CASE STUDIES – SAKER FALCON (*FALCO CHERRUG*)

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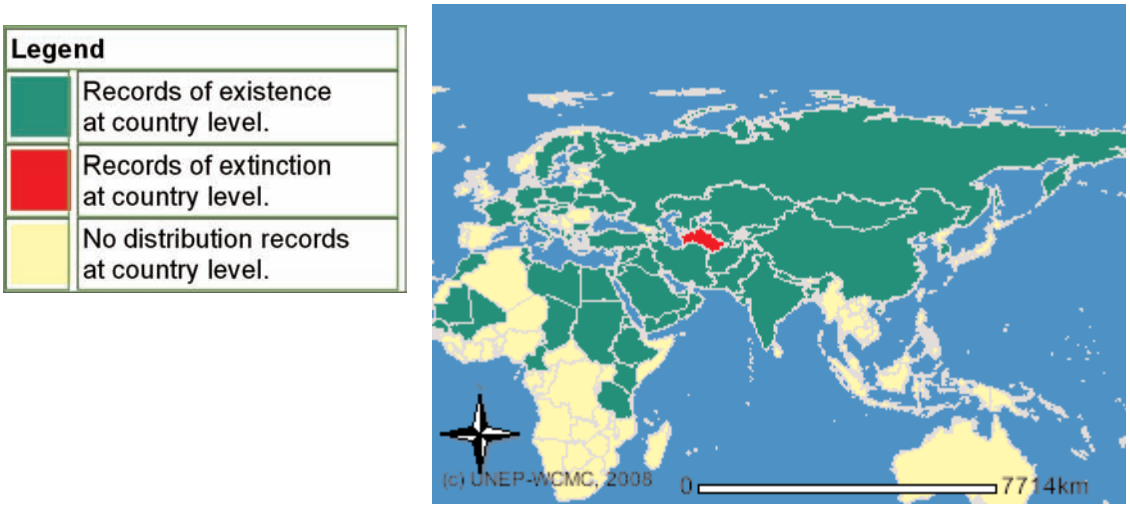
I. Background information on the taxa

1. BIOLOGICAL DATA

1.1. Scientific names and common names

Falco cherrug – two subspecies recognised so far: *F.c. cherrug* and *F.c. milvipes*
Common name: Saker Falcon

1.2. Distribution



Range & population *Falco cherrug* occurs in a wide range across the Palearctic region from eastern Europe to western China, breeding in Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Serbia & Montenegro, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Belarus, Ukraine, Turkey, Iraq, Armenia, Russian Federation, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and China, and at least formerly in Turkmenistan and probably Afghanistan, possibly India (Ladakh), with wintering or passage populations regularly in Italy, Malta, Cyprus, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Sudan, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iran, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Afghanistan and Azerbaijan, with much smaller numbers or vagrants reaching many other countries[3,4,6,9,11]. The global population was estimated to be 8,500-12,000 pairs in 1990 compared to 3,600-4,400 pairs for 2003[6]. The population is therefore estimated to have declined by 48-70% over this period, with a best estimate (between median estimates for 1990 and 2003) of 61%. Declines for the following countries give particular cause for concern: Kazakhstan (90% decline from median of 1990 estimates to median of 2003 estimates), Uzbekistan (90% decline), Russian Federation (69%), Kyrgyzstan (68%) and Mongolia (59%)[6]. Assuming a generation length of five years and that the decline of the Saker began (at least in some areas) in the 1970s and 1980s (consumption of Sakers in the Middle East was heavy by mid-1980s), the declines over 13 years equate to 66% over 15 years (based on median estimates), with a minimum-maximum of 53-75%.

1.3. Biological characteristics

1.3.1. *General biological and life history characteristics*

Laying generally in April – may on cliff ledges and crags; also nest in tall trees, particularly in western part of its range. Can occupy abandoned nests of other raptors, corvids or other birds. In part of its habitats where deforestation is widespread, nesting has been recorded on pylons and exceptionally on small mounds on the ground. It can reuse same nest or move between various nests from year to year. The clutch is normally 3 to 5 eggs and replacement clutches have been recorded. Incubation last over 30 days, mainly by the female, the male bringing most of the food as the female usually does not hunt until the second half of the nestling period. Fledging generally occurs around 45-50 days and the young still depend on the parents for another30-45 days. Two to three chicks from a clutch of five will reach fledging age. Sexual maturity at 2-3 years, exceptionally as early as one year old. The species is mainly migratory or nomadic in part of its range. In the southern range it is dispersive or sedentary. Wintering visitor in the North

of Pakistan, Arabian Peninsula, Eastern Africa and in some parts of the Middle-East and China. In the northern part of its range will leave its breeding ground from late August to October. However some pairs have been recorded all year round even in Northern regions. Pairs return on their breeding grounds in March – April.

1.3.2. *Habitat types*

The main habitat is steppe, sometimes wooded, and in some cases even woodlands. Also occurs in rocky cliffs and canyons. Wide range of altitudinal distribution from plains to altitudes as high as 4700m. Outside the breeding season the range of habitat used in wider but mainly open, rarely along the coasts, sometimes over lakes or marshes.

1.3.3. *Role of the species in its ecosystem*

The Saker is physically adapted to hunting close to the ground in open terrain, combining rapid acceleration with high manoeuvrability, thus specialising on mid-sized diurnal terrestrial rodents (especially ground squirrels *Citellus*) of open grassy landscapes such as desert edge, semi-desert, steppes and arid montane areas; in some areas, particularly near water, it switches to birds as key prey, and has recently substituted domestic pigeons for rodents in parts of Europe[3,11]. It uses copses or cliffs for nest sites (sometimes even the ground), occupying the old nests of other birds. Clutch sizes vary from two to six, with means from 3.2 to 3.9 in different circumstances. Breeding success varies with year (especially in areas where rodents cycle). Birds are sedentary, part-migratory or fully migratory, largely depending on the extent to which food supply in breeding areas disappears in winter.

1.4. Population:

1.4.1. *Global Population size*

Despite its apparent rarity, the world population might number 35 to 40,000 pairs. The numbers and population trend are not accurately known, particularly over Asia, however it is generally accepted that the migrating Asian population is declining where some resident populations are relatively stable.

1.4.2. *Current global population trends*

___increasing __XX_decreasing __X_stable ____unknown

1.5. Conservation status

1.5.1. *Global conservation status* (according to IUCN Red List):

___Critically endangered ___Near Threatened
_X_Endangered ___Least concern
___Vulnerable ___Data deficient

1.5.2. *National conservation status for the case study country*

Protected under United Arab Emirates Federal Law 24 (1999). In most other countries of its distribution range the Saker falcon is protected

1.5.3. *Main threats within the case study country*

___No Threats
_X_Habitat Loss/Degradation (human induced)
___Invasive alien species (directly affecting the species)
_X_Harvesting [hunting/gathering]
___Accidental mortality (e.g. Bycatch)
___Persecution (e.g. Pest control)
___Pollution (affecting habitat and/or species)
___Other_____
___Unknown

In Europe the Saker has suffered mainly from the loss and degradation of steppes and dry grasslands through agricultural intensification, plantation establishment and declines in sheep pastoralism, causing a decline in key prey species; offtake for falconry is also a problem, which has caused local extinctions. In eastern Hungary, landscape reversion following the abandonment of agriculture could have a negative influence, as most prey species require short swards that are maintained by agricultural practices. Elsewhere declines are mainly attributable to offtake for falconry, although human persecution, pesticide use (notably in Mongolia in 2003) and agrochemical deployment play a lesser part. Estimated numbers of Sakers trapped annually for Middle East falconers are 4,000 in Saudi Arabia, 1,000 in Qatar and 500-1,000 in each of Bahrain, Kuwait and UAE, which, allowing for a 5% mortality prior to receipt, indicates an annual consumption of 6,825-8,400 birds. Of these, the great majority (77%) are believed to be juvenile females, followed by 19% adult females, 3% juvenile males and 1% adult males, potentially creating a major bias in the wild population. Hybridisation with escaped or released hybrid falcons could influence the genetic integrity of wild populations. In the UAE, the threats are mainly trapping for falconry and / or illegal trade, mainly from Central Asia, Iran, and Pakistan.

2. SPECIES MANAGEMENT WITHIN THE COUNTRY FOR WHICH CASE STUDY IS BEING PRESENTED

2.1. Management measures

2.1.1. *Management history*

This is mainly a winter migrant to the UAE and therefore would only be found here in the winter months. Management of the species was initiated after CITES issued a trade suspension on the UAE (originally not link to trade of falcon species. To overcome the trade suspension, a management system for falconry birds needed to be put in place.

2.1.2. *Purpose of the management plan in place*

The purpose of the management plan is to eliminate the illegal trade of saker falcons and control the legal trade. It is also aimed at allowing the traditional practice of Arab falconry (with frequent transborder crossing for hunting trips) with the legal obligation of international law, in particular CITES.

2.1.3. *General elements of the management plan*

The main elements are a strict application of CITES for import – export and re-export of Saker Falcons, the enactment of a strict national legislation on wildlife trade, confiscation, registration of the falconry birds in the country (through a network of dedicated falcons hospital. The registration needs to happen within a week of the legal import of any falconry birds (wild or captive-bred) or within two weeks on a bird being hatched in one of the UAE captive-breeding centres. At registration each birds is given a close – ring and PIT, its owner, sex, photo, ring and PIT number, entry (or hatching date) are entered in a register. The hunting birds are also issued a "falcon passport" under CITES to allow for regular movements of the bird across borders.

2.1.4. *Restoration or alleviation measures*

A number of captive-breeding have been established in the UAE and elsewhere, and the UAE recently banned the import of wild-caught saker falcons. A number of conservation initiatives (falcons' releases, artificial nesting and field studies) have also been initiated by the UAE in various range states in Central Asia, China and Mongolia).

2.2. Monitoring system

2.2.1. *Methods used to monitor harvest*
There is a small harvest which takes place under special circumstances of wintering falcons. These falcons are then fitted by an open ring and PIT by the proper authorities and register.

2.2.2. *Confidence in the use of monitoring*
The import monitoring is now quite strict. It is however difficult to control the illegal shipment arriving through third parties, as the real origin of the birds is difficult assesses.

2.3. Legal framework and law enforcement:

UAE FEDERAL LAW:

- There is a UAE Federal Law 24 (1999) Concerning Protection and Development of the Environment as amended, and its Executive Order issued by Council of Ministers Decree No. (37) of 2001.
- UAE Federal Law 11 of 2005 on Wildlife Trade. This law enforce strictly all requirements of the CITES convention within the legal system of the UAE.

CITES:

- Notification to the Parties, No. 2006/012, which states that UAE will not allow live falcons to be imported into the UAE unless they have a closed ring whose number or ID is also clearly marked on the CITES permit.
- Notification to the Parties, No. 2006/061, regarding Review of Significant Trade Trade in *Falco cherrug*. With nine range States where the species was categorized as 'of urgent concern' and to 26 range States where it was categorized as 'of possible concern'. With regard to the range States for which trade in *Falco cherrug* was categorized as of 'urgent concern', the Secretariat informs Parties that until further notice, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have suspended the issuance of export permits for *Falco cherrug*. Also the Parties are requested to inform the Secretariat if an export permit for specimens of *Falco cherrug* from one of these countries is presented to them.

3. UTILIZATION AND TRADE FOR RANGE STATE FOR WHICH CASE STUDY IS BEING PRESENTED

3.1. **Type of use** (origin) **and destinations** (purposes)

This species is mainly used for falconry purposes. Since the UAE Notification No. 2006/012 does not allow birds without closed rings this would imply that falcons coming in would either be from captive-bred operations and/or ranching operations. Also due to notification No. 2006/061 there are some bans in place on countries which were legally exporting specimens e.g. from quotas or ranched operations.

3.2. Harvest:

3.2.1. *Harvesting regime*

There is some live trapping allowed under special circumstances as the UAE does not allow hunting of its natural resources as per its Federal Laws.

3.2.2. *Harvest management/ control* (quotas, seasons, permits, etc.)

The birds captured have to be fitted with an open ring and such birds when presented to the appropriate management authority have to sign a document under oath.

3.3. Legal and illegal trade levels

To the extent possible, quantify the level of legal and illegal use nationally and export and describe its nature. It is estimated that between 6 to 9,000 saker falcons are imported in the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrein and the UAE) for falconry purposes. In the UAE, it is estimated now that since the implementation of Federal Law 11 in 2005, around 90% of the imports are now legal. Since UAE notification 2006/012 the number of wild caught sakers imported in the country has dramatically decreased. However it has been reported that wild caught sakers are now finding their way through Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The export of saker falcons from the Arabian Peninsula is minimal, and essentially to send prime falcons to breeding facilities abroad.

II. NON-DETRIMFNT FINDING PROCFDURE (NDFS)

1. IS THE METHODOLOGY USED BASED ON THE IUCN CHECKLIST FOR NDFs?

_X_ yes ___ no

2. CRITERIA, PARAMETERS AND/OR INDICATORS USED

3. MAIN SOURCES OF DATA, INCLUDING FIELD EVALUATION OR SAMPLING METHODOLOGIES AND ANALYSIS USED

4. EVALUATION OF DATA QUANTITY AND QUALITY FOR THE ASSESSMENT

5. MAIN PROBLEMS, CHALLENGES OR DIFFICULTIES FOUND ON THE ELABORATION OF NDF

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

NDF are only useful if they are known and available to the importing countries. Export permits are issued by the country of origin, not by the importing country. In most cases the importing country does not know if NDF has been done, and even if done, the importing country does not know it validity. In the case of the UAE, it did happen several time, that UAE did confiscate falcons that were imported with CITES documents issued by the "proper" country of origin authorities but where the birds where not the one declare on the papers, where declared as captive-bred when no such facilities exists in the country of origin, or when UAE authorities were made aware of a suspicious consignment.