

The *Falconers*

& RAPTOR CONSERVATION MAGAZINE

Summer '91

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INSIDE



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LAPPET FACED VULTURE

SPECIAL: WORLD OF WINGS HORSEA

●  ... THE SPARROWHAWK

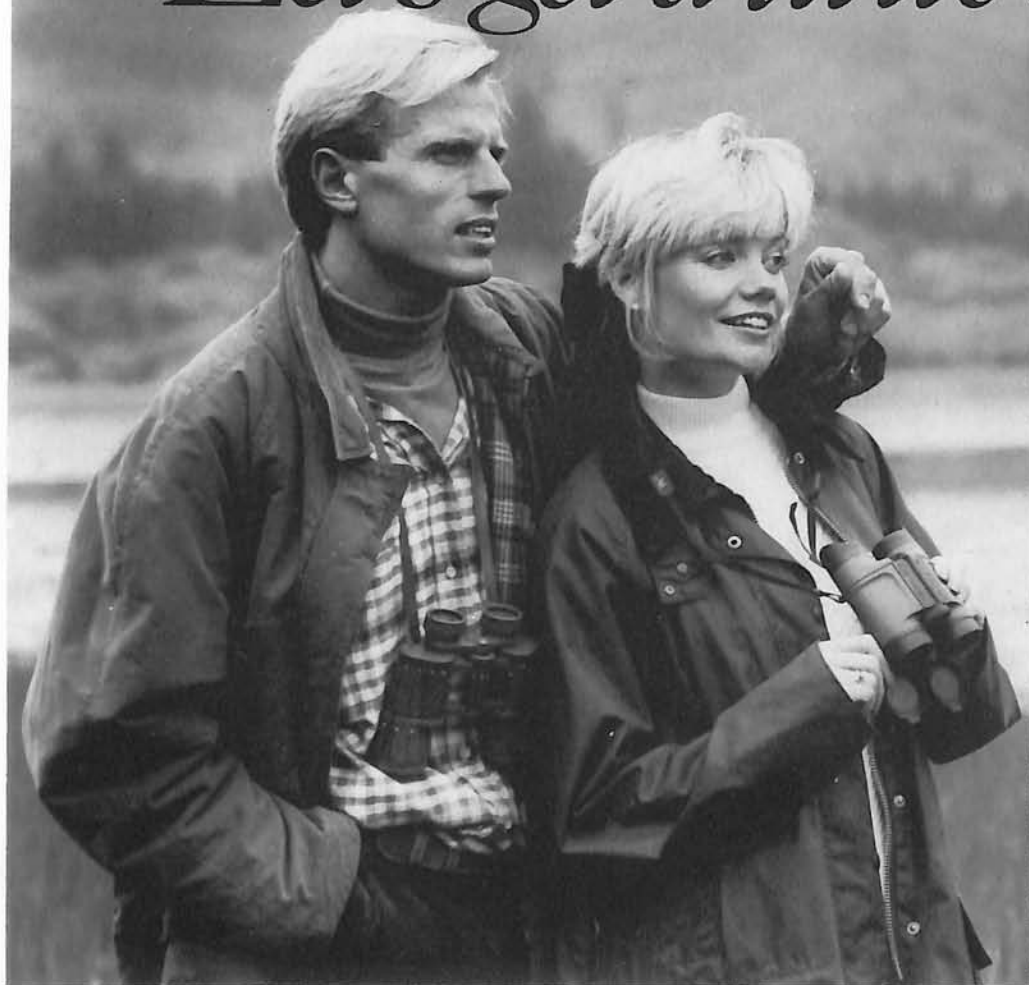
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The Falconers

& RAPTOR CONSERVATION MAGAZINE

Times are changing and so is the Falconers Magazine. As you may already have noticed we have re-designed our cover and changed the title and there are many more changes inside the magazine. We have been approached by various conservation groups to include more conservation in the magazine, all raptor related, but don't worry, you will still get your falconry articles. We want the magazine to grow and at the same time we must diversify a little. Although we do not want to lose sight of our initial aim, which is to produce a magazine for Falconers. Also as Falconers receive quite a bit of bad press as regards conservational aspects of Birds of Prey, we would like to give you the chance to set the record straight and tell just how much you have done towards the conservation of endangered species in this and other countries. We have another great competition for you with over £800 pounds worth of prizes. Lots of news and reviews and a marvellous centre spread by Philip Snow. We would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody for their continuing help and support and we hope to see you at the Falconers Fair at Stoneleigh on 18th and 19th May.

David Wilson Editor



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THE FALCONERS FAIR 1991

Following the great success of Europe's very first Falconry Fair staged last year at the National Agricultural Centre, Stoneleigh, this years event is planned to be bigger and have more scope.

Organising Secretary, Ron Morris, says, "We have now incorporated the word 'Raptor' into the title of this unique annual event with the intention of portraying the broader aims of the fair to provide a platform for all bird of prey interests which, in turn, always go hand in hand with practical conservation and it is hoped to reflect some of the work being carried out by committed individuals and organisations involved in this important field".

The world's finest falconry equipment makers will be exhibiting and selling their latest falconry accessories. Other exhibits include Emma Ford and the British School of Falconry, the Welsh Hawking Club, Central Falconry and Raptor Club, Raptor Rescue, The Hawk Trust and The Barn Owl Trust, The British Falconer Club and The Falconers and Raptor Conservation Magazine. Sir Michael Leighton and Ian Evans will be presenting a special educational exhibition showing the progress and current situation of the Red Kite in England. Book sellers catering for the practical falconer and collector, taxider-

mists and artists will also be present. Making a guest appearance on both days will be the world famous Hungarian falconer, Lorant de Bastyai.

Activities in the Falconry Arena will be con-


tinuous and varied and will include displays of the falconers dog and its training. One of the country's best known falconers, Mr. Bryan Patterson, will be leading the flying displays throughout the two days. Bryan,

from the West Midlands is one of the country's top experts in his field. He is well known for his expertise on T.V. and his appearances at the country's leading outdoor events with his birds of prey and flying displays. He runs his own mini zoo and Falconry Centre near Evesham and also lectures students at Worcester College in the ancient art of falconry.

The British Falconry and Raptor Fair is complimented by the Country Sportsman's Show running alongside over the two days. This fair offers the general public and the keen sportsman the opportunity to participate, get advice or tuition or just admire the many events and exhibits on display which include gundog competitions, terriers, lurchers, ferrets, The Working Gundog Centre, clay shooting, 4 x 4, fishing, hounds, dressage and air gunning to name but a few. A programme of arena events is planned for the two days. There will also be many trade stands to browse around and a large craft marquee with over 40 craftsmen displaying their skills.

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HAWK AND OWL TRUST

The Hawk and Owl Trust's National Centre for Owl Conservation is now a Wolterton Park near Aylsham, North Norfolk. It is signposted two miles north of Aylsham from the A410 Norwich to Cromer road. For more information please ring Paul Johnson 0485 518180.

VINCE THE VULTURE



Photograph by Ernie James

Possibly the ugliest chick this Easter, Vince the Vulture makes his press debut at 11.00am on Good Friday at Whipsnade Wild Animal Park, Dunstable.

Vince is the first Ruppell's Griffon Vulture to be parent hatched in the UK and his namesake, Vince Curzon, an Overseer at Whipsnade is delighted with his new charge.

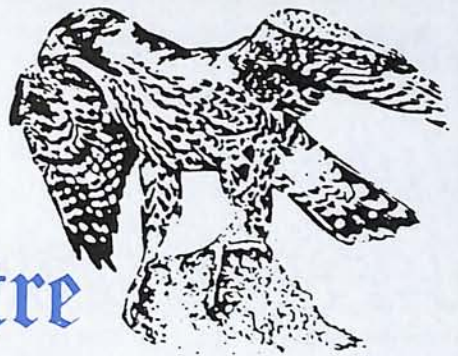
"Exactly why the birds started breeding is unclear, although the birds are no longer kept in a netted aviary" said Vince. "In addition, the Lappet-Faced Vultures which were quite aggressive and may have suppressed the Ruppells were transferred to London." Whatever the reason, the staff at Whipsnade Wild Animal Park are clearly thrilled with Vince the Vulture.

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THE FRENCH HAVE A WORD FOR IT

RAPPORT

by
DERRY ARGUE

Rapport. My copy of the Concise Oxford Dictionary defines the word as "communication, relationship, connection". Top dog handlers have rapport with their charges. If they didn't they would be top dog handlers no longer. Unerringly, Lester Piggott rides home the winners. Clearly, he is quickly able to establish a very strong rapport with the horses he rides.

Falconers do not generally establish a rapport with their birds. There is no need, and anyway, such a relationship would be impossible to establish. Certainly, there may be recognition, even affection, by a bird for its owner but rapport is associated with a natural bond between members of the same family or pack. In the man-horse relationship, the rider takes the place of stronger and more dominant members of the herd. A galloping horse must

It is quite beyond the ability of any dog to be deliberately disobedient, it is our fault for not training the dog properly in the first place

remain subservient to the mass, guided by bodily contact with its fellows. Any attempt to resist and go its own way would lead to the non-conformist being trampled by the majority or being picked off by a predator as it breaks from the body of the herd.

Birds of prey, of course, do not generally co-operate in flocks so they have no need to be influenced by their fellows. Dogs, on the other hand, have a

complex social development and very quickly learn to co-operate with each other in hunting. The worst combination to allow to stray into the countryside is a collie and a terrier. The sheepdog rounds up the sheep and the terrier goes in to kill, the perfect division of labour and specialisation of function.

Man-dog relationships in the hawking field fail most frequently because falconers do not understand elementary canine psychology. The second biggest cause of failure must be because the dog does not understand what it is his human companion is trying to do!

The dog is a predator, just like the hawk, and it's instinctive objective is to work towards the death of its prey. Canine predators are so specialised in this function that they will work so that another member of the pack may accomplish the kill. In man-dog relationships, it is essential for there to be rapport between the two for this "pack" bond to be found. It is not necessary for the hunting dog to perform the kill itself so long as it realises that the aim has been achieved.

Dogs are not philosophers. They know nothing of ballistics, forward allowance, or of the fine differences between hawking and falconry. But they understand the destruction of their prey. I recall one dog, obviously exasperated by the repeated failure of the falcon, rushing in to a covey, leaping into the air after the birds, catching one and retrieving it to its owner! Do I really need to explain the mental processes involved here? Mere disobedience? I think not. See how quickly a young dog learns to run in to shot, or to the "fall" of shot game! Who can doubt that this is not the expression of a hunting instinct?



"A close relationship develops between man and hawk - but seldom rapport"

There is no doubt that falconers would get far more out of their dogs if they would realise that their dogs are hunting companions who only want to see game put into the bag. That they occasionally do not get it right is not the fault of the dog but generally the mistake of the owner. Over a career of some 35 years with dogs I have seen owners guilty of every sort of injustice towards their dogs. I can honestly say that I have found dogs to be, on the whole, a lot smarter and quicker to learn than their owners! Dog training is primarily a communications problem.

A few case histories? Certainly! One falconer beat a pointer with his telemetry aerial because it "false pointed". Apart from the fact that it wasn't his dog, could he possibly have been able to guess at the facts of the situation? Could he scent the grouse better than the dog? Of course not! So he was in no position to judge what actually happened. Perhaps the birds had run. Most certainly, the dog would be more cautious in the future leading to an increased incidence of unproductive points and frustration to the falcon. A no-win situation.

On another occasion, after many hours work on a grouse moor with very few birds, another dog chased a hare. A few minutes later the dog returned. It was a fully trained and very experienced dog. My interpretation of the incident was that the dog had worked hard and wanted a bit of relief. The chase did no one any harm, cost us perhaps five minutes. The misdemeanour would probably not be repeated again for some time. The owner deliberated for several minutes, then took hold of the dog and gave it a generous licking. To what end? The punishment was too late to be associated with the action of chasing the hare. And anyway, what is to say that the dog would not associate the beating with its failure to catch the hare? To my mind, the dog had already learnt a valuable lesson by allowing the hare to lead it a merry dance to no profit! The best course would have been to get another point and try to get a kill, then to have sat down in the heather for another five minutes, to talk to the dog, caress it, and show it how much the grouse the falcon had caught was valued! How many falconers involve their dogs in the kill this way? Most regard dogs as mindless machines and that is what they get!

A moment's thought will surely explain the reason why the most sensitive dogs, assuming the presence of other working instincts, are generally the best. For sure, you will damage that delicate rapport between dog and man by a hasty action or harsh punishment, but how much more valuable to have a hunting companion which responds to your quietest command and slightest gesture? Would you really kick your child in the ribs or beat your wife with the dog lead? Yes? Well, there are institutions for such people and help available under the Mental Health Acts. No? Then why treat your greatest ally in the hunting field with any less respect?

My dog on point, I gestured to my dog boy to take the pointer in to flush the birds for the Guns on either side. It was to be the boys first chance to work a dog and I should really have known better. The dog glanced up and saw

the boy rather than myself. He rushed in, flushed the birds, and chased them over the horizon. As he came back, the gamekeeper handed me his stick. With thanks, I handed it back. I told the Guns that the dog had thought the boy was there to steal his and my birds, hence his unseemly behaviour. I predicted the dog would perform even better for the rest of the day, without any chastisement, and so it happened. It is quite beyond the ability of any dog to be deliberately disobedient. If things go wrong, it is our fault for not training the dog properly in the first place ... and training is not a process by which we establish dominance over the dog but a process through which we engrain a set of actions and reactions making it clear to them how the kill is to be achieved. Failure in that is a failure in communication, not in a dog's ability to obey the rules. Realise that and you are half way home.



To get the best from a dog needs more than affection

INCUBATOR HYGIENE AND PREPARATION

by Robin Haigh

Well before the, first signs of raptor breeding behaviour is the time to dig the trusty Marsh Roll-X or Turn-X incubator out of winter hibernation.

Task number one is to thoroughly clean and disinfect, with bleach, washing up liquid or any good proprietary brand of disinfectant taking care to avoid wetting any electrical components.

Fumigation is a wise move but I would advise using Formaldehyde on its own rather than mixing it with potassium permanganate which I consider far too volatile. A pad on a saucer soaked with a small amount of Formaldehyde inside the running incubator should be quite adequate. Make sure that this operation is carried on outside and away from any livestock and in no circumstances inhale the fumes! Leave the incubator running all night if necessary until the pad is dry.

The fan motor bearings will appreciate a couple of drops of lubricating oil at this time but do not over oil or you may find the surplus all over the inside of the incubator. Make sure that any electrical components are quite dry before attempting to switch on.

The temperature controls both primary and secondary, if you have one, will almost certainly require resetting. Run the incubator for half an hour to make sure the whole unit has warmed up thoroughly before making adjustments.

The incubation temperature to be aimed at for most species of raptors is 99f (37,25c). A word of caution is offered at this point, for those thinking of purchasing their first incubator remember You get exactly what you pay for! To buy a cheap incubator for valuable eggs is, really unwise and the results will be predictably bad.

Highly accurate temperature control is the prime requirement of a modern incubator this can only be achieved with the forced air system where temperature controlled air is fan circulated to every part of the unit. A still air incubator works mainly by convection, that is cold heavier air moving down

and warm air rising, its plain to see that the still air system will cause uneven temperatures throughout, some can vary by as much as ten degrees from top to bottom.

The Super Roll-X incubator, still the leader in its field, will react to a temperature change of one tenth of one degree F, and control the unit to better than 0.2f.

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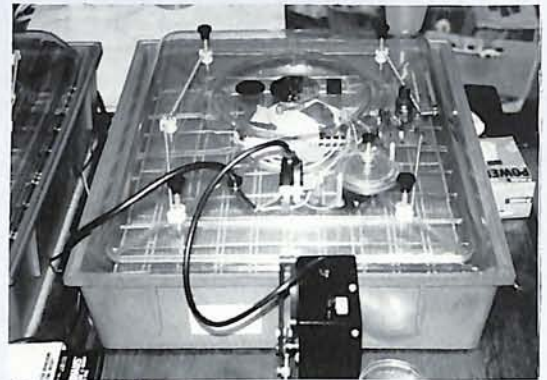
Accurate thermometers are required and a mixture of mercury and electronic types will prove useful in setting up the incubator but later on I tend to solely rely on the electronic model which is far easier to read. Always check electronic thermometers initially for calibration error and change the battery each season making sure that the battery terminals are clean and dry.

After setting the precise incubation temperature the humidity inside the incubator will need to be checked. There are probably more errors made with humidity than anything else. The root of the problem is that humidity, to most incubator users, means having to add extra water. In fact, this damp climate of ours the air being drawn into the machine is often quite wet enough. Heating air has a drying effect. Warm air can carry more moisture than cold air. The addition of a minimal amount of extra water may be necessary, although many eggs require no water during incubation at least until the eggs 'pip'.

Humidity could be likened to perfume in that a little is good while a lot is definitely not better! The ideal average humidity required by the perfect egg, if there is such a thing, is around 46%, I would suggest that

50% RH is acceptable and 55% RH a maximum. Humidity readings below 35% are almost impossible to obtain without the addition of drying agents such as Silica Gel crystals which are effective for only a very short period of time and then require drying out. They are not to be recommended. More useful is a room dehumidifier which is capable of removing gallons of water per day from the air. These are now easily obtainable and reasonably priced.

Eggs of many Raptor species do well as low as 40% RH. Accurate humidity readings need only be taken when required, if that sounds obvious I



Super Roll-X Incubator

assure the reader that to many it is not, humidity requires checking at the start of the season or whenever the amount of water in the incubator has been altered. In most instances no water is required during incubation.

The water fountain type feed system will give a controlled amount of water to the incubator which is unlikely to vary. Alternatively humidity may need to be adjusted for individual species although the majority will do well at the 50% mark.

The most accurate way to take a humidity reading is to use a good thermometer with an absolutely clean wick covering the bulb portion, if the wick is contaminated in any way it will no longer absorb moisture at the correct rate which in turn will affect the rate of cooling of the thermometer bulb.

The principle behind this effect is that when water is evaporated off an object it 'drags' heat with it and thereby cools it. The rate of evaporation is controlled by temperature and to some extent airflow and the amount of moisture load that the air is already carrying, for example fully loaded air around 100% RH will be unable to take any more moisture, and may even shed some (this is 'dewpoint') being unable to take any more moisture means that evaporation off the thermometer bulb can no longer take place so there is no cooling effect and the 'wet bulb' thermometer will read effectively the same as the 'dry bulb'.

Identical wet and dry bulb readings can also occur for the opposite reason, no moisture present to allow evaporation and cooling to take place! The more water that you add to the incubator the higher the wet bulb will read, the less you add the lower it will read until the incubator is completely dry and it will then read the same as the dry bulb, say 99f.

A better understanding of these principles will prevent the large number of egg losses due to incorrect humidity, which is often the primary reason for poor hatches.

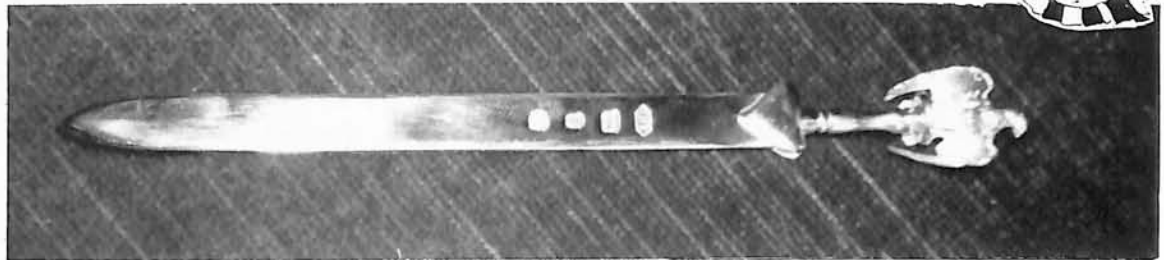


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Four runners up prizes of a years free subscription to the Falconers and Raptor conservation magazine.

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 CTC Publications, Top Floor, Tailby House, Corner Bath Road/Digby Street, Kettering, Northants NN16 8NL.

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 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)



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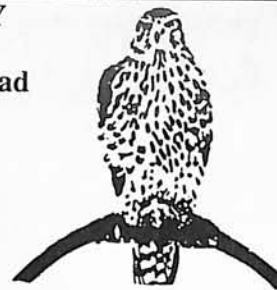
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CHANGE OF NAME FOR RAPTOR CLUB



"At the recent AGM of the former Heart of England Raptor Club, the club constitution was discussed and ratified. As a result of this the majority decision was that the name of the club should be changed to The Central Falconry and Raptor Club, in order to better describe the club's activities. The club's aims and objectives will remain the same, and all members, "old" and new, will be extremely welcome whether they be experienced falconers, raptor keepers or bird of prey enthusiasts.

The club will be attending the Falconry & Raptor Fair at N.A.C. Stoneleigh on 18th and 19th May, and members are looking forward to the chance to talk to anyone interested in joining. In the meantime, anyone who would like to know more about the club should contact Sue Dewar on 0734 696501"

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VIVA ESPANA — Philip Gowdy

Next time you're packing for your annual holiday with the family, if you are going to the Costa Del Sol or the Balearics, make sure you take your binoculars and camera.

Two weeks 8 hours a day stretched out on those sun drenched beaches can become somewhat boring, once the novelty wears off. So do what I do, hire a car, get hold of a good map and head for the places that aren't on the tour guide. You will be most glad you did. I will start with Majorca, thousands of us Brit's head to this region every year and spend our days in busy Palma (which is the capital) or Magaluf (mistake). Forget these places and head up to the Northern Peninsula.

You will pass many rustic farms and castles with plenty of Tavernas, so you can try one or two Cevesa's (Spanish beer).

As you start to see the hills and mountains of the north. Keep your eyes and binoculars ready. Your wife will probably give you a hefty dig in the ribs everytime your binoculars scan the beaches, because ladies just seem to lose all their inhibitions once they see the mediterranean (Birds! Yes back to what we are here for) right at the tip of the island, there is a very rugged peninsula called 'Formentor'. This is the region where Elenoras Falcons live and breed. You can also find Peregrine, Kestrels and Buzzards here. The journey from Formentor down to Soller has the most dramatic and spectacular scenery with rugged cliffs and mountains with steep wooded valleys. Watch in this area for Red Kites, Falcons and Griffon Vultures. If you travel from Formentor having first had a chat with Prince Charles or Michael Douglas who lives in this area, head south along the road to Alcudia and then onto Lago Esperanza, much of this area resembles a building site but behind the new complexes and hotels, which are opposite the beach, you can find fantastic marshes with many varieties of Harriers, Falcons and Ospreys.

The next island is Minorca.

Minorca is an island where life is a great deal slower, but more expensive, than its big brother Majorca. It is a haven for Birds of Prey. You will fly in to Mahon Airport, within two miles of the runway, red and black kites, can be found walking across the road picking off the casualties of the night. The beaches on this island are some of the best in the mediterranean. To the south most of the tourist beaches are to be found. Punta Prima-Son Bou, and the two fabulous white sandy beaches of Cala Galdana and Son Saura will keep the family very happy. One day I thought I had reached heaven while I was floating in the turquoise waters on my lilo, I looked up into the deep blue sky to see two Red Kites displaying overhead. There are Black and Red kites on the south of the island, but drive to the North and life gets far more exciting. Take any of the small roads from Mercadal or Ferrerias and they will end up usually as dead ends, on one of the many deserted bays. This coast line from Cala Morell to Cala Pergonda is a reserve and the hills and slopes contain many species of Raptors, Falcons, Kestrels, Buzzards, Ospreys, and Short Toed Eagles. I have seen five Short Toed Eagles thermaling with both types of kites.

Finally: Andalucia (mainland Spain)

Andalucia is famous for the inland areas being "The real Spain", the Spain of white towns, Flamenco and lush mountainsides

with eagles floating on warm air over the peaks.

To the east of Andalucia is Cadiz, a very busy city which attracts many species of birds to its open mares and sewer beds. Marsh, Montagus, Hen Harriers, Black and Red Kites, Peregrine, Kestrels, Vultures and Buzzards all float around this area.

To the north is a region called Coto Donana National Park, this is one of the last great wildernesses of Europe and, besides the usual raptors, this is the breeding area of the Spanish Imperial Eagle.

As we go back down the coast towards Algeciras, Egyptian Vultures, Red and Black Kites, Peregrines, Hobbys, Short Toed Eagles, Harriers and Buzzards. The hills behind Gibraltar contain all these birds, as they roost here, after travelling the short distance across the sea from North Africa. They can be seen hunting low on the gentle slopes looking for easy targets.

In these areas there are plenty of small birds, rabbits, hares, partridges, egrets-storks, hoopoe-gulls to be taken. Obviously

these areas are most abundant during the migration times of Spring and late Autumn but many species find this area suitable to them all year round.

Inland towards Arcos De La Frontera (C343) is a fantastic rubbish tip which smells awful. There are not too many people around but its the place to go if you want to see a hundred various kites at close quarters.

Over the quaint village of Cesares, thirty kestrels live in the church tower, suddenly to the left a flock of Griffon Vultures float upwards and then drop away beneath you, one of the rare opportunities to watch the birds from above them.

Behind the swinging coastal resorts of Puerto Banus and Marbella are the mountain ranges of Ronda, in these ranges and the road from San Pedro to Ronda you can find Egyptian Vultures, Black Vulture, Booted and Bonellis Eagles and Golden Eagles. A variety of raptors hang in the sky around the ancient town of Ronda. This town, which is built between two cliffs, has a bridge over a gorge, while I was standing amazed at the view a peregrine 'waited on' near us then stooped away into the gorge. Griffons hang on the thermals over the old town. All in all Ronda is an incredible place. As you wind your way back to the coast you will be able to view valleys completely covered with coniferous trees, this area has both Sparrow Hawk and Goshawk.

Spain has one of the highest populations in Europe of Goshawks, and Falconers/Austringers have hunted with them for centuries. From what I have seen although smaller than the northern birds, we usually fly in Britain, they are very manouverable and a lot steadier, (perhaps the hot climate plays a part).

The inland lakes are homes to many raptors, but there are some other African species such as Pink Flamingoes and Storks. Barn Owls, Tawny Owls and Eagle Owls are all present in Spain. The cork plantations are full of Little Owls which Goshawks frequent and kill with ease.

There are a few people (Falconers and vets) who do a lot of good work with injured raptors, shooting and poisoning still goes on, you will see some photos of the lucky ones, all in all if you do go to Spain its well worth getting away from the busy sea fronts and taking a look at all the beauty this country has to offer.

Overleaf: Some of Spains Birds of Prey by Philip Gowdy

If you do go to Spain its well worth getting away from the busy sea fronts and taking a look at all the beauty this country has to offer

Checklist: Raptors in Spain

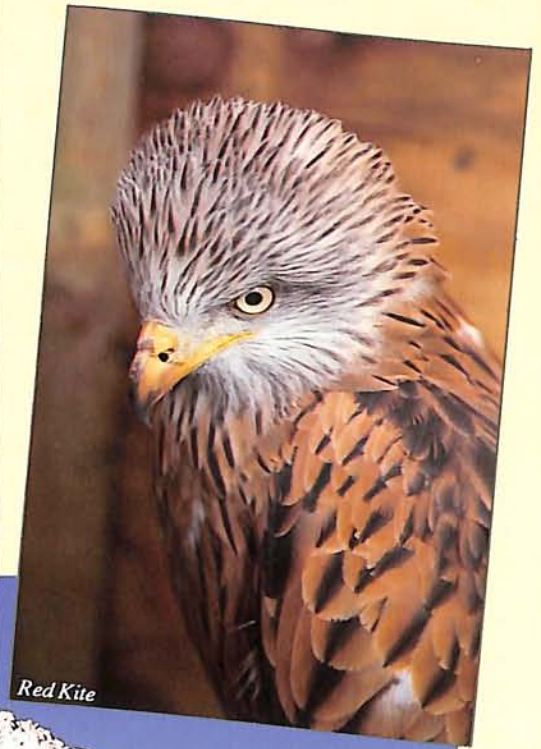
Black Winged Kite	approx 60 pairs	Hen Harrier	500 pairs	Osprey	10-20 pairs
Black Kite	20,000 pairs	Goshawk	3000 pairs	Peregrine	1,500 - 2000 pairs
Red Kite	1,000 pairs	Sparrowhawk	8000 - 9000 pairs	Elenoras Falcon	320 pairs on Majorca alone
Egyptian Vulture	2,000 pairs	Buzzard	5000 pairs	Hobby	4000 - 5000 pairs
Griffon Vulture	3,000 pairs	Golden Eagle	350-400 pairs	Merlin	Does not breed in Spain only overwinters
Black Vulture	200 pairs	Imperial Eagle	30 pairs	Kestrel	30,000 pairs
Short Toed Eagle	2,500 - 3000 pairs	Booted Eagle	1000 pairs	Lesser Kestrel	40-50,000 pairs
Marsh Harrier	500 pairs	Bonellis Eagle	300 pairs		



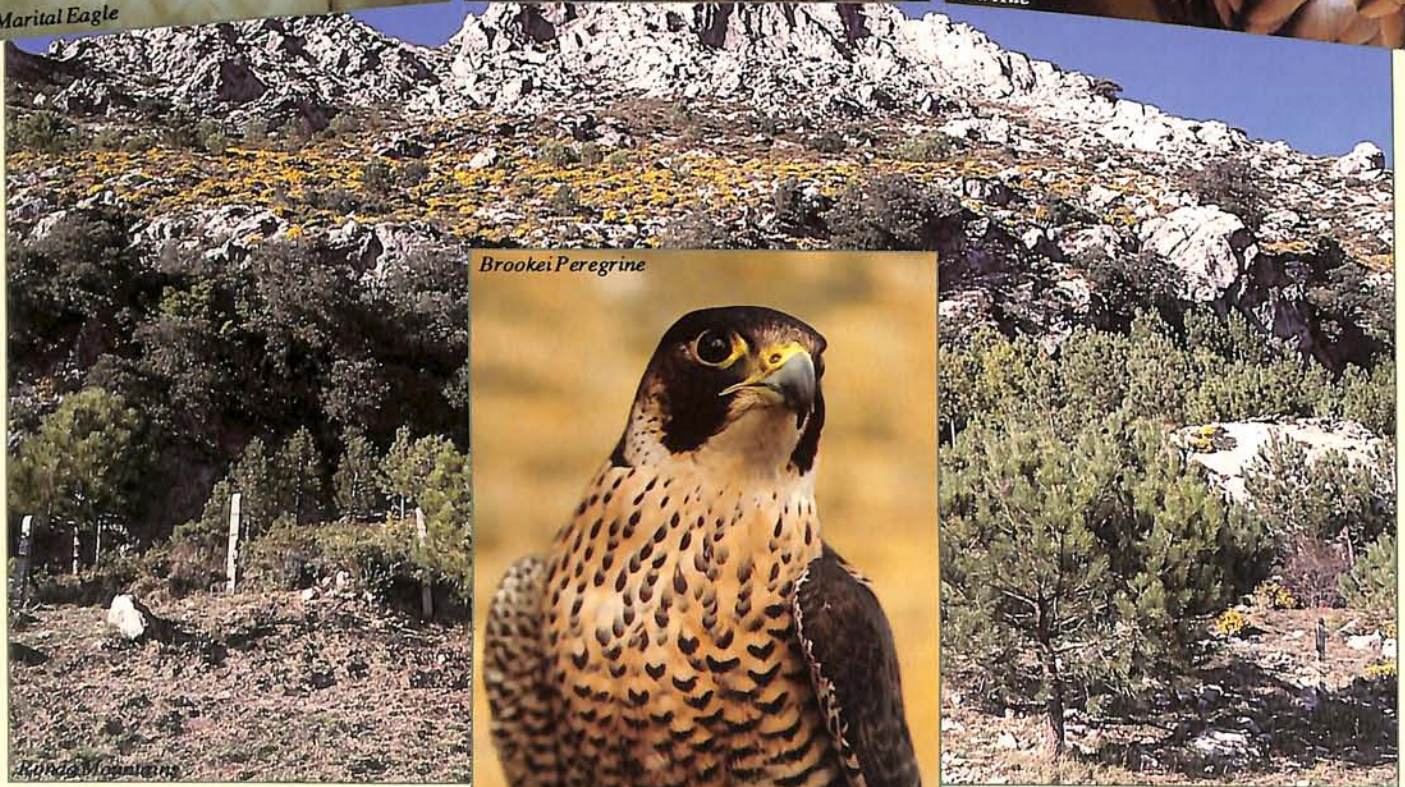
Marital Eagle



Griffon Vulture



Red Kite



Korda Mountains



Brookei Peregrine



Immature Bonellis Eagle



Booted Eagle with chick

THE SPARROWHAWK

by
Mike Everett

Like the Peregrine, the Sparrowhawk has had a chequered history during the 20th century, until the 1950s, Sparrowhawks were very common, with the only check on their numbers being heavy pressure from gamekeepers; two world wars brought periods of respite and, in turn, were followed by a general decline in keeping which worked to the bird's advantage. In 1954, the Protection of Birds Act gave protected status to all our raptors and owls, with the single exception of the Sparrowhawk, which was still widely regarded as "vermin" and a relentless killer of young gamebirds. Legal protection finally came in 1961. Despite studies which show predation on gamebirds to be minimal, and something which can be prevented anyway, there are still many instances of illegal killing. In its recently published study on bird of prey persecution, the RSPB lists 47 proved cases (involving a total of 50 birds) for the period 1979-89 - 12 birds poisoned, 26 shot, 6 trapped and 5 killed in other ways. Given the obvious difficulties in tracing incidents, these figures must represent a small fraction of the true totals. During the early 1960s it became obvious that the Sparrowhawk, like the Peregrine, had suffered a massive decline in numbers. The causes and the effects were much the same - prey contamination from organochlorine pesticides leading to death, eggshell thinning, greatly reduced breeding success and the total disappearance of Sparrowhawks from many areas, most notably in the agricultural areas of southern and eastern England. Even where Sparrowhawks survived, numbers were often greatly reduced. As the offending substances were gradually banned, or their use was restricted, the Sparrowhawk made its comeback - little by little, so that parts of eastern England have only been recolonised in the last few years. Where I live, on the edge of the Fens, my regular local birdwatching produced only two Sparrowhawk sightings be-

tween 1970 and 1984; sightings increased thereafter, but still only totalled 25 in 1989. Last year, that figure was more than doubled. Observations elsewhere within a 20-mile radius of home followed a similar pattern and it has been obvious for several years now that we have birds breeding locally in a number of places.

ent observers have described many variations on this basic theme. On two occasions I have had a male bird swerve deliberately towards me, using me as an extra bit of cover in an open garden, before launching a strike; when this happened last summer, the Sparrowhawk passed so close that had I been an Australian-class slip fielder I



Sparrowhawk on nest with young

Photograph by Miguel Lopez

While I was getting some ideas together for this piece, I twice watched our local female Sparrowhawk working the long, mature hedge which borders the field behind my house. That set me thinking about Sparrowhawk hunting tactics, kills and chases I have witnessed and how females differ from males. Like most other people, I always thought that the standard hunting technique of a Sparrowhawk was the one I have seen most often. This involves fast, characteristically low flight, along hedges (often flipping from one side to the other), through open woodlands and scrub, in and out of gardens and even between buildings, with marvellous use of cover and "dead ground". The element of surprise is vital here, the Sparrowhawk giving its prey as little chance as possible as it bursts upon the scene, attempts a quick grab or flies the victim down in a short chase. Differ-

might have caught him! What nobody realised until fairly recently was that woodland hunting involves very different methods; these were revealed by the long-term studies of Ian Newton and his colleagues in south-west Scotland, which amongst other things included extensive tracking of radio-tagged birds. It was found that Sparrowhawks actually spend a lot of time in cover, moving from one concealed vantage point to the next, watching and waiting and hunting from a perch. My hedgerow female (and sometimes a local male too) uses a variation on this general theme which is commonly employed in more open country. She sits high in the hedgerow trees (the male more often uses the hedge itself), constantly on the look-out, moving on by dropping down, gliding low and fast and then sweeping upwards to the next perch. No other British raptor uses sur-

prise and camouflages its approach quite so completely. Certainly none can match the astonishing manoeuvrability of a Sparrowhawk hunting in cover. Although they are not particularly well equipped for fast pursuit out in the open, Sparrowhawks can be surprisingly good at it, at least over short distances. They lack the pure speed of a Hobby and the almost frenzied persistence of a Merlin, but the fact that they will hunt open fields, saltmarshes and even mudflats argues a fairly good success rate. As well low-level raiding and forays from flat ground, they not infrequently hunt from a fair height, from both flap-and-glide flight and soaring: strikes are then made from long slanting dives (sometimes over quite considerable distances) or impressive near-vertical stoops. Female Sparrowhawks tend to hunt more in the open than males. They are also nearly twice as heavy (more still before laying), about 15% longer from beak to tail-and some 20% wider in wingspan. This enormous size difference means that a very wide range of bird prey is available to them. There is a great deal of overlap, but females often tend to take larger species than males, sometimes even up to the size of Woodpigeons. Both sexes can apparently carry prey of around their own bodyweight over quite long distances. They no doubt better that from time to time. I once watched a male Sparrowhawk lift and fly off with an adult Lapwing it had killed: their weights would have been around 150 and 200 gms respectively! The Spar, though, failed to clear a fence of pig-wire netting which lay ahead of it: it passed easily through one of big square holes in the mesh, but lost its catch as it fouled on the wire! Apart from continuing illegal persecution by some keepers, the Sparrowhawk is doing well again. The population probably numbers some 30,000 breeding pairs, plus over 30,000 non-breeders, making this our commonest raptor after the Kestrel.

A DAY ON THE HILL by Alan Gates

As I stood knee deep in the dry golden bracken, just a few feet from the top of the hillside. I turned and looked out across the dale, what a view and by god what a day.

It was mid morning and the sun was glorious, the sky was blue with just a few white fluffy clouds. Only a slight nip in the air betrayed the illusion of an early summers day. It was in fact mid January, and I was in the heart of the North Yorkshire Moors.

Standing a yard or so behind me puffing on his pipe, was Morris, who owned all he surveyed and more. Twenty yards or so to my right was his head keeper, John. It was through John that I had in fact been invited here to perform, well not me, it was 'Ivan' they really wanted to see in action.

Our invitation was to 'have a go at them blasted rabbits', as John had put it to me one night on the phone. I was always more than happy to accept such a request.

As I looked down the hillside to beyond the drystone wall, where the bracken halted and cultivation started, I could see what he had meant. The farmer had tried growing a field of wheat, thirty per cent of the field starting from the wall was bare, not a blade



of green. Then the chopped stalks, slowly increased in height until about the middle of the field it was at its full height of twelve inches, which I suppose was due to the poor ground and the lack of fertilizer. Well I knew we were not going to make much of a dent in this population of rabbits, no matter how many times we were invited back. Unfortunately there are much more efficient but ruthless methods for dealing with this quantity of rabbits. Luckily, we were here to show a bit of sport, or should I say 'Ivan' was.

He was already high above us, riding the moor top breeze on broad dark wings. I could just make out the gold on his head as he watched us below. 'Ivan' is a trained adult male golden eagle, with a flying weight of seven and a half pounds, and a six foot wing span.

Very few eagles are trained for falconry in Britain, mainly because they are difficult to obtain and are reputed to be temperamental in training and subsequent handling.

They are certainly no bird for the beginner to falconry, as you require a great deal of open country in which to fly them.

I could see that 'Ivan' was starting to get a little impatient with waiting above, he knew there were rabbits in this bracken and was starting to drift along the hill, I explained how we would beat our way through this infernal cover and thus set about to serve our winged companion.

John moved about twenty yards down the hillside and had just started beating along the line of the hill when he flushed the first rabbit. Ivan had obviously been watching John, for no sooner had the shout of RABBIT left his lips, Ivan had closed his wings, rolled over and stooped, crashing into the bracken no more than ten feet in front of John.

When I got to him and parted the bracken I could see he had the rabbit in one foot and it was dead. I offered Ivan a small reward, the front leg of a rabbit which I took from the meat pouch in my hawking bag. I offered it to him in my gloved hand, and he stepped onto my arm, releasing the rabbit. This I slipped into my bag whilst he was occupied eating his reward. I waited until he had completely finished and had feaked his beak, that is to clean his beak with a stropping motion across my glove, and then picking up any tiny morsels of flesh thus removed. When all this important instinctive ritual is completed, I raised



my arm facing him into the wind. Feeling the updraft from the dale below he half opened his wings and allowed the lift of air to take him up to about twenty feet. He banked to the left across the wind and climbing higher moved further along the hill.

We continued beating expecting Ivan to return as before, after about two or three hundred yards, he would turn and glide back towards us. Then circle above where we were beating, checking the ground for any movement, he would then fly fifty or so yards behind us just in case any rabbits were making a sneaky retreat. Once satisfied he would glide on ahead, all the while watching below for the slightest twitch of a rabbits ear. This pattern of flight he would repeat time and time again as we moved slowly forward, trying to dislodge the rabbits from this dense cover.

Suddenly a shout from Morris, as I looked ahead I saw Ivan in a spectacular stoop, corkscrewing down, wings tightly tucked in, he looked like a massive bolt from the blue. It then dawned on me that his aim was not taking him into the bracken, but further down into the farm land. 'Oh god, I hope it isn't someones chickens' I cried. Just then he levelled out, clipped the top of a thorn hedge and crashed into the edge of a corn field. I ran through the bracken

and over the dry stone wall, desperately trying not to dislodge any more stones, as it sadly needed some restoration. I staggered up to Ivan, gasping for air and with heart pounding in head. There he proudly stood with a large buck hare in his feet, its back leg gently kicking a final nervous twitch. I lifted Ivan off the hare and rewarded him, I slipped the hare into a small sack I carried in my hawking bag. This I hid near the dry stone wall and would collect at the days end. Its no joke trying to carry an eight pound hare in a hawking bag attached to your waist belt. As I climbed over the wall Ivan decided he could get to the top of this hill a lot easier on his own. He opened his wings, I released my grip on his jesses and he was away. He was back in position before I was half way up the hillside, I waved to John and Morris to carry on beating as Ivan was about fifty feet above them and waiting to be served.

He caught two more rabbits before we decided to call it a day. As we made our way diagonally down the hill, John virtually stood on a cock pheasant, it burst into action, its verbal cacophony was still ringing in my ears as I saw Ivan close his wings and start to plummet earthwards.

Now, he rarely takes any notice of feathered quarry, and I had informed

our host of this matter with almost certainty.

Ivan had commenced his stoop some thirty or forty yards behind us and it was near vertical, perhaps he had seen a rabbit, the old cock was now cracking on ahead. My companions were still watching the departing pheasant, Ivan levelled out of his dive and passed between Morris and I at about shoulder height. With wings still tucked tight to his body he flushed past like a missile. I saw Morris flinch at the sound of the parting air. He overhauled the pheasant in a couple of seconds, and as he came level, he rolled onto his side and we saw a large yellow foot, reach out and pluck the pheasant out of the air. He then turned into the hillside and landed.

I was speechless, then Morris whooped out and yelled 'BRILLIANT'.

I apologised. 'Sorry?' he yelled 'That was the best yet, I've never seen anything like it. What a brilliant day'.



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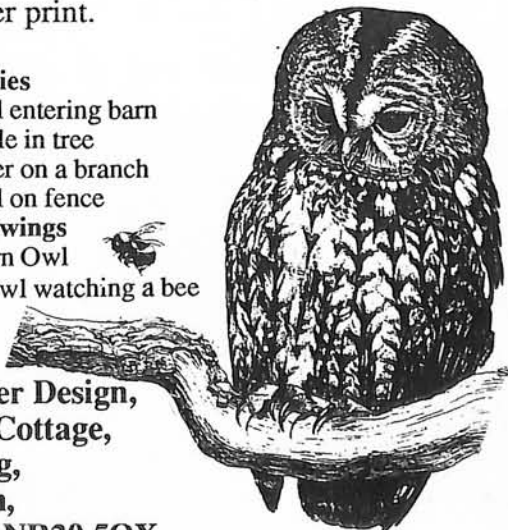
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News

OFF TO A GOOD START



Philip has finally achieved his goal of opening a Falconry Centre. Incorporated in The Butterfly Park at Long Sutton in Lincs., it has the potential to be a great success. Already he has some great characters in his birds, not least being Danny, a beautiful Tawny Eagle who's light coloured plumage makes him a joy just to look at, let alone watch fly. And in the short time he has been flying in displays he has picked up an obvious taste for the camera because everytime he lands it is with his best side showing.

Philip was originally scheduled to open at Easter 1992 but he did a quick turn about and in five weeks he has put together a nicely set out centre, with well built weatherings and a nice selection of birds, including a female peregrine, a Barbary peregrine/Gyr hybrid and of course Danny. There are two displays a day at approx 12pm and 3pm and Philip fly a mixed selection of birds.

The centre is not yet complete as he is in the process of putting together a lecture room which is also making good progress. The Butterfly Park is open until October and Philip will be more than pleased to see anyone who wishes to visit.

Left: Sadie a Bengal Eagle Owl (the baby at the centre)

Above: Philip with his Tawny Eagle 'Danny'

"TRAINING GUNDOGS FOR FALCONRY"

On Sunday 14th July 1991 Guy Wallace will be holding another of his successful Gundogs for Falconry Training Days at the Warren Gundog Training Centre near Brecon. Set in the beautiful countryside of the Welsh Borders, the home of the peregrine and the red kite, the course covers every aspect of training gundogs for falconry including pointing live game. Participants are encouraged to bring their own dogs. The cost of the course will be £20 and accommodation can be arranged.

Further details from Guy or Marian Wallace, Tel: 0874 754311.

RAPTOR

Ron Jones

RESCUE NEWS

A phone call from Cannock Chase Forestry Commission came early one morning, to report that they had a young Bird of Prey and would I take it off their hands. It turned out to be a 4/5 day old Sparrowhawk. Without going into detail, the youngster could not be returned to the nest. The bird was force fed every 2-3 hours and kept in a heated hospital cage. I telephoned all the L.R.K.'s that I knew and breeders etc in an attempt to foster, much to my amazement I was unable to find anybody to help, I even tried a radio station to see if they would broadcast a plea for help. As time went on I became increasingly concerned about imprinting. My colleague, Mick, gave me a dead Sparrowhawk and I was very kindly lent a recording of a Sparrowhawk nest site by a local ornithologist. From that point onward, entering the hospital shed, the recording was played and the dummy Sparrowhawk, armed with food was offered to the nestling and happily, it responded by calling and taking the food. This process continued whilst in an enclosed flight until the youngster was fully fledged. After a few weeks, she was tackled up and I began to train her using falconry techniques. This is when the trouble began, as typically, a Sparrowhawk flying weight is critical, she would not respond to the fist and often threw fits if I was late feeding her. Time went on and she progressed but for the slight problem of her eyes being bigger than her stomach. She would ignore virtually all small quarry but think nothing of chasing a cock pheasant 200 yards away. Eventually I lost her for a few weeks. Finally she was reported, found fighting it out with a Tawny Owl (typical of her). She was retrained and showed more interest in

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

smaller quarry. She made a kill and continued to pursue appropriate sized quarry and was finally released back to the wild. The whole exercise took months. She was known as 'Gem' to me, great fun and a lot of hard work but to see her go back to the wild made this rehabilitation work worth all the effort. If you find a raptor in trouble and you need help and/or advice please ring this number;- 0920 463694 Alternatively if you would like to join Raptor Rescue you can write to Miss A Rossin, 3 Highwood Road, Hoddesden, Herts EN11 9AJ or M Robins, 20, The Larches, Ware, Herts, SG12 0XJ.



This Sparrowhawk is now back in the wild with the help of Raptor Rescue

Come and meet Eddie Hare at the RAPTOR CENTRE

I founded the centre in 1977 and from the beginning I have stuck to one principle. The RAPTOR CENTRE IS FOR THE BIRDS. Today the centre is based at Chilham Castle in some of the most picturesque countryside in Kent. Situated on the A28 half-way between Ashford and Canterbury, We have a comprehensive breeding programme and only release some of the young back into the wild. Releasing too many birds could in fact be detrimental to the wild population, creating unnecessary territorial disputes. The remainder are offered for sale, the proceeds of which help to finance the centre. All birds purchased will have our own rings on, as well as any other it may have to carry by law, our rings carry a number, the year, our name and telephone number.

When purchasing a bird, the buyer registers his (or her) name in the database. Should a bird be lost and reported to us we will then be able to contact the current registered owner and have them retrieve it. If the system is not abused we should be able to offer an extra security

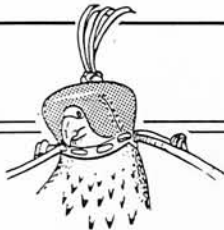


Baby Kestrels hatched at the Centre May 1990 - all were later released

to the owners of the birds bred by us, particularly the owners of Owls.

We arrange school visits on Mondays and Fridays to give children an insight into Birds of Prey and their conservation. The other days we are open to the public from Easter to October and flying displays are given

daily. The Raptor Centre is a recognised charity and relies a lot on public support. We have grown steadily over the last fourteen years but only with the public's help. So if you would like to come and see our birds we would be more than happy to welcome you.



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SCOTLANDS RAPTORS - a conservation success?

Field sketches, studies and text by (professional wildlife illustrator) PHILIP SNOW
(A personal & pictorial view of birds of prey in Scotland)



GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*)
Scotland supports a good and important percentage of the worlds Golden Eagles, but they, and other raptors, face increasing illegal poisoning, pole trapping and shooting by pheasant, partridge and grouse shooting estates and sheep farmers. With the rapidly expanding wilderness sports and leisure industry and blanket forestry all intruding upon them as well, it is obvious they need our continued support and protection.



MERLIN

(*Falco columbarius*)

Certainly our most endangered resident raptor, mainly by the loss of its specialist heather moor habitat. Although the initial conversion of moor and sheepwalk can aid birds like Hen Harrier, Short Eared Owl and even Merlin, it fairly soon destroys their preferred open hunting habitat and later encourages predators like fox and corvids, and ironically the magnificent GOSHAWK (*Accipiter gentilis*) another, otherwise, welcome recoloniser. Perhaps an apparent increase in tree nesting (Merlins nest in open birch woods in N Europe) will aid them, but the long term future looks grim at the moment.



Last year 19 **RED KITES** (*milvus milvus*) were reintroduced to N & Central Scotland joining those remaining from an earlier introduction and obviously hopes are that they will breed. Unusually, a few **HONEY BUZZARDS** (*Pernis apivorus*) summer in the Deeside area, joining the ranks of the widespread and successful **BUZZARD** (*Buteo buteo* - the common 'telegraph pole eagle!') which like the **KESTREL** (*Falco tinnunculus*) are surviving well in most areas. Apart from the **SHORT EARED OWL** (*Asio flammeus*) the owls are not particularly plentiful in Scotland, with a more south-easterly distribution of the **TAWNY OWL** (*Strix aluco*) and the **LONG EARED OWL** (*Asio otus*) and of course the **BARN OWL** (*Tyto alba*) ??? faces the same problematical decline as in the rest of Britain.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*)

The survivor par excellence with a well documented recovery from just about everything "civilisation" can throw at it! With now more peregrines, although in fewer places, (than pre-war, pre-pesticides etc) it must be said that in the far N & W of Scotland things are not too brilliant. The gradual degradation of an already acid environment means fewer moor and bogland breeding birds and with marine pollution and over fishing affecting sea bird colonies, these factors could be restricting further growth.

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*)

One of the RSPBs most celebrated conservation successes, recolonising itself in the 1950s only with rigorous protection. Now very well established, especially around the Central Cairngorm Massif. An undoubted tourist attraction, with enterprising fish farm owners providing viewing areas for its spectacular plunge dive fishing techniques. As with other migratory birds, it faces many problems en route elsewhere in the world, regardless of our birds triumphant return.

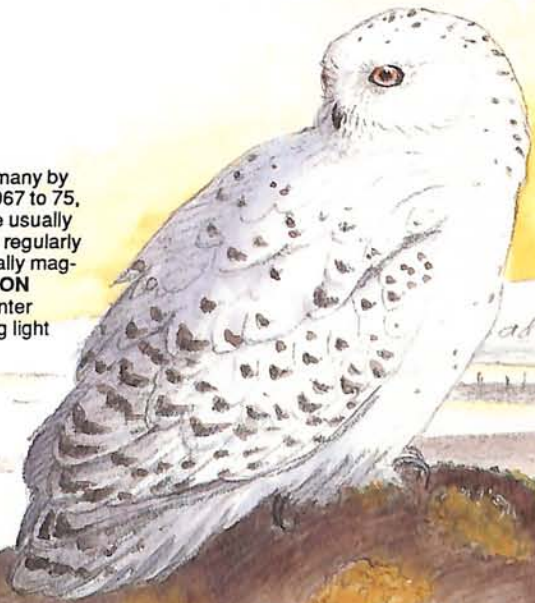
HEN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*)

Again, mainly good news, with birds recolonising N & W Britain from Orkney, their only remaining UK territory up until 1939. Disliked and actively persecuted by many grouse moor keepers, it is nonetheless one of the most beautiful complements, along with S E Owls, to this wide landscape, elegantly and slowly quartering it on canted wings. Doubtless the rapid spread of commercial forestry has initially and temporarily aided both species and they also share a winter coastal habitat of marsh, dune and farmland, with the harrier forming communal roosts.



SNOWY OWL (*Nyctea scandiaca*)

This charismatic arctic owl surprised many by breeding in the Shetland Isles from 1967 to 75, but subsequently only female owls are usually present, although birds are seen fairly regularly on the Cairngorm tops in spring. Equally magnetic and circumpolar, the **GYR FALCON** (*Falco rusticolous*) is also a regular winter visitor to the north, in its widely ranging light and dark plumages.



WHITE TAILED EAGLE (*Haliaeetus albicilla*)

Persecuted to extinction in Britain by 1917, young birds from Fenno-Scandia, were reintroduced via the Isle of Rhum, in the mid 70s by a joint RSPB/NCC venture. First successful breeding was in 1985, but the future must still be uncertain as slow attainment of breeding age, breeding failures and natural mortality all affect this small nucleus. Their massive wings and deep flapping flight make them appear slow and ponderous but their diet here of mainly hare and coastal duck, belies that. Certainly I have watched one nearly catch a Peregrine, in a long whistling stoop and their spectacular whirling display is very energetic.



Letters

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

Dear Editors,
referring to Derry Argue's "The Falconers Dog", part one. I feel I must reply in defence of HPR's which have more to offer the average falconer, than he may realise.

Surely Mr Argue is not naive enough to believe that these breeds came about simply by crossing one breed with another, and Hey Presto! we have our all round gun dog?

Even if we are daft enough to ignore nearly a century of selective breeding, what happens when, as Mr Argue suggests, we mate our 'well bred' labrador, to one of the British pointing breeds, and the resultant puppies have the pointing instincts of the Lab. and the ground covering abilities of the native 'bird dogs'? These traits may well appear, unless of course, we ignore the Mendelian theory of genetics as well.

I do hope that would be breeders of working dogs are not encouraged to produce mongrels of dubious temperament and ability.

I would add that I have for many years flown both short, and long wings, over German Pointers, with a fair amount of success, and I admit that I would love to use a pointer or setter, appreciating their style and beauty, but I, like many others, have to have a dog that I can use in many situations, and the HPR if well bred, meets these demands admirably.

Yours faithfully
Roger James

Derry says

Has Roger ever tried crossing a Pointer with a Labrador. I have as have many others (and was delighted with the result). I wish Roger the best of luck with his choice of breed, but after nearly 30 years its a bit hard to change my ideas now.

RESOLVE OF A REDTAIL

Michael Raphael

After much deliberation between either a Harris or a Redtailed Hawk I chose a male Redtail. My choice was purely that I felt a male Redtail offered much more in hard hitting aggression towards its' prey than a Harris even though a Harris would arguably catch more I Acquired Scarlet, a parent reared, Male Redtail on 4th February 1990, I wanted one late in the season to avoid social calling which can happen if they are handled too early. I did nothing with him for a couple of weeks except a lot of manning. On March 11th he made his first kill and everything was going well.

That was until the Sunday before I was going to lay him up for the moult. While flying a rabbit he flew into a rusty barbed wire fence. I noticed that the barbed wire had caused a puncture hole at the side of each leg. After treating them with a mild disinfectant, when I got home, they didn't look too bad. However I was horrified two weeks later when the scales parted to leave a centimetre hole in the side of each leg. My usual Vet sent me up to see Nigel Hardcourt-Brown in Harrogate, he operated, stitching the scales together, and it was a great success. This brings me to this season. It started well and I was very pleased with not only his hunting ability, but also the way he could follow me through woodland, while I would beat below. Disaster struck on 16th November '90 when he caught a rabbit, he took it well in the head but his petty digit on his left foot went into the rabbits mouth and was bitten. I had never noticed before but the teeth in the upper part of the rabbits jaw are like chisels. I took him straight to my vet, who put four stitches in the wound and gave him a course of antibiotics. At the time there didn't look as if there was any damage to the tendon and two days later he caught another rabbit so it didn't put him off. After several trips back to my vet it became obvious that there was some tendon damage, as he could grip with the toe but not extend it, so the decision was made to take him up to Nigel in Harrogate, to see what he thought. As soon as Nigel saw the toe he said it would need an operation, but he said the outcome would probably be the toe would be amputated. An hour later Nigel brought through from his operating room a very groggy Redtail, sorry to say, minus a toe. The operation was on the 20th December and a week later he was adding to the seasons bag.



Dear David and Lyn,

Having seen so many articles on Falconry in the U.S.A. and U.K. I would just like to comment on the present state of falconry in the middle east. I have received a letter from Dr Faris A. Al Timimi, a well known falconer and vet in Qatar. The letter states that falconry, because of the Gulf Crisis, has suffered a 50% decline, his veterinary practice is also down 50%.

Arab countries are enforcing game like seasons to protect wildlife and the U.A.E has banned hunting, with other countries looking to follow suit. I have seen falconry in the middle east and am going back out there, once my contract of work comes through, I feel very fortunate to be able to work away from England and still practice my beloved sport.

My wife and I have had a good season flying our peregrine tiercel, female redtail and Saker falcon and we have, on order, from a well known Scottish School of Falconry, one peregrine X prairie and one peregrine X Saker, both tiercels, for this coming season.

What really concerns me is the number of so called, 'Falconry Centres/Schools', opening up, there's a new one nearly every month and I know that some of the people running these places have only been practising falconry for a very short time indeed. This is very worrying and we are already seeing an increase in abused



Peregrine Falcon

birds and even worse, beginners being sold everything from a sparrowhawk to a peregrine or even worse, a very large, aggressive female redtail or goshawk, which to an inexperienced person, could cause a major problem. If mal practice like this continues it will only harm the sport, not help it and should people like the R.S.P.C.A and protection societies like the R.S.P.B. push this argument, we could well see our sport facing bans etc.

Also, after studying falconry for 15 years and coming through the mid eighties with the ridiculous prices birds were fetching, nobody now breeds imprinted birds, there's nothing wrong

with a properly reared imprint, the Americans fly them very successfully. What is wrong is the fact that unreliable breeders just tell tales when selling their birds. Why if this is not true, do we have to demand a letter saying the bird is parent reared? Is there no trust among falconers and breeders in falconry?

All I can say when buying birds, is to go to someone who has a good reputation with birds of prey. I purchased, in 1990, no less than 8 falcons from one breeder and one falcon I received in exchange from one other person and we are totally satisfied with all the birds, not one bad falcon amongst them, and I am proud to say they were B Haddon and D Durman-Walters, both of whom I have the utmost respect for. As with everything there's always a bad element and no doubt, in time, they may be forced to leave our sport and good riddance to them.

I know, out there, there are many good falconers and breeders and it is only by supporting each other, can we survive and pass on our sport to our children and, like most of you, I hope the day never comes when falconry in England might face a ban. I wish all dedicated falconers and breeders a prosperous 1991 and a good hunting season.

Yours sincerely
W Hawkins-Pinchers

O FOR AN EAGLE'S VOICE ——— KEN SMITH

I have read with a great deal of interest the article by Alan Gates entitled 'In reply to the Hawk Board', Winter 90 issue, and with equal interest in the Hawk Board report to which he refers. I've taken a lot of interest in Alan's breeding efforts and helped in my own small way, I am a member of the Hawk Board so I have the greatest respect for both parties and it is not my intention here to knock either. Eagle owners however, with a few exceptions, like Alan, have shown and continue to show a distinct lack of interest in using their birds for breeding, often with perfectly valid reason. They are a small dedicated band on the fringes of falconry who will die out with their birds if current attitudes prevail, and who seem blinkered to the fact that although eagles are long lived they are not immortal and may therefore need replacing eventually. Lack of availability is what the Hawk Board initiative is all about and while it is perhaps being conducted by those with little personal interest in golden's, at least they are doing something, and in a manner shown to be impartial. The initiative is a product of NCC/DOE policies and not, I think, something the Hawk Board would choose to do if the circumstances were different. If I were to criticise it's report it would be to question the wisdom of putting into print what the NCC/DOE have only insinuated, with particular reference to license applicants merely wanting a cheap eagle. A victim of the ever changing policies of the NCC over a period of twenty years, having tried every possible means to acquire golden's only to find that when I get within striking distance they adeptly move the goalposts, I can only conclude that at best the NCC/DOE do not 'encourage' the captive breeding of this species so much as doing everything within their limitless powers to discourage it. Here I list some of the reasons given for refusal of license applications along with my comments:-

1971 licenses are granted on individual merit
1972 we are not required to give a reason for refusal

(Two replies which cropped up many times up to and including 1989)

1974 licenses are only granted to those experienced with eagles

(I've owned a tawny eagle since 1969 and five other species in later years)

1976 licenses are only granted for falconry purposes

(reply to my application for breeding purposes)

1977 licenses are only granted for breeding purposes

(reply to my application for falconry purposes)

1980 licenses granted to take one nestling golden eagle

(the typescript crossed out free hand and replaced to read one eyas peregrine, I had applied

for a pair for breeding purposes as president of the club and one for falconry as a personal application)

1981 no licenses being issued because last year there were fewer applicants than the allocated six permits (must mean I failed to apply last year, funny!

could have sworn ...)

1986 licenses can only be given to those with experience of breeding raptors

(I had bred 21 species increasing to 34 species to date, if I can include owls)

1987 licenses can only be granted for Scientific/educational purposes

(I am co-owner of a falconry centre subject to Zoo, Licensing Act (zoology is a science) we take students on placement from the Royal Veterinary College, Min. of Agriculture College, Edinburg University, Leeds University and education facilities used by approx. 30,000 school-children per year)

1988 licenses can only be given as part of a well planned, well organised breeding programme

(As well as the public Centre we have twenty private enclosures specifically for breeding, utilised by the RBA club goshawks, and can claim for what it's worth at least one World first. The enclosures are seclusion type with electric and water, one way observation and remote feeding)

1989 no further licenses are being issued

Through an eighteen year period I have fulfilled and every criteria set by the NCC/DOE even to the extremes of offering to sign a legal undertaking to hand back any offspring to the Nation (via DOE) to dispense with under some form of licensing, and even made provision for the welfare of the birds in the event of my early demise.

All to no avail, but each department, NCC, DOE and Scottish Office had in turn advised that captive bred golden eagles are available from Germany and a license to import would not normally be refused. The Hawk Board report includes this.

I was foolish enough to believe that for once the powers that be might be telling the truth, so I decided to do exactly what they advised.

In the Spring of 1990 I was put in touch, through a third party, with two German breeders. Genuine, reputable breeders who in recent years had proven by DNA tests that they are indeed genuine, and who had exported golden's to Britain in 1988 and 1989. The CITES certificate is the document issued by the Committee for International Trade in Endangered Species and is the internationally agreed means of confirming the legality for trading purposes of the birds to which it refers. Coming from Germany, an EEC member country, one cannot imagine it would be regarded as unsafe so on receiving it, I secured

the birds with a deposit to await processing of the import permit by the DOE.

Two of the birds are F1 generation so it was possible that their use could be confined to breeding only, two others are F2 and may be used for any purpose and in the case of these two the DOE are not required to consult their scientific advisors (???). In early December 1990 the NCC had a meeting with its 'colleagues in Germany' before coming to any decision regarding F1 birds. By mid January no decision had been forthcoming so I forwarded the CITES/Export permits for the F2 birds, and the NCC had a meeting with its 'colleagues in Germany' before coming to any decision. After many phone calls to the DOE, the NCC are a secret society and unavailable, I was told that the birds are captive bred, proof by genetic fingerprint would be accepted providing the blood samples are taken in the presence of an official from the German issuing authority. I perhaps should add that in a phone call to the DOE in December I was told that a license could be issued for a male immediately. I take this to refer to the F2 male. A decision not only reversed but flatly denied some four weeks later.

No I cannot accuse the NCC of refusing a license since they have not, but they have once again put insurmountable obstacles in the way knowing full well that to organise six blood samples (2 young and their respective parents) at the convenience of both the Vet and the Bundesamt official is next to impossible, particularly with only six weeks to the golden eagle breeding season.

Through the 1970's the NCC/DOE allocated a certain number of licenses to be granted each year, applications were then passed to one man, a member of the BFC, to decide who should receive them. As a non member my 'individual merit' will no doubt have been somewhat reduced and perhaps that could also explain the handwritten alterations on the 1980 license, which I still have. However, the point I wish to make is that those halcyon days are gone, and the future of eagle falconry relies entirely on captive breeding and ultimately the present eagle owners. Particularly poignant to me was Alan's worries about over production, since, while I agree that some form of control may be necessary over who acquires these potentially dangerous birds, I can confirm that eggs are extremely easy NOT to hatch if the need arises. The Hawk Board initiative should be accepted as just that, an initiative, an effort to motivate the eagle keepers into realising the full potential of the birds they own. Otherwise they could find themselves the last of the eagle men, birds do die, and they could find that one day my story will become theirs.

SALMONELLA IN IMPORTED DEAD DAY OLD CHICKS

Thanks to recent government measures and improved hygiene standards British hatcheries are now the cleanest in Europe and are producing both eggs and chicks that are salmonella free.

Unfortunately the same cannot be said for a number of our European partners. Salmonella has been discovered in eggs produced by hatcheries in Holland. Dutch day old chicks are imported in large quantities to be sold for raptor food. No tests are carried out on these by the producers to check for salmonella.

Readers would be well advised to think carefully before feeding their birds on imported chicks at least until the foreign hatcheries are given a clean bill of health.

ROBIN HAIGH

PLEASE TELL US WHO AND WHERE YOU ARE!!!

We would like to hear from all the Falconry Clubs, centres and places where Birds of Prey are kept so we can compile a list for inclusion in the magazine, we are daily discovering new clubs etc. and we are sure there must be individual Falconers out there that would like to join a club or be able to go along to their nearest centre for a chat but don't know where it is.

So you tell us and we'll tell them. We would also like to include news items about you and what you are or have been doing. Phone 0536 722794.

We would also like to hear from overseas subscribers about their clubs and any centres in their area as it would be nice for falconers to be able to look them up when travelling abroad. And we would like to hear about different methods of falconry and hunting practised abroad.

Review

INTRODUCING FALCONRY

Reviewed by D. Perkins

This is a facsimile by E.B. Mitchell, of Tom Speedy, F.H. Salvin and W.M. Broderick with superb black and white line drawings by George E Lodge, J.G. Millais and others. In the first section E B Mitchell runs through some of the birds available to falconers and their behaviour. In the second section Tom Speedy gives you an insight into the naive destruction of all of Great Britain's birds of prey at the turn of the century, some of which is still going on today. Going in to detail about how landowners, sheep farmers and gamekeepers planned and instigated the slaughter of both old and young birds. It is definitely not for the faint hearted. The third section is based on a book by W H. Broderick and F.H. Salvin and briefly explains what implements are used in the training of a bird for falconry. This book is a compilation of views of different writers and the works of distinguished artists and gives you an insight into the art of falconry and birds of prey.

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HINTS ON THE MANAGEMENT OF HAWKS AND PRACTICAL FALCONRY

Reviewed by P. Bates

Due to popular demand this book, which has been out of print for a few years, has been re-issued. The author has revised the original text and made considerable addition to the illustration and has included an update in the law. This book gives an insight into the art of falconry and Birds of Prey. J.E. Harting goes into detail in some chapters and not so much in others. His only aim has been to revive public interest in a time honoured field sport and to share with others the pleasure which he himself has derived from its practice.

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ADVANCED TAXIDERMISTRY

By P.A. O'CONNOR

Reviewed by Simon Askew

When I was first handed a copy of Advanced Taxidermy By P.A. O'Connor I was expecting it to be complicated. On the contrary, Mr O'Connor has provided us with a book for the person who has read a beginners book and has tried a few specimens himself and wishes to know more. This book is packed with explicit instructions and diagrams and colour photos all taken by wildlife photographer David Nye. There is a very comprehensive eye size chart at the back of the book which I found very helpful. He also tells you the tools and chemicals you will need and where to obtain them. For anybody who wishes to take up taxidermy I can unreservedly recommend this book for the person who wants an easily understandable but in depth taxidermy book.

Chapters covered: Birds, Mounting a trophy head, Mammals, Tanning, Rug making, Fish, Wax leaves and vegetation, Freeze dried work, Combined and a general guide to Taxidermy. Check lists of wire and eye sizes.

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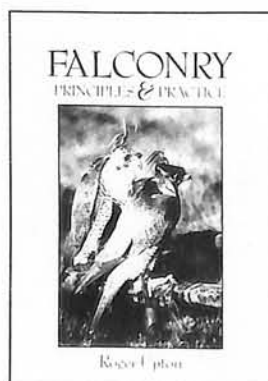
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FALCONRY PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

Roger Upton

Roger has provided us with an up to date book on flying the larger long winged falcons, Peregrine, Saker, Lanner and the Gyr. The chapters on training, furniture and housing are, in general, applicable to all species of hawk and have been written so as to be understood by everyone. Roger has over 30 years experience of flying hawks and falcons and has explained some of the problems and pitfalls when flying these birds, they are brought to light so you can avoid them and so prevent the loss of your hawk. This book goes in depth into hunting all species of quarry with the longwinged falcons, e.g. Rook, Crows, Jack-



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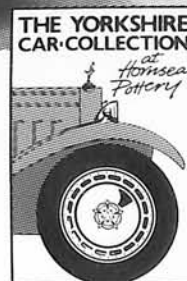
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A DAY OUT WITH A DIFFERENCE

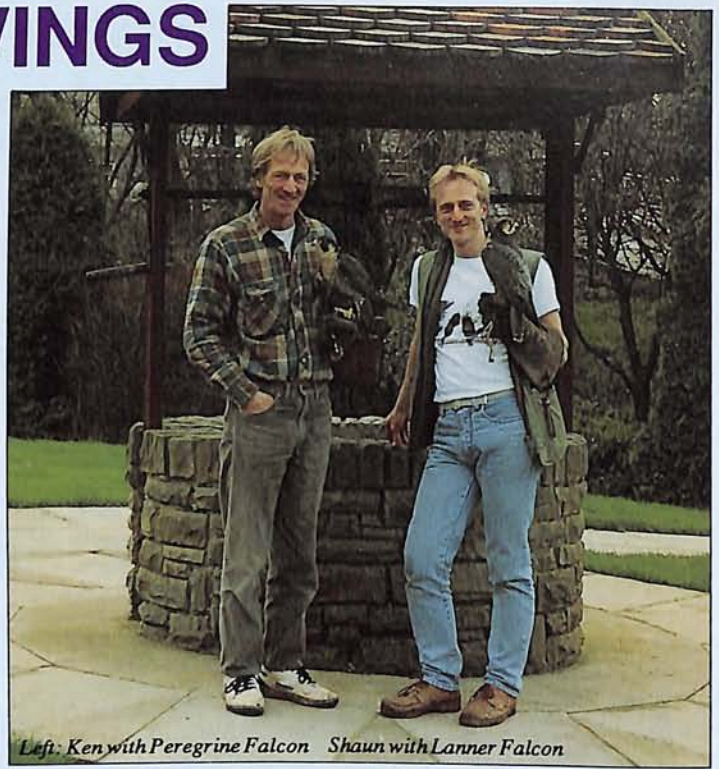
THE WORLD OF WINGS

Bird of Prey and Conservation Centre

The crowd watched in awe and the mass intake of breath was audible as Sequoia parachuted from the sky to land like a butterfly on Shaun's arm. Arm! well yes, for Sequoia is an Alaskan bald eagle who's huge feet spread from fist to forearm, very proud and with excellent manners she performs with the utmost grace and dignity that does nothing to detract from her free spirit. Imported in the centenary year of the massacre at Wounded Knee, she is so named in honour of the great Cherokee chief renowned for his intellect and remembered as a peacemaker. Her flight is the finale to the main flying demonstration given at 2.00pm daily when a variety of raptors, owls and vultures included, are flown, with a commentary leaning strongly towards education and conservation and taking in their biology and ecology while stressing the important role of captive breeding.

Where is this you must be wondering? We are at the World of Wings Hawk Reserve, part of Hornsea Retail and Leisure Park situated on the outskirts of a quiet holiday resort on Yorkshires East coast a short distance South of Bridlington. Along with all the other visitors (almost a million per year) we were given the warmest possible welcome and impressed by the willingness to oblige of Ken and Shaun of whom it seems nothing is too much trouble nor any question too mundane. Equally impressive are the well kept lawns and gardens where the birds are housed in aviaries individually tailored to specific needs and tastefully situated, almost hiding, among the mature parkland trees. There are tall cacti in Mexican desert and crags on a New England mountainside to mention but two of the micro habitats created for the comfort of the exhibits and the aesthetic enjoyment of the customer, all artificially produced but a surprising and pleasant change from a 2" x 2" perch and plywood nest shelf. The birds obviously find it as relaxing as we did as the Centre has so far bred 34 species of raptor, all naturally with no artificial insemination needed yet, among the notable being the brown fish owl with the probability of Aplomado falcons and Lappet Faced Vulture, with eggs at the time of our visit.

The Centre was founded in 1980 by Ken Smith, a falconer for 30 years, and was a natural progression of his early breeding experiments, so vital to the future of falconry, and of his 'club' falconry displays conducted as a means of informing the public and redressing some of the bad press aimed at the sport in the not too distant past. Shaun, Ken's son and partner, being brought up with hawks of all description his hereditary skills make him a natural in all aspects of training hawks to teaching school children about owls. Both are falconers to the core and have three decades worth of descriptive stories to tell of hawking experiences but tend to treat falconry as a private pastime indulged in for personal enjoyment, the objectives of the Centre being somewhat different. Owls, vultures and other 'non falconry' birds take an equal place, by the fact that all species are inter-dependent in the scheme of things makes the single Lappets egg as important, perhaps more so, than the other 34 species currently being bred. Of the stock of 130 birds, about 80 are on public view with plans to build eight more large enclosures for eagles, enclosures are due for completion this Spring but have been temporarily shelved awaiting planning permission. There are a large variety of birds on



Left: Ken with Peregrine Falcon Shaun with Lanner Falcon



Hobby



Cara Cara chick bred at the centre

display including Malaysian Fish Owls, Boobook and Abyssinian Spotted Owls, Goshawks and Sparrowhawks, Hobbies, Merlins and Saker Falcons, Bald Eagles, Imperial Eagles and White Bellied Sea Eagle, Lappet Faced and Hooded Vultures, an Andean Condor and many more.

Also there is a childrens corner with rabbits to stroke, miniature Shetland ponies and a variety of turkeys and chickens and a mousehouse.

Our day did not end there, the Model Village occupies three quarters of an acre, Butterfly World is among the country's largest while the Yorkshire Car Collection is a selection drawn from Europe's largest private collection. We left the children for a while in the supervised play area with it's Western Fort, real Russian tank and many other 'toys' while we paid a visit to the hand potter and did a little shopping in

Barn Owl



Cochise, a female Bald Eagle



European Eagle Owl



White bellied Sea Eagle



Sequoia, a female Bald Eagle

the factory outlet shops selling everything from face cream to furniture including top name designer goods at affordable prices, and for lunch! Everything from a hot dog to a three course meal. Certainly a day out with a difference.

HOOKEED ON HARES

Sometimes the hawks wrestled with jackrabbits 100 or more metres away from us and were only able to hang on for six to eight seconds. One buck even managed to kick both hawks of at once.

The air was clear and crisp, only a breath of wind stirred the cinnamon to lime coloured sage bushes filling our nostrils with a pleasant herbal scent. The cloudless blue sky stretched to infinity. In the distance snow capped mountains rose one to two kilometres above this enormous high altitude valley. The only perceptible movement was antelope and mule deer 600 to 800 meters ahead of us moving slowly to higher vantages. Three of us had been working the dry multi-hued flat for an hour without producing any hares or cottontails, but the scenery was so spectacular to us East Coast falconers that no one complained. My nephew, Mike Moreland, also our cameraman, had already burned up a roll of movie film on the surrounding panorama without any hunting action.

Therefore, due to the lack of game in cover, we began to search on a lower tier of open grassland. This pasturage appeared to be overgrazed by cattle. The immense prairie was bordered on one side by a harvested wheat field. Much to our surprise the jackrabbits were found closer to the cultivated land. The hares were hiding in no cover; yet, they were invisible until bolted. The first few got up far out of range and ran in a straight line, kicking up little dust trails like the rooster tail of a speedboat on water, until disappearing from view. Since this was our first jackrabbit hunt we were shocked at their size and their speed. They looked

like white tailed deer loping away.

I was flying a cast of Harris Hawks. My intermewed tiercel, Elvis, was a very capable cottontail killer, but my other hawk, Sheena, was a first year hen fresh out of my breeding chamber. Sheena had been entered on several cottontails and seemed to be a little faster and more eager than most hawks her age; but, after seeing these jackrabbits we all felt that hares were probably beyond her abilities. Kim Titus, the

dodges, quick spins and blaze away speed left our hawks sitting on the ground bewildered. The next hare was even worse. This monster dodged Elvis and kicked Sheena off after she rode him for ten metres like a cowboy on a mustang. A few minutes later Elvis grabbed one. Elvis was dragged 10 metres and slammed into a bush and left dazed. After all this, Sheena lost her confidence and began checking off, but Elvis became more deter-

being able to run fast enough to help. Of course in retrospect, this is ridiculous because no human can run that fast. Sometimes the hawks wrestled with jackrabbits 100 or more metres away from us and were only able to hang on for six to eight seconds. One hare even managed to kick both hawks off at once. Another jack on a long chase dodged Sheena, spun 80 degrees and returned full speed towards us. Elvis in late pursuit was on a head on course with this hare. Nevertheless, the jack never wavered. A split second before a head on collision the hare leaped over Elvis leaving him crashed in the dust.

As the jackrabbit ran into the wind and safety he executed a taunting series of victory hops peculiar to these prairie hares after escaping danger. This display left us, and probably the hawks too, insulted and humiliated. These hares of the open land have been discouraging and escaping from raptors for milenia. Their tactics are instinctive. Some of the old time Western falconers believe jackrabbits really don't seem to fear the smaller raptors like harris hawks and goshawks; they claim only Ferruginous hawks and Golden eagles really scare jack into full speed dashes.

Now it was time for us to regroup and examine our strategies. We had heard hare hawking was tough, but this seemed impossible. After a discussion and a rest we decided to only release the hawks on close slips, to walk closer together, and to keep the wind, although



Author's son, Marvin Presley, and his hen harris, "Zinger", displaying morning's catch of 1150 gram cottontail rabbit and 2720 gram blacktail jackrabbit at 1984, Lamar, Colorado, NAFA meet

other member of our team, carried Sheena for me and released her at my command.

At the first close slip, 30 metres, I launched Elvis and Kim released Sheena. They quickly closed the gap on the three quarter speed jackrabbit, but much to the hawks' surprise the hare's blurring

mined. Finally Elvis bound to a jack's head. The jackrabbit jumped high in the air and did a forward somersault causing Elvis to slam into the ground on his back; the force of this blow stunned Elvis and broke his grip. At this point I thought my hawks were ruined for hares; moreover, I blamed myself for not

BY FLOYD PRESLEY, USA

slight, behind us. We figured on only hunting the more open spots, especially since the best concentrations of jacks seemed to be devoid of cover.

After lunch we started again. This time we patiently held the hawks as jackrabbits broke from their forms out of our effective range. Suddenly a jackrabbit broke within 10 metres; I sling shot Elvis off the glove with a fierce throw. Elvis streaked toward the jack straight and true like a heat seeking missile. A quick wingover and Elvis struck the jack in the head. Then all hell broke loose! The jack twisted, tossed and tumbled trying to shake Elvis. As I ran to the flopping duo, the jack was growling like a dog, and Elvis looked back at me and his eyes said, "Come on partner, grab this critter, I can't hold on much longer". So, our first jackrabbit was subdued and killed. I couldn't get over the strength of this monster. Since Sheena had checked on this hare we allowed her

to come in and bind it. Then we permitted both hawks to fee up on the rich red meat. Feeding up on a kill is a real confidence builder, and all hawks seem to prefer hare meat to rabbit meat.

The following day was different. We were smarter and so were our hawks. At the first good slip Elvis banged a jack in the head and Sheena came in and anchored it. The hawks acted like they had been doing this all their lives. We picked both hawks up with fresh jack legs and fed them each about a quarter crop, settled them down for a while, and then began hunting again. The next jack was rear ended by Sheena, but before she could be dragged, Elvis nailed down the hare's head. The hawks really had their technique down pat. On this kill we fed up for the day, not wanting to press our good luck too far.

The following day the hawks took three hares in fine style. Their technique of doubling up on targets



seemed perfect. There was no way any of these victims could have broken away. My Harris' were "made" hare hawks. Moreover, I was addicted to jack hawking.

Because this hunting was part of the North American Falconry Association's 1982 meet, we returned each day to the NAFA headquarters in a motel in Brigham, Utah, and swapped hawking stories with other falconers who, like us, had travelled from all over the United States to

attend this gathering. From these exchanges of information one fact was very evident: Only the harris hawkers were catching jack rabbits in numbers. Some of the goshawkers and redtailers caught a few jackrabbits but most admitted their hawks would only fly cottontails. This knowledge made hare hawking even more of a challenge.

By the end of the week my cast of harris hawks had bagged quite a few blacktail jackrabbits; but, it wasn't the quantity of hares caught remembered, it was the quality of flights. Watching determined raptors attack elusive, confident prey was thrilling. Every chase was different; yet, no kill was sure. Escapes were always more prominent than captures. The tricks of the wily jackrabbit will excite even the most hardened falconers and challenge the best of the shortwinged hawks. Moreover, once astringers successfully kill hares with their hawks no other quarry will satisfy this quest. Each season now I migrate to the western United States for a week or two to try my hawks at these long eared beasts. There is quite a growing cult of harris hawkers in the US who are infected with this disease of being "hooked" on hares.



Maryland falconers posing with their harris hawks at lunch break in Amarillo, Texas: the 1983 NAFA meet. Author is holding Jack Russell terrier

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NEWS NEWS NEWS NEWS NEWS NEWS NEWS NEWS NEWS

A COUNTRY FAIR AT WARE?

Despite rain and heavy winds interspersed with bouts of sunshine, the Game Fair season got off to an excellent start with a large crowd for the Falconers at the Country Fairs Gamekeeper and Countryman Fair. Ben Long, Bob Dalton and the Sussex Falconry Club produced a most superb display in the Falconry Tent, which created a lot of public interest. At one stage I thought Ben was going to sell a telemetry system to a mum trying to keep 'tabs' on her wayward offspring.

As ever David Wilson, our esteemed editor was there surrounded by magazines. W.H. Smith would have been proud of him. The flying display (Red Tail Falconry) with Ray and Wendy Alikor, produced the largest arena crowd, which reached seven deep in some places. Little "Willow" the Barn Owl was the childrens favourite, "Lop Lop", the Eagle Owl, enthralled both parents and children alike and the crowd visibly drew breath each time the Lanners dived and swooped past within centimetres of them. The birds themselves drew spontaneous appl-use and Ray was very careful to explain that they were not pets and still exceedingly independent. Ten out of ten to Malcolm, who wore hid "tights" in front of a home crowd, Raptor Rescue, with thanks to Mick Robins and Mike Abbey, put the icing on the cake and our survey proved that Falconry was one of the most popular aspects of a very busy show.

Bryan Patterson will join the team at Chilham Castle on 3-4 August and the resident falconer Eddie Hare will be flying "Fuzzball" the White Bellied Sea Eagle



Ray and Wendy Alikor with some of their birds at St Edmunds College, Ware

WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS

West Sussex County Council have tried gas detonators, electronically operated robotic screaming birds, loud speakers, relaying the calls of seagulls in distress and shotguns fired into the air, to try and keep the gulls and rooks off a rubbish dump at Westhampnett because of the health hazard and potential risk of damaging the aircraft using Goodwood airfield, and all to no avail.

Then someone suggested the falconry centre at Locksacre near Chichester. When Noel Pannell and Andrew Stokes brought along two of their falcons to the dump, just the sight of them cleared the flocks in moments and have now become a permanent deterrent.

GENTLESHAW BIRD OF PREY HOSPITAL

Gentleshaw Bird of Prey Hospital has been available to the needs of injured birds for several years and as its name suggests, specialises in raptors, although no injured bird of any species would be turned away.

The hospital began through the interest of ex-gamekeeper Rob Smith who, living on Cannock Chase had always had a close link with wildlife. The hospital itself came into being after an injured Tawny Owl was brought to Rob by a friend. After successfully healing and returning the owl to the wild, Rob decided that he would like to help birds of prey on a larger scale and so the hospital was born.

After giving up his job, Rob started to give talks and displays to schools, clubs and other institutions in the hope that with greater public awareness, at least some injuries could be avoided. These talks led to an interview on BBC Radio which helped the cause considerably.

The hospital now has two Centres at which captive bred birds are displayed to raise money to help injured birds. These are, Byrkley Park Garden Centre which is located approximately 1 mile from Burton on Trent and Trentham Gardens near Stoke on Trent. It is hoped that Trentham Gardens can be built up into a useful educational centre where school parties and other societies can come on field trips. Both of the above centres are also main agents for Wombourne Falconry Equipment.

SMALL FALCONS CONFERENCE

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

CALENDAR OF EVENTS 1991

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

August 3rd/4th 1991

CHILHAM CASTLE COUNTRY FAIR
CHILHAM CASTLE GARDENS, KENT
(5 miles SE of Canterbury on A262)

August 17th/18th 1991

THE SUSSEX COUNTRY FAIR
ST. MICHAEL'S, BURTON PARK, PETWORTH, SUSSEX
(10 miles North of Chichester on A285)

August 25th/26th 1991

WINDSOR GREAT PARK NATIONAL DRIVING CHAMPIONSHIP & COUNTRY FAIR
WINDSOR GREAT PARK, SURREY
(Exit 6 M4)

September 14th/15th 1991

MIDLAND GAME & COUNTRY SPORTS FAIR
(Associate Show)
WESTON PARK, SHIFNAL, SHROPSHIRE
(6 miles from Junction 12 M6 on A5 Watling Street)

September 21st/22nd 1991

THE YORKSHIRE COUNTRY FAIR
HAREWOOD HOUSE, HAREWOOD, LEEDS, YORKSHIRE
(3 miles North of Leeds on A61)

October 12th/13th 1991

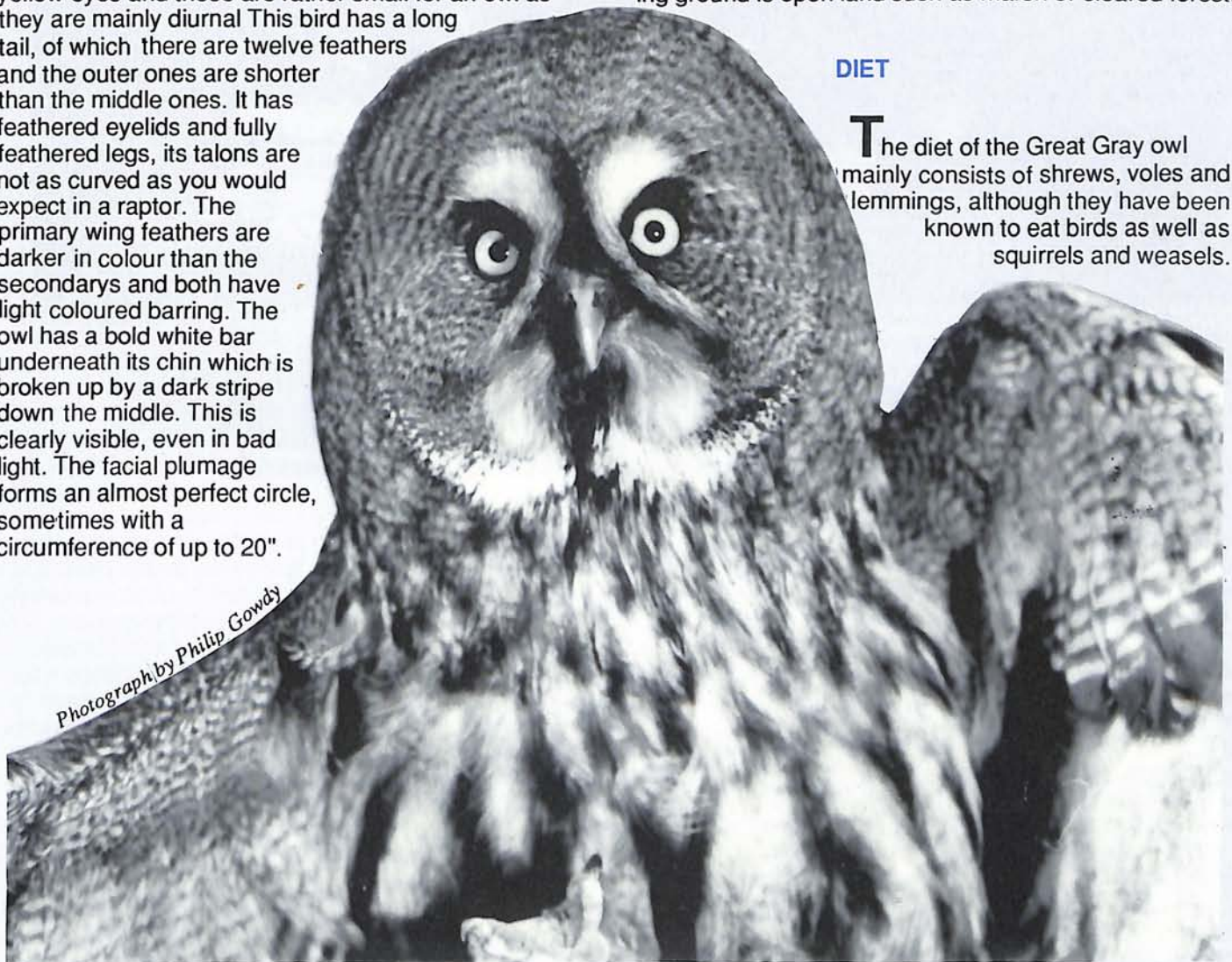
For further information on any of the above, please contact: County Fairs Show Office, 9 Beechfield Rise, West Midlands WS13 6EL. Tel: 0831 430608 or 0543 264162 Fax: 0543 263055

PHANTOM OF THE FOREST

THE GREAT GRAY OWL

The size of these owls is belied by their weight which is only half that of the European Eagle owl, although they look to be much the same size. The reason for this is their abundance of plumage, which they need to keep themselves warm in a very cold climate. They have very yellow eyes and these are rather small for an owl as they are mainly diurnal. This bird has a long tail, of which there are twelve feathers and the outer ones are shorter than the middle ones. It has feathered eyelids and fully feathered legs, its talons are not as curved as you would expect in a raptor. The primary wing feathers are darker in colour than the secondaries and both have light coloured barring. The owl has a bold white bar underneath its chin which is broken up by a dark stripe down the middle. This is clearly visible, even in bad light. The facial plumage forms an almost perfect circle, sometimes with a circumference of up to 20".

Photograph by Philip Gowdy



hovering, as the Owl dives into the snow it pushes its head forward, bringing its feet forward at the last moment. Sometimes it will actually strike the snow with its head first and impressions of the owls heads have been found in the snow to bear this out. Their preferred hunting ground is open land such as marsh or cleared forest.

DIET

The diet of the Great Gray owl mainly consists of shrews, voles and lemmings, although they have been known to eat birds as well as squirrels and weasels.

HUNTING

This bird's unusual looks are matched only by its unusual hunting techniques. This owl has a highly advanced sense of hearing as the majority of its prey is out of sight underneath the snow and sound is its only means of locating its intended victim. Its facial plumage acts as a dish, much as a satellite dish, picking up sounds. They hunt from a post or bush, and they sit and watch and listen intently for any sign of movement. They fly towards their target and stop above it, occasionally

BREEDING

Great Gray owls do not usually build a nest, they either use an old nest built by some other bird or they use a tree stump. They start their courtship around March and the egg laying takes place during April and May, with anything from three to six eggs being laid, at intervals of one to three days. The young leave the nest at between 20-29 days although they are unable to fly. During incubation the female does all the sitting and the male does all the hunting.



Hazel 14 months old with just some of her 1st place cards

HUNGARIAN VIZSLA

by
Andrew McNally

Much is spoken of the qualities of dogs used in Falconry. These are only personal opinions, so far I have been told or read that only the Pointer is a worthy hawking partner or was it one of the Setter Breeds or perhaps a Spaniel of some sort. All of these opinions and preferences are based on the personal choice and experience of the owner/trainer. As much as I respect these, I do however object to such bold statements as "I know very little about the imported HPR breeds and what I do know does not tempt me to learn more". The author goes on "Even the name pointer-retriever seems too provocative to me, it implies that our native breeds, which have done successive generations of sportsmen throughout the English speaking world well enough for several hundred years, don't re-

trieve! " What a defamation, thankfully falconers are not usually interested in that, although I suppose it might come in useful if the telemetry breaks down!

To me watching any pointing breed, hunting and pointing is a beautiful sight, though thankfully we all have a choice as to the hunting breed we wish to work, even if it is one of the HPR breeds which, incidentally, have also done successive generations of sportsmen throughout more than just the English speaking world! well enough for several hundred years and more!

Unlike the Pointer and Setter breeds, even Retrievers to some degree, HPR's are not divided into the show/working categories because

the show fraternity and working fraternities are generally the same. Also, looking at the HPR breeds, yes they are all capable of hunting, pointing and retrieving, some are better pointers than retrievers and vice-versa, while some excel at both. These qualities can be spotted at a very early age, which is useful to the falconer, who may prefer stronger pointing tendencies. Not being a specialist in all HPR's I would not even try to give an informed account of each breed, hopefully someone, more informed than myself, will do so in due course. So I will concentrate on the one breed I do have some experience with:-

The Hungarian Vizsla (Vizsla means to seek) was

originally bred by the Hungarian notability, trained to hunt the Great plains, pointing and flushing quarry for their Hawks and Falcons. I will not give an indepth history, most Falconers only want to know if the dog can do the job, in my opinion they most definitely can, as long as the trainer can handle this almost human breed.

My first experience with Vizslas came about eight years ago when I met a local breeder who showed and worked his dogs. He was extremely keen to see how they would work with my Hawks, we quickly became close friends. Three years later my own dog, a GSP, had to be retired from working. As Martin and his Vizslas were in great demand with several local shoots, this meant very little time for my Hawk, so for most of that season I had to

rely on my ferrets, I very much enjoyed ferreting but on cold, wet and windy days I prefer to be on the move rather than standing around rabbit warrens.

During the next few years, I helped to train and work several dogs from Martins kennel. I gradually came to know their sensitive character and fell in love with these mischievous golden creatures.

Martin phoned me one evening in April 1987 to let me know a litter I had been very interested in had just been born. Without further ado, I was in my car, and heading towards Uffington to see them. Being very interested in genetics and knowing the blood lines and pedigrees behind the parent, the puppies should have more than their fair share of show and working ability. As luck would have it they did. I had my eye on one of the bitches right from the start and no one was surprised when seven weeks later I very proudly took 'Hazel' home.

Most people who first see a Vizsla will perhaps think they are too slight or refined to do a decent days work, but in reality they are physically very robust. My bitch can work all day and be ready again the next day, and the next (in fact getting out of the house alone once the Goshawk is in the car is almost impossible).

Some notes on training:- Although physically robust and intelligent, they are very sensitive, to an extreme, not a breed that would respond to a heavy hand or mental cruelty of any kind, which only shows in the bad training methods of the handler.

I was once told "if you never let a dog do something wrong then it never will" this took a very long time to understand but it makes good sense. The Vizsla is a keen worker - full of enthusiasm but those energies must be directed and encouraged, until a point is reached when the dog is trustworthy.



My Goshawk with Cedar one of my bitches' pups showing relationship with dog and hawk

It is better to take the training step by step, carefully checking the progress of the protege and to let the dog learn at his own pace. Do not leave any doubt in the dogs mind as to what you want him to do, and always be in the right frame of mind yourself. The Vizsla is very sensitive and will know when his owner is angry or impatient with him.

As an HPR, dare I say it, I also teach the retrieve (although controlling is a better word as they retrieve naturally). Why just use one dog in an incomplete role, as long as no confusion is put into the dogs mind during training, it should not cause any

problems. In fact it encourages steadiness and is useful in teaching the right and left commands. I have never had a blackbird, rabbit, pheasant or hawk returned to hand even if we work the day after the shoot.

Training and control is very important but great care must be taken to quash the essence of a good gundog (its instinct) that ability to cover ground, hunting, pointing, flushing and if required, retrieving. 90% of a good gundog has got to be the instinct but the 10% of control must be extremely good and can only be obtained by careful training.

I have learned to trust my

dogs, their senses are far superior to our own. On several occasions when out on shoot's and I have been asked to send the dogs into some cover, when they refuse, I know there is nothing in there. This is proven when the keeper arrives grumbling expletives and sending in another more obedient breed to find the cover empty of game. This feels better than a swig from the flask. I also know their willingness to enter cover when game is present.

Hazel (my bitch) is now four years old and as given as many years enjoyment and loyal service. At three years old and after much deliberation, I decided to interrupt her working and show career and mate her to a show champion, with a good working line behind him - as beautiful an animal as my bitch (She was entered into the kennel club stud book at 11 months, won the junior warrant at 14 months, has qualified for Crufts for life and has won many many firsts and championship shows including Crufts with two reserve CC's to her credit).

9 weeks later she gave birth to a wonderful litter - I would think that though wouldn't!! Four dogs and one bitch. Two of the litter went to show homes and have both qualified for Crufts 1991 and 1992 but the most important aspect is they all show good working potential.

Cedar the puppy I kept has just finished his first weeks Hawking and I am as pleased as punch, he lacks the experience of his mother, but that will come with time proving HPR's can work, and work very well indeed.



Hazel on point. Although physically robust and very intelligent, they are very sensitive to an extreme, not a breed that would respond to a heavy hand or mental cruelty of any kind.

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Raptor

Help and Hints

The year starts with the big aviary clean out before the breeding season proper gets under way. This clean up is most important as the build up of disease in the previous twelve months is enormous and can dramatically affect the hatchability of fertile eggs. The birds are caught up and the DOE rings checked, talons and beaks coped if needed. They are then released in a spare aviary. All the aviary woodwork is first pressure-washed then creosoted, being careful to avoid the nest ledges. If there is a nest, it's taken down and a start made on a new one. If there is a nest ledge, all the old gravel is removed from the aviary and replaced with fresh. The inside woodwork is checked for soundness (nothing is worse than a nest ledge collapsing with a sitting bird on it) The gravel under where the birds usually sit is removed and fresh put in; the whole floor is then raked over. The birds are then replaced after seven days. If you do not have a spare aviary, then you will have to use Fenceguard which is safe for birds, so they can be released straight away, but it is not as good as it does not kill potentially dangerous organisms as the tar based products do.



Ceri Griffiths food parcelling with Peregrine Falcon

I start to work my imprints from the first of January, going into the aviaries once a day for the first two weeks then twice for the next two then three until I am in at least five times a day. I display to the males always wearing my copulation hat and the same clothing. I turn by back on them and start to wail. The birds that were used the previous year will jump on straight away, but will stand up at first. Later they sit on their elbows, and later still press down with their tails to give you the semen. The birds that you are training are not of much use the first year, only jumping on the hat, but not knowing what to do when they get there. All the work with the males is well worth the effort as a good well trained male will give good clean semen two or three times a day for at least eight weeks and twelve if you are lucky. Females have the same number of visits. I display and call to them and food pass if they want to. By late February the old hands are soliciting copulation (which starts as soon as I have semen) the young ladies often have to have forced insemination for the first year of laying. All these birds are full imprints which have been raised, flown and hunted with the idea of breeding later on. I will explain in later articles how we raise our non-mantling, non-screaming, beautifully mannered imprints.

This issues Raptork is by Ceri Griffiths of the Welsh Hawking Centre who is giving us help and hints about preparing for the forthcoming breeding season.



Copulating hat

The incubators are cleaned out and fumigated with potassium permanganate and formalin. All electrical contacts are checked. They are run up to temperature to make sure all is well. We use modified Rolex (turning mechanism, fans and temperature controllers) and A. B. Newlife, which I am still evaluating. Modifying incubators is winter work which I will cover later. I feel that there are good points on all the well known makes and bad points too, pity we couldn't roll them all together!! The natural breeding pairs of birds are fed as many times in the day as I can persuade my staff to go round. The more times that one can encourage a food pass the better. Be careful not to overfeed as to do so will give you a vermin problem at best and a smelly ridden aviary at worst. I feel that chicks are not a good enough diet for most birds and in any case are too high in cholesterol, so we try to feed a wider diet lab rats and mice, rifle shot rabbits and quail are all good. This is where the small breeder can really score over the commercial man: it is much easier to provide a good diet for one or two aviaries than over a hundred. We use over 9000 chicks per week; and I try not to feed them more than 4 days out of seven; good food is a major problem to me. Our breeding diary is started on January the first and I consider it essential for learning. We record nest building, food passing, nest scraping, calling, copulation, egg laying and any unusual happening. The following year you will be very glad and you can look back and see what happened and when.



Peregrine showing how the copulation hat is used

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PHILIP SNOW BA Hons

is a professional wildlife illustrator, whose work is regularly published worldwide in books, magazines, prints and cards etc., by such as BBC WILDLIFE, COLLINS, R.S.P.B., AMERICAN EXPRESS, BIRDWATCHING, BRITISH BIRDS, CHESHIRE LIFE, INTERCONTINENTAL of N.York, Texas's OCEAN WORLD and Turkeys TURQUOISE magazine etc.

He has exhibited in many of Londons top venues, i.e. THE SOUTH BANK, THE BARBICAN, ASS. OF ILLUSTRATORS, SOCIETY OF WILDLIFE ARTISTS, THE TRYON GALLERY, THE DESIGN CENTRE, OLYMPIA, and in the R.A. exhibition of BRITISH ART in Saudi Arabia. He specialises in raptors in landscape, particularly in flight and welcomes commissions. The illustrations in this issue, of Scottish raptors; are closely

based on his own field sketches and own photo's and he has studied birds in many countries. That illustration is for sale; in addition to a selection of Limited edition prints of raptors etc. For details, colour samples, enquiries to PHILIP SNOW GLANABER COTTAGE PENRHYN PARK BANGOR GWYNEDD LL57 3UR Telephone: (0248) 351223

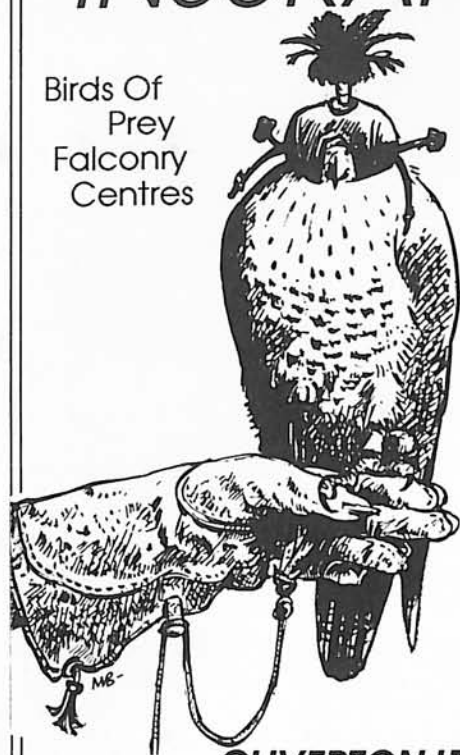
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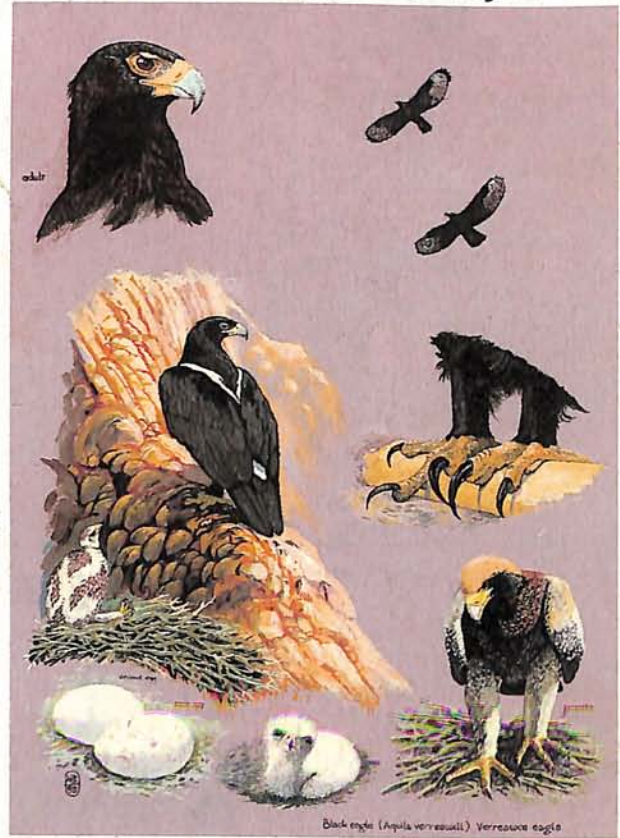
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