

Saker Falcon



Classification
Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Aves
Order: Falconiformes
Family: Falconidae
Genus: *Falco*
Species: *cherrug*



Range, Habitat, Conservation Status

- **Range:** Wide range across parts of Europe, Asia, and northern Africa.
- **Habitat:** Dry country habitats with cliffs, scattered trees and/or electricity pylons located near water, including arid montane areas, steppe, forested steppe, open grasslands, and semi-deserts.
- **Conservation Status:** Endangered due to habitat loss, indirect poisoning, and trapping. Climate change has also impacted the vegetation in arid habitats, which has led to the disappearance of some prey species.

Physical Characteristics

- **Body Length:** 17.7 to 22 inches (45-57 cm)
- **Wingspan:** 38 to 49.6 inches (97-126 cm)
- **Weight:** 1.61 to 2.87 pounds or 25.7 to 45.8 oz (730-1300 g). Females are visibly larger than males.
- **Lifespan:** 5 to 7 years in the wild and 15 to 20 years in human care.
- **Identifying Traits:** Grey flight feathers and brown underbellies with streaking on breast. Dark "trousers" when perched.

Behaviors

- **Feeding:** Eats small mammals, including susliks, hamsters and voles, as well as medium-sized birds, such as rooks, magpies, rollers, and larks. Also known for stealing prey items from other species of birds, including other birds of prey. Able to catch prey in flight but are seen most of the time snatching prey off the ground.
- **Breeding:** Occurs during the spring season. Males soar over their territories, calling loudly and engaging in arial displays to attract females. Mates/prospective mates are also known to bow to each other.

- **Nesting:** Does not build nest, instead uses old nests of other raptors and ravens in trees, on ledges, in holes of rocky cliffs, on the bare ground, on bridges, on top of abandoned buildings, and on electricity pylons/power poles. Use the same nest sites each year. Females may lay 2 to 5 eggs, which will be incubated around 30 days. Hatchlings are ready to fly after 40 to 45 days but will stay with their parents for up to two months.
- **Migration:** Migrate to the northern parts of southern Asia and parts of Africa for the winter.
- **Call:** A loud, harsh “kek-kek-kek-kek”. Females will make a chirping noise to prompt offspring to open their beaks for food. The young will also chirp to get the parent’s attention. Males call to attract females, and sometimes, the female will join in the calling if she accepts the male at the end of an aerial display. They will also call aggressively to scare off intruders.

Resident Bird(s)

Name: Avia

- **Age:** Hatched in 2010
- **Sex:** Female
- **Background:** Hatched at another education facility in the United States. See her during Meet a Raptors, private programs and other special events.
- **Unique Individual Traits:** Always eager to participate in training sessions and surprises staff by how quickly she learns.

Name: Athena

- **Age:** Hatched in 2006
- **Sex:** Female
- **Background:** Came from another facility in the United States in 2018. See her during Meet a Raptors, private programs and other special events.
- **Unique Individual Traits:** She turns her head upside down to greet her trainers.

Fun Facts!

- Also known as the Altai Falcon.
- The Saker Falcon has four recognized sub-species.
- The second largest falcon species in the world with the Gyrfalcon being the first largest species.
- The Saker Falcon is adapted for horizontal hunting meaning it swoops down low over the open ground to catch prey items.
- In the Disney movie “Mulan,” the Hun leader Shan Yu has a Saker Falcon called Hayabusa.

Importance



- Saker Falcons are important predators of small mammals and medium-sized birds. They help keep the numbers of these prey populations in check.

Sources

- <https://www.peregrinefund.org/explore-raptors-species/falcons/saker-falcon>
- <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/sakfal1/1.0/introduction>
- <https://ebird.org/species/sakfal1>
- https://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Falco_cherrug/
- <https://cascadesraptorcenter.org/birds/saker-falcon/#callf425-67fc>