



# Falco

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Compiled and distributed by Merle M. Apo- MEFRG Administrative assistant

## The Middle East Falcon Research Group

The Middle East Falcon Research Group is managed by the Veterinary Science Department in association with the Falcon Management and Research Programme of the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

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### Editorial note

Falco, the newsletter of the Middle East Falcon Research Group, is published quarterly and contains papers, reports, letters and announcements sent by members. However, the contributions included in Falco are not refereed. Although, every effort is made to ensure that the information provided is correct, the Chairman and the Administrative Assistant cannot accept responsibility for the accuracy of contributions. The opinions expressed in the contributions submitted are those of the individual writer and are not necessarily shared by the Middle East Falcon Research Group or the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency.



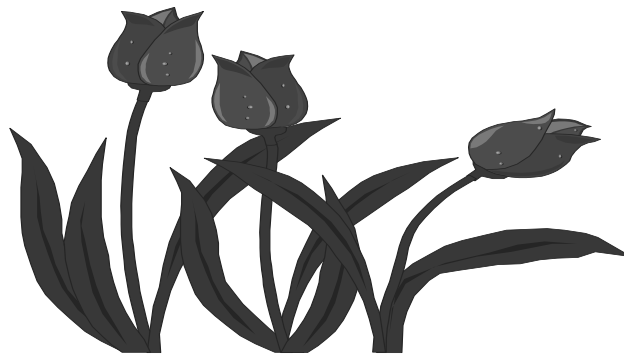
## Letter from the Chairman's office

A new season...a new challenge. A new falcon season always brings a sense of thrill to everybody involved with falcons and falconry in the Middle East. Veterinarians are ready to try new pharmacological products available in the market, scientists are anxiously waiting for additional serum samples to assess a new laboratory test and field biologists will be eagerly awaiting to see if any bird tagged with a microchip in Central Asia is identified in falcon markets or hospitals in any Gulf country.

In the past, most of the clinical and research activities around falcons in the Middle East were conducted by individuals in their own little world, but times have changed. Nowadays, we see more people exchanging information and working together than ever before ... something that it was considered impossible by many. This is what the Middle East Falcon Research Group (MEFRG) is all about, to bring together professionals working in the same or in different disciplines. However, there is still a lot of work to do. New clinics, new research initiatives and new breeding projects have started in many countries in the Middle East, but in particular in the United Arab Emirates. This could mean more opportunities to achieve much more ... if we were to work together.

There is a special development this season in the Middle East. Mediac

Communications and Promotion is organising the first Arab Hunting Exhibition in Dubai from the 14th to 17th October 1997. The exhibition intends to bring together for the first time manufacturers and suppliers of the latest camping equipment, four-wheel drive vehicles, fishing equipment and falcons. The exhibit promise to attract large numbers of people interested in hunting, but mainly those interested in falcons and falconry. The Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency and the Middle East Falcon Research Group have been provided a small space to set up an exhibition stand. In this, the Agency intends to display different aspects of its multiple areas of research including terrestrial, marine, veterinary science and the environment. We will be there to illustrate the different activities in which members of the MEFRG are involved with, to show what the Group is intending to achieve and to promote the idea of sustainable hunting. The functions and activities of the Group and the Agency will be illustrated in the form of posters and videos. If you are assisting to the exhibition, please come and visit our stand.



**“The centre of your life should be living. Appreciate every moment of life that God allows you, because life is fragile. Do not sacrifice today for a tomorrow that may never come or for a yesterday that is gone. Learn from yesterday and live for today. While you are living and striving, do it to the fullest because today will soon become yesterday and you will not have the opportunity to experience this moment again...”**

## Local News

### Veterinary Research Sub-group progress report

Prepared by: Merle M. Apo, MEFRG Administrative Assistant, Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency, P.O. Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Several members of the Middle East Falcon Research Group (MEFRG) based in the United Arab Emirates were asked in early 1997 to create the Veterinary Research Sub-group to study the most common diseases affecting falcons in the United Arab Emirates under the chairmanship of Professor Ullie Wernery of the Central Veterinary Research Laboratory (CVRL). The Subgroup met on 22nd January and 29th April at the CVRL. The following is an account of the minutes of the two meetings.

#### Newcastle disease

- A progress report on the antibody response in falcons non-vaccinated and vaccinated against Newcastle disease (ND) at 24 hr, 4 weeks and 12 months was presented by Professor U. Wernery. The Newcastle vaccine prepared by the CVRL has proved successful when two doses are administered two weeks apart. Its use amongst falcons in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) should be encouraged. Very few fatal ND cases seen at the CVRL during the 1996-1997 season. More samples are needed post-vaccination to monitor antibody levels. Veterinarians pointed out that the collection of blood samples from falcons used for hunting has proved difficult for obvious reasons.
- Professor Wernery is conducting a series of studies on vaccination strategies in several avian species using the ND vaccine developed by the CVRL. Good results have been obtained in all species under study. He strongly recommended that imported falcons should be vaccinated against Newcastle disease in the country of origin before they arrive in the UAE.

#### Falcon pox

- Professor O. Kaaden arrived recently in the UAE with the new falcon pox vaccine developed by the CVRL in collaboration with the Veterinary Faculty of Munich University. This is intended for field trials during the season 1996-1997. The pox challenge experiment was reviewed recently

by Professor Wernery, Professor Liess and Dr. J. Samour. Some theories were postulated as to the reason for failing to reproduce pox in experimental falcons. These theories will be discussed with Professor Kaaden and a new attempt will be made.

- Dr. A. Sharma, of the Emirates Falcon Hospital, conducted a vaccination trial using the new pox vaccine. A total of seventy eight (78) falcons were vaccinated. Four birds developed periorbital hyperaemia that subsided 3 or 4 days later. Still another bird developed pox lesions after 2 months of vaccination. The periorbital hyperaemia was probably caused by an allergic response to the vehicle used in the vaccine. The sub-group agreed, that the vaccination trial was conducted late in the season. Another vaccination trials will be conducted this year prior to the season (September to October) with careful and thorough monitoring of the birds.
- Professor Wernery will arrange for sufficient stock of vaccine to be available to clinicians in Abu Dhabi and Dubai before this coming season so they can carry out additional trials.

#### Aspergillosis

- A proposal was received from Dr I. Poliakov of Binomed GmbH, Bern, Switzerland for the production of a vaccine against aspergillosis. Professor Wernery and Dr Samour will follow up the proposal with Dr Poliakov and find out vital questions with regards to the costs involved and the proposed time table for its production. A comprehensive report will be prepared and presented to the Sub-group for consultation before this is submitted to higher authorities for funding.
- Professor Wernery submitted the draft proposal of Dr I. Poliakov to Professor

Kaaden of Munich University for a second opinion. Dr. Samour has also communicated with Dr. Patrick Redig, University of Minnesota, U.S.A. requesting a similar proposal. Dr Redig is a world authority on aspergillosis.

### **Chlamydia**

- Professor Wernery presented a report on the newly developed ELISA Chlamydia test. This test was pioneered at the CVRL, Dubai. The test is carried out on cloacal swabs and it has proved very successful. Further tests will be carried out to assess its efficiency with other samples e.g. oral swabs. Birds which have tested positive to Chlamydia have responded very well to treatment.
- Professor Wernery showed a graph of results concerning the Chlamydia diagnostic services carried out at the CVRL. The test has proved successful in several species of birds, such as pigeons, parrots, houbaras and falcons. He said that samples can also be collected from the oropharynx of birds.

### **Serrastopiculiasis**

- Dr Samour presented a brief report on the stage of *Serratospiculum* research. Samples sent to the International Institute of Parasitology in the United Kingdom were identified as *Serratospiculum seurati*.

Unfortunately, a literature search comprising 75 years failed to produce any information concerning its life cycle. A full parasitology study aimed at investigating the life cycle and the role of intermediate hosts will be carried out in the new Wildlife Veterinary Research Institute. More samples are required in order to confirm the number of **Serratospiculum** species occurring in the Middle East.

- Dr. Samour informed the Sub-group that additional *Serratospiculum* specimens have been submitted to the International Institute of Parasitology for identification. Dr. J. Kinne and Dr. Sharma provided additional specimens for the study.
- Mr. P. McKinney suggested that the use of ivermectin tablets on a regular basis could help to control *Serratospiculum* infections.

### **Thyroxin**

- A preliminary literature search has failed to produce any information related to normal T3 levels in falcons. More samples are needed to establish normal thyroxin levels in falcons and to evaluate seasonal changes. This can proved difficult with hunting falcons and it was proposed to create an experimental group of falcons that could be used for this purpose.

## **Veterinary tips: considerations during the training season.**

Report by: Dr. Jaime Samour Veterinary Science Department, Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency, P.O. Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

During the training period, try to avoid *over-exertion* and *heat* stress at all times, in particular when dealing with peregrines, pure *gyr* falcons or *gyr hybrids*. If you acquire these species, be *patient* and *do not rush* their training. Maintain them in rooms with air-conditioning units, gradually

get them out for training and train them only late in the afternoon. Build up *slowly* their training schedule and *never* push them too *hard*. A pure *gyr* falcon could develop *aspergillosis* in less than two weeks after arrival if subjected to stress.

- *Check* regularly the feathers for *external parasites* and with the help of your veterinarian the faeces for *internal parasites*.
- *Check* the *feet* of your falcon for signs of *bumblefoot*.
- *Check* daily the *appetite* and food *intake* of each falcon.
- *Check* regularly the *breathing* for signs of abnormalities.

*If you see early signs of a disease, take your falcon promptly to a veterinarian*



*“If you keep doing what you are doing, you will keep getting what you are getting”*

## ***Caryospora* species from falcons in the United Arab Emirates**

Report by: Mr. Cristudas Silvanose and Dr. Jaime Samour, Veterinary Science Department, Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency, P.O. Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

*Coccidia* species are obligate tissue parasites with sexual and asexual stages in their life cycle. Several genera of protozoan parasites, including species of *Caryospora*, *Eimeria*, *Isospora*, *Frankelia*, *Sarcocystis* and *Toxoplasma*, use raptors as intermediate or definitive hosts. Relatively little information is available describing the developmental cycles, systematic, pathogenesis or epidemiology of these parasites in raptors. Most of the *Caryospora* species have been reported from reptiles, but very few from birds. Seven species of *Caryospora* have been reported in birds, *C. bubonis* in great horned owls; *C. falconis* in peregrine falcons, *C. henryae* in black kites, eagle owls, northern hobby falcon, European kestrels, and turkey vultures, *C. strigis* in barn owls, *C. boeri* in common kestrel, *C. megafalconis* in Gyr falcon, saker falcon and common kestrel and *C. neofalconis* in peregrine falcon, lanner falcon, common kestrel and european hobby.

A preliminary protozoology survey was carried out in captive falcons during the 1996-1997 hunting season by the Wildlife Veterinary Research Institute of the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency (ERWDA). The species

examined included saker (*Falco cherrug*), peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*) and gyr falcons (*Falco rusticolus*).

A total of 24 falcons were examined including 13 saker, seven peregrine and four gyr falcons. From this total, two sakers, two peregrines and one gyr falcons were found positive to *Caryospora* sp. Morphologically, there were two stages found in the faecal sample, sliding motile forms with bacterial inclusions and oocysts, rounded with a mean diameter of 30µm, and oval, measuring 22 x 26µm, 24 x 28µm, 26 x 28.6µm, and 25 x 30µm. Faeces and cloacal swabs were inoculated in sporulation media and examined microscopically after every 24 hours up to 10 days. Sporulated oocyst of *Caryospora* sp. had a single sporocyst that encloses eight sporozoites.

The presence of the protozoa in the digestive tract of birds does not always constitute a disease process and depend on host resistance, immune status, level of parasitemia, and concurrent bacterial, viral and fungal infections. However, affected falcons with high parasitic levels of *Caryospora* sp may show anorexia, depression, vomiting and diarrhoea.



*Caryospora falconis* from a peregrine falcon

## International News

### The National Museums of Scotland: Arabian bird and mammal collections

Report by: Dr. Andrew C. Kitchener, Curator of Mammals and Birds, Royal Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh EH1 1 JF.

In recent years the Bird and Mammal Sections of the National Museums of Scotland has had the great fortune to be able to develop an excellent collection of Arabian birds and mammals to assist a variety of research projects, which will benefit our better understanding of the past and help promote the conservation of endangered species. Unfortunately, in many cases we still know little about the geographical variation in and hence conservation importance of Arabian populations of mammals and birds. Still more unfortunately, good series of skins and complete skeletons of mammals and birds are comparatively rare in museums, so that NMS's collections are of increasing research significance.

Since 1990 we have visited the Al-Areen Wildlife Park, Bahrain, the National Avian Research Center, United Arab Emirates and the Oman Natural History Museum to prepare skins and skeletons of mostly captive birds and mammals. Where possible we have tried to prepare a skin and skeleton for each specimen, so that the new methods of preparation have had to be developed for birds, in the skins of which many skeletal elements are normally preserved. Muscle samples are also taken for molecular studies by other researchers.

As a result we have created series of about 50 specimens each of houbara bustard, *Chlamydotis undulata*, and saker falcon, *Falco cherrug*, for taxonomic research. As the origins of these captive birds are known, it is hoped to determine these retrospectively to see where wild-caught birds or the founders of captive populations originated by comparison with museum material of known origin. We have also prepared lesser numbers of peregrine, *F. peregrinus*, gyr falcon, *F. rusticolus*, kori bustard, *Ardeotis kori*, and rufous-crested bustard, *Eupodotis ruficrista*.

We are hoping to use this material to good effect in a series of taxonomic and archaeological studies. Much of the skeletal material of gazelles and other bovids collected from Al-Areen is currently on loan to the Environmental Archaeology Unit of York

University where it is being used to identify bone fragments from archaeological sites throughout the Arabian peninsula. This can yield useful information about the past distribution and exploitation of species, which can be fed into further reintroduction's of gazelles and oryx following the criteria set out in the IUCN guidelines. We also supplied molecular samples to York University for a preliminary study on gazelle and oryx taxonomy and to the Institute of Zoology at London Zoo for a study on the phylogeny of bustards. Domestic cats, *Felis catus*, collected in the UAE are being used in a study of the problem of hybridisation between wildcats, *F. silvestris*, and domestic cats in Scotland! NMS and NARC are hoping to embark on a collaborative taxonomic study on the houbara in the near future. As the collection expands so do the possibilities for more research, so we are most grateful to all those who have very generously donated specimens to our safe-keeping. The falcon skins we have collected also will also be used in a taxonomic study of the saker being carried out at.

We are also able to assist in advice on specimen preparation and storage, exhibition design and display taxidermy to help develop research collections as exhibitions in Arabia. CMS has recently prepared some mounted specimens for a new falcon hospital in Abu Dhabi, which will be used in an educational display about the captive husbandry of falcons to encourage their improved care and welfare.

However, in the last few years we have suffered a dramatic reduction in our grant-in-aid funding, so that we have not been able to complete the preparation of some falcon and bustard skins and skeletons. If anybody can assist us financially in making this valuable resource more accessible to the research community, I would be most keen to hear from you.

NMS is very grateful to the following people who have assisted us in the development of our Arabian collection: Mr. Jassim Al Sheikh, Al-Areen Wildlife Park, Bahrain; Dr. Jaime Samour, National Avian Research

Center, UAE; Mr Michael Gallagher, Oman Natural History Museum and Sean McKeown, H.H. Sheikh Butti Bin Juma Al-Maktoum, Wildlife Centre, Dubai, UAE. We are most

indebted to Dr. Jaime Samour who has encouraged and assisted us in many ways and whose continuing friendship we greatly value.

## Feature

### Falconry: United Kingdom in Focus

Report by: William Hawkins-Pinchers, Falconoid International UK.

As in Arabia, falconry has a long and traditional past here in the United Kingdom. Earliest records date from the late 6th century AD, but probably the biggest interest in falconry first started with the Norman conquest of England in 1066, and there after the influences and different falconry techniques picked up in the crusading years. It is clear that whilst these battles raged, different exponents of our art, took the liberty of learning from each other.

Falconry thereafter was normally a widely practised sport. Its popularity being influenced by different cultures and social climates. With the coming of the fire arm, falconry then started a steady decline.

We who practice today, owe to the former masters and mentors of our art. For it was surely their dedication and love, not only for falconry but for the beauty of nature itself around them that kept the light glowing through what could have been the final years for falconry.

We have all seen great traditions vanish! And one that did not survive in the United Kingdom, was the trapping and flying of passage falcons and hawks. Today, falconry once again is a well established field sport in the United Kingdom. Throughout all our battles, constant legislation, from not only our own government, but also the EEC. We are, I hope setting the ground rules for falconry to continue into the next millennium.

Today the United Kingdom possibly has one of the largest number of birds of prey in captivity.

There are possibly 13,000 raptor keepers with between 16,000 to 18,000 birds of prey kept by them.

The modern day pressures of practising good falconry have also left its mark. Many falconers now only fly their hawk and

falcons at weekends. This will surely have a great effect on the quality of flight and on falconry itself. No falcon can maintain 100% fitness being flown only once or twice a week. Many falconers in the United Kingdom fly Harris' hawk at weekends. This suits most people well, for the Harris' is quite an amicable bird requiring little maintenance and effort once pre-trained, although again her fitness will suffer being used only weekends.

Traditional United Kingdom falconry originally entailed flying peregrines, merlins, goshawks and sparrowhawks. All these required time and effort. Today we see all species being used, but not always being used successfully. Many falconers simply refuse to persist with any given species. Therefore they fail to get the best of their birds. All birds must be judged on their own individual merits. Simply by comparing one species to another is like comparing the way in which individual falconers train and manage their birds. One factor that has opened up this debate is the production of the hybrid falcon. Ardent falconer traditionalists are against it. So are the many conservation organisations believing simply we will contaminate the wild pure gene pool. Only time will give us this answer. But why wait, careful management, sensible breeding and common sense will at least help us find a real way forward. Indeed how many may remember the days when captive breeding itself was thought to be a "pie in the sky"! Indeed, now we find more and more hybrids being flown in the United Kingdom. And many prove to be a great success especially peregrines x sakers, gyr x sakers, and gyr x peregrines. We also now see a small number of tri-breds. These too are good falcons to have. I am sure the debate will go on for many more seasons to come.

As to longwing flying in the United Kingdom, it mainly splits into two main forms "game hawking" and "out of the hood flight". Game hawking involves falcons waiting on



Pointers, (dogs) are used to locate the quarry, i.e. grouse, pheasant and partridge. The falcon is then released to mount to her chosen perch, this can be anything up to 1000 ft. Once in position, the dogs flush the quarry, down she stoops and hopefully catches her game. Sounds quite simple on paper, but put in all the things which can affect a good and well positioned flight, plus what could go wrong, and game hawking in itself becomes a dedicated art. Falconers who regularly practice game hawking especially grouse and wild pheasant hawking are to be only the most dedicated.

Out of the hood flights are similar to houbara bustard hawking. In the United Kingdom the quarry is approached into the wind. As the quarry rises the falcon is released. She will pursue the chosen quarry in an enduring hopefully splendid ringing flight. Again in theory it looks quite simple, but then again so is life!

Lastly, the most worrying factor that may have bigger implications on United Kingdom falconry is the relative ease in which less experienced people can buy anything from a kestrel to a gyr falcon or indeed a golden eagle!

Although falconry has just been given a good report by recent R.S.P.C.A. inspection, the professional standard to which falcons are being kept, more important flown and properly trained is a prospective real worry, so is the way some falconers use their birds as battery farm animals only.

The real success of an adult breeding falcon is not only in eventually producing young birds, but also in the fact that it has matured in all its inherited traits. So to close my contribution, a question to all: Will the constant domestic breeding of predatory species, breed out its natural ability to hunt, if generation after generation of a species is not allowed to develop fully in all its aspects?



**The author, William Hawkins-Picners, Falconid International, UK**

**“If you are constantly looking back, chances are pretty good you will fall into a hole ahead”**

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## **An interview with an Arab falconer**

Conducted by: Merle M. Apo with Shadi Akram as translator, MEFRG, Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency, P.O. Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

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"The passion for falconry is and will always be part of the Arab culture, it will remain and will always be cherished by the old and young alike", said Ateeq Mohammed Juma Al Muhairy, an eighteen year old falconer from Sweihan, Abu Dhabi. Ateeq comes from a family of falconers, as most Arab families in Sweihan are. His father, grandfather, great-grandfather, brothers and cousins are all falconers. Ateeq started practicing falconry when he was thirteen years old. His father gave him his first bird, a peregrine falcon, "shaheen" in Arabic, the bird commonly used by the family. Until he was 16, hunting was solely a family event, but now he goes hunting with friends too, especially with a friend whose name is Rashid. Arabs like falconry as a social significance in the region, it connotes power and integrity. And so are the birds they use. Ateeq said, he prefers "shaheen" among other falcon species because of their speed and stamina. He chooses "shaheen" with big feet, short body, but stocky. "Shaheens" he said, are easy to manage. Ateeq keeps his falcon in an "areesh" or moulting room made of "barasti" or date palm fronds which is cool and fresh even in the summer. But he also puts his falcon in an air conditioned room when it is really very hot.

The Sweihan falconers train their birds starting October of each year. Ateeq trains his falcon at least two weeks before he takes her to hunt. He said that he makes his falcon hungry before he takes her for training so she will pay more attention. Otherwise, if the falcon is not hungry she does not respond to the trainer's call. They hunt in the north of Sweihan, in the Al Ajban area. As most Arabs, they usually hunt for houbaras and stone curlews. However, they follow strictly the United Arab Emirates (UAE) law on hunting and observe and support conservation drives to be able to maintain a sustainable number of prey to hunt in the future. They know that if the quarry, the life blood of falconry, gets to the verge of extinction, so thus the sport itself. At a very young age, Ateeq is a very responsible falconer and he values the importance of falconry as a tradition inherited from his forefathers. He said that you have a certain feeling of pride to be a part of a tradition handed down to them by their elders. As a falconer he said, you feel happy by just looking at your bird. Reminiscing the excitement it

brought you in so many occasions, not only in bringing the catch, but how it improves her responses with training.

With the transformation of the UAE from a bare desert into a modern and progressive country. From the simple and uncomplicated ways of the Bedouins, the nomadic tribesman of the desert to a modern society highly influenced by the limelight of foreign ways and interests from the West, we asked Ateeq if there has been changes in the way falconry is practised in the UAE. Though young, Ateeq said, "the old days and ways are gone". We no longer ride camels and horses to go hunting. Not even my grandfather, as far as I can remember. Instead, we now go hunting in four wheel drives. Before, there were no gyr falcons or hybrids, nobody knew anything about them, all of us used peregrines or sakers. There was no telemetry equipment or GPS readers, we rely on how we train our birds and the bond that developed between us to remain loyal in order to ensure that she will respond to our call. Before our forefathers hunted to find something to eat, it was a means of livelihood to them, to provide food for the family. Today, falconry is a sport of the desert. With the use of powerful 4 wheel drives and recent advances in hunting equipment, people covered vast distances in a single day.

When he started hunting, he recalls that they could see houbaras close to Sweihan even after winter, but now they seldom see them anymore. Year after year they find very little prey to hunt, he said. We asked if this may cause this traditional sport to eventually end up as a thing of the past, specially with rapid developments in the cities. The young Arabs may be fascinated with the emergence of new cars, technologies, other sports, like water and sand skiing, sand dune and wadi bashing etc. There are also lots of amusements centers, hotels with sports clubs all over the Emirates, these may come to be more exciting to them and the eagerness to test something new may destruct the young Arabs interest towards the traditional sport and start to deviate their attention to something new, something different. No, he said, the sport has a grand following from all Arabs of different walks of life, it may regress slowly in the cities but not in the countryside specially places like Sweihan.

Arabs in the remote country side are more conservative, family oriented, they value so much the tradition that they have inherited from their elders. The pride and rewarding feeling they themselves experienced in the practice of the sport will serve as an inspiration for them to pass and inculcate in the minds of their children the love for the sport. According to him, Falconry will remain and continue as it started. It will always be a part of the desert Arab's way of life.

We also asked him if they would be interested in joining a falconry club in the future. He said that he is sure that all his friends will welcome the idea. He said that falconer groups from different nearby villages used to get together during the hunting season. They used to organise activities where they could compete with each other in showing off what their birds can do. It is usually a friendly competition. They also share a lot of experiences. There are about 3 or more different group of falconers near the Sweihan area namely, Samha, Marmoul and Faqqa.

According to Ateeq there is a place near Sweihan called the public hunting triangle, this is where they usually hunt. They do not hunt in the evening, nor do they hunt for hares. They go for stone curlew "karawans" instead. We suggested that members of the Middle East Falcon Research Group could visit their Group in October to give a talk and a slide show on the different diseases affecting falcons. The Group could also offer free consultations and vaccination drives. He was pleased with the idea as he just lost one of his birds to Newcastle disease. We also asked him if he takes his bird to a veterinarian for medical check-ups. Yes, he said, he used to take his birds to Mr. Peter McKinney in Dubai or to the Baynunah Veterinary Clinic in Al Ain at least once every two months.

After the interview, we were delighted to know, that there is still a burning desire among the young Arabs to continue to practice an immemorial sport handed to them by their elders and will pass it to the future generation.



Ateeq Mohammed Juma Al Muhairy, an eighteen year old falconer from Sweihan, Abu Dhabi.

**“The value of a man should be seen in what he gives and not in what he is able to receive”**  
Albert Einstein

## Traditional Arab training methods.

Report by: Dr. Jaime Samour Veterinary Science Department, Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency, P.O. Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Arab falconers in modern Arabia train their falcons applying the same methods used by their forefathers in ancient times. Yet, the expertise used by Arab falconers to transform a wild falcon into a disciplined and subdued creature, is not documented anywhere. Young falconers learn the required skills from their fathers and grandfathers, as this wealth of information is conferred from generation to generation as a legacy of pride and honour.

The taming of a falcon demands great patience, complete devotion and a deep knowledge of psychology. Essentially, the falconer has to build up gradually a close relationship with his falcon. Yet, this relationship is not the type of association between a master and a servant, but a partnership between two faithful and loyal friends. A relationship based on trust and understanding.



The falcon, after completing its moult, is carried in the mangala by a designated falconer for several days. During this time, the falconer will try to form an intimate bond with the falcon by maintaining a close physical contact. This is accomplished by covering and uncovering the head of the falcon with the hood frequently, by caressing its neck and chest while talking softly and by feeding it with tender morsels from his hand. This step is continued until the falcon is no longer afraid of its handler. After this time, the falcon will be tied to its stand for most of the day. At feeding time, the falconer will gently approach the falcon and will offer the food from a short distance away. The objective is to make the falcon jump from its stand to the mangala where the food is being offered. The distance from the stand to the mangala, at this

early stage, is equal to the length of the leash. When this step has been achieved satisfactorily, the next phase of the training consists in increasing the flying distance by using a thin and strong rope tied from the leash of the falcon to the stand. At first, the falcon has to take only a short jump, but gradually the distance is increased until the falcon has to fly 25 to 50 m to get to its food. When the falconer is convinced that the falcon is performing well, the thin rope is removed and the falcon is allowed to fly freely, from a distances of 200 to 400 m, in order to reach the handler who is offering the food. This stage is crucial and there are no short cuts. Simply, the falconer has to assess whether the falcon is ready to fly freely or not. An impatient falconer and a premature judgement will only result in your falcon and all your efforts flying away over the horizon.



At the beginning, the falconer may offer a piece of meat or the carcass of a quail or pigeon to attract the falcon to his mangala. However, when the training enters more advance stages, the falconer may begin attaching these food items to a lure. A typical Arabian lure is made of four or five houbara bustard wings, tied up in a bundle, that were collected during a previous hunting trip. Usually, the wings are severed from the carcasses of houbara bustards at the elbow joint; the wings are then opened along the long bones to strip off all the meat, then salt and wood ashes are placed into these openings and left to dry hanging on one side of a tent in long rows. The lure will normally be used to call the falcon when the jumping distance exceeds a few metres. The falconer usually positions the baited lure on the ground and will entice the falcon to jump on it. When the distance is far enough, the lure will be swung in circles calling aloud to attract the attention

of the falcon. When the falcon is close to the lure, this is swiftly moved in a continuous graceful circular movement. The same routine is usually executed 5 to 10 times, until the lure is deposited on the ground allowing the falcon to catch it. Some falconers prefer their falcons to catch the lure up in the air, since this minimises the danger of breaking feathers on the ground.



In some countries of the Gulf, falcons are trained using live pigeons instead of lures. In such countries, pigeons are introduced at the time when the lure is introduced in the training of falcons in other countries. In the last stages of training, live pigeons are used as follows. One falconer stays in one place with a pigeon, while the other, carrying a falcon, moves 200 or 400 m away by car. A thin rope about 5 to 8 m long, is tied to a leg of the pigeon. The falconer, holding the rope, throws the pigeon high up in the air, calling at the top of his voice as he does so. The second falconer, removes the hood of the falcon and as soon as he is aware of the pigeon, the falcon is released. The falcon flies directly to the calling falconer and catches the pigeon either on the ground or up in the air. This is a very simple and probably not the best way of training a falcon.



Nowhere in the Gulf are falcons better trained than in the United Arab Emirates. Falconers in the Emirates are masters in the use of the lure to train falcons. At the last stage of training, a falconer goes by car about 600 or 800m away and stops at the top of a high sand dune. As soon as he is in position, he begins calling at the top of his voice while swinging the lure in wide circles.



The second falconer, also on the top of a high sand dune, removes the hood and the falcon is released. The falcon flies directly towards the calling falconer. When the falcon is just 10 m away, the falconer hides the lure and sits down on the sand. At that moment the falconer who originally released the falcon, starts calling the falcon back using another lure. The falcon, slightly confused, circles the already seated falconer, but as soon as he is aware of the second falconer, he turns and starts flying back to the calling falconer. This falconer, will make the falcon dive for the lure several times until he allows the falcon to catch the lure up in the air or on the ground. Following this method, the falcon flies 1200 to 1600 m and is made to dive 5 to 10 times in order to get its food. Falcons trained in this way are fit and have great stamina, permitting them to confront more effectively the challenges of the hunting season

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## **Announcements**

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**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)171 388 234

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## **NARC - MEFRG- website - updated**

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The NARC Homepage on the Website has recently been updated. Members can now track the different activities of NARC - MEFRG. Thanks to the works of Nabil Marchi, Theri Bailey and Derek Gliddon.

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## **Members E-mail address**

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We would like to request members to send us their e-mail address to facilitate faster, reliable and economic way of communication.

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## **Public Awareness Centre - An appeal**

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

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:**

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

**We would like take this opportunity to thank Mr. William Hawkins-Pinchers of Falconoid International UK, who generously responded to our request and sent us a set of falconry equipment commonly used in the United Kingdom. Once again we would like to ask members to help us in this endeavor.**

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## **Dates for your diary**

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### **Arab Hunting Exhibition**

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**14 - 17 the October 1997**

Al Boom Tourist Village  
Dubai, United Arab Emirates

The first Arab Exhibition is organized by MEDIAC, Media Communications and Promotions. It is slated to be a unique exhibition of its kind here in the Middle East. It will showcase the widest range of hunting equipment and accessories which includes falcons and falconry. They will also exhibit different hunting 4-wheel drives, guide services to different hunting destinations all over the world. Fishing boats and equipment, optics, clothing for hunting and outdoors, taxidermy specimens and many more.

For further information, please contact:

**Mr. Abdulla A. Abulhoul**  
Managing Director  
MEDIAC, Communications and Promotion  
Tel No: 00971 - 4 - 692 - 004  
Fax No. 00971 - 4 - 691 - 296  
P.O. Box 5196, Dubai  
United Arab Emirates

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## 3rd International Raptor Biomedical Conference

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**9 - 11 August 1988**

Midrand, South Africa

### First Announcement and call for papers

The 3rd International Raptor Biomedical Conference is the third in a series of which the first one was held in London (1980) and the second in St. Paul, Minnesota (1988). The Conference will be held on 9 - 11, 1988 in conjunction with the V World Conference on Birds of Prey and Owls (August 4 - 11) at the ESKOM Training and Exhibition Centre in Midrand, South Africa, and is planned close to the International Ornithological Conference of Birdlife International (August 16 - 22).

The main sessions for the symposium are I. Pathology and Microbiology (chaired by J.E. Cooper), II. Environmental Disease and Mortality Factors (chairperson tbd), III. Management of Captive Raptors and Falconry Birds (chairperson tbd), IV. Medicine and Therapeutics (chaired by J.T. Lumeij), V. Surgery and Anaesthesia (chaired by P.T. Redig), VI. Breeding and Genetics (chairperson tbd), VII. Rehabilitation and post - release monitoring and survival (chaired by D Csermely), VIII. Legal Aspects (chaired by M. Cooper). Wetlabs on orthopaedic techniques and rehabilitation are planned preceding the two day conference on Sunday August 9th.

At the conference an abstract book will be provided. Full length papers will be refereed and published after the symposium in a book format.

Suggestions for papers and practical training sessions (wet labs), including an informative 100 word abstract and suggested presentation time should be submitted to the Chairman of the Scientific Committee before November 15th, 1997. Speakers will be notified shortly after the Scientific Committee has decided on the definitive program on December 1st, 1997. Deadline of full length manuscripts is March 31st, 1998. The referees will notify speakers about major changes which have to be made in the manuscript before May 1st. The deadline of the abstracts for the book which will be provided at the conference is June 15th,

1998. The referees will give their comments within one week after the conference and authors will be given the opportunity to correct the manuscripts and include information raised during the conference before September 15th, 1998. The conference book is scheduled to be published by the end of 1998.

The Organizing Committee is chaired by Dr. P.T. Redig from the Raptor Center at the University of Minnesota (The Raptor Center, 1920 Fitch Avenue, St. Paul, Minnesota 55108, USA, fax +612 624 8740, E-mail: redig001@maroon.tc.umn.edu.) and communications are managed by N. Forbes from the UK (Clockhouse Veterinary Hospital, Landsdown Veterinary Practice, Stroud, Gloucestershire GL53JD England, fax + - 453 - 756065, Email:drhawk@cix.compulink.co.uk).

Those who want to receive further information on registration, hotel accommodation, the social program and field trips, please contact Local Arrangements Manager Dr. Gerard H. Verdoorn, P.O. Box 72155, Parkview 2122, South Africa, Tel+27-11-646-4629/8617, Fax-27-11-646-4631, E-mail: neshar@global.co.za. He can also be contacted for information on the V World Conference on Birds of Prey and Owls (August 4 - 11).

For information on the International Ornithological Conference (August 16-22) please contact Birdlife South Africa in Durban, Dr. Aldo Berutti E-mail:aldo@birdlife .org.za.

Abstracts for suggested papers should be submitted in triplicate by mail before November 15th to the Chairman of the Scientific Committee, 3rd International Raptor Biomedical Conference, J.T. Lumeij, Department Avian and Exotic Animal Medicine, Utrecht University, Yalelaan 8, 3584 CM Utrecht, The Netherlands. Fax+30-2518126, E-mail: J.T. Lumeij@ukg.dgk.ruu.nl. Authors should indicate their name, postal address, fax number and E-mail number.



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**World Conference on Birds of Prey and Owl**

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**August 4 - 11, 1998**

ESKOM, Training and Exhibition Center  
Midrand, South Africa

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**International Ornithological Conference of Birdlife International**

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**August 16 - 22, 1998**

ESKOM, Training and Exhibition Center  
Midrand, South Africa



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**Joint Meeting of the WAWV with the American Association of Zoo Veterinarians (AAZV) and the Canadian Association of Zoo and Wildlife Veterinarians (CAZWW)**

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**October 16 - 22, 1998**

Holiday Convention Center  
Omaha, Nebraska

For further information please contact:

**Dr. Wilbur Amand** , Executive Director AAZV and President WAWV  
6 North Pennel Road (Lima),  
MEDIA PA 1906, USA

or

**Dr. David Jessup**, Program Chairman WAWV  
7945 Amalfi Way, Fair Oaks  
CA 95628-5902  
USA

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## Books

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### **Bustard Protozoology**

By: Cristudas Silvanose & J. H. Samour

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Bustard Protozoology is a comprehensive protozoology survey carried out in the different species of bustard in the collection of the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency in the United Arab Emirates. The study included samples from clinically normal individuals, clinical cases and post-mortem examinations. It also includes 28 coloured photographs illustrating

the different species of protozoas both non-pathogenic and pathogenic to avian species.

The Handbook of Bustard Protozoology by Christudas Silvanose & J.H. Samour, is available at the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development for Dhs. 30.00 (Draft check in U.A.E. dirhams made payable to National Avian Research Center).

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### **Handbook of Bustard Haematology**

By: J. H. Samour, T.A. Bailey, J.C. Howlett, J. Naldo and M. A. D'Aloia

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This handbook intends to combine the practicalities of a manual and of an atlas by including haematological techniques and photographic identification of blood cells in a single volume. The first section describes, step by step, the methods used in the laboratory of the National Avian Research Center, including the formulae for the preparation of working solutions and stains. The photographic atlas illustrate normal red cells, white cells and thrombocytes and includes some of the most

common haemopathological responses and haemoparasites in bustards.

The Handbook of Bustard Haematology by J.H. Samour, T.A. Bailey, J.C. Howlett, J. Naldo and M-A. D'Aloia is available at the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency for Dhs. 55.00 (Draft check in U.A.E. dirhams made payable to National Avian Research Center).

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### **Status and Conservation of the Breeding Birds of the United Arab Emirates**

By: Mr. Simon Aspinall

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#### **A book sponsored by NARC and ADNOC**

A new book about the country's birds, entitled the "Status and Conservation of the Breeding Birds of the United Arab Emirates", has recently been published. The book was written by Simon Aspinall, Senior Ornithologist of the Abu Dhabi based National Avian Research Center and pulls together, for the first time, the results of many years of professional and amateur efforts to map the distribution and to provide population estimates of the breeding birdlife of the entire country. Over one hundred species of bird have now been found nesting in the UAE. The publication of the book was made possible by the generous financial support of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC).

#### **Foreword by H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan**

The foreword to the book has been written by H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan who writes that;

*"The outstanding international importance of the UAE for both breeding and visiting birds has only been realised in the last few years, particularly since the establishment of NARC, an organisation of which I am proud to be associated."*

H.H. Sheikh Mohammed goes on to say that the citizens of the UAE should take pride in their wildlife and have good reason to

be thankful for its bountiful nature. He concludes;

*“Ensuring a future for wildlife in our changing country is a challenge we have to meet and there can be no room for complacency. This book is an important and timely work produced to help meet the challenge and I laud its message wholeheartedly.”*

**A book that will appeal to the general public, interested amateurs and professional researchers**

For each bird species the book describes its UAE distribution, naming important sites and outlining the threats to their well-being. The book is not only intended as a popular reference work but also as a blueprint for the conservation of the country's avifauna. Over 50 colour photographs enrich the text and show the diversity of species to be found here (the quality of the photographs is unsurpassed). The book is expected to have wide appeal to the general public, interested amateurs and professional researchers alike.

**The UAE is home to the endemic *kalbaensis* subspecies of white-collared kingfisher**

As a result of research for the book many startling facts have emerged. Fresh surveys of Abu Dhabi islands, in particular, showed the UAE to support the only Arabian Gulf colonies of red-billed tropicbird and sooty gull, over 95% of the osprey population of the Gulf and internationally important populations of crab plover, Socotra cormorant, sooty falcon

and five species of tern. The endemic *kalbaensis* subspecies of white-collared kingfisher, completely confined to the UAE mangroves (at Khor Kalba) and with a total population of only 44 pairs, is one of the world's rarest birds.

**An emphasis on conservation**

The emphasis of the book is towards conservation, having been written with the intention that it is used as something of a manual. Some urgency is clearly needed and the author is quick to stress what actions should be taken to conserve each and every species. Twenty three of these have been singled out as being of particular priority. The variety of threats to the survival of the different species makes for some sombre reading but the overriding message is that, with prompt action, the situation is not irredeemable. Part of the book is given over to mapping out potential wildlife reserves.

**Hobby Publications**

This book is a companion volume to the widely acclaimed standard work 'The Birds of the United Arab Emirates' by Colin Richardson and was produced by the same specialist publishing house namely Hobby Publications, itself a name synonymous with design and production of high quality natural history books.

The book is available from all good bookshops, including Magrudy's in Dubai and at all Spinneys outlets in the UAE and it can be bought directly from the Center, price Dhs. 110.

**For further information please contact:**

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## **Desert Ecology of Abu Dhabi**

Edited by: Dr. Patrick Osborne

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The National Avian Research Center, which is now a part of the newly established Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency (ERWDA), has just published its book 'The Desert Ecology of Abu Dhabi'. This book is based on the first couple of years of the Center's ecological survey work and provides the first comprehensive review of the wildlife and ecology of the deserts of Abu Dhabi. There is no doubt that this book will become the baseline for future research work in the country, and will also be required reading for anyone with a general interest in desert natural history.

Within the book, the wildlife and habitats found in Abu Dhabi's deserts are illustrated with over 100 colour photographs, and ecological data are clearly presented with the help of colour maps and diagrams. The following sections are covered in the book:

- Geology - how the present landscape and landforms of Abu Dhabi were shaped by past climate and changing sea levels.

- Climate - the present-day conditions that limit life in the desert

- Plants - the plant associations found in the desert and how they may be managed and altered through irrigation, grazing and topsoiling

Birds - winter bird communities, breeding species and their ecological requirements. A separate chapter is devoted to the houbara bustard the favoured quarry of Arab falconers.

- Reptiles - a systematic list of all recorded species with notes on their ecology.

- Mammals - annotated check-lists of both known and suspected species occurring in Abu Dhabi's desert with notes on their conservation.

- Invertebrates - an overview of the species recorded and those that probably await discovery in this poorly known environment.

The book is retailing for 120 Dhs and can be bought directly from the Center.

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### **For further information please contact:**

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## **Birds of Prey - medicine and management.**

By: Dr. Manfred Heidenreich

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The most thorough and comprehensive guide of the last 20 years to address diagnosis and treatment of raptors. Conditions of ill-health that result from ineffective husbandry, management, and breeding practices are

detailed. Also included: Explanations of new diagnostic, therapeutic, and surgical techniques 334 illustrations and diagrams, including 295 in colour, and more. 1997, 294 pp., 8114 x 11, illus., hardcover, #0-632-04186-2, \$194.95.

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## **Middle East Falcon Research Group**

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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**

Email: narc@emirates.net.ae

- 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:**

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**The Middle East Falcon Research is your Group**

**A great deal of our success depends upon the professional cooperation between all members**

