

THE HAGGARD, THE PASSAGER AND THE SORE HAWK

Throughout the years quite a number of haggard sparrowhawks have come to me. Some, sadly, were badly injured and never recovered. Others, luckily, arrived with only minor injuries, usually self inflicted by crashing into windows or wire fences. They all survived and eventually became fit again. Always larger because of well developed muscles, the haggard will weigh at least an ounce more than a hard-penned eyass, passager or sore-hawk. She will be at least two years old and if a very slate grey in her plumage and with cadmium eyes will be three or more. What a hawk she must be with that experience of hunting under her belt.

I would always firstly hood the wild hawk. As it will be very nervous of humans and will suffer a lot of stress in the first few days of captivity. Added to this will be the stress and shock of injury. In fact, it is very probable that an injury could be aggravated. A fracture, for instance, could be made worse by the bating due to her wildness in captivity. You will inevitably become known in your area and more than likely someone will arrive some day with a cardboard box. You will get a variety of descriptions over the phone so expect anything when you open the box. Once I travelled ten miles to investigate a young hawk which had fallen from the nest only to find a baby swallow. The hawk may have a visible injury or it could be apparently uninjured. If the latter is the case and nothing visible is wrong, I still think it would be unwise to release the hawk. You could be condemning her to a slow death by starvation caused by an impaired ability to hunt. If you are at all worried that she may not be able to fend for herself the procedure is to man her and hunt her until you are sure she can. It is quite surprising how a wild hawk will settle in the hood and stand and preen herself on a bow perch. At least for a day or so she can be observed and left outdoors in a warm place to rest and enjoy a little sun with lots of fresh air. In this way you can observe her balance and grip and generally ascertain the extent of any minor impairment. She, of course, can be encouraged to eat through

THE HAGGARD, THE PASSAGER
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the hood and will suffer only minor stress in the process, compared to that caused by being shut up in some shed, thrown food and then locked in semi darkness again.

If you feel it best to man and hunt her prior to hacking back to the wild you will witness the beauty of a well mannered proud sparrowhawk and the superb opportunist and strategist the haggard can be. What has surprised me is how quickly they tame. One haggard which came into my possession with a minor leg injury is a hawk which I will never forget. She flew free without ever being on a creance, on the ninth day of her captivity. On the tenth she took a jackdaw at seventy metres; on the eleventh missed a blackbird, went on another twenty metres and bound to a wood pigeon in some ivy, lost it and came to my glove with talons full of breast feathers. She stood to the hood with the manners of a lady and the fact that I hunted her at all was purely accidental.

Having decided to man and hunt this beautiful haggard prior to hacking back, I hooded her immediately on arrival and started her training the following day. Having a good well tried hood was a big plus, as after a very close examination I was able to hood the hawk, fit anklets, bells and jesses and rest her until it was time to take her up. She was lower in condition than she should have been because of an abrasion on the pad of her foot, which was infected. So the time to take her up was as soon as possible. If such a hawk were picked up, say, having crashed into a window, she would be in high condition and so it would be best to keep her hooded and quiet for twenty four hours so that she would be hungry and therefore likely to accept a meal. However, this particular haggard had not successfully hunted for perhaps several days and was therefore very hungry, cold and, of course, stressed. So being hooded and settled in a dry, warm room for the night and left alone she was best approached in the morning after a night's rest. If her condition had been such as to cause concern then she would have needed to be fed immediately.

In medieval times, and even up until quite recently, a newly caught sparrowhawk was waked as a prelude to training. The hawk, deprived of a natural perch, was carried on the fist continuously until she would sleep on the falconer's fist in his presence. This was unnecessarily hard on the hawk and probably even harder on the falconer. A mews which can be darkened is by far the best place to start manning a hawk as she can be settled instantly at the flick of the light switch, either hooded or unhooded. The falconer can then, after some hours, make another attempt to induce the hawk to eat if the first try upset her too much and she refused.

The following morning, after the hawk had been allowed a good night's rest, her injury having been treated the night before, she was approached and taken up. I had a fresh pigeon breast plucked to offer her. Going into the mews, I turned up the dimmer switch slowly to ascertain whether she was still quiet and had not slipped the hood. If she had I would have switched off the light completely and gently taken her up on the glove in the normal way by placing my gloved forefinger behind her legs and she would then, by reflex action, have stepped back and up. You can do this just as readily, of course, if she is still hooded. I would place the hawk on her perch the night before minus swivel and leash. It is dangerous to tie up a hawk with even the slightest leg or wing injury, any injury in fact, as a bate could aggravate the injury itself or at the very least inflict pain. If the hawk slips her hood she will remain settled in the darkness on her perch. If, on the other hand, as you slowly turn up the light just enough to assess whether she has slipped the hood or not and she has, she will remain where she is if you quickly turn down the light. Then locate the slipped hood with the torch and taking her up, either rehood her or proceed to induce her to eat. Never leave an untrained hawk loose even in a purpose-built mews unless hooded or in darkness.

At this stage I would simply slip the leash into the slits on the jesses and tie the leash at the button to act as a temporary stop, in case she were to bate. Tie the free end of the leash to the glove tassel as this ensures that if things go wrong you can deal quickly and more easily with the situation. It would not be a good idea to depend on holding just the jesses to secure the hawk. Should she bate and refuse to climb back on the glove while at the same time the hood has disappeared into the dark oblivion, you will cause further bating if you are forced to bend down and search for the hood. If she has spent the night hooded you can switch up the light to full and start to encourage her to eat. If dealing with a hawk high in condition you will know that a gap of twenty four hours will ensure she is hungry. Attempting to induce a hawk to eat, particularly unhooded, when she is not keen will do considerable harm to the relationship which you must establish with her. If a hawk is not due a meal, particularly in the early stages of training, leave her alone. A major advantage in using the hood is that you can approach the hawk and test her appetite without her seeing you and therefore taking a dislike to you.

Be certain of one thing however, much as it may seem to be impossible at the time and despite failure at several attempts, she will eat with the hood on. Stroke her toes with the meat. Also touch it to her beak, meanwhile draw your saliva through your teeth. If hungry, any hawk will react instantly to this sound. You will feel her tighten her grip on the glove. For bravado we used to fly spars to the bare fist sometimes. I was younger and more foolish then. Nothing delighted a hawking friend better than to make the sound I have just described for the fun of watching the unfortunate falconer's reaction! Hunger and your gentleness and patience will induce her to eat. Do not fall into the trap of assuming it is not possible and then remove the hood hoping to entice her to eat. That can be done of course, but you must weigh up the consequences. Can the bating which will definitely ensue do more

damage to a leg or wing injury? By using the hood from the very beginning you can teach the hawk your voice, a very advantageous asset in establishing a relationship. I actually believe that feeding through the hood for about three days and concentrating on teaching her your voice lays a very firm foundation for the subsequent training of a hawk. Because she hears your voice and within a short space of time, as little as three days, she associates it with something pleasant, a much anticipated meal, she will welcome the sound of the falconer's voice always. It is very difficult to achieve this with a sparrowhawk in the wild state she is in when she is first approached if she has to contend with the sight of man as well. In short, she is terrified. Once you can induce her to take a good meal through the hood and she associates your voice with that, it is easier to calm her when you do unhood her for the first time. On the fourth day, for example, when it is time for her evening meal, take her up using your voice as usual and encourage her to take some mouthfuls of meat. Always do this. Talk to her as you take her up and have her take a little before undoing the braces. As she reaches down with her beak and takes a piece of meat, simply hold the now loosened hood by the plume and as she raises her head she is unhooded. Also ensure that the light is not too bright but more importantly that she has not got a view outdoors. It is much easier to settle an upset hawk indoors as she has not got her eye on the nearest tree and the freedom it offers. As already mentioned a hawk will always be tamer indoors than outside. At this stage do not move but now talk to her, using the same tones and words and encourage her to continue eating her meal. The sight of you will, of course, upset her. She knows very well what man looks like but has never allowed herself to come into such close proximity. It is very likely that your eyes will be the focus of her attention and so I find it is very effective if one does not stare. I am convinced that staring at any animal, and I have seen this particularly with dogs, induces fear. Consider too how a lot of predatory animals and even insects can mesmerize their victims and

reduce their reflex action making them easier to catch. For the first few moments of her unhooding then, avoid eye contact and simply talk to her and entice her to continue feeding. Because she knows the sound of your voice and associates it with a meal it is easier to settle her and get her to continue eating. Do make sure she has had a few mouthfuls before being unhooded. Again, because she has tasted food and is already salivating, her desire to continue, despite the sight of the falconer within such close proximity, will be so much stronger.

So, for the first four days the training of the haggard, passager, or the sore-hawk differs from the brancher in that the former are hooded and voice trained first. I would never attempt to take up a wild hawk and train it without the use of the hood. Remember they have sustained an injury which is why they are in captivity in the first place. Any extra stress is undesirable and unnecessary and will undoubtedly cause harm to the hawk. Finally, by using the hood for those critical first four days you avoid the likelihood of the hawk disliking you and believe me, a haggard, if she chooses, will do just that. It avoids any aggravation of an either apparent or an unseen injury and allows close study of the hawk to assess her condition. And at the same time, allows her access without stress or bating to lots of fresh air and warm sun which will encourage her to relax, preen and oil her plumage.

If you so desire you can use this regime to train the brancher. It will only take an extra four days. The brancher may prove difficult to hood and any protracted attempts at hooding will only serve to prolong training and do more harm than good. If a hawk is to remain hooded, then give no castings for that period. This will do absolutely no harm and is safer in the end. I prefer not to have my hawk cast through the hood.

The particular haggard I mentioned earlier disappeared one day into the myriad hedgerows that abound in this countryside. She was in

full regalia as her freedom was not envisaged for another selfish while. Six months later, with bells and anklets, she was seen chasing a blackbird along the Boyne river by a fisherman who could not believe his eyes, or rather his ears.

When she is well entered, keep her high:
so that you do it with labour, as with tiring
or plumeage, water, carriage, & casting far off;
for then she will have strength & courage
wind & breath at will, whereby to maintain
her flights lustely: which for lack of any of
all she cannot fly fare, although her will be
good & come of the best airs. Yet many are
of opinion that being high as is said, she
will not care for the man & not come at all.
I answer they know not their tymes, for at
the 1st, recayinginge if they use her as is
said in the title of ensayminge &
recayinginge, that she may once come
ernestly without check or delay, she will
never forget it after, except she be kept
to to wanton and never carried.

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INTRODUCING THE HOOD

Hooding the sparrowhawk is difficult because of the hawk's diminutive size. The hood, being so small, leaves little if any room for error. If the beak opening, for instance, is not wide enough, then it becomes impossible to put it on at all. Constant failure to hood a hawk will rapidly make the hawk hood-shy and she will bate at the mere sight of it. Added to the problem of size and accuracy of fit will be the beginner's lack of experience and the usual habit, particularly of the eyass, of dodging and ducking her head. This means she is not afraid of it and merely views it as a particular inconvenience. Provided you take your time and do not annoy her she will stand to the hood in time. A hawk that collapses backwards on the glove at the sight of the hood must be gradually and very gently introduced to its use. Imprints are very difficult to hood, branchers a little easier. The passage or sore hawk, lacking age and courage, will be very frightened at first. The haggard, on the other hand, will take the hood with great dignity. She will bate on occasions for any amount of reasons but rarely, if ever, will the proud elegant haggard collapse backwards in fear.

The hood therefore must be a perfect fit and, particularly for the process of training, must never be too small in any dimension. The Afghan hood, on which my pattern is based, originally had no braces. When the hawk shook off the hood the falconer, in whose company the hawk would always be, simply picked it up and rehooded the bird. An advantage of this pattern is that the beak opening, because it is joined at the centre of the throat strap, can be adjusted there if too small or too big. It does however, need to be joined very carefully at that point where the two ends meet.

As to whether to hood your sparrowhawk or not: I would say do so if you can foresee yourself in any situation in which hooding might be advantageous. Most people travel their hawks in their cars and usually one or two hawks travel very well unhooded. Problems can arise with

opposite: Hooded eyass female and musket in first year plumage

more than one or two. If unhooded they cannot be left unattended with safety on a perch across the rear of the car. It is also very impractical to have three or four passengers, each having to take a hawk on the fist, for a long car journey. The ideal is to be able to hood each hawk and place it on a soft, easily gripped perch which has been fitted across the back of the car. With such a perch across the average hatchback four hooded sparrowhawks can travel in comfort and safety. The falconers can also relax and the calm hawks will leave everyone all the more at ease including, I might add, the driver. I have seen situations where a falconer, not having trained his hawk to car or hood, has simply cast his sparrowhawk and, with a borrowed hood and assistance, hooded her. Hooding, in this instance, is quickly and easily done causing far less stress to the hawk than otherwise would be the case if left to bate and bate for three or four hours on a car journey. I can guarantee that it will grate on everyone's nerves. If, for example, one hawk needs to be fed and the others not, the hooded hawks will remain oblivious to what otherwise would be a chaotic situation and all the more so if it must be done en route and it is pouring rain outside. When travelling either alone or not you will need a break. It is obviously much more relaxing to know that the hawks, being hooded, are relaxed and calm and are not a danger to each other.

If you do decide to use the hood beware also of overusing it. Essential, as previously mentioned, in training the haggard, the passenger and sore hawk, the beginner must be careful and more especially logical as to when and where it is used. If the hood is overused then the manning, the tameness, that familiarity with everything and anything so essential for a well trained sparrowhawk will suffer as a result. I have fallen into this trap in the past through overuse of the hood and my hawks were difficult and obstreperous in a crowd. Besides one has enough to do with one's first hawk, the object being to tame her not

annoy her with endless futile efforts to get a hood on. If you have made it yourself it could be a bad fit or too heavy and either way uncomfortable. If this is your first hawk, train her first and then when she has flown and killed and both or you are more confident, then, I suggest, try the hood. I am sure I was that typical beginner who carries his hawk about so carefully. The one who, at the slightest hint of trouble, hoods his hawk and thinks himself all the greater that he can do just that. This kind of action will lead to endless trouble as instead of exposing your hawk to as many visual experiences as possible you are removing the sight of anything which annoys her. Something psychologically similar would happen in the wild: she would remove herself from it! Do not use the hood if your hawk bates madly at the arrival of visitors, let her get on with it and rather use the situation so that she gets used to the car load of relatives arriving for afternoon tea. When less relaxed and experienced about sparrowhawks, I would have rushed to my bating hawk and at least taken her to the fist with a tiring to preoccupy her and then probably have hooded her. Now, with a few more years under my belt, I would let her get on with the tantrum but still keeping a watchful eye. Provided a hawk is sufficiently manned in the first place and it is not too early in her training, then it is far better to let her get used to the situation. In fact, it is necessary. In latter years I have come across younger falconers who man sparrowhawks to an incredible level. Few hood their hawks and the hawks go everywhere with them. I have noticed too that when the hawk throws a tantrum it is usually very short-lived. Their hawks, in short, get used to everything. This high level of manning has another plus to it: these hawks can always be flown high in condition and will fly and chase all the better for it.

Assuming that you want to make your hawk good to the hood then do take pains to ensure that there are no problems caused by the hood itself. My best advice is that on the first time round it would be wise to

purchase a hood from a reputable hood maker. This will give you a good idea as regards thickness of leather, braces, style and, most importantly, fit. In the matter of hooding, the wilder the hawk the more preoccupied she will be with you and dogs. Being so, they almost do not seem to notice your putting on the hood. In fact you can make use of this situation. Instead of closing the braces, rather hood and unhood the hawk while she stands on the glove. You will find that because of her preoccupation with you and the dogs, you can hood her and remove it after a few seconds a number of times. Her fear will be directed at you and the dogs; the hood a minor inconvenience puzzling at most. It is now, in this short time span, within the first ten to fifteen minutes that the groundwork for success is laid. Later, as she becomes more familiar with you, she will almost certainly bate, but will soon accept the inevitability of being hooded and will stand to it. Also do not be in a hurry, never rush that part, ever. It is precisely when one is in a hurry to hood a sparrowhawk that failure and a tantrum will result. The hood will be flicked off and the more you persist the worse things will get, and I will bet someone will be watching to add to the humiliation. So for hooding, and this applies always, both falconer and hawk should be relaxed and have time in hand.

Always use a dimmed mews in which to introduce the hood. As in the case of training the haggard do not introduce it during daylight. If you fail to hood the hawk quickly and easily she will become very agitated and will bate continuously. It takes only minutes to make a hawk hood-shy and it may never be undone. Now comes the first time to hood your hawk. Hold the hawk so that her head is about level with your eyes. If you hold her too high you will have to reach too far with your free hand. If she is held too low it is impossible to keep visual track of the throat strap, which is important. Holding the hood by the plume between your thumb and forefinger, with the braces well open, place the throat

strap below her beak up under her chin. Then pivot the hood on over her head. As you begin to place the throat strap under the chin and, as her mandible goes through the beak opening, slowly revolve your gloved hand from the wrist, slightly anti-clockwise. This action will cause her to lean forward and, as that happens, you are bringing her head into the hood while the right hand completes the action. In essence you are putting her head into the hood and the hood over her head at the same time, in two movements, one being the opposite of the other. Also a good thing to do before presenting the hood is to flick out both the edges of its beak opening with your thumb. This can be done easily in one hand. In this way the beak opening temporarily becomes slightly wider but also, because the sides are flicked outwards, her mandible will slide into the opening much more easily. When the hood is in place the sides of the beak opening in seconds will settle back and form a comfortable light-proof fit. Also the throat strap should be as thin as possible so that it goes under the beak easily. Do not be tempted to cut it any narrower than about 2mm as a very thin strap could cut into her. I always remember getting some excellent advice from a games master when quite young at school. It was that the secret in catching a ball was to keep your eye on it, not your opponent, even before it left your opponent's hand. Apply this to hooding and it is the hawk's beak which is the object to follow with your eye. Do not follow your hand or the whole hood, concentrate on that area and everything else is automatic. You will have been standing for all of this with the torch within easy reach beside you. The leash will be tied to the glove tassel for extra safety. As I have said, do not rush but take your time and particularly for the final operation, closing the braces which comes a little later. Never close the braces on the first attempt as any fumbling will upset the hawk.

It is as well to mention at this stage that the longer the closing braces the easier it is to close the hood, whereas the buttoned braces for

opening can and actually should be short. A guide would be say ten centimetres for the closing braces when the hood is closed.

Place the hood on the hawk and after a few seconds remove it. Talk to her and, as long as she is calm, replace it again having stroked her breast with the throat strap. Also take careful note of her attitude to the hood as it is raised towards her chin. If she appears apprehensive, rather than insisting on putting it on, stroke her with it, talking all the time to calm her. Then offer some tit-bits, re-present the hood and try again. Always, and I must repeat, always bring a hood up to a hawk. Allow her to see it and never hold it above her. If she wants to play with it or even attack it, allow her and encourage her to do this, remembering familiarity is, after all, the objective. So for the first twenty minutes or so hood and rehood your hawk, never closing the braces at this stage and in between each hooding encourage her to take mouthfuls of meat from your glove. Now the hawk will still be staring wide eyed at you and may, in all probability, pay no attention to the meat or even the hood. Gently stroke her talons and use your voice. Continue stroking her toes and, at some stage, she will glance downwards. Now she knows it is there, so hood her again and stroke her all the while placing and replacing the hood and in between inviting her to eat. When you have gained confidence in actually hooding then try closing the braces. Take one brace between your teeth and the other in your free hand and simply close the hood halfway. Adjust it gently if you have pulled it slightly to one side and then, without jerking, close the hood fully. If you have achieved all this on the first evening, and it should only take about an hour, then you have made her to the hood.

The number of other things that can happen will take rather more time to overcome. She may, if a brancher, a passager or a sore hawk collapse backwards off the glove at any attempt to hood her. In this situation you must use a very different approach. Of course you are not

introducing the hood in any instance where the hawk is not due a meal. In short, she must be hungry, keen enough for food, to put up with this inconvenience, and fear of something new. If you have a hawk that will not stand to the hood, then do not attempt to cure her until she is totally familiar with you at least. You must build confidence in her slowly and be sure she will eat unhesitatingly on the glove. The more familiar she is with you, the better for the next stage as her fear of the hood and your persistence, if at all too much, could easily result in her dislike of you, so be careful. Fool her with the use of bechins offered inside the hood at first. This will, first of all, remove her fear of the object and so make its approach pleasant to see with the promise of a juicy reward. Cut up a quarter or half crop of slices of beef or pigeon breast and every so often allow her to take the pieces out of the hood. Also place some, from time to time, on the top of your second finger in that way you can hold the hood in the normal way by the plume between your thumb and forefinger. Let her see the inside of the hood and the slice of meat on your finger tip which is now held in view through the beak opening but below it. She will have to place her head into the hood to get at the meat. Once you can get her to put her head into the hood half the problem is already solved provided, and this is paramount, that you do not attempt to hood her until the next stage has been completed. The whole object in this particular method is, in fact, to have the hawk literally hood herself and not think anything of it. So continue with this system of offering tit bits through the open hood for several days at least. Each time you do this ensure the braces are always opened. Occasionally she will plunge her head well into the hood to get at the meat and in doing so hood herself. As the braces are loose and the hood is well open it will usually fall off in a second or two. That is exactly what you want to happen. It is a kind of game; the hood is a light, soft, very minor inconvenience well worth tolerating for the delicious pigeon breast it offers. If she stands on it, let her, if she tries to eat the plume or the braces, well and good. Allow

her to become totally at ease with this interesting thing with its endless supply of her favourite food.

Allow this game to continue for three or four days and by then you will be well able to gauge just how much to close the braces so that the next time she lifts her head the hood stays. This you can easily do by degrees as by now she is hooding herself all the time. A good idea also is to have a tough tiring so she is now having to really work at it meanwhile putting her head deep down into the hood with more determination. When she can hood herself and the hood is staying on most of the time leave it in position for a little longer, perhaps to the count of ten, then gently remove it. Allow three or four days of increasing the hooded time to as long as she will leave it without shaking or footing it off, but never be tempted to close the braces until you are very confident that she is totally at ease with the hood. When you do close the braces, only close them a small amount then, after a short interval, meantime gauging her attitude, close the braces gently and fully. The time to do this is at the end of her meal so that she is hooded and settled for the night. The next problem one can encounter is the hawk's getting the knack of footing the hood and getting it off continuously. If that is the only problem you have in regard to hooding then it is minor one. Do not overdo any adjusting at this stage as a hood closing too tightly, even by a very small amount, will instantly cause considerable discomfort. An adjustment made in haste, at this or any stage, if resulting in the hood being too tight, will undo in seconds all that has been achieved over a week or ten days. If she is footing the hood off it may be simply too wide around the neck or altogether too large and so a size smaller is required. Check after closing the braces that the hood is not coming open itself at the braces. This can easily happen if the hood is narrow around the head, as it will put pressure on the braces and so open itself. Also check that the braces are not too loose in the brace slits as this can also cause the hood to become

HACKING BACK TO THE WILD

so loose that the hawk can sometimes shake it off. If you discover that the braces, particularly after some use become too loose and free, either make a new set or use a brace stop. This is a tiny piece of thin leather about 6mm in length and the same width as the closing brace. Chamfered down at both ends, it is then glued onto the closing brace or both in such a position that when the hood is put on and closed the stop or extra thickness of leather passes through the hood slit and it then requires a lot more pressure to open the braces. This stop piece should be glued on when the hood is closed, as you will see exactly where to place it on the closing braces. Provided you do this evenly and without jerking it will not concern the hawk at all and her hood will remain in situ until you decide to remove it.

Another problem which is very disconcerting to any falconer is a hawk which will try to jump or even fly in the hood. If this happens it is probably because the hood is too small and is causing discomfort or because the braces have been closed too suddenly. Provided it is not a fault in the hood itself encouraging the hawk to eat when hooded is usually a good solution. To achieve this you simply hood her about halfway through her meal and allow her to finish through the hood leaving the braces a little loose. To get a hawk to eat through the hood is much easier than it seems; patience is the key. This you will have to do with the haggard, passage and sore-hawk anyway, so it is not as impossible as one might imagine. When a hawk makes a kill in the wild she binds to her quarry with a grip of such intensity that, despite all the victim's struggles, nothing will loosen her hold. In fact, the more the quarry struggles the more the hawk will tighten her grip. It is like mantling, a reflex action. All this the hawk feels through her feet. When in captivity and hooded, if a piece of meat is drawn across her toes and you press them with your fingers, her reflex is to bend her head to feed. Despite her not being able to see, a hungry hawk will react to this kind of

manual stimulus and within a short time, a matter of less than an hour, perhaps even minutes if she is hungry enough, eat a full crop through the hood. It is in this way that the wild injured hawk can be very well fed for the first three or four days without stress.

A word about casting will not go amiss. A hooded hawk cannot cast through some patterns of hood with the braces closed. However a hawk well fed, with a full crop and castings, in say the evening, can be safely left hooded overnight. I would attend to her first thing in the morning although she may not cast until that evening if she has had a lot to eat. A hawk, on the other hand, given a third of a crop with castings at six in the evening may cast by nine in the morning. I see no reason to hood a hawk for the night when she is kept in the darkened mews. It is totally unnecessary except in the case of an injured wild bird which should only be given meat without castings until she can be unhooded and weathered in the normal way.

In times past when, for instance, hawking was done from horseback the hood was a necessity. It would be impossible to ride out, particularly at the gallop, with a hawk unhooded on the fist. If one has to run to get shelter from a sudden rainstorm, or if there is a sudden gale along with rain or sleet, a hawk unhooded can be very difficult to cope with. On the other hand having the use of the hood makes a situation such as this easier to deal with. I have been caught out in pretty foul weather on occasions and if at all concerned that my hawk would suffer a drenching I would hood her and then cover her with the best available object to hand, even my hat. I would not recommend covering a hawk in a rainstorm with any plastic material. Plastic does not allow the body to breathe and I would be very concerned that the hawk would actually catch a chill because of it.

HACKING BACK TO THE WILD

THEIR TRAINING

*Early Training, Sitting/Staying, Quartering,
Dropping to Game, Hand Signals, Walking to Heel*

In the case of an unwanted sparrowhawk or a hawk which has been nursed back to fitness, it should be released into the wild, "hacked back". In both cases you must satisfy yourself that the hawk is absolutely fit and very high in condition otherwise you may be doing the hawk a disservice. In the case of an eyass, which has been trained and flown for some time it is easy to know her ability and so she can be released into an area where there is plenty of quarry. The hawk which has suffered an injury, however minor, must be monitored carefully. Ideally this hawk is also best manned and trained to the fist and hunted before hacking back. The advantage of this training beforehand means that if the hawk fails to kill within a couple of days she will come to the fist, or at least the lure, for a meal and while she is feeding you can check her condition. So the only way to hack a hawk to the wild is to train her to hunt as a normal trained hawk would do and then give her a good meal and release her in the morning. Watch the weather and if it is going to be stormy wait until it settles, also avoid prolonged rain. Frost and snow will be to her advantage in one respect as other birds become more vulnerable and easier for her to hunt although there may be fewer too, so be watchful of this. She should be fit and at maximum weight with no damaged tail or primary feathers. Also release her somewhere convenient so that you can go there each day after and whistle and swing the lure. If she is around and hungry she will come. If a little wild she will come down to the lure if you walk away a distance. With a sparrowhawk this system of visiting the area should go on for about a week to ten days and if she is clearly still coming to you a week later I would take her up and discontinue the hack as something is not quite right, particularly if she has lost weight. To release any hawk and presume it to have the degree of fitness and stamina necessary to survive and hunt for itself, especially after injury, would in all probability result in death through cold and starvation. You must take on the responsibility and once she is set out at hack visit the area daily for an hour. A hawk is a finely tuned athlete, with little extra

HACKING BACK TO THE WILD

fat as reserve. Every wing and tail feather is vital for her ability to chase and kill and so impeded feathers should be very well done. Broken bones and muscle injuries are serious as the lack of use during recuperation results in muscle wastage and at least a decline in fitness. A hawk must be one hundred percent fit for hacking back not any less. This is all the more obvious when compared to other birds. I know a jackdaw who is making a very good living with a hanging wing. Most species of birds that forage for food can survive with many minor and even some major defects. They do not have to chase for a living.

The same process of visiting a spot in the case of a lost hawk must be adhered to. Although the falconer has to the best of his ability kept his or her hawk to a level of fitness whereby it should be capable of hunting and catching quarry for itself, that may not happen. Therefore you must go back to the area in which the hawk was last seen and call her with the whistle and lure. The loss of one's hawk will drive you out on a cold Winter's morning before work or school without complaint. You can be lucky —even though a week may pass. If she is dear to your heart then keep up the visits. A sparrowhawk gone wild and killing for herself will still come to the fist or lure readily after a week if you just happen to get her attention when she is hunting. If, on the other hand, she has been unsuccessful your arrival in the area will be most welcome to say the least.

SPANIELS FOR HAWKING, THEIR TRAINING

Early Training, Sitting/Staying, Quartering, Dropping to Game, Hand Signals, Walking to Heel

Before actually discussing the training of spaniels it is as well to look firstly at other dogs used in shooting and falconry. Labradors are basically retrievers, although some hunters like to let them range out instead of walking to heel until game is shot. Pointers and setters are game-finding dogs, but without the zeal required to plunge into thick cover to flush. A school of thought exists, and I agree with it, which feels teaching a pointer or setter to flush may result in unsteadiness. This would tend to be more the case with the Irish red setter rather than a German pointer, but would also depend on the individual dog. Personally, I feel a good bold spaniel, springer, cocker, or clumber, is perfect for hawks off the fist or at stand as it will find and flush game. The Brittany spaniel is even better as it will both point in the open and flush game in cover.

The essential requirements of a spaniel is that he will flush game and drop on flush, be fearless in the thickest briars, enter water without hesitation and, with all that, be very biddable. Every spaniel will not fill the list of requirements mentioned above. Indeed, it is very difficult to get a good one - and despite the newspaper ads which list the pedigrees of litters, these, and I know to my cost, mean nothing. By far the best way to judge a puppy is by keeping your ear to the ground and watching the form of litters from a particular bitch or sire. Physical conformation is important. Avoid thin dogs - not easy as puppies are usually plump. A well-built dog, short in the legs, broad shouldered and dark-eyed is my preference - good, honest eyes that watch you. Never buy a dog that is not interested in you at the puppy stage.

When trained a spaniel will find and flush his game, there and then drop and only hunt again on command. It does not take a lot of figuring out as to the value of these attributes when hawking. There are people who feel any old dog will do and whose idea of training ends with the dictum, "Well, sure, he comes back, doesn't he?" In my view falconry

deserves more than that and so does a working dog. Flushing game is not as easy as it might seem. In fact even the best spaniel can be fooled particularly by rabbits. Partridges and woodcock can and will run through the undergrowth at an alarming pace, so will pheasants. Problems arise in a situation where this happens, the main one being that a spaniel is taught to quarter his ground close, about ten metres either side of the handler, left or right, but never, and particularly during the training stages, straight on. So, if game, instead of crouching, runs on and a spaniel is hot on scent, it stands to reason - the dog's that is - that he should do the same. A shooter or trial man would be appalled at a spaniel "boring" on, as the subsequent flush would probably be well out of gun range. This equally applies to hunting with a sparrowhawk.

So, the shooting spaniel ranges from left to right or the reverse and is kept tightly within a ten metre distance of the handler. There are two reasons for this. The first is that when game is flushed at, say, ten metres by the time the average reflexes come into action and the bird is up the shooter has time to react. Also you stand a far better chance of getting a "right and left", a prized achievement, especially with woodcock. The second and equally important reason for close working is that a spaniel thus trained will cover his ground much more thoroughly and lessen the likelihood of passing game - an eliminating fault in trials and undesirable in any instance. On the subject of "passing game": it is quite likely that this will or can happen with the best of spaniels the prevailing conditions determining the magnitude of the "crime".

A good spaniel, in fact any good game dog, hunts with his nose, not by sight. So, in thick cover a questing spaniel, nose down and boring through dense cover, is picking up hot scent perhaps seconds old. He is nose down oblivious of the thorns - probably eyes half shut anyway. A clever rabbit can side track very easily, only to break cover behind the dog. On the subject of "boring on", the trial spaniel is expected to

"break" off a line of scent if he is going straight ahead.

So, for hawking, what spaniel? I would still insist on a close working dog. You cannot afford to pass game nor can you slip a sparrowhawk to something fifty metres away and bolting for cover. Also I would and do require a spaniel to take a line on command but otherwise ignore it. In short, the ideal spaniel for trials, shooting and hawking is one and the same. If you are flying falcons, then a spaniel will only come into play when the game has been found by the pointer or setter. It would be disastrous to have a spaniel off the lead until the falcon is at her pitch and waiting on.

It is real pleasure to watch a good spaniel, nose down covering every possible square foot of ground. He is busy, and oblivious of virtually any obstacle. As the scent hots up there is a burst of energy, his pattern gets even tighter; from out of seemingly nowhere there is a burst and a flash of wings. The spaniel drops instantly on his haunches and, ears and muscles tense, watches the game until out of sight. A really good one will alternate between watching you, the handler, as well or when the game is either down or out of sight, turn his glassy bright eyes and look at you as if to say, "What now?" I think that is the supreme moment between me and a spaniel. I am totally in command - totally. Any number of situations could exist, particularly if I were shooting. But this time I am hawking and I have not slipped my sparrowhawk. The pheasant which he has just flushed is, need I say, well outside the capabilities of a female spar - and she knows it. No, we are after the partridge just ahead in an isolated clump of briars, about twenty metres away directly in front.

I would venture to say that if you were working with a badly trained dog, or one not trained at all, the following would happen. The pheasant naturally would be put up only to be immediately chased, for a

bit at least, by the dog. Realising, as he has done for the hundredth time, he cannot catch a flying bird, he breaks off. Well, it is natural, isn't it? Next he plunges into a clump of briars about forty metres away in front of you, out screams a partridge, your spar bates and you feel like bashing your head against the nearest tree. You might even allow yourself the temptation, to at least to consider, bashing the dogs... This situation is bad enough for you, but think of what it has done to your hawk. It is probable that after a few more, or even one, of these incidents your hawk will want to take stand and still-hunt for herself, and rightly so.

Now, to go back to the beginning. The spaniel flushes the pheasant and drops. You have spotted the partridge slipping into the clump of briars from somewhere off to your left. No doubt the hawk has seen it too, but knows your form. Now, you make your decision - there is one smaller patch of cover between us and the larger one with the partridge and it is possible, just possible a partridge is there too. You say "gone away" to your watching spaniel, casting him off again to hunt to your left, away from the flying pheasant. He passes in front of you, now no longer interested in that pheasant and you all three gradually work up to the small clump of briars. Your dog checks for a split second then goes in at the roots. You are holding the hawk well above your head, the jesses are free; she can go when she wants. Now she is off, as a chattering partridge comes out from ground level. Your hawk is upon it after a flight which you will remember for years. Your spaniel is down on his haunches watching and waiting. Now you can heel him and walk up to the hawk on her quarry without fuss, or leave him on the drop and when you are satisfied that all is well, call him up to you. A point worth a mention at this stage is this; whereas a trained spaniel will drop automatically to "game" he will hardly be expected to do so to every small bird that comes out of a bush so it is simply a matter of dropping him verbally or on the whistle after you have slipped your hawk. I have found that the dogs I

have, drop once the hawk is slipped if, at the beginning, you take the dog out when training the hawk and drop him each time you get a slip. Besides, you are at the same time teaching the hawk to watch the dog.

The problem as to when formal training for spaniels should begin is a vexed question. Some books suggest six months others nine months and so on. I would consider nine months the minimum age. You are going to train the spaniel not just to hunt and quarter his ground within a short distance of you all the time, but also to hup on command or on flushing game and remain there until told otherwise. A young dog will find the latter difficult to come to terms with and so it is better not to confuse an immature puppy with such a task. If you start the hup lessons too soon you could inhibit the dog's hunting ability and wind up with a steady spaniel, albeit as steady as a rock but useless in cover and having no dash. I would wait until the young spaniel is showing signs of "facing" cover, that is boring in on the scent into punishing brambles, for example. When the dog is showing these signs then I would begin the formal obedience training and certainly not before. Up to then a good deal of groundwork in quartering can be laid very easily and treated almost like a game in a way that the dog is conditioned rather than bossed into working in a good tight pattern. When your spaniel is well developed and bold in his questing is the time to start. His age could be anywhere between six, nine, even twelve months, up, in fact, to a year and a half; the later sometimes the better.

The first thing to teach is sitting and staying. This vital lesson, as indeed any lesson, lays the groundwork for something else to come at a later stage. If you do not set out at the beginning to get perfection and lay the proper foundation at the start, then you will not get perfection later in the field. Good handling gets the maximum from your dog. It not only looks stylish but produces game with no roaring and shouting. There is little effort on the part of the falconer who has more time to concentrate

on the orderly carriage of his hawk and getting good slips. The basic ingredients for a good hunting dog are laid at this stage with patience and a large degree of consistency. You have been consistent with your hawk, so do it with your dog.

Your spaniel at six months is still a puppy, so do not expect miracles too soon. It takes about a year to eighteen months to produce a good steady dog. Yes, you may know someone who has done it sooner, but to get each lesson to really sink in, the slower the better. Do not, of course, hold back the dog that has a natural ability and willingness to learn. Your dog will look to you like a pack leader - keep it that way. Play with him, always keeping him close. If he runs off a distance call him and, if necessary, run the other way. Develop his always watching you - he will use his nose to hunt. So, this first lesson is teaching to sit or hup. Spaniels, like humans and hawks, vary so be mentally flexible and try to anticipate what he might do in a certain situation. Assume your dog is going to jump up and run. That way you are ready and prepared before the event. Funnily enough, I find I am never annoyed at disobedience when I am prepared for or expecting it.

During the four to six month period you will have familiarized him with the lead. Walk him on the lead across a field and after some fifty paces or so give a sharp but gentle tug on the lead at the same time saying, Hup. If he does not drop, firmly ease him down on his haunches and then, repeating Hup, praise him. Do this twice or three times, no more, over the next one hundred and fifty paces, always repeating deliberately Hup, also raising your free hand palm towards him. Do not then roll him over and excite him - keep him calm at this stage. Walk him on for another, say thirty metres, take the lead off and hunt him for five minutes or so, not more than ten. Call him up, put the lead on and avoid the temptation to repeat the lesson on the way home. Never train more than once a day. No pushing or cramming your dog. When he will sit or

Hup on command with the lead on then comes the crunch; the lead must come off. Be ready. Have him sitting as calmly as possible. Gently remove the lead, repeating Hup, not forgetting to raise your hand. If he breaks, go to him, catch him and carry him back to the spot, repeating Hup. Eventually, with your patience, he will do it perfectly. If he sits calmly step back a pace at a time, about three feet is enough, holding your palm upwards and repeating Hup if he shows any sign of breaking. Praise him, put the lead on and walk on for a little; take the lead off, a five minute hunt and then home. If, during this or any lesson, your dog shows signs of losing interest, discontinue the lessons for a few days, but also keep him at home. It is an excellent idea in fact to discontinue the lessons for up to a week every so often. I would strongly recommend no more than two or three days of lessons and a week's break during which the dog is best kennelled.

Keep this lesson up for about ten to fifteen minutes each day. You will find that your dog will sit on command to Hup. Remove the lead and have him sit while you step back ten or so paces. Always face him, do not stare into his eyes and, as you pace slowly backwards, your left or right hand is raised palm towards the dog. It goes without saying that if he breaks, you must take hold of him and carry him back to his seat repeating Hup.

Now you can introduce the stop whistle. As you pace backwards blow one long blast on your whistle, showing the raised hand as you do. You are actually teaching him to sit or drop to three signals: Hup, a verbal command, the raised hand, silent command and the whistle which takes the place of the raised voice so as not to disturb game to the same extent when hunting. Also you can now begin to walk around your dog while he is dropped. Step back as usual about ten or twelve paces then walk a square around him about this distance out, always ready for a break. If he moves to turn and watch you, this is good - he is alert.

Always lots of calming praise after this lesson, then put the lead on and after a walk of three or four minutes take the lead off and let him hunt for, say, five minutes.

It is worth discussing hunting at this stage. Some shy dogs will develop the instinct to hunt rather later, perhaps at nine months, so be easy with obedience training with a shy one. Also, never do any of the obedience lessons on ground where there is any likelihood of game, the finding of which would be a disaster at this stage. Nothing must interfere with these lessons, including humans who might want to play with him.

During these sit and stay lessons he may crouch in the grass and look at you forlornly or even avoid eye contact. Just be firm and he will grow out of this. Increase your distance to about fifteen paces all round and do not overdo this lesson. As soon as you are sure he has got it, go on to the next stage for a while to vary the scene. Go back to the lesson every so often to be sure it is understood. In fact this should be done all through training, revision leaves you and the dog sure of each other.

During these lessons it is a good idea to call him up to you from the drop. However, you must judge for yourself how often. Too often may make him prone to anticipate being called to come in to you and so it becomes difficult to send him on out from that position. The next stage is sitting and staying while you walk away with your back to him for any distance you choose up to, say fifty or sixty metres. Simply extend the distance in one direction by degrees. Choose a bush or wall and nip behind it for a few seconds. Be in a position to see him and if he breaks, pop out and drop him with the whistle and the raised hand. If he does drop, walk back and calmly praise him. Never, in the early stages, do these lessons where you drop down a hollow or disappear behind a rise.

All through these stages your dog will be getting variety with the quartering lessons. Quartering is a natural thing to a spaniel but it needs

careful timing and handling to develop it. "Boring on" is also natural. However, if the quartering is well established in the training it will minimize the likelihood of "boring on". During the playful puppy stage you can induce the habit of the dog watching you all the time. Do this with your voice and by using your hands. Some handlers chat to the young dog as he noses about. He will react to the voice as at the same time you walk in a zig-zag pattern very slowly. As he passes in front of you, for instance going from right to left, sweep your hand in that direction and he will naturally follow. Later, as this develops and you start formal quartering lessons, use the whistle. A short blast on the whistle every time you want him to turn, or as he turns, will soon ingrain itself upon him.

Hunting, Quartering

Remember that before casting a dog off to hunt you must have him sitting. Take off the lead and cast him using your hand which he will tend to follow. Never ever allow a dog to start to hunt straight ahead in front of you. It must always be to the left or right, out ten metres. Always work into the wind as the scent of game is coming that way, and it keeps him tight. When he is quartering his ground, nose down and facing cover which he will develop in his own good time, the dropping and quartering come together. Do not use gamey ground during the early quartering lessons, in fact not until you can hup him when he is in on the move. It is well worth while dropping your dog when he is busy in cover. This teaches him to drop solely on the whistle out of sight of you. Also call him up to your side from this position and on other occasions tell him to hunt on.

Professional trial men use a rabbit pen, usually about half an acre in size. About half a dozen rabbits are housed. In this way it is easy to control the situation if he chases, and you can always be sure of a find,

saving sometimes hours of fruitless hunting. Do steady your dog on rabbits first, as the temptation to chase ground game is great and also rabbit scent really gets a spaniel going. It is when he is hot on fresh scent and about to push his game that he will ignore you. If at any time, it will be then. The minute the rabbit or game breaks, blow the stop signal and show the raised hand. Chances are that you will also shout "Hup", and a good thing too, as at this early stage a firm reminder is valuable. If he does drop, walk up to him, calmly praise him and say, "Gone away". Always use this phrase when he pushes game which is to be ignored. Now you must always cast him off in the opposite direction from the flushed game, using, for example, "get on" or "seek it"; always the same phrase. The act of breaking off a line of scent is usually done by noting the line of a flushed rabbit, then hunt him by degrees until he is bound to cross it. If he checks but carries on across it, well and good. However, if he "takes the line" and bores on immediately, blow the turn signal. If he ignores it, take him by the scruff of the neck back to the spot where the "crime" was committed and blow the turn signal in his ear a couple of times, casting him off away from the line. If you want him to take a line, it is simply done by the use of retrieving training and the word "back". I do not propose to go into retrieving lessons in full here, as it would and should be a volume in itself.

However, the refinement of going out ahead, taking a line or boring on under control, can be achieved in one retrieving lesson which I will describe. Walk along a narrow lane with the dog on a lead. After a little, drop a dummy on the ground where he can see it and walk him on with the wind at your back for about ten metres. Hup him, remove the lead and, using a flourish of your hand, say "back". He will turn around and race back to the dummy. Repeat this, increasing the distance each day. Also vary it later to, say along a wall. When you are sure "back" has sunk in, secretly drop the dummy one day on the lane and repeat the

exercise. Then one day do the same in an open field. Walk him, drop a dummy, walk on a fair distance and then send him back. It is worth noting here that all during these lessons he will have your foot scent to guide him back to the dummy, but always walk away downwind from the dummy so that on the way out and within range he will pick up the scent of it. It is incredible to think that his nose is so sensitive it can pick up your hand scent from the dummy. A good trick, which I use, is to carry the dummy under my arm before dropping it. Although this exercise is essentially for retrieving, its value, when required to flush something ahead quickly, is enormous. Your hawk could be at stand in a tree twenty or thirty metres away with something underneath which must be flushed. Drop your spaniel on the whistle just as he is crossing in front of you. Allow him a couple of seconds to face you and give the command "back". If there is a line of scent, he will take it and come upon the game. And even if there is no line, if the lessons have been well done, he will go out anyway. Spaniels have been bred so carefully that, given a good dog, all the lessons mentioned and more lessons with hand signals are possible. Never go on to the next lesson until you are sure, really sure, the dog knows the meaning of a particular command. Always add variation into lessons, e.g., change of ground, without losing sight of the aim in mind.

In conclusion, I would recommend teaching a spaniel, which may be intended exclusively for hawking, all the aspects of retrieving, because hand signals are very useful when you need him to react in a particular way at a distance. However, if he is inclined to be unsteady, except for a minimum of "back" lessons, give him no retrieves afterwards at all. The final touch is walking to heel and it is the last thing I would teach a spaniel.

Training to heel at an early stage can inhibit a spaniel's hunting instincts. This is simply done by walking out with the lead on, repeating HEEL at any sign of the dog pulling on the lead. Next, as you are

