

Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) in the Mahazat as-Sayd Protected area in west-central Saudi Arabia

The Egyptian Vulture's *Neophron percnopterus* current status is Least Concern (BirdLife International 2004), and there has been a sharp population decline in Europe and elsewhere in the world. If the population is also declining in other parts of its range, then the species would warrant upgrading to the Vulnerable (or even Endangered) status.

In Saudi Arabia it was never a common species, but regularly seen in the west-central part of Saudi Arabia. In March 2007, we saw ten Egyptian Vultures feeding on a carcass in the Mahazat as-Sayd protected area. Such a large aggregation of the species has not previously been recorded in Saudi Arabia.

The Mahazat as-Sayd protected area in Makkah province is 219 000 ha in size. It is fairly flat area, 900-1100 m

a.s.l., comprising sandy plains and a few rocky outcrops. Mahazat is a special nature reserve and it was established in 1988 for the reintroducing of Arabian Oryx *Oryx leucoryx*, Arabian Gazelle *Gazella arabica* and Houbara Bustards *Chlamydotis undulata*. Mahazat as-Sayd is about 175 km north-west of Taif and south of al-Muwayh. It is fenced and moderately to well vegetated with *Acacia totilis*, *Indigofera* spp and *Salsola* spp as dominant shrub/trees. The Mahazat as-Sayd protected area has a large breeding population of Lappet-faced Vultures *Torgos tracheliotos* and Egyptian Vultures are regularly observed.

We plan to start detailed surveys of Egyptian Vultures in Saudi Arabia in order to determine their population and breeding status and the extent of their population decline.

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