

# PREDATION / PROTECTION

## > Please do not disturb!

Seen as a ferocious beast that would not hesitate to steal children, when it was not suspected of being a demon, the bearded vulture was hunted and persecuted by man throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. This, together with its low rate of reproduction, the transformation of the landscape and the gradual disappearance of its food supply, led to its virtual extinction in the Alps.



It was not until the 1980s that a vast international programme of reintroduction brought it back through the release of birds bred in captivity. The population is currently being built up again and numbered 49 reproductive pairs in the Alps in 2019, 17 of which were in the French Alps, 14 with fledglings.

In an extension to the reintroduction programmes, protection plans were rolled out to limit disturbance from human activities (signboards, markers on electric cables and ski lifts...). Goal: to favour reproduction and reduce the risk of adult mortality due to collision, electrocution or intoxication.

## THE EXPERT'S ANSWERS

- 1/ **TRUE**. Thanks to its highly acid digestive juices and after dropping them while flying to break them into smaller pieces.
- 2/ **TRUE**. It regularly takes mud baths in red and orange coloured mud containing iron oxides. We think that this is to mark its territory better.
- 3/ **TRUE**. Because, even if the 2nd egg hatches, the bearded vulture only raises one chick.
- 4/ **FALSE**. Although it can live to an age of 45 in captivity, its average lifespan in the wild is only around 20 years.



## On the trail of ... THE BEARDED VULTURE



**Family:** vulture  
**Height:** 110-150 cm  
**Wingspan:** 260-290 cm  
**Life expectancy:** 30 to 40 years  
**Incubation:** around 55 days  
**Clutch:** 1 or 2 eggs

### Special features

- ✓ Expert gliders
- ✓ Bearded (adult) at 7 years old
- ✓ Bone breaker



## IN THE BEGINNING

### > Bearded vultures are rare in more than one way

As one of the only representatives of the *Gypaetus* species, it is one of the largest species of vulture in Europe, but also one of the most threatened. Recognizable at a distance by its narrow, pointed wings and lozenge-shaped tail, it can also be identified close to by its little beard. As for its very specific diet, this has earned it the nickname of “bone breaker” and gives it a healthy and salutary role.



## DAILY LIFE

### > Compulsory initiation course

I remember the day I left the nest to live my own life as if it were only yesterday. It was the day I learned to fly, without any test flight first, when I was about 4 months old and felt that I was ready. After that I wandered for a long time: a bit like a probationary period of more than 6 years. When I lost my dark downy feathers, I knew I was almost an adult.

### > A certain sense of family

At around 6-7 years old, when I became sexually mature, I settled down and made a home in an eyrie made of plants, branches, sheep's wool and other animal hair.

Actually, an abandoned eagle's eyrie would have done just as well.

I'm not really a jealous type when I have a mate and it is not uncommon for another guy to invite himself into my nest, thus increasing the chances of offspring. Madame lays her eggs at the start of the year and 55 days later, 1 or 2 chicks hatch. Only one of them survives and starts flying in the summer.



### > A master in the art of using leftovers

As the last link of the food chain, I enjoy eating the carcasses of wild or domestic ungulates. My favourite menu: some lovely bones with a little meat and tendons. By doing this, I keep the natural surroundings clean, limit the spread of parasites and prevent disease. I am naturally quite resistant to germs thanks to the high acidity of the digestive juices in my stomach and the only food intolerance I have is to the lead shot left in animal carcasses.

## TRUE OR FALSE ? Answers on the back page

- 1/ The bearded vulture can swallow bones up to 25 cm long.
- 2/ The bearded vulture puts make up on before going out.
- 3/ The bearded vulture is in favour of the one child policy.
- 4/ The bearded vulture goes through a midlife crisis.

## HABITAT

### > Nests galore

A fan of open environments, the bearded vulture prefers rocky cliffs with cavities where it can nest, sheltered from bad weather. Its home area in France is at altitudes ranging from 400 m up to the highest peaks. It can cover up to 700 km<sup>2</sup>, and have several nests in that area, 1 – 2 km apart. It occupies the nests in an unpredictable pattern each year, mainly because it refuses to do any housework!

