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CVWG ANNUAL REPORT 2023



Summarised Version



CAMBODIA VULTURE WORKING GROUP (CVWG)

The Cambodia Vulture Working Group (CVWG) Annual Report 2023 summarises the results of the vulture conservation of three Critically Endangered vulture species (the White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*, Slender-billed Vulture *Gyps tenuirostris* and Red-headed Vulture *Sarcogyps calvus*), undertaken from January to December 2023 by CVWG members.



Slender-billed Vulture
©Mardy Sean - SVC



White-Rumped Vulture
©Porchay Taing - MoE



Red-headed Vulture
© Porchay Taing - MoE



Government Members



Non-Governmental Conservation Organisation Members



Conservation, Eco-tourism and Academic Members

The core membership of the CVWG is comprised of two government members (the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forests, and Fisheries), five conservation NGOs (ACCB, NatureLife Cambodia, Rising Phoenix Co. Ltd, the Wildlife Conservation Society, and the World Wide Fund For Nature), and three further eco-tourism and academic organisations (Sam Veasna Conservation Tours, Cambodia Bird Guide Association, and the Centre for Biodiversity Conservation).



POPULATION MONITORING & SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING PROGRAM

A key action undertaken by CVWG members each year is the operation of so-called ‘Vulture Restaurants’ – designated sites where domestic livestock carcasses are regularly provided for the Vultures.

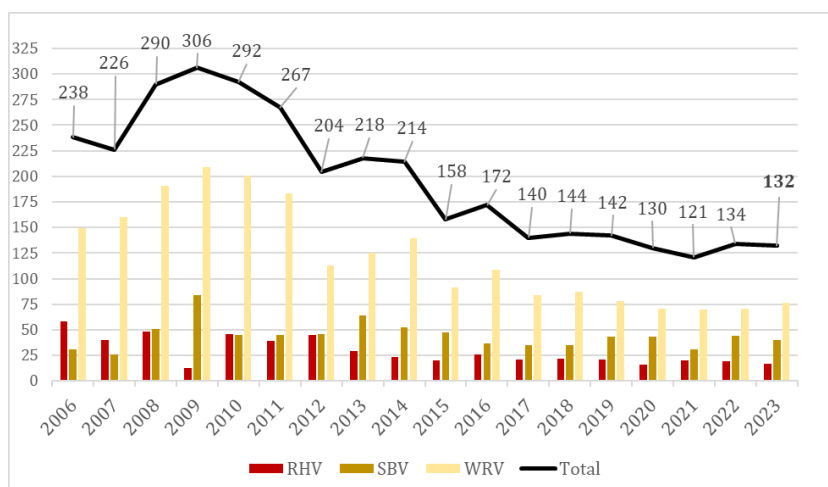
This is conducted mainly to allow for accurate population monitoring, as the vultures that attend can be counted, but is also an essential action to mitigate reducing natural food availability. In 2024, 124 carcasses, mainly of domestic cows and buffaloes were provided, the highest amount provided for vultures in Cambodia since this conservation action began in 2004.



Five times every year, the restaurant sites operated by Rising Phoenix, WCS and WWF synchronised recording of vultures, enabling the estimation of the National Vulture population. This provides a minimum estimated number, for tracking the trend of vultures each year.

The 2023 Minimum Population Estimate (MPE) was 132 vultures of all three resident species.

This result is similar to recent yearly estimates, possibly indicating that targeted conservation measures appear to have stabilised the remaining population following historic declines.



Graph of Annual Minimum Population Estimates 2006-2023
RHV-Red-headed Vultures – SBV-Slender-billed Vultures – WRV-White-rumped Vultures

NEST MONITORING & OTHER KEY ACTIVITIES

CVWG members conduct yearly searching, monitoring, and protecting of vulture nests.

In total 30 nests were located of all three species, of which 87% were able to successfully fledge 26 chicks.

This is a very positive result, the highest on record for number of nests found. At Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary, Rising Phoenix have installed 21 artificial nest platforms, some of which are now occupied by nesting Slender-billed Vulture pairs.



A Slender-billed Vulture nests on an artificial platform at Siem Pang

© Eang Samnang - Rising Phoenix

Combatting the threat of poisoning through monitoring, mitigation, and advocacy activities, and promoting the conservation of vultures on local and national platforms is a priority action address this destructive practice.

In 2023, multiple potential poisoning incidents were responded to, with mitigation protocols applied, and thankfully no cases of vulture mortality from poisoning were recorded.



CVWG run targeted community awareness programs promoting vulture and biodiversity awareness periodically. During 2023 International Vulture Awareness Day was also celebrated with a jointly-coordinated social media campaign in September, and one interactive event targeting environmental-sector university students took place at the Royal University of Phnom Penh. (photo ©NatureLife Cambodia)



In May of 2023, a young Red-headed Vulture in a poor state of health was rescued at Srepok Wildlife Sanctuary. Through collaboration between several CVWG members, it was rescued and taken into care at ACCB, with plans to rehabilitate it, fit a tracking device, and release back to the wild in the future. (photo © ACCB)

COORDINATION, PUBLICITY & CAPACITY-BUILDING



The CVWG held three working group meetings in 2023, during April, August and December, well attended by all of the non-governmental and Government members.

CVWG Meeting on the 29th of August 2023 © CVWG/NatureLife Cambodia

During 2023, five articles for the general audience were published in National Media in Cambodia that covered the work of the CVWG or its members, and featured quotes from CVWG members as well as the Ministry of Environment spokesman H.E. Neth Pheaktra.



The CVWG represents Cambodia as core member of the vulture conservation consortium SAVE (Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction), and all CVWG members are also included as Affiliate-level partners. In March 2023, the 14th SAVE Annual General meeting was attended by Mrs. Kem Bopreang from MoE, Mr. Eang Samnang from Rising Phoenix, and Ms Ny Naiky from NatureLife Cambodia. In March 2023, in the lead up to the SAVE AGM in Nepal, the CVWG arranged for Mr. Eang Samnang from Rising Phoenix to attend a three-day workshop on vulture-tracking provided by SAVE at Nepal's Vulture Safe Zone and vulture-release centre.



The vulture-tracking workshop (above) © Eang Samnang – Rising Phoenix & the SAVE AGM group photo (below)



MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS

POPULATION TREND APPEARS TO HAVE STABILISED

The 2023 Minimum Population Estimate (MPE) of 132 vultures of all three resident species was generated in June during one of the five vulture population census events is mildly encouraging. The result is only one lower than the previous year's MPE, and higher than 2022 or 2021. This provides further supporting evidence to suggest that since the declining numbers from 2009 to 2017, focused conservation measures appear to have stabilised the remaining population(s).

FORMAL ENDORSEMENT OF THE WORKING GROUP BY DECREE

From its inception as the Cambodia Vulture Conservation Project, through the 2016 transition to the CVWG, the working groups activities have been guided by the historic MoU between core NGO members, and through the two 10-year Vulture Action Plans, that together span the period 2005 to 2025. Recognising the groups valued vulture conservation work, and promoting even more engagement with central directives and policies the working group was formally endorsed by Decree from then Minister of Environment H.E. Say Samal in July of 2023.

HIGHEST-EVER YEARLY TOTAL OF NESTS RECORDED

The re-discovery of the White-rumped Vulture nesting colony by Rising Phoenix is a timely development, as the White-rumped Vulture nests have been scarcely recorded in recent years, despite it being the most numerously abundant of all three species. The nests were located due to GPS/GSM tracking, with the discovery of the colony being prepared for publishing in the Cambodian Journal of Natural History.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Revise, disseminate and retrain in the Vulture Restaurant Protocol.
2. Continued and/or expand GPS/GSM tracking of Vultures.
3. Continue to research factors impacting nesting behaviour and priority habitats.



‘To prevent the extinction of Cambodia’s vulture populations, restore their population size to levels consistent with their long-term survival by mitigating threats throughout their range.’

[The Aim of the 2016-2025 CAMBODIA VULTURE ACTION PLAN]



This is a summarised version of the CVWG Annual Report 2023. This version prepared by Oliver Gray-Read/NatureLife Cambodia on behalf of the CVWG in August 2024.