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Falconers

Magazine



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Photograph: David Wilson.

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The Falconers Magazine

Happy New Year! Hope the hawking is going well despite the awful weather we have been having.

We have had a lot of enquiries about the front cover photo on the November 1990 issue, so for everyone who asked, it is a Gyr hybrid and the photo was taken at the 1989 N.A.F.A. Field meet by Robin Haigh.

From the 1st of May 1991 subscription to The Falconers Magazine will be £12.50 a year. The Falcon and Raptor Fair will be held at Stoneleigh on 19th May, and is all set to be a huge success, with an array of Falconry wares and of course The Falconers Magazine. We hope to see a lot of you there.

Please keep your letters and articles coming as we still need your support.

We would like to thank everyone who helped The Falconers Magazine through 1990 and we hope they will stick with us through 1991.

David Wilson Editor



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ELSA

THE REDTAILED HAWK

by
Gary Henson

In 1989 I was fortunate enough to purchase a Red Tailed Hawk. I had been on hunting trips with Goshawks, Harris Hawks and Redtails and this was the one that appealed to me the most. The bird I purchased was a female. I named her Elsa. She took over six weeks to train and the training was made more difficult because she was reluctant to travel in the car. Because of this it was made to the hood.

More important still, she became very upset when near cows or horses. And as most of the land I had to hunt was grazing, I had to spend a lot of time getting her to accept them.

After much hard work and bad moods that verged on depression she started to respond. The weight she seemed to fly well at as a young bird was 2lb 11.5oz, during training I aimed for this weight. It took nearly four weeks for her to fly to me at 100 yds. It took a long time but by then she was doing it consistently and I was satisfied that she could be flown free. At this point I was very happy with Elsa, she flew very well, better in fact without the creance.

The next step was the lure. If I was unhappy with her as a young bird I became very pleased as she took to the lure. The aggression she showed towards the lure was unbelievable, rabbit, moorhen and pheasant lures were all taken viciously. Then the day came, after several weeks of training, when I introduced her to wild quarry. The day she hunted for real, she was flying at 3lb, this was the weight she had worked up to during training. I took her to hunt over a local market garden with a big rabbit problem. I was only on the second field, some twenty minutes into the hunt, when Elsa spotted a movement under a hawthorn hedge. I cast her off the fist and she literally slammed into the object of her attention. It was a weasel.

Now as a rule I would let her eat her well earned, first kill, but the stench that the weasel gave off was putrid. A frightened ferret smells the same. I replace Elsa's kill with a piece of rabbit.

I was overjoyed that day and after that we have never looked back.

The very next day was Sunday and my friend Paul came with his ferrets, we went to a wood which holds some rabbits. I put Elsa up into a large Elm tree, underneath which was a five hole warren. Pauls polecate jill was entered and it was not long



Elsa flies well at 3lbs

before we heard a bump and were rewarded with the sight of a rabbit bolting from it's hole. Elsa spotted it immediately and swiftly left her perch in hot pursuit. She followed it through a hedge taking it on the other side, by the head. IT WAS DEAD.

Well that was it! I was over the moon, what a weekend! This time I let Elsa feed on the kill, it was the least she deserved. That first season was memorable. Including the first two kills, the total tally was sixteen head. Its not a lot by some peoples standards, but the hunting round here is hard. However I'm in it for the sport of falconry.

Elsa will fly a rabbit at some 300 yds, or follow a moorhen into dense blackthorn. However up until her fourth kill she made a lot of noise, screaming almost, it annoyed me because it had the effect of putting up game before we reached it, or so I thought. After her fourth kill, she stopped screaming and there was no problem. Also throughout last season I used three double thickness gloves due to her talons gripping so hard and her biting them.

Elsa was and still is, very aggressive towards the glove and her quarry although she did the quarry more damage. And as nasty as she is, she is very easy to take up off a kill as long as she is well rewarded.

If anyone is considering flying and hunting a Redtail I can certainly recommend one.



Elsa on a well deserved kill

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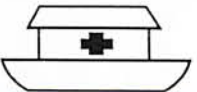
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RONALD STEVENS - THE MASTER

by Derry Argue

In my estimation, Ronald Stevens is the Grand Master of falconry. A natural gentleman, and one of the kindest and most generous people it has been my privilege to meet, I was very lucky to have been one of his pupils back in the 1960s.

Ronald is one of the few falconers who remain as the link between modern falconry and the heady days of pre war era. I corresponded with Ronald long before I met him. I had heard Geoffrey Pollard speak of him in revered tones and I think I first wrote to Ronald about homing falcons as it was a subject which has always fascinated me.

At that time Ronald lived at Fermoye Lodge, Connemara, Co. Galway, in the West of Ireland. He had no telephone and those in the know were under strict instructions never to send him a telegram, the postman had to make a special journey over several miles on his bicycle to deliver it and the event caused consternation in the Steven's household. For under the unwritten laws of Irish hospitality, the man not only had to be tipped but wined and dined too! Ronald was torn between his naturally generous instincts to supply the postman with the customary glass of whiskey and his concern for the now drunken man's welfare on the return journey!

Fermoye is a wooded oasis in the middle of the remote vastness of the Connemara bogs. The small island of mixed ornamental trees and shrubs around what had been a fishing lodge attracted all sorts of bird life as well as a motley collection of human visitors. Ronald also kept an aviary of free flying foreign birds, including parakeets, laughing thrushes, and numerous small finches. The parakeets were particularly spectacular, taking to the air when it suited them and ringing up in a noisy, squawking flock, often going up out of sight.

When Ireland brought in protection for the sparrowhawk, Ronald suffered losses to a pair which took up residence in his garden with characteristic stoicism. But I have to add it was quite charming to see these lovely birds almost fearless of man. They nested in a tree about six foot from the ground and attacked intruders by flying directly at their faces, veering off when just inches from impact! Quite unnerving!

To watch Ronald with a falcon is an education. He is, without doubt, one of the greatest authorities of the sport. Ronald would dissect a pigeon for feeding to his falcons like a skilled surgeon. Each joint was meticulously severed with one of the old fashioned single bladed razor blades



Ronald Stevens with Eyas Tundra Peregrine

Photograph: Derry Argue

and taken apart with great expertise. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Ronald worshipped his falcons. I could not imagine Ronald having a falcon on his fist with a single feather out of place or his even owning a falcon with a broken feather ... it would be promptly and expertly impeded as a matter of the utmost urgency. Ronald has always been a supreme stylist, his falcons trained to wait on at extreme pitch and the kill of interest to him only as an incident in the sport. Ronald was so concerned for the welfare of his birds that he never stooped a falcon to the lure because he had once pulled a line through a falcon's primaries and he feared another similar accident.

I recall two young visitors coming to Fermoye. One lad sat on a falcon's block. Ronald said nothing until later but he was truly outraged at such a desecration. I do not remember being allowed into the mews until I had known Ronald for several years. And then when I was invited in, I felt I had been asked to join some very privileged and mystical priesthood, which of course is exactly the truth of it!

Ronald was not interested in poor flights and his falcons were carefully trained to go up into the heavens expecting game to be served to them without exception. He used Llewellyn setters exclusively and was rather surprised when I once asked him who trained his dogs for him. Ronald believed a dog should train itself, something that

had me thinking for a long time until I too, got some of these wonderful dogs. The best dogs are "trained" by giving them the opportunity to train themselves, the rest should be bred in. Ronald was a personal friend of the late William Humphrey, the great falconer and setter breeder. They were neighbours in Shropshire and shared their sport together, flying falcons on the Long Mynd.

On the subject of homing falcons, Ronald told me of a wild falcon which came over and ruined his sport in Connemara day after day. Finally, exasperated, Ronald decided to trap the wild peregrine and give it to his chauffeur the next time his had to go to Dublin airport to put a visitor on a plane. At last the day of opportunity arrived and Ronald gave the chauffeur the bird in a cardboard box with strict instructions not to let it go until he had reached Dublin. Meantime, Ronald went out hawking that afternoon as usual ... and was once again annoyed by the wild bird. The chauffeur got a good talking to when he returned but Ronald was finally convinced that he had followed the orders and the bird had flown back home in just a couple of hours averaging over 50 mph in level flight!

On the same subject, Ronald kept an Indian lugger falcon free flying around Fermoye called Plunket.

Plunket was quite a character. Ronald when I knew him was almost completely bald and Plunket had a nasty habit of taking a

cut at Ronald's bare scalp when he was called to the fist. Ronald would come in to tea, chuckling away at the mischief Plunket had done, with a great gash in his head and blood flowing down his face! So he adopted a rather unusual stance when calling Plunket to the fist, partly to provide a perch for the bird and partly to protect his head!

Plunket was no fool. I did not rate Indian Luger falcons too highly until I saw Plunket in action. He chose his moment and would sit quietly for days on an upstairs window ledge which was his favourite perch. When Plunket judged conditions to be right he would move to a new perch on top of the aviary. When this happened we could watch out for some spectacular flying because Plunket would take on the free flying parakeets and pursue them right up into the heavens. Maybe not today or even tomorrow, but the day would come. But Plunket was not just flying the parakeet flock for fun. Not a bit of it. He would select a young bird and take it in a spiffing stoop, as good as many peregrines in style. No, Plunket was certainly not lazy and definitely no fool but he just had to do things his way.

For many years, Ronald kept open house. Older friends had known him at Walcott



Ronald Stevens with Intermewed Peregrine Falcon and Colonel Henry Swain with his Eyass Falcon

Hall in Shropshire. I heard a lovely tale from the late Eustace Poles, an ex-African game warden, who had been invited to stay by Ronald. "Just drop me a post card when you can come", Ronald generously told Eustace. So Eustace sent the card and, a few days later, turned up for what he supposed was going to be a

good hawking holiday. Ronald invited him in and ordered tea. They chatted away quite happily when Ronald made his apologies and asked to be excused. "You see", said Ronald, "I am expecting Eustace Brown to stay and I hope you will forgive me for not asking you to dinner..." "Eustace politely withdrew and slunk off home, not wishing to point out to Ronald that he was the Eustace who was expected and not Eustace Brown (another falconer with the same first name!)"

During the war, Ronald contributed to the defeat of the enemy by taking part in the destruction of peregrines around the coast, a job he truly detested. This had to be done to protect homing pigeons which might be returning exhausted with a message from allied spies and resistance fighters. So Ronald managed to persuade the authorities to transfer him to the job of catching homing pigeons with trained peregrines in case they carried messages to the enemy. As such a responsible job could hardly be undertaken by a private Ronald was elevated to the rank of Sergeant! Field Marshall of falconry would have been a better title! Ronald has now given up the sport and lives quietly in his beloved Connemara.

Photograph: Derry Argue



Hawks on lawn at Fermoyle

Photograph: Derry Argue

NORTH AMERICAN FALCONERS ASSOCIATION

Driving 150 miles along unfamiliar back country roads in the middle of an Oklahoma night is not much fun. Even the numerous signs along the highway announcing that I was on historic route 66 did little to raise the spirits.

As my speed crept above the legal limit, which varies between forty and sixty five mph, to keep up with the great eighteen wheel trucks that regularly travel at over 80 I drifted through tiredness to boredom and back again.

Although only able to see the narrow band of countryside lit up by the Ford Tempo's headlights I was aware that this was a very different type of terrain to that of southern Florida that we had left some fourteen hours previously.

Mary dozed while I passed the time by counting road kills, this is a quick and easy method of determining the wildlife in a given area. In the USA they have turned the study of highway carcasses into a science with books published on the subject.

Route 66 was certainly a productive area with Raccoons, Coyote and Skunks being the most commonly observed. By the way, for those readers unfamiliar with the smell of a dead skunk, or come to that a live one, I can assure you that driving by one is as close as you want to be, for even then it may take a mile or two before the foul odour disappears from inside the vehicle. Through Geary and Watonga Deer Hazard signs became more frequent but we did not see any, then the town of Siling and finally the glow over the lights of Woodward appeared out of the darkness and almost immediately we came upon the Northwest Inn, the NAFA Meet headquarters, right on the edge of town.

Perception can be distorted by extreme tiredness and the hotel looked none too



Hooded Gyr Falcon

Photograph: Robin Haigh



Female Merlin

Photograph: Robin Haigh

impressive at first glance, almost deserted and unfinished. However the welcome was friendly, the room was warm and clean and the beds comfortable.

After a good nights sleep we awoke desperate for a cup of coffee. Half an hour later when leaving for the hotel restaurant and breakfast we discovered the management had thoughtfully hung a plastic bag on the door containing a flask of coffee and the days paper! This service continued throughout the meet.

The weathering area, as usual warded by Bruce Clements, was situated on the hotel front lawn adjacent to the main highway and, from day one, attracted a great deal of attention from the locals who showed considerable interest in the sport of Falconry and the birds used.

A guided tour of the weathering Gyrs, Peregrines, Lanners, Prairies, Merlins, Kestrels and a multitude of hybrids plus Redtails, Harris, Gos, Sharpshins & Coopers Hawks often produced land to fly on. In fifteen minutes I was offered two parcels of land, one of 10,000 acres the other of 26,000 acres!

The only worry, that the farmers were less keen for the falconers to fly at Quail. The Oklahoma Quail population is around 3 million and the shooting is let out to syndicates. However when the landowners realised how little impact the NAFA members were likely to have on the Quail harvest they willingly allowed falconers onto their land.

A total of 287 head of quarry was taken during the six day meet including Cottontail 94, Jack Rabbits 54, Duck 62, Quail 29, Lesser Prairie Chicken 4 and Pheasant 1. More than 330 NAFA members, plus wives and families, attended the meet with some from as far afield as the UK, Europe and Mexico.



Blue skies and a Harris Hawk

Photograph: Robin Haigh

N FIELD MEET WOODWARD OKLAHOMA 1990

The local towns people, hoteliers and farmers for miles around had all been well briefed by the Chamber of Commerce and could not do enough to help. Signs with the wording 'Welcome Falconers' appeared all over town. Anything we asked for was arranged instantly and with a smile.

The hospitality and friendliness of the people in Kearney, Nebraska where last years meet was held is legendary but could hardly compare with the response we all received from the folk of Woodward and the surrounding area. And a special mention should be made of the Management and staff of the Northwest Inn whose efforts on NAFA's behalf were definitely above and beyond the call of duty.

I have seen well run Hotel services buckle and then collapse with the sudden influx of three hundred or so falconers, their families, birds and dogs, with the restaurant unable to cope and even towels running out. But none of this in Woodward, all ran smoothly, the pool was hot the restaurant was a pleasure to eat in and served some of the best prime rib in the area.

In my position, in charge of Hawking Party

Liason, I was in constant contact with the Hotel management and whether we required a fax machine, typewriter, extra tables or whatever, all were provided with charm and efficiency.

Even the fall out from around 100 dogs was taken care of by a specially designated member of the hotel staff.

The weather was kind to us, instead of the expected cold to very cold days with a constant breeze we experienced shirtsleeve sunshine all week and only a couple of days of not too severe wind.

From the Sunday, the first day of registration, to the banquet on Friday there was plenty to do when not out hawking, from the now traditional breakfast with the directors of NAFA on two mornings, general meetings with a raffle each evening, followed by sales of all manner of falconry ephemera, guest speakers, a thanksgiving evening game barbecue with quarry caught by the hawks, cooked and served. (I am unsure which of them caught the burgers and chicken !)

For the youngsters a programme of trips to the Alabaster Caverns and to the Plains



Photograph: Robin Haigh

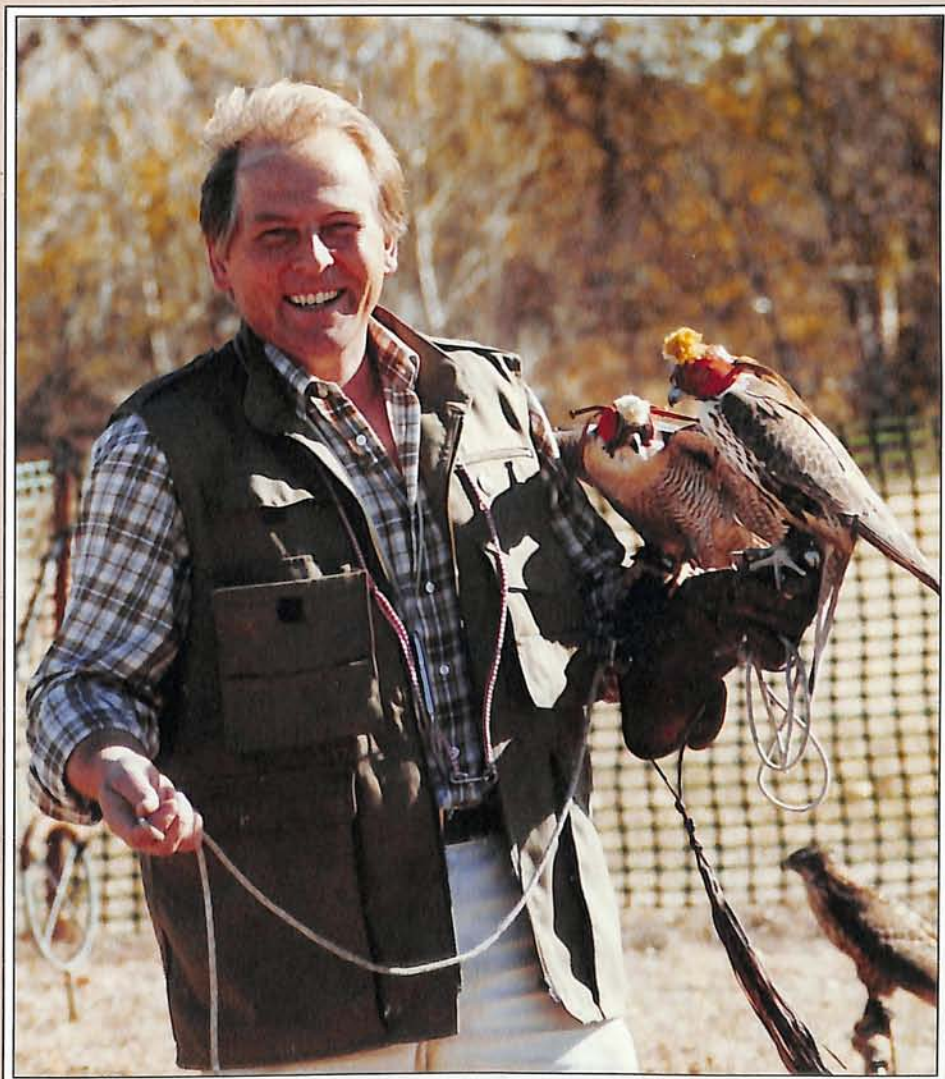
Immature Female Redtailed Hawk weighing 68oz

Indian and Pioneer museum plus a pizza party on banquet night, kept them amused. The nightly raffles raised a total of over 5000 dollars from gifts donated by businesses and individuals. Prizes ranged from hoods and bells to prints, books and telemetry. The funds generated by the raffle, together with registration fees, goes to running the meet.

Hal Williams the field meet chairman and his crew worked extremely hard to make the meet a success. Most members are unaware of the groundwork that goes on many months before and the effort that is put in by the volunteers to make everything run on schedule, and I suppose that's how it should be. The sign of good organisation is that all progresses smoothly and seamlessly, as if by magic, without anyone other than the organisers being aware of the behind the scenes dramas.

Saturday morning and the final goodbyes is always a sad time knowing that friends will not be seen again for another twelve months. Then time to leave for that long journey home. We realised that even though we would not arrive in the UK until Sunday morning many of our American friends would take much longer to reach home than us, some driving for 27 hours! The 1991 NAFA MEET is to be held in Dodge City, Kansas.

The 1990 NAFA journal has just appeared and what a superb publication this is! Top quality colour reproduction, superb artwork and excellent text. The editor Dan Cecchini has really excelled himself! If you would like to join NAFA and receive three Hawk Chalks and a Journal each year please send a stamped addressed envelope to:- ROBIN HAIGH, NAFA UK, ABBEY BRIDGE FARMHOUSE, COLONELS LANE, CHERTSEY, SURREY KT16 8RJ. ENGLAND.



Photograph: Robin Haigh

Tony Crosswell with cast of Falcons

THE LONG EARED OWL *by Tony Turk*

Asio Atus, Asio means a horned owl, otus, the ear. An enigmatic owl, seldom seen in spite of its 20,000 resident population in Britain. Usually regarded as a migratory species in Britain but only when its food supply fails, rather than due to harsh weather conditions. In the north of its range, Scandinavia for instance, migration movements are more regular, resulting in noticeable increases in our winter populations.

This ability to cross wide expanses of open sea allowed it to colonise Ireland (where the Tawny Owl could not reach) and even the Canary Islands, where there now exists a smaller resident sub-species, *Asio otus canariensis*. Two other sub-species, *A.O. abyssinicus* and *A.O. graveri* survive in the mountainous areas of eastern and central Africa, these probably being relic populations. The North American Long-eared is split by some authorities into two races *A. otus wilsonianus* and *A. otus tuffsi* the latter being from the western regions. These differ from the old world nominate form by the barring on the underside, an over all greyer appearance and the yellow not orange eyes.

The range extends throughout the United States and some parts of Canada, from Ireland across to Japan, in fact circling the globe in the Holarctic region wherever suitable habitat exists, because of its nomadic disposition it can take advantage of regional increases in its prey.

In winter the long-eared owl can often be found in communal roosting sites, when good feeding grounds are available numbers of over a hundred birds have been recorded. Being predominantly small mammal feeders the population thrives when there is ample prey, but, especially with prolonged snow cover, they are adaptable, preying on the wintering flocks of passerines found especially on the coastal area of marshland.

The sexes are similar except that males tend to have noticeable paler underparts, the background to the stripes on the female being buff while in the male it is almost white, females are also slightly larger.

During the breeding season their preferred habitat is the woodland edge where they have the security of sometimes quite dense forestry to nest in and fields, moorlands and the now declining heathlands to quarter over for their rodent prey. Disused crow, magpie and pigeon nests are favoured, the latter are sometimes added to, to form a more substantial foundation, a rare occurrence in owls, but squirrel dreys, hawk nests and even ground nesting have been recorded.

In common with short-eared owls the long eared uses wing clapping during its aerial displays declaring the boundaries of its territory. In good vole years however pairs are quite tolerant of each other with several pairs nesting in close proximity. Laying usually starts in March or April with an average of four to six eggs being laid, large clutches have been recorded in the north of its range when food is plentiful. The male provides for his mate while she incubates, delivering the prey to the nest rather than

allowing her to leave and feed away from the eggs. After an incubation period of twenty-seven days the chicks start to hatch in the staggard fashion common in owls. The female broods the chicks for two weeks until she is forced to join the male in search

of prey for the growing brood. At three weeks of age the young start to leave the nest area clambering around in the branches, it will be at least another week before they can fly. During this period, prior to dispersal, the young keep in contact with their parents with their plaintive hunger cries.

On the rare occasions when this most cryptic of owls is seen it's as a fast disappearing shape away into a wood or along a hedgerow from a spot where no owl like form could previously be detected.

The plumage has many characteristics of the night jar, with the stripes and mottlings which blend into the tree trunk against which it often nests. The disproportionate ear tufts are raised when danger approaches helping to disrupt the slim branch-like outline. With such a high level of camouflage the long-eared owl would be ideally suited for the perch and pounce system of hunting of the Tawny owl but its long wings prove that it is well adapted to hunting on the wing as does the Barn owl and Short eared owl, two other vole specialists.

Breeding successes in captivity in Britain are very few whereas I understand that on the continent, especially in Germany, Long-eared owls are not considered difficult to breed. To those fortunate enough to have a pair I would suggest keeping them in a secluded aviary, (although I am not an advocate of the total seclusion or sensory deprivation aviary) where they can feel secure as, unless hand reared, they tend to be highly strung birds. Disused crow or magpie nests could be provided, but I am sure a simple nest tray, partially screened with twigs would suffice. Diets high in rodents rather than the over used day old chicks would also improve the chances. Given the above conditions I am sure that in the near future more captive bred Long-eared owls will be available to those who, like me, find them fascinating birds.



Long Eared Owl in flight

Photographs by: Michael Leach

R **review**

OWLS

by Jemima Parry Jones

This video is witty, interesting and informative. Jemima shows you how they breed owls at her centre, showing you the various stages of incubation, brooding and feeding by hand. You will see a Bengal Eagle Owl go from hopping to the fist in an aviary to flying free in a wood. She explains about all the different types of owls, the families they belong to and where they can be found.

We meet Mozart who is 17 years old and was reared by Jemima at Londons Royal Academy of Music.

This video will also be of great interest and a valuable aid to anyone involved in a Barn Owl breed and release scheme as Jemima outlines the most suitable areas for these birds and the places to avoid. And the things to look for.

Jemima is very much at ease in front of the camera and a pleasure to watch.

OWL written and presented by Jemima Parry Jones is available by mail order at £9.99 each through:

WCP Video, Millers House, Roman Way, Market Harborough, Leicestershire LE16 7PQ.



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THE GREEN MAN by *Diana Durman Walters*

Who is this man who confronts us now with his principles of an egalitarian habitat where man and beast live in protected harmony? Is he connected with the aspects of conservation and ecology that affect you and I? Does this 'Green Man' or concerned conservationist worry more about the mud on his green wellies getting the inside of the car dirty, or is it that he is more concerned with his sense of duty from behind his office desk? Pouring out alterations to the Wildlife and Conservancy Act. As we race towards the year 2,000AD I begin to see the possibility of a new form of genocide, that of the "Rural Sportsman". It is paradoxical that as the number of people living in towns increases, the demand for an ecological perspective becomes stronger. Concern for the protection of woodlands, hedgerows, moorlands and wetlands has now spread to the towns and had become a national issue. It's one thing to talk about wildlife it's another to do something about it. At present some 5,000,000 country sports enthusiasts have been practising voluntary conservation in the interests of their sport. But the 'Green Man' intends to change this.

There are 50 million acres of rural land in Britain. Less than 10% is subject to conservation by public bodies. The rest is controlled by farmers, foresters and other land users. These people constitute the group known as "Rural Sportsmen". They are loathe to make changes that are detrimental to their sport and as a direct result of this hedges are maintained, headlands left unsprayed, small copses planted, ponds dug, cover for animals and birds provided. Gates, jumps, stiles and bridges maintained for easy access. All this costs money but preserves our landscape and wildlife. Without question the people who use a natural resource are those most concerned about its proper management.

The Green Man doesn't hold with these philosophies and principals of wildlife management. More often than not he is a politician giving vent from Europe. People put politicians into power; and people remove politicians from power. So the aspirations of the public can and often do affect the decisions of politicians. Such wealth of feeling results in political influence in all aspects of the wildlife scenario. This is well known to the politician and it is known too to those people who want to influence political decisions in all mans field of endeavour. The people

who most acutely understand the power this gives them over the politician in wildlife matters and who use it shamelessly are the vociferous minority representing the fanatical fringe of the 'anti' groups in the external environment.

Politicians feed upon information provided by ecological scientists. These biologists deal with the habitats of living organisms, their modes of life and relations to their surroundings. However no matter how extensive a scientists qualifications may be they do not equip him for administration positions. No single category of person qualifies for such a position but assuredly their arguments should greatly depend upon their backgrounds their general understanding of the philosophies and principles of wildlife management and general usage. Generally, therefore the broader the base of an administrators experience, the greater his potential in representing wildlife.

The 'Green Man' has had very little to say upon the subject of falconry, but then he has so many other aspects of wildlife "management" to go at which unfortunately all are encompassed in some way in falconry. The "hands off" attitude of many wildlife managers and the arrogant hostility shown by some administrators to members of the public who want greater involvement with wildlife resources is destructive. They should accept that there ARE many people who want a deeper involvement with wildlife but who are unable to achieve that involvement because of current official attitudes.

If "The Green Man" wants to look at and notice conservation at work at one of it's highest levels, he has only to take a look at the propagation of raptors throughout the world to see the heights that the 'Rural Sportsman' can achieve. It is probable that all species of falcon can be bred now in captivity, including hawks and eagles. This means that no species of raptor has to become extinct. No stigma can be attached as to the CONTINUED use of wild birds. I think someone ought to tell him that conservation of any species can only take place when that species is considered in relation to it's environment, and to other species sharing that environment, and that other species is him!!!

THE BRITISH FALCONRY AND RAPTOR FAIR

Now in its second year, this Fair is gathering momentum, interest and scope. The only event of its kind, it will take place again at the N.A.C., Stoneleigh, Warwickshire on Saturday 18th and Sunday 19th May, 1991.

Internally the Falconry Fair is being resited and will be situated amongst the attractive park and lawns near the lake.

An ongoing, comprehensive programme of hawking activities in the Birds of Prey Arena is being planned plus a very large variety of falconry and raptor related trade stands, exhibitions and demonstrations.

The renowned falconer and wildlife expert, Mr Bryan Paterson, is, as last year, part of the organising team and would like any falconry or raptor organisation who would like to have a presence at the Fair to contact him in the evenings on 0562 850329.

Allied trades should contact Ron Morris on 0588 672708.

Ron Morris, organising secretary, says "Since the inaugural event last year, we have received an enormous number of enquiries about this event from all over the country requesting information and dates for the 1991 Fair and we are confident that with the planned programme of events, we can all look forward to a great weekend".



The COUNTRY SPORTSMAN'S SHOW

SAT. 18TH & SUN. 19TH MAY
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AN ACTION PACKED DAILY PROGRAMME
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TELEPHONE ENQUIRIES TO SHOW OFFICE:
0588 672708

A DAY OUT WITH A DIFFERENCE FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY!

"TRAINING GUNDOGS FOR FALCONRY"

On Sunday 21st April 1991 Guy Wallace will be holding another of his successful Gundogs for Falconry Training Days at the Warren Gundog Training Centre near Brecon. Set in the beautiful countryside of the Welsh Borders, the home of the peregrine and the red kite, the course covers every aspect of training gundogs for falconry including pointing live game. Participants are encouraged to bring their own dogs. The cost of the course will be £20 and accommodation can be arranged. Further details from Guy or Marian Wallace, Tel: 0874 754311.

SMALL FALCONS CONFERENCE

The first ever international conference on all aspects of wild and captive 'Biology and Conservaton of Small Falcons', organised by the Hawk and Owl Trust, is to be held at the University of Kent, Canterbury from 6th - 8th September 1991. It has attracted a wide range of speakers from all over the world. Full details and booking forms are available from Fiona Swingland, DICE, University of Kent, Canterbury CT2 7NY. Offers of poster papers, contributions to workshops etc., should be addressed to Dr. M. Nicholls, Christchurch College, North Holmes Road, Canterbury, Kent CT1 1QU.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS 1991

Bryan Patterson, Flying Display, Hawk and Owl Trust, Raptor Rescue, Falconry Furniture Makers and The Falconers Magazine will be attending the following: **COUNTRY FAIRS**

April 6th/7th 1991

ST. EDMUND'S COUNTRY FAIR

ST. EDMUND'S COLLEGE, OLD HALL GREEN, WARE, HERTS.

(14 miles North on A10 from Junction 25 M25)

July 27th/28th 1991

CHILHAM CASTLE COUNTRY FAIR

CHILHAM CASTLE GARDENS, KENT

(5 miles SE of Canterbury on A262)

August 17th/18th 1991

THE SUSSEX COUNTRY FAIR

ST. MICHAEL'S, BURTON PARK, PETWORTH, SUSSEX

(10 miles North of Chichester on A285)

September 14th/15th 1991

WINDSOR GREAT PARK NATIONAL DRIVING

CHAMPIONSHIP & COUNTRY FAIR

WINDSOR GREAT PARK, SURREY

(Exit 6 M4)

September 14th/15th 1991

MIDLAND GAME & COUNTRY SPORTS FAIR (Associate Show)

WESTON PARK, SHIFNAL, SHROPSHIRE

(6 miles from Junction 12 M6 on A5 Watling Street)

September 28th/29th 1991

THE YORKSHIRE COUNTRY FAIR

HAREWOOD HOUSE, HAREWOOD, LEEDS, YORKSHIRE

(3 miles North of Leeds on A61)

October 12th/13th 1991

WIMPOLE PARK COUNTRY FAIR

ARRINGTON, NEAR ROYSTON, HERTS

(3 miles exit 12 M11 on A603 from Cambridge)

For further information on any of the above, please contact: County Fairs Show Office, 9 Beechfield Rise, West Midlands WS13 6EL. Tel: 0543 264162 Fax: 0543 263055

INTRODUCTION TO FALCONRY IN CANADA

by Dennis Maynes

There is no discernible horizon as the dark haze over the salt marsh fades into the overall greyness of the sky. Our progress is more than audible as we rush through the high grass and over the saturated ground. I stop to listen for bells. The black silhouette of a peregrine appears out of the mist overhead and disappears back into it.

I have to run faster to catch up with Colin Terry and his Labs. 'Luke' and 'Amy' suddenly tense while their tails are still excitedly rotating. A 'rooster' pheasant reluctantly flushes. I cannot see the stoop but I hear the bells whistling. I feel the rush of her descent as she comes down over our shoulders. We have to run even faster, hoping to reach the falcon and quarry in time to aid her with the kill.

When we reach a clearing at the edge of an old runway the dogs come up to greet us. The peregrine is standing in the grass at the far side, wet and frustrated. Pheasant feathers lay about hinged to the dew laden blades surrounding the falcon. It is obvious that the rooster has escaped but not totally unscathed.

As Colin kneels to take up his bird another shape appears over us. Ruk! Ruk! Ruk! a young gyr falcon barks out her resentment of this intrusion of her wintering territory. She has revealed her presence during the flights on previous days but so far had not interfered. The peregrine returns to her feeding as the gyr drifts away. We are all soaked to the skin, and exhausted as we walk slowly back to our vehicle.

These were the conditions under which I first experienced flying longwings.

The Fraser River spills out of the mountainous coastal rainforest and runs for another hundred miles to the salt marshes on the Strait of Georgia. This delta and the Saanich Peninsula twenty miles away to the southwest sit in the middle of the Pacific flyway and are extremely important wintering areas for waterfowl.

Falconry was pioneered on the west coast by Frank L Beebe. In the 1950's and 60's, utilizing the readily available eyas Peales falcons from the Queen Charlotte Islands, a competent group of young falconers developed. Although the landscape was a little less than ideal, the availability of falcons and abundance of quarry allowed for pursuit of the art.

It seems that here, more so than in other areas of North America, falconry was approached with an experimental and innovative attitude rather than adhering to the old methods. Equipment such as the 'Y' swivel system, invented by Brian Davies, is now used throughout North America.

When the peregrine politics of the 70's interrupted access to the Peales falcons the B C falconers turned their attention towards the Gyr falcon. Techniques for the trapping and care of passage Gyrs were learned. More and more gyr falconeries were being discovered by falconers in areas of northern B C where previously they were not known to exist. Gyr falcons are currently used for flights at waterfowl, both eyasses and passagers as well as domestic - produced falcons.

In Saskatchewan another nucleus of talented falconers was forming. The flights were more 'classic' over pointers and setters to grouse. Initially using prairie and peregrine falcons and in later years passage Gyr falcons.

Early in the season, except in drought years, young falcons were started at waterfowl on isolated prairie ponds. Even the reluctant Prairies and Gyr falcons would learn the advantage of height. After freeze - up the falcons were switched to Hungarian Partridge (Perdix Perdix) and Sharptailed Grouse (Tympanuchus Phasianellus) Some extremely high waiting - on falcons were developed with this method. Saskatchewan falconers

were never very impressed with out comparatively low-flying birds on the coast! Men such as Doug Bush and Bob Rafuse have achieved some of the highest quality falconry found anywhere. Recently the scene in Alberta has gathered momentum. The conditions are similar to Saskatchewan especially in the south and east. As the geography is more varied and includes the east slope of the Rockies there may be more opportunities to make use of Goshawks. Alberta has large and healthy nesting populations of Prairie falcons and Ferruginous Hawks. It is these tough indigenous raptors, along with Gyr falcons and Goshawks which suit the falconer facing the adverse weather conditions of the plains. Wainwright Alberta is home to the Canadian Wildlife Service falcon breeding efforts. Approximately 100 Anatum peregrines are produced each year in an attempt to re-establish the anatum in the industrialized south - eastern Canada.

Ontario differs from the west in other ways. The provincial government has chosen in the past not to recognise falconry. Falconers were prohibited from utilizing indigenous raptors and were forced to obtain their hunting birds outside the province. Prairie falcons, Gyr falcons and Ferruginous Hawks are not known to nest in Ontario, therefore their possession was not regulated. A few unscrupulous types saw this as a business opportunity to market illegally acquired birds. This situation has since stabilized and legitimate falconry organisations are pushing for workable regulations. The Ontario provincial government must bear full responsibility for the past circumstances as they set the stage for the infamous 'Operation Falcon' in North America.

In the early 1970's there was an attempt by the federal government to take over the management of raptorial birds in Canada. Saskatchewan and British Columbia refused to relinquish their control. At the same time the US federal government was successful in gaining overall control of its states. The US falconers were burdened with an overbearing beaurocracy which they must fight continuously to deregulate. The advantage of the US system is that a falconer travelling there can count on similar regulations in each jurisdiction. In Canada each falconry club is in a 'one on one' relationship with its provincial regulators but there is much variation province to province.

The North West American Falconers Association was inspired by Harold Webster of Colorado and Frank Beebe of British Columbia amongst others. N.A.F.A has become the political voice in answer to US federal regulation. With perhaps less than 10% of practising Canadian falconers holding membership in N.A.F.A., this organisation is in effect 'American' rather than North American.

Without federal regulation in Canada a real need for a national falconers association has not surfaced. It follows that there exists no falconry publication such as N.A.F.A.'s "Hawk Chalk". Falconers from abroad have great difficulty in contacting their bretheren when travelling in Canada.

This country has vast territory with a comparatively low human population. Its' geography and climate exhibit great variation and it is certain many falconry possibilities are yet to be explored. In BC alone it is possible to hawk ducks below the temperate rainforest in the morning and five hours later put your falcon up over the rough sagebrush desert to hunt Chukar Partridge (Alectoris Chukar). At present only four of ten provinces have established falconers organisations and there are many areas which hold game populations that have never been tested by dog and falcon.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome visiting falconers from the UK and to invite exchange of correspondance with Canadian Falconers.

List of Clubs

NORTHWEST FALCONERS ASSOCIATION (Formerly B.C. Falconry Assn.)

Della Crawford, Secretary
142-208 Street
Langley, B.C.
Canada V3A 4P4
ph. 604 530 6593

Alberta Falconers Association
Mike Person DVM
PO Box 3442
Spruce Grove, Alberta
Canada T7X 3A7

Saskatchewan Falconry Club
Doug Bush
P O Box 180
North Portal, Sask
Canada SOC 1W0
ph. 306 634 6886

Ontario Falconers Association
Steve Shute
RR#1, Cambridge
Ontario, N1R 5S2
Canada
ph. 519 6210336

RAPTOR RESCUE

by Mick Robins
(Chairman)



Above:
The Kestrel in this photo was a nestling found with one leg, the other having been amputated by fishing line, which was possibly taken back to the nest site by one of the parents attached to some nest material. After a few weeks physiotherapy it was able to stand up on its own, and it was taken from the hospital unit to a flight where it made a few bumpy landings before adjusting to having one leg. Feeding was another problem, but after making several unsuccessful attempts to take the mouse and falling over each time, he found that if he took the mouse to the edge of the flight he could lean on the panelling and eat the mouse without falling.

I am grateful to the editors for the opportunity of spreading the word about raptor rescue, a registered charity devoted to the rescue and rehabilitation of all birds of prey. Although I hold the grand sounding title of 'Chairman' it is almost entirely an organisational role, and I am neither a licensed rehabilitation keeper nor a falconer. May I firstly therefore acknowledge the vast amount of assistance I have received from L.R.K.'s, Peter Nutt, Barry Wilcock, Mick Cunningham and Mike Abbey in compiling this feature.

Raptor rescue has, since its inauguration in 1978, assisted sick and injured birds of prey and, when full recuperated, correctly returned them to the wild. The members of raptor rescue work alongside the R.S.P.C.A. and the Police in many parts of the country. Despite our success to date, we only handle a very small percentage of the vast number of birds requiring our assistance. Conservation of our wild raptor population is vital. With an estimated 60-80% mortality rate within their first year, combined with a declining habitat, the use of various lethal chemicals and persecution from a variety of sources, we feel that our concern is not misplaced.

Our aims are briefly to:-

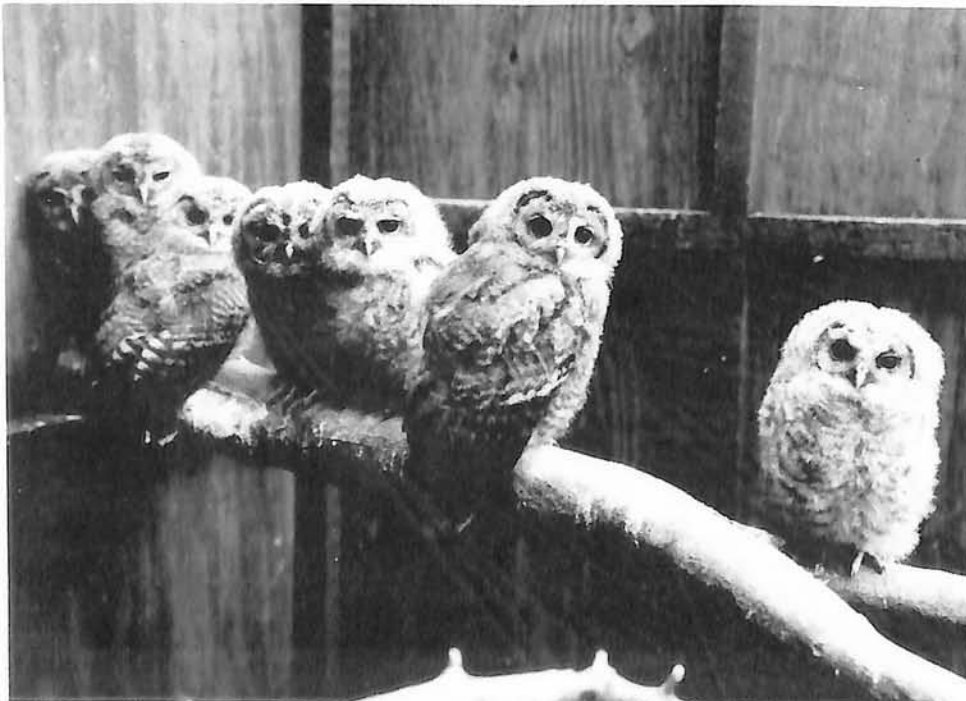
- A) Rehabilitate raptors as quickly and efficiently as possible.
- B) Ensure that all raptor casualties are handled by competent persons.
- C) To correctly diagnose and treat any ailment, seeking veterinary advice if necessary.
- D) Provide adequate and suitable housing during their confinement.
- E) Protect the interests of wild raptors; from shooting, trapping, poisoning, removal from the nest etc.
- F) Comment, as a body on any impending government legislation.
- G) Collate and store relevant information for future reference.

The idea of raptor rescue was first conceived by a northern falconer who was concerned about the fact that there were no recognised organisations adept enough to handle the large number of sick and injured birds of prey that came into care every year. Such birds were being looked after by either dedicated but overworked individuals or well-intentioned persons with somewhat limited experience. In many cases birds that, with the correct care, could have been returned to the wild or become part of a breeding and release scheme, were being humanely destroyed.

Following an article in 'Cage and Aviary Birds' the inaugural meeting was held in the Autumn of 1978 at an hotel in Morecambe, Lancashire. Less than a dozen people were in attendance but the nucleus of raptor rescue was formed during the course of the evening. The basics of a constitution were formulated and a venue for a second meeting was arranged. Owing to the fact that those present were predominantly from the Greater Manchester and Midlands area, the subsequent meeting was held at an hotel in Wigan.

This was to become the regular venue for meetings which were held on a bi-monthly basis over the course of the next three years. Such meetings were open to all members and committee business was kept to a minimum, being followed by an open forum which was kept on an informal basis. During the early years much time was spent by the founder members promoting awareness of the organisation. Details were left at local veterinary surgeries, police stations, R.S.P.C.A and P.D.S.A establishments etc. Publicity through the local media resulted in an increase in membership which grew at an encouraging rate. Attending country fairs and visiting schools also contributed in a not insignificant way.

Active members of raptor rescue benefited in several ways. Apart from the social aspect of communications with like minded people it was useful to be able to seek advice on particular problems from within the membership. It also reduce the workload of individual members who, if inundated with injured birds, were able to ask other members for practical help in the form of aviary space or assistance in hacking back recuperated birds. Members who supported the organisation but who did not handle injured birds were provided with four newsletters per year which itemised raptor rescues progress and gave details of individual case histories. Minutes of the monthly meetings were also circulated. In 1981 the membership stood at over 150



Left:

These tawny owl chicks are some that were handed in to the Ware branch of Raptor Rescue and were kept in an enclosed flight before being hacked back to the wild. Although they came from different areas of Hertfordshire they were all released in the same place.

with members throughout the British Isles including representatives in Scotland, the Isle of Wight and the Isle of Man.

The advent of the wildlife and countryside act and the involvement of the department of the environment caused great concern within the organisation. Many members thought that the regulations and registration requirements would prove to be too constrictive and prevent raptor rescue from operating efficiently. Areas of concern included the vast increase in administrative paper work, the failure to recognise imprinted birds as being unfit to return to the wild, and the prohibitive cost of having to pay to register every permanently disabled bird. Opinions were voiced and the department of the environment was made aware of the problems that we envisaged. They proved to be remarkably sympathetic and flexible, introducing 'approved keepers' status (later to become licensed rehabilitation keeper status) waiving the registration fees to licensed keepers for disabled birds, recognising the inherent problems of imprinting, and providing a simple (by government department standards) form on which to keep records, time has proved that this system works extremely well and there are few, if any, people who could justifiably argue that the introduction of the wildlife and countryside act was anything but beneficial to our work.

The growth of raptor rescue throughout the 1980's continued at a steady rate and the organisation has been instrumental in caring for, and rehabilitating thousands of birds. In addition to this, great emphasis has been placed upon the conservation aspect and making the general public aware of the problems facing our native raptor population. Several members, on an individual basis, have been engaged in the breeding and release of Barn Owls in order to redress the current decline of this species. This is a most time consuming operation requiring careful research into habitat, the reasons why there are no Barn Owls in a certain locality, the full co-operation of



landowners, and the commitment required to ensure that any controlled release programme is provided with the optimum chance of success.

As we entered the 1990's raptor rescue could justify a claim to be 'probably the largest bird of prey rescue organisation' by showing a total membership in excess of 1200. Only a very small number of those are L.R.K.'s and we would very much like to see others join us. As with all charities, finance is a major headache and L.R.K.'s have a constant battle to raise funds to pay for the considerable expenses incurred in their rehabilitation work. Accordingly, we try to offer some financial support to L.R.K.'s from central funds to assist with aviary building and repairs, purchase of equipment or any other justifiable outlay. To enable us to do this we seek sponsorship and donations from those who support our aims but cannot, for whatever reason, take an active part in our work.

Also, throughout the year most of our L.R.K.'s visit societies, clubs, schools, fetes and country fairs for the dual purpose of education and fund raising. Many hundreds of hours of dedication are spent in these activities, time which could perhaps be better spent caring for the birds for which we exist, but, as in all walks of life, money is essential to pay the bills.

Nearly all species of British raptors are received at one time or another by our L.R.K.'s, not surprisingly, in terms of total numbers, Kestrels, Tawny Owls, Little

Left:

These birds were rescued by Staffordshire L.R.K. Mick Cunningham. They were kept illegally in a small dark cage, and their feet were encased in large round balls of dried excrement from the bottom of the cage, as no perches were provided. Both were eventually hacked back to the wild. In the Summer following, the male bird returned regularly to the hack board for increasing amounts of food, and soon his whole family were visiting.

Above:

These birds were originally taken illegally from the nest, but fortunately passed to Staffordshire's L.R.K. Mick Cunningham before too much damage was done. After careful rearing, all three fully grown birds were trained (using falconry techniques) to hunt prey for themselves and were released back to the wild.

Owls and Sparrowhawks are the most common. Every conceivable injury has been encountered including shooting and poisoning, but again the most common is probably from road accidents. Many young birds are also received from well intended, but inexperienced people, who unfortunately do not realise the problems of imprinting.

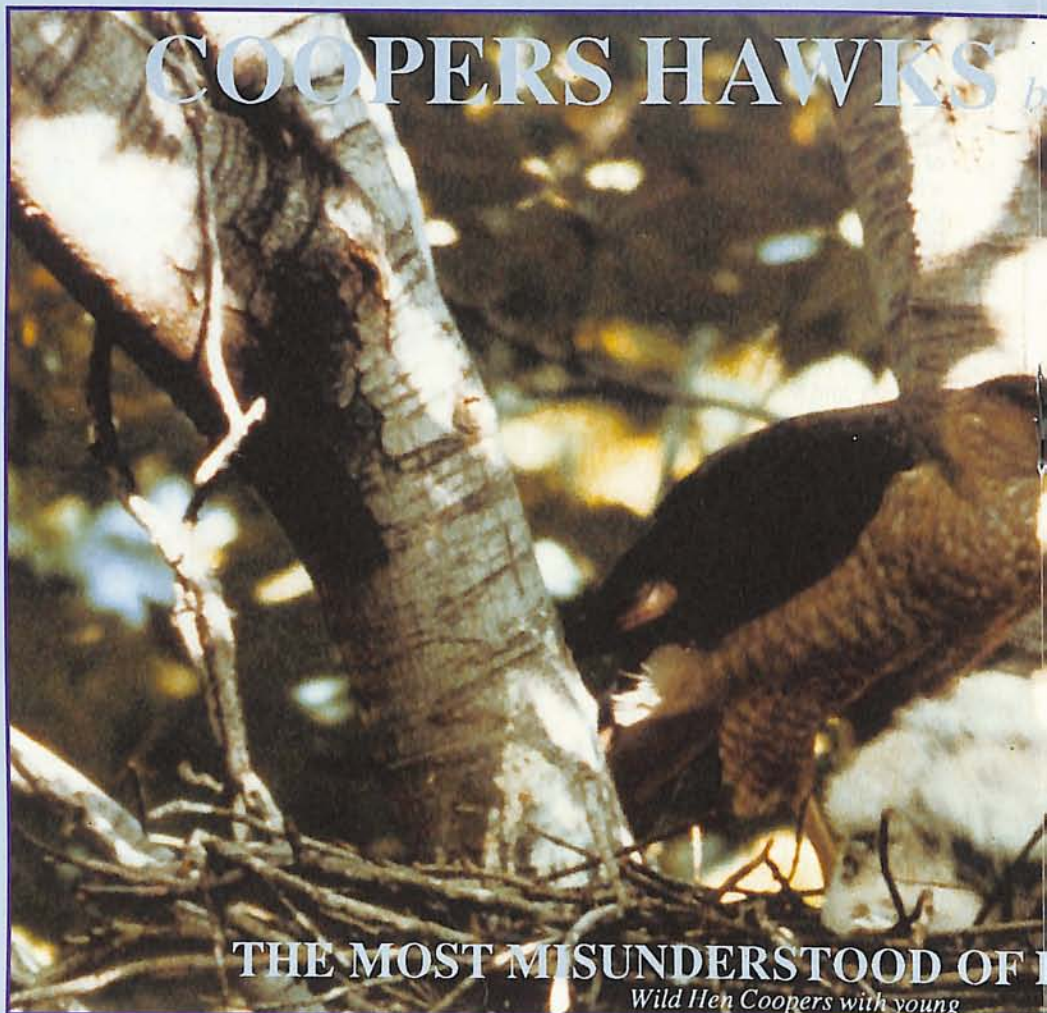
Some L.R.K.'s are increasingly using homeopathic medicines in the treatment of birds. For example, Yorkshire L.R.K. Barry Wilcock reports tremendous results with the use of Arnica on species such as Sparrowhawks and Merlins. Arnica slows the metabolic rate, acting as a tranquilliser and dramatically reduces the risk of fits.

Although raptor rescue has now grown too large to have regular meetings that all members can attend, we have an active committee that meets six times a year at an A.G.M., usually held in October.

Our newsletter continues to be sent four times annually and tries to keep the whole membership in touch with developments. With the growing political and media interest in conservation, our aim is to double our membership over the next two years. Family membership is only £5.00 per year and all new applications receive a small starter pack of raptor rescue items, together with a recent newsletter.

I would like to close by offering our thanks to all the many generous people who have assisted raptor rescue over the years and ask that their help continues. Membership details, and any other information about raptor rescue can be obtained by contacting The Secretary, Miss A. Rossin, 3 Highwood Road, Hoddeson, Herts EN11 9AJ or M. Robins, 20 The Larches, Ware, Herts SG12 0XJ.

Coopers Hawks as falconry birds are hard to describe. They are either very good or very bad. Many successful American goshawkers have given up on coopers hawks halfway through training and forever called coopers "crazies" or worse. However, several novice redtailers have done splendid jobs training and hunting coopers hawks. What are the differences? I don't know, maybe the individual dispositions of the hawks. Because of my hunting achievements with six different coopers hawks and because the best raptor I've ever flown in twenty six years of falconry was a coopers my judgement is prejudiced in favour of these valiant accipters. However, there are vast differences in passage coopers hawks and imprinted eyasses; and to confuse the issue more, eastern coopers hawks appear to be vastly different beasts when compared to western coopers hawks. Of course, between these sub species, the size variance is striking. Many eastern female coopers hawks' flying weights are between 500 grams and 595 grams; even the smaller eastern females fly around 450 grams. Whereas, the largest western female coopers fly between 390 and 425 grams. These size variations dertermine the type of game these raptors can take. These sub species of coopers developed in separate terrains and consequently each evolved with distinct prey items.



My expertise has been with eastern coopers taken as downies. They have been hunted in the Eastern United States in suburban areas on small farms. Coopers have natural advantages hunting in woods through thickets like the flash of an arrow. However, these flights are hard to track and most times not sporting, so open area flying increases the challenge and the pursuits are beautiful. Coopers hawks seem to instinctively know how to catch quarry unaware. When flown from trees coopers show a surprising bag of tricks to get in range of their targets. If they manage to get close to their victims, escape is almost impossible. In a short burst of speed, coopers hawks probably can out fly any raptor in America. They can catch quail and pheasants in close slips off the fist which goshawks cannot. Moreover, coopers hawks can consistently catch pigeons baited into feed spots which goshawks cannot. However, in a fifty or hundred meter flight goshawks will outfly coopers. Coopers hawks are like dash runners. They are only capable of top speed for bursts of 30 or 40 meters. Nevertheless, coopers also are capable of instant acceleration from 0 to full speed in the blink of an eye.

The areas I hunt in Maryland limit my coopers to pigeons, starlings, rabbits, bob white quail, English Sparrows, chipmunks and piney squirrels. A veteran hen coopers also will tackle, sometimes to her own peril, mallard ducks, green herons, and ring neck pheasants. If a cooper grapples with one of these monsters the falconer must be quick to make in and subdue the prey. Several coopers have been dragged into the water and drowned by ducks. Pheasants, especially cockbirds, put up a tremendous struggle on the ground. As a seasoned coopers binds to an airborne pheasant the falconer usually can observe his hawk adjusting her grip from the pheasants back or belly to the pheasants head or neck as the pair fall to the ground. Coopers Hawks are best suited for quail and pigeons. These prey items will give the best performance and provide the most challenge without risk of injury. Chipmunks and English sparrows are too

y Floyd Presley

RAPTORS

easy. Piney squirrels are too dangerous because of their biting abilities and rabbit wrestling eventually leads to feather damage.

Another problem American falconers encounter when free flying coopers is accidental captures of protected species like blue jays, robins, meadow larks, green herons, etc. Now, if you are hunting a hand raised eyas, this is not always an unsurmountable problem, providing the hawk is fed often on fresh killed white rats. Then if your coopers catches a no-no, a quickly produced white rat on the glove will cause the coopers to release the victim and jump to the glove. a quarter grown white rat can also be used as a lure; since the hawk eats it all, she never feels robbed. One of these two techniques usually permitted me to free unwanted catches.

The best game hawk I've ever hunted was my first eyas coopers hawk. She was taken as a downie and imprinted. Due to her spirit and courage she was named Apache. She rode calmly in my automobile unhooded; moreover, she allowed me to cover her with my hunting coat without objection on damp days in the field. It was not uncommon for Apache to follow me for an hour in search of game without ever being called to the fist. Apache was obedient and responsive. On command she would come to the glove instantly. Apache also carried

very well in the field; in fact, she seemed to become tamer and smarter each year. In the six years we hunted together Apache ran up an unbelievable score, even by today's standards. Her victories were only limited by the amount of time we could spend hunting. Apache's speciality was feral pigeons. We baited them into open concrete drainage ditches that could be approached unobserved. Then, five or ten metre slips with height advantages were available. In time, Apache could be released a hundred metres away and she would hug the ground in a stealth flight straight to the ditch, completely surprising the feeding pigeons. As Apache improved we stalked pigeons in bridges and old barns resulting in many victories but never with as high of a percentage of kills as in our baited areas.

The most prized prey we sought was quail, but due to their spotty population, competition with shotgunners, and the lack of a good pointing dog, Apache only had limited success. Quail were only found about every fourth hunt. A typical hunt lasted three to four hours. The first hour Apache would ride the glove to the most prime quail spots. During these sorties she was restrained from flying at other game like rabbits or larks. If we lucked into a close quail slip Apache would either catch it or put the quail screaming into cover. Re-flushing a cooper scared quail is almost impossible, but if a reflush occurred the quail was always caught. More typically

quail wouldn't be found in the first hour, so Apache was free flown. One day she caught three rabbits and a black bird and we never found quail. Sometimes Apache would be pursuing something and be out of range when quail broke cover, or be following too far back out of an effective closing range. However, most good slips went into the hawking bag.

In her first season, Apache caught twenty six bunnies by accident while hunting quail. This was more rabbits than my veteran redtail caught by design with the help of beagles. However, Apache payed the price for rabbit grappling with broken tail feathers and I became very good at imping.

On occasions Apache's pursuits caused quarry to stun themselves while trying to escape by flying into obstructions. This happened very often with pigeons. When Apache closed the gap on flying prey she seemed to turn on the afterburners and smothered the prey move for move. It seemed the victims didn't have time to breathe, much less select an escape route. On her stealth approach many times the target was struck within a foot of its original perch.

In summary coopers hawks can be very difficult to train, but the falconer who is lucky or patient enough to understand the ways of this tenacious speedster will be awed by the courage and aerial abilities witnessed in hunting forays. Coopers hawks, aggressive on game, can be very gentle and tame to their falconers.



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GOOD DOGS MAKE GOOD HAWKS

by Guy Wallace

Successful falconry in the field is very much the case of the proverbial three-legged stool. It requires three sound legs to function. One is the falconer, another is the hawk and the other is the dog. Without one of any of the three the venture is doomed to failure right from the start. Ask any of the experienced falconers who have been catching a lot of quarry for donkey's years how they have done it and they will all tell you, to a man, that the dog (or dogs) are responsible for their success.

There is an old and well tried maxim that "good dogs make good hawks". In order that the hawk or falcon may fly quarry that quarry must first be found and produced. All the kicking bushes and bashing bramble patches with a big stick in the world will not produce a fraction of the game that is lurking there. Some years ago I spoke to two friends who had shot over the same farm every Saturday of the shooting season for years without a dog. On most occasions the bag was a pigeon or a couple of rabbits and thus they carried on until one day they invited a friend with a spaniel. On that occasion the bag was 5 pheasants, 6 rabbits, a hare and a woodcock. They each went out and bought a spaniel!

The more a hawk kills, the more it kills. It becomes fitter, a better footer, gains more confidence and develops a more aggressive attitude towards its quarry - and it cannot do this without being provided with a regular supply of game. Indeed if most hawks or falcons are not entered early on they become desperately fist or lure bound and then they become extremely difficult to enter. Our breeds of gundog with their nose, their gamesense and, above all, their trainability have been bred for centuries to do just that.

Just as before acquiring a hawk or falcon the falconer ascertains what type of country he has available and what quarry it holds and then gets a bird to suit it. So with choosing the right dog. If your hawking ground consists of woods, hedges and cover of one sort



Partridge Hawking. Dave Simpson & Alastair McKissock with "Penny"

or another the austringer will require a working cocker or English Springer Spaniel or one of the Hunter Pointer Retrievers (HPR) from the continent such as a German Shorthaired Pointer, Vizsla or Brittany Spaniel. A gos is sharp enough and quick enough off the mark to be flown over a spaniel but a redtail or Harris Hawk which needs to build up a head of steam, is better being flown over one of the pointing breeds. Should the falconer be fortunate enough to have vast acreages of heather, stubble or winter corn over which to fly his longwings, then a pointer or English setter with its effortless, far ranging gallop and its exquisite finely tuned nose will do the job with inimitable style. (Their white colouring makes them easier to see than the russet Irish setter or the black and tan Gordon setter). Should you fly both longwings and shortwings then an HPR will do both jobs for you. It is a question of horses for courses.

It is a well known fact that nine out of ten falconer's attitude towards his trusty hawking companion is "Away goes the hawk - blow the blinking dog". That is fine, as long as the dog has been trained in the first place. One of the greatest advantages of a hawk moulting is that it gives the falconer the summer in which to train his dog! It takes twenty days to train a hawk and twenty weeks to train a dog. All that is required is 15-20 minutes a day, one textbook applicable to the breed and a bit of commonsense. There is no more mystique to training a dog than there is to training a hawk. A trained dog is a joy to hawk over and will greatly increase your hawk's successes. An untrained one is a menace and is likely to have its owner, and every other falconer, banned from the farm or estate by the landowner and can only serve to get falconry a bad name.

I paid £8 for my first goshawk and £16 for a spaniel pup to fly her over. I considered it money well spent and without the dog could never have killed 100 head of quarry per season. I have never been able to understand how a so-called falconer will spend £1500 for a hawk and will not cough up £150 for a pup. I can only think that actually flying hawks, regularly, at game must be very far down his list of hawking priorities!

Hawking over a trained dog is like having a freezer. You will wonder how you ever managed without one. Not only will you have a lot more successful flights but the dog will add a completely new dimension to your hawking.



Teaching a Vizsla to point live Pheasants at the Warren

Photographs: David Tomlinson

Letters

All letters should be addressed to:-
THE EDITOR, THE FALCONERS MAGAZINE,
C.T.C., 2ND FLOOR, TAILBY'S BUILDING,
CNR. BATH RD/DIGBY ST, KETTERING,
NORTHANTS., NN16 8NL.

IN MEMORY OF MAX

Our introduction to falconry stems from a day trip to The World of Wings in Hornsea in 1987. We have always had an interest in birds of prey, hence the day out.

Our interest grew enough for Andy and I to go on a falconry course run by Ken and Shaun Smith. The first bird we trained was a female kestrel and we learned a lot from her and had tremendous fun flying her. She has since bred successfully at Hornsea.

Andy and I became friendly with Ken and Shaun and, through this friendship, our interest in falconry grew, and thanks to them, Andy and I have probably trained a wider variety of birds than any novice falconers in such a short time. One of the birds we were lucky enough to train and fly was Max, an imprinted male Harris Hawk.

We took him up when he was hard penned and after a short time he was flying, weighing 11b 6oz to the fist. Max was so tame that if we got tired walking with him on the fist we could carry him on our shoulder without the fear of a stray peck.

Then, again thanks to Ken and Shaun, we were introduced to "true falconry" flying the birds as nature intended, hunting.

As an animal lover I wasn't that enthusiastic about hunting, but we took Max's weight down to 11b 4oz and trained him to the rabbit lure,

which he took to quite easily, and off we went on our first hunting trip.

The location was North Yorkshire, miles of open flying space, rolling hills filled with rabbit warrens, and hopefully rabbits, with only dry stone walls to impede flight. It was a beautiful clear and crisp winters day, the sun was shining, the wind minimal and Max was going for the rabbits!

I must admit that I did, and still do, feel a certain amount of sympathy for the quarry, but there is nothing like watching your bird try its' hardest in pursuit of its' intended prey, (and giving superb flights in the process), and the feeling of elation and achievement as they catch their quarry, only to feel the great disappointment when they are kicked off and the rabbit dives to safety in the nearest hole.

Max was successful on his third slip. The rabbit bolted from a hole approximately fifteen yards away from where we were stood and ran of down hill with Max in hot pursuit. A female Harris was slipped at the same time but Max had the speed to his advantage and the female gave up and raked away. The rabbit was skipping from side to side but Max was too quick and grabbed it with both feet around its' neck and, by the sheer force of his momentum, lifted and carried it between one and two metres. With a whoop of delight and being totally over the



top I ran down the hill to retrieve our pride and joy. Luckily Andy had the video camera running and caught every second of it on film.

Alas that was to be Max's one and only kill, he died a week later when we were out flying him near our home. While following on, he landed on an electricity pylon and electrocuted himself. We now have him perched on a log on our fireplace, but still watch the video to supplement the memories of such a brilliant bird.

We now own a female Harris called Lena and, although parent reared and hence not as tame, she shows all the signs of being equally as good. To date (12/90) Lena 1 Rabbits 20.

JAYNE BREWER.

GOLDEN EAGLES - A REPLY TO MR. GATES LETTER (Winter '90 issue)

by Diana Durman-Walters, Co-ordinator Golden Eagles, Hawk Board

In 1986 I received a series of letters from individual falconers whom had repeatedly applied for Golden Eagles from the wild for the purposes of falconry. Their refusals were due to the fact that no further licenses were to be granted to take an indigenous eagle from the UK. This decree would be reviewed once the Hawk Board, the D.o.E & NCC were aware of whether eagles were breeding in captivity.

To this end the Hawk Board initiated a Golden Eagle seminar in February 1989. Speakers all with special interests in this species were invited to talk, looking at falconry, aviculture and field study programmes in the wild. This initiative in discovering what could be possible if keepers via; stimulating ideas and contacts were able to utilise this for their own breeding trials. This concept was termed a National Project.

This seminar offered many eagle keepers the right to listen to others, air their views and to arrange the pairings of single birds wherever possible. Indeed this had never been done before and was

evident that the Hawk Board took very seriously the need to alert Golden Eagle keepers to maintain a watchful eye on their branch of falconry. From this seminar half of the keepers later responded to a questionnaire which asked them (amongst other questions) how their breeding programmes had progressed. Three young were born in 1989

In 1990 No young Golden Eagles were produced.

Alan Gates 'In Reply to The Hawk Board' presented a rambling monologue of contradiction upon his discontent with the eagle situation as he saw it. We would he imagine, be overrun by eagle progeny so much that undesirables would seize the chance of obtaining one. These people don't live in the 'right place' and furthermore would be instrumental in leading the eagle to be classified as a Dangerous Wild Animal and all the legislation that would follow. Secondly; that during the period of licenses from the wild it provided at its best 5 licenses in one year. These were 5 fortunate people of which Mr Gates represents one of them. As

he quoted the figure of 55 eagles in captivity it doesn't need a mathematician to realise that these did not come from the wild in this country. The majority were brought from captive breeding colonies overseas. Their keepers had to look elsewhere for their falconry eagle because this country had not produced any available young! It was a common misconception amongst eagle owners who had taken them under licence from the wild that they were a small dedicated group which had no aspiring enthusiasts, or certainly not in any number. Taking a look at today's figures shows this to be an error.

The Hawk Board initiative (Golden Eagle Seminar) has allowed eagle keepers to see what is currently happening in like minded breeding schemes throughout the UK as their recently received fact sheet on breeding results illustrates. In addition it has the facility to put cooperative owners in touch with each other, should they so wish. Again Mr Gates has taken full advantage of this system. These Aquilas of intrinsically low

reproductive rates stand to benefit from the input of propagation techniques, utilising the current eagles in captivity plus a small number of wild bred indigenous young. It is important that projects are capable of sustaining their breeding momentum. In order to facilitate this it would be necessary to obtain wild taken young which would be admitted to bonafide projects within the UK, ie Falconry Clubs or similarly recognised groups. These young to have been foster reared so that their psychological disposition is organised to filial responses per. se and not malapropos to man.

The advent of captive breeding has produced an era to falconry that has never been equalled. One of the few pieces missing from the breeding 'jigsaw' is that of the Golden Eagle. It has developed momentum, but it requires input far more than any other raptor project. The Hawk Board is there to encourage these breeders to use this as a platform for mapping the future and furthermore; making it work.

PRECAUTIONS AGAINST THEFT

1) Do not advertise what type of birds and numbers you have to people you do not know. If speaking with friends, be careful who else might be listening.

2) Breeders of raptors who sell their birds often have to advertise them in magazines and the like. Initial contact is generally by telephone and the would be buyer asks all sorts of questions in respect of the bird and also your name and address. I do not wish to make your sale difficult or even lose you a customer, but if possible don't give your details too hastily. Ask the buyer some details first, like his name and address and most definitely his telephone number, so you can call him back. The buyer, however, for the same reasons may not wish to give his details but I can see no reason for refusing name and telephone number. If you can, find out if he is already a raptor keeper. (Some thieves don't know one bird from another, only that they are valuable). If he is, then the chances are that he is known to someone that you know. If there is any doubt and you are suspicious, then don't allow this person to your house. Find a friend who does not keep raptors and meet the person first. If the buyer does not ask to see the parent birds then you may be able to sell the bird from a premises other than your own. As a last resort, please obtain the registration number, make, model and colour of the vehicle they arrive in. I do not wish to sound like I've gone "over the top" on this, but thefts have occurred this way and will probably continue to do so.

3) Identifying your bird

Should your bird(s) be stolen, then found, you may be required to prove beyond any doubt that it is your bird. This may be easier said than done. There are only two ways that I would recommend:-

(a) Microchip Implant

This method appears to be foolproof and there can be no question about whose bird it is. Although the most expensive, it is without doubt the most reliable. As far as I'm aware, no raptor with an implant has yet been stolen. It may be coincidence but ...

(b) Tattoos

Far cheaper but not reliable. Skin on birds is

not easy to tattoo and is likely to fade. Also, tattoos can be changed.

The only other way is when some type of injury has occurred, ie, a missing talon, eye injury etc. Following the Wildlife and Countryside Act, birds in captivity were required to be ringed and to a certain degree became identifiable by means of a ring. Although all rings are easily removed, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that someone somewhere has a stolen bird in their back garden with the original ring still on the bird, and of course, is not even aware that the bird is a stolen one.

I will therefore list some of the birds that have been stolen:

Harris Hawks:

1) Male: Close Rung

RX080471

UK75963 Cable Tie

2) Male: Close Rung

IJSW80W

3) Female: Close Rung

2JSW80W

4) Male: Close Rung

RX080421

UK75939 Cable Tie

5) Female: Close Rung

5596W

6) Male: Close Rung

6753W

Goshawks: Cable Tie

1) Female: UK62065

2) Male: Cable Tie

UK76150

3) Male: Close Rung

0866W

Peregrines: Close Rung

1) Female: 3094W

2) Female: Cable Tie

UK70940

(Imprint, Prolific egg layer)

Lanners: Close Rung

1) Male: 0111V

2) Female: Cable Tie

UK01754

Lanner x Lugger x Saker:

1) Female: Close Rung

1844W

2) Male: Close Rung

3293W

Goshawks - stolen since November 1990:

1) Male: Close Rung

01570 (7 years)

2) Female: No Ring (18 months)

(Has a scar/callous at top of left leg caused by ring that has now been removed)

Numerous other birds have been stolen but cannot be listed in full, mainly due to the fact that they were not ringed and are not identifiable in any other way. However, the list does include all types of birds already mentioned plus Merlins, Buzzards, Black Sparrowhawks and also Owls: Snowies, Macgellans, African Spotted, Chinese Spotted etc.

If any raptor keeper has one of the birds mentioned on the list, I would ask that person to contact me. If the bird has been acquired in good faith then no offence has been committed. I am not looking to take the bird away but I would, of course, have to notify the person who owned it when it was stolen. My main interest is to trace the person who stole it.

Also, if anyone has information in respect of bird thefts, no matter how little, I would like to talk to them. It would be treated as confidential between that person and myself, and if you wish you do not have to give your name.

Remember, at the end of the day only you, as raptor keepers, can stop your birds from being stolen by catching the person(s) responsible and letting me know who they are.

Also, if any person has had a bird stolen and has not yet spoken to me then please ring or write to me:

PC 2386 Beecroft

Twyford Police Station

Station Road

Twyford

Berkshire

Tel: 0734 352255 ext 6257.

LAUGH OR CRY

I, being a Falconer and Ferreting man, and proud of it, fell prey to a so-called "GREEN" person recently who had nothing better to do than to bug me with one of his views.

"I'd like to see all bloody, blood-sports banned!" (I don't think he meant the pun).

I promptly began to humour him - something we all get bored with - only to find him going into conversation about his cat, calming down a bit, perhaps.

"She (the cat) caught a bird the other day. I could have kicked her up the backside".

I could not believe my ears - WHAT A HYPOCRITE!!

I had just received a ticking off for being involved in field sports - controlled field sports with selected legitimate quarry and here was a "GREENY" who put his cat out every day to kill, indiscriminately, a huge range of wildlife.

I wonder how many other so-called "GREEN" people allow their pet cats to go off hunting every day, unsupervised. Still, one good thing has come from this conversation - The next time somebody wants to pick on you for being involved in field sports, just before they get started, remember one line

HAVE YOU GOT A CAT?!!

Good hawking ladies and gents.
Steve Muchmore, Maldon, Essex.

THE COMPLETE OWL

Dear David and Lyn

I am compiling information for a book called THE COMPLETE OWL.

Due to be published in 1992, by Chatto and Window. I would be pleased to hear from anyone with a rare owl with a view to taking photographs for inclusion in the book.

For more information write to Michael Leach, Natural History Communications, Brookside, Kinnerley, Oswestry, Shropshire SY10 8DB, or telephone Knockin (069185) 639.

BARN OWL SYMPOSIUM

by Sue Dewer

At the end of 1989, the Hawk and Owl Trust organised the first National Barn Owl Conservation Network Symposium, entitled "The Future of Barn Owl Conservation in Britain". The proceedings are shortly to be published in full, but below is a 'taster' of the papers.

The Symposium, hosted by Bristol Zoo, consisted of eight excellent papers, the first of which was presented by **Colin Shawyer, Director of Research & Conservation for the Hawk and Owl Trust** and author of *The Barn Owl in the British Isles: Its Past, Present and Future*. Colin's paper covered the habitat requirements of Barn Owls focusing on their main prey item, the Short tailed Vole. A single Barn Owl consumed an average of six prey items every 24 hours amounting to an annual intake of around 2,000 small mammals. However, a breeding pair of owls with dependent young required about 2,000 prey items during the fledgling period alone. In order to support a breeding community of Barn Owls the habitat needed to be rich in rank, tussocky grassland, preferably in low lying areas where there was limited snow cover. Intensive farming or heavy grazing made an area unsuitable; however, linear grassland habitats alongside rivers, streams, ditches and hedgerows provided an abundance of prey items.

Colin advocated the creation of rough grassland field margins at least six metres wide which would not only provide the necessary foraging habitat but would also help to re-establish dispersal networks between isolated pockets of Barn Owls. Perennial grasses made excellent habitat, and once a margin had been established it need only be cut back or lightly grazed each autumn to prevent growth of unwanted weeds. The Government's Set Aside Scheme promoted the creation of grassland strips by making compensation payments to farmers.

Paul Johnson, the Hawk and Owl Trust's Conservation Officer, spoke on his work for the Trust which involved educating the public and landowners on the conservation of the Barn Owl and its habitats, co-ordinating the Barn Owl Conservation Network and conducting research monitoring of Barn Owl population and habitats in a study area based in North Norfolk. Nest boxes had been erected, and in areas where suitable habitat was available 'owl windows' in barns had been unblocked or created, providing traditional nest sites. Some Barn Owls had drowned in cattle water troughs, and as a result, field trials were taking place using plastic matting which floats in the trough allowing the cattle to drink and giving owls the necessary means of escape from drowning. A booklet had been produced by the Trust entitled "The Barn Owl - the Farmer's Friend needs a Helping Hand" detailing conservation methods.

During the first year since opening, the Trust's National Centre for Owl Conservation at Blickling Hall in Norfolk had attracted over 80,000 visitors, and educational talks to many different groups had promoted the work of the Hawk and Owl Trust.

Perhaps the most lively paper of the day was presented by **Tony Warburton who founded 'BOBARS' (British Owl Breed and Release Scheme)**. In the light of adverse publicity for Barn Owl release schemes which had reached a peak shortly before the Symposium, Tony replied to the 'Doubling Thomases' in no uncertain terms. However, he stressed that all those people involved in the captive breeding and release of Barn Owls must not only monitor their results but make them available for publication.

Whilst BOBARS used only one release method, Tony recognised that different methods worked better in different parts of the country. In reply to critics who suggested that 90% of released birds did not survive, Tony's studies showed that only 12.5% of released birds were found dead, whilst 27.3% bred at the release site the following year.

Tony felt that the figure of between 4,000 and 5,000 breeding pairs of Barn Owls remaining in Britain in 1985, (quoted in Colin Shawyer's book: see above), was probably now nearer 3,000 breeding pairs and still declining. His view was that the main hope for the Barn Owl's future was the restoration of suitable hunting habitat, coupled with provision of nest boxes and followed by captive breeding and release by responsible people.

Graham Lenton gave the meeting a fascinating insight into the success of the Barn Owl in Peninsular Malaysia, where the demise of rubber plantations had resulted in an increase in oil palm plantations. Rats the (almost) exclusive diet of the Malaysian Barn Owl, accounted for the loss of revenue from the oil palm harvest, but by providing nest boxes at high densities in plantations the damage was reduced dramatically.

The afternoon session opened with a paper on Barn Owls in Lincolnshire, given by **Bob Sheppard**. A survey in the area revealed that around 350 pairs of Barn Owls were present - about 10% of the total population of England and Wales! The area was covered with a network of waterways: drains, river systems etc., providing thousands of kilometres of banks along which the Barn Owls could hunt, with natural corridors linking populations and providing prey-rich habitat away from the danger of major roads. Nest sites, however, were in short supply, and Bob had instigated a nestbox scheme with 118 Barn Owl boxes in place at the time of the Symposium. He stressed that for anyone contemplating a nestbox scheme, it should be viewed as a long term project. In addition to indoor boxes, Bob had erected pole nest boxes along banks. These were placed in pairs as many boxes were used by Kestrels which were prevalent in the area. At the end of 1989 breeding season it was reported that of eight pairs of pole boxes, four were used by nesting Barn Owls, and three each by Kestrels, Stock Doves and Jackdaws.

Doug Woods dispelled any previous thoughts that small mammals are uninteresting with his paper on the orders Rodentia and Insectivora. Far from being unimportant, these animals play a vital role in the food chain, by breaking down

vegetable and animal matter, controlling insects, distributing seeds, and by providing a source of food for predators. Doug gave us a brief but thought provoking view of the different species of British small mammals.

The subject of veterinary problems with Barn Owls was ably covered by **Dick Best**, who briefly discussed the care and treatment of injured birds before moving on to captive owls. He had found that Barn Owls in captivity were very hardy, and seldom encountered serious veterinary problems in adult captive birds. The majority of problems were associated with captive breeding. In younger birds the main problems appeared to be with parasites. Lice were present on all owls, but could become life-threatening on birds which were severely stressed or in poor condition. Worms presented another problem, in particular capillaria, which could be successfully treated with a worming preparation such as Sheep Panacur. Rickets in young owls were as a result of misfeeding, although more common in Tawny Owls and Little Owls than in Barn Owls. It was important to ensure that the birds were getting enough calcium. Another problem was that of respiratory infections in young owls, in particular those caused by the fungus aspergillosis, and Dick stressed that birds should never be allowed to come into contact with hay or straw which was a classic source of the fungal spores.

Dick commented on the difficulty of sexing Barn Owls by sight, and quoted from his own experiences during which he had noticed that as birds aged the characteristic brown ruff on the females tended to fade.

The final paper was presented by **Chris Sperring**, who recounted his experiences during the winters of 1985 and 1986, when he provided supplementary food for wild barn owls whilst weather conditions were particularly hard. By providing day old chicks for a pair of wild owls at a traditional site in the north of Somerset, Chris helped the owls survive during a period prior to which pellet returns showed that they had found virtually no food. The owls took the supplementary food until weather conditions were improving when there was once again evidence in their pellets that they were finding wild food for themselves. The following summer the same pair went on to fledge five youngsters.

The Symposium ended with a unanimous request by the delegates for a follow up within the next two years. **Jane Fenton, Chairman of the Hawk & Owl Trust**, thanked all members of the Barn Owl Conservation Network for their efforts and stressed the importance of working together towards a common goal.

Since the publication of "The Barn Owl in the British Isles", the Hawk & Owl Trust has been compiling data on Barn Owl captive breeding and release. I am currently analysing the results of approximately 600 releases, but in order to get an accurate picture covering the whole country, it would be very useful to hear from anyone who has kept records of their release methods and success rate. If you would be willing to supply information for inclusion in my analysis, the results of which will be published, please contact me on Reading (0734) 696501.

VISIT TO BURG GUTTENBURG - CASTLE IN THE AIR



Photographs: John Davies

Vultures in flight

Just a few lines to share with you the pleasureable visit to Germany which John Abbott and I had at Claus Fentzloff's castle in Germany and his wonderful flying display with eagles and vultures.

The eagles were flown from this castle perched high on a near vertical hill, reached only by a twisting road, and included golden eagle, African fish eagle, American bald eagle and a hybrid golden, imperial eagle which was still in training.

Imagine sitting on terraced seats over a thousand feet up and watching these eagles fly out and back to the handlers. It was magnificent, but even this was nothing compared to the spectacle when they let loose five huge griffin vultures at the same time. You saw them glide out on the thermals until they looked small in the distance, and then return on these fantastic big wings to receive a chick and how once landed most of them were picked up bodily by the falconer and literally thrown over

the edge and left to soar away and back for a repeat performance.

We were next taken to see the sea eagle chicks which were 3 and 4 weeks old, each in their nest and then to see a sea eagle about 7 days old. Claus Fentzloff being a known expert with eagles and the breeding of them takes the top off some eggs and covers with cling film and studies the chick as it grows in the egg!

We then travelled back to the Belgian border to stop with a German falconer who is a top sergeant in the German Army. He has a Raptor Rescue Station on the army base and all sponsored by the Government. It was all beautifully set up in a wooded area where he had gos's, buzzards, kestrels, tawny owls and a big eagle owl sitting on four gos's eggs. The most astonishing thing was a huge ant nest a yard in diameter and about a foot high and the purpose of this nest was that the ants cleaned the mites out of the birds feathers through the acid exuded which did not affect the birds themselves.



One of the Display Vultures



Claus Fentzloff with sea eagle chicks

The area in which our friend Buddy lives has the highest population of goshawk anywhere in Germany (it is thought that it is because it also has the biggest population of racing pigeons).

The other pleasant surprise as we travelled through Germany was, not only did we see lots of buzzards and a few kestrels, but quite a few red kites soaring over the motorways. The only disappointment was being unable to stop to take photographs. Thats all folks but maybe another letter next year as we have been invited to a weeks hawk meet in December and January with Goss' laid on for our use. Fantastic.

by John T Davies

reprinted from the Raptors Breeders Association Magazine with the kind permission of the author.

CATCHING ON TO THE

During the middle ages, falconry was known as the sport of kings, and it was during the thirteenth century that one of the greatest works of ornithology of all time was written: the book "De arte venandi cum avibus", or "On the art of Hunting with Birds". This treatise was the product of years of research, practical experiment and careful thought on the part of its compiler, who was no less than Frederick II of Hohenstaufen (1194 - 1250), King of Sicily, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Jerusalem. Frederick possessed a great passion for hunting and a deep interest in birds of prey: he, like today's falconers, sought to train falcons to reach their maximum natural ability, and so to gain the fullest satisfaction from the sport.

The Emperor had more than fifty royal falconers, and obtained his birds of prey from Malta, the Arctic and the Middle East: in fact it was whilst on Crusade in the Holy Land that he learned from Palestinian Arabs the art of seeling the eyes of falcons to keep them calm. Such was Frederick's enthusiasm for the sport that apparently when the great Khan of the Mongols wrote one of his tiresome letters telling the Emperor to submit to his might or forfeit the crown, Frederick remarked that he might gladly resign his throne if he could become the Khan's falconer!

The "De arte venandi cum avibus" was based on notes and drafts which Frederick had apparently been accumulating for over thirty years, and was a considerable intellectual and scientific achievement for his time. Most of it was the result of the Emperor's own observation, or what he had learned from his staff of falconers, although he took care to consult existing works. One of the problems with contemporary writings on the subject however, was the fact that much of the information was based on mythical and erroneous assumptions about birds in general and about falcons and their prey in particular, and Frederick was determined to dispel such misguided beliefs through experimentation.

There were, for example, stories that barnacle geese were hatched not from eggs but from barnacles in the sea, or even from trees: so Frederick had pieces of wood bearing barnacles brought to him for examination, and sensibly came to the conclusion that although there were similarities in shape between barnacles and the geese, there was no biological connection. Another uncertainty seemed to have arisen regarding the sense by which vultures detected their prey: was it by sight or by smell? Here again Frederick experimented: he seeled the eyes of his captive vultures, and proved that they operate by sight.

If Frederick II's observations and advice to falconers were basically sound, the same cannot necessarily be said of tips offered by all medieval writers. The "Boke of St Albans" for example, advocates the addition of stewed adders to the bird's diet during the critical period of the moult in order to speed the process. "Take ii or iii of them and smyte of ther hedes and thendys of theyr taylis" advises the author, presumably for the benefit of readers who possessed both considerable bravery and a strong constitution, "then take a new erthen pot that was never used" (this part was absolutely vital of course) "and cut them into small gobbettys, and put those same therin, and let hem sethe stronglich a grete while at good layser". Delicious, no doubt; nutritious - and so easy to prepare! Alternatively, it seem, one could be really clever and stew the adders, soak wheat in the gravy, feed chickens on the wheat, and then feed the hawk on the chickens: a complicated option which surely provided extra entertainment value for the falconer, if nothing else!



Photograph by: Tony Haynes

Roy with his male Harris Hawk

Having initially come across such anecdotes as a result of my keen interest in medieval history, but by this time intrigued, not to say somewhat touched by the apparently selfless dedication of such falconers of days of yore, I decided to find out a little more about this sport of kings which prompted such devotion. One of the many falconers who today share all of the enthusiasm, if only some of the convictions, of their medieval predecessors is fifteen year old Roy Lupton, who lives, like me, near Maidstone in the heart of the Kentish countryside. Roy who has been involved with falconry for the last six years, and keeps and trains a variety of birds of prey ranging from Common Buzzards to Kestrels, from Barn Owls to a Bengalese Eagle Owl, and from a European Eagle Owl to a Harris Hawk. When I asked him to describe to me the aspects of the sport which he found most fascinating, he kindly invited me on a hawking expedition to experience this essential and exciting element of falconry for myself.

It was the Harris Hawk, called Smurf, which was taken out hunting when I visited. The thrill of the chase is something with which all falconers must be familiar, but for me of course it was a new experience. As for Smurf, for all his aloofness, easy self confidence and air of undoubted superiority, he could not hide his eagerness to demonstrate his skill: indeed, his enthusiasm for the flight was clearly at least a match for mine. Neither of us was to be disappointed. Having voiced his anticipation in ear-piercing screeches all the way to the field, once released, Smurf gave a

SPORT OF KINGS by Tracey Dessoy

magnificent display of what must surely be everything that makes the training worthwhile: rising and swooping, soaring across the setting sun with almost Icarian self-abandonment - and of course diving precisely and accurately for the kill whenever his sharp eyes detected the movement of an unfortunate bob-tailed bunny rabbit.

In all, Smurf caught no less than five rabbits during just one hour in the field. Personally, I was relieved to discover that all had thus been spared a more lingering death from myxomatosis, with which they were all clearly diseased. But for Smurf the important thing was the chase; and while my heart went out to the rabbits, no doubt he would have considered a healthy target more of a challenge, had such an animal been foolish enough to emerge from its cover. Roy pointed out to me that what I was witnessing was the learned behaviour of a bird of prey which in its natural state would have consumed its booty and flown, but which was now disciplined enough to be separated from its victims and to return to its keeper, knowing that it would be rewarded. In short, Smurf was, of course, a fully trained bird; and I was beginning to appreciate the rewards, from the trainer's point of view, of all the time, dedication, patience and understanding which a good falconer must bestow on his or her bird in order to reach that stage: quantities which, I realised, might, after all, prove to have been expended in vain, since once the bird is unleashed there is nothing but the bond it has developed with the trainer to prevent its flying away for good.



Photograph by: Tony Haynes

Bengalese Eagle Owl

The risk of losing a bird was, needless to say, as much a concern for falconers in the middle ages as it is today; and perhaps the medieval Spanish expert on falconry, Pero Lopez de Ayala, can be forgiven for his decidedly sexist piece of advice: "Your eyes should be constantly on your hawk, as a woman's on her mirror!" Medieval falconers did apparently take certain precautions to avoid losing the birds on which they had lavished such great expense and long hours of devotion. One book, for example, recommends a quick prayer before hunting: "In the morowe tyde when ye goo owt and hawkyng sey In nomine Domini volatilia celi erunt sub pedibus tuis" ("In the name of the Lord the birds of the heaven shall be beneath thy feet") Should this fail to work, and the unhappy falconer, having seen his bird disappear into a tree, "cryeth and whystleyth tyll that he be right evil athurste", but all in vain, then he might try climbing the tree after dark, shining a lantern on the hawk to confuse her, and attempting to "take hir by the leggyis". If all else failed, he could always make a short pilgrimage and offer a wax model of the bird to the Virgin: apparently some falconers claimed to have had their errant hawks miraculously restored to them in such circumstances!

Today, there are of course, somewhat more reliable methods of avoiding the loss of a bird. Roy explained to me the crucial necessity of ensuring that the bird retains its optimum weight for flying: that if a bird is not keen, there is effectively no incentive for it to return to the falconer, because basically the provision of food is the secret behind the bird-owner bond. However, if this principle lies at the heart of prevention, it seems to me quite likely that the frustrated falconer will at some stage be reduced to climbing that tree at night in pursuit of his hawk and attempting to "take hir by the leggyis"!

Falconry, I concluded, although a great pleasure for the observer, is definitely a sport for the dedicated.



Photograph by: Tony Haynes

Kestrel

PEREGRINE FALCON

by Mike Everett

THE ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF BIRDS



Most falconers will need no introduction to the Peregrine. To many, it is the ultimate bird - but there are others who disagree. I have no intention of getting involved in that particular argument! As a wild bird, it certainly represents an evolutionary peak - a fast, robustly built bird-catcher which its devotees regard as the finest raptor of all. On the wing, a Peregrine has few equals; it famous "stoop" after flying prey is the subject of interminable debate about the speeds achieved.

Without doubt, the Peregrine is a remarkably successful species. Its virtually worldwide distribution is one measure of this and is matched by no other bird of prey: only the Osprey and the Barn Owl are in the same league. The enormous popularity of the Peregrine, among falconers and ornithologists alike, has made it one of the most closely-studied and best known of all raptors and this, in turn, has led to the very special position it enjoys in the history of bird conservation.

It was a survey of our Peregrine population which led directly to a realisation of the dangers of organochlorine pesticides. During the Second World War, there was an official programme of Peregrine shooting and nest destruction, aimed at reducing predation on message-carrying homing pigeons, concentrated mainly in southern England. By 1955, the English Peregrine population had climbed back to around three-quarters of its pre-war numbers; elsewhere, decreases had been smaller and numbers were probably back to normal. Soon, though, there were indications of a decline; meanwhile, pigeon-fanciers were reporting a growing population which was seriously interfering with their sport. Following a request from the Home Office, the (then) Nature Conservancy instituted an enquiry, which was carried out by the British Trust for Ornithology in 1961-62. The results were staggering.

By 1962, only half the pre war population remained. Further surveys showed a fall to 44% in 1963 and what was even more alarming was the fact that only 16% of breeding pairs were rearing young. There was a lot of argument at the time as to what had caused this massive decline and the huge drop in productivity, but it is now clear that organochlorine residues, accumulated from contaminated prey, were to blame. As much as anything, the plight of the Peregrine served to draw attention to the dangerous side effects of these largely untested substances and to a potential environmental disaster of enormous proportions.

We were by no means alone in all this. Elsewhere in Europe, similar decreases (and virtual disappearances) were discovered, while in the eastern USA the "Duck Hawk" almost literally became extinct. The subsequent story is long and involved, and varies in detail from country to country, but has the common themes of bans or reductions in use of the pesticides concerned, of intensified protection of remaining pairs and of "returning and increasing Peregrine numbers. Work in the USA involving captive breeding and release enabled ornithologists there to re-create a wild Peregrine population, a remarkable story in itself and also one with valuable spin offs for falconers - who had been involved from the very beginning in the then unknown science of breeding Peregrines in captivity.

For a time, the position here was both difficult and confused. Conservation bodies and the public opinion they were able to mobilise led to a series of withdrawals, bans and restrictions and,

gradually, the organochlorine crisis passed. Meanwhile, protection of the remaining Peregrines was stepped up, often involving enormous amounts of volunteer effort. Many responsible falconers played their part to the full, even though it meant accepting that, for the time being, the licensed taking of young for falconry was out of the question; that ban was to continue for many years. It has to be said, though, that there were others who took a very different line. Nest robbing was commonplace and, while egg collectors were certainly involved too, all the evidence points to outlaw falconers being the main culprits; as the finalisation of the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act loomed larger and larger, and registration and all that it involved was about to become a reality, nest losses were actually around 70 - 80 per year! A number of successful and much publicised prosecutions revealed the size of this particular problem - and, not surprisingly, embarrassed and angered responsible falconers.

From time to time, various people pushed for captive breeding and release schemes to restore our Peregrine population, citing the exciting American programme as their justification. Conservation bodies such as the Nature Conservancy Council and the RSPB, however, held out strongly against this approach, believing that, depleted and embattled though it was, our population was quite capable of making its own comeback: all that was needed was effective protection, an end to nest robbing on a grand scale and all round observance of the law. Our numbers, in fact, never approached the low levels (around zero in some cases!) recorded in some other countries. In the event, the "natural" approach proved to be the correct one. Our Peregrine population has recovered to such an extent that, at

somewhere around 1000 breeding pairs, it is perhaps larger than ever before; old sites have been recolonised and entirely new ones have appeared. Nesting has even resumed on parts of the south coast of England. After a long gap, a number of licences to take wild young are issued every year. Even so, all is not well RSPB statistics, covering proved incidents, show that the Peregrine is one of the two most heavily persecuted birds of prey in Britain (Buzzard is the other). In 1989 alone, we knew of 16 birds shot, 3 trapped and 4 poisoned, while in the same year eggs were taken in 28 instances and young in 31. A particularly disturbing feature of last year was the arrest and conviction, in two separate cases, of Germans attempting to smuggle the contents of Peregrine nests out of the country. Peregrines will undoubtedly loom large in the big campaign against raptor persecution which the RSPB will launch in the spring - a campaign which deserves the support of all falconers.

It would have been nice to write about Peregrines in the wild, but it seemed more important to say something about their recent history instead - and to point out that they still face a lot of problems caused by law breakers. The literature on wild Peregrines is enormous, but if you want to know more about this very special bird you could do no better than to read the best account there is - *The Peregrine* by Derek Ratcliffe, published by T and A D Poyser.

In 1989 we knew of
16 birds shot,
3 trapped and 4
poisoned, while in the
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and young in 31

Opposite page: *Peregrine Falcon feeding young*
Photograph: C.H. Gomersall



Raptor

WHOOOPS!

In the November issue's Raptork feature we misquoted Robin Haigh saying that "Domestically produced birds are much smaller than their wild taken counterparts" It should have read "Domestically produced birds are much steadier than their wild taken counterparts".

We would like to apologise for this mistake and we hope that we have not offended anybody.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A GOOD VET

Dear Sir,

About two years ago I was given a beautiful male Kestrel, he was about 10 years old and fit and healthy. After I had had him for a couple of months I noticed his foot was swollen. I took him on the Friday morning to a local vet, who professed to have an extensive knowledge of Birds of Prey. I was met by a vet who obviously did not know what she was doing, when the bird managed to escape and flew around the consulting room, she practically hid under the table and almost begged me to catch him up as quickly as possible. She gave Jim an antibiotic injection in between "taking telephone calls", personally I think she was consulting a book, she asked me to bring the bird back on Monday. She also added that she thought he had bumblefoot.

That weekend we went to a Falconry Centre and I bought a copy of *Veterinary Aspects of Captive Birds of Prey* by J.E.Cooper. I have always fancied myself as a bit of a doctor/vet so I decided to check up on the vets diagnosis. By the time I had finished reading the chapter on feet I was convinced that Jim did not have bumblefoot as we had been told.

On Monday I went to the vets armed with my book, all ready to explain to the vet why I did not think Jim had bumblefoot. I was met by a brick wall, she didn't want to listen. "It is bumblefoot" she declared. Bring the bird back on Friday and we will put him out and cut open and clean his foot. I went home very worried and extremely frustrated. She was the expert but I was convinced that she was wrong.

She was the expert
but I was convinced
that she was wrong ...

When I arrived home I rang a lady from the next village who had kept birds of prey for years and I asked her if she knew of a good vet, she said she did and gave me the name of another vet about 30 miles away. I immediately made an appointment and off we went to see him. He took one look at Jim's foot and declared him to have gout, "Gout?" I echoed, he asked me if Jims diet was mainly chicks, I said as far as I knew he had been mainly fed on chicks all of his life, he went on to explain that as Jim got older his kidneys were less able to cope with the large amount of protein in his day old chicks and because of this urates were building up around his ankle joint. He said that the bird wasn't in any pain and the swelling would come and go.

About two weeks later I received a bill from the first vet, I wrote a letter expressing my dissatisfaction with their service and my disappointment that we could not work together to solve Jims problem. I enclosed a cheque, which was returned to me, along with a letter, which contained no apology but rather dismissed the matter as of no importance. As far as I am concerned it was of great importance that they were going to put Jim through the trauma of a totally unnecessary operation, which could have, especially at his age, killed him.

So if you have a Bird of Prey or are thinking of getting one make sure you have a vet who knows what he is doing. It could be the difference between life and death for your bird.

Wendy Smith, Northants

PREPARING FOR THE WORST

Most people wait until their cat or dog etc is ill before they find a vet but, because a Bird of Prey needs specialist care, it is a good idea to find yourself a vet before he is needed. Do not be afraid to shop around. Find one who will, if necessary, get in touch with a raptor specialist such as Neil Forbes, J. E. Cooper or Mike Williams, for help and advice and also one who is willing to listen to what you have to say and also willing to work alongside you

if needs be.

Ask if there is somewhere where you can sit down that is out of the way so you are away from strange dogs and maybe even ask for access through a side door. If the bird bates, one snap from a dog is all that is needed to see your bird off for good.

Although many of you may prefer to go direct to the experts in this field, if your bird is found in a critical condition it may not be

able to make a long journey and your local vet can get in touch with them by telephone and probably save your birds life.

By letting your local vet know you may be visiting him in the future with one of your birds, he will be more likely to know what to do as he will have had time to read up on the subject, unless of course he is already well up on Birds of Prey.

As veterinary practices which specialize in birds of prey seem a little thin on the ground, we feel it would be a good idea for falconers to help each other by writing about any ailments their birds may have had. We would like you to tell us how you came to notice something was wrong, symptoms, how the illness was diagnosed and, if possible, by whom and of course, the treatment and ultimate outcome.

We would also like to hear about how you have overcome non-medical problems.

We would like to start a problem and answer page as well and want to hear from both people with problems and people who feel qualified to advise them.

Please write to C T C Publications, 2nd Floor, Tailby's Building, Cnr Bath Road/Digby Street, Kettering, Northants, NN16 8NL.

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WELSH HAWKING CLUB INTERNATIONAL MEET

During the summer, the Heart of England Raptor Club were delighted to receive an invitation from the Welsh Hawking Club to attend their International Field Meeting at Pwhelli in November. H.E.R.C. organise their own field meetings throughout the year, but I was very keen to go on a meeting run on a much larger scale, and so we accepted the invitation gratefully.

Unfortunately, we weren't able to go for the full week, but having farmed out the children and arranged for a fellow falconer to move in and look after our menagerie, Richard and I left Reading at 3am on the Friday morning. The weather throughout the journey was appalling; as we reached Ffestiniog the cloud was so low we couldn't see the road in front of us and I had visions of spending the day in our hotel. But as we reached the Lleyn Peninsula the cloud lifted and we arrived at Pwhelli just in time to choose which party we would go with.

We decided to join the longwing, as I fly a Lanneret, and under the guidance of Brian Patterson, we set off for the hunting ground: "one we haven't tried before". When we parked at the bottom of a mountain I assumed we would cross the road and work the valley below us, but Brian set off at a goodly pace up the side of the mountain, assuring us that it was flat on top! I had thought that I was pretty fit, but an hour later Brian still hadn't slowed down, whilst I thought my lungs were about to burst. We must have clambered up and down the mountain from every possible angle before our intrepid guide decided that it was devoid of game, and after the third cloudburst we headed back for the cars. I managed the journey down considerably faster than the journey up; having eaten breakfast at 2.30am my stomach wasn't sure if it was lunch or dinner time, and the idea of a pub lunch seemed like heaven. But it was not to be: for the sake of those who had not even had the opportunity to unhood their birds, Brian decided we would return to more productive hunting grounds. The afternoon was more successful, and we managed to flush

some partridge and had some exciting slips, with one kill. Then back to Pwhelli to pick up our own car and discuss the other party's successes over a welcome cup of coffee. At this point (5.30pm) Richard insisted we find a chip shop, as "my stomach thinks my throat's been cut". The evening saw an excellent Buffet Dinner at which those Landowners were wined and dined; the company and food was superb, but the combination of an open fire in the bar and the fact that we had been on the go for 22 hours proved too much for us, and we crept round the corner to our hotel.

The total head count was 129.

**77 rabbits, 2 hares,
20 pheasants,
1 partridge, 6 ducks,
3 waterhens, 1 stoat,
2 magpies, 9 various**

On Saturday morning, completely refreshed and clutching a packed lunch (we weren't going to get caught out twice!), we set off again for Pwhelli. The weather was glorious: a cloudless sky with a very slight wind, and quite warm. As I was suffering severely from withdrawal symptoms having not flown my own bird for two days, we joined the longwings again, but with the added bonus of the company of a superb Golden Eagle. We spent the morning flushing partridge and had one or two good slips with the Peregrines, then the longwings were put back in the cars and it was off to another mountain to watch the Golden Eagle perform. This time all we had to do was sit and watch, and what an incredible sight it was. The sun came out, and as the Eagle worked to gain some

height a wild Peregrine began to mob him. If that was not enough, seconds later a wild merlin began to mob the Peregrine. Oh, for a zoom lens!

The wind was against the Eagle, and he was not to catch anything, although he had taken a hare earlier in the week.

The weather stayed fine during the afternoon and we went off to a pond with three falcons and a tiercel, not forgetting 'Face', a superb GWP who held one point for over 7 minutes! Time was running out and the light was beginning to fade, but with determination from the beaters and dogs we flushed three ducks, one after the other, and had three kills from the falcons. The tiercel battled gamely after the fourth flush, but was unable to take it: what he lacked in size he made up for in guts!

We returned to Pwhelli just in time for the final speeches around the beautifully arranged display of game.

For the record the total head count was 129: 77 rabbits, 2 hare, 20 pheasants, 1 partridge, 6 ducks, 3 water hens, 1 stoat, 9 various, and 2 magpies, the latter taken by Andy Garlick's beautiful cast of Peregrines.

We were told that numbers at the meeting were growing rapidly, with 200 people this year against 70 last year. There had been falconers attending from Mexico, America, Holland, Sweden, Belgium and Southern Ireland, and there were more longwings flown than ever before. Both the landowners and gamekeepers had enjoyed hosting the meeting, and the WHC was thanked for supporting the local holiday industry.

There was just time to have a quick browse over Ben Long's equipment and Paul Morgan's excellent selection of books, then it was time to head for home. My one regret was that we didn't get to go out with any of the shortwings; we'll just have to go for the whole week next year!

Many thanks indeed to the Welsh Hawking Club for inviting us, and in particular to Brian and Elaine Paterson, and to Roger and June James for making us so welcome.

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