



## **Report of the International Association for Falconry and the Conservation of Birds of Prey with regard to the implementation of “The Code of Conduct for Hunting and IAS” prepared by the Bern Convention.**

The International Association for Falconry and the Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF) is an international non-profit organization registered in Belgium. It is the globally representative organization for Falconry which it defines as “the traditional sport of taking quarry in its natural state and habitat by means of trained birds of prey. It is a hunting art”. The IAF represents falconers from 90 member organizations and 67 countries, worldwide. The IAF has the right to send a representative to meetings of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention.

The IAF contributed to the formulation of Principle 5 of the Code of Conduct for Hunting and Invasive Alien Species, the final draft of which was released by the Bern Convention in August 2013. Since the release of this document, the IAF has taken steps to inform falconers of the content of this document and to implement the proposals contained there-in. As President of the IAF, I presented the Code of Conduct and, specifically, Principle 5 of this Code to my Advisory Committee and then to the Council of Delegates at our Annual General Meeting, held in Doha, Qatar, in January 2014. At this meeting, I gained the acceptance and support for Principle 5 from our member organizations. To further publicize this Code, we have included an article on this topic in our annual flagship publication, *The International Journal of Falconry* (2014).

Let us now consider the elements of Principle 5:

### **5. Practice animal-aided hunting minimizing the risks of escapes and of impacting native species**

The unintentional introductions (escapes) of species used in animal-aided hunting (e.g. falconry, ferreting, drive hunting with dogs) can cause impacts on native species. Domestic forms and feral animals of domestic species use in hunting (dogs, ferrets, etc.) in fact represent alien species that in some cases can cause severe impacts on biodiversity<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Dogs are known to cause impacts on biodiversity, for example by predating native species or hybridising with the wolf. However, considering there are no evidences that escaped hunting dogs have formed self-sustaining populations in the wild in Europe, the present Code of Conduct does not cover this specific topic.

Falconry is a traditional hunting technique, recently stated as Living Human Heritage by UNESCO. Falconry is practiced throughout Europe and often use is made of non-native birds of prey, some of which are hybrids with native birds. The chances of a hybrid falcon hybridising further with a native wild species are very limited but the risk of introduction of non-native genes through falconry should be carefully taken into account.

The IAF is closely monitoring any evidence of such introgression and will welcome and assist with any scientific research in this area. We include an expert on this topic, Prof. Matthew Gage, on our Advisory Committee and he has been invaluable in collating and assessing the available information. With the assistance of Prof. Gage, we provided comment on this issue to the Saker Task Force of the CMS Raptors MoU in the development of the Saker Falcon Global Action Plan. We also provided extensive comment to the proposed Strategic Plan for Raptor Conservation in the European Union which was developed for the Raptors MoU.

Most of the threats arising from falconry are due to a bad practice of this traditional hunting technique. It is therefore important that falconers take measures to minimize any possible risk caused by the introduction of non-native genes through falconry, and to apply appropriate training methods for hunting. In order to ensure a safe and sustainable practice of falconry, it is also important to encourage the adoption of voluntary self-regulations (e.g. codes of conduct as recently proposed by the International Association for Falconry and the Conservation of Birds of Prey - IAF).

The IAF has developed its own Code of Conduct with respect to falconry and IAS. This has been presented by Prof. Gage to the Council of Delegates in January 2014 and has been circulated to falconers, internationally, in the form of an eNewsletter. Furthermore, it has been placed on our website, [www.iaf.org](http://www.iaf.org). This Code is attached below as an appendix.

Falconers should also negotiate the adoption of appropriate national/regional regulatory measures (e.g. regulation adopted by the Government of Canary Islands in 2011), with national or regional authorities, taking into account the scientific evidence for risk of gene introgression or the establishment of invasive populations of raptors.

As part of the process of informing falconers on this subject, we have advised them to engage with their authorities on this topic. The information on our website as well as the article awaiting publication in our Journal provide resource material for national falconry organizations and the IAF will provide further assistance as requested.

In terms of self-regulation, falconers should as a starting point adopt the recommendations included in the position statement of the International Association for Falconry and Conservation of birds of prey on falcon hybrids:

- hybrids be fostered if possible by a parent that does not occur locally in the wild;
- hybrids only be hatched<sup>2</sup> in large conditioning pens;
- hybrids only be flown with reliable telemetry equipment;
- maximum efforts be made to recover any hybrid that is lost;
- hybrids should never be deliberately released.

This advice is derived from the IAF statement on Hybrid and Exotic Falcons which was accepted at the Council of Delegates AGM, held in Amarillo, Texas, in 2000. This is largely superseded by our Code of Conduct for Falconry with respect to IAS.

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<sup>2</sup> Method of “soft release” to learn flying skills

Responsible falconers should adopt all possible measures to prevent escapes of birds of prey, in particular of hybrids or non-native birds. Furthermore, a registration scheme, aimed at identifying the origin of each bird (pure-bred or hybrid), should be adopted and, consequently, any bird should be registered and individually marked by a ring and/or a microchip.

All legitimate falconry raptors within the European Union are required by law to wear official tamper-proof rings and to be registered with the national conservation authorities ((EC) Regulation Nr. 338/97). The IAF proposed a system of “Mark and Bank” registration at the Council of Delegates AGM in Abu Dhabi in 2004. This registration scheme proposes the combination of tamper-proof rings with banking of DNA material to ensure the accurate identification of any falconry raptor. There is early discussion regarding the proposal to combine this scheme with a central multinational registry or “Stud-book”

Also the establishment of a web-based monitoring system for lost/escaped hybrid or exotic raptors should be considered.

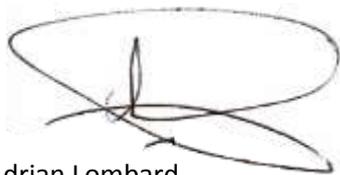
This is currently established and is accessible on our website [www.iaf.org](http://www.iaf.org)

Finally, within the context of the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC), falconers should be encouraged to reduce the use of hybrids and, specifically, to avoid the use of hybrids with any species which exists only in North America.

Hybrid falcons enjoy limited popularity amongst falconers in European Union countries. They have been banned in Germany. Research has shown that the use of hybrids is significantly reduced in those countries where a limited sustainable harvest of wild raptors is accessible to falconers<sup>3 4</sup>. It is the strategy of the IAF to actively encourage the establishment of such a harvest, where possible, noting that this is permissible in terms of Article 9 of the Wild Birds Directive. A sustainable wild harvest would have the dual benefit of encouraging falconers to reduce their use of hybrid raptors and would, at the same time, encourage their further active engagement in the conservation effort.

Conclusion:

This report demonstrates the engagement of falconers, as represented by the IAF, in the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Hunting and IAS. Whilst appreciating that this will be an ongoing effort, we wish it noted that the requirements of Principle 5 have been implemented or are in process.



Adrian Lombard,

President: International Association for Falconry and the Conservation of Birds of Prey.

## Appendix 1:

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<sup>3</sup> Kenward, R.E. 2004. Management tools for raptors. Pp. 329-339 in Chancellor, R.D. & B.-U. Meyburg (eds). Raptors Worldwide. World Working Group on Birds of Prey and Owls, Berlin, Germany.

<sup>4</sup> Kenward, R.E. 2009. Conservation values from falconry. Pp. 181-196 in Adams, W., Dixon, B. and Hutton, J. (eds.) Recreational Hunting, Conservation and Rural Livelihoods: Science and Practice. Zoological Society of London & IUCN SSC/Sustainable Use Specialist Group & Blackwell Publishing.

## **CHALLENGES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR FALCONERS WHEN FLYING HYBRIDS AND EXOTICS: AN IAF CODE OF CONDUCT**

Despite studies so far demonstrating no evidence for an IAS issue from falconry, it's important that falconers take responsibility to minimise bad publicity that could arise as a result of misunderstanding surrounding IAS issues, and also to ensure that no ex-falconry species ever does become established. On top of these, is the responsibility arising from a primary duty of care by falconers to their birds through the prevention of loss (and subsequently high risk of mortality). Responsibility has been taken by some elements where previous risks of bird loss existed: free-hacking is now conducted in large, enclosed conditioning pens; telemetry technology and investment has risen to high levels and reached new bounds as a major industry within falconry; the tradition for hacking back by some falconry cultures such as Arabia has ceased for non-indigenous species. Despite all this, the success of captive breeding occasionally allows falconry birds to get into irresponsible hands, and these can be subsequently lost because they are flown in inappropriate places by irresponsible people. The responsible falconry community will not tolerate these incidents because they are (1) failures of the duty of care we have to our birds, and (2) create bad (albeit anecdotal) publicity that falconry could be relevant to an IAS issue.

Therefore, to even further minimise any risk that exotic species or hybrids could potentially pose to the name of responsible falconry through the Invasive Alien Species issue, IAF requires that affiliated falconry Clubs should formally adopt this code of conduct when their members fly exotic species or hybrids:

- 1. No hybrids or exotics should ever be deliberately released to the wild**
- 2. Modern functioning telemetry should be used when any hybrid or exotic species is flown**
- 3. IAF will manage an online reporting scheme so that any incidents of ex-falconry hybrids or exotics can be recorded attempting to establish or breed in the wild**

This code should allow falconers to monitor the IAS issue effectively and transparently, while further minimising any poor publicity created by lost falconry birds.