BEARDED VULTURE (Gypaetus barbatus)

IDENTIFICATION
102-117 cm. Adult with creamy head and neck, with a black line from the head to the base of bill becoming a “beard”; dark upperparts with fine pale streaks; buff underparts. Juvenile dark brown, with pale streaks on wing and upperparts.

SIMILAR SPECIES
This species is unmistakable.

SEXING
Plumage of both sexes alike.

MOULT
Partial postbreeding moult changing each year only small body feathers on head and body; bigger body feathers and wing coverts are moulted spending several years; this species spends 4 years to change primaries: the 1st year changes 3 to 5 inner feathers; the 2nd year changes till 8th primary: the outermost are changed in the 3rd year and the 10th in the 4th year; moult is active between June and November. Duration of postjuvenile moult is 4 to 5 years; most of the body feathers and some inner primaries are moulted in 2nd year; median primaries and a large number of secondaries are moulted in 3rd year; outer primaries and the old juvenile secondaries can spend two years to be changed; moult period is active between April and November.

AGEING
7 types of age can be recognized (CAUTION: there are individual factors (different metabolism, food availability, date of birth, e.g.) causing that the moult in a so big birds no always fit exactly the annual cycle described here):

Juvenile with fresh plumage and without moult limits; black head and neck; dark iris; very small beard; mantle with a distinct white “triangle”; brown upperparts; brown wing coverts with some white feathers; dark brown breast and underparts with pale mottled.

2nd year autumn/3rd year spring with moulted inner primaries; black head and neck; pale iris; mantle with a less prominent white “triangle”; brown upperparts; brown wing coverts with more white feathers; pale brown breast and underparts.

3rd year autumn/4th year spring with strong moult limit on flight feathers between the short and rounded new feathers and the long and pointed juvenile feathers; black head and neck with some pale feathers on cheek; yellow iris; mantle without a white “triangle”; brown upperparts; wing coverts paler than the flight feathers, sometime with some white feathers; pale brown breast and underparts.

4th year autumn/5th year spring with juvenil outermost primaries; neck still black and sides and top of the head white; narrow band on breast; brown upperparts; wing coverts paler than the flight feathers, sometime with some white feathers; pale brown breast and underparts.

5th year autumn/6th year spring with white head and neck and still some black feathers on neck; wing coverts still with some pale mottled; pale brown breast and underparts but still with come contrast.

6th year autumn/7th year spring similar to adult, but with subadult feathers on neck, breast and underwing coverts.

Adult with white to orange head, neck, and breast and underparts; fine collar on breast; black feathers on upperparts with silvery centres; black wing coverts; grey flight feathers.

PHENOLOGY
STATUS IN ARAGON
Resident, breeds in Pyrenees with vagrant birds in Sistema Iberico. An endangered species with less than 100 breeding pairs.