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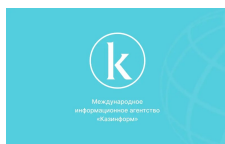
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Last Kazakh eagle hunters in China



None

URUMCHI. KAZINFORM - Khaimu, a 70 year old Kazakh, looks forward to the most awaited period when he will demonstrate the art of eagle hunting on the festival of snow and ice in Qinhe district of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, on the Mongolian border, in front of 10 thousand visitors,



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**Xinhua
agency
writes.**



Khaimu was 40 when he learnt eagle hunting from his uncle. "Eagle is a noble bird. Not everyone is able to tame it. My uncle delegated it to me when he became too old", said Khaimu.

Eagles are protected birds. Hawk hunting is prohibited in China. The organizers of the festival had to make a lot of effort so that Khaimu could perform.

"People like this Kazakh tradition of eagle hunting. Some accused me of cruel treatment of the bird but for me the eagle is

"The eagle is a family member. I take care of them better than of my grandchildren", said Khaimu.



For the last several years Khaimu has had seven eagles. "When I take a young eagle for raising I feed it well to help it grow before winter.

January is the best time to train eagles. In summer birds gain strength" said Khaimu.



When the sun is high, Khaimu puts on his fox fur hat, fur coat and felt boots - the traditional attire of an

eagle hunter.

He trains the young eagle near the house. When the eagle makes a soft landing on his arm Khaimu awards it with a piece of fresh meat. He also trains the bird to follow the moving target. Riding a horse Khaimu drags fox skin on the snow, whilst the birds rockets up from his right arm in order to find the target.



The young eagle has managed to find the prey four times during two hours but Khaimu always stays positive. "A young eagle needs time", said he.



At times the bird compels Khaimu to be rigid, when the young eagle show its character, but he never hurts the bird. "Once it pecked me. The eagle had a leather cap ("tomogo") on covering its eyes, and I imitated hare sounds. The eagle flew down and stabbed his beak into my palm", he explained.

Eagles are kept captive for about four years and afterwards are let into wild nature for reproduction.



Khaimu does

not earn on eagle hunting - it is the matter of tradition.



"In Qinhe we have 40 hunters and 40 eagles", the head of eagle hunting association, Tuokon, said.



Average age of eagle hunters is not older than 50 years. Khaimu and Tuokon are worried that they might be the last eagle hunters who know the art of eagle hunting.

"I have two sons. One of them is a driver and the other is a businessmen. None of them are interested

are interested in learning the art of falconry. And I am afraid that when I die falconry dies with me", 60-year old Tuokon said.



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