

Migrating eagles racked up a huge cellular bill

Migrating eagles with tracking beacons that send texts reportedly accrued roaming charges so high that scientists had to take out a loan to pay for them, as well as attempt to raise money from a crowdfunding campaign – because some of the birds made unexpected detours (via *BBC*).

One eagle, Min, was apparently so far off course that its transmitter sent enough texts to eat up the entire tracking budget, according to the *BBC*. Min was expected to fly to Kazakhstan, where it would have sent a bunch of coordinates over SMS that it collected while out of range of a network. Those texts would have cost of approximately 30 cents each. However, Min apparently flew straight to Iran and the texts were sent from there, where they cost approximately 77 cents each. Come on, Min!

The eagles' migration routes.

Image: Russian Raptors Research and Conservation Network, via BBC

“They really left us penniless,” Igor Karyakin of the Russian Raptors Research and Conservation Network said, according to *AFP*.

Fortunately, it seems like the team will be able to pay for the charges. The crowdfunding campaign has apparently raised more than 100,000 rubles, according to the *BBC* – about \$1,563 – which will help pay for the trackers through the end of the year, according to an auto-translated Facebook post from one of the researchers. The researcher also said on Facebook that the team’s wireless carrier, MegaFon, will “return the Iranian spending” accrued by Min and make a “special tariff” for

tracking the eagles, so it seems it will be cheaper for the researchers to track them moving forward.

If you want to better browse the eagles' migration routes yourself, check out this interactive tracker on the Russian Raptors Research and Conservation Network website.

Animal tracking is becoming increasingly easier as tags become more powerful, more efficient, and are less obtrusive to the animals. Here's a great article about it in the *Washington Post*. Sometimes, though, animals with trackers have been thought to be spying – this *National Geographic* article has a few humorous examples, my favorite being the 14 squirrels in Iran accused of wearing eavesdropping equipment.

<https://www.theverge.com/2019/10/25/20933022/migrating-eagles-scientific-research-major-data-roaming-charges-sms-russia-iran-kazakhstan>