

# Environmentalists praise Pakistan ban on hunting of rare bird

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A falcon (R) tries to catch a houbara bustard during a falconry competition in Hameem, 150km west of Abu Dhabi, on December 9, 2014

Wildlife campaigners on Thursday welcomed a decision by Pakistan's Supreme Court to ban the hunting of a rare desert bird whose meat is prized among Arab sheikhs for being an aphrodisiac.

Wealthy hunting parties from the Gulf travel to Pakistan's southwestern

Baluchistan province every winter to kill the houbara bustard using hunting falcons, a practise that has sparked controversy in recent years because of the bird's dwindling numbers.

The issue has also cast a spotlight on traditionally close ties between Pakistan and its allies in the Arab world, particularly Saudi Arabia.

"The [court](#) has cancelled all the licences and permits issued by the federal government to foreign nationals and locals," Raja Muhammad Farooq, a lawyer told AFP. The verdict was handed down Wednesday.

Ejaz Ahmed, Senior Director of WWF-Pakistan, said: "WWF-Pakistan recognises that illegal hunting and trapping of the houbara bustard are detrimental to the population of the species.

"WWF-Pakistan strongly believes that hunting permits should be issued by the relevant provincial departments only after extensive population assessments have been conducted.

"The breeding populations of houbaras in Nag Valley, Baluchistan should be extensively protected and more sanctuaries should be established to support migratory bird populations."

The International Union for Conservation of Nature includes the bird on its 'red list' of threatened species, estimating there are fewer than 97,000 left globally.

A provincial High Court in Baluchistan in November last year cancelled all permits for [hunting](#) in the province, but the [federal government](#) headed by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif—a close ally of Saudi Arabia—continued to issue licenses.

Rafay Alam, a lawyer and environmental activist, said "I am absolutely

thrilled and overjoyed," adding that the verdict was a result of extensive media coverage and a Supreme Court that was more willing to challenge the government than in the past.

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