

MONITORING FREQUENCY & BREEDING SUCCESS OF THE GRIFFON VULTURE (*GYPS FULVUS*) COLONIES IN CRETE

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Estimating the breeding population and the reproductive outcome of Griffon vultures (*Gyps fulvus*) depends greatly on the monitoring frequency of their colonies. We conducted nine complete annual surveys of griffon colonies in the island of Crete from December to May during the years 1998-2000. Then, we examined which combination out of four visits prior to fledging produces the maximum number of egg-laying pairs and assesses their breeding success with accuracy. Last, by considering the best survey dates we estimated the number of egg-laying pairs during ten years of monitoring (1996-2005). Overall early visits (mid December-January) are more precise as regards to the size of the breeding population but overestimate breeding success since they are based on the attempts of experienced breeders. On the contrary, late visits (mid or late March) generate poor results due to the high rate of nest failures that occur early in the breeding season and go by undetected. The most accurate and cost-effective breeding success rates are produced by two (1-15, 16-28 February) and three visits (15-31 January, 1-15 February, 1-15 March) respectively. However in both cases the number of egg-laying pairs are underestimated by 30-40% revealing that only a complete survey of four visits (mid January-mid March) can significantly assess the size of the breeding population (ca. 89%).