

SOOTY FALCONS IN SHARAAN NP, ALULA, KSA

Borut Rubinić
Nature Reserves Monitoring Manager
WILDLIFE AND NATURAL HERITAGE

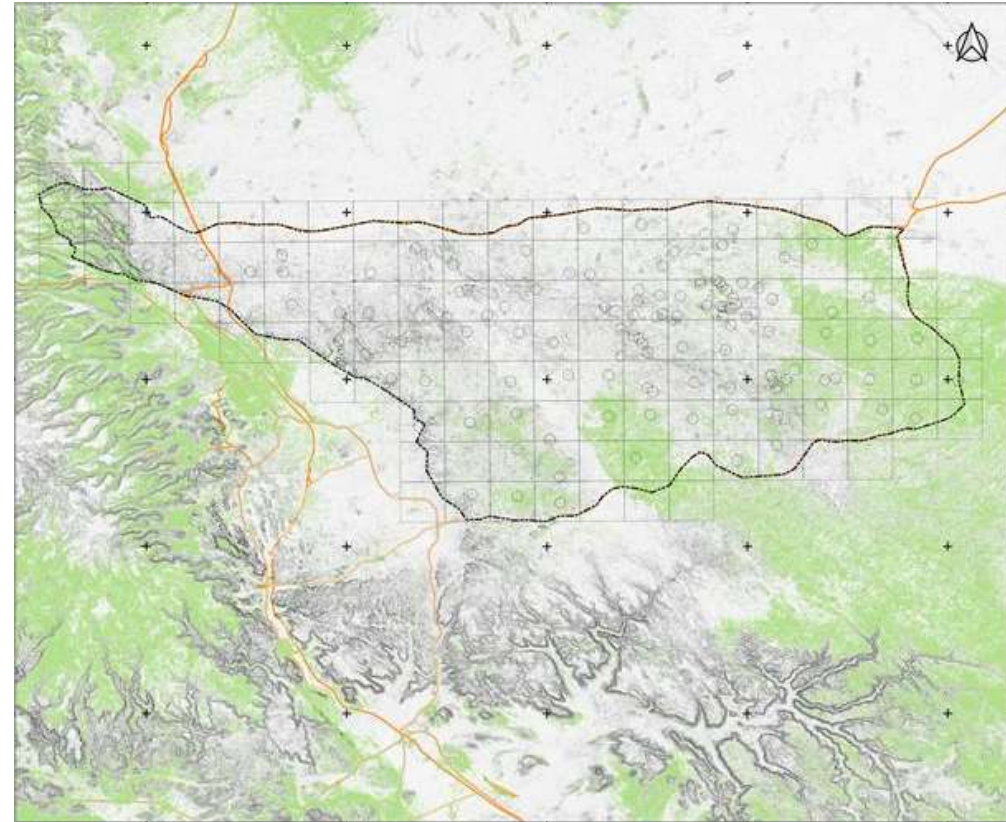
19TH NOVEMBER 2025
Sooty Falcon Knowledge Exchange Meeting
Raptor MoU, CMS



Sooty Falcon in Sharaan NP, AlUla

OBSERVATIONS DURING BREEDING SEASON 2025

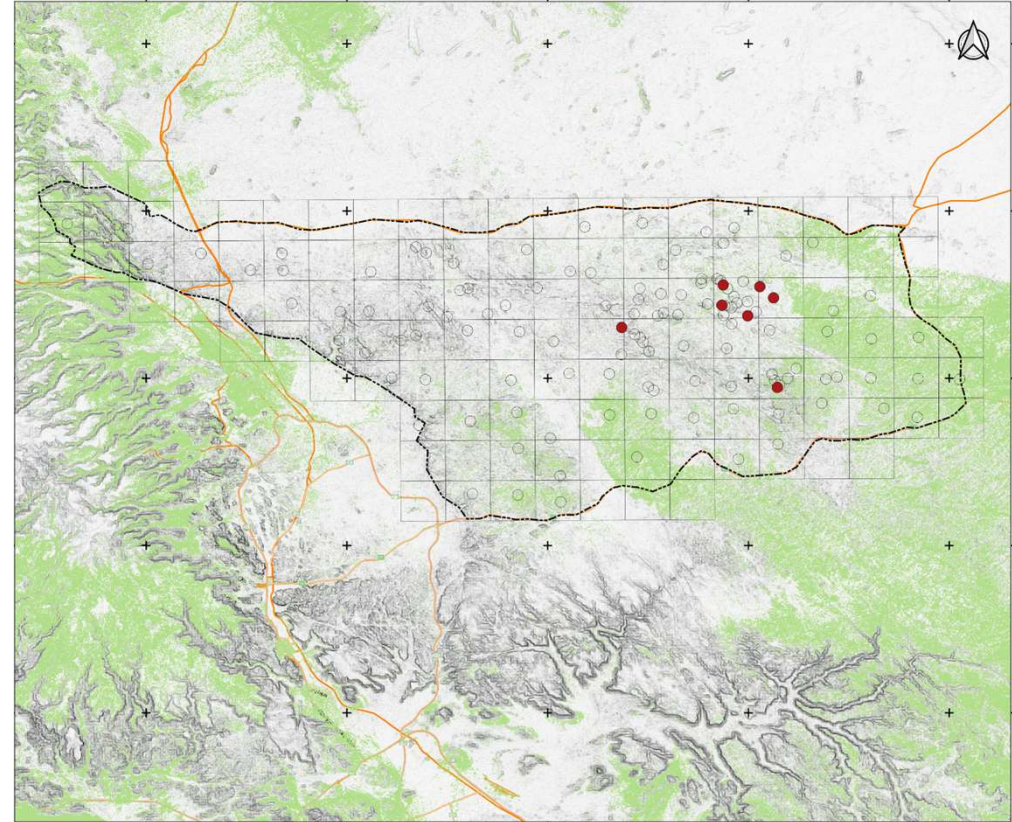
- Full survey of Sharaan National Park
- 85 observation points within 4x4 km grid and 42 observation points within 2x2 km grid
- 127 observation points in total in two strata
- 3 to 4 repetitions using playback following strict protocol from June to October
- 15 trained observers
- 123 man/days of survey effort in 2025



Sooty Falcon in Sharaan NP, AlUla

OBSERVATIONS DURING BREEDING SEASON 2025

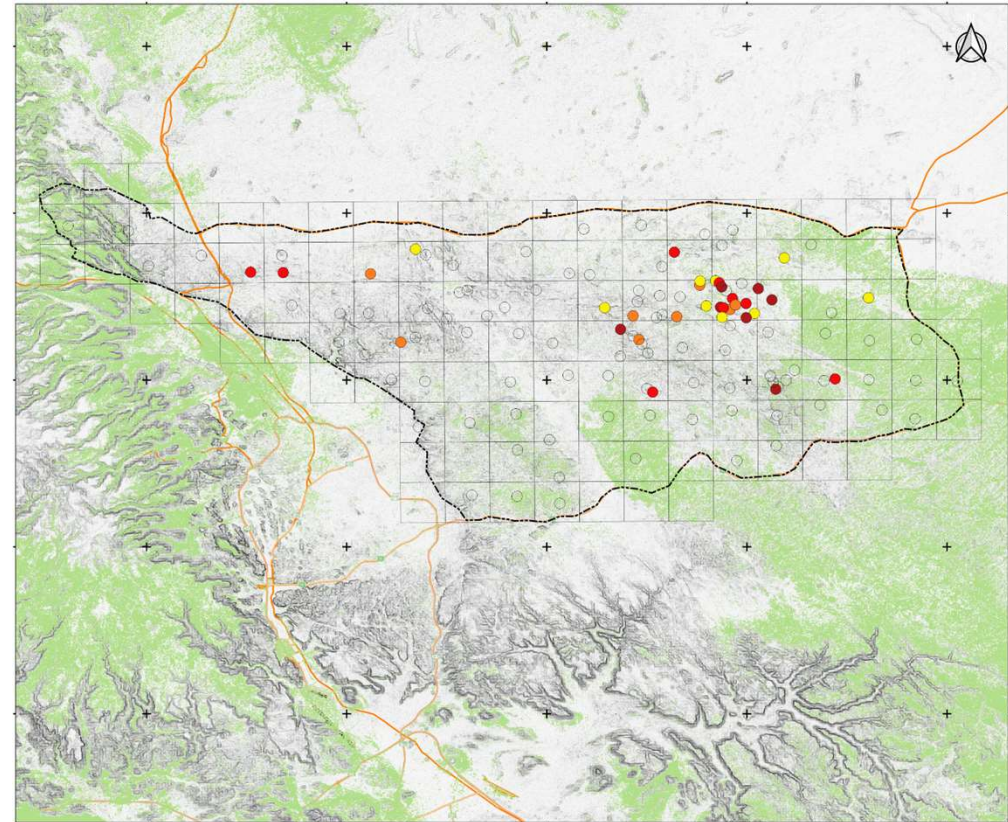
- High site fidelity – all the nests that were found in 2024 (N=7) were occupied in 2025



Sooty Falcon in Sharaan NP, AlUla

OBSERVATIONS DURING BREEDING SEASON 2025

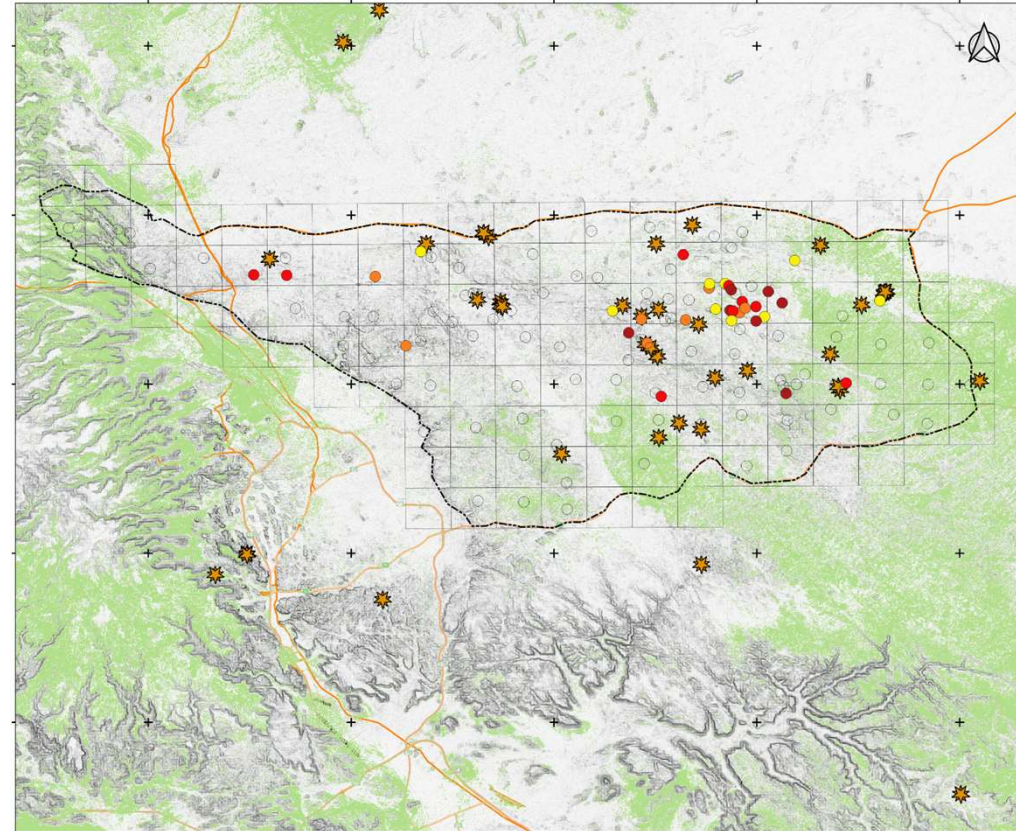
- 38 territories:
- 19 nests located precisely and nest parameters collected
- Additional 19 territories where nest is nearby



Sooty Falcon in Sharaan NP, AlUla

OBSERVATIONS DURING BREEDING SEASON 2025

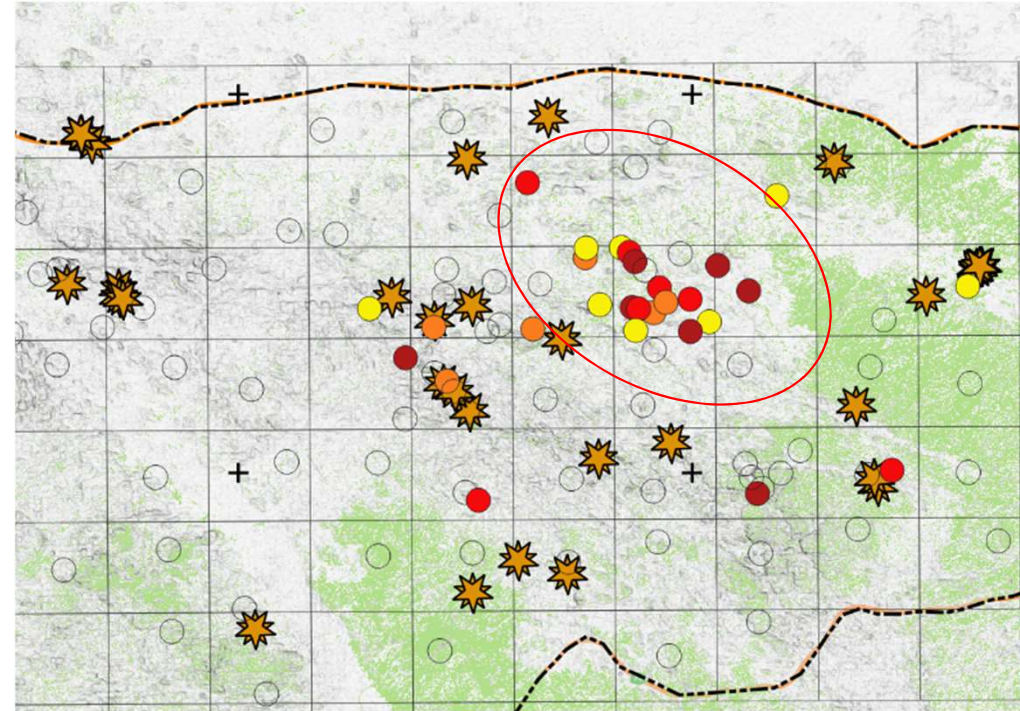
- Theory in progress: Sooty Falcons avoid the presence of Pharaoh Eagle Owl (PEO)
- Majority of Sooty Falcon pairs are in areas without (known) PEO presence
- These areas are suboptimal in terms of prey availability
- Trade off between prey availability and chick survival



Sooty Falcon in Sharaan NP, AlUla

OBSERVATIONS DURING BREEDING SEASON 2025

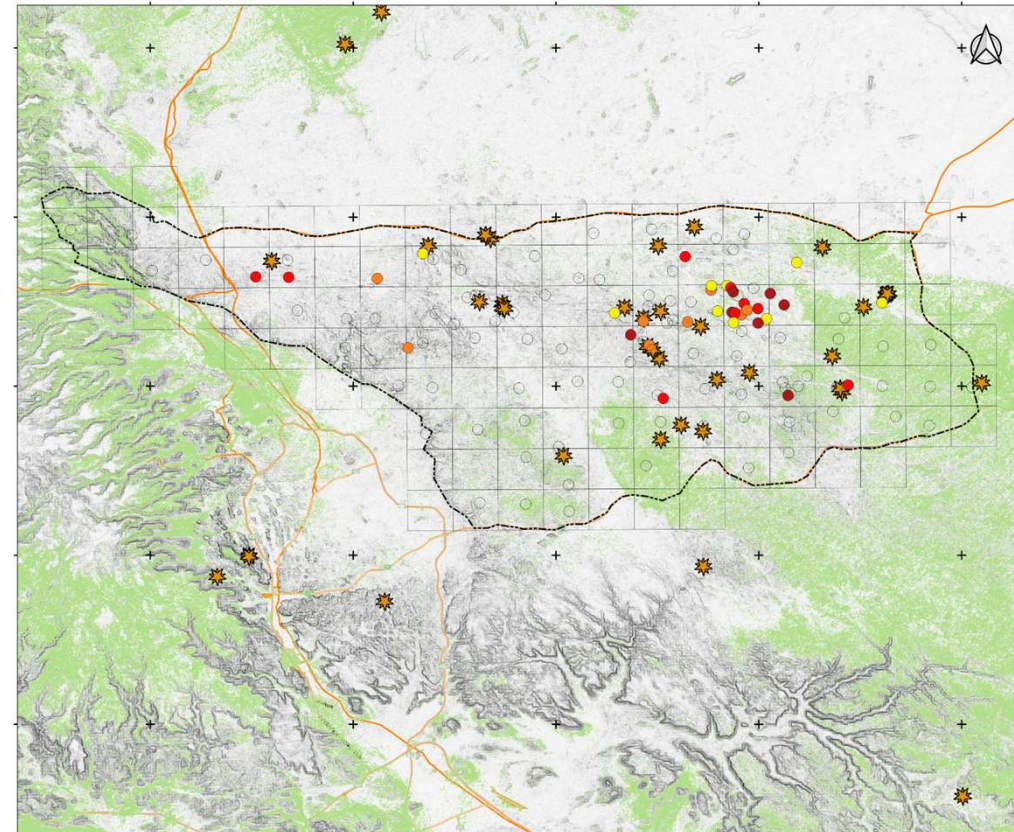
- Theory in progress: Sooty Falcons avoid the presence of Pharaoh Eagle Owl (PEO)
- Majority of Sooty Falcon pairs are in areas without (known) PEO presence
- These areas are suboptimal in terms of prey availability
- Trade off between prey availability and chick survival



Sooty Falcon in Sharaan NP, AlUla

OBSERVATIONS DURING BREEDING SEASON 2025

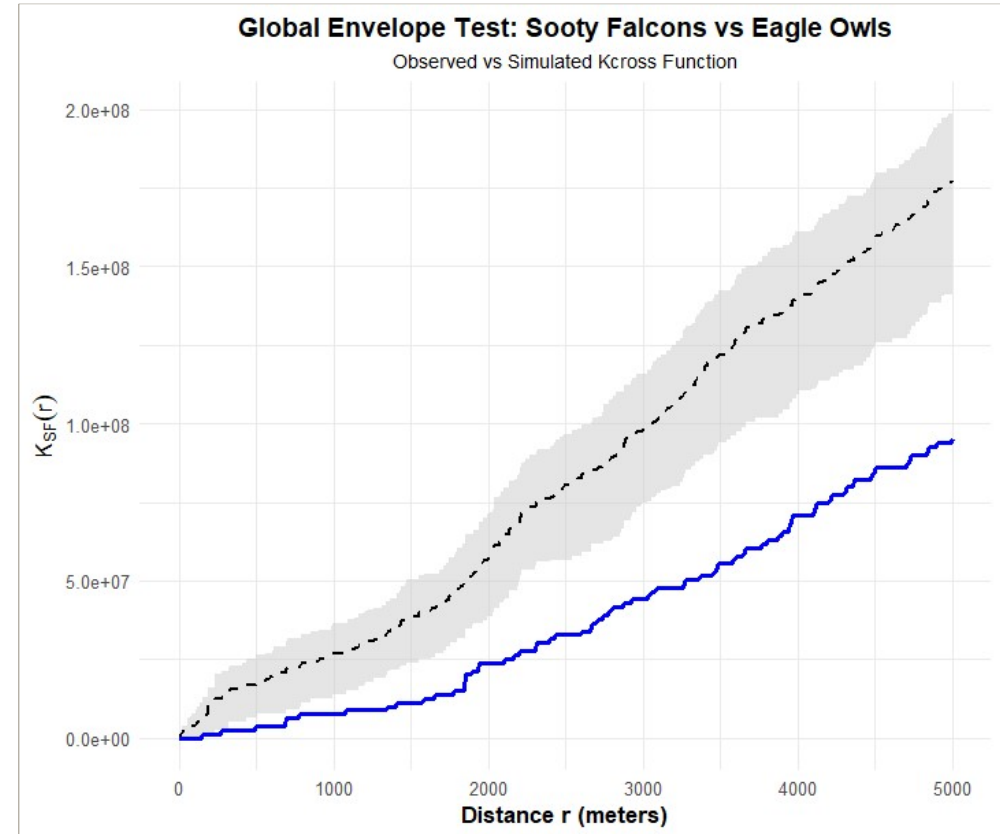
- Theory in progress: Sooty Falcons avoid the presence of Pharaoh Eagle Owl (PEO)
- Majority of Sooty Falcon pairs are in areas without (known) PEO presence
- These areas are suboptimal in terms of prey availability
- Trade off between prey availability and chick survival
- **Distance from vegetated areas – Vachellia communities – is relatively small**
- **Falcons are able to catch prey in vicinity of nests or fly to areas with more vegetation where prey is more abundant – little effort for good fliers**





OBSERVATIONS DURING BREEDING SEASON 2025

- Theory in progress: Sooty Falcons avoid the presence of Pharaoh Eagle Owl (PEO)
- Majority of Sooty Falcon pairs are in areas without (known) PEO presence
- These areas are suboptimal in terms of prey availability
- Trade off between prey availability and chick survival
- **Distance from vegetated areas – Vachellia communities – is relatively small**
- **Falcons are able to catch prey in vicinity of nests or fly to areas with more vegetation where prey is more abundant – little effort for good fliers**



Our analysis shows that SFs and PEOs are not randomly distributed. SFs tend to stay away from PEOs during the breeding period — statistical confidence that this is a real pattern, not just a fluke. **Test prepared by:** Dr. Mahomed Desai

Sooty Falcon in Sharaan NP, AIUla

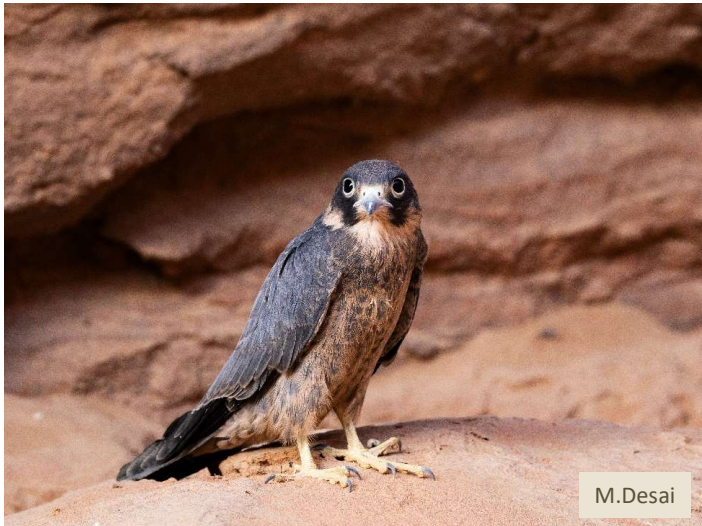


MAIN FINDINGS

- Sooty falcon was first confirmed as a breeding species in AIUla in 2024 with an estimate of 39 breeding pairs
- In 2025 a comprehensive survey was organized, including 127 observation points surveyed 3 to 5 times between June and October

A current population estimate is 50 to 70 breeding pairs of Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor* in Sharaan NR, ca. 4.0% of global population of the species according to the current knowledge.

- Birds nest in loose colonies of pairs that are 100-1000 m apart in one type of habitat (inselberg type) and 1150-2150 m apart in another type of habitat (cliff type). Nesting was recorded in cliffs higher than 40m (40-95 m)
- At least two instances were found with two or more pairs breeding in the same rock face, not more than 100 m apart from each other
- Sooty Falcons are choosing breeding areas which are away from potential main predator of their young – Pharaoh Eagle Owl and at the same time as close to areas with abundant prey as possible (mostly areas with vegetation restoration in SNP)



Sooty Falcon in Sharaan NP, AIUla



Threats

- Urban, industrial and energy development
- Disturbance by tourism and fisheries
- Lack of knowledge on the species
- Introduced terrestrial predators
- Locust and Quelea control operations
- Hunting and taking
- Lack of knowledge on the impacts of climate change
- Poisoning and habitat degradation from agricultural intensification

Threats in AIUla

- Lack of knowledge on the species
- Lack of knowledge on the impacts of climate change





The Sooty Falcon Team

Mahomed Desai
Benjamin Lee
Laszlo Patko
Ashraf Alhallah
Khaled Alhikmani
Abdullah AlShehri
Ahmed AlRashoodi
Abdulrahman Ganem
Aesh Atiyah
Sultan Saleh AlBalawi
Nawaf AlBalawi
Khaled Mahmyat
Maher Mufleh Almazini
Nawaf AlJohani
Ali AlAnezi
Borut Rubinic



Sooty Falcon in Sharaan NP, AlUla



Safe flight for the Sootys!