



CONVENTION ON MIGRATORY SPECIES

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IAF COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSED CHANGE OF THE SAKAR FALCON CONSERVATION STATUS

Submitted by the International Association for Falconry & Conservation of Birds of
Prey to the 17th Meeting of the CMS Scientific Council



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Subject: The IAF Comments on the Proposed Change of the Saker falcon (*Falco cherrug*) Conservation Status at the CMS COP 10

The International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF) represents more than 70 Member Organisations in 50 nations worldwide. Specifically the IAF represents falconers in almost all of the member states of the European Union. The IAF seeks to promote the legitimate practice of falconry and to support and engage, through its Member Organisations and other raptor conservation groups, in the conservation of birds or prey. Further, the IAF has participated in previous CMS Conferences of the Parties regarding various bird of prey issues.

On November 16, 2010 in Nairobi, Kenya, UNESCO recognized falconry as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity on the request of 10 European, North African, and Middle Eastern countries; more European countries will join this year. This is significant to the CMS COP, because this was the largest multinational submission ever presented to UNESCO. A basic component of the recognition was that falconers have used raptors harvested sustainably from the wild for centuries. And now UNESCO and conservationists recognize the contributions that falconers, as the essential leaders of raptor conservation, have made throughout history to protect and conserve birds of prey, modelled on the recently acknowledged and promoted principles of sustainable use of wildlife.

There is no doubt that the Saker falcon (*Falco cherrug*) is in a need of serious protection measures and conservation programmes based on the principle of sustainable use, especially through its Asiatic range countries. There is a serious lack of information on the Saker's status in many parts of its range, which justifies the need for further investigation.

The Saker population in Europe is stable or increasing. There are conservation projects already in place for active protection throughout its range within Europe intended to increase that population trend.

Now there is an immediate need for a global assessment of the Saker population through a thoughtful, well developed field research plan. Previously Birdlife International recommended further research as proposed in its report to the Saudi Arabian Wildlife Commission in July 2010 (see UNEP/CMS/SsC17/Inf.6 of 21 June 2011 for details). Unfortunately, such a field investigation has not been undertaken to confirm the present status of the Saker throughout the Asiatic range nations, focusing particularly on central Asia.

The Saker was already downgraded from Endangered to Vulnerable on the Red Data List of Birdlife/IUCN (see www.iucnredlist.org for details) following confirmation of larger than anticipated population levels, which were demonstrated at the Specialist meeting on the Saker falcon held in Abu Dhabi in 2010. Coupled with the known increasing population in Europe, the move to upgrade the Saker at this time is premature without a comprehensive field investigation. To upgrade it now without specific information might call into question the biological integrity of the listing process. Clearly it appears illogical and inconsistent to upgrade the status of this species at this CMS COP immediately after IUCN and Birdlife International downgraded its conservation status, based on the same data provided by Birdlife.

As a principle of wildlife management the IAF endorses the Addis Ababa Principles and Guidelines: *“Sustainable use is a valuable tool to promote conservation of biological diversity, since in many instances it provides incentives for conservation and restoration because of the social, cultural and economic benefits that people derive from that use. In turn, sustainable use cannot be achieved without effective conservation measures.”* With this in mind, the IAF strongly supports the idea of protection through sustainable use, used as a principle for the Programme for conservation and sustainable use of the Saker (*Falco cherrug*) in Mongolia. We encourage other range countries to undertake similar actions to protect the species based on the same model.

The IAF also supports the conservation actions proposed by IUCN/Birdlife, based on CITES regulations, especially by improving the custom regulations, practices and enforcement in the interested range states, by micro-chipping all traded birds and by the implementation of sustainable use-based conservation projects.

The IAF strongly recommends to the CMS to conduct the research programme, listed in Appendix E of document UNEP/CMS/SsC17/Inf.6 of 21 June 2011. In addition, a worldwide conference on the Saker falcon status and the development of a conservation programme should be held prior to further consideration and a decision on its CMS conservation status, similar to the Peregrine Conference in Poland in 2007 and the Gyrfalcon Conference in the US in 2010. The IAF will be pleased to assist in the promotion of a Saker Conference, including the development of funding for a gathering of international experts.

The IAF recommends postponing the proposed upgrading of the Saker to Appendix 1 of the CMS Convention until the results of the research programme proposed by Birdlife are available. Finally the IAF asks the CMS countries to consider adopting a sustainable use principle for all species of birds of prey used for falconry, based on the thoughtful and effective Addis Ababa principles.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Frank M. Bond". The signature is written in a cursive style with a blue ink color.

Frank M. Bond
President

cc: Janusz Sielicki, IAF Delegate for CMS COP 10
IAF Officers and Advisory Committee