

## **Questionnaire (prepared by Dick ten Bosch, David Horobin and Jevgeni Shergalin)**

This list of question is not obligatory, it is recommended as a facilitation of talks. Any lyrical deviations, innovations and vivid addenda will be only appreciated.

### **The falconer personally:**

Full name, date and place of birth, married/unmarried, names of spouse or wife, number of children and their names.

- 1) Lawrence Formosa
- 2) Place of birth Pieta Malta
- 3) Date of birth 17/11/1970
- 4) Married wife name Nathalie Formosa
- 5) Two Children daughter Justine Formosa son Carl Formosa

Kindly describe from to what kind of family you belong (city/country side, your profession and that of your father). Are you hereditary falconer?

- 1) I come from middle class family with strong tradition of hunting and trapping.
- 2) Live in village but spent lot of time in countryside.
- 3) After finished school since from 1988 I worked for 18 years in a micro electronics factory as operator. Last five years before I left the factory I was promoted to a machine technician. From that time onwards my jobs were always related to animals and birds of prey.
- 4) My father was marine plumber but he use to work as a gunsmith in the beginning.
- 5) I am not hereditary falconer. I am the person who revived falconry in Malta after the knights.

Kindly describe your current place of residence and especially the falconry facilities in use in or near your residence.

- 1) I live in a terraced house and I keep my birds on the roofs. At the moment I have five aviaries and six small mews. Also I have a maintenance room were sometimes I keep certain birds in too.

Are you the only person living in your house engaged in falconry?

- 1) I am the person who is interested in falconry in our house but if I will be in need my wife help me the best she can.

How old were you when you had your first bird?

- 1) I had my first bird when I was eleven. It was a male kestrel which was trapped and given to me by my father.

How did you become interested in falconry (from your parents, relatives, friends, neighbours, after watching cinema or TV program, from the radio, from an article in a newspaper, book ?

- 1) When I was very young, if I remember well, from around the age of five onwards every time I passed by bus or car to our capital city with my mum or someone else I remember that I always stare at a big eagle statue that is still there today. I can't say exactly as a young boy what draws my attention, if it was the gold colour that it is painted with or the majestic posture of the way it is sculpted. What I remember also is that every time we will be close to it I go to the side of the car or bus where I can see it. As I said when I was eleven I had my first bird of prey and although I had no idea of falconry I was really impressed by a TV program that by coincidence I saw at that time. It was about catching a falcon from the wild and training it to fly free. When I saw that program I tried to train my kestrel but I did not manage to. After several temptations of training this kestrel I gave up trying and I just kept it for several months and then released it. From that time onwards I always had birds of prey most of them come to me as injured birds which I always tried to cure the best I can and after most of them were released. All these birds were arriving to me as people were realising my interest in birds of prey. Since 2004 I simply kept and released birds as my main hobby was hunting with gun. Then I decided to stop hunting completely and concentrate only on birds of prey and falconry. So I started reading books, searching on the internet and joined falconry clubs abroad. First I joined the NAFA and after the BFC from where I got much more information and so I became more interested. Also at those times I got in touch with the IAF. After all this I can say I had started, I bought my first book which was understanding the bird of prey of Dr Nick Fox. Then I started reading and experimenting on a kestrel which I had at that time, which finally I managed to fly him free. From that time onwards I never stopped. I also was lucky to have the opportunity to train several types of birds.

Who encouraged you and who discouraged you taking up falconry?

- 1) I was encouraged by most of the people who saw me flying the birds free including some hunters as they never saw this before here in Malta especially the old hunters who don't believe that someone will manage to fly a bird free here without being shot.
- 2) What discourages me is that although we fly our birds with a nylon ribbon which can go off the bird very easily if it gets tangled still every now and then we have birds being shot. We use the ribbon simply to give a signal to hunters that this is a captive bred bird.

How does your wife or husband relate to your interest in falconry?

- 1) She accepted my way of life although she many times argue that I spend much time with the birds and they took my life, but I believe that deep down she love them too.

Did your children inherited your interest in falconry from you?

- 1) I can't tell exactly about my children as they are still young. What I can say is that they love the birds and at the age off three they both handled my female Harris hawk nearly by their own which was half their size. I see this very positive.

How important is falconry to you? Do you see it as a hobby or rather as something that defines you as a person?

- 1) Now falconry is a very important part of my life, I think of it day and night and I don't imagine myself without it.
- 2) I see it as a hobby or way of life but I think if people start knowing you automatically you will be defined due to the birds and falconry.

How has falconry affected your life, your relationships, work/career outside of the sport?

- 1) Although I am happy doing this, falconry effected my whole life because to take care of my birds and fly some of them I cannot do a normal job but I am doing four different small jobs. I have to find a way to go around them and so by now this is how we are surviving as a family. It is not easy at all.

Do you feel you have to sacrifice any aspect of life outside of falconry to pursue the sport?

- 1) Apart from my family and birds I have nothing else in my life. This is due to lack of money and time. In my opinion the more birds you have the bigger the commitment have to be and something has to be sacrificed to do one good thing.

Do you feel falconry is better now than when you began the sport? Why? What are the main changes you have witnessed?

- 1) I only have been flying birds for nearly ten years and so I don't expect to see great difference. What I noticed is that as before I was the only person flying birds here and it was like a big thing. Now as there are others flying birds people are getting use to it. Also I noticed that by time the places where we can fly the birds are shrinking drastically which makes things worse in a small country like ours.

If you could have experienced any aspect of falconry from any place or time in the past, from which you would have benefitted considerably, what would it have been?

- 1) As I mainly evolved by my own and it was very hard, I benefitted from every new thing I met so from books up to the most experienced falconers. One place that I gained lot of experience due to meet good falconers was in AL AIN at the third falconry festival. I can say also that when I was a hunter I learned too by watching wild falcons.

What has falconry taught you about (i) wildlife? (ii) the balance of nature and environmental issues? (iii) your own character and capabilities ?

- 1) About wildlife, regard birds, I learned more that it is not easy to survive in the wild due to so many things including hunger and migration. We don't have the opportunity like most of the other countries to see birds flying so close to us and so when I started flying and trying to understand my birds I learned a lot from them.
- 2) The fragile balance of nature can be destroyed very easily when we mess with the environment. This may quickly affect the prey and the predator follows. If we don't quickly realise what we are doing soon the chances for practicing falconry will be much narrower especially in some places.
- 3) After from hunting with a gun try to hunt with a bird my character turned to be more sensitive to nature as you will see another part that before you have no chance to see.

Which character features and temper should any good falconer have from your point of view?

- 1) In my opinion the best character belong to those falconers who have nice and calm character so with people and especially with animals. Unfortunately by now I am really patient with animals but not with people.

Did you stop falconry during Second World War or during any military actions?

- 1) Luckily I was not here during the Second World War and by now in Malta we don't have such things that disturb us that way.

Do you plan to put on paper your memoirs in order to share your experiences with other people and a younger generation of falconers?

- 1) I can't say about this especially at the moment when I am very busy, but most probably not, as many things will be forgotten as days pass by.

### **His/her birds:**

To what species did your first hunting bird belong?

- 1) Female Harris hawk.

What was its nickname?

- 1) Her name is Jessie.

How did you obtain it? Was it given to you or did you trap it yourself?

- 1) I have her parents which I imported from UK.
- 2) I hand raised her from day four.

How many birds did you keep simultaneously?

- 1) There were times that I was keeping thirteen birds by my own. At the moment I have eleven.

How many birds have you flown during your life approximately? Please specify by species.

- 1) I can't remember exactly but I think more than twenty. These were all trained by me from the beginning till flown free.
- 2) Species I trained myself are kestrels, barn owls, eagle owls, hobbies, marsh harriers, pallid harrier, eleonora falcon, Harris hawks, peregrine x saker hybrids, gyr x saker falcon, peregrine tiercels, male merlin, lanner falcon, prairie falcon, musket, turkey vulture, American black vultures, short toed eagle and golden eagle. Not all flown for a long time and some of them does not belong to me.

How many years have you had the bird which was longest in your possession? To which species did it belong?

- 1) A severely injured honey buzzard which I kept for thirteen years and then I have to pass it to someone else. Now a pair of harris hawks which I still have and are nearly ten years.

Did you ever try out any other birds of prey excluding Falconiformes and Strigiformes, like ravens, shrikes, cormorants etc?

- 1) Once I trained a female mallard duck to fly and land next to me when I call her. Also I have a magpie which I hand raised and now is nine years old. He only stays on the fist and sometimes he say hello. The magpie I can't say I actually trained it.

Who were the best and worst hunters among your hunting birds from your point of view and why?

- 1) The best I have is the harris hawk as she use a lot her brain and I spend a lot of time with her. In my opinion all the birds have their potential and as we are keeping them it's only due to us to make them successful. If one persists there will be a sort of result with any bird.

What were the main veterinary problems encountered and which bird diseases did you experience?

- 1) Three times I had bumble foot cases and unfortunately I lost one of the birds.

**His/her dog:**

Kindly advise whether you have ever used a trained dog for your falconry. If affirmative please advise on breed, origin numbers etc.

- 1) I don't have my own dog but sometimes when we release quarry we flush it with a Weimaraner dog which belong to my brother in law.

**His/her field:**

Kindly provide us with a description of your hunting grounds, including vegetation and quarry available.

- 1) We mainly fly our birds in rocky landscapes with loads of small bushes and few scattered trees. Mainly carob trees and eucalyptus trees. Although you can find few rabbits in these areas they are very hard to catch with birds as they go very quickly in deep rocky holes and even to ferret them sometimes is very difficult. Our country is very short of resident quarry and most of the times that my Harris hawk caught something, these were rats and sometimes pigeons.

How far do you have to travel to your hunting grounds?

- 1) Approximately half an hour where we normally go.

By which means of transport (car, bike, bicycle, horse etc.)?

- 1) We always use car.

Have you travelled outside of your country to practice or experience falconry?

- 1) It was in AL AIN the only time I went for a falconry experience outside my country. This was at one of the hunting trips that were organized as part of the third falconry festival. Practicing falconry in another country is one of my dreams as here we have very limited sources.

**Quarry:**

Please specify what the usual quarry is for each of your birds?

- 1) For my Harris hawk and my brother in law peregrine tiercel we mainly release bobwhite quail and pheasants as I explained we nearly have no wild quarry especially for these birds. What they manage to catch apart from these we consider it as bonus. Now I started experimenting with a musket as I think he can be more adapted for our country.

**Exceptional Falconry events:**

Kindly share some of the most remarkable, funny or otherwise memorable episodes, experienced with us.

- 1) Once I was impressed by a prairie falcon that we use to fly. She grabbed a bobwhite that we released for her few inches before it touched the ground while she was coming down at high speed. I can't believe how she manages to avoid smash herself to the ground. On another day while I was flying my harris hawk she caught a Muscovy duck from a farm far away and by the time I arrived she was like someone dipped her in a bucket of mud. I thought she was going to die due to this as she after looked very weak. She took a few days to clean herself well even after I washed her myself. Apart from these stories there are many others, some like risking my life to recover a hawk from cliffs or valleys. In my opinion this is part of the package of falconry.

Could you tell us about some of your exceptional falconry successes and failures, regular mistakes and other experiences?

- 1) In my opinion mainly I was successful in two things one is when I manage to built up a high flying bird and the other, when I had a bird coming to me from someone else as a difficult bird and I manage to slightly change his attitude and also fly him. For me this is another great satisfaction.
- 2) Regular mistakes I did a lot in the beginning are that I was not able to judge how much I can reduce the weight and due to this I lost several birds by over feeding them. The biggest failure I feel I had is when I lost a bird due to bumble foot.

### **The falconer within society:**

Falconry recommendations to young falconers.

Has falconry brought you into contact with people from other countries or cultures? If so, how have these relationships shaped you as a person?

- 1) Yes of course due to falconry I made friends abroad. Due to these contacts I learned much more especially considering my little experience compared to falconers that had been flying and hunting with birds for many years.
- 2) When I met and discussed with people that have the same passion from different countries around the world I realised that we still have the same feelings. In my opinion this is sometimes very hard to find. Also due to falconry I learned to understand and accept things which before I didn't.

How many times (roughly) have you been interviewed by the press and other media about falconry?

- 1) I can't remember exactly how many times I was interviewed about falconry. I think approximately eight times.

From your point of view, which other experienced, well known, senior falconers should also be interviewed by the FHT at least in your area or country?

- 1) In our country there are no senior falconers and we are nearly all at the same stage in terms of falconry. If you want to have contacts of others I can send them to you.