

Rare falcons shot in Cyprus

October 12 2007

Hunters in Cyprus have shot about 50 endangered red-footed falcons, which migrate through the island in the spring and fall.

The dead birds were found by farmers on the Akrotiri Peninsula, The Independent reported. Six falcons were still alive despite being sprayed with birdshot.

Bird Life Cyprus called for a ban on all hunting on the peninsula. Most of the area is a preserve but hunting for turtle dove and quail is allowed in one strip in September and October.

The red-footed falcon, which nests in Europe and winters in Africa, is protected in the European Union. The bird's status was recently changed from "vulnerable" to "globally threatened."

"Globally near-threatened is as bad as it gets, which makes this one of the worst cases of illegal bird killings ever reported in Europe," Martin Hellicar of Bird Life Cyprus told the British newspaper.

Experts say that because of the small number of pellets found, the shooters appear to have been excellent marksmen who used the falcons for target practice.

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