

## Reintroduction of the Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* in Nebrodi Regional Park, Sicily

### Nebrodi Regional Park staff

The Nebrodi Regional Park is the largest protected area in Sicily, containing 25% of the island's forests. The Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* was common in Sicily until the mid-1900s (Benoit 1840, Minà Palumbo 1853, 1857, Doderlein 1869-74, Massa 1985, Iapichino & Massa 1989) and the last Sicilian population lived in the Nebrodi Regional Park until 1969. In this year, the Griffon Vulture became extinct in Sicily due to a poisoning event (Priolo 1967). A reintroduction plan for this species has been underway in the Nebrodi Regional Park since 1998, with the main aim of increasing biodiversity in this conservation area. As a scavenging species, Griffon Vultures also fulfil an important ecological role. With the reintroduction of nearly 30 vultures during the period 1998 to 2004, a small population of ten Griffon Vultures established itself.

In December 2004 the vultures initiated breeding and in February 2005 three eggs were laid by two pairs. There were two eggs in one nest, an exceptional event as Griffon Vultures usually lay only one egg (Cramp & Simmons 1980, Brichetti et al. 1992). It does not seem as if two females each laid an egg in one nest. During the last week of April 2005, the three Griffon Vulture eggs hatched, marking the first Sicilian breeding of this species in more than 40 years. To promote the success of this project, the Park administration has recently established two feeding stations and these are already being used by the small vulture population. To continue with the reintroduction programme in the Nebrodi Regional Park, 12 Griffon Vultures will be released in the Park in the next few months and it is also planned to import additional birds from Spain.

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