

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS AFTER EEP-VCF STAFF VISIT AT THE RESCUE CENTER FROM FPWC

During summer 2017 the Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC) has built in his Bear Rescue Centre a double Bearded vulture aviary, following the EEP guidelines. This Rescue centre is located in the 15.000 hectares big Caucasus Wildlife Refuge (CWR), which is managed by this foundation. The objective of this small BV breeding Unit is to transfer the bearded vulture breeding pair located at the Yerevan zoo, and owned by the FPWC, before the breeding season 2017-18 really starts.

Since 2014 the VCF is helping the FPWC as advisor in all related with vultures, especially on bearded vulture captive breeding. Additionally in 2015 an agreement was signed between both institutions with the goal that the FPWC participate in the BV EEP.

Before realize the transfer of the pair it was accorded to invite Alex Llopis (EEP coordinator & VCF staff) to visit the new small breeding Unit, and evaluate if any improvement has to be done before to translocate the birds.

Introduction:

The visit was done between the 23rd and 15th of October 2017. Alex Llopis had the opportunity to visit the Bear Rescue Centre from the FPWC at the CWR, to meet Mrs Vicky Mkrchyan (Environmental Projects Coordinator) and Mr Manuk Manukyan (Yerevan zoo Curator) –both staff from the FPWC- and evaluate what should be improve before the transfer should be done. Furthermore he had the pleasure to meet Zoo and FPWC Director Mr Ruben Khachatryan, and discuss future projects and actions.

The Bearded Vulture breeding Unit:

The new Bearded vulture breeding Unit has been built in the Bear Rescue Centre from FPWC. This centre is located in the Caucasus Wildlife Refuge at 1200m a.s.l. -7.3km from the Municipality of Urtsadzor and 1 hour and 20 minutes by car to Yerevan (see picture below; location of the centre). Further only 20 minutes by car from a BV wild breeding pair, which is regularly visiting the centre.



Municipality of
Urtsadzor

Bear Rescue Centre

The small captive breeding Unit is located at the end of the Rescue centre, near the base of the mountain where birds of prey like Golden eagle, Black and Griffon vultures, Bearded vultures and smaller are regularly visiting.



This Unit is composed of a two-cage module. Each aviary is 6 x 10 x 5m high and ahead there is a secure cabin as entry.



There is a continuous 4m long roof covering the almost 4m deep and 6m wide platform from both aviaries. The back of the aviary and both sides of the platforms are covered with wooden boards from the ground until the roof ensuring shedding of birds against adverse climatology. Further the parts of the aviary where neighbouring birds could have direct physical contact are closed with wood, but leaving light cracks where birds can try to break, having visual view to the neighbours.



Perches are installed throughout the aviary, at least 60cm away from the mesh, and at the same level as the platform following the EEP recommendations but only 13cm wide, not giving birds enough stability by matting. Further a spiral step has been installed in front of each platform but with only 50cm large and 13cm wide steps, and with 25cm step height, making the climb to the platform difficult without breaking feathers.



Conclusions and suggestions:

The centre is located in an altitude over the sea level where other centres have never been confronted with one of the illness which is causing the highest losses inside the EEP: aspergillosis infection. Further the construction of this small breeding Unit has followed the principal EEP guidelines, being only necessary to realize small improvements before the birds can be located there.

All conclusions as well suggestions were directly transmitted to the members of the FPWC. Nevertheless, following are mentioned the exposed suggestions to keep them in mind.

- To assure that birds can succeed by mating, we suggest **removing the thin boards and substituting them with 20cm width perches**. If perches are not enough width and rigid -to prevent them from bending during copulation- birds will not copulate on them. **We suggest to install perches approx. 20cm width and 4-5cm thick.**



- In the Nest-platform a **nest 1.3 x 1.3m should be built** in the left corner where the sun shines during the morning and **exactly** as is described in the **guidelines** for housing BV in captivity. The nest itself should have a firm structure: a wooden frame, filled with tree bark, covered with washed wool and appropriately sized branches.

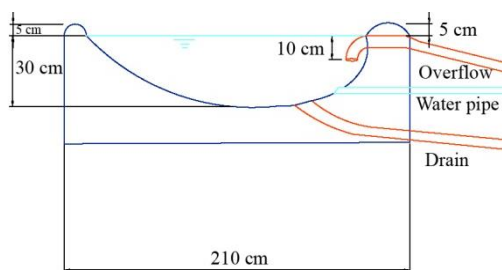




- Bearded Vultures are soaring birds of prey and are impossible for many of them, especially females and older birds, to access perches through flapping flight. Steps make it much easier for the birds to transport material to the nest (an important behaviour during the breeding season that reinforces the pair bond) and to bring food to the perches, where it can be handled more easily than on the floor. **We propose to remove the actual short steps** -which will provoke collision with the pillar breaking the feathers-, by a **Spiral steps (20cm wide, 4-5cm thick, 150cm long, and with a height of 45-50cm between them) without passing under the platform.**



- All birds of prey drink and bath regularly. And especially during egg formation, females drink large quantities of water. The actual drinking bath is located just below the future perches, from where the birds can dirty it with their own faeces. **We suggest to build a drinking bowl in the middle of the aviary and far from the perches.** This should have a soft access ramp and big enough to allow birds to bathe (210 x 130cm wide and 30-35cm deep). Is recommended to install a **mechanism that allows the drinking bowl to be regulated from outside the aviary**, what avoids disturbances by entering in the aviary during the breeding season. A **continuously running water system**, helps to maintain the water clean and reduce the necessity to enter in the aviary.



- Bearded Vultures develop the peculiar habit of bathing in mud rich in iron oxide. Although the reason for this behaviour is still unknown, they must be kept in captivity in good physical and psychological condition, offering them all available means of developing as many innate behavioural patterns as possible. Therefore it is recommended to **install a mud bath in the ground near the feeding stone** where mud

rich in iron oxide can be provided every 15 days (1m in diameter, and 10cm deep). Use only mud **free of any toxic substances** (heavy metals or other organic contaminants).



- To avoid that birds can have visual view to the neighbours through the light cracks between the wooden boards and to stop air currents at the platform, we suggest to **close the light cracks with fine wooden boards at the whole platform and the wooden wall on the ground between both aviaries.**



- **Is recommended to feed the birds through the mesh.** We must 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 next to the security cabin and feed the birds daily through mesh without entering in the aviary.





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