UN environment programme

# Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

CMS

RAPTORS MOU

## THIRD MEETING OF SIGNATORIES TO THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ON THE CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY BIRDS OF PREY IN AFRICA AND EURASIA

*(Dubai, 3-6 July 2023)*

UNEP/CMS/RAPTORS/MOS3/Doc.13.4

## AMUR FALCON CONSERVATION INITIATIVE IN NORTHEAST INDIA

*(Prepared by the Government of India and the Coordinating Unit of the Raptors MOU)*

**Summary:** This document presents a report by the Government of India on the activities that it has carried out for the conservation of Amur Falcon since MOS2.

1. This document presents a report by the Government of India on the activities that it has carried out for the conservation of the Amur Falcon, *Falco amurensis*. The report is presented in Annex 1 to this document and refers to work undertaken since the Second Meeting of Signatories to the Raptors MOU (MOS2, Trondheim, October 2015).

2. Document UNEP/CMS/Raptors/MOS3/Inf.14 (only available in English), also submitted by the Government of India, provides additional detail on the work addressed in Annex 1.

3. The Coordinating Unit commends the Government of India for its commitment towards the ambition of the Raptors MOU, and applauds its initiative to track Amur Falcons in support of their conservation.

**Action requested**

4. The Meeting is invited to:
   (a) Review the report made available in Annex 1 to this document, and take note of it; and
   (b) Consider suggesting any ideas for follow-up work.

**ANNEX 1**
**Amur Falcon Conservation Initiative in Northeast India**
*(Prepared by Dr Suresh Kumar, Government of India)*

The Amur Falcon Conservation Project initiated in 2013 with the timely support of the CMS Raptors MOU and Hungarian raptor biologists helped create mass awareness and garner the support of local Naga people bringing about a change in their attitude towards hunting practices. An estimated 120,000 to 140,000 Amur Falcons were reported trapped and killed for human consumption in Nagaland in 2012 and this brought to notice the serious threat to migrating falcons in the region. This however is a story of the past and since then there has been a complete stop to the hunting of falcons in the region. The satellite tracking initiative proved very effective in producing positive results in conserving Amur Falcons through the engagement of local communities in falcon conservation. Along with this, administrative orders banning hunting, media campaigns, conservation awareness through the support of the church, and community ownership were also key factors in halting the large-scale harvest of Amur Falcons in the region. This initiative, as originally conceived has also helped in the understanding of the migration of Amur Falcons, their migratory routes, stop-over sites in Nagaland and Manipur State and adjoining areas, and elsewhere, and documentation of their prey at the stop-over sites.

A total of 15 Amur Falcons were fitted with the 5-gram Solar PTT (Microwave Telemetry, Inc. USA) from stop-over sites across Nagaland and Manipur State. Six of these tagged falcons were successfully tracked for at least one round trip from Northeast India to their Southern African non-breeding grounds and back to their northern hemisphere breeding grounds in the Manchurian Steppe in Northern China. One female Amur Falcon named *Longleng* set the record for the longest tracked duration of 1331 days only to cease transmission during the fourth year of tracking in its breeding grounds in Northern China. Undertaking the long-distance trans-equatorial migration and following an elliptical or loop migration strategy, the tagged falcons either passed through or stopped over in 23 countries including India. Amur Falcons undertook non-stop flights on their autumn and spring migration between Northeast India and Somalia, averaging a record distance of 5500 to 6000 km covered in five and a half to six days. This included an oceanic crossing over the Arabian Sea where the presence of optimal wind conditions facilitated their non-stop flights.

This tracking study of the Amur Falcon has provided deeper insights into the migration of these incredible long-distance migrants. We propose Amur Falcons as an ideal model or subject for understanding climatic influences on migration in birds and also how changing land use likely impacts the species at a regional scale across their range. This study confirmed the significance of the Northeast Indian region specifically selected sites in Nagaland and Manipur as important stop-over sites for Amur Falcons on passage during their autumn migration. The availability of superabundant prey particularly the swarming termites appeared to influence stop-over site selection by Amur Falcons in the Naga hills and adjoining ranges. In support of this, an examination of regurgitated pellets of Amur Falcons at the stop-over sites showed a high frequency of occurrence of termites (88%). An investigation on the identity of the termite species in the diet of Amur Falcons found this to belong to the unique fungus-growing genus *Odontotermes*, and to be of two species, *O. feae* and *O. horni*. To conclude, this tracking project apart from creating conservation awareness has helped in a better understanding of Amur Falcons passing through Northeast India and adjoining areas, which is critical for conservation planning. Many important facets of their migration strategy, however, remain unknown and call for further research. Lastly, the true success of the Amur Falcon Conservation Initiative is attributed to the "*Naga Pride*" - the fact that hunters can also become protectors.