

The

Falconers

& RAPTOR CONSERVATION MAGAZINE

Autumn '93

£2.50



ELEONORAS FALCON

**LANNER, LUGGER
FERRUGINOUS.**

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AFRICAN HUNTER

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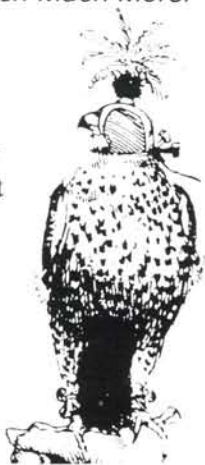
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The Falconers

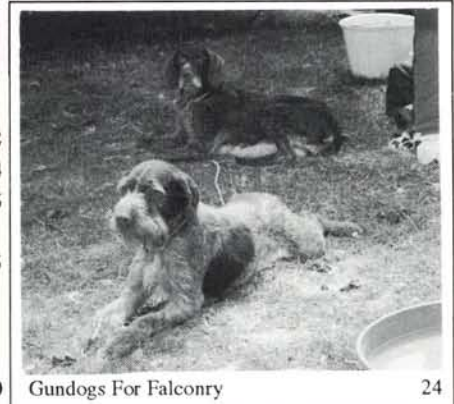
& RAPTOR CONSERVATION MAGAZINE

We have been asked by a few people why we have rejected certain articles and advertisements. The reasons are as follows: Due to the pressures being put on Falconry by 'antis' we try not to publish anything which may be used against falconry in a negative way. We also refuse advertising from people who are bringing or have brought falconry into disrepute. We try, as far as possible, to monitor the standards of advertisers in the magazine. We are planning to print more hunting articles as this "is" falconry but, they must be presented in such a way that they are inoffensive. The same goes for photographs. Your views on this subject would be welcome and anybody requiring a copy of our editorial policy may obtain one from the usual address.

The magazine is still looking for contributions from its readers in whatever form, letters, articles, news etc. In future issuea we are starting a problem page, we have three eminent people willing to answer questions on, veterinary, legal and breeding problems.
Ed's.

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THE CODE OF GOOD MANAGEMENT

The British Fields Sports Society Falconry Committee and the Hawk Board, together with the recognised clubs, have for some time been preparing a Code of Good Management. This is now in its' final stages and copies should soon be available. It covers the management of both diurnal birds of prey and owls, breeding, transporting, displaying, rehabilitation and use in falconry.

Many Hawk-keepers feel that there should be possession licensing, in which people should pass a test and obtain a license before purchasing a raptor. On the whole the Hawk Board has not supported possession licensing for three reasons. Firstly the cat is already out of the bag and it is too late to put it back in again. Too many people already own hawks to introduce possession licensing. One could not take away somebody's bird which he/she already owns if he failed the test. Secondly, we feel that it is an undue restriction which could be used to tighten the noose and strangulate hawk-keeping by limiting the species and numbers of birds which could be kept. Thirdly, with the opening of free movement of birds within Europe, we are also likely to see an increase of temporary movements of falconers with their birds on hawking trips and the regulation would have to cover other nationals.

Therefore we have tackled the issue of welfare by producing this voluntary code of Good Management. It has been agreed by representatives of all parties and sets out clear guidelines of what is and what is not acceptable practice. Obviously room has to be made for exceptions, but where there are exceptions, the keeper should be able to justify them. The code is not legally enforceable; it is purely voluntary, but it does spell out what minimum standards should be maintained. This should help beginners to get off on the right foot and also perhaps persuade more experienced keepers to re-assess their methods.

The R.S.P.C.A. is funding a project to look at the welfare of raptors in captivity. This is being undertaken by Dr Ruth Cromie, based at the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology at the University of Kent. The Hawk Board has offered full co-operation and no doubt Dr Cromie will be looking at many issues covered by the Code of Good Management.

REGISTRATION.

The Hawk Board has been approached by the D.o.E. for comments on the future registration of raptors. Many keepers nowadays do not remember what it was like before registration started. Registration was brought in ten years ago in a climate of low wild raptor populations (which were only slowly recovering from pesticides) and relatively low numbers of domestic raptors. The sole purpose was to help conserve *wild raptor populations*

The current government wishes to reduce both expense and bureaucracy at all levels and therefore the D.o.E. has to justify the expense of registration (about £320,000 per year) in terms of benefit to the wild populations. The income from fees is only £108,000 so registration is costing the tax-payer £13 per bird in subsidy. Clearly this cannot continue, nor in most cases can registration be justified on conservation grounds. The forecasts for birds likely to be bred in the next decade make it impossible to sustain present levels and costs of registrations.

The Hawk Board is also attending consultation meeting on the EC CITES Regulation and the International CITES criteria for Appendices. At both EC and international levels the emphasis is on reducing constraints on relatively common species and focussing more on species which are truly endangered. This is a much more realistic approach and helps to ensure that scarce funds and resources are used where they are actually needed, rather than dissipated on paper-pushing exercises. These developments also flavoured our response to the D.o.E. registration review.

The other major criteria we had to consider is that very soon there will be free movement of birds within the EC. It will be possible to move around within the EC without any inspections or controls at national boundaries. This is all in the interest of free-trade agreements. Unfortunately most of the other EC countries do not have an organised national registration system as we do. Nor do they have a standardised system of marking. Nor are birds identified on any computerised database, nor is there an EC centralised database. So we are in a position that keepers could bring birds into this country without proper rings or papers and sell them here. If you buy such a bird you must still be able to prove that you obtained it legally, and this could be very difficult to do.

Therefore we had to suggest a system which would be cheap both for the D.o.E. and for the keeper, which would at least have some real value the teeth, and which could possibly also be managed by the most organisation-averse EC countries.

As a result we have proposed a two tier registration scheme. Owls would be left as they are. The remaining registerable raptor species would be split into two groups, the monitored species and un-monitored species. The monitored ones would include, on a European basis, those which, for reasons of rarity or high commercial value, could be most affected by abuse. This list would be reviewed frequently and might include for example such species as; Goshawk, Golden Eagle, Sea Eagle, Spanish Imperial Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, Peregrine, Merlin, Gyr, Hobby, Lesser Kestrel, Mauritius Kestrel. Monitored species would be ringed and registered very much as now except that the pattern of inspections would be different. Instead of expensive, frequent visits of an inspector bearing rings, the inspector might come only once, on an un-announced visit to see that all

is in order. We also recommend the use of DNA testing where other evidence indicates that birds are not genuine.

All the common species and species that are exotic to the EC and not on CITES Appendix I, would be un-monitored. They would wear close numbered rings of a size too small to remove, but they would not be registered. The keeper would still be legally obliged to prove the birds origin and therefore would need a statement from the breeder identifying it and its' parents. But no centralised computer records would be kept. If applied for, a 'passport' could be issued to accompany the bird for life, so that it could travel within the EC. Even this would be un-necessary for bird which stay in the UK.

The foregoing apply only to domestic birds, that is birds whose parents were legally in captivity when the egg was laid. All wild-sourced birds or un-ringed birds would be fitted with Hess rings. Cable ties would be phased out. Birds which cannot tolerate rings would be micro-chipped. In this way the overall costs would be minimised, a high level of monitoring would be maintained where needed, no extra financial burden would fall onto the remaining monitored birds and there would be some prospect of at least some measure of control throughout the EC.

Of course these are only our recommendations. The D.o.E. has to consult with other national and EC bodies. It may not be able to sustain even this minimal level of monitoring. We shall see.

EC HAWK BOARD

The increasing EC regulations and legislation have entailed more and more correspondence with our counterparts in other EC countries. Some of this has been on an *ad hoc* basis and some has been through the International Association of Falconry through the kind services of Christian de Coune in Belgium. The IAF was formed initially by Jack Mavrogordato to cope with non-commercial falconry issues in all nations. Each country is represented by one falconry club.

The problems we are facing relate to all aspects of raptor-keeping most of which nowadays involve trade because most people buy domestic birds. And we have a lot of items specifically relating to the EC which in many functional respects is now one country. We have been fortunate in the UK to have a well established Hawk Board with close working relations with the government and other bodies. This is not the case in the other EC countries. Most have no single representative body for all hawk keepers (as distinct from falconers) and many have poor working relationships with their governmental bodies.

At present we are considering ways of improving co-operation across the EC, either by proposing to IAF to alter its' structure and role or by establishing a less formal working body of representatives who have the personal time and funds to get the work done.

THE WORLD'S BIGGEST FALCONRY DISPLAY VISITS SLF/CLA GAME FAIR

The biggest falconry demonstration in the world visited this year's Scottish Landowners Federation/Country Landowners Association Game Fair, which ran from 22-24 July, at Gosford Park, Nr Edinburgh.

The main aim of the impressive flying demonstrations and displays of exotic birds was to highlight the differences between Hawks, Falcons and Eagles and show people how the birds are trained and flown.

"The size of the display at the Fair Reflected the growing popularity of the sport," said Jemima Parry-Jones of the National Birds of Prey Centre. "Much of this interest has been generated by public flying displays. There are no short cuts in training the birds. It takes around three years to train a falcon for hunting and they take a long time to mature and settle in a new habitat before you can breed from them. You only get one short breeding season each year.

Although one of Britain's oldest and noblest field sports, falconry has moved with the times.

"Falconers have pioneered breeding, investigation into behaviour, reintroducing endangered species bred in captivity and educating wider public," said

Jemima. "This work is vital because, in the wild, the odds are heavily stacked against the birds and as many as 50% die in their first year." Her work has also acquired a certain urgency, as she estimates that 70 of the world's 400 species of birds of prey are under threat of extinction - mostly as a result of the removal of their rain-forest habitat.

Falconry has also made extensive use of modern technology. A "bleeper", which is attached to the birds tail to allow it to be tracked by radio, is so sensitive, it will even indicate if the bird is sitting or flying.



Jemima Parry-Jones with falcon

On display at this year's Game Fair were Hawks, Eagles, Falcons and Buzzards. Among the star attractions was a black African Verreaux Eagle, bred in captivity this year from Zimbabwean parents after a thirteen year wait.

While Jemima is a regular visitor to the Game Fair, she never tires of seeing thousands of people witnessing the power and beauty of these magnificent birds. "When hundreds of people see it climb to 1,000 feet, stoop down and return to the ring, it is then that I feel all the hard work is worthwhile," she added.

Exhibition of Carved Birds:

Pensthorpe Waterfowl Trust,
Norfolk.

The Directors of Pensthorpe Waterfowl Park are kindly loaning their viewing Gallery for an exhibition of Bird carvings. The Pensthorpe Collection of wildfowl is one of the largest in the world setting that is both quite beautiful and appropriate. The gallery could be a better place to compare the amazing artistry achieved by so many of our carver's in the East of England, whilst their subjects glide past the windows.

All work will be for sale. Any carver's living or working in the East of England are invited to submit their work for selection for this exhibition. It is hoped that this will prove to be a good opportunity for the public to appreciate and purchase the superb quality of work of our growing band of bird carver's. Ranging from top professionals to highly gifted amateurs, too often this work is only seen by family and friends or lucky purchasers.

To encourage carver's there will be awards for different categories of entrant or carvings e.g. under 21, natural finish, painted songbird, raptor and waterfowl. Selection for the exhibition and for Awards will be made by a committee of;

Director of Pensthorpe; Bill Makins.
Director of Conservation; David North.
Artist; Joe Blossom.

Organiser; Judith Nicoll.
At least one other carver and a sponsor.
Conditions of entry and an Entry Form may be obtained by sending an S.A.E. to the organiser: Judith Nicoll, 18 Ditton Court Road, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex. SS0 7HG. Tel/Fax: 0702 432774.

OWL SEARCH

An organisation who's main aim is to provide a service for the captive bred owl who strays too far from and can't find his or her way home. Most of us are aware that most birds of prey are covered by government legislation and are compulsorily registered with the department of the environment. You are probably also aware that owls are the main group of birds not covered by the legislation. This means that there is no central register for captive bred owls in the British Isles.

It is our aim to fill this gap in bird of prey registration and, at the same time, provide a means by which lost birds, when found, can be reunited with their keeper.

All mature birds entered onto our register will receive a metal split ring, whilst hatchlings will receive a solid metal ring. All rings bear a registration number which can be cross referenced on our central records.

All owls who wear rings are automatically covered by a third party liability insurance. Giving their keepers the peace of mind that if their owls stray then any damage is covered.

While developing our scheme we have always had the problem of theft on our minds. A ring bearing bird would almost certainly be reunited with its' keeper if the bird was found by the majority of the public, but in today's society there is that small minority intent on theft and dishonesty. With this in mind we are currently investigating the possibilities of microchipping the birds in our scheme, as well as issuing rings. We feel that this could benefit everybody in our scheme, as the thief who sees one of our rings on a bird will never be sure that

the bird isn't also carrying an implanted chip. All registrations are held on a computer database which is covered by the data protection act. No keeper details will be released without their prior consent.

If you would like your birds registered with our scheme, please write to us at: Owl Search, P.O.Box 3286, Studley, Warks. B80 7RW or Tel: 0572-853274.

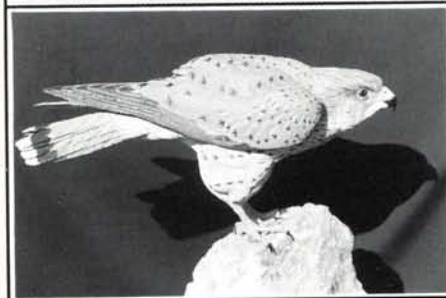
CONVICTIONS

Charles Oswald, Silverdale, Lancs. Admitted six charges under the Animal Protection Act and The Wildlife and Countryside Act. He was banned from keeping Birds of Prey for three years and fined £320.

When police and RSPCA visited him they found one sparrowhawk dead from starvation and other birds starving and in filthy conditions.

STOLEN BIRDS

1. Harris Hawk - Female - Ring no. 428OW. Stolen from Wales, March 1993.
2. Goshawk - Female - Ring no. UK81010. Stolen from Staffordshire. Dec. 1992. Cere has a grey patch.
3. Goshawk - Male - Ring no. 5044V. Stolen from Scotland, Feb. 1993.
4. Lanner Falcon - Ring no. 1664V/10RAH. Lost/stolen from Thames Valley, March 1993. Left pinnion feather sticks out.
5. Snowy Owl - Male - Left wing is broken. Stolen from Staffordshire, March 1993



BRITISH BIRDWATCHING FAIR.

The fourth annual British Birdwatching Fair will be held from Friday to Sunday, August 20-22 1993, at Rutland Water, Leics.

As well as entertaining bird watchers from all over the UK, the Fair aims to help birds in Poland by raising funds for the Birdlife International Polish Wetlands Appeal.

The British bird watching Fair is organised by the RSPB, the Leicestershire and Rutland Trust for Nature conservation and the optical retailers In Focus.

Philip Snow (who as you know contributes regularly to the magazine) will be exhibiting both originals and prints with Focal Point, who are also optical retailers. He will be attending the Fair on Saturday and Sunday, 21st & 22nd.

News continued

The plant conservation charity, Plantlife, has launched its' Great Hedge Project - a plan to establish a continuous network of hedges across Great Britain

The project will work by encouraging communities to revive hedges that mark their local boundaries, filling in the gaps and reviving traditional hedge management. All this will eventually be connected, linking adjacent hedges across the country. David Bellamy, President of Plantlife (pictured) said: 'Our hedges need all the help they can get. I hope this project fires your imagination the way it does mine - please support it.



GREAT HEDGE PROJECT

For further information please contact: Tim Rogers, The Great Hedge Project, The Wilderness Centre, Mitcheldean, Glos. GL17 0HA. Tel: 0594 544933.

THE BRITISH FIELD SPORTS SOCIETY AND FALCONRY

DEREK STARKIE, Legislative Secretary.

"The retention of field Sports as an integral part of the activities of modern society" is the first of the British Field Sports Society's objectives.

Today, more than ever before, field sports are under attack from those who would like to see them abolished for a variety of reasons; falconry has not escaped criticism. The Society therefore runs training courses to help spokesmen for field sports to deal effectively with Press and T.V interviews. Spokesmen for falconry are thus well placed to put their case cogently and answer their critics.

The Society monitors proposed legislation in Parliament as well as in Europe and takes appropriate action if proposals made are against the interests of falconry. The Society is in a strong position to put points to Members of Parliament.

It is essential that falconers maintain high standards of behaviour to prevent falconry from falling into disrepute and the Society plays its part in a number of ways.

The public watch displays by birds of prey at country fairs and shows all over the country and it is important that the show is well organised and that those giving the displays, apart from providing entertainment, are able to educate the watching public and explain the role birds of prey play in the ecology of the countryside. The Society issues a comprehensive guidance leaflet to show organisers and display givers and recommends those who comply with the guidance; shows and display givers' performances are monitored.

The Society, in conjunction with the Hawk Board, is drawing up a code of good management to set standards for hawk-keepers and falconers. The aim of the Code is to assist potential beginners, to guide existing hawk-keepers and falconers and to state publicly standards which have been set in the interests of the birds best welfare.

The Society is confident that it is fulfilling its objectives for falconry.

NEWS FROM THE RSPCA ----- *Tails We Win*

The RSPCA is to get tough on anyone docking dogs' tails.

New laws which came into force on 1st July made illegal for any person, other than a veterinary surgeon, to remove a dogs' tail. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons has issued strict guidelines to all vets, making it clear that docking should only be done for treatment of tail injury, or where the likelihood of tail damage is so high as to justify the operation.

This new amendment to the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 means that the RSPCA's team of 300 Inspectors can prosecute any lay person caught docking the tail of a dog under a week

PIPER - Pest remover.

Pipipers are a range of ultrasound devices that remove small animals and most insects from where they are not wanted. Pipipers eliminate the need for poisons, traps and sprays. They will not hurt animals and are environmentally green

Pipipers will be effective in removing animals and insects from an area of approx. 100 square metres. (1,000 sq. ft.) They will not affect birds, large animals or spiders.

The manufacturers of Piper are looking for someone to install and try one for a month to establish its effectiveness when used around birds of prey.

If you are interested please contact Lyn on 0536-722794,

Training and Enterprise Council for help. Because of his age he was turned down, the advice given was to go back to school for another two years and then try again. As a last resort he contacted Livewire who helped him to put together a business plan and gave him all the advice he needed to launch his business. He won an award for his enterprise and was presented with £150 by Earl Spencer and was entered for the regional finals in which he was runner-up. Since then he has been booked for various fairs and shows around the country, and he also attends schools and gives talks on falconry and conservation.



DANNY TAKES OFF!

Danny Keeber (pictured with Lanner Falcon), has been a keen falconer for six years, who on leaving school decided to take up falconry for a profession so he approached the Princes Youth Business Trust and Northamptonshire

Clubs

Toffee nosed, Cliquesy, Stand-offish, Old fashioned, Arrogant; I have heard it all, and worse, from those who do not know, or want to know more about the B.F.C.

So I welcome the invitation to write a little about the club, its members, and the aims and ideals we so relentlessly pursue.

Let me start by stressing one very important point about the B.F.C. We are a hunting club and we welcome members who follow the sport of falconry as the dictionary defines it: "The taking of suitable in natural habitat by means of trained hawks and falcons." Those members with a single hawk that hunts in good style are the bedrock of modern falconry, and of the B.F.C. A few are also active in other aspects of hawk-keeping, but first and foremost they are hunters, and up front in their enjoyment of the sport.

As a club we are in the front line when it comes to attacks on falconry

WHAT WE ARE NOT! The British Falconers' Club.

Nicholas Kester, Press Officer

by antis or legislators; and with one thousand members we can make a fair impact.

I wonder how many of your readers saw last years McNamara bill as an attack on hunting that might lead to an eventual ban on falconry? The B.F.C. did, and as a result many of our members wrote to their MP siding with the hunting community and seeking support in the defeat of the bill. They attended public meetings, media briefings and co-operated with the major lobby groups. We will continue to defend ourselves in this way through our close links with the British Fields Sports Society; an organisation that all true falconers should join.

Recently the department of the Environment has asked a wide selection of interested parties for their views on the future of registration and the ringing of raptors. Like all government departments they seek to save taxpayers' money.

One suggestion is that certain species be removed from the register altogether. Along with other recognised clubs, we see this as not being in the best interests of either the hawks or falconers. We are therefore working on recommendations that we believe will maintain controls, but facilitate the government role.

On the international scene the B.F.C. is a member of the International Association for Falconry (IAF), who tirelessly represent our interests in the dread eurocratic nightmare that is Brussels. Their recent efforts on behalf of the beleaguered Danish falconers are to be applauded. Then there is the Hawk Board, whose role as representatives of all

aspects of hawk-keeping is funded by the five recognised clubs. Last year the B.F.C. provided over 70% of their funds. They do an excellent, unpaid job which is largely unrecognised by the non-affiliated falconer. So when you meet a B.F.C. member, do not think of my opening paragraph, except to prove to yourself that it is inaccurate. Just remember that we want to be hunting with our hawks for many years to come and are doing something to ensure that does happen.

P.S. "Why didn't he say something about displays?" I hear you ask. "More on that next time," says he.

HOME COUNTIES HAWKING CLUB

A group of enthusiasts in the Surrey, Berkshire, Hampshire area have got together and formed a new club. The Home Counties Hawking Club is aiming to become a focal point for all those in the surrounding area interested in birds of prey and falconry. The first meeting had over thirty people in attendance and received apologies from a dozen more who vowed they would be there in the future.

Roger Ratcliffe is the club Chairman and Alan Greenhalgh, a very well respected falconer from Ashford is the vice chairman. The club meets on the third tuesday of every month at the Rose and Crown public house in Sandhurst. The club is open to prospective members of all levels of experience, from those just starting out, or even contemplating their first, to those with many years behind them. Various speakers have been lined up for the coming months and some club outings are planned. The club will be publishing it's own newsletters and plans for a yearly journal are in hand.

For further details contact either Roger on: 0344-774019 or Alan on: 0784 250577.

A DAY OUT FOR THE SCOTTISH HAWKING CLUB.

The Scottish Hawking Club held one of its' Bar-B-Q's on the 27th June. They say the sun shines on the righteous and it certainly did on this day. A blue sky, day long, helped to make this a good gathering of the Clan, being held at the kind invitation of the newly opened CLYDE VALLEY HAWKS, at the Clyde Valley Estate, Crossford, Lanark. Members and their families were able to view this comprehensive collection of Hawks, Falcons and Owls free of charge, there was also a Golden Eagle and



two Bald Eagles on display for that day only, specifically for Club members. First prize on the raffle was won by Jim Doddie, a non-



member and the guess the weight of the "Cloutie Dumpling" kindly donated by our Hon. President, Martin Connelley, was won by Bob Abdy, the centres manager (a fix if ever I've seen one) thanks must go to all who helped set up this day, as well as the cooks.

Our next event is another Bar-B-Q. to be held in August.

For further details of the club send s.a.e. to: The Scottish Hawking, Crookedstane, Elvanfoot, By Biggar, Lanarks ML12 6RL

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ELEONORA'S FALCON

By Mike Everett

The Chiffchaff in the foredeck well was reluctant to go, even though the coast of Crete was only a few miles away. One of several small migrants which had arrived on the ship overnight, it had reached possibly the most hazardous part of its long Mediterranean crossing. Crete represented dry land, abundant food and relative safety, but first the tiny bird would have to run the gauntlet of the Eleonora's Falcons....

It seemed strange to find the dark, long-winged hunters out over the open sea, miles from their nearest colony on a small island some way to the east of us. I watched one, in the distance, chasing a Cory's Shearwater across the wave-tops, presumably just for fun since the big seabird could hardly have been potential prey. Other falcons were closer to the ship, cruising and waiting - one eating a small bird. Over the open sea, any small, tired migrant have been easy meat, even more so than over the cliffs and coves of the countless Mediterranean islands where the falcons traditionally wait on, poised to take their share of the autumn food bonanza.

I didn't see our Chiffchaff leave, but I hope it made it ashore. Many of the

countless millions of small birds which swarm across the Mediterranean in autumn don't: it has been estimated that in addition to all the other dangers they face, one in every 600 falls prey to Eleonora's Falcons. All the bird-hunting raptors around the Mediterranean benefit from the superabundance of prey available to them during autumn migration, but Eleonora's Falcon is the only one that exploits it to the full, even timing its breeding cycle to coincide with it.

Although it has outposts in the Canaries and off the Atlantic coast of Morocco, Eleonora's Falcon is essentially a Mediterranean bird, breeding in colonies on islands from the Balearics to the coast of Turkey. While the first birds appear around the breeding cliffs in April, the return is not usually complete until late May or even early June. It is late July or early August before breeding gets under way and until then the birds range widely, often using favoured feeding areas and generally being most active in the early morning and evening. Interestingly, they feed mainly on large insects at this time, many of them taken on the wing. Once nesting begins, the birds' behaviour changes markedly, the females become

ing tied to the colony and the males confining themselves to hunting in the near by area. The menu changes too, to a diet largely consisting of small birds. It will be some time in October before the cycle is over and the birds leave the cliffs.

There have been a few unconfirmed reports of Eleonora's Falcons wintering in the Aegean, but to all intents and purposes they are true migrants, just like many of the small birds they eat in autumn. We know that their main winter quarters are in Madagascar (where they apparently revert to a diet largely consisting of insects), but we know next to nothing about their migration routes. Very few are seen at the well-watched raptor migration concentration points in the Middle East. There could be two reasons for this. Firstly, such places are probably manned too early in spring and autumn to catch the main passage; secondly, these may in any case be the wrong places to look. Unlike the big soaring raptors, Eleonora's Falcons are not deterred from crossing the open sea and it seems very likely that they migrate on a broad front.

Two things govern the breeding distribution of Eleonora's Falcon in the Mediterranean - suitable cliff sites for nesting and an abundance of autumn migrants on which they feed their young. As far as we know, all colonies are on islands, ranging from little more than small rock stacks to places as large as Mallorca and Cyprus. Colonies are invariably on major migration highways used by small birds. One of these runs through the myriad islands of the Aegean Sea and it is here that the Eleonora's Falcon is commonest: the Greek Islands, with some 2800 breeding pairs, hold almost three-quarters of the estimated world population.

Thanks largely to Hartmut Walter, who had written an excellent monograph on the species, we know a lot about the breeding biology of Eleonora's Falcon. He has also produced an inventory of known colonies, with details of counts or estimates made at various times in the past. There are a few more recent figures available, but for many colonies there is little or no up-to-date information. It is quite likely that a few colonies remain to be discovered: a few years ago I found birds patrolling above perfect-looking nesting cliffs on a small Greek island



Eleonora's Falcon (Male) Photographs taken in Mallorca by Philip Snow.

where, as far as I know, there is no record of them breeding. Any raptor enthusiast with lots of money and free time could do worse than to devote several summers to cruising the islands of the Aegean censusing Eleonora's Falcons.....

We could certainly do with a lot more information on their modern distribution and numbers. This is essential if a long term programme is to be considered for the conservation of this scarce bird. While many colonies are safe, others are subject to increasing disturbance, especially in areas of heavy tourism, and some are regularly robbed of eggs and young by local people - for food. The most vulnerable colonies would benefit from reserve status. The possibility of establishing public viewing and information facilities at one or two of the best-known and most accessible sites, rather as we do with our Ospreys and Peregrines in the UK, is surely worth considering. Eleonora's Falcon could be used not only as a tourist attraction, but also to increase awareness among local people of conservation problems in the Mediterranean generally.

It is inconceivable that Eleonora's Falcon was unknown to those who lived and travelled in the Mediterranean in the past, but apart from a possible reference in 1627 there is no literature mention of the species before the 1830's. It was, in fact, one of the last European birds to be "discovered". In or around 1833, the Italian historian and naturalist Alberto della Marmora shot several on the island of

Toro, off the southern-west corner of Sardinia, and these were formally described by the Turin zoologist Giuseppe Gene in 1839.

Gene named the new falcon in honour of a famous Sardinian princess, Eleonora of Arborea. If ever you find yourself in the pleasant little coastal town of Oristano, halfway down the western side of Sardinia, spare a few moments to look at the statue of this remarkable lady in the Piazza that bears her name. She lived in the latter half of the 14th century, dying (of plague) in either 1403 or 1404. For much of her adult life she was embroiled in the struggle for Arborean independence from the Kingdom of Aragon, even leading her troops into person. The tangled history of those times in what we now call Italy and Sardinia is far too complicated to unravel here, but Eleonora emerges from it as a successful and revered military and political leader who, to this day, is remembered as Sardinia's greatest heroine.

Her other claim to fame is as author of the *Carta de Logu*, a comprehensive code of enlightenment and unexpectedly humanitarian laws which was way ahead of its time and which remained in use until

Sardinia was unified with Italy in 1861. Amongst other things, and with falconry in mind, the code gave strict protection to nesting hawks and falcons. It is impossible to say whether Eleonora actually knew the bird which would one day bear her name - but I like to think she may have done.



Eleonora's Falcon (Female) Photograph taken in Mallorca by Philip Snow.

RSPB NEWS: 'CRIME AGAINST CON- SERVATION' AS RED KITE DIES.

A red kite, one of the UK's rarest birds of prey, has been found illegally poisoned in Bedfordshire. The killing is described by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds as 'a crime against conservation'. The bird dies after eating a rabbit baited with an agricultural pesticide. It was found by a game keeper on the Southill Estate, five miles from the RSPB's headquarters.

The red kite was one of 20 released in England last year as part of a re-introduction project run by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Red Kites bred successfully last year in England and Scotland for the first time in more than a century. Once common throughout Britain, they were driven to the edge of extinction by human persecution. Until the re-introduction project began in 1989, they were confined to central Wales where careful protection has enabled the population to reach 80 breeding pairs.

Barbara Young, RSBP chief executive said: The tragic poisoning of this magnificent bird is an appalling crime against conservation. Such killings continue despite a government campaign against illegal poisoning. Incidents like this are wholly unacceptable in a civilised society.

Roy Walker, JNCC chief officer said: At least seven of the kites we have released died as a result of illegal poisoning. Poisoning is by far the most important cause of mortality, accounting for nearly 70 per cent of recorded deaths during this project. It would be a tragedy if such killing jeopardised the success of this international venture.

The case is being investigated by Bedfordshire Police and the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who are appealing for information on the incident, and any recent sightings of the bird, which spent most of the winter around Abberton Reservoir in Essex before moving to Bedfordshire. Anyone with information which might assist the police should contact Sergeant Phil Cannings, Wildlife Liaison Officer 0525-404422. A re-introduction project, aimed at establishing breeding populations of red kites in England and Scotland, is being co-ordinated by the Joint Nature Conservancy Committee and the RSPB. Every year since 1989 young kites from Spain have been released in southern England. Swedish kites have been released in Scotland.

The first success of the project was seen last year when ten young were raised in England and one in Scotland.

The kite killed in this incident was born and released last summer. It was marked with a wing tag and a radio transmitter to enable its movements to be studied.

The Red Kite is a large bird of prey, 60-65cm long with a 175-195cm wingspan. It has a distinctive, long forked tail. Its body and tail are a rusty red colour and its wings have white patches.

A campaign against illegal poisoning was launched by MAFF and the DoE in 1991

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URBAN KESTRELS

Paul Barham

At present there are eight pairs of Kestrels living and breeding in the Bow area of London. Some nest on tower blocks in air vents or on ledges on old factories. One pair nested in an old magpie nest in the local cemetery. Most pairs have at least three nest sites to choose from; they lay four to five eggs from which two to three young are usually reared to fledging stage. I know of one pair which is usually sitting on eggs at the end of March, but most pairs do not lay their eggs until the middle of April or May and the young ones are on the wing in late July or early August, when they can be seen flying in family groups. All Kestrels in town are very territorial and stay on their own territory all year round in pairs and will not let any other Kestrels encroach on it. This makes it very difficult to release any Kestrels

which come in to me too young to fend for themselves or injured. I now release them into the surrounding countryside where there is less competition from other wild Kestrels. The Kestrels in town hunt in four different ways. The most common is hovering, but they also dive through flocks of sparrows and take one on their way through, or they still-hunt, this involves sitting on a building or tree and then pouncing on prey such as mice or grasshoppers, and lastly, flying through trees in woodland hoping to pick off some unsuspecting small bird, in much the same way as a Sparrowhawk. Most urban Kestrels prey on mice, young rats, small birds, starlings and insects. It looks like the Kestrel will be with us in town as long as it can find somewhere suitable to both nest and hunt.



Kestrels are just as much at home in the city as they are in the countryside

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1. Which bird of prey is featured on one of the Isle of Man's coins?
2. What is the Falconry term for a bird cleaning its' beak?
3. The male of which bird of prey is called a robin?
4. What is the proper term for someone who flies 'true hawks' (accipiters)?

Closing date 20th September.

LANNER, LUGGER, FERRUGINOUS.

Do They Make Good Hunting Birds?

BY DIANA DURMAN-WALTERS.

The Scottish Academy of Falconry and Related Studies.

These three desert raptors are often the underplayed and overlooked of all the hawks. Without doubt the Lanner and the Lugger have played a very large part in teaching many falconers the skills and art of flying falcons.

In the early '70's the Lanner falcon was, numerically, the most well known of all falcons. The majority were imported from West Africa and were the staple flying diet for so many falconers because access to Peregrines was virtually non-existent. Licences seemed always so much easier to acquire for these exotic falcons, rather than our indigenous falcon. Passage Lanners seemed to be far easier entered on quarry than eyases and, indeed, some of these passage hawks were courageous and outstanding in the field. The one drawback to their continued success was our inconsistent weather. Female Lanners and Luggers give away up to 12oz's in flying weight to a female Peregrine, and this enormous weight differential

can only act against these falcons when the weather is windy or unsettled. However, they make up for this in warm to very hot days, when a Peregrine simply would prefer to take shelter in cooler places. Secondly, they had to contend with larger game. Partridge, Grouse and Pheasant may be a challenge that, given the development of flying skills, are excellent for Peregrines to hunt, yet for the Lanner and the Lugger, who have, in their native countries a greater variety of small to medium sized bird quarry, it was a case of overkill. They couldn't be expected to be consistent on a quarry that could tax a more powerful Peregrine.

One thing was evident in them, they did not hang back from having a go. Amongst our early imports was a passage Lugger falcon. This female was certainly determined as a hunter and could tackle a Partridge. She was capable of getting her pitch rapidly and would wait on for serving, becoming so wedded to Partridges that she would actively go looking for them herself if you didn't provide the opportunities to hunt straightaway. She impressed us with her tenacity and nerve, plus the fact that she was invariably successful. With her natural ability to wait on and obtain pitch, the subsequent Lanner falcon benefited from what had been learned with the Lugger. This falcon was a master at obtaining pitch quickly and steadfastly above the falconer. From this vantage point she could be steered across the sky to the dogs on point, below. Partridge were also her forte, and she could stoop at these with deadly accuracy. She was also taken onto the grouse moor in that same year and remains one of the rare cases of a Lanner taking Grouse.

But what of then today? All Lanners and Luggers are captive bred, and have not the advantage of learning essential skills in the wild before you fly them. Of the ones that I have seen, or handled, their genetic input still provides them with the qualities to succeed. The Lanner that I am flying at present, albeit she is demonstrating her skills in flying displays, has, from the onset, been a natural hunter. She was imported from a French Lanner breeding project and during the first few days of her free flying, directly after the initial training, she took on our local carrion crow family. No doubt unaware at the time, the difficulty of the task, and the inherent dangers of this action she flew the first crow hard and fast and bound to it. The crow immediately gave it's alarm call, to which the partner masterminded an aerial attack in defence. By stooping and physically striking her he drove both the falcon, and the crow she was tightly bound to into a deep pool of a hillside stream, by the time she was eventually located, her prize was gone and she was submersed up to the neck, saved only by, fortunately, landing on a



A fit Lanner Falcon can be a determined and accurate hunter



*Left:
The Luger Falcon
is a master at
obtaining it's pitch
quickly above the
Falconer*

*Below:
The Ferruginous
Hawk benefits from
windy days where it
can get lift, and
makes use of ther-
mals in the same
way as an eagle.*

rocky shelf projecting out into the fast flowing water. Usually such instances put most falcons off repeating such one-sided battles. Not her. The following week she seemed enraged when carrion crows again appeared in the area she was flying in and immediately she launched another attack. This time she couldn't quite get to grips with them. Although her flying was never intended to have her actually hunting she will always capitalise on opportunities as they arise. On Saturday, whilst flying over a wood to seek favourable thermals, she took a woodpigeon. Her fitness was the key factor, combined with her strong desire to hunt. She was once again successful.

Luggers are just as capable. Several years ago Ronnie Brodie was flying an eyas Luger on our ground at partridges. This female was more than effective on Partridge, and like any Lanner, could wait on at a very impressive pitch. She could be brought right over the point and her stooping was accurate. Like many light wing-loaded falcons, she needed to be absolutely overhead, because coveys breaking out of position couldn't be flown down in the same manner as a Peregrine would successfully attempt. Nevertheless, brought up in the strict training for gamehawking, she was well worth the effort.

The Ferruginous Hawk is another character that so often is passed by in favour of others. Like the Lanner and Luger, it is an excellent performer if the weather is dry. However, unlike the other two, it is not put off by windy days and in fact often does far better. This species of hawk is so very much like a small eagle in its flying requirements. Without doubt they perform spectacularly on hilly to mountainous ground, where they can get lift. Flying from the fist is far from easy, and often little is achieved by this. They can make use of thermals in exactly the same way as any eagle, and can stoop in the same manner as a falcon at quarry below. They are capable of tackling brown and blue hares. Probably their small feet don't endear them either by comparison to Redtails and Harris Hawks but their superior weight is to their advantage.

Once they're fit they can be flown from steep hillsides at rabbits in the gully or valley bottoms. Capable of following on whilst the ground is beaten out below, they will

tackle quarry in long, shallow, gliding stoops or more dramatic, vertical stooping. These are specialist hawks, that need space and time given to their very individual requirements.

One thing is for sure, any of the above three are more than capable of rewarding time and effort invested in their training. They may not be consistent, which is also a determining factor as to why they are not more popular, yet any of these, in hunting mode, is more than a pleasure to be with.



MICROCHIPPING

What Is A Microchip And How Does It Work? By Paul K Beecroft

A Microchip or Microtag is an injectable, passive transponder which provides an electronic means of identification. The miniature transponder is approximately the size of a grain of rice (after cooking). The transponder does not need a battery and can be interrogated by a portable or static reader. The chip is then activated by the reader and transmits its unique code/number which is then displayed on the reader. Every unique number is recorded on the National Register which in turn gives the details of the owner(s). There are two types of Readers (1) The Portable or Mobile. (2) The Static reader which is normally seen in the Veterinary Surgery attached to the wall. The readers can be used at anytime regardless of environment conditions.

Is The Microchip Safe?

The companies concerned with Microchips state the answer is YES. They report that they have been used for many years on humans and animals world-wide without any problems. To date over 4 million animals have been chipped.

Reports are available on tests with animals. One in particular was a study over a period of 105 weeks on 55 male and 55 female Sprague-Dawley Rats. All the results showed no inflammatory or other negative tissue reactions and analysis of the implant with S.E.M. (Scanning Electron Microscopy) did not show any changes. The glass protection of the chip is guaranteed past the life span of the implant carrier animal and as long as it is implanted by a suitably qualified person there is no risk to the bird's health. The chip, once inserted, is very quickly encapsulated with tissue and effectively ignored by the body as an inert item. The bird or animal therefore will not even know it is there. I have personally witnessed a number of Raptors, mine included, being chipped. The insertion takes very little time and the distress to the Raptor is minimal. I have witnessed a non-imprint adult Sparrowhawk go through this procedure with no ill effects.

Floating, Migrating, Losing, Removal etc.

Once again the companies concerned state that the Microchip is permanent. It will not fade, it cannot be disguised, it cannot be removed, it cannot get lost and the unique number cannot be changed. I have spoken with the companies on these matters and I am informed

that if the chips are inserted correctly, underneath the skin and into tissue/muscle then as previously stated the chip becomes encapsulated. I am not a Vet but if this is correct and I can only assume that it is, then I cannot see how it could possibly migrate or become lost. Removal of chips is reported to be very difficult and would require an operation. There are no reports of this ever having been done. In dogs & horses where it has been tried on an experimental basis it has taken upwards of 4 hours for two veterinary surgeons to find the chip and this was with the use of three dimensional x-rays. I think it is therefore safe to say that no chip is likely to be removed by an 'unauthorised' person.

The risk of failure of a chip is currently 0.0001% which must be acceptable considering that this a manufactured item. From personal experience with my own birds (a number of which were chipped in 1987) I can only say that they are still working and have not failed or become lost. I currently have on loan a Scanner/Reader and check the birds regularly. I have also checked other birds that I know have been chipped and have always been able to find the chip very quickly.

Rumours

There are many stories and rumours circulating within the Falconry world about Microchips, even as I write this article. I am fully aware of one of the sources and reasons behind it, but for obvious reasons it cannot be printed.

I do from time to time give talks on the Theft of Raptors and always mention Microchipping. Generally there is someone who has heard about birds having been chipped and they no longer work. I believe I have traced every rumour that I have been made aware of and found that no chips in Raptors have been lost. In fact I have only been able to trace one instance of a report on the failure or loss of the microchip and this is currently being investigated, this was not however a Raptor. I was able to find out that during the early stages of Microchipping in this country mistakes were made by the operators, none of whom were vets. There were a number of complaints that once inserted they no longer worked and a reading was not shown. If however the floor had been scanned they would have found the desired reading as the chips had fallen out of the insertion device.

In other cases the scanner was not

being used correctly, so obviously the reading would not show. As with most new products there are quite often teething prob

lems and these now appear to have been sorted out.

Benefits Of Chipping

By having your birds(s) chipped I believe it reduces the risk of Theft. The theft of Raptors still continues to be a serious problem. The two main ways of theft are stealing from the Aviary/Mews or the finding of a lost bird that has become separated from the Falconer. In both cases the rings are removed and the identifying features, such as broken feathers are also removed. It then becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible to prove that this is your bird. If the bird has been chipped then no other proof would be required. The benefit of this has already proved its worth to a Yorkshire Falconer who got his bird back only because it was chipped.

Microchipping And The D.O.E.

The D.O.E. have agreed to include the number of any Microchipped bird on the Registration Document in the space 'other ring'. All that is required is the return of the Registration Document with a letter of explanation together with the details of the Chip. No. and a new document will be issued. There are no plans to amend the Registration Documents to read 'other ring/implant number'.

Cost Of Microchips

The cost of this appears to vary greatly throughout the country, from Vet to Vet. The average cost from a Vet which includes the chip plus insertion, appears to be approximately £20-£25 which also includes the first years subscription on the National Computer (see below)

The price can be reduced by ordering large quantities of chips e.g. 100 would cost approx. £13.00. This is of course without the insertion fee. One Falconry Club that I know of has ordered a larger amount and the price is even less. This is the price quoted by Animalcare.

Microchip Companies

There appear to be three main companies operating in the U.K. involved in Microchips.

R.S. BIOTECH.

Who are based in Northampton. This company promotes the Trovan

System. This company took over the UKID Microchipping Co. I was very impressed with R.S.BIOTECH. In less than 24 hours of contacting this company a Product Manager was sitting at my kitchen table giving me the history of his company along with various bits of literature and a demonstration of his products. The equipment i.e. the Scanner and the specially designed Implant Gun appeared to be first class. The good news from this company was that they were willing to sell us the Microchips at £4.00 each. The bad news is that R.S.BIOTECH have cornered the part of the market that is not specifically geared towards the individual. As far as I am aware no Vet, R.S.P.C.A. Dog Pound or Police Force is using this system, so there are no readers readily available and I think it would not practical to use this company.

PETTRAC

Who are based in Uckfield, East Sussex. This company promotes the AVID system. This company again was very helpful. A meeting was to be arranged with a Manager but owing to commitments we had not been able to meet at the time of going to press.

The cost of the Chip from the company is £12.00 each, reducing with quantity and this includes lifetime registration on the National Pet Register.

The Reader/Scanner from this company is reported as being capable of reading other chips and is called the Multichip AVID Reader. On speaking with the company they state it will not read the Trovan System, but it will read Identichip. The cost of the reader to buy outright is £450.00 plus V.A.T. The company do however have a scheme where they loan the reader at a price of £250.00 which is held on deposit until the reader is returned. Pettrac (AVID) was launched in April 1992, in this country, but has been established in the U.S. since 1985. AVID is currently being used by a number of local authorities, dog wardens and animal shelters, where most of the marketing efforts were reported as being spent. To date I myself have not come into contact with any of the AVID chips.

ANIMALCARE Ltd.

Who are based in York. This company promotes the Identichip System. In respect of this company, I will try not to sound biased towards them. It is not my intention to do so and I trust the facts below will speak for themselves.

The following is a paragraph taken from a letter written by Andy Pound the Marketing Manager for Animalcare:

"We are part of the Veterinary Drug Co.

PLC. which is one of the largest veterinary wholesaling organisations in the UK. & has been operating for some 35 years. Animalcare initially operated as a marketing and sales arm for the wholesale group but in December 1988 was made into a separate company with one individual identity to allow it a wider scope within the veterinary market. We operate in a very wide sphere of products within the Veterinary Market including a large number of licensed pharmaceuticals thus indicating that we take our products very seriously and are very well versed in looking into all aspects of products prior to their launch. We launched Identichip in July 1989 and the scheme has been recognised as the leading identification scheme in Europe from which many of the schemes now set up around the world have taken their lead"

With regard to the implants in use in the UK. there are currently in excess of 80,000 implants in daily use in small mammals and birds. Readers currently number around 1500. Veterinary practices using the Identichip system are increasing on a weekly basis and there are approx. 850 at the present time. This relates to a total practise population of 2300 of which 750 would be large animal only Vets who do not at this time have need of the current system. The price of the chip is as previously stated. The cost of the mobile reader is £199.00 plus V.A.T.

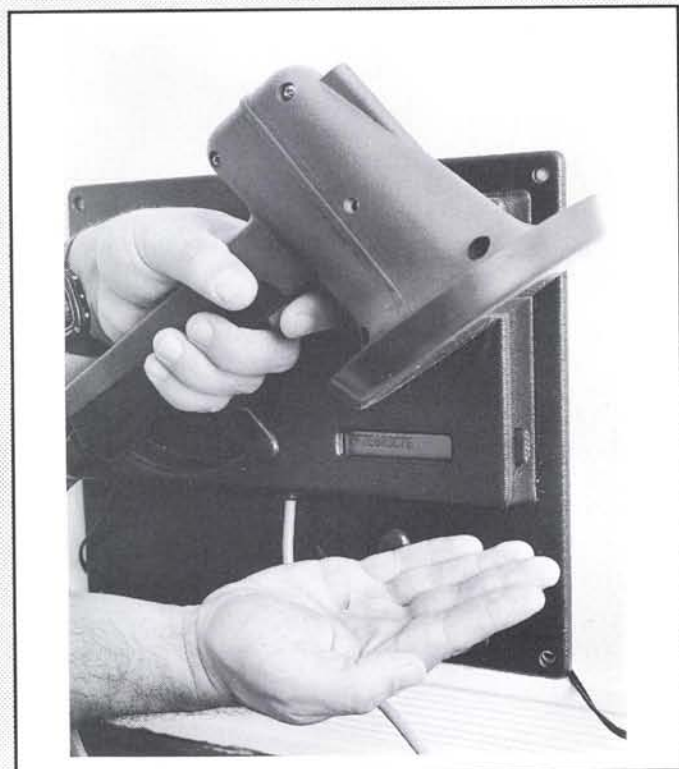
Throughout my travels around the UK. This is the system I have seen in use at both Vets and other Agencies. All of the birds I have come across that have been chipped have been done so by

Identichip. I have been in contact with Mr Andy Pound on and off for some time now. I have, to date, found him very helpful and honest with the questions I have put to him. I have on loan from this company a Microchip plus inserter and also a Mobile reader for demonstration purposes and for use during my investigations into Theft. In respect of the National Register where details of owners are placed this is a definite must. The information must be held at a central point where it would only take one phone call to ascertain who the owner is. It would be of little or no use if various clubs,zoos etc. set up their own register, we would not know where to start and problems would arise.

There is currently a charge of £3.00 a year, per bird to remain on the register or a lump payment of £19.00 for life. Andy Pound has stated that this fee will be waived, as it is not very likely that the authorities will need information on birds of prey in respect of lost ones very often. However we must agree that the registrar is updated each time a bird changes hands. This is a must or the fee will be re-introduced. Each bird has an individual form in respect of the Chip.Register and there is a tear off slip provided for use if the owner gives away or sells the bird. This is a very good offer, so we must abide by it.

So there it is - the MICROCHIP.

In the police force we have a phrase that is known nationwide - LOCK IT OR LOSE IT. I feel that under the current circumstances with bird thefts so prevalent I am entitled to change it slightly to - CHIP IT OR LOSE IT.



Photograph showing size of hand held scanner and microchip.

ADVENTURES OF A FOREST-HUNTER



BY
GERALD SUMMERS

Towards the end of 1955 I left the Edgerton Agricultural College at Nakuru in Kenya, equipped with a diploma in Tropical Veterinary Science and a Fiscal Shrike named Dirgaan

(named after a particularly blood-thirsty Zulu chief whose character he most certainly shared).

I had no serious intention of actually practising as a vet and in any case I would have required a rather more serious proof of my professional skill than a mere "DIP AG EDGE". However, I had enjoyed the course and it had kept me out of mischief (well almost!) and introduced me to some like-minded eccentrics.

The shrike had been bestowed upon me for a nominal amount of good East African currency by Kimare, the college's head gardener, who had quickly discovered that the Bwana N'Dege (Bird man) was a sucker for anything feathered and vaguely predatory.

The Fiscal Shrike is one of the most characteristic and prominent of all African birds and appears to perch on every second bush and at intervals of a few hundred yards, on all the main telegraph wires from Nairobi to Mombasa and in every other direction as well.

The mature bird is a handsome black and white beast, slightly larger than the rare Red-backed shrike (which winters in Africa, but is seldom seen) It is rarely persecuted (probably due to some mysterious ju-ju myths). It therefore shows scant fear or respect for human beings.

It is apparently named "Fiscal" after some obscure South African Dutch officer who, in the old days of colonial rule combined all the charm and basic good will of a magistrate cum hanging judge which, let's face it , is a gross libel on a very attractive and intelligent little bird.

When Dirgaan had been presented to me as a half fledged, greyish, mottled object with no tail and an outsize orange gape, I hadn't a clue as to what manner of beast it might be. However after having been placed (for want of anything more suitable) in my new and highly expensive pith helmet, it promptly regurgitated or "cast" a large pellet, which, in close inspection, appeared to be composed of the no-longer- required, outer casing of large grass-hopper or locust-like insects,

together with bits of fur which indicated a rather more actively predatory diet. This was fine as one hardly could move about the place without disturbing clouds of arthropoda at every step, within ten minutes my room mate and I had collected a large jar full and we were in business.

After a few days of almost non-stop eating Dirgaan began to develop a tail, to use his very serviceable legs and to call loudly in a not unmusical tone. Also his beak, which was long in proportion, had a decided hook- like end, more like that of a miniature Raven or gull, than that of a "proper" raptor. He also had a rather attractive warbling call, which he used to demand immediate nourishment. In days rather than weeks, he had learned to fly

I suddenly heard the rush of wings as Batty swept overhead to swing round in a wide arc, I called his name and he came in at once to land on my arm with all the grace of a gigantic butterfly.

and would come long distances to my fist demanding anything meaty and edible from a 'Rhinoceros' beetle to a freshly slain mouse or lizard. He became very popular and soon a number of my fellow students, most of which had never shown any great interest in falconry or ornithology, were carrying shrikes of their own, and thus the jolly, if short lived, Edgerton Shrike Club was born. The authorities, from the Principal down, were remarkably tolerant and, so long as one attended the occasional lecture, did not mind what one did in one's spare time. Dirgaan was great fun at what we called 'indoor falconry'. Seated on the back of a spare chair in my quarters after dark, he would sally forth to intercept any sausage fly, Rhinoceros beetle or other nocturnal horror that invaded my room, drawn by the hissing pressure lamp (we were pretty

primitive in those days). Held down in one foot in true raptor style the victim would disappear into the crop, to reappear as a shining black casting.

Whilst at Edgerton I had made friends with two blokes named Bill and Fergus. Bill was the son of third generation Kenya settlers and Fergus, a wild Scot who always swore that he had left his country for his countrys' good (which I could believe). We had decided that we would stay together, if possible, as we had much the same outlook on life and none of us relished the prospect of working as underpaid assistants on someone else's farm, which was the only sort of employment going at that time. We all stayed at Bills' family home in Nairobi, so were not in urgent need of food and lodging .

One day we found an advert in the local rag for Desert Locust Officers, Vehicle provided and no experience required. This was fine, especially the last bit . Experience was what we hadn't got. We duly turned up at the Nairobi H.Q. and after a few questions were accepted. The pay was £90 a month plus petrol allowance. Not bad for the 1950's. We were also equipped with a prototype Landrover each, an area to patrol, a back-up 5cwt truck complete with driver and mate and of course a tent and camping equipment. The general theory was that we got in touch with local African herdsmen, who in our case happened to be the wild, independent minded Nasai, who in many ways resemble American Indians rather than their fellow Africans. Being pastoral by habit and owning immense herds of cattle they were deeply involved with the whereabouts and doings of their chief enemy the voracious N'Zeegi (locust). As soon as they located an area infested with 'hoppers' (the immature flightless locusts) they would report to us and we would go into action with our 15 cwt trucks, which contained sacks and sacks of bran laced with D.D.T. which slew the enemy in their thousands. Another trick was to watch the sky as the plains were infested with different sorts of raptor, Yellow Billed and Black Shouldered Kites, Lizard Buzzards, Chanting Goshawks, several types of Kestrel and even Tawny Eagles - all would come to the feast from miles,

together with four-footed hunters such as Jackals, Hyenas and even Lions, a local settler told me that they tasted like shrimps or prawns, so, always adventurous, I fried up a few to see if he was right. In fact they tasted like a paper bag in which shrimps had been kept, I do not recommend them unless you happen to be lost and starving in the bush and even then I would think twice before tackling them again.

Having plenty of spare time I let it be known that I might be interested in any unusual birds, especially if they had a hooked beak and sharp claws. I did not have long to wait, within days a deputation of Nasai Warriors arrived carrying a grass-lined basket in which reposed an object that to me resembled a refugee from the prehistoric department of The Natural History Museum.

It had a huge head and beak, large green legs and feet and virtually no tail. It was like nothing I had ever seen before. As my knowledge of Nasai language was limited to say the least, I didn't get much help from them. The Europeans weren't much help either. The main characteristics of my new acquisition were its' unlikely appearance and colossal appetite. It was, however, a raptor and therefore well worth keeping. Eventually, by a process of deduction, I decided it must be a young Bataleur Eagle. At the first opportunity I took it to the Coryndon Museum in Nairobi where the curator, John Williams, confirmed that I was right. Batty, as I named him, was an intriguing beast - ate like vulture and grew by the hour, or so it seemed. He was very tame from the beginning (today I suppose he would have been called an imprint) However he was a very slow developer, preferring to run about the camp, attacking the bare feet of my African assistants, who showed remarkable forbearance. He eventually became airborne and would belt about the sky in enormous circles and at great speed, but was totally incapable of landing until he crashed flat into the branches of some convenient tree and fell to the ground, dazed, but unhurt. It took ages before he mastered his own element, but when he did, was spectacular and his speed and dash, dropping out of the sky like a bomb shell (in noise, not size). He never learnt to catch anything worthwhile and if I had had to depend upon him I would have starved to death, but he was a real character and great fun. One day I got a message from H.Q. that I was to move several hundred miles north to the Somali-Ethiopian border to deal with a huge locust swarm. I had to travel alone as Bill and Fergus were doing the same thing elsewhere. So I packed my kit including Batty, and followed by my truck, with its supply of lethal bran and D.D.T., headed north. The new area was totally different to the

lush plains and forest land I had left behind, being semi-desert, airless and with an unrelieved, almost menacing heat. It was also infested by the Shifta - sinister arab type Bandits - armed to the teeth and with a reputation for killing anyone who got in their way. I found where the locust swarm was at its densest and soon got to work, assisted by a whole Whipsnade of wild animals, Feral cats, Carakal Lynxes, Jackals, foxes, the lot. Batty had a great time, scouring the sky from horizon to horizon, helping in a small way to reduce the locust population but failing to catch anything worthwhile for the pot.

However, I have a feeling that he saved my life one day as I was prospecting for water on foot a few miles from my camp. It was a leisurely trip and I was in no hurry. I had cast Batty off and as usual he was cruising about overhead. He had learnt, by then, to answer my call, particularly when sharp set, as he was on this occasion. I had found a small, slow flowing stream and was about to fill my water bottle when I heard a sound behind me, looking round I saw half a dozen or so of

the most villainous looking characters I had ever seen, coming towards me. They were armed to the hilt and looked thoroughly unfriendly. I didn't like the look of the situation one bit, I was totally unarmed except for my fists and I had never been much good at punch-ups, anyway, I suddenly heard the rush of wings as Batty swept overhead to swing round in a wide arc, I called his name and he came in at once to land on my arm with all the grace of a gigantic butterfly. I turned round and strode past the bandits with my heart in my mouth and Batty mantled impressively on my fist. I am sure they must have believed me to be a medicine man of immense power who could call wild eagles out of the sky at will, anyway, the effect was the same and when I looked back a few seconds later they had all melted away into the bush. A few days later, having done all I could to reduce the local locust population I headed, thankfully, south once more with Batty, whom I now valued above the price of the finest rubies or anything else for that matter.



Batty had a huge head and beak, large green legs and feet and virtually no tail. He was like nothing I had ever seen before.

OBSERVATIONS ON LEARNING FALCONRY

Dr Nick Fox.

When I was a boy I hawked for three seasons before I ever met another living falconer. The books available then were few to someone of my limited means. Jack Mavrogordato had published his first book 'A Hawk For The Bush' and Michael Woodford had just published 'A Manual For Falconry'. Most of the other books were too historical to have much relevance. Growing up in the country, without others to help, my attitude has always been 'Ash the birds'. They will tell you what they need.

This is a very hard, slow way to learn something as unforgiving as falconry. I treasured those years very much. They were simple, natural years when I hacked my birds without really being aware of the deep intellectual pool of knowledge whose surface I was swimming on. In factual terms I could probably teach somebody in a couple of days all the information I learned during my childhood. How to put on jesses and all that kind of thing. But I could never easily teach someone how to read a hawk's mind, how to interpret the glance of a hawk which betrays what it is thinking.

When I started meeting and corresponding with other falconers, all the complications of modern falconry started. In the twenty years after the war the small groups of falconers started to

come to a focus. Pesticides decimated the hawks which suddenly had special status. Philip Glasier opened his Falconry Centre at Newent and the Hawk Trust was formed. Rumours circulated that hawks could be bred in captivity....

More and more people wanted to learn falconry and to meet this demand Philip Glasier started to run courses. In return for working at his centre in the summer it opened, he taught me to block hoods, to exercise falcons and a host of other practical things which cannot easily be picked up from books. Many of these details had been passed on, person to person, from the Old Hawking Club and back into the mist of time.

In 1971 I was approached to run three courses under contract during the summer. Although I had only taken my first head of game scarcely five years earlier I took the opportunity and all went well. For the first time I realised what a diversity of approaches there are to falconry. The British Falconers' Club's attitude to beginners at that time was that you would not be accepted into the Club until you were taking quarry regularly with a trained hawk. This rather left beginners out in the cold' by the time they were taking quarry regularly they had lost all desire to join the BFC! As a reaction, the Hawking Club of

Great Britain was formed, intended more for the 'common man'. Soon, after some hiatus, it amalgamated with BFC. Now we see the wheel turning full circle again with the BFC not fulfilling the needs of beginners and the consequent blossoming of small local clubs and private enterprises filling niches left empty.

Some of these clubs, such as the North of England Falconry Club, have now started their own apprenticeship scheme, and I believe the BFC intends soon to follow suit. This is an admirable way of getting beginners off on the right foot. Of course it depends how good the tutor is, both at falconry and teaching, but it is the next best thing to actually being reared in hawking.

The problem was that up until the 1980's, hawks were in short supply. Beginners were discouraged because they represented future competition for scarce birds. This is not so any longer. Now the cry is "irresponsible breeders producing too many hawks!". Such people don't appreciate that breeding hawks is not quite the same as manufacturing widgets. Beginners now do not represent competition for hawks but they do represent competition for hawking grounds and worse still they do represent an increasing threat to the future of falconry through potentially bringing the sport into disrepute by doing something stupid. When there were only a hundred falconers keeping a low profile, there was no problem. When there are perhaps ten thousand hawk-keepers, many in populated areas and many actively seeking publicity, then there is great potential for bad press.

Therefore it is important to achieve and maintain certain standards, not just for the beginner, but also for experienced hawk-keepers. Those standards are intended to cover the welfare of both hawks and quarry, and to prevent hawk-keeping including any disreputable activities.

Through the early eighties we taught more courses for three or four weeks in the summer. The BFC weren't happy about it and wanted us to do it free of charge so that there would be no hint of commercialism. At the same time they offered no other alternative for



A young beginners first rabbit with a buzzard in Scotland

beginners. So we ran courses each year and learned more about the process of learning.

The first thing we learned was the amazing capacity of the human race for messing people about. The person who could book a course, send a deposit, arrive on time without bringing their dog/ferret/mother/children, without losing their flight ticket/hearing aid, able to both speak and write English, capable of getting up in the mornings and eating normal meals was a rare gem.

Apart from their idiosyncrasies, the beginners fell into three groups: those who had no natural aptitude or empathy with the hawks and should not be allowed near them with a barge pole. These we weaned off the idea with whatever means we could. The second group really wanted a summer break doing something special, a taster. They had no serious intention of continuing, but supported falconry and enjoyed actively participating for a few days. We tried to make their week enjoyable, to show them some of the fascination of falconry and we didn't worry too much if they didn't take in all the technical details. The third group were the ones who meant business. We were more fussy with them, picking them up on small errors which could have been fatal to a bird. At the end of the three weeks we lent them the buzzards which had been used on the courses. They took them away for a year. Some caught quite a lot of rabbits with them, some gave up falconry when they sent the bird back. But they had had a chance to get started without great expense using birds that were tough enough to weather callow treatment. With dogs, horses and hawks I find it is always better if one of the partnership is already trained.

We found that the best courses consisted of four to six people. This made the group 'gel' with fertile discussions and a happy atmosphere. You can only teach intensively in short bursts, then there has to be time to consolidate. Then coursers can talk amongst themselves and discuss different viewpoints. There's always a wise gut who wants to show the others how to fit hood braces! In the mornings we covered theory and indoor practical work such as fitting anklets and repairing feathers. In the afternoons we did outdoor practical work such as calling off hawks and, on the advanced courses, hawking, either crow or magpie hawking or rabbit-hawking.



Preparing to fly falcons in Wales

When people first arrived on their course, on their first morning, I would ask them one question - "Why are you here?". Few of them had thought about this and we would return to the point several times during the course. Everyone has different motives for taking up hawk-keeping and/or falconry. Some of these motives are not even conscious. We tried to get people to come to terms with their real motives and to act on them, either to give up or go forward.

One of the main problems is that most of the people coming in to falconry have urban backgrounds. They have not been brought up in the country and do not understand it. They do not understand farming or farmers' problems. They do not have the fieldcraft skills necessary to produce good slips for their birds. Usually they have come into it through a fascination with a hawk on the fist. Thus we found that some of the keen rough-shooters who came on a beginners' summer course had taken over fifty head by Christmas whereas many people with no country background caught nothing within three years. These are the kind of people who become "muddlers" who never really get it together. A lot of people never really get it together in falconry.

By 1987 overseas commitments and increasing pressure from breeding made us decide to give up the courses. But more and more places started to offer courses and there was mounting concern that the standards were low. The market for courses is a free-for-all, there is no controlling body or legislation. Therefore I approached the BFC and said "Why don't you inspect the courses and give them your approval if you think they are up to standard?".

This eventually took place. But it has not had the impact it should have done because the BFC was itself nor clear what standards and criteria it wanted to see, and it did not have the manpower to inspect courses on a regular basis. Hopefully the situation is now improving and we can look forward to BFC approval as being on a par with the approval of, say, the British Horse Society.

More bad and some good courses have sprung up. There are also now taster days, weekends and hunting days. These are situations in which falconry interfaces with the public on very intimate terms. Anyone can ring up and go on one of these days. They can take a camera or video. That material could be used in the media against falconry. It is thus important to ensure that all of these activities are properly conducted and do not bring falconry into disrepute. It is also important that beginners are properly taught and receive value for money. Courses can help avoid many of the elementary pitfalls. They are almost always better than nothing at all. But they are only a very small beginning down a very long and interesting path. The good falconer, when he hits a problem, will not immediately go running for advice. He will try to puzzle it out for himself, he will ask his bird, and he may come up with some very original solutions.

Perhaps it would be useful for readers of this magazine who have been on courses or hawking days to write in and tell of their experiences for better or for worse? It is easy to be critical and hard to be constructive. But it might help improve standards and highlight the truly horrendous. Or perhaps the magazine could run a review along the lines of "Which?" magazine.



^ c58cm
VULTURINE FISH
EAGLES, or PALM
NUT VULTURES in
talon grappling display.
S.W. Senegal - Basse Casamance. 3/92.



^
AFRICAN RIVER, or FISH EAGLE
c67cm



^
Imm. LANNER c48cm
chasing Senegal wattled
Plover. Dry season in
Kabrouse, S.W. Senegal.

YELLOW BILLED
KITE c57cm.

BLACK
BREASTED
SNAKE
EAGLE.
c67cm



RAPTORS IN SENEGAL

Part 1



WHITE-BACKED VULTURE
c87cm



c63cm ^
HARRIER
HAWK
LIZARD
BUZZARD
c35cm



^
Abyssinian
Roller
- E. indy S.E. ♀
c55cm BATELEUR



P. Snowo 930

to scale



AN IRISH SAFARI Hawking Magpie in Co. Leitrim

By
LIAM Ó BROIN

Our safari in Co. Leitrim started out as a result of an invitation to attend as guests with hawks at an annual country fair. It ended up being a week, hawking and camping across three counties. Even in Ireland Leitrim is sometimes known as "the forgotten county". This is surprising, even to a native visitor, as it is especially beautiful. Rugged, with open mountainous bogs to walk up snipe, woodcock, duck and very wild grouse, it abounds also with that prized quarry for the falconer and sparrowhawk, the magpie. Leaving the more densely populated midlands and north east of Ireland and travelling westwards, or as in this case northwest, larger more prosperous farms give way to smaller holdings. These tiny farms, with stonewalled boundaries and few trees, are ideal terrain for getting the ever clever magpie out in the open for flights to test the best of falcons. Cunning and opportunism are, however, more to the fore for success with the sparrowhawk and a bit of Irish luck thrown in as well! Further west, counties like Sligo and Mayo are the ultimate for either hawks or falcons and, those brave enough to go native!

A week later we had packed our bags and were en route westwards having spent a very pleasant sunny day at the country fair, the spars no doubt being the better of it too. Our, or rather my objective, was to get to the mountains in Leitrim before dark. I reasoned wrongly, as it turned out, that it would be disruptive to a very tight schedule, to even mention that we were invited for free drinks after the fair! When I did MENTION it later, on arrival at the camp site, there were no complaints. In fact no one said anything – for an hour! "After all", I argued, "We had made very good time, it's only half past seven!" "So we noticed", came the cryptic reply.

Still, the infatigable Fogarty had everyone running around in good humoured fashion erecting the tent and all was forgiven! After mountains of bacon, eggs and sausages all six sparrowhawks were checked and placed for the night. (No, the bacon, eggs and

sausages, were for the falconers!)

Dawn gently invaded the tent opening which was facing east, the glow of sunlight promised a warm and sunny day ahead. Noel McGuinness, who shared a section of the tent with me, stirred, his head popped up like a ferret sniffing the air, disappeared and re-emerged again seconds later at the sound of bells and a baw by one of the hawks under the canopy. Noel's head held stiff while we eyed each other now relaxed and vanished again into the warm depths of his sleeping bag. I too lay back as the gentle tinkle of a tail bell told us the hawk had regained her bow perch shaking her train in contentment. Gradually Noel and myself eased into a conversation. From the depths of his bag he suggested we two explore the surrounding countryside and return to a hot breakfast which no doubt the others would have ready. We dressed and checked all the hawks and their leashes. As the morning established itself the sun still had not made its appearance over the ridge of low hills to the east. Yet it still looked good. The sky was clear blue without a trace of cloud except for a blanket of mist hanging stationary over a line of high hills to the north west. As we went about I was pleased to notice my hawk tilting her head this way then that way following our every move. She looked good standing on one leg fluffed up against the early morning chill but nonetheless alert and interested. The campsite was in a small field, about twenty yards from the road bounded by a stone wall, the previous evening we had turned off the main road, crossing the river, which now ran alongside our campsite, by a narrow stone bridge.

Beyond and below the road to our right as we walked lay small neat fields surrounded by stone walls and here and there a hawthorn bush. Directly below, and at the back of the silent white walled cottage we had just passed, was a bright green meadow with neat hay cocks dotted around it, each capped with a plastic bag, which glistened in the sunlight. And below that again, the river winding its way from the campsite. A magpie took wing from the field and chattered its disapproval of our presence and glided down into the valley towards the campsite. We exchanged knowing glances and watched it make to a tree within watching distance of the tent. By now

we had walked about a half a mile along the narrow road. Between gaps in the sparse hedge row rush fields came into view. Here and there lay disused stone outbuildings surrounded by thin clumps of bushes and a pine tree or two. We watched a second magpie take flight as it noiselessly followed the same flight path as the first one. "So far no sign of any blackbirds", remarked Noel as we stood and took in the sheer beauty of this place with its background of blue distant hills and the warmth of the beginning of a new day. Our walk ended at a second bridge as the road curved over the river and rose steeply and disappeared higher up. Turning we arrived back at the campsite to find the remaining falconers delicately emerging into the morning sun. Fogarty first to emerge shushed our greeting, "Listen, I hear a magpie". "We know, we know," came the reply from the two confident scouts. By eight thirty a great breakfast had been consumed by all. Even before a second coffee was finished the now alert and restless spars were bating towards every move anyone made. It was obvious all the hawks were keen for the chase without exception. Each hawk was taken up without coaxing and quickly the conversation became animated, "Lets try to flush the magpie". The futility of that was met with an appropriate silence. *That is just the problem, you need open countryside to get the flights, but equally the quarry, ever on the alert, can see the approach. Anyway, how do you get a magpie out of a thirty foot pine tree with six waiting sparrowhawks at the base? You don't! It's as simple as that.* Other tactics were needed and so for the time being it was decided to hunt the river and follow its course, flying whatever was flushed. The two magpies scolded us from their vantage point above as we walked away towards the river.

Here and there as the river ran its course there were gaps, good ones, some thirty yards apart between mostly hazel trees along the bank. To start Noel and Liam Rigney were sent downstream on one side with Fogarty. Paul Donoghue sent me further on to a gap some seventy yards ahead on our side with Karl Lawlor between the two of us to cover early flushes.

Beating began and, within minutes, a blackbird came shooting down stream and pitched in thirty yards to my right!

Donoghue was instantly on the spot with a dog. The place where I stood, midway between a curve in the river and a good open gap, seemed ideal. If the blackbird broke out across the open field it would be well covered by Karl or Noel on the opposite bank, who by this early stage, was as much in yarak as was his hawk! If it flushed upstream it was well covered by Donoghue. If it came my way downstream hugging the run of the river it would come like a bat out of hell around the bend. Shouting to Donoghue to start the reflush I allowed my hawk free stand on the glove. On no account, I reasoned, must I hold her jesses. She'll see the blackbird long before I do. Suddenly she leaned forward on the glove almost as if she was held down with a jangoli. Out of the trees and coming like a dart, the dark silhouette of the blackbird streaked out of the bend. The hawk had seen it well before I did just as I had figured. The spar's timing was perfect, she had the patience to wait, and at the right moment with split second timing, lunged off the fist and met the blackbird in midstream. The speed of both of them was incredible, the spar unbelievably missed the bird, yet was instantly in pursuit and both of them hit the water some twenty yards further downstream. All I saw was a bundle hitting the water, as I too was in instant pursuit, running, stumbling, shouting, "she's got it, she's got it!" I approached the last four yards with caution, heart thumping like mad. She had missed again but stood her mark and was not leaving the spot! A hawk who flies half heartedly will always veer off when she knows she won't catch her quarry and usually will take stand in a tree. This little spar was expert at marking her quarry exactly where it put in and would wait attentively while any dog or number of beaters took the place apart! Voices now were at a frenzy, "it's here," "try there," "what a flight," "did you see that, Paul?" Noel McGuinness, separated from all the fun by the river, drawled, "don't believe him, she didn't fly anything, it's all in his imagination!" The hawk, ever attentive to the dogs and oblivious to the human banter taking place, saw the movement! "There it is," someone yelled and she was away again in hot pursuit and, for the second time, both hawk and quarry hit the water with a splash. This time the hawk had taken enough! The DIPPER, as we now all realized it was, carried



on downstream and disappeared. Meanwhile, a thoroughly wet hawk took stand in an ash tree, fanned her train to dry and cigarettes were passed on both banks. A great start to the day and Noel grinned across at me from the far bank.

It was around about then that we noticed one of the party was missing! "Where's Lawlor?" "He should have been between you and me," I replied to Paul Donoghue. "Where's he got to now?" "Try under the water", quipped Fogarty! "He's probably gone back for a sleep." And so the matter was left to rest. Our next point of interest was a clump of furze along the river bank. Donoghue took the lead on this occasion, hardly had he approached when the clump yielded a large thrush and Paul's spar took it after a very fine chase of forty yards.

Now Noel walked out into the open meadow and his hawk had a lovely ringing flight over the open ground at a pippit. The hawk, being no match for the pippit, flew nevertheless with marvellous gusto. And the hawk, to crown her effort in mid flight, came back to Noel's raised glove from sixty yards out like she had been doing it every day - and probably was! It was now nearly midday and getting very warm, in fact, nearly too warm. Liam Rigney's spar, next in line, took a very noisy blackbird in a classic thirty yard dash, both disappearing into a thorn bush and the almighty din from within confirming the kill. It was obvious that the afternoon was going to be far too hot to hawk so lunch seemed a more logical prospect. "I wonder what happened to Lawlor?" I asked, still

puzzled by his disappearance. "He's back at the campsite." Liam Rigney had stood on a high bank and was looking in that direction, "I can see him from here." "He's probably making lunch for everyone", Rigney grinned. "If I know Karl he's up to something," replied Noel straining his neck to see as much as possible. And indeed Karl had been up to something! Some ten minutes later on arrival at camp we perspiring five were greeted by a grinning Karl, "Tea everyone," and guess what Before he could finish Paul Donoghue was doing a jig, "He's got a bloody magpie, he's got a bloody magpie!" And there before our incongruous eyes was a very busy sparrowhawk pluming with gusto a very dead magpie! "How the hell did you?" and then everything slipped into place. "Yes, chaps you've guessed it, when we were back at the river, who did I spy slipping into camp for a little foraging, but your man here," Karl pointed to the now almost naked magpie. "But how did you get close enough for a slip?" someone asked. "Ah! that's where the real skill comes in doesn't it!" "I didn't go towards the campsite at all but instead I ran across the meadow." Fogarty completed the rest of the story, which by now, we all knew. "Over and behind the wall, all the way along to where it faces the campsite and bingo, you got a twenty yard slip." "Tea for everyone," Karl grinned!

That afternoon hawking was impossible due to the heat. And so we broke camp and headed for Sligo... but then that's another story isn't it?

Training Gundogs For Falconry

By Guy Wallace

Part Nine

Communication, Crime and Punishment

There are three main areas in which communications between dog and handler break down. One is when the handler knows what he or she wants the dog to do but the dog does not understand. The second is when the dog understands only too well what the handler wants but does not want to do it and thirdly, and probably the most important, is when the handler does not look at a given situation from the dog's point of view (which may well be very different from the handler's.)

WORDS OF COMMAND and SIGNALS should be short, distinct and given as a definite command which the handler confidently expects to be obeyed. If you give a hesitant command wondering whether it will be obeyed, you can bet your boots that it will not be! Sharp commands get a sharp response and sloppy commands get a sloppy response - or no response at all! NEVER give a command that you know you do not have a hope in Hell of having obeyed or you will effectively teach the dog to disobey commands. So when our friend (?) the hare takes off, with Fido in hot pursuit, unless you can drop Fido before he hits top gear, keep your mouth shut, leave your whistle alone and await his return. As a rearguard action on his return you can shove his nose in Puss's form and give him a "rollicking" (which may make YOU feel better) and then go back to the drawing board on hares and stop whistles, but at least he has not learned to DISOBEY a command. Gundog handlers are like schoolmasters. One walks into a classroom, say QUIET and has instant

hush; another walks into the same classroom, says QUIET and has instant chaos! It is a matter of confidence, consistency and NEVER bluffing. Do not keep on "nagging" at the dog hoping that it will eventually obey the command. If it does not obey a command first the time, the second time of giving it you are over to the dog in a flash and you immediately demonstrate to it the error of its ways. As always you then give the dog the same command in the same situation and when it obeys (as it surely will) make a big fuss of your pupil. B L A C K / W H I T E , GOOD/BAD. Whatever you do, do not become a "waffler". The waffler gives a whole string of commands in the form of a running commentary that becomes like the background noise of traffic to the dog. An example with, say, retrieving goes like this. Trainer 'A' says FETCH and on taking the retrieve says DEAD. GOOD BOY. Trainer 'B' says, FETCH IT. HI LOST. GOOD BOY. ITS OVER THERE. WHY CAN'T

YOU SEE IT, YOU IDIOT. THAT'S IT, CLEVER BOY. WELL DONE BRING IT ON. NO COME IN TO ME. DON'T RUN ROUND IN CIRCLES. OVER HERE. DEAD. GIVE IT UP. LEAVE. DOWN. etc.etc. thoroughly confusing both him- (or her!) self as well as the dog. A variation of this is the "whistle waffler" who accompanies every canine action with a constant concerto on the whistle.

Some suggestions for verbal words of command are SIT (or HUP), DOWN, HERE, (or COME), GO, PLAY, HEEL, GET ON (or CAST ON) [to start hunting], OVER [either over, through or under (!) obstacles], GET IN [for cover], LEAVE or GONE AWAY, KENNEL or BASKET, IN THE BACK [car], QUIET and NO to name a few! Again choose one specific word of command for each action and stick to it for life. Similarly with whistle signals. A long PEEP for SIT, two short PIP PIPS for turn or move off from the drop and two lots of three PIPS i.e. PIP PIP PIP PIP PIP PIP for Here are all you should need and all on the

same whistle. (I have always wondered why a man with only one dog at all the best country fairs requires a veritable museum of whistles hung round his neck!) As already mentioned hand signals can be substituted for vocal or whistle signals on appropriate occasions. For SIT hold the hand up out to one side of the body like a policeman holding up traffic (a stamped floor is another signal for SIT which can be extremely useful on certain occasions). For HERE pat one thigh vigorously. Do NOT use both extended arms like a crucified effigy since a dog sees movement much better than a stationary signal (GSP's appear to be particularly short-sighted) and extending the arms is extremely difficult to do holding a shotgun, a brace of pheasant and a large hare or, for that matter, a Golden Eagle on your fist!

For change in direction swing the appropriate arm in the required direction. As with SIT the trainer starts off by teaching the vocal command and when that has been thoroughly mastered, give the same vocal com-



Commands should be short and distinct

mand followed immediately by the appropriate whistle signal OR hand signal. Eventually one or the other can be dispensed with as the dog comes to associate voice, whistle or hand signal all with the same command e.g. HERE can be "HERE" or PIP PIP PIP PIP PIP PIP or a patted thigh.

DISCIPLINE. The whole subject of discipline must be faced up to squarely right from the outset. I have never subscribed to the old saying that "A woman, a spaniel a walnut tree, the more you beat 'em, the better they be"! The carrot in front in the form of praise always works much better than the (proverbial) stick behind and fortunately most well-bred Gundogs work to please their respective owners and the occasional growl from the trainer is all that is required to put young Fido in his place. It is not so much what you say to a dog as how you say it that is important. It is imperative that your *tone* of voice indicates praise or displeasure as well as the actual words. This is a particularly important point for people with a naturally gruff voice to watch out for. However, there is always the budding young lager-lout that gives you two fingers and carries on in his (or her) own sweet way. In fact most young dogs that are going to make anything in life will probably 'try it on' at some-time but this attitude still cannot be tolerated. I have frequently referred to 'giving it a good rollicking', 'giving it a good shaking' etc. etc. but in most cases, especially if the dog has been conditioned to accept you as The Boss right from the start and its whole life revolves round wanting to please you, this is only necessary once or twice throughout the whole of its training unless you have a real delinquent on your hands. I can do no better than to quote from Peter Moxon's excellent book 'Gundogs: Training and field trials' (my copy is priced at

25/-!) "PUNISHMENT MUST BE ADMINISTERED IMMEDIATELY THE OFFENCE IS COMMITTED AND ON THE EXACT SPOT WHERE THE PUPIL DID WRONG" It is essential that the pupil knows *why* it is being punished and, as always, the trainer must put himself in the dog's situation and look at the whole thing from the *dog's* point of view. A friend in West Africa was once housetraining a monkey. Every time it messed on the floor he smacked its backside and threw it out of the window. After a fortnight of this the monkey would mess on the floor, smack its own backside and jump out of the window....!

With most dogs, holding them by both jowls, glaring straight into their eyes while repeating the command or whistle signal that has just been disobeyed is sufficient to explain to them the error of their ways. It is no more than their mother would have done when they stepped out of line. However, with a real 'hard case' to whom a good shaking is like water off a duck's back, fold the slip lead in two, slide the 'stop' button up to one end out of the way and, holding the dog by the jowls, give it a few severe cut across the fleshy parts of the quarters with the folded slip lead whilst repeating the

word of command or whistle signal that was disobeyed and on the exact spot where it was disobeyed. It is not so much a question of being cruel to be kind but of reading your dog correctly.

One hears more and more about the use of electric collars that appear to be the "be all and end all" of dog training in the United States. I have no experience of them and have always suspected that those "trainers" that need them the most are those least qualified to use them! The nearest that I have ever come to using one was to hang the wet and still kicking carcass of a recently killed chicken on a electric cattle fence. The (pet) dog that had just killed it came back for a second 'go' and the effect was dramatic! However, I believe that electric collars may have a temporary use for the dog that is subject to 'riot' as an adult dog on sheep, deer or hares that it never came across as a pup during training. On the other hand, in the wrong hands they are likely to ruin more dogs than they make and *in no way* are they a substitute for actual training. Some owners end up with a dog that is a misery to themselves and the bane of all their hawking friends. Once the 'aggro' outweighs the enjoyment it is time to do something about it. If you

are unfortunate enough to own such a brute do not put up with it for the next ten years but GET RID OF IT. And by get rid of it I mean put it down or approach the rescue service. Putting it down is not 'cruel' to the dog - only cruel on the owner but you are not doing anyone, least of all the dog, any favours by 'finding it a good home' in the top flat of a high rise tower block or a vivisection laboratory which is where most of the "Free to a good home" dogs end up. Fortunately most Gundog breeds have a rescue service where unselfish, hard-working people re-home dogs of that breed that "do not suit" their owners because those same owners either bought the wrong dog for the wrong reason, never bothered to find out how to even train it in obedience or are the sort of people with whom any dog will do as it likes. Different dogs suit different people and a dog that goes well for one trainer may be a disaster in the hands of another and VICE VERSA. However, if you do not make a success of your first two and certainly your third I would seriously doubt your suitability to own another one. I have seen Field Trial Champions ruined in a few weeks under a new owner.

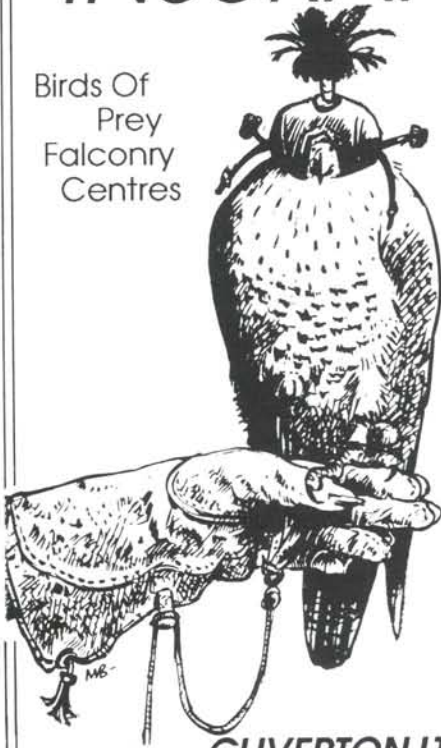


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RAPTOR RESCUE NEWS

RAPTOR RESCUE - A YEAR IN PERSPECTIVE

Trying to gauge the success rate of an organisation such as *Raptor Rescue* is no easy task.

Many individuals, living in many different areas of the British Isles, are involved in the rehabilitation work and the cases dealt with can vary in length from a few hours to several months. In an effort to get an overview of what is being achieved, vice-chairman and L.R.K., Mick Cunningham has conducted a survey amongst a number of members - the results of which can be seen below.

In order to relate these figures to the annual funds, a chart giving a breakdown of *Raptor Rescue's* expenditure for the same year is also shown. Mick has accompanied the graphics with his observations and notes, as well as some background details of particular cases.

"Our rehabilitators' reports, for the year 1.9.91 to 31.8.92, show that most of the casualties which were suitable for release have now been returned to the wild. The few that still remain in care are 'long stay' casualties, which have been retained through the winter. These birds are in the process of being prepared for a controlled release towards the end of the breeding season.

Inevitably, some of these birds will prove unsuitable for release during the course of rehabilitation training; for that reason these birds have been categorised as 'retained' in these statistics until reports are updated.

An overall release percentage for all the species handled was high at 51.57% and reflected the large number of eyasses/owlets taken into care, which obviously, if handled correctly have an excellent prognosis.

This was most prominent in the two species most commonly taken into care, these being Kestrels and Tawny Owls, which made up almost 49% of all casualties handled and showed a release rate of 63% and 60% respectively.

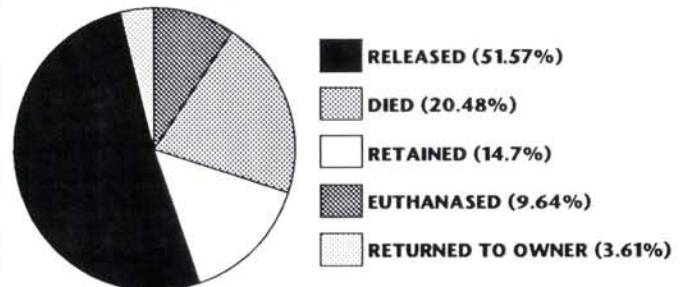
Sparrowhawks, another common casualty showed a release rate of 48%. At the lower end of the scale, Barn Owls had a release rate of 29%.

It was unfortunate and frustrating for our rehabilitators that the few Peregrines that were taken into care could not be released, due to one being fully imprinted and the others having injuries too severe to make them suitable candidates for release.

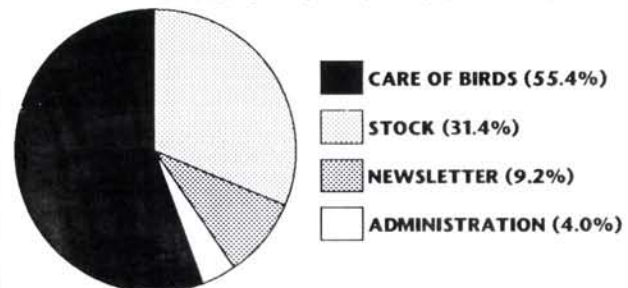
Better news however on the two Merlins; one has already been released and the second is to be rehabilitated using a falconry technique. The two Hen Harriers were from the same brood; it is hoped they may go out to hack, although there is a possibility they may not be suitable for release due to their handling before coming into Raptor Rescue care."

Mick Cunningham
June 1993

BIRDS TAKEN INTO CARE (1991-1992)



DIVISION OF FUNDS (1991-1992)



The total number of birds which came into care was 415.

The species breakdown of this figure is as follows:

KESTRELS	103	TAWNY OWLS	99
SPARROWHAWKS	86	LITTLE OWLS	62
BARN OWLS	27	LONG-EARED OWLS	4
BUZZARDS	7	PEREGRINES	7
MERLINS	2	HEN HARRIERS	2
SHORT-EARED OWL	1	LOST DOMESTIC BRED BIRDS	15

These statistics were compiled from reports supplied by 20 rehabilitators and cover the period 1st September 1991 to 31st August 1992.

RAPTOR RESCUE IS AN ORGANISATION DEDICATED ENSURING THAT ALL INJURED AND SICK BIRDS OF PREY ARE CARED FOR BY SUITABLY QUALIFIED PERSONS AND, WHENEVER POSSIBLE RELEASED BACK INTO THE WILD. IF YOU FIND A RAPTOR IN TROUBLE AND NEED HELP AND/OR ADVICE PLEASE RING 0920 463649. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO JOIN RAPTOR RESCUE PLEASE WRITE TO: MICK ROBINS, 20 THE LARCHES, WARE HERTS SG12 OX5.

— FIRST GROUSE FOR SNAKE —

By

Graham A. Woods

Snake is a Peregrine/Saker hybrid, bred by Dr Nick Fox, using Artificial Insemination. She was parent-reared and hatched. She was christened by Nick one blustery day, when, having only been out at hack for one week, she appeared above us. We were mooching about the hack site when in the distance we observed a 'Peregrine' approaching, a wild falcon by the way she flew. Remaining motionless we watched her effortless flight, at about 200 feet. No wing movement, up she came, silhouetted against the sky. The wind was blowing on our backs and the falcon approaching in the wind.

"It's chilling isn't it?" said Nick. "Yes" I replied, having already had the back of my neck tingle and the hair start to bristle! "It's like swimming under a water snake" he said. (Nick has spent time 'down under') "Jesus" I exclaimed, "I can vaguely see a jess or something trailing. Someone must have lost a bird."

The adrenaline buzz was instantaneous. Rushing back to the mews a lure was grabbed, running back down the valley I hurriedly gamished it. Heart thumping, the smell of my own blood from lungs bursting and then lure-swinging, I returned to the spot where I had left Nick and saw a somewhat wry smile upon his countenance.

"Guess what?" he smirked. "What" I replied, furtively luring. "Well, you know those hawks that you've been religiously feeding, twice a day up at the hack box? One of them has found her sails and there she is, above you!" The lure line went limp as I stood transfixed, the vague trailing 'jess' was in fact the radio transmitter aerial. We had cut them all short to minimalise snagging.

"Bloody Hell!" "Well" says the unflappable Fox "Watersnake, is a bit of a mouthful, so what do you reckon to Snake?" "Yep, sounds good to me". So Snake was christened in the wild wind of west Wales.

Eventually Snake was taken up and trained,

jumping many a tale, we will skip along to that flight.

Nick and I had spent fourteen hours driving, to get to the very north of Scotland. If you walked off the moor you fell in the sea and as you surfaced, looked at Orkney! The flight in question was the very next day, less than 24 hours after arriving. Anxieties started to rise...had the journey upset the hawks? We had taken four birds. Snake and Sandy were Nicks' Peregrine/Saker falcons, Sunshine was a Peregrine falcon bred by Ray Turner of the book "Game Hawk" fame and Reiver was Nick's grey jerkin.

We had been walking for several hours and Nick had had his slip and bagged Sandys' first grouse of the season. With a field of distinguished gentlemen, the need to provide a quality flight was paramount. On the way up to the area we were to hawk, an event occurred which I took to be a good omen. I think many hunters would agree that sometimes a little magic (or even a lot) is involved and the more respect you have for your quarry the better the hunting day. I personally, do not think that we 'take', but rather that the great spirit 'gives'. Anyhow, back to the moor...

The sky, a great vaulted ethereal blue, no cloud, no wind. The moor, intense purples and greens, stretching to the horizon, almost organically tartan. A slim strip of sea to the north and a sliver of distant rock called Orkney. I had fallen behind the main party as I had been examining the remains of a hawk kill. A Herring Gull carcass which had had every feather and gramme of flesh removed. It lay on a smooth patch of dried peaty puddle, some surrealistic sculpture of great intensity. The main party disappeared over the brow of the hill and I suddenly realised I was alone with Snake, hooded and calm on my fist. Slowly turning through 360 degrees, I could

see at least twenty miles all round. The clarity and the sense of space had some effect on my consciousness, it felt pinpoint, a lucid intoxication. A moment out of time. A thousand years flashed before my eyes, a flash, a flash. What the hell was that flash in the sky?

To the north-west at about five miles out and 1000 feet was a dot and it was getting larger, fast. For a brief second, UFO? Then the dark smudge below and behind told me no, no super alien, no this is fossil-fuelled. By now it was getting larger and coming straight towards us. If I tell you that this was the time of the Gulf War, or thereabouts, perhaps you could guess. I braced myself, the velocity, I guessed was near Mach 1 and there's the chance of a sonic boom, which wouldn't do Snake any good, as the hill that we were on was only about 150 feet below the trajectory of the oncoming plane. TORNADO! It's a frigging Tornado! Standing on the highest point for miles, I wonder, has he seen me? No he couldn't have, but you never know! Silhouetted against the sky I raised my right hand and making as large an arc as possible, I waved. I guessed that he could be using the high spot as a navigational point. The next few seconds, probably less than 30 were intense. The Tomado was in full Desert Storm livery and was not the nice clean machine of the air shows.. This one had dirty, black carbon smudges around the exhaust and oily streaks of sweat ran along its' fuselage. This was a full bloodied war machine, state of the art, "Don't mess with me brother!" His trajectory took him slightly to the left of where we were standing only 100 yards or so, at 150 feet he dipped his port wing and arced around us over 90 degrees. I saw his tinted visor, assassin-like, looking down at us, he waved, and then, he waggled the wings! For Christsake Snake, he's waving back! and thank God he's subsonic. By now he'd flattened off, turned on the afterburners, pulled the nose up and in a blaze of purple metallic flame and a perfect set of white light dancing diamonds in the exhaust gases, headed for the heavens in an earth-shattering roar. I watched and waited for the after-burner flames to die, but could still see the lights of the dragon's roar as the aircraft ceilinged at about five miles! Meanwhile, back on the grouse moor...

I had full confidence in Snake. She had progressed well, the flights we had had with hybrids had been good and they had exhibited the qualities we desired, especially the Saker's tenacity and determination. Someone in that day's hawking party had enquired about the Saker's tendency to rake off and I said that it hadn't caused any problems.

I think it could have been in the early stages of training, for I remember Snake on her first flights off the creance, she would fly in a straight line up and away. By using a technique taught to me by Ray Turner, it was possible to get Snake to turn and again fly a straight. This was quite amusing as Snake would fly a square of 300 yard sides. One has to bear in mind that as your bird is barreling away from you on its first free flight, waving the glove is of no use if it is looking at the horizon, away from you. By using voice command the bird hears and turns to see what's occurring. So the seed of the Sakers 'ranginess'



Nick's grey jerkin, Reiver, on a Rook.

All Photos by: L. Campbell.

was sown in the back of my mind.

You can imagine the utter dismay when, after casting Snake off, the ensuing events occurred. There was Snake after one circuit of the area, belting off in a straight line to the horizon. I was utterly dumbstruck. How could she do this to me? All the hours, days, weeks of feeding, hacking, manning, entering, all gone, off into the wind, with a Saker/Peregrine hybrid totally out of control, heading towards Shetland! What have I done wrong? I thought, as I ran up the hill, off and away chasing one errant hawk. She disappeared over the ridge and, as in Nicks description in the Spring '93 edition of The Falconers Mag. "We were left like actors in an unresolved drama, waiting for a prompter".

Upon arriving at the top of the ridge, there, on the other side of the loch I espied what I thought was Snake at about 1500 feet, casually cruising along. I just couldn't believe this, what the hell was she playing at? Luring caused no change in the nonchalant flight of this falcon, which was the merest pinprick in the sky. The frustration was explosive, the embarrassment all consuming and the bird seemed irretrievably lost. Then the scenario started to unfold. Underneath what I mistakenly took to be Snake, was another dot travelling in a laser-straight line at an angle of 30degrees to the horizontal - Snake! Oh my God, she's flying a wild falcon! I was awestruck at Snakes' stamina, after a long day in the Landcruiser, all that travelling in a completely foreign terrain she was going for it. "This is my airspace and no-one else is going to be in it!"

I flopped on a tussock, eyes rivetted to the rapidly closing dots, an uneasy sense of doom loomed. Time to get the binoculars out. Luring was of no avail, short of lobbing some triple A up I couldn't think of any resolution, but to wait. Snake's unerring line took her smack into the falcon. Through the 10x50's I saw her



Snake's first flights off the creance were in a straight line up and away (L. Campbell.)

talons strike once, she dipped 20 feet, twice, she dipped again, three times! This can't go on, I thought it's no match, the wild falcon will slaughter her. I could faintly hear Snake's screams of rage. I just could not believe all this, I've really screwed up in style this time, I thought. On the third strike the falcons stayed united and tumbled out of the sky. Down, down, down, the bundled mass of fury and feather fell onto the far side of the loch, which stretched three miles. No movement. The loch was about a mile away and a mile wide. My penance, I thought, was to swim the loch and pick up the crumpled remains of Snake. Utter despondency. Halfway down the slope to the loch I realised that the telemetry receiver wasn't going to appreciate being soaked in peaty water, the hawking party didn't know what was happening and no-one was going fly their hawks until they knew what the situation

was. So, utterly dejected I walked back up the hill to join the party, what a prat! Poor old Snake. She was destined to hawk Houbara in the desert with Arab royalty, but was slain on the moor because I hadn't checked the far horizon. Already two trained tiercels had been slain by Golden Eagles, now this! Upon reaching the ridge the rest of the field were still patiently waiting and two pointers were still on point. I would have to get back to the Landcruiser, drive around the loch and find, what? Snake mangled, maybe even two dead falcons. I could see the headlines. "Blood crazed-Falconer uses genetically-engineered superhawk to kill protected, wild Peregrines". There was only one honourable way out, I should have to commit

Hari Kiri, with my hawking knife. While trotting along in this pit of remorse and self indulgence, I was awoken by calls from the rest of the field.

"What's up? What's up? What's up?" came drifting across the heather. What's up? I thought. I'll tell you what's bloody well up! Then tuning into the acoustics "Yo hup! Yo hup!" I had been absent minded swinging the lure and there behind me was a rapidly approaching Snake! Snake! Well knock me down with a feather or what? The joy was overwhelming, the thoughts raced as did my legs. Should I play safe and call her down to the lure? She was flying alright, all her feathers in tact. The adrenaline was on, and the chance of our first grouse still there as I could see two pointers on point. Lure back in the sack, glove waving, can I pull this one off?

Snake comes scorching back into the scenario, I run to Dave who's holding his black and white English Pointer bitch. I presumed, to stop her moving in on the grouse, a twenty minute point does rather test a dog. As I breathlessly arrive Snake's in the right position and I rush around like a madman trying to flush a grouse. Dave tumbles what is occurring and says that that particular grouse had died of boredom several hours ago and he was just stroking his dog. Snake arced around like an F16 in dark desert on full bore with after-burners. I catch her eye and it is full blazing fire. Across the valley Nick casually signals that his German Wirehaired Pointer bitch is still on point. Another 250 yard dash across foot-deep heather, glove waving, Snake completing the large circuit on the momentum of the incoming stoop. Nick sets up the flush and the rest is already written.

Upon arriving at the kill, Snake is still pluming away and I make in gently, slip her jesses on and let her gorge. Dave, the head stalker arrives and asks, "What is it?" and absent-mindedly I come out with the classic, "It's a grouse!" Full of northern tact he replies. "I know that you bloody prat, is it a cock, hen or cheeper?" (cheaper? I mused, this is the most priceless in the universe!) Honour is restored, the gralloching knife - untainted by my own blood and bowels! Suddenly, it dawns on me, "I've caught my first grouse." says I, beaming from ear to ear. Mr Frank, sharing my delight said, "Congratulations young man, the first of many I'm sure".



Sandy is also a Peregrine/Saker bred by Nick Fox. (L. Campbell)

A DAY OFF WITH DORIS

By David Rampling

The hoar frost has been here, day and night, for a week now and still looks beautiful. Doris has been flying like a demon in this cold, clear weather and today is my day off. Six days a week I fly her in my dinner break and we usually catch something, it's always a little rushed but now I have all day ahead of me.

Ten and a half ounces today, spot on. I have had her since she was a ten day old, grey eyed bundle of white down. I have flown her in gale and sunshine, rain and snow and she is now silent in the field, only calling once or twice when she is first picked up to fly. But I like the noise and wouldn't mind too much if she called more often.

She now sports a fine black jackdaw tail, (one she caught herself), it is a little short perhaps but I have long since run out of sparrowhawk feathers. On her two central decks she has her one, top quality, bell. (Attached via a guitar plectrum). Sometimes I think I couldn't lose her if I tried. On the rare occasions she has carried, always my own fault for 'making in' too fast, I simply go home for an hour, have a cup of tea, and return to the place I lost sight of her. She returns to my whistle then, usually damp from a bath she has had somewhere, with a medium crop. Try doing that with a parent-reared sparrowhawk!

She looks neat and trim in the watery, Aberdeenshire sun, with her crest up and bright eyes alert for the start of the game. We walk along the valley floor, following the railway line, when the dog bumps a hen pheasant, which explodes from the cover. Doris is off before I even realise what it was, but she peels off straight away. She caught a few poults in her first summer and was even overconfident enough to bind to a full grown hen once and I don't think she will do it again after the hard time she had.

She wheels about above me, looking larger than life 'waiting on' almost, in anticipation of me offering her my fist. There are few birds more responsive than a well-conditioned sparrowhawk, but I leave her up there for a while as I walk through the frost-covered scrub. A Blackbird, an old cock, has seen her

and is making for cover ahead. Doris has seen him too and starts a wingpowered, shallow stoop towards his retreating form. Her height, low though it is gives her extra speed and although she closes the gap considerably, she is beaten to the hedge.

Doris is funny about Blackbirds. She never saw one for the first twelve months of her life, there were none on my part of Mull and she will usually only chase them when she senses she has an overwhelming advantage. So I leave the Blackbird in his hedge and call Doris to the fist. We walk on to a bank of dead Rose Bay-Willow herb where Sparrows are often in abundance and maybe, if we are lucky, the dog will find a Moorhen in the ditch alongside.

The odd Skylark gets up in front of me, but Doris knows well that she can't catch them and, except for squeezing my hand, she ignores them.

The dog is not in sight but I find her pointing in the ditch, Moorhen or Pheasant? She almost pins it as it breaks cover, a Moorhen, Doris has it,

Doris is on it again, determined and single-minded, she lowers her legs and, snatch, she has it. She drops into the short, frosty grass with it and waits for me to pick her up before she starts to plume.

she rides it for a few yards, shifting her grip as she is pulled along, she grabs its head and has it subdued. I dispatch it, feed her some neck and brains, she always gets something, and pop it in the gamebag. I check her tail, fine, (this is how she smashed it in the first place.) Back on the fist and we walk on. Further on a small group of Sparrows get up in front of the dog and head for the farm sheds, She's off, wings a blur, and grabs the last bird to rise neatly in one out-

stretched foot. She flies on some twenty yards and lands in the field. I make in slowly, *very* slowly and she mantles, watching me approach. I offer her my gloved hand gently, it is a waste of time offering her a titbit at times like this, she only wants the Sparrow, but my fist is where she knows she can eat safely and comfortably and she jumps to the fist with it and starts plucking. I love it when she does that. A bit of plucking, a few mouthfuls, then it disappears. She wipes her beak on my thumb and we carry on. I decide to put her down on a post and walk, Doris knows the game and catches up before I have gone thirty yards, flying from post to telegraph pole.

Half a mile or so on I can hear the approaching Aberdeen - Inverness train Doris knows trains and doesn't like them, and with her, the best thing to do is just leave her to her own devices. As the train gets closer Doris flies off fast, downwind, almost out of sight, into an oak tree. A glance ahead at the disappearing train and I see a few Sparrows rise and them drop again into the weeds. Tactics here should see a reasonable flight.

Doris is already on her way, wanting to be close now the train has passed. I am not sure if she has seen the Sparrows but as she flies into a tree close by me I know she can't have. I call the dog to heel and run into the weeds where I last saw the Sparrows. Shouting and waving my arms like a lunatic, Doris knows I must have seen something. She races in and circles once about me but nothing flushes. I must have been mistaken about the position. Doris is on her way back to the tree when they decide to break cover, just the three of them, flying low over the Rose Bay-Willow herb. I shout and Doris turns on a sixpence, she is badly misplaced but pumps in fast and singles one out. It drops into cover as she passes over-head, she flips over and piles in after it. I walk up and part the cover, she has missed it but has a firm hold on a root clump. I wait until she has relaxed and realised she has nothing worthwhile in her feet. I offer a titbit and she returns to my fist.

The Sparrow is in there somewhere so I back off a few yards, hold Doris high and send in the dog. Crashing, sniffing and the Sparrow is away, this time along the fence line. Doris is away again, flying low, as if to force the Sparrow to climb above the fence. As she closes the gap the Sparrow flips over to the other side, Doris does the same, only faster, she snatches, but misses. The Sparrow has turned completely and is heading back towards me and its nearest cover. Doris is on it again, determined and single-minded, she lowers her legs and, snatch, she has it. She drops into the short, frosty grass with it and waits for me to pick her up before she starts to plume. That was all she caught that day, she missed a few more sparrows and a star-

ling and almost had a Snipe before it rose and beat her in the air.

On the way home I fed Doris both sparrows and thought about my tea. Moorhen, wrapped in bacon and roasted, who says Sparrowhawk aren't (small) pot fillers?

I tied her to her bow perch when we got home, to enjoy the last hour of sunshine. She was full-cropped, well exercised and content. And I consider

myself lucky that I can still get so much enjoyment from such a humble sport as Sparrow Hawking with my imprint.

SPARROWHAWK:- DIET AND FITNESS.

Without doubt, I have had more fun and more hours hawking with Sparrowhawks than with anything else. A humble sort of hawking perhaps, but in my opinion, matchless. A good flight with a sparrowhawk makes my heart beat as fast as any Peregrines stoop.

With the recession and money worries of today, and the fact that, although 'price' should not be the deciding factor when choosing a hawk to fly, but often is, perhaps the Sparrowhawk will become more popular than it is already.

Many fine Sparrowhawks are flown in Britain today by Sparviteres who need no telling from me how to improve their sport, but if, by putting a few words down on paper, I can help one person practising our beloved sport gain a little more sport and enjoyment from his first Sparrowhawk then I will risk being accused of preaching.

Diet for Sparrowhawks has been written about so many times that you would hardly think it needs mentioning again, but in these days of easily available day old chicks, far too many birds (not only Sparrowhawks) get these as a staple diet, instead as the emergency standby they should be.

Now I am not saying that Sparrowhawks can not be reared, maintained and moulted on a diet of D.O.C.'s, they can and are. But feather strength and quality are much impaired.

The bird itself is not as strong and resistant to disease as one on a more natural diet.

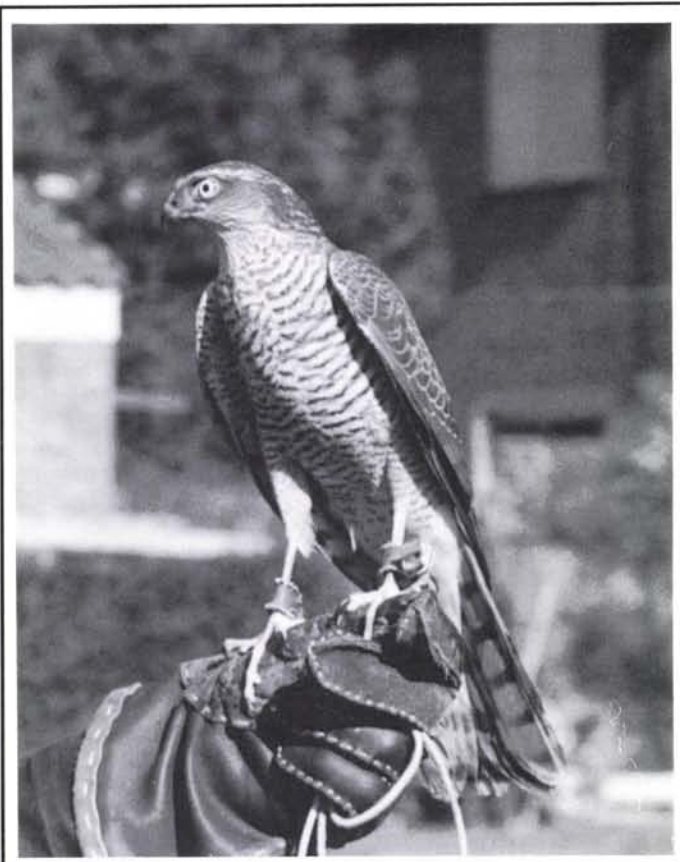
Much better to feed quail, mice, pigeon, sparrows etc. and feed up on kills at the end of the day. I occasionally use rabbit, giving a full crop to lower an overweight Sparrowhawk, but never for more than a day at a time. Using D.O.C.'s only to call the bird to the fist (there is no doubt that day old chicks are tasty, whatever their drawbacks) With this kind of diet, (and lots of it) plenty of flying and a stress-free home environment you will never have problems with fits of any kind, minor injuries sustained in the field heal rapidly and you will spend less time repairing broken feathers or worse still, broken bones.

The other subject worth mentioning to the Falconer with his first Sparrowhawk is fitness, I have heard it said, and indeed seen it written that fitness is not a necessity in a trained Sparrowhawk to see sport. While to some extent this may be true, perhaps on calm days and with close slips, you are not seeing the best your bird has to offer. Very much better flights are obtained with a fit bird. With self confidence and fitness a Sparrowhawk can be flown in a half gale and even some upwind flights end successfully.

To see a fit Sparrowhawk fly vertically up a rock face, or to the very top of a tall tree, as if pulled up on a piece of elastic is one of the most splendid sights in hawking.

A very fit hawk will take on much longer slips than you would expect, flights an unfit one would either ignore or only make a half-hearted attempt at, and I believe it only takes a fit bird, not just a courageous one to persist at the larger and more dangerous quarry such as rooks.

Calling off to the fist and lure are simply not enough, nor are a few



Some magnificent sport can be had with a fit Sparrowhawk.

dashes from the fist. The only way is to teach the bird to follow on, simple enough, but often neglected. To illustrate my point I will describe a memorable flight I had last season with Doris.

Walking along a high farm path in Aberdeenshire Doris started the headbobbing movement she always makes when spotting some distant or well-concealed quarry. Then she dropped from my fist and left the woodland edge, wings purring, heading for the open fields and a distant deer park, some half a mile away. All I could see out there were two feeding rooks, well out, and well away from cover. She was keeping low, skimming the grass, shortening the distance fast and heading straight for them. Surely they were too far away? She kept on line, the rooks fed on, and didn't see her long, low approach. She got to some four hundred away and, slam, she hit the deer fence. She had flown over it and through it dozens of times before and it didn't even occur to me that she would hit it, but, hit it she did, and hard.

The rooks had seen her now and stood there, heads up and watching. She regained herself and set off, through the fence towards the rooks. The rooks stood there a while longer and watched her come, perhaps not bothering that so small a hawk could mean business. She was within seventy yards when they took flight across wind. Doris was approaching downwind and with a slight height advantage, (she was flying down into a valley) and she caught up easily on the last bird but was perhaps travelling too fast, or shaken from her collision, and missed her strike. The rook turned into the wind, uphill and towards me to its nearest cover. Doris followed, I cheered her on and they flew up-wind and uphill for nearly half a mile. Doris not losing or gaining ground, but keeping slightly lower. Finally the rook flew into the scrub at the edge of the woods and Doris caught it there.

I ran until I found her and the rook. She had it upside-down, with one foot around its head and beak, trying to hold them at a safe distance, its legs and wings flailing harmlessly. And Doris wasn't even panting. A flight of nearly a mile, half of it upwind, a collision and a kill. She couldn't have done that on a diet of 'day olds' and only being flown at weekends! GOOD HUNTING.

L LETTERS

All letters should be addressed to:- THE EDITORS
THE FALCONERS AND RAPTOR CONSERVATION
MAGAZINE, 20 BRIDLE RD, BURTON LATIMER,
KETTERING NORTHANTS NN15 5QP

AFTER THOUGHTS

Dear David and Lyn,
For such a great sport, which falconry is, there are many people who have their hearts in it and some who have not. It seems clear to me that it is a specialised subject in which newcomers may be misled especially by the sale of raptors where the owner has an excuse/reason for selling the bird.

I think that even many professionals would agree that this type of 'worn off novelty' selling of a raptor may be putting a thud on the sporting aspects of falconry. It is time for the fobbing off to finish.

The Falconers and Raptor Conservation Magazine should now be able to take control professionally through the appropriate methods of, a raptors aspect, when being sold or bartered! Could it be with the help of the professionals with 'punch' and the members of the Falconers Magazine to alleviate Cage and Aviary Birds etc. etc.

I feel for the sport, after all quality stock buying farmers don't go to a pet shop for their stock do they?

Whatever future there is for falconry I feel there is just one more comforting thought. Now that the price of raptors has fallen, and the money making ideas are disappearing, dedicated and self sufficient falconers will be left and falconry in this country will undoubtedly settle and establish, I believe.

p.s. Will someone put me right if I am wrong

.Yours Paul Swain

THEN CAME SEBASTIAN

Dear David and Lyn

With ref. to the article about Sebastian the Golden Eagle being the first to transmit T.V. pictures.

Around 1985 I worked with BBC engineers from Bristol in the designing and fitting of a TV camera and harness that we later fitted to the back of my own

Golden Eagle 'Kintyre'. This was done in the making of the BBC series the 'Living Isles'.

Approx two years later we fitted a similar camera to the back of my Redtail Buzzard and these shots were used in the award winning film 'In Flight Movie'.

In both cases the camera was operated by a remote control so that the pictures taken were from the back of the eagle waiting on over the Grampians and the back of the redtail waiting on over the Cheviot Hills.

So in conclusion Sebastian was not the first bird of prey to carry a TV camera on its back.

Yours sincerely

Tony Scott

Northumbria Bird of Prey Centre.

MEMORY LANE

Dear David and Lyn

I have just been handed several back numbers of The Falconers Magazine by a young man here in the village, Andrew Schofield, who flies a male Harris Hawk.

I was a practical falconer (or rather Austringer) from 1949 - 1960. I trained and flew some five or six Goshawks, which I obtained from a J.H.M Pieters of Enschede, Holland. This gentleman, whom I never met, used to trap passage Goshawks in traps baited with live pigeons. He then placed the Goshawk in a sock and laid her in a cardboard box which he shipped from Schipol Airport to Manchester. He never would take any money, and all I paid at Manchester was around £3. customs duty! I lost three Goshawks in this area at that time and we now have two pairs nesting within three miles of my home here in the Pennines. I have not flown Goshawks or any other hawk or falcon since 1960, I am content to watch them, being a keen birder in my retirement.

I also got Goshawks in 1959 - 60 from J M Bridcka of Prague, Czechoslovakia who kept as many as 30 at a time.

In your Spring '91 issue you had an article about Ronald Stevens. I met this gentleman at Walcott Hall in Shrops. in 1953 and admired his falcons, including a splendid Gyrfalcon. He supplied me with tea and fruit cake during my three hour stay! I was introduced to Ronald through the late Jack Bamber (ex R.A.F. pilot) who was a keen falconer at his farm in Whitchurch, Shrops. Whilst I have respect for genuine falconers, I hate these people who merely keep birds of prey as show pieces or status symbols.

Yours sincerely

G F Trownan

FALCONERS FAIR?

Dear David and Lyn

By the time you get this letter the "Falconers Fair" will have finished and no doubt many falconers will have visited it to meet up with other falconer friends and maybe to buy some equipment that they have been promising themselves since the previous year. We envy them

We are writing this letter on behalf of all the falconers who were unable to attend the so called Falconers Fair, because it was decided to hold it on a bank holiday. The majority of the falconers who were unable to attend this year were probably 'Professionals', like ourselves. I know that we are in the minority but it is the professionals that buy most of the furniture and look forward to being able shop around and try on the various bits of furniture. To pick up and examine the gauntlets, blocks, hoods etc. Can you remember the time

when everything had to be done by post and you never knew what you were going to get until it arrived and nearly always it was the wrong size or type but we accepted it because it was too much trouble to send it back.

Then it all changed, thanks to some enterprising falconers, they decided to organise a 'Falconers Fair' that was run BY falconers FOR falconers. At last a falconer's dream come true. Everything under one roof, so to speak. More furniture manufacturers than you could dream of. At last you could talk to the guy who made it, if you liked it you could but it there and then or at least place an order for something you had seen and handled.

What the hell happened? It would seem that this years dates were chosen for maximum attendance by the general public, instead of considering the ordinary falconers who created the fair in the first place. We understand the reason for choosing the venue because of limited finances and that a good deal was offered. OK that's good business, but haven't we got things a little mixed up when we started catering for the general public who go along to buy their cheap waxed jackets and imitation Hunter wellies, who then browse around the falconry tents and stay to watch the flying display?

Isn't it just a case of the tail wagging the dog. We always thought of the Falconers Fair as a sort of trade fair for falconers. Like the ad says 'The National Falconry Event'. So let's have it at a time when all falconers can attend. Do we need the Game Fair side of it? If we do then something is wrong, let's keep it by falconers for falconers.

We know that we professionals are in the minority and are even frowned upon by some other falconers but we are in the public eye nearly every day and the equipment that we use should be the best, after all we are a sort of showcase for falconry. So give us a chance to buy it. When we attend the fair we know that we usually spend on average around £200 to £600 and we are not alone either. Can you furniture manufacturers afford to pass up this kind of business? We could fill a 12 seater minibus with falconers who could attend because the dates were set for the general public and not falconers, and we mean all falconers. Give us back OUR fair we don't want to be tagged onto the end of yet another game fair as an added attraction. It was our idea in the first place.

Two very disgruntled ex -Falconers Fair customers.

Geoff Pearson & D Penn

BEGINNER'S EYE VIEW

Dear David and Lyn

I know that to most of the readers of this magazine what I am about to say is old hat, but bear with me for a while eh? The main audience for this article is those who have toyed around with the idea of keeping and training a raptor of some description and maybe have picked up this magazine at a centre or a show where the professionals have made everything look easy.

Let me tell you now that I am not a falconer, but one of those who in the near future intend to keep and train a bird of prey. When I first started with the idea a year ago I thought that if I was about to embark on this venture then I had better do it properly. I am city born and bred and although I have spent the best part of my adult life travelling the world care of Her Majesty's Armed Forces, I can honestly say I know little about the British countryside and its native flora and fauna.

Like most people I got my first real close up look at raptors at a show. The falconer there made everything look simple. While flying his birds around he kept up a constant banter with the public, being witty, charming and informative all at the same time. Only now can I fully appreciate the work that has gone into the twenty minute show that he put on. On arriving home I had decided that this is something that I would like to do, but like all ideas the problem was how to go about it.

Next stop for me was the local library, and while I cannot say they had many books on the subject what I did find was the addresses where I may be able to find out more information. And so the search for knowledge had begun.

After writing about a dozen letters to different falconry centres across the U.K. and waiting up to about three weeks for all the replies to return I had come to realise just how large a task I had set myself. Information was coming at me left, right and centre. I was being swamped by prices for courses that ranged from a half day introduction to a full week covering all the basics. Where do I start and what was best for me?

The next step I took was to try and talk to the professionals themselves. Not forcing my way into their lives, but just being polite and asking questions that may have seemed obvious to them but to me were the beginnings of my knowledge. What I found out is that no matter how stupid the question they were all prepared to give me a straight answer. What I did not do is stick to one person for my information, ask around, talk to professionals and amateurs alike. They all seem to have similar views, with just enough difference in their information that I came to the conclusion that most of the training of the birds was similar, there is just enough difference around the country that no-one has the monopoly on the knowledge required. Although the basics remain the same every body has their own ideas about how a bird of prey should and can be trained. What is good for one person may not be good for another, so don't be put off if what you hear from

one does not totally confirm what another has been saying. One thing that I will say at this point is that if you see someone in the middle of a training session with their bird, don't immediately rush up and start questioning them. Sit back at a fair distance, watch what is going on and, when they have finished, then is the time to approach them. You will find them more responsive to your questioning for the simple fact that you have let them finish what they were doing with no interruptions that could disturb the bird.

During all this time there are books to read, not only about the training aspect of flying raptors, but also about the countryside and actions of the quarry (the final result for all true falconers) that you intend to catch with your bird. It seems that just having a bird in peak condition is not good enough, you should really know about the actions of your final objective. Again what I have read may not be for you but so far it has seemed to work for me. Before I leave the subject of books, a final topic I feel must be covered is that of health and veterinary aspects of your bird. If, heaven forbid, something does go wrong it helps to have some knowledge about what to do.

What I suppose I am trying to say is that if you want to keep a bird of prey then by all means do. Just research the subject properly. It has taken me just under a year to reach the point where I can talk to falconers on the basis where their language does not confuse me, and I no longer find myself interrupting them to ask what certain words mean. I now feel that I am ready to take on a course that will give me the hands-on practice that I need to fill in the theoretical knowledge gained. Maybe there are quicker ways to achieve what I have, but in my view, and the view of the falconers I have talked to, if you are going to take on the responsibility for a living creature then the least you can do for it is learn about its requirements before you start.

One final word, if after all this you still wish to carry on and acquire your very own raptor, be prepared to give up a lot of what you used to consider free time, and if you do, good luck, and I hope that you will have as much fun as I have had (and hope to have) in pursuing the sport of falconry.

Bill Sinclair

Dear David and Lyn

To avoid confusion amongst your readership, would you please point out that Ray Turner LRK, and Ray Turner author of "Gamehawk", are not the same person.

Ray Turner (Author)

GALA SUCCESS

Dear David and Lyn

We would like to thank every body for the help and support they gave us in order that our Gala/Open Day would be a success. It was a great occasion and all the people that attended had a thoroughly enjoyable time. We raised about £1000 for the three charities we supported.

Many thanks

C Asprey HMP Coldingly Surrey

BIRD TALK

THE SPORTSMANS REST:

is an entirely new product aimed at helping Falconers to eliminate the strain of carrying their bird over extended periods of time. Made in lightweight, very strong plastic (ABS), with either a leather or canvas strap, it is easy to put on and take off and will eliminate aching muscles in arms, shoulders, back and neck.



WATCHING?

The RSPB Estimates that over half a million people have viewed the breeding peregrines at Symonds Yat, Glos.

They are wardening peregrines and welcoming members of the public at Avon Gorge and also at Derby Dale Quarry, Rishworth Moor, Yorks. Where there are facilities for watching breeding peregrines.

IDENTITY CRISIS?

Falconers are causing great consternation among bird watchers, they are being totally confused as to the species of certain birds which they come across due to the fact that they are hybrids.

EAGLE FOUND DEAD!

A white Tailed Sea Eagle was found dead near Mallaig, West Scotland in late March. It was one of seven young reared last year. It was thought to have died from poisoning, but upon examination it was found to contain three shotgun pellets, although vets were unable to prove that this was the cause of death.

NESTING SUCCESS

This year sees 99 Red Kite nests in Wales, which bodes well for its continued survival as a wild inhabitant of our country.

Also Osprey numbers are looking very good with approx. eighty to ninety nests.

BUILD A 'TRACEY ISLAND'

By Taff Hinge.

To be fair to the BBC Childrens TV programme "Blue Peter", we couldn't eat enough yogurt to get the required amount of empty cartons etc., to build our very own Thunderbird H.Q. So rather than waste the late summer evenings (post Hawking), utilise the time by making some Falconry Furniture or expressing your views through the Falconers Magazine.

FERRETS FOR WORKING OR PETS

AILMENTS AND DISEASES

FERRETS LIKE, ALL OTHER ANIMALS, ARE SUSCEPTIBLE TO MANY AILMENTS AND DISEASES, SOME CAN BE KILLERS, BUT MOST CAN BE AVOIDED BY KEEPING THEM IN CLEAN DRY CONDITIONS.

BOTULISM

One of the biggest killers of ferrets is BOTULISM, caused by the bacterium CLOSTRIDIUM BOTULINUM. When this bacterium comes into contact with decaying meat and is eaten by the ferret it attacks the nervous system, causing paralysis, spreading to the vital organs. It dies in extreme agony. There is no cure. One of the main culprits is road casualties, remove the innards and dispose of; then freeze. All frozen meat should then be defrosted completely before being fed to the ferret.

HEATSTROKE

Probably the next biggest killer, especially in the hot summer months is HEATSTROKE. The first sign in the animal is usually laying in the cage panting heavily, if left in this condition the ferret will collapse and then go into a coma and die. It must be cooled down very quickly if it is to be saved, dunk the animal into cool water for a few seconds to bring

the temperature down, repeat if necessary, keep it in a cool place until it recovers and take it to a vet. As prevention is better than cure it is advisable to have a double layered roof, to keep the lower layer always in the shade.

CANINE DISTEMPER

This another disease that can kill ferrets, only in very mild cases can they be expected to recover with vaccinations, the usual signs are; swollen feet to begin with, runny nose and eyes, lack of appetite, diarrhoea, vomiting follows, then falling into a coma and eventually dying. Isolate infected ferrets, absolute cleanliness is essential as distemper can soon spread through the entire stock.

BITES

Bites can be very dangerous to ferrets, especially working ferrets, rat bites in particular, as rats carry many diseases. Clean the bite with an antiseptic solution and take the ferret to the vet as soon as possible

MASTITIS

With jills feeding kits MASTITIS can cause a painful problem, the glands become very hard and swollen and very little milk, if any, can be obtained by the young. The result is lost kits and perhaps the jill too, a quick visit to the vet for some antibiotics will soon put things right.

EAR MITES

Ear mites can cause ferrets a lot of discomfort and could, if not treated, lead to death. Ear mites can be got rid of ear drops, administered over a couple of weeks and this should put an end to the problem. The usual sign of ear mites is continual scratching of the head, if they infect the inner ear the ferret will be unable to stand properly or hold its head straight; very soon it will die.

FLEAS AND TICKS

These can be picked up by ferrets, especially those working underground, a bath in insecticidal shampoo will soon get rid of fleas and usually the ticks.

by Bryan Cockings

Makesure the housing is clean or the ferret will become infested again. If the ticks prove difficult to control, a matchstick or a very small brush can be used with surgical spirit to paint them.

FOOTROT

If the housing is clean and dry there should be no problem with FOOTROT caused by wet, dirty conditions.

STINGS

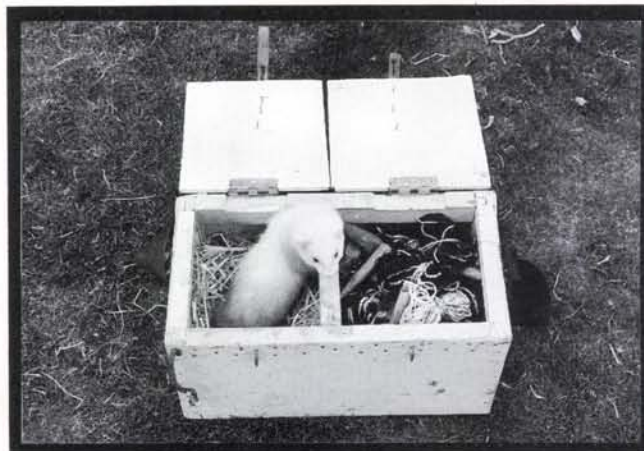
These can be very painful for ferrets especially wasp or bee stings, if it is at all possible to get the sting out with tweezers, then do so and apply an antihistamine spray to ease the pain, if the sting is in the mouth rush the ferret to the vets.

INFLUENZA

Ferrets can catch INFLUENZA, the symptoms are virtually the same as in humans, feverishness, sneezing, listlessness. Isolate infected ferrets.

ALEUTIAN DISEASE

Over the past few years a disease called ALEUTIAN DISEASE has been found in ferrets. It is thought to have come from Mink which have been released into the countryside. There does not seem to have been a great deal, if any, research done into this disease, as most ferrets are put down if they are diagnosed positive by a blood test.



The best way to keep a ferret is - healthy!

ON THE RIGHT COURSE

BY GORDON AYERS

Before I start let me offer assurance that I intend no slight toward any individual or organisation and am simply expressing my own views on a subject very close to my own heart which worries me almost to the point of panic. Let me also state that I am not a "Professional falconer" in any shape or form..

None of us need reminding that Falconry is under constant bombardment and threat of extinction.

Over the last two or three years I have heard so many horrific stories of incorrect and sometimes dangerous practices advocated by "Falconry schools", that I felt this train should be shunted into a siding for a refit before it ran away altogether. What right do I have to criticise "professionals"? I say every right, after all it is my sport as well and I want my daughter and if they desire her children to be able to practice this ancient art. Sadly however, no-one seems prepared to stand up and be counted. The late Ella Wheeler Wilcox said, "To sin by silence when we should protest makes cowards out of men". I feel I can no longer remain silent. Both the Hawk Board and B.F.S.S. do an admirable job and recently they have got together to introduce a Code of Good Management for hawk-keepers and maybe they could do the same for courses, but they need and must have support if we want falconry to even survive, let alone flourish.

It would seem that an increasing number of people whose experience and knowledge is at best limited are deciding to open their own school. This cannot be good. In fact it can only bring Falconry into disrepute. There has to be a standardised code of practice for

the operation of Falconry Schools and it has to come from within Falconry. The primary interest of too many people would appear to be; 'how much money can I make out of Falconry?' I know people have to make a living but surely they can do it just as easily using the right methods as the wrong. The adoption of a caring and professional attitude can only improve not only ones reputation and standing, but the bank balance as well.

The overall standard of tuition reflects upon us all and is arguably the most overt indicator which the public, and any potential novice Falconer, can use before deciding whether or not to take up the sport. One school teaches one thing whilst another teaches something in complete contradiction. This doesn't surprise me, but it can't continue. There are a number of Falconry Clubs throughout the U.K. but they do not co-ordinate their efforts in support of Falconry. It would seem they actively maintain an insularity so strong that one would not even think we are all practitioners of the same art and, unfortunately, it would appear the same attitude prevails amongst the proprietors and staff of tuitional establishments. Somewhere along the line there has to be a meeting of minds and a common policy followed.

Young and novice falconers must be assured that regardless of which school they attend, the tuition they receive will at least ensure that on completion of the course they will be competently equipped to pursue their chosen sport.

Falconry is some 4000-4500 years old and making allowance for the fact that we can no longer take birds from the wild, the methods of training have

changed comparatively little in that time. So what I am saying is, if it has served us well for that long why change. Change is fine, provided it is progressive. Change for its own sake achieves nothing.

Courses should be geared to the purpose they intend to serve and, with this in mind, I make the following offerings:

1. Structure courses to serve the needs of the students, dependent upon their requirements and experience. For some schools this may mean the provision of services they do not provide at present. Note that I say needs, NOT wants. Most of us would like to fly Falcons, Few have the time, land, money or dedication.

2. Emphasise that the primary and in the end, only vital objects, must be:-

A. The welfare of the hawk
B. Respect for the quarry i.e. bag numbers do not matter.

C. Respect for property (Don't ever fly where you don't have express permission)

D. A willingness to support your sport to another who may have uninformed and preconceived ideas based on insufficient and/or unreasonably biased information.

E. A tacit acceptance that certain people are totally anti - field sports despite your polite and informed explanations.

F. Absolute observance of the legislation in relation to Hawks.

G. Explain clearly that displays may be entertaining and even spectacular but they are not Falconry.

How to assess students? Firstly send them a questionnaire along the following lines:

1. What is Falconry?
2. Why do you want to do it?
3. Do you have the time?
4. Can you afford it?
5. How much land do you have to hunt over? (with express permission)
6. Does it hold the quarry you want to hunt?
7. Will the hawk you would like catch that type of quarry?
8. What do you expect to achieve on the course?
9. Would you expect after-course advice and support?

Any student who is either not prepared or unwilling to under take the necessary research to provide satisfactory answers to these questions is, I would suggest, not a suitable candidate for acceptance on a course. After all you decide whom you teach

Students should also be encouraged to purchase a suitable publication e.g. "Falconry and Hawking" by Philip

Glazier, prior to attending a course. I know it doesn't cover all eventualities but what book does?

So to actual courses. What can and should be offered. Obviously this will depend upon many factors not least the ability and experience of those running the school, the birds they have and the land and quarry available to them. The vast majority of novice falconers will only ever be able to fly a hawk. If they can and want to fly a falcon, make it a separate course.

.Assess each prospective student and teach them what they need to know in as much depth as you can. If they are intending to fly a Common Buzzard or Harris Hawk, relate the training to that bird. They don't need to know how to swing a lure. Make sure they understand the commitment they will have to make in respect of the bird they intend to fly. Stick with what is known and proven to work. Opinions can only be based upon long experience and should only be offered to students who come back with problems at a later stage.

After-care and advice I see as part and parcel of the provision of the service offered. To be unable or unwilling to meet any such reasonable requests, to my mind, displays a less than caring and distinctly unprofessional attitude.

.You must expect a reasonable number of requests for help when a fledgling falconer you have trained asks for reminders with regard to details provided on their course. This could be kept to a minimum if you provided sufficient time for the taking of notes and asking of questions. Also what's wrong with the issue of course notes/handbooks. As with any form of tuition, you must gear it to the abilities of the students.

Novice Falconers should know when they attend a course, not only what the course is intended to provide for them but also what is expected of them as students of the Art. Completion of a questionnaire, as suggested earlier, will give some indication as to their suitability, inclination and commitment.

Suffice to say that a weekend or a two to three day course cannot possibly prepare anyone to the standard necessary for the training of the first bird, I feel that courses should be graded and structured, dependent upon the requirements and assessed abilities of the student. If this means someone has to buy a hawking day and/or weekend/introductory course before being accepted for a Junior/Initial course, so be it, and whilst on the subject, which after all is the point of this article, I consider that with the average individual,

the course should be two weeks, or ten working days in duration. All very well you say, but people either won't pay for that or cannot take that much leave just for a Falconry course. I say one thing in answer. They will hopefully have a bird that lives for twenty-twenty five years, which will need daily attention even when moulting. If they cannot arrange the time for their initial course, how strong is their desire to become Falconers. Yes, it does mean we may have to decline to teach some people, but in the long run it can only be beneficial, not only to the sport of Falconry, but Falconry Schools as well.

Unless one can justify what one does, the methods employed and show a consistency of information and content in courses, such credibility and public support as exists at present, will disappear rapidly. We must adopt the pose of Caesars' wife - not only as pure as can be, but prepared to prove it under the closest of scrutiny.

I have, I hope, been successful in expressing the views of many in these few lines. Please, accept that what I have penned is done with all good intent. I am merely an Austringer who wishes to continue practising my sport and, if I can, assist in its' survival and growth for as long as there are Hawks and people.

Some of you will, quite understandably, argue that, regardless of whether or not the courses are properly run, it is not possible, under the current circumstances, to prevent anyone buying a hawk from an unscrupulous breeder and going their own way. This is of course, regrettably, true. Two wrongs, however, do not make a right and a start must be made somewhere, and very, soon.

In final analysis I can only summarise what I am attempting to express by paraphrasing a quotation by John F. Kennedy, "Ask not what Falconry can do for you, but rather what you can do for Falconry". Happy Hawking.

If you have taken a course and are happy or un-happy with it please let us know. We would like to try and assess which Falconry courses are worth recommending to our readers. All letters will be dealt with in complete confidence and any information would be used purely for research purposes.

FUTURE RAPTORK'S

We have approached three gentlemen who are specialists in their field and asked if they would be willing to answer questions and solve problems for our readers. They all readily agreed and we are starting a problems section in the next issue .

If you have a problem that you think these gentlemen could help you with please write to us and we will forward it to them for a reply which will be later printed in the magazine. By writing to us and letting others hear of your problems and their solutions this could help other people in a similar situation and recognise problems at an earlier stage or solve them more easily.

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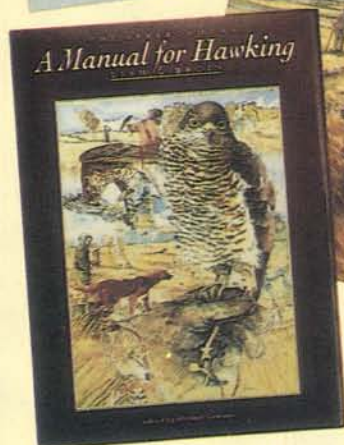
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