

NINTH MEETING OF THE SAKER FALCON TASK FORCE (STF9)

(Online, 21 March 2023)

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MEETING REPORT

(Prepared by the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU)

1. Welcome

The Saker Falcon Task Force (STF) Chair (the “Chair”), Mr Colin Galbraith, welcomed all participants to the meeting.

The Chair highlighted important points of principle during his introduction:

- He reminded that the forthcoming months would witness critical assemblies, including the Raptor MOS3, the CMS Scientific Council (SC-ScC6), and the CMS COP14.
- The Chair emphasized the need to prepare for upcoming meetings to present the work of the STF and urged the team to determine the content of their statements for these meetings.
- The Chair added that the work of the STF should not be limited to the current mandate and the upcoming CMS COP but should continue to the next CMS Conference of the Parties.
- The Chair stressed the importance of partnership to ensure the success of the initiative, stating that involvement from a range of organizations, including NGOs and other participants, is essential.
- The Chair concluded his introduction by suggesting that any individual who wished to discuss any matter separately may schedule a meeting with the Secretariat.

2. Discussion on the Adaptive Management Framework

Mr Andras Kovacs, Technical Advisor to the STF and Coordinator of the Adaptive Management and Monitoring Framework Discussion Group (AMFDG), presented the Governance and Management Module of the Adaptive Management Framework (AMF) for the Sustainable Use of Saker Falcon. He raised the issue of unequal distribution of conservation resources between Europe and Asia for the preservation of the Saker Falcon and suggested that funding availability could potentially address this imbalance.

2.1 The Concept of a Quota System

The sustainable Quota Management System (QMS) aimed to address unsustainable trapping, harvesting, and trade of Saker Falcons by using an Adaptive Management Framework that included monitoring, assessment, and positive conservation actions.

The "cap and trade" principle could establish a controlled and sustainable market for wild Saker Falcons, but it required global caps, predefined sustainability safeguards, and cooperation from Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). The global quota would be split into voluntary credits given to responsible breeding Range States that could sell credits to cover conservation costs. The cap would be modified based on monitoring data using adaptive management.

Mr Kovacs showcased the key safeguards for sustainable harvesting and QMS, along with six supplementary safeguards put forth by the CMS Secretariat. He presented a proposed timeline for implementing a national quota management system, which consisted of three phases. He then highlighted significant concerns that required resolution when considering the expansion of a quota management system to an international level.

Participants emphasized the importance of monitoring illegal activity in implementing a quota system to preserve endangered species and the fact that there was still a significant lack of data regarding Saker Falcon populations, particularly in Asia.

Another participant highlighted the need to address the trapping of first-year birds on passage as a way of controlling illegal trade, adding that the lack of knowledge at the scale of flyways was a challenge.

It was reminded during the meeting that the only subpopulation where legal harvest and trade could take place according to CMS requirements was the Mongolian subpopulation. Take in any other CMS Signatory State would go against the requirements of the Convention. A participant reiterated that it was of utmost importance to maintain specificity and limitation with regards to the present legal framework. A participant added that the intention should be to encourage other countries to adopt a similar stance. As such, he advised to avoid specifying any measures in the plan. He clarified that the focus had always been on discouraging the taking of adult birds, with the intention of only taking first-year birds, whose plumage was distinguishable by trappers.

Ms Karen Gaynor, representative of the CITES Secretariat, suggested to include in the paper the actual volume of legal trade under CITES. She mentioned that trade is already regulated by CITES. She emphasized the significance of clarifying the proposed process for determining the global quota, which includes explaining the voluntary credits concept and the process for reaching an agreement.

Actions:

- The Chair suggested that the group take more time to review the documentation. He indicated that there was need for further discussion on the issue of take during migration.

2.2 Coordination and Management of Sustainable Use

Mr Kovacs presented a proposal that included decision-making procedures for Range States and a governance framework. He explained that to use Saker Falcons sustainably, Range States would need to meet legal requirements and safeguards. Listing a population of Saker Falcons for protection may be proposed if the requirements are fulfilled.

Mr Kovacs indicated that the establishment of an International Coordination Center would be necessary to gather data and work with CMS, CITES, and governments to set global and national quotas for sustainability. The Center would gather information from national information points to meet those sustainability standards.

2.3 Data and Information Management

Mr Kovacs proposed a three-level governance structure for the global QMS, consisting of the international, national, and local levels. The international level would have a coordinating unit with a management authority and a scientific authority.

According to this structure, the management authority would be responsible for the management and consistency of the global portal management system, and stakeholders would decide which body would collect and assess information. The scientific authority would ensure that the quota management system would be sustainable, science-based, and independent.

In the process, raw data would be collected locally and analysed and validated at national monitoring and research hubs, before being sent to the national information hub. The derived data would be collected and analysed by the Saker Falcon Global Information Center from national information hubs and fed into the global quota management system. The security of sensitive data is ensured, and illegal use is prevented by this system.

A participant commented that there was a need for clarity on the mechanism for setting global quotas and suggested that Parties would likely have to have a role in setting quotas. To that end, a proposal to establish such quotas should be presented at the upcoming CMS COP.

Actions:

- Consider inviting AEWA to a future STF meeting so that they may explain their ongoing work and approach to creating guidance on adaptive management.
- The Chair proposed further discussion and one-to-one meetings to address knowledge gaps and develop a practical and cost-effective system for governance. The importance of obtaining the right amount of information was emphasized. The topic would be revised and revisited at the next meeting.

2.4 Evaluation and Reporting

Mr Kovacs presented the importance of regular performance reviews for evaluating Adaptive Management and Quota Management Systems, which should be conducted annually to make adjustments based on results. He emphasized the need for multiple stakeholders to be involved in the evaluation process. The reporting components should be categorized into three levels: international, national, and local.

2.5 Socio-economic Issues and Fundraising

Mr Kovacs outlined the economic and social prerequisites of Saker Falcon AMF and QMS.

2.6 Outline of the Role of the Task Force

Mr Kovacs recalled the mandate of the Saker Falcon Task Force, reminding the group of how it aligned with CMS Resolution 11.18 (Rev.COP12).

Mr Gallo-Orsi, Programme Management Officer of the Raptors MOU, emphasized the need to increase the understanding of the relationship between breeding areas, breeding populations, and their respective habitats.

Actions:

- The Chair suggested organising a sub-meeting to clarify information and address data gaps related to assessments before drafting papers for future meetings.
- He also proposed that the next STF meeting be structured dedicating the first part to ecological questions and the second one to electrocution.

3. Discussion on Electrocution and Report from the Discussion Group

Mr Gallo-Orsi presented in replacement of Mr Rob Sheldon, Coordinator of the Electrocution Discussion Group, who was not able to attend the meeting. Mr Gallo-Orsi explained that Mr Sheldon had been investigating the impact of electrocution on Saker Falcons in Central Asia, specifically in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. He had been trying to assess such impact by consulting with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and investigating the impact of the electric network on the species. Efforts were being made to support local NGOs in developing a draft questionnaire to collect information on Saker Falcon electrocution across all former Range States. Mr Gallo-Orsi added there was a need to better understand the current situation in order to identify priority areas where electrocution of the species could be addressed.

Mr Shobrak mentioned that powerlines in Saudi Arabia had been isolated in areas that were significant for the migration of Saker Falcons and other falcons. Additionally, Saudi Arabia partnered with the Royal Society of Jordan to develop an Arabic publication that illustrated the dangers faced by falcons.

Actions:

- The Chair suggested that Mr Sheldon provide a written update to the STF on his work regarding the assessment of the impact of electrocution in Central Asia.

4. Forward look to the Raptors MOU MOS3 and CMS COP14

4.1 Consideration of Timelines and Document Preparation

4.2 Key Issues to Include

Actions:

- The Coordination Unit indicated that meeting documents should be translated and posted online by 3 June 2023. The Chair concluded that mid-May would be the deadline for the group to finalise document production.
- The Chair suggested obtaining the endorsement of the STF's work by the MOS, indicating that such would be beneficial to gain support in the lead-up to the CMS COP.
- The Chair proposed organizing a presentation and a side-event at MOS3 .
- The group decided to produce a revised timetable for its upcoming meetings, and to organise an AMF meeting before their next main STF meeting, to discuss technicalities were raised during the current meeting.

Participant list

Range States	
Saudi Arabia	Mr Bandar Alfaleh Mr Abdulkarim Alanazi
Slovakia	Ms Andrea Lešová Mr Peter Puchala
Partners & Independent Experts	
BirdLife International	Ms Vicky Jones
CITES	Ms Karen Gaynor
CMS Secretariat	Mr Ivan Ramirez
Independent Expert	Mr Mohammed Shobrak
International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF)	Mr Janusz Sielicki
IUCN – Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM)	Mr Robert Kenward Mr Adrian Lombard
Raptor Protection Slovakia	Ms Zuzana Guziová
Saudi Falcon Club	Mr Yones Radwan
Steering Group	
STF Chair	Mr Colin Galbraith
Technical Advisor to the STF & Coordinator of the Adaptive Management and Monitoring Framework Discussion Group Discussion	Mr Andras Kovacs
Raptors MOU Coordinating Unit	Mr Umberto Gallo-Orsi Ms Lauren Lopes
Other	
CMS Scientific Council	Mr Fernando Spina Mr Fahad Al-Quthami