

THE STATUS OF THE BEARDED VULTURE IN CORSICA

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Until recently, little was known about the Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*) in Corsica. Population estimates varied between two to three and seven to ten pairs, and only two eyries were known. The 'Parc Naturel Régional' of Corsica therefore decided to investigate the bird's status on the island and, following extensive fieldwork, it can confidently be said that the population consists of 14–16 pairs. So far (1982), 14 eyries in the territories of 7 different pairs have been discovered, with the ranges of a further 7 being fairly precisely known.

The density of the species in Corsica is higher than in the Pyrenees, occupied nests being situated as little as 4.5km apart. Productivity seems to be lower than in the Pyrenees but may be sufficient to maintain the population at its present level on the island. In 1981, of the six pairs known at the time, at least three laid eggs and a minimum of three young hatched, of which two fledged. In 1982 it would appear that there were no serious breeding attempts.

Many interesting details of behaviour have been recorded. Food remains were collected from the eyries and analysed to determine the diet. The food supply is fairly abundant; numerous domestic and semi-wild animals roam the mountains throughout the year and in summer they are joined by large migrating flocks of goats and sheep. Mouflons are on the increase but remain very localized and do not form a major source of food.

Compared with other European populations, the Bearded Vulture has survived remarkably well in Corsica. It has not been persecuted, or hardly so (for instance, we do not know of any skin originating from Corsica in museum collections, whereas skins from Sardinia are common). While there is no immediate threat to the species on the island, the ever-increasing human presence in the mountains, and the disappearance of the migrant grazing flocks, are causes for concern. It is vital that traditional pastoralism be maintained and the Mouflon encouraged to spread out once more into the whole of its former range throughout the mountains of the island. Efforts must be made to increase public awareness of the richness and fragility of this apparently barren landscape so that the tranquillity of the habitat remains undisturbed.

Our knowledge is still very incomplete, but these discoveries are nonetheless encouraging. It is apparent that Corsica is an important refuge for the Bearded Vulture in Europe, and if it can be allowed to continue to prosper one may hope that the species will one day recolonize Sardinia.

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