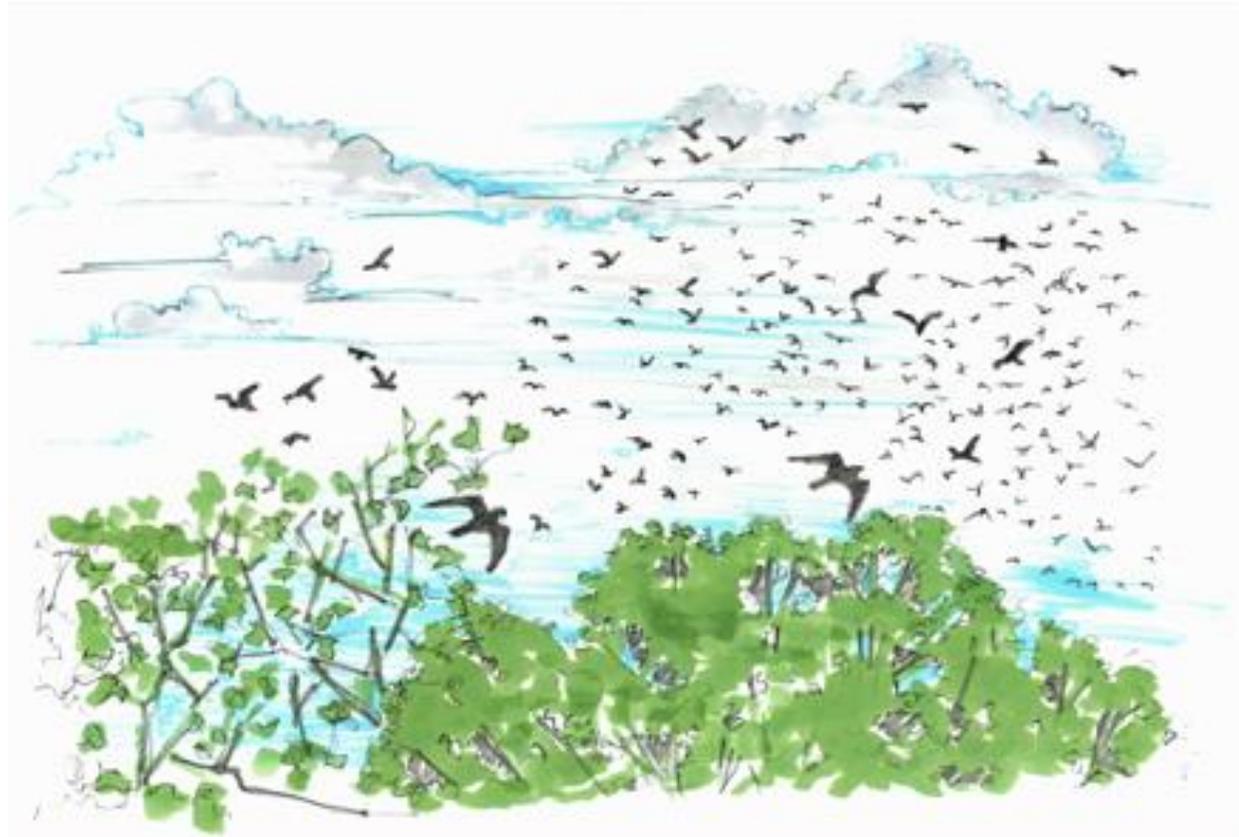


## Picture Story: Mighty Migrations

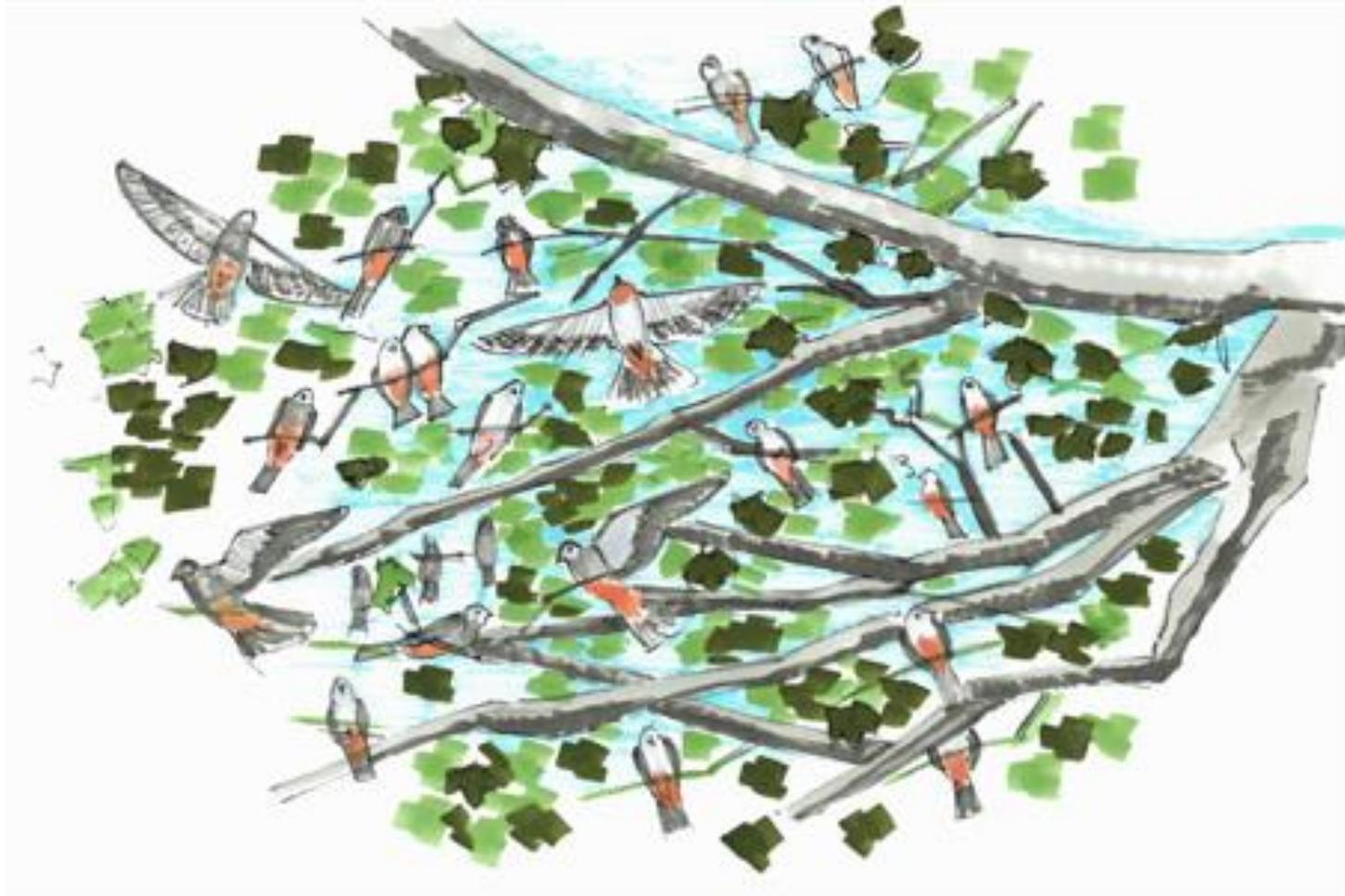
### A Mighty Falcon Migration (Based on a true story)

*Picture 1*



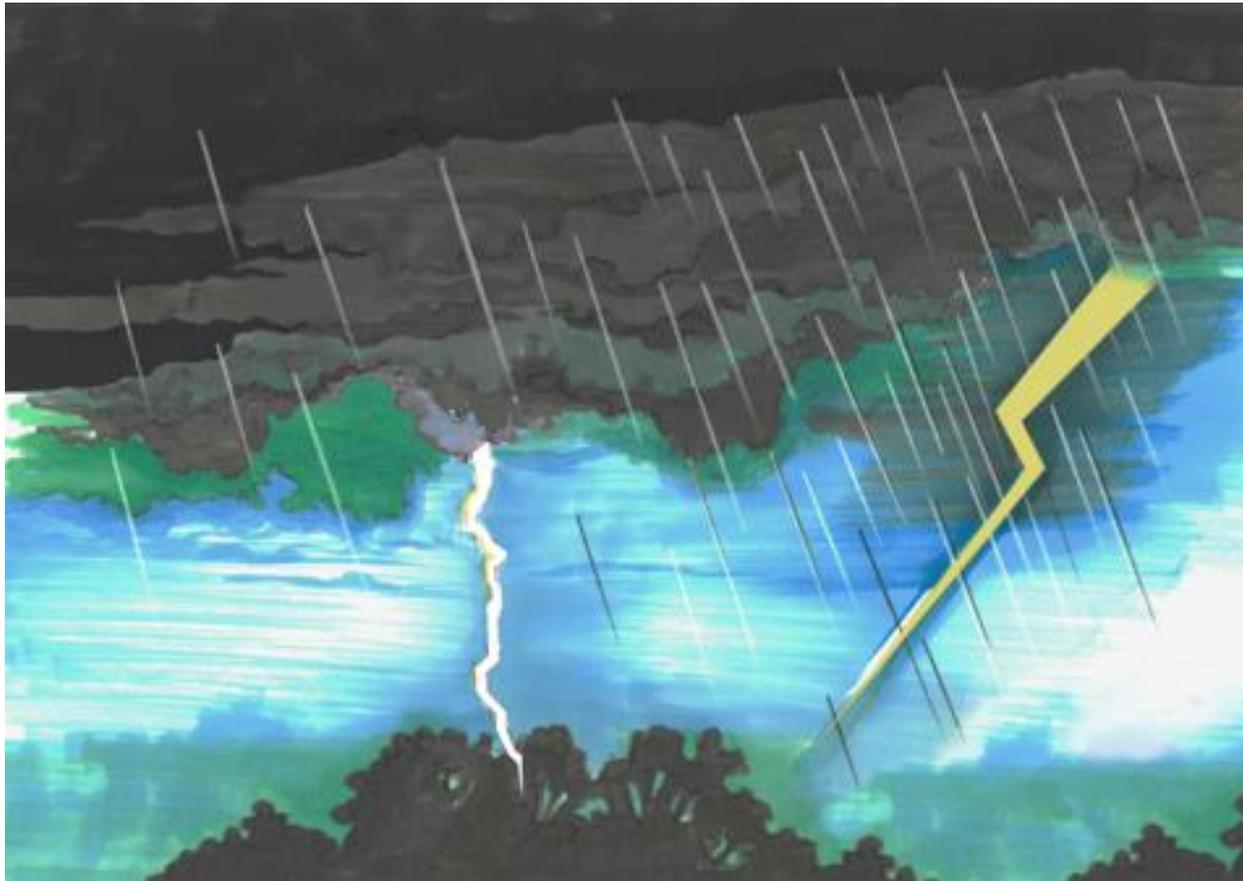
Our story starts in the town of Mooi River in KZN. It's a hot summer evening and everyone wishes it would rain, but the sky is clear. As its getting dark, hundreds of small birds fill the sky, flying in ever tightening circles towards one particular tree in the Spar parking area. It's the 9<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

*Picture 2*



They settle in the tree, one at a time, then 10 at a time, then 100, then 1000s all whistling gently to each other. The tree comes alive with Amur Falcons flocking to roost for the night.

*Picture 3*



Suddenly the sky darkens with storm clouds. The air has a sudden chill, the wind starts to gust in circles, the clouds are angry, green and voluptuous. **CRACK** the lightening splits the sky with a sharp blast of blinding light. The rain starts to fall, large, heavy drops at first, then thud, thud, thud, thud, thud, crash, crash, crash.

Oh no....its hailing.

*Picture 4*



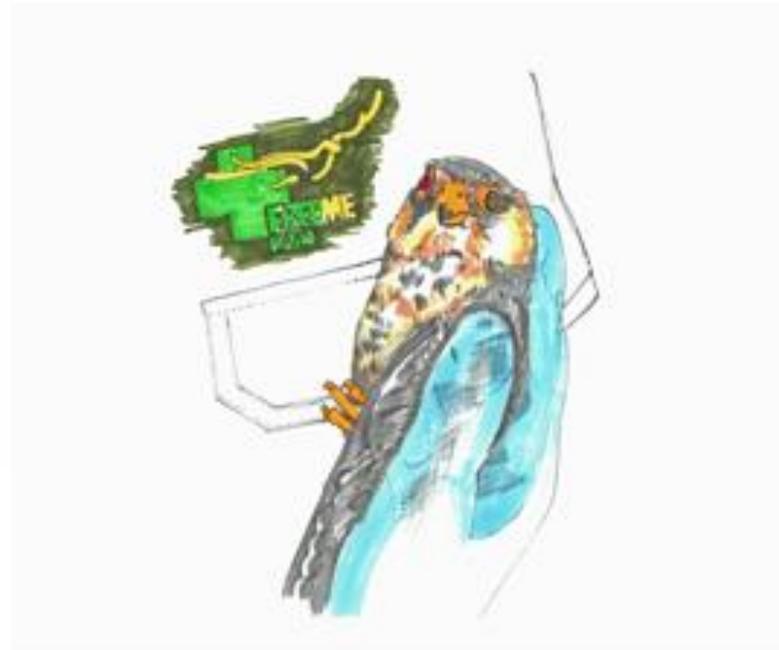
The hail stones get bigger and bigger until they are the size of golf balls. Then as suddenly as it started, the hail stops. The rain continues, but the scene is one of devastation. Hundreds, yes hundreds of Amur Falcons are now lying at the base of their roost covered in small ice rocks, debris and each other. Many are dead, some are calling, a plaintive wail, stunned, confused but still alive.

*Picture 5*



Free Me receives an SOS call at 18:45 from the Mooi River SPCA. Concerned SPCA and security staff and members of the general public have collected injured and dying birds – 1090 of them, and carefully put them into the back of bakkies and trailers to be transported to Free Me Rehabilitation Centre in Howick.

*Picture 6*



Kirsten responded immediately to the call for help. By 20:30 the injured birds were being attended to. She and her team were up all night treating the injuries, feeding the birds and calming them down.

*Picture 7*



There were many volunteers over the next few days that worked around the clock. The race was on because the falcons are about to start their epic journey, these injured birds cannot miss their flight!

*Picture 8*



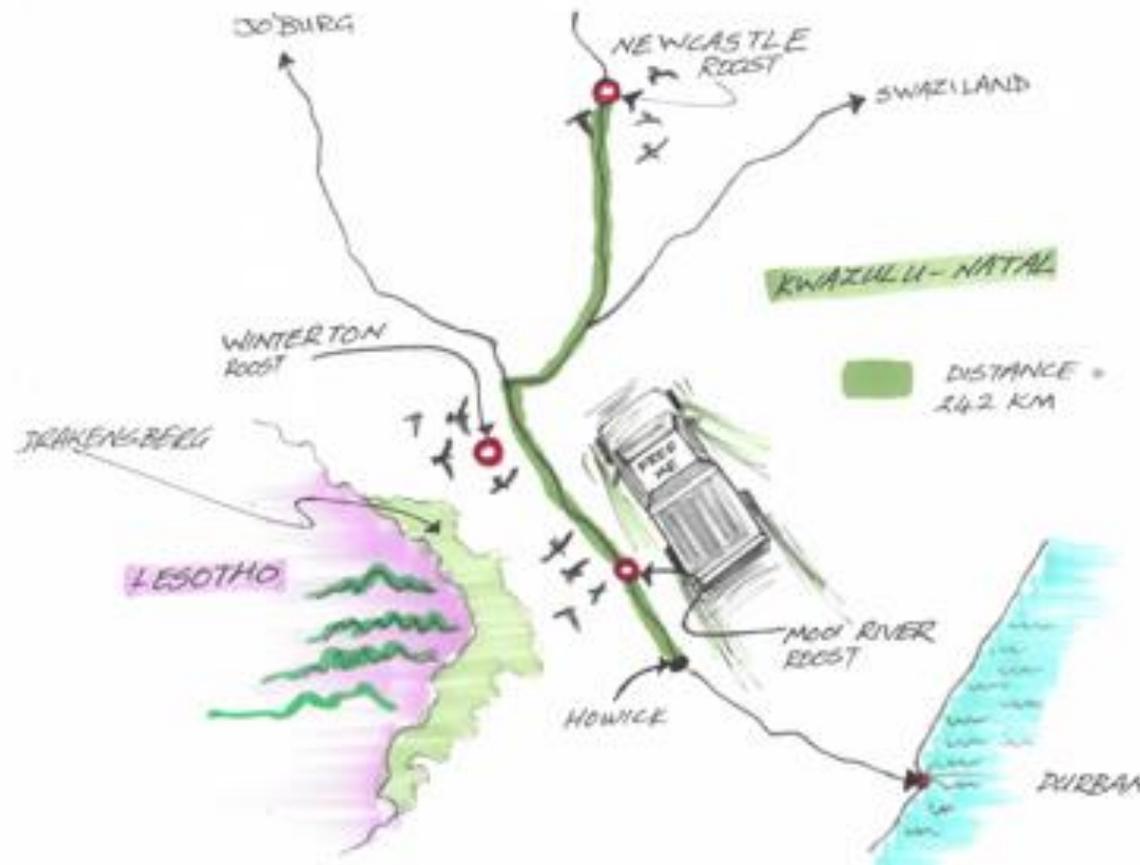
Every year in March the Amur Falcons gather in flocks in preparation for their long migration from South Africa to their breeding areas of south-eastern Siberia and northern China, around the Amur River - a distance of 22 000 kms! They will leave SA in March and arrive in April in time for the new breeding season. Their journey includes the longest sea crossing of any migratory bird of prey. They rest in Nagaland over the Doyang Reservoir before and after their epic flight. from tropical east Africa to west India – 4000 km non-stop! They fly high, above 1000 m to catch the strong winds that help them on their way.

*Picture 9*



By Monday 11th March 400 of the 1090 birds were released to re-join the flocking Amur Falcons in Mooi River.

Picture 10



March 22, 20:30. Kirsten is again woken up from her deep sleep by her cell phone ringing. Exhausted after a week of round the clock feeding and treating birds at Free Me she is dumbfounded to hear-  
 “Two thousand are dead, but 900 are injured”, said Wade. “We have to get to Newcastle ASAP, it’s a 3 hour drive”.  
 Another hail storm has hit the Farmer’s Hall roost in Newcastle where up to 10 000 Amur Falcons spend the night.

*Picture 11*



The birds are again rushed to Free Me clinic. Awaiting their arrival and ready to help are the now experienced volunteers, among them, Rina Pretorius. As she examines the injured birds she cannot believe her eyes - a female with a SAFRING on her leg. It can't be? It is! No 789 - a female Rina ringed not even a week ago, released on Monday has been hit by the hail AGAIN and survived AGAIN. She truly is an "Iron Lady".

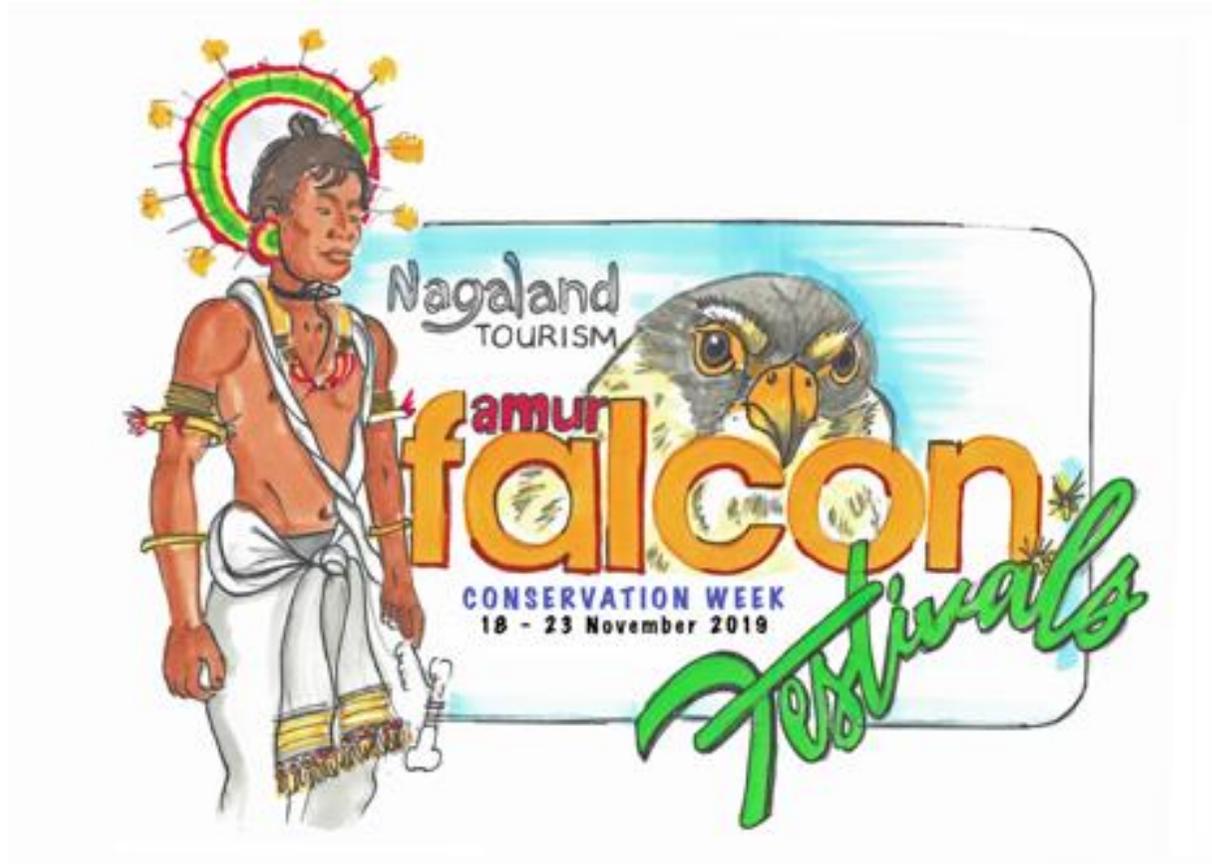
With a total of 1810 birds treated and released over a period of 2 weeks, the team at Free Me have miraculously managed to get the birds fit for their migration to northern China.

*Picture 12*



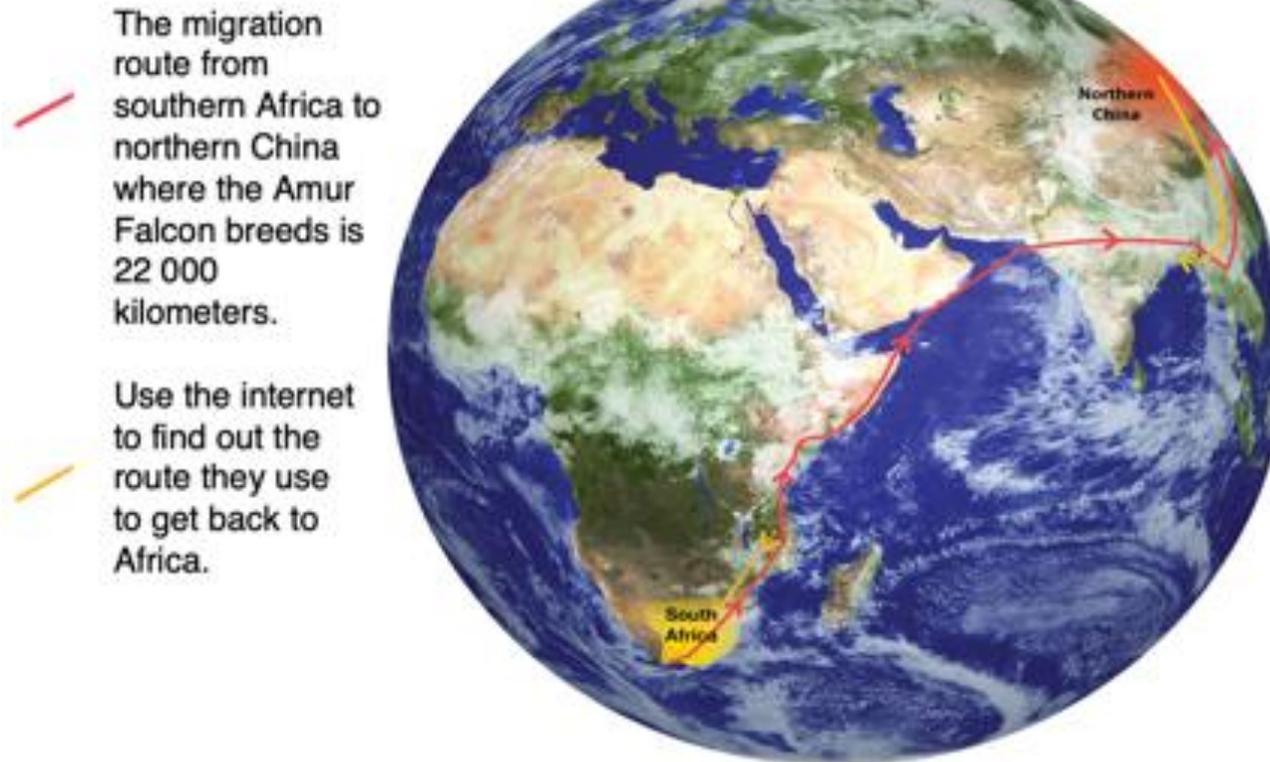
On the other side the world a male Amur Falcon called Naga, (named after Nagaland, the place where he was caught and fitted with a satellite tracking device), has flown 66 000 km in 3 years. Bird Life and conservation authorities in India have been educating people in north-east India about the Amur Falcon.

Picture 13



Up to a million Amur Falcons stop over at the Doyang Reservoir, Nagaland on their way to and from northern China and Siberia. The people in the area used to hunt the birds for food and to sell, but have decided to stop this practise once they learned how far these amazing birds migrate and now respect the falcon. The Amur Falcon Festival now takes place every year, to celebrate this conservation success story.

Picture 14



The Iron Lady has left South Africa to breed in her place of birth. Her SAFRING is her identification if she gets caught or found dead somewhere along her route letting us know where she went.

As the people in India have turned hunting the Amur Falcons into eco-tourism and conservation, would the Free Me Junior Custodians like to 'adopt a spot' to highlight the journey of the Iron Lady and help make the roost in Mooi River

## Questions for classroom discussions

Teachers can play the following videos in the classroom and ask students to watch it at home before this class

The Incredible Amur Falcon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PV25poqZhuQ>

Conservation of Amur Falcon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=58kqIOTiGN4>

Teachers can now ask the following questions:

1. What did you learn from this story and the videos?
2. What fascinated you about the Amur falcons? And why?
3. What are some of the threats other than hunting that you think affects migratory birds?
4. Do you think it is important to conserve birds? If yes, why?
5. What are some steps we can take in order to protect birds/migratory birds?