

## **Ecology and Characterization of Red-billed Chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*) in Natural Park of Alvão**

In Portugal, the population of chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*) is classified as "Endangered" as well as the global trend of the specie, whose populations are in sharp decline. The main objectives of this study were to determine the type of habitats, the local status of the specie as well as associated diet in the Natural Park of Alvão. The material and methods used included the direct observation of individuals, the use of photographic cameras, remote sensing, individual marking and radiotracking.

Over 8 months (February to October 2006), the structure of the populations was evaluated. The number of birds of the studied group varied throughout the year. Higher number of individuals was observed during the winter (average number of 16 individuals) and this number decreased in the reproductive period (average number of 4 individuals). During 2006, it was confirmed the presence of a reproductive couple with evidence of possible nesting. In the study area, choughs use two mainly roosts: a granitic cavity and, more frequently, a section of an underground mining.



The radiotracking method allowed the confirmation of loyalty to the monitored roosts and determined the main areas used for food. The habitat used by choughs was found over 700 meters of altitude, mainly characterized by the presence of rocky-granite outcrops, associated with low vegetation that consists of *Pterospartum tridentatum*, *Erica arborea* and *Erica cinerea* and herbaceous species.



In sampling sites, several evidences of the use by other animals were recorded, namely “Maronês” cattle, goats and rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*). Analysis of excreta samples collected in the roosts revealed the presence of insects namely Arachnidae (spiders), Coleoptera (scarab), Diptera (flies), Hymenoptera (ants) and seeds of different plant species.

As conclusions of this preliminary study, we propose some conservation and protection lines such as:

- Creation of support for traditional farming practices;
- Maintaining the traditional practice of burning bushes;
- Encourage the maintenance of the traditional winter grazing;
- Integration of ecological requirements of the species in the management plans;
- Controlling the forestation in the food areas;
- Promoting awareness actions among local people about the role of this specie as an indicator of a "high-quality environment."