

PROPOSAL FOR INCLUSION OF SPECIES ON THE APPENDICES OF THE CONVENTION
ON THE CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY SPECIES OF WILD ANIMALS

A. PROPOSAL: Inclusion of Geronticus eremita in Appendix II.

B. PROPONENT: Government of the Federal Republic of Germany

C. SUPPORTING STATEMENT

1. Taxon

1.1. Classis	Aves
1.2. Ordo	Ciconiiformes
1.3. Familia	Threskiornithidae
1.4. Genus/Species/Subspecies	<u>Geronticus eremita</u> (Linnaeus) 1758 Monotypic
1.5. Common names	
English:	Waldrapp (Northern Bald Ibis)
Spanish:	Ibis Eremita
French:	Ibis chauve

2. Biological data

2.1. Distribution

There are two widely separated populations: one in Northwest Africa and one in Southwest Asia. The Northwest African population breeds in Morocco and Algeria and disperses in winter largely within these two countries but with some birds (at least formerly) regularly moving south to winter in Mauritania and Mali. The Southwest Asian population formerly bred in Turkey and wintered in Northeast Africa (mainly Ethiopia). The Turkish breeding population is now extinct in the wild (one bird in 1989), although there is a small captive breeding population from which a few birds are released each year. A small number of birds has recently been discovered in Arabia; up to 14 have been seen in Yemen (in 1985), and at least 27 were found in the Asir Mountains of southwestern Saudi Arabia in 1991. It seems likely that these are birds from hitherto unknown breeding colonies in southwestern Arabia.

2.2. Population

Two populations are recognized.

- Morocco/Algeria: 400-450; possibly now stable after a long period of decline (Rose & Scott 1993).

- Turkey/Arabian Peninsula/Northeast Africa: Minimum of 27 in Arabia; Turkish colonies extinct; marked decrease.

Formerly bred in Switzerland, Austria and Hungary, but had disappeared from Europe by the end of the 17th century. By the early 20th century, the species was believed to be restricted to isolated populations in Asia Minor and Northwest Africa. Five breeding colonies were known in the eastern population, but only one of these, at Birecik in Turkey, survived into recent decades. This was estimated to number about 3,000 pairs in 1890, but had fallen to 530 pairs in 1953, 65 pairs in 1964,

23 pairs in 1973 and only a single bird in 1989. The western population, which consisted of more, smaller colonies, has also declined markedly, from about 1,000 pairs in the 1930s to 198 pairs (in 13 colonies) in Morocco and 8-12 pairs (at one colony) in Algeria in 1975. A census in 1981 located 64 pairs (319 birds) at ten colonies. In 1990, only six colonies remained in Morocco, with 78 breeding pairs and a total population estimated at about 300 birds. Numbers appear to have been relatively stable in recent years, although most colonies do not produce young. The total population in Northwest Africa is currently estimated at 400-450 (Rose & Scott 1993). Recent records of birds in the Arabian Peninsula were initially thought to relate to birds from the Birecik colony, but it is now clear that unknown colonies exist, possibly in the unexplored Asir Mountains of southwestern Arabia, where many remote wadis have suitable nesting cliffs and feeding habitat. Up to 27 birds were seen near Wadi Taif in Saudi Arabia in March-July 1991, and a group of 14 birds, including two juveniles, was seen in the Tihamah in Yemen in 1985 (Rahmani and Shobrak 1992). A bird was seen in Sinai, Egypt, in 1962.

2.3. Habitat

Occurs on arid and semi-arid plains and plateaux with rocky escarpments; also in cultivated fields, high altitude meadows and pastures. Nests and roosts on cliffs adjacent to water courses or along the coast, sometimes in association with man; in the past, birds have been found nesting on old castles, towers and walls (del Hoyo *et al.* 1992).

2.4. Migrations

The Turkish population was migratory, with birds vacating the breeding colony in late June or early July. The winter quarters were poorly known, but were thought to be in Northeast Africa, chiefly in the highlands of Ethiopia. The Northwest African population is dispersive and erratic, with birds generally moving south after breeding, although most birds remain throughout the winter in Morocco. Young birds tend to move further, especially in dry years when they occasionally reach Mauritania and even Mali. A single bird was seen in Senegal in March 1985.

3. **Threat data**

3.1. Direct threats to the population

The reasons for the disappearance of the species from Europe are unknown, but climatic change and the collection of chicks for food have been suggested as possible causes. The main causes for the decline in the Turkish population are believed to have been the intensive use of pesticides in feeding areas around the breeding colony, especially in the late 1950s, and to a lesser extent also direct human disturbance at the nesting sites. The inhabitants of Birecik and its environs have traditionally held the species to be holy or semi-sacred and killing it to be a crime; thus direct persecution has not been a factor at this site (Collar & Stuart 1985). The development of land for agriculture and direct persecution appear as the main reasons for the decline in the Northwest African population. Persecution has involved shooting for

either pleasure or food or both, the capture of adults and young for food, and the capture of birds for the zoo trade. However, the parallel slump in Asia Minor and earlier extinction in Europe suggest that undetermined natural factors may be responsible for the declines, with human pressure merely exacerbating the situation (Collar & Stuart 1985).

3.2. Habitat destruction

Habitat conversion is believed to have been one of the major causes for the decline in the Northwest African population. Twenty-four colonies in Morocco are believed to have been abandoned because of drastic changes to the feeding areas, and the total desertion of the previously healthy and numerous Middle Atlas colonies is attributed to agricultural development and mining activities (Collar & Stuart 1985).

3.3. Indirect threats

The total collapse since the 1950s of the Turkish breeding population is directly attributable to the massive use of toxic chemical pesticides in the late 1950s in southern Turkey, and their continuing application on farmland in the Birecik region ever since (Collar & Stuart 1985). Pesticides in agriculture are apparently not yet a problem at the Northwest African colonies. However, disturbance from military activities, road-building, quarrying, tourists, film-makers and local people engaged in recreational activities have all contributed to the decline at colonies in Morocco (Collar & Stuart 1985).

3.4. Threats connected especially with migrations

None known.

3.5. National and international utilization

Eggs and chicks are known to have been taken for food at the breeding colonies in Europe, and this persecution continues at the colonies in Northwest Africa. The capture of birds for the international zoo trade has also put pressure on the dwindling populations (Collar & Stuart 1985).

4. **Protection status and needs**

4.1. National protection status

The species has been protected by law in Morocco since 1923. Elsewhere in its range in Africa, it is protected under national legislation in Algeria, Ethiopia, Mali, Mauritania, Somalia and Sudan.

4.2. International protection status

Geronticus eremita is listed in Appendix I of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, and also in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), to which Morocco and Algeria are parties. The species is listed in category 'E' (Endangered) in the 1990 edition

of the IUCN List of Threatened Animals (IUCN 1990).

4.3. Additional protection needs

Both populations of Geronticus eremita are listed in the category 'Threatened' in the Draft Management Plan for the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds because of the species' IUCN listing as globally threatened.

Effective protection is essential. Creation of the long-awaited Oued Massa National Park in southern Morocco will be a major step forward, as this would encompass three breeding colonies and also the main wintering habitat. Captive-breeding is readily achieved, and could be important in the recovery of surviving populations through reintroductions. However, attempts to reintroduce captive-bred birds into the wild in Turkey have so far been unsuccessful.

The species should be given legal protection against taking at all times of the year and against disturbance to nesting areas, and an International Species Conservation Plan should be developed. Immediate surveys and research on the Geronticus eremita population in southern Saudi Arabia and Yemen should be carried out to determine the status of these birds and whether they are breeding in the area.

5. Range States

See attached table.

6. Comments from Range States

7. Additional remarks

8. References

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Taxon: <i>Geronticus eremita</i>		
Population		
(a) Morocco/Algeria		
(b) Turkey/Arabia/NE Africa		
State	Pop.	Status
Algeria	a	Sw
Egypt	b	V
Ethiopia	b	W
Mali	a	W
Mauritania	a	W
Morocco	a	Sw
Saudi Arabia	b	Ws?
Turkey	b	S
Yemen	b	Ws?
Key to Status		
S/s Breeding summer visitor	R/r Resident	
W/w Winter visitor	V Vagrant	
P/p Passage migrant	? Status uncertain	
Upper case = primary status Lower case = secondary status		