



GLOBAL FLYWAYS SUMMIT, APRIL 23-26 2018

Conserving the Saker Falcon – Implementation of the Global Action Plan

Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* (globally Endangered) populations have suffered rapid declines driven by threats including electrocution on powerline poles, unsustainable trapping for falconry purposes and habitat degradation. The ten-year Saker Falcon Global Action Plan (SakerGAP), adopted by CMS Parties in 2014, brought together more than 80 countries, organisations, scientists, falconers and other stakeholders with the shared goal to re-establish a healthy, self-sustaining wild population throughout its range.

The session, convened by the CMS Raptors MOU, provided an overview of the SakerGAP, its opportunities and challenges; presented an update of conservation actions performed in the frame of an initial suite of five Flagship Proposals; outlined the draft SakerGAP Summary Implementation Plan with key priorities; summarised the conservation principles and safeguards relating to sustainable use of the Saker Falcon, the challenges and opportunities; and encouraged collaboration and support across participating sectors to conserve the species.

Programme

In his opening remarks, H.E. Mohamed Ahmed Al Bowardi, Managing Director of Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi, recognised the role of the CMS Raptors MOU in developing a comprehensive international organisational framework and workplan to conserve the Saker Falcon. H.E. Al Bowardi announced the establishment of a USD 20 million Raptor Conservation Foundation, under the auspices of H.H. Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, with initial seed funding of USD 1 million to combat the threat of electrocution of falcons and other birds of prey on powerline poles.

In the SakerGAP overview session presented by Nick P. Williams (CMS Raptors MOU), the main points highlighted were the holistic, inclusive and multi-level conservation approach of the SakerGAP, which incorporates the concept of sustainable use for falconry purposes and an Adaptive Management Framework; the continuation of the Saker Falcon Task Force (STF) with a remit to facilitate implementation of the Action Plan; and integration of the SakerGAP into national biodiversity and other plans. It was noted that the SakerGAP was developed through extensive consultation with stakeholders, with shared interests and responsibilities to conserve the species on the breeding grounds and along its flyways.



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A Summit for the Flyways Outcomes

To gain momentum for implementation, five Flagship Proposals (FPs) were elaborated and included in the SakerGAP, with the following aims: (1) To create a single Saker Falcon Online Information Portal; (2) To engage 10 Falcon Hospitals and 10 Trappers within a Saker Falcon Network; (3) To deploy 100 satellite tags on Saker Falcons; (4) To erect 1,000 artificial nest platforms for Saker Falcons; and, (5) To install or retro-fit 1,000,000 new or existing 'bird-safe' electricity poles.

The session reported some excellent progress on these initiatives achieved by the STF, in collaboration with organisations and experts. FP1 and FP2, reported and presented by Prof. Robert Kenward, IUCN-CEM and Mr. Janusz Sielicki, International Association of Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF), respectively, had been completed in the form of www.sakernet.org. This online portal is available in four languages (Arabic, Farsi, Pashto and Russian) and was visited 7,000 times by the end of 2017. Eight Falcon Clinics expressed interest in future cooperation with a scheme to monitor wild Saker Falcon populations and trade through mark-recapture methods. As a contribution to FP3 (compiled by Mr. Mátyás Prommer, Herman Ottó Institute Nonprofit Ltd., and presented by Mr. András Kovács, Specialist Technical Advisor to the STF), over 70 Saker Falcons have been tracked by satellite tags in Europe (32) and Asia (38+) since 2014. Interpretation of the collected data is an important next step. Dr. Andrew Dixon (Emirates Falconers' Club) provided update on the progress of establishing artificial nest platforms for Saker Falcons and assessed their potential conservation management roles. Mr. Janusz Sielicki (IAF) summarised efforts to retrofit dangerous power lines across the range of the Saker Falcon (FP5) and emphasized the importance of permanent solutions.

The aim of the draft SakerGAP Summary Implementation Plan 2018–2020, presented by Dr. Robert Sheldon, SakerGAP Coordinator, is to operationalise the core objectives and actions outlined in the SakerGAP. It was prepared on the basis of the SakerGAP but supplemented by means of an extensive Questionnaire Survey. Initial results had been introduced by the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MoU at the 4th STF Telecom on 26 March 2018. The draft Implementation Plan combines the Flagship Proposals, components of the Adaptive Management Framework and the Framework for Action, and consolidates them in to a single summary document. This Summary Implementation Plan will be used to both guide and track progress of the delivery of the SakerGAP, and should be considered a dynamic working document that can be updated regularly. Alongside the summary document, a comprehensive Implementation Plan is being developed that includes details of all actions applicable to the Range States, other partners and stakeholders. The morning session ended with breakout group discussions covering the topics of (1) Engaging national governments; (2) Enhancing co-ordination between Range States and across the flyway; and (3) Monitoring and research. Rapporteurs from Working Groups summarised participants' valuable ideas and suggestions, which will be fed into the SakerGAP Implementation Plan.

The afternoon session was allocated to the topic of sustainable use. In his introductory speech Dr. Adrian Lombard (IAF) presented

considerations relating to sustainable use of the Saker Falcon as a conservation tool and assessed the pros and cons of such an approach. Prof. Colin A. Galbraith (Chair of the STF) delivered a keynote presentation on sustainable use as proposed by the SakerGAP. The underlying principle had been established in Objective 2 of the SakerGAP to 'Ensure that where trapping and other forms of taking Saker Falcons from the wild are legal, they are controlled, and sustainable, thereby encouraging population growth and eventual stabilization'. During the session, the potential cumulative negative consequences of uncontrolled use of the Saker Falcon were considered, as were the essential and desirable ecological and conservation safeguards to ensure a sustainable limited harvest of birds. The presentations were followed by a plenary discussion about sustainable use of the Saker Falcon, which provided additional valuable inputs to promoting implementation of the concept established in the SakerGAP.

Key outcomes

The session reaffirmed the importance of the SakerGAP, particularly in relation to its transparent and consensus-building approach. It noted excellent progress on the Flagship Projects, but also that implementation needs to be scaled up on the basis of the SakerGAP Implementation Plan and extended into priority Range States, especially to address the primary threat of electrocution. For the effective long-term conservation of the species, it is essential to move from the current unregulated illegal taking of Saker Falcons to a situation which ensures that any taking of birds from the wild is regulated in a transparent manner and in line with the SakerGAP goal to re-establish a healthy, self-sustaining wild population throughout its range, including by adopting the safeguards established in the plan.

In addition to an enhanced level of resource mobilization involving Range States and stakeholders, full implementation of SakerGAP will require development of a governance framework. Participants applied their knowledge and experience to finding solutions to key challenges inhibiting effective delivery of the SakerGAP – the valuable outputs will be incorporated into the Implementation Plan.



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