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Forest dept to support drug ban to save vultures

Biswabrata Goswami
in Krishnagar

Feb. 5. — At a time when scientists have given hope that the Asian vultures can be saved if the inflammatory drug — diclofenac — mainly found in dead cattle, is replaced by a new drug meloxicam, the Nadia district forest department is planning to support the ban of drug in the district.

In this regard, the divisional forest officer (Nadia and Murshidabad range) Mr Sourindranath Paul said:

“The government’s aim to ban the drug was hampered due to the lack of an alternate drug. But when the new drug has been found that could replace diclofenac, we should take quick steps to propagate the Centre’s directive of banning the diclofenac. I will personally talk to the district veterinary officer on Monday and request him to ban the use of diclofenac immediately.”

Mr Paul’s effort has come in the light as a large nesting site of White-rumped Vulture Gyps (Bengalensis), one of the three species of the Asian Gyps vulture, has been spotted in the Banguria forest near Bethuadahari Wildlife Sanctuary in West Bengal recently.

A large flock of such birds has found a safe haven here for the past five years when all habitats in the nearby places of Bethuadahari and other parts of Nadia district have been reportedly destroyed. The carrion-eating birds, who were once a common sight in West Bengal, have indeed made a self-styled effort to be re-colonised.

Meanwhile, a juvenile vulture identified as cinereous





vulture, which are common in Himalayan range was rescued from Kandi recently and brought in the Bethuadahari Rescue Center for temporary shelter. The dramatic decline in three species of vultures came to notice about a decade ago when researchers saw a flock of vultures falling down from a tree in a bird sanctuary in northern India. The livestock painkiller diclofenac, consumed by vultures when they eat a carcass, was blamed for the sharp decline of the vulture population.

In 1980s, the white-backed vulture was thought to be the most abundant large bird of prey in the world, but in little over a decade, the population has crashed by about 98 per cent. As a result, the species was classified as critically endangered in 2000, along with the closely related Slender-billed Gyps tenuirostris and Indian Vultures Gyps indicus.

In the journal PLoS Biology, the scientists from Britain, India, South Africa and Namibia have said diclofenac — which is fatal to the birds — could readily be replaced by meloxicam, which is not harmful for the vultures.

The scientists noted that the populations in South Asia of the three threatened vulture species had plummeted by more than 97 per cent over the past 15 years due to the widespread use of diclofenac to treat sick cattle..

Birds eating the carcass of an animal that had died shortly after treatment with the drug suffered kidney damage, increased serum uric acid concentrations, visceral gout and death.

In Banguria forest, 11 nests on sishu trees particularly, were spotted. In most of the nests, the vultures were seen incubating their eggs. Though, the reason behind choosing the Banguria forest as a real habitat by the vultures is also not clear since there are no permanent dumping sites within a radius of 30 kilometres.

In a recent trip to the Banguria forest, it has revealed that the population of these white-rumped vultures is supposed to be increased to 35 from 12 during the past five years.