

# POSITION STATEMENT

## Falconry

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

Falconry is the practice of hunting wild quarry in its natural state with a trained, captive bird of prey. As falconry generally entails the capturing, keeping and training of wild raptors, important ethical and ecological considerations need to be taken into account to ensure the well-being of birds caught for this purpose and their wild, source populations. Additionally, established hunting ethics such as fair pursuit and sustainable use also apply.

### BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA POSITION STATEMENT

This position statement refers to falconry exclusively as the use of birds of prey for hunting purposes and excludes the keeping of birds of prey for other purposes such as rehabilitation and captive breeding for conservation programmes. Falconry is a recreational activity enjoyed by some raptor enthusiasts, and forms part of the cultural heritage of many practitioners. With the correct permitting, which is province-specific, this practice is legal in South Africa. Falconers either source birds from captive breeding facilities or catch wild, mostly juvenile birds, which they train and hunt with for one or multiple seasons, before releasing them back into the wild. As juvenile raptors are thought to have a high mortality rate and there are few falconers in South Africa, these removals are thought to have no noticeable effect on the source raptor populations. Additionally, if best practices are followed, released birds are thought not to be compromised or to suffer increased mortality risks (Holz & Mansell 2006). BirdLife South Africa's objective in this matter is to promote practices that do not compromise the conservation of any species and, where outcomes are uncertain, advocate for a precautionary approach.

Although BirdLife South Africa remains neutral on the ethics of hunting for sport, we support the sustainable utilisation of wildlife resources under the following circumstances:

- Broadly acceptable ethical codes of conduct and humane standards of practice are strictly adhered to, including high standards of animal husbandry.
- Sustainable utilisation of both raptors and their prey.
- No Threatened (Critically Endangered, Endangered and Vulnerable) or Near-Threatened species, or their eggs, should be harvested from the wild or hunted.
- Full compliance with all applicable legal requirements, including conditions imposed by relevant licenses and permits.

For general best practices please refer to the South African Falconry Association's Norms and Standards (<https://raptorwelfare.iaf.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2017/10/South-African-Norms-and-Standards-of-Falconry.pdf>).

BirdLife South Africa recognises that the use of exotic or hybrid raptors in falconry is controversial and already takes place in South Africa. Such birds are sought after for their increased hunting prowess and climate adaptability. Although it is not common for falconers to lose trained birds, this does happen (Flemming et al. 2011) and escaped exotics and hybrids may therefore pose risks to indigenous populations:

- Lost birds run the risk of hybridising with indigenous species and compromising their genetic integrity (Rivas-Salvador et al. 2021, Rodríguez et al. 2019).
- There is a chance that escaped birds may establish local populations.
- The transport of birds across geographic regions enhances the chances for the spread of diseases and the introduction of novel diseases. All foreign birds entering the country should therefore be quarantined and cleared of any disease risk before being flown locally. The importation of such birds must additionally comply with all applicable legal requirements.

Considering these risks, the severity of which is admittedly still under debate, BirdLife South Africa takes a precautionary approach and discourages the use of exotic and hybrid species in falconry. If exotics are used, however, then it is imperative that the following of the South African Falconry Association's norms and standards are adhered to:

- *“Exotic birds are trained in such a way that they are entirely dependent upon their co-operation with man for hunting success and cannot survive by hunting independently.”* >>>>>

- No Exotic or Hybrid hawk shall be “Wild- Hacked” or purposefully be released.
- All Hybrid or Exotic raptors shall be reared so that they are sexually imprinted on man or on a parent-raptor species that does not occur in the wild in South Africa.
- All Exotic or Hybrid hawks will be flown with two transmitters at all times.
- All Exotic and Hybrid Hawks will be flown by “A” Grade falconers who have already successfully flown a Peregrine Falcon. The only exception to this is the Harris Hawk. In this case the Harris Hawk may be flown by a “B” Grade falconer who has demonstrated proficiency with telemetry to their Provincial Club committee.
- In the event of loss of a Hybrid or Exotic hawk, every reasonable effort must be made to recover the lost hawk. In the event of failure to recover or re-trap the hawk the

hawk should be exterminated if it is considered a significant threat to biodiversity.”

BirdLife South Africa recognises that captive breeding already takes place in South Africa to supply the demand for falconry birds (including for export). Breeders should in all cases comply with relevant requirements prescribed by the environmental and nature conservation authorities to conduct this activity. To prevent this practice from undermining the genetic integrity of wild populations, rigorous regulation of genetic standards of progeny is needed. We therefore suggest that a regulatory body is established to ensure compliance with regulations and best management practices, such as comprehensive studbooks that ensure the genetic integrity of the captive birds.

## REFERENCES

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