

Nandankanan zoo to house vultures

Anon.

Bhubaneswar – Nandankanan, known for its famous white tigers and considered to be one of the most natural zoos in the country, will add another feather to its cap in terms of conservation and breeding of the endangered White-backed Vultures. The centre will be established in six months.

Besides Nandankanan, zoos in Bhopal, Junagarh and Hyderabad have also been selected by the central government for the vulture conservation and breeding centers. The ecological, social and cultural significance of vultures in India may be summed up as scavenging on animal carcasses and thereby helping keep the environment clean. Thus the presence of vulture in the ecosystem is significant for the well-being of humans. They are nature's most efficient scavenger and can very neatly finish off a carcass of an adult cow within 20 minutes. They prevent the outbreak of epidemics by eating the carcasses before they rot and are known to feed on rotting flesh without any adverse effect on them. The Indian White-backed Vulture in 1992 number was more than 100 times than the 2003 number. Although they hang out in smelly places and eat carcasses, research shows that if given a choice they prefer fresh meat. In view of the present emergent

situation, for conservation breeding and management of the White-backed Vultures, the Ministry of Environment and Forest decided to set up four captive breeding centers in different zoos. One of them is proposed to be established in Nandankanan Zoo. It is a challenging task as the status of the species in nature is vulnerable and few individuals are living in nature. The size of the pens needs to provide ample space to them to do their entire daily chore so that they feel at home, said Nandankanan sources. The pens should not be very large as it would make it difficult to catch or monitor them. There should be a clear span in the aviary for the free movement of the housed birds. Vultures need lot of water to bathe and drink, so provision for clean water in large water trough inside the aviaries would be provided. Shaded areas would be provided in the aviaries where vultures can take shelter when it rains. Non conducting material would be preferably utilised for providing shade. In addition, quarantine aviary, nestling or nursery aviary and hospital aviaries would be established. Each individual bird would be properly marked by way of microchipping as well as ringed and wing tagged. After they are put inside the quarantine aviary health screening protocols would be carried out.

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