



The global breeding range of the Bearded Vulture covers a wide area across the Palearctic, Ethiopian and oriental regions. Two subspecies have been recognised, mostly based on morphological features: *barbatus* in Eurasia and N Africa, and *meridionalis* in E and S Africa.

According to available data, about 55% of the European breeding population (c 135 breeding pairs) occurs in the Pyrenees. The reintroduced population in the Alps with about 52 territorial pairs in 2018 is steadily increasing. In Spain, two new breeding populations are being re-established thanks to reintroductions in Andalusia (Sierra de Cazorla, three pairs) and Asturias (Picos de Europa, one pair). In contrast, the two surviving native insular populations of Corsica and Crete are very close to extinction with five pairs each following declines in the first decade of this millennium. The population in Crete was part of a larger population that historically occurred across and around the Balkan Peninsula, from where the vultures were extirpated following systematic persecution. As shown in the change map, spatial losses are concentrated in the above-mentioned Balkan Peninsula and gains in the Iberian Peninsula and in the Alps.

Long-term population monitoring data point to an annual increase in population size of approximately 4% over the past 30 years in the Iberian Peninsula and 10% for the reintroduced population in the Alps (Schaub *et al.* 2009). More information about the demographic situation in Turkey and the Caucasus region is urgently needed.

Declines throughout Europe seem to be mostly due to inadvertent poisoning, lead intoxication from hunting ammunition, collisions with aerial cables, and, even today, direct persecution (Margalida *et al.* 2008), threats that are still widespread across Europe. Mitigation measures against wildlife poisoning as well as targeted supplementary feeding programmes have contributed to enhancing pre-adult survival in the Pyrenees, which triggered a marked population recovery (Oro *et al.* 2008, Margalida *et al.* 2014). The successful recovery of the Bearded Vulture population in the Alps following reintroduction is linked with the availability of carcasses of wild ungulates (notably ibex *Capra ibex*, chamois *Rupicapra rupicapra*, roe deer *Capreolus capreolus* and red deer *Cervus elaphus*), which have shown marked population increases in the past decades (Hirzel *et al.* 2004).

Antoni Margalida & Raphaël Arlettaz

Illustration: Paschalis Dougalis

