Saker Falcon in Russia

Igor Karyakin & Elvira Nikolenko

In Russia Saker Falcon is found on the northern border of its breeding range



Habitats of Saker Falcon are extremely varied: from rocks among desert steppes to alpine high mountains Saker Falcon can nest on trees, power line poles and other human-made constructions, on cliffs and, exceptionally, on the ground.

> Necessary condition for nesting is the presence of a nest construction of another bird of prey, as a rule of buzzard or eagle.



In a Saker Falcon clutch there are usually 4-5 eggs, rarely 6-7 eggs





Main sources of nutrition for Saker Falcon are: different species of piping hare, sousliks, gerbils and big voles, such as Brandt's voles



Due to its adaptability, trophic specialization and middle size, Saker Falcon should be quite common, but this is not the case due to several reasons









73.5% of the Russian Saker Falcon population nests in the Altai-Sayan region

From the Altai-Sayan falcons 63% inhabit mainly the mountain-steppe regions of Tyva

Primary nesting places of Saker Falcon in the region are found on mountains on the periphery of steppe depressions

Large part of Saker Falcon pairs nest on the periphery of the Ubsunurskaya depression on the mountains Tannu-Ola and in the mountainous junction on the borders of Tyva and Altai





Monitored areas in 1999–2008





Bird excrement stays on the cliffs years after the birds have ceased to breed on the given site

In the Altai-Sayan region the number of Saker Falcon has decreased by more than 70% for the past 25 years and 17.1% for the past 7 years.

In some depressions Saker Falcon has already disappeared, and in others the numbers continue to decrease.



What is the reason for the decline of Saker Falcon?

- Decrease of the feed basis
- Natural predators
- Human activity





Abundance and access to sources of nutrition are the main reasons for the fluctuation of breeding success of Saker Falcon









In relation to changes in numbers of food sources, also occupancy of nests and brood size changes asynchronously The quantity of principal sources of nutrition of Saker Falcon in the Altai-Sayan region fluctuates within norms and decrease in their total number is not observed.





Negative fluctuation on separate years cannot produce continuous perennial fall of Saker Falcon numbers, as loss from years with low numbers of food sources is leveled by the growth in breeding success of falcons during years of increase in numbers of food sources.



Death of Saker Falcon due to preying by Eagle Owl and Golden Eagle does not exceed 10% and is substantially less than death of young falcons from starvation during years of little access to food.



The main reason for decline of Saker Falcon in the little-developed Altai-Sayan region is the negative impact of human activity







1. Poisoning

The occupancy of nests in the Altai-Sayan region sharply decreased in 2003. In 2002–2003 in Mongolia bromdialon was used to fight Brandt's voles and many falcons died as a result.



The mortality on nesting sites is very low due to low density of birdhazardous power lines.

The issue is practically not studied in connection to Russian falcons.







In the Altai-Sayan region Saker Falcon nests mainly there, where the power line infrastructure does not exist, is being developed or is in a degraded condition.

Thus, mortality on power lines takes place mainly during the migration period within the region.



The density of Saker Falcon in region



The density of power lines in region

3. Destruction of Saker Falcon nests on artificial constructions by local inhabitants



Destruction of nests in Tyva took place practically everywhere and falcons were not saved even by the border zones

4. Illegal capture and contraband



Change of partners on observed nests over 10 years (*n*=29)



Negative influence of capture and contraband:

- Many falcons die already during transportation.

 Falcons, that are released after the hunting season, die on the way back to their breeding places.

- Pigeons with loops are let loose during the capturing, poses a significant threat to wild populations of falcon.







As a result of illegal capturing and contraband, majority of falcons are irretrievably removed from the population and do not participate in breeding.



The areas of bird capture in the region: the quantity of encounters with hunters according to questionnaire data from specialists:



Most difficult areas are Khakassiya, Altaisk Province, South-Eastern Altai and Southern Tyva.



According to expert estimation, carried out within a project by WWF in 2006, in Altai-Sayan region no less than



Saker Falcons are captured every year



A special conservation programme must be realized for the protection of Saker Falcon in Russia. This programme must include the active participation of border control, customs, Russian Nature Supervison, scientific organizations and the public.

Primary directions of activity:

1. Suppression of illegal capturing of birds with specially organized target forces

2. Reinforcement of customs control in airports and vehicle border crossing points

- 3. Control by operational customs of persons that have been detained for an attempt of bird capturing or transportation
- 4. Carrying out actions to build artificial nesting constructions
- 5. Continued monitoring of the breeding success of Saker Falcon in the Altai-Sayan region for keeping record of the species numbers
- 6. Continued tagging of falcons with standard split rings and microchips for the study of the stress on Saker Falcon population in the region.

