



## Endangered Egyptian Vultures Make Record Appearance at Badli Pond of Jodhpur in Rajasthan

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### ABSTRACT

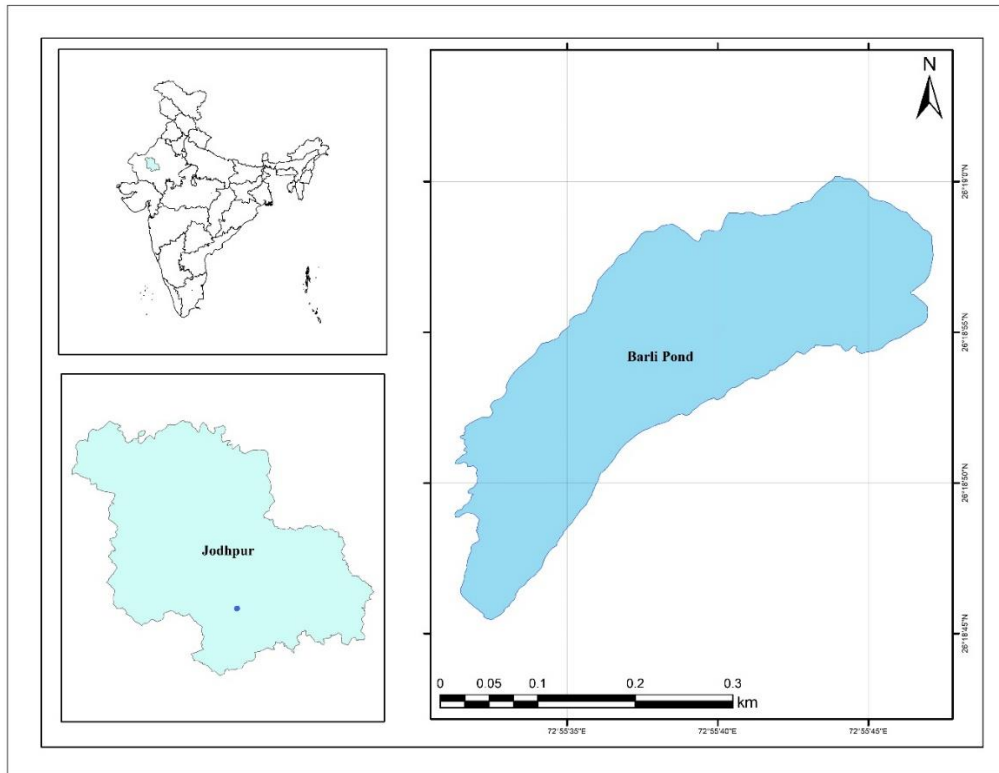
Rajasthan hosts seven of the nine vulture species found in India, including the endangered Egyptian vulture, which is experiencing a declining population trend. The primary threats contributing to this decline include trichobezoars, predation by feral dogs, exposure to diclofenac, and collisions with high-tension power lines. The Badli Pond, which has recorded an average population of 1575 Egyptian vultures with a maximum count of  $1670 \pm 30.95$  individuals, along with the Keru dumping yard and Arna Jharna, presents an opportunity to be developed into a vulture-safe zone for conservation efforts.

**Keywords:** Conservation, Egyptian Vulture, Endangered, Record, Vulture safe zone.

### SHORT COMMUNICATION

Rajasthan is home to seven out of nine species of vultures in India, including the resident red-headed vulture (*Sarcogyps calvus*), white-rumped vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*), long-billed vulture (*Gyps indicus*), Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), and migratory vultures such as Eurasian griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), Himalayan griffon vulture (*Gyps himalayensis*), and cinereous vulture (*Aegypius monachus*)<sup>1,2</sup>. The Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*, Linnaeus 1758) is a scavenger and medium-sized avian species with 12,400–36,000 mature individuals and a declining population trend<sup>3,4</sup>. Adult birds can be identified with distinctive white feathers and a yellow beak with a black tip. Juveniles have brown– black feathers. It is

distributed across North Africa, southern Europe, India, China, Nepal, Pakistan, and Afghanistan<sup>4</sup>. It is lighter than other vultures<sup>5</sup>. Several researchers have assessed the declining trend of vultures in Jodhpur as well as in Rajasthan and attributed it to the following factors: high-tension electric lines, diclofenac, feral dogs, trichobezoar, and unknown causes<sup>6,7</sup>. Badli Pond, Keru Dumping Yard, and Arna Jharna congregates good number of vultures, including the endangered Egyptian Vulture. A major congregation of Egyptian vultures is seen at Badli Pond situated in between 72°55'30" E to 72°55'50" E and 26°18'45"N to 26°20'00"N (Figure 1) at Jodhpur district of Rajasthan, India<sup>8</sup>. The vultures were sighted in association with steppe eagles (*Aquila nipalensis*), painted storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*), black-headed ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*), great cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), little cormorants (*Microcarbo niger*), with some common birds in and around the pond. The major vegetation surrounding the pond is Vilayati babul (*Prosopis juliflora*), Ber (*Ziziphus nummularia*), and Masa (*Tephrosia purpurea*). A few stands of *Prosopis cineraria* were also observed in the surrounding area of the pond. The vultures were counted using the total count count and block count method with photographs and videos as tools<sup>9,10</sup>. On 25th February, 2024, authors have observed 1596± 30.95 number of Egyptian vultures from Badli Pond in Jodhpur district. On 27th of February, record numbers 1670± 30.95 vultures were recorded from Badli Pond. The authors kept track of the vultures for five days regularly and recorded a mean population of 1574.6 vultures (Figure 2). Earlier, 1171 vultures were recorded from the same site<sup>1</sup>. Another researcher has also recorded 890±63.30 vulture from the same site and its vicinity<sup>2</sup>. Nestled on the undisturbed hillocks is the Keru dump yard, which is located in Jodhpur. The municipal corporation of Jodhpur also installed a carcass plant in Keru. On average, 40–50 dead livestock from Jodhpur city and its nearby locality are regularly dumped over the carcass plant. Jodhpur is also the hub of the leather industry. Dead animals are first skinned for use in the leather industry, with the necessary parts kept and the remainder left out for vultures to consume. Because of plenty of easy food at Keru, good roosting sites like Badli, and breeding sites such as undisturbed hillocks, Badli and its adjoining localities can be considered a vulture-safe zone. The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate change (MOEFCC) of India has also recommended setting up a minimum of one vulture safe zone in each state of the country in accordance with the same state government's recommendation to set up a vulture safe zone combining all three locations, i.e., Keru Dumping Yard, Badli Pond, and Arna Jharna<sup>11</sup>. Despite the decreasing population trend of this endangered species across the globe, the sighting of such huge numbers definitely brings a smile to all conservationists.



**Figure 1: Study Area**



**Figure 2: A View of Badli Pond**