

Falco



Middle East Falcon Research Group

National Avian Research Centre

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

P.O.Box 45553

Phone: + 971-3747555

Fax+ 971-3-47607

Newsletter No. 7. November 1996

Letter from the Chairman's office

Report by Jaime Samour, Head of Veterinary Science, National Avian Research Centre,
P. O. Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

A new season.....a new challenge. The summer is over and a new hunting season is about to begin. Veteran falcons are in the last leg of moulting and newly imported falcons are arriving into the Gulf countries every day. Yet, this season is full of promises. New developments are taking place in the Middle East and the future of falcon medicine and clinical research could not be brighter. One important development is the deep awareness amongst falcon owners of advancing preventive medicine. In this respect, the Group have been asked to form a sub-group to promote and implement research programmes encompassing long-standing falcon medical conditions and to come up with long-term solutions...and I could not agree more...

Veterinarians and falcon hospitals based in the Middle East have made important contributions to advance falcon medicine in the last 15 years. The list of important achievements throughout the years is extensive and impressive. Some of these accomplishments include, the development of strain-specific vaccines against Newcastle and pox viruses; the design of thermoplastic and form-fitting casts to be used in the post-operative care of bumblefoot cases; the use of fibre-optic endoscopy in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases such as serratospiculiasis and aspergillosis; the establishment of normal haematology, blood chemistry and microbiological databanks to aid in the clinical diagnosis, and a wealth of medical information on the taxonomy and incidence of gastrointestinal parasites and haematozoa.

However, despite the advances made throughout the years, there is still so much to be accomplished. *Serratospiculum* worms are still present

in great numbers in falcons, and yet we still do not know anything about its origin, its life cycle or its intermediate host. Every year new strains of *viruses* are discovered in the Middle East prompting the creation of new vaccines. Enormous sums of money, time and effort are spent in the production of these vaccines, yet still very few falcons are taken to veterinarian for vaccination. *Aspergillosis*, *trichomoniasis* and *bumblefoot* are still major causes of morbidity and mortality amongst falcons in the region. Clearly, major emphasis should be made in public awareness and prevention rather than to concentrate our efforts only in undertaking costly treatments.

Yes, we have made great achievements, but there is still an enormous amount of work to be accomplished. However, we cannot achieve this alone and without the full support of everybody involved. We need more interaction between falcon hospitals and research institutions operating in the Middle East. We need to enlist the active participation of every falconer in preventing management-related diseases. *Why*, falcons that cost 20,000 Dirham or more are still being fed on a 10 Dirham freshly-killed domestic pigeon that could potentially transmit trichomoniasis, internal parasites, Newcastle disease or avian pox? *Why*, do we still perch our falcons on stands fitted with flat-tops and covered with soft carpeting knowing that this form of management could lead to bumblefoot? *Why*, do we still administer ammonium chloride to our falcons when the same results can be obtained by giving them access to pebbles? *Why*, are falcons still dying every season of over-exertion and heat-stress?

Only by working together we can accomplish the same common objective...to keep falcons strong and healthy to ensure their continuity in portraying the character of mighty predators in the ancient tradition of falconry in the Middle East.

“The fine art of living is acquired only through long discipline, observation and experience. Day by day you have opportunities for correcting in yourself mistakes and misjudgements. As you see where you might have done differently and better, you can record the item in your memory and resolve to profit by the experience. Life is a great school, in which you are constantly learning what to do and not to do, how to plan and execute better. The schoolmaster may seem stern and relentless at times, but the discipline and instruction are for your ultimate good. Study the lessons assigned to you in the wonderful school of life, and if occasionally a problem seems difficult, be assured a solution awaits you somewhere”

Falconry throughout history in the Middle East

Report by Jaime Samour, Head of Veterinary Science, National Avian Research Centre,
P. O. Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

It is an early cold December morning. The mist had just cleared and every single leaf and grass blade is shining to the newly risen sun. A group of falconers is standing on the highest point of a small sand dune overlooking the vast immensity of the hunting ground. The leading falconer removes the hood from his falcon. The bird on his wrist is a “spotter” falcon. As soon as the bird is free from the hood, he begins scanning the ground before him with his large eyes. Slowly he moves his head from side to side keeping a sharp lookout on every single bush and patch of grass, flourishing now in the desert after the long awaited rains. Throughout the years, this falcon has been his faithful companion on numerous hunting trips to different lands and on countless similar occasions, the falcon has never failed to detect the well camouflaged quarry, the houbara bustard. The falcon continues scanning the horizon when, all at once, he stops and starts bobbing vigorously his head in one particular direction. He has seen a houbara and has locked his sight on it. The falconer knows the meaning of this change of attitude and soon covers the bird's head with the hood. He soon prepares a second falcon, takes the hood off and directs the falcon to look in the same direction. This second falcon is promptly aware of the presence of his quarry and starts showing signs of uneasiness on the wrist of his master. The falcon is released and the hunt begins. The falcon flies very strongly and low towards a particular bush 400 metres away. When the falcon is 100 metres from the target, the houbara comes out from its hiding and begins a threatening display to scare the falcon away by opening his wings and tail. The falcon hits violently the houbara on the ground, securing his grip by locking his talons around the chest and back of his quarry. The hunt is over. The falconer arrives soon after and retrieves very gently the priced houbara by covering it with his dress and offering a small piece of meat to his falcon as reward.

This scene could have happened one thousand years ago or could had just happened yesterday somewhere in the sun-scorched plains of the Arabian Peninsula. The mystical relationship between falcon and falconer has defied time as the tradition continues almost unchanged, even to the present day.

In the past, Bedouins used to trap, train and hunt with falcons to supplement their basic diet. Nowadays, falconry is still widely practised in the Middle East and it is considered by many a sport. Yet

to Arab falconers, falconry is not just a sport, but an excuse to go back to the desert where they once belonged, an opportunity to see and sit with friends around a camp fire, a way to enjoy life in the desert once again. Fast cars and fast food restaurants in a fast changing world have displaced traditions and customs, but falconry remains deeply rooted in the heart of Arabs as a way of communion with the past.

Arabian scholars have been able to establish that, in the Arabian peninsula, falconry saw its early beginnings during pre-Islamic times in the Jahiliya era with a man named Al Harith bin Mu'awiyah bin Thawr bin Kindah. One day while he was watching a man setting up a net to trap birds a falcon appeared and attacked a bird already caught in the net. The falcon soon became entangled in the net and Al Harith marvelled at these proceedings and ordered that the falcon be brought to him. He took the falcon to his house and appointed a servant to feed and train the falcon for hunting. Al Harith used to carry the falcon on his wrist and then one day during a trip, the falcon saw a pigeon, took off from the wrist of his master and killed it. Al Harith, fascinated by this display, ordered that the falcon should be trained even further. On a second occasion while on a trip, a hare broke cover from behind a bush. The falcon chased it and killed it, filling Al Harith with admiration at the abilities of the falcon to chase and kill birds and mammals. In a short time, many Arabs became aware of the experiences of Al Harith and his falcon and soon the trapping and training of falcons for hunting became part of life in the desert. Then came Islam. One of them most famous hunters during the period that witnessed the rising of Islam was the renowned Hamzi bin Muttaleb, God bless his soul. He was greatly admired by his courage and was dubbed “The Lion of God”. It is said that he embraced Islam after returning from a hunting trip and while holding a falcon on his wrist.

In the ensuing period, falconry continued to flourish and it became part of the Ommayyads in post-Islamic times. One of the most famous falconers of this era was Yazid bin Mu'awiyah. Abu Al Hassan bin Ali Al Saudi once said “Yazid loved music, birds of prey, dogs and cheetahs, and was an enthusiastic hunter, a sport in which he excelled. He was the first man to carry a cheetah on horseback”. Yazid bin Mu'awiyah, when appointed Caliph of Damascus (680-683 AD), ordered the construction of falconry hunting lodges for his own personal use. These lodges were thereafter used by future Caliphs. In the

same era, Hisham bin Abd Al Malik, a keen hunter, while on a hunting trip observed his party from an elevated point. Some hunters used birds of prey, while others hunted with cheetahs and bows and arrows. Later he commissioned a drawing of the hunt, where he and some of his aides were portrayed, by the distinguished artist Al Ghatri bin Qudama from the tribe of Ghassan. Hisham also instructed Al Ghatri to care for his birds of prey, to train them and to keep them ready for hunting, to cure them when they were ill and he bestowed upon him the title "Hunt Master of Hisham bin Abd Al Malik". A special department was also set up within his court to deal with issues related to his falcons and falconry. The first Arabic book related to falconry, the "Book of the Benefits of Birds", was published in 775 - 785 AD comprising 153 chapters. In one of its sections it says "It was natural that the keeping of birds of prey and hunting birds should not be restricted to the Caliphs but that people in all walks of life should be able to do so as well". This was also a treatise in which issues such as diagnosis and diseases were first described. A subsequent publication dated 842 - 847 AD, addressed husbandry and welfare issues of falcons. "The Book of Animals", one of the most famous treatises on animals of all times in Arab literature, was produced around 869 AD. In this book, the famous author Al Jahiz mentioned that Arab falconers preferred to hunt with saker and peregrine falcons rather than with goshawks, although the latter were much in demand by Persians, Turks and Indians at the time.

In the Abbassid era, falconry rose to new dimensions with the influence of the Persians who were well known for their ability to train and hunt with birds of prey. During the rule of the Caliph As Saffah, falconry continued thriving, since As Saffah was very

fond of birds of prey and a devoted hunter who practised falconry from an early age. His interest and enthusiasm for hunting were legendary and he was a source of inspiration to all his people. Yet, there were other eminent Caliphs in this era with a great passion for hunting who promoted falconry to the status of art. During the reign of the Caliph Al Rashid, individuals were summoned to his presence to explain a particular hunting skill they had developed. Al Rashid was already a skilled hunter, but he always had a keen interest in furthering his knowledge in a continuous quest for perfection. By this time, falconry was not only a well established entertainment of the Caliphs, but it was also considered an affair of the State. During the period of the Al Mut'tassim, one percent of the total daily budget of the Caliphate was allocated to maintain the sport of falconry. Thus, salaries of up to seventy dinars a day were paid to falconers and falcon keepers. At the end of this era, between the years 1096 and 1204, Arab falconry extended its influence over Western Europe. In this respect, two of the most important Arab contributions to European falconry were the hood and the use of the lure. Sadly, there was a crucial interlude in the continuing contribution of Arab literature to the history of falconry with the Mogul occupation of Baghdad in 1258. It has been estimated that approximately 30 publications on falcons and falconry were made by Arab writers between the 9th century AD, at the peak of Arab cultural evolution, and the 13th century AD, when the Abassid empire collapsed. Throughout the succeeding decades, falconry continued declining in the domains of the Ottoman and Moguls, but there was a niche in which falconry prevailed in the hearts of the Arab people..... deep inside the immensity of the sands of the Sheikhdoms in the Arabian Peninsula.

New publications

Veterinary medicine, falcons and falconry in the Middle East.

J. H. Samour

Proceedings, Association of Avian Veterinarians Annual Meeting, Tampa, Florida, USA, August 1996, p 233 - 239.

Normal blood chemistry of the saker falcon (*Falco cherrug*).

J. H. Samour and M-A D'Aloia.

Avian Pathology (1966) **25**: 175 - 178.

Normal haematology of the saker falcon (*Falco cherrug*).

J. H. Samour, M-A D'Aloia and J. C. Howlett.

Comparative Haematology International. 1996: 6: 50 - 52

***Babesia shortii* infection in a saker falcon (*Falco cherrug*).**

J. H. Samour, M. Peirce.

Veterinary Record, 1996: 139, 167 - 168.

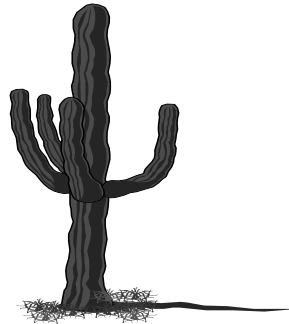
Birds of Prey - Kazakhstan

This book is a publication of the National Avian Research Centre (NARC). The book is written in Russian and is intended not only for those who are involved with NARC in Kazakhstan but also Russian speaking ornithologists and others elsewhere. Our hope is that it will encourage raptor studies and conservation, particularly in Central Asia.

For further information, please contact the Head of the Public Relations Department, National Avian Research Center, P.O. Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Fax: +971-3-747607.

Specialist Workshop of the Middle East Falcon Research Group

The Proceedings of the first Specialist Workshop is now ready for distribution. Extra copies or copies for members are available at \$ 10.00 USA dollars each. Please place your orders now. Cheques should be made payable to the "National Avian Research Centre" and sent together with your orders to the following address: "The Middle East Falcon Research Group, P.O. Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates".



“The man who lives in the present, forgetful of the past and indifferent to the future, is the man of wisdom. The best preparation for tomorrow’s work is to do your work as well as you can today. The best preparation for a life to come, is to live now and here. Live right up to your highest and best”

Lord Avebury.

Letters to the editor

Honourable members

First let me introduce myself, my name is William Hawkins-Pinchers, and I currently run a small breeding facility called Falconoid International, UK. The main aim of this project is to produce a selected number of high quality longwings, both pure species i.e. peregrines and sakers, plus hybrids i.e. peregrine x sakers, gyr x peregrines, gyr x sakers and two tri-breds gyr/saker x saker and gyr/peregrine x saker.

All the breeding stock we currently have has been captive-produced by a number of well-known and respected falconers. The sakers have come from a variety of saker breeders, some here in the United Kingdom (UK) and we have bloodlines from 2 German saker breeders, who specialise in producing only sakers. Like all sakers, they vary in size, colour and shape. It took us 3 years to get all the sakers we currently have in the project. Not only did we look for relatively large sakers, but for those which also showed good shape, colour and above all good hunting attitude. This year (1996), we produced our first two sakers. Both are pale in colour and good looking, and we hope to double up next year on this particular pair.

Our peregrines again are mainly bred in captivity. Some are F1 generation falcons, their parents being wild-taken birds. We also have one passage-taken peregrine acquired this year. She will hopefully be a good source of new genes. We have been careful in choosing our birds, not just obtaining them from various breeders, but asking breeders about the origin of their falcons to avoid inbreeding and using the Department of the Environment (D.o.E) UK, to help check that the falcons are genuinely unrelated. With the removal of many species from the D.o.E. list the prospect of inbreeding certain species may arise if breeders are not vigilant when crossing new breeding stock.

Lastly, we have a few hybrids male falcons mainly gyr x sakers; we currently have 5 pairs of gyr x sakers males to pure female saker falcons. Also, we have 2 pairs of gyr x peregrine tiercels to female sakers. In total, 12 pairs of falcons, plus the young falcons newly acquired in 1996.

I feel very honoured to be a member of the Middle East Falcon Research Group (MEFRG). The work being carried out by many of the members is not only important regarding raptor conservation, but also equally important for the long-term survival of falconry and its related activities.

Merely being a falconer and flying falcons alone will not preserve our art; it is wise and important to think of the future. Our children must embrace our art, traditions and customs if they are to truly survive. In this respect, I applaud the Middle East traditions in the art of falconry.

Falconoid is also currently doing a UK saker survey. So far, I have seen around 150 sakers in the UK out of a prospective total of 650 - 700 individual birds. Without going into a full, and what would be a costly survey, it is impossible to pin-point the origin of most of these sakers, although many appear to be European or common sakers (*Falco cherrug cherrug*). Again, size, colour and shape vary a great deal with over 80% of females weighing between 2lb 2 oz and 2lb 8 oz. What has happened over the years is that breeders have been pleased with simply producing sakers. Very few of these breeders have kept records and so far over 99% of those sakers seen were bred here in the UK. The degree to which sakers have been crossed i.e. sub-species to sub-species could only really be resolved by extensive DNA testing.

What I found totally amazing now, more than a decade on, is that since the Middle East Arabs became interested in the large hybrids, everyone seems to be breeding falcons to this end! Saker prices have steadily risen and everybody seems to once again have large pale or dark sakers. In all honesty, most UK falconers, do not really know all that much about sakers, simply because getting the best of a saker here in the UK is hard work, when compared with flying a peregrine or a peregrine hybrid. The same can be said about gyrs in the UK. They are only now becoming more freely available, I fear that most falconers who obtain these beautiful falcons are obtaining them for the wrong reasons, most of the time, just sustaining mere fashion accessories.

The skill of falconry not only relies on the falconer training his/her falcon well, but also on his/her skills in the field, the ability to judge potential quarry, knowing the habitat and ultimately choosing the right falcon for the job.

In the desert the saker rules supreme. In the diverse weather of the UK, the job is best done by the peregrine or a peregrine hybrid. No doubt we all share different opinions. Some falconers have had great success with their various chosen birds, but the common bond we all share is ultimately the pursuit of our chosen quarry with our favourite falcon or hawk on the fist.

Falconoid International is planning an expansion of the current breeding facilities. The proposed facility would produce between 50 to 100 large falcons once is fully operational, made up of peregrines, sakers, gyrs and gyr-hybrids. It is indeed an ambitious project, but we feel confident in making such a facility work, as do many of the most reputable breeding centres throughout the world.

To all my fellow falconers out there, good hunting wherever you are,

For more information about Falconoid International please contact:

William Hawkins-Pinchers
Falconoid International UK
6 Wilson Rd.
Coseley
West Midlands
United Kingdom
Phone: 0044-1902-883047
Fax: 0044-1504-877708

Dates for your diary

Raptor Research Foundation Second International Conference on Raptors

2 - 5 October 1996
Urbino, Italy

University of Urbino

For more information on all aspects of the conference (included suggestions or workshops and round tables)

Local committee chairperson

Dr. Massimo Pandolfi
Istituto di Scienze Morfologicho Universita di Urbino,
Via M. Oddi 21 - 61029 Urbino, Italy.

Phone : +39-722-328033
+39-722-327893
Fax: +39-722-329655

For more information on the scientific programme contact

Scientific programmme organiser

Dr. Keith I. Hudson
Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association, RR 2.
Box 191, Kempton, PA 19529 - 9449 U.S.A.

Phone: +1-610-756.6961
Fax +1-610-756.4468

**Association of Avian Veterinarians
Annual Conference**

**9 - 13 September 1997
Reno, Nevada, USA**

Advancing and promoting avian medicine and stewardship

Call for papers:

Michelle Curtis-Velasco DVM,
Education Chair
2121 S. Oneida St.
Suite 325
Denver, Co. USA
80224-2552
Fax: 303-7598861



**The European Association of Avian Veterinarians
Fourth Conference**

**18 - 23 May 1997
London, England**

**For general enquiries or further information
contact Conference Secretary:**

Mr Alan K. Jones MRCVS
The Cottage, Turners Hill Road,
Worth, Crawley, West Sussex, RH10 4LY
England, United Kingdom.

Phone: +44-1293-884629
Fax: +44-1293-885507



Biology and Conservation of Owls of the Northern Hemisphere Second International Symposium

**5 - 9 February 1997
Delta Winnipeng
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada**

under the auspices of the
Manitoba Department of Natural Resources
Canada

Announcements

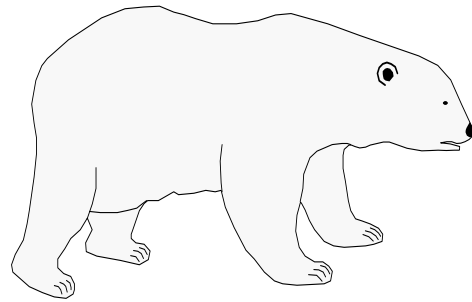
**The Institute of Zoology
(Zoological Society of London)**

and

**The Royal Veterinary College
(The University of London)**

MSc in Wild Animal Health

This is a twelve month course for European and overseas graduates in veterinary and relevant sciences making a career in wild animal health. The course includes practical and theoretical instruction in the husbandry and nutrition of wild animals, taxonomy, population biology, conservation genetics, welfare and ethical aspects, epidemiology, immunology, infectious and non infectious diseases, disease investigation, restraint, preventive medicine and surgery, together with an individual research project. Training will be given by staff at the Institute of Zoology and the Royal



Veterinary College, as well as invited speakers from other veterinary and zoological centres. Applications are now invited for the 1996/97 or the 1997/98 courses starting in October 1996 and October 1997 respectively.

Full particulars and an application form are available from the Registrar, The Royal Veterinary College, Royal College Street, London NW1 OTU - U.K. Tel: 44 (0)171 468 5000 Fax: 44 (0)171 388 2342.

Copies for sale

Veterinary Aspects of Captive Birds of Prey

(second edition with 1985 supplement)

by

Professor John E. Cooper FRCVS.

For information please write to:

Mr. E. F. Cooper
8 Scotchel Green
Pewsey, Wiltshire
SN9 5Au
United Kingdom

Dr Jaime Samour
Middle East Falcon Research Group
P.O. Box 45553
Abu Dhabi
United Arab Emirates

Price without postage: J17.50 or \$30.00

Price including postage and packing:

UK 1st class/surface mail outside UK J21.00 or \$35.00

Europe air mail J23.00 or \$37.00

Rest of world air mail J25.00 or \$40.00

Public Awareness Centre. An appeal

The newly created **Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency** in the United Arab Emirates is planning to create a Public Awareness Unit attached to the new **Wildlife Veterinary Research Centre**.

One of the main exhibits of the proposed Unit will be designed and built by The Middle East Falcon Research Group. The main themes of this exhibit will be on "Falconry as part of the Arab National Heritage", "Falconry Throughout the Ages", Falconry and Islam", "Falconry from Around the World", "Falconry as a Sport", "Falcons, Falconry and Conservation" and many others.

We are appealing to members from around the world to donate books, videos, brochures, leaflets, stickers, posters and falconry furniture for some of this exhibits. Your contribution will be adequately acknowledged. Your organisation may even consider having a permanent exhibit within the Centre!

For further information please contact:

Jaime Samour
National Avian Research Centre
P.O. Box: 45553, Abu Dhabi,
United Arab Emirates.
Phone: + 971 - 3 - 747555
Fax: + 971 - 3 - 747607
Email: narc@emirates.net.ae

Fire damage World Center for Birds of Prey

Late in the evening, on 9th June 1996, a fire swept through the imprint barn at The Peregrine Fund's World Centre for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho. In minutes, the entire building was engulfed in flames and destroyed. At the time of the fire, the barn housed 10 behaviourally imprinted falcons. Three of the peregrine falcons that died in the blaze provided semen for about half of the World Centre's annual production of that

1995 Leslie Brown Memorial Grant

Simon Thomsett of Nairobi, Kenya is the recipient of the 1995 Leslie Brown Memorial Grant. Simon is currently working with The Peregrine Fund, Inc. in a joint programme with the Ornithology Department of the National Museums of Kenya for the conservation of raptors. His interest in raptors was greatly influenced by the late Dr. Leslie Brown whom he accompanied on some field trips to Eagle Hill. Simon has visited Eagle Hill regularly since 1979 and witnessed dramatic land changes that have had a negative impact on the natural fauna of the region. However, Eagle Hill still has a remarkable number of resident raptors. Simon intends to use the Leslie Brown Memorial Grant to increase local awareness by building a small education library at Gataka Primary

species. As Dr Bill Burnham, President of the Peregrine Fund, put it, "It was more than the death of ten falcons, it was the loss of ten friends that we have invested thousands of hours and considerable emotion in". The Peregrine Fund hopes to raise funds to replace the facility. For more information, please contact: The Peregrine Fund, World Center for Birds of Prey, 566 Flying Hawk Lane W, Boise, Idaho 83709.

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School at the foothills of the hill. He hopes to complete this project by June 1997.

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The National Avian Research Center (NARC) particularly welcomes this award as Simon Thomsett is one of the team in Kenya involved in the satellite tracking of kori bustards. Early June 1996, Professor John E. Cooper and Dr Frederic Launay flew to Kenya in order to open a new chapter in NARC's international programme by establishing scientific links between NARC and the National Museums. As a result, two kori bustards were caught and satellite transmitters were placed to monitor regional migration.

The Middle East Falcon Research Group

The Middle East Falcon Research Group (MEFRG) intends to bring together experts in falcons and falconry, veterinary surgeons, falcon biologists and conservationists working in the Middle East and other professionals interested in falcons and falconry from around the world.

The main objectives of the MEFRG are:

1.- To provide

- A central body for the coordination of research activities related to falcons and falconry.
- A common forum for exchange of information and for promoting collaborative research programmes.

2.- To promote

- Research on health and diseases in falcons, falcon moulting patterns in the Middle East and falcon nutrition, captive breeding programmes and semen cryopreservation and artificial insemination.
- Field studies on falcon migration, taxonomy, morphometrics, reproductive biology, nutritional ecology and behaviour.
- Improved management conditions of captive falcons through educational awareness programmes.
- A better understanding of falconry as part of the Arab cultural heritage.

3.- To hold

- Regional workshops on veterinary medical aspects, falcon biology topics, falconry and conservation issues.
- International Conference on veterinary medical aspects, falcon biology topics, falconry and conservation issues.
- It is envisaged to publish the papers and posters presented at the conference in the form of proceedings.

4.- To publish

- Joint papers on aspects concerning falcons and falconry.
- A quarterly newsletter containing contributions on medical, biological and conservation topics of common interest, new developments and recent medical advances.

- Membership

Any veterinary surgeon, biologist, conservationist or falconer working in the Middle East or any other person interested in medical, biological and conservation aspects of falcons and falconry from around the world

For further information please contact:

Jaime Samour
National Avian Research Centre
P.O. Box: 45553, Abu Dhabi,
United Arab Emirates.
Phone: + 971 - 3 - 747555
Fax: + 971 - 3 - 747607
Email: narc@emirates.net.ae