

Tagged vulture causes concerns

In January 2011 several newspapers and media services ran a story about a tagged and ringed vulture that was found in Saudi Arabia. A significant amount of media coverage followed, with a range of unusual explanations for the presence of a tagged vulture in Saudi Arabia. Ohad Hatzofe provides a welcome sense of perspective. Editor.

This innocent media “star” is a Griffon Vulture that was initially marked on the 15th of September 2008 in Ramon Crater (southern Israel), and marked with a yellow ring (H05), a red ring (N for Negev desert), a brown wing tag (R26) and a metal 181 ring (TAU Univ. Israel). It was, then, at least 6 years old.

On the 18th of September it was trapped again, physically examined and the wing tag was replaced to R65. It was re-sighted many times, mainly around southern Israel until on the 14th of September 2010 it was recaptured and fitted with a new wing tag (X63) and a back-mounted GPS data



logger (# 636; manufacture by e-OBS; www.e-obs.de), by Orr Spiegel. Orr is a PhD student from the Department of Ecology, Evolution and Behaviour at the

Hebrew University of Jerusalem, working under Professor Ran Nathan and studying the movement and foraging of griffons. The last confirmed sighting prior to the current recapture was in the Golan Heights on 17th of October 2010.

Each year in Israel we mark approximately 150 Griffon vultures. Many of them are migratory or wintering birds from the Balkans or Turkey. From these marked vultures we receive hundreds of re-sightings and observations from a wide range of countries including France, Italy, Croatia, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Macedonia, Turkey, Jordan, Sinai and even from Saudi Arabia. Together with Orr Spiegel we fit 40 GPS-loggers (these are not transmitters) as part of a feeding and demography study, in addition to a smaller number of GPS/PTT transmitters received from Argos.



In common with most areas where they occur, vultures perform an important sanitary function in the ecosystem. We operate a network of feeding sites that provides approximately 100 tons of food

each year. Much of the food for this network (approximately 30 tons/year) comes from Bedouins in the Negev desert, as part as their efforts to improve sanitary conditions around their towns or tent camps. In the absence of these vultures there would be a sanitation crisis, resulting in a proliferation of feral dogs, wolves and particularly Golden Jackals (which are

extremely common here). The GPS-loggers are being used to test the efficiency of the feeding efforts, including food preferences of the vultures.

I would be very happy to provide any additional information about our research and monitoring, especially if it will help to assist the survival of this and other vultures.

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