

# 15 more vultures in captive breeding

By Shoaib Ahmed

LAHORE, Oct 3: The Punjab Wildlife Department in collaboration with the World Wide Fund for Nature is putting efforts to conserve the population of white-beaked vultures, which species is almost extinct now, and in this connection 15 chicks will be added to captive breeding centre of vultures in Changa Manga Forest Station.

Officials told *Dawn* on Wednesday that according to the studies carried out in Pakistan by the Peregrine Fund and Ornithological Society of Pakistan, population of vultures in Changa Manga and Dholewal, near Taunsa, had completely vanished. From 2001 to 2004, Changa Manga station had around 750 pairs, Dholewal had 421 and Toawala, near Multan, had 2,000.

They said over 1,600 dead vultures were recovered from fields and among the dead ones, single largest cause of mortality, up to 85 per cent, was visceral gout disease. Visceral gout is a disease of birds in which kidney failure causes a build-up of urates in internal organs, leaving a chalky white coating on them. Symptoms include anorexia and emaciation. It is a problem common to caged birds but vultures

are particularly sensitive to poisoning by diclofenac, which leads to renal failure, visceral gout and death to them.

The officials said vultures are ecologically important because they clean the environment and are resistant to livestock and wild animals' diseases. Vultures control their spread from carcasses. The vulture population decline can lead to an increase in stray dogs population that poses potential health threat to humans, they added.

Talking to *Dawn*, Imtiaz Tajwar, the director general of the Punjab Wildlife Department, said a breeding farm was set up in Changa Manga in 2006 where the Punjab Wildlife Department and World Wide Fund for Nature under a joint project kept more than eight vultures in captive breeding and 15 more would be added in a month's time.

The reformed breeding centre had been set up at six acres land belonging to the Punjab Wildlife Department in Block-4 of the Changa Manga Forest Station, he said adding that under the agreement the centre would be handed over to the Punjab Wildlife Department after three years.

Tajwar said the Punjab

Wildlife Department officials were feeding the birds kept at the breeding centre.

Explaining the objectives of the center, Tajwar said this small population of vultures was being provided with diclofenac safe food and international standards were being maintained in their care. He said through the center the population of vultures would be increased and later they would be released in their habitat.

He said the Hawk Conservancy Trust, UK, was providing technical support to the project. The trust has contributed in kind by providing technical help and has offered to provide training in breeding and husbandry of vultures at the trust.

He said the project was being run under a vulture technical committee set up by the federal environment ministry and in Punjab under the supervision of a project steering committee chaired by the Punjab Wildlife Department director general.

Tajwar regretted that ban on the sale of diclofenac was weak and it was still available at drug stores.

Natural Resources