

ANNUAL REPORT

2023-2024



صندوق محمد بن زايد للمحافظة على الطيور الجارحة
MOHAMED BIN ZAYED
RAPTOR CONSERVATION FUND



“For centuries, falcons and falconry have played an essential part in our culture and heritage. In today’s world, when wildlife everywhere is under pressure, it is only through research and conservation programmes like this, conducted in collaboration with scientists and research and conservation institutions in other countries, that we can aspire to preserve both falcons in the wild and their place in our culture.”

- His Highness Sheikh Mohamed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan
President Of The United Arab Emirates

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Saker Falcon landing.
(Photo by Munir Virani - MBZRCF)

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Vice Chairman Mohamed Al Bowardi releasing a Peregrine Falcon in Pakistan.
(Photo by Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi)

MESSAGE FROM VICE CHAIRMAN

At the core of our mission and rooted in our cultural heritage of falconry, lies a profound commitment to preserving our planet's rich biodiversity that raptors represent. From the steppes of Mongolia to the landscapes of Bulgaria, our efforts have yielded remarkable results.

In Mongolia, in collaboration with our in-country partners, we have ensured that each year, nearly 18,000 birds of prey are spared from electrocution by insulating 27,000 low-voltage distribution power poles—a testament to the power of collective action.

Our work does not stop there. We revisited all 5,000 artificial nest sites that we deployed in 2010 across the Mongolian steppes, recognizing the invaluable role these play in bolstering wild populations such as the endangered Saker Falcon, a national symbol in the United Arab Emirates. We estimate that our artificial nest efforts have added 25,000 Saker Falcons to the wild.

Our successes extend beyond borders. In Bulgaria, our Saker Falcon breeding and reintroduction project has provided hope for a species extirpated in the 1990s. Through our new partnerships—from the Americas to Mozambique, Central India to the Philippines—we are extending our wings, reach and impact, tackling the urgent challenges facing raptors on a global scale. We are a force for good.

Closer to home, we're nurturing a culture of raptor awareness and building a dedicated team to champion our cause. We believe in the power of partnerships, the strength of community, and the transformative potential of collective action.

Together, let's rise to the challenge, stand as stewards of our planet's magnificent raptors, and forge a future where these majestic creatures thrive for generations to come. Finally, we are grateful to all our partners for their unstinting support and commitment to ensure that raptors continue to grace our skies.

Mohammed Al Bowardi
Vice Chairman, Mohamed Bin Zayed Raptor Conservation Fund

WHO WE ARE

In 2018, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, established the Mohamed Bin Zayed Raptor Conservation Fund (MBZRCF). This initiative was born from a profound recognition of the critical role that raptors play in our ecosystems. The alarming reality is that one out of every five of the 567 raptor species worldwide teeters on the brink of extinction without urgent conservation intervention.

Our vision is to ensure that raptors and their habitats are conserved and restored as valuable elements of regional and global biodiversity.

This mission is inspired by Abu Dhabi's remarkable journey in conservation, where initiatives like the reintroduction of the Arabian Oryx and the protection of the Houbara Bustard showcase a commitment to preserving endangered species.

Building on Abu Dhabi's conservation legacy, our efforts focus on protecting raptors through science-driven initiatives, captive breeding programs, and innovative research on raptor genetics and migration.

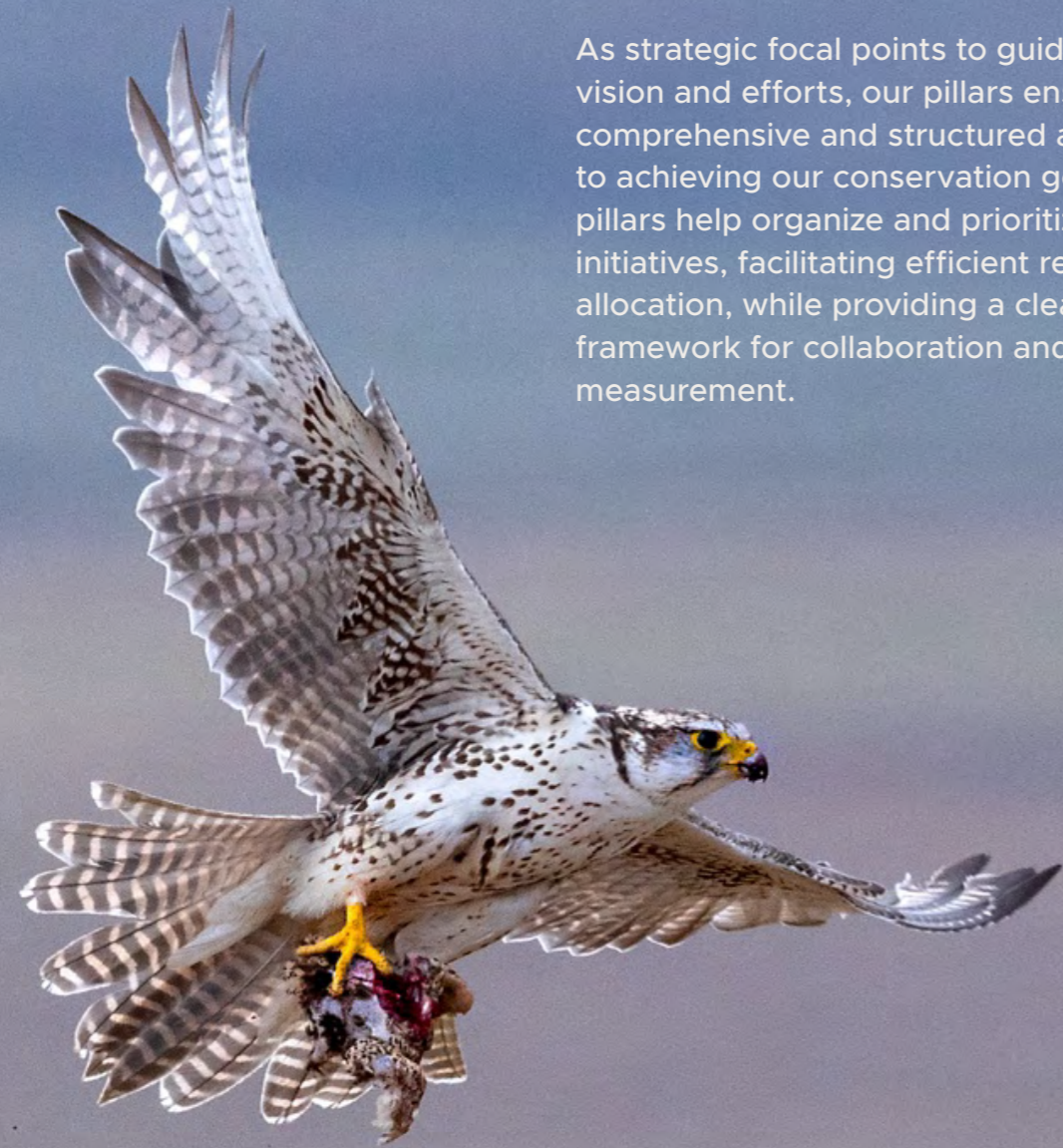
Institutions like the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital and the International Fund for Houbara Conservation exemplify our approach, promoting excellence in conservation and public awareness.

We strive to make a global impact by fostering partnerships and supporting raptor conservation projects worldwide. Guided by the visionary leadership of the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, we aim to ensure that raptors thrive for generations to come.

Saker Falcon diving.
(Photo by Munir Virani - MBZRCF)



OUR PILLARS



As strategic focal points to guide our vision and efforts, our pillars ensure a comprehensive and structured approach to achieving our conservation goals. These pillars help organize and prioritize our initiatives, facilitating efficient resource allocation, while providing a clear framework for collaboration and impact measurement.

Saker Falcon holding prey.
(Photo by Munir Virani - MBZRCF)



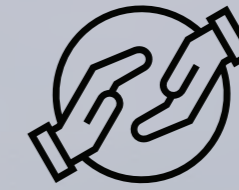
Species Conservation

We focus on conserving and restoring populations of threatened raptor species, such as the Saker falcon. Our efforts include initiatives like artificial nest deployment, captive breeding, and reintroduction programs to bolster wild populations.



Scientific Research

Grounded in sound science, this pillar aims for effective and sustainable outcomes for raptor populations and their habitats. We advance our understanding of raptor ecology, behaviour, and threats through research, developing innovative conservation solutions based on scientific evidence.



Global Partnerships

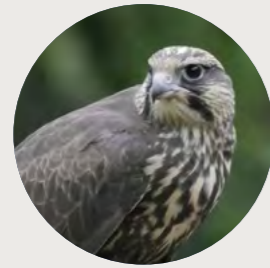
Collaboration and partnership on a global scale are crucial. We work with stakeholders, organizations, and governments worldwide to collectively tackle raptor conservation challenges, extending our impact.



Conservation Leadership

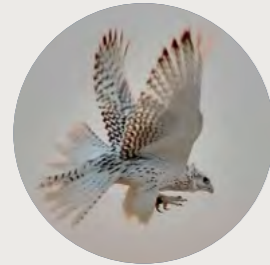
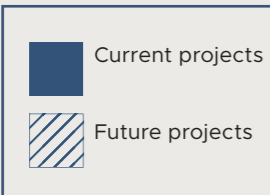
We cultivate the next generation of raptor conservation leaders by providing training, mentorship, and capacity-building opportunities. This pillar inspires and empowers individuals to become effective advocates and practitioners, ensuring the sustainability of conservation initiatives.

OUR PROJECTS



BULGARIA

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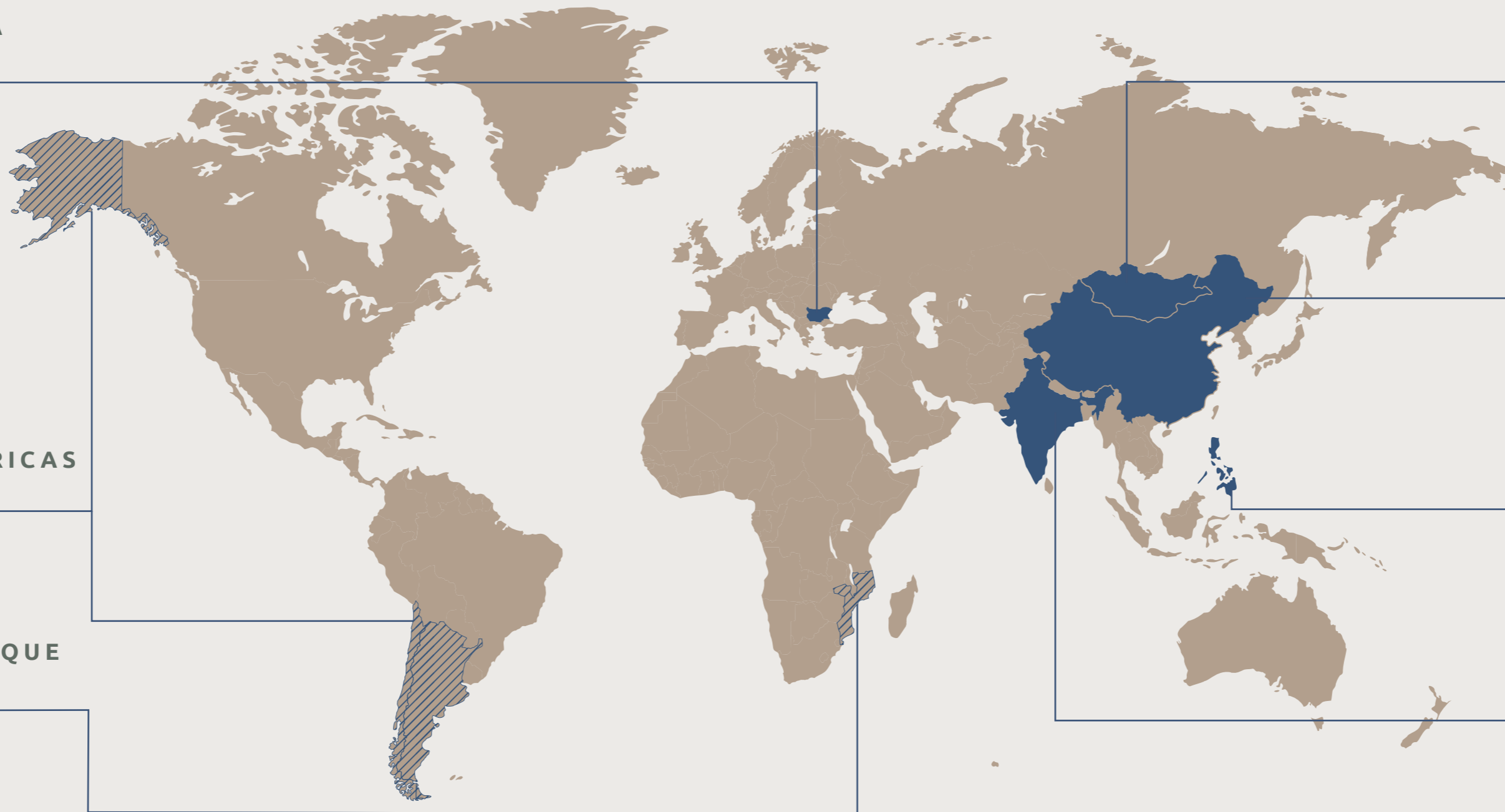
THE AMERICAS

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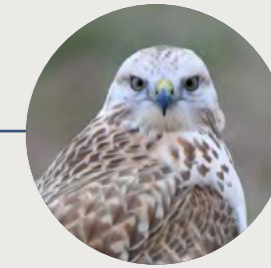
MOZAMBIQUE

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MONGOLIA

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CHINA

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PHILIPPINE

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INDIA

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MONGOLIA

Partners: Mongolian Bird Conservation Center; Wildlife Science and Conservation Center

INITIATIVE TO REDUCE RAPTOR ELECTROCUTIONS

In Mongolia, electrocution at power distribution lines was identified as a major cause of raptor mortality, killing an estimated 18,000 raptors annually, including 4,000 Saker Falcons. Under a Memorandum of Understanding with the Mongolian Ministry of Environment and Tourism, we initiated a project to insulate the most dangerous distribution lines in the Mongolian steppe.

In 2023, our field teams inspected all previously insulated poles, surveying 68 lines across 15 provinces. Insulation covers had been installed on nearly 27,000 power poles, and preliminary results show that the raptor electrocution rate was reduced by 95%.

This initiative represents the largest single-line powerline conservation effort globally.

Insulation covers had been installed on nearly 27,000 power poles, reducing the electrocution rate of raptors by 95%.



Mongolian utility company engineer insulating a power pole. (Photo by Munir Virani - MBZRCF)



Saker Falcon perches on an artificial nest in Mongolia. (Photo by Munir Virani - MBZRCF)

ARTIFICIAL NESTS FOR RAPTORS AND GRASSLAND CONSERVATION

In 2023, our field teams surveyed a network of artificial nests across the grasslands of central Mongolia. Virtually every nest was occupied by a raptor, including 926 Saker Falcons, 304 Upland Buzzards, 126 Ravens, and 117 Common Kestrels.

In addition to increasing raptor predation on grassland pests, these artificial nests help bolster raptor populations, especially the globally endangered Saker Falcon. Since their deployment in 2010, we estimate that these nests have produced around 25,000 young Saker Falcons, making a significant contribution to their conservation in the Mongolian grasslands.

25,000 young Saker Falcons have been produced in the wild since 2010.

Upland Buzzard perches on an insulated conductor cable.
(Photo by Andrew Dixon - MBZRCF)



CHINA

Partners: Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Sciences,
Beijing

SAKER FALCON CONSERVATION ON THE QINGHAI-TIBETAN PLATEAU

The Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau is the core of the global Saker Falcon population, supporting up to 60% of the global population during winter, with around a third being migrants from Mongolia. Pikas are the main prey of Sakers on the plateau, and their abundance allows Sakers to breed in large numbers.

In 2023, we found Sakers breeding in artificial nests at the highest recorded density in the world. Previously, we identified electrocution as a high mortality risk for Saker Falcons and other raptors on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. However, many older, dangerous power lines have been replaced with new, insulated conductor cables that are raptor safe.

This demonstrates that the rapidly developing electricity distribution network on the plateau can be installed without posing an electrocution risk to raptors.

The highest density of breeding Saker Falcons in the world occurs at artificial nests at the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau.



Saker Falcon perches in an artificial nest in Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau.
(Photo by Andrew Dixon - MBZRCF)

BULGARIA

Partners: Green Balkans Wildlife and Rehabilitation Center

SAKER FALCON REINTRODUCTION

The population of Saker Falcons in Bulgaria declined throughout the 20th century, with the last confirmed nesting attempt in 1998. In 2006, Abu Dhabi initiated conservation projects in the southern Balkans, collaborating with local conservationists to develop a captive breeding and restoration program for Saker Falcons in Bulgaria.

Since 2019, our efforts in Bulgaria have intensified, yielding groundbreaking results. In 2023, 19 young captive-bred Saker Falcons were released. Over the past four years, a total of 73 captive-bred Sakers have been released in Bulgaria using the 'wild hacking' technique. One bird fitted with a transmitter travelled widely through Bulgaria and neighboring countries, frequently returning to the hack area after long exploratory journeys.

In 2023, two pairs of released Saker Falcons bred in the wild in Bulgaria, successfully raising six chicks.

73 captive-bred Saker Falcons have been released in Bulgaria.



Staff at Green Balkans prepare a captive-bred Saker Falcon for release. (Photo by Green Balkans)

Captive-bred Saker Falcons at the release site in Bulgaria. (Photo by Green Balkans)





Indian Vulture in flight in Orchha, Madhya Pradesh, India.
(Photo by Munir Virani - MBZRCF)

INDIA

Partner: The Corbett Foundation

MONITORING INDIAN VULTURES

The Mohamed bin Zayed Raptor Conservation Fund, in partnership with The Corbett Foundation, has made significant strides in conserving the critically endangered Indian Vulture (*Gyps indicus*) through the Asian Vulture Conservation Initiative. After an eight-year hiatus, the initiative has resumed crucial studies in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, employing robust methodologies such as using “occupied nest as a measure of unit” for population assessment and conducting annual surveys during the breeding periods. Key study areas, including Bandhavgarh National Park and its environs were surveyed with new high-resolution images to enhance clarity and precision in marking vulture nests, establishing a comprehensive baseline for future conservation actions and enhancing global partnerships and conservation leadership.

We are building local capacity and developing strategies to mitigate new threats to critically endangered vultures.

MBZRCF COO Munir Virani conducts a Vulture Breeding and Monitoring Training Session with Staff of The Corbett Foundation in Central Madhya Pradesh, India in preparation for the Vulture Breeding Season. (Photo by The Corbett Foundation)



Collaboration with The Corbett Foundation has been pivotal in building local capacity and fostering conservation leadership, with team members deeply involved in all aspects of the project, from data collection to formulating mitigation strategies. The initiative has also identified new threats, such as collisions with power lines, and plans to focus on tagging vultures to monitor their movements and develop strategies to mitigate these risks. This project is a cornerstone in filling the significant gap in conservation science for the Indian Vulture, showcasing a meticulous approach to scientific research, strategic partnerships, and a commitment to nurturing future conservation leaders. The work carried out is invaluable for the survival and thriving of the Indian Vulture and other raptor species in South Asia, setting a solid foundation for the continued protection and recovery of this vital species.

PHILIPPINES

Partner: The Philippine Eagle Foundation

PHILIPPINE EAGLE TRANSLOCATION

In a groundbreaking collaboration between the Mohamed bin Zayed Raptor Conservation Fund and the Philippine Eagle Foundation (PEF), the Philippine Eagle Translocation Project achieved a major milestone in raptor conservation. This year, two critically endangered Philippine Eagles were successfully released in Leyte, the first such release outside Mindanao, symbolizing hope for the species' recovery and genetic diversity.

Aiming to relocate ten individuals from Mindanao to Leyte over three years, this pilot project seeks to restore the species' population and habitat, addressing threats like shooting and habitat loss. By engaging local communities and raising awareness bolsters wild populations, preserves genetic diversity, and protects forest tracts. Supported by local communities and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Fund has committed three years of funding to ensure the success of this initiative, highlighting its dedication to the survival of the Philippine Eagle and its role as an apex predator.

Two critically endangered Philippine Eagles have been successfully released from Mindanao to Leyte to increase their viability in the wild.



Representatives of The MBZRCF and The Philippine Eagle Foundation at a ceremony in Davao, Philippines where a landmark agreement was signed to translocate 10 Philippine eagles from Mindanao to Leyte. (Photo by The Philippine Eagle Foundation)



Philippine Eagle.
(Photo by Klaus Nigge)

LOOKING AHEAD

The Fund signed new agreements with partners across the globe, expanding our global conservation portfolio. From baby steps, we are now making giant leaps to ensure transformative and impactful raptor conservation at scale.

White-headed Vulture taking flight. (Photo by Munir Virani - MBZRCF)



MOZAMBIQUE: GORONGOSA WHITE- HEADED VULTURE PROJECT

Partners: Endangered Wildlife Trust, Marshall Telemetry

The critically endangered White-headed Vulture, Africa's most iconic and threatened vulture, finds its stronghold in Gorongosa National Park, a symbol of successful conservation. Gorongosa showcases how protected areas can address biodiversity loss and support local communities. The Fund has partnered with South Africa's Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) to enhance the conservation of the White-headed Vulture and develop raptor conservation leadership within the park.

With an estimated 5,500 individuals remaining continent-wide, our efforts include comprehensive nest monitoring, breeding success, and movement data analysis within Gorongosa. This will provide vital knowledge to identify threats at various scales. Training local partners and mentoring young scientists will establish a long-term, self-sustaining program.

Combining rigorous research, community engagement, and education, this project embodies Gorongosa's conservation success and serves as a model for protecting threatened raptor species worldwide.

Gyrfalcon in flight. (Photo by Munir Virani - MBZRCF)



THE AMERICAS: GYRFALCON, POLAR RAPTORS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Partner: The Peregrine Fund

This new and exciting partnership with The Peregrine Fund will address the urgent challenges posed by climate change to protect nine species of raptors that occur in the polar regions, including the Gyrfalcon.

Over the next three years, this collaboration will focus on a multifaceted approach to research and conservation. The objectives include conducting in-depth studies on the population dynamics of key species such as the Gyrfalcon.

By pooling our expertise and resources, both organizations aim to provide valuable insights into the resilience of polar raptors and contribute to global efforts to conserve biodiversity in these regions.

This collaboration not only underscores our shared commitment to raptor conservation but also exemplifies the transformative impact of international partnerships in addressing complex environmental challenges.

CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP

Partners: Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital

We are deeply honored to have supported Bulgarian Falcon veterinarian Stefka Dimitrova in her remarkable journey to the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital for a four-week training program. This initiative, part of our burgeoning conservation leadership program, aimed to equip Stefka with cutting-edge falcon veterinary techniques crucial for enhancing our Saker Falcon breeding and reintroduction project in Bulgaria.

Stefka's time at the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital was profoundly inspiring. She recounted,

"From the moment I set foot in the Falcon Hospital, I was awestruck by the advanced equipment and the expertise of seasoned specialists. Each day was filled with new discoveries and insights, each more exhilarating than the last. The wealth of knowledge and skills I gained during my training at the Falcon Hospital will undoubtedly shape my approach to falcon veterinary care."

Dr. Stefka Dimitrova showcasing some falcons during her training. (Photo by Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital)



One of the most remarkable aspects of Stefka's training was her exposure to innovative treatments. She was particularly impressed by the use of homoeopathic medicine, which had a tangible impact on the health of the birds. Additionally, learning to administer subcutaneous fluids opened up new avenues of care previously unexplored. Encountering conditions such as pseudomonas infection broadened her understanding of avian health, providing invaluable insights for her work at the Wildlife Rescue Centre in Bulgaria. Furthermore, refining her skills in reading X-rays and performing endoscopies will enhance her ability to diagnose and treat avian patients with precision and care.

"Every feather I repair and every bird I heal brings us closer to our goal of conserving these magnificent creatures."

Stefka's training at the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital has been nothing short of transformative. She expressed her heartfelt gratitude to the entire team, saying, "I learned something new from each of the specialists at the hospital."

With the support of the Mohamed bin Zayed Raptor Conservation Fund, Stefka is now equipped with the knowledge and skills to make a significant impact on the conservation of raptors in Bulgaria. She affirmed,

"I am excited to bring back what I've learned to our conservation efforts in Bulgaria."

She looks forward to applying her newly acquired skills to the Saker Falcon breeding and reintroduction project supported by the Fund, confident that together, we can ensure a brighter future for these majestic birds.

Dr. Stefka Dimitrova and staff proudly display her certificate upon completing her training at the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital. (Photo by Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital)



EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

In 2023, we presented at four major events: the 3rd Meeting of the Signatories of the United Nation’s Convention of Migratory Species Raptors Memorandum of Understanding in Dubai, the World Utilities Congress in Abu Dhabi, and the Conference of the Parties (COP28) Climate Summit in Dubai. We highlighted successful mitigation efforts in Mongolia, where 27,000 power poles were insulated to reduce bird electrocutions by 95%, emphasizing collaboration between conservationists and the energy industry.

We also addressed the decline of African raptor populations due to energy infrastructure, advocating for enhanced conservation efforts, particularly for critically endangered vultures, as part of climate action. Our presentations underscored nature-positive solutions and technological advancements in raptor conservation.

Our Science and Conservation Director, Dr. Andrew Dixon, participated at the Eagles of the Palearctic Conference in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and the LIFE for Falcons: Saker Falcon Conference in Stara Zagora, Bulgaria. At both conferences, he summarized the results of our electrocution mitigation surveys in Mongolia. Our teams found that power lines fitted with protective covers effectively reduced bird electrocutions. The covers were durable, easy to install, and didn’t disrupt the power supply. Preliminary results have demonstrated that our insulation efforts have significantly decreased bird electrocution without causing any problems to the power supply.



(From the right) H.E. Mariam Almheiri, H.E. Abdulla Ahem Al Qubaisi, and H.E. Abdulla Ghurair Al Qubaisi attend a conference.



MBZRCF COO Munir Virani speaks at a conference.

PAPERS PUBLISHED

In 2023, we published four significant peer-reviewed papers in raptor research. Our studies covered nesting patterns in the Junggar Basin, genetic diversity among peregrine falcon subspecies, the vulnerability of African savanna raptors, and threats to Nepalese raptors.

We highlighted unique nesting dynamics between Saker Falcons and Golden Eagles, genetic variations in peregrine falcons, the role of protected areas in African raptor conservation, and the dangers posed by powerlines, poisoning, and persecution in Nepal. We proposed strategies such as retrofitting power poles and conservation education to mitigate these threats.

These publications underscore the importance of collaborative partnerships and interdisciplinary research in protecting raptor populations globally.

JOIN US ON OUR MISSION

As we look towards the future, we invite individuals, organizations, and governments to unite in safeguarding the world's imperiled raptors. Together, let us create a future where birds of prey not only survive but thrive, ensuring a legacy of conservation excellence for generations to come. By joining us on our mission, you become a guardian of these majestic creatures, securing a brighter tomorrow for our children and the diverse ecosystems they call home.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED:

- **Follow Us on social media:** Stay updated on our latest initiatives, success stories, and opportunities to make a difference by following us on our social media platforms. Together, we can amplify our message and inspire others to join us on our mission.
- **Sign Up for Our Newsletter:** Receive exclusive updates, conservation insights, and invitations to events by signing up for our newsletter. Stay informed and engaged as we work tirelessly to protect raptors around the globe.
- **Become Our Messengers of Hope:** Spread awareness and advocate for raptor conservation in your community and beyond. By becoming our messengers of hope, you play a crucial role in building a brighter future for raptors worldwide.

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📍 Mohamed Bin Zayed Raptor Conservation Fund

White-headed Vulture Project Manager, Rebecca Bishop (right) shows two young Mozambicans a vulture nest at Gorongosa National Park.
(Photo by Munir Virani - MBZRCF)



OUR PARTNERS



الصندوق الدولي للحفاظ على الحبارى
International Fund For Houbara Conservation



هيئة البيئة - أبوظبي
Environment Agency - ABU DHABI





صندوق محمد بن زايد للمحافظة على الطيور الجارحة

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