

Project Update: May 2022

In May 2022, we successfully started work on the project "Monitoring of specially protected species of birds of prey and mammals using camera traps at feeding sites in the Ustyurt State Nature Reserve". We purchased 10 new camera traps and additionally used another 10 camera traps left over from previous projects. During two field trips we installed 12 camera traps on the current territory of the Ustyurt Reserve and 8 cameras on Kaplankyr chink (South Ustyurt on the border with Turkmenistan) which is proposed to be included in the reserve. Most of the camera traps were installed at feeding grounds and a few more were installed at watering places.

Two of 5 previously known Black Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) nests were occupied by birds. Four avian scavenger species were visually recorded: several pairs of Egyptian Vultures (*Neophron percnopterus*), three Griffon Vultures (*Gyps fulvus*), four Black Vultures and one immature Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*). It should be noted that the Bearded Vulture was found on the territory of Ustyurt Nature Reserve only for the second time in the history of observations. We first recorded this species on the territory of the Reserve in 2011-12. Probably some specimens of the Bearded Vulture come to the Ustyurt plateau from the neighboring Turkmenistan, where this species is observed for breeding.

In addition, for the first time we found a relatively fresh corpse of the honey badger on the territory of "South Ustyurt"- a proposed cluster of the Reserve - previously we found only traces of this very rare species on this territory.



We also surveyed more than 100 km of power grid, which are potentially dangerous to birds. Due to extremely low rodent numbers caused by the drought of 2021, we found on study area practically no live birds of prey, including eagles. Accordingly, facts of mass death of birds of prey on power lines were not observed this year.

Unfortunately, the situation with the border fences on the border of Kazakhstan with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan has not yet changed: they are still an insurmountable barrier to the traditional migration of ungulates, especially gazelles. It is obvious that direct contacts between representatives of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Border Service of the Republic of Kazakhstan are needed to solve this problem. We submitted all recommendations for solving this problem to the Ministry of Ecology, Geology and Natural Resources of RoK back in 2021.

