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Agenda Item 28

**SAKER FALCON (*Falco cherrug*) GLOBAL ACTION PLAN (SAKERGAP)**

*(Prepared by the Saker Falcon Task Force in collaboration with the Secretariat)*

**Summary:**

This document reports on progress to implement Resolution 11.18 (Rev.COP12) *Saker Falcon (Falco cherrug) Global Action Plan*. It contains draft amendments to this Resolution as well as draft Decisions.

Revision 1 makes consistent the language in decisions directed to the Scientific Council.

## SAKER FALCON TASK FORCE – GLOBAL ACTION PLAN

### Background

1. The Conference of the Parties, at its 12<sup>th</sup> meeting (2017), adopted Resolution 11.18 (Rev.COP12) *Saker Falcon (Falco cherrug) Global Action Plan (SakerGAP)*, which decided to continue the Concerted Action for the species and the Saker Falcon Task Force under the auspices of the Raptors MOU, and recommended that the Task Force reports to the Meeting of Signatories of the Raptors MOU, the Sessional Committee of the CMS Scientific Council and the CMS Conference of the Parties.
2. The species is of cultural significance in many parts of its range. However, Saker Falcon populations have suffered rapid declines driven by threats including electrocution on electricity poles, unsustainable trapping for falconry purposes and habitat degradation across its global range..
3. The species has a wide breeding distribution covering large swathes of central Asia, China, and parts of Europe, with seasonal movements into the Middle East and Africa. The Saker Falcon is listed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List as ‘Globally Endangered’. It has a global population of between 12,200 and 29,800 individuals with the population trend assessed as ‘Decreasing’. During the 19-year period 2002-2021, the population has experienced a 44.6 per cent decline (based on median estimates), with a minimum-maximum decline of 12-71 per cent.
4. The species is listed in CMS Appendix I, with the notable exception of the Mongolian population which is listed in CMS Appendix II. Under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) the species is listed in Appendix II.1. While, with the exception of the population in Mongolia, the taking from the wild of Saker Falcon is currently prohibited in accordance with its Appendix-I listing pursuant to Article III.4 of the CMS Convention, under CITES, Parties are allowed to trade the species internationally under certain conditions – although, the populations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan are subject to a ‘zero quota’.

### SakerGAP implementation

5. The Saker Falcon Global Action Plan (SakerGAP), adopted by CMS Parties in 2014, brought together more than 80 countries, organizations, scientists, falconers and other stakeholders with the shared goal of re-establishing a healthy, self-sustaining wild population throughout its range. The Plan is envisaged to be implemented over a 10-year period (2015 – 2024). The SakerGAP outlined four Flagship Projects that aim to fill gaps in knowledge and spur action in key areas to conserve the species. The four projects, which are primarily led by collaborating partner organizations, NGOs and experts, have made substantial progress.
6. Significant support was received from the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF) to support the first Flagship Project identified in the SakerGAP, which developed an online information portal, SakerNet, ([www.sakernet.org](http://www.sakernet.org)). SakerNet was launched in 2015 in five languages: Arabic, Farsi, Pashto, Russian and English. There has been growing interest, with around 17,000 visits

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<sup>1</sup> CITES Appendix II lists species that are not necessarily now threatened with extinction but that may become so unless trade is closely controlled.

to SakerNet in total; IAF recently upgraded the site to add five additional languages. The site lists falcon hospitals and contact points for falconers and trappers throughout the region. The system is now functioning as a hub, with links to satellite websites from different regions.

7. The second Flagship Project (to deploy one hundred satellite tags on Saker Falcons) has also seen good progress, with at least 79 Saker Falcons satellite-tagged in Austria, Bulgaria, China, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Mongolia, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine since 2014. The actual number is likely to be closer to the target of 100 tags.
8. The third Flagship Project (to erect 1,000 artificial nest platforms for the Saker Falcon), a ground-breaking project led by International Wildlife Consultants UK Ltd and supported by the Environment Agency–Abu Dhabi, created a managed breeding population in Mongolia, which now occupy some of the 5,000 artificial nests installed. By 2015, there was an average of around 600 breeding pairs of Sakers producing around 2,000 chicks each year. Additionally, according to a report from the Emirates Falconers' Club, 200 closed-box design artificial nests have been erected on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, as part of a pilot study by the Institute of Zoology in Beijing and its partners. The project utilizes data from artificial nests erected by local authorities (approximately 10,000 across the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau). Artificial nest platforms have also been established in Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine.
9. The fourth Flagship Project (to install or retrofit one million new or existing bird-safe electricity poles), has retrofitted poles and undertaken related activities in Bulgaria, China, Hungary, Mongolia, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Slovakia. Efforts to design and apply bird-safe pole configurations and insulate existing poles are actively ongoing in several Range States. For example, the Mohamed bin Zayed Raptor Conservation Fund (MBZ RCF) is supporting an initiative in Mongolia to remediate up to 34,000 power poles in the steppe zone where nearly 20,000 birds are killed by electrocution annually, including 4,000 Saker Falcons. The initiative has seen impressive results, with an expected mortality reduction of 98 per cent. As another example, the Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds has insulated more than 4,600 powerlines across Bulgaria to reduce the number of electrocution-related deaths. The Qatar Falconry Club has also recently indicated its interest in supporting the retrofitting of pylons in Mongolia.
10. Reintroduction programmes are an important part of the effective conservation of the species and there is an ongoing initiative in Bulgaria, supported by the MBZ RCF. The breeding population in the Southern Balkans became extinct in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century due to habitat degradation and poaching. The Saker Falcon Reintroduction Programme was launched by the Green Balkans Wildlife Rehabilitation and Breeding Centre in 2015 to restore breeding populations in areas of Bulgaria where the species was considered to be extinct. Between 2015-2020, Green Balkans released 80 captive-bred Saker Falcons into the wild and one pair has been successfully breeding since 2018.
11. Further significant financial support for the implementation of the SakerGAP was provided by the European Commission to reinforce Saker Falcon populations within the European Union, primarily in Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria. Additionally, between 2014 and 2022, the Saker Falcon benefited from the support of at least nine projects funded by the European Union's LIFE programme. Project activities included the restocking of prey species and the conservation of their habitats, satellite tracking, the provision of artificial nest platforms, retrofitting of dangerous medium-voltage power lines, and awareness-raising among key stakeholder groups.

12. The Saker Falcon Task Force (STF) is now actively undertaking work to implement the SakerGAP, particularly in relation to two key aspects of conservation and management action. First, the STF has been developing an Adaptive Management Framework (AMF) for the sustainable use of the species (for populations that are not listed in Appendix I). It is also focusing on the impact of electrocution on populations throughout its range. The 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the STF, on 24 June 2020, agreed to establish two small discussion groups to progress the key priorities of the AMF (AMF DG) and electrocution (EDG).

### **Electrocution**

13. Electrocution of Saker Falcons on medium-voltage powerlines is identified in the SakerGAP as one of the principal causes of increased mortality. Objective 1 of the SakerGAP is to “Ensure that the impact of electrocution on the Saker Falcon is reduced significantly, enabling a stable or increasing population trend of the Saker Falcon in key breeding range countries of Central Asia and Europe”.
14. The work of the EDG has focused on assessing the feasibility of developing a map of dangerous powerlines across the Saker range. No complete data set exists to develop such a map, which is key to identifying priority areas to focus action to mitigate dangerous powerlines. The required information is widely dispersed among national stakeholders and a questionnaire is in development to help assess the overall existence and availability of such data.
15. A fieldwork approach is being taken in some key areas of the Saker range to identify dangerous powerlines and their ownership, and subsequently encourage mitigation. Combining the data from both fieldwork and the questionnaires on the location of dangerous powerlines will be used to help raise awareness of the global issue of electrocution of Saker – as well as of other birds of prey.
16. It is recognized by the STF that work on electrocution of Saker Falcon overlaps with similar work in relation to other raptors, waterbirds and landbirds, and that collaboration with other working groups (e.g., the CMS Energy Task Force), developers and operating stakeholders, and national governments is fundamental if progress is to be made.

### **Adaptive Management Framework for the sustainable use of the Saker Falcon**

17. The key aim of developing an AMF is to explore whether current illegal and (most likely) unsustainable trapping activity can be transformed into legal and controlled harvesting that can be carefully monitored, that is sustainable in the long-term and that conforms with requirements under CMS and CITES. To tackle this issue, an Adaptive Management Framework Discussion Group (AMF DG) was formed by STF members and observers in 2020. A modular Adaptive Management Framework is being developed as a tool to assist the decision-making of stakeholders, especially international partners and Parties' authorities, on the sustainable use of the Saker Falcon.
18. The objective is to design an AMF that integrates nine modules:
  - a. global governance and data management, including effective sustainable-use models and a sustainable, international quota scheme,
  - b. internationally harmonized policy and law-making,
  - c. reinforced law enforcement,
  - d. effective awareness-raising,

- e. effective monitoring and research schemes,
  - f. complementary ex situ conservation measures,
  - g. in situ conservation measures,
  - h. effective stakeholder engagement, cooperation and networking to respond to the socioeconomic and cultural drivers of Saker Falcon use, and
  - i. the involvement of rural communities in the conservation management of the Saker Falcon.
19. While the design of the AMF is still in development, a number of key points are guiding the overall approach. These include:
- a. Currently, Mongolia is the only CMS Party in which the taking of the Saker Falcon is permitted under CMS. The legal taking of the Saker Falcon from the wild in any Range State that is a Party to CMS and CITES would need to be in compliance with CMS and CITES provisions.
  - b. The overall (global) number of birds taken from the wild could be decided by a Quota Management System based on regular reports by the Range States involved.
  - c. The Saker Falcon Quota Management System would be based on monitoring data collected over a minimum of five years, and the re-adjustment of management practices as required.
  - d. The Quota Management System would ideally create financial incentives to manage wild Saker Falcon breeding populations in a sustainable way, especially for those Range States where use may be permitted within the limitations of the safeguards proposed by the STF, and conservation funding is currently limited.

Safety net features of the Adaptive Management Framework for the sustainable use of the Saker Falcon

20. In addition to the six essential and four desirable safeguards set out in the SakerGAP, the following legal, ecological and social safeguards would be included in the AMF to ensure the sustainability of any legal use:
- a. A three-level (international, national and local) governance and management hierarchy would ensure the collaboration of breeding and non-breeding Range States and stakeholders.
  - b. The Saker Falcon Quota Management System would bring together governments, regulators, conservation organizations and market players, rather than treating them separately.
  - c. Sustainable use of a particular Saker Falcon population would require a change in the listing of the relevant population of Saker Falcon from CMS Appendix I to Appendix II, unless one of the exceptions to the prohibition of take could be invoked, and the CITES zero quota removed for relevant Parties.
  - d. The AMF should be evidence-based, follow available guidance and best practice, and take a precautionary approach with regard to major knowledge gaps.
  - e. Knowledge gaps should be actively addressed through targeted research and monitoring that will improve the AMF over time. Legal protection of the Saker Falcon should be in place in all Range States and effectively enforced to successfully address illegal take. National laws would ensure any use is managed sustainably through the AMF.
  - f. Any taking of wild Saker Falcons must be traceable. The source population of trapped falcons must be identifiable through individual marking and/or genetic ID.

- g. Wild falcons would be allowed to be taken only through a clearly defined process of licensing.
  - h. Habitat conservation and management activities should be implemented by national governments in line with the SakerGAP.
  - i. Local communities would need to be involved in the implementation of the AMF for the conservation and sustainable use of the Saker Falcon.
21. While designing the AMF, the STF is seeking to find a careful balance between the benefits of an internationally coordinated sustainable-use framework and the inherent risks of taking birds from the wild, especially given the unique set of circumstances involved in the case of the Saker Falcon.

#### Key challenges

22. The STF is continuing to refine thinking around how an Adaptive Management Framework might be applied in practice. For example, legal harvest may conditionally be allowed in larger, stable or increasing Saker Falcon populations in parts of its global range, only if safeguards for sustainability are met and the origin of falcons is identifiable. Depleted or decreasing populations (e.g., in Europe, the Russian Federation and some Central Asia Republics) are not currently considered suitable for harvest and illegal as listed in CMS Appendix 1. However, the illegal taking of wild falcons must still be mitigated along the flyways and in wintering areas as part of an Adaptive Management Framework.
23. Other questions remain to be answered and key ecological issues are yet to be considered. These include:
- a. How to ensure the effective monitoring of wild Saker Falcon populations and their trade (legal/illegal)?
  - b. How to fill the significant ecological and market/economy knowledge gaps?
  - c. How to incorporate Saker Falcon trapping and trade along flyways into the Quota Management System?
  - d. How to ensure that sought-after, severely depleted sub-populations are not harvested?
  - e. How to build trust and consensus among key stakeholders in regard to the sustainable use of wild Saker Falcons?

#### Discussion and analysis

24. The Saker Falcon Task Force (STF) has achieved a great deal over recent years; however, much remains to be done. Recent activity has highlighted the urgent need to tackle the key threats to the global population, notably the impact of electrocution related to power lines. Simple changes to power lines can reduce mortality significantly, and the STF now needs to work with a range of partners to target key areas to reduce such impacts.
25. There is also an urgent need to complete the design of the Adaptive Management Framework (AMF) for the species, noting that the population of the Saker Falcon has declined or is still small in many parts of its global range. This next phase of work aims to finalize and test the AMF, particularly in terms of population modelling and assessing the practicalities involved in operating such a carefully controlled management system.

26. Given the progress to date, there is a need now to update and review the Global Action Plan for the Saker Falcon to provide a renewed focus on the conservation and management action required for the species. This will be undertaken in a way that does not delay the urgent action required to maintain and enhance the population of the species.
27. It is notable that much of the progress made over recent times has relied on the active and enthusiastic input of expertise from a number of organizations and individuals. Looking ahead, it is clear that further resources will be required to ensure the effective delivery of the Global Action Plan.
28. The proposed amendments to Resolution 11.18 (Rev.COP12) form a key part of the reporting requirement for the STF and, if adopted, will provide a clear remit for the STF for the coming period.

#### Recommended actions

29. The Conference of the Parties is recommended to:
  - a) adopt the amended Resolution contained in Annex 1 of this document;
  - b) adopt the draft Decisions contained in Annex 2 of this document.

AMENDMENTS TO RESOLUTION 11.18 (Rev.COP12)

**SAKER FALCON (*Falco cherrug*) GLOBAL ACTION PLAN (SAKERGAP)**

*NB. Proposed new text to Decisions originating from COP13 is underlined. Text to be deleted is ~~crossed-out~~.*

*Noting* that at its Tenth Meeting, the CMS Conference of the Parties (COP10) in Resolution 10.28 decided on an immediate Concerted Action supported by all Parties, including the establishment of a Task Force under the auspices of the Coordinating Unit of the CMS Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation of Migratory Birds of Prey in Africa and Eurasia (Raptors MoU) to bring together Range States, Partners and interested parties, to develop a coordinated Global Action Plan, including a management and monitoring system, to conserve the Saker Falcon

~~Further n~~*Noting* that CMS COP10 decided that improvements in the conservation status of the Saker Falcon in any Range State may allow sustainable taking from the wild in that Range State under a management system, and that in such cases a Party or Parties may request an exclusion from the Appendix I listing to apply in that Range State, and that the Task Force would endeavour to facilitate this process through the Scientific Council inter-sessionally and through the Conference of the Parties,

Further noting that CMS COP 11 adopted the ten-year SakerGAP (UNEP/CMS/COP11/Doc.23.1.5.2) as the basis for action on the conservation and management of the Saker Falcon, and decided to continue the Saker Falcon Task Force, under the auspices of the Coordinating Unit of the CMS Raptors MOU to bring together Range States, Partners and interested Parties,

~~Recalling that the Saker Falcon Task Force was mandated to report to: the First Meeting of the Signatories to the CMS Raptors MoU held in the last quarter of 2012; the 18th Inter-sessional CMS Scientific Council Meeting; and, to the 11th Meeting of the CMS Conference of the Parties, with consideration given to down-listing the Saker Falcon at that time,~~

Recalling that the Saker Falcon Task Force, established by CMS COP11, was mandated by COP12 to report to the Signatories of the CMS Raptors MOU, the CMS Scientific Council and to the CMS Conference of the Parties,

Aware of the urgent need for conservation action to ensure the survival of the Saker Falcon throughout its range, including the need to reduce the impact of electrocution from powerlines and related infrastructure,

~~Recognizing that the listing of the Saker Falcon in CMS Appendix I excludes the population in Mongolia, in recognition of its Saker Falcon conservation and management programme, which has been carried out in collaboration with the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi, on behalf of the Government of the United Arab Emirates and that any legal taking of the Saker Falcon is allowed only within the legal frameworks of CITES and CMS in particular,~~

*Further recognizing* that the work of the Saker Falcon Task Force has been a unique and productive partnership involving a wide range of parties, and appreciative in particular of the financial contributions made by the Parties, the European Union, the Saudi Wildlife Authority on behalf of the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and by the CITES Secretariat,



as well as of the wider support in the form of working time contributed by all the members of the Saker Falcon Task Force; and

*Stressing* the need for immediate action by Range States and stakeholders to address the principal threats to the Saker Falcon at all stages of its life cycle and across its full range,

Noting that significant data and information gaps exist in relation to understanding the ecology of the Saker Falcon across its range including in particular the origin of birds seen and trapped on migration, and that there is an urgent need to develop a coordinated monitoring programme for the species.

***The Conference of the Parties to the  
Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals***

1. Congratulates the Saker Falcon Task Force on its work, including especially the transparent consensus-building approach that has been employed, and recognizes the importance of the development of the Saker Falcon Global Action Plan (SakerGAP) for the conservation and management of the species;
- ~~2. Adopts the ten-year SakerGAP presented as UNEP/CMS/COP11/Doc.23.1.5.2 as the basis for action on the conservation and management of the Saker Falcon in the coming triennium and beyond, with the overall goal 'to re-establish a healthy and self-sustaining wild Saker Falcon population throughout its range, and to ensure that any use is sustainable';~~
3. ~~Decides to continue the CMS Concerted Action for the Saker Falcon during the next triennium at least, to enable the continue the implementation of the SakerGAP with the overall goal to re-establish a healthy and self-sustaining wild Saker Falcon population throughout its range, and to ensure that any use is sustainable.~~
4. Further decides to continue the Saker Falcon Task Force, ~~under the auspices of the Coordinating Unit of the CMS Raptors MoU, and instructs the Task Force, subject to the availability of resources, to:~~
  - a) Actively promote the implementation of the SakerGAP including by continuing to facilitate engagement, communication, cooperation and collaboration between the stakeholders; and coordinate its review;
  - b) Further develop, refine, and implement, where legally possible, an adaptive management and monitoring framework to improve the present conservation status of the Saker Falcon through, *inter alia*, regulated, and sustainable use;
  - c) Keep under review the option to down-list the species;
  - d) Work collaboratively with the CMS Energy Task Force (ETF) to ensure synergies and identify priority areas within the range of the Saker Falcon and promote mitigation measures that could reduce the impact of electrocution from power lines and related energy infrastructure on populations of the Saker Falcon; and
  - e) In collaboration with the CMS ETF and other expert groups, continue to raise awareness of the serious issue of electrocution of Saker Falcon with energy companies and national governments;

- ~~5. Welcomes the offer by the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF) to lead in taking forward the first Saker Falcon Task Force Flagship Project to develop an Online Information Portal to engage falcon hospitals, falconers and trappers within a Saker Falcon Network;~~
5. Agrees on ~~Recommends~~ the following reporting framework for the Saker Falcon Task Force:
  - Report to each meeting of the CMS Raptors MOU;
  - Report to the next meeting of the CMS Scientific Council; and
  - Review progress on implementing the SakerGAP and report to the 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the CMS Conference of the Parties;
6. *Urges* Parties, Range States and stakeholders to actively support, ~~including by voluntary financial contributions,~~ the work of the Saker Falcon Task Force.
7. *Further urges* Parties, Range States and stakeholders to work collaboratively to immediately begin to mobilize the considerable resources required to fully implement the SakerGAP throughout the species' range;
8. *Invites* Parties and Range States to integrate implementation of the SakerGAP into their national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs), and/or National or Regional Species Action Plans developed under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

## ANNEX 2

## DRAFT DECISIONS

SAKER FALCON (*Falco cherrug*) GLOBAL ACTION PLAN (SAKERGAP)***Directed to Parties***

14.AA Parties are requested to participate in the review of the Saker Falcon Global Action Plan during the coming triennium.

***Directed to the Scientific Council***

14.BB The Scientific Council is requested to keep under review the work to implement the Saker Falcon Global Action Plan and to advise on the scientific principles and precedents involved, notably in relation to the adaptive management of the species and on the significance of data and information gaps in assessing the impact of electrocution on the viability of populations across the global range of the species.

***Directed to the Secretariat***

14.CC The Secretariat shall convey Resolution 11.18 (Rev.COP14) to the secretariats of the other Multilateral Environmental Agreements, in particular CITES, seeking their support and contributions to the implementation of the Saker Falcon Global Action Plan.

14.DD The Secretariat shall, subject to the availability of external resources,

- a) ensure coordination across CMS working groups and Task Forces and those of AEWA, especially in relation to the adaptive management of species and in relation to the assessment of the impact of electrocution on species populations;
- b) organize regional workshops of the Saker Falcon Task Force within the triennium 2023-2026 in the breeding range, to promote the implementation of the Saker Falcon Global Action Plan (SakerGAP);
- c) review and update the SakerGAP.