

The *Falconers*

& RAPTOR CONSERVATION MAGAZINE

Summer '91

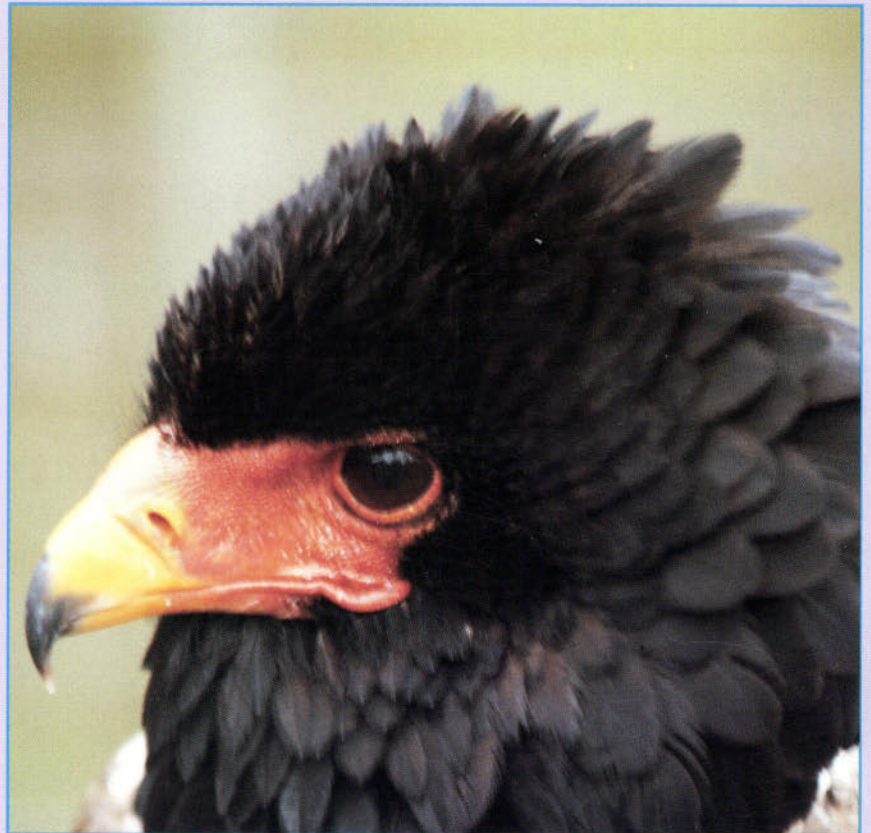
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Renowned Wildlife Artist Philip Snow
- **SULTANA THE SAKER AND SHAKESPEARE**
- **DUCK HAWKING IN THE U.S.A.**
- **ARTIFICIAL NESTS**
Hawk and Owl Trust
- **SPECIAL**
The Falconers Fair at Stoneleigh



- **THE KESTREL**



Bataleur Eagle



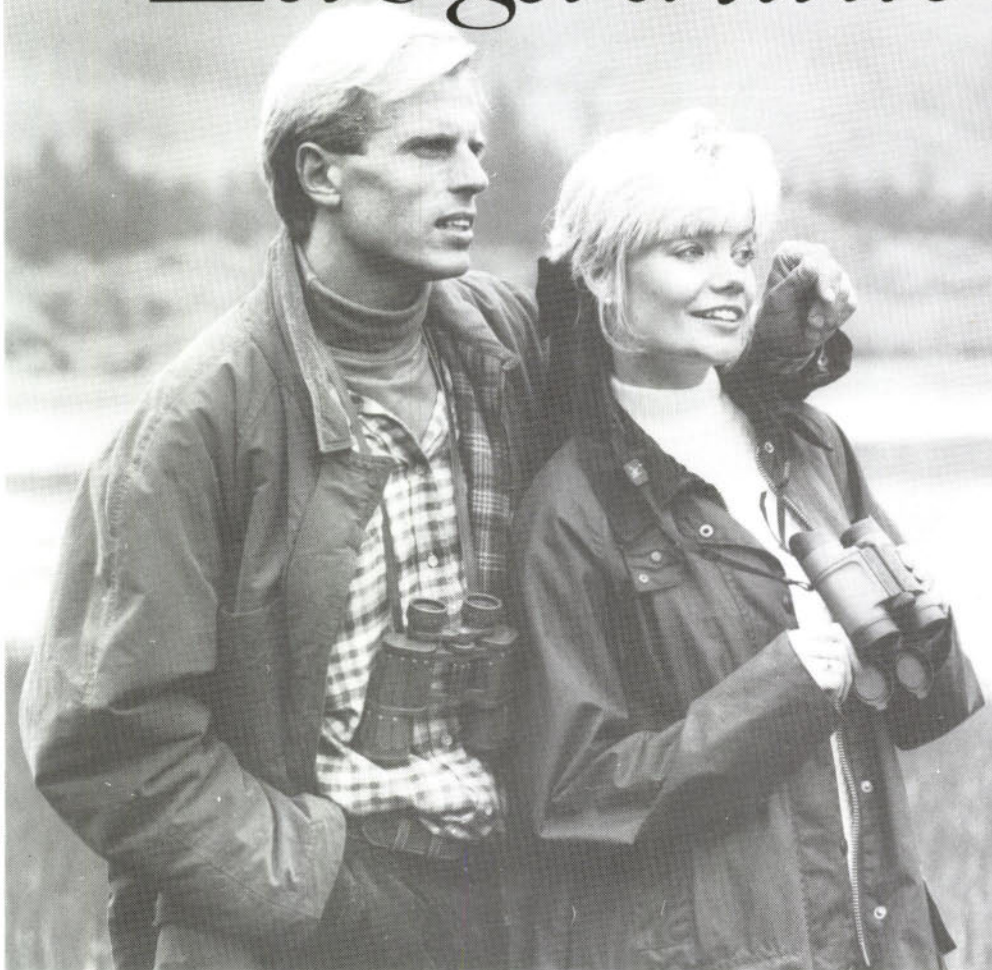
Male Kestrel



Female Saker Falcon

**COMPETITION
FREE
ENTRY**

"And then he said: 'Let's get a little closer.'"



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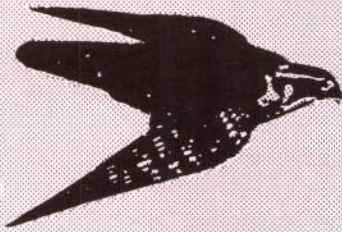
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The Falconers

& RAPTOR CONSERVATION MAGAZINE

Hello to all our regular readers and welcome to our new ones.

We are now on issue 8 (did any of us ever think we would get this far?) and looking towards the future with ever increasing enthusiasm.

The Falconers Fair at Stoneleigh was a resounding success, and I am sure we are all looking forward to next year. As Falconry seems to be a very individual sport, it was great to see so many of you all in one place.

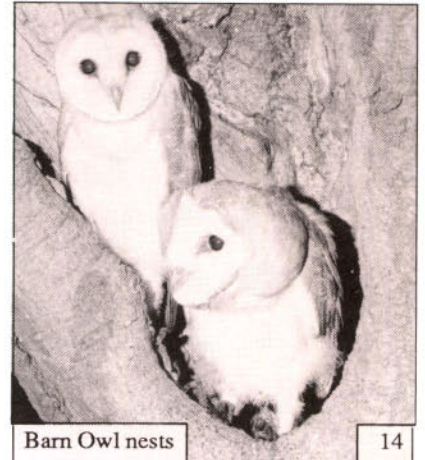
We believe that Falconry needs something like this to represent it as the general public, especially, still do not understand it fully and there are a lot of strange ideas still floating around which we need to dispel and also a lot of beginners who need to be taught Falconry the right way, alongside an experienced Falconer and not on their own, by trial and error as there is very little margin for error with a Bird of Prey, so it is up to us to bring Falconry into the 90's and help it to grow in the right way. Anyway, back to the magazine, I must take this opportunity to tell you that the magazine is now fully run by David and myself, so please note address and telephone number changes throughout.

And last, but definitely not least, a note to Owl Keepers, WE DO WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!!! Out there are a lot of very knowledgeable and dedicated Owl people and we want you to write to us. Well that's it for this time, nice talking to you all, be back again in November.

David Wilson

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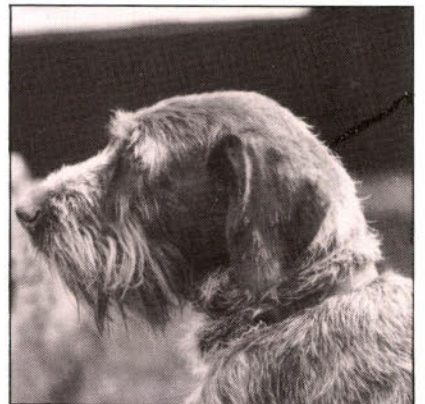
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News



Raptor Research Foundation's annual meeting will be held November 6-10 at the Westin Hotel, Tulsa, Oklahoma. Oral papers, poster papers and films on any aspect of diurnal or nocturnal raptor biology are invited. For an abstract form contact Scientific Program Chairperson, M. Alan Jenkins, G.M. Sutton Avian Research Center, P.O. Box 2007, Bartlesville, OK 74003 (0918) 336 2473 (BIRD), for other information contact the Local Committee Chairperson, Ms. Keven Colbert at the same address. Deadline for abstracts is August 15, 1991.

A day at the Warren



Sunday 1st April saw another one of Guy Wallace's very popular Gundogs for Falconry days. The day started with an introduction to the breeds available to a Falconer and advice as to which would be the most suitable for each individual Falconer taking into consideration the ground you have to hunt over and which type of bird you will be hunting with.

Guys main objective is to head you in the right direction and, if mistakes have already occurred then advice to correct them. Whether you are experienced or have never had a dog before or are considering getting one then a day at Guys in the beautiful Brecon hills should set you off on the right road.

FIRST EVER SMALL FALCONERS CONFERENCE

The Hawk & Owl Trust is organising the first ever conference on the "Biology and Conservation of Small Falcons" at the University of Kent, Canterbury from 6th to 8th September 1991.

The conference promises to be well worth attending with over 40 speakers, including many from overseas. Carl Jones and Willard Heck will be describing the Mauritius Kestrel project, under which this species, once considered the world's rarest bird of prey, has been dragged back from the edge of extinction.

Other contributors to the conference, which brings together both professional and amateur ornithologists and other biologists from all over the world, include British vet John Cooper, who is world famous for his work on the health of free-living wild animals, especially birds of prey and reptiles, David Parkin, whose Nottingham-based research group is applying DNA fingerprinting techniques to wildlife, and Jemima Parry-Jones who will discuss the techniques involved in breeding African Pygmy Falcons in captivity.

Topics will include breeding ecology, health and disease, hunting and foraging behaviour, captive breeding and associated research, taxonomy and evolution of small falcons.

In addition, there will be a book shop, art and poster displays, workshops and films, with Jim Flegg attending as guest of honour and speaking at the Conference dinner.

Full details of the conference and a booking form can be obtained from Fiona Swingland, Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE), University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NY.

Review

BREEDING BIRDS OF PREY

Breeding Birds of Prey, by Jemima Parry-Jones, is a very well thought out and well presented video.

It starts at the beginning, explaining what sort of aviaries they have found most successful and taking you through the various stages of pulling eggs, incubation, hatching, brooding, candling, feeding the young and returning them to their parents.

At no time are you 'told' to do anything, everything is left up to the individual, Jemima just tells you what methods she finds work the best for her.

Again, as in the Owls video, her sense of humour is evident, making for easy watching. There is a lot of information and on a second viewing you will notice a lot of points that you missed the first time around.

For anyone considering breeding Birds of Prey, or having problems this video is well worth watching.

Available from William Clarke Productions, Millers House, Roman Way, Market Harborough, Leics. LE16 7PQ. Price £19.99 + £2.00 p+p.

NEW RELEASE



TELL US WHO AND WHERE YOU ARE

We would like to hear from falconry clubs, centres and places where birds of prey are kept in Great Britain and abroad so we can compile a list for inclusion in the magazine. Phone: 0536 722794.

Warwickshire & West Midland Game Fair

An event that will be of interest to all country minded folk is The Warwickshire and West Midland Game Fair, which takes place in the stately surrounds of Ragley Hall, Nr. Alcester, Warwickshire on Saturday 17th and Sunday 18th August. This will be presented by the same team that organised the recent British Falconry and Raptor Fair at Stoneleigh in May.

The Fair will present all the country sports and pastimes with a particular accent on Falconry. Apart from the presence of some of the top furniture makers, and Chris Christoforou, Alan Hunt and Judi Kent-Pyrah, there will also be four half hour Main Arena demonstrations by the well known falconer, Bryan Paterson.

Ten huntsmen from France in full livery will play a selection of traditional sporting fanfares, which will add music, colour and a pageantry to the occasion.

A spectacle well worth watching is Ken Jones' gundog training demonstration, with six Springers, which seem to be electronically controlled. A breath of the Frozen North is brought by the presence of Lesley Monk and her racing Husky team. Lesley and husband Roy are veterans of the 1100 mile Iditarod Race for sled and husky teams which takes place in Alaska every March.

A spectacular Main Arena event is British Champion Hywel Morgan and his long distance casting, while Austin Bennett gives a delightful portrayal of how to train a young sheep dog.

New additions for this year will be a hound show and also a new terrier championship, both of which take place on the Sunday at 12 noon.

Clay shooting, archery and fishing along with over 100 Trade Stands, all go to make a charming and interesting day out for all.

Ragley Hall is on the A435, eight miles North of Evesham and two miles south of Alcester.

Clubs



East London Falconer's Club

At present we are a small club and have been running for four years. Most of our members are flying and hunting their birds, redtails and harris hawks being the predominant species. We also welcome people who are 'beginners' and want to learn, even if they do not have a bird of their own. We are hoping to increase our membership and want both experienced and inexperienced people - with a view to the experienced ones helping the others. During the summer months we attend shows and give talks to local institutions and in the past we have arranged coach trips various places of interest for the benefit of our members and their families. We meet twice a month on Wednesdays at 8pm at Bretons Club, The Manor House, 411 Rainham Road, Rainham, Essex.

Anyone interested in joining should either write to East London Falconer's Club, c/o Bretons Club, The Manor House, 411 Rainham Road, Rainham, Essex or telephone 0708 756015 or 081 517 9362. We also welcome enquiries from anyone who would like us to attend their events.

London Hawking Club

Dear Sir

I am enclosing this information about the London Hawking Club which has been formed for 5 years now, at this time we have 15 dedicated members which keep our meetings very friendly and all new members are encouraged to partake in all club activities. We have a wealth of experience in breeding and flying birds. Between the club members we have quite a range of Hawks, Falcons and Owls.

We have one meeting every month on the third Tuesday from 8 - 10pm in the cabin at Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, Southern Grove.

The meetings are a friendly affair and members are encouraged to gain experience in Falconry and have a say in the aim of the club.

We do have our own hunting land and arrange shows and outings to different Falconry Centres around the country.

Yours faithfully

T. Peasy, Secretary

Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park, Southern Grove, Bow, London E34 PX.

Telephone: Rusty on 081 980 2372 or Paul on 071 515 7754



The Duke of Gloucester made a recent visit to the Butterfly Park, Long Sutton in Lincs, where he met Falconer Philip Gowdy with his collection of Birds of Prey. The Duke was greatly impressed with the birds and commented on the way the mews display had been made to blend nicely with the surroundings. He asked about the difference in the birds and their uses and the kind of quarry they could hunt when trained.

The South East Falconry Group

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the editor of the Falconers Magazine for the opportunity to promote the SEFG and for providing a much needed forum in which falconers, conservationists and raptor keepers can express their many varied views and experiences.

The SEFG was formed in 1981 and is this year celebrating its tenth anniversary. The Club has seen a steady growth over this period and now has a very healthy core membership, with a total membership in excess of one hundred. Being a relatively new Club, which has expanded in line with the growing interest in Falconry, we have a youthful and energetic outlook and this is reflected in the informal way in which the Club is managed. The officers of the Club see this as a great strength and one of the main reasons why core membership continues to steadily increase leading hopefully to the SEFG to attaining "Recognised Club" status with the Department of the Environment by the middle of 1992.

In the main our membership is drawn from practising falconers, who provide a wealth of experience and advice for those less experienced members requiring it. It is the clubs policy to remain primarily a Falconry club but ensuring that a strong emphasis is placed on conservation and captive breeding. The latter of these continues to meet with great success.

The Club holds meetings here once a month and these are very well supported. It is here that special evenings such as talks, demonstrations, and lectures are held and at most meetings falconry equipment is made by our own members and professionals is also available. We also encourage members to air their experiences and where possible ensure that members with specific interests such as Game Hawking or captive breeding meet members who, are and have, achieved success in this area.

Of course, as a Falconry club there are a number of field meetings held each year but more importantly, new members are encouraged to join in with the informal meets which take place every weekend during the season.

In conclusion, the South East Falconry Group does of course invite the readers of the Falconers Magazine to attend one of our meetings and further information is available by contacting myself on the number below.

Dean White,
Secretary
Telephone 0375 671302
or
Gary Biddiss,
Chairman
Telephone 0268 728860

WILDLIFE ARTISTS

BRITISH FALCONERS



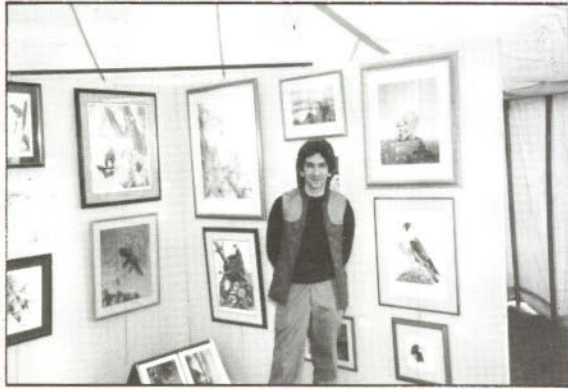
Alan Hunt with some of his paintings



Judi Kent-Pyrah with one of her paintings



Terry Large with Lanner Falcon, Organiser's Ron and Bryan Patterson with Lanner Falcon.



Chris Christoforou with some of his paintings



Sir Michael Leighton explaining the plight of the Red Kite

Now into it's second year, The British Falconers and Raptor Fair, set in the ornamental gardens at Stoneleigh Showground, Warks. Was greeted with overwhelming success from Falconers not just from Britain but around the world, with visitors from as far afield as the United States.

The weather was kind enough to stay dry and the sun managed to show itself once or twice over the two days. One of most unique things about the fair was the amount of Falconry related exhibitors, who included Sir Michael Leighton and Ian Evans, who came along to explain the plight of the Red Kite, bringing with them photographs and information accumulated over many years, during which they have dedicated themselves to its' conservation. Also we met world famous artists Alan Hunt and his wife Judy Kent-Pyrah and Chris Christoforou who came along to support the Fair and brought with them some stunning examples of their work. They told us they are very concerned with the conservation of Birds of Prey and hoped to help increase public awareness.

There were other artists, including Ken Wood and up and coming young Andrew Ellis, a name to watch out for in the future. J.T.O. Telemetry were showing their revolutionary



Andrew Ellis working on one of his superb paintings



Keith Brassington, Ken Wood with some of his paintings



Jim Cooper with Bengal Eagle Owl



Paul Morgan



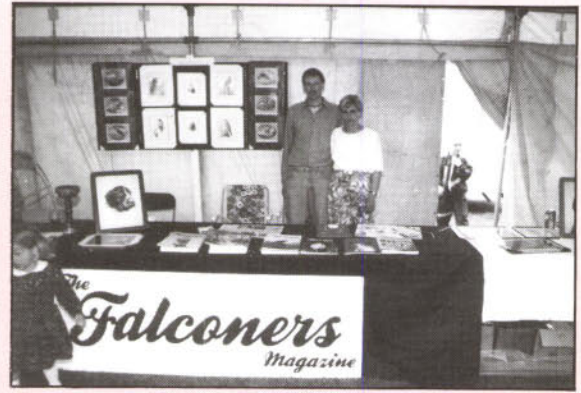
Christine and Chris Johnson



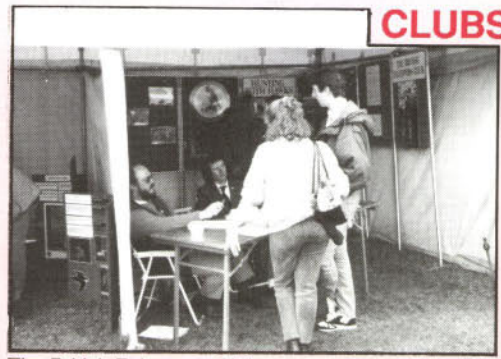
Falcon Leisure with Derek Yates minding the shop

AND RAPTOR FAIR

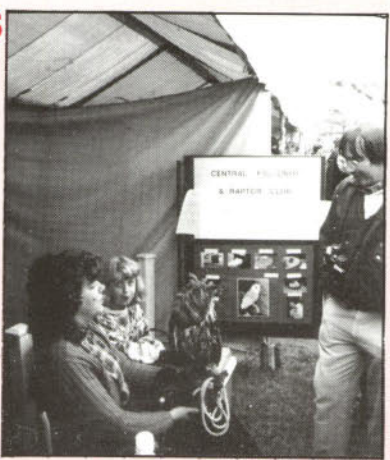
CLUBS



Morris David and Lyn Wilson - The Editors. "BRILLIANT weekend, see you all next year"



The British Falconers Club was represented by Bob Stanley and Peter Dodd



Sally Yates with European Eagle Owl



Welsh Hawking Club. Adrian Williams, Terry Large, Cindy Head, Doug Morgans, Dave and Jean Diamond are in there somewhere!

new aerial which folds down small enough to fit into your pocket, and they also explained they are working on a transmitter that will fit into your pocket as well and the nice thing about it is it is not to hard on your back pocket.

The other unusual thing about the fair were the flying displays, which started at twelve noon going through to about five thirty in the afternoon on both days. Our thanks must go out to Bryan Paterson who as always, put on a brilliant display, being helped by Terry Large from the Welsh Hawking Club, Jim Cooper from Raptor Rescue who talked about Raptor Aid and Conservation and Derek Yates from Central Falconry Club who's little male Merlin flew superbly.

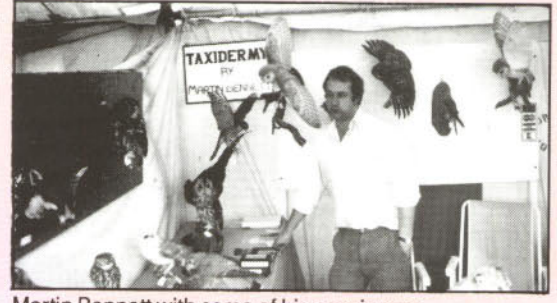
There was an introduction to the different breeds of dog used with the birds for hunting, given by Gordon Ayer.

It was a Falconers dream, with everything Falconry related from Furniture makers (of which there were ten) to Books, Clubs to Schools, Taxidermy to Bells, Artists to Conservationists and of course, The Falconers Magazine.

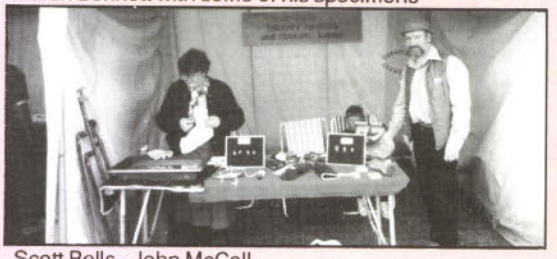
I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ron Morris and Major Peter Wainwright and Bryan Patterson for making it a memorable weekend.



Hawk and Owl Trust - Christine and Ray Boswell



Martin Bennett with some of his specimens

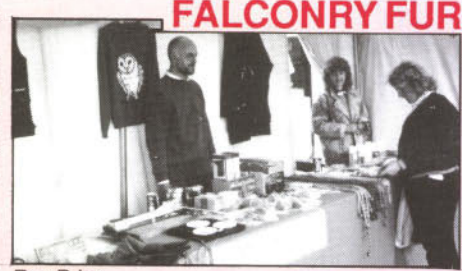


Scott Bells - John McColl

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Ben Long with helper

Tale of a Redtail

by
David Rampling

I had seen so many mountain hares when I was out gathering sheep on the hills, that they had driven the two collies to distraction. And although the Sparrowhawk is really my love, I just had to get a Redtail to give these hares a bash.

It would have to be a female redtail, I thought, to cope with the constant wind that blows on these, the Inner Hebrides.

After a few phonecalls I had some luck, someone had a 1990 female Redtail, one they were going to keep themselves but now they found themselves overbirded. The long drive from Oban to the Midlands took all day but when I got there and was shown the bird she was a beauty. Her back was chocolate brown and she was really big. We weighed her, 31b 9oz. She was put into the carpet lined tea-chest I had brought along and I set off home.

Right from the start she was very steady, very calm, almost gentle and never given to mad bouts of bating or squeezing the glove. She took all manning in her stride and after only a few days on the farm totally ignored the cattle and sheep milling around us and sat unperturbed wherever I would take her.

By dropping her weight a little, she first stepped, then hopped and later flew to my fist after very little delay. I never did use a lure for her, I didn't need to with my last Redtail but then she was a much more aggressive bird than this and here, of course, was my first mistake with her.

She was now 31b 20z and obedient to the fist, so I took her to an area I knew I would find rabbits lying about. Rabbit after rabbit got up and she hardly looked at one, let alone flew one, this, of course was my fault. At the 'centre' I don't suppose she ever had anything to eat but chick and rat and I had fed her on rabbit and chick, but rabbit neatly butchered and not at all like these grey things dashing around the field. So I offered her a dead one on her perch at feeding time and she promptly bated away,

screaming, as if frightened of it. I sat with her there and cut pieces off, bits she would recognise and with careful coaxing, by the end of the feeding session I had her pulling meat from the carcass. The next day was easier, she was afraid at first but when I cut it open she soon tucked in and by the following day she was 'footing' the rabbit like a veteran.

By now she was very fat but at least she knew what a bunny was for. I made up a rabbit-skin lure and started again, this time alternating between fist and lure. In less than a week she would start for, and bind to a rabbit skin lure that Jan, my wife, would be running with, maybe 300 yards away.

The next time the weather was perfect, I was back with her at

my rabbiting area. My pulse raced as a rabbit got up near my feet, she was off in an instant but the rabbit just made it into a patch of rushes before she had caught up. The Redtail sailed over the top and landed on a nearby rock, overlooking the area. I walked over and by walking through the rushes I sent the rabbit out of the other side, it ran straight towards the hawk, who just stepped off the rock and caught it, head on. Not very spectacular but I was more than happy. She caught a few more rabbits and soon I figured her ready for a go at the hares.

It was one of those perfect, sunny, still winters days and after she had been easily out-flown by a few grouse, she didn't even bate after them anymore. The only way for her to learn, I thought. There in the heather, about a hundred yards away, I had seen a movement and as I walked over, away shot a mountain hare, half brown, half white (they rarely go completely white on Mull) and off shot the Redtail. Although a Redtail never looks particularly fast it always amazes me how quickly they can catch up with a hare. And she almost had it when the hare dived into some rank heather, where it was well hidden. The Redtail hung there like a huge Kestrel, gained a little height, folded and crashed into the heather. The squeal told me she had made a direct hit and I rushed in to assist, although I hardly needed to, she had a very good hold on it's head and loins. I fed her up and headed for home.

After seeing Kelvin Rushmeres' superb collie working with his Redtail, I have been tempted to use one of my collies for the same purpose. She will work sheep, catch rabbits at night, with my old lurcher, using a lamp and find hares for the Redtail. I am going to teach her the alphabet next and encourage her to write a book next year!

I like nothing better, after a good day on the hill, than to sit in front of the fire with my dogs curled up on the rug and the Redtail on my fist. I just wish I could housetrain her!



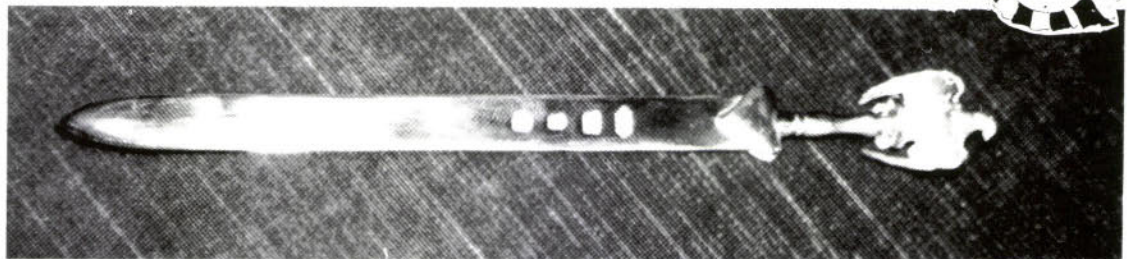
David with his female redtail

My pulse raced as a rabbit got up from under my feet, she was off in an instant but it just made it into a patch of rushes

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5TH PRIZE:-

Falconry bag donated by **Ian Vance.**

6TH PRIZE:-

Print - Goshawk on fist donated by **Andrew Hutchinson.**

Four runners up prizes of a years free subscription to the Falconers and Raptor conservation magazine.

HOW TO ENTER

All you have to do is answer all the questions correctly, put your name and address on the back of a postcard or sealed envelope and send to: David and Lyn Wilson, The Falconers and Raptor Conservation Magazine, 20 Bridle Road, Burton Latimer, Nr. Kettering, Northants., NN15 5QP. The first ten correct entries picked out of the bag after the closing date will win. Closing date is August 31st 1991. Winners will be announced in the Winter issue (November 91).

QUESTIONS

1. What bird of prey escaped from London Zoo in 1965
2. Which according to the Guinness Book of Records is the fastest stooping falcon in the world
3. What does H.P.R. mean (with respect to dogs)
4. If Hawks - Eagles - Falcons are diurnal what are Owls
5. Where are Swarovski's main headquarters (Country)

Falconry.

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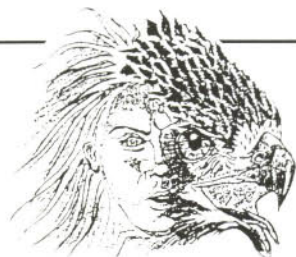
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Obituary

MAJOR EUSTACE POLES

by Derry Argue

I met Major Eustace Poles in the early 1960's and immediately made a firm friend. I was very sorry to hear of his death last year.

Eustace Poles would best be described as a charming old rogue with a twinkle in his eye that no fellow sportsman could resist. My first recollection was a firm handshake from a hand like old leather and that mischievous grin as if from some Devon pixie! He was a very keen dry fly fisherman for trout and that immediately put us on the same wave length. He was also a very experienced falconer with a wide experience of training eagles and other short wings in Africa. Eustace's repertoire of fascinating stories was endless; and they were all gleaned from real life with no need for embellishment or falsification. Eustace Poles had led a very full and adventurous life.

Born in June 1902, Eustace Poles was educated at Bedford. In 1922 he joined the British South Africa Police which then maintained order in what was known as the Rhodesias. The duties of this force included dealing with inter-tribal disputes, arresting criminals and trouble-makers, and protecting lone farms and settlements in vast areas which were virtually un-mapped. It was work which required utter self-reliance and skills of horsemanship, marksmanship, and the mastery of languages. Most of all, it required the instinct of self-preservation and an ability to almost smell trouble.

During the Second World War Eustace served in India with the 11th East African Division. He then joined P-Force, a special unit of Burmans, recruited to carry out harassing operations behind the Japanese lines to the Chindwin River. From February 1945 Eustace was appointed Commander of Ferret, one of three groups that was

parachuted into south-west Burma. It was because of his work there that Eustace was awarded the Military Cross.

Ferret's task was to round up fanatical and isolated groups of Japanese which work continued up until October 1945. After the war, Eustace Poles joined the Northern Rhodesia Game and Tsetse Control Department, later called the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Zambia, and had charge of a huge area of country including

the Luangwa Valley and Bangwaulu Swamps, all of which had to be traversed on foot. He left the Department in 1957 and took charge of the Blue Lagoon Ranch (now the Blue Lagoon National Park).

When I knew him, Eustace had imported one of the first Black Sparrowhawks from Rhodesia which he flew at pheasants near his home in North Devon. He also flew European sparrowhawks with some success. I remember him taunting me at a

field trial on the late Lord Rank's ground to get him a pheasant as the place was moving with them! Another time he needed a sparrowhawk. On neither occasion did he go home empty handed, so highly did I hold him in my estimation as a sportsman and friend. What was particularly endearing was his humility and willingness to listen to anyone with something worth saying, which was almost equal to his intolerance for fools.



The late Major Eustace Pole with black Sparrowhawk

BATALEURS AT BATSFORD

In 1989 Geoff Dalton, Owner of The Cotswold Falconry Centre at Batsford Park, acquired a pair of Bataleur Eagles from Canada.

They were about sixteen years old and to the best of his knowledge had never shown any signs of breeding. As the aim was to breed the eagles they were placed in a large aviary 30'x24'x30' with a nest ledge at about 15' off the ground. This was to cause problems as the female would spend most of her time on the ground displaying, while the male would stay on the ledge out of the way. This problem was solved by placing them in a smaller aviary 15'x24'x15', this and the arrangement of the perches suited them much better. After about six months, with a good diet of rats, day old chicks, quail and six week old chicks the eagles looked much more settled, their ceres and feet went a lovely deep red, as they should be and their plumage a glossy black. About July/August the birds were looking superb, nesting materials were introduced to encourage them to start nest building. The female started carrying sticks about almost at once, the male showed very little interest at this time. But on September 1st copulating was observed, taking place about twice a day for the first few weeks gradually building up to about 15 times a day after six weeks. To the delight of Geoff and everyone at the centre an egg was laid on the 14th October, everyone



was surprised as this was the earliest recorded egg for Bataleur eagles in this country, most eggs were laid after Christmas. It was decided to leave the egg, they only lay one, with the parents. For the first few days the male wanted to do some of the sitting but the female was reluctant to let him and so she did all the sitting herself. Strangely

there was no food parcelling seen. As the incubation period was about 53 days that would take them into December and at that time of the year the weather can turn quite nasty, if the egg was fertile then the chick would be hatching at the worst time of the year. As a safe guard the egg was removed to an incubator, it was hoped that the female would recycle but she didn't. The egg was matt white with no markings at all and the thickness of the shell made it impossible to candle. On the 23 November it was a good time to see if there was anything in there. The egg was put on a flat surface and left for a minute, as the embryo cooled and got uncomfortable it should start to move and, to Geoff's delight, it moved. A second opinion was arranged to make sure Geoff's eyes weren't playing tricks on him and sure enough the egg was seen to move by four people simultaneously, the egg was placed back into the incubator for the remaining weeks. The 3rd of December was the most rewarding to date as Geoff heard the chick chirping from inside the egg, quite a vocal chirping with a good strong voice. Then on the 55th day of incubation disaster struck, Geoff awoke to find that there had been a power cut, the generator was immediately started and the incubator was brought back up to the right temperature, in the meantime Naomi, Geoff's wife, was keeping the egg warm in bed to the best of Geoff's knowledge the electricity had been off for about 3 hours, the egg was placed back into the incubator, the next few days were agony waiting to see or hear something from the chick but unfortunately they never did. The decision was made to turn the incubator off, the egg was removed and opened up, the chick was in perfect condition and should have hatched had it not been for the power cut. Next year Geoff says he will pull the first egg in the hope that they recycle, and hopefully leave the second egg with them.



Photographs by Frank Selby

With a good diet of rats, chicks, quail and chicken's the eagle's looked much more settled, their ceres and feet went a lovely deep red and their plumage a glossy black as they should be

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Breeding Raptors The Welsh Hawking Centre Way

by Ceri Griffiths

As I write this we have just hatched our 103rd baby raptor this year, remember though that I have many more potential breeding pairs than most people. What counts is the percentage of potential breeding pairs that produce young birds. In our case this is around 40%, a low figure, but we do have some species that we know little about.

The private breeder can often attain a much higher figure because of the individual care that can be given, because of the fewer numbers. The other figures that need to be looked at in any breeding project are, percentage of fertile eggs, percentage fertile that hatch and the percentage hatched that fledge. It is at these stages that I think our returns are good. About 70% of the eggs are fertile, parent birds are allowed to lay infertile eggs for two clutches, after this, depending on circumstances, the male is changed or we decide to use artificial insemination.

About 85% of our fertile eggs hatch. Every egg that does not hatch should be opened and examined to try to find out why they failed. Eggs which looked clear on candling are often found to have died



One of the young Falcon's bred at the centre

within the first 72 hours of incubation. This is easily seen by examination of the germinal disc with a magnifying glass. This is often caused by poor food for the parent birds or poor incubation. (This is the most critical time for an egg)

Eggs which pip and then are weak, we deal with in the following way; as soon as they pip they are placed in a hatcher with the humidity as high as we can raise it. They are left alone for 48 hours, at this stage a small window, about 5mm in diameter, is made in the blunt end of the egg, the exposed membrane is then painted with distilled water at 100°F, this exposes the blood vessels on the surface of the egg. While arterial blood is flowing, to take out the chick is to condemn it to almost certain death. The window is covered with cling film and the egg is replaced in the hatcher. It is re-checked every hour until the colour change from bright red arterial blood to dark brown non-circulatory blood is seen. The chick can then be carefully removed from the egg. If the yolk sac has retracted all will be well, if not then this will need to be tied off. Our success rate with un-retracted yolk sacs is about 50%. We have successfully raised an American Kestrel chick with and un-retracted yolk sac weighing 4 grams on hatch'

Problems hatching are usually caused by-weak stock, bad feeding, poor incubation or odd shaped eggs, the cure is often in our own hands, wild birds hatch better than 90% under their own parents and this is what we should aim at.

On hatching all chicks have their navel smeared with antiseptic cream and are placed straight in the brooder baskets set at 100°F under the bulbs. They are not fed for 12 hours unless they demand it.

FEEDING

All our babies are fed on skinned, eviscerated, food processed rats, to which we add a vitamin supplement and bone flour. This is never prepared more than 12 hours in advance of use as it goes off very quickly, even when refrigerated. We have tried chicks and quail for the babies but found that although unpleasant to prepare, the rats are much better, resulting in bigger babies with no tummy troubles.



Baby eagle owl being fed rats

BROODING

Our brooder baskets are simple but work well. At one end two 150 watt bulbs are wired in series through a light dimmer switch. The basket is a plastic vegetable basket with the solid bottom cut out and replaced with a plastic mesh. This lets the chick control its' own temperature by moving up and down the basket and the mesh allows the mutes to drop through, keeping the chick very clean and making it very easy for us to clean the baskets.



Harris Hawk in 'Brooder'

RINGING

The birds need to be D.O.E.Rung at about 10 days, maybe a day or two earlier for big Goshawks or Merlins. The growth rate in baby raptors is incredible so if you are a first time breeder, be careful, 48 hours can be the difference between a very loose ring and an inability to get it on at all.

At this time you will have to decide how you want your babies raised. Full imprint, creche reared, parent reared behind wire or parent in a seclusion aviary.

In my next article I shall discuss the pros and cons of the four methods and there may be a few raised eyebrows at my conclusions.



NEST SITE LEAFLETS

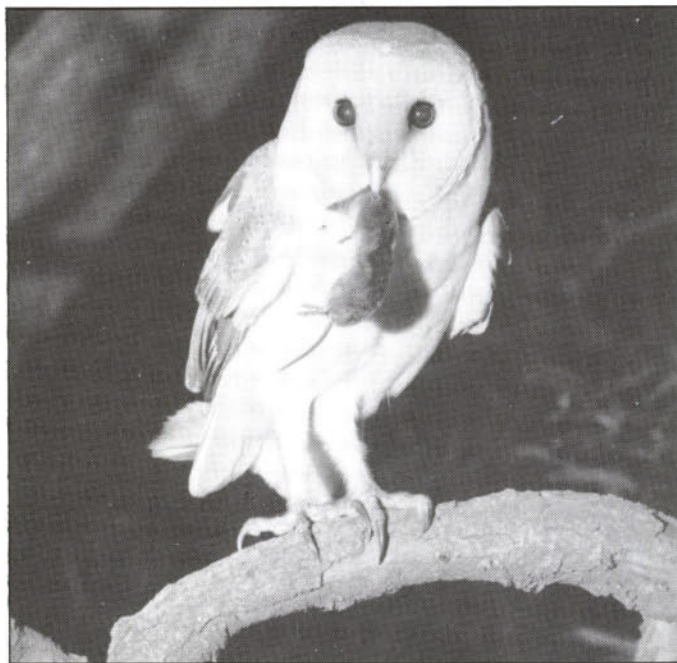
The Hawk & Owl Trust, in conjunction with the BTO, have produced a new set of six leaflets on artificial nest sites for birds of prey. Individual leaflets cover the Barn Owl, Tawny Owl, Little Owl and Kestrel, with a separate one on artificial stick nests and platforms for birds such as the Osprey, Goshawk and Hobby, and a further general leaflet on fixings, materials, techniques, habitats and general conservation measures. They have been written by Hawk & Owl Trust Vice-Chairman Dr Phillip Burton and Conservation Officer Paul Johnson, together with David Glue from the British Trust for Ornithology.

To obtain copies of the leaflets, please write to The Hawk & Owl Conservation Trust, c/o Zoological Society of London, Regent's Park, London NW1 4RY. The leaflets cost 30p each. Please enclose a large stamped addressed envelope when requesting leaflets.

THE BARN OWL

The Barn Owl or White Owl can be found on low lying farmland throughout most of the British Isles. It is however scarce in many counties. One reason for this has been the gradual disappearance of suitable nesting sites. It rarely breeds at altitudes greater than 500 feet above sea level. It is not an owl of dense woodland, preferring open land and the woodland edge, where rank tussocky grassland provides good numbers of voles, shrews and mice, the Barn Owl's favoured prey. This owl does not hoot, but utters a long drawn-out screech. Despite its name, the Barn Owl will nest in a wide variety of situations, but always prefers roomy and well sheltered places free from excessive human distur-

bance. Barns both old and modern are used if they provide wide ledges, wall cavities or spaces among bales of hay or straw. Spacious tree cavities are also a favoured nesting site, particularly in eastern England, but loss of elms caused by Dutch Elm disease has greatly reduced the availability of suitable trees. Barn Owls make no nest as such, but lay an average of 5 eggs in early May. Each egg hatches after 31 days. A very long fledgling period follows with the young remaining in the nest for eight to nine weeks, rarely leaving it until late August. In years of high food abundance two broods are sometimes

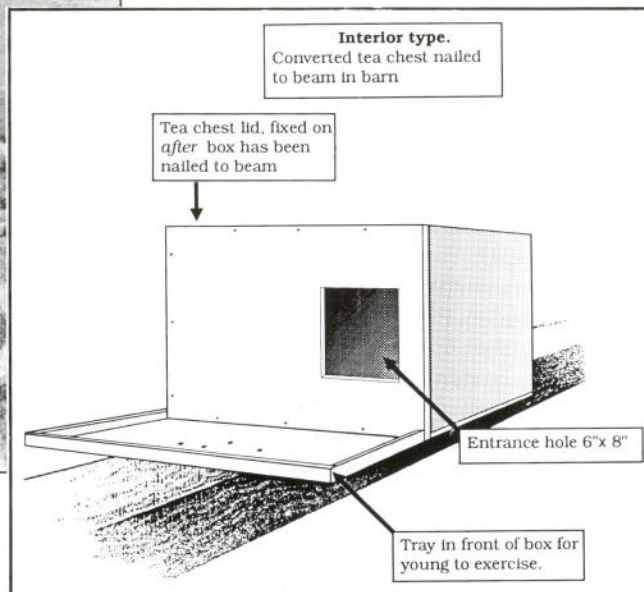


Adult Barn Owl returning with food

reared. Boxes not only provide suitable nesting quarters, but offer additional roosting sites which are important for this bird. Boxes are most successful when erected on farms where Barn Owls have been seen or in places where they are already known to roost. Occupied sites can be recognised by black pellets about the size of a human thumb which the owl ejects from the mouth. Accumulations of these pellets splattered with profuse white droppings denote a favoured roosting place.

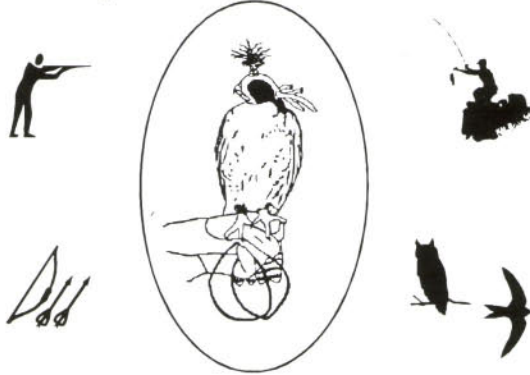


Young Barn Owls



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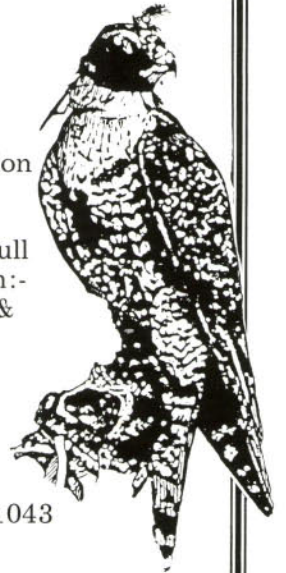
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WELSH HAWKING CLUB Clwb Hebogwyr Cymru



President:
Lorant de Bastyai

The Welsh Hawking Club was founded in 1961 by a handful of Welsh sportsmen. Their mentor was a Hungarian gentleman, Lorant de Bastyai, a Falconer of International Fame. The following year the W.H.C. was invited to attend the International Field meetings of the Austrian and German clubs, Osterreichischer Falknerbund and Deutscher Falkenorden. The W.H.C. made many friends on these trips and some members returned with Goshawks on their fists which were gifts from their new friends. The club soon became Internationally recognised and started to hold its own field meetings. Membership steadily grew and the W.H.C. is now one of the largest Hawking clubs with around 400 members drawn from all over the British Isles. We hold our monthly meetings in South Wales with a more informal meeting in North Wales. At these meetings there are occasionally speakers on Falconry related subjects, several leading furniture makers exhibit and sell equipment, club raffles are held, advice is freely available, ale is consumed and exciting flights are relived! The club has invested a great deal in its breeding programme with a view to supplying some Hawks to members and we currently have many Hawks and Falcons out on loan. Field meetings are held, members receive an annual magazine "The Austringer" several newsletters, can borrow club receivers for use with their own transmitters, are offered discounts by some furniture makers, telemetry dealers, bell makers, authors etc, and can purchase club badges, car stickers and sweaters. The Welsh Hawking Club has always had a reputation for being a friendly club with a large proportion of its members being keen Falconers rather than armchair Falconers and many founder members still hold office including Lorant de Bastyai as President. Despite increased legislation and many other pressures flying a Hawk at quarry remains our priority.

Our annual subscription is £17.50 plus an initial fee of £5.00.

For further information contact The Hon. Secretary, Adrian Williams, Maendy Farmhouse, Church Village, Near Pontypridd, Glam. Telephone: 0443 206333.

County Fairs



CALENDAR OF EVENTS 1991

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CHILHAM CASTLE GARDENS, KENT

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August 17th/18th 1991

THE SUSSEX COUNTRY FAIR

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(10 miles North of Chichester on A285)

August 25th/26th 1991

**WINDSOR GREAT PARK NATIONAL DRIVING
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WINDSOR GREAT PARK, SURREY

(Exit 6 M4)

September 14th/15th 1991

MIDLAND GAME & COUNTRY SPORTS FAIR
(Associate Show)

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

September 21st/22nd 1991

THE YORKSHIRE COUNTRY FAIR

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Training Gundogs For Falconry

by Guy Wallace

Part One

What breed should I have?

This is the first article on the stage-by-stage sequence of training gundogs for falconry. Assuming that you have reached the conclusion that most successful falconers through the ages reach fairly early on, viz. that a trained gundog is, at worst, a necessary evil to showing sport and having got used to the idea of having a dog, probably the most frequent question that I am asked is "What is the best breed to have?" "One man's meat" and, within reason, any dog owner/trainer will get on better with a breed that he likes and wants rather than a breed that is foisted on him by a (so called) expert.

Having said that it is an inescapable fact that some breeds are more suitable for certain types of hawking than others. If a would-be falconer moves to a new location the first thing he does is to assess the countryside around him and ascertain the nature of the ground and what quarry it contains. He then acquires a suitable hawk for the area. So with a dog. It is a question of horses for courses. Before looking at the various breeds of gundogs available (and one can only generalise with regard to any particular breed) I should perhaps state that, as a professional gundog trainer, I do not have a favourite breed. At the time of writing I have ten different breeds in training

including a number of pointers and five HPR breeds so what I have to say is purely objective. I might also add that I have flown longwings and shortwings over dogs in the United Kingdom and abroad for over twenty years.

Gundogs are divided into four separate categories: retrievers, spaniels, pointers and setters (bird-dogs to use a convenient American expression) and HPRs (Hunter Pointer Retriever breeds from the Continent). Retrievers which include labradors, flatcoats and golden retrievers are primarily concerned with collecting dead game rather than finding live game and although they can be taught to hunt after a fashion are completely unsuitable as a falconer's dog. I would go so far as to say that any falconer who only owns a retriever should set about acquiring a second breed to use as a hawking companion. Spaniels, for which read working English Springer or cocker are grand little hunting dogs (a Brittany spaniel is an HPR of which more later). Clumbers (much beloved by the late Jack Mavrogordato), Welsh, Sussex and Field Spaniels have had many or all of the working qualities bred out of them by the showing fraternity as have the show English Springers and show cocker spaniels. I always flew my Goshawks in the UK and

Black Sparrowhawks in Africa over English Springers but spaniels have the great disadvantage of not pointing their game. If one flies longwings over pointers, spaniels are also very good at flushing "on the button" if the pointer is "sticky". Again a spaniel would not be an aspiring austringer's first choice.

If you are fortunate enough to practice what is probably the cream of all fieldsports let alone the cream of falconry - flying longwings at game over dogs - a pointer or setter is the only logical choice. One assumes that the falconer is looking for "class" from his falcons and therefore requires class from his dogs. They have a graceful, effortless gallop, a wider range when quartering and a more exquisitely tuned nose than the other breeds which is invaluable if game is "jumpy". The four breeds from which to choose are Pointers (there is no such breed as an "English" pointer), English, Irish and Gordon Setters. Beware: all breeds have completely separate showing and working lines. Pointers are the most readily available and they have a lot of white on them which makes them easy to see at a distance against the heather. English setters also have a lot of white about them and were used by a number of pre-war falconers including Gilbert Blaine. The russet coloured Irish setter and the black and tan Gordon setter are difficult to see against the heather but a wide collar covered with "dayglo" material offsets this problem somewhat.

Do not imagine that you will get through a day's falconry let alone a week or a season with only one bird-dog. However fit they may be, they burn themselves out quickly unless rested and run turn and turn about. Several falconers can run one dog each in this way.

The last category of gundog is the Hunter Pointer Retriever (HPR). These include German Shorthaired Pointers, German Wirehaired Pointers, Weimeraners (Germany), Large Munsterlanders (Germany), Hungarian Vizslas, Brittany Spaniels (France) and the Italian Spinone. HPRs are to the bird-dogs what the cob is to the racehorse or the lurcher is to the greyhound - a versatile utility breed with more stamina but less "class" or quality. They are the first choice for the austringer or for



Left to right:
Brittany, Large Munsterlanders, Vizsla, G.S.P.

the falconer who flies longwings as well as shortwings or broadwings. Probably more than with any category of gundog, individual dogs within a breed or even within a litter vary tremendously in their natural ability due, in part, to the fact that they are bred simultaneously for work and show. The qualities that the handler requires are to quarter the ground with a wide beat in the open and a much reduced range in cover, to enter thick cover both when hunting and to flush game, to swim, to be staunch on point but to flush instantly on command. A lot of dogs will do most of these things and a few will do them all. Probably the most important quality of all is to be biddable and under control. Wild, uncontrollable dogs running amok on either your own or your neighbour's ground are the easiest way to ruin a days sport and to lose good hawking ground not only for yourself but also everyone else.

The German Shorthaired Pointer (GSP) is numerically the strongest of the HPRs in Britain. They point well but their hunting ability varies from excellent to only just. A good one takes a lot of beating. German Wirehaired Pointers (GWP) are either very good or downright awful with very few in between. A Weimeraner would not be my first choice. They are better guard dogs than shooting/hawking dogs and males tend to be stropky with other male dogs. I have trained some excellent Large Munsterlanders for roughshooting which equates with an austringer's requirements. All the Ger-

man HPRs tend to be noisy and/or destructive if separated from their owners even if only by a kennel door. The Hungarian Vizslas suit sensitive trainers and are generally good all-rounders. For those living in a small house and garden (and few falconers seen to have addresses like "Grousemoor Hall" these days!) the little Brittany Spaniel, called only a Brittany over here, might well be the answer. In essence

it is a wider ranging springer or cocker spaniel that also points. They are bonny little dogs with none of the social problems of the larger German dogs. I have very little experience of Italian Spinones but I have heard of one being successfully used for falconry in East Anglia. "Yer pays yer money"

In the next issue I shall talk about obtaining a suitable puppy and how to go about it.



An Italian Spinone learning to point live Pheasants at the warren

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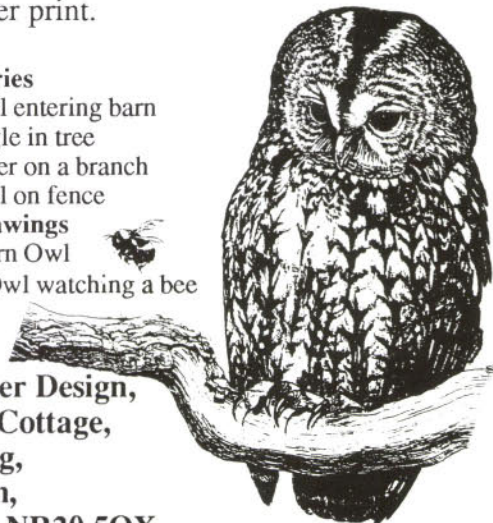
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- 5 Baby Barn Owl
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RAPTORS IN WALES. Conservation in Action

Sketches and Text by Wildlife Illustrator PHILIP SNOW. B.A.



RED KITE (*Milvus milvus*) In Britain, the elegant and languid flight of the Red Kite is synonymous with a few picturesque wooded valleys in Mid-Wales, but this certainly is not typical habitat. It just happened to be its' last British refuge by the turn of our century and required rigorous conservation efforts by the Kite committee, (RSPB and latterly NCC) to ensure its' future. Happily they succeeded and a steady increase from just 11 pairs in 1950, to about 82 pairs (250 birds) in 1990 resulted. The climate though, doesn't really favour them, and inbreeding, small clutch sizes, the idiot and indiscriminate illegal poisoned bait laying all take their toll. Video surveillance, a falconry aided fostering scheme and re-introduction of fennoscandia birds are all helping them and perhaps, at last, they may be able to start recolonising a Britain in which they were once very common.



BUZZARD (*Buteo buteo*) If the Red Kite is The prize Welsh raptor for many, the numerous soaring Buzzards are much more typical of its' hills and valleys, with between 4-5,000 pairs, a quarter of the British population. This adaptable and non-specialised raptor breeds in most habitats, most successful in central and east Wales, but uncommon on Anglesey. Like most birds of prey, it has bounced back from the 60's pesticides crash, being more strongly affected by the 50's myxomatosis outbreak. The population is now fairly stable, not much persecuted and could possibly help to re-colonise eastern England?

Buzzards
S.E. OWL



♂ Kestrel

SHORT-EARED OWL (*Asio flammeus*) One of the most wonderful, but now, sadly, fairly uncommon sights on open moor, marsh and dune is the slow, dancing flight of this owl; slowly quartering for its' favourite prey, the short tailed vole. Indeed, its breeding success is closely linked with that of the vole, fluctuating accordingly. 1988 was a good year for both, but this could still only raise about 23 successful pairs in Wales; temporarily arresting a decline which has seen the entire Anglesey and other lowland populations disappear since the 60's. As usual, forestry and loss of heather moor have hit them and they winter on the coast with continental birds. In flight, the scarce but easily overlooked **LONG-EARED OWL** (*Asio otus*) is similar, but darker overall and usually gliding on flat wings not raised.

KESTREL (*Falco tinnunculus*) The 'wind hover' is another adaptable and successful ariel predator, being relatively, if locally, common on seacliff, farmland, mountain and moorland here. This beautiful little long tailed falcon feeds mainly on small mammals, insects and birds; largely taken from its' precise and stepped hover. Even whilst hanging in very strong winds it manages to keep its head rock steady, also using Sparrowhawk/Merlin tactics to catch birds, probably mainly at fledging time. Like the Buzzard and Sparrowhawk, it is little persecuted.



© P.Snow

♀ Kestrel

♂ Merlin



Red Kites

GOSHAWK (*Accipiter gentilis*) This huge and powerful bird is well known to Falconers and, thanks to their deliberate and accidental releases, is well on the way to becoming re-established in Britain, (Albeit in confusing, different races'). Although almost exterminated by the beginning of this century, by the usual game interests, this magnetic and secretive bird is sneaking back to delight us with occasional sightings. Much of Wales seems ideal for them, and during their distinctive display flight they become more noticeable, 'pothooking' up and down above their favoured site; undertail coverts puffed out and almost encircling the tail base. Even with eggers gamekeepers and some falconers still after them, they will, I think, prevail!

SPARROWHAWK (*Accipiter nisus*) Excellent numbers, continually growing. Seems as common as the Kestrel here, with no particular problems.

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) Recent pronouncements of calamity accompanied this elusive raptor, as it appeared to be as doomed as its 'favoured heather moor' Happily, more nests are being found in forestry, as in most of its British range.

The R.S.P.B. and N.C.C. are keeping a close eye on developments and anyone wishing to see them should go to our large estuaries in the winter months, where they are joined by their northern (and often larger) cousins.

LITTLE OWL (*Athene noctua*) Gradually spreading westward in Wales, but common on Anglesey.

TAWNY OWL (*Strix aluco*) Widespread and locally common, but the **BARN OWL** (*Tyto alba*) is, as elsewhere, declining; though with a good number on Anglesey. Well intentioned re-introductions of A.B.C.R. birds are, unfortunately, not helping much; mainly because factors that lead to their demise, i.e. habitat loss are not addressed.

HEN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) This harrier disappeared from Wales in the 20's; first proved breeding again in 1938, building up to about 27 pairs in the late 70's. Like the Merlin, it seemed to crash again in the 80's, but recovered enough to fledge 29 young in '89, and possibly again in 1990. It is being closely monitored by the R.S.P.B and N.C.C.

(now Countryside Council for Wales), who think that only immigration is saving them, as 43 pairs breed on nearby Isle of Man, in young forestry. (100 strong winter roosts) Grouse keepers, a seeming distrust of forestry

(unlike elsewhere), and monogamy number amongst their Welsh problems (Chapel influence?) and their future is very uncertain. The Beautiful **MONTAGU'S HARRIER** (*Circus pygargus*) alas, is now only a rare passage immigrant, but used to breed here sparingly, with a mini explosion of up to 5 closely monitored pairs on Newborough Warren N.N.R. in the 60's. Anglesey was also the last Welsh breeding site for the **MARSH HARRIER** (*Circus auregenosus*) in 1974 and with more passage and occasional overwintering birds, it could do so again.



top: ♂ Goshawk
left: ♀ Goshawk
below: ♀ Sparrowhawk
Peregrine



♀ Marsh Harrier 'ringtail' Hen Harrier

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) Wales is, undoubtedly, one of the strongholds of this tenacious and spectacular falcon, which reached a disastrous nadir of only 1 successful nest in 1963! The R.S.P.B.'s estimate was of 250 pairs in 1989, but callous South Wallion pigeon men added their bizarre armoury of exploding and poisoned pigeons to the long list of obstacles this favourite bird has had to overcome. Nevertheless, conservation is definitely winning.



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Letters

LETTERS -- LETTERS -- LETTERS -- LETTERS



L to R: Oliver, Edward and James Williams with Jaffa

Dear David and Lyn

This is a photograph of our Bengal Eagle Owl whose name is Jaffa. My younger brother named him Jaffa because his eyes look like Jaffa cakes.

He was one year old on 29th April 1991 and we now have him flying free at 21b 2oz.

I would like Jaffa to catch rabbits but so far he is only willing to fly at his rabbit lure. Thanks to a kind local farmer we are able to fly him in open country-side which is great fun.

Oliver Williams

Aged 8

Worcs.

Dear David

Just a few lines to congratulate you and Lyn on the Falconers Magazine which seems to be going from strength to strength. But I have to say I was not impressed at the article by Mike Everett for the R. S. P. B. on the Peregrine Falcons, in which he complains about lawbreakers being responsible for the following; 23 birds shot, trapped or poisoned, these I assume he attributes to the shooting and pigeon racing fraternities. The 28 cases of egg stealing no doubt he blames egg collectors and falconers. Finally in the 31 cases of young being 'taken' he, without any thoughts to the contrary, lays full blame with falconers. Now he used the word 'taken', but I wonder whether they were all 'taken' (eggs and chicks) by the culprits he blames or were there more than a few cases of them being taken by carrion crows etc. after the parent birds had deserted owing to interference by the R. S. P. B. who are constantly visiting nests, checking clutch size, egg size, ringing chicks, marking chicks and weighing chicks. Also the siting of hides, all of which must put great pressure on the parent birds. I shall finish with this one last thought, the R.S.P.B. are the 'self elected' guardians of our bird life but "Quis custodiet ipsos custodes" which roughly translated means who watches the watchers.

J Abbott

I am sorry that the truth does not impress Mr Abbott. Unfortunately, Peregrine eyries are still robbed and some of these robberies do involve falconers or other raptor-keepers, or people hoping to sell Peregrines to them. Losses resulting from the forms of disturbance he describes were not included in my figures: we knew of none in 1989 and in any year they are rare. If Mr Abbott knows otherwise, the RSPB would welcome chapter and verse: I can assure him that any negligent behaviour by anybody acting on behalf of the RSPB will be investigated. Incidentally, the RSPB does not erect hides at nests and does not normally get involved in the sort of detailed nest-recording activities Mr Abbott describes.

Mike Everett

Living in a city

Dear Editors

With much encouragement from friends, I have decided to write this letter about the problems and difficulties of keeping birds of prey in London. Over the last fifteen years, I have collected quite a few birds, among which, I have a beautiful European Eagle Owl. I decided that I wanted to fly her and soon realised that this was to be a difficult task, however, being a very determined person after many weeks of enquiry, I was at last granted permission to fly my bird in the vast grounds of the local hospital. My collection also includes the indigenous species, Barn Owl, Tawny Owl and Common Buzzard. I have often taken these birds to local schools. Some people would say taking indigenous species would only encourage people to try and obtain one for themselves. I find this is not so. The children and also the adults, have never seen their native birds at such close

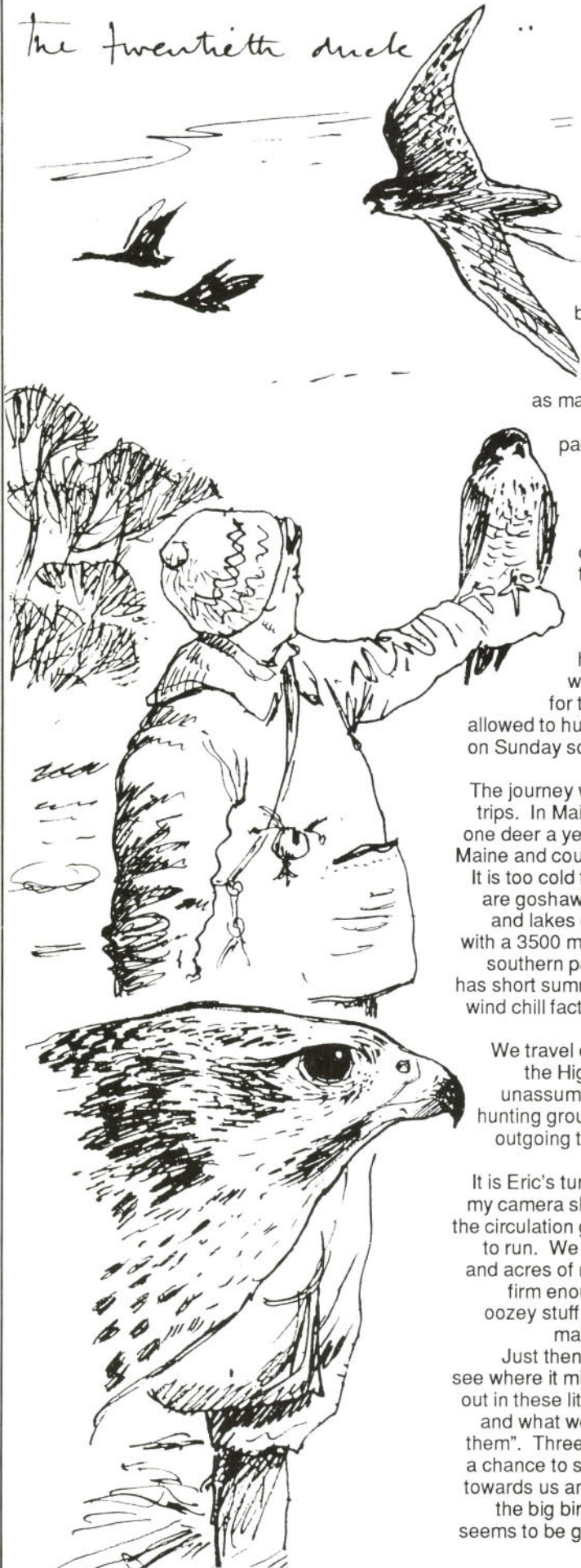
quarters and I find it does nothing but good to allow them to see how beautiful these creatures are and also that they must be protected in the wild. As well as learning about conservation they also learn about the birds themselves. I keep my birds at home in my medium sized garden in South London and often people, mostly children, will come to the door and ask to see them and not once has anyone asked, "How can I buy one". I know London is not the best place to keep birds of prey but I feel that as long as they are looked after properly, have ample space and are exercised regularly, and because the children in my area have learned so much about them, for example, when I used to fly a Kestrel a little boy said to me "Is that an Eagle Miss?", Yes I do feel it can do nothing but good.

Pauline Taylor.
South London.

**All letters should be addressed to:-
THE EDITORS, THE FALCONERS AND
RAPTOR CONSERVATION MAGAZINE,
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DUCK HAWKING AT HAM

The twentieth duck



"Would you like to come with us tomorrow?" he said.

"Sure thing" I replied. "OK be here at four o'clock, we'll have some coffee and make a start" Four o'clock in the morning? Oh well, it could be good, flying peregrine/gyr hybrids at black duck.

I was talking to Mark Fanning, the foremost falconer in Maine, which is the northernmost state in North America, next to the Canadian border. It is January 1991 and I have never been so cold in my life before. This was afternoon, and although I am wearing long johns and several layers of clothes, the minus fifteen degrees of cold creeps into your bones "Do you mind if I take photographs" I asked.

"Not a bit, take all you want" he said.

I took some photographs of Steve's Peales falcon - a big dark bird almost black and Eric's Peregrine Gyr cross and Mark's Prairie Gyr hybrid. Giving a pat to Mark's rangy dog "Shotgun" I bid them goodbye until four o'clock in the morning.

It is half past three, pitch black and quite cold in the house. I get as many clothes on as I can and still move about - and creep downstairs to make a cuppa before moving off. I collect the camera and my packed lunch and quietly leave the house for the garage. First of all I have to unplug the heater which keeps the radiator and the anti freeze from freezing. Then try the car. It starts. Good, now we're under way. I drive along the deserted Maine highway easily, in this part of America, they are very efficient and the roads are kept clear of snow almost as soon as it falls. Every fourth house seems to own a 4 x 4 pickup with a snow plough or a snow blower on it so there is little chance of anyone being blocked in by snow for long.

It is still dark when I reach Mark's house but he's about and Eric is putting his bird into the back of his truck. It sits quietly hooded on his beautifully made cage. Hunting bags are thrown in and then as we finish our coffee they make a final mental check and we climb in for the fifty mile drive to New Hampshire. It is Sunday and you are not allowed to hunt in Maine on Sunday - you can hunt in the next state southwards on Sunday so that's where we are heading. Mark looks at me and grins, "A day without hunting is a day wasted!" Off we go with Eric following on. The journey was quite an education too. Mark told me of other kinds of hunting trips. In Maine anyone that lives there can get a licence to shoot one bear and one deer a year. This is black bear and white tailed deer but there are moose in Maine and cougar and coyote, not to mention racoon and ground hog and skunk. It is too cold for most of the smaller hawks to survive the bitter winters but there are goshawks and the golden and the bald eagle both reside in the mountains and lakes of Maine. In size terms it is a big state, about the size of England, with a 3500 mile coastline but only a tenth of it is inhabited, and that's mainly the southern part of the state. So here is a state which is sparsely populated and has short summers and very long winters. Only the hardy survive here. With the wind chill factor it can easily get down to minus fifty, to commit suicide you need

only take your hat off and stand outside for a bit!

We travel down the freeway keeping below the speed limit so as not to upset the Highway Patrolman lurking underneath the bridge. He could be quite unassuming at this time of the morning. We drive on and pull up next to the hunting grounds which are a huge expanse of salt flats. They are tidal and the outgoing tide has frozen over the spartina grass so that our footsteps crunch

through the crispy surface. It is Eric's turn to fly first and since I do not know the territory I follow on behind, my camera slung around my neck and rubbing my hands together to try to keep the circulation going. Within minutes my eyes are streaming and my nose begins to run. We cross a stream and make our way towards the middle of the acres and acres of mud flats. "Some of this mud is deceptive" says Mark. "It can look firm enough to stand on but you could find you're up to your armpits in cold oozy stuff in double quick time!" I said that I would follow them and try not to make a fool of myself. The mud had taken on a new meaning for me. Just then the first duck of the day was spotted. Flying low, we watched it to see where it might land. "You can't see them but there's scores of duck all hiding out in these little waterways, the whole place is criss crossed with these streams and what we have to do is get a few duck airborne so that the hawk can get at them". Three more duck are sighted and Eric stikes the hood and gives his bird a chance to see where it is. The duck although a long way off seem to be flying towards us and the hawk bobs her head as she sees them approach. Eric gets the big bird into the air and we watch her as she begins her slow climb. She seems to be going in the wrong direction and we all shout and call to her to keep her attention in the right area.

her attention in the right area.

her attention in the right area.

her attention in the right area.

PTON FALLS by Michael Bignold

She is now up about a hundred feet and has completely ignored the black duck that flew past us and alighted out of sight in the mud shallows. Eric's bird is more interested in seagulls and has veered off and is painfully not paying any attention to the job in hand. Eric whistles to her. Nothing happens. She is still climbing but going away, she's at least a mile from us and seems to be getting smaller. I know they have telemetry on but it would still be a worry that far off. Just then she turns our way and we see she is following a duck weaving across the flats about four feet above the ground.

Eric and Mark start running and calling to encourage the hawk. She half closes her wings and stoops to the duck. We are silent watching the bird. She misses. The duck has disappeared and the hawk shoots up on the curve, she looks beautiful in the sun, we can see her looking back over her shoulder as she rises away from us. A fabulous quick turn and she is down again very fast cruising along the flats at zero feet. We try again and although we put up two more duck she doesn't really get close and Eric decides to call a halt. He throws out the lure to bring her down. She has no trouble seeing a lure being thrown and is down on it like a grey flash. A quick feed and she's hooded and we begin to walk back to the car.

I've taken some shots of the bird flying but with a wide angle lens she will look very small. I find the mud flats are fascinating and it was more fun to record the falconers leaping into the mud heaps in the middle of streams with their hooded hawks waving about.

I change the film in the camera with difficulty as it is so cold I can hardly open the back and threading the film is extremely fiddly with frozen fingers and streaming eyes. I have to take my gloves off to do this and I wonder if my hands will ever feel warm again. Eric's bird is put away and Mark gets his ready. We take a quick sandwich and set forth again. I photograph some skunk tracks going over the snow - that is something I've not seen in the wild before.

We take a different route, stepping carefully through shallow water and hopping on and off mud pillars, in the middle of the bigger streams and Mark soon has his bird out of the hood and getting up to a good pitch.

We move along the crunchy banks of the windswept river with duck rising in pairs and singles - we look up at the fast beating pointed wings above - she's not ready yet, we have to give her time. Up and up she goes she's about three hundred feet high now. Waiting in the icy cold I had forgotten how long it takes a falcon to gain a good height. I vaguely remember a guy telling me that he used to hunt grouse in Scotland and he would put the dogs out on the moor, find the quarry with them, let loose the hawk and put the dogs back in the truck for an hour while she got up to her pitch. He watched her with binoculars until she began to wait on at 1500 feet or so.

A duck rises from the bend and suddenly the falcon stoops ... the closing speed is phenomenal ... Whammm, the duck is hit and the hawk wheels round and dives down on the stricken bird. Mark cheers with delight at the kill. He caught nineteen duck with this bird last year and he was hoping to break that record. This duck has made it for him ... she has caught her twentieth duck! It's almost the last day of the season. He has reached her now and taken the trophy away and she's feeding up on some tit bit from the hawking bag. Mark begins to pluck the duck while it is still warm, in minutes it is a neat plucked bird almost ready for the oven. We have a photo session and we stand in the freezing wind staring at the peregrine feeding up on her chunk of meat that Mark brought along for her. This will be her last flight of the season and from today onwards she will be getting weight on. The bird is picked up and hooded and hunched up against the knifing wind we make our way back to the cars. The birds are settled and we drive to the nearest cafe for a welcome cup of coffee before the homeward trip.



GO ON! GO ON!



THE KESTREL

by Mike Everett

THE ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF BIRDS



At any time of the year, the Kestrel is probably the most numerous and widespread of all our birds of prey: it is thought that the breeding population is around 70,000 pairs. The history of this population is rather complicated by many local ups-and-downs, but broadly speaking the picture is one of increase and spread around the 1960s (despite a pesticide-linked decline in the arable lands of eastern England), with numbers now fairly steady after a slight general decline. The period of increase saw the well-known spread of Kestrels into more and more built-up areas, including the largest towns and cities, and also the birds' gradual discovery that grassy motorway verges were good hunting places.

A look at the Kestrel's winter distribution shows that in Scotland numbers tend to be greatest in the south-west and the east, while in England there are more birds in the central and eastern parts of the country. There is quite a lot of movement from higher ground into lower-lying country, with some suggestion of a preference for cultivated land. Some British Kestrels emigrate in winter, but we also receive winter visitors from Europe, mainly into eastern England.

In conservation terms, the Kestrel is not a threatened bird - in fact it seems to have adapted to living with man more successfully than any of our raptors. Habitat loss is only ever likely to affect Kestrels in a very local (and probably short-term) way: where there is a lack of nest-sites, Kestrels will readily use nestboxes. There are still cases of young being taken illegally from nests. What is much more surprising is that Kestrels are still persecuted by an ignorant minority in the supposed interests of game preser-

vation: the RSPB report *Death by Design* records 68 known cases (in reality there must have been many more) between 1979 and 1989, with 40 birds shot or trapped and 28 poisoned. The latter figure shows two things - that Kestrels, like many raptors, will take carrion when it is available and (yet again) that poisoning is totally unselective.

Asked about the bird in the wild, the average person will probably think first of two things - the fact that Kestrels seem to occur just about everywhere, regardless of habitat, and, secondly, their habit of hovering.

There is no doubt that the Kestrel is a versatile and adaptable bird. It is at home in open and semi-open country, even where this includes wetland, and is no stranger to built-up areas. Altitude is no barrier: I have watched Kestrels hunting over the highest hills in Britain and found their nests while surveying breeding Golden Eagles. Only dense, closed woodland deters them. In north-western Europe, Kestrels are mainly rodent-feeders, with a particular preference for voles where they are common, so some open ground is the one habitat feature they must have. Other prey is widely taken, however, including small birds, lizards, insects and earthworms; some of this may be taken on a seasonal basis, as and when it is most available, or diets may vary from place to place, again reflecting what is there to be caught. The flexibility shown by Kestrels in terms of diet and habitat has led some people to categorise them as "generalised" rather than "specialist" raptors. In fact they are specialised, but have been extremely good at using their abilities in a wide range of circumstances - hence their success as a species.



Kestrels sometimes hunt and catch birds on the wing and many observers have seen them giving a good account of themselves as "true" falcons. They are a good deal faster and much more manoeuvrable than we often think: I remember how surprised I was during a winter break in Mallorca to see a Kestrel hunting ground-feeding flocks of finches and sparrows by using dead ground for its approach and launching its attack at great speed and only inches off the ground. Its tactics at once suggested a combination of Sparrowhawk and Merlin. Most Kestrels, though, most of the time, use two distinct methods when hunting - from the air, with frequent bouts of hovering, or from a look-out perch, in the second case

usually at no great height above the ground. Perch-hunting is a method commonly employed by a great many birds of prey, including some which are popularly supposed to use only more spectacular tactics. For Kestrels, it represents an energy-efficient type of hunting, but one which has some minor limitations - it results in a fairly low rate of return, but this will be entirely adequate in most situations when the bird is not feeding young. Perch-hunting can be used against most kinds of Kestrel prey. Although many of them do so at least occasionally, very few European raptors hover persistently: Black-shouldered Kites and Kestrels are the main exceptions, with Rough-legged and

Common Buzzards and Short-toed Eagles ranking somewhere behind them. Kestrels use a lot of energy when hovering, especially when there is little wind to help them, but it is a method which produces a very good rate of capture and, with other flight-hunting, is used when food demands are high, such as when there are young to feed. Hovering is used mainly for catching small mammals. Although Kestrels are such common and familiar birds, most of us know surprisingly little about them. Luckily, though, we can once again turn to an excellent modern work of reference: *I thoroughly recommend that you read The Kestrel*, by Andrew Village, published by T and A.D. Poyser.

ODE TO GOS

*I own a Hawk of some repute,
A magnificent bird, a handsome brute.
Steel claws like a sabres curve,
For it's prey, it's death, to serve.
Sat on her perch, of prey to dream,
The thought of which makes her red eyes gleam.
Off the glove with bells a jangle,
Into the brush, feathers and fur a tangle
Victim held in a grip of steel
Me, down beside her, forced to kneel
A lowly serf at his master's feet,
To call her off with a tasty treat
Then again, she's free, in the air
And I can only stand and stare
She's way up there and flying free
I can only hope she'll return to me.
A beautiful, living, death machine,
To me, the greatest Hawk that has ever been.*

John Davis



RAPTOR

by Mick Robins

An organisation dedicated to ensuring that all injured and sick birds of prey are cared for by suitably qualified persons and whenever possible, released back to the wild

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MIKE, CARLOS AND "SIMON SNORKEL"

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Wednesday 27th March, 8.15am, the first of two days off after seven days of quite "high pressure" work. I am looking forward to a nice quiet day, doing nothing very much, thank you.

8.20am the telephone rings and I get a distinct feeling of foreboding. It is my local police station requesting my services to rescue an Eagle Owl stuck up a tree, not at all the usual place for birds to need help getting down from. About three miles from my home and I find it is indeed a European Eagle Owl, 50 feet up a dead Oak tree and very firmly caught up by its jesse's. I get dizzy looking down from my own height, so I was most definitely not going up the oak for anything much less than a pools win'

The fire brigade were duly called, and after an initial double-take arrived very quickly. I was heartened by their refusal to tackle the job without the use of specialist machinery in the guise of "SIMON SNORKEL", commonly called an hydraulic platform. It made me feel less of a coward. Even then, the platform crew would not risk the ascent until overhead power lines were switched off and we had another delay whilst the road was closed off and the electricity board came to do the necessary. By now, this was without doubt the most expensive Eagle Owl in Britain' It was then that I made my first horrendous mistake. "Any tips guvnor?" said the fire officer "We don't like the look of that beak" "It's not the beak you need to worry about" says I "it's those ***** great feet". With that yours truly is unanimously elected by the fire service to go up

with them. Afraid I wasn't, petrified I was, but with the aid of brown trousers and bicycle clips I made it to the top, eventually.

After a short struggle the owl was brought down and quickly identified as "Carlos", who had escaped from a nearby wild-life park some six weeks earlier.

If you find a Raptor in trouble and need help and/or advice please ring - 0920 463649. If you would like to join you can write to Miss A Rossin, 3 Highwood Road, Hoddesden, Herts EN11 9AJ.



Mick (disguised as a fireman) about to recover Carlos



Female Sparrowhawk

Paul pays tribute to a "Fine Hawk For The Bush"

me with an expression which said where the hell were you when I needed you? I can only assume that she held onto the moorhen while it dived under the water in order to lose the company of its unwelcome passenger.

To conclude, in my opinion, to fly a Sparrowhawk properly it takes a special kind of falconer who can devote full time and attention, something of which I had difficulty doing because of studying. Despite this I did notice, and couldn't turn a blind eye to, the fact that after each moult she became progressively more difficult to handle and man and despite being only an arms length away from her at dawn the morning after I lost her, she flew off and had already responded to the call of the wild. However, I've been keeping track of her and I know she is still about because I have seen her and her kills, she had field jesses on so has come to no harm

It is still my ambition to be good enough to be able to fly a Sparrowhawk successfully, season in and season out. To date I know of only one person who flew a sparrowhawk for 10 consecutive seasons, he has now retired her to avoid losing her and who can blame him? However until then I have some spare time on my hands which will doubtless be taken up training my pointer pup for the coming season, that is in between trying to pass my 'A' levels' But who knows, maybe when the pheasant season has closed and the rabbits are scarce I will call upon a Sparrowhawk to provide me with the frosty winter morning flights which I enjoy the most, because I am sure all those who have flown these birds will agree, the Sparrowhawk really is a "Fine Hawk for the Bush".

by Paul Clay

It was through no-ones fault but my own that I recently lost the Sparrowhawk that I was flying, she was the first one I had flown, but left an impression in my mind one would find hard to forget.

I had lost her due to flying her quarter oz over weight, I could probably have got away with it at the end of the season, however it was the beginning of the season and I was anxious to get a few kills under her belt.

She was certainly the most courageous little so and so I had ever come across and would literally bate at hares when we used to disturb them in the tramlines. Although I will openly admit that the bag was never bursting with quarry, it was insignificant in the wake of my enjoyment, obtained from flying her. Her first season, unfortunately, only lasted two months, due to her putting her front talon through her back toe whilst hawking one afternoon, inevitably bumblefoot set in, but after two quite large lancements and six weeks of sharing the bedroom with me, she was cured. In that two months she caught eleven head which was made up of two poult, two woodies and various other small birds.

Her second season was more of a memorable one, totalling 21 head I know there will be a few of you who have Goshawks in your mews who can boast seasons of fifty head and more who will be laughing, but when you're sixteen, with a students bank balance and when it's just you and the hawk, without the assistance of a dog or beater, 1 maybe 2 kills a week from a bird that is giving its' all is a most rewarding and satisfying feeling.

I hold a lot of respect for these little hawks and what I admire them for is there ability to dive flat out into the thickest of thorn riddled hedges, only to be picked up and do exactly the same thing five minutes later' I am still trying to work out whether this is a result of pure guts and determination or just a serious case of a shortage of brains' A combination of both I don't doubt.

I remember one afternoon whilst out hawking I saw three moorhens enjoying freshly drilled seed, they all noticed us and made a dash for the nearest cover, the slip was over 50 yards and with only 20 yards to run I didn't give her very good odds, however I gave her the benefit of the doubt and slipped her. The outcome was very surprising, she pulled round and hit this moorhen right in the front, knocking it flat on its' backside, slightly dazed, it got up and continued to run only this time carrying, sorry dragging a hawk under its' belly. She then let go and re-positioned her grip onto the moorhens back. Now, not being quite able to match up to Linford Christie, I was unable to assist her in her struggle and began my search in the cover into which she had been dragged, I expected to find her sitting in an adjacent tree somewhat shaken but not stirred. After ten minutes of no bells or response to the whistle I heard the familiar cry coming from the ground, I looked round and saw her sitting at the foot of a moorhens hole on the other side of a small brook, absolutely drenched, she looked at



Paul with Mirahana after a successful mornings hunting

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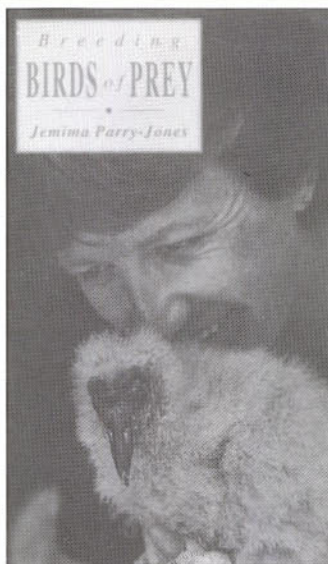
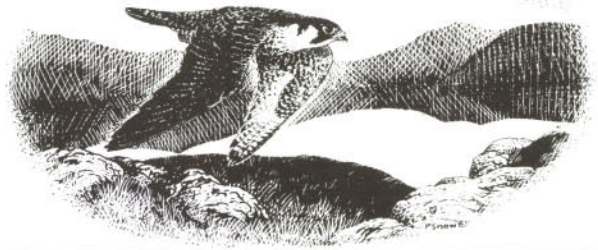
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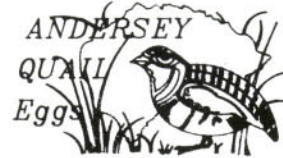
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HARRIS HAWK HINTS

by
Robin Haigh

Probably the most intriguing of all falconer birds is the Harris Hawk. Not only are its looks unusual but its behaviour both in the wild and in captivity sets it apart from other raptors.

In the wild it is gregarious, hunting, roosting and even breeding in groups sometimes with one male mating with several females. In falconry these social tendencies are encouraged and within this relationship imprinting need play no part.

Harris Hawks give the impression that they actually enjoy being with people rather than just tolerating them as most other raptors do, they have been known to come to the house or fly in through the open car window and perch on the seat to await the falconers return. This trait can be a real nuisance when the falconer is looking forward to long days hawking and the 'lost' bird is sitting in the car waiting to go home!

While most falconers will have discovered the positive side of Harris Hawks and consider them Gods gift to stress free hawking many are not aware of the drawbacks.

Harris Hawks originate from the southern United States and south through Mexico and beyond, far warmer climes than the cold and damp British Isles therefore great care must be taken with them in the winter. They are prone to frostbite and the cold related 'blain' more correctly called bursitis which affects the end joint of the wing around the alula. They should not be kept tethered to low perches exposed to draughts, damp or severe cold. Wind and cold together produce what is now known as the chill factor capable of lowering ambient temperatures by many degrees. If you must keep your Harris on a low perch in winter ensure that it is in a well insulated and draughtproof structure. Far better keep it loose in a part roofed enclosed aviary where it may have a choice of perching sites. Of course adjust the hawks diet according to the temperature so that it is always flown in the highest possible condition commensurate with good behaviour.

The Americans have learned to their cost that Harris Hawks are very susceptible to carbon monoxide fumes, more so than other

raptors. Do take care when travelling birds long distances that the vehicle is not sucking in exhaust gas, this particularly applies to flat backed vehicles, hatchbacks and pick-up trucks with clip on tops which are more common in the USA.

Harris's are slim boned, light feathered hawks that are slow to grow to full weight and are often flown too soon at quarry that is too large. Not only can this put the bird off but can lead to broken limbs. Even a large adult Harris will not tolerate the kind of impacts that the rough tough Redtail experiences and flies away from almost daily.

A waterlogged Harris is a common experience, they love to hunt waterfowl. I have seen them in Mexico hunting in a group of half a dozen or so around the edge of a shallow swamp. They invariably end up in the water and are very unwaterproof! On rainy days they become saturated very quickly. I have resorted to the hair drier more than once to bring a shivering Harris back to normal temperature. It makes sense to leave the wetter parts of your hunting ground until the end of the days hawking. Inbreeding has resulted in many very poor quality birds being produced. Some breeders with an eye only on the money have deliberately inbred birds that are now showing all the classic problems, small size young with physical & skeletal defects many with organ troubles, in fact just about every problem under the sun! Any genuine breeder will tell you who these cowboys are and remember even if the bird they offer you is half price it is still too expensive! Some have taken to importing Harris Hawks from the surplus birds that the breeders have in the USA. It would be naive to imagine that



Female Harris Hawk

these left overs were anything more than the ones that were unwanted by American falconers and yes they have inbreeding problems too!

The Harris aficionado will tell you that his bird is the Superior race or whatever subspecies when, if the truth were known, Harris's were obtained from such a hotch-potch of sources no one could even guess what the domestic F2 & F3's origin was. Even accepting that there are any subspecies, remember the derogatory American term for a Harris is 'Clone'

After laying out all the problems let it be said that I fly a Harris, I love Harris Hawks for they take all the pain and anguish out of hawking.

Perhaps it is because I am getting older that I can no longer tolerate the spoiled brat sulking behaviour of the Goshawk and the Harris is much quicker to train and harder to lose than a Redtail.



The Author
with Female
Harris Hawk
Inset: Harris
Hawk down
a rabbit hole



Sultana - The Heron

by Lorant



Sultana the Saker Falcon

Drawing by Peter Udurnoki

When I came to this country about 36 years ago I was fortunate enough to bring my Heron-Saker Sultana with me. At that time there were no such things as import licences or quarantine so we arrived happily here with Sultana. I settled in at my brother's place in Stratford and naturally because Sultana was used to flying everyday I started to fly her in the fields around Stratford. Also I went to the friends I had corresponded with from Hungary, Michael Woodford, the Hon. Secretary of the British Falconers Club and Jack Mavrogordato, Tony Foster, Stephen Frank etc. When I was staying with Michael Woodford I met Philip Glasier. He lived in the neighbouring village of Mellbury Osmond in Dorset. There I was flying Sultana to the lure for him and Mike and lots of other falconers. However my favourite flying places were the marsh fields near Stratford by the river Avon where I walked nearly every day when I stayed there. Once it happened that when I was flying Sultana and she was in the air and I was swinging the heron lure a heron got up near the river from the reeds. Sultana was just in that direc-

tion and you could see her thinking that was just what she had wanted since moving from the fish farms on the Hungarian Plains. So there she was off after the heron who was flapping his wings as fast as he could and croaking to get as far away from the Saker as he could. Sultana was in her old fighting mood in seconds and swooped at the heron and nearly lost her balance back into the edge of the reeds, but in seconds was back in the air again flying as fast as she could. By this time they were on the other side of the river and I was really worried. Luckily something happened and the heron went down in the bushy reeds and disappeared from the Saker and I heard the bells of the Saker from above the reeds and suddenly there she was flying towards me. But somebody else was also there not too far away - a policeman. I already knew that Herons, the same in Hungary, are a protected species. So there I was with my Sultana in the air and also a policeman leaning himself on a willow tree



Sultana on grey heron killed on the bank of a little canal which is supplying the rice fields with water

Saker and Shakespeare

de Bastyai

watching carefully to see what was happening. I picked up Sultana from the lure using a bit of chicken meat put the lure into the Falconers Bag and feeding Sultana on my fist started to walk towards the town and towards the Policeman. My greatest worry was that when I picked up Sultana from the lure the policeman was already walking towards me. Naturally when the policeman got to me I stopped and said hello and I remember that my voice was not the strong one I use to call back the falcons. Perhaps I was waiting for the policeman to take out his notebook and pencil and ask me some questions which I would find uncomfortable to answer. However he didn't do any of those things but smiled at me and said "What a shame she didn't get the heron - it was a marvellous sight to see when the falcon showed her courage and chased a bird much bigger than herself". I explained to the policeman that I knew that in England, like Hungary that herons are protected species and I was glad Sultana hadn't got the heron and broken the law. The policeman told me he was an angler and he knew that herons take lots of fish from the river Avon. During the walk to town I fed Sultana with some shin of beef after the chicken so that she should know she had done very well and come back from the heron so obediently. When we got near to the town the policeman said goodbye and went on his way. I started walking towards the town because I have always wanted to see Shakespeare's grave. I never managed to go before because I had been carrying Sultana on my fist. This time I had Sultana on my fist but standing in the door of the church was the vicar who was waiting for a coach load of American tourists. When I was near to the church the vicar asked if he could come and look at my falcon. Naturally I told him he could with great pleasure. After he had looked and praised the bird he suddenly said "I've seen you several

times walking with your falcon and I thought you might one day come into the church and look around". Naturally I answered, "How could I come in with a bird on my fist - I couldn't just leave her outside on the back of a bench" "No" said the vicar "You should bring your magnificent falcon into the church like in medieval times the noblemen did and the ladies". So that was a great encouragement for me and I took Sultana into church. I was standing silently before the grave of Shakespeare and his family and was speculating how many falcons Shakespeare knew and he referred to them in nearly all his poems and writings. Whilst thinking about these things I had not noticed that two or three coach loads of American tourists had arrived and filled up the church completely. Suddenly I noticed that Sultana's tail was starting to come very slowly but surely up which meant that in any minute she would drop something on the graves. With all the American tourists behind me I could not reach the door of the church because Shakespeare's grave was at the other end, not even if I ran like a rabbit or a greyhound. I was thinking that Sultana was going to leave a white mark on Shakespeare's grave and all the American tourists would be able to help the vicar to lynch me. My other thought was to put my hunting hat discretely and nicely below the tail of the saker so that's what I did and Sultana dropped her "white card" in the middle of my falconer's hat. It was all so discrete that nobody noticed except myself because after fifteen minutes I walked from the church towards my brother's house and it started to rain. I forgot, all about what was in the falconer's hat and put it nicely on my head. Only later in the afternoon when the barber was speculating about what kind of hair cream leaves a dry white thing on your head and he washed my hair. For long years afterwards the white mark remained in my hunting hat to remind me of the church in Stratford on Avon where Shakespeare and his family are buried.



*Sultana catching the wing of a heron (Photographs and drawings are over 35 years old)
Photograph by Dr Zultan Tildy*



*Sultana versus herons on the rice fields
Drawing by Peter Udurnoki*



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Raptor

Help and Hints

All tied up?

Dear David and Lyn,

A number of Falconers are concerned about the practice of using cable-ties as bell bewits. Most of you will have seen the method and I hope rejected it. Instead of using leather bewits a cable-tie is passed around the leg and through the bell loop. When this idea was first used it was soon found that when you nipped the end of the tie off a tiny piece was still exposed. A Hawk might pull at this thereby tightening the tie and strangulating the blood supply to her foot. The problem was solved by slipping a length of tubing over the cable-tie so preventing the tie from closing. O.K. what are the advantages of the cable-tie over leather bewits? Well its neat, doesn't come loose and is quicker and easier to fit than leather bewits, so saving time and trouble. I wonder what Jack Mavro' would say about that? He said " If you are looking for a sport in which you can save yourself trouble, falconry is not for you ! " Right, so what are the disadvantages you ask?

One. But one writ very large. One which responsible Falconers must consider. All Falconers are agreed that every effort should be made to ensure that a lost Hawk survives in the wild. Take the lost Hawk wearing leather bewits. Soon the leather will weaken and break. The Hawk parts company with the bell and bewit and is unencumbered. Now look at the Hawk wearing a cable-tied bell. When the bell loop breaks the bell will drop off leaving the cable-tie still around the leg. The cable-tie will probably never come off. Sooner or later the Hawk will become caught up and hang or will suffer an injury when something goes between the tie and the leg. Traditional jesses were used until Guy Aylmer thought of something better which practically everyone uses. Let us continue to use traditional materials like leather and if you don't like traditional or button bewits why not try one of the other methods. Try a tail bell or a neck bell, attach a bell to the aylmeri through a very small eyelet or use a bewit joined by an eyelet through which you attach the bell. Why not send in your ideas on bell fitting to Raptork? By NIVALIS.

APOLOGY

In our Spring '91 issue we printed a letter by Wendy Smith of Northants, about the importance of a good vet. We have had a good, positive response to it but also it would seem we have offended some people along the way. So; we would like to state that neither of the vets in the article were

in any way connected to any of the vets who write for or advertise with us. And as they are advertising with us they are obviously a good choice for anyone seeking veterinary advice or treatment for one of their birds. We would like to apologise for any offence caused, none was meant.

Review

A FALCONRY MANUAL.

Frank L. Beebe

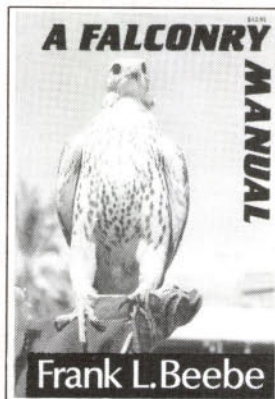
Frank L. Beebe has managed to produce a comprehensive Falconry manual that successfully works on two levels. The first level offers an accurate and informative source of knowledge for the novice, whilst the second level delivers to the more experienced practitioner a good quantity of Falconry gems and tidbits that should keep him interested throughout the more standard stuff. The main aim of the manual is to provide sound instruction in the art of Falconry.

The manual covers the great majority of Falcons and Hawks, taking care not to assume too much of the reader. This classifying of the birds takes just under half of the entire book. The rest of the pages are used to examine; Falconry equipment, care and attention of your bird, training, capturing wild raptors, hunting, etc.

All sections are well covered. Diagrams attempt to illustrate how to make more of the equipment required, while the training section is offered in a helpful step by step manner. Fortunately the hunting section is the last chapter, because by the time you've reached and devoured this part you cannot help but feel eager to get up and go and fly your pride and joy.

The inclusion of a section on how to capture wild raptors was somewhat disturbing for a country which has outlawed such acts. However he goes to great lengths to make sure that none of his trapping devices causes any unnecessary stress. All the same allowing for the fact that learning Falconry from a manual is the same as learning to drive from an armchair. Mr Beebe has compiled a coherent work that will long be a source of reference for Falconers, old and new alike.

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'A Fist Full of Feathers' is, as Chris Neal of The Rehabilitation Centre in Hagley, tells us 'a light hearted look at modern day Falconry.'

Although it begins back in the reign of Charles 1, when Falconry was at its' zenith, we are soon brought back to the Twentieth Century as we are invited to watch a baby Barn Owl emerging from its' shell and then compare its' size with that of 'Oswald' a baby Bengalese Eagle Owl.

We are then introduced to 'Sweep', a very sooty Tawny Owl, brought to the centre, having been saved from an untimely death down a ladies chimney. No prizes for guessing why they call him Sweep.

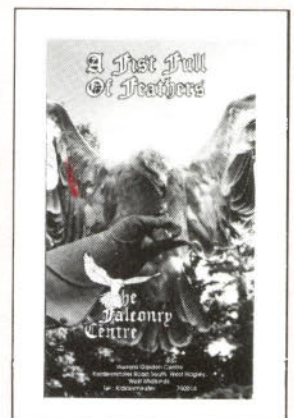
'Tubbs' the male Kestrel, illustrates the pure beauty of a small falcon flying to the lure.

The video also covers school children enjoying Raptors at first hand as they learn about the need for conservation, (the children that is not the raptors).

Having seen Chris fly a male Saker Falcon at a partridge and on the day of filming bag a rook, we watch Tally get down to some serious hunting, taking a very large squirrel and a rabbit.

This is just a taste of what proves to be a very enjoyable and action packed sixty minutes of film that will delight non-falconers and falconers alike.

Price £20 inc. p+p. Available from: The Falconry Centre, Kidderminster Rd South, Hagley, West Mids.



If you would like The Falconers and Raptor Conservation Magazine to review a book, video etc. please contact us at 20 Bridle Road, Burton Latimer, Nr. Kettering, Northants., NN15 5QP. Telephone: (0536) 722794.

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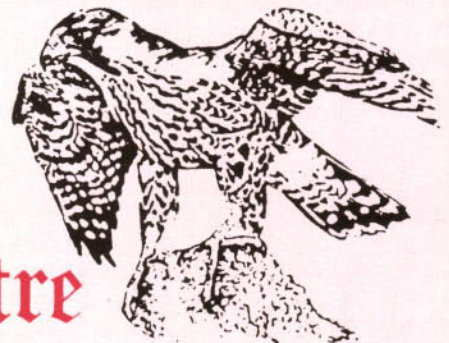
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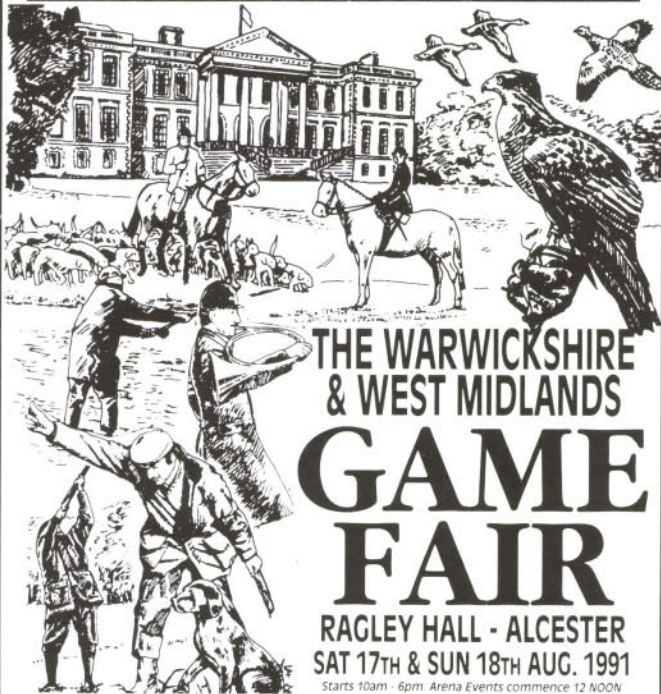


The Hawk and Owl Trust is holding the first International Conference on "Biology and Conservation of Small Falcons" from 6th - 8th September 1991 at the University of Kent, Canterbury.

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Details from: Fiona Swingland, DICE, University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NY

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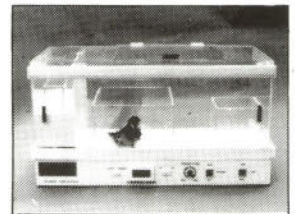
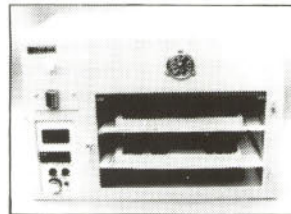
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