

# No longer missing: Bearded Vulture Flysch-Vigo identified again four years after her UK visit

DNA analysis of feathers has once again identified the famed Bearded Vulture 'Flysch-Vigo,' four years after she went missing and 1200 km from her last known location in the UK.

During the 2020 lockdown, one of the rarest and largest raptors in Europe visited the UK, sparking the curiosity of thousands. This was far from the Bearded Vulture's usual habitat, as the species typically inhabits mountainous terrains in Europe, mainly in the Alps and the Pyrenees.

*"In the Alps, where the Bearded Vulture was reintroduced and is closely monitored, we often see young individuals from the region disperse northwards, exploring new areas," states José Tavares, Director at Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF), which leads the Bearded Vulture reintroduction efforts in Europe.*

Nicknamed 'Vigo' at the time, this Bearded Vulture represented only the second-ever confirmed sighting of the species in the UK.

*"When this magnificent bird decided to spend the summer of 2020 in the Peak District, it was fascinating to monitor her, and she brought a lot of joy to tens of thousands of people," comments Matt Buckler, Director of Natural Solutions at Derbyshire Wildlife Trust. "She has given everyone a glimpse of what a wilder future could look like if we help nature's recovery."*

With no tags or rings, many speculated about the vulture's identity and origin. Ultimately, feathers collected at a preening site in the Peak District told her story. Sent to Pro Bartgeier in Switzerland for DNA analysis, the feathers confirmed that 'Vigo' was actually 'Flysch,' a female hatched on 6 July 2019 in a wild nest in Haute-Savoie, high up in the French Alps. She is the offspring of a wild-hatched father and a zoo-reared mother named Zufall, who was released into the wild in 2006.

*"This pair has been settled in the Bargy chain since 2016. The following year in 2017, the adults produced their first chick," shares Etienne Marle, the Bearded Vulture Project Manager at Asters CEN 74, which is in charge of monitoring the species in Haute-Savoie. "Each year, we try to collect genetic samples of wild-hatched birds under or in the nest to improve genetic monitoring."*

Following her long four-month stay in the UK, Flysch-Vigo went 'missing' after she was last spotted in October 2020, flying south over the sea from the coast of the UK. No one knew if she had returned to the mainland or made it back to the Alps - until recently.

Flysch-Vigo reappeared during the 2023 reintroduction period when an almost adult Bearded Vulture visited the release site of Pro Bartgeier close to Melchsee-Frutt in the Swiss Alps, where Bearded Vultures are still being released for conservation purposes. This site is crucial for expanding the genetic diversity and population of Alpine Bearded Vultures eastwards. It's part of a successful reintroduction project that started in the 1970s with a captive breeding programme aimed at releasing birds into the wild.

*"Today, we can say that the species was brought back from extinction in the Alps. There are 85+ breeding pairs in the region, in what is considered one of the greatest wildlife comeback stories of our times," adds José Tavares.*

During her unexpected visit to the release site, Flysch-Vigo displayed a social side, engaging with two newly reintroduced young vultures, Obwaldera and Marco. She joined Obwaldera with food, and they ate side by side. However, it remains uncertain whether Flysch-Vigo intentionally shared her meal or if Obwaldera simply helped himself. Days later, Fredueli, a five-year-old Bearded Vulture, arrived. They sat peacefully together for about half an hour before Fredueli suddenly attacked, chasing Flysch-Vigo away. The next morning, a lone feather marked the site of their encounter, which once again led to her identification following a genetic analysis.

The Bearded Vulture is one of Europe's most monitored species, thanks to the International Bearded Vulture Monitoring Network (IBM), which records hundreds of observations annually through field sightings, GPS data, and genetic analyses. Since 1998, genetic monitoring has covered both captive-bred and wild Alpine Bearded Vultures. Human keepers collect blood samples from captive birds, while local IBM partners actively search beneath nests to collect feathers, enabling them to track the wild population and secure genotypes of wild-fledged birds.

*"Our IBM database includes the genotypes for more than 500 birds which hatched in captivity and from almost 200 individuals hatched in the wild," says Franziska Lörcher, Scientific and Conservation Coordinator at the VCF.*

Questions remain about Flysch-Vigo's future—will she settle in the Swiss Alps, continue her travels, or return to her native French Alps? Conservationists remain hopeful that ongoing monitoring will identify her once again, ideally with offspring.

## NOTE TO EDITORS

### Links to high-resolution images

All copyrights go to © Franziska Lörcher

- [Flysch-Vigo, almost adult bird, photographed in the Swiss Alps in 2023](#)
- [Flysch-Vigo and Fredueli eating together before their fight](#)
- [Flysch-Vigo and Fredueli fighting, which led to the retrieval of a feather](#)
- [Flysch-Vigo's feather, which revealed her identity after DNA analysis](#)

### Background Information

The Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF) is the world's leading organization dedicated to protecting, conserving, and restoring Europe's four vulture species. VCF focuses on captive breeding, reintroductions, threat mitigation, and monitoring. Their mission is to ensure healthy, self-sustaining vulture populations with good conservation status, supported by quality habitats and valued by people. Learn more at [www.4vultures.org](http://www.4vultures.org)

Foundation Pro Bartgeier, established in 1999, aims to reintroduce and ensure a viable population of Bearded Vultures in the Alps. Through reintroduction, genetic diversity, scientific monitoring, and public education, the foundation works with international partners to protect and promote acceptance of this species, ensuring optimal conditions for their survival. Learn more at [www.beardedvulture.ch](http://www.beardedvulture.ch)

Asters-CEN74, founded in 2000, is an NGO dedicated to managing, protecting, and promoting the natural spaces of Haute-Savoie, France. They oversee 41 sites, including 9 national nature reserves, and collaborate with various conservation organizations nationally and internationally. Learn more at [www.cen-haute-savoie.org](http://www.cen-haute-savoie.org)

Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, founded in 1962, is one of 46 local Wildlife Trusts in the UK. It promotes and protects wildlife across Derbyshire, aiming for a Wilder Derbyshire through nature recovery networks, community engagement, and inspiring environmental action. Learn more at [www.derbyshirewildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.derbyshirewildlifetrust.org.uk)

### Contact

Eleni Karatzia  
Communications Officer  
[e.karatzia@4vultures.org](mailto:e.karatzia@4vultures.org)