

Eleonora's Falcon

Eleonora's Falcon is a long-distance migratory bird, flying from the Mediterranean, to winter in Madagascar. A falcon is a raptor, a carnivorous bird that hunts other animals. They have powerful talons, sharp, curved beaks for tearing food and keen eyesight. If you were a Falcon what would be your prey? And what would you do if you were migrating and found your breeding area no longer existed? How do you think you would see the world as you flew between countries?

Little known facts on the Eleonora's Falcon

- The Eleonora's Falcon takes an inland route through the Sahara Desert and the total distance covered during a one way flight has been recorded up to 9000km.
- It will eat in flight, catching large insects and small birds that it can transfer from its talons to beak.
- Falcons are renowned for their exceptional eyesight and ability to spot prey from great distances.
- Baby falcons are called eyasses and covered by white down when they are born, which is replaced by feathers in three to five weeks.

But why is the Eleonora's Falcon important

- Many raptors (birds of prey), are in decline with half of the world's species under threat from habitat loss, hunting, accidental killing and climate change.
- Raptors such as the Eleonora's Falcon are an indicator species. As they are at top of the food chain these falcons are a good barometer of how well the rest of the food chain is doing. A bird of prey is unlikely to survive in areas of poor biodiversity.
- Raptors are important for control populations of rodents, such as rats and other small mammals.

How climate change will affect the Eleonora's Falcon

- Migrating birds such as falcons are very susceptible to climate change as they stop off in different places for feeding, resting or to sit out bad weather.
- The habitat which falcons depend upon are in danger of disappearing due to desertification, flooding and rising temperatures. Droughts will increase the size of deserts and force migratory birds to undertake longer journeys.
- Climate change leads to a change in location, timing and length of migration routes. Some falcons might not migrate at all if there is a warmer climate and need to survive cold winters in the places they spent the summer.
- A change in weather patterns will lower water tables, reducing the amount of water available and the number of suitable habitats.
- As temperatures become warmer, migrant species will arrive earlier at their breeding grounds. If the food supply is not available due to climate change this will affect bird numbers.
- Increased storm frequency will affect the nesting ability of species in low lying coastal areas. Especially in the tropics. A change in vegetation will affect birds that nest or winter.
- Warmer waters lead to a loss of plankton and sand eels will move further out to sea, an important food source for birds. This will reduce the amount of smaller birds that the Falcon will feed on when in air.

The world without the Eleonora's Falcon

Falconry is an ancient sport and has been practiced in China before the year 2000 BC.

