



ROMANIA

REPORT REGARDING THE CONSERVATION OF THE SAKER FALCON (*FALCO CHERRUG*) IN ROMANIA

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The Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*) is a bird of prey typical of the open steppe regions. Its habitats are lowland steppes, agricultural areas and mountain foothills. These habitats can be potential expansion areas for the core population if there would be enough nesting places and the threats would be reduced. The Romanian name for Saker is Danubian Falcon because it was usually found along the big Danube River.

The species is globally threatened being listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive and also identified as priority species for LIFE-Nature projects.

Large scale survey was conducted in 2007 in Dobrudja (SE Romania) aiming to assess the Saker Falcon population in the region. The area was divided into 90 squares comprising the most proper potential Saker Falcon habitats. 87 of those squares were surveyed by researchers of Milvus Group Bird and Nature Protection Association and the Danube Delta National Research Institute. Two methods of survey were used: i) Direct observation from a fixed point; ii) Survey on suitable nesting sites such as electricity power lines, cliffs, solitary trees, mature forest edges.

6 single birds were observed (5 of which positively identified as adults). Five of the records were in Northern Dobrudja with only one from Central Dobrudja.



Distribution of Saker Falcon in Romania

Additionally one pair with flying young was observed suggesting probable breeding in the area (Babadag Forest on 11 July 2007).

In 2008, four single birds were observed in the Danube Delta in February, May, June and July from three locations.

Three records in North Dobrudja were made in three different locations – all of them in May.

Three nests are known in north Dobrudja. Two of them were revealed in early 2000's. In 2008 only one pair managed to produce 2 chicks.

Feather samples from the three nests were collected and sent to genetic laboratory in Cardiff University in order to add information about the DNA profile of European Sakers.

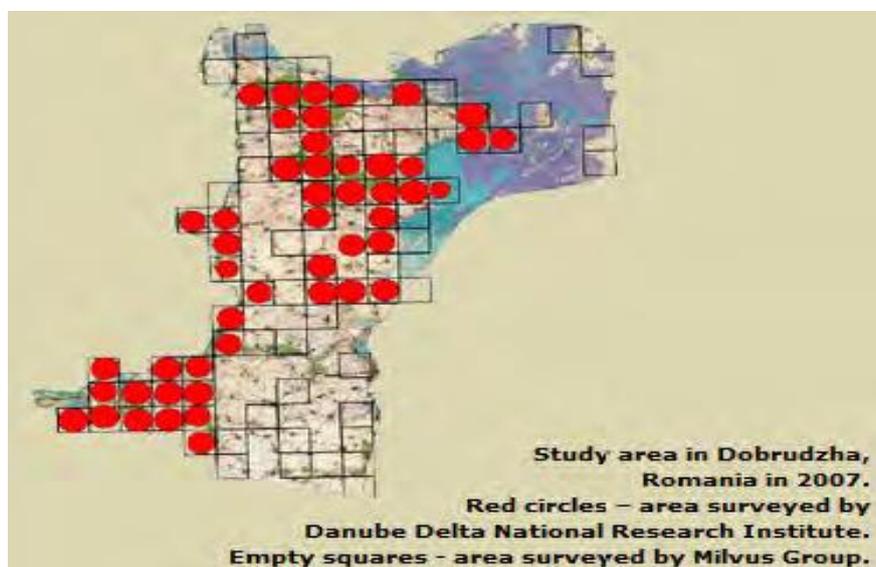
The LIFE09 NAT/HU/000384 project “*Conservation of Falco cherrug in Northeast Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia*” involving BirdLife Romania and “Milvus Group Bird and Nature Protection Association” aims to create favourable conditions and a steady growth of population in Central and Eastern Europe and to transfer the knowledge and experience of Hungarian and Slovak partners gained during the LIFE06 NAT/H/000096 project to Romanian and Bulgarian partners, for implementing the best practices for Saker Falcon conservation.



Broken eggs of Saker Falcon (Photo Luca Andrei Dehelean)

The biggest threats to raptors are the power lines which increase the mortality caused by electrocution.

Among the victims are individuals of endangered species such as the Saker Falcon, Imperial Eagle, Egyptian Vulture etc. Other factors which affect the population are the wind turbines, loss and degradation of natural nest sites, degradation of feeding habitat and pesticide use. The baseline survey for assessing the Saker Falcon population was carried out by BirdLife Romania and Milvus Group Bird and Nature Protection Association in Dobrudja region: the Special Protected Areas ROSPA0073 Măcin-Niculițel, ROSPA0100 Stepa Casimcea and ROSPA0040 Old Danube-Brațul Măcin, Babadag Forest, Măcin Mountains and in the western part of country in the Special Protected Areas ROSPA0069 Lunca Mureșului Inferior, ROSPA0015 Câmpia Crișului Alb and Crișului Negru, taking into consideration the location of the breeding pair found during the last spring.



Distribution of Saker Falcon in Dobrudzha region

Three trips were made in early spring to the Măcin Mountains to identify the active pairs.

The status of the three nests known as being used by Saker Falcon, was as following: one nest was found empty, the second nest was occupied by a pair of Long-legged buzzards (*Buteo rufinus*) and the third nest was partially fallen down from the rock slope, so it was not suitable for Saker Falcon to breed.

The ornithologists extended this activity also near to the Special Protected Area ROSPA0069 Lunca Mureşului Inferior where *Falco cherrug* is currently breeding. 753 medium voltage pylons were checked in the Western part of the country.

The collected data was introduced in a GIS database.

The assessment of the effects of the agricultural subsidies and related habitat management practices on Saker Falcon habitat started in January 2011 and will be end in June 2014.

The movements of the breeding Saker Falcon pairs were monitored and registered regularly in order to identify the main important hunting areas. 6 pairs of Saker Falcon were found, among them, a new successfully breeding pair.

One juvenile was marked by PTT.

One of the most successful methods to stabilize and increase the population of the Saker Falcons is the installation of artificial nests on the electric pylons. An agreement was made with the Romanian Electricity Companies (ENEL, Electrica and Transelectrica) regarding the nest boxes installation. In the West part of the country, aluminium nest boxes were installed in four counties: Satu Mare, Bihor, Arad and Timiș and other wooden nest boxes were installed in Bihor and Satu Mare counties.



100 nest-boxes were installed on pylons - Photo Attila Nagy

In Dobrudja region, the nest boxes were installed in the bordering area of ROSPA0073 Măcin-Niculițel, Babadag Forest, ROSPA0100 Stepa Casimcea and ROSPA0040 Old Danube - Brațul Măcin.

A press release was sent and a press conference was organized jointly by Milvus Group Bird and Nature Protection Association and ENEL Company in April 2012 concerning the newly placed nest-boxes.

The decision makers of the Romanian Electricity Companies accepted to insulate the dangerous pylons of medium-voltage power lines and are ready to help the project team in this activity.



Tagging Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*) by PTT

The Agri-Environmental Working Group of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development was contacted in order to introduce Saker Falcon specific measures into the agri-environmental scheme for 2014.

An article about the project's achievements has been prepared for the BirdLife Romania publication "Alcedo". Four TV channels broadcasted information about the Saker Falcon conservation and 31 online newsletters were published the main issues about this species. 400 copies of Guideline about the effect of wind farms on Saker Falcon population were prepared for local

authorities in Romanian, Hungarian, Bulgarian and Slovak languages. 4000 copies of leaflets and 1000 copies of DVD were produced for public.

BirdLife Romania is working with the public through media in order to support the conservation efforts of *Falco cherrug*.



Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*)

An intensive communication programme targeting farmers and decision-makers has increased awareness at local and national level and created support for protection of Saker Falcon.

As a result of this project, by 2014, the conditions for this species will be significantly improved and the National Action Plan for conservation the Saker Falcon will be approved.

Regarding the National Action Plan for Saker Falcon conservation with take into account the following:

Objective 1 Improvement of legal protection

Action 1. Review the relevant legislation and take steps where possible to make sure that it protects all birds of prey from all form.

Action 2. Strengthen the application of the legal protection of birds of prey by ensuring appropriate penalties.

Objective 2 Population decline halted

Action 1. Monitoring the breeding population parameters: number of breeding pairs, distribution, status of conservation, breeding success.

Action 2. Collecting information on the Saker Falcon population and migration routes, from available sources, in a programme of field research.

Action 3. Develop existing microchipping schemes to help monitoring of the Saker Falcon.

Action 4. Elaborate a GIS database of Saker Falcon and of the prey species.

Objective 3 Habitat conservation and sustainable management of the important sites and flyways

Action 1. Implementing the programme of habitat management.

Action 2. Undertake Environmental Impact Assessment for any project potentially adversely impacting sites on raptors and their habitats.

Action 3. Maintain ecologically and socially sustainable grazing systems to ensure long-term survival of key prey species.

Action 4. Conduct Strategic Environmental Assessments of planned significant infrastructure developments within major flyways to identify key risk areas.

Objective 4 Increase breeding success

Action 1. Collect information on the national power line network and create a basic national potential conflict hotspot map together with information about the Critical Site Network Tool, Important Bird Areas.

Action 2. Installation of next boxes on electric pylons in the western part of Romania and in Dobrudja region.

Action 3. Insulate the dangerous electric pylons in Bihor, Satu-Mare, Arad, Timiș counties and Dobrudja region.

Objective 5 Decrease the impact of electricity transmission lines, conductors and towers in causing injury and death to Saker Falcon and to minimize the risk in the long term.

Action 1. Collaborate with the relevant utility companies.

Action 2. Encourage constructors and operators of new transmission lines and towers to incorporate appropriate measures and to neutralize existing towers.

Action 3. Elaborate the database of priority power lines and bird casualties.

Objective 6 Raise awareness of problems faced by the Saker Falcon

Action 1. Develop a programme of public awareness using electronic and print media to publicise the current status of Saker Falcon, the threats, the conservation measures.

Action 2. Educate and raise awareness of local communities to the importance of Saker Falcon and the need to monitor and protect this species.

Action 3. Organise training workshop to improve skills in the monitoring of Saker Falcon.

Objective 7 Establish the best practices for the Saker Falcon conservation

Action 1. Elaborate and implement the National Action Plan for conservation of the Saker Falcon.

Action 2. Elaborate and implement the Management Plans of Special Protected Areas which include conservation measures for the Saker Falcon.

Action 3. Enhancing scientific research and information in connection with the development of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

Objective 8 Develop the cooperation between Government agencies, IGOs, NGOs, the electrical utility companies and with the neighbouring countries for the Saker Falcon conservation

Action 1. Establish legal procedures between various stakeholders.

Action 2. Partnership working which foresees closer collaboration with IGOs, NGOs, private sector.

Action 3. Identifying opportunities for cooperation and coordination at national and regional level through the creation of synergies.