

First record of Rüppell's Vulture *Gyps rueppellii* arriving in Morocco from Spain

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The Rüppell's Vulture (*Gyps rueppellii*) is an African species spread in the Sahel belt from southwestern Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia and Guinea east to Sudan and Ethiopia, and thence south through the savannah regions of east Africa, down to Tanzania. The nominate race occurs in most of the species' range. *Erlangeri* occurs in Ethiopia and Somalia. It is considered as a resident but it is able to perform daily movements of 150-200 km away from its local grounds (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001).

The species has suffered a fast population decrease, mostly in West Africa. It has been included in the IUCN Red List as 'Near Threatened' (IUCN 2007).

Out of its distribution range, it has been recorded in south Morocco since the late 1970s (Thévenot *et al.* 2003). The first Spanish record dates from 1992 (Hernández & Otano 1994, Pizarro *et al.* 1994), the first Portuguese record from 1993 (de Juana 2006) and the first sighting on the Spanish side of the Straits of Gibraltar from 1997 (Gutiérrez 2003). Since then, the number of records has greatly increased in the Iberian Peninsula.

The various projects surveying the soaring birds migration on the European side of the Straits of Gibraltar provided a surprising number of Rüppell's Vultures in this area during recent years. As an example, 127 records were obtained in 2009 (Torralvo *et al.* in press). Some of them refer to birds crossing the Straits with Griffon Vultures, either leaving Europe during autumn (e.g. a bird crossing from Tarifa on 28 September 2009, Torralvo *et al.* in press) or reaching Europe during

spring (e.g. Montoya 2008; Ramírez *et al.* 2011; Torralvo *et al.* in press).

Probably due to the lack of regular monitoring programs, no similar data were available on the African side of the Straits but on 9 November 2011, 11:02 AM Universal Time, 146 migrant vultures were detected over Cape Cires in the northernmost part of the Tangier Peninsula, arriving from the European shore. They were flying over the sea at 200-300 meters height and all headed South once inland. One of these vultures was positively identified as a Rüppell's, while the others were the usual Griffon Vultures (*Gyps fulvus*).

Most of recent Moroccan records are from the North of the country, including five in the Tangier Peninsula since 2002 (Ramírez Román & Solís Gómez *in Bergier et al.* 2010; Ramírez Román *et al. in Bergier et al.* 2010; Ramírez Román & El Khamlichi *in Bergier et al.* 2012; Cherkaoui *in Bergier et al.* 2012; Jerez Abad & Ramírez Espinar *in Bergier et al.* 2012) and three at Ceuta involving at least five different individuals (Cambelo Jiménez 2007).

According to these records, the phenologic category of the Rüppell's Vulture has recently been updated from 'Accidental Visitor' to 'Accidental Visitor/Passage Migrant?' in Morocco (Bergier & Thévenot 2010) but Spain still considers it as a rarity (de Juana 2006).

If this movement pattern continues, the status of this 'Near Threatened' African species will need to be reviewed both in Morocco and Spain.

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