

Mews Views

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EDITOR'S LETTER

This has been a turbulent year in our country, economy, and SAFA. I take my hat off to all falconers who still manage to fly their hawks to a high standard at this time. Unfortunately, work and club pressures have narrowed down my time to the point where I do not feel like I can do the Mews Views justice going forward and will have to resign from the post.

SAFA has also been through its fair share of challenges. On this note, I can only say that we need to stand together. A culture of elitism has crept into our attitudes, and we need to do some serious introspection if we want falconry to continue in our country. The California Hawking Club Apprenticeship Manual starts with the sentence "Park your ego at the door". These are words to live by, and if we start removing self-interest and stop playing the blame game, falconry can only grow.

Happy hawking





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By Keaton Ditchfield

Retrospective on Flying Eight Ovambo Sparrowhawks

BY **ROBBIE ROBINSON**

It is with great pleasure and anticipation of some great hawking that I see the increased interest in austringers flying Ovambo Sparrowhawks. Because of how different I found my first Ovambo from training and flying African Goshawks and even Black Spars, I thought some insights and lesson I learned might interest austringers.

Most of my birds were taken as eyases and reared in the house. As you will see from what follows, my birds have all been reared in close association with me and the family and pets. This showed me how significant early handling interacts with the stages of development of a young Ovambo and ultimately influences how it performs as a hunter. It needs no comment on how desirable it is to avoid hard imprinting and there are various strategies one can use. What does need emphasising is how important it is to avoid having the chick associate you directly with food. At one time, I thought that placing the food on a glove on the floor was a good idea, but some birds then infuriatingly peck at the glove when on the fist, so later I fed all eyases on a saucer.



Mental development of the eyas is remarkably fast. Over the space of a day, they will show differences in behaviour and response to activities. For me, this has meant that I need to be extremely sensitive of how my bird has changed while I have not been around. My experiences with creche rearing a group together have reinforced these observations. Within a matter of hours differences between individuals can become evident and might require each to be handled differently.

This is why it is good for the bird to be in a place where it can see all sorts of activities. It also means that ideally one can spend considerable time around her and starting to get her to allow you to approach her when there is no reward involved.

From flying my own birds and seeing a few birds reared by other austringers, it is apparent that the way eyases are reared has effects beyond imprinting on their behaviour as adults. Food imprinting can develop if the eyas sees you only when it is fed. Similarly, even a highly socialised eyas that has learned that it can run away from you when approached will do the same thing as an adult, resulting in a bird that carries prey away even though it has no fear of you or of being robbed. If an eyas that has started feeding on the glove is allowed to take its food and turn away from you, it will do that when being flown. Avoiding bad habits in your Ovambo takes as much, perhaps more, alertness on your part than does raising a rug rat!

I am strongly in favour of having any shortwing made to the lure and keep my birds keen to come to it throughout their lives with me. To this end, I start letting the eyas pick food off the lure between times of being fed on a saucer. With my first bird I thought that it would similarly having it start standing on the glove once that age of food imprinting was past. Bad idea. Because the eyas is still not jessed up, it can simply jump off the fist when it has finished feeding. This follows though to the rest of its life, so you have a bird that bates off the fist once its meal is over – definitely the wrong thing! So, whenever they are encouraged onto the glove for a titbit, I make sure I put them back off the glove before they leave by themselves.

Stepping, hopping and even short flights to the glove start while my birds are still in the rearing pen that is set up in my lounge. (Yes, Di is extremely supportive and long-suffering of household disruptions caused by my falconry!)

Ovambos, like most shortwings, use their hearing for hunting as well as communication with one another. For this reason, I use a whistle for attracting my bird's attention. This very quickly develops a conditioned reflex to get the bird to look for you even when out of sight. When I start training to step onto the fist, I will whistle every time the bird steps or is called to glove or lure.

Calling off perches to the glove and lure outside then is mainly a case of avoiding disturbances and getting the weight right. Weight control here is quite tricky. Because your eyes is relaxed and already partly trained, she will be responsive until something else interest her or startles her. This is where continuing flying on the creance until you have figured out a weight at which he will come instantly you show the glove or lure is essential. Distance is far, far less important than obedience with Ovambos. In the same way, calling from different places, especially out of trees, needs to be started even before she is off the creance. [Yes, I too have had a bird hop from branch to branch, around and around the trunk, until it was near the top of a tree, creance thoroughly tangled. Solution? Climb some way up the tree, cut the creance, get down, go into the open and throw the lure out. The value of the lure as an "emergency handbrake" can't be too strongly emphasised given the temperament of Ovambos.] Just as important as having your bird come from a variety of stands, it is very important to get them to fly to a tree and then call them back to you. My approach is to call to the glove a couple of times, then to the lure on the ground and for the last flight of the day, to the glove. My lure is a special item while the glove is the "go to" when called.

Use of a lure, and here I mean an artificial one, with shortwings is often controversial and I have strong opinion about it based on my Ovambos, Black Spars, Af Gosses and Rednecked Falcons, all birds flown from the fist. Apart from increasing your visibility to the bird and adding a different attraction, timely use of your lure can completely avoid a bird starting to carry.

Ovambos, especially muskets, are particularly prone to carrying. For wild muskets this is a way of getting away from their sisters of mates who want to rob them and probably is almost instinctive in captive reared birds. A bird sitting on a kill can usually be encouraged to grab a lure to which it is used to coming. There is no hastening in making-in before it decides to find a comfortable perch or fuss and bother chasing the bird, or having him just pull the food away from you.

Because creance training has included flying my birds away from me to a perch or the thrown lure, first free flights are just a repeat of creance training, but for me, with emphasis on distance and obedience. It is well worth spending a bit of extra time on this stage of training – it will pay off when you are hunting. Ovambos are notional birds and no matter how long they have been flown and how keen they are to hunt, there will be occasions when they take stand in a tree and just look around. As long as the situation is safe, the best thing to do is walk away, stopping and calling and luring at intervals. On one occasion, I have walked a kilometre from a recalcitrant Black Spar. Eventually she became more worried than me and came to the glove as though nothing had happened. This training does work.

In spite of their rapacity, some of my Ovambos have needed quite a few offers at quarry flushed close to them before getting the idea. Throwing a dead bird of the type most likely to give the first wild flight helps in getting the idea across to the hawk. This mustn't be done for too long or too often because Ovambos very, very quickly get cunning and learn that putting your hand in your bag or a string twitching the grass means an easy "kill".

There is no question about Ovambos being somewhat temperamental. All my birds as well as the few others I have seen flown have sometimes simply gone off and sat in a tree. Quite often this happens after a failed pursuit and especially if they have seen prey not seen by the austringer and bated at it but been restrained. They get the sulks and on the next flight they might just go off and sit somewhere. This is another situation where I don't throw out a dead bird unless the situation poses possible danger to the hawk. Obviously, the size of a reward for returning to the glove or lure is small or they are given nothing.

The quickness with which Ovambos learn what is easiest for them has implications for when to introduce different quarry and how one manages hunts. Although I haven't had any of my birds getting strongly wedded to a particular species, they have all become particularly keen to hunting species which they have often caught. These are not necessarily particularly easy species – my last female flew and caught Crowned Lapwing on the wing at any opportunity she had. A bird Kenny Pinnock flew for a number of seasons would fling itself at any snipe that flushed within ten metres of her. Unfortunately, there is a reverse side to this.

My birds have become reluctant to chase species, for example, larks that have often eluded them. The last musket I flew refused larks no matter how many ways I tried to reignite his earlier enthusiasm. This was really disappointing because he would fly other birds that appeared to me just as fast flying and even more maneuverable than the larks.

"The Ovambo is an amazing shortwing that is beautifully suited to savanna and open grassland conditions."

Perhaps in another article I will wax lyrical on successful hunting and frustrating moments with the Ovambos I reared and the passage birds I flew. For the moment all I will say is that the Ovambo is an amazing shortwing that is beautifully suited to savanna and open grassland conditions.

Female Ovambo Sparrowhawks have virtually the same "reach" of foot as most Black Sparrowhawk muskets even though she is only about 60% of his weight. And muskets have a reach as large as that of musket African Goshawks. Muskets are small enough to be flown in the same conditions as Little Sparrowhawks but have as big feet as female Redbreasted Sparrowhawks. Despite being small, muskets are sufficiently bigger than Redbreasted Sparrowhawk muskets so that they can still be hunted (with care) during winter in the colder areas. Well managed Ovambo Sparrowhawks will give you amazing f aerial flights and will fly all afternoon. I hope to see many more people getting totally hooked on Ovambos.



Accipiter Ovampensis

BY MALCOLM HARDING



Successful falconry is about flying the correct bird for the available space and quarry. By the time August 2020 came around, it was time to submit our wish lists for the coming season. I started to check flying grounds to see what available quarry was around to obtain the correct calibre hawk for the operation, make sure that all my equipment is of the appropriate size and weight, and that my telemetry is in order.

I had come to the conclusion that there is a vast amount of smaller birds species during the summer months, and this made me ponder about a micro hawk for the operation. The natural conclusion was that a Musket Ovambo would be the perfect candidate for an amazing season ahead. I decided to do a social imprint of 15 days old as to have a window for breeding as they'll be imprinted on parents thus to know they are hawks and social imprint for bonding.

The next step was to read all the books I had for small accipiters: *The Imprint Accipiter 2* by Michael McDermott, *A Hawk for the Bush* by Jack Mavrogordato, *Sparrowhawks a Falconer's Guide* by Ben Crane, and *Trustworthy* Emma Ford. This helped me formulate a plan to work from to achieve success with a micro-hawk.

The bureaucrats also needed to be kept happy, and once I had formulated my plan, I applied for trapping permit and put through my motivation to committee for approval.

While waiting for Nature Conservation to issue the permit, I approached Robbie Robinson and Kenny Pinnock for some more advice and to better understand these little pocket rockets as they had numerous successes and had flown them for some time.

By mid-September the permit arrived, and I had already started finding and monitoring some nests, now it was just a matter of watching until the right time.

24 October I climbed a tree we had been watching compliments of Andrew Walker who found this nest and assisted me with extreme drone footage of the mother sitting on nest with chicks. I got up the tree $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way to the nest and was out of reach, felt a bit dizzy and near from the height so I climbed back down. Plan B was to call a trustworthy gardener who climbed trees like a natural. He went up as if it was second nature made it look so easy, pulled the smallest of the three chicks from nest, put it in small box and in a kit bag and lowered the prize down to me. I opened the kit bag and was in absolute awe of this little beauty, I was so grateful for that momentum and rewarded the gardener extremely well.





One of the things I learnt from imprinting, raising and hunting this musket was his passion for slaying little brown jobs (LBJs), he was soon spinning like a boss and well on his way to a double-digit headcount.

He was trained using the Michael McDermott method so I never fed him on the glove and he would recall to ungarnished glove with no problems. We got our rhythm after a few months and he was on fire, he would be averaging 3-4 kills a daily.

He did however have the habit of taking out his frustrations on me when he missed a slip, so I watched some Ben Woodruff YouTube videos on aggression, and this helped me redirect his anger. Sjoie thank goodness I got that right in the early stages.

We ended the first season on 223 kills. I moulted him out in a room dedicated to him in the house I would go in to feed and interact with him daily to keep him fairly tame.

USE OF THE QUADCOPTER IN SOUTH AFRICAN FALCONRY

BY ALAN HARVEY

Falconers the world over have since time immemorial been trying to find ways to consistently and reliably train falcons used for gamehawking to take high pitches. Kites and the helium balloons were developed in America in the eighties with some success. We started using kites here in South Africa in the nineties after corresponding with Carlton Green by letter nogal. It wasn't long before every long winger here had a kite of sorts and was using it as part of their falcons training. Results were mixed with some birds becoming big flyers and others would not fly above treetop height if there was no kite in the sky. The naturally mounting birds and most passage falcons of course just flew high as they had since the beginning of falconry.





The problem as we found out was the switchover from flying up to a suspended bait on the kite to mounting with nothing in the sky over the quarry. Some birds just became wedded to flying a thousand foot up to the kite just as did some falconers who became addicted to seeing their bird cranking skywards.... we tried flushing quarry when the falcon was halfway up to the kite and then gradually allowing the falcon to get closer to the kite before the flush. The idea being to teach the hawk the value of height and to not fixate on the kite but to keep an eye on what was happening below her, all these clever plans did bring some improvement but consistency in producing good high-flying falcons was still lacking.

Francois Breedt and I then started using RC planes instead of kites. This changed the focus of the falcon from flying up to a stationary suspended lure to actively hunting an RC plane towing a bait. The plane could either be in the air when the falcon was cast off or launched after casting off. This increased the scope for different training techniques. You could drag the falcon all over the sky at breakneck speed and finally allow it to take the lure in a full-tuck vertical dive. Francois has had great success with the plane with a number of his own birds and other guys' birds he has helped train notably a cast of tiercels he and Graham sleep flew in a cast. Unfortunately, some of the less experienced pilots did some spectacular nose dives into the ground with pieces of plane and lipo batteries exploding everywhere... The RC plane route works better than the kite but has more logistics and requires a good pilot and a helper/launcher.

Then we started using the quadcopter more commonly known as a drone. This has the advantage of having a combination of the good points of the kite and the plane. You can use the quadcopter as a stationary lure or drag the lure around the sky like a plane.

The biggest advantage though is that no special piloting skills are needed and the quad returns to its launch site on its own allowing the falconer to concentrate on his falcon. Initially, we started with huge quads, some with eight props and taking up almost the whole back seat or canopy of the bakkie. We have since moved to the much smaller and more affordable DJI Phantom series drones and now the even smaller foldable DJI Mavics and Air 2s which are available making it possible to carry the complete quad and transmitter in your falconry jacket. These smaller quads have thirty minutes flying time per battery and have proved more than capable of carrying a lure at the speeds required.

With the use of all the above hardware, the problem is still the changeover to hunting quarry. None of the above guarantees you will develop a high-mounting bird. Recently Gareth Rowley told me about a new way of using the quadcopter which an American falconer Scott Larson has developed. He had also run into the same problems we were having. Being an old-style falconer who had always used pigeons to train his birds he got to thinking how he could use the new technology. He came up with what he calls the Perfect Pigeon. As the use of pigeons is not legal in South Africa, I have decided to share the following method that has worked very effectively for numerous falconers.

The technique in short works like this. You first train your bird to pull the lure off the quad as before using about 5 meters of dacron connected to a small parachute around 50cm in diameter stuffed into a capsule hanging about a meter below the quad. Either with a release clip or using the friction of the chute in the capsule to hold it.

Once the bird grabs the lure hanging at the end of the 5 m dacron line the parachute deploys and the bird floats down to the ground. You hit the

return to home button and the quadcopter returns to where it took off from and switches off. The 1m length of line between the quad and the parachute capsule is important to stop the lines from getting entangled in the props which will potentially cause a serious dent in your credit card. In short, basically how we have always used the quad.

The way Scott describes it is you use the quad as a substitute for a controlled flush. You cast off your falcon. When the bird has reached whatever pitch she usually takes, instead of flushing quarry, you launch the quad from where you have previously set it up ready for takeoff. Your falcon comes racing over and takes the bait as the quad is climbing. Now each day you move the quad launch side further and further away from and in random directions from where you cast the falcon off, until the quad is launching up to 5 or 6 hundred meters away.

So the thought process here is that the falcon starts mounting higher in anticipation of quarry/ the quad flushing but because it has no idea where the flush will come from the bird needs to get progressively more height to cover the area.

This is a much more realistic scenario that ties in with actual hunting and does not have the awkward changeover process when your falcon does not have a visual cue in the sky to get it to mount. You have total control over the quad and can make it go faster, higher, or streak away like normal quarry. you can adapt the level of difficulty as needed to challenge the falcon at each stage of her development.

I have started using this quad training method and like Gareth has also found the results very encouraging. Full credit to Scott Larson and other falconers around the world for working out new training methods and sharing in the quest for better falconry.

SANDGROUSE HAWKING

with THE PASSAGE LANNER

BY **ANTON MULLER**

I am looking across a dry, barren, seemingly lifeless plain in central South Africa. Apart from the beautiful vista in the crisp morning light, what can it possibly have to offer in the sense of excitement? The chain of events that is about to unfold has the ability to put any falconer on a high that can last for days. A melodious sound first faintly audible, but ever growing louder brings a smile to my face, the Namaqua Sandgrouse are flying into their feeding area for the day. In groups from two to ten, they come in and settle in different parts of the plain. I carefully mark the different groups by drawing a line on the ground with my boot pointing in the direction of settled groups of sandgrouse. With each line drawn, a careful estimation of the distance to the sandgrouse is remembered.

A little while later I am walking slowly but determined in a straight direction on the barren plain. Despite my slow pace, my heart is pounding in my chest, to the extent that I can hear my own heart beating in my ears! But why the excitement?

A sickled spot of wing high in the heavens above is the reason for my contained excitement, for a trained passage Lanner Falcon is waiting on. Waiting on to be served a flight at the quarry of quarries-sandgrouse. The sheer height and determined wingbeat are a demonstration that the falcon knows what to expect. I stop walking to glance upwards, for a couple of seconds, and my trained eye locates a speck amongst the clouds - the falcon is in position. I continue on my determined course with even more contained excitement. An eruption of wings at my feet and six sandgrouse lift from the ground. I was expecting them a bit further ahead or it could be a totally different covey I wasn't aware of. An aerial drama is unfolding, the grouse is straight-lining away at incredible speed six feet above the ground, above the falcon has folded after three seconds of rapid vertical wing strokes. My eyes lock on the stooping falcon, the catapult of gravity and super aerodynamics are hurtling the falcon projectile ever faster toward the ground. The crisp morning rays of sunlight lights up the white chest of an intermewed passage Lanner Falcon. An elegant arc at the bottom of the stoop drops the falcon in behind the fleeing sandgrouse already three hundred metres away. Incredible momentum speeds the falcon without a wingbeat right up to the grouse. Sensing the danger the six



sandgrouse scatter in different directions, 'each to his own' for survival. Amongst this flurry of wings a single sandgrouse opted for a hard left break manoeuvre, but the timing was off. As the grouse jolted left to become perpendicular to its original direction of flight, an extended leg from the falcon bring the falcons foot into contact with the head of the sandgrouse—a headshot. It seems like a slight touch but the visible shockwave that runs through the body and feathers of the falcon, is testimony to the incredible speed of contact.

The wingbeats of the sandgrouse seizes in that instant, but its own momentum carries it on towards the left, it hits the ground in a cloud of dust, bumps up and continue to hop and roll head over heels for another twenty five meters slower and slower until it eventually stops as a stone dead sandgrouse. Another few seconds and the Lanner Falcon casually glides in from its throw-up to take possession of the prize for victory.

Long before you spot the sandgrouse it can be identified by its very distinct and beautiful call. When flying they won't let five seconds go by without uttering this call. A call that cuts a long distances through the air, even half a kilometre or more on a quiet day. It often happens that you hear a Namaqua Sandgrouse, but fail to spot the dove-sized silhouette in the blue skies. In the Afrikaans language the name for this sandgrouse species is: 'Kelkiewyn.' It is a direct description to the sound this bird makes.

In English phonetics, it will sound like a high pitched: "cal - key - vane ". The meaning of the word Kelkiewyn: 'small glass of wine'. Maybe the early pioneers that entered the harsh desolate landscape of the western parts of Southern Africa, found consolation in this somewhat lonely, sad and beautiful call that was heard over the dunes and gravel plains.

The plumage of the male and female is different. The male has a single brown band across the chest, lighter colour and beautiful pearly spots within the back cover feathers. The female has slight barring on the chest and a somewhat darker but duller overall appearance. The body feathers are easily shed with contact but not as easy as with doves.

A loose body plumage is definitely a defence strategy against attack by raptors. Many attempts of attack by trained falcons leaves feathers behind drifting in the air, meanwhile the sandgrouse is hooking top gear and the falcon gets burned in the race that follows. The primary and secondary flight feathers are stiff and strongly bedded in the wings. The central tail feathers are longer and forms a short pointy tail, but the other tail feathers are quite short but effective for manoeuvrability at very high speed.

The weight range of the Namaqua sandgrouse lies between 185 grams for the female and up to 210 grams for the males. They have very strong skin compared to other birds their size, to the extent that even a big falcon has to exert itself in tearing into the carcass of a sandgrouse. The ligaments of the wings are also notably stronger than similar-sized doves and even bigger pigeons. To tear a wing and breast from a 200 gram sandgrouse carcass, a grown man has to grip and even grip again at the wings. A fine beak and a small head on the one end and a sharp tail on the other. And in between the tail and head is what grips the interest of the falconer, an enormous chest bone protruding in the front, roundly filled with dark red pectoral muscles. These muscles power relatively small wings of the sandgrouse.

Sandgrouse will only glide when descending sharply to land. And when coming in to land they will hover the last meter or so with fast-beating wings to soften their landing. This is testimony to the incredible high wing loading sandgrouse have.

The Namaqua Sandgrouse, and most sandgrouse in general, possess attributes that make them a dream quarry for the serious game hawk. As a species, they favour open ground far from any shrub or hedge that could offer safety against aerial predation. Instead, they rely on their superb camouflage and incredible speed to keep them out of harm's way. Their nature of camouflage makes them sit tight while a falcon is in the air, creating hawking setups that are as close to perfect as can be. Sandgrouse are very much creatures of habit, for periods they have definite roosting, watering, and feeding areas. The flights between these three areas are a reliable way of locating them in the vast areas they occur in. Once located, the punctual nature of sandgrouse can utilized to strategize flights with falcons on them.

Sandgrouse never perch on a tree, fenceline or shrub, they are absolute ground dwelling.

They are slow moving terrestrials that heavily rely on camouflage to stay out of harm's way. When danger is sighted they drop flat on their bellies with their heads flat on the ground. Their cryptic colouration makes it almost impossible to spot them. Only at very close range, and basically looking down on them, can they be picked out with the eye. You can pass hundreds of sandgrouse on the ground without ever knowing they were there. So to locate them by looking for them on the ground will not be productive at all.

Only once you are aware of their holding areas they can be spotted with a pair of binoculars while sitting upright in the fields or walking about and feeding.

So how to locate the game for your falcons? In flying season, Namaqua Sandgrouse occur in what I would describe as clusters. I would describe a cluster of sandgrouse as the number of birds that favours the same roosting, drinking and feeding areas. This cluster of sandgrouse can vary in number from 30 to thousands of birds. Depending on the size of the cluster the birds move between the roosting-, drinking- and feeding areas in flocks that vary from 1 to fifty birds or even more.

The first step in locating sandgrouse would be to utilize the characteristic of them being creatures of habit in regards to flying to the same areas at the same time every day. For our purposes of campaigning sandgrouse with trained falcons, a sandgrouse's day can be reduced to three activities in three different areas: roosting, drinking and feeding.

Waking at their roosting area they will sun and groom themselves for 1 to 2 hours after sunrise. In small groups they will start flying to the drinking area, first a trickle of flocks and gradually more flocks so that after an hour or so the stragglers would also have left for the drinking spot. Of course a small cluster will all be gone in a matter of minutes but also flying in broken flocks. This punctual drinking habit can be exploited in two ways. First be in the area 8am, get out of your vehicle and start listening for the beautiful and distinct sound of the Namaqua sandgrouse.

It is essential to be armed with a good pair of binoculars to scan the horizons for flocks flying out of earshot. Very distant flocks of birds can be identified as sandgrouse by their characteristic straight line flying and stationary flock pattern, even in very windy conditions their small wings cut the gale and carry their heavy bodies in a straight line through the air. Pigeons and starlings will go up and down and reform as flock when observed. Sandgrouse fly like fighter jets in formation.

When the sandgrouse is spotted flying at this time of the morning, it will be a sure indication from the direction they come, lies their roosting area and where they are heading is the drinking spot. The flocks can mostly be followed by the eye with a pair of good binoculars. Where they go down will indicate the area of the drinking spot. If the flocks fly out of vision the drinking area is too far and you will have to move to another observation point along their flying line. Roads or the terrain permitting a vehicle can also be used to keep the flocks of sandgrouse in vision.

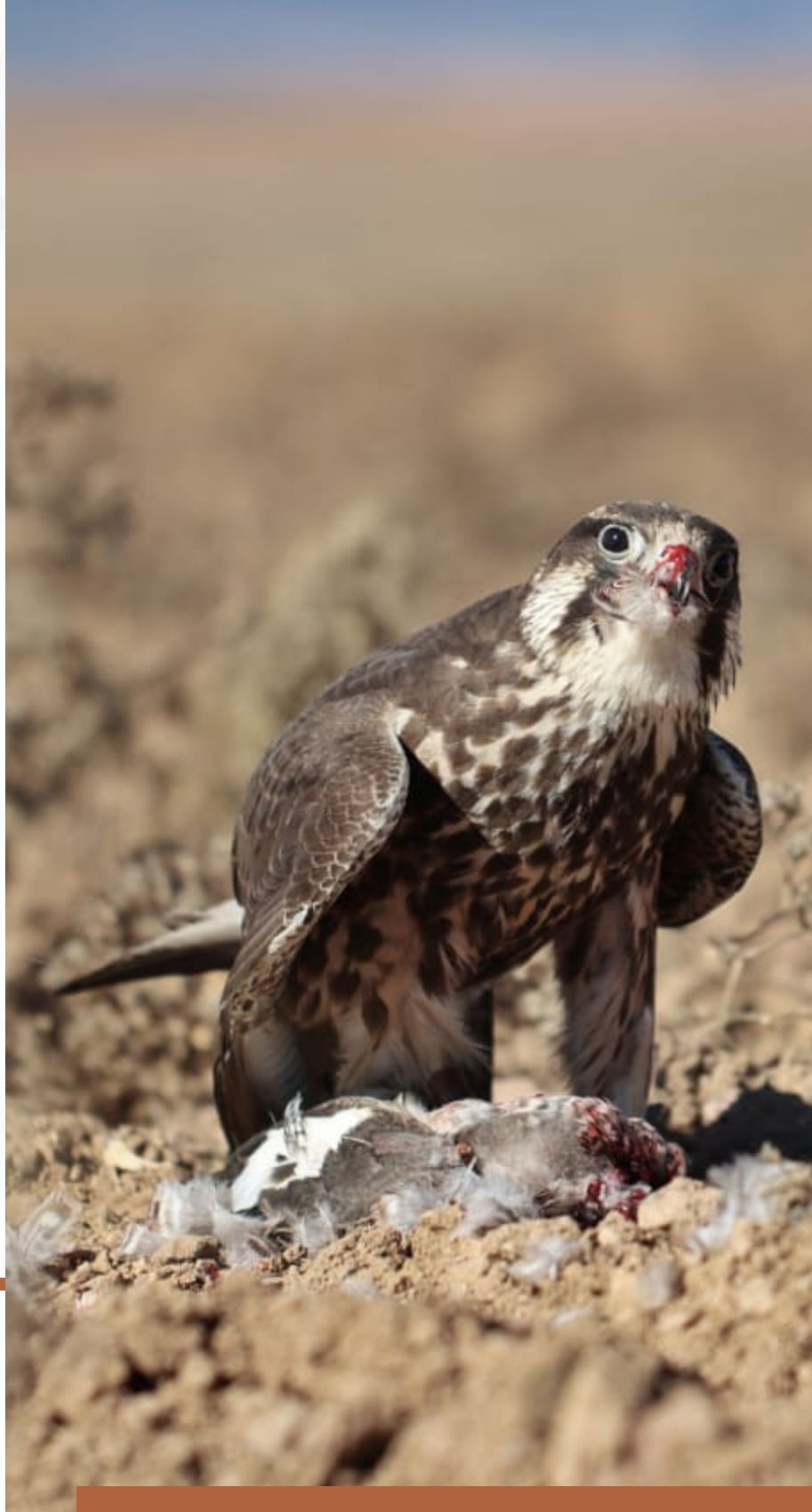
Sandgrouse fly like fighter jets in formation

The drinking spot will be a water source that is at ground level that permits the sandgrouse to walk into the water and drink. Sandgrouse are not capable of perching on the edge of a trough or reservoir and leaning over for water like doves and pigeons do. The water source can be a small puddle from a leaking trough or reservoir, or a bigger body of water like a ground reservoir, natural spring, and water-filled pans or depressions. The other criteria for a suitable drinking spot is that the surrounding area must be clear with very little or no vegetation. This clearing on the water's edge allows the sandgrouse to land safely and walk towards the water. The clearings around the water are also used for feeding, resting, or sometimes social interaction. The drinking area is the next step in locating the feeding areas. By keeping the flocks that leave in sight with binoculars an accurate direction can be obtained to the feeding areas, usually, it is out of vision so another observation point will have to be made along the flight path to determine where the birds go down for feeding. The waterhole can be utilized for flying setups if the number of sandgrouse visiting are not too many.

Too much sandgrouse traffic concentrated around the waterhole will turn your long-awaited sandgrouse flight into frustration. But a waterhole with a big clearing around it and where a couple of sandgrouse visit can offer great setups. Often they will start feeding at the waterhole after drinking, walking away into the clearing, and pecking.

These groups of sandgrouse can be observed and marked. The falcon can then be put up a good distance away. It is better not to take a slip at sandgrouse close to the water as they have a strong flight instinct when in a vulnerable situation like at the water's edge. Rather wait for a covey to walk away and be totally aware of their surroundings as the sight of a falcon will make them take flight and your slip will be ruined.

After drinking, the sandgrouse fly from the waterhole to their feeding area for the day. The feeding ground flight happens about two to three hours after sunrise. If flocks are spotted flying from nine o'clock onwards it can be deduced they are flying in the direction of the feeding grounds. With the same flight observation methods as described before the direction of the feeding area can be located. As with the waterhole, sandgrouse have very specific needs in regards to their feeding areas.



They prefer bare ground with slight vegetation where they can walk easily in search for protein-rich seeds. They cannot jump and climb over obstacles with their short under-developed legs, like other gamebirds do. In my area fallow fields and harvested sunflower fields fit this criteria.

The sandgrouse mainly feeds on certain protein-rich weed seeds and sunflower seeds spilled from the harvest. However, overgrazed veldt or brackish pans can also be favoured as feeding areas by the sandgrouse. Observing sandgrouse and the habitat they favour on a day-to-day basis, will quickly show you what to look for in feeding areas. If the flight direction takes you to an area that fits the description for a feeding area you have most likely found your grouse to fly at. For flights with Lanner Falcons this is the area you are looking for. At this daily feeding area the sandgrouse will be present from 9:30 am to 16:00pm. Once the feeding area is located the falconer can be waiting at the field from 9:00am. Here the small flocks will start arriving and settle in the fields to start feeding. It is very exciting to wait at the edge of a field and wait for the sandgrouse to arrive.

The beautiful calls of the Namaqua Sandgrouse always announces their arrival.

With your gaze in the direction of the calls, you will be able to spot the arriving flocks. To watch these powerful flyers pass overhead and settle in the fields adds to the whole hawking experience. Marked flocks on the ground can be flown at by your falcon at this time. If you prefer to fly later you can also drive around in a vehicle, in or around the area where most of the flocks have landed. A motor vehicle is not regarded as a danger by sandgrouse, they stand upright and continue feeding with a vehicle close by.

By driving very slowly and with a trained eye you will be able to spot the silhouettes of the sandgrouse. To stop in an area and carefully scan from within the vehicle with a pair of binoculars is also a very effective way of locating sandgrouse in the feeding area. If the vegetation is too high to scan for sandgrouse, the vehicle can be slowly driven in the area to hopefully bump a covey and then mark them as they land again for a slip.

From 16:15pm onwards the sandgrouse that have spent the day in the feeding area will start returning to their roosting area. First one or two flocks will take flight but the rest will soon follow and thirty minutes later all the sandgrouse will have left. The roosting area can also be located by observation as with the drinking and feeding

areas. A roosting area will be an area with little vegetation where sandgrouse can land safely and settle for sleeping. By being present at the roosting area from 16:15 the arriving flocks can be marked for slips when they land. Roosting areas can be small areas and a lot smaller than the feeding areas, consequently, there will be a high concentration of sandgrouse. Thus great care has to be taken not to disturb the pattern of the cluster of sandgrouse when flushing for a falcon. Rather the hawking should be limited and only be done on the fringes of the area as to not disturb too many birds with a flight and change the daily pattern of the cluster. The roosting area offers the late afternoon slip for your falcon. The high concentration of sandgrouse and their punctual arrival makes this a sure slip for the day.

The Lanner Falcon is a very successful falcon and as a species exploits a wide range of habitats. In Southern Africa I have seen a lanner sitting on the shoreline of the West Coast in the extremely arid Namib Desert, happily hunting shorebirds. On the East Coast of Southern Africa, I saw a pair of Lanners happily sitting in a dead tree in a coastal forest, the female with a half-eaten rat in her talons. In the middle, so to speak, on a high mountain peak of the Drakensberg Mountain Range, a Lanner Falcon caught a Speckled Pigeon before my eyes. These sightings in such different environments are testimony to the adaptability of the Lanner Falcon.

The ability to adapt by a falcon can be utilized as a strength in a falconry application. But this characteristic of the Lanner Falcon will also deliver very different individual falcons in the species. Between the mountain-dwelling pigeon-catching falcon and the rat-catching forest falcon, it is obvious which falcon will most likely be the better falconry bird. The same applies to Peregrines but the difference in habits is bigger in the Lanner species because it is such an adaptable and successful species of falcon.

In the Highlands of Lesotho, in the Semonkong Gorge, I have seen a pair of lanners targeting big species of swifts as prey. They hunted them by stooping in tandem at swifts crossing the gorge. And in a small village in the Kalahari Desert, I saw a lanner tiercel, flying by with a small bird in its claws, thought to be a sparrow at that time.

A little while later I saw this Lanner tiercel energetically pursuing a Barn Swallow repeatedly stooping and chasing it. The female came in from a big height with a big stoop, struck the swallow dead and the male collected the falling swallow.

This pair of lanners was utilizing the influx of migratory birds in the desert very successfully as I saw the male flying with yet another small bird. So despite what has been said and written about the Lanner Falcon as a falconry bird, it is wired as

a bird-catching falcon, doing this in great style with hard stoops and bone-tearing strikes. Species of birds personally observed as prey species for Lanners include the following: swallows, swifts, various dove species, various pigeon species, Yellow-billed Hornbill, Crowned with hard stoops and bone-tearing strikes. Species of birds personally observed as prey species for Lanners include the following: swallows, swifts, various dove species, various pigeon species, Yellow-billed Hornbill, Crowned Lapwing, kestrels, Blackwing Kite, sandgrouse, teal and korhaan (small bustard) to name a few. This prey list gives an idea of what the Lanner Falcon is capable of.

As falconry birds lanners have been trained to hunt successfully on duck, teal, pigeons, doves, partridge, francolin, snipe, lapwing, quail and sandgrouse.

The nature of the sport of falconry can be described as a lifelong passion and pursuit that involves the falcons and hawks, the game, and the beautiful outdoors and veldt. In the pursuit of this passion, it is understandable that it would come along with certain likes and dislikes as well as strong opinions on certain subjects. This would include the falcons and hawks, the pointing dogs and even the vehicles used for transport to the veldt. One such subject is the Lanner vs Peregrine debate. Where you have some Peregrine aficionados on the one side that won't tolerate any comparison to the supreme Peregrine Falcon.

And on the other hand, those that have hunted the lanner successfully and seen falconry comparable to the best there is available. I personally believe the lanner falcon is a bigger challenge to fly than the peregrine and the reward in achieving success is as good as having a thrilling peregrine for a season. But this success with lanner falcons is only available to those that give full commitment to a lanner as their falconry bird and treat it with the dignity it deserves. The comparisons drawn are between the African Peregrine Falcon and *Biarcticus* subspecies lanner of Southern Africa. The weight ranges for the lanner is 430 -510 grams for the tiercels and 550 -720 grams for the females. The minor subspecies of peregrine's weight ranges are similar for the tiercels but some female peregrines can weigh up to 775 grams.

However with both species, the weight is not indicative of the size of the quarry the falcons are willing to take, as you can get smaller females that happily take ducks and bigger ones that refuse.

The lanner has a different build from the peregrine but not an inferior build, as many believe. The peregrine is the falcon that hunts

the localized high prey density areas, and usually this happens at first light and at the last light of the day when the peregrine is energetically in pursuit of its prey. The lanner on the other hand is the falcon that uses its flying strengths and the air currents to climb to out-of-sight pitches over vast areas of land with a much lower prey density, from these pitches it uses its phenomenal eyesight to locate prey in these areas.

High-speed attacks on unsuspecting prey like flocks of pigeons feeding in a field is made by stooping from these out-of-sight pitches during the day. These are differences that can be used to fly both species to their strengths in falconry and offer excellent sport.

The bigger wings of the lanner gives it a slower wingbeat than the peregrine and admittedly it is less pleasing to the eye, but Lanner Falcons are by no means slow falcons, they have the ability to fly down fast flying birds in level flight like doves and rock pigeons. They also have a remarkable climbing ability if they are trained to do so or have the incentive to get up there.

A lanner tiercel flown to the kite climbed the 300 meters of kite line in three minutes, this is impressive by any standards. A peregrine tiercel trained on the same kite couldn't beat this climb rate. This same lanner tiercel was flown at breaking light in the morning and would take a constant pitch of between 800 and 1000 feet, simply because it was trained and flown like a peregrine. Interestingly the recent advent of GPS transmitter technology has put the Lanner and the Peregrine a lot closer to each other than what has originally been propagated by many falconers and naturalists alike. This is especially true under falconry conditions. Flight data recordings with these transmitters have shown that the speed of the average falconry stoop lies between 140km/h to 200km/h and that both lanners and peregrines come down at these speeds.

The fastest lanner speed I recorded was from my lanner tiercel that clocked in at 204km/h in high definition mode. This speed was attained from a pitch of 350 meters high in a successful attack on a dove. Many stoops by peregrines and lanners from thermal pitches of 700 meters or more were only in the region of 175km/h. This shows that the emphasis on pitch alone is rather overrated. Some conclusions we can make is that the biggest incentive for a falcon to stoop faster is to prevent quarry from escaping, like getting to a dove that is heading for cover or a sandgrouse that is heading for the horizon.

I can confidently say that a dove or sandgrouse hunting lanner is going to stoop faster than a duck-hunting peregrine. The smaller fast-flying quarry also draws out bigger contact speeds simply because the risk of injury is less with

smaller quarry regardless of the species of falcon.

When it comes to aggression the peregrine is definitely the more aggressive species. Not to say you won't find peregrines that refuses to take bigger quarry like ducks. But in general with less effort most peregrines will be more easily trained to take ducks, than what can be achieved with lanners. Some individual lanners can however be extremely aggressive and utilizing the striking habit can be very effective on big quarry with a debilitating blow to the neck or head. A good example of this is a lanner tiercel that can be flown at cock Swainson's Spurfowl which is a hard fighting quarry on the ground, and one that have kicked off many female peregrines on the ground.

What style the lanner lacks in going up it certainly makes up for in the endgame when it comes to the strike. Where a bind is the norm for peregrines, a strike is the method most often used by lanners to disable the quarry. This habit results in spectacular kills for the falconer and is certainly one of the reasons I prefer lanners for many of my seasons in falconry. The lanner tries to keep as much momentum as possible to enable another attack if the first attempt fails. When contact is made it results in an audible hit that can be heard over hundreds of meters and a feather-strewn track with the hapless quarry at the end.

This striking habit also let the lanner happily cut across the flight path of quarry for a strike and when doves sometimes double back to the tree they have been flushed from, the lanner is happy to take them head on. While a peregrine is more inclined to align from behind and below to catch the fleeing quarry.

Lanners are very intelligent falcons, which can make them great falconry companions.

But this intelligence and their opportunistic nature can also make them notoriously lazy if wrongly handled by the inexperienced falconer. They will find the easiest way to feed themselves and if allowed it will be from the falconer's bag and not from the game they catch. Peregrines are a lot more forgiving in this regard and way less prone to laziness.

The balance between the hunter and hunted is an important element for good sport. For example, a big exotic hybrid flown at our local partridges upsets this balance which results in a lot of dumping or even an intimidated suicide flight.

With a lanner in the air, the balance shifts a lot more to the quarry flying hard and honestly. In the case of sandgrouse, the chances of dumping is a lot less with a lanner than with the fast wingbeat flight of the peregrine. Thus single marked sandgrouse can offer a great flight with a lanner whereas the same single sandgrouse will almost certainly dump in front of a stooping peregrine.

Putting game in the bag through the season or at a field meet is not just a function of which falcon is better than the other. But in this regard a lanner is certainly not taking a back seat to the peregrine. Lanners can be as effective and in many instances even more effective than peregrines. It all comes down to the training and skill of the falconer and the type of quarry hunted. By using sandgrouse as a measure and from my humble and limited experience my female Lanner Skyfall was the most effective falcon to date I flew on sandgrouse. Second to this was a passage peregrine tiercel although it took about fifteen serious attempts before the first sandgrouse was caught. But from then on he became very deadly on sandgrouse. The two passage lanner tiercels I flew on sandgrouse weren't as effective as the female lanner and slightly less than the passage peregrine tiercel.

Sandgrouse is certainly one of the most demanding quarries to put in the bag for a falconer. It becomes easier with time, but to bag the first sandgrouse can be a feat that is accomplished only after a couple of seasons. This is especially true for the falconer that has limited slips on them in a season. I remember way back before sandgrouse seriously campaigned as a quarry, the campfire conversations at falconry meets was heated, as to what falcon you would need to put a sandgrouse in the bag. Many a conclusion on this speculation ended with; a big female peregrine as the solution for the quest. It certainly was a right answer, but not the only one. There proved to be more than one solution for the quest and among them was the passage lanner.

Both male and female passage lanners proved to be not just capable of catching sandgrouse, but doing it in a style that puts them right next to the peregrine and certainly above for me. Most falconers will find this hard to believe and just plain otherwise but allow me to explain why the Lanner falcon is my first choice for many a hawking season.

As a farmer early mornings and late afternoons are usually the most demanding for time. The lanner's style of flying fits the late winter morning slip perfectly in central South Africa. This flying slot with the cold air starting to warm up and rise in thermals, allows for sky-out pitches. You don't have to follow a strict training regime and reward

system to achieve these pitches day after day in flying season. The Lanner is simply doing what it is doing in nature day after day and you are a handy spectator. Another advantage with this slot is that the sandgrouse is present in their daily feeding area, and you can be choosy with slips from 9:30 right up to 16:00 in the afternoon. If you don't find them in the morning you can always find them later. A flying session can consist of one to four stoops from a thousand feet and more and can last an hour or more. More fun than you can handle in one day. With success and reward in this scenario, the Lanner becomes wedded to the sandgrouse quarry and starts flying harder and harder, higher and higher. On a day without thermals a strong right minded Lanner easily climbs to 800 feet pitches or more in succession, because it wants to hunt sandgrouse. With a falcon in this state of mind and body its whole demeanor changes from a surviving raptor to an arrogant and proud falcon thriving in the company of its human servant. I don't mind this.

The passage lanner that has been on the wing for four to five months is the right falcon to train for sandgrouse hunting. In South Africa that would be trapping in the months of April and May. Falcons trapped in these months have already acquired a wealth of flying and hunting skill that can be harnessed by you as the falconer. These falcons already start showing some feathers of adult plumage coming through and the tail and primary feathers show a bit of wear and tear. Don't mind the feather imperfections as they are testimony to the hunting skill and reckless nature of the trapped falcon.

The training philosophy I use is similar to the philosophy that Ed Pitcher describes in his book THE FLYING OF FALCONS. However, it can be described as a lighter or watered-down version. I find it more practical to tame the freshly trapped falcon first. Manning and feeding the falcon on the glove until the falcon would jump to the glove indoors for its meal and eat at peace with me and the indoor surroundings. When not on the glove I keep the falcon on a screenperch, hooded or unhooded depending on the reaction toward its surroundings. To progress to outdoor training with the falcon, I skip the previous day's meal and take the falcon to a quiet area where very little human or pet disturbance is possible. From this stage in training, I stick to the philosophy that a falcon should look away from the falconer for food. I use a cleaned pigeon carcass with the wing and wing feathers still in tack. Tied to a string I throw the carcass at my feet. Kneeling down with the falcon on the glove and tied to the creance, I unhood the falcon and twitch the carcass with the string. A hungry falcon should jump down and start feeding immediately on the exposed meat of the carcass. As the falcon is taking mouthful after mouthful of meat I slowly

move the glove with a big and tasty piece of pigeon over the carcass in the falcon's feet. The falcon starts tearing on the meat of the glove and soon you have your first pick-up accomplished. The exposed meat on the initial carcass outside just helps to curb the carry instinct the falcon might feel outside. After two or three sessions that is moved further and further away from your feet, you can substitute the cleaned pigeon carcass with a whole pigeon carcass and gradually increase the distance to 30 meters on the creance. All the while practicing making-in and the pick-up. When the falcon immediately leaves the glove for the dead pigeon twitching on the string, the falcon is ready for free flight.

Before releasing your falcon for free flight you must make sure your falcon is on the responsive weight that you have been training him on and that the gut is empty. To skip the previous day's meal is a sure way to prepare your falcon for a successful free flight. Pick a day with very little wind and select the time of flying to be late morning with rising thermals. You must also carefully select the flying terrain. It should be big clear area with short cover vegetation. If you are not able to drive in this area there should at least be a road that can take you closer to the extremities of your selected flying area. Depending on the direction of the wind, position yourself for cast-off to be close to the edge of the clearing with the biggest space of the clearing to be downwind from the cast-off position. This so that you can follow a falcon drifting downwind by car and position yourself close to right under him when the falcon is at pitch.

For cast-off face the falcon into the breeze, unhooded the falcon would start looking around for the familiar twitching pigeon carcass. Not spotting anything the falcon will most probably take off into the breeze, just sit on your glove or fly down to the ground and look at you for food. If the falcon takes to the air your measure of training was perfect, if sitting on the glove or ground and looking at you, you overdid the training a little. But don't despair if this happens, just sit the falcon out and do absolutely nothing. The falcon should soon realize its freedom and start looking out for himself again by taking to the sky.

A falcon that has been completely over trained like a rehab or hand me down bird can be fixed from over dependency. With the falconer hiding in the car or even driving off to binocular distance, the falconer can wait the corrupted falcon out to eventually take to the air. This of course applies to a falcon that has flown high before and the flying conditions must be great for climbing.

So the falcon took off and started rising, let it

continue to climb to a point where you can comfortably keep it in sight. Six hundred feet high pitch will do, with this kind of training go big on pitch from day one. If the falcon drifted downwind reposition yourself under the climbing falcon. Put a dead pigeon on a lure line, and give it a swing or two. When the falcon shows any interest immediately throw the pigeon out as far as you can, and your falcon will oblige you with his first controlled stoop. Before serving the dead pigeon the falcon's attention can be gained by shouting or waving a cap, depending on what you will be doing in your hunting setups. Typical thermal flights takes the falcon out of position as the falcon utilizes rising air especially in the first week or two. To bring an out of position falcon over for the flush, a signaling system will be necessary. Waving a cap or arm is quite adequate but in the beginning you will have to sweeten the cap signal a little bit by flapping a dead pigeon in hand for short intervals. The falcon will catch on very quickly and mid-season the signaling becomes irrelevant as your falcon will be omnipresent in the skies, thermal hopping above you and waiting for your well timed flush.

This easy meal, dead pigeon training should be limited to a minimum and be substituted with quarry.

The first flights at quarry must be carefully orchestrated to enable guaranteed success for your trainee falcon.

Here the passages comes into their own right as experienced hunters and their nature honed habits let them capitalize on any chance coming their way. A failed hunting attempt is quite normal in the wild, but should be avoided in the beginning of training because the opportunistic predatory mind-set of a falcon will have it looking for other ways of hunting pretty soon. Half-hearted hunting attempts, because of training installed laziness or bad weight control should be curbed. Call the falcon down on the lure and pick-up with a bony tiring. Hood the falcon and don't feed during that day. It is very important to ensure a great opportunity for hunting success the following day. This discipline is necessary for all falcons but especially for the lanner falcon that have a phenomenal sharp wit and opportunistic nature. With all successful flights that ends in a kill a gorge-out should be allowed to cement the rewards of success in the relationship.

You have seen a flock of sandgrouse go down in the field and have an accurate bearing on their



on their position. Or you have a visual of a group of grouse casually sitting in the field. It is time to test your falcon against this incredible quarry. But for the contest to happen some mistakes have to be avoided. If possible let someone keep a visual on the sandgrouse, this is to be able to produce a timely flush for your falcon when in position. If the sandgrouse is not visible make double sure of the heading towards them and the distance they landed.

Avoid slips on a group of sandgrouse that have landed more than 200 meters away. It is very difficult to judge the distance of a group of landing birds further than 200m and a controlled flush will be very difficult. To walk past the crouching sandgrouse that landed far away, without producing a flush is very likely. With a falcon in the air, sandgrouse will sit tight to the extent that you can walk a few feet past them without dislodging them from their crouching position.

If the sandgrouse is very close you have to move at least a hundred meters away for cast-off. Sandgrouse are very strong flyers and a falcon taking to air simply gets neutralized as a threat by them taking off and flying out of vision. Great care also has to be taken to not let the falcon fly straight towards the crouching sandgrouse.

If they are sitting upwind even at a hundred meters plus away, the falcon taking off and flying straight in their direction will put them to flight. Likewise, if the sandgrouse are sitting downwind a downwind turn by the falcon heading towards them will put them to flight. Cast the falcon off with the sandgrouse not straight up-or downwind and put the vehicle between you and the sandgrouse, to obscure the flying falcon from the sandgrouse's vision for that little while that will let them crouch rather than take flight. When the falcon is about 150 feet up the sandgrouse will be cemented to their location and the stage for your drama is set.

The falcon should be allowed to gain more than adequate pitch and be given time to reach a pitch of at least 600 feet up. Make double sure of the sandgrouse's position while keeping the falcon in

sight. A GPS tracking systems can be very helpful to the falconer flying alone without any assistance. With the falcon at pitch and in position make progress towards the position of crouching sandgrouse. At this point in time, your excitement will be hard to contain but it is very important to stay focused on your duty in this natural drama. Your duty to produce a well-timed flush is critical for success, especially in the beginning of hunting sandgrouse. With a falcon overhead don't just simply scramble the area to get the birds up. Rather make sure the falcon is coming over and focusing on your actions.

A falcon just circling and not paying attention to your actions will easily miss the first three seconds of the flushing sandgrouse and injure his chances greatly of catching a sandgrouse. Try if possible to flush for a falcon that is coming over towards you and flush when at a 70-degree angle. This angle puts the flush in full view of the approaching falcon and its reaction time will be quick. If the falcon has passed over and the flush is basically behind the departing falcon, chances are very good your falcon will see the sandgrouse too late.

A slightly angled flushing position leaves the sandgrouse some room to escape and will decrease the chances of sandgrouse dumping for the stoop. It is always better to target slightly bigger numbers of sandgrouse like five or more for a slip, this will also reduce the chance of them dumping for the stoop. A dump is a highly effective escape strategy from the sandgrouse when they realize they don't have a good chance of escaping. When the falcon shoots over they take off the other way and if they don't outfly the falcon, they easily jink the falcon's second onslaught because of reduced speeds.

Sandgrouse has a tremendous turn of speed and at this speed, they become extremely maneuverable and hard to catch by a falcon. The only way an attacking falcon can curb this speed and maneuverability is with even more speed on and maneuverability is with even more speed on contact. Falcons used to regular quarry like partridge and duck have a harder time catching sandgrouse than falcons used to hunting doves

and pigeons. A good dove and pigeon-catching falcon has a good chance to catch a sandgrouse with a couple of good opportunities at them. Female falcons have an advantage over tiercels in catching sandgrouse because of their bigger build. They can afford to make contact at bigger speeds than males with less risk of injury to themselves. I have seen and documented flights on film where the falcon's talons dig too deep into the sandgrouse's body in the strike. The contact spins the falcon's body around in mid-air even though the falcon has more than three times the weight advantage over the sandgrouse. Needless to say, the sandgrouse looked like it had been shot with an expanding bullet. On another occasion a slight miscalculation had a female falcon hit the sandgrouse with her sternum. Although the hawk was slightly disorientated the hawk suffered no permanent injury.

The sandgrouse's body was crushed, and when plucked a blue bruised line was visible across the chest and the sternum was shattered. One can imagine that this type of contact will be more hazardous to a smaller built tiercel. Nonetheless, the tiercels catch their share of sandgrouse in fine style but the bigger females are more effective.

The Lanner Falcon is a remarkable and capable falcon in the realm of falconry. In its size range, it can offer great flights and especially so in the classic game hawking style of the stoop. It is my wish to inspire many falconers to give these falcons the place they deserve in their falconry careers.

Not as a stepping stone towards the peregrine, but rather as a stepping stone to new frontiers in their careers after some peregrine experience. With full dedication and access to opportunities of game hawking a lanner won't disappoint, but rather surprise and thrill the falconer with action he didn't think possible.



FLYING A CAST OF FALCONS



PART 2

BY FRANCOIS BREEDT


In Part 2 of this article, I will share some thoughts and ideas myself and Graham experienced during two seasons of hunting the cast on various quarry. So upon our return to the Fairest Cape we immediately started with the basics of training any longwing except everything we did was to first get them to understand that working as a team has great benefits.

This was easier said than done as I clearly remember the first day of free flight. We had a discussion about how to progress, but we decided to just put them up together and see what happened.

Well, I can tell you that both just got up to great pitch and just went on their own way.

After lengthy tracking sessions we got both back safely and now we could plan our way forward.

Peregrines don't have a genetic drive to hunt together except when paired up with a breeding partner, so we had to plan carefully as sharing is not high on their priority scale.

So we had an idea  enter the radio control plane. As both these tiercels were chasing feathered quarry hard, the plane would not only teach them the advantage of pitch but would trigger a chase response with 2 baits being dragged all over the sky.

By using this method we could raise their weights and by both grabbing their individual baits there

was harmony in sharing and eating together after a successful plane hunt.

We used this method for a lengthy period not to build fitness as they had plenty cardio development at hack, but purely to see benefits in co-operative hunting.

As we progressed to the next stage pigeons were introduced as quarry and the transition went faultless.

We caught some wild rock pigeons and watching them hunt together was a sight to behold. No pigeon or other type of quarry could escape once the boys decided to make their intentions known.

We started seeing that Blacky was always first to engage with Scotty shortly behind him. When one made a kill the other tiercel would go perch a few meters away and keep guard for any lanners or buzzards that wanted to rob them of their prize.

I think flying them robust had a lot to do with them not getting possessive over their kill.

One morning we had them up as two mere dots and looking for rock pigeons that were sleeping in old fallow lands, when a cape shoveller decided to make a run for it.

Looking at the duck we heard the noise of that tearing paper sound that results from a falcons stoop, the next minutes a whack from Blacky, and the duck was thrown off balance, as it tried to get itself going again Scotty just finished the flight with another strike and it was all over.

We just stood there and were elated that the boys were starting to see waterfowl in their quarry preference.

We embarked on a grouse trip to Northern Cape and knew that we had a great chance with them as they really started to know the game.

On the first flight we did they caught a Namaqua Sandgrouse and now we thought we would have a great trip for next week of hunting.

But sadly after another 3 days of grouse continuously dumping when being flushed, we packed it in and went to the Free State for some much-needed Orange River francolin.



We spent some time at Gert Pretorius farm on the outskirts of Parys and had loads of opportunities but when we released them, they were like kids in a candy store with all the thousands of doves flying from horizon to horizon.

It was combining maize season so who could blame them? We eventually just sat back and watched them through binoculars working doves from one side of the farm to the next. Just a hint that type of flying is not for the faint-hearted.

Of the two Blacky was the one that showed more preference for waterfowl, and if he didn't commit Scotty would just hang back and see what happens.

We always joked that Blacky was the trigger of the cast.

Blacky highest weight was 605g and Scotty's was 565g. We found that a bit extreme and settled for 585g and 535g respectively.

Flying the boys for 2 seasons was some of the most spectacular flying I have ever witnessed in my entire falconry career.

They were just such a great team and although we didn't chase quantity in kills but quality flights I can honestly say that if a passionate longwinger never experienced a cast of falcons you are missing out.

Just some tips on training and flying a cast. Get a fellow falconer that can help especially in the beginning stages. Try and fly them in heavy robust conditions. Get two birds from the same clutch and hack them together. I honestly believe the hacking that Alan Harvey did lay the platform for our success.

Don't overthink the training and let the birds guide you, books can only give a falconer ideas but think on your feet, and correct things before they go wrong. Fly the quarry they enjoy not what you want to fly.

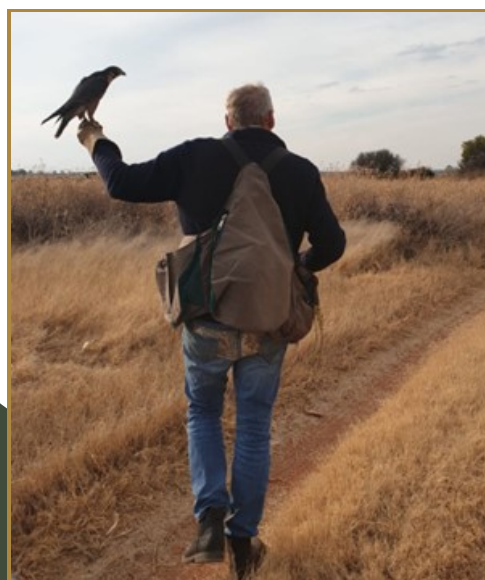
Charge your telemetry gear and have a good pair of binoculars at hand.





Swainsons at Sixty: Ruminations & Reminiscences

BY STEVEN SQUIRES



Many articles have been penned focusing on specific raptor species, few on a particular quarry species.

This article aims to take a closer look at the Swainsons spurfowl (formerly francolin), its habits, habitat, and survival strategies, all mixed up with sixty years of anecdotes and observations from a falconer's perspective.

So let's start with my first memory of a Swainsons as falconer's quarry. As a young teenager, I was invited by Rudi Geisswein, a very competent Zimbabwean falconer, to accompany him one afternoon to fly what I think was a passage Callidus peregrine. Two excited pointers jumped from the back of an old bakkie and we strolled through some open woodland behind them. Not long after they hit a point and Rudi cast the peregrine off. With a tinkle of bells, she disappeared over the tree line and much to my consternation didn't re-appear. After some time even Rudi seemed to get restless, the dog started to creep and finally broke point. This triggered the second dog to start racing about and after a short while a Swainsons was evicted from some long grass. It cackled into the air and set off for the opposite side of the valley. I was watching it go and wondering what this game was all about when a small brown dot closed in behind the francolin at warp speed, smacked it with an audible whack, bounced it off the ground and with a flick of a wing looped over and bound to it on the ground. Game over in a few seconds. This memory has stuck for the last fifty years or so and the master made it look so simple.

In the early 1990's I had my first chance to try Swainsons myself. Armed with an unruly but talented setter and a lannerette who knew no fear I set off to hunt these birds on the Mafikeng commonage. Here I learned a lot about their habits, most of them bad ones. The cock birds could most easily be found by listening for their crowing and then putting the dog in to work near the spot. Differentiating between them and the black Knorhaan took a few days but we soon learned the difference. I got quite a few points but never any flushes, the fowl just seemed to evaporate as soon as I put the falcon up. This ended up with numerous tracking sessions after a falcon that had got bored and raked away in search of more productive hunting partners.

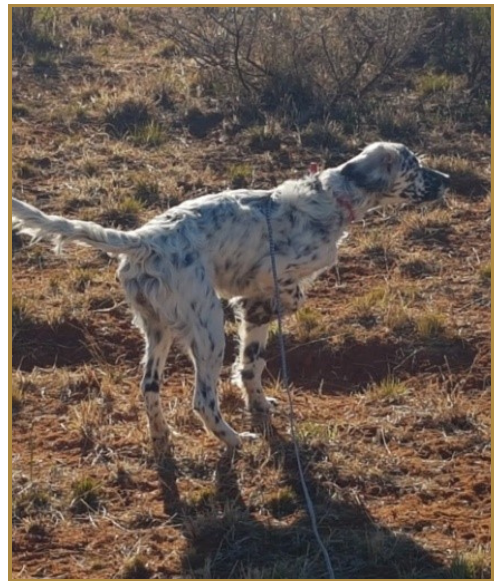
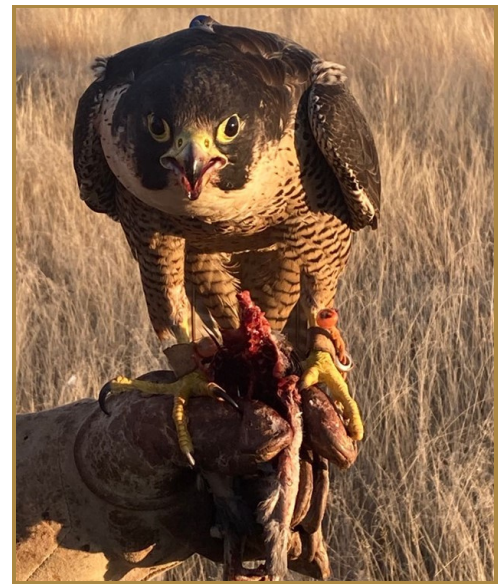
The breakthrough came when with the falcon in the air hunting doves, the dog suddenly came on point. A clumsy flush produced a young hen Swainsons, an out-of-position lanner came skimming in and hit it head-on, killing it stone dead in front of me. The dog and I were ecstatic.

So the lesson was learned, put the falcon up first and the Swainsons are less inclined to creep. This technique worked well, spot or hear the quarry, put the falcon up, put the dog in and mostly there was some action. The Swainsons would invariably be found near cover, often thick thorny cover, fences, herds of cattle and often it seemed in the company of cobras and puffadders. They occupied the less-nice parts of the neighbourhood. Their cousins, the Orange River francolin, lived in the better parts. In Mafikeng I learned that they eat a wide variety of foods; grass, a lot of bulbs, fallen grain, insects and berries. They seem to be independent of surface water but will drink if it is available. They are not like guineafowl that move large distances to water every day and I think they satisfy their moisture requirements through the insects, particularly white ants, that they eat. That said they are not birds of the true desert and require a more treed environment if there is no surface water available. I think it is to do with the availability of tree-dwelling insects.

Swainsons are no match in the air for a fit raptor. The skill to hawking them lies more in the dog work, out-witting the wily old cocks, and the very real courage it takes for a falcon to subdue such a cock bird on the ground. I have had falcons driven off a hen bird they had caught by a feisty cock, and indeed have seen one cock bird quite cold-bloodedly killing a rival in the middle of a game reserve road. (The bloodied corpse was scoped up by our game scout who packed it in his cooler box for supper.)

A large cock bird often needs several strikes to subdue it and a dog that will re-flush is invaluable. There is a subtle difference between re-flush and digest. One particularly brutish pointer (not mine) by the name of Tessa had a wonderful nose. She could and would road a running francolin for hundreds of meters after the first flush, eventually oiling up to it, invariably in thick bush, from whence would emerge not a rocketing francolin but the sound of crunching bones. After gentle solicitations from her owner, she would emerge sheepishly licking her feathery chops, swallowing hard and the falcon would be called down to the lure. This is not considered classical game hawking.

A cast of peregrine tiercels and a good dog make fine sport at Swainsons. They strike hard, knocking feathers and often bouncing the bird into the ground. A fast re-flush by the dog will put it in the way of the second tiercel who repeats the process. Smart francolin often take refuge up a thorn tree where neither the falcon nor the dog can get at them. Then it is the falconers turn to perform, and after a scratchy



bloody climb the quarry is dislodged from the upper branches to face another volley of blows from the tiercels. Usually, it is killed on the ground by a tiercel, or as above, dispatched by the dog.

When I left Mafikeng and arrived in the South Western Free State it was to a Swainsons-less desert of overgrazed red sand that I came. I started to develop the irrigation on the farm and as luck would have it I was too poor to buy large center pivot machines, a 30 Ha machine being the best I could do. This turned out to be important. Swainsons are birds of the margins, they feed out in the open but need cover close by. They are territorial and territory size is determined by the proximity of food and cover. They sleep on the ground but use trees for cover, predator evasion, and displaying. A 30 Ha pivot has almost 65 meters of circumference per Ha of pivot, a 50 Ha machine has 50 meters of circumference per Ha and a 60 Ha machine 46 meters of circumference per Ha of the machine. Thus the smaller the pivot the greater the circumference per Ha of irrigation and the more birds the area can support. Again, due to financial constraints, I left the triangles between the pivots as natural veld and this serendipitously provided cover and breeding area too.

Not long after I arrived the first Swainsons arrived, like me immigrants looking for fortune. They set to work breeding and multiplied greatly. After a few years I tried my lanneret on one and caught it. To the disgust of both dog and falcon, I let it go again and it went on to breed some more.

Bird densities stabilize at about one covey per four hectares and get less dense away from the prime habitat. Surplus birds are pushed out to the more open areas where they are easy to hunt and can often be found several kilometers from thick cover. If a bird is taken from the prime habitat it is quickly replaced by one from the outlying areas.

They lay eggs throughout the year so year-round cover equals year-round production. Unlike guinea fowl, they do not breed in the standing crops but rather in the rank grass surrounding the pivots. Burning destroys this grass and reduces winter breeding so it is best to leave many patches unburnt. The more untidy and disreputable the area looks the more birds it is likely to produce.

Several other important factors have played a role in the successful breeding of these birds. The first was the introduction of GM crops and the adoption of low tillage crop farming. The GM crops enabled us to stop using broad spectrum insecticides thus boosting insect numbers and availability for small chicks. The stubble mulch of the low till system is like a giant compost heap with plentiful food, all situated under the protective canopy of the crop. For security reasons, we stopped farming small stock and stopped persecuting jackals and caracal. These medium sized predators returned in numbers and greatly reduced the number of small egg/chick-eating predators such as skunks, mongooses and feral cats. As a result brood productivity rocketed. It is now not uncommon to see four to six large chicks with a hen, not the usual one or two.

Whilst the caracals definitely do catch Swainsons they don't destroy nests so damage is limited. Jackal would undoubtedly eat a nest of eggs but they are scared of the caracal and don't hang out much near the cultivated areas. I have also seen many young Swainsons taken by black sparrowhawks, a lanner falcon still hunting Swainsons chicks off a pivot, one taken by a booted eagle and several by the martial eagles. Just about everything eats them, including me, but despite this, the population continues to grow.

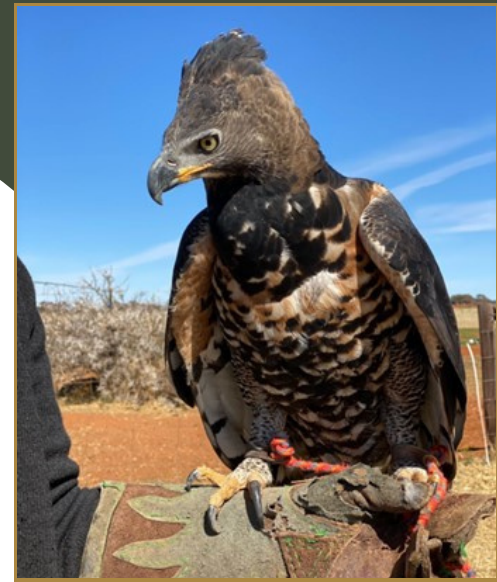
Over the last ten years or so I have flown peregrine falcons at this quarry. They pack more punch and speed but lack the maneuverability of the tiercels. I have tried to emulate the senior echelons of South African falconry by getting really high pitch before flushing but with little success. Invariably the quarry bird bails when the falcon is still on the way down and a rat hunt ensues. No, Swainsons are bush birds and you need to hunt them with bush falcons. The peregrine works best at a pitch of no more than 100 meters, 50 is better, tight over your head, watching the dog intently. The quarry squats and doesn't creep, the dog flushes cleanly and the falcon has more than enough speed to slap down or bind to the quarry in the air.

During covid, my farm was a haven to city dwellers wanting to ditch the mask. One of these friends came to watch falconry for the first time and I put him downwind of the patch of cover to watch the action. As luck would have it the flushed Swainson flew almost straight at him and right in front of his face the peregrine bound to it with a smack, leaving some feather drifting into his open and maskless mouth. Bush hawking at its best.

Last year I tried a passage peregrine at Swainsons. If I could find one out in the open she took it with consummate ease, but at the tight waiting on required for bush hawking, she was abysmal, invariably being out of position or out of sight when the birds flushed and always being beaten to cover.

I have for some years been thinking that a nice friendly lanner falcon would be the best bird for this kind of hawking, indeed the wild lanners often join me hunting and love chasing Swainsons. They are spectacular to watch and pack a heavy punch.





I can hear the gallery muttering “just get a black spar” or even worse a Harris hawk, but they miss the point of falconry which to quote Art Haschak “is not to capture the quarry but to capture yourself”.

At the outlying margins of this sport I have tried my crowned eagle at Swainsons, the first one she saw she chased with gusto straight into an electric stock fence that the quarry snuck through and she never looked at them again until I trod on one while out night hawking. She bated at it but unfortunately, she was leashed to the glove so was brought up short, glaring at me with malevolent intent. It is best not to cross her deliberately.

Another outlier is my horse Bismarck, who is at least as good, if not better, than my setter Aniseed at detecting francolin. I have always

praised him for not shying when they flush at his feet and now I suspect he seeks them out in order to win praise. Such is the power of operant conditioning. While riding on the farm, with the dog ranging ahead, he will prick his ears and arch his neck whilst staring at a patch of cover from which a francolin will invariably erupt. It has been overlooked by the dog but somehow he senses it is there. His size thirteen hooves have no problem persuading the bird to flush and if it weren't for the multitude of fences strung over the property I think he would make a wonderful addition to the team. For those who hawk in open areas a calm intelligent horse could be worth a try and a falcon would quickly learn to wait on over a francolin producing horse.

So in summary for those who don't like to read too much, the swainsons is a fine falconry quarry.

It is impossible to hunt near cover with high-flying falcons but is great fun to hunt from relatively low pitches with a good dog. A cast of tiercels provides great sport and I think a lanner is ultimately a more effective falcon for this quarry than a peregrine. For those who prefer shortwings, it is a near perfect quarry if you have a good dog to help. By judicious land and crop management, small areas can be made to produce large numbers of francolin without resorting to feeding and predator control. Crop and cover management are key to this. Some horses are able to sense where francolin lurk and even big eagles are keen to catch them.

In all, it is a wonderfully versatile, brave and resourceful quarry worthy of any falconers attention and conservation.



CLUB REPORTS

Boland Falconry Club

BY: TONI KRAUS

Ever-intensifying pressure and regulations from local wildlife authorities in addition to internal disturbances by inactive members were some of the challenges faced by the BFC over the past year. Thankfully the club seems to be in a much better place now as compared to last year.

A handful of new members have joined and a few have re-joined the club. We look forward to the fresh enthusiasm new members can bring to the club and look forward to a good season of falconry.

The BFC held its 2022 AGM on September 10th. Lizette Beukes was elected as chairwoman, Toni Kraus as Secretary and Bertus Beukes as treasurer. Lizette later stepped down and Bertus was elected to take her place at a special general meeting. At this special general meeting, the membership also voted to alter the constitution to limit the scope of involvement of members that are not actively pursuing falconry. Upon acceptance of this new statute by Cape Nature we are confident internal disturbances will be limited going forward.

The club currently consists of 21 members, of which unfortunately only six are active falconers. The birds currently flown include Peregrines, Harris Hawks, African Goshawk, a black sparrowhawk, and a Jackal Buzzard. The committee continues to engage with Cape Nature on the new permit conditions, in hopes of tweaking certain elements.

Cape Falconry Club

BY: ANDRÉ CILLIERS

Both the Cape clubs have faced challenges with CapeNature over the past few years. Listing all of these challenges is a discussion all on its own and although we are working on it, we are also celebrating another excellent year.

We had quite a few members take lanners off the wild take this year, all flown in various styles but successfully.

The Harris hawkers kept the larders full of bunnies and guinea fowl and the guys flying big peregrines on duck could supply a restaurant by the end of the season.

We are looking forward to our 30th birthday meet in 2023, and to the IUCN sustainable use conference that our own Dr Lombard is hosting at the beginning of the meet.

Julius has done well maintaining relationships with the Northern Cape Hunting fraternity and we have started building relationships with Kaapjag as well.



CLUB REPORTS

Eastern Cape Falconry Club

BY: ALAN HARVEY

Chairman Alan Harvey
Secretary Arnold Slabbert
Members
Aiden Zimmerman
Juanita Krauspe
Dr Lisa Rhodes
onathan Arnott

Alan is flying two intermewed female Peregrines from last season. one passage and one hacked eyes, both birds took a fair number of duck and a

couple of partridge, greywing , orange river and Swainsons. Duck were mainly yellowbill with a few rebill teal and shovellers. It was a very wet season in my area with lots of standing water in the veld which made for difficult hawking with the birds in their first season. Both birds finished the moult in February and are now on the drone for fitness training.

Juanita is flying an Af Gos in Port Elizabeth with Arnold as her mentor and is making progress.

Aidon is flying two male Harris mainly for bird abatement and seems to be having fun. Work commitments have prevented him getting out into the veld more often

Jonathan is flying a Black Sparrowhawk around Kenton on Sea and his partner Lisa who is the local veterinarian is getting acquainted with what falconry is all about.

Mpumalanga Falconry Club

BY: STEVEN VAN RENSBURG

The Mpumalanga Falconry Club's AGM was held in March 2022 at the Aloes Inn, Waterval Onder. Steven v Rensburg was elected chairman/ permit coordinator and Pierre de Villiers as Secretary/treasurer. The Mpumalanga Falconry Club remains a small club with a membership of 7 falconers of which 2 are actively flying birds. Steven v Rensburg flew a passage peregrine tiercel for most of 2022 and has recently taken on a captive-bred peregrine tiercel bred by Tim Wagner (FFC). Pierre de Villiers trapped a passage female Lanner falcon in 2022. This bird is presently down for the moult. Tom Armitage flew a passage female African Goshawk. Magdali Theron flew a rehab female peregrine.

New Members

The MFC welcomes Zama Ngomane, Michael Johansen and Luke Simmonds as new members to the MFC.

Fieldwork

Members of the Mpumalanga Falconry Club continue to actively monitor breeding Lanner/ Peregrine (falcons), Crowned Eagles, and Black Sparrowhawk nesting sites.



CLUB REPORTS

Free State Falconry Club

BY: TIM WAGNER

The phenomenal rains of the past three years have transformed the Free State into a duck hawkers paradise. Unfortunately, this excessive rain turned most early-season hawking trips into either Camel Trophy or 4x4 recovery events. While the seasonal sandgrouse influx was dismal, the partridge and duck numbers were excellent. One memorable afternoon during the FS field meet, the majority of birds were flown, one after the other, on just two ponds a couple of hundred meters apart and the adjoining grassland.

COBUS BEZUIDENHOUT

I started the season with my four times intermewed female peregrine with her understanding ducks even better than before as she was familiar with each pond by now. She would disappear from sight on most flights. I killed a few ducks; I don't tally anymore. I didn't get in as many flights as I would have liked, due to restricted access from the wet conditions. One flight that stood out was at our FS field meet. They fitted a GPS for fun and off she went. After a few minutes, they let me know, she was coming over high. We walked in to flush with the guys shouting to run as she was in a shallow stoop. Ran in and flushed, keeping our eyes on the duck, we waited, but no falcon appeared. She was stooping after a rocky in the other direction. Didn't catch it but registered some good speed. Well, that was my last flight for the season and we all had a good laugh. Hoping for a good 2023.

FRANCOIS VAN ZYL

My season started with me flying an intermewed passage peregrine falcon, she started the season off only mounting when she wanted to, so I decided to try and thermal her. Boy, was this a game changer; she would mount out of sight every time and would do so by actively climbing into the thermals. My main quarry was going to be duck and not having flown them before I decided to drop the weight a little and give it a go. She took her first wild duck with no encouragement and didn't look back from there. She ended her season with 30-something duck, all taken from stoops that started from thousands of feet up in the sky. This way of flying is not for everyone but it adds a whole new dynamic to the flights. I plan on flying her for the 2023 season as well as two tiercel hybrids.

BRADLEY CHASE

Just back from the USA and with plans to acquire a Jackal Buzzard, I received a call from the local

Rehabilitation Centre that a hawk had come in with a broken wing. The hawk was a female Black Sparrowhawk and after some deliberation, it was agreed that I would help with the rehabilitation after the wing set. After weeks of care and vet visits the bird has made a full recovery. She weighs in at 770g and is currently flying a good distance to fist and lure. Hoping to get her out into the field and hunting before I return to US, when she will be released back into the wild.

GERRIE VAN NIEKERK

The 5th of December 2022 was the beginning of a new Harris hawk adventure when I picked up the bird from a past FSFC member. The bird was in excellent condition and after some weight conditioning, we were on the same page. The bird is everything one can hope for in a Harris Hawk and has great potential. While we haven't caught anything yet we have frightened a couple of plovers. I was hoping to get her going on some young guinea fowl but they don't seem to of had a good breeding in my area this year. Looking forward to the first season of many to come with her.

TIM WAGNER

Started last season with two intermewed peregrines and a fresh passage in anticipation of a good sandgrouse season. It was soon apparent that the grouse numbers were dismal and I passed one intermewed bird on to another falconer. Despite a number of long trips to the more arid regions of our country, I didn't have a brilliant season. Falcons were on top of their game, but sandgrouse were scarce. This pre-season I have spent significant time surveying sandgrouse country, chatting with farmers and organising flying grounds. My reams of permit applications are already submitted and hopefully, it won't be a repeat of last season.

GERT PRETORIUS

2022 started with the training of two new birds, a peregrine tiercel and female gyr/peregrine hybrid. Initially, all went well but with the wet weather, both birds came down with a bad case of pox and worms. I nearly lost both birds and struggled to keep them healthy after that, eventually putting them down to recover and build some weight. I managed to get them going again before the end of the season and made a couple of kills. Looking forward to picking them again now after the moult, both birds showing great potential before being put down to moult.

ANTON MULLER

I took up a captive bred peregrine from Gert Pretorius and named him Gertjie. I drone trained Gertjie during the summer months in the early mornings. By April he was super fit and taking quarry regularly. At first, he struggled with doves and rockies, but later improved his footing and tactics to a level where he got the better of them. He managed to take laughing doves, rockies, crowned plover, orange river and red-billed teal. I am super excited to show him sandgrouse this coming season. I bred 3 red-necked falcons, one was sent to a falconer in the TFC and the remaining two hacked back to the wild. Five barn owls were also raised and returned to the wild.

STEVEN SQUIRES

My planned year of the eagle fizzled out when I found a passage peregrine slapping rock pigeons amongst my center pivots. A quick drive to the pigeon loft secured the bait, some comical falling around and getting stuck in the mud secured the bird with a noose carpet. She turned out to be a very sweet-natured bird and took to captivity well. In a year with over a meter of rain, the cover was too thick to hunt swainsons until the very end, so we kept to the open and flew pigeons and the few swainsons that could be found away from cover. The one chance I had at orange rivers at the Free State field meet I chickened out, being in the company of more august falconers than myself and not wishing to track in the dark, so she went untried on this quarry. The end of the season showed four swainsons and many pigeons in the bag and a falcon that had gone from 680 g trapped weight to 720g flying weight over the course of the season. I have moulted her out and we will re-engage with the swainsons shortly.

Again, due to the very thick cover flying the crowned eagle during daylight hours was problematic even though hares are relatively common. I eventually resorted to putting her on a centre pivot and beating the veld nearby and in this way got several good flights. She took several springhares off the bakkie, just to keep in food, but walking them up in the thick grass was almost impossible. So, this season coming, it is intermewed peregrine and crowned eagle for me.

CLUB REPORTS

Natal Falconry Club

BY: CAMERON COLEY

Can't believe it's that time of the year again, cold mornings and good flying. The Natal Falconry Club has had a stable year, with the regulars flying their usual birds and a couple of guys dusting off the gloves and starting to fly again.

Gareth Rowley rehabilitated a passage peregrine and released it in August. His captive-bred African Peregrine is flying beautifully, eating the sky, and putting plenty of duck in the bag, 2 Egyptian Geese, and even a Spurwing.

Bruce Padbury, and his intermewed Peregrine "Blue" did business as usual. This bird truly knows the game and the numbers speak for themselves, with plenty kills, mostly partridge and duck. He also had some fun with his Female Red-Breas.

Dieter Nischk dusted off the glove and got a captive bred Peregrine Falcon, "Savuti". This bird

sure knows how to fly, with some duck and partridge in the bag, she sure is shaping up to be a great bird. Can't wait to see more of her.

Kyle Solms decided he had missed it too much and that it was time to get back in the game. His Imprint Female Peregrine is quite the stunner, and although young is already taking duck. This bird is going to be a heavy hitter. I was on the receiving end of one of the strikes at the NFC Quail Meet, just glad I was wearing a hat.

Stuart Pringle and "Hera" his intermewed Female Peregrine had some great flights last year and put some duck and partridge in the bag. I was fortunate to see some of her best ones live. Elton Arnot had another really solid season with his two Female Peregrines. "Pearl", the veteran, knows the game well and is always sure to be a spectacle to see.

Greg McBey is giving it a proper go at the moment, he is flying a Musket Black Sparrowhawk, a Lanner Falcon and a Peregrine Falcon. Stephen Lourens has had some good action with his cap-bred female Harris Hawk that is really good on geese. Lee Ramsden is rehabbing a Little Sparrowhawk. This bird is a little pocket rocket and really beautiful. Martin Alborough is currently flying a Black Sparrowhawk, and Ryan Lee is manning and training a Jackal Buzzard - stunning bird.

I have had a decent season, "Rickets", my Red Spar isn't always a mean machine on Cisticolas and other small birds. I wasn't as lucky with quail this year as previous ones, but a good season nonetheless. My Lanner Falcon is fit and flying well, really looking forward to a good SAFA.



CLUB REPORTS

North Eastern Falconry Club

BY: RION LERM

The North Eastern Falconers Club had an exciting 2022 season where we took up two promising apprentice falconers. They are each flying AfGos at the moment but the birds are still to bag some quarry in true AfGos style.

We also had a new green apprentice join recently. We hope to get him a bird this coming season. Other seasoned falconers are still flying their birds from the previous season.

Flip Blignaut, Dave Holliday and Rob van Veen are still flying African Hawk Eagle while Tjoppie Kruger will be continuing to fly his musket Harris'

Hawk with his eldest son. Kruger will be continuing to fly his musket Harris's Hawk with his eldest son.

Tjoppie is looking forward to taking up a well-mannered female BlackSpar this season too. Rion Lerm is still making life difficult for quarry with the RedSpar he is flying however, he hopes to have a more successful season in 2023 with the 'pocket rocket'. Rion could unfortunately not hold onto a LittleSpar he was flying for some weeks.

The club currently enjoys eight active falconers

but we said goodbye to chairman Pierre Venter who moved to Gauteng. We are also grateful for the support of our foreign falconers.

Finally, our relationship with LEDET (local nature conservation authority in the Limpopo Province) is solid and we are thankful for them allowing us to now apply for most permits online which also means we can collect documents from local district officials or print our permits online.

We also appreciate their approval of our annual wild-take quota. Happy hawking.

North West Falconry Club

BY: ADRI DU TOIT

The club currently has 4 members keeping falconry in the province. The birds kept remained unchanged with the Naude family's two Lanner Falcons and Adri du Toit's African Goshawk and Peregrine falcon. The Peregrine falcon kept by Adri is now 18 years old and is showing signs of aging. She came from TimWagner's breeding and served the club well by being passed from originally Roger Neilson to several falconers in the club. New birds and new members must be recruited to keep things active in NorthWest.



CLUB REPORTS

Transvaal Cape Falconry Club

BY: PAUL STRYDOM

Magnus Brownlees, Natasha Saunders, Andrew Walker and Errol Blignaut all flew passage Lanners.

Errol's female tallied up an impressive score on the ducks - Big Yellow Beaks included, while Andrew's tiercel did some class flying, taking doves consistently. Both Magnus' Passage and Natasha's Intermewed females flew well, with Natasha's being very reliable in the thermals.

Paul Strydom flew a Hand-Me-down female Peregrine that sadly hit a barbed wire fence and his season ended early.

Leon Havemann decommissioned his Black Sparrowhawk Pair and spent a good part of the season getting both birds hunting fit for release.

Malcolm Harding continued to press the small stuff with his intermewed Ovambo, taking numerous head on most outings. Shortly after this bird was hacked back, it took up residence with a local female close to Malcolm's home. The Pair fledged a single chick.

Dirk Verwoerd managed to squeeze some falconry into his busy schedule and was getting out with a female Peregrine consistently.

Rickus Van Der Schyff flew a hot little Musket African Goshawk and had some seriously fun, aerial Hawking on walked up Grass birds amongst others.

Mark Labuschagne flew his intermewed Bomber Hybrid. She flew high and wide but failed to pull t

the trigger on the Ducks.....The Plumber has big plans for her in 2023!

Ernest Blignaut flew his made little Hybrid once again, the bird continued its classy form on the ducks from the previous season. He also had a cracking season with his African Hawk Eagle, taking Hares regularly that were walked up - All in the Daytime.

Richard Huchzermeyer flew his intermewed Lanner Falcon, which seemed to be plagued from the get go with what was suspected poisoning in its first season. Bird has since been release in good health and fighting fit condition.



CLUB PHOTOS





