



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

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REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SAKERGAP

Prepared by Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU

1. Since the second meeting of TAG, there have been a number of official reports relating to the Saker Falcon Global Action Plan (SakerGAP)¹, prepared either by the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU or the Saker Falcon Task Force, namely, to the second Meeting of Signatories to the Raptors MOU² (October 2015); the 44th Meeting of the Standing Committee³ (October 2015); the first meeting of the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council⁴ (April 2016); the 45th Meeting of the CMS Standing Committee⁵ (November 2016); the 12th Conference of Parties to CMS⁶ (October 2017); and, the third Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council in May-June 2018⁷.
2. CMS Resolution 10.28 established the Saker Falcon Task Force (STF) at CMS COP10 in 2011, under the auspices of the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU, to develop a coordinated Saker Falcon Global Action Plan (SakerGAP), including a management and monitoring system, to conserve the Saker Falcon. The SakerGAP was developed over three years and adopted at CMS COP11 in 2014 by means of CMS Resolution 11.18. The SakerGAP was also endorsed by Signatories to Raptors MOU at the second Meeting of Signatories (MOS2), held in October 2015. The SakerGAP has been translated into both Arabic and Russian and published on the Raptors MOU website.
3. CMS Resolution 11.18 (subsequently revised slightly at CMS COP12 in October 2017⁸) extended the STF's remit to oversee SakerGAP implementation and recognized 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 internationally.
4. 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 is sustainable*'. It is envisaged that the SakerGAP be implemented over a 10-year period (2015 – 2024), incorporating regular reports to the CMS Conferences of Parties (COPs), scheduled to be held in 2017, 2020, 2023 and 2026.
5. No specific funds were made available by CMS Parties in 2015 to drive forward implementation of the SakerGAP so only modest progress could be achieved. However, significant financial support was received from the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF) to

¹ <https://cms.int/raptors/en/publication/saker-falcon-global-action-plan-sakergap>

² <https://cms.int/raptors/en/document/conservation-initiatives-under-raptors-mou-0>

³ <https://www.cms.int/en/document/implementation-programme-work-2015-2017>

⁴ <https://www.cms.int/en/document/saker-falcon-global-action-plan-sakergap>

⁵ <https://www.cms.int/en/document/implementation-programme-work-2015-2017-1>

⁶ <https://www.cms.int/en/document/implementation-programme-work-2015-2017-2>

⁷ <https://www.cms.int/en/document/report-saker-falcon-task-force-implementation-saker-falcon-global-action-plan-sakergap>

⁸ CMS Res.11.18 (Rev.COP12) <https://www.cms.int/en/document/saker-falcon-falco-cherrug-global-actionplan-sakergap>

support the first Flagship Project identified in the SakerGAP, which enabled excellent progress to be made to develop and launch an Online Information Portal at www.sakernet.org.

6. The four Flagship Proposals described in the SakerGAP provide strategic guidance, underpinned by a suggested coordination structure led by the Saker Falcon Task Force and including plans to establish four Regional Implementation Groups (Africa, Asia, Europe, Middle East and North Africa) to ensure coverage throughout the whole range of the species.

7. The Flagship Proposals are described in the SakerGAP as:

Create 1 Saker Falcon Online Information Portal engaging 10 falcon hospitals, falconers and trappers within a Saker Falcon Network: This proposal is for a multilingual portal to build trust and raise awareness by linking falconers, trappers, falcon hospitals, conservationists and researchers in an exchange of information that enables estimation of harvests and sizes for Saker Falcon populations, and encourages best practice. The portal would facilitate a more complex data collection and management system to manage trade in the Saker Falcon. Trappers could be encouraged to register by a prize-linked smart-phone survey.

Deploy 100 satellite tags on Saker Falcon: The primary aim of the proposal is to reveal the potential impact of the threats, including their spatial distribution, posed on adult Saker Falcons in their breeding habitat by collecting information about the the daily movements of individual falcons. The secondary aim is to list potential risks factors posed both on adult and juvenile Saker Falcons on migration and in their wintering areas. The project aims to gather information on the movement patterns of Saker Falcons, including the use of breeding and wintering habitat, and migration. Assimilating information on favoured habitats, diet composition and prey species is also planned.

Erect 1,000 artificial nest platforms for Saker Falcons: One thousand artificial nests will be erected to increase the breeding population and/or productivity of the Saker Falcon in areas where a shortage of optimal nest sites is limiting the size of the Saker breeding population. Grids of 100-200 nest-boxes will be placed in Kazakhstan, extending south into empty steppe from a tree-nesting Saker population at Naursum, and north from cliff-nesting populations in the south. Falcons of appropriate Kazakh stock will be released on each grid. The objectives of the proposal are to a) discover how artificial nest sites can best enhance Saker breeding in Kazakhstan; and, b) test whether local communities can promote conservation of breeding Saker Falcons.

Install or retrofit 1,000,000 new or existing 'Bird-safe' electricity poles: One of the main identified threats to the Saker Falcon is the electrocution on medium-voltage electricity poles, which occurs across the full extent of its range also affecting other threatened birds, including populations of other birds of prey. The goal of the proposal is to install or to make bird-safe 1 million new or existing electricity poles for the Saker Falcon in priority breeding and wintering areas, as well as along migration flyways in the longer term (by 2024). The objectives of Phase I are to a) identify priority areas for action; b) ensure that new and fully reconstructed electric line sections are safe for birds in target areas from 2017 onwards; and c) ensure that existing 'killer' poles (e.g. switch, strain and transformer poles) are modified to be bird-safe and their number gradually reduced by 20% by 2024.

8. The SakerGAP identified the need to recruit a coordinator to drive forward its implementation in a coordinated and effective manner. Absence of funding and subsequently administrative issues resulted in long delays but a formal recruitment process began early in 2016 and was eventually concluded in November 2017, when two part-time consultants began work: Robert Sheldon as the SakerGAP Coordinator and András Kovács as STF Specialist Technical Advisor. In addition, Colin Galbraith agreed to continue as Chair of the STF. A small Steering Group, including the three people

mentioned above, plus Nick P. Williams (Programme Officer) and Jenny Renell (Associate Programme Officer) from the Coordinating Unit, was established to guide progress and to support the work of the STF.

9. Given the amount of time that had elapsed since the adoption of the SakerGAP, a concise questionnaire was developed to gather information from Range States about their progress to date and their forward plans to implement SakerGAP. This Status Update Questionnaire was circulated in December 2017 to over 80 Saker Falcon Range States, members of the STF, other stakeholders and interested parties. By the end of January 2018, over 40 email replies had been received from 26 Range States and one Co-operating Partner to the Raptors MOU. The SakerGAP Coordinator produced a draft Summary Report and Analysis of the responses. This highlighted good overall geographical coverage, although completed questionnaires were not received from two key breeding States. Excellent progress was reported on the five Flagship Projects identified in the SakerGAP, primarily led by collaborating partner organizations and experts. Some good activity was reported covering almost all aspects of Saker Falcon conservation, albeit less widespread than is ultimately needed. The final question in the Questionnaire sought information regarding the challenges (apart from financial constraints) that respondents were experiencing that were either delaying or preventing implementation of SakerGAP. The replies received illuminated a wide range of 74 activities, most of which fall within the anticipated role of the STF. These responses underlined the importance of the promotion, coordination and facilitation roles of the STF in driving forward effective implementation of the SakerGAP.

10. The Flagship Projects outlined in the SakerGAP aimed to generate momentum, take immediate actions after the preparation of the SakerGAP and guide activities to conserve the Saker Falcon over the ten-year period 2015–2024 covered by the plan. The first two Flagship Projects (Online Information Portal – final report is available on Annex 1 to this document; Saker Falcon Network) have been completed. In late 2014, the Coordinating Unit led a project with the IUCN European Sustainable Use Group (ESUG), funded primarily by a generous contribution from IAF, which is a Cooperating Partner to the Raptors MoU. A project Steering Group meeting was hosted by the Coordinating Unit in Abu Dhabi, UAE in March 2015, and the Saker Online Portal was released live on the web in April 2015 in five languages: Arabic, Farsi, Pashto, Russian and English. An initial survey of visitors to the site confirmed the practicality of engaging falconers and trappers through the internet, and also that they already mark trained Sakers widely with the aid of veterinarians, who are prepared to help use this for conservation purposes so that a semi-voluntary system could monitor populations, harvest levels and trade. The Portal (www.sakernet.org) was launched on schedule, and met its target of 1,000 visits in the first four months, with over 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 encouraging according to a report from IUCN's thematic group on Sustainable Use and Management of Ecosystems. Survey data were contributed by 32 individual falcon trappers and from nine falcon hospitals/clinics, with two others known but these failed to respond. Falconers and trappers primarily engaged where their national clubs were well-organized and encouraged them to do so but relative response to survey was low in end-use countries for traded falcons. Reasons given for lack of response mainly involved concerns about how the 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 highlights the importance of further work to (re)establish and maintain a flourishing wild population of the Saker Falcon in suitable Central Asian States, through construction of nest platforms, and addressing the threat of electrocution on power-line poles.

11. Regarding the third Flagship Project (to deploy 100 satellite tags on Saker Falcons), so far at least 79 Saker Falcons have been satellite tagged in Austria, Bulgaria, China, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Mongolia, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine since 2014. In 2016 and 2017, IAF and Ecotone Telemetry co-funded with several institutions a satellite-tracking project on

Sakers in the Russian Federation and Mongolia, which represents half of the top four Range States hosting breeding populations.

12. With respect to the fourth Flagship Project (to erect 1,000 artificial nest platforms for the Saker Falcon), a ground-breaking project led by International Wildlife Consultants UK Ltd created a managed breeding population in Mongolia occupying artificial nests, which produced in the region of 2,500 fledgling Saker Falcons in 2014. According to report from the Emirates Falconers' Club, two hundred closed box design artificial nests have been erected on Qinghai Tibetan Plateau as part of pilot research by Institute of Zoology in Beijing and partners. The project also utilizes data from artificial nests erected by local authorities (ca. 10,000 across the Qinghai Tibetan Plateau). Artificial nest platforms have also been established in Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine.

13. Regarding the fifth Flagship Project (to install or retrofit 1,000,000 new or existing bird-safe electricity poles), retrofitting of poles and related activities have been undertaken in Bulgaria, China, Hungary, Mongolia, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Slovakia. Designing and applying bird-safe pole configurations and insulation of existing poles are actively ongoing in several Range States. For example, Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia (WSCC) and the Emirates Falconers' Club trialled a new pole configuration on a ca. 50 km of powerline between Bayan-Ovoo and Galuut counties in Mongolia. A pre-configuration survey showed that about 75 per cent of dead birds found were Saker Falcons. An estimated 85 per cent reduction in mortality was documented for poles with modification compared to unmodified poles on this line. An IAF-led recommendation⁹ on '*Preventing electrocution and collision impacts of power infrastructure on birds*' proposed to the IUCN World Conservation Congress was adopted in 2016. The main thrust was to alert financing institutions of major infrastructure projects that all new powerlines should incorporate bird-friendly pole designs. IAF has subsequently promulgated this approach at several conferences, prepared a brochure¹⁰ on preventing electrocution in 14 different languages, and created a website¹¹. IAF has established a European Foundation for Falconry and Conservation, whose first task will to promote retrofitting of one of the most dangerous powerlines in Morocco. In addition, MME (BirdLife Hungary) hosted an international conference on the threat posed to birds by power grids in Hungary in November 2016.

14. The Coordinating Unit hosted the fourth STF online teleconference in March 2018 to provide an opportunity to update STF members on progress in implementing SakerGAP, particularly relating to activities undertaken or underway in the Range States. The SakerGAP Coordinator also introduced a draft SakerGAP Summary Implementation Plan 2018-2020 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 into a single Summary Table. A more detailed Comprehensive Implementation Plan is being developed, with the help of STF and the Steering Group, in Excel format. This is intended to incorporate details of all actions and sub-actions applicable to Range States, other partners and stakeholders; and timescales and commitments from Range States to different activities. Both versions of the SakerGAP Implementation Plan are considered as dynamic working documents that will need to be updated on a regular basis, in line with the existing reporting arrangements for the plan.

15. In April 2018, the Coordinating Unit convened a full-day session dedicated to SakerGAP at the Global Summit for the Flyways, held in Abu Dhabi, UAE, including a facilitated discussion on sustainable use. 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

⁹ WCC-2016-REC-098 <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/46515>

¹⁰ Preventing the Electrocution of Birds on Power Infrastructure
http://www.iaf.org/documents/electrocution_booklet3_LR.PDF

¹¹ <http://birdelectrocution.org/>

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. The summit Declaration¹² includes a concise report of the Saker Falcon session.

16. The next STF telecom is planned to take place before the end of 2018, to review the draft SakerGAP Implementation Plan, which is included as Annex 2 to this meeting document. The TAG is invited to review the draft Implementation Plan and to offer feedback at TAG3.

Action requested

TAG is requested to take note of this report and to offer feedback on the draft SakerGAP Implementation Plan.

¹² <https://www.birdlife.org/hub/summit-flyways> , pp.20-21.