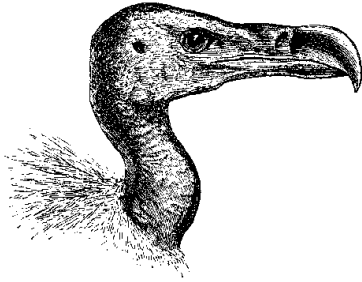


FIRST CAPTIVE BREEDING OF RARE VULTURE

The first ever captive breeding of the endangered Slender-billed Vulture, *Gyps tenuirostris*, at the Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre (VCBC) in Pinjore, India, was announced on the 8th of August when the first Slender-billed nestling was 140 days old and ready to fledge.



Woodcut from:
"Fauna of British India"
Birds—Vol. 3
by W. T. Blanford.
1895

The various vulture species in India have had a catastrophic decline from 40 million to just 60,000 in recent years. As there are fewer than 1,000 Slender-billed Vultures represented in this figure, this breeding success marks a triumphant milestone in the VCBC's captive breeding programme. And

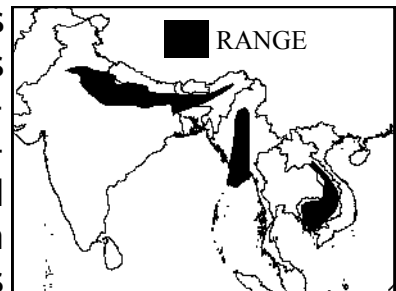
there's more good news: A Slender-billed nestling hatched at Rajabhatkhawa Centre in West Bengal has recently fledged.

In a recent release from vulturerescue.org, the director of the Bombay Natural History Society Dr. Asad R. Rahmani said:

"The hatching of this endangered species has given us more confidence in the husbandry and care of Vultures practiced at our centres."

Dr. Vibhu Prakash, Principal Scientist and Head of the Vulture Conservation Breeding Programme, stated that Slender-billed Vultures presented a unique challenge to the breeding programme.

The Slender-billed Vulture is a protected species listed on the Appendix II list of CITES. Its decline is largely due to the use of the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) Diclofenac (an anti-inflammatory drug used as a veterinary product and marketed as *Voltaren* for humans) in working farm animals, especially in India. Diclofenac is poisonous to vultures, causing kidney failure, and is being replaced by Meloxicam (another NSAID), which is not toxic to vultures. The retail sale of Diclofenac is banned by law in India, however it is still acquired illegally and applied to livestock.



Wild populations remain in northern and eastern India through to southern Nepal and Bangladesh, with a small population in Burma. The only breeding colony in Southeast Asia is in the Steung Treng province of Cambodia. This colony is thought to number about 50-100 birds. The survival of the vultures in Cambodia may have been partly due to

Diclofenac not being available there. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds predicts total extinction of the wild population within the next decade.

As Slender-billed Vultures have never been kept in captivity before, and have not been studied much in the wild, it was a challenge to house and breed them in captivity. Therefore, this initial successful captive-breeding achievement is a big step forward in saving this highly endangered species.

Because of their crucial role as scavengers in India's ecosystem, the various Vulture species' decline has been linked to an increased spread of rabies in humans.

India's captive breeding programme is the last hope of the species. Let's hope the Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre has continuing success in their efforts to save these majestic raptors.

Reference: 1. *Wikipedia*

2. *EcoWorldly*

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BIRD KEEPING IN AUSTRALIA