

HOME EDITORIAL OPINION NATION BUSINESS REGION INTERNATIONAL APPOINTMENTS USED CARS  
 CLASSIFIED GOLD/FOREX PROPERTIES SPORTS

NATION

[Khaleej Times Online](#) >> [News](#) >> [NATION](#)

## Devoted to the Cause of Falcons

Silvia Radan  
 by Manuel Salaza

7 January 2009

[Print](#)



[E-mail](#)



ABU DHABI - A brown envelope reaches Dr Margit Muller's desk and she smiles as she finds inside, her pictures with General Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, during the Abu Dhabi Awards.



Dr Margit Muller was presented the Abu Dhabi Award for the discovery and treatment of a new disease in falcons.

"In falcons, we found the first case in 2006. At first we didn't know what it was. It was not something you could find in books. A big group of falcons were found dead or died the next day. We did tests after tests until I finally had my first suspicions of what it could be," Dr Muller said. Microsporidiosis is an infection caused by parasites, usually found in human beings infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

Just like in human beings, microsporidiosis can cause an infection of the intestine, lung, kidney, brain, sinuses, muscles, and eyes.

The symptoms were similar for all the birds — very tired, not flying well and in the more advanced cases they also had diarrhoea, severe dehydration, lack of appetite and vomiting.

"At first, the disease was too advanced and couldn't be proved. All tests for various other diseases came out negative, so we became desperate. We kept checking until we finally found it and we had a big surprise when we realised it had the same strain in humans too," said Dr Muller.

According to her, this was the first time the same strain was found in both humans and birds.

"Even before we established it was microsporidiosis, I thought it couldn't be anything else, so I designed a treatment, which worked," Dr Muller added.

"The whole treatment took between three to six weeks and the birds recovered to the point they were able to hunt again and you know that only perfectly healthy falcons can go hunting," Dr Muller said proudly.

It is not yet known how the falcons catch the disease or whether it can be transmitted from birds to humans and vice versa.

In fact, she revealed that right now a new disease is plaguing the falcons and she is working round the clock to find out what it is.

"I have my first suspicion, which still needs to be proved. If it's true, there is almost no treatment available for it," the doctor continued.

Dr Muller, who has a PhD in the study of falcons, used to work in Germany until one day she was invited to come here to bring the newly opened Falcon Hospital to international standards. She has been with the hospital in Abu Dhabi for seven years now.

"I love falcons because they are very special, majestic birds. They are big, heavy birds, weighing up to 1.2kg yet they have such a delicate nature, being constantly in need of good care.

"When a falcon comes to the hospital, you can see in its eyes that it wants to survive and it will fight for life.

"Of course, they can become very attached to people. Usually, when the owner comes to collect his bird, as soon as he opens the door, the falcon recognises him and starts looking very active and alert," the specialist said.

"I know an owner and a falcon where the 'relationship' was close. When they went to the desert, he never tied the bird. It could fly away anytime, but it used to jump around and sometimes made noises as if it trying to speak to the owner," Dr Muller said.

Not surprisingly, she is a falcon owner too, a four year old gyr-peregrin named Alia.

"I don't take her for hunting because I don't have time, but she is a naughty little lady, very dominant. She always wants to be the boss."

### A conference hall with falcons

ABU DHABI - It might be difficult to pay attention to the boss at a board meeting if there are falcons moving around in the room, but the Falcon Hospital assures that their (falcons) presence at conference facilities serve as an 'inspiration'.

The falcon hospital has grown to become the largest in the world helping thousands of birds, serving as the country's centre for avian flu contingency planning and is a tourist attraction.

But its latest facilities are a little different.

"It all started a few years back, when more and more visitors asked us if they could hold meetings here, so we finally decided to build a special conference room," Dr Muller said, "It will have falcons flying around."

Dr Muller said this should be an inspiration rather than a distraction to the participants.

And, of course, there is the tourism side of the hospital. For over a year, the Falcon Hospital is on the tourist trail of Abu Dhabi, along with the Shaikh Zayed Mosque and coffee at Emirates Palace.

"We now have morning and afternoon tours that last up to two hours or even longer if they include lunch. They are so popular that advanced booking is required," Dr Muller said.

From an annual capacity of 1,000 falcons in 2001, the hospital grew to accommodate 4,600 birds last year.

[silvia@khaleejtimes.com](mailto:silvia@khaleejtimes.com)



Print

E-mail

### Related News

[Warm Response to Dubai Cares Call for Gaza Relief Goods](#)

[Al Gharbia to Set up Entertainment Centres for Women](#)

[Construction Firms Told to Limit Work During Rainy Season](#)

[Financial Aid for Projects Linked to Action on Environment](#)

[Amateur Artists Invited to Art Trip to Hone Skills](#)

[Need to Improve Rescue Services](#)

[Click here More News](#)

[Properties](#) - [Appointments](#) - [Used Cars](#) - [Classifieds](#) - [Gold / Forex](#) - [Prayer Timings](#) - [NRI Problems](#) - [RSS Feed](#) - [Weather](#)

[Write to Us](#) | [About Us](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Careers](#)

Copyright © 2008 Khaleej Times