

Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:**Griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus* HABLIZL, 1783) on Crete:
Gyps fulvus fulvus still common in Crete's mountain region**

We already reported (as abstract) about the **griffon vulture** (*Gyps fulvus*); therefore see our leaflet No. 022-04/E, Page 2 [http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/022-04E.pdf]. In this leaflet we will report about the endemic to Crete subspecies *Gyps fulvus fulvus* of which still about 350 – 450 individuals seem to be on the island (counting 1996 – 2002)

Griffon vulture belongs zoologically to the family of the Accipitrids, in the subfamily of the Old World vultures (Aegypiinae); one differentiates between 2 subspecies: *Gyps fulvus fulvenscens* (range: Afghanistan, Pakistan and North India) and *Gyps fulvus fulvus* (range: from northwest Africa and the Iberian peninsula over the Balkans, Turkey, the middle east to Arabia, Iran, Pamir up to the Altai mountains).

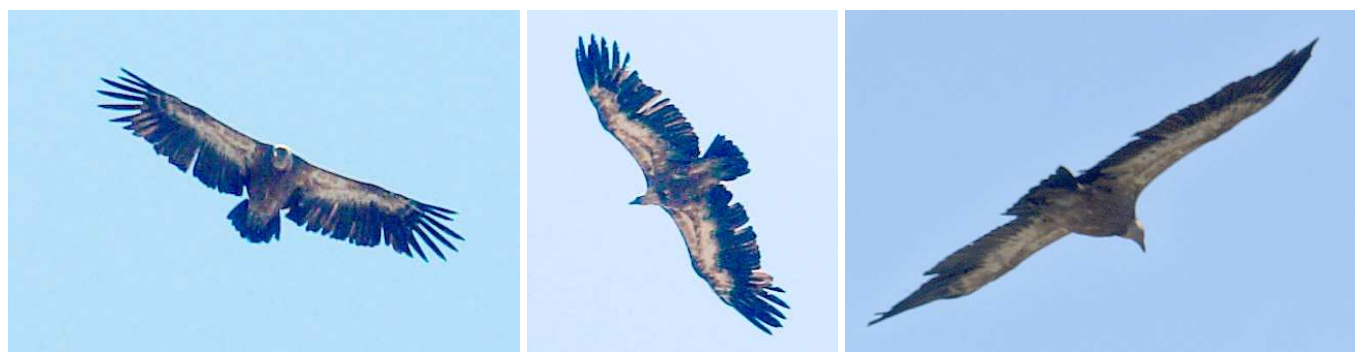
Griffon vulture at the soil is hardly to be confounded with another raptorial bird. It weighs between 4 to 6 kg and is somewhat larger than a sea-eagle. The head and the neck are fletched only with palely brownish to cream-white dunes. Remarkable and characteristically for the bird is the yellowish-white fluffy ruffle. The birds are adult after 2 to 5 years; Males and females are colored alike. They are thermal-dependent gliders that show a remarkable flight silhouette. Their wingspan amounts to 2.4 to 2.8 m, the body length 0.95 - 1.05 m. The wings are almost rectangular and board-like. Here the long fletched end-wings are noticeable. The short, nearly straight tail and the close to the body sitting head are remarkable, since the neck is drawn in. Griffon vultures can reach an age of 35 - 40 years. The food consists of carrion and entrails of large animal wastes (e.g. sheep, goats). They establish an eyry (up to 1 m diameter), which consists of long branches (up to 60 cm), forest vines, stems and hay. They usually nest at suitable places in ravines or at steep cliffs. Only one plain-colored white egg (with rust-colored spots at the dull end) is laid at the beginning of February and/or. March; twin clutches of eggs are rare with the griffon vulture in the wild. The breeding duration amounts to 52 and 58 days; the nestling time 110 to 120 days. Young griffon vultures are more darkly colored than adult animals.



The pictures show Griffon vultures at their breeding site in the Selinari Gorge in July 2008; right: young bird. The philopatric birds breed here since decades. Nine successful breeds have been counted between 2004 and 2008.

Pictures: Maria Eleftheria

Nearly half of the today's griffon vulture population of Greece lives on Crete. Those about 350 to 450 still determined griffon vultures of Crete live in approx. 23 colonies and are formed by approximately 148 breeding pairs. Most colonies consist of 11 to 15 single birds. The largest colonies are on Asterousia (Kofinas), Giouhtas, in Selinari, on the Selakano plateau and in the Kourtaliotiko ravine. Approximately 68 activity places of the goose vulture are well-known on Crete, of those about half (about 34) are proven as breeding areas. The ranges of activity concentrate on 21 in the prefecture Iraklion, 19 in the prefecture Lassithi and 28 in the prefectures Rethymno and Chania. *Gyps fulvus fulvus* is at the red list of endangered species of the IUCN 2007 in the version from May 2006. On Crete it is not yet endangered, since the food offer is still various due to the transhumance (goats and sheep); also the missing realization of the European Union guideline for the removal of animal wastes (on Crete) works positively in addition, see fig.: Animal waste "disposal place in the botanic" at the Lassithi Plateau - a "good fodder" for the vultures. **Picture:** *H. Eikamp*



The fig. are showing 3 flight silhouettes of griffon vultures over the Lassithi plateau in July 2008

Pictures: *Maria Eleftheria*

The vultures probably propose the most riddle in Paleo-ornithology. They actually belong to two different families, which have nothing to do with each other in phylogeny. One differentiates between New World vulture (Cathartidae) and Old World vulture (Accipitridae). The Old World vultures descending from eagle-similar ancestors form a clearly defined subspecies (Aegypiinae). Surprisingly the Old World vultures are represented fossil in the North American Tertiary period. Since fossils of Old World vultures also appear in the Old World, those dates back to the early Miocene (species *Palaeohierax*), the past fossils proofs of vultures give no reference to their origin. The oldest fossil proofs of vultures (*Palaeogyps*) originate from the Oligocene, about. 37.5 millions Years before today.

Translated by Michael Bloechinger-Daeumling

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Linkleiste: www.maria-elftheria.de

