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### **Minister Gansukh visits Artificial Nests**

An artificial nest program in Mongolia, aimed at increasing the population of wild saker falcons and under-pinning their sustainable use, is near to completion. Mongolian workers have been constructing and erecting nests since October 2009. By the end of October 2010, 5000 artificial nests will be erected in twenty different areas. This massive project is funded by Abu Dhabi and resourced by International Wildlife Consultants (IWC) and their Mongolian partners, the Wildlife Science and Conservation Center (WSCC)

During a recent visit to Mongolia, Dr Nick Fox (IWC) met with Minister Gansukh, Ministry of Nature, Environment and Tourism (MNET) in Ulaanbaatar. The meeting focused on saker falcon research, using microchip technology to track exported CITES regulated saker falcons, monitoring the breeding success of saker falcons at the new 5000 artificial nests and using the artificial nest population data to set quotas for the annual trade in saker falcons.

Dr Fox invited Minister Gansukh to Abu Dhabi in September to meet HE Majid Al Mansouri, head of the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi, to sign a new agreement between the two countries. This will replace the previous five year agreement which has provided funding for Mongolian biologists and research projects.

Minister Gansukh travelled to Bayan to look at an artificial nest that was erected in 2008, this year it has been fitted with a nest camera which records continuously how many Brandt's Voles and Mongolia Gerbils are eaten by saker falcons and their young. Biologists are investigating the potential of using artificial nests to increase predation on these pest species. Raptors act as biological controls and reduce the need to apply expensive and ecologically damaging rodenticides. Minister Gansukh has commissioned this same camera research for Kestrels and Upland Buzzard which also nest in these recycled metal barrels. Minister Gansukh said "the nest camera research has the potential to tell us exactly how many rodents are eaten by birds of prey; this information could be given to herdsman so they can see that increased numbers of birds of prey can improve the degraded Mongolian Steppe".

The June visit was planned to coincide with presentations given by WSCC research biologists, Nyambayar Batbayar and Gankhuyag Purev-Ochir, on the research findings that led to the implementation of the artificial nest project. Scientists from the 6th International Symposium of the Asian Raptor Research and Conservation Network, ARRCN, visited Bayan to meet the Mongolian students and sixteen staff working on the project. They were amazed at the size of the project, each nest is 1.5km apart with staff driving over 25,000km to erect 5000 nests. The interested party declared the project innovative and beneficial to both the Mongolian people and the saker falcon which is classified as vulnerable.

**ENDS**

#### Notes for editors

1. The Saker Falcon is listed in Appendix 2 of CITES.
2. The Mongolian population is currently estimated at 2,000- 5,000 breeding pairs.
3. International Wildlife Consultants are based in UK. [www.falcons.co.uk](http://www.falcons.co.uk)
4. Contact Nicola Dixon for more information [nicola@falcons.co.uk](mailto:nicola@falcons.co.uk) Photographs attached, additional photographs are available.