

## In memory of a great naturalist, David Gómez Samitier

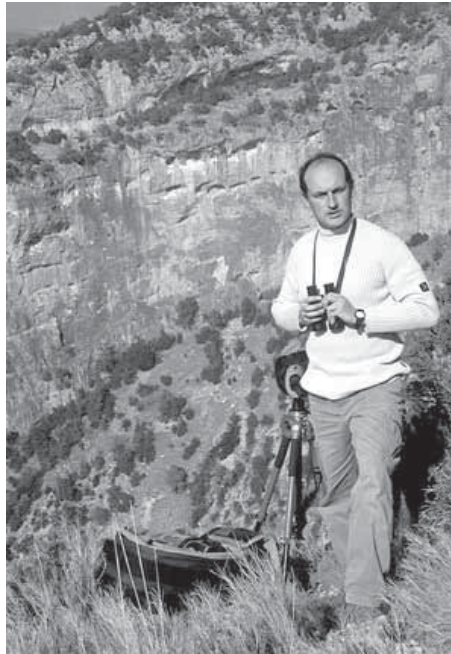
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On 10 April 2005, David Gómez Samitier, his wife, and two daughters, died in a car accident. In this obituary, I would like to acknowledge his contributions, especially those conducted during the past 25 years through the non-governmental organization, *Fondo de Amigos del Buitre* (=Vulture Friends' Fund).

I met David in 1979 at a vulture feeding site (*muladar*) in the north of Huesca province. A strange place for an initial meeting we thought. We immediately started talking about birds. We were both passionate about vulture conservation, so we decided that day to share our knowledge to conserve these birds.

Initially guided by intuition, as our knowledge on carrion-eating birds was limited, our initial plan was to establish small feeding sites within the range of the Bearded Vulture. The location of these feeding sites were not fixed, but moved around. Our aim was to encourage breeding birds and their fledglings to improve their fitness while flying between these feeding sites. When our busy work schedules allowed time, we carried food in backpacks to the mountains of the Huesca Pyrenees or the *Sierra de Guara* as the area is known. The efforts

increased as less accessible and more remote nest sites were located. We anticipated that this would increase the survival probabilities for the Bearded Vultures.



We frequently met, always discussing possible future projects. We then decided to establish the first permanent *muladar* in the Medium Cinca River Valley area. Through a member of another non-governmental organization (Ansar) in Monzón (also located

in the Huesca province), we opened it at the Binaced Municipality. Since I was a child I had observed vultures at this place, and thus we thought that it would be a successful feeding site. After that we established a second feeding station in Estadilla. The councillors laughed, but did not oppose the project, when this initiative was explained at a council meeting. The first thing we did was to fence the area and I will always remember the blisters on our hands. Our projects were ongoing and our two feeding sites improved with time. On a daily basis David provided food to the restaurant at Estadilla, while I provisioned the Binaced sites. This work enabled us to gain much knowledge about the wildlife living around a feeding site. In 1984 a few of us decided to legalize our activities by forming an NGO, the *Fondo de Amigos del Buitre* (FAB). There were a lot of people willing to cooperate so the association was open to everybody. Diego, a new member, decided to work at Estadilla. This enabled us to open a third feeding site in the Bierge municipality, a place well known to David. At this site we built a wooden observation structure, where people could

watch the vultures without disturbing them. Our activities were increasing, the *muladares* were called “*Supplemental Feeding Areas*”, and we published the details of our work “*Gypaetus-Percopterus*”.

In 2000 we lost Pepe Chaverri, a renowned Aragonese mountaineer, during a climbing accident. He was the youngest of the five FAB founders. As a tribute to Pepe we decided to continue with our tasks. One of these was the provisioning of food at a site near Santa Cilia de Panzano, where we had fed Bearded Vultures since 1981. One of the villages in the area has a museum, the *House of Vultures*, designed by FAB, which attracts lots of visitors, contributing to the economy of the area.

David and Lourdes were founder members of the FAB and they have left, together with their daughters Jara and Iris. How many dreams were broken in a second? We are orphans and have empty hearts. Leave in peace, brothers. We will keep your dreams. They will give us strength to continue with our raptor conservation work.

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