

Sooty Falcon in Saudi Arabia

On going Activities to Implement the Sooty Falcon Action Plan



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Content of the Presentation



- Introductory
- Threats affecting the sooty falcon Populations
- Implementing the Sooty Falcon Action Plan
- Recommendations



Falconidae in Saudi Arabia (11 Species)



الاسم العلمي Scientific Name	الاسم الإنجليزي English Name	الاسم العربي Arabic Name	حالة النوع بالقائمة الحمراء IUCN Red List (Global/Regional)	حالة النوع بالمملكة Status in SA
<i>Falco naumanni</i>	Lesser Kestrel	عَوَيْسِقُ	LC/NT	Bm/pm, ↓
<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Common Kestrel	عَوَسَقُ (الشبوط)	LC/LC	BM/WV/PM, ↓
<i>Falco vespertinus</i>	Red-footed Falcon (Western Red-footed Falcon)	لَزَيْقُ شَائِعُ	VU/NA	V., ↓
<i>Falco amurensis</i>	Amur Falcon (Eastern Red-footed Falcon)	لَزَيْقُ شَرْقِيٌّ (صقر عمورية)	LC/NA	V., ↓
<i>Falco eleonora</i>	Eleonora's Falcon	صَقْرُ الْيُونُورِيِّ	LC/NA	pm, ↑
<i>Falco concolor</i>	Sooty Falcon	صَقْرُ أَسْحَمٍ	VU/EN	BM/pm ↓
<i>Falco columbarius</i>	Merlin	يُؤْيُؤُ	LC/NA	pm/wv ↔
<i>Falco Subbuteo</i>	Eurasian Hobby	شُومِهِيْنُ أَوْرَاسِيٌّ	LC/NA	pm, ↓
<i>Falco biarmicus</i>	Lanner Falcon	صَقْرُ وَكْرِيٍّ	LC/CR	Bm/pm, ↓
<i>Falco cherrug</i>	Saker Falcon	صَقْرُ حُرِّ	EN/CR	pm, ↓
<i>Falco peregrinus</i> <i>F. p. pelegrioides</i>	Peregrine Falcon	صَقْرُ شَاهِيْنٍ (شاهين جبلي) للمفرخ بالمملكة والمهاجر يعرف بالشاهين البحري	LC/EN (breeding)	Br/pm, ↓



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Sooty Falcon Introductory



- In the Arabian Peninsula, recent observations indicate a significant decline of the species. It has disappeared as a nesting bird from United Arab Emirates, and the numbers of the nesting pairs have decreased in the Sultanate of Oman, Bahrain, and the Red Sea region in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. (Jennings 2010, Al Jahdhami et al. 2021, McGrady 2011; 2016; 2023). Jennings (2010) estimated the populations on the Arabian Peninsula, 500 pairs.
- This decrease in breeding numbers placed it on the IUCN regional (Arabian Peninsula) Red list as “Endangered”. (Symes et al. 2015).



Sooty Falcon Introductory



- The first surveys on the Saudi Arabian Red Sea were conducted during summer of 1982 & 1983 in which a significant breeding colonies on several rocky islands in the northern Red Sea were reported (Ormond et al. 1984)
- Ground and aerial surveys of breeding Sooty Falcons *Falco concolor* were conducted along the western coast of Saudi Arabia and its offshore islands from August to October 1991 and 1992 estimated that the Saudi population was 260–381 pairs in the Red Sea.



Sooty Falcon Introductory



- Another aerial survey of all Saudi Arabian Red Sea islands was completed in summer 1996. This was the first survey to cover all islands in a period of less than a month in the same summer (Newton & Al Suhaibany 1996).
- PERSGA (2003) and Jennings (2010) suggested that the distribution of the species in Red Sea shows concentrations near Al Wajh Bank and Al Lith.
- Jennings (2010) reviewed literatures on the food intake by the sooty falcon at the nests and showed that the majority were a breeding migrate species.
- In 2011-2012 a study on the status of the seabirds on the Northern Red Sea islands found a possible of 5 pairs on Rekha island (Shobrak and AlOufi 2014)
- In August 2017 a camera trap was replaced near a sooty falcon nest at an Island part of Farasan protected area for nearly 24 h to study the breeding activities (NCW unpublished report).



Sooty Falcon Introductory in Saudi Arabia



- Since 2018 up to date detailed studies & surveys were carried out at most of breeding areas in the northern & Jabal Al Lith island, However, baseline study needed in southern part of the Res Sea
- Different artificial nests were tested
- Out of the questionnaire developed by Raptor MoU to update the Sooty Falcon Action plan, showed that the number of breeding pair estimated for Saudi Arabia was 171-196 pairs (Leonardi et al. 2024)
- Between 2018-2025 more nests were found in the Main land and the first action plan was developed for NEOM area
- Saudi Arabia was supported the resolutions of the action plan during Raptor/MOS3 in Dubai (2023) & at CMS COP 14 in Samarkand (2024).
- Conservation efforts – There is no national action plan but Neom and the Red Sea Project (which includes Amaala) are developing local action plans. A meetin in the 15th February to discuss the establishment of the National Working Group are plan to es



Implementing the Sooty Falcon Action Plan



The main objectives of the Sooty Falcon Action Plan

Protect the species

Improve knowledge through monitoring and research

Exchange lessons learnt and raise awareness



Implementing the Sooty Falcon Action Plan



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Protect the species

Legislation: Relevant legal framework –

- The Sooty Falcon is a protected species according to Saudi law. It is also included in the list of High Conservation Priority Species for Saudi Arabia
 - ✓ Hunting of Wildlife Terrestrial Species no. 1442/1/312179, Date: 17/1/2021
 - ✓ Trade on Wildlife and their Products act no. 1442/1/356344, Date: 8/2/2021
 - ✓ Protected Areas act, no. 1443/45/67867, Date: 27/9/2021



Implementing the Sooty Falcon Action Plan



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Protect the species



- Enforcement on the National-level
 - Established the Special Forces For Environmental Security
- Protect known breeding sites

2016		End of 2025		2030	
Terrestrial	Marian	Terrestrial	Marian	Terrestrial	Marian
4.3%	3.5%	18.1%	16.3%	30%	30%



Implementing the Sooty Falcon Action Plan



The main objectives of the Sooty Falcon Action Plan



Protect the species



- Determine the threats to the species at the breeding
 - Disturbance,
 - development at the coastal & offshore islands (reduce the availability of habitat preference),
 - Predation
 - Pouching (Chicks taken from the nest)
 - Invasive species
 - Unpredicted wheatear conditions.



Implementing the Sooty Falcon Action Plan



The main objectives of the Sooty Falcon Action Plan



Protect the species



- Implement control plans for non-native invasive predators
 - Strategy is developed, and not implemented, but work need to be start during the next years
- Protect known breeding sites



Implementing the Sooty Falcon Action Plan

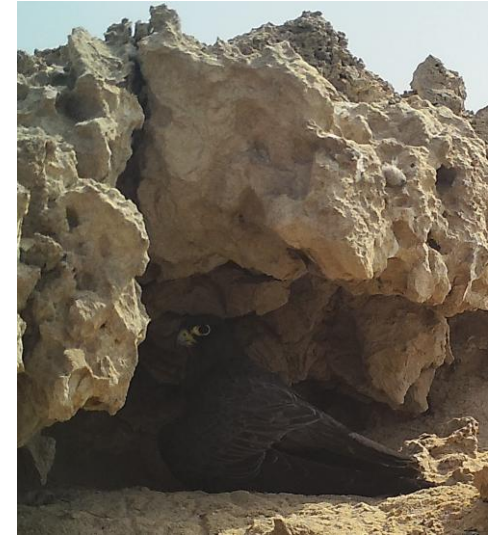


The main objectives of the Sooty Falcon Action Plan

Protect the species



- Investigate the viability of artificial nest provision to promote (re) colonization of suitable breeding sites
 - Four types of artificial nests were examined (46)



Implementing the Sooty Falcon Action Plan



The main objectives of the Sooty Falcon Action Plan

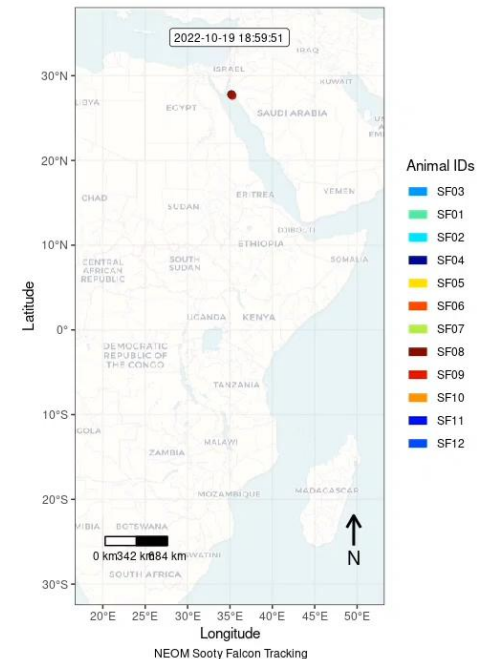
Protect the species



Improve knowledge through monitoring and research



- Annual breeding surveys of northern Red Sea Islands; disturbance studies; foraging behaviour; genetics
- Publication
 - Calabrese et al - Sooty Falcon (*Falco concolor*) in the northern Saudi Arabian Red Sea: population assessment and conservation
 - Calabrese et al. - Nest selection and usage of nest boxes by the Sooty Falcon (*Falco concolor*) in the Al Wajh Bank (Saudi Arabia)
 - Calabrese et al. - Juveniles dispersal and population exchange evidence in the Sooty Falcon (*Falco concolor*) breeding in Saudi Arabia.



Implementing the Sooty Falcon Action Plan

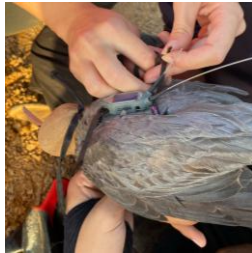


The main objectives of the Sooty Falcon Action Plan

Protect the species



Improve knowledge through monitoring and research



- Annual breeding surveys of northern Red Sea Islands; disturbance studies; foraging behaviour; genetics

Foster et al. In Press.
Breeding distribution of the Vulnerable Sooty Falcon (*Falco concolor*) in NEOM, Saudi Arabia.



Implementing the Sooty Falcon Action Plan



The main objectives of the Sooty Falcon Action Plan

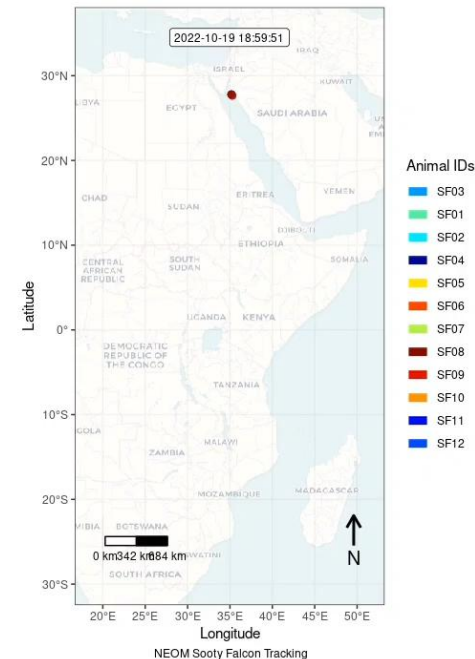
Protect the species

Improve knowledge through monitoring and research



Improve population estimates & distribution range especially with more nests discovered in different part of the main land (50-70 in Al Ula), Ibx Reserve 2nest, NEOM 40, King Salman Royal Reserve

- Species research and monitoring: 67 birds were tagged.



Implementing the Sooty Falcon Action Plan



The main objectives of the Sooty Falcon Action Plan

Protect the species

Improve knowledge through monitoring and research

Exchange lessons learnt and raise awareness

Communicate the findings of the ISSAP to governments, researchers (**On going**)

Best management options (**On going**)

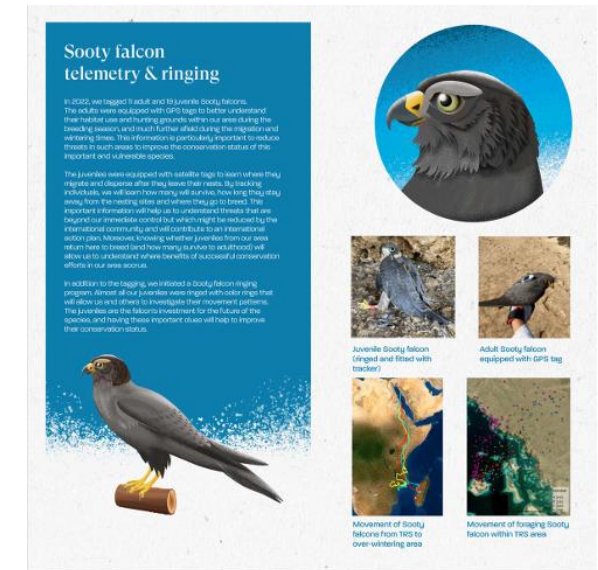
National awareness program on the importance of protecting the species (**On going**)



Recommendations for the Implantation of International Action Plan for the Sooty Falcon



- Promoting adequate levels of protection for all reproductive sites: (Protecting the breeding sites in the islands & in the main land).
- Limiting factors affecting the populations
 - Control of invasive species (no action were observed in this issue)
 - Prevent poaching of eggs & chicks,
 - Share expertise & Knowledge
- Monitoring and research
 - Improve the population estimate of the breeding population in the Kingdom
 - Improve the knowledge on migration routes and the cause of decline
 - Develop a mechanism to exchange information and centralize the information
 - Publish more scientific work
 - Develop a genetic research to between the different population in the Red Sea and the main land population
 - Organize a scientific meeting to present the work
- Communication and awareness
 - Increase the communication among different players (develop a national working group for the sooty falcon)
 - Raise awareness. disseminate experience in proper management
 - Promote ecotourism
 - Host the international working group for the sooty falcon involving all range states





Thank you



KAUST 
Beacon Development
المنارة للتطوير

Kevin Webb CEcol MCIEEM



Red Sea
Global

Licia Gallabrese

الهيئة الملكية لحافظة العلاء
ROYAL COMMISSION FOR ALULA



Borut Rubinic

المركز الوطني
لتنمية الحياة الفطرية
National Center for Wildlife
المملكة العربية السعودية

