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Indian falconologist finds recognition in Saudi Arabia

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JEDDAH: Passion and dedication are two drives that not only push one to reach certain goal but to strive for higher excellence that will continue until satisfaction is achieved. An Indian academic passionate about falconry has carved a niche for himself in Saudi Arabia where falcons have a pride of place in Arab national heritage. Zubair Medammal, an enthusiastic falconologist from Kerala, has not only established himself in the trade and done research on the subject but has also shot a documentary on the rare species of bird in the gulf.

Medammal has an interesting story to tell behind the flowering of his unique passion. Like numerous folks hailing from Malbar region, he too had tried his luck for a job in the Gulf but wasn't able to make it with a specialisation in wildlife biology, which had no demand in the region.

"As I was going to Al Ain from Abu Dhabi in UAE in 1995, I found signboard put up by Shaikh Zayed Falcon Research Center and Hospital, but when I approached the center for a job there which was promptly declined. I begged for any position - I was even ready to work as a sweeper - but my request was turned down in a humiliating manner," says Zubair Medammal.

Forgetting the humiliation, he often spent his savings on repeated visits to the UAE on a visitor's visa in search of job in falconry, each time returning empty-handed. But after having seen different species of falcons and the

method of maintaining them at the Shaikh Zayed Center, he opted to be an independent falconologist, Medammal said.

Perceiving it as a challenge, he studied and trained in falconry (including artificial breeding) in Germany. It was, in fact, rather ironical that he was rejected by a German official when he had applied at the Shaikh Zayed Falcon Center.

It was rather difficult for him to gain expertise on falcons as there are none in India, especially in the southern states where he belonged.

Earlier, Medammal had visited Prince Fahad Bin Sultan Falcon Center in Riyadh in Tabuk city. "It was fascinating to know about Prince Fahad Bin Sultan, the governor of Tabuk, a Saudi royal known for falconry in the Arab world," said Zubair.



Zubair said the shooting of his documentary film on falcons in the Gulf region is progressing, with shootings happening in Saudi Arabia, Oman and UAE. Shootings will follow in Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait before the film is processed in Dubai.

"I aim at raising awareness of falconry among people in Gulf countries besides India where 100,000 DVDs of the

documentary will be distributed to students at free of charge," Zubair told.

Falconry is considered a rich heritage and the bird is a status symbol among in Arab tribes in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries. It is the only bird that has a passport with a microchip embedded that enables it to travel across the region except Oman.