

First migration of released captive-bred Egyptian vulture juveniles in Italy (2004-2015)



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Will Egyptian vulture survive in Italy? This dramatic question paints the delicate situation of this small vulture, holding since a long time the sad record of the most threatened bird of prey in Italy.

Every year its extinction seems closer, almost inexorable. In 2016 there were only 8 breeding pairs, concentrated in Basilicata, Calabria and Sicily.

In 2016 the CERM Association holds, at the homonymous breeding facility in Rocchette di Fazio (GR, Tuscany), 42 Egyptian vultures of different ages and origin; a part of these animals is employed for the captive breeding programme.



The Egyptian Vulture Project (Progetto Capovaccaio), carried out by the CERM Association, implements some practical conservation measures in the attempt to prevent the loss of the species:

- development of captive breeding techniques;
- release into the wild of captive-bred juveniles, thanks to the cooperation with Italian and European authorities, institutions and associations;
- management of supplementary feeding points in sensitive areas.



The CERM Association started to release captive-bred juveniles in 2003. These operations led to the release of 19 juveniles until the year 2015 by using the hacking method (with one exception in 2003).

Most of the released juveniles were born at CERM while some others in the zoos of Jeréz de La Frontera (Spain), Prague and Zlin (Czech Republic).

The information provided by the remote monitoring (9) and the direct observations of the first migration of 12 released juveniles suggests that the juveniles born in June and released in September don't follow the "right" flyway followed by adults and immatures to reach Africa, which crosses the straight (150 km) between Marettimo Island (Egadi Archipelago) and Cap Bon (Tunisia).

When in Sicily these juveniles move southwards and try to cross the Mediterranean sea along an accidental path which leads them to fly over 500 km over the sea, with an high risk of drowning.

We think that this behaviour is due to the lack of adults and immatures to be followed along the traditional migration route.

In late Summer juveniles have scarce probability of meeting migrating adults and immatures as their number is low and the migratory peak has already occurred.

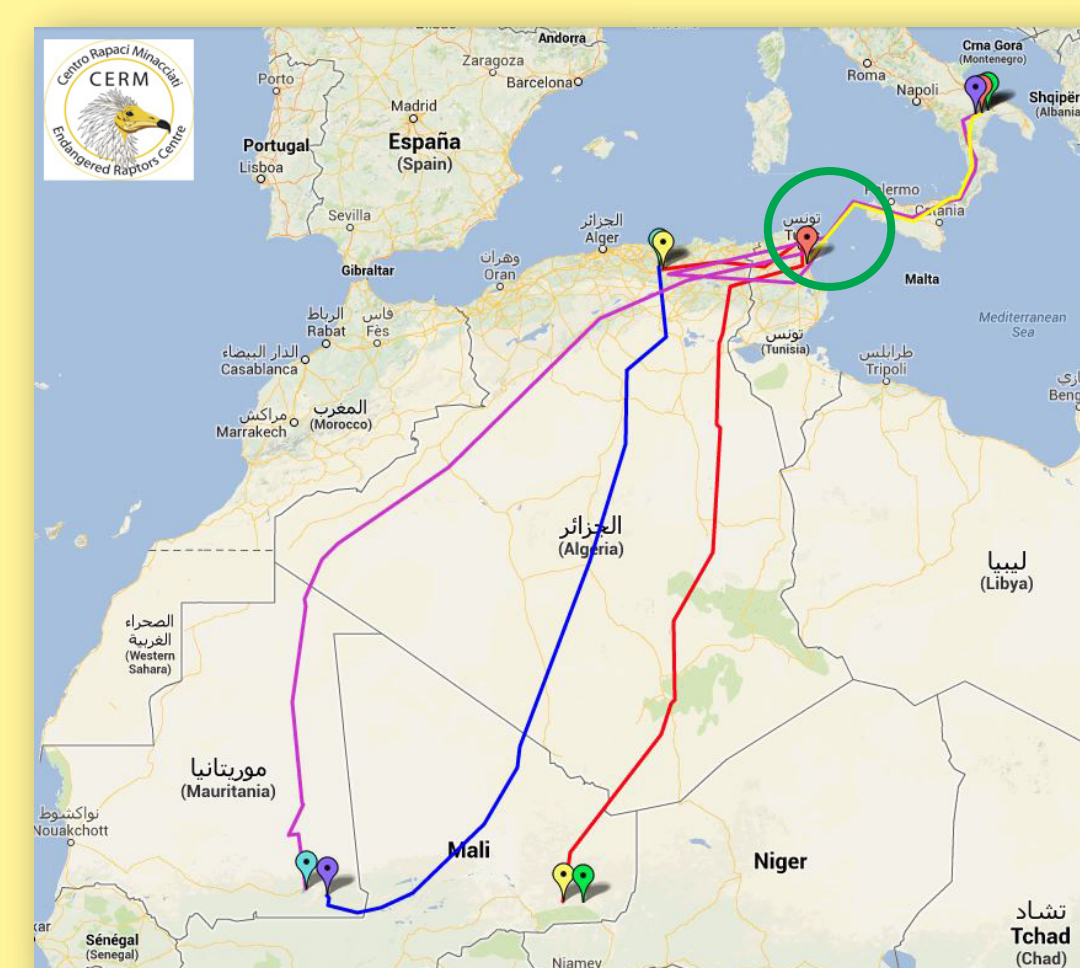
CONCLUSIONS

In order to decrease the mortality of the captive-bred juveniles during the first Autumn migration it would probably be helpful:

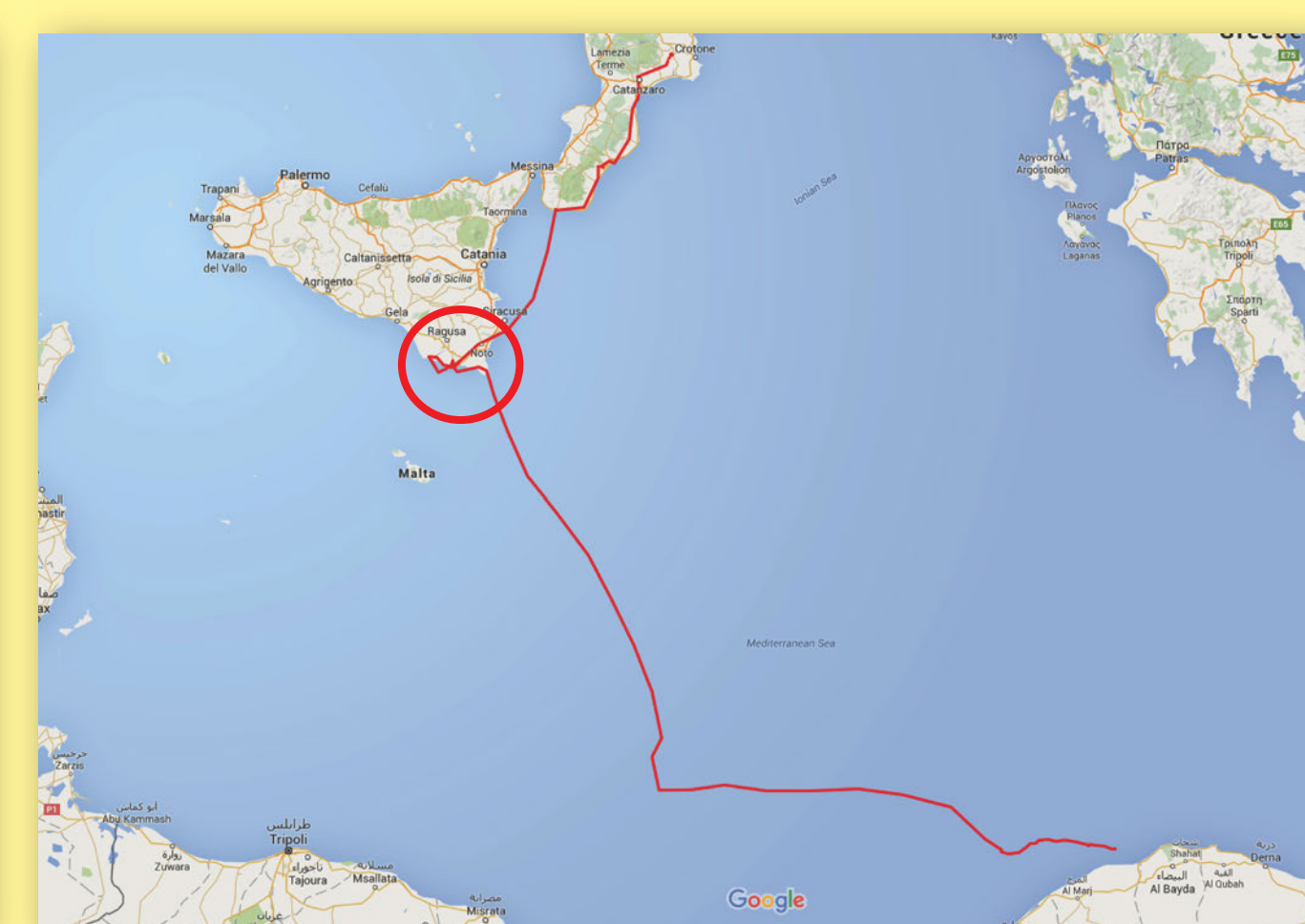
- to release late-born individuals in the next Spring (as already tested in Israel), so that they could have more chances of meeting adults and immatures and follow them along the safest migration route;
- to release the greatest possible numbers of captive-bred individuals in the next years in order to allow the safest path to be perpetuated.

Thanks to

Right flyway



Wrong flyway



Birth and release month	n. E.V.	Right flyway	Wrong flyway	Arrived in Africa	Dropped into the sea	No data
May; August	7	5 (71,42%)	2 (28,58%)	4 (57,14%)	2 (28,57%)	1 (14,28%)
June; September	5	0 (0,00%)	5 (100,00%)	2 (40,00%)	2 (40,00%)	1 (20,00%)
TOTAL	12	5	7	6	4	2
	100,00%	41,67%	58,33%	50,00%	33,33%	16,67%

