

The “wild climbers” of Greece

JACKDAW

All species of raptors are protected by national, European and international legislation.

The majority of diurnal raptors, including the **Bonelli's eagle**, are breeding from February to July approximately, although the exact dates depend on the local climatic conditions (altitude, weather) and the natural fitness of each individual pair at a certain time. The only exceptions to this general rule are the **Bearded vulture** and the **Griffon vulture** which start breeding in the heart of winter (December-January) and the **Eleonora's falcon** which starts laying its eggs early August.

Some other species of birds that are nesting on rock faces are nocturnal raptors such as **Little owls** and **Eagle owls** and a variety of corvids such as **Ravens**, **Coughs** and **Jackdaws**.

Apart from the larger birds, numerous smaller species show a preference to the vertical walls for nesting and foraging. Their small size and their greater abundance do not mean that they are not sensitive to disturbance. Some characteristic species include the **Rock Nuthatch**, the **Blue Rock-Thrush** and the **Alpine Swifts**. The climbers who prefer the alpine walls may be lucky enough to meet the unique **Wallcreeper** and other species specialized on the high-altitude environment.

Unfortunately, for the majority of these species the breeding season coincides with the ideal months for climbing in Greece. As a result, in the areas where climbing is very popular, disturbance can be a significant pressure for the birds.

BLUE ROCK-THRUSH

What can I do to avoid harming unwittingly the wildlife?

-  I learn which areas I should avoid every season using the web-tool created for this reason on the site www.lifebonelli.eu
-  The season that requires the greatest attention is the breeding season (February – June) while, for the coastal rocks of the Aegean islands, the period from August to September is also one to be alert.
-  During a climb, in case I see raptors getting flushed in the air or in a stressed behavior (agitation, anxious calls and fake attacks) or even if I happen to come by an active nest, I choose to retreat as soon as possible.
-  If I stumble across an active nests with chicks, I retreat with slow and steady movements. I do not take pictures.
-  I climb as silently as possible, especially in areas where I am aware of the existence of active nests. Of course, the same applies for the use of tools such as power drills.
-  If I have information about nests along a route, I share it with my fellow climbers and I make sure the authorities responsible for the protection of nature are informed so that we can jointly take precautionary measures if needed.
-  While bolting a new route, or just sending one, I try to avoid any deliberate change in the natural environment. I don't uproot plants, as rocks regularly host small and fragile populations of rare ore or even steno-endemic species of plants.
-  When I leave from the crag, I make sure I have taken all my litter with me.
-  In case I come across climbers who are putting nests or birds' breeding in danger, I try to inform them about the impact of their actions. I always choose to engage in a polite conversation as I know that the vast majority of climbers will respond positively to my advice. If this is not the case, I choose to inform the authorities and the environmental organisations on the matter.

Rocks are a place for entertainment but also a refuge

ROCK NUTHATCH

Help us protect the invaluable rock-face habitats and the birds of Greece!



Get informed before you climb:
Check the sensitivity mapping web-tool for outdoor activities



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Climbing & Wildlife

We share the rocks with care



www.lifebonelli.eu

Climbing & birds: a delicate balance

Greece arguably has to offer some of the finest crags in Europe. Besides being a great way for one to develop their athletic skills and an excellent source of adrenalin, climbing gives its lovers the opportunity to experience nature in the most unique way. While climbing, one does not only acquire a better understanding of the matrix of rock-face habitats; they can admire and appreciate nature in a more comprehensive way.



Climbers are not the only rock-dwelling “species” on the planet... Numerous animals and plants have chosen this unique habitat as their home, although for different reasons.

Rock faces are areas inaccessible not only to men but to most of the terrestrial predators and as a result they became a **safe haven for many plants and animals**. Species' adaptation to rock-face habitats is the result of a long-term evolutionary process, involving special requirements that are not met elsewhere. As a result, these species are not able to withstand sudden changes we induce to their habitats.

Rare species of birds are nesting on ledges and crevasses, while bats are roosting in caves and holes. Moreover, despite being seemingly infertile and barren, rock-faces are the most important **habitat for endemic plant species** in Greece. Having evolved to adapt to the needs of a life on the wall these unique rarities are able to cope with extreme weather conditions (ice, wind and draught) and to utilize even the smallest cracks to set their roots.



Birds and especially raptors are particularly sensitive to human-induced disturbance.

The rocks of the raptors

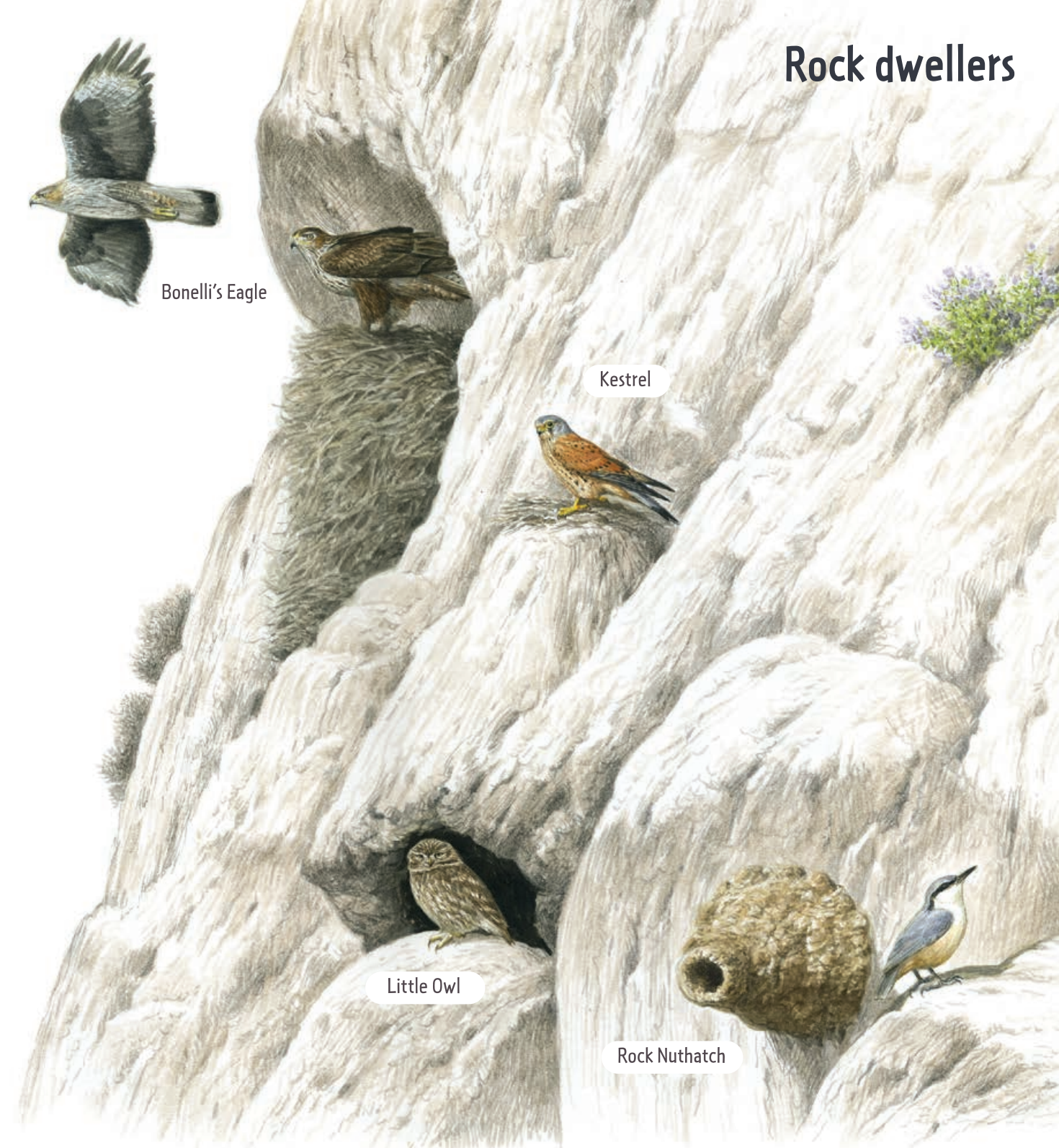
During the nesting season **disturbance may have a significant negative impact on the breeding success of raptors**. If the birds feel that the spot they chose to nest is in danger, there is a good chance they will abandon it and not return for a long-time. This could have a deadly impact on eggs and chicks.

The minimum safe distance for approaching such areas varies according to the species and the regional topography. **For the largest birds of prey -such as eagles and vultures- a minimum distance of 500m -in straight line- should always be respected**, however climbers often need to be even more cautious as this distance may not always be safe enough.

Even in cases when disturbance does not lead to nest abandonment, it can still have deadly results. **Every time an incubating bird is forced to leave the nest, the eggs are left exposed to the natural elements and to predators waiting to take advantage**. The same is true for nests with chicks of young age, where the parents always have to keep a close eye for possible intruders.

It's also important to remember that **raptors, especially eagles and vultures, use traditional breeding sites (e.g. a wall or a gorge), where they build several nests**. It is very common for these nests to remain occupied by the same birds for many years or even repetitively for many generations. This means that the abandonment of a nest and/or the disturbance of adult birds can have severe consequences, especially in places where nesting site opportunities are scarce.

Rock dwellers



Bonelli's Eagle

Kestrel

Little Owl

Rock Nuthatch