



# Global Re-introduction Perspectives: 2010

Additional case-studies from around the globe  
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IUCN/SSC Re-introduction Specialist Group (RSG)





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## Re-introduction of Griffon vultures and consequent return of Egyptian vultures in the Kotel Mountains, Bulgaria

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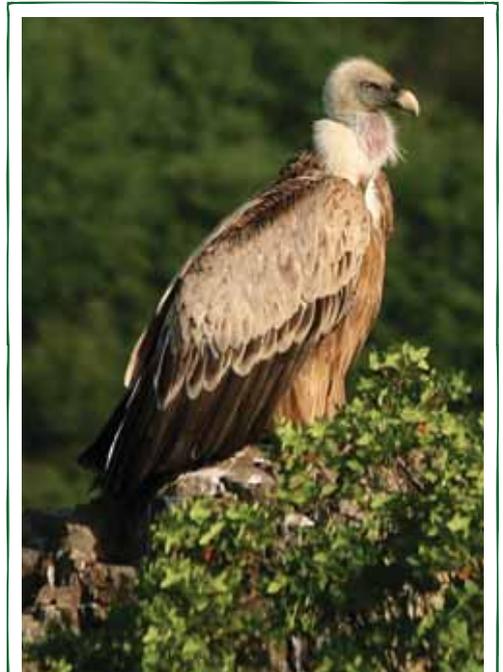
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### Introduction

The Griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) is a large old world vulture, scavenger, feeding mostly from carcasses of dead animals which it finds by soaring over open areas, often moving in flocks. It grunts and hisses at roosts or when feeding on carrion. It breeds on crags in mountains in southern Europe, north Africa and Asia, forming colonies and laying one egg. It is included in IUCN Red List in Least Concern category and in National Red Book of endangered species. Griffon vulture population in Bulgaria and neighboring countries dramatically decreased in the last decades, as a result of persecution, habitat destruction and using of poison bites for predators. At present there is only one small breeding population in Bulgaria, located in Eastern Rhodopes Mountains.

The Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) is a small old world vulture, found in Southern Europe, Northern Africa and Eastern Asia. It is declining in most of his range, totally collapsed in India, due to using of poisons used in veterinary medicine, which entered the species food chain. The species has declined fast in Bulgaria, probably as a result of complex factors, including the use of poison baits against predators, destruction of nesting habitats and a high decrease in animal farming.

Consequently this species was up-listed from Least Concern to Endangered status in the 2007 IUCN Red List. It is also included in the National Red Book or rare and endangered species. Kotel mountain is a part of Eastern Stara planina (Balkan)



Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*)



**Egyptian vulture**  
(*Neophron percnopterus*)

mountains. The area includes a variety of habitats, dominantly broad-leaved woods and pastures. The mountains holds vast species diversity and many parts of it are under protection by national laws or Natura 2000.

## Goals

- Goal 1: Re-introduction of the Griffon vultures as a tool for the re-introduction of the globally threatened Egyptian vultures.
- Goal 2: Attracting and concentrating remnant non-breeding Egyptian Vultures individuals from a larger area, where facing different types of threats and reproduction limitations to a safe well managed area and establishing a nucleus of several breeding pairs.
- Goal 3: Managing and monitoring of the most favorable nesting and foraging sites in the area, in order to provide optimal conditions for breeding of Griffon and Egyptian vultures.

- Goal 4: Establishment of feeding

stations for vultures and other birds of prey in order to stabilize the populations and prevent the risk of poisoning.

- Goal 5: Establishment of extensive sheep breeding farms managed in optimal conditions to benefit the vultures and the habitat.

## Success Indicators

- Indicator 1: New and regular observations of the targeted species in the project area and recorded first breeding attempts.
- Indicator 2: Working system for provision of food resources for the targeted species.
- Indicator 3: Complete or partial restriction on the use of poison against predators.

## Project Summary

All four European vulture species used to breed in Kotel Mountain in Bulgaria until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century and the last pair of Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) survived until 1989. The extinction of the vultures came after a mass and well organized (on state level) campaign for poison baits use against wild predators. It was combined with complete changes in livestock breeding practices and hygiene improvement which led to food scarcity and frequent poisoning incidents. After 1992 the poisoning was officially forbidden, but it still continued locally and less intensively as illegal practice. At the same time the species status fast became unfavorable in almost its entire range, due to the reasons mentioned above. Once

the commonest vulture in Bulgaria, the species started to disappear from many traditional breeding places. The livestock farming decrease led to massive habitat changes, especially degradation of pastures and thus to extinction of many species connected to them. Strongly involved in nature conservation activities in the region, the Fund for Wild Flora and Fauna (FWFF) decided to start actions to support the vultures in Kotel Mountain. The project was supported by specialists and volunteers from other NGO's and University of Sofia.



View from Kotel Mountain

Main objectives of the initiative included establishment of feeding station for birds of prey, re-establishment of livestock breeding in the area and re-introduction of Griffon vultures (*Gyps fulvus*) as an instrument to attract and re-establish local breeding nucleus of Egyptian vultures. Local people were also involved in the activities, especially in the newly established extensive sheep farms and in the monitoring activities.

Following a variety of project activities, came the first success. A small nucleus of Griffon vultures, after 50 years of absence, and first observations of four sub-adult and immature Egyptian vultures on the feeding station after almost 20 years absence. Experiencing the breeding and territorial behavior of a young new pair of Egyptian vultures while the species is facing an overall rapid decline in Bulgaria and globally.

### Major difficulties faced

- Modifying local people attitude to birds of prey, traditionally known as a threat for farm and game animals.
- Preventing the use of poisons against predators, as a major threat for vultures.
- Involving a solid number of educated scientists and volunteers to monitor all stages of the project.
- Convincing the conservation community that re-introduction of the non priority species as Griffon vulture is a very good tool for restoring the population of the highly endangered Egyptian vulture.

### Major lessons learned

- Direct involvement of the local community in project work and connecting the re-introduction with tourist activities in the region is vital.

# Birds

- A management of system for providing carcasses at the feeding station guarantees the presence of birds and protects them from poisoning risks from uncontrolled feeding.
- Griffon vultures that are easy to find for release could be used as instrument for attracting and creating a new nucleus of Egyptian vultures in safe areas.

## Success of project

Highly Successful	Successful	Partially Successful	Failure
	√		

### Reason(s) for success/failure:

- Return of the Griffon vulture and Egyptian vulture in Kotel mountain after approximately 50 and 20 years absence respectively and the constant presence of the birds in the area.
- The attraction and permanent presence of several birds as well as the breeding and territorial behavior of the Egyptian vultures increases expectations for constant species returning and breeding in the area. The project would be considered highly successful after establishing of high reproduction success which is still not documented, but expected in the future.
- Established feeding station for birds of prey holds permanently additional rare species of raptors, including Griffon vulture, Egyptian vulture, golden eagle, black kite and globally threatened eastern imperial eagle of which only the golden eagle was previously present.