

Vulture restaurants a hit in Cambodia

Title

When they're serving carcass of buffalo at the vulture restaurant in Siem Pang district, there's no shortage of lunchtime patrons. In Cambodia, the vultures are a threatened species, and conservationists have established a chain of eateries like this one, in the hope of bringing them back.

Net Norin from Birdlife International in Indochin said, "We preserve the vulture because they are near extinct in the world so we, Birdlife International, are trying to preserve them by giving them dead cows or buffalos each month." A lack of food is the principle reason for the vulture's decline in Cambodia. Uncontrolled hunting of wild animals is cited as one reason. Tighter controls by farmers over livestock that used to roam freely, is another.

In India, the same vulture species have been decimated by the drug Diclofenac used to keep livestock healthy but toxic to vultures feeding on the carcasses. The restaurant program in Cambodia, however, is showing positive results for the species as a whole. "Since we started our vulture preservation project in 2004 till now the numbers of vultures have increased. For example, we surveyed the whole country in 2004 and found 140 vultures. Then another survey in June 2009 found we had up to 286 vultures.

So the numbers have increased and the villagers received a lot of knowledge about preserving the vulture because they see more and more tourists come to visit this area which they benefit from", said Pich Bunnat, Wildlife Conservation Society]: And raising awareness about the plight of the vulture may well be key to their long-term survival. In the meantime, there's nothing like a free lunch.