

Houbara Bustard threat in South Africa

Title BirdLife South Africa (BirdLife Partner) joined forces with other organizations to react with dismay to the receipt of information suggesting that there is interest in the hunting of Houbara Bustard by means of falcons in South Africa. According to information received, there is intention by falconers to establish a Houbara Bustard breeding facility in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa and to release and hunt these bustards with large exotic falcons. Their media release was as follows: We wish to state, in the strongest terms, that we are vehemently opposed to this suggestion. We understand that there may also be an intention to hunt indigenous bustards and korhaans with exotic falcons, which we also strongly oppose. The basis of our opposition to any such proposals would be that:

- The release of exotic species into the natural environment to be hunted is contrary to existing biodiversity legislation and could be detrimental to the conservation of indigenous birds.
- Falconry is the art of hunting wild quarry with a trained hawk. The practice of 'put and take' hunting where quarry species are released into the natural environment and then hunted does not fit this definition and would, in our opinion, be unethical.
- We are of the opinion that the captive breeding of Houbara Bustards in South Africa on a scale that permits their hunting by falcons is impractical and, probably, not feasible. We have real concern that this activity may be used as a front to enable the hunting of indigenous bustard species.
- Ten species of bustards occur in South Africa, of which six are endemic (or near-endemic) to southern Africa (in other words, found nowhere else in the world) and of which six are listed in *The Eskom Red Data Book of Birds of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland*. The Denham's Bustard and Blue Korhaan are also listed as 'Near-threatened' internationally.
- Whilst we strongly support the concept of sustainable utilization, including the sustainable hunting of natural resources, and view this as a significant conservation tool, we believe that hunting of indigenous bustards and korhaans is not sustainable, in line with their current legal status within South Africa. Hunting would be an additional threat for these species, all of which breed slowly and are threatened by many other human-induced factors.
- The South African Falconry Association (SAFA) has very strict regulations regarding the use of exotic raptors for falconry. With the application of these regulations, the loss of a free-flying exotic raptor into the environment becomes a very rare event. In this way the use of exotic raptors for falconry is not a contravention of existing biodiversity legislation and does not threaten the natural biodiversity of South Africa. In practical terms, only exotic raptors can be used to hunt Houbara Bustards. We would oppose, in the

- strongest terms, the possession of exotic raptors, which may be used for falconry, by any persons not affiliated to SAFA and not subject to these SAFA regulations.
- We take pride in the history of co-operation by hunters, including falconers, with South Africa's conservation authorities with particular regard to sustainable utilization issues in general and falconry in particular and we would oppose any practices which would not conform with acceptable sustainable utilization standards of practice and ethics.

We question why the Northern Cape Government is considering this application, which may pre-empt the national translocation policy under discussion by the national Department of Environmental Affairs, provincial conservation authorities and the hunting industry, given that such a policy may apply very strict controls on the movement of non-indigenous animals including the Houbara Bustard and exotic falcons. We question the failure of the Northern Cape Provincial Government to inform and consult with established stakeholder organisations about this application. We call on the Northern Cape Government and any other provincial administration to reject any application for permits to captive-breed Houbara Bustards or hunt any bustards and korhaans by exotic falcons.