A Specialized Heritage and Scientific Magazine published by Emirates Falconers' Club



نادي صقاري الإمارات
EMIRATES FALCONERS' CLUB



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A Quarter-Century of Achievement

Falconry... A Renewed Legacy and an Enduring Responsibility

Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan
Chairman of the Board of the Emirates Falconers' Club

Twenty-five years have passed since the founding of the Emirates Falconers' Club. Far more than the passage of time, they have marked a rich and enduring national journey to safeguard a legacy deeply rooted in the national consciousness of the UAE.

This journey was inspired by the vision of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may God rest his soul, who established falconry as a cultural and environmental value, reflecting the bond between people and their land while embodying the principles of balance and respect for nature.

Under the leadership of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the State, may God protect him, the United Arab Emirates has continued to strengthen this civilised approach by supporting national efforts to preserve cultural heritage and advance sustainability and environmental balance, making falconry a pioneering Emirati model that has earned regional and international recognition and respect.

Since its establishment, the Club has worked to translate this vision into a tangible reality by building an integrated framework dedicated to falconry as a living heritage, one that combines practice with knowledge and keeps pace with the demands of the times without losing its authenticity.

Major initiatives, programmes, and projects, alongside local and international partnerships, have served as powerful means of strengthening the presence of falconry and consolidating its standing.

Today, as we enter a new era marked by accelerating environmental and technological transformations, our responsibility to preserve this legacy becomes even greater, not only by protecting it but also by developing and enhancing it in ways that ensure its sustainability for generations to come.

Falconry is no longer merely a heritage practice; it has become a global model of balance between humankind and nature.

What has been achieved over the past decades is the fruit of our supportive leadership's vision and the sincere efforts of the sons of this nation. We affirm that the Club's journey continues, with steadfast determination that ensures falconry remains a symbol of authenticity and a bridge linking the past with the present and the future.

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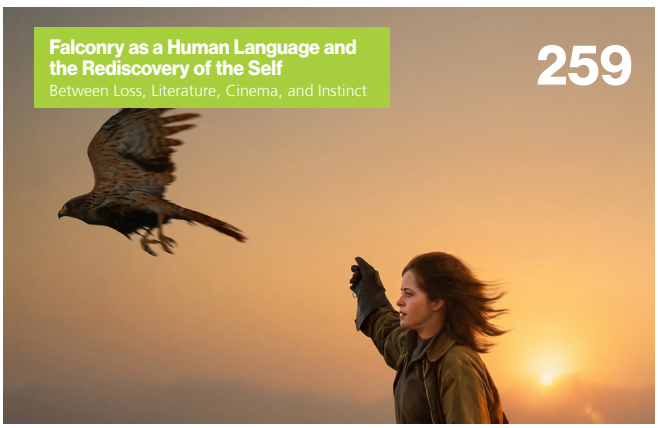
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"Al-Saggar"

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Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Emirates Falconers' Club:
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Editor-in-Chief:
H.E Majid Ali Al Mansouri
Managing Editor:
Omar Fouad Ahmad
Art Director and Marketing Manager:
Alaa Sabra
Editorial Board:
Abdul Nasser Nahar
Administration:
Ranim Shehade
Design and Layout:
Zeno Reed Bracamonte,
Jennifer Nobleza,
Zainab Abuobeida Abdlnabi

Contributors to this Issue:

Dr. Fatima Al Mansouri
Dr. Ali Al Quhais
Mouza Al Daraei
Frédérique Flaesch
Graeme Leo Coles
Rachel Dellman
Roy Bebbington
Mary Lang
Eng. Imad Saad
Eng. Amjad Qasim
Sarangerel Ishenkhorloo
Nicola Dixon
Caroline Van Hemert
Marylee Williams
Mohammed Abu Aita

Magazine Address:
Liwa Tower, Al Rawdah / Emirates Falconers' Club,
near the Exhibition Centre, Abu Dhabi, Office 401
P.O. Box 47116, Abu Dhabi
Email: pr@efcuae.com

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25 Years of Safeguarding the Nation's Legacy



Falconry in an Era of Transformation: From Heritage to a Smart Future

Majid Ali Al Mansouri
Secretary General of the Emirates Falconers' Club
Editor-in-Chief of "Al Saggar" Magazine

Twenty-five years since the founding of the Emirates Falconers' Club marks a significant milestone in a journey rich in achievement, a journey that has established a leading model for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and transforming it into a living practice that continues to evolve with each generation, keeping pace with the transformations of the age, including the rapid developments in the fields of the environment, technology, and artificial intelligence.

Since its establishment in 2001, guided by the vision of its founder, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE, may God protect him, and with the support and patronage of its Chairman, His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Ruler's Representative in Al Dhafra Region, the Emirates Falconers' Club has continued its journey, drawing inspiration from the approach of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may he rest in peace, who laid the foundations of sustainable falconry and linked it to the values of ecological balance and biodiversity conservation, in a vision that anticipated many modern environmental concepts.

Throughout this journey, the Club has worked to develop falconry within a modern institutional framework that combines cultural heritage with scientific innovation. Falconry is no longer merely a traditional practice; it has become a field in which environmental knowledge intersects with advanced technologies, including tracking, monitoring, imaging, recording, and data analysis tools that contribute to understanding the behaviour of birds of prey, monitoring their movements, and supporting efforts to conserve them.

This direction has taken shape through an integrated system of distinguished programmes, initiatives, and projects, encompassing the organisation of international events and the building of strategic partnerships with scientific and research institutions, as well as the launch of unique competitions that have reinforced falconry's presence and cemented its status as a living heritage combining authenticity with renewal.

Over the course of a quarter-century, the Club has launched around 100 distinguished projects and initiatives, which together have formed essential pillars in the journey of developing and safeguarding falconry. Among the most prominent of these were the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition (ADIHEX), alongside the International Festival of Falconry, the Arabian Saluki Centre, and the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School, which plays a pivotal role in transmitting traditional knowledge and developing it through modern educational methods, in addition to Al Saggar, a specialised scientific heritage magazine.

On the international stage, the Emirates Falconers' Club has played a prominent role in cementing falconry's standing as a global human heritage, contributing to its inscription on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, alongside launching pioneering initiatives such as the Middle East Falconry Archive and international cooperation programmes that bring together traditional expertise and modern techniques, as well as supporting the establishment of the Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Museum of International Falconry.



Amid mounting environmental challenges, the Club continues its coordinated efforts to protect biodiversity through distinguished initiatives that raise awareness of sustainable practices, most notably its participation in programmes to supply captive-bred houbara, helping to curb illegal hunting and strengthen ecological balance.

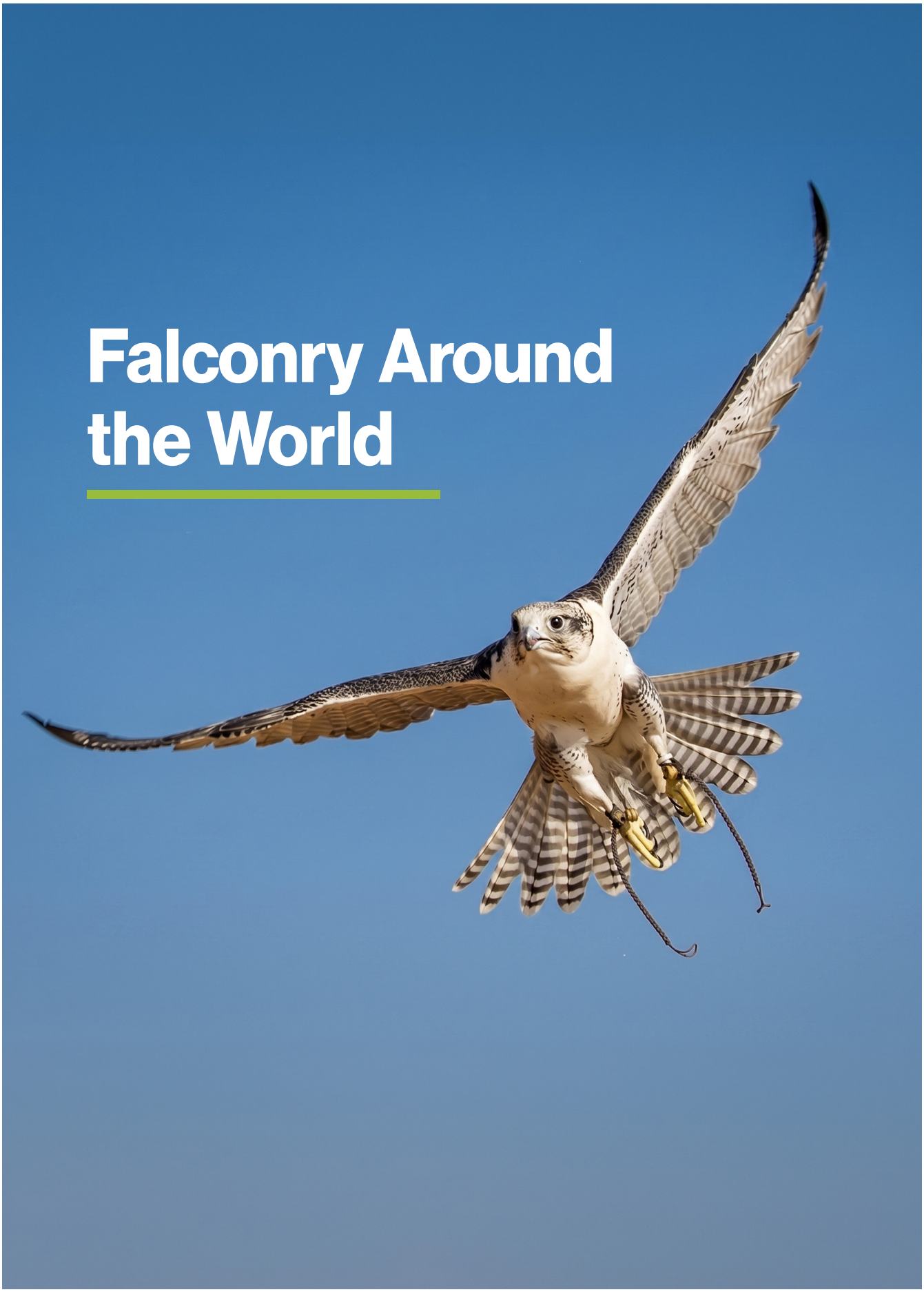
The Club also continues to support national and international initiatives and contribute to the development of the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey, alongside supporting research programmes that employ digital technologies and data analysis to understand the changes affecting birds of prey and their habitats.

In recognition of the importance of scientific research, the Club has launched collaborative projects with distinguished academic institutions, contributing to the generation of advanced scientific knowledge and the development of documentary databases concerned with the history and future of falconry, opening new horizons for advancing sustainability and innovation in this field.

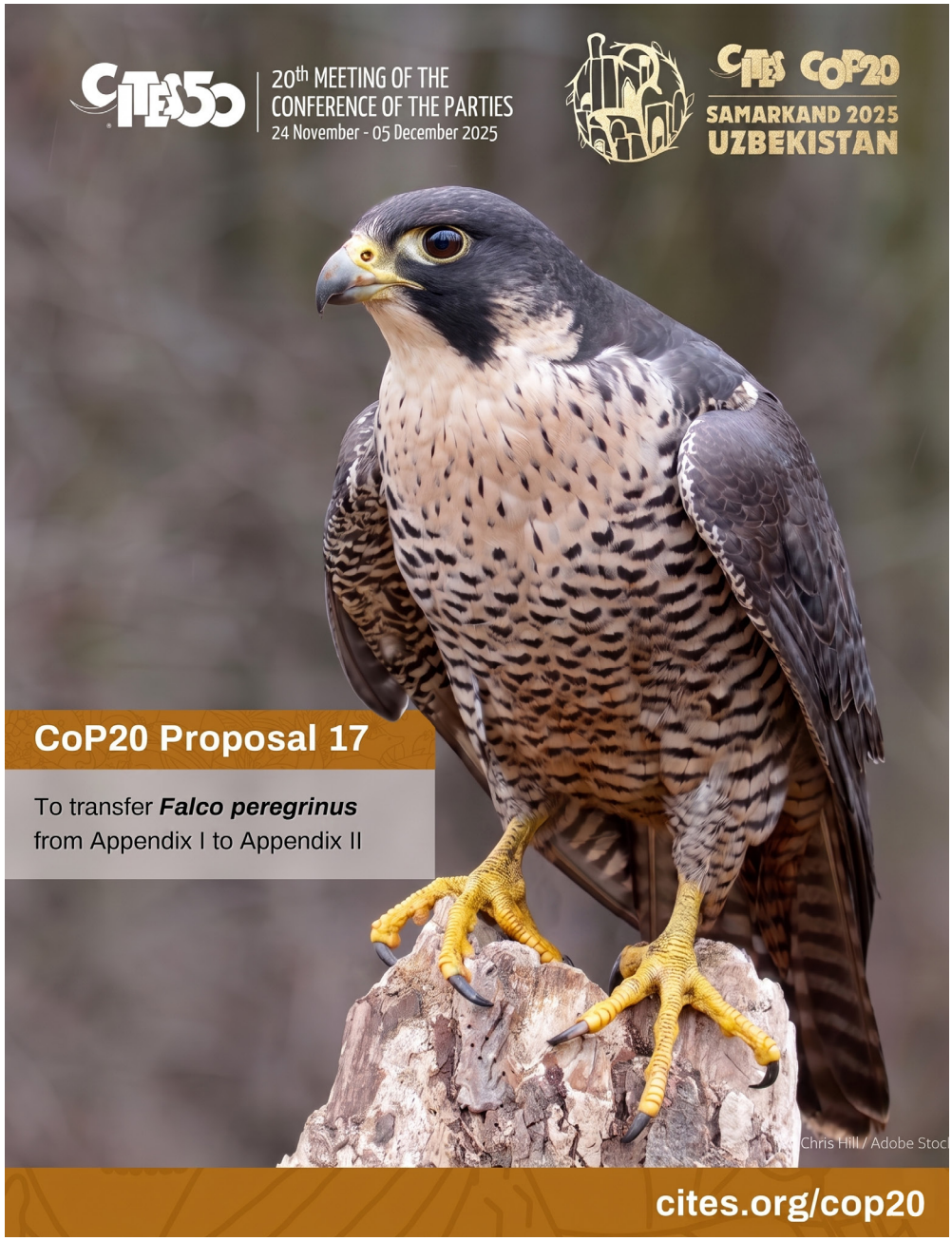
The achievements accomplished throughout this long journey are the fruit of a supportive leadership's vision and the sustained efforts of dedicated teams who have recognised that safeguarding heritage in the modern era requires new tools and an open outlook that brings together authenticity and renewal.

As the Club celebrates the twenty-fifth anniversary of its founding, its resolve is renewed to continue this journey towards a future where heritage values and innovation are integrated, and where falconry remains a symbol of authenticity and a platform for knowledge.

Falconry Around the World



CITES Holds Firm on Peregrine Protection Despite Pressure to Ease Restrictions



Member states of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) have rejected a proposal put forward by the United States and Canada to ease restrictions on the international trade in Peregrine Falcons (Falco peregrinus) during the Convention's summit held in December 2025 in the Uzbek city of Samarkand, a decision that reflects the continuing cautious approach toward one of falconry's most significant birds of prey.

The proposal called for moving the Peregrine from Appendix I of the Convention, which imposes the highest level of protection and prohibits international trade, to Appendix II, which allows regulated trade under official permits. However, the secret ballot failed to secure the required majority, with 61 countries voting in favour against 74 opposed, including the member states of the European Union.

The Peregrine is among the most widespread raptors in the world, comprising 19 subspecies. During the last century it suffered a severe decline due to overhunting and the heavy use of chemical pesticides, before gradually recovering thanks to international conservation programmes.

The United States and Canada based their case for the proposal on the Peregrine's classification as "Least Concern" on the IUCN Red List, alongside the fact that most falcons used in falconry are sourced from captive-breeding programmes, thereby reducing pressure on wild populations.

Opponents of the proposal, however, pointed to persistent gaps in data relating to certain subspecies , particularly in Asia, Africa, and South America, making a full assessment of their true status incomplete. Further concerns centred on the continued prevalence of illicit trade, the difficulty of verifying the origins of traded birds, and the potential impact of avian influenza on wild Peregrine populations.

The Peregrine Between Troubling Decline in Britain and Remarkable Recovery in the United States

In a development that reflects the influence of environmental factors and human stewardship on the fate of species, the fortunes of the Peregrine Falcon vary considerably across different parts of the world. While this iconic bird faces alarming declines in some habitats, it is enjoying notable success else where.

Britain: Decline Despite Protection

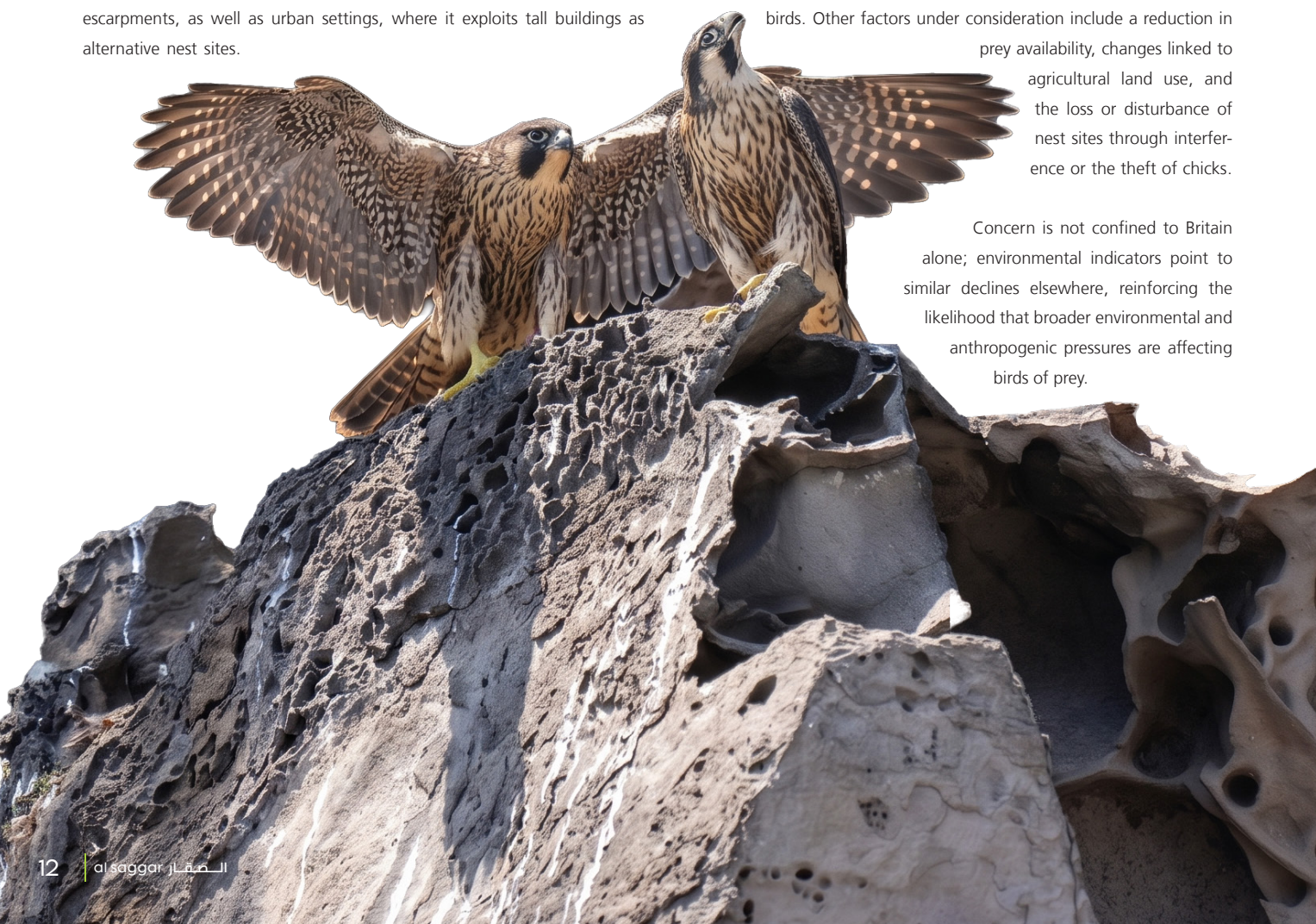
Peregrine numbers in Britain are falling markedly, causing considerable concern in conservation circles, particularly as this species had been regarded as one of the greatest success stories in raptor protection, having recovered from the effects of pesticide contamination during the twentieth century.

The data reveal a decline of more than 80% in Peregrine numbers since the 1970s, with a further accelerating drop in recent years , despite the bird's remarkable adaptability to natural environments such as coastlines and rocky escarpments, as well as urban settings, where it exploits tall buildings as alternative nest sites.

This decline is occurring despite protection and rewilding programmes that have included the release of threatened birds into the wild and have supported the recovery of many of them, raising serious questions about the new environmental pressures bearing down on the Peregrine.

Specialists believe that the spread of avian influenza, particularly the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain, may be among the most significant contributing factors, as infection reaches falcons through the consumption of infected birds. Other factors under consideration include a reduction in prey availability, changes linked to agricultural land use, and the loss or disturbance of nest sites through interference or the theft of chicks.

Concern is not confined to Britain alone; environmental indicators point to similar declines elsewhere, reinforcing the likelihood that broader environmental and anthropogenic pressures are affecting birds of prey.



A Return to the Cities

Against this broader trend of decline, certain British cities present a different picture, where the Peregrine has adapted successfully to urban environments, exploiting towers, bridges, and high-rise buildings as alternative nest sites, while benefiting from the abundance and easy visibility of prey within cities.

A particularly striking relationship has emerged between the Peregrine and the Ring-necked Parakeet, an invasive species that has spread prolifically through British parks and gardens. According to environmental reports, the Peregrine has increasingly come to rely on this species as prey, a behaviour that reflects its remarkable ability to adapt to changing environmental conditions.

Modern technology has also contributed to the study of this shift, with cameras installed near urban nest sites allowing researchers to monitor the daily lives of these raptors and analyse their feeding patterns, behaviour, and interactions with the urban environment.

This phenomenon demonstrates that modern cities are not necessarily ecologically impoverished environments; rather, they can transform into active, living ecosystems that support specialist predators such as Peregrines, which have developed hunting strategies adapted to the built environment and the predictable daily movements of their avian prey, drawing on their capacity for vertical flight and precision stooping.

These falcons have become something akin to "living cameras", providing continuous data on environmental changes within cities and helping researchers understand species interactions in complex settings that are difficult to study by conventional means.



Ohio: A Recovery That Reflects the Power of Conservation

In the United States, the state of Ohio presents a contrasting model, where the Peregrine Falcon is regaining its presence in one of the most renowned raptor reintroduction success stories in North America, having all but vanished from the state during the last century as a result of chemical pesticide use.

The ban on DDT in the early 1970s, combined with protection and reintroduction programmes, contributed to the gradual recovery of Peregrine numbers, to the point where sightings are now commonplace across various parts of the state, particularly near bodies of water and coastal areas.

From the 1980s onwards, reintroduction programmes were launched in a number of American cities, where tall buildings provided a suitable substitute for the natural cliff faces that Peregrines rely upon for nesting. These programmes have yielded stable populations of breeding pairs.

Scientific monitoring programmes have also supported this recovery, through the installation of nest boxes, the monitoring of chicks, and the fitting of identification bands that allow researchers to track their movements and understand their behaviour.

According to naturalist Jim McCormac, Peregrine sightings in Ohio are no longer unusual, the bird can be encountered in numerous locations, particularly near wetlands and bodies of water, especially along the western shore of Lake Erie, where prey is plentiful.

Despite this success, specialists emphasize the importance of sustained conservation efforts, given ongoing environmental changes and the spread of certain diseases, alongside the need to preserve habitat stability and prey availability as essential conditions for ensuring the long-term continuity of this recovery.





The Peregrine in France: From Natural Hunting Behaviour to Modern Falconry

In France, the Peregrine Falcon stands as an example of a bird of prey that has preserved its refined natural characteristics while simultaneously integrating into modern settings that reflect the evolution of falconry as a practice.

The Peregrine relies on hunting strategies built around height, observation, and rapid stooping, making use of elevated positions such as rocky escarpments and tall buildings, which have provided a suitable alternative within urban environments for nesting, while also affording a tactical advantage in spotting prey.

The significance of the Peregrine extends beyond its natural behaviour to encompass its role in what is known as "modern falconry", a practice no longer confined to traditional hunting, but now embracing fields such as the breeding of falcons in specialised centres, educational and public awareness displays, the protection of airports and farms, and contemporary sporting and tourism events.

This shift reflects falconry's transition from a means of subsistence to a cultural, educational, and recreational pursuit, one concerned with preserving this heritage and presenting it within a contemporary framework. The French experience illustrates how falconry can evolve with time without losing its historical roots or its fundamental values.

Chongqing, China: The Peregrine Falcon from Winter Visitor to Urban Resident





Illustrating the Peregrine Falcon's capacity to adapt to environmental shifts, the Chinese city of Chongqing has emerged as a striking example of this bird's transition from a seasonal visitor to a permanent resident in an expanding urban environment.

Peregrines have long visited the city during winter, migrating from colder northern regions and benefiting from the milder climate and available food sources. In recent years, however, some of these birds have taken up year-round residence, becoming a regular feature of the city's urban landscape.

The distinctive geographical features of Chongqing, where mountains and rivers meet, provide favourable conditions for Peregrines, offering both the air currents that aid flight and an abundance of prey such as pigeons, rodents, and smaller birds.

The city's modern built environment has also supported this adaptation, with Peregrines taking up alternative nest sites on bridges and skyscrapers, behaviour consistent with what has been recorded in numerous other cities worldwide.

Successful breeding within these urban environments has been documented, including the rearing of chicks and the continued presence of pairs at the same sites across several consecutive seasons, reflecting the species' increasingly stable presence within the city.

Specialists attribute this shift to a relative improvement in the urban environment resulting from habitat protection efforts and the enhancement of certain ecological systems, alongside growing public awareness of the importance of protecting birds of prey and avoiding disturbance to their nest sites.

Chongqing's experience offers an additional example of the Peregrine's capacity to adapt to, and even benefit from, modern cities, provided that suitable conditions of safety and food availability exist, reflecting this bird's resilience and its continuing role within evolving ecosystems.

The Peregrine Soars Again Over India... A Sign of Ecosystem Recovery



The recent sighting of a Peregrine Falcon at the Udanti–Sitanadi Tiger Reserve in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh provides further evidence of improving ecological conditions within one of the region's most significant protected areas.

The Peregrine, renowned for its extraordinary speed when stooping, is a raptor whose ecological significance is closely linked to the health and stability of natural systems, given its sensitivity to changes affecting the food chain and natural habitats.

This occurrence carries particular importance in light of the Peregrine's preferred habitats, as it is typically associated with mountainous terrain and rocky escarpments, making its presence within this densely forested reserve an indication of a balanced environment capable of sustaining apex predators.

Its presence also reflects the success of efforts to protect natural habitats, curb human encroachment, alongside anti-poaching programmes and the engagement of local community in conservation efforts.

Environmental reports indicate that the reserve has seen a notable improvement in biodiversity in recent years, with the return of rare bird and mammal species, a sign that a degree of ecological balance is being restored.

The Peregrine's presence is more than just an ecological record; it serves as an indicator of a healthy natural system, as an apex predator that plays a vital role in regulating populations of smaller and medium-sized birds and maintaining the balance of food chains.

These indicators align with a broader global pattern of the gradual return of certain birds of prey to environments from which they had previously disappeared, whether in cities or nature reserves, from European and American cities to the forests of India, reflecting the resilience of these birds and their importance within modern ecosystems.



The Aplomado Falcon in Texas: Natural Breeding in the Wild, Evidence of Real Success

The reintroduction of the Northern Aplomado Falcon to southern Texas in the United States represents one of the most significant raptor recovery projects in North America, following the species' complete disappearance from the United States in the 1950s as a result of habitat degradation and chemical pesticide use.

According to a report in Garden & Gun (November 2025), the project has entered a more advanced phase, one no longer limited to releasing birds, with clear signs of successful natural breeding in the wild.

One of the most significant indicators was the presence of 49 juvenile falcons at the onset of autumn, birds that had recently fledged, whose adult plumage had not yet fully developed, and which were in the process of learning to hunt and exploring their home ranges.

This figure carries particular significance because these falcons were not the product of direct release programmes; they were born in the wild during that same spring to wild parents, within the grasslands and coastal islands of Texas. This reflects the project's transition from intensive human intervention to a phase of growing reliance on self-sustaining reproduction.

Recovery efforts had begun in the late 1980s, drawing on limited numbers of Aplomado Falcons brought from Mexico, where the species had persisted. Through captive-breeding programmes, thousands of chicks were produced and used in release projects, with more than 1,600 falcons released across southern and western Texas over several decades.

These efforts employed the technique of "hacking", raising juvenile falcons at elevated release sites with minimal human contact before gradually releasing them into the wild. This method has helped strengthen the birds' self-reliance and improve post-release survival rates.

Over time, it became clear that the greatest challenge lay not simply in producing falcons, but in restoring suitable habitats for their long-term survival. Efforts accordingly extended to collaboration with landowners, particularly cattle ranchers, to improve grassland environments through vegetation management and the control of invasive species that have harmful ecological impacts.

The presence of approximately 50 wild-born juveniles in a single season represents a qualitative shift in the project's trajectory, signalling the beginning of this species' return to its natural life cycle without full dependence on releases. The sustainability of this success nonetheless remains contingent on the continued improvement of habitats and the maintenance of their ecological balance.

Falconry as a Human Refuge... Kelly Osbourne Finds Her Path to Healing

British media personality Kelly Osbourne has spoken of turning to falconry as a new hobby, a remarkable personal experience that came in the wake of a difficult period following the passing of her father, rock music legend Ozzy Osbourne, at the end of 2025.

According to media reports, Osbourne found that working with birds of prey, and the Peregrine Falcon in particular, brought her a sense of calm and balance, helping her regain a sense of emotional stability after a period of grief.



Video clips she shared on social media showed her direct interaction with falcons during training sessions, in which she expressed her admiration for these birds and the power, focus, and speed they embody.



Her mother Sharon Osbourne also joined her in some of these experiences, a family activity that carried a strong human element and helped ease the weight of loss, amid widespread public interest. This shed light on a different dimension of falconry, one that extends beyond the bounds of a traditional pursuit to reflect the sense of emotional comfort and the benefits of connecting with nature.

Rediscovering Life Through a Falcon... A Human Journey After Recovery from Cancer

In an inspiring personal story, British woman Candida Merrick found a way to rekindle her love of life following a long course of cancer treatment, through her relationship with a Harris's Hawk.

Having come through the treatment phase, Merrick experienced a sense of emotional emptiness and a loss of purpose, feelings that often accompany survivors of serious illness. The turning point came when she decided to acquire a juvenile falcon, thereby embarking on a different kind of journey toward inner recovery.



Over time, a close bond developed between her and the bird, one built on trust and daily connection, as caring for and training it helped her rebuild a daily routine and gave her a sense of responsibility and a connection with nature.

Merrick describes the experience as her "moment of saying yes to life", pointing to the profound psychological transformation that falconry brought about in her life after illness.

Her story reflects a deeply human dimension of falconry that goes beyond its status as a heritage practice, illuminating its capacity to provide a sense of balance, renewal, and strengthened self-confidence, especially after serious health challenges.

Falconry in British Care Homes: Emotional Support Through Birds of Prey



Care homes across Britain are increasingly embracing falconry as an innovative means of supporting mental wellbeing and enhancing quality of life for residents, by connecting them with the natural world in an interactive and human way.

At Malthouse Care Home in Dorset, residents welcomed a visit from a specialist birds of prey team who showcased various species of owls and Kestrels, along with simple explanations of these birds' behaviour and natural habitats.

In a similar experience, West Bank Care Home in Ross-on-Wye hosted a live display featuring falcons, owls, and eagles, where residents were given the opportunity to interact directly with the birds, through holding them and posing for photographs, in an atmosphere marked by enthusiasm and curiosity.

These experiences left a positive impression on many of the elderly residents, helping to break the daily routine and stimulate social engagement, while for some they rekindled memories associated with nature and rural life.

Care home managers confirmed that introducing elements of wildlife into daily activities helps create a more vibrant and enriching environment, and gives residents a sense of connection with the outside world.

These initiatives reflect a growing human dimension of falconry that reaches beyond its traditional scope, establishing it as an effective means of supporting psychological and social wellbeing, and of deepening the bond between people and nature.



Birds of Prey Visit Patients in the United States

In an initiative that brings together environmental awareness and wellbeing support, a hospital on Catalina Island in the United States welcomed birds of prey as part of a special visitation programme for patients and residents.

The event introduced patients to several birds, among them a Peregrine Falcon and a Eurasian Eagle-Owl, offering them the opportunity to observe these birds at close range and learn about their characteristics and behaviour, an experience that was at once educational and deeply human in character.

The initiative aimed to bring joy to patients, particularly the elderly, while also raising awareness of the importance of birds of prey and their role in maintaining ecological balance.

These visits also reflect a growing trend toward harnessing falconry and its associated activities within broader community contexts that extend well beyond their traditional scope, becoming a vehicle for human connection and for engaging with the natural world.

Farewell to "Sibley": A Peregrine Falcon Who Became a Symbol of Environmental Awareness in Montana



The passing of the Peregrine Falcon "Sibley" marked a moving moment for those involved with birds of prey in the US state of Montana, following a journey spanning more than two decades in falconry displays and environmental education.

According to KPAX News, the falcon passed away at the end of last year at the age of 22, having become one of the most recognisable symbols at the Raptors of the Rockies centre in the Florence area.

Sibley's role was never simply that of a bird of prey, it became a living educational tool that contributed to raising awareness of bird conservation and the protection of their natural habitats.

The figures cited in the report show that it participated in 764 educational programmes and 962 outreach tours, while approximately 72,000 people had the opportunity to meet Sibley at close range, making it one of the most far-reaching public awareness initiatives ever associated with a single bird of prey.

Sibley's story is closely linked to Kate Davis, who founded the centre in 1988 with the aim of spreading knowledge about birds of prey and their protection. The falcon accompanied Kate for many years, and she described it as "the brightest star" in her educational programmes, noting its pivotal role in reaching successive generations of the public.

Sibley was raised in a domestic environment, with Davis nurturing it from an early age before it went on to become a true ambassador for environmental awareness, accompanying her to schools, events, and public programmes. Its influence extended beyond the educational realm to become part of her daily life, it even accompanied her throughout the writing of six books.

The wide response to news of its passing speaks to the depth of impact this bird left behind. Davis received messages from people who had encountered Sibley in childhood, only to return and relive that experience with their own children, a testament to his enduring influence across multiple generations.

A Small Falcon Opens the Door to Hope for a Boy in a Closed World



The British film Kes, directed by Ken Loach, highlights the unique relationship between human beings and the natural world through a profoundly moving story centred on a boy named Billy, who grows up in a harsh social environment in northern England, where poverty and marginalisation dictate everyday life.

Amid renewed interest in Loach's work, the Cinémathèque française hosted a special event in 2026 to celebrate his career, headlined by a special screening of Kes, a film widely regarded as one of the most notable works addressing childhood and the relationship between humanity and nature, one that cemented the falcon's place as a symbol transcending the confines of hunting to express the enduring human longing for freedom.

Billy suffers from family neglect and abuse, along with academic difficulties that leave him isolated at school, with the expectation that he will end up working in the mines, like so many others from his background.

But his life begins to change when he finds a young Kestrel, which he decides to raise and train with the help of a specialised book. The relationship gradually develops into a bond founded on trust and a profound connection with the natural world.

Through this relationship, the boy discovers a new sense of confidence and dignity, clearly visible in one of the film's most memorable scenes, when he stands before his classmates and explains how he trains the falcon and describes its behaviour.

In Kes, the falcon is not presented merely as a bird of prey, it becomes a symbol of freedom and hope, set against a harsh social reality that limits ambition and leaves little room for dreams.



North Carolina: World Falconry Day Brings Together Heritage and Education

In a scene reflecting the cultural and educational dimensions of falconry, the Allison Woods Outdoor Learning Center in North Carolina organised a special event to mark World Falconry Day, in partnership with the state's falconers' association.

The event drew a wide audience of families and enthusiasts, with visitors given the opportunity to encounter birds of prey at close quarters, watch live flying demonstrations, and take part in interactive activities designed to introduce falconry as a global cultural heritage.

The event also included educational segments and field demonstrations by professional falconers, who showcased methods of training and caring for birds, alongside an explanation of the role of falconry in promoting wildlife awareness and ecological balance.

Falconers moved among the crowd, sharing stories and answering questions. Visitors were introduced to the centre's "Owl Pals" programmes, offered both on-site and through mobile outreach, which give children and adults alike the chance to encounter these enigmatic nocturnal birds up close.

Several community organisations participated in the event, including the Iredell Children's Museum and the Iredell County Library, lending the event a family-friendly and interactive atmosphere.

The Allison Woods Center, founded in 1992, is a non-profit organisation dedicated to environmental education, offering a wide range of programmes including field trips, summer camps, Forest School, the "Little Explorers" programme for children, and the "Animal Ambassadors" initiative.

These efforts affirm the important community role of falconry, not merely as a traditional sport, but as an educational tool that connects people with nature and reinforces the values of conservation and environmental sustainability.

The North Carolina experience offers a model for how falconry can be harnessed in the service of environmental education and community awareness.



Photography by:Wayne Atkinson (@wayneaphoto), courtesy of the Allison Woods Outdoor Learning Center and its team.

A Falconry School in Australia... An Educational Experience Linking Heritage with Conservation



In mid-2026, the Australian state of Victoria saw the opening of a specialist falconry school at the Full Flight Birds of Prey Centre in Miners Rest, near the city of Ballarat, a notable development that reflects the growing global interest in this ancient human heritage, approached through a modern educational and environmental lens.

The school offers an educational programme that allows visitors and enthusiasts to learn about the techniques and methods of falconry, with opportunities to interact directly with birds of prey and understand their behaviour, in an immersive experience modelled on traditional practices, though without live hunting, given Australia's legal restrictions.

The initiative is led by Australian falconer Graeme Coles, who emphasizes that the goal is not to turn out falconers in the traditional sense, but to offer an "educational journey" that introduces the public to a legacy stretching back thousands of years, one that originated in the Middle East and Asia before spreading to Europe during the Middle Ages.

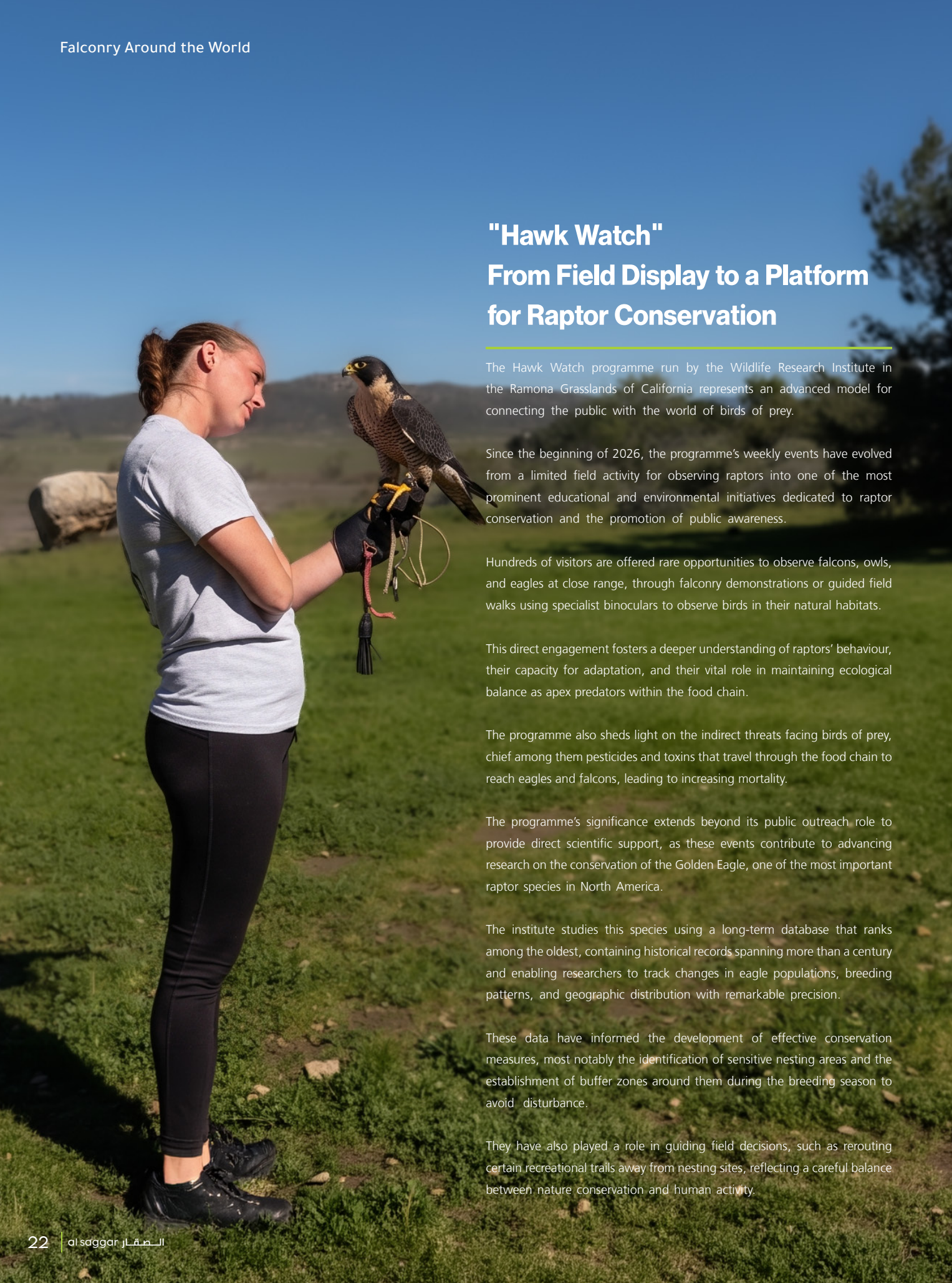


The centre is home to approximately 70 birds of prey, including falcons, eagles, and owls, all sourced from captive-breeding programmes as part of efforts to conserve threatened species and promote environmental awareness.

The centre has also expanded its interactive programs with innovative activities such as a "Birds and Brushes" experience, which allows visitors to sketch a raptor up close, an attempt to blend art with environmental experience and deepen the public's connection with these creatures.

The Centre operates under a wildlife licence and runs breeding programmes for endangered species, and occasionally supplies zoological parks and specialist institutions with birds.

Notably, the new school represents an extension of similar international experiences, drawing inspiration from longstanding European models, particularly traditional falconry schools in Austria, reflecting a growing global trend toward presenting falconry as a means of environmental education and cultural dialogue.



"Hawk Watch" From Field Display to a Platform for Raptor Conservation

The Hawk Watch programme run by the Wildlife Research Institute in the Ramona Grasslands of California represents an advanced model for connecting the public with the world of birds of prey.

Since the beginning of 2026, the programme's weekly events have evolved from a limited field activity for observing raptors into one of the most prominent educational and environmental initiatives dedicated to raptor conservation and the promotion of public awareness.

Hundreds of visitors are offered rare opportunities to observe falcons, owls, and eagles at close range, through falconry demonstrations or guided field walks using specialist binoculars to observe birds in their natural habitats.

This direct engagement fosters a deeper understanding of raptors' behaviour, their capacity for adaptation, and their vital role in maintaining ecological balance as apex predators within the food chain.

The programme also sheds light on the indirect threats facing birds of prey, chief among them pesticides and toxins that travel through the food chain to reach eagles and falcons, leading to increasing mortality.

The programme's significance extends beyond its public outreach role to provide direct scientific support, as these events contribute to advancing research on the conservation of the Golden Eagle, one of the most important raptor species in North America.

The institute studies this species using a long-term database that ranks among the oldest, containing historical records spanning more than a century and enabling researchers to track changes in eagle populations, breeding patterns, and geographic distribution with remarkable precision.

These data have informed the development of effective conservation measures, most notably the identification of sensitive nesting areas and the establishment of buffer zones around them during the breeding season to avoid disturbance.

They have also played a role in guiding field decisions, such as rerouting certain recreational trails away from nesting sites, reflecting a careful balance between nature conservation and human activity.

Falconry in Digital Media... Between Humour and the Allure of Birds of Prey

Birds of prey have attracted considerable attention on social media platforms in recent years, evolving into compelling content that blends humour, visual spectacle, and an interest in wildlife.

In 2026, videos from the United Kingdom generated widespread attention, showing a falconer attempting to film educational content with birds of prey, scenes marked by spontaneity and comic appeal, offering a different glimpse into everyday life with these birds.

The footage showed the difficulty of managing the birds' behaviour during filming: they were uncooperative, vocalising constantly, moving without pause, and straying from the frame, prompting some viewers to liken the situation to a parent trying to manage young children.

Instead of cooperating quietly in front of the camera, the birds acted with complete spontaneity and chaotic charm: shrieking, interfering with equipment, disappearing from the frame, or attempting to peck at the microphone, turning the filming process into an exhausting endeavour.

According to reports, this behaviour reflects the essentially untamed nature of birds of prey, which retain their wild instincts even when trained. Falconry, as a traditional practice, is based not on fully domesticating the bird, but on working in partnership with it, whereby the bird remains free in its actions and responds according to its own nature.



Falconry in Britain... The Continuing Debate Over Hunting Legislation

As 2026 unfolds, debate in the United Kingdom continues over the effectiveness of the Hunting Act 2004, which in principle banned the hunting of mammals with dogs.

Despite more than two decades having passed since its enactment, evidence suggests that such practices persist, raising questions about the legal loopholes that may be undermining the law's objectives.

Discussion focuses particularly on what is known as the "falconry exemption", which permits the use of dogs to flush quarry from cover for the purpose of taking it with a bird of prey.

While this exemption is framed in law as a specific activity associated with the practice of falconry, critics contend that it is sometimes used as a legal cover for the continuation of certain traditional hunting practices.

In this context, the Hawk Board has noted that falconry is not practiced by pursuing foxes and that birds of prey are not suited to this form of hunting , highlighting the distinction between traditional falconry and such practices.

The year 2026 has seen mounting political pressure to address these loopholes, with calls to close the exemptions that may be open to misuse, as part of broader efforts to strengthen animal welfare legislation. Those involved argue that addressing only the more contentious practices will be insufficient without a comprehensive review of all the exemptions associated with the Act.

This comes against a backdrop of considerable public support in Britain for the strengthening of wildlife protection laws, posing a challenge for the government as it seeks to strike a balance between effective enforcement of the law and the preservation of its clarity and credibility.



As this debate continues, the falconry exemption stands out as one of the most significant issues surrounding hunting legislation in Britain in 2026, with attention turning to what legislative efforts in this area may yet yield.

A Scottish Falconer Leads a Legal Amendment to Protect Falconry

In an unusual scene inside the Scottish Parliament, the discussion was not confined, as is customary, to papers and reports. "Stanley", a Golden Eagle, was there, standing steady on his falconer's glove: a living testament to a tradition stretching back thousands of years.

There, at the heart of the legislative chamber, the bird was not merely a symbolic display, it was part of an important effort to persuade , as his owner sought to move falconry from the realm of abstract debate into tangible reality, demonstrating to decision-makers the delicate relationship between a falconer and his bird, and the nature of a practice that is difficult to understand without seeing it up close.

That scene was not a performance; it was a turning point. It contributed to reshaping the debate around falconry and the hunting of mountain hares, and paved the way toward a legal amendment that restored recognition to a tradition more than 4,000 years old.

Scottish authorities had in recent years enacted tighter measures to protect the mountain hare, amid concerns over declining numbers resulting from intensive hunting. This decision led to the species being added to the list of protected species, imposing strict legal constraints on any activity involving it.

Yet this protection had unintended consequences for falconers, as falconry by its nature relies on the instinctive behaviour of the raptor, which may pursue this species as prey without direct instruction.

Faced with this reality, the Scottish falconer launched an organised campaign that took several parallel tracks. Years later, these efforts culminated in a legal amendment permitting the practice of falconry for mountain hare hunting within a regulated framework, ensuring that mountain hare populations are not adversely affected.

The case highlighted the challenges faced by falconry in a number of countries, as environmental legislation continues to expand and the need to strike a balance between wildlife protection and the preservation of traditional heritage practices grows more urgent.



Joint Efforts to Protect Falcons Earn a National Award

In a step that reflects growing international commitment to protecting birds of prey, a British multi-agency team was awarded the " Wildlife Crime Operation of the Year 2025 ", in recognition of its work to protect falcons from illegal activities.

The recognition was presented at the 36th Annual Wildlife Crime Conference in the United Kingdom, with the initiative drawing on representatives from the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Raptor Study Group, and specialist conservation organisations.

The operation, named "Glassbeak," focused on the protection of Peregrine Falcons during the 2025 breeding season, with particular attention to the sites most exposed to threat.

Efforts included nest monitoring, enhanced field protection, and the deployment of drones to access rugged terrain that is difficult to monitor by conventional means.

Peregrine Falcons are legally protected in Northern Ireland, yet they still face multiple threats, including the theft of eggs and chicks to supply the illegal falconry trade, as well as poisoning and the destruction of nest sites.

The operation contributed to one of the most successful breeding seasons for these birds in recent years, with chicks growing and successfully fledging at sites that had previously suffered repeated nesting failure.



European Cases Reveal a Growing Commitment to Raptor Protection

Across Europe, there has been a marked increase in legal cases relating to the protection of birds of prey, as legislation tightens and violations that threaten ecological balance and natural heritage are being actively pursued.

In Britain, a court handed down a sentence against Michael Watt (37) following his conviction in October 2025 for poaching in Threshfield, North Yorkshire, where he was found in possession of an injured rabbit in his vehicle, alongside a Harris's Hawk and illegal hunting equipment. The court imposed "a criminal behaviour order" prohibiting him from keeping birds or engaging in any hunting-related activity, while the animals were confiscated and transferred for rehabilitation.

In a separate case still before the courts, a man from the Malvern area of Worcestershire has faced, since 2025, 21 charges relating to the illegal possession and trade of Peregrine Falcons, on suspicion of providing misleading information regarding their origins by claiming they were captive-bred.



British Falconer Andrew Knowles-Brown (70) was convicted in October 2025, following investigations that revealed deteriorating conditions for approximately 90 raptors at his facility, "The Scottish Eagle Centre" at Elvanfoot, relating to violations dating back a number of years. The court ordered him to pay fines exceeding £13,000 and prohibited him from keeping most of his birds, which were transferred to specialist organisations.

Prosecutors described the case as "a shocking instance of animal abuse." Knowles-Brown had been a prominent figure in the falconry world, having previously held leadership positions including the Chair of the Scottish Hawk Board, which added a further dimension to the case.

In France, the case of farmer Didier Ronat dates back to 31 December 2022, when he shot two protected vultures, a Black Vulture and a Bearded Vulture, in the Drôme Provençale region. In December 2023, the court at Valence initially sentenced him to four months' imprisonment suspended, a two-year withdrawal of his hunting license, and compensation of approximately €30,000. The case remains under appeal before the Court of Grenoble in 2026, with conservation groups calling for the compensation to be raised to approximately €168,000.

According to Didier, dozens of vultures attacked his flock on the day in question, causing panic among the sheep and prompting him to intervene by firing his weapon. By contrast, conservation organisations maintain that vultures are primarily scavengers that feed on carrion, and that attacks on healthy animals remain rare, stressing that any breach of the law jeopardises years of efforts to restore ecological balance.

Vultures are classified as legally protected species in France, following the success of reintroduction programmes since the late twentieth century, after the birds had all but disappeared from the wild.





Kazakh Falconry Soars on a Global Stage at a Traditional Hunting Festival

In a picture that embodies the deep-rooted presence of falconry in the cultures of Central Asia, the East Kazakhstan region hosted the fifth edition of the "Shygys Salburuny" an international festival of traditional hunting, with broad participation by falconers from Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, China, Russia, Hungary, and Spain.

The event was held in the Ulan area from 8 to 11 October 2025, with the participation of 148 falconers and an audience of more than 10,000 spectators, a testament to the rising profile of this ancient heritage sport.

Over three days, raptors including Golden Eagles, falcons, and hawks, presented high-level competitive displays, with 107 birds participating and nine advancing to the finals, in contests that showcased the skill of training and the precision of performance alongside the values associated with traditional hunting culture.

Environmental Disputes Highlight the Sensitivity of Raptors

In a related development, a legal dispute in Britain has shed light on a subtle aspect of the world of falconry: the extreme sensitivity of raptors to their environment.

A dispute arose between a landowner and neighbouring falcon breeders in Cornwall, following allegations that the landowner had caused the deaths of several valuable Gyrfalcons and the failure of eggs to hatch, as a result of the birds being alarmed by construction work and noise during the breeding season. The court accepted that the disturbance had caused direct harm and awarded significant financial compensation, a decision that remains under appeal in 2026.

The case illustrates the extent to which raptors are affected by surrounding conditions, whereas noises or even minor visual changes can provoke severe stress, potentially resulting in the death of birds or the failure of eggs to hatch. Falcons may also be disturbed by factors that might appear minor, such as the movement of construction equipment or the appearance of unfamiliar objects within their field of vision.

This type of dispute reflects growing challenges in the breeding of birds of prey in modern environments, where human activities increasingly intersect with the needs of these sensitive creatures, calling for a careful balance between land use and the welfare of the animals.



Kazakh falconer Ayazhan Daniyarkyzy.

The international participation reflected the diversity of falconry schools. Medeukhan Saidoldauly, President of the Mongolian Eagle Hunters' Association, noted the improved standard of organisation and competition, observing that the fifth edition had seen "a markedly higher level than in previous years, both in the quality of the birds and the number of participating falconers."

In the same context, Hungarian falconer Gergely László Bodis shared his first impressions of Kazakhstan, describing it as "the homeland of falconry" and explaining that Hungarians were the first to introduce falconry to Europe, though the practice has become increasingly limited there due to the time and commitment it demands, whereas it remains very much alive and deeply rooted in Central Asia.

The event also saw a prominent female presence: Kazakh falconer Ayazhan Daniyarkyzy noted that interest in falconry among young women is growing noticeably, recounting how her own journey began with inspiration from her trainer before becoming a professional vocation.

"Our message is clear," she said: "to develop our national traditions and pass them on to new generations."

The event extended beyond the competitions to include a heritage village featuring dozens of tents and live demonstrations of Kazakh customs, reinforcing the connection between falconry as a practice and the cultural and social context from which it springs. The festival forms part of official efforts to establish falconry as a cornerstone of Kazakhstan's national identity and to promote it internationally.



Photography: Nagima Abuova / The Astana Times.

A Young Falconer Keeps the Hunting Heritage Alive in Kazakhstan

In a picture that reflects the continuity of heritage at the heart of Central Asia, fifteen-year-old Aizere Markskyzy has emerged in eastern Kazakhstan as one of the promising young figures helping to preserve the ancient tradition of falconry, continuing to practice the art of hunting with birds of prey that her family has passed down through generations.

She belongs to an environment that still upholds the traditions of "hunting with Golden Eagles", known locally as "Berkutchi", a practice that demands years of training, discipline, and meticulous daily care of the birds.

Her relationship with falconry began at an early age, accompanying her father on eagle-training expeditions from childhood and gradually learning to read a bird's behaviour and understand its subtle signals. She stresses that falconry is not a performance, but a practice grounded in patience, respect, and the building of trust between humans and birds.

Aizere currently works with three Golden Eagles, each with its own distinct character, and has already competed and placed in local tournaments, reflecting the development of her skills despite her young age.

She also gives considerable attention to daily matters, such as monitoring the birds' weight and diet, and managing the moulting seasons, a period requiring particular care, during which hunting activities are suspended.

This heritage tradition extends beyond the birds of prey alone to include the Kazakh Tazi dog, used in hunting alongside the eagles, within an integrated system shaped over centuries of interaction between humans and the natural world in the steppes of Central Asia.

Aizere also emphasized that falconry is not merely a hobby for her, but a way of life that builds character and instils values of responsibility and discipline. Looking to the future, she speaks of her ambition to establish a cultural and tourism centre that would introduce visitors to this art and give them the opportunity to experience it closely.



Young falconer Aizere Markskyzy.
Source: Kazinform / The Astana Times.

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المعرض الدولي للصيد والفروسية
INTERNATIONAL HUNTING & EQUESTRIAN EXHIBITION



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Arab Falconry Roundup

"From Scientific Documentation to Environmental Sustainability... Arab Falconry in an Evolving Landscape"

Arab falconry is witnessing a growing momentum that combines scientific documentation, cultural presence, and technological advancement, reflecting the continuity and sustainability of this ancient heritage and its ability to keep pace with changing eras, while reinforcing its standing as a living and renewed human tradition.





Falconry Terminology Dictionary Documents the Language of Hunting Expeditions and Preserves Falconers' Heritage

The King Salman Global Academy for Arabic Language, in collaboration with the Saudi Falcons Club, has launched the Falconry Terminology Dictionary, an initiative aimed at documenting the specialised vocabulary used by falconers during hunting expeditions and falcon training, and presenting it within an organised scientific framework.

The dictionary goes beyond simply compiling words; it is dedicated to defining the precise meaning of each term as it has settled in practical use, whether relating to the characteristics of falcons, stages of their training, hunting equipment, descriptions of quarry and the environments associated with falconry practice. Falconers understand that a term is not merely a word, but the distillation of long experience. Each expression carries a precision that distinguishes between the bird's different states and behaviours, while encapsulating a deep understanding of the hunt in all its dimensions.

This work holds particular significance as it transfers the language of falconry from oral tradition to scientific documentation, while preserving its specificity and accuracy, which reflect the accumulated expertise of falconers passed down through generations. The dictionary also offers a body of knowledge that can be drawn upon in linguistic and heritage studies, and helps introduce newcomers to the terminology of this ancient art, strengthening their command of its concepts and literature.

The publication represents a valuable addition to the Arabic library and reflects a growing commitment to documenting the components of the cultural heritage associated with falconry.



" Hunting Memories ": Documenting the Transformation of Falconry

Al Faisal Global Foundation for Culture and Knowledge and Al Faisal Publishing House launched, during the Katara International Hunting and Falcons Exhibition (S'hail 2025), the book "Hunting Memories … From a Necessity of Life to a Pleasure for Enthusiasts", by HE Sheikh Faisal bin Qassim Al Thani. The work documents an extensive personal journey spanning more than 100 falconry and hunting expeditions across Qatar and beyond, over a period of approximately 70 years.

Across its multiple chapters and 446 pages, the book presents a narrative that weaves personal memory with heritage documentation, charting the transformation of falconry from a subsistence necessity of the past into a sporting and cultural pursuit of the present, while highlighting the values associated with it, such as patience and self-reliance.

Its chapters include: "A Day in the Latest Hunting Expedition", "Men and Falcons — Sons of Nature, " "Falconry of the Old Days, ", "The Hobby of Kings and Princes," "Falconry as a School of Manhood", "Dangers Worth the Journey", and "Hunting to the Rhythm of Gunfire".

The book also contains a visual archive documenting live scenes from hunting expeditions, reflecting the nature of the relationship between the falconer and his environment, while preserving the details of this heritage and presenting them to new generations in a style that combines narrative with documentation.

Sheikh Faisal remarked: "I hope this book enriches human knowledge about the life of the people of Qatar and the Gulf during hunting expeditions, and how they have achieved the difficult balance between embracing modernity and openness to the world, while preserving their heritage by reviving the enduring legacy of hunting and falconry, and practising it generation after generation."

Falconry Takes Flight at the Damascus International Book Fair



Falconry made a notable appearance in the Qatari pavilion at the Damascus International Book Fair in February 2026. It was presented as one of the most prominent elements of intangible cultural heritage inscribed on UNESCO's lists, reflecting the vibrant presence of this heritage in the contemporary cultural space.

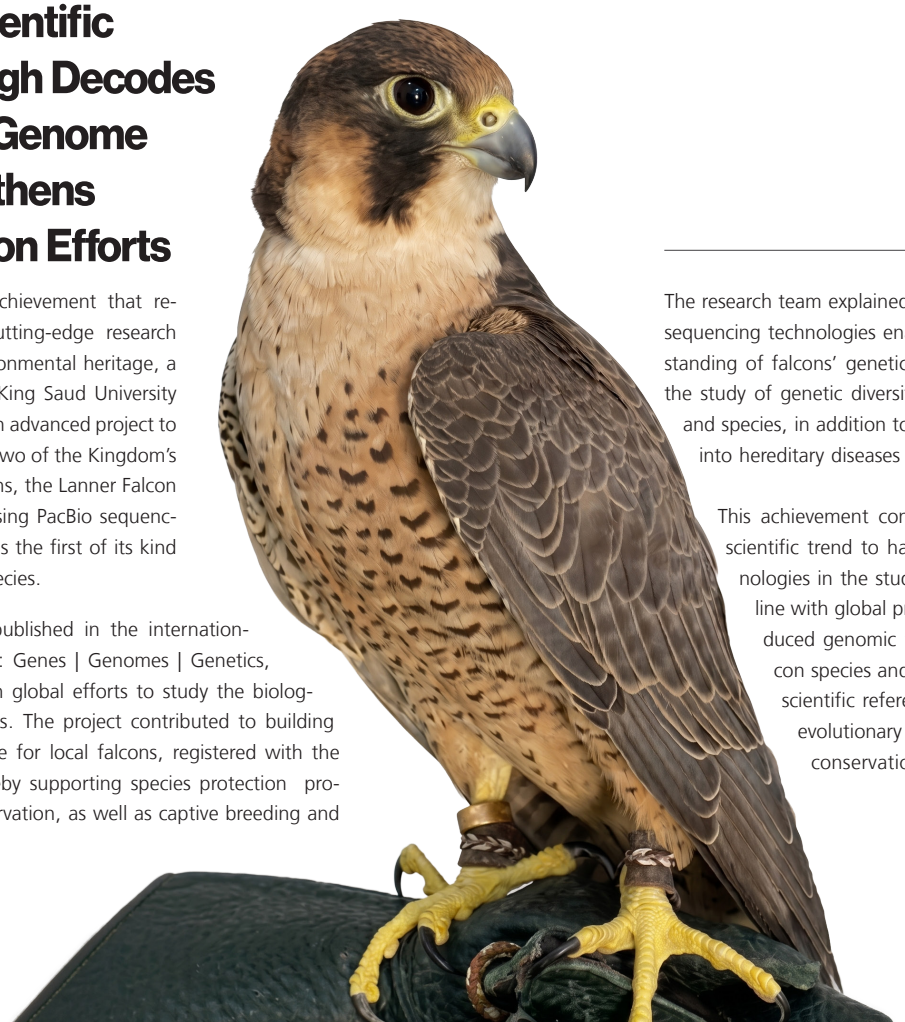
Falconry was showcased within the "Spectrum of the Sands" section, which introduced Qatari heritage and highlighted its various elements to tens of thousands of fair visitors, by presenting falconry as a living practice that combines its historical depth with social continuity.

Those overseeing the pavilion explained that featuring falconry in such cultural events raises awareness highlights its value as a shared human heritage, while showcasing Qatar's role in inscribing this element on the World Heritage lists. They also noted that falconry remains widely practised in Qatar, particularly through hunting expeditions, in addition to the organisation of heritage festivals, competitions, and specialised tournaments that support its enduring its presence and sustainability.

A Saudi Scientific Breakthrough Decodes the Falcon Genome and Strengthens Conservation Efforts

In a pioneering scientific achievement that reflects the integration of cutting-edge research with a commitment to environmental heritage, a Saudi academic team from King Saud University has successfully completed an advanced project to analyse the full genomes of two of the Kingdom's most prominent native falcons, the Lanner Falcon and the Peregrine Falcon, using PacBio sequencing technology. The project is the first of its kind in the Kingdom for both species.

The project's results were published in the international peer-reviewed journal G3: Genes | Genomes | Genetics, reflecting its standing within global efforts to study the biological genomes of wild species. The project contributed to building a reference genetic database for local falcons, registered with the global NCBI database, thereby supporting species protection programmes, biodiversity conservation, as well as captive breeding and reintroduction efforts.



The research team explained that whole-genome sequencing technologies enable a precise understanding of falcons' genetic structure and allow the study of genetic diversity among individuals and species, in addition to supporting research into hereditary diseases in birds of prey.

This achievement comes amid a growing scientific trend to harness genomic technologies in the study of wild species, in line with global projects that have produced genomic maps for various falcon species and established them as scientific references in the fields of evolutionary genetics and wildlife conservation.



The Emirates Falcon Racing International Cup: A Successful Inaugural Edition from Kuwait

The inaugural edition of the Emirates Falcon Racing International Cup, hosted by the State of Kuwait last December, attracted 200 falconers and more than 270 falcons across various categories, amid high-level official attendance and broad participation from falconers and spectators alike.

The Cup concluded its first edition with great success, firmly establishing itself as the first world championship of its kind in this field, drawing widespread international attention from enthusiasts and observers worldwide. The tournament programme included seven races in the Farkh (juvenile) category, in addition to heats for farm-bred Hurr (Saker)and Shaheen (Peregrine) captive-bred falcons, alongside the final Cup Race, for which five falcons from each category qualified, in the categories of Pure Gyr, Gyr-Shaheen, Qarmousha, and Gyr-Taba. Total prize money reached half a million UAE dirhams.

In his address at the closing ceremony, held at the Jaber Cultural Centre in Kuwait, His Excellency Dr Ahmad Belhoul Al Falasi, Minister of Sports of the United Arab Emirates, expressed his profound appreciation and gratitude to the leadership, government and people of Kuwait for the exemplary hosting of the championship, affirming that the success of this inaugural edition reflects the depth of brotherly ties between the two nations. His Excellency noted that falconry sport has proven its capacity to build bridges of rapprochement between peoples, adding that the outstanding performances of falconers at this major international event embody the balance between the authenticity of heritage and the evolution of modern sport.

His Excellency Abdulrahman Al Mutairi, Kuwait's Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs, also addressed the ceremony, commending the tremendous efforts invested in organising the championship and hosting its inaugural edition in Kuwait. He affirmed the Kuwaiti leadership's support for this ancient sport, and expressing his thanks to the UAE for its confidence in holding this global event on Kuwaiti soil.

Official attendees praised the high organisational standards led by the UAE Falcons Federation, under the directives of His Highness Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Vice President of the UAE, Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the Presidential Court, and under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Second Deputy Ruler of Dubai, President of the International Federation for Falconry Sports and Racing, and President of the UAE Falcons Federation, with the constant follow-up of His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Hamad bin Hamdan Al Nahyan, Vice President of the International Federation for Falconry Sports and Racing and Vice President of the UAE Falcons Federation.

The ceremony also featured an address by Rashed bin Markhan, Secretary-General of the International Federation for Falconry Sports and Racing, Secretary-General of the UAE Falcons Federation, and Chairman of the Tournament's Supreme Organising Committee, who affirmed the importance of holding the inaugural edition in Kuwait. He said: " The joy of the participating Kuwaiti falconers at the value of this achievement and their crowning in this Cup that bears the name of the United Arab Emirates represents for us a driving force and a great incentive to continue developing and organising the tournament to the highest standard."



King Abdulaziz Falconry Festival Sets a Record with 3,536 Falcon Entries

The King Abdulaziz Falconry Festival 2025 concluded at the Saudi Falcons Club's venue in Malham, north of Riyadh, after 17 consecutive days of competition, recording an unprecedented participation of 3,536 falcons and reinforcing its standing and role as a global platform bringing together the falconry community.

The festival, which concluded its activities in January 2026, hosted 142 rounds across the Melwah and Mazayen competitions, with wide participation from falconers from inside and outside the Kingdom, under a rigorous organisational structure encompassing meticulous registration procedures, veterinary inspections, and certified judging mechanisms. Dedicated rounds for new categories were introduced, among them the Schools Round and the Falconer of the Future Round, a step aimed at broadening the base of participation and strengthening the presence of younger generations in the arenas of falconry.

Total prize money in this latest edition exceeded SAR 38 million, distributed among various rounds and categories, contributing to heightened competition and attracting an elite field of falconers.





Over 1,300 Exhibitors from 45 Countries at the International Saudi Falcons and Hunting Exhibition

The Saudi International Falcons and Hunting Exhibition was held at the Saudi Falcons Club in Malham, north of Riyadh, from 2 to 11 October 2025, with extensive international participation reflecting the scale of global interest in the falconry and hunting sector.

The exhibition welcomed more than 1,300 exhibitors and brands from 45 countries, spanning 28 specialised sectors including hunting equipment, expedition technologies, falconry supplies, and services related to outdoor activities.

The event included a range of activities, among them live falcon displays, workshops, and platforms showcasing the latest technologies used in falcon training and tracking, giving visitors a comprehensive view of developments in this sector.

The exhibition also drew large numbers of visitors, amid a diverse array of participating pavilions and the presence of specialist international companies, further cementing its standing as one of the largest specialist falconry exhibitions in the region. The organisation of this important annual event formed part of broader efforts to support the sector, develop its economic infrastructure, and connect its various components to global markets.



Record Turnout and International Presence at S'hail 2025

S'hail 2026, the Katara International Hunting and Falcons Exhibition, is preparing for its tenth edition, scheduled from 8 to 12 September 2026. The event is a globally renowned Qatari platform dedicated to preserving and promoting the arts of falconry.
The ninth edition, which ran for five days, featured a wide range of activities that drew large audiences and notable international attendance, with the participation of more than 200 companies from 21 countries.

S'hail 2025 offered a diverse programme of activities combining traditional heritage with a contemporary dimension, including falcon auctions, cultural and artistic events, as well as specialist lectures and workshops in the fields of hunting and falconry.

The event attracted large number of enthusiasts and experts, alongside competitions spanning multiple categories in a competitive atmosphere that reflected the distinction of participants, adding a special ambiance to the exhibition.

The final day saw the crowning of winners in the Most Beautiful Pavilion and Most Beautiful Hood competitions. First place went to Saif Al Shammari, second place to Omar Malik from the United Kingdom, and third place to Pablo from Spain.

As it prepares for its tenth edition, S'hail 2026 , the exhibition continues to consolidate its standing as an international platform that brings together falconry enthusiasts and contributing to the promotion of this heritage at both regional and global levels.



Marmi 2026 Festival: One Falconer Crowned at the Conclusion of the Tala'a Championship



The Tala'a championship rounds at the Qatar International Falcons and Hunting Festival (Marmi 2026) witnessed fierce competition, concluding with the participation of five falconers who had qualified for the final stage following a series of thrilling eliminations.

The results saw falconer Ali Hassan Al Saa'i claim first place, while the remaining rankings were withheld, as the other falcons were unable to meet the required Tala'a conditions, despite having reached advanced stages of the competition.
The organising committee confirmed that the final brought together an elite group of falcons that had demonstrated their ability throughout the preceding rounds, noting that the nature of the championship relies on meeting precise criteria that reflect the skills of both falcon and falconer simultaneously. The committee ensured fairness among participants through careful selection of the suitable terrain and the provision of equal conditions for all.

The organising committee set a five-minute time limit, beginning with the release of the Houbara and the announcement by the Chairman of the Tal'a Committee, or his representative, authorising the unhooding of the falcons. This period also included the final seconds allowed for the last falcon of any participant in the group to emerge from the vehicle.

The distance between the point of the Houbara's release and the falcon's release point was estimated at between 2 kilometres and 1,800–1,900 metres, depending on the direction taken by the Houbara upon release.

"Tala'a" is considered one of the most prominent traditional hunting methods associated with Qatari heritage, embodying an important aspect of the history of falconry in the desert environment and occupying a special place among the festival's competitions.

Bahraini Falcons Excel at the Conclusion of the Nasser bin Hamad Falconry and Hunting Season



The falconry competition rounds of the eleventh edition of H.H. Sheikh Nasser bin Hamad's Falconry and Hunting Season concluded in January 2026, with broad participation from Bahraini falconers across all categories, in an atmosphere that reflected the growing interest in this heritage sport.

The Malak heats witnessed strong competition among amateurs and beginners, providing them with the opportunity to showcase their skills and gain further experience. A dedicated heat , "The Young Falconer" was set aside to encourage children and juniors to take up falconry and strengthen their connection to the heritage. The Malak rounds are reserved for Bahraini falconers in the amateurs and beginner categories.

The Results saw Wafi Al Kawari claim first place in the Gyr-Peregrine – Jarnas (adult) category, recording the best time in the tournament across all categories, while Mohammed Jaber Al Marri secured first place in the Gyr-Peregrine – Furookh (juveniles) category. In the Saker – Jarnas round, Mishaal Nasser Al Dosari was crowned champion, while in the Saker – Furookh(juveniles) round, Ali Khalifa Al Ka'bi took first place.

Rakan Al Ajmi claimed first place in the Mixed Gyr – Jernas category, and in the Mixed Gyr – Furookh round, Rashed Abdullah Al Ka'bi secured first place. Khalid Adel Al Rumaih took first place in the Peregrine – Jernas category. The Young Falconer round was won by Saad Mohammed Al Ajmi.

The season was organised by the Bahrain Inherited Traditional Sports Committee (Mawrooth), as part of its efforts to preserve traditional national sports, support falconers across all categories, and instil heritage values among children and youth.

Saker Falcons in Iraq and the Threat of Extinction Through Poaching



The desert regions of eastern Iraq , particularly Qazaniyya in Diyala Governorate, witness a seasonal activity of trapping wild falcons that coincides with the passage of migratory birds from Central Asia. The Saker Falcon is among the most targeted species, given its high value in falconry markets.

Trapping in these areas is no longer confined to being a traditional activity; it has evolved into an economic resource driven by growing regional demand, where falcons hold a high cultural status and certain rare strains command premium prices based on their characteristics, lineage, and responsiveness to training.

Observers of the field note that the Iraqi desert has historically provided a suitable environment for trapping falcons, but rising demand and higher prices have contributed to an increase in trapping activity in recent years, raising growing environmental concerns about the sustainability of these species.

According to the "Baghdad Today" website, specialists have warned of a decline in wild falcon populations in Iraq as a result of poaching and weak regulatory controls, affirming that the continuation of these practices may threaten ecological balance and impact the biodiversity associated with birds of prey.

Despite these challenges, falconry remains part of the social heritage of Iraq and the wider region, combining its heritage dimension with economic returns and raising increasingly pressing questions about how to strike a balance between preserving the ancient tradition of falconry and ensuring the sustainability of wildlife.

The Hadad Programme Continues its Falcon Release Efforts in Kazakhstan

The Saudi Falcons Club has continued the implementation of the Hadad Programme's 2026 phases, releasing a number of falcons in the Republic of Kazakhstan as part of its rehabilitation and reintroduction efforts. The programme aims to support the sustainability of falcons and maintain long-term ecological balance, by releasing birds of prey following rehabilitation programmes encompassing healthcare, flight training, and the development of self-reliance.

Releases are conducted at carefully selected sites, in coordination with specialist authorities, ensuring that the environment is suitable for the reintroduction of falcons into the wild. The most recent release site was selected based on scientific criteria, including the suitability of environmental conditions and proximity to major migration routes.

"Hadad" is considered one of the most prominent environmental programmes linked to falconry, combining the heritage dimension with falcon conservation and wildlife protection efforts, through release operations carried out both within Saudi Arabia and abroad.

Based on the latest release, it is anticipated that 34 Saker Falcons will breed in the Almaty region , 28 females and 6 males. These birds were sourced from several countries and underwent an acclimatisation process at the Sunkar Falcon Centre. Researchers from the Institute of Zoology in Almaty also examined the birds.

Kazakh officials expect that within three years, the falcon population in the Altyn-Emel region will rise from six registered birds to approximately 150, as part of a joint programme with Saudi Arabia.

Organisers, local authorities, and visiting delegations expressed their hope for the project's success and that poaching would not pose a threat to the birds' return to their natural habitat.

برنامج هدد لإعادة الصقور لمواطنها
Hadad program to return falcons to their original habitat



Falcons Nest Atop Doha's Tallest Buildings in a Rare Phenomenon

A team from the Qatari Society of AlGannas has spotted a falcon's nest atop one of Doha's high-rise buildings. Ali bin Khatim Al Mahshadi, President of the Association, stated: "This is a rare occurrence, one we are witnessing for the first time in the State of Qatar. We were notified of it in April 2026. Historically, this may be the first time such a phenomenon has occurred in Qatar's natural environment."

Cameras were installed to monitor and observe the site, enabling the team to observe the mated pair of falcons alongside their chicks. The Al Gannas Association formed a dedicated team to study this unique phenomenon in Qatar to determine the fate of the chicks, their movements, and to study their behaviour by placing tracking devices on them.

Al Mahshadi explained that the nesting site is well-suited for breeding, a high-rise building on the Doha waterfront, where prey is abundant. He noted that the Qatari environment, and the Arabian Gulf in general, are home to certain bird species, owing to a suitable environment for their growth and reproduction, the availability of prey, increased awareness of species conservation, and a move away from poaching.

According to officials at the AlGannas Association, falcon nesting in urban environments is an extremely rare occurrence. Should they choose to nest, falcons first ensure that the location is safe and that prey is available. Furthermore, the two mated falcons that were observed belong to two different lineages, a rare occurrence in nature among birds or animals, indicating a genetic difference between the male and the female.



Moroccan Falconry at the Moulay Abdellah Amghar Moussem Through "Al-Bayaza"

Moroccan falconry has long maintained a distinguished presence at the festivities of the Moulay Abdellah Amghar Moussem, where the Al Qwassem tribes take part in falcon displays as part of showcasing Al-Bayaza, one of Morocco's most prominent forms of traditional hunting, passed down through the generations.

The Moussem's organising committee in August 2026 dedicated ample space to falconry associations, enabling falconers to present live demonstrations and introduce visitors to the methods of rearing and caring for falcons, alongside transmitting the knowledge associated with this art to visitors, particularly young people, in a step that reflects the continuity of this heritage within Morocco's local communities.



A number of participating falconers affirmed that the event represents an annual occasion that brings together those interested in the field and contributes to strengthening its presence in society, in addition to its role in entrenching falconry as part of Moroccan cultural identity. They also noted that the practice of falconry in Morocco is subject to legal regulation, ensuring the preservation and protection of birds of prey, amid growing awareness of the importance of safeguarding this natural heritage.

"Al-Bayaza" embodies a model of traditional falconry in North Africa that extends beyond being a recreational activity, representing a way of life rooted in an inherited bond between human and bird, passed down from one generation to the next within families and local communities.

The Saudi Falcons Club Announces its 2026 Calendar

The Saudi Falcons Club has announced the dates of its major events for 2026, aimed at strengthening national heritage and affirming its presence, alongside supporting the falcon sector, developing related hobbies, and cementing Saudi Arabia's standing as a global destination and home to falcons and falconers.

The Club's inaugural event is the International Auction for Captive-Bred Falcon Farms, running from 5 to 25 August, with wide participation from leading producers, falcon breeders, and premier local and international breeding farms from around the world.

The auction dedicated to locally caught passage juvenile Peregrine falcons will accept falcons over a two-month period coinciding with the migratory season, from 1 October to 30 November.

Early October also marks the launch of the Saudi International Falcons and Hunting Exhibition at the Riyadh Exhibition and Convention Centre in Malham, north of Riyadh, open to visitors until 10 October, featuring dozens of events spanning culture, entertainment and tourism, and environment sectors.

The Club will organise the Melwah Race from 4 to 9 October, over six days during which falconers compete for prize money and championship titles across a number of categories.

The King Abdulaziz Falconry Festival will be held from 17 to 30 November. The year's events will conclude with the Saudi Falcon Club Cup, scheduled from 21 to 28 December, featuring local falconers competing in rounds designed to showcase the skills and speed of the falcons over the course distance.

Falconry in the UAE



Emirates Falconers' Club Pavilion at Sheikh Zayed Festival

A Heritage Experience Attracting Thousands of Visitors

The Emirates Falconers' Club pavilion at the Sheikh Zayed Festival 2025–2026 drew large numbers of visitors from various nationalities and age groups, who were offered the opportunity to learn about the Club's objectives in preserving falconry and safeguarding the authentic Emirati heritage and traditions.

Throughout the festival, held annually under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE, may God protect him, and under the guidance and directives of His Highness Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE Vice President, Deputy Prime Minister, and Chairman of the Presidential Court, the Club presented a range of educational and interactive activities.

These activities offered visitors the opportunity to learn about falcons, their species, care, and training methods; the practice of falconry and sustainable hunting; the Arabian Saluki and its care; and the traditions of hunting dog training.

His Excellency Majed Ali Al Mansoori, Secretary-General of the Emirates Falconers' Club, affirmed that the Sheikh Zayed Festival represents a global platform for showcasing Emirati heritage and culture, offering visitors from different continents the opportunity to enjoy a diverse array of cultural and artistic activities. He added that the Club's vision focuses on celebrating Arab falconry and maintaining a balance between preserving authentic traditions and developing programs that support sustainable falconry and the conservation of falcons and their prey.

His Excellency expressed his profound appreciation and deep gratitude for the support of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan; His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Ruler's Representative in Al Dhafra Region and President of the Emirates Falconers' Club; and His Highness Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, towards the Club's projects, events, and all heritage festivals, thereby reinforcing national identity and preserving the UAE's rich cultural legacy.

His Excellency underscored the significance of this unwavering support in shaping and implementing a strategic vision that ensures harmony between heritage conservation and the application of the latest species conservation methods, an approach that enhances the UAE's international standing as a world centre for culture, heritage, and traditional falconry, and enables visitors from around the globe to explore the UAE's pioneering experiences in this remarkable field.

The Club's pavilion offered festival visitors the opportunity to interact directly with falcons and Arabian Salukis. Children and heritage enthusiasts were able to take commemorative photographs with them and learn about the traditions of Arab falconry, documenting an experience that brings people closer to the desert environment.
The Arabian Saluki Centre in Abu Dhabi, the first and largest centre of its kind in the Arabian Gulf region and the Middle East, provided essential educational information about the Saluki and the diverse services it offers. During the festival, visitors were also able to register at the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School, which encompasses specialised training programs for beginners and professionals alike, as well as engaging group educational activities for all age groups.

The Emirates Falconers' Club 's pavilion at the Sheikh Zayed Festival welcomes close to half a million visitors each season, particularly children, school students, families, and tourists, who enjoy a uniquely educational and heritage experience.







A Seasonal Branch of the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School at the Sheikh Zayed Festival



The Emirates Falconers' Club launched a seasonal branch of the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School as part of its participation in the Sheikh Zayed Festival through a comprehensive educational platform that enabled festival visitors to learn about the School's programmes and register for them, in a step aimed at broadening access to this authentic intellectual heritage.

The seasonal branch was launched as part of the Club's vision to strengthen the presence of Arab falconry at major national festivals and to link educational programmes with open cultural platforms that annually attract hundreds of thousands of visitors from various age groups.

This launch coincided with the commencement of the School's tenth academic season in Al Ain City, where the seasonal branch in the Al Wathba area provided an interactive educational experience that enabled visitors to explore the programmes and learning pathways, and to register directly for programmes targeting young people between the ages of 7 and 17.

The seasonal branch offered a range of educational programmes on falcons, their species, care, and training, along with the principles of sustainable falconry, desert physiognomy, etiquette, and the traditions of authentic Emirati hospitality, all within a framework that combined theoretical knowledge with practical application.

The launch of the seasonal branch within the Sheikh Zayed Festival represents a strategic step towards broadening the reach of the School's educational programmes giving the public the opportunity to explore and enroll in them during the festival.



Emirates Falconers' Club Enriches the Inaugural Edition of the Al Ain International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition

The Emirates Falconers' Club participated in the inaugural edition of the Al Ain International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition (AAIHEX 2025), held from 26 to 30 November, with a prominent pavilion featuring a wide range of its leading initiatives and projects aimed at preserving falconry and safeguarding authentic Emirati heritage.

The pavilion showcased prominent programmes and projects, including the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School, the Club's pioneering educational programme , the International Festival of Falconry (IFF), the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition (ADIHEX), the Arabian Saluki Centre, the Falcon Clinic, as well as the "Al Saggar" magazine corner, offering a rich experience that introduced the public to sustainable falconry and the world of falcons and the art of handling them.

His Excellency Majed Ali Al Mansoori, Secretary-General of the Emirates Falconers' Club, stated that the Club's role in this event, whether through participation or co-organization, reflects its continued commitment to preserving falconry as a universal human heritage and to passing on its knowledge to new generations through an approach that combines education, enjoyment, and interaction.

He further affirmed that organizing the Al Ain International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition for the first time represents a significant milestone in the advancement of the hunting and equestrian sector in the UAE and the region, and constitutes a natural extension of the success of the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition, which was launched in 2003 and has, over more than two decades, established itself as the largest and most important event of its kind in the Middle East and North Africa.

Al Mansoori noted that the launch of a parallel edition in Al Ain City reflects the UAE's vision to broaden the reach of the national heritage, adding that the selection of Al Ain to host this important event reflects its position as a city of profound historical significance situated at the heart of the desert and home to several of the world's most important tangible cultural heritage sites inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List. This makes it the ideal setting in which to present a model that brings together natural and cultural heritage. Moreover, hosting the exhibition in Al Ain further enhances the city's standing as a heritage oasis and a guardian of national identity, while supporting the sustainability of efforts dedicated to safeguarding the cultural legacy.

His Excellency expressed his deepest gratitude and appreciation to His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE, may God protect him, founder of the Emirates Falconers' Club; His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Ruler's Representative in Al Dhafra Region and Chairman of the Club; and His Highness Sheikh Hazza bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Ruler's Representative in Al Ain Region and patron of the Exhibition , in recognition of their unwavering support for the Club's journey and initiatives at both the local and international levels. He affirmed that this enduring support has been and continues to be the cornerstone that has enabled the Club to pursue its mission and consolidate its global presence, drawing inspiration from the legacy of the Founding Father, the Late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may God rest his soul.

The Emirates Falconers' Club pavilion at the inaugural edition of the Al Ain Hunting Exhibition offered a comprehensive interactive experience that introduced visitors to the importance of falconry, its art, methods, and tools. Live falcon displays were presented in designated areas for















safe, direct interaction with the birds, alongside demonstrations of traditional hunting methods and the proper techniques for handling falcons, as well as opportunities to take commemorative photographs with the birds.

The "Young Veterinarian" activity offered children an enjoyable educational experience through which they learned the fundamentals of falcon health and care. Young participants took part in simplified veterinary tasks that enhanced their awareness of animal welfare and encouraged a sense of responsibility toward animals. The activity also helped foster their interest in veterinary medicine and highlighted its vital role in safeguarding falcons and ensuring the sustainability of falconry traditions.

The Emirates Falconers' Club also presented interactive sessions and demonstrations by young falconers, alongside heritage stories that illustrated the prominent place of falconry in Emirati culture. The pavilion further introduced the Arabian Saluki to visitors through an engaging and interactive experience showcasing its characteristics and behaviour, while Emirati experts shared stories about the Saluki's historical and cultural bond with falconry and life in the desert.

The experience was rounded off by cultural and traditional activities, most notably the preparation of Arabic coffee and the etiquette of Emirati hospitality, as well as presenting commemorative gifts to visitors, who enjoyed a rich journey through the world of falconry and heritage, combining knowledge, interaction, and unforgettable memories.

The Emirates Falconers' Club pavilion attracted the largest number of visitors within the Preservation of environment and cultural heritage sector, offering one of the most distinctive and engaging experiences at the Al Ain International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition. Thanks to its heritage-themed performances, live demonstrations, and educational activities designed for children, the pavilion drew the highest number of visitors from all segments of society.



Emirati Falconers at " S'hail 2025" - A Presence That Reinforces Leadership and Renews the Heritage Mission

The Emirates Falconers' Club participated in the Katara International Hunting and Falcons Exhibition (S'hail 2025), held at the Katara Cultural Village in the Qatari capital Doha, which attracted a large number of enthusiasts of hunting sports and cultural heritage from around the world.

The Club's participation affirmed the leading role of the UAE in preserving falconry heritage and enhancing its global presence, by presenting a comprehensive cultural experience that combines authenticity with intellectual engagement and highlights the ongoing efforts to safeguard this venerable human legacy.





An Emirati Platform Reflecting Abu Dhabi's Leadership

Through its pavilion, the Club showcased a range of initiatives and projects reflecting Abu Dhabi's efforts in preserving falconry, including specialised publications and brochures, alongside rare educational and documentary audio-visual materials on traditional hunting expeditions, presented through modern display screens that introduced visitors to the history and evolution of falconry.

The pavilion also featured an interactive heritage mural tracing the journey of falconry from its origins, highlighting its inscription on UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage , a feature that attracted considerable interest from visitors.

The Club's pavilion attracted large numbers of visitors, with live falcon displays under the supervision of professional falconers, offering visitors the opportunity to learn about falcon handling and care, as well as to take commemorative photographs.

The participation was further distinguished by a live presentation of Arabian Salukis, which constituted a noteworthy cultural feature reflecting the deep connection of this noble breed with the desert environment and the Arab hunting heritage.

Several senior figures and officials visited the Emirates Falconers' Club pavilion, where they explored its exhibits and received a detailed briefing on the Club's achievements and future plans, reinforcing the Club's presence as a platform for cultural dialogue and the exchange of expertise at the international level.

The Club's pavilion drew remarkable attendance, with visitor numbers exceeding 20,000. Thousands of informational materials were distributed, including the "Al Saggar" magazine in both Arabic and English, and numerous interactive activities were organised targeting all age groups, particularly youth and children, as part of efforts to inspire future generations to take an interest in the sport of falconry.

This participation formed part of the Emirates Falconers' Club's endeavors to promote the concept of sustainable falconry and reinforce the values of environmental and traditional preservation, ensuring the continuity of this heritage for generations to come.

The Club affirmed that its participation in the " S'hail " exhibition represents an important milestone in the path of Gulf and international cultural cooperation, and embodies the UAE's commitment to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and sharing it with the world.



Resounding Success of the President Cup Falcon Competition

The Abu Dhabi Falconers Club announced that the 13th edition of the President's Cup for Falconry, organised by the Club from 10 to 27 January 2026 at the Al Falah Field in Abu Dhabi, attracted a record participation of 830 falconers and 3,300 falcons.

Sultan Al Mahmoud, Managing Director of the Abu Dhabi Falconers Club, stated that the sport of falconry enjoys the support and attention of the wise leadership, highlighting the remarkable success of the latest edition of the President's Cup and the distinguished participation from within the UAE and abroad across its diverse events held over a period of 17 days.

He pointed to the championship's continued development year after year and the efforts of the Abu Dhabi Falconers Club in advancing it and providing an attractive environment, which has clearly contributed to the growing number of participants across all categories. He also commended the dedicated efforts of all committees in supporting the championship's success.

He added that the Club places great emphasis on the younger generation by providing all the necessary means to encourage them to practice this sport and by creating a motivating atmosphere for all age groups, particularly since the Club annually welcomes between 13,000 and 14,000 students as part of the "Abu Dhabi Falconer" project, which trains and qualifies school students and forms school teams to participate in falconry events.

In the General Public / Owners Category, Pure Gyr Qarmousha – Gyrfalcon -Jernas (adult) competition, first place was awarded to the falcon "Qamra," owned by Nasser Batahan Sultan Al Mansoori; second place went to the falcon "Zahi," owned by Saif Ahmed Saif Al Maqoudi Al Falasi; and third place went to the falcon "G1," owned by Ali Omar Ali Qambar Al Balushi.

In the General Public / Owners Category, Gyr Shaheen–Gyr Taba Jernas (adult) competition, the title went to the falcon "B68," owned by Saif Ahmed Saif Al Maqoudi Al Falasi; second place was secured by the falcon "T7," owned by Khalid Jumaa Khadem Suhail Al Hamli; and third place went to the falcon "X," owned by Fahad Mohammed Salem bin Saqr Al Mansoori.



Alongside the championship's main events, Gulf nationals' heats were also organised, with the participation of 424 falcons and 109 falconers, including 92 falcons and 23 falconers from the Kingdom of Bahrain; 129 falcons and 44 falconers from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; 45 falcons and 16 falconers from the State of Kuwait; 5 falcons and 1 falconer from the Sultanate of Oman; and 153 falcons and 25 falconers from the State of Qatar, in a scene that reflected the strong Gulf interest in this traditional sport and its central role in preserving a shared cultural heritage.

The latest edition of the championship reflected the spirit of family cohesion, in line with the declaration of 2026 as the 'Year of Family', as reflected in families' keenness to attend the events, children's presence at award ceremonies, the participation of women from various age groups in the competitions, and the encouragement of younger generations to embrace traditional sports, given their tangible impact in strengthening national identity and reinforcing the values of belonging.





Broad Participation and Strong Competition in the President's Cup Falcon Beauty Contest

The seventh edition of the President's Cup Falcon Beauty Contest 2026 (Mazayna 2026) recorded strong participation and intense competition among falcon owners and falconry enthusiasts. The event was organised by the Abu Dhabi Falconers Club at the Al Falah area over two days , 25 and 26 January ,coinciding with the President's Cup for Falconry.

The contest featured various categories with numerous prizes allocated to each, attracting some of the finest and most beautiful falcons, in line with the Club's commitment to strengthening national identity and safeguarding this longstanding heritage.

Participating falcons underwent precise evaluation according to defined criteria for determining the winners across various categories, including several competitive characteristics, most notably the head and eye area, feather smoothness, colour, the shoulder, the chest, the crop, and other features, with the judging committee applying the highest standards of transparency through the use of modern tools and a high degree of professionalism.

In the Gyr Qarmousha– Jernas (adult)category, the falcons "Al Aryah," "Dubai," and "Abu Dhabi," all owned by Salem Nasser Muthakkir Al Shafi Al Hajri, secured the top three places. In the Gyr Qarmousha–Juvenile (Farkh) category, the falcon "Aliya," owned by Suhail Hilal Salem bin Tarraf Al Mansoori, claimed first place; second place went to the falcon "Al Ain," owned by Mohammed Ali Mohammed Ali Al Dhaheri; and third place went to the falcon "Al Sanyoura," owned by Nasser Khalid Muthakkir Al Shafi.

In the Pure Gyr– Jernas (adult) category, the falcons "Tuwayq," "Al Aqzan," and "Tahhan", all owned by Salem Nasser Muthakkir Al Shafi Al Hajri, won the top three places. In the Pure Gyr–(Farkh) category, the falcon "Rawq," owned by Abdullah Sultan Falah Hamoud Al Qahtani, secured first place; second place went to the falcon "Al Shahabi," owned by Hamad Hussein Abdullah Abdulrahman Al Hammadi; and third place went to the falcon "Al Fatin," owned by Suhail Hilal Salem bin Tarraf Al Mansoori.

Over 5,000 Birds Compete in the Fazza Championship for Falconry (Al Talwah)



With the Sheikhs' category heats held on 15 January 2026, the curtain fell on the main Fazza Championship for Falconry (Al Talwah), organised under the umbrella of the Fazaa Championships Management at the Hamdan bin Mohammed Heritage Centre and held at the Centre's headquarters in the Lahbab area of Dubai. The event drew broad participation from within the UAE and abroad, with more than 5,000 birds competing and a total prize pool exceeding AED 17 million. The conclusion of the Sheikhs' category competition witnessed high levels of competitiveness, with leading teams participating and elite falcons soaring through the championship skies in pursuit of the best recorded times, in one of the most prominent events in the sport of falconry.

In the Pure Gyr category, Team Al Nayyef claimed first place in the Ramz Farkh heat, while the remaining places were taken by teams F3 and F3S. Team Al Nayyef also maintained a strong presence in the Qarmousha Farkh and Jernas heats, alongside the strong performances of teams M7 and F3S across several other heats.

In the Gyr Taba heats, Team F3S secured first and second place in the Ramz Farkh heat, while Team Al Nayyef claimed the Gyr Taba Jernas title with the competitors' times closely matched.

At the conclusion of the competitions, the Executive Vice President of the Hamdan bin Mohammed Heritage Centre, Rashed bin Markhan, accompanied by the Chairman of the Championship Organising Committee, Dhaithan bin Suwaidan, presented awards to the first-place winners.

Falconry Graces the Open Master Games 2026

The Open Masters Games Abu Dhabi 2026, one of the world's leading sporting events, concluded with great success and distinguished organization. Held across Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, and Al Dhafra with broad participation from athletes and community members aged 30 and above, with total participants exceeding 25,000 individuals from 100 countries.

The Italian city of Como received the Games flag from Abu Dhabi and is set to host the global event in 2027, following the first-ever edition to be held in the Middle East, which featured 38 different sports.

The closing ceremony of the Open Masters Games Abu Dhabi 2026 was held on Hudayriyat Island, in the presence of Aref Al Awani, Secretary-General of the Abu Dhabi Sports Council. The ceremony featured a programme of artistic and musical performances that affirmed the message which participants had endeavoured to convey and embed throughout the championship's competitions.



The Abu Dhabi Falconers Club, in cooperation with the Organising Committee, held The Falconry Competition at the Open Masters Games over two days at its headquarters in Al Falah area.

The programme also featured competitions for youth in the Pure Gyr category and the Gyr Qarmousha category for juvenile (Farkh) and adult (Jernas) falcons, as well as women's competitions covering all Gyr categories, including juvenile (Farkh) and adult (Jernas) falcons.

The championship also included youth competitions in the Gyr Shaheen, and Gyr Taba, Farkh and Jarnas categories, in addition to events specifically designated for senior citizens across all falcon categories, Gyr Farkh and Jarnas.

Sultan Al Mahmoud, Managing Director of the Abu Dhabi Falconers Club, stated that traditional sports constitute a fundamental pillar of the Open Masters Games Abu Dhabi 2026 program, carrying within them a message of cultural dialogue and mutual understanding among peoples, while reinforcing the State's efforts, backed by its wise leadership , to preserve its heritage, instill its values in the hearts of future generations, and encourage its practice.

The Hunt Begins"" A New Heritage Programme on the Abu Dhabi Media Network



In January 2026, the Abu Dhabi Media Network launched its new heritage programme " The Hunt Begins", broadcast every Wednesday evening on the Emirates, Baynounah, and Yas channels. The programme targets Emirati and Arab enthusiasts of heritage, nature, and falconry, as part of a commitment to delivering distinctive content that reinforces national identity, contributes to the revival of folk heritage through an innovative media approach, keeps pace with audience aspirations, and enriches the local media landscape.

Episodes of "The Hunt Begins" are available to audiences on the ADMN platform via the StarzPlay application, offering smooth and seamless viewing within an advanced technological framework that meets the highest international digital broadcasting standards.

The programme takes audiences on a captivating heritage, cultural, and competitive journey into the world of falconry, highlighting one of the most deeply rooted pillars of the Emirati heritage through a contemporary visual style that preserves the spirit of authenticity and reinforces the connection to national identity.

The programme was presented as a distinctive television initiative, featuring unique competitions and experiences, with the participation of five of the UAE's most prominent falconers , each possessing their own approach and a unique bond with their falcon. The challenges ranged across skill, knowledge, and the human interaction with the bird, all set against a heritage atmosphere brimming with excitement.

Participating Emirati falconers were: Saif Salem Al Mansoori, Mohammed bin Youlah Al Qemzi, Hamad bin Buta Al Ameri, Saif Mohammed Al Meqbali, and Mohammed Atiq Al Qubaisi , who proudly embodied the spirit of Emirati heritage and competed across a series of challenges that showcased the art of falconry and the values of patience, discipline, and harmony between the falconer and his bird.

The episodes of " The Hunt Begins" featured traditional Majlis gatherings, the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition, falcon breeding farms and training grounds, falconry hunting expeditions in the Al Marzoum and Tilal reserves, as well as the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital, the Al Ain International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition, and the Al Maqeed (moulting grounds) , presenting a comprehensive picture of the falconer's journey from the selection, rearing, and training of the bird to engaging in falcon release and hunting expeditions in open environments.

Each episode comprised three segments: the first opened with a visual introduction incorporating a line of traditional poetry about falcons, quick introductory scenes, and brief conversational interviews with the falconers during their travels and training. The second segment focused on an informational section highlighting each episode's theme, including short interviews with the falconers and quick introductory scenes. The third segment of each episode followed the bird's training phase, accompanied by brief interviews with the falconers and supporting footage from activities and filming locations.

Episode themes ranged from selecting and raising the bird to its creance training, recalling , and releasing, featuring trials conducted to assess the bird's interaction and responsiveness to commands , before progressing to the pre-hunt preparation stage and readiness, followed by falconry expeditions and releasing experiences in the reserves, culminating in the final episode dedicated to Al Maqeed, during which the falconers shared their experiences, lessons learned, and the extent to which their relationship with their birds had evolved throughout the journey.

The Liwa Project. An Emirati Model Advancing Houbara Sustainability and Supporting the Heritage of Falconry

In the Liwa desert of the Al Dhafra Region, a new national project has emerged that reflects the UAE's commitment to the conservation of the houbara bustard, one of the most vital components of the traditional falconry environment and a fundamental pillar in sustaining this distinguished cultural heritage.

The project, led by Emirati falconer Ahmed bin Hayay Al Mansoori, represents an advanced model combining traditional expertise with modern technologies in the breeding of the houbara and the conservation of wildlife in the desert environment. The focus on the houbara stems from its pivotal role in the sport of falconry, as this bird has been closely associated with the traditional practices of falconers in the region for centuries, making its conservation both an environmental and cultural imperative.

In this context, the project has succeeded in producing approximately 240 birds within a single year, with future plans to increase production capacity to approximately 5,000 birds over the next five years, thereby supporting wild release programmes and enhancing ecological balance.



The project has attracted official interest, with His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Ruler's Representative in the Al Dhafra Region and Chairman of the Emirates Falconers' Club, visiting the site and reviewing the breeding programmes and expansion plans. His Highness affirmed the importance of such initiatives in supporting the State's efforts to protect the environment, preserve cultural heritage, and promote the principles of sustainability for future generations.

The project is not limited to houbara breeding; it also encompasses hare breeding programmes within dedicated habitats aimed at supporting natural reserves and strengthening the food chain within desert ecosystems , thereby contributing to the achievement of a comprehensive ecological balance. This approach reflects a deep understanding of the nature of the desert environment, where conservation efforts require addressing ecosystem components in a holistic and interconnected manner.

The Liwa Project represents an extension of the UAE's approach to reconciling heritage preservation with the adoption of modern scientific methodologies, as falconry has today become a global model for sustainable practice that supports the protection of biodiversity whilst affirming at the same time the continuity of this cultural legacy for future generations.



Abu Dhabi Environment Agency Develops Monitoring Tools to Enhance Natural Resource Sustainability

The Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD) announced the expansion of its Desert Vegetation Classification Project to include new areas in the Emirate during 2026, in a step that reflects its commitment to enhancing the sustainability of natural resources and developing environmental monitoring tools through the latest technologies.

The project had previously encompassed photographic documentation of wildlife distribution areas and analysis of the relationship between these species and vegetation cover, which contributed to a deepened scientific understanding of the nature of desert ecosystems and their dynamics.

The project relies on employing artificial intelligence technologies and drones to analyse and classify vegetation cover with high accuracy, by integrating spectral signatures with advanced scientific indicators. This enables tracking changes in natural habitats and understanding the responses of ecosystem to factors such as grazing and climate change, providing accurate data that contributes to supporting environmental planning and decision-making.

The EAD clarified that the new expansion is a continuation of its efforts to monitor vegetation cover over the long-term, thereby assisting in evaluating the impacts of climate change and pressures arising from human activities, including overgrazing, the use of vehicles in wilderness areas, and their resulting impact on habitat sustainability.

In a related context, this project represents an extension of the EAD's approach to employing advanced technologies in environmental work. A number of initiatives have previously been implemented relying on artificial intelligence and drones in the fields of soil monitoring, environmental change surveillance, and natural habitat rehabilitation, thereby contributing to the establishment of an accurate and comprehensive database on the components of the local environment and paving the way for the application of more advanced solutions in vegetation cover analysis and the enhancement of environmental monitoring efficiency.

The EAD affirmed that the adoption of modern technologies has contributed significantly to raising the efficiency of field work, enabling access to areas that are difficult to cover using traditional means while reducing the environmental impact resulting from survey operations. This approach has further contributed to a 90% reduction in operational and administrative costs and a significant reduction in the time required to complete studies in comparison with traditional methods.

Through artificial intelligence and drone technologies, the specialised teams of the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi were able to cover extensive areas of wildlife habitats, collecting and analysing accurate data on the biological indicators of a number of local plant species, thereby enabling the assessment of the vegetation health and the identification of the prominent factors affecting it, whether natural or related to human activities.





هـيـئـة الـبـيـئـة - أبـوظـبـي
Environment Agency - ABU DHABI

Seasonal Falconry Permit Service



This service allows falcon owners to enjoy houbara hunting for one season in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi

In accordance with the applicable requirements and regulatory controls.

www.ead.gov.ae

Special Feature

When Algorithms Began Watching the Sky!



Falconry, A Living Cultural Heritage Enters the Age of Artificial Intelligence

In ages past, the falconer looked to the sky as an open book filled with signs and meanings. He read the direction of the wind, the shifting of light, the movement of birds, and the silence of the open desert, to know when migration would begin, where quarries would move, and how the falconry season would change.

For centuries, falconry was never merely a means of hunting. It was a form of deep knowledge of nature. Knowledge built through patience, observation, and experience, passed from one generation to the next as part of the bond between man and the environment in which he lived.

But the world has changed.

Today, the sky is no longer read by the eye alone.

There are satellites tracking the flight paths of birds across continents, precision instruments transmitting thousands of data points from falcons in flight, and algorithms capable of analysing migration, storms, and climate change in ways that surpass human capacity itself.

Artificial intelligence has entered the world of birds, and technology has begun to move into a domain that for centuries belonged exclusively to direct human expertise.

In research laboratories around the world, intelligent systems are now analysing bird sounds through the night, identifying species through their calls during flight, and tracking their movements via radar and satellite.

And yet, the falconer still stands on the falconry ground, watching the sky in the same way his forebears did for hundreds of years. This is precisely where the new questions begin.

How can an ancient human tradition like falconry intersect with one of the most advanced technologies of our time?

Can algorithms understand nature in the way the falconer has understood it through long experience?

Will man remain at the heart of the relationship with birds and nature, or will data become the sole new language for understanding the world?

Migratory birds today are no longer merely creatures crossing the sky. They have become living indicators of climate change, biodiversity loss, and the disruption of ecosystems.

From this, the tracking of falcons and migration is no longer a matter of heritage interest, it has become part of modern environmental science, and part of attempts to understand the future of nature itself.

This is why the traditional expertise that falconers have carried throughout history is acquiring new value in a world that depends increasingly on data and scientific monitoring.

What was once known through observation and experience is today measured by satellites, digital mapping, and predictive modelling.

Yet technology, however precise, cannot reduce the human relationship with nature to equations.

Artificial intelligence can analyse millions of data points, but it does not know what it means for a falconer to wait an entire season just to watch the first migrating bird appear on the horizon. Nor can it understand that complex relationship which made falconry, throughout history, far more than a practice tied to hunting.

Nevertheless, as environmental and technological transformations accelerate across the world, falconry may become one of the clearest examples of humanity's capacity to adapt to the future, without losing its soul.

Before Satellites. How Did the Falconer Understand Nature?

The Arab falconer needed no digital maps or weather apps to know that the migration season was approaching.

When the sky was the guide!

At its core, falconry was never an isolated practice, detached from the environment. It was a form of accumulated natural knowledge, built upon a precise understanding of seasons, habitats, and the movement of living creatures.

The falconer knew that a shift in the winds could affect the timing of migration, that delayed rains would alter the movement of quarry, and that the disappearance of certain birds might signal a broader transformation within the environment itself.

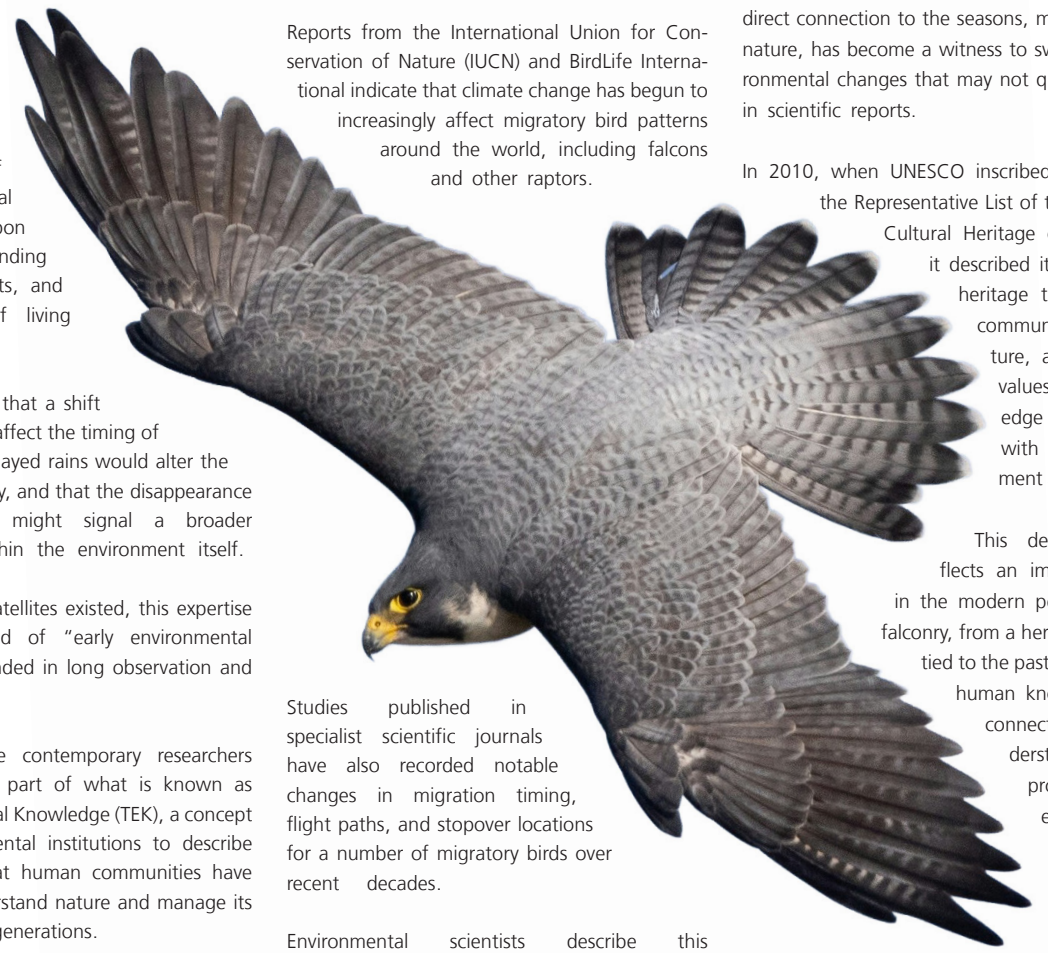
In an age before satellites existed, this expertise represented a kind of "early environmental monitoring", grounded in long observation and direct experience.

This is why some contemporary researchers regard falconry as part of what is known as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), a concept used by environmental institutions to describe the knowledge that human communities have developed to understand nature and manage its resources across generations.

In the thirteenth century, Emperor Frederick II described falconry as a science in its own right, one that unites the understanding of birds, animal behaviour, and environmental observation, in his famous book: The Art of Falconry (De Arte Venandi cum Avibus).

But what was once viewed as traditional expertise is now receiving growing attention within modern environmental science. Birds of prey are considered among the most sensitive creatures to climate change and the loss of natural habitats, as they sit at the top of the food chain, meaning that any environmental disruption is quickly reflected in their migration, breeding patterns, and geographical distribution.

Reports from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and BirdLife International indicate that climate change has begun to increasingly affect migratory bird patterns around the world, including falcons and other raptors.



Studies published in specialist scientific journals have also recorded notable changes in migration timing, flight paths, and stopover locations for a number of migratory birds over recent decades.

Environmental scientists describe this phenomenon as "phenological mismatch", whereby birds arrive at breeding grounds after the timing of food availability has already shifted due to rising temperatures and disrupted seasons, threatening the breeding and survival rates of several migratory species.

The Role of Falconry Communities

Here, falconry acquires a new dimension that goes beyond its status as a cultural heritage or traditional sport. The falconer, by virtue of his direct connection to the seasons, migration, and nature, has become a witness to sweeping environmental changes that may not quickly surface in scientific reports.

In 2010, when UNESCO inscribed falconry on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, it described it as "a social heritage that connects communities to nature, and transmits values and knowledge associated with the environment and wildlife."

This description reflects an important shift in the modern perspective on falconry, from a heritage practice tied to the past, to a form of human knowledge also connected to understanding and protecting the environment.

Today, with the advent of satellites, tracking technologies, data analysis, and artificial intelligence in the world of migratory birds, ancient knowledge is beginning to converge with unprecedented scientific tools.

From here, the new story of falconry in the age of technology begins.



From the Desert to the Satellites

How Has Technology Changed Our Understanding of Falcon Migration?

For thousands of years, the migration of birds was, to the falconer, part of the knowledge acquired through observation and experience. He knew the seasons of their passage, anticipated their routes, and the timing of their arrival.

But no one knew with any precision what happened after the birds disappeared beyond the horizon.

Where did they go? How great were the distances they covered? How did they cross deserts, seas, and storms? And what happened to their routes when the climate changed or natural habitats disappeared?

These questions remained for centuries beyond the capacity of human observation.
Until satellites opened a new window onto the world of migration.

When Birds Became Living Maps

The 1990s witnessed a major turning point in the study of migratory birds, with the development of space-based tracking devices and low-weight GPS technologies that could be fitted to birds of prey without affecting their ability to fly.

For the first time, scientists were able to monitor the movement of falcons moment by moment, across continents, oceans, and political borders.

Small tracking devices began transmitting precise data on: geographical position, altitude, speed, flight direction, temperature, and stopover timing during the journey.

Thus, migration transformed from a phenomenon described through observation into a phenomenon read through data.

With the dawn of the new millennium, international tracking projects expanded enormously, involving universities, research centres, and environmental organisations, among them: BirdLife International, Movebank, The Peregrine Fund, and the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center.

These projects enabled the collection of millions of data points on the movement of migratory birds, fundamentally changing the scientists' understanding of migratory birds.

What Did the Satellites Reveal?

Modern tracking data has shown that some migratory falcon species cover more than 10,000 kilometres annually between Central Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, and Africa.

But the greater surprise lay not in the distances alone, but in the complexity of the decisions birds make during flight.

Published scientific studies have shown that birds of prey respond continuously to changes in: winds, storms, temperatures, food availability, and even human disturbances along migration routes.

This means that migration is not a fixed instinctive movement, as was once believed, but a dynamic process of adaptation to a constantly changing environment







Big Data Enters the World of Birds

This scientific development created a new challenge. Each tracking device can transmit hundreds or thousands of coordinates during a single journey, meaning scientists found themselves facing enormous daily flows of environmental data.

Here, environmental science began to enter the age of "Big Data." The problem was no longer in gathering information, but in the capacity to analyse it and understand the complex patterns within it.

This is why artificial intelligence tools and machine learning began gradually entering the study of migration and birds of prey.

Researchers began using algorithms to analyse: flight patterns, the impact of climate change, environmental risks, and shifts in natural habitats.

With time, technology was no longer merely a means of monitoring birds, it had become a tool for prediction as well.



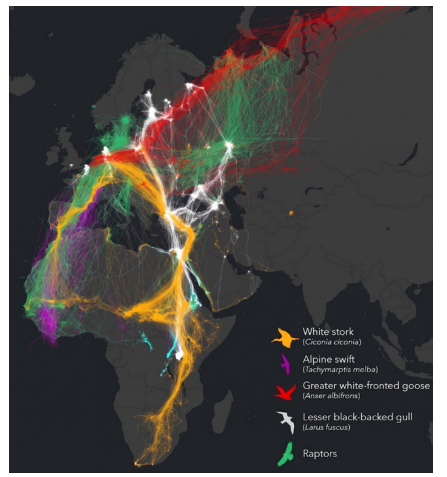
From Monitoring Bird Migration to Predicting the Future

Today, researchers using computational models can analyse millions of data points relating to: climate, vegetation cover, storms, humidity, and flight routes, to build forecasts about:

Changes in future migration routes, regions threatened by biodiversity loss, the impact of rising temperatures on raptors, and the likelihood of certain natural habitats disappearing.

Some Environmental organisations now use artificial intelligence to identify "critical hotspots" requiring urgent intervention due to desertification, loss of vegetation cover, declining wetlands, or urban pressures.

Environmental scientists describe this capability as resembling "an early warning system for nature", one that helps detect environmental shifts before their effects worsen.



Falconry in the Age of Digital Mapping

This scientific transformation has also been reflected in the world of modern falconry. The contemporary falconer no longer relies solely on traditional expertise, but increasingly engages with digital maps, weather applications, tracking devices, and environmental monitoring platforms.

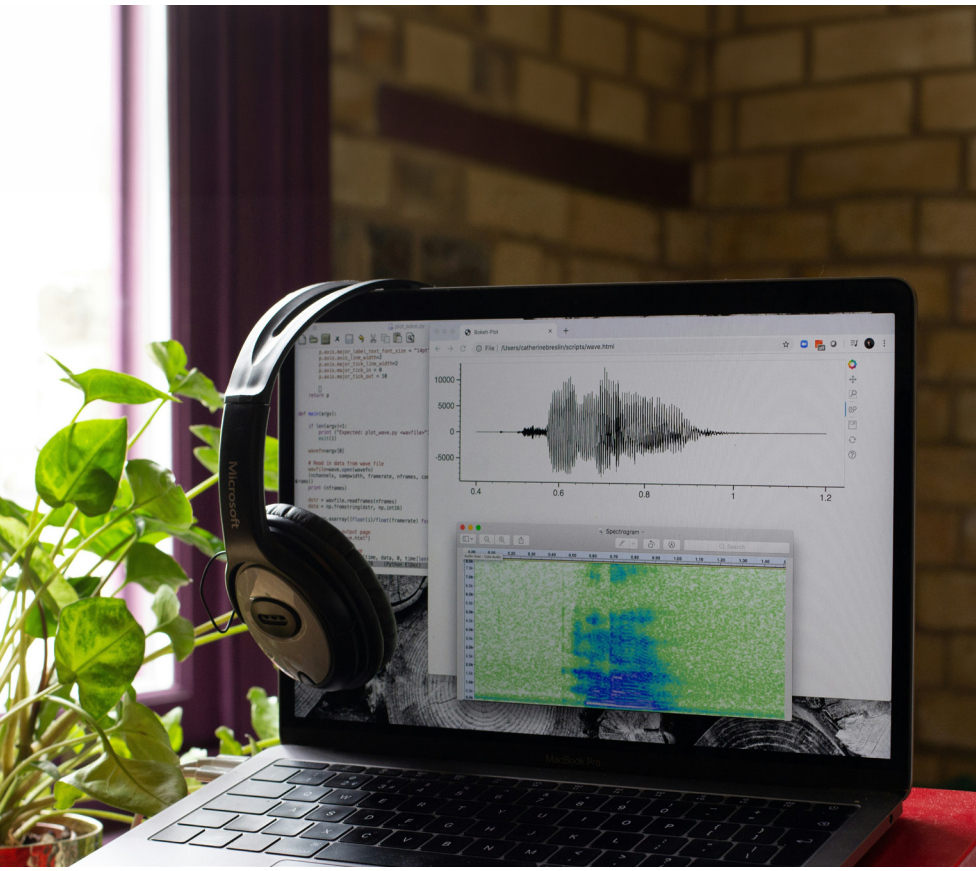
Specialist institutions have also begun using data to support: falcon conservation, the regulation of hunting seasons, migration monitoring, and the study of climate impacts on birds and quarry.

Thus, falconry has entered a new phase in which heritage and technology meet in an unprecedented way.

But the greatest transformation was not in the satellites alone; it was in the moment when the algorithms themselves began trying to understand birds.

And so, artificial intelligence entered the sky.





When Algorithms Began to "Hear" Birds

Artificial Intelligence Takes Flight

Artificial intelligence is no longer a concept distant from the natural world. Over recent years, algorithms have begun to enter a space that for centuries was built on human observation and direct field expertise.

In the world of migratory birds, the sky is no longer monitored by the eye alone, but also through: satellites, radar, audio recordings, neural networks, and big data analysis.

And so, a new phase has begun, in which technology attempts to understand nature through the language of numbers and algorithms.

Why Has Artificial Intelligence Become Necessary

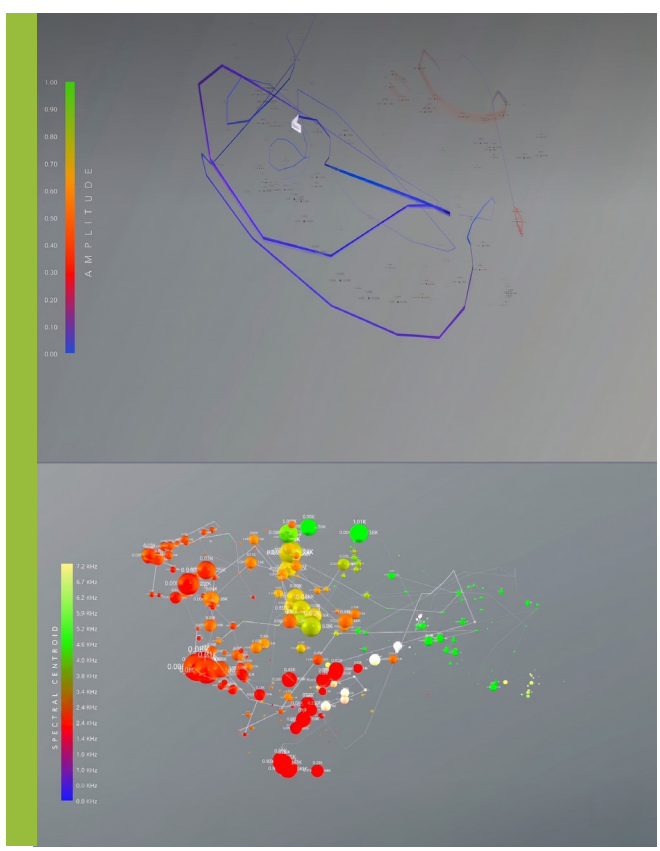
Over the past two decades, the volume of environmental data has multiplied at an unprecedented rate.

Every bird fitted with a tracking device can transmit thousands of coordinates over a single migration season, while satellites and climate monitoring stations produce enormous quantities of information relating to: temperatures, winds, humidity, vegetation cover, storms, and urban expansion.

With this vast explosion in data, manual analysis is no longer sufficient.

Researcher Andrew Farnsworth from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology put it plainly: "It has become increasingly easy to collect a massive amount of acoustic data, but increasingly difficult to analyse even some of it."

This is precisely where artificial intelligence began to transform from a technical tool into a scientific necessity.



Bioacoustics. Algorithms Listen to the Sky

Among the most compelling developments in this field is what is known as bioacoustics, a science that studies the sounds of living creatures to understand their environmental behaviour, movements, and migration patterns.

For many years, ornithologists faced a complex problem: recording bird calls was relatively straightforward, but analysing thousands of hours of recordings required enormous time and painstaking human effort.

With the advancement of artificial intelligence, algorithms began to learn how to listen to different bird species and identify many of them even in complex natural environments filled with background noise.

In the United States, researchers from New York University, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and the Central School of Engineering in Nantes, France (École Centrale de Nantes) developed a project known as BirdVoxDetect, a system that uses neural networks to analyse and classify the nocturnal flight calls of migratory birds by species.

The significance lies in the fact that most migratory birds move at night, at a time when traditional visual monitoring is difficult.



After training this system on thousands of hours of recordings, the project succeeded in detecting more than

233,000 flight calls across approximately 7,000 hours of audio recordings.

In a striking description of the concept, researcher Juan Pablo Bello said: "All we want to replicate using computers is Andrew", a reference to the attempt to train algorithms to listen to birds in the same way human experts do.

From "Machine Learning" to the "Internet of Animals"

Among the most notable global projects:

BirdNET — a system developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology that uses machine learning technologies to identify birds through their sounds alone. The system contains an audio database encompassing thousands of species, making it an important tool for researchers and birdwatchers around the world.

The BirdCast project uses radar data, weather maps, and artificial intelligence technologies to build near-real-time maps of migratory bird movement across the United States. The project relies on radar data covering 48 American states, enabling daily tracking and analysis of migration waves.



And so, algorithms are no longer satisfied with analysing images and maps; they have begun to "hear" birds as well.

"The Internet of Animals"

Among the most ambitious scientific projects is the ICARUS Initiative, an international project aimed at tracking the movement of living creatures from space, using small transmitters linked to satellites and the International Space Station.

German researcher Martin Wikelski described the concept as an attempt to build an "Internet of Animals", one that allows an understanding of the relationship between the movement of living creatures and environmental and climatic changes at the planetary level.

As tracking devices have evolved, it has become possible to attach devices weighing less than one gram to small birds, enabling the collection of unprecedented data on: migration routes, energy consumption, weather impacts, and fine-grained movement patterns.

And so,migratory birds have transformed into a living network, continuously monitoring the state of the planet.

Artificial Intelligence and the Protection of Endangered Species

The use of artificial intelligence is not limited to migratory birds alone; it extends to the protection of endangered species on a global scale.

Environmental organisations now use AI-powered platforms to analyse millions of wildlife images and audio recordings. One such platform has succeeded in: Processing more than 12.5 million images and detecting more than 4 million animals from 68 different species, including species threatened with extinction.



Cal Chalmers, a researcher at Conservation AI, a specialist organisation in deploying artificial intelligence for environmental protection, says: "Without AI, we will never be able to achieve the United Nations' targets for protecting endangered species."

But researchers also emphasise that technology is not a substitute for humans. Environmental experts note that the data from which algorithms learn still depends fundamentally on human observation, field work, and accumulated environmental expertise.

From Studying Birds to Aviation Safety

AI applications in the world of birds are no longer confined to scientific research alone; they have also become part of aviation safety systems.

In the United States, advanced systems such as BAM and AHAS are used to monitor bird movement and analyse the risks of bird strikes with aircraft.

These systems rely on the integration of radar, geographic information systems (GIS), historical data, and predictive models, to provide real-time maps that help avoid hazard zones.

Aviation experts estimate that the United States Air Force spends approximately $100 million annually repairing damage resulting from bird strikes, according to biologist Adam Kohler, who oversees the bird dispersal programme at Altus Air Force Base.



The Paradox: When Falcons Outperformed Technology

Despite all this technological advancement, falcons themselves are still used at some airports as the most effective means of dispersing birds from flight paths.

In France, specialist programmes were established to train falcons to operate inside airports, after trials demonstrated a notable reduction in bird strike incidents.

The United States Air Force has also used falcons since the 1970s to protect air bases, while certain NATO bases employ professional falconers for this purpose.

Some statistics indicate that 65% of take-off and landing incidents are bird-related.

In a striking paradox, falcons, historically associated with hunting and heritage, appear to be part of future solutions that rely on the integration of nature and technology.



Can Algorithms Fully Understand Nature?

Despite the enormous potential of artificial intelligence, researchers affirm that technology still needs humans. Algorithms do not operate in a vacuum; they depend fundamentally on data collected by humans, field observations, and accumulated environmental expertise.

Moreover, artificial intelligence, however precise, cannot understand the cultural and human context of the relationship between man and nature. For this reason, many researchers believe that the future of environmental sciences will not be built on replacing humans with technology, but on integrating the two.

In the world of falconry in particular, this idea seems clearer than anywhere else. For while algorithms learn how to watch the sky, the falconer still holds something that technology cannot fully replicate: human expertise.



Can Artificial Intelligence Be Wrong?

Nature in the Face of Fabricated Data!

The more artificial intelligence technologies advance, the greater their capacity to see and analyse the world in ways that appear remarkable.

Algorithms today can identify birds from their sounds, analyse millions of environmental images, and track migration via satellites and radar.

But within this rapid development, scientists are raising a fundamental question:
What happens when intelligent systems begin to analyse data that is not real?

The Problem Is Not in the Intelligence. But in the Data



Artificial intelligence in environmental sciences operates on a simple principle: The more accurate the data, the more reliable the results.

For this reason, algorithms rely on millions of images, audio recordings, coordinates, and field observations, to learn and understand wildlife patterns.

But with the widespread proliferation of AI-generated images and footage, a new problem has emerged that threatens what researchers call "data integrity", that is, the quality of the information from which intelligent systems learn.

When Artificial Intelligence Invented a Bird That Does Not Exist

In one case that sparked wide debate among bird enthusiasts, an image spread across social media of a strange bird bearing vivid colours and unfamiliar features, under the name "Santa Cardinal."

To many, the image appeared entirely real. But the problem was that this bird did not exist in nature at all. It was an image generated entirely by artificial intelligence.

Although some regarded it as merely an amusing image, researchers warned of a far more serious problem: What if fabricated images began to infiltrate genuine environmental databases?

Here, algorithms might begin to learn incorrect information about species, colours, distribution patterns, and even the ecological behaviour of living creatures. Over time, this could affect the scientific studies themselves.



Has Abundance Become a Problem?

The paradox is that the same technology that facilitated data collection has also created an enormous flood of information that is difficult to verify in its entirety.

Today, automated cameras, environmental microphones, satellites, and bird monitoring applications produce vast quantities of data around the clock.

But not everything collected is equally reliable. Researchers therefore affirm that the real challenge is no longer merely in gathering information, but in filtering it, verifying it, and understanding its proper environmental context.

Algorithms Do Not Understand the World as Humans Do

Despite the artificial intelligence's capacity to detect patterns at astonishing speed, it remains unable to understand many meanings that appear self-evident to humans.

An algorithm may identify a bird's call, but it does not understand:

- Why the bird suddenly changed its behaviour.
- How the surrounding environment influences its actions.
- Or whether there are exceptional circumstances that do not appear within the data.

Intelligent systems are also unable to understand the cultural and human dimension of the relationship between humans and nature. For this reason, many environmental scientists affirm that artificial intelligence cannot be a substitute for: Field expertise, human observation, and knowledge accumulated over time.



A Partnership. Not a Replacement

In modern bird monitoring projects, human expertise remains the foundation from which algorithms learn.

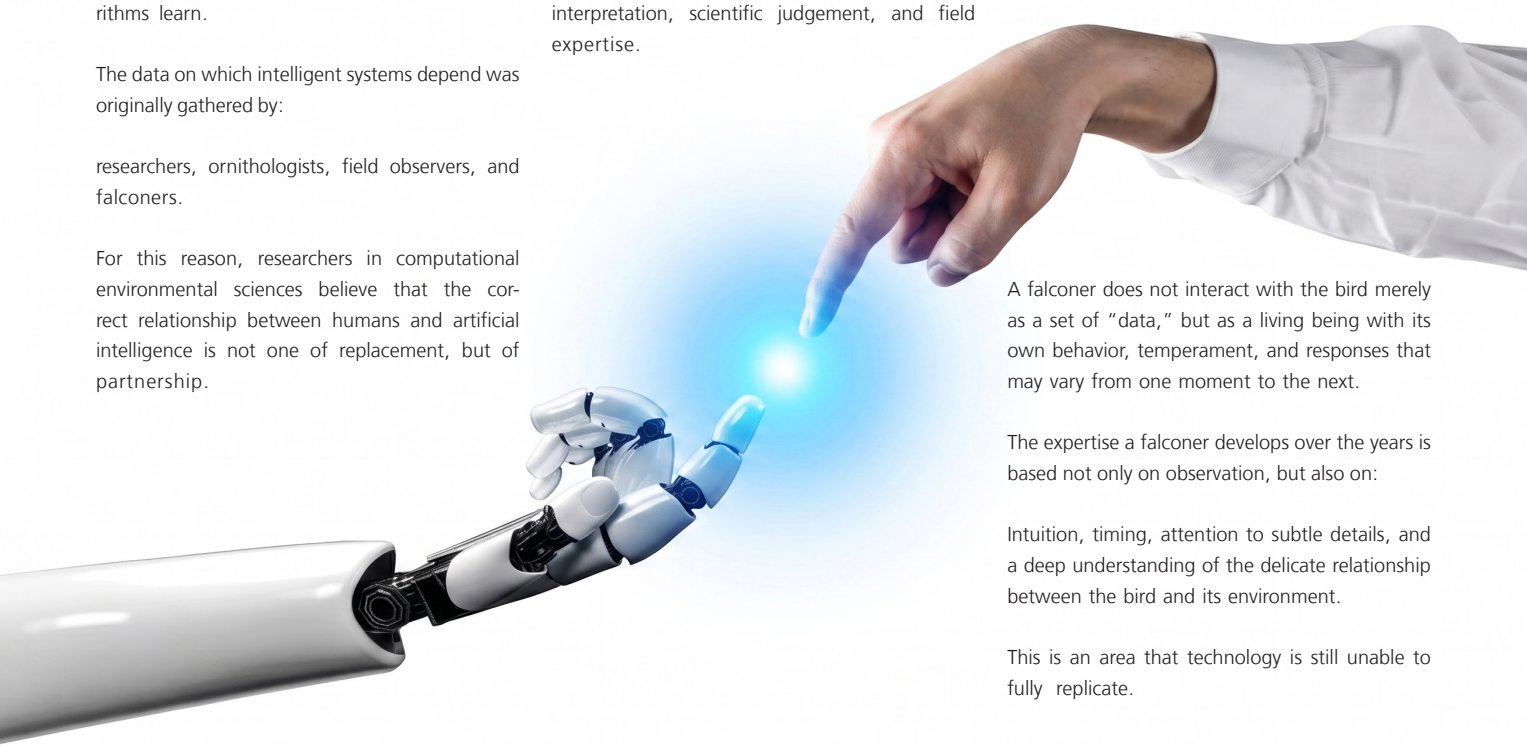
The data on which intelligent systems depend was originally gathered by:

researchers, ornithologists, field observers, and falconers.

For this reason, researchers in computational environmental sciences believe that the correct relationship between humans and artificial intelligence is not one of replacement, but of partnership.

Algorithms can process millions of data points at speed, but they will always require human interpretation, scientific judgement, and field expertise.

In the world of falconry, this truth becomes even more apparent.



A falconer does not interact with the bird merely as a set of "data," but as a living being with its own behavior, temperament, and responses that may vary from one moment to the next.

The expertise a falconer develops over the years is based not only on observation, but also on:

Intuition, timing, attention to subtle details, and a deep understanding of the delicate relationship between the bird and its environment.

This is an area that technology is still unable to fully replicate.

Falconry and the Expertise That Cannot Be Programmed

In the world of falconry, this truth appears more clearly than anywhere else.

The falconer does not engage with the bird merely as "data", but as a living creature with behaviour, temperament, and responses that differ from one moment to the next.

The expertise the falconer acquires over the years is built not only on observation, but also on instinct, timing, reading subtle details, and understanding the delicate relationship between bird and environment.

And this remains a space that technology is still unable to fully replicate.

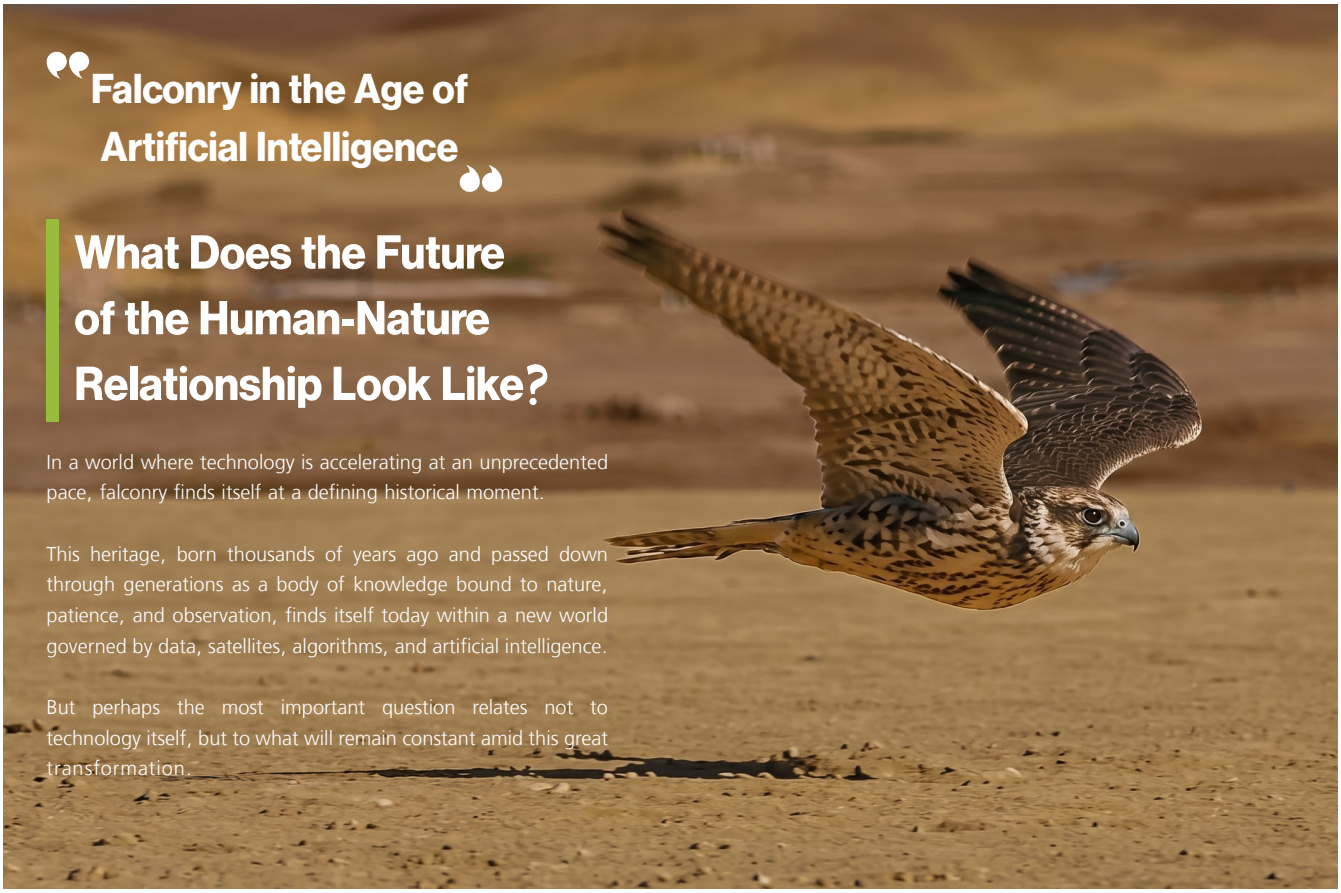


Technology Is Not Infallible!

The more the world comes to depend on artificial intelligence, the greater the need to be reminded of a fundamental truth: Technology is not immune to error. Algorithms can be wrong, and data can be incomplete or misleading; computational models remain, at their core, attempts to understand the natural world which is far more complex than any digital system.

For this reason, the future of nature conservation appears to rest not on replacing humans with technology, but on finding a new equilibrium between human knowledge, traditional expertise, and modern intelligent tools.

And it is precisely in this balance that the true value of falconry in the age of artificial intelligence may lie.



"Falconry in the Age of Artificial Intelligence"

What Does the Future of the Human-Nature Relationship Look Like?

In a world where technology is accelerating at an unprecedented pace, falconry finds itself at a defining historical moment.

This heritage, born thousands of years ago and passed down through generations as a body of knowledge bound to nature, patience, and observation, finds itself today within a new world governed by data, satellites, algorithms, and artificial intelligence.

But perhaps the most important question relates not to technology itself, but to what will remain constant amid this great transformation.

From Hunting to Environmental Knowledge

Throughout its history, falconry has changed many times.

What began as a means of sustenance and hunting transformed, with time, into a cultural heritage and then into a space for conserving birds of prey, supporting sustainability, and protecting ecological balance.

Today, falconry enters a new phase that transcends the concept of a traditional hobby.

With the rising global concern over climate change and biodiversity, migratory birds have become part of modern environmental science, and migration itself has become a source for understanding the transformations affecting the planet.

In this context, falconry has begun to acquire a new meaning, not merely as a heritage practice tied to the past, but also as a human knowledge bound to the future of nature.

A New Generation of Falconers

The contemporary falconer lives today in a world entirely different from that known to his forebears.

He uses weather applications, tracking devices, digital maps, and environmental monitoring platforms.

Access to climate information and migration routes is now available at the touch of a button, where once it depended entirely on direct observation and experience.

Yet despite this transformation, the essence of falconry remains built upon the same idea: understanding and respecting nature.

Technology, therefore, has not eliminated the falconer's role; it has changed the tools he uses.

Will Technology Redefine the Concept of Falconry?

With the advancement of artificial intelligence, new questions have begun to emerge within both the environmental and heritage worlds alike.

Can algorithms become more capable than humans at understanding migration?

Will bird monitoring become, in the future, an entirely digital process?

And what will happen to traditional expertise when data becomes accessible to all?

For now, technology appears to be moving toward expanding knowledge, not replacing it. Algorithms can:

- Analyse data.
- Detect patterns.
- Generate forecasts.
- And identify environmental risks at extraordinary speed.

But they cannot inherit the human experience itself.

Because the relationship between the falconer and his bird is built not only on information, but also on:

- Patience.
- Long-term observation.
- Unwritten understanding.
- And the human connection with nature.

Heritage Does Not Live in Museums Alone

One of the greatest paradoxes of the technological age is that much traditional knowledge has begun to reclaim its value.

After long decades in which scientific progress was seen as a substitute for traditional expertise, researchers have returned to the knowledge held by communities connected to nature, accumulated wisdom relating to: seasons, migration, climate, and wildlife.

For this reason, falconry is no longer presented today merely as a heritage tied to the past and displayed in museums, but as part of what may be called "humanity's environmental memory", one still capable of contributing to the understanding of nature even in the age of artificial intelligence.

From the Desert to Space

Perhaps the uniqueness of this moment lies in the fact that falconry now stands at a rare point where two seemingly distant worlds converge:

- The world of the open desert and the hawking ground.
- And the world of cutting-edge technology.

For while the falconer watches the sky with his eyes, it is simultaneously watched by satellites, radars, algorithms, and artificial intelligence networks.

But the ultimate goal remains one and the same: to understand nature and endeavour to preserve its balance.



The Future: Human Expertise Remains Essential

The future of falconry does not appear to be built on a conflict between humans and technology, but on a new partnership between them.

Artificial intelligence grants scientists an unprecedented capacity to:

- Analyse environmental data.
- Predict risks.
- Protect natural habitats.
- And monitor migratory birds on a global scale.

In return, human expertise remains essential for understanding what data alone cannot fully explain.
For this reason, the most balanced models of the future may well be those that bring together:

- Traditional knowledge.
- Modern science.
- And intelligent technology.

The Falconer Will Never Be a Robot

And perhaps here, precisely, lies the most important idea in this entire story.

Artificial intelligence can learn flight patterns, analyse satellite imagery, and track migration across continents.

But it cannot feel what the falconer feels when he watches the first bird appear on the horizon at the start of the season.

Nor can it understand that ancient relationship between humans and nature which has kept falconry alive through all these centuries.

For this reason, however far technology advances, there will always remain at the heart of falconry something that cannot be reduced to data or algorithms:
Human expertise.

Between the desert and the satellites, between heritage and artificial intelligence, falconry today seems to tell a story far larger than that of an ancient pastime.

It is the story of the changing relationship between humans and nature in the age to come.



From the Eye of a Falconer to the Algorithm

In the Past	Today
Watching the sky with the naked eye	Satellite tracking
Knowing the seasons through experience	Climate data analysis
Tracking migration through observation	Real-time digital mapping
Reading wind and clouds	Predictive modelling
Inherited expertise	Artificial intelligence

When Artificial Intelligence Entered the World of Sustainable Hunting



As the presence of artificial intelligence in the fields of environment and wildlife grows, certain institutions engaged in sustainable hunting in Europe have begun developing digital tools that rely on algorithms and image analysis to study wild birds and gather precise scientific data about them.

In France, the National Federation of French Hunters (FNC) announced the launch of a new AI-powered feature within its digital application "ChassAdapt", aimed at automatically analysing images of certain waterfowl species. This step demonstrates how AI technologies have begun to gradually enter the world of bird monitoring and wildlife management.

According to a press release issued by the Federation, the new technology is now capable of automatically identifying the sex and age of birds through the analysis of images captured via smartphones, across four species of waterfowl and ten other bird species.

The user, after logging the bird in the application, takes a photograph, whereupon the AI system analyses the image and sends the result moments later via an in-app notification.

From Images to Environmental Data

The objective of this technology extends beyond simply facilitating the logging of prey, it is also linked to the collection of scientific data that helps researchers understand the dynamics of wild bird populations with greater precision.

According to the French Hunters' Federation, knowing the ratios of males to females, as well as the ratio of juvenile birds to adults, is an important indicator for understanding the demographic status of wild species and monitoring their development across different seasons.

This data acquires particular significance in the case of migratory birds that breed great distances from Europe, where field information helps build a clearer picture of species status, movement routes, and ecological condition.

Developing this algorithm required thousands of images of waterfowl, collected in collaboration with hunting associations and birdwatchers, as part of an environmental project known as "AutoWing."

Sustainable Hunting and Modern Technology

Those overseeing the project believe that technology can become a supporting tool for the concept of "sustainable hunting", by improving the collection of environmental information and strengthening scientific studies relating to wildlife.

In the official statement, Willy Schraen, President of the National Federation of French Hunters, confirmed that the use of artificial intelligence reflects a move toward modernising hunting practices and connecting them more closely to scientific and environmental knowledge.

He also noted that the success of these systems depends greatly on the participation of hunters themselves in gathering field images and data, which makes technology linked to direct human work, rather than a replacement for it.

This project comes as part of a broad network managed by hunting institutions across France,



Project data indicates that it relied on more than 15,000 images of wings and complete birds, within a programme launched in 2021 with the support of the French Office for Biodiversity. In certain tests, the AI achieved an accuracy rate approaching 95% in identifying some species.

This project reflects a growing global trend toward the use of artificial intelligence in the study of wildlife and migratory birds.

In recent years, algorithms have become widely used in the world of hunting. Many of these systems rely on "machine learning" technologies, which allow computers to learn different patterns within images and data, progressively improving their ability to identify species with greater accuracy over time.

In the case of the French application, this technology is used to develop a broad database that helps researchers better understand changes in bird populations and their geographical distribution.



a country with more than 945,000 annual hunters, alongside approximately 70,000 hunting associations, 94 local federations, and 13 regional federations. This gives these digital applications considerable capacity to gather field data and develop environmental studies relating to birds and wildlife.

In the world of falconry in particular, this type of technology opens wide avenues for thinking about the future of the relationship between heritage and technology, and how modern tools can contribute to understanding birds and protecting the environment, without eliminating the human expertise that has remained, for many decades, the foundation of the relationship between humans and nature.

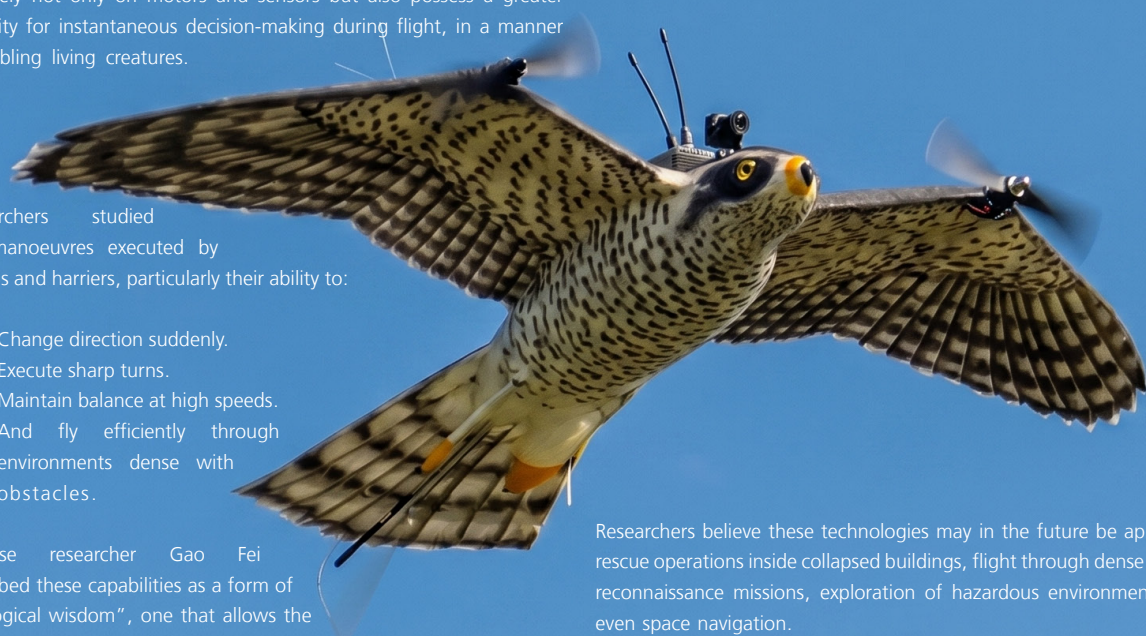
From Falcons and Harriers to the Robots of the Future

Birds of prey are no longer a source of inspiration for falconers alone; today, they have also become a model studied by artificial intelligence laboratories and aerial robotics researchers around the world.

In recent years, researchers in China, Switzerland, and the United States have begun developing a new generation of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), based on the study of how falcons, harriers, and other raptors fly, in an attempt to transfer what might be called the "kinetic intelligence of nature" into algorithms and autonomous control systems.

Last year, a research team from Zhejiang University in China announced the development of a new artificial intelligence system for drones, directly inspired by the way birds of prey fly during hunting and manoeuvring in complex environments.

This project is part of a rapidly accelerating global race to develop drones that rely not only on motors and sensors but also possess a greater capacity for instantaneous decision-making during flight, in a manner resembling living creatures.



Researchers studied the manoeuvres executed by falcons and harriers, particularly their ability to:

- Change direction suddenly.
- Execute sharp turns.
- Maintain balance at high speeds.
- And fly efficiently through environments dense with obstacles.

Chinese researcher Gao Fei described these capabilities as a form of "Biological wisdom", one that allows the bird to transform dangerous manoeuvres into behaviour that increases its chances of success and survival.

To this end, the team of experts developed a system based on two principal components: the first translates complex movements into precise flight commands; the second operates on the principle of "risk versus reward", whereby the artificial intelligence balances speed, performance, safety, and energy consumption during decision-making.

During trials, the drone successfully navigated courses filled with tunnels, sharp bends, and obstacles with remarkable speed and precision.

In one direct comparison, the intelligent system achieved a 100% success rate, against just 12.5% for a skilled human pilot, during a test based on rapid manoeuvring through a highly complex course.

Researchers believe these technologies may in the future be applied to rescue operations inside collapsed buildings, flight through dense forests, reconnaissance missions, exploration of hazardous environments, and even space navigation.

However, scientific inspiration drawn from birds of prey is not limited to China alone.

The Harris's Hawk Teaches Robots How to Fly!

In the Swiss city of Lausanne, Italian-Swiss researcher Dario Floreano at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) is working on a project based on what is known as Bio-Inspiration.

His team is attempting to develop drones that learn to fly in the same way that raptors do.

Rather than simply improving motors or sensors, the team focuses on understanding the way birds themselves fly: How do they take off? How do they change direction? How do they face the wind? And how do they execute landing manoeuvres with great precision?

By answering these questions, researchers have begun developing aircraft equipped with movable wings, adjustable tails, and even "legs" inspired by the way certain birds use their limbs to push off during take-off.

But the most advanced aspect of the project relates not to form alone, but to the manner of thinking and decision-making during flight.

The aircraft developed by the laboratory are currently classified as "semi-autonomous"; the human provides the basic manoeuvring commands, while the AI systems within the aircraft determine how to adjust the wings and tail and execute the movement in the optimal way.

Among the birds studied most closely by researchers is the Harris's Hawk, a species renowned for its exceptional manoeuvring capability and precision landings.



Scientists observed that this bird: first accelerates to build speed, then gradually raises its wings, opens its tail to slow its descent, before landing with precision on the branch.

A recent study conducted in collaboration with researchers from Oxford University showed that the hawk does not choose this trajectory merely to reduce effort, but to avoid dangerous flight angles that could cause it to lose stability during landing.

Based on these findings, the Lausanne team reprogrammed the AI systems within the drones to learn and improve their landing technique after each attempt, exactly as birds do in nature.
The results of this research were published in Nature, one of the world's most important scientific journals.

Floreano believes that birds of prey still surpass technology in their ability to combine:

- Rapid manoeuvring.
- Long-endurance, energy-efficient flight.

Current drones are generally divided into:

- Fast aircraft with limited range.
- Aircraft capable of long endurance, but with less manoeuvrability.

Birds do both simultaneously; naturally.

Looking further into the future, Floreano speaks of the possibility of artificial intelligence systems emerging that rely on "animal data", in the same way that current AI models rely on human data.

He says: "If ChatGPT relies on human data, we may one day arrive at RobotGPT, one that relies on animal data."

And so, birds of prey are no longer merely part of the natural world or heritage, they have also become a model studied by advanced robotics laboratories for understanding movement, flight, and decision-making in the world of tomorrow.

In the Age of Artificial Intelligence. Creatures That Never Existed Outside the Digital World!

With the rapid expansion in the use of AI technologies, digitally generated images of birds and animals have begun spreading extensively across social media platforms, to the point where distinguishing the real from the fabricated has become more difficult than ever before.

Throughout 2025, specialist reports in the world of birds and wildlife warned of the growing phenomenon of fantastical images produced by AI applications, depicting birds with colours and forms that appear highly realistic, despite having no existence in nature.

These images spread widely across Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and visual content platforms, leveraging the capacity of algorithms to produce hyper-realistic imagery that is sometimes difficult to detect as false at first glance.

The problem, according to specialists, is that some of these images are not presented as works of art, but are published as though they were genuine documentation of rare species or rescue scenes involving injured birds and animals.

Among the examples cited in the relevant reports, footage and images circulated showing parrots, vultures, and even other wild animals seemingly seeking help from humans after being injured on roadsides or near boats, scenes designed to provoke empathy and human emotion.

But these stories, according to specialists, are nothing more than scenes generated entirely by artificial intelligence, aimed at attracting emotional engagement and views on social platforms.

Images also emerged of fantastical birds containing obvious anatomical errors, such as unnaturally overlapping digits, illogical wing construction, or the blending of features belonging to different species within a single bird.



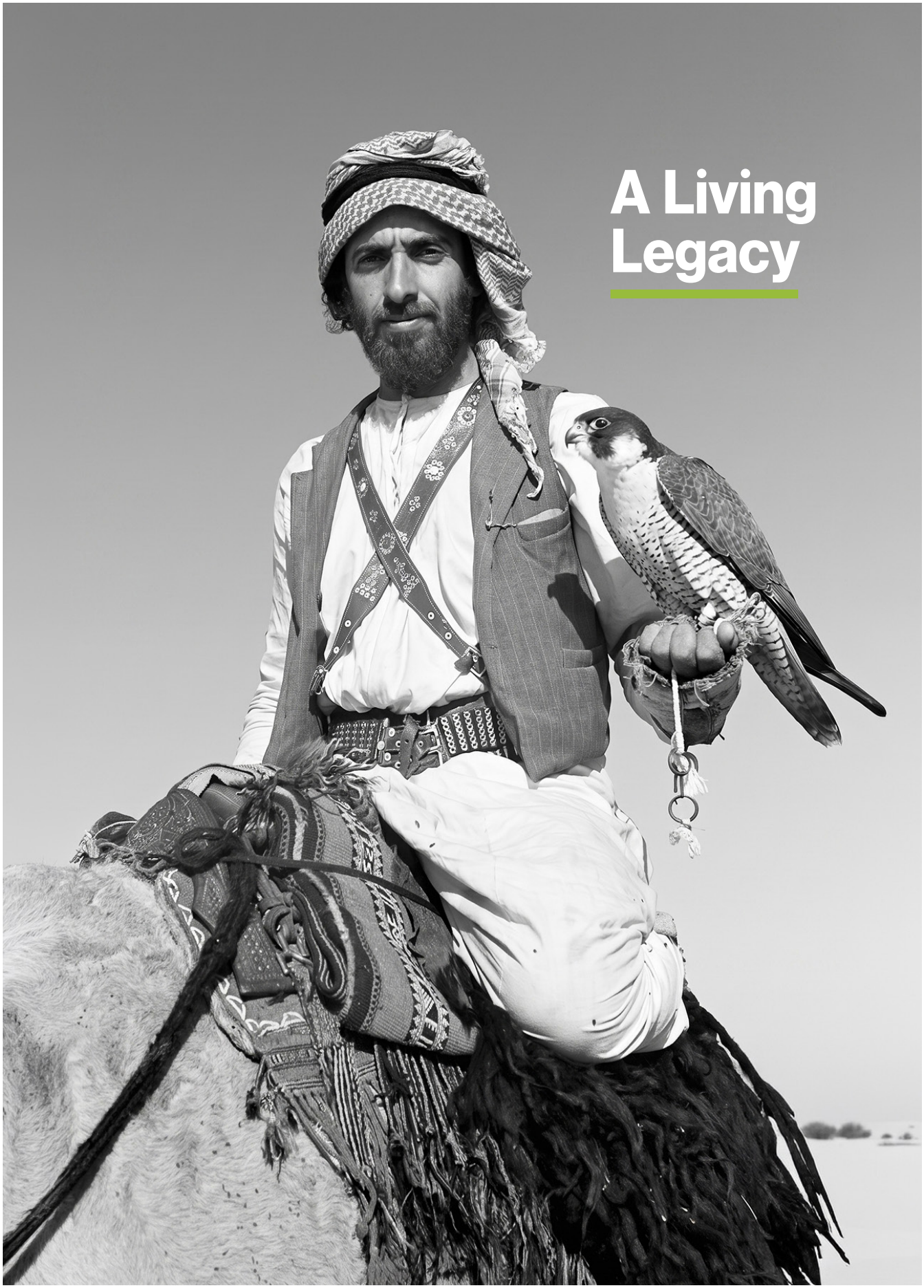
In one widely circulated image, a bird of prey appeared alongside a Bedouin man who looked entirely real, leading many to believe the bird was equally genuine, despite it having been generated entirely by artificial intelligence.

Researchers warn that the mixing of real images with digitally generated content may in the future affect the accuracy of environmental databases, the reliability of visual documentation, and biodiversity studies.

And so, while algorithms help scientists understand birds, migration, and climate change, the very same technology is equally capable of producing "fabricated nature" that grows more convincing with every passing day.

For this reason, environmental and wildlife specialists affirm that human expertise remains essential for distinguishing reality from fiction, particularly in an age when algorithms have become capable of inventing creatures that never existed outside the digital world.

A Living Legacy



Zayed's Legacy in the Journey of the Emirates Falconers' Club

Human stories...
Moments Recounted, Values That Endure

The legacy of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may he rest in peace, cannot be measured by his achievements alone, but also by the system of values he instilled, which made falconry a school of patience, responsibility, and respect for nature, and a message carried forward by pioneering national projects.

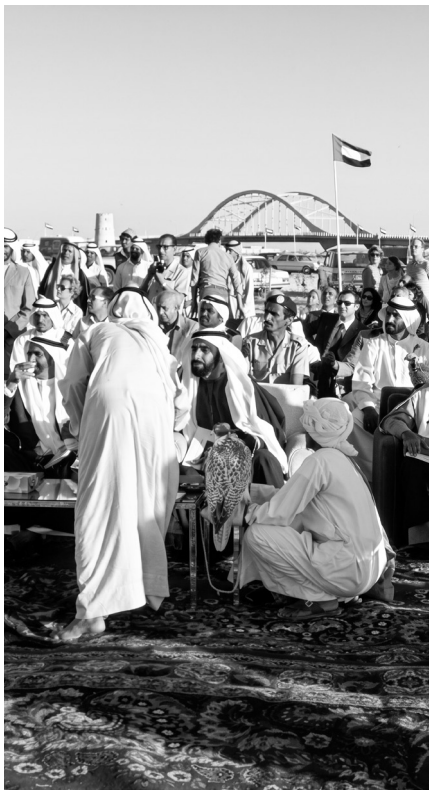
Over the past twenty-five years, Emirates Falconers' Club has been one of the foremost guardians of this legacy, firmly embedding these values and passing them on to new generations of falconers, ensuring that Zayed's legacy remains alive in hunting expeditions, desert majlis gatherings, and the Club's events to this day. The following pages explore this enduring legacy through documented stories and personal testimonies.

A Legacy Renewed Through Time... 50 Years of Devotion and Giving

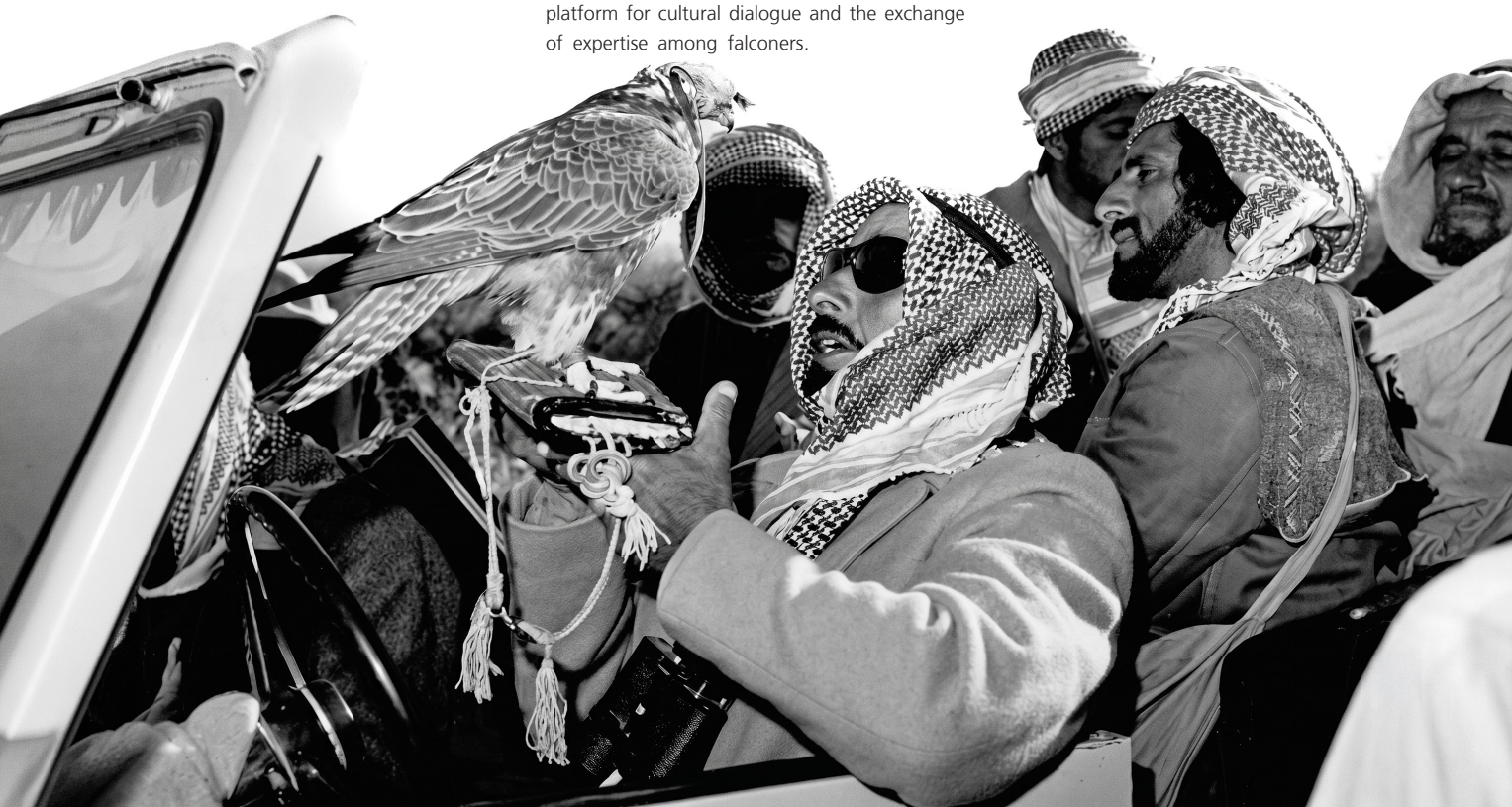
As fifty years have passed since the launch of the first edition of the International Festival of Falconry (Al Baizara) in 1976, the journey of an enduring legacy is clearly revealed, a legacy that began with the vision of Sheikh Zayed, may he rest in peace, to make falconry a bridge for dialogue between peoples, and has evolved over time into a national project with a global presence.

When the Emirates Falconers' Club was established in 2001, it took on the responsibility of showcasing a legacy whose roots extended back decades, worked to transform it into a national project with a global presence, and ensured its continued development and consolidation through its local and international programmes and initiatives.

In 2011, the Club revived the International Festival of Falconry, affirming that true legacy is not preserved by celebrating the past alone, but by renewing its presence and keeping its message alive in every generation. This journey continued through subsequent editions of the festival in 2014 and 2017, cementing its status as a global platform for cultural dialogue and the exchange of expertise among falconers.



This time-honored legacy did not begin with an institutional decision; it was born in the heart of the desert, forged by the hunting expeditions that shaped the character of the late Sheikh Zayed. It was then passed down through the generations until it became an approach carried forward today by the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School, the pioneering educational programme of Emirates Falconers' Club.









Zayed's School: A Legacy Inherited by Generations

When a British journalist once asked Sheikh Salem bin Ham which school he had studied at, he answered simply: "I studied at Zayed's school, and I remain a student of knowledge to this day." This phrase encapsulates the place of the late Sheikh Zayed, may he rest in peace, in the hearts of those who knew him and worked alongside him. He was a teacher and a role model before he was a leader, passing on his experience through companionship and shared experiences, and instilling values through deeds rather than words.

The transmission of this legacy did not stop with the generation in which Sheikh Zayed learned the principles of falconry from his father, Sheikh Sultan bin Zayed Al Nahyan; it continued into the next generation as well. His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, may God protect him, grew up in an environment steeped in falconry, hunting expeditions, and desert life, and was among his father's closest companions on desert excursions and hunting trips. From him, he learned firsthand that falconry is not merely an acquired skill, but a complete system of patience, discipline, horsemanship, and respect for nature.

From this school emerged a vision passed down through the generations, one built on the understanding that a true legacy remains alive only through those who carry and develop it. His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan's interest in falconry and heritage was the continuation of a message in which he was raised from an early age; he believed that preserving it was a national and cultural responsibility requiring the transformation of inherited knowledge into institutional action ensuring its continuity for future generations.

Building on this vision, and thanks to the constant guidance and support of His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Chairman of the Emirates Falconers' Club, came the initiatives that helped cement the Club's position as one of the guardians of this legacy and made the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School a contemporary extension of Sheikh Zayed's school, where young falconers today learn from experienced practitioners, ensuring that the journey of knowledge continues.

Hunting Holds No Rest: It Is a School for Life

When Sheikh Zayed was once asked whether hunting trips were for rest, he replied: "There is no rest in hunting… it teaches endurance and patience." He viewed the desert as an open school for life, saying: "On a hunting trip we pass through vast lands and deserts, encountering people we have never seen before; we hear their speech and interact with them, we experience their way of life and benefit from it."

The late Sheikh Zayed believed that the value of the hunting expedition lay not in the hunt itself, but in the experiences and human encounters that accompany it, refining character and bringing people closer to nature and to one another.

In his book Falconry as a Sport: Our Arab Heritage, Sheikh Zayed recounts that he practiced hunting with a rifle in his youth before coming to prefer falconry, having become convinced that hunting with a rifle was " an unjust assault on animals, a rapid cause of their extinction."

Falconer Dhahi bin Hamad Al Mazrouei describes the experience of the hunting expedition, saying: "Sheikh Zayed was a school unlike any other in hunting; from him we learned profound wisdom and noble values, especially when we went hunting with him in Baynouna and western Liwa, where he taught us lessons in hunting that we will never forget, along with profound wisdom and moral lessons that we cherish to this day."

The influence of that school did not stop at a single generation but extended to the generations that followed. Falconer Abdullah Rabie Al Qemzi says: "We continue what Zayed planted in us, and in turn we have planted it in our children," affirming that "Sheikh Zayed's vision has borne fruit, and the younger generation has reaped its fruits."



The Hunting Expedition: A Path to the People

For Sheikh Zayed, hunting expeditions provided an opportunity to connect with people and learn about their circumstances. He believed that the desert gave a leader the chance to see reality as it truly was. He expressed this conviction, may God have mercy on him, saying: "I love hunting because it brings together the young and the old…"

Falconer Murshid Ali Murshid Al Marar affirms this, saying: "We used to hunt with the late Sheikh Zayed in Baynouna and Ghantoot. A hunting trip with Zayed was never an ordinary trip; rather, he used it as an opportunity to assess the needs of the areas he passed through, while taking care to check on how people were doing and immediately ordering that their needs be met."

Al Marar adds that hunting trips with Sheikh Zayed were filled with friendly gatherings, meaningful conversations, poetry recitation, and storytelling, noting that Sheikh Zayed was keen to sit with his companions and share the details of the journey with them, to the extent that "he would join us himself in preparing the food," a scene reflecting his humility and closeness to the people.

A Leader in the Field: As in the Affairs of the Nation

Sheikh Zayed's hunting expeditions were managed according to a precise system reflecting his character as a leader and his commitment to organization, close supervision, and accountability. He personally oversaw the distribution of falcons among the falconers, monitored their training and health, and made it a point to know the details of the daily work in the falconers' camp.

At sunrise, the hunting groups would set out into the desert, divided into teams comprising a number of vehicles, with a supervisor assigned to each group to oversee its activities and submit reports. When everyone returned to camp in the evening, Sheikh Zayed would ask about the condition of the falcons and falconers, and the needs of the participants.

His leadership presence was not confined to managing the affairs of the hunting expedition; it extended to his national responsibilities, as he balanced his passion for falconry with attending to the affairs of the nation and its citizens. Sheikh Zayed's companions saw in him both a head of state and an expert falconer from whom they learned the principles and etiquette of falconry, drawing on his observations and guidance.

For him, the hunting expedition was not a respite from responsibility, but an extension of his approach to leadership, combining his love of falconry heritage, his closeness to the people, meticulous organization, and commitment to his national duties, in a manner embodying in one person the qualities of both the experienced falconer and the wise leader.





The Falcon: A Companion, Not a Hunting Tool

Sheikh Zayed's poetry reveals a profound human dimension in his relationship with falcons. In many of his poems, he addresses his bird as one would address a friend who had long accompanied him, bound to it by trust, experience, affection, and mutual respect. He also viewed falconry as a school of values and teamwork, summarizing this outlook by saying: "Another thing that greatly drew me to love this sport is that it is a team sport more than any other kind of sport."

This outlook did not stem merely from a passion for hunting expeditions and love of falcons, but from a deep knowledge of their secrets and behavior, a knowledge borne out by many falconers who accompanied Sheikh Zayed closely.



This conviction was not confined to Emirati falconers alone. Austrian falconer Karl Buschberger described Sheikh Zayed as "a true expert in evaluating the quality of falcons, particularly Saker falcons," adding that much of his own knowledge of falcons had been acquired from Sheikh Zayed, whom he regarded as one of the greatest experts in the field.



From the Memories of Falconers

The testimonies of many who lived alongside Sheikh Zayed present a vivid portrait of a man marked by courage, boldness, and a love of nature from his earliest years, showing that falconry was an integral part of his personality.

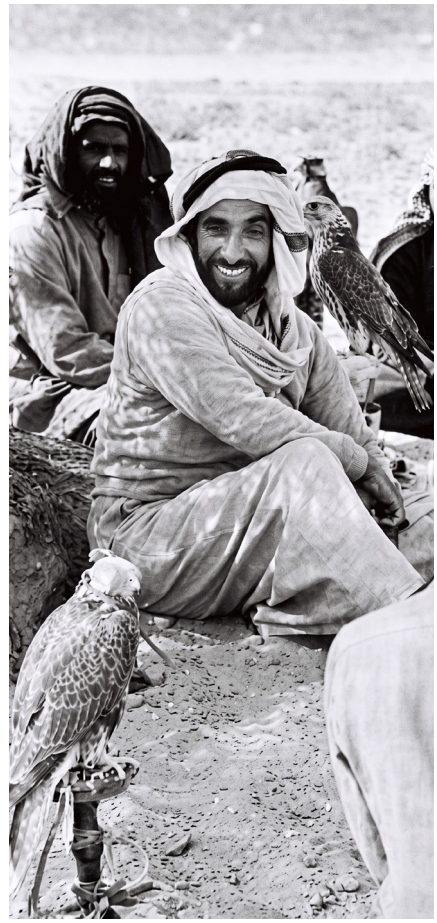
Sheikh Zayed was known for his extensive knowledge of the secrets and finest details of falconry, being well versed in the different types of falcons, methods of rearing and training them, and their ailments and treatments, until he became a reference for falconers who benefited from his knowledge and experience. He also possessed a remarkable eye for evaluating falcons, able to distinguish a good falcon from others at first glance, and to accurately assess its health and readiness for the hunt.

Memories of the hunting trips were preserved not only through oral narratives but also through folk poetry. Among these is the poem "Al-Megnas" by the late poet Ahmed bin Ali Al Kindi, which documented one of the hunting expeditions with Sheikh Zayed, recording details of the route, the falcons, the companions, and the regions through which the expedition passed, as well as the excitement of the flight and the chase, and journey between the deserts of Al Dhafra and Al Ain.

The inherited values of falconry remain present in hunting expeditions to this day. Some of the companions of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan recount scenes reflecting the special bond between the falconer and his bird. Among these are the beautiful verses composed by poets during one of the hunting expeditions, describing how His Highness gave water to his falcon "Falah" with his own hand and sprinkled water over him after a long and fruitful day of hunting; a scene that encapsulates a facet of the knowledge, care, and compassion upon which true falconry is founded, long before it depends on hunting skill.

The respect Sheikh Zayed commanded was not confined to the falconers who accompanied him in the desert; his influence extended beyond the borders of the UAE, leaving a lasting mark on the history of contemporary falconry. British falconer and researcher Ken Riddle affirmed that the falconry community owes a debt of gratitude to Sheikh Zayed for the support and guidance he gave to traditional Arab falconers, for helping them attain global standing, and for his pioneering role in advancing a new philosophy for promoting falconry and hunting in the twenty-first century.





From the Elders... To Bearing the Trust

The journey of many young Emirati falconers began by accompanying their fathers and grandfathers, watching in silence how a falcon is carried, trained, and cared for, learning by observation before practice, believing that falconry is a discipline attained only through patience, perseverance, and years of close companionship.

Over time, this knowledge was passed from the majlis and desert expeditions into the training and development programmes offered by Emirates Falconers' Club, and to the educational environment provided by Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School, which combines inherited expertise with modern knowledge, allowing young people to continue their journey of learning this heritage and honing their skills under the guidance of veteran falconers.

Many young falconers describe falconry as a mission before it is a hobby, affirming that they see it as an extension of Sheikh Zayed's legacy, an approach inherited from their fathers and grandfathers, which they seek to carry faithfully to future generations.



When Children Carry the Banner

One of the most striking aspects of the Emirati falconry journey is that it has not remained confined to the generation of fathers and grandfathers but has reached grandchildren as well as sons.

Emirati falconer Aisha recounts that her relationship with falcons began in her early childhood, as she learned falconry from her late father at the age of four. She recalls how falcons were part of everyday family life. Recent years have also seen young falconers taking part in competitions.

Abdulrahman Al Mazrouei describes falconry as a way of life more than a hobby, affirming that his bond with it was an extension of what he inherited from his family—a love of hunting expeditions and respect for the falcon and the values it embodies. One falconer sums up this idea, saying: "From my father I inherited falconry; I learned patience, and I learned how a falcon is a companion never to be abandoned."

Students Speak of the Impact

Throughout its journey, Emirates Falconers' Club has invested in preparing new generations and equipping them with knowledge and practical experience in the world of falconry, through educational and training programmes, as well as cultural exchange initiatives that have enabled young people to explore diverse experiences and acquire new skills.

A number of students who took part in one of the Club's international programmes spoke of the impact the experience had on them. Mohammed Saeed Al Suwaidi described it as "a truly beautiful journey" that enabled him to explore different cultures and experiences, while Mohammed Ahmed bin Nawi Al Mazrouei spoke of his happiness at learning new methods of handling falcons, affirming that passing this heritage down from fathers and grandfathers to sons is a shared value passed down through generations.



Saeed Ali Al Badi Al Dhaheri spoke of the importance of the practical knowledge he gained in releasing falcons, while Hareb bin Ahmed Al Qemzi affirmed that participating had added new and useful knowledge to his understanding of falconry and its practices. Hadher Salem Al Muhairi, for his part, spoke of the opportunity the experience provided to learn about different customs, traditions, and cultures, expressing his appreciation for the opportunity to take part in this distinctive educational experience.

Today, amid memories of hunting expeditions with Sheikh Zayed, the testimonies of those who accompanied him in the desert, and the stories of young people and young falconers carrying the banner forward, one of the most important fruits of the Emirates Falconers' Club's twenty-five-year journey is revealed.

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The Desert Falcon



The Desert Falcon

Scenes from Sheikh Zayed's Memories
By British Author Claud Morris

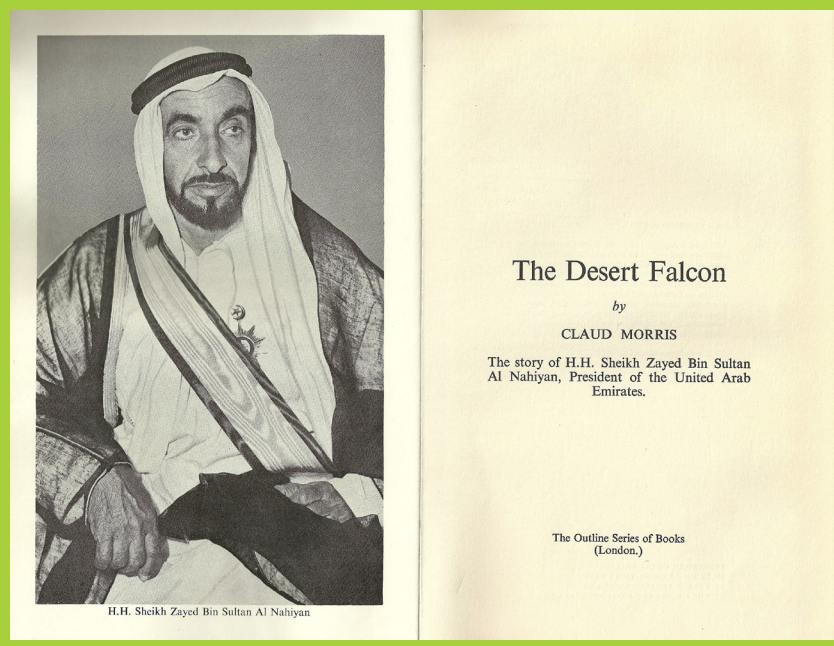
A Reading of Falconry and Hunting Between Memory and Meaning

Mouza Uwais Ali Al Daraei
Abu Dhabi Heritage Authority

"The Desert Falcon" This is the title the British writer and journalist Claud Morris chose for his book about the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may he rest in peace, following his meeting with him in the city of Al Ain in 1974. This choice of title, in its apparent significance, reflects the depth of Sheikh Zayed's bond with the world of falcons and hunting. It also alludes to the many noble qualities that distinguished him and that he sought to embody with awareness, determination, resolve, and faith, despite the challenges and difficult circumstances that surrounded him throughout his journey towards the renaissance of his nation, the service of his people, and his contribution to the issues of the Arab and Islamic world. In Arab culture, the falcon embodies strength, pride, and exalted status. This symbolic presence aligns with the resonances evoked by the book's title, which presents the falcon as a symbol of courage, sharpness of vision, and lofty ambition, qualities associated with leaders of exceptional stature and the capacity to influence and drive change. These are the very meanings Morris sought to illuminate through his narration of aspects of Sheikh Zayed's life and journey.

• The Desert Falcon: A Book Documenting the Biography of a Leader

An initial reading of the author's book, ***"The Desert Falcon: The Life Story of His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates"*** reveals it to be the first work dedicated to chronicling the life of the late Sheikh Zayed, may God rest his soul. In it, Morris explores Sheikh Zayed's childhood, upbringing, and the early chapters of his life, through to his assumption of the leadership of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi and the establishment of the Union. He also addresses his ideas and visions on life and governance, alongside a number of other issues and themes, distributed across eleven chapters.



The book "The Desert Falcon", with a cover photograph of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may God rest his soul.

The author drew upon this work through direct interviews with Sheikh Zayed, as he himself noted in the introduction to his book, writing: "*The opinions presented are not mine, but rather a reflection of the thought and general outlook of the President of the United Arab Emirates*"[1]. In this context, Patricia Morris, wife of Claud Morris, noted that the meetings between Sheikh Zayed and Claud Morris were repeated following their first encounter, where "they would meet and speak for hours, and sometimes the conversation would extend into the late hours of the night. Claud would take notes while Sheikh Zayed regaled him with his stories, and shared with him his philosophy and concerns. After some time, Claud suggested writing Sheikh Zayed's biography based on what he had been recounting, and Sheikh Zayed agreed on the condition that 'the truth be told,' and Claud gave him his word. And so, the biography of Sheikh Zayed was prepared as a concise volume, rich in meaning, bearing the title The Desert Falcon, and it joined the ranks of rare books".[2]

This book was printed in four editions in the English language and two editions in the Arabic language. The author was born on 20 January 1920 and passed away on 21 May 2000 at the age of approximately eighty. He was known for his championing of Arab causes and his advocacy on their behalf. In 1979, in collaboration with the UAE Ministry of Information and Culture, he organised an international seminar in London titled: "The Arab Image in Western Media." He later organised a similar seminar in the French capital titled: "Towards Improving Relations Between Arabs and the West," in October 1984, in collaboration with the Media Relations Committee of the Arab Gulf States.

Morris had worked at the Daily Express and founded a fund known as Morris International, which served as a forum for dialogue on peace in the Middle East[3]. He also founded the newspaper Voice of the Arab World, which brought him to the region and continues to be published under the supervision of his daughter Anne, who manages the family-owned publishing house[4].

The book "*The Desert Falcon*" conveys a wealth of meaning and significance through its account of Sheikh Zayed's life. Its pages present events, dreams, ambitions, and hopes, all of which were realized by God's grace and guidance, and then through the patience, determination, wisdom, and courage that distinguished the leader, becoming a tangible reality experienced by all who have set foot upon this land, which has been transformed from a barren desert into a green paradise and a thriving environment, drawing visitors from every corner of the globe, having once been, in earlier times, little known in many Arab and foreign countries.

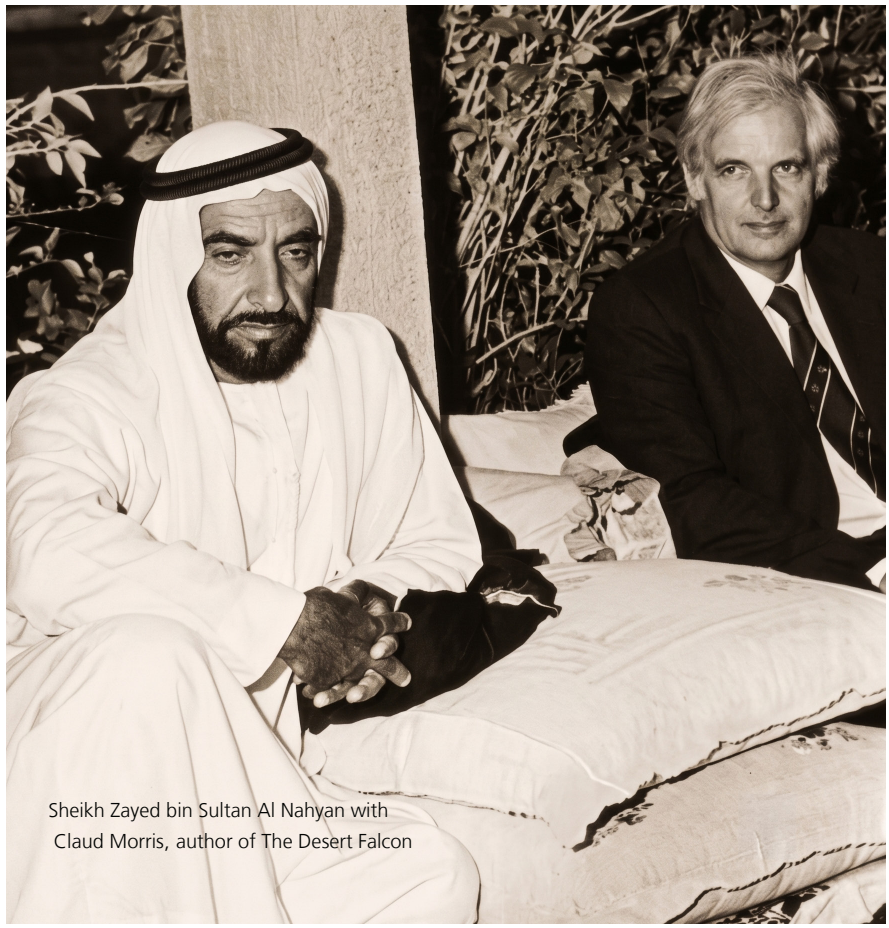
In the following lines, we quote and shed light on one of Sheikh Zayed's most cherished sports, to which the author devoted particular attention in his book: falconry. It is evident from the work that this sport was among the earliest hobbies mentioned by Morris, who devoted considerable space to it in his account of Sheikh Zayed's life.

• Zayed... A Passion for Horses and Hunting

Morris began his account by noting that Sheikh Zayed, as attested by his peers and countrymen, was, without question, the most adventurous of his brothers. The author then conveys part of a conversation that took place between himself and Sheikh Zayed, recounting that Sheikh Zayed told him: *"I loved horse riding and hunting; they were my greatest passions*[5]*."*

Morris adds that the family of Sheikh Zayed, in the 1920s, owned one hundred and eighty horses and four hundred camels. He also notes that Sheikh Zayed began riding horses from almost the moment he was able to walk. He would wear a white head covering known as a sufhara[6] and a bandolier[7], and would carry a German or English rifle, or whichever one came to hand. Morris further notes that hunting was a favourite pastime of Sheikh Zayed, a fact he himself acknowledged, and that it was a pursuit which captivated his interest to a remarkable degree[8]. Indeed, it frequently occupied him entirely, commanding his senses, his feelings, and his thoughts[9].

Morris did not confine his account to conveying Sheikh Zayed's passion for hunting. He also portrayed the atmosphere of those expeditions and the tools and practices associated with them, chief among them the rifles that Zayed and his companions used in his early years. He notes that most of the Bedouin who went out on the early hunting trips with Zayed used Portuguese rifles dating back to the seventeenth century. He also quotes one of the Bedouin, speaking with dry humour, as saying: "We give the gazelles a sporting chance", a reference to how slow those rifles were. These rifles, by his description, seemed almost to explode in their user's face when the trigger was pulled. He adds that they were long-barrelled weapons, measuring some seven feet in length, fitted with brass rings around their muzzles, and operated by ignition fuses that the shooter would light and then wait, watching as the spark crept slowly towards the powder pan before the round was discharged[10].



Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan with Claud Morris, author of The Desert Falcon

What Morris records makes clear that the pursuits Sheikh Zayed practiced, foremost among them horse riding and hunting, were not merely a personal passion, but part of a lived experience that helped to forge his character and consolidate a set of values bound to the desert environment and its cultural inheritance. These dimensions, therefore, represent an important entry point for understanding certain aspects of his human and leadership development.

• Zayed... and the Memories of a Hunting Trip with His Father

In this section, we recount part of what remained etched in Sheikh Zayed's memory from the hunting journeys of his childhood. At the age of eight, as Morris notes, Zayed undertook one of the most remarkable hunting expeditions of his life, using his falcon in pursuit of the Houbara[11] bustard. Sheikh Zayed had learned to track the Houbara by carefully studying the ground for its footprints, which enabled the hunter to follow its tracks and estimate the number of Houbara. Sheikh Zayed would hold the falcon in his hand and then release it towards the quarry, whereupon it would stoop from a height of a thousand feet. On his left hand, Zayed wore the blue-and-yellow mangala, which falconers use to protect their hands from the powerful talons of the falcon[12]. Upon the bird's return, Zayed would cover its eyes using the blue hood[13i]. In addition to using the falcon in the hunt, Zayed had by this early age already become a skilled marksman with a rifle[14].



The Asian Houbara bustard in its desert habitat in the UAE



Jebel Hafeet in the city of Al Ain

Morris lingers, as did Sheikh Zayed himself, over those memories that carried him back to the past and to those most dear and beloved to him, recounting one of the fondest memories of the journeys Zayed undertook in the company of his father, Sheikh Sultan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Ruler of Abu Dhabi (1922–1926), and his brothers. Among what Morris conveys is the following: when Zayed looked back upon those bygone days from the vantage point of the mid-1970s (at the time we met), *Zayed told me of his enthusiasm for those sports and the joy of those days. He said: I would cross the water with my father on a sailing vessel, a dhow, from Abu Dhabi to the other side. We would number around thirty persons. The large double-masted vessel cut through the waters of the Gulf with grace and ease. In the white shade at the stern, I sat with my father and brothers, while the captain was at the helm. They brought with them tents and provisions, for a single hunting expedition might last ten days. After the vessel anchored on shore, they would disembark and walk hundreds of miles across the desert. A good day might yield a dozen birds and perhaps six gazelles. As for the Houbara, which is a large bird that can stand some two and a half feet tall and weigh up to eight pounds, its meat was considered among the most delectable when grilled over an open fire at the hunting camps.*[15]"

Sheikh Zayed continues to summon the story of those days and those pleasurable journeys, and Morris provides some details about the daily schedule of the hunting expedition from early morning until evening: "We would begin our day at four in the morning, at the break of dawn. We would return around two in the afternoon. If the hunt, whether by rifle or by falcons, had been plentiful, we would return before that hour; otherwise, we would press on[16]." They would also take water with them. In earlier times, when water was scarce or unavailable, the Bedouin would resort to tayammum or using sand for cleansing. In the evening, after the completion of the dinner meal around the fire, the Bedouin would use the miswak to clean their teeth. Everyone wore the loose, flowing Bedouin garments suited to the desert climate, along with sandals, which were quickly set aside whenever the opportunity arose, in order that the feet might remain as clean as the hands[17].

Those journeys and those like them were, for Zayed and his family and companions, as Morris portrays them, a time rich in sport and adventure[18]. And beyond the pleasure and challenges they held, those expeditions constituted a treasury of memories that remained ever-present in in Sheikh Zayed's heart and mind, bound to those nearest and most beloved to him, foremost among them his father and brothers, reflecting the central place that family occupied in his life.





It is also evident from the foregoing that Morris does not confine himself to narrating the details of the hunting expeditions. He also conveys to the reader aspects of social life, Arab customs, and authentic traditions that accompanied such expeditions in the desert community, encompassing daily practices and inherited values. This narrative equally reflects the environment that contributed to shaping the early experience of Sheikh Zayed, embodying the values of patience, endurance, keen observation, and a deep bond with the desert heritage and its cultural expanse.

• Zayed and the Falcons... In the Accounts of His Companions

In his account of Sheikh Zayed's passion for hunting, the British author Morris records that, after meeting Sheikh Zayed and while seeking further insights into that period of his life, he encountered one of the men who had accompanied Sheikh Zayed in his youth, Mr Abdullah bin Ghanom[19]. Morris notes that Abdullah was at that time eighty-two years of age, resided in Al Ain, and had been an advisor, companion, and guide to Zayed in his younger days. Among what Morris records, quoting from Abdullah and his memories of Zayed's childhood and his love of hunting, is the following: "*The boy — meaning Zayed — would climb Jebel Hafeet, on the border between Abu Dhabi and Oman, to hunt gazelles with astonishing tenacity, and with a skill and composure that belied his years. He was the most courageous boy I ever knew. He paid no heed to the weather, whether the heat was unbearable or the cold was biting. His father would always charge me to keep an eye on him, yet still he went his own way with his falcons and his rifles. You might be sitting in the camp with the group and then look round suddenly to find that Zayed had vanished like the wind. The boy's legs would carry him at great speed in pursuit of any quarry, and there seemed to be nothing that could stop him*[20]."

In this regard, one of those who met Sheikh Zayed and knew him closely recounts that he was deeply devoted to hunting and falconry, and frequented Jebel Hafeet and the nearby ravines in pursuit of this passion, as the area in times past, and Jebel Hafeet in particular, abounded with gazelles, rabbits, and mountain goats that descended from the mountain to graze in the wadis below[21]. Antony Cawston, one of the individuals who served in the Trucial Oman Scouts from 1959 to 1961, also notes that he went one day to meet Sheikh Zayed in Al Ain, recounting: "*I drove along the track leading to Al Ain in search of Sheikh Zayed, but he was not in Al Ain, and I was told he had gone out on a falconry expedition, and that I might find him somewhere in the vast desert to the west of Jebel Hafeet. I drove some five miles or so in that direction, taking with me a compass, and at last, I spotted smoke rising from a camp in the distance. I made my way towards it and found him with a small number of his men, and two falconers, seated on the ground with pieces of roasted mutton before them. He invited me to eat with them*[22]."

These accounts derive their significance from the fact that they come from individuals who lived alongside Sheikh Zayed and knew him at close quarters, which lends them a particular documentary value. Through these testimonies, the contours of a character emerge, one closely bound from an early age to the desert, hunting, and falcons, and marked by courage, boldness, and strength of will. They also reveal the care with which his father, Sheikh Sultan bin Zayed, surrounded him, and his diligence in guiding and following his son's development, in a formative period that helped to temper his character and develop his capacities. These accounts, therefore, do not merely document Sheikh Zayed's passion for hunting and falconry, but offer a portrait of certain early traits in his personal development, within the desert and familial environment in which he was raised, until falconry became one of the enduring hallmarks by which those who knew and lived alongside him remembered him.



• Zayed Between Hunting and Development... and Sheikh Khalid Takes Charge

Among the other scenes and memories recounted by Claud Morris in his book is his account of Sheikh Zayed's regular hunting expeditions, which often lasted several weeks at a time, leaving the administration of the region to his brother Sheikh Khalid bin Sultan Al Nahyan (1906–1977)[23], who managed its affairs during his absence. In describing those expeditions, Morris notes that Sheikh Zayed's tents were visible from a distance out in the desert, with four or five vehicles beside them and a water tanker, while the falconers were near the camp with their birds, roaming the neighbouring sand dunes, calling them by their names and training them to obey their handlers and respond to their calls[24].

Morris adds that when Sheikh Zayed was not engaged in hunting in the desert or in climbing the steep rocky heights of the Jebel Hafeet range on the border between Oman and Abu Dhabi, he devoted part of his time to digging wells, improving the falaj irrigation system in Al Ain, and constructing buildings and facilities, among them the Al Ain market, of which he was especially proud.[25] These records and scenes reveal several things, most notably Sheikh Zayed's reliance upon his brother Sheikh Khalid to manage the affairs of the region during his absence, a man well suited to that trust. They also reveal the place that hunting expeditions occupied in Sheikh Zayed's life, as he was careful to undertake them regularly despite his responsibilities and duties. At the same time, they illuminate his ability to balance his passion for hunting with his engagement in development and construction, reflecting a character that combined a deep attachment to the desert heritage with a commitment to progress and nation-building.

A journalist once asked Sheikh Zayed whether he went on hunting trips every year, and whether they were intended for rest. He replied: "*There is no rest in hunting, it teaches endurance and patience, and there is neither luxury nor leisure in it. I love hunting because it brings together the young and the old… I find in hunting something that draws the mind away from the responsibilities, duties, and difficulties we live with throughout the year, in preparation for a new year with all its concerns, ambitions, and duties that await us.*[26]"

Sheikh Zayed also believed that hunting was the finest means of shedding the burdens of daily work and renewing the spirit, in addition to its value in acquiring physical and social skills. It was also a means through which a person could communicate with his sons and fellow citizens, coming to know their hopes, aspirations, and wishes[27], and thus addressing the people's affairs with awareness, understanding, and a sincere, deep knowledge of their circumstances. For this reason, Sheikh Zayed looked forward to those expeditions with great eagerness[28].

• Zayed Through the Eyes of an Archaeologist

In his biography of Sheikh Zayed, Claud Morris includes the description offered by the Danish archaeologist Geoffrey Bibby upon his first visit to Al Ain in 1959, when he met Sheikh Zayed and described him as: "*A man of tall stature, slender build, with broad shoulders and hawk-like features resembling those of a true Bedouin.*" He also noted that Zayed's name commanded great esteem and respect among the people, as he was known as a consummate hunter and a renowned desert warrior.[29]

This description reflects an aspect of the image associated with Sheikh Zayed in the minds of those who knew him and met him. The falcon, carrying as it does in Arab culture the connotations of courage, pride, loftiness, and nobility, remained a symbol that harmonised with many of the qualities for which Sheikh Zayed was known. Bibby's comparison of him to a falcon was therefore not merely a description of his outward features, but an expression of qualities linked to his name: courage, boldness, and fortitude, qualities that made him a striking figure in his desert milieu long before the wider historical role he was to play had fully emerged.

• Why Was Zayed " The Desert Falcon"?

Claud Morris concludes his book with the very phrase he chose as the title for Sheikh Zayed's biography, writing: " *The Desert Falcon, who was born in a place and under circumstances that were nearly impossible, awakened a local community in Al Ain*[30]." From that time onward, this exceptional Sheikh, who, like any person, was not entirely free from the influence of his environment and social inheritance, continued to provide the impetus and the drive that roused his country from its long slumber and set his people on the path of renaissance and progress[31].

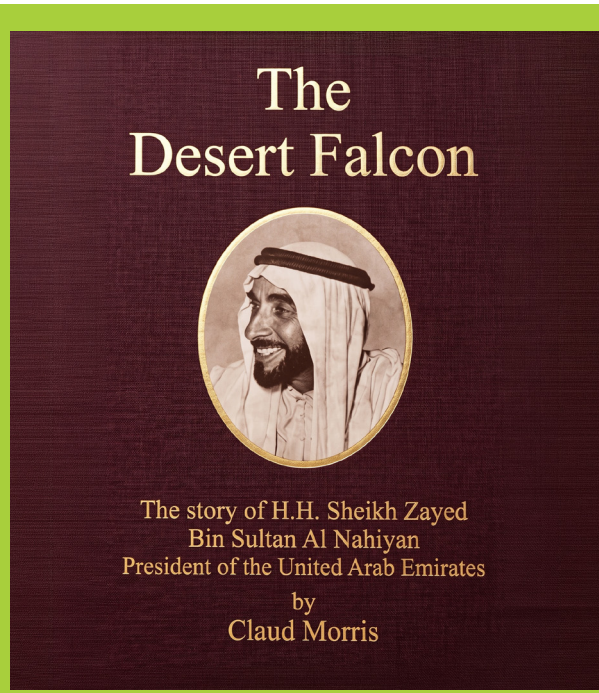
Morris concludes that the decisive test in a person's life lies not in whether they are rich or poor, great or small, but in the measure of positive change they bring about in the lives of others, in the efforts they expend in confronting difficulties, resolving conflicts, rising above upheaval and turmoil, and propelling their society forward. From this standpoint, and according to the standards of that test, Morris believes that Sheikh Zayed's life must be judged, declaring him to be " ***The Desert Falcon***.[32]"

Perhaps herein lies the explanation for Morris's choice of this title. For "the Desert Falcon," in his view, was not merely a description of Sheikh Zayed's passion for falcons and hunting, but an expression of a character that was able to transcend the challenges of his environment and circumstances, and to harness his will, wisdom, and foresight in the service of his nation and people, and in shaping a more prosperous future.

In conclusion, the pages that Claud Morris devoted to the subject of Sheikh Zayed, falcons, and hunting reveal dimensions that extend well beyond the boundaries of a hobby into a far wider space of human values and experience. Through the desert, the hunting journeys, and falconry, the contours of a character emerge, shaped by patience and perseverance, by closeness to the people, and by a bond with the environment and heritage. It is perhaps this that led Morris to see in Sheikh Zayed an exceptional model of a leader who was able to channel those values in the service of his nation and people, and to transform them into a civilisational project that left its clear imprint on the journey of the nation and the lives of its people, making him fully deserving of the description Morris chose as the title of his book: ***The Desert Falcon***.



Archaeologist Geoffrey Bibby during a visit to the Umm Al Nar site in 1996, accompanied by a group of visitors.





Footnotes

(1) – Morris, Claud, The Desert Falcon: The Story of H.H. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, Ministry of Information and Culture, Abu Dhabi, 1975, p. 12.

(2) – Morris, Patricia, "Crossing Temporal, Cultural and Linguistic Barriers," a paper published in the proceedings of the symposium Memories of the Emirates through Oral Narratives, Abu Dhabi, National Center for Documentation and Research, 2012, p. 380.

(3) – See: the official website of the Emirates News Agency (WAM): WAM source. For further details, see also: Claud Morris – WikiVisually.

(4) – Morris, Proceedings of the Symposium: Memories of the Emirates through Oral Narratives, op. cit., p. 382.

(5) – Morris, Claud, The Desert Falcon: The Story of H.H. Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahiyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, London, Morris International, 1974, p. 21.

(6) – That is, the ghutra, or the shawl, as it is sometimes called.

(7) – What is meant here is the mihzam, an ammunition belt containing a row of cartridges and a suspended dagger. It comes in several forms, including the upper mihzam (a belt extending from the left shoulder to the right side of the waist), the chest mihzam (two belts crossing over the chest in the shape of the letter X), and the lower mihzam (a belt worn only around the waist). A circular ammunition holder is attached to the lower mihzam. The mihzam enhances the appearance of its wearer as a complement to traditional dress and serves as a symbol of courage, authenticity, and manliness. Hanzal, Falih, Dictionary of Colloquial Terms in the United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi, Ministry of Information and Culture, 2nd ed., 1998, p. 181; Al Balushi, Fathiya, "Traditional Weapons of the Emiratis: Protection and Prestige," published on the website of Al Ittihad newspaper: Al Ittihad source.

(8) – Morris, op. cit., p. 21.

(9) – Al-Arshani, Awad, The Life of Zayed: The Knight Who Conquered the Desert, n.p., n.publ., 1st ed., 1980, p. 87.

(10) – Morris, op. cit., p. 21.

(11) – The houbara bustard is considered one of the finest quarry species hunted by falcons. It is a beautiful bird, approximately 70 centimetres in length, with plumage mottled in gold, white, black, and a muted reddish colour. It runs swiftly on the ground, is powerful in its movements, quick to take off, and flies rapidly when it senses danger. Morris described it as a large bird standing two and a half feet high and weighing up to eight pounds, approximately 3.6 kilograms. Tammam, Hamdi, Zayed Encyclopedia, Vol. 2, Abu Dhabi, n.publ., 1992, p. 56; Morris, op. cit., p. 23. For further details, see: Al Muhairi, Darwish bin Eid, "The Houbara: The Difficult Quarry," Al Dhafra Magazine, Abu Dhabi, Al Dhafra Group, Issue 26, June 2009, pp. 118–123.

(12) – The manqalah (also known as manjalah) is the protective gauntlet that shields the falconer from the falcon's talons and enables him to carry the bird on his hand for extended periods. It consists of a piece of thick fabric padded on the inside with soft material and covered externally with velvet. Overall, the manqalah is thick and strong enough to protect the falconer's hand, while remaining soft enough not to harm the falcon's talons. Tammam, op. cit., p. 48.

(13) – The burqa, as described in some references, is a hood covering the bird's face, or a small covering fitted to the size of the bird's head, with a small opening in the middle through which the falcon's beak protrudes. It is made of soft, coloured leather and is decorated externally by the craftsman with attractive patterns. Ibid., p. 48.

(14) – Morris, op. cit., p. 22.

(15) – Ibid., pp. 22–23.

(16) – Morris, op. cit., p. 23.

(17) – Morris, The Desert Falcon, op. cit., p. 35; Morris, op. cit., p. 23.

(18) – Ibid., p. 23.

(19) – Ibid.

It should be noted that the person's name appears in the Arabic translation of the book as *Abdullah bin Ghanem, while in the English edition it appears as *Abdullah bin Ghanom, which is the form adopted in the main text. Morris, op. cit., p. 35.

It is also worth noting that Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Ghanom Bou Ghanom Al Hameli was born in 1892. He received his education under his maternal uncle, Sheikh Mohammed "Al Kindi" bin Ahmed bin Sultan bin Mujren Al Marri, the Qadi (judge) of Abu Dhabi, as well as under Sheikh Abdul Latif Al Mubarak. During his childhood, he accompanied his father to the barzas (public audiences or majlis gatherings) of Sheikh Zayed bin Khalifa Al Nahyan, Ruler of Abu Dhabi (1855–1909).

He also accompanied Sheikh Shakhbut bin Sultan Al Nahyan, Ruler of Abu Dhabi (1928–1966), from the beginning of his reign and became one of his close associates. In 1936, he was appointed the Ruler's representative in the Al Ain region and, while carrying out his duties, resided in the fort of Sheikh Sultan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Ruler of Abu Dhabi (1922–1926).

When Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan became the Ruler's Representative in Al Ain in 1946, bin Ghanom became one of his close advisers. He also served as financial adviser to Sheikh Shakhbut bin Sultan and accompanied him on his journey to Europe in 1951. He further accompanied Sheikh Hazza bin Sultan Al Nahyan on his travels between Abu Dhabi and Al Ain and on hunting expeditions, as well as Sheikh Khalid bin Sultan Al Nahyan on a number of hunting expeditions.

Abdullah bin Ghanom was a man of considerable social standing and prestige. He was known for his role in reconciling people and resolving disputes. His majlis was open to members and prominent figures of the community, and Sheikh Shakhbut regularly visited him there on a weekly basis. He died in 1976 at the age of eighty-four.

See: Al Mawrooth (@almawrooth) account on Instagram, post dated 21 May 2021, by Saeed Khamis Al Suwaidi, a researcher in local heritage. See also: Abdoul, Raeda, "Sultan bin Ghanom: The First Car I Owned Had Neither a Roof nor Doors," Al Dhafra Magazine, op. cit., Issue 4, August 2007, pp. 44, 46; Heard-Bey, Frauke, From Trucial States to United Arab Emirates, translated by Aida Yani Khoury, Motivate Publishing, 2007, p. 110.

(20) – Morris, op. cit., pp. 23–24.

(21) – Daaboul, Raeda, "Salem Balhas: Fifty Years Ago, the English Photographed Me with a Camera," Al Dhafra Magazine, op. cit., Issue 12, April 2008, pp. 32–33.

(22) – Coston, Anthony, "The Seven Sheikhdoms of the United Arab Emirates: Past and Present," a paper published in the proceedings of the symposium Memories of the Emirates through Oral Narratives, op. cit., p. 174.

(23) – After Sheikh Zayed assumed the rulership of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi in 1966, Sheikh Khalid was appointed Deputy Ruler of Abu Dhabi, serving from September 1966 until 1968. Sheikh Zayed frequently relied on Sheikh Khalid in administrative affairs. Matera, Giunti, Zayed: From Challenge to Union, Abu Dhabi, Center for Documentation and Research, 2007, pp. 127, 194.

(24) – Morris, op. cit., pp. 30–31.

(25) – Ibid., p. 31.

(26) – Tammam, Hamdi, Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan: The Leader and the Journey, Abu Dhabi, n.publ., 1981, pp. 248–250.

(27) – Badr, Mahmoud Ismail, "Zayed, One of Its Most Prominent Patrons Worldwide: Falconry, the Arabs' Foremost Sport," Al Dhafra Magazine, op. cit., Issue 8, December 2007, p. 138.

(28) – Al Nahyan, Zayed bin Sultan, Falconry: From Our Arab Heritage, Abu Dhabi, n.publ., 1976, pp. 12–13.

(29) – During the excavations conducted at Umm Al Nar in 1959, Sheikh Zayed—who was then the Ruler's Representative in Al Ain (1946–1966)—visited the Danish archaeological team. After examining the discovered tombs, he turned to Bibby and his colleagues and told them that if they wished to see hundreds of similar mounds, they should go to the Al Ain region. The team subsequently visited Al Ain. It is also worth noting that archaeologist Geoffrey Bibby expressed, in his book on his work in the Arabian Gulf, his gratitude for the encouragement he received from Sheikh Zayed and his brother Sheikh Shakhbut bin Sultan, Ruler of Abu Dhabi (1928–1966). The book was published under the title Looking for Dilmun. Hellyer, Peter, The Hidden Civilization: An Introduction to the Archaeology of the United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi, Union National Bank, 1998, pp. 176–177; Morris, op. cit., p. 36.

(30) – Morris, op. cit., p. 106.

(31) – Morris, op. cit., p. 104.

(32) – Ibid.



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In Zayed's Footsteps



Sheikh Zayed Falcon Release Programme

32 Years of Returning Raptors to Their Natural Habitats

How a Living Tradition Became a Global Project for Species Sustainability



Falconry does not end at the moment of the hunt; rather, it begins anew when the falcon is returned to the wild, free, strong, and capable of surviving and breeding. Through scientific research and field expertise, the Sheikh Zayed Falcon Release Programme renews, year after year, a success story that brings together the authenticity of heritage and a vision of sustainability, transforming this time-honoured tradition into a global project that contributes to restoring balance in nature.

Zayed's Legacy: From the Philosophy of Falconry to the Science of Sustainability

In the vision of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may he rest in peace, hunting with falcons was never an act detached from the environment; rather, it was part of an integrated system founded on respect for nature and the preservation of its balance. From this deep understanding, the Sheikh Zayed Falcon Release Programme was born in 1995, recasting this legacy within a modern scientific framework that bridges heritage and sustainability.

Today, after 32 years, the programme stands as one of the world's foremost initiatives for the protection of birds of prey, having returned approximately 2,400 Saker and Peregrine falcons to the wild, continuing a long-standing approach that is measured not by numbers alone, but by its capacity to address escalating environmental challenges, from habitat loss and expanding human activities to climate change and unsustainable captive-breeding practices.

The programme commenced with its first release in the Balochistan region of Pakistan, in cooperation with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). Subsequent releases took place in Pakistan and other countries until the programme became permanently based in Kazakhstan in 2009, where annual releases have continued ever since, with the sole exception of 2020, when the release was relocated to Uzbekistan due to challenges associated with COVID-19 prevention measures.

The falcons are released within the framework of the sustainable approach intrinsic to Arab falconry heritage. For centuries, some falconers would catch a number of wild falcons each autumn as they passed through the Arabian Peninsula during their migration from breeding grounds in Russia and Central Asia to their wintering grounds in Africa.



These birds would be trained to hunt the quarry favoured by falconers of the Arabian Peninsula, such as Houbara bustard, stone curlew, and hares. As quarry numbers declined in spring with their return migration to breeding grounds, the falcons would be released back into the wild.

Today, falconers continue this fruitful tradition, which reinforces wildlife sustainability, by releasing groups of falcons each spring as part of the Sheikh Zayed Falcon Release Programme, alongside developing captive breeding programmes for falcons and relying on them in the practice of falconry.



Kazakhstan: The Heart of Migration Routes and the Convergence of Species

The selection of Kazakhstan as the programme's principal release site over the past 17 years was not simply a matter of geography; it was the result of cumulative field studies and satellite-tracking data. The programme became permanently based in this region because it represents a key node in falcon migration routes extending across Russia, China, and Mongolia.

This environment, combining vast steppes and rugged mountains, provides ideal conditions for falcon survival, from an abundance of prey to a diversity of terrain. It also serves as a meeting point for the migration routes of the Asian Houbara bustard.

With its establishment in Kazakhstan, the Sheikh Zayed Falcon Release Programme strengthened its ties with the International Fund for Houbara Conservation (IFHC), which has maintained close working relationships with relevant authorities in the country since the 1990s, when studies, research, and satellite-tracking data on the Asian Houbara confirmed Kazakhstan's importance as a habitat and a pivotal anchor point for both breeding and migratory Asian Houbara.

This partnership evolved to include joint research and field studies, as well as species conservation efforts and natural habitat protection. It culminated in the establishment of an IFHC branch in Kazakhstan and the creation of the largest and most advanced centre for Asian Houbara conservation, the Sheikh Khalifa Houbara Breeding Centre- Kazakhstan, which encompasses a wide range of environmental and community facilities supporting the regional economy.

Pre-Release: The Exact Science Behind a Survival Opportunity

If the moment of release is the most captivating, what precedes it is the most consequential. At the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital, the rehabilitation phase begins; and it is the cornerstone of the entire operation's success.

Preparations for the release programme begin before the close of the annual hunting season, when falcons are enrolled in a rehabilitation programme designed to help them readapt after their return to the wild. Falcons selected for release are placed under continuous veterinary supervision, receive ongoing training, and are fed a varied diet to build their condition and strengthen their musculature.

The falcons also undergo a rigorous series of veterinary examinations to screen for disease, and their plumage is carefully inspected to ensure it is capable of withstanding long migratory journeys. No falcon is released unless it is of wholly wild origin and in optimal health, a strict condition that reflects the programme's commitment to scientific standards.

It is worth noting that all falcons donated by local falconers over the years since the programme was launched, as well as those confiscated by the relevant authorities for violations of applicable laws and regulations, underwent a comprehensive series of medical examinations and intensive training before being released into the wild.

The rehabilitation phase then begins in earnest; falcons are trained in daily flight, stimulated to recover their natural hunting instincts, and placed on a carefully devised dietary programme that increases their body weight and builds energy reserves to carry them through the critical period immediately following release.

In this context, Dr. Margit Müller, Director of the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital, affirms: "The programme has contributed to understanding whether migratory birds such as the Peregrine and Saker falcon can maintain their established migration routes, and we hope it will form the foundation for developing international guidelines for falcon rehabilitation."





The Falcon's Identity... Where Heritage Meets Technology

Before departing the UAE, each falcon is assigned a precise identity: a metal ring bearing a serial number and the programme's contact address, while each bird also carries a small microchip implanted subcutaneously to identify the bird should it be captured.

While all falcons receive identification rings, a number are fitted with solar-powered satellite tracking devices to monitor flight routes and collect scientific data on survival rates.

The solar-powered tracking devices operate with batteries lasting between three and five years. These devices transmit daily data on location, altitude, and body temperature, enabling scientists to track migration routes and understand the behaviour of these birds with unprecedented precision.

Reading the Land... How a Release Site Is Selected

Before the moment of release, the team undertakes an extensive field survey spanning hundreds of kilometers in search of the optimal location. It is not sufficient for the terrain to be open; it must possess specific elements: an abundance of prey, proximity to water sources, and relative safety from competing raptors.

The timing of all releases is chosen to coincide with the falcons' migration to their breeding areas, and the locations are selected with meticulous care from among safe sites that lie along migration routes and offer adequate numbers of the falcon's preferred prey.

The site is inspected on multiple occasions; wind direction is analysed, and any potential threats are assessed, in a process that more closely resembles 'reading nature' before entering it.

The Moment of Release... Testing Instinct

When the falcon is freed from the hand, the long-awaited moment begins, one that encapsulates everything that came before. The falcon hesitates for a few seconds, then soars into the sky.

During the first two weeks, the falcon faces its most severe test: total self-reliance. Here, there is no margin for error. Either the falcon succeeds in hunting and adapting… or it disappears.

This phase is precisely what makes every preceding detail, from the meticulous examination to the thorough training, a decisive factor in the success of the release.

After the Sky... When Falcons Become Data

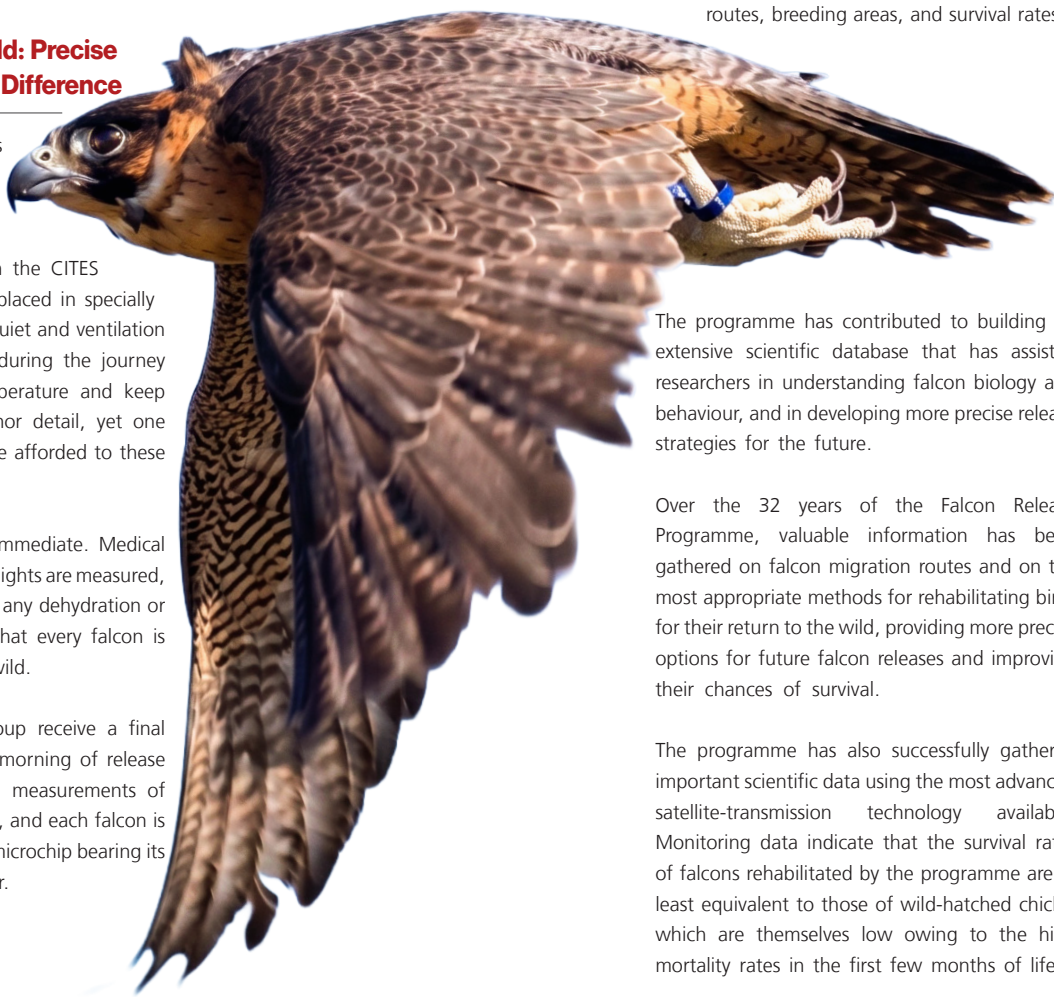
The story does not end after release. Falcons fitted with tracking devices continue to transmit daily data, analysed in Abu Dhabi, revealing migration routes, breeding areas, and survival rates.

The Journey to the Wild: Precise Details That Make the Difference

The transfer of the falcons is not merely a geographical relocation; it is a meticulous phase subject to strict protocols in accordance with the CITES convention. The falcons are placed in specially designed crates that ensure quiet and ventilation and are misted with water during the journey to maintain their body temperature and keep them calm, a seemingly minor detail, yet one that reflects the depth of care afforded to these creatures.

Upon arrival, release is not immediate. Medical examinations are repeated, weights are measured, and the birds are checked for any dehydration or feather damage, to ensure that every falcon is genuinely ready to face the wild.

All birds in the selected group receive a final medical examination on the morning of release day, in addition to scientific measurements of wingspan, plumage, and feet, and each falcon is implanted with an electronic microchip bearing its unique identification number.



The programme has contributed to building an extensive scientific database that has assisted researchers in understanding falcon biology and behaviour, and in developing more precise release strategies for the future.

Over the 32 years of the Falcon Release Programme, valuable information has been gathered on falcon migration routes and on the most appropriate methods for rehabilitating birds for their return to the wild, providing more precise options for future falcon releases and improving their chances of survival.

The programme has also successfully gathered important scientific data using the most advanced satellite-transmission technology available. Monitoring data indicate that the survival rates of falcons rehabilitated by the programme are at least equivalent to those of wild-hatched chicks, which are themselves low owing to the high mortality rates in the first few months of life.

The Female Peregrine... The 40,000km Journey



Among the thousands of falcons that have passed through the Sheikh Zayed Falcon Release Programme, the story of a female Peregrine stands out, not because she was the strongest or the fastest, but because through her journey she embodied the full meaning of "returning to the wild."

Her story began in 2018, when she entered the programme as a wild falcon and underwent the necessary rehabilitation and care before being transferred to Kazakhstan and released along her natural migration routes. Nothing distinguished her at that moment from the others, except for a small tracking device fitted to her, which quickly became a scientific window onto one of the most remarkable journeys on record.

After release, she headed north on a long course that carried her to the far reaches of Siberia, where she spent the summer in areas close to the Arctic Ocean, one of the most distant points reached by Peregrine falcons. There, in a harsh and frozen environment, she demonstrated her capacity for adaptation and survival, beginning the first chapter of her extraordinary journey.

As winter approached, she turned south, crossing Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, through Iran, until she reached the coast of the Arabian Sea in the Sultanate of Oman, where she fell into the hands of hunters. Her story could have ended there. But what followed was a defining moment: the hunters, recognising from the metal ring she bore that she was part of the Sheikh Zayed Falcon Release Programme, chose to return her.

That decision was no incidental detail, it was a reflection of a growing awareness among falconers of their role in safeguarding this legacy. Thanks to this awareness, the Peregrine returned to the programme, where she was rehabilitated and released once more from the very same location where she had first set out.

On her second journey, she retraced virtually the same route, returning to Siberia, then heading south again, but this time she wintered in the vicinity of the UAE-Oman border, in clear testament to her ability to "remember" routes and select wintering grounds.

Her third journey was the most precise and consistent of all. Researchers observed her return to the same location for the third consecutive year, a sight reflecting a remarkable precision in natural navigation, and one that provided scientists with a deeper understanding of the migration patterns of this species.

Yet the end of her journey came unexpectedly. In late 2020, she was struck and killed during an aerial chase with another falcon. Despite its brevity, what preceded it was more than sufficient to make her one of the most significant cases ever documented by the programme.



Over three years, this female Peregrine covered approximately 40,000 kilometers, one of the longest journeys ever recorded for a tagged falcon within the programme. That distance was not merely a number; it was a complete scientific and human story: of the capacity for survival, of the precision of instinct, and of humanity's success in supporting nature without interfering in its course.

Thus, the female Peregrine became far more than a case study. She became a symbol of Sheikh Zayed's vision, and a living witness to the truth that falcons, when given the opportunity, will always return to the sky... and find their way.

A Network of Cooperation... From Abu Dhabi to Central Asia

The programme rests on a broad network of partnerships including the Environment Agency- Abu Dhabi, the International Fund for Houbara Conservation, the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital, the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, the Emirates Falconers' Club, the Mohamed bin Zayed Raptor Conservation Fund, and international partners in Kazakhstan.

This collaboration extends beyond implementation to encompass scientific research, data exchange, and the development of working methods, making the programme an international model for wildlife protection.

In this regard, His Excellency Mohammed Ahmed Al Bowardi, Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi, affirms that the programme has transcended its origins as a local initiative to become "one of the world's most important initiatives for the restoration of endangered wildlife species", reflecting the continuity of the legacy of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan and demonstrating the UAE's leadership in protecting biodiversity and advancing the balance between humanity and nature.

He consistently emphasises the importance of the partnerships uniting national and international institutions, which have contributed to the programme's development and the expansion of its impact.

The Falconer... From Practitioner to Partner in Conservation

At the heart of this project stands the falconer, but in a different role. No longer merely a practitioner of falconry, he has become a partner in protecting falcons by handing them over at the end of the season and participating in their release.

The programme has also succeeded in encouraging falconers from the UAE and numerous GCC member states to donate falcons, thereby enabling the programme to return them to the wild.

Key platforms and events such as the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition (ADIHEX), play a pivotal role in raising this awareness, widening the base of community participation, and promoting the use of captive-bred falcons.











Towards 2027...
The Continuity of Zayed's Path

As preparations are made for next year's release, the call for falconers to participate continues, as do scientific efforts to develop the programme. The story has not ended, nor will it end. It renews itself each year, with every falcon that returns to the sky.

In Zayed's footsteps, the story that never ends. From the falconer's hand to the researcher's laboratory and examination centre, and onward to the open sky of the wild, this success story continues.

A story that cannot be reduced to a number... and does noe end at the moment of release.

It begins anew each time a falcon returns to its home.

"And in Zayed's footsteps, the falcons remain free... and the vision of sustainable hunting endures."





Projects and Achievements



25 Years of Excellence and Leadership in Safeguarding Falconry

From Zayed's Legacy, the Story Began

Over a journey spanning a quarter-century, the Emirates Falconers' Club celebrates this year its Silver Jubilee, drawing inspiration from the legacy of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may he rest in peace, who established falconry as an authentic component of the cultural and environmental identity of the UAE, and laid the foundations for its preservation and the safeguarding of its inherited values.

Throughout those years, the Emirates Falconers' Club remained steadfast in its role of protecting the cultural and environmental heritage bound to falconry and transmitting it to future generations, reflecting the vision of Their Highnesses the Sheikhs, which is rooted in achieving a balance between authenticity and sustainability, and cementing heritage as a living part of the nation's present and future.

This journey has been marked by sustained efforts to preserve the sport of falconry and enhance its standing and presence at the local, regional, and international levels through pioneering initiatives, specialised programmes, and scientific projects that have contributed to safeguarding this ancient human heritage and ensuring its sustainability for generations to come.



Falconry in the UAE's Cultural Memory and Its Values Rooted in the Environment, Knowledge, and Expertise

The roots of falconry in the history of the Arab region extend back thousands of years. It has formed part of the heritage of many peoples and civilisations, intertwined with human culture and the relationship between humans and their environment, evolving across generations into a practice that unites knowledge, expertise, and discipline.

In the UAE, falconry has acquired a special place as part of the intangible cultural heritage, associated with enduring values that encompass an understanding of nature, respect for its resources, and the capacity to adapt to its conditions.

The late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may he rest in peace, gave great attention to this heritage, in recognition of its cultural and environmental importance and his commitment to ensuring its continuity for future generations. He adopted an approach founded on achieving a balance between traditional hunting practices and environmental conservation and contributed to cementing the concept of sustainable falconry as part of the national and cultural identity of society.

With the establishment of the United Arab Emirates in 1971, a clear commitment emerged for the preservation of this heritage, not merely as a historical legacy, but as a living element capable of development and enhancement in line with the demands of the modern era. From an early stage, the nation sought to establish foundations that would ensure the continuity of falconry, through supporting sound practices, encouraging scientific research related to the field, and raising awareness of its cultural and environmental importance.

Within this framework, the outlines of an integrated vision began to take shape, aimed at transitioning falconry from the domain of individual practice to a more organised and sustainable framework paving the way for the emergence of initiatives and projects dedicated to the preservation and development of this enduring heritage.



The First Falconry Conference in 1976: The Beginning of an Organised International Path for Safeguarding Falconry and Enhancing Scientific Cooperation

In the context of these early efforts to preserve and develop the heritage of falconry, the First International Conference on Falconry & Conservation, held in Abu Dhabi in 1976 at the initiative and under patronage of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, marked a pivotal milestone in the journey of safeguarding falconry, not only at the local level, but internationally as well. The conference brought together an elite gathering of falconers, researchers, and experts from countries around the world, provided a platform for dialogue and the exchange of knowledge, and contributed to redefining falconry as a practice that unites heritage and science. It also established a new direction based on international cooperation in the conservation of falcons and their prey, and on strengthening the role of scientific research in developing sustainable hunting practices.

The significance of this event extended far beyond its status as an international gathering, becoming the starting point for a series of initiatives aimed at organising and advancing this field. The conference contributed to cementing the conviction that institutional frameworks were needed to bring falconers together and unify the efforts devoted to preserving this heritage. It also laid the early foundations for understanding falconry as a shared responsibility, requiring a balance between practice and environmental conservation, a principle that was later reflected in many projects and initiatives that emerged in the decades that followed.





Developmental Shifts and the Growing Need for a Framework to Organise Falconry and Ensure Its Continuity

With the accelerating pace of development witnessed by the UAE from the second half of the last century, new challenges emerged in relation to the preservation of cultural heritage, with falconry among its most important pillars, against the backdrop of rapid economic and social transformation. In this context, the need became increasingly pressing for an organised body that would work to protect this heritage and reintroduce it within a modern framework that would ensure its continuity. This need crystallised in light of the directions that emerged from the 1976 Falconry Conference, calling for the development of falconry within an integrated system that brought together traditional expertise and scientific knowledge.

Based on these foundations, a new phase began to take shape, one founded on transforming recommendations and ideas into practical reality. Multiple initiatives emerged in the fields of research, awareness, and the organisation of falconry-related practices, contributing to the development of a knowledge and institutional foundation that paved the way for the establishment of a body to bring falconers together and unify their efforts. Within this framework, the subsequent founding of the Emirates Falconers' Club may be viewed as a natural extension of these efforts, and a practical translation of the vision that began to take shape in the 1970s.



The Establishment of the Emirates Falconers' Club in 2001: A Practical Translation of the Leadership's Vision for Safeguarding Falconry

The establishment of the Emirates Falconers' Club on 24 September 2001 marked the culmination of a long journey of dedicated work and strategic thinking focused on safeguarding falconry and strengthening its presence. The Club was formally established with the support of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, may God protect him, and under the guidance of His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, making it the first entity in the country dedicated to organising the sport of falconry according to modern principles that uphold sustainability and preserve environmental balance. This establishment represented an important turning point, as falconry transitioned from its traditional framework into an integrated institutional system.

The purpose of founding the Club was not merely to provide an organisational umbrella, but to establish a comprehensive platform that would bring falconers together, develop their skills, raise their awareness, and provide them with the necessary services. From the outset, the Club also sought to cement the concept of falconry as a responsible practice, linked to environmental protection and the conservation of biodiversity, in line with the UAE's vision to achieve a balance between preserving heritage and meeting the requirements of sustainable development. The Club thus began laying the foundations for its work, which would later evolve to encompass a wide range of programmes and initiatives at both local and international levels.



Developing an Integrated Falconry System Rooted in Environmental Awareness and Responsible Practice

From its inception, the Emirates Falconers' Club worked to translate its vision into practical reality by building an integrated system that addressed falconry as a heritage, a culture, and environmental responsibility simultaneously. Its role was not limited to organising the practice, it sought to develop it along modern scientific lines that ensured its sustainability and kept pace with the transformations taking place within this field. In its early stages, the Club focused on raising awareness among falconers by providing them with information and guidance related to hunting seasons and methods, while introducing them to best practices that strike a balance between hunting and environmental conservation.

In this context, the Club was committed to cementing the concept of responsible falconry, founded on compliance with regulations, respect for the natural balance, and the reduction of unsustainable practices, so as to ensure the protection of falcons and their prey, foremost among which is the Houbara bustard. It also worked to guide falconers towards the use of modern methods that reduce pressure on wild species and enhance their chances of survival. From the outset, this approach constituted one of the Club's fundamental pillars and contributed to fostering a new culture among falconers grounded in awareness and responsibility, while preserving the authentic values associated with this practice.



Strengthening the Integration Between Traditional Expertise and Scientific Programmes Through Collaboration with Specialised Institutions and Organisations

This vision was given practical expression through early collaboration with a number of specialised national institutions, most notably the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital, the National Avian Research Centre in Sweihan, and the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency in Abu Dhabi. This collaboration contributed to establishing a solid scientific foundation to support falconry practices, by providing knowledge related to falcon training, nutrition, disease diagnosis, and treatment methods, in addition to accurate information on falcon prey and their behaviour.

This integration between traditional expertise and scientific knowledge represented a qualitative step in the development of falconry, which was no longer reliant solely on inherited experience, but came to be based on scientific foundations that contributed to improving performance and reducing risk. The collaboration also helped raise awareness of the importance of species conservation, foremost among which is the Houbara bustard, widely regarded as one of the most celebrated quarry species in falconry and often described as "the falconers' beloved."

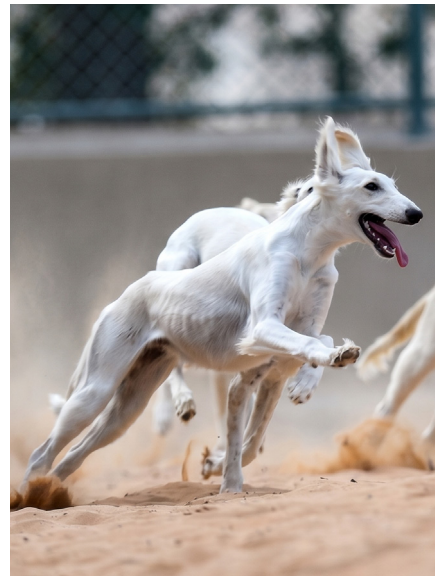
Through these efforts, a balanced model began to emerge, one that combines traditional practice with scientific approach, a development that was positively reflected in the advancement of this field across the Emirate of Abu Dhabi and the UAE.



The Club's Role in Rehabilitation, Knowledge Transfer, and Building an Integrated Environment That Supports Falconers and Develops Their Skills

Alongside its awareness-raising and scientific role, the Emirates Falconers' Club was committed to fulfilling an integrated educational role, aimed at preparing a new generation of falconers equipped with both knowledge and skill. In its early years, the Club organised training programmes and specialised courses covering the fundamentals of falconry, modern training methods, falcon care techniques, and the identification of common diseases and prevention measures. These programmes also contributed to transferring the expertise of veteran falconers to younger generations, ensuring the continuity and evolution of this knowledge.

In parallel, the Club worked to provide an integrated support system for falconers, by developing facilities such as "Al Meqeedh" (falcon moulting facility), designed to exemplary standards, alongside the provision of falconry equipment and supplies at the Club's headquarters in the Sweihan area of Abu Dhabi. This environment contributed to creating a space that combined learning with hands-on practice, facilitated the exchange of expertise among falconers, and fostered a spirit of community participation. The Club also sought to provide direct practical services, including support for hunting excursions, consultations related to the buying and selling of captive-bred falcons, and other services that contributed to enhancing the experience of falconers both within the UAE and abroad.



The Launch of the Arabian Saluki Centre and the Club's Regional Expansion Through Building a Network of Falconers.

The Club's founding year of 2001 witnessed early steps of significant importance to the Club's direction and future vision. The Arabian Saluki Centre was established alongside the Club's headquarters, becoming the first centre of its kind in the Arabian Gulf region, reflecting the importance placed on integrating the heritage elements associated with falconry. Membership was also opened to falconers from GCC countries, in a clear affirmation that falconry represents a shared heritage transcending geographical boundaries and requiring regional cooperation in its preservation and development.

Within this framework, the Club worked to enhance its presence beyond the country's borders by appointing representatives in a number of countries, with the aim of broadening communication with falconers, sharing knowledge, and unifying efforts related to the preservation of this heritage. These initiatives contributed to reinforcing the Club's position as a regional platform that brought falconers together and worked to build a network of relationships supporting the exchange of expertise and strengthening the presence of Emirati falconry in regional and international forums.



Early Achievements Reflected in Growing Participation and the Launch of Pioneering Initiatives

Within a short period, the results of these efforts became evident. In 2002, the Club attracted more than 2,000 falconers from the UAE and GCC countries, a figure that reflected the scale of engagement with this initiative and the need for a body to bring falconers together and unify their efforts.

In the same year, the Club participated actively in the Arab Hunting and Adventures Exhibition in Dubai, and commenced collaborating with the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi to develop a system for the registration of captive-bred falcons and to issue the world's first falcon passport, a pioneering early step in organising the movement and protection of falcons, and ensuring the sustainability of falconry on a sound scientific basis.

This phase also saw the launch of a number of important initiatives, most notably participation in the Sheikh Zayed Falcon Release Programme, affirming the Club's commitment to species conservation, alongside the publication of the first issue of Al Saggar magazine, which served as a specialised platform for sharing knowledge and documenting expertise in this field. This reflected the leading role that the UAE was beginning to play in the development of falconry at the international level.



The Beginning of the Club's Global Presence and the Launch of the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition

By 2003, the influence of the Emirates Falconers' Club had expanded internationally as it became a member of the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF), enabling it to participate actively in the international efforts to safeguard this heritage and promote its sustainability. This step marked a qualitative leap in the Club's journey, making it part of a global network comprising specialised falconry clubs and associations working to develop the field according to modern scientific and organisational standards.

In the same year, the Emirates Falconers' Club organised the inaugural edition of the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition (ADIHEX), which subsequently became one of the world's foremost specialised events. This unique event served as an annual gathering that brought together falconers, experts, researchers, and enthusiasts from around the world, alongside captive-bred falcon breeders and breeding farms, as well as falconry clubs and associations. The exhibition contributed to cementing the UAE's standing as a global centre for falconry and consolidating the Club's role as a principal hub uniting heritage, knowledge, and development.





Cementing the Club's International Standing and Launching the First Efforts to Inscribe Falconry on UNESCO's Representative List

The Emirates Falconers' Club further strengthened its international presence in subsequent years through participation in workshops and specialised events focused on species conservation, particularly those concerning the Saker falcon, alongside the organisation of conferences and seminars concerned with the advancement of the sport of falconry. In 2004, the Club hosted the General Assembly of the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) in Abu Dhabi, under the motto "Falconry: A World Heritage."

The Club continued to launch pioneering initiatives, most notably the organisation of the first competition for the selection of the world's most beautiful captive-bred falcons, and the supervision of major heritage events, all of which contributed to widening the circle of interest in falconry and strengthening the Club's presence at regional and international levels.

This phase was not merely an extension of the founding phase, it marked the starting point for a more influential role on the international stage. In 2005, the Club initiated efforts to inscribe falconry on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, a landmark step that led, approximately five years later, to falconry's recognition as a living human heritage through a joint multinational nomination file led by the relevant UAE authorities in cooperation with 11 countries. This achievement contributed to cementing the legitimacy of falconry practice, and to the adoption of a World Falconry Day on 16 November each year, a crowning recognition of the long efforts devoted to preserving and promoting this heritage.

Emirates Falconers' Club (2001–2026)

This file documents the most significant milestones, projects, and achievements of the Emirates Falconers' Club from its establishment in 2001 to 2026, tracing a journey distinguished by dedication and excellence, that reflects the United Arab Emirates' commitment to safeguarding its intangible cultural heritage and enhancing its presence and sustainability for future generations, in a spirit that combines authenticity with innovation.

From Past to Present

Milestones in the Journey of the Emirates Falconers' Club

From Foundation to the Silver Jubilee (2001–2026)

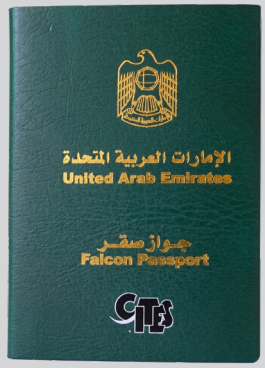




2001

- Official establishment of the Emirates Falconers' Club.
- Participation in the Arab Hunting and Adventure Exhibition in Dubai.
- Establishment of the Arabian Saluki Centre in Abu Dhabi.
- Commencement of welcoming senior dignitaries and visitors to the Club's headquarters in Sweihan.
- Opening Club membership to falconers from all GCC member states.





2002

- Attracting more than 2,000 falconers from the UAE and GCC countries.
- Participation in the Arab Hunting and Adventure Exhibition at the Dubai World Trade Centre.
- Collaboration with the Environment Agency to develop a dedicated registration system for captive-bred falcons.
- Commencement of annual participation in the Sheikh Zayed Falcon Release Programme.
- Publication of the first issue of Al Saggar, a specialised heritage and scientific magazine.
- Issuance of the world's first falcon passport, in cooperation with the relevant authorities in the UAE.



2003

- Membership in the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF).
- Organisation of the inaugural edition of the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition (ADIHEX).
- Launch of the Most Beautiful Captive-Bred Falcon Competition at ADIHEX.
- Participation in the Symposium on the Saker Falcon Status in the Range States.
- Contribution to the Abu Dhabi Declaration on the Conservation of the Saker Falcon.

2004

- Hosting the General Assembly of the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) under the motto "Falconry... A World Heritage."
- Organisation of the second edition of ADIHEX.
- Launch of the "Falcons Through the Eyes of Painters and Photographers" Competition.
- Supervision of the Heritage Pavilion at the World Aerobatic Championships in Al Ain.



2005

- Establishment of the first falconry archive in collaboration with The Peregrine Fund in the United States.
- Commencement of efforts to compile documents, films, photographs, and publications in support of the inscription of falconry on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list.
- Organisation of the third edition of ADIHEX.
- Organisation of a special photography exhibition entitled " Zayed: The Gift", featuring rare photographs of Their Highnesses the Sheikhs during falconry expeditions.
- Hosting the General Assembly of the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC).



2006

- Inauguration of the Sheikh Zayed Heritage Museum in the United States.
- Extensive promotional campaign for ADIHEX across the GCC countries.
- Organisation of the fourth edition of ADIHEX.
- Expansion of the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital from a veterinary facility into a specialised institution.
- Collaboration with the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage to present Al Ayala, Al Harbiya, and Al Yowlah performances at ADIHEX.
- Participation in the Heritage Exhibition at the World Aerobatic Championships in Al Ain.



2007

- Participation in the International Festival of Falconry in Englefield, United Kingdom.
- Organisation of the fifth edition of ADIHEX.
- Organisation of the inaugural Captive-Bred Falcon Auction.
- Organisation of a competition for the finest Nabati poems on the falcon and falconry expeditions.
- Launch of an educational plan to introduce the sport of falconry and promote awareness of sustainable hunting among school students in the UAE.





2008

- Promotional tour for ADIHEX across the GCC countries.
- Organisation of the sixth edition of ADIHEX.
- Organisation of the second Captive-Bred Falcon Auction.
- Increased participation in the Emirates Falconers' Club competition for the finest Nabati poems on the falcon and falconry expeditions.
- The Al Megnas programme, produced under the supervision of His Highness, the Chairman of the Club's Board of Directors, wins the Gold Award for Best Documentary at the Cairo Arab Media Festival.



2009

- Organisation of the International Festival of Falconry in Englefield, United Kingdom, in cooperation with the British Hawk Board, and participation alongside several official bodies and authorities in the "Abu Dhabi Village" at the festival.
- Organisation of the seventh edition of ADIHEX.
- Hosting delegations from UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage at ADIHEX.
- Hosting performances by the British Royal Cavalry at ADIHEX.
- Participation in a workshop on the submission of the multinational nomination file for the inscription of falconry on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list.



2010

- Organisation of the eighth edition of ADIHEX.
- Hosting the World Arabian Horse Racing Conference at ADIHEX for the first time.
- Inscription of falconry on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, followed by the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey commending the UAE's efforts in achieving this milestone.
- Reception of a delegation from the Royal Spanish Falconry Association.



2011

- Organisation of the second edition of the International Festival of Falconry (IFF) in Al Ain.
- Hosting the annual meeting of the Board of The Peregrine Fund.
- Organisation of the ninth edition of ADIHEX.
- Supervision of the falconry competitions at the Al Dhafra Festival.
- The International Falconry Forum in Al Ain reviews ways of safeguarding falconry, training falconers, and the legal frameworks governing falconry.
- Participation in celebrations marking the inscription of falconry on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France, at the invitation of the European Parliament's Sub-Committee on Hunting and Sustainable Environmental Protection.

2012

- Organisation of the Abu Dhabi Falconry Competitions at Al Wathba, with the participation of more than 600 falconers and 1,100 falcons.
- Organisation of the tenth edition of ADIHEX.
- Organisation of the Arabic Coffee Preparation Competition and the Best Nabati Poetry on Falconry Competition, in collaboration with the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority.
- Launch of heritage and cultural radio competitions for the ADIHEX audience.
- Supervision of the falconry competitions at the Al Dhafra Festival across all competition categories.



2013

- Launch of the Houbara Distribution Programme for falconers.
- Organisation of the eleventh edition of ADIHEX.
- Organisation of another edition of the Arabian Saluki Beauty Contest.
- Launch and sponsorship of the Best Falcon Display Stand and Falconry Equipment Competition at ADIHEX.
- Showcasing the International Falconry Archive at the Emirates Falconers' Club pavilion at ADIHEX.
- Organisation of the falconry competition at the Al Dhafra Festival.



2014

- Organisation of the third edition of the International Festival of Falconry (IFF) in Abu Dhabi.
- Announcement of the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School.
- Signing of a cooperation agreement with the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey.
- Representation of the UAE as Guest of Honour at the Tan-Tan Moussem Festival in Morocco.
- Participation in the Al Qawasim Falconry Festival.
- Organisation of the twelfth edition of ADIHEX.



2015

- The UAE assumes the position of Vice President of the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey for the Middle East and North Africa Region.
- Organisation of the thirteenth edition of ADIHEX.
- Active participation in the Sheikh Zayed Festival.
- Participation in the Conference, "Falconry: Heritage, History and Medicine," at New York University Abu Dhabi.
- Participation in the Falconry Festival in El Jadida Province, the Kingdom of Morocco.



2016

- Official inauguration of the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School in the Remah area of Al Ain.
- Development of the Falconry Strategy for the Middle East and North Africa Region.
- Convening of a workshop on the illegal trade in birds of prey.
- Organisation of the fourteenth edition of ADIHEX.
- Organisation of the International Symposium on Falconry in the Middle East and North Africa under the theme "Moving Forward with UNESCO Inscription: Preserving Traditional Values and Finding New Solutions to the Challenges Facing Wildlife."
- The Statistics Centre – Abu Dhabi conducts a public opinion survey on falconry in the UAE in partnership with the Emirates Falconers' Club.
- Graduation of the first cohort from the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School.



2017

- Organisation of the fourth edition of the International Festival of Falconry (IFF).
- Launch of the Mohamed bin Zayed Raptor Conservation Fund.
- Launch of the Sheikh Zayed Falconry Heritage Library.
- Organisation of the fifteenth edition of ADIHEX.
- Participation in organising the Sons of Pride Camp, in cooperation with the Martyrs' Families' Affairs Office.
- Organisation of an international workshop on the illegal trade in birds of prey.





2018

- The UAE wins the Presidency of the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey.
- Signing of a cooperation agreement with the International Fund for Houbara Conservation.
- Strengthening Houbara conservation efforts amid the growing success of the Houbara Distribution Programme for falconers since its launch in 2013.
- Support for local and international legislation to combat illegal hunting.
- Organisation of the sixteenth edition of ADIHEX.
- Participation in organising a new edition of the Sons of Pride Camp, in cooperation with the Martyrs' Families' Affairs Office
- Participation in the Saudi Falcons and Hunting Exhibition.





2019

- Organisation of the Second International Conference on Illegal Trade in Birds of Prey in Abu Dhabi.
- Organisation of the seventeenth edition of ADIHEX.
- Development of a global falconry strategy in cooperation with the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey.
- Participation in organising a new edition of the Sons of Pride Camp, in cooperation with the Martyrs' Families' Affairs Office
- Participation in organising the Al Megnas Programme in the Sweihan desert as part of the Sultan bin Zayed Heritage Festival.



2020

- On its twentieth anniversary, the Emirates Falconers' Club received widespread media recognition for its role in safeguarding heritage and promoting sustainable hunting.
- Celebration of the tenth anniversary of the inscription of falconry on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, with the number of participating countries doubling to 22.
- Convening of the IAF Annual Council of Delegates Meeting, held virtually.
- Active participation of the Club in the Sheikh Zayed Festival 2020–2021.



2021

- Organisation of the eighteenth edition of ADIHEX.
- Organisation of the conference "The Future of Falconry " in cooperation with UNESCO and the IAF.
- Signing of a strategic partnership with the UK's The Game Fair to strengthen the international presence of Emirati falconry and promote the exchange of heritage expertise.
- Re-election of H.E. Majid Ali Al Mansouri, Secretary General of the Emirates Falconers' Club, as President of the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey.
- Significant participation in the Sheikh Zayed Festival 2021–2022.
- The number of countries participating in the UNESCO inscription of falconry rises to 24, making it the largest multinational nomination for intangible cultural heritage in UNESCO's history.





2022

- Organisation of the nineteenth edition of ADIHEX.
- The Falcon Auction achieves success exceeding all expectations at ADIHEX.
- Launch of new competitions in the falconry sector.
- Organisation of the conference "The Significance of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in Linking Intangible Cultural Heritage and Wildlife Conservation," in cooperation with UNESCO, the IAF, and the IUCN.
- Celebration of the World Falconry Day on 16 November.
- Participation in the inaugural meeting of the International Federation for Falconry Sports and Racing.
- Participation in the honouring of winners of the UAE Falconry Union Cup Championship in Dubai.
- Participation in organising a new edition of the Sons of Pride Camp, in cooperation with the Martyrs' Families' Affairs Office.
- Active participation in the Sheikh Zayed Festival.



2023

- Signing of a collaboration agreement with the INPEX JODCO Foundation to strengthen friendship programmes, student exchange, and cultural cooperation between Emirati and Japanese falconers.
- Organisation of the twentieth edition of ADIHEX.
- Organisation of the largest captive-bred falcon auction.
- Launch of new contests for the finest falconry equipment at ADIHEX.
- Organisation of the conference "Sustainable Falconry: Meeting the Challenges of the Twenty-First Century" in cooperation with the IAF.
- Organisation of the conference "The Role of Media in Preserving Falconry and Intangible Cultural Heritage" during ADIHEX.
- Significant participation in the Sheikh Zayed Festival.





2024

- Organisation of the first edition of the Emirati- Japanese Falconry Program in the Remah area of Al Ain.
- Organisation of the twenty-first edition of ADIHEX.
- Re-publication of Al Saggar magazine in a special edition comprising 25 diverse sections featuring 86 heritage, cultural, scientific, and environmental articles.
- Signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on joint cooperation with the Abu Dhabi Heritage Authority.
- Launch of the ninth season of the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School.
- The Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Museum of International Falconry in Brussels begins welcoming visitors.
- Commencement of preparations for establishing the Hamdan bin Zayed International Falconry Library, the first of its kind in the Arab world and globally.
- Launch of a new website for the Emirates Falconers' Club.
- Participation in AERUS 2024 at Khalifa University of Science and Technology, with the aim of supporting efforts to prepare a new generation that preserves its heritage through smart technologies.
- Participation in the second edition of the Early Childhood Development Exhibition at Umm Al Emarat Park.
- Active participation in the Sheikh Zayed Festival..
- Celebration of World Falconry Day and the growing global reach of falconry, thanks to the efforts initiated and led by the UAE.
- Participation in the celebrations of the UAE's 53rd National Day, in cooperation with a number of ministries and schools.
- Under the UAE's presidency, the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey witnessed significant growth in its projects and achievements. Its membership grew to include 150 institutions, associations, and clubs from 90 countries, where more than 100,000 falconers practice the sport.











2025

- The second edition of the Emirati -Japanese Falconry Program was held in the city of Ichihara, Japan.
- The ninth educational falconry season at the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School attracts the highest number of student trainees in the School's history.
- Signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC), comprising 1,900 members across 86 countries, aimed at promoting the sustainable management of wildlife and natural resources.
- Participation in the General Assembly meetings of the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) in Doha.
- Signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood, within the framework of the celebration of UAE Children's Day, under the motto "The Right to National Identity and Culture."
- Participation in the fourth edition of the "Make It in the Emirates" Exhibition, which brings together innovators, investors, and policy-makers to shape the future of industry and promote growth.
- Signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the British Archives of Falconry.
- Organisation of the twenty-second edition of ADIHEX.
- Organisation of a range of educational and recreational activities for children at the Club's pavilion at ADIHEX, including the "Little Veterinary" and the "Guardians of Falconry" passport.
- Publication of a new bilingual (Arabic-English) issue of Al Saggar magazine comprising 34 diverse sections and featuring more than 100 heritage, cultural, scientific, and environmental articles.
- Organisation of the nineteenth edition of the Arabian Saluki Beauty Competition within ADIHEX.
- Active participation in the S'hail–Katara International Hunting and Falcons Exhibition in Doha.
- The Emirates Falconers' Club enriches the inaugural edition of the Al Ain International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition 2025 with a rich heritage experience.
- Signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Russian Roscongress Foundation, the official organiser of the International Falconry Day Forum.
- Participation in "Abu Dhabi Autonomous Systems Week" and the Asia-Pacific Robot Championships, in cooperation with Khalifa University of Science and Technology.
- Participation in the 2025 Al Nalia Mobile Exhibition, in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education across several emirates, as part of efforts to strengthen national identity.











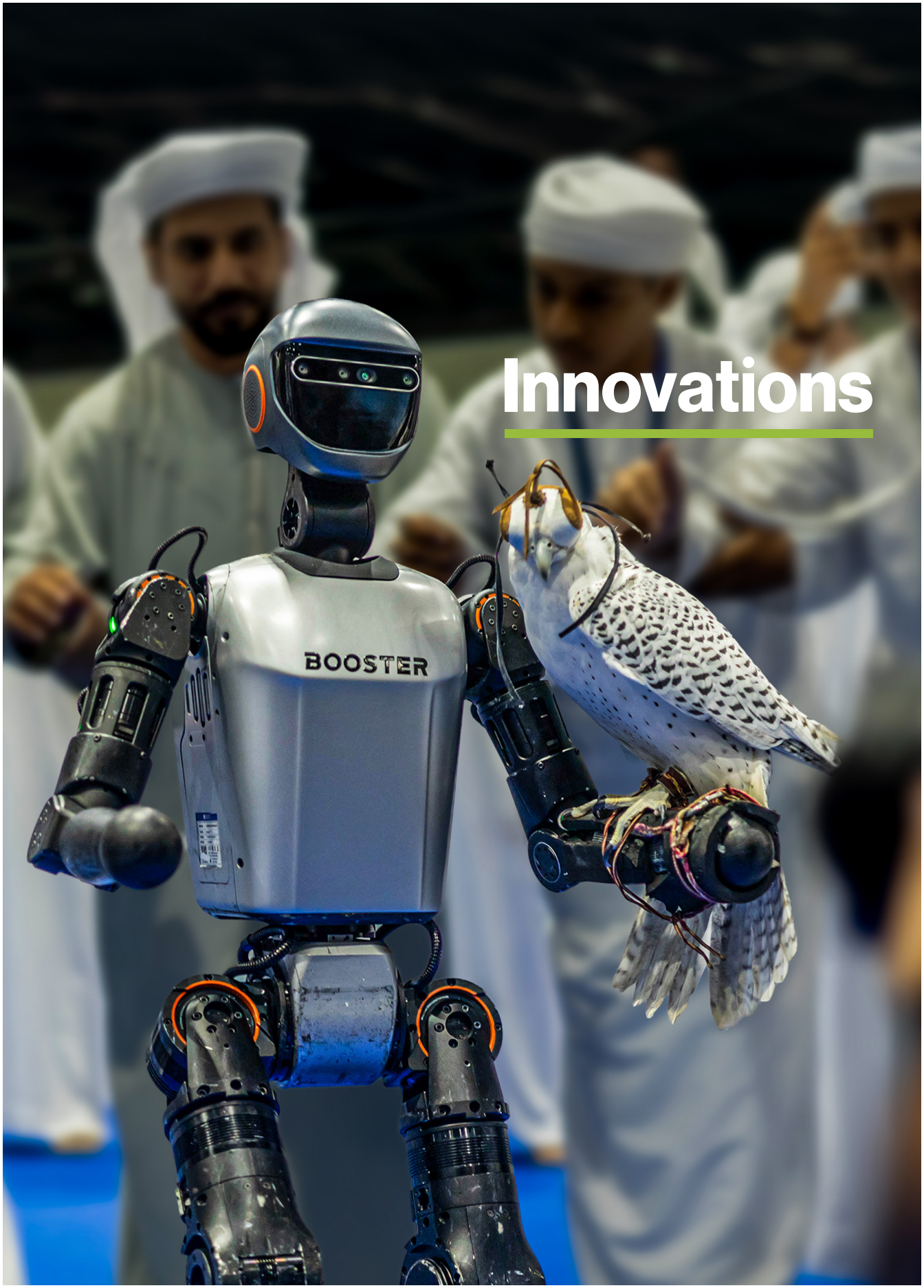


2026

- Organization of the third edition of the Emirati -Japanese Falconry Program in the Remah area of Al Ain.
- Active participation in the Sheikh Zayed Festival.
- Launch of a seasonal branch of the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School at the Sheikh Zayed Festival through a comprehensive educational platform.
- Commencement of work on establishing the Arabian Saluki Registration Centre in Al Ain, with the aim of developing a comprehensive Arabian Saluki database and an integrated electronic system.
- Participation in the Al Nalia Exhibition 2026 at the National Theatre in Abu Dhabi, in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education, within the framework of strengthening Emirati national identity.
- The tenth educational season at the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School achieved outstanding success.
- Organisation of the twenty-third edition of ADIHEX.
- Launch of the book 25 Years Following the First Falconer's Legacy, on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Emirates Falconers' Club.
- Publication of a new bilingual (Arabic-English) issue of Al Saggar magazine comprising 38 diverse sections and featuring 108 heritage, cultural, scientific, and environmental articles.
- Organisation of the twentieth edition of the Arabian Saluki Beauty Contest.
- Organisation of the Arabian Saluki Race and Arabian Saluki Beauty Contest in Al Dhafra Region.
- Organisation of the Arabian Saluki Race in Al Ain City







Innovations

From the Falcon's Wing to the Robot of Tomorrow

The Emirates Falconers' Club Supports Efforts to Integrate Heritage with Artificial Intelligence

The Emirates Falconers' Club participated in the inaugural edition of "Abu Dhabi Autonomous Week 2025," held from 10 to 15 November 2025 under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Chairman of the Presidential Court for Special Affairs and Chairman of the Smart and Autonomous Systems Council.

This participation affirmed the presence of Emirati falconry within the fields of scientific and technological innovation, as a living heritage capable of keeping pace with the future and engaging with the latest global technological developments.

The Club participated, in cooperation with Khalifa University of Science and Technology, in the eighth edition of the RoboCup Asia-Pacific (RCAP) 2025, held as part of the Week's activities and organised by Khalifa University for the first time in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The competition brought together 168 teams from 22 countries and more than 700 competitors, who competed across eight main championships and 15 subcategories built on the latest applications of artificial intelligence, robotics, and autonomous systems.

Innovative Applications Simulating Falconry Using Robotics

The Emirates Falconers' Club's participation with Khalifa University included innovative applications that simulate falconry using robotics and artificial intelligence technologies, embodying a vision that brings together the preservation of authentic Emirati heritage and the exploration of future horizons.

Falconry, historically associated with patience, courage, and wisdom, has today become a source of inspiration in advanced fields such as computer vision, motion analysis, and artificial intelligence. Researchers and experts are studying the flight dynamics and behaviour of falcons to draw on them in the design of more precise and efficient robotic systems, whether in drones or field robots.



Abu Dhabi... The Capital of Heritage and Innovation

Abu Dhabi is distinguished as a vibrant global centre of culture and heritage, and at the same time an incubator for the latest achievements in science and technology, making it the ideal environment for the launch of initiatives that embody the Emirati identity, which balances authenticity with modernity.

These initiatives are in line with the UAE's vision of building a knowledge economy grounded in innovation, while simultaneously preserving the elements of national identity and intangible cultural heritage. From this perspective, falconry has emerged as one of the most prominent models reflecting the capacity of Emirati heritage to engage with contemporary scientific developments.

Technology in the Service of Falcons

The Emirates Falconers' Club, through its local and international initiatives and participation, continues its efforts to promote awareness of falconry as a sustainable heritage practice, and to harness modern technology in the service of the environment and the conservation of biodiversity.

The Club also contributes to the development of scientific projects in cooperation with numerous academic and heritage institutions and bodies, including the use of robotics, genomics, and smart data systems to support breeding, care, and species conservation programmes.

Among the promising innovations currently being developed by researchers are intelligent systems capable of tracking falcons in their natural environments without affecting their movement or behaviour, through computer vision technologies and precision sensing devices. These systems assist in gathering scientific data on falcon flight patterns, migration, and general health, thereby reinforcing efforts to conserve threatened wild species.

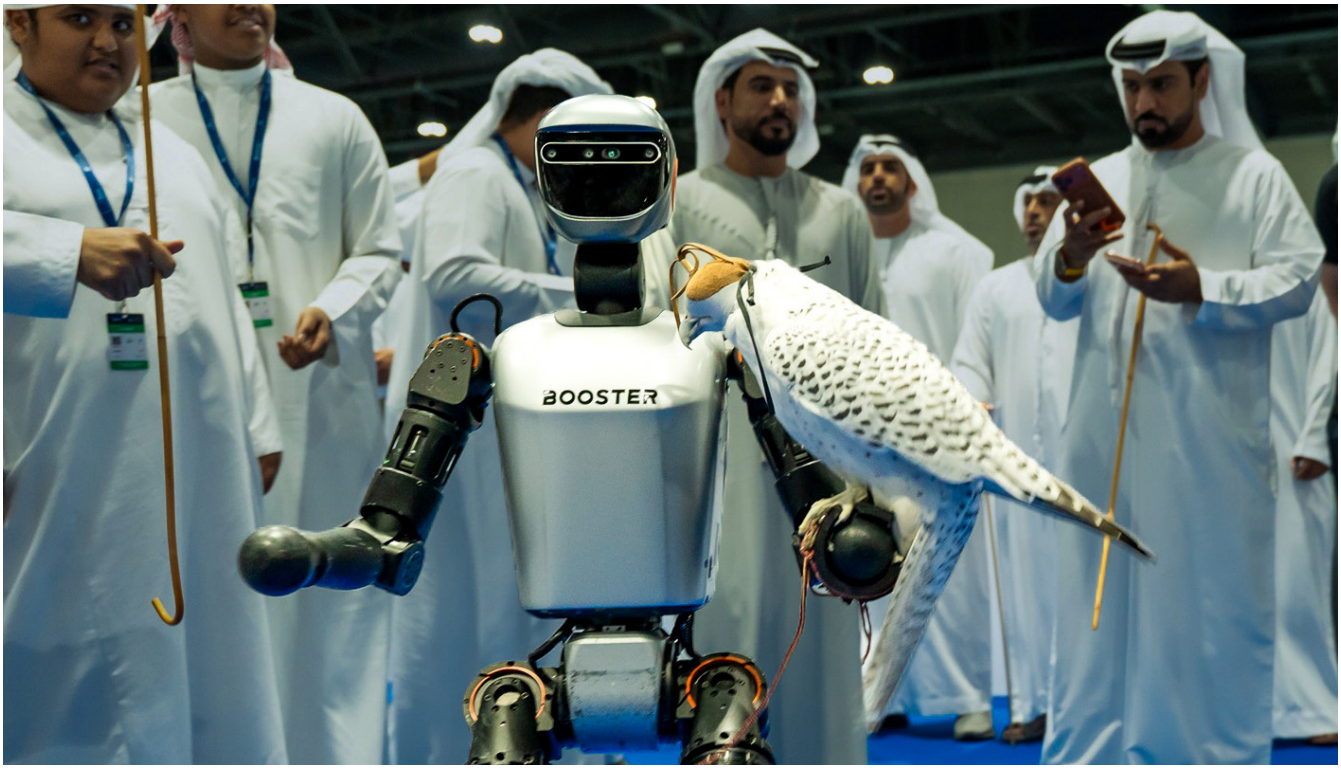
World Heritage in the Language of Artificial Intelligence

The Emirates Falconers' Club's participation in this global scientific event formed part of a research and cultural collaboration with Khalifa University, aimed at strengthening the integration between scientific research and Emirati cultural heritage, and highlighting the sport of falconry as a human heritage inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The participation also sought to introduce new generations to the importance of preserving national identity, by linking Emirati authenticity with modern knowledge and technology, and transmitting this great heritage to future generations through the deployment of technology and innovation in its service and protection.

In this context, the Club presented live falconry demonstrations and interactive introductory sessions, enabling the public to engage directly with the falcons, contributing to spreading awareness of sustainable hunting and highlighting the authentic values upon which this venerable heritage sport is founded.

The activities also attracted wide interest from students, researchers, and those with an interest in modern technologies, who found in falconry a unique model that connects humanity with nature and reveals how heritage can be a catalyst for scientific creativity rather than merely a historical legacy.



Research Projects and Intelligent Challenges

The collaboration with Khalifa University, together with the participation of the Emirates Falconers' Club in Abu Dhabi Autonomous Week 2025, aims to bring together falconry expertise, academic knowledge, and scientific research to create new opportunities for creativity and innovation while at the same time raising students' awareness of the importance of authentic Emirati heritage.

The Emirates Falconers' Club had previously participated in the 36th edition of the International Conference on Intelligent Robots and Systems (IROS 2024), organised by Khalifa University, which attracted more than 10,000 visitors.The Club presented field demonstrations and educational sessions on sustainable falconry, while also supporting student projects developing intelligent systems for falcon tracking and hazard monitoring.

The Club supports the Falcon Monitoring Challenge launched by Khalifa University in collaboration with the Department of Mechanical and Nuclear Engineering, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), and the Robotics Society of Japan, aimed at developing advanced non-invasive systems for falcon tracking using artificial intelligence and computer vision.

The outcomes of this challenge are expected to contribute to the development of intelligent field robots that assist researchers in studying falcon behaviour and flight dynamics in their natural environments, thereby reinforcing international efforts to protect threatened wild species and opening new horizons for the application of biotechnologies in the fields of the environment and wildlife.

This collaboration between the Emirates Falconers' Club and Khalifa University is an inspiring model for integrating modern science with authentic cultural heritage and reflects the UAE's vision of achieving a balance between the preservation of national heritage and global scientific leadership. It also highlights Abu Dhabi's standing as a global city that combines deep-rooted heritage with progress, embodying the Emirati identity founded on innovation and openness to the future.

From Hunting to Innovation

It is worth noting that the use of falcons today extends well beyond the bounds of hunting, encompassing diverse fields including the enhancement of airport safety and the dispersal of birds from flight paths, and the protection of agricultural crops through natural and sustainable means.

Recent studies have also begun drawing on the superior visual capabilities of falcons to develop advanced imaging and sensing systems, alongside applying their flight techniques in designing drones with greater agility and efficiency.

Emirati falconry is thus transformed from a time-honoured heritage practice into a global platform that inspires scientists and researchers alike, affirming that when heritage meets innovation, it becomes a bridge to the future.

The Heritage of Falconry Meets the Challenges of the Modern Sky

Falcons Confront Drones Instead of Traditional Quarry

In a world where technological progress is accelerating and security challenges associated with unmanned aerial vehicles intensify, birds of prey are returning to the fore, not merely as a symbol of heritage, but as a potential tool in modern protection systems.

In a scene that captures the meeting of past and present, a number of countries are turning to the sciences of falconry to develop unconventional solutions for countering drones, with raptors taking to the skies, but this time to intercept drones rather than traditional quarry.



"Pakistan's "Eagle Initiative Under Trial

In this context, Pakistan has launched a pilot initiative seeking to train eagles to intercept drones, a step reflecting a move towards what may be described as "biological defence." The project draws upon the natural capabilities of these birds, long renowned for the speed of their dive and the precision of their strike.

A first trained eagle has already been deployed within a specialised centre, where it is enrolled in a meticulous conditioning programme aimed at accustoming it to engaging small aerial targets. Those overseeing the project affirm, however, that the initiative remains in its exploratory phase, with plans for comprehensive assessments to measure its effectiveness and safety before it is implemented on a wider scale.

In one of the most remarkable trials, a large imperial eagle at Pakistan's East Continental Falconry & Aviary Centre is undergoing specialised training to intercept drones, drawing upon its formidable natural attributes, including its broad wingspan and razor-sharp talons, one of which measures more than 11.5 inches in length.

International Experiments: From France to India

This approach is not exclusive to Pakistan, as several countries have preceded it in exploring this path. In France, the Air Force trained golden eagles to intercept drones near sensitive military installations. Training begins at an early age, with the eagles conditioned to regard drones as prey, and this behaviour reinforced through a system of food rewards upon successful interception.

Specialised protective equipment has also been developed, including leather coverings for the birds' talons, aimed at reducing the risk of injury during engagement with technological targets.





In India, the Telangana Police adopted the "Garuda Squad", a unit comprising trained birds of prey used to secure major events and the movements of senior figures, in an effort to mitigate potential threats from unauthorised aircraft.

Specialists note that birds of prey possess exceptional visual capabilities that enable them to detect small targets from considerable distances, high diving speeds, and precise reactions, characteristics that have made them the subject of interest in certain experiments related to drone countermeasures.

Some researchers believe that studying the detection and diving mechanisms of raptors may, in the future, contribute to the development of faster vision and response systems for drones and autonomous robots.



Earlier Experiments and Lessons Learned

The Pakistani initiative follows a series of international experiments that have sought to deploy raptors in counter-drone operations. The Netherlands was among the earliest countries to enter this field, through a programme launched by the National Police in cooperation with a private company, aimed at training eagles to intercept drones in urban environments.

Despite the considerable attention the project attracted in its early stages, it was subsequently halted due to operational challenges, alongside concerns relating to the safety of the birds during mission execution, highlighting the gap between theoretical potential and practical application.

Similarly, countries such as the United Kingdom and Spain studied comparable initiatives, but these remained within the bounds of limited trials and did not develop into large-scale operational systems.

In this context, the project's spokesperson in Pakistan affirms that the programme remains in its exploratory phase, with further precise assessments awaited to measure its viability in terms of efficiency, safety, and operational effectiveness, before any decision is taken regarding its wider implementation.

Many of these noteworthy experiments draw on the fact that birds of prey instinctively treat small flying objects as moving targets, much as they would treat natural quarry, making it easier to train them to intercept drones within defined geographical areas.

Central Asia... Falcons in the Service of Aviation Safety in Uzbekistan

As global interest grows in deploying raptors in the fields of security, aviation safety, and drone countermeasures, falconry today has an increasing presence in the fields of the future, as a form of heritage knowledge capable of engaging with the most advanced technologies.

During 2026, a notable development emerged in Uzbekistan that reflects the deployment of falconry in modern applications: Tashkent International Airport introduced a specialised falcon unit as part of its aviation safety system.

These raptors are employed as a natural means of dispersing other bird species that may pose a hazard to aircraft during take-off and landing, such as crows, pigeons, and starlings. This method forms part of what is known as avian biological control, an approach that draws on the natural behaviour of raptors to deter other species without disturbing the ecological balance.

According to published information, falcon training begins at an early age, between four and five months, and may continue for up to a full year, depending on the type and temperament of the bird. The falcons are deployed during daylight hours, subject to weather conditions, as operations are suspended during periods of extreme heat or rainfall.

The current unit comprises a limited number of falcons, including females used in daily operations. These birds patrol the perimeter of the runways and disperse bird concentrations that may cause what are known as bird strike incidents, one of the most prominent challenges facing aviation safety.

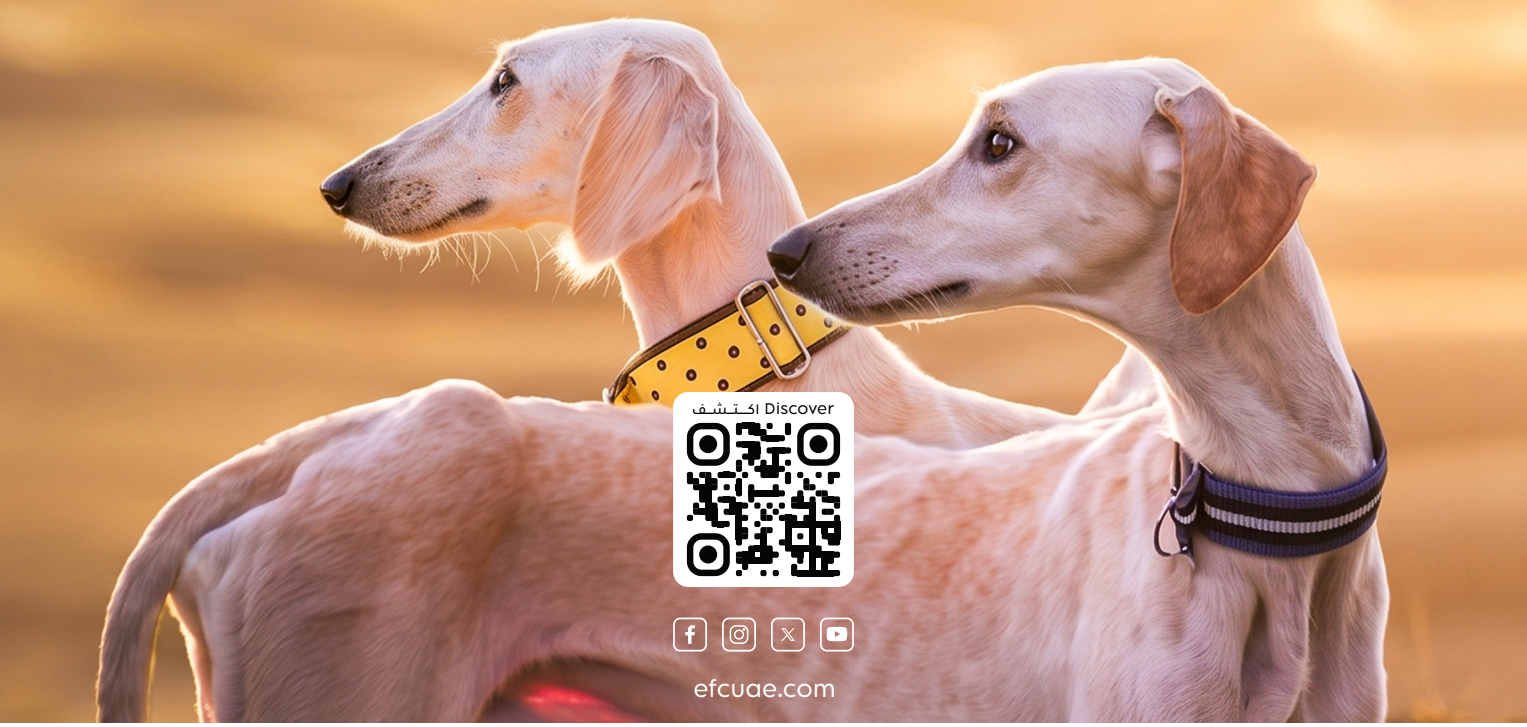
The operational service life of falcons in this role extends over several years, with birds typically serving in this capacity for an average of around seven years, and potentially longer with appropriate care.



The Arabian Saluki
An Authentic Heritage

The Arabian Saluki Center provides

- Facilities dedicated to the care and well-being of Salukis.
- Training in behaviour and obedience, hunting and evasion.
- Saluki beauty contests and racing.
- Consultations on travel and transportation arrangements.
- Guidance for those interested in acquiring Arabian Salukis.



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The World of Birds





When Birdsong Become a Language for Understanding and Protecting Nature

In a remarkable educational experience in France, enthusiasts are learning to listen to birdsong before searching for birds with their eyes. Although simple in appearance, this approach reveals a profound gateway to understanding nature and contributing to its protection.

Can listening become a new beginning for humanity's relationship with the environment?

How Does Listening to Birds Lead Us to Protect Them?

On a spring morning in the French region of Brittany, a group of enthusiasts stood at the edge of a trail bordered by trees and meadows, binoculars in hand, scanning the high branches for a passing movement or the flutter of a wing. But their instructor stopped them with a single word: "Listen first." In that moment, the entire perception of the scene shifted. What had initially seemed like overlapping noise gradually transformed into a world rich with subtle signals, each sound carrying meaning, each tone serving a function.

Listening Before Seeing

The philosophy underpinning modern birdwatching education rests on a fundamental premise: understanding birds does not always begin with what we see; in many cases, it begins with what we hear. In dense natural environments, birds may disappear behind leaves and branches, yet their sounds continually reveal their presence. For this reason, ornithologists and experienced enthusiasts rely on hearing as an essential tool in species identification.

Specialists note that every bird possesses its own "acoustic fingerprint", just as every person has a distinctive voice, making attentive listening a fundamental skill in field ornithology

Bird Schools...From Hobby to Scientific Learning

In France, the League for the Protection of Birds leads specialised educational programmes aimed at training enthusiasts to identify birds through a systematic approach that combines scientific knowledge with field practice. These programmes typically comprise around 20 theoretical lessons and 6 field workshops, alongside audio training sessions for sound analysis and observational outings across diverse natural environments.

In recent years, these initiatives have attracted growing interest from participants of all ages and professional backgrounds, reflecting rising environmental awareness and the desire to restore a direct connection with nature. This knowledge is no longer confined to scientists and specialists; it has become part of a broader environmental culture built on the participation of individuals in monitoring, observation, and protection.

Song and Call...The Hidden Language of Birds

Scientists classify bird vocalisations into two principal types: songs and calls. Song is the more complex and sustained of the two, generally associated with the breeding season, used by the male to attract a female, assert territorial dominance, and warn rival males. Certain species, such as the nightingale and the blackbird, are remarkable for their ability to vary their vocal phrases and learn new patterns over time.

Calls, by contrast, are shorter and simpler sounds used in daily life, to warn of predators, communicate within a flock, maintain contact during flight, request food, and communicate between parents and chicks. Alarm calls tend to be sharp and rapid, as high-frequency sounds travel quickly and reduce the predator's ability to pinpoint the bird's location.





How Do Birds Produce Their Sounds?

Unlike humans, who use the larynx and vocal cords, birds possess a specialised vocal organ known as the syrinx, located at the point where the trachea divides into the lungs. This organ is one of the most complex vocal organs in the animal kingdom, allowing certain birds to produce two distinct sounds simultaneously.

Certain species of songbirds are therefore capable of producing highly complex and precise melodic sequences. Researchers have established that some birds control each side of the syrinx independently, while others can produce more than one note at the same moment. The European nightingale is among the most celebrated species for its vocal richness, capable of producing hundreds of distinct phrases within a single song.

The Sonogram...When Sounds Become Visible

One of the modern tools used by ornithologists and trainees to analyse bird vocalisations is the sonogram, a visual representation of sound waves that displays frequencies, amplitude, rhythm, and the duration of vocal phrases. Through this technique, it becomes possible to "see" a bird's sound as lines and curves that assist in distinguishing between similar species.

Smartphone applications today use artificial intelligence to analyse bird sounds and compare them with global databases, enabling enthusiasts to identify species quickly and accurately. Experts nonetheless affirm that technology is no substitute for training the human ear, as understanding the context and behaviour surrounding a sound remains essential to accurate identification.

Seven Keys to Understanding Birds

Modern birdwatching schools follow a precise methodology known as the "Seven Criteria", elements that help build a complete picture of a bird even when seen for only a few seconds or identified by its sound alone. These criteria encompass: size, shape, colour, behaviour, sound, place, and time.

A rapidly repeated call emanating from a wetland area during the early morning hours, for instance, may lead to the identification of a species before it even comes into view. Sound is therefore regarded as a pivotal element in the process of field identification.

Learning in the Field... Testing the Senses

In field workshops, participants encounter the true challenge; distinguishing between sounds in a natural environment is no simple matter at first. The sounds of wind, insects, distant vehicles, and even aircraft mingle with bird calls. Some trainees recount having initially confused the sound of a woodpecker with distant mechanical sounds, or the calls of swallows with the whistle of wind through branches.

Over time, however, hearing gradually becomes more acute, and the ear grows more attuned to fine detail. Neuroscientists note that consistent training in auditory discrimination actively contributes to the development of particular regions of the brain associated with concentration, attention, and sound analysis.







Enthusiasts and Citizen Science

Birdwatching is no longer merely a leisure activity; it has become an important component of the "citizen science" framework. Thousands of enthusiasts worldwide today participate in recording bird sightings, documenting sounds, monitoring seasonal migrations, collecting environmental data, and detecting rare or threatened species.

Numerous scientific institutions rely on this data in preparing studies related to climate change, the decline of biodiversity, and shifts in natural habitats. Over recent decades, international reports have documented a notable decline in the populations of many bird species, attributable to habitat loss, pollution, agricultural pesticides, urban expansion, and climate change.

For this reason, engaging the community in early environmental monitoring has become increasingly important.

Why Do Birdsong Give Us a Sense of Calm?

Recent studies in environmental psychology indicate that listening to birdsong is associated with improvements in mental wellbeing and reductions in stress levels. Researchers at European universities have found that birdsong help reduce anxiety, enhance the sense of tranquillity, and stimulate the feeling of connection with nature.

Scientists explain this by noting that the human brain evolved within natural environments in which birdsong was an indicator of safety and ecological balance, hence the sense of ease many people experience when hearing birds sing in the morning. Notably, a number of European cities have begun incorporating natural recordings of birdsong into parks and healthcare facilities to improve the quality of urban life.

Falconry and Listening to the Environment

In Arab culture, the idea of listening to nature is far from alien to the heritage of falconry. The true falconer does not rely on sight alone; he reads the environment in its entirety, from the movement of the wind and shifts in behaviour to traces of quarry, the sounds of birds, and the subtle signals of the desert.

Throughout history, falconers understood that comprehending the environment begins with precise observation and deep attentiveness to all that surrounds them. In this, the modern scientific approach to birdwatching converges with the spirit of traditional falconry, despite the difference in tools and methods. Both rest upon patience, attentiveness, an understanding of animal behaviour, and a profound connection with nature.

Knowledge as the Gateway to Protection

The experience of learning birdsong reveals that the protection of nature does not always begin with legislation and conferences; sometimes it begins with a step far simpler: to pay attention… to listen… and to strive to understand the living world around us before we lose it.

People become far more inclined to protect what they know well. Learning birdsong is therefore not merely an environmental hobby, it is training in the rebuilding of the relationship between humanity and nature, at a time when environmental transformation accelerates without pause.

Perhaps the sound of a bird at dawn is the beginning of a larger story… the story of humanity reclaiming its ancient sense of belonging to this world.



Peregrine Falcons and the Falcon Camera

From Live Streams to a Global Environmental Rescue Story

A Digital Window onto the Life of Falcons

At the top of a concrete tower in the heart of Saint Paul, Minnesota, where human activity intersects with the realm of birds, a small camera performs a role that extends far beyond live broadcasting. "FalconCam" is not merely a live stream of a Peregrine falcon nest; it has become a digital window that brings the hidden world of wildlife closer to the public, transforming daily viewing into a living educational experience.

Since 2014, this camera has allowed followers to observe the full life cycle of one of the most awe-inspiring birds of prey; from the moment the eggs are laid, through hatching, the early stages of growth, and on to the first attempts at flight. The screen has thus become an open educational space that redefines the concept of "watching" as direct participation in understanding nature.

Environmental educators describe the experience as "an open laboratory that brings animal behaviour to the public without mediation."

Speed Beyond Perception: Superior Biological Engineering

Biologists agree that the Peregrine falcon (Falco peregrinus) represents the pinnacle of aerial adaptation in the avian world. During its high-speed hunting dive, known as the stoop, it can reach speeds exceeding 320 to 360 kilometres per hour, making it the fastest living creature known on Earth.

Yet speed alone does not account for the Peregrine's mastery. According to ornithologist David Anderson, this falcon relies on computational precision in its angle of attack and the timing of its strike, transforming the hunt into an exact physical equation.

This exceptional capability derives from an integrated biological system that encompasses:

- Pointed wings that minimise air resistance.
- Powerful pectoral muscles that deliver enormous acceleration.
- A respiratory system capable of functioning under the intense pressure of the stoop.

The Peregrine is thus regarded as a unique model of biological flight engineering, to the extent that certain studies in aerodynamics have drawn inspiration from its structure and movement.

A Peregrine falcon captured in the midst of a stoop exceeding 300 km/h; a breathtaking display of nature's most complex flight adaptations.



In the heart of modern cities, Peregrine falcons have found a natural alternative to rocky cliff faces atop skyscrapers.



Wildlife cameras such as FalconCam allow the details of the Peregrine's daily life to be followed without human interference.





From egg to first flight: the stages of the Peregrine's growth reveal precise biological transformations across just a few weeks.

The Memory of a Silent Extinction

Despite its power and majesty, the Peregrine falcon faced one of the most dangerous environmental crises in its history during the twentieth century. In the 1960s, it disappeared from vast stretches of North America, not through hunting for the practice of falconry, or sudden habitat loss, but because of a silent chemical: the pesticide DDT.

In her landmark book Silent Spring, researcher Rachel Carson demonstrated that chemical substances do not always kill creatures directly; they may instead erode their capacity to survive and reproduce.

In the case of the Peregrine, DDT caused the thinning of eggshells, leading to the failure of hatching and the gradual collapse of breeding rates. By 1965, the falcon had virtually disappeared east of the Rocky Mountains.

This crisis represented one of the most pivotal moments in the history of modern environmental awareness, revealing that threats to wildlife can be invisible, yet devastatingly profound.

Restoring the Species: When Science and Community Cooperate

The Peregrine's story did not end at the edge of extinction. With the prohibition of DDT in the 1970s and the commencement of reintroduction and captive-breeding programmes, falcon numbers began a gradual recovery.

Data from Minnesota's wildlife programme indicate more than 70 active nesting sites today, with an annual production of between 120 and 150 chicks. The Peregrine was removed from the federal list of endangered species in 1999, and from the state list in 2013.

Conservation scientist Tom Kade describes this comeback as a success that extends beyond biology, reflecting the capacity of communities to correct their errors when the will and the knowledge are present.

The Peregrine's story thus stands as one of the most prominent wildlife conservation success stories globally, bringing together scientific research, environmental legislation, community participation, and captive-breeding and release programmes.

Cities: A New Home for Falcons

One of the most remarkable phenomena in the Peregrine's modern life is its migration to cities. Scientists have discovered that skyscrapers and high bridges closely resemble the rocky cliff faces on which it naturally nests, while urban pigeons have provided a stable and abundant food source.

Urban ecologist John Marzluff notes that wildlife does not disappear from cities; it reshapes itself within them. Cities are no longer the antithesis of nature; in several cases they have become alternative habitats that allow certain species to adapt and survive.

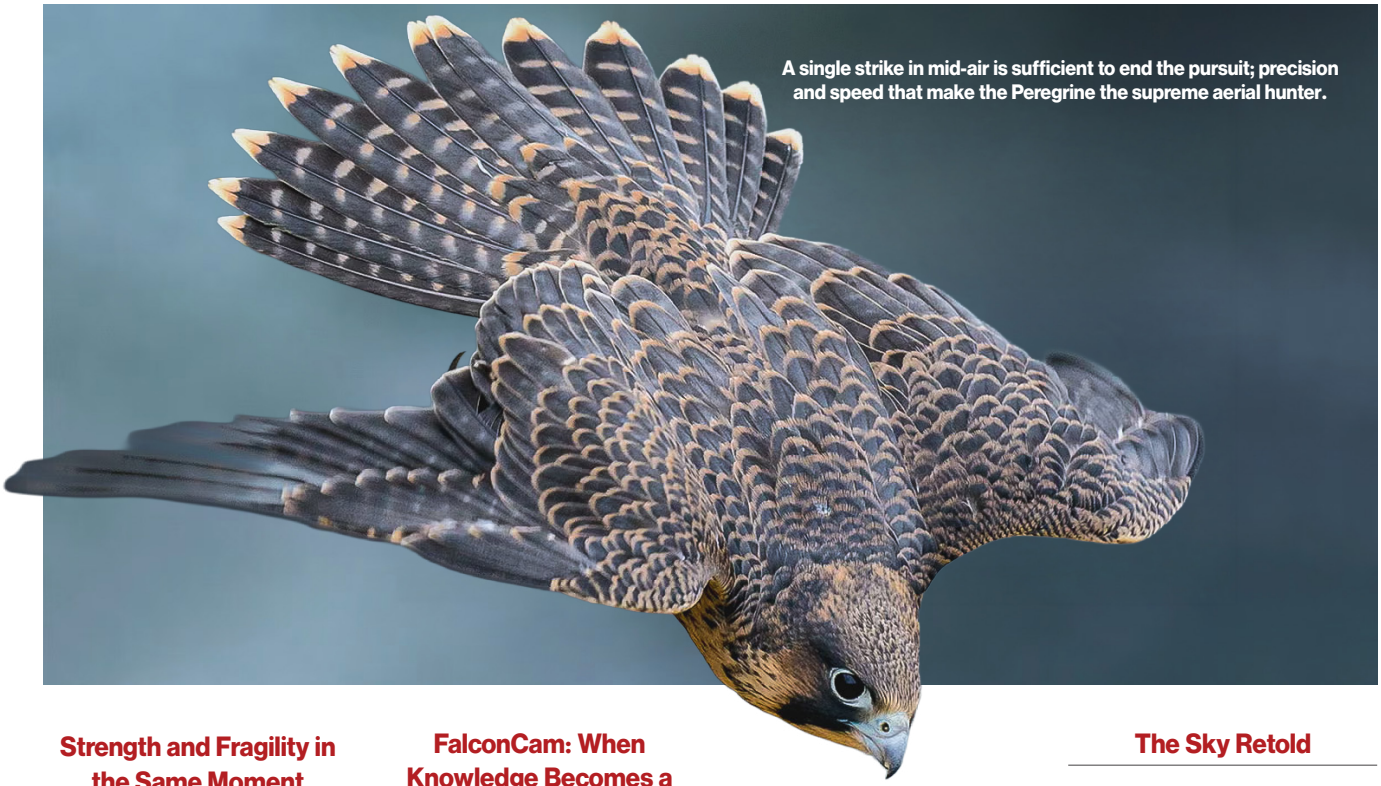
Notably, many of the Peregrine's modern nesting sites are now found on towers, government buildings, and bridges, allowing the public to observe the details of wildlife within the urban environment itself.

A Life Cycle Broadcast Live

FalconCam has allowed researchers and enthusiasts to follow the Peregrine's life cycle with unprecedented precision. Through the live stream, the principal stages of development can be observed:

- The female typically lays between 3 and 4 eggs between March and May.
- Hatching occurs after approximately 33 to 35 days.
- The chicks transition gradually from white down to brown plumage.
- First flight attempts begin after 35 to 42 days.

The significance of these observations extends beyond the educational dimension; they also provide important scientific material for the study of behaviour, as the cameras allow continuous monitoring without direct human intervention that might otherwise affect the birds' behaviour.



A single strike in mid-air is sufficient to end the pursuit; precision and speed that make the Peregrine the supreme aerial hunter.

Strength and Fragility in the Same Moment

Although the Peregrine is considered one of the most powerful and efficient birds of prey, its life is not without risk, particularly during its first year.

Studies indicate that a significant proportion of young falcons do not survive, owing to inexperience in hunting, collision with man-made structures, environmental change, and the hazards of urban life.

However, falcons that succeed in navigating this critical phase generally enter a period of stability that may extend to approximately twenty years.

This contrast reveals that the most powerful creatures can simultaneously be profoundly fragile in the face of the environmental changes wrought by humanity.

FalconCam: When Knowledge Becomes a Living Experience

The importance of FalconCam lies not only in the quantity of information it provides, but in the manner in which that knowledge is delivered. The viewer does not merely read about falcons; they live the experience moment by moment, watching the hatching, feeding, growth, and the first faltering attempts at flight, as though present within the nest itself.

Educators describe this form of engagement as "learning through direct observation", where the recipient is transformed from a passive viewer into an active participant in the experience.

Reports from the US Department of Natural Resources also affirm that wildlife cameras are among the most effective means of deepening the public's connection to wildlife and raising environmental awareness.

What Does This Experience Mean?

The significance of FalconCam extends beyond the borders of the United States, because it offers a global model that can be drawn upon in regions with a deep-rooted heritage of falconry, such as the Arabian Gulf and the broader Middle East.

The combination of traditional knowledge and modern technology opens wide horizons for the protection of falcons, the enhancement of environmental awareness, and the transmission of knowledge to new generations.

Wildlife broadcast projects and field cameras can equally be transformed into educational and cultural tools that bring people closer to the world of birds, linking heritage with the concepts of modern science.

The Sky Retold

In the end, FalconCam tells not only the story of a falcon, but the story of the complex relationship between humanity and nature; how humanity sometimes damaged it, and how it endeavoured to repair it once more.

It is a reminder that the protection of wildlife depends not on legislation alone, but equally on knowledge, care, and the capacity to see the natural world as part of our daily lives.

Perhaps this is why the sky, however distant it may seem, appears closer to us when we look at it through a small lens, and with a measure of responsibility.

Source:
This report draws on information published on the FalconCam page of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources: https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/features/webcams/falconcam/falcon-cam-faq.html



His Highness
Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed
MUSEUM OF INTERNATIONAL FALCONRY

Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Museum of International Falconry

In 2010, falconry was officially inscribed as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity by UNESCO, to be safeguarded for future generations and promoted to those who may not yet recognize its significance.

Join us at the Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Museum of International Falconry in Brussels to explore the fascinating and intricate world of falconry, its history, and the diplomatic ties that have connected cultures for thousands of years up to the present day.

The museum tour unveils both the tangible and intangible dimensions of falconry, including traditional hunting, poetry, fine art, a photographic archive, falconry equipment, as well as sculptures and depictions of falcons.

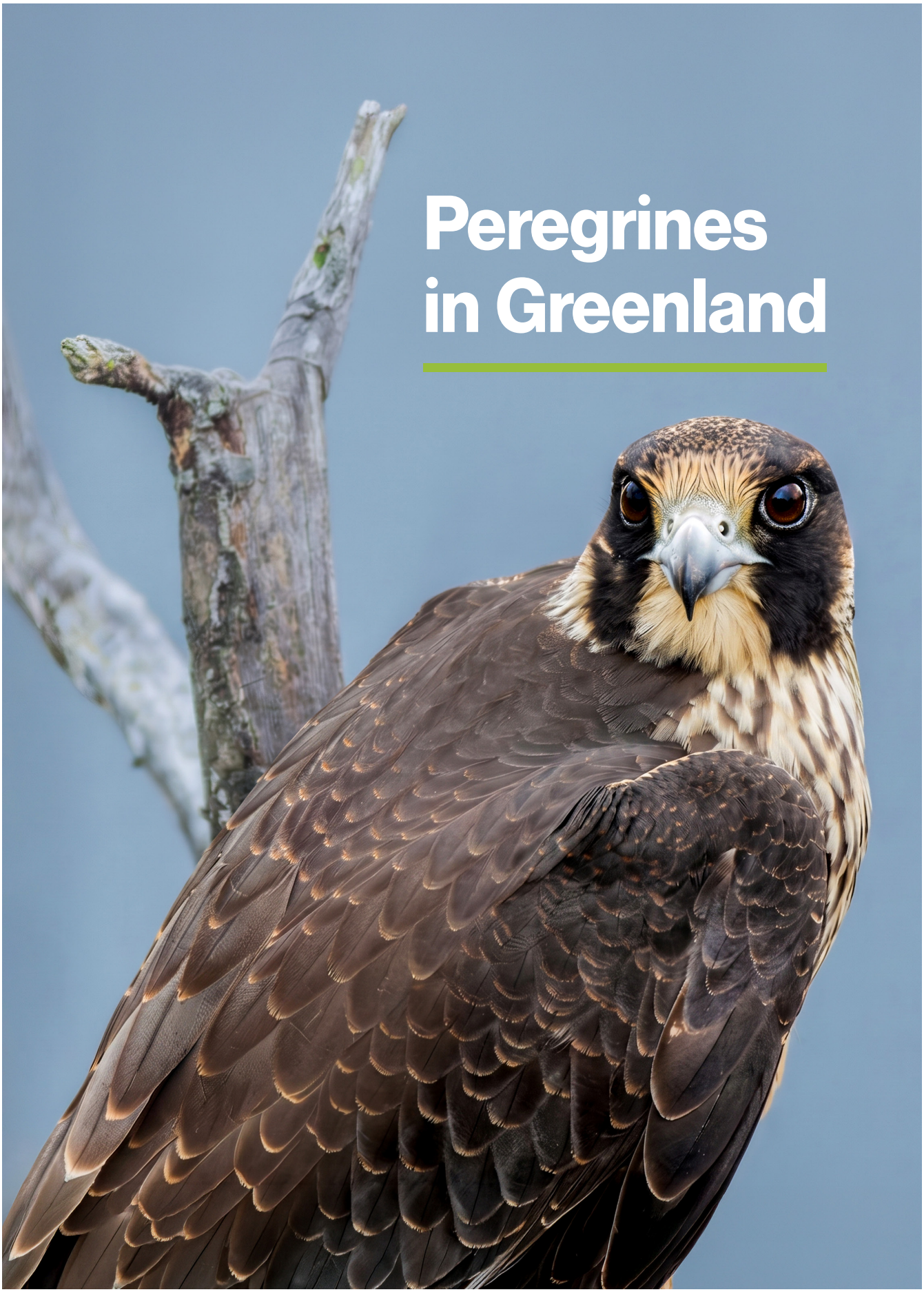
The museum highlights that although falconry is practiced in nearly 90 countries, its roots lie deeply in Bedouin culture and the realities of desert life. Passing down the heritage of falconry is not only about preserving a central element of Emirati tradition, but also about offering an inspiring model for the wider world, where falconry continues to hold great cultural value.

Located in the heart of Brussels, Europe, the museum reflects efforts to safeguard falconry that were initiated by the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, and are today carried forward under the leadership of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates.

The museum is a collaborative initiative between the Mohamed bin Zayed Raptor Conservation Fund, the Emirates Falconers' Club, and the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey.

www.internationalfalconrymuseum.org

Peregrines in Greenland



The World's Fastest Birds Confront the Harshness of the Arctic

How Greenland's Falcons Redefined the Limits of Adaptation at the Far Edge of the World

Caroline Van Hemert



At the far northern reaches of the globe, where ice sheets stretch in near-endless expanse and polar winds become a daily test of nature's severity, life seems a perpetual miracle. There, in Greenland, the environment grants few opportunities for survival. Sub-zero temperatures, sudden storms, the long grip of winter, and the scarcity of resources make every living creature a testament to resilience.

And yet, nature retains the capacity to astonish us with the secrets it keeps.

In those remote polar expanses, researchers have discovered populations of Peregrine falcons living and breeding in areas previously believed to exceed the limits of this bird's tolerance. This discovery was not merely a new addition to the world of raptors; it was a scientific window offering a deeper understanding of what adaptation and resilience truly mean in the face of environmental and climatic change.

The article published by American writer and biologist Caroline Van Hemert on the BioGraphic platform carried the reader into these distant polar worlds, recounting the story of falcons that appear as "winged ghosts", appearing briefly, then vanishing between glacial mountains and rocky valleys.

On the Edge of the World

The author describes her journey to southern Greenland aboard a sailboat with her family, where the adventure evolved from an exploratory voyage into a profound human and scientific experience. There, in the Tasermiut Fjord, nature appears in its purest form: towering mountains, hanging glaciers, cold waters through which ice floes drift, and valleys coloured by Arctic grasses.

Against this majestic backdrop, the appearance of a Peregrine falcon was an exceptional moment.

A lightning-fast stoop, wings cleaving the air at astonishing speed, then a rapid disappearance toward the rocky cliff faces. Those brief moments were sufficient to reveal the scale of the challenge facing scientists in their study of these birds.

Greenland's Peregrine falcons offer researchers little time for observation. Their appearances are fleeting, their movements precise, and their nesting sites often found in rugged terrain that is difficult to reach. For this reason, the study of these falcons has become a mission demanding extraordinary patience, field experience, and the capacity for endurance in an unforgiving environment.

The Fastest Living Creature in the Harshest of Environments

The Peregrine falcon has long been synonymous with its status as the fastest living creature on Earth, its hunting dive exceeding 320 kilometres per hour. This capability has granted it a special place in human heritage and in falconry cultures around the world, making it a symbol of power, precision, and mastery.

What distinguishes Greenland's falcons, however, is not speed alone; it is their capacity to live within a harsh polar environment where the conditions of survival shift without warning. These birds inhabit regions covered in snow and ice for most of the year, relying on a precise food system intimately tied to seabirds and other Arctic creatures.

Researchers note that these falcons have developed complex adaptive strategies that have allowed them to persist in the high north, contrary to what was previously understood about the Peregrine's environmental requirements.

Behaviour That Surprises the Scientists

For a long time, the Peregrine was regarded as a migratory bird that depended on moving to warmer regions during winter. Yet recent studies in Greenland have revealed a far more complex picture.

Some falcons remain in the north for considerably longer periods than scientists anticipated, while others return with remarkable speed to their nesting sites once migration ends. Data have also revealed clear differences between individuals in their migration routes, feeding strategies, and choice of flight corridors.

This behavioural diversity has led researchers to reconsider the capacity of species to modify their life patterns in response to severe environmental conditions. Rather than a single fixed model of migration and behaviour, Greenland's Peregrine falcons appear to possess a high degree of flexibility, allowing them to adapt to the rapidly changing conditions of the Arctic environment.



Technology Unlocks the Secrets of the Sky

Satellite-tracking technologies marked a turning point in the study of these falcons. Through small tracking devices, scientists have been able to map the precise movements of the birds and discover unexpected migration routes.

The findings revealed that some of Greenland's falcons cover tens of thousands of kilometres annually, in journeys extending from the Arctic all the way to South America. It also emerged that these birds do not always follow traditional migration routes, instead selecting variable courses according to weather conditions and the availability of prey.

These data reveal that Peregrine falcons are not merely migratory birds, but creatures capable of making complex decisions related to survival, energy management, and environmental risk assessment.

An Exceptionally Sensitive Ecological Network

Greenland's falcons depend principally on seabirds as their food source, making them part of an extraordinarily delicate ecological network.

A successful breeding season hinges on the convergence of several factors: an abundance of prey, moderate weather conditions, the timing of egg hatching, and the stability of marine systems. Any disruption to this balance may directly affect the falcons' capacity to survive and reproduce.

For this reason, scientists regard the Peregrine falcon as a sensitive environmental indicator, one through which the transformations unfolding across the Arctic can be understood.

From a Victim of Pesticides to a Symbol of Environmental Recovery

The story of the Peregrine falcon carries an important chapter of modern environmental history. In the mid-twentieth century, populations of these birds suffered a catastrophic collapse due to the use of chemical pesticides, chief among them DDT.

These substances caused the thinning of eggshells, leading to the failure of hatching and a sharp decline in falcon numbers across North America and Europe.

Studies conducted in Greenland, however, played an important role in understanding why certain Peregrine populations survived and persisted. Research revealed that Arctic falcons had been exposed to far lower levels of contamination than those elsewhere, a finding that gave scientists hope that the species could be saved.

With the prohibition of these pesticides and the commencement of breeding and protection programmes, the Peregrine recovered a significant proportion of its numbers, going on to become one of the most celebrated success stories in the field of wildlife conservation.





The Arctic Is Changing

Yet despite this success, the challenges have not ended.

The Arctic today is undergoing accelerating transformation as a result of global warming, from the melting of sea ice to the disruption of rainfall seasons and rising temperatures.

Researchers believe that Greenland's falcons now stand on the front line of these changes. Severe storms and heavy rainfall can lead to the death of chicks, while rising temperatures are enabling new species of insects and diseases to proliferate in the polar environment where none previously existed.

At the same time, certain falcons appear to be benefiting partially from these shifts, beginning to expand northward into new territories previously considered beyond the limits of their range.

This contradiction reflects the very nature of climate change itself: new opportunities for some creatures, set against an escalating threat to the stability of entire ecological systems.

More Than a Scientific Study

The story of Greenland's falcons does not stop at the boundaries of ornithology. The article also reveals the human dimension of scientific research conducted in challenging environments.

The scientists who study these falcons do not confine themselves to distant observation; they undergo a demanding experience that requires scaling rocky cliff faces, confronting storms, and navigating small vessels between glacial mountains.

For many of them, a passion for these birds has evolved into a long-term commitment to defending the environment and protecting the natural systems of the Arctic.

Recent studies have also begun to afford greater recognition to the traditional knowledge held by Greenland's indigenous communities, after decades in which foreign research dominated the study of wildlife in the region.

Redefining the Limits of the Possible

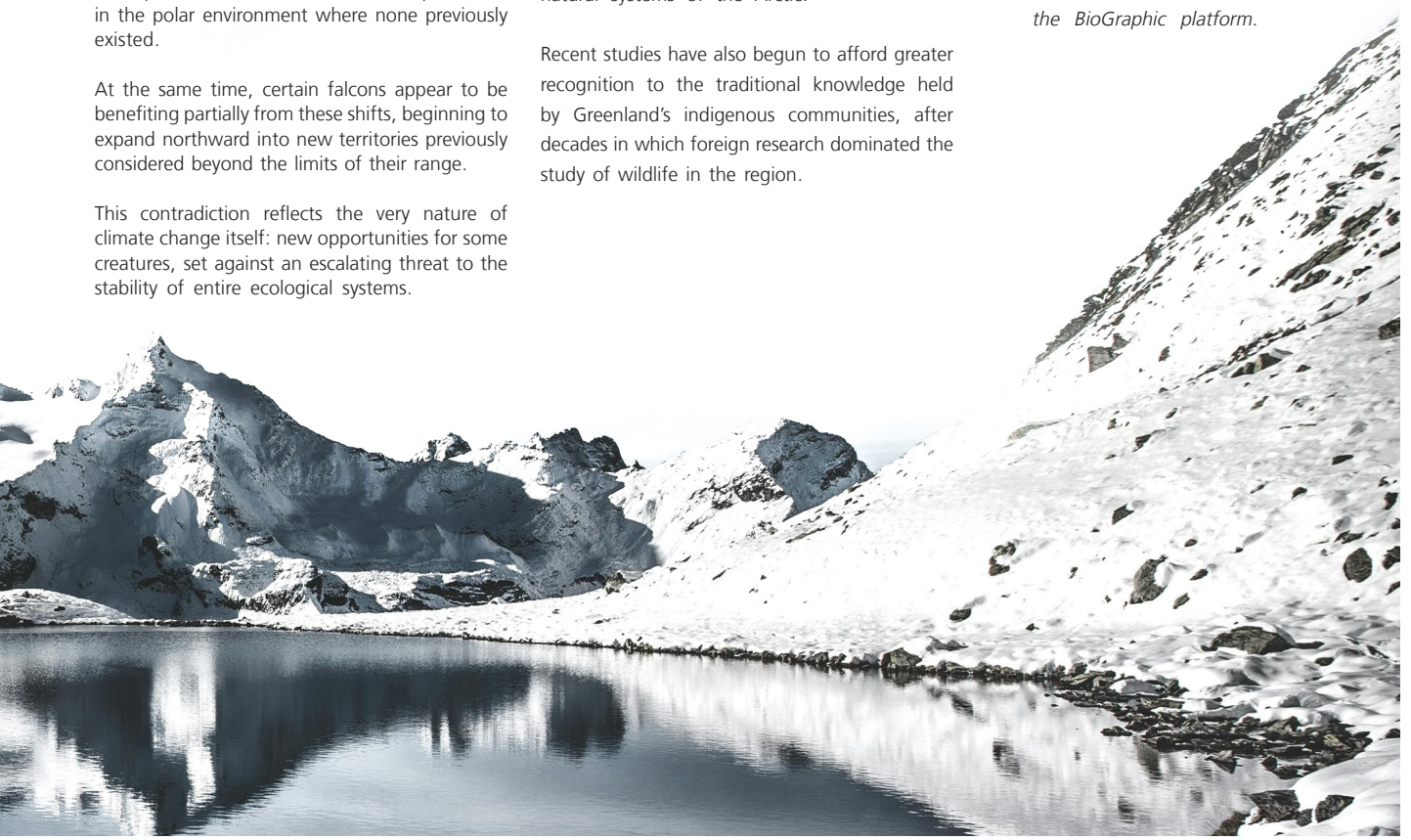
The story of Greenland's Peregrine falcons reveals that nature has not relinquished its capacity to surprise us. What was once believed to represent the final limits of a creature's ability to adapt now appears to be merely the beginning of a more complex understanding.

In an environment that seems hostile to life, these falcons succeed in surviving, breeding, and continuing their vast journeys across continents. In doing so, they represent not merely a species of bird of prey, but a living model of resilience, adaptation, and determination.

Perhaps the significance of this story lies in the reminder it offers: that protecting nature is not a mission separate from humanity's future, but part of our understanding of our relationship with the world we inhabit.

Each change that strikes the Arctic, and each disruption to the lives of these falcons, carries within it a broader message about the future of the environment on this planet.

- *This article is based on "The Fleet-Winged Ghosts of Greenland" by writer and biologist Caroline Van Hemert, published on the BioGraphic platform.*



Scientific Facts - Raptors



The Saker Falcon: The Living Memory of Authentic Arab Falconry

Courage in the Face of Quarry, and the Capacity to Adapt to Desert Environments

The Saker falcon occupies an exceptional place in the history of Arab falconry, and is considered one of the birds of prey most deeply associated with falconers across the Arabian Peninsula and Central Asia. This falcon has earned its distinguished standing through the combination of strength, intelligence, patience, and courage it brings to the pursuit of quarry, alongside a remarkable capacity to adapt to open desert environments. For this reason, the Saker has remained, across the centuries, the constant companion of the Arab falconer, and a symbol of chivalry, skill, and patience.

The Saker belongs to the falcon family and carries the scientific name *Falco cherrug*, known internationally as the Saker Falcon. Its name has become so closely bound to traditional falconry in the Arab world that its very presence has come to form an authentic part of the cultural heritage associated with the sport of falconry.





Physical Characteristics: Where Power Meets Agility

The Saker falcon is distinguished by a powerful build and an imposing appearance that combines size with agility in equal measure. Its body length ranges from approximately 45 to 55 centimetres, while its weight varies according to sex; the female (900–1,300 g) being notably larger than the male (700–900 g), as is the case with most falcon species. It possesses relatively broad wings that afford it considerable capacity for sustained flight over long distances and stable soaring above open plains.

The plumage of the Saker varies considerably, ranging from pale sandy tones to dark brown, with some birds displaying brown streaks and spots that provide camouflage suited to the desert environment. Certain individuals are exceptionally pale, with their bodies covered in off-white to yellowish feathering.

Among the most readily observed characteristics of this species noted by falconers are its large, wide-set eyes, reflecting the sharpness of its vision and the intensity of its focus. The Saker possesses a strongly hooked beak used to tear into prey, as well as sharp, curved talons that enable it to grip quarry with firm precision.

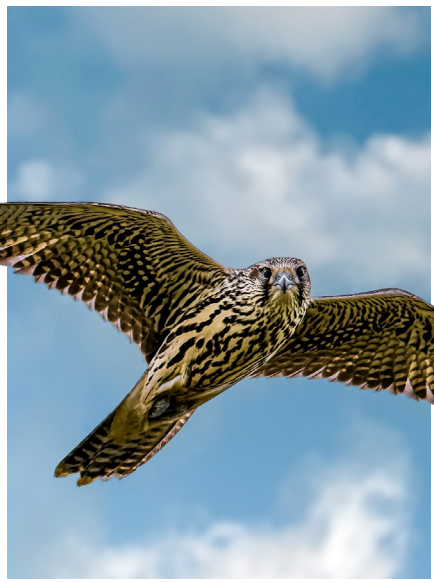
The Saker is noticeably larger than the Peregrine falcon, and bears some resemblance to the large, heavy-bodied Gyrfalcon. Saker falcons generally display more brown on their upper parts, and their chicks tend to be darker, with plumage variation closely linked to geographical origin.

Hunting Method and Tactical Capabilities

The Saker employs a hunting style known to falconers as the "search and chase" method, a technique based on low-level flight over the ground, followed by a direct strike on the quarry after a brief, rapid pursuit. This approach differs from that of the Peregrine, which relies to a far greater degree on a near-vertical stoop from considerable height.

The Saker is renowned for its high intelligence and ability to read the movement of its quarry and adapt swiftly during the pursuit, qualities that lead many Arab falconers to regard it as among the most intelligent falcons used in falconry. It combines precision of execution with agility of movement despite its relatively large size and displays a remarkable boldness when confronting quarry that may exceed it in bulk.

Although the Saker's speed is less than that of the Peregrine, its physical strength and wide wingspan grant it a significant advantage in taking ground-based quarry and medium-sized birds across open terrain. It has historically been regarded as the falcon of the plains, the plateaux, and the wide deserts.



Diet and Preferred Quarry

The Saker feeds on a wide range of small to medium-sized creatures, a diversity that constitutes one of the principal reasons for its strong adaptability across varied environments. Its quarry includes small mammals such as rodents and wild rabbits, as well as lizards and various bird species including partridge, quail, grouse, and pheasant.

The Saker is capable of taking birds in flight, though it captures much of its prey on the ground following a swift, low-altitude pursuit. During hunting it may travel tens of kilometres from its nest site in search of food, drawing on its considerable capacity for sustained flight over distance.

The Saker employs its powerful beak to dispatch prey swiftly and is known to be capable of breaking the spinal column of some quarry upon seizing it, a characteristic that reflects its exceptional physical strength compared with other falcon species.





Natural Habitat and Distribution

The Saker has historically been associated with the open expanses stretching across Central Asia, parts of Eastern Europe, the Russian Federation, China, and Mongolia. It favours grassy plains, plateaux, and deserts in proximity to open woodland and scrub, and may also be found near rocky cliff faces and mountain terrain up to altitudes of 4,500 metres above sea level.

Two principal subspecies are recognised. The first, Falco cherrug cherrug, formerly ranged from Central Europe through south-western Russia and Ukraine, Iran, and on to the Altai Plateau, wintering across the range extending from Europe and north-eastern Africa to western India.

The second subspecies, Falco cherrug milvipes, is found in south-eastern Siberia, northern Mongolia, and northern China, wintering across the range from Iran eastward to Nepal, north-western India, and central China.

In general, certain Saker populations migrate with the onset of winter towards warmer regions in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, while others remain resident in their original territories, particularly in the more southerly regions.

Over the years, the Saker's range has contracted significantly. Today it has become very narrow, encompassing principally Mongolia and parts of China and Kazakhstan.

Ornithological data indicate that Saker populations are now effectively confined to two population groups: a western and central European population, and a Siberian-Mongolian population. The populations of China, central Kazakhstan, and eastern Ukraine have virtually disappeared, while those of Europe and Kazakhstan have suffered substantial declines.



The Saker Falcon and Arab Falconry

No account of Arab falconry would be complete without acknowledging the deep historical relationship between the Arab falconer and the Saker. For centuries, this falcon was the preferred choice of many falconers, valued for its endurance, patience, and relative composure during training.

In earlier times, falconers of the Arabian Peninsula would receive migrating Saker falcons each autumn, catching a number of young female birds during their first migration southward, training them, and employing them in hunting expeditions throughout the season before releasing them once more to the wild. Falconers invariably preferred young birds over adults, as the former proved easier to train and more responsive than adult birds (known as Jernas).

The Saker also became closely associated with the pursuit of Houbara bustards, wild rabbits, and other desert quarry, forming part of the folkloric heritage bound to the desert and the Bedouin way of life. Arabic poetry and traditional storytelling have preserved the falcon's standing as a symbol of strength, courage, and fidelity.

In recent decades, reliance on captive-bred falcons has grown significantly, a step that has helped ease pressure on wild populations and reinforced the concept of sustainable falconry, which unites the preservation of heritage with the protection of wildlife.

Breeding and Life Cycle

The Saker's breeding season typically begins in spring, with the female laying between three and five eggs in April or May in nests built on rocky cliff faces or tall trees. The Saker frequently makes use of abandoned nests formerly belonging to other birds of prey, such as vultures and eagles.

The female takes charge of incubating the eggs for approximately one month, while the male provides food and defends the nest territory. Saker eggs are broad and elliptical in shape, pale orange-yellow or pale brown in colour with dense rust-coloured spotting.

After hatching, the chicks develop gradually until their plumage is complete at approximately 45 to 50 days, whereupon they begin their first attempts at flight.

The Saker is noted for its tendency to use the same nest year after year when conditions permit, a characteristic that contributes to the stability of breeding pairs in certain territories.

Threats Facing the Saker Falcon

Despite the great esteem in which the Saker is held, it faces in the modern era an array of mounting challenges that have led to the decline of its numbers across many parts of its historical range. Among the most significant threats are the loss of natural habitat through agricultural expansion and changes in land use, the depletion of natural prey populations, and electrocution on power lines.

Illegal hunting represents one of the most serious factors affecting wild Saker populations, whether through capturing chicks from nests or the trapping of birds during migration. In addition, chemical pesticides used in rodent control have caused the poisoning of significant numbers of falcons, particularly in parts of Mongolia and Central Asia.

Recent studies indicate that certain wild Saker populations have experienced sharp declines over the past decades, prompting international environmental bodies to list the Saker among threatened species at varying levels of concern.

Protection Efforts and Species Conservation

Recent years have witnessed extensive international efforts to protect the Saker and ensure the sustainability of its presence in the wild. The UAE has played a prominent role in this field through scientific programmes and field initiatives aimed at supporting wild populations of this species.

Foremost among these is the Sheikh Zayed Falcon Release Programme, established by the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may he rest in peace, with the aim of returning falcons to their natural habitats following the close of hunting seasons. Since its inception, the programme has contributed to the release of significant numbers of falcons back into the wild, a pioneering initiative that embodies the balance between the practice of falconry and wildlife conservation.

The Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi has also undertaken specialised research projects to study the Saker's ecology and migration routes, in addition to establishing thousands of artificial nest boxes in Mongolia to increase breeding opportunities in areas that lack natural nesting sites.

An Enduring Symbol in Arab Heritage

The Saker falcon remains far more than a bird of prey employed in hunting; it is a symbol deeply rooted in the Arab cultural memory and a living witness to the profound relationship that has bound the Arab people to their desert environment across the centuries. Through its strength, intelligence, and patience, the Saker has retained its distinguished place in the world of falconry to this day.

As awareness of the importance of wildlife conservation grows, the protection of the Saker has become a shared responsibility uniting falconers, researchers, and environmental bodies alike, ensuring that this majestic bird continues to soar over the deserts and plains and to live on in the consciousness of future generations as one of the foremost symbols of authentic Arab heritage.



Legal Status and International Protection

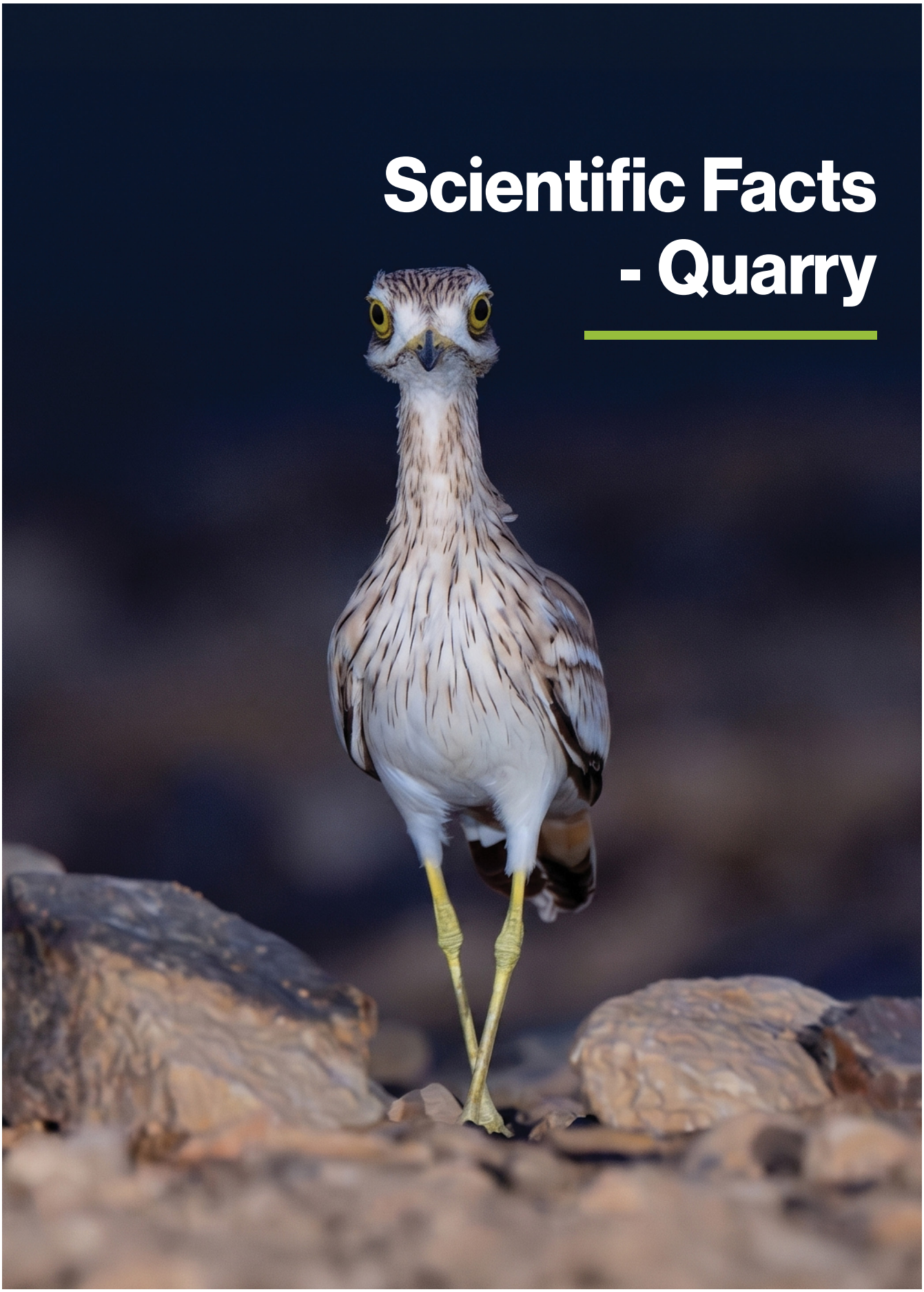
The Saker falcon is today regulated under Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), meaning that international trade in this species is conducted according to official controls and permits designed to protect wild populations from depletion and unsustainable hunting.

The Saker is also classified as an endangered species under the assessments of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), in light of the population declines it has experienced across a number of areas within its historical range during recent decades. This has strengthened international calls to support captive-breeding programmes, protect natural habitats, and reinforce the concept of sustainable falconry as an integral part of safeguarding this ancient cultural and environmental heritage.





Scientific Facts - Quarry





The Stone Curlew: The Bird of Caution, Concealment, and Camouflage

A Desert Quarry Active by Night, Uttering Its Mournful Cal

The stone curlew is distinguished by a mode of behaviour entirely unlike that of other quarry species. It is among the nocturnal wild birds that stir in the hours of darkness and disappear by day.

Although it does not enjoy the widespread renown accorded to the Houbara bustard, the stone curlew has remained a recognised quarry in traditional hunting expeditions, owing to its extreme wariness, remarkable capacity for camouflage and concealment, its nocturnal habits, and its distinctive call, a sound that has become inseparable from the stillness and clarity of desert nights.

The falconer tracking the stone curlew relies on his experience in reading footprints and listening for its distinctive calls at specific times. Hunting this bird requires precise knowledge of the environment and nocturnal bird behaviour, reflecting another dimension of the falconer's skill, grounded in observation and patience.

This bird is known internationally as the Stone Curlew, bearing the scientific name Burhinus oedicnemus, and is referred to in Arabic as Al Karawan. It belongs to the family Burhinidae, a group of ground-dwelling birds that combine the characteristics of wading birds and desert birds, distinguished by their long legs, wide eyes, and cautious behaviour.



Natural Camouflage as a Means of Survival

The stone curlew is of medium and relatively robust build, measuring between 40 and 44 centimetres in length, with a wingspan of approximately 85 centimetres. At first glance it bears some resemblance to certain larger plover species, though its distinctive features make it readily identifiable in open desert environments.

Among the stone curlew's most immediately striking characteristics are its large, prominent yellow eyes, which bear a certain resemblance to those of an owl, and clearly reflect its adaptation to nocturnal and crepuscular activity. It also possesses a relatively large head and a short, thick bill, yellowish in colour with a black tip.

The bird's plumage is predominantly sandy-yellow, interspersed with fine streaks and spots that enable it to blend into stony and sandy ground with such effectiveness that detecting it at rest becomes extremely difficult. This natural camouflage is one of its principal defences against predators.

Its legs are long and olive-yellow in colour, with the tarsal joint appearing noticeably swollen, the feature from which its scientific name, meaning "thick-kneed," derives.

A Bird of Night and Perpetual Vigilance

The stone curlew relies on wariness and concealment more than on speed. It therefore spends most of the daylight hours motionless among the gravel and sand, or near low shrubs, drawing on its excellent camouflage. When sensing danger, it will generally freeze in place rather than take flight, a behaviour that renders it difficult to detect even for experienced observers.

The stone curlew becomes considerably more active during the crepuscular and nocturnal hours, when it begins to move in search of food, emitting its well-known call, a sound resembling a wail or sorrowful cry that Bedouin people have long associated with the quiet of the desert night.

The stone curlew is not known for great speed in flight; it flies low and relatively calmly, with slow, powerful wingbeats and its legs trailing behind. On the ground it moves with a measured, deliberate walk and a steady trot, extending its head and neck forward with evident caution.

Its social behaviour is also notable. Stone curlews tend to form small flocks during late summer, autumn, and winter, while during the breeding season they are observed in small gatherings at dusk.

In certain periods of spring, pairs congregate in open areas near nesting sites, where the birds move about calling loudly and engaging in display movements, leaping, and brief pursuits, behaviours associated with communication, courtship, and pair bonding.



Habitat and Distribution

The stone curlew favours open and semi-arid environments, and is accordingly found across sandy and stony plains, short grasslands, desert margins, and areas near seasonal wetlands. It can also be observed near sand dunes, valley banks, mudflats, and quiet coastal zones.

Its range extends across large parts of Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia, with several subspecies differing in their geographical distributions. The desert subspecies associated with the Middle East is found across North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and parts of Iraq, Iran, and Turkey.

Migratory stone curlew populations begin to gather in flocks after the breeding season ends, gradually commencing their southward autumn migration from late summer, with certain populations crossing into the Middle East, North Africa, and warmer regions beyond.

In spring, the birds return to their breeding grounds as temperatures moderate, and this seasonal movement forms an essential part of the stone curlew's life cycle across much of its range.

Populations from northern Europe and Central Asia migrate in autumn to warmer areas in the Middle East and Africa, while resident populations in warmer regions remain within their territories throughout the year.

The stone curlew is notably capable of adapting to certain human-modified environments, provided they remain open and free of dense vegetation and obstacles that would impede its movement and its ability to see its surroundings.

Diet and Methods of Foraging

The stone curlew feeds on a diverse range of small creatures, relying heavily on insects and terrestrial invertebrates. Its prey includes beetles, grasshoppers, crickets, ants, larvae, and earwigs, as well as small reptiles, rodents, and molluscs.

It forages by walking slowly and deliberately across the ground, relying on its keen eyesight in the dark. When it detects its prey, it strikes swiftly or seizes it directly with its short, strong bill.

It is also sometimes observed leaping to catch flying insects, or taking prey from among low vegetation. Its feeding activity reaches its peak between dusk and dawn, when insects and small ground creatures are most active.

Breeding and Life Cycle

The stone curlew's breeding season begins in spring across most of its range. Its nesting approach is one of extreme simplicity. The nest consists of a shallow scrape on the ground, sometimes lined with a little grass or a few pebbles.

The female typically lays two eggs, camouflaged in colours resembling stone and sand, which effectively conceal them from view. Both male and female share in incubating the eggs and caring for the young, with an incubation period of approximately twenty-five days.

Stone curlew chicks possess an innate capacity for concealment, lying flat and motionless on the ground at the approach of any danger, relying on their cryptic colouring to make discovery extremely difficult. The success of the breeding attempt depends on the condition of the habitat, the degree of protection available, and the intensity of predation pressure.







The Stone Curlew and Arab Falconry

Although the stone curlew is not among the principal quarry of Arab falconry, such as the Houbara bustard or the Eurasian curlew, it has long been known to falconers in desert environments, particularly during migration seasons and in the open areas where it is most frequently encountered.

It is a quarry that demands particular skill from the falcon, on account of its extreme caution and its reliance on rapid running and concealment before taking wing. For this reason, some falconers regarded its pursuit as a test of the falcon's capacity for concentration and swift ground-level strikes.

Its nocturnal habits and reserved temperament also made it less visible than certain other quarry species, lending it an air of mystery in the popular memory associated with desert hunting.





Challenges Threatening Its Existence

Although the stone curlew is not considered globally threatened with extinction, its numbers have declined across several parts of its range in recent decades, as a result of habitat loss, intensification of agricultural activity, and urban expansion.

The stone curlew is not among the principal commercially regulated species under CITES and therefore does not feature prominently in the international trade appendices for threatened species.

Although still classified as a species of Least Concern globally by the IUCN, recent studies indicate a continuing decline in certain populations, particularly in open agricultural environments in Europe and parts of Asia.

The species is subject to protection and monitoring programmes in a number of countries within its range, given the sensitivity of its habitat and its rapid responsiveness to changes in land use and the loss of natural habitats.

Changes in land use, the disappearance of natural grazing lands, and the decline of open terrain in parts of Europe and Asia have affected its breeding success and the stability of its populations. These pressures are compounded by unregulated hunting in certain migration areas, as well as collisions with power lines and overhead cables.

These challenges have prompted a number of countries and environmental institutions to launch monitoring and protection programmes for the species, encompassing the protection of nesting sites and cooperation with farmers to maintain the habitats on which it depends.

A Quiet Presence in the Memory of the Desert

The stone curlew remains one of those birds that embody the character of the open desert and the stillness of Arab nights, a bird that combines wariness, quietude, and a singular capacity for concealment in harsh environments.

Although its presence in Arab falconry is less celebrated than that of certain other quarry species, it has remained part of the scene of traditional hunting, and of the memory of those falconers who came to know this bird by its distinctive nocturnal call, its reserved behaviour, and its close association with open ground and the wide desert plain.





Scientific Facts - Hunting Dogs





Wirehaired Vizsla

The Falconer's Ideal Companion in the Field

Finding and Retrieving Quarry After the Hunt

Falconry throughout its long history has been shaped by many elements that defined the character of this ancient sport, and the hunting dog was no less important than the falcon itself in many hunting expeditions. Falconers relied on dogs to track quarry, locate their hiding places, and guide birds of prey toward them, to the point where certain breeds became an essential part of falconry culture across Europe, Asia, and many regions of the world.

Among the breeds that have drawn the attention of falconers in recent decades, the "Wirehaired Vizsla" stands out, a hunting dog that combines exceptional stamina, a keen nose, obedience, and calmness when working alongside birds of prey. This dog has gained growing recognition as one of the most suitable hunting breeds for modern falconry.

Known internationally as the Wirehaired Vizsla, this breed is one of the hunting dog breeds originating from Hungary and belongs to the group of versatile hunting dogs known by the abbreviation HPR (Hunt, Point, and Retrieve).

What sets this breed apart is its ability to combine searching for quarry, pointing to its location, and then retrieving it after the hunt, qualities that have made it one of the most useful breeds for falconers and field hunters alike.

A Natural Passion

Many falconers believe that what distinguishes the Wirehaired Vizsla is not its physical strength alone, but its evident passion for work and its constant desire to cooperate with its owner. solely because it has been trained; it appears to genuinely enjoy the chase, the search, and following scent trails, which gives it a distinctly different presence in the field.

This dog is known for its close bond with the falconer, regularly glancing back at its owner during work, as though seeking its approval or awaiting a new command. This trait is considered one of the hallmarks of dogs that work in true partnership rather than complete independence. Some breeders describe the Wirehaired Vizsla as "a dog that hunts with its owner, not without him", a reference to its consistent tendency to maintain eye contact and follow the falconer's movements during work.

A number of falconers have shared accounts that confirm the sharpness of this dog's senses. It can at times pinpoint the location of quarry that would be nearly impossible for a human to detect, even in open terrain with sparse vegetation. For this reason, the phrase "always trust your dog" has become a recurring expression among breeders, offered as the defining lesson of experience with this breed.

A Multi-Talented Breed

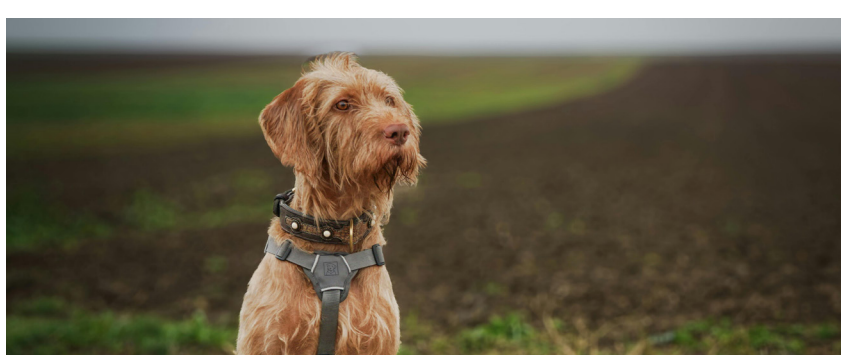
The Wirehaired Vizsla belongs to the category of versatile hunting dogs, breeds that do not specialise in a single task but are capable of carrying out a wide range of field work. It can search for quarry, pinpoint its location, participate in flushing it, and then retrieve it after the hunt.

For this reason, many falconers who practise different styles of falconry prefer the Wirehaired Vizsla, whether with long-wing birds such as the Peregrine, or short-wing birds such as the Goshawk and Harris's Hawk.

It can also work in a variety of environments, including grasslands, agricultural areas, open plains, ploughed fields, and even cold and wet conditions.

The breed possesses considerable stamina and can work for extended hours across varying weather conditions, an important quality during long hunting trips.

This versatility gives the Wirehaired Vizsla a distinguished place among falconers who move between different quarry types and hunting seasons.



Between Steadiness and Discipline

The Wirehaired Vizsla has a relatively calm temperament compared to some other hunting breeds and is less impulsive and excitable than its close relative, the Smooth-Coated Vizsla. It is also known for its ease of training and high responsiveness to commands, making it well-suited to falconers looking for a disciplined and cooperative dog.

However, this quality can occasionally become a drawback if the owner places excessive emphasis on obedience from an early age, as the dog may become overly attached to its owner and hesitant to range out during quarry searches.

For this reason, breeders advise giving the dog early exposure to natural terrain and quarry, encouraging it to develop independence and self-confidence without undue pressure or harsh correction.

The dog's dense wiry coat also provides protection against cold, moisture, and sharp vegetation, a significant advantage when working in thick or rough terrain.

An Effective Partner for Falcons

The Wirehaired Vizsla has demonstrated considerable success working alongside various types of raptors. Some falconers have used it for hunting rabbits and wild birds with the Goshawks, Harris's Hawks, Red-tailed Hawks, and Peregrines.

Its success in this role is built on its strong ability to track scents and work with focus and composure, along with its skill in holding a firm point near the quarry's location, a quality that gives the falconer and his bird a better opportunity to prepare for the stoop.

Some breeders affirm that this breed possesses an exceptionally powerful nose, and that a considerable part of the falcon's success in locating rabbits and concealed quarry is owed to the dog's precision in pinpointing their locations.

The Wirehaired Vizsla can also adjust its search range according to the type of quarry and the nature of the terrain, widening its pattern when pursuing elusive gamebirds, and tightening its range when hunting rabbits or close-holding quarry.

Between Falconry and Family Life

The Wirehaired Vizsla is not viewed solely as a working dog; it is also known for its ability to integrate into a family environment. It forms strong bonds with its owners and displays a notable degree of warmth and obedience, which has endeared it to many owners.

That said, this breed is not suited to those who are short on patience or quick-tempered, nor to those who do not have sufficient time for training and field work. The Vizsla requires constant activity and ongoing engagement and performs at its best when it feels it is a genuine part of its owner's daily life.





A Dog Suited to Various Types of Hunting

Some falconers prefer working with breeds that are highly specialised in a single type of work, such as Pointers or Setters specialised in bird hunting. However, the Wirehaired Vizsla stands out as an ideal choice for the falconer who practices more than one style of hunting, working across varied terrain and pursuing a variety of quarry.

While it does not rival the Pointer or Setter breeds in the specialised field of bird hunting, its versatility and wide range of abilities give it a clear advantage among falconers who pursue different types of hunting.

It combines a powerful nose, obedience, steadiness, stamina, and adaptability.

For this reason, many consider it among the most well-rounded hunting dogs in the world of modern falconry.



The Ideal Companion for the Falconer Who Shares His Passion

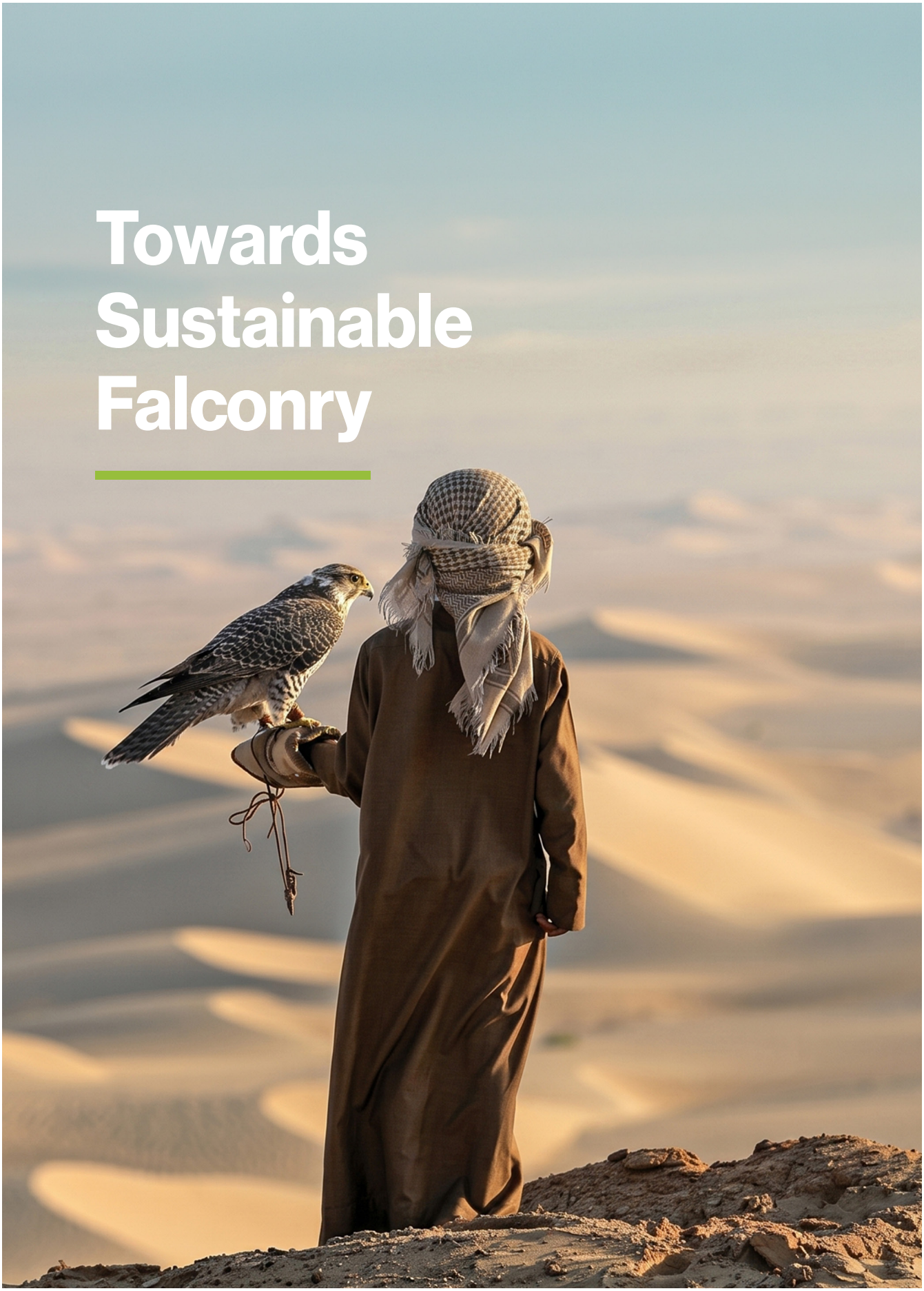
The Wirehaired Vizsla remains one of those breeds that has succeeded in establishing a strong presence in falconry through the balance it strikes between fieldwork and a deep connection with people. It is not merely a dog that follows commands; it is a companion that shares the falconer's hours of searching, watching, and pursuit across open terrain.

As interest among falconers in versatile HPR breeds continues to grow, this dog further strengthens its standing as a trusted partner, one that brings together intelligence, discipline, and a true working spirit; the very qualities that have made it, without question, the ideal companion for the falconer.

Based on an article by Roy Bebbington - The Falconers & Raptor Conservation Magazine.



Towards Sustainable Falconry





Responsible Hunting

When Heritage Becomes a Partnership with Nature

Throughout its long history, falconry was never merely a means of hunting or a skill tied to the chase. It represented a complete ethical framework built on respect for nature and an understanding of its laws. Hunting with falcons in Arab culture became inseparable from the values of patience, discipline, and moderation, to the point where the true falconer came to be measured by his awareness and character more than by his ability to hunt.

The early falconers understood that the falcon, the quarry, and the human being were all elements within an interconnected ecosystem, and that disrupting this balance would have a negative impact on wildlife and humankind alike.

From this understanding emerged the concept of moderate hunting, one that rests on taking only what is needed, respecting breeding seasons, and avoiding harm to threatened species or the depletion of natural resources.

Today, this approach is known as "sustainable hunting", a term that is modern in name but has been deeply rooted in the ethics of traditional falconry for centuries. Sustainable hunting does not mean the prohibition of falconry; rather, it means regulating it in a manner that ensures its continuity without causing harm to the environment or to biodiversity.

The Ethics of Falconry: A Responsibility Towards the Falcon, the Prey, and Nature

The ethics of falconry extend beyond the relationship with prey; they also encompass the relationship with the falcon itself. The falconer is responsible for his falcon's health and nutrition, for protecting it from exhaustion or injury, and for treating it with respect and care. Neglect or harshness is therefore considered conduct that runs contrary to the authentic values of this ancient sport.

The falconer's ethical responsibility also extends to the surrounding environment through keeping the desert clean, avoiding harm to vegetation or water sources, and behaving responsibly while travelling and hunting. True falconry cannot be separated from respect for the hunting ground in which it is practised, nor from a commitment to protecting the natural habitats of falcons and their prey.

In the modern era, falconry has become part of global efforts aimed at environmental protection, with falconers and heritage institutions participating in captive breeding programmes, the reintroduction of falcons into the wild, and the raising of environmental awareness among new generations. The falconer has thus evolved from a user of nature into a conscious partner in its protection and the preservation of its balance.

The UAE: A Global Model in Preserving Falconry and the Environment

The UAE has succeeded in presenting a balanced model that brings together the protection of heritage and the preservation of the environment. Since the time of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may he rest in peace, a clear vision has taken root, one that regards falconry as part of the national identity while closely linking it to the protection of wildlife and environmental balance.

Drawing from this vision, the country took pioneering steps in the field of sustainable hunting. Among the most significant was the decision to ban hunting with falcons in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi in 1977, with the aim of giving falcons and prey the opportunity to breed and restore the natural balance. This decision marked an important turning point, as falconry transitioned from an unregulated practise to an activity subject to clear environmental regulations.

As legislation developed, the law regulating wild hunting in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi was issued in 2005 and subsequently amended in 2021, defining hunting seasons, permitted areas, and species that may be hunted, thereby ensuring the protection of wildlife and preventing over-hunting.

Nature Reserves: A Safe Environment for Sustainable Falconry

The UAE has given considerable attention to protecting natural habitats through the establishment of nature reserves, which have become safe refuges for wildlife and centres for the responsible regulation of falconry.

Among the most prominent of these reserves are Sir Bani Yas Island, Al Wathba Reserve, and Mangrove National Park, in addition to reserves where falconry is practised in a regulated manner during the hunting seasons, such as Al Marzoom Hunting Reserve and Tilal Reserve in the Remah area of Al Ain.

These reserves contribute to the protection of biodiversity and the regulation of hunting within a monitored environment, preventing the indiscriminate depletion of prey and preserving the sustainability of falconry for future generations.

Houbara and Falcons: When Breeding Programmes Serve the Sustainability of Heritage

The protection of the Houbara Bustard has been one of the most important pillars of the UAE's environmental sustainability efforts. In 1982, the first Houbara chick was hatched in captivity; the National Avian Research Centre was then established in 1989, followed by the founding of the International Fund for Houbara Conservation in 2006.

These programmes aim to breed Houbara bustards and release them into the wild in support of ecological balance and the sustainability of falconry, and the UAE has achieved global milestones in this field with numbers surpassing all expectations.

The country also launched the Sheikh Zayed Falcon Release Programme in 1995, which aims to return falcons used in hunting to their natural habitats at the conclusion of the hunting season. The programme has contributed to the release of thousands of Saker and Peregrine Falcons, reinforcing wild falcon populations and contributing to the protection of biodiversity.





The Hunting Law... Protecting Heritage and Nature Alike

Within the framework of regulating hunting with falcons, the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi oversees the implementation of the wild hunting regulation law in cooperation with the Emirates Falconers' Club, with the aim of ensuring that falconry is practised in a responsible and sustainable manner.

The law stipulates that an official permit must be obtained to practise hunting, specifying the hunting season, designated areas, and species permitted for hunting. The Houbara Bustard has been designated as the only quarry species permitted in traditional falconry, and hunting must be conducted using falcons that are licensed and registered with the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment.

Traditional hunting in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi is confined to open areas, with a mandatory distance of no less than two kilometres from restricted zones, including nature reserves, residential, military, and petroleum areas. Hunting within or in proximity to pastoral and natural reserves is strictly prohibited in order to preserve ecological balance.

To obtain a falconry license, the applicant must be a UAE national, at least 18 years of age, and must adhere to the hunting season specified in the license issued to him, which is valid for a single season only.

The law also sets out a number of prohibitions with which the falconer must comply, including hunting or disturbing any other species of wild animal, driving vehicles over vegetation, transferring a hunting permit to another individual, and always carrying the permit while hunting and producing it upon request.

In keeping with the digital transformation, the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi has made hunting licenses available electronically through the "Tamm" platform, making it easier for falconers to obtain permits

CITES... International Protection for Wildlife

The protection of falconry is not limited to domestic legislation alone; it is also linked to international conventions concerned with the protection of endangered species, foremost among them the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

The Convention aims to regulate international trade in threatened animals and plants, and to ensure that such trade does not undermine the survival of these species in the wild.

The Convention covers more than 40,000 species distributed across three appendices according to their level of threat (species that are rare and endangered, for which commercial trade is prohibited; species that are not currently threatened but may become so if trade is not regulated; and species protected in specific countries that require international cooperation to regulate their trade).

The UAE is committed to implementing the Convention's requirements, reflecting its commitment to combating the illegal trade in falcons, Asian Houbara bustards, and other internationally protected species.

Sustainable Falconry... A Heritage for the Future

The UAE's experience affirms that the protection of heritage cannot be separated from the protection of the environment, and that falconry can remain a living and ever-renewed practise when it is built upon awareness, responsibility, and sustainability.

Falconry is not merely hunting; it is a culture that teaches human beings to respect nature, balance, and moderation. This underscores the importance of educational and heritage institutions, such as the Emirates Falconers' Club and its leading educational programme, the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School, in instilling these values within new generations.

Sustainable falconry has thus become a civilisational model that brings together authenticity and environmental awareness, affirming that true heritage is not only what we inherit, but what we preserve and pass on responsibly to the future.



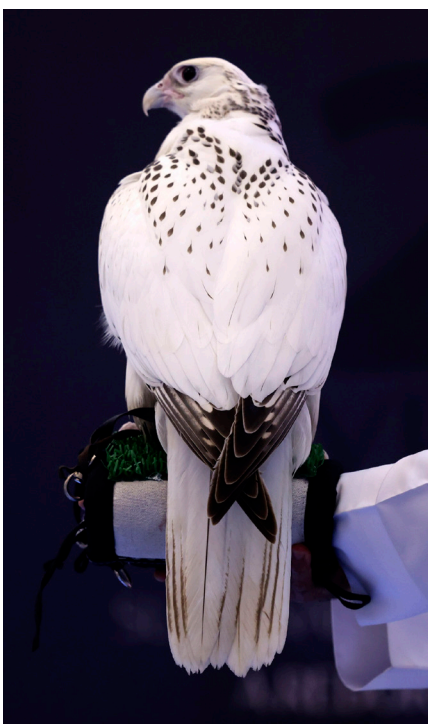
Captive-Bred Falcons

Scientific Research in Service of Falconry Between Superior Performance and Environmental Challenges

Within the complex fabric of avian evolution and centuries of human involvement in the art of hunting, the captive-bred falcon stands as a remarkable example of where nature meets human ingenuity. A bird of prey born of deliberate crossbreeding between different falcon species, it combines within its build the qualities of speed, power, and agility, forming what may be described as a rich tapestry of diverse attributes.

Unlike pure wild falcons shaped entirely in the wild, the captive-bred falcon is born within supervised breeding centres, where falconers and breeders select specific pairings, such as the Peregrine Falcon (Falco peregrinus) with the Gyrfalcon (Falco rusticolus), or the Saker (Falco cherrug) with the Lanner (Falco biarmicus), with the aim of producing birds that embody the finest qualities of these species combined. These falcons represent a modern chapter in the history of falconry that stretches back thousands of years.

According to research published by the British website Icarus Falconry, captive-bred falcons represent an advanced model in the world of modern falconry, combining high performance and technical sophistication, set against environmental challenges that demand well-informed and responsible management.





The Beginnings: From Scientific Experiment to a Global Phenomenon

The story of captive-bred falcons traces back to the 1970s, when breeders in Europe and the Middle East succeeded in producing the first viable offspring from the crossbreeding of different species. The first documented hybrid was recorded in 1971, resulting from the pairing of a female Saker with a male Peregrine, an achievement that opened the door to broader experimentation in the field.

Over time, multiple hybrid combinations emerged, most notably:

Gyr–Peregrine: combines the Gyrfalcon's imposing size and polar endurance with the Peregrine's extraordinary speed.

Peregrine–Saker: combines flexibility with the ability to adapt to desert environments.

In some cases, these falcons are capable of breeding, enabling the production of subsequent generations, such as triple-lineage birds (Gyr–Peregrine–Saker). However, the majority of falcons used in practice remain first-generation (F1) birds, in order to maintain the strength of their traits.

To overcome the natural barriers between species, artificial insemination is frequently employed within breeding programmes that operate under strict ethical standards at falconry centres around the world.

Exceptional Features: Ever-Changing Beauty and Inherent Strength

Captive-bred falcons are among the most visually diverse of all birds. They conform to no single fixed pattern; rather, their characteristics vary according to the hybrid combination. The wingspan of some hybrids, such as the Gyr–Peregrine, can reach approximately four feet, with a body length of around two feet and a weight ranging from approximately one to more than two kilograms, females being larger, as is customary among birds of prey.

The plumage carries a striking blend: the Gyrfalcon's pale tones of white and grey alongside the Peregrine's dark blue back, with the distinctive moustachial markings around the eyes, together with warm brown tones inherited from the Saker.

This diversity grants the bird a capacity for camouflage across varied environments, from snow-covered terrain to urban settings to open desert.

These birds also exhibit the phenomenon known as "hybrid vigour", a biological effect that can yield enhanced physical capacity and immunity compared to purebred falcons, resulting in better overall health, a stronger build, a more robust immune system, and lustrous plumage that reflects exceptional vitality.

A Designed Environment: Life in Captivity and the Capacity to Adapt

Hybrid falcons do not live naturally in the wild; they are raised within specialised facilities known as "mews" (falcon houses), designed to replicate natural habitats and allow the bird freedom of movement and training.

Nevertheless, cases of escape have been recorded, and some birds have occasionally managed to form semi-wild populations, as has occurred in certain parts of the British Isles.

These falcons demonstrate a notable capacity for adaptation:

The Gyr–Peregrine hybrid tolerates extreme cold, while the Saker–Lanner hybrid withstands high temperatures.

Breeding generally takes place in spring, with the female laying between three and five eggs. After an incubation period of approximately one month, the chicks hatch and begin to fly within six to eight weeks.



Behaviour and Hunting: A Remarkable Display of Power and Intelligence

Captive-bred falcons reach their greatest distinction in their behaviour and hunting abilities, combining the genetic heritage of multiple species into a single, cohesive performance.

A Gyr–Peregrine hybrid, for example, can stoop from great heights at speeds exceeding 200 miles per hour, combining the Peregrine's speed with the Gyrfalcon's power, to target prey such as ducks or partridges.

These birds also demonstrate a balance of temperament: high trainability inherited from the Peregrine, alongside the strong independence of the Gyrfalcon.

Their prey ranges from fast-flying birds such as pigeons to ground-dwelling prey such as rabbits.

Certain hybrid types also master the technique of "waiting-on", soaring at altitude before stooping.

Modern Falconry: Global Stardom and Precise Regulation

Captive-bred falcons have brought about a genuine shift in the world of falconry, becoming the preferred choice for beauty contests and racing championships, public displays, and educational programmes.

Training begins at an early stage using the hood and lure to establish a long-term relationship with the falconer that may extend for up to twenty years.

In the Middle East, these birds are highly valued and command high prices, with their movement subject to rigorous regulation, including dedicated passports issued for each bird.

In certain countries, such as the United States, the use of dual tracking devices is required when flying them, to prevent loss and minimise any potential environmental impact.

The Challenges: Between Protection and Risk

Despite this progress, captive-bred falcons raise important environmental issues, chief among them:

- The risk of interbreeding with wild species.
- The impact on the genetic integrity of pure lineages.
- The threat posed to endangered species such as the Saker Falcon.

Illegal trading further compounds these challenges, driving the adoption of technologies such as microchipping and DNA testing.

Organisations such as the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey play a role in promoting sustainable practices and encouraging the use of captive-bred birds in place of taking falcons from the wild.





Tales from the World of Breeding: When a Bird Becomes a Legend

The world of captive-bred falcons is not without extraordinary stories that reflect their unique capabilities. One trained Gyr–Peregrine in the UAE pursued a Houbara Bustard across vast distances of open desert, enduring sandstorms in a breathtaking display of stamina and ability that embodied its polar heritage.

On the training grounds, these birds exhibit intelligent behaviours, such as watching drones with curiosity or mimicking their trainer's whistle with remarkable precision. Their pellets reveal a varied diet ranging from feathers to bones.

In quieter moments, these birds preen their feathers with care and build a close bond with the falconer, responding to names and signals in a scene that speaks of a partnership grounded in trust and mutual respect.

A Bird Between Two Worlds

The captive-bred falcon represents far more than the product of crossbreeding; it is a bridge between a deep wild heritage and an enduring human ambition. While it opens new horizons in the world of falconry, it serves at the same time as a reminder of the necessity of preserving the balance between innovation and the conservation of nature.

In the skies above falconry centres and breeding facilities, where these birds fly with confidence, captive-bred falcons stand as proof that when nature meets knowledge, it can produce a remarkable diversity of types and characteristics, provided they are managed with wisdom and responsibility.

Many specialists hold that the reliance on captive-bred falcons has contributed to easing the pressure on wild falcon populations and to curbing overhunting and illegal trading, making captive breeding programmes a meaningful part of modern efforts to achieve the sustainability of falconry and the protection of wild falcon populations.



Sustainable Falconry: From Cultural Heritage to the Protection of Biodiversity

The UAE Experience as a Model

Engineer Imad Saad
Expert in Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Social Responsibility
Chairman of Abu Dhabi Environment Network

- Falconry is not merely a hobby… it is a complete cultural framework.
- Sustainable falconry is the practical model for responsible use of nature.
- Sustainable falconry views the falconer as a partner in protecting nature and passing on its ethics to future generations.
- True falconry does not teach a person how to control a bird… but how to respect life.
- The UAE has proven that heritage can lead the future.

Introduction

In the Arab consciousness, falconry was never simply a hobby or a traditional practice; it was always a complete cultural and intellectual framework that took shape in harsh desert environments and expressed a refined relationship between humankind and nature. Falconry taught people how to read the winds, understand the movement of birds, and respect the rhythm of the seasons, while instilling enduring values of patience, discipline, gentleness, and responsibility.

As falconry evolved from a means of livelihood in desert communities into a living intangible heritage recognised internationally, this practice is today called upon to fulfil a new role in an era of environmental crises, not merely as a memory of the past, but as a living model capable of contributing to the protection of biodiversity and the advancement of environmental awareness.

From Means of Livelihood to Living Human Heritage

In its earliest form, falconry was linked to the need of those living in arid environments to hunt and secure food. Over time, however, it evolved into a practice bearing social and ethical values, such as patience, discipline, gentleness towards birds, and respect for nature. The Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi affirms that falconry has been practised in the UAE and the Arabian Peninsula for thousands of years and was an important form of hunting in a resource-scarce environment, before becoming one of the UAE's most cherished heritage sports today.

This transition from subsistence necessity to cultural symbol gives falconry a distinctive significance. It is not preserved as a static memory, but practised, renewed, and handed down through the generations. Herein lies its central importance: falconry is not a "past" invoked on special occasions, but a living heritage capable of adapting to the issues of the present age.

Sustainable Falconry: Preserving Heritage and Protecting Nature

In an era of declining biodiversity and growing pressure on wild species and natural habitats, it is no longer possible to view falconry in isolation from sustainability. Sustainable falconry means practising the sport within scientific and ethical parameters that protect falcons, quarry, and habitats alike, ensuring that this practice remains part of the ecological balance rather than a cause of its disruption.

This understanding aligns with the objectives of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, which is based on three principal goals: the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits.

From this perspective, sustainable falconry becomes a practical model for the responsible use of nature, one that does not deny the historical relationship between humankind and wildlife, but reorganises it according to the principles of protection, moderation, compliance, and scientific awareness.

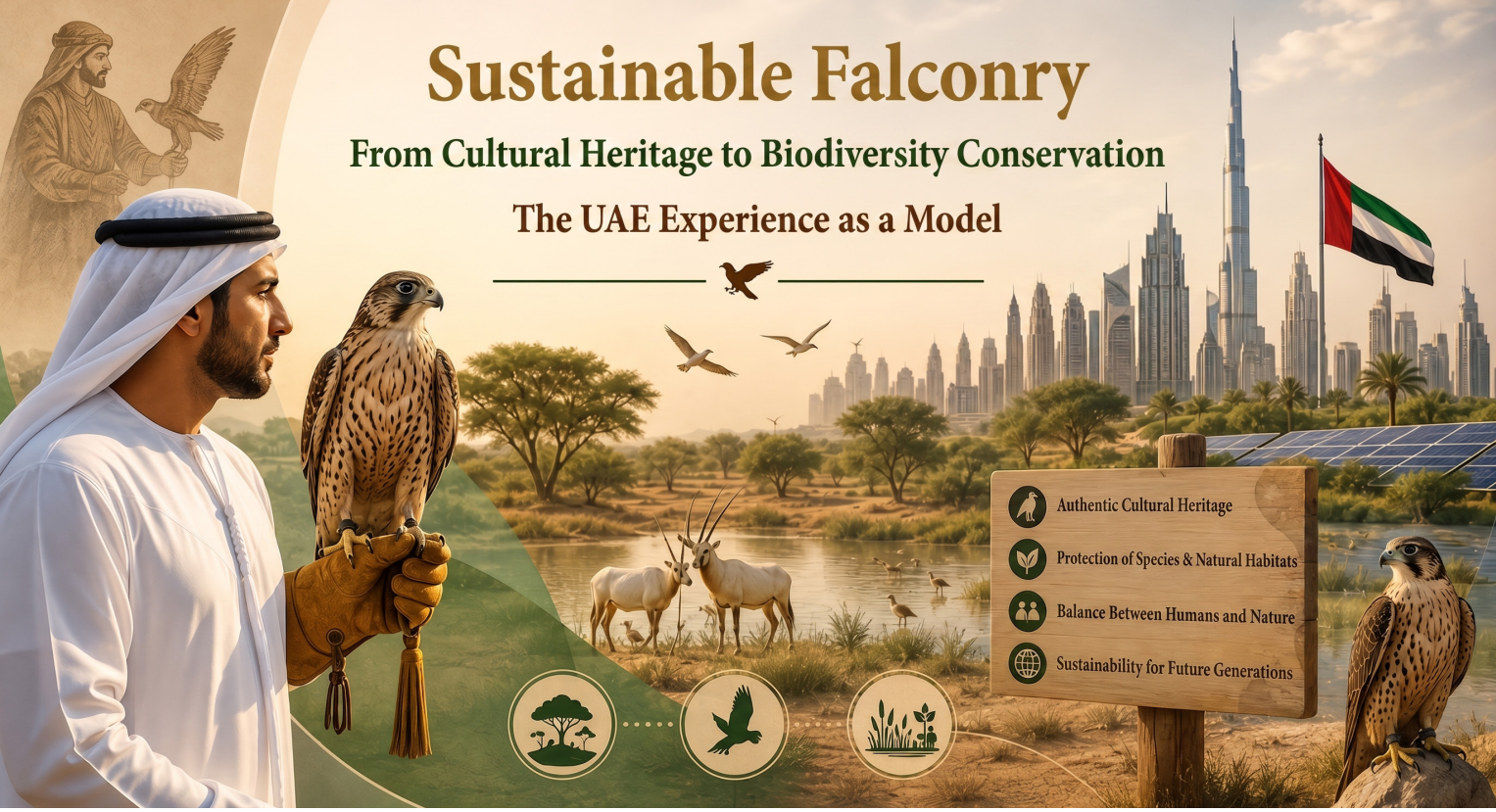
The Falconer as Guardian of Nature, Not Merely Its User

From an environmental standpoint, the falconer can serve as a field observer of nature, engaging directly with birds, quarry, and habitats, and tracking changes in seasons, wildlife abundance, and the condition of the wild. For this reason, certain institutions concerned with falconry and the conservation of birds of prey affirm that falconry communities can contribute to the protection of raptors and their habitats, and that falconry, recognised as intangible heritage, can be linked to conservation efforts when practised within responsible and lawful frameworks.

Sustainable Falconry

From Cultural Heritage to Biodiversity Conservation

The UAE Experience as a Model



What Is Meant by Sustainable Falconry?

Sustainable falconry may be defined as the practice of falconry within a legal, ethical, and environmental framework that ensures the continuity of heritage, protects wild species and their natural habitats, and strikes a balance between the human right to practise one's heritage and the right of nature to survive and regenerate.

This definition is consistent with the concept of "sustainable use" as set out in the Convention on Biological Diversity, meaning the use of components of biodiversity in a way and at a rate that does not lead to their long-term decline, while maintaining their capacity to meet the needs of both present and future generations. Sustainable falconry is therefore not the abolition of the practice, but its reorganisation according to standards of protection and continuity.

Practising Falconry Within Environmental and Ethical Parameters

Sustainable falconry rests on the principle that the relationship between humankind, the falcon, and nature must be one of respect rather than depletion. This encompasses gentleness with falcons during training, transport, and care; avoiding practices that harm the animal or the environment; adhering to modern animal welfare standards; and avoiding unnecessary pressure on wild species. Animal welfare and veterinary care standards have become an important component of modern falconry practice in many countries, including the UAE.

Respect for Wild Species and Quarry

No discussion of sustainable falconry is complete without consideration of the wild species upon which the ecosystem depends. This means refraining from targeting threatened species, respecting the ecological limits of quarry populations, avoiding over-hunting, supporting captive breeding and reintroduction programmes where needed, and drawing on scientific data in species management. Reports from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) indicate that one million species are threatened with extinction as a result of human activities, underscoring the importance of responsible use of nature.

Adherence to Seasons and Regulations

Among the cornerstones of sustainable falconry is that it be practised in accordance with clear regulatory systems governing hunting seasons, permitted areas, protected species, licensing requirements, and conditions for transport and care. Observing seasons is not merely an administrative procedure; it is a means of protecting breeding and migration cycles and ensuring that ecological balance is not disrupted. For this reason, many countries, including the UAE, have adopted regulatory frameworks that balance heritage preservation with environmental protection.

Protecting Natural Habitats

Wild species cannot be protected in isolation; they must be protected through the conservation of their habitats. Sustainable falconry is therefore linked to broader efforts that encompass the protection of deserts, open plains, and pastoral areas; limiting unregulated urban encroachment into natural habitats; combating pollution and waste in wild environments; and rehabilitating degraded habitats. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) affirms that the loss of natural habitats is among the leading causes of the global decline of wildlife.



Ensuring the Responsible Transfer of Knowledge to New Generations

Sustainable falconry does not merely preserve tools and symbols; it transmits the values that accompany the practice, such as patience and discipline, respect for animals, an understanding of nature, moderation, and responsibility towards the environment. This is consistent with UNESCO's concept of intangible cultural heritage, which focuses on the transmission of knowledge and skills from one generation to the next in a living and ever-renewed form.

The Distinction Between Traditional and Sustainable Falconry

In its historical form, traditional falconry was tied to a set of skills and values that reflected the nature of life in earlier times; centred on mastery of falcon training, proficiency in hunting techniques, and the acquisition of field experience in desert and open environments, alongside the courage, patience, and endurance. Falconry also carried considerable social and cultural prestige, and was regarded as a symbol of chivalry, dignity, and belonging. All of this was consistent with a different historical context, one characterised by population size, pressure on natural resources, and the level of environmental knowledge available at the time.

Today, falconry has evolved beyond its traditional framework, and new dimensions have been added that make its practice more comprehensive and more aligned with the demands of the present age. It begins by preserving the essence of the practice itself through safeguarding traditional skills and the arts of falcon training and transmitting them to new generations as an authentic part of cultural heritage.

A Brief Comparison

Dimension	Traditional Falconry	Sustainable Falconry
Objective	Hunting and practice	Practice and conservation
View of Nature	A resource associated with the practice	A partner to be preserved
Species Management	Traditional expertise	Expertise, Science, Law

Why Has This Concept Become a Necessity Today?

The concept of sustainable falconry has become an urgent necessity in light of the accelerating environmental changes the world is witnessing; chief among them the alarming decline in biodiversity. Recent decades have witnessed a sharp drop in the populations of many wild species as a result of habitat loss, overexploitation of resources, pollution, and climate change, which has prompted international institutions to warn that current extinction rates far exceed natural levels. In this context, it has become essential that all practices involving wildlife, falconry among them, adapt to the standards of conservation and sustainability.

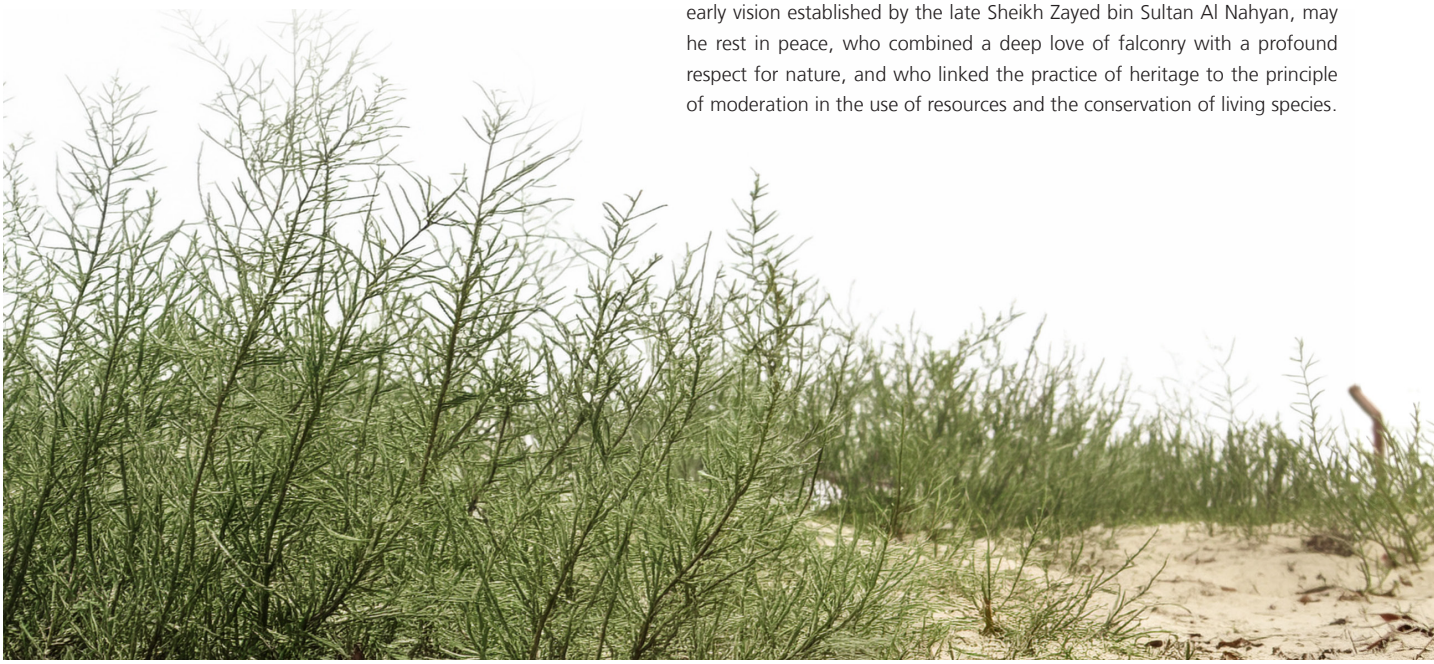
Falconry and Its Relationship to the Protection of Biodiversity

Biodiversity is no longer a concern for scientists alone — it has become one of the most critical issues in environmental, economic, and cultural security worldwide. The stability of ecosystems, soil quality, the balance of food chains, and the sustainability of natural resources are all directly tied to the integrity of biological diversity. The Convention on Biological Diversity affirms that the loss of biodiversity threatens human well-being, economies, and societies, and that its preservation is essential to sustainable development. In this context, falconry emerges as something greater than a heritage activity — it can represent a framework of field knowledge capable of contributing to the monitoring of environmental change, the promotion of responsible use of nature, and the deepening of public awareness of wildlife.

The UAE Experience as a Global Model

The United Arab Emirates represents one of the world's leading examples of transforming falconry from a local heritage practice into a comprehensive institutional model that brings together the preservation of heritage, the protection of wildlife, the advancement of scientific knowledge, and the regulation of the practice according to sustainability standards. The country has succeeded in elevating falconry from the realm of traditional pastime to an instrument of environmental awareness, a bridge for cultural dialogue, and a platform for international cooperation in the protection of nature.

This transformation was not the product of chance. It was built upon an early vision established by the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may he rest in peace, who combined a deep love of falconry with a profound respect for nature, and who linked the practice of heritage to the principle of moderation in the use of resources and the conservation of living species.



The Vision of the Late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan

Sheikh Zayed's name has long been associated with falconry in the deepest sense, yet he regarded it not merely as a sport or a social tradition, but as a school that teaches patience and discipline, and strengthens the bond between humankind and nature. He was known for his great respect for the desert environment and his commitment to not depleting its resources, founding a philosophy built on balancing the preservation of heritage with the responsibility owed to future generations.

One of the defining features of Sheikh Zayed's vision was its foundation in compassion and kindness towards living creatures, far removed from any notion of absolute dominion over nature.

He called for respect for wild birds, for avoiding cruelty and excess in hunting, and for the care and welfare of falcons in accordance with ethical and humane standards; an understanding that anticipated many of the modern concepts associated with animal welfare and sustainability.

Leading Institutions

1. The Emirates Falconers' Club

The Emirates Falconers' Club was established in 2001 to serve as a specialised national platform for preserving and developing falconry and for leading local and international initiatives linked with this ancient heritage. The Club plays an important role in supporting sustainable falconry, organising events and championships, promoting the environmental culture associated with falconry, as well as training new generations and strengthening international cooperation. Over time, it has become one of the most prominent institutions working in this field worldwide.

2. Specialised Veterinary Hospitals and Centres

One of the most significant elements of the UAE experience is the development of an advanced healthcare infrastructure for falcons, at the forefront of which stands the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital, one of the largest and most renowned specialised hospitals of its kind in the world. The hospital provides diagnostic and treatment services, advanced surgical procedures, preventive care and health awareness programmes, and support for scientific research. This development has elevated falcon care from traditional practice to an advanced standard of modern veterinary medicine.

3. Training and Awareness Programmes

The UAE experience encompasses diverse programmes for training falconers and educating the wider public, including educational workshops for youth, programmes dedicated to falcon welfare, environmental awareness campaigns, cultural exhibitions and festivals, and intergenerational knowledge-transfer initiatives. These programmes affirm that the preservation of falconry extends beyond safeguarding tools and outward forms; it encompasses the instilling of awareness and values that accompany the practice. The UAE has also led or participated in a number of international initiatives related to falconry, species protection, and wildlife conservation, and has strengthened cooperation with leading global environmental and cultural institutions, consolidating its standing as a soft power and an international model that combines heritage with environmental responsibility.

4. Falconry's Inscription on UNESCO's Representative List

In 2010, falconry was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO, and the multinational nomination was subsequently expanded to include additional countries around the world. The UAE was among the most prominent nations to lead this process, contributing to international efforts to present falconry as a shared human heritage transcending borders and cultures.

This inscription constitutes international recognition that falconry is a living practice transmitted across generations, encompassing specialised knowledge and skills, strengthening social bonds, and embodying a responsible relationship with nature. It affirms that falconry is a heritage worthy of protection, preservation, and transmission to future generations. Falconry thus moved from a local or regional sphere to an internationally recognised global cultural heritage. cultural heritage.

4. Regulation of Practice

The existence of clear legal frameworks is among the most important reasons for the success of the UAE experience in this field, having contributed to achieving a considered balance between the preservation of cultural heritage and the conservation of the environment and wildlife. These frameworks regulate falcon ownership and registration, transport and travel, establish health standards, and set rules for responsible hunting and the practice of falconry.

The licensing system serves as an essential instrument for ensuring organised and safe practice, helping to maintain accurate records of practitioners, strengthen regulatory compliance, facilitate administrative tracking, and curb unauthorised or unregulated practices. It also contributes to raising the standard of professional accountability among falconers.



Why Has the UAE Become a Global Model?

The UAE has become a global model in this field because it has succeeded in bringing together elements that rarely converge in a single experience. It began with leadership that believes in the value of heritage and the importance of protecting nature and established strong specialised institutions to oversee this field with efficiency and continuity. It supported all of this with a clear legal framework that regulates practice and ensures its alignment with environmental requirements.

The UAE experience has demonstrated that the preservation of heritage does not mean freezing it in the past, but rather developing it within a modern institutional framework that transforms it into a cultural and environmental force with global impact. For this reason, falconry in the UAE has become a prominent example of how a national identity can be transformed into an international model of sustainability and the safeguarding of living heritage.

UAE Programmes for Species Conservation and Reintroduction

The UAE has distinguished itself through its efforts in the field of falconry, which have not been confined to preserving the traditional practice alone but have extended to the conservation of the species themselves through an advanced framework encompassing captive breeding, reintroduction into the wild, specialised veterinary medicine, and applied scientific research. This dimension is significant because the preservation of heritage linked to wildlife cannot succeed if the species themselves decline or their habitats deteriorate. This approach is consistent with the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which emphasises the need to conserve species and ecosystems and ensure their sustainable use.

Falcon Breeding Programmes

Falconry has historically relied on wild falcons as the primary source of birds used in the practice. As global demand increased and environmental pressures grew, the need arose to develop captive breeding programmes as a sustainable and balanced alternative. The importance of these programmes lies in reducing reliance on wild falcons, easing pressure on migratory species, minimising the risks of illegal trafficking, and providing birds with documented health records that support organised and responsible practice.

Reintroduction of Falcons into the Wild

Reintroduction programmes are centred on returning healthy falcons to their natural habitats after the end of the falconry season or following rehabilitation, thereby helping to sustain wild populations. The UAE has distinguished itself in this field through pioneering programmes that have received wide international recognition and have established a concept that combines heritage with environmental responsibility.

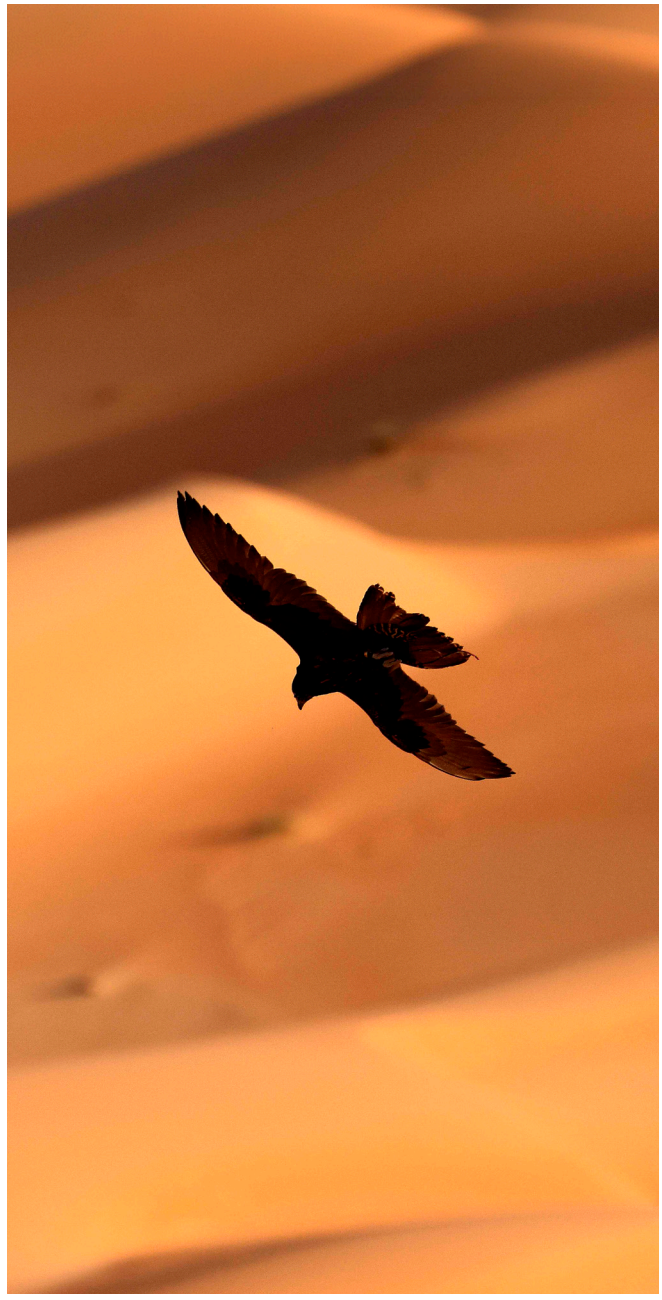
Advanced Veterinary Medicine

Falcon care was historically based on inherited experience and traditional knowledge. The UAE has contributed to developing a specialised field of falcon veterinary medicine that is among the most advanced in the world, at the forefront of which is the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital, one of the largest specialised centres of its kind globally. Modern veterinary medicine for falcons encompasses clinical examinations, radiography and diagnostic imaging, advanced surgical procedures, the treatment of injuries and disease, nutrition programmes, and the prevention of infectious diseases, thereby providing high standards of veterinary care.

Why Is the UAE Considered an Advanced Model?

Because it has succeeded in bringing together four integrated elements that rarely converge in a single experience: preserving falconry as a living heritage; supporting environmental conservation through reintroduction and protection programmes; advancing animal welfare through modern veterinary medicine; and investing in science and technology through tracking, research, and data.

The UAE experience demonstrates that the preservation of falconry is not confined to safeguarding its cultural symbolism; it encompasses the protection of the falcon itself, its environment, its health, and its future in the wild. In this way, the UAE has evolved from a guardian of heritage into an active contributor to species conservation on a global scale.



INPEX











Japan and the UAE
Celebrating Friendship Through Culture

Special Coverage 1





From Falcons to Salukis

A Complete Heritage Experience Presented by the Emirates Falconers' Club at the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition

The pavilion of the Emirates Falconers' Club at the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition (ADIHEX 2025) presented a complete cultural and heritage experience, bringing together education and entertainment, the authenticity of Emirati heritage, and the spirit of modern innovation. Throughout the exhibition, the pavilion drew thousands of visitors, including families, children, and those with a passion for falconry and heritage, offering them an immersive journey into the world of falcons, Salukis, and the values associated with sustainable hunting.

The Club's participation in the 22nd edition of ADIHEX marked an important milestone in its nearly quarter-century journey of preserving heritage and promoting the principles of sustainable falconry. The pavilion reflected the Club's vision of making falconry a way of life and a human culture that transcends the boundaries of traditional pastime.

The Most Visited Pavilion in the Preservation of Environment and Cultural Heritage Sector

The Emirates Falconers' Club pavilion at ADIHEX 2025 attracted the largest number of visitors within its sector (the Preservation of Environment and Cultural Heritage), through a programme rich in diverse interactive activities:

- **Over 120,000 visitors to the Club's platform**
- **Over 40,000 participants in interactive activities**
- **Over 2,000 passports distributed as part of the Guardians of Falconry initiative**
- **Over 1,900 children participating in the Guardians of Falconry programme**
- **Over 15 school visits**
- **Over 3,500 promotional materials distributed**
- **Over 1,000 copies of Al Saqqar magazine distributed in Arabic and English**
- **Over 70 Arabian Salukis participating in the beauty contest**

A Pavilion Pulsing with Heritage and Interaction

The Emirates Falconers' Club pavilion extended across a generous space that showcased a wide range of pioneering initiatives and projects through which the Club works to protect heritage and transmit it to new generations.

Visitors moved through the pavilion between a variety of stations combining knowledge with hands-on experience, beginning with the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School, continuing through the International Festival of Falconry, the Arabian Saluki Centre, and on to the Al Saggar magazine corner.

Visitors were given the opportunity to interact directly with falcons in a dedicated area for live demonstrations, where they learned about proper handling techniques for birds of prey, traditional hunting methods, and the use of falconry tools, in addition to taking commemorative photographs with the falcons, an experience that proved particularly captivating for children and families.

A mounted falcon displayed with wings fully spread, recreating the dynamic moment of a stoop, added a visually striking and educational dimension, enabling the public to observe the bird of prey in close detail and gain an understanding of its anatomical characteristics and extraordinary capabilities.





Heritage Through Innovative Education... Guardians of Falconry

The Club's pavilion this year placed particular emphasis on interactive activities directed at children and young people, within a vision aimed at instilling the values of heritage and falconry in new generations through modern methods that combine knowledge with enjoyment.

Among the most prominent of these initiatives was the Guardians of Falconry passport, which gave children the opportunity to move between multiple educational stations inside and outside the pavilion, collecting stamps upon completing each activity or learning experience. The passport became a motivating educational journey, encouraging children to discover the world of falconry, the environment, and heritage in an interactive and unconventional manner.

The journey encompassed dedicated stations for the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey, the Mohamed bin Zayed Raptor Conservation Fund, the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School, the Arabian Saluki Centre, and the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, alongside a number of local and international institutional partners. Upon completing the journey, participants were awarded the title of "Guardian of Falconry", an experience that combined knowledge and excitement while instilling the values of heritage protection and environmental conservation in young minds.

The "Little Veterinarian" activity also attracted considerable interest, introducing children to the medical examinations specific to falcons under the supervision of specialists, including eye and ear examination, the use of microscopes to analyse samples, techniques for repairing broken feathers, and the fitting of modern tracking devices. The activity offered an educational experience combining scientific knowledge with practical application, with information presented at a level appropriate for children of different ages.

Traditional activities were equally present throughout, with the pavilion hosting workshops on the preparation of Arabic coffee and the customs of traditional hospitality, alongside a falcon hood design and colouring activity, giving children the opportunity to express their creativity while learning about one of the most iconic symbols of traditional falconry.

The Arabian Saluki The Falconer's Companion Through History

Alongside the falcons, the Club showcased the Arabian hunting dog as an integral part of the region's falconry heritage. The Arabian Saluki Centre was one of the pavilion's main attractions.

The platform gave the public an opportunity to learn about the history of the Arabian Saluki, its characteristics, its extraordinary speed, and its exceptional hunting abilities, as well as the chance to interact directly with the dogs and take commemorative photographs.

The Club also highlighted the Arabian Saluki Beauty Contest, one of the region's leading heritage initiatives, which extends beyond assessing the external appearance and aesthetic specifications of the Arabian hunting dog to encompass behaviour, hunting skills, and the traits associated with the purebred Saluki.

The considerable interest in the Arabian Saluki reflected the Emirates Falconers' Club's commitment to protecting authentic breeds and introducing new generations to the importance of this historic heritage, one that has been closely associated with falconry expeditions for thousands of years.

















Live Displays and Interactive Experiences

Thousands of visitors learned about proper falcon-handling techniques, traditional training methods, and the behaviour and characteristics of birds of prey. Children were also given the opportunity to take commemorative photographs with falcons and Salukis, in scenes that reflected the deep historical relationship between people and these animals, which have long been associated with the region's hunting heritage.

At the Arabic coffee corner, visitors experienced a complete heritage immersion that evoked the atmosphere of traditional Emirati majlis, from the roasting and grinding of the coffee beans to the preparation and serving of Arabic coffee in accordance with the traditional customs of Arab hospitality. Stories and anecdotes about Bedouin life and desert hunting expeditions accompanied the experience, adding a rich cultural and human dimension to the pavilion.

International Partnerships and a Global Presence

The Club's pavilion extended well beyond its local dimension, reflecting the growing international reach of Emirati falconry through hosting a number of leading institutions and partners engaged in the conservation of birds of prey and the cultural heritage associated with falconry.

Participants included the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF), the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC), the Russian Roscongress Foundation, alongside the UAE Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, and the Mohamed bin Zayed Raptor Conservation Fund.

This international presence reflected the UAE's growing standing as a global centre for the preservation of falconry and the promotion of environmental sustainability and biodiversity protection.

A Quarter-Century of Efforts to Preserve Heritage

Over many years, the Emirates Falconers' Club has succeeded in establishing itself as one of the most prominent heritage and environmental institutions dedicated to falconry at both the local and international levels. Since its founding in 2001 under the vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the State, may God protect him, and with the support and patronage of His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Ruler's Representative in Al Dhafra Region and Chairman of the Club, it has continued its efforts to preserve falconry heritage and transmit it to new generations in a manner that combines authenticity with modernity.

The Club's participation in the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition reflected this long journey and affirmed that falconry is not merely a traditional pastime; it is a global cultural and human heritage built on respect for nature, the strengthening of national identity, and the values of sustainability.

The participation also reflected the exceptional public turnout at the Club's pavilion, which became a living space bringing together heritage, education, and interactive experience, affirming falconry's ability to engage new generations through modern approaches that preserve the spirit of authentic heritage.

Once again, the Emirates Falconers' Club pavilion succeeded in delivering a complete experience that carried visitors from the world of falcons to the world of the Saluki, and from traditional heritage to the concepts of modern education and sustainability, proving once more that the protection of heritage does not mean preserving the past alone, but building a living and ever-renewed relationship between generations and their authentic cultural inheritance.










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Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition

A Global Platform Bringing Together Heritage and Sustainability

The 22nd edition of the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition (ADIHEX 2025) marked an exceptional chapter in the history of this world-renowned heritage event, recording unprecedented public turnout and broad international participation that affirmed the Exhibition's growing position on the global map of specialised cultural and heritage events.

Held under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Ruler's Representative in Al Dhafra Region and Chairman of the Emirates Falconers' Club, ADIHEX 2025 was organised in partnership between ADNEC Group and the Emirates Falconers' Club, presenting what was widely described as the largest and most vibrant edition since the Exhibition's launch in 2003.

Record Global Attendance

The Exhibition attracted over 380,000 visitors over nine days, with the participation of 2,068 exhibitors and brands from 68 countries, reflecting the world's growing interest in hunting and equestrian sports, as well as authentic Emirati heritage. The edition also showcased wide diversity across its fifteen sectors, encompassing falconry, equestrian, camping, hunting, marine sports, arts and traditional crafts, alongside newly introduced sectors including the Arabian Saluki, camels, hunting knives, and the heritage market.

The latest edition was held under the theme "The Legacy Lives On", affirming the Exhibition's ability to bring together authenticity and the spirit of development through a comprehensive experience that blended heritage, innovation, and sustainability. The edition also featured expanded programmes of interactive activities, educational workshops, and specialised forums focusing on environmental protection and the principles of sustainable hunting.

The Emirates Falconers' Club played a pivotal role in the success of the latest edition, both at the organisational level and through its heritage and educational pavilion, which became one of the Exhibition's most popular attractions, drawing families, children, and falconry enthusiasts alike.



ADIHEX also hosted a major falcon auction, in which more than 57 falcons were sold for a combined value exceeding AED 2.1 million, alongside auctions for camels and Arabian horses, reflecting the economic and cultural significance the Exhibition has come to represent.

The Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition continued to cement its standing as a global platform for cultural exchange and heritage preservation, drawing experts, falconers, and specialists from across the world, and offering a comprehensive interactive experience that deepened the connection of new generations with their cultural heritage, while further establishing Abu Dhabi as a global centre for preserving the shared human heritage associated with falconry, equestrian, and traditional sports.

Heritage Through a Global Lens

His Excellency Majid Ali Al Mansouri, Secretary-General of the Emirates Falconers' Club, affirmed that the 22nd edition of the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition embodied Abu Dhabi's global standing as a leading centre for the preservation of Emirati heritage in hunting, equestrian sports, and all traditional sports, and as a prestigious economic hub whose diverse sectors reflect the variety of its products and events, offering opportunities for interaction and exchange between exhibitors and visitors.

He stated: "This edition witnessed unprecedented engagement from participants and the public alike, reflecting the growing international interest in authentic Emirati traditions and the many facets of humanity's cultural heritage, alongside our continued commitment to advancing scientific research, innovation, and sustainability, and achieving further accomplishments in these fields."

For his part, His Excellency Humaid Matar Al Dhaheri, Managing Director and Group CEO of ADNEC Group, said: "We take great pride in the exceptional success achieved by the 2025 edition of the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition (ADIHEX), which exceeded all expectations and achieved unprecedented milestones".

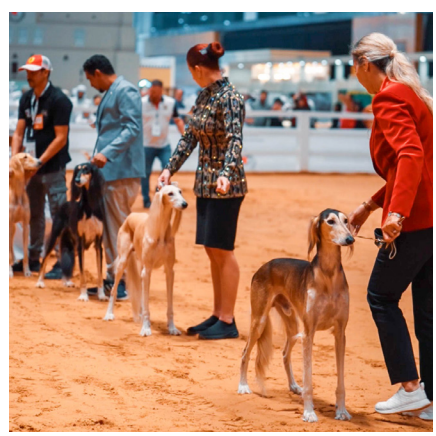
He noted that the Exhibition drew a distinguished group of experts, specialists, and enthusiasts across its fifteen sectors, in addition to heritage enthusiasts and families from across the UAE and around the world, adding: "This success reflects the wise vision of the UAE's leadership and its unwavering commitment to preserving cultural heritage, alongside its support for innovation and sustainability across all domains."

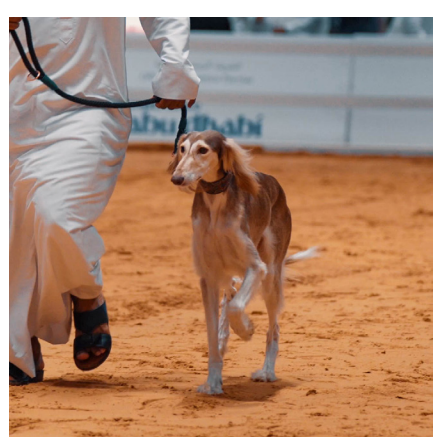
Between falcons and Salukis, between traditional majlis and modern technologies, the Emirates Falconers' Club presented at the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition a living model of how heritage can be preserved as a living, evolving culture capable of speaking to the world and to new generations in the language of the future.






















عيادة الصقور







Special Coverage 2



From Ichihara to Al Ain

Falconry Builds Bridges Between the UAE and Japan





In a scene that brings together the authenticity of heritage and the spirit of civilisational dialogue, the Emirati-Japanese Falconry Program has continued to consolidate its standing as one of the leading international cultural initiatives, embodying the ability of falconry to build bridges between peoples and strengthen mutual understanding through a shared cultural heritage rooted in respect for nature and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge.

The city of Al Ain hosted the third edition of the Program in January 2026, under the theme *"Building Heritage Bridges Through Falcons"*, organised by the Emirates Falconers' Club and the Japanese INPEX–JODCO Foundation, in collaboration with the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School, and with the support of the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi, at Tilal Resort in the Remah area of Al Ain.

This edition came as a continuation of the successes achieved by its two predecessors, the first held in Al Ain in 2024, and the second hosted by the Japanese city of Ichihara in February 2025, within the framework of a cultural and educational exchange program dedicated to falconry as a shared intangible cultural heritage between the United Arab Emirates and Japan.

Broad Participation and a Comprehensive Field Program





The Program's third edition brought together 48 participants from the UAE and Japan, including 13 Japanese falconers and 11 Emirati students from the Sheikh Zayed Private Academy for Boys, alongside trainers, supervisors, experts, and specialists in falconry and the conservation of birds of prey.

The Program comprised 17 diverse activities, including 8 educational sessions and workshops, 6 hunting trips, alongside live demonstrations and interactive sessions aimed at introducing participants to the foundations of traditional Arab falconry, the ethics of sustainable hunting, and the role of the falcon in Emirati and human heritage.

The Program also built upon the achievements of the first edition held in Al Ain, an initiative that from its inception has sought to transfer knowledge and deepen shared understanding of the art of falconry as an ancient human heritage.

The Desert Camp... Living the Spirit of Falconry

The Program was designed as a Bedouin falconry camp in a desert environment that faithfully recreated the traditional falconers' way of life. Participants lived a complete field experience that brought together practical training, cultural exchange, and daily immersion in the atmosphere of the Emirati *megnas* (the traditional falconry expedition).

The experience extended well beyond training activities alone. Participants shared the daily life of the desert camp, from evening gatherings around the fire to traditional *majlis* and the customs of Emirati hospitality, in an atmosphere that allowed Emirati and Japanese youth alike to experience the spirit of the traditional falconry expedition and gain a direct understanding of the human values bound to falconry.

From the Lure to Casting Off... A Living Experience at the Heart of the Desert

The activities enabled participants to move from theory to practical application by engaging directly with falcons, using traditional hunting equipment, and practising falcon training techniques with the *tilwah* (lure), alongside hunting expeditions conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of sustainable falconry.

Field experiences included hunting Houbara bustards and hares using falcons and Arabian Salukis, as well as tracking and desert physiognomy activities, giving participants a hands-on introduction to the traditional skills associated with Emirati falconry.

A Complete Educational Experience in Understanding the Desert Environment

Participants also took part in a specialised desert physiognomy tour led by experts and field guides, during which they learned about local plants and animals and how they adapt to the harsh desert environment, alongside reading natural signs, traditional desert navigation methods, and the uses of plants for food, medicine, and shelter. The experience brought together environmental knowledge, cultural heritage, and practical learning in a single immersive setting.

The Program also featured live falconry demonstrations that showcased the speed, precision, and natural instincts of the falcons, in scenes that embodied the close bond between the falconer and his bird and affirmed falconry's standing as a living heritage built on respect for and preservation of nature.













The *Hadheerah* and Arabic Coffee... Heritage as a Human Experience

The experience extended well beyond falconry alone, encompassing rich cultural and heritage dimensions that reflected the details of traditional desert hunting life. The *hadheerah*, the camp's traditional gathering place, hosted cultural sessions covering Emirati customs and etiquette, Arabic coffee, and stories of desert hunting, alongside traditional cooking activities and the handcrafted arts associated with falconry.

Participants also designed and crafted their own traditional falconry equipment, an initiative aimed at connecting young people with the heritage crafts of falconry and introducing them to the cultural significance of the tools used in falconry across generations.

An arts and crafts workshop allowed participants to express their experiences through paintings depicting hunting scenes and desert life on canvas, bringing together creativity and heritage while strengthening the human connection between Emirati and Japanese youth.

In the sphere of cultural exchange, dialogue sessions and daily interaction between the Emirati and Japanese participants deepened mutual understanding and built lasting human bonds, reflecting falconry's role as a bridge for civilisational dialogue and cultural understanding between peoples.

Falconry and Sustainability... A Shared Environmental Message

The Program highlighted the environmental dimension of falconry through sessions addressing biodiversity conservation, natural habitat protection, and the adoption of sustainable hunting practices. The Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi presented its efforts and initiatives in this field, reflecting the UAE's commitment to achieving a balance between the preservation of heritage and the protection of nature.

The activities also included an educational visit to the falcon clinic, during which participants learned about preventive healthcare for falcons, disease prevention, and the importance of regular veterinary follow-up in maintaining the health of birds of prey and the sustainability of falconry.



Falconry: A Universal Language That Transcends Borders

His Excellency Majid Ali Al Mansouri, Secretary-General of the Emirates Falconers' Club, affirmed that the sustained support for this program reflects a deep belief in the value of falconry as a unifying cultural and human heritage, and in its role in building bridges of civilisational dialogue and entrenching the values of mutual respect and sustainability.

He also noted that "falconry is a universal language that transcends borders, reflecting authentic values built on respect for nature and the transmission of knowledge between generations."

In his closing remarks, His Excellency expressed appreciation for the partnership with the Japanese INPEX–JODCO Foundation, commending the enthusiasm of the young Japanese falconers for learning and their positive engagement with the ethics of Arab falconry. He also praised the participation of students from the Sheikh Zayed Private Academy for Boys, and the efforts extended by the experts, trainers, and supervisors in transmitting knowledge and expertise to new generations.



The Program concluded with a closing ceremony honouring the participants' commitment and achievements. His Excellency Majid Ali Al Mansouri, joined by Her Excellency Sheikha Salem Al Dhaheri, Secretary-General of the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi, and Mr. Hiroshi Fuji, Institutional Advisor at INPEX Corporation and Representative Director of the INPEX-JODCO Foundation, presented shields and certificates to the participants. A complete set of traditional Arab falconry tools was also gifted to the young falconers from both the UAE and Japan, an initiative that reflected the shared pride in preserving the falconry heritage and safeguarding it for generations to come.

For the third consecutive year, the Emirati-Japanese Falconry Program succeeded in transforming the desert into a space for cultural and human dialogue, making falconry a means of building friendship and mutual understanding between peoples.

Between Al Ain and Ichihara, the Program affirmed that true heritage is not confined to preserving the past; it also possesses the power to shape the future and build bridges between cultures and generations through a shared human language.

Spotlight On 1



From the Mangala and Perch to the Desert and Megnas

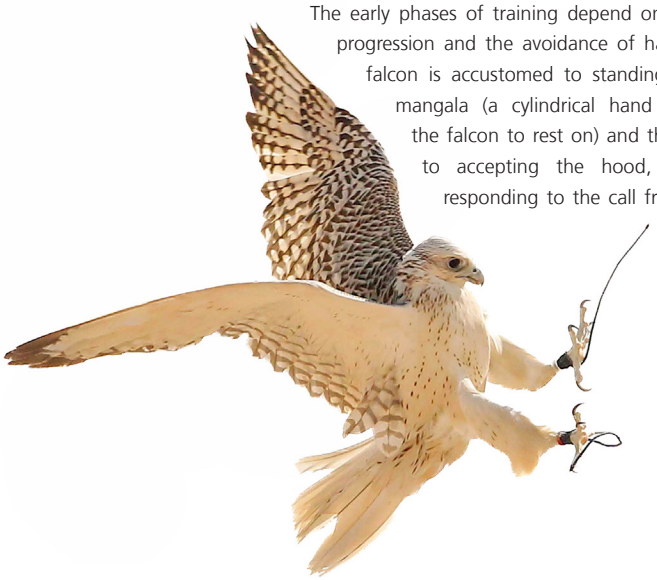
The Fundamentals of Falcon Training and Building Trust Between the Falconer and His Bird

Falconry is an integrated heritage science that brings together knowledge, skill, and ethics.

Falcon training is the most delicate and sensitive phase in the practice of falconry, during which the relationship between the falconer and his bird takes shape, and the foundations of trust and understanding are laid, the effects of which are later reflected in hunting and in daily handling. Successful training does not rely on force or speed; rather, it is built on patience, gradual progression, and a deep understanding of the falcon's nature and behaviour.

The falcon is a highly intelligent bird with a great capacity for learning, yet it is at the same time an inherently independent creature that does not respond to harshness or coercion. For this reason, training begins from the very first moments by accustoming the falcon to the presence, voice, and movements of its owner, in a calm and measured manner that gives the bird a sense of security and prepares it psychologically for the training stages that follow.

The early phases of training depend on gradual progression and the avoidance of haste. The falcon is accustomed to standing on the mangala (a cylindrical hand pad for the falcon to rest on) and the perch, to accepting the hood, and to responding to the call from short



distances, with food used as a means of reinforcing positive behaviour and building familiarity and trust between the bird and its owner.

The tilwah (lure) is among the most important training tools, used to develop the falcon's ability to return and stoop with precision. Training sessions begin over short distances before gradually increasing as the falcon's responsiveness and concentration improve.

An experienced falconer pays close attention to the individual differences between falcons. Some learn quickly, while others require more time to adapt and build confidence.

Training methods vary according to the species, age, and temperament of the falcon, making falconry a body of accumulated expertise that combines practical knowledge with a heritage passed down across generations.

The falconer also monitors the falcon's health and weight on a regular basis, as the balance between nutrition and fitness is one of the most critical factors in the success of training and the bird's responsiveness.

Rest is no less important than training itself. A fatigued or stressed falcon loses its ability to concentrate and respond and may display undesirable behaviours. Successful training therefore rests on achieving a balance between exercise and rest, while avoiding violence or harshness, which can undermine the falcon's trust in its owner and affect its behaviour in the long term. Calmness, consistency of approach, and disciplined repetition contribute to building a positive relationship grounded in cooperation and trust.

Falcon training does not merely teach the bird to fly and hunt; it also cultivates important values in the falconer, such as patience, attentiveness, self-discipline, careful observation, and a sense of responsibility, alongside respect for quarry, preservation of the environment, and adherence to the ethics of hunting. This makes falconry a heritage school that brings together skill, ethics, and knowledge, a school of character that instills patience, discipline, and respect for nature.

Falconry is not simply about training a falcon to hunt quarry. It is a relationship built on trust, patience, and mutual respect between the falconer and his bird.

In the pages that follow, we explore the stages of falcon training and the principal falconry tools and their uses, from the initial stages of taming and conditioning through to the falcon's readiness for the hunt.









Key Concepts

- Taming the falcon requires patience and avoiding haste, and an understanding of bird behaviour and the individual differences between birds.
- The hood is used to calm the falcon and reduce its stress; it is removed at specific times during training.
- In the early stages of training, the falcon relies on eating directly from the falconer's hand, which strengthens familiarity and trust between them.
- Falcons differ in their responses to external stimuli, some are affected by sounds or the movement of a hunting vehicle, while others respond only to their owner or under specific conditions.
- The lure is used during training to encourage the falcon to stoop and return, as the bird perceives it as real prey.
- The falcon does not require a direct introduction to the location of prey, given its sharp eyesight and high capacity for observation.
- Some falcons can be trained to respond only to their owner's call, while others respond to any familiar call during training.

Stage One: Taming (*Al-Tarbeeb*) - Conditioning and Building Trust

This stage represents the foundation of the relationship between the falconer and the bird. It is a psychological process before it is a training one.

- Tethering the falcon to the leash (marbat) safely and placing it on the mangala.
- Using the hood to calm the bird and reduce stress.
- Sitting with the falcon for extended periods until it grows accustomed to the human voice and movement.
- Accustoming it to the call (al-hazaf).
- Training it to eat from the falconer's hand (al-tankeel).
- Repeating these steps over a period of 3 to 10 days, depending on the individual bird's temperament.

Stage Two: Loosening and Casting Off (*Al-Fakk wal-Hadd*) - Managing the Falcon's Movement and Accustoming It to Flight

Once the falcon has settled psychologically, its physical training begins.

- Gradually reducing restraint by loosening the jesses attached to the falcon's legs, easing the force of its grip and reducing tension.
- Training the bird to stand on the perch and return to it.
- Using the lure to stimulate the flying instinct.
- Accustoming the falcon to flying short distances while ensuring its return.

Stage Three: Jump Training (*Al-Naqz*) - Building Responsiveness and Increasing Distances

This stage serves as a genuine test of obedience and concentration.

- Training the falcon to fly towards the falconer immediately upon hearing the call.
- Incrementally and systematically increasing distances from several metres to 50 metres, then 100 metres, and beyond.
- Monitoring the falcon's fitness and strengthening its focus and speed of response.
- Repeating these steps is essential for strengthening the bond between the bird and the falconer.

Stage Four: Food Management and Motivation (*Al-Taqtee'*)

Food management is a precise training method that relies on balance.

- Reducing the amount of food given to the falcon (mild food restriction) without harming its health.
- Increasing the falcon's enthusiasm and motivation for hunting and flying.
- Careful and continuous monitoring of the bird's weight and general condition to prevent weakening.
- Training note: Excessive or poorly managed food restriction can weaken the falcon or undermine its confidence.

Stage Five: Taking Live Quarry (*Al-Qatt 'ala al-Taryda*) Hunting Training

The transition to practical application.

- Beginning with easy, slow-moving quarry released in front of the falcon (pigeons, quail, etc.).
- Training the falcon to stoop and take the quarry.
- Ensuring a gradual increase in the difficulty and speed of the quarry.
- The falcon learns to associate hunting with food reward.

Stage Six: Post-Hunt Behaviour Management (*Al-Talqeef*)

An important stage for regulating the falcon's behaviour after a catch.

- Calmly separating the falcon from its quarry after the catch.
- Preventing the bird from gripping its quarry excessively or aggressively.
- Using substitute pieces of meat as both food and reward, conditioning the falcon to relinquish its catch.











Stage Seven: Accustoming to the Vehicle and the Observation Point (*Al-Marqab*)

Preparing the falcon for the real hunting environment and enhancing its readiness.

- Acclimating it to movement and noise inside the vehicle, ensuring it remains unafraid.
- Taking it to an elevated vantage point (Al-Marqab) to observe quarry.

Stage Eight: Final Readiness Assessment Using the Lure

A comprehensive evaluation before the hunting expedition.

- Testing speed and strength.
- Observing the bird's focus, responsiveness, and the precision of its return.
- Determining the falcon's overall readiness.



Stage Nine: The Hunting Trip (*Al-Megnas*) – The Practical Phase

The final phase of training, undertaken once the bird has reached its full readiness and capability.

- Taking the falcon into a suitable desert environment.
- Hunting Houbara Bustard, Hares, Stone Curlews, and other available quarry.
- Maintaining full commitment to the ethics of hunting and the preservation of the environment.



Falconry Equipment and Its Uses

From Daily Care to the Requirements of the Hunt

Falconry is a heritage sport built on a precise knowledge of its specialised tools and equipment, which play a fundamental role in the care, training, and behavioural management of the falcon, as well as in maintaining the safety of both the bird and the falconer throughout all stages of training and hunting.

Each tool in falconry has a specific function and particular application, from equipment used for calming and controlling the falcon to modern training and tracking devices, reflecting the accumulated expertise that characterises falconry and brings together practical skill with inherited knowledge passed down across generations.

(1) Tools for Calming and Controlling the Falcon

The Hood (*Al-Burqa'*)

The hood is a covering placed over the falcon's head to block light from its eyes, helping to keep it calm and reduce stress. It is typically made of leather and features an opening at the front through which the falcon's beak protrudes, along with small ventilation holes. The hood is used when carrying the falcon, during transportation, or in situations where it needs to be calmed.

The Jesses (*Al-Sabq / Al-Subuq*)

The jesses are two straps tied to the falcon's legs and are among the most important means of controlling the bird. They prevent sudden takeoff and are used primarily during the early stages of training.

The Leash (*Al-Mursal / Al-Marbat*)

The leash is a braided cord, with one end attached to the jesses and the other to the block perch or the mangala. Its purpose is to secure the falcon in place and prevent it from flying without the falconer's permission.

The Swivel (*Al-Mudawwar*)

The swivel is a small fitting mounted between the jesses and the leash, preventing the strings from twisting or tangling during the falcon's movement. It contributes to the bird's comfort and ease of handling.











(2) Tools for Carrying and Perching

The Gauntlet (*Al-Dass*)

A leather glove worn by the falconer to protect the hand from the falcon's sharp talons. It allows the falconer to carry and feed the falcon safely and is considered an essential tool.

The *Mangala*

The call is a specific sound or distinctive whistle used by the falconer to summon his falcon. Over time, the falcon learns to associate this call with returning to its owner.

The Block Perch (*Al-Wakr*)

A wooden or metal post with a flat top resembling a plate. It is covered with leather, felt, or carpet to enable the falcon to stand comfortably, whether at home or in the field.

(3) Training Tools for Flight

The Lure (*Al-Tilwah*)

A fundamental training tool made from four to six Houbara wings assembled in the shape of a bird. It is attached to a cord approximately three metres in length and is used to stimulate the falcon to fly and stoop, which the falcon perceives as real quarry.

The Call (*Al-Nida'*)

The call is a specific sound or distinctive whistle used by the falconer to summon his falcon. Over time, the falcon learns to associate this call with returning to its owner.

(4) Hunting Training Tools

The Quarry (*Al-Tarida*)

The quarry is used to teach the falcon actual hunting skills. Training begins with easy prey such as pigeons or quail, gradually developing the falcon's ability to pursue, stoop, and catch the quarry.

The Meat Reward

The falconer offers the falcon a piece of meat following a successful training session or hunt. It reinforces positive behaviour and is sometimes used to encourage the falcon to relinquish its quarry calmly.

(5) The Falconer's Supporting Tools

The Falconry Bag (*Al-Makhla*)

A pouch of thick canvas or leather worn over the falconer's shoulder. It holds the falcon's food and the essential falconry equipment needed during training or hunting trips.

The Scales (*Al-Mizan*)

The scales are an essential tool for weighing the falcon daily and monitoring its health and fitness.

The Binoculars (*Al-Marqab*)

The binoculars are used to sight quarry at a distance. They assist the falconer in surveying the surrounding terrain and identifying quarry before releasing the falcon, making the hunt more precise and controlled.

The Ground Pad (*Al-Markaz*)

The ground pad is laid on the desert floor during a hunting trip. It provides comfort while waiting and enables the falconer to observe the surroundings calmly and with focus.

(6) Modern Falconry Tools

Tracking Devices (Al-Radar)

Tracking devices are among the modern tools introduced into falconry. They consist of a small transmitter attached to the falcon's tail feathers or leg and a receiver carried by the falconer, enabling him to locate the falcon, track its movements, and determine how far it has ranged should it fly far from the hunting party.

Kites, Remote-Controlled Aircraft, and Houbara Models

Training falcons using kites, remote-controlled aircraft, and scale models of the Houbara Bustard, the falconers' preferred quarry, similar to the lure, is a highly effective method of training falcons to soar to great altitudes.

- Falconry equipment is far more than a collection of practical tools; it is an integral part of this ancient heritage, embodying the balanced relationship between the falconer and his falcon, helping to ensure the safety of all, and supporting the continuity of falconry in a manner that brings together knowledge, responsibility, and respect for nature.








Spotlight On
2



Arabic Coffee at the Falconer's Camp

When Hospitality Becomes a Language of Generosity & Prestige

Arabic coffee in the desert was never merely a beverage served to a guest; it was the hallmark of the majlis, a message of welcome, and a declaration of generosity and sanctuary. In the camps of falconers, coffee is present every evening, drawing men together around the fire, opening doors to conversation, and reinforcing the values of traditional etiquette, hospitality, and respect for the guest.

Arabic coffee has been deeply intertwined with the life of desert people that it has become an intrinsic part of Emirati cultural identity and a symbol of generosity and social standing.

The cup of coffee served to a guest was never merely a custom; it was a social language conveying respect and a warm welcome, expressing the virtues and inherited values of the people of the desert.

In the falconer's life, coffee accompanied falconry expeditions and desert gatherings, ever present in the camps alongside falcons, the campfire, and the long conversations into the night.

There, falconers meet to exchange knowledge, discuss the condition of the birds, and prepare for another day of hunting, while the fragrance of cardamom and roasted coffee drifts through the stillness of the desert.

The significance of coffee extended far beyond its flavour, extending to the rituals of its preparation, the tools used, and the etiquette of serving it; from roasting and pounding the beans in the mortar (najar), to pouring from the dallah (Arabic coffee pot) according to refined customs that reflect respect and refinement.

The preparation of coffee was also closely associated with fire and firewood. The people of the desert understood from earliest times that authentic coffee requires glowing embers, patience, and expertise. And so, the lighting of the fire — shabb al-dhaw — was itself one of the essential skills of desert journeys and falconers' camps.

In recognition of its profound cultural and social standing, Arabic coffee was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2015, affirming its value as a living heritage passed down through generations and an integral part of Emirati culture. Arabic coffee has also become a symbol of unity and social cohesion, a means of expressing the bonds between members of the community, sustaining the tradition of the majlis, and preserving the values of social connection and hospitality.

Interest in Arabic coffee has extended well beyond majlis gatherings and camps, becoming the focus of numerous heritage events and specialized competitions held across the UAE, aimed at preserving its traditional methods of preparation and passing this cultural heritage on to new generations, thereby reflecting the status of coffee as a symbol of both hospitality and national identity.

Arabic coffee in the falconer's camp is the warmth of the majlis, a message of generosity, and a living heritage that expresses the spirit of the desert and the character of its people.









The Stages of Preparing Emirati Arabic Coffee

1. Selecting the Coffee

Good, clean green coffee beans are carefully selected, as the flavour begins with the quality of the beans. The coffee is prepared only in the quantity required, without waste.

2. Roasting the Coffee (*Al-Mahmasah - Traditional Coffee Roasting Pan*)

Coffee preparation begins with roasting, during which the beans are continuously stirred. The beans are placed in the *Mahmasah*, held at an angle, and stirred continuously with a lifting-and-lowering motion until they reach the deep brown colour characteristic of Emirati coffee; care is taken not to burn or blacken the beans.

3. Cooling (*Al-Mibarrad - Coffee Cooling Bowl*)

After roasting, the beans are transferred to the *Mibarrad* and left to cool completely before grinding. Cooling is an essential step that regulates the flavour and prevents bitterness.

4. Grinding (*Al-Najar - The Mortar*)

The beans are finely ground in the *Najar*. The sound of the *Najar* is itself one of the hallmarks of the majlis and a sign that preparations for hospitality are under way.

In earlier times, the sound of beans being pounded could be heard from a distance, an announcement to all who passed that a majlis was in full swing, with coffee and welcome awaiting.

5. Brewing

Water is first brought to a boil, then the ground coffee is added. The coffee is left to brew slowly over a low flame for no less than ten minutes, skimming off any foam that rises to the surface. The *malqamah* (brewing pot) is then removed from the fire and placed nearby to keep it warm before being left to settle for about five minutes.

6. Spicing (*Al-Tabheer*)

Meanwhile, approximately one coffee cup of cardamom, or more or less according to taste, is pounded in the najar before being added to the dallah. Cardamom is the defining characteristic of Emirati coffee. Saffron, cloves, or cinnamon may also be added according to custom or occasion.

Emiratis take pride in the art of preparing authentic Arabic coffee, in its variety, its aroma, and its rich, lingering fragrance.

7. Settling (*Al-Safawah*)

The coffee is left to settle, then strained gently and carefully without agitating the malqameh, preserving the clarity that has taken time to achieve. The dallah is briefly placed over the heat until the coffee just begins to simmer once or twice, releasing the full fragrance of the cardamom.

8. Transferring to the Dallah (*Al-Zall - Decanting*)

The coffee is poured from the malqameh into the dallah, a step known as *zall al-qahwa* (pouring the coffee), and kept warm over a gentle heat without returning to a boil.

The Tools of Emirati Coffee

The tools used in preparing Arabic coffee are collectively known as al-ma'ameel and include a range of traditional equipment associated with roasting, grinding, brewing, and serving.

- *Al-Mahmasah* — a pan for roasting the beans over the fire while stirring them continuously
- *Al-Milqat* —Tongs for stirring the beans during roasting
- *Al-Minhaz / Al-Najar / Al-Hawan* — Mortar for pounding and grinding the beans
- *Al-Mibarrad* — for cooling the beans after roasting
- *Al-Malqamah* — for stirring and decanting the coffee
- *Al-Dallah* — a pot for serving coffee
- *Al-Fanajeen* — small cups without handles

The *dallahs* used in preparing Arabic coffee come in several types, most notably: *dallet al-khumrah* for brewing the coffee, *dallet al-talqimeh* for straining, and *dallet al-mazalleh* for serving.

The Etiquette of Serving Coffee and the Meaning of the Cups

Serving Arabic coffee is governed by customs and traditions recognised among the tribes:

- Coffee is served by the meqahwi (the person who pours and serves the coffee) who remains standing out of respect for the majlis.
- The dallah is held in the left hand, the cup in the right.
- Serving begins from the right.
- The cup is never filled completely.
- The cup is refilled until the guest signals they have had enough.
- Shaking the cup signals the guest is satisfied.
- Coffee is customarily served with dates.

It is a longstanding tradition that the cup is filled only partway; a small, deliberate pour, in keeping with inherited custom.

The Four Cups and Their Meanings:

1. Finjan Al-Hayf — the first cup drunk by the host to reassure the guest of its safety.
2. Finjan Al-Duyuf — the cup of hospitality, drunk by the guest unless they have a request to make.
3. Finjan Al-Kayf — for the enjoyment of the flavour, taken at the guest's preference.
4. Finjan Al-Sayf — carrying deep social significance, it is considered the most powerful of the four in symbolic terms. In earlier times, drinking it meant that the one who did so would stand with the host in good times and in hardship alike, bound to defend him, if need be, by the sword













Campfire and Firewood in the Desert Majlis... *Shabb Al-Dhaw* and the Art of Preparing Coffee in the Desert

Arabic coffee in the desert was never simply a hot drink prepared over a fire. It was a complete heritage ritual, beginning with the choice of the right spot, passing through the lighting of the fire, and completed only with wood that yields glowing, steady embers suited to brewing coffee with its authentic flavour.

In the past, the people of the desert prepared their coffee over a simple hearth - a hollow dug in the ground - before the kuwar, a clay vessel designed to brew coffee and preserve embers within the majlis and tent, came into use.

The people of the desert understood from earliest times that the quality of coffee depends not on the beans alone, but also on the type of firewood and the nature of the fire over which it is prepared. A fierce, fast-burning fire can spoil the coffee's flavour and alter its taste, while steady embers allow it to brew slowly and preserve its distinctive taste and aroma without burning or bitterness.

For this reason, the choice of firewood was never arbitrary; it was an inherited knowledge, rooted in experience and discernment. The people of the desert were careful to use firewood that provided a stable fire and embers that lasted, for Arabic coffee is made with patience and calm, not with a hurried flame.

Lighting a fire in the desert was known as shabb al-dhaw, and it ranked among the essential skills of desert journeys and falconers' camps. Fire served for warmth, for preparing coffee and food, and for providing light through the desert nights. It also formed the centre of the camp around which the people gathered to share stories and knowledge, spending the evenings in an atmosphere of companionship and tranquillity.

Shabb al-dhaw was therefore more than a passing act; it was a skill practised with knowledge and experience, requiring familiarity with the correct method of lighting, the right types of firewood, and adherence to safety measures, all to ensure an authentic desert gathering that brings together the warmth of the fire, the fragrance of the coffee, and the spirit of the Emirati desert.



- Arabic coffee in the falconer's camp is more than a drink offered to a guest. It is a majlis, a spirit of companionship, and an inherited message of generosity, embodying the authentic values of the people of the desert and carrying within its cups the story of a living heritage that continues to bring people together around the campfire and kind conversation.
- It is enough to say that coffee was offered to the guest before any enquiry was made about his needs, as an expression of security, gracious welcome, and respect for the guest. In the desert majlis, coffee is served before food, a mark of the guest's standing and priority given to welcoming him.



Inspired by the enduring vision of His Highness the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan and His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the IAF proudly safeguards the future of falconry as a living heritage and a global force for conservation.

The Global Voice for Falconry and Conservation



Uniting Traditions. Advancing Conservation. Inspiring the Future.

The International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF) is the global voice of falconry, representing more than 120 falconry organisations across over 90 countries. Together, we unite people, cultures, and generations through a shared passion for birds of prey, promoting falconry as a living cultural heritage and a practical force for wildlife conservation, scientific research, education, and animal welfare.

A Global Voice for Falconry

The IAF represents falconry at the highest international level, working with international organisations and multilateral environmental agreements such as IUCN, UNESCO, CITES, CMS, CBD, IPBES, the European Union, and many other institutions to ensure that the knowledge and experience of falconers contribute to wildlife conservation, sustainable use, and environmental policy worldwide.

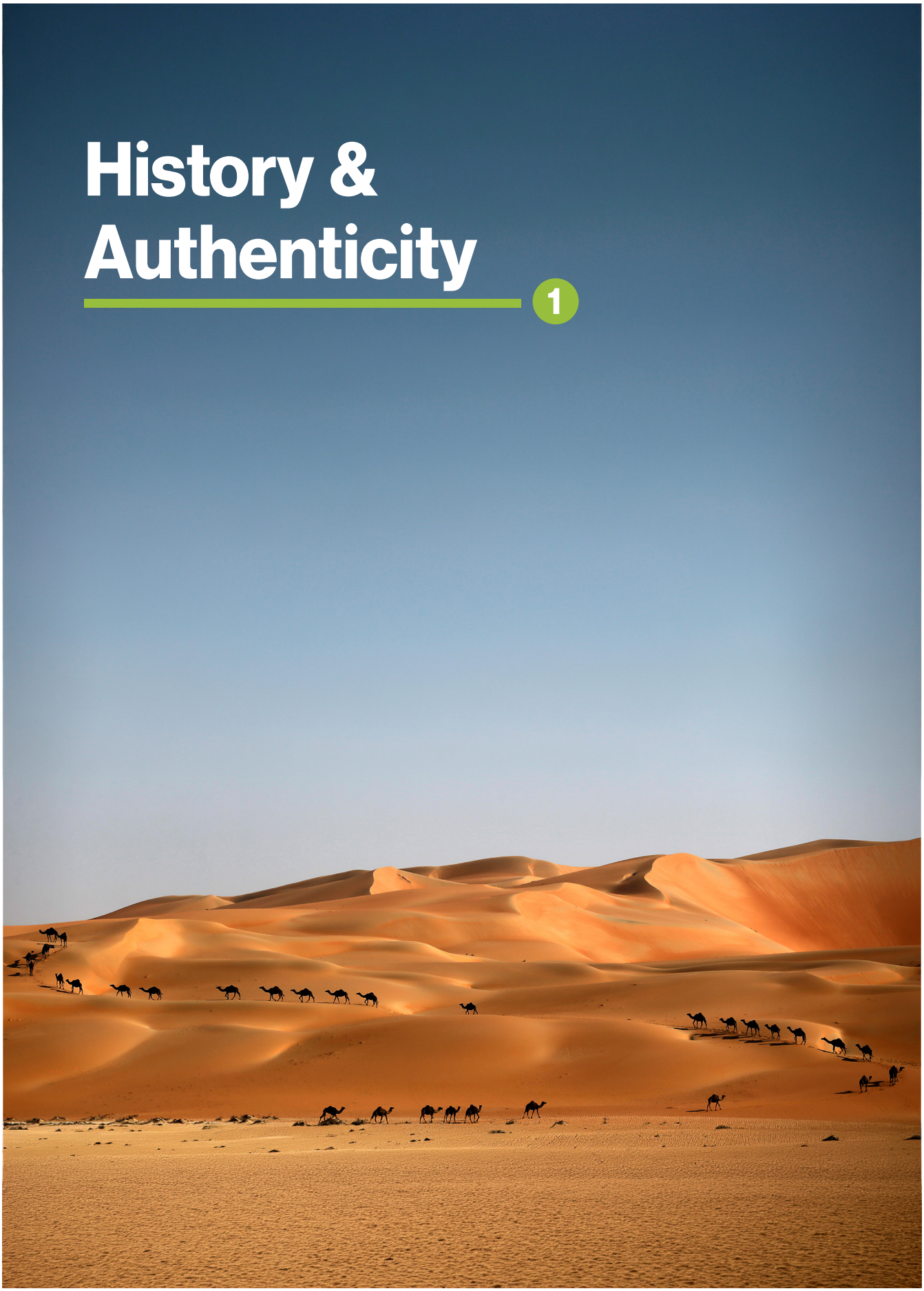
Since 1968, the IAF has worked with its members and international partners to safeguard, promote, and advance falconry as a living cultural heritage. Today, it continues to support international efforts—including those following UNESCO's inscription of falconry on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010—to ensure this unique art is safeguarded and passed on to future generations.



www.iaf.org

History & Authenticity

1





Desert Physiognomy of the UAE's People
The Knowledge Forged by the Desert

When the Sands Were an Open Book

For the people of the UAE, the desert was, and remains, a living world pulsing with signs and signals, requiring people to learn how to see what cannot be seen, and to read the land, the sky, the wind, and its creatures with the eye of an expert and the mind of a keen observer.

It was from within this environment that physiognomy was born, not as a mysterious gift or fleeting intuition, but as a practical science shaped by necessity and imposed by the very nature of life in the desert.

The desert does not yield its secrets easily, and anyone who wished to live within it had to learn the language of the sands, the direction of the winds, the traces left by birds, the movement of the stars, and possess a refined ability to connect small signs to significant outcomes.

The people of the UAE understood long ago that survival in the desert does not rest on strength alone, but on precision of observation, swiftness of understanding, vigilance, and the ability to make the right decision at the right moment. Thus physiognomy became an integral part of the desert dweller's character, a fundamental pillar in the life of the falconer, the Bedouin, the herdsman, and the traveler.

The Desert: The Environment That Forged Physiognomy

The desert of the UAE extends from the southern shores of the Arabian Gulf across the gravel plains bordering the Hajar Mountains, reaching the vast sand expanses of the Empty Quarter, one of the greatest and most awe-inspiring deserts.

In the Al Dhafra region, where the sands spread without end, man lived in daily confrontation with nature. The desert honed his mind before his body, teaching him to understand the shifting sands, read the movements of the wind, and navigate by track and star.

Crossing these deserts would have been impossible without the expertise of their people. The British explorer Wilfred Thesiger, in his celebrated journeys through the region, noted that the people of this land possessed extraordinary knowledge of the desert's paths, its water sources, and directions of travel; knowledge acquired not from books, but through long experience and inherited wisdom.

On the edges of the Empty Quarter, Liwa Oasis emerged as a living testament to the relationship between man and desert, where red sand dunes meet date palm groves in a scene that embodies the ability of the Emirati people to adapt to and make use of the environment.

The desert of the Al Ain region is also part of Abu Dhabi Emirate's desert ecological zone, forming a transitional region between agricultural oases and open sandy terrain. This desert has served as a natural laboratory for studying environmental adaptation, dune movement, and the desert climate.

It was from the heart of this environment that physiognomy was born; the science of reading subtle signs before they turn into dangers, and of understanding what the earth is saying to those who know how to listen.

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Physiognomy: The Science of Observation & Survival

The people of the desert relied on physiognomy in the details of their daily lives. Knowledge was not read in books, but in:

- ✓ A footprint in the sand
- ✓ The collapse of a sand dune
- ✓ A shift in the direction of the wind
- ✓ Or an unfamiliar silence in the surroundings

Through these signs, the people of the desert could determine:

- ✓ The direction of travel
- ✓ The location of prey
- ✓ The approach of danger
- ✓ Weather conditions
- ✓ And even the nature of the land and the life it held

Physiognomy was therefore never an isolated skill, but a complete system encompassing knowledge of terrain, animal behaviour, bird movement, celestial navigation, and an understanding of winds and seasons.

Caution was a cornerstone of this science, for any mistake in the desert could have severe consequences. The people of the desert thus developed an exceptional ability to pay attention to small details and link causes to their effects; an expertise accumulated across generations until it became part of the cultural identity of the Emirati desert.

Suhail: The Star of the Seasons and the Falconer's Companion

In the memory of the Emirati falconer, the star Suhail is more than just a celestial body shining in the sky; it is a major seasonal marker, indicating the beginning of change in desert life.

When Suhail appears at dawn in the final days of summer, the people of the desert know that the fierce heat has begun to subside, that the nights are becoming milder, and preparations for the falconry season begin. For this reason, it has become associated in popular tradition with the well-known saying:

"When Suhail rises, the night turns pleasant and the day grows mild."

The falconer associated the appearance of Suhail with the improvement in the falcons' flight, the gradual return of activity among prey, and the beginning of migratory birds moving toward the desert.

Before Suhail's appearance, falcons are placed in the *maqeedh* during the moulting period, when the heat is at its most intense and the activity of both birds and prey declines. After its appearance, the land gradually begins to recover its vitality, and the Al Wasam season arrives, bringing light rains that help grasses grow and restore vitality to the desert.

Thus, physiognomy among the people of the UAE was linked to an understanding of natural time rather than rigid calendars, as the falconer recognised the seasons from the stars, the direction of the winds, and changes in the behaviour of birds and other creatures.



Birds: Seasonal Messages in the Sky

For the people of the desert, migratory birds were never merely passing creatures; they were living signs of the changing seasons and shifts in the environment.

After the rising of Suhail, many species of birds begin to arrive in the desert, including the Houbara Bustard, the Stone Curlew, and small birds whose arrival the people of the desert recognised from their calls even before seeing them.

Migratory raptors also appear, including the Peregrine Falcon (*Shahin*), the *Shamaliyya*, the *Qateemi*, and eagles, each with its own distinctive characteristics and behaviours that those versed in physiognomy could interpret with precision.

Their understanding of nature reached such a depth that they could identify the species of raptor responsible for a kill from the remains of the prey and the traces of movement around it and could tell whether an area was a *hawm* — a place attracting birds of prey because of its abundance of rabbits or small birds.

Thus, the sky became part of the desert's open book, telling the falconer what awaited him on the ground.

The Winds: Another Language of the Desert

The people of the UAE understood that the winds were not merely moving air, but a fundamental element in understanding the desert.

A falconer does not release his bird before reading the direction of the wind, its strength, and its effect on the falcon's flight and the movement of prey. Northerly winds are considered favourable for hunting, as they bring clear skies and good visibility, while the samoom winds exhaust falcons and reduce the activity of desert wildlife.

The winds also played a significant role in shaping the desert environment, carrying plant seeds, contributing to the spread of life, and preserving the desert's natural balance.

The people of the desert also relied on their knowledge of *al-thara* and *al-mahab* to understand the prevailing wind directions and identify suitable locations for camping or hunting. This was precise traditional knowledge acquired through long observation of nature.

Reading the Land: Understanding the Terrain

The falconer never regarded the land as a single, undifferentiated expanse. He read its terrain with an expert eye, distinguishing between the *seeh*, the *tu'oos*, the *qee'an*, and the *rawadh*, each with its own significance and influence on the movement of prey and the flight of falcons.

The *seeh*, an open expanse, is well suited to training and swift stoops, while the *tu'oos* provide a deceptive landscape, where prey disappears behind the sand dunes, demanding both a skillful falcon and an experienced falconer.

The *qee'an* and *rawadh*, the low-lying ground and meadows, are associated with water, vegetation, and wildlife, making them among the most important areas monitored by the falconer during the migration seasons.

The people of the desert also read the land through its plants; the presence of *rimth* and *arta* shrubs indicates areas frequented by rabbits, while sidr and ghaf trees attract birds seeking shade and shelter.

Tracking: Reading What Cannot Be Seen

Tracking (*qass al-athar*) is among the most refined sciences of desert physiognomy. It is the ability to read footprints and other traces of movement in the sand to determine the type of creature, its direction, its behaviour, and when it passed.

Through these tracks, the people of the desert could distinguish between the traces left by rabbits, foxes, wolves, sand cats, and gazelles and even detect subtle differences between individual animals from their gait, the shape of their footprints, and the nature of the tracks they left in the sand.

They also possessed a deep knowledge of the behaviour of the Houbara Bustard and the desert hare, reading the movements of prey from its tracks, identifying its resting places and feeding grounds, and knowing the times of activity and danger.

For this reason, it was said that the sand never forgets, and that the earth preserves the story of everyone who has passed across it.



The Stars: The Desert People's Compass

Before the advent of maps and modern instruments, the people of the desert relied on the stars to determine direction, calculate the seasons, and estimate time.

The Pole Star served as a constant guide to the north, while Suhail was associated with the seasons and changes in the weather. The Milky Way and the brightest stars in the night sky were used for navigation across the desert.

This knowledge was never separate from falconry. The movement of migratory birds was linked to the stars, and the falconer relied on his understanding of the sky to determine the best times for falconry and travel across the desert.

A Legacy of Knowledge and Environmental Awareness

The desert physiognomy of the people of the UAE reveals a complete system of knowledge, one that grew from a deep relationship between man and nature, built upon contemplation, observation, and accumulated experience.

The son of the desert learned to read the land as one reads a book, and to understand the winds, the stars, and the birds as living signs that helped him find his way and sustain his life.

In an age of modern technology, this traditional knowledge remains a testament to the ingenuity of the Emirati people in understanding and adapting to their environment, and to falconry's connection with the values of respect, balance, and awareness of nature.

The desert was never a barren void; it was a great school that forged a unique body of knowledge known as physiognomy, and the sands of the UAE still preserve something of its wisdom to this day.



History & Authenticity 2



Agnes Hathaway (Jessie Buckley) with her falcon. Focus Features

Medieval European Falconry

Medieval women used falconry to subvert gender norms

As part of its commitment to documenting the many dimensions of falconry as a cross-cultural human heritage that spans history and reflects the complex relationships between people and nature, Al Saggar magazine highlights a study examining the presence of women in medieval European falconry, revealing the unconventional roles they occupied in a sphere long regarded as the exclusive domain of men.

This article offers a historical perspective that broadens our understanding of falconry, not merely as a hunting art, but as a means of expressing status, identity, and power.

The text has also been translated into Arabic, with its original content preserved, as a contribution to enriching specialised knowledge in this field.

By Rachel Delman

Heritage Partnerships Coordinator, University of Oxford

Hawks are taking cinematic flight. In two recent literary adaptations, they are entwined with the lives and emotions of their respective protagonists: Agnes Shakespeare (née Hathaway) and Helen Macdonald.

Birds of prey and their symbolism are explored in Hamnet, Chloé Zhao›s adaptation of Maggie O'Farrell's 2020 novel, and H is for Hawk, based on Macdonald's 2014 memoir. In these films, hawks become complex and multifaceted figures, articulating gendered relationships to grief, nature, humanity, and selfhood.

Hamnet is set in the Elizabethan period, and H is for Hawk in the modern day. However, the relationship between women and birds of prey has an even longer history. My research shows that in the medieval period, too, that relationship was multilayered.



Far more than fashionable accessories, hawks offered women both real and symbolic means to express gender, power, and status within a male-dominated world.

In the Middle Ages, the process of training hawks, with its delicate dance of control and release, was popularly associated with the game of courtship between men and women.

Falconry's romantic connotations are emphasised in art, objects, and literature from the time. Images of men and women hunting together with birds of prey feature across a wide range of medieval material culture, from tapestries for castle walls to decorative cases used to contain and protect hand-held mirrors.

The largest of four fifteenth-century tapestries, known collectively as the Devonshire Hunting Tapestries, takes falconry as its subject. Lovers are depicted strolling arm-in-arm as their birds hunt prey.

On a smaller scale, two fourteenth-century mirror cases from the collections of the British Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art show scenes of lovers riding on horseback, each holding falcons. The mirrors may have been gifted as love tokens. Literary texts are also filled with references to women with, and even as, hawks.

The trope of the woman as a hawk needing to be tamed and controlled, however, was not a straightforward one of female submission. Falconry and its symbolism offered elite medieval women mastery and autonomy.

The Mirror case from the British Library collection. The Trustees of the British Museum, CC BY-NC

Defining themselves

Where high-status medieval women had the opportunity to represent themselves through visual culture, they often chose to include birds of prey. This is most obviously seen in seals, which were used by a wide range of medieval people to authenticate legally binding documents. Seals represented the sealer's endorsement, identity and status.

The iconography of seals, and the matrices or moulds used to create them, provides important evidence of how women of status wished to be perceived and remembered. Elizabeth of Rhuddlan, the youngest daughter of King Edward I and Eleanor of Castile, chose the most popular motif among thirteenth-century women as the matrix for her personal seal. It shows a woman standing upright, her body tilted towards an obedient bird of prey in her left hand. In another seal matrix from the same century, Elizabeth, Lady of Sevorc, is shown in a more energetic pose. She rides side-saddle, a falcon in one hand and a large eagle's claw in the other.

Through their seals, medieval women showed their mastery over their birds of prey and affairs, and their belonging to a fashionable and powerful female collective.

Beyond imagery, records show that queens and noblewomen created and managed parks and hunting grounds. They also hawked together, trained birds of prey, and even gave them as gifts.

Smaller birds, such as the merlins, were considered appropriate for women. In the film adaptation of H is for Hawk, Claire Foy's Helen refuses to settle for a merlin, dismissing it as a "lady's bird." It seems that medieval women similarly refused to be limited by the options conduct manuals offered them.



A lady observing her hawk fly towards a duck, from the Taymouth Hours. British Library

Henry VIII's paternal grandmother, Margaret Beaufort, had many birds of prey. These included merlins and lannerets, as well as larger species such as goshawks and lanners.

The deer park Beaufort created at her palace at Collyweston in Northamptonshire, with its terraces, ponds, and water meadows, was ideally suited to falconry. Her daughter-in-law, Queen Elizabeth of York, who had her own room at the palace, hunted with goshawks.

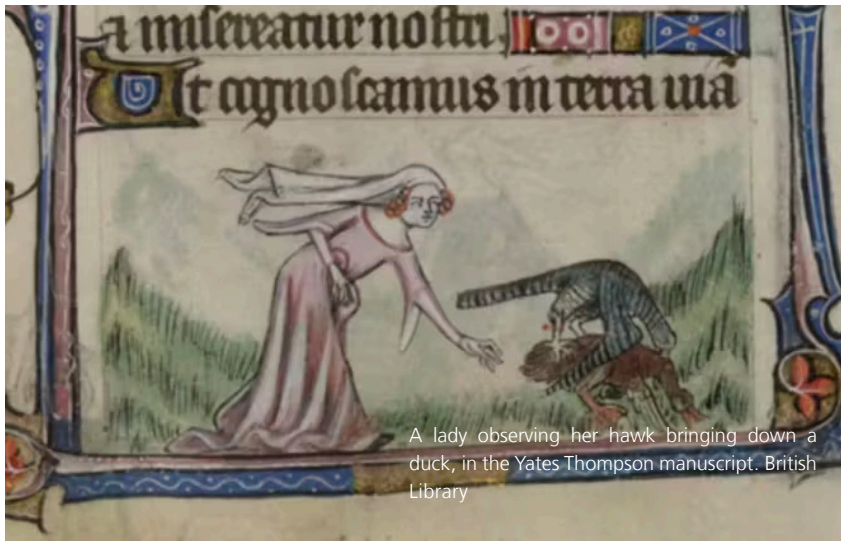
In some cases, women appear to have been recognised as authorities on falconry-related matters. The Taymouth Hours, an illuminated 14th century book likely produced for a queenly reader, shows women with billowing headdresses hunting mallards with large birds of prey. The women adopt authoritative stances, demonstrating their skill, command and control over the birds.

In the following century, Dame Juliana de Berners, a prioress from Sopwell Priory, is thought to have authored at least part of the Boke of St Albans, which contains treatises on hunting and hawking.

Research by English Heritage has identified that women could even make a living from their expertise in training hawks. In the mid-thirteenth century, a woman named Ymayna was the keeper of the Earl of Richmond's hawks and hounds at Richmond Castle. In exchange for her expertise, she and her family were permitted to hold land nearby.

Ymayna stands out as a woman in a male-dominated profession, but her example suggests that there were probably other women like her, whose names are unidentified or absent from the historical record.

Women falconers may have been among the owners and users of knives, the handles of which survive in museum collections across Europe. An exquisitely carved example from the 14th century, now displayed in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, takes the form of a noble lady with a tiny bird of prey clutched close to her heart.
Literary texts reveal that falconry offered opportunities for female socialization and bonding. In the Middle English poem Sir Orfeo, Orfeo spies a collective of 60 women on horseback, each with a hawk in hand.



A lady observing her hawk bringing down a duck, in the Yates Thompson manuscript. British Library



A lady hawking for a hare in the Yates Thompson manuscript. British Library

In Hamnet, Agnes tells her husband William Shakespeare that her falconry glove was a gift from her mother. Medieval and early-modern women certainly gave gifts to one another, including gloves. My research, however, suggests that birds of prey were more commonly gifted between women and men.

Margaret Beaufort gave and received birds of prey to and from male relatives and associates, including her young grandson, the future Henry VIII. Birds of prey were considered suitable gifts for special occasions and life milestones. Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury, gave her nephew, Henry Courtenay, three falcons to mark his elevation to the title of Marquess of Exeter in 1525.

That powerful women landowners participated in rituals of gift exchange with men suggests falconry was not a straightforwardly feminine expression of power and status. Through their ownership of parks and the giving and receiving of birds of prey as gifts, women also used the culture of falconry to show their belonging to a masculine world of hunting and lordly largesse.

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History & Authenticity

3

The Arabian Saluki: The Falconer's Partner in the Arabian Desert

A Breed That Has Preserved the Memory of Arab Hunting for Thousands of Years

When a falconer contemplates a hunting expedition (megnas) in the Arabian desert, it is difficult not to picture that sleek, long-legged hound, always poised for action, with its gleaming eyes and remarkable endurance and pursuit. The Arabian Saluki was never merely a hunting dog; it was an authentic partner in the culture of the desert, a companion to the falconer, the Bedouin, and the traveller throughout centuries of desert life.

The Saluki has retained its status as one of the world's oldest hunting dog breeds, becoming one of the symbols of Arab heritage associated with falconry and the megnas, and a living testament to the profound bond between the Arab people and their desert environment.



Roots Deep in History

Archaeological studies and ancient drawings suggest that the Saluki is among the oldest known dog breeds, with a history extending back more than seven thousand years. Its emergence has been linked to the ancient civilisations of the Arabian Peninsula, Mesopotamia, and the Nile Valley, where drawings and engravings of long-legged, fine-featured dogs clearly resembling today's Saluki have been found.

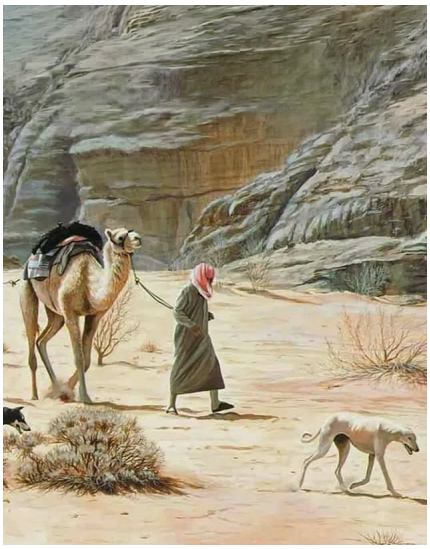
In ancient Egypt, Saluki-like dogs enjoyed exceptional status, appearing in funerary paintings and royal hunting scenes, and were even mummified and buried alongside mummies, reflecting their symbolic and practical value.

Some historical accounts suggest that the ancient Egyptians fashioned statues of these dogs to be placed at the prows of vessels as an omen of protection and good fortune.

In Mesopotamia, engravings discovered at Tepe Gawra depict hunting dogs resembling the Saluki dating to 4000 and 3700 BC, while the remains of the Sumerian city of Eridu point to an early relationship between humans and hunting dogs in those ancient civilisations.

The Saluki's presence was not confined to the Arab East. Similar dogs also appeared in ancient Greek art and Roman mosaics across North Africa and Asia Minor, while references to the breed have also been found in parts of China, reflecting its wide distribution along ancient trade routes and through journeys of travel and hunting.



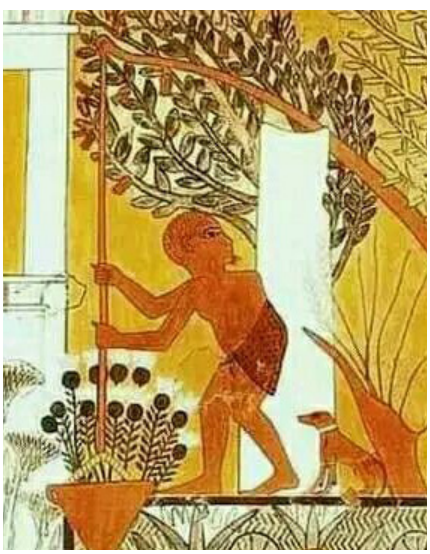


The Origin of the Name: From "Salouk" to the Arabian Desert

A number of researchers believe that the name Saluki derives from the city of Salouk, located in southern Yemen, which was historically renowned for hunting, armour-making, and breeding swift, highly skilled hunting dogs capable of pursuing prey.

Over time, the name of the city became associated with this breed, which gained widespread renown among the Arab tribes, until the name Saluki became synonymous with the noble, swift hunting dog.

The breed was also known in some regions as the Arabian Saluki, to distinguish it from other breeds such as the Persian or Afghan Salukis, although they all share certain physical characteristics typical of desert hunting dogs.



The Falconer's Partner in the *Megnas*

The Arabian Saluki has been closely bound to falconry, forming, together with the falcon, a complementary partnership in traditional hunting expeditions. While the falcon stoops on the prey from above, the Saluki pursues it across the ground or locates it should it take cover among the scrub and sand dunes.

The Saluki proved especially valuable in open desert terrain, where injured prey would sometimes require swift pursuit or careful tracking after it fell. For this reason, falconers relied on the Saluki for its remarkable speed, agility, stamina, outstanding tracking ability, intelligence, and unwavering loyalty to its owner.

Falconers took great care in training the Salukis, knowing that success in the *megnas* depended not on the falcon alone, but on the harmony between the falcon, the Saluki, and the falconer himself.

On many occasions, the Saluki was able to detect quarry concealed in the grasses or behind shrubs, a task of vital importance in traditional hunting.



The Saluki in Bedouin Life

For the Bedouin communities, the Saluki was far more than a hunting dog; it was woven into the daily fabric of life in the desert. It accompanied trading caravans on their long journeys, travelled with the Bedouin through their seasonal movements, and served as a guardian, a companion, and an aid in the search for food.

The Arab tribes were keen to preserve the purity of the breed, devoting considerable care to its breeding, conditioning, and training, until the ownership of a purebred Saluki became a source of pride among desert people.

The Saluki is distinguished by its calm temperament and its strong bond with its owner, so much so that it became a symbol of loyalty and nobility in Arab folklore. The Bedouin valued its intelligence and its ability to understand signals and endure the harsh conditions of the desert, just as they valued a fine falcon.

Historical images of Arabian caravans frequently depict the Saluki alongside men and camels, as though it were a shadow of the desert, inseparable from it.



A Presence in Arabic Poetry and Narrative

The Saluki has long occupied a place in the Arabic literary imagination. In classical poetry it was invoked as a symbol of speed, courage, and loyalty, while its name was linked with the arts of hunting and horsemanship.

Historical accounts record that Al-Harith ibn Mu'awiyah al-Kindi was among the first Arabs to hunt with both falcons and Salukis, and was known for his expertise in their training and conditioning.

Wa'il ibn Rabi'ah al-Taghlibi, chief of the Taghlib tribe, was likewise renowned for his passion for hunting and for his constant companionship with his Saluki, until he became known by the nickname Kulayb, a name that later became inseparably associated with his celebrated story in Arab history.

The Saluki in Islamic Culture

Hunting with dogs holds a recognised place in Islamic culture. The "trained dog" is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah in the context of lawful hunting.

For this reason, throughout the Islamic era, the Saluki was used for hunting as a trained dog and was mentioned in books of Islamic jurisprudence in the chapters devoted to hunting and its rulings, reinforcing its continued presence and use across Arab and Islamic societies.

This jurisprudential acceptance also contributed to the continued breeding and use of the Saluki in the megnas, unlike certain other types of dogs that did not enjoy the same standing in Arab society.







From the Desert to the World

As Arab trade routes expanded, the Saluki spread to many regions beyond the Arabian Peninsula, reaching the Levant, Iraq, Egypt, North Africa, and Persia, before eventually making its way to Europe.

A number of Western travellers and Orientalists who came into direct contact with the Arab tribes took a keen interest in the breed, most notably Lady Anne Blunt, Florence Amherst, Austen Layard, and Gertrude Bell, all of whom documented the Saluki's place in Bedouin life and introduced it to the Western world.

These travellers played a significant role in introducing the Arabian Saluki to Europe, where it later became a recognised breed at international dog shows, earning widespread admiration as one of the finest and rarest traditional hunting dogs.

Saluki Beauty Contests: The Legacy Continues

Despite the transformations of modern life, the Saluki has retained its place in the Gulf and Arab cultural consciousness and has become an integral part of the heritage events associated with hunting and falconry.

In the UAE, the Saluki receives particular attention through major heritage festivals, where specialised Saluki beauty contests showcase the breed's beauty and its defining breed characteristics. Among the best known are those organised by the Emirates Falconers' Club as part of the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition.

These events go beyond the competitive dimension, playing a vital role in preserving the purity of the breed and introducing new generations to the significance of the Saluki in Arab heritage.

A Living Legacy of the Desert

The Arabian Saluki remains a living witness to a long history of companionship between man and the desert, and to an authentic Arab culture founded upon horsemanship, falconry, and a profound understanding of the natural world.

When the falconer sets out into the desert with the Saluki running beside him over the sands, the image of the traditional Arab megnas comes vividly to mind, defined by skill, patience, passion, and deep respect for nature.

Thus, despite the passing of centuries, the Saluki remains one of the most authentic and enduring symbols of traditional Arab hunting, and a cherished emblem in the collective memory of the people of the desert.









References on the Saluki

Saluki: Hound of the Bedouin

A concise work published in 2005 by Julia Johnson, focusing on the Saluki as a symbol of traditional Bedouin life, its origins, and its uses in the Arabian desert. Jamal bin Huwaireb Centre for Studies – Dubai.

The Salulqi: Coursing Hound of the East

A monumental encyclopedic work featuring over 1,000 rare photographs. It traces the Saluki's origins from ancient times, explores its place in Bedouin heritage, examines its regional types across the Gulf states and North Africa, and follows its journey to the West. The book also includes scholarly analysis, travel accounts, and interviews with local breeders.

The Salukis in My Life: From the Arab World to China

A memoir linking the author's life as a diplomat with his bond with the Saluki across several countries. It offers a richly personal account of the breed's history from Iraq to China, supported by photographs, artwork, and traditional illustrations.

The Saluki in History, Art and Sport

A concise yet comprehensive overview of the Saluki's history and its role in art and sport, serving as an accessible reference for researchers and enthusiasts alike.

Saluki: Companion of Kings

Traces the Saluki's history in royal courts and its role as a noble hunting dog.

The History of the Tahawi Saluki

Explores the roots of Saluki breeding among the Tahawi tribe of eastern Egypt and their well-documented connection to the Salukis that were trained and introduced to Europe from the late nineteenth century, including the story of the two dogs Lam'an and Aisha, who contributed to the foundation of the English Saluki line.

Falconry and UNESCO





1

Wings of Knowledge

Falconry Education as a Tool for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage

- **Sarangerel Ishenkhorloo / Nicola Dixon**
  And the IAF Falconry Education Working Group and ISLP
  Prepared by Al-Saggar Magazine based on a report published in the International Journal of Falconry 2024 (IAF)

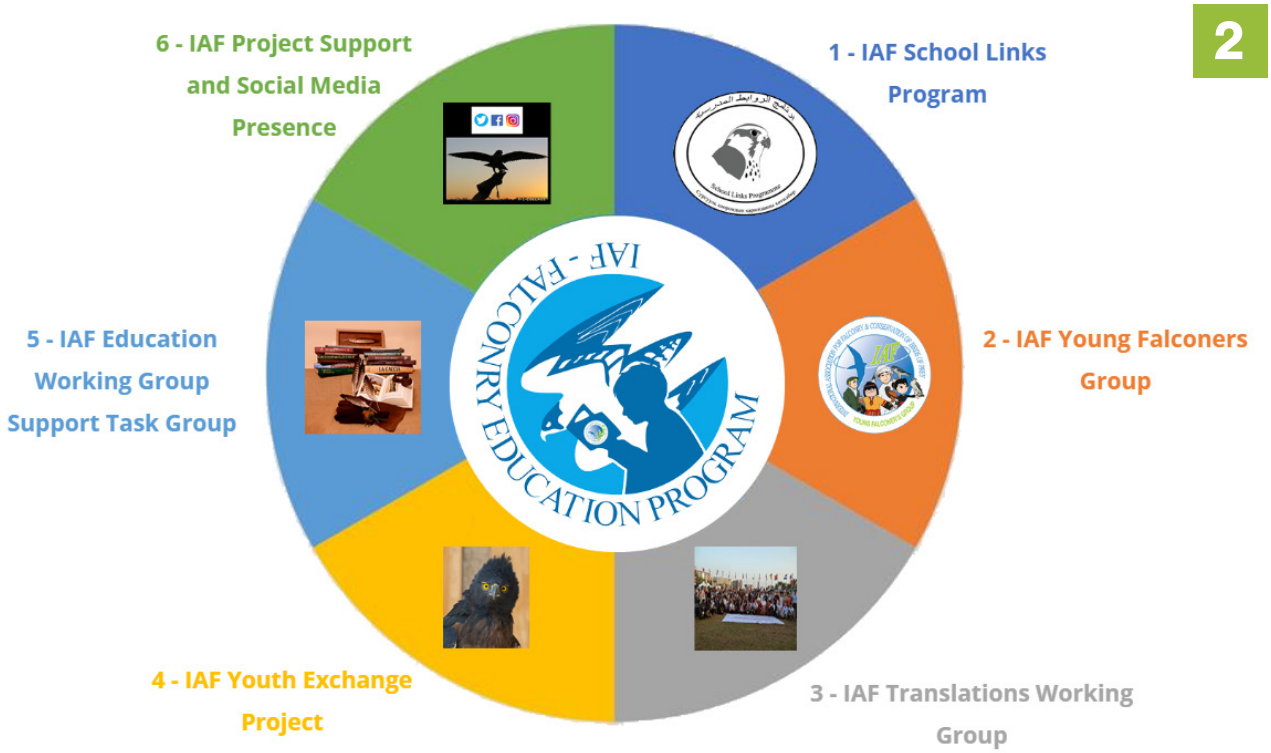
In a rapidly changing world, where concerns are growing over the disappearance of traditional knowledge and the weakening bond between people and the natural environment, falconry stands out as one of the rare examples of living heritage capable of adapting to the modern age without losing its historical and cultural roots.

Today, falconry is no longer merely a practice associated with hunting or a traditional pastime pursued by falconers. Rather, it has evolved into a comprehensive framework of knowledge, culture and education that embodies the values of identity, the environment, sustainability, and intercultural dialogue.

This is why falconry-related educational initiatives have become increasingly important, particularly since falconry's inscription in 2010 on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This international recognition has paved the way for the development of global educational programmes aimed at transmitting this heritage to new generations, not merely as a historical legacy, but as a contemporary instrument for environmental, cultural, and humanistic education.

Foremost among these initiatives are the IAF Falconry Education Program (IFEP) of the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey, and the IAF School Links Program (ISLP). Together, they represent a global model for transforming heritage into a cross-border educational platform.

2



Falconry from UNESCO's Perspective: From Traditional Practice to a Universal Heritage of Humanity

When UNESCO inscribed falconry on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, it was far more than a recognition of an ancient sport or pastime. It was a recognition of a comprehensive cultural system encompassing traditional knowledge, social practices, technical skills, language and terminology, training methods, ethical values, and the profound relationship between people and the natural world.

UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage affirms that intangible heritage represents "a source of cultural diversity and a guarantee of sustainable development." Against this backdrop, falconry has become a living example of heritage that bridges culture and environment, traditional knowledge and science, as well as local identity and global openness.

The falconer does not regard the falcon merely as a hunting tool, but as a partner within a finely tuned system of ecological balance and inherited wisdom. Safeguarding falconry therefore means not only preserving the skills of training birds of prey, but also protecting the language associated with falconry, the majlis gatherings, the rituals, the traditional methods of teaching, and the human values that accompany them.

Education as a Means of Safeguarding Heritage

One of the foremost challenges facing intangible cultural heritage is how to transmit it to new generations amid accelerating social and technological change. Education has consequently become a central pillar in UNESCO's heritage safeguarding strategies.

In the case of falconry, the importance of education becomes even greater, since this heritage is fundamentally rooted in "learning through practice " and in direct intergenerational transmission. The knowledge associated with falconry is not acquired from books alone; it is passed on through experience, by accompanying experienced falconers, observation, and hands-on fieldwork.

It was from this understanding that the International Association for Falconry established the IAF Falconry Education Program (IFEP) in 2019, with the aim of bringing falconry-related educational initiatives under a single unified global framework, promoting understanding of falconry as a shared heritage of humanity, providing multilingual educational resources, encouraging young people to engage with heritage and the natural environment, and building a global network of cultural exchange through falconry

The programme brings together a specialist working team comprising falconers, educators, translators, media and communications professionals, and experts in bird of prey conservation. This diversity reflects a deep appreciation of falconry as a science, a culture, an element of heritage, and an educational system.

The School Links Program: When Falconry Becomes a Global Language

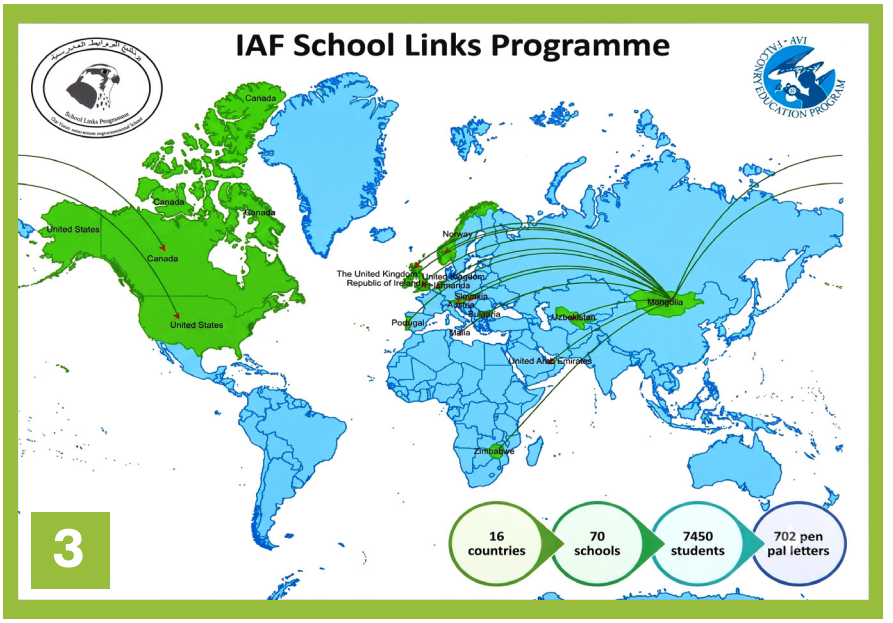
The IAF School Links Program (ISLP) is one of the most ambitious and internationally influential educational projects associated with falconry. It was originally established in 2011 in Mongolia as part of a project to protect Saker falcons and artificial nests, before gradually developing into a global educational network connecting schools, students, and falconers across continents.

Within a few years, the programme expanded to encompass more than 70 schools across 16 countries, reaching over 7,000 students.

Yet the figures alone do not convey the depth of the experience. The true value of the programme lies in its educational philosophy, grounded in learning through heritage, experiential education, and intercultural dialogue.

Participating students do not study falconry as a theoretical subject. They engage in an interactive experience that combines observing falcons up close, learning about falcon training techniques, understanding the falcon's ecological role, studying its natural habitats, and connecting with students from different cultures who share the same passion.

In this way, falconry becomes a shared language for global cultural dialogue.

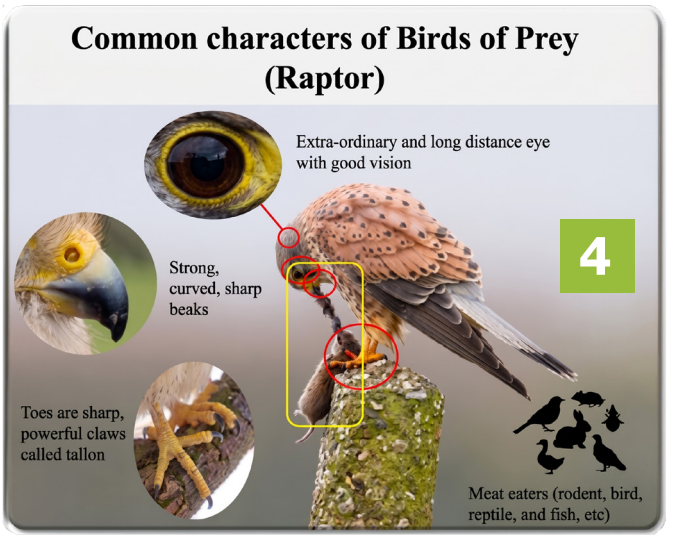


The School and the Falconer: A Partnership for Transmitting Living Knowledge

One of the most distinctive features of the IAF School Links Program (ISLP) is the direct participation of falconers in the educational process. Falconers visit schools with their hawks, deliver presentations, lectures, and workshops on the history of falconry, birds of prey, training techniques, the ethics of hunting, and environmental conservation.

These school visits offer students a learning experience entirely unlike conventional classroom instruction. It connects knowledge to reality, transforms heritage into a living experience, and forges an emotional bond between children and nature.

The programme also links schools through correspondence and joint activities, enabling students to exchange information, photographs, and messages about falconry and the environment in their respective countries, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of global cultural diversity.



Falconry and Environmental Education: From Heritage to Sustainability

Among the programme's core areas is the connection between falconry and environmental conservation. By its very nature, falconry is closely linked to ecological balance and the health of natural systems.

Falconry is therefore used within the programme as a gateway to teach students about biodiversity, bird migration, ecosystems, environmental threats, and the importance of sustainability.

The programme does not view the environment merely as a backdrop for falconry practice, but as an integral part of the heritage itself. Traditional knowledge associated with falcons, the seasons, prey species, weather, and migration routes forms part of the falconer's historical expertise, a body of knowledge accumulated over centuries of interaction with nature.

Falconry thus becomes, within these educational programmes, a means of understanding the intrinsic relationship between humans and the environment, and of demonstrating how traditional heritage can contribute to reinforcing the principles of modern sustainability.

Activities include field trips to nesting sites, visits to raptor habitats, and learning about the threats facing falcons, such as electrocution on unsafe power lines, and the loss of natural habitats.

In Mongolia, for example, thousands of students participated in field trips under the Artificial Nest Project, gaining practical insight into the relationship between falcons, the steppes, and local ecosystems.

This form of field-based education fosters among students a deep understanding of the relationship between humans and nature, one of the core objectives of Education for Sustainable Development supported by UNESCO.


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Falconry and the Sustainable Development Goals: A Living Heritage for the Future

A particularly notable aspect of the IAF School Links Program is that it does not operate in isolation from contemporary global concerns. Rather, it draws on a number of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in shaping its educational activities.

This is of considerable significance, as it repositions falconry from the realm of "traditional heritage" into a broader framework encompassing quality education, environmental protection, international partnerships, the promotion of environmental awareness, and biodiversity conservation.

Falconry thus becomes a practical model for how intangible cultural heritage can contribute to building a more sustainable future, rather than being viewed merely as a relic of the past.

This approach also reflects UNESCO's vision that cultural heritage is not separate from development, but rather represents an intellectual and cultural resource that can be harnessed to address the challenges of our era.


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Multilingual Education: Falconry as a Global Language

One of the important ideas reflected in the programme is its aim to establish a global educational platform accessible in multiple languages, enabling knowledge associated with falconry to reach diverse communities and cultures.

This approach reveals a deep understanding of falconry as a heritage that transcends borders, one shared by many peoples despite differences in languages, environments, and cultures.

The presence of translators within the educational team underscores the importance of "making heritage accessible" globally, one of the central ideas in UNESCO's philosophy, which holds that human heritage grows stronger the more it is shared and exchanged among peoples.

From this perspective, falconry may be regarded as a "global cultural language", one that transcends the boundaries of geography and politics, uniting people around shared values of nature, knowledge, and tradition.

Volunteer Falconers: The True Custodians of Heritage

The programme relies extensively on a network of volunteer falconers from countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Poland, Greece, Canada, Mongolia, Algeria, and Croatia.

These volunteers not only play an educational role but also represent what UNESCO calls "heritage bearers" individuals who safeguard heritage through daily practice and by transmitting it to others.

The significance of this lies in the recognition that safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is not achieved through formal institutions alone; it depends fundamentally on local communities, practitioners, traditional experts, and committed individuals who continue to pass that knowledge to new generations.

Falconry stands as a clear example of living heritage that endures through the people who carry it in their memory and daily practices.

Falconry and Experiential Education: Learning Through Living Experience

The programme reflects a modern educational approach founded on experiential learning through observation, participation, hands-on experience, and field trips.

A child who observes a falcon up close, learns how it is trained, and takes part in environmental activities related to it acquires a far deeper understanding than abstract theoretical instruction.

This approach makes falconry an effective educational means for nurturing scientific curiosity, developing observational skills, strengthening children's connection with nature, and cultivating a sense of cultural and aesthetic appreciation.

The lived experience also creates in children lasting emotional memories associated with heritage, an element of profound importance in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.

10

ANNUAL SCHOOL VISIT AND ARTIFICIAL NEST FIELD TRIP



SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS:

БАЙГАЛЬ ОРЧИН, НОГООН ХӨГЖИЛ, АЯЛАЛ ЖУУЛЧЛАЛЫН ЯАМ

МОНГОЛЫН ШҮҮХ ХАМГААЛАХ ТӨВ

The Scientific Dimension of Falconry Education... Where Heritage Meets Modern Knowledge

The programme does not confine itself to cultural and heritage dimensions alone. It integrates scientific subjects related to ecology, biology, the behaviour of birds of prey, field studies, and environmental research.

This blending of heritage and science endows falconry with a contemporary intellectual dimension, affirming that traditional knowledge is not the antithesis of science, but can serve as a gateway to a deeper scientific understanding of the natural world.

Students do not simply learn about the history of falconry; they also study bird migration, ecosystems, the relationships between living organisms, and the impact of human activity on the environment.

Falconry thus becomes a bridge between traditional knowledge and modern academic knowledge.

World Falconry Day... Celebrating the Shared Human Heritage

The sixteenth of November marks an important annual milestone in the programme's activities, as the world celebrates "World Falconry Day", commemorating falconry's inscription on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010.

On this occasion, schools, associations, and falconers organize falcon displays, educational workshops, cultural and artistic competitions, children's activities, and lectures on heritage and the environment.

The programme also draws on other international observances, including World Wildlife Day, World Migratory Bird Day, International Day of Forests, and International Youth Day.

This alignment between falconry and global events strengthens its presence within the international cultural and environmental agenda, affirming that intangible cultural heritage is capable of contributing to contemporary global discussions.

Art as an Extension of Heritage

The team behind the programme realized that safeguarding heritage cannot be achieved through theoretical education alone; it also requires fostering both creativity and emotional engagement in children and young people.

To this end, the programme launched artistic competitions linked to falconry and birds of prey, inviting children to express their connection to falcons and nature through drawing, photography, design, and various creative activities.

These works have since been compiled into annual international calendars reflecting children's vision of heritage and nature, giving them a genuine sense of active participation in protecting this cultural legacy.

These initiatives also reveal the role of art in giving heritage visual and emotional expression, so that it does not remain merely preserved information, but becomes a source of creativity and personal expression.

Falconry and Children's Cultural Identity... Building a Sense of Belonging Through Heritage

The impact of these programmes extends well beyond the transmission of information. It also fosters in children a sense of cultural identity, belonging, pride in their heritage, and a connection to nature.

This psychological and cultural dimension is of great importance within UNESCO's concept of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, because the ultimate goal is not merely to preserve skills, but to ensure that heritage continues to be present within the collective consciousness of new generations.

A child who comes to understand falconry as part of the history and culture of their community becomes more willing to protect it and pass it on to future generations.

Building a Global Falconry Community. Heritage as a Living Human Network

One of the profound ideas underpinning the programme is that it seeks not only to educate children, but also to build a contemporary global falconry community that connects falconers, schools, experts, institutions, and new generations.

In this way, heritage is transformed from a "memory of the past" into a living, dynamic human network sustained through communication, as well as cultural and intellectual exchange.

This idea lies at the very heart of UNESCO's concept of intangible cultural heritage, which regards heritage as a living, constantly evolving social practice, not merely artefacts preserved in museums.

Falconry as a Bridge for Intercultural Dialogue

Perhaps the greatest value of the IAF School Links Program lies in its capacity to transform falconry into a tool for global dialogue. Through this programme, children from different countries come to know one another through a shared heritage, exchanging knowledge, experiences, and perspectives.

Falconry thus becomes a means of fostering cultural understanding, a platform for global education, and a tool for promoting respect for cultural and natural diversity.

This aligns entirely with UNESCO's vision, which regards intangible cultural heritage as an instrument for promoting peace and rapprochement between peoples.

The Wings of Heritage Towards the Future

The experience of the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey and the IAF School Links Program demonstrates that the future of falconry depends not only on preserving traditional practice, but on its ability to renew itself and engage with the defining issues of our time, foremost among them, education, sustainability, environmental conservation, and cultural dialogue.

When children learn through falconry to respect nature, to understand environmental diversity, and to value human heritage, falconry transcends its role as a historical legacy and becomes a civilisational project for the future.

The "wings of knowledge" embodied in this programme thus represent a true extension of UNESCO's vision for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage: a living heritage that is ever-evolving, transcends borders, and is capable of building bridges between people, nature, and different cultures, from one generation to the next.

Photo Captions

1. UF1: A group of participants and students during a falconry education event aimed at promoting knowledge of falconry and raptor conservation.
2. UF2: Components of the IAF Falconry Education Program, comprising:
- the IAF School Links Program;
- the Young Falconers Group;
- Translation and Education;
- Youth Exchange;
- Media and Social Support; and
- Educational Working Groups.
3. UF3: A map illustrating the reach of the IAF School Links Program across multiple countries, indicating the number of participating schools and students worldwide.
4. UF4: An educational diagram illustrating the physical characteristics of birds of prey, including:
- visual acuity;
- the sharp, hooked beak;
- powerful talons; and
- dietary habits.
5. UF5: Students and supervisors participating in an educational activity related to falconry and raptor conservation.
6. UF6: A falconer presenting a bird of prey to students inside a school, as part of falconry awareness and environmental education.
7. UF7: A child participating in an art activity, expressing their connection to birds of prey and falconry through drawing.
8. UF8: A group of children during an educational field trip as part of the falcon and artificial nest conservation project in Mongolia.
9. UF9: Students and participants visiting natural and artificial nesting sites to learn about raptor habitats and conservation efforts.
10. UF10: A map of the school field trip programme and artificial nest visit project in Mongolia, showing activity locations and supporting organisations.

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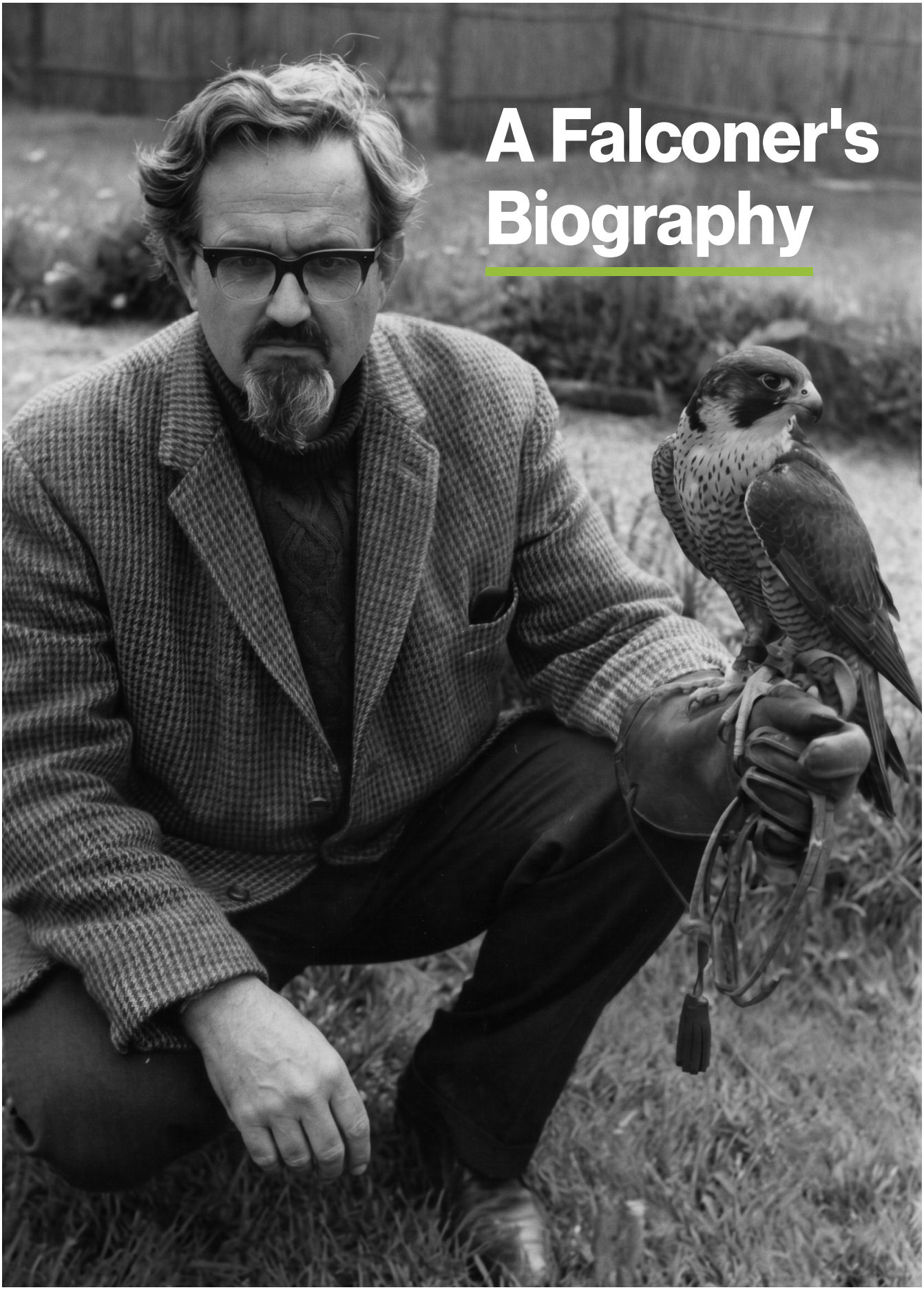
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A Falconer's Biography

British Falconer Philip Glasier...

When Europe Rediscovered Its Connection with Falconry and Birds of Prey

Philip Glasier was not simply a master of handling birds of prey; he was one of those who redefined falconry itself in the twentieth century.

At a time when the practice was in decline across Europe, he offered a different vision that transformed falconry from its narrow traditional confines into a broader discipline that combined understanding, behaviour, and a close relationship with nature.

Glasier was Britain's foremost expert in falconry and hunting with birds of prey. He sparked renewed interest in falconry in both the United Kingdom and the United States

He devoted much of his life to the conservation and breeding of raptors and to introducing them to the public through the establishment of the Falconry Centre, which later became the International Centre for Birds of Prey, as well as through his books, lectures, and public demonstrations. He also founded the Hawk Trust and the Raptor Breeders' Association.

The Context and the Transformation

Falconry was far from its finest hour in Britain and Europe generally by the mid-twentieth century. Its standing had gradually diminished and it no longer carried the cultural presence it had commanded in earlier ages. Its practice had become confined to limited circles and had lost the vitality that once characterized it. In this context, the challenge was not simply to preserve falconry as it was, but to rethink its very essence: should it remain a preserved tradition, or could it be renewed?

It is precisely here that Philip Glasier's name emerges, not as a continuation of what already existed, but as an internal transformation in the way falconry was understood. He is regarded today as one of the figures who bridged the transition of European falconry from a restricted aristocratic tradition into an educational and cultural practice linked to the conservation of birds of prey and environmental awareness.

Early Life and Formation

Philip Edward Brougham Glasier was born in 1915 into a rural British environment where nature was part of daily life, not merely a backdrop. From his earliest years, his interest in birds of prey was not rooted in a desire to own or train them, but in observing them. He would stand for long periods watching their movement across the sky, noting their shifted direction with the wind, timing of their stoops, watching how they negotiated open space. This early habit of observation was not a pastime but an exercise in understanding, even if he did not yet recognise it as such.

During WWII, Glasier served as an instructor in the Royal Armoured Corps. He was initially stationed at Bovington Camp in Dorset as a tank instructor before moving to the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst as a gunnery instructor. He was demobilised in 1950 after six years of service.

The war added another dimension to his character. It did not teach him falconry, but it gave him tools that would later prove fundamental to his approach: patience, discipline, and the ability to read a situation before reacting to it. When he returned after the war, he did not return to falconry as a pastime but as a field that could be understood and developed.

In 1953, Glasier played a minor role as the "Royal Falconer" in the film The Sword and the Rose, where he flew falcons to add authenticity to the production. He was also responsible for flying the falcons in Knights of the Round Table, and in 1959 a television series entitled Three Golden Nobles also provided him with further work in falconry.

He later returned to Millbury Osmond in Dorset, southwest England, and returned to Scotland each year during the hunting season to fly his birds for prominent figures including Prince Philip and HRH The Prince of Wales. In 1963 he undertook an overland journey to the Middle East and India in search of Hodgson's hawk-eagles.

That same year he wrote his autobiography As the Falcon Her Bells, a title drawn from Shakespeare's As You Like It, he recalled his early life and the uncle who had shaped his career most profoundly.







In 1965, Glasier visited RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland to demonstrate how trained birds of prey could be used to deter bird strikes on aircraft by dispersing gulls and other birds from runways. This was the first time falcons had been used in this way.

A Philosophy of Training and a Redefined Relationship

At that time, prevailing training methods relied heavily on repetition and direct control. The objective was clear: to make the bird respond. But Glasier was not convinced that response alone was sufficient. For him, the question was not "how do I make the bird obey?" but "how do I understand this bird?"

This simple shift in how the question was framed led to a profound difference in practice.

He would begin his day with the birds by observing rather than acting. He would stand before the bird, watching its posture, the movement of its head, and its response to its surroundings. These details were never incidental to him; they were indicators of the bird's overall condition. If it appeared tense, training would not begin. If it seemed distracted, he would ease the pace. If it showed readiness, he would proceed gradually, without hurrying.

In this context, training was not a sequence of commands but a form of unspoken communication. Even the way he carried the bird on the glove was part of that dialogue. He paid close attention to the bird's balance, comfort, and sense of stability, because any flaw at this stage would later be reflected in the bird's flight.





Daily Practice: The Details That Make the Difference

Over time, he developed a keen sensitivity to the smallest details. He understood that a bird's weight was not merely a number, but a direct indicator of its condition; that the timing of feeding could determine its level of responsiveness; and that the surrounding environment, however quiet it appeared, might carry elements of stress not easily visible.

In this way, falconry for him was no longer simply a skill but a complete system of observation and interaction.

When the moment of flight arrived, it was never a sudden event but the result of long preparation. The bird flew because it was ready, not because it was compelled. If it returned, it was not merely the result of technical training, but of a relationship built gradually over time.

When things did not go as expected, he did not treat the outcome as failure but as information. He would return to the details, review what had occurred, and look for the cause. This analytical approach was among his most defining qualities, and it was what made his experience transferable as a method.

From Individual Practice to Institutional Influence

In hunting, this philosophy became most clearly visible. The moment of releasing a bird into an open environment is a true test, not only of the bird's ability, but also of the success of the relationship between the bird and the falconer. At that point, control cannot be imposed. The bird decides, moves, and chooses. If it returns, it does so because it has chosen to, not because it is compelled.

This understanding led Glasier to see in falconry as an experience that transcended the immediate outcome. Hunting was not the goal itself, but an extension of a relationship built on trust.

Over time, these ideas began to reach beyond his personal experience. Other falconers noticed the distinctiveness of his approach and learned from it. Gradually, new approaches to training emerged emphasising understanding before application, reducing pressure, and building a balanced relationship with the bird.

Yet the greatest transformation in his career came not in the field, but in the way he chose to present falconry to the world.

Falconry Before the Public: The Defining Moment

In 1967, he founded the Falconry Centre in Newent, Gloucestershire, a step that was far from commonplace at the time. The aim was not simply to establish a display centre, but to reintroduce falconry to the public: to be explained and understood, not merely watched.

At the Centre, demonstrations were different. It was not simply a matter of a bird flying before an audience, but an interpretive experience. Glasier explained what was happening, linking movement to behaviour and turning the display into a compelling narrative. This approach transformed the public's perception of falconry, making it more accessible and easier to understand.

His goal was for the public to get closer to birds of prey, to see how they were handled through flying demonstrations, and to become more aware of their ecological value, at a time when many birds of prey were widely regarded as destructive pests.

The Centre grew and developed breeding programmes for species that had never previously been bred in captivity. Over time, this model became the foundation for many of today's falconry centres around the world.

In 1982, following the enactment of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Glasier retired in Scotland. He nevertheless continued to fly his birds and went on to write another volume of his autobiography.

Falconry & Environmental Awareness

During this same period, the environmental threats facing birds of prey were becoming increasingly apparent. The effects of pesticides and habitat alteration led to a decline in the populations of certain species. Glasier recognised that falconry could not be separated from this reality.

If the bird disappeared, falconry could not survive.

Guided by this conviction, he became involved in supporting breeding programmes, contributed to raising public awareness, and became part of a wider effort to protect birds of prey. His role was no longer confined to that of a falconer; he had become part of the broader nature conservation effort.

As the Falconry Centre's activities expanded, it moved beyond displays and education to become a leading institution in the captive breeding of birds of prey, particularly globally threatened species. These efforts focused especially on vultures and other rare birds of prey in an attempt to support their conservation and help restore their populations.

An Impact That Transcended Borders

A Quiet Legacy and an Enduring Impact

Although Glasier's work began in Britain, its impact did not remain local. He engaged with falconers from different cultures, exchanging knowledge and experience with them. He believed that falconry, despite its diverse methods, was founded on a single essence: the relationship between man and bird.

This understanding gave falconry a broader human dimension and made it a shared language that transcended borders.

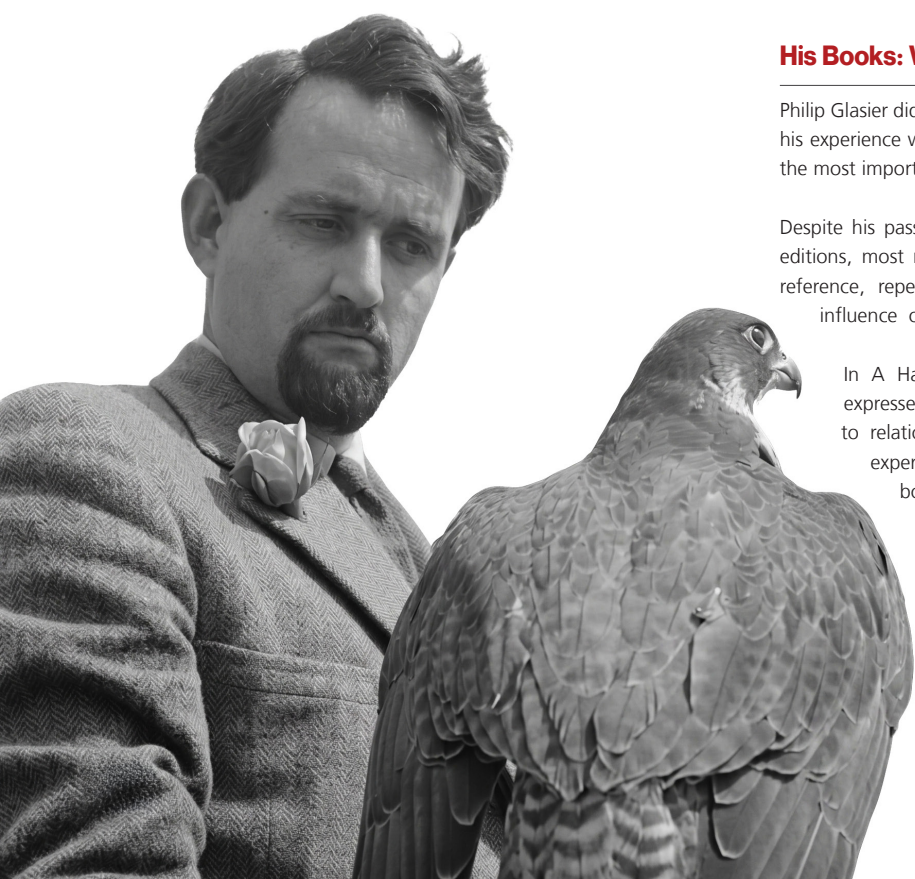
Philip Glasier passed away in 2000, without ever becoming a high-profile public figure. Yet he left a profound mark on the foundations of modern falconry. His legacy is evident today in training methods, educational centres, and the link between falconry and environmental conservation.

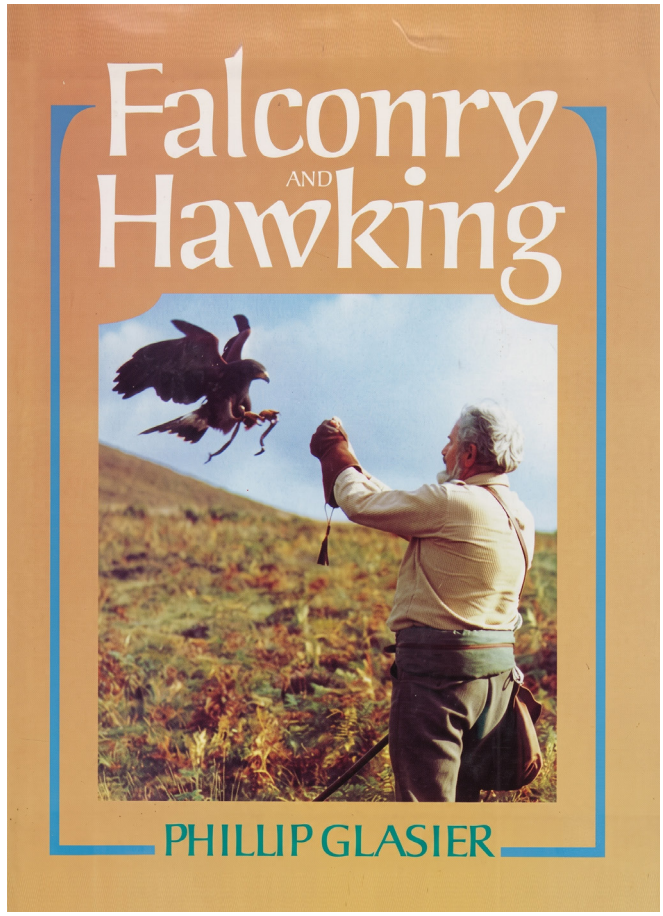
He changed the fundamental question in this field. The question was no longer, "How do we hunt?" but rather, "How do we understand… and how do we preserve?"

That change, for all its apparent simplicity, was enough to reshape the art of falconry from within.

In the end, Glasier's significance lies not only in the fact that he was an outstanding falconer, but in the fact that he redefined the relationship between humans and birds, making it a relationship grounded in understanding rather than control, in balance rather than dominance.

That is what makes his legacy endure: not only in books, but in every responsible practice of falconry today.





After Glasier's passing, his daughter, Jemima Parry-Jones, continued to build on his work, playing a prominent role in strengthening the International Centre for Birds of Prey as a globally recognised educational and conservation institution, while carrying forward the approach that had linked falconry with the conservation of birds of prey, and environmental awareness.

His Books: When Experience Becomes a Reference

Philip Glasier did not limit himself to fieldwork. He was committed to sharing his experience with readers through books that, over time, became among the most important references in modern falconry.

Despite his passing in 2000, his works have continued to appear in new editions, most notably Falconry and Hawking, which has remained a key reference, repeatedly republished and updated, reflecting his enduring influence on modern falconry.

In A Hawk in the Hand (1990), his philosophy is most clearly expressed, moving from explanation to reflection, from technique to relationship, offering a work that reflects the maturity of his experience and the depth of his vision of this art. Through these books, Glasier did not merely document his career; he helped shape the understanding of generations of falconers, and made the written word a living extension of practice.

The Book That Changed the Understanding of Falconry

Published in 1963, As the Falcon Her Bells, described as "a distinguished memoir," is a rich account of the experiences of one of Britain's foremost falconry experts, Philip Glasier (1915–2000). Glasier devoted much of his life to the conservation and breeding of birds of prey, while also introducing them to the public through the establishment of the Falconry Centre in Newent, Gloucestershire.

In his autobiography, Glasier recalls his early life and reflects on the influence of his uncle, the falconer and photographer Charles Knight, who played a pivotal role in introducing him into the world of falconry. The photographs within the book document important moments in his life, including his first experiences of falconry alongside his uncle; later introducing the art to his own children, activities of the falconry club; and his experience of training an eagle during a Scottish winter.

The book also includes striking photographs of birds in flight and as they land, alongside his recollections of meeting the American actor Robert Taylor (1911–1969) during the filming of the British-American historical film Knights of the Round Table (1953), for which Glasier was responsible for training and flying the falcons.

This is a personal memoir that weaves human narrative with practical experience, as the author revisits his beginnings and the influence of those who taught him this art, offering the reflections of a falconer whose experience was marked by profound insight.



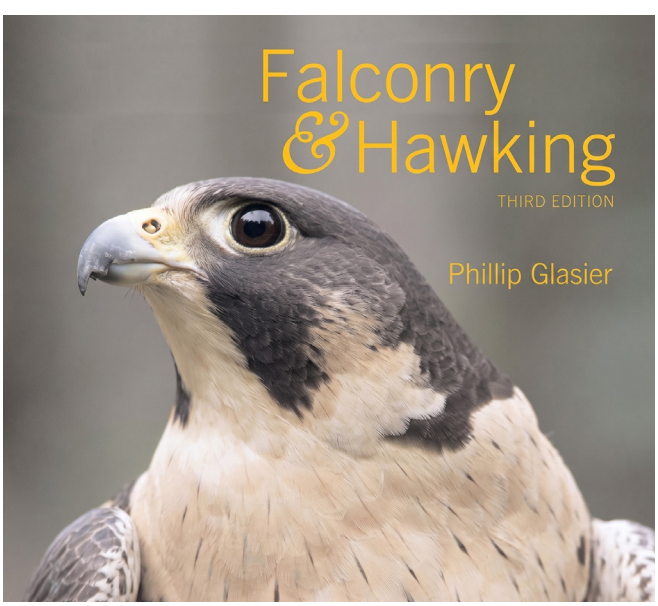
For Beginners and Seasoned Falconers

His book, Falconry and Hawking, which was published in several subsequent editions, was conceived as a more systematically organised guide, bringing together the fundamentals of training and the care of birds of prey, while reflecting the evolution of his understanding of falconry as a discipline grounded in observation and analysis.

In the third edition of 2006, following earlier editions published in 1986 and 1998, Glasier, drawing on his experience as a seasoned falconry instructor, continued to offer one of the most comprehensive and detailed guides for beginners in the field.

In collaboration with birds of prey specialist Greg Simpson, this edition presents fully updated content on the health and diseases affecting birds of prey, together with in-depth guidance on aviary management and bird husbandry.

Both beginners and experienced falconers will find in this book a valuable body of knowledge that combines practical expertise with scientific guidance, making it an important reference for understanding the fundamentals of working with birds of prey and developing skills in the art of falconry.



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On the Wing of Zayed's Legacy

An Inspiring Journey with "Fuhaid Al Hajeri" in the Field of Falconry

Fifteen years of passion and perseverance, leading to the highest podiums of victory.

"A bird's worth is equal to that of a good man" and our journey is a continuation of the counsel of our father Zayed.

From traditional "Calling back" to "satellites" technology has transformed the face of falconry.

From medical care to open reserves: official support beyond imagination.

By Mohammed Abu Aita

When the star of "S'hail" rises over the Arabian Peninsula, and the first gentle breezes begin to soften the fierce heat of summer, other hearts seem to awaken within falconers, unlike those that beat within them throughout the year. There is a secret thread, drawn taut without ropes, binding the pupil of the falcon's eye to the eye of the falconer, who never ceases to scan the horizon in search of the signs of freedom and feather.

Falconry in the United Arab Emirates is not merely a pastime with which to fill idle hours; it is a "sanctuary of the soul," the enduring counsel of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may he rest in peace, which he entrusted to the hearts of his sons, so that it might become a continuation of the counsel of the forefathers and of a love that sons and grandsons inherit, generation after generation.

At the heart of this noble sport, the story of the young Emirati "Fuhaid Al Hajeri," a son of the capital Abu Dhabi, stands out as an inspiring model for a new generation of falconers, a generation that has combined the heritage-rooted passion of the desert with the most advanced technologies,including artificial intelligence, in the service of the birds.

The Beginning: Behind the Elders

Fuhaid Al Hajeri's journey with falcons did not begin with owning prized birds or topping the podiums; it began with wonder and constant companionship. As a boy, he watched everything closely, carrying the birds while accompanying the elders of his family and the workmen on hunting expeditions.

He did not own a bird of his own, for falconry is a weighty science whose keys are not handed to the young until the elders have tested in them the virtues of patience, endurance, and the ability to handle the birds. Fuhaid absorbed the experience through observation, watching how the bird settles calmly on the hand, how it is called back to the falconer, and how it is fed, savoring those surroundings that shaped his inner being.

Everything changed in January 2010. Fuhaid had just turned nineteen when he received a special gift from his maternal uncle:



a "Pure Gyr" falcon, bred outside the country. This gift was Fuhaid's "official deed of entry" into the world of ownership and independent rearing.

The young man set out with his first bird, caring for it throughout the winter. When March arrived and the hunting season ended, he stood before the greatest challenge, the one that distinguishes the true falconer from the passing amateur: the challenge of the "moulting period".

The moulting period, that critical period of summer during which the falcon sheds its old plumage (qarnasa), demands medical and environmental care of the utmost precision. Fuhaid resolved to take on the challenge himself, and for the first time set up a dedicated moulting chamber for the bird in his home. He supervised it day by day and provided it with complete care, and his joy was overwhelming when the moult succeeded and the bird emerged from the moult with perfectly renewed plumage and excellent health.

From that year on, passion turned into an annual strategy, and Fuhaid began purchasing a group of birds each year, continuing along this path without interruption to this very day, where his mews now houses a group of birds among the finest of falcons, to which he devotes his full attention.

The Counsel of Our Father Zayed

Fuhaid continues in a tone of pride and responsibility, giving voice to the sentiments of his generation, deeply rooted in this heritage: "Today, as a generation of young falconers, we do not practice this pursuit merely to fill idle time; rather, we walk with our hearts and our steps guided by the counsel of our father Zayed, may God rest his soul.

This heritage banner, which we received from our elders, we regard as a precious trust upon our shoulders, and we are determined to carry on the message in every detail, so that falconry may remain alive and towering, and so that we in turn may pass it on, alive and vibrant, to our sons after us. Faithfulness to Zayed's legacy is our compass in every season."

Over the course of fifteen years in the world of rearing and monitoring, Fuhaid Al Hajeri never ceased to develop himself and deepen his knowledge. When you ask him the secret behind refining his skills, he answers with the certainty of the seasoned falconer: "No person is born knowing everything, and falconry is a school that grants its diplomas only through instruction, experience, and daily practice. What truly made the difference was constant practice and mingling with falconers older and more experienced than myself in this field."

Neither ambition nor youth kept Fuhaid from seeking the counsel of his elders; on the contrary, he would seek them out and consult them on methods of training and monitoring, and on identifying the different types and categories available in the market and the hunting fields. Fuhaid sees the falcon not as a mere tool for hunting, but as a creature of lofty standing, akin to that of a good man. He says in a decisive tone: "The bird has its place and its worth, just as a good man has his place and his worth; whoever keeps a bird must either value its worth or not keep it in the first place."

This ethical philosophy made him a falconer who refuses to see any bird treated poorly, even if it belongs to another; for the falcon, in his eyes, is a symbol of dignity and nobility, worthy of nothing but honour.



A Journey Through Memory
"Anad," Never to Be Forgotten

For nearly twenty years, Fuhaid has pursued this passion. During that time, many birds came and went, some leaving lasting scars in his memory. Some were lost in the far reaches of the hunt, while others were taken by death. Each time, he thought he would never find a better bird than the one he had lost, yet the days would always bring him an even finer one.

Fuhaid recalls a Peregrine (Shaheen) falcon that came to him as a gift from his cousins, when he thought he would never see a bird to match it in its instinctive nature. Al Hajeri draws a beautiful comparison between people and birds, saying: "Just like human beings, God grants some individuals special gifts and a natural acceptance that He does not grant to others, and birds are the same; there are birds that are calm by nature, untroublesome, that neither tire you in carrying them, nor vex you, nor embarrass you when you call them back or carry them before other men."

But the bird closest to his heart throughout his journey, the one that left an indelible mark, was a "Gyr-Peregrine" (Gyr Shaheen) that he named "Anad." Anad was not merely a bird; he was, to Fuhaid, "like a human friend." Between them, as he describes it, there was an extraordinary bond and an exceptional calm in their dealings, each understanding the other by a glance and a feeling.

"Anad" came to Fuhaid when the bird was in its second year and, most regrettably, died at that same age, leaving a sorrow in the heart of its keeper, who affirms that finding a bird with the nature and loyalty of "Anad" is well-nigh impossible.





Ghadab
"Gold on the Grand Podiums"

Fuhaid Al Hajeri's journey was not confined to recreational hunting; he entered the arena of official championships and major competitions, targeting the most demanding categories such as the Sakers and Qarmousha Gyrfalcons. In 2019, Al Hajeri reaped the fruits of his own efforts and preparation when he took part in the Fazza Falconry Championship in Dubai with a bird he had prepared and trained himself, which he named "Ghadab" (a farm-bred Russian Saker). "Ghadab" shook the field and seized first place with distinction, announcing Al Hajeri's emergence as a formidable competitive falconer.

The year 2020 was an exceptional one in Fuhaid's journey, marked by outstanding achievements and extensive travel. Al Hajeri set off toward the Saudi fields and competed with his Saker birds, achieving a great accomplishment by claiming second, third, and fourth place.

He returned that same year to compete in the domestic championships, taking part in the UAE's three premier falconry championships: the President's Cup Falconry Championship, the Fazza Championship for Falconry, and the His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Falcon Racing Cup. He claimed second place in all three competitions in succession, an achievement that demands exceptional perseverance and outstanding physical and medical preparation of the birds.

His ambitions did not stop there. In 2023, he returned to seize first place in the Qaramish category of the President's Cup Falconry Championship. He then stepped back temporarily, devoting himself to the care of his own birds while quietly and methodically preparing for what lay ahead.



The Technological Leap: From Simple Threads to Satellites

Over recent years, Fuhaid has witnessed how technology has transformed the face of falconry.

In the past, training relied on traditional methods of calling the falcon back using the lure over long distances. Then came successive stages of development, from gliders to balloons and then to drones.

With time, the devices became more advanced and less disruptive to the birds, especially after dispensing with certain fuel-powered systems and replacing them with battery-operated ones.

Falconers have also benefited from modern technologies in other areas, such as access to medical information and specialised treatments, making use of artificial intelligence applications in research and knowledge.

As for tracking devices, they brought about a true revolution: whereas falconers of old once relied on simple methods and basic threads, satellites today are able to pinpoint the bird's location with high precision. Fuhaid believes this tremendous advance has shortened years of hardship once endured by the early falconers.

Despite this significant technological progress, he affirms that the most important factor behind the success of falconry in the UAE is the support the falconers enjoy. The State, as he describes it, has provided falconry with support beyond imagination, from championships, competitions, and festivals to specialised farms, hunting reserves, modern hospitals, and clubs that serve falconers and provide them with everything they need.

He notes that the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition (ADIHEX) has become an annual platform showcasing the latest technologies and services related to falcons. He also praises the role played by the Abu Dhabi Falconers' Club in serving falconry and preserving its legacy.



He places particular emphasis on the reserves established by the State for falconers, such as Al Marzoom and Rimah, which have granted them the opportunity to practice hunting within the homeland without the need to travel abroad.

As for the veterinary hospitals specialised in falcons, he describes them as among the finest in the region, whether in terms of equipment, medical personnel, or the services provided.





The Language of Feeling and the Falconer's Precious Time

Fuhaid Al Hajeri's story reveals the arduous human and social dimension of the falconer's life; for falconry is no mere pastime, but a commitment that demands time and energy. Al Hajeri says: "We falconers, our time is gold, for the young man who practices this pursuit scarcely has any idle time. His life is divided between his work and his family, and he devotes all his remaining free time to being with his birds."

At times these birds so preoccupy their keeper that they compel him to cut short his appointments and engagements, and to excuse himself from many occasions in order to be at their side should some harm or ailment befall them, for the bird's keeper is the one closest to it, sensing its pain and suffering before any outward signs appear, and his presence beside it in that moment may save its life.

Al Hajeri explains that falconers, with the rising of the star of S'hail, fall into two groups: those who keep falcons out of passion and love, and those who do so simply for amusement. The true devotee stays with his bird twenty-four hours a day and never leaves it, and when he goes out for his affairs his heart remains tied to the perch, wondering about its condition until he returns to it, while others are obliged to employ a dedicated handler to care for the bird alone during the hours they spend at work.

The Echoes of the Mews and a Counsel for the Future

Within the mews, amid the fragrance of heritage, many powerful verses echo in Fuhaid Al Hajeri's mind, but the ones dearest to his heart, which he recites often, are the lines of the well-known Qatari poet "Buraik bin Hadi bin Ghafran Al Marri," in his famous poem in which he laments to his friend "Eid" the loss of a rare young Peregrine (shaheen), describing it as "gunpowder" that flies with a falconer's frenzy, awe-inspiring and swift, where he says:

O Eid, I entrusted a young Shaheen
to your care;
You were the one in whom I placed my trust,
and my hopes were fulfilled.

For you are a connoisseur of the finest
falcons, discerning and wise;
A master falconer whom none can outmatch.

They saw it in Doha, so Hussein
himself attests;
And people in Al Nasr still speak of it.

It scarcely remained in the market
for two days, O Eid;
O Abu Mohammed, it was no ordinary bird.

It was like gunpowder, I swear by these eyes;
The moment a falconer sees it, he loses all
composure.

In closing his conversation with "Al Saggar Magazine," the champion Fuhaid Al Hajeri offers a heartfelt message, shaped by years of experience, to young people and the new generation wishing to enter this noble world, affirming that the bird teaches a person patience, endurance, and resilience.

He says: "For anyone with the will and the desire, the bird is among the finest and most beautiful of pursuits. But my advice to every student or employee is not to let the bird distract you from the essential matters of your life or from your academic and professional future. Give the bird the love it deserves, and give your life its due in growth and balance."



Interview conducted by:

Mohammed Hussein Salama Salem Abu Aita
Journalist and researcher in the field of heritage

O Duhai, bring me glad tidings when S'hail appears

Taraat Al-Umr (The Prime of Life) - By Emirati Poet Saif Salem Ghanem Al Mansoori



Saif Salem Ghanem Al Mansoori is one of the most distinguished Nabati poets of the United Arab Emirates, whose name shone across the Gulf poetry scene after winning the coveted title of Sha'er Al Million in its sixth season in 2014. He was raised in an authentic Bedouin environment in the Al Wathba area of Abu Dhabi Emirate, where he absorbed the vocabulary of the desert and the spirit of genuine Emirati heritage, an upbringing that is clearly reflected in his beautiful poetic experience, which combines eloquence of style, honesty of imagery, and strength of feeling.

Al Mansoori distinguished himself through his remarkable presence in the poetry of falconry and hawking, conveying the details of desert expeditions and the bond between falconer and bird in a vivid language that pulses with Emirati folk heritage. His verses celebrate the values of brotherhood, companionship, generosity, patience, and courage that mark the falconry journey, alongside precise descriptions of the bird, its movement and majesty as it commands the desert sky.

In his poem Taraat Al-Umr, the poet presents a rich poetic canvas that evokes the full atmosphere of the falconry expedition: the preparations for the journey, the conversations among falconers, the sounds of song out in the open desert, right through to the moment the falcon stoops upon its prey. It is a poem that embodies the poet's love for the bird and the hunt and reveals the depth of his bond with Emirati heritage and identity, so much so that the poem reads as a living record of the desert's memory and the life of falconers.



I want a day to call them forth, a day when readiness is right, To cast them on the lure as smoothly as a ball drops from its height.

That was the time that filled us all with joy, and we bid our friends goodbye, We readied a brand-new vehicle, fresh off its maiden run to try.

Not American it is, nor one of those Nissans shipped from afar, A Toyota, jet black, sent straight from Japan — a worthy car.

The one who designed it is a master of his craft, precise and true, He knows how to perfect its balance and fine-tune every detail.

He spent three months of sleepless nights just to design and frame each door, And its steering column took him weeks of careful work and more.

He crafted each design with artistry and weighed it on the scale, Now tuning the amperes, now tightening its belts.

A specialist who had lived and breathed tar all his life, Before the making began, he had already shaped its form.

Heavy with burdens, the moustached man, the hero of his day, A vow I never thought he'd keep, yet he earned his doctorate that way.

I want us, when the morning light is fresh and its glow fills the air, And cold has settled deep within the ribs and tightened there.

To grind the coffee first, then let it rest like a cooling engine, Its warmth fills the air, and every worry slips away.

And we ride with you, dear friend, whose worth is spoken far and wide, And wind along that rugged desert track with you beside.

With poetry set to melody, flowing in the rhythm of: Dan wa Dan, And words on the edge of longing, sailing verse by verse and span.

To the tunes of Bu Salem and the strumming of the oud held near, Then Anoud Al-Sayd takes it up, sung by Abu Noura's ear.

Our grandfathers used to roam a barren wilderness untouched by man, Save for ruins marked by one who shuffles on a leg that barely ran.

And in it nothing but dried scrub, from which the fires were fed, Whose smoke draws out the deepest trouble, even when it lies unsaid.

Two days before, a desert shower had coursed through the wadi's bed, From its source down to its floor it broke the ancient rock ahead.

And with us is an elder, in whose heart lie dignity and name, And a falconer of seasoned skill, and a poet of honest fame.

And with us is a band of brothers worth the whole wide world's regard, Their fellowship is our treasure, and their company stands guard.

None of us carries a heavy heart, none buries grief inside, None carries envy or spite, and none whose nature strays from pride.

When the bird makes its kill — and they cry out: Bless God on high! Your heart soars with gladness, dressed in joy that cannot die.

And when he misses and returns to air, coming back with empty claw, He lifts your spirit still, returning readily to the lure.

Young men of meaning, with knowledge of the hunt in every vein, For that same passion you find them all with birds in hand again.

I have a purpose, O Duhai, it is not the chasing of the doe, Nor the love of soft-eyed girls whose glances cast a spell below.

My heart's true passion, by God, is that proud and fiery one, When he lets his leg relax in rest, you'd say the flight had just begun.

And when he beats his wings against the wind in fury and in pride, You would think it an Airbus—or even Concorde, cutting through the wide.

But what we have is something else , that golden, joyful bird, Broad-chested, wide of shoulder, with a crystal-like head.

Short-legged, with eyes that bear the bewildered gaze of an old man, A chest white as a chalkboard, bright beyond compare.

When he spots his quarry in the open and locks his aim with care, He launches like a bullet, folding every wing with flair.

He plays with her mid-air like a lover lost in longing's tide, As though he'd found a companion who forgives him for time denied.

And from the seventh sky he plunges down with tender force inside, The dust of his stoop billows so thick it darkens the air.

The bustard's feathers scatter, swept away by a raging wind, And above, a cloud rolls through the sky, dragging its dusty trail.

Know this, this is the prime of life, for life is but two days in all, This is the cause of my longing, the source of all that stirs my heart.

And send your blessings upon the Chosen Prophet, as countless as the rumble of thunder, and as many as the stars across the heavens.



"O Falcon, I Bought You with the Rising of S'hail "

Jibtak Wahsh (I Took You Wild)
by the Kuwaiti poet Samir bin Sulaiham

The late poet Samir bin Sulaiham is regarded as one of the most distinguished poets of Kuwait and the Arabian Peninsula. He is known for a fluent style that captures the spirit of falconers, with a remarkable ability to draw on the vocabulary of the desert and seasonal rhythms of birds, plants, and rain, so that his poem reads like a living diary of a hunting enthusiast, well versed in the ways of the desert and its birds.

His poem Jibtak Wahsh (I Took You Wild) is considered one of the finest modern falconry poems in the Arabian Gulf, for the authenticity of its experience, precision of description, and deep knowledge of the bird and the hunting seasons.

In this poem, the poet vividly portrays the falconer's journey, from acquiring and training the bird, through the waiting for the season of S'hail and Al-Wasm, to the start of the hunting expedition amid the springtime landscape and open desert.

The poem stands among those texts that have preserved the spirit of Gulf falconry, binding together the falcon, the desert, the rain, and the bonds of brotherhood in a vivid poetic image deeply rooted in the culture of the Arabian desert.

The poet opens his poem by linking the purchase of the bird to the rising of the star S'hail, the moment falconers await as the herald of the hunting season:

O falcon, I bought you with the rising of S'hail;

Before the autumn clouds could gather and break.

At the first passage of the swift migratory falcons;

Whose haunts lie deep within the barren desert.

Today the tall palms are being pollinated;

The fierce heat had passed, and its seasons stood revealed.

You've let me down, O broad-winged one;

No buyer or seller remained for you in the market.

I took you wild, straight from the net and the snares;

And on the leash I trained you to fine manners.

I kept you close, tending you with patient craft;

And for the love of you I named you Manna.

I sought quarry for you across the wilderness;

Through every mountain pass, yet found no quarry rising.

We went and came with men of every stripe;

And saw the plains, the seas, the cairns, the hills.

By God, I marked in them no yield at all;

Only much toil and the grey of barren ground.

Yet I place my hope in God through the nights to come;

That your turn will arrive in goodness and in grace.

A season when circling raptors come in sweeping waves;

Their ranks streaming past in unbroken succession.

And Suhail rises after a stretch of the night;

Its ray shining bright with the glow of dawn.

At a time when the air quickens the body and its strength;

Wherever the breeze blows, a fresh gust reaches you.

Then came to us, foretold by trusted signs;

An early autumn rain, its lightning flashing bright.

It poured and lingered, and its first fall swelled the floods;

And the streams ran on, following its lead through the lowlands.

Spring came in full, and the lush grasses sprouted;

And the high ground turned green and swaying with growth.

Grasses mingled with blossoms and dark desert blooms;

Rolling like gardens set across the hollows.

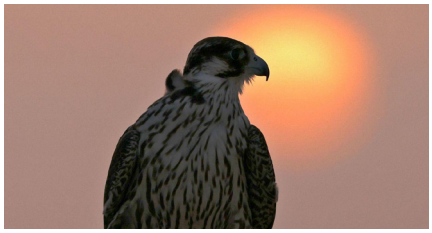
The hunt turned fine, so make ready, O men!

With falcon, and motorcar, and all the season's gear.

The poem closes with praise of God, who revealed the Truth;

Who healed Job (Ayyub) of all afflictions.





When S'hail Marks the Time for Birds

By Saudi Poet Ibrahim Abdullah Al Zahrani (Al Qernas Al Muhajir)

Poet Ibrahim Abdullah Al Zahrani, known by the pen name Al Qernas Al Muhajir (The Migrating Falcon), is one of the most prominent poets of falconry and the Megnas (hunting expeditions) in Saudi Arabia and the wider Arabian Gulf. His name has become synonymous with Nabati poetry that celebrates the desert, the falcon, and the hunt.

Al Zahrani lived the life of the open desert in all its pleasure and hardship, roaming its expanse as a lover of nature and the hunting seasons, and this is reflected clearly in his poetry: authentic in feeling, rich in Bedouin vocabulary, and saturated with imagery that carries the reader into the atmosphere of the hunt, the warmth of brotherhood, and the falconer's longing for the season of the falcons.

He distinguished himself through a style that flows naturally and speaks directly to the falconer's heart, with a rare ability to paint scenes of falcons, the casting off, and desert journeys in language that pulses with life, earning him recognition among enthusiasts as the poet of the Megnas.

His verse is marked by a constant yearning for the migration season, and by his profound attachment to birds of prey, which have formed the central axis of his poetic experience.

In his poem "When S'hail Marks the Time for Birds", the poet evokes the moment of S'hail rising as a long-awaited sign for the falconers and lovers of the open wild, for in popular tradition, this star heralds the easing of the heat and the start of the falconry season. Through his verses, Al Zahrani paints a vivid and living canvas in which scenes of the desert, the hunting ground, and the birds are woven together with the values of loyalty and companionship that have always formed an authentic part of Arab falconry culture.

Last night, when darkness deepened
and the sky grew still;

I climbed to find S'hail and raise
the glad tidings high.

To bring the falconers and hawking
folk the news they await;

That S'hail has risen and taken its
place in the sky.

For when that star appears, it marks
the hour for the birds;

For all who love the open desert and
the falconry way.

It brings the cool that settles deep and fills
the heart with ease;

The signal that the summer's burning grip
has had its day.

How fine the hunt becomes when you set
out with those you know;

Companions whose friendship is a gain
beyond all price.

Beyond the deserted passes, should your
journey carry on;

Lies open country clothed in ever-greener
grass.

A hunting journey is worth more
than staying at home;

Finer far than city life and all its comforts.

In a land where the tawny falcon keeps its
appointed season;

It returns with the coming of autumn.

How many times his memory and the sight of
him have brought me peace;

For his sake I have woven verses in
the finest of words.

How sweet it is to meet him, should the
encounter come at dawn;

With the hunt just setting out in the early
morning hours.

From the moment I saw him against
the blue sky, my spirit soared;

Such is the fire of my love, a warmth
that never fades.

And when he casts off with force, I take
pride in him;
How fine his turn, his fold, and his plunge.

The scourge of houbara and
free-ranging pigeons;

So swift, it never reckoned with an
aircraft's speed.

When he strikes, the feathers scatter
wide across the air;

From his blessed grip the quarry
tasted bitterness.

He circles still, gripping fast, and I took
pride in him;

Spinning in delight, overcome with joy.

He is my wish, O people of this passion,
if I were to dream;

To love him is a gain, and never any loss.

May God bring him back, for I have
long awaited his return;

Across open land, where the
hunting grounds are his home.

O God, I call upon You after prayer
has been performed;

The prayer of one who seeks Your guidance,
sound and true.

May my livelihood be free
from troublemakers;

Whoever prowls through what is mine
will come away empty-handed.

Or else be drawn into endless uproar
and raised voices;

Enough to make the mind explode.

How much has happened in our time,
and I have seen it clear;

How many fell through wrongdoing,
through recklessness and disgrace.

And I counsel you, O one who walks
among the noble ones;

A neighbour on the hunting ground
is loyal to his neighbour.

And if along your path you ride with
others side by side;

Stay loyal and do not burden yourself with
those who bring decay.

Never slight your friend when first your
paths unite;

Be as a stranger in the house, for the house
is his.

These were the ways of those who came
before, if only, if only;

Those days could return after
their long disappearance.

No good can come of prolonging my lament;

O time, we have lost your companionship.

My verses are complete, and truth
has been my aim;

My heart has caught aflame,
and the beginning was its spark.



The Falconry Journey in Emirati Nabati Poetry:

Documenting Practices and the Values They Embody

Ms. Fatima Al Mansoori
Researcher in Heritage and History

Introduction

Falconry has long held an established place in the Arab memory. It is one of the oldest practices associated with Arab life, the environment, and its values. The Arabs' interest in caring for, raising, and training falcons was no passing affair. Historical accounts point to the deep roots of this practice in Arab history.

Early references to the Arabs' interest in falcons have been preserved in historical sources, including accounts attributed to Al-Harith ibn Mu'awiyah ibn Thawr Al-Kindi. Some accounts suggest that he was among the first to use the falcon for hunting: Al-Mas'udi records in Muruj al-Dhahab that Mu'awiyah saw a falcon stooping upon a sparrow and was struck by its prowess. He then ordered that it be raised and trained for hunting, an event said to have marked the beginning of the widespread practice of falconry among the Arabs.

In the Arab heritage, Al-Jahiz also drew attention to the falcon's standing in Arab culture in his work Kitab al-Hayawan, where he spoke of the hunting animals kept by kings, mentioning the goshawk, the cheetah, the falcons, and other birds of prey, before distinguishing between the Arab perception of the goshawk and that of the falcon. He observed that the goshawk was more associated with the customs of non-Arabs and the profession of the baziyareen (professional falconers), whereas the falcon, particularly the Shaheen (Peregrine), remained closely associated with Arab nobility and prestige.

This observation reveals the particular place the falcon occupied in the Arab imagination, a bird associated with dignity, prestige, and nobility, not merely with the act of hunting.

While traditional sources preserved the earliest Arab traditions of caring for falcons, Emirati Nabati poetry has preserved the living practices of the sport of falconry, including its hunting expeditions and their many details. The hunting expedition as depicted in Nabati poetry is no fleeting scene; it becomes a living oral record documenting every stage of the journey, with all the knowledge, experience, and emotion it embodies. Poets preserved the names and qualities of the birds, most notably the falcons of Sheikh Zayed, until those names themselves became part of the memory and oral tradition of the Megnas (the hunt).

Poets also recorded the timing and seasons of the hunt, as well as the finest hunting grounds and their distinctive features. Nor did the poems stop at describing the bird and the landscape; it also revealed the longing that overtakes falconers, and the homesickness, loyalty, and deep attachment to family and homeland felt by falconers during their time away. At the heart of the journey stands the falconry majlis, a place for companionship, evening conversation, and storytelling. In this way, falconry poetry becomes an oral and cultural document preserving the details of lived experience, and this is what we shall explore in this article in greater detail.

The value of the falconry journey in Emirati Nabati poetry becomes evident in its portrayal as an authentic practice, deeply rooted in the region's heritage and forming an integral part of its inherited folk culture. In this context, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum captures this significance in the following verses:

Falconry is the tradition of people of virtue;
a legacy handed down to the people of the Peninsula.

Among the traditions that have shaped our character;
The very essence of our noble Arab identity.

Take heed, O keeper of the bird;
And accept this sincere counsel and guidance.

The Place and Time of the Hunt
"The Grazing Grounds of Gazelles"

Place and time occupy a prominent place in Nabati poetry, for poets did not confine themselves to describing the bird alone; they also turned their attention to the landscapes of the falconry journey.

Their poems present a variety of perspectives on the ideal hunting grounds. Some associate them with untouched land, bearing no trace of previous hunters, where the only tracks to be found are those left by the houbara. Others regard the grazing grounds of gazelles as the finest places for falconry, suggesting abundance, open landscapes, and plentiful quarry; still others identify the hunting grounds by their actual place names.

Yet despite the different ways in which poets portrayed hunting grounds, whether by naming a location or describing its distinctive features, their poems converge in presenting place as an essential element of the falconry journey.

Among the verses describing such hunting grounds are these lines by the poet Mohammed bin Sultan Al Darmaki:

They roamed across the open plains;
Scattering into countless distant groups.

The watercourses were clothed in fresh pasture;
How many houbara linger there for days.

No one has described the finest hunting grounds more eloquently than His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, who counsels the falconer and guides him to the places where the houbara are most abundant:

Take heed, O keeper of the bird;
And accept this sincere counsel and guidance.

They gather once the songbirds have departed;
In verdant meadows lush with fresh growth.

Near the watercourses and the sand dunes;
There you will find their tracks in abundance.

Across open country where green pasture thrives;
And the barren black ground stretches beyond.



"Megnas of Baynunah"

Baynunah is mentioned in the following verses as one of the distinguished hunting grounds preserved in the Emirati folk memory. Describing this place, the poet Al Darmaki writes:

A rugged land beyond the reckless and the rash;
It lies among the sweeping ridges of untouched sands.

Its soil drinks deeply of your joy as you tread upon it;
The grazing grounds of the houbara, where my hunting paths lie.

"Open Ground Where No Foot Has Trod"

In the following verses, the poet Rashed bin Saleh bin Muqareh Al Murri presents a vivid vision of the natural qualities that define the hunting grounds preferred by falconers:

The true delight of falconry lies in open land where no foot has trod;
Where houbara and sandgrouse draw near of their own accord.

The guide of our hunt is Zayed, steadfast and resolute;
Generous to his neighbour, a companion none can fault.

He continues:

A hunting ground whose bounds are left unguarded;
Its guardian is God alone, to whom all grace belongs.

The Timing and Season of the Falconry Journey"

The timing and season of the Megnas are among the most important elements of the falconry journey. The hunt does not take place at any random hour, but at a carefully chosen moment that coincides with the movement of the birds, clear skies, and moderate temperatures. Accordingly, poets gave considerable attention to recording the timing of the Megnas.

In this context, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum identifies the ideal time for the falconer who seeks the most abundant and rewarding hunt:

The scattered white ones, the prized birds;
When the midday sun grows fierce.

They dip and settle into their flight;
Glinting like flashes of keen sight.

Far they have flown beyond the ridge;
Seeking open space, scattered in flight.

The poet Ahmed Eid bin Musa'id Al Mansoori links the time of the Megnas to the appearance of S'hail (the star Canopus), long regarded as the sign that the intense heat has broken and milder weather has arrived. He says:

S'hail has appeared, and the falconer rejoices;
Releasing his bird after its long confinement.

After being kept behind walls and enclosures;
He takes it out with his companions, calling upon God.

Our appointed time is when the star Suwaybi appears;
And each man prepares his gear and provisions.

The Leader of the Journey

The falconry journey in Nabati poetry does not confine itself to describing the bird, the place, and the appropriate timing; it also extends to portraying the journey's leader, his experience, wisdom, and ability to lead his men. He appears in the poem as a symbol of trust and knowledge.

In a poem entitled Han Al-Masham, the poet Mohammed bin Sultan Al Darmaki addresses the leader of the journey, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan, saying:

O leader of the journey, O righteous and noble commander;
May God grant this journey every blessing and good fortune.

O Sheikh, we are accustomed to your expeditions;
May God grant that you repeat them every year.

We long for the moment you announce our destination;
A land whose soil is adorned with the colour of green.

And you descend into valleys dressed in lush pasture;
Where the houbara nests and your companions come to hunt.

In another poem, the poet Mohammed bin Saeed Al Raqrai describes and praises the leader of the journey, Sheikh Surour bin Mohammed bin Khalifa Al Nahyan saying:

Our leader, Abu Mohammed, does as he wills;
He gives the command, and we carry out all he says.

To travel with him brings pride, honour, and rich reward;
He has guided us through the hardest of trials.

By his command, his guidance, and his counsel, may God grant him happiness;
May success crown all his endeavours.

In safety and joy, may God grant success to the hunting journey;
A hunt conducted under the Sheikh's guidance, in proper order.





The Names of Falcons in the Memory of the Hunt "Falah" and "Farhan" - The Falcons of Sheikh Zayed

Many poems describing falconry journeys bear witness to the presence of Sheikh Zayed's falcons in poetic memory, not merely as passing names, but as symbols of pride, skill, exceptional prowess, and authenticity. This is no surprise, for these were the falcons of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the falconer whose fame spread far and wide. Poets celebrated these names, above all Sheikh Zayed's falcon Falah, which was featured in falconry poems as a bird of exceptional character, powerful in temperament, and masterful in the cast-off and the pursuit.

In the poem "A Bird That Casts Off and a Bird That Returns" by the poet Rabi' bin Yaqut, composed while accompanying the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan on a falconry expedition in Pakistan, the poet praises Sheikh Zayed's falcon Falah:

I praise you, O bird, in admiration;
A pure Saker, true-bred and a hunter.

O pursuer of the scattered houbara;
Capturing them and fulfilling every wish.

However high they rise into the sky;
Falah needs no urging to pursue them.

I have witnessed it with my own eyes,
I swear by the One who created me, Lord of all creation.

Sheikh Zayed's falcon, Falah, continues to feature in another poem by Mohammed bin Sultan Al Darmaki. Here, the poet does more than merely mention the bird by name; he devotes a vivid description to it, revealing its distinctive qualities:

Never tell the falconer to send him in pursuit;
Falah is at his finest during the cast off .

Rosy-hued across the shoulders, broad of chest;
The eye of the brave, ever present in the chase.

His judgement in the cast off is that of a true expert;
He understands its principles and has mastered them.

His Excellency Dr. Mani' Saeed Al Otaiba also praised Falah in his poetry, celebrating his speed:

With Falah close at hand, the quarry is yours;
A Saker whose fame has spread far and wide.

He overtakes even the swift houbara;
Its feathers scatter in the air.

In another poem, the poet Mohammed bin Sultan Al Darmaki describes another of Sheikh Zayed's falcons, Farhan:

"Farhan", O Sheikh, is renowned for his long-proven qualities;
Well trained, his course is as certain as the flow of a flood.

Release him when the scattered quarry takes flight;
Once you have seen his stoop, you will never forget him.

When he stoops, he catches even the most elusive quarry;
Honour belongs to the man who carries him upon his right hand.

"Daghash" - The Falcon of the Poet Ahmed bin Sulaim

The range of falcon names celebrated in falconry poetry widens further. The poet Ahmed bin Sultan bin Sulaim was on a hunting expedition with Sheikh Hasher bin Maktoum and a group of companions. They had two falcons with them, one named Daghash, a bird seldom matched for the abundance of its quarry.

One day, while Daghash was pursuing his quarry, a Shami falcon confronted him, struck him down, and he fell dead. The poet composed verses mourning the lost falcon and sent them to his companions lamenting his loss:

Daghash, no falcon taken from the common breed;
Rare among us, and held in the highest esteem.

How often we delighted in the bounty of his fierce hunts;
How often he relieved our hearts of sorrow.

Fate decreed that yesterday a Shami falcon attacked him,
bringing him down dead.;
A wild bird that met him in the sky, as was destined.

The Hunting Tools in Nabati Poetry

Hunting tools have a place in Nabati poetry, helping to preserve their traditional terminology.

Among these are terms such as al-wakr (the perch), al-burqa' (the hood), and al-makhlah (the falconry bag). One example appears in the poem The Day I Reflect and Gaze by the poet Rabi' bin Yaqut, written about falcons, in which he mentions several hunting tools:

Upon the perch, it shifts restlessly,
Hooded and completely still.

Well trained and accustomed;
Called at the evening hour.

His Excellency Dr. Mani' Saeed Al Otaiba had a falcon named 'Allaq , a name that appears to reflect its ability to pursue quarry and fill the falconry bag:

When quarry appears, 'Allaq seeks it out;
Intent on his prey and its pursuit.

With him we lure and we pursue;
Until he fills the falconry bag to the brim.



The Falconry Majlis

The Falconry Majlis has a striking presence in these poems, appearing not merely as a place of rest, but as a social space in which the customs of men and the rituals of the falconry journey come alive: the lighting of the fire, the brewing of coffee, the exchange of stories and conversation, all reflecting the values of warmth, generosity, and true brotherhood that the Megnas embodies.

In this regard, the poet Ibn Musa'id describes the Majlis:

Our resting place, where dry firewood is gathered;
We kindle a fire there whenever we halt.

From it the brass coffee pots turn dark with use;
Their cups the colour of honey, marked with the stain of use.

Stories that soothe burdened hearts;
Shared over long hours with pure coffee.

A brotherhood of men bound by deep understanding;
Whose companionship is warmth, intimacy, and laughter.

That is the heart's deepest wish, O Ghuneim;
So long as every man has his passion and his purpose.

The Qualities of the Falconer

No portrait of the Megnas in Nabati poetry is complete without the presence of the falconer, the most essential element of the falconry journey, possessing knowledge, patience, and discernment. Falconry is not merely accompanying a bird; it is a precise understanding of its nature.

In this context, the poet Saeed bin Jasim Al Raqraq Al Mazrou'i says in a poem entitled "The Bird":

A bird demands a true falconer;
Not an inexperienced novice.

The Return Journey

The return from the Megnas forms the emotional conclusion to the falconry journey, with the hunters coming back laden with longing for home, feelings that sometimes arise even while they are still on the expedition.

"A Home That Guides All Who Are in Need"

In longing and return, once the hunting expedition has drawn to a close, the party rides back, led by its Sheikh, to their homeland after a journey that may last an entire month. The poet Al-Asri bin Karraz says:

The whole month passed, and all were filled with longing;
Each wishing to return to his own land.

They set out upon a safe and easy journey ;
A day we count among our days of celebration.

They arrived at a home known to all who are in need;
And its settled and its nomadic people rejoiced together.





"Rahim Khan"

The poet Rabi' bin Yaqut refers to Rahim Khan, a region associated with Sheikh Zayed's falconry expeditions in Pakistan23. Yet its presence in his poem is not merely a geographical marker of where the hunt took place; it becomes an emotional landscape in which feelings of longing and homesickness come alive. The poet evokes the distance between himself and his homeland and loved ones, reminding us that the falconry journey was never separate from the inner life of the poet. Rather, it opened a door to yearning within him, turning the hunting ground into a mirror of longing:

Between you and me lies the distance of miles;
Rahim Khan and the mountains of Kashmir.

I find myself among slopes and ruins;
Calling out to the voices of the songbirds.

On the green edges of the hills;
I write and sketch my thoughts for you.

And continuing:

O Abu Usamah, return at once;
Bring me back to those open hollows.

I would find rest in the shade of a resting place;
Where the oud-wood passes and familiar haunts appear.

What the foregoing makes clear is that the Megnas in Nabati poetry is not a passing journey; it is a cultural record preserving an important dimension of the memory of the hunting expedition. Through their poems, the poets succeeded in documenting many of the practices associated with the hunt: knowledge of place and season, the skill of the falconer, the ethics of companionship, the etiquette of the gathering, and the importance of the leader and the duty of following his command.

It is in this light that the importance of Nabati poetry becomes fully apparent as a historical and cultural document that preserves heritage and history, especially the heritage of falconry stretching back hundreds of years in Emirati society. The evocation of these practices associated with the falconry journey, and their transmission to new generations, helps to instill authentic values and strengthen their presence in the consciousness of future generations.

The Majlis: Schools of Sana' and the Memory of Megnas

From the Campfire to the Desert Tent: Stories Told and Ethics Passed Down

The majlis in Emirati culture was never merely a place for gathering or hospitality. It was a school for life, a platform where characters were shaped, relationships were forged, and wisdom and experience passed from one generation to the next.

This is why the people of the Emirates distilled the standing of the majlis into their well-known saying: "*Al-majalis madaris*" — gatherings are schools — a phrase that encapsulates an entire social philosophy, one that has shaped the Emirati community's collective conscience across long decades.

From the majlis of Sheikh Zayed bin Khalifa — Zayed the Great — held outside Qasr Al Hosn in the late nineteenth century, to today's gatherings in the age of technology and digital platforms, the Emirati majlis has remained a space for dialogue, guidance, and the exchange of opinion. It has served as a bridge connecting leadership to community, embodying the spirit of dialogue, consultation, and communication upon which the UAE was built.

In the past, the majlis fulfilled the role that schools and universities serve today. Fathers and grandfathers would gather to pass on to their sons the sum of their experience and knowledge, teaching them Sana' (ethics), customs, traditions, and the proper way of conducting oneself with people. The majlis was equally a space for exchanging news of the falconry expeditions (Megnas), fishing, pearling, and trade, and a forum that celebrated poetry and poets, where verses were recited and stories were shared.

The majlis was far more than a place of hospitality and social gathering. Throughout the history of the Emirates, it stood as an open school of knowledge and learning, a place where sons absorbed the wisdom of their elders on matters of politics, economy, poetry, culture, and the varied affairs of life.







The Majlis: Roots Running Deep in Emirati History

The majlis has been woven into the fabric of Emirati society for hundreds of years, present in the lives of the people of the desert, the sea, and the oasis as a space for consultation, receiving guests, and exchanging views and experiences.

In the gatherings of sheikhs and community leaders, people would bring forward their concerns and share their news, while the younger generation learned the art of speech, the ethics, and the etiquette of the majlis.

The Emirati majlis drew the attention of travellers and orientalists who visited the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, impressed by the unique social and human qualities they witnessed there.

The traveller Samuel Zwemer documented the majlis of Sheikh Zayed bin Khalifa during his visit to Abu Dhabi, noting with admiration the generosity and warmth with which the people of the region received their guests. The German explorer Hermann Burchardt, in 1904, captured one of the earliest rare photographs of Sheikh Zayed's majlis outside Qasr Al Hosn, a scene that speaks to the majlis as a gathering place for the people and a platform for dialogue and consultation.

Across the decades, the Emirati majlis remained an open space bringing leadership together with community. The late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may God rest his soul, upheld this cherished tradition, as did his sons, the sons of Zayed, who are known for their open majlis welcoming all citizens, listening directly to their concerns and proposals. The majlis thus endures as a symbol of human closeness and social cohesion, and one of the most significant expressions of authentic Emirati identity.



Sana':
The Soul of the Majlis and the Character of Men

Sana' at its core is not simply a set of inherited rules of conduct. It is a comprehensive system of noble values, customs, and traditions that expresses the authenticity of Emirati identity and its Arab and Islamic roots. It encompasses one's words and actions, appearance and behaviour, and is closely associated with chivalry, respect, and consideration, becoming a mirror that reflects the Emirati individual's awareness of himself and of those around him.

Sana' is not the preserve of any one social class. Rather, it is a unifying culture that flourishes in everyday life as much as in formal gatherings, practised in the home, at school, in the neighbourhood, and in the workplace, as an integral part of the culture of society and its institutions.

Sana' is also closely associated with the etiquette of the Emirati majlis, from extending a warm welcome and serving Arabic coffee to showing respect for guests and elders, and listening attentively when others speak. These are values that have continued to define the character of the falconer and the morals of the people of the desert.

Among the traditions passed down through the majlis is the serving of Arabic coffee at frequent intervals, with the guest expressing that he has had enough by gently tilting the cup. The incaense burner (mabkharah) is then passed among those gathered, and then the welcoming food (Fawala) is presented, a scene that embodies the genuine Emirati spirit of generosity.

Sana' does not stand in opposition to modernity. Rather, it gives modernity its human and ethical dimension, preserving the balance and identity of the community in a time of rapid change, so that it remains evident in conduct before words, and in substance before appearance.

The Emirati Majlis:
A Forum of Values and Connection

Throughout the history of the Emirates, the majlis served as a social and intellectual gathering that brought together sheikhs, elders, young men, and members of the local community to discuss everyday matters and people's affairs. It was equally a starting point for humanitarian and social initiatives, and a place where sons learned the art of conversation, the manners of good conduct, and respect for others.

Gatherings were held in bayt al-sha'ar woven from goat hair, camel wool, and sheep fleece, or in the open air around a campfire with Arabic coffee. In the coastal towns they were held within houses made of mud and gypsum or under palm-frond shelters, whereas in the mountain regions, they took place in guesthouses and gathering places.

In recognition of its importance to Emirati society, the majlis was inscribed in 2015 on UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, acknowledged as a living tradition of communication, dialogue, and the building of social bonds, preserved by leadership and society alike as a bridge connecting generations and strengthening social cohesion.

Among the most distinctive qualities of the Emirati majlis is that it welcomes everyone. Officials, merchants, people of experience, elders, and young people gather in the same space to engage in conversation and exchange views and experience. This is what has given the majlis its standing as a school of everyday life and a forum for building trust and relationships within society.

In Abu Dhabi, the majlis has long been an integral part of the emirate's social and cultural fabric. Among the most renowned are the Al Mushrif, Al Bateen, and Zakher majlis, along with many others that have maintained their role as spaces for communication, the sharing of knowledge, and the strengthening of social bonds.





The Falconers' Majlis: An Extension of the Spirit of the Desert

In the world of falconry, the majlis takes a different form, yet retains its very same soul. The desert majlis of the falconers is not simply a tent pitched in the sand, it is a space where the values of the entire journey are reflected.

After long hours of Megnas, the falconers gather around the campfire, the traditional Arabic coffee pot (dallah), sharing stories of birds and quarry, of the wind and patterns of the hunting seasons, recounting stories of old journeys and hunting expeditions that live on in memory.

In the majlis, conversation is not merely a social pastime; it is an integral part of the culture of falconry itself. The falconer learns to listen before speaking, to value the spoken word, to respect elders, and to uphold the dignity of the majlis.

This is why sana' was inseparable from the character of the true falconer. Young falconers learned to greet upon entering, to sit where they were invited, to respect their elders, to listen well, and to adhere to the etiquette and prestige of the majlis. These were not minor social details; they were a foundational part of the falconer's upbringing and morals, in the desert and among men.

The Elders: The Memory of the Megnas

Elders hold a special place in the falconers' majlis. They are the custodians of long experience and possess a deep knowledge of migration routes, the nature of the land, and the hunting seasons. The young falconer learned from them through sitting in their company and observing before asking questions, for much of falconry's knowledge was never written down, but passed on orally through the majlis and the journeys of the desert.

Through those gatherings, the conversation was never confined to hunting alone. It extended to the values of manhood, patience, brotherhood, endurance, and respect for one's companions. The majlis thus remained a school in which the falconer's character and understanding were shaped before his skills in the megnas were honed.

Coffee and the Language of Companionship

In the desert majlis, Arabic coffee is not merely a gesture of hospitality; it is part of the spirit and ritual of the gathering. Around the dallahs and the glowing campfire, companionship grows among the falconers, the weight of travel and fatigue eases, and the stories of old journeys are told.

The majlis was also closely associated with Nabati poetry, evening gatherings, and the art of conversation, becoming a space for consultation and the exchange of knowledge and experience, making the hunting expedition a social and human experience that extended far beyond the act of hunting itself.

For this reason, the tent has remained in the Emirati consciousness a symbol of generosity, solidarity, and hospitality, while the traditional majlis has become an integral part of the cultural landscape, reflecting the identity and enduring values of Emirati society.

The Majlis and Emirati Identity

The UAE is committed to preserving the presence of the majlis in festivals and cultural events, among them the Sheikh Zayed Festival in Al Wathba, where the majlis is presented as a living space that reflects the Emirati society, its customs, and traditions.

At these events, Nabati poetry, Arabic coffee, the traditional evening gatherings, the rababa, and heritage-style sittings all come together, keeping the majlis as a testament to the depth of the relationship between the people and their heritage, and to the role the majlis has played in strengthening the values of belonging, communication, and social cohesion.

Today, the majlis continues to fulfil an important role in promoting community and cultural awareness, preserving the Emirati heritage, and reinforcing the relationship between generations, remaining one of the most significant spaces that expresses the spirit of Emirati society and its authentic identity.

Though times have changed and the tools of communication have evolved, the Emirati majlis endures, in spirit and in purpose, from the popular desert gathering to the smart majlis and modern digital platforms, because the values of dialogue, communication, consultation, and respect for others have always remained a constant thread in the identity of the Emirati society.

Sana': The True Ethics of the Falconer

The Megnas is not complete with the bird alone, and the status of a falconer is not measured by his skill in the hunt alone, but by the morals, ethics, and respect for people and the desert that he possesses.

Sana' in the culture of Emirati falconry is not a secondary detail. It is the foundation of the relationship between falconers, and the way trust, companionship, and brotherhood are built within a single journey.

This is why the majlis remained a school for falconers, a place where they learned the art of speech, respect for their elders, the grace of listening, and an understanding of the meaning of companionship, generosity, and dignity.

And perhaps this is why the majlis remains, to this day, an inseparable part of the spirit of Emirati falconry, because it preserves something that goes far beyond the skill of the hunt. It preserves the ethics and character of men.

The Falconer's Ethics

When the Megnas Becomes a School of Values

Falconry in the UAE was never simply a pursuit built on hunting skill alone. From the earliest times, it was bound to a comprehensive framework of morals, Sana' (ethics), and respect for people, the quarry, and the environment. So much so that the true falconer came to be known for his morals before his bird, and by his reputation in the desert before the number of his quarry.

For the people of the Emirates, the Megnas is not merely a hunting trip; it is a school where the values of patience, brotherhood, compassion, and nobility are instilled, and where the falconer learns the meaning of companionship, respect for nature, and the proper etiquette of the desert.

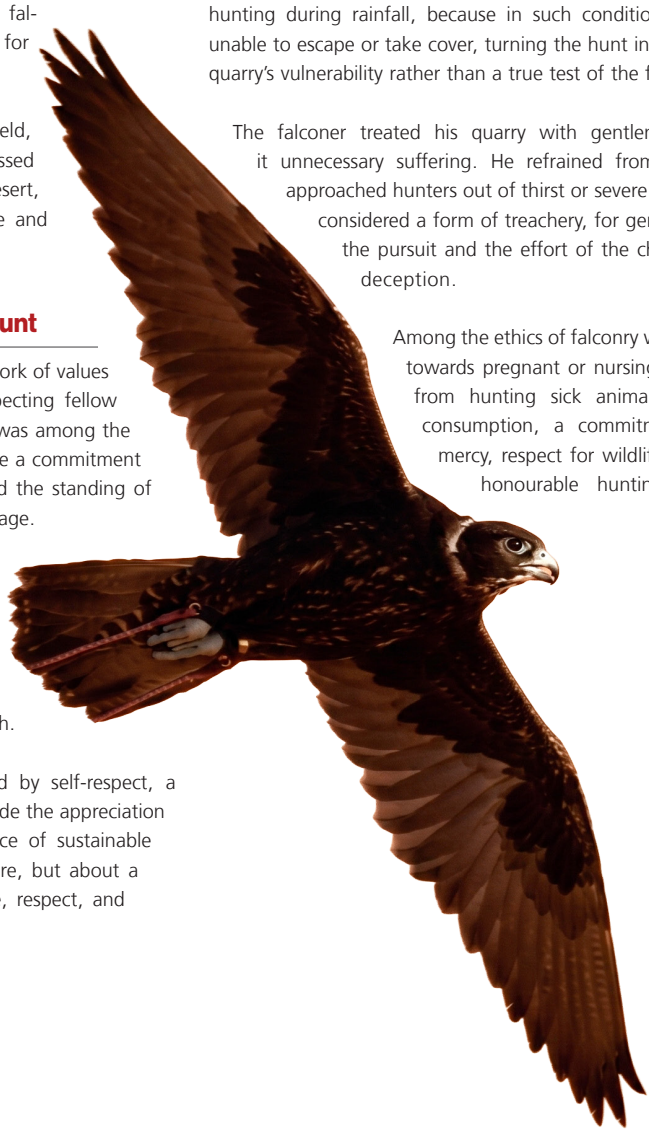
It is for this reason that the Emirati falconer has upheld, across the generations, an unwritten code of ethics, passed down through the majlis and journeys into the desert, becoming an integral part of Emirati falconry culture and heritage identity.

Falconry: A School of Ethics Before the Hunt

Emirati falconry has long been founded upon a framework of values that shaped the character of the true falconer. Respecting fellow falconers and regarding them as friends and brothers was among the foundational principles of Sana' in the desert, alongside a commitment to the authentic customs and traditions that preserved the standing of falconry as a time-honoured cultural and human heritage.

Teaching children the art of falconry was never simply training in the techniques of the hunt. It was a complete upbringing, one that passed on ethics before skill, and in which the young people learned patience, strength, and the spirit of teamwork, while cultivating honesty, cooperation, nobility, and self-worth.

The character of the true falconer was also defined by self-respect, a commitment to chivalry, and respect for others, alongside the appreciation of the environment and heritage through the practice of sustainable hunting; for falconry was never about depleting nature, but about a balanced relationship with it, grounded in knowledge, respect, and responsibility.



Compassion for the Quarry, A Hallmark of the Falconer

The Emirati falconer never viewed the hunt as a show of dominance or a display of power. For him, the Megnas was guided by the ethics of compassion, fairness, and respect for the laws of nature.

For this reason, falconers avoided hunting birds that were unable to fly, as well as birds in their nests for fear that they might have chicks. They also avoided hunting during rainfall, because in such conditions the quarry becomes unable to escape or take cover, turning the hunt into an exploitation of the quarry's vulnerability rather than a true test of the falconer's skill.

The falconer treated his quarry with gentleness and never caused it unnecessary suffering. He refrained from hunting animals that approached hunters out of thirst or severe cold. Night hunting was considered a form of treachery, for genuine hunting is built on the pursuit and the effort of the chase, not on ambush or deception.

Among the ethics of falconry was showing compassion towards pregnant or nursing animals and refraining from hunting sick animals that were unfit for consumption, a commitment to the values of mercy, respect for wildlife, and the principles of honourable hunting.

The Falconer and the Environment: A Relationship of Respect, Not Exploitation

Emirati falconry has, since the earliest times, been bound to respect for the environment and the preservation of its natural resources. The people of the desert understood that the land was a partner in the journey of the Megnas, and that caring for it was part of the ethics of the true falconer.

Falconers were careful never to leave the remains of a hunt scattered in the desert, collecting and disposing of them in designated places. They refrained from cutting down or burning trees for cooking, to preserve the natural environment and the sources of wildlife.

They were also committed to causing no harm to the land or the vegetation upon which livestock and wildlife depended, and to respecting farmland and private property. Before leaving any camp or hunting site, they ensured that the fire was completely extinguished.

Excessive hunting had no place in the culture of Emirati falconry. Falconers were careful never to hunt beyond what was needed. They also promoted awareness of the importance and effectiveness of captive-bred falcons for hunting and avoided capturing or trading in wild birds, to preserve ecological balance and ensure the sustainability of wildlife.

The Novice Falconer: Learning Before Carrying the Falcon

Emirati falconry culture encouraged the novice falconer to begin his journey with knowledge before practice, recognising that falconry demands responsibility, experience, and a thorough understanding of raptors and their needs.

It was therefore not accepted to acquire raptors before gaining sufficient knowledge about them. Beginners were expected to follow the guidance of raptor breeders as well as the advice of recognised and experienced falconers, exercise sound judgement, and learn from personal and practical experience.

Falconers were also committed to dealing only with licensed and authorised entities for the purchase and treatment of falcons, and to upholding the code of falconry ethics before obtaining a licence as a general falconer, affirming that falconry is an ethical responsibility before it is a hobby or a skill.

The Etiquette of Companionship in the Field

On the journeys of the Megnas, the relationship between falconers was never built on competition alone, but on mutual respect, brotherhood, and adherence to the etiquette of companionship in the desert.

A falconer should never feed his falcon when other raptors are nearby or show food to any bird of prey in the field. He would always place his falcon on the perch to prevent any confrontation with another falcon.

A falconer would refrain from standing close to another falconer, or behind his falcon without first obtaining permission, out of respect for the falcon and its owner. He was also expected to alert others if he noticed any damaged or unsuitable equipment, in the interest of everyone's safety.

The spirit of brotherhood is most evident in group hunting, where falconers would agree in advance on the hunting arrangements and the allocation of time among them. All were committed to waiting until every falcon had completed its hunt, and no falconer would leave the field before assisting the others.

The etiquette of group hunting also required that a falconer would move his falcon away if it was not actively hunting, to allow another falcon to take its opportunity. He would also take responsibility for the direction and manner of his falcon's flight, while experienced falconers would explain their hunting methods to others and share with the group their expectations of how the hunt would unfold.

Even when a new falconer wished to join the group, he would be received with courtesy and respect, with a courteous explanation if the group was already complete, reflecting the spirit of companionship and cooperation that has distinguished Emirati falconry across the generations.

Falconry: Ethics Passed Down Through the Generations

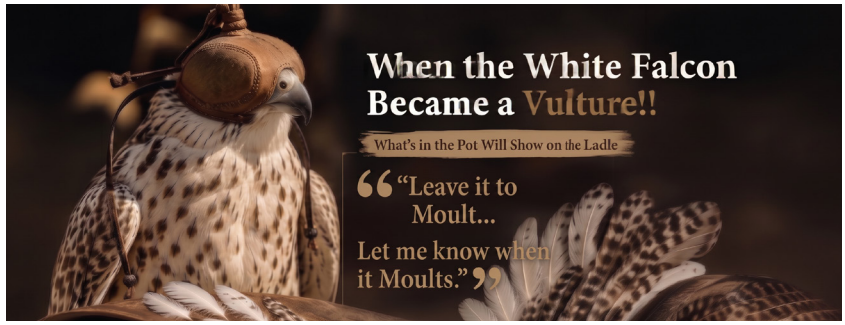
Across the generations, Emirati falconry has remained far more than a journey into the desert or a hunting skill. It was bound to Sana', brotherhood, and respect for others and for nature, becoming a school that taught patience, cooperation, compassion, and commitment.

For this reason, the true falconer was always measured by his ethics, dignity, and the quality of his conduct before his skill in the hunt was ever considered. The Megnas in Emirati culture was never simply the pursuit of quarry; it was a place where values were preserved and the morals of honourable men were passed down from one generation to the next.



How Did the White Falcon Become a Vulture?

"What's in the pot will show on the ladle"



Dr. Ali Al-Quhaiss*

The love of falconry, raising falcons, particularly the Sakers, and taking care of them, is a heritage deeply rooted in the culture of fathers and grandfathers since time immemorial, and it lives on to this day. In times gone by, this passion was a trade, a livelihood, a primary means of securing food for the people of the desert across the Arabian Gulf states, who depended on strong falcons to hunt lawful quarry, such as gazelles, rabbits, and houbara. This was before weapons and modern transport were available, and before the region came to enjoy the prosperity and abundance it knows today.

With time, the trade transformed into a beloved pursuit, a deep and abiding passion, and a heritage sport, expressing authenticity and identity, embodying the environment as well as the customs and traditions whose roots run deep into history and bear the distinctive imprint of cultural heritage.

Some fifty years ago, when falcons were rare and scarce, the Saker falcon was among the rarest and most valuable birds, owned by only a handful of kings, princes, sheikhs, and the earliest prominent falcon owners.

In the 1970s, Sheikh Ibn Sha'lan, sheikh of the Ruwala, of the well-known Anaza Arabian tribe, purchased a white Saker falcon, a bird that appeared almost like a white dove, distinguished only by the black of its eyes and beak; the rest of its body was clothed in a brilliance of white that drew every eye.

He paid a steep price for this extraordinary bird from a falcon trader in the Levant, in Syria specifically, and then presented it as a gift to King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz (1924–2015), who was then Commander of the Saudi National Guard. It is said that Sheikh Ibn Sha'lan was a maternal uncle to some of King Abdullah's children, God rest his soul.

King Abdullah was deeply taken with the falcon, captivated by its striking white colour and rare appearance, and went on to present it as a gift to King Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (1906–1975), who was at the time the reigning King of Saudi Arabia.

King Faisal was an experienced falconer, well-versed in birds, their species, and their appearance. When he set eyes on the white falcon, he showed none of the wonder that had taken others. He studied the bird carefully, then said:

" Leave it until it begins to moult -
Let me know when it moults its feathers."

Time passed, and the bird entered the moulting season. As its new feathers came through, its true colours were revealed. The bird had changed entirely; it now resembled a pied vulture, black and white, its plumage uneven and discordant, bearing no trace of that dazzling whiteness it had once displayed.

At that point, King Faisal said:
"Send for Prince Abdullah."

When he arrived, King Faisal gestured toward the bird and asked:
"Do you know this bird, Abdullah?"

Abdullah looked at it and replied, baffled:
"No... what is this patchy, piebald creature that looks like a vulture?!"

King Faisal said:
"This is your white bird, the one you gave us."

King Abdullah was stunned; he could barely believe what he was seeing. It was a sudden and complete transformation in the bird's appearance and colour.

King Faisal then said:
"Find out the story of this bird, how its colour changed in this way, and bring me the full truth."

Without delay, King Abdullah reached out to Sheikh Ibn Sha'lan and told him everything that had occurred, saying:
"Assure the man who sold you the bird that he has nothing to fear, but we want to know the full story and how this deception was carried out."

Ibn Sha'lan immediately contacted the trader who had sold him the falcon and said:
"You may keep the money, and you have my assurance of safety, but tell me, how did you deceive us in this way?"

The trader replied:
"When I found the bird, it was an ordinary falcon, worth very little. I brought in a skilled veterinarian from the Levant, and we sedated it for four hours. I then enlisted the services of a skilled Armenian automotive painter, who dyed the bird pure white, feather by feather, with great precision and skill, until it looked exactly as you saw it. It caught your eye, and you paid a handsome price for it, before the truth came out when it moulted and its real colours showed through once the temporary dye had faded."

He then added apologetically:
"I ask your forgiveness. A man with a trick will always use it!"

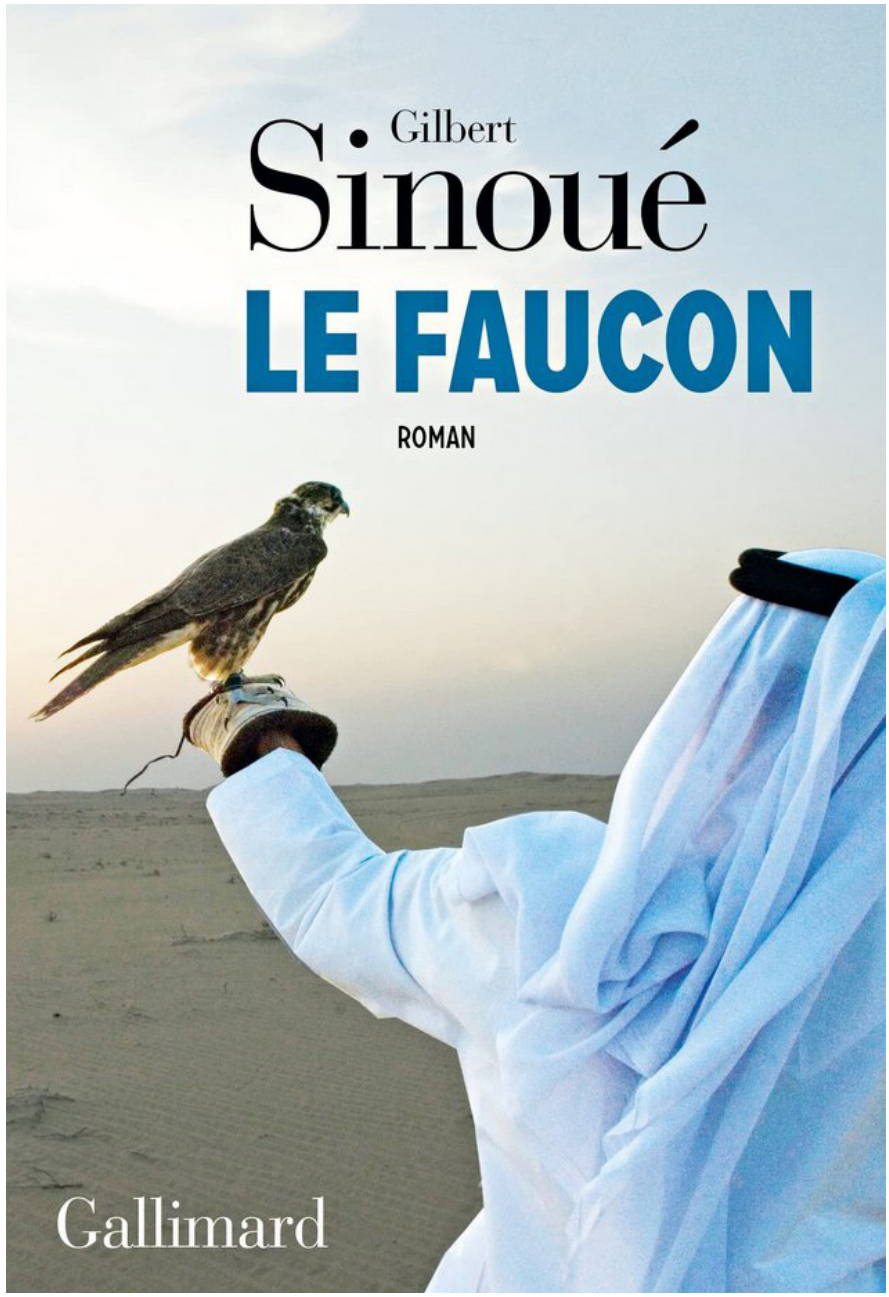
And so the truth came to light, and the lesson was clear; what is concealed must inevitably appear, and appearances may deceive, but the true nature of things will always reveal itself in the end, as the saying goes:
"What's in the pot will show on the ladle."

** Saudi writer and researcher*



"The Falcon"

A Leader's Life in the Form of a Novel



Sheikh Zayed: From the Heart of the Desert to the Pages of World Literature

It is rare for falconry to find its way into the modern novel as a pivotal element in the shaping of character and events. Yet the French-Egyptian author Gilbert Sinoué chose to make the falcon the key that unlocks the world of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may he rest in peace, in his novel Le Faucon — The Falcon — published by Gallimard, one of Europe's most distinguished publishing houses.

Through a historical narrative, the novel seeks to portray the Founding Father through the symbolism of the falcon, which embodies his defining qualities, from authenticity, strength, wisdom, far-sightedness, and the ambition to soar.

The Arabic edition of The Falcon was published by Dar Al Jamal, translated into Arabic by Saleh Al-Ashmar, and the novel is expected to be published in several other languages. It is also worth noting that the work was awarded the Sard Al Dhahab Prize 2023 in the UAE Narrative category, organised by the Abu Dhabi Arabic Language Centre.

The novel holds particular significance as one of the first major international literary works to place Sheikh Zayed at the centre of its narrative. It does not offer a conventional biography, but a work of fiction that draws on defining moments from his life and reimagines them through the language and imagination of literature bringing together historical fact and the art of the novel.

The Falcon as a Symbol of Leadership and Vision

Sinoué chose the title The Falcon with care. In the novel, the falcon is not merely a reference to a pursuit practised by Sheikh Zayed, it becomes a literary and cultural symbol that distils many of the qualities associated with his character. In the Arab imagination, the falcon stands for freedom, dignity, strength of will, and far-sightedness. These are the values the author sought to illuminate in his portrayal of the novel's central figure.

The author describes his protagonist as a man who emerged from the heart of the desert to lead an exceptional project of development, one that, within a few short decades, brought about a fundamental transformation in the lives of his people and his nation. Through this narrative vision, Sinoué draws the portrait of a leader who combined political wisdom with a profound connection to his land and heritage, and who succeeded in bringing together authenticity and modernity in an experience that has drawn the attention of scholars and historians across the world.

The novel moves through multiple stages of modern Emirati history, illuminating aspects of Sheikh Zayed's life, his human relationships, and his national convictions. It pauses at pivotal moments both before and after the founding of the United Arab Emirates, within a narrative framework that aims to present a deeply human portrait of the nation's leader and founder.

Writing biography in the Language of Fiction

Critical readings of the novel note that it celebrates Sheikh Zayed as a father, a brother, a ruler, and a poet, highlighting his presence in the lives of Arab and international figures who knew him or whose paths crossed his. One of the most striking aspects of the work is its incorporation of a number of Sheikh Zayed's own poems into the fabric of the narrative, a choice that lends the text a distinctive poetic depth, and offers the reader a window into his literary voice. Poetry here is not merely a complement to events, but a window into the inner world of the character, reflecting his human sensibility and his profound bond with place, nature, and heritage.

The novel equally reveals the author's deep knowledge of the history of the region. Gilbert Sinoué is well known for his engagement with historical novels and the biographies of figures who have shaped the course of different civilisations. He built his literary reputation on works exploring figures and events marking turning points in human history.

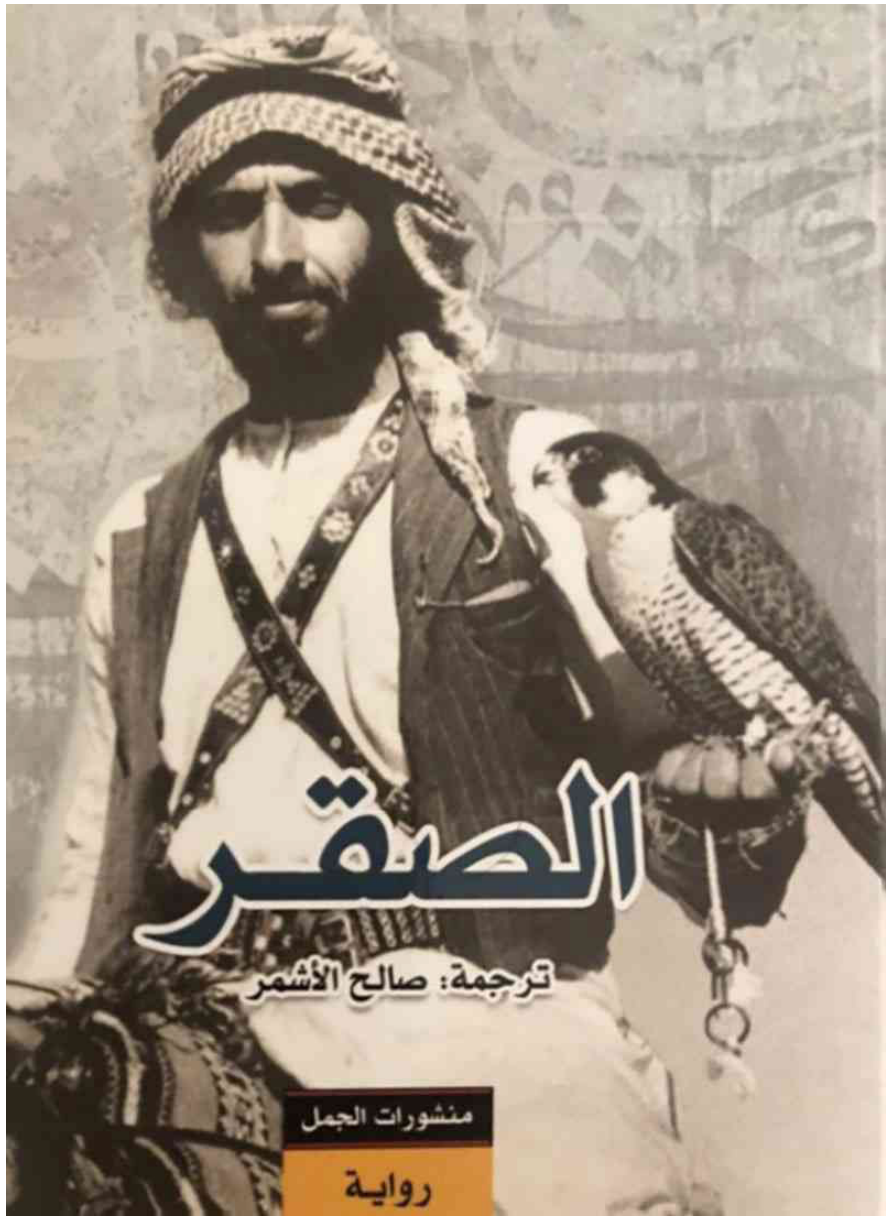
Falconry in Contemporary World Literature

In this context, The Falcon is a natural extension of that literary project, one that seeks to present history in a novelistic form capable of speaking to the contemporary reader.

The significance of the novel reaches beyond the boundaries of its local subject. It stands as a clear example of the place of falconry and the symbolism of the falcon in contemporary world literature. Here, the falcon does not appear as a bird of prey or a tool for hunting; it becomes a grand metaphor for leadership, vision, ambition, and the capacity to rise above challenges.

It is for this reason that the title speaks as much to the essence of the work as it does to the character at its heart.

In this sense, The Falcon offers a compelling model for how falconry can live within literature, affirming that this ancient heritage retains the power to inspire novelists and writers, just as it has inspired poets and artists across centuries. The falcon continues to hold its place as a cultural symbol that transcends the boundaries of time and place.



"The Author of The Falcon: "Sheikh Zayed Lived Within Me

The French author Gilbert Sinoué has spoken of his delight at the reception of the work, published by Gallimard, one of the foremost French publishing houses.

Sinoué expressed his happiness with the book and the positive response it has received, reflected in a wealth of articles and critical reviews. He said: *"I did not know a great deal about the late Sheikh Zayed, but I came to appreciate his immense significance during my visits to Abu Dhabi. The deeper I went into my research, the more astonished I became. He is among the greatest men the Arab world has ever known, if not the greatest."*

He went on to say: *"I felt as though Sheikh Zayed had lived within me, that I had entered his world entirely. This is something that has never happened to me in thirty-five years of professional life. Sheikh Zayed reminds me of Gandhi. I have never encountered anyone with such profound humanity."*

The Heritage School



3074

Trainees in an Exceptional Season

Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School

Where Heritage is Preserved and Generations are Forged



In the heart of the Emirati desert, where the bond between people, nature, and the sport of falconry stretches back to the earliest of times, the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School stands as one of the UAE's foremost heritage education initiatives and a unique model that brings together the authenticity of tradition and the standards of modern education.

The School was founded in 2016 in honour of the legacy of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may God rest his soul, and his enduring commitment to preserving falconry and passing it on to new generations in a responsible and balanced manner.

The School operates under the Emirates Falconers' Club and, since its establishment, has successfully delivered a specialised educational experience dedicated to teaching falconry and desert physiognomy through a comprehensive scientific and systematic approach.

The School in Numbers

2016
Founded

3074
Trainees in Season 10

10
Educational Seasons Completed

7-17 Years
Target age group

9747
Total Trainees

Emirates Falconers' Club
Supervising Body

63.5%
Male

36.5%
Female



An Educational Vision for the Preservation and Sustainability of Heritage

The Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School is guided by a vision aimed at elevating the standing of Arab falconry and ensuring its sustainability at the national, regional, and international levels. It stems from a firm conviction that falconry is not simply a hobby or a heritage sport, but a comprehensive cultural system, one bound to Emirati identity and to the relationship between humans and their desert environment.

Through its educational mission, the School aims to instill the principles of sustainable Arab falconry in new generations through teaching, training, and the acquisition of knowledge, ensuring that this ancient heritage continues and is transmitted accurately and responsibly to future generations.

In this framework, the School focuses on grounding the genuine customs and traditions associated with Arab falconry, acquainting students with the history of falconry in the UAE and across the Arabian Peninsula, and highlighting the country's efforts to preserve this cultural heritage and strengthen its presence both locally and internationally.

The School's programmes also aim to promote the principles and ethics of Arab falconry at the international level, by preparing a generation of falconers equipped with both scientific and practical knowledge, and clear awareness of the importance of environmental conservation, natural balance, and the sustainability of quarry populations.

The School offers specialised training courses covering falcon training, care, and nutrition, an introduction to the diseases that can affect birds of prey and the means of prevention, as well as the development of students' skills in handling falcons and understanding their behaviour, within a learning environment that combines field training with academic knowledge.

The School's objectives extend beyond the educational sphere to reinforcing the standing of falconry as an element of the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and as a cultural symbol of authentic Emirati society, while supporting international efforts to protect this heritage and raise awareness of the importance of its sustainability.

The School also ensures that students are introduced to the legislation and policies related to the protection of falconry and the environment, and encourages research and study in the fields of heritage and falconry, alongside participation in local, regional, and international conferences and forums concerned with safeguarding cultural heritage and enhancing its presence in contemporary society.

His Excellency Majid Ali Al Mansouri, Secretary General of the Emirates Falconers' Club, affirmed that falconry and desert physiognomy are "not merely a cultural legacy, but a comprehensive science and a way of life, one that brings together knowledge, values, responsible conduct, and a deep bond with the environment."

He noted that the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School has succeeded in presenting this heritage in its proper context, bridging the experience of fathers and grandfathers with the demands of modern education, helping to develop a generation that takes pride in its heritage and is well equipped to carry that trust forward into the future.











The Tenth Season: An Exceptional Milestone in the School's Journey

With the conclusion of the tenth season of the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School, spanning November 2025 through February 2026, the School has firmly established its place as one of the most successful heritage educational initiatives in the UAE, having achieved its highest enrolment since its founding in 2016.

The tenth season saw the participation of 3,074 male and female trainees, a record figure, the highest in the School's history, compared to 1,634 participants in the ninth season and 1,228 in the eighth. This growth reflects the continued expansion of interest in the School's programmes and the growing confidence in its role in teaching falconry and desert physiognomy through a modern, structured, and scientific approach.

The statistics also reveal the remarkable growth the School has undergone across its seasons. It began its first season (2016–2017) with just 100 students before expanding its programmes gradually, encompassing foundation courses, summer camps, virtual programmes during the Covid pandemic, and advanced programmes that now attract thousands of students and young people from across the emirates of the country.

Over its ten seasons, the School has trained a cumulative total of 9,747 participants, 6,189 male (63.5%) and 3,558 female (36.5%), reflecting the breadth of community engagement and the School's success in drawing in diverse age groups from among the sons and daughters of the UAE, within a comprehensive heritage learning environment.

The tenth season's statistics further illustrate the scale of expansion in the School's educational and community programmes: 819 students took part in school visits, 122 enrolled in the foundation course, and 27 in the membership programme, while more than 2,000 students benefited from the external participations and events organised by the School throughout the season.

The tenth season also saw 31 trainees participate in the third Emirati Japanese Falconry Program, a step that reflects the international cultural dimension the School has come to embody, alongside the reception of a range of delegations and visits, including 70 students from the Martyrs' Sons Camp, and diplomatic visits, all of which affirm the School's growing standing as an educational and cultural platform that reflects the values of Emirati heritage and contributes to its presence on the world stage.

The tenth season reflected the breadth and diversity that now characterise the School's educational and practical programmes. Students continued to receive both theoretical and hands-on training in falconry, desert physiognomy, the principles of Al Sana' (traditional Emirati ethics), and Emirati hospitality, alongside practical skills in handling falcons, understanding the desert environment, and the ethics of sustainable hunting.

This continued success demonstrates the School's ability to transform the UAE's heritage into a living educational experience that brings together knowledge and practice, while helping to nurture a new generation with a deeper connection to its national heritage and a greater appreciation of environmental stewardship and the cultural identity of the United Arab Emirates.



Educational Programmes Bringing Together Heritage, Knowledge, and Environmental Sustainability

The Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School is committed to delivering a comprehensive educational programme that integrates the heritage, knowledge, and applied dimensions of the subject, through programmes and courses designed specifically to introduce students to the world of falconry and desert physiognomy in an interactive and modern way, connecting theoretical learning with hands-on experience.

The School's educational programmes are organised across several tracks, foremost among them the Foundation Course and the Membership Course, through which students receive specialist knowledge on the history of falconry and Emirati cultural heritage, and on the efforts of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may God rest his soul, to preserve and safeguard the heritage of falconry for new generations.

Courses also cover topics relating to falcon species used in Arab falconry, quarry identification, methods of falcon training and care, the principles of sustainable hunting and environmental conservation, and natural balance, as well as physiognomy in falconry traditions around the world, raptor anatomy, in addition to traditional and contemporary falconry equipment.

The School places particular emphasis on the concepts of environmental sustainability, grounding the principles of sustainable hunting and acquainting students with the importance of protecting quarry and maintaining natural balance in the desert environment.

Its educational programmes work to cultivate a culture of respect for nature and responsible engagement with wildlife, reflecting the authentic values that have been associated with Arab falconry throughout its long history, and affirming the close relationship between environmental heritage and the sustainability of falconry for future generations.

The programmes naturally extend well beyond theoretical instruction. The School places primary emphasis on practical training and immersive field experience, allowing students to gain direct hands-on knowledge in working with falcons, understanding their behaviour, and becoming acquainted with the desert environment, its native plants, and the etiquette of desert journeys, deepening their connection with nature and with authentic Emirati heritage.





As part of broadening its community reach, the School organises the School Visits Programme, which offers students from government and private schools a comprehensive educational and cultural experience, introducing them to desert physiognomy skills, falcon species, falconry equipment, lure training, and the etiquette of preparing Arabic coffee and Emirati hospitality.

The School Visits Programme is distinguished by its interactive character, guiding students through a variety of field tours to identify desert plants, hands-on experience in lure training and the release of falcons, as well as introductory sessions on the history and fundamentals of falconry, making the educational experience more immediate, engaging, and impactful for students.

Through its diverse programmes and training curriculum, the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School has developed a modern educational model that preserves the authenticity of the UAE's heritage while introducing it to new generations through a scientific and practical approach that integrates knowledge, values, and national identity.





An Active Presence at Heritage and Community Events

The role of the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School extends well beyond the classroom and field-based training programmes. The School has also established a strong cultural and community presence through its active participation in leading heritage events and specialised exhibitions, both within the United Arab Emirates and abroad.

Among its most notable appearances was its participation in the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition (ADIHEX 2025), where the School showcased its educational mission and specialised programmes in falconry and desert physiognomy through an information booth within the Emirates Falconers' Club pavilion. The exhibition also provided an opportunity to engage with visitors and enthusiasts of heritage and the falconry.

The School likewise maintained a prominent presence at the Al Ain International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition, highlighting its role in passing the traditions of falconry on to younger generations and promoting its specialised educational and training programmes.

Reflecting its openness to emerging technologies, the School also participated in Autonomous Systems Week – Abu Dhabi 2025, where it showcased the integration of falconry heritage with modern technology and artificial intelligence. This participation underscored the School's ability to present the UAE's heritage in a contemporary manner that embraces technological innovation.

A Seasonal Branch at the Sheikh Zayed Festival Extending the Reach of Heritage

A seasonal branch of the School was launched at the Sheikh Zayed Festival in Al Wathba area, where the School delivered live demonstrations of falconry and desert physiognomy, contributing to reinforcing national identity and direct engagement with visitors. The pavilion of the Emirates Falconers' Club and the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School received more than 100,000 visitors, a clear indication of the growing community interest in the School's programmes and its cultural and heritage mission.

This significant step reflects the School's commitment toward broadening access to its educational programmes, and connecting heritage education with the major national cultural platforms that attract hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.

The seasonal branch gave visitors the opportunity to learn directly about the School's programmes and educational pathways, as well as to register on the spot for courses and activities designed for age groups from 7 to 17, within an interactive educational experience that brings together theoretical knowledge and practical application.

The seasonal branch also offered a range of programmes and activities covering an introduction to falcon species, methods of care and training, the principles of sustainable hunting, desert physiognomy, Al Sana' (traditional Emirati ethics), and the traditions of authentic Emirati hospitality, reflecting the School's mission to present Emirati heritage in a contemporary educational format that is accessible to all segments of society.

The launch of this seasonal branch represents a strategic step in strengthening the presence of Arab falconry at major national festivals and expanding the reach of the School's educational programmes to a wider community.













Learning Through Practice

The School employs a teaching approach that brings together theoretical study and practical application. On the theoretical side, students are introduced to the history of falconry, falcon species, falconry equipment, the ethics of hunting, and the importance of environmental conservation and natural balance. On the practical side, students train in safe handling of falcons, understanding their behaviour, and caring for them, as well as participating in actual hunting expeditions under the supervision of experienced falconers and specialists.

The School's role extends far beyond teaching falconry skills. It extends to shaping an informed and capable falconer, one who can make sound judgements, and is committed to the values of safety, responsibility, and respect for nature. The School's programmes also work to instill the values of patience, discipline, teamwork, and self-confidence, while developing observational skills and an understanding of desert physiognomy.

A Leading Emirati Model: Towards Season Eleven

The Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School represents a pioneering Emirati experience in transforming heritage into a living educational project built on knowledge, experience, and practice. It does not stop at teaching falconry skills, but also seeks to reinforce national identity and strengthen the bond between new generations and their environment and cultural heritage.

Through its educational and applied programmes, the School affirms that falconry is not a skill acquired by chance, but a science, an experience, and a set of values transmitted through organised learning.

Between the sands of the desert, the call of the lure, and the eyes of falcons soaring toward the horizon, the Mohamed bin Zayed Falconry and Desert Physiognomy School prepares for the launch of its eleventh season (2026–2027), continuing to write a distinctive Emirati story that makes heritage a science and national identity a living practice that pulses in the hearts of new generations.





The Roscongress Foundation is a socially oriented non-financial development institution and a major organizer of nationwide and international conventions; exhibitions; and business, public, youth, sporting, and cultural events. It was established in pursuance of a decision by the President of the Russian Federation.
The Foundation was established in 2007 with the aim of facilitating the development of Russia's economic potential, promoting its national interests, and strengthening the country's image.

The Roscongress Foundation's international platform is designed to support the development of international dialogue on trade, economic, cultural, and humanitarian cooperation. Its key task is to create international communication platforms that facilitate the establishment and maintenance of business contacts between representatives of Russian and foreign business communities, the implementation of joint projects in various fields, and the expansion of mutually beneficial cooperation as a whole.

Participants from
209 countries and territories

>15,000 media representatives

>5,000 experts in Russia and abroad

258 economic partners, including industrialists' and entrepreneurs' unions, financial, trade, and business associations from **93** countries worldwide

386 Russian public organizations, federal and legislative agencies, and federal subjects

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Figure 1

doi: 10.14202/vetworld.2025.1452-1465

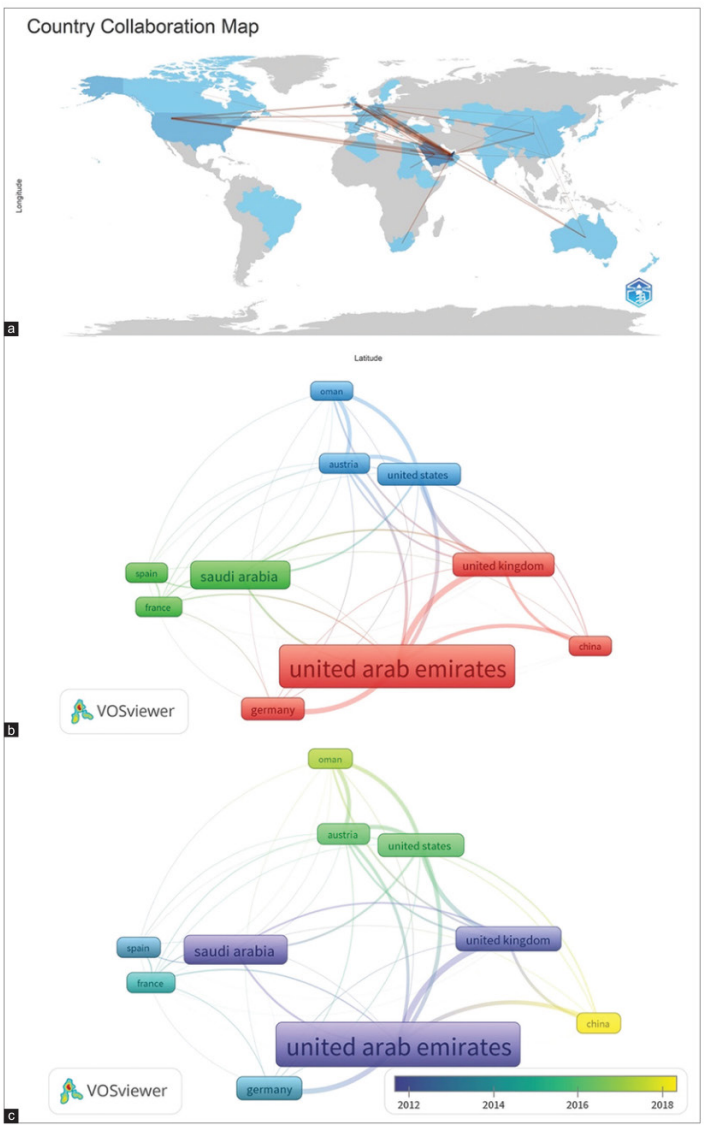


Figure 2: International collaboration in falcon research in the Arabian Gulf Region (1984–2024). The figure illustrates the patterns and evolution of international collaborations in falcon research related to the region. (a) The global map of collaborations, highlighting strong ties between the UAE and Saudi Arabia as well as key international partners. (b) A network visualization in which the UAE and Saudi Arabia are central nodes connected to other countries. (c) The time of evolution of these collaborations.

Falconry Between Heritage and the Laboratory

How Science Is Shaping the Future of Falconry in the Gulf Region

In the modern falcon hospitals of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Riyadh, Kuwait, and Doha, falconry is no longer simply a heritage practice tied to the desert and hunting expeditions; it has become a field of advanced scientific research. Behind the spectacle of falcons soaring overhead, specialized laboratories are analyzing DNA, tracking viral diseases, and studying genetic diversity, all in pursuit of protecting this cultural heritage and ensuring its sustainability for future generations.

Despite falconry's deep roots in Gulf cultural memory, scientific research reveals that this field is still developing at a remarkable pace, driven by pioneering work in which the UAE stands at the forefront, while knowledge gaps remain that call for greater investment and collaboration.

From Heritage to the Laboratory

With international recognition of falconry as an intangible cultural heritage, interest in falcons has moved well beyond traditional practice and become a subject of systematic scientific research.

In this context, a scientific study titled "Bibliometric Analysis of Falcon Research in GCC Countries (1984–2024)," prepared by a team of researchers and published in the journal Veterinary World , offers a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the trajectory of scientific research in this field over four decades.

Figure 1: Figure 1. Keyword cloud of falcon research in the GCC (1984–2024).

Figure 2: International collaboration in falcon research in the GCC (1984–2024), illustrating the patterns and evolution of international research partnerships in falcon studies across the region.



How Do We Read Science? A Rigorous Methodology Behind the Numbers

The study drew on a bibliometric analysis of the Scopus database, using specialized tools to track scientific publication trends, map research networks, and trace the evolution of scientific topics related to falcons across the GCC states.

To ensure accuracy, the researchers employed the PICO framework and the PRISMA methodology, both widely adopted in systematic studies, while excluding books, conference papers, and general reviews, focusing exclusively on original research publications.

This methodological rigor demonstrates that the findings are not based on general impressions or random aggregation, but on a precise scientific reading of four decades of falcon research, lending the analysis considerable credibility and reliability.

Modest Numbers But Revealing Ones

The study finds that the total scientific output on falcons in the GCC between 1984 and 2024 amounted to just 126 studies, representing an annual growth rate of 2.3%. The picture becomes clearer when the details are examined: 384 researchers contributed to these studies, with an average of 4.59 authors per paper, reflecting the strongly collaborative nature of this field.

These studies appeared across 63 scientific journals, indicating both the breadth of research interest and, conversely, the absence of a single dominant specialist journal dedicated to falcon research.

The Research Timeline: From Interruption to Accumulation

Scientific research on falcons in the Gulf did not follow a steady upward trajectory. It passed through periods of fluctuation and discontinuity, particularly during the 1980s and early 1990s, when some years saw no scientific publications at all.

The situation began to shift gradually toward the late 1990s, before more visible growth emerged after 2010, driven by the expansion of veterinary institutions, growing concern over epidemic diseases, and the entry of molecular technologies into the field.

In some years, the number of published studies reached seven, a figure that remains modest compared with other research fields, yet signals the emergence of an increasingly stable and more mature body of knowledge.

The Gulf Research Landscape: Clear Disparities and Concentrated Research Output

The study reveals a marked concentration of scientific research output, with the UAE leads the Gulf, followed by Saudi Arabia, while the remaining GCC countries contribute comparatively little.

This disparity reflects not only differences in capacity, but also the varying degrees to which falconry has been integrated into scientific and research ecosystems across the region.

The UAE: Where Heritage Becomes an Integrated Scientific System

Within this landscape, the UAE stands out as the most advanced model in transforming falconry from a heritage practice into a fully integrated scientific system.

The presence of specialized hospitals, advanced research centers, and programmes covering treatment, captive breeding, and genetic diagnostics has helped build an environment that brings together traditional expertise and modern technology, a development clearly reflected in the UAE's scientific research output.

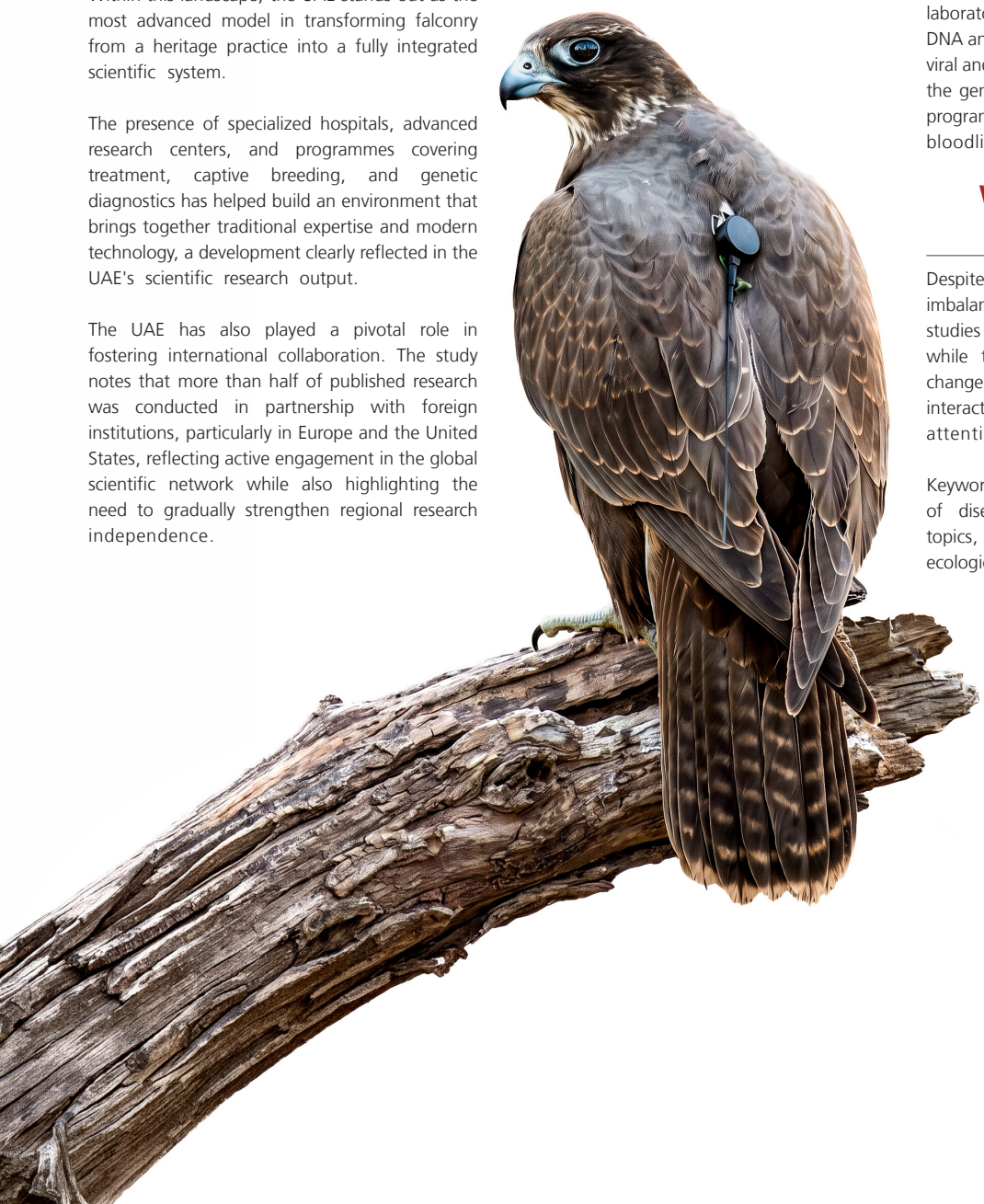
The UAE has also played a pivotal role in fostering international collaboration. The study notes that more than half of published research was conducted in partnership with foreign institutions, particularly in Europe and the United States, reflecting active engagement in the global scientific network while also highlighting the need to gradually strengthen regional research independence.

Research Networks: Collaboration Across Borders

The analysis of research networks reveals extensive scientific relationships linking the Gulf with leading research centers, particularly in Germany, Austria, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

This collaboration has helped transfer expertise and drive the adoption of advanced techniques in molecular diagnostics, the study of viral diseases, and the analysis of genetic diversity in falcons.

At the same time, this pattern of collaboration raises an important question about the region's capacity to build an independent knowledge system capable of leading scientific research, rather than merely participating in it.



From the Clinic to the Molecular Laboratory: How Has Research Evolved?

The study documents a clear shift in the nature of scientific research, with studies moving from a focus on traditional diseases and clinical diagnosis to the use of molecular technologies and DNA analysis.

Some recent studies have also addressed globally significant issues such as avian influenza and zoonotic diseases, reflecting the growing intersection of falcon research with animal health and environmental security at the international level.

Modern veterinary examinations no longer rely solely on conventional tests. Specialized laboratories now use genetic sequencing and DNA analysis techniques for the early detection of viral and fungal diseases, as well as for monitoring the genetic diversity of falcons used in breeding programmes and the conservation of rare bloodlines.

What Are We Studying and What Are We Missing?

Despite this progress, the study points to a clear imbalance in research attention. The majority of studies focus on health and veterinary aspects, while topics such as falcon ecology, climate change, migration patterns, and ecological interactions receive comparatively limited attention

Keyword mapping further reveals a dominance of disease, diagnosis, and treatment-related topics, alongside a relative scarcity of long-term ecological studies.

Knowledge Gaps Seeking Answers

The study identifies several knowledge gaps that require further investigation, most notably:

- Limited advanced genetic studies
- Lack of epidemiological research
- A shortage of scientifically grounded captive breeding programmes
- Insufficient research on environmental issues and climate change

The study argues that these gaps represent not merely weaknesses, but genuine research opportunities capable of giving rise to a new generation of scientific studies on falcons across the region.

Toward a Comprehensive Science of Falconry

From a broader perspective, falcons today stand at the intersection of culture, the environment, and science, giving scientific research in this field a distinctly strategic dimension. Research no longer aims solely to treat falcons or improve their performance; they have become part of a wider endeavor to protect cultural heritage, understand biodiversity, and develop sustainable strategies for preserving this unique legacy.

When Science Protects a Living Legacy

This study reveals that the future of falconry in the Gulf will not be built on traditional practice alone, but on the scientific knowledge that supports and advances it.

While leading Gulf models continue to emerge in this field, the real challenge lies in expanding this momentum and transforming it into a fully integrated research system, one that connects heritage with the laboratory and field expertise with science, and ensures the continuity of this legacy for generations to come.

In the Gulf region, where the bond between humans and falcon has endured for centuries, the future of this heritage will be shaped not only on hunting grounds, but inside laboratories, across databases, and through scientific research networks that span the globe.





Source:

Bibliometric Analysis of Falcon Research in GCC Countries (1984–2024), Veterinary World – PubMed Central (PMC)
https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12269954/

When Geography Rewrites the Laws of Survival:

A New Study Reveals: Rarity Alone Is Not Enough for Species Survival

For a long time, biodiversity in nature appeared to be the result of a delicate balance among living organisms, a balance that allows different species to coexist within the same ecosystem without any single species gaining complete dominance over another.

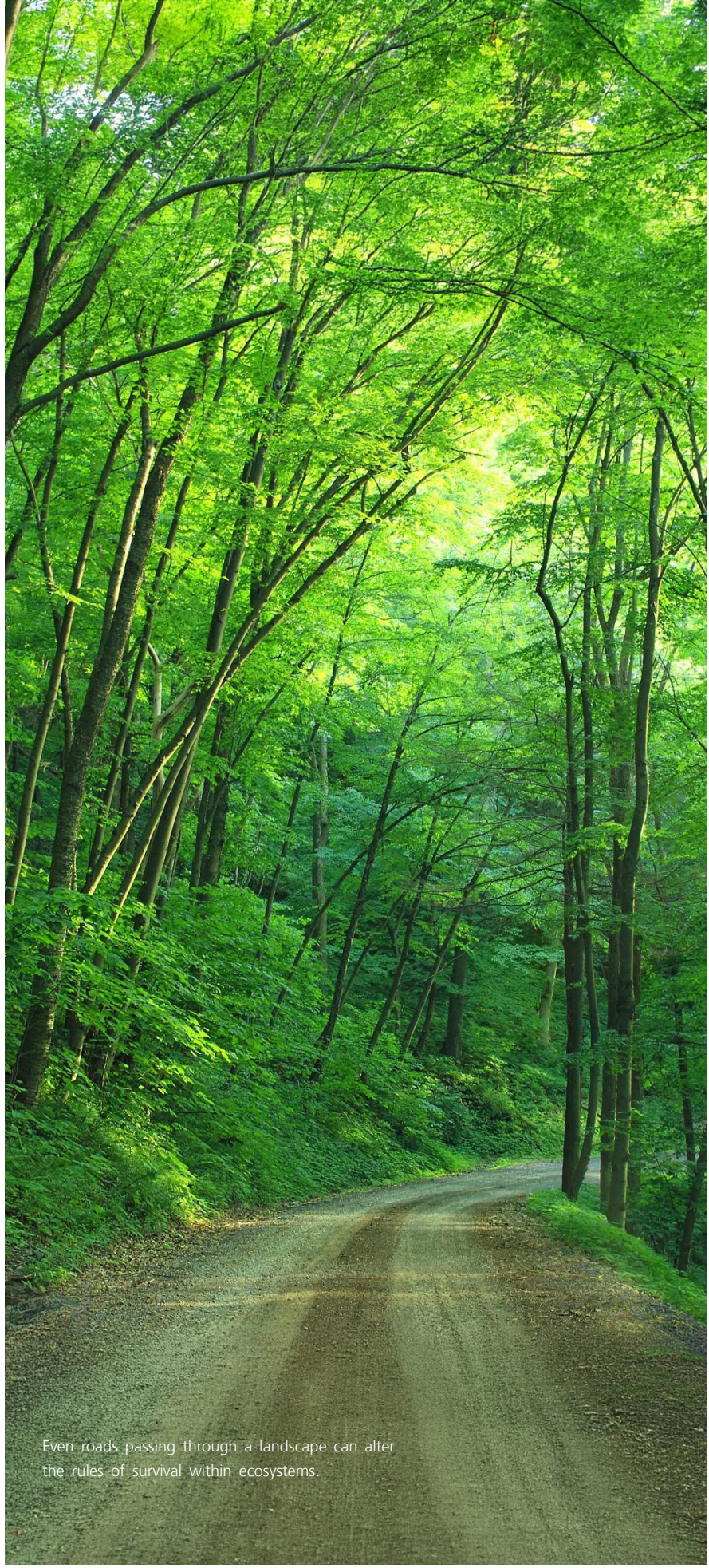
Among the ideas that became firmly established in evolutionary ecology was a theory proposing that rarity itself might be a survival strategy. A species that exists in smaller numbers may stand a better chance of persisting because it faces less competition, or because it can access resources that more abundant species leave untouched.

This concept, known scientifically as negative frequency-dependent selection (the "rare advantage"), remained for decades one of the foundational pillars of our understanding of biodiversity. Scientists used it to explain many phenomena in nature, from the stability of biological communities to the diversity of birds and organisms within isolated environments and islands.

But a recent study from researchers at Carnegie Mellon University, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), has reopened this question from an entirely different angle, posing a deeper inquiry:

Is rarity alone sufficient to protect species, or is the place itself the true determining factor in who survives and who disappears?

According to the scientific report prepared by Marilee Williams and published by Carnegie Mellon University, the study's findings suggest that habitat connectivity may be a more influential factor than the "rare advantage" itself in determining a species' ability to survive.



Even roads passing through a landscape can alter the rules of survival within ecosystems.



Urban sprawl not only changes the shape of cities, but also redraws ecological relationships.

The Theory That Shaped Scientific Understanding for Decades

The concept of negative frequency-dependent selection rests on a principle that appears simple at first glance, yet carries profound significance in ecology. When a species becomes rare, competition for it diminishes and its chances of benefiting from available resources increase, helping it recover and persist within the ecosystem.

Conversely, more abundant species face greater pressure due to intensified competition and resource consumption, which prevents them from achieving full environmental dominance. In this way, a form of natural equilibrium is established that allows biodiversity to continue.

This idea seemed capable of explaining many natural phenomena that had long puzzled scientists, such as the sustained coexistence of large numbers of different species within the same environments despite constant competition. It was also used to explain certain evolutionary and behavioral phenomena, and even some biological patterns within the human body.

Yet this theory, as researchers today observe, rested on an unspoken assumption: that organisms move within an open, connected world that allows for constant interaction between species and individuals.

A World Connected in Theory Fragmented in Reality

When we look at maps of the natural world, it appears interconnected and open. But ecological reality is far more complex. Species do not inhabit a single, uniform space; they live within fragmented environments separated by countless natural and human-made barriers.

Mountains, rivers, deserts, highways, cities, built-up areas, farmland, and fences all constitute real boundaries that affect the movement of organisms and limit their ability to disperse, interact, and reproduce.

This was the central premise of the new study:

If species do not live in fully open environments, do the rules of negative frequency-dependent selection still hold as previously understood?

To answer this question, the researchers developed mathematical models to simulate fragmented environments and studied how survival dynamics shift when natural habitats become isolated from one another.

When Rare Species Lose Their Advantage

The findings showed that rarity does not operate in the same way in fragmented environments. In open, connected environments, rare species are able to leverage their natural advantage because they interact continuously with other species across a wide range.

But when habitats become fragmented into isolated patches, opportunities for interaction diminish considerably, and each part of the ecosystem effectively becomes a semi-independent world of its own.

In such conditions, rare species may lose the very advantage that once aided their survival, because the balancing mechanism itself becomes constrained within small, isolated ranges.

The study notes that the spatial structure of an ecosystem is not merely a backdrop against which organisms move; it is a fundamental element that reshapes ecological relationships and the very laws of survival.



In isolated environments, species may maintain local equilibrium within confined ranges without that equilibrium extending to the broader ecosystem.



Aerial view of Sesoko Island in Japan's Ryukyu Archipelago, where researchers drew on data from island bird populations to study the effects of geographic isolation on biodiversity.

A Paradox That Overturned Conventional Thinking

Among the findings that most captured the researchers' attention was an unexpected paradox revealed by the scientific models. In certain fragmented environments, different species continued to coexist for extended periods even in the complete absence of any genuine advantage for the rare species.

This means that the persistence of biodiversity does not always depend on the mechanism of negative frequency-dependent selection as previously thought. Instead, it may depend on how organisms are distributed across the landscape, and to the nature of connectivity, or isolation, between different ecological habitats.

In other words, geography itself may sometimes matter more than rarity in determining the fate of species.

The Ryukyu Islands Nature Provides the Evidence

To ensure the findings were not confined to theoretical models, the researchers drew on real-world data from bird populations in Japan's Ryukyu Islands, an archipelago well known for its pronounced geographic isolation.

The data revealed that the rarity advantage does indeed operate within each individual island, where species maintain a form of local equilibrium within their confined range. However, this effect does not transfer between islands because of the spatial isolation that prevents broad interaction between biological communities.

In this way, nature itself provided a real-world example that supports what the mathematical models had shown: spatial fragmentation is no less important than the biological characteristics of the organisms themselves.

The study further shows that mechanisms operating within small local ranges do not necessarily produce the same outcome at the level of the broader ecosystem, as geographic fragmentation can effectively decouple local equilibrium from overall biodiversity.

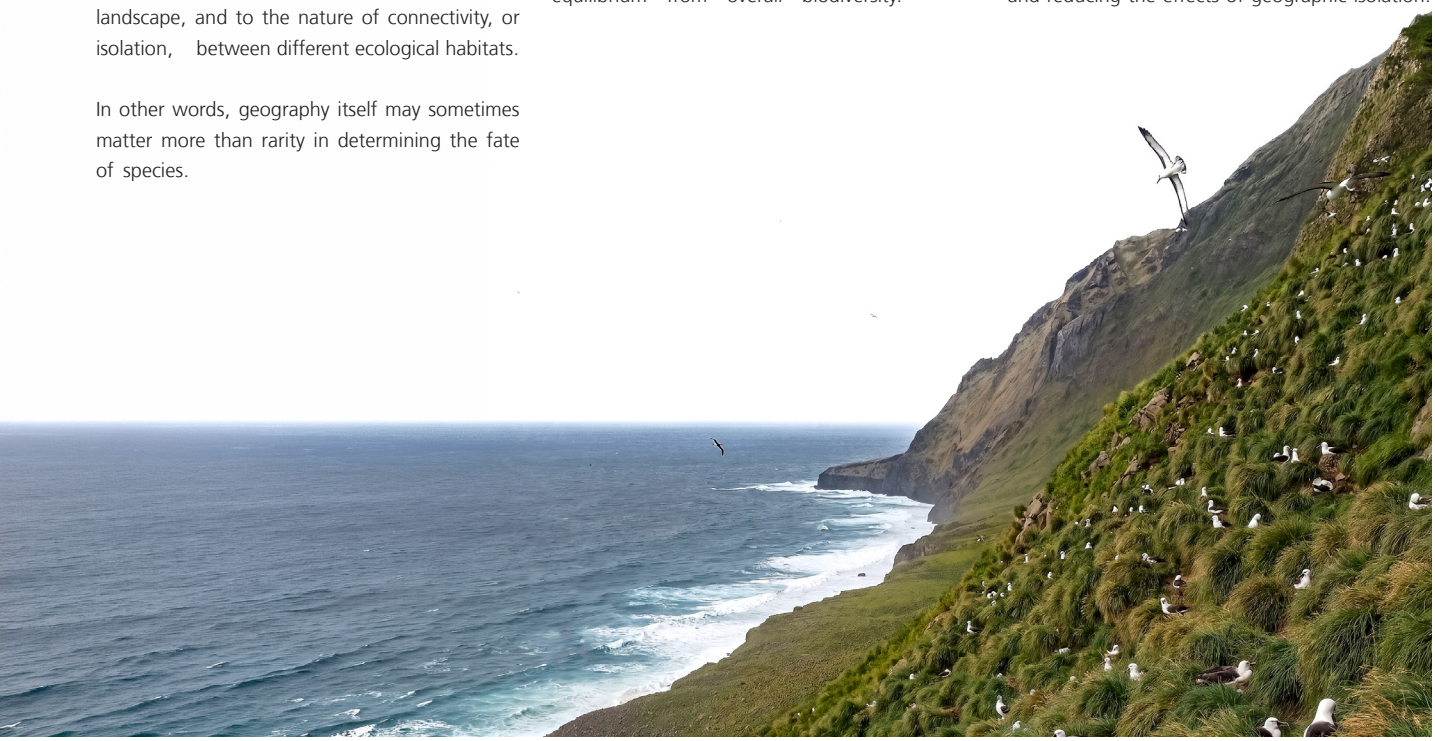
Why Do These Findings Matter Globally?

The significance of these findings lies in the fact that they come at a time when the world is experiencing accelerating and unprecedented environmental change. Urban expansion, road networks, and industrial and agricultural projects are continuously fragmenting and isolating natural habitats from one another.

In many cases, conservation efforts focus on protecting species as individual units, while overlooking the impact of geographic changes that prevent those species from moving and interacting naturally.

The new study, however, suggests that preserving biodiversity means more than preventing extinction; it also requires maintaining ecological connectivity that allows species to disperse, interact, and reproduce.

These findings carry additional weight given the substantial investments being made by conservation institutions worldwide to establish ecological corridors that reconnect fragmented habitats, with the goal of protecting biodiversity and reducing the effects of geographic isolation.



From Forests and Birds to the Human Body

What makes this study particularly compelling is that its implications extend well beyond ecology. The researchers believe that the same patterns may manifest within the microscopic biological systems of the human body, most notably inside cancerous tumors.

The researchers point out that tumors are not homogeneous masses, but complex environments that sometimes contain isolated regions separated by barriers of dead tissue, conditions that allow certain rare cells to survive and evolve within specific parts of the tumor.

Understanding the relationship between place and rarity may therefore contribute to new insights into how certain diseases develop, and potentially open different avenues in future approaches to treatment.

Oana Carja, Assistant Professor of Computational Biology at Carnegie Mellon University, explains that understanding the relationship between spatial structure and biodiversity is not limited to protecting species in nature; it extends to understanding disease within the human body.

She notes that this understanding could, in the future, support biodiversity conservation efforts by reconnecting fragmented natural habitats, while also opening new perspectives on how diseases spread and how cancerous tumors evolve within the body.

Carja further explains that her team's research seeks to understand how social and spatial structures influence the evolution of biological systems, from the microbiome, bacteria, and viruses, all the way to complex ecological communities.

Redefining What Survival Means

This study reveals that our understanding of nature may be more complex than scientists had long imagined. Survival is not determined solely by the number of organisms, nor governed by competition alone; it is also shaped by the very way environments are structured.

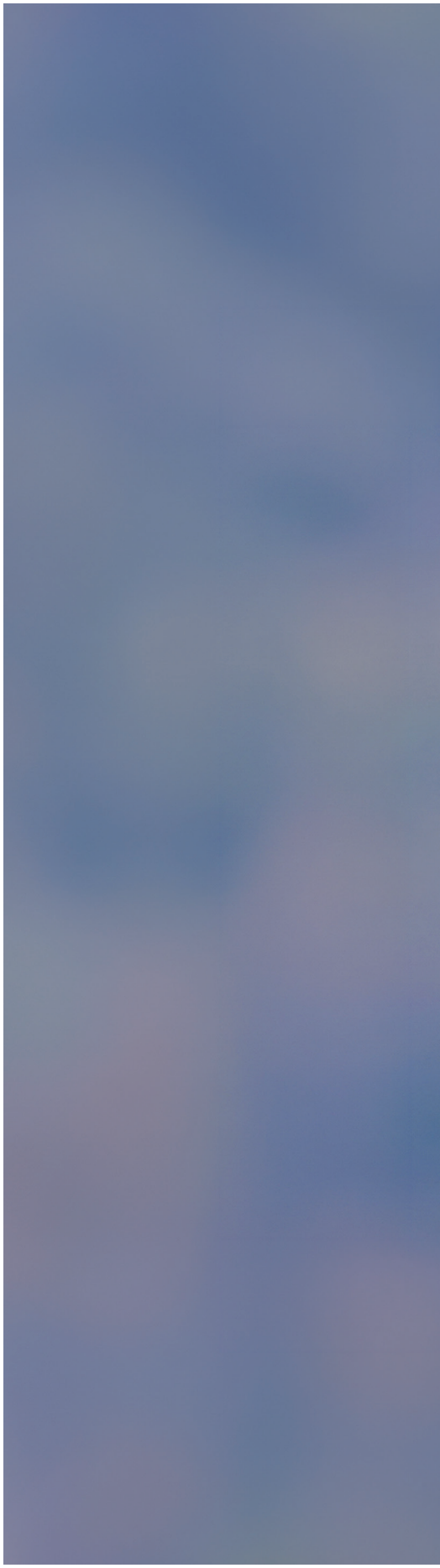
A rare species may have a chance of survival in an open environment, yet lose that chance entirely when the environment becomes a collection of isolated islands divided by barriers.

And so the study poses an old question in a new form:

What matters is not only how many organisms exist, but how they move, how they connect, and how the place itself allows them to remain alive.

References and Sources:

- Local Negative Frequency Dependence Can Decrease Global Coexistence in Fragmented Populations — Carnegie Mellon University.
- CMU Research Challenges Long-Held Ecological Belief of How Rare Species Survive.
- Carja, O., & Devadhasan, A. (2026). Spatial Structure and Negative Frequency-Dependent Selection. Carnegie Mellon University





The ability of organisms to survive depends not only on their characteristics, but also on the structure of the environment within which they move.

From the Clubs



The Falconry School in Paris

When Birds of Prey Become a Science and a Profession - A Modern European Experience

Amid the quiet forests north of the French capital, in an area that feels closer to unspoilt wilderness than to the bustle of Europe's great cities, falcons, eagles, owls, and vultures soar above open expanses where the voices of falconers and their daily instructions echo through the air.

There, within a dedicated training environment, falconry is not presented merely as a hobby or a form of public entertainment, but as a professional discipline grounded in science, rigour, and sustained fieldwork.

This is the home of the Falconry School of Paris (École de Fauconnerie de Paris) one of France's and Europe's foremost institutions specialising in falconry education and the professional handling of birds of prey, offering a model that illustrates a distinctly different dimension of how falconry is practised and developed worldwide.

The school does not present itself as a tourist attraction or simply a venue for bird displays. It is an officially recognised educational institution, dedicated to training professional falconers and specialists in raptor care, managing educational demonstrations, and using birds of prey in a range of environmental and professional applications.





Eight permanent specialists work at the school, covering falconry, ornithology, raptor veterinary medicine, and anatomy. University academics are also brought in to support specific units within the educational and training programmes.

The school is directed by French expert Frédérique Flaesch, who represents a contemporary model of the European falconer, combining heritage and art of falconry with modern applications, including professional training, film production, and the use of falconry as an ecological tool for urban wildlife management, all while preserving the family tradition of passing knowledge and experience between generations.

A Professional Academy for Falconry

In the traditional European imagination, falconry is bound up with images of nobility, knights, and royal hunts. For centuries, birds of prey served as symbols of social standing and prestige within European courts. In recent decades, however, there has been a marked shift in the way modern institutions engage with this ancient legacy.

In France today, falconry is no longer a purely historical practice rooted in the past. It has become an educational and professional field that brings together:

Ornithology, Veterinary Care, Behavioural Training, Environmental Education, and Cultural Demonstrations.

The Falconry School of Paris clearly embodies this transformation, approaching the falconer as a specialist who requires precise scientific knowledge, daily practical skills, and the ability to communicate with the public and manage birds with professionalism.

Accordingly, the school is closer to a professional academy for falconry than to an amateur club. Employment opportunities are available to graduates who complete the school's programmes, meaning that enrolment is driven not only by passion, but also by clear professional considerations.

Inside the Forests of Val-d'Oise A Natural Setting for Training Birds of Prey

The school is located in the Val-d'Oise region north of Paris, set within a large park that forms part of a vast forest, less than an hour's drive from the capital.

This location gives the school a fundamental advantage: a natural environment suited to free flight, hands-on training, and direct engagement with birds of prey under conditions that closely resemble the natural environment.

From the moment a trainee arrives, it is evident that the space has been designed as a fully integrated: professional environment, housing and care facilities, flight grounds, training equipment, and areas for daily fieldwork.

It is within this setting that the unique relationship between falconer and bird begins to take shape, a relationship built not on control, but on careful observation, trust, and constant communication.



From Hobby to Profession

The school is guided by a clear vision of transforming falconry from an amateur pursuit into a structured professional pathway.

To this end, it offers several core programmes:

- A professional programme in raptor care.
- A professional programme for developing expert falconers.
- A specialisation in ecological bird dispersal, using birds of prey to deter and displace nuisance birds.
- A specialisation in educational shows with birds of prey.

The school also organises short courses and introductory workshops targeting enthusiasts and the general public, covering the identification of raptor species and hands-on flying sessions conducted under the supervision of professional falconers.

Group sizes are kept deliberately small, typically no more than eight participants, to ensure training quality and allow direct engagement with the birds.

Perhaps most striking is that some training programmes allow participants to work with as many as fifty different birds of prey during a single programme, offering a rich opportunity to understand the behavioural and physical differences between species.





Hours to Forge a Professional Falconer 350

The professional falconer training programme is the cornerstone of the school, an intensive ten-week course equivalent to approximately 350 training hours, running from nine in the morning until five in the evening every day.

That figure alone speaks to the seriousness with which the school approaches falconer development. Rather than relying on classroom instruction or brief demonstrations alone, the programme is built around sustained daily practice and professional discipline.

The curriculum is divided into three principal phases:

Scientific knowledge of the bird, Acquisition of daily skills, and practical application and professional communication.

The school's underlying philosophy is one of gradual progression. Before a trainee is permitted to release a bird of prey or engage in fieldwork, they must first understand the bird itself:

Its behaviour, anatomy, needs, responses, and relationship to its environment.

Starting with Science: Understanding the Raptor Before Handling It

The opening days are devoted to identifying raptor species, studying their scientific classification, anatomical characteristics, feeding habits, and the distinct behavioural characteristics of each species.

This is not presented as a mere theoretical introduction, but as the essential foundation upon which the entire training programme is built.

The school operates from a clear conviction: a true falconer does not begin with hunting; he begins with understanding.

From the outset, trainees learn to observe the bird with precision:

Its posture, eye movements, its response to sound, changes in appetite, and the behavioural differences between species.

These may appear to be minor details, but they form the very core of the daily relationship between falconer and bird.



Health and Care: Discipline Before Flight

Training then moves to the health and organisational aspects of managing birds of prey, covering:

Biosecurity, disease prevention, first aid, managing bird housing facilities, working with veterinarians, and following health monitoring protocols.

From there, daily hands-on practice begins:

Cleaning the facilities, handling falconry equipment, preparing the birds, and providing direct care.

At this stage, the trainee experiences their first short flight sessions, a defining moment in the development of trust between falconer and bird.

Flight here is not a performance; it is a careful test of a relationship that has been taking shape gradually through daily care and handling.



Manning and Weight Management: The Heart of Modern Falconry

An entire week is dedicated to manning, weight management, and nutrition, all regarded as among the most important and nuanced aspects of professional falconry.

During this phase, trainees learn to:

Monitor weight daily, understand the relationship between nutrition and performance, practice glove-feeding, and read behavioural cues linked to the bird's physical condition.

It quickly becomes clear to the falconer that weight management is not a routine procedure:

It is a precise language for understanding and communicating with the raptor.

A small increase or a slight decrease can have an immediate effect on the bird's inclination to fly, its responsiveness to the call, its activity level, and even its general temperament.

For this reason, the daily weigh-in at the school forms part of the "silent dialogue" between falconer and bird.



From Care to Practical Performance

As the programme advances, trainees move into more complex levels of flight and fieldwork, including:

High and low-altitude flight, recall techniques, flying beyond the training facilities, and monitoring the bird's health and behaviour during various activities.

Participants also learn how to use birds of prey in educational activities and public displays, a skill that requires the ability to combine bird handling, scientific explanation, and communication with the public.

In this way, the school produces not simply hunters, but individuals capable of representing the culture of falconry to the wider public.



Birds of Prey in Service of the Environment

One of the most notable aspects of the school's programmes is its focus on ecological bird dispersal using raptors.

This refers to the deployment of falcons, vultures, and other birds of prey to disperse flocks of birds from:

Airports, farms, industrial facilities, and sensitive sites.

This technique has become an established environmental tool across Europe for addressing bird-related challenges through natural, non-harmful means, as an alternative to chemical or harmful methods.

The school offers a dedicated four-week programme in this specialization, a field that illustrates how European falconry has evolved to become directly connected to environmental services and modern ecological management.



The Falconer Before an Audience: When Falconry Becomes a Cultural Message

Training at the school extends beyond working with the bird alone; it also prepares trainees to deliver educational and public-awareness displays.

Participants practise presenting to audiences, preparing commentary to accompany flights, communicating scientific information in accessible terms, and conducting practice demonstrations.

At this point, falconry transforms from an individual practice into a cultural and educational message.

The school views a bird of prey not merely as an animal for flight or hunting, but as a means of introducing people to nature, ecological balance, and the relationship between human beings and wildlife.









Simulating Real Professional Life

The programme reaches its culmination in the final two weeks, as trainees move from the learning stage to assuming full practical responsibility.

In the ninth week, they begin carrying out the birds' full daily care programme with near-complete autonomy, including feeding, weight monitoring, facility cleaning, equipment preparation, and organising flight sessions.

The tenth and final week marks the final assessment phase, during which the trainees are required to manage the complete daily cycle independently, from care and flight through to displays and technical preparation.

The school's stated aim is to ensure that each trainee is fully prepared to enter professional practice by combining theoretical knowledge with practical skills.

Between the French Experience and the Universal Spirit of Falconry

The experience of the Falconry School of Paris reveals a different face of modern European falconry, one that reintroduces an ancient heritage through the language of the present day:

Education, professionalism, the environment, and cultural engagement.

Despite the different historical contexts across countries, the essence of falconry remains universal: the deep bond between human and bird, the long patience through which trust is built, and the mutual respect between falconer and raptor.

In this respect above all, the French experience stands as a contemporary effort to preserve the spirit of traditional falconry within a new institutional and professional framework.



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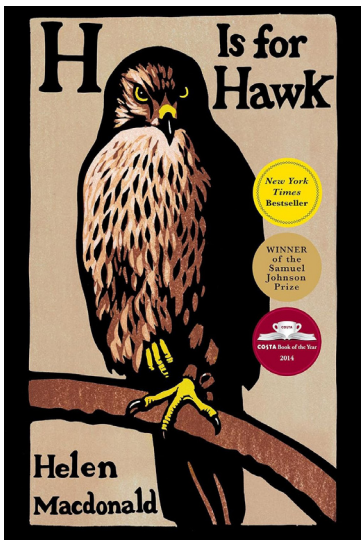
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Falconry as a Human Language and the Rediscovery of the Self:

Between Loss, Literature, Cinema, and Instinct

This reading draws on press interviews with Helen Macdonald and Claire Foy, published in Country-file and The Hollywood Reporter, together with material on the visual style and filming locations of H Is for Hawk.

When Grief Leads to the Wild

In a world whose pace has accelerated to the point where people struggle to listen to themselves, falconry appears at first glance to belong to another time entirely, a time of long patience, close observation, and direct engagement with the natural world.

Yet this traditional image, for all its depth, reveals only one dimension of a far more layered experience.

When falconry enters exceptional human contexts, as in the experience documented by British author and ornithologist Helen Macdonald in her celebrated work H Is for Hawk, later brought to the screen through the performance of British actress Claire Foy, it transforms from a skill into an existential journey, from a heritage practice into a tool for self-understanding, and from a relationship with a bird of prey into an open reckoning with questions of loss, meaning, and the limits of human control.

Falconry as an Instinctive Response to Loss

Macdonald's decision to train a goshawk was not a passing choice or simply a continuation of an old hobby, it was an act that bordered on instinct, a response to a profound personal trauma: the death of her father. In that moment when the mind can no longer process pain and grief becomes an overwhelming, uncontainable state, she turned to a creature that knows nothing of this emotional language, a creature that offers no consolation and no sympathy, but instead imposes a sharp, insistent presence, demands complete attention, and silently reorders a person's inner priorities, allowing no room for escape.

Here, falconry begins to take shape as an alternative system of meaning. Grief shifts from a formless internal state into a sequence of precise actions: observation, training, response, and continuous reading of signals from a bird that says nothing, yet reveals a great deal.

The Goshawk: A Partner That Cannot Be Fully Tamed

The goshawk, as one of the most complex of all raptors, was not merely a technical choice, it was a defining element of the experience itself. This bird, known for its acute sensitivity, volatile temperament, and fierce independence, does not offer its keeper a stable or reassuring relationship.

The goshawk is distinguished by a degree of autonomy and sensitivity that sets it apart from many of the birds used in falconry, making the work of reading its behaviour and responses exceptionally demanding. It does not settle into companionship in the way that some other raptors might, which means working with it is closer to an ongoing dialogue with something wild than to any conventional taming process.

The falconer here does not impose their own rhythm, they learn instead to read a different rhythm, to move within it without breaking it. This transforms falconry into a continuous exercise in understanding limits: the bird's limits, the human's limits, and the precise distance at which the two can meet without either one negating the other.

Falconry and Focused Attention: Reorganising the Inner World

This constant tension between control and release, between closeness and distance, lends falconry a psychological depth that far exceeds what is ordinarily attributed to it. Working with a bird of prey demands a particular mental state, one of complete presence and concentrated attention, a state that psychology recognises as one of the clearest and most effective states of awareness for reorganising a person's inner experience.

In this state, the mental noise of anxiety and memory recedes, and present-moment awareness tied to action moves forward. The person is no longer absorbed in interpreting what they feel, but wholly occupied with what they are doing. This shift, though it may appear simple, carries a profound effect, because it relocates the centre of gravity from inner turmoil to outward order, from feeling to doing, from distraction to focus.

What gives this state its distinctive character is that the falconer does not simply focus on the bird, they gradually begin to attempt to perceive the world through the bird's own mode of awareness.

Raptors do not engage with their environment as a field of meanings or memories. They engage with it as a space of immediate signals and present opportunities. Thus, the falconer develops a remarkable capacity to redirect their attention toward the present moment, as though temporarily learning a different perceptual language from the one ordinarily available to human beings.



Nature as an Alternative System of Meaning

Yet this "outside" is not a neutral space, it is nature itself, with all the laws that distinguish it from the human world.

In Macdonald's experience, as in the essence of falconry more broadly, nature does not appear as an aesthetic backdrop. It emerges as a complete alternative system, one in which the relationship with time, the body, and perception is recast from the ground up.

This shift carries a particular significance in Macdonald's own case, given that she came from an academic environment built on analysis, interpretation, and intellectual abstraction. Falconry propelled her out of a world in which experience is mediated through concepts and theories, and into a world in which it is mediated through observation and direct response, a transition that reveals something essential about falconry's capacity to reorder the priorities of human perception.

The rhythm here is not set by the clocks of the city, but by the movement of light, the behaviour of the bird, and the changes in the wind. Decisions are not built on social or purely rational considerations, but on an immediate reading of subtle indicators: the angle of a wing, a change in the gaze, a hesitation in movement.

In this sense, falconry becomes an experience of passage, from a world governed by language to a world governed by signals, from a culture of interpretation to an instinct of response.

Falconry and Cinema: When Reality Collides with Representation

When this experience made the transition to the screen, it encountered a fundamental challenge that goes to the heart of falconry itself: how can one represent a relationship that is, in essence, unrepresentable? Cinema, for all its extraordinary power to recreate reality, rests on control, repeated takes, and the subordination of all elements to the demands of narrative.

But a bird of prey, and a goshawk in particular, cannot be fully absorbed into this system. It does not repeat the same action twice in exactly the same way, does not always respond on cue, and does not conform to the path the director has in mind. This required the performance, as in Claire Foy's experience, to shift from representation to interaction, from execution to response, with the bird's presence becoming a force that sets its own terms on the scene, rather than simply an element deployed to serve it.



The paradox is that the bird's natural defiance of the demands of filming was itself one of the sources of the film's authenticity. The less control exerted over the raptor, the more the real moment asserted itself within the scene, and the performance shifted from calculated imitation to genuine engagement with a creature that retained its full independence before the camera.

Foy has noted that her training in working with the goshawk was among the most unusual experiences of her professional career, because the relationship is not built through direction or commands, but through the gradual development of mutual trust, stillness, and sustained attention. These were requirements that brought her closer to the lived experience that Macdonald herself had undergone.

The Visual Geography: Place as Inner Mirror

This interplay between what is controllable and what is by nature ungovernable redefined the relationship between cinema and falconry, making the film a genuine testing ground for the limits of artistic control. The shot that takes shape in this context is not the product of complete planning; it is the product of a delicate equilibrium between what can be managed and what must simply be accepted as it is.

This is what lends the film a rare visual authenticity, because what appears on screen is not merely a representation of a relationship with a bird, but part of that relationship itself, as it takes shape before the camera.

Place, too, played a central role in carrying this experience from the interior to the exterior, from the private to the shared. Moving between spaces such as Cambridge, with its disciplined academic and urban order, and the raw, open expanses of Wales was not a geographic choice alone, but a visual translation of the transformaation the character undergoes.

Place here does not simply frame the events; it reflects and shapes them. Open landscapes become extensions of solitude; coastlines and fields become mirrors of inner states. This reaffirms that falconry cannot be separated from its environment, and that understanding it requires reading the bird, the place, and the human being together as elements of a single system.

The Goshawk and Loss: A Relationship That Does Not Replace but Reshapes

At the deepest level of this experience, the question of loss remains ever-present, not as a direct subject, but as an unseen force that drives everything. The relationship with the bird, with all its tension and closeness, reflects indirectly the nature of the relationship with the one who is absent: a presence that cannot be held, a closeness that does not eliminate distance.

The goshawk, in this context, does not compensate for loss or fill the void. Instead, it offers a new way of living with it, a way built on coexistence rather than overcoming, on continuation rather than forgetting.

Falconry as a Shared Human Language

Here, falconry moves beyond its identity as a practice to become a language capable of carrying the deepest of human experiences, a language that does not rely on words, yet can express the most complex of states.

This explains falconry's ability to move from a private experience to a work of world literature, and then to a film that speaks to a diverse global audience, without ever losing its essential character. For at its core, it rests on elements that are universal: the relationship with nature, the attempt to understand what cannot be controlled, and the search for meaning in the face of loss.

This also accounts, perhaps, for the wide international reach achieved by the story, in both its literary and cinematic forms. Audiences did not engage with it simply because it is about falconry, but because it uses falconry as a doorway into shared human questions that transcend cultures and borders: How does a person face loss? How do they rebuild their relationship with the world after it has broken? And how can nature become a medium through which the self is rediscovered?

It is worth noting that Macdonald's interest in the world of birds of prey as a cultural and historical phenomenon was long-standing. This interest was reflected in her book Falcon, which explored the bird's presence in myth, symbol, and human memory, and was published years before her more celebrated H Is for Hawk.

The Limits of Control and the Meaning of Understanding

In an age in which human beings seek to exercise control over everything, from technology to the environment, falconry reminds us of a simple but profound truth: not every relationship can be reduced to commands, and not every creature can be fitted into a closed system.

There is always a space for the wild, within nature, and within ourselves, a space that cannot be fully tamed, but that can be understood, or at the very least lived alongside.

Perhaps this is precisely why falconry continues to draw people across ages and cultures, not only because it is a skill or a heritage, but because it is an experience that reveals something fundamental about our nature: that however far we travel from the wild, we remain bound to a world that does not revolve around us, and that understanding this world begins not with controlling it, but with listening to it.

It is a wisdom that falconers have carried for centuries, having long understood that a successful relationship with a raptor rests not on subjugation, but on building trust, reading signals, and respecting the nature of the creature that accompanies them.



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EMIRATES FALCONERS' CLUB

Raptors in Falconry Around the World

Diversity of Birds and Different Environments

Falconry, throughout its long history, has been deeply tied to the local environments in which it took root. Falconers relied on birds of prey native to their natural surroundings, trapping them from the wild for use during the hunting season, then releasing them at its end, a practice that reflects a profound understanding of nature's cycles and ecological balance.

Over the centuries, falconry spread widely across peoples and civilisations, and the geography of each region, along with its quarry, shaped which raptors were used and how they were trained. This diversity gave rise to distinct schools of falconry, each with its own traditions, terminology, and methods, yet all sharing a common appreciation of the raptor as the falconer's partner in the hunt.

Over the past five decades, falconry has undergone a significant transformation, as falconers and specialised centres have succeeded in captive-breeding most species of falconry birds. This has helped ease the pressure on wild populations, which faced numerous challenges including habitat loss, pesticide poisoning, and harm from electrocution.

Today, falconry is practised largely with captive-bred birds, or wild-caught birds, in accordance with each country's laws, regulations, and environmental considerations.

Modern breeding programmes have contributed to the conservation of several species that came under increasing environmental pressure during the twentieth century. They have also enabled falconers to work with bloodlines selected for specific traits, such as speed, power, or endurance, which in turn has influenced the development of contemporary falconry methods across the world.





Peregrine Falcon

Falconry in the Arabian Peninsula

In the United Arab Emirates, falconry has traditionally centred on two principal species: the Peregrine and the Saker, both of which have proven highly suited to desert environments and their quarry. In recent years, the Gyr has also become part of this tradition, along with hybrid falcons produced by crossing the Gyr with the Saker or the Peregrine, prized for combining strength, speed, and endurance.

The reputation of the Peregrine and the Saker is rooted in their ability to handle open desert terrain, where pursuing quarry demands long distances and high speeds. These qualities have firmly established both species within the local heritage, to the point where they have become among the most iconic symbols associated with falconry across the Gulf region.

The Gyr is widely used across the Gulf countries, despite not being a desert species, as well as in North America and, traditionally, in Northern Europe, particularly in Scandinavia and Iceland. It originates from the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions of the Northern Hemisphere and is the largest of all falcon species.

The Peregrine is the second most widely used bird in falconry after the Goshawk, yet it is the species most closely associated with the image of falconry in the human imagination. The Peregrine occurs naturally on virtually every continent except Antarctica, which is why it is found across the full breadth of falconry traditions worldwide, from the Arabian deserts to the European coastlines and the American plains.



Harris's Hawk

The Americas and the Diversity of Raptors

In North America, the Prairie Falcon is commonly used, a medium-sized falcon well suited to local quarry. In South America, the Aplomado Falcon is widely favoured, renowned for its agility and exceptional manoeuvrability in open environments. It is flown at quarry in direct pursuit, one of the most thrilling styles of falconry.

The Red-tailed Hawk is also a popular choice for beginners in falconry, and is equally valued by experienced falconers across America and Europe.

Another notable bird on the American continent is Harris's Hawk, the Chestnut-winged Hawk, distinguished by its ability to adapt to hot desert climates and take medium-sized quarry. While it cannot match some other falcons in outright speed, the ease of its training and handling has made it one of the most popular raptors among falconers. It is also distinguished by a rare trait among birds of prey: hunting in groups.

The remarkable diversity of raptors used across the Americas reflects the marked differences in natural environments between north and south, from deserts and plains to grasslands and open woodlands. This has given rise to a wide variety of training and hunting methods, each suited to the character of its region and quarry.

Europe, the Merlin and "the Cook of the Table"

In Europe, the Merlin holds a special place in the world of falconry, earning the title "Lady of the Falcons." Known for its elegance and grace in flight, it is most often used in late summer to capture small birds, delivering displays that combine skill, precision, and beauty.

The Goshawk is among the most versatile of hunting birds, and is used by many falconers around the world. Its quarry ranges from small to medium-sized birds, such as crows, ducks, partridges, and pheasants, as well as small mammals such as rabbits. In the medieval era it was known as "the Cook of the Table," a reference to its ability to put food on the table.

The Goshawk is characterised by its speed and exceptional ability to swoop and pursue quarry over long distances; falconers frequently work it with dogs to help flush quarry from cover. Training the Gos demands considerable patience, but it is a rewarding and exciting bird to fly.

The Sparrowhawk, the smaller cousin of the Gos, is known for its unpredictable, ambush-style hunting, striking quarry with sudden and rapid attacks. It is a bird that requires significant expertise and care, and is not generally recommended for beginners.

The importance of falconry in Europe has never been limited to hunting alone; it has historically been bound up with social standing and cultural identity, with certain raptors earning a distinguished place in European literature and arts, becoming symbols of grace, skill, and chivalry.

Africa and New Zealand

In Africa, the Lanner Falcon stands as a prime example of adaptation to high temperatures and arid environments, a raptor that has demonstrated its capacity to perform under harsh climatic conditions.

In New Zealand, the native falcon, known as the Karearea, is distinguished by its short wings and long tail, which grant it exceptional manoeuvrability, as well as a bold and spirited temperament that has made it one of the most distinctive raptors in the region.

The Indian Subcontinent and Asia

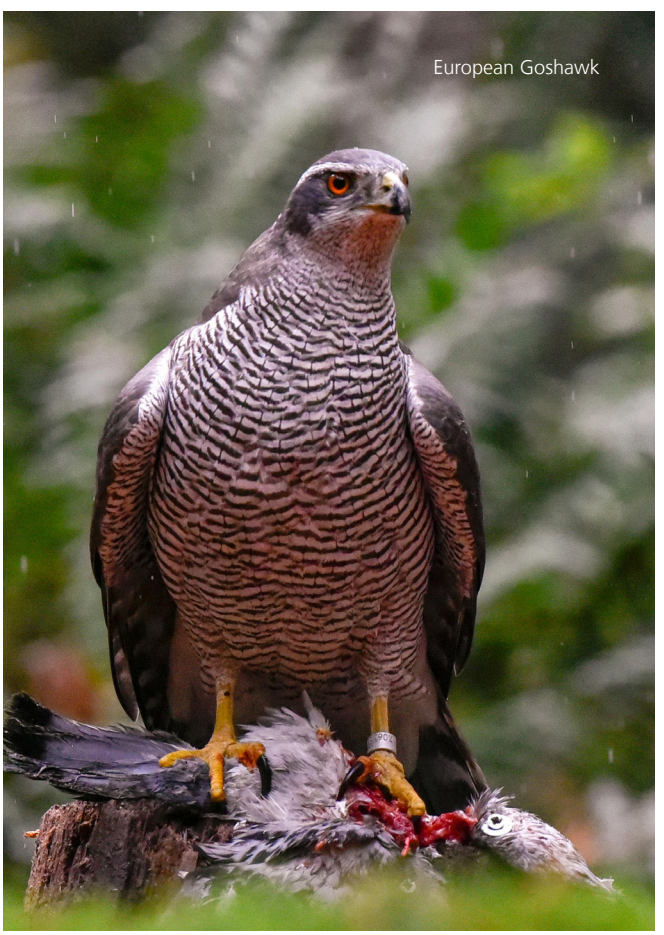
Across the Indian subcontinent, the "Turumti", a red-headed falcon, is used in falconry practices deeply embedded in local culture. In Pakistan, falconers rely extensively on Goshawks capable of taking both ground quarry and birds in forested terrain, often working alongside trained dogs to locate and flush prey from cover.

Goshawks and Sparrowhawks are among the most widely used falconry birds in the world, prized for their speed, sharp responsiveness, and distinctive yellow eyes. However, working with them demands considerable commitment and experience from the falconer, given their high sensitivity and active nature.

These raptors reveal a different dimension of falconry, one that relies on rapid response and manoeuvrability in complex environments such as forests and woodlands. For this reason, they require close attention and a strong bond with the falconer, making them among the most demanding raptors to work with.



Merlin Falcon



European Goshawk



Gyr Falcon



Golden Eagle

Central Asia: The Eagles, Masters of the Sky

Eagles remain among the most awe-inspiring and majestic birds in the world of falconry. In Mongolia, Kazakhstan, and across the vast steppes of Asia, falconry with eagles continues to represent an ancient and enduring tradition. The practice has also spread to Europe and has seen a notable rise in North America and southern Africa.

Among the most prominent species used are the Golden Eagle, the Imperial Eagle, the Steppe Eagle, the Short-toed Snake Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, and other eagles known for their ability to take large quarry.

Falconers of Central Asia fly the Golden Eagle, with its immensely powerful feet, to hunt wolves, both to protect their livestock and to use the pelts as protection against the bitter cold.

Eagle falconry is among the oldest hunting traditions in Central Asia, with the skills of eagle training passed down through families from one generation to the next. The practice remains alive in a number of heritage festivals that showcase the remarkable bond between falconer and bird, and keep this ancient cultural legacy alive.

Raptors Beyond Falconry and the Challenges of Survival

Although certain other raptors are no longer used in falconry, they face very real threats to their survival. Vultures across parts of India and Pakistan have suffered severely from consuming the carcasses of animals treated with the anti-inflammatory drug Diclofenac, causing a deeply alarming decline in their numbers.

The owl, despite its beauty and vital ecological role, faces harm in some parts of the world due to longstanding folk beliefs and inherited superstitions. Among the best-known species facing these challenges are the Barn Owl and the Pharaoh Eagle-Owl.

At a time when falconry continues to evolve and benefit from scientific advancement, the importance of efforts to protect raptors and their natural habitats grows ever greater. Conserving these birds serves not only falconry, but also the ecological balance in which raptors play a pivotal role as apex predators in the food chain.

Classification of Birds Used in Falconry

Falconers classify birds of prey according to wing shape into three main categories:

- Longwings: such as falcons (Peregrine, Saker, Gyr, Merlin)
- Shortwings: such as hawks (Goshawk, Sparrowhawk)
- Broadwings: such as large birds of prey and eagles (Harris's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Golden Eagle)

An Exceptional Partnership with the Natural World

The falconry birds of the world mirror the diversity of environments and cultures from which this ancient sport has grown. While the species used, the methods of training, and the styles of hunting differ from one region to another, the common thread remains the unique relationship between humans and raptors, a relationship built on knowledge, patience, and a deep respect for nature.

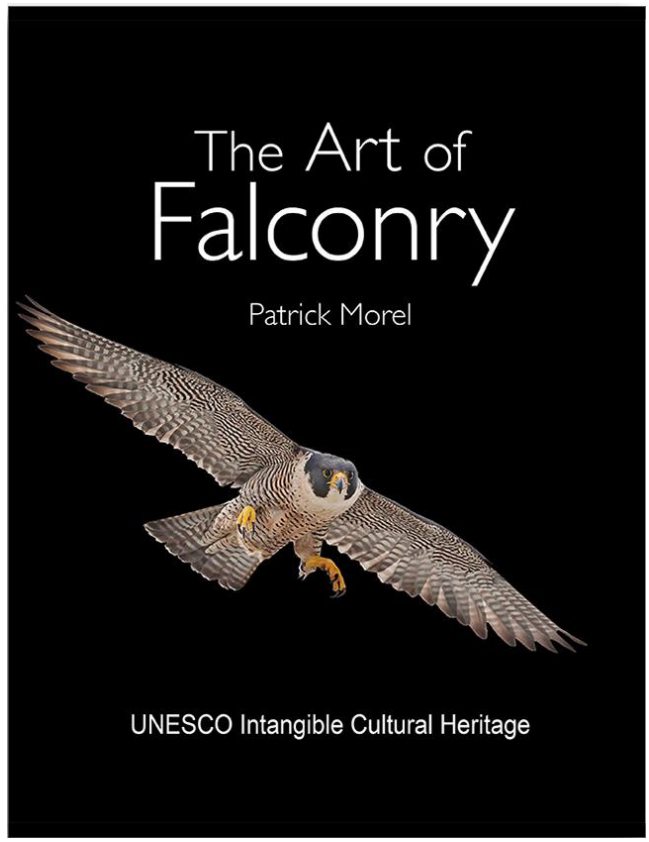
From the Arabian deserts to the Central Asian steppes, from the forests of Europe to the open landscapes of the Americas, birds of prey stand as a living testament to humanity's ability to forge an exceptional partnership with the natural world, and to preserve a cultural heritage that stretches across the centuries.

The World Falconry Library...

Books Telling the Story of Falcons and Falconers

Throughout its long history, falconry has formed a comprehensive world of knowledge, traditions, arts, and skills passed between peoples and generations, finding its way into the pages of books, studies, novels, and historical manuscripts. From the Middle Ages to the present day, falconers, scholars, researchers, and writers have authored hundreds of works documenting their relationship with birds of prey, seeking to understand their secrets, behaviour, and place within human culture.

In this edition of our "Publications" section, we take a closer look at a selection of books representing important milestones in the global literature of falconry, works that serve as a source of inspiration for researchers, historians, and raptor enthusiasts around the globe.



A Global Human Heritage: The Art of Falconry... A Journey Across World Cultures

Despite the diversity of environments and local traditions in which the ancient art of falconry has been practised, the discipline has always preserved its essence: the singular relationship between man and bird of prey, and the body of knowledge and experience passed down across generations over long centuries.

It is in this context that The Art of Falconry by French researcher and photographer Patrick Morel stands out as one of the most significant recent publications to approach falconry from a comprehensive global perspective, combining historical documentation, field observation, and photography in a work that illuminates the cultural diversity that distinguishes falconry communities across the world.

The author takes the reader on a journey stretching from the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula to the steppes of Central Asia and the forests and meadows of Europe, examining the similarities and differences between the various schools of falconry, and showing how the practice has managed to maintain its presence through the ages despite the social and technological transformations the world has undergone.

The book places particular importance on the role falconry plays in the preservation of cultural heritage, as an integrated system of skills, knowledge, and social values bound to the natural world.

The author highlights the international efforts that led to falconry's inscription on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, an achievement that reflects the global standing falconry enjoys as a bridge of connection between peoples and cultures.

Among the publication's most distinctive features is its use of photography as a tool for both documentation and storytelling simultaneously. The book contains a large collection of field photographs taken across numerous countries, capturing falconers, their birds, their equipment, and their natural environments, offering the reader a visual landscape that reflects the richness and diversity of this heritage.

The author also addresses the role that modern falconry plays in supporting conservation efforts for birds of prey and their natural habitats, clarifying that the relationship between falconer and bird is no longer limited to training and hunting, it now extends to scientific research programmes, rehabilitation and reintroduction into the wild, and initiatives aimed at protecting threatened species and raising environmental awareness.

The book further presents a number of national experiences that have contributed to the preservation of falconry and the transmission of its knowledge to new generations, affirming that the continuation of this heritage depends on the ability of communities to safeguard its intellectual and cultural components alongside the natural environment in which it took root.

An Aristocratic Culture

Falconry... The Royal Art

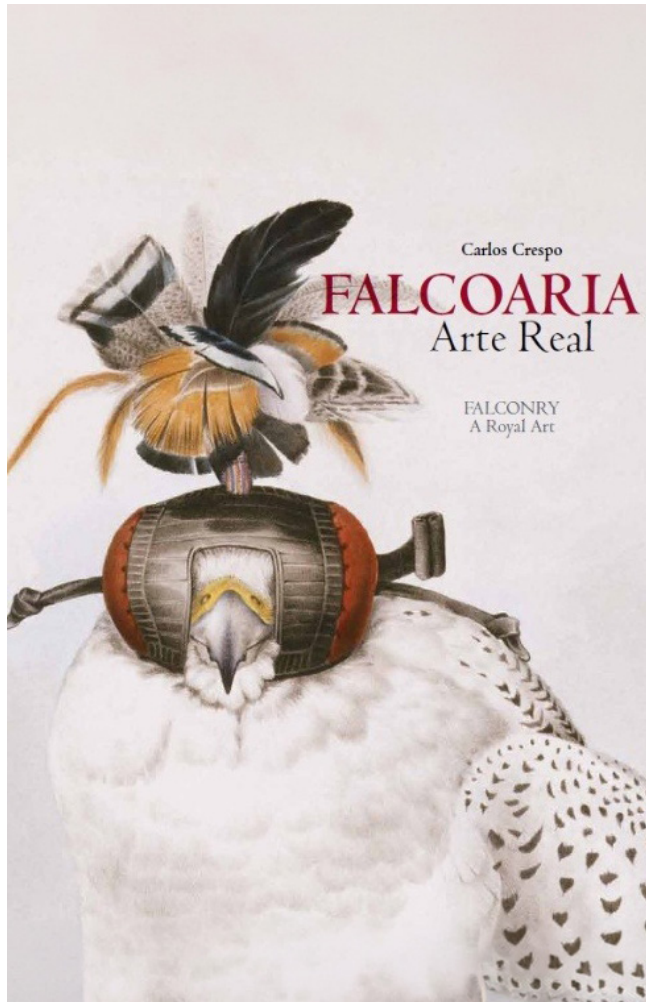
For centuries, falconry was tied to ruling elites and royal families across the world, becoming a symbol of chivalry, courage, prestige, and high social standing. In Europe in particular, falconry occupied an exceptional place within royal courts, not merely as a means of hunting, but as a cultural and social practice that reflected refined taste and the symbols of power and influence.

It is from this historical legacy that Falcoaria: Arte Real – Falconry, A Royal Art by Portuguese author Carlos Crespo draws its significance, offering the reader an illustrated journey into the world of royal falconry, surveying its history, traditions, and place in European culture across the ages.

The book draws on rich documentary material bringing together contemporary photography, fine art paintings, historical manuscripts, and rare documents, presenting a comprehensive picture of the bond that united kings, princes, and knights with this ancient art. Through its pages, the reader discovers the role falconry played in the daily life of European courts, and the status occupied by birds of prey as symbols of power, discipline, and courage.

The author pays particular attention to the Portuguese and Iberian traditions of falconry, among the oldest and most enduring in Europe, tracing how the methods of training, hunting, and caring for birds of prey evolved, along with the development of the tools, dress, and symbols associated with falconry across different historical periods.

The book also reveals the broad presence of falconry in the European arts, where falcons appeared in oil paintings, miniatures, illuminated manuscripts, and decorative objects, becoming part of the visual language artists used to express concepts of nobility, authority, and connection with nature. These works of art underscore the esteem in which falconers were held in European societies, and the role falconry played in shaping a significant facet of aristocratic culture.



The book does not confine itself to the past alone, but also addresses the contemporary reality of falconry and the efforts made by specialist associations and institutions to preserve this heritage and transmit it to new generations. The author shows how falconry has managed to adapt to the demands of the modern age without losing the essence and traditional values it has maintained for centuries.

The publication is distinguished by the high quality of its artistic design, its pages read almost as a visual exhibition documenting the history of European falconry, offering readers the opportunity to discover rare scenes and images that reflect the richness and diversity of this heritage. Its audience, accordingly, extends well beyond falconers and researchers to encompass all those with an interest in art history, heritage, and European culture.

The Reference That Was Centuries Ahead of Its Time

The Art of Falconry... An Encyclopaedia of Birds of Prey from the Thirteenth Century

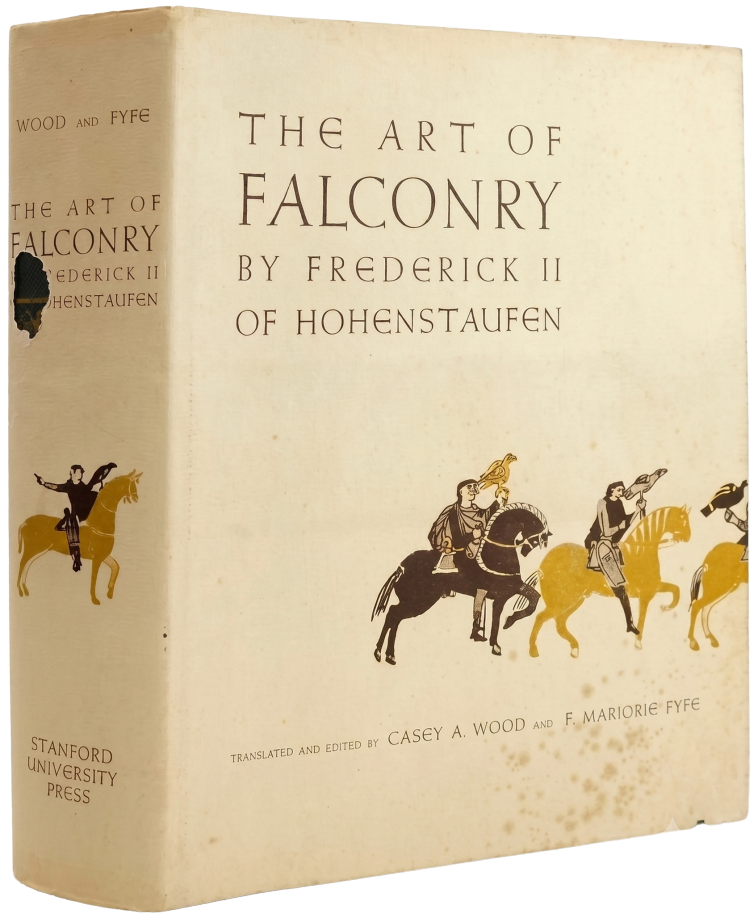
When the global history of falconry is discussed, the name of Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen (1194–1250 AD) stands out as one of the most influential figures in the documentation of knowledge relating to birds of prey and their training. This ruler, scholar, and researcher left behind an extraordinary work that remains to this day one of the most important texts ever written in the history of falconry: De Arte Venandi cum Avibus, known the world over as The Art of Falconry.

Frederick II composed his work during the thirteenth century, a period of great flourishing in the exchange of knowledge between East and West. He drew upon the expertise of falconers and scholars he encountered through his travels and diplomatic contacts, and was influenced by the scientific knowledge transmitted into Europe through Arab and Islamic civilisation. This cultural cross-pollination was reflected in the content of the book, which brought together precise scientific observation and practical experience in the handling of birds of prey.

This work differs from most writings of its era in that it relied not merely on transmission and repetition, but on direct observation and experimentation. The author devoted considerable attention to the study of birds' behaviour, anatomy, sensory capabilities, and flight patterns, endeavouring to explain the phenomena associated with them through a scientific approach grounded in observation and testing.

The book contains detailed descriptions of the various species of birds of prey known in that age, with explanations of their characteristics, behaviour, methods of training, and use in the hunt. It also addresses the care of falcons and the approaches to handling them at different stages of training, along with an account of many of the falconry practices prevalent in medieval Europe.

Among the most distinctive features of this work are the illustrations and illuminated manuscripts that accompanied its historical copies, which today constitute one of the most important visual sources for the study of European falconry history. These illustrations display a remarkable precision in depicting birds of prey, their postures and behaviour, as well as documenting the tools of falconry and their use in that era.



Many researchers hold that the significance of this book extends beyond falconry alone, reaching into the broader history of the natural sciences. The author presented precise observations on birds, their lives, and their behaviour at a time when systematic scientific study was still in its earliest stages. For this reason, some historians regard Frederick II as one of the earliest researchers to apply the method of scientific observation to the study of living creatures.

The book also reveals the high standing that falconry occupied in European societies during the Middle Ages, where it represented an activity combining knowledge, skill, and chivalry, associated with kings, princes, and nobles. Yet the true value of the work lies in its ability to transcend the limits of its time, for many of its observations continue to captivate researchers and historians to this day.

The book has maintained its presence across the centuries through multiple translations and studies, and has become an essential reference for all who engage with the history of falconry or the development of knowledge concerning birds of prey. It has also introduced successive generations of readers to one of the most important chapters in the history of the relationship between humans and bird.

Raptors and Falconry in the Arab-Islamic Heritage

When Falconry Became a Science in Arab Civilization

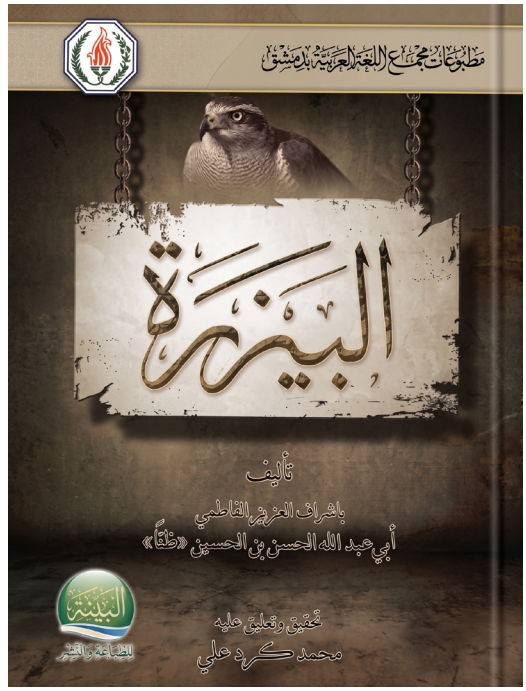
Centuries before the famous European works on falconry appeared, Arab scholars and falconers had already laid the foundations of an extensive body of knowledge about birds of prey, leaving behind specialised texts covering the rearing of falcons, goshawks, and peregrines, their training, care, and the treatment of their ailments.

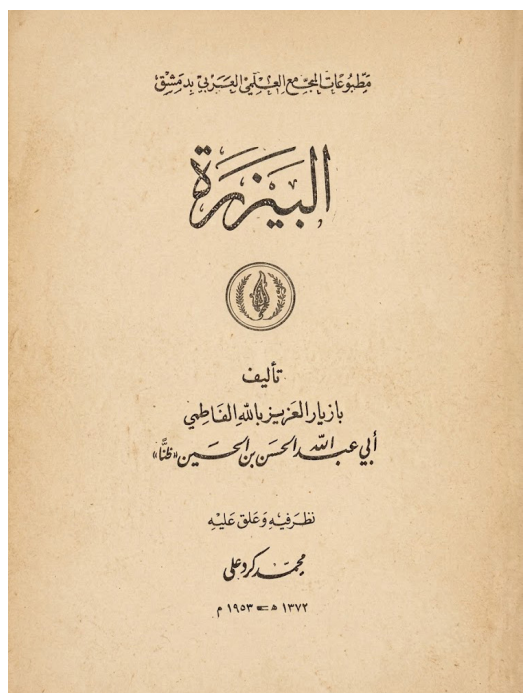
This body of knowledge came to be known in the Arab heritage as 'Ilm Al-Bayzara (the Science of Falconry), a discipline that drew together field expertise, precise observation, and practical experience, eventually becoming one of the established branches of knowledge associated with the culture of hunting and horsemanship in Arab and Islamic civilization.

The classical books that have reached us reveal the great standing occupied by birds of prey in the lives of caliphs, princes, and knights, where falconry served as a means of hunting and as a practice linked to knowledge, skill, and social standing. This widespread interest gave rise to a number of specialised works that addressed the descriptions of raptors, their natures, their ailments, and their training, alongside the tools of hunting, its seasons, and its etiquette.

Among the most celebrated of these works is Kitab al-Bayzara, one of the earliest surviving Arabic books on falconry, attributed to the Grand Falconer of the Fatimid Caliph al-Aziz. The work comprises dozens of chapters addressing the species of raptors and their characteristics, methods of taming them and teaching them to hunt, as well as precise descriptions of the medicines and treatments used to cure the ailments of birds of prey. It also contains references to the practical observations and accumulated expertise of Arab falconers gathered across many generations.

The significance of these works lies in the fact that they did not confine themselves to describing hunting and its methods, but presented a comparatively advanced knowledge of ornithology for their era, grounded in direct observation and practical experience. For this reason, a number of researchers consider that the Bayzara books represent an important dimension of the history of applied sciences in Arab-Islamic civilization, bringing together environmental knowledge, veterinary medicine, and field expertise in the handling of raptors.





These books also reveal the extraordinary richness of the Arabic terminology associated with falconry, preserving hundreds of words that describe the species of falcons, their colours, ages, ailments, hunting equipment, and training methods.

These works contributed to the transmission of a great deal of falconry knowledge to other parts of the world, particularly during periods that witnessed broad civilisational exchange between East and West.

The Most Comprehensive Reference on the World's Largest Falcon

The Gyrfalcon... A Scientific Journey into the World of the Greatest Northern Falcon

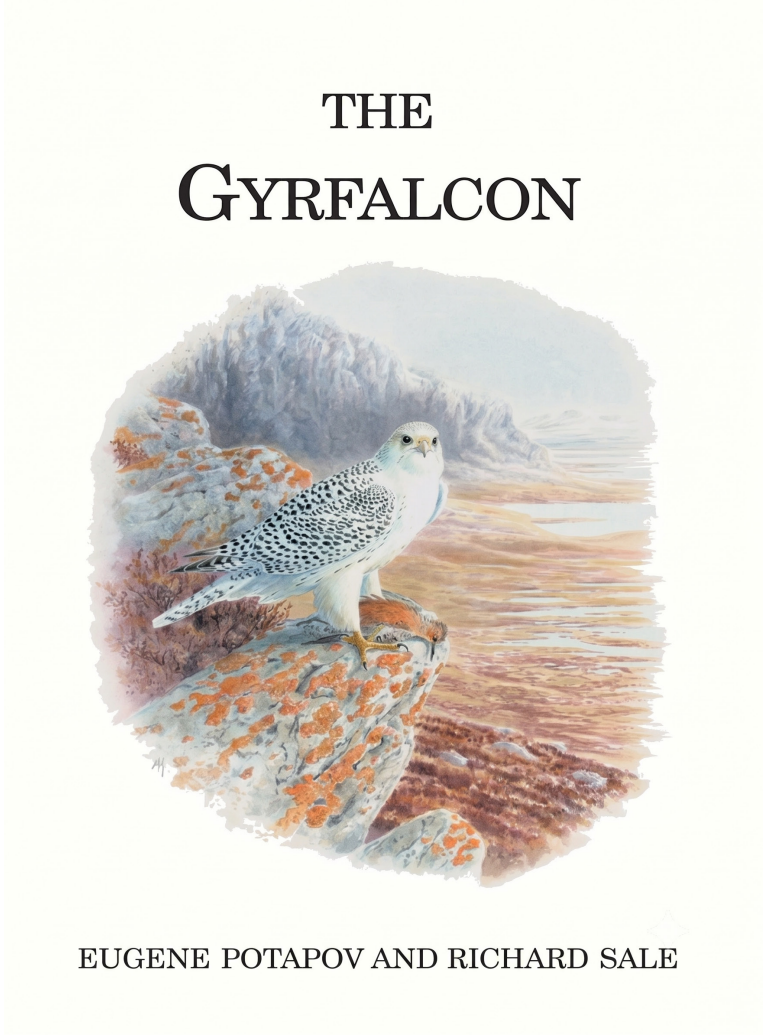
The Gyrfalcon occupies an exceptional place among birds of prey: it is the largest of all falcon species and the most capable of adapting to the harsh conditions of polar environments, and is regarded as one of the most fascinating raptors for scientists and falconers alike. From this deep fascination was born The Gyrfalcon by authors Eugen Potapov and Richard Sale, widely regarded as the most comprehensive and specialised reference on this remarkable bird.

The book is the fruit of many years of field research and scientific study, with the authors tracking the Gyr across the full range of its distribution, extending through the Arctic circles of Europe, Asia, and North America, drawing upon the latest scientific studies and field data available on this species.

The work presents a complete picture of the Gyr's life, beginning with its scientific classification and physical characteristics, moving through its natural habitat, behaviour, breeding patterns, and migration, and arriving at the environmental challenges it faces and the conservation efforts undertaken on its behalf. The authors also discuss the colour variation well known in this species, from pure white to grey or dark, one of the traits that has earned it wide renown among falconers and raptor enthusiasts.

Among the publication's most distinctive features is its reliance on intensive fieldwork: the authors visited the various regions in which the Gyr is found and reviewed an enormous volume of scientific records and recent observations, enabling them to redraw a more accurate map of the bird's range and offer new insights into its capacity for adaptation in changing environments.

The book also reveals important aspects of this falcon's biology, including its dependence throughout most of its life on a limited number of principal prey species, a trait that is comparatively rare among birds of prey. The authors present the findings of recent research concerning its relationship with polar ecosystems and the role it plays as one of the most prominent predators in those environments.



The work does not restrict itself to the scientific dimension alone, but also traces the historical relationship that has bound the Gyr to falconry across the ages. For centuries, this falcon was among the most prized birds in the courts of kings and princes across Europe and Asia, serving as a symbol of the highest standing and influence — one whose acquisition was considered a privilege reserved for the very few.

The book is rich with photographs, illustrations, and carefully prepared scientific maps, offering readers a rare opportunity to encounter this bird across the various stages of its life and in its natural environments. The combination of scientific rigour and distinguished visual production has made this work an essential reference for researchers and conservation professionals, as well as for falconers and raptor enthusiasts.

Lead author Eugen Potapov serves as Head of Research at the Falcon Research Institute in Carmarthen, United Kingdom, while Richard Sale is known as a writer and photographer specialising in polar environments, giving the book a rare combination of scientific expertise and field experience.

A New Book on the Fastest Living Creature on Earth

The Peregrine Falcon... The Complete Story of the World's Fastest Bird

The Peregrine is among the most famous and admired birds of prey in the world, a bird whose name has become synonymous with speed, power, and precision, and one that has claimed a special place with ornithologists, falconers, and wildlife enthusiasts alike.

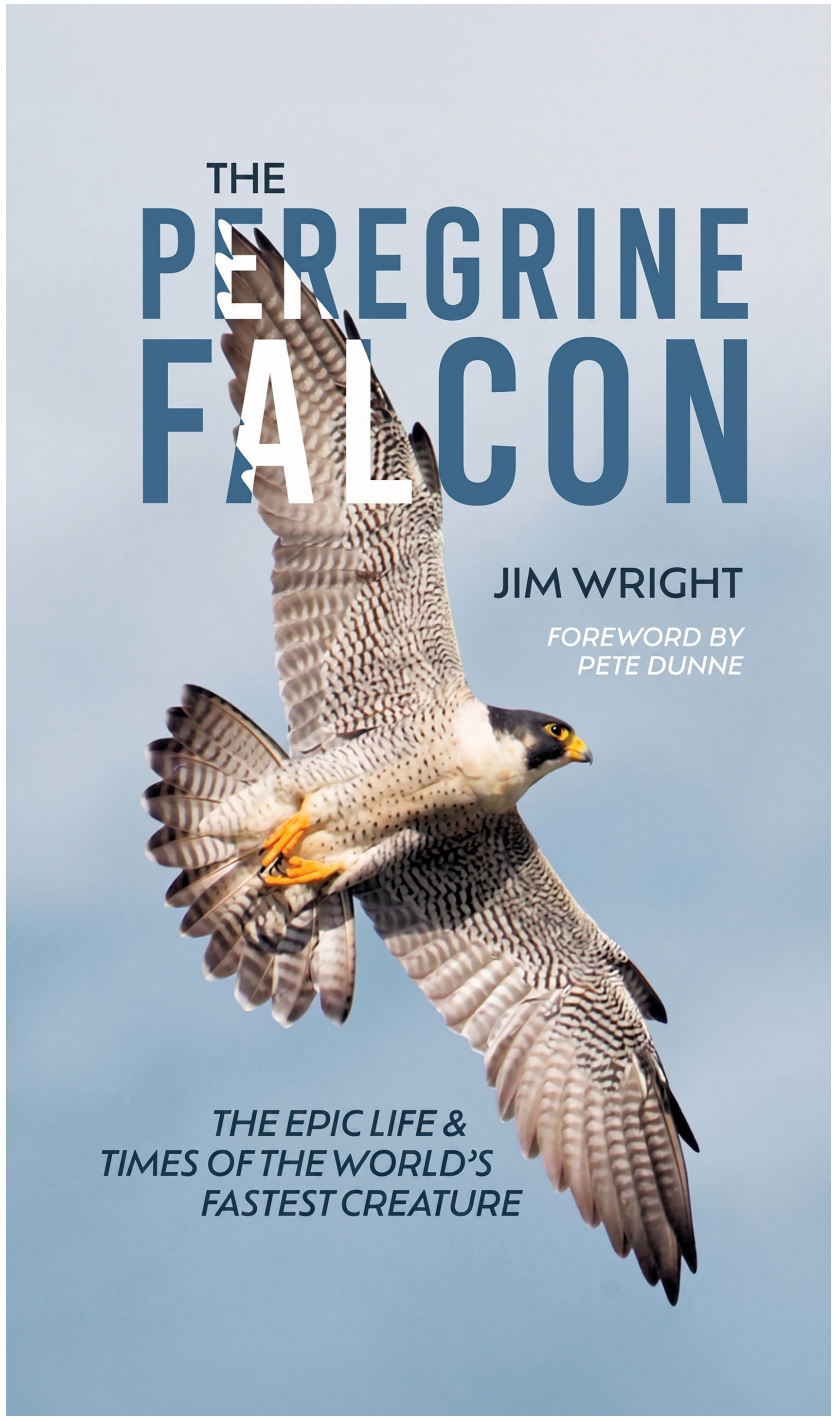
From this enduring fascination comes The Peregrine Falcon: The Epic Life and Times of the World's Fastest Creature by American writer and researcher Jim Wright, recently published to offer a comprehensive portrait of this extraordinary bird's life, history, and future.

The author takes the reader on a journey spanning the continents across which the Peregrine is found, examining its biological characteristics and the unique capabilities that have made it the fastest living creature on Earth. The book explains how the Peregrine, during its stoop, can reach extraordinary speeds that have made it a subject of intense interest to researchers in the fields of aviation and aerodynamics.

The work does not limit itself to the scientific dimension, but also traces the historical relationship that has connected humans and Peregrine, and the role the bird has played in falconry over long centuries, remaining one of the most highly prized birds of prey among falconers across the world.

The author devotes a significant part of the book to the story of the Peregrine's decline during the twentieth century as a result of certain chemical pesticides, and to the scientific efforts, along with captive breeding and release programmes that followed and contributed to pulling the species back from the edge of extinction. This experience stands as one of the most outstanding conservation success stories of recent decades.

The book also contains a large collection of photographs, field accounts, and testimonies drawn from the author's long experience observing birds of prey, making it a work that combines scientific narrative with field documentation in an accessible and engaging style. Some specialists have described it as a modern reference that can serve as an ideal entry point for those wishing to discover the Peregrine and its natural history.



When Equipment Becomes Part of the Heritage

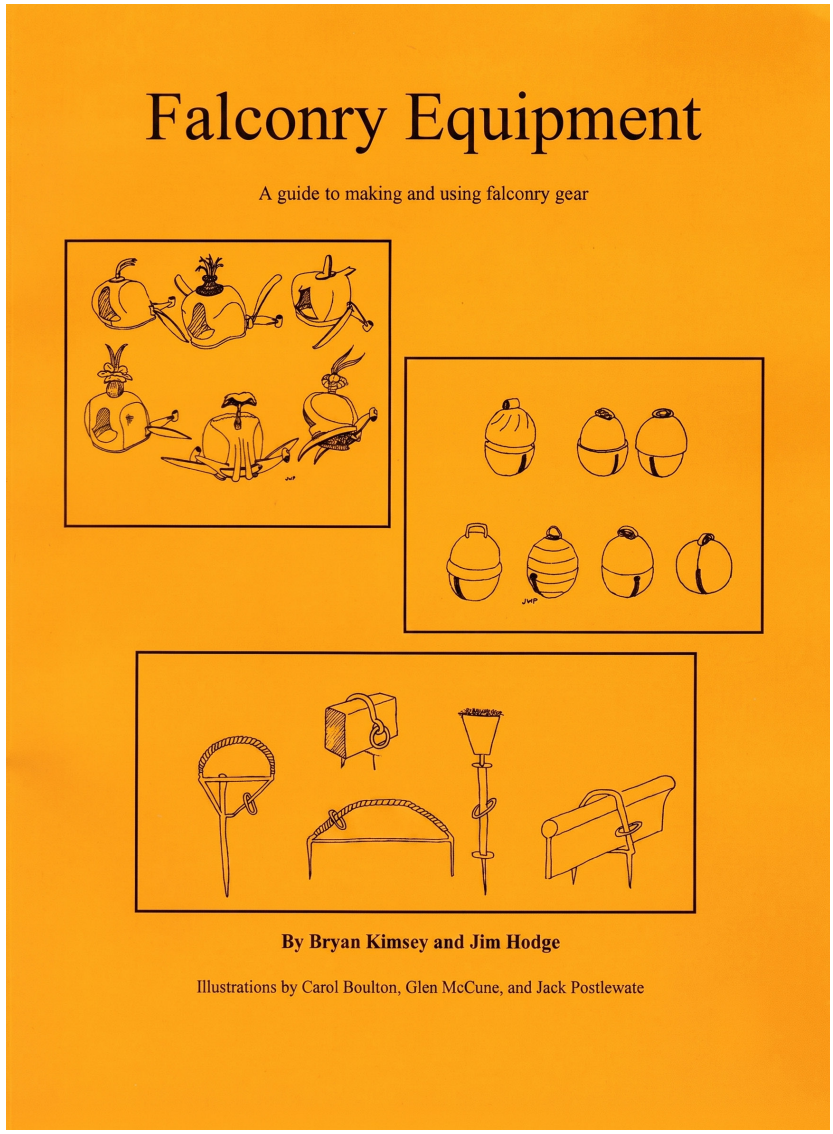
Falconry Equipment... The Story of the Craft That Has Accompanied the Falconer Through the Ages

Falconry rests not only on the bird and the falconer, but equally on a complete system of tools and equipment that has evolved over hundreds of years, becoming an integral part of the heritage associated with this ancient art. From the hood, the glove, the perch, and the leash, to modern bags and transport equipment, falconry has always been bound to specialist crafts and skills that have helped in the handling and care of birds of prey.

It is from this specialised dimension that Falconry Equipment by authors Brian Kimsey and Jim Hawkins emerges as one of the most comprehensive references available for the documentation of falconry tools, their functions, methods of use, and historical development.

The book takes the reader on a wide-ranging tour through the world of equipment used by falconers, examining its historical origins, the diversity of its forms, and the variations from one region to another. The authors show how these tools evolved in response to the needs of falconers and the differences in the environments in which falconry was practised, while at the same time preserving many of their traditional elements.

The book devotes several chapters to the principal tools without which falconry can scarcely be practised, explaining the role of each in training the bird, protecting it, and maintaining its welfare. It also addresses the materials used in their manufacture, from natural leathers and traditional fibres to the modern materials that have entered the field in recent decades.



Among the publication's most distinctive features is its use of detailed illustrations and technical diagrams that help the reader understand the components of the equipment. It also provides practical guidance on use, maintenance, and storage, making it an important reference for novice and experienced falconers alike.

The book does not confine itself to the technical dimension, but also sheds light on the cultural significance associated with falconry equipment. Many of these tools have been tied to local identities and traditional crafts inherited across generations, becoming reflections of the cultural distinctiveness of the communities that have practised falconry. In many countries, the manufacture of certain falconry tools continues to be carried out by hand according to traditional methods that have survived despite significant technological advances.

The authors also discuss the balance required between preserving the traditional character of the equipment and benefiting from modern innovations designed to enhance the safety and comfort of the birds. The book offers numerous examples of how certain tools have evolved without abandoning the core functions that have proven their worth across time.

Falconry Medicine



Falcon Healthcare and Disease Prevention

General Tips for Maintaining Peak Condition

Falcon healthcare is the fundamental pillar upon which successful falconry rests. Whatever the value of the bird or the skill of the falconer, outstanding performance in training and hunting cannot be achieved unless the bird is in good physical and psychological condition.

The quality of daily care has a direct impact on the falcon's ability to fly, focus, and respond, and contributes to extending its productive life and maintaining its fitness across different hunting seasons.

This care encompasses a complete system beginning with proper nutrition, followed by hygiene and preventive healthcare, and extending to the daily monitoring of the bird's behaviour and overall condition.

Proper Nutrition — The Foundation of Health and Strength

The falcon requires a balanced diet that meets its nutritional needs and provides the energy necessary for its daily activity. Relying on raw meat alone is not sufficient to cover its full dietary requirements. Falcons in captivity need food that resembles as closely as possible what they would obtain in the wild, and for this reason it is preferable to offer whole quarry such as quail, pigeon, day-old chicks, and appropriate rodents, so that the diet includes meat, bone, skin, and internal organs such as the heart and liver.

The importance of this type of diet lies in the fact that it provides the falcon with a complete range of nutrients, vitamins, and minerals essential for healthy bones, feathers, muscles, and immune function.

The importance of balanced nutrition becomes particularly pronounced during periods of training and hunting, as the quantity and quality of food directly affects the falcon's level of activity and responsiveness to commands. Overfeeding can lead to weight gain, lethargy, and a weakening of the bird's drive, while insufficient feeding causes fatigue, loss of focus, and a decline in physical capacity.

For this reason, the experienced falconer maintains a precise balance between food and daily activity, ensuring the bird receives adequate energy without losing its enthusiasm for flying or its responsiveness to training.

Poor nutrition affects not only performance; it can also give rise to a range of health disorders. When a falcon is deprived of essential nutrients, general signs of weakness may appear, including deterioration of feather condition, paleness of the skin, weakening of the beak and talons, and a reduction in immune function. These problems are most commonly associated with deficiencies in vitamins and minerals rather than in proteins or fats.

Water: No Less Important than Food

Falconers often focus on feeding and overlook the importance of providing an adequate supply of water. Water is essential for maintaining the body's various functions and for preventing dehydration, which is among the most common problems seen in falcons. A suitable water bowl should be provided that allows the falcon to drink and bathe simultaneously, as bathing also helps maintain the cleanliness and health of the feathers.

Dehydration can be identified through simple signs, such as the skin on the leg being slow to return to its normal position after being gently pinched. In such cases, steps should be taken promptly to provide the falcon with adequate fluids. One practical method used by some falconers is to pour a small amount of water over the food; an approach to which many falcons respond readily, allowing them to take in additional fluid with their meal.





Hygiene: The First Line of Defence Against Disease

Hygiene plays a central role in the prevention of disease and parasites, and is among the falconer's most important daily responsibilities. Maintaining the cleanliness of the perch, the block, and all falconry equipment helps limit the spread of pathogens and provides the bird with a healthy and comfortable environment. Food remnants must be removed daily, water changed regularly, and housing areas cleaned on a consistent basis.

Periodic disinfection of the area and equipment using appropriate disinfectants is also advisable, and care should be taken not to overlook the cleaning of air-conditioning filters, which can become a source of fungal growth and spread. Regular inspection and monitoring of the housing environment helps identify bacterial and fungal problems at an early stage before they are allowed to escalate.

Care of the Feet, Beak, and Talons

Foot injuries are among the most common problems encountered in captive falcons. They may begin with mild signs such as redness, thinning of the skin, or minor abrasions, but can develop into serious infections if neglected. These problems most commonly result from inappropriate perches, poor hygiene, overgrown talons, or insufficient exercise.

To help prevent these problems, daily inspection of the feet is recommended, along with gentle massage using appropriate creams to stimulate circulation, while maintaining perches in good condition and encouraging the bird to fly and exercise regularly. The beak and talons must also be trimmed periodically to maintain their proper function and prevent injury or fracture.



Appropriate Housing Conditions

Falcons require clean, well-ventilated housing with sufficient space. Overcrowding in enclosures or cages increases the risk of disease transmission and leads to stress and fatigue. The falcon's environment must also be safe and free from sharp tools or objects that could cause injury.

Another important practice is to designate a separate area for falcons that are sick or suspected of illness, in order to prevent the spread of infection to healthy birds. It is also preferable to keep falcons away from other birds and animals in mixed-species farms or breeding facilities.



Equipment Safety and Its Role in Prevention

Falconry equipment is an integral part of the bird's healthcare and must therefore be maintained consistently. It is advisable to designate a glove and Mangala (a padded cuff for the falcon to rest on) for each individual falcon and to avoid sharing them between multiple birds, in order to prevent disease transmission. All equipment should be thoroughly cleaned after each use and all food residue removed.

The hood must fit the falcon precisely to avoid causing injury or sores around the eyes and beak, and worn or frayed jesses should be replaced to prevent abrasions and wounds on the feet. Perches must be kept in good condition, cleaned daily, and any damaged parts replaced immediately.



Daily Monitoring: The Key to Early Detection

One of the most important hallmarks of the professional falconer is the ability to detect health problems at their earliest stage. This is achieved through close daily observation of the falcon's behaviour and physical condition. The level of activity, eye movements, feather condition, the condition of the beak and talons, and the manner in which the bird stands on its perch are all important indicators that reveal a great deal about the bird's health status.

Any sudden change in appetite, activity, breathing, or vocalisation should immediately draw the falconer's attention and prompt immediate follow-up. Early detection of health problems increases the chances of successful treatment and prevents the condition from worsening.



Vitamin D and the Importance of Sun Exposure

Vitamin D is one of the essential nutrients for a falcon's health, playing a vital role in calcium absorption, bone development, and the maintenance of skeletal strength. A deficiency in this vitamin leads to weakened bones, increased susceptibility to fractures, and structural problems.

Notably, falcons do not generally obtain sufficient Vitamin D from their diet. Instead, they acquire it primarily through direct exposure to sunlight. Specialists therefore recommend exposing falcons to sunlight daily for appropriate and safe periods, thereby supporting their overall health and strengthening their skeletal system. Falcons kept indoors for extended periods may require suitable supplements under veterinary supervision to address this deficiency.

The benefits of sun exposure and fresh air extend beyond the provision of Vitamin D; they also contribute to improving the bird's overall condition, enhancing its activity, and strengthening its immune system, provided that the extreme heat of the day and harsh climatic conditions are avoided.

Vaccination: Prevention of Common Diseases

True prevention begins before the falcon is even acquired. It is recommended to select a bird that is healthy and capable of adapting to local environmental and climatic conditions, and to subject it to a comprehensive veterinary examination prior to purchase. Routine veterinary examinations at the beginning and end of the hunting season are also advisable to confirm the bird's health status.

Vaccination ranks among the most important preventive measures, helping to protect falcons from serious viral diseases such as Avian Pox and Newcastle Disease. These vaccines should be administered in accordance with approved veterinary programmes and on a regular schedule.

Among the diseases that warrant particular attention is Aspergillosis, a fungal infection that primarily affects the respiratory system. The likelihood of infection increases in poorly ventilated environments or in falcons experiencing stress and reduced immunity. Its most common signs include loss of appetite, changes in vocalisation, lethargy, and difficulty breathing. Early diagnosis is a decisive factor in the success of treatment and in improving the chances of recovery.

Internal and external parasites also represent a persistent threat to the health of falcons. Lice, ticks, and mites can cause damage to the skin and feathers, while intestinal worms and other internal parasites can lead to serious digestive and health problems.

Regular veterinary examinations, faecal analysis, and the use of appropriate treatments when needed therefore constitute essential measures for maintaining the bird's health.

A Holistic Approach

Falcon healthcare is not a seasonal measure confined to the training or hunting season. It is a comprehensive approach that begins with the selection of appropriate food, the provision of water, and the maintenance of hygiene, and extends to daily monitoring, veterinary prevention, and attention to the bird's psychological wellbeing.

The higher the standard of this care, the greater the falcon's capacity for outstanding performance, the lower the likelihood of illness, and the stronger the bond between falconer and bird.

In this way, true falconry remains a model of balance between knowledge, responsibility, and respect for living creatures, ensuring that this ancient heritage endures for generations to come.



Rest and Psychological Wellbeing

Falcon care is not limited to physical health alone; it also encompasses the bird's psychological well-being. The falcon is a sensitive creature, affected by stress, fear, noise, and sudden changes in its environment. Chronic stress can lead to weakened immunity and the emergence of abnormal behaviours such as aggression or reluctance to fly.

It is therefore important to provide the bird with a stable and calm environment, and to allow it adequate periods of rest between training and hunting sessions.

The relationship of trust between falconer and falcon also contributes to reinforcing the bird's sense of security and has a positive effect on its responsiveness and behaviour. Falconry is not merely training or hunting; it is a long-term relationship built on patience, respect, and sustained care.





Falcon Health and First Aid

The Falconer's Guide to Handling Emergencies and Protecting the Bird from Harm



The health of the falcon is the foundation upon which successful falconry rests. Whatever the skill of the falconer or the quality of the bird's training, any sudden health problem or injury can directly affect the falcon's ability to fly, hunt, and respond. The falcon is a powerful bird capable of great endurance, yet at the same time a sensitive living creature that is rapidly affected by injury, dehydration, stress, and the surrounding environmental conditions.

During hunting trips, training sessions, or travel, the falcon may be exposed to sudden accidents and injuries that require a swift and considered response from the falconer, ...not to provide direct veterinary treatment, but to prevent the condition from deteriorating and to preserve the bird's life until it can be taken to a specialist veterinarian.

This is where the importance of a sound grounding in first aid and preventive healthcare becomes clear, as an inseparable part of responsible falconry practice.

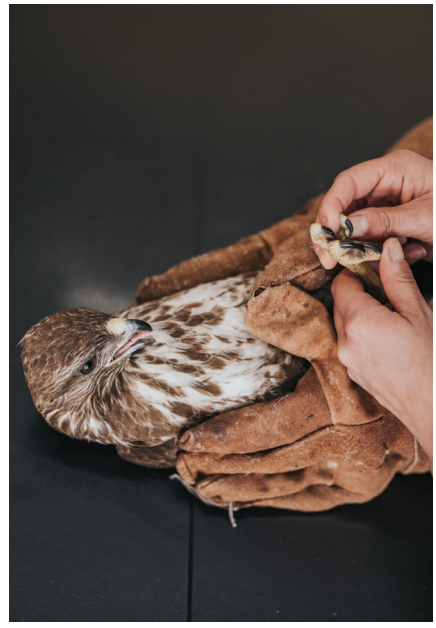
How Does the Falconer Know When His Falcon Is Unwell?

Successful healthcare begins with close observation. The falconer who monitors his bird daily is better placed to detect health problems at an early stage, before they worsen and develop into serious conditions.

General signs that warrant attention include unusual lethargy, difficulty standing, rapid or irregular breathing, loss of balance, or keeping the eyes partially closed for extended periods. Fluffed feathers or a drooping posture may also indicate a health problem requiring prompt attention.

Localised signs include one wing hanging abnormally, discharge from the eyes or nostrils, unfamiliar sounds during breathing, soiling of the feathers around the vent as a result of diarrhoea, changes in the colour of the mutes, swelling and redness of the feet, or the appearance of wounds, bleeding, or feather loss in specific areas of the body.

These indicators are often early warnings from the falcon that something is wrong. Ignoring them may allow the condition to worsen and become more difficult to treat.



The Daily Check: A Few Minutes That May Save the Falcon's Life

The falconer does not need complex procedures to monitor the health of his bird. A quick and consistent daily check that causes the falcon no undue stress is sufficient.

The check begins with the head and eyes to confirm that there are no scratches, injuries, or fractures of the beak, while observing the eyes for signs of inflammation, unequal pupil size, or lesions inside the mouth or on the tongue.

The check then moves to the body, where the bird's posture, feather condition, and cleanliness are noted, along with palpation of the keel bone, which serves as an important indicator of nutritional status. A prominently protruding keel with reduced surrounding musculature may indicate weight loss or the presence of an underlying illness.



The wings should also be examined and moved gently to confirm freedom of movement and the absence of pain, bleeding, or damaged feathers. The feet and talons must be inspected carefully for any swelling, redness, warmth, or wounds that may be the early signs of more complex health problems.

A simple test that helps assess the falcon's hydration status involves observing how quickly the skin returns to its normal position after a small fold of skin is gently lifted. A slow return may indicate dehydration that warrants attention.

Calm: The First Medicine in an Emergency

When the falcon suffers an injury or sudden accident, the falconer's response is a decisive factor in protecting the bird or compounding its distress. Emergency situations call for calm and precision far more than they call for haste or agitation.

An injured falcon will often be in a state of shock resulting from pain, fear, or blood loss, and it must therefore be calmed first before any attempt is made to examine or handle it. Rough or hasty handling can increase its distress and compound the damage caused by the injury.

Contacting a specialist veterinarian at the earliest opportunity is an essential part of the appropriate response to any emergency.

Shock: The Danger That Cannot Be Seen

Shock is among the most serious conditions a falcon may experience following an accident or injury, and its signs may not be immediately obvious.

Its most prominent signs include severe lethargy, rapid and shallow breathing, fluffed down feathers, inability to stand, and the head drooping downward.

In such cases, the falcon should be moved to a quiet, dark, and warm place and gently restrained using a suitable towel, with the head held slightly higher than the body. Feeding or forcing the bird to move must be avoided; it should be left to recover calmly in a quiet environment, away from sources of disturbance.



Wounds and Bleeding: Swift Action Makes the Difference

The falcon may sustain wounds of varying severity during training, hunting, or transport, and in such situations prompt first aid becomes essential to limit blood loss and prevent wound contamination.

For minor wounds, the affected area can be cleaned with an appropriate antiseptic, haemostatic agents applied where needed, and the wound covered with a light, clean dressing.

Deep or extensive wounds require direct pressure applied to the site of bleeding using sterile gauze, while any attempt to close the wound or suture it by improvised means must be avoided. The falcon should be taken to a veterinarian as quickly as possible. If immediate access to a clinic is not possible, the wound should continue to be monitored and protected from insects.





Head Injuries: Cases Requiring the Greatest Caution

Head injuries are among the most serious injuries in falcons because of their potential to affect the brain or nervous system.

These injuries may be accompanied by bleeding from the nostrils or mouth, or by disturbances of balance and behaviour. In such cases, the falconer's role is limited to calming the bird and placing it in a dark, quiet location before transporting it promptly to a specialist veterinarian, as field interventions are extremely limited in such cases.

Fractures and Skeletal Injuries

Fractures are among the more common injuries seen in falcons, whether in the wings, legs, toes, or talons.

The golden rule is never to attempt to reset the bone or carry out any advanced treatment without veterinary supervision, as doing so may worsen the damage.

The falconer's role is limited to immobilising the affected part and preventing movement as far as possible. In cases of wing fracture, the wing can be gently secured in its natural position. A fractured leg can be supported temporarily using a padded splint, while injuries to the toes or talons require light immobilisation and prompt control of any bleeding.

The Eye: The Falcon's Window to the World

Falcons rely primarily on their eyesight for flight and hunting, and for this reason eye injuries are treated with the utmost seriousness.

When an eye injury is suspected, the falcon must be kept away from strong light, and the eye washed with saline solution or clean water if necessary, while direct contact with the eye and the use of any tool that may cause further damage must be strictly avoided.

Any eye injury, however minor it may appear, requires examination by a specialist veterinarian to preserve the falcon's visual capacity.

Dehydration and Fatigue: The Falcon's Hidden Enemies

Health problems are not always linked to visible injury. Dehydration and fatigue are among the most common threats facing falcons during intensive training or extended hunting trips.

The signs of dehydration include reduced general activity, declining flight performance, lethargy, and loss of vitality. To manage this condition, appropriate water should be provided, and lost fluids and nutrients replenished. The falcon should also be given adequate rest, and additional physical exertion avoided until it has fully recovered.

The First Aid Kit: The Falconer's Field Companion

Just as the falconer carries his essential equipment on every trip, a first aid kit dedicated to falcons should always accompany him.

It should ideally contain gauze, bandages, medical cotton wool, scissors, forceps, and plastic syringes, in addition to haemostatic agents, antiseptics, iodine solution, a thermometer, and basic tools needed for the initial management of emergency injuries.

Regular inspection of the kit's contents is no less important than having the kit itself, ensuring that all supplies are ready for use when needed.

Common Mistakes That May Cost the Falcon Its Health

Many complications arise not from the injury itself, but from the errors made in handling it.

Among the most common of these mistakes are ignoring the signs of shock, forcing the falcon to fly after an injury, using human medications without veterinary advice, applying dressings too tightly in a way that affects circulation, or delaying presentation of the bird to a specialist veterinarian.

In many cases, refraining from a misguided intervention is more beneficial than attempting an ill-considered treatment.



Health Prevention Begins Before Illness Appears

Maintaining the health of falcons is not limited to treating injuries when they occur; it begins with providing a healthy and safe environment that reduces the risk of disease from the outset.

Preventive measures include maintaining the cleanliness of housing areas and the mews, regularly cleaning perches, jesses, and equipment, providing clean and wholesome food, and monitoring the condition of the feet, mutes, and crop on a consistent basis.

Effective prevention saves the falconer considerable effort and expense while keeping the falcon in peak condition throughout the season.

Hidden Dangers in the Falcon's Environment

The environment surrounding the falcon is home to microscopic organisms such as bacteria, fungi, and viruses, which are invisible to the naked eye and may remain harmless so long as their numbers remain limited.

However, poor hygiene, spoiled food, humidity, elevated temperatures, and reduced immunity can create the conditions necessary for these organisms to multiply and become a genuine source of danger.

A hidden infection typically begins with loss of appetite, reduced performance, vomiting, diarrhoea, or weight loss, and symptoms may recur despite treatment if the underlying environmental cause is not addressed.

Regular Health Screening: The True Line of Defence

Experience has shown that the most effective way to break the cycle of recurring illness is to carry out a regular health screening of the housing environment.

This includes examining samples from the floor of the housing area, the perches, water baths, food vessels, food preparation areas, equipment in use, and the falcon's own mutes.

The findings of these checks help identify sources of risk and develop effective plans to eliminate them or limit their impact, raising the overall standard of health protection over the long term.

Travel and Transport: Additional Challenges for the Falcon's Health

The risk of health problems increases during travel and transport, as a result of stress, changes in environment and feeding routine, contact with other falcons, or exposure to disease-carrying insects.

For this reason, prevention must receive heightened attention during periods of travel, through strict adherence to hygiene, reduction of sources of stress, maintenance of regular healthcare, and ensuring vaccination and veterinary screening programmes are observed when required.

The First Line of Defence

Falcon first aid is not a substitute for veterinary care, but it represents the first line of defence that may preserve the bird's life and prevent its condition from deteriorating until it reaches a specialist veterinarian. The knowledgeable falconer does not seek to play the role of the doctor; rather, he knows how to calm his falcon, assess its condition, stabilise an injury when necessary, and deliver the bird to specialist care in the best possible state.

By combining a sound grounding in first aid with a commitment to daily health prevention, the falconer can maintain the health and readiness of the bird and contribute to the preservation of this ancient heritage, a heritage that rests as much on responsibility, compassion, and knowledge as it does on skill in the hunt.



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The Impact of Chemical Pesticides on Birds of Prey and Falcons Worldwide

Eng. Amjad Qasim
Academic and Writer Specialising in Scientific Affairs



Birds of prey, and falcons in particular, represent one of the most environmentally sensitive components of biodiversity when it comes to chemical pollution and ecological change, a consequence of their advanced position in the food chain. With the global expansion in the use of chemical pesticides, serious environmental challenges have emerged that have directly affected the health, lives, and capacity for survival and reproduction of these birds.

Chemical pesticides are defined as chemical substances composed of mineral and organic compounds, each with specific properties and characteristics. They encompass insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides.

These compounds are classified into several principal categories, the most prominent of which are organochlorines, such as DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane), characterised by high environmental persistence; organophosphates and carbamates, which are less environmentally stable but more acutely toxic; and pyrethroids, which exhibit highly toxic effects on fish and aquatic organisms.

Despite their vital role in daily life through enhancing agricultural production and limiting the spread of harmful pests, their indiscriminate and excessive use has produced profound environmental consequences that have extended across multiple levels of the food chain.

An Imminent Threat to Falcons Worldwide

Birds of prey, with falcons at the forefront, occupy a high position in the food chain, making them sensitive bioindicators of the overall health of ecosystems. Species such as the Peregrine Falcon and the Saker Falcon play a decisive role in regulating prey populations and maintaining biological balance, yet this very position makes them more vulnerable to the effects of biomagnification, whereby toxic compounds accumulate in their tissues at concentrations far exceeding those found in organisms lower in the food chain.

Recent environmental studies have documented a notable decline in their numbers worldwide, attributed to a combination of interrelated factors, foremost among which are the loss of natural habitats, global climate change, and chemical pollution. The impact of chemical pesticides stands out as a principal factor in this context, as the use of certain types has been linked to serious physiological and reproductive disorders in birds of prey and falcons.



The Environmental Behaviour of Chemical Pesticides

The environmental behaviour of pesticides is one of the most important aspects in assessing their risks to different ecosystems and living organisms. The effects of these compounds are not confined to the immediate site of application, but extend through complex processes of migration and transformation across soil, water, and air. The nature of this behaviour depends on the physical and chemical properties of each pesticide, including its chemical stability, solubility, vapour pressure, and water-lipid partition coefficient.

After application in agricultural fields, pesticide molecules may bind to soil particles or be carried with irrigation water and rainfall into surface and groundwater. Pesticides with high water solubility are more susceptible to aquatic transport, while hydrophobic compounds tend to bind to organic matter in the soil and accumulate there for extended periods.

Certain highly volatile pesticides can be transported through the atmosphere over long distances, eventually depositing in regions far removed from their original site of application, which explains the discovery of traces of certain chemical compounds in isolated polar environments or remote desert areas.

In the environment, these compounds undergo multiple and complex degradation processes, including chemical, photolytic, and biological degradation by microorganisms. However, the rate of these processes varies considerably between compounds; some organochlorine pesticides, such as DDT, exhibit exceptional stability that allows them to persist in the environment for many years without breaking down.

Mechanisms of Chemical Toxicity in Birds of Prey and Falcons

The mechanisms of chemical toxicity in birds of prey and falcons represent one of the most complex aspects of environmental toxicology, given the interplay of biochemical and physiological effects that occur within the organism following exposure to these compounds. The severity of toxicity varies according to the chemical composition of the pesticide, its concentration, the duration of exposure, and the bird's metabolic characteristics, yet many pesticides share the capacity to cause profound disruption to the neurological and physiological functions of birds of prey.

Organophosphate pesticides inhibit the enzyme acetylcholinesterase, an essential enzyme responsible for regulating the transmission of nerve signals by breaking down the neurotransmitter acetylcholine at synaptic junctions. When this enzyme is inhibited, acetylcholine accumulates in the nervous system, resulting in continuous and abnormal stimulation of nerve and muscle cells. In birds, this manifests as muscular tremors, loss of balance, and motor and respiratory disturbances that may culminate in death in cases of acute poisoning.

The toxic effects also extend to vital organs in birds of prey and falcons, particularly the liver and kidneys, which serve as the principal centres of metabolic processing and excretion within the body. The liver, the organ responsible for detoxification, is subjected to considerable strain as a result of continuous exposure to foreign chemical compounds, which may lead to hepatocellular damage, disruption of enzymatic activity, and the accumulation of toxic metabolic by-products. The kidneys, in turn, are affected through the filtration and excretion of these toxic compounds, which may cause damage to the renal tubules and disturbance of fluid and electrolyte balance within the organism.



Among the most dangerous phenomena associated with the environmental behaviour of pesticides is bioaccumulation, the accumulation of chemical substances within the tissues of a living organism at a rate exceeding the body's capacity to metabolise or eliminate them. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in the case of lipid-soluble compounds, which are stored in fatty tissues and transferred gradually through the food chain.

Biomagnification represents a yet more serious extension of bioaccumulation, whereby the concentration of a toxic substance increases progressively with each step up the food chain. As a result, birds of prey, and falcons above all, are exposed to the highest concentrations of pesticides through their consumption of chemically contaminated prey. Numerous studies have demonstrated that these elevated concentrations cause serious neurological, physiological, and reproductive disorders, making falcons precise bioindicators of the extent of chemical pollution across different ecosystems.



Another mechanism underlying the toxicity of these pesticides can be attributed to the phenomenon of oxidative stress, which arises from increased production of free radicals within cells. These highly reactive molecules are capable of attacking lipids, proteins, and nucleic acids, resulting in damage to cell membranes and disruption of vital cellular functions. Studies have shown that birds of prey exhibit elevated levels of oxidative stress markers following chronic exposure to pesticides, a finding associated with reduced immune capacity, reproductive disorders, and declining survival rates.

In most cases, the concentrations of these pesticides are not immediately lethal and do not cause the instantaneous death of the birds. However, they weaken the birds and reduce their capacity to hunt and reproduce, which ultimately affects the stability and sustainability of birds of prey populations and the biodiversity of different ecosystems.

Effects on the Reproduction of Birds of Prey and Falcons

Chemical pesticides have serious effects on the reproduction of birds of prey in general and falcons in particular. When these organisms are exposed to relatively low concentrations of certain pesticides, acute disruption of the physiological processes associated with reproduction can occur, leading gradually to a decline in population numbers and a reduction in their capacity to persist in natural environments. These effects are particularly pronounced in species with low reproductive rates, such as falcons, where even a slight reduction in breeding success translates directly into instability of their numbers in the wild.

Falcons, which occupy an advanced position in food webs, feed on birds and small mammals that may themselves have been exposed to varying concentrations of pesticides and chemical pollutants. As a result, falcons are indirectly subject to a continuous accumulation of toxic substances through their daily diet.

The danger of this process lies in biomagnification, which causes the concentration of chemical pollutants to increase progressively with each step up the food chain. Pesticide residues may be present at low concentrations in insects or plants, but become more concentrated in the small birds that feed on them, and reach their highest levels in the bodies of the falcons that feed on those birds.



Pesticides also give rise to embryonic disorders that may prevent the complete development of the embryo or cause its death within the egg. Some studies have documented developmental abnormalities and reduced vitality in hatchlings, diminishing their chances of survival in the early stages of life.

The toxic effects of these pesticides on birds of prey also extend to reduced hatching success and embryonic disorders that may result in embryo death within the egg, or developmental deformities. These pesticides may also disrupt the endocrine systems of these birds, interfering with their natural hormones, including reproductive and fertility hormones, thereby contributing to the decline of birds of prey populations in the wild.

A Silent Killer of Falcons

Falcons play a vital role in the stability of global ecosystems, and they are directly affected by chemical pollutants owing to their position at the apex of the food chain.

In broader terms, falcons are not merely apex predators that regulate prey numbers and maintain biological balance, they are also precise environmental indicators that reflect the level of chemical pollution in natural environments. From this perspective, falcons have acquired particular scientific importance in environmental toxicology research, as any physiological, behavioural, or reproductive changes recorded in them will generally reflect broader-scale disruption throughout the food chain.

Many pesticides, particularly organochlorine compounds such as DDT, are characterised by high lipid solubility, which allows them to be stored within the fatty tissues of living organisms for extended periods. As these compounds continue to be transferred through the food chain, birds of prey become the ultimate repository for elevated concentrations of environmental toxins.

Among the most serious consequences for falcons is eggshell thinning, historically linked to the use of DDT and its derivatives.

Studies have shown that these compounds interfere with calcium metabolism within the bird's body and affect the activity of the enzymes responsible for depositing calcium carbonate in the eggshell. As a result, the shell becomes thinner, more fragile, and unable to bear the weight of the incubating bird, greatly increasing the likelihood of egg breakage during incubation or before the embryos have fully developed. This leads to reduced hatching rates and widespread reproductive failure.

This phenomenon was clearly documented in numerous birds of prey, most notably the Peregrine Falcon, whose numbers suffered a sharp decline in the mid-twentieth century, particularly across Europe and North America, as a result of reproductive failure linked to environmental contamination by organochlorine pesticides used in pest control, which directly compromised the integrity of the eggs of these birds.

This crisis constituted one of the clearest pieces of scientific evidence of long-term chemical pollution and contributed to driving the international community to reassess its policies on pesticide use.



The impact of pesticides was not limited to reproduction alone; it extended to neurological and behavioural disorders that affected hunting efficiency, migration, and survival. Chronic exposure to certain chemical compounds leads to changes in neurological activity and the cognitive capacities of the bird, as well as reduced motor coordination and diminished responsiveness to environmental stimuli. These effects, although sometimes not directly lethal, gradually erode the chances of survival and reproduction in natural environments.





Legislation and International Agreements

The environmental and health risks associated with chemical pesticides prompted the development of a body of legislation and international agreements aimed at limiting the use of highly toxic and environmentally persistent compounds. These instruments focused in particular on persistent organic pesticides, characterised by their capacity to remain in the environment for long periods and to accumulate through food chains, posing a direct threat to biodiversity and to birds of prey in particular.

Among the most prominent international agreements in this field is the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, which entered into force in 2004 with the objective of eliminating or progressively phasing out the production and use of persistent organic pollutants.

The Convention covered a number of hazardous pesticides, including DDT, while permitting limited and exceptional uses in certain disease control programmes. The Convention contributed to strengthening international cooperation in the fields of environmental monitoring, information exchange, and the management of hazardous chemical substances.

Alongside international agreements, many countries have adopted environmental policies and national legislation aimed at protecting birds and wildlife from the dangers of chemical pollution, through the regulation of pesticide circulation, the setting of maximum residue limits in the environment, and the strengthening of environmental monitoring programmes. More recent trends have seen a move towards the application of integrated pest management principles and a reduction in reliance on highly toxic pesticides, in pursuit of a balance between the requirements of agricultural production and the preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity.

Although new types of pesticides have been developed that are less chemically persistent and more selective in their action, their long-term environmental effects remain poorly understood by many researchers, particularly with regard to their cumulative impacts on the birds of prey and falcons.

This highlights the urgent need for further multidisciplinary research bringing together chemistry, toxicology, biology, ecology, and modern analytical techniques, with the aim of building a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of chemical pollutants on wildlife in general and on birds of prey and falcons in particular.

The protection of these creatures represents not merely an environmental concern, but reflects a scientific and ethical responsibility towards preserving the delicate balance upon which the sustainability of ecosystems and the future of biodiversity on our planet depends.

Milestones



The Arabian Saluki Centre in Abu Dhabi

Twenty-Five Years of Preserving the Legacy of the Falconer's Companion

The Arabian Saluki Centre in Abu Dhabi embodies one of the leading heritage initiatives launched by the Emirates Falconers' Club to preserve one of the most significant symbols associated with the culture of traditional hunting in the region, the Arabian Saluki, which for centuries has been the falconer's companion on hunting expeditions across the desert.

Since its establishment in 2001, the Centre has succeeded in cementing its position as the first and largest of its kind in the Arabian Gulf region and the Middle East, founded with the aim of reviving the traditions of hunting with Saluki hounds, preserving authentic Arabian breeds, and providing specialist services for those wishing to acquire and care for these dogs.

A Quarter Century in Service of Heritage

The Arabian Saluki Centre marked its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2026, celebrating a journey rich with achievement, during which it reinforced its position as the foremost reference on the Arabian Saluki in the region, and as a specialist centre bringing together care, training, and breeding.

Over twenty-five years of sustained work, the Centre has succeeded in strengthening the presence of the Arabian Saluki at heritage events, preserving its authentic breeds, and passing on the knowledge associated with it to new generations of breeders and heritage enthusiasts.

In doing so, the Centre continues to fulfil its mission of safeguarding one of the most important elements of the heritage associated with traditional hunting in the UAE, combining the preservation of cultural heritage with the adoption of best modern practices in care and training, so that the Arabian Saluki remains an authentic symbol of the Arabian desert and a constant companion to the falconer.







Integrated Facilities for the Housing and Care of the Saluki

The Centre is committed to providing a specialist environment that meets the needs of Saluki hounds to the highest standards. It has established fully equipped kennels, together with comprehensive dietary programmes that include cooked, canned, and dried food, provided according to the specific nutritional requirements of each dog.

These facilities provide appropriate daily care for the dogs, ensuring their health, fitness, and readiness to participate in various activities and events.

Training: Preparing Champions of the Heritage Arena

Training is one of the Centre's most important functions, working to prepare Saluki hounds for participation in heritage festivals, events, and competitions of all kinds. For this purpose, the Centre provides individual running tracks adjoining the kennels, in addition to an outdoor arena to training.

Training programmes encompass a wide range of activities that reflect the natural capabilities of the Arabian Saluki, the most prominent of which are:

- Shows and beauty competitions
- Physical fitness programmes and swimming
- Obedience and behaviour training
- Speed racing
- Hunting and manoeuvring training

These programmes have contributed to enhancing the presence of the Arabian Saluki at specialist heritage and sporting events both within the UAE and beyond.



Preserving the Authentic Bloodlines

The Centre plays an important role in supporting breeding programmes and preserving the genetic characteristics of the Arabian Saluki, by providing advice and guidance on authentic bloodlines and how to protect and preserve them.

These efforts form part of the Centre's commitment to preserving the historical characteristics of the Arabian Saluki as one of the oldest hunting dogs in the world.



Travel and Transport Assistance

With the growing participation of Saluki hounds in regional and international events and competitions, the Centre provides guidance on travel and transport arrangements, including advice on documentation requirements, customs procedures, vaccinations, and the health regulations applicable in destination countries.

This service has become an important reference for Saluki owners wishing to transport their dogs safely and efficiently to destinations around the world.







A Destination for Those Wishing to Acquire an Arabian Saluki

The Centre provides advisory services for those wishing to acquire an Arabian Saluki hound, giving them the necessary advice and information on authentic Arabian bloodlines and their characteristics, and assisting them in selecting dogs suited to their needs and objectives.

This contributes to the promotion of responsible ownership and the preservation of the purity of authentic Arabian bloodlines.

Twenty Editions Celebrating the Beauty of the Arabian Saluki

The Arabian Saluki Centre continues its pioneering role in raising awareness of the Arabian Saluki and preserving its authentic bloodlines through the organisation of the Arabian Saluki Beauty Contest, which has become one of the most prominent specialist heritage events within the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition (ADIHEX).

As the 23rd edition of ADIHEX 2026 takes place, the Centre celebrates the twentieth running of the competition, an achievement that reflects the success of the sustained efforts made over many years to enhance the standing of the Arabian Saluki and highlight its heritage and cultural value.

The contest is organised to highlight the historical standing of the Arabian Saluki, a dog that has formed an integral part of the hunting heritage of the region for thousands of years. It also contributes to introducing new generations to the values associated with Arabian Saluki, foremost among which are loyalty, courage, and deep connection to the desert environment, while encouraging breeders to preserve authentic bloodlines and care for their dogs to the highest standards.

Participation in the contest is open exclusively to purebred Arabian Saluki hounds meeting the approved health requirements, with the presentation of a valid vaccination certificate and an identification microchip being mandatory.

Competitions are divided into four principal categories covering males and females of both the Smooth (Hess) and Feathered (Aryash) varieties.

Judging panels apply precise criteria that take into account breed, temperament, general appearance, and hunting skills, making the contest a unique event that brings together the preservation of the aesthetic qualities and functional capability for which the Arabian Saluki has been renowned throughout history.









The Arabian Saluki Beauty Contest is distinguished from many other dog competitions around the world through its focus on the hunting dog's character, its innate skills, its reactions, and its sensory responsiveness, alongside its physical characteristics.

The assessment process includes close study of breed standards and physical conformation, movement, behavioural traits, pursuit and hunting skills, as well as overall impression, an approach that aligns with the Saluki's historical role as an authentic hunting dog first and foremost, before it is regarded as a show or beauty dog.

The precise judging and assessment criteria take into account the breed standards of the competing dog, temperament (including gait and movement), physical features (including the head, eyes, nose, mouth, ears, teeth and jaw), conformation (including size, neck, shoulders, chest, back, and tail), and appearance (including coat, colour, movement, and legs), together with hunting and pursuit skills, overall impression, and behavioural characteristics.

The contest carries additional significance by virtue of being held within the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition, the first heritage event in the Arab world to celebrate the Arabian Saluki and shine a light on its historical role as a companion to humankind and desert companion since ancient times, contributing to broader societal awareness of this authentic heritage and embedding its presence in the memory of new generations.

Rize, Türkiye: Where Bird Migration Marks the Falconry Season

and the Heritage of the Sparrowhawk Becomes a Way of Life

Along the eastern coast of the Black Sea, in the highlands overlooking the migration routes, a scene unlike any other takes shape each year as summer draws to a close. Here, in the Turkish province of Rize, time is measured not by the calendar, but by the passage of birds across the sky. The Sparrowhawk falconry season begins with the first waves of migration and transforms into a social and cultural ritual that binds man to the rhythm of nature.

On late-summer mornings, the falconer in Rize does not look at his watch; he looks at the sky. There, as the first flocks of migrating birds begin to trace their paths across the green highlands, the start of a season unlike any other is announced. A short season, intense and laden with a heritage that stretches across generations. With the first appearance of the Sparrowhawk, these highlands become a living stage for a form of falconry that is not built on possession, but on passage.

Sparrowhawk falconry in Rize, known locally as Atmacacılık, is among the forms of falconry most intimately bound to the natural cycle, tied directly to the season of bird migration, particularly the quail that cross the region on their journey south.

The Sparrowhawk (Accipiter nisus) is a small raptor of the hawk family, distinguished by its speed and skill in pursuing small birds, and it is the principal bird in the seasonal falconry traditions of Rize Province, Türkiye.

With the arrival of this seasonal migration, the Sparrowhawk appears, and the falconers begin their preparations, awaiting a brief moment that may come only once in a day.



With piercing eyes and a commanding presence, the Eurasian Sparrowhawk stands as a symbol of an ancient falconry tradition still very much alive on the Black Sea coast and in the highlands of Rize, Türkiye.

Reading the Sky: A Skill That Goes Beyond Hunting

Along the highlands overlooking the coast, falconers construct small wooden hides known as gume, built with care at strategic locations that afford a wide view of the birds' flight paths. From within these hides, long hours of patient watching begin, with no room for unnecessary movement or distraction.

This form of falconry depends on a precise reading of bird behaviour. A small bird is used as bait, tethered by a light string behind a fine-meshed net. When the Sparrowhawk approaches, driven by its hunting instinct, the decisive moment arrives: a rapid stoop, followed by the closing of the net in one calculated movement. It is a process that allows no margin for error and condenses years of accumulated experience in understanding timing, distance, and reaction.



A panoramic view of the city of Rize from the mountains overlooking the Black Sea coast.

Choosing the Bird And the Beginning of a Relationship

After the Sparrowhawk is caught, a new phase begins, focused on calming the bird and beginning its training. Falconers prefer young females, as they possess a greater aptitude for learning and a better capacity to handle quarry. The bird is carried on a light perch and fed gradually in a quiet environment with minimal stimuli that might unsettle it.

Training here is neither long nor complex; it relies on building a swift responsiveness in the bird, enabling it to accompany the falconer through the short season. If the bird shows no aptitude for training, it is released immediately, a practice that reflects a practical understanding of the nature of this raptor.

A Temporary Falconry: And a Philosophy of Release

What distinguishes Sparrowhawk falconry in Rize is that it does not end with the falconer retaining the bird. With the end of the migration season, typically in late October, the Sparrowhawk is released back into the wild. It is not kept, nor is it held in long-term captivity; it returns to its natural course, as though the relationship between the bird and the falconer were merely a passing waypoint in its journey.

Even the birds used as bait are returned to nature, an affirmation that this falconry is built on balance, not exploitation. It is a temporary relationship, yet a deep one, that ends with the close of the season only to be resumed anew the following year.

A Living Social Heritage

This practice is inseparable from the local community; it is woven into the fabric of daily life. It is present in folk songs and stories and is passed down within families, where children learn to read the sky before they learn the techniques of hunting. Women also play a role in preserving this heritage through their contribution to the care of the birds and the preparation of falconry equipment, reflecting its inclusive community character.

The tradition extends along the coast from Rize to Artvin, passing through areas such as Çayeli, Pazar, Ardesen, and Fındıklı, where the highlands become seasonal gathering places for falconers united by a shared experience that is repeated year after year. Local festivals and competitions are also held, reflecting the depth of the community's attachment to this heritage.

Between Change and Continuity

Despite the decline of traditional falconry in other regions, Sparrowhawk falconry in Rize has maintained its continuity, although it faces challenges arising from changing land use and declining interest among some younger generations. Even so, local initiatives, including festivals and cultural events, continue to keep this heritage alive in public consciousness.

Some practices have also evolved to become more environmentally responsible, with indiscriminate methods being curtailed and replaced by more selective approaches, within a framework that balances the preservation of heritage with the protection of the birds.

When Falconry Is Part of the Migration

In Rize, falconry is not practised in isolation from nature; it is born with it and disappears with it. It begins with the first migrating bird and ends with the last wing to leave the horizon. Between beginning and end, a unique relationship takes shape, one built not on control, but on a brief encounter.

And so, Sparrowhawk falconry remains a rare example of a living heritage that is renewed each year, not only because it is preserved in memory, but because it is still being practised… in the sky.

Source:

Türkiye Today, How Rize Keeps Türkiye's Sparrowhawk Heritage Alive, October 2025.



A panoramic view of the city of Rize from the mountains overlooking the Black Sea coast.



A falconer waits inside his wooden hide, known locally as a gume, overlooking a migration route above the Black Sea, where the Sparrowhawk is traditionally caught and trained in Rize Province, Türkiye. (Photo: IHA News Agency)



Falconers from Rize Province, Türkiye, continuing an ancient Sparrowhawk falconry tradition stretching back many centuries. (Photo: IHA News Agency)

Falcons Live on Air:

When Raptor Nests Became a Daily Show Watched by Thousands of Viewers



From Skyscraper to Window on Nature

In the heart of the Australian city of Melbourne, at a dizzying height above the city's restless rhythm, something far from an ordinary urban spectacle is unfolding: a complete life story, broadcast live through the project known as the Melbourne Falcon Cam.

A small Peregrine nest, fixed to the façade of a skyscraper, has become a daily point of focus for thousands of people around the world, who follow the finest details of these raptors' lives as though watching a story unfold live, one that can never be replayed.



A Phenomenon That Goes Beyond Curiosity to Connection

This phenomenon, highlighted in a recent BBC report, reveals not only human curiosity about wildlife, but also points to a deeper shift in the relationship between people and falcons. These birds are no longer seen solely in the context of hunting or traditional practice; they have become part of a collective digital experience, consumed daily through screens and followed with striking emotional engagement.

Nor is this experience confined to Melbourne alone. Recent years have seen the proliferation of dozens of live-streaming projects covering raptor nests across the United States, Europe, and Australia.

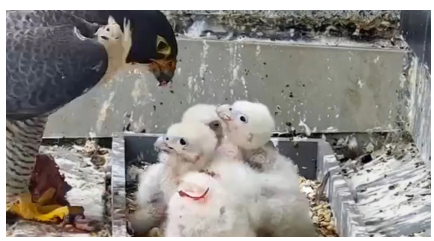
Wildlife cameras have become a popular means of following eagles, falcons, and owls during breeding seasons, attracting large audiences of nature and bird-of-prey enthusiasts.

This trend reflects growing public interest in observing the natural behaviour of wildlife, and the transformation of these scenes into a part of contemporary digital culture.

Real Drama: From Hatching to First Flight

The live broadcast, which follows the life of a Peregrine family in the heart of Melbourne around the clock, offers viewers a rare opportunity to witness the intimate details of every stage: from egg-laying and hatching, through feeding and the chicks' first tentative movements, to the most eagerly awaited moment of all, their first flight.

These moments, once witnessed only by falconers and researchers, are now available to the general public, followed with passion, analysed, and discussed across social media platforms as though they were dramatic events.



An Audience That Watche And Feels

What is striking about this phenomenon is not merely the number of viewers, but the nature of the engagement. Many viewers do not simply watch; they develop an emotional bond with the birds, give them names, and eagerly await their daily progress. One regular viewer who follows the stream every day says:

"I open the stream every morning as though I'm visiting them… I feel like I'm part of their lives."

Another describes the experience in these words:

"This is better than any television programme… because everything that happens is real."

This attachment raises an important question: why do falcons, specifically, generate this level of interest when viewed through a live digital broadcast?

The Falcon: Between Majesty and Proximity

Part of the answer lies in the nature of the falcon itself. The Peregrine, with its extraordinary speed, precision in the hunt, and capacity for adaptation, represents one of the most remarkable raptors in the world. Yet in this context, the falcon does not appear merely as a predator, but as a creature living out a complete life cycle, in which there is nurture, learning, risk, and independence.

Live streaming reveals this hidden side of the raptor without stripping it of its majesty, creating a rare balance between intimacy and awe.

A Falconry Reading: Lessons from Nature

From a falconry perspective, these scenes carry genuine educational value. What the audience observes is not merely "natural life"; it is the precise behaviours that form the foundation of understanding raptors. The way chicks are fed, the distribution of food, the encouragement of movement, and even the deliberate reduction of feeding to encourage the young to fly are all elements well known to the falconer and used in the training of birds.

The difference here is that these processes occur in nature, without human intervention, which lends them a behavioural purity that is rarely observed with such clarity.

For falconers, the value of these scenes extends beyond visual pleasure or scientific curiosity; it offers a rare opportunity to compare the instinctive behaviour of wild raptors with that observed in birds that interact with people within the context of falconry.

Following the stages of growth, learning, and gradual self-reliance in the wild helps build a deeper understanding of the natural instincts that have formed the basis of falconry knowledge across the centuries.



Falcons in the City: An Unexpected Adaptation

This phenomenon also reveals the falcon's capacity to adapt to urban environments. Skyscrapers, with their height and rock-like façades, have become a natural substitute for the cliff ledges on which falcons have traditionally nested. Cities, for their part, offer an abundant supply of prey, particularly small birds such as pigeons, making them an unexpectedly suitable environment for these raptors.

This adaptation reflects not only the falcon's flexibility, but also raises questions about the future of the relationship between wildlife and urban development.





From Practice to Digital Culture

Most significant of all, however, is the cultural shift reflected by the phenomenon. Falcons, which for centuries were associated with exclusive practices or specific traditions, have now become part of an open digital culture accessible to anyone.

Getting to know these birds no longer requires field experience or the company of a falconer. An internet connection is sufficient.

And yet there remains a profound difference between knowing the falcon through a screen and knowing it through direct experience. Traditional falconry was never built on observation alone, but on daily experience, continuous interaction with the bird, and a deep understanding of its temperament and responses.

These cameras can therefore be seen as a window onto the world of raptors, not as a substitute for the experience that has formed the very heart of falconry throughout history. They broaden interest in falconry, while at the same time changing the nature of that interest, from direct practice to the experience of watching.

The Paradox of Closeness Through the Screen

Here a striking paradox emerges: the closer people come to falcons through screens, the farther they become from them in the field. Watching, for all its richness, cannot replace the direct sensory experience on which traditional falconry is built.

Even so, this phenomenon can be seen as a new gateway rather than a substitute. It introduces a wide audience to the world of raptors, awakens their curiosity, and may inspire some to explore further, whether through reading or through practice itself.

Falcons ... Between the Sky and the Screen

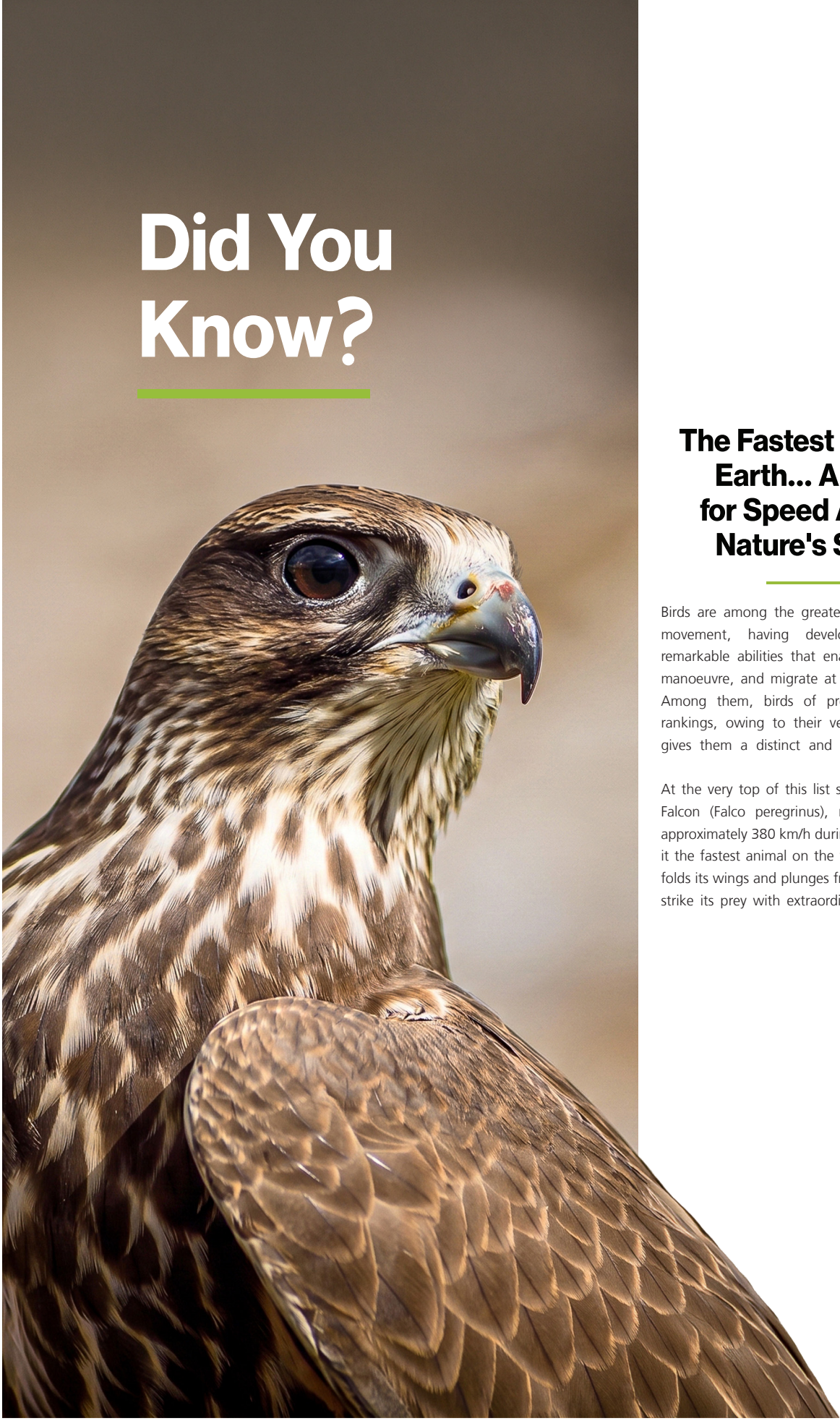
Ultimately, this experience cannot be separated from the broader context in which we live, one in which nature itself is presented through digital media and rediscovered on screen. Falcons, within this framework, have not lost their essence, but have gained a new layer of presence: a continuous visual presence that allows people to observe, learn, and reflect without leaving where they are.

And while these raptors soar above cities and raise their young on the edges of towers, the scene, for all its modernity, remains a reminder of something far older:

That the relationship between humans and nature is never broken; it merely changes its form. And that the falcon, whether in the sky or on the screen, is still capable of evoking the same sense of wonder and raising the same question:

How do we see this world... and how do we choose to be a part of it?

Did You Know?



The Fastest Birds on Earth... A Race for Speed Across Nature's Skies

Birds are among the greatest masters of aerial movement, having developed, over time, remarkable abilities that enable them to hunt, manoeuvre, and migrate at exceptional speeds. Among them, birds of prey lead the speed rankings, owing to their vertical stoop, which gives them a distinct and decisive advantage.

At the very top of this list stands the Peregrine Falcon (Falco peregrinus), reaching speeds of approximately 380 km/h during its stoop, making it the fastest animal on the face of the Earth. It folds its wings and plunges from great heights to strike its prey with extraordinary precision.


Peregrine Falcon


Golden Eagle

The world's fastest birds include a diverse range of species, spanning raptors, seabirds, and smaller birds, as follows:

1. Peregrine Falcon (Falco peregrinus): approx. 380 km/h (stoop)
2. Golden Eagle (Aquila chrysaetos): approx. 320 km/h (stoop)
3. White-throated Needletail (Hirundapus caudacutus): approx. 169 km/h (level flight)
4. Grey-headed Albatross (Thalassarche chrysostoma): approx. 125 km/h (sustained flight)
5. Frigatebird (Fregatidae): approx. 150 km/h (high-speed flight)
6. Saker Falcon (Falco cherrug): approx. 240 km/h (stoop)
7. Gyrfalcon (Falco rusticolus): approx. 210 km/h (stoop)
8. Common Swift (Apus apus): approx. 110 km/h (level flight), capable of remaining airborne for months on end without ever touching the ground
9. Eurasian Hobby (Falco subbuteo): approx. 160 km/h (short bursts)
10. Anna's Hummingbird (Calypte anna): approx. 100 km/h (brief dive)


Gyr Falcon


White-Throated Needletail


Saker Falcon

This list reveals a striking diversity in the ways birds achieve speed. Raptors such as the Peregrine, Saker, and Gyrfalcon rely on the vertical stoop to reach their highest speeds, while other species, such as swifts and the albatross, are distinguished by their ability to maintain high speeds in sustained level flight over long distances.

These remarkable abilities also reflect highly specialised biological adaptations, including streamlined bodies, powerful wings, and exceptionally acute vision, enabling these birds to excel within their respective environments.

In the context of falconry, certain species on this list, foremost among them the Peregrine and the Saker, hold a place of particular distinction, possessing a rare combination of speed, power, and precision.

These birds, in all their astonishing diversity, stand as a living testament to nature's ingenuity in devising multiple solutions to achieve one and the same goal:

Mastery of the skies, whether through a lightning-fast stoop or sustained flight, in a spectacle that unites science, beauty, and the ancient heritage of falconry.

Source:
Discover Wildlife (BBC Wildlife Magazine) — Fastest Birds in the World

The Vikings Traded Falcons with Baghdad in the Middle Ages

The white Gyrfalcon was among the most prized gifts to reach the Abbasid Caliphs, brought from lands within the Arctic Circle.



An illustration of a falcon from a manuscript attributed to Zakariya al-Qazwini, preserved within Walters MS 659 at the Walters Art Museum.



A Gyrfalcon, the largest falcon species in the world, was among the most prized birds to reach the court of the Abbasid Caliphs through trade networks extending from northern Europe.

A recent study published in the journal Early Medieval Europe reveals a remarkable chapter in the global history of falconry, indicating that the Vikings played a role in transporting rare Gyrfalcons (Falco rusticolus) from the far north of Europe to the court of the Abbasid Caliphs in Baghdad during the ninth and tenth centuries AD.

Researchers Caitlin Ellis and Sam Ottewill-Soulsby drew upon Arabic sources, archaeological findings, genetic studies, and historical falconry manuscripts to reconstruct an extensive trade network stretching from Iceland and Scandinavia to the very heart of the Islamic world.

The evidence suggests that rare white Gyrfalcons, captured in the Arctic regions, were transported along trade routes controlled by the Vikings and the early Rus peoples, all the way to Baghdad.

Historical sources record that the Abbasid Caliphs received large numbers of falcons as diplomatic gifts from rulers and princes of the regions lying to the north of the Islamic world. In 893 AD, Ismail ibn Ahmad al-Samani presented Caliph al-Mu'tadid Billah with 32 falcons, among them 11 white falcons.

Within just a few decades, no fewer than 172 falcons had reached the Abbasid court, presented as part of political relations and the exchange of gifts between sovereigns.

Falconry was one of the most prominent expressions of aristocratic culture in the Abbasid era, intimately associated with the Caliph's standing and the prestige of the state. The Caliphs devoted considerable attention to the birds used in hunting and to falconers, to the extent that some sources refer to vast sums being spent annually on hunting and falconry.

The study notes that white falcons were the most prized of all falcon species; a tenth-century author described them as the swiftest, most beautiful, and most enduring in flight and in the hunt.

The researchers suggest these birds were most likely Gyrfalcons, the largest falcon species in the world, native to Iceland, Greenland, and northern Scandinavia.

It appears that the Viking settlement of Iceland, which began around 870 AD, coincided with the emergence of these rare falcons in Baghdad. The researchers propose that the new settlers may have taken advantage of the island's abundant Gyrfalcon population and begun trapping them for trade, much as they exploited the walrus for ivory.

Remains of falcons and birds of prey used in falconry have also been found in the graves of Scandinavian elites from the Viking Age, attesting to the Vikings' familiarity with the sport and its social standing. Certain archaeological finds point to the spread of falcon-shaped symbols and motifs across Scandinavia and Eastern Europe during the period in which this trade flourished.

The study paints a striking picture of inter-civilisational connections in the Middle Ages; a Gyrfalcon caught near the Arctic Circle could travel through Viking settlements and trading centres across the lands of the Rus' and Central Asia, to arrive ultimately at the court of the Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad, where it would be flown in the hunt and presented as a symbol of status and political prestige.

Though this trade was not long-lived, it affirms the exceptional standing that falcons have commanded throughout history, and their role in binding distant peoples and cultures within a network of commercial and diplomatic exchange stretching from Iceland to Iraq more than a thousand years ago.

Source:
"The Caliph and the Falcons: A Ninth-Century History from Iceland to Iraq," published in Early Medieval Europe, as featured on Medievalists.net

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His Highness Sheikh

Hazza bin Zayed Al Nahyan

Ruler's Representative in the Al Ain Region

بطولة السلوقي العربي - العين

Arabian Saluki Championship - Al Ain

Arabian Saluki Beauty Contest & Hunting Simulation Competition

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- **Al Ain International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition (AAIHEX)**
- **Al Dhafra Festival**
- **The final competitions are held at the Sheikh Zayed Festival**



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Falconry: A Legacy Renewed in a Changing World

Omar Fouad Ahmad

Projects Director of the Emirates Falconers' Club
Managing Editor of Al Saggar Magazine



As we turn the pages of a new issue of our magazine, we find ourselves in a year rich in achievements and transformations that have once again affirmed that falconry is no longer merely a historical legacy invoked on special occasions, but has become a global model that brings together culture, nature conservation, cultural diplomacy, and sustainable development.

Since the publication of our previous issue in September 2025, the international stage has witnessed a series of significant developments that have further reinforced the standing of falconry as one of the most prominent elements of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity. International organizations, foremost among them UNESCO and the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey, have continued to expand cooperation programmes aimed at protecting this human legacy, strengthening its role in conserving biodiversity, and transmitting traditional knowledge to new generations, recognising falconry as a living model of the balance between humankind and nature.

Over the past year, new issues have emerged, reaffirming that the future of falconry is, more than ever, tied to science, legislation, and sustainability. The world has witnessed growing discussions on the protection of birds of prey and the management of their populations, with many countries moving toward greater reliance on captive-breeding programmes and the conservation of wild species, in line with best environmental practices and in ways that ensure the sustainability of falconry for future generations.

In turn, the United Arab Emirates has continued to consolidate its standing as a global capital of falconry, not only by organising events, exhibitions, and championships, but also by adopting a comprehensive vision that makes falconry a bridge for communication among peoples, a platform for cultural dialogue, and a means of supporting the conservation of birds of prey and their natural habitats. The Emirati experience has become a model to be emulated in bringing together authenticity and innovation, and in preserving heritage while investing in scientific research and education.

Recent years have also proven that falconry is capable of keeping pace with global changes through the use of modern technologies in tracking, veterinary medicine, breeding, training, and knowledge documentation, without losing its authentic spirit passed down through generations over many centuries.

Amid these significant transformations, artificial intelligence and digital transformation are becoming increasingly important in advancing falconry, enhancing scientific research, supporting efforts to conserve birds of prey, and documenting inherited expertise, while preserving the essence of this authentic human heritage.

As the end of 2026 approaches, falconers around the world are turning their attention to a number of important international milestones, foremost among them the annual meeting of the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of Birds of Prey in Beijing, the Chinese capital, which will bring together representatives from dozens of countries to discuss the future of falconry, issues related to the conservation of birds of prey, and the strengthening of international cooperation in the fields of heritage, the environment, and education.

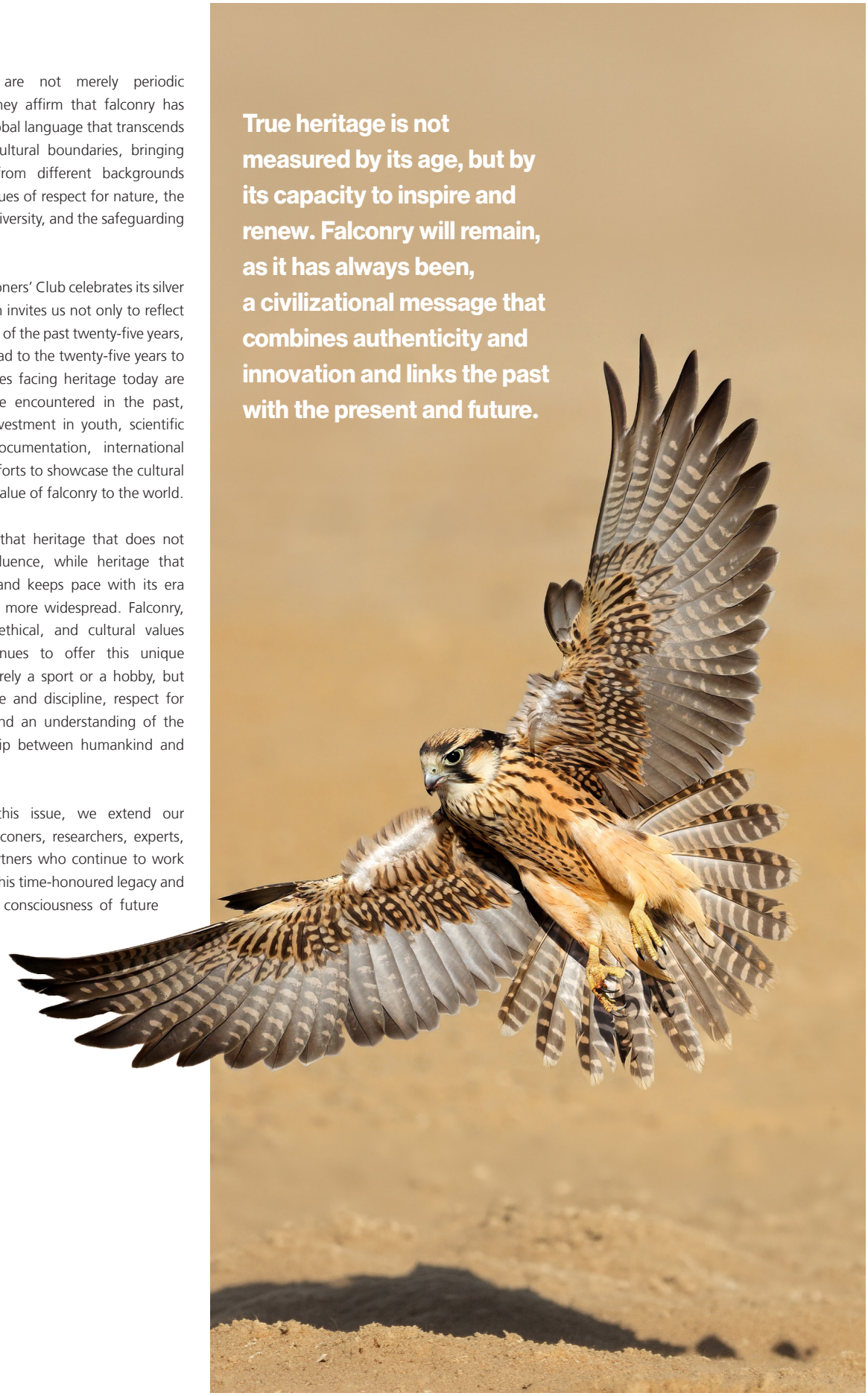
These gatherings are not merely periodic meetings; rather, they affirm that falconry has become a shared global language that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries, bringing together peoples from different backgrounds around common values of respect for nature, the conservation of biodiversity, and the safeguarding of human heritage.

As the Emirates Falconers' Club celebrates its silver jubilee, this occasion invites us not only to reflect on the achievements of the past twenty-five years, but also to look ahead to the twenty-five years to come. The challenges facing heritage today are different from those encountered in the past, requiring greater investment in youth, scientific research, digital documentation, international partnerships, and efforts to showcase the cultural and environmental value of falconry to the world.

History has shown that heritage that does not evolve loses its influence, while heritage that preserves its roots and keeps pace with its era grows stronger and more widespread. Falconry, with the human, ethical, and cultural values it embodies, continues to offer this unique model. It is not merely a sport or a hobby, but a school of patience and discipline, respect for the environment, and an understanding of the profound relationship between humankind and living creatures.

As we conclude this issue, we extend our thanks to all the falconers, researchers, experts, institutions, and partners who continue to work sincerely to protect this time-honoured legacy and keep it alive in the consciousness of future generations.

True heritage is not measured by its age, but by its capacity to inspire and renew. Falconry will remain, as it has always been, a civilizational message that combines authenticity and innovation and links the past with the present and future.



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الصقار al saggar

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