

Syrian Poachers Nabbed in Siberia

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A saker falcon used in falconry in Doha, Qatar. **Pharaoh Hound**

Police in the Siberian republic of Khakasia have detained a group of Syrian men suspected of plotting to poach endangered Saker falcons.

Although the nine men, aged 22 to 53, were falconless when they were apprehended near the village of Vorota on Wednesday morning, they were traveling with 67 bait pigeons, 114 traps and five falcon hoods, regional police said in a statement.

This is at least the third time Syrian poachers have been caught in the region in the past year, a regional police spokeswoman said by telephone on Thursday.

In the other cases, poachers were discovered with live falcons, presumably for export to wealthy customers in the Middle East, where falconry is a traditional and fashionable hobby.

The trade of endangered Siberian falcons, often by Syrians, is a "lucrative, highly organized"

business, said Natalya Dronova, head of the World Wildlife Foundation's species program in Russia. A healthy Saker falcon can fetch \$30,000 or more in the Arab world, she said.

"The falcons are objects of pride, especially large males whose feathers have an ornate, alternating dark and light pattern," she said by telephone.

Dronova said foreign poachers often rely on locals to point out nesting spots and help with the dirty work of snaring Saker falcons, Gyrfalcons and Peregrine falcons, all of which are endangered.

The birds are then stuffed into suitcases and flown back on commercial airlines, a traumatic trip in which about half the animals die and very few are intercepted, Dronova said.

Between 12,800 and 30,800 mature Saker falcons remain in the wild, according to Birdlife International, which estimates that up to 8,400 of the birds are caught for Middle East falconers each year.

The men apprehended on Wednesday face eight administrative violations and a maximum fine of up to 2,000 rubles (\$63).

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