

> *BELOW:* DR MARGIT GABRIELE MULLER IS ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS FALCON VETERINARIANES IN THE WORLD. *OPPOSITE:* FALCONS ARE FANTASTIC BIRDS, SO MAJESTIC, AND YET SO DELICATE.

> *CI-DESSOUS:* LE DR MARGIT GABRIELE MULLER EST L'UN DES VÉTÉRINAIRES POUR FAUCONS LES PLUS RÉPUTÉS AU MONDE. *CI-CONTRE:* LES FAUCONS SONT DES OISEAUX FANTASTIQUES, TELLEMENT MAJESTUEUX MAIS EN MÊME TEMPS TRÈS FRAGILES.

ATTENDING TO THE FALCONS' EVERY NEEDS

AS AN ANCESTRAL TRADITION, FALCONRY OCCUPIES A PRIVILEGED PLACE IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES. THE FALCON IS ITS VERY SOUL. IN ABU DHABI, THERE IS A HOSPITAL DEDICATED TO IT: THE ABU DHABI FALCON HOSPITAL, MANAGED BY A GERMAN, DR MARGIT GABRIELE MULLER.

They resemble little prie-dieu, covered in a sort of synthetic green carpeting. Positioned among the chairs in the waiting room and the table covered in magazines, you hardly notice them. The visitor wonders what on earth can be their use, but doesn't dwell on the question. This is the Abu Dhabi hospital for falcons and the objective is to see the falcons, these majestic birds that are the focal point of the United Emirates tradition. Opening the door into the examination room, the purpose of strange prie-dieu becomes evident. Ten falcons or so, their heads hooded so that they don't attack each other, patiently await their turn, perched on these

funny little seats. However, there is one exception. Like a bothersome pupil, it keeps on getting off its perch and moving around. A vet scolds it from the back of the room and it resumes its position. Then a few minutes later, it starts again, and doesn't stop until its turn comes. This falcon is one of the 6,000 that the head of the hospital, Dr Margit Gabriele Muller, has been treating each year, since 2001. "I was offered this position, and I came straight away to Abu Dhabi. It was a great surprise, but it was the best decision of my life."





> SOME FALCONS CAN BE WORTH SEVERAL HUNDRED THOUSANDS OF FRANCS.

> CERTAINS FAUCONS PEUVENT VALOIR PLUSIEURS CENTAINES DE MILLIERS DE FRANCS.



Dr Muller is one of the most famous falcon veterinarians in the world. She has been working with falcons and birds of prey for 16 years and with cats, dogs and other animals for 13 years. Her doctor's thesis, successfully submitted in 1999 at Munich University, was about "Studies on bumblefoot in falcons used for hunting in the United Arab Emirates".

A graduate in veterinary dentistry and homeopathy, and a member of the Royal College of Veterinary

Surgeons in England, she is also the author of a reference book, *Practical Handbook of Falcon Husbandry and Medicine*, and in January 2012, she is going to publish a work entitled *Modern Veterinary Practice Management*. She has also discovered two diseases affecting falcons. In 2008, Dr Muller won the Abu Dhabi Award, one of the most prestigious distinctions in Abu Dhabi. "There's been a long relationship between falcons and me", she confirms. "They are absolutely fantastic birds, so majestic, and yet so delicate. Working with them and treating them presents a permanent challenge. They are so beautiful and each one has its own character, making them so impressive.

Once I had started working with them I couldn't let them go. The Falcons' Hospital of Abu Dhabi has given me the opportunity of caring for over 40,000 falcons. This wide experience obliges me to share my knowledge with veterinarians and students all over the world."

The Abu Dhabi Falcons' Hospital, opened in October 1999, is the first public hospital in the United Arab Emirates. Today it is the largest in the world and its patients come for many different countries, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain.

"We are also the world leader in falcon medicine and we offer courses for veterinarians and students," explains Dr Muller.

PRACTICAL INFO

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“Furthermore, since 2007, the hospital has been open to the public, so that people interested from the United Arab Emirates and all over the world can come and get to know these magnificent birds of prey.” At the same time, the falcons’ hospital has become one of Abu Dhabi’s ten most popular tourist attractions and has gained 13 awards in the United States, England, Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy, Spain and Belgium. State of the art equipment, including two endoscopic machines, enabling procedures to be conducted simultaneously with the possibility of digital recording, allows the highest possible quality of patient treatment. “Falcons require specific treatments, just as children do,” explains Dr Muller. “Over recent years, the hospital has placed the emphasis on prevention, encouraging falconers to bring in their falcons for basic treatment, such as vaccination, claw and beak filing, and general physical examination. This includes examinations before and after the falcons’ moulting season.” Veterinaries can also mend feathers broken during flight accidents or

collisions with their prey or obstacles. Falcons can also fall victim to diseases from parasites, bacteria and fungal infections. These are transmitted by the prey, if the falcon does not hunt the strongest, but another easier to catch, which may be infected. “During the hunting season, we have many cases of broken wings that have to be treated surgically. Operations on broken bones are the longest performed on falcons. They can last up to three and a half hours. This type of surgery is very difficult and very delicate, as we are dealing with spots that are smaller than a postage stamp,” Dr Muller explains.

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> 1 & 2 THE ABU DHABI FALCON HOSPITAL TREATS SOME 6,000 FALCONS EACH YEAR.

> 1 & 2 L'HÔPITAL DES FAUCONS D'ABU DHABI SOIGNE QUELQUE 6000 FAUCONS PAR ANNÉE.

Like real stars, falcons, which can be worth several hundred thousands of francs, have their own passports. This means that the falcon is extremely threatened, but also highly protected. “In the Emirates, falcons are trained twice daily, but hunting is forbidden. As a result, falconers go abroad to hunt with their falcons. However, as falcons are a protected breed, they cannot travel without an export-import permit. To make procedures easier, the United Emirates was the first country in the world to introduce a passport for falcons, so that each falcon travels under its own passport,” confirms Dr Muller. Outside the hospital, some falcons that are convalescing are lazily asleep in vast aviaries. Perhaps they are already dreaming of their next hunting expedition somewhere in a desert of golden sands. ■

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