

The

Falcons

Magazine



Autumn '90

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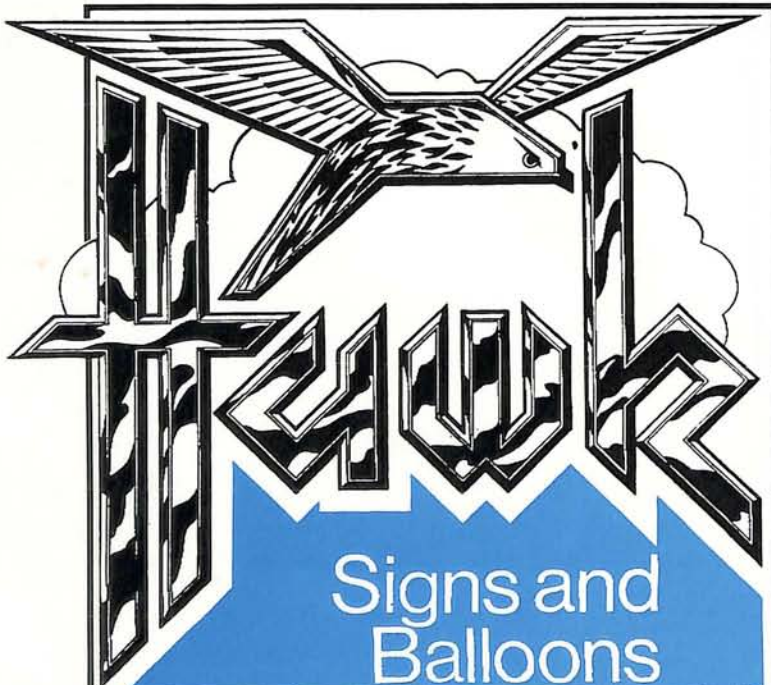


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The Falconers Magazine

**AUTUMN 1990
NO. 4**

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The Falconers Magazine is up to its' fourth issue and gaining in popularity in Great Britain and abroad, including places as far a field as Canada, America and Saudi Arabia. We have been attending Craft Shows and Game Fairs all over the country and have had an encouraging response and I would like to assure everybody that the Falconers Magazine will be with you for the foreseeable future. Some of you are due to re-subscribe so please do not forget to send off your forms. This is the most important thing you can do for the mag as it lets us know you want it and we know it is worth us continuing. We are always looking for budding writers so if you feel like having a go, please feel free, we would love to hear from you. This is also very important as without articles there would be no magazine to subscribe to.

As Falconry and conservation go hand in hand, we would like to place more emphasis on conservation in the magazine. This will be by way of articles by organisations such as the R.S.P.C., etc. We would like to think that Falconers are very conscious of such matters as the welfare and preservation of our wildlife and countryside, without which we could not practice our sport. We are also in future issue going to be including more articles on hunting for all you bloodthirsty falconers out there, especially with the forthcoming hunting season in everybody's mind. If you have any views on either of these things or stories you would like to recount please send them to us. Thankyou for your continued support we look to hearing from you.

Editor

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Something "From the Falconers Dog" By Laurent De Bastyai
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FALCONERS FAIR 1990

This year saw the very first Falconers Fair, incorporated in the Countryman and Gamekeepers Fair two day event staged at Stoneleigh in Staffs on 19th & 20th May.

It was organised by Ron Morris and Brian Paterson. Brian did three very impressive Falconry displays throughout the day, explaining the handling, training, maintenance and flying of birds of prey, to give people an insight into the age old art of Falconry.

A special Guest appearance was made on both days by Hungarian Laurent De Bastyai. It was a great honour for many people to meet a man who has such a great standing in the Falconry world and so much experience, who is also willing to share his knowledge with others.

The Falconers Fair was attended by Falconry Furniture makers, artists, photographers, taxidermists, clubs, incubator special-

ists, Raptor Rescue and of course The Falconers Magazine. Everybody, when asked, said they were very impressed and pleased with the response. Visiting Falconers said it was great to have somewhere where they could all get together once a year.



Apart from the Falconers Fair there were 100's of other stands covering everything from stick-making to clothing, books to pest-control, camping to feed specialists.

There were demonstrations of archery, claypigeon shooting, working gundogs, including obstacle courses, scurrys and straight retrieve competitions. Terrier and lurcher showing and racing, ferret showing and racing, hound sports, stick-dressing, fishing, 4 x 4 charity drive, side saddle riding.

All in all the Falconers Fair was a huge success and much enjoyed by everyone. It has been long awaited and it arrived in style. We hope to see it go from strength to strength in years to come. For details of next years Falconers Fair please keep your eye on The Falconers Magazine early next year and as soon as we hear anything we will let you know. Hop to see you all next year.

HIGH AS A KITE

Peter Litherland and Michael Duffy who run the Falconry Centre at Holdenby House are pleased to announce the arrival of the first Yellow Billed bred in captivity in this country. It hatched at 11pm on 6th May 1990. Its parents are a 12 year old male and a 25 year old female. The female is on loan from Jemima Parry-Jones of The National Bird of Prey Centre. In February 1989 they were introduced together into an aviary and to everyones surprise they laid and sat a clutch of eggs but unfortunately they were infertile. At the beginning of April 1990 she laid one egg and she sat it and lo and behold 34 days later the egg hatched. They do not know yet what sex it is but as you can see it is a lovely bird, and well worth the wait.



FELIN GERI FALCONRY AND HAWKING CENTRE

John McGinty, with finance and partner, Michelle Legg have fulfilled their ambition to start a falconry centre. Although on a small scale at the moment, with just 17 birds, they have plans to extend. John devotes a great deal of time to talking and explaining the art of falconry to the audience. They have a nicely laid out weathering ground and an open work-shop. The falconry centre is in the grounds of Felin Geri, which is one of the last working 16th Century water powered flour mills in the country which supplies its own bakery and is owned by Mike Haycock. A meal can be had in the Japanese restaurant and the children can have great fun in the adventure playground.

Future plans for the centre are all year courses and the opportunity for falconers either with or without birds to go hawking.



John and Michelle in the Workshop

MALAYSIAN BROWN FISH OWL

We have our first egg of the season, began my original article penned in January, and there it may have ended, without the promised update, when, seven days later the egg was candled and proven infertile. However, on February 27th another egg was produced by our erstwhile pensioners which at seven days incubation showed the beautiful tell tale red blood vessels with a tiny jelly fish nucleus, "fertility". It was not to be plain sailing however when at 28 days incubation the parent birds gave up and abandoned it, we found the egg ice cold but, still forever the optimists we reasoned that one Fish Owl egg equals three Tawny Owls and did a nifty swap. It worked and on day 33 the first Malaysian Brown Fish Owl was born, an all fools day baby which certainly fooled the Tawny's who reared it as their own for the first three weeks at which point we did a further nifty swap and transferred it to the European Eagle Owls to rear along with their own which had just begun to hatch. They are brilliant parents and kept it so well covered that it was to be eight weeks later before we saw it again, from ten weeks it began to explore the surroundings beyond the nest confines. Now at twelve weeks it is still not quite grown but we are guessing it to be a male and with plumage many shades paler than its parents. He is strong and healthy and should now be assured of survival but of course the next great problem presents itself, that of locating a potential mate for him when he matures, in about three years time, if there is a lonely female out there perhaps she might get in touch.



STOLEN

On the weekend of June 9th/10th two birds were stolen from the Birds of Prey Centre at Hornsea Pottery, East Yorks. A fourteen years old female Lanner ring no. UK76202 used for display work and a one year old male Harris Hawk no. 6273W. The Harris is disabled from birth and unable to fly more than a few yards, it has wide gaps in the centre of each wing where feathers don't grow and stands with the left wing dropped giving it a lop sided look when viewed from the front. A substantial reward is offered for informatin leading to the conviction of the thieves and return of the stolen property.
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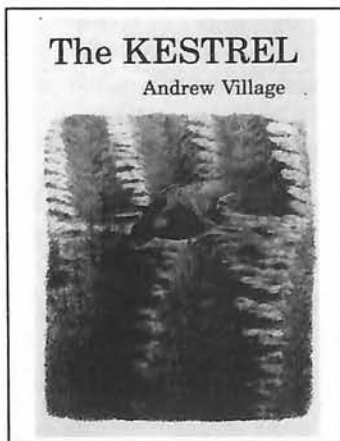
Reviews

THE KESTREL.

By ANDREW VILLAGE.

Reviewed by D.Perkins

This is a comprehensive study by Dr Andrew Village, of the Kestrel taken over five years in Eskdalemuir in Scotland and seven years in two agricultural areas in Eastern England. The book contains carefully catalogued data covering all facets of the Kestrel, its life and habits. From Kestrels around the world, through diet, hunting, moult, territory and nesting sites, with special attention paid to breeding, which covers five of the twenty-one chapters, population and age and sex ratios. The book is written in such a way that it is very readable as well as being very informative.



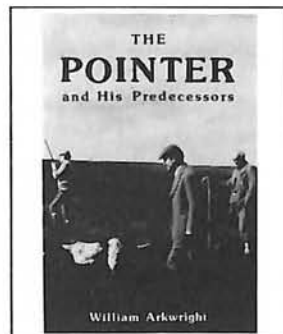
The author Dr Andrew Village, who also studied under the supervision of Ian Newton on his sparrowhawk project, has provided us with the most in-depth and up to date book on Kestrels available today. The book contains over forty-five excellent photographs and artist Keith Brockie has contributed over 30 superb illustrations. THE KESTREL by ANDREW VILLAGE is published in hard back by T & A D Poyser. It is available at all good book stores or on mail order from; Foots Gray, High Street, Sidcup, Kent, DA14 5HP Price £18. (inc. p&p UK only).

THE POINTER AND HIS PREDECESSORS

By WILLIAM ARKWRIGHT

Reviewed by John Merlin

Good books on dog training are worth their weight in gold. They can save you an awful lot of time, both in the initial choice of the dog and then understanding how to train and work it. The most important book ever written on the English pointer is undoubtedly William Arkwright's "The Pointer and His Predecessors" which was first published in 1903, and then in 1906, 1977 and 1989.



Most people know that there is a difference between the working pointer and the show pointer. But as I read Arkwright's chapters on "Early History" and "Later History" describing the origins of the dogs, then their development in Britain from first importations in 1725, I began to realise why modern working pointers vary so much, even in Britain.

Arkwright goes on to discuss "the present" (at the turn of the century!) under "Shows and Trails" (there were grumbles about The Kennel Club even then!), then to "Characteristics of the Pointer" and "Breeding and Selection". The chapter on "Alien Crosses" condemns the introduction of foxhound, bull terrier, and greyhound blood to "improve" the dogs for trials and the bench. All fascinating stuff.

"Shooting Over Dogs" was probably my most enjoyable chapter, for obvious reasons, and it is followed by a useful and practical chapter on "Breaking" with quotations from earlier authors that are as applicable to today's dogs as they were nearly four hundred years ago. Falconry, sad to say, is scarcely mentioned but that is not surprising considering the period in which the book was written.

All in all, I would strongly recommend this book to anyone interested in pointing dogs, especially to any falconer even contemplating game hawking. There have been many books since on this breed, and many have gone, but Arkwright is immortal. This is a book which should be on the shelf of every serious dogman or falconer.

"The Pointer and His Predecessors" by William Arkwright (ISBN 0 906924 03 0) is published in hard back by Derry Argue at £20 (Cash with Order) including post and packing from: Argue Publishing, Miller's Place, Fendom, Tain IV19 1PE.

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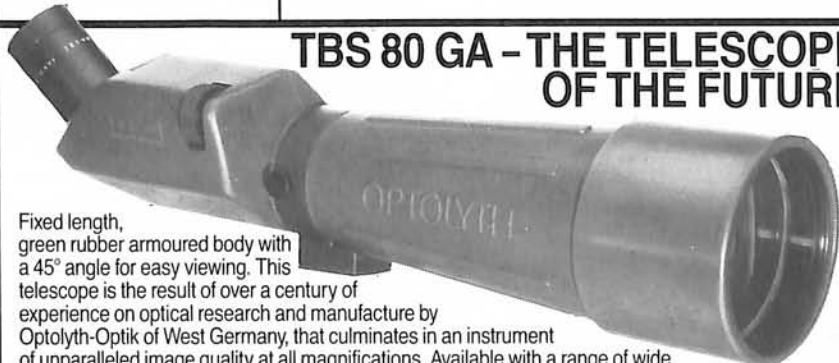
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CALL OF THE WIND

by
Alan Gates



"What on earth made you want to fly golden eagles?" I was once asked, by a smartly dressed falconer with a dainty peregrine tiercel stood on his fist. The answer is not as easy as one would imagine, and somewhat impossible to sum up in a few words. Looked at logically, there are possibly a lot more minuses to flying an eagle than there are pluses, but then attraction is rarely based on sensible reasoning.

It was twenty five years ago when I was given my first opportunity to fly a golden eagle. A regal adult male, with a gentle temperament. We flew him at hare on the South Downs, and although I thoroughly enjoyed a few days sport in the company of this fine bird, the attraction of flying an eagle had not got a hold. Or at least, I was not aware that it had.

In those days of the mid sixties, only a few falconers owned golden eagles. There were less than nine eagles wearing jesses in the British Isles, and only three or four of those regularly flown at quarry.

The few who had attempted to train a golden eagle to hunt, accounted for many of the legendary stories of bad tempered eagles attacking their owners or spectators in the field. In general most of the experienced falconers of the day who put pen to paper to extol the art of falconry in book form, would, upon listing the various species of birds of prey suitable for the hunt, usually leave the eagle until last. Then recount a catalogue of disaster that befell some poor unfortunate who had been foolish enough to attempt to train this most unpredictable and ferocious of birds. These stories usually ended with the poor owner at his wits end, giving the eagle to a zoo or menagerie. The writer who had probably never encountered an eagle, warning the reader never to be tempted for whatever reason. I had grown up with this advice ringing my ears, many good falconers had had eagles, but had soon given up with them. Unpredictable, with a slow, sluggish and boring performance was usually their verdict.

After twenty one consecutive seasons flying solely golden eagles, it is only now that I feel able to criticise those eagle falconers of the past. Their greatest error was to consider an eagle as just a large version of a goshawk, instead one should look at how these birds hunt in the wild, adapt their training and

hunting methods, and above all respect their greater intelligence. My decision to own and fly a golden eagle was all due to a short telephone conversation, when I was offered the fine male eagle, which I had flown on the Downs a few years previously. I was so taken aback and felt a little honoured at this offer, that I accepted without a great deal of thought. But then I was young and impetuous.

At the time I lived in the Channel Islands, which are situated in the English Channel, just off the coast of Northern France. Not the most suitable place to hunt with a golden eagle, and quite a different terrain from the rolling hills of the South Downs.

After many hours of acclimatising myself to handling my new eagle 'Ivan',



Maria in full flight

I was ready to start to hunt, and it was on the western coast of my native island of Jersey that I chose to start.

Here was probably the largest open space on the island. Something like four square miles of sand dunes, with a reasonable population of rabbits in residence.

Our early outings were a little intense, I was often worried that Ivan might take it into his head, for whatever reason, and fly out to sea. A prospect that filled me with dread, as I would be unable to follow, just stand and watch. As my confidence grew and his flying abilities developed I watched in admiration as he rode out the sea born up-drafts.

Now I was experiencing for the first time what was to attract me to flying eagles for many years to come.

After a couple of seasons a natural team developed between myself and Ivan. I became a lot more confident as we both learnt to hunt the available ground that was suitable for an eagle. This in the main was the headland slopes above the islands sea cliffs. The northern and western coasts of Jersey, and the eastern and northern coasts of the tiny island of Herm were our favourite haunts. These headlands were steep, bracken and bramble covered slopes about two hundred yards wide and a few miles long. The main quarry here was the rabbit. With almost total cover they were a wily adversary.

Ivan adapted a technique which was both exciting and successful. Using the natural up-draft from the cliffs he would ride backwards and forwards, as I struggled through the bracken beating the most likely looking hiding places. If anything moved, near me or ahead he would sail across and above the spot, roll over, close his wings and stoop, punching his way through the dense cover to grab a rabbit.

He would often miss, as he would only get a glimpse of a rabbit as it sped its way through a network of tunnels, trampled by tiny feet under this vast blanket of bracken and brambles.

If there was a strong wind blowing, I would check on the direction, as it would determine as to which coast we would head for. I would fly Ivan in winds up to, and sometimes in gale force. In these conditions I defy anyone to stand, or try to stand with me, and say that a trained eagle is a boring performer. Here on the top of our sea born cliffs the wind has powered its way right across the Atlantic, with nothing in its path to dissipate its strength. Finally it smashes into the base of the islands granite cliffs, its full force now directed in an upward thrust. I found it difficult to stand, and had to lean into the wind, in these conditions extra care must be taken not to go too close to the cliff edge.

Ivan with only his wing butts projecting, would power across the sky like

a fighter jet. He would dip low over the tops of the dead bracken and pass me at high speed, above the noise of the wind, I could hear a high pitch whine. At this speed his single leg bell would act as a very efficient whistle. He would turn towards the cliff edge and hit the full blast of the up-draft, within a second he rose at least two hundred feet vertical. Now he would ride back over where I was beating, in these winds he can manage two speeds, Dead stop, as he hangs over a place where he last saw a rabbit, and with a slight tilt of his tail, full speed across the wind.

On days like this it is so easy to become a spectator, just to stand and watch as he plays with the might of the wind. As he hangs high in the sky, gulls mill around scornful of this dangerous looking intruder. Sometimes a pair of Great Black Backed Gulls would escort him, one either side. At first Ivan would take no notice, to the gulls this is a sign of weakness. One would slip behind him to try and tweak his tail. As I watched I could see Ivans head turn, instantly he would let the wind lift him up and then push him back over the gull. Now he was in a position to dive on this cheeky varmint and chase him a mile or so up the coast.

I would watch him speed off into the distance, with the gull desperately trying to out-manoeuvre this now very determined pursuer. Soon Ivan would come back, hanging in the sky over my head, a rabbit moves and he crashes into the bracken. If he was successful he is rewarded and the rabbit goes into the bag. If not he would peer in disbelief all around, sometimes poking his head through the bracken and trying to look along the runs. Then when he was finally convinced that the bunny had shown him a clean pair of heels, he would half open his wings and the wind would lift him from the spot to about one hundred feet.

Thankfully we rarely caught more than three or four rabbits in a days outing. The weight in the hawking bag on the long walk home, might have balanced out the weight of the eagle, but neither did much for my tired old legs.

When I moved to mainland Britain, Ivan showed me he had not gone soft with rabbits, and took the large brown hares in fine style. The huge arable fields of Yorkshire and Lancashire gave many happy hare hawking outings. In the embryonic days of the Falconers Association (Hunting Group) in the early seventies, quite large meetings of falconers and their hawks would gather on the Bleasdale estate in Lancashire. Here we had permission for some 10,000 acres over which to fly our birds. Unfortunately the weather was not always kind to us. High winds, and, on occasion



"Maria" a 17 year old female Golden Eagle

blizzard snow soon grounded the goshawks. Not Ivan, he was up, with about thirty beaters below all trying to serve him. Two or three hares could be on the run at once. He would swoop down on the nearest, and if it jinked out of his clutch, he would rise up and swoop after another.

These displays of hare hawking certainly encouraged a few falconers of that time to consider the eagle, and with the possibility of obtaining licenses to take golden eaglets from their highland eyries, it made what had once been an impossible dream, a bit more of a reality.

June 1973 found me in the Grampian Mountains in the Highlands of Scotland, I had just lowered a cane basket down the steep crag, inside was Maria a down covered female eaglet. Sat behind me in

the eyrie was her brother, I had just handed him a few slivers of grouse meat before I too lowered myself off the ledge and out of his life.

Maria was about three weeks younger than I had hoped for, but she already weighed eight and a quarter pounds and my time in the highlands was running out. She was the first female eaglet taken under licence, and at the time there was only one other trained female eagle being flown in Britain.

I was subjected to the same negative reaction from fellow falconers, that I had had when first embarking on eagle flying. Golden eagles in general still carried a bad press, and anyone attempting to train a female really had lost his marbles. After all Capt. C.W.R. Knight attempted to train two females, and returned both of

them from whence they came. One, very nearly caused the loss of one eye when she too hold of the side of his face. Both these females started to develop a seriously bad habit of grabbing at his free hand whilst standing on the gloved arm.

Maria grew up in an open straw lined pen of the farm, she was given unlimited food and just left to bask in the sun and grow. This she did and was soon a magnificent dark uniform brown, with a golden head and superb white banded tail. The most striking feature (no pun intended) was the large span of her feet, each foot had an equal span to my hand and was fearsomely armed.

The early stages of training Maria were very straight forward, I encouraged her with great care to return to the fist, or should I say arm. The ultimate rule in this practise, is never take away any of the reward held in your fist. Always allow the eagle to eat all that you offered her, if you fail to follow this basic rule you will encourage her to guard her food, gripping your gloved hand with crippling power and lashing out to grab your bare hand as you attempt to make away with her prize.

What takes most novice eagle falconers by surprise, is the speed in which an eagle will sus out your mistakes in training her. Sloppy moves in which you might trick a goshawk and the like, an eagle will notice, assess and take advantage of, by the third time you try it on.

I flew Maria to the fist for about a year, one soon learns to compensate for the moment of contact as she lands. The only reason I stopped was attributed to inexperience on both our parts. It was at the end of an afternoon hare hawking over some winter wheat fields, a stiff wind was developing and dusk was falling. Time to call it a day, Maria was sitting in the middle of a large oak tree in the hedgerow, from where she had commanded an excellent view as I walked the field towards her. I held up my arm as I walked away from her, and as usual she left her position to return to me. The direction of her approach gave her a tail wind and the visibility was dropping, I

heard her approach and felt her land, one foot on my arm and the other on the back of my head. I bent forward and she continued onto the ground in front of me, luckily she had not gripped and I had no marks, but I can still feel that foot clasp the back of my head today. I took it as a sort of warning, and now she returns to a reward on the ground.

She was soon riding the up-drafts from the moorland valleys, here in the high hills Maria pursues the hill fox and the occasional roe. With her much greater weight than the male eagle, she packs an almighty punch from a high stoop. She has killed both these species of quarry stone dead with one stoop, the largest to go this way was a roe at fifty two pounds in weight.

Once again here was proof against those disparaging remarks of a female golden eagles performance. Maria developed a devil may care attitude to flying in wild weather, similar to horses it seemed to excite her as she tore across the sky on half open wings.

We would often hunt over hillsides covered with small sized oak plantations, and Maria has often pursued above the trees, ground game running along the woodland floor. She obviously calculates where there is the least obstructions and dives through the branches. I make this statement because she is never hurt or deflected off her aim, but the resounding crash and the number of small branches she breaks as she punches her way through the trees, often makes me



Ivan coming to the authors fist

flinch as I despair at her disregard for her own safety. With suitable quarry quite scarce on the moorland hills, she will regularly play on the wind. Letting it take her higher, then swooping earthwards she levels out, streaking along the flat moorland tops, passing me at shoulder level she cocks an eye to me, then out over the edge and bang straight into the up-draft and vertically up for a couple of hundred feet.

This is what attracts me to flying golden eagles, as I walk the hills she defies the elements to throw all they have at her, and she rides it like a roller coaster. We do not need any quarry to see a spectacular display, evolution has honed this bird to aerial perfection all that is required is the wind and real eagle country in which to fly her.

FOOTNOTE

Although it gives me pleasure to share my experience of eagles with fellow falconers. I sincerely hope it does not encourage anyone to embark on attempting to train an eagle for falconry, without first considering all that is required. Firstly a vast area of open deserted land is required. A commodity that is very very scarce these days, even in Wales, Northern England and Scotland it is

becoming more difficult every year to be totally alone in the hills.

As most eagles that become available for training originated as eyasses, they invariably become imprinted on their handlers. This makes them 'one man birds', which can have very serious drawbacks as the guard their territory to all on-comers except their handler. Passing eagles through many owners does nothing for their temperaments, and so one must be prepared to own an eagle

for life, which can be thirty or more years.

Sadly there are far too many eagles in menageries, falconry centres or just caged up in a vain hope that they will breed. Some excuse these actions by proclaiming that these birds are flown daily, although many never leave their blocks. A few hundred yards flapping around a field is not flying an eagle, and anything less is nothing short of physical and mental cruelty.

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THE MAGNIFICENT GYR FALCON

by Bob Dalton

The Gyr Falcon has always been considered the ultimate Falcon for the chase. That is up until the turn of the century, when for all intent and purpose, the art of keeping Gyrs in good health and condition had been lost. The falconers of that period that had the good fortune to obtain Gyr Falcons were generally disappointed with their performance and alarmed at the rate at which they fell ill and died.

But the modern Falconer has re-learned the important lessons of keeping Gyrs fit and healthy. As a result the Gyr is once again considered the most exciting longwing to fly at quarry. They are the largest and without doubt, the fastest of all the falcons. Gyr falcons fly at around 3 lbs 4ozs and male Gyrs (known as Jerkins) fly at around 2lbs 8ozs. Bearing in mind a good sized Peregrine Falcon flies at just under 2lbs, Gyrs really are large and powerful.

The wild Gyr is a bird of the northern hemisphere and is divided into seven races by ornithologists. The Falconer does not classify the Gyr by race but by colour. The grey phase, the black and the dramatic looking white phase.

The diet of the wild Gyr is chiefly birds, particularly ptarmigan and grouse, but they will take all birds from small passerines to ducks and geese. Very occasionally they will take ground game such as lemmings and other small mammals. Their home range varies tremendously, depending on region and quarry available. For example in Iceland the average territory of a pair of birds is 25 square miles, while in Alaska this can be anything up to 400 square miles. Pairs do not breed every year but will miss a year if food is in short supply. The female lays anywhere between 2 and 7 eggs, although the normal clutch is 4. The eggs are incubated for 28 to 29 days, having been laid at three day intervals. The young fly at about fifty days, but stay with the parents for another month or so.

Thanks to captive breeding Gyrs are no longer beyond the reach of the average falconer. But what must be considered, before obtaining one of these magnificent birds, is can the average falconer do the bird justice. They require a tremendous amount of room in which



White Gyr Falcon

to fly and hunt. The first time they are flown free they will scare the average falconer to death. Unlike Peregrines which tend to stick close in the early days of flying, Gyrs like to stretch their wings and range out an astonishing distance. I have known of one go out of telemetry range, fifteen miles, and come back overhead considerably later. The falconer requires nerves of steel in the first few weeks.

Even when stooping to the lure their turning circle has to be seen to be believed.

But once fully trained they are a joy to fly. They are flown mainly from the fist, out of the hood, and make very attractive rook hawks. But when flown at pheasant and partridge the Gyr shows its true speed. They can overhaul a cock pheasant in full flight with deceptive ease. Gyrs are also very efficient at waiting on flights for grouse and duck. In fact one of the most successful grouse hawks of recent years has been a captive bird, grey phase jerkin.

It is mainly German and American falconers, that have re-discovered the art of flying Gyrs to their full potential. The Americans have been particularly successful with captive breeding and have advanced to the stage of producing Gyr hybrids to suit their needs. The most common being either Gyr/Peregrine or Gyr/Prairie. These combinations produce large powerful birds with hybrid vigour. For example a male Prairie will fly at around the 11b 1oz mark, whereas a Gyr/Prairie hybrid male flies at around 11b 10ozs. There have even been Gyr/Merlin crosses, but I have never seen one of these first hand, let alone fly one. So I am not in a position to comment on their capabilities.

The German falconers do not like the Gyr/Peregrine combination, but instead prefer a Gyr/Saker hybrid. These are big birds and more than capable of taking brown hares. Their method of capture is to strike the hare several times, around the head if possible, and then grab the animal once it is sufficiently stunned.

When training Gyrs there are several points to be borne in mind. They have great powers of fasting, and unlike Peregrines do not dehydrate quickly, and therefore can go five or six days without food and not suffer any harm, providing they were in good condition to start with of course.

They also have a very supe-

rior intelligence, when compared to other birds of prey. Therefore when being flown to the lure it must be presented in as many different ways as possible and should not be given to the bird, at the end of the exercise period, by throwing it up in the air. The Gyr should always be allowed to catch the lure during exercise. This way it will believe it has won the game and therefore will remain interested.

It should also be mentioned that Gyrs are very playful and enjoy human company. They should be put out to weather where they are able to see plenty of life and action. Most Gyrs also like a tennis ball, or something similar, to play with.

Gyrs must be flown everyday, without fail, to keep them fit. They get out of condition very quickly indeed. When being entered they need to be extra keen or they will not take the game too seriously, but once entered they can be flown in a relatively high condition.

Continental falconers have found that the best way to moult a Gyr and keep it healthy is to let it loose in an aviary, but not feed it as much as it would like. As is the conventional way. They find that birds stay healthier if they are kept tame and only allowed to go two or three ounces over their flying weight. The birds are made to come to the fist for their food and the falconer remains with the bird whilst it eats, talking to it all the time. Only fresh food is used for Gyrs, never frozen. The most popular food on the continent is two week old chicks or quail. A Jerkin will eat three quail a day.

With all this talk of American and Continental falconers it should not be forgotten that probably the most successful falconer of modern times with the Gyr is our own Ronald Stevens.

As mentioned earlier, Gyrs are used mainly for game or rook hawking, except in the middle east where a few are flown at Houbara. But the vast majority of Gyrs that end up in the middle east die of heat exhaustion sooner or later. But in the halycon days of falconry, the Gyr was used for heron and kite hawking. It was normal to fly a cast of falcons (a cast being two falcons) at both these quarries and flights of great length and sporting quality ensued. The flights were followed on horseback and would last for several miles.

Due to changes in country-



*Above:
Dr Faris Al Timimi
in Qatar with
a Female Grey
Gyr Falcon*

side and conservation laws these flights are no longer possible, but a Gyr flown at rooks or game is still a spectacle to be marvelled at. As D'arcussia said "to own a Gyr is to be disappointed with all other hawks".

For those who would like to read about the Gyr two books are recommended;

Observations on modern falconry by Ronald Stevens
Traite De Fauconnerie by Schlegel and Wulverhorst
both books are available from Falcon Leisure, 52 Bennetts Close, Cobham, Surrey, KT11 1AJ. Telephone 0932 64404.

*Below:
Black Gyr Falcon*



THE FALCONERS DOG

PART 1

DERRY ARGUE

There is probably no need to pose the question, why do you need a dog for falconry? The answer is self-evident. But why should you go for the best you can afford?

I believe the answer to that question must be that an animal or bird is trained by success. A falcon learns to go high because height means more kills. A hawk or falcon will try harder if everything is done to consistently serve it with quarry at the critical moment. To guarantee this process, you need the best dog you can get.

The behaviour pattern which makes a falcon strive to achieve height in game hawking is established more readily by the certain knowledge that birds will be sprung when it has reached its pitch. A fast ranging stylish dog with stamina will get you points when others have

any contact with the dead bird and some may even express no interest in dead game the objective is the same, the destruction of their prey.

Many owners forget this basic fact. Successful training depends on getting the message across to the dog that the bird can most efficiently be killed by following the role man has chosen for it. Getting this message across seldom has anything to do with the dog's reluctance to learn or its inability to do the job. Dog training is a communications problem.

For this reason it is usually advisable to shoot over a young pointer or setter for its first season and it goes without saying that birds should only be killed over the dogs points. Killing a bird with a falcon is too remote from it's work for the dog to comprehend. The falcon learns it has a better chance of a successful

slight touch of the tail of the net on her rump caused her to move forward to flush the birds and catching grouse en masse became so efficient it was easy to see why the netting poachers were so hated by gamekeepers.

The pure dogs are best for the open grouse moor or expansive partridge manors, if such still exist. The best working dogs really do not make the best pets. They are far too active and keen for work. For more enclosed country a less hyper-active dog would be better. There are of course "look-at-my-bird-look-at-me" falconers to whom the ownership of a dog is just part of the image they are seeking. Choice in this case rests with what will best suit the fashion, preferably something exotic, exclusive and of show stock!

There are many breeds of imported HPR varying considerably in temperament. Research is essential to make sure you get a dog which will suit your temperament and style of training. Frankly, I do not like these breeds, but I admit that my experience of them is limited. But if I wanted a pointing dog for work in more enclosed country I would simply cross a well bred lab with a good example of one the British pointing breeds. That way I would be sure to have a dog with a temperament suited to British training methods and bred for the purpose in mind.

I started my career in bird dogs about thirty years ago with Irish setters when the breed was at its peak. Now, I would not choose an Irish setter for falconry although a good one is hard to beat. They get very clever, like an old fox, but need a bit too much handling for falconry in my opinion. Irish red and white setters are merely a variation on the same breed but have been bred from too small a genetic base so that nervousness is a problem in some I have seen.

Pointers came into my life next and it is easy to see why they took over in popularity from the setters when first imported in 1724. They are primarily a shooting dog. The pointer will accept training over a longer period than a setter but it requires a certain amount of "maintenance training". The English setter, a breed I have come to favour, needs to be trained only once. But it is just as easy to put the wrong information



Llewellyn setter pups are highly instinctive

given up and come into heel. Getting a consistent production of game at the point. Consistently reliable points will only be obtained with dogs which have the required instincts bred in.

The traditional bird dogs, the pointer and the three breeds of setters, are highly instinctive hunters. Working them is not too far removed from flying a falcon. They often work at extreme range and being predators their mental processes are not dissimilar to a bird of prey's. Although a pointing dog may never have

stoop if it goes high; the dog has to learn that it will succeed by pointing staunchly and participating in your sport. When did you last congratulate your dog because your bird had a successful flight?

I once trained a setter to work with a net for catching live grouse for research. The act of two men pulling a net over the dog when on point made that dog much keener on her work than shooting had done. I can only conclude the dog felt more involved in the process and so the procedure made more sense to her. The

into the dog's head, or leave the training too late, and find that you cannot erase the problems bad training has caused. But that is the trainer, not the dog.

The history of the Llewelin, a separate strain of English setter, is a fascinating story but too long to tell here. Suf-

Really, it is a matter of giving the dog the opportunity to gain the right experience whilst keeping it from harmful influence but perhaps I will cover that in a future article.

The Gordon setter is a much neglected and under-rated breed. True, they are

ing. If you do, you will have a very intelligent, instinctive, and loyal hunting dog. Most Gordon setters of the right breeding have super noses, tremendous endurance, and a lot of natural sagacity. But they really do have minds of their own.



"Advie Palladin, the writer's Pointer, on the moor"

fice to say that these were the purebred English setters owned by the late William Humphrey, the famous falconer and field trialer. These were the dogs insisted upon by Ronald Stevens and other earlier top falconers for game hawking.

Ronald believes a dog should work without the need for training. To some measure, I agree but it helps to train them!

among the wrong colour (a criticism which can also be applied to Irish setters) but I have seen one worked with fluorescent orange waist-coat and it stood out like nothing I have ever seen. It is not generally realised that the Duke of Gordon responsible for putting this setter on the map was a keen falconer. If you are lucky you might still get hold of a Gordon setter of good working breed-

Whatever your choice, a good dog will not only enhance your sport but could really make it. A good dog should be as much a part of the falconer's equipment as his bird. A good dog will last for up to ten years and probably work out the cheapest item of your teambut it will contribute well in excess of 50% to your sport.

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Sharon O'Gorman

We all insure our cars, our homes, our lives and everything else that is precious to us - but what about our birds?

One night's work for a thief can devastate years of training and ruin breeding programmes plus the financial loss, so why do we take a chance?

None of us believes that it can happen to our birds in the environs of our own homes but it can, and does, with increasing regularity. Then we get hit by hurricane force winds as we did in January and February of this year. What happens when our aviaries are torn apart by high winds and the occupants soar up and away - or a tree falls and kills the birds? Not only thieves, but natural phenomena can lead to heavy financial loss. Malicious damage or vandalism is another scourge of modern times and I know of birds that have been shot whilst sitting in their aviaries. Death by accident, illness or disease can be covered, and that includes the savaging of one bird of prey by another. There was a case recently where a Red Tailed managed to get into the aviary of a Ferruginous Buzzard and the Buzzard was killed.

Because I have kept birds myself for the past 11 years, including the successful rearing and returning to the wild of 2 Tawny Owls and a Kestrel, and because I am a registered insurance broker with my own company, I set about putting together a special insurance package specifically for birdkeepers to cover every type of bird - including birds of prey.

After 6 months of negotiation with insurance companies and meeting with a great deal of reluctance of their part, I eventually succeeded in setting up a pilot scheme 4 years ago. Such was its success, that the large insurance companies became very interested in taking on the scheme and after careful consideration, I decided upon Norwich Union and they became the insurers on November 4th 1988 with myself as underwriter.

Security is of paramount importance to birdkeepers so it was arranged that I



would be totally responsible for the running of the scheme. Whilst I need a list of birds that are kept in collections, the information is not kept on computer and even Norwich Union don't have any records. When the birds are insured with my firm, I am the only one with access to collection details.

A separate claims division has been set up by Norwich Union specifically to handle bird claims and, in most cases, settlement is finalised within 10 days. The largest payout for a single bird was £18,000 last November and the cheque was on its way to my client within 24 hours! That is the type of service I like to offer.

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First of all, quickly tot up the total value of your collection and you'll find that it runs into hundreds or thousands of pounds. You've spent endless hours training your birds you fly. You have carefully selected your breeding pairs. You've waited for months to find a suitable mate for your Goshawk. You're eagerly awaiting the hatching of your young Harris Hawks. At last, you've obtained your Peregrine x Barbery. And

what happens? Thieves find out you're away for the evening at a Falconer's meeting. They throw meat into the kennel run that you've put close to your aviaries where your dogs are on guard. They cut a hole in the roof of your flight after breaking the bulb in your security lighting system and they take your pair of Goshawks while your wife is still up and about in the house.

I'm sure you're thinking "what a load of scaremongering rubbish" but that event happens to be perfectly true and happened to one of your fellow falconers on June 27th. And it isn't an isolated case, either.

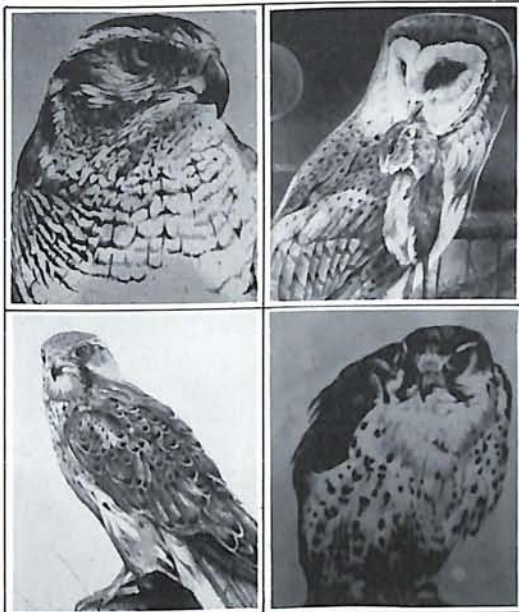
I've had another case where a bird was shot with an air rifle whilst it sat in its aviary. The Ferruginous Buzzard savaged by a Red Tailed Hawk is also a true case. And then there are the claims for losses during the storms this year. In one case, a pair of Sparrowhawks escaped when their aviary was torn apart by the winds and they weren't seen again. In another case, a pair of Goshawks escaped. The female was recovered because she was a trained bird but the male disappeared. That same female was stolen only a few weeks ago when thieves entered through the back of the bird's accommodation, evading the security system.

During the past 4 months, Norwich Union has paid out £45,264 in claims for losses during storms and as a result of theft. That is a lot of money and represents a lot of birds belonging to fellow birdkeepers. Birds that cost money to replace. Those birdkeepers were fortunate, their insurance paid them out in full for the value of the birds they lost. They were able to buy replacement birds. If the worst were to happen to your birds, would you be able to replace them without financial difficulty? Nothing can replace the characters and personalities of your birds, nor the hours of training that you've spent but at least with the money in your hand, you can make an immediate start on rebuilding your collection. That is why we should insure our birds.

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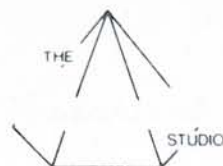
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(Left to right) Merlin £75, Japanese Falconer £57,
Falcon on fist £65.

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SCOTLAND'S OSPREYS BY MIKE



Adult Osprey

Ospreys are not the only birds of prey which eat fish, but they are the most specialised among those which do so. Their long, fairly broad wings enable them to circle and patrol slowly over the waters where they hunt, but they also seem much more efficient in steady, flapping flight than many raptors of comparable size and build. For such big hawks, they have rather small narrow heads and fine-tipped bills, but these features are not all that surprising in a bird which tears up the comparatively soft flesh of fish. Ospreys have rather short, thick legs and powerful-looking toes, with long hooked talons; a reversible outer toe and tiny sharp spicules on the undersides of the toes are clear adaptations for grasping and holding wet, slippery fish.

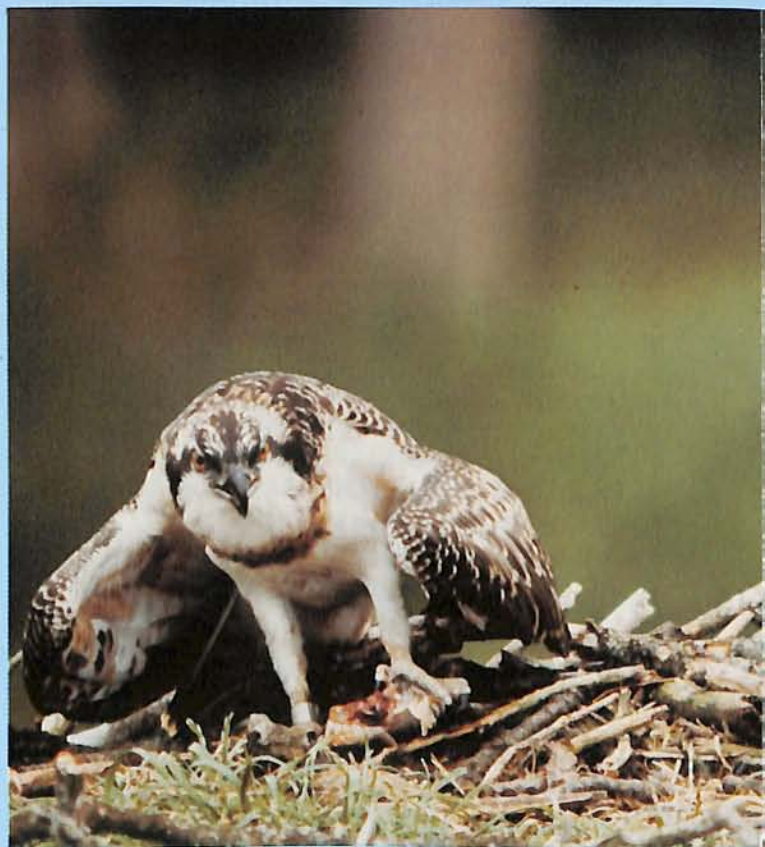
In Britain, we tend to think of Ospreys as birds which fish freshwater lakes and rivers, but in fact they are equally at home hunting shallow coastal bays and estuaries. In some countries they are exclusively sea feeders. Hunting birds normally circle above the water, often hovering, and take fish in their talons following a fairly shallow, headlong dive. Most dives are from a height of 20-30 metres, but Ospreys sometimes fish from considerably greater heights, or dive from just a few metres up. In coastal waters especially, they may even fish in a very low horizontal flight. Shallow dives from a convenient perch over the water are by no means unknown.

Normally, fish are quickly juggled around so that the flying bird carries them in both feet, head foremost, rather like a torpedo slung beneath an old aeroplane. The fish taken are those commonly found at or near the surface: while at the coast flounders are the most frequent. Ospreys only rarely eat anything other than fish - but an interesting record from the Red Sea concerns birds regularly dropping large conch shells from a height to smash them open.

The Osprey runs the Peregrine a close second in being one of the most widely distributed raptors in the world, breeding from northern Europe across Asia to Japan (with outposts in the Atlantic Islands, the Mediterranean and the Red Sea) in South-east Asia and Australia and in north America. Broadly speaking, northern populations are migratory and those further south fairly sedentary. Ospreys can clearly adapt to different climate

- their basic requirements being a rich source of food and somewhere suitable to nest. I have seen tree nests in northern Europe, sea-cliffs nests in the Mediterranean, ground nests on islands in the Red Sea and eyries on telegraph poles, pylons, buildings and man made "Osprey poles" in the USA. Where they are not molested by man, Ospreys can be surprisingly confiding birds.

In Scotland, Ospreys used to nest on island and rocks, and one of their best-known old sites was on the ruins of the Wolf of Badenoch's castle on Loch an Eilein, Speyside. Today, though, only tree sites are used - mainly living trees, with a distinct preference for Scots Pine. All being well, the number of young



Adult and well grown youngster on

Ospreys which have flown from Scottish nests since 1954 will pass 800 this year. It is a remarkable total, but then the whole story of Scotland's Ospreys is remarkable.

All the evidence points to Ospreys being quite common in the Scottish Highlands at one time, but by the end of the 19th century they had been virtually wiped out by persecution and by egg and specimen collectors. They vanished from England long before that. The last Scottish pair bred during the First World War and it was almost 40 years before Ospreys bred in Britain again: a pair reared two young at a Speyside site in 1954. The following four seasons were years of uncertainty and frustration, with a bird shot in one year and eggs robbed in another, but, under intensive RSPB protection, a pair reared three young at

Loch Garten on Speyside in 1959. A bold decision was made that year - to open the site to the public (under careful supervision of course): it was a huge success and the birds attracted 14,000 visitors in that first year of "Operation Osprey".

Recolonisation proceeded slowly at first. It was not until 1963 that a second pair attempted to breed and young were not reared from two nests until 1967. Gradually, the numbers grew, reaching 50 pairs by 1987; in 1989, we knew of 54 pairs, of which at least 49 laid eggs. Over 50 young were reared for the first time in 1985 (53); there were 81 (the most so far) in 1988 and 78 in 1989.

than the building of a few suitable nest platforms, or (as Loch Garten) the repairing of old ones. There have been problems, of course, over the years. In the early days, it was not too difficult to provide 100% protection, but as the population grew beyond the first two or three pairs this became impossible. Today, a system of relying on the help, the goodwill and the vigilance of landowners, keepers, foresters and other local people augments the close protection of a few pairs. The system works extremely well and the Ospreys owe a lot to many largely anonymous and unsung helpers.

Sadly egg collectors remain a problem: Ospreys are clearly prime targets for these mindless vandals who, despite a considerable input of time and resources (and several successful prosecutions) remain very difficult to stop. Our Osprey statistics include some which are disgraceful: take 1989, for example - 9 nests robbed, or over 18% of the total. We know of three nest robberies, and one attempted robbery in 1990 too

Despite egg-collectors, despite the hooligans who have twice tried to cut down the nesting tree at Loch Garten and despite birds being shot on their migration down to winter quarters in West Africa, the Ospreys are firmly re-established. Numbers will continue to increase and it is not impossible that one day pairs will nest in England. Our annual programme of ringing Scottish Ospreys (which includes year-coded colour ringing) has not only told us about where these birds spend the winter, and about those shot during migration, but also that our population is self-sustaining - the ultimate test of the success of recolonisation.

A number of falconers helped with round-the-clock watches in those early days when the Ospreys were trying to secure a foothold. Those I knew were as optimistic as the rest of us about the eventual success of what we were doing - little did any of us realise just how well it would all turn out!

All photographs by M. W. Richards



typical exposed eyrie in a Scots Pine

Over 35 years after the comeback began, Ospreys still make the news. The media still announce their arrival at Loch Garten each year and later give details of their breeding success. This continuing publicity, plus the showing of the Loch Garten birds to well over a million people over the years, has done an enormous amount to foster public interest in bird conservation. Loch Garten has also become world famous as a site where the technique of showing rare birds to people was pioneered. It has also been important in taking a lot of pressure off breeding Ospreys elsewhere.

The Osprey story in Scotland demonstrates how, with careful protection, a new wild population can become established, can increase and can prosper without any more "artificial" help



The Strike. At the last moment the diving Osprey swings its feet forward to seize a fish

THE BIRD OF PREY

I stood

*Ankle deep in the mud of the ditch
Blending, in the stillness,
With the backdrop of the trees behind.
I watched with bated breath
The sheer magnificence
Of this, an aerobic engineer
The likes of which I cannot call to mind
Up, Up, hundreds of feet above
Swept by the currents of the rising wind,
The graceful creature hovered there
Barely within my range of vision
Yet, I was confident*

*That every move I made was soon observed
So finite her capacity for sight,
Sensitive to even a convulsive shudder
She stooped*

*And, barely feet above the ground
She swerved*

*Positioning herself with expertise
That, in an instant, then before my eyes
Revealed her prey*

*Grasped in her own sharp taloned stranglehold
Twas hers*

*Twas not for me she'd sought to slay
Food for her need - no more -
Was all that motivated any kill*

I let her feed and stood quite still.

*But not until her catch was quite devoured
Discretion was the plan*

Not gluttony

*So I approached quite close, but carefully,
And bending as I drew myself quite near*

On one knee, just to minimise her fear,

I reached a gloved hand over where she ate

And murmured, "Come, my beauty, it is late"

Only an instant wasted in delay

And in my hand

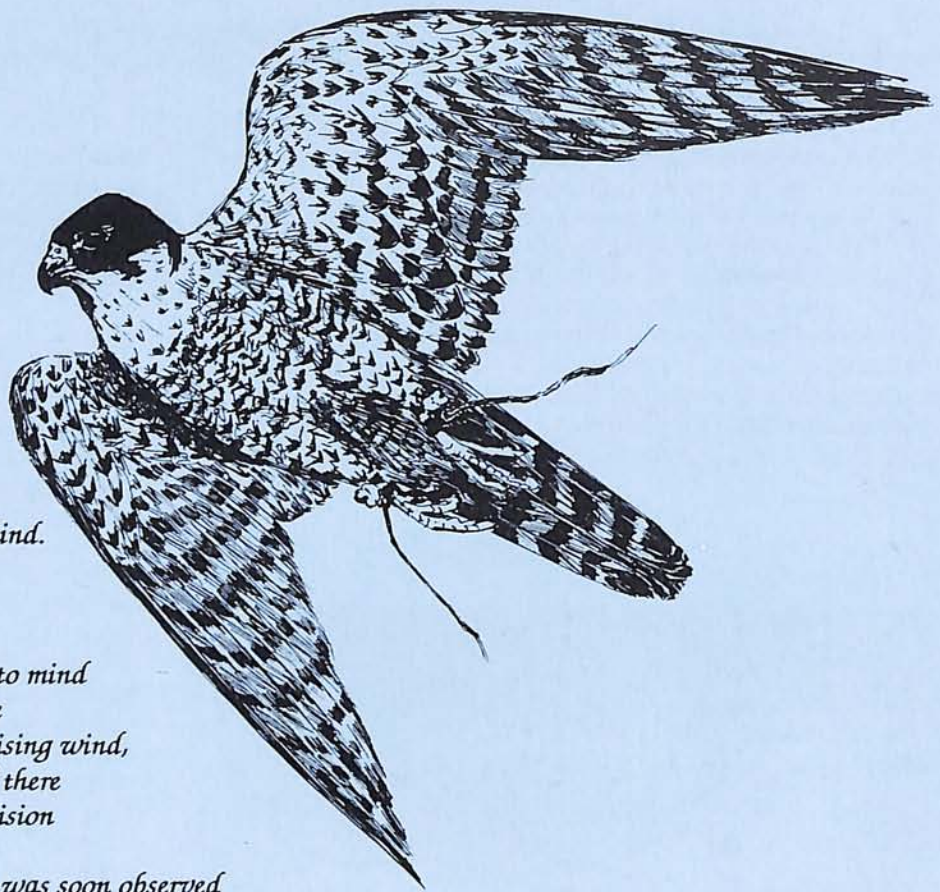
I firmly grasped the kill

While she

Upon my glove now quite secure

Fluffed at her feathers and, once more demure,

Looked an unchallenged, "Didn't I do well?"



STEVE COBB

Raptor



◀ Buzzard



◀ Redtailed Buzzard

In this issue, Raptor will be taking a look at the birds available to the novice or beginner, for people who have limited experience in the handling of birds of prey. I will state again that this magazine is not to be used as a means of learning Falconry, that should be left to the professionals or a Falconer who is willing to share his time and expertise with you. When you have had some tuition then you must make a decision as to which bird to have. For the total beginner I would recommend one of three birds, The Common Buzzard, The Harris Hawk or the Redtailed Buzzard. There are other birds e.g. The Kestrel, which the beginner could have but the three above have the size and temperament suitable for your first bird, as they can withstand the small mistakes that you will inevitably make. If due to mismanagement they were to lose half an ounce, because of their size it would not be critical but for the Kestrel it could prove fatal.

The Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) Males 2lb, Females 2.5lb approx., are not particularly fast in flight but with dedication and perseverance they can be encouraged to take rabbit and moorhen.

The Harris Hawk (*Parabuteo unicinctus*) Males 2lb, Females 2.5lb approx., is now more readily available than ever before and they make superb hunting birds, they will fly at a variety of quarry including: pheasant, partridge, rabbit and moorhen and females will also take hares.

The Redtailed Buzzard (*Buteo jamaicensis*) Males 3lb, Females 3.5lb, approx., like the Harris hawk is easily obtainable. They are larger, faster and more aggressive than our Common Buzzard and will take rabbit, moorhen, hare and sometimes pheasant.



▲ Harris Hawk

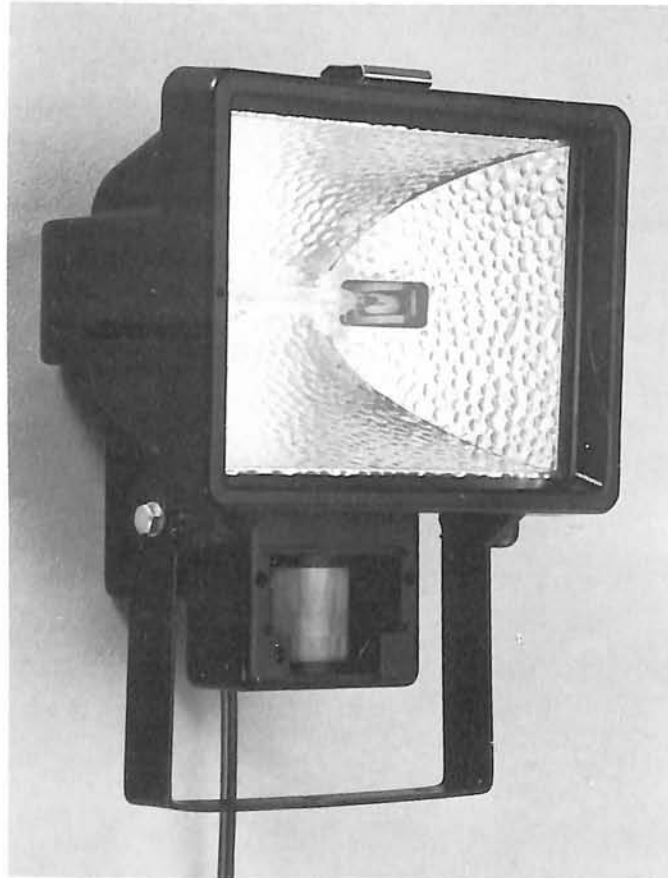
FOOTNOTE

When buying your first bird, do your homework and make sure you get advice from other Falconers so that you make the right decision for your sake and the birds. Remember these large birds can live for over twenty years.

All the weights mentioned above are approximate full weights before training and should only be used as a rough guide.

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Sanctuaries for precious birds of prey have long been an ideal target for bird thieves. Inevitably, an increasing number of insurance companies have become either insistent on tighter security, or are offering lower premiums to encourage better security. In fact, one recent case of bird theft resulted in the insurance company actually refusing to meet the claim of a bird sanctuary because sufficiently effective security measure had not been installed.

Light of course, is one of the most effective deterrents to the would-be burglar, both by suggesting that premises may be occupied, and also illuminating areas to restrict a thief's cover of darkness. Unlike burglar alarms, which are only activated when the intruder is on the premises, and breaks a light beam, the passive infra-red detectors work on the principle of detecting heat and body movement over significant distances. One Company has the ideal security lighting system for such applications - Tasley Ltd.

Tasley Limited was founded in 1977 by Graham Midgeley, the current chairman, his initial objectives to provide a range of products of the highest quality to the electrical wholesale industry. Concentrating on external lighting products, Tasley was the first British company to introduce fully enclosed Tungsten Halogen floodlights in a compact format, and at a price which was readily accepted by the trade. This type of floodlight has now become the standard adopted by the lighting industry.

Six years ago, Tasley became interested in Passive Infra Red, used in conjunction with external lights. They were quick to recognise the benefits that could be derived from this new concept and applied the technology initially to stand alone units, which could be linked to all types of external luminaries but, because of the significant interest aroused, developed the concept by applying the same technology to a variety of different applications. During this period of development, priority was given not only to produce products of the highest specification, but to endeavour to incorporate a high level of reliability.

This was a period of pioneering, very few people had even heard of Passive Infra Red, being only aware of the Active Infra Red used in internal burglar alarm systems. Early successes came through enlightening prospective customers, advertising, and gaining interest through trade publications. This early experience was truly beneficial and has resulted in Tasley being recommended as one of the market leaders in Europe in PIR associated products.

In early 1989, the Company launched a new product ideally suited to the vagaries of protecting premises of any scale. Particularly significant for the protection of bird sanctuaries is the fact that the Sentry 500 alarm system, even when activated is totally silent. This is of course, a prime consideration when valuable birds are involved, particularly during the breeding season when the birds are even more susceptible to stress.

Sentry 500 is a high intensity floodlight with an integral passive infra-red detector. Most PIR detectors are designed for optical operation at 2.5m, whereas floodlights perform efficiently at somewhere between 3 and 4m.

The 500 was designed with this in mind, and the PIR was designed to operate at the higher fixing point. Included with every unit are sector blinds which can be inserted segmentally to exclude, where necessary, such objects as swaying trees, or anything else which may spuriously activate the light.

The 500 features integral universal mounting brackets, LED-controlled walk test facility for daytime testing, adjustment to vary the operating time from approximately 10 seconds to 10 minutes, and automatic reset after the protected area has been vacated. The range is approximately 13m-15m.

Guaranteed for one year, the unit can incorporate a manual over-ride switch to provide floodlighting at any time. It has a die-cast alloy body, uses a 500W tungsten halogen bulb, and is weatherproof to IP54.

Tasley also offers a wide range of security products which offer alternative methods of protection for the bird owner, including:

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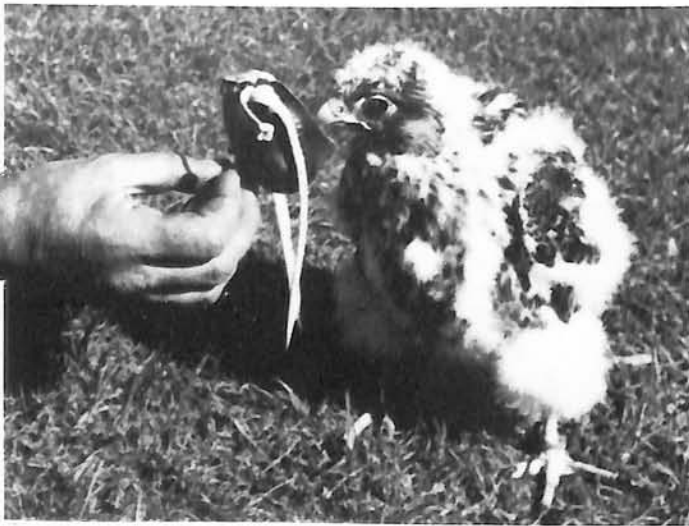
Graham Midgeley is Chairman of the Tasley Group in Leeds.

Welsh Hawking Centre



In 1980 ex-teacher Ceri Griffiths (Griff to everyone who knows him), purchased a run down, financial disaster known as Cardiff Zoo. This complete with lions, tigers, leopards, bears etc.etc. Over the following ten years these animals have been rehoused and their accommodation converted to aviaries which are now home to around 350 birds of prey. There are over 40 species of raptor in the collection including such rarities as Red Headed Merlins, Hobbies, Swainson Hawks, Savignines Owls, Bald Eagles, White Gyr Falcon to name but a few.

One of the most amazing sights can be witnessed during the breeding programme from late April to mid July and that is Peregrines, Lanners, Luggers and Tawny Eagles incubating and later feeding their young at very close quarters often as little as five feet. This is made possible by the parent birds having been correctly imprinted for artificial insemination and so are happy with human company so close.



Birds like this Peregrine Falcon are introduced to the hood and Pointer at a very early age

Griff is the only person in the country to have artificial insemination on video tape available for lectures and sale to interested parties. He has some of the male birds imprinted so they can be stripped of semen without distress for long periods (often up to three months). Other males are trained by displaying to them four or five times a day wearing a special copulation hat, the bird lands on the hat and copulates with it, the semen is then collected, a sperm count made and providing all is satisfactory the female inseminated at the correct time.

To witness an adult bird feeding its young in the same way as a wild bird is a truly wonderful experience. Many birds bred at the centre breed in natural pairs in wire fronted aviaries, these include Tawny Eagles, Harris Hawks Swainson Hawks and Peregrine Falcons. These copulate, lay their eggs, incubate, hatch and rear their young in full view of the public. To see so many species doing this must be a unique experience world wide.

The centre breeds between 200 and 250 raptors each year. Whilst at the centre we saw many young birds being hand raised (imprinted correctly) for A.I. or flying. These species included Bengalese, Great Horned, Turkmainean and Mackinders Eagle Owls, Tawny Eagles, Sakers, Goshawks and different falcon hybrids all in full public view. We later saw some of the earlier years imprints flying none of which mantled or screamed, a tribute to the way they had been raised and trained.

Falconry displays are given three times a day and last about half to three quarters of an hour. A commentary is given over a loud speaker about each bird as it is flown describing its habitat, quarry, behaviour and uses in falconry. The public is encouraged to participate with the flying of some of the birds during these displays.

The Welsh Hawking Centre has expanded recently in order to provide interest for all the family especially the children and now contains pigs, sheep, ducks, geese, rabbits, donkeys, ponies and cattle. There is also a small children's adventure playground with swings, slides and a sandpit.

The latest project currently underway (completion Easter 1991) is a children's zoo where younger members of the family will be able to see and handle various animals and reptiles.

The centre also runs a Barn Owl and a Merlin release project as well as taking in most of the wild injured birds in the area (up to 200 a year). Future major building will be a wild bird hospital and a lecture theatre (sponsors please note this one says Griff!!) when funds allow.

There is plenty for the visitor to see and do to keep them entertained all day. There is a cafe seating 60 which is strategically placed in the centre of the park providing a comfortable vantage point from which to view the birds.

The gift shop sells a wide range of momentos of your day at the Welsh Hawking Centre and also stocks Falconry Equipment by all the major makers including Ben Long and Martin Jones. All types of frozen hawk food is always available.

All in all The Welsh Hawking Centre provides a great day out for the falconer who need not feel guilty as his family is also well catered for.



Top:
Peregrine Falcon with young in full view of the public

Top Left:
Caracara

Right:
Roger James the manager and Griff with their favourite Display Lanner Falcons

Bottom Left:
Male Gyr Falcon



Below: *Tawny eagle drying off after a bath*



DISEASES OF CAPTIVE "HAWKS"

Arabia conjures up images of deserts, heat, thirst, camels and falcons.

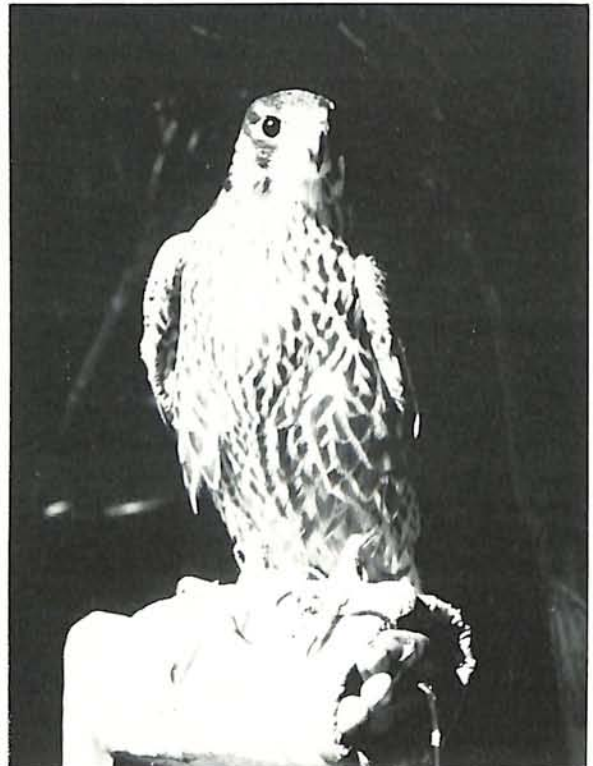
Since oil was discovered, the lifestyle of the local bedu in the Middle East has changed considerably. Falconry in modern Arabia is considered a direct link with the old way of bedouin life and is now seen as a way to strengthen tribal unity. Local falconers consider the Arabian Bustard (*Chlamydotis undulata*) or houbara to be the ultimate prey. The rarity of this species in the United Arab Emirates, has forced the hunting parties to travel to Pakistan and Morocco, where small and declining numbers of houbara are found. The harsh climatic conditions of the Middle East restricts the hunting season to the winter months lasting from November to March. In the past, "Hawks" were trapped at the beginning of the season and released at the end. This commendable practice is no longer seen, except in the larger collections; as a result 'hawks' are kept in mews during the summer months, when the temperature in the shade can reach 49 degrees centigrade. Many of the mews are excellent, with air-conditioning, adequate lighting and clean, sand-based floors. Others are less than adequate, resulting in an increased mortality rate. Because the "hawks" are destined to hunt the houbara, which can weigh up to 1.2kg, the larger species are favoured e.g. female sakers (*Falco cherrug*) and peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrinus*). Approximately 70% of the "hawks" presented for treatment were female sakers as the peregrine falcon is considered less well suited to the harsh climatic conditions. Several reviews of falconiform diseases are available Cooper 1969, 1978, Greenwood 1977, Kenward 1981. This communication describes the diseases observed in approximately 350 captive "hawks" presented for treatment at Al Ain Zoo in the United Arab Emirates, during a two year period.

BUMBLE FOOT (Pododermatitis).

Bumblefoot has been a recognised disease of captive Falconiformes for centuries. In this study, most cases affected the metatarsal pad of the foot, and were often presented at an advanced stage exhibiting gross swelling, often in conjunction with overgrown talons. Damage to the skin by talons appears to be the major initiating factor in the development of the disease, allowing bacteria, usually *Staphylococcus aureus*, to enter subcutaneously producing localised infection and tissue damage. "Hawks" with an impaired immune system may be less likely to combat this infection and a life - threatening disease can develop. Antibiotic therapy by intramuscular injections, followed by corrective surgery and post operative casting of the foot to reduce pressure on the surgical site, has proved highly successful (Riddle 1981). Prevention of pododermatitis involves regular inspection of the weight bearing regions of the feet, routine talon care and the use of suitable blocks. The traditional Arabic falconry blocks are not ideal as they are nonabrasive, allowing talons to become overgrown. For this reason many of the more progressive falconers are now using stone blocks in the mews which appears to reduce the incidence of pododermatitis. Early diagnosis and professional treatment of bumblefoot are essential because a delay in treatment often results in advanced disease which may not respond to surgery. An ingenious device, which is frequently used by the Syrian "hawk" trappers, is a modified hood which is used to prevent self inflicted mutilation of the digits. During the trapping process, some "hawks" incur toe injuries at which they begin to bite. If neglected the "hawk" can destroy the complete toe. The modified hood prevents the "hawk" biting at the injury allowing the damaged area to heal. The hood is removed at feeding time and when the "hawk" supervised. I have found this device useful in selected cases of self-mutilation.

FALCON POX

Falconers in the United Kingdom are fortunate that falcon pox is rarely diagnosed in "hawks" in their country. In the Middle East this disease is a common, often debilitating and sometimes fatal, viral disease associated with biting insects e.g. mosquitoes (Gerlach 1986). The disease occurred during the cooler months when mosquito numbers were highest. Falconers report that on hunting expeditions to Pakistan, mosquitoes plagued the "hawks" in the evenings and after returning from such trips, many cases of clinical falcon pox were observed. The disease is characterised by crusty, proliferative lesions of the skin around the eyes, cere and feet. Severe cases involving the mouth and crop,



Falcon on Mangala

required intensive supportive therapy including force - feeding. Lesions on the toes often resulted in the loss of one or more talons which permanently disfigured the "hawk". Treatment consisted of the application of topical antiseptics and Vitamin A injections. Vaccination studies were attempted but further research is required.

TRICHOMONIASIS (Frounce)

Many of the cases presented with trichomoniasis were at an advanced stage and showing many of the typical signs of disease including excessive salivation, exaggerated swallowing motions, firm swellings in the crop and pale, cheese-like material in the mouth. Microscopic examination was necessary to differentiate the disease from bacterial abscesses, capillaria infestation and Vitamin A deficiency. Most cases responded to therapy with Vitamin A injections and oral metronidazole but debilitated "hawks" often required supportive therapy with fluid administration and force-feeding. The practice of feeding pigeons to "hawks" is widespread in the U.A.E. and is considered to be a primary factor in the development of the disease.

ASPERGILLOSIS

Aspergillosis has been reported as a common cause of mortality in captive Falconiformes (Cooper 1978). In the Middle East, this disease is common, and advanced cases rarely recover despite

IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

by Peter McKinney MVB, MRCVS

intensive therapy with antifungal drugs and supportive therapy. "Hawks" which do respond to treatment often have chronic air sac and lung damage which are severe handicaps for a hunting "hawk".

In the initial stages of aspergillosis, or "radat" as it is locally known, diagnosis by radiology and blood analysis, allows the disease to be treated before severe damage to the lungs and air sacs occurs. Aspergillosis is often seen in conjunction with bumblefoot, air sac infestations by *Serratopiculum* parasites (see later) and falcon pox. It is likely that aspergillosis is the result of a reduced immune response which can be caused by a variety of factors e.g. stress of capture, inadequate diet, increased exposure to fungal spores in the mews, and concurrent disease. Prevention of aspergillosis involves a reduction in the number of fungal spores in the environment, and of course treatment of any disease which might stress the "hawk".

PARASITES

Many of the "hawks" presented with a history of poor flying performance or excessive weight loss, were often found to be infested with parasites. In most cases parasitism was exacerbated by a very low level of nutrition. Parasites detected included, *Serratopiculum* air sac worms, *Capillaria*, trematodes and coccidia species. *Serratopiculosis* was considered the cause of death in three peregrine falcons. Massive infestations caused severe air sac disease resulting in breathing difficulties, poor appetite and death. Many clinically normal "hawks" were found to have small numbers of *Serratopiculum* ova in the faeces and in these cases no treatment was administered unless clinical signs developed at a later date. Anthelmintic therapy was successful in treating most cases of parasitism and should be recommended at the start of the training period before the food intake of the "hawk" is reduced.

MISCELLANEOUS

Several cases of sal ammoniac poisoning were observed. This chemical is used by local falconers, to clean the crop and increase the appetite or keenness of the "hawk", and is usually given after the moult. The chemical is usually vomited by the "hawk" soon after administration but if vomiting fails to occur, the drug is absorbed and can induce anorexia, diarrhoea or death, depending on the dose (Allen 1980).

Several cases of lead poisoning were presented for treatment. Usually the source of lead was gunshot pellets present in the doves or pigeons used for food for the "hawks". Two cases of tuberculosis were presented. One such case was presented with a history of weight loss over a two week period, and was initially diagnosed as capillaria infestation. The "hawk" dies two days after treatment and post-mortem examination revealed the typical signs of tuberculosis in the liver. In this case the parasitism was possible secondary to the generalised effects of tuberculosis.

In my opinion, the stress induced by capture, training, and a low plane of nutrition may be a factor in the development of some of the diseases observed during the two year period. Captive-bred "hawks" would be less susceptible to stress factors but are rarely used for falconry in the UAE, although interest has been expressed. Traditional medicine, including the use of thermocautery, is still widespread in the UAE so cases presented for treatment may not reflect the actual prevalence of disease in the captive "hawk" population because many "hawks" are not presented for treatment. Modern veterinary medicine has an important role in "hawk" management and it is encouraging to see how the local falconers have accepted it.



Arab Falconer with Falcon

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank David and Cheryl Remple, Kenton Riddle and John Cooper for their advice and encouragement.

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Recommended for further reading; "Falcons and Falconry in Qatar" by Faris A. Al-Timimi. Printed by Ali Bin Ali Printing Press, Doha. First published in Qatar 1987.

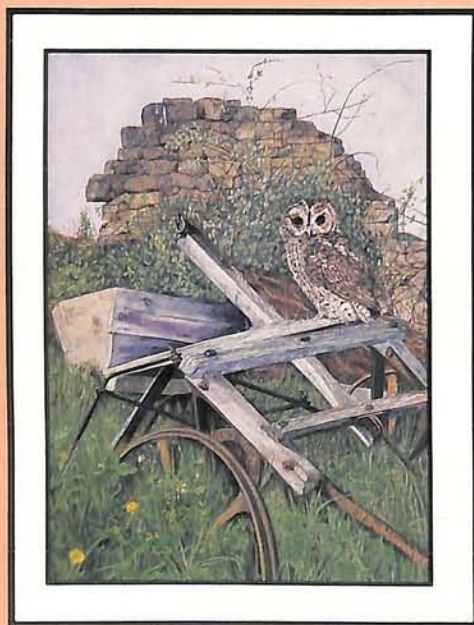
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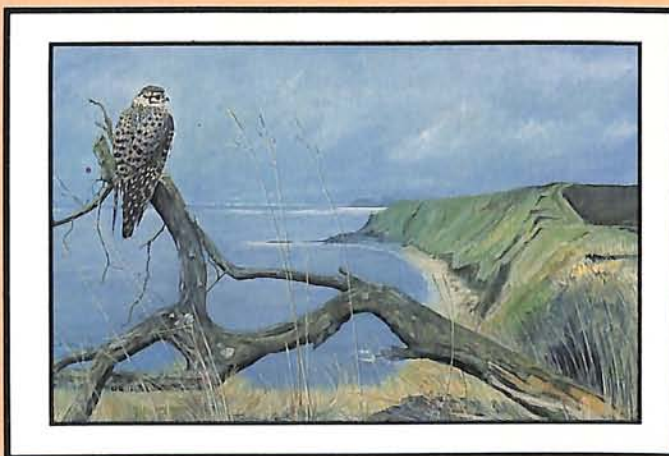
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AN ARTIST AND A FALCONER

Philip Charles Turner

This issues special presentation offer of a painting produced in a strictly limited edition, of a Peregrine Falcon dispatching Red Grouse is of particular appeal to the Falconer, in depicting the culmination of the art; namely the taking of grouse by a trained Peregrine from a stoop. It is therefore not too surprising to find that the artist has created this painting from his own personal experience of this magical feat of nature, as realised through the trials and skills of falconry and, even more rarely, as witnessed in the wild.

Philip Charles Turner was presented with this challenge of creating, specifically for the Falconers Magazine and therefore Falconers, a special painting on the theme of Peregrine taking Grouse. Undaunted he took on the project with zeal, not too surprisingly, as on further investigation Philip Charles Turner proves to be admirably qualified for such an undertaking. He is an active falconer, BFC member since the early 1970's and more recently a member of the Welsh Hawking Club. Appropriately he has flown his own Peregrine Tiercel and falcon at grouse in the idyllic and breathtaking setting of Caithness. Latterly the pair have proven compatible for breeding and producing eggs, therefore he is positively encouraging this and has not removed them from the breeding aviary for hunting purposes this season. Currently he flies his tiercel Goshawk in his own locality of Scarborough, bordering the North Yorkshire Moors. Ideally he would like to spend the summer months flying Peregrines, either future progeny, if forthcoming or his own pair followed by the winter months spent locally flying his Goshawk.

Practising falconry, apart from its obvious advantages as regards painting this picture, is also a good stance of having some idea of what appeals to the falconer. Whilst executing this picture Philip remained constantly aware of the Falconers experienced and critical eye perusing the result and so constantly strived for perfection.

In a broader sense Philip is an all round "countryman",

having various other interests which embrace a knowledge, awareness and involvement in the countryside, namely; photography; angling; beekeeping; walking and birdwatching. All of which provide a means of observing all aspects of wildlife, birds in particular, which help the execution of his paintings, in which he aspires to capture in paint what he so admires, for the enjoyment of other people.

Just a love of, and interest in, the natural world has been a lifelong passion, Philip has also always expressed himself artistically, enjoying his painting for his own personal pleasure. Latterly a combination of his interest in wildlife and painting has been used to produce pictures for the enjoyment of others.



Philip with one of his Peregrines

to develop his own style and technique.

He has worked in various mediums and still enjoys working in oils, but it is in recent years that he has found satis-



Philip at work in his study

His artistic career is firmly rooted in basic study at art school where he acquired an 'A' level in art and completed a design course in graphics. He has retained an interest in, and an admiration for, past masters and great painters from Van Gogh to the exacting styles of the wildlife artists who particularly inspire him, Sir Edwin Landseer, Archibald Thorburn, Charles Tunnicliffe R.A., Alan Hunt, Raymond Ching etc. Whilst admiring and studying other artists, Philip has been actively following various ave-

faction in working with gouache and watercolours as this medium is most suitable for his beautifully detailed bird paintings. This exacting style requires immense concentration and painstaking execution which Philip Charles Turner finds challenging and rewarding. He likes to draw on first hand knowledge of his subjects as observed in the field, consolidating this with his own photographic records, personal field sketches and post mortem drawings as well as studying his own birds of prey.

When creating a picture, foremost attention must be paid to detail making the subjects stance and feather detail all correct and feasible but the whole effect depends on appropriate setting, compatible to the birds natural habitat. This is where first hand knowledge is indispensable. Philip is not concerned solely with bird portraiture, but in painting birds within their own domains, hoping to capture some sense of their lifestyle within his paintings.

Philip has previously enjoyed success with his first two limited edition prints, namely, Merlin (*falco columbarus*) and Goshawk (*accipiter gentilis*), both of which capture a 'mood' far beyond mere physical representation, The Goshawk sharp set and in Yarak, hunting from the vantage point of an old oak, The Merlin, lone and solitary, resting on a coastal vantage point during its' winter sojourn from the moorland, where it spends the summer. These have proved wide-ranging in appeal, selling as far away as Canada.

Philip accepts original works, accepts commissions and other illustration work. He feels the benefit of producing prints from his paintings, is to make a picture accessible to a wider audience and this may influence some people in the way they look at nature. Philip is a keen conservationist.

In this picture "Game Hawk" Philip hopes he has captured for posterity an event close to every Falconers heart.

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Dear Sir,

The Heart of England Raptor Club was recently invited by the Welsh Hawking Club to support their efforts to clarify certain issues regarding new proposals in D.O.E. regulations soon to be announced. A letter was drafted and all members of the H.E.R.C. were asked to send one to their respective M.P.'s. The response from Westminster was predictably poor - certainly from one party in particular, however one M.P. - Mr N.Fowler said via a letter that he would raise the points with the minister concerned and send the results to us. We now have that letter and since the points it covers are of interest to all bird keepers I enclose a copy for you to consider for inclusion in your magazine.

Yours faithfully
J. Sealey
Press Officer
H.E.R.C.

Dear Norman,

Thank you for your letter of 21 May about the matter raised by your constituent, Mr A Glohessy of Sutton Coldfield concerning proposed changes to regulations under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, governing the registration and ringing of birds of prey.

I think your constituent may have misinterpreted some of the proposals on which the Department recently sought the views of falconers and bird-keepers. We do not intend to change the existing regulations in so far as they apply to birds which have escaped. This particular proposal was purely an administrative means designed to meet concerns expressed by falconry representatives over the possibility of challenge while recovering such a bird. In the event, the proposal has not found favour and we shall not now implement it.

Neither do we propose any change in the circumstances under which a licence is required to recover a lost bird. The terms of the 1981 Act do not require the grant of a licence to recapture any bird which has been bred in captivity, as the consultation paper made clear. The type of ring worn by the bird is irrelevant in this context. However, a licence is needed to recapture a bird which originated in the wild, or to employ a trap: this has been the case since the 1981 Act was passed and the reference in the consultation paper was included merely as a reminder of the position. You may be assured that the Department will issue such licences, where appropriate, very quickly indeed.

Your constituent also expresses concern about a proposal to require information on the exact date that eggs are laid. Other breeders have also told us that they would face practical difficulties with this; and we shall give their views very careful consideration.

Finally, you may wish to reassure your constituent that the changes we propose are in no way intended to inhibit the legitimate pursuit of falconry. The purpose of the registration system is to deter the theft from the wild of some of our most vulnerable bird species. To enhance its effectiveness, we are proposing certain amendments to help ensure that the Department's records are as accurate and up-to-date as possible, so that apparent offences can be easily identified. Previous experience has shown that the requirement to renew registration of all birds every three years allows us to keep inaccuracies to a minimum and to provide the strongest and most effective statutory protection for our most endangered wild birds - an aim which I am sure your constituent would support.

We do, however, intend to amend the regulation so that each registration runs for a full three years. At present there is a fixed three yearly cycle and many new registrations run for less than the full term. This particular change will enable us to check records regularly, while providing a more efficient service and better value for money for bird-keepers.

Yours
David A Trippier RD JP MP



A Brief Outline of the Welsh Hawking Club



The Welsh Hawking Club was founded in 1961 by a handful of Welsh sportsmen. Their mentor was a Hungarian gentleman, Lorant De Bastyai, a Falconer of International fame. They met once a month at the Caerleon Inn where they talked and learnt of their sport and saw practical demonstrations which would be invaluable when they obtained Hawks. The following year they attended the field meeting of the German Club, Deutsche Falken Orden. Here the W.H.C. made many friends and a few returned with Hawks on their fists, gifts from these new found friends. Hawks were hard to obtain in those early years and the W.H.C. obtained many of theirs from overseas. Attendance at more International meetings was to follow with members now taking their own Hawks and the W.H.C. soon became Internationally recognised, and the Club then started holding its own field meetings. The membership was now steadily growing and there were very good turnouts at the monthly meetings. These were good times for our sport,

the only thing to discuss was Hawking. Unfortunately those days are long gone and the W.H.C. has had to change with the times. The Club now has around 400 members and still holds monthly meetings in South Wales and also an informal gathering in North Wales. As currently no licences are being issued to take Hawks from the wild for Falconry, the Club has invested a great deal of money in its breeding programme, breeding aviaries and the acquisition of stock, the aim being to be able to supply our members with suitable hunting Hawks. The Welsh Hawking Club has always had a reputation for being a close knit friendly club and this continues today with many founder members still holding office, including Lorant De Bastyai as President. The increase in legislation affecting the sport means that Hawking is far from the only thing discussed at meetings. The flying of a hunting Hawk however remains our absolute priority.

OUR LOVABLE RASCAL

After reading the article in your magazine about Amber The Bengal Eagle Owl I just had to tell you about our Bengie. I guess you will know by his name that he is also a Bengal Eagle Owl. My son and I got him last summer to keep for a few months. He was in very poor condition and had two very sore and swollen feet, it was doubtful if he would recover. We spent a lot of time and effort trying to pull him through and it really paid off. He is a lovable rascal and we were dreading the time when we would have to part with him. After much bargaining and heckling we finally got to buy him. He is now three years old and each day we

have him gets better, as for myself I just live for him he is the best thing that ever happened to me. He is really funny, when he calls me I answer him and he calls back.

We do exercise him and fly him free. Anyone interested in having one of these birds must be prepared to spend a lot of time and give them plenty of love and they will reap their rewards. I am enclosing a picture of Bengie, we think he is just gorgeous and last but not least we are really enjoying the magazine and find most of it very helpful indeed.

by Marjorie and Ian Patterson



Raptor Rescue

(Birds of Prey Rehabilitation)

Reg. Charity No: 283733

Dear Sir,

Could you please publish this letter in your next edition of the "Falconer" magazine:-

As an active member of Raptor Rescue and part of a Barn Owl Breed and Release scheme I am interested in anyone who may have young Barn Owls suitable for release. Through talking to people at shows it is clear that many people keep and breed Barn Owls very successfully in captivity but do not know what to do with the young or how to go about hacking them back to the wild in unrelated pairs.

Through leaflets handed out at the shows we are building up an extensive list of suitable release sites all over the country and the interest being shown by farmers and landowners is very encouraging.

If you have a pair of Barn Owls or would like any information about the rescue site register, the breed and release scheme or Raptor Rescue itself, please contact me on telephone number 0902 - 744234.

Regards

Jim Cooper

UNUSUAL BIRDS

This photo of a 9 month old tiercel peregrine has been sent in by Peter Hogan. It was bred by Ray Turner from parents that have been bred from before, yet they nor any other pair have produced anything like him. It is Peters hope that when he moults out this summer he will not lose his unusual markings.



If you have an unusual bird please send details along with a photograph to the above address.

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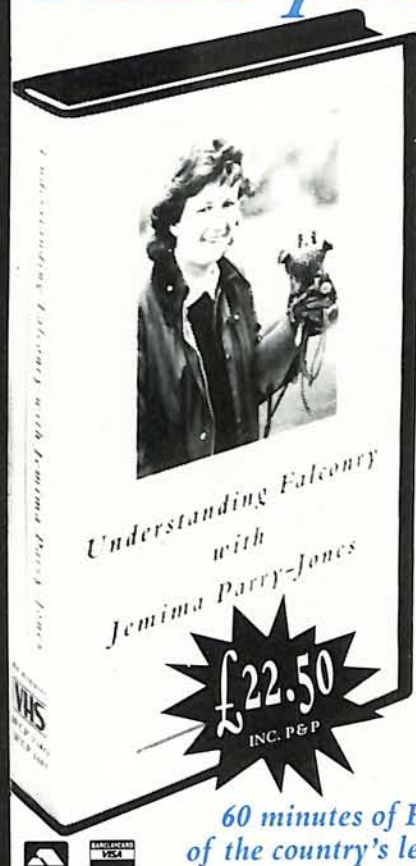
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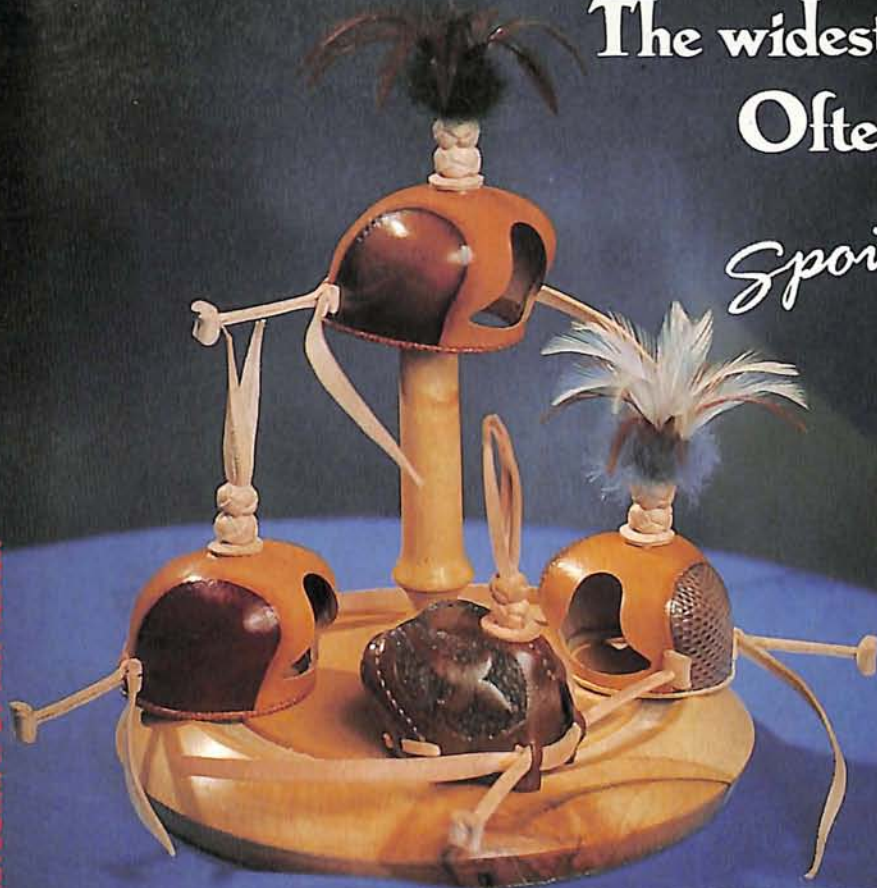
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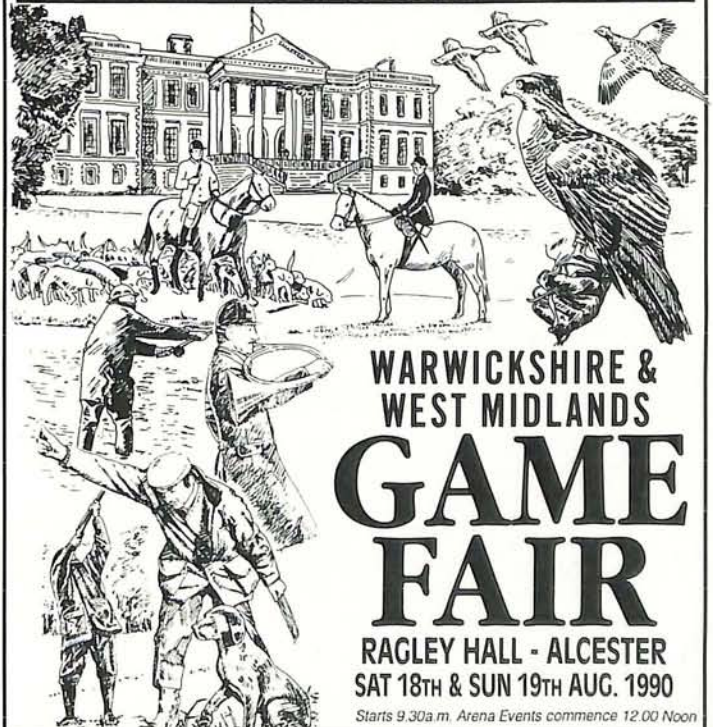
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