



LIFE06 NAT/H/000096  
Conservation of the *Falco cherrug* in the Carpathian Basin  
Beneficiary: Bükk National Park Directorate  
3304 EGER, Sánc u. 6.



## SAKER FALCON (*FALCO CHERRUG*) IN UKRAINE AND ADJACENT AREAS

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The studies were conducted during 10 field seasons of 2001-2010 in 11 regions of Ukraine (steppe and partly forest-steppe zones), in 2005 - in Moldova, and in 2004, 2008, 2009 - in Southern Russia (Rostov Region and Ciscaucasia). During this period there were examined various forests, planted forests, main power lines in the steppe zone, most of the coastal cliffs of the Black and Azov Seas (including the Bay of Sivash), as well as rock outlets in the foothills and mountains of the Crimea. The total length of automobile routes across Ukraine, Moldova and Russia amounted to 76,370 kilometres. As a result of these works it was surveyed about 75% of the area potentially suitable for breeding Saker. Total for this period we found 248 breeding sites with 240 breeding cases. In addition, it was checked the contents of 66 nests, 2 of which were with clutches and 64 - with chicks.

Distribution of the Saker Falcon in Ukraine and adjacent areas has changed dramatically in the last century. Thus, from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and until the 1950s-60s the species was rather common and nested there in most areas except the Transcarpathians and western part of Polissia. It occupied mostly forest-steppe and steppe zones, the mountains of the Crimea; some pairs have met in Polissia (Averin et al. 1971; Zubarovsky 1977). In the late 1980s - early 1990s the Saker Falcon still nested in places in the forest-steppe, for example, in Kiev Region (Domashevsky 2004). It was also met at that time in Poltava and Kharkiv Regions of Ukraine, the most part of Moldova and in some areas of Rostov region of Russia. In next years the reliable findings of the Saker in forest-steppe and forest zones of Ukraine and Moldova were not observed. At present, in Ukraine and Moldova Sakers' breeding sites are concentrated in the steppe zone. It is connected with disappearance of Sausliks, being the main prey in the forest-steppe and forest zones, adjustment of the Saker to other mass feeding forages, in particular - rooks (*Corvus frugilegus*), which numbers at that time were steadily growing in the steppes of the Ukraine for the aging shelter belts. Furthermore, adaptation of the Saker Falcon to a new type of nesting occurred – on pylons of power lines, the network of which in the steppe zone had greatly increased exactly by the 1970s. These reasons led to a noticeable change in the bird range - it moved mainly in the steppe zone; where earlier it was almost no breeding habitats for this species. Thus, the Saker stopped nesting in the forest zone of Ukraine in the mid-twentieth century, and in the forest-steppe – in the 1980s-1990s. Currently in Ukraine there are two ecological groups: the first nests on cliffs and precipices, narrowing its spread to the territory of Crimea; the second almost entirely moved from the trees on pylons of power lines, having settled most of the steppe zone.



Hungarian partners: Aggteleki-, Balatoni-, Duna-Dráva-, Duna-Ipoly-, Fertő-Hanság, Őrség-, Hortobágyi-, Kiskunsági-, Körös-Maros National Park Directorate, E-misszió Environmental Association, MME/BirdLife Hungary, Provértes Nature Conservation Public Fund

Slovak partners: Raptor Protection of Slovakia, The State Nature Conservation of Slovakia, SOS/BirdLife Slovakia, West-Slovak Electric Company



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On the territory of Moldova the Saker Falcon was found only in the southernmost part, and in adjacent areas of Russia the species was not detected at all.

In Ukraine in the first half of the twentieth century the Saker was quite common. But in the 1960s-1970s there was a tendency of reducing the total number of the species, which also continued in next decades (Zubarovsky 1977). In the mid 1980s the Saker population in Ukraine was estimated at 30-40 pairs (Zhezherin 1988). In our opinion, these data were clearly underestimated. To judge on the dynamics of the species numbers in Ukraine is possible only in general terms, as before our researches any large-scale counts of the Saker Falcon in Ukraine did not take place. Analysis of the literature data shows that during the 1980s-1990s there was a decrease in the number of forest-steppe Sakers, but the bird appeared on breeding in many places of the steppe zone. Therefore, in the mid 1990s with the overall reduction of the Saker number in the country, in the steppe zone it was already known about 30 pairs (Prokopenko 1994). V.I. Pilyuga (1999) only in the interfluves of the rivers Danube and the Southern Bug writes of a possible breeding of 80 pairs. In the early 1990s the species population in Ukraine was approximately 150 pairs (Prokopenko 1994). Similar data were given for Ukraine in the European reports as well: 120-150 pairs, with a tendency of reducing the range and numbers (Tucker, Heath 1994); 120-150 pairs, with a weak reduction in the number (Snow, Perrins 1998); 150-200 pairs in 1998, with a little reduction in the range and numbers (Heath et al. 2000), and 45-80 pairs in 1990-2000 (BirdLife International, 2004).

The number of the Saker Falcon was rapidly declining throughout Europe during the 1980s-1990s. In the European part of Russia it was 80-150 pairs in 1990 (Tucker, Heath 1994; Hagemejer, Blair 1997), 120 pairs (Heath et al. 2000), and in the early 21st century it was equalled only to 30-60 pairs (BirdLife International, 2004). The decline of numbers occurred everywhere up to complete disappearance (Belik et al. 2003). In Moldova, the number of the bird was steadily low - in the late 1980s there bred 5-7 pairs (Tucker, Heath 1994; Snow, Perrins 1998; Heath et al. 2000), in 1990s-2000s - 4-7 pairs as a stable population (Birds in Europe, 2004). Current numbers of the Saker Falcon in the study area are estimated by us within the 330-360 pairs, of which 315-345 inhabit the territory of Ukraine, which is about half of the entire European population of the species. The vast majority of pairs breed on the territory of its five administrative regions and the Crimea Autonomous Republic, where this bird of prey reaches maximum numbers. In the surveyed areas of Luhansk and Poltava Regions the species was not found, the breeding of individual pairs in Kharkiv Region is assumed. On the territory of Moldova in 2005, we have revealed only 8 nests of the Saker. All of them were placed on pylons of main power lines. According to our estimates, the number of species in this republic does not exceed 10-12 pairs. In adjacent to Ukraine areas of Russia the Saker now, probably, does not breed.



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