

**PROPOSAL FOR INCLUSION OF SPECIES ON THE APPENDICES OF THE  
CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY SPECIES OF  
WILD ANIMALS**

**A. PROPOSAL:** To list *Falco cherrug* on Appendix I, excluding the population of Mongolia

**B. PROPONENT:** European Union and its Member States

**C. SUPPORTING STATEMENT:**

**1. Taxon**

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|------------|-----------------------|---|---|
| <b>1.1</b> | <b>Classis</b>        | : | Aves  |
| <b>1.2</b> | <b>Ordo</b>           | : | Falconiformes                                   |
| <b>1.3</b> | <b>Familia</b>        | : | Falconidae                                      |
| <b>1.4</b> | <b>Species</b>        | : | <i>Falco cherrug</i>                            |
| <b>1.5</b> | <b>Common name(s)</b> | : | Saker Falcon; Saker; Faucon sacre; Halcón sacre |

**2. Biological data**

**2.1 Distribution**

Overall, this species is partly migratory. Breeding adults of most populations tend to be sedentary with a few exceptions (northern parts of Asia); that depends upon the extent to which food supply in the breeding area is sustained throughout the year. In most populations, young birds show migratory behaviour; however, only a part of them are true migrants independently of the geographic area. The Saker Falcon has a wide range from central and eastern Europe to Mongolia and western China, extending south in Asia as far as India, and in Africa as far as Kenya. In general, the more northerly states make up its breeding range and the southerly ones its wintering range, but there is a broad latitudinal overlap of the two ranges in Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East and China.

**2.2 Population**

According to BirdLife data, total population is estimated to 9,600-17,000 breeding pairs and trend show 32 per cent decrease (based on median estimates) over the 19 year period (1991-2010), with a minimum-maximum of 29-62 per cent, and best placed in the band 30-49 per cent (BirdLife International Species Fact Sheet). However, more recent data (especially those from Asian part of range) indicate even stronger decline.

This very rapid population decline is particularly marked on the Central Asian breeding grounds (see References /Moshkin's article). 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, the declines over 13 years equate to 66 per cent over 15 years (based on median estimates), with a minimum-maximum of 53-75 per cent. Declines for the following countries give particular cause for concern: Kazakhstan (90 per cent decline from median of 1990 estimates to median

of 2003 estimates), Uzbekistan (90 per cent decline), Russian Federation (69 per cent), Kyrgyzstan (68 per cent) and Mongolia (59 per cent). European population underwent a large decline (> 20 per cent in two generations) between 1990 and 2000 (Nagy & Demeter 2006).

Having considered (a) the lack of appropriate quality data from some parts of the distribution range data; (b) and that the available data from most of the breeding range of the species show rapid decline in the breeding population; (c) as well as considering the precautionary principle as first expressed in Rio Declaration<sup>1</sup> and as one of the European Union's statutory pillars, listing the Saker Falcon in Annex I of CMS is an urgent and very necessary act.

### 2.3 Habitat

It prefers open grassy landscapes such as desert edge, semi-desert, steppes, agricultural areas, arid mountain areas; in some regions, particularly near water. It uses copses of trees or cliffs for nest sites and occasionally the ground, occupying the old nests of other birds. Man-made structures (including electricity pylons) are also sometimes used, and in some countries, this is deliberately encouraged for conservation purposes by setting artificial nests.

### 2.4 Migrations

Studies proved that there is an age-dependent and partial migration at Sakers. In most of the species' distribution area, adults are sedentary, while some of the juveniles migrate. The considerable differences in migration habits of juveniles within the same population are not yet understood. The species leaves its extreme northerly nesting areas completely at the end of the breeding season. Elsewhere, depending on the severity of the winter and the availability of prey, adult individuals may stay at the eyries, leave the immediate vicinity of the nesting place or migrate over few hundred kilometres (Potapov et al 2002). Juveniles in those areas can show true migrant, sedentary or 'indecisive' behaviour (Prommer & Bagyura 2010).

Migration is noted annually throughout the Mediterranean region, Turkey and the Middle East, Central Asia, India and China. Autumn migration starts in late August; however, juveniles may start their migration – especially in the more southern countries – as late as the end of November or beginning in December (Prommer & Bagyura 2010).

The most important wintering areas are North Africa (Sahel), probably East Africa, the central and eastern part of the European Mediterranean (Prommer & Bagyura 2010), Kazakhstan and Tibet.

## 3. **Threat data**

While the substantial decline of the species seems to have been curbed to a certain extent in most of the EU, it appears that the species is under threat in the remaining parts of its distribution range, where much of their breeding and wintering grounds are found and full legal protection is lacking. Therefore, in principle the conservation status of this raptor species would be improved through comprehensive and co-ordinated action covering its entire range.

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<sup>1</sup> Principle No. 15: "In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation."

### 3.1 Direct threats

#### 3.1.1 Electrocution

Electrocution is very likely to be one of the major threats posed to Sakers. It was reported as a threat from Hungary, the Czech Republic (Beran et al 2010), Slovakia, Russia (Goroshko 2011), Kazakhstan (Lasch et al 2010), Mongolia (Harness & Gombobaatar 2008) and China based on evidence (carcasses found). However the same problem occurs in all the Central and Eastern European countries, and Italy. With the recent adaptation for breeding on electricity pylons in the west of the range, it may become a serious threat. The level of risk can be well illustrated with the following example: 3 out of 44 satellite-tagged Sakers in Hungary were certainly electrocuted (2 in Hungary and 1 in Russia) and also in some other cases they had likely been electrocuted but the bodies were not found (Prommer & Bagyura 2010). It also has to be mentioned that the Chinese standards for pylons of mid-voltage power lines are especially dangerous for birds, and such pylons are now being exported to many Asian, and more and more African countries increasing the risk for Sakers, as well as other bird species.

#### 3.1.2 Persecution

Deliberate killing by humans is known to occur, though the extent to which this is a problem for the conservation of the species is hard to determine. Cases of shot Sakers (bodies found) are known from Slovakia, Hungary and Niger, but deliberate shooting is very likely to occur in many other countries as well. It is worth mentioning that shooting of Saker occurred in Hungary, even though the country is considered one of the most protective countries for Sakers (as well as for other raptors), and conservation measures include also large scale public awareness raising campaigns.

#### 3.1.3 Direct and indirect poisoning

Death and reduced breeding success caused by pesticides, to which large falcons are well known to be sensitive, is still a factor in some parts of the bird's range. Chemicals can enter the food web and thus to Sakers' body through inappropriate agricultural activities like using various pesticides (e.g. rodenticides) or soil fertilizers whether in too large amounts/concentrations or simply not following the descriptions for use. A Hungarian study in 2009 found more than a dozen various chemical substances in addled Saker eggs. Among the chemicals such persistent ones were found like DDT that was withdrawn from use in Hungary in 1968. That chemical was responsible of the 90 per cent of the decline in the Peregrine population in the Northern Hemisphere up to the 1960s and obviously it had a serious effect on other raptor species as well. In some Asian and African countries DDT is still in use.

Deliberate poisoning of mammal predators and corvids are also affecting the Sakers indirectly. Although usually not feeding on carrions, Sakers may rob prey from other raptors or they rarely can take part of the poisoned bait especially when feeding nestlings. In both cases mentioned above, carbofuran causes the vast majority of poisonings (Bagyura, pers. comm.).

#### 3.1.4 Trapping

A key issue is the taking of birds for falconry that affects mainly but not only the Asian population. Recent decline and even local extinction have been attributed as being specifically due to this activity. According to local trappers in the Syrian Desert, the number of trapped falcons dropped by 90 per cent between 1984 and 2003. Falcon trapping puts heavy pressure on the migrating large falcons in the area (Serra & al. 2005). Majority of trapping is

for the international trade (Ma & Chen 2007). Studies have estimated that the numbers of Saker Falcons 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 per cent mortality prior to receipt, indicates an annual consumption of 6,825-8,400 birds. Of these, the great majority (77 per cent) are believed to be juvenile females, followed by 19 per cent adult females, 3 per cent juvenile males and 1 per cent adult males, potentially creating a major bias in the wild population.<sup>2</sup> (ERWDA 2003, Fox 2002). Taking in numbers that even approach these kinds of figures cannot be sustainable in this species.

Mongolia – as a single country that can legally trap and export wild Sakers – with an assistance of foreign experts has launched a Saker conservation programme that may be able to slow down the decrease of the population. Having regard to the extent of the problem of trapping completed with other threats, a single field conservation project on some well-located places in one country seems to be insufficient to conserve the Asian populations of the species in the long term.

### 3.2 Habitat destruction

In its European range, the species has suffered mainly from the loss and degradation of steppes and dry grasslands through agricultural intensification, plantation establishment and declines in sheep-grazing. All of these factors contribute to a decline in key prey species, particularly small mammals, such as sousliks and hamsters. Due to habitat changes in the western part of the range, birds have become a more important component of the diet.

Landscape reversion following the abandonment of agriculture may also have a negative influence, as most prey species require short swards that are maintained by agricultural practices.

Both in the breeding and wintering areas more and more wind farms are established on the open areas often in co-incidence with Sakers' preferred habitats. Hungarian studies show that adult Sakers are rather showing an avoiding behaviour so those areas between the wind mills are lost habitats for them, even if there is plenty of food there. Juveniles are less afraid of wind mills. However this is the reason why they are more exposed to the risk of collision with the turbines (Váczki & Prommer 2010). Such conflict is increasing throughout the species' range; however, it is more emphasized recently in Central and Eastern Europe.

### 3.3 Indirect threats

Hybridization with escaped or released hybrid falcons (which is known to occur) might influence the genetic integrity of wild populations.

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<sup>2</sup> Females are larger and more powerful in this species as in many of the falcons, and are thus disproportionately selected for falconry.

### 3.4 Threats connected especially with migrations

Electrocution and collision with wires are reported as a threat from China (for birds of the wintering Mongolian population) and Bulgaria. However they are very likely problems in many other countries too.

Sakers migrate on broad front and they regularly cross large water bodies such as the Mediterranean Sea, or deserts. Global warming may influence wind trades, the extension of desert areas and that will certainly affect migration habits and migration routes – although it is very difficult if not impossible to say how.

### 3.5. Threats in the EU

Despite strong legal protection, also in the EU the species is still exposed to certain important threats other than those mentioned above, namely electrocution, poisoning, illegal harvesting of broods and poaching during migration. A significant effort is being done at EU level to stop illegal killing (e.g. the European Conference on Illegal Killing of Birds that is being organized in Cyprus in July 2011 under the Council of Europe and Bern Convention and the EU has been acting strictly against Malta, where shooting migratory birds is a common tradition).

### 3.6 National and international utilization

Professional trapping in Asia is the major type of national and international utilization. Wild caught *Falco cherrug* is traded for falconry purpose. The main importers are Arab countries. Only trade in captive bred specimens is allowed to the EU. A number of captive bred specimens are exported from Europe. *Falco cherrug* has been listed in CITES Appendix II since 1975. CITES Appendix II species can be traded if the exporting countries demonstrate that trade is sustainable and is not detrimental to long term conservation. In 2004 however, this species underwent the so-called Significant Trade Review Process, which is an internal mechanism to CITES where range states, in case a species is traded in relevant numbers, are requested to provide data on population status and trends, and on management measures put in place to guarantee a long-term sustainable harvest. As a result of this process, trade was suspended in 2005 from Tajikistan, Armenia, Iraq, Bahrain and Mauritania. In 2006, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have suspended, at the request of the Secretariat, the issue of export permits until further notice. After a long analysis, in 2009 the CITES Standing Committee, in the light of information provided by Mongolia and a recommendation from the Secretariat, withdrew its recommendation to Parties to suspend trade in *Falco cherrug* with that country, provided that it maintained an annual export quota of 300 specimens for the years 2009 and 2010 and, before establishing a quota for 2011, reported at the 25th meeting of the Animals Committee (which will meet in July 2011) and took advice from that Committee about the development of its management programme for the species. Today, under the CITES rules, the only country which is allowed to export wild *Falco cherrug* is Mongolia, within a limit of 300 specimens/year for 2009 and 2010. For all other countries, no export in wild specimens is allowed.

It has to be mentioned that in North Africa trapping of all kinds of birds including birds of prey is a national tradition. However wild caught birds usually perish very soon as basic conditions for keeping live animals are lacking. Sakers are caught and sold illegally for

falconry also in North Africa. However, in some cases caught birds may end up as a pet in some households.

In the EU, *Falco cherrug* is listed in Annex A of Regulation 338/97. This means that no commercial trade is possible for specimens of wild origin. Therefore its listing in CMS Appendix I will not affect European traders and falconers.

#### **4. Protection status and needs**

##### **4.1 National protection status**

The Saker is a protected and often red-listed species in many range states, particularly in the Western parts of its range.

##### **4.2 International protection status**

###### **4.2.1 Coherence with the CITES**

It is listed on CITES Appendix II. Controls of illegal trade were implemented in various countries in the bird's western range in the 1990s.

Trade that can be addressed by CITES is a major threat to Saker Falcon. However a number of other threats and pressures such as electrocution, persecution, habitat destruction, decline in prey species and use of pesticides are also seriously contributing to the decline of the populations. Therefore, CMS is an additional, necessary and appropriate instrument for the conservation of the species.

###### **4.2.2 Coherence with the Birds Directive**

The Saker Falcon is listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive, and benefits from the establishment of Special Protection Areas and concerted conservation efforts agreed at the level of international Action Plans.

The EU and other European countries have endorsed the International Action Plan for *Falco cherrug* initiated by the Council of Europe under the Bern Convention. The *Falco cherrug* Action Plan calls for adequate protection according to the requirements of the CMS. Although the Action Plan focuses mostly on the European range of the species, some of the recommended actions should also be addressed in non-EU states, where threats to the species are also identified.

EU financial support to the species was provided in the form of LIFE funding to several LIFE projects carried out in particular in Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Italy<sup>3</sup>.

###### **4.2.3 Coherence with the CMS Birds of Prey MoU**

In accordance with Activity 1.1 set out in Table 2 of the Action Plan, which is part of the CMS Birds of Prey MoU, both this species and the Red-footed Falcon (*Falco verpertinus*) should be included in CMS Appendix I, i.e. uplisted from Appendix II to Appendix I, because

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<sup>3</sup> E.g., LIFE07/NAT/BG/000068, LIFE06/NAT/H/000096, LIFE09/NAT/HU/000384, LIFE07/NAT/H/000321, LIFE06/NAT/RO/000177.

they are listed in Category 1 of Table 1.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the two draft proposals are in line with the Birds of Prey MoU. Although in accordance with the same activity of the Birds of Prey MoU, a number of other Category 1 species – including those occurring in the EU – should similarly also be proposed for uplisting from CMS Appendix II to Appendix I, considering available population trends and data on extensity and seriousness of various threats affecting the populations, Saker Falcon should be given a high priority.

#### 4.2.4 Coherence with CMS

Uplisting the *Falco cherrug* is in line with CMS Resolution 9.20, which strongly recommends uplisting this species into Appendix I.

#### 4.3 Additional protection needs

The species should receive protection under national legislation in countries where this is not already the case. Greater protection (against habitat conversion, degradation and pollution) of key breeding environments is also important. Solutions must be found to the issue of unsustainable taking for falconry. As one example, captive breeding has developed strongly in some countries, including UAE, as a means of substitution for wild-caught birds. Adequate enforcement is a key tool to tackle illegal trapping and illegal trade. Intensive wardening and management has produced a steadily rising population in Hungary, and such techniques could be used in other breeding Range States (Baumgart 1994). The maintenance of ecologically and socially sustainable grazing systems would help to ensure long-term survival of key prey species. Other needs include: improved systems of customs control and the enforcement of CITES regulations; and improved micro-chipping schemes to help monitor and regulate trade and quantify its effects. Registering falconry birds by using DNA samples at least in the developed countries and building an international database is a desirable tool to prevent keeping falcons originating from illegal harvesting of wild populations.

#### 4.4. Considerations

Including the species in Appendix I of CMS will raise the awareness of the governments in the affected countries to strengthen their measures to protect the species and monitor its population more closely, which may result in a more accurate population estimates in the close future.

Because Mongolia undertook a big effort to comply with CITES which led them to successfully being authorized to set a quota of 300 live specimens taken from the wild, the population of Mongolia is excluded from this proposal. No other CITES Party has actually, or had in the last eight years, published a quota for this species. Kazakhstan has a quota of 120 captive-bred specimens. Under the CMS, exceptions to taking are possible, e.g. under Article III paragraph 5.d., if extraordinary circumstances so require, provided that such exceptions are precise as to content and limited in space and time and that such taking does not operate to the disadvantage of the species.

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<sup>4</sup> The Activity 1.1 of the Action Plan recommends to update CMS Appendix I to include all Category 1 species of MoU.

## 5. Range States<sup>5</sup>

Afghanistan, ARMENIA, AUSTRIA, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, BELARUS, BULGARIA, China, CROATIA, CYPRUS, CZECH REPUBLIC, EGYPT, ETHIOPIA, HUNGARY, INDIA, IRAN, Iraq, ISRAEL, ITALY, JORDAN, KAZAKHSTAN, KENYA, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, LIBYA, MALTA, , MONGOLIA, Nepal, Oman, PAKISTAN, REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA ROMANIA, Russian Federation, SAUDI ARABIA, SERBIA, SLOVAKIA, Sudan, TAJIKISTAN, TUNISIA, Turkey, Turkmenistan, UKRAINE, United Arab Emirates, UZBEKISTAN, YEMEN. (Small numbers or single vagrants reach many other countries).

## 6. Comments from Range States

See comments received from the Government of Croatia in document UNEP/CMS/Conf.10.15/Addendum

## 7. Additional remarks

## 8. References

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<sup>5</sup> CMS Parties in capitals.

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