

The **Falcons**
— & Raptor Conservation Magazine —

Winter '94

£2.50

Longwinging
IN
AFRICA

CROW HAWKING
IN
NORTHUMBERLAND



ISSN 0967-2206
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PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY:

THE FALCONERS & RAPTOR CONSERVATION MAGAZINE

20 Bridle Road, Burton Latimer, Kettering, Northants. NN15 5QP

Telephone: (0536) 722794 **Fax:** (0536) 722794

Subscriptions: UK & Eire £12.50, Europe £16.00, Airmail £24.00

Cheque/Postal Order payable to: The Falconers Magazine.

For more details phone 0536 722794

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COVER: Female Peregrine. Photo A. Knowles Brown (See p. 10)

COMMENT

Hello Everybody,

Here we are again, nearly Christmas, doesn't it come around quickly. Must be age creeping up.

Talking of age, the magazine is five years old. Must be a landmark. We would like to thank everybody who has stood by us for the last five years and we hope you will continue to do the same for the next five years.

We are sorry for the delay with the diaries, we have had a problem with the paper, we have a firm date for delivery, details are on page 39. If you have ordered solely diaries we will not cash your cheques until we receive the diaries and check everything is in order.

Once again we have more convictions, and a plea for help from Paul Beecroft. It is in all our interests to stop bird thieves and if you know something please tell him either directly or through a third party. Falconry must be self governing, if it is left to someone outside to police it we will probably lose it. It is very precious to us but to an outsider it is a minority sport and not worth all the trouble it would cause them.

Anyway, let us wish you all a Merry Christmas and Good Hawking & Keep Falconry Safe.

David & Lyn

CONVICTIONS

This case was the fifth successful prosecution involving DNA fingerprinting that was used to prove or disprove breeding claims. (3) John Michael BARKER of Gleadless, Sheffield
Appeared at Sheffield Magistrates Court on 21 July 1994. He was charged with the following offence:-

(1) Possession of a wild Goshawk

This is a particularly interesting case in so much that it is the second time that a person has been prosecuted in relation to this particular bird.

The story originally started in 1992 involving the first ever case using DNA fingerprinting when Joseph SEIGA was convicted in relation to 4 Goshawks. The Court following the conviction were unable to forfeit these 4 birds as they had disappeared.

Following enquiries from a case, a bird allegedly gifted to BARKER in January 1993 and allegedly in excess of 10 years was examined at his address. Examination of the plumage showed the clear presence of several retained juvenile secondary feathers. The cable tie ring also showed signs of tampering and it was arranged that it would be removed by the DOE Inspector at a later date. A blood sample was however obtained. Two days later, this Goshawk and another Goshawk which was allegedly wild and disable were apparently stolen from his garden. The blood sample was analysed and it was found to be one of the outstanding birds from the SEIGA case.

Following a one day trial BARKER was found guilty. He was fined £500.00 with costs of £22.00.

THEFT UPDATE

As predicted, following de-registration of a number of species, the theft of Raptors from captivity has escalated and is now a serious problem. Some species that have been stolen, have to my knowledge, never been stolen before, and probably would not have been if they had still been on Schedule 4. The following is a list of birds stolen either shortly before de-registration or after it had come into force.

LEICESTERSHIRE

Harris Hawk Female Ring No UK81815 & CX010502

Harris Hawk Male Ring No 9942W

SCOTLAND

Redtail Female Ring No 0417Y

BERKSHIRE

African Goshawk Male Ring No 13CD088V

African Goshawk Female Ring No VK86842

SCOTLAND

Redtail Male Ring No 2144X & 1843Y

LANCASHIRE

Harris Hawk Male Ring No 4154W

Harris Hawk Female Ring No 2751W

Stolen together with 3 chicks Ring No:

13765W, 14665W, 7223W.

WALES

Red Headed Merlin Ring No 9412S

Red Headed Merlin Ring No UK86642

Red Headed Merlin Ring No UK86644

Merlin Female Ring No 2510R

Merlin Male Ring No 0602R

Hobby Female Ring No 9492S

Hobby Male Ring No UK86641

Goshawk Female Ring No UK82805

BERKSHIRE

Tawny Eagle Male Ring No 0124Z

Harris Hawk Male Ring No 3830W

AVON

Common Buzzard Ring No 7483W

BEDFORDSHIRE

Merlin Male Ring No 2343P

Merlin Female Ring No 6434P & 3661R

Goshawk Female Ring No 8102W

Kestrel Male Ring No 7778R

Sparrowhawk Female Ring No 6588R

Sooty Falcon Ring No 5980R & 10852S

KENT

Harris Hawk Ring No 7232W

Tawny Eagle - Recovered

YORKSHIRE

Goshawk Male Ring No UK80410

Goshawk Female Ring No UK80412

Goshawk Female Ring No UK80413

Goshawk Female Ring No 5499V & 9617W

Goshawk Female Ring No 5096V & 8428W

As can be seen from the list of stolen birds the problem is growing. The theft of birds from the wild also, still continues. There are reported thefts of chicks from the nests for 1994 for species such as Goshawks, Merlins, Peregrines, Buzzards, Sparrowhawks and Kestrels and also Golden Eagles. These are chick thefts and not eggs although many of these have been stolen as well, some of which have undoubtedly been hatched out in captivity.

Where are all these stolen birds that have been taken from either the wild or captivity. I have to say there is only one place they can be, and that is in the back gardens of Raptor Keepers being hidden away. Some of these keepers will, I know have them unknowingly, because they have been entered into the system as captive bred and sold on to all intents and purposes as legal birds. Some keepers know they have or at least suspect, they have stolen birds and are not saying anything for obvious reasons. If you leave it and do not say anything, it will be too late when the DOE/Police knocks on your door one morning asking for a blood sample for DNA analysis. You will not be able to say 'No' and if you do it will go from bad to worse. If you have a bird(s) that you are not sure of, then contact me and sort it out. If you have obtained the bird legally and in good faith it will not be a great problem. YOU coming to ME has got to be better than ME coming to

YOU. If you are looking after birds for someone else that are not legal or you suspect they are not, then remember, you as the keeper are in possession and control of them and the act says "He shall be guilty of an offence". Don't just imagine that nothing is going to happen and you won't get caught. The convictions shown in this Magazine prove otherwise. Please contact me if you have any doubts about anything. I know I am a Police Officer and many people may be reluctant or worried but I am also a Falconer and Raptor Keeper myself. I have an understanding, I am sympathetic and I am also human - Try me. If you have information on someone else then tell me. It is not 'Grassing'. It is called returning the birds to the wild/rightful owners and that surely should give you some satisfaction. What would be better than knowing that you have played a part in conservation or helped return Falconers birds to their rightful owners. You cannot imagine the devastation it causes by having bird(s) stolen until it happens to you. If you do contact me I will protect your identity. There may even be a financial reward at the end of it. If you still have any doubts about me then go through the Magazine. Let us at least try and Police ourselves and attempt to bring this thieving to a stop. Remember, everytime it happens the media get to hear about it. They are becoming more and more interested in Raptor related matters. Often their reports are not totally correct and are sensationalized but everytime it is reported it does untold damage to Falconry. It can be stopped by you if you want it. If we Police ourselves then there can be no criticism from outsiders and at the end of the day it will be good for Falconry and Conservation - need I say more.

I can be contacted on:-

Police Station 0734 536000 Ext 6257

Police (Ansp) 0734 321243

LOST/FOUND BIRDS

A number of Falconers birds have not been taken into care obviously either escaped or have become separated from their owners. In an effort to reunite them with their owners some details will be released by not all. If you have lost one of these birds and you think it may be yours then contact either myself or the editor. You will be required to answer a lot of questions such as species, gender, ring number in full, equipment on bird when lost etc.

(1) Falcon Part Ring No 101

(2) Falcon Part Ring No 146

(3) Falcon Part Ring No 145

(4) Hawk Part Ring No 129

(5) Falcon Part Ring No 150

STOP PRESS

Lost or Stolen from a back garden in

Somerset 27 September 1994

Female Goshawk Ring No UK 88212

Paul K Beecroft

RECORD BREEDING FOR OSPREYS AND RED KITES

Ospreys and Red Kites have had their best breeding season for more than a hundred years, reports the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

A total of 25 pairs of Ospreys in Scotland raised 146 young, the largest number this century. Red kites re-introduced to England and Scotland have had their best ever breeding season.

A total of 28 pairs of red kites raised a total of 50 young this year. In England 20 pairs raised 37 young and in Scotland eight pairs raised 13 young. The red kite is one of Britain's rarest birds of prey and the breeding locations are being kept secret to prevent disturbance.

The breeding populations have been established by an experimental re-introduction project, run by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Since 1989 young red kites from Spain and Sweden have been released into the wild in England and Scotland. This year young kites born in the wild as a result of this project have themselves bred for the first time.

Red kites were once very abundant and widespread in Britain but were persecuted to extinction in England and Scotland. A small population has survived in Wales, increasing to more than 100 pairs as a result of many years of conservation action.

Dr Mike Pienkowski, JNCC Director Life Sciences and Chairman of the Red Kite Project Team, said: "The experimental re-introduction project is a remarkable success. We are now closer than ever to restoring the red kite throughout Britain, although illegal poisoning remains a threat to the future of this magnificent bird."

Graham Wynne, RSPB Director of Conservation, said: "The success of this project is a tribute to the international co-operation between conservation organisations and the help of landowners, farmers and others in the UK. The sight of kites soaring across our skies once again will be more than ample reward for the hard work involved."

Today (Tuesday 19 July), Lord Arran, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of state, Department of the Environment, accompanied by Lord Cranbrook, Chairman of English Nature and a member of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, will help to release a further group of young kites, brought from Spain this year, at a secret site in southern England.

In Norfolk, Montagu's Harriers had their best breeding since 1924, with 9 pairs producing 10 young. However, in the South-West no pairs bred for the first time in more than 20 years. Two or three pairs bred in South-East England.

Gwyn Williams, RSPB head of species poli-

cy, said: "The record breeding results for Ospreys and Red Kites are a tribute to the hard work over many years, of dedicated volunteers and staff from a wide variety of organisations.

Breeding results for rare breeding birds in the UK were:

Osprey - Best breeding of this fish-eating Bird of Prey since records began. 95 pairs raised 146 young, compared with 88 pairs raising 111 young in 1993. The Osprey was persecuted to extinction from Scotland earlier this century but began a slow recolonisation in the 1950's.

Red Kite - Virtually wiped out in the 19th century, a tiny population of this carrion feeder has survived and increased in central Wales. This year, 106 pairs produced 98 young, compared with 101 pairs producing 79 young in 1993. Birds released at secret locations in England and Scotland by the RSPB and the Joint Nature Conservation (JNCC) bred for the third successive year. In England 20 pairs produced 37 young (9 pairs produced 14 young in 1993) and in Scotland 8 pairs raised 13 young (5 pairs raised 7 young in 1993).

Montagu's Harrier - 9 pairs produced 10 young in Norfolk (the largest number since 1924), but this was offset by the south-west where no pairs bred for the first time in more than 20 years.

NIGEL HAVERS PRESENTS TRUST PRIZES

Actor Nigel Havers was joined by a Peregrine Falcon to congratulate the winners of The Hawk and Owl Trust's international photographic competition on Thursday 8 September at London's Natural History Museum. The Peregrine is the bird featured on the trusts logo.

First prize winners are: Rachel Hingley (13) of Stockton on Tees, Cleveland (young photographers category), George McCarthy of Horsham, West Sussex (professional category), Don MacCaskill of Strathyre, Callander (amateur), Andy Rouse of Peasmarsh, Surrey (Hawk and Owl Trust member category). They have been chosen by a panel of judges, chaired by renowned professional wildlife photographer Dr Heather Angel. Rachel Hingley also won a runners-up prize. The other runner-up in the young photographers category was Claire Thomas of

Peterlee, County Durham. Runners-up in the professional category were: Gerald Downey of Bicknacre, Essex and Nick Williams of Rippindale, Lincolnshire. Runners-up in the amateur category were Jean Roberts of Poole, Dorset; Shelagh Ross of Cambridge; John Watkins of Woodford Bridge, Essex; and Mike Wilkes of Redditch, Hereford and Worcester.

The winning entries were among 60 photographs of the world's hawks, falcons, buzzards, eagles and owls on show at the museum throughout September to celebrate The Hawk and Owl trusts 25 years of conservation effort and achievement. Founded in 1969 to help save the Peregrine, today the Trust is the only UK organisation dedicated solely to conserv-

ing wild birds of prey, including owls, and their habitats.

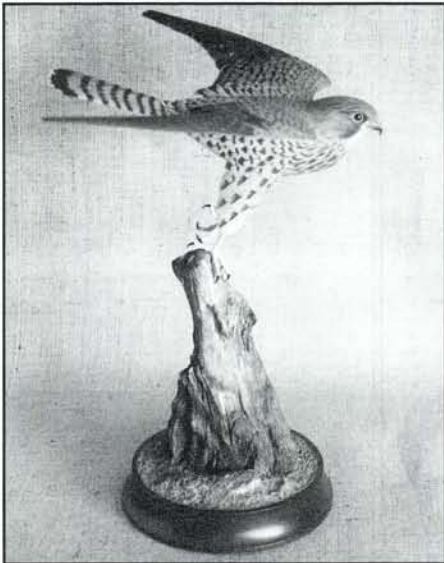
The Trust is very grateful for the support of Abercrombie & Kent, Amateur Photographer, Boots Knockinaam Lodge, Lastolite, Nikon, President Holidays, Reader's Digest, Shell and the Swissotel Istanbul which has made the competition and exhibition possible.



**NATIONAL EXHIBITION
OF CARVED BIRDS
3-11 September 1994**

This year the show took off with a bang. There were 253 carvings on display from 60 exhibitors of which 201 were for sale and we sold 86 of them - 43%. More could have been sold if they had been available, and certainly carver's will be receiving calls about commissions. There was a wonderful atmosphere in the gallery every day and the visitors, around 6,500 of them, were stopping anyone who looked official and saying how much they enjoyed it all. The comments in the Visitors' book were more than complimentary from people all over the country. Some wrote that they had come back twice or even three times!

This years "Bird of Prey" winner was Roger Jeeves for his carving of a Kestrel.



**GRAND RAFFLE
PRIZES WON**

This year the Scottish Hawking Club and Clyde Valley Hawks ran a joint Grand Raffle.

The winners are as follows:

1st prize. S Sharp of Lanark, who won a days hunting for two people at Clyde Valley Hawks.

2nd prize. Gemma Chalmers of Peterhead, who won a day out at on a Scottish Hawking Club Field Meet.

3rd prize. D McDonald Northampton, who won a bottle of 12 year old whisky.

MICROCHIPPING UPDATE

Paul Beecroft

Since my last article on the subject of Microchips there have been a few changes, especially in respect of the price of the individual chip. There are still the 3 main companies supplying Microchips and the breakdown is as follows:-

(1) ANIMALCARE LTD

This company promotes the IDENTICHIP system. A number of my birds have been implanted with these chips. This was done in 1986 and they are still working. I also have access to a Common Buzzard which unfortunately died. The bird has been in a freezer for the past two years, and the Microchip is still going strong. Microchips from the Company can be purchased for £10.00 and includes entry onto the National Register.

(2) PETTRAC

This company promotes the AVID system. They have offered two different prices for their chips. They are prepared to sell them at £6.00 which will not include insertion on the National Register or £9.00 which will include insertion onto the Register. I do feel however that it would be better to be on the Register as I can foresee problems arising if it were not.

The Scanner/Readers from both Animalcare and Pettrac are being continually up-graded. Both can now read the others Microchip.

(3) RS BIOTECH

This company promotes the TROVAN system. In my last article I reported that it would not be practical to use this system and I believe that still stands. This company have been quite active in Zoos etc but it is not being used by individual Vets, RSPCA etc. The Microchip can only be

read by their own scanner. As far as I am aware there are no Scanners/Readers being used or held by any agencies such as the RSPCA, Vet, Dog Pound etc. Therefore any bird lost/stolen would not be recovered because of the Microchip.

I am aware that a number of Police Forces throughout the country do have in their possession the Trovan Reader. This however is being used for non-animal related matters. I have contacted a number of Forces about their Reader in order to ascertain it's availability should it be required for an animal or bird. Of all the Forces I contacted only one knew what I was talking about and I traced that to an office at New Scotland Yard. Even if all Forces had one, then I believe the total would be 43. Some Forces cover many hundreds of square miles. My Force covers 3 Counties. We have to be practical, because it can only be kept in one place at a time, and therefore the bird and the Reader could be a long way apart, which would then make things difficult. Compare that to the several thousands of Readers spread throughout the country belonging to Animalcare (Identichip) and Pettrac (Avid). The decision however is yours. I am only trying to give the best advice possible to help get back lost and stolen birds.

In respect of the Agencies mentioned I think I can safely say that all found Falcons and Hawks are now being scanned for Microchips as a matter of course. I am receiving a number of reports from Agencies, LRK's and Raptor Keepers that they are in possession of lost Falconers birds. All of them have been checked and they are not chipped. Had they been, they would now be back with the owner.

**CLUB APPOINTS
REGIONAL OFFICER**

Originally from Derbyshire, Mike Cleaver moved to the far north of Scotland in May 1993 to sample the quality of life that Caithness has to offer. In April 1994 he launched Pin on Pewter to offer a range of Pewter products to the UK and Overseas markets.

Mike has flown raptors since the late seventies and favours shortwings. His ambition is to fly a Golden Eagle.

Mike has recently been appointed Regional

Officer for the North of Scotland for the British Hawking Association. Anyone in the north of Scotland who is interested in the Association should contact Mike at Upper Achies, Harpsdale, Caithness. KW12 6UW. Tel/Fax 0847 84213.

"It is in the long term interest for all falconers and hawking clubs to work together to keep our magnificent sport available for generations to come. The BHA hope to create an umbrella organisation for all clubs to associate to. We will have strength in numbers but retain identities of the individual clubs".

SCOTTISH HAWKING CLUB NEWS



The Scottish Hawking Club's year started off with a bang in more ways than one. Our first meet of the season was a shooting one, on the glorious twelfth, over-looking St Mary's loch in the spectacular setting of the Southern Uplands, and although Grouse numbers were down on last year we were able to put a few birds in the bag. Thanks to Clyde Valley Hawks for the venue.

The second meet, hawking now, was an evening meet for Shortwings at rabbits, held at Leadburn by kind permission of Colin Grieves. This looked like it was going to be a washout, as it poured all day, but as the birds were being taken out of the cars, a big blue hole appeared in the sky and the sun shone for the next 2 hours. Even though the birds were a bit rusty, due to it being the beginning of the season, a good number of bunnies were accounted for with Rab Steels male Harris, Tex, being the star by taking 8.

Our first 2-day meet was held on the 10th and 11 September, by kind permission of Ian Hunter. The Saturday was for Longwings. This turned out to be a worrying time for one member, as his falcon disappeared with no trace of signal or sighting, only to turn up 2 hours later from where she had left. She was severely beaten up and at one point collapsed totally on the way to the vets. But after treatment and a few days recuperation, she seems to be back to her normal self. The Sunday, for Shortwings was extremely good with over 20 head in the bag at the end of the day. Later

WELSH HAWKING CLUB NEWSLETTER

The Welsh Hawking Club attended the C.L.A. Game Fair in July along with the B.F.C. and other falconry related organisations. The setting was picturesque, the static displays of all present were of a high standard and the flying display was carried out, brilliantly as usual, by Jemima Parry-Jones, in her own inimitable style

The Clubs Annual Field Meeting, usually held in North Wales was called off this year due to local difficulties. We thought that a replacement venue had been found in Ayrshire but at the 11th hour, again due to local problems, this also had to be cancelled. Therefore, there will not be a Club Field Meeting this year. However, arrangements are already in hand to ensure that normal service will resume next year. The Club has had numerous queries over the last 12 months asking whether or not you have to be Welsh or live in Wales to become a member. I can now assure everyone that this is not the case. The Club has members from all over the world so if anyone reading this is thinking of applying but has doubts as mentioned above, don't worry, apply and be assured of a warm Welsh welcome.

The usual social gatherings are still taking place at the Newbridge Inn, Tredunnoch, Nr Usk, on the second Monday of each month and at the Goshawk, Mouldsworth, Nr Chesterton on the first Wednesday of each month. All new members are welcome. Good Hawking Mike Clowes. (Chairman)

we held our AGM at the local Hostillery which showed our membership to be rising rapidly. We are now the largest club in Scotland. Our club hawk food scheme had purchased 225,000 Day-Old-Chicks for our members, a far greater amount than expected, and we are now trying to get regular supplies of Rats and Quail. Some new projects are the Club Registration Scheme, which with the help of PC Beecroft and Scottish Police Wildlife Liaison Officers, will co-ordinate all reports of lost/stolen birds in Scotland, as well as keeping records of any members birds. To compliment this, we have negotiated a supply of micro-chips which should work out well under £10.00 each, including registration with the club, and chip company. Also, we are offering SHC close rings to breeders of non-registrable birds, so all of these measures will make club members birds traceable, should they be lost or stolen.

Our 1st issue of the club magazine was well received, so we have decided to put out a quarterly issue. We are looking for in-put and articles of interest. Any budding literary genius, please get in touch. Also, any potential advertisers wishing to get into this vast untapped Scottish market, please do likewise.

Our main meet of the season, 4 days on the Isle of Skye, at the end of October will have just past. Hopefully all will have gone well!!! I will report in the next issue. So, in the meantime, GOOD HAWKING.

ON THE HILL - NOT! BY NICHOLAS KESTER

I have just finished reviewing two books on falconry and hawk keeping for The Field. Both are by acknowledged experts in their field and represent between them over fifty years accumulated knowledge. The mind boggles at all the things they may have forgotten, which I will never even learn.

And where have I been whilst writing these reviews? In a croft owned by the Director of the British Falconers' Club on the grouse moor he rents each year. As he has been coming to this particular part of Scotland for twelve years and his falconer has been with him for ten of them, I have had the benefit of a further twenty two years to draw upon. So what is the point of this advanced maths, apart from being a way to while away the mornings before heading for the hill?

It is all because the BFC has just launched the first fully accredited falconry apprenticeship scheme. A scheme that has been two years in the gestation and which has gone through a fair number of metamorphoses before reaching its present form. The final version will be published in a future issue if this magazine. But it might interest readers to understand the why and where of its appearance.

At a Club council meeting certain members raised the thorny problems of standards, and how to maintain them as a defence against the future. A sub-committee was formed. Isn't it always the case? The first report was a mish-mash of all the things that concerned us - from proper dress in the field to adequate respect for the quarry and its environment. In the end we could have written a book on the debating, but like the committee who set out to design a horse, it would have ended up as a camel. Best to leave such writings to the professionals.

It then transpired that all of us had served some form of apprenticeship with a falconer of advancing years and experience. This had usually come about through grim determination and dogged persistence which must have been tiresome in the extreme for our patient mentors. So why not formalise the matter and give the shy or nervous newcomer a chance to learn without having to pester one particular falconer. Bingo.

The scheme is no replacement for all the other things that come with the sport; such as reading all the available books and even doing a course. What seems to have been lost in the mists of time is peoples' patience. Everybody has to achieve everything yesterday: fly a longwing, train a dog. Hopefully the scheme will help the new falconer take things stage by stage and benefit the sport and his hawks. I wish it had been around when I started. It would have saved the late Ken Wood much pestering by the enthusiastic Kester.

It is the BFC's ambition to help new falconers, and to do so without appearing pompous and dogmatic. Let us try and avoid washing our dirty linen in public, which may well result in us having legislation forced upon us, but rather resolve our problems from within as a show of strength. The BFC apprenticeship scheme should go a long way towards achieving this.

ROUGH-LEGGED-BUZZARD

When you are a birdwatcher, an October day on the North Norfolk coast can set the pulse racing. Migration is in full swing and almost anything is likely to turn up.....It was like that at Cley on 26th October, 1973. I saw both Bittern and Water Rail on the marsh and a Grey Phalarope on one of the pools: there was a Black-throated Diver on the sea and I found half-a-dozen Lapland Buntings in the rough grass behind the beach ridge. A special thrill was watching 19 Bewick's Swans coming in off the sea on the last leg of their long journey from Siberia. The bird of the day, though,

was Rough-Legged buzzard. I had seen a great many Roughlegs two years previously, when I spent a month in northern Norway and Finnish Lapland, but had never encountered one in Britain. During a stop for coffee, one flew over - and shortly after that there were two more. Before the day was over, I had seen six out of a probable total of at least nine seen in the area. Something quite exceptional was clearly happening and much later I learned that about 45 Roughlegs had arrived in North Norfolk during the last 10 days of the month. When all the records were finally gathered

together, it turned out that about 170 had arrived in the U.K. in October (mostly in eastern and south-eastern England), with about 80

least 10 years since I last saw one in the U.K. So what happened in 1973-74 and 1974-75? In trying to find an answer, it is first of all nec-

The Rough-Legged Buzzard is not much bigger than the Common Buzzard but it has a bulkier look to it with longer wings and tail. and could be mistaken for a small eagle



remaining through the 1973-74 winter. I saw little more of them - two together in Suffolk in March being my only other sighting. In the following October, it happened all over again, with perhaps 250 birds this time and up to 100 wintering, in much the same general areas as before. My work took me over to Suffolk many times during the 1974-75 winter and it seemed that wherever I went I came across Rough Legged Buzzards, sometimes seeing between five and seven in a single day. With a couple seen in Kent, and one in Sussex, I totalled 35 sightings on 11 dates between November and March.

Very occasional Roughleg "invasions" had occurred before but never on this scale and never in two successive winters. There has been nothing comparable since and (unless we get a big surprise this winter) we are back into the normal pattern of occurrence, where the total number of birds present in any winter is normally under 20 and the Roughleg can fairly be described as a regular but rare winter visitor. I haven't checked the dates, but it is at

essary to understand something of the Roughlegs way of life. The Rough-legged Buzzard is a bird of the far north in both the Old World and the New. In the breeding season, it is primarily a bird of arctic and sub-arctic tundra and low fell country, generally avoiding tree cover of any sort except in years when prey is plentiful. Its numbers and distribution vary in response to the cycles of abundance of its principal prey - voles and lemmings. It can be numerous in an area in a good vole year and then scarce or event absent altogether in a poor one: I got a good idea of just how common the Roughleg can be when I was in northern Norway in the spring of 1971 and counted over 50 birds in about 30 miles along the northern shore of Varangerfjord. In theory, the events of those two exceptional winters could be explained by the sort of situation which normally produces "invasion" behaviour - a high post-breeding population coupled with a failure of the early winter food supply leading to mass emigration and the appearance of large numbers of birds beyond their normal win-

tering range. Such situations are well known with Waxwings, tits, crossbills and several other species. But extensive enquiries failed to reveal the makings of a classic invasion in the case of the Roughleg in those two winters. There was some suggestion that post-breeding numbers were high in the second winter, but otherwise nothing very positive to go on. The only thing we know for certain is that wintering numbers were lower than normal in Denmark and that there was a westward shift which brought many more birds than usual to England and also to The Netherlands. We will probably never know exactly why this happened. If you are lucky enough to be travelling in summer anywhere around the fringes of the Arctic, in northern Europe, Russia, Siberia or Canada, there is every chance that you will see Rough-legged Buzzards. They are generally a bit easier to find in winter. In central and eastern

Europe, their range extends a long way south, while in the New World they occur in the northern half of the U.S.A.; I saw several in the hills of southern California during a December visit. They are not too difficult to identify, but check the books carefully to appreciate variations in appearance and age. All Roughlegs are dark above and the commonest type is noticeably pale-headed and very white below, with obvious blackish wing-ends and carpal patches and a very dark belly. The most obviously diagnostic feature is the tail. Seen from below, it is very pale, with a broad, dark terminal band, but in some lights this can be surprisingly hard to detect. A decent view of the upperside of the tail clinches identification beyond any doubt - strikingly white with a broad black terminal band. The tail-pattern is less clear-cut but still very obvious in young birds. As falconers, you should be

good At picking up differences in size, shape and so on and these are good pointers in Roughleg identification. While a Roughleg is not much bigger than a Common Buzzard, it has a bulkier look to it and is distinctly longer-winged and longer-tailed. In fact it can look as much like a small eagle as a

Buteo, an impression which is heightened by loose and rather leisurely wingbeats and a gliding profile in which the inner wing is raised and the primaries held level. Roughlegs also hover expertly while hunting - much more frequently and consistently than Common Buzzards.



By Mike Everett

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Due to increased production costs and a large increase in the price of paper, the cover price of The Falconers Magazine is going up to £2.95, a UK Subscription is going up to £14.00 from February 1995. A European subscription will be £18.00 and an overseas subscription will be £26.00.

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LONGWINGING OVER

ANDREW KNOWLES-BROWN

I was rudely awakened by the sound of dogs barking and strange voices, it was pitch black and damn cold, I took a few moments to get my bearings and groped around to find the light switch dangling somewhere above my head, the dull yellow light from the 12 volt electric system was better than I thought it would be and I quickly dressed, boy it was damn cold, not what I had expected in Africa, after ablutions everyone met in the main lodge for tea/coffee and rusks, these were very hard rectangular biscuits incorporating fruit which had to be dunked otherwise teeth could be broken!!, by this time day was breaking and the dawn chorus, African style had started (exactly as you hear on the TV) some loud screeching close to camp gave away the hiding places of some natal Francolin and a little further away Cocqu's Francolin were proclaiming their authority, the dogs restrained and loaded onto the vehicles along with the birds, us, cooler box with light refreshments, camera's video's and Uncle Tom Cobby and all.

We left camp most mornings by 7 am leaving a billowing red cloud of dust behind us as we sped along the graded dirt roads, as we were sitting up on the safari seats outside we travelled in the leading vehicle so we didn't have to "Eat Dirt", although Jeff reckoned each area had its own distinct,

piquant taste when inhaled deeply!! Some mornings we found quarry almost within sight of camp, other times we drove for 20-30 minutes, whenever the river lines and valleys were shrouded in thick early morning mist it foretold of a hot day so we invariably flew the birds close to camp as we would have to stop early before it got too hot, on these days we would get soaked through from the heavy dew on the 6 foot high dead grasses staining us with their pungent juices, although we were usually sun dried by the time we returned to camp, this left us looking like we had tie-dyed our clothes.

The hawking itself was similar in quality to that seen over here or anywhere else in the world where dedicated falconers practice their sport, the difference being the abundance of quarry, unaffected by commercial shooting, the terrain, and most importantly the birds being flown, namely African Peregrines (F P Minor), these diminutive little birds which, as you would expect, have the same manner as our own Peregrines were 1/4 smaller, the Falcons flew at around 1 1/2 lb whereas the Tiercel's flew at approximately 1 lb, we saw 5 Peregrines fly at each camp they were as follows :-

DEVULI:-

Adrian Langley's NEVANA thrice intermewed passage falcon

Geoff Boddington's ISIS twice intermewed passage falcon

THOR captive bred eyass tiercel parent reared and hacked

John Grobler's AVALON F2 twice intermewed parent reared eyass falcon

HOBBIT captive bred eyass tiercel

Lions Den:-

Adrian and Geoff's birds as well as Andre Groenwald's

LEVI F2 once intermewed eyass Falcon sister to AVALON

SLICK Twice intermewed parent reared eyass tiercel brother to HOBBIT

Although everything sounds ideal the birds didn't always get things their own way as a couple of excerpt from my diary shows.

2nd day Thursday am NEVANA caught Hen Cocqui Francolin or swempie (African) ISIS flew at red billed teal no luck

AVALON caught young cock swainsons Francolin and was nearly taken by a Tawny Eagle!!!

pm ISIS unserved a swainsons Francolin

3rd day Friday am Birds flown but nothing caught

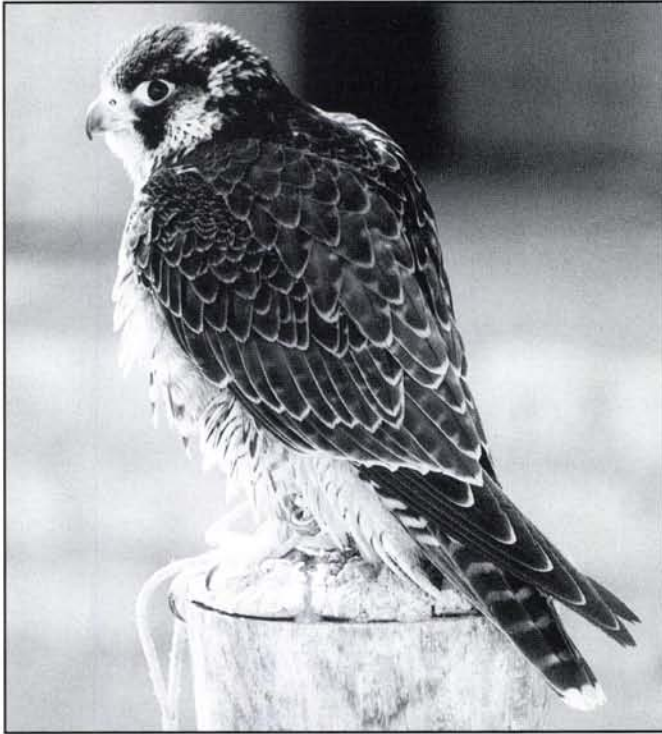
pm HOBBIT caught swainsons, NEVANA caught swainsons

others unserved

I might add that the second days morning escapade with the Tawny Eagle was spectacular but not in the falconry sense, Avalon had bound to the swainsons quite high and coasted down some 150-200 yards away behind some Acacia trees, so John, Jeff and I went to look for her but with the tall grasses you couldn't see more than 5 foot in front of you, with us not finding her John went back to the car for the receiver and as he left he said "Look out for Eagles". Within seconds I spotted a dot in the sky at a 45° angle up from me, by the time John had been to the car, returned, set up the ariel and receiver and got a signal this dot was coming in fast with wings closed determined in its unwavering path, the signal was strong so we knew Avalon was around here somewhere but we could not locate her, and still the Tawny kept coming, I was videoing the Eagle coming down but voices were starting to get raised and panic was setting in, the Eagle seemed to be heading for one of the acacia trees so we ran towards it shouting and waving our arms with me tripping over



SLICK. Andre Groenwalds Tiercel on a Crowned Plover



Hobbit, John Groblers Tiercel, he flies at 460gms

an unseen termite mound and ending up in an undignified heap, but still the Eagle came steaming down, it put in a final burst and crashed into some grasses no more than 15 yards from us totally unmoved by our agitated presence, a Cocqui flushed right under it and disappeared at high speed the eagle following not quite so fast, this was some stoop we had witnessed, one any falconer would be proud of their bird producing, and Avalon well she was sitting under the Acacia tree with her prize no more than 10 foot from where the tawny landed, a very close call indeed. Many days we had good flight as some more excerpts from my diary shows:-

4th Day Sat AM Nevana caught Hen Cocqui

Avalon caught cock Cocqui

5th Day AM Avalon caught grey Touraco (Pfunye Africaan)

Nevana caught swainsons hen (with spurs unusual)

8th Day AM Lions Den

Flew Isis at swainsons got to a high pitch 800-1000 foot good stoop and caught it

Nevana unserved at Swainsons flew at doves good multi stoops, hit one but didn't kill

Levi flew good flight but didn't kill

13th Day AM

Flew Isis at swainsons good flight high mounting 800-1000 foot cracking stoop bound to one but dropped it in the middle of a 1/2 grown wheat field, Slick flew well at doves 5-6 good stoops, hit one but it escaped good flight

PM Isis flown at swainsons good stoops but not finishing Thor flew fair no high pitch but flew at glossy Starlings, Doves and Quelea, a swainsons flushed, flew a long tail chase and took from under

Nevana caught swainsons and grey touraco

Levi caught cock swainsons

Slick flew well but didn't catch anything, flying when moon was up.

14th Day AM Went out after Green Pigeons slick was up for a long time but none would flush (wise birds) killed a redfaced mouse bird stone dead and then took a Touraco

PM Levi caught swainsons well

Slick caught swainsons by default after stooping at a large flock of Quelea and grabbing a passing francolin (lucky blighter)

Isis caught swainsons in short stoop whacked it hard, it was dead

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

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NEVANA. Adrain Langleys thrice inter-mewed passage falcon on a Coqui Francolin.

in the air
 Thor stooped well but we kept bumping francolin while he was out of position
 As can be seen this was falconers flying hawks for falconers, our hosts knowledge of all the surrounding Flora and Fauna was impressive as well as their thirst for knowledge, as very little study has been made of francolin in Zimbabwe they make a point of recording all data of kills, covey size, location, and distribution as well as much more, this is then published for all to see, they don't take their quarry for granted and can notice any trends before others, they also take part in many summer studies at nest sites to record other valuable data, their dedication and passion to the sport of kings left me feeling humble when I think of how some take our sport for granted we could certainly take a leaf out of their book, this trip is certainly for any like minded falconer and I would recommend a visit to Zimbabwe if you have the chance to go!!!



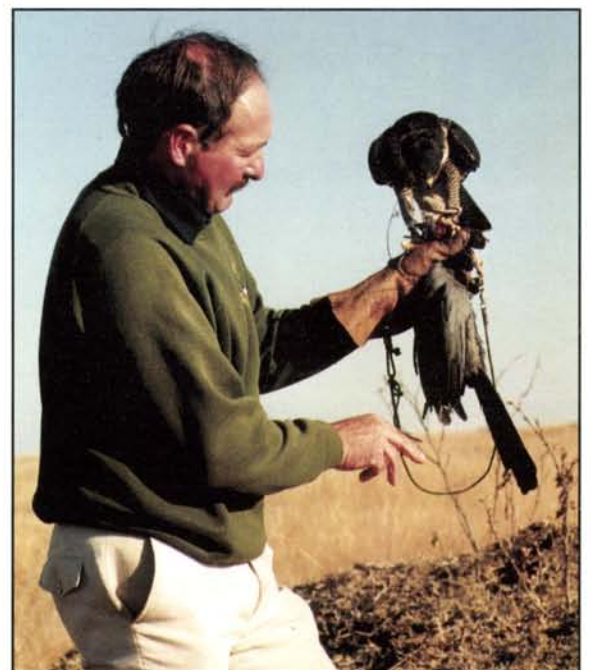
The days bag. Grey Touraco, Swainsons Francolin and a Mousebird with ISIS



ISIS with a Swainson cock



A misty daybreak at Devuli with the dew laden grass



Geoff Dalton holding Avalon with a Touraco

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MUNSTERLANDER

MEMORIES

Falconers are a strange breed, quite happy to spend the equivalent of the National Debt on a quality hawk, the average falconer begrudges spending anymore than is absolutely necessary on a working dog. Now, those who know me well will attest to my tendency towards keeping the pursestrings tighter than a tourniquet and I would be the very last person to advocate unnecessary expenditure, but consider the following.

Barring death through illness, accident and the nightmare of all falconers, loss whilst flying, a hawk will be with you for many years. A long lifespan obviously demands a very large commitment from the keeper and assuming you want to get the optimum from you hawk - why else have it? - then, in my opinion, a good working dog is absolutely essential. Whatever your opinions upon the emotive subject of hunting if you want, as you should, a healthy, happy hawk, then flying your bird free to keep it in fit condition is of prime concern. A hawk kept on a perch or in an aviary is never fit - it needs to fly. Nature has taken a great deal of time and trouble to evolve the perfect predator and I, for one, would not deny any bird the opportunity to fulfil nature's design. When out with one of my hunting hawks I feel extremely privileged to witness a timeless, natural occurrence, that in the normal way of things, I would not see. It is also a very exciting practice, where the quality of the flight far exceeds the quantity of the bag. Considering that the average domestic cat will kill more in one night than my hawks will kill in a week I do not have any moral disquiet in allowing my birds to hunt - just the opposite.

Domestically bred raptors are the major source of falconry birds in the U.K.. Your new hawk, fresh from the breeding chamber, is a blank page. How that bird turns out is down to you entirely. There is no such thing as a bad hawk, only inept falconers. An essential part of your birds training will be your ability to serve the required prey species time after time, to give the hawk the opportunity to become strong and proficient at hunting, and the best - and easiest - way to do this is to have the use of a good hawking dog.

I was not actually looking for a Munsterlander as a new dog, in fact had only heard of them as a breed and not seen one in the flesh. I had resigned myself to buying a puppy and embarking on the lengthy process of training it for hawking, a prospect I did not relish as my wife Jude and I were in the midst of setting up the Snowdonia School of Falconry and time was a precious commodity. I had trained a German Short-haired Pointer before and knew the amount of time and effort needed for that and the thought of having to wait a couple of years to get much out of the dog, assuming it all went well, was a tad depressing to say the least.

Whilst 'phoning around for a suitable puppy we were offered Emma - thanks Scott - a three year old, professionally trained Munsterlander bitch who was being worked at a rival establishment. To cut a long story short we went to see her work, were suitably impressed by her abilities, and a deal was struck. She was not cheap, the best never is, but when you sit down and work out how much it would cost to buy a puppy from a working strain, feed it and keep it healthy for two years and, should you feel

unable, have it professionally trained, then we got a bargain. Best of all I could work her from day one, and work her I did! Here I should mention one of her failings. She's a one person dog and will only work for me, which is a drawback if Jude wants to take her Harris Hawk out on her own. Emma will work to hand signals, whistle and telepathy for me but will carefully consider Jude's commands before carrying them out.

I can best describe the relationship that Emma and I share by recounting a typical hunting excursion. It is hard to pick just one from the many times that it has all come together and made all the effort, and frustrations, of training hawks worthwhile, but here goes.

After exchanging mews for field jesses we let the birds go into the nearest trees. Tarot, Jude's female Harris Hawk taking her usual high stand in the top branches whilst her sibling, Rune, my young male, moves on ahead to have a look around. I slip Emma's lead to let her have a quick run around and burn off some of her boundless energy, a few minutes of this will calm her down and concentrate her mind on the work ahead. Today's expedition is for rabbit, our predominant target for hunting, although Emma is equally skilled at finding pheasant, moorhen, hare and the occasional grouse. We move off from the jeep towards our chosen hunting ground, the male Harris' moving on ahead, the larger female hanging back, taking longer to switch on, as is common with heavier hawks, and Emma puts nose to the ground and begins the hunt.

The terrain of the Snowdonia mountains being as it is we always have to walk at least a little way from the jeep to the hunting grounds and I never restrain Emma on these little journeys. Apart from the forlorn hope that the noise of a loud diesel engine has not driven every bunny in the vicinity deep into the bowels of the earth and an early flush to stimulate the birds may occur, this walk also serves to warm up Emma's senses and remind her of the signals she has to obey. In the hawking field a disobedient dog is a complete liability but the best of them need a chance to settle down before working in earnest.

We reach today's chosen ground, an area of upland hill farm with a few trees - and those stunted by high winds and hard winters - covered with gorse and bracken. Rune is already in position, looking about him and bobbing his head at anything of the slightest interest. Tarot soon follows and gains the highest point in a convenient hawthorn, instinctively knowing that she will need height to gain the power



MIK STANDING

required for the chase. Both of them watch Emma as I set her off to hunt.

Emma works like no other dog I've owned. With her there is none of the headlong rushing around trying to scent everywhere at once, her attention to detail is quite amazing, her thoroughness so complete that you find yourself trusting her judgement utterly. We have come to realise that if she does not want to work an area it is because it is devoid of anything of interest for the hawks. This was found out the hard way and much time was wasted trying to work her over rabbit-less ground before I learnt to trust her nose. Her desire to please me can be overwhelming at times, no matter how deep the cover - bramble or gorse - she will go in on command and not come away until told. She gives us 100%, who could ask for more?

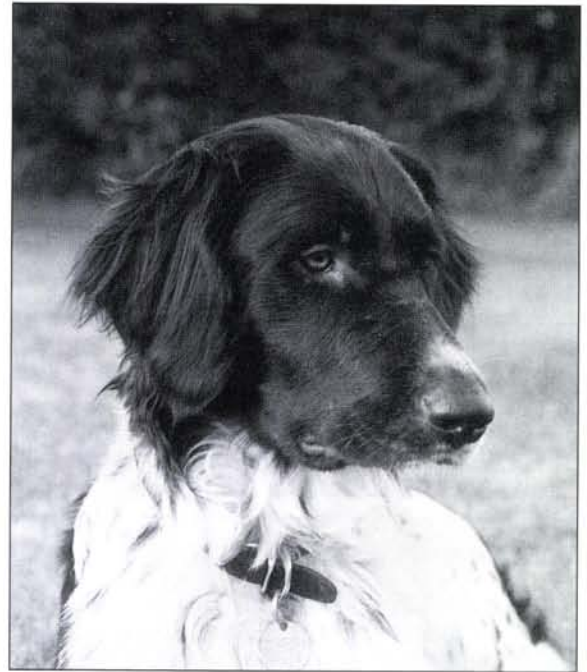
There are not many buries up here in the highlands of Wales, the bare bones of the earth are closest to the sky here and tunnelling through basalt and granite is not too easy for a rabbit. This means that bunnies can be found laying out some way from a warren, either locked down or creeping for cover. No matter how sparse the flora a rabbit can find shelter and we always kick each and every clump of sedge or gorse even though an ant would be hard pressed for protection. There are times when I have almost stood on a bunny that's frozen in a clump of grass so never underestimate the rabbits ability to remain unmoving in the face of fear.

At the base of the tree where the hawks have taken their stand a bank falls away for a few feet then the ground flattens out for seventy-five feet to another bank surmounted by a dry-stone wall. Gorse covers the nearer bank and a few clumps are scattered across the intervening ground. I put Emma in, allowing her to choose her own path along the bank and watch as, approaching the gorse, she slows down, nose a few inches from the grass, her snuffling the only sound to be heard. She moves to and fro,

her tail wagging normally, an indication of the lack of live scent, covering the area with immaculate precision. Suddenly her tail increases its beat and then she freezes. Her head down, nose to a clump of gorse, her entire body quivers from her head to her now motionless, rigid tail. Point. I glance up at the two hawks to check that they have realised the situation and, as usual, they stare at her as intently as she points her prey, waiting with immeasurable patience. I wait a little longer, it is the first point of the day and it will not hurt to remind Emma who is in control here.

I give the command and she crashes forward into the gorse.

Up gets the rabbit and bolts across the open ground towards the walled bank and safety. The Harris Hawks leave the tree in unison, their lethargic leap into space belying the speed of their flight. The female takes the lead by virtue of her higher stance and greater wingspan, closing on the rabbit quickly. Forty feet from safety the rabbit feels Tarot at its back and, with a desperate twist, jinks to the left, the hawks claws cleaving the air instead of flesh. Rune is hard behind, his agility giving him the chance to veer left and launch his attack. With a flick of his wings he closes the gap and strikes the bunny hard. Over and over they tumble, the rabbit bucking and kicking to break free, the hawk gripping with ferocity to keep his prey. His grip slips and away the bunny runs, white tail bobbing, faster than ever. Rune follows up off the ground but knows he cannot catch this one now, although his work is not over. The rabbit reaches the sanctuary of the far bank and the cover of bracken. The male Harris flies over the prey, ignoring it for now,



Photographs with kind permission of Alan Gates.

and alights upon the stone wall. Turning, he marks the rabbit's position, staring at it intently. Tarot, who has flown onto the wall after her attack failed, joins him.

Jude and I, with Emma, stroll across to the birds. There is no rush - the hawks will keep the rabbit locked down. Emma follows the bunny's scent to where it has laid up and again points. Once more the command is given and the prey is flushed. Not across open ground this time, the rabbit is wiser now and runs along the base of the bank. The white tail flashes and the hawks leave the wall, claws skimming the dogs head as they converge on the fleeing bunny. Wings pumping furiously, heads straining forward to close the gap and once again the rabbit jinks. Away to the right, up the bank and through the smallest chink in the wall to safety. Tarot hits the turf hard, her anger apparent in the way she begins to foot the grass. Rune wings over and lands before the wall, staring after the escaped bunny unwilling to admit defeat.

A good chase, dog and hawks working perfectly in unison, satisfying to behold. Nothing for the bag but a catch of memories. We will move on now, a couple of hours of daylight stretch before us, plenty of time to find a few rabbits and put this well-oiled machine into action.

Since Emma joined the team out hunting capabilities have increased immeasurably. Not only is she a wonderful asset in the hawking field, augmenting the skills of all our birds, but she has become a much loved and respected companion too. Emma is of the Ghyllbeck line and I can only thank the Hargreaves for breeding such a healthy, solid and dependable dog. I wholeheartedly recommend the Large Munsterlander as a hawking dog but, whatever breed you go for, get yourself a good one and remember, as with all aspects of falconry, you get what you pay for.



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He has exhibited in many of London's top venues, I.E. THE SOUTH BANK, THE BARBICAN, ASS. OF ILLUSTRATORS, SOCIETY OF WILDLIFE ARTISTS, THE TRYON GALLERY, THE DESIGN CENTRE, OLYMPIA, and in the R.A. exhibition of BRITISH ART. in Saudi Arabia. He specialises in raptors in landscape; particularly in flight and welcomes commissions.

The painting of raptors in this issue is for sale and closely based on his own field sketches and photo's and he has studied birds in many countries. For details of limited prints or commissions please contact: P SNOW.

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Raptor Rescue Annual Survey



Following our first review of rehabilitator's reports, which covered the twelve months from 1st September 1991 to 31st August 1992, we have repeated the exercise for 1992/93. On this occasion however, more detailed information was asked for, to try to improve our knowledge regarding the ages of the birds which were treated, the types of injuries sustained and their length of stay in care. It is our hope that by gathering similar data over a period of several years and making comparisons of the results, it will be possible to monitor any significant changes in wild raptor populations. The graph is accompanied by a brief summary and some background details written by Raptor Rescue's vice-chairman, Mick Cunningham; who was responsible for co-ordinating and compiling all the statistics.

OF THE 310 WILD RAPTORS taken into care during the period of this survey, 158 (50.97%) were returned to the wild. This high release percentage was once again directly related to the number of eyasses/owlets which were handled (almost 25% of the total casualties). As these young birds are not normally injured, they have an excellent prognosis. If these non-fledged birds were to be removed from the statistics, the release rate would drop to 33%.

From a total of 13 different species encountered, the Kestrel and the Tawny Owl were the most common requiring attention, totalling 60% of the birds handled compared to 49% last year.

The number of mature casualties was more than double that of immature and juvenile birds.

Cases involving fractures were lower than expected at only 23%, of which 72% were fractures of the wing. 45% of all fracture cases were eventually euthanased and the percentage of birds released after suffering fractures was finally 23%.

Of the total number of birds taken into care 48% were able to be sexed. This revealed 54% to be female and 46% male.

The status of a species in the wild is often reflected by the number of casualties that appear during the year. For the first time, 2 Goshawks were treated by our rehabilitators. Unfortunately, one bird had to be euthanased due to gunshot wounds to the head; the other, a juvenile female, was trained and hunted using full falconry techniques, to ensure she was fit and capable of catching quarry before finally being released.

The immature male Red Kite was suffering from concussion. Following rest and therapy, it was released after nine days. The same bird was observed some six weeks later by R.S.P.B. officers who reported him to be fit and healthy.

No Merlins were taken into care this year and the number of Barn Owl casualties dropped from 27 in 1991/92 to 9 birds this year.

In addition to wild raptors, our rehabilitators also received 25 domestic bred birds which had either escaped from aviaries or been lost whilst being flown.

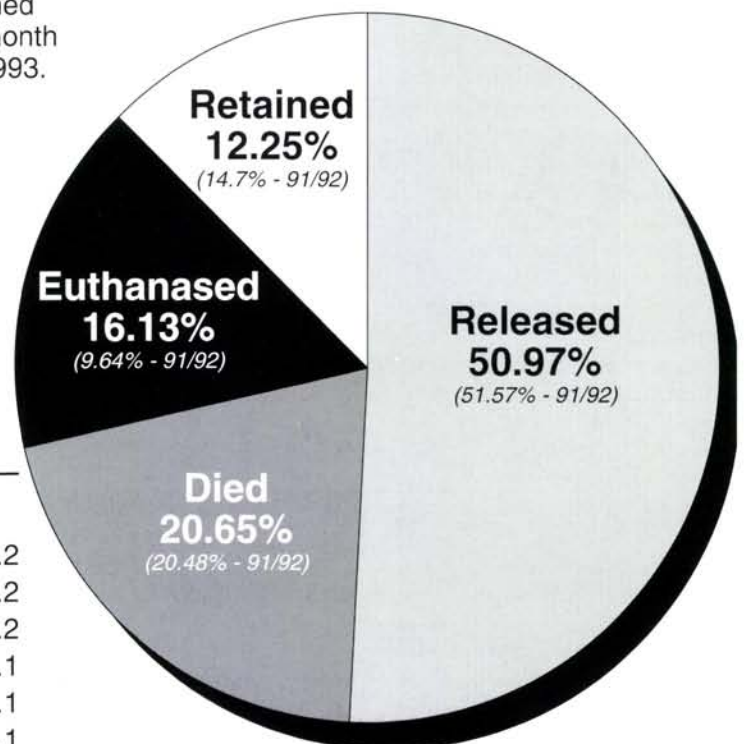
Mick Cunningham.
June 1994.

These statistics were compiled from reports returned by 18 of our rehabilitators and they cover the 12 month period from 1st September 1992 to 31st August 1993.

Wild Casualties	310
Domestic Bred*	25
Released	158
Died	64
Euthanased	50
Retained	38

Species Breakdown

Kestrel	96	Long Eared Owl	2
Tawny Owl	89	Goshawk	2
Sparrowhawk.....	53	Short Eared Owl.....	2
Little Owl	42	Hobby	1
Barn Owl	9	Red Kite	1
Common Buzzard	8	Honey Buzzard.....	1
Peregrine	4		



* Note: Domestic bred birds are now recorded as a separate category and not included in the graph.

TIRINGS

Sitting here in front of the keyboard my gaze wanders, as it so often does, to the window. My view overlooking the Gellilydan valley is one of great beauty, from the oak trees and dry-stone walls in the foreground to the timeless and majestic mountains in the distance, especially now as vibrant green gives way to the sombre hues of autumn, undoubtedly my preferred season. Mind you, it is regrettable to lose those bright, elysian days of summer and equally sad to note the ever-decreasing hours of daylight as the dimly depressive incessant rain, howling winds and the freezing cold, that scares the bravest of brass monkey sidles insidiously nearer. It has been said that the only people who are over-winter in Gwynedd are training to perambulate Iceland, those who are hiding from some indescribable crime against humanity or the Welsh, who don't seem to notice. Unfortunately, I am not native to these climes and so am trying to develop the metabolism and hibernation skills of a tortoise, without apparent success.

Of course, the real joy of September is that the moult is over, weights are down and it's time to get out there and fly. You may have begun re-training weeks ago or, like me, had to endure the frustration of a long and tedious moult, but by now you're likely to be well on your way to achieving the reward of hours of dedication and stress that comes with teetering along the path of our ancient tradition. For the experienced, the coming months offer the opportunity to renew acquaintance with your hawk, perfect hunting techniques, test your powers of exaggeration, acquire frost-bite and gain an intimate knowledge of the pneumoconiosis bacterium. But what of the beginner, how does the nascent austringer gain access to such delights?

All of us, no-matter your experience and skills as a falconer, was once a beginner. Whether seduced by a falconry display, mesmerised as a youth by the film 'Kes' (I wonder just how many of us had our first contact sitting in a school hall? Mr Loach may have a lot to answer for) or bored with budget-rigars and led to falconry through the classified advertisements in Cage and Aviary, we all of us came as a neophyte seeking enlightenment in the esoteric way of the falconer. But how exactly do you take up falconry? Let us consider the options.

You have just watched a stupendous display where a dashing handsome/stunningly beautiful person strode about an arena wearing the very best of the local country sports-wear shop can provide and exuding enough confidence to float the economy. With nary a stutter and bid their majestic birds to

cavort in aerial ecstasy and, as if by magic beyond the ken of mortal man, those sweet birds obeyed his, or her, command! Well, something like that. Enthralled by the show, you realise that **this is for you**. Here, at last, is a hobby worthy of your full attention, so, amazed at your temerity, you seek the giver-of-displays and ask that all-important question, "Ere mate, how do I get a bird like that then?"

Now, before all you falconers from the entertainment sector start biting my ankles let me say that I am not extracting any sort of body fluid out of falconry displays, or their originators. I do not have any problems with professional falconry (I have always felt the term falconry **parasite** a little harsh) as long as the individual falconer remains within the socially accepted bounds of morality. I have been, with my wife, the owner of a falconry school and have earned a meagre living as a display falconer. So I write with some knowledge of how the vastly impressionable public can sometimes react, especially those who see falconry as a possible pastime in which to 'dabble'. From experience I can state that, no-matter how much a display falconer should, or wants to, help with this sort of enquiry, there are only so many hours in the day and so, usually, a few addresses or a couple of leaflets are given. Of course, a tight schedule does not excuse the degree of rudeness that is so often experienced. Personally, I have always made time for members of the public to talk with me after a display as I see the display falconer as something of a 'Falconry ambassador', but then again, I've always had delusions of grandeur. Anyway, feverishly clutching your nice, gaily coloured leaflet for a falconry course where "you can learn to become a proficient, experienced falconer" in a single week-end for an extremely reasonable fee that only requires the loss of an arm and a leg, and a serious, subdued brochure with a decidedly 'leather-bound' feel inviting you to aspire to membership of one of the various falconry clubs, you toddle off home to tell your friends that you are going to be a Falconer. Relish this moment, if you continue in this direction it will not be long before you scarcely have any friends at all!

In a perfect world the seeker of truth would now go on a course, learn everything needed to enable the safe, correct training of their first hawk, acquire said bird from a reliable, honest breeder and join an organisation of like-minded seekers who, in a spirit of self-effacing altruism, welcome a fellow acolyte and freely impart the wisdom of the ages. Unfortunately, this is not a perfect world, far from it. In all probability a more realistic

scenario might well go thus:

After returning to the bosom of the family the aspiring austringer is persuaded by a wife/husband/parent/psychiatrist/priest that this is a very stupid idea. This is good. We are all aware of the time, money and dedication required and are probably sick of being told this, nevertheless it is true, and although there is much wisdom in the "more practitioners of falconry there, are the stronger our voice will be" faction, anyone not prepared to adhere to the high standards needed to keep hawks correctly should desist from further involvement. That also goes for any not willing to uphold a strict ethical code of practice, the so-called 'undesirable element' (who should dictate this standard and define the 'undesirable' is another can of worms we'll open some other day), but it is more relevant to discourage one individual who is unsuited to falconry than encourage ten who are.

Those that decide to continue the quest may now consider going on a course, a sensible choice but, upon learning that the private clinic advertising in 'Exchange and Mart' does not want to buy your kidney, you realise that you cannot afford the fees. Now you turn to a club for advice but, as you live on the planet Earth in the last years of the 20th century, you are abashed by the air of elitism you encounter and you decide to ask the bloke who lives down the road at No 42, with the Buzzard that screams all day and who **must** be an expert, to teach you everything you need to know. Trouble is, although you would really like a Goshawk all you can afford is a Kestrel, but that is alright because you can learn with the cheaper bird and if you lose it, or it dies, it doesn't matter because it didn't cost much anyway, and you can always get another one. Sussed.

Although there may be the tiniest modicum of exaggeration, this scenario is close enough to reality to make a grown falconer cry. It does happen, and will continue to do so until we face up to the future, accept our responsibilities and put our house in order. Reading this, I hope I have captured your attention. Next time, we'll look at some of the reasons for this utterly deplorable situation and investigate possible alternatives to the established convention. In the meantime, here is a falconry joke:

How many falconers does it take to tailbell a hawk?

Four. One to cast the bird, one to bell it, one to say "That's not how they did it in my day" and one to slag-off all the others at the Falconers' Fair.

Move over Ben Elton.

Mik Standing

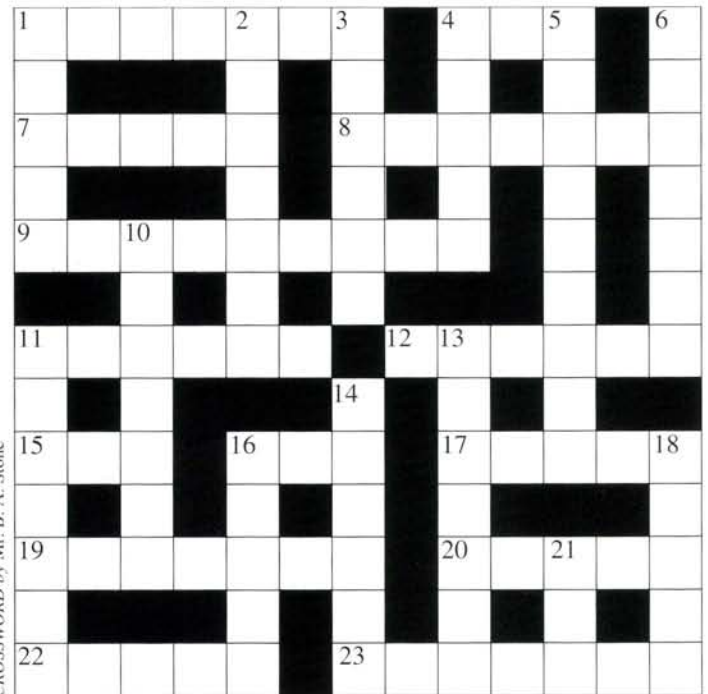
CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1 Masculine (7)
- 4 Vital Fluid (3)
- 7 Classical Place to Give Birth (5)
- 8 Without Fragrant Irises (2,5)
- 9 Subordinate Subject (9)
- 11 Lacking in Richness or Strength (6)
- 12 Utter (6)
- 15 Feminine (3)
- 16 Thrice (3)
- 19 Disgorged Following a Meal (7)
- 20 To turn or Set or Become Turned (5)
- 22 Items of Enticement (5)
- 23 Offspring in 7(7)

DOWN

- 1 Fashion (5)
- 2 Safety Line (7)
- 3 Falco Biarmicus (6)
- 4 To Hunt Game with a Gun (5)
- 5 Held in High Esteem, Worldwide (9)
- 6 Large Accipiter (7)
- 10 Strutting Females (7)
- 11 As Opposed to Surgery (7)
- 13 Accommodation (7)
- 14 Petty (6)
- 16 Attempts (5)
- 18 Numbers to Remember (5)
- 21 Away From the Wind (3)



CROSSWORD by Mr. B. A. Stone



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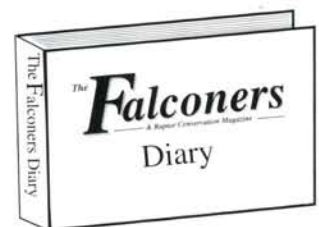
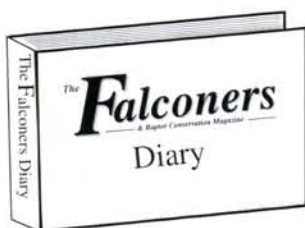
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Closing date for entries 31st December 1994.

Results announced in next issue.





• Buzzards

• ♂ Hen Harrier

Raptors of THE HEBRIDES



• Gyr Falcons,
• White phase
immatures

• Golden Eagle ♂ Hare

• ♂ & ♀ Hen Harriers

Scotland's Western Isles are some of the world's most beautiful, complemented, of course, by superb & accessible raptors. BUZZARDS (*Buteo buteo*) are usually widespread, the commoner bird of prey, wind hanging over flower rich machair or mountain, with MERLINS (*Falco columbarius*) especially numerous on the Outer Isles, & KESTREL (*Falco tinnunculus*) & HEN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) also do well here. The GOLDENEAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) has very good populations on islands like Mull, Rùm, Skye, Harris & Islay; & the reintroduction of the massive WHITE TAILED or SEA EAGLE (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) to the Isles continues well, with nearly 40 young fledged so far. PEREGRINES (*Falco peregrinus*) do not appear to be doing so well here, with persistent marine pollutants effecting their seabird prey, it is thought. However, the magnificent GYR FALCON (*Falco rusticolus*), usually immature white phase 'Greenland' Falcons, puts in fairly regular appearances on the northern Isles, & the Shetlands.

• Golden Eagles, Harris.

The outer Isles, especially the Uists & Lewis, have large flocks of Starlings & Twite that attract Merlins, & waders that also feed Peregrines. Rock Doves still exist here, increasingly 'diluted' by feral pigeons, but Peregrines hardly care!

♀ Merlin.



♂ Merlin, Harris



• Peregrine & Rock dove.

SPARROW & GOSHAWKS (*Accipiter nisus* & *gentilis*) do not often favour the largely treeless isles, whilst OSPREYS likewise are uncommon, unlike in their triumphant return to the mainland. (As is the case with the successfully reintroduced RED KITE (*M. milvus*)). The WHITE TAILED EAGLE largely tree nests in the Inner Hebrides, & largely preys on Hare & duck, such as Mallard & Eider; & some carrion.

PHILIP SNOW.



• White-tailed Eagles, Inner Hebrides. Adult & top, juvenile.

• Philip SNOW © 94

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HARRIS HAWK

There is not doubt that the Harris Hawk is extremely popular with many Austringers and especially so to those who are relatively new to the sport. Those who 'cut their teeth' on Goshawks have however, in the main, remained loyal to them. It's probably better if I say right at the beginning that I prefer to fly Goshawks. Right, that's probably got rid of everyone who flies a Harris. Now for those still reading I'll tell you why I prefer Goshawks. It is very simple. If a Goshawk is in yarak then when it sees quarry it tries to catch it, but most importantly to us, the spectators, it looks and flies as though it is trying to catch it. The flight is therefore exciting.

The flight of the Harris' is different.



Deceptively different. It does not always look as though it is trying to catch the quarry - even when it is trying and is subsequently successful. Now perhaps the remaining Harris' owners who are still reading will see that I am not knocking the Harris' and suggesting that it is incapable and doesn't catch anything. Far from it. I've seen some very good flights with Harris'. As the purpose of flying a Hawk is to see a good flight it follows that the enjoyment of the flight is enhanced when the Hawk is visibly more determined to succeed rather than where the Hawk appears content to merely glide after the quarry. It takes all sorts of people to make the world however, and some Austringers may be content to watch this type of flight or else be unable to improve matters. This may be for very sound reasons and I accept that. The most obvious benefits of the Harris' over its main rivals in the popularity stakes, the Goshawk or to a lesser extent the Redtail, are that they are easily trained, need little or no manning and no maintenance manning which is a necessity for most Goshawks especially those only flown at weekends. Also, they are usually very obedient and rarely become spooked, all giving the relative newcomer to the sport the clear impression that the Harris' is the bees knees and the Goshawk is a damn nuisance. Of course this view is not only held by newcomers but also by some experienced Austringers who prefer Harris' for a variety of reasons. I have no argument with them. They have the experience to know what they want and what

time etc they have available.

The problem - or main disadvantage, would perhaps be a better description - of having a Harris' on the fist of a beginner, as I and many others see it, is this - people with little or no knowledge of Hawking are coming into the sport and as a result of being given the opportunity to see several different Hawks flown, whether through visiting a Falconry centre or attending a field meeting or whatever, then decide that a Harris' would suit them, because they are so easy. They are able to start Hawking (taking quarry) a year or so earlier than would have been the case had they followed the 'old' scheme of learning the management with a Kestrel or Buzzard.

That's OK provided they don't subsequently want to fly something else such as a Goshawk or Spar. Why? Because invariably these will then be found to be extremely difficult. Experienced Austringers of course, already know that the accipiters are difficult. But they

Austringer won't realise this and so the majority of Harris' flown in this country don't do all that well and are not all that impressive. But this does not stop the Harris' from being obedient.

Now the point of all this. After proving to himself that he is now an Austringer many of these Harris' owners decide a season or two later that they want the 'challenge' (it goes through me when I hear people say that they fly Hawks for a challenge) of flying something more difficult - usually a Goshawk. After a couple of months during which their hair turns white and/or the wife leaves home, (celebration!) he decides to give up because (a) It's un-trainable! (b) It's an imprint (c) I've changed my job and no longer have time for a Goshawk, or (d) a combination of all three or even a different dodge altogether.

So, he returns to the Harris' because it's so easy. What a pity. In the majority of cases therefore, the Austringer has restricted himself to flying only one species simply because he tried to gain experience quickly or in the wrong order. Some might say he tried to run before he could walk. If you think I'm wrong have a look at how many of those who started with a Harris' Hawk later decided that they had to try an Accipiter and see how many went on to successfully fly one and how many went back to the Harris' Hawk.

Now as I'm sure some readers will take the wrong view, that is, that I'm anti-Harris' I will repeat I am not. I will also repeat that I prefer

Goshawks. I have seen good flights with Harris' and there are some excellent examples of Harris' in the

Friend or Foe?

will usually have had the advantage of progressing along that 'old' method of training a couple of other Hawks such as Kestrels and Buzzards before having a Goshawk or Spar thereby having at least some experience of a Hawk that needs patient work in order to

be flown satisfactorily before moving on to something more difficult, whereas the Harris' generally don't need much work or patience.

If our beginners either start with a Harris' or have one after very little experience they will almost certainly train it easily. They will also almost certainly catch something with it. They probably won't catch an awful lot with it in the first season unless they have the help of a good Austringer looking after their shoulder. This is not the Harris' fault of course, but simply their lack of experience and this will hopefully be cured in time. They are likely to be flying it in too high a condition, although that is much better than in too low a condition. An inexperienced



country. They are usually good, obedient Hawks which are capable of a much more varied type of Hawking than is the Goshawk. The problem is not with the Hawk. It is with the Austringer. Will we find it one day - if the number of Harris' being flown continues to increase - that the art of Hawk training is lost? I hope not. I will relate something I heard a Harris' owner say at a club meeting. "To fly a Harris' Hawk should not require a license. Production of a bus pass should suffice."

Oh, what do I fly? Well, at the time of writing I am flying a Goshawk and er - a Harris' Hawk.

What do you think? Please send your comments in to the Editor.

AN EAGLE FOR ALL OCCASIONS



Tara is a four year old Bonelli's Eagle. It was a strange day when I went to pick her up. I had always wanted a Bonelli's Eagle and I would have preferred a male, mainly because of the type of land over which I could hunt. It is quite tight woodland and I thought the larger female would have some difficulty coping with it. I chose the smallest, darkest bird from two that had been bred and raised together. The young eagle was quite docile to start with and allowed me to fit Aylmeri anklets and jesses. Her moods were very changeable though, one minute sitting on the fist quietly, the next throwing herself off with the persistence of an unmanned Goshawk. Over a period of three to four months she quietened down and took to

the hood. Training Tara was also a battle of nerves. When flying short distances she was very obedient but also appeared to be annoyed with herself for doing something she didn't want to. Her flight was strong and very controlled for a young bird and soon we had progressed to a rabbit lure, her first attempt was interesting to say the least, taking the lure in fine style, mantling over it with her hackles raised and taking around half an hour to begin feeding. Soon she was chasing rabbits with some success and actually took her first in a flight from the fist, she was rewarded with as much as she could eat. Although a large bird she is a very slow eater, choosing small beakfuls of food, very hawk like.

Now, at four years old, she is still a handful to fly, not just carrying all 5lbs 2oz of her, but also reading her moods and serving her with quarry to keep her occupied. She has, on the other hand, become very steady, hoods well and travels in the car. When hunting, if not being flown from the fist, she follows on well through the trees, even in quite thick and awkward woodland, showing great agility for a large bird.

This year she has been kept loose in an open fronted flight, rather than on her block and it seems to have made her more steady and relaxed. As with most birds of prey, I hope that in the next few years she will continue to gain in her confidence and enjoy hours out in the countryside.



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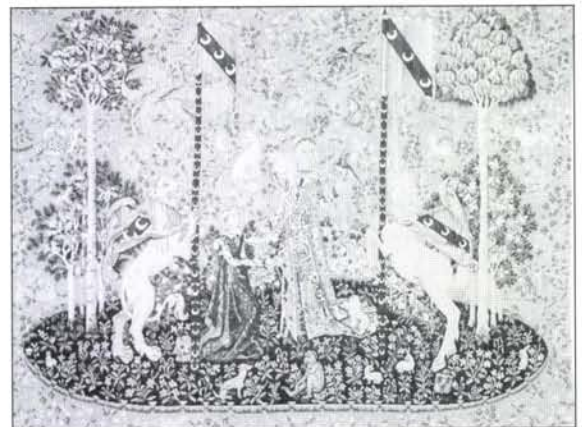
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DEPARTURE FOR THE HUNT



THE LADY AND THE UNICORN

Crow Hawking In Northumberland

Text & Illustrations by
Liam O'Broin

Vast and panoramic, a place of total openness, the Northumbrian landscape is spectacular. It is dominated continuously by its skies, ever changing and huge in proportion to the land mass, they rarely fail to impress. It is August, and after several hours of heavy rain the skies have cleared to great banks of cumulus clouds. Overhead they block out the sun intermittently sending long sweeping shadows over the rolling countryside. Across this almost treeless landscape one can see for miles into a blue distant haze. The coarse grass and rushes which cover the surface of the rain sodden turf flash brightly in the perpetual wind. The wind here also dominates. It moves like a brush across a canvas, mixing, changing colours and hues, as it paints the mood of the place. My horse Toby shifts and lifts his head into the wind. Two other riders are in our group. They stand, also facing into the oncoming breeze, almost motionless. One of the party has a falcon on his left gloved fist. Dr Nick Fox murmurs something to the rider near him. His wife Barbro points outwards to our right. "Crows, there" she continues "they've just dipped in behind the ridge". Her voice is measured, calm and low. Seconds later two black shapes come up from behind the ridge about two hundred yards away. As they dip and disappear and emerge again they almost resemble two black plastic bags floating aimlessly in the wind. The two crows go about their aimless drifting. Unaware, they are being watched and very carefully at that. Nick Fox waits. A slip must be perfect. Even for a falcon of Aurora's size and speed the timing needs to be exact. The crows hang momentarily in sight over the ridge only to disappear again out of view. This is nerve-wrecking. A slip at the wrong moment could mean anything, but particularly failure for the falcon. Of the endless possibilities, Aurora, when unhooded, will herself choose her strategy. However, her falconer, will choose the situation which will give a young falcon all the probabilities of success. We can't see what the ground is like on the other side of the ridge. Also the ground rises after an indeterminable distance to a high hill further back. The falconer does not want a down wind slip, it must be upwind. There the landscape with an uninterrupted view dips down and away from us. All conversation has ceased. Nothing is instinctively done to alarm the crows. My

lungs fill with the fresh clear air as it forces its way down blowing full into my face. I watch a long cool shadow sweep diagonally across the nearest farmstead perhaps two miles away. There is a brilliant flash of pale golden ochre tinted with green as the passing cloud allows the sun to light up a late summer meadow cut to the quick. The horses, as if sensing the oncoming drama, are now tense with alertness. The hooded falcon on Nick Fox's fist is Aurora, a Gyr/peregrine cross of the year. She has been hacked for three weeks along with six other falcons of various varieties all of whom shared a common purpose. Being hard penned and in perfect condition they were given the total freedom of these vast boundless Northumbrian skies. For all that time Aurora had chased her companions high into the elements. She quickly learned to mount up on her tail. Using the perpetual winds and thermals she played endless games. Mounting and waiting on over the sweeping terrain she would stoop at any curious thing that moved below. Aerial mock battles were played out as, unfettered, the falcons hung in the wind a thousand feet high above the landscape they dominated. Each evening and as often as they liked the young falcons careered in to rest, preen and feed at the hack hut. Undisturbed they, unknowingly and at play, developed into superb athletes, but without that sense of urgency, that drive, to chase and kill for food. Now that short but crucial period as a playful juvenile was gone. Set to do her business, she would fly at crows for at least two months here in the wild border region and then at houbara and desert hare in Dubai. Aurora now unhooded was doing precisely that. The crows, drifting unconcerned, upwind, had come up from behind the ridge. They were making a direct flight towards a line of pine trees across our view and to our left. Everyone knew their part from now. The landscape had been looked at, studied and possibilities and probabilities discussed. As Aurora was unhooded, Barbro and I rode towards the pines shouting and waving. I could feel my horse's excitement as the action unfolded. The crows, as

was the plan, immediately began to beat it into the wind and away from us. Aurora had watched these last few seconds and sized up her strategy - she took off. As the crows ringed up I could see their instant reaction on the sight of the falcon. The angle of ascent changed dramatically. The crows no longer had that limpid drifting plastic bag look. Now they were way up in their scramble for height - it was urgent and direct. Aurora, however, was not in tail pursuit, but she had taken a wide arc - well out to their left. The falcon had thus gained momentum and some height before the crows realised what was happening. For their part the pines were obviously out of bounds, so up was the only way out. Aurora was pumping into the wind and turning the crows forcing them up. All three of them sailed at a very acute angle into a blue sky patched with great white and grey masses of continuously changing shapes hanging, rolling above us. Even in those first few seconds I could see Aurora's technique and the power she could apply. She now pushed the crows to their limit and all three, the falcon and crows, hung like tiny dots in the abyss. My horse pranced and



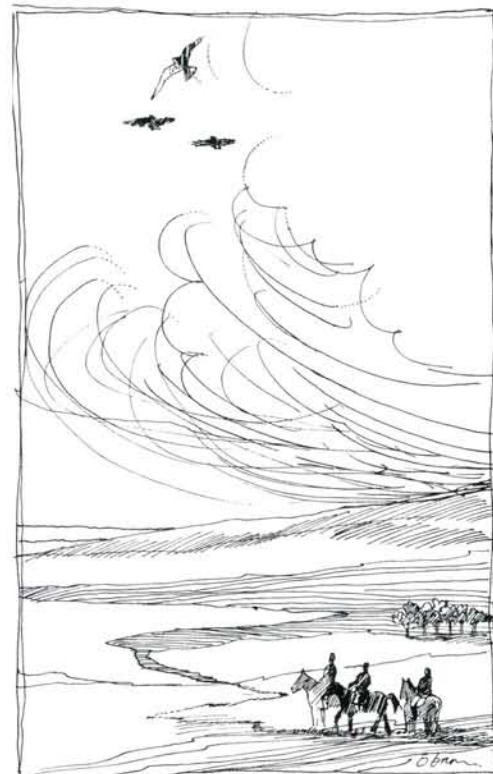
wheeled about dying for a chase. It was euphoric - this place, its vastness, my horse's instant response to every touch. Above us the falcon over her crows began to drift with the wind across the sky. There in that place high above us a deadly battle of nerves was taking place. Aurora had gained her pitch and could dominate her quarry. Above them she was in control and could wait. They continued to drift and seemed to make an arc, losing height? But instead they traced the dome of the sky and for a brief moment I felt I could see myself beneath and the earth was a flat disc and we were on the edge of it!

One of the crows separated as they turned back into the wind and drifted directly over us. Aurora held her place and didn't move. The crow's move was a diversion, a trick and it failed. The falcon was master of the situation and held her nerve. Suddenly the second crow lost its nerve as Aurora made a mock shallow stoop. The crow plummeted to earth like a stone. The falcon knew exactly what to do. Now all those endless days of play were turned to deadly use. The stoop was magnificent, they came downwind directly towards us. Yet the crow was going to make the pines! We dashed, heels dug into flanks, shouting, yelling towards the trees. As the chase levelled out into the trees I reined in about thirty yards out. The other two were practically in the pines as quarry and falcon in a deadly tail chase literally wove in and out of the pine tops. Any attempt by the crow putting into the trees was quickly seen to by the yelling and shouting. And Aurora was not giving up. She persisted, making incredible sharp turns until the second crow appeared out of nowhere and exposed itself purposely. Aurora, now frustrated by her efforts to foot the crow she chased, turned her attentions in mid-air and streaked out after the diversion. The second crow went off downwind gaining as much height as it could. With the falcon in earnest pursuit both disappeared behind the ridge from where the two crows had emerged so nonchalantly earlier. Then Aurora reappeared alone, but high up, her dignity unscathed heading back towards us. The lure was thrown out for her and seconds later she landed in front of us - not even breathless. The weather, as always, dominated each new move and decision. The short sunny spell we had enjoyed ended abruptly as ominous clouds gathered, packed tightly, in the west. The rain came and poured out of the heavens for that and the next day. That first Sunday afternoon was a casual affair. We had simply hacked from the farm watching for quarry. Today, Wednesday, a green coat day, was a buzz of preparation and contained excitement. The ground was well into the hills and at least an hours drive away. While Nick was on the phone giving advance notice to landowners, Maria, their affable Swedish groom, had been working from very early that morning. Barbro's Arab gelding, Henry, is by any standards a very handsome horse. With the extra attention he had received for this day he was truly beautiful. The rest of the horses, elegant

though they were, paled into the background in his presence.

A green coat day was formal riding gear with the Northumberland crow hawkers emblazoned buttons on green jackets. Guests got away with rat-catcher. I had borrowed mine from Michael Comyns, my erstwhile editor and former whipper-in of the Galway Blazers. "My God Mick", I exclaimed at the sight of a pair of heavy cavalry breeches and leather gaiters to match. "I've never worn the likes of these before - are you sure its rat-catcher?" "Not my fault, O'Broin, if you've had a deprived childhood", came the laced reply. Meanwhile the paraphernalia and equipment, item by item, required for four horses and three falcons was checked. The sum total is considerable yet in order of things essential. While all this goes on the daily ritual for the falcons is unchanged and all have been weathered and bathed. Claudia, a Gyr/saker Falcon of the year, will come on this trip along with Flash, a white Gyr/peregrine, and of course Aurora.

The amount of suitable land on which to hunt crows needs to be large in terms of acreage, or, to be more realistic, miles! Goodwill with landowners is paramount. To obtain an area of, say, one hundred and fifty square miles which is divided and subdivided by landowners and roads is a test of pure determination and diplomatic endurance. Once ground is gained it can be very easily lost - so it is never taken for granted. We journeyed north through border villages and reached our ground by two in the afternoon. It was a dry warm day with a good stiff wind and rolling clouds. The good organisation proved itself. We were saddled and off by three, with Claudia to get first crack. The sheer logistics of all this were awesome to all but the stout hearted. But what of the falcons? Here was Claudia hooded, her light plumage almost white splashed with sepia. She had all the looks of power and speed. To catch a crow in August; it didn't begin at her weathering this morning, although that was a vital part. This day's hawking actually began in March. Through constant and constant association with the falconer, Reiver, her grey Gyr semen donor and her female parent - were brought into breeding condition. Then in April the act of consummation and the patient wait through incubation and her emergence from protective egg into the world of falconry. Through May and June the diet and weighing and watchful development to her freedom of the skies in late July at hack. That was the penultimate stage in the development of her independence and prowess. Now in August her short but careful training is complete. We had hardly ridden our horses a mile when Claudia's first crows of the day were sighted. We had, despite temptations, waited for an upwind slip and were now rewarded. Unhooded, Claudia lost no time in spotting her



"A deadly battle of nerves....."

crow. The ground being good and dry, we could enjoy our ride as well. She was every bit as good as Aurora at mounting for height and in less than a minute we were charging about this way, then that way! The chase was changing constantly as Claudia pushed her crows up and now hung over them. I could count at least seven of them and they seemed to be miles up! They drifted, or rather this time raced with the wind only to dash upwind again even higher. It was extremely difficult to make out falcon from crows. We were just four riders - double that number and it becomes very dodgy with people looking up while riding in all directions. Toby, hesitant always to take swampy ground, was into his own on the dry turf. A crow lost its nerve and raced for ground while the main batch belting into the wind were lost in cloud. Then I saw the crow come down and pitch in ahead of me. Claudia, only a split second behind, streaked in at eye level and threw up. I could now see nothing except clumps of rushes, we all rode straight into them yelling. Then incredibly Claudia came back in and landed short of her crow, which was thirty or forty yards ahead! It refused to become airborne, she lunged at it. The crow jinked aside easily. What happened next proved beyond any shadow of a doubt the intelligence of these hybrids. She learned quickly, very, very, quickly! The crow again refused our attempts to get it into the air. Claudia turned her back on the crow and went up into the wind on her tail. She had learned, by quick mistake, that she had no power in a thirty yard dash! The falcon took a wide arc out and away from the mayhem. It was quite difficult for us to mark a crow determined to hide in knee long rushes, but now it was up and away downwind. Claudia for her part timed her turn perfectly. She was able to

watch us by taking a wide arc, turning as the crow got up, she came streaking in at head height. Now she had momentum - yet it was the landscape which thwarted her efforts. The crow put into a clump of bushes no higher than a rider and horse some two hundred yards away, and between us and the crow? Four strands of very formidable barbed wire and no gate! As we looked on helplessly my heart sank for Claudia who was already upwind again for a third attempt. The whole episode had gone on for, I would guess, some fifteen minutes every single second filled with excitement.

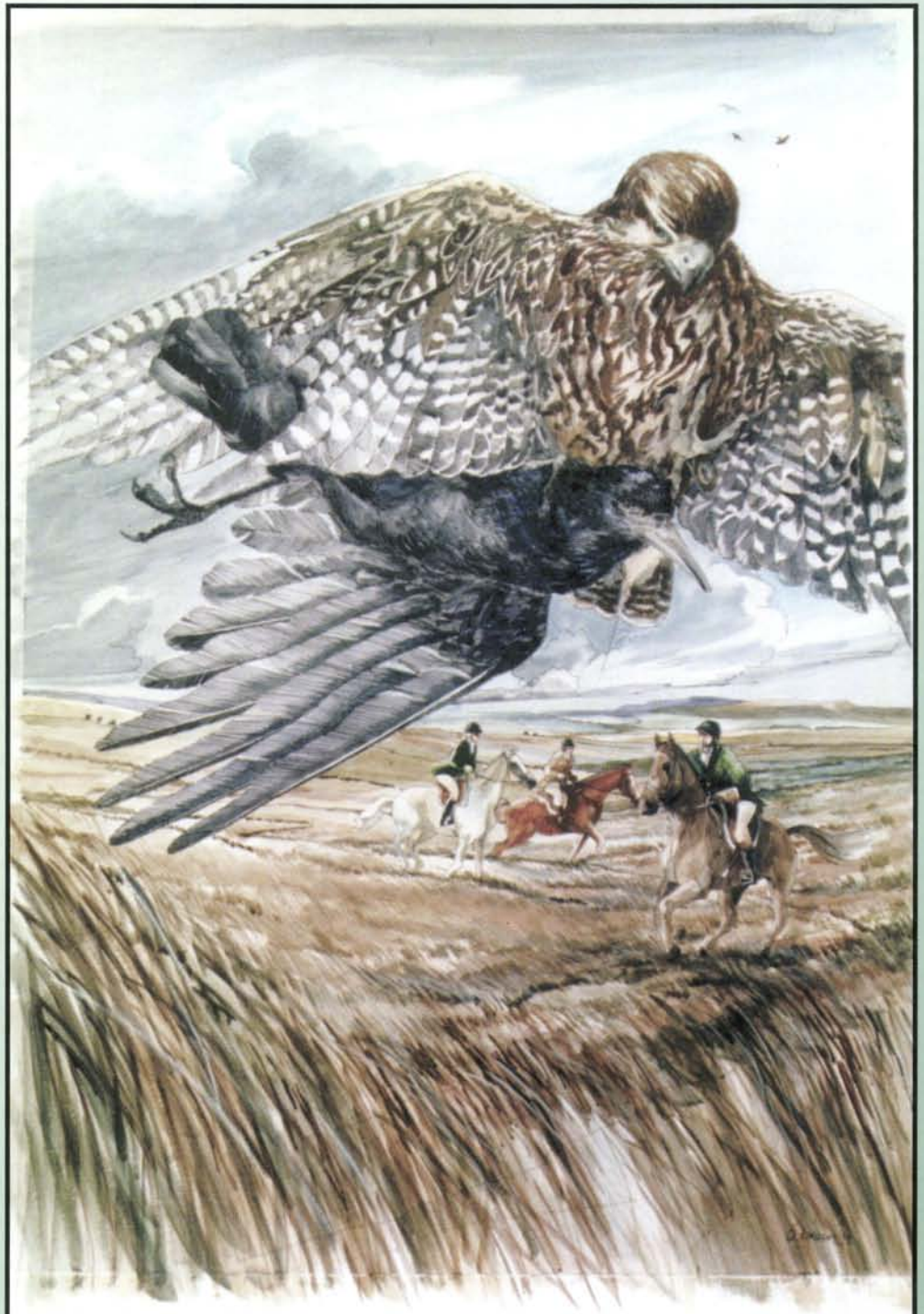
Her efforts must be rewarded and were. A dead crow from Aurora's kill on Tuesday was thrown out, high up, as near as the falconer could get to the real thing she so richly deserved. Claudia had all that it took for crow hawking.

The farms are quite isolated here so self-sufficiency is aimed at as the ideal. Not surprising to see a wind generator then on a small mound neatly fenced off. It was no more than eight or ten feet in height and not big enough to be unsightly in the surroundings. We had a long ride after that with rather few sightings of crows. Some were too far down wind or if the flight went the way it looked it might - we would not be able to ride after it. So the ground and the slip had to interlock. We knew also from our landscape that if we spotted crows our next flight could be a very long one. We were now separating, sometimes fanning out quite a distance from the falconer hoping to spot our quarry.

The ground although firm was also dangerous. Long narrow drainage cuttings, overgrown with coarse grass and rushes, ran in parallel patterns with the fall of the landscape. We were on the side of a long sloping hill. My attention was taken away from picking my ground by a shout, I looked up to see Aurora streak away at a very large crow. They are tenacious, rugged, hardy birds these mountain crows, some live up to twenty-five years - so the adults are hardened campaigners and cunning in the extreme. Falconer and mount had come over a low hillock and surprised the crow - the slip was quick. Then they were off - down at an angle towards the valley. Everyone was away, I was about fifty yards behind Nick and it was fast! So fast, I was not watching Aurora or her crow - at this pace staying on was more important. My last glimpse of them was Aurora and her crow locked in a deadly tail chase and Nick Fox in hot pursuit. In those vital seconds I lost a stirrup - Toby was belting it for all his worth. We overshot a dry gully and consequently when I did get control we were left with a jump which he refused. Everyone had now disappeared.

I next saw Nick's horse, riderless, come galloping downhill! Remounted, I rode up through short heather to the top of the hill - surprised to find Adam walking towards me. "Aurora is dead". I had asked my question first "Where's Nick?" I was concerned. Adam spoke very quickly, it's graphic clarity both reassuring and devastating. Adam spoke again, "The windmill; she hit it." There it was, now static on its grassy fenced mound. I was incredulous. Barbro looked away from us totally stunned. Adam continued even as I said, "but I thought Nick had come off." "No, Aurora chased the crow uphill from the valley. The crow was very hard pressed - it came right around the farmyard, made straight for the windmill, flew around it with Aurora right on her - it was working and the crow and Aurora hit the blade!" It had been a long, long battle. Aurora was

clearly never at any stage giving up. Her pursuit was in deadly earnest. Although not a ringing flight, it was more than made up for by the brilliant chase - most of which was at eye level. Under these circumstances good horsemanship and thinking ahead all the time had resulted in Nick turning a hard pressed crow away from the only cover, some trees a long way out. He had literally out-paced the crow. Then the quarry had taken the difficult way, yet its only option, of flying uphill with Aurora undeterred pumping after it. Before I left we drank a toast to Aurora, a sad end to a brilliant young falcon. But even as I write this now in June, Aurora's new brothers and sisters are out at hack. The horses for their part are doing their road work and plans are well on the way for falcons to catch crows in August!





Aurora, a female inter-mewed Hobby.

Whether or not you have a liking for small birds of prey the Hobby is perhaps the most striking in feature and physique and cannot help but have you pause a moment to admire it.

To fly these stunning miniatures requires all the skills of the larger falcons and some degree of experience with either merlin or sparrowhawk. They have never been noted for their performance in the falconry field, but then that's not surprising when you consider that they are exclusively migratory and the experience of flying them simply wasn't available to latter day falconers in this country.

As with all raptors, that has changed. Domestic bred birds of prey of infinite variety and species has meant there is the opportunity to look at the potential of them all. The Hobby that we fly at present is an intermewed female called Aurora. She was purchased from Dennis Blacktops project which has had much success with this falcon.

She was not bought to hunt with, but to enter into the display work of our falconry section at the Scottish Deer Centre. Something of an enigma, no-one could be sure how she might perform. (there were no known flying weights) or whether she could handle the Scottish winters. I was already familiar with these falcons, having watched them closely in South Africa. Getting up at 4 o'clock each morning, I would get into the car, which at that hour was like a refrigerator. My good friend Edmund and I would make our way to the precincts of the University grounds to watch Hobbies arrive from their mountain roost and hunt in the cool, early morning air, high above Stellenbosch. These Hobbies were intent on catching insects and could be observed quite easily as they darted and twisted in the clear sky above. It was on one of these mornings that I saw a Hobby take a swift.

Swifts hunt at exactly the same time in the morning as the Hobbies. The falcons by en large ignoring one another, which may well have been a reflection on the abundance of food. At any

time there would be 3-4 Hobbies within the same air-space. With their intricate manoeuvring around the skies they swept through with bat-like determination searching out insects. So one devouring insects simply didn't see one of the Hobbies make a move towards it. The falcon, aware that an opportunity had presented itself, accelerated towards the swift and bound neatly to it. With its quarry firmly secured, it turned immediately for the mountains and flew back in that direction, which was a good 8 miles away, as the crow flies.

By 7 am, it was becoming so hot (between 75f080f) that Hobbies simply vacated the sky. They probably departed for the cooler climes of the mountain range where it would be possible to sit out the intense heat of the African day.

In the late afternoon we would drive to the outskirts of Cape Town to watch some stunning hunting by European Hobbies on swifts and swallows. A lumber yard with tree trunks lying on the ground was the perfect place for insects. High up in Gum trees that surrounded the yard were perched 6 Hobbies. They would arrive at exactly the same time every evening and, as if by telepathy, would depart in the same way. Their method of hunting was quite simple. Insects were abundant around the piles of wood which naturally attracted the swifts and swallows. These would skim and zip through the clouds of insects twisting and turning, lazily flying, then speeding into their never ending food source.

The Hobbies would be magnetised by the insect catchers. The Gum trees at 40 - 50 feet high were the perfect vantage point. Closing their wings they would high dive from the branches as if steering a heat seeking course to any of the birds in front. So may of these hunts were abortive. The

Miniature Marvels

swallows and swifts had all the flying skills necessary to combat their eternal enemy.

So attractive was this quarry to the Hobby that given the choice to hunt insects, which were in swarms and freely available, they chose, instead, to obsessively hunt the swifts and swallows. On one of my evenings observations I watched one of the 6 Hobbies make 20 concerted efforts to hunt swallows, finally being successful.

In the heat of the African evening the weight loss to the Hobby would have been minimal and one wondered why they didn't choose to take the insect food source which must have been easier to fill up on. The Hobbies I was watching had their nighttime roosts high in the mountains. Here, the intense and sometimes severe cold would account for their need to take bulk feeding of a high protein level, which would sustain them and give them high energy levels for the following days hunting.

The quality of flight that Hobbies provide is one of pure speed and brilliance. This is exactly how Aurora performs and she can give some dramatic and exciting demonstrations of her powers whilst chasing the lure. She has not yet been put to the test as to whether she will hunt co-operatively in a falconry sense and one wonders just how she might perform as, there are traits of her wild counterparts in her which often come to the fore. She is such an accomplished flier that for her, recreational flying is imperative and in this respect she is as watchable as her wild cousins.



BY DIANA DURMAN-WALTERS

A Helping Hand

Dear David & Lyn

With the advent of de-registration, it is obvious that losers of personal birds may well have difficulty in being re-united with their lost bird, even if it is recovered safe and well by an honest finder. Raptor Rescue members have taken in an average of thirty to forty such birds in the past few years, and we now envisage that number increasing. Naturally, we would like to return such birds to their proper owner, as the care of lost domestic birds is not really part of our remit. We are, of course, willing and able to assist in such circumstances.

Whilst we do not propose to set up any formal register to deal with this problem, we do intend to initiate internal procedures to help our members, and losers, to resolve as many problems as possible. As this has not been fully discussed by our committee, I cannot publish full details as yet. What I can say is that it must certainly be worth any loser contacting either myself or Paul Beecroft, so we may help if possible. I can be contacted on 0992 587711 Ext 1308 or 0992 505327, or Paul can be contacted via this magazine.

Yours sincerely
Michael Robins
LRK/Chairman

WRONG START

Dear David and Lyn,

I am writing to you concerning the letter in your magazine which was written by Biff Norman. All I can say is brilliant! This person really knows what (s)he is talking about. I have seen in the past couple of years quite a large amount of very poorly trained and highly incompetent so called falconers. These people drag falconry's name down in the mud, and very importantly end up injuring their birds. However, most of the blame does not lie with them, but with the people who taught them, the 'falconers' who see the easy chance to make a quick £30.75. This is not on!

What I feel needs to be done is as Biff said to form a guild or at least standardise a teaching procedure. A possible way of doing this is to make up quite a complex and possibly difficult test for which the instructors should take. This would stop poor teaching and give potential falconers the best possible start. Of course many of the long-lasting and respected falconers such as Jemima, Geoff Dalton and Ashley, need not take the test as their knowledge and love for falconry has been proved time and time again.

Yours sincerely,
Alex Heming

CAPTIVE BREEDING REGISTRATION

Dear David & Lyn

Captive breeding plays a major role in falconry today and as more falconers are beginning to turn to breeding as a way of supplying themselves and friends with cheaper birds it is important that the bloodlines that exist in this country are not lost or ruined. This applies especially since the DOE have chosen to abandon their role as overseers to captive breeding of non-indigenous species. Most breeders seem quite happy with the change as it saves them a few pounds each breeding season, and because of this they are reluctant to enrol their birds with the new registers that are being set up around the country. This will make it increasingly difficult to assess the origin of captive bred stock in future.

As a breeder myself, I feel that the importance of registration or some kind of official documentation relating to the origins of captive stock can not be stressed highly enough. The time I have spent building up a completely unrelated breeding collection will not go to waste, and I am sure that other private collectors who have endeavoured to ensure their stock is pure, will continue to do so, and by retaining some kind of pedigree will allow captive breeding to continue to supply a source of viable falcons and hawks for use in the art of falconry.

Inbreeding in certain species can result in early deaths and so reduces the amount of birds available for breeding programs within

the UK. This in turn could result in it becoming necessary to begin taking raptors from the wild to bolster existing breeding programs and this is one route falconry does not want to take. The lack of pedigree documentation has always puzzled me as people will not part with £150 for a dog without pedigree papers yet will happily part with £1,000 for a bird of prey that has no documentary proof of good breeding. The BFC has started its own pedigree records as have some other clubs and this is definitely a step in the right direction. Such schemes should not be allowed to fizzle out. Too many people think that breeding falcons and hawks is about putting opposite sexes together in an aviary and then selling the off-spring. This is a very irresponsible stand-point. The future of falconry in this country may rely on the continued success of captive breeding. It is in our hands to ensure falconry survives to be enjoyed by future generations. The problem of explaining this subject is that the consequences of non-registration and lack of pedigree may not be apparent for many years. Yet it lies with us to do something now to ensure these problems will not be encountered in the future.

I am sure that all falconers feel the same as I do where the future of our sport is concerned. By supporting your local bird register you could well be ensuring the continued well-being of falconry in the British Isles.

Yours sincerely
R Gerard

ENOUGH COWBOYS

Dear David & Lyn

I am writing with regard to Biff Norman's letter in the last issue of the Falconers Magazine. As a practising falconer of twenty plus years, experience, I wholeheartedly endorse her sentiments. Whilst giving would-be falconers the option of a five or ten day course as a bare minimum, if I am ever asked to give anything less than these options I refuse for the very reasons stated by Biff in her letter.

If I am asked to do a one day introduction I will only undertake this on the strict understanding that it is only an insight and no more. There are enough cowboys out there and as falconry is my livelihood as well as a consuming passion, what is the point of catering to someone who can only afford sixty to seventy pounds for a one day course if then they go out and buy a bird, which will invariably suffer, and bring the sport into disrepute into the bargain.

Yours sincerely
Julian Stevens.

WIVES & MOTHERS

Dear Falconers Magazine

Have any of you ever thought what it's like to be a falconer's Wife or Mother?? Well, - I'll tell you - it's HELL. Does anyone else innocently go into the freezer for some fish fingers and find it full of horrible dead animals with horrible dead eyes, looking at you?

Anyone else gone to make a cake and found that the family falconer has 'got at' the scales? I mean it isn't easy balancing a cup of sugar on Astroturf.

I will gloss over the favourite leather waistcoat that mysteriously turned into jesses (he was young at the time) - but I can't forgive him giving our collie a nervous breakdown trying to train him to be a pointer - or the time I went to work and inadvertently pulled a dead day-old chick out of my pocket - they think I'm into Voodoo and Black Masses - or the time I sat in a very posh hairdressers and noticed a very strong smell of ferret emanating from my jumper.

They should build homes for female relatives of Falconers.

Signed
A Falconer's Mother

TIGHT TIGHTS AND LEATHER TASSLES

Dear David & Lyn

I have been asked by Michael Robins of Raptor Rescue, to put a piece in the Falconers Magazine about a weekend I did in aid of their charity.

Poulton-Le-Fylde is a market town three miles inland of Blackpool on the West coast. It has a market square with stocks, whipping post and fish slabs. Looking down the square from the stocks it is flanked either side by shops, a police station and two banks. Looking down the square from the stocks St Chads Church can be seen, stood on a raised mound with a perimeter wall and trees in the grounds and in Spring a vast carpet of multi-coloured crocus.

This being the 900th anniversary of St Chads, a Medieval Weekend was planned for the 18th and 19th of June. I was asked to take part with my Red-tail Hawk Jess.

All the stalls were allowed to collect for their chosen charity, so I chose Raptor Rescue. Now to dress as a Medieval Falconer is easier said than done. For one thing my legs are not built for shorts let alone tights.

The top was not hard to make. I just butchered a leather jacket and dyed a shirt green. My footwear was a pair of high ankle boots trimmed with leather tassels. Trousers were a different cup of tea. Could I find any suitable for the job? Not on your nelly! I started looking in January but I could not find any baggy enough to hang over my boots. They were all too narrow. Two weeks before the big event, my wife Sandra was in town and came across a pair. She bought them and as she was leaving the owner of the shop said "If they ask where you got them, don't tell them" The price of these trousers was the extortionate price of 95p, and brand new at that. The day arrived and we put up the stockade

which was 17foot long by 8foot wide. A tent was used at one end for protection from the sun for Jess. This was not needed as it was cold, windy and overcast. Straw bails made a perimeter boundary and we were all set to go. Hung from the tent was two lures, one fur and one feather. A board was made up with hoods, jesses, swivel and leash. Two Falconers magazines were open at hood making and furniture. My collection box was strategically placed with a piece on Jess and a request for 20p if they wanted a phot with Jess.

With some Raptor Rescue information pamphlets laid out the money started to role in and the pamphlets disappeared. I could not believe the interest shown and the money given on the first day.

Jess was two thirds through her first moult and behaved impeccably on both days. We had people eight deep all the first day and children came in the enclosure to have a photo taken next to Jess. At the other end of the street was a small fair which played Walt Disney music all day, but come Sunday they had gone much to our disappointment as it attracted people from other parts of the town.

At the end of the first day I could not believe my eyes as I counted the money - £120.00. I recounted just to make sure and it was right. Better weather was forecast

for Sunday, so what would we take then? Alas, it was quieter and without the music the atmosphere was not there, but we took £83.05, so I was more than pleased because I thought that we would take about £40.00 over the two days. The majority of coins were £1, 50p and 20p's. People looked in their purses and just tipped it in the box, on the final count we took £203.05. After I counted it, I wrote to my local paper and

put a big thank you in to all the generous people and children.

I will end on one touching moment when a blind lady asked to have a photo of herself with Jess. After the shot I took hold of her hand and gently stroked Jess on her breast. The lady asked what it was and I said "That's the feathers on Jesses breast." Well, her face was a picture. That moment made it all worthwhile, even if I did look a PRATT in my home-made outfit. Michael Robins and his committee are as pleased as I am with the results of my effort, and with the help the money has given them they intend to start a new project, so that's OK. My bit has been done and I hope to do more in the future for them.

So with that I will say good hunting to you all and good health to you and your bird.

A very satisfied bird and keeper
Jess and John Welsby

SMOKING - CAN!

Re: Page 37 of your Autumn '94 Edition and the dire warning on smoking.

We were horrified to hear of the effect that a low tar cigarette butt had on this poor bird - but were delighted there was a **Ray** of sunshine at the end of the tunnel. However, those of us who drink from glasses do not have unlimited supplies of soft drink cans at our disposal! "One man's addiction is another man's poison." I make no **Prior** claim to this profound analysis.
Anonymous

We don't usually print anonymous letters but we thought we would make an exception this time. By the way, I have spoken to Ray and he says he will do you second hand soft drink cans at 15p each.

Buzzard Problem

Dear David & Lyn,

My female Harris Hawk "Ruby" has been flown every day for the past two years and has given hours of pleasure as she is a joy to handle. After each flight she dutifully returns to the fist without the need for a bechin. Or she will wait in a tree while I crash about in the undergrowth to flush prey.

Her total bag in that time has been two half grown rabbits, a couple of fledgling birds, a frog, a vole and a Buzzard; many times!! Therein lies the rub.

The land over which I have permission to fly her is also home territory for a pair of Buzzards. In the two years they have successfully reared one young in each year. Clearly they cannot tolerate one another's presence within their territory boundaries. At first, it was Ruby who flew at the Buzzards and seemed to have the upper hand until the Buzzards learned to set upon her

together. Ruby had one or two nasty punctures to her legs and feet, but no serious injury. On one occasion she held on long enough for me to get within arms reach of the thrashing feathers before the buzzard wrenched itself free.

The effect on Ruby of this series of battles was that on hearing a Buzzard call, or on first sight, she made for the nearest low cover and cowered out of sight. She came to me as soon as I signalled that food was available, but the bad experience had completely unnerved her so that she now constantly scours the skies for danger rather than seek out suitable prey. She now sees danger in anything larger than a pigeon size, so rabbits and pheasants are seen as potential threats to her well-being.

I have tried educating her by carrying her tethered to the glove so that she could not bate away when the Buzzards appeared. This did slowly bring back her confidence. At the same time I retrained her to a rabbit sized lure, which she attacked with spirit. Indeed, last week (early

September) she was again prepared to do battle on an individual basis with one of the Buzzards and I thought I might try her at normal size prey once more.

The following day I lost her temporarily when she was carried off on an easterly wind having soared high on an up-current. This did not worry me unduly, as she has made off several times in the past and always returned home after a few hours, even days occasionally.

After four hours had passed, I decided to return to the spot from which she departed. She came to me from some low scrub and it was immediately obvious from her manner - fast head movements scanning the skies - that she had had a further bad encounter with the pair of Buzzards.

The following few days have proved it, for she again behaves like a scared mouse.

Has anyone any advice?

Yours frustratedly
John Ellis

IS IT SAFE?

Dear David & Lyn

As I sit in my falconry room with a hawk on my fist, dogs head on my lap, looking through the half opened door out onto the lawn, the sun is shining on the hawks and falcons weathering. One or two are in their baths, and others are putting the final touches to their new plumage.

After a busy summer attending Shows, Fayres and Fetes, the display boards, portable weathering etc are packed away until next year. We now begin conditioning the birds and dog for the coming hawking season.

My mind goes back to the previous seasons hawking. We enjoyed many fine flights and had great fun, even when some days didn't go according to plan. Yes, even experienced Falconers have days when all goes wrong. There seem to be no end of articles explaining, and taking us through the joys of perfect flights which can be a little disheartening for beginners. Most beginners tend to think that if their bird is at its flying weight, well manned and fit, nothing can go wrong. I'm afraid falconry is not that simple. For instance, flying your hawk along the back of a nice scenic lake has its appeal, but there are hidden dangers.

During the winter, the water is more than likely to be frozen over in places. No problem for your hawk, but for your dog this can prove deadly. If your dog is working the waterside, he can quite easily break the ice and disappear. Some parts of the lake might look fine. Sheltered areas may be frozen.

I cast my mind back to late February when we were hedgerow hawking. We came upon a large lake. On the water were ducks, coots, moorhens, etc. Typically, upon spotting us, they all made for cover. I had my my harris, "Chilli", following on, who obviously, upon seeing moorhens, ignored my glove and gave chase. He flew down the bank, out across the water, turned and dived into cover where he secured his moorhen. All seemed well, until I discovered he was on an island. I was more than lucky to find a small rowing boat. (You have to ask yourself what would have happened if there was no boat and half a frozen lake.)

Hawking along a river bank also has its hidden dangers. Besides the usual hazards of your hawk killing on the opposite side of a wide deep river with the nearest crossing point half a mile upstream, there are other dangers such as mink. "What mink?" I hear you say. Yes, mink. Mink are becoming numerous in certain areas. Their favourite haunts are river banks, lake-sides, marshes etc.

Like all of the Martin family, minks are very courageous and vicious. They devastate huge areas in very little time. My first encounter with mink came when out hawking, again with a harris hawk, along a river bank near my home. (Cheshire)

There seemed to be no sign of life on the river. The Harris was following on in the usual manner as I was working my spaniel, who up until now was taking all the blame for not putting anything up. To keep up the hawk's interest, I called her down to a bechin. Suddenly, I noticed something black run along the log of an over-hanging tree. Slipping my hawks jess-

es into the safety position, I began to investigate. The hawk bated, but I didn't want to let her go, at least until I was sure what it was. I can only describe what I saw a large black ferret. It showed no fear of me, my dog or the hawk. In fact, I think it's true to say that it was happy to stand it's ground. I then left hawking in that area for a while, and notified the landowner of this menacing problem. There are also the more obvious problems such as: electric pylons, cable and poles, especially with transformer boxes fitted. These can and have proved fatal. The only answer here is simple. Don't fly your bird near them. If you do, you're asking for trouble.

I'm sure by now we are all familiar with the dreaded barbed wire fence. Never has a hawking season passed, and I have not heard of, or seen hawks having nasty collisions which may prove fatal. Barbed wire can cause nasty injuries to your dog especially if the dog likes to jump rather than go under the fence. The underpart of your dog is very soft and thin skinned. A fellow falconer and friend of mine is at this moment resting his spaniel after a nasty gash to its stomach. When jumping the fence she brushed the top stand of wire. I personally check my dog for thorns and injuries after every outing. There are many more hidden dangers, believe me. I've encountered enough of them to write a book.

With the help of my vet, I now carry a hawk and dog first aid kit. I hope I never need it, but who knows. Enjoy hawking. Think safe.

Tom McNally
(Cheshire Falconry)

REDRESSING THE BALANCE

Dear David and Lyn

I am hoping this letter gets published in your issue of the Falconers Magazine. It relates to the Yorkshire Dales Falconry Centre. There were two letters in your last issue about what happened with the Kestrel and the Harris Hawk, one from the Falconer and one from the Spectator/Falconer, which I am sure are both correct. I also know that if the owner of the centre, Mr O'Donnell, who was out of the country at the time, had been there it would not have happened.

What is does do is give the Centre a bad name which is bad enough, but to get a bad reputation among fellow Falconers who read your magazine cuts very deep indeed. As a totally neutral observer who has nothing to do with the Centre I will give you my opinion. I have been going to the bird displays since it opened, three years ago. Although I am spoken to by the people who work there, they don't know that I am also a Spectator/Falconer with over 100 visits to the

Centre. I have been flying Birds of Prey for over 33 years, so I know a bit of what I am talking about. I could go to any Falconry Centre in the Country and find fault in how they do things, but who's right? What happened that Sunday (8th May) was wrong. The Kestrel should never have been flown first, especially by a young Falconer who has not had enough years under his belt to know when to put the swivel back on and call for the next bird.

Kestrels can be the hardest birds to fly in a Demonstration, as a good Falconer will tell you. I do hope Philip and Tracey Gibbon's, who wrote the letter of complaint to the magazine, go and see Mr O'Donnell to clear the air a bit and see what a good Centre it really is.. The young Falconer, Craig Mathewson, I am sure will turn out to be a good Falconer. I myself, will keep on going with my children for a lovely day out.

Yours
P Emmott

PEACE OF MIND

Dear David and Lyn

I would like to express my appreciation for the wonderful job you are doing putting together such a magazine which has been a source of inspiration and enjoyment for me since the first issue.

Secondly, this summer I used Raptors Rest as I was away on a school expedition for four weeks. I would like to pass on my whole hearted recommendation as a place to care for ones birds of prey. It is always a great worry if you have to leave birds in other peoples care even for a short period. Terry and Carol did a great job and in a most friendly manner. The weatherings are clean and well thought out and the whole operation seems professionally run. I wish you and the magazine every success.

Yours sincerely
Chris Jowett

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STANDARDS MUST BE HIGH

Dear David & Lyn,

Only two years ago, I would look out across my own weatherings and see sitting there, the ever-faithful Peregrines, Lanners, Luggers and Sakers. All these falcons have something to offer the present day falconer, and given time all will hunt successfully for you. Just remember to judge all falcons on their own merits and not compare them negatively when putting them next to Peregrines.

Although all falcons are near to my heart, I have a great affinity for the larger species, especially the Saker Peregrine in all her subspecies, the Gyr and of course Hybrid Falcons. For those who have flown Hybrid's, this ecological niche of an invention, is proving to be a great all round falcon, especially the larger, more powerful hybrid species. For me, the hybrid has proved once and for all that the modern falconer can breed his own hawks, finally putting the Anti-Sceptics in their place and secondly it proves man is capable of actually doing good and inventing a species rather than persistently destroying one.

Many argue that lost hybrid's would pollute pure strains. This is untrue. You would need to saturate the environment tremendously to even try to get that theory to work, as nature's natural selection would not allow cross breeding to happen. Otherwise, we would already have an environment full of hybrid's. Hybrid breeding is either done by AI or by years of selective natural pairing by raising the prospective breeding pair together, often under the same parents. One must understand that aviary birds have a very limited environment and if you were to

build a very large aviary and put in say, a female Saker and a pair of Peregrines, then I'm sure the female Saker would be left unpaired. Today, as I look out on my weathering, I can only see the modern falconers great advancement in captive breeding. I have Gyr and Sakers, and Gyr and Peregrine loaned by the Scottish Academy and fine falcons they are too. I also have my own loved Saker and Peregrines, my first breeding of falcons and I'm thrilled to bits. I'm sure in my own heart, that nothing beats flying a well-bred hawk, and I'm even more sure that nothing beats flying a hawk you've actually bred yourself!

Since falconers had to go it alone in the pursuit of actually breeding our own supplies, the tide is slowly but surely turned in our favour. We must keep it doing so. The future of falconry, I believe, is secure. Many hawks in captivity are now 3rd, 4th, even 5th and 6th generation, truly domestic stock. Maybe we will see together, legislation in the future, but this should be guided towards protecting falconers. And what urgently needs addressing is the way in which new, inexperienced people are getting their hands on anything from a Kestrel to a Goshawk etc. Many Falconry Clubs already work together, and so should Falconry Centres and Falconry Schools. It costs nothing to sit down and talk and possibly hold meeting every six months. This should not have anything to do with the very competitive side of Falconry, but should concentrate entirely on good practice and good instruction.

It's a great shame to see so many individual Falconers joining Falconry Clubs to strengthen our cause, then we are let down by

Falconry Centres who are below standard. Falconers and Centres should work to a strict code, if you have Z-blocked hawks and their equipment is immaculate, then all is well, but if you have 3 hawks and one has tacky equipment, then you've one hawk too many. You must work within your own limitations, and each and every hawk requires a set amount of time for flying and general care. Centres in general should employ experienced staff, not as I've seen many times, bits of kids who are limited in life, never mind experience.

If employing professional falconers is a financial problem to a Centre, then don't open one! You don't see Arabian falconers being mean in this respect, and I'm not suggesting we're all as rich as Sheik's. But Falconry is a professional occupation and should thus be treated with that prestige. It's quite simply a choice of if you can't afford an experienced falconer, do the work yourself!

Of course there are good Centres and a few excellent Falconry Schools. These are a great credit to Falconry and many of these have outstanding International reputations. They treat their Staff correctly and constantly monitor each members progress, and only allow their Staff to do disciplines they are proficient in. As to all the Centres (or should I say would-be Centres) which are currently around, either improve dramatically or close yourself down, before you become Cannon Fodder for the Anti's. The majority of Falconers endeavour to preserve and maintain our sport for the future. We all can well do without bad press. Falconry is our heritage, our past, present and our future. Please keep our Sport safe!

Yours William Hawkins-Pincers

11,000 BIRDS EGGS SEIZED IN POLICE RAID

Sunday the 25th September saw Operation Avocet, involving eight police forces, lead to a police raid on homes in seven counties in England and Wales, where they confiscated 11,000 wild birds eggs. These included Golden Eagle, Osprey and Peregrine eggs, and also documents, maps and photographs.

Operation Avocet was started after a raid on the Jourdain Society's annual dinner in Salisbury in July, when the police seized documents. The Jourdain Society was formerly the Oological Society and they carried out work of scientific value at the turn of the century but there is no scientific value in egg collecting now. Although strongly denied it is alleged that the Society is used as an information

bureau by egg collectors, a pastime which was outlawed in 1954 by the Protection of Birds act and also in 1981 by the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

Egg collecting seems to be an all consuming passion and some 'egggers' have have drowned trying to reach nests on remote islands and others have been found dead at the foot of cliffs with prize eggs, smashed, in their pockets. One collector even stole eggs from the British Museum whilst posing as a student.



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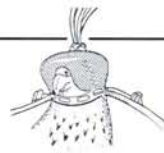


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THE ART OF WILDLIFE IN NOTTINGHAM

Driving through Nottingham on a busy Saturday morning it was difficult to imagine we could be anywhere near a Deer Park. How wrong we were. We saw a sign for Wollaton Hall, turned left and were immediately surrounded by open fields.

We had received an invitation to a Gallery opening from David & Gill Fox and had decided to have a day out. We found the Gallery and upon entering we were greeted by walls lined with wildlife and Bird of Prey paintings, by people such as Philip Snow, Andrew Ellis, Hilary Burns, Bruce Henry, Trevor Boyer, Alan Hunt and Chloe Talbot-Kelly. What more could we ask for?

Situated in one of the courtyard buildings of Wollaton Hall this is an ideal venue for an art Gallery, the house is very impressive and a pleasure to look at, building started in 1580 and took eight years to complete.

Wollaton Hall also houses the City of Nottingham's Natural History Museum which has a collection of over half a million species, put together over

thirty years.

The Hall is set in over 500 acres of natural park land with a lake, flower gardens and a large variety of trees. Herds of Red and Fallow Deer roam the Park and it is once again the home of a herd of White cattle.

The Hall also houses the City of Nottingham's Industrial Museum,

which offers an insight into Nottingham's industrial past with a collection of knitting and lace-making machines.

There is a small cafe where you can get light refreshments.

For more information about the Gallery please ring Gill or David on 0602 287391.



By Mark Chester

Florida's Raptors

Although Florida is the number one holiday destination in America, a wide variety of wildlife can be discovered in amongst the tourists and theme parks. Fifteen species of hawks, buzzards, eagles, owls and vultures are resident in the State, with the most commonly seen being the Turkey Vulture. These birds gather in number at roadside kills or ride the thermals on characteristic shallow U-shaped wings. Black Vultures are also present, but are distinguished from the Turkey Vulture by having the underside of the primaries black instead of grey.

Another common large raptor in Florida is the Osprey. Warm coastal waters and inland lakes offer a plentiful supply of fish and these combined with the erection of nesting platforms in trees and on telegraph poles, have enabled the population of Osprey to flourish.

On a visit in 1992 on the West coast near Tampa I found over a dozen pairs of Osprey nesting on artificial platforms all within about a 1/2 square mile! Whilst on a recent trip I had to swerve to avoid hitting an Osprey as it flew in and out of the traffic on the main motorway in Miami.

The national bird of the US, the Bald Eagle is also the largest in Florida with a wingspan of nearly eight feet. The state has the most breeding pairs of Bald Eagles next to Alaska, and they are a relatively common sight around the Kennedy Space Centre and in the Everglades National Park. The Everglades also holds a number of other species including Short and Red Tailed Hawks and American Kestrels. The latter two species being very approachable, are often seen perched on road signs or telephone wires. The Red Shouldered Hawks found in south Florida are much paler in colour compared with those found further north. One of Florida's rarest birds of prey is the Snail Kite, formerly called the Everglades Kite. It is now endangered because its small wetland habitat is also under threat. The Snail Kite feeds on the Pomecea Snail found in tall wetland grasses, which it captures with its talons and then extracts the snail from the shell with its long curved bill.

There are five resident species of owls in Florida, the largest being the Great Horned Owl, sometimes called the 'Cat Owl'. Its deep resonant hooting travels far into the night. The Barred Owl as its name suggests is recognised by the pattern of horizontal bars running across the chest. It is quite common in Florida and can be found in deep oak woods and cypress swamps. The other dark-eyed owl to be found here is the Barn Owl, similar in appearance to the British Barn Owl. This race has darker, cinnamon coloured underparts. Florida's smallest owl is the Common Screech Owl, up to 10 inches in length, it inhabits woodlands and farmyard, feeding on small mammals and insects. The common Screech Owl has three colour phases: grey, brown and red. One theory for this variation is that the variety of colours will ensure that some of the birds will be well camouflaged within their chosen habitat.

The Burrowing Owl can be found on the open grasslands of central Florida. They inhabit rabbit and gopher holes as well as digging their own burrows.

If you do visit America's southern state, take time off to explore some of the wildlife reserves and their abundant wildlife.



Bald Eagle



Osprey on nest



Great Horned Owl

BANDING PRAIRIES ON THE PRAIRIES

The day had finally arrived that I had been waiting for for the past two months, oh, and the the way, we are writing from Edmonton, Alberta the second most western province in Canada. Home to the Rocky Mountains, the white capped border between us and British Columbia. The alarm went off at seven o'clock sharp, so after a quick cuppa tea off I set. I was headed for the Strathcona Raptor Shelter which is a 20 minute drive from our home. I was involved with the Strathcona Raptor Shelter shortly after my arrival in Canada in the summer of 1992.

We arrived at Karl's just after eight. Karl Grantmyre is the executive director for The Alberta Society for Injured Birds of Prey who run the shelter which is located at his acreage. We spent some time checking and double checking equipment, and after the last member of our party arrived we were on our way. Our destination is the Bow River, where we will spend the next three days on boats covering about a one hundred mile stretch, and our goals, well, to band young Prairie Falcons and to put in some artificial nest sites.

About ten minutes into the drive we were treated to some aerobatics in the form of a Sharp-Shinned Hawk (*accipiter strianus*) being pursued at high speed by a male Red-Winged Blackbird straight across the highway in front of us (meant to be the other way round I thought), however these birds are quite defensive this time of year as I have been mobbed whilst training my Black Lab at a local slough, in any event it was a very nice start and a good omen of what was to come. It was about a three hour drive that lay ahead of us so I decided that forty winks was in order, and remembering the stories Karl had told me I wondered what adventures lay ahead!

John Cambell Sr and Jr have been running and organising this trip since the 60's and

know practically every nest site, bend and camp-site, along this stretch of river. Peregrine Falcons were seen along the river in the 1970's by John and his brother and only two years ago a single Falcon was seen, one (cold) egg was found that had been abandoned and was taken back for analysis at the Peregrine Breeding Facility located in Wainwright, Alberta. It is run by Phil and Helen Trefry, two dedicated falconers and Canadian Wildlife Officers, and it was found to be infertile. Karl and the Shelter have been involved with the banding trip for nine years now and Karl provides the boats, volunteers, some funds, and also does a lot of the organising to make sure it's a success.

We arrived finally at our destination which was just south of Calgary and east of Oatokos. A local farmer was kind enough to allow us to camp in his field the first night of the trip and to leave our vehicles there for a few days. The field is situated right next to the river with a convenient inlet to which we could launch the boats. Hills surrounded us littered with coniferous trees, and opposite on the far bank a family of Canada Geese basked in the sun. A pair of White Pelicans came gracefully gliding in from the south and landed 50 metres downstream with not so much as a wing beat, and above a pair of Red Tailed Hawks enjoying the warm thermals and up drafts. My first impression of the Bow River pretty much speak for themselves.

After the initial unpacking of equipment and the unloading of the boats, we were left with some spare time so I decided to unpack my fishing rod and attempt to catch some of the Rainbows that were jumping. Shortly after this Rick Morse fellow rehabber, birder, and good friend and his brother Steve arrived. Now we had to make the trip to Bassano Dam where the trip would con-

clude to drop off the van and trailer, another two hour drive. The Dam is home to about twelve nest sites and is approximately two and a half miles in length and with any luck at least half of the sites will be occupied. The field we left the van in was home to Curlews and Godwits which were none too pleased we were there. Also teams of Mosquitoes were present which hurried up our departure back to base. The drive back passed quickly with the swapping of tales and playing who can spot the most Swainsons. The rest of the evening was spent socialising, drinking coffee round the camp fire and attempting to catch one of the Rainbows that kept surfacing next to us, of which I caught none.

The next morning Rick, Steve, and myself were first up, after a bucket of cold water over the old head, nothing quite like it!! We were ready to start our first day on the mighty Bow. By nine thirty we were on the river, five in our boat and four in John's, and as both boats were engine powered all that we needed to do was sit back and enjoy the scenery. Our first eyrie was just 500m down the river and round the bend, and as we approached she got up off the nest. This nest is particularly low to the river, at about 25 foot. This was to be my first look at a Prairie Falcon (*falco mexicanus*) in the wild. She circled above us with very powerful wing beats and them would soar up, calling all the time, Kree, Kree, Kree. We pulled the boats over and made our way to the base of the cliff, and as this was fairly low a straight climb was all that was needed. John and I climbed this one. John banded (or ringed) the young while I jotted down notes, band numbers etc. There were three falcons and two tiercels and were approximately three weeks old. At this age it is quite easy to sex them as the falcons are considerably larger than the males especially their feet. It was such a thrill to be so close to these birds in the wild.

Next on the agenda was the construction of some artificial nest sites. This would be achieved with the help of a small generator we had brought along and with two long extension cords, we could drill a hole anywhere on the face of the cliff. John's party continued down the river where two other nest sites had to be checked. After a few wrong turns on some of the inlets, we reached a nice strong face on which we could work with. After deciding on the best location we set about climbing the cliff, it was about 150 foot or so. Next we banged the safety bar into the ground, tied off and Karl began his rappel down. The drill was sent up on a rope and about an hour later he finished the hole. It was about 20 inches high by 26 inches wide by 24 inches deep, just the job! We continued on down the



A descent of over a hundred feet

—BY RICHARD AND DEBBIE MOONEY—

river to meet up with the others for a spot of lunch. They had just sheared a pin on the propeller in some low water, but luckily had some spares. (This wouldn't be the last time!) After lunch it was our turn to band while others put in the artificial sites. It was my turn to band next. The nest was about 200 foot above the river and about 10 foot down from the top. Once at the top the remaining party in the boat would position us to the right spot via hand signals, that way we could throw the rope on line with the nest a short rappel down. I was faced with five young prairies, about four to five week-old. This nest held two falcons and three tiercels. I tied off and began to band the young, which they were none too pleased about. As soon as I began to put my hand in they would adopt the position of on the back, wings spread out, trying to foot me but as soon as you had hold of them they quietened down.

The remainder of the day was spent banding at four more locations. We finally met up with the other boat about four miles short of our first camp-site. They were putting in another site, so told us to carry on and check one more eyrie, then head over to camp. By this time it was starting to get dark. As Karl made his descent the other boat had already docked at the camp site, and one of the members began to holler "The boat, The boat", and as we looked down we saw our boat drifting downstream with Karl's daughter Roseanne, and Romona in it, neither of which knew how to stop it. After about an hour of pure pandemonium everyone got back to camp safely.

The next morning we were back on the river



Richard with one of the Young Prairie Falcons to be rung.



Two of the nest sites with young Prairie Falcons in.



by ten o'clock and another glorious day back. This part of the trip was mainly covering a lot of water in order to get to the dam by dusk. The nest sites were few and far between. On this leg only two or three the whole day. A Golden Eagle usually nests along here. However, this year she was there but hadn't nested. Our only obstacle on the way was a weir but John had arranged for a chap to be at the portage with his truck to move boats and equipment. Again we had a lot of water to cover but it was nice to take in the scenery and wildlife, Bald Eagles, American Kestrels, Nighthawks and even some Black-Crowned Night-Heron to name but a few. We finally arrived at the dam at about eight o'clock. We spotted about six nests, the white wash is always a good indicator but not always the rule. We emptied the boats as we didn't need equipment in them for the final leg, and a nice camp fire to finish the day.

Everyone was up about eight thirty and back out on the water

by ten. We started down at the bottom of the dam and worked our way up. I got the opportunity to band some more, which I thoroughly enjoyed. The last three nests were quite near to each other, about 100 metres inbetween each so Karl guided us from the boat below. The cliffs here are about 150 foot. Six of the sites were occupied, one with eggs. On average, out of the 53 young we banded most were around the three to four week mark. At the bottom of the scale two weeks and at the top five weeks. Over the years that the birds have been banded they haven't seemed to have risen or declined, but tend to fluctuate with the cycles of the Gophers. their main prey base. But with the introduction of new nest sites, and a little luck they'll maintain their numbers along the mighty Bow.

The drive back was a long one, but gave me time to reflect on the last three days and let it all sink in. The Prairie Falcon truly is a wonderful bird, and seems to be able to live in close proximity with its neighbours without much conflict. With the average clutch being five, there seems to be no shortage of food, at least this year. The trip, other than a few anxious moments, was a success. To see these glorious falcons in their natural environment and surrounded by so much beauty, will be an experience I will treasure always.

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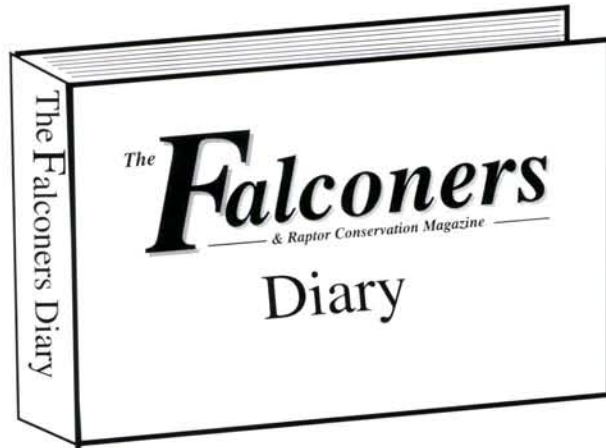
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DATE	SPECIES	NAME	WEIGHT	FOOD GIVEN	QUARRY TAKEN
18.11.95	Harris hawk	Arthur	1lb 5oz	2 chicks	1 rabbit & 1 pheasant
Left the house at 7pm. Cold, frosty morning, a little misty at first but the sun came through later. Had four good slips and two were successful. Ducks like temorecs lunch is sorted out. Meeting John temorece to fly his Redtail, plenty of quarry this morning, fingers crossed for temorece.					
DATE	SPECIES	NAME	WEIGHT	FOOD GIVEN	QUARRY TAKEN
19.11.95	Harris hawk	Arthur	1lb 5oz	2 chicks	
Left the house at 7pm. Cold, frosty morning, a little misty at first but the sun came through later. Had four good slips and two were successful. Ducks like temorecs lunch is sorted out. Meeting John temorece to fly his Redtail, plenty of this morning, fingers crossed for temorece.					
DATE	SPECIES	NAME	WEIGHT	FOOD GIVEN	QUARRY TAKEN
20.11.95	Harris Hawk	Arthur	1lb 5oz	3 chicks	
Left the house at 7pm. Cold, frosty morning, a little misty at first but the sun came through later. Had four good slips and two were successful. Ducks like temorecs lunch is sorted out. Meeting John temorece to fly his Redtail, plenty of this morning, fingers crossed for temorece.					

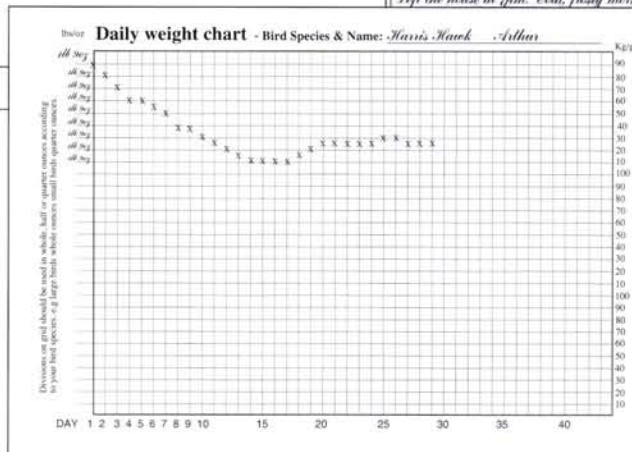
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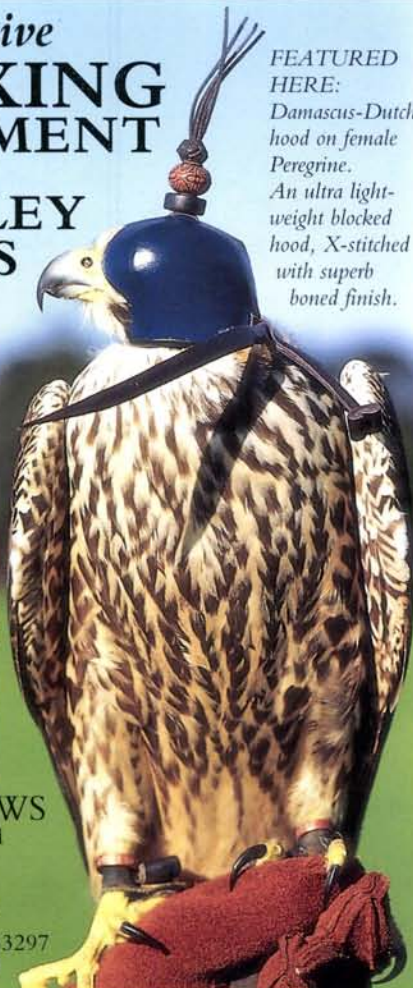
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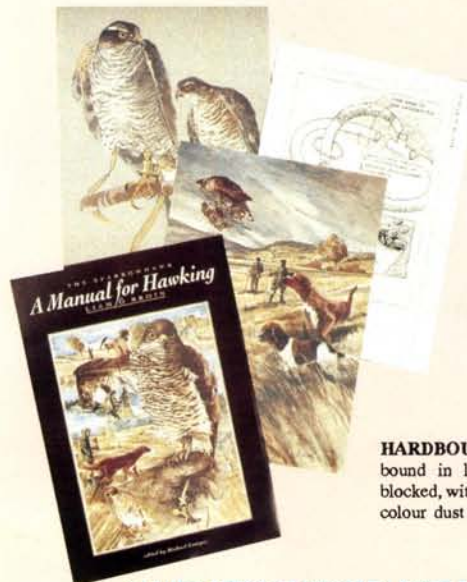
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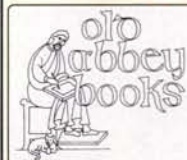
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