

## **3<sup>d</sup> Meeting of the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council (ScC-SC3)**

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### **REPORT FROM THE SAKER FALCON TASK FORCE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SAKER FALCON GLOBAL ACTION PLAN (SakerGAP)**

*(Prepared by the Saker Falcon Task Force)*

**Summary:**

CMS Resolution 10.28 established the Saker Falcon Task Force (STF) to develop a coordinated Saker Falcon Global Action Plan (SakerGAP). CMS Resolution 11.18 (subsequently revised at CMS COP12) extended the STF's remit to oversee SakerGAP implementation, and recommended the STF to report on progress to the intersessional meeting of the Scientific Council.

This document provides a progress report on the activities of the Task Force, focussing on developments since the last report to the Sessional Committee of the Scientific Council in 2016.

## REPORT FROM THE SAKER FALCON TASK FORCE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SAKER FALCON GLOBAL ACTION PLAN (SakerGAP)

### Background

1. 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, to develop a coordinated Saker Falcon Global Action Plan (SakerGAP), including a management and monitoring system, to conserve the Saker Falcon. SakerGAP<sup>1</sup> 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 CMS COP12 in October 2017<sup>2</sup>) 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.

### Progress

2. 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 (Programme Associate) from the Coordinating Unit, has been established to guide progress and to support the work of the STF.
3. 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 forward plans to implement SakerGAP. This Status Update Questionnaire was circulated to over 80 Saker Falcon Range States, members of the STF, other stakeholders and interested parties in December 2017. Over 40 email replies were received by the end of January 2018 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, and also good activity 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.

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

<sup>2</sup> Res.11.18 (Rev.COP12) <http://www.cms.int/en/document/saker-falcon-falco-cherrug-global-actionplan-sakergap>

4. 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. Since the last report<sup>3</sup> to the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council in 2016, the first two Flagship Projects (Online Information Portal; Saker Falcon Network) have been completed. The Portal ([www.sakernet.org](http://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 primarily 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.
5. 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, the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey (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.
6. With respect to the fourth Flagship Project (to erect 1,000 artificial nest platforms for the Saker Falcon), 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.
7. 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 trialed 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 recommendation<sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>3</sup> UNEP/CMS/ScC-SC1/Inf.3 <http://www.cms.int/en/document/saker-falcon-global-action-plan-sakergap>

<sup>4</sup> WCC-2016-REC-098 <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/46515>

subsequently promulgated this approach at many conferences, prepared a brochure<sup>5</sup> on preventing electrocution in 14 different languages, and created a website<sup>6</sup>. IAF has established a European Foundation for Falconry and Conservation, whose first task will be retrofitting of one of the most dangerous powerlines in Morocco.

8. The Coordinating Unit hosted the 4<sup>th</sup> STF online teleconference on 26 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.

#### Next steps

9. The *Summit for the Flyways* in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on 23-26 April 2018, will be an opportunity to promote the SakerGAP. The event is being convened by BirdLife International and hosted by the International Fund for Houbara Conservation, with most of the final day allocated to the SakerGAP (Thursday, 26 April 2018). Invitations have already been issued and an outline programme is under preparation. The Steering Group is also exploring the possibility of SakerGAP session being included in the agenda of the Annual Meeting of the Raptor Research Foundation, scheduled to be held in South Africa in November 2018.
10. It is anticipated that a final draft SakerGAP Summary Implementation Plan 2018-2020 will be circulated to the STF for approval in May 2018, followed by dissemination to all Range States, partners and stakeholders shortly thereafter.
11. Following the approval of the SakerGAP Implementation Plan, Step II: Design the implementation of the SakerGAP will begin with the preparation of detailed concepts and actions as guides for achieving the objectives of the SakerGAP.
12. The Coordinating Unit is planning to host the 5<sup>th</sup> STF Telecon in May 2018.

#### Recommended Actions

13. The Sessional Committee is recommended to take note of this progress report, including plans for further action in advance of CMS COP13 and ScC-SC4.

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<sup>5</sup> Preventing the Electrocution of Birds on Power Infrastructure  
[http://www.iaf.org/documents/electrocution\\_booklet3\\_LR.PDF](http://www.iaf.org/documents/electrocution_booklet3_LR.PDF)

<sup>6</sup> <http://birdelectrocution.org/>