



Memorandum of Understanding
on the Conservation of
Migratory Birds of Prey in
Africa and Eurasia

10 May 2018

4th Saker Falcon Task Force Telecom: SakerGAP Implementation

Monday 26 March 2018, 09:00-10:40 UTC

Summary Note

- Participants:** **Range States:** China – Zhenzhen Lin; Hungary – Mátyás Prommer; Iran – Mohammad Asghari Tabari; Kazakhstan – Sergey Sklyarenko; Mongolia – Nyambayar Batbayar; Saudi Arabia – Hany Tatwany and Mohammed Shobrak; Slovakia – Peter Puchala; Ukraine – Maxim Gavrilyuk. **Partner Organisations:** CMS Scientific Council – Fernando Spina; BirdLife International – Vicky Jones; Emirates’ Falconers Club – Andrew Dixon; International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey – Janusz Sielicki; IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management – Robert Kenward; Siberian Environmental Center (Russia) – Elvira Nikolenko and Igor Karyakin. **Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MoU:** STF Chair – Colin Galbraith; STF Specialist Technical Advisor – András Kovács; SakerGAP Coordinator – Robert Sheldon; Coordinating Unit – Jenny Renell and Nick P. Williams.
- Apologies:** Pakistan, United Arab Emirates; CMS, European Commission, FACE, International Wildlife Consultants.
- Also invited:** Armenia, Bahrain, Iraq, Qatar, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan; CITES, League of Arab States, UNEP/ROWA.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Nick Williams welcomed everyone and handed over to Colin Galbraith (STF Chair) who reminded participants about the documents that had been distributed by the Coordinating Unit: Outline Agenda (20 March), draft SakerGAP Summary Implementation Plan (v.1.2), draft Summary overview and analysis of SakerGAP Implementation Status Questionnaire (v.1.2), Revised Saker Falcon Task Force list (20 March 2018) and a hyperlink to [CMS Resolution 11.18 \(Rev.COP12\)](#) on the SakerGAP. Tour-de-table introductions were made.

2. Background, update and purpose of the Telecom

CMS Resolution 10.28 established the Saker Falcon Task Force (STF) at COP10 in 2011, under the auspices of the Coordinating Unit of the CMS Raptors MoU. The Saker Falcon Global Action Plan (SakerGAP) was developed over three years and adopted at CMS COP11 in 2014 by means of CMS Resolution 11.18. CMS Resolution 11.18 (subsequently revised slightly at the recent CMS COP12 in October 2017) extended the Task Force’s remit to oversee SakerGAP implementation and recognised that the work of the STF had been a unique and productive partnership employing a transparent consensus-building approach, involving a wide range of parties. Ongoing support by Task Force members would be crucial to successful implementation of the SakerGAP. A small Steering Group (Colin Galbraith, Rob Sheldon, András Kovács, Jenny Renell, Nick P. Williams) had been created to move things forward and to support the work of the STF.

The purpose of this telecom was to provide an opportunity to update STF members on progress in implementing SakerGAP, particularly relating to activities undertaken or underway in



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Convention on Migratory Species Office - Abu Dhabi • United Nations Environment Programme
c/o Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi • PO Box 45553 • Abu Dhabi • United Arab Emirates
T +971 2 6934 437 • F +971 2 4997 252 • cmsoffice.ae@cms.int • www.cms.int/raptors



the Range States; and to introduce the draft SakerGAP Summary Implementation Plan 2018-20 and to begin considering key priorities and to identify (lead and other) contributors.

3. Summary of results of SakerGAP Implementation Status Questionnaire

Nick Williams introduced the topic and advised that the Coordinating Unit had circulated a 'Summary Report and Analysis of the SakerGAP Implementation Status Questionnaire' the previous week, with an updated version circulated earlier that day –Andrew Dixon, Mátyás Prommer and Janusz Sielicki were thanked for their constructive comments. Following adoption of SakerGAP at CMS COP11 there had been a long delay before the Coordinating Unit was able to secure the resources to recruit consultants (Rob and András). Because of this delay, it has been decided to create a Questionnaire to gather information from Range States about their progress and forward plans to implement SakerGAP. It was important to know who was leading on particular aspects so that synergies can be exploited and to avoid reinventing wheels. Nick Williams took the opportunity to thank all those who had completed the Questionnaire (circulated in Dec 2017): almost 40 respondents, involving 26 Range States and a few additional countries that chose not to submit Questionnaires, either due to the low numbers of Saker Falcon in their respective countries, or simply a lack of detailed knowledge. Questionnaire was also submitted by IAF. Results were summarized in the paper – but it was noted that a couple of updates were still to be done.

Among responses, there was good geographical coverage, though a couple of key breeding Range States were missing. Excellent progress had been made on the Flagship Projects identified in the SakerGAP, primarily led by collaborating partner organisations and experts (see Agenda Item 5 below), and some good progress too in all aspects of Saker Falcon conservation. However, there appeared to be a lack of concerted actions focused on the Saker Falcon with only four Range States reporting that they had developed National Species Action Plans, although a number of others highlighted that Saker Falcon was included in other wider Nature Conservation Plans. Lack of conservation plans seemed to underline the importance of the promotion, coordination and facilitation roles of the STF in driving forward effective implementation of the SakerGAP. Responses to the last question of the Questionnaire (regarding challenges and blockers that respondents were experiencing that were causing delays or preventing implementation) clearly illuminated a range of activities with which the STF could assist, even in the absence of funds. These were grouped as follows: (a) Support to influence national Government agencies for effective legislation and enforcement; (b) Information materials and awareness raising about the status, biology and conservation of the Saker Falcon; (c) Combat threat of electrocution of the Saker and engage power companies; (d) Improve co-ordination between Range States; (e) Monitoring support and guidance; and (f) Research support.

During the discussion, it was noted that future questionnaires should consider a wider regional aspect and international organisations. The Coordinating Unit didn't yet have copies of the National Species Action Plans mentioned in the Summary Report, but would aim to obtain them and to share with STF members, if permitted.

Action 1: STF members to send any additional feedback on the 'Summary Report and Analysis of the SakerGAP Implementation Status Questionnaire' to the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MoU by 15 April 2018.

Action 2: Coordinating Unit to seek to obtain National Species Action Plans mentioned in the 'Summary overview and analysis of SakerGAP Implementation Status Questionnaire' and to share with the STF.

4. Updates from Participants

A covering email circulated by the Coordinating Unit with the telecom papers last week proposed that participants aim to respond concisely to the following two questions: (a) What are your

priorities in terms of implementing the SakerGAP; and (b) What or how can you contribute to achieving these. **China** reported that they are keen to collaborate for example in genetic related research. **Iran** stated focus should be on Saker Falcon breeding sites (Iran was a wintering state). In addition, the Department of Environment had focused on prevention and combating illegal taking of the Saker Falcon; and the Wildlife Bureau management had taken steps to develop a National Action Plan. **Slovakia** reported that they had undertaken several activities, for example concerning addressing the threat from electrocution and more recently combatting poisoning on birds of prey. They too welcomed collaboration. **Hungary** said they had recently completed an EU Life Project and were starting a third one affecting raptors in the country, concerning the prey base needed to sustain Saker Falcon populations. **Saudi Arabia** had recently founded a National Falconry Club, led by the Crown Prince. Saudi Wildlife Authority had secured a budget for Saker Falcon monitoring: currently funds were available for 20 transmitters. Saudi Arabia also mentioned that a guarded protected area had been established along a 20km stretch of the Red Sea coast to prevent illegal taking of wild falcons. Colin Galbraith thanked everyone and invited any additional updates be sent to the Coordinating Unit in writing.

Action 3: STF members to send the Coordinating Unit any further updates on activities, ongoing or planned, contributing towards implementation of the SakerGAP.

5. Updates on SakerGAP Flagship Projects

To gain momentum for implementation, the Task Force had developed five Flagship Proposals that were included within the SakerGAP.

Flagship Project 1 ('Develop 1 Saker Falcon Online Portal') and **Flagship Project 2** ('Engage 10 Falcon Hospitals and 10 trappers with a Saker Falcon Network'): IAF reported on behalf of IUCN-CEM. These two projects were closely linked and had been jointly funded by IAF and CMS as a single project over two years. Both had been completed. In year 1, the SakerNet portal was created and launched on-line as scheduled, and met a first-year target of 1,000 visits in the first four months, with 7,000 visits by the start of 2018. Engagement with an online survey of falconers and trappers in the main Saker Falcon breeding areas of Asia was heartening. There were survey data from 32 trappers and from nine falcon hospitals/clinics, with two others known but which had not responded. There had been great enthusiasm for engagement from the clinics, and particular enthusiasm for further participation had been expressed by Qatar and Iran. However, falconers and trappers primarily engaged in countries with national clubs that were well-organised and encouraged them to do so (e.g. Pakistan), and responses to the survey was relatively low in end-use countries for traded falcons. Reasons given for not responding related primarily to concerns about how information might be used. Although development and trial of a system for trade and ecological monitoring of Saker Falcon populations had been planned (as SakerNet 2), it had not been funded within the window of availability for key participants; this raised the level of importance of further work to (re)establish Saker Falcons in suitable Central Asian states, through construction of nest platforms, and the remediation of power-lines.

Colin Gabraith highlighted the opportunity of working closer together going forward. EFC mentioned Flagship Projects 1-2 seemed to concentrate on sustainable harvest and Flagship Projects 3-5 on other targets, and that funding shouldn't be being sought only for the Flagship Projects but any project contributing to the implementation of the SakerGAP.

Flagship Project 3 ('Deploy 100 satellite tags on Saker Falcons'): Mátyás Prommer reported that over 70 Saker Falcons had been tagged in Europe and Asia since 2014 – not only to study migration but also in relation to habitat use. IAF said only 18 Sakers were tagged in Asia but most challenges occurred in Asia and suggested the SakerGAP Coordinator to consider finding grants for a scientific surveys to run additional tracking projects and to collect and elaborate data from different studies already conducted. The Chair of the CMS Scientific Council reminded participants about the CMS Resolutions, Decisions, and initiatives related to Saker Falcon – all these efforts were amazing, and he considered that connectivity was really the key to conserving this migratory species, an issue that falls squarely within the remit of CMS.

Flagship Project 4 ('Erect 1,000 artificial nest platforms for Saker Falcons'): EFC reported artificial nests were a useful conservation management tool to increase breeding populations when there was a surplus of non-breeding Saker Falcon in areas where a lack of nest sites limited the size of the breeding population. In addition, artificial nests could contribute to conservation through making potential nest sites for Sakers safer and easier to monitor. In Europe it was unclear whether or not the Saker Falcon population was limited by a shortage of nest sites despite the fact that most Sakers now used artificial nests on pylons or on trees. In Asia, artificial nests had been used to successfully increase the breeding population of Saker Falcons in Mongolia. Five thousand nests were erected and monitored over five years (2011-15). Productivity helped buffer increased mortality in a changing environment – for example, the significant threat of electrocution on power line poles. In China artificial nests had been used to encourage raptors to breed in extensive rangelands as a way of controlling small mammals that are regarded as pests (as grazing competitors or contributors to soil erosion). Over 10,000 open basket design nests and perches had been erected on the Qinghai Tibetan Plateau. There was a need to encourage design based on trials to assess preference and reproductive success. Two hundred closed box design artificial nest had been erected on Qinghai Tibetan Plateau as part of pilot research by Institute of Zoology in Beijing and partners. Artificial nests and perches were used in other areas including Xingjiang and Inner Mongolia but there was no data on their use by Saker Falcons in these areas. The Flagship Project of 1,000 nests needed to be more nuanced and to explicitly state aims of artificial nest programme. The number of nests required would be determined by the aim and the scale at which a lack of nest sites regulated the breeding population. IAF mentioned in 2014 a meeting was held in Kazakhstan at which the issue of artificial nests and sustainable use had been discussed.

Flagship Project 5 (Install or retro-fit 1,000,000 new or existing 'bird-safe' electricity poles'): IAF reported that they had led development of a draft Recommendation on [Preventing electrocution and collision impacts of power infrastructure on birds](#) which was proposed to, and adopted by, the IUCN World Conservation Congress in 2016. The main idea was to inform institutions financing energy infrastructure developments that new powerlines should be bird-friendly. IAF had since presented that approach in several conferences, prepared a [brochure on preventing electrocution](#), and created a website birdelectrocution.org including 14 language versions of the brochure. IAF had established a European Foundation for Falconry and Conservation, whose first task would be retrofitting one of the most dangerous powerlines to birds of prey in Morocco.

Colin Galbraith welcomed the excellent progress made with the Flagship Projects and congratulated all who have been involved in tackling this work.

6. Draft SakerGAP Summary Implementation Plan

a. Introduction

Rob Sheldon thanked Andrew Dixon, Mátyás Prommer and Janusz Sielicki for constructive comments on the draft document. The revised version had been circulated by the Coordinating Unit earlier that day. The overall goal of the SakerGAP is to re-establish a healthy and self-sustaining wild Saker Falcon population throughout its range, and to ensure that any use for falconry purposes is sustainable. The draft Summary Implementation Plan (2018-2020) had been developed to operationalize the objectives and actions outlined in the SakerGAP. It combined the Flagship Projects, the Adaptive Management Framework (AMF) and Framework for Action (FFA) components in the SakerGAP, and consolidated them in to a single Summary Table. At this stage, this was a summary to capture key actions, and alongside it, a Comprehensive Implementation Plan was being developed, with the help of STF and SG, in Excel format. That would include details of all actions and sub-actions applicable to Range States, other partners and stakeholders; and time-scales and commitments from Range States to different activities. This was a dynamic working document that would be need to be updated on a regular basis, in line with the existing SakerGAP reporting arrangements.

Rob opened the floor for comments and offered the opportunity for bilateral discussions after the telecom.

b. Discussion

Kazakhstan stated it was important to consider establishing a database of Saker breeding centers to facilitate fast exchange of information and provide points of contact to combat illegal trafficking of wild taken falcons purported to be captive bred. **EFC** commented this might be a matter of national legislation. Colin Galbraith commented the key challenge for STF members was to consider how to move forward. He reminded participants that during the development of the SakerGAP, sub-groups were formed to drive specific actions. He suggested that this approach might be considered useful to guide implementation as well. **EFC** noted in the draft Implementation Plan that there was a point about sustainable harvest but it didn't set out a principle on how to do this – practicalities needed to be laid out. András Kovacs agreed and reminded that SakerGAP established six safeguards (and four desirable ones) in relation to sustainable harvest. **Mongolia** commented that many research activities were ongoing but more conservation actions were needed on the ground.

Action 4: STF Steering Group to consider proposing establishment of sub-groups to drive forward implementation of the SakerGAP.

Action 5: STF members to send any additional feedback on the draft SakerGAP Summary Implementation Plan to the Coordinating Unit by 15 April 2018.

7. Upcoming opportunities to promote SakerGAP

Summit for the Flyways in Abu Dhabi, UAE, 23 - 26 April 2018: Nick Williams reported that this was an event convened by BirdLife International and hosted by the International Fund for Houbara Conservation. A day has been allocated to the SakerGAP (Thursday 26 April 2018). BirdLife International mentioned that their EU Life funded EuroSAP Project manager was willing to promote SakerGAP in their online tracking portal.

Action 6: The Coordinating Unit to liaise with the EuroSAP Project Team to seek to upload the SakerGAP onto this web portal ASAP.

Third Meeting of the CMS Scientific Council (ScC) Sessional Committee in Bonn, Germany, 29 May - 1 June 2018: SakerGAP was on the Agenda in line with the Progress Reporting mechanism established in Resolution 11.18 (Rev.COP12), but was also open to STF members to suggest specific questions or requests for support to be posed to the CMS ScC. It was anticipated that Nick Williams would attend the meeting.

8. Next STF Telecom

The Coordinating Unit volunteered to circulate a DoodlePoll for the next STF Telecom, tentatively to take place at the end of May 2018.

9. AOB

Mátyás Prommer noted he was working with a Hungarian University in cooperation with the Russian Academy of Science on a genetics project, and invited anyone interested in collaborating to contact him.

Janusz Sielicki noted that the Annual Meeting of the Raptor Research Foundation would take place on 12-16 November 2018 in Kruger National Park, South Africa, and that perhaps SakerGAP should be on the agenda. IAF will present the Saker electrocution problem during the electrocution symposium there.