

7. Vulture Species- Environment

Wildlife group BNHS to reintroduce two vulture species in Assam in January. The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) is set to reintroduce captive-bred Slender-billed and White-rumped Vultures in Assam to revive their critically endangered populations. This initiative seeks to counter the catastrophic 99% decline caused primarily by the veterinary drug Diclofenac, restoring their vital ecological role as nature's clean-up crew.

The Reintroduction Initiative

The Initiative- The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) is prepared to reintroduce captive-bred vultures into the wild.

Target Species- The reintroduction focuses on two Critically Endangered species-

1. Slender-billed Vultures (*Gyps tenuirostris*)
2. White-rumped Vultures (*Gyps bengalensis*)

Location- The release will take place in the state of Assam.

About Vultures- General Profile

Definition- Vultures are large, carrion-eating birds.

Global Distribution- There are 22 species of vultures globally, residing primarily in the tropics and subtropics.

Diversity in India- India is home to nine specific species of vultures-

1. Oriental White-backed Vulture
2. Long-billed Vulture
3. Slender-billed Vulture
4. Himalayan Griffon
5. Red-headed Vulture
6. Egyptian Vulture
7. Bearded Vulture
8. Cinereous Vulture
9. Eurasian Griffon

Significance of Vultures

Ecological Importance

Nature's Clean-up Crew- Vultures act as primary scavengers.

Disease Control- By feeding on infected carcasses, they effectively kill pathogens and bacteria, thereby breaking the chain of infections that could spread to other animals or humans.

Cultural Importance

Parsi Community- Vultures play a central role in the funeral rites of the Parsi (Zoroastrian) community.

Towers of Silence- The community leaves their dead atop these towers (*Dakhma*) to be consumed by vultures, a practice known as *Dokhmenashini*.

Major Threats and Population Decline

Veterinary Drugs (Primary Threat)- The widespread use of Diclofenac, a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) used to treat cattle, is fatal to vultures who feed on the carcasses of treated livestock.

Solution- BNHS actively encourages veterinarians to use vulture-safe alternatives like Meloxicam and Tolfenamic acid.

Habitat and Food Issues

Lack of Nesting Trees- Destruction of habitat reduces breeding sites.

Food Dearth- Reduced availability of safe carcasses.

Contamination- Consumption of food contaminated with pesticides.

Infrastructure Hazards- Electrocuting by power lines is a growing cause of mortality.

Scale of Loss- India has witnessed a catastrophic decline, losing 99% of the population of three key species- the Oriental White-backed, Long-billed, and Slender-billed Vultures.

Conservation Status

The following table details the protection status of the nine vulture species found in India according to the IUCN Red List and the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), 1972.

Species Name	IUCN Red List Status	Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), 1972
Oriental White-backed Vulture	Critically Endangered	Schedule I
Long-billed Vulture	Critically Endangered	Schedule I
Slender-billed Vulture	Critically Endangered	Schedule I
Red-headed Vulture	Critically Endangered	Schedule IV*
Egyptian Vulture	Endangered	Schedule IV*
Bearded Vulture	Near Threatened	Schedule I
Himalayan Vulture	Near Threatened	Schedule IV*
Cinereous Vulture	Near Threatened	Schedule IV*
Eurasian Griffon	Least Concern	Schedule IV*

About the Organization- BNHS

Full Name- Bombay Natural History Society.

Nature of Organization- It is one of India's largest and oldest Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

History- Founded on September 15, 1883, in Mumbai.

Mission- To conserve nature through action based on three pillars-

1. Scientific Research.
2. Education.
3. Public Awareness.

Source- <https://www.theweek.in/wire-updates/national/2025/12/04/bes12-mh-bnhs-assam-vultures.amp.html>