



LIFE SUPport Project Networking Activities

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Associated beneficiary	STICHTING THE VULTURE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION (VCF) JAVNA USTANOVA PRIRODA (JU Priroda) HEP-OPERATOR DISTRIBUCIJSKOG SUSTAVA DOO ZA DISTRIBUCIJU I OPSKRBU ELEKTRICNE ENERGIJE d.o.o. (HEP-ODS) OPĆINA BAŠKA Affiliated partner: TRGOVAČKO DRUŠTVO BAŠKA d.o.o. Associated partner: Directorate for Nature Protection of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Green Transition
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1. Introduction

Successful conservation of the Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) and other related species relies to a large extent on effective international cooperation. Their populations in Europe are currently partially geographically fragmented, while individual birds travel over large distances, particularly during the juvenile stage. Conserving these populations and reducing threats therefore require cooperation and the exchange of experience among countries, projects and organisations involved in their conservation. A number of LIFE projects across Europe focus on restoring vulture populations, improving conditions for their survival and reducing the main threats, providing opportunities to exchange and apply experience gained in different areas. In addition, reintroduction projects are returning birds to parts of their former range, thereby further strengthening the overall population.

Since its launch, LIFE SUPport has made use of opportunities to connect with other LIFE projects and international initiatives addressing vulture conservation and related threats. The project proposal foresees the exchange of experience and good practices with international partners and the use of relevant experience from other projects in implementing activities in Croatia. During the project, partners have participated in international conferences and expert events and organised a targeted study visit, with key stakeholders relevant to applying the experience gained in Croatia involved in selected activities.

In 2023, representatives of the LIFE SUPport partnership participated in two important international events. In May, representatives of Biom Association and HEP DSO attended the international conference “Best practices for mitigating electrocution and collision risk” in Cagliari, Sardinia, organised within the LIFE Safe for Vultures project, whose partners include the Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF) and E-Distribuzione, the host of the conference. In November, several representatives of the LIFE SUPport partnership attended the European Vulture Conference in Cáceres, Spain, organised by VCF within the LIFE Aegyptius Return project.

In July 2026, VCF organised a targeted study visit to Sardinia, bringing together representatives of three Balkan vulture conservation projects – LIFE SUPport, LIFE Balkan GriffON and Raptors for LIFE – to visit and exchange experience with the Sardinian LIFE Safe for Vultures project. The visit focused on food availability, feeding-site management, and the veterinary and sanitary framework. In addition to project partners, the Croatian delegation included a representative of the Directorate for Veterinary and Food Safety of the Croatian Ministry of Agriculture, enabling the experience gained in Sardinia to be directly linked to activities implemented in Croatia.

In the final year of the project, international activities will gradually shift towards presenting and transferring the results and experience developed through LIFE SUPport.

2. International Conference “Best practices for mitigating electrocution and collision risk”

The international conference “Best practices for mitigating electrocution and collision risk” was held on 23–24 May 2023 in Cagliari, Sardinia. Dubravko Dender from Biom Association and Marta Malenica from HEP DSO participated on behalf of the LIFE SUPport project partnership.

The conference was organised within the LIFE Safe for Vultures project, which implemented Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) conservation activities in Sardinia. The project was coordinated by the University of Sassari, with partners including the Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF) and E-Distribuzione, the Italian distribution system operator responsible for implementing measures to reduce electrocution and collision risks associated with electricity infrastructure. E-Distribuzione hosted the conference, while VCF coordinated the event. The conference brought together around 100 participants, including nature conservation experts, researchers, representatives of the electricity sector, public institutions and various European projects. The programme focused on assessing electrocution and collision risks and implementing measures to reduce bird mortality associated with electricity infrastructure.

Experience from Italy, Spain, Portugal and other European areas was presented, together with IUCN guidance on interactions between wildlife and electricity infrastructure. Topics included risk assessment and mapping, pole configurations and other network elements that increase electrocution risk, insulation of conductors and other hazardous parts of the infrastructure, the effectiveness and maintenance of protective materials, and measures to increase conductor visibility and reduce collision risk.

E-Distribuzione’s experience in implementing measures in Sardinia was particularly relevant to LIFE SUPport activities. Within the LIFE Safe for Vultures project, priority areas for intervention were identified by combining movement data from GPS-tracked birds with known mortality records. Critical sections of the network were identified in areas with the highest Griffon Vulture presence, and mitigation measures were implemented on medium-voltage power lines. A similar approach has been applied within LIFE SUPport to identify risk areas and prioritise measures on the distribution network on Cres.

The conference also enabled direct exchange of experience between the nature conservation and electricity sectors, covering topics from monitoring and spatial risk analysis to technical design, maintenance and adaptation of electricity infrastructure. The experience gained is relevant to the continued implementation of LIFE SUPport activities aimed at reducing electrocution and collision risks on Croatia’s distribution network.

3. 2nd European Vulture Conference

LIFE SUPport partners participated in the 2nd European Vulture Conference, held from 14 to 17 November 2023 in Cáceres, Spain. The conference was organised by the Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF), a LIFE SUPport project partner, within the LIFE Aegyptius Return project. Participation in the conference was not foreseen in the original LIFE SUPport activity plan; however, once the event was announced, the opportunity was taken for representatives of several organisations within the project partnership to attend.

LIFE SUPport was represented at the conference by Dubravko Dender and Andreas Engelen from Biom Association, Marko Modrić and Elvis Vuleta from the Public Institution “Priroda”, and Marija Nezirović from the Agricultural Cooperative „Otok Krk“. The event therefore brought together project representatives involved in different aspects of implementing Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) conservation activities in Croatia.



LIFE SUPport delegation at the 2nd European Vulture Conference in Cáceres.

According to the organisers, the 2nd European Vulture Conference brought together around 400 participants from 46 countries. The programme included 110 standard presentations, 20 short presentations, four plenary talks, two round tables, a workshop, 61 posters, as well as networking and field activities. The topics covered by the programme closely matched many of the areas addressed by LIFE SUPport. Research and practical experience were presented on vulture population monitoring, food availability and feeding-site management, poisoning and the use of veterinary medicinal products, mortality

associated with electricity infrastructure, rehabilitation and release of birds, GPS tracking, and reintroduction programmes. LIFE SUPport participants were therefore able to explore a range of approaches to addressing threats that are also relevant to the Croatian Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) population.

A particular value of the conference for LIFE SUPport was that it brought together a large number of organisations and projects working on vulture conservation in one place. Participants included representatives of LIFE and other projects, NGOs, public institutions, protected-area managers, research institutions and other expert organisations. This enabled direct contact with projects implementing activities comparable to those of LIFE SUPport and discussions on practical experience with their implementation. Although the conference focused primarily on European vulture populations, it had a much broader international dimension, with experts and organisations from other parts of the world also participating. This provided insight into approaches to vulture conservation under different ecological, social and legislative conditions.

The concluding field programme in Extremadura, one of Europe's most important regions for vulture conservation, provided additional value. The field component offered direct insight into areas where large populations of these species coexist with different forms of land use, including extensive livestock farming. This is particularly relevant to LIFE SUPport because the persistence of Croatia's Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) population is closely linked to traditional livestock farming and food availability on the Kvarner islands.

Participation in the conference was particularly useful because it took place during the first year of LIFE SUPport implementation, when many project activities were only beginning. Bringing together a large number of experts, organisations and projects addressing different aspects of vulture conservation enabled project partners, at an early stage of implementation, to learn from experience and approaches in other countries, establish contacts with relevant organisations and exchange experience on issues addressed by LIFE SUPport. In particular, the conference provided opportunities to network with representatives of a number of LIFE and other conservation projects at different stages of their implementation, including completed projects, ongoing initiatives and projects that were only starting their activities. This enabled the exchange of experience both with projects that could share results and lessons learned from completed activities and with those addressing similar challenges in parallel with LIFE SUPport. The conference therefore provided an important opportunity for international networking by the project partnership and for applying the experience gained in the further implementation of project activities.

4. Study visit to the LIFE Safe for Vultures project in Sardinia

The study visit to Sardinia took place from 30 June to 3 July 2026 and was organised by the Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF). Representatives of LIFE SUPport, together with representatives of other LIFE projects from the Balkans, visited the LIFE Safe for Vultures project in Sardinia. The visit focused on exchanging experience in vulture conservation, with particular emphasis on food availability, feeding-site management, the veterinary and sanitary framework, and population management and restoration. Participants from Croatia included Dubravko Dender and Ivana Ribić from Biom Association, Tomislav Anić from the Beli Visitor Centre and Griffon Vulture Rescue Centre managed by the Public Institution “Priroda”, Branka Filipović from the Municipality of Baška, and Vlatka Tomašić from the Directorate for Veterinary and Food Safety, who is also a member of the LIFE SUPport Project Steering Committee. In addition to project partners, the Croatian delegation therefore included stakeholders directly involved in the management of the rescue centre and feeding sites, local government, and the competent veterinary authority.



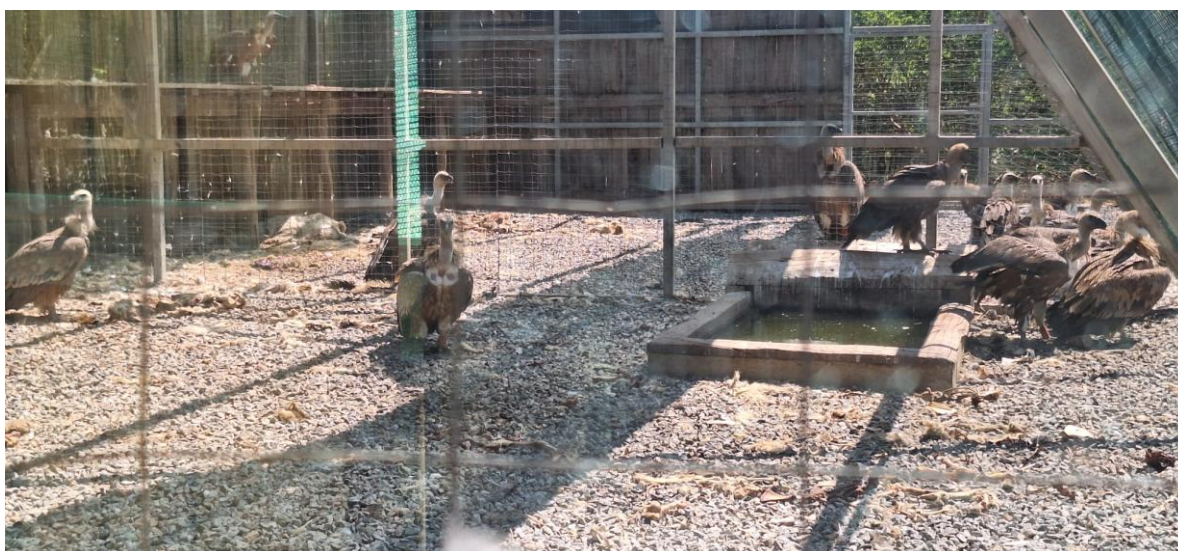
LIFE SUPport delegation during the study visit to Sardinia.

Sardinia provides a particularly relevant example for LIFE SUPport because the island supports a significant Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) population, and long-term conservation activities have developed a system combining population management, improved food availability, cooperation with livestock farmers, reduction of key threats, and the involvement of different public institutions and sectors. Of particular relevance to LIFE SUPport is Sardinia's experience in developing a network of feeding sites on livestock farms. In Croatia, feeding sites for Griffon Vultures have so far largely been established and managed by public institutions responsible for protected areas, with the exception of the feeding site established by the Rewilding Velebit Foundation. The Sardinian model extends this approach by directly involving livestock farms in providing food for vultures. Subject to the prescribed veterinary and sanitary requirements, local livestock farmers may leave livestock carcasses at authorised feeding sites on their own farms. This creates a spatially distributed network of food sources linked to areas of extensive livestock farming, rather than relying exclusively on a small number of centralised feeding sites.

This approach is particularly relevant to Croatia because of the decline in traditional livestock farming and the resulting reduction in food availability for Griffon Vultures. Its application, however, depends directly on the veterinary and sanitary framework governing the use of animal by-products. For this reason, a representative of the Directorate for Veterinary and Food Safety was included in the study visit. Vlatka Tomašić's participation enabled direct exchange of experience with the Italian authorities responsible for

authorising and supervising feeding sites, as well as discussion of the potential application of appropriate solutions under Croatian conditions.

On the second day, participants visited LIFE Safe for Vultures infrastructure in Villasalto, including an acclimatisation aviary and a centralised feeding site managed by the regional agency Forestas. They learned how the infrastructure operates and about experience related to population reinforcement and the recolonisation of parts of the species' former range. On the third day, the visit continued in the Bosa area, which supports a Griffon Vulture colony, and at Monte Minerva, a site used for bird releases. An important component of the study visit was direct exchange with representatives of the Department of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Sassari, the regional agency Forestas, the Corpo Forestale e di Vigilanza Ambientale, and local health authorities responsible for authorising and supervising feeding sites. Participants also visited a feeding site established on a livestock farm through the LIFE Safe for Vultures project and gained first-hand insight into its operation. The experience from Sardinia is directly relevant to LIFE SUPport activities aimed at ensuring the long-term availability of food for Croatia's Griffon Vulture population. The project works with existing feeding sites in the Kvarner region and is working to establish an additional feeding site on Krk, while also cooperating with livestock farmers and the competent veterinary authorities. The Sardinian model demonstrates the potential for further developing a system in which food provision is not limited to centralised feeding sites but is more closely integrated with livestock farming and the areas where vultures naturally forage.



Acclimatisation aviary in Villasalto.

The participation of Branka Filipović from the Municipality of Baška provided direct insight into different feeding and feeding-site management models relevant to the establishment of the new feeding site on Krk, while the participation of a representative of the Beli Visitor Centre and Griffon Vulture Rescue Centre enabled the exchange of experience related to feeding sites, the admission and rehabilitation of birds, and the management of infrastructure used for species conservation.

On the third day, a separate expert meeting was held on the potential reintroduction of the Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) in Croatia. The meeting was linked to the preparation of the Feasibility Study for the species' reintroduction, initiated by Biom Association in 2026. Discussions covered experience from reintroduction programmes, the preconditions for re-establishing a population, and the issues that need to be considered when assessing the feasibility of reintroducing the species in Croatia.

In addition to the specific technical topics, the study visit had an important networking function. Alongside LIFE SUPport representatives, representatives of LIFE Balkan GriffON and the forthcoming Raptors for

LIFE project took part in the visit to LIFE Safe for Vultures, enabling an exchange of experience among projects working on vulture conservation in different parts of the Balkans. At the same time, the involvement of local government, the managers of the rescue centre and feeding sites, and the competent veterinary authority ensured that experience from LIFE Safe for Vultures was transferred directly to stakeholders with an immediate role in developing and implementing relevant solutions in Croatia.

5. Further networking and dissemination activities

International networking activities will continue until the end of the project, with the emphasis gradually shifting from gathering experience towards presenting and transferring LIFE SUPport results. Contacts established with other LIFE projects, organisations and experts through activities to date will remain relevant to completing project activities, developing the After-LIFE approach, and potential future initiatives for vulture conservation in Croatia and the region.

The project proposal envisaged a networking visit to the Cyprus-based LIFE with Vultures project, focused on the conservation of the Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) in Cyprus. A separate visit to Cyprus has not been organised to date because direct exchange with representatives of that project took place during the 2nd European Vulture Conference. Given the contacts and exchange of experience already achieved, as well as the logistical demands of a separate trip to Cyprus, such a visit has not been considered necessary at this stage. The possibility of organising it nevertheless remains open until the end of LIFE SUPport should it prove to offer additional value for project implementation.

Participation in the 3rd European Vulture Conference in Bulgaria is planned for the final year of the project. While the events attended to date have primarily focused on networking and the exchange of experience useful for project implementation, participation in this conference will focus mainly on disseminating LIFE SUPport results. The aim is to present the results, experience and transferable approaches developed through the project to the international expert community, including experience related to food availability, reducing poisoning and electrocution, monitoring, and cross-sectoral cooperation.

The international component of LIFE SUPport therefore encompasses both directions of exchange: drawing on relevant experience from other LIFE projects and experts during project implementation, and presenting and transferring the project's own results and experience to other projects and initiatives during its final phase.