

COMMENTARY

C.I.T.E.S. CLASSIFICATION OF THE GYRFALCON

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The status of the Gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolous*) in Canada was a topic discussed at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (C.I.T.E.S.) conference held 22 April–3 May 1985 in Argentina. Canada opposed foreign proposals which would interfere with the international trade of three species of wildlife. The one proposal accepted by the Convention, despite Canadian opposition, regarded the North American population of the Gyrfalcon. Until March 1981, all populations of Gyrfalcon were listed in Appendix I. Appendix I status is reserved for endangered species and prohibits export and import for commercial purposes. The North American population of the species was moved to Appendix II at the C.I.T.E.S. Conference in 1981. Old and New World Gyrfalcon populations have been treated differently under C.I.T.E.S.

Denmark and Norway proposed that the North American population be moved from Appendix II classification to Appendix I at the Argentina Convention (effective 1 August 1985). Under Appendix II classification, international trade was permitted with the Gyrfalcon by the Canadian government in some provinces. Denmark and Norway noted dramatic declines in Gyrfalcon populations in Iceland, Greenland, Norway, Sweden and Finland in their proposal to the Convention. The proposal went on to state that "Very little information exists regarding the Canadian population . . . status in Canada is so poorly understood that it remains unclassified by The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Although

it has recently been under consideration for inclusion on Canada's endangered species list . . . , harvests have proceeded in two Canadian territories in recent years." On the other hand, Canadian Wildlife Service officials have stated that the Gyrfalcon's numbers in Canada are far greater than those in other countries.

Also cited in the proposal was the increase in illegal trade of Canadian Gyrfalcons. "Illegal trade . . . is apparently escalating to meet an increasing demand for the species, principally by falconers. White gyrs are the most highly prized colour phase, and the Canadian population contains some of the whitest gyrs in the world." As pointed out by Canadian Wildlife Service officials, black market trade in any species is not documented through government channels, and placing the Gyrfalcon in Appendix I will not measurably affect illegal trade but will affect those involved in legal trade.

Canada intends to make a proposal to move the North American population of the Gyrfalcon back to Appendix II at the next C.I.T.E.S. Convention to be held in Ottawa, Ontario, 12–24 July 1987. Classification of a species in a C.I.T.E.S. appendix is normally based upon the biological status of the species in question. The reclassification of the Gyrfalcon was not based upon a biological status of the species *per se*, but rather upon law enforcement difficulties involved with legal trade. The apparent precedent which the Parties have now set is cause for considerable concern.—**Jimmie R. Parrish and Clayton M. White.**