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RAPTORS AND POWERLINES IN SOUTHERN EUROPEAN RUSSIA AND NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

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The contradictory importance of powerlines for raptors is well known but poorly documented. There are over 60,000km of powerlines throughout forestless areas in southern European Russia. On the one hand they constitute a threat to eagles and other raptors and on the other hand they are used by raptors for nesting.

In the early 1980s specific projects disclosed that powerlines were responsible for an annual loss of some 15,000 raptors. The most dangerous are powerlines of voltage from 6 to 35 kilowatts during late summer and early autumn movements (August - October). To prevent such a high loss some protective devices have been fitted on powerline poles over 5,000km. Recent studies in some regions show a smaller loss both along protected and unprotected lines.

At the same time powerline poles and pylons are used increasingly by nesting raptors. They are above all Steppe Eagles (up to every tenth pylon in western Kalmykia; an average of one occupied nest per 1-5 km in eastern Kazakhstan), Long-legged Buzzards (from 6 nests per 80 km up to 9 nests per 20 km in north-eastern Kazakhstan), Saker Falcons (the majority of tree-nesting Sakers changed to pylons in the Odessa region, Ukraine), Kestrels (8-9 % of poles occupied by them at the Upper Don river basin) as well as a few pairs of Hobby, Black Kite, Common Buzzard, Imperial and Golden Eagles. Thanks to powerlines, an evident increase in raptor populations has been recorded in some forestless areas.