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Who we are

The Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF) is the leading **non-profit organization** dedicated to the conservation of Europe's vulture species: the **Bearded Vulture, Griffon Vulture, Cinereous Vulture, Egyptian Vulture,** and the **Ruppel's Vulture**, that has recently started establishing itself in Portugal and Spain. In the past century, these species have faced numerous challenges: their habitats have been reduced, their food resources almost disappeared and human activities and infrastructures have negatively affected their numbers.

Since its establishment, the VCF has been at the forefront of vulture conservation efforts with one clear mission: **actively working to reverse the decline of vulture populations across Europe**. The VCF's initiative to reintroduce the Bearded Vulture to the Alpine Mountain range is celebrated as one of the **most remarkable successes in wildlife conservation** in the last 50 years. The VCF is currently involved in multiple projects reintroducing or restocking Bearded, Cinereous and Griffon Vultures across Europe. Today we lead on vulture conservation across Eurasia, and we coordinate the Bearded Vulture captive-breeding network on behalf of EAZA's European Endangered Species Programme (EEP).

We establish our work on **rigorous scientific foundations**, and tailor it to each vulture species' behaviour, ecology, habitat and the threats they face. We cooperate with governments, businesses, local communities and NGOs, applying our expertise in captive-breeding, species reintroduction, threat mitigation and vulture monitoring. In addition, we are involved in science dissemination and public awareness campaigns.

With our commitment to biodiversity, ecosystems health and wildlife conservation, and *your support*, we can ensure that these majestic scavengers thrive across Europe.

Together we can write a new, brighter chapter in the story of European vultures .

Mission

The VCF works for the recovery of vultures and their ecosystems in Europe by initiating, facilitating, and building capacity for science-based and long-lasting conservation actions and research. The VCF shares its technical expertise and practical knowledge with partners from local and national governments, and international and civil society organisations to raise awareness and support for the essential role that vultures play in our ecosystems.

Timeline

Commentato [EV1]: Summarise. Less text

1978: European conservation pioneers unite with a vision to reintroduce the Bearded Vulture to the Alps. They agree to purchase the existing Bearded Vultures in captivity in European Zoos, with a grant from the Frankfurt Zoological Society, and start a captive-breeding programme for reintroduction.

1986: The first releases of captive-bred Bearded Vultures take place at Hohe Tauern National Park, Austria.

1992: The Foundation for the Conservation of the Bearded Vulture (FCBV) is officially launched to protect the iconic mountain species. The Frankfurt Zoological Society cedes the 49 Bearded Vultures it owns to the new Foundation, with a purpose to expand and develop Bearded Vulture captive-breeding and conservation.

1997: The first Bearded Vulture breeding pair in the wild in the Alps successfully raises a chick in the French Alps.

2006: The Andalusia Bearded Vulture reintroduction project starts. The Guadalentin Bearded Vulture centre is established

2009: Building on expertise gained, the FCBV transforms itself into the Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF), expanding its mission to safeguard all of Europe's vulture species.

2012: The French Massif Central Bearded Vulture reintroduction project starts

2013 : The VCF acquires a professional structure, by employing 4 staff, including a Director

2014 :

The VCF becomes involved in its first LIFE project (co-funded by the European Union's LIFE Programme), LIFE GypHelp project (with Bearded Vulture in the French Alps) This was the first of many – until 2024, the VCF has been a partner or has coordinated a total of 16 LIFE projects, of which 10 are ongoing by the end of 2024

The reintroduction of Griffon Vultures to the Central Balkan mountains in Bulgaria starts, as part of XXXXX

2015 : VCF's work portfolio expands joining four new LIFE-funded projects

LIFE GypConnect: Restoring the Connections between Bearded Vulture populations in the Alps and the Pyrenees Mountains.

LIFE Europsap: Coordinated efforts for international species recovery, focusing on developing and updating Species Action Plans (SAPs) for 16 bird species, including Cinereous Vulture and Bearded Vulture.

The Vultures Back to LIFE: Returning the Cinereous Vulture to the skies of Bulgaria, connecting the Balkan's only population in Greece with other populations in Crimea, the Alps, and the Iberian Peninsula.

LIFE Rupis: Strengthening the populations of Cinereous Vultures, Egyptian Vultures, and Bonelli's Eagle in the cross-border Douro Canyon.

2016 . The Corsica Bearded Vulture population reinforcement project starts

The VCF joins the *LIFE RE-Vultures* project. It aims to mitigate threats to Cinereous and Griffon Vultures in the Eastern Rhodope Mountains bordering Bulgaria and Greece, facilitating the recovery of these vulture populations.

2017 : The EU international species action plans for the Bearded Vulture and for the Cinereous Vulture are adopted. These were developed and coordinated by the VCF as part of LIFE EuroSAP project

The Multi-species Action Plan to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures (Vulture MsAP) - the global blueprint for vulture conservation, is adopted by the CMS (Convention on Migratory Species) at COP12 (Conference of the Parties) in Manila, Philippines- The VCF has co-led this process and managed all the Eurasia input into this seminal document, that provides the framework for a coordinated international conservation effort aimed at rapidly halting population declines in 15 species of Old World vultures across 128 countries.

The VCF organises the 1st European Vulture Conference in the Algarve (Portugal) with 280 participants.

2018 . The Maestrazgo (Valencia, Spain) Bearded Vulture reintroduction project starts.

The Reintroduction of Cinereous Vultures in Bulgaria starts, as part of LIFE *Vultures Back to LIFE* project

Further expansion with Phase one of 3 large-scale conservation projects funded by the MAVA Foundation:

- Balkan Anti-Poisoning Project (BAPP), a cross-border initiative uniting stakeholders across six Balkan countries to combat poisoning and protect wildlife.
- Illegal Killing of Birds (IKB) project aimed at reducing illegal bird killings in the Mediterranean, including awareness raising, training for enforcement agencies, and advocacy for stronger environmental protection legislation.
- Safe Flyways Energy Infrastructure project with the goal of minimizing risks of electrocution and collisions for vultures and migratory birds in the Mediterranean region by promoting compatibility between bird conservation and the energy sector.

LIFE GYPHELP and LIFE EUROSAP are successfully implemented and closed.

2019

LIFE with Vultures project is launched to save Griffon Vultures in Cyprus **2020**

The first VCF-led LIFE project, *Balkan LIFE Detox* is launched, building on BAPP's success to strengthen national capacities to fight wildlife poisoning and raise awareness about the problem across seven Balkan countries.

LIFE RUPIS is successfully implemented and closed.

The VCF undertakes the management of the Guadalentin Bearded Vulture Captive-Breeding Centre.

2021

LIFE Safe for Vultures is launched in Sardinia with the aim to reinforce the local population and bring the Griffon Vulture back to the whole island.

LIFE GYPRESCUE is launched in Corsica to prevent the disappearance of the Bearded Vulture .

LIFE Re-Vultures is successfully implemented and closed

First Wildlife Crime Academy Level 1 and 2 Courses are carried out in Spain, involving 34 professionals from nine European countries, as part of the LIFE Balkan Detox.

2022

The *LIFE Gyp'ACT* project begins. It focuses on implementing the reintroduction of Bearded Vultures in Southern France, *LIFE Aegypius Return* starts. It aims to consolidate, enhance and accelerate the return of Cinereous Vultures in Portugal and Western Spain.

LIFE Vultures Back to Life and *LIFE GypConnect* successfully implemented and concluded.

2023

LIFE Bearded Vulture project starts in the Balkans. It aims to reestablish the historical distribution of Bearded and Cinereous Vultures. It will establish a Bearded Vulture population in Bulgaria/Balkans and fortify the existing Cinereous Vulture population, while also initiating a vulture recovery programme in Romania.

LIFE SUPport project starts. It aims to stabilize and eventually increase the Griffon Vultures population in Croatia .

The VCF organises the second European Vulture conference in Cáceres (Spain), with 400 participants.

2024

The *LIFE Rhodope Vultures* begins with the aim of restoring the Cinereous Vultures population in the Bulgarian-Greek cross-border region.

The Wildlife Crime Academy LIFE project launched at the end of the year. It aims to strengthen national capacities to combat wildlife crime and raise awareness about this threat in Europe and North Africa.

Overview

Reflecting on the years gone by, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to all our invaluable partners, colleagues, supporters and funders for their continued support during all this time.

The last years have seen incredible progresses in the Bearded Vultures Captive Breeding network, with an unprecedented survival rate of the hatchlings and two record years in a row for the number of fledglings produced. This allows us to consolidate and expand our reintroduction projects: the Bearded Vultures populations in the Alps are now very healthy and robust. Lastly, we've relentlessly contributed to the species come back in Bulgaria's Balkan Mountains: a reintroduction site has been identified, and the first group of Bearded Vultures will be released in spring 2025.

Another population that has seen incredible progresses in the last two years is the Portuguese Cinereous Vultures population. Thanks to the efforts of the LIFE Aegyptius Return project and its partners, we now count 116 pairs and 5 colonies. The project monitored and tagged more than 50 vultures between 2023 and 2024 and contributed to the conservation of the species through studies, seminars, trainings for police officers and collaboration with the local authorities.

We supported ecologically crucial Griffon Vultures populations in collaboration with LIFE projects in Sardinia, Croatia and Cyprus. The Sardinian population saw a constant growth and in 2024 welcomed 43 individuals from other countries to increase the chances of the establishment of a new colony in the south of the island. We also collaborated at the release of around 20 Griffon Vultures in Cyprus, to boost the local population, and advocated for a better management of the electrical infrastructures to reduce bird collisions and electrocutions. In Croatia, the LIFE SUPport project - started in 2023 - helped the local population to rise from 130 to 150 breeding pairs and saved numerous young vultures from drowning in the sea.

A new species of vultures, the Rüppell's Vulture, started to expand its range from Africa to Europe. Therefore, we chose to be proactive and deepen our knowledge of this rare species by contributing to tagging individuals in Morocco.

Our effort to protect vulture species in Europe and beyond did not stop at reintroductions.

Poisoning, electrocution and collision with electrical infrastructures, are still major threats to vultures' survival across Europe. We engaged with national and international partners to advocate for vultures' safety and for better wildlife crime investigations. Additionally, we intensified our efforts on these topics organising training sessions and workshops for professionals and police officers.

We contributed to the scientific scenery with studies and workshops, and we organised and took part in several conferences – like the European Vultures conference in Cáceres in 2023 and the International Bearded Vulture Meeting in Corsica in 2024 - to improve knowledge dissemination and collaboration among vulture experts.

While there is still much work to be done, we carry on with optimism and a sense of urgency. We deeply appreciate your support in our mission to ensure vultures thrive safely in Europe and beyond.

Our work

Two centuries ago, Bearded, Cinereous, Egyptian, and Griffon Vultures were among the most common breeding bird species in the mountains of central and southern Europe. However, diminishing food sources, habitat loss, persecution, and poisoning drove them to the brink of extinction, with populations dwindling and isolated by the 1960s. Today, thanks to unwavering conservation efforts, European vulture populations are making a remarkable comeback. In many regions, the majestic sight of vultures soaring the skies has become a common and spectacular spectacle once more.

We began our work in the 1970s in the Alps, with a focus on the Bearded Vulture, our emblematic flagship species. Over the years, our expertise and collaborations have consistently yielded positive outcomes for this species in Europe, despite numerous challenges. As we continued, our efforts expanded to include all European vulture species, such as the Cinereous, Egyptian, and Griffon Vultures, in various regions. We adapt our strategies to each project's specific needs and priorities, working in close partnership with other stakeholders, from NGOs to government authorities and businesses, to achieve the best results. We have also initiated close monitoring of the critically endangered Rüppell's Vulture, originally from Africa, as it becomes a more common sight in Europe.

Vultures, often misunderstood and misrepresented, play an essential role in our ecosystems. These birds, unfairly stigmatized as symbols of death, are actually vital contributors to environmental health. By efficiently consuming and disposing of carcasses, vultures can potentially limit the spread of diseases and help maintain healthy ecosystems.

The Vulture Conservation Foundation is dedicated to transforming the perception of vultures and highlighting their importance beyond wildlife conservation goals to foster a new understanding of these remarkable birds and rewrite their narrative. Vultures can positively contribute to society by providing ecosystem services, with the potential to lower CO2 emissions, reduce costs for farmers, and boost local economies.

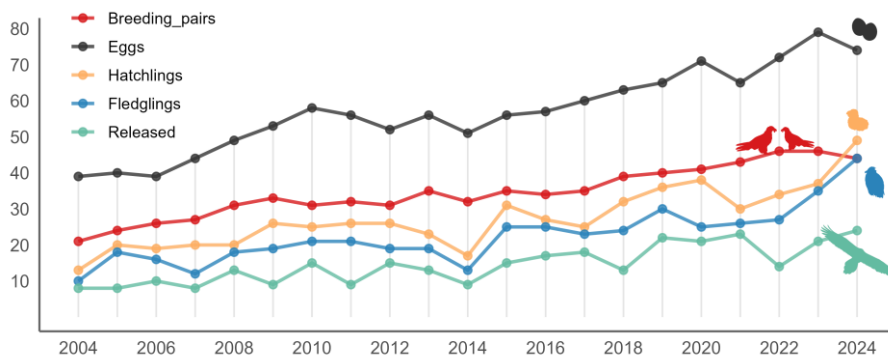
As the leading wildlife conservation organization solely committed to protecting, conserving, and restoring Europe's vulture species, we leverage our decades-long experience and expertise in captive breeding, reintroduction, restocking, monitoring, research, and threat mitigation to shape a hopeful and critical chapter for European vultures and the ecosystems they inhabit, where vultures are valued for their indispensable role in the natural world, and their populations are self-sustaining and thriving.

Captive Breeding

Captive breeding is crucial when a species faces extinction in the wild. Within the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA), Ex situ programmes (EEP) manage species in captivity or establish new populations, emphasizing intensive approaches to reintroduce and strengthen populations. In Europe, three such programmes exist for [Bearded](#), [Cinereous](#), and [Egyptian Vulture](#).

Coordinating an EEP is essential for optimal breeding, involving collaboration among facilities and experts. With over 40 years of experience, the Vulture Conservation Foundation's coordinates the Bearded Vulture EEP, on behalf of EAZA, cooperating with zoos, private collections, and specialized breeding centres to breed Bearded Vultures in captivity for conservation. This initiative aims to reintroduce young vultures, contributing to the conservation of Europe's wild Bearded Vulture population.

Captive breeding plays a pivotal role in facilitating successful species restorations and reintroductions, reinforcing vulnerable populations, and ensuring the genetic health of the species.



Commentato [GU2]: Hi everyone,
I'm currently working on the revised version of the report and need your assistance. If possible, could you please send me this new graph, along with the image from the LIFE Aegypius Return project (page 26 in the document)? I'm unable to extract them myself, and I'd like to include them in the updated report.
Please send the images to my email address - thekestrelimage@gmail.com
Thank you in advance.

Best regards,
Kalman Moldvai

The VCF also manages two specialized breeding centres:

1. the Bearded Vulture Specialised Breeding Unit at Centre de Fauna Vallcalent, following an agreement with Generalitat de Catalonia,
2. the Bearded Vulture captive breeding centre at Guadalentín, following an agreement with the Junta de Andalucía.

Bearded Vulture

2023 and 2024 have been extraordinarily positive years for the [Bearded Vulture Captive Breeding Network](#), now counting 193 birds in total. For the last two years consecutively, the network has seen a remarkable increase in the survival rate of the hatchlings (94.6%) and has produced a record number of young vultures.

	EEP results	
	2023	2024
Breeding pairs	46	44
Eggs	79	74
Fertile Eggs	48	64
Hatchlings	37	49
Fledglings	35	44

To support and improve the work done within the network, in 2024 we organised a “Workshop on Artificial Incubation and Rearing of Bearded Vulture Chicks” at the Parc Animalier des Pyrénées. The workshop touched crucial topics such as a comprehensive protocol for artificial incubation and chick rearing and CITES management.

Final objective 200 birds in captive stock – 173 right now. Lots of transports and new pairs in the network (look at the slides for the numbers)

Vallcalent

This unit specializes in artificial incubation and takes in pairs that struggle to reproduce in other entities and require technical support. These challenging pairs are sent to Vallcalent for specialized care, benefiting from the expertise of Alex Llopis and the centre's facilities to improve their chances of breeding successfully. Among the special cases in Vallcalent, there is a human-imprinted Bearded Vulture. Unfortunately, it only recognizes humans as its own species, and as a result, Alex 'pairs' with him every breeding period, enabling the vulture to serve as a foster parent, adopting and raising a chick.

Currently, Vallcalent houses 32 birds, with 4 active breeding pairs and 3 pairs that could potentially breed in the foreseeable future.

	Captive Breeding Results	
	2023	2024
Breeding pairs	4	4
Eggs	8	5
Fertile Eggs	6	4
Hatchlings	3	3
Fledglings	3	3

Highlights

2023

In 2023, the film “[Story of the Bearded Vulture](#)” by Lizzie Daily was launched, including incredible footage recorded in the specialized breeding unit in the centre.

2024

For the first time in nearly 50 years of EEP, the centre was able to [hatch a genetically rare chick produced pairing two Bearded Vultures from wild Pyrenean bloodlines](#). The Pyrenean bloodline is extremely rare in the EEP, and pairing two birds from this area together is even rarer. The pair took four years to produce a fertile egg for the first time, but the egg was broken before it could hatch. It took the team almost 10 years of work, and several unsuccessful trials, to finally produce and successfully hatch an egg.

Four additional aviaries were built during the year, to increase the capacity of the centre.

Being one of the leading teams in Bearded Vultures Captive-breeding within EEP, the Valcaent team shared their incubation techniques with the other teams throughout several workshops. The incubation guidelines developed have also been published.

Guadalentín

Playing an instrumental role in the conservation of Bearded Vultures, this centre contributes many chicks to reintroduction programmes in Andalusia and other regions across Spain, France, and the Alps. Specializing in double and even triple adoptions, it also plays a crucial role in taking in chicks from other Bearded Vulture EEP partners to ensure bearded vultures rear them so that they can behave like their wild counterparts when they grow up, allowing them to survive in the wild and breed once they become sexually mature.

	Captive Breeding Results	
	2023	2024
Breeding pairs	8	6
Eggs	16	12
Fertile Eggs	10	12
Hatchlings	8	11
Fledglings	8	10

Highlights

2023

To increase its breeding capacity, the centre restored 6 Egyptian Vultures aviaries to house Bearded Vultures.

2024

The centre marks its personal record for the highest number of chicks produced (12 fertile eggs and 11 hatchlings).

3 Bearded Vultures aviaries are restored and 20 cameras installed thanks to the VCF agreements with Junta de Andalucía.



Reintroduction and restocking projects

The Vulture Conservation Foundation leads and is part of several efforts across Europe to revive Bearded, Cinereous, Egyptian, and Griffon Vulture populations. Collaborating with partners in Bulgaria, France, Cyprus, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland, our team employs various release techniques to reintroduce or restock wild populations.

Releasing Young Captive-Bred Vultures:

1. **Hacking Technique:** A successful method, especially for young Bearded and Cinereous Vulture captive-bred birds, mimics the natural way of fledging for the species. This method involves placing a minimum of two birds together, typically around 90 days old, in an artificial nest or hacking cave located in the wild. They are fed without human contact for approximately two months until they acclimatize to the natural environment while closely monitoring their progress. As they approach the age of fledging, which occurs after 20-30 days, the young vultures engage in wing exercises and ultimately take their first flight.
2. **Delayed Release and Fostering in Wild Nests:** For Egyptian Vultures, which migrate to sub-Saharan Africa after fledging, there are two methods:
 - **Delayed Release:** Young birds wait 1-2 years before release. They stay in captivity, adapt in an open aviary, and are released into the wild the following spring.
 - **Fostering:** Captive-bred birds are placed in wild nests with breeding pairs, helping them adapt early for their first migration.
3. **Translocation:** Populations of young and wild-hatched Cinereous and Griffon Vultures rescued and rehabilitated in Spain are transferred to other European countries following collaboration with regional governments and rescue centers. Upon arrival, they spend several months in acclimatization aviaries to adapt new environment before their release in the wild.

Before their release, all birds are equipped with GPS/GSM transmitters, enabling us to closely track their movements and monitor their behaviour. GPS monitoring not only informs conservation actions and scientific studies but also allows for prompt response in case a bird requires rescue.

Conservation initiatives have successfully returned the Bearded Vulture as a breeding species in regions like the Alps, Andalusia, and Vercors. Translocation efforts have also allowed for the recovery of Cinereous and Griffon Vulture populations in France, Bulgaria and Italy.

Bearded Vulture

[Map with the areas & the projects]

The Bearded Vultures produced within the EEP are distributed between the reproduction programmes across Europe and several reintroduction key areas. Out of the 79 fledglings hatched within the EEP in the last two years, 45 were distributed to reintroduction projects across Europe.

Over the past 40 years, the European population has increased by an astounding 365%, and the experts predict the Alpine population alone to double over the next decade. During the International Observation Days for Bearded Vultures 2023, 617 Bearded Vultures were counted around Europe.

The **International Bearded Vulture Meeting 2024** highlighted the increased breeding success of wild pairs with higher rates for those living in protected areas. While central populations in the Alps are thriving, peripheral populations, with lower breeding productivity and higher mortality rates, are vulnerable to declines. The seminar also highlighted that anthropogenic mortality remains a critical threat to the species.

Bearded Vulture - Alps

The species was driven to extinction in the Alps during the 20th Century, and to bring them back, [pioneers from all Alpine countries initiated the reintroduction project in the 1970s](#). The first birds were released in 1986 at Hohe Tauern National Park (Austria), and in 1997 the first breeding pair successfully raised a chick in the wild in France. Today, there are around 350 Bearded Vultures across the Alps in Austria, France, Italy and Switzerland, including 85 breeding pairs. This reintroduction project has garnered wide support across the Alpine chain and is regarded as one of the greatest wildlife comebacks ever.

Commentato [EV3]: Can someone confirm these numbers?

The population in Central Alps is now demographically self-sustaining, but it benefits from reintroduction of birds with rare genetic lineages. Genetic diversity is crucial for the health and the survival of the local population in the long term.

Highlights

2023

2 Bearded Vultures released in Berchtersgaden (Eastern Alps - Germany).

2 Bearded Vultures released in Melchsee-Frutt (Switzerland). The birds released at this site come from genetically rare lineages, to improve the genetic diversity of the local population.

2024

2 Bearded Vultures released in Berchtersgaden (Eastern Alps - Germany).

3 Bearded Vultures released in Melchsee-Frutt (Switzerland).



Bearded Vulture - Massif Central and the Pre-Alps

Two centuries ago, Bearded Vultures populated the entire southern European mountain range, stretching from Western Spain to the Balkans and the Alps. However, today, they are primarily found in the Pyrenees, reintroduced populations in the Alps and Andalusia, and isolated regions such as Crete, Corsica, and the Moroccan Atlas.

As the Bearded Vulture population in the Alps grows, the VCF and partners plan to conclude the reintroduction project in the wider region. However, despite the substantial size of the Alpine population, its genetic diversity is limited, stemming from a small number of founders. To enhance genetic diversity and facilitate population connections, reintroduction efforts bridging the Alps and Pyrenees started in 2010. Since 2015, this work continued within the *LIFE GypConnect* (2015-2022) and the *LIFE Gyp'Act* (2022-2028) projects to establish a breeding population in the Massif Central and the western Pre-Alps by mitigating threats and releasing birds into the wild. The ultimate goal is to re-establish the connection between the Bearded Vulture populations in the Alps and in the Pyrenees.

The *LIFE Gyp'Act* project launched the first anti-poisoning dog unit to detect and deter criminal activities. The action is part of the project metapopulation approach to

anthropogenic threats which implements innovative partnerships with judicial authorities and law enforcement to tackle illegal killings.

Highlights

2023

8 Bearded Vultures released in France: 2 in Vercors, 2 in Baronnies and 4 in Grands Causses.

2024

8 Bearded Vultures released in France: 2 in Vercors, 2 in Baronnies and 4 in Grands Causses.



Bearded Vulture - Andalusia

Bearded Vultures went extinct in Andalusia in 1986 primarily due to direct persecution, wildlife poisoning, and human disturbance at nesting sites. In 1996, the Junta de Andalucía and the Vulture Conservation Foundation initiated a reintroduction project, supported by the creation of the Fundación Gypaetus, responsible for managing the project and establishing the Guadalentín captive breeding centre. The first bird releases took place in 2006.

Since then, 88 captive-bred Bearded Vultures have been released in various territories across Andalusia, including Sierras de Cazorla, Segura, Castril, Sierra Nevada and Las Villas. By addressing threats and releasing birds into the wild, the species population has been gradually increasing. Today, Andalusia counts 65 reintroduced Bearded Vultures alive in the wild.

Highlights

2023

7 individuals were reintroduced in Parque Natural de Cazorla.

2024

The first Bearded Vulture chick from reintroduced individuals hatched in the wild in Sierra de Castril.

A new reintroduction site has been established in Sierra Nevada with the reintroduction of 3 individuals.

3 birds were released in Cazorla.



Bearded Vulture - Maestrazgo

In the historical Bearded Vulture breeding grounds of Spain's Maestrazgo region, which became extinct at the end of the 19th century, a project led by the Generalitat of Valencia commenced in 2018 to establish a thriving wild breeding population. Though no resident population exists, the area receives occasional visits from individuals released in Andalusia. This initiative mirrors the *LIFE GypConnect* project in France, connecting Pyrenean and Andalusian populations, much like its French counterpart links the Pyrenees and the Alps.

Throughout the [project](#), Bearded Vultures will be released in the Parque Natural de la Tinença de Benifassà. These released birds will be closely monitored via GPS transmitters to gain insights into their regional movements. Additionally, the creation of supplementary feeding stations aims to encourage vultures to frequent the region.

So far 17 birds have been released in this area. 4 of them died, two in a fight with a golden eagle near the hacking site and the third near an electric infrastructure.

Highlights

2023

Reintroduction of 2 individuals.

2024

Reintroduction of 3 individuals.



Bearded Vulture - Corsica

Corsica hosts one of the last remaining autochthonous Bearded Vulture populations in Europe. This population represents the last surviving genetic pool of a former meta-population, encompassing Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, and the Alps. Over the past three decades, Corsica's Bearded Vulture population has dwindled dramatically, suffering from threats like low genetic diversity, anthropogenic mortality, food scarcity, and demographic instability due to its small size.

To preserve this unique genetic pool, the VCF, in collaboration with the Parc Naturel Régional de Corse and international partners, initiated an emergency action plan. Our main actions involve releasing captive-bred Bearded Vultures on the island every other year. As part of our long-term strategy, we also began integrating Corsican birds into our Bearded

Vulture EEP by extracting eggs from underperforming wild nests, hatching and raising young chicks in breeding centres to form a Corsican genetic reserve.

In 2016, we marked a pivotal moment with the first release of captive-bred Bearded Vultures, Cimatella and Muntagnolu, in Corsica as part of the restocking programme goal to reinforce the wild population with new genes.

The second crucial moment for Corsican Bearded Vultures is the beginning of the *LIFE Gypprescue* in 2021. The project involves a comprehensive approach that includes strengthening the existing population, improving feeding practices, mitigating risks of poisoning and electrocution, and fostering public awareness and engagement. In 2022, two young captive-bred Bearded Vultures were released on the island. It was the first reintroduction action within the project and the fourth one since 2016.

Highlights

2024

Release of 2 individuals specifically selected to add genetic diversity to the local population.



Cinereous Vulture - Bulgaria

Nearly three decades after its local extinction, the Cinereous Vulture returned to Bulgaria as a breeding species following the extensive reintroduction programme led by the Vultures Back to LIFE project.

From 2018 to 2022, the project team released around 70 young Cinereous Vultures in various regions of the Balkan Mountains – some birds hatched in captivity, but most were wild birds rescued and rehabilitated in Spain. Junta de Extremadura and Junta de Andalucía have been donating some of the recovered birds to this project, while [AMUS](#) prepared them for their transport by conducting the necessary quarantine period and health checks. The Vulture Conservation Foundation then arranged the transportation to Bulgaria, where Green Balkans and Fund for Wild Flora and Fauna (FWFF) transferred them to specially constructed acclimatization aviaries ahead of their release in the coming months.

Currently, the population is distributed in two core areas: the Eastern Balkan Mountains (Kotlenska Planina) and the Western Balkan Mountains (Vrachanski Balkan and Ponor).

The efforts to protect and support the Cinereous Vultures in Bulgarian Balkan Mountains are still ongoing thanks to the new Bearded Vultures LIFE project.

Highlights

2023

The population counts 12 breeding pairs.

[3 chicks fledged in the wild](#): 2 in the Kotlenska Mountains (Eastern Balkan Mountains), and 1 in the Western Balkan Mountains.

2024

20 breeding pairs recorded. This is an unprecedented success for the species in the Balkan Mountains.

7 chicks hatched in the wild, the highest number since the reintroduction programme began, and [5 fledged successfully](#). The Vratsa Balkan Nature Park celebrated the first successful Cinereous Vultures reproduction on site ever.

9 Cinereous Vultures - donated by the regional governments of Extremadura and Andalusia in Spain – were transported to Kresna Gorge. 7 of them were successfully released in Kresna Gorge, 1 female was released in Kotel mountain to increment the local number of females in the area.



Griffon Vulture - Cyprus

Cyprus was once home to a thriving Griffon Vulture population. However, their numbers dwindled significantly due to factors like illegal wildlife poisoning, changes in farming practices, and nesting disturbances. By the early 2010s, only 10 to 12 Griffon Vultures remained, putting the species in imminent danger of extinction.

In response to this crisis, Project GYPAS, initiated in 2011, aimed to protect these vulnerable vultures. It introduced 25 Griffon Vultures from Crete to bolster the local population, preventing immediate extinction. However, the challenges persisted, and the Griffon Vultures remained vulnerable. To address this ongoing threat, conservation efforts continued with the launch of LIFE With Vultures. This project involves restocking the Griffon Vulture population by importing birds from Spain, with the goal to release approximately 25-30 Spanish Griffon Vultures in Cyprus to support the critically endangered local population.

Spain, hosting the highest Griffon Vulture population in Europe, generously donates birds to this project. Every year, young Griffon Vultures in Extremadura are rescued due to malnutrition and weakness. They receive care in wildlife rehabilitation centres. In collaboration with the Vulture Conservation Foundation, the Junta de Extremadura donates young Griffon Vultures to the project. These vultures spend time at AMUS to prepare for their transfer to Cyprus. Upon arrival, they spend about 4-5 months in an acclimatization aviary before being released into the wild.

Highlights

2023

16 Griffon Vultures released to restock the local population.

2024

14 Griffon Vultures released to restock the local population.



Griffon Vultures - Sardinia

The Griffon Vulture was distributed all over Sardinia up to the late 1940s with an estimated population of 800 to 1200 individuals. After the Second World War, the population of the species on the island dropped rapidly until the outlawing of poisoned baits in 1977. This

Commentato [EV4]: @José Tavares - VCF can you help me with this please? Do you have more info?

Commentato [JV5R4]: I believe it is 16 GV in 2023 (14 in September, but other 2 earlier in March - possibly from the 2022 batch?) and 14 GV in 2024

decline restricted the species distribution range to the north-western part of the island, and during a 2013 survey, only 30 territorial pairs and 130 individuals were remaining. The Griffon Vulture population in Sardinia represents the last autochthonous breeding population of vultures in Italy and the island is home to two of the most important breeding sites for Griffon Vultures in Italy and the wider Mediterranean. To secure and boost the important Griffon Vulture population in Sardinia, the LIFE Under Griffon Wings project began in 2015.

The project released more than 60 individuals in north Sardinia and worked on mitigating threats such as poisoning and electrocution. In 2020, when the LIFE Under Griffon Wings project ended, the local population counted about 250 Griffon Vultures.

A year later, the LIFE Safe for Vultures project took over to ensure the long-term survival of the species and to guarantee its expansion towards the centre and the south of the island. The Junta of Extremadura (Spain) donates rehabilitated Griffon Vultures for this restocking project in collaboration with the VCF. Before being released on the island, the birds spend few months in the acclimatisation aviary in Villasalto and they are equipped with a GPS tag.

Highlights

2024

43 Griffon Vultures released in two different events, in April and October.

A third group of 30 individuals has been transported on the island and will be released in spring 2025



Monitoring

Monitoring vultures is essential for well-informed conservation. We utilize techniques such as colour-ringing, wing feather discolouration, and lightweight GPS transmitters on both released and wild birds. These methods are key to monitor individual birds and populations, as they enable us to accurately track bird's movements, providing valuable data on vulture behaviour, survival, productivity, foraging and migration patterns. Thanks to this information we can direct our conservation efforts more effectively.

Highlights

2023

with the support of the VCF our partners tagged:

8 Bearded Vultures in Maestrazgo and France

18 Cinereous Vultures in Portugal

19 Griffon Vultures in Cyprus, Sardinia and Bulgaria

2024

with the support of the VCF our partners tagged:

8 Bearded Vultures in Maestrazgo and France

47 Cinereous Vultures in Portugal, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan

56 Griffon Vultures in Cyprus and Sardinia

Commentato [JV6]: Can I suggest saying 'wing feather discolouration' so there is no confusion with wing tags (that was my first thought when I read it)

Commentato [JV7]: Numbers of BV tagged with LIFE Gypact missing

Commentato [EV8]: Asked Joao

Commentato [JV9]: Numbers from Gypact missing.

Commentato [JV10]: Again, number of CV tagged in Bulgaria missing (if any)

2 Rüppel's Vultures in Morocco – since the species is slowly expanding its range towards Europe, the VCF is proactively studying its behaviour and movements together with the local partners at the Vultures Recovery Centre (CRV Jbel Moussa).

1 Lappet-faced Vulture in Angola

International Bearded Vulture Monitoring Network

The International Bearded Vulture Monitoring Network (IBM) is a collaborative effort led by the Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF), comprising 18 partners and two associated organizations. This unique international network focuses on monitoring and safeguarding the Bearded Vulture population in Europe. Through the IBM, partners share and disseminate Bearded Vulture data, fostering global discussions on conservation strategies. Local partners employ GPS tags, rings, and feather bleaching to track and identify birds, aiding in survival assessment and conservation actions. The annual International Observation Days involve experts in simultaneous counts, contributing vital data for accurate population demography figures across European regions.

International Observation Days for Bearded Vultures 2023

The International Observation Day is the widest citizen science initiative for the species. Organised by the International Bearded Vulture Monitoring Network (IBM) and coordinated by us at the VCF, it involved 1124 volunteers in 8 countries (Austria, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, Switzerland), and registered 617 Bearded Vultures observations.

Bearded Vulture Population Estimates

The Alpine Bearded Vulture population ranged from 316 to 419, lower than the demographic model's estimate of 460 individuals. The estimated age class distribution was: 59% adults, 9% subadults, 15% immature, and 14% juveniles. These estimates were derived from observation data collected during the International Observation Day, combined with other observations of individuals in the region, including territorial birds, fledglings, and GPS-tagged birds (70 individuals in 2023), among others. In the Massif Central, the Bearded Vulture population was estimated at around 11 individuals, while approximately 6 to 7 individuals were estimated in the Aude region of the French Pyrenees. Outside of the Pyrenees in Spain, Bearded Vulture populations were estimated between 4-5 individuals in Maestrazgo and 39-54 individuals in Andalusia and Rioja.

The 2022-2023 breeding season saw a new record in the Alpine range, with 59 successfully fledged chicks. In Corsica both breeding attempts were

Commentato [EC11]: Look at the article and ask for numbers

Commentato [JV12]: 1124 in our blog: <https://4vultures.org/event/international-observation-days-for-bearded-vultures-2024/>

Commentato [JV13]: International Observation Day ?

Commentato [JV14]: using (n = xx) makes it immediately 'scientific' and boring! :D; For this type of document I suggest spell it out as: (70 individuals in 2023)

unsuccessful.



Mitigating threats

The Vulture Conservation Foundation is committed to preserving vulture populations in Europe, countering threats that have contributed to their drastic decline. Key challenges, including poisoning, electrocution, collision, illegal killing, and limited food availability. Within our various conservation LIFE funded projects, we mitigate several threats for different species and regions alongside our partners.

In the last couple years, we mostly focused our efforts tackling two of the biggest threats for vultures: poisoning and electrocution and collision with electrical infrastructures. We also constantly supported the transition to lead-free ammunitions, working directly with hunters in hunters in Portugal with the LIFE Aegypius Return project, in Croatia with the LIFE SUPport, in Sardinia with LIFE Safe for Vultures and raising awareness in Italy.

One of our most popular instruments to contribute to wildlife crime prevention and investigation is the [Wildlife Crime Academy](#). Led by the VCF and the Junta de Andalucía within the Balkan DetoxLIFE project, the WCA shares Spain's best practices and experiences with professionals in conservation, law enforcement, and forensic science from other countries. The WCA takes a multidisciplinary approach, offering three levels of qualification covering various aspects of crime investigation, including forensic entomology, ballistics, crime scene investigation (CSI), forensics, genetics, toxicology, crime analysis, and court procedures. At the end of 2024, the WCA becomes a LIFE project.

Highlights

2023

Commentato [EV15]: no news from Jovan

[Third specialised training course](#) under the Wildlife Crime Academy

Meeting of public prosecutors from several Balkan countries with their Spanish counterparts to discuss the crucial involvement of the judiciary in the fight against wildlife crime.

First ever prosecuted case for wildlife poisoning in Cyprus, a necessary step to curb this widespread illegal wildlife crime on the island.

2024

International Wildlife Crime conference in Cyprus under the LIFE with Vultures project and in collaboration with the BalkanDetox LIFE project

12 National training courses for investigation of wildlife poisoning implemented under the BalkanDetox LIFE with over 250 people from the relevant national law enforcement institutions (police, environmental inspection, veterinary inspection, veterinarians etc.) trained for investigation of wildlife poisoning.

Cooperation in the establishment of a [new police unit in Albania](#) dedicated to environmental crimes and illegal wildlife trafficking

10 workshops about prosecuting wildlife crime cases for public prosecutors and judges implemented in the project countries, with the participation of over 100 public prosecutors.

4 educational workshops implemented in local communities where poisoning incidents are often recorded.

Start of the Wildlife Crime Academy LIFE project

Research

Vulture research for informed conservation

Dedicated to advancing vulture conservation, the Vulture Conservation Foundation conducts, collaborates, and supports impactful research to unravel vulture behavior and ecology. Our team contributes to important studies that shape vulture conservation strategies. From feasibility studies guiding reintroduction initiatives to comprehensive multi-species analysis of GPS data, our research spans diverse vulture topics. Together with our partners, our continued efforts on compiling long-term datasets on movement, breeding, mortality, and survival provide much-needed evidence to inform current and future conservation actions, ensuring effective measures for the preservation of these essential species in Europe and beyond.

The European Vulture Conference (2023)

The second European Vulture Conference (EVC), held in Cáceres, Spain, from November 14 to 17, 2023, was a significant milestone for international collaboration and knowledge exchange. Although its focus was on European vultures, it reached experts and enthusiasts across the globe. With around 400 participants from 46 countries, the event highlighted the collective dedication to protecting the future of vultures worldwide.

The conference delivered an extensive scientific program, featuring 110 standard talks, 20 speed talks, four keynote speeches, two roundtables, one workshop, and 61 posters.

Commentato [EV16]: Discuss with Jose - electrocution/collision, Uros for poisoning with BalkanDetox - important meetings?

Key Takeaways

- **Vulture populations thrive with collaboration and legislative action.** Success stories often involve international cooperation, funding, and strong policies, such as the ban on diclofenac, adherence to the EU Birds and Habitats Directive, and the Vulture MsAP.
- **Long-term investment pays off.** Sustained funding and conservation efforts bring substantial ecological benefits, particularly through enhanced ecosystem services.
- **Conservation is a multigenerational effort.** Projects like the Bearded Vulture reintroduction, which began in the 1970s, demonstrate the importance of long-term vision.
- **Strategic government engagement is key.** Building stronger ties with policymakers and actively participating in conventions can advance conservation goals and secure vital support.
- **Technological innovation and data collaboration drive better outcomes.** New technologies, like drones for monitoring and automatic detection systems using artificial intelligence at wind farms to spot birds and stop turbines as needed, are interesting approaches for the future of conservation.
- **Addressing varied threats require multifaceted conservation strategies.** Poisoning remains the greatest threats to vultures, together with collision and electrocution that are becoming increasingly common with the expansion of renewable energy infrastructures. Emerging disease like the avian flu demand continuous monitoring to mitigate their impact on vultures. Lastly, food availability is still a critical but complex topic. All these threats can only be addressed if scientists, NGOs, governments and local farmers and industries work together towards the same goal.
- **Effective communication and education underpin long-term conservation success.** Positive communication is crucial to engage governments and the general public and advocate for legislation and funding.

Highlights

2023

Ivanov, I., Stoyanov, E., Stoyanov, G., Kmetova–Biro, E., Andevski, J., Peshev, H., Marin, S., Terraube, J., Bonchev, L., Stoev, I. P., Tavares, J., Loercher, F., Huyghe, M., Nikolova, Z., Vangelova, N., Stanchev, S., Mitrevichin, E., Tilova, E., & Grozdanov, A. (2023). First results from the releases of Cinereous Vultures (*Aegypius monachus*) aiming at re-introducing the species in Bulgaria – the start of the establishment phase 2018–2022. *Biodiversity Data Journal*, 11, e100521. <https://doi.org/10.3897/BDJ.11.e100521>

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2024

Cerri, J., Rosa, D. D., Fozzi, I., Terraube, J., Tavares, J., Lörcher, F., Secchi, D., Muzzeddu, M., Seguin, J.-F., & Berlinguer, F. (2024). Movements of translocated Griffon Vultures (*Gyps fulvus*) from Sardinia to Corsica call for the transboundary management of an expanding vulture population. *Rivista Italiana Di Ornithologia*, 94(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.4081/rio.2024.714>

McGrady, M. J., Ross, S., AlJahdhami, M. H., & Meyburg, B.-U. (2024). Characterising ecological resource utilization by the endangered Egyptian vulture in Oman to better manage and mitigate electrocution risk. *Journal for Nature Conservation*, 78, 126565. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jnc.2024.126565>

Commentato [JV17]: I have standardised these citations.

Commentato [JV18]: I've added this one as in acknowledges the use of a tag we provided - Jose to see if it makes sense to keep

Serratosà, J., Oppel, S., Rotics, S., Santangeli, A., Butchart, S. H. M., Cano-Alonso, L. S., Telleria, J. L., Kemp, R., Nicholas, A., Kalvāns, A., Galarza, A., Franco, A. M. A., Andreotti, A., Kirschel, A. N. G., Ngari, A., Soutullo, A., Bermejo-Bermejo, A., Botha, A. J., Ferri, A., ... Jones, V. R. (2024). Tracking data highlight the importance of human-induced mortality for large migratory birds at a flyway scale. *Biological Conservation*, 293, 110525. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2024.110525>

Schaub, M., Loercher, F., Hegglin, D., & Arlettaz, R. (2024). Demographic assessment of reintroduced bearded vultures in the Alps: Success in the core, challenges in the periphery. *Ecological Solutions and Evidence*, 5(2), e12347. <https://doi.org/10.1002/2688-8319.12347>

Tréhin, C., Duriez, O., Sarrazin, F., Betton, B., Fonderflick, J., Loercher, F., Marlé, E., Seguin, J., Traversier, J., Ziletti, N., & Mihoub, J. (2024). Long-distance post-release movements challenge the metapopulation restoration of Bearded Vultures. *Ecosphere*, 15(8), e4856. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ecs2.4856>

Projects

We collaborate with our partners on a series of comprehensive projects, rooted in our expertise and the latest scientific knowledge. These projects are tailored to address the unique behaviour, ecology, threats, and habitats of each vulture species.

Drawing upon our expertise in captive vulture breeding for conservation, as well as reintroduction and restocking efforts, threat mitigation, and the monitoring and tracking of wild vultures, we foster collaboration with governments, businesses, local communities, and fellow non-governmental organizations. Together, we conceive and implement conservation projects that span across Europe, working collectively to ensure the protection of vulture populations.

In an increasingly complex conservation landscape, where the challenges faced by vultures are better understood, our focused projects aim to preserve, connect, restore, and protect vulture populations across the continent. We remain committed to the ongoing protection of these magnificent birds, and we are actively exploring new opportunities and partnerships for future projects.

LIFE Programme Projects

The LIFE Programme, initiated by the European Union in 1992, plays a vital role as a funding instrument for environmental and climate initiatives. It has co-funded over 4,500 projects that contribute to conservation efforts, green technology advancements, and climate action across Europe.

In 2024, the VCF was involved in ten LIFE projects, and coordinates three of them, working on vulture conservation in Europe.

BalkanDetox | LIFE

The BalkanDetox LIFE project, the first VCF-led LIFE project, addresses the widespread issue of illegal wildlife poisoning across seven countries in the Balkan Peninsula. The main motivation behind the use of poison bait is to eliminate wild predators and animals that may damage livestock or game species. However, this indiscriminate method also harms protected and vulnerable species, leading to population declines and hindering wildlife recovery. Vultures, as scavengers, are particularly vulnerable to poisoning.

Illegal wildlife poisoning is identified as the top conservation concern for various threatened species in the region, with over 2,300 vultures estimated to have perished from poisoning in

Commentato [JV19]: Julien is co-author in this - Jose to see if it makes sense to keep

Commentato [EV20]: Uros?

the past two decades. Only a fraction of poisoning incidents is reported, leaving the true impact largely undocumented.

The BalkanDetox LIFE project is a five-year, €1.8 million endeavor with nine partners. It is co-funded by the EU's LIFE Programme and co-financed by the MAVA Foundation, Europeanatur, and the VCF. Its mission is to raise awareness and strengthen national capacities to combat this critical conservation issue in Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Serbia.

Highlights

2023

National anti-poisoning working group officially formalized in North Macedonia.

Standard operational protocols for investigation, forensic wildlife necropsy and toxicology under way, using official protocols in use by the relevant agencies of the Junta de Andalucía as best practice models, developed in North Macedonia.

National anti-poisoning road map being developed in Croatia.

Capacity building of relevant governmental authorities

Level 3 training course of the Wildlife Crime Academy.

International workshop for public prosecutors from the Balkans

National anti-poisoning training courses carried out in Serbia (for veterinary pathologists), North Macedonia (law enforcement agencies) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (law enforcement).

Educational workshops in local communities (vulture areas, poisoning hot spots) implemented in all target countries.

2024

Standard operational protocols for investigation of wildlife poisoning submitted in Bosnia and Herzegovina and adopted in North Macedonia

12 National training courses for investigation of wildlife poisoning implemented in project countries with over 250 people from law enforcement institutions

National Anti-poisoning Road Maps (NARM) for wildlife poisoning finalised by the NAWG and submitted officially for adoption in Bosnia and Herzegovina

10 workshops about prosecuting wildlife crime cases for public prosecutors and judges implemented in the project countries, with the participation of over 100 public prosecutors.

4 educational workshops implemented in local communities where poisoning incidents are often recorded.

Special Department for environmental crimes established within the State Police in Albania.

International conference on achievements and challenges in wildlife crime – Wildlife Crime Conference co-organised with the LIFE With Vultures project in Cyprus.



LIFE Aegypius Return

LIFE Aegypius Return, the second project led by the VCF, launched in 2022 to consolidate and expand the Cinereous Vulture population in Portugal and Western Spain. This species faced a significant decline in the 20th century due to habitat loss, poisoning, and persecution. By 2010, Cinereous Vultures naturally began recolonizing Portugal from Spanish colonies, but the population remained fragile, so the LIFE Aegypius Return project came to life.

The project aims to double the breeding population in Portugal from 40 to 80 pairs, increase breeding success, downgrade the species' national status from Critically Endangered to Endangered, and enhance connectivity between colonies.

Key actions involve habitat improvement, population reinforcement and threat mitigation across ten Natura 2000 sites along the Spanish-Portuguese border. This includes release birds via soft release, equipping vultures with GPS transmitters, improving existing or creating new nesting platforms, establishing feeding stations, and enhancing habitat. The project also focuses on building capacities, combatting poisoning, raising public awareness, and transitioning hunters to non-lead ammunition. Co-financed by the EU's LIFE Programme, the project involves collaboration with nine partners and has a budget of 3.7 million euros.

Highlights

2023

15 Chicks tagged (18 ringed and sampled)

2 rehabilitated CV released

135 police officers and rangers trained on rescuing and handling Cinereous Vultures

Maintenance of nest-platforms in PT and ES

More than 10 public presentations and talks and over 100 news items published

[European Vulture conference](#) held in Cáceres

2024

108 pairs discovered counted in Portugal

[A fifth breeding colony was discovered](#) in Vidigueira (Portugal)

4 juveniles Cinereous Vultures were rescued, rehabilitated and released.

19 Cinereous Vultures chicks tagged in their nests and 23 chicks ringed.

49 additional police officers and rangers trained on rescuing and handling Cinereous Vultures

An [aviary for acclimatisation and soft release](#) was built in Douro Internacional Natural Park in Portugal, together with a supplementary feeding station. The aviary hosted already 4 juveniles Cinereous Vultures.

40 birds tagged and sampled for microbiological, biochemical, toxicological and genetics.

Several relevant studies carried out within the project have been published: habitat suitability, roost analysis

7 active dogs in Portugal for anti-poison units



LIFE SUPPORT

LIFE SUPPORT project launched in 2023 as an urgent response to the dramatic drop in Griffon Vultures colonies across Croatia. The species was once widespread across the mainland, but due to habitat loss, poisoning and diminished food availability, only a few colonies now exist. The remaining population, located across the Kvarner Islands, count 110-130 pairs. It also has a unique breeding ground, nesting only on sea cliffs.

Lead by the public institution Priroda, the LIFE SUPPORT project aims to address the critical threats to Griffon Vultures survival such as nest disturbance, food scarcity, poisoning and electrocution. The ultimate goal is to increase the local Griffon Vultures population and reconnect it with those in the Alps and the Balkans.

Highlights

2023

Workshop about GPS tagging on Griffon Vultures

4 juvenile Griffon Vultures rescued with the collaboration of the wildlife rescue centre BELI, tagged and released

2024

150 Griffon Vultures pairs counted in the Kvarner Islands

Several workshops and seminars about food supply and sanitary regulations, lead ammunitions, electrocution and GPS tagging

9 Griffon Vultures tagged and monitored

Volunteer patrol units deployed to monitor nesting areas during the tourist season

Construction of an aviary for adaptation and soft release



Sufinancirano sredstvima
Europske Unije

Bearded Vultures LIFE

The Bearded Vulture LIFE project builds upon the significant conservation achievements of previous vulture LIFE projects conducted in Bulgaria. Expanding from the successful reintroduction of Griffon Vultures in the country, and the comeback from extinction of the Cinereous Vultures, the Bearded Vultures LIFE project (2020-2025) aims to reestablish the historical distribution of Bearded and Cinereous Vultures in the Balkans. This will be accomplished through strategic reintroductions and protecting the autochthonous populations, thereby facilitating the restoration of genetic connectivity between Western Europe and Africa and Asia.

One of the most important initiatives of this project is the Wildlife Crime Academy. It aims to conduct anti-poisoning training programmes dedicated to the staff of environmental institutions and other stakeholders in the Balkan region. In addition, it fosters international cooperation especially on wildlife poisoning.

Highlights

2023

Level 3 course of the Wildlife Crime Academy in Málaga

Establishment of the "Crimes against the Environment and Wildlife" police sector in Bulgaria

First National anti-poisoning training course for pathologists in Serbia

2024

Standard Operational Protocol for handling wildlife poisoning cases adopted in Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia

Bosnia and Herzegovina finalised its National Anti-Poisoning Road Maps.

12 national courses on investigating wildlife poisoning, equipping over 250 enforcement officials with essential skills.

10 specialized workshops for public prosecutors and judges trained more than 100 participants on prosecuting wildlife crime.

Informational videos on how to respond to suspected poisoning incidents were released in seven different languages.

Special Department for Environmental Crimes was established in Albania within the State Police.

International Wildlife Crime Conference in Cyprus in cooperation with the LIFE With Vultures project.



LIFE | Gyp'Act |

Commentato [EV21]: Franziska & Josè

Continuation of Gyp Connect. Secure the corridors between Pyrenees and the Alps. Intoxication and poisoning are major issues, but they have a great protocol for investigation. Creating a dog unit.

The Bearded Vultures populations across southern Europe face significant challenges due to a decrease in food availability and anthropogenic threats. Building on the success of the LIFE GypConnect project, which contributed to preserve the French Bearded Vultures population and establish six new pairs in South-Eastern France, the LIFE Gyp'Act project (2022-2028) aims to further consolidate the Bearded Vulture population in the region, ensuring connectivity between the Pyrenean and Alpine populations. The project seeks to reintroduce 60 Bearded Vultures to key areas, mitigate primary threats, and improve food availability.

Highlights

2023

8 Bearded Vultures released

The project contributed to the construction and repair of Bearded Vultures aviaries in Guadalentin and Vallcalent breeding centres.

2024

8 Bearded Vultures released

The project selected a new release site

2 Bearded Vultures breeding pairs have been registered in Vercors

LIFE with Vultures

The LIFE with Vultures project, led by BirdLife Cyprus, aims to prevent the extinction of the Griffon Vulture, Cyprus's most endangered bird of prey. The project addresses the multiple threats the species faces, including illegal wildlife poisoning, food scarcity, and collisions with power lines. Project actions involve studying and combating illegal poisoning, improving food availability, securing hazardous power lines with bird diverters, and establishing a vulture restaurant. To reinforce the population, the project plans to transport, release and monitor 25-30 vultures from Spain.

Highlights 2023

7 Griffon Vulture released and 15 more transferred from Spain to a local acclimatisation aviary

The project [collaborated with BalkanDetox LIFE](#) to tackle wildlife crime through seminars and workshops, including the Wildlife Crime Academy level 3 course.

For the first time a person was [convicted and paid a fee for illegally poisoning birds](#).

2024

Anti-poison dog units have been implemented

2 animation videos produced to disseminate knowledge on vultures and their ecological role

The project held the "Wildlife crime: achievements and challenges" international conference in collaboration with the BlakanDetox project.

Thanks to the project restocking actions the extinction of Griffon Vultures on the island has been avoided

LIFE Safe for Vultures

Following the success of the LIFE Under Griffon Wings project, the LIFE Safe for Vultures project, led by the University of Sassari and funded by the EU's LIFE Programme, aims to consolidate the Griffon Vulture population in Sardinia and return it to its historical habitats across the entire island.

The project involves an array of targeted conservation actions, including expanding the network of farm feeding stations, establishing anti-poison dog units, introducing a feeding station in the south of the island, and releasing 40 additional Griffon Vultures coming from

Spain. Additionally, the project will address collision and electrocution risks on energy infrastructure, securing power lines in sensitive areas.

Highlights

2023

12 Griffon Vultures transported from Spain and released

“Best practices for mitigating electrocution and collision risk” international conference

Several feeding stations installed in farms

Egyptian Vultures couple breeding in the north of the island and feeding on the farm feeding stations

2024

2 Griffon Vultures releases in southern Sardinia for a total of 43 individuals, and a third group of 30 individuals has been transported from Spain to the acclimatisation aviary in Villasalto

A new feeding station established in the Asinara National Park, the first to be established in a National Park in Italy

Establishment of anti-poison dog units

Egyptian Vultures couple breeding in the north of the island and feeding on the farm feeding stations



LIFE GYPRESCUE

The Bearded Vulture population in Corsica has severely declined since 2009, suffering a 60% loss of territorial pairs. In 2020, the population numbered 20 individuals with only four territorial pairs, making it urgent to take action. The LIFE GYPRESCUE project launched in 2021, under the leadership of Parc naturel régional de Corse (PNRC), to prevent the extinction of the Bearded Vulture in Corsica.

The project addresses the challenge of population decline by releasing captive-bred Bearded Vultures into the wild and aims to preserve genetics through ex-situ conservation actions. Furthermore, LIFE GYPRESCUE concentrates on enhancing food availability by establishing supplementary feeding sites and supporting livestock farmers and releasing captive-bred mouflons to augment natural food sources. Additionally, it strives to reduce the risk of poisoning through awareness campaigns and to mitigate the hazards of collision and electrocution by identifying and securing dangerous power lines.

Highlights

2024

2 Bearded Vultures released

A pair of reintroduced individuals laid an egg for the first time, but the chick did not survive.

The LIFE GypRescue seminar brought together over a hundred conservationists and vulture experts across Europe.



LIFE Rhodope Vultures

The LIFE project “Restoration of the Cinereous Vulture Population and Trophic Chain.” has been launched in September 2024. It aims to establish a new Cinereous vulture colony in the Bulgarian Rhodopes, support the only existing breeding colony in Greece, located in Dadia-Lefkimi-Soufli National Park and promote sustainable economy that benefits local communities and nature. The project will tackle the main threats to vultures' survival, such as poisoning, poaching, and collisions with energy infrastructure. It will also focus on improving the food base for vultures to prevent and mitigate conflicts between human and wildlife.

Highlights 2023

Project presentation during the Vulture Festival in Madzharovo (Bulgaria)
Kick-off partner meeting in Ivaylovgrad (Bulgaria).



LIFE WildCrimeAcademy

The project stems from the BalkanDetox LIFE project and started at the end of 2024. Following its mission as part of the BalkanDetox LIFE project, it aims to train wildlife experts on wildlife crimes building capacities to effectively investigate, manage and tackle illegal wildlife poisoning incidents across Europe. It further aims to bolster institutional

cooperation on wildlife crime response, especially poisoning incidents, through workshops and conferences.

The project involves experts from Spain, primarily from the Junta de Andalucía, who will teach the attendees all about the most important components when it comes to managing illegal wildlife poisoning incidents such as investigation, forensic pathology and toxicology.

Governance

The Vulture Conservation Foundation is an international non-governmental organisation established in 2009 with a legal base in the Netherlands and Spain.

The VCF's governance structure strives to ensure effective operations and strategic direction. Our organisation is overseen by a Management Board consisting of five committed professionals who volunteer their time to guide and govern our activities.

In shaping our conservation priorities and making well-informed decisions for Europe's vulture species, we rely on the guidance of our Advisory Board. Comprising 11 conservation experts, these individuals bring their specializations in various aspects of vulture conservation and extensive knowledge of the natural history of European vulture species. Their voluntary contributions play a pivotal role in supporting our work.

At the heart of the Vulture Conservation Foundation is a dedicated team of 20 passionate professionals. With expertise spanning captive breeding, vulture reintroduction, research, communication, finance, and more, we are united by a shared commitment to the preservation of Europe's four vulture species. Our collective dedication drives our mission to restore the populations of these ecologically significant birds to the skies of Europe.

Finances

The VCF, as a non-profit organization, primarily relies on grant funding from the European Union's LIFE Programme. We are also grateful for the support we receive from sources such as foundations, such as the Hans Wildirf Foundation, zoos and generous donors.

Acknowledgements of funders:

Organisations

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Hans Wildirf Foundation
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L.C. Reiff
Novacek Rene
OSTRAVA ZOO
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Introducing our financial performance for 2023

Total expenditure: € 1.732.832

of which 94% are linked with multi-year projects (LIFE programme, MAVA projects, Guadalentin)

Project expenditure	1.714.393
<i>LIFE projects</i>	<i>1.111.784</i>
<i>Swiss Foundation</i>	<i>204.296,95</i>
<i>MAVA</i>	<i>47.944</i>
<i>Guadalentin</i>	<i>264.250</i>
<i>other projects</i>	
<i>(Bearded vulture EEP captive breeding, breeding/release services, IBM database management, among other projects)</i>	<i>86.907</i>
Management and administration expenditure	17.758
Total expenditure 2023	1.732.832

Thank you

As we wrap up our 2023-2024 review, we want to express our sincere gratitude to the individuals and organizations that have made our work possible: our valued funders, donors, partners, colleagues, and supporters. Your support has played a key role in our accomplishments. With your involvement, we look forward to a future where Europe's vultures can soar and thrive. Thank you for being an integral part of our conservation efforts.

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