

# *Gyps himalayensis*

No image

**Common name:** Common name: Himalayan Griffon, Himalayan Vulture, Kumai Vulture, Snow Griffon, Snow Vulture

**Local names:** Thankar (Ladakhi)

**Classification:**

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Falconiformes

Family: Accipitridae

Genus: *Gyps*

Species: *himalayensis*

**Profile:**

The Himalayan griffon is an Old World vulture belonging to the family Accipitridae, which also includes eagles, buzzards, kites and hawks. The species is closely related to the European Griffon (*Gyps fulvus*). It is a huge bulky creature, about 115-122 cm in length, and 7-10 kg in weight. The wingspan is around 260 cm. The head and upper neck are covered with soft white down feathers while the lower neck has a sandy-brown ruff. The bird has a sandy-brown body with grey-brown primaries and secondaries and a short, square black tail. The whitish coverts contrasts sharply with the dark brown flight feathers. The underparts are tawny with white streaks. It has a large heavy yellow bill, yellow eyes, and fleshy pink legs. There is no sexual dimorphism and the juvenile members are generally dark brown with whitish streaks with brown neck ruff and a black beak. They attain full plumage after 5-6 years. The typical call of the bird is a hoarse hissing 'kagakaka'.

**Lifespan:** Data unavailable

**Distribution:** The species has a large range with an estimated global extent of occurrence of 1,000,000-10,000,000 km<sup>2</sup> (IUCN). The population is mostly resident and distributed in the high mountain ranges of Central and South Asia in the following countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, China, Mongolia, Bhutan, Nepal, Malaysia, Thailand, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and the Russian Federation. In India, it is found in Ladakh, frequenting altitudes up to 5000 m, and descending to lower valleys during winter.

**Population:** 100,000-1,000,000 individuals (IUCN) (Figures are for wild population only)

**Behaviour:** The griffon can be observed soaring over mountain slopes and cliffs, singly or in small flocks, with hardly any wing motion. In pairs, they fly one immediately above another, so that it looks like the one on top is sitting on the other with its wings stretched out. They fly so evenly and close to each other that from below only one bird is visible. The griffon makes grunting and hissing noises while roosting and also when feeding. They are quite wary and shy and take flight if they are disturbed during their feeding sessions. The birds make massive nests on the ledges of inaccessible cliffs. These nests are made of branches, sticks and trash heaped into a loose untidy pile. The same nests are used for several years, the pairs repairing them with new material every year. These nesting sites can be easily recognized as the surrounding rock faces get 'whitewashed' with the faeces of the birds over several years.

- **Diet:** Like other vultures, the Himalayan griffon is also a scavenger, feeding on carrion.
- **Reproduction:** Breeding season: January-April; Incubation Period: 50 days; Clutch Size: 1 egg; Fledging period: 4-5 months

**Current status:**

- **Status:**
  1. IUCN 2008: Least Concern
  2. CITES 2008: Not listed

- **Threats:**  
Poisoning by run-off pesticide from agricultural lands
- **Conservation practices:**  
Although the Indian government has been working to conserve the vulture population at large from pesticide poisoning by banning the sale of DDT, no particular emphasis has been placed on conservation of the Himalayan griffon population, as it is not perceived to be in immediate threat of extinction.