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ABSTRACTS



Diet composition of the Eurasian Black Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) in Thrace, NE Greece

Theodora Skartsi¹, Haralambos Alivizatos², Petros Babakas³, Dimitris P. Vasilakis^{4,5}

¹: WWF Greece, Greece; d.skartsi@wwf.gr

²: Hellenic Bird Ringing Center, Greece

³: Region of Eastern Macedonia-Thrace, Regional Division of Evros, Greece

⁴: Department of Environmental and Natural Resources Management, University of Patras, Greece

⁵: Hellenic Republic, Decentralized Administration of Macedonia-Thrace, Forestry Service of Soufli, Greece

We studied the diet of the Black Vulture in the National Park of Dadia-Lefkimi-Soufli Forest in relation to the long operation of a “vulture restaurant”, a management tool contributing to the conservation of necrophagous birds but affecting their behavioral parameters. We analyzed pellets and food remains collected from nesting trees to estimate the contribution of food supplied at the “restaurant”, on diet composition and assess conservation implications. During 2006-2014, 245 food remains and 373 pellets were collected from 63 nesting trees. Domestic pigs and sheep/goats made up 35% and 30.5% of food items respectively, estimated as frequency of occurrence. Domestic pigs’ carcasses/offal was the main food supplied at the “restaurant”, in contrast to sheep/goats which were rarely supplied (82.3% vs. 5.5% of average annual weight). These results corroborate the findings by transmitter-marked birds that Black Vultures not only exploit the food resources of the “restaurant”, but they also search for food in a broader area in Thrace. Tortoises were represented by 14.9% of food items (frequency of occurrence), a finding that might be related with kleptoparasitism or other foraging behavior. Wild ungulates were clearly under-represented in food items compared to their abundance in the region. The supplementary feeding program seems to have not significantly affected the species’ foraging behavior. Continuation of the supplementary feeding program is highly recommended as a crucial management measure for the species. Tortoise populations should be enhanced through suitable habitat management measures. Minor changes in hunters’ practices could increase availability of wild ungulates remains in nature.

Keywords: pellet analysis, “vulture restaurant”, supplementary feeding, tortoise, Dadia