

Diet of the Eurasian Black Vulture, *Aegypius monachus* Linnaeus, 1766, in Turkey and implications for its conservation

(Aves: Falconiformes)

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Abstract. We analysed 120 pellets of the Eurasian Black Vulture, *Aegypius monachus* Linnaeus, 1766, collected in Turkey during the breeding season in order to assess diet preference and implications for conservation. In addition, we were able to analyse the stomach content of a dead individual. The most abundant prey item was sheep, which was found in 76.6% of all pellets, followed by Wild Boar (44.1%) and chicken (22.5%). This shows that livestock plays an outstanding role in the diet of the Eurasian Black Vulture, and underlines its dependence on extensive livestock farming and grazing. Dumping livestock carcasses around the vultures' breeding sites should therefore be permitted. In order to minimise the risk of poisoning, it should be forbidden to dispose of contaminated or poisoned carcasses in natural areas.

Key words. *Aegypius monachus*, Eurasian Black Vulture, food preferences, Türkmenbaba Mountain.

Introduction

When there is an absence of prey, different strategies can be performed by raptor species. Changing foraging behaviour and prey items (COSTILLO et al. 2007a, DONÁZAR et al. 2010), expanding feeding home-ranges (BONAL & APARICIO 2008) and modifying breeding strategies (STEENHOF et al. 1997) are responses of birds of prey to the lack of food. But these strategies may not be enough to overcome insufficient food supplies in every situation. Numerous studies have documented that lack of a suitable food supply has led to nest desertion, a failure of nesting attempts, lower breeding success or the extinction of raptor species (TORNBERG et al. 2005, SALAFSKY et al. 2007). For example, because of the extinction of the insular mammal fauna as available raptor prey, the endemic large raptor species also became extinct on islands during the Holocene (BRETAGNOLLE et al. 2004). As another contemporary example, following the decline of suitable food, the breeding success of many raptor species decreased in the Iberian Peninsula (COSTILLO et al. 2007a, DONÁZAR et al. 2009a). On the other hand, legal protection and the high availability of food have led to increases in the population size of vulture species such as *Gyps fulvus* (Hablizl, 1783) in Spain (PARRA & TELLARIA 2004, DONÁZAR et al. 2010).

Vultures are very vulnerable species on account of several characteristics in their reproductive process, such as the 4-7 years needed to reach sexual maturity, hatching only one or two broods every one or two years, and an extended breeding season. In fact, several vulture species are categorised as Near Threatened, Vulnerable, Endangered, or Critically Endangered (BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL 2009, DEYGOUT et al. 2009). Among them, the Eurasian