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ANNUAL REPORT 2006/2007



Heinz
Sielmann
Stiftung



Mutters, January 15 2008

Dear friends of the bald ibis migration project

In this report we shall give a résumé of the years 2006 and 2007; the fifth and sixth year of our project. I can report about two comprehensive and successful years.

In 2006 we raised birds but did not perform a human-led migration. Instead, we tested new types of microlights and completed data collections. Our main focus of that year was the presentation of our scientific work at conferences and workshops.

In 2007 we performed the fourth human-led migration, from a new starting point in Burghausen, Bavaria, and with a new type of microlights. On August 13 we began the migration. An Austrian TV team followed along with us to document the migration. On September 19 we arrived in the Tuscany however the order of events throughout was not fully expected. But thanks to a highly motivated team we did end the migration with success.



However, the big news of 2007 was due to Aurelia, Bobby and Mede: the, three birds which we guided to the Tuscany in 2004. In spring 2007 they flew on their own to Upper Austria and in autumn again back to the Tuscany. So these three birds are the first free-living, migratory Northern Bald ibises in Europe in almost 400 years. Their behavior is evidence that the human-led migration works to establish new migrations traditions in Northern bald ibises.

Our successful work during the last two years would not have been possible without the assistance of many co-workers and the financial support of many institutions and individuals.

Thanks a lot!

Johannes Fritz
Leader Waldrappteam.at

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YEAR 2006

HANDRAISING AND FLIGHT TRAINING

Handraising of eight birds out of the colonies from Zoo Vienna and gameparc Rosegg took place at Zoo Vienna. The Foster parents were Barbara Riedler and Katharina Zoufal.

On June 21 we moved to our camp at the airfield Scharnstein in Upper Austria. There we started with the flight training. For the first time we used so called, Paraplanes. These microlights with a flexible wing allow flying much slower than with the microlights we have used so far. It was possible to fly with two people (pilot and foster parent), matching the flight speed of the birds (40 to 45 kmh). Hans Neudorfer (Sunflight Aircraft) and Walter Holz Müller (Fresh Breeze Xcitor) were our test pilots.

In particular, I would like to mention the support of Hans Neudorfer. He lent us his microlight and he flew repeatedly in the early morning hours from Ried im Innkreis to Scharnstein to train our birds. In autumn 2006 he died during a flight accident.



Hans Neudorfer and J. Fritz during test flights

Flight training lasted until the end of July. In particular, one microlight from the German company Fresh Breeze, equipped with a particularly big and slow wing, met with our expectations.

At the beginning of August 06 we transferred the birds to Burghausen in Bavaria to begin test flights there. Burghausen should become the breeding and training area in 2007. Unfortunately, poor weather conditions impeded extensive test flights. After the training in Burghausen we concluded the flight activities for that year.

CONFERENCE CONTRIBUTIONS

In August and September 2006 we contributed to two international conferences and to one workshop. We presented the results of our scientific work with seven posters and three talks. Three abstracts were published. at the international ornithological conference in Hamburg 2006 and we also had an information table.



Information table Waldrapteam and TechnoSmart at the international ornithological conference, Hamburg 2006

We are grateful to the Austrian ministry of agriculture and forestry (Lebensministerium), who financially supported the conference contributions.

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA COLLECTIONS

In March 2006 we began a systematic geographical data collection utilizing a GPS data-logger, produced by TechnoSmart. The apparatus are small and light enough to be fixed on the back of the birds by a harness. In selectable intervals of 1 second to 10 minutes the position of the birds is measured and stored in an internal data-logger. This data collection allows detailed analysis of the spatial-temporal patterns of the birds, which is particularly relevant during the migration flights.

This data collection takes place in close collaboration with Giacomo Dell'Omo, the owner of the company, TechnoSmart, which produces and sells these data-loggers.



GPS data-logger on the back of an NBI

SPRING MIGRATION 2006

In April 2006 birds from the generation 2006 left the wintering area and flew northwards. Those were the first departures of birds during the vernal migration period.

These birds were seen in Northern Italy, Slovenia and Austria. One bird flew as far as Neumarkt, a location in Styria, just 90 km from the breeding area in Scharnstein, Upper Austria. However, no birds reached the breeding area; instead they turned and flew back to the wintering

area. This behavior was probably due to the fact that the birds have not yet reached sexual maturity and thus not ready to breed at that time.

Later in the year, on July 18, all birds of the generations 2004 and 2005 left the wintering area; 12 birds in total. The birds of the generation 2004 returned to the wintering area at and after August 25. The birds from the generation 2005 were seen first at a location near Tomina in northern Italy and later on further north near Cavalese in the Alps. There we caught two birds on October 13. The other birds continued to Saalfelden in Tyrol, where we caught them on November 7. After a short stay at the Alpenzoo in Innsbruck we transferred the birds back to the Tuscany.

In 2006 we experienced for the first time substantial losses and mortality. In total seven of 22 birds were permanently lost or died during that year. Two of the birds were shot by hunters. For the other missing birds hunting is also the likely cause. We have no indication of losses by natural predators. So, illegal hunting is the primary reason for mortality.



X-ray of a male bird with pellets of a pellet gun. The birds were found close to Laguna di Orbetello on November 11 2006; thanks to Dr. Mauro Delogu for autopsy and analysis.

YEAR 2007

HAND RAISING AND FLIGHT TRAINING

The foster parents Martina Schiestl and Tanja Hampel raised a group of 20 birds, offspring of the zoo colonies Zoo Vienna, Zoo Prag, Waidhofen a.d.Thaya, Konrad Lorenz research station Grünau, and gameparc Rosegg. The first part of hand-raising took place at Zoo Vienna. A new Waldrappteam information tent adjacent to the raising area allowed visitors to observe the activities of the foster parents.

On June 1 the foster parents moved with the birds to Burghausen, Bavaria. After years of preparation Burghausen became the new training area and our starting point for the migration. The city is located in the centre of the historical breeding range of the European NBI population. Due to a feeding ecological data collection in 2005 the agricultural areas around the city, particularly the organically farmed areas, offer ideal feeding habitats for the birds.

The offspring we received from the sedentary free-flight colonies in Grünau and Rosegg hatched exceptionally early (April 14 to April 25). The offspring we received from the enclosed zoo colonies hatched about one month later (May 9 to May 26). In 2004 and 2005 the hatching dates of the sedentary free-flight colonies and the enclosed zoo colonies were similar (April 28 to May 26). The exceptionally early breeding of the free-flying birds was probably related to the preceding mild winter and, therefore, to the early availability of natural food items for the free flying birds.



Abbildung: Landung nach einem Trainingsflug in Burghausen; v.l.n.r. Pilot W. Holz Müller, Ziehmütter M. Schiestl und T. Hampel.

Due to the age difference of our birds the period of flight training was exceptionally long (June 21 to August 7). We were able to perform numerous training flights (25 flights, 657 flight minutes). However, the youngest birds joined the flight group only for the final two flights. Thus we had a heterogeneous group with very different flight experiences.

HUMAN-LED MIGRATION 2007

The migration lasted for 38 days (from Aug. 13 to Sep. 19). The team consisted of 16 people (T. Hampel & M. Schiestl, A., E., V. & J. Fritz, E. Falschlunger, A. & M. Kirtz, M. Bichler, W. & E. Holz Müller, C. Trapp, M. Unsöld, E. Mark, A. Cimadom). Most of them worked free of charge. We used two identical microlights (Xcitor), piloted by Walter Holz Müller and Johannes Fritz.

Financing of the microlights was possible due to the financial support of the German 'Heinz Sielmann Stiftung' and the 'Verein für Tier- und Naturschutz in Österreich'. I want to mention particularly the involvement of Walter Holz Müller. He is a professional paraglider pilot. During the flight training and the migration he piloted the microlight with the foster parent on board.

After the first two flight days we reached the Alps (137 km) and had to cross a mountain pass to Styria. However, the birds were not willing to cross that pass. After several attempts we also tried to follow another route through the valley Ennstal to the south, but again we failed. Unfortunately at that point we had to transfer

the birds by car to Fagagna in Northern Italy. From there 16 birds followed the micolight very well over a distance of 243 km to Ali di Classe at the Adriatic Sea north of Rimini. There the birds again refused to cooperate. The final 319 km to the wintering area were flown with a reduced group of 5 birds. The rest of the birds were transferred by car.



Flight along the Adriatic sea; the birds fly in a typical V-formation

Flightday	Date	from	to	Distance
1	13.Aug	Burghausen	Frankenburg	53 km
2	14.Aug	Frankenburg	Windischgarsten	73 km
3	18.Aug	Windischgarsten	Spital am Pyhrn	11 km
4	25.Aug	Spital am Pyhrn	Temberg	56 km
5	28.Aug	Temberg	Fagagna	Car Transfer
6	31.Aug	Fagagna	Piancada	49 km
7	01.Sep	Piancada	Valle Gaffaro	132 km
8	03.Sep	Valle Gaffaro	Lido di Classe	62 km
9	11.Sep	Lido di Classe	Santarcangelo	38 km
10	12.Sep	Santarcangelo	Arezzo	98 km
11	15.Sep	Arezzo	Valdichiana	28 km
12	16.Sep	Valdichiana	Alfina	58 km
13	19.Sep	Alfina	Laguna di Orbetello	88 km
Total				746 km

Statistics of the flight days; human-led migration 2007

The course of action during the migration of 2007 differed from what we had planned. None of the birds experienced the passage over the Alps between Spital am Pyhrn and Fagagna. However, the partnership with the directors of Oasi die Quadris in Fagagna offers a realistic chance for all the 17 birds from the generation 2007 to establish a migration tradition between Fagagna, Northern Italy, as a breeding area and Laguna di Orbetello, Tuscany, as a wintering area. This is a good opportunity for an experimental migratory colony. Establishment of a migration tradition between Burghausen, Bavaria, and Laguna di Orbetello seems improbable for the birds of the generation 2007.

We assume that the age difference of the 2007 birds and, as a consequence, the inconsistency of the flight experiences of the group was the main reason for the failure to cross the Alps. The issues were more significant in the larger group of birds. When we reduced the group to a small number of well trained individuals it worked well.

Passage over mountain ranges like the Alps is not a principal problem. That is indicated by the successful human-led migrations from Upper Austria to the Tuscany in 2004 and 2005. Therefore, we plan to perform further migrations from Burghausen in the following years.



Route of the human-led migrations 2007; across the Alps the birds were transferred with cars

BIRD MIGRATION 2007

Vernal migration 2007 began precisely on the same day as in 2006. On April 2 the first birds from the generations 2004 and 2005 left from Laguna di Orbetello. Three birds flew northwards to Kirchlandl in Upper Austria, a village in the Alps just 50 km from the breeding area in Scharnstein. Then these birds turned back to Styria, where we caught them and transferred them into an aviary at our camp in Scharnstein. Two further birds were caught at Osoppos, Northern Italy, and also transferred to Scharnstein.

Due to the close proximity of the sedentary free-flight colony in Grünau these five birds remained in the aviary, together with four juvenile birds and a breeding pair from the colony of the Gameparc Rosegg. The presence of an experienced breeding pair should motivate our birds to start their own breeding attempts and fortunately that was the case. Our birds Aurelia and Speedy started to breed and raised three offspring.

This breeding success would have been not possible without the professional care of Isabel Strohman, Elfride Pühringer, Anna Wimmer and the members of the Konrad Lorenz research station, namely Sinja Werner, Florian Schmid, Michaela Koch, Sabrina Eder and Anna Braun.

On July 17 we released the group in Scharnstein. As expected, our birds associated with the birds of the Grünau colony and remained in the valleys Almtal and Kremstal. As of the end of August our birds showed no tendency to leave for autumn migration. So we decided to try transferring our birds. We were able to capture four adults and two of the three juveniles. This group was transferred about 70 km south to Kobenz in Styria, a location the birds passed during the vernal migration. Our hope was that the birds would then start southwards once we removed them from the dominant group of non-migrants.

Indeed, from there the birds left and flew southwards. Three adults and the two juveniles were seen in Osoppo, Northern Italy, on September 15. Osoppo is exactly along the route of the expected migration route for our birds. On September 20, one day after the conclusion of the human-led migration, two adult birds reached the wintering area. On November 1 a further adult bird arrived there. The two juveniles remained missing after the sighting in Osoppo.

In Osoppo one of the birds released in Kobenz was absent. This was the male bird Speedy, parent of the three offspring. During vernal migration he started off separately and flew across Slovenia to Austria (GPS data). In autumn this bird carried a satellite transmitter, which was on loan to us by RSBP. Unfortunately, this transmitter did not function properly, with the exception of one position on September 18, shortly after the sighting of the other birds in Osoppo. The position was in Slovenia, exactly along the route of Speedy's vernal migration. After that we received no further signal and Speedy remained missed.



Flight paths of the male bird Speedy; green: human-led migration 2004; red: vernal migration 2007 (GPS data); yellow: position September 2007 (satellite navigation).

The migration journey of the three birds Aurelia, Speedy and Bobby are the most relevant events over the course of our project. However, there are still several open questions to be investigated. For example, it remains unanswered why the birds did not continue for the final few kilometers from Kirchlandl to Scharnstein during the vernal migration. It also remains unanswered why the juvenile birds did not arrive in the Tuscany. Maybe the family group disassociated during the contact with the sedentary Grünau colony. But if so, what caused the separation of the group during the migration? Hunting is another possibility for the loss of the birds during the migration journey.

Due to the statistics presented below 19 birds joined the migration group in 2007. Seven birds of generation 2006 and three birds of generation 2007 were delivered to zoo colonies. One adult bird (Speedy) is missing since the vernal migration and three birds of the generation 2007 disappeared soon after release in autumn 2007. Two of

the three offspring from Aurelia and Speedy disappeared during the vernal migration; the third bird remained in the valley Almtal and died due to a predator attack. Due to that the mortality is lower compared to 2006. However, we hope that an information campaign for Italian hunters in spring 2008 will lower the mortality of our birds.

Year	Group	added	died	missed	transferred	Group size end of year
2004	handraised	7	0	0	0	7
2005	handraised	7	0	0	0	14
2006	handraised	8	3	4	0	15
2007	handraised	19	0	4	10	20
2007	parent raised	3	1	2	0	0

Statistics of demography 2004 till 2007.

MEDIA COVERAGE 2007

From March 29 to November 15 we have recorded a total of 51 articles regarding our project: Germany 13 articles; Austria 23 articles; Italy 3 articles; other 12 articles. During that time period the German press agency produced three press releases. Since we do not systematically monitor media coverage the recorded articles are only a part of the total amount of international reports.

From April 20 to September 20 seven TV productions were produced by ORF, BR, SAT1, BBC and others. Also the Reuters agency produced one TV clip.

PUBLIC RELATIONS 2007

The aim of our public relations was to elucidate the relevance of domestic agricultural areas for the biodiversity. In particular, to highlight the importance of the organically farmed areas as a refuge for numerous wild animal and plant species. The NBI can act as an ideal indicator for the biodiversity of an agricultural area.

Info-Tent

Our tent was setup at Zoo Vienna from April 16 to May 31 and open daily from 0900 am to 0600 pm (496 opening hours and about 3.312 visitors in total). From June 15 to August 10 the tent was setup in the centre of the city of Burghausen. (496 opening hours and about 1.984 visitors in total). The majority of the visitors knew about the project due to the numerous media reports.



Info-Tent at Zoo Vienna. The tent was permanently staffed with a person. In the tent the hand raising work could be observed live and via a monitor.

Guided Tours

In cooperation with the Heinz Sielmann Stiftung and with ecopedagogues we developed age-graded guided tours. The program was sent to 53 schools and 49 nurseries in Bavaria and Upper Austria. From June 20 to August 4 a total of 16 groups with 356 people of every age were guided. A guided tour lasted from 60 to 180 minutes, depending on the group composition.



School class at the camp Burghausen during a guided tour

Raffle

We organized a raffle in Germany and Austria. People were asked to answer the question: *How long will the migration 2007 last?* 680 people participated.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

Data collections on NBI feeding-ecology were completed in 2006. Results were presented at conferences and workshops and repeatedly published.

The spatial-temporal data collections by the use of GPS data loggers and satellite transmitters are on going. Results have been presented at conferences and workshops.

In spring 2007 the following PhD started:

[Parasitological and microbiological investigations with Northern Bald ibises \(*Geronticus eremita*\) during a human-led autumn migration](#)

Juliane Weinel, PhD; Supervisor: Dr. med. vet. K. Volmer, Leiter des Instituts für Wildbiologie der Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen and Prof. Dr. med. vet. E. F. Kaleta, Leiter der Klinik für Vögel, Reptilien, Amphibien und Fische der Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen

Summary:

The project aims to make a continuous parasitological and microbiological monitoring of a group of Northern Bald ibises before, during and after a human-led migration. We are particularly interested on the interaction between host and parasites during the different life history states and on the impact of different ecological conditions on the parasite load. We regularly collect fecal samples for microbiological and parasitological analysis. The data collection is completed by virological and hematological analysis.

The following research project is financed by the Austrian science foundation (P20633):

[Physiology and energy expenditure of Northern bald ibises during human-led autumn migration](#)

Univ. Prof. Dr. John Dittami, Department for Behavioural Biology, University of Vienna; Prof. Dr. Franz Bairlein, Institute of Avian Research, Wilhelmshaven, Germany; Dr. Johannes Fritz, Waldrappteam.at

Summary:

The research project will capitalize on a Northern Bald Ibis (NBI) conservation project to collect physiological data on these birds that will shed light on the energetic and energetic decisions made during and after migratory flight. In the proposed project, the authors plan to use the techniques of hand-raising NBI in Austria and physically leading them over a migration route to a wintering area in Northern Italy to document the in-flight physiology of a migratory bird. The close relationship between the birds and their human foster parents will allow us to collect this data with a minimum of disturbance for the birds. Key parameters will be measured in blood chemistry to document the individual energetic condition, fuel use and the endurance capacity. These will be compared with individual flight behavior and metabolism assessed with the doubly labeled water method. Noninvasive monitoring of adrenal activity will complement the blood chemistry and the metabolic measurements. Finally, body mass and subcutaneous fat changes will be monitored as cross-indicators of tissue use. The goals are to determine whether changes in blood chemistry parameters are used by the birds to terminate individual migratory bouts and, whether the degree of change predisposes an individual shift from a catabolic to an anabolic state. The experimental set up will allow the researchers to carry out both fatiguing and non-strenuous flight bouts in one year. This will allow us to document extremes in the analyses of physiological parameters and flight duration. In a second season, the spontaneously occurring energetic and physiological set points for migratory bouts will be investigated. This will be the first case of a study combining blood parameters, endocrine analyses and energetic measurements in free-flying migrating birds. The NBI is a globally endangered species that became extinct in European during the middle ages. Information about their migratory physiology is essential to the establishment of migratory traditions with human lead migration.

The following research project is in preparation:

[On the relationship between genetic determination and social tradition in the bird migration: a comparative study in Ciconiiformes](#)

PhD Project in preparation; Mag. M. Unsöld, Zoologische Staatssammlung München; Dr. Johannes Fritz, Waldrappteam.at;

Abstract:

Research on bird migration is traditionally focused on genetically determined behavioural patterns. Despite numerous data and anecdotes indicating a high relevance

of social learning, systematic investigations on the relationship between genetic determination and social tradition in bird migration are rare. White storks (*Ciconia ciconia*), for example, are known to have a genetically determined migration preference (east and west). However, cross fostering experiments indicate a superimposed impact of social information: offspring take over the migration route of their (foster) parents. In Northern bald ibises (NBI, *Geronticus eremita*) timing of the migration seems to be genetically determined while the migration route and the wintering destination is a socially learned tradition (Fritz et al. 2006). Thus, there seems to be a gradual variation in the impact of social

information on the determination of an individual's migration behaviour. Clearly, the ability to acquire social information needs an appropriate social context. NBI, for example, are known to have a particularly close and long lasting parent-offspring relationship. This is also being manifested in a particularly long-lasting and close relationship to human foster-parents. Thus, we assume that the relationship between genetic determination and social tradition in birds' migration behaviour is related to the social system. The project aims to compare the migration behaviour and the social system within the group of Ciconiiformes.

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