

AIPS Short-Term Research Grant Final Report

Project Title: Political Bird: Elite Falconry, Power Politics and Conservation in Pakistan

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Dates for Project: June 1 to August 10, 2022

Location: Karachi, Pakistan

1. Significance to Pakistan Studies

This ethnographic study about Taloor will provide insight about institutional politics on conservation and governance of wild species and will help understand how national and international elite may challenge state's laws on wildlife hunting, conservation and management practices in Pakistan. By focusing on a small migratory bird and the deeply held falconry hunting of it, this study will highlight how mobility of the species and the hunters relate to ideas of environmental belonging. The study will help propose wildlife policy recommendations, give strategic guidance, and develop an on-ground conservation and management plan about Taloor bird in Pakistan. Lastly, the study will contribute towards raising awareness about threatened species, and will assist in informed decision making and conservation planning at local, regional and international level.

2. Key Outcomes and Deliverables

As part of the funding from AIPS, I conducted research from 1 June to 10 August 2022 in Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan. I visited the offices of Sindh Wildlife Department, IUCN Pakistan and WWF-Pakistan and met with relevant representatives. I conducted 8 semi-structured interviews with officials at Sindh Wildlife Department, IUCN and WWF; and with a legal expert, an ornithologist, and representatives of local communities. Interviews explored how the revisions in wildlife laws and rules, and hunting by Middle eastern elites, have impacted the Taloor habitat and population – with a focus on Sindh. I also documented the narratives of governmental and non-governmental organizations, ornithologists, legal experts and communities about Taloor hunting and conservation.

During this research, I secured key documents, such as the revised Wildlife Act 2020, the 18th Amendment in the constitution of Pakistan, and Supreme Court judgements related to the ban on hunting of Taloor in 2015 and the lifting of the ban in 2016. I reviewed the Wildlife Act, which has integrated falconry into the law, and media reports related to Taloor hunting and the breeding initiatives by the Houbara Foundation in Pakistan.

Outcomes:

- Through this research, I learned about the involvement of different government departments, conservation organizations and communities in Taloor hunting. Apart from the Foreign Ministry of Pakistan, wildlife departments, IUCN and WWF-Pakistan, other actors such as Houbara Foundation, Ministry of Interior, Zoological Survey department, local landlords, retired army staff are also engaged in the hunting of Taloor. I developed close working relationship with Pakistan Zoological Survey Department and IUCN Pakistan to work in future on this project and get technical expertise from their representatives.

- This research helped me to further work on my research proposal including research methods and questions. It also helped me to finalize my PhD project research sites and provided me data about the organizations involved in the conservation and hunting of Taloor.

Deliverables

- This research helped me to finalize my three areas of specialization required for my PhD research study.
- This study has been instrumental in collecting the data on legal aspects of the falconry in Pakistan.