## Diclofenac Threat to Vultures

## Why in news?

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The 104 birds bred at Rani, Assam face a serious threat by Diclofenac drug used in cattle.

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# How is vulture population in India?

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- India hosts 9 vulture species, 5 of them the highly endangered Gyps species.
- ullet Assam is naturally a suitable habitat for vultures.
- It is home to 6 species, including winter visitors from the Himalayas the Himalayan and Eurasian griffons.
- The Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC) in Assam at Rani, Guwahati has 104 vultures, brought in as chicks.
- It has 30 adults and sub-adults: all oriental white-backed and slender-billed.
- These are 2 of the 6 species found in Assam that are old enough to be set free.

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 $\bullet$  The vulture population in Assam is presently battling toxic chemicals in livestock carcasses, due to Diclofenac use.  $\ensuremath{\backslash} n$ 

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#### How does diclofenac affect vultures?

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 $\bullet$  Diclofenac is a painkiller, usually injected to cattle. \n

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 $\bullet$  The digestive system of vultures is so evolved.

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 This makes it possible to tolerate bacteria and natural toxins in putrefying meat.

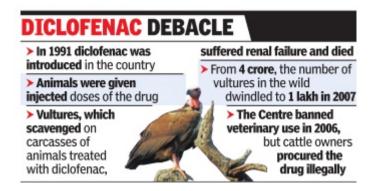
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• But they are vulnerable to chemicals such as diclofenac.

• Diclofenac present in the carcasses of cattle, injected as a painkiller, finds way into the vulture.

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# What are the challenges in eradication?

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• **Diclofenac** - Diclofenac for veterinary use was banned in 2005 but it was continued to be made for humans.

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• BNHS pressured the government into banning the vials (containers) of 30 ml or more in 2015.

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• Humans need 3-5 ml while only 30 ml or more works for cows.

• But untrained veterinarians use the 30 ml vials for veterinary use, with fatal

consequences for vultures.

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• The last of the 2015 stocks of the big vials expire by December 2018.

• This is thus delaying the freedom (release) for adult vultures being reared in captivity in the State.

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• **Pesticides** - Even after the expiry of diclofenac stocks, there is no guarantee that the birds will be safe.

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• The rampant use of pesticides by farmers and more than 70,000 tea gardens is another concern.

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- Villagers generally poison carcass of dead animals with pesticides to kill dogs, jackals and leopards that are a danger to livestock.
- Unfortunately, vultures that feed on these carcasses become the unintended victims.

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 $\bullet$  Recently, around 30 vultures, most of them Himalayan griffons, died in Assam, after feeding on the poisoned carcass of a goat. \n

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• **Life cycle** - Vultures take time to mature, pair for life, breed once a year, and live up to 70 years.

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• This extended cycle make captive breeding efforts challenging.

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### What are the efforts to address this?

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• The VCBC takes various efforts to save the birds by reducing their exposure to the fatal drug.

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• Mutton is the only food given at the VCBC and goats are kept for 10-12 days before the feeding.

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• This is to ensure that traces of any toxic painkiller or other chemicals are flushed out.

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**Source: The Hindu** 

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## **Quick Fact**

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### **VCBCs**

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- $\bullet$  The VCBCs are set up by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) in association with State Forest Departments.  $\$
- $\bullet$  The Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC) in Assam is at Rani, about 30 km west of Guwahati.

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- $\bullet$  It is one of the 4 Vulture Conservation Breeding Centres in India.  $\ensuremath{^{\backslash n}}$
- The other three are in Pinjore (Haryana), Buxa (West Bengal), Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh).

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