

# The vulture rises again

With scientists finding out the reason for the collapse of the vulture population in India, there's hope that the bird, a useful scavenger, will be saved from extinction. This vulture family's story is an eye-opener

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We went far so we could get fresh, organic food for you. Your friend ate food laced with human chemicals and has fallen ill ””

The baby vulture let out a big sigh. He was bored sitting all alone in the nest. And ma and pa had gone out to bring food for him. He let out another sigh. His wings had developed and he could fly well. But ma and pa were even stronger. They flew high up in the sky. So high and far up that within a few minutes they became mere specks in the sky. Evening approached and finally he saw his parents flying towards the nest. By then he was

in a foul mood. Hungry but angry he asked them, "Why did you go so far? I am so bored ma. I have no one to play with pa. My only friend has also disappeared. I went to his nest today but there was no one there. Where did he go pa?" Saying this he let out a loud wail. Ma and pa were handsome white-rumped vultures. They had black wings and a white patch on their rump. Because of a ruff of feathers around their neck they looked very regal, but their neck and face were completely bare. They couldn't say anything because their beaks were full of

food. They gently caressed baby with their beaks and implored him to eat. Baby was very hungry and he soon gobbled up every last tasty morsel. Hunger assuaged he finally calmed down. Ma said, "Dearest, we went far so we could get fresh and organic food for you. Your friend ate food laced with human chemicals and has fallen ill." But ma couldn't tell him that all his friends had disappeared because they had eaten diclofenac in their food. Pa looked at ma's worried face and said, "Don't worry ma, scientists have finally found the reason for our decline. I am sure they are taking measures to stop our ex-

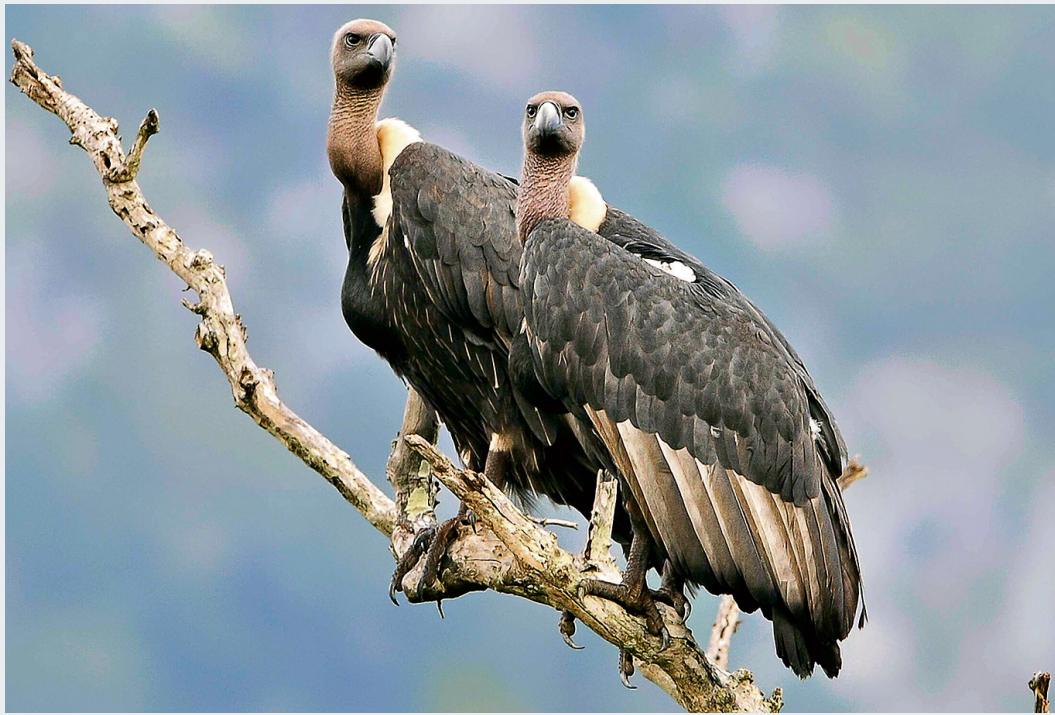


## BE AN EXPLORER

Try these activities that will expand your knowledge of the animal kingdom

1. Match the birds with their beaks/or names (Parakeet, Eagle, Sunbird, Vulture, Egret)





tion. They have started a breeding programme to increase our population” ma flared up, “When will that happen? Already 99.99 per cent of vultures have died out in India because of this chemical. Only a handful of us are left on this cliff side.”

Pa said, “Have hope ma, we are a resilient species. We will rise again.”

Next morning, baby woke up before ma and pa. He practised a few flights near the nest. As soon as his parents woke up, he declared, “I want to come with you today. I am bored at home. Please take me along.” Ma and pa relented and if you had stood un-

der the cliff, you would have seen a beautiful sight of three vultures soaring away.

Baby asked pa, “Where are we going pa? When will we reach? Pa answered, “The forest department has opened a vulture restaurant for us. They test our food for diclofenac and only put out chemical-free food.”

Baby was enjoying the flight. The air was cool but pa said it would be even better when it was hot. The hot air rising up helped them glide even higher. The forest looked really beautiful from high up.

As they flew baby started seeing a number of different birds. He saw a fierce looking “Black

Eagle”, a bright yellow “Golden Oriole”, a lot of snow-white “Little Egrets”, tiny and very shiny “Purple Sunbirds”, and also a flock of “Yellow-throated Sparrows”. “So many birds! Pa there are so many birds in the forest. I can play with any of them, can’t I ma? I will never be bored with so many playmates.” exclaimed baby excitedly to his parents.

Ma said, “Of course you can my baby. Ask them politely and I am sure you will find a lot of friends today.”

Baby quickly gobbled up his lunch while ma and pa lingered over theirs. He really wanted to play. He flew to the nearest tree

and spoke to the Little Egret, “Will you play with me egret?” The egret was cleaning his snow-white feathers and looked at baby vulture with alarm. “Don’t you come near me, I am warning you! I have just cleaned my feathers and you have blood all over your beak.” Baby felt very sad but he wanted a playmate. So he flew to the tree nearby where he saw the Black Eagle sitting. Very politely he asked the eagle, “Will you play with me eagle? We can both soar high in the sky. Let’s play chase the tail.” Eagle looked at baby vulture with disdain, “I am a bird of prey, not a scavenger like you. I chase and kill my prey with my talons. You vultures have no shame in eating already dead animals. I will not play with you.”

Baby felt very crestfallen but he decided to try again. A tall fig tree was fruiting nearby. Suddenly he saw one of the figs disappearing, so he decided to take a closer look.

And he was very surprised when he saw that what he thought were green leaves were actually a flock of birds. “Yellow-footed Green Pigeons” sat feeding on the yummy fruits. He approached them very humbly and said, “Lovely pigeons, will you play with me please?” The pigeons felt offended and answered quite rudely, “We are frugivorous, we only eat fruits. Whereas you only eat meat. We cannot play with you.”

Baby felt truly sad and he hung his head. Under the tree was a peacock. Before baby could say anything the peacock said derisively, “Don’t you even dare of

asking me to play. I am the National Bird. See my bright colours they are better than a rainbow. You are so dull grey and dirty. You don’t even have feathers on your neck!”

Before baby could say anything in his defence, a Racket-tailed Drongo arrived. He looked very distraught and in a troubled voice announced, “Friends I am just coming from the riverside. There is a dead Gaur and it’s already rotting. Our water will be poisoned. Where will be find enough water in the summer?”

Baby immediately spoke up, “Please don’t worry. Meet us at the riverside in an hour and see the magic.” Saying this he flew off.

The birds looked at each other in puzzlement. But they were very curious to find out what the magic was. Before the hour was up they all flew to the riverside and lo and behold there was no sign of the dead gaur. Instead, there was a flock of vultures finishing off the last of the rotten meat.

All the birds felt ashamed of their behaviour. They all apologised to the vultures.

Pa said, “We accept your apology. But let bygones be bygones. We have evolved to be different. We don’t have feathers on our neck so we can poke our head in the dead bodies to feed easily.”

All the birds thanked them for their clean-up service to the forest. And all of them asked baby vulture, “Dear friend, will you come and play with us?”

Baby vulture happily said, “Yes, yes, yes!”

## 2. Answer the following.

- 1) Why don't vultures have feathers on their neck?
- 2) What chemical led to the decline of vultures?
- 3) Name two scavengers found in our forests?
- 4) How many birds are mentioned in the story? Name them.

- 5) What is a vulture restaurant?
- 6) What are the different species of vultures found in India?
- 7) What is a frugivore?
- 8) Name the bird of prey mentioned in the story?
- 9) Which is the national bird of India?
- 10) Which mammal is mentioned in the story?

## 3. Find the birds hiding in the tree-



(Yellow footed green pigeon, Golden oriole, Yellow throated sparrow, Black Drongo)

- Answers to quiz**
1. They don't have feathers on their neck so they can poke their head into dead bodies to feed easily.
  2. Diclofenac
  3. Vulture and hyena
  4. Nine (Vulture, Black Eagle, Golden Oriole, Little Egret, Purple Sunbird, Yellow-throated Sparrow, Yellow-footed Green Pigeon, Peacock, Racket-tailed Drongo)
  5. A vulture restaurant tests food for diclofenac and only puts out chemical-free food.
  6. Nine species (Indian vulture, Griffon vulture, Himalayan vulture, Bearded vulture, Slender-billed vulture, White-rumped vulture, Cinnereous vulture, Egyptian vulture, Red-headed vulture)
  7. Frugivores eat only fruits
  8. Black Eagle
  9. Peacock
  10. Gaur