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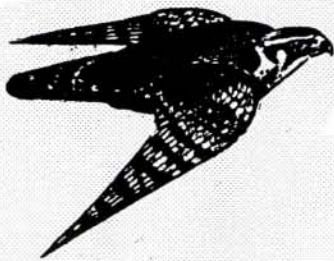
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Peregrine Falcon - *Bob Dalton*

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Welcome to the Launch Issue of the Falconers Magazine. It has taken many months of hard work, sleepless nights and innumerable headaches, but here it is.

The success of this magazine depends entirely on you the Falconer. But I am sure you will all be eager to put pen to paper now you have seen it is for real.

We have tried to produce a magazine which will appeal to everybody, whether you are just interested, a beginner in this ancient sport or have been a Falconer for many years.

We want you to feel free to write us about anything to do with falconry and birds of prey.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody for their help and support, especially Bob, Chris, Geoff and Nick and my wife Lyn for putting up with me and doing hours of typing.

Hopefully there will be a regular feature for all you Owl lovers, but due to a lack of response there is nothing for you in this issue. So let's hear from you, PLEASE.

The magazine will be published quarterly, there is a subscription form on page 5. Can I please remind you to include your postcode, with all subscription applications. THE FALCONERS MAGAZINE was born through demand, A MAGAZINE BY FALCONERS FOR FALCONERS! Whether you subscribe, advertise, share your specialist knowledge by contributing articles and features or supporting the advertisers that support the publication, and therefore support you, because YOU are THE FALCONERS MAGAZINE'S greatest asset. So let's work together for the good of Falconry.

David Wilson

Editor

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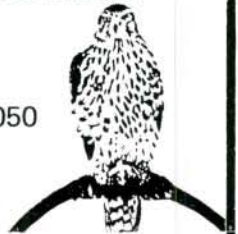
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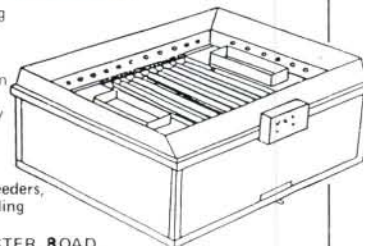
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FOR THE SAKER UNDE

Misunderstood in Britian but prized in the Middle East.

The Saker Falcon is a truly magnificent hunting bird, but in Europe, particularly Great Britain, it is misunderstood and not rated very highly. Probably because for a great many years western falconers have suffered from what Jemima Parry-Jones calls in her book "Terminal Peregrinitus". If it is not a Peregrine Falcon then it can not be a good Falcon. But Sakers are very good Falcons, powerful on the wing, good footers with a long reach and a very aggressive nature towards their quarry. The lack of success with Sakers in this country is due mainly to the low level of knowledge amongst falconers of how to enter them properly. The Saker comes in many varied shapes, sizes and colours. In the west we recognise four species of Saker: Cherrug of central Europe, Cyanopus of eastern Europe and Russia, Milivipes of Asia (east of Afghanistan) and Altaicus of the Altai mountains of central Asia.

Unlike us the Arab falconer does not recognise birds by species or region, but by size and colour. To him there are approximately eleven types of Saker, the main six being as follows: The Ashgar or blonde, the Ahmar or red, the Akhdhar or green, the Adham or dark, the Sinjari or black and the Tibri or golden. The most highly prized are the Ashgar or the Sinjari.



Ahmar - Adult red female Saker

The Arab falconers know more about the Saker than any western falconer can ever hope to know. They can look at the traders catch in the market place, of probably a hundred plus falcons, and unerringly pick out the best hunting birds. Although any bird of unusual coloration will sell for a good price. This has led to various trickery in the past, including bleaching the feathers of a Saker with peroxide, to make it appear a truly unusual bird. Believe it or not the bird did sell for a very high price and the ruse was not discovered until the bird had moulted out the following year.

The traders themselves also have an

unequalled knowledge of the Saker. A trader in Arabia is very different to a trader in Europe, he will have spent his entire working life around falcons, but until he reached the age of twenty five to thirty he would never have been allowed to handle one in earnest. He would only have been allowed to do the menial tasks such as preparing the food and cleaning up any mess. After many years he will be allowed to handle a bird but not become involved in the negotiations for buying or selling. This only comes when he has reached the age of fifty or so, but by the time he does actually come to deal in birds he will have had around thirty years experience under his belt, even then he must exercise caution.

Last year a dealer in Saudia Arabia had a very good Ashgar Saker. It was the beginning of the season, when most of the birds arriving had been trapped in Turkey, not normally a source of good birds, so the Ashgar was a a good bird to have. Accordingly a high price (50,000 dollars) was asked. A lot of interest was shown in the bird, but the highest price offered was 45,000 dollars, which was refused and the dealer stuck his ground for two weeks to try and get the higher price. After this time he decided to settle for the 45, 000 dollars offered, but by now other Ashgars had arrived from Syria and Pakistan, so the highest price he could obtain was 25, 000 dollars.

RSTANDING ...

Tiercel.



Adham - adult female dark Saker.

To be a successful trader in Arabia, you must have a thorough knowledge of your customers and your competitors as well as your own stock.

Some western breeders have made the mistake of thinking Arab falconers will pay any price for birds and therefore there are rich pickings to be had. Most have had a very rude awakening, one or two unscrupulous dealers have made a lot of money by trickery and deception, but only the once. Arabs do not buy Eyass Falcons, they will never ever buy an imprint and any bird that will not take large quarry is useless to them.

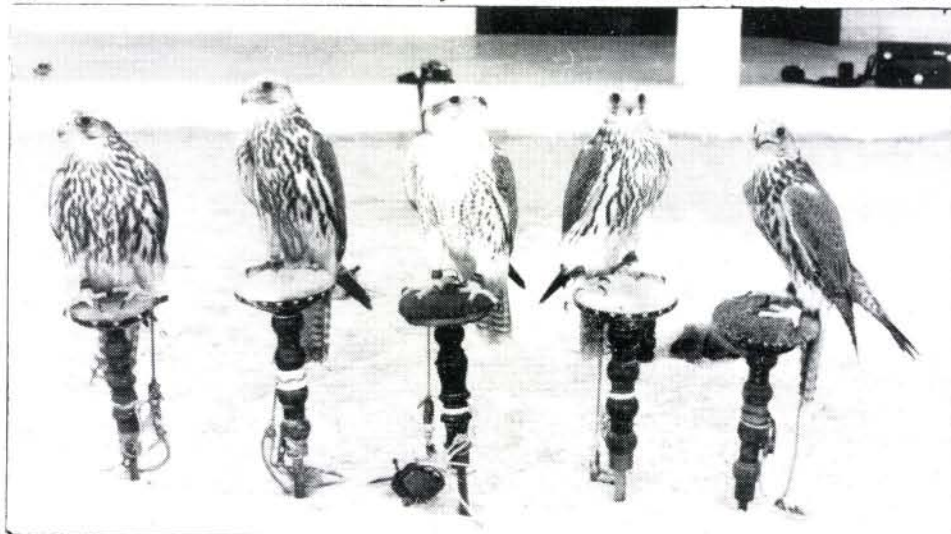
One of the few successful western breeders, who sells captive bred birds to the Arabs, has developed a system that seems to work. He only

sells captive bred, parent reared Gyrs, but they are flown and entered in Europe, then shipped out to Damascus for the start of the trading season in September. Because his birds are strong and good hunters, he is assured a warm welcome by the traders and his reputation and stature grow year by year, as does the price of his birds.

Generally speaking Arab falconers do not buy captive bred birds, there are sufficient numbers of wild caught Sakers and Peregrines in the market place each year. Western falconers and conservationists think that Arabs are a terrible drain on the wild raptor population. This just isn't true, it must be remembered that all but the very best three or four birds are released

at the end of the season, in good condition and at a time when they would be migrating back to Asia anyway.

The captive bred falcons flown by the Arabs, such as Gyrs, make up a tiny percentage of the birds used. These are not normally released at the end of the season but moulted out for the following year. Should any of these captive bred birds be lost during the hunting season then the experience gained in hunting should help them to survive in the wild.



Ashgar Parade A group of 5 Sakers - in the centre a white adult female the other 4 are Juvenile



The Ashgar or blonde, a large Juvenile (female) Saker.

The training methods in Arabia are very different to those used in Europe. The first thing that would strike the western falconer is the constant noise that the birds are subjected to from the moment they are taken up.

The Arab falconers teach each bird to know its name by shouting it constantly. They also stroke their birds the whole time, with sweeping movements of the hand, from the top of the head to the tip of the tail. The birds are taught to feed through the hood and are kept with the falconer all the time. Once they will feed through the hood the training begins in earnest and when unhooded they are given nothing to eat until they will feed freely on the fist. If this takes two or three days, then so be it, however this does not apply to the Peregrine as they dehydrate too quickly. They must have some food in order to obtain the moisture they need.

Once the falcon will feed freely on the fist then progress is very quick indeed. In as little as fifteen days the bird will be entered at wild quarry and if the falcon shows any reluctance to fly such large prey as Houbara she will be given one or two bagged ones, that have been taken alive by other hunting falcons (bagged quarry is illegal in Great Britain). Once she flies these, she will be tried at wild quarry again but if not, she will be given a good meal on the fist and then released.

The hunting season begins in November and goes through to the end of March, when the summer heat begins. Due to scarcity of quarry, as a direct result of over hunting, most of the better falconers leave the Gulf to do their hunting elsewhere. At first, it was Pakistan and Egypt that had visiting falconers by the score but quarry is getting scarce there now as well. Hunting expeditions now range out to: Somalia, Sudan, Morocco, Algeria, Nigeria and Mauritania. Now that the gulf war has ended, then at least Syria and Iraq are back on the hunters list.

The Arab falconer is only interested in three quarry species: Macqueens Bustard or Houbara, Stone Curlew or Kairowan and the Hare or Arnab. Apart from the Saker, only two other falcons are employed: The Shunqar or Gyr and the Peregrine or Shahin, very occasionally an exceptional male Peregrine will be kept and trained. These are used only for Stone Curlew. In fact the Arabic name for the Tiercel is Tiba, which means Stone Curlew poison.

It is the Saker which is the mainstay of Arab falconry and Houbara the main quarry. When out hunting an old Saker will be used as a spotter and when she becomes agitated and bobs her head the falconer will place

his hand directly in front of her face. If she tries to look over his hand then the falconer knows the quarry is a long way off, but if she tries to look under it then the Houbara is near enough for a slip. The look-out is then hooded up and the falcon chosen for the chase unhooded. Arab falconers do not cast their birds off but let them take wing at will. This is very important with Sakers, as anyone who has flown them at Rooks in this country will know. They need to be able to have a look round and take stock of the situation, otherwise they will rake off and not take on the slip required.

Sakers soon become wedded to the Houbara and chase them with relish and another big advantage with the Saker, is that it loves a rough and tumble on the ground. Whereas a Peregrine would stand off such a large bird, the Saker is in for the kill without hesitation. Arab falconers admit that the Peregrine is slightly quicker in a straight line, but the Saker has much greater stamina and perseverance.

For those that have never seen Arab falconry it really is very disappointing after watching western style flights. It resembles longwing Goshawking.

Most of the quarry is taken on the ground and very few Houbara try to escape by ringing up, which they are capable of doing.

For the European falconer, the Saker has several possibilities. The most common flight for both Saker and Sakret is the Rook, a quarry at which Sakers excel. Of all the falcons, except perhaps the Gyr, Sakers require the longest slips and a lot of ground to build up their speed and they also have to be taken lower than the average Peregrine to enter them. Once they have two or three kills under their belt, they soon become wedded.

Sakrets also make ideal Partridge hawks, they are not too big or clumsy but must be served quickly. They can be taught to wait on easily, but will not sustain it, as would a Peregrine. Female Sakers do not make Grouse hawks, they have too much sail and cannot cope with the strong winds normally found on a moor.

One of the most endearing qualities of the Saker is its affectionate streak, one really old Haggard that I used to have would sleep at the end of my bed, but kill Rooks in fine style when called upon to do so. But back in the house she would return to being the baby of the family.



Juvenile Saker Falcon, from Iran, very probably bleached to achieve this unusual colour.



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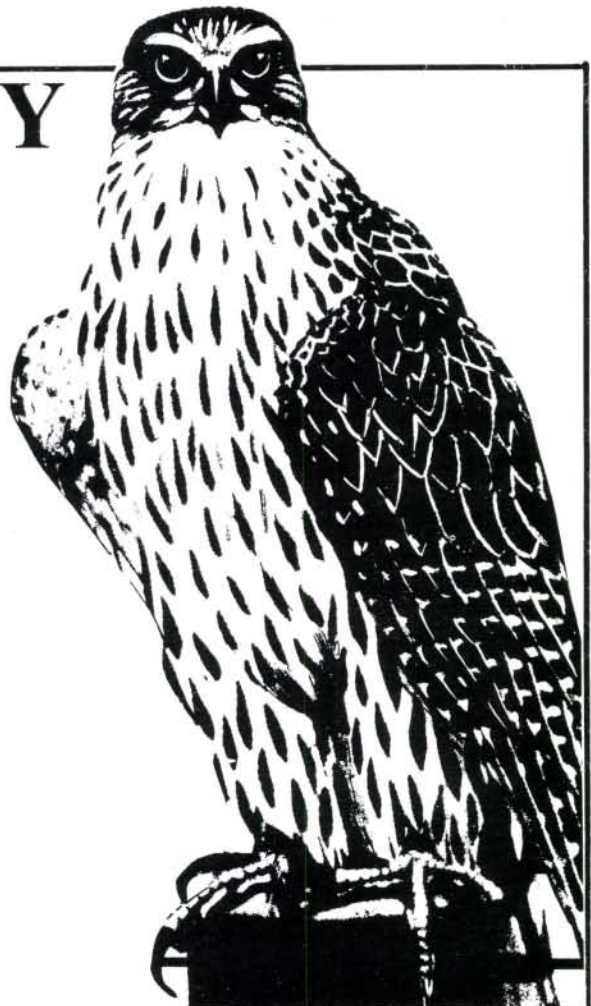
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I have always found it hard to understand why it is considered acceptable for a Falconer to buy equipment, rent a grousemoor, buy a dog and purchase a vehicle or horse for hawk-ing, buy a quail for hawkfood or even a ferret, yet it is considered, by some, immoral to buy or sell a bird of prey, I cannot think of one other sport (field or otherwise) where this twisted logic occurs.

Reasons offered why it is wrong to buy or sell raptors include the standard "they may be offered for sale in pet shops", which almost never happens, "they are difficult to train", but so are horses which are considerably more dangerous, "they may be purchased by the wrong people"

Surely that one is not even worthy of response. Falconry is alive and fairly well today, not through the Clubs efforts alone but mainly because of the work of commercial importers at the end of the sixties and early seventies who provided much of the original parentstock of Lanners, Luggers, Redtails, Harris's, Goshawks, Peregrines etc. and the incredible efforts and successes of individual falconers 'commercial' breeding projects. Today we are in the enviable position of having almost as much choice of useful falconers birds as we did before import licencing and quarantine in the early seventies and this is almost entirely due to the work of 'commercial' individuals, **not club**, breeding projects. Until very recently the Clubs have failed to understand the immediacy of the problem and the basic premise that returns from a breeding project

are roughly in proportion to what is put into it. Now that domestic propagation of raptors is no longer guesswork but a disciplined, complex and expensive procedure the successful breeder is entitled to be rewarded for his foresight, hard work, expertise and capital outlay.

Domestic breeding of raptors for sale or otherwise is a perfectly legal occupation or hobby and one of the most overregulated, its participants should be encouraged by all, for in the future it is solely the breeders that will provide

the basis for our sport. Those that shout loudest against commercialism are generally those that have been 'the takers', using birds from the wild year after year, at little or no cost to themselves, the domestic commercial breeding projects are 'the producers' making birds available not only for falconers but for research, zoos and restocking depleted or even extinct wild populations, and remember that for each raptor bred in captivity is one less that needs to be taken from the wild. The duplicity of some of

the anti-commercial falconers is intriguing, still ringing in my ears are the words of a well known figure who boasted that he had never bought a bird in his life and never would, he failed to add that at that time he had not bred any either. He was later discovered selling Gyrs to the Middle East!

Many small projects have produced more raptors in one year than the Clubs breeding schemes have since their inception. With most of the breeding expertise outside Club projects and club attitudes to commercialism it may

breeding enclosures, the designs suggested in various newsletters are often basically overlarge and inexpertly designed.

4. Take advice from those that are actually running successful projects, at the moment it is often a case of the blind leading the blind.
5. Attend lectures and seminars on raptor breeding and incubation.
6. Encourage commercial falconers to join the Clubs for they are generally among the keenest and most knowledgeable among us.

The Devils Advocate

Robin Haigh

be some years before thing improve.

However there are signs that a change is underway and to those that are now prepared to listen I would offer these words on domestic raptor breeding:-

1. Buy the best quality birds you can afford, forget about doing everything on the cheap.
2. Purchase the best possible equipment, do not make do with old, faulty or out of date items.
3. Build cost effective, well designed, durable

7. Finally do not be influenced by those club members with out of date attitudes towards the domestic commercial propagation of raptors and commercial falconry in general for they have little or nothing to contribute and are only guaranteed to appear out of the woodwork when success looks imminent.

Other forms of raptor related commercialism have also provoked criticism and concern. Suggestions that exhibitions, falconry schools and



Ferruginous and Young

medici appearances may somehow damage the sport are almost without substance. Well run falconry schools can only enhance the quality of our sport and improve the standard of care of our birds.

Exhibitions, flying displays, medieval fayres (yuk!) and even worse in my opinion, raptor shows, do stimulate interest in the sport and in raptor keeping and provide enjoyment for the spectators. While the thought of some

or all of these raptor based pastimes may seem distasteful to some, and that includes me, there is in fact nothing wrong with them assuming they use only home produced raptors and they stay within the law.

What we have to remember is that falconry is not the only legitimate use for captive bred raptors. It is my opinion that clubs would do themselves little harm by taking all who have any interest in raptors under their wings.

They say "Things always come in Threes"

GARY HENSON

We've all heard the stories, everything goes right, no problems with the birds, and a bag full of game at the end of the day. But what about the days when everything goes wrong?

It all started while hawking down in Warwickshire with two friends.

For a start we had been watching Chris flying Bess, his female Harris Hawk, at rabbit and pheasant and then we moved on to a field approximately 20 acres, with a small pond in the middle which usually harbours moorhens. Paul, flying a female sparrowhawk at 8 3/4oz and myself with Bella a female sparrow at 7 1/4oz. Once at the pond Paul and I went round to the back and this time it was my slip.

We moved along the bank beating the reeds, when a moorhen took to the wing and flew out towards open fields with the nearest available cover some distance away.

Chris being on the other side of the pond didn't realise that I had slipped Bella and thought the moorhen was unseen.

Unfortunately by this time he had slipped Bess. Just as Bella reached the moorhen, the inevitable happened, Bess took her side on with both feet.

We all ran towards Bella and found the Harris attempting to make a meal of her, it took quite a while to get those powerful talons out of

Bella's tiny body, without causing any more damage. When released we found her to be in a terrible state, feathers missing and blood on her back and breast, "but still alive".

She had a very severe fit and didn't know where she was, her head went back, eyes closed tight, no response at all. She was immediately given quails liver dipped in glucose powder, I gently prised open her beak and pushed it down her throat. I repeated this before rolling her up in a scarf and putting her up my jumper caressed against my bare body to keep her warm, until we got home. Once home, she was placed in a dark box with a towel in the bottom, next to a radiator. Later that evening I opened the box and to my surprise she was standing, still in a daze, but managing to sit on the fist, I chopped up more quail and fed her by hand.

Within a few days she was back to her normal self, and to my amazement went on to fly and take quarry.

Some time after this incident, with Bella fully recovered, the same party of us went hawking in Northamptonshire. I had several slips on this outing but still nothing in the bag, Bella wasn't as sharp-set as usual because I had fed her a little over her normal diet, as the day before was very cold. We decided to leave her for the remainder of that day and fly Chris' Harris Hawk in-

stead.. Whilst walking along a brook, looking for rabbits and moorhens, we could see the Harris had something in her sights. She was slipped only to double back over our heads and strike Bella off my fist in a flash. Obviously I feared the worst, but after the initial shock we realised the damage wasn't as bad as we had first anticipated. As she had another fit I treated her as before. She had been very lucky once more, but it didn't end there....

We all ran towards Bella and found the Harris attempting make a meal of her, it took quite a while to get those powerful talons out of Bella's tiny body, without causing any more damage.

Our next excursion was an invitation to a field meeting in the Cotswolds, surely nothing could go wrong this time?

Bella was still a little overweight, she kept banking off her quarry and was slow to return to the fist, so I decided to leave it for the morning and try again later in the afternoon. I was taking Bella back to the car and was far away from the rest of the party when I came to a fence at the top of a steep bank. As I clambered over the fence, I slipped and Bella bated off. As she did so I heard cries of "Gary!", "Gary!", suddenly the weight on my fist got heavier and I looked down to find a Harris Hawk deep in Bella's body....

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It took the strength of three of us to prise open the Harris's talons. Once Bella had been released I checked her over, to find she had had another bad fit, with more wounds and feathers missing. The Harris's back talon had submerged as far as it could go. The same successful treatment was applied in the

manner described before. She still didn't die... and they say "Cats have nine lives!" Considering her size I have never known such a plucky bird as this one. Jeff, the owner of the Harris was very upset at what had happened, but accidents do occur, and don't they say "things always come in threes!".

On all three occasions there was nobody to blame, it was purely bad luck. Bella has gone into an aviary with a musket with one eye, so if they breed I would like to think that their offspring will be strong birds. She laid this year but unfortunately the eggs were infertile. If anyone has heard of a spar

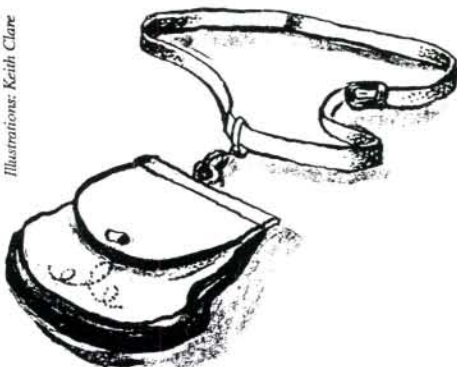
being taken by another bird and surviving, I for one would like to hear about it. Wouldn't it be nice if we could all admit to things going wrong once in a while.

** If anyone has had a similar experience to Gary's, please write to me. Ed*

An Ode to Falconry

*What about a hobby, a way to spend our time
One we can do together, as "ours" not "yours" or "mine"
Whatever can our choice be, we think that we can see
That keeping birds of prey, could really be the key.
We start off with a kestrel and get all the books to read,
The hours we spend on studying to get "info" we both need,
The training started up, the bird did very well
Step by little step, the patient hours began to tell,
But then the hidden problems, began to cause a strain,
The hours that he devoted, began to be a pain.
As birds progressed in sizes from falcons up to hawks
So weekends were eaten up with all his hawking walks,
The weekdays also taken, with manning up and training,
As his interest grew and grew, mine was really waning,
For while he went a hawking, spending lots of time with birds
I baby-sat and cleaned the house now wasn't that absurd!
It caused some rifts, it caused some rows, we really got to fight
It nearly caused the end of us, until we saw the light
So we talked and talked and tried to sort the problem out,
He obviously loved his birds, I could see without a doubt.
It could have been them or me, but that could've really cost
For if he thought and thought it out, I'm sure that I'd have lost
So, some years on, we've compromised and this is how we stand
We both have separate hobbies and life really is quite grand
So, if you're looking for an interest, a game for two to play
Just think about this ditty, turn to your spouse and say*

"Well, if you're thinking about Falconry, FORGET IT!!!"



Jo Glover



Cotswold Falconry Eagle and Hawk Park

A magical transformation has taken place just outside a small village on the edge of the Cotswolds. What was once shire-horse stables, knee deep in the remains of 40 years of lambing has now been impressively restored and refurbished to become Batsford Falconry Centre.

Geoff Dalton and Chris Tuffrey met at a village open day where Geoff was displaying his birds in aid of a local cause and almost immediately discovered they had a common interest and some months later whilst out hawking they also discovered they had a common problem. Both were inundated with requests for advice and people wishing to see their birds. Jokingly Chris suggested they start a falconry centre and Geoff said he knew the ideal spot and Batsford was on the way.

The buildings are 100 years old and needed a lot of work, but within two months of starting they were unofficially open to the public to get the birds

used to people walking around.

On entering the centre you are met by displays of falconry furniture by Ben Long and Ray Prior. Also framed photo's and artwork by Paul Sly, Pollyanna Pickering, and John Hayden. To your left is an art gallery housed in the old oak stall displaying pictures by Paul Sly, who at weekends can be seen working. As you step outside you are greeted by well kept weatherings containing a variety of hawks, eagles owls and falcons, including a Grey Buzzard Eagle, a Red Necked Shaheen, a Bengal Eagle Owl and two superb Golden Eagles. The centre prides itself on the fact that all the birds on the weatherings are flown regularly, with exception for heavy moulting and new-comers, which are still being trained. All new birds undergo a thorough examination on arrival by Aylmer and Cannon veterinary surgeons who perform a regular monthly inspection of the birds and all their living quarters, and are an in-

valuable asset as advisers on all aspects of the health and safety of the birds.

To your right is the old dutch barn, originally earmarked for demolition, but rescued and converted into three very large eagle aviaries, the first housing a pair of Steppes, the middle a pair of Bald Eagles and at the end as part of a mixed housing project a pair of Caracaras, a pair of Bataleurs and soon to be introduced a pair of Condors.

Follow the path round to your left and you will come upon the Owl Wood which was kindly donated by Redkir Construction and has been thoughtfully designed with the aviaries having been built individually in the mature spinney, it contains a varied selection of owls, from the native Little Owl to the rare hand and hypnotic Great Grey Owl from Canada, Scandinavia and N Russia.

As you come out of the Owl Wood there are other aviaries housing Griffon Vulture from Europe, Africa, India



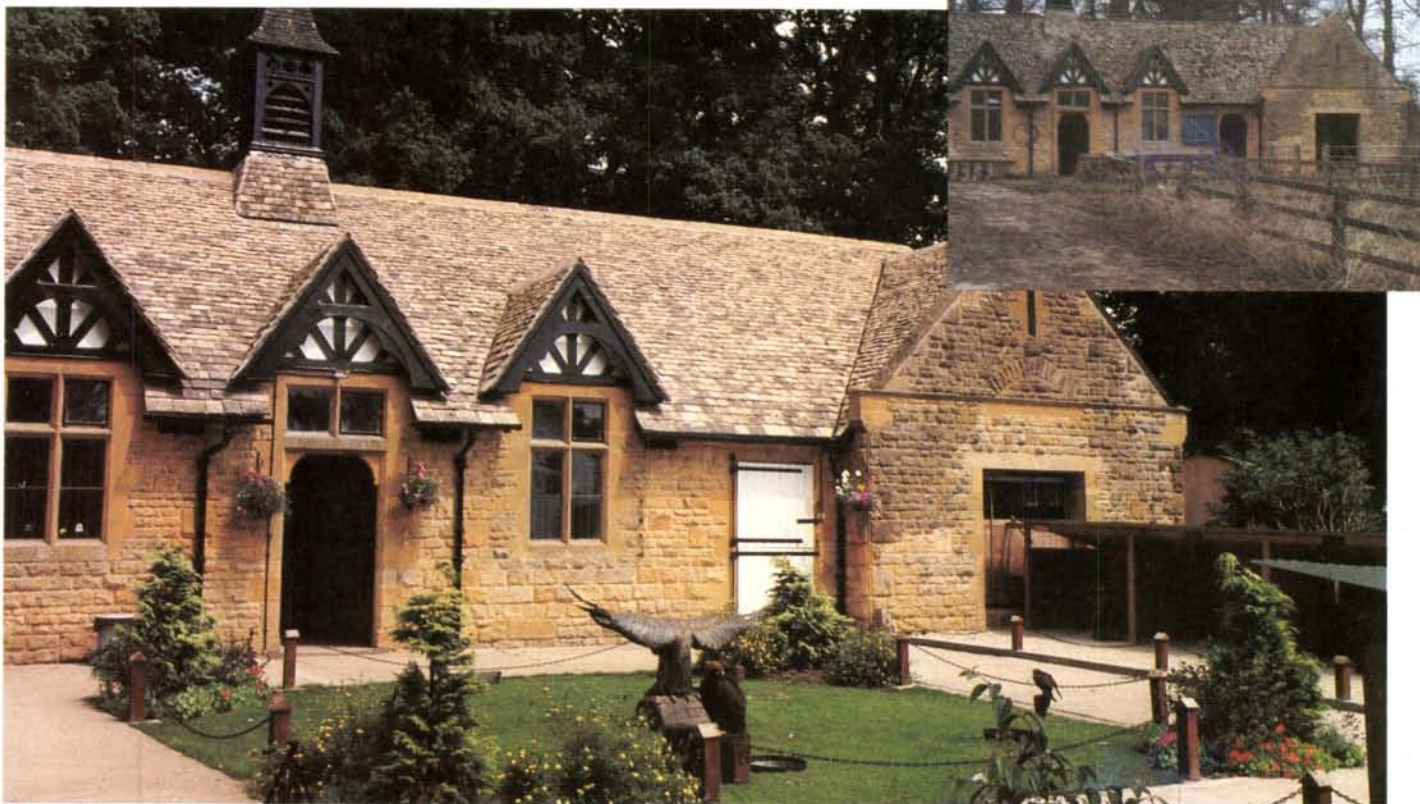
Harris Hawk



Prairie Falcon



Owners Geoff and Chris



and Afghanistan, Red Kites from Europe, Asia and N Africa and the splendid little American Kestrel from the USA and Mexico.

Batsford is run with conservation playing a large part, and it has a Barn Owl project sponsored by Group Four Securities, there are three release sites, the project entails introducing the young owls into the wild naturally not hacking back the adults.

The most entertaining part of the day is the flying displays, of which there are three given at approximately two hourly intervals (weather permitting) each lasting at least an hour starting at 12 pm. Whether you are involved in the sport of falconry or just enthralled by the magnificence of the birds, there will be something for you. The audience are encouraged to participate in the flying of some of the birds at the

same time being informed about the birds origin, hunting techniques and their use in falconry. Geoff and Chris are more than happy to answer any questions that you wish to ask.

The feeling these two men have for their birds is very much in evidence and so is the trust the birds have in them, this is reflected throughout the whole of Batsford Falconry Centre.

For more pictures see Page 19



Redtailed Hawk



Bengal Eagle Owl



Grey Buzzard Eagle

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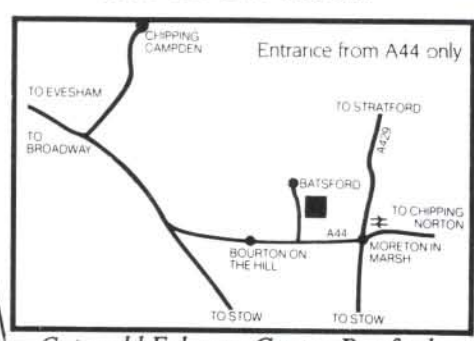
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SQUIRT: *The Magical Return of the Merlin*



The Squirt is a haggard jack Merlin that suffered a broken wing when he flew into some power lines in Great Yarmouth, Suffolk. This was on the 4th March this year. He was handed in to Yarmouth RSPCA the next day and then forwarded to Bill Alston, an RSPCA inspector in Kingston, Surrey. Bill is an LRK who had circulated a request for any disabled Merlins, unable to go back to the wild, for a breeding project.

Bill has bred and released a great many Barn Owls over the years and his aim is to start doing the same with Merlins.

Once in Bills care, the Merlin was x-rayed and it was discovered the break was in the left radius. The wing was duly strapped and the Merlin was kept quiet for the next three weeks. The strapping was removed on April 3rd and the wing re-x-rayed. The break

had healed nicely but in the vets opinion the Merlins flight would be sufficiently impaired to make it unfit for release. The Merlin was placed in a seclusion aviary and the search for a suitable female began. When placed in the aviary the Merlins left wing still drooped slightly and he seemed reluctant to fly around the aviary.

On the 26th May, Bill phoned and asked me to come over and have a look at the bird. He had spent considerable time watching the birds progress in the aviary and it seemed to him that it had recovered fully, I went over the next evening and watched the Merlin, in the seclusion aviary for some considerable time. Despite repeated flights up and down the aviary, at no time did the Merlins wing droop nor did his powers of flight seem in anyway impaired. Obviously he was out of condition, having

been sitting around for a couple of months.

Bill and I discussed the possibilities of the Merlin going back to the wild and it was agreed I would train him and if he could take quarry then we would release him. The Merlin was collected from Bills on the 5th June and the DOE informed the next morning. Although sympathetic the DOE insisted on a £15 transfer fee, even though the bird was going to be released, all being well within six weeks.

Training followed conventional lines and progressed very quickly. From a falconers point of view it was lovely to have a haggard again. The temperament of Haggard and Passage birds is always so calm and dignified, I'm referring now to falcons of course, not hawks. I feel sorry for the generation of falconers that has grown up not

knowing the delights of training a freshly trapped falcon. Back to the Merlin, he was made to the hood, as I believe in making every bird to the hood as a matter of course. It helps on occasions, if you are on your own and have to change an aylmeri bracelet, for example, if you can hood the bird. I make every bird to the hood even Goshawks. The Merlin was named the Squirt as was flying loose in six days. He was flown twice daily in an effort to get him thoroughly fit as quickly as possible. As with all Haggards he was slow to enter at quarry. It is as if they switch off, he would chase, but you could tell he was not in top gear.

Out of frustration I dropped his weight another eighth of an ounce to 6.125 ounces and this did the trick. Now he would chase every small bird with verve

and was unlucky several times. After three days at his new weight his first kill came, but it was not a long or taxing flight. Before releasing him it was essential to know he could sustain a long and difficult flight with out showing any signs of weakness in the wing.

The Squirt carried on catching various head of quarry, but on Thursday 6th July he finally proved he was ready to go back to wild. He took on a slip at a small group of starlings and the flight was very long, with many twists and turns and ended in a kill. The wing was not drooping and the Merlin was not panting by the time I got to him.

For the next five days, The Squirt was fed as much as he could eat, but not handled at all. Orton in Cumbria was picked as the release site as it is very good Merlin country, with understand-

ing Gamekeepers. Also the time of release coincided with an abundance of fledgelings. There is absolutely no reason why The Squirt should not survive. Squirt was released at eight in the morning. He circled three times, roused in mid air and then set off to his destiny.

Prior to release I thought I'd be very sad to see Squirt go, but in fact as he flew away I was filled with elation. It was good to see him free and in an environment to which he truly belonged.

A lot of people put a great deal of effort into putting a six ounce bird in to the wild, but we all felt it was a worthwhile exercise.

Bob Dalton



dogs AND hawks

b The would-be falconer, after finding himself on the slippery slope, becomes a tireless researcher, ferreting through piles of dusty tomes in search of Hawking Knowledge. In a short time he/she is conversing quite freely with experienced falconers on highly specialised subjects, using the accumulated wordhoards of famous falconers of the past. Often, this is before ever having had a hawk on the fist. Some time later the first bird is obtained, and in time another falconer is made. In almost every book that the falconer reads is a section on the use of dogs with hawks, but when it comes to dogs, many falconers seem to have a penchant for doing everything arsebackwards.

The dog should obviously be obtained well in advance of the hawk. It never is. You will have noticed how

l after their initial trials and tribulations with kestrels or buzzards, falconers obtain a hawk which will have the capability of taking vast quantities of wild quarry, with (or usually in spite of) the falconer's help. As soon as a few head of quarry have been brought to book, the nouveau falconer deems it to be necessary (all the best authors say so) to have a dog, to supposedly enhance the quality of sport and to boost the bag.

o It is fair to say that training a hawk is something a kin to breaking a horse. It takes a relatively short time, and is something of a trick, in that if the trainee had more between the ears it would immediately a) buck you off, or b) fly away. Due to their greater intelligence, training dogs isn't a bit like that. It requires endless careful repetition, achieving small improvements each day, and although after perhaps six months you may have a usable dog, training is never fully complete. The novice falconer, having trained his hawk with relative ease and therefore full of all the confidence of the ignorant, now looks to take on a puppy with a view to training it alongside the novice hawk. As if that were not folly enough, there now comes the multiple choice question. Which model of hawking dog to choose, and whether it should be new or second-hand.

The choice of type is usually governed by asking advice from another dog-owning falconer, or by reading articles written by advocates of a certain breed. Everyone has asked the owner of a recently-purchased car about its qualities. Have you ever heard one say that it returns less than 50 m.p.g.? Does less than 120 m.p.h.? Handles less well than the winner of the Lombard-RAC rally? Dog and car owners are only human. They would not admit to buying anything less than perfect, so their advice should be heeded, but not necessarily taken.

Many sportsmen (including falconers) seem to be guided

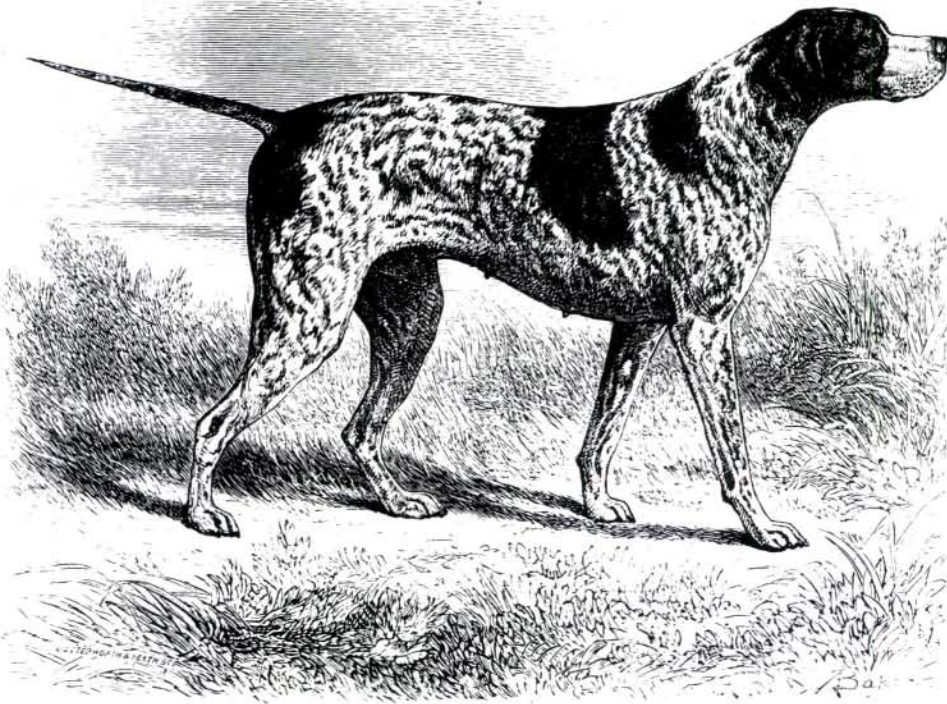
much by fashion and compromise. There are now plenty of breeds which can hunt, point, retrieve, sing, read, cook and tell the time, but they don't often do all (or usually any) of it very well. Given their training capabilities, most falconers would be a lot better off with a good heavy lab, which is tolerably easy to cope with, and they would at least stand a chance of staying close to it. It's all very well having a fashionable dog, but it is of little use in the next county. Fashions often seem to be based on fairly tenuous logic. For instance, we all know that spaniels are great dogs in the right hands, and there is one particular breed which was advocated by a great falconer some years ago. It is the largest type of spaniel, and the reasoning was as follows: large size = lack of agility and speed = ideal

Let it be said that falconers, by thier very nature are individualists. Their pride does not usually allow them to take the easy path which would lead to buy a fully-trained dog.

who would have little trouble keeping up with his (half-trained) dog. However, anyone who has seen one of these dogs in full cry after a rabbit will know

that even Ben Johnson (drug-assisted or otherwise) would come a pathetic, gibbering third.

Let it be said that falconers, by their very nature, are individualists. Their pride does not usually allow them to take the easy path which would lead them to buy a fully-trained dog. (Mind, they also tend to be a bit reluctant to part with the necessary brass for such an item.) No! The proud falconer invariably goes for a puppy, upon which he can put his own individual stamp (and which can also be purchased at a fraction of the price). Falconers also have a pathological aversion to learning anything about dog training - note the ratio of books on falconry, compared with those about dogs, on any falconer's bookshelf! However, any sportsman may only have five dogs in his sporting lifetime. There seems little point in wasting a large part of your own life, let alone wasting the lives of the puppies which will be ruined before the would-be falconer/dog trainer even gets to handle a trained dog. It is far better to swallow some pride and buy an older dog which has already been trained, and better still if the purchaser allows himself to be coached in its handling. It isn't as easy as it looks! A professional dog trainer must have the most thankless task in the world, as most of their products end up ruined by their owners with a few days. Once the handling of the trained dog has been mastered, the falconer may wish at a later date to try his hand with a part-trained dog, and eventually progress to having a puppy. By then, it should be needless to say that the best possible working stock should be sought, but it's surprising how many



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Recently-qualified dog owners, falconers included, have the romantic notion that the more the dog is in their company, the better and more obedient it will be. With few exceptions nothing could be further from the truth. As the owner will perforce spend a good deal of his time in doors instead of keeping to simple doggy vocabulary ("sit", "here" and such like), he will find himself in no time using the more complex commands - for instance "stop chewing the carpet", or "keep off the new dralon suite". In the case of pointers (I kid you not) these commands may include "desist from urinating on the video" or "get off my head immediately". These multiple commands will be liberally sprinkled with 'f' words and references to canine parentage, and are, of course, totally incomprehensible to the dog. Coupled with this, when dog and owner venture outside, there is no novelty in being in its master's company, so the dog will be much more interested in performing its own bodily functions or chasing cars. Even worse, should the owner be forced to leave his pupil in the care of the wife and family, he will begin to notice that it has learned, as if by magic, words like "bikky" and "chokky" at the expense of "hie lost" and "heel". In other words, for all the training that is achieved, the family has unwittingly but systematically untrained the dog. It is wrong to kennel one that is not used to it, or any dog without company, but it is amazing how reponsive and

eager to please a dog can be having just been let out and whilst still halfway through it third high-speed circumnavigation of the garden. When in this frame of mind much can be accomplished, even though the dog's concentration span is very short. Take the young dog from the kennel, give him a bit of exercise coupled with a bit of training when he is listening, and put him away. He will love you each time he sees you, and so will the wife because the house is neither knee deep in fur nor smelling of dog pee.

Lastly, it is really necessary for the falconer to have as much interest in dog work as in hawking. Treated in the right way, dogging can be fun! Yes, fun! Indeed, some falconers have found it so interesting that they have gone on to be successful professional gundog trainers, and forgotten about hawking. Strange-but true! Interestingly, some professional trainers have been know to advise the inexperienced that when their puppies have gone irretrievably wrong they should give them away to falconers! If handled correctly and gently, a dog can be a faithful and intelligent companion, and indispensable in the field. Unfortunately, many falconers find dogs to be just a handful, and therefore live to regret their purchases. These sportsmen ought to seriously consider the alternative - taking their hawks out and belabouring the hedgerows with a good stout stick!

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Raptor

A falconry magazine is like most other magazines in that it is supposed to be enjoyable and at the same time helpful and informative. But I must stress right from the start that under no circumstances is it to be used as a way to learn falconry.

There is one rule which I think most Falconers will agree with, and that is, you do not obtain a bird until you have read, studied and talked to falconers and are fully aware of what you are entering into. Everybody has heard the saying that a dog is for life and it is the same with a bird but ten times more demanding. So before you begin, you must be able to answer yes to all the questions below.

- 1) Have you room to keep the bird, indoors and out?
- 2) Spare time, have you at the very least 2 hours a day to spend with your bird? (preferably more)

The first in this regular problem solving feature advises those considering buying their first bird of prey. Next issue (Spring 1990) we shall cover falconry furniture maintenance.

- 3) How much money have you to spend? Can you afford initial outlay, for a perch, scales, a glove, a bag and food every week?
- 4) Have you got somewhere to fly and/or hunt the bird?
- 5) Have you got someone who can advise you, either a friend or a Falconry centre?
- 6) Is there someone at home all day, or at least at regular intervals, who can keep an eye on the bird?

7) Is it going to be possible to keep dead chicks and rats in the freezer? *Will you wife or mother object?*

If you have answered yes to all the above questions then read on.

I have been asked many times by people 'how can I learn about falconry', this is the answer I always offer:

Firstly as falconry books are expensive and you will most certainly have to read more than one or two, I suggest a trip to a good library and read up thoroughly on all aspects of Falconry.

Below are a couple of books you might find useful:

Falconry and Hawking by Phillip Glasler.

A Manual of Falconry by M H Woodford.

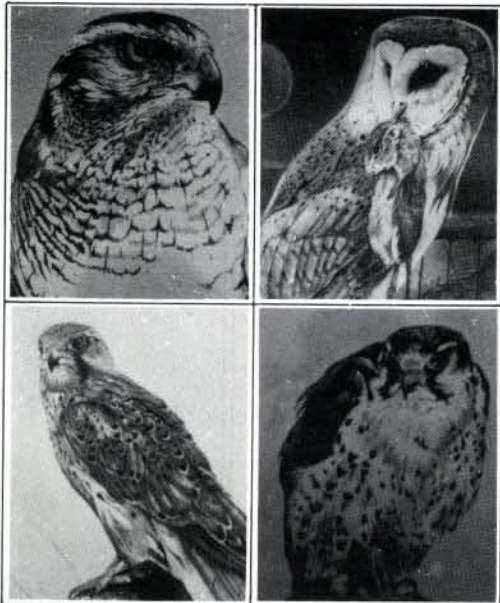
Then you must try and get in touch with falconers in your area, first write to them telling them about yourself and interest in birds and falconry, and if you can show them that you are genuinely interested in birds of prey I am sure they would be more than happy to help and advise and this person will be your most valuable asset. If there is a local club you can join, then do so, or a falconry centre offering courses then go along and introduce yourself and have a talk with some of the people who work there.

If after, at least 6 months of reading, talking and generally finding out about falconry you are still interested then you can seriously think about getting a bird.

PAUL SLY

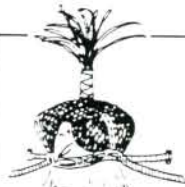
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Dear Editor,

I am a falconer employed by a bird control company, to keep birds off an amenity tip neighbouring an airport on the edge of Cambridge. The work itself offers accommodation (a caravan) low wages and no rest as I am here seven days a week living in. But it also offers as much falconry as you can do. There is no doubt that the birds make it all worth while and if you can put up with the afore-mentioned bad points for your favourite field sport this job is certainly for you.

A typical day starts at six a.m. As the aircraft do not start flying until about eight, this gives me plenty of time to put the birds out and clean their baths etc., and will end at dusk which of course varies with the season. In the summer there are not usually a lot of birds about to control (or hunt) but in winter the sky can be alive with hundreds of rooks, gulls and starlings, all trying to catch a quick feed. Most people prefer to use falcons for the job, as the sight of one waiting on for the lure or quarry seems to trigger the birds into a state of pure panic, as they search for cover or safety in distance.

The company does not supply the birds but will lend you some until you can acquire your own. They breed birds each year which can be bought at a cut price. Although a Kestrel is usually good enough to scare starlings, the most popular birds used are Lanners, Luggers and Peregrine falcons, which will clear the rest for miles.

I am buying a Peregrine from the firm to fly at rooks we have here which is something I could never have done with out this company, I can safely say I owe a lot to my job and falconers I have met through it.

Barrie Hammond.

**All letters should be addressed to:-
THE EDITOR, THE FALCONERS MAGAZINE,
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Dear Editor

Two years ago I bought a female sparrowhawk and have never regretted it. For her first season the little spar. flew excellently, catching quarry regularly, on two occasions catching wood-pigeons twice her size. I am hoping to better her performance this season, but one thing concerns me about these courageous little birds, I feel they are priced in a such way that they are accessible to the beginner, although they are under no circumstances a beginners bird. I have heard of quite a few beginners in my area alone who have taken on spars only to have them die through lack of experience.

This year has seen a huge reduction in the price of sparrowhawks. muskets are now about £70 and females £150, and with the exception of Barn Owls and Kestrels they are the cheapest birds available. The question I ask myself is, do some breeders actually care about where the birds are going, and whether they are going to experienced or inexperienced falconers. The breeder from whom I bought my Sparrowhawk was very concerned where his birds were going, he asked me to keep in touch and let him know of the birds progress, which, I did and still do. I wish there where more breeders like him.



Paul's female Sparrowhawk

Unless beginners are fortunate enough to have an experienced falconer to teach them, as I did, or go on a course, then it is difficult to tell by relying on books alone how to correct things when they start to go wrong. And I'm sure that most people who have trained a spar will agree that whatever can go wrong will.

Although I will admit to only training a couple of birds before getting my spar, I did have quite a bit of knowledge of the birds temperament and their behaviour, something which I consider most important to have. But unless a beginner has been on a course they have little or no practical knowledge.

I think the price of Buzzards, which are more suitable for beginners, should be brought down below that of spars, so it is not such a temptation for a beginner to buy one.

I am sure there are a lot of people who agree with me, I am not trying to offend anyone, I am just expressing my opinion on a subject about which I care a great deal.

Paul Clay
(Age 15).

EXPO '89

EAST OF ENGLAND

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Ray Aliker with 'Megan'

If you like to see the old steam engines pumping out smoke from their tall chimneys, building up pressure to drive generators, which in turn drive the magnificent organs, which can be heard all over the showground, or cars, bikes, lorries and tractors dating back to the early twentieth century, having been fully restored to their former glory, then this is the place for you. There were many traditional crafts and

craftsmen such as wheelwrights (wheel makers and repairers) and coopers (barrel makers) and the art of making corn-dollies was also being displayed. There was an array of dancing, with the participants all wearing their National Costume.

The main arena was a hive of activity all day with Royal Mounted Military Police - otherwise known as the Redcaps - and the R.A.F. Police Dog Demonstration

Team providing very impressive displays of skill. Special guest on Sunday was Timmy Mallett of Wac-a-day fame, and on Monday Peter O'Brien of Neighbours.

Behind the main arena, The Redtail Falconry Display Team (husband + wife Ray and Wendy Aliker) had the audience in stitches whilst flying Willow the Barn Owl to some of the youngsters and Lopyy the European Eagle Owl to the parents, encouraging him to fly over both children and adults sitting on the ground, flying so low, that to their delight, his wings brushed the top of their heads. Because of the buildings close by and the very strong wind on the day in question, the male Peregrine and female Lanner did not gain the height expected but still flew well. The male Saker raked out a good distance, coming

so low that he gave Wendy quite a start as he usually stays high. The display was rounded off with a female Harris Hawk flying to and from the main stand, taking pieces of meat which were thrown into the air, demonstrating the immense agility of these particular birds.

As well as displaying at Expo, Game Fairs and other similar functions, Ray and Wendy Aliker visit schools, free of charge, giving informative talks with a strong emphasis on conservation and flying their birds. As Ray is also a professional photographer photos are taken of the children holding some of his birds, which can be purchased if required.

For more information on the Redtail Falconry Display Team, Ray and Wendy can be contacted on: (0279) 410379

Heart of England

FALCONRY CENTRE

The Heart of England Falconry Centre, owned by Steve Wright, is the only place where you can show your birds of prey, and see others being shown. They originally started in 1986, when field sports were under threat (and still are) to increase the awareness of the general public by bringing them together with falconers.

There are four shows a year and on the occasions I have been there, many non-falconers and falconers have attended, with a variety of birds mainly Kestrels, Buzzards, Redtailed and Harris Hawks, Lanner, Lugger and Saker Falcons and on some occasions Goshawks and Spar-

rowhawks, Ferruginous Buzzards, Peregrine Falcons and Merlins. Owls account for a large number of the birds, ranging from Little Owls, Barn Owls and Tawny Owls to Bengal and European Eagle Owls and Snowy Owls.

When entering your bird allowances are made depending on the time of the year, for moulting and hunting, extra points are awarded if the bird is flown free, with special attention being paid to the maintenance of furniture.

The day is rounded off with presentations of plaques, rosettes etc.,. For more information you can contact Steve on: (0962) 52716

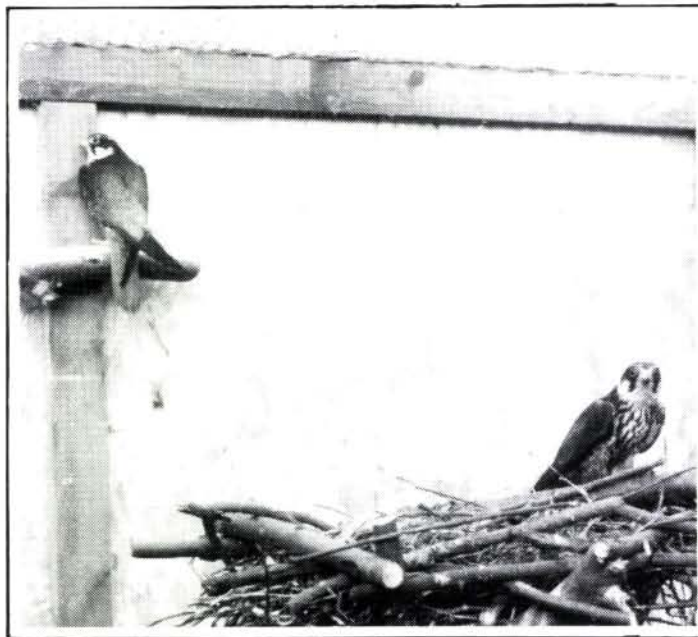
GEOFF'S HOBBIES

In 1985 I acquired a pair of Hobbies with the sole aim of breeding them. They were housed in a totally secluded aviary measuring 24'x12'x8' high. The floor was just natural dirt. The roof was galvanised chain link, which was O.K. for the previous occupants (a pair of Lanners), but for the Hobbies I laid inch nylon netting over the top of the chain link just to be on the safe side. Four feet of the roof was completely covered giving protection over the nest ledge, which is a triangle - 3'x4'x5' situated diagonally over one corner at six feet off the ground. The five foot length across the front is six inches deep and the ledge is covered with a combination of sand gravel peat and soil, mixed equally to a depth of three inches, and a couple of rocks and a few twigs scattered about.

The birds were fed solely on chicks with SA37. This format had worked well in the past for breeding other falcons and I felt it a good start for the Hobbies. Perching spots were arranged around the aviary at various heights from seven feet down and they came off the wall at right angles of various lengths, leaving plenty of space for flying without obstruction.

In the first year the birds settled down well, looked extremely fit, were very vocal and three eggs were laid and pulled to put in the incubator. A second clutch of three more eggs was laid, copulating had not been observed and all eggs were infertile. I felt the male was inhibited about coming onto the nest ledge

with the female. Thinking he felt trapped by the angle of the nest ledge, with only being able to come and go from the front. So for the 1986 breeding season, I erected a crows type nest out in the middle of the aviary, with no cover over it. This being more of a natural type of nest for wild Hobbies. Great excitement was shown in this nest by both birds, especially the male, who seemed to spend a lot of time on the edge of the nest displaying and exercising very



rapid wing beating. He was often joined by the female and the pair seemed well bonded, but just before the eggs were due the nest was abandoned on favour of the original nest site, used the previous year. Treading had been observed on several occasions and food parcelling many times. Again three eggs were laid and put in the incubator and a second clutch of three eggs were laid, with the male doing his share of the incubating. But all were in-

fertile again.

So for the next year I decided the answer must be in the feeding. Nothing was changed in the aviary. Hobbies being mainly insectivorous, I felt that feeding locusts might be the answer. (I had trouble breeding them to start with, but that's another story). As the 1987 breeding season approached I increased the amount of locusts being fed. At the beginning it was difficult to get the hobbies to feed on them, but

by getting the birds keen to feed then popping the locusts through the feed hole they soon started taking them. By the breeding season there were locusts hopping all over the aviary, which seemed to stimulate lots of food parcelling, with copulating and displaying, the birds looked extremely well but yet again that year, no fertile eggs. I decided it was about time we had a change by splitting the pair and finding a new partner for one of them. This has al-

ways been my policy with previous breeding birds. Having felt that these birds had had every chance of producing fertile eggs, but nothing coming of it, I decided to look for another male. One was obtained and put into the breeding aviary with the female just before Christmas. The female accepted him straight away and they seemed very compatible. But then in April the female died. I managed to find a replacement on a breeding loan, both birds settled in well but we had no eggs that year. This year, 1989, both birds looked fit and well on a diet of mice and chicks with SA37, no locusts. I have not spent as much time observing them as I would have liked, but have seen food parcelling and displaying, food parcelling, treading and even taking turns with the incubating, I have no fresh ideas for next year at the moment. None of my other breeding birds have had the time and effort put into them, apart from my Swainson Hawks, which have also produced three infertile eggs this year. In the past I have bred many species without effort or attention. It doesn't seem to matter whether they are imprinted or not or what food you feed them, it seems that if they are going to breed they will. Maybe for next year I will consider A.I. (Artificial Insemination).

Geoff Dalton

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BY R. DAVID DIGBY



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