

## The lords of the Rhodopean skies

With their distinctive size, appearance and behaviour, vultures are among the most impressive birds in the Rhodope Mountains. Vultures are known as „nature's health officers". They can dispose of even a large animal carcass effectively within a few hours of discovery, thereby preventing the spread of disease among domestic and wild animals, and also among humans. Vultures can serve also as an indicator of preserved natural habitats and ecosystems.

## LIFE Vultures project

„Conservation of black and griffon vultures in the Rhodope mountains" project aims at strengthening and restoring populations of black and griffon vulture in the transborder Rhodope Mountains. This will be done mainly by improving natural prey availability, and by reducing mortality through factors such as poaching, poisoning and power line electrocution and collisions. The project actions will contribute to maintaining a stable or increasing populations of no less than 35 pairs of black vultures and 80 pairs of griffon vultures. The project is developed by Rewilding Europe in partnership with Rewilding Rhodopes Foundation, Bulgarian Society for the protection of birds, WWF Greece, Vulture conservation foundation and Hellenic ornithological Society.

## Objectives

The LIFE Vultures project focuses on the recovery and further expansion of the black and griffon vulture populations in this part of the Balkan region. And also:

- To increase knowledge of mortality factors and threats
- To reduce disturbance, poisoning, direct persecution and lead poisoning of Black and Griffon vultures
- To increase availability of food for Black and Griffon vultures
- To reduce the mortality risk from electricity infrastructure
- To gain support from key stakeholder by promoting local ecotourism business related to vultures and wildlife
- To gain active participation of livestock breeders towards the protection and food provide for vultures
- To increase awareness of vulture conservation



**The project „Conservation of black and griffon vultures in the cross-border Rhodope mountains" is funded by the program LIFE, EU's financial instrument supporting environmental and nature conservation projects throughout the EU.**

LIFE14 NAT/NL/000901

Duration: 5 years  
Start date: 01.01.2016  
End date: 30.06.2021

### Contact us:

Rewilding Europe: [www.rewildingeurope.com](http://www.rewildingeurope.com)  
Rewilding Rhodopes: [www.life-vultures.com](http://www.life-vultures.com)  
Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds: [www.bspb.org](http://www.bspb.org)  
WWF Greece: [www.wwf.gr](http://www.wwf.gr)  
Vulture Conservation Foundation: [www.4vultures.org](http://www.4vultures.org)  
Hellenic Ornithological Society: [www.ornithologiki.gr](http://www.ornithologiki.gr)



LIFE RE-Vultures

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[www.life-vultures.com](http://www.life-vultures.com)





## Black vulture

Known commonly as 'kartal', the Black Vulture is now extinct in Bulgaria as a nesting species. The only breeding colony of the species in the Balkans is located in Dadia National Park in the Greek part of the Rhodope Mountains, close to the border with Bulgaria. Members of the colony often visit Bulgarian part of the Rhodope mountain in search of food.

## Griffon vulture

The Griffon Vulture was once widespread in Bulgaria and Greece. At the turn of the 20th century, however, its numbers started to drop until it reached the point of extinction. Thanks to considerable conservation efforts in 2016 the numbers in Bulgaria reached 80 pairs. Nowadays the highest Greek population occurs on the island of Crete – 320 pairs. On continental Greece there are only 20 pairs left, with 7 to 8 of these based in Thrace.



SVETOSLAV SPASOV / BSRB

## Activities

### Research

The research actions within the project aim to broaden our knowledge about the biology and ecology of the Black and Griffon vulture and help us to better understand the major threats for the species. With research actions we aim to:

- 👉 Study of the pattern of presence of Black vulture in the Rhodopes and search for possible breeding pairs outside the known colony.
- 👉 Map nests, identify population number, age structure and pattern of movement and survival of the Griffon vulture in Bulgaria and Greece.
- 👉 Identify threats, mortality factors, temporary settlement areas, dispersal patterns of Black and Griffon vulture using GPS based telemetry.
- 👉 Prepare Human dimension study on the attitudes and impact.
- 👉 Identify Ecotourism Business opportunity identification and planning.

### Conservation

Conservation activities are the essence of our work on the Black and Griffon vultures, being the main tool for prevention of the species extinction from Greece and Bulgaria. With conservation actions we aim to:

- 👉 Improve the feeding conditions for vultures involving local communities
- 👉 Promote establishment of Black vulture in new areas by building artificial nests
- 👉 Release wild prey species to increase the natural food base for vultures
- 👉 Reduce the local threat of poisoning with the help of the anti-poison do unit operation.
- 👉 Install insulators to prevent electrocution and bird diverters to prevent collisions of vultures with power lines in key areas
- 👉 Improvement of legal status for the disposal of carcasses for vultures in the nature

### Communication

With communication activity we aim to communicate more deeply and efficiently the nature conservation messages to our target groups, which is off high importance for the conservation of the Black and Griffon vultures. Some of the communication actions include:

- 👉 High-quality audio-visual archive
- 👉 Local, regional and national media activities
- 👉 Local and national indoor and outdoor exhibition
- 👉 Regular update of the project activities on Website, Facebook, and Instagram
- 👉 Promotion of nature tourism services

### Education

This LIFE+ project involves a series of educational and training sessions for teachers, students, environmental clubs, etc. in order to reach out to an even broader range of people and supporters.

- 👉 Developing a children and youth awareness programme of extracurricular activities related to vulture conservation
- 👉 Production of information materials'

