

Sooty Falcon International Single Species Action Plan: Building support toward active conservation

(Online, 5 February 2026)

UNEP/CMS/RAPTORS/SFWorkshop1/Report

MEETING REPORT

(Prepared by the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU)

1. Welcome and introduction

The workshop marked the second coordinated session under the recently adopted [*International Single Species Action Plan \(ISSAP\) for the Sooty Falcon \(2024-2036\)*](#). Participants from across the species' breeding, migration, and wintering range shared updates about on-going activities and worked collaboratively to establish priorities for the implementation of the action plan.

Ms. Rouba Abou-Atieh, Executive Coordinator, CMS office – Abu Dhabi, opened the workshop by underscoring the critical importance of strong national engagement and international collaboration across the species' range, from North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula to the coast of South-East Africa and Madagascar, for the successful implementation of the Sooty Falcon ISSAP.

Ms. Abou-Atieh outlined the key objectives of the workshop: to strengthen shared ownership of the Action Plan; to identify clear priority actions for the next two years in both breeding and wintering countries, including resource mobilization for implementation; and to promote collaboration while encouraging active national engagement in carrying out the Action Plan.

2. The International Sooty Falcon Action Plan

Mr. Umberto Gallo-Orsi (Coordinating Unit) presented an overview of the ISSAP's development process and core content, noting its adoption by CMS in 2024 and its role in guiding 12 years of coordinated conservation efforts. The Plan prioritises strengthening legal protection, reducing key threats, and expanding research to address major knowledge gaps related to demography, migration, and the drivers of population decline.

Since the development of the ISSAP and the establishment of a communication platform, research activities presented at the Knowledge Exchange Workshop held on 11 November 2025, resulted in new breeding sites been identified in Libya, Saudi Arabia and Jordan while population monitoring have taken place in KSA, Oman and Libya. The Egyptian government has developed a National Sooty Falcon Action Plan.

Mr. Gallo-Orsi emphasised the importance of effective coordination for successful ISSAP implementation and invited range countries to step forward and take on this coordinating role.

3. Resources available

Ms. Alexandra Caron-Strehlow (Coordinating Unit) presented an overview of the resources available on the Raptors MOU website to support implementation of the Sooty Falcon ISSAP, namely:

- The [Sooty Falcon ISSAP webpage](#)
- Leonardi G, Lopes L, Gallo Orsi U, Javed S, McGrady M (2024) [International Single Species Action Plan for the Sooty Falcon 2024 - 2036](#). CMS Raptors MOU, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
- [Factsheet on the sooty falcon](#)
- [Library of literature on the sooty falcon](#), Version 2 updated as 31/12/2025
- [Sooty Falcon Breeding Population Survey Protocol](#)
- [CMS species page on the sooty falcon](#)
- Award-winning Omani-German film [The Migrant - Sooty Falcons in Oman](#)
- Documents of the [Sooty Falcon Knowledge Exchange Meeting](#), 19 November 2025

The Coordinating Unit would welcome collaboration toward the translation of these resources, specifically the factsheet and the survey protocol in languages used in the species range, including, but not limited to, Arabic and French.

4. Technical presentations

Following the interventions of the Coordinating Unit, four technical presentations were delivered by guest speakers, providing an overview of ongoing activities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman, satellite tagging activities in Madagascar, and global monitoring priorities.

a. Ongoing activities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Mr. Mohammed Shobrak (National Center for Wildlife, Saudi Arabia) delivered a presentation on ongoing activities related to the implementation of the Sooty Falcon ISSAP in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Key actions include:

- The NEOM and Red Sea Project areas are developing local action plans and establishing dedicated working groups.
- The sooty falcon is legally protected under Saudi law and is listed as a High Conservation Priority Species at the national level.
- Several breeding sites are protected, with ongoing measures to reduce threats at these sites, such as controlling non-native invasive predators, and to improve the effectiveness and viability of artificial nests.
- Annual breeding surveys are conducted on the northern Red Sea islands, alongside studies on disturbance, genetics, foraging behaviour, and other ecological aspects.
- Efforts to improve population estimates and refine knowledge of the species' distribution are ongoing. As part of such efforts, 67 individuals were recently satellite tagged.
- Communication activities and a national awareness programme are being implemented.

b. Ongoing activities in the Sultanate of Oman

Mr. Taimur Al Said (Environment Authority, Oman) presented an overview of ongoing activities related to the implementation of the Sooty Falcon ISSAP in the Sultanate of Oman. Key points included:

- 2022 assessments revealed a decline in the number of breeding pairs on several islands.
- 2023 assessments identified 20 active nests on breeding islands, with territories distributed across four islands. An average of three nestlings per nest was recorded, and prey availability was considered high.
- Results from the 2024 assessment were broadly consistent with those of 2023, although the number of occupied nests remained lower than historical levels.
- The 2025 assessment recorded an increase in nest occupancy. During this survey, 11 nestlings were fitted with metal BTO rings to improve understanding of movement patterns, mortality, longevity, and site fidelity.
- Capacity-building activities are ongoing, including training of rangers in field surveys, nest monitoring, and ringing procedures.
- Planned next steps include improving survey methods and guidance, establishing a long-term monitoring programme, and strengthening Oman's contribution to the conservation of the species.

c. Satellite tagging from Madagascar

Mr. Munir Virani (Mohamed bin Zayed Raptor Conservation Fund, UAE) presented an overview of sooty falcon satellite tagging activities in Madagascar, conducted in collaboration with The Peregrine Fund's Madagascar Programme. Key highlights included:

- The first expedition to Madagascar took place from 1–18 March 2025 in the Alley of the Baobabs area in western Madagascar.
- Nine sooty falcons were captured and fitted with satellite and GSM transmitters.
- Tracking data confirmed the Alley of the Baobabs as a critical wintering stronghold for the species.
- Tagged individuals were associated with three distinct breeding clusters located in the Sahara, along the Red Sea coast, and in the Arabian Gulf.
- A confirmed mortality was recorded in Ethiopia; the local team responded rapidly to recover the transmitter, with predation considered the most likely cause.
- Preliminary findings indicate a potential dual pesticide threat linked to red-billed quelea (*Quelea quelea*) and locust control activities in East Africa warranting further investigation.

d. Global monitoring priorities

Mr. Giovanni Leonardi (Hierofalcon Research Group), compiler of the Sooty Falcon ISSAP, delivered a presentation on global monitoring priorities for the species. Key messages included:

- Population trends at the national level indicate declines in most range countries.
- Countries for which population data are considered valid or current include Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Oman.

- Countries where available population data are considered obsolete include Chad, Djibouti, Eritrea, Iran, Jordan, Pakistan, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.
- Strategic priorities for future conservation action include directing resources towards key populations that are essential for maintaining the species' current global range, and prioritising urgent interventions and new surveys in regions currently characterised by obsolete or legacy data.

5. Group session

Following the technical presentations, participants were assigned to one of three working groups to collaboratively address a key topic related to the implementation of the Sooty Falcon ISSAP.

a. Identifying priority actions for breeding countries

The working group 'Identifying priority actions for breeding countries', was chaired by Mr. Osama Al Nouri (International Fund for Animal Welfare – IFAW). The main points raised during the discussion were as follows:

Capacity building

- Strengthening capacity remains a major priority. Many countries face challenges related to insufficiently equipped and trained teams, as well as high staff turnover.
- There is a need as well to train field officer for targeted surveys, particularly on islands and at inland breeding sites, alongside specific training for field officers to improve data collection and monitoring.

International and regional collaboration

- Improving collaboration at both regional and national levels is essential. Despite generally friendly relationships between experts and countries, coordination can still be challenging.
- Access to data and data availability were highlighted as key issues. Participants suggested that CMS could play an important role as a platform to facilitate data sharing, including data from developers and private companies.
- Improved data accessibility would help generate reliable trends and strengthen understanding of population dynamics.

Knowledge and monitoring

- Significant knowledge gaps persist, particularly in the Horn of Africa and south of Jeddah (Saudi Arabia). Patchy information may be leading to underestimation of sooty falcon populations.
- Monitoring efforts need to be strengthened through more field-based activities such as ringing, use of camera traps.
- The use of technology (e.g., high-quality mapping tools) was encouraged to reduce costs and facilitate fieldwork.

- While eco-tourism and tourism were discussed, they do not appear to be the primary threats at present.
- The UAE was highlighted as an example of a country with strong funding and extensive monitoring efforts, yet still experiencing serious population declines, the causes of which remain unclear.

National commitment and support

- Countries expressed general support and commitment to conservation efforts.
- Several countries discussed developing national action plans where these do not yet exist.
- Plans are underway to conduct national surveys in some countries (e.g., Jordan).
- Communication and awareness-raising were identified as important components of conservation strategies.
- Funding constraints remain a common challenge across all countries.

b. Identifying priority actions for non-breeding countries

The working group 'Identifying priority actions for non-breeding countries', was chaired by Mr. Ralph Bui (The Peregrine Fund and Wageningen University, NL). The main points raised during the discussion were as follows:

Conservation and monitoring

- Information on the main threats in Ethiopia, East African stopover countries, and Madagascar remains patchy. In particular, there is very limited data on:
 - Pesticide poisoning
 - Key prey availability and dynamics
 - Indirect effects of pesticides, including prey depletion and secondary poisoning
- Pesticide use is a major concern. Spraying campaigns targeting locusts and red-billed quelea may represent a significant threat to the species' survival across multiple countries along the migration pathway. A better understanding of where, when, and how pesticides are applied is urgently needed.
- Infrastructure-related mortality is another concern. Mortality from poorly designed power lines, wind energy developments, and communication towers is likely under-documented. These structures pose significant risks of collision and electrocution along key migration routes and require improved monitoring and mitigation.
- Based on the key challenges described above, the following research and monitoring needs were identified:
 - Expanded surveys to assess pesticide risks in Ethiopia, Kenya, and elsewhere across the non-breeding range.
 - Identification and monitoring of key stopover sites (which may vary between years).
 - Monitoring population numbers at winter roosts in Madagascar, particularly in relation to pesticide use in surrounding areas.

Country specific challenges

- Ethiopia:
 - Large geographic scale and remoteness
 - Security concerns in some regions
 - Sparse and dispersed distribution of sooty falcons
These factors make coordinated conservation and monitoring particularly challenging
- Kenya:
 - Hunting and persecution (documented for Eleonora's falcons and potentially relevant to sooty falcons)
 - Pesticide use that is spatially and temporally unpredictable
 - Limited access to casualty monitoring data
- Syria (and parts of the Middle East):
 - Hunting and trade of sooty falcons
 - Limited confirmed records in Syria and Lebanon, but evidence of broader regional pressure
- Madagascar:
 - Limited local capacity
 - Logistical challenges in monitoring major winter roosts

Awareness and capacity building

- IFAW training initiatives: Ongoing training programmes targeting traders through government entities in the Middle East should explicitly include sooty falcons, with the aim of raising awareness and reducing trade-related pressures across the region.

c. Identifying priority actions for resource mobilisation

The working group 'Identifying priority actions for resource mobilisation', was chaired by Mr. Munir Virani. The main points raised during the discussion were as follows:

Conservation Leadership and Capacity Needs

- There is a critical need to strengthen conservation leadership and secure sustainable funding, particularly in non-breeding countries along the migration route.
- Significant knowledge gaps remain regarding key stopover areas used during migration. Improved research and coordinated monitoring efforts are needed to address these gaps.
- Some countries, notably the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates, have made substantial progress in research, monitoring, and conservation action. These efforts provide a positive model that could inspire and guide similar initiatives elsewhere along the flyway.

Funding Opportunities Identified

Several potential funding sources were highlighted, with particular emphasis on capacity development in non-breeding countries:

- **National Geographic, Explorer Programme:** Potential support for research, exploration, and conservation initiatives.
- **Segré Foundation:** Funding for research and monitoring, from a conservation leadership perspective.
- **National Center for Wildlife:** Potential funding opportunity for research on undiscovered breeding areas in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, particularly outside Royal Nature Reserves.
- **Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund:** Funding opportunities in Jordan, Libya, and across the Mediterranean region, supporting conservation actions within biodiversity hotspot.

6. Closing of the meeting

The Coordinating Unit thanked all participants for their active engagement and contributions to the workshop, and reiterated the importance of effective coordination for the Sooty Falcon ISSAP to ensure strong national engagement and successful implementation of conservation actions.

7. Acknowledgements

The Coordinating Unit extends its sincere thanks to all participants for joining the workshop and for their active and valuable contributions.

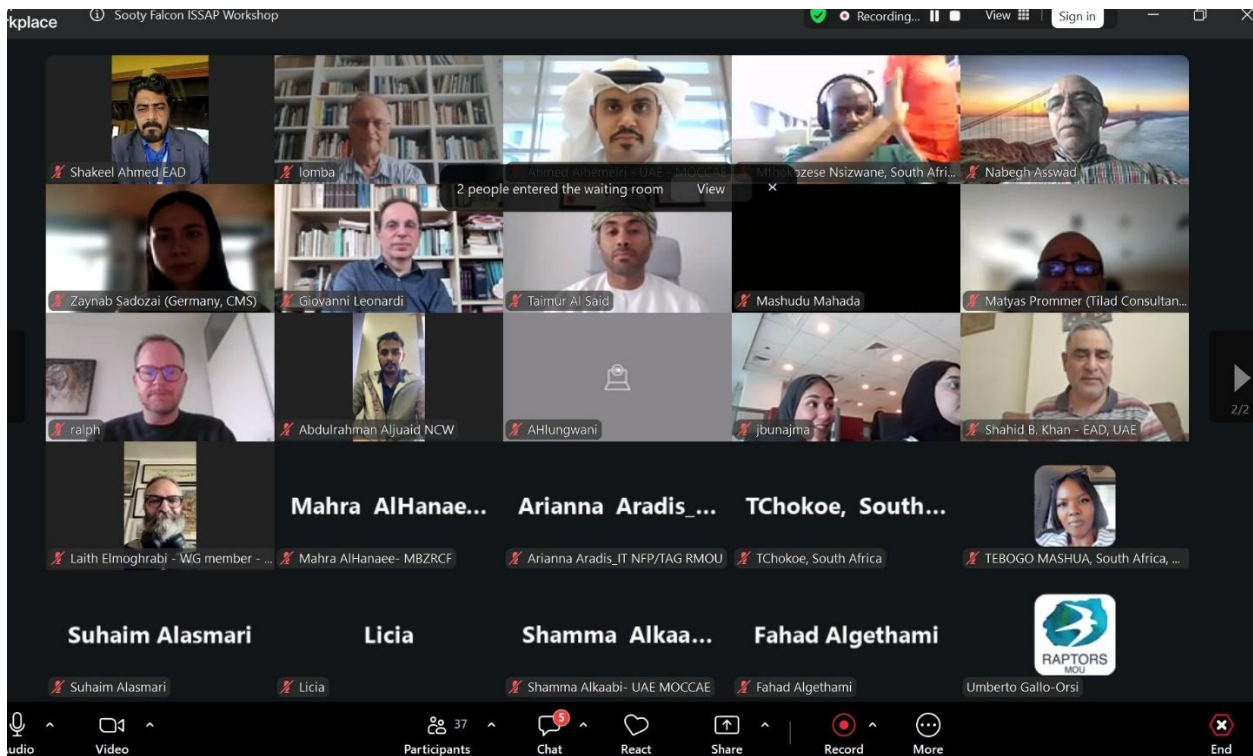
We would like to express our special appreciation to the guest speakers Mohammed Shobrak, Taimur Al Said, Munir Virani, and Giovanni Leonardi for sharing their expertise and insights.

Our gratitude also goes to the breakout group chairs and rapporteurs Osama Al Nouri, Ralph Buij, and Munir Virani for their leadership and support in facilitating the discussions.

Annex 1: Participant List

Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU	
Rouba Abou-Atieh	Alexandra Caron-Strehlow
Umberto Gallo-Orsi	
Speakers	
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	Mohammed Shobrak
Oman	Taimur Al Said
Madagascar	Munir Virani
Guest presentation	Giovanni Leonardi
Attendees	
Abdulrahman Aljuaid	Mashudu Mahada
Adrian Lombard	Matyas Prommer
Ahmed Alhemeiri	Mike McGrady
Arianna Aradis	Mohammed Alshamlan
Asnath Hlungwani	Mthokozese Nsizwane
Borut Rubinic	Nabegh Ghazal Asswad
Fahad Algethami	Osama Al Nouri
Hadeel Abu Al Hommus	Ralph Buij
Helena Clavero Sousa	Shahid B. Khan
Jawaher Bunajma	Shakeel Ahmed
Kevin Webb	Shamma Alkaabi
Laith El-Moghrabi	Suhaim Alasmari
Lakew Berhanu Wolde	Tebogo Mashua
Licia Calabrese	Tlou Chokoe
Mahra Alhanaee	Zaynab Sadozai

Annex 2: Group photos



Annex 3: List of presentations

- Document 1: [Presentation of the Sooty Falcon International Single Species Action Plan](#) – Mr. Umberto Gallo-Orsi (Coordinating Unit)
- Document 2: [Presentation of the resources available to the implementation of the Sooty Falcon ISSAP](#) – Ms. Alexandra Caron-Strehlow (Coordinating Unit)
- Document 3: [Presentation of ongoing activities related to the implementation of the Sooty Falcon ISSAP in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia](#) – Mr. Mohammed Shobrak (National Center for Wildlife, Saudi Arabia)
- Document 4: [Presentation of ongoing activities related to the implementation of the Sooty Falcon ISSAP in the Sultanate of Oman](#) – Mr. Taimur Al Said (Environment Authority, Oman)
- Document 5: [Presentation of sooty falcon satellite tagging activities in Madagascar](#) – Mr. Munir Virani (Mohamed bin Zayed Raptor Conservation Fund, UAE)
- Document 6: [Presentation on global monitoring priorities for the species](#) – Mr. Giovanni Leonardi (Hierofalcon Research Group), compiler of the Sooty Falcon ISSAP