



Annual Bearded Vulture Meeting 2014

Barcelonnette, Alpes de Haute-Provence

8-9 November 2014 - **Conclusions**

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The main conclusions of the 2014 annual bearded vulture meeting are the following:

2014 breeding season in the Alps

- ✓ The bearded vulture alpine reintroduction project continues to be a great success – one of Europe's great conservation achievements, and one of Europe's greatest wildlife comeback stories.
- ✓ Across the Alps, the population continues to increase, and 2014 was an excellent year for the wild population with a new record: 31 territories, 24 breeding pairs and 19 fledglings!
- ✓ Alpine bearded vulture population continues to have a very high productivity (0,61 in 2014) and low mortality.
- ✓ Number of bearded vultures hatched in the wild (n= 128) will soon surpass the number of released birds (n=204).
- ✓ First signs of linkages between the Alps and the Pyrenees continue. One male released in 2012 in Grands Causses/Cévennes (Basalte) already crossed the Rhone Valley several times.

EEP & releases

- ✓ In 2014 the VCF made considerable investment into the captive breeding network: captive breeding guidelines were updated, a new service of technical visits to zoos within the EEP started to improve conditions for bearded vultures, and generally a closer relationship and engagement with Zoos established
- ✓ As a result, there has been an increasing recognition of the merits, expertise and effectiveness of the bearded vulture EEP by several sectors
- ✓ Very poor and atypical breeding season within the captive breeding network in 2014: 37 breeding pairs laid 51 eggs, from which only 17 birds hatched and 13 survived. Only 5 chicks produced in the specialized breeding centres (average last 10 years 10,2 chicks/year). Zoos produced average number of chicks: 7,1 chicks/year. The EEP network currently includes 153 birds distribute between 38 zoos and 5 breeding centres.

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- ✓ Only 9 birds released in 2014, 4 in the Alps, 2 in the corridor region, and 3 in Andalusia.
- ✓ Bearded vulture releases in the Alps continued to be a great PR success.
- ✓ Increasing news about flights shows in Europe having bearded vulture. VCF needs to address flight shows and has developed position paper.
- ✓ Plan for future releases discussed and validated: see below

Breeding success	2015			2016			2017			remark
	average	good	bad	average	good	bad	average	good	bad	
Central Switzerland	2	3	2	2	2	0	2	2	0	1)
Hohe Tauern	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	
Mercantour/Alpi Marittimi	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	
Grands Causses / Cévennes	2	2	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2)
Vercors/Baronnies	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2)
Andalusia	4	5	3	4	5	3	4	5	3	
Corsica	0	0	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	
Total	12	14	9	12	15	9	12	15	9	

1) Genetic valuable individuals have a preference for Central Switzerland. It has to be avoided that the release site receive no birds during two consecutive years

2) These releases are planned in the framework of the life project GYPCONNECT

This table is definitive for 2015, and will be re-evaluated again in the next meeting, figures for 2016-2017 are indicative only

Future strategy alpine reintroduction project

- ✓ Confirmed and agreed that we are now entering the exit phase of the alpine reintroduction project.
- ✓ Releases in the Alps continue with two (interrelated) strategic objectives a) increase genetic diversity until genetic effective population size reaches 50 and founder genome equivalents are 20; b) create a corridor to link Alpine population with Pyrenean one (first phase of the European metapopulation restoration)



- ✓ GYPCONNECT project has been submitted to LIFE+, if approved will start in summer 2015 and will enhance the corridor component.
- ✓ Need to enhance genetic monitoring in the Alps (to know if we are getting to the final objective).
- ✓ Need to update demographic model, and to integrate demographic and genetic data – plan is to do this within the LIFE+ GYPHELP project that started this year.
- ✓ Recommendation to mark (colour rings and GSM) and sample (genetics) wild young when nests accessible, pairs stable and capacity exists.

Wider bearded vulture conservation

- ✓ Our project is changing from an Alpine reintroduction to one seeking the restoration of the former European metapopulation of Bearded Vultures.
- ✓ There are 176 territories in the Pyrenees. Of these 108 pairs laid and produced 43 fledglings. On the French side, the number of fledglings is increasing very slowly. On the southern slope during the last 15 years the number of fledglings is stable although the number of laying pairs has increased significantly.
- ✓ Three birds released in Andalucia, no known mortality in 2014. Project continues in spite of drastic financial cuts in the public administration.
- ✓ First copulation in the wild in Andalucia early this year, pair building nest now, 30+ years after last nesting attempt – excellent signs that one of the most important milestones in the reintroduction project there (first breeding in the wild) is nearer. No mortality in 2014.
- ✓ Reproduction in Crete in 2014 excellent (13 territories, 6 territories with only 1 adult, 5 from 7 pairs with eggs, 5 fledglings).
- ✓ In Corsica, another bad year. Poor breeding (only one fledged), disappearance of individuals and pairs. During the last year there was a consensus that we are facing an emergency situation, and an action plan for saving this threatened island population was agreed with the Parc Natural Regional de Corse and LPO and should now be implemented.

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- ✓ Population in Morocco still surviving, very small, threat factors still causing mortality.
- ✓ Need to start working on populations in the Caucasus (and Turkey)
- ✓ A proposal to do the update on the International Species Action Plan has been submitted to LIFE. This would be a relevant and great opportunity to put alpine project in context and develop plan for metapopulation conservation in the medium-term

Vulture Conservation Foundation, November 2014.



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