

**Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:**
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:**Excursion to the cave at Kalo Horio / Prefecture Iraklion**
Griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*)

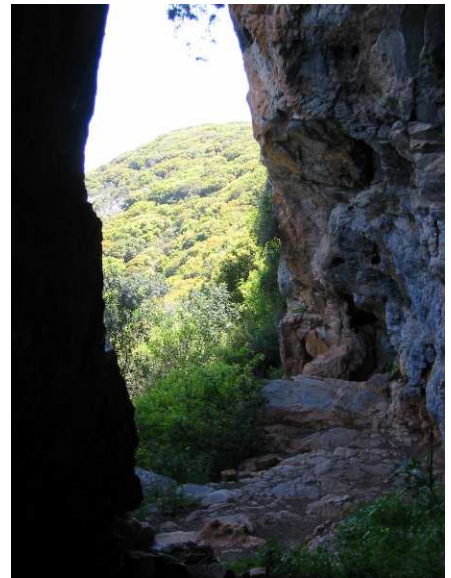
The cave is located after *Chersonissos* [Χερσόνησος] (around 15.5 miles east of *Heraklion* [Ηράκλειο]), towards South (to *Kastelli* [Καστέλλιον]) after approx 4.3 miles on the right hand side at the turn-off towards *Kalo Chorio* [Καλόν Χωρίον]. The cave formation is visible from afar. After the junction it is about another mile to a small bridge, where you find a good parking lot at the right. From here it is not far up to a chapel which is on the opposite side of the street right the cave and also worth a visit (see picture).

The cave itself is not easy to reach. Starting at the parking area, (after passing the road) follow a mountain brook for around 200 meters and than keep right towards a steep face. To do so, you must pass a 100 meter wide marsh and smaller water channels, before you reach the foot of the steep face. The ascent to the cave (ca. 30 meter) is also difficult because of undergrowth (briar) and “aquaplaning” of the slope. The cave access is secured with a wire entanglement (against sheep and goat), the last 10 meters (after the wire entanglement) are steep and lathy and therefore carefully to be walked. Despite all odds, it's worth! From the cave, you have a wonderful view of the Valley of the mountain brook and the distant hills. The Grotto itself is relatively small (high, but less space) with a main corridor narrowing to a "creep" path (see pictures).



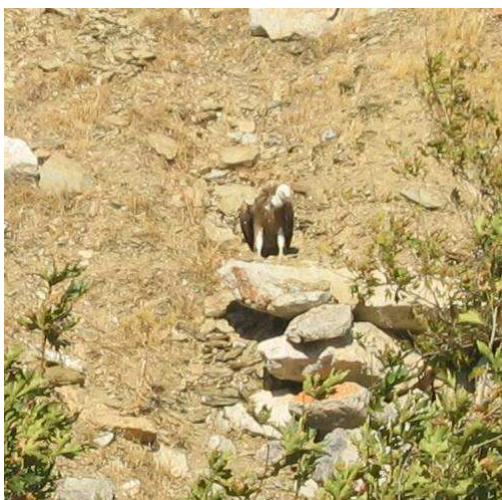
The picture shows the cave formation with chapel (in the background) at the junction to *Kalo Chorio*. The white "spots" on the wall (right of the cave) are faecal from a several years old Griffon vulture eyrie (see yellow arrow). Griffon vultures are often seen in this area as also in the further East, the territory between *Malia* [Μάλια] and *Agios Nikolaos* [Αγιος Νικόλαος].

Photo: U. Kluge 2003)



The figures show (from left to right) the access to the cave; a part of the main corridor, which narrows after 20 – 30 meters to a “creep” path and a view from the inside out. Photos: H. Eikamp (2003)

The **Griffon vulture** (*gyps fulvus*) belongs zoological to the family of Old World Vulture (Aegypiinae); its range extends from the Northern Africa (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia) eastward over the Iberian Peninsula up to the North-western Mongolia (Western Pakistan, Kashmir, North India). In Europe, the spread has huge gaps.



Today almost half of Greece Griffon population lives at Crete. At the end of the 1970s the population were estimated at 500 birds. Exact numbers do not exist today. The estimates vary between 250 and 400. Griffons can be seen regularly in pair or small groups on Crete. They nest in appropriate places in canyons or steep cliffs.

On the ground they are hard to confound with other raptors. He weighs up to 9 kg and is slightly larger than a sea eagle. The head and the neck are fletched with cream or pale brownish down. Noticeable and characteristic for the bird is the yellowish-white fluffy ruffle. After 1 to 2 years the birds are pubescent; male and female are coloured the same. They are thermal-dependent gliders which have a distinctive flight silhouette. The wings are almost rectangular and board-like.

Remarkable are the almost straight tail and the short set head because the neck will can be hold in. They can reach an age of 35 – 40 years.

The food consists of carrion and the viscera of large animal cadaver (such as sheep, goats). They build themselves an eyrie (up to 1 m diameter), which consists of long branches (up to 60 cm), clematis, stems, and hay. Early February or March they lay one white egg – with pinkish spots at the blunt Egg pole.

Picture is showing a *Griffon vulture* “at the ground”, here within the *Selinári Canyon* between *Malia* and *Agios Nikolaos* at the Old National Road. At least two breeding pairs nest in the steep faces of this canyon in recent years. Photo: U. Kluge (2003)

