

On 4.i.2006, the bird was sighted at 16:15 hrs amidst thick undergrowth on the left bank of Alaknanda River at Swait village (550 m m.s.l.), near Srinagar town (Uttaranchal). The dense thicket of vegetation was mainly composed of *Lantana camara* and *Cordia myxa*. We were surveying the area for birds along the Ganges, Alaknanda, and Bhagirathi rivers as part of an ecological study organized by HNB Garhwal University, Srinagar (Atkore 2005).

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The fate of a small population of Indian White-backed Vultures *Gyps bengalensis* in Vadodara (Gujarat, India)

Raju Vyas

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Raju Vyas, 505, Krishnadeep Apartments, Mission Road, Fatehgunj, Vadodara 390002, Gujarat, India. Email: razoovyas@hotmail.com.

Since 1985, I have regularly observed a small population of Indian White-backed Vultures *Gyps bengalensis* roosting and breeding, in and around Sayaji Baug Zoo & Garden in Vadodara (Gujarat, India). Sayaji Baug Zoo is one of the oldest zoos in India, developed in 1879 by Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaikwad III, on the banks of Vishwamitri River (22°19'N 73°13'E). The entire complex encompasses 110 acres and contains about 80 species of large trees. The vultures might have selected this area, for their activities, due to availability of tall palms and other species of trees, and the undisturbed riverside area. The vultures selected only high, straight trees that were above 15 m tall, and preferred only those palm trees, which are located in the zoo areas.

My data indicates that the vulture breeding population is crashing and will perhaps vanishing from the area (Table 1). During 1986 I counted over 36 roosting vultures of which 16 pairs bred on various tree species in the garden area (Table 2). The number gradually decreased to 11 birds and 5 nests within a period of 10 years. During 1996 only 5 nests were present of which 3 were at new locations—the 'traffic center' and opposite the third gate in the garden. A vulture's nest was also spotted on an *Ailanthus excelsa* ("vilayati arduso") in the EME school compound in 1996, which is about 1.5 km from the zoo. After that no vultures nested in the area. All that is now left of this colony, since the last seven years, is a single bird that stays in zoo area and feeds on the garbage

of the zoo. It has been known to disappear for a few days but has always returned—alone.

Some of the threats noticed during this period were the loss of large trees, especially those that were used by the birds. The birds were also deliberately disturbed by the garden management—with the view to prevent nesting and roosting. But the main threats for the cause of the vulture population decline seem to lie outside Sayaji Baug. The first is feeding on contaminated food in the area surrounding Vadodara city. And the second possibility is the expansion of the city airport. Earlier there was a small domestic airport at Vadodara, but after 1988 the Indian Air Force started new airbase and the domestic airport has been upgraded. The airport management began awarding an annual contract for scaring / shooting birds that were found in the vicinity of the airport—to prevent birds-related accidents.

At present (April 2005) the entire vulture population has vanished from the Sayaji Baug Zoo & Garden.

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Table 1. The Indian White-backed Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* population in and around Sayaji Baug Zoo & Garden

No.	Location	Tree species	Number of Vulture Nest			
			1986	1991#	1996	2004
1	Sambar enclosure	'Haldarvo'	1 (R)	TF	---	
2		Palm	1	1	0 (TF)	0
3		Palm	1	1	0	0
4		Palm	1	1	0	0
5	Blackbuck enclosure	Palm	1	1	1	0
6		Palm	1	1	0	0
7	Primate section	Palm	1	1	0	0
8		Palm	1	1	0 (TF)	0
9		Palm	1	1	0 (TF)	0
10		'Ambali'	0 (R)	0 (R)	0 (R)	0
11	Bear section	Palm	1	1	1	R
12	Tiger section	Palm	1	1	0	0
13		Palm	1	0	0	0
14		'Peepal'	1	1	0 (R)	0
15	Nursery	'Naliyeri'	1	1	0 (D)	0
16	Garden	Palm	1	1	0 (D)	0
17		Palm	1	1	0 (D)	0
18	Traffic center	(?)	0	0	1*	0
19		'Haldarvo'	0	0	1*	0
20	Opposite gate 3	'Kanazo'	0	0	1*	0
		Total	16 (36)	14 (16)	5 (11)	0 (R)

R=Roosting; TF=Tree-felling; D=Tree dead; *=Nesting pairs shifted; #=Source: Walker 1992.

Table 2. List of trees used by Indian White-backed Vultures *Gyps bengalensis* for nesting and roosting at Sayaji Baug Zoo & Garden (1985–2004)

No	Species	No. of trees	Activity [No. of nests / Roosting]
1	Palm or "Pankha Tad" <i>Borassus flabellifer</i>	13	13 / Roosting
2	"Naliyeri" <i>Cocos nucifera</i>	1	1 / Roosting
3	"Peepal" <i>Ficus religiosa</i>	1	1 / Roosting
4	"Kanazo" <i>Holoptelea integrifolia</i>	1	1 / Roosting
5	"Ambli" <i>Tamarinus indica</i>	1	0 / Roosting
6	"Haldarvo" <i>Adina cordifolia</i>	2	2 / Roosting
7	Unidentified	1	1 / Roosting
8	"Shankar Jata" <i>Caryota urenus</i>	1	0 / Roosting
	Total	20	

A visit to Nandi Hills, Karnataka, India

Nick Lethaby

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Nick Lethaby. Email: nlethaby@ti.com

As a keen birder who gets to visit Bangalore each year, I like to visit some of the local birding hot spots when I come. The morning of 8.iii.2006, I decided to take advantage of the fact that all my meetings were after lunch and head up to Nandi Hills, which are about 60 km north of the city. Of course, being Bangalore, I subsequently managed to work a ten-hour day despite the late start!

The remnant forest in the fort here holds a few Nilgiri Wood-Pigeons *Columba elphinstonii*, which I hoped to see better views of than in my previous visits. In addition, the Nandi Hills have a record of attracting interesting wintering and migrant species such as Pied Thrush *Zoothera wardii* and Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula supercilialis*. It seems likely that the isolated hill-top forest concentrates migrants