

THIRTEENTH MEETING OF THE SAKER FALCON TASK FORCE (STF14)

(Online, 26 May 2025)

UNEP/CMS/RAPTORS/STF14/Report

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. Adoption of the Agenda

Following the welcome, the Chair invited participants to review the proposed agenda and the annotated agenda. This structured approach allowed for any final amendments or suggestions for "Any other business" items. The agenda was adopted without amendments.

3. Updates since the 13th Meeting of the STF

3.1 Report from the Coordinating Unit

Mr Umberto Gallo-Orsi, (Coordinating Unit), reported on the activities undertaken in the past year. The process of establishing a dedicated Vulture Multi-species Action Plan Working Group was well underway, with an inaugural online meeting provisionally scheduled for September. The West African Vulture Conservation Plan was formally recognized as a Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) document, providing a robust framework for action in that region. Concurrently, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) approved its own regional Vulture Conservation Strategy, marking a commitment to prioritizing investment in vulture conservation programs within the SADC member states. The Coordinating Unit plans to organize further regional vulture meetings, ideally in-person gatherings, and seeks to replicate the successful SADC model in other key regions, including the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, East Africa, and West Africa to ensure stronger governmental engagement in vulture conservation. The International Single-Species Action Plan for the Sooty Falcon has been endorsed by the CMS Standing Committee; the plans' development has generated activities and interest in the Range States. Egypt, in particular, has developed a national action plan, serving as an example for other range states. Communication and information exchange have been significantly enhanced through active WhatsApp groups, fostering a vibrant community of practitioners and researchers. The report also mentioned the successful promotion of this work at side events during the UNCCD Conference of the Parties (COP) in Riyadh, raising international awareness and support. Plans are in motion for a dedicated working group meeting, and a monographic issue on the Sooty Falcon is currently under preparation, consolidating scientific knowledge and best practices. An expert group meeting held in Astana, Kazakhstan in early May marked the launch of the development of the Steppe Eagle Global Action Plan, identifying primary threats such as trapping,

electrocution, and poisoning. The objective is to finalize this global action plan for submission to the Scientific Council and subsequent adoption at the upcoming CMS COP.

Substantial progress has been made on the STF Governance document for the decision-making framework, a central topic of the current meeting. Furthermore, the Coordinating Unit has actively engaged in strategic discussions with key stakeholders, including the Saudi Falcon Club and the National Center for Wildlife in Saudi Arabia, exploring avenues for strengthened cooperation on Saker Falcon conservation initiatives. Collaboration with the IAF led to the development of critical questionnaires targeting falconers and assessing the impact of electrocution on Saker Falcon populations. Raising awareness about the threat of electrocution has been a priority, exemplified by a successful and well-attended webinar and the participation in a Seminar conducted in partnership with the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA).

India has banned the veterinary use of nimesulide, a Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drug highly toxic to vultures. NSAIDs were also discussed at a workshop in Saudi Arabia and CMS has started a cooperation with the World Organization for Animal Health, advocating for broader policy changes. Additionally, the first meeting of the West Asia Illegal Taking of migratory Birds Task Force was successfully convened and well-attended, building upon existing regional efforts to combat the illegal killing of birds in the Mediterranean and Asia Pacific.

Uganda joined the MOU in March 2025, followed by a national workshop to support the development of their national Raptor conservation strategy. Zimbabwe also became a signatory, elevating the total number of parties to 66 and crucially surpassing the 50% threshold of range states. Bahrain and other nations have also expressed keen interest in joining. The CU emphasized that while there is a clear mandate to update the Saker Falcon Action Plan, which was set to expire in 2024, the lack of sufficient resources for proper surveys and revisions poses a substantial challenge.

3.2 Updates from Members and Observers

Following the Coordinating Unit's overview, the following updates were provided on the implementation of the Saker Falcon Global Action Plan (SakerGAP).

Mr Janusz Sielicki (International (Association on Falconry and conservation of birds of prey - IAF), provided a detailed update on two crucial questionnaires developed in collaboration with the Coordinated Unit (CU) of the Raptors MOU and the financial support of the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD), designed to gather vital data on threats and practices impacting Saker Falcons.

Electrocution Questionnaire: This questionnaire garnered over 420 submissions from 48 countries. The findings were illuminating: over 300 respondents demonstrated a clear awareness of electrocution as a critical cause of Saker Falcon mortality. Furthermore, approximately 267 respondents reported the existence of electrocution monitoring schemes within their respective countries, indicating a degree of proactive engagement in some regions. A notable finding was that over 260 respondents believed that retrofitting dangerous power lines not only mitigated a direct threat to Saker Falcons but also contributed positively to broader climate action and mitigation efforts. The wealth of detailed data collected, including contact information for further engagement, will be analysed to inform future conservation strategies and targeted interventions.

The Electrocution questionnaires are available at the following URLs:

English: <https://ideas.ircenter.com/ankiety/index.php?r=survey/index&sid=413936>

French: <https://ideas.ircenter.com/ankiety/index.php?r=survey/index&sid=413936>

Falconry Questionnaire: This questionnaire served as a follow-up to a similar survey conducted a decade prior, with new questions incorporated to capture evolving dynamics and perspectives. To maximize participation the questionnaire was made available in multiple languages, including English, Arabic, Russian, Pashto, and Chinese. The primary objective is to facilitate comparative

analysis with previous findings, identifying trends and differences across Saker Falcon range countries. Mr Mohammed Shobrak (Independent expert) underscored the critical importance of direct, targeted engagement with falconers in the Arabian Peninsula, recognizing their unique insights and potential contributions to the data collection effort. The CU suggested leveraging major upcoming hunting exhibitions, such as Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition (ADIHEX) and the Qatar International Hunting and Falcon Exhibition, as strategic platforms for direct outreach and to maximize questionnaire responses, capitalizing on the concentrated presence of falconers and enthusiasts.

The Falconers questionnaires are available at the following URLs:

English: <https://ideas.ircenter.com/ankiety/ankiety/index.php?r=survey/index&sid=816354&lang=en>

Arabic: <https://ideas.ircenter.com/ankiety/ankiety/index.php?r=survey/index&sid=837277&lang=ar>

Urdu: <https://ideas.ircenter.com/ankiety/ankiety/index.php?r=survey/index&sid=459182&lang=ur>

Russian: <https://ideas.ircenter.com/ankiety/ankiety/index.php?r=survey/index&sid=364665&lang=ru>

French: <https://ideas.ircenter.com/ankiety/ankiety/index.php?r=survey/index&sid=994151&lang=fr>

Chinese: <https://ideas.ircenter.com/ankiety/ankiety/index.php?r=survey/index&sid=694898&lang=zh-Hans>

Action Point:

A. All participants to share the questionnaires among their network

Mr Andrew Dixon (Mohammed Bin Zayed Raptor Conservation Fund - MBZRCF) was unable to present due to his ongoing fieldwork commitments. The CU briefly provided an overview on his behalf. MBZRCF's consistent and significant work on Saker Falcon projects in key range states like Mongolia, Kazakhstan and China was acknowledged. In Mongolia a research station has been established to deliver 4 research projects: one studied at how rodents react at different levels of predation risk and investigate a range of predator-prey relationships in Saker Falcon and other raptors; a research on the migration strategies and the genetic of Mongolian Saker Falcons; a research on the 'Altai Falcon' is looking at its genetics, carrying out baseline population surveys and providing nest boxes with a new design. Work on the electrocution mitigation in Mongolia also continues by providing technical advice to the Mongolia National Working Group. In China the work focuses on assessing occupancy of different design of artificial nests, study on the diet of nesting pairs and the spatial separation between Sakers and Upland Buzzards. The new project in Kazakhstan started in 2025 aims at identifying release sites for 'Altai falcon' phenotypic birds, sites for artificial nests and the identification of dangerous powerlines. This long set of initiatives highlights MBZRCF's ongoing dedication to the species' conservation in these crucial regions.

Mr Mátyás Prommer (independent expert) presented an overview of the Saker Falcon populations in Europe based on the comprehensive data compiled for the [Ornis Hungarica monographic issue](#) highlighting stark contrast between population trends in different regions.

In Central Europe, encompassing the Carpathian Basin, southwestern Czech Republic, and western Romania, the Saker Falcon population has demonstrated remarkable growth. Over the last 12 years, the population has increased by more than 100 breeding pairs, reaching an estimated 300-350 pairs. This thriving population is characterized by two growing sub-populations, expanding outwards from established refuge centers. The quality of monitoring data in Central Europe is exceptionally good, largely due to annual, rigorous monitoring efforts, which provide a clear picture of population dynamics. This success is directly attributable to active conservation projects, particularly those focused on mitigating threats like electrocution. Despite the ongoing challenge of electrocution, targeted interventions and retrofitting initiatives have demonstrably contributed to the positive population trajectory in this region. Reintroduction efforts, historically undertaken in countries like Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Austria, were also

mentioned, though some of these programs are no longer active.

On the contrary, the Saker Falcon population in Eastern Europe, specifically in Ukraine, Bulgaria, and eastern Romania, faces significant challenges. The population in this region is in serious trouble, grappling with several threats, including prey population decline, taking for falconry, and electrocution and other detrimental factors. While electrocution is a known issue, its precise scale and impact in Eastern Europe, particularly in conflict-affected areas like Ukraine, remain poorly studied due to severe limitations, including the presence of landmines that impede access for conservationists and researchers. This lack of comprehensive data underscores the urgency of addressing these threats and the need for greater research capacity in the region.

The analysis of the natal dispersion based on ring recovery and re-sighting, indicates a strong philopatry with very limited exchange of individuals between the two sub-populations in Central Europe, despite being separated by only 200 km, despite the important dispersion movements observed in juvenile birds. This is an important issue to be considered in case of reintroduction programmes.

Ms Shamma Alkaabi (Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, United Arab Emirates) delivered an insightful presentation on the United Arab Emirates' commitment to raptor conservation, demonstrating how their national efforts align with the broader objectives of the Saker Falcon Global Action Plan (SakerGAP). The UAE's approach is multi-faceted, encompassing habitat conservation, ex-situ conservation initiatives, the implementation of science-based regulatory measures, and robust stakeholder engagement.

Falconry, deeply embedded in Emirati culture, holds an important status and has been formally recognized by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage, underscoring its historical and contemporary significance. The UAE adheres to international conservation frameworks as it's a Party to the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) since 1990 and to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) from 2019.

The presentation detailed the UAE's legal framework governing wildlife protection, including Federal Law #24 of 1990, which ban hunting, possession and trade of falcons without appropriate permits. Federal Law #11 of 2002 enacts CITES and set punishing fines if the legislations is not respected. Specifically for falcons, stringent regulations govern their keeping and use for hunting. A cornerstone of this regulatory system is the mandatory closed rings with unique numbering and passport system.

All captive-bred falcons are tagged with closed rings and registered. This innovative system serves as a crucial tool for individual identification, comprehensive monitoring, and the legal cross-border movement of falcons, effectively mitigating the illegal trade of wild Saker Falcons.

Mr. Obaid Al Shamsi (Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, United Arab Emirates), replying to a request of clarification from Mr Shobrak, further elaborated on the unified procedure adopted among the GCC countries for the seamless transboundary movement of falcons. This procedure, formalized under the GCC and Wildlife Convention's Standing Committee, streamlines the process and ensures consistent application of regulations across the region. During major hunting exhibitions, such as the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition (ADIHEX), special arrangements are put in place. This proactive measure ensures that falconers can comply with international regulations while participating in these important cultural events.

Mr. Nurlan Ongarbayev (Biodiversity Research and Conservation Center Community Trust) enquired on the availability of historical data on falcon international movements in the UAE database. Mr Al Shamsi clarified that such information is available upon request from a relevant government.

Mr Sielicki and Mr Shobrak raised the issue of the need for genetics identification of birds before their release back to nature. Mr Al Shamsi clarified that the UAE registration system includes

information on the whether individual belongs to a specific species or is a hybrid but the database does not include DNA sequence information.

Mr Shobrak and Mr Prommer, both raised the issue of the need of common standards in the national regulations on the subject and the need for exchange of information between countries. Mr. Rober Kenward (IUCN CEMI) emphasized the importance of Falconers codes of conduct as an effective way to promote good behaviour in-country and abroad.

Mr Nabegh Asswad (International Fund for Animal Welfare - IFAW) provided an update on the organization's activities concerning the illegal trade of birds (ITB) in the Middle East. Combat wildlife crime is one of the 5 pillars of IFAW's work. This is delivered through strong relationships with governments, collaborating with academia, NGOs and stakeholders developing materials and capacity building events such as the 80 DISRUPT training course delivered in the MENA regional in the last 15 years to support law enforcement. Most recently IFAW is building the capacity of law enforcement agencies on cyber wildlife crime and is monitoring cyber wildlife crime and establishing a database, which currently contains a few saker-related cases. The results are then shared with the relevant national governments. The organization is also supporting the operations of several wildlife rescue centres including one in Lebanon and has established an Academy of Rescue and Conservation to facilitate knowledge transfer between centres.

Mr Shobrak, encouraged IFAW to support, during the training courses the awareness of law enforcement agents and falconers of the SakerGAP.

The Chair encouraged continued collaboration and engagement between IFAW and the Saker Falcon Task Force, recognizing the complementary roles of enforcement and conservation efforts.

4. Decision-making structure for the conservation and adaptive management of the Saker Falcon

The Chair initiated the discussion on the draft document titled "A Proposed CMS Decision-Making Structure for the Conservation and Adaptive Management of the Saker Falcon" (UNEP/CMS/STF14/DOC3). This document, intended for submission to CMS COP15, represents a significant step towards establishing a formal and effective governance framework for Saker Falcon conservation under CMS. The document proposes a process building on some existing structures and decision-making processes already in place within the CMS. It proposes that the STF meets every year while a decision on quotas is taken every 3 years as it will have to be endorsed by COP.

Mr. Gallo-Orsi clarified the document's purpose: to provide a concise framework for the COP, with more detailed suggested operational processes outlined in annexes. He highlighted that the document incorporates a thorough CMS legal analysis (Annex 1), which critically examines the legal context for developing and implementing an Adaptive Management Framework (AMF). The document also includes a proposed Membership structure the STF (Annex 2), and a proposed revised terms of reference for the Saker Falcon Task Force (Annex 3) to ensure continuity and clarity regarding participation. The document includes a reminder of CMS Decision 14.160.

Ms. Vicky Jones (BirdLife International) raised the importance of the scientific underpinning of the decisions and recommended the document to explicitly indicate that, the modelling feeding off this science and to include a specific role for the Scientific Council in the decision-making process. She considered the indicative level of quota for the future nine years not in line with good practice for adaptive management and indicated that ideally the decision should be made on a yearly basis, based on latest scientific information.

Mr Matyas Prommer, highlighted the need for an international overview of the populations to

assess national quotas, in particular for small countries. The CU confirmed that the STF will propose national quotas and added that the philopatry of the individual shown in the European context seems to justify an initial approach on a country level and the system aims at improving population modelling at regional level based on good quality data.

Replying to a question from Mr. Al Shamsi, the Chair, clarified that while the task force was mandated to develop a global adaptive management system, Mongolia currently remains the sole country with an established exception for taking Saker Falcons from the wild. The proposed AMF, however, was envisioned as a broader mechanism to facilitate active dialogue and address complex conservation issues, even if direct taking under an AMF is currently limited to specific exceptions. For instance, the framework could be used to engage in discussions about the appropriateness of taking Saker Falcons from small European populations, promoting science-based decisions and preventing practices that might jeopardize vulnerable populations. The AMF is designed to provide a structured approach for considering diverse conservation challenges and potential management interventions. He confirmed that the COP is the final decision making based on the STF proposal of national quotas.

Mr Adrian Lombard (International Union on the Conservation of Nature – Commission on Ecosystem Management – IUCN CEM) reminded the participants that CITES Non-Detrimental Finding (NDF) process has been recently enhanced by new guidelines on several issues including migratory species and birds that should be considered in the development of the quotas.

Ms Karen Gaynor (Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species - CITES) thanked Mr Lombard for referencing to the NDF guidance and reminded the meeting of the three pathways for setting of quotas within the CITES framework. The COP-decision based quotas for few significant species such as Leopards or Rhinos which is supported by the compliance mechanism that in case a country fails to comply to the quite may result to a trade ban. The Review of Significant Trade process may result in the relevant Committee requesting countries to produce an NDF which may result in recommendations to improve management or even in a trade ban. The third mechanism is the national voluntary quotas as mitigation measure following the development of NDF which are monitored and adapted yearly. Ms Gaynor recommended considering these three different potential approaches and concluded reminding that the funding needs for such a process need to be considered carefully.

The chair thanked Ms Gaynor and proposed a separate meeting with CITES to further explore the issue

Action Points:

B. CU to organize a meeting with CITES to explore the different mechanisms for setting quotas (Done)

The Chair concluded that the discussion stressed the science and evidence-based approach needs to be clearly highlighted in the document; The role of the CMS Scientific Council need to be spelled out as it will bring in further scientific expertise and advice; the COP will give all Parties the opportunity to comment on what the STF does; the need to build on CITES processes and expertise on quota setting. While understanding the desirability of a level of constancy, the adaptive management decision-making process needs to work on shorter timelines and be responsive to available evidence. .

Participants were requested to provide their comments by Mid-June to allow for prompt revisions.

Following this, another online session is planned for early September (late August or end of September) to facilitate a detailed review and final discussion of the revised document before its official submission to the Scientific Council in October. This iterative process underscores the commitment to developing a robust, legally sound, and widely accepted decision-making structure for the conservation and adaptive management of the Saker Falcon.

Action Points:

C. CU to circulate the Document to all STF meeting with request for written comments to be received by 15 June 2025. (Done)

D. CU to post as outcome of STF13 the updated document on Governance (Done)

5. Enhancing monitoring of the Saker Falcon national populations

Mr Gallo-Orsi introduce the issue by highlighting that monitoring national population is crucial to fulfil the mandate of STF of both assessing the conservation status of the species and to set sustainable quotas. The main parameters to assess whether the species has attained a favourable conservation status are population size and trend and the species range. It is a responsibility of the Range States to provide such information, while the STF's role would be to support the Range States by producing and sharing monitoring guidelines and methodologies. The monitoring would need to provide good quality data to be able to assess changes in population size over a three-year period. Is this important? Who can help in developing the TOR?

Resource needed to develop the monitoring guidance.

Mr Andras Kovacs (Technical Advisor to the STF) reminded that some guidance was collected in the early stages of the STF work and should be made available to all range states.

Ms Jones, noted that alongside reproductive parameters, the population/ scenario modelling needed would require the sex structure of the populations is also important as the take is more prominent of females.

Action Point:

E. CU to develop by the end of June a draft the TOR based also on exiting documents for STF members to comment ahead of inclusion of the document to be submitted to ScC

6. Next meeting of the STF

The CU reported that, as discussed in previous meeting an in-person meeting was deemed useful to strengthen the cooperation and further implement the Saker GAP and the development of the AMF. The CU had approached a number of Range States and stakeholders and Mongolia has indicated interest in hosting a meeting but the available support would only cover the cost for the venue, logistical support for visa, a formal dinner and an excursion. More resources were needed to ensure all STF members would be able to attend. The in-person meeting would need to be scheduled for after COP15. The CU will produce a concept note and a budget that will be circulated among the STF Member seeking for financial contributions.

Action Point:

F. CU to prepare and circulate a costed Concept note by the end of June

7. Closure of the meeting

The Chair thanked all participants for a very fruitful meeting.

ANNEX 1 Participant List

Range States	
Iran	Mohammad Tabari
Slovakia	Peter Puchala
United Arab Emirates	Obaid Ali Humaid Al Shamsi Shamma Alkaabi
CITES	Karen Gaynor
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)	Janusz Sielicki
IUCN – Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM)	Adrian Lombard Robert Kenward
Mohammed bin Zayed Raptor Conservation Fund	Andrew Dixon
International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)	Nabegh Asswad Osama Al Nouri Akram Eissa Darwich
Independent expert	Mátyás Prommer
Tilad Associates	Albara Binothman
Steering Group	
Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU	Umberto Gallo-Orsi
Chair of the STF	Colin Galbraith
Volunteer Technical Advisor to the STF & Coordinator of the Adaptive Management and Monitoring Framework Discussion Group	Andras Kovacs