

RELEASING OF CINEREOUS VULTURE INTO WILD – A SUCCESS STORY OF CONSERVATION

An injured juvenile cinereous vulture was stranded during ockhi cyclone (2017) near Asaripallam in Nagercoil town of Kanniyakumari district. The vulture was rescued, and proper veterinary care was given by Kanniyakumari Forest Division. It is kept in Udhayagiri biodiversity park in Udhayagiri Fort since then. Due to the sincere efforts and meticulous care provided by the forest staff, the vulture has completely recovered and grown into an adult. It is now fit to be release into the wild. The vulture was named as “Ockhi” with reference to the cyclone in which it got stranded. Cinereous Vultures are a long-distance migrant and high-altitude flyers. They are also social animals living in flocks. Hence in order to ensure its right to life, Tamil Nadu forest department had taken special efforts to release the vulture in wild.

This vulture was likely a young individual when rescued as juveniles of this species are known to be stragglers and may have got drifted with air currents and ended up at the site near Kanniyakumari. Large vultures like this depend on thermals or air currents for lift off and soaring flight. In the absence of such thermals the vulture may have got stranded. Considering the suitable wintering sites of Cinereous vultures in India. It was suggested that the captive vulture be transported to northern India to Rajasthan State and released. The necessary permission has also been obtained from the Chief Wild life Warden, Government of Rajasthan for the same.

In Rajasthan State there are number of cattle carcasses dumping sites that support large populations of vultures. One such site is the “Keru” cattle carcass dumping site 20 km from Jodhpur town. The Keru site is ideal for release of the captive vulture not only because of the presence of other Cinereous vultures but also because of ready availability of food.

Further, close to the Keru Site is the Machia Biological Park (Jodhpur Zoo) where the captive vulture on arrival in Jodhpur may be housed for few days for it to acclimatize. The vulture can then be deployed with the transmitter there and released at the Keru site.

As the Machia Biological Park is located around 2600 km from Kanyakumari, it would take a minimum 4 to 5 days to transport by road or rail as halts would be required to minimize the stress to the bird. Hence it was decided to transport the bird by Air. Permission was obtained from the Ministry of Civil Aviation to transport the vulture by Air for the first time in the Country. Necessary clearance and logistics supports were provided by Air India staffs at Chennai, New Delhi and Jodhpur Airports.

Transportation Schedule:

30.10.2022	–	Kanniyakumari to Arignar Anna Zoological Park, Vandalur by Road.
31.10.2022	–	02.11.2022 – Acclimatization at AAZP

03.11.2022 – Transportation of vulture by Air India Aircraft from Chennai to Jodhpur and releasing in Machia Biological Park.

The vulture was finally transported in a special cage designed with proper ventilation and space for the vulture as per IATA Live animal regulations.

A special aircraft with more cargo space and ventilation was arranged with support of Air India and the Pilots were appraised of ensuring proper ventilation during the flight. In Delhi Airport, there was a halt of 3 hrs. In order to calm the vulture and reduce the travel stress, Special Airside permissions were arranged in Delhi Airport for the accompanying persons i.e. DFO Kanyakumari, Vet Doctor and Bird handler to be with the vulture in Delhi Airport. During this time, the handler was provided water to the vulture and interacted with it to make it calm.

The Airport staff were given specific instructions to handle the cage cautiously to prevent stress to the vulture and ensure priority in loading and unloading. The vulture has been successfully transported to Machia Biological Park, Jodhpur where it will be conditioned for a safe release in to the wild. The bird has also been tagged by the Wild life Institute of India (WII), Dehradun to enable its tracking after release in the wild.

Additional Chief Secretary

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