বিষয়া পদেধৰ গগৈ, পত্ৰ চিকিৎসক দেৱেশীৰ সোলাকাৰদেৱীয়া আৰু মুৰিন আলীয়ে ঘটনাস্থলীলৈ যাবলৈ যায়। মৃত শগুণবোৰৰ মৰণোত্তৰ পৰীক্ষাৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰাৰ লগতে তাতে পুতি থোৱাৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰা হয় বুলি বন বিষয়াগৰাকীয়ে জানিবলৈ দিয়াৰ লগতে অসুস্থ ১২টা চৰ'ওৱালৈ পঠোৱা হয়। অসুস্থ শগুণ কেইটা সুস্থ কৰিবৰ বাবে ডিমৌ বগু বন বিষয়া মনেশ্বৰ দুৱৰা, চৰ'ওৱা বন বিষয়া মুৰুল গগৈয়ে প্ৰচেষ্টা অৱ্যাহত ৰাখিছে আৰু কাইলৈ উন্নত চিকিৎসাৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰা হ'ব বুলি প্ৰকাশ কৰে। এটা মৃত গৰুৰ পোৱালী ভক্ষণ কৰাৰ ফলতেই বিষজিৱা হৈ শগুণকেটোৰ মৃত্যু হোৱা বুলি আৰ্থমিক তদন্ত পোৱা গৈছে বুলি বন বিষয়াগৰাকীয়ে জানিবলৈ দিহাৰ লগতে মৃত গৰু পোৱালীটো পথাৰৰ মাজতে পৰি থকা অৱস্থাত উদ্ধাৰ হয়।

Annexure-1

Salient poisoning cases reported from Sivasagar district in Assam between March 2018 and April 2019, India

Year	No. of vulture infected	No. of vulture death	Source
01 April 2019	NA	29	http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=apr0119/state052
31 March 2019	70	37	https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/poisoned-cattle-carcass-kills-37-vultures/article26689260.ece
03 September, 2018	NA	50+	http://www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=apr0119/state052
26 October, 2018	32	32	https://blog.forumias.com/poison-kills-32-rare-vultures-in-assam/
April 2018	18	18	https://northeastlivetv.com/2018/04/23/vultures-found-dead-in-sivasagar/
19 March, 2018	NA	36	https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/36-vultures-poisoned-to-death-in-assam/articleshow/63362782.cms

Please help us to save the vultures in Assam

The logo for Aaranyak is presented in a white, cursive script font against a solid black rectangular background. The word "Aaranyak" is written in a fluid, handwritten style, with a prominent underline beneath the letters "a" and "r" that extends to the right.

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