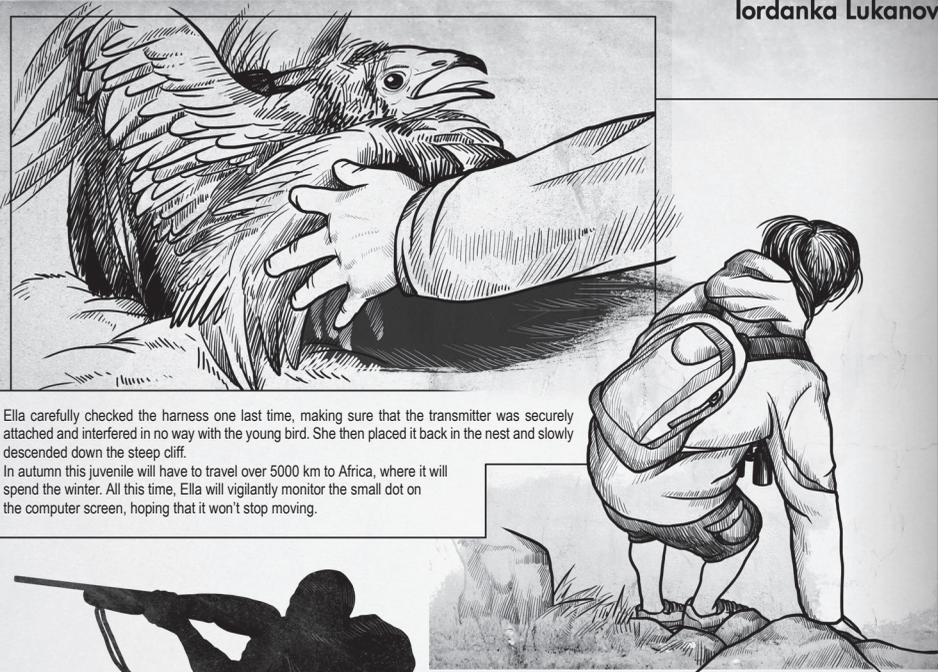


PASCHALIS

lordanka Lukanova



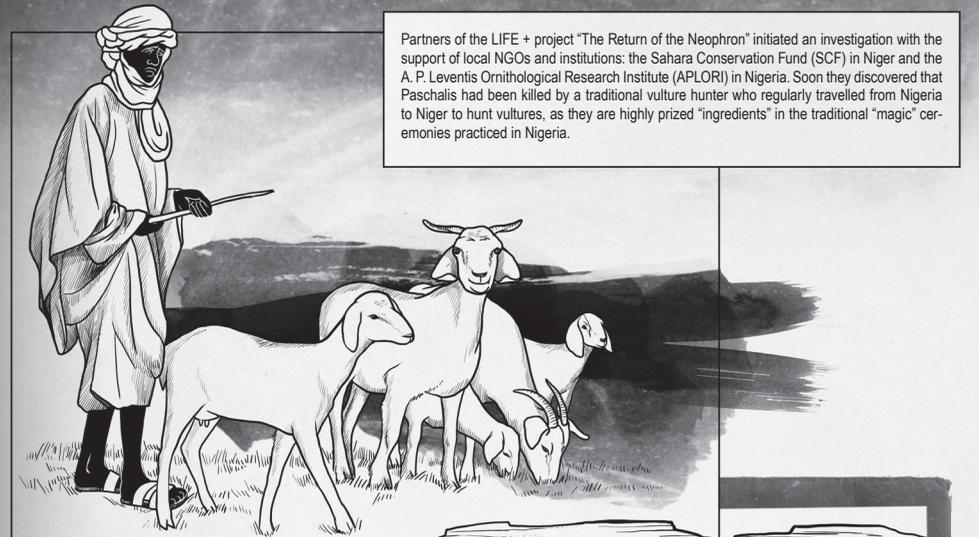
Ella carefully checked the harness one last time, making sure that the transmitter was securely attached and interfered in no way with the young bird. She then placed it back in the nest and slowly descended down the steep cliff. In autumn this juvenile will have to travel over 5000 km to Africa, where it will spend the winter. All this time, Ella will vigilantly monitor the small dot on the computer screen, hoping that it won't stop moving.

A few months later, another person in another continent patiently waited, hiding behind the sand hill. The bait was set, the rifle - loaded. Nothing could go wrong. A shot echoed. The dot on the computer screen

STOPPED moving...

In 2013, 10 young Egyptian Vultures were tagged with satellite transmitters. Three of them migrated overland and successfully reached their wintering grounds. The other seven went across the Mediterranean, relying only on their instinct to go south. Five of them found their death in the sea and two - on Mediterranean islands. Paschalis was the single individual who successfully managed to pass this natural barrier... only to run directly into a hunter.

The story would end here if it was not for the satellite transmitter on his back. This transmitter proved not only to provide the bird's location, but also to give us invaluable information about the life and threats to the species. All this information is essential for conservationists to propose effective conservation actions to help save the species.

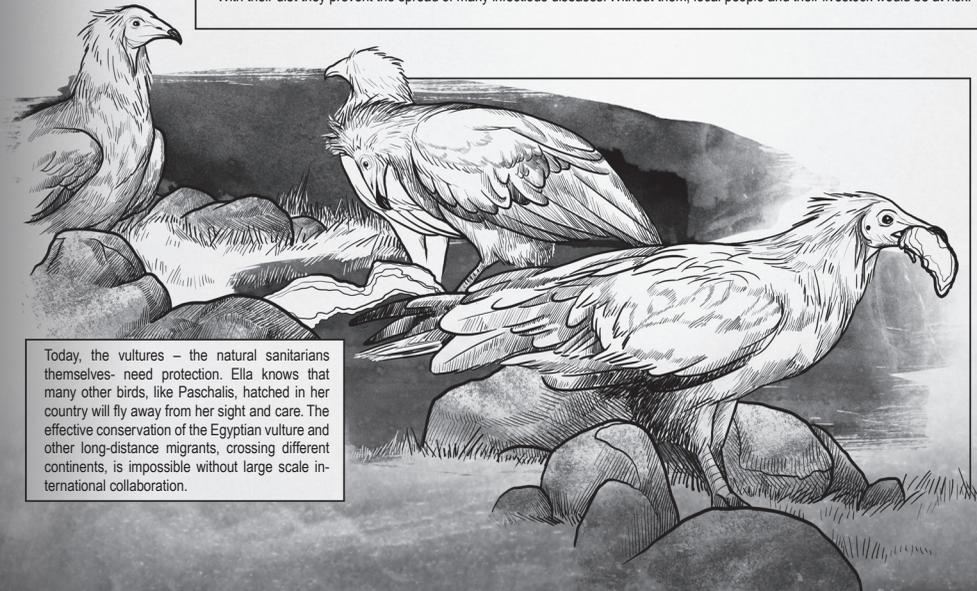


Partners of the LIFE + project "The Return of the Neophron" initiated an investigation with the support of local NGOs and institutions: the Sahara Conservation Fund (SCF) in Niger and the A. P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute (APLORI) in Nigeria. Soon they discovered that Paschalis had been killed by a traditional vulture hunter who regularly travelled from Nigeria to Niger to hunt vultures, as they are highly prized "ingredients" in the traditional "magic" ceremonies practiced in Nigeria.

The hunter is just a piece of the puzzle. What is needed to mitigate this threat is to uncover and put a stop to both those who practice these ceremonies, and those in charge of the illegal trade that supplies the vultures. Traditional beliefs about miraculous healing and magic, requiring the deaths of Egyptian vultures, led to the complete extinction of the species from Nigeria as well as its fast decrease in other neighboring African countries. These beliefs are based on the vultures' role as the "cleaners" of nature: although they feed on dead animals they do not fall sick to different diseases. Local people in Africa see this every day and hence believe that magical powers protect the vultures.



But it is exactly these "magic powers" that actually protect the people and wildlife. Egyptian vultures migrate to Africa during the winter in Europe while the dry season begins in Africa. The Fulani people and other nomadic tribes from the Sahel region gather around water sources with their livestock. Tens of thousands of animals and humans gather at one place. Vultures are also there. With their diet they prevent the spread of many infectious diseases. Without them, local people and their livestock would be at risk.



Today, the vultures - the natural sanitarians themselves - need protection. Ella knows that many other birds, like Paschalis, hatched in her country will fly away from her sight and care. The effective conservation of the Egyptian vulture and other long-distance migrants, crossing different continents, is impossible without large scale international collaboration.