



## MEDIA RELEASE

**For immediate use**

### **Shocking Amur Falcon massacre in northeast India**

**Johannesburg, 9 November 2012:** The massacre of tens of thousands of migrating Amur Falcons (*Falco amurensis*) killed in Nagaland, Wokha district in northeast India, has shocked the world (see <http://www.conservationindia.org/campaigns/amur-massacre>). Conservation India claimed that about 12 000 – 14 000 Amur Falcons were hunted for commercial sale and human consumption most days during October 2012 in Nagaland and it is believed that this killing is not limited to this particular district only.

The Amur Falcon is a migratory raptor species, about the size of a pigeon, that travels up to 22 000 km from its breeding grounds in Siberia, Mongolia, Manchuria, Korea and China in eastern Asia to the non-breeding grounds in Africa including Somalia, Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia and southern Africa (excluding Namibia). Amur Falcons are a resource shared by many countries, including South Africa, and they play a vital role in controlling insect pests, particularly locusts. The conservation of the species is therefore of international concern.

In October, huge numbers of Amur Falcons arrive in northeast India en route to their final overwintering destinations in Africa. It is at one of their migratory stop-over sites in India, in the late afternoon, that these falcons descend from the powerlines on which they perch, to forested patches along the banks of the Doyang reservoir to roost. It is then when hunters catch the falcons using massive fishing nets. The birds are inhumanely caught and kept alive until they are sold as meat in markets in the nearby villages and larger cities. “The large scale hunting has happened over the last five to six years, since the construction of the water reservoir in Nagaland that likely attracts insects on which the Amur Falcons feed”, says the Bombay Natural History Society in India. The killing of Amur Falcon has been illegal since 2010 but this has not, however, stopped either the hunters or illicit sellers of these falcons.

BirdLife South Africa is extremely concerned about the killing of this species at certain parts of the migration route. “If this continues the numbers of the species could start crashing globally, and this would significantly affect the birds that spend “their winter” in South Africa”, says Dr Hanneline Smit-Robinson, BirdLife South Africa Conservation Manager.

“We would like to offer our full support to Conservation India and the Bombay Natural History Society, the BirdLife Partner in India, in their engagements with the national and state governments to ban the hunting (and trade) of Amur Falcons in Nagaland”, states Mark D. Anderson, CEO of BirdLife South Africa. It is encouraging that the Indian Minister of Environment and Forests, Mrs Jayanthi Natarajan, has asked for action to be taken by the Nagaland government.

According to a statement by Conservation India, “It is significant to note that India, as a signatory to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), is duty bound to prevent this killing, provide safe passage, as well as draw up appropriate action plans for the long-term conservation of this bird. At the recently concluded 11<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), of which India is the president for the next two years, the importance of CMS in conserving species, and especially in stopping bush meat hunting, was repeatedly stressed.”

The massacre of Amur Falcons is but one example of a global crisis where birds are hunted at their migration stopovers, and this necessitates support of the current global conservation initiatives, such as the Convention of Migratory Species (CMS), as well as direct interventions at national and regional levels to ensure that conservation measures are in place at important stopover sites. BirdLife South Africa will approach the South African Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) for its support in further communication to the Indian minister and government.

**Notes for the editor:**

- Amur Falcons are commonly found in north-eastern South Africa. The recent satellite tracking of Amur Falcons by German and South African researchers has shown that Amur Falcons migrate a considerable distance over the sea. Ten Amur Falcons were fitted with satellite transmitters by members of BirdLife Northern Natal and German researchers, providing an opportunity to study the full migratory route of Amur Falcons.
- The global population is estimated to number > c. 1 000 000 individuals and the species is globally listed on the IUCN Red Data List as Least Concern (BirdLife International 2012). The report of this major killing will call for an international revision of the Red List Status of the species as the population is suspected to be stable in the **absence** of evidence for any declines or substantial threats such as the major killing reported.
- Images and further information can be obtained from <http://www.conservationindia.org/campaigns/amur-massacre>
- For more information, please contact: Dr Hanneline Smit (082 453 4714).
- The vision of BirdLife South Africa is to promote the conservation, research, understanding, observation of and enjoyment of natural birds, and their habitats.
- South Africa has 844 bird species, of which 65 species only occur here and 125 (15%) are listed in *The Eskom Red Data Book of Birds of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland* (Barnes 2000). With

one of the highest levels of bird endemism in the world, South Africa has an important obligation to ensure their survival.

- BirdLife South Africa is the largest non-profit bird conservation organization in the country. It relies on donor funding and financial support from the public to carry out its critical conservation work.
- BirdLife South Africa contact details: Lewis House, 239 Barkston Drive, Blairgowrie, P.O. Box 515, Randburg, Johannesburg, South Africa, Tel. +27-11-7891122, Fax. +27-11-7895188, e-mail address: [conservation@birdlife.org.za](mailto:conservation@birdlife.org.za), website: [www.birdlife.org.za](http://www.birdlife.org.za)