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DECLINE OF THE EGYPTIAN VULTURE (*NEOPHRON PERCNOPTERUS*) IN THE CANARY ISLANDS

The Canary Islands lie off the northwest coast of Africa 100 km (Fuerteventura) north of the Tropic of Cancer. There are seven islands and six islets of volcanic origin with mountainous terrain. The climate is subtropical. Since the beginning of the 20th century the Canarian Black Oystercatcher (*Haematopus meadewaldoi*) and the Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*), as well as two endemic subspecies, *Phylloscopus collybita exsul* and *Saxicola dacotiae murielae* (Emmerson et al. 1994, Catálogo y bibliografía de la avifauna canaria, Cabildo de Tenerife, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Canary Islands) have become extinct as breeding birds. Here, we report on the population trend of the Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) in the Canaries since the beginning of this century.

Our methods included a literature survey of all published and unpublished works referring to the species. We also conducted a census of Fuerteventura and neighboring islets, the only area where there is still a breeding population, and collected information on the breeding success of this island's population in 1998.

In the Macaronesian region, the Egyptian Vulture is found only in the Canary Islands and Cape Verde. In both cases, it is sedentary and does not migrate to the nearby African continent. The species is also considered accidental in the Azores and Madeira (Le Grand 1983, *Archipelago* 4:49–58; Bannerman and Bannerman 1965, *Birds of the Atlantic Islands*, Vol. II, A history of the birds of Madeiri, the Desertas and the Porto Santo Islands, Oliver and Boyd, London, U.K.). It was relatively abundant in the past in all the Canary Islands, with the exception of La Palma. Since the 1950s, populations have been declining both in the Canary Islands and Cape Verde.

The first census of the population of Egyptian Vultures in the Canary Islands was conducted in 1987. It showed that 31–37 pairs inhabited the islands with 26–31 pairs concentrated in Fuerteventura (Delgado et al. 1993, *Bol. Mus. Munic. Funchal* 2:77–78). The census we conducted in 1998 located only 18 nesting pairs of Egyptian Vultures in Fuerteventura with the possibility of two additional pairs that also probably bred on the island. There were 1–2 pairs in Lanzarote and only one pair on the islet of Alegranza making the total breeding population in the Canary Islands at about 22 breeding pairs. This represented a 30% reduction in the breeding population in 10 yr.

Of the 18 pairs monitored in Fuerteventura, 10 did not breed successfully. Five of these failures occurred when nests were deserted prior to egg laying, three occurred because the eggs were infertile and two occurred when young were stolen from the nests. Only nine young fledged from eight successful breeding attempts for a productivity of only 0.50 young per breeding pair. In other studies carried out in different European regions, the productivity was twice as high averaging 1.00 ($N = 42$) young per breeding pair in Provence (Bergier 1985, *World Working Group for Birds of Prey, Bull.* 2:77–78), 1.10 ($N = 117$) in the French Pyrenees (Braillon 1979, *Le Percnoptere dans les Pyrennes francaises, La grande faune pyreneenne et des montagnes d'Europe*, Université de pau et F.I.E.P., Pau, France) and 0.81 ($N = 117$) in Navarra (Donázar and Ceballos 1988, *Ardeola* 35:3–14).

The theft of eggs and young from nests as well as poisoning and direct disturbances from people near nesting sites are probably factors causing the low reproductive rate of this population. The increasing importance of tourism on the island has caused the gradual abandonment of the traditional economy based on livestock grazing and agriculture and the opening of new roads and the growth of urban areas. Many vultures also die each year because of collisions or electrocution from overhead cables. A study carried out by Lorenzo (1995, *Ecologia* 9:403–407) found six dead adult and juvenile Egyptian Vultures along 45.3 km of powerlines.

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