



LIFE AEGYPIUS RETURN

POST-FIRE EMERGENCY PLAN FOR THE CINEREOUS VULTURE IN THE DOURO INTERNACIONAL NATURE PARK

October 2025





Nearly four decades after becoming extinct in Portugal as a breeding species, the Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) recolonised the country in 2010, following nesting by a number of birds originating from Spain and thanks to conservation efforts carried out in both countries by NGOs and government authorities, across public and private land. Although the number of breeding pairs has been increasing, the Cinereous Vulture population remains highly fragile, and its future in Portugal is still uncertain. The LIFE Aegypius Return project, co-funded by the European Union, aims to secure the species' definitive return.

<https://4vultures.org/life-aegypius-return/>

Coordinating Beneficiary



Associated Beneficiaries



Funding



Co-funded by
the European Union



The LIFE21 NAT/NL/LIFE Aegypius Return/101074677 project is co-funded by the European Union. The views and opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the European Union or the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA). Neither the European Union nor the funding agency can be held responsible for these opinions.

DATASHEET

Recommended citation

Gutiérrez, I., Santos, J., Pereira, J. 2025. Post-fire emergency plan for the Cinereous Vulture in the Douro International Nature Park. LIFE Aegyptius Return.

Coordination

Palombar - Conservação da Natureza e do Património Rural

CONTENTS

1. BACKGROUND	Erro! Marcador não definido.
1.1 The Cinereous Vulturein Portugal	5
1.2 The Cinereous Vulturein the Douro International Nature Park	5
1.3 Fire at the Cinereous Vulturecolony in the Douro International Nature Park	Erro! Marcador não definido.
2. POST-FIRE EMERGENCY PLAN FOR THE BLACK VULTURE IN THE DOURO INTERNACIONAL NATURAL PARK	8
2.1 Planning and implementation of actions to minimise impacts and recover the habitat and the Cinereous Vulturecolony in the Douro International Nature Park.	9
Table 1. Actions to minimise impacts and recover the Cinereous Vulturehabitat and colony in the Douro International Nature Park	11
Table 2. Implementation schedule for the actions described.....	16
3. REFERENCES.....	18
4. ANNEX 1. Occurrence report	19



1. FRAMEWORK

1.1. The Cinereous Vulture in Portugal

The Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) became extinct as a breeding species in Portugal in the late 1960s (Equipa Atlas 2008). However, it remained present along the border zone of the Centre and South regions, with individuals coming from Spain (Catry et al. 2010). Subsequently, during the 1990s and 2000s, breeding attempts were recorded but were unsuccessful (Catry et al. 2010).

In 2010, the species bred successfully again in Portugal, establishing itself in the Tejo Internacional Natural Park, four decades after it had become extinct as a breeder in the country (Equipa Atlas 2022). The Douro Internacional colony of Cinereous Vultures was the second to become established in Portugal, when a pair of this species bred for the first time in 2012 in the Douro Internacional Natural Park (PNDI). The species was later also recorded breeding at Herdade da Contenda, in Alentejo, in 2015. A few years later, two further colonies of this species were discovered in the Centre and South of the country, respectively in the Serra da Malcata Nature Reserve in 2021 and at Herdade do Monte da Ribeira, in Vidigueira, Alentejo, in 2024 (Matos et al. 2024).

1.2. The Cinereous Vulture in the Douro International Nature Park

From 2012 to 2018, there was only a single pair of Cinereous Vultures breeding in the PNDI. Over those seven years, it is estimated that only four fledglings were produced. In July 2017, a large wildfire, with more than 2.200 hectares burned, affected the Douro Internacional pair, destroying the nest and incinerating that year's unfledged chick (ICNF 2017). As an emergency measure after this fire, under the LIFE Rupis project, four nest platforms were installed in the colony area in January 2019, one of which was occupied that same year by a second pair. Subsequently, a third pair became established in 2023 and, in 2024, the colony grew to eight pairs. That year, three breeding pairs were on the Spanish side, in Arribes del Duero Natural Park. In 2025, the number of breeding pairs remained at eight (Figure 1).

One of the limiting factors for this colony is the nesting habitat. In general, Cinereous Vulture breeding colonies are located in extensive forest stands (Muñoz-Adalia & Hernández Lázaro 2013; Del Moral & de la Puente 2014), and nests are built on large or robust trees. However, the Douro Internacional colony is situated on the cliffs of the Douro River canyon, where large trees are scarce. This may be why most nests are built on junipers (*Juniperus oxycedrus*) and only a small proportion on holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*). In the other four colonies in Portugal, the species builds nests mainly in pines and oaks. A very similar situation occurs in Spain, where, according to data from 2017, 87.7% of nests were in trees of the genus *Pinus*, 9.1% in *Quercus* and only 2.7% in junipers (Del Moral 2017).



Figure 1. Panoramic view of the area where the Cinereous Vulture colony is located in the Douro Internacional Nature Park. © Iván Gutiérrez/Palombar

Regarding breeding success, in 2024 the rate was very similar both in the Douro Internacional colony and across the five existing colonies in Portugal (0.50 in Douro Internacional and 0.51 at the national level; *unpublished data*, LIFE Aegypius Return). In Spain, however, breeding success appears to be higher. In 2024, the success rate in the Castile and León region was 0.71 (Junta de Castilla y León, 2025) and 0.70 for Spain as a whole in 2017 (Del Moral, 2017).

The Douro Internacional colony remains the most fragile and isolated in Portugal, located more than 90 km from the nearest colony, in the Quilamas Special Protection Area (SPA), in the Sierra de Francia, Spain (ICNF 2017). This isolation and the small population size make this colony highly vulnerable to several risks, making its protection essential.

1.3. Fire in the Cinereous Vulture Colony in the Douro Internacional Natural Park

On 15 August 2025, a wildfire broke out in the locality of Poiares, municipality of Freixo de Espada à Cinta, within the Douro Internacional Natural Park (PNDI). This fire severely affected the Douro Internacional Cinereous Vulture colony (Figure 2) and the acclimatisation station for Cinereous Vultures managed by Palombar under the LIFE Aegyptius Return project (**for further details and impacts of this fire, see Annex 1**).



Figure 2 - Fire in the Douro Internacional Nature Park. Image taken from the Carrascalinho viewpoint on 17 August 2025 © Iván Gutiérrez/Palombar

To minimise the impacts of this fire, a recovery plan for the Cinereous Vulture colony and the surrounding habitat in the PNDI was established. The plan is summarised in the following section of this document.



2. POST-FIRE EMERGENCY PLAN FOR THE CINEREOUS VULTURE IN THE DOURO INTERNACIONAL NATURE PARK

2.1. Planning and implementation of actions to minimise impacts and recover the Cinereous Vulture habitat and colony in the Douro International Nature Park

1. Ensure increased food availability for the Cinereous Vulture and other threatened scavenger birds

1.1. Provision of food in feeding stations for scavenger birds (in Portuguese, *Campos de Alimentação para Aves Necrófagas* - CAAN)

1.2. Licensing and provision of food in Private Areas for Feeding Necrophagous Birds (in Portuguese, *Áreas Privadas para Alimentação de Aves Necrófagas* - APAAN) on extensive small ruminant livestock farms (farm feeding stations).

2. Promote the restoration and management of habitats for biodiversity conservation and support of traditional activities

2.1. Restore the nesting habitat of the Cinereous Vulture

2.2. Recover habitat in strategic areas to support livestock farming and promote game species

2.3. Restore strategic habitats to support and conserve wildlife

3. Reactivate the Cinereous Vulture soft-release programme, re-establishing the operating conditions of the Fornos acclimatisation station and associated infrastructure

3.1. Reactivate the acclimatisation aviary and complete the 2025 Cinereous Vulture *soft-release* programme

3.2. Re-establishing the logistical support infrastructure and video surveillance system for the acclimatisation aviary

3.3. Restore the operational capacity of the Fornos CAAN

4. Reinforce monitoring of the Cinereous Vulture

- 4.1. Monitor the species *in situ* in the colony area
- 4.2. Monitoring the movements of Cinereous Vultures tagged with GPS/GSM transmitters
- 4.3. Monitor the use of feeding areas

5. Ensure protection and minimisation of negative impacts on the Cinereous Vulture colony

- 5.1. Minimise disturbance resulting from human activities in the colony area

Table 1. Actions to minimise impacts and recover the habitat and the Cinereous Vulture colony in the Douro Internacional Nature Park

General objective	Specific objective	Actions	Priority	Implementation period	Organisations
1. Ensure increased food availability for the Cinereous Vulture and other threatened scavenger birds	1.1 Provision of food feeding stations for scavenger birds (CAAN)	Provide animal by-products not intended for human consumption (categories 2 and 3), on a weekly basis and 1-2x/week, in six CAAN located in the PNDI, namely Ifanes, Lamoso, Bruçó and Fornos, Escalhão, Cumieira (subject to use by Cinereous Vultures).	High	August 2025 - September 2026	Palombar Faia Brava
	1.2 Licensing and provision of food in Private Areas for the Feeding of Scavenger Birds (farm feeding stations/APAAN) on extensive small ruminant livestock farms	Greater efforts to find new APAANs in the area of influence of the Cinereous Vulture colony.	Medium	September 2025 - September 2026	Palombar Faia Brava

General objective	Specific objective	Actions	Priority	Implementation period	Organisations
2. Promote the restoration and management of habitats for biodiversity conservation and support of traditional activities	2.1 Restore the nesting habitat of the Cinereous Vulture	Rebuild and reinforce 4 nest platforms destroyed or partially affected by the fire in the PNDI; build 8 to 10 new platforms, with priority installation on the Spanish side, in the Arribes del Duero Nature Park (PNAD), where the fire had less impact.	Medium	October - December 2025	Palombar GIAM ICNF JCyL/PNAD
	2.2 Recover habitat in strategic areas to support livestock farming and promote game species	Provide emergency food, in the form of seeds, for more immediate support for the fauna; install 5 watering troughs, 5 feeders and distribute half a tonne of seeds; install a minimum of 10 hectares of seedbeds to encourage prey species and promote extensive grazing. A mixture of seeds (cereals and pulses) will be used.	Medium	September 2025 - September 2026	Palombar Wild beech Livestock producers Fornos hunting and fishing club
	2.3 Restore strategic habitats to support and conserve wildlife	Recover 1 temporary pond.	Medium	November 2025 - March 2026	Palombar REN

General objective	Specific objective	Actions	Priority	Implementation period	Organisations
3. Reactivate the Cinereous Vulture soft-release programme, re-establishing the operating conditions of the Fornos acclimatisation station and associated infrastructure	3.1 Reactivate the acclimatisation aviary and complete the 2025 Cinereous Vulture soft-release programme	Remove carbonised waste and decaying organic matter from inside the cage; repair the damage caused by the fire to the cage structure; relocate the six black vultures translocated to CIARA as an emergency measure during the fire, in order to complete the acclimatisation process in the cage and proceed with their phased return to the wild.	High	August - November 2025	Palombar Faia Brava
	3.2 Re-establishing the logistical support infrastructure and video surveillance system for the acclimatisation aviary	Remove the wreckage of the container and the equipment destroyed by the fire from the affected area; purchase a new container to support the acclimatisation station and all the associated equipment for logistics and video surveillance, and install it.	High	August 2025 - January 2026	Palombar Faia Brava
	3.3 Restore the operational capacity of the Fornos CAAN	Repair the damage to the CAAN fence; clean up the area where food is deposited, removing post-fire debris; resume the supplementary feeding programme.	High	August 2025	Palombar

General objective	Specific objective	Actions	Priority	Implementation period	Organisations
4. Reinforce monitoring of the Cinereous Vulture	4.1 Monitor the species <i>in situ</i> in the colony area	Implement a systematic and continuous monitoring programme, with regular visits (1-2x/month) to the colony area to detect the presence of individuals of the species, breeding pairs and follow the dynamics of reoccupation of that area after the fire.	Medium	August 2025 - September 2026	Palombar Wild Beech ICNF JCyL/PNAD
	4.2 Monitoring the movements of Cinereous Vultures tagged with GPS/GSM transmitters	Remotely track colony members marked with GPS/GSM transmitters on a daily basis in order to observe movement patterns, assess territory use after the fire and detect situations of risk or mortality at an early stage.	High	August 2025 - September 2026	Palombar Faia Brava
	4.3 Monitor the use of feeding areas	Maintain the photographic capture system in the CAAN and APAAN during the feeding period (see specific objective 1.1) to detect the presence and assess the frequency of use of these infrastructures by the Cinereous Vulture and other threatened scavenger species.	Medium	August 2025 - September 2026	Palombar Faia Brava

General objective	Specific objective	Actions	Priority	Implementation period	Organisations
5. Ensure protection and minimisation of negative impacts on the Cinereous Vulture colony	5.1 Minimise disturbance resulting from human activities in the colony area	Restrict human activities at critical periods, particularly during the breeding season. Sectors: - Game; - Livestock; - Agriculture; - Forestry; - Tourism.	Medium	September 2025 - September 2026	ICNF Fornos Hunting and Fishing Club Agricultural producers Foresters Tourist agents Palombar

Table 2. Implementation schedule for the actions described

	Specific objectives	2025					2026								
		AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEPT
1	1.1. Provision of food in feeding stations for scavenger birds (CAAN)														
	1.2 Licensing and provision of food in Private Feeding Areas for Necrophagous Birds (APAAN) on extensive small ruminant livestock farms.														
2	2.1 Restore the nesting habitat of the Cinereous Vulture														
	2.2 Recover habitat in strategic areas to support livestock farming and promote game species														
	2.3 Restore strategic habitats to support and conserve wildlife														
3	3.1 Reactivate the acclimatisation aviary and complete the 2025 Cinereous Vulture soft-release programme														
	3.2 Re-establishing the logistical support infrastructure and video surveillance system for the acclimatisation aviary														
	3.3 Restore the operational capacity of the Fornos CAAN														
4	4.1 Monitor the species <i>in situ</i> in the colony area														

5	4.2 Monitoring the movements of Cinereous Vultures tagged with GPS/GSM transmitters														
	4.3 Monitoring the use of feeding areas														
	5.1 Minimise disturbance resulting from human activities in the colony area														

3. REFERENCES

Catry, P., Costa, H., Elias, G., Matias, R. 2010. Aves de Portugal. Ornitologia do território continental. Assírio & Alvim, Lisboa.

Del Moral, J. C. (Ed.) 2017. El buitre negro en España, población reproductora en 2017 y método de censo. SEO/BirdLife, Madrid.

Del Moral, J. C., de la Puente, J. 2014. Buitre negro – *Aegypius monachus*. En: Enciclopedia Virtual de los Vertebrados Españoles. Salvador, A., & Morales, M. B. (Eds.). Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales, Madrid.

Equipa Atlas. 2008. Atlas das Aves Nidificantes de Portugal (1999–2005). ICNB, SPEA, Parque Natural da Madeira e Secretaria Regional do Ambiente e do Mar. Assírio & Alvim, Lisboa.

Equipa Atlas. 2022. III Atlas das Aves Nidificantes de Portugal (2016–2021). SPEA, ICNF, LabOr/UÉ, IFCN, Portugal.

ICNF. 2017. Conservação do abutre-preto no Parque Natural do Douro Internacional: ações de minimização do impacto do incêndio de 15 a 16 de julho de 2017. Relatório produzido no âmbito do projeto LIFE Rupis. ICNF, Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo. 15 pp.

Junta de Castilla y León. 2025. Seguimiento del estado de conservación de la población reproductora de buitre negro (*Aegypius monachus*) en Castilla y León. Año 2024. Consejería de Medio Ambiente, Vivienda y Ordenación del Territorio, Valladolid.

Matos, M., Guilherme, J., Albuquerque, J., Barroqueiro, C., Delgado, D., Fernández-García, M., Godino, A., Gutiérrez, I., Infante, S., Mateo-Tomás, P., Monteiro, P., Pacheco, C., Pereira, J., Ribeiro, P., Rocha, P., Santos, E., Santos, J., Tavares, J. 2024. Annual report on soft-releases and movements of tagged Cinereous Vultures - 2024. LIFE Aegypius Return. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14535302>

Muñoz-Adalia, E. J., Hernández Lázaro, A. 2013. El buitre negro en España: Una revisión de su biología y estado de conservación. *Chronica naturae*, 3, 66–75.

4. ANNEX 1

Incident Report: Fire in the Cinereous Vulture Colony of the Douro Internacional Nature Park

- Incident Report -

Fire in the Cinereous Vulture Colony of the Douro Internacional Nature Park

In the early afternoon of **Friday 15 August 2025**, the technicians from **Palombar - Associação de Conservação da Natureza e do Património Rural** were alerted by a resident of Fornos, in the municipality of Freixo de Espada à Cinta, about a fire that had broken out at around 13:00 in Poiares, in the nearby locality of Poiares, within the Douro Internacional Nature Park (PNDI). The high temperatures and strong winds that day contributed to the rapid spread of the flames, which in just a few hours evolved into a large wildfire that extended to the neighbouring municipalities of Mogadouro and Torre de Moncorvo. The fire also approached the locality of Fornos, where a **Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) colony and an acclimatisation station** managed by Palombar under the LIFE Aegypius Return project are located.

Two Palombar teams immediately travelled to Fornos to assess the situation of the fire, so that if it became necessary to relocate the six Cinereous Vultures that were at that time housed at the acclimatisation station, ensuring a rapid and safe operation.

Although the fire front was still some distance from the station, the unstable weather conditions in the area led the Palombar technicians, in coordination with the Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests (ICNF) of the PNDI, to decide to proceed with the rescue and translocation of the six vultures to the Wildlife Interpretation and Rehabilitation Centre (CIARA), located in the village of Felgar, in the neighbouring municipality of Torre de Moncorvo. The six vultures arrived at the centre around 22:00, and it was confirmed that none had suffered any injuries during transport.

On the afternoon of the following day, **Saturday 16 August**, the fire reached the area where the acclimatisation station and the Fornos feeding site for scavenging birds (CAAN) are located, causing slight damage to the aviary (the facility where the Cinereous Vultures were housed) and completely destroying the veterinary and logistics support container (**Figure 1**). The fire also burned a large area of land surrounding the acclimatisation station and the CAAN, despite the vegetation having been cut over a considerable area (approximately 23 ha) as a preventive measure implemented under the Habitat Management and Fire Risk Reduction Plan (PGHRRI) for Cinereous Vulture territory within the Special Protection Area “Douro Internacional e Vale do Águeda,” developed as part of the LIFE Aegypius Return project.

On the morning of the following day, **Sunday 17 August**, while some hotspots were still burning in areas along the Douro River cliffs, Palombar technicians visited the Fornos area to assess the damage to the acclimatisation facilities and monitor several Cinereous Vulture nests in the vicinity. Later that same day, during the afternoon, the fire advanced along the cliffs, affecting numerous nests and artificial nesting platforms built to improve breeding conditions for the species. According to the provisional national report of the Forest Fire Information Management System (SGIF), the fire was only brought under control on the morning of Tuesday, 19 August, having burned an estimated total of around **12.000 hectares (Figures 2 and 3)**. The report classified the cause of the fire under the category “Transport and communications,” with the cause type identified as “negligence.”

On Tuesday **19 August**, once much of the smoke had cleared, Palombar technicians went to the Spanish side of the cliffs, in the **Arribes del Duero Nature Park (PNAD)**, to monitor all breeding pairs in the colony and assess which nests and individuals had been affected by the fire. The technicians confirmed that, of the five active nests on the Portuguese side of the cliffs, four had been affected: two were completely burned (**Figure 4**) and two were partially damaged by the flames. In addition, one unoccupied nest and four artificial platforms installed for future pairs were also partially affected by the fire (**Figure 5**). That day, no Cinereous Vultures were observed in the area – neither juveniles nor adults.

On Thursday **21 August**, Palombar technicians, who remotely monitor the movements of juvenile Cinereous Vultures tagged with GPS/GSM transmitters under the LIFE Aegypius Return project, noticed that one of the tagged birds, which had left the nest two weeks earlier, had shown no signs of movement since the previous day and was located on a burnt hillside between the localities of Mazouco and Fornos (**Figure 6**). A Palombar team immediately went to the site and found the chick dead (**Figure 7**). In coordination with **CIARA** and the **Veterinary Hospital of the University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro (HV-UTAD)**, the carcass was collected and sent for necropsy. On the same day, veterinarians performed the necropsy and determined that the cause of death was internal fractures caused by impact with a structure or object. The bird’s respiratory tract was completely black due to smoke inhalation, leading to the hypothesis that this had caused the bird’s disorientation prior to the collision.

Of the five chicks born in 2025 in the Douro Internacional colony, only one is known to still be alive, as it is being monitored remotely through a GPS/GSM transmitter. Two chicks have already been found dead (**Figures 7 and 8**), and the status of the remaining two – approximately 118 and 110 days old at the time of the fire, and therefore non-fledglings – remains unknown, as they were not tagged and have not been observed again at the nests. Given that they were not yet capable of flight, the likelihood that they survived and managed to move away from the burned area is very low.

Uva, 09 October 2025

Iván Gutiérrez
Palombar | Nature Conservation - Biodiversity Monitoring
+351 925119249

IMAGES



Figure A1. Image taken from outside the Fornos Feeding Site for Scavenging Birds (CAAN), showing the extent of the burned area, the completely destroyed veterinary and logistics support container (foreground, right), and the acclimatisation aviary (background, left). © Iván Gutiérrez/Palombar

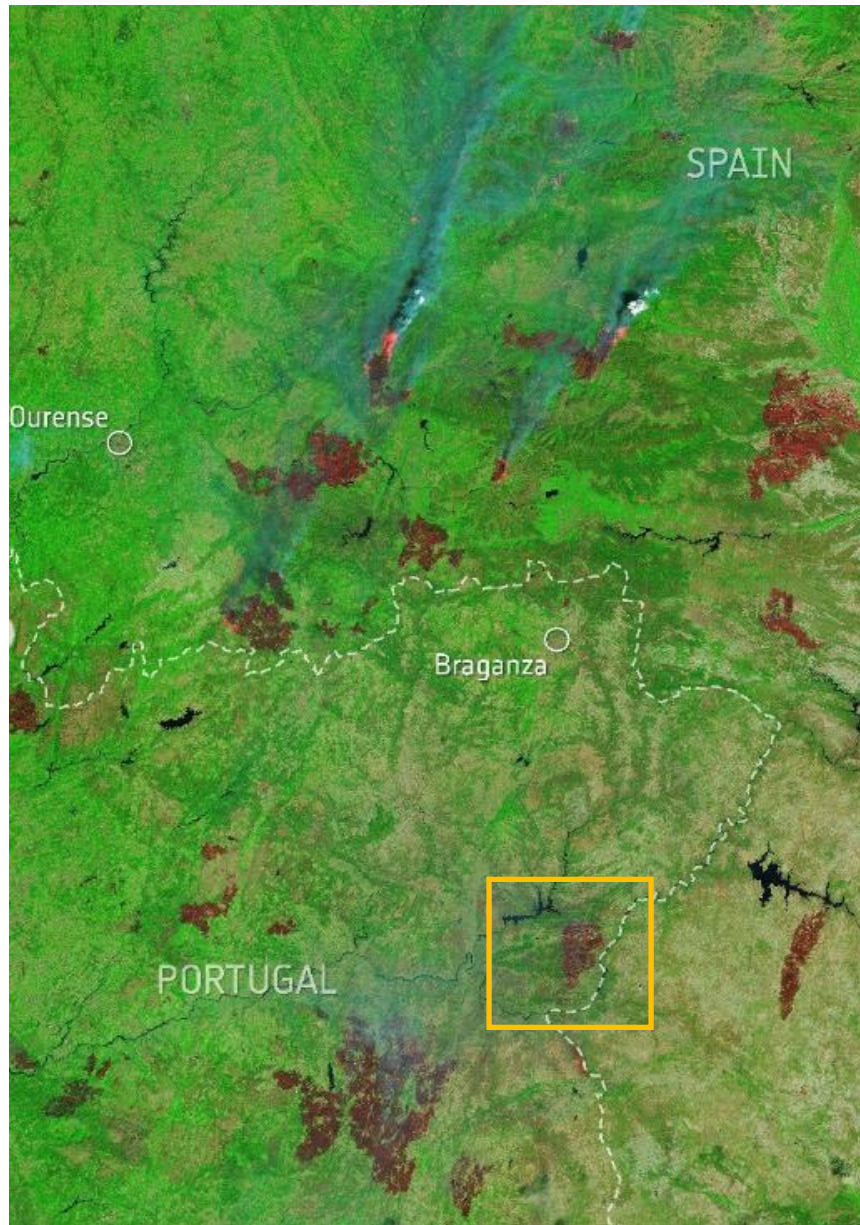


Figure A2. View of the burned area in the Douro Internacional Natural Park (yellow square). False-colour satellite image from Sentinel-2 showing burned areas and active fires in Portugal and Spain on 16 August 2025. © Copernicus Sentinel data (2025)

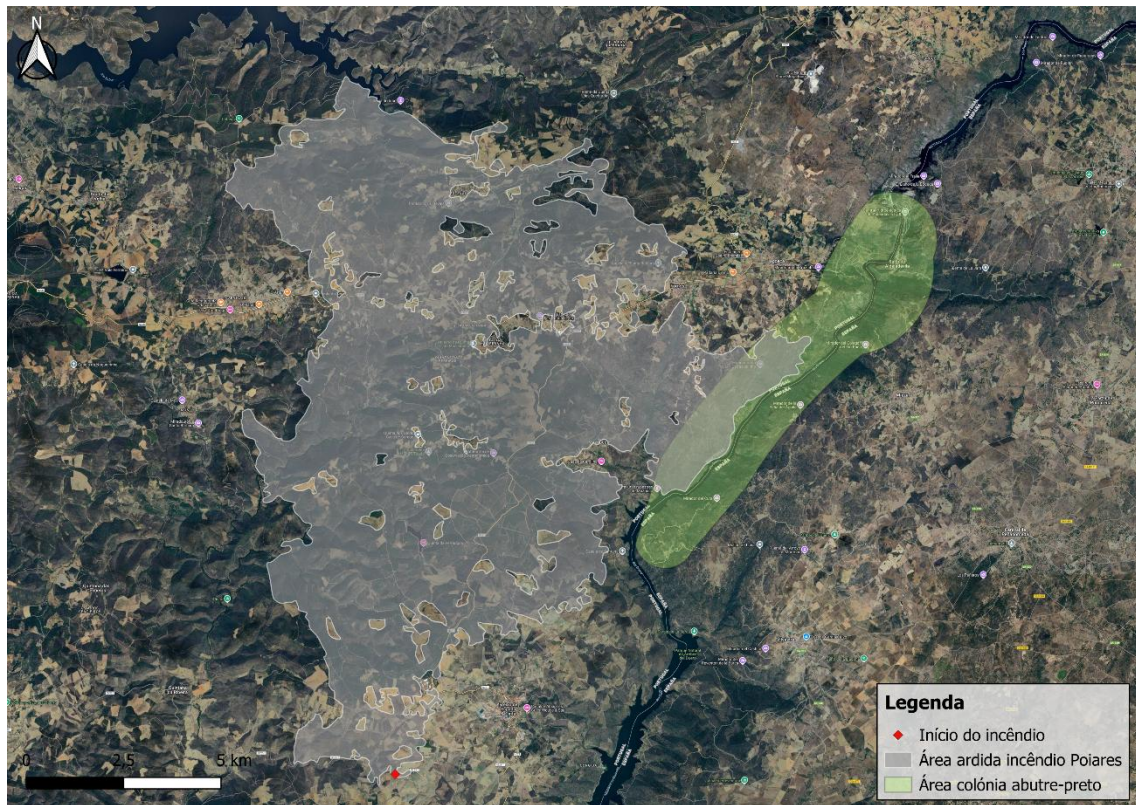


Figure A3. Orthophotomap of the area affected by the Poiares fire. The grey spot corresponds to the total burnt area. The green area marks the Cinereous Vulture colony in the Douro Internacional Natural Park. The part of the colony affected by the fire includes the acclimatisation station, the Fornos CAAN, and several natural and artificial nesting platforms.



Figure A4. Burned Cinereous Vulture nest during the fire in the Douro Internacional Nature Park colony. This nest was built on an artificial nesting platform installed in 2019 under the LIFE Rupis project. The iron base of the artificial platform can be seen in the image. © Iván Gutiérrez/Palombar



Figure A5. View of one of the partially burned artificial nesting platforms during the fire. This platform was installed in the Cinereous Vulture colony of the Douro Internacional Natural Park in 2023 under the LIFE Aegypius Return project. © Iván Gutiérrez/Palombar



Figure A6. Overview of the burnt area in the Douro International Nature Park in the Mazouco area, municipality of Freixo de Espada à Cinta. © Iván Gutiérrez/Palombar



Figure A7. Carcass of the Cinereous Vulture chick *Acer*, tagged with a GPS/GSM transmitter and rings, in the nest in June 2025. © Iván Gutiérrez/Palombar



Figure A8. Remains of a Cinereous Vulture chick found near its nest, which was completely burned. This chick was approximately 115 days old at the time of the fire. © GIAM/Palombar