

Statement of the International Association for Falconry and the Conservation of Birds of Prey regarding the Illegal Wildlife Trade.

The International Association for Falconry and the Conservation of Birds of Prey (IAF) is the international representative body for Falconers. The IAF has 105 member organizations and represents falconers from 67 member nations with a number of additional nations afforded observer status within our organization. The IAF is an International NGO Member of the IUCN, has the right to send a representative to meetings of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention, represents falconers at the meetings of major international conservation conventions including CBD, CITES, and the CMS and is a signatory to the Raptors MoU of CMS. The IAF is, therefore, a significant international conservation organization and is strongly supportive of sustainable use as an essential conservation tool as envisaged by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). As such, the IAF holds strong views regarding the illegal trade in wildlife and issues the following statement:

Concerned at the increasing levels of illegal trade in elements of wildlife and the involvement of organized crime as well as organizations responsible for political instability within this trade, the IAF wishes to state unequivocally that IAF opposes all use and trade of wildlife that is unsustainable and illegal. The IAF also recognizes that well-managed, sustainable trade and use can contribute both to conservation and sustainable livelihoods.

Recognizing that illegal trade and the unsustainable use of wildlife presents a serious challenge to the conservation of the world's biodiversity, the IAF condemns this trade and expresses its absolute contempt for all engaged in illegal activity. Similarly we will use our resources to expose those involved and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Aware that there is a current international emphasis on regulation and law-enforcement to halt this illegal trade, we have concern that this approach alone will be unsuccessful and possibly be counter-productive. We believe that any approach must represent a balance between prevention of illegal trade and the encouragement, if possible, of legitimate and sustainable use. Our concerns are based on the following points:

- Illegal trade is, by definition, practiced by criminals. If trade in a commodity is illegal, it loses value to legitimate traders but its value may be enhanced on the black-market favouring the development of illegal trade and the involvement of organized crime.
- Banning the use of, or trade in, a natural commodity removes the value of that asset to communities within the source countries. This further impoverishes those communities while removing an incentive to conserve the commodity.
- Rigid regulation and trade bans will prevent the development of sustainable use projects which can enhance conservation of wildlife, combat illegal trade and reward the communities involved in legitimate sustainable trade.

Understanding that a balanced approach to combating illegal trade in wildlife is essential for success, we call for caution in relying on simplistic solutions involving only increased regulation and legislation. Such solutions may be attractive to the general public, particularly in developed nations while sustainable use is a more complex concept that may not gain ready acceptance. It must be the responsibility of all involved in this effort to seek a balance between increased law-enforcement and regulated sustainable trade. Similarly it is our responsibility to educate and inform the general public, legislators and funders regarding these principles.

Realizing that there are concerns within the falconry community and conservationists relating to wild-life crime, the IAF plans to address this through two significant projects:

1. The Saker Falcon is currently of conservation concern having been up-listed to Appendix I of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). One of the factors leading to the decline in populations of this species is unsustainable trade. The IAF has been actively engaged in the Saker Task Force of the Raptors MoU of CMS. This MoU has recently produced the Global Action Plan for conservation of this falcon, now accepted by CoP11 of the CMS. This Plan is firmly based around the development of sustainable use of the species and one part of the plan is designed to develop communication involving Falconers in the Gulf region, Falcon Hospitals in that region and falcon trappers, so as to develop a true idea of the extent of trade and to measure this. The IAF plans to contribute to this project and is working to produce funding for it.
2. Most falconry raptors are provided through captive breeding, while these breeding projects have also contributed to restoration efforts in the wild. A small proportion of falconry raptors are obtained from wild populations based on scientifically determined sustainable quotas. There remains concern regarding falconry birds which are taken illegally. The IAF is planning a registration scheme designed to prevent the laundering of illegal raptors and halt this illegal use. The support of conservation organizations and regulatory authorities will be essential for the success of this project.

“Falconry is a constant reminder to us of the forces of nature, of the inter-relationship between living things and the land they share, and of our own dependence on Nature.” Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan.

Dr. Adrian Lombard,
President, International Association for Falconry
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