



IBM Newsletter 2015-05

Dear Vulture-Friends

The bearded vulture release season has just started and the first four birds have already been released. The next releases will follow in the next weeks! The captive breeding season was extraordinary successful and hence a total of 15 birds will be released this year.

Also the breeding season in the wild is advancing and in several nests all over the Alps at least 15 young birds are growing and will fledge in the next weeks.

Enjoy reading the news!

Best regards,

Dominique Waldvogel, Franziska Lörcher and José Tavares

www.gyp-monitoring.com

Release of Noel-Leya



Noel-Leya just before take-off

Noel-Leya is flying again amongst the snowy peaks of the Alps! At the beginning of April the team from our Swiss partners, Stiftung Pro Bartgeier, re-released back to the wild this young bearded vulture. On a glorious sunny day, after a strenuous trek up a snowfield, Noel-Leya was taken out of his transport box and put on the snow. He stood there for a moment and in a gracious movement flew away into the mountain peaks - [Film by Lucas Pitsch](#)

He soon disappeared into a side valley, but reappeared a short time later, showing us that he had not forgotten how to fly. Circling higher and higher, he was briefly accompanied by a Red Kite.

Noel -Leya had originally been released in 2014 in Switzerland, as a 3 month old chick, born into the VCF-coordinated captive breeding network, as part of the wider alpine reintroduction project. Later, in November 2014 his GPS transmitter indicated he was stationary. A team was dispatched, and found him sitting on the snow - he was then recaptured (read the full story about Noel-Leya here: [English](#) - [German](#) - [French](#) - [Italien](#)). He was soon transferred to the Nature and Animal Park in Goldau where expert hands nursed him back to full health. Now the spring conditions are ideal for a second start.

Noel-Leya, fitted with a new GPS transmitter, was released near Surselva (Grison), where he was residing last autumn, so in

familiar territory. The party had to go up the snowy slopes, first with a chair lift, and then walking. Once a suitable place, with a good overview of the area, was found, Noel-Leya was re-released. So far the GPS data shows that Noel-Leya is well on the move again and undertakes extended flights - [interactive map >>](#)

Captive breeding season



One of the young bearded vultures from the captive breeding network

The captive breeding season has just ended and a new record could be achieved. This year 35 pairs laid 57 eggs. From them 33 chicks hatched and 26 are still alive (results from Chomutov Zoo still not included). Only in 1999 a similar result was obtained (25 hatchlings).

This year the breeding season has been very special with an abnormal large laying period. The first eggs were laid on the 6th of December and the last on the 8th of March. Consequently the same occurred with the hatching dates, resulting in a huge distribution in time and age of the chicks. This complicated matters to both meet the needs of the EEP (include as much as possible males in the captive network) with those from the release (release date, similar age of released birds, gender of the birds, etc.).

With such a good breeding season the needs of the EEP could also be addressed: we will include many of the males born in captivity into the breeding network to correct the sex-ratio imbalance, because in a short future several old breeding pairs will stop to reproduce and they should be replaced by young pairs to continue to provide enough chicks for the EEP and the on-going reintroduction projects.

This year 4 new founders -3 new breeding pairs-, and two young pairs produced for the first time a chick. Additionally a new young pair bred without success and by 3 others matting attempts could be observed.

2015 release season



two young bearded vultures just after the release

Thanks to the excellent results from the captive breeding network 15 birds will be released this year at five different places in Europe: Cazorla (Spain), Grands Causse (France), Parco Naturale Alpi Marittime (Italy), Melchsee-Frutt (Switzerland), and National Park Hohe Tauern (Austria). Depending on the age of the birds the releases have started in mid-May and go on until mid-July.

You can find all details about the releases on each partners website:

France: <http://rapaces.lpo.fr/qypaete-grands-causses>

Switzerland : www.bartgeier.ch/auswilderung

Italy: <http://www.parcoalpinmarittime.it/news/497/in-arrivo-due-gipeti-si-cercano-volontari>

Austria: <http://www.hohetauern.at/de/>

Spain: <http://www.gypaetus.org/>

We will also report from the releases of the young bearded vultures on the [Vulture Conservation Foundation homepage >>](#)

Bearded vulture and golden eagle census in Stelvio



Participants in the census in the Stelvio National Park

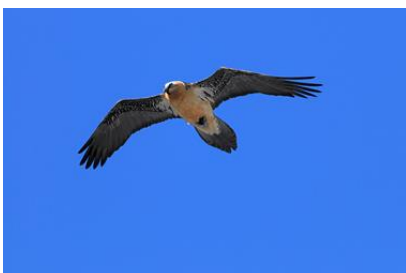
The annual census of golden eagles and bearded vultures in Stelvio National Park took place last 14th of March, for the 11th year in a row, under good weather conditions. The attendance was very high with almost 200 observers, who covered a 1200 km² area over four Italian districts in the Central Eastern Alps. The survey started at 9:00 and ended at 14:30. During this time a total of 316 golden eagle and 95 bearded vulture observations were recorded. Later analysis of the results estimated that a minimum of 66 golden eagles and up to 14 bearded vultures were seen.

Many of the volunteers had arrived already on Friday night in Bormio for the traditional dinner with regional food specialties. The highlights of the evening were the announcement of the names for this year's bearded vulture chicks, which were drawn among the names of the volunteers by Franziska Lörcher and Dominique Waldvogel, visiting representatives of the Vulture Conservation Foundation and the International Bearded Vulture Monitoring (IBM), and the donation of the money collected for the dinner to support a project on the monitoring of the Bonelli's eagle (*Aquila fasciata*) nests in Sicily, which are threatened by robbery of the eggs and chicks by falconers.

The observation weekend ended on Sunday with a guided excursion in the National Park. During the outing, Enrico Bassi, coordinator of the census and scientific consultant of the Stelvio National Park, gave some information on the history and biology of bearded vultures and guided the participants to a few spectacular sightings of the bearded vultures Heinz and Felice on the path called "The bearded vulture's valley".

<http://www.4vultures.org/2015/04/02/22nd-census-of-the-stelvio-national-park-14-bearded-vultures-66-golden-eagles-counted/>

First wild bearded vulture hatchling in Andalusia for more than 30 years



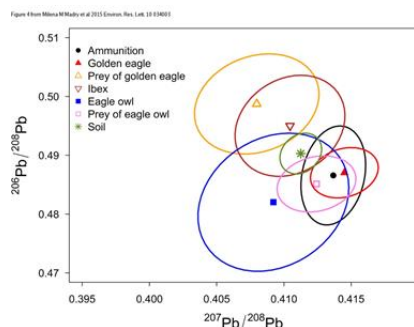
Only nine years after the first bearded vultures were released back into Andalucía, you can see now in this [excellent footage](#), shot by Dr. Francisco Javier Montoro García, the first bearded vulture chick hatched in the wild in a nest high up in the sierra de Cazorla – a huge success in an extraordinary project, and a just reward to the many people that worked so hard to bring back this species to Andalucía, and to the Junta de Andalucía, that since day 1 has invested politically and financially in this project.

The chick is growing well thanks to Tono - a 9 year old male,

released in 2006, in the first year of the project, and Blimunda, a 5 year old female released in 2010.

You can read the full story [here>>](#) and [here>>](#)

Excessive lead burden among golden eagles in the Swiss Alps



Two recently published studies confirm concerns about the risk of lead from hunting ammunition for raptors. The studies were carried out by the Swiss Ornithological Institute in cooperation with the Fish and Game Department of the Canton of Grisons, the Department of Forensic Pharmacology and Toxicology at the University of Zurich and the Institute of Veterinary Pharmacology and Toxicology at the University of Zurich.

In eastern Switzerland, 36 dead golden eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* which are frequent scavengers, and 19 eagle owls *Bubo bubo* which feed only on live-caught prey, were analysed for lead in liver, kidney, feathers and bones. Three golden eagles were found with acute lead poisoning. Lead concentrations in soft tissues were significantly higher in golden eagles than in eagle owls. Bones of golden eagles contained 10 times more lead than bones of eagle owls. In order to investigate whether the sublethal lead of golden eagle originates from ammunition or from generic environmental contamination, lead isotope ratios were examined. Lead isotope signatures of golden eagle bones were very similar to those of hunting ammunition, but differed significantly from the lead isotope signatures of bones of their prey, eagle owls and soil. Isotope signatures did not change with increasing bone lead concentration in golden eagles. These findings indicate that in the Alps, most golden eagles take up lead from spent ammunition in carcasses or their offal in sublethal quantities throughout their life and a few in lethal quantities leading to acute lead poisoning. In order to examine the patterns of lead intake, flight feathers were cut into three segments. In 22% of the golden eagles, one feather segment had a high lead concentration, while the other two segments had a low concentration. This indicates an episodic intake of lead of various amounts that may be immediately fatal or sublethal. Such an episodic lead uptake can be explained by ingestion of lead particles from carcasses or offal left behind by hunters. These findings in golden eagles highlight the importance of lead poisoning by hunting ammunition also for other scavengers, notably for the bearded vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*) for which several cases of acute lead poisoning and high levels of lead in bones are documented.

The two articles can be found here:

[Environmental Research Letters](#)

[Journal of Ornithology](#)

David Jenny - Swiss Ornithological Institute, Stiftung Pro Bartgeier

Dead adult bearded vulture and another one shot at in France



An adult bearded vulture was found dead on the 6th April within the ski resort of Flaine, in Haute-Savoie (department 74), of unknown causes. The bird was found relatively close to a ski lift, and the body was recovered to do a full post-mortem, and toxicological analysis. A few days later, on the 9th of April, another adult bearded vulture, with a suspected broken leg, was spotted by staff from the Parc National des Pyrénées in Aspe valley (Pyrenees Atlantiques). Following a complex operation, the bird was finally captured at midnight. It was immediately transferred to the rehabilitation centre Hegalaldia, where the sombre diagnostic was made: a small calibre lead pellet in the femur, and one lung perforated. The bird had also a wounded talon, and other wounds from a possible collision with a cable. The bird is now recovering in the Hegalaldia center

The bearded vulture found dead in the French Alps is not marked, suggesting it was a wild-born bird. In Haute-Savoie there are three breeding pairs, and there was some anxiety that the adult bird could come from one of those, thus potentially jeopardizing the on-going breeding season, but fortunately all the birds from these three pairs have been accounted for by staff from ASTERS, the local partner that has been surveying and contributing to the conservation of the species in Haute-Savoie. Blood samples from the bird have been sent to analysis, to try to see if its DNA matches any sample stored in the alpine database- many alpine bearded vultures have been genetically fingerprinted throughout the years, through the collection of feathers under nests.

Unfortunately the bearded vulture shot-at in the French Pyrenees was probably breeding, as it had evident incubation plaques. This is the third bearded vulture shot in the Pyrenees Atlantiques in the last 8 years: In 2008 a bird was killed in the same valley, while in 2013 another bird was shot and killed in the French Basque country. There are only 8 pairs of bearded vultures in the Pyrenees Atlantiques (40 for the whole of the French Pyrenees, 130 breeding pairs in the Spanish side of the mountains). Even though the species is now recovering, the loss of breeding adults is an important blow, as bearded vultures only start breeding when they are 11-12 years old. The League pour la Protection des Oiseaux (LPO), which has been leading a conservation and monitoring programme for the species in the French Pyrenees, has pressed charges against unknown individuals, and an investigation is now under way.

You can read more about the dead birds [here>>](#)

Our network is a unique collaboration between:



Impressum:

IBM Newsletter - updates about the most recent happenings in the bearded vulture world

Impressum - Published by: International Bearded Vulture Monitoring (IBM. www.gyp-monitoring.com), Texts Franziska Lörcher, Dominique Waldvogel, José Tavares

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