

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS AFTER EEP-VCF STAFF VISIT AT THE ASTERS BREEDING CENTRE

Between the visit at the Parc des Oiseaux and the Annual Bearded Vulture Meeting celebrated in Barcelonnette, there was a possibility to visit Asters Breeding Centre. Therefore between technical of the Asters Breeding Centre and staff of the EEP/VCF it was accorded to take advantage of the planned trip, and visit the centre with their aviaries and birds.

### Introduction:

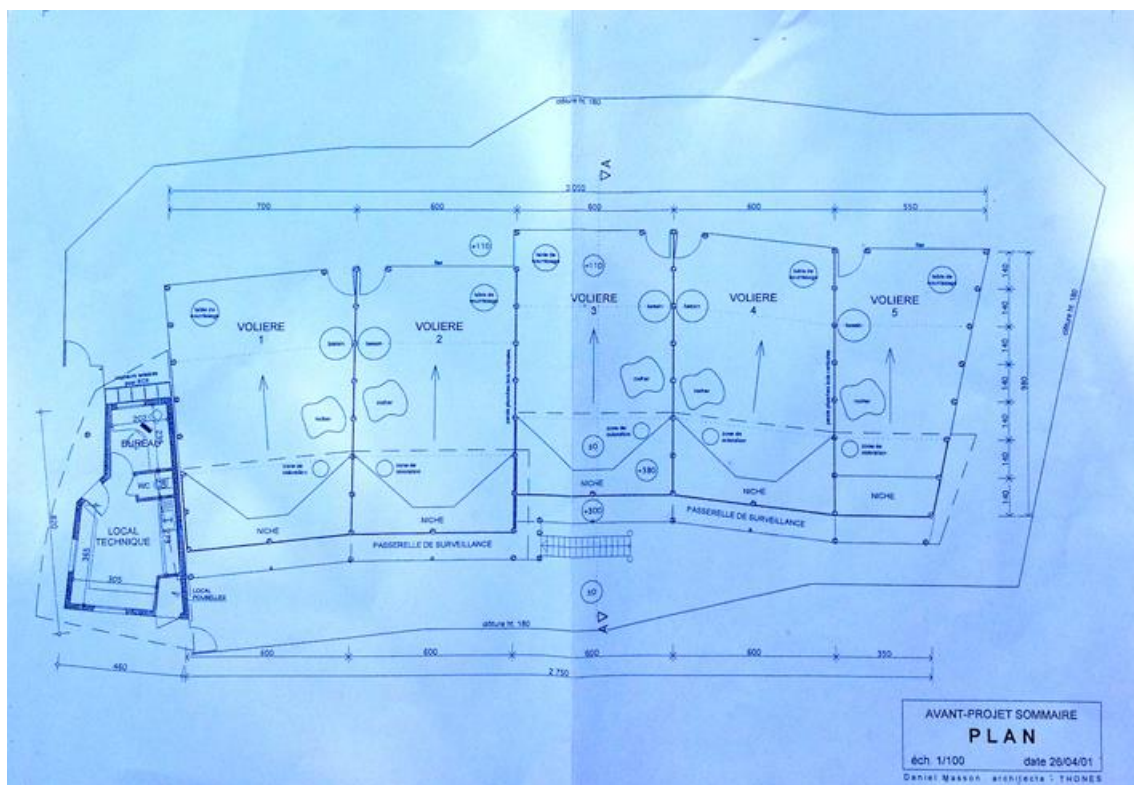
Actually Asters Breeding Centre house 7 Bearded Vultures:

1. A breeding pair -male from 1998 and female from 1989-, which arrived in 2004 at Asters Breeding Centre. The pair started to breed in 2006.
2. An adult pair -male from 2005 and female from 2007-. The male arrived in 2006 at Asters Breeding Centre and the female is a descendant from 2007 of the old breeding pair (BG087 x BG054). During breeding season 2013/14 first mating attempts from the male could be observed.
3. A young pair -male from 2013 and female from 2013- which arrived in 2013 at Asters Breeding Centre.
4. Furthermore a female from 2009 which arrived in 2010 at Asters Breeding Centre.

During the 7th November morning, we had the opportunity to visit the centre and observe the pairs.

### The Bearded Vulture Breeding Centre:

The Centre is composed by 4 breeding aviaries (6 x 9.8m) and a small enclosure for isolation about 4m width on the back and 5.5m on the front, and 9.8m deep (picture 1). The aviaries are about 4m high on the front and 5m high on the back.



Picture 1: Centre plane.

The centre is located in a slope facing north. The aviaries are built in that way that the nest platforms are facing south and the ground, covered with grass, has a slope to the bottom where the nest platforms are located. The structure, side and back walls of the enclosures are made on wooden. The front is closed with a welded elastic wire mesh and the roof with a net. All entries are located in the front of the aviaries, furthest away from the nest. Furthermore each entry has a security cabin to prevent birds from escaping as staffs enter the aviary (picture 2).



*Picture 2: View from outside of the Breeding Centre.*

Perches, almost flat, are installed only on the side wooden walls (pictures 3-5).



*Picture 3-5: Different types of perches are installed only on the side wooden walls.*



At the back wall, 2m from the roof, each aviary has a platform running along its width. At about 1m of each platform, at their South-East facing corner, there is a second smaller platform with a nest. The roof projects enough above the platform to prevent the nest from getting wet. At the side wooden walls small windows are installed, almost at the same altitude as the nest. Round pillars (25-30cm diameter) are installed by each platform as a leader for helping the birds to climb up to the platform. (picture 6).

By each aviary a feeding place is installed where food is offered. Mostly of them are placed at the other side of the security cabin being necessary to cross the aviary by offering food.



Picture 6: View from inside of one of the breeding aviaries.

### Conclusions and suggestions:

Following are exposed the possible suggested improvements by the Asters Breeding Centre.

- It is recommended to avoid entering and crossing the cage for feeding the birds. Remember their cage = their territory. Like in the wild, if you approach their territory the pair feels threatened and leaves the nest. **Install a 90 x 90cm feeding place close to the entry** where food can be deposited by only opening the door, without entering in the aviary.
- For preventing collisions by flying against the fence is recommended **to install perches around the aviary** (60cm away from the mesh and **never higher than the nest**). This gives them the possibility to move around the cage without getting on the ground,

especially when the nest must be controlled by the keepers. It is recommended to install a **holding arm perches system which avoids collisions** with it.



The perches need to be adapted to suit the anatomy of Bearded Vultures feet. Is recommended to install **flat perches, around 20cm wide and 4-5cm thick**. also need to be **rigid enough** to prevent them from bending during copulation on the perch. It is recommended to install a **holding arm perches system which avoids collisions** with it.

- Breeding birds become more nervous, irritable and aggressive as soon breeding season starts. In captivity sometimes this aggressiveness can be redirected against the partner if they have no possibilities to redirect towards other species or con-specifics as it happens in the wild. That's why is recommended breeding pairs to have visual contact with the neighbouring pairs. This gives them the possibility to discharge their potential aggression against the neighbour and not to its partner. However, direct visual contact from the nest between neighbouring pairs can lead to birds neglecting incubation due to being more concerned with defending their territories.

In order to provide the birds with the breeding stimulus of observing neighbouring breeding pairs, while at the same time giving them enough privacy to incubate successfully, we recommend **building wooden walls between aviaries to prevent neighbouring birds from having direct physical contact with each other**. There should be one wall at ground level, and one wall at the height of the perches. **The rest of the aviary wall can be kept as mesh only**. Furthermore we recommend close the windows which are at the same altitude as the nest.



- Bearded Vultures are soaring birds of prey and are impossible for many of them, especially females and older birds, to access perches through flapping flight. Steps make it much easier for the birds to transport material to the nest (an important behaviour during the breeding season that reinforces the pair bond) and to bring food to the perches, where it can be handled more easily than on the floor. **Spiral steps** (20cm wide, 4-5cm thick, 150cm long, and with a height of 45-50cm between them) are the best option to **allow Bearded Vultures to access perches and nest platform**.



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