



**Third International Festival of Falconry
in Abu Dhabi – UAE 2014,
under the patronage of the President of the United Arab
Emirates and Emir of Abu Dhabi,
His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan**



Text and photographs © Tomáš Krivjanský, <http://krivjansky.sk/>
Translation by Zuzana Sroková, Bc. and Tatiana Horniaková, MSc., Bratislava
Bratislava 10. 11. 2016, Slovak Republic



His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of the UAE, His Excellency Mohammed AL Bowardi Al Falacy and representatives of UAE and IAF



Third International Festival of Falconry in Abu Dhabi – UAE 2014

From 7th to 14th December 2014, the falconry club of the United Arab Emirates - **EMIRATES FALCONERS' CLUB**, together with the **ABU DHABI CULTURAL PROGRAMS AND HERITAGE FESTIVAL COMMITTEE**, in cooperation with the **INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR FALCONRY AND CONSERVATION OF BIRDS OF PREY – IAF**, organized the Third International Festival of Falconry in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, under the patronage of the President of the United Arab Emirates and Emir of Abu Dhabi, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khalifa_bin_Zayed_Al_Nahyan).

This worldwide falconry event was also supported by the following: Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority, The Environment Agency, Abu Dhabi Falconers Club 2013, Al Ain Zoo, Al Forsan International Sports Resort and media partners. Delegates of the **Slovak Falconers Club** were Anton Moravčík, its president; Tomáš Krivjanský, vice president; Martin Krankus, English interpreter and translator of the book **FALCONRY Past and Present**; and Assaf Haitham, the official representative of the club for Arab states, who participated at his own expense. Delegates of the **Slovak Falconers Club in the Slovak Hunters Chamber (SKS in SPK)** were MVDr. Ladislav Molnár, vice president and a member of the Advisory Committee of the IAF and veterinarian (<http://www.iaf.org/>); Ing. Ján Kebísek, member; Ivan Mala, member and winner of the photography competition; Ing. Ľubomír Málek, member and winner of the drawing competition. A separate expedition was formed by representatives of the Elementary school with Kindergarten in Štiavnické Bane (**Základná škola s materskou školou Maximiliána Hella v Štiavnických Baniach**) – Slovak School of Falconry # FALCEDU, in district Banská Štiavnica. Mgr. Michal Pavel, headmaster; Lucia Hudecová, 14-year-old student; Dorota Osvaldová, 7-year-old student, together with her father; Maroš Karabinoš – a member, who has been working in Dublin, Ireland for several years. At the festival, he presented the school in English. It is the **only primary school in the world** where the subject “Falconry, hunting and forestry” is taught as part of the regular school curriculum. The education of children in falconry was presented in a separate tent at the Festival, in which this school had its exhibition (<http://www.zakladnaskola.com/?id>).

The Slovak representatives departed from the Austrian airport Vienna-Schwechat at 11:10 AM, via Airbus A320 which arrived in Abu Dhabi at 7:50 PM with a time shift of 3 hours.

Unlike in the year 2011 at the Second Festival in Al Ain, the buses waiting at the airport in Abu Dhabi did not take us to the hotels. A journey into the desert awaited us. We left shortly after 9 PM. We journeyed more than two hours on the highway E11. After leaving the highway, our destination was the western desert region of Al Gharbia, in the Abu Dhabi Emirate. Particularly, our camp, named “**Desert Camp**” with the coordinates 23° 58' North and 54° 11' East of the city of Abu Dhabi. In the desert before the camp, we attended a presentation around midnight. It was presented by Jevgenij Schergalin, IWC consultant, the archivist of Falconry Heritage Trust-UK (<http://www.falconryheritage.org/viewItem.php>), member of the Advisory Committee of IAF for public information and member of the organizing committee of the Festival. Everyone received a bag with written materials about the festival program. The documents were in English, Arabic, Chinese, Spanish and Russian. Sponsored delegates were given a blue tape, and the delegates traveling at their

own expense were given a green tape, which they fastened on their wrists. Finally, at around 01:30 after midnight, we arrived at our destination. In the darkness, we could see it from the bus already from a great distance. The huge tent camp was perfectly illuminated. It was built in the wide surrounding desert. It had the capacity to accommodate and provide meals for 1,008 people, consisting of foreign and domestic delegates, falconers with birds of prey and the serving staff. You can watch Desert Camp on video (<http://archive.is/fgrKe>).

Desert Camp had a rectangular shape with the main entrance in the middle of the longer, northern side. The tallest and biggest tent – “Dining room”, dominated in the center, with 100 large round tables in several rows next to each other. Next to each table were 10 chairs. All of them were covered in white fabric. In every corner, along the walls of the tent to its center, were Swedish buffet tables with foods you could only dream of. Arab cuisine dominated, but also European and world foods were in abundance. Meat dishes, vegetarian, fish, seafood, pasta, various types of pierogi (traditional Slovak filled dumplings), sweet, salty, sauces, salads (mayonnaise, vegetable, fruit), desserts, puddings, and fruit. And of course, non-alcoholic drinks, including tea and coffee. Everything was continuously replenished by unobtrusive waiters in black suits, alternatively in only black pants and white shirts, with a bow tie at their neck.

On the southern side of the “Dining room” was the second, largest, conference tent – “Cinema”. It had six closed booths for interpreting, a large projector screen and almost 250 chairs in rows. Lectures and conferences were conducted here, with screening of films and videos. The floor was covered with Persian carpets. Below them were also ordinary carpets. They were practically in the whole camp, on all of the paths between the tents. Of course, to the toilet as well. The sand on carpets was swept by dedicated staff several times a day.

The sand was so fine that the road to Desert Camp was paved for buses and supply trucks. The organizers did not recommend the delegates, who came at their own expense on rented cars from Abu Dhabi, to go deeper into the desert outside the camp. They would risk getting stuck after 500 meters at most. And not only them, but also the local emergency vehicles. However, the sand was pleasant on bare feet. It would be cool in the morning and warm feet during the day and evening. Therefore, most of us would walk either barefoot or in sandals only.

On the eastern and western side of the “Dining room” and “Cinema”, there were tents for accommodation, asymmetrically distributed in two squares. In each square, there were three tents in 6 rows, i.e. 18 tents altogether. Four squares multiplied by 18 = 72 tents. They were lit with two lamps inside. The lamps were placed on wooden posts that upheld the tent. On each of them, there were two electric plugs for charging mobile phones and batteries. Below them, there was a PVC chair with a backrest. On the longer side of the tent, there were seven beds with sheets, pillows and blankets. Opposite them, on the other side, there were sleeping bags on thick mattresses. The floor was covered with a carpet. Inside, right at the entrance, there was a wooden, four-storey cabinet. It had four doors, each with a key. We would leave our valuables in them. Especially photographic videorecorders and cameras, which were most vulnerable to the soft sand. In one tent, 14 people could sleep, which multiplied by 72 tents gives the incredible number of 1008 people.

Despite the high temperatures of about 35-37 degrees around noon, at dawn it was only 5-7 degrees Celsius. Many people didn't mind; they would sleep just in the sleeping bags under the open sky in the desert.

In the southwest corner of the camp, there were tents of native falconers and folk dancers. They were built in the form of a wide “U”. Four in the base row, two on the sides and a large common tent in the middle.

At the lateral sides of each square, consisting of 18 accommodation tents, there were two spacious WC containers. Separate for men and women. Each of them had 10 with showers. Opposite them, there were 10 ceramic sinks with mirrors. Throughout the day, dedicated staff would maintain cleanliness here as well.

On the east and west side of the “Cinema” there were two large and high tents for the birds of prey. With regard to the heat, on the longer sides they were ventilated with mesh fabric. The raptors could rest here, on block and bow perches, after flight training - attacks on the lure. The lure is made of a few wings of prey, which are fixed on a base of leather with long cord. The skin is filled with sand. The cord is attached to a long, flexible pole. It is called a “whip”. The falconer swings the lure above himself and provokes the raptor to attack. It is a great art. The falconer has to dodge with the lure at the last split-second so that the falcon does not catch it in its talons. According to the interest and endurance of the raptor, there may be tens of flight attacks. On the lure, there is meat between the wings, tied by two straps. It serves as bait before and also as a reward for the bird of prey after catching the lure. In Arab countries, the most common prey of a falcon is the African or Asian desert bustard - the Houbara. The most common prey of a hawk is the Arabian desert hare, which is almost half the size of our European hare. A higher level of falcon training was chasing the lure, attached to a model of a motor aeroplane, which was controlled electronically. The highlight of flight demonstrations of falcons, however, were the attacks on the lure, tied on a cord, fastened to a realistic electronic model of a Houbara bustard. The human-controlled engine's movement very authentically mimics the flight of a Houbara in nature, when escaping from a bird of prey.

The southern, longer wall of the camp, in front of the tents for birds of prey, was closed off by two large, social tents. They were built in the traditional Arab style with red carpets on the floor and red mattresses and pillows all along the sides of the tent, to sit and drink tea, coffee, as well as eat on the ground. They differed from other white tents also by their black outside color, and beautiful red fabrics on the inner walls. Ahead of them on the southern side, open to the desert, were open fires, some with a stone fire ring, where coffee and tea were served.

Informal discussions were conducted there. It was literally a “Babylon of nations and languages”. It was formed by more than 800 falconers from 92 countries of the world: Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Croatia, Cuba, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Georgia, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, the Republic of Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Malta, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Namibia, the Netherlands, North Korea, Northern Ireland, Norway, New Zealand, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Scotland, Serbia and Montenegro, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, the Republic of South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom – Great Britain, the United States, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Vietnam, Wales and Zimbabwe.

In the center, between two traditional, social tents, therefore directly in front of the exit of “Cinema”, a common “arena” was formed. There were cubicles built of wooden posts, with the outer walls and roof made of reeds. In each, there were benches painted red, with backrests and tables. Towards the desert, the arena was open. Here the falconers entered, carrying birds of prey on their arms.

Also, native folk artists had performances here - dancers with long, thin sticks accompanied by small drums. They held them in one hand and drummed with the other. The group consisted of around 50 men, including children.

Finally, falcons were trained here to attack the lure, pulled by a motor model of a Houbara bustard. Everyone else could comfortably watch, while seated and protected from the strong sun, the always-changing but all the more interesting program.

On Monday morning – December 8th, 2014, the staff brought brand new sofas, still sealed in plastic. These replaced the wooden benches in cubicles in the base part of the “U” arena. In the afternoon, almost 50 selected falconers from all around the world, with the raptor on their hand, had the honor to greet and shake hands with the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. He had a friendly talk with each of them. This was followed by traditional dances of the natives, dressed all in white. I will call them “folk” dances.

Finally, the highlight of the program came. A falconer released a falcon that soared in circles, constantly increasing in altitude. Another falconer started the motor model of the “Houbara desert bustard” with the lure hanging on a rope, which was immediately attacked by the falcon soaring above. There was a great aerial chase, which everyone watched breathlessly. The Prince himself stood up and walked a few steps forward so that he could better see the falcon’s attacks. The native kept all onlookers in suspense for a few minutes, by skillfully controlling the escaping model of the bustard, before multiple falcon attacks. He prepared a nice, exciting experience for us. The highlight of the masterful performance, however, was when he directed the model of the bustard in front of the arena, where we all stood and shielded our eyes from the sun with our hands, while watching this spectacular theater. Finally, he made such a maneuver that the falcon managed to “capture” the bustard in the area in front of the arena, just in front of the feet of onlooking falconers. Then the falconer who released the falcon, took the raptor from the “catch” to his glove. This was followed by the enthusiastic applause of spectators. Even the Crown Prince did not spare the applause. Finally, he stopped by the native women and girls in the right wing of the arena. Here, draped in black dresses with veils on their faces, they prepared local specialties for us, on open fires or gas cookers.

Then a rare visit, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of the UAE (<https://www.cpc.gov.ae/en-us/thecrownprince/Pages/default.aspx>) stepped into a white Toyota, which drove him behind Desert Camp to a helicopter, in which he flew to Abu Dhabi.

The evening continued with the participation of His Excellency Mohammed Ahmed Al Bowardi, Managing Director of the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi, Deputy Chairman of the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund and the International Fund for Houbara Conservation – Abu Dhabi (<https://www.mubadala.com/en/who-we-are/board-of-directors/mohammed-ahmed-al-bowardi>); <http://www.adioc.ae/the-conference/speakers/he-mohammed-al-bowardi.aspx>).

On my website in the gallery (<http://krivjansky.sk/index.php/fotogaleria/fotky-2011.html>) you can view the photographs from the II. Festival in 2011 in Al Ain, but

also from this III. Festival in Abu Dhabi in 2014. In 2011, I gifted H.E. Mohamed Ahmed Al Bowardi my first book on falconry in Slovak. I gifted him the second book in Valkenswaard, Netherlands in 2013. In the evening, in Desert Camp, I asked him whether he would be willing to become the “godfather” of my first book on falconry in English - FALCONRY Past and Present. He said it would be an honor for him. Unfortunately, the “baptism” of the book did not happen because of my failure in organization. I believe that this will happen at the earliest opportunity (<http://eshop.krivjansky.sk/book.php?id=1>).

In Desert Camp, every evening the participants of the festival could sign up for falconry hunts in the desert, the next morning or afternoon. The new hunting ground was about seven times larger than the one in the year 2011 near the city of Al Ain, which was 21 km across. This allowed three or four groups to hunt at the same time. In this way, many more people could attempt hunting in the traditional way with falcons on camels and Harris hawks on horses. Early in the morning, already from 6:00 AM until noon, and every afternoon from 2:00 PM until evening, in the desert they hunted bustards and hares with the birds of prey.

Those who were interested in hunting were transported by buses from Desert Camp to another Center in the desert. Here were stabled over 60 camels and 20 horses. A group of four camels, tied one after another, was always led by a native on foot. On the first camel sat a native with a falcon on his hand, protected with a “Mangla”. It is a cylindrical cover of textiles, which instead of the leather glove used in the rest of the world, protects the hand of the falconer from the sharp talons of the falcon. Behind him, three foreign participants sat on camels, tethered one behind the other. Three to four such groups formed a single hunting unit that hunted in the desert in sight of each other.

Sitting on a camel was not easy, because the camels were dromedary, one-humped. Therefore we did not have our backs supported by a second hump of the camel. In contrast, the seat consisting of blankets was moved completely to the rear of the camel. Straddling on the seat was quite difficult. We kept our stability in the “saddle” by pressing our thighs against the body of camel. Several people had a problem with it. In the front part of the saddle, there was a mostly metal structure, on to which we held. It was the only stable point. After two to three hours of “riding” through the desert, we had a short, 10-15 minute break, when we had the opportunity to step down from this ship of the desert. Before this, the camel sat down on all four legs, so that we could finally reach the sand with our feet. That eagerly awaited moment, however, surprised many people, because their legs, getting cramps, barely handled the weight of their body. So, some people found themselves in an unwanted position in the sand. It was not less challenging also when mounting the camel and its standing up on all fours. Firstly, it stood on its hind legs. If you were not holding on correctly and did not lean backwards enough, there was a risk of flying forward across the camel’s neck and ending up in the sand two or three meters below. Some managed to do so. Just then, however, the kneeling camel stood also on its front legs. If you did not lean forward immediately, again there was a risk of falling. Especially when incorrectly holding on to the seat construction on the front part, but also in case of opposite leaning of the body backwards and forwards. But that was not all. Almost everyone had a photographic camera around their neck, and some even had a video camera. Here, the problem appeared that due to the wobbly movements of the camels, they had a tendency to bump into each other. The only option was that one of the devices had to be on the back, so that you could control the other one on front with your hand. The heroes, who wanted to do it with

both of their hands without holding the front seat with one hand, usually ended up in the sand.

Despite these drawbacks, there was one unquestionable advantage. From that height, we could see far enough into the distance, and in the sand with scattered bunches of partly greenish, but mostly drying bushes, we tried to spot Houbara desert bustards. Almost always, however, the first to spot them was the native with a falcon on the first camel. Sometimes even from a distance of 300-500 meters. Right after that, the whole group began approaching the quarry. On the instruction of the head falconer, the group stopped and he released the falcon. After flushing the bustard by a native on foot, the falcon tried to catch up to the bustard and strike it. Watching this knightly fight of a several-times-smaller predator with a larger bird, moreover armed with a long, pointed bill and long legs, was an unforgettable experience. I am glad that I managed to photograph it.

All this was preceded by the "Program of rearing Houbara bustards". It started in 1960. After many years, it managed to breed the first 90 chicks. Currently, the International Fund for Houbara Conservation (<http://houbarafund.org/>) annually releases 46,000 Asian (*Chlamydotis macqueenii*) and African (*Chlamydotis undulata*) bustards back into their natural habitats in the United Arab Emirates, Morocco and Kazakhstan. Over 260,000 birds have been released until now.

The vast majority of festival participants agreed that the falconers are ultimately "responsible" for maintaining the Houbara bustards, mainly via the mentioned International Fund.

Near Desert Camp, "forest" areas formed by low trees and bushes were planted. Here, desert hares were hunted either on foot or on horseback, using our European hawks (*Accipiter gentilis*) and so-called American hawks - Harris Hawks (*Parabuteo unicinctus*). They are also called dark hawks. They nest on cactuses in Central America. In contrast to our hawks, Harris hawks hunt in groups. Together they attack single prey. They do this without attacking each other, which is a big advantage when hunting. As a forester, I note that the "desert forest" has nothing to do with the classic forest elsewhere in the world (<https://www.ead.ae/Pages/know-your-environment/forestry.aspx>).

Those who were not interested in hunting or did not feel physically strong enough, but also those who came back from hunting, had the opportunity to hear expert presentations that took place in the "Cinema". For example, Dr. Javier Ceballos from Spain – Ethics of falconry. Haroon Latif from Pakistan - Training hawks in Pakistan. Dr. Nick Fox - Falconry and the use of robotic prey. Maroš Karabinoš from Slovakia/Ireland - Education in falconry. Atef Jenhani from Tunisia - Tunisian falconry. Kent Carnie from the USA - Evolution of North American falconry and its impact on the world. Prof. Sigrid Schwenk from Germany – History of falconry. Dr. Ulambuyaryn Erdenebat from Mongolia – a book on the history of falconry in Mongolia, which I exchanged with him for my book FALCONRY Past and Present. Noriko Otsuka from Japan – a review of ancient manuscripts on falconry in Japan. Dr. Alexander Sorokin from Russia - Preserving the Gyrfalcon in Russia. Raul Pacchiano from Mexico - Preserving birds of prey in Mexico. Due to the diverse range of topics, I cannot name them all.

Delegates could also participate in practical seminars. For example: Kamran Khan from Pakistan - The future of falconry in Pakistan, Iran, India and Afghanistan. Huischeng Chen from China - The future of falconry in China and Taiwan. Bakyt Karnakbayev from Kazakhstan - The future of falconry in Asia. Dr. Bohumil Straka from the Czech Republic - Meeting of the Advisory Committee of the IAF. MVDr.

Ladislav Molnár from the Slovak Republic - Management of falconry birds, and many others.

Delegates devoted a lot of time to practicing flight demonstrations with birds of prey, in preparation for their performance in the arena at the Festival of Nations, in Al Forsan International Sports Resort in Abu Dhabi, from Thursday to Saturday.

The evenings were unforgettable, with sunsets over the desert and discussions next to open fires with a cup of authentic Arabian coffee and tea.

The center of the camp was formed by the entrance area to the “Dining room”. Here there were information panels with the daily program and registration for the next day. Either for the already mentioned practical hunting in the desert, or full-day bus excursions to Abu Dhabi.

Delegates from Slovakia participated in the excursion to the Grand Mosque of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE and Emir of Abu Dhabi; also to the Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital (ADFH) and they also visited the “Festival of National Heritage”, held as part of the celebrations of the National Day public holiday – the 43rd anniversary of the United Arab Emirates.

In the words of His Highness Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Minister of Presidential Affairs, the Great Mosque represents a great emotional and moral value for the people of the UAE and their leadership. It was built in the years 1996 to 2007 on more than 12 hectares without external landscaping and parking areas for cars. The outer casing is made of white Macedonian marble. The interior surfaces are made of Italian, Indian and Chinese marble. During Friday prayers, it can hold 40,000 worshipers at a time. Of that, the main prayer room can hold more than 7,000. Dimensions of the building: length 420 m, width 290 m, height 85 m. The mosque has 82 domes, which are of seven different sizes. Furthermore, the four minarets have a height of 107 m. Construction costs were 2 billion dirhams (545 million USD). The carpet in the main prayer room holds the world record, with an area of 5627 m² and a weight of 35 tons (<http://www.szgmc.ae/en/>).

The Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital (ADFH) is a major tourist attraction of the UAE. It was established by the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi on October 3rd, 1999 (<https://www.ead.ae/sitepages/home.aspx>). During its fourteen years of existence, it has admitted more than 67,000 “patients” - falcons. Annually, it admits around 9,000 falcons, worth up to 1 million USD, for examination and treatment. Since its creation, it is one of the most renowned hospitals for falcons in the area of the Persian Gulf. It has its own breeding center, which is working on the reintroduction of some species of falcons back into the wild. According to the announcement of the Director of the hospital Dr. Margit Müller, so far it has released more than 1,300 falcons back to their original habitat in Pakistan, Iran and Kazakhstan (<http://www.wam.ae/en/news/emirates/1395276605317.html>). This world’s largest veterinary hospital for falcons is also the center of falconry medicine in the world. It is the only one with the right to issue passports for falcons. It has a broad client base in the UAE, and includes clients from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain.

As the first public institution in the UAE, it provides full service veterinary care for not only falcons, but also for all species of birds and poultry, since 2006 (<http://www.falconhospital.com/>).

At the “Festival of National Heritage”, during the celebration of the National Day - the 43rd anniversary of the UAE, the organizers surprised us very pleasantly. Immediately after getting off the bus, they welcomed and introduced us to the area. After the end of the exhibition, they organized a common dinner for all of us.

On December 2nd, 1971, the seven emirates united under one flag and formed the United Arab Emirates. The unity of the seven emirates is the major reason for the excellent results achieved by the country. "The Spirit of the Union will live on throughout the years and it will remain the theme of this year's festivities as we reflect on the past and pay tributes to the wisdom and foresight of the UAE's great founding fathers - Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, Sheikh Rashid Bin Saeed Al Maktoum and other members of the Supreme Council as well as the present leaders who have built on such strong foundations," said Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Culture, Youth and Community Development. ([https://www.zawya.com/story/National_Day_celebrations_to_reflect_spirit_of_the_u_nion_Nahyan-GN_14062014_150633/](https://www.zawya.com/story/National_Day_celebrations_to_reflect_spirit_of_the_union_Nahyan-GN_14062014_150633/)).

On Wednesday December 10th, 2014, early in the morning, all of us delegates moved by bus from Desert Camp to the spacious parking lot in front of sports complex Al Forsan International Sports Resort in Abu Dhabi. It is a huge grassy area in the shape of a wide rectangle, the sides lined with large, green trees with rich crowns. I do not dare to estimate its size, but you can get an idea from the already mentioned video.

The main entrance was right next to the parking lot at one corner of the rectangle. It consisted of two tall columns, bridged in the upper part, with welcome banners. Inside, on both sides of the entrance, were information tents. Every morning, they welcomed us and every evening, they walked us out with never-ending smiles on their faces. Without distinction whether they were women or men. Immediately after entering the area, we were impressed by, at first glance, an innumerable number of white tents, flamboyant with all the colors of flags of the participating countries. Literally, a tent city. The entry into it was lined with enclosed cubicles - 10 on the right and 9 on the left. Tradesmen from all over the world offered everything related to falconry there. Behind them, there were toilets at a hotel level on both sides. On the left of the cubicles, there were three tents with food on PVC tables, with chairs for about 300 people. Among the stalls, there stood a spacious tent in the traditional style, for the native participants from the UAE, without lateral walls on the sides. There, we were greeted by native falconers with falcons on their hands or on perches. The whole entrance area was enclosed by large wooden shelters of 6 x 4 m, attached to each other by 8 in two arcs. They were formed by the exhibitions of the representatives of the Emirates Falconers' Club, Emirates Heritage Club, Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital, the International Fund for Houbara Conservation, Al Ain Zoo and the Saluki Center. There was also a separate space for traditionally served Arabian coffee and an automatic photo booth.

Shelters were divided in the middle, so that you could move smoothly to the "Pavilion of Arabian falconers". In reality, it was an open space for the already mentioned folk dances of natives with sticks and drums. Next to it, there were two large, traditional tents. Inside were placed large-sized panels of four more Arabian countries. To the right of them, there was an even smaller, traditional tent. To the left, there were another two small, traditional tents, with three shelters in between.

Behind the pavilion of Arabian falconers, there were two other tents. One served as a "Women's parliament" and the other as the "Common room". Behind this tent, there were five other tents with food. PVC tables and chairs for around 500 people were placed next to them.

The tent city was formed by the tents of different nations. In front of each of them, there was a large panel with the name and flag of the state. In addition, a state flag was flown from a high post. Together there were 60. Of which: 28 International, 2

North and 2 Eastern Europe, South Africa 2, 7 South America, East Asia 3, 5 Camp UK - Great Britain, 5 nomadic Mongolian tents - round yurts with a diameter of 8m, 2 brightly colored Native American tents - teepees, 2 Scandinavian and Baltic countries, 2 Balkan countries.

Furthermore, the tent city consisted of 13 large tents of "international initiatives", aimed at the following exhibits: 1. Dog Show, 2. Education of falconers, 3. IWC administration, 4. IAF exhibition, 5. Falconers, 6. Paintings and art, 7. Photography, 8. Heritage, 9. Falconry archive of the Middle East, 10. Conservation of birds of prey, 11. Conservation of prey, 12. Rehabilitation and 13. Art - Christian Alston.

Among them, there were tables and chairs for informal talks, or let's say, for the continuation of the "Babylon of nations and languages". To the right of them, on the shorter side of the rectangle, were two tents for the "International Exhibition Centre".

The whole complex was completed by three family tents with attractions for children, in the left corner at the junction with the entrance.

Next to them, there was a second complex with food. It also consisted of three tents, with PVC tables and chairs for about 300 people.

In the opposite corner, there were two tents that served as prayer rooms. Behind them, there was a huge, public rest area. It was a huge tent roof on six wooden posts without side walls. Visitors, mostly with children, rested there on textile seats. It was practically diagonal to the opposite corner, opposite the entrance to the area. Toilets were placed here as well.

On the opposite, longer side of the rectangle, the grandstand was built. It was in the middle, with three large, covered tents for VIP guests and the highest government officials of the UAE. To its right, there were two tents that served as a VIP guest lobby. Just next to them were toilets, too.

In front of the grandstand was the main arena. Every day (Wednesday through Saturday), the main program took place there. It was a grassy, provisionally fenced space, at least the size of a football stadium, with a path to the right to the tent with birds of prey and meeting-place of the falconers.

Opposite the grandstand, on the other side of the arena, there was space for the audience, which was enclosed by the tents of the various nations, and the already mentioned Mongolian yurts. On the right side of the arena, there was a wide screen onto which the activities in the arena were broadcasted live. This way, it enabled even the distant members of the audience to watch the program. Just next to the screen, there were two boxes of the commentators. Every day, I photographed the program in the arena from the stairs of one of them.

After the main grandstand arena, the second dominant of the tent city was a massive, high tent with mesh side panels for ventilation for birds of prey - falcons, hawks and eagles.

In the opposite corner, diagonally to the main entrance, was the exit from the site. After crossing a two-lane main road, lined by colorful flowerbeds, we came to a natural amphitheater. It was a concrete basin with circular terraces, surrounded by palm trees. Coming up along the amphitheater terraces, we reached the area in front of Hotel Al Forsan. In its internal, but especially outdoor area, was where all the delegates from the tent city had their meals. A two-day, IAF plenary conference also took place here, along with expert presentations during the 3 days of the Festival.

On Wednesday, all the national delegates, immediately after leaving the bus in the parking lot, went into their national tents, which they decorated and equipped with exhibits for visitors. The others went to special working tents, where they also installed exhibits, transported by the organizers of the festival.

After setting up the exhibits in the tents, everyone moved by bus for lunch and accommodation in exclusive hotels - Aloft Hotel, Centro Rotana Hotel and Premier Inn, which were less than a 20-minute drive away.

In the afternoon, the organizers transported us by bus to the Emirates Falconers' Club (EFC) in Abu Dhabi (<http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=53933>). The Club represents falconers in the UAE. It was founded in 2001. Its main aim is to preserve the traditions of falconry for future generations, mainly through a series of educational and conservation initiatives. It is actively engaged in international issues affecting falconry. It is involved in Houbara bustard conservation projects, reviewing classifications of wild falcons according to the convention and the United Nations Environment Programme, and the conservation of migratory species. Most importantly, it advocates and supports the international efforts of various countries of the world for the registration of falconry in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

According to Majid Al Mansouri, Executive Director of the EFC, the founding of the club is in line with the vision of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan and supplemented by the vision of Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan – to contribute to the conservation of falcon populations in the world. Among other things, it is carried out by falconers in the Arabian Peninsula freeing trained falcons after the winter season. The falconers release them in the spring and capture them again in autumn. In winter, they use the falcons to hunt. This way it is repeated every year.

By visiting the Falconers' Club, we reminded ourselves of the friendly atmosphere of Desert Camp. Furthermore, it was enhanced by dining under the open sky and sipping tea or coffee. Over the entire area of the club, the smiling natives would offer us tea with a kettle and glasses in hand. At the open fires under the night sky, we would again be offered authentic Arabian coffee, after which it was problematic to fall asleep, but also after tea.

Fresh memories were magnified by friendly greetings with native falconers with falcons on their hands, protected by a Mangla or resting on perches, in front of the biggest traditional tent that I ever had the opportunity to see. On the front side, it was open, without a wall. It revealed in red-and-white patterns. Perhaps it was because of this that it looked so monumental. I think it was almost the length of 100m.

The shuttle bus transport between the hotels and tent city, with an arena for the "Grand Parade", was problem-free over the whole duration of the festival.

On Thursday December 11th, 2014, the **Third International Festival of Falconry** continued, in the tent city and in the arena of Al Forsan Sports Resort.

In the presence of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of UAE, the festival was inaugurated by Majid Al Mansouri, Executive Director of the Emirates Falconers' Club. He emphasized that falconry is very important, as it reaches into the depths of Arabian culture. The image of a falcon is even on the national emblem of the UAE. Falconry has been practiced in Arabia for thousands of years. Not only as a necessity, but also as a source of socialization and development of the country. Today, it has become a culture. The Falconry Festival represents this cultural heritage as one of the forms of its preservation. The idea of the festival was started by Sheikh Zayed in 1976. It was revived in 2011, when the city of Al Ain and falconry in the UAE were registered on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, particularly thanks to the multi-national initiative led by the UAE. "The meeting of more than 800 people from 92 countries is the largest gathering of falconers in the world. We plan to organize it every three years", said Al Mansouri.

At the festival, each state had its own national tent, with the dimensions of 5 x 5 meters. Larger states or more states together, such as “Balkan countries”, had two connected tents, that is 5 x 10 meters. In each tent, there was electricity. There was also a video player with a large plasma TV, large fans on stands and a table with chairs. Organizers printed large-sized photographs and banners, from previously sent documents, which they installed in the tents during construction, as required by individual countries. Other exhibits, banners, photographs and various falconry equipment were brought by the delegates themselves. Here, each state tried to present many things about falconry and the culture of their country. The vast majority of delegates brought their national costumes. Almost every club tried to distinguish themselves by uniform clothing. At minimum, by T-shirts of the same color, with the emblem or logo of the club.

Part of the festival was also formed by an exhibition of photographs, works of art, jewelry and costumes, as well as presentation of the arts by invited singers, dancers, poets and writers dedicated to falconry.

Some delegates also managed to get in touch with the embassies of their countries in the UAE, which assisted them in their national presentation at the festival and provided universal support and assistance. Here, I would like to highlight the Ambassador of the Slovak Republic in Abu Dhabi, Mr. Ing. Dušan Horniak with his wife Tatiana, who were officially invited by the organizers to the Opening Ceremony, where they took the place of honor on the grandstand. With thanks, I approve of their visit with Mr. Ľubomír Lúčan, Deputy Head of Mission and Consul, with his family in the “Heritage Exhibit” tent, where I was delegated to work by the organizers. We worked in a team of falconry heritage under the leadership of David Horobin, together with his father John Horobin, Paul Beecroft from England and Peter Devers from the United States. The Ambassador, with his Deputy Head of Mission, together with their families, also visited the exhibition of the Elementary school with Kindergarten of Maximilian Hell in Štiavnické Bane, as well as the national tent of the Slovak Republic. The greater was our joy, when they visited us with their family members also the next day.

During the three days, falconers from many nations presented their birds of prey and training techniques in the established arena. Every afternoon at 4:00 PM, a formal, national procession was held – named “Grand Parade”. Falconers from all participating countries marched, with birds of prey on their hands, in front of the grandstand. Inspired by the Olympics, most of the delegations were dressed in uniforms or national costumes. Each delegation was led by a representative of the country, who carried the state flag and another carried a sign with the name of their country.

The falconers were greeted with and rewarded by applause from the stands, by the highest representatives of the UAE and representatives of the coordinating organizations. Also by Ambassadors of the individual countries and other guests, invited personally in writing by the President of the UAE.

In parallel with the Festival, a two-day conference of the IAF took place in the conference rooms of Al Forsan hotel. The first day it was moderated by His Excellency Dr. Awad Ali Saleh from the UAE, and the next day by Dr. Andrew Dixon from England.

Every day, a series of lectures and seminars took place, where experts from all around the world discussed topics related to the protection of birds of prey, conservation of their natural environment (and potential prey), falconry education, veterinary care, the use of dogs during falconry hunts, practical falconry,

rehabilitation of birds of prey, creating a world internet forum to promote falconry, as well as conservation of falconry as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity, registration of falconry in other countries around the world on the UNESCO list.

On the first day of the IAF Conference, Germany, Italy, Pakistan and Kazakhstan announced their intention to join the UAE and 13 other states, where falconry is already inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. On the other hand, some nations expressed their concerns that falconry in their country is dying, because hunting with birds of prey is banned in their country. "Hunting is only part of falconry. There is so much more to it, so many traditions tied to it. Ultimately, falconry is a message, a cultural symbol, a way to teach our children about this heritage," pointed out His Excellency Dr. Awad Ali Saleh, Chairman of the UNESCO Action Plans for Falconry. Children themselves were the first visitors of the festival, which was opened on Thursday morning at Al Forsan Sports Resort in Abu Dhabi.

"The two-day seminar, organized by Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority (TCA Abu Dhabi), will bring bigger hope for Germany, Italy, Pakistan and Kazakhstan together with the United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Morocco, Syria, Belgium, Austria, Hungary, France, the Czech Republic, Mongolia, Korea and Spain. Including these four countries is the next logical step following the addition of Austria and Hungary in 2012. The joint international file provides guarantees for all countries that comply with the requirements for registration", said Dr. Nasser Ali Al Humairi, Director of the Intangible Heritage Department at TCA Abu Dhabi (http://www.uaeinteract.com/docs/Abu_Dhabi_to_host_UNESCO_state_parties_falconry_expansion_workshop/67108.htm).

The festival ended on Saturday, December 13th, 2014, with a social evening, in the natural open-air amphitheater in front of Al Forsan Hotel. Traditional Arab sofas were arranged around tables on the terraces. Below, in the area behind the tables, waiters stood with stainless steel containers, ready to offer meals, desserts, fruit and beverages, accompanied by Arabian music. Finally, an Arab music band had a performance. After this beautiful dinner, full of impressions and unforgettable experiences, we realized that the festival had ended. Now, only a bus trip to the hotels and packing up for home awaited us.

Besides the national delegates, many other officials of falconry organizations, experts, researchers, exhibitors, falconry coaches, writers, artists, painters, sculptors, photographers and journalists specialized in falconry attended the festival, from all around the world.

"The first time, delegates were guests in the UAE in the city of Al Ain in December 2011. For the second time, it was on this Third International Festival of Falconry in Abu Dhabi. This time, however, we have even more participants - more than 800 falconers from even more countries - 92 countries of the world," said Abdullah Butti Al-Qubaisi, Director of Projects Management at the Cultural Programmes and Heritage Festivals Committee - Abu Dhabi.

"One of the most important aspects of the festival this year is the Conference on falconry, where around 50 experts will discuss all issues related to falconry, including UNESCO Action Plans for falconry," concluded Al-Qubaisi.

(<http://www.dayofdubai.com/news/hoods-luers-yurts-kalpaks-and-mighty-birds-800-falconers-80-countries-arrive-abu-dhabis-al#sthash.wxPLYXqw.dpuf>).

The last night before packing was used by some to bathe in the swimming pool on the 20th floor of the 25-storey hotel. Then we said goodbye to our friends and moved

to the airport in Abu Dhabi by the prepared buses. The representatives of Slovakia departed together at 02:40 AM, by the Airbus A320 that would arrive at the Austrian Schwechat airport at 09:05 AM, again with a time shift of 3 hours. Here, our family members were waiting for us, with whom we returned home.

I am extremely happy that thanks to my books on falconry, I had the honor to take part in this grand, global celebration of falconry for the second time. On behalf of all participants, I sincerely thank the highest government officials of the United Arab Emirates, the sponsors and organizers, for making this wonderful festival a reality, very beneficial for world falconry.

Author's Note. If any of the links does not open directly, please copy it into your browser.

Text and photographs © Tomáš Krivjanský, <http://krivjansky.sk/>
Translation by Zuzana Sroková, Bc. and Tatiana Horniaková, MSc., Bratislava

Bratislava 10. 11. 2016, Slovak Republic

All of my photos from the festival
Refer to the attached links:

<http://krivjansky.sk/>

<http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/>

http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141206_0_iff_uae_vienna-schwechat-airport/

http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141207_1_desercamp-dc_registration-before/

http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141207_2_dc_conference-on-practical-falconry/

http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141207_3_dc_practical-falconry/

http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141207_4_dc_dinner-in-the-restaurant-tent/

http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141208_5_dc_he-mohamed-al-bowardi-and-evening-socials/

http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141208_1_dc_until-lunch/

http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141208_3_dc_hh-mohammed-bin-zayed-al-nahyan-crown-prince-of-abu-dhabi/

http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141208_4_dc_sand-dune-cinema/

http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141208_5_dc_he-mohamed-al-bowardi-and-evening-socials/

http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141209_1_excursion_the-sheikh-zayed-grand-mosque/

http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141209_2_excursion_the-falcon-hospital/

http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141209_3_excursion-to-the-formula-premises-and-supermarket-rush-berlesque/

http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141209_4_excursion-and-quests-43-spirit-of-the-union-uae/

http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141209_5_dc_final-night/

http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141210_1_departure-buses-of-the-desert-camp-into-abu-dhabi-al-forsan/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141210_2_flying-events-and-social-bbq-at-the-abu-dhabi-falconers-club/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141211_1_af_preparation-tent-heritage-exhibit/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141211_3_af_participation-in-the-uae-of-the-ambassador-of-the-slr-ing-dusan-horniak-with-wife/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141211_4_af_public-festival-closes/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141212_1_af_representatives-and-the-national-tents/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141212_3_af_mansouri_deputy-ambassador-sr-lucan_saleh-in-a-tent-he/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141212_4_-af_international-initiatives-exhibits/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141212_5_af_arena-events-grand-parade/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141212_6_af_refreshment/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141212_6_af_refreshment/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141212_7_af_children-tents/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141212_8_af_restaurants-food-of-participants/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141212_9_falconers-gala-dinner-and-concert/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141212_10_af_public-festival-closes/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141213_1_view-from-rooms-507-hotel-centro-by-rotana/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141213_2_yet-look-into-the-tent/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141213_3_af_arena-events/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141213_4_af_restaurants-food-of-participants/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141213_5_af_during-lunch-you-had-fun-karts/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141213_6_af_exposure-of-abu-dhabi-falcon-hospital/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141213_7_my-book-in-abu-dhabi-bought-almost-all-the-world/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141213_8_af_tent-heritage-exhibit/
http://www.krivjansky.sk/fotogaleria-2014/gallery/20141213_9_in-the-centro-hotel-before-heading-home/



His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of the UAE, and the top representatives of the SAE executive at the opening of the festival



تحت رعاية
صاحب السمو الشيخ خليفة بن زايد آل نهيان
رئيس دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة حفظه الله

3rd International
Festival of
Falconry



مهرجان الصداقة
الدولي الثالث
للبيزرة



falconryfestival.ae

#FalconryFestival

برنامج الفعاليات

13 - 7 ديسمبر 2014، أبوظبي، الإمارات | www.falconryfestival.com

