United Arab Emirates

The NARC houbara bustard program

Photos courtesy of Xavier Eichaker and Mark Lawrence, respectively

Houbara bustard displaying

The houbara bustard is a 1 to 2 kg sandy-buff-colored steppe and semidesert dwelling bird distributed from North Africa to Mongolia. All populations of African houbara are resident or nomadic, whereas northern populations of Asian houbara breeding in Central Asia, China and Mongolia are migratory, moving southwards in winter to Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and the Arabian Gulf states.

The houbara bustard is the ultimate quarry of Arab falconers. Its populations are seriously threatened by detrimental factors including a loss of suitable habitat on the wintering grounds, heavy illegal trapping, and excessive hunting.

The National Avian Research Center (NARC) has been in operation since 1989 with the mission of promoting bustard and falcon conservation and reconciling the traditions of Arab falconry with a sustainable use of the resources. To achieve its strategic goals, NARC is organized around three main programs: a captive-breeding program, an ecology and conservation program, and a rehabilitation program. In the last ten years, NARC has organized numerous expeditions over the entire distribution range of the houbara bustard in Asia with a special emphasis on China, Kazakhstan and Pakistan. Expeditions are targeted at studying population dynamics, distribution, and migration. Satellite tracking is used to understand the migration strategy of the birds and to define the most important stopover sites and migration paths of the species. It is also used for estimating mortality rate of the birds. To date, NARC has harnessed more than 100 houbara with PTTs and followed some individuals over more than 7,000 km from Arabia to Mongolia.

Olivier Combreau with a houbara bustard

Olivier Combreau, director of the National Avian Research Center of Abu Dhabi

Populations of the houbara bustard are seriously threatened by detrimental factors including a loss of suitable habitat on the wintering grounds, heavy illegal trapping, and excessive hunting.

Norway

Tracking juvenile golden eagles' movements in Scandinavia

Photos courtesy of Karl-Otto Jacobsen

Juvenile golden eagle

The Golden Eagle has been accused of inflicting damage on semi-domestic reindeer owned by the indigenous Sami people in Finnmark, Northern Norway. Claims are made that golden eagles gather there to prey on reindeer in winter. Little is known of the migratory patterns of the eagles from these areas.

Two eaglets from different nests were tagged with Argos/GPS solar-powered 70 g transmitters in July 2002, in the reindeer areas in Finnmark at approximately 70°N, 25°30´E. One bird stayed in its natal area until late September. The signal was then lost until it reappeared in the Gulf of Bothnia on October 18, the last recording of that bird.

The second bird moved from its natal area during September, and was recorded in northern Finland during mid-October. No signals were transmitted until February 20, 2003, presumably due to low solar battery charge, until it reappeared in Central Sweden, more than 900 km to the south.

On March 25 it took off for the north, moving through inland Sweden, covering 850 km in only 20 days. It moved between Finland and Norway in April, visiting its natal territory on May 7. On May 24 it came to rest in a reindeer calving area. The bird was never recovered. The allegations that juvenile birds stay in Northern Norway during winter to prey on reindeer were not supported by this study.

The new Argos/GPS technique proved very promising, despite the fact that only one of the two birds provided detailed information. The best transmitter provided 308 GPS and 547 Argos fixes in its year of operation.

Torgeir Nygård holding a juvenile golden eagle

Torgeir Nygård and Geir Helge Systad, Norwegian Institute for Nature Research

Claims have been made that golden eagles from large areas may gather in large flocks in Finnmark in winter, causing damage to the reindeer.