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THE RETURN OF THE NEOPHRON

THE EGYPTIAN VULTURE

In the past the Egyptian vulture was widely distributed in Bulgaria and Greece in high numbers. However, nowadays less than 30 and 20 pairs remain respectively in each country. Moreover, the whole of the Balkan Peninsula is home to less than 90 pairs.

The Egyptian vulture is one of the birds with fastest population decrease in the world and is classified as "Endangered" in the IUCN Red List. Changes in the traditional human activities in rural areas combined with direct threats in the species breeding and wintering grounds, have lead Egyptian vultures to the brink of extinction.

The Egyptian vulture has always been considered a symbolic bird in Greek mythology and folklore. The species was also regarded as a herald of spring and its return was always earnestly expected in the rural areas.

THE LIFE+ PROJECT FOR THE EGYPTIAN VULTURE

The LIFE+ Project "*Urgent measures to secure the survival of the Egyptian vulture (Neophron percnopterus) in Bulgaria and Greece*" (LIFE10 NAT/BG/000152) aims to prevent the extinction of the Egyptian vulture from Bulgaria and Greece. The duration of the project is five years and it covers 27 target areas within the Natura 2000 network: 12 in Bulgaria and 15 in Greece.

The Project is carried out by four partners from three countries: the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB), the Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS), WWF-Greece and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). It is implemented with the financial support of the European Commission and the co-funding of the A.G. Leventis Foundation.



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PROJECT ACTIVITIES

THE PREPARATORY STUDIES will add to the knowledge about the biology and ecology of the Egyptian vulture, and also about the species' main threats forming the solid base needed in order to design and to put into action more efficiently all of the project's conservation and communication actions. The research will try to throw some light on different aspects about the species that still remain unclear for the Bulgarian and Greek populations such as migration routes or diet, while also helping in the identification and assessment of the threats these birds face during their stay in both countries.

THE CONSERVATION ACTIONS represent the core of the project's work with the species as they are directly aimed to prevent its extinction in Bulgaria and Greece. The results from the preparatory studies carried out within the project will contribute greatly to the correct planning of these activities which address directly the species' main threats such as illegal poison baits, insufficient food supply or disturbance.

The project's main actions include a variety of activities working at different levels such as nest guarding and supplementary feeding of selected breeding pairs, the identification and insulation of dangerous electricity network poles, or the setting up of a network of local stakeholders against the use of illegal poison baits and capacity building of public authorities in the fight against wildlife crimes.

The main **THREATS** of the species in both Bulgaria and Greece include the use of illegal poison baits, decrease in food availability, electrocution by electricity network poles, disturbance during the nesting period, poaching and destruction of the species' key habitats.

The **PROJECT'S OVERALL OBJECTIVE** is to minimize the species extinction risk in the Bulgaria and Greece by means of the reduction of the main mortality factors as well as the increase of the species breeding success.

The Egyptian vulture is one of the species with the highest risk of extinction in Greece - Urgent conservation measures are needed!

THE EGYPTIAN VULTURE IN GREECE

- Classified as "Critically Endangered" in the Greek Red Data Book.
- Widely distributed in the past in continental Greece; now restricted mainly to three regions: Epirus, Thessaly and Thrace.
- Present in Greek folklore and myths and known with multiple local names like "The Cuckoo's Horse", "The Cheesemaker", "The White Eagle".

Learn more about the Egyptian vulture at
www.LifeNeophron.eu



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THE COMMUNICATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION ACTIONS aim to increase public awareness on the species, helping people to realize the acute risk of extinction these vultures are going through, in order to finally engage society in the race against time towards the survival of the species.

The Egyptian vulture population has collapsed during the last 30 years in Greece (more than 90% decrease).



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