



Frankfurt Zoological Society
Wassennar Wildlife Breeding Centre

20th November 2011

La Garenne, Paris

Annual Meeting on the Bearded Vulture: 30 years cooperating for its conservation.

During 12 and 13th November, it was held in Mallnitz (Austria) the annual Bearded vulture International Information Meeting of the VCF (*Vulture Conservation Foundation*), organized by the Hohe Tauern National park. The day before 11th the Steering Committee of the *International Bearded Vulture Monitoring (IBM)* was held.

The **Bearded vulture International Information Meeting** takes place since the beginning of the Bearded Vulture re-introduction project in the Alps in the late 70's. The Meeting joined partner organizations of the *European Endangered Species Program (EEP)*, the different *in situ* projects in co-operation with the VCF (Alps, Andalusia, Corsica, Crete, Pyrenees and the Balkans) and other independent projects such as the one in Picos de Europa (Spain). The event dealt with several topics: the current situation of the different Bearded Vulture populations, both autochthonous (Pyrenees, Corsica and Crete) or re-introduced (Alps and Andalusia), future plans for the development of an European meta-population, general overview of the monitoring of the Alpine project (including the improvement of the genetic and satellite monitoring methods), new challenges and threats for the future.

In 2011 a great success in the breeding network has been achieved (21 raised offspring, 9 of them at the Guadalentín Breeding centre, Andalusia), thanks people responsible for the ever-growing network of the *European Endangered Species Program (EEP)*. Nowadays, it includes more than 30 centres mainly European zoos, private collaborators and 7 Breeding units; three in Spain: Guadalentín (Cazorla-Jaén), Vallcalent (Lleida) and Torreferrussa (Barcelona), the Richard Faust Zentrum in Wien (Austria), Haute Savoye in France, Goldau in Switzerland and Stara Zagora in Bulgaria.



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Regarding the wild population in the Alps there fledged at least 14 juveniles out of 20 couples that started the breeding season; a new maximum of wild-born birds. The Alpine population has been steadily growing since the first fledgling in 1997 to a total of 82 individuals. Furthermore, people responsible of the monitoring showed the huge number of observers involved in network across the Alps. In Andalusia (Spain) where the release project started in 2006, the first pair bond in the wild has been documented.

Concerning autochthonous populations Corsica showed an alarming decline, 3 pairs have been lost in 2010-2011 with a decrease of all population parameters and no individuals born this year. In Crete, numbers are optimistic (4 birds born in 2011). A new feeding strategy focused on breeding success will be shortly implemented in Corsica. Finally, results from the Pyrenees, the largest population in Europe, showed that although the numbers of territories have increased (140-150 territories), the number of fledglings (-48 in 2011) and breeding parameters are decreasing.

The first successful steps regarding the *Corridor project* to start a genetic flow between the new established Alpine population and the remaining nearby autochthonous ones (North of Spain, Corsica) have been taken. In 2012 a new release site in the Grands Causses (France) will become a milestone to support the development of a meta-population. The remarkable movements of the Bearded vultures released in the Sierras de Cazorla, Segura y las Villas between Andalusia and Picos de Europa and the Pyrenees, and the migrations of birds released in the Alps proved that the development of a meta-population is realistic and an evidence of the effectiveness of the breeding and releasing methods for Bearded vultures used in the VCF projects. The survival of the released birds is monitored by the IBM team. All the 9 juveniles released in the Alps in 2011 are alive, independent and display a perfectly normal behaviour. Release took place at 4 different sites (Italy, France, Switzerland and Austria). In Andalusia it has been cancelled in 2011 by the Andalusian authorities and the VCF as a result of the poisoning event in May. Then, the female *Cata* and the male *Pontones* were found dead in Castril (Granada). The activities against the illegal use of poisoned baits have been strengthened with the implementation of a specific action plan for the area so releases can be continued in 2012.

Despite the positive overall results, new problems are on the ground. Minimizing human-induced mortality is crucial for the conservation of vultures: high levels of lead-poisoning, the high numbers of vultures killed by wind farms (more than 1000 dead birds/year estimated only in Spain and the prove that less than ¼ of them are responsible of more than half of the casualties) and the effect of supplementary feeding used in the Spanish Pyrenees that affects the population in terms of change in territorial habits and decrease of productivity.

Discussion of all these topics is the basis for the work of the international community towards the conservation and the long-term survival of the Bearded vulture and other vulture species. Only by means of the compromise of each person involved and the collaboration for a common goal will be possible. Presentations given at Mallnitz will be available at the website of the *International Bearded vulture Monitoring (IBM)*, www.gyp-monitoring.com . The next meeting will take place in Brunnen, Switzerland, 10th-11th November 2012.

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