Raptor Rehabilitation and Release in Thailand

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Anakin, the Cinereous Vulture an inspirer of raptor rehabilitation & release in Thailand
Raptor Rehabilitation & Release

- The cooperation of

  - Kasetsart University Raptor Rehabilitation Unit (KURRU)
  - Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP)
  - Wild Bird Rehabilitation and Release Fund
    - Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST)
Introduction

• Diurnal birds of prey
  – Hawks, eagles, vultures

• Nocturnal birds of prey
  – Owls
    • Barn owl
    • Scops Owl
    • Wood Owl
Legal Mitigation

• All species of diurnal raptors in Thailand are protected under the Wildlife Protection and Preservation Law

• Most of owls are protected as well

• Personal keeping as pets are legally not allowed
Reasons for Rehabilitation

• Raptors are legally protected

• Raptors are natural resource for all

• Raptors are natural legacy for future generations

• Wildlife welfare and their right to live free
  – If able and health condition allowed.
Problems

- Raptors threatened by illegal trade, hunting, shooting

- Urbanization & Environment Problems
Conditions for Rehabilitation

• Emaciation due to shortage of food
  – Vagrant vultures in winter months

• Injuries
  – Shot wound
  – Electrocution
  – Object hit
  – Predated wound

• Orphaned young birds
  – Owls on branching period
Reasons for Admission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sick &amp; Injury from wild</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orphan</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal captive</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Procedures of Rehabilitation

• Health

• Behavior & hunting ability

• Flight exercise in enclosure
Health Examination

- Clinical examination
- Deworming
- Clinical pathology assessment
  - PCV, Plasma protein
  - Blood lead level
  - Clinical chemistry; uric acid, protein, albumin, etc.

- Zoonotic diseases
  - Avian influenza
KURRU Policy on Non-releasable Raptors

• Generally, non-releasable birds will be euthanized unless they are endangered species, as practiced in other wildlife rehabilitation centers worldwide.

• However, at KURRU such disabled birds are to keep as “living textbook” for the education and outreach program for veterinary students and the public.
Hunting Test

• To be releasable, rehabbed raptors need to be fit for hunting test

  – Given live suitable prey
    • Cricket, frog, mice, rat, guinea pig
      – Depending species of raptors

  – This procedure is regulated under KU Lab Animal Use Committee
Facility for Rehabilitation

• One 5x6x24 m-long flight enclosure
  – Second enclosure, 30 m long will be built next year

• Six holding cages for diurnal raptors.
• Three holding cages for owls.
Flight Enclosure
Flight Exercise
Second Flight Enclosure
Holding Cages
Cases per Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>35</td>
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Birds Rescued over Last 2 Years

Species:
- Barred Eagle-owl
- Brown Hawk Owl
- Asian Barred Owlet
- Spotted Owlet
- Collared Scops Owl
- Barn Owl
- Common Kestrel
- Peregrine
- Himalayan Griffon
- Changeable Hawk-eagle
- Imperial eagle
- white-bellied Sea-eagle
- Crested Serpent-eagle
- Osprey
- Crested Goshawk
- Japanese Sparrowhawk
- Rufous-winged Buzzard
- Black-shoulder Kite
- Brahminy Kite
- Black Kite
- Black Baza

Number
Health Conditions of Releasable Raptors

- Free of Avian influenza and other blood parasites.
- Gaining normal weight of the species
- Normal PCV and plasma protein

- Not disabled that will diminish the ability to survive on its own in the wild, post-release
- Conditions that are not releasable;
  - Loss of eyesight
  - Loss of talons or bill
  - Wing loss
  - Loss of human wariness (being tamed)
Post-release Monitoring: Banding
Wing-tagging
Re-sighting by wing-tagging

A Himalayan Griffon found 110 days post-release in North-east China
Satellite tracking
Satellite Tracking

Fly the Vulture Home

Myanmar (Burma)  Laos  Thailand

China

Release site

Locations
Course
Countries

30 0 30 60 Kilometers

Collaborators

Department of National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation
Faculty of Veterinary Medicine Kasetsart University
Thai Raptor Group
BCST Bird Conservation Society of Thailand
Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia
Singha Inc.
Public Awareness Activities: KURRU Media Tour
Public Awareness Activities:
Bird Watching Field Trips & Bird Release
Public Awareness Activities:
Thailand Bird Fair & Chumphon Raptor Watch Fest
Raptor Release
Media Outreach Activities: Websites

www.thairaptorgroup.com

www.bcst.co.th
Outreach Activities: News Release
WILDLIFE NURSING RARE BIRD BACK TO HEALTH

Vulture find inspires conservation fund

JULAWAN DOLOH

A rare cinereous vulture recently found in Thailand has inspired a project to breed and conserve local species of vulture feared to be close to extinction.

Krisana Kaewplang, of the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST), said bird experts and conservationists have set up the Fly the Vulture Home Fund to raise 700,000 baht for nursing the frail vulture back to health.

The rare, black cinereous vulture, or *Neophron monachus*, is believed to have been migrating from either South Korea or Mongolia and stayed off course into Thailand.

An adult black vulture is one of the largest flying birds in the world. It is about a metre long and 1.25m in weight, with a wingspan of about 2.7 metres, according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

Since its capture, conservationists have started a project to breed and conserve local species of vultures.

Of the total money, 200,000 baht will be spent on helping the vulture restore its flying capabilities. The bird will be checked for avian flu before being sent for a one-month flight practice course in the compound of Kasetsart University’s Kamphaeng Saen Campus in Nakhon Pathom.

About 300,000 baht will be set aside for the purchase of a satellite-controlled global positioning system device to track the bird and 200,000 baht for the transport cost for shipping the bird back to its native habitat by air.

Veterinarian Chayavit Kesornokea, of Kasetsart University’s faculty of veterinary medicine, said the bird was found at tambon Thap Sai in Chanthaburi’s Soi Dao district on Jan 3.

“When it was first discovered, it weighed only 6kg, looking skinny and unhealthy. It was unable to sit on a perch,” he said.

He said public donations are welcome for the fund which will be used for breeding of vultures of local species in captivity.

Veterinarian Kaset Suechui, of the same university, who checked the bird’s health, said the black vulture is rarely found in the wild in Thailand.

He said the male bird, aged about 2 years, was not carrying any diseases. It was weak and fell from the sky because of lack of food and water, he said.

Kawin Chutima, BCST president, said black vultures are an endangered species, with a population of about 20,000 worldwide.

“Finding a vulture in Thailand is good news. Several species including Red-headed Vultures and White-rumped Vultures were a common sight in Thailand 40 years ago. They are believed to have become extinct,” Mr Kawin said, adding that vultures should not be seen as a symbol of bad luck, according to old Thai beliefs.

Actually, the feathered friends are significant in the environment and the food chain, since they help get rid of decaying matter, which could be breeding grounds for diseases harmful to humans.
Outreach Activities: Academic

Presentation at the 5th Asian Raptor Symposium on raptor rehabilitation in Vietnam.
Education through “Living Textbook” for Vet. Students