

Project Update: August 2012

According to the aims of the project, a joint 2-week Ukrainian-Hungarian expedition took place in second half of June 2012 in the Crimea and south-west Ukraine to map the distribution of saker falcons and their habitats.

During the expedition, similarly to the previous year, we crossed the western part of Ukraine up to Kryvvy Rih on the north and east, and we travelled around the Crimea only crossing the southern mountains. We checked the nests known from the previous years and we visited those sites that seemed to be appropriate for the species. We found habitats close their natural state only on some well-defined parts of the Crimea: otherwise we saw mainly intensively and in some places less intensively used agricultural areas.

Unfortunately, it was not uncommon that we found only one pair or we did not find any pair at all in areas, where more pairs had been recorded earlier. In the first 5-6 days of the expedition, we were visiting the former breeding sites without seeing any saker falcons. Fortunately, later on we have found a number of saker pairs with just fledged juveniles. The majority of broods can be found on pylons of high voltage power lines in natural nests. We also tagged two sakers in order to gain information on their habitat use and movements that is crucial to plan the conservation measures.

Threats to sakers and habitats identified during the expedition:

- Electrocutation;
- Declining food base (rodents) due to transforming agriculture and thus habitats;
- Shooting and poisoning;
- Nest robbing for falconry and for tourist attraction;
- Wind farm development;
- Natural threats.

Miscellaneous

Besides surveying sakers, we collected information on rooks and red-footed falcons. We recorded the colonies that we saw on our route. It was an extra reward that we discovered an as yet unknown griffon vulture colony in a remote part of south Crimea.

During the expedition, experts identified the locations, where artificial nests will be installed for the Sakers in autumn.

The photos of the expedition can be seen here:

<https://picasaweb.google.com/114883134038981713649/UkraineJune2012#>

The poster of the project is about to be ready and the latest version of the draft is available here:

<https://picasaweb.google.com/114883134038981713649/SakerPoster#5779970371241102738>

