



ORNITHOLOGY

Spring vagrancy of Egyptian Vulture north of its range

7 May 2026

By Marc Duquet



Adult Egyptian Vulture, Greece, January 2024 (© Frédéric Lelièvre)

In the latest issue of *Notes d'ornithologie française* (Dubois & Duquet 2026), we reported three records of the Egyptian Vulture in May 2021 (Tissier 2021), May 2024 (Cowles 2024) and May 2025 (S. Chanel/Faune France) in the Rhône department, where the species had not been seen since 1891. Intrigued by the similarity of the dates, I searched for other spring records in the northern half of France and found that there were quite a few. Birds regularly reach the Atlantic coast (Trolliet 1980, Recorbet 1992) and even Brittany (Gager *et al.* 1986, Cozic & Le Corre 2010), the shores of the English Channel and the north-east. Further research on eBird revealed that Egyptian Vultures also venture (very occasionally) further north in spring, as far as the British Isles and southern Scandinavia. This article presents these data and attempts to explain them.

I - The Egyptian Vulture

I-1. Distribution

In Europe, where the subspecies *percnopterus* is found, 50% of the population breeds on the Iberian Peninsula, amounting to approximately 1,500 pairs (del Moral & Molina 2020). The Balkan population, which has declined sharply, numbers fewer than 70 pairs, and there are around 10 pairs remaining in Italy, the species having disappeared from Sicily and the south of the peninsula (Oppel & Margalida 2020). In France, the Egyptian Vulture population remains relatively stable, with 87 breeding pairs in 2024, 67 of which are in the Pyrenees and the Aude, and 20 in the south-east (Quaintenne *et al.* 2026).

I-2. Migrations

Western European Egyptian Vultures leave their breeding grounds between the second ten-day period of September and the first few days of October, and migrate via Gibraltar to overwinter in the western Sahel, specifically from Mauritania and Senegal to Mali (Phipps *et al.* 2019). The autumn migration of French birds begins as early as the last ten days of August and ends in the second ten days of September, with only a few stragglers remaining until the end of that month (Kobierzycki 2022). Breeding birds from Eastern Europe (the Balkans), meanwhile, migrate via the Bosphorus and spend the winter in the eastern part of the Sahel, mainly in Chad and Sudan, whilst those from the Caucasus spend the winter in the Horn of Africa (Phipps *et al.* 2019).

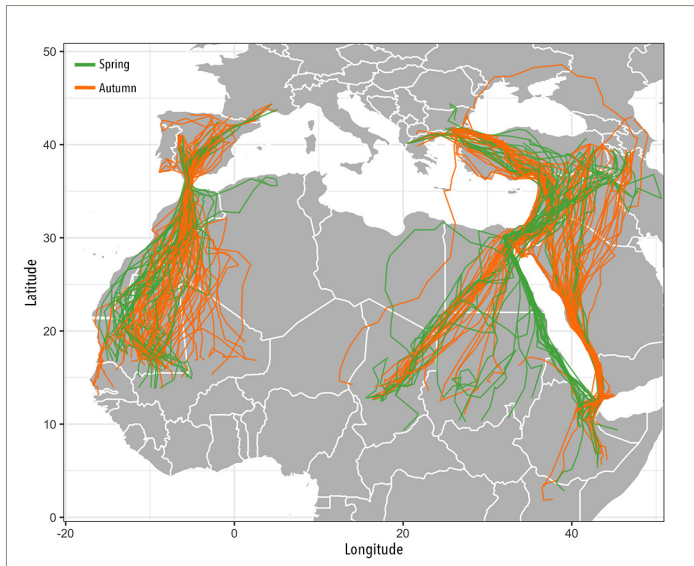


fig. 1. Track records of the 188 migrations undertaken by 60 Egyptian vultures in spring ($n = 71$) and autumn ($n = 117$), according to Phipps *et al.* (2019)

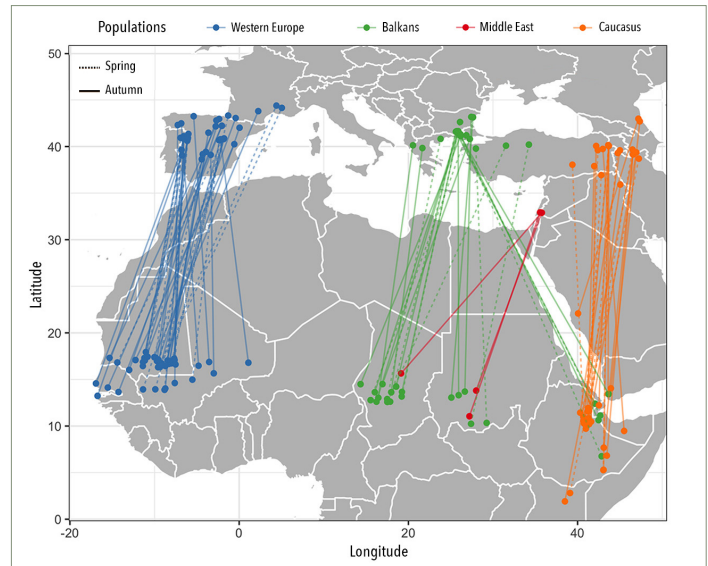


fig. 2. Starting and ending points of the spring and autumn migrations of 60 Egyptian vultures from four subpopulations, according to Phipps *et al.* (2019)

In spring, breeding adults return to their European nesting sites between early March (sometimes as early as late February) and mid-April, with most arriving in the second ten-day period of March (Phipps *et al.* 2019). However, non-breeding individuals (immature and subadult birds) leave their wintering grounds nearly a month after the adults, that is, in the last ten days of March, and appear in Europe from the second ten days of April to the first few days of May (Phipps *et al.* 2019). Thus, in Gibraltar, the spring passage of adults takes place in March, whilst that of 2–3-year-old immature birds occurs between mid-April and early May (Génsbøl 2009).

During spring migration, Egyptian vultures from south-eastern France follow a corridor approximately 100 km wide between the Pyrénées-Orientales and the Ardèche to the north and the Bouches-du-Rhône to the east; the species is only occasionally found elsewhere in France and very rarely ventures beyond the Midi (Kobierzycki 2022). Pre-breeding sightings outside the southern regions occur between mid-April and early June, particularly during the month of May (Dubois *et al.* 2008).



Immature Egyptian Vulture, Spain, July 2021 (© Miguel Rodríguez Esteban)

II – The Egyptian Vulture north of the Massif Central and the Alps

II-1. Source of data

The dataset analysed here is unlikely to be exhaustive. The European data (16 records relating to 11 individuals) originate from eBird (<https://ebird.org/home>), whilst the national records come from Faune France (<https://www.faune-france.org/>). For the latter, I selected records made between March and June north of a line connecting Bordeaux to Lyon, totalling 58 records (relating to 57 individuals) for the period 1967–2026. There are also a significant number of spring records (white circles in Figure 1) on the outskirts of breeding areas which have not been taken into account here. In total, therefore, 74 records of Egyptian vultures (68 individuals) were obtained in Western Europe north of 45° latitude. In addition to these northern European data, there are records from the Netherlands, Finland and Estonia (BOURC 2025).

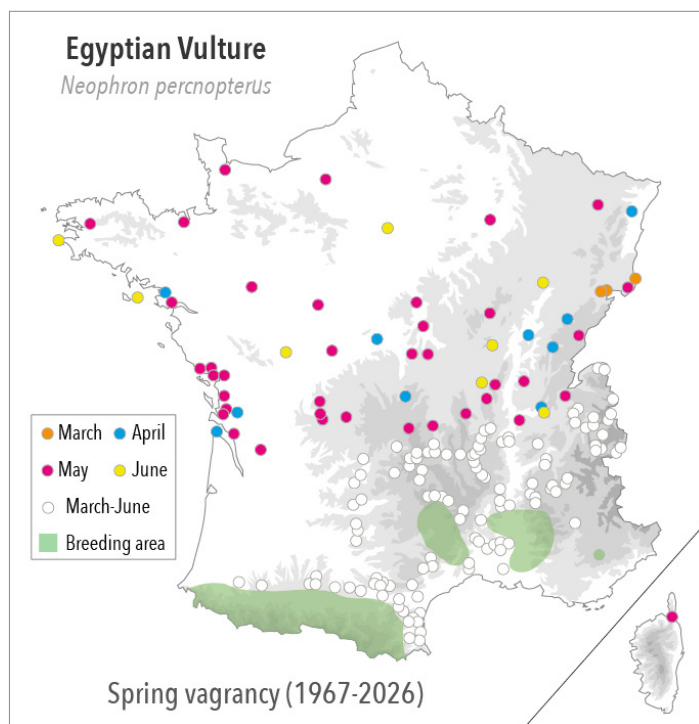


fig. 3. Spring data of Egyptian vulture in France (1976-2026)

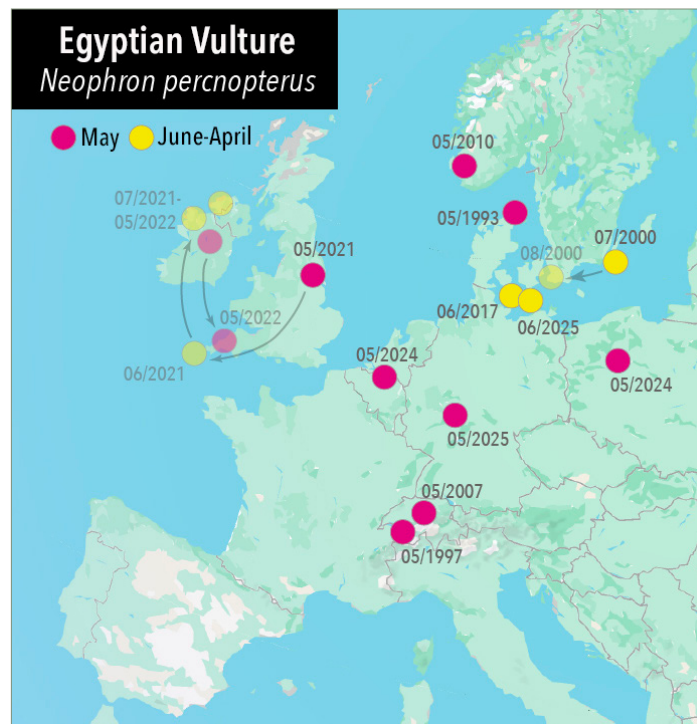


fig. 4. Spring vagrancy records of the Egyptian Vulture in Western Europe

II-2. Distribution of sightings

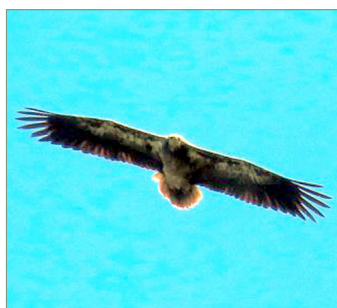
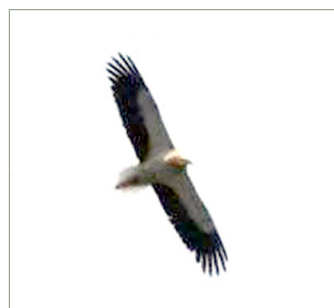
Figure 3 shows records of the Egyptian Vulture in France north of the Massif Central and the Alps. This map shows that the species regularly reaches the Atlantic coast (from the Gironde estuary to the Loire estuary) and strays as far as Brittany (Finistère and Côtes-d'Armor) and Normandy (Manche and Eure) in the north-west, as well as Lorraine (Moselle) and Alsace (Bas-Rhin) in the north-east. It is also noted that the number of individuals observed in May (red dots) is by far the highest (63.2%, $n = 57$), with April (blue dots) and June (yellow dots) accounting for 21.1% and 14% of the birds respectively, whilst a single individual was sighted at several locations in March (1.8%).

Figure 4 shows the few Northern European records collected, most of which (72.7%, $n = 11$) relate to birds also observed in May (red dots), with the remainder recorded from June to April (yellow dots). The arrows and transparent dots indicate the movements of a single bird observed at several locations:

- thus, the individual (age unspecified) seen on 13 August 2000 at Falsterbo is likely to be the same bird that had been reported on 9 July and on 2 and 3 August 2000 on the island of Öland, 240 km to the east,
- a subadult that arrived in Lincolnshire on 13 May 2021 and was seen again in the Isles of Scilly on 14 June 2021 subsequently continued on to Ireland, where it stayed from 14 July 2021 to 6 May 2022 in the counties of Donegal, Mayo and Roscommon, before being sighted again on 22 May 2022 in Cornwall, having in the meantime acquired its full adult plumage (BOURC 2025); this individual's prolonged, wintering stay in the British Isles remains highly unusual.

II-3. Age of birds

Among the records of vagrant birds in the northern part of the range for which age was recorded ($n = 61$), 18 individuals were identified as immature, *i.e.* predominantly brown birds, 12 as subadults and 31 as adults, making a total of 43 in predominantly black and white plumage. It can also be assumed that the rare observations ($n = 8$) for which the plumage type was not specified refer to adult-type birds as well, as a brown bird would in most cases prompt a specification of age, the species being by default associated with its adult plumage. Thus, nearly three-quarters (73.9%) of Egyptian Vultures observed in Europe north of the species' breeding range are adult-type birds, and only a quarter (26.1%) are brown immature birds.

Immature Egyptian Vulture,
Finistère, June 2024 (© Stéphane Guérin)Immature Egyptian Vulture,
Moselle, May 2021 (© Nicolas Hoffmann)Adult Egyptian Vulture, Maine-et-Loire,
May 2024 (© Frantz Barrault)Adult Egyptian Vulture, Doubs,
May 2025 (© Mikael Viain)

III – Discussion

Whilst the majority of data from northern regions relate to birds in adult-type plumage, these are not necessarily sexually mature individuals. In the Egyptian Vulture, the median age at first breeding is 6 years for females and 7 years for males, which means that birds displaying adult plumage (from the age of four) may in fact still be biologically immature (Sanz-Aguilar *et al.* 2017). This immaturity – and consequently the absence of breeding and, therefore, of a fixed breeding range – explains the erratic movements of these individuals during the breeding season.

Furthermore, the scarcity of brown birds in the northern part of the species' range is due to the fact that juveniles fledged from early August to mid-September (Kobierzycki 2015) and begin their autumn migration shortly afterwards, mainly between the last ten days of August and the second ten days of September (Kobierzycki 2022). Furthermore, juveniles remain in their African wintering grounds for more than a year after their first migration (Phipps *et al.* 2019), with some individuals not returning to Europe until they are 4-5 years old (by which time they have adult plumage), which explains why brown immature birds are rare in Europe (Gensbøl 2009).

Given the later spring migration dates of immature and subadult birds and their vagrant nature (Phipps *et al.* 2019), these individuals are most likely to be found north of the species' breeding range. However, as the plumage of these birds is almost entirely black and white from the age of 3 years (4th year), they are often identified as 'adults'.

It should be noted that there have already been three 'northern' sightings of Egyptian Vultures during the spring of 2026 in France: the sighting – remarkable for the number of birds involved – of two adults on 17 April 2026 at La Celle-Condé (Cher), as well as two others on 29 April in the east of the country, namely one adult at Marlenheim (Bas-Rhin) and one individual (age unspecified) at Saint-Germain-les-Paroisses (Ain). As the month of May is even more conducive to this sort of unexpected sighting, perhaps you will be lucky enough to spot an Egyptian Vulture somewhere in the northern half of France?



Adult Egyptian Vulture and European Magpies, Dagestan, May 2023 (© Slava Luzanow)

References : • BOURC (2025). Egyptian Vulture added to Category A of the British List. *Rare Bird Alert* 27 mars 2025. • Cowles T. (2024). Un Vautour percnoptère dans le Rhône : deuxième citation départementale depuis 1891. *L'Effraie* 64 : 24-27. • Cozic E. & Le Corre Y. (2010). Un Vautour percnoptère *Neophron percnopterus* dans les monts d'Arrée en mai 2008. *Ar Vran* 21-1 : 29-32. • del Moral J.C. & Molina B. (eds) (2020). *El alimoche común en España, población reproductora en 2019 t método de censo*. SEO/BirLife, Madrid. • Dubois P.J. & Duquet M. (2026). Notes d'ornithologie française (NOF 5) : partie 2. *Post-Ornithos* 3 : e2026.02.20. • Dubois P.J., Olliso G., Le Maréchal P. & Yésou P. (2008). *Nouvel inventaire des oiseaux de France*. Delachaux et Niestlé, Paris. • Gager L., Henry J., Linard J.-C., Gélinaud G. & Pustoc'h F. (1986). Actualités ornithologiques du 16 mars 1985 au 15 juillet 1985. *Ar Vran* 13-1 : 2-96. • Gensbøl B. (2009). *Guide des rapaces diurnes. Europe, Afrique du Nord et Moyen-Orient*. Delachaux et Niestlé, Paris. • Kobierzycki E. (2015). Vautour percnoptère. In Issa N. & Muller Y. (coord.), *Atlas des oiseaux de France métropolitaine. Nidification et présence hivernale*. LPO/SEOF/MNHN. Paris, Delachaux et Niestlé : 378-381. • Kobierzycki E. (2022). Vautour percnoptère. In Dupuy J. & Sallé L. (coord.), *Atlas des oiseaux migrateurs de France. Volume 2 : des Ciconiides aux Embérizidés*. MNHN/LPO. Mèze, éditions Biotopie : 604-607. • Oppel S. & Margalida A. (2020). Egyptian Vulture. In Keller V., Herrando S., Voříšek P. *et al.* (eds), *European Breeding Bird Atlas 2: Distribution, Abundance and Change*. European Bird Census Council. Barcelona, Lynx Edicions : 440. • Phipps W.L., López-López P., Buechley E.R. *et al.* (2019) Spatial and Temporal Variability in Migration of a Soaring Raptor Across Three Continents. *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution* 7 : 323. • Quaintenne G. & les coordinateurs-espèces (2026). Les oiseaux nicheurs rares et menacés en France en 2024. *Ornithos* 174 : 4-35. • Recorbet B. (1992). *Les oiseaux de Loire-Atlantique du XIX^{ème} siècle à nos jours*. Groupe ornithologique de Loire-Atlantique, Nantes. • Sanz-Aguilar A., Cortés-Avizanda A., Serrano D., Blanco G., Ceballos O., Grande J.M., Tella J.L. & Donazar J.A. (2017). Sex- and age-dependent patterns of survival and breeding success in a long-lived endangered avian scavenger. *Scientific Reports* 7 : 40204. • Tissier D. (2021). Un Vautour percnoptère dans le Rhône, première citation départementale depuis 1891. *L'Effraie* 54 : 6-12. • Trolliet B. (1980). Observation d'un Percnoptère (*Neophron percnopterus*) adulte en Charente-Maritime. *La Trajhasse* 11 : 41.



Find many more free
articles in the digital
magazine *Post-Ornithos*!