

THIRTEENTH MEETING OF THE SAKER FALCON TASK FORCE (STF13)

(Online, 29 May 2024)

UNEP/CMS/RAPTORS/STF13/Report(Rev.1)

MEETING REPORT

(Prepared by the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU)

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair of the Saker Falcon Task Force (STF), Mr Colin Galbraith, welcomed all participants (see Annex 1) to the meeting.

2. Outcomes from the 14th Conference of the Parties to CMS (COP14)

The Chair noted that the 15th Conference of the Parties to CMS (COP15) was approaching (tentatively first quarter of 2026) and the time available for the Task Force to deliver on its mandate was limited. He proposed that the STF submit to COP15 a formal proposal for the governance structure of the Saker Falcon Adaptive Management and Monitoring Framework (AMF) and for a way forward for the work.

Mr Umberto Gallo-Orsi recalled that COP14 took place in February 2024 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, and that its main outcomes for Saker Falcon were the following:

- Adoption of CMS [Resolution 11.18\(Rev.COP14\)](#) on *Saker Falcon (Falco cherrug) Global Action Plan (SakerGAP)*, which called for
 - o Continuing implementation of the SakerGAP;
 - o Continuing the operation of the STF to:
 - Actively promote implementation of the SakerGAP;
 - Further develop, refine, and implement, where legally possible, an AMF;
 - Promote monitoring and research;
 - Collaborate with the CMS Energy Task Force (ETF) and the CMS Central Asian Flyways Initiative to minimise the impacts of energy infrastructure.
- Adoption of [Decisions 14.158-160](#) on *Saker Falcon (Falco cherrug) Global Action Plan (SAKERGAP)*, which called for:
 - o Reviewing and updating the SakerGAP;
 - o Organising regional workshops across the breeding range to promote implementation of the SakerGAP.

3. Updates from Members and Observers

Mr Andrew Dixon indicated that his organization had initiated a new project that aimed to study “landscapes of fear”. The project was deploying artificial nests across the Mongolian landscape

to measure how rodent populations responded to the presence of Saker Falcons and other predators. They were also planning to initiate work on Mongolian powerlines around July/August 2024. In addition, recent retrofitting work had been done in the country, fixing over 80% of dangerous powerlines, which led to substantially reduced electrocution rates. The results of that work were planned for publishing.

Mr Matyas Prommer indicated that in October 2023 a [conference](#) was held in Stara Zagora, Bulgaria bringing together Saker Falcon experts. At that conference, it was shared that the species' population in Central Europe was increasing. On the eastern part of Europe though, the population was on the brink of extinction (extensive monitoring over the two previous years was only able to find less than 10 breeding pairs). Various articles had been published sharing those results, and more were forthcoming in the upcoming issue of the journal *Ornis Hungarica*. Mr Prommer added that a potentially rising problem in Europe could be Avian Flu, as infected Saker Falcons had already been detected in the Hungarian population. Mr Prommer also made reference to work he was involved in in Kyrgyzstan, where a project had been releasing Saker Falcons into the wild since 2023. The animals released were former falconry birds that were trained to survive in the wild. Some of them were released with satellite tags and this had enabled information to be collected on disease, trapping, and electrocution – results would be made publicly available. In closing, Mr Prommer noted that in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan local farmers were trapping birds, which contrasted with the previously known trend of foreign falconers going to the country to trap birds during certain seasons.

Mr Andras Kovas indicated that he had attended two international workshops on Saker Falcon Conservation – one in Bulgaria in October 2023 and [the other in Kazakhstan](#) in September 2023. At the events, he introduced the AMF concept to the audience, which generated interesting discussions. There was some debate around why sustainable use was thought to be the best option, though the audience generally agreed that options for saving the species were becoming limited and that measures additional to law enforcement were needed. One of the workshops resulted in a [declaration on Saker Falcons](#).

Mr Gallo-Orsi indicated that the Coordinating Unit was working with the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF) to finalise two questionnaires. One would target falconers and be similar to the questionnaire circulated in 2013. The other would target governments, conservationists and energy infrastructure management companies and aim to collect information on Saker Falcon electrocution across the species' range. The international falcon festivals taking place in Abu Dhabi and Riyadh would be used to engage respondents for the former, and the ETF and IRENA for the latter.

Action Points:

- 3.1 STF to develop an information sheet on avian diseases affecting Saker Falcons to share with falcon hospitals and Raptors MOU National Contact Points;
- 3.2 STF to invite the falconry community to monitor avian disease.

4. Membership Confirmation

The Chair highlighted that there would be a need to refresh the STF's membership after COP15.

Mr Gallo-Orsi reminded members that the STF was established in 2011. He explained that there was a need to revise the mandate of the Task Force following the outcomes of COP14, and to confirm who were the Task Force's members. Representation from Central Asia, North Africa, China and Russia were lacking in the STF. The representation of non-governmental parties could also be improved.

Ms Vicky Jones suggested that expertise on illegal trade also be added to the STF (e.g., TRAFFIC). Mr Nurlan Ongarbayev shared that he had contacted TRAFFIC and learnt that Saker Falcon was not a focus species of their work in Asia. Mr Kovacs added that some TRAFFIC data on illegal trade in Saker Falcons was publicly available at <https://www.wildlifetradeportal.org>. He also agreed that it was a good idea to invite TRAFFIC to share any additional information on their data, including the results of any analysis undertaken.

Mr Dixon suggested that consideration also be given to inviting Fauna and Flora International and the Mongolian Government to join the STF.

Mr Mohammed Shobrak highlighted that the STF lacked expertise on Avian Flu, which could benefit the Task Force.

Action Points:

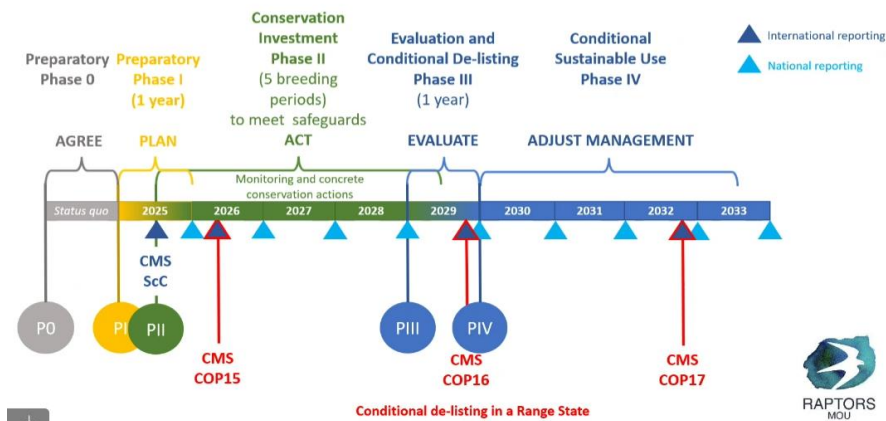
- 4.1 Coordinating Unit to share draft versions of the revised Terms of Reference of the STF (one version for the work until COP15 and another for beyond that);
- 4.2 Coordinating Unit to contact Range States to ensure effective representation in the STF;
- 4.3 Coordinating Unit to invite TRAFFIC to deliver a presentation on illegal trade on the species at the next STF meeting (consider inviting also Fauna and Flora International);
- 4.4 Coordinating Unit to invite the Mongolian Government to attend the next STF meeting.

5. A Roadmap for the Future of the Saker Falcon Adaptive Management and Monitoring Framework (AMF)

Mr Kovacs provided an update on the work undertaken to develop an AMF:

- Reviewed specific areas of evidence base and existing knowledge gaps;
- Clarified legal feasibility of the AMF;
- Developed an AMF modular concept;
- Developed a draft concept for global governance and management structure and functions, quota management system, and concerted actions along flyways;
- Updated geographical priorities for implementation;
- Amended sustainability safeguards and safety net features;
- Develop a draft Implementation Plan and Roadmap;
- Collected Mongolian and other case studies on conservation and sustainable use.

A provisional timeline for implementing the AMF in a volunteer breeding Range State was shared:



Ms Jones asked how the STF members could deliver comments on the AMF document, to which Mr Kovacs responded that a minimum of one month should be given to STF members for commenting.

Ms Jones posed questions on the elements included in Figures 4 and 5 (reproduced below for ease of reference) of Annex 1 to Document [UNEP/CMS/STF13/Doc.3](#), suggesting the addition of a green box to each figure reading “Is effective action being taken to address illegal taking?”. There was general agreement by STF members that such addition would be useful. Mr Kovacs confirmed that Safeguard 12 of the AMF’s Governance Module called for the legal protection of the species and its effective enforcement. Ms Jones then referred to a comment from Mr Dixon on artificial nests being a useful tool only in geographic areas where nest sites were a limiting factor. She suggested that, preceding the question on artificial nests in Figure 4, it first be asked “Is availability of nest sites a limiting factor?”. Only if so would a positive answer to “Have at least 300 artificial nests been established in Saker Falcon habitats?” be required in order to proceed to the question “Is there a consensus amongst the key Stakeholders that the use of the Saker Falcon would be sustainable and acceptable?”. STF members generally agreed that this would be a useful refinement.

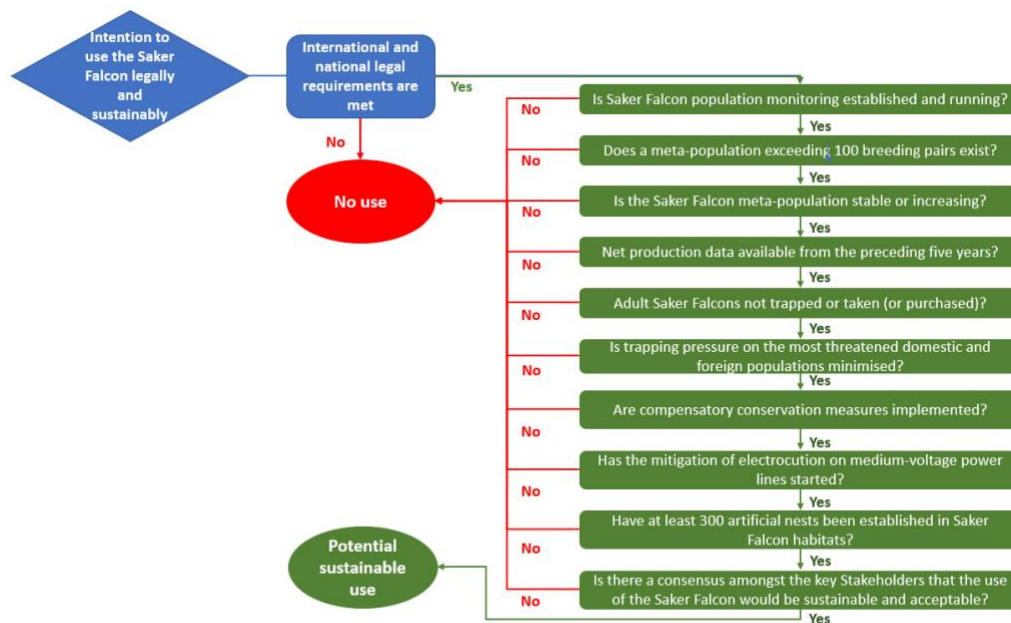


Figure 4 A proposed decision-making process for breeding Range States

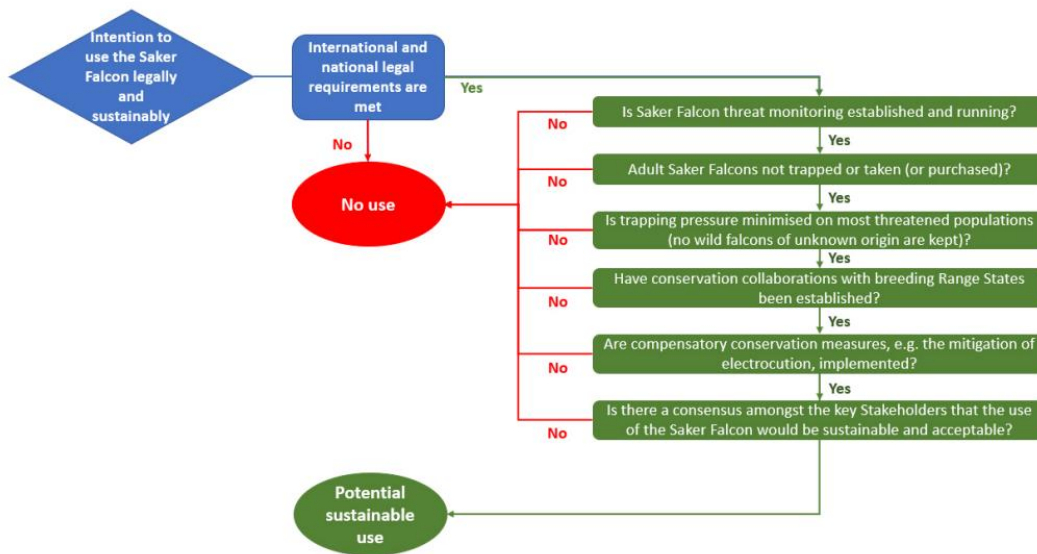


Figure 5 A proposed decision-making process for non-breeding (passage and winter) Range States

Mr Ongarbayev did not see reflected in the document the root cause of the problem at hand – i.e., the consumption demand. He asked if it would be possible to include information on sustainable consumption. Mr Kovacs agreed it could be included if members so wished but noted that the document under consideration consisted of the Governance module. The modules on Awareness Raising and Stakeholder Cooperation could be more suitable locations for including such information.

Mr Ongarbayev commented on the preconditions for the AMF, proposing that different approaches be accepted for different countries given their different contexts. Mr Kovacs reminded members that the AMF preconditions were those identified in the SakerGAP, recommending that they not be changed. He added that only very few countries met the “minimum of 100 breeding pairs” criteria.

Mr Ongarbayev then pointed out that, unless local communities were involved in the management process, the illegal take and trade problem could not be solved. Mr Kovacs suggested that partnerships be established with communities, including to tackle corruption.

Mr Ongarbayev also raised concerns about the risk of green-washing, given the difficulty in ensuring that any take was sustainable when corruption was present. He noted that until corruption among national authorities was addressed, there could be no guarantee of the AMF’s sustainability assurances.

Mr Mohammad Tabari pointed out that more scientific research was needed for applying the AMF system in breeding Range States. He considered that the criteria proposed for non-breeding Range States was not strong enough and could even increase the illegal trade pressure on the species. End-user Range States should accept some responsibility for benefiting from the AMF.

On identifying a volunteer Range State to pilot the AMF, Mr Dixon believed that it was not realistic to think that any of the five countries in Central Asia meeting the AMF preconditions would be interested in testing the concept. Instead, he believed that Mongolia would be the low hanging fruit that should be pursued. The Chair and Mr Kovacs agreed that Mongolia would seem to be

the lowest hanging fruit. Mr Prommer agreed, as he also could not see piloting being feasible in any of the five countries in the near future.

Mr Gallo-Orsi highlighted attempts had been made to engage Mongolia in the STF discussions. Being unsuccessful, he welcomed ideas from STF members on how to move forward.

Mr Dixon added that, for non-breeding countries, piloting could focus on an end-user State.

Action Points:

- 5.1 Coordinating Unit to place the AMF document on Google Drive and share access with STF members;
- 5.2 All STF members to send comments on the AMF document to Mr Kovacs (with the Coordinating Unit in copy) by the end of June 2024;
- 5.3 Coordinating Unit, Andras and Chair to prepare the next STF meeting.

6. Any Other Business

Mr Gallo-Orsi indicated that the STF should identify what the SakerGAP review and update requested by COP14 should target. The Chair added that an agreement should also be reached on the timeframe for the review, to which Mr Gallo-Orsi responded that approximately one year was available to complete the work and raise resources.

Mr Ongarbayev suggested that STF members contribute to the SakerGAP's review by identifying gaps that concern their own countries.

Coming to a close, the Chair asked the Coordinating Unit about the possibility of organizing an in-person meeting of the STF, to which Mr Gallo-Orsi responded that discussions with a potential donor were taking place. Other potential offers would also be welcomed.

With no further remarks from members, the Chair thanked all participants for their engagement and closed the meeting.

Action Points:

- 6.1 Coordinating Unit to provide guidance to the STF on the process for undertaking the review and update of the SakerGAP;
- 6.2 STF members to look at the SakerGAP and flag to the Coordinating Unit any gaps they identify in the information that concerns their countries of expertise.

ANNEX 1 Participant List

Range States	
Hungary	Eva Fejes
Iran	Mohammad Tabari
Saudi Arabia	Bandar Alfaleh
Slovakia	Peter Puchala
Partners & Independent Experts	
Biodiversity Research and Conservation Center Community Trust	Nurlan Ongarbayev
BirdLife International	Vicky Jones
CMS Secretariat (Bonn)	Ivan Ramirez Tilman Schneider
Independent Expert	Mohammed Shobrak
International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF)	Gary Timbrell Janusz Sielicki
IUCN – Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM)	Adrian Lombard Robert Kenward
Mohammed bin Zayed Raptor Conservation Fund	Andrew Dixon
Steering Group	
Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU	Lauren Lopes Umberto Gallo-Orsi
Chair of the STF	Colin Galbraith
Technical Advisor to the STF & Coordinator of the Adaptive Management and Monitoring Framework Discussion Group Discussion	Andras Kovacs