

## Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*)

The Egyptian Vulture is one of the smallest vultures in Oman and the Arabian Peninsula. It can be identified by its featherless head, bi-color, thin and long bill, dark iris, distinctive wedge-shape tail, and the contrast of the white and black wing feathers in adult birds. The two sexes are alike and encounter five phases (patterns) of feather replacement (moulting) during its life time. It soars over dump areas and coasts searching for carcasses and other potential food. It is classified as Endangered under the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) Red List and is protected under the second annex of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

## Objectives of the Egyptian Vulture Project in Oman

The worldwide population of Egyptian Vultures drastically crashed in the mid-1990s, mainly due to the contamination of carcasses with the diclofenac drug, which proved to be a toxic agent to vultures. Studies done in the early nineties, documented a decline of the Egyptian Vulture population throughout mainland Arabia. The objective of this study is to estimate the population size of Egyptian Vultures and identify the major threats in common distribution areas known in Oman, such as Masirah Island and around the governorates of Muscat, Al Dhahirah, Ad Dakhliyah, Al Batinah, Al Sharqiya, Musandam and Dhofar. Study results will contribute to an integrated species and habitat conservation plan at the national scale, and to the development of local capacity to control and preserve these raptors. The programme was initiated in 2012 on Masirah Island, and numbers concluded that the population is four times greater than 1980s estimation.

## Working with the local communities

In addition to its core conservation objectives, the Environment Society of Oman has closely worked with local communities since the inception of the project to raise awareness on biodiversity. The Omani Women Association of Masirah has been part of a long term pilot study that provides women with training that could lead to business prospect. Under the project umbrella, female cadres from Masirah Island were trained on printing on fabric and recycling certain outputs of the local environment with the aim of giving women the leading role in preserving the environment and enhancing their income resources.

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Environment Society of Oman

# Egyptian Vulture

*Neophron percnopterus*

Help us conserve it



**Egyptian Vulture**  
*Neophron percnopterus*  
Masirah Island – Oman  
Photo: Omar Al-Sheikhly, 2014

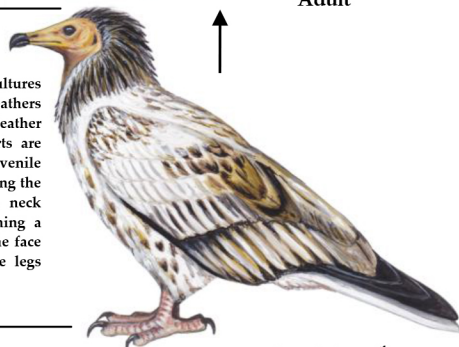


The white body feathers contrast with the black flight feathers. The face is pale yellow (yellow in females and orange yellow in males during breeding season). The body, tail and tail coverts, and upper and under wing coverts are white. The head, neck, back, belly, scapulars and tertial feathers have a rustic tint. The outer edges of the secondary feathers are white except the feathers' base which forms two black strips along the outer secondaries. The legs are pink-pale grey.

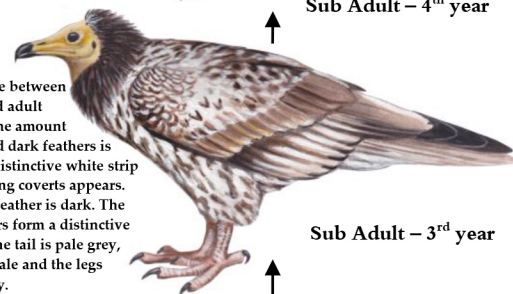


Adult

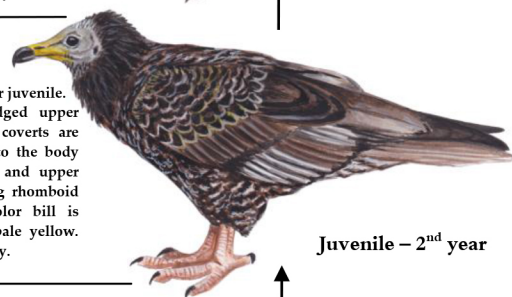
Similar to 3<sup>rd</sup> year vultures but more white feathers appear. The new tail feather and under wing coverts are white with few old juvenile dark feathers found along the body and wings. The neck feathers are dark forming a distinctive necklace. The face is pale yellow and the legs are pale pink-grey.

Sub Adult – 4<sup>th</sup> year

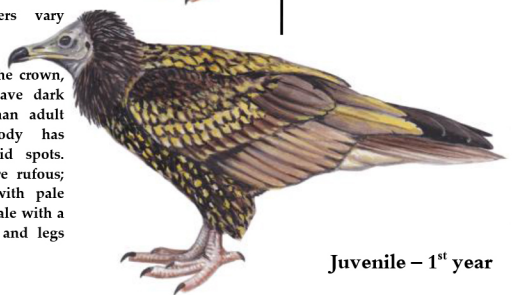
Intermediate between juvenile and adult plumage. The amount of white and dark feathers is various. A distinctive white strip of under wing coverts appears. The crown feather is dark. The neck feathers form a distinctive necklace. The tail is pale grey, the face is pale and the legs are pale grey.

Sub Adult – 3<sup>rd</sup> year

Similar to 1<sup>st</sup> year juvenile. The newly fledged upper and under tail coverts are brown, similar to the body feathers. Under and upper parts are lacking rhomboid spots. The bicolor bill is pale gray and pale yellow. Legs are pale grey.

Juvenile – 2<sup>nd</sup> year

The body feathers vary between dark coffee-brown and pale brown. The crown, nape, and neck have dark feathers shorter than adult vultures. The body has numerous rhomboid spots. The tail coverts are rufous; the tail is grey with pale edges. The bill is pale with a pale yellow base, and legs are pale blue-grey.

Juvenile – 1<sup>st</sup> year

## Identification field sheet of Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* in Oman

This leaflet contains the most prominent criteria for field mark identification of the Egyptian Vulture in Oman and the Arabian Peninsula. It helps researchers distinguish the different ages and molting patterns of the resident and migrant vultures with notes on breeding, feeding and geographical distribution.

### Classification

Kingdom: Animalia  
Phylum: Chordata  
Class: Aves  
Order: Accipitriformes  
Family: Accipitridae  
Genus: *Neophron*  
Species:  
Egyptian Vultures,  
Egyptian Eagle  
*Neophron percnopterus*  
(Linnaeus, 1758)  
IUCN Status: Endangered

### Worldwide geographical distribution

The worldwide distribution of Egyptian Vultures spreads around southern Europe, Asia and North Africa. Small numbers are found in Canary Island and Green Head Island. Most of the breeding population of Oman is believed to be resident, and passage migrants visit the Sultanate in the winter. As opposed to other raptors, they travel long distances within their resident and breeding areas. They return to the same nesting areas in subsequent years.

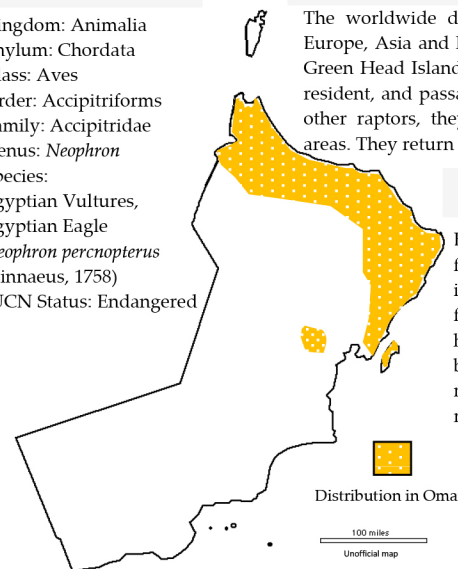
### Feeding

Egyptian Vultures are carnivorous scavenging raptors that feed on carcasses. They have been observed feeding on insects, crustacean species, reptiles, young mammals, fledglings, and sometimes on feces of large animals. They have also been observed carrying small rocks in their beaks to break other birds' eggs to feed on. Young Egyptian Vultures mostly feed on young birds, reptiles and mammals which are rich in calcium needed for bone growth.

### Breeding

Egyptian Vultures are monogamous species that migrate with their partners to nesting areas. They have one brood per year and the incubation period varies between populations and geographical distribution. Males and females contribute to building and defending their nests. They use their beak to carry food and sometimes adults cut out prey into small pieces to be easily fed to their youngsters. Their nests are typically built in the cracks and cliffs of mountains and rocky valleys. Nests are lined with animal wool, hair and skin and their constituents sometimes contain worn out mats.

Males maneuver towards females before mating. Females lay eggs between March and May and incubate them for a few days before males start taking part in the incubation subsequently. Females lay 1-3 pale reddish eggs at the first time that need 39 - 45 days of incubation before hatching. Nestlings need a period of 71 - 85 days for feather fledgling, and a period of 28 - 30 days to leave the nest and develop the ability to hunt and fly. Young birds fly over the nesting area accompanied by their parents in a family parity before they leave the nest at the beginning of the migration season. They become self-dependent at around four months and have the ability to incubate after six years (for females and males equally).



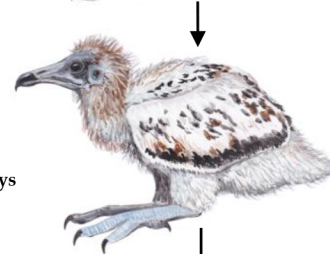
Eggs color variations



Newly hatched nestling



Young (30 - 40) days



Young (60 - 70) days

