

## **LIFE-Nature Projects for the Conservation of the Bearded Vulture in Crete, Greece: Public Awareness Campaign and Results**

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### **Abstract**

The Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*) is considered as one of the rarest raptors in both Greece and Balkans, since its breeding population can be found only in Crete and the relevant number of breeding pairs of the species is only four. In 1998, DG Environment of the European Commission funded a LIFE - Nature project on the "**Conservation of the Bearded Vulture in Greece**" [B4-3200/98/444], which was implemented by the NHMC and the Hellenic Ornithological Society (HOS) during the period October 1998 - February 2002.

In the framework of the same funding measure of the European Commission (LIFE - Nature 2002), the Natural History Museum of Crete, in collaboration with the Forestry Department of the Region of Crete and the Municipality of Inachorio, undertook the implementation of a new project on "**Conservation Actions for the Bearded Vulture and Biodiversity in Crete**" [LIFE02NAT/GR/8492]. The duration of the project is four years and its implementation started on July 2002. The main objectives of the aforementioned project are the implementation of the most urgent conservation actions for the species in Crete and the elaboration of specific conservation measures in mountainous areas of Crete.

The project LIFE02NAT/GR/8492 aims to the conservation of the current population of the Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*) in Crete, as well as the conservation of the biodiversity of the island, through the confrontation of specific human threats to wildlife (e.g. direct execution and use of poisons, low food availability, desertification of ecosystems and habitat degradation etc.). In addition, the project aims to the environment-friendly development of rural areas, through the promotion of ecotourism and local products at the project sites.

Apart from the conservation of the Bearded Vulture population, the project focuses on the conservation of Crete's biodiversity. Through the implementation of certain actions, species such as the Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), the Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), the Bonelli's Eagle (*Hieraaetus fasciatus*), the Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*) and the Lanner (*Falco biarmicus*), which are also protected under Directive 79/409/EEC, are expected to benefit significantly from the project.

A wide public awareness campaign has been implemented all over Crete, since the scientific achievements for the effectively protection of the species is better to be widely disseminated. The main actions of the aforementioned campaign are the following:

- ◆ Design and implementation of an effective warding scheme in the Wild Life Reserves of mountainous Crete from relevant Forest Services and Hunting Associations. Wardens of Crete attended relevant seminars for improving their specific knowledge on raptors' biology, observation and warding. The seminars were organised by the Natural History Museum of Crete (NHMC) and the proceedings of the seminars are already available in printed and electronic version.
- ◆ Establishment of three Information Centers in Crete and function of a mobile exhibition for raptors' conservation in upland communities throughout the implementation of the project.
- ◆ Publication of information material, e.g. leaflets, posters, documentaries, stickers, T-shirts.
- ◆ Promotion of environment-friendly agricultural and pastoral practices through a relevant wide campaign for agri-environment regulations of the European Union, and also support for the verification and promotion of local biological products.
- ◆ Organisation of Workshops on: a) Sustainable Farming and Extensive Pastoralism; b) Collaboration with Tour Operators of Crete; c) Conservation of the Bearded Vulture (Network of LIFE projects); d) Avian Scavengers (focusing on Vultures); and e) Balkan Network on the Bearded Vulture.

- ◆ Creation and maintenance of a website for the project ([http://www.nhmc.uoc.gr/life\\_gypaetus/](http://www.nhmc.uoc.gr/life_gypaetus/)).
- ◆ Environmental education material.
- ◆ Organisation of nature festivals in two mountainous areas of Crete for two consecutive years (2004 and 2005).
- ◆ Promotion of ecotourism in the mountainous areas of the project, which will be based to the particular value of the natural and human environment. The action includes the restoration and signing of old mountainous trails, the construction of bird observatories, the establishment of Information Centres, the organisation of exhibitions and fests, and the production of relevant information material (e.g. ecotouristic guides).

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