



The Union for the Conservation of Raptors

– Part I-B-1. –

(These pages are excerpted from THE BRIEF, and are followed by Barton's report.)

The Perversion of Science:

United Arab Emirates and Dr. Nigel Barton 'Cook' Scientific Data, Providing Cover to Falcon Smugglers and Falcon Farms in Reports to the World Via "Raptor Research Foundation":

One group of veterinary hospitals in the U.A.E. reported 5,000 treatments of falcons in 1995-1996. In 1997, they examined 274 captive-bred falcon *Hybrids*, versus 58 hybrids in 1993-1994. Between 1993 and 1998, 1,200 freshly trapped, *adult* female Saker falcons, and 600 *adult* female peregrine falcons, were seen in one hospital alone. Between 1993 and 1998, a total of 4,612 new, wild Sakers were brought to U.A.E. hospitals; during the same period 3,373 new Peregrines were brought to U.A.E. hospitals. With the exception of less than 500 birds, **these were all illegally acquired**, and very many were wild adult breeding stock smuggled from Central Asia – on terms agreed between Central Asian and Middle East Governments, knowingly defying C.I.T.E.S. Treaty laws – to the catastrophic detriment of endangered wild falcon populations.

Among hired European and American biologists and veterinary doctors who were a party to these offenses, none raised a flag to object to C.I.T.E.S. and international conservation agencies – presumably because their lavish pay scale eclipsed even their own moral and professional standards. Gulf-based biologists and veterinary doctors are paid to shut-up. Each smuggled falcon represents a dramatic story of deceit and criminality, involving Royal Sheikhs and Princes, courier aircraft, constellations of implementing agents that include biologists, veterinary doctors, Diplomats, Government Officials, and the Russian Mafia across Central Asia, the Middle East – and even our own U.S. *State Department*.

This report by Dr. Nigel Barton, representing the U.A.E., copied in [Tab Enclosure: 27](#), makes a fantastical leap of faith by presuming that a mere 274 captive-bred *Hybrid* falcons imported into the U.A.E. accounted for a 43% decline in wild Saker falcons brought to UAE falcon hospitals – from 1,292 in 1994, down to 732 in 1998 (-560 birds).

The report fails to factor into its data, the fact that many of today's Sheikhs and Princes employ their own private veterinary doctors and medical experts, thus negating visits to western-run falcon hospitals. Arabs have become well-versed in self-treating their own falcons with modern medicines, and have less need to visit falcon hospitals.

Thus, numbers in this report only represent falcons *visiting* U.A.E. hospitals, and do not reflect the *total* numbers of falcons held in captivity in the U.A.E., Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar. Aggregate data from multiple sources – often from the smugglers themselves – demonstrates a frightening trend: 3,000 wild falcons held in the Middle East in 1982 – then up to 8,600 in 1994 (a conservative estimate by U.A.E.-paid veterinary doctors) – with today, 14,000 new healthy specimens smuggled each season into the Gulf. How can anyone believe that 274 captive-bred falcons has caused any reduction in demand for wild falcons, when market demand for wild specimens is increasing? And much of the material presented in these U.C.R. *Exhibits*, is published by the perpetrators themselves!



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Additionally, a reduction of 560 wild falcons examined in U.A.E. hospitals between 1994 and 1998, cannot be explained by the import of 274 captive-bred falcons – because 274 farm falcons cannot possibly replace 560 wild falcons, nor can they replace even 100 wild falcons. Arabs buy cheaper captive-bred falcons in batches, understanding that only a few are capable of killing Houbara; the others will be “thrown away” (released), because captive-bred falcons simply do not hunt Houbara as efficiently as wild falcons. For the U.A.E. to claim 274 falcons have effectively replaced 560 falcons, is like saying the UAE has replaced 500 of its most elite army forces, with 200 cooks and mechanics. And the suggestion that a couple hundred farm falcons have reduced regional dependence on wild falcons is so deliberately fraudulent, when considered in the context of the full report, as to justify examining the credentials of Dr. Nigel Barton and his associates.

To understand the supply dynamics for this trend, one must visit Central Asia to see that U.C.R.’s relentless pursuit of U.A.E. and Saudi courier jets, coupled with U.C.R.’s interference with smugglers hired by those Countries (itemized here in these *Exhibits*), severely reduced Arab access to wild falcons.

And most significant: by 1998 Mohammed al-Bowardi, Nick Fox, Fred Launay and their associates had already removed – to the point of regional extinction – nearly *all* wild Saker falcons from Kazakhstan. Prior to U.A.E. smugglers arriving in Central Asia, Kazakhstan’s Dr. Anatoliy Levin acknowledged there were several thousand breeding Saker falcons in his country. Thereafter, the U.A.E. presided over falcon extractions in Kazakhstan so that, by the year 2000 Dr. Levin himself – now a paid U.A.E. biologist – admits there are only between 150 – 200 pairs of wild Sakers breeding in his Country.

As both Levin and Barton are U.A.E. falcon scientists, Dr. Barton certainly was aware of Dr. Levin’s data proving the regional extinction of Kazakhstan’s Sakers. However, Dr. Barton completely ignored this data, when describing a 43% decline in Saker hospital visits. In this regard, Dr. Barton only makes a vague reference to the plight of Kazakhstani falcons when stating: “...is this because of decreasing population numbers?”

Instead, Dr. Barton relied upon a contrived excuse, right out of Nick Fox’s play book: (See page 04 in [Tab Enclosure: 22 in ENCLOSURES TO EXHIBIT I](#)) that farm falcons are the panacea, and that they have “reduced” demand for wild falcons (in trade that has skyrocketed from 3,000 – 14,000 new birds each season!) During these years of Saker depletion, Kazakhstan was *the* primary source for U.A.E. Saker falcons. Once all the falcons were removed from Kazakhstan, and by 1998 when only a trickle of wild (illegal) Sakers were coming down to the U.A.E., Dr. Levin’s U.A.E. income was dramatically reduced, and Dr. Levin was effectively “thrown away” by Dr. Nick Fox – now keen to find new, more abundant sources for wild falcons.

Concurrent to this, the U.A.E. was redoubling efforts to replace hard-to-find Sakers with more easily acquired Peregrine falcons. In the U.A.E., Peregrine falcon visits to local hospitals actually *increased* 12.6% – from 661 specimens in 1994, up to 744 specimens in 1998.



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Dr. Barton attempts to explain the increase in Peregrine acquisitions by the U.A.E. when stating, “Historically, Peregrine falcons were used more than Saker falcons in the Gulf States.” This statement claims Peregrines were historically more popular than Sakers, and that is why there is a 12.6% increase in Peregrine visits to hospitals. Indeed, Peregrines *were historically used* in greater numbers than Sakers – but this was only because more Peregrines than Sakers migrated through the U.A.E., where the Peregrines were easily trapped on beaches. But historically and today, Sakers were always valued *far more highly* than Peregrine falcons, and Sakers were always zealously sought after, as the Cadillac of hunting falcons. That is why only Sakers and Gyrfalcons are identified as “al-Hurr”¹, while no Peregrine on earth or in the heavens could ever be identified as “al-Hurr”. Peregrines are simply called “Shaheen”. Prices also reflect the lower regard U.A.E. falconers have for Peregrines, relative to Sakers and Gyrfalcons. Thus, an increase in Peregrine hospital visits does not reflect an increased **demand** for Peregrines – rather that increase is due to the **lack of Saker availability** and the **easy availability of Peregrine falcons**. Dr. Barton has misled his readers and the scientific community.

And, this increase of 83 Peregrines contradicts UAE claims that captive-bred falcons are reducing demand for wild falcons. If captive-bred *Hybrid* falcons are reducing demand for wild falcons – why then, is there a 12.6% increase in Peregrines brought to hospitals?

The only explanation is fact that Sakers were wiped out in Kazakhstan. Peregrines (not farm falcons) were the next-best replacement – while the U.A.E. *Triad* Sheikhs (Sheikh Hamdan, Sheikh Mohammed, Sheikh Khalifa) ordered their criminally professional implementing agents to find other, greener pastures with more wild falcons.

We see that February, 1998 is the first time that Dr. Nick Fox visited Mongolia, paid GOM and *Ministry* Officials – and drove U.C.R. and the *Department of Interior* out of Mongolia – so that his robust black market export to the U.A.E., of wild Saker falcons and *Altai* Gyrfalcons could pick up where it left off in Kazakhstan. Dr. Fox’s 1998 arrival in Mongolia – a Country that was at that time flush with falcons – coincides precisely with the U.A.E.-led depletion of Sakers in Kazakhstan, and the U.A.E. *Triad* Sheikhs’ orders to prospect for new sources of illegal, wild falcons.

The report also makes vague references to substantial falcon exports to Saudi Arabia (which U.C.R. demonstrates are undertaken by Mohammed al-Bowardi, Nick Fox, and Fred Launay), where falcons smuggled from Central Asia are first offered to the U.A.E. *Triad* Sheikhs – with unwanted specimens subsequently exported and sold to Saudi Royal Princes.

This report is yet another example of a person in a position of authority – in this case, Dr. Nigel Barton – providing cover for today’s robust black market, and is tantamount to a physician writing prescriptions for hard narcotics to unrepentant drug addicts.

¹ In Arabic, “al-Hurr” means “the perfect” or “the priceless”. In Arab culture, when paying money for an “al-Hurr” falcon, the buyer is paying for the labor of the man who trapped and delivered it – the buyer cannot pay for the bird itself, because the bird is considered to be so perfect, that an exchange of money would be an insult to perfection. The term “Shaheen” (“fragile” or “like glass”) is strictly limited to Peregrine falcons, which are not so highly valued.



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The perversion of science in Dr. Barton's report is easily examined and explained, in the context of the timeline, supply dynamics, market dynamics, and political considerations amply detailed in U.C.R.'s *Evidentiary Exhibits* at www.SaveTheFalcons.org.

The U.A.E. report by Dr. Barton is included in the following three pages:

TRAPPING ESTIMATES FOR SAKER AND PEREGRINE FALCONS USED FOR FALCONRY IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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KEY WORDS: *trapping; Saker Falcon; Peregrine Falcon; Falco cherrug; Falco peregrinus; Middle East; falconry.*

Falconry in the Middle East depends on large numbers of wild-caught Saker (*Falco cherrug*) and Peregrine (*F. peregrinus*) Falcons (Allen 1980, Platt 1988, Remple 1988, Riddle and Remple 1994, Cade 1997). The larger female falcons are used primarily to hunt Houbara Bustard (*Chlamydotis undulata*), but some Saker Falcons are used for hunting Arabian hares (*Lepus capensis*). Smaller male Peregrine Falcons are more suited to catch Stone Curlews (*Burhinus oedicnemus*). Falcons are trapped from as far as Eastern China to the Red Sea coast. Although information might be gathered from trappers or from markets, figures for the number of falcons being sold to the Middle East are difficult to collect and their reliability is questionable. Other species used in smaller numbers include Lanner Falcons (*F. biarmicus*), Laggar Falcons (*F. jugger*), Barbary Falcons (*F. p. peregrinoides*), Red-headed Falcons (*F. p. babylonicus*), Black Shaheens (*F. p. peregrinator*), Gyrfalcons (*F. rusticolus*) and captive-bred Gyrfalcon hybrids.

Since the early 1980s, professional veterinary care has been provided for these falcons with well-established clinics in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, Bahrain and more recently in Saudi Arabia. At the Dubai Falcon Hospital (DFH), comprehensive computer records have been maintained since 1983. As many as 60 falcons are treated each day during the peak season. The majority of falcons admitted are from the United Arab Emirates with small numbers from other parts of the Middle East. An increase has been seen in the number of visits falconers make to the veterinary clinic. This is largely due to increased awareness amongst falconers and encouragement from the service being sponsored by H.H. Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum as a free service to the people. Many of the falcons are brought immediately upon purchase for routine checks and vaccinations and are therefore healthy on their first visit. The hospital is the most accurate source for information on falcon numbers and species within the region. In recent years, the majority of falcons seen at the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital have been hybrids. Hybrids are much less common in Saudi Arabia and the recent establishment of a falcon hospital in Riyadh should provide data, particularly on

the numbers of wild-caught Saker Falcons being sold to that region. This paper examines data collected on falcon numbers in the DFH from 1983-98. It is intended to estimate the minimum numbers of wild-caught falcons being used for falconry in the United Arab Emirates, mortality during the year, the proportion of captive-bred falcons being used and the species used.

METHODS

Each falcon brought to the hospital was routinely allocated a sequential case number and accompanying veterinary record which included information on the species, sex, age, mass, relevant health problems and the owner's background. On its first visit, each falcon was implanted with a permanent microchip making it identifiable for subsequent visits. Any veterinary problems were treated and results of treatments, surgeries, microbiology, hematology and pathology were added to the computerized veterinary record.

A distinction was made between new falcons, total falcons and total visits. New falcons were those which had no microchip and were, therefore, assumed never to have been in the hospital before, or was implanted elsewhere but had never been to the hospital before. Total falcons were new falcons and falcons seen during the year which had been recorded at the DFH in previous years. Total visits were the sum of the number of visits made by each falcon during the year. No account is taken of length of stay in the hospital. The annual figures were calculated for the year beginning June 1, the peak falcon season being October-February.

Saker and Peregrine Falcons are the most popular species and they accounted for most of the falcons seen. For this reason, the data were analyzed separately and the data were for new falcons only each year. Very few captive-bred Saker or Peregrine Falcons are sold to the Middle East. Therefore, the figures were a good estimate for the number of falcons trapped.

RESULTS

From 1983-84, the total number of falcons of all species brought to the hospital for treatment or routine checks was 73 (Fig. 1). This number increased to 2594 in 1997-98. During the 5-yr period from 1993-98, the numbers remained relatively constant despite the fact that very few falcons were not brought to the hospital.

Since 1993, a record was kept of the number of visits made by each falcon and hence a total number of visits for all falcons each year. The number of new falcons and the total number of falcons remained relatively constant (Fig. 2) averaging 1900 and 2400, respectively, each year.

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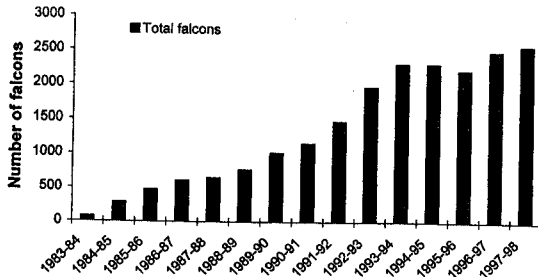


Figure 1. Total falcons admitted to the Dubai Falcon Hospital each year since 1983.

However, falcons were brought more frequently than in previous years with the total number of visits exceeding 5000 in 1995-96. No figure was available for 1997-98. Since 1993, approximately 25% of the falcons brought to the hospital in any one year had been to the hospital the previous year or before, an indication that most falcons were held during the summer months and used again the following hunting season. Of the other 75%, some were lost, released at the end of the season, died or were not brought to the hospital in subsequent years.

Both Saker and Peregrine Falcons were categorized by age and sex in 1993-98 (Table 1). The numbers were calculated as a percentage of new falcons (all species included) to indicate the changes within each species, sex, and age category. The total number of Saker and Peregrine Falcons remained fairly constant at about 1500 individuals, down from a maximum of 1953 falcons during the 1993-94 season. The total number of Peregrine Falcons increased by 12.5% over the 5-yr period, whereas Saker Falcon numbers decreased by 43%. The largest decrease was in juvenile female Saker Falcons.

There was a gradual decline in the percentage of Saker Falcons and an increase in the percentage of Peregrine Falcons. During 1993-94, Saker and Peregrine Falcons accounted for 94% of all new falcons seen. In 1997-98, they accounted for 74%. One reason for this decrease in Saker and Peregrine Falcons may have been the resurgence in popularity of captive-bred Gyrfalcons and Gyrfalcon hybrids. From a total of 58 hybrids seen in 1993-94, the number increased to 274 during 1997-98. However, in absolute numbers, Saker Falcons decreased from 1292 to 732 over the 5-yr period.

DISCUSSION

Within the United Arab Emirates, Saker Falcon numbers are decreasing whereas the numbers of captive-bred hybrids and Peregrine Falcons seems to be increasing. Historically, Peregrine Falcons were used more than Saker Falcons in the Gulf States. In the 1970s, there was a surge of captive-bred falcons into the Middle East, but their numbers subsequently decreased because falconers preferred wild-caught falcons. This attitude was largely

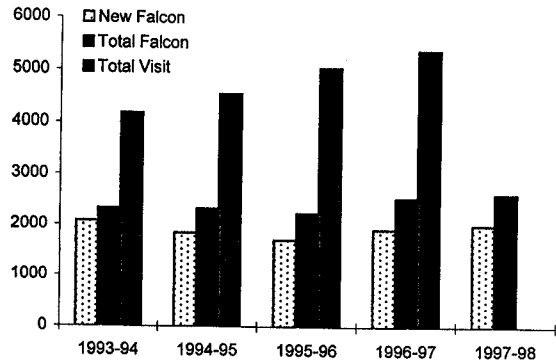


Figure 2. New falcons, total falcons and total falcon visits to the Dubai Falcon Hospital from 1993-98. No value was available for total visits in 1997-98.

due to falconers applying the same methods which they used to train wild falcons to training captive-bred falcons. Captive-bred falcons require different training methods and the Arabs did not get the best out of the falcons and were disappointed in them. There has recently been a resurgence in the number of captive-bred falcons used, partly because falconers have modified their training

Table 1. Numbers of new Saker and Peregrine Falcons admitted to the Dubai Falcon Hospital from 1993-98 calculated as a percentage of the total of new falcons admitted. All species included in parentheses.

| | SAKER FALCON | | PEREGRINE FALCON | |
|----------|--------------|------------|------------------|------------|
| | MALE | FEMALE | MALE | FEMALE |
| 1993-94 | | | | |
| Adult | 26 (1.3) | 225 (10.8) | 19 (0.9) | 81 (3.9) |
| Juvenile | 112 (5.4) | 929 (44.7) | 189 (9.1) | 372 (17.9) |
| Total | 1292 (62.2) | | 661 (31.8) | |
| 1994-95 | | | | |
| Adult | 27 (1.4) | 242 (13.1) | 23 (1.3) | 107 (5.8) |
| Juvenile | 73 (4.0) | 623 (33.8) | 171 (9.2) | 358 (19.4) |
| Total | 965 (52.3) | | 659 (35.7) | |
| 1995-96 | | | | |
| Adult | 12 (0.7) | 222 (13.1) | 18 (1.1) | 69 (4.1) |
| Juvenile | 53 (3.1) | 473 (27.8) | 222 (13.1) | 367 (21.6) |
| Total | 760 (44.7) | | 676 (39.9) | |
| 1996-97 | | | | |
| Adult | 15 (0.8) | 208 (10.9) | 16 (0.8) | 105 (5.5) |
| Juvenile | 77 (4.0) | 563 (29.5) | 199 (10.4) | 313 (16.4) |
| Total | 863 (45.2) | | 633 (33.1) | |
| 1997-98 | | | | |
| Adult | 17 (0.8) | 217 (11.0) | 36 (1.8) | 133 (6.7) |
| Juvenile | 72 (3.6) | 426 (21.5) | 199 (10.1) | 376 (19.0) |
| Total | 732 (36.9) | | 744 (37.6) | |

methods and because of the increasing interest in hybrids. Large, light-colored falcons have always been highly valued in Arabia. As such, pale colored Gyrfalcons and Saker Falcons were previously sought after. Survival of pure Gyrfalcons in the desert environment and Middle East climate requires special handling and fatalities are frequent. Large, pale, captive hybrids such as Gyrfalcon/Saker Falcon crosses combine the advantages of a desert-adapted falcon with a falcon of exceptional power and beauty.

Saker Falcon numbers, especially juvenile females, have fallen dramatically. During the 1997–98 season, 426 were admitted to the hospital compared to 929 in 1993. Data were collected at one hospital in Dubai, a rapidly developing country. In recent years, some sheikhs within Dubai have bought only large numbers of captive-bred hybrids. It is possible, therefore, that the market for Saker Falcons has concentrated on other regions of the Middle East. However, unless female Peregrine Falcons are preferred to female Saker Falcons, a similar decrease might be expected in Peregrine Falcon numbers. On the contrary, Peregrine Falcons have shown a recent increase.

Is the decrease in the number of Saker Falcons admitted to the hospital a real indication of fewer Sakers being trapped? If so, is this because of reduced demand or decreasing population numbers? Although juvenile numbers decreased, the number of adult Saker Falcons remained constant. Does this indicate that Sakers have experienced several consecutive poor breeding seasons? Almost every falcon is brought to the hospital at the start of the season for a routine check. Therefore, the difference in numbers between the species should not be attributed to some species being more susceptible to disease and therefore more often seen in the hospital.

The falcon species flown vary in different regions of the Middle East. For example in Taif, the plateau region in southern Hejaz, Saudi Arabia and on the Tihama plains adjacent to the Red Sea, Barbary Falcons are preferred. They are more suited to hunt Stone Curlews, Francolins (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) and Partridge (*Amoperdix heyi*) found in this region. They are also cheaper to buy and more within the price range for people from this area than large falcons which sell for higher prices in the larger cities and which are used for Houbara Bustard and hares (Cade 1997). Lagger Falcons, Lanner Falcons and other small falcons are also trapped, but they have little financial value.

From the Dubai data, there is no evidence that the number of falcons being used for falconry is increasing. The number of falcons seen each year since 1993 remained relatively constant. Approximately 1500 Saker and Peregrine Falcons were brought to the DFH each year. In addition to these, falcons were trapped for sale in other parts of the U.A.E., Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bah-

rain and Qatar. Riddle and Remple (1994) estimated that there might be as many as 8600 Saker and Peregrine Falcons in captivity in the Middle East. It appears that there is considerable movement of falcons within the Middle East countries with falcons arriving in the Emirates and subsequently being moved to Saudi Arabia. If this is the case, then this figure would overestimate the actual number of falcons being used. Additional data from other falcon hospitals in the Middle East, especially Abu Dhabi and Riyadh, in conjunction with ongoing population studies should enable us to determine whether Saker and Peregrine Falcon populations can support this trapping pressure and, if not, what approach should be taken to regulate it.

RESUMEN.—El halcón sacre (*Falco cherrug*) y el peregrino (*Falco peregrinus*), son los halcones mas utilizados en la ceterria en el Medio Oriente. Los registros veterinarios en el hospital de halcones de Dubai proveen una base para estimar el número de halcones atrapados anualmente. Durante el período de 1993–98, el número de halcones peregrinos atendidos en el hospital se incrementó en un 12.5%, mientras que los halcones sacre disminuyeron en un 43%. Los híbridos de halcón gerifalte (*Falco rusticolus*) aumentaron en un 13.8% del total de halcones observados en la clínica. Las hembras juveniles de halcón sacre disminuyeron en un 54%.

[Traducción de César Márquez]

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