

Action Plan for the Recovery and Conservation of
Vultures on the Balkan Peninsula and Adjacent Regions



Vulture Conservation in the Balkan Peninsula and Adjacent Regions

10 YEARS OF RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION



This publication gives an overview of the vulture conservation work done in the Balkan Peninsula and the adjacent regions during the last decade. Papers have been contributed from Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey, all by representatives attending the last Balkan Vulture Action Plan Workshop (11-13 May 2011, Vratsa, Bulgaria). Each article is followed by information on its author/s.

The main goal of this publication is to present the actual status and trends of the four European vulture species in each country and show the conservation work done over the last ten years.

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Vulture Conservation in the Balkan Peninsula and Adjacent Regions

10 YEARS OF RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION

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ACRONYMS USED:

AECID – Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo
B&H – Bosnia and Herzegovina
BPPS – Birds of Prey Protection Society
BSPB – Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds
BVAP – Balkan Vulture Action Plan
BVCF – Black Vulture Conservation Foundation
CBNP – Central Balkan National Park
EAZA – European Association of Zoos and Aquariums
EC – European Commission
EEP – European Endangered Species Programme
EU – European Union SPAs – Special Protection Areas
EVN – Energie Versorgung Niederösterreich
FCBV – Foundation for Conservation of the Bearded Vulture
FWFF – Fund for Wild Flora and Fauna
FYR – Former Yugoslav Republic
FZS – Frankfurt Zoological Society
GIS – Geographic information system
GPS – Global Positioning System

GREFA – Grupo de Rehabilitación de la Fauna Autóctona y su Hábitat
GSM – Global System for Mobile Communications
HOS – Hellenic Ornithological Society
INCS – Institute of Nature Conservation in Serbia
IUCN – International Union for Conservation of Nature
LPO – Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux
MES – Macedonian Ecological Society
MoU – Memorandum of Understanding
NGO – Non-governmental Organization
ODNP – Ornithological Society “Nase Ptice” (Ornitolosko Društvo Nase Ptice)
OKNV – Youth Club “New Wave” (Ormladinski Klub “Novi Val”)
RSPB – Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SBS – Southern Blue Sky
UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VBNP – Vrachanski Balkan Nature Park
VCF – Vulture Conservation Foundation
VHF – Very High Frequency
WWF – Worldwide Fund for Nature

Foreword



Wolfgang Fremuth
Frankfurt Zoological Society

In the last 30 years birds of prey have gone through an extremely difficult period across the entire Balkan region. Under the political systems of socialism and communism in the Balkans predators, primarily wolves and stray dogs, were the subject of poisoning on a massive scale.

As a side effect, thousands of birds were killed, especially scavengers.

First in the line of fire, vultures experienced a deep decline in population sizes in the late 1980s in Bulgaria, what was then Yugoslavia, Greece, Albania and Romania, and even the remnants of Black and Griffon vulture colonies on the Crimean Peninsula experienced a steep fall as a result of massive poisoning activity in the countries mentioned. Furthermore, eagles and other birds feeding on carcasses experienced a deep drop in population numbers.

In some countries like Bulgaria, for instance, engaged environmentalists had already started action towards mitigation of these threats and to raise the awareness of the decision makers before the political changes of the late 1980s.

As result of the massive use of poisoned baits against wolves, Black Vultures had been almost completely eradicated from the Balkan Peninsula. Only a small colony survived close to Dadia in north-eastern Greece.



Evelyn Tewes, Petar Iankov and Stefan Avramov, FZS Balkan vulture finding mission, Eastern Rhodopes - Bulgaria, 1990 / photo Carlota Viada

The Bearded Vulture became, as it was in the Alpine region, completely extinct. Griffon Vultures survived in small numbers in several colonies in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia. The population of the Egyptian Vulture - the only one of the four European vulture species that undertakes seasonal migration - was still in deep decline in the Balkan region, as well as in the western part of its range.

This severe situation at the turn of the century and the very positive results of the active conservation work on vulture populations in Spain, France and Italy provided the initial impetus for beginning work on the recovery of vulture populations across the entire Balkan region.

Because of the vultures' large feeding ranges, it was clear from the very beginning that, in order to succeed, work would need to be carried out in more than just one or two countries.



Reintroduction committee (BVCF, FCBV and FZS members), Bulgaria, 2006
/ photo Green Balkans archive

A longer discussion was organized between the leading vulture conservation organizations, the Foundation for Conservation of the Bearded Vulture (FCBV) and the Black Vulture Conservation Foundation (BVCF). As a result, the decision was taken to start up a vulture conservation programme for the entire Balkan region. The Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) provided the basic funding from the beginning, as it had for the breeding and reintroduction programme for Bearded Vultures in the Alps since 1978 and the recovery of Black Vultures in Majorca.

The experts from the FCBV and BVCF linked up with others from BirdLife and the RSPB. After a fact-finding mission in 2002 a comprehensive action plan for the conservation and recovery of the four vulture species in the Balkan region was drafted and discussed with relevant experts from the region at the first BVAP workshop in Sofia, Bulgaria.



Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) / photo Angel Sánchez

First, feasibility studies for Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine (Crimea), Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia were carried out. With the financial support of the FZS, the first plans for action could be implemented in Bulgaria, Greece, Macedonia and Serbia.

Experts from Spain, France, Italy and Austria shared their experience with their colleagues in the Balkan region in order to find the right approach for bringing vulture numbers back up again. Feeding the birds in safe places with poison-free food was an important first step. This had good results, especially in the Griffon Vulture colonies in Serbia. The colony in the Uvac Gorge increased in size year by year.

The remaining colonies in Bulgaria, Greece and Macedonia could be stabilized. Due to these positive results, it was decided to start an active translocation programme from the 'booming' Griffon Vulture colonies in Spain and France to Bulgaria in order to fill in the gaps between the remaining small colonies of Griffons on the Bulgarian-Greek border with those on the Greek-Macedonian border and in Serbia.

Four localities in Bulgaria have since carefully been chosen as reintroduction sites. Detailed feasibility studies were carried out, and after a period with no cases of poisoning in the target regions, the first birds were brought from Spain and France to Bulgaria.

In the meantime the birds have been released and attempts to breed have even been recorded. It is obvious now that the chosen approach and, even more importantly, the close cooperation of organizations and their activists have turned this enormous effort into a permanent positive result.

The lesson to be learned is that it is very easy to drive a species to extinction,

but requires an enormous amount in terms of man- and women power and money to bring these them back to their ecosystems so they can to fulfil their essential functions.

It is only with this high degree of enthusiasm, engagement and strong will to cooperate towards the same aim, that it was, and is, possible to see vultures soaring in the Balkan Mountains again.

A special thanks goes to all the people on the ground: without their personal contributions, it never would have happened.



Wolfgang Fremuth and Hans Hrey with a juvenile of Bearded Vulture / photo Norbert Guthier - FZS

First steps of vulture conservation in Europe



Michel Terrasse
LPO / BirdLife France
Vulture Conservation Foundation

We can say that the vulture conservation was born in the 1960s, mainly in Western Europe.

At that time, the last strongholds for these scavengers, such as Africa and Asia and, especially, India, seemed inexhaustible ... In these countries hundreds of thousands of vultures were recognized and appreciated for the services they rendered as eternal purifiers.

In contrast, in Europe their populations were sparse and many countries had already lost a high proportion of their vultures. As early as the 1960s, it became necessary to change the laws for the protection of these birds, which were often still classified as pests, to prohibit the use of the poisons used to eliminate carnivores and to discover a whole range of conservation measures suited to these large raptors, such as, for instance, "vulture restaurants".

In France, at the beginning of the 1970s, a Griffon Vulture reintroduction programme was implemented, and the slow process of recolonization of the former territories frequented by these large raptors began.



Jesus Garzon, Rafael Notario, Michel Terrasse, visit to the recovery center of Sevilleja de la Jara, Spain (1980) / photo Jean-François & Michel Terrasse

A few years later, in 1978, at the meeting in Morges, Switzerland, a courageous ambition was born to build up again, across the arch of the Alps, a population of Bearded Vultures, which had been wiped out there in the 19th century. Together with the conservation of the Black Vulture, an impressive tree-nesting vulture limited in those days to southern Spain and northern Greece, a new page in the history of the return of vultures was written in Europe. These two key actions for wildlife conservation relied on the creation of two foundations, the Foundation for the Conservation of the Bearded Vulture (FCBV) and the Black Vulture Conservation Foundation (BVCF), working in symbiosis for the future of these species.



Hans Frey and Nina Roth-Callies, Bearded Vulture release, Haute-Savoie, France (1988) / photo Jean-François & Michel Terrasse

In the early 21st century one thing is clear. To be very brief one can say that, for vultures, Europe is split into two parts.

In the west, France and Spain have won the first round. Their four species of vultures are no longer endangered and the Griffon has reached record levels of population, with over 25,000 pairs. The Bearded Vulture is now well established and welcome in the Alps in Austria, France, Switzerland and Italy. The success story of such a comeback is now considered one of the most encouraging examples of wildlife conservation in the world. The Black Vulture, in spite of its scarcity, has shown excellent abilities with restocking



Michel Terrasse and Jean Bonnet, ringing a Griffon Vulture, National Park of the Cevennes, France (1982) / photo Jean-François & Michel Terrasse

programmes in the Balearic Islands and successful reintroductions in southern France.

In all of these projects for reintroducing or restocking vultures collaboration with European zoos and the establishment of captive breeding programmes were crucial for success. Many vultures born in captivity within the European Endangered Species Programmes (EEP) of the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) were released into the wild.

Regrettably, in the east, the situation is not as favourable. The Balkan region is still in an emergency situation and a mission in 2002, with the support of the Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) and participation of experts of both the BVCF and FCBV, provided an alarming review of the situation: most of the four vulture species were in the process of extinction and the development of a strategic plan to reverse this trend was urgently needed. And so was born the Balkan Vulture Action Plan (BVAP), with the aim of improving basic knowledge on the remnant populations in order to identify the most serious threats and carry out appropriate and urgent conservation action. Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Greece and even Turkey have been partners in the BVAP, whose present booklet illustrates ten years of working together.

All was not successful, unfortunately, in spite of very hard work. We have witnessed, for example, the disappearance of the last Bearded and Black vultures from their scattered sites along the border between Greece and Macedonia, and the inexorable decline of the Egyptian Vulture from Serbia to Greece. These bad news stories were, happily, offset by increases in the last Griffon Vulture colonies of Croatia, Serbia and Bulgaria, where a brighter future promises.

However, without doubt, the greatest success achieved is in the networking of skills, of energies and passions, real engines for any kind of future action. This achievement certainly represents for the BVAP our best chance of success for not accepting the inevitable and winning the vulture battle. Vultures are not only impressive and magnificent birds. They are also

key species in the cycle of life. In addition, and for thousands of years and through many civilizations, they have been also highly symbolic because of their cleaning job, wiping the marks of death from the Earth.

All that is certainly at the root of the broad movement to save them, now well established and structured around the Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF). Let's hope it will be up to the challenge! Thanks to this energy and enthusiasm, there is no doubt that we will bring vultures back into Balkan skies.



Jean-François Terrasse, Bearded Vulture release, Haute-Savoie, France (1988) / photo Jean-François & Michel Terrasse



Vulture status in Albania

Ben Hallmann

Little was known about the presence of the four vultures species and other birds of prey in Albania. The underlying reasons are the mountainous character of most of the country, historically and still actually poor access to many regions and the low level of ornithological research capability.

The political situation has for a long time hampered such baseline research, but nowadays allows it in most of the country. The rapid pace of economic development logically demands conservation action towards the valuable biotopes and fauna species, among which the large birds of prey – potentially a very important European asset – deserve a high priority. This, logically, must start with pinpointing the whereabouts of these species.

The scope of the Albanian project is, basically, the improvement of knowledge about the presence and distribution of vultures and their habitats, as well as the identification of conservation problems, in an effort to direct possible remedies.

Basic reconnaissance on the presence of vultures had started in north-western Albania in the autumn of 2002. In spite of indications in old literature and recent information from locals, the large vultures appeared extremely rare if not absent here. An observation of a single Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) in the border area with FVR Macedonia on 10 May 2004 might be related to the known presence (perhaps a colony) in the south of Kosovo.

A colony of Griffon Vultures that had existed near Tepelena in the south in 1996 appeared to have vanished, although Golden Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) had held their own well in the area. If poisoning had been a prime cause of the vultures' disappearance (as in Greece and elsewhere), it was puzzling that the Golden Eagles – with which they often share their habitat – had survived while they had not.

The situation with livestock farming was also assessed, everywhere, so as to find an explanation to a possible reason for the poor vulture presence, particularly in comparison with the neighbouring countries.

The "recent" presence of Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*) at Mount Korab on the Macedonian border, and on Mount Nemerska in the south, could not be confirmed despite a number of searches. Some excellent habitats have been located for Bearded Vultures, including zones with Balkan Chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra balcanica*), particularly in the north and east of the country, but they may still need more thorough exploration.

Access to the more remote areas is still difficult due to the very poor road network, so the method of using telescopes to make long-distance searches from vantage points was mostly used during the fieldwork.

Surveys on the distribution and population of, especially, Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) took place from 2003. From these it appeared that the species was still thriving in the south of the country with some



Nemerska Papingut / photo Ben Hallmann



Macedonian part of Korab Mountain / photo Ljubo Stefanov



Mountain Kurvelesh / photo Ben Hallmann



Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) / photo Angel Sánchez

isolated occurrences in the centre and north. That distribution coincides with the past stronghold in the adjacent Greek region of Epiros.

Year after year, new pairs were discovered and later on verified in every breeding season. The presence of Egyptian Vultures could be reported in a total of 27 localities.

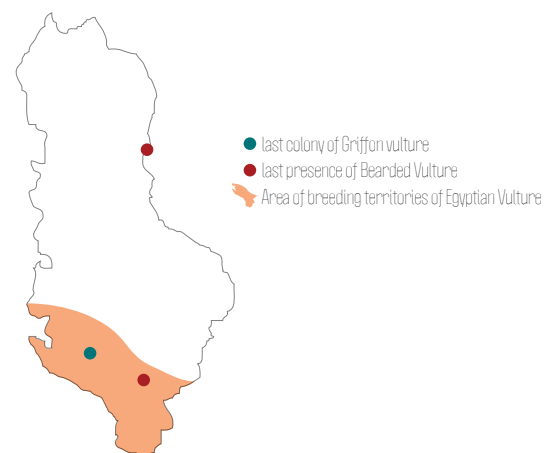
The 2008 surveys gave the best results with 12 of the previously located sites occupied, and ten pairs successfully, or most likely successfully, nesting. In 2009, nine pairs probably succeeded in raising offspring.

The best occurrence was found in the Gjirokastra, Delvina and Saranda districts, especially around Mount Kurvelesh.

Monitoring could only partly be carried out in 2010-12, and was recently assisted by the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds/BirdLife Bulgaria, the Bulgarian (BSPB) team in its LIFE+ project "The Return of the Neophron".

Taking into account the poor access to large parts of the country, the present population of Egyptian Vultures can be estimated at 10-15 pairs. An obvious decline in the population is occurring; although several pairs appear to be successfully reproducing every year, others have just disappeared without any indication of the reason for this.

map 1 Present breeding areas of Egyptian Vulture and historical presence of Griffon Vulture and Bearded Vulture in Albania





Status and conservation of vultures in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Dražen Kotrošan, Naše Ptice

Saša Marinković, Fond za zaštitu ptica grabljivica

Dejan Radošević, The Institute for Protection of Cultural, Historical and Natural Heritage of Republic of Srpska

Adnan Đuliman, Youth Club New Wave

Dušan Toholj, Southern Blue Sky

Over the last two decades, biodiversity in Bosnia and Herzegovina has declined tremendously, with many species becoming locally extinct (such as the Griffon Vulture) while others abandoned traditional range areas. In the 19th century Bosnia and Herzegovina had viable populations of at least three of the four species of vultures found in Europe: Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*) and Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), as well as the presence – not confirmed as a breeding species – of Black Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*).

These populations disappeared in the 1990s as a result of the war that devastated the region and caused the abandonment of rural areas, together with the use of poison and disturbance of some breeding colonies. In Bosnia and Herzegovina there are currently only isolated observations of Griffon Vultures, and no recent records of the other three species at all.

The main reasons for their disappearance were poisoning (against wolves and wild dogs) and scarce food availability (both domestic livestock and wild ungulates were reduced in numbers), as well as, possibly, illegal hunting and disturbances. Currently the main problems in promoting their return are the total lack of birds to attract vultures from colonies in the neighbouring countries, habitat loss and the construction of wind farms.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is of strategic importance for the conservation of vulture populations in Europe. It is located in the corridor that should join vulture populations in Western Europe (Spain, France, Italy, Austria, etc.) with Eastern Europe (Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, etc.). For this reason, the recovery of vultures and their habitat in this country is a priority for European biodiversity and thus for the BVAP.

However, there are a number of preconditions that have to be met: general public support, stronger environmental NGOs, restoration of the habitat's carrying capacity, checking the capacity of the authorities to monitor environmental crimes, efficient legislation, monitoring programmes, etc. The extinction of vulture populations led to not only a loss of biodiversity but also a loss of cultural and tourism resources, and therefore a socioeconomic loss (e.g. in ecotourism) in areas where their history is closely linked to such natural riches.

In 2005 Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the BVAP, with the involvement of its three most active biodiversity NGOs: Ornithological Society "Naše Ptice" (ODNP), Youth Club New Wave (OKNV) and Southern Blue Sky (SBS). The ODNP is based in Sarajevo, and is the only dedicated ornithological organization in Bosnia and Herzegovina, linked to the National Museum of Sarajevo, and with a scientific background. The OKNV, based in Mostar, is a youth organization that is very active in environmental education, ecotourism and pastoralism; it created and manages the educational and conservationist

Eco Centre in Blagaj. The SBS, of Trebinje, undertakes monitoring of fauna and raising rural populations' awareness of biodiversity conservation in the Republic of Srpska.

Since 2006 a number of activities aimed at recovering local Griffon Vulture populations have been started, including monitoring vultures and other predatory birds to confirm their actual status in the country, raising public awareness in villages and schools, staff training, etc.

Between 2006 and 2009 an "Ecodevelopment for rural areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia" project was carried out, within the framework of the BVAP, co-financed by cooperation funds from the Spanish (via the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation – AECID) and Balearic governments (through the Mallorquin Fund for Solidarity and Cooperation (Fons Mallorquí de Solidaritat i Cooperació) and the Centre Balears Europa) coordinated by the Black Vulture Conservation Foundation (BVCF). A series of activities were successfully implemented, in addition to establishing a solid network of NGOs and institutions. The project focused on:

- 1) The promotion of ecotourism in Blagaj with the installation of Green Points Ecotourism and the creation of its new Eco Centre, with facilities for the upkeep of vultures for environmental education. Traditionally, before the war, in this village tourism was linked to the Griffon Vulture colony.
- 2) The recovery of pastoralism in south-eastern Herzegovina, with the completion of a pioneering study on the status of livestock in the region after the conflict, followed by its partial implementation.
- 3) The elaboration of a strategy for the development of ecotourism in south-western Serbia, involving local NGOs, municipalities, small businesses and natural parks, with the implementation of some activities to improve what is on offer related to the enjoyment of nature.
- 4) Monitoring, recovery and conservation of vultures in Nova Varos (Serbia) and Trebinje and Blagaj (B&H).

The Eco Centre of Blagaj was inaugurated in 2007 with the aim of contributing to nature conservation and increasing environmental awareness, focused on the recovery of the Griffon Vulture colony that had become extinct during the war, and on endemic domestic animals. After its inauguration, a great number of people started to visit the Eco Centre to admire the vultures, which also became part of the education programme for schools. Between 2007 and 2012 more than 25,000 people visited the centre.

With the aim of becoming economically self-sustainable, the Youth Club "New Wave" prepared a Business Plan on the required investments. In 2009, thanks to the UNDP-financed project "Pathways of the Blagaj donkey", five donkeys were acquired, and since then the Eco Centre has run excursions to generate income and these are helping to cover some expenses.



Griffon Vulture release cage, Popovo Polje / photo Dejan Radošević



Former breeding territory of Griffon Vultures, Blagaj / photo Sanel Marić

Since 2010 the Institute for Biological Research, the Republic Institute for the protection of the Cultural, Historical and Natural Heritage of the Republic of Srpska, the Fund for the Protection of Birds of Prey, Belgrade and SBS in Trebinje have initiated a reintroduction project for the Griffon Vulture in the region of Popovo Polje. This project includes activities such as the establishment of vulture information centre, a feeding site and the translocation of Griffon Vultures from Serbia.

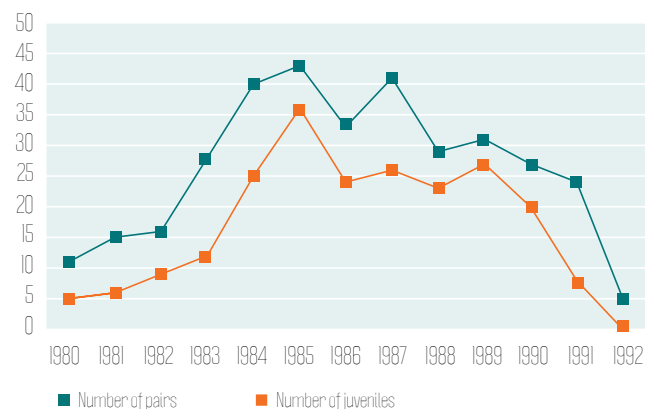
In May 2011, the centre for the reintroduction of Griffon Vultures was completed by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural, Historical and Natural Heritage of the Republic of Srpska. The centre is located in the municipality of Trebinje, in the village of Sedlari. This project also includes activities such as the establishment of a vulture information centre, a feeding site and the translocation of Griffon Vultures from Serbia.

Preparation of the study for a proposal to designate the site as a Protected Area in the IUCN's category of Special Nature Reserve is in progress.

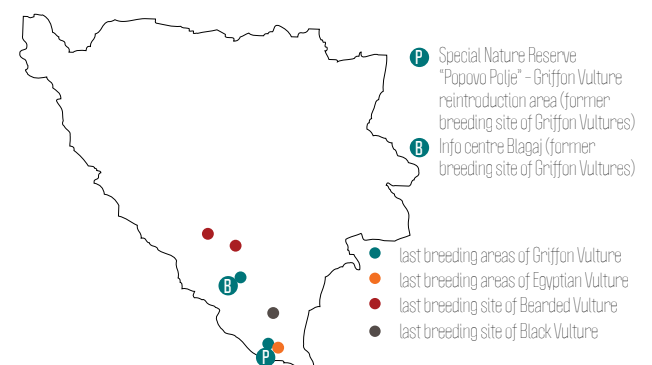
Among the goals are creating the conditions for conservation biology programmes in the Republic of Srpska and the development and use of modern technology in the conservation and reintroduction of endangered and extinct vulture species.

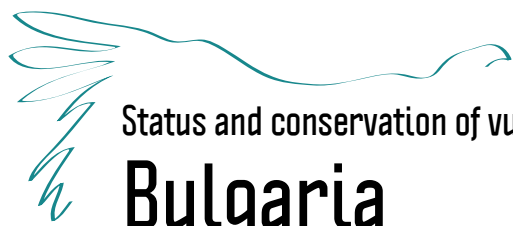
The partners in the project are the Institute for Biological Research, Belgrade; the Fund for the Protection of Birds of Prey Belgrade, and the NGO SBS, Trebinje, supported by the Representative Office of the Republic of Srpska in the Republic of Serbia. The first, most important, phase of the project was funded by the Fund for Environmental Protection of the Republic of Srpska.

fig.1 Population status of Griffon Vultures in Herzegovina 1980 - 1992



map 1 Historical breeding areas of vultures and current vulture conservation activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina





Status and conservation of vultures in

Bulgaria



Black Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) / photo Angel Sánchez

At present there are two species of vultures still breeding in Bulgaria – Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) and Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*). The Egyptian Vulture is undergoing a significant decline while the population of Griffon Vulture has somewhat stabilized and even increased and expanded, mostly thanks to the efforts of nature-conservation organizations. The Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*) is considered to have been extinct since the 1970s when the last specimen was found poisoned in the area of the Eastern Balkan Mountains. Since then, only single vagrant individuals have been irregularly observed in southern Bulgaria. The last breeding pair of Black Vultures (*Aegypius monachus*) was confirmed in 1993 in the area of the Eastern Rhodopes but they did not return the following year. However, adult and juvenile individuals from the nearby colony in northern Greece are often seen in south-eastern Bulgaria, regularly using the supplementary feeding sites operated.

Vultures have been among the main concerns of the nature-conservation NGOs of Bulgaria since their very formation at the end of the 1980s. There are several main organizations working for vulture conservation in various areas of the country: the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds/BirdLife Bulgaria (BSPB), the Green Balkans Federation, the Fund for Wild Flora and Fauna (FWFF) and the Birds of Prey Protection Society (BPPS).

The first targeted conservation activities were directed towards providing safe food within especially established supplementary feeding sites in the Eastern Rhodopes; these were maintained by the BSPB and Green Balkans. Similar sites were later established in the Balkan Mountains and south-western Bulgaria. In 1998 the BSPB established a Nature Conservation Centre Eastern Rhodopes through the Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Programme in order to promote nature-conservation activities, implement studies in the field of biodiversity and develop management measures for threatened species in the Eastern Rhodopes.

In 2002 all of the above organizations joined the Balkan Vulture Action Plan (BVAP), and in 2005 they signed a special Memorandum of Understanding with the Bulgarian Ministry of Environment and Waters. This MoU was essential for positive collaboration of the different Bulgarian organizations towards the same aim, each with different input, expertise and activities. At the same time all of the parties were developing various initiatives within a common programme to combat illegal poisoning. An outstanding example is the programme developed by the FWFF for compensating livestock breeders for loss of animals in order to reduce risk levels for large predators.

In 2006 special viability studies were developed to assess the chances of developing specialized reintroduction programmes for Black and Bearded vultures. The ultimate goal was, and still is, to return the Bearded Vulture to the country. As a first step, a reintroduction programme for Griffon Vultures was designed. It would take advantage of the strong, proliferating Griffon Vulture populations of Spain and France. In Spain alone, more than 25,000 breeding pairs of Griffon Vultures have been recorded, so a surplus could easily be taken to enhance the Balkan colonies. The reintroduction programme has foreseen four primary reintroduction sites, along the Balkan chain, which starts at the Black Sea and communicates with the Serbian Stara Planina range as an extension of the Carpathian Mountains. The places selected here, in Bulgaria, the Kotel Strict Nature Reserve (on Kotel Mountain, or Kotelenska Planina), the Sinite Kamani Natural Park, the Central Balkan National Park (CBNP), the Vrachanski Balkan (VBNP) Nature Park and, in Serbia, the Stara Planina Nature Park. These areas have been

carefully prepared. Feeding sites have been installed in order to provide high-quality food for the future vulture population. Detailed field studies have been done to assess both the natural food resources of wild living animals (ungulates) and livestock.

The translocation was started only after a secure period of with no episodes of poisoning.

In 2009 pilot releases of Griffon Vultures were initiated in the Eastern Balkan Mountains by the FWFF. Inspired by the good results, the FWFF set up a similar Griffon Vulture reintroduction programme for the area of Kresna in south-western Bulgaria. In 2010 a joint LIFE project was developed by Green Balkans, the FWFF and the BPPS for reintroducing the Griffon Vulture into the Balkan Mountains as a first step towards the return of Black and the Bearded vultures. In the meantime the BSPB operates a LIFE project targeting Egyptian Vulture conservation.

Green Balkans Federation Activities

Elena Kmetova

Green Balkans has been working towards vulture conservation since 1991 following long-term strategies and targeted measures for conserving the species and their habitats.

Since 2002 activities of Green Balkans targeting the conservation of carrion-eaters have been implemented within the framework of the BVAP.

In 2006 Green Balkans developed a series of feasibility studies for the reintroduction of Bearded Vultures to the following areas: the Eastern Balkan Mountains, the Royak-Provadia Plateau and the Western Rhodopes. Above all, these studies discussed in detail the reasons for the extinction of the species, the current state of the target areas, the contemporary threats and the availability of potential prey. A panel of international vulture experts visited the areas to assess the outcomes of the studies. It was then decided to start the recovery of vultures in Bulgaria with Griffon Vulture as an indicator of habitat quality, public acceptance and institutional and operational capacity, and to proceed later with the recovery of Black and Bearded vultures.

An integral part of Green Balkans' work has always been ex situ conservation activities. The organization operates a Wildlife Rescue Centre, unique for Bulgaria, which has facilities and expert capacity to render first aid to wild birds in distress and develop captive breeding programmes for strengthening wild populations. The centre maintains a breeding pair of Griffon Vultures, a sub-adult, non-breeding pair of Bearded Vultures, two sub-adult female Black Vultures and a total of five rehabilitated Egyptian Vultures at various ages.

At the same time the organization has maintained active in situ conservation measures for the strengthening of the existing colonies of the target

species. The organization has been running a supplementary feeding site at the village of Pelevun, in south-eastern Bulgaria, used by both Griffon and Black Vultures, since 1997. In an attempt to attract breeding birds, 15 artificial nests have been installed and five real-size vulture dummies have been put up.

Within the LIFE+ project "Recovery of the Populations of Large European Vultures in Bulgaria" in the 2010-2012 period, 162 Griffon Vultures were imported, secured by the Black Vulture Conservation Foundation (BVCF), the Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF), the Grupo de Rehabilitación de la Fauna Autóctona y su Hábitat (GREFA), Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO)/BirdLife France, Doué-la-Fontaine Zoo (France), Dierenpark Amersfoort (Netherlands), Alwetterzoo (Germany) and Zlin Zoo (Czech Republic).

By the end of 2012 about 107 Griffon Vultures had been released from the four adaptation aviaries established in the VBNP, CBNP, Sinite Kamani - Grebenets and the Kotel Strict Nature Reserve, seven of them tagged with VHF radio-transmitters and seven more tagged with various prototypes of an innovative GPS/GSM transmitter. Regular supplementary feeding and monitoring have been provided. As a result of the efforts of the team, as of December 2011, there was a settled group of 9-11 released vultures in the area of the VBNP, a permanent group of seven to nine at the CBNP and a formed group of 20-25, regularly flying between the feeding sites in Sinite Kamani - Grebenets and Kotel Strict Nature Reserve. In 2012 the first confirmed breeding pair of Griffon Vultures in the Eastern Balkan Mountains for the past 50 years was recorded. All this proves the value of the careful planning and preparatory work to successful outcomes.



Release of Griffon Vulture by the team of Green Balkans and local authorities
/ photo Green Balkans archive

Over the same period numerous meetings with local stakeholders have been carried out in order to elaborate the networks developed for feeding the vultures and tracking their reintroduction success.

In addition to this, the project team has started the process of drafting National Action Plans for Griffon, Black and Bearded vultures in Bulgaria,

as well as compiling GIS models for some of the main species considered potential food sources for carrion-eaters in the target areas.

In terms of threat prevention, in addition to the maintenance of an active poison prevention campaign a dialogue with a local electricity supply company has been launched following the confirmed electrocution of several of the released birds. After a successful series of meetings, the relevant company – EVN – isolated four dangerous pylons in close proximity to one of the adaptation aviaries.

Other threats that had to be dealt with outside the LIFE+ proposal area included the numerous plans for developing wind farms in the areas of the adaptation aviaries.

The project team has started intensive work with park authorities and tourist agencies to promote sustainable and vulture-friendly tourism in the target areas. A series of festivals has been organized to focus the public's attention and increase their knowledge and understanding.

The Green Balkans team has managed to establish excellent cooperation and connections within an active network of international experts, institutions and authorities with the target of vulture conservation.

Fond for Wild Flora & Fauna (FWFF) Activities

Emilian Stoyanov

Since the beginning of the Balkan Vulture Action Plan, the FWFF has been implementing an integrated anti-poisoning campaign. Its activities include the collection and toxicological testing of the carcasses of wild and domestic animals and baits, improvement of protection of the herds against predators and compensation for losses of livestock due to predator attacks. The FWFF is working on restoration of transhumance and extensive livestock development by owning its own herds of sheep and goats and moving them to winter pastures in southern Bulgaria (Sakar, Kresna Gorge) in the valleys and in high mountains (the Central Balkans, Pirin, Kotel Mountain, Ponor Mountain) during summer months. In this way, pastures are maintained in an optimal ecological way, both ensuring the restoration of needed grazing pressure to abandoned pastures in mountains and avoiding overgrazing in the lowlands in summer.

The organization started and is implementing the reintroduction of Griffon Vultures to Kotel Mountain in eastern Bulgaria and Kresna Gorge in the south-west. These activities also integrated working with livestock breeders (compensation and depredation prevention programmes) and encouraging the development of ecotourism, as well as educating target groups, students, etc.

The first results from the reintroduction of Griffon Vultures are encouraging, as the species started breeding for first time in 50-60 years, in Kresna Gorge in 2011 and the Eastern Balkan Mountains in 2012. The feeding

sites and the presence of the Griffons attracted not just birds of the same species from other areas into the target regions but also Egyptian Vultures. In this way the release sites are playing an important role as safe stepping-stones for both Griffon Vultures migrating along the Balkan Peninsula and summering Egyptian Vultures.



Transhumance, FWFF activities / photo Vavor Iliev - FWFF

Birds of Prey Protection Society (BPPS) Activities

Georgi P. Stoyanov

The Birds of Prey Protection Society (BPPS) is working simultaneously on two projects with the common name "Restoration of Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) as a breeding species. Reintroduction" in the VBNP and CBNP. The project in the VBNP started in 2003. The other, in the CBNP, began two years later in 2005. For this reason the first is at a more advanced stage.

The main project activities carried out during the past two years were as follows:

- Running a continuing awareness campaign among the local communities and different targets groups like farmers, fishermen, foresters, etc.
- Regular monitoring

In 2006 and 2007 two viability studies were prepared for both target areas. Two feeding sites started to operate in the VBNP (2004, 2009), and three in the CBNP (2007, 2009, 2010). Two adaptation aviaries for the reintroduction of Griffon Vultures were built (2008 in the VBNP and 2009 in the CBNP).

A system for acquisition of waste meat has been developed and regular feeding has been performed throughout.

The BPPS is the first organization in Bulgaria to obtain a license for fully legal operating feeding sites from the State Veterinary Authorities. This occurred in 2005 for the VBNP place (renewed in 2011) and later, in 2011, for the CBNP location.

In 2009 the first Griffon Vultures were imported from Spain. During the next year (2010) the first releases of vultures from the two adaptation aviaries were made.

In 2011 and 2012 the deliveries of vultures from Spain, France and some zoos continued, and periodic releases of birds in the both areas were performed in parallel.

The main BPPS partners at a local level are the Park Directorates of the VBNP and CBNP, the Regional Veterinary Inspectorates and the city authorities. At the national level, these are the Bulgarian NGOs – Green Balkans and the Fund for Wild Flora and Fauna.



Tagging of the Griffon Vultures / photo Green Balkans archive

Tagged Griffon Vultures / photo Green Balkans archive



Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds/ BirdLife-Bulgaria (BSPB) Activities

Dobromir Dobrev
Ivaylo Angelov
Vladimir Dobrev

The Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB) is the leading authority in nature and bird conservation in Bulgaria. The main priority of its conservation strategy is endangered birds and preservation of their habitats. Since its foundation in 1988 vulture conservation has been set as a priority in the BSPB's long-term development. Artificial feeding of vultures began in 1984, and this resulted in an increase in Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) numbers. However, a long-term study on the Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) revealed a sharp decrease in its population over the preceding 20 years. In 1997 the Vulture Conservation Centre was established in Madzharovo, in the Eastern Rhodopes. The centre was built under the Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Programme project and operates as the headquarters for vulture conservation in the Eastern Rhodopes. Local conservation activities, education, ecotourism and awareness-raising activities among the people turned the region of the Eastern Rhodopes into a stronghold for vultures and biodiversity conservation in Bulgaria.

From its foundation in 1988, and later in the framework of the BVAP, the BSPB started urgent project efforts towards Egyptian Vulture conservation in Bulgaria. Unfortunately, the species' population suffered a sharp decline from more than 100 pairs in the 1990s to 29 pairs in 2012 (Fig. 1). The main threat driving the decline in the last ten years is the unsustainably high mortality among adults and possibly immature birds, mainly due to poisoning. Stopover and wintering sites along the flyway, together with temporary settlement areas in the Middle East may be contributing additionally to the population decline, possibly through by accidental mortality of tens or even hundreds of birds electrocuted on hazardous power lines or mass mortality after poisoning at rubbish dumps targeted against stray dogs and jackals.

The BSPB prepared its Egyptian Vulture National Action Plan (2009-2018). Consequently, 81 young birds were ringed. Long-term dietary and toxicology studies were conducted in order to reveal the main threats for the species. In 2010, a satellite transmitter was attached to one juvenile, which reached Chad. In 2012 another five satellite transmitters were put in the framework of the LIFE + project. In 2011 colour ringing of juveniles was terminated. In 2009 the BSPB started investigating the threats for the species along the migration flyway. In cooperation with local partners several expeditions to Turkey, Ethiopia and Sudan were conducted. In 2009 and 2010 a large wintering congregation of at least 1,400 Egyptian Vultures was confirmed as still existing in the Afar region of Ethiopia, while no serious threats were recorded. In 2010, an electrocution hotspot in Sudan was confirmed as a continuing cause of mortality among large numbers of migrating Egyptian Vultures, 28 years after its first discovery.

fig.1 Population status of Egyptian Vulture (territorial pairs)

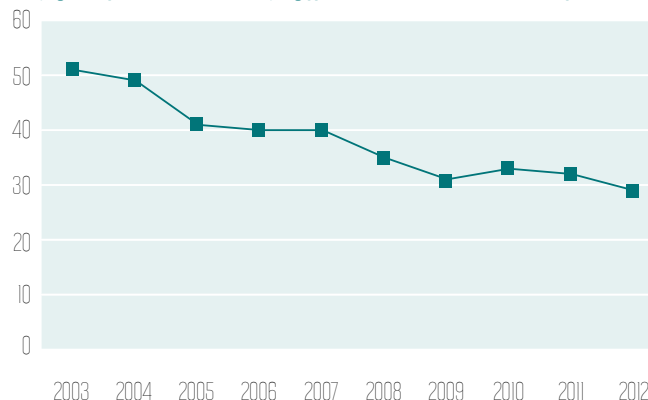
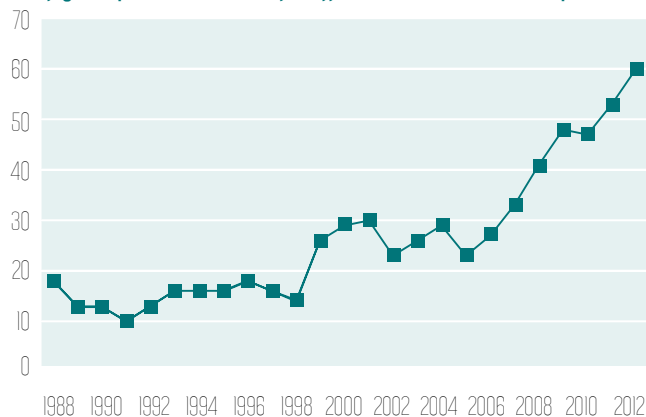


fig.2 Population status of Griffon Vulture (territorial pairs)



The Griffon Vulture was a numerous and widespread species in Bulgaria at the beginning of the 20th century. In the middle of the century it was reported as already becoming a rare species across its whole range within Bulgaria. Griffon Vulture conservation efforts started before the BSPB's foundation in 1984 when the first artificial feedings were conducted. Regular monitoring of the species started in 1988. The BSPB later - through the Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Programme - initiated the establishment of the Nature Conservation Centre in the Eastern Rhodopes and the regular feeding of vulture species in the region. As a result of the setting up of designated protected areas and intensive work with local people, Griffon Vultures increased in numbers and followed a slight increase. In recent years the BSPB has implemented several projects for the support of Griffon Vultures through sustainable management of natural resources and pastoralism. Later on, four juveniles were marked with



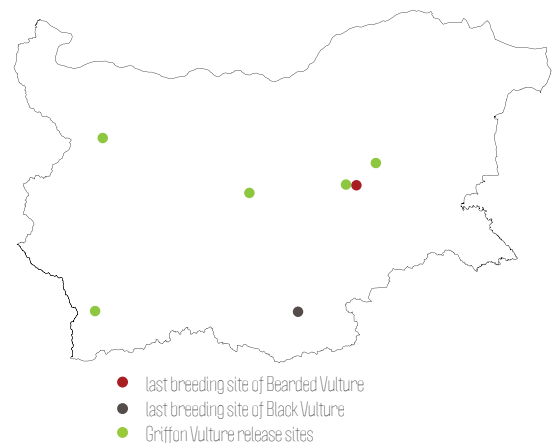
Juvenile and sub adult of Egyptian Vultures / photo Angel Sánchez

wing tags and colour rings; three of them were later seen in Israel. In 2012 the number of breeding pairs reached 60, which is the highest ever established since now. At the same time as this increase in numbers, new breeding sites were occupied by vultures (Fig. 2).

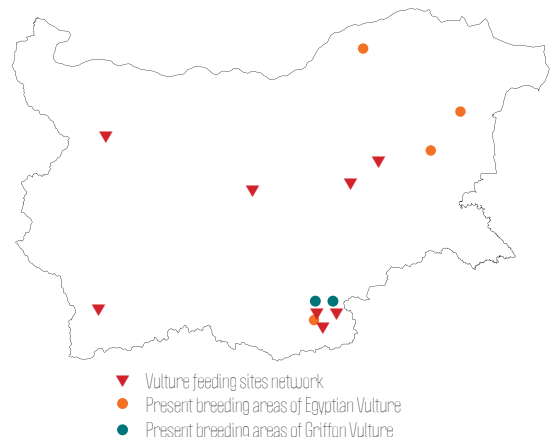
The Black Vulture was common in Bulgaria until the 1930s. Then, the population declined and some authors considered that this species had disappeared from the country as breeding species in the 1970s, while others assumed that there were one or two breeding pairs. Since 1980 the Black Vulture has occurred regularly in the Eastern Rhodopes. In the Studen Kladenets area, one nest with a fledgling was discovered in 1993. Between 1997 and 2002 a group of four to seven vultures fed and roosted in the same area). Since 1997 the number of birds observed together at the Studen Kladenets feeding station has varied between one and 17. Regular monitoring of the species started with the artificial feeding of vultures in 1984. Later, the BSPB – through the Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Programme – built nine nests in suitable habitats in the Eastern Rhodopes, but all of them were left unoccupied.

Future conservation efforts on vulture species should prioritize focusing on work with local communities in and around vulture strongholds. However, special communication skills and knowledge of the mindset of the local community are needed for this purpose. The involvement of experienced conservationists in vulture work among local people is necessary for achieving final success, otherwise the effect on the population might even be negative. Work along the migration flyway must focus on finding the critically important congregation sites (by satellite tracking and field expeditions), surveying the threats causing mortality and planning priority activities at the same time.

map 1 Historical breeding areas of Black and Bearded vultures and current Griffon Vulture reintroduction activities in Bulgaria



map 1 Present breeding areas of Griffon and Egyptian Vultures and feeding sites network in Bulgaria





Vulture status and conservation in

Croatia

Dr.sc.Goran Sušić

MSc.Vesna Radek

Gyps fulvus - Research-Educational Centre for
the Protection of Eurasian Griffons and Nature



The world-oldest known legally protected area only for and because of Griffon vultures - the Special ornithological reserve Kuntrep on the Island of Krk, established in 1969 /
photo Goran Sušić

During the last 20 years protection of Griffon Vultures (*Gyps fulvus*) in Croatia has been run by the NGO Eco Centre Caput Insulae-Beli, Research-Educational Centre for the Protection of Nature, and after 2012 it is run by the NGO Gyps fulvus - Research-Educational Centre for the Protection of Eurasian Griffons and Nature.

The method of Griffon Vulture protection is integrated, as it is led by seven programmes that complement each other: the Griffon Vulture Visitor Centre, as well as our programmes for education (about 2,000 school children per year), volunteers (about 100 volunteers per year), conservation of cultural heritage, protection of biodiversity and ecotourism (the "Ecotourism on Cres as a method of Protection of Natural and Cultural- historical Heritage" project was designated "best" in the world in the sustainable tourism development for 2011 by Skal International). In collaboration with the Zagreb Institute of Ornithology, the centre monitors the Griffon Vulture population on the Kvarner Archipelago (Cres, Krk, Prvić and Plavnik) and marks them in their nests, and follows some by GPS satellite transmitter. More than 860 have been ringed/marked and there have been more than 2,000 resightings in Europe, Asia and Africa. On Cres, two permanent vulture restaurants (providing 50-60 tonnes of meat per year) have been established. Activities undertaken include the rescue of young vultures that fall into the sea (because of disturbance by tourists) or that have been injured, exhausted or poisoned, and their treatment and rehabilitation in the custom-built recovery centre.



Goran Sušić with Griffon with satellite gps-transmitter/ photo Goran Sušić



Quentin Mikičić and Nives Radek care about exhausted Griffon at the Rescue centre/ photo Goran Sušić



Vesna Radek with Griffon rescued from the sea/ photo Goran Sušić

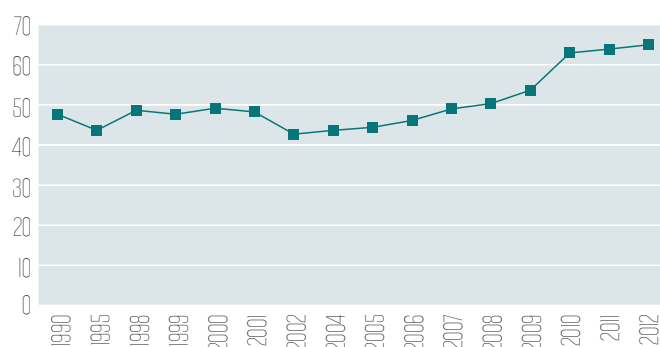


Special ornithological reserve Prvić / photo Goran Sušić

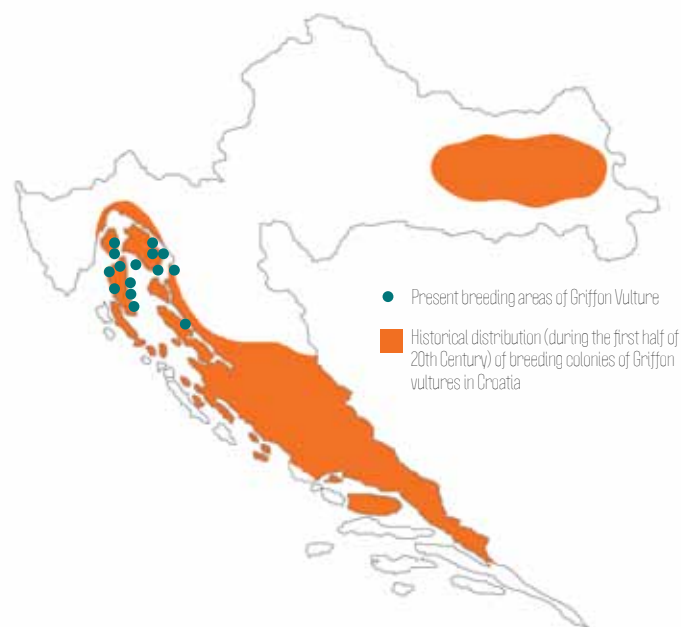
During the last ten years, 112 rehabilitated Griffon Vultures have been released back into the wild. On top of this, almost all of the electricity pylons on Cres have been made electrocution proof. As a result of these efforts, the Griffon Vulture population has increased during the last ten years from 35 breeding pairs to 80 on Cres, and from 12 pairs to 30 on Krk. The total population on the Kvarner Archipelago (i.e. the current Croatian population) has risen from 70 breeding pairs ten years ago to 130 pairs now.

The main threat to Kvarner Archipelago Griffon Vultures colonies today, and incrising every year, is the intensive tourism development in North Adriatic. Many boats full of „birdwatchers“ ready to take a picture of strange, huge birds from as close distance as possible, every year results with bigger disturbance during the fledging period. There are up to 25 juveniles (almost 30% of all fledglings) each Summer found floating or drowned in the sea. Thanks to National Protection and Rescue Directorate (emergency phone 112) as well as results of many years of our efforts toward education and sensibilisation of fishermen, sport divers, owners of touristic boats and police, we are able to rescue yearly about 50% of falling Griffon Vultures. After rehabilitation we release them back to nature, but permanent solution has to be implemented. On long term, only organized guarding of colonies during Summer months, as well as signs visible from the sea, as „sea border“ on floating buoys along all four Special ornithological reserves on islands Krk, Prvić and Cres, could help.

fig.1 Number of Griffon Vultures pairs on the island of Cres



map 1 Historical and present breeding areas of Griffon Vultures in Croatia





Gyps fulvus - Research-Educational Centre for the Protection of Eurasian Griffons and Nature, formerly known as: Eco-centre Caput Insulae-Beli (Griffon Vulture rescue centre) / photo Goran Sušić



Status of vultures in

Greece

Lavrentis Sidiropoulos, Rigas Tsiakiris, Panagiotis Azmanis,

Antonia Galanaki, Kalliopi Stara and Thanos Kastritis - Hellenic Ornithological Society

Pantelis Konstantinou - Environmental Group of Almopia "Chrysaetos"

Elzbieta Kret and Theodora Skartsi - WWF Greece

Hans Jerrentrup - Society for Protection of Nature and Eco-development

Stavros Xirouchakis - Natural History Museum of Crete

Theodoros Kominos - Management Body Of Straits and Estuaries of Acheron and Kalamas Rivers

The Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*) has recently been lost from continental Greece, with the disappearance in 2004 of the last individual in the continental Balkans, from the mountains of Almopia in the Greece-FYR Macedonia border area. In Crete there are six to seven breeding pairs while the total population numbers are estimated 40-45 individuals.

The last breeding population of Black Vultures (*Aegypius monachus*) is still in the Dadia-Lefkimi-Soufli Forest National Park where 90 per cent of the nests are inside the strictly protected zone. The number of breeding pairs has shown a slight increase since 2005, from 19 to 28 breeding pairs but the total population remains stable due to mortality from poisoning,

Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*) / photo Angel Sánchez





Fitting a juvenile of Egyptian Vulture with satellite transmitter, Meteora / photo Haritakis Papaioannou - HOS



Observing the recently abandoned Egyptian vulture nest in Vikos gorge in the EuroBirdwatchII organized by HOS and Northern Pindos National Park. October 2011 / photo Kalliopi Stara

electrocution and collisions with wind turbines. Irregular Black Vulture observations occur in other places in Thrace (Nestos Gorge and Kompsatos), and even in western Greece. The species is an irregular winter visitor to Crete (although for the last three years two immature individuals have been sedentary in the eastern mountain ranges where pine forests occur). The Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) population's sustained decline intensified after the beginning of the 21st century with the estimated 100-140 territories in the period 1994-2003 falling to 30-50 in 2005-2008. Since the implementation of "The Return of the Neophron" (LIFE10 NAT/BG/000152) in October 2011 fewer than 20 territories in the whole country have been confirmed as being occupied by pairs or individuals.

The plight of the Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) is similar, with several colonies having been wiped out in the last decade, e.g. Kalamas Gorge, Pineios Gorge, the Valtou Mountains and Nestos Gorge, invariably due to mass poisoning incidents, with the latest incident happening just at the beginning of 2012. The current population of Griffon Vultures barely exceeds 30 pairs in five colonies spread across western and north-eastern Greece. Three of the colonies host just one to three pairs and/or the birds breed only irregularly. In Crete the species exhibits positive population trends with over 700 individuals, including 240 breeding pairs. A small colony remains also in the island of Naxos.

The first vulture conservation efforts in continental Greece were initiated approximately 30 years ago with the establishment of the Dadia Forest Protected Area, where the continuing implementation of conservation

activities by WWF Greece over the past 20 years and the operation of a permanent feeding station by the local authorities have partly secured the local vulture populations.

In Crete eight vulture restaurants operate in which bones and medium-sized livestock extremities are left (mainly aimed at the conservation of the Bearded Vulture). Two of the sites are fenced and whole carcasses, slaughter-house remains and offal are provided to all scavengers.

Across the rest of the country, activities conducted so far, because of the lack of involvement of the local authorities and long-term engagement from the organizations, have, at best, included recording the status of the populations and identification of the key threats, mostly poisoning, electrocution and, recently, collisions with wind turbine blades. The activities of the Black Vulture Conservation Foundation/Frankfurt Zoological Society's Balkan Vulture Action Plan have provided, and still provide, baseline knowledge for wider conservation initiatives. Of the several vulture restaurants currently built, only the ones in Dadia-Lefkimi-Soufli Forest National Park, Nestos Gorge and the two on Crete are licensed, and only the first of these is systematically operational.

Unless effective conservation measures are firmly established in the next few years, the vulture populations of continental Greece are likely to fall below critically low numbers, and reintroduction will be the only means to their restoration in the distant future.



Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) on Nestos feeding site / photo Hans Jerrentrup

Brief assessment of the progress of the implementation of the BVAP in Greece 2003–2011

The Action Plan for the Recovery and Conservation of Vultures on the Balkan Peninsula and Adjacent Regions (Balkan Vulture Action Plan – BVAP) was activated in Greece in 2003 with the local NGO, the Environmental Group of Almopia “Chrysaetos”, through trans-boundary vulture conservation projects in the border mountain range of Greece and FYR Macedonia (the Kozuf, Tzena and Kaimaktsalan mountains). The main aims of the project on the Greek side were the operation of the Mount Pinovo feeding site for all four vulture species present in the area at that time, the identification of critical habitats for vultures in the wider mountain range and baseline monitoring of vultures, as well as public awareness activities and the galvanization of local authorities into acting against poisoning.

The project has achieved the successful operation of the feeding station over the years of its existence, and the information gathered on the presence of vultures in the mountains has contributed significantly to Protected Area designations and updating of the relevant Important Bird Areas. Several articles have been published in local media, and the members of the project have participated in and presented their work in a series of local and international workshops. The positive involvement of local authorities and forestry services has been achieved, culminating in a small workshop against illegal poisoning in 2005. Since then, a “vulture camp” has been organized every summer in order to familiarize the public with the vultures present in the mountains. However, it has not been possible to maintain the positive momentum established because of the lack of funds and the organization’s capacity levels, especially as all of the active members of the NGO moved from the area after 2006.

After 2008, when the trans-boundary project was discontinued, the main activity of the BVAP in Greece was a monitoring project on Egyptian Vulture populations with associated localized public awareness events. The project was active until 2011 when the BVAP shifted its focus to monitoring

the Griffon Vulture populations in mainland Greece, and also tested potential feeding sites in two colonies in the western part of the country and briefly reactivated the feeding station at Nestos Gorge. A pilot project surveying the Golden Eagle population of the Rhodope Mountains was also briefly supported as this species uses the same habitat and faces similar conservation problems. All of the information collected over the years was used in drafting larger conservation initiatives (e.g. the “The Return of the Neophron” LIFE10 NAT/BG/000152).

Currently, the status of the vultures in continental Greece and Crete is pretty well known with the Egyptian Vulture population estimated at below 20 pairs, the Griffon Vulture population at around 30 pairs (plus 240 on Crete), the Black Vulture at 28 pairs (roughly 90–100 individuals) with a breeding success of 50–65 per cent and the Bearded Vulture at six to seven breeding pairs on Crete. The central and Southern Pindos Mountains range may hold hitherto unknown Egyptian Vulture territories, and therefore surveys in those areas should be a priority.

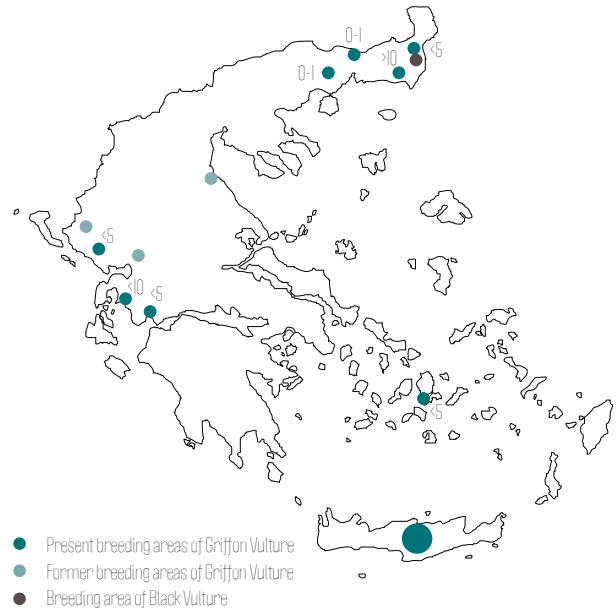
The widespread use of poison in the Greek countryside is undoubtedly the most important threat to vulture populations, having claimed the Nestos Gorge Griffon Vulture colony, one adult Egyptian Vulture in Meteora and one adult Black Vulture in Evros area as its latest victims in 2012, while the operation of artificial feeding sites in safe areas has been postponed several times due to funding problems. The level of other threats is not well known, but depending on the locality, electrocution, collisions with wind turbine blades, disturbance of breeding grounds, forest fires (for the Black Vulture) and lack of natural food/decline in extensive livestock numbers have been identified as problems.

More than 90 per cent of the funding for BVAP projects in Greece was provided by the Action Plan's resources, with partial contributions from the HOS and WWF Greece.

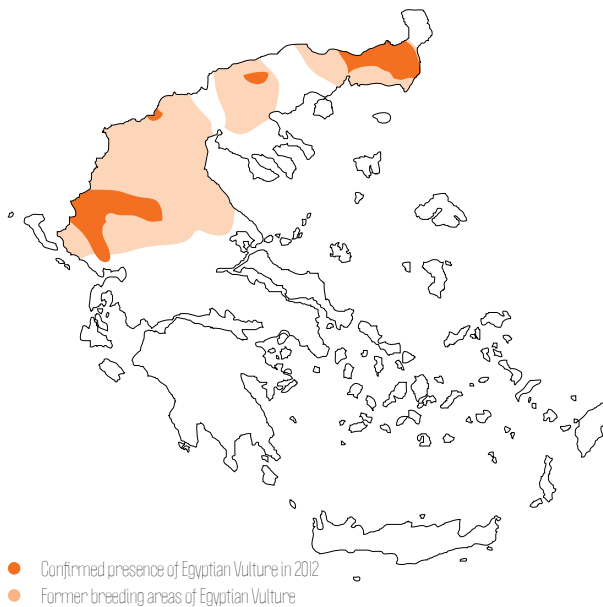
Immediate priorities should include:

- A sustained anti-poisoning campaign framework, both within the land-user communities (education and assistance of hunters and shepherds), the central government and decentralized services. Intensive lobbying, legislative development and capacity building (e.g. specialized poison detecting dog units, etc).
- Reopening of all of the disused feeding sites and the establishment of new ones, near all of the remaining Griffon Vulture colonies and Egyptian Vulture territories, after the necessary changes in legislation in order to meet the latest EU sanitary regulations, as well as the establishment of free on the spot carcase disposal zones in the relevant Special Protected Areas (SPAs).
- Identification of Griffon Vulture movements and critical foraging areas in western Greece through marking and tracking.
- Reviewing all SPAs with vulture populations and adjusting boundaries, data sheets, etc. according to the above findings and population sizes, in order to facilitate the prevention of harmful development (e.g. networks, roads and wind farms).

map 1 Historical and present breeding areas of Griffon Vulture and present breeding area of Black Vulture



map 2 Historical and present breeding areas of Egyptian Vulture in Greece



map 3 Present distribution of Bearded Vulture in Greece and last observation of the species in continental Greece





Carpathian Basin Vulture Conservation

Hungary

Petra Vásony

István Sándor

Miklós Dudás

Hortobágy National Park

Because of its biogeographical situation, as well as its provision of habitats, the Carpathian Basin was the northern edge of the breeding range of two European vulture species: Griffon (*Gyps fulvus*) and Black (*Aegypius monachus*) until the beginning of the 20th century.

The Carpathian Basin, a grassy plain and wooded steppe-like basin, covered with a network of rivers provided an ideal habitat for vultures with its numerous herds of Aurochs (*Bos primigenius*) – a fact supported by paleontological data. Later, the herds of domesticated animals brought in by people – during the period when transhumance was practised – served as an abundant food supply.

During the 20th century all the vulture species disappeared from this area; the reasons for their local extinction are multiple:

- Trophy hunting
- Poisoning
- Human-wildlife conflict
- Changes in agricultural practices – decreasing number of grazing animals
- Introduction of new veterinary practices – the obligation to bury dead animals

For these reasons the nesting areas in the Carpathian Basin ceased to exist. Within the current borders of Hungary only one definite former Griffon Vulture nesting area can be confirmed – in the Mátra Mountains – while in the mountains surrounding the Carpathian Basin (now in Slovakia, Romania and Serbia) about ten former nesting areas could be identified. In line with the loss of nesting areas, vulture sightings also decreased significantly. The last nesting pairs are known to have disappeared from the Transylvanian Mountains in around 1954.

In the period between 1950 and 1990 there were hardly any sightings of vultures in Hungary, but from 2000 onwards they started to reappear, sometimes even more than one bird at one time.

Hungarian raptor conservation is very well organized, and significant results have been achieved in conserving such globally endangered species as the Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*) and Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*).

The most important raptor habitat in Hungary is the Hortobágy steppes, which also used to be a traditional feeding place for vultures.

Hortobágy is the largest continuous natural grassland in Europe. The Hortobágy National Park, established in 1973, is the country's largest protected area, with an extent of 82,000 hectares. The Hortobágy National Park has been inscribed on the World Heritage List by UNESCO in the

category of cultural landscapes, since the Hortobágy Pusztas have been used by humans for grazing their domestic animals for more than two millennia.

In the heart of the National Park lies a 170-hectare wildlife park. The main aim of this park is to introduce the long-lost wildlife of this ecosystem to the public and to educate them about the reasons why these species became locally extinct and provide them information about nature conservation. Among Aurochs, wild horses, wolves and jackals, in 2011, 12 Griffon Vultures were obtained from GREFA (Spain). With these 12 birds, the National Park is aiming to achieve the following:

- Education of the public
- Raising awareness among officials and hunters
- Using them as communication tools for future plans
- Using any that breed, as the founding population of a reintroduction programme

The early years will give the potential for getting better acquainted with the behaviour, breeding ecology, etc. of the birds. The experience of exchange and cooperation with GREFA, which has a lot of knowledge gained from other reintroduction projects, will be a very important part of this phase.

Unfortunately, there were setbacks in the first year. In the spring three of the vultures died, two of them from gout. Despite consultation with several veterinary surgeons, no exact reason for the disease could be ascertained. It is most probable that several causes contributed to this illness.

In order to reach some form of conclusion for the future and for other similar projects with captive populations the facts below were discussed:

- The enclosure – This consists of an aviary of approximately 300 m² that is 7–8 metres high. The birds had no winter shelter, as this was then under construction. In January and February there were periods with temperatures of –20 °C, and the deaths occurred in April after a sudden cold period in March.
- Enrichment – There was nowhere for the birds to bathe, as this facility was also under development. Several studies show that vultures drink during bathing and, as gout is linked with severe dehydration, not having bathing facilities could have also contributed to this, even though they were provided with fresh water all the time.
- Feeding regime – The animals were fed red meat and internal organs once a week, the meat was sourced from the National Park's own livestock which is reared organically, so there was no question of the birds having eaten meat from any anti-inflammatory medicated livestock (the authors are aware of the Diclofenac issue of India's vultures). As one possible cause of gout could be the lack of a suitable amount of vitamin A in the food, the feeding regime was examined

carefully, and other zoos contacted in order to find out their feeding regimes. After all the information was gathered and examined the conclusion was drawn that the National Park's method of feeding the birds was similar to that of other zoos, and provides them with sufficient levels of vitamins and minerals.

- It is also possible, that 12 birds was too high a number for this amount of space, which might have caused continuous stress to the animals. Moreover, they did not have enough places to hide from visitors if they felt the need, and the flightless birds could not use the higher branches where they would have felt safer.

Naturally, after this loss, the greatest efforts have been used to find solutions for every possible aspect of the above-mentioned issues. These are as follows:

- The remaining birds underwent a veterinary check by the Chief Veterinary Surgeon of Budapest Zoo. This consisted of blood samples and a general condition check for each individual bird. Their condition

was completely satisfactory, although some of the blood samples showed high levels of uric acid, even though these birds had no (and still do not show) symptoms of gout.

- The enclosure - The vultures now have a big bath, which they love and use regularly for bathing and drinking. The water can be changed without people having to enter the enclosure, which reduces stress to a minimum. Shelters have also been added to the enclosure that could serve as nesting boxes as well in the future, but, most importantly, will provide the birds with refuges from the elements.
- More intestines were added to the vultures' diet. Fresh intestines are obtained from an organic slaughter house every week, and the vultures are fed on only the intestines once a week to make sure that even those of lower rank can access them; red meat is given on another day.

It is truly hoped that this inexplicable situation will not happen again in the future, so the birds can thrive and perhaps even breed.



Griffon Vultures in the aviary of the Hortobágy National Park / photo Petra Vásony



The Griffon Vultures aviary approximately 300 m² and 7-8 metres high, Hortobágy National Park / photo Petra Vásony

Vulture Conservation in Macedonia

Metodija Veleviski

Macedonian Ecological Society

Emanuel Lisitchanets & Tome Lisitchanets

Nature Conservation Association AQUILA



Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) / photo Angel Sánchez

Two of the four species of vultures living in Macedonia went extinct at the beginning of the 21st century. Although both Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*) and Black Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) last bred in the country in the 1980s, it was possible to observe individual birds until 2004 and 2005, respectively. In the same period, the populations of both Griffon Vulture

(*Gyps fulvus*) and Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) declined strongly, chiefly because of the illegal use of poisonous bait for the control of predators and feral dogs, but also as a result of food shortage, habitat loss and disturbance.



Implementation of the Action Plan for Recovery and Conservation of Vultures on the Balkan Peninsula and Adjacent Regions (Balkan Vulture Action Plan – BVAP) started in Macedonia in 2003, following the fact-finding mission and the First BVAP Workshop in Sofia, in 2002.

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between five national organizations, the consortium of international organizations and the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning in 2003. Of the five national organizations, only two (the Macedonian Ecological Society, MES, and Aquila, formerly the Fund for Wild Flora and Fauna – Kavadarci/FWFF) remained actively implementing conservation activities until 2011.

In the 2003–2012 period the main focus of conservation activities was:

- Monitoring the population size and the breeding success of Griffon and Egyptian vultures
- Understanding the threats to vultures in the country
- Educational activities and raising public awareness, especially among livestock breeders and hunters
- Supplementary feeding (five feeding sites were introduced; three are still in operation in 2011)
- Training of government institutions (state inspectorates) to fight against illegal use of poison

The results of these activities are as follows:

The complete situation with regard to the vulture population is known (Figs. 1 and 2); unfortunately, the last individuals Bearded and Black Vultures still remaining in the country in 2002 were lost in 2005–2006. The Griffon Vulture population reached its lowest number in 2006 (12 pairs), had a slight recovery but is now falling again (14 pairs in 2012). The Egyptian Vulture population underwent a strong decline (from c. 37–44 pairs to 22 pairs in the last eight years).

fig.1 Population status of the Griffon Vultures in Macedonia in the period 2003–2012

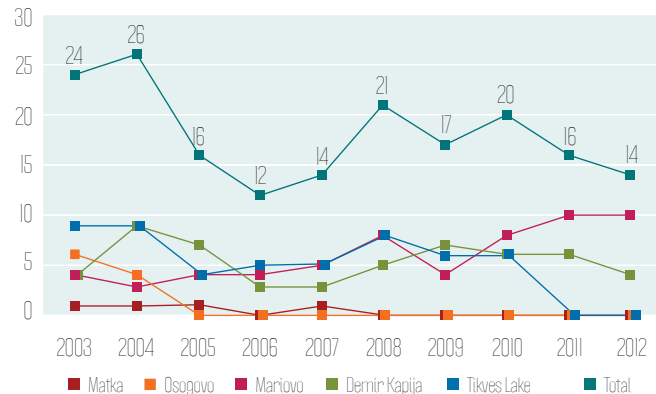
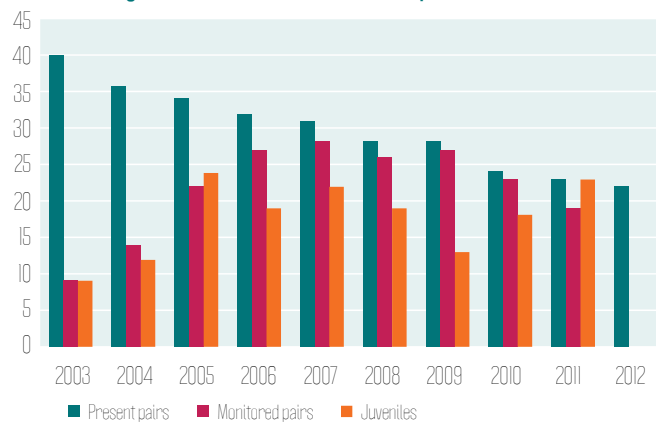


fig.2 Population status of the Egyptian Vultures and their breeding success in Macedonia in the period 2003–2012



Griffon Vulture habitat, close to the breeding colony in Mariovo / photo Ljubo Stefanov





Griffon Vulture territory, Demir Kapija / photo Ljubo Stefanov

The use of poisonous baits to control predators (mostly wolves) was identified as the primary threat to the vultures. Major poisoning incidents (between 14 and 20 birds lost) occur on average every two years (possibly even more frequently), mostly affecting Griffon Vultures. The lack of available natural food is the second greatest threat. The threats for Egyptian Vultures are not well understood, but it seems that 50-70 per cent of the losses in the last six years have occurred in the breeding territories, and the rest along its migration routes and/or in its wintering quarters.

A network of collaborating people has been established among the villagers in the vulture regions, reflecting the effort spent in making direct contact and in lectures in the villages and to the hunting organizations (c. 60 lectures have taken place in 50 villages).

Supplementary feeding takes place at Demir Kapija, Ovce Pole and Vitacevo. The feeding site at Vitacevo is most important, for both Griffon and Egyptian vultures, and food is provided at about seven-day intervals. The feeding sites at Demir Kapija and Ovce Pole, for financial reasons, operate under limited conditions, and during 2010 food was provided about once a month. The feeding sites in Mariovo and at Matka stopped operating, for financial reasons and after loss of the breeding birds, respectively.

Training and educational activities were held for all state inspectors of hunting and the environment, plus a significant number of veterinary inspectors and limited number of police inspectors. This action is thought to provide good results only if implemented on regular basis.



Poisoned Egyptian Vulture, at the vulture feeding site, Vitacevo, April 2011 / Photo: Metodija Veleviski



Food supply at the Vltchevo vulture feeding site, Kavadarci / photo Emanuel Lisitchanets

Funding of project activities

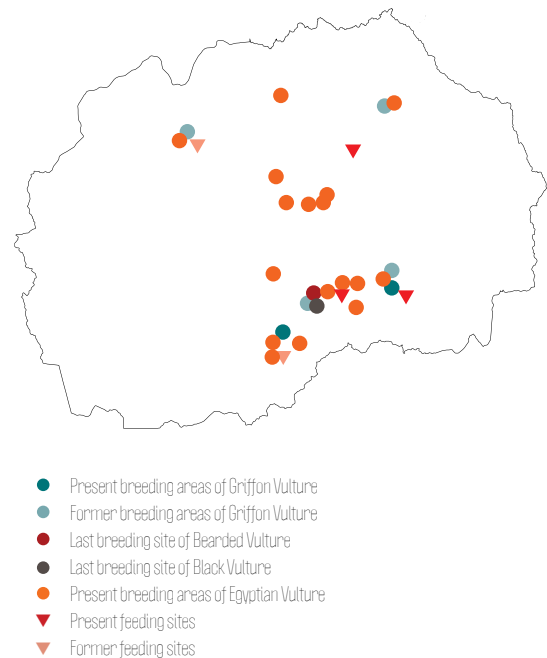
Baseline funding has been provided through the Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS), Black Vulture Conservation Foundation (BVCF) and Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF) (81.2 per cent of all costs), but some additional funds were secured from the EC in 2006 (15.0 per cent), and from Lush Ltd and BirdLife International in 2008 (3.8 per cent). The RSPB/BirdLife UK provided funding for monitoring the Egyptian Vulture population in 2012.

Future priority activities

Although few activities are listed below as priorities, they should be seen only as complementary to the activities already going on for monitoring and education, and continuation of the already implemented capacity-building activities. In no particular order of priority, these are:

- A strong campaign against the use of poison among livestock breeders and hunters
- Training of state inspectors and inclusion of the justice system in the prevention of and fight against illegal use of poison
- Training of veterinary surgeons and toxicologists in anatomopathological and toxicological analyses
- Marking of Griffon Vultures and marking and tracking of Egyptian Vultures
- Development of a livestock compensation programme
- Providing legal protection for the most important sites
- Regular feeding at five feeding sites

map 1 Historical and present vultures breeding areas and current conservation activities





Status and conservation of vultures in Serbia

Bratislav Grubač

Institute of Nature Conservation in Serbia

Vultures have been legally protected in Serbia since 1950. Regular conservation measures and activities have been carried out by the Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia (INCS) and other organizations and institutions. The establishment of Protected Areas (National Parks and Nature Reserves) was very important for the vultures. The first Special Nature Reserves established for the Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) were "Pavlovića Brod" in 1971 and the "Uvac Gorge" and "Treshnjica Gorge" in 1995. Provision of feeding sites for vultures began in 1989, and a specific feeding site for carrion-eaters was built in 1995. Research and monitoring of the Griffon Vulture population started in 1982, followed by educational activities and public awareness activities: articles were published in journals and magazines, television programmes and documentary movies were made and educational lectures were given to the public. During this period many injured or weak Griffon Vultures were recovered in order to reduce the number of deaths from negative factors.

Until the 1960s all four European vulture species bred in Serbia. The last two breeding pairs of Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) were recorded on Suva Mountain in 1999–2004. However, in the last few years (2005–2011) there have been some observations of single, paired or trios of birds together in foraging, dispersion and migration in different parts of Serbia (mainly in the southern, eastern and south-western parts of country). The last breeding pair of Bearded Vultures (*Gypaetus barbatus*) was recorded at Šara Mountain during 1954–1955 and the last bird was observed there in 2001. The last incidence of breeding Black Vultures (*Aegypius monachus*) was recorded in 1960s. Single birds were observed during 2006–2011, close to the Griffon Vulture colonies.

Griffon Vultures (*Gyps fulvus*) on feeding site / photo Jesus Sánchez Cidoncha





Trešnjica River gorge (Western Serbia)- nesting habitat of Griffon Vultures / photo Bratislav Grubač

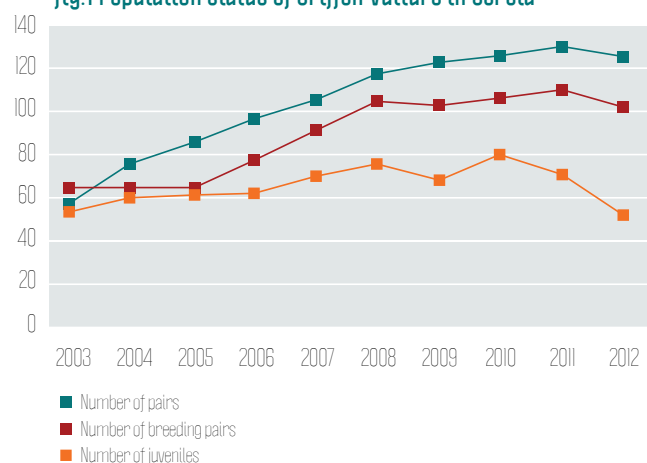
Griffon Vultures still breed in three locations in western and south-western parts of the country – in the Trešnjica, Uvac and Mileševka gorges. The monitoring of breeding pairs and pairs was organized (two to four times per breeding season) during 2004-10. There are precise data about numbers of breeding pairs, pairs and young for each year (see Figure 1). Its Serbian population was estimated to be 120-130 pairs in the last few years (a maximum of 106 pairs began breeding in 2010).

One of the main threats to, and problems for, protection is the use of poison in the wild, and this is the main cause for the disappearance and decline in vulture populations in Serbia in the past (from the late 19th to the early 21st century). In the modern period (2004-2012) there have been recorded instances of occasional or rare poisoning of pest animals (several recorded cases of poisoning of feral dogs and rarely of wolves, foxes and other carnivores, and wild boars). The most common poison was “kreozane”, while other poisons and chemicals were more rarely used.

Habitat degradation is another widespread and diverse threat, with mostly negative consequences on vultures and other threatened species. Even in protected areas (and special nature reserves for Griffon Vultures) various building structures (holiday homes), roads, quarries, artificial dams and lakes, fires (i.e. the forest fire observed in the Mileševka Gorge on 27-28 August 2010), etc have been recorded. In the last ten years three individuals have perished on electricity poles or by flying into high-voltage power lines, making electrocution another considerable threat. In some occasions disturbance was recorded in the colonies in the Uvac and Trešnjica gorges,

caused by hunters, tourists and fishermen (the last through uncontrolled movement of boats). Direct illegal killing of vultures has been noted only very rarely during the last decade. One adult Griffon Vulture was killed near the village of Drlace (near the Tresnjica Gorge) in February 2012.

fig.1 Population status of Griffon Vulture in Serbia





Uvac River gorge - nesting habitat of Griffon Vultures / photo Bratislav Grubač

Other potential threats and problems could be nest-robbing and trapping – there is no evidence although there are some indications that it happens sparsely. In addition, the uncontrolled use of medications in treating livestock and widespread use of pesticides and other chemicals could be considered as a potential threat. Lastly, the development of wind farms in several locations of Serbia marks a potential future danger for vultures.

The Balkan Vulture Action Plan in Serbia started in 2004 supported by the Black Vulture Conservation Foundation (BVCF), Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS), Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (AECID) and Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO). As of 2009, the INCS had implemented many conservation activities, such as:

Surveying and monitoring

The survey included all of the important areas for vultures (data were collected on the status of vultures); monitoring included all breeding colonies and potential locations for Griffon and other vultures (data were collected on the numbers of pairs or birds in breeding colonies of Griffon Vulture, breeding success, trend and threats).

Feeding and feeding sites

It was necessary to build feeding sites for vultures in Serbia since food was either insufficient in amount or unavailable (due to methods of livestock farming and veterinary measurements). The sites were crucial to the extremely important conservation and recovery of Griffon Vultures in the period 1996-2012. The feeding places for vultures functioned excellently in the Uvac Gorge, in the Trešnjica Gorge (2004-2012) and in the Mileševka Gorge (2009-12). Food was brought between three and five times a month and this was a regular gathering place for Griffon Vultures from these colonies. The feeding site in the Pčinja Gorge at Vidlič was also working regularly in 2006-2009.

Education

Twelve thousand copies of a flyer in the Cyrillic alphabet on vulture conservation were printed in 2007 and 2008. These were distributed in the region of Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro. The PowerPoint presentation of project “Action Plan for Vultures and Eco-development in Rural Areas of Serbia” was presented by ornithologist Bratislav Grubač in eight towns in important areas for vultures in Serbia in the latter year. During the presentations, local media conducted interviews about this project.

Several video reports on the challenges of protecting Griffon Vultures in Serbia were made by various national and international film crews. Several scientific-popular articles on the conservation of Griffon Vultures and vultures in general were written and published in various daily newspapers and magazines in Serbia during 2004-2012.

Workshop meetings on suppressing poisoning and other negative factors

In order to suppress poisoning and other negative factors influencing the project of vulture conservation in Serbia, the INCS, in cooperation with their project partners, led a series of nine workshop meetings in the towns in important areas for vulture conservation during 2008 and 2009. Invited participants included representatives of the all-important local and national institutions, various organizations and individuals interested or affected by these challenges. Participants included environmental and veterinary inspectors at national and municipal levels, together with representatives of the police, justice system, hunting societies, environmental NGOs and other organizations, media etc. These meetings were very successful as many questions were asked and many challenges were discussed regarding the problems of poisoning, shooting and activities of feeding sites, etc.



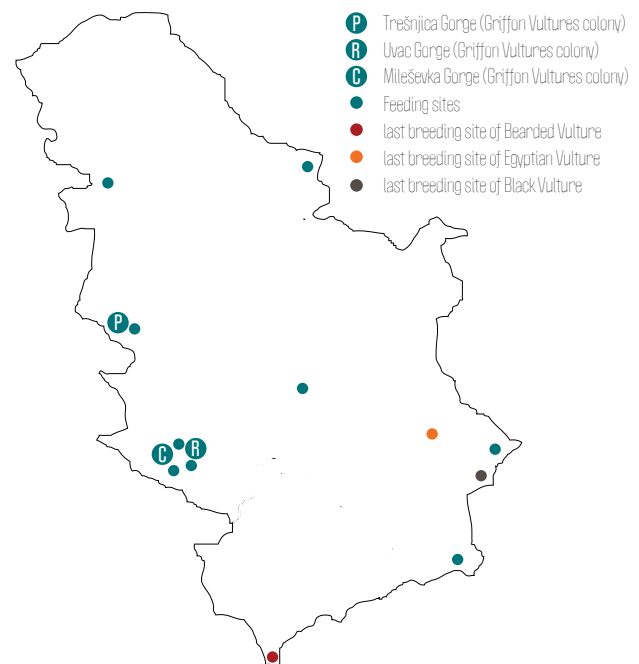
Bratislav Grubač at the field / photo Metodija Veleviski

In order to suppress poisoning and to educate members of the local communities, a flyer was prepared under the name "Let's stop animal poisoning in Serbia". In total, 1,400 copies of this flyer were printed by the INCS in cooperation with its project partners during 2007 and 2008. They were distributed during the workshop meetings, presentations and field work in all of the important areas for vultures in Serbia.

Interventions and other activities of the Institute connected to vulture conservation

The INCS organized the rescue, medical treatment and recovery of over 20 captured weak, injured and poisoned Griffon Vultures throughout Serbia in the period 2004–12. Several cured and recovered individuals were released back into the wild.

map 1 Historical distribution of the extinct vulture species, present breeding areas of Griffon Vulture and feeding sites network in Serbia



Vultures in Turkey

Bilgecan Şen

Middle East Technical University
Doğa Derneği / BirdLife Turkey

All four of the European vulture species breed in Turkey. The resident vultures (Black, Griffon and Bearded vultures) are endangered on a national level with a decreasing trend while the migratory Egyptian Vulture is considered vulnerable and decreasing. In the absence of a proper monitoring programme and relevant scientific studies on the subject, estimation of the breeding populations of these species is not precise and usually the range between the estimated minimum and maximum values is quite high. However, in order to assess the relative importance of breeding populations of vultures in Turkey and compare them to their European counterparts we can refer to BirdLife data.

According to BirdLife, Black, Bearded and Egyptian vulture populations in Turkey comes just after Spain in terms of breeding population size with 300-400, 400-700 and 1,500-3,000 pairs, respectively. The Griffon Vulture

population of 300-600 pairs, although overshadowed by that of Spain, is on a par with France, and constitutes an important part of the European breeding numbers. Initial studies conducted between 2000 and 2010 have shown that intensive forestry operations and illegal poisoning are the main threats against vultures in Turkey.

However, uncontrolled and widespread rubbish dumps, which are frequently exploited by vultures, pose a real threat to these charismatic species as they are used not only by resident populations but also by migrating populations from Balkans. In order to prevent a catastrophe that could be caused by a simple poisoned carcass, such rubbish dumps must be mapped and observed regularly to instigate the necessary action plan for their management.



Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*) / photo Akif Aykurt



Black Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) and Griffon Vultures (*Gyps fulvus*) on feeding site / photo Angel Sánchez

Summary



Jovan Andevski ^{1,2,3,4}

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¹ Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS), BVAP coordinator (2012)

² Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF), BVAP coordinator (2011)

³ Black Vulture Conservation Foundation (BVCF), BVAP coordinator (2008-2010)

⁴ Macedonian Ecological Society (MES), BVAP local project assistant (2004-2007)

The Balkan Vulture Action Plan (BVAP) Workshop (11-13 May 2011) was followed by an initiative for publishing a booklet of summaries of the presentations given at the workshop. This was a starting point that was later developed into an idea for publishing a more useful publication, something that will reflect most of the vulture work done in the last ten years and provide general information on the status of the four vulture species and present the conservation work done. This publication presents

not only the projects funded by the BVAP but also most of the organizations and institutions involved in vulture conservation in this region. The collecting of this data was based on the personal motivation of the authors towards conservation of these species, and was made possible by working in a network, which is an important feature of this programme. Only because of this networking could we estimate the populations in the region and present a clear picture of the situation of each of the four European vulture species.



Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) / photo Rafael Paloma Santana

The vulture populations of the Balkan Peninsula and surrounding regions reached a critical conservation status at the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st, despite attempts in some countries to save the remaining populations, whether pairs or individuals. Of the four species, the Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*) and Black Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) are now on the edge of regional extinction.

The last population of Bearded Vultures on Crete numbers around six pairs and that of Black Vultures in Dadia, Greece, around 25 pairs. The number of Egyptian Vultures (*Neophron percnopterus*) has declined by more than

50 per cent in the last ten years, and continues to fall. This species is still present in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Greece and Albania, totalling around 80 pairs. The population of Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) has also been depleted and the species has disappeared from many countries (Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Montenegro), whilst in the rest, isolated and small populations are highly threatened (continental Greece, Macedonia and Bulgaria). Strong populations are present in Serbia and Croatia, numbering up to 130 pairs in each country. An estimated total for this species in the region is up to 600 pairs. For more detailed information, see the table below.

Table: The most recent population counts, estimates and trends for the four European vulture species in the Balkan Peninsula and adjacent regions. The percentages for the population trends reflect the changes over a period of ten years.

Species/Countries	Griffon Vulture		Egyptian Vulture		Black Vulture		Bearded Vulture
Albania	† 1996		*9	D 40%	†?		†?
Bulgaria	(60)	I 96%	*32	D 56 %	†1993		†1972
Croatia	*125 (135)	I 60%	†1987		†1950		†1910 (?)
Greece (continental)	(30)	D 50%	<20	D >50%	*28	I 20 %	†2004
Crete (Greece)	240	I 100%			3 inds (2012)		6-7 (130%)
FYR Macedonia	*14 (16)	D 50%	*23	D 47%	†2006		†2006
B&H	†1991		†1995		†1910		†1987
Serbia	*130	I 60%	†2005		†1960		†1954

* Number of confirmed breeding pairs, in parentheses number of estimated breeding pairs; D = decline & I = increase; % of decline or increase of the population over the period of the last ten years; if species extinct † and year of extinction.

The main cause for the decline of vultures in the Balkan region and the current limiting factors for their recovery is the use of poison against wild predators that come into conflict with human activities (mainly livestock farming and hunting). This is not the only threat affecting the vultures in the region, as they also face a lack of food in the wild, collisions and loss of habitat. The development of wind turbines in sensitive areas is a new, increasing threat.

A lot of conservation work has been done in the last ten years, some financially supported by the BVCF/VCF through the BVAP, but also through many other projects for which the funding was provided by other sources and implemented independently by different national NGOs or governmental institutions.

Since its inception in 2002, the BVAP has developed as a regional strategy for the protection and recovery of vulture populations in the Balkan Peninsula and adjacent regions. The BVAP is a guide for vulture conservation work; the implementation of the logical framework differs for each country, as not every country has the same conditions and capacities. The BVAP's funding, much of which came from the FZS, was distributed among the different partners where necessary and when no other funds were available for the individual country. The BVAP is not just a funding mechanism, it was

intended to be a coordinating body with the main objectives of maintaining the network and gathering data in order to create a regional image and perspective. Nevertheless, despite several problems with some partners, and even internal problems with the BVCF/VCF coordination, BVAP as a network has maintained itself throughout the previous period, naturally based on the extraordinary motivation of all of the interested partners. This publication aims to demonstrate that this network is still active and is the only way to represent the vulture situation in this region to the international public.

The role of the BVAP will continue to focus on connecting all of the partners, collecting data and relaying them between partners and to the international public, such as the development of regional projects in the direction already targeted at the last BVAP meeting, including the Balkan Anti-poison Campaign and the establishment of a network of feeding sites, a common monitoring scheme, a reintroduction strategy and special action for conserving the Egyptian Vulture.

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