

Egyptian Vulture status in the Middle East

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Status of the Egyptian Vulture in Saudi Arabia

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Among the 15 species of the old-world vultures, seven occur in Saudi Arabia; of which, four are breeding, one is winter visitor and two are vagrants. The breeders are Lappet-faced (*Torgos tracheliotos*), Griffon (*Gyps fulvus*), Egyptian (*Neophron percnopterus*) and formally the Bearded vultures (*Gypaetus barbatus*), whereas the Cinereous vulture (*Aegyptius monachus*) is a wintering visitor in most of the central and northern parts of the country.

Out of the breeding vultures, the Lappet-faced Vulture at Imam Saud bin Abdul Aziz Royal Reserve was the most studied species in the Kingdom, with the main objective to determine the threats affecting the population. The results showed that the number of nesting pairs was fluctuating during the years between 1992-2022, with minimum 6 nests found in 1992 and the maximum was 37 nests in 2003. Nests' distribution showed changes from dense on one area of the reserve to scattered around the reserve. In addition, nestlings' adaptation to high ambient temperature was investigated, and results showed that the hatching chicks needed intensive nursery by its parent.

As for Egyptian vulture, observation showed decline on the breeding and migratory populations. Moreover, working with the Egyptian Vulture New LIFE project, a congregating site was discovered with more than 200 birds and possible electrocution and indirect poisoning from Diclofenac were found.

Observations of the Griffon vulture at two areas showed increase on the number of the species, but low breeding success. For example, In Tanumah area, in the southwest of Saudi Arabia, 38 nests were located, but only 6 nestlings fledged. Observations between October 2016 and April 2021 showed that egg predation by Fan-tailed raven (*Corvus rhipidurus*) during incubation period was one of the key factors reducing the productivity of the species. Poisoned vultures were also reported, with 13 vultures found in May 2022 dead 34 km east of the study area. On the other hand, the observations at Hubran area, Hail governate, King Salman Royal Reserve, 22 active nests were found scattered at escarpments over eight mountains with 1 to 4 nests per cliff. Poisoning is probably the main threat in this area. The Bearded vulture is probably an extinct breeder. The last recorded individual was at sandstone cliffs in the northern part of the Kingdom in 1993. Although a sighting was reported by the National Center for Wildlife staff at Hail area in 1997, there is a need for more intensive investigation for the breeding and distribution of this species in the Kingdom.

The investigation on threats showed that poisoning, electrocution and collision with power lines, egg predation and disturbance at nesting site represent the main threats to the vultures in Saudi Arabia. The future work under 2030 vision gives the vultures conservation a priority through the implementation of the CMS Vulture Multi-species Action Plan.



Photo: Stoyan Nikolov

Peer-reviewed research derived from the abstract:

Shobrak, M., Alasmari, S., Alqthami, A., Alqthami, F., Al-Otaibi, A., Al Zoubi, M., El Moghrabi, L., Jbour, S., Arkumarev, V., Oppel, S., Asswad N.G. and Nikolov S.C. (2020) Congregations and threats of migratory Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* along the southwest coast of Saudi Arabia. *Sandgrouse* 42: 248-258.

Updated status of breeding and wintering Egyptian Vultures in Egypt

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The Egyptian Vulture (EV) is generally a migrating visitor in Egypt from late August to early June. Considerable numbers are present in autumn and spring, mainly through the Sinai, Nile Valley and Eastern Desert. In 1982, 437 EVs were recorded at Suez, and a year later 1,189 individuals were counted in the same area. Small number of birds from other countries presumably winter in Egypt. The EV is a rare resident breeder in most parts of the country, except for the extreme south-eastern corner, where it is common. Breeding has been documented at Gebel Elba, Gebel Abrag, Gebel Abu Hareigal, and Wadi El-Allagi. New wave of surveys was carried out between June 2013 and August 2022 aiming to provide

recommendations to the National Parks of Egypt for adequate protection and conservation of the species. More specifically, the main goal was to evaluate the local breeding EV population. For this reason, site visits were restricted from early June to mid-August, when migratory vultures are not present. EV was found in three locations: Gebel Elba National Park, Wadi El-Allagi National Park and Wadi El-Gemal National Park. The presence of fledglings indicated breeding around those areas. Mating took place from mid-March to mid-April, and fledglings were seen between end of July –mid-August. The estimated breeding population at those areas is 5-15 breeding pairs, with maximum counted 50 wintering and resident adult and sub-adult individuals in 2017. Further studies are needed to investigate the breeding parameters.



Peer-reviewed research derived from the abstract:

Habib, M.I. & Dobrev, D. (2023) Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* population estimate in southeastern Egypt. *Acta Zoologica Bulgarica*, Suppl. 17, in prep.

Collaborative efforts on Egyptian Vulture conservation in the Sultanate of Oman

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The Environment Society of Oman (ESO) is an environmental NGO that has collaborated with local governmental agencies to conduct raptor research and conservation since 2012, including work on globally endangered Egyptian vulture (EV). Oman is a stronghold for EVs, and Masirah Island, located on the sultanate's southeast coast, hosts a globally high density of breeding EVs. Studies in 2013 have estimated the minimum nesting density on Masirah Island at 8.17 pairs per 100 km². Additional surveys in 2020 in the eastern Hajar Mountains have found many more EV territories than expected in northern Oman (based on previous population estimates), recording 61 occupied territories. We present a summary of our efforts thus far, including information from breeding surveys on Masirah and the mainland, dumpsite counts, and tracking via satellite. We will outline the threats EVs face in Oman, detail our engagement efforts with industry stakeholders, and highlight our community outreach initiatives.



Peer-reviewed research derived from the abstract:

Angelov I., Yotsova T., Sarrouf M. & McGrady M.J. 2013. Large increase of the Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* population on Masirah Island, Oman. *Sandgrouse* 34: 140–152.

Angelov I., Bougain C., Schulze M., Al Sariri T., McGrady M. & Meyburg B.-U. 2020. A globally-important stronghold in Oman for a resident population of the endangered Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*. *Ardea* 108: 73–82

The Egyptian Vulture on Socotra: population, threats and awareness programmes

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Detailed surveys have calculated the population of the resident Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* on the island of Socotra to be c. 1,900 individuals, probably the highest concentration in the world. There are no serious threats to them, though waste management is a concern and the Socotri treat them with respect. The reasons for a healthy population are discussed. An annual public awareness programme, linked to the International Vulture Awareness Day has been organised by the Socotra Wildlife Association since 2017 and examples of their events are given.



Peer-reviewed research derived from the abstract:

Porter, R.F. & Suleiman, A.S. 2012. The Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* on Socotra, Yemen: population, ecology, conservation and ethno-ornithology. *Sandgrouse* 34(1): 44-62

Status of the Egyptian Vulture in Iraq

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Egyptian Vulture (EV), according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) globally is an endangered species. In Iraq, it is a summer breeder and passage migrant. Based on the preliminary studies, Iraq holds significant roosting population of this threatened bird species, but still there are different threats facing this iconic species such as poisoning, direct persecution, trading, electrocution and collision with power lines.

As a part of IBA/KBA monitoring program by Nature Iraq, since 2007 different potential areas for EV have been surveyed. Several potential roosting and feeding sites for this species were found and a list of conservation measures were identified to preserve and protect this vulture species. Also, according to satellite tracking data, many EVs from other populations migrate over Iraq. It is assumed that Iraq holds significant number of breeding EVs: there are approximately 250-500 breeding pairs (Richard Porter, pers. comm.) just near Sulaimania City. Three large roosting and feeding sites were found, with 70-100 individuals per site. Nature Iraq, with the support from Egyptian Vulture New LIFE project, initiated activities to mitigate the threats on the EV this was implemented through different approaches based on the feasibility studies.


