

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

A. PROPOSAL: To list the entire population of *Falco cherrug* on Appendix I

B. PROPONENT: Government of Croatia

C. SUPPORTING STATEMENT:

1. Taxon

1.1 Classis: Aves

1.2 Ordo: Falconiformes

1.3 Familia: Falconidae

1.4 Species: *Falco cherrug*

1.5 Common name(s): Saker Falcon; Saker; Faucon sacré; Halcón sacre

2. Biological data

2.1 Distribution

Overall, this species is strongly migratory. A few populations tend to be sedentary, but this depends upon the extent to which food supply in the breeding area is sustained throughout the year. It 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 some latitudinal overlap of the two ranges in eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Middle East and China.

2.2 Population

The global population was estimated to be 8,500-12,000 pairs in 1990, and 3,600-4,400 pairs (7,200 to 8,800 individuals) in 2003. This puts the population decline at 48-70% over this period, with a best estimate (between median estimates for 1990 and 2003) of 61%. This very rapid population decline is particularly marked on the Central Asian breeding grounds. 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% over 15 years (based on median estimates), with a minimum-maximum of 53-75%. 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%). European population underwent a large decline (> 20% in two generations) between 1990 and 2000 (Nagy & Demeter 2006). The species is classified by IUCN as Endangered.

2.3 Habitat

It prefers open grassy landscapes such as desert edge, semi-desert, steppes, agricultural areas, arid montane 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

The species completely leaves its more northerly nesting areas at the end of every breeding season. Elsewhere, individuals may all leave, or some may remain, at least partly depending on the severity of the winter and the availability of prey. Migration is noted annually through the Mediterranean region, Turkey and the Middle East, Central Asia, India and China. Birds depart the northern breeding areas in late September and October, returning in March and early April. In its more southerly breeding areas, it may leave for much shorter periods; for instance, it may leave Romania in November and return in February to March. In Slovakia, it may still be present for all but a period in January to February. In Africa, the bird arrives in October and stays until March or, at latest, April.

3. **Threat data**

3.1 Direct threat

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. Death and reduced breeding success caused by pesticides, to which large falcons are well known to be sensitive, is likely still to be a factor in some parts of the bird's range. A key issue is the taking of birds for falconry. Recent declines, and even local extinctions, have been attributed as being specifically due to this activity. 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% 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. (Females are larger and more powerful in this species as in many of the falcons, and are thus disproportionately selected for falconry.) (Erwda 2003, Fox 2002). Taking in numbers that even approach these kinds of figures cannot be sustainable in this species.

Electrocution was reported as a threat from Hungary and China. With the recent adaptation for breeding on electricity pylons in the west of the range, it may become a serious threat.

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 susliks 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.

3.3 Indirect threats

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

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.

3.5 National and international utilisation

Apart from taking for falconry, none is known.

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

I

t is listed on CITES Appendix II. Controls of illegal trade were implemented in various countries in the bird's western range in the 1990s. It is listed on the Appendix 1 of proposed draft Action Plan of Raptor MoU.

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. 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 microchipping schemes to help monitor and regulate trade and quantify its effects.

5. Range States¹

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, MOLDOVA, MONGOLIA, Nepal, Oman, PAKISTAN, 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

7. Additional remarks

8. References

- Baumgart, W. (1994) Saker *Falco cherrug*. Pp. 198-199 in Tucker, G.M. and Heath, M.F., eds. *Birds in Europe: their conservation status*. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International (Conservation Series 3).
- BirdLife International (2008) Species factsheet: *Falco cherrug*. Downloaded from <http://www.birdlife.org> on 20/6/2008.
- Brown, Leslie *The Birds of Africa Volume I* (1982) Academic Press, London.
- Nagy, S. Demeter, I. (2006) Saker Falcon: European Single Species Action Plan.
- ERWDA (2003) The status of the Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*) and assessment of trade. Abu Dhabi, UAE: Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency.
- Fox, N. (2002) The conservation of the Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*) and the role of CITES in UAE 2002. Abu Dhabi, UAE: Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency.
- Snow, D.W. and Perrins, C.M. (1998) *The Birds of the Western Palearctic: Concise Edition* OUP, Oxford.

¹ CMS Parties in capitals.