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Illegal Trade in Falcons in Syria

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted during the period from July 2008 to July 2011 to assess the level of legal and illegal international trade in falcons and also how falcons are used in Syria. This study aims to assess how illegal trade can be reduced and how legal trade can be promoted to preserve falcons and sustain falconers, particularly as regulated by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). It will also provide recommendations for improving the implementation of CITES in Syria and for reducing and preventing illegal trade in falcons. Literature, the database of the CITES Management Authority in the Syria and the CITES Trade Database provided information used for the analysis of international trade in falcons. In addition, several interviews and surveys were conducted with falconers, officials from the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs (MSEA), Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reforms (MAAR), Ministry of Trade and Syrian Customs.

The study suggests that legal and illegal trade in falcons co-exist in Syria, although it is very difficult, due to the difficulties Syria faces at the time of writing, to assess or document the current rate. Illegal trade in falcons takes several forms like replacement of species, smuggling and misleading authorities. Legal trade in falcons encounters certain obstacles that make it easy for illegal trade to prevail. Some of these obstacles, among others, include: hunting laws, prevention of the establishment of falcon breeding centers, lack of veterinary expertise and large bureaucracy governing the legal trade in falcons. Furthermore, there are idiosyncratic laws governing hunting with falcons in Syria – resulting in long periods to receive hunting permits.

Keywords: CITES, Falcons, Syria, trade, Customs, Ar Ruhaybah, Al Jabbul.

ABBREVIATIONS

- AC Animals Committee (CITES)
- CITES Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild
Fauna and
Flora (1973)
- COP) Conference of the Parties to CITES (
- IUCN World Conservation
- NGO's Non-Governmental Organizations
- MOE Ministry of Environment
- MAR Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reforms
- UNEP United Nations Environment Programme
- WCMC World Conservation Monitoring Center

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Chapter I

Literature Review

1.1-Introduction:

It is estimated that annual international trade in wildlife to be worth billions of dollars and includes thousands of specimens of flora and fauna (CITES, 2013a). For instance, the US Dollar value of illegal trade in endangered wildlife products is estimated at \$7 to \$10 billion annually (Wyler and Sheikh, 2013), making it the third largest illegal trade by Dollar value after drugs and arms (South and Wyatt, 2011; Wyler and Sheikh, 2013). Moreover, illicit international trade in falcons is a lucrative business as the price of a falcon may reach up to US\$270,000 for the “rare hunting and sports birds” compared to US\$30 in the late 1940s (Al-Saihati, 1995; Fuchs, 2013).

Falcons are divided into three main groups; Kestrels, Hobbies and Peregrines. According to White *et al.* (1994), there are 44 living species of falcons in the family Falconidae. These species have diverse habitats and migratory flyways that make them vulnerable. In this regard, land use which affect the habitat for foraging and breeding, hunting, trapping, illegal taking and illicit international trade are considered as primary factors that contribute to endangerment of the falcon species (Thiollay, 1994; White *et al.* 1994). Furthermore, migratory species face additional threats because they require suitable

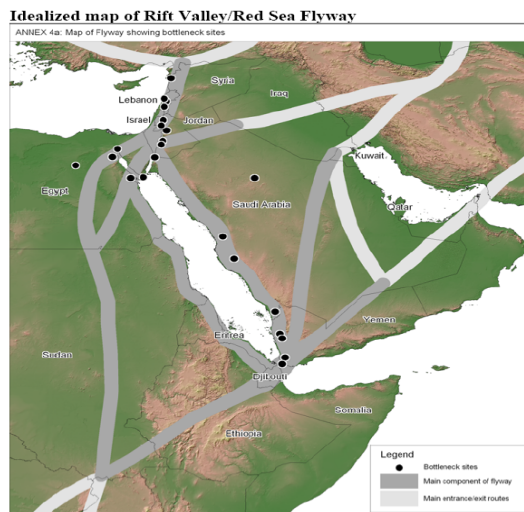


Fig. 1.1. Birds flyways over the Middle East.

habitats along their migration routes (Zalles and Bildstein 2000). Above all, populations of falcons (*Falconiformes* spp.) suffer from illicit international trade.

Falcons are traded in high numbers and such high demand has led to illegal trade in these species in violation of CITES regulations. Consequently, they are listed in the CITES Appendices so that international trade does not threaten their survival in the wild. CITES list 6 falcon species as particularly impacted by international trade. The Convention also produced an identification guide to these species (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1. CITES lists 6 falcon species as particularly impacted by the falcon trade.

Species	Home Range
• Lanner Falcon (<i>Falco biarmicus</i>)	• Breeds in Africa, southeast Europe and just into Asia.
• Saker Falcon (<i>Falco cherrug</i>)	• Breeds from eastern Europe eastwards across Asia to Manchuria
• Laggar Falcon (<i>Falco jugger</i>)	• Indian subcontinent from extreme south-east Iran, south-east Afghanistan, Pakistan, through India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and north-west Myanmar.
• Barbary Falcon	• Northern and Eastern parts of Africa, Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia,
• Peregrine Falcon	• Arctic tundra to the tropics.
• Gyrfalcon	• Northern America, Greenland, and Northern Europe
Source: http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2009/ec/CW66-203-2-2008E.pdf ; http://en.wikipedia.org/	

There are several reasons why falcons are vulnerable species to the effects of international trade. Large birds, such as falcons, are particularly at risk of extinction due to their size, longevity and slow rates of reproduction (Bennett and Owens 1997). Species with slow reproduction inevitably take a long time to recover from high off take. Falcons are also subjected to several human threats. For example, migratory raptors often congregate at man-made structures such as bridges, as well as inhabited natural features like coastlines and mountain passes. The high interaction with humans in these environments make falcons vulnerable to hunting and trapping (Zalles and Bildstein 2000) and other killings. Figure 1.1. shows the flyway and the bottleneck sites of raptor migration routes through the Middle East and North Africa.

1.2-Falconry in Islamic and Arab Culture:

Falconry has historical significance in Islamic culture and this may influence the nature of trade in falcons in Islamic countries. The holy book, Quran, includes a verse permitting falconry as a hunting method: *"In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful: They ask you as to what is allowed to them. Say: The good things are allowed to you, and what you have taught the beasts and birds of prey, training them to hunt-- you teach them of what Allah has taught you-- so eat of that which they catch for you and mention the name of Allah over it; and be careful of (your duty to) Allah; surely Allah is swift in reckoning."* On the one hand, this verse (Fig. 1.2) reflects the idea of Prey caught by trained dogs or falcons is considered halal (allowed to be eaten in Islam) in the Quran as early as 7th century, where falconry was already popular in the Arabian Peninsula. Furthermore, it points to the strong tradition of falconry in Islamic culture. Moreover, the prophet Muhammad, peace upon him, opposed recreational hunting saying: "whoever shoots at a living creature for sport is cursed."- He also reported to have said: "There is no man who kills [even] a sparrow or anything smaller, without its deserving it, but Allah will question him about it [on the judgment day]," and "Whoever is kind to the creatures of God, is kind to himself."



Fig.1.2. The verse of Quran indicating falcons prey hunting is halal.

More than anywhere else in the world, falconry is considered a symbol of Middle Eastern culture and over 50% of the world's falconers are reputed to be in the region (IAF, 2013). In fact, Arab literatures pays great respect and dignity towards falconers and the falcons used by the Bedouins in the

Syrian and Iraqi deserts and also by the Arabian Peninsula tribes. Experienced Arab falconers memorized geographical locations of habitats and routes of migration as well as time of migrations for falcons. Through traditional knowledge, experienced falconers became the best observers of falcons and their prey activities (Al-Saihati, 1995). Still today; falconry has long been a favored tradition of the rich and famous individuals in the Middle East. It began with Bedouin tribes who used the birds to hunt in the deserts where their prey became a major source of food for the tribes. In more recent times, falconry is practiced solely for sport.

1.3- History of falcon trapping and trade in Syria:

According to Norbert Bar (1997), the Qalamon mountain range with its outlying plains and plethora of game species provided birds of prey with an ideal environment. Until the 1920s there were hardly more than 50 falcons trapped per year. Until the 1930s there was a local *Falco* population with up to 80 breeding pairs of Lanners. This population seems to have persisted in good numbers up until the mid-1970s at least (Macfarlane 1978), but falcon-trapping had apparently driven it to extinction by 2000 (Serra et al. 2005).

Bar added that trapping of falcons in Syria reached its zenith in the early 1970s with 700-1,200 birds trapped per season. During the 1970's Bedouins and other local communities; such as those in the town of Ar Ruhaybah in the Syrian Steppe (Badya in Arabic) hosted the main professional falcon trappers in Syria. Merchants and trappers of these communities have ventured as far as north Africa and Afghanistan on trapping excursions. Since 1995 those trappers expanded their operations into the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. In that year alone, there were 400-500 Syrian trappers in central Asia, a doubling of the number from the previous year.

In town of Ar Ruhaybah (famous in falconry) the number of falcon trappers has remained constant since the 1960s. Their number has increased from a handful in the 1930s to 150-250 in the 1970s. With the increase in trappers comes an increase in the number of birds trapped, rising from 100 in the 1950s to 500-700 in the 1960s. The figure for the 1950s was already double that of previous years (Personal Communications, 2011).

1.4- Hunted Species and Hunting Areas in Syria:

Syria is a place of residency for migrating birds and routes for their migration. Many species of falcons reside in Syria and migrate through it. These include; Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*), Kestrel (*F. tinnunculus*), Sooty Falcon (*F. concolor*), Eleonora's Falcon (*F. eleonora*), Merlin (*F. clumbarius*), Hobby (*F. subbuteo*); Red-footed Falcon (*F. vespertinus*);

Lanner Falcon (*F. biarmicus*); Saker Falcon (*F. cherrug*), Peregrine Falcon (*F. peregrines*) and Barbary Falcon (*F. pelegrinoides*). Saker falcon is the most hunted for species. The ideal size of the falcon is 47 cm around the breast by 48 cm long. Generally speaking, most Cherrugs are caught in the wild. In Arab countries, they are caught mostly for trade (Dixon, 2005). The other species is the Peregrine falcon, the Shahin in Arabic. A large Shahin measures 42 cm. Smaller falcons are favored compared to larger ones when they are of a certain coloration. The preferred color varieties of the Saker are white, gold and red, and for the Shahin, dark brown and black. The back and flight feathers of birds must be of a uniform tone and without specks.

Falcons trapped in Syria and Iraq are usually considered the best for hunting. It is believed that those found in sparsely vegetated areas with little prey available are perfect in their techniques and are much better to be used in hunting. A large falcon is of value as the stronger, and more persevering specimen and, therefore, may represent or allude to a more successful hunter, for which reason the female falcon specimen is always preferred to the male specimen. A falconer's prestige may be exemplified by the size and color of the bird he owns. The main trapping season of falcons in Syria starts in mid-September which, coincides with the start of the great migration of falcons from Europe, Southern Russia and Turkey to the deserts of Syria, Iraq and Arabian Peninsula.

The Saker falcon is listed as Globally threatened species in the Endangered category (A2bcde+3cde+4bcde ver. 3.1) (BirdLife International, 2012). On the other hand it is reported that the population of Shahin is stable worldwide, and the species does not approach the thresholds of vulnerability under the population trend criterion (BirdLife International, 2012).

Besides falcon trapping, which it is considered an important threat to falcons (CITES, 2004), falcons are experiencing various other threats that endanger their survival in Syria. These include, but are not limited to, chemical poisoning by pesticides, disturbance of nest sites, hunting, agricultural and grazing activities, and shooting, although this threat is largely reduced in coastal areas of the country, but widely practiced in the Steppe areas, and finally nest robbing (CMS, 2013a).

1.5- Falconry in Syria

Falconry was practiced in Syria thousands of years ago, mainly in communities living near birds habitats or along the migration routes of falcons. The traditional Bedouin method of capturing falcons is based on the use of a free-flying dove, to the back of which a noose is tied. When the falcon strikes the dove, he is trapped by his talons. Basically the weight and movement of the prey tires out the falcon very quickly and it is forced to land, facilitating its capture.

1.6- Objectives of the Study:

The study is carried out to achieve the following objectives:

1. Assess the current status of illicit International trade in falcons in Syria.
2. Explore ways to reduce illegal trade in Falcons.
3. Promote legal trade as regulated by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).
4. Provide recommendations for improving the implementation of CITES in Syria.

Chapter II

Materials and Methods

2.1- The Framework of Analysis:

The Driver-Pressure-State-Impact-Response (DPSIR) framework developed by the European Environment Agency (Kristensen, 2004) was used in this study (Fig. 2.1). Assessment under this framework included the status of illicit trade in falcons in Syria, the driving forces and pressures underlying this illegal activity, the impact of illegal trade on the traded species, ecosystems and societies practicing falconry, and, finally, the response of government and society to reduce illegal trade in falcons and promote legal trade in compliance with CITES regulations and provisions. Criteria and indicators were used wherever possible to support issues dealt with in the framework.

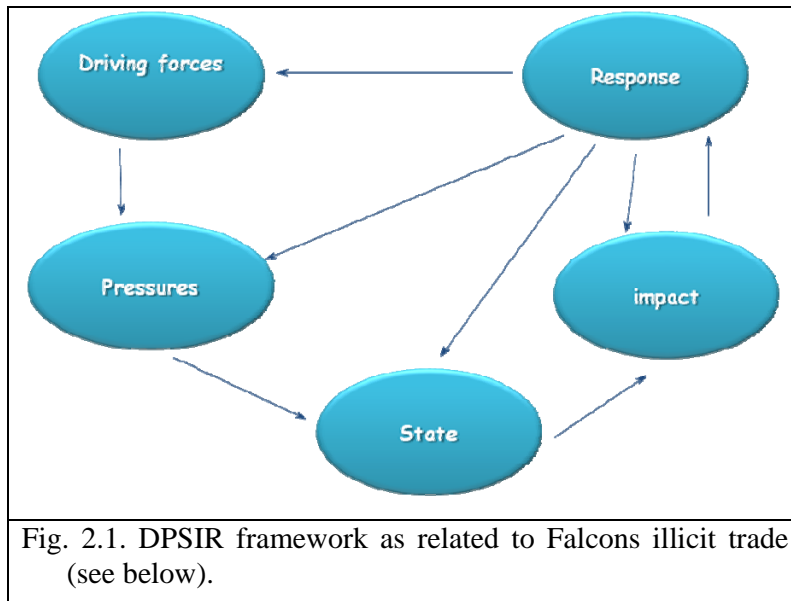


Fig. 2.1. DPSIR framework as related to Falcons illicit trade (see below).

The following terminologies were used in identifying components of the DPSIR framework:

The DPSIR framework is a system for analysis that can link .1 social and economic development aspects of a society (driving forces) and the pressures exerted on the environment causing changes on the state of environment. The impacts of these driving forces and pressures on ecosystems, human life aspects elicit a government and societal response. This response is directed towards driving forces, pressures or the state or impacts to redress the situation. The model allows for the provision of integrated

assessment using criteria and indicators to understand the various aspects of illicit trade in falcons in Syria.

2. In this study the driving forces represent the indirect causes for illegal trade in falcons, whereas the number of trapped falcons, trappers, dealers, the high prices of falcons may constitute the pressures (direct causes) for illicit trade in these species.
3. The state in the framework represents the status of the trade in falcons, population size, the number of falcons being traded, etc.
4. The impact represents the consequences of reducing falcon populations on the overall population, other associated species in the food web, loss of the species and the impact on human welfare.
5. The response component of the framework represents actions being taken at the international level (CITES) and local level (Syria) to regulate trade in falcons as to reduce the impacts of species decline. In this regard, compliance with CITES is a formal response from the government.

The following questions were taken into consideration during the process of the study:

1. What is the size and value of illicit trade in falcons in Syria and why?
2. What are the consequences for trade in falcons and what is the level of compliance with CITES regulations?
3. What is being done to curb the rising trend of illegal trade in falcons and to promote legal trade and how effective is it?
4. What are the general trends related to international trade in falcons?
5. What actions could be taken to comply with CITES regulations in order to preserve the species and sustain its habitats?

2.2- Sources and analysis of data and information:

This study was conducted in the period from July 2008 to July 2011 using many different sources of information and data. The following elements explain sources and methods used:

- A.** Literature on falcons was searched for information on the species and on the history of falconry in the Arab countries. Also relevant documents in Arabic were examined for additional information. A thorough search of the literature was conducted to review current and past information on the use of falcons and on level of their trade in Syria. The World Wide Web was a good source of useful information.
- B.** Interviews were conducted with officials responsible for implementing CITES, falconers, falcon traders and bird specialists with a view to obtain more supporting data and information.
- C.** The CITES Trade Database (CITES Secretariat), administered by UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre, was used to obtain data related to the international trade in falcons. Analyses of the Syrian import and export falcon trade data was undertaken. Obtained data were from 2000 - 2010, though not complete, but sufficient to draw reliable conclusions (see Appendices). The CITES Guide to interpreting outputs from the CITES Trade Database was used to assist with the analysis (CITES, 2004).
- D.** Two questionnaires were prepared for gathering information from falconers, falcon traders, falcon breeders and officials responsible for the implementation of CITES in the Syria. The aim of these questionnaires was to ascertain the level of awareness about CITES and the level of trade in falcons and to identify existing problems with the current procedures and regulations in order to suggest possible solutions and improvements. Data of these questionnaires were likewise analyzed.
- E.** Interviews were conducted with several persons each with a special expertise. Mr. Belal Al Hayek Director of Biodiversity, Lands & Protected Areas in the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs (MSEA) in Syria; Mrs. Omayma Rehan from the Management Authority and national focal point for CITES in Syria.
- F.** Interviews with Syrian officials were made during 2008-2010 and included officials from MAAR, MSEA, Ministry of Trade, Customs and quarantine facilities at Damascus and Aleppo International airports, the General Directorate of Customs in Damascus, members of the CITES Scientific Authority such as Dr. Adwan Shehab a researcher in the *General Commission for al-Badia Management and Development*, and Dr. Darem Tabaa, a veterinarian doctor, chairperson of SPANA (NGO) in Syria who kindly gave his contribution and opinions about applying CITES in Syria. Personnel from the Society of Arabian horses and falconers in the Damascus suburbs were also consulted.

- G.** In addition, visits were made during 2008 up to 2010 to local markets and auction houses, local falconer houses and Damascus, Aleppo, Palmyra and Homs provinces.
- H.** Language of interviews and discussion sessions were in Arabic. Exact translation by author of replies and views were used for the purpose of this work.
- I.** Data and information obtained were analyzed in quantitative and qualitative manner .

Chapter III

Results and Discussion

3.1-Driving Forces and Pressures for International Trade in Falcons:

In Syria, in some local communities falcon trapping is very popular, trapping by residents of Ar Ruhaybah being a case in point. Some locals travel to other regions outside the country to trap falcons. It is reported that in the 1990's falcon trapping by Mongolians and foreigners especially Syrian nationals was widely practiced in Mongolia (Dixon, 2009). In general, factors driving the trade in falcons in Syria may include:

- a. The lucrative business of trading in falcons in developing countries including Syria. For instance, it is estimated that 127 Sakers which were intercepted at the airbase in Kyrgyzstans in 2005 before they were smuggled into Syria had a black market value of £2.6 million in a country (Mongolia) where the average annual income is about £200 (Parfitt, 2005).
- b. Trapping and sale of falcons is practiced by Syrians in and outside Syria and is increasing due to demand from rich countries in the Arabian Peninsula where, for instance, falconers are willing to pay up to £15,000 for a female falcon (Parfitt, 2005).
- c. The belief among local desert communities is that success in trapping falcons can change a person's economic situation through the deal of a lifetime: Capturing a bird can make you a jackpot millionaire where thousands of dollars can be gained in one deal. In this regard, a falcon (called locally white Jernas), which was captured in the desert east of Abu Kamal city, Syria, on the border with Iraq in 1992, sold for \$US220000; equivalent to 11 million Syrian pounds (\$US= 50 Sy.p.), which is a fortune in local currency.
- d. Falcons were an important means of hunting for food in Bedouin communities for thousands of years and bird hunting has a long history as a popular sport and leisure activity.
- e. Falconry and traditional hunting events are still held in important ceremonies to demonstrate the status of individuals within their communities.

3.2- Status of Falcons Trade in Syria:

3.2.1- Falcons trafficking:

The following pages of this section summarize the results of field visits, interviews and questionnaires conducted in this study. These findings may shed light on the level of illegal international trade in falcons in Syria as well as in other countries involved. .

A field visit was made to Ar Ruhaybah, a Syrian town in mid Syrian Desert, 40 km north east of Damascus (Fig. 3.1). The town has a reputation as an international stock market for falcons, where prices of captured wild birds are set and the “deal of lifetime is made” (Bsaiki, 2012).

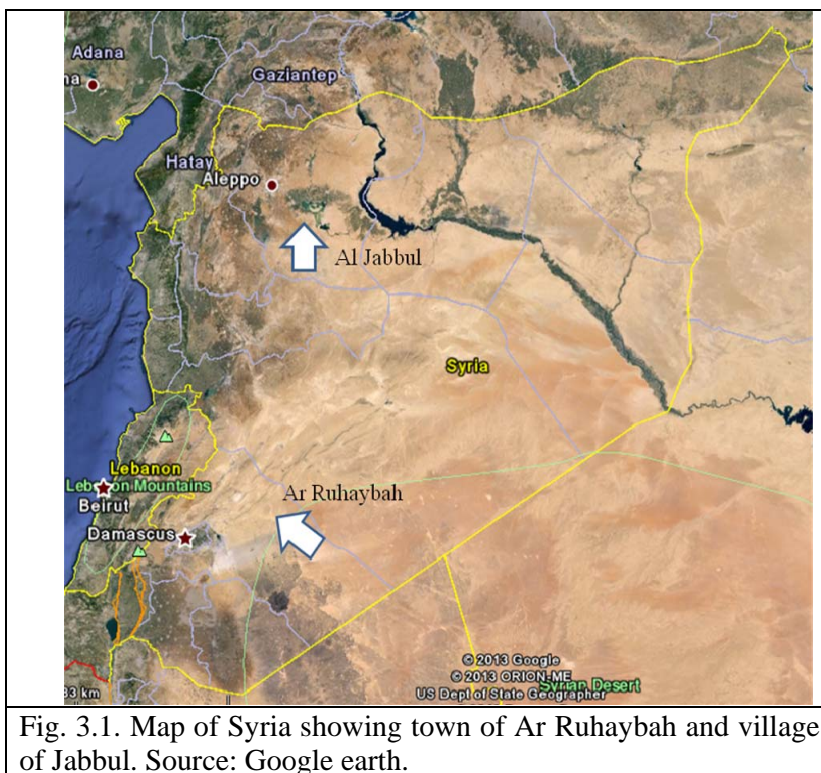


Fig. 3.1. Map of Syria showing town of Ar Ruhaybah and village of Jabbul. Source: Google earth.

Typically, locally captured birds of high value are replaced by inexpensive imported falcons for re-export purposes. These inexpensive birds are mostly imported from Eastern Europe and Russia. The operation is called as replacement smuggling, as a sort of fraud and evasion (Bsaiki, 2012). The process is possible primarily because of lack of monitoring and careful inspections at border crossings of the country and its airports. In this case the role of the biodiversity bureau at the MSEA is to attach a ring to the bird’s leg as a kind of identification, so that the specimen can be inspected by Customs during re-export inspection of specimens.

During an interview with a group of falconers, Mr. Ali Al sheikh, a well known falconer, stated: We wish the government could allow us to establish special breeding facilities for falcons, we take good care of our birds. He added that: if we don't trap these birds they will be trapped in Jordan along their migration flyway. With regard to the Falcon market in Syria, interviewed falconers mentioned the existence of brokers and trade offices in Syrian cities like Aleppo, Homs, Damascus (Saroujah market) as well as in small towns like Sarakeb (North west Syria) and Ar Ruhayba. The falconers go on trapping trips to in Russia, Mongolia, Turkey and Azerbaijan and dealers in Ar Ruhaybah buy the birds regardless of whether they were trapped in Syria or abroad, he added.

In another discussion, a falconer stated: I think what happens is traders bring cheap falcons like the Shahin only with a CITES certificate and then re-export a different expensive bird with the same name and same certificate. This is fraud on the government. The falconer Mr. Abo Meri added; We as falconers, bring falcons from Russia with certificates. It happened one time that they sent me birds by smuggling them, but they all arrived dead to Syria. They died while they were in the container on an airfreight from Russia to Al Sharjah in U.A.E. in route to Syria.



Fig:3.2. Falconer from Ruhaiba area explains techniques used to trap falcons it's a tradition for his family and a source of income.

"Photo by: May Abido"

Mr. Al Shiekh, a falconer from a family with long history of practicing traditional falconry, stated that the trade in falcons in Syria is estimated to be at around at 150 million Syrian Pounds (\$US 3 million) per year. He added that the people of Ar Ruhaybah made their wealth from falconry And that the money was then invested in other businesses like stone quarries. As

for the question of whether the birds are subject to veterinary inspections inspected at the airport, the falconers confirmed that the birds have their stool examined. Mr. Al Shiekh mentioned that he dealt with Russian birds, and he was not interested in Turkish ones. In responding to a question regarding bird shipments, the falconers unanimously agreed that sometimes some dealers put a quarter of a sleeping pill in the feed or the water to calm the falcons before they are transported.

With regard to the question: Do you believe that currently, when you go hunting, there are less birds than before? A falconer replied positively. He added, I stayed one month monitoring birds, but I didn't see any, even in Russia, despite the fact that during March we used to see the sky full of falcons, now it is not really the same. He continued by stating that the reduced number of birds may be due to the unusual weather where eggs in nests did not hatch and the number of female birds were reduced due to hunting.

With regard to the question: What do you know about the Syrian falcon colonies? A falconer replied: We used to have in nearby Ar Ruhaybah about 20 colonies of falcons. Nevertheless, because people kept picking them up and trapping birds there are almost none of them left. One is still present within the boundary of a military protected site in a mountain cliff in Palmyra. The colony is still being seen each year.

Another local falconer, Mr. Saib Al Shiekh, from Ar Ruhaybah, estimated the number of falcons imports and exports to be approximately 600-700 birds per year. The value price of these birds varies between 10,000 to 6-7 million Syrian Pounds depending on its breed, type and willingness of buyers to pay. The average price for a bird may range from 100,000 to up to a million Syrian Pounds, though some auctioned birds may receive even higher prices. He added that starting from 15 September of each year birds are exported to Qatar almost on a daily basis. He added that: We are ready as falconers, who practiced falconry father to son, to pay \$U.S. 400 fees for each bird to be imported or exported legally. He emphasized that there is no need to smuggle falcons if falconers are allowed to import/export them legally. He continued by saying: Among our problems is that there are not enough falcons veterinarians and even if they were available in sufficient numbers, it could provide a channel for bribery. Why don't we pay for a stamp for example instead of paying money for each bird. In this manner everything would be clear.

Mr. Al Shiekh stated that these birds encourage tourism and provide work for locals, even shepherds in the desert can benefit from these birds. He added that nearly 300 persons are working in falconry in the town of Ar Ruhaybah alone. Their ages range from 14 up to 65 years old. It is a family business. Most people here, Mr. Al Shiekh said, go to Mongolia because in

Turkey the price of birds is not very high, i.e. it ranges from 30,000 - 100,000 Syrian Pounds. only. He mentioned that once he bought a bird from Moscow zoo in Russia. The people who trap in Syria are very poor but the ones that go to Ukraine for example are supported by some rich merchants. In another example, Mr. Al Shiekh stated that he bought 2 birds from Canada with a legal health certificate for \$US 120,000 thousand. However, on arrival by air in Syria, they were dead. He sued the airline company in Syrian courts (case number: 14531) in 1999, but he didn't win the case as the court ruled against him in 2006.

During a group discussion held in one of the houses in Ar Ruhaybah, one falconer explained how birds are auctioned. Whenever the bird is available for purchase, all the merchants and dealers gather for the auction. They would either buy it together as partners or alone. One of the falconers stated: We all wish to get the bird for 10000 Syrian Pounds. and sell it for 1 million Syrian Pounds so we can make a fortune. When they call from other provinces that they trapped a falcon we go there to buy it. One time two young men lost their lives in a car accident while driving to get caught birds in another village. There are many farmers there who think that they will change their whole life if they find a bird.

The falconers agree that falconry is a gift from Alah (God) and are gifted and lucky to be good at practicing falconry. They understand it like any commercial trade where you may win or lose, there is always a risk. One falconer added: When asked; why do you bring birds from UAE?. He responded: We bring them from Russia to UAE then to Syria for our benefit. Because here it is our land and we can control the prices. From the above statements, it can be deduced that the falconers also become falcon dealers who trade in falcons.



Fig. 3.3. In the background of his house, has many falcons in a large cage designed especially for his business. "Photo by: May Abido"

Regarding a falconer's opinion about private farms for falcons, he stated that: I think a big facility can work but it needs a lot of money and support and protection from the government. He added: I am now 60 years old and if we had the knowledge before I wouldn't have brought a long time ago 3 chicks from the nest.

Sabkhat Al Jabbul in Northern Syria was declared a Ramsar site. The village Al Jabbul is located on the northern edge of the Al Jabbul lake. An interview was held in 2010 with falconers in Al Jabbul village in the form of a group discussion. A falconer in the group stated that each year nearly 140 Falcons are being trapped in Syria. The group estimated the number of falcons being trapped each year at 140 in east of Aleppo at the Al Jabbul protected area and near Tichreen dam. They add that they usually bring the birds from Turkey in groups of 50. Each bird is sold for 60 -70 thousand Syrian pounds equivalent to \$US1200-1400. Once the birds are in Syria, people from the Gulf countries come and pay higher prices for them. The following pictures give insights and illustrate some aspects of the interview.

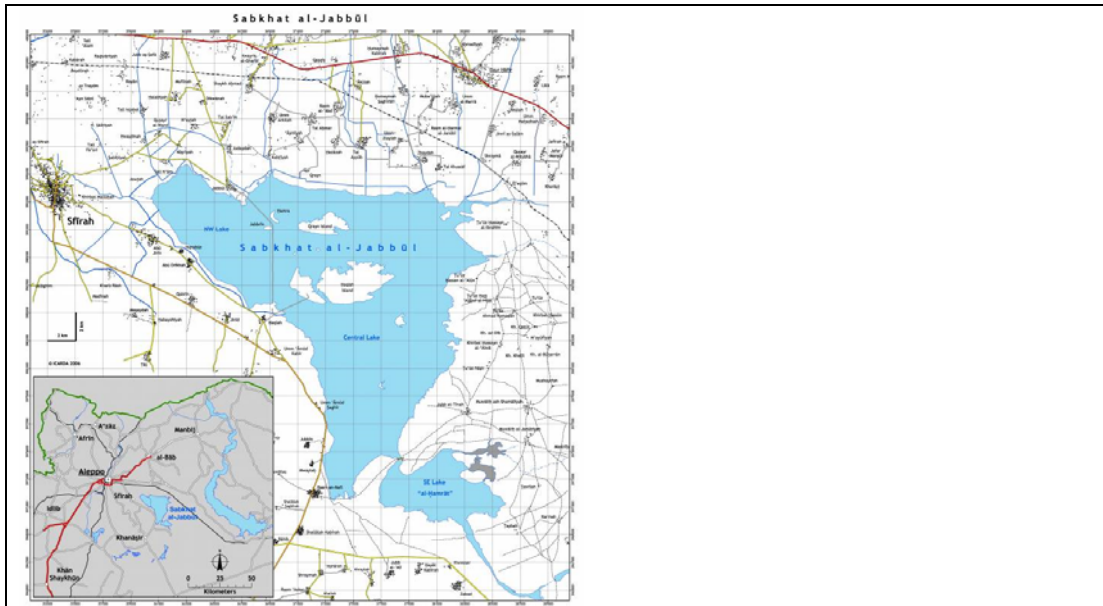


Fig. 3.4. Al Jabbul village and Sabkhat Al Jabbul Source: <http://www.jabbul-wetland.org/index.php?module=PhotoGallery&func=detail&pid=3&startnum=0>



Fig. 3.5. A meeting with a group of hobbyists and falconers and some locals who were ex-hunters and were trained to be eco-guides in Al Jabbul protected area. The young man is carrying the birds of Syria field guide book and trying to identify what species they see or trap in his village. “Photo by: May Abido”



Fig. 3.6. The falconer carrying his bird used in trapping and explaining the difficulties he faces with the hunting law. He stated that it is better to regulate hunting than to prevent it totally. “Photo by: May Abido”

In Damascus, as well as in other cities, the majority of the group interviewed emphasized the importance of establishing an association for Falconers. They believe that authorizing such an association to grant bird identification certificates provides the best solution to curb illegal trade.



Fig. 3.7. A Local falconer in Ar Ruhaybah showing their family business products for falconry head covers, gloves, ropes and other tools used in falconry, they sell these products locally and to the Gulf countries as well. "Photo by: May Abido"



Fig3.8 trapping at Jaboul lake in Aleppo. "Photo by: May Abido"



Fig: 3.9. A local shop in Ruhayba area that sells equipment for falconry.
"Photo by: May Abido"



Fig:3.10. A local Falconer from Jaboul lake in Aleppo with his equipment ready to trap falcons
"Photo by: May Abido"

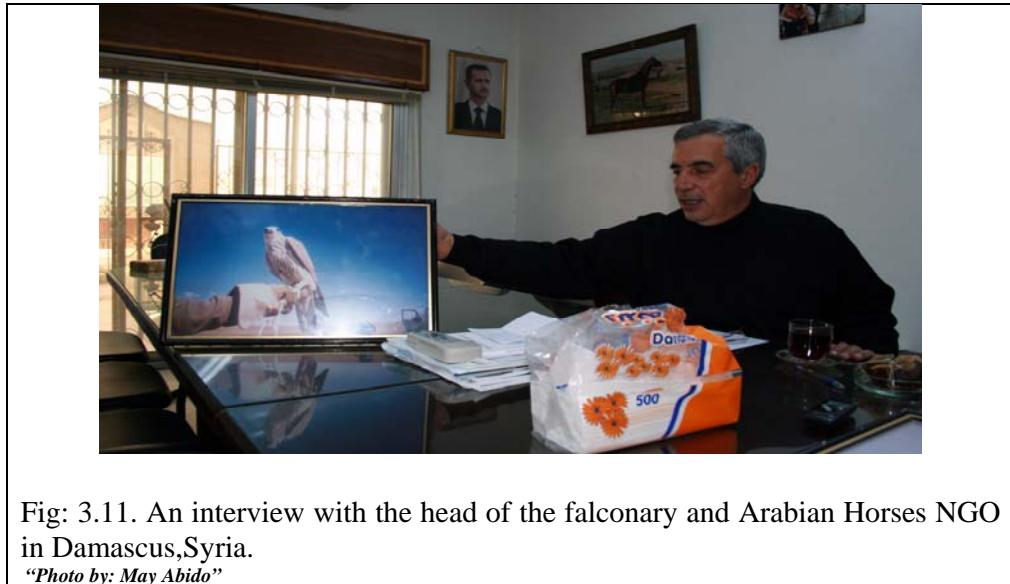


Fig: 3.11. An interview with the head of the falconary and Arabian Horses NGO in Damascus, Syria.

"Photo by: May Abido"

In an interview with Syrian officials at MSEA headquarters in Damascus, Engineer Belal Al Hayek and Eng. Omayma Rehan, both stated that in order to regulate the trade of falcons, a number of measurable steps need to be taken. These include; ensuring consistency of national legislation with provisions of CITES to meet country obligations under the Convention and tightening national regulation measures on the trade in falcons. They stated that it is absolutely prohibited to export falcons caught on Syrian territory under the enacted hunting law. However, falcons imported from abroad can be re-exported.

The methods used to trap and transport falcons are often inhumane, resulting in death or distress for the bird. Trapped falcons are shipped in a thermos flask or put in a small tube to restrict movement. Smugglers usually put birds between bottles filled with iced water in two sports bags, which have a hole for air. They use hoods on the bird's head hoods, and tightly bandage their paws and tails, to prevent their cries and moving. As a falconer explained: I travelled this year by bus via Aleppo to Turkey and eastern Iran, where I trapped a Shahin, which I bought back under my coat by bus back to Syria. Some of the illegally trapped falcons are smuggled and then somehow given 'CITES certificates' for onward export (Fig. 3.12.).



Fig. 3.12. Shipped birds

3.2.2- The value of Falcons in the local and Gulf Countries Markets:

It is very difficult to estimate the value of falcons in Syria as well as their prices abroad. Different numbers were given since the value depends on the willingness of the buyer to pay the price set by local falconers and dealers. Furthermore, these prices are paid upon assuming the bird will be shipped to the buyer. This implies hidden costs that may be in form of bribes, smuggler fees; etc. To illustrate this point, the following cases may offer an idea about prices and fees paid for smuggled birds and provide some indication of the challenges being faced by officials responsible for the implementation of CITES regulations.

In reviewing a law suit, case No. 1453 dated 15-10-2006 filed by Syrian Customs in the Supreme Court in Damascus against a falconer, Mr. A.L., for smuggling 4 falcons, the defendant presented official documents issued by concerned authority that he was allowed to import falcons from abroad through the Aleppo airport only. The value of imported falcons were estimated by experts hired by the government to be at 4 million Syrian Pounds (\$US 80,000).

Archives of MSEA indicated that, in 2007, MSEA granted permission in response to Request Number 2606/b dated 30/10/2007 by a falconer, Mr. B.N, to re-export 100 *falco cherrug* to Arabian Gulf countries. Furthermore, another record documented the number of imported falcons reported by the Ministry in 2005 at 750 birds.

Data on CITES permits and certificates were obtained from falconers that agreed to cooperate in revealing information about illegal and legal trade in falcons in Syria. If their cooperation could be established, it may suggest that solutions could be found to alleviate the problems associated in obtaining CITES permits. However most of these data in this study are censored from public access due to the sensibility of some high profile personnel from some countries, i.e., their names may figure in the data. For example, data obtained from 5 approval documents stated that 367 falcons

were exported. However, 2 of these approval documents from MSEA cited exporting 100 falcons on each permit. This may raise concerns about gaps in data and data reliability and accuracy. In other words,, there is a difference in the data reported to CITES and official government figures for falcons exported in 2005. A questionnaire, developed for the purpose of this study was directed to the Ministry of Finance, General Directorate of Customs on 1st of July 2009. The questionnaire included the following questions:

1. What is the number of imports/exports of falcons in Syria? Does the General Directorate of Customs have statistics and records of these numbers?
2. Did Customs seize or confiscate any smuggled falcons on Borders or checkpoints? If yes, what were the followed procedures?.
3. Does the General Directorate of Customs consider itself responsible for controlling international trade in falcons in Syria?
4. Is there any cooperation or coordination between Customs and other concerned ministries such as MAAR or MSEA or Ministry of Trade?
5. Are the personnel of the Customs trained to identify species of falcons that are being imported or exported and what are the regulations that Customs follow when dealing with falcons on check points or borders?
6. Is there any law or decree that Customs refers to when dealing with falcons?
7. Do you have any previous knowledge of CITES? What are procedures followed to cooperate to regulate the trade of falcons and prevent illegal trade?

Answers were received via an official letter from the General Director of Customs illustrating general points on the questionnaire. Main points were:

1. No cases were recorded in Customs offices except in the Customs Investigation Office, where, few cases were recorded in 2008.
2. On 29 July 2009 Customs confiscated six falcons in a house of a person called M.A from the town Ar Ruhaybah and a case was filed against the defendant (No. 60 \ 2008) at Damascus Custom Court. The case was settled by paying an amount of 48,000 Syrian Pounds with 25100 Syrian Pounds as fees.
3. On 29 July 2008 Customs confiscated 12 Shahin falcons in the house of a person in Ar Ruhaybah. Customs sued him by case (No. 24 \ 2008) for an amount of 96,000 Syrian Pounds and 50160 Syrian Pounds as court fees.

4. On 29 July 2008 the Custom investigation Unit confiscated 12 falcons from a person in Ar Ruhaybah. A case No. 117 \ 2008 was filed against him. Amount of sue case settlement is estimated at 96,000 Syrian Pounds and fees of 50160 Syrian Pounds
5. With regard to statistics on the number of Falcon imports and exports in Syria, Records in Damascus - Sbeineh Customs did not indicate information regarding any export or import of falcons and did not register any case of smuggling of any bird species. Furthermore, the Jdeideh Customs on the Lebanese border showed in its letter No. 247 \ 2009 Date 21- 6 -2009 that the falcons in general exported to Gulf countries by Customs of Daraa and Nasib on the Jordanian Border and through Damascus airport. Customs did not register any entry or exit from the check point of Customs at Jdeideh cross border with Lebanon.
6. A Customs fee of \$US 100 is charged on each exported falcon in accordance with the General Customs rule number 7530 \ T \ 2002 and the provisions of Ministry of Economy fee book No. 164 \ 4 \ 9 dated 7-1-1997.
7. The number of smuggled falcons are recorded at the check points on borders and Customs centers.
8. Health certificates are issued by the Animal Health Bureau in MAAR; Customs uses appropriate expertise in this area.
9. The Falcons are imported to Syria upon the approval of the MAAR (veterinary quarantine), which is granted based on the approval of MSEA.

In the above context, the role of Customs is to verify imports and exports of falcons at borders, airports and other entry points by checking relevant documents presented by exporters and confiscate any illegal shipments. Furthermore, Customs ensures export duties are paid for the shipments. The answers also suggest that Customs faces many challenges in controlling falcon smugglings; in particular, the issue of bird replacement, where local high value birds are exported using same documents of cheap falcons. Thus making things difficult to custom officers to match every bird with its certificate since they do not know how to identify the specimens.

The same questions were directed to Ministry of Trade. However, an official reply was not received. During an informal interview with a concerned official in the Ministry of Trade, he stated that the Ministry follows the rules set by MAAR and authenticates issued certificates.

In conclusion, the irregularities found in legal and official trade of falcons in Syria are unfortunate. For instance, replacement of birds using the same

certificate appears to be a common practice. According to the Director of Animal Health Bureau at MAAR, falcon merchants misuse CITES certificates issued by MSEA. He stressed that some traders come with sick birds or weak ones and replace them with healthy and expensive ones using the same certificate..

Another aspect of misuse is that when the traders in falcons notice that the MSEA is giving approvals for a certain species, they apply for the to import or re-export the same species. The director added, Most of the time, the species that are applied for its import–re export are totally different from the species re-exported. Endangered species could be re-export but the responsible personnel for enforcing CITES provisions at MSEA are not always aware of this fact.

Some insights from these interviews and formal and informal discussions suggests that corruption may also be a factor in illegal trade. Laws and regulations need to be reviewed and updated. Likewise, enforcement of these laws must be tightened in order to effectively control illegal trade in falcons. At the time of writing, wildlife trade in general is not a priority for the Syrian government. Other priorities exist like combating poverty, and finding jobs for thousands of unemployed people. More lobbying by environmentalist, NGOs and GOs could be undertaken to make environmental issues a national priority, including compliance with CITES provisions.

Literature consulted (Parfitt, 2005; Environment Canada/CITES, 2008; Wyatt, 2011; Bsaiki, 2012), coupled with the above interviews and interviews suggest that smuggling falcons and evasion under the current law in Syria may be a serious problem. This deprives Syrian treasury duties of exporting 300 wild birds per year at a nominal fee of \$US 100 per bird to Gulf countries. The Society for the Protection of Animals Abroad (SPANNA) estimated the illegal trade with falcons as almost double the number of legally ones, thus a loss of \$30,000 yearly is inflicted upon Syrian treasury. In reality, the price for an exported falcon can reach \$US 60,000 on the average, raising the dollar value of falcons illegal trade in the country to \$US18 million (Bsaiki, 2012).

It may be useful to outline in more detail the procedures and provisions that apply for import and re-export falcons:

A. Import:

1. Acquiring prior approval from MSEA according to the following provisions:
 - a. Birds are imported by air freight exclusively.
 - b. Birds are accompanied with a health certificate and certificate of denoting country of origin ascertaining that the birds are

not infected with the bird flu, in compliance with the resolution No. 301 \ for 2006 issued by the MAAR.

B. Export:

1. Approval by the MAAR based on the approval by MESA.
2. Health certificate from the Animal Health Bureau in the MAAR.
3. A Pledge to pay the expense and a certificate of origin and certified bill with note that the price of one falcon is 60,000 Syrian Pounds.
4. An import permission and pay Customs dues.
5. Legal procedures for re-exporting falcons:

The following steps constitute the procedures at the time of writing to be followed when importing and re-exporting falcons in Syria:

1.1. *Falcons importation for the purpose of re-export:*

- a) An application of import must be filled.
- b) A copy of CITES certificate or bird passport is attached with the application from the country of origin.
- c) A declaration is written by the relevant person or authorized representative to present the original CITES certificate or original passport of falcons to be imported. These documents are to be compared with the copies attached with the application and the Customs clearance form which authenticated the entry of the falcons into Syrian territory. However, final approval for imports is not granted unless the original permits of the previously imported lots are presented.
- d) The original CITES permit along with the Customs clearance form are forwarded to the MESA, when the imported consignment is granted entry into Syria.
- e) The relevant person shall keep a copy of the CITES permit and Customs clearance form to be presented when the falcons are re-exported falcons. In case the original CITES permit and Customs clearance form are not provided, the birds will be denied exit and no import of any new lot will be allowed.
- f) The approval is valid for one entry only.

1.2. *Falcons re-export:*

- a) An application for re-export is completed.
- b) A copy of the CITES permit and Customs clearance form which granted entry to the falcons must be attached with the application.

- c) Approval by the MESA is addressed to the Animal Health Directorate, MAAR.

1.3. *Additional Procedures:*

- a) In order to insure compliance with the law and to prevent irregularities in the outlined above procedure, two communications were issued by MSEA. The first communiqué (No. 331/S/M.W.) dated 07-09-2004 was sent to the Ministry of Finance, General Directorate of Customs and the second communiqué (No. 1302/S/B/T.H) dated 13/08/2005 was sent to MAAR, Animal Health Directorate. It was directed through these communications to tag birds with a tight plastic ring on their legs when they granted entry into Syrian territory. Furthermore, birds are given serial numbers by the Quarantine Bureau, MAAR offices at Syrian crossing borders and airports.
- b) A Customs inspector is also appointed to monitor import and re-export of falcons as to ensure that birds caught in Syrian territory are not exported, so that the same imported specimens are the ones that are re-exported.

3.2.3- **Public awareness**

Public awareness, communication and outreach are the first essential steps in raising awareness of the public regarding a certain issue. Public awareness on the topic of illegal trade in falcons and its consequences on the species, ecosystems and society is arguably important. Through public awareness campaigns and environmental education programs, the essence of nature conservation can be made understood to the public resulting in more positive attitudes and behaviors towards the environment.

Given the above, a discussion was held with a group of 14 people chosen from different backgrounds and representing three provinces (Damascus, Aleppo and Palmyra). Data from this discussion indicated that 64% of the members in the group thought that falcons belong to the same family of Eagles and Vultures. Nearly, 50% answered that hunting with falcons is not legal in Syria. Furthermore, the groups was of the opinion that Strict enforcement of hunting laws was a was needed to conserve falcons and curb illegal trade. Another suggestion was to develop breeding programs and providing protected gaming areas for bred falcons.

Also of interest was their suggestion that more effective conservation of falcons in Syria can be achieved through campaigns that raise public awareness on conservation of falcons and associated trade issues. Such campaigns can be implemented through different media including; printed materials, the Internet, especially websites, and other communication

channels, with the aim of educating the public on the importance of falcons for the ecosystem and related issues.

With regard to the question about the Management Authority responsible for the import or re-export of falcons in Syria; 50% mentioned MESA, while the other 50% named three or four agencies. These answers illustrate the importance of making information and knowledge about role of agencies that are involved in regulating falcons trade more easily and readily available. When asked whether falconry means hunting, most answers were yes, however, a few answered that it is different than hunting. In general these results may suggest a lack of environmental awareness at the public level and provide data for more large-scale surveys to ascertain effective public awareness programs.

The question directed at officials in MAAR and MESA about the coordination efforts on the regional level to control the trade of falcons also received interesting answers. For example, 75% of sampled officials answered I don't know. This reply may indicate that more efforts should be undertaken to define the roles of officials. It also points to the need to cooperate with bordering countries to control the trade. Furthermore, 60% of officials answered that falcons belong to the same family of vultures and eagles, which suggest that more capacity building and training is needed for officials and other stakeholders in the government who are responsible for trade in wildlife and implementation of CITES.

With regard to the question if local trade in falcons was effectively controlled by the concerned authority, 100% of answers were negative. The reason for this response may lie in the fact that national legislation for trade in falcons in Syria has not been enacted in Syria. This problem is compounded with weaknesses in the current hunting law.

On the question if there was an annual budget for implementing CITES, again there was consensus that a budget was not allocated specifically for implementing CITES. Furthermore, when asked if there was a national law to enforce CITES, some officials stated that all CITES activities in Syria are mainly paper work that lack enforcement of national law, if such a law existed.

Officials responsible for implementing CITES regulations in MSEA are few in numbers (4-5), may lack capacity for responsibilities associated with CITES and perform other duties in addition to CITES work. Arguably, There is a need to assign additional human resources and institute a training program to ensure better compliance with and implementation of CITES, particularly with regard to the conservation of falcons.

Lastly, in an interview with 25-30 falconers (hobbyists, traders, trainers and breeders) during 2008-2010, the main concerns expressed were to: a) establish veterinary hospital for falcons, b) provide better facilities for the

export and import of falcons at airports and borders, and c) establish associations for falconers. These falconers were familiar with CITES procedures and their main concern was simplifying the procedures of applying for permissions.

3.2.4- Review and Analyses of the CITES Trade Database:

This section presents an analysis of CITES data taken from CITES permits and certificates for imports and exports to and from Syria. These data are important for analyzing the total number of falcons imported and exported. However, of greater interest may be the reasons behind the total number of imports and exports. The CITES data may indicate whether falcons are imported and exported for trade, personal use or other reasons. In addition, CITES data will be used to examine the source where falcons were taken from. From this analysis, variations between the source and the purpose of import and export can be better understood. Furthermore, the CITES data can be further analyzed to examine the trade between Syria and countries that import from or export to. By corroborating data between different export and import countries, it is possible to identify gaps in the data, which may provide information for the formulation of recommendations in this study.

Analysis of the data on trade in falcons in Syria during the period 2000-2010 retrieved from the CITES Trade Database indicates that the Syrian Arab Republic trades in species of falcons with 12 countries. It exports to 7 countries and imports from 9 countries (Figs. 3.8 and 3.9). In addition, Syria exports and imports to and from 4 countries. Data show that a total of 721 falcons were imported by the Syrian Arab Republic through 86 transactions. Species subjected to trade were: *Falco Cherrugs* (497), *Falco Peregrinus* (10), *Falco hybrid* (176) and *Falco rusticolus* (38) (Fig. 3.10). The most common bird import was the *cherrug*, making up 69% during the ten year period whereas, 24% of imports were Hybrid falcons, 7% *peregrinus* (Appendix I) and 5% *rusticolus* (Appendix I). The data indicate that imports to Syria deal mostly with Appendix I species which includes *peregrinus* and *rusticolus* falcons (CITES, 2013c).

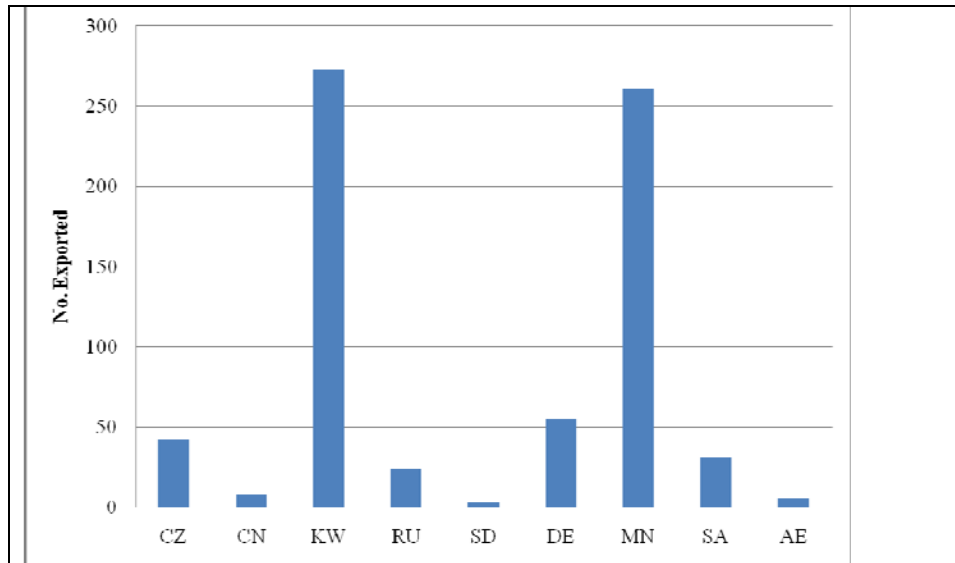


Fig. 3.13. Number of falcons exported from Syria by countries (2000 – 2010), CITES Trade Database

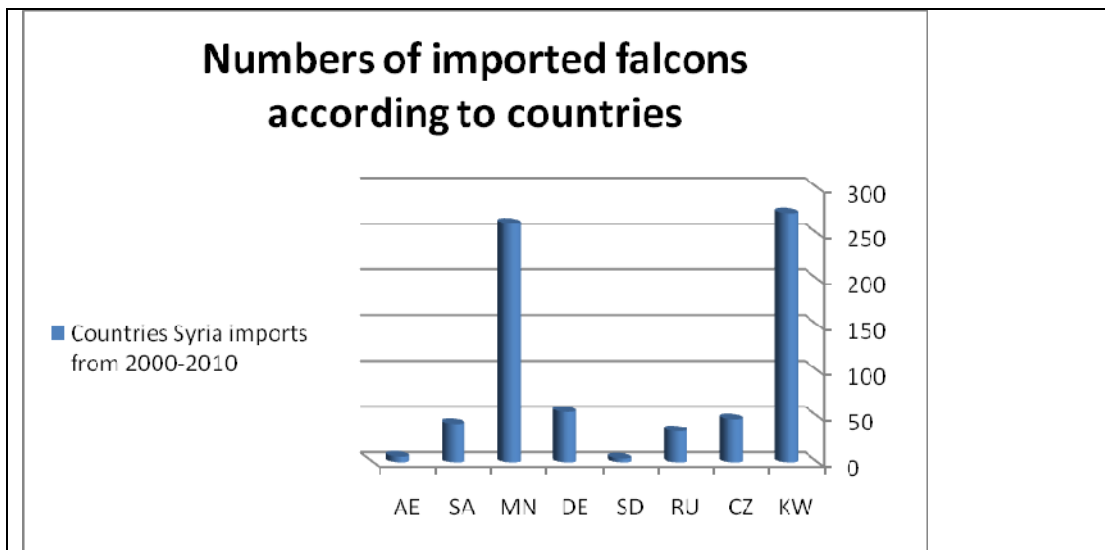
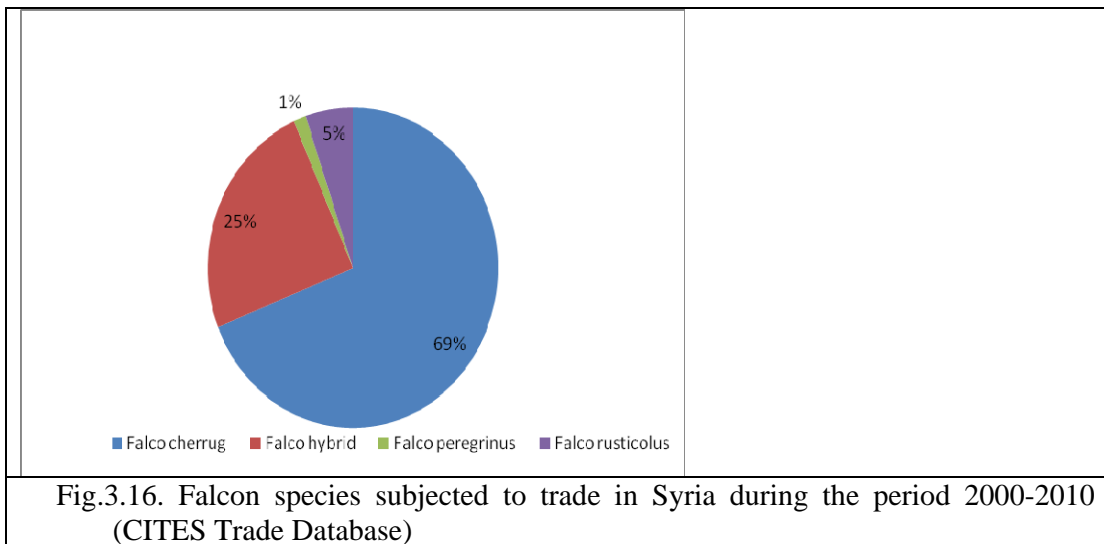
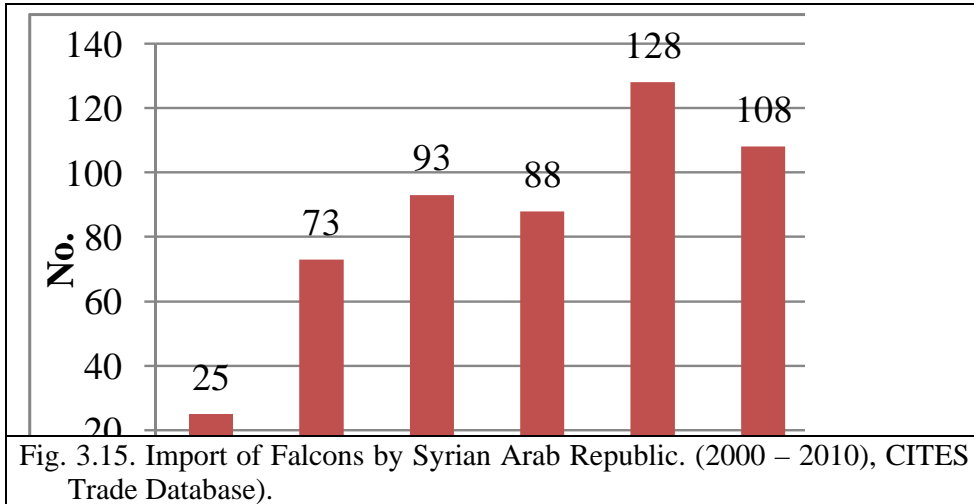


Fig. 3.14. Number of imported falcons to Syria by countries (2000-2010), CITES Trade Database).



The majority of imported falcons bred in the wild numbered 425 or 59% of the total. Furthermore, 24% of imported falcons were sourced from captivity, 12% were bred in captivity for commercial purposes and just 4% were bred in captivity for subsequent generations. Data suggest that no particular species was more likely to be sourced from the wild or captivity (Fig.3.17).

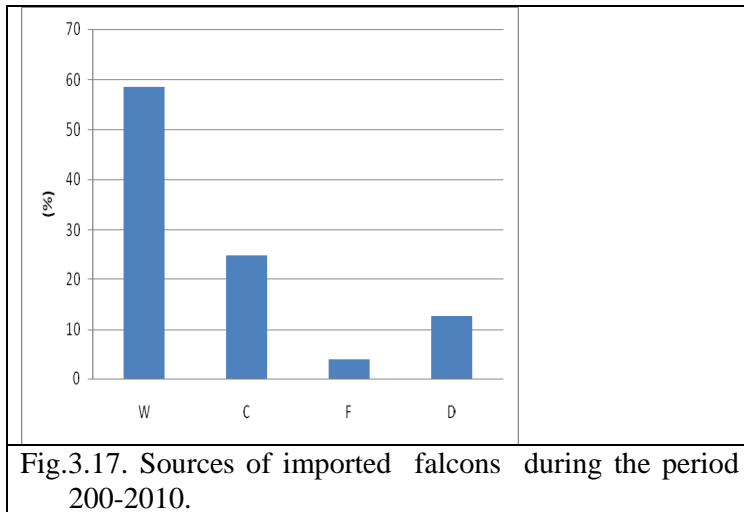


Table 3.1 illustrates the purpose of falcon imports to Syria by species (2000 – 2010). The data indicate that commercial trade is the most common reason for import, as it accounts for 56.7% of all total falcon imports. Personal use was the other major reason or 39.4% of imports. Other reasons consisted of just 4% of all imports. From these it can be deduced that the most common reason for import of the Cherrug falcon was for trade.

Out of the total number of imports for trade, 73% were for Cherrugs, similar to the overall percentage of Cherrug imported for all purposes (69%). The figures for personal use by species, are also similar as the number of total imports. Cherrug accounted for 64% of all imports for personal use, Hybrid 29%, Rusticolus 6% and Peregrinus 1%. These data suggest that with regard to imports to Syria, there is little variation between species and the declared purpose.

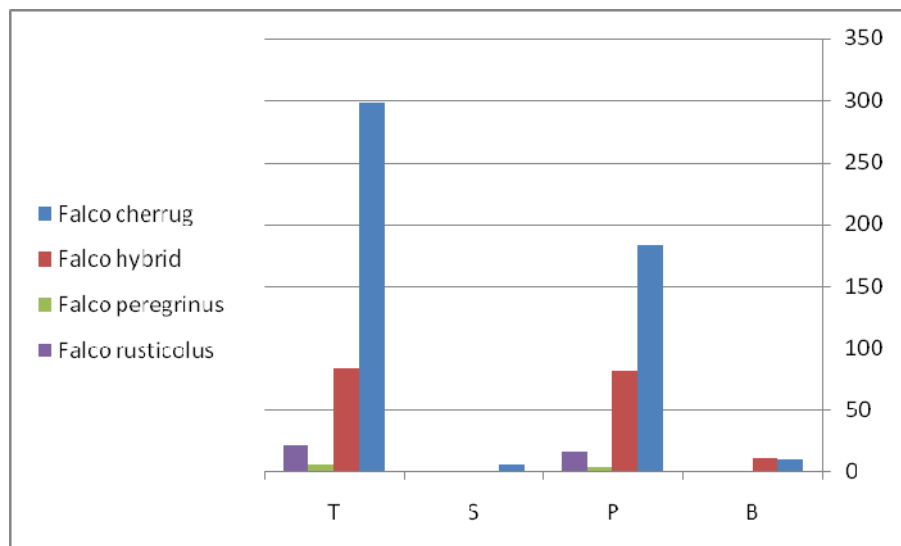


Table 3. 1. The purpose of falcons imports to Syria by Species (2000 – 2010) (2000 – 2010), CITES Trade Database.						
<i>F. rusticolus</i>	<i>F. peregrinus</i>	<i>F. hybrid</i>	<i>F. cherrug</i>	Grand Total	(%)	Purpose*
1		11	10	22	3.1	B
16	4	81	183	284	39.4	P
			6	6	0.8	S
21	6	84	298	409	56.7	T
38	10	176	497	721	100	Grand Total
*Breeding in captivity or artificial propagation (B), Personal (P), Scientific (S), Commercial Trade (T).						

Figure 3.18 shows the annual variation in imports. Although data are missing for 2008-2010, it can be deduced that out of the 721 falcons imported, 611 were imported during 2000-2007, leaving just 110 in the last three years of the study. By far, the largest numbers of imports were made in 2003 and 2004, accounting for 70% of imports over the ten year period. There were very few imports from 2005 to 2007, largely as a result of severe restrictions on the movement of birds due to avian diseases. Although the data are incomplete, 110 falcons were imported during 2008-2010 suggesting that imports did increase again after leveling off in the middle of the decade.

Analyses of CITES trade data regarding exports of falcons by the Syrian Arab Republic during the years from 2000 to 2010 (Tables 3.2 and 3.3, Fig. 3.14) indicate that a total of 592 falcons were exported by the Syrian Arab Republic in 29 separate transactions. The data also reveal that personal use (P) was the primary reason for the export of falcons in the Syrian Arab Republic (65% of total falcons exported). Trade (T) was the second reason (27%) for such trade while scientific (M) was the third reason with 2 falcons listed in (I) CITES Appendix I (2 transactions, 6 Falcons). The highest number of falcons which were exported for personal use were taken from the wild (W) (14 transactions of export, 531 falcons). This number was followed by falcons bred in captivity for commercial purposes (D) (2 transactions, 12 falcons), falcons bred in captivity (C) (5 transactions, 7 falcons).

Table 3.2. Exports of falcons from Syrian Arab Republic by species (2000-2010) (CITES Trade Database).	
Taxon	Number exported
<i>Falco cherrug</i>	531
<i>Falco hybrid</i>	13
<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	41
<i>Falco rusticolus</i>	4
<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	1

<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	2
Total	592

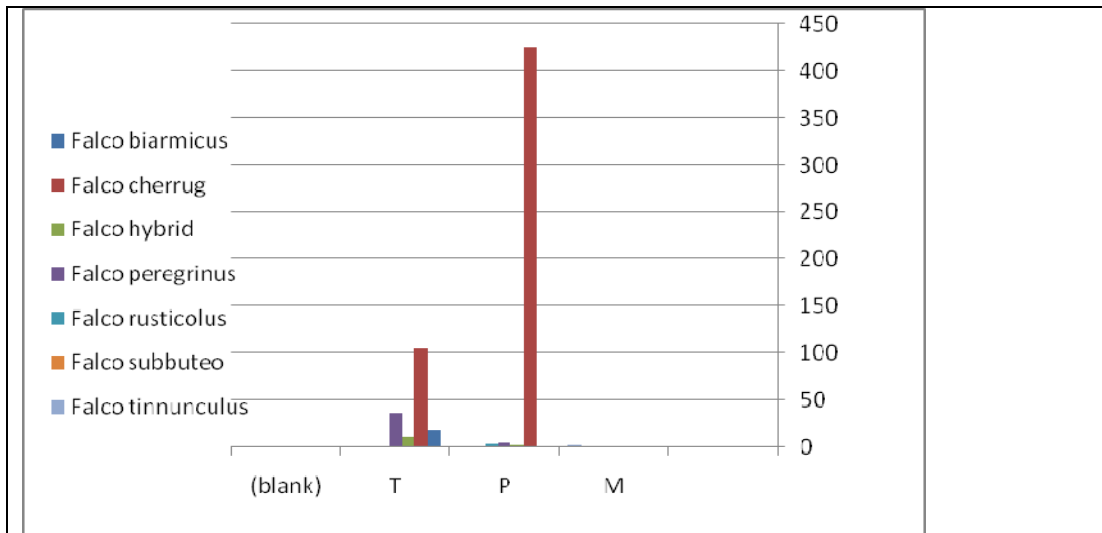
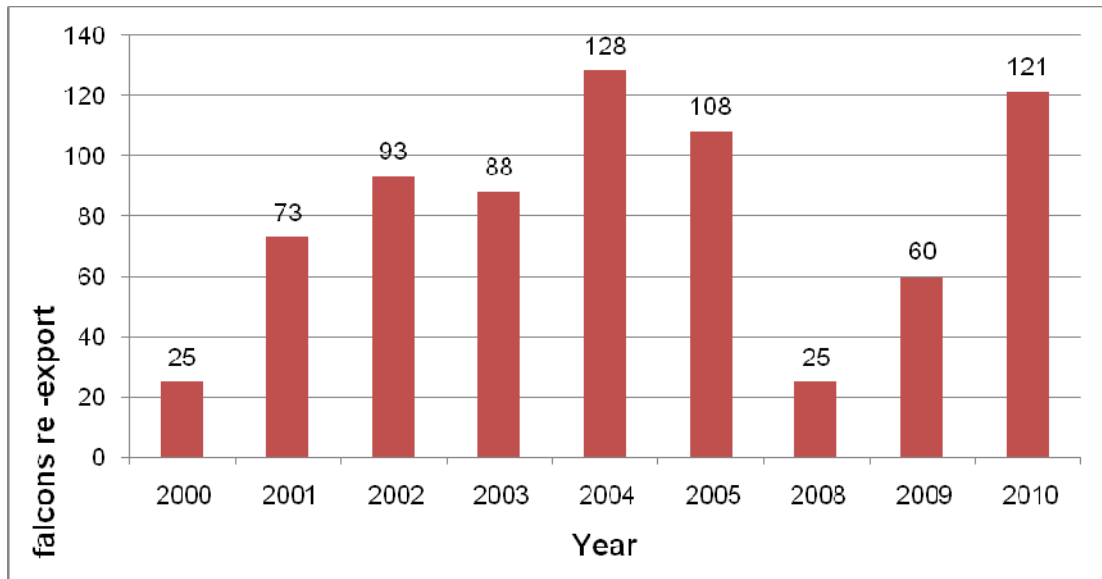
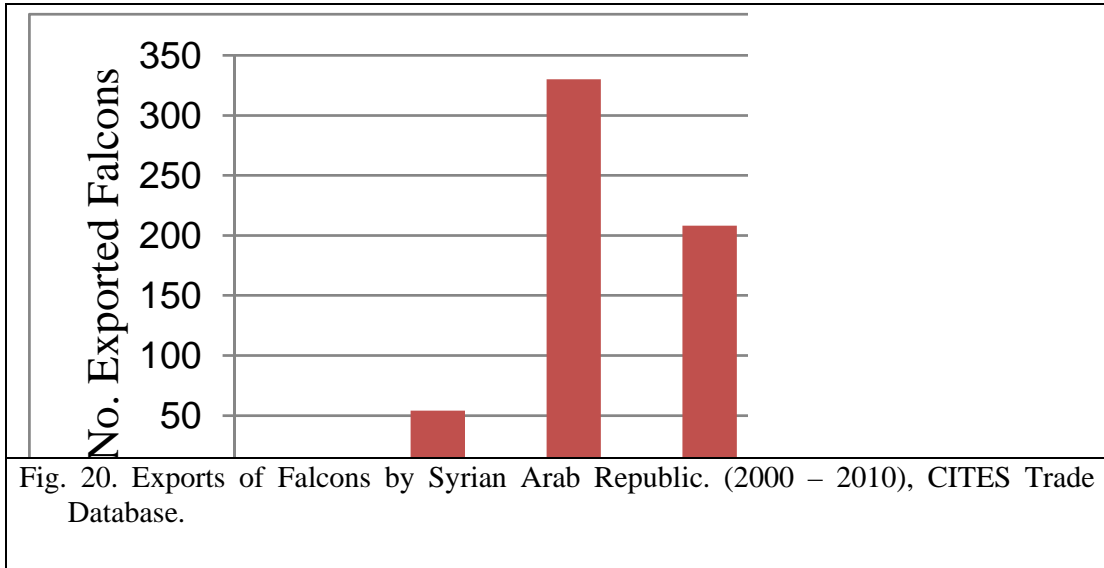


Fig. 3.19. Purpose of exports from Syria by species. (2000 – 2010) (CITES Trade Database).[personal use (P), Trade (T), scientific (M)].

Figure 3.19 indicates that 610 live falcons were exported from Syria in 27 separate transactions. Of the 610, the vast majority were *Falco Cherrug*, accounting for 88% of exports. *Falco Peregrinus* made up 7% of exports, *Falco biarmicus* 3%, *Falco hybrid* 2% and the three other species constitute less than 1% each. In contrast to the data for imports, data for exports present a complete breakdown by year, with the exception of 2006 (Fig 9). In 2006 there was no documentation on international trade due to the strict trade restrictions placed during that year. From this, a more even spread of exports can be seen compared with imports. This suggests that there is a more regular client base requiring consistent exports of falcons from Syria. In contrast, the large clusters seen on falcons imported to Syria suggest that occasional large batches are required, possibly for redistribution to other countries (which may be undocumented).



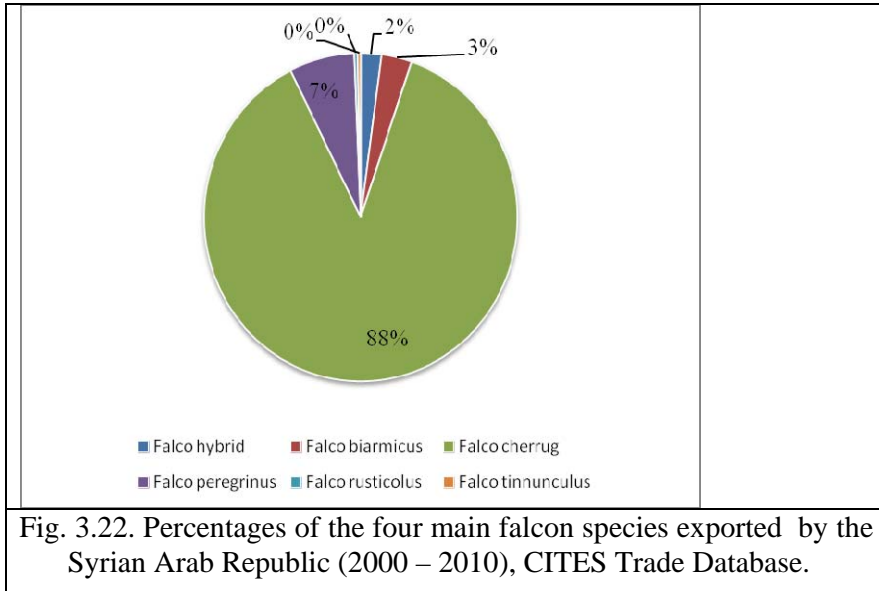


Fig. 3.22. Percentages of the four main falcon species exported by the Syrian Arab Republic (2000 – 2010), CITES Trade Database.

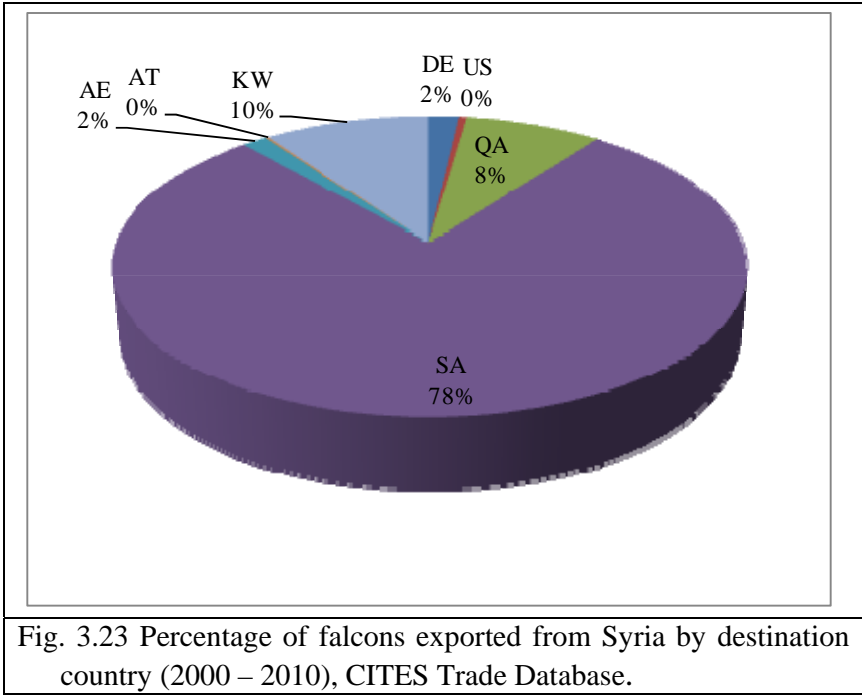


Fig. 3.23 Percentage of falcons exported from Syria by destination country (2000 – 2010), CITES Trade Database.

The figures in Table 3.4 indicate that 78.4% of exports were for personal use and 21% for commercial trade. When compared with imports, where 57% were for trade, the variation in numbers may be significant. There are several possible conclusions that can be drawn from these numbers. Given the data, it may be possible to speculate that imports to Syria are being re-sold to both internal and external customers.

CITES data indicate that 80% of Cherrugs were exported for personal use compared with 20% for trade. This contrasts sharply with Peregrinus where just 12% were exported for personal use and 87% were for trade. Although the available data are may not be sufficiently adequate to draw concrete conclusions, it does suggest that endangered species are exported for personal use, whereas the more common Peregrinus is exported for trade.

The majority of falcons exported from Syria were sourced from the wild, 87% in total. The data are missing for 9% of export sources, while the remaining 4% is split between sourced from captivity, D and I. Chart 12 indicates that out of 436 falcons exported for personal use, 97% were sourced from the wild. This compares with 90% of the 117 exports for trade being sourced from the wild. The smaller sample size of exports for trade can account for the small difference in the figures.

The data, indicating the source for Peregrinus, are scarce, with 85% of exports not indicating the source. In contrast, however, the data for Cherrugs is complete, with 99% being sourced from the wild.

The main exporters of falcons to Syria are Mongolia and Kuwait (see Figure 10) accounting for 76% of all falcons imported in Syria. The data can be cross referenced with the export data of these two countries to uncover discrepancies between the figures. Such a study may suggest that not all imports and exports are declared, making the figures somewhat unreliable.

A similar situation may exist for falcons exported from Syria. The main destination for exports is Saudi Arabia, accounting for 78% of all exports. This again may suggest that there exists a consistent, regular demand for exports from Syria. The data for imports to Saudi Arabia does not match exactly with the record of exports from Syria, although there is a similar trend in the purpose and source, so the data can be considered as reasonably reliable. Analysis of data indicates that there are gaps in the data. The numbers reported by the exporting countries do not match those reported by the importing countries and vice versa.

Table 3.3. Purpose for export of falcons from Syria by source (2000-2010), CITES Trade Database.

Purpose of trade	Source of specimens	Number of export cases	Total No. of falcons
T	D	2	12
T	W	3	105
P	I	2	6
P	W	9	423
P	C	5	7
M	W	2	3

Commercial Trade (T), Personal (P), Scientific (M), Bred in captivity for commercial purposes (D), Specimens taken from the wild (W), Confiscated (I), Bred in captivity for non-commercial purposes (C).

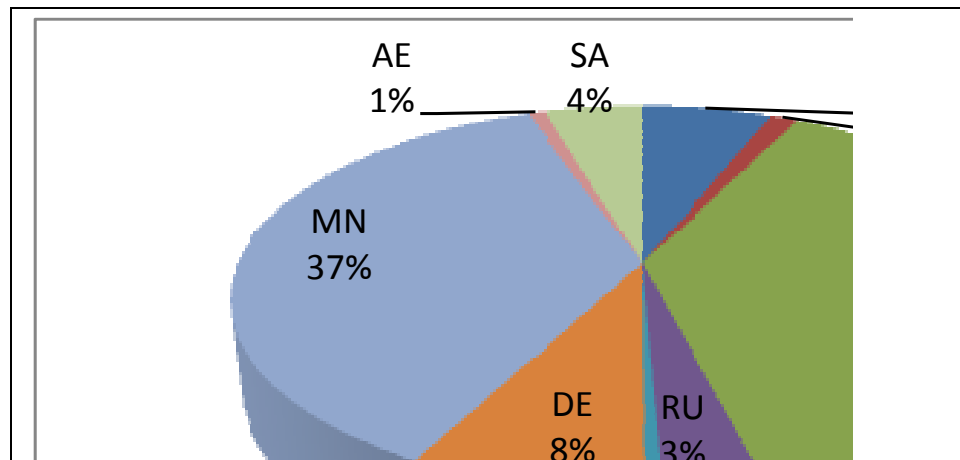


Fig. 3.24. Falcons exported to Syria by countries (2000-2010), CITES Trade Database.

C. Impacts of Illegal Trade on Falcons

Illegal trade in falcons has a detrimental impact on the species. Illegal takings impact negatively populations of falcons in Syria as well as in other countries. For example, nearly 20 colonies of Saker falcon were established in Ar Ruhaybah town surroundings in Syria. In 2010, only one colony is left and can be seen within the boundary of a military protected site at a mountain summit in Palmyra, according to interviewed falconers in the area. The following example (Fig. 3.25) is from Saudi Arabia where it shows the number of trapped falcons is on the increase in the region.

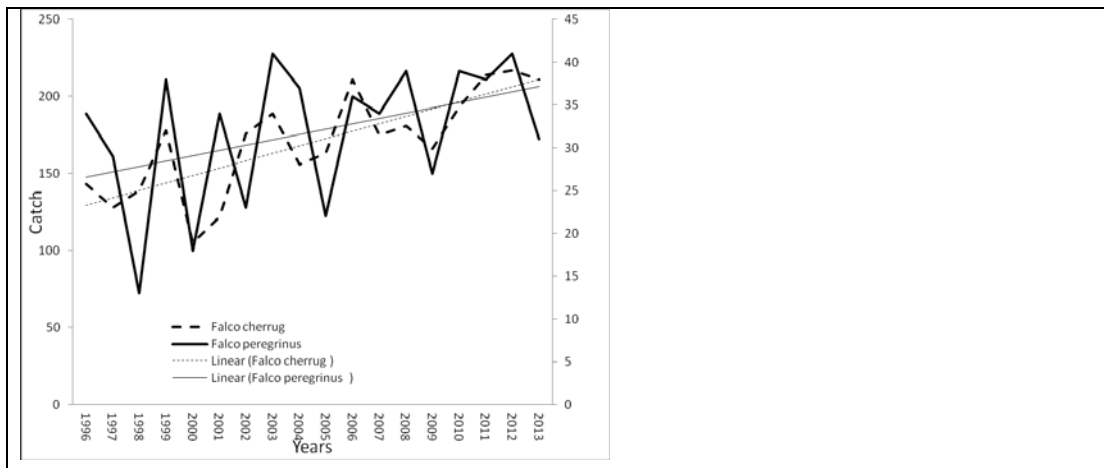


Fig. 3.25. *Falco peregrinus* and *Falco cherrug* trapped from Saudi Arabia (1996 – 2013) (recoded by Mohammed Al Khathlan).

Source: Shobrak, M. (2013). Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Status and Conservation from the Kingdom Prospective.

http://www.cms.int/species/raptors/saker_falcon_tf_stakeholders_ws/presentation_03_shobrak.pdf

Falcons are part of an ecosystem and perform a key function in the environment by regulating populations of their prey. Although there is not much information about the niche of falcons in Syria, nevertheless, they have a definite role to play in an ecosystem. Degrading of this ecosystem by reducing number of species present and endangering others will generate negative impacts of ecosystem products and services.

Other species are directly affected by illegal trade in falcons, especially the traditional prey species like the Houbara Bustard. The latter species used to inhabit deserts of many Middle Eastern countries, including Syria. At the time of writing, millions of dollars are being spent to rehabilitate this species in Arabian Gulf counters as well as falcon species.

Illegal trade in falcons is a criminal activity in most countries including Syria. This may put unscrupulous falcon trappers, smugglers, dealers, and others that may be involved in illegal activities to face penalties or prison under the law. It is hoped convictions may reduce illegal activities and better protect the species and ensure its vital role in the ecosystem.

3-4-The Response:

3-4-1- Legal Framework:

3-4-1-1- **National Legislation:** There is no specific legislation protecting falcons or regulating their trade in Syria. However, there are more general national legislations related to protection of birds in Syria. The main ones are listed below:

- a) The Forestry Law: This law was issued by a Legislative Decree No. 25 of 2007. The law defines forest protectorate as a specific area of

forest lands or a state property land characterized by its plant and animal richness and microorganisms that coexist with each other in an ecosystem in order to protect and maintain its integrity. It defines national parks as a land of natural forest or state property land afforested or prepared to. This land is should be protected and widely regulated for use, including eco-tourism, recreation and/or to achieve other environmental goals. The law defines a type of protected area as preventive or protection area where a natural forest or state property land that has forest trees or prepared to be planted with forest trees and managed for environmental goals. Although forestry law defines various lands to be protected according to law provisions, it does not mention bird hunting or protecting bird species in forest lands. However, the law emphasized in its provisions the importance of habitats by penalizing violators of the law especially acts of igniting fires, grazing domestic animals and gathering woody products.

- b) Hunting laws: Legislation that regulates hunting and dates to 1930s during the French mandate for Syria. That is, hunting was regulated by the resolution No. 3979 of 1932 and Resolution No. 174 of 1933. Both highlighted the importance of protecting certain species of birds by preventing destruction of their nests or hunting them. Recently, the first enacted legislative Decree includes the regulation of hunting law number 152,23.07.1970. It stipulates the methods of regulating hunting and also defines methods, tools, seasons, locations for practicing game hunting. Furthermore, the law specified conditions for obtaining hunting permits and possession of hunting weapons and their types.

A Higher Council for Hunting (HCH) headed by the Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform with sub-committees in the provinces was established by the law. Main task of the HCH is to develop a plan for sustainable hunting for conservation of wildlife and promote sustainable hunting as a sport activity. Specified games that allowed to be hunted is mostly birds. Furthermore, the law set certain dates and seasons for hunting that cannot be modified. In 1994, a ministerial decree (No. 41) was issued by the Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform preventing hunting prey of all kinds of games in all regions of Syria for a period of five years. This ban was extended in 1999 by decree No. 53 for additional five years. Later, the ban was extended for another two years in 2004 and then for another year which ended in 2006. The law and its extension amendment were supported by a Legislative Decree No. 51 and No.23 dated 2001 and 2002 respectively. These legislative decrees regulate possession of arms and ammunition and sets rules and fees for their licensing as well as imposition of criminal penalties for violation of their

articles. Other related laws were enacted such as Animal quarantine law No. 29 for 2006, Protection law of animal welfare No. 87 passed in 1979 and decree No. 60 of 1988 issued by the Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform are important in protecting diversity especially local livestock.

The provisions of the 1970 law which aims at regulating hunting are comprehensive and the law is still applied in the country. Nevertheless, enforcement of the law and associated decrees despite their hard penalties is difficult, as nearly 300,000 hunters practice hunting with official permits in Syria, in addition to other hunters coming from neighboring and Gulf countries (Al-Atar *in*: Bsaiki, 2012).

34-1-2-Relevant international agreements, laws and regulations: Multi-lateral environmental agreements (MEAs) represent a global mechanism for addressing specific issues at global and local levels. Countries that have joined, i.e., are parties, agree that these instruments provide the means to better conserve and use sustainably the environment. Syria is party to a number of environmental conventions related to the conservation of biodiversity including; the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Ramsar Convention on the Protection of Natural Habitats of Wetlands (RAMSAR), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) with its two agreements; the agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) and Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) and Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Seas, Mediterranean and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS), among others. Table 3.4. lists the MEAs and protocols to which Syria is party to.

Table 3.4. Biodiversity related conventions and agreements that Syria is party to.	
Convention and Agreements	Date
CBD	1993
RAMSAR	1998
CITES	2003
CMS/AEWA /ACCOBAMS	2003
Source: SCBD, 2013; RAMSAR, 2013; CITES, 2013b; CMS, 2013b.	

Compliance with these MEAs is instituted through action plans to implement and comply with their provisions. For instance National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) were prepared and submitted to secretariat of the Convention on Biodiversity to conserve biodiversity components in the country. One Ramsar site with an area of 10,000 hectares was designated in northern part of the country. With regard to CITES, The Syrian Arab Republic deposited its instrument of accession on 30 April 2003, making it the 162nd Party to CITES. CITES entered into force on 29 July 2003. The following paragraphs expand on the response of Syrian government to CITES.

CITES is a multilateral treaty among governments with the aim of regulating trade in specimens of wildlife and plants as not threaten their survival in the wild. Species covered by the treaty are listed in three categories according to the protection they may need. Species threatened with extinction and or threatened by trade are put under Appendix I. Trade in approximately 931 of these species is prohibited and considered illegal. An import and export permits for species in this list is required and granted only in exceptional circumstances; excluding commercial use according to [Article II, paragraph 1](#) and [Article VII](#) of the treaty.

Appendix II includes about 34419 species of which trade is controlled to promote and sustain their survival in the wild. International trade in the specimens of Appendix-II species requires an export permit or re-export certificate. Appendix III contains about 147 species that put under protection in a certain country and requesting cooperation from CITES parties for controlling its trade (CITES, 2013a).

3-4-2-Institutional Framework

3.4.2.3. Institutional setup: MAAR has sole responsibility for overseeing and enforcing hunting laws in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior. MSEA offers technical help to agencies tasked with enforcement duties in identifying species. This is done in cooperation with research institutes and universities. Another role played by the MSEA is coordination among various concerned ministries and institutions as it functions as a focal point for a number of biodiversity related conventions including CITES. Raising public awareness on the importance of wild fauna and flora is another responsibility it must fulfill. For instance, the ministry declared 2012 as the year of the eagle, forbidding export of rare birds, but permitting temporary importation for re-export.

On the other hand, the Syrian Custom bureau is the agency responsible for checking and inspecting specimens of wild fauna and flora. The agency had the executive capacity and infrastructure to

enforce regulations and decrees related to import or export of specimens. However, it lacks trained personnel to identify and confiscate specimens (Al-Khatib, personal communication). Moreover, the three agencies lack networking and coordinating actions for accurate implementation of regulations regarding trade.

- 3.4.2.4. **Capacity Building:** Three training courses were held for Customs officials, personnel from MSEA and its provincial directorates that have border crossing centers with neighboring countries as well as concerned officials at airports. These courses focused on CITES, its importance, and mechanisms. The courses also provided training on how to identify and distinguish falcons from other bird species. In addition, posters were printed and sent to be displayed in airports and border crossing centers to raise public awareness of CITES. However, there is a need for continuation of training courses. At the time of writing, a guide on wildlife species that are trafficked in Syria and the neighboring countries is also being drafted.

Additional measures were taken to curb illegal trade in falcons. For instance, the import of all bird species, including falcons, was prohibited during the avian flu crisis between 2006 and 2007. Furthermore, wildlife offices were being established at border crossing centers with the neighboring countries. An office was launched in Nsaib (border crossing center with Jordan) and became operational in January 2012. Offices were planned to be opened at the Damascus International Airport, Aleppo International Airport, and the Jdaidet Yabous Center with Lebanon. Offices for Wildlife were to be established in every border crossing center (land - sea - air). These offices will be linked to MSEA (CITES Administrative and scientific authority). They are to be staffed with the technical personnel from MSEA (office director and four biologists). Their mission is to control the exit and entry of living wild specimens of fauna. Personnel will also participate in follow-up specialized training courses on CITES and on monitoring of the trafficking of wildlife. Such offices should improve on efforts to better control trade and facilitate coordination with the other national authorities. They should also reduce the rate of smuggling operations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Falcons are found on many regions of the planet and illegal trade in falcons affects many countries. In this context, there exists a gap of knowledge about the status of falcons in Syria, including illegal trade in that species. National official records do not provide much assistance as they do not indicate the rate of illegal trade. With regard to Syria, the CITES database contains incomplete trade data which hampers a thorough analysis of the problem of illegal trade in falcons. Proper reporting and transparent mechanisms must be in place for authorities to prevent such illegal trade and to better conserve the species. Moreover, insufficient research has been conducted on species of falcons in Syria. Research is needed on areas of falcons habitats, species status, population size, breeding rhythm, and survivals.

The following recommendations can be drawn from this study:

- 1.** An international effort utilizing strict and transparent enforcement of CITES regulations at the country level must be given more attention and resources for effective implementation.
- 2.** More effort should be done to improve Syria's capacity to more effectively implement CITES. In this respect, more targeted training workshops for MSEA and MAAR officials as well as Custom officials is urgently needed.
- 3.** Adoption by Syria of best practices used by countries that have success in the conservation and sustainable use of CITES-listed species.
- 4.** Updating national Syrian legislation, especially hunting law, to include and cover CITES provisions in order to comply with the Convention's aims and objectives.
- 5.** Establishing a coordination mechanism among agencies involved in trading of falcons to promote standard procedures, including more effective inspection of falcons and certification.
- 6.** Recognition by the Syrian Government of a society for falconers. This will enable falconers to develop communication networks, exchange information and organize meetings, seminars and exhibitions.
- 7.** Establishing a research and monitoring programs of falcon populations in Syria.
- 8.** Initiating a breeding programs for falcons by the government and legalize captive breeding, keeping and training falcons in the private

sector. This should reduce or eliminate problems associated with keeping falcons at private residences and will encourage captive breeding which should reduce pressure on the populations of wild falcons.

- 9.** Establishing clinics or hospitals with specialized sections for falcons.
- 10.** Establishment by the Government of a local falcon market as to reduce black market activity with regard to the trade in falcons.
- 11.** Improving procedures for the issuance of CITES permits and certificates for trade in falcons.
- 12.** Conducting public awareness and education campaigns for falconers in order to better familiarize them with procedures for obtaining CITES falcon permits.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Survey: Falcons in Syria for officials in MOE, MAAR, Ministry of trade

1. What do you know about CITES ?

- What do you know about CITES ? CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora).
- CITES does not take the place of national laws.
- CITES is an international agreement between governments.
- CITES legislation's are included in the Syrian Law.
- CITES aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.

Other (please specify)

2. is Syria a member of CITES ?

- is Syria a member of CITES ? Yes
- No
- I don't know

3. Do you know the Authority responsible for the implementation of CITES in the Syrian Arab Republic ?

- Do you know the Authority responsible for the implementation of CITES in the Syrian Arab Republic ?

MOE

- MAAR
- Customs
- Ministry of trade
- All mentioned above

Other (please specify)

4. Do you know if there are update statistics for the number of falcons in the State of Syrian Arab Republic ? if yes please state in which Ministry? if no please mention why?

- Do you know if there are update statistics for the number of falcons in the State of Syrian Arab Republic ? if yes please state in which Ministry? if no please mention why?

Yes

- No

Other (please specify)

5. Are there national laws for the regulation of the trade in falcons in the Syrian Arab Republic ?

Are there national laws for the regulation of the trade in falcons in the Syrian Arab Republic ? Yes

No

Other (please specify)

6. Are there any coordination efforts on the regional level to control the trade of falcons?

Are there any coordination efforts on the regional level to control the trade of falcons? Yes

No

I dont Know

7. Is hunting by falcons considered legal in the Syrian Arab Republic ?

Is hunting by falcons considered legal in the Syrian Arab Republic ? Yes

No

I don't know

8. Falcons are

The same family of Eagles and Vultures.

falcon are migratory birds

Falcons are national birds

falcons are very similar to parrots

9. Is the local falcon trade in the Syrian Arab Republic effectively controlled by the concerned authority?

if yes or No please explain why?

Is the local falcon trade in the Syrian Arab Republic effectively controlled by the concerned authority? if yes or No please explain why?

10. Is there a separate annual budget allocated for implementation of CITES in the Syrian Arab Republic ?

Appendix:2

Table 1: Falcon Species that occur in Syria.

Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	Uncommon summer visitor and passage migrant	LC
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Common resident	LC
Sooty Falcon	<i>Falco concolor</i>	Vagrant	
Eleonora's Falcon	<i>Falco eleonora</i>	Rare summer / autumn visitor to coasts, may breed	LC
Merlin	<i>Falco clumbarius</i>	Widespread winter visitor	LC
Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	Uncommon passage migrant	LC
Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>	Uncommon passage migrant	NT
Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>	Now a rare passage migrant; previously bred	LC
Saker Falcon	<i>Falco cherrug</i>	Now a rare passage migrant	VU
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrines</i>	Once widespread; now rare on passage or in winter	LC
Barbary Falcon	<i>Falco pelegrinoides</i>	Status unclear; may occur in the south	LC

Updated as well in 2007 FINAL SPECIES LIST FOR ARABIC BIRDS OF SYRIA (as agreed by Murdoch & Porter JUNE 2007)

Appendix 3

Species	Number	Year	Place of seize	Source of info
<i>Falco cherrug</i>	7	2002	Donetsk Airport, flight to Larnaca	http://www.zoospace.narod.ru/krimkont.htm
<i>Falco rusticolus</i>	1		Donetsk Airport, flight to Larnaca	http://www.zoospace.narod.ru/krimkont.htm
<i>Falco cherrug</i>	11	09.2004	— Kyiv (Borispol) Airport,	http://nr2.com.ua/ua/2871.html
<i>Falco rusticolus</i>	1	09.2004	— Kyiv (Borispol) Airport,	http://nr2.com.ua/ua/2871.html
46 ind. <i>Falco cherrug</i>		09.2005	Zaporozh'e Airport/ flight Kiev-Aleppo	http://www.sbu.gov.ua/sbu/control/uk/publish/article;jsessionid=6BC389EB949432F1D9EDE61F2899728B?art_id=40921&cat_id=40897
5 ind. <i>Falco rusticolus</i>	2006	—	Kyiv (Borispol) Airport	http://raptors.org.ua/ru/47
, 7 <i>Falco cherrug</i> , 1 <i>Falco rusticolus</i> , 1 <i>Falco peregrinus</i>	10.10.2008	—	Kyiv (Borispol) Airport, flight Kyiv-Damask	
4 <i>Falco cherrug</i> ,	19.11.2008	Kyiv (Borispol) Airport,	Birds, hidden in two traveling bags	http://www.umoloda.kiev.ua/number/1271/116/45014/news by 21.10.2008
50 pigeons and a saker falcon, nets and other devices for catching birds.	August 19, 2009	Khakassia		http://www.19rus.info/news/43135.html
8 saker falcons	September 10,	marked in		http://www.19rus.info/news/43135.html

	2009	the town of Kyzyl		
eight peregrine falcons		passenger flight from Moscow to Doha	The smugglers, the citizens of Syria and Armenia,	http://www.Customs.ru/ru/press/of_news/index.php?id286=27956
11 gyrfalcons	2007-09-27 /	tundra in Chukotka		http://www.ng.ru/regions/2007-09-27/6_chukotka.html
Two Sakers (Falco cherrug) and two Peregrine Falcons (Falco peregrinus)	29 September 2006.			http://ecoclub.nsu.ru/raptors/RC/08/raptors_conservation_2007_8_pages_4_11.pdf Sergey Okayomov NGO «Sayanskiy sokol» B. Hmel'nitskogo str., 224 Abakan 655004 Republic of Khakasiya Russia tel.: +7 (3902) 25 07 83
Three Gyrfalcons (Falco rusticolus) and a Saker (Falco cherrug)	December 2006	Samaradushanbe.		
127 Saker Falcons Falco cherrug (CITES II)	On 27 October 2004	KYR GYZ STAN		www.iwpr.net/index TRAFFIC BULLETIN SEIZURES AND PROSECUTIONS MARCH 1997– DECEMBER 2010