

## Abstract

Aided by trained falcons, Middle Eastern elites have been hunting migratory Houbara bustards (*Chlamydotis macqueenii*) or *Taloor* (in Sindhi) for five decades in the arid and semi-arid lands of Pakistan (Mian, 1986; Hasnain, 2019). Dubbed “the sport of the kings” (Pace, 1984) or “heritage sport” (Koch, 2015), foreign elites with economic influence, political power and prestige pursue the migratory *Taloor* into their wintering grounds in Pakistan. Observing how the bird shapes bilateral relations between Pakistan and Gulf states, political analysts have called *Taloor* “the political bird” (Lagari, 2016). Developing the concept of “multispecies diplomacy,” this doctoral research explores the interface of politics and conservation through an ethnographic study of elite falconry in Pakistan. Analysing how humans and non-human birds co-construct inter-state diplomacy, the study asks, “How do inter-species relations among elites, falcons and *Taloor* in falconry configure Pakistan’s diplomatic relations with Gulf states; domestic laws and conservation practices; and rural lives and livelihoods in the desert areas of Sindh Province?”. The research uses the ethnographic methods of participant observation and semi-structured interviews at multiple “sites” to examine the political, discursive, symbolic, legal, and material effects of elite falconry. These sites include Karachi and Islamabad, where offices of key governmental and non-governmental organizations are located, and the influence of *Taloor*, falcons and elite falconers on diplomatic relations between Gulf states and Pakistan (Q1) and the internal political life of the host country (Q2) can be studied. They also include the desert and semi-desert areas of Sindh, Pakistan, where the impacts of falconry hunting by Arab elites on the lands, lives and livelihoods of native Sindhi farmers and herders and the *Taloor* (Q3) can be analysed in conjunction with strategic use of camera traps. This research study is significant as it advances and theorizes the concept of multispecies diplomacy, helping to understand the entanglement of multispecies relations and inter-state diplomacy. It also develops understanding on how conservation is navigated through complex political and legal dynamics which in turn impact lands and lives of local Sindhi famers and herders in desert areas of Sindh, Pakistan.