

## Rare birds of prey observations in Kresna Gorge in Bulgaria

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### Introduction

The Kresna Gorge of Struma River is found in south-west Bulgaria, between Pirin Mountain on the east and Maleshevska Mountain to the west (UTM, FM73). It represents a rough terrain of silicate rocky habitats and degraded deciduous forests with Mediterranean climate influence.

Following the re-introduction of Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) by Fund for Wild Flora & Fauna in Kresna Gorge in 2010 and establishment of the feeding site for vultures (Stoynov & Peshev 2011, 2012, 2013), as well as increased ornithological observations in the area, related to the above, several rare species of birds of prey were observed or their regular presence was noticed. Some of them are new for the area, while others are considered extinct

regionally. We herewith report on them.

### Egyptian Vulture

*Neophron percnopterus*

After extinction of the last breeding pair in 2003 and the last single birds observed in 2010 and 2012 (Stoynov *et al.* 2013), in 2013 three different birds were observed and photographed at the feeding site as follows:

A sub-adult bird was present at the feeding site on 21, 25 and 26 May 2013 and 5 Jun 2013.

An adult bird was present at the feeding site on 9 Jul 2013.

An immature (3 cy) bird was present at the feeding site on 17 and 18 Jul 2013. This was a ringed specimen (blue ring with dark inscription MBL), which appeared to

have been ringed in its nest in Demir Kapia (FYR Macedonia) in 2011 by Macedonian Ecological Society (Metodia Veleviski pers.comm.).

### **Eurasian Black Vulture**

*Aegypius monachus*

An immature bird (2 cy) was observed at the feeding site on 5 and 6 May 2013 (flying together with Griffon Vultures) and later on 28 May 2013 (feeding together with Griffon Vultures). It is very possible that this is the same bird that visited the area twice. This is the first record of a Black Vulture from the area after May 1997 (Hristov & Stoyanov 2002), but it is the first time a Black Vulture is observed to feed in the area and to have spent more than a day in the area.

### **Eurasian Griffon Vulture**

*Gyps fulvus*

More than 70 individuals out of those released within the project for the re-introduction of the species in Kresna Gorge were identified to have passed through and stayed for a while to use the feeding site and roost in the area in 2013. Passage of birds from Serbia, Croatia, FYR of Macedonia and Greece were recorded, as well as a bird tagged in Israel, but most were probably of Balkan origin. There are two peaks of increased presence of

exogenous Griffon Vultures in Kresna Gorge and these are in May-June and September-October.

### **Red Kite**

*Milvus milvus*

One individual was observed on 20 Nov 2012 for two hours at noon at the feeding site in Kresna Gorge. The bird was interacting with groups of Ravens (*Corvus corax*) (about 200 present at the time) and perched on electric pylons from time to time. This is the first known record of the species from Kresna Gorge.

### **Eastern Imperial Eagle**

*Aquila heliaca*

An immature (2 cy) was observed and photographed over the feeding site in Kresna Gorge on 19 Mar 2013.

### **Greater Spotted Eagle**

*Aquila clanga* was observed over the feeding site in Kresna Gorge interacting with Griffon Vultures and Ravens in flight on 30 Mar 2010. This is the first record of the species from the area.

### **Lanner Falcon**

*Falco biarmicus feldeggii*

A territorial single adult bird (most probably female) was frequently observed and photographed in Kresna Gorge from November 2010 to May

2012. There it was frequently observed to hunt and to feed on Black bird *Turdus merula* and other passerines and to interact with the Griffon Vultures, Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* and Ravens in flight. In 2013 a pair of Peregrine Falcons occupied the cliff used from the Lanner Falcon. In 2013 two observations were made of single Lanner Falcon in flight in Kresna Gorge on 17 of March and 22 of June. This is the first record of the species in the area and the very first photographed Lanner Falcon in Bulgaria.

### **Eleonora's Falcon**

*Falco eleonora*.

Frequent observations of groups (2 to 32 ind.) of young birds were observed every year 2010-2013 from mid May to late July. The earliest record within the season is of 16 May 2010, while the latest is of 28 Jul 2012. The highest number of birds in a single flock catching and eating insects in flight is from 18 Jun 2011, when 32 individuals were observed together. Eleonora's Falcons have been frequently observed to feed on insects over degraded forests of *Quercus pubescens* as well as above the vulture feeding site in Kresna Gorge.

### **References**

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