



A Word from the IAF President 2018:

In this year's contribution to the IAF Journal of Falconry, and in what will be my last "Word from the President", I thought it would be appropriate to reflect on the is relevance of falconry and what the future of our Art may be. As falconers, how do we stand in relation to our Art and do we have responsibilities beyond caring for our hawk and flying it to the best of our ability?

Since the recognition of falconry by the UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2010, falconers around the world have shared the news of this recognition. We have celebrated it through World Falconry Day and through a series of International Festivals. We proclaim it to governments, conferences and to almost any group of people who will listen to us. Only the most isolated and uninformed of falconers can be unaware of this treasured status which our Art enjoys. What is less well appreciated is exactly what this status means. What actually is an "intangible cultural heritage"? What are the rights, responsibilities and obligations which accompany this status and to whom do they extend?

I heard a recent radio announcement that France had proposed that the *baguette* be recognised as a cultural heritage. This announcement may have amused me had I not heard something else on the radio some weeks before. In the earlier program, a baker was being interviewed and a listener phoned in with a question. He had lived in France for some years and had come to love baguettes but since returning to South Africa he could not find a baguette that tasted nearly as good as a French one – "why was this?". "Ah", replied the baker, "tell me when you plan to come by my shop and I will try to make you one". For me, this information was like switching on a light! A baguette is made of water flour, salt and yeast – how difficult can it be to make? Clearly there is skill and technique and this is known to French bakers. Taken to the extreme, if the last baguette-maker were to die, the art of making baguettes would disappear; a tragedy for the French at least! That then is the relevance of "Intangible Cultural Heritage" and how we can explain the significance of this convention.

The Falconry submission which was originally recognised by the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage included 11 nations. Since then, other nations have joined the submission and there are now 18 nations included which make this by far the largest multinational submission to the convention. These nations all have an obligation to safeguard falconry within their nation and to ensure that its practice is developed and supported. The United Arab Emirates, as the lead nation within this international submission, has special obligations in promoting falconry and coordinating this submission. The UAE certainly meets its obligations through its support for falconry, through the International Festivals which promote the Art and through arranging meetings of the submitting nations to develop and coordinate new submissions. But 195 nations have now ratified the convention. This means that these 195 nations recognize and agree that falconry is an element which is deemed worthy of safeguarding by the Convention. What of those nations which have not yet ratified the convention? Surely, they have, at least, a moral obligation to recognize the value set on the elements, such as falconry, which are safeguarded through this convention by nations representing the majority of humanity.

The purposes of this convention are listed as:



- (a) to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage;
- (b) to ensure respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned;
- (c) to raise awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage, and of ensuring mutual appreciation thereof;
- (d) to provide for international cooperation and assistance.

Not only governments have obligations in terms of this Convention. The IAF is an Advisory NGO to the Convention and, as such, we have an obligation to meet the purposes of the Convention and to safeguard and promote the practice of falconry. But ordinary individual falconers also have obligations, whether stated or not, to promote the purposes of this convention. With privileges and rights come responsibilities and this does mean that individual falconers must also have an obligation to safeguard and promote falconry. This must include ensuring the passage of skills to the next generation. In 2017, the IAF supported the Emirates Falconry Club to develop and hold the 4th International Falconry Festival in Abu Dhabi. The theme for the event was set by our hosts as “Developing the Youth in Falconry” and this is entirely in line with the purposes of the Convention. The IAF was tasked to invite youth representatives from the over 90 nations around the world where falconry is practiced. In fulfilling this objective, we were astonished at a number of national representatives that responded that they had no youth to send! This is disastrous for falconry in those nations! During this, the second golden age of falconry, if you have no youth involved in your falconry, your falconry has no future. Moreover, you are failing in your obligations to our Art.

Having noted the apparent absence of young falconers from some countries, it was also exciting to meet the many capable and skilled young falconers who attended from every corner of the globe. The Desert Camp was held at the Sheikh Mohammed School for Falconry and Desert Physiognomy. This is a magnificent facility designed to teach young Emiratis, including girls, falconry and the traditional skills of desert life. Attending the Festival, we had groups of youth from schools where falconry is part of the curriculum coming from diverse countries including Spain, Slovakia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. There were eloquent young Japanese falconers, a growing contingent of skilled young falconers from China, from Pakistan, Morocco, Egypt and from South America. There were young falconers from countries where falconry is not expected, including Australia, Cuba and Papua New Guinea! If we had alarm over those countries that could produce no youth, there is ample evidence that falconry is alive, well and developing and not only from those countries which are traditionally associated with our Art.

The growth of falconry may be impeded in countries for political reasons. Repressive regimes may suppress falconry such as was seen in some states during the former Soviet Communist era but we are now seeing a resurgence of falconry in these nations. Security and criminal activity can also be a factor as we see in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Falconry continues in Afghanistan and we have established links with falconers in that country while they may be inhibited from joining international gatherings. Where falconry is associated with former colonial rulers or elitist regimes,



it may be outlawed as in Kenya and India and these prejudices are difficult to overcome. One of the most exciting developments in recent years has been the apparent resurgence or unveiling of falconry in China where the government is seeking to create a legitimate framework for this traditional art. Falconers need to be resilient and patient under difficult circumstances but we need not tolerate unreasonable prejudice.

The IAF is playing an increasing role in responding to legislation and regulations which affect falconry in countries all around the world. This is a result of our increased capacity but also of an increasingly regulatory approach in many countries. We see the influence of growing animal rights pressures. Falconers must be alert to the development of new regulations which may affect them and need to involve the IAF in providing advice and responses as early as possible. One piece of legislation where we have intervened needs special mention. Legislation has been pushed through the Polish Parliament with what would appear to be inadequate notice and public participation for a European Union nation. This legislation forbids youth under the age of 18 from participating in or attending hunting activities. The legislation can be seen to be aimed at undermining the safeguarding on intangible cultural heritage and is obscene in that it prevents young people from enjoying healthy outdoor activities which bring them into contact with nature. Worse still, this legislation would appear to violate basic Human Rights. It is a fundamental right for parents to educate their children according to their own beliefs and customs and this legislation fails to respect this. Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights reads: *"the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions"*. May a falconer not share the falconry experience with his or her child? It remains to be seen how effective the IAF response will be but I fear this particular fight is far from over. We are entitled to a deep anger over such absurdity but we must also be aware of the increasingly fascist approach of the Animal Rights movement.

Human history is crowded with evidence of intolerance. The intolerance for different religions, races and political philosophies has resulted in wars, vicious repression and genocide. We live in an era where people try, consciously, to overcome such intolerance and we have established international Human Rights which are designed to ensure that we respect people's differences and avoid the horrific excesses of past history. Why is it then that the Animal Rights movement is apparently immune to such restraints? When we see the outpourings of critics of hunting there is a frequently repeated refrain: "I do not understand how they can kill an animal". This lack of understanding is then the justification for calls to ban hunting and for the vilification of hunters on social media frenzies. The lack of understanding of other people, about their customs and their religious beliefs has been the justification of past and even present excesses; now hunters face this same "demonization" and we face it because people are becoming more urbanized and they no longer understand the natural world and our association with it.

While we decry legislation that stops young people from going into the field to accompany a falconer or to practice falconry it is worth pausing to consider why they should be permitted or even encouraged to do this. There is an increasing urbanization for the world's 7 billion people and now over 50% of the world's population is urbanized. Our numbers and activities are irrevocably altering the earth, changing the climate and bringing about a new era in the Earth's history: the Anthropocene. Unless we respect the planet on which we live, we and life as we know it will not



survive. We need to retain links to the earth and understand the natural world if we are to have the wisdom to manage the future of ourselves and all biodiversity.

In 1857 the US Government used “eminent domain” to seize 840 acres of land in the centre of New York City. This was to become a semi-wilderness area within the city, known as Central Park, and was expected to “improve the moral character of even the poorest of New Yorkers”. So, over 150 years ago, it was appreciated that there was a need to create natural areas for the wellbeing of city dwellers. There is the clear perception that it is beneficial for humans in cities to maintain some link with nature. This link need not be hunting and there are myriad of pursuits, such as hiking and bird watching, that can link people with nature and contribute to human health and mental wellbeing. There is, however, something special about hunting activities in that they bring people into intimate contact with wildlife, with the laws of nature and with the natural environment. Hunting engenders a special respect for nature and for wild creatures and inevitably promotes conservation of the natural world. Falconry can be seen to stand out among hunting disciplines because of the very special relationship which falconers enjoy with their hawk. A falconer is never more than a hunting partner in the hawk’s endeavour to practice what survival demands of it and what is its natural destiny. The raptor’s life is full of what we, as humans, see to be dramatic and exciting. Falconers work extremely hard and with great patience, to enjoy this privileged relationship. Should we tolerate legislation that denies this privilege? Should we cower because people decry what we do through ignorance – because they “cannot understand”?

The late Sheikh Zayed, God protect his soul, said, in his wisdom:

“Falconry is a constant reminder to us of the forces of nature, of the inter-relationship between living things and the land they share, and of our own dependence on Nature.”

So, we see that hunting and particularly falconry have a significant role to play in the preservation of nature and the survival of biodiversity through retaining the links to nature and overcoming the lack of understanding. Falconry will survive and flourish if we meet our obligations and pass the baton to the next generation. In the course of my falconry career I have had a number of youngsters who have suffered as my “apprentices”. I must now acknowledge that they have all reached a level where their skills far exceed those of the “master” but I also know that nothing gives me greater pleasure than accompanying them into the field. Were that all my investments should be so profitable!

So, falconers must continue to take the field with their hawks and they should remember to take a youngster with them. The IAF will continue to support them in their Art and to defend their right to practice our shared heritage. Please support us as we support you.

Adrian Lombard, IAF President

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