

The **Falcons**
& Raptor Conservation Magazine

Autumn 1996

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ISSN 0967-2206



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AUTUMN 1996 No. 28

features

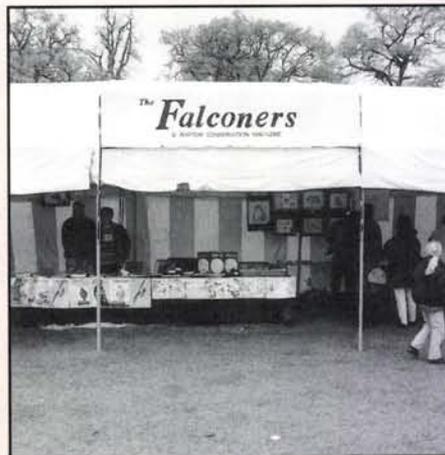
- 8** THE GOLDEN EAGLES
GOOD FOOD GUIDE.
Diana Durman-Walters
- 13** THE FITNESS FACTOR
Australian debate still ongoing
Richard Naisbitt
- 14** MEDITERRANEAN
HAWKING
Andrew Knowles-Brown
- 15** A SAKERS SECOND
SEASON
James Knight
- 18** RAIDER OF THE
WELSH DARK
John Matcham
- 20** REG'S MEADOW
- 26** MORT
HAPPINESS IS A HARRIS?
Ray Turner LRK
- 28** BRITISH BIRDS OF
PREY CENTRE
- 32** BREEDING HYBRIDS.
A BRIEF HISTORY
Carl Jones
- 34** ARMCHAIRS, YARNS &
ALEHOUSES
STEVE GOLLEDGE
- 36** OUR FIRST SUCCESS WAS A
BLACK KITE
Jenny Wray
- 37** A DAY WITH DOROTHY
Steve Radford

regulars

- 6** CLUB DIRECTORY
- 7** COMPETITION
TWO GREAT PRIZES
FOR EACH OF OUR TEN
WINNERS
- 10** RAPTOR RESCUE
A SOBERING TALE BY
MIK STANDING
- 12** THE PEREGRINE
THE FIRST IN A NEW SET
OF BIRD PROFILES BY
PHILIP SNOW

up-to-date

- 4-5** NEWS
More Lost, Found &
Stolen and a New Owl
Society
- 24** & CLUBS
Reports from the Cumbrian,
Scottish, Central & Welsh,
- 22** REVIEWS
A BOOK, A VIDEO AND A
CLOSING TOOL
- 30** LETTERS.
WHO IS SAYING
WHAT?
- 38** CLASSIFIEDS.



Falconers Fair p19



British Birds of Prey Centre p28

COMMENT

Hello Everybody,

The hunting season is almost upon us again. Are you all polishing your swivels and digging out your hawking bags.

This issue is full of good stuff again. Don't miss our exclusive offer on p38.

It was good to see you all at the Falconers Fair. Especially our overseas visitors. It gives me a real buzz to meet the people whose subscriptions I update each year and whose labels I stick on and magazines I pack four times a year. We often wonder about you all, it is odd when a name is so familiar yet we have no idea at all what you look like etc..

You will be pleased to know the magazine is going from strength to strength. Our subscription numbers are rising rapidly just lately. Natalie Nicholson distributes 75 copies to subscribers in the US and the magazine goes out to 24 different countries.

We need more articles from you again, especially from our overseas readers. We look forward to hearing from you. In the meantime Keep Falconry Safe..

David & Lyn

EDITORIAL TEAM

EDITORS: LYN & DAVID WILSON

DESIGN: D PERKINS

ADVERTISING: LYN WILSON

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY:

THE FALCONERS & RAPTOR CONSERVATION MAGAZINE

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

Telephone: (01536) 722794 **Fax:** (01536) 722794

Subscriptions: UK & Eire £14.00, Europe £18.00, Airmail £26.00

Cheque/Postal Order payable to: The Falconers Magazine.

For more details phone 01536 722794

The views expressed in this magazine are the views of the author. No responsibility for the quality of goods or services offered in this magazine can be accepted by the publishers or the printers, and the advertisements are accepted in good faith.

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COVER:Baby Sparrowhawks. Photos David Wilson

LOST

- | | |
|----------------|---------------------|
| 1. Redtail | Ring No: 11815W |
| 2. Redtail | Ring No: 0947Y |
| 3. Redtail | Ring No: 2 WHB95Y |
| 4. Harris Hawk | Ring No: IBR 255W |
| 5. Harris Hawk | Ring No: 9328W |
| 6. Harris Hawk | Ring No: 974RR95W |
| 7. Lanner | Ring No: 1217W |
| 8. Lanner | Ring No: 1603W |
| 9. Lanner | Ring No: UK64681 |
| 10. Saker | Ring No: 4864W |
| 11. Saker | Ring No: 8098W |
| 12. Saker | Ring No: HE00102321 |
| 13. Saker | Ring No: 5852W |
| 14. Saker | Ring No: 7764W |
| 15. Goshawk | Ring No: UK78105 |

Stolen

1. Stolen from Barnsley, Yorks. June 1996 Redtail Ring No: UK81177
2. Stolen from Ayr, Strathclyde. Barn Owl Ring No: 4113 BC93W.
3. Stolen Evening 27th/28th June. Turkmanian Eagle Owl, no ring Lannerette Ring No: 8314W and two German Wirehaired Pointers
4. Worcs. 1st July. Harris Hawk. Female

Stolen and Recovered

Aged 12yrs. Ring No: 0168W

1. Stolen from Bow Perch in garden in June 1996 was a Harris Hawk in West Sussex. This was recovered a day or two later. The jesses on this bird had been cut.

The magazine had a telephone call on the 2nd of June from a very upset lady telling me that her common buzzard had been stolen from her back garden. It was to feature in the STOLEN column, but, I am very pleased to say it has been recovered and all thanks to her milkman.

Found birds

The following birds have been found and are being cared for by Raptor Keepers all over the country. If you think one of them is yours then please contact me.

1. Redtail D.o.E Rings 15??Y & 21??X
2. Buzzard D.o.E Ring 73???
3. Buzzard D.o.E Ring 108???
4. Buzzard D.o.E Ring 50???
5. Buzzard 81 Breeders ring
6. Kestrel. Cable tie UK824??
7. Spar. Breeders Ring NTV + Seven numbers.
8. Harris Hawk
9. Buzzard D.o.E. Ring 43???
10. Buzzard D.o.E Ring 97???
11. Harris Hawk D.o.E Ring 128???

12. Buzzard. D.o.E. Ring 100???
13. Lanner Ring No 137???

There are many other birds that have been recovered which have been previously circulated. If you have lost any Falcon, Hawk or Owl then it is worth a phone call to find out if yours is one of them.

Man found guilty of theft

On Wednesday 8th May 1996 Raymond LINDEY-JONES who runs the Garston Bird Shelter Nr Watford, Herts appeared at St Albans Crown Court charged with an offence of theft of a Peregrine x Saker Falcon and also a second charge of offering the bird for sale under COTES Regulations.

The Court heard that Mr Alan Wallace of the Landrover Flying Display Team was the owner of the bird and that in May 1995 he was flying the bird at Windsor Horse Trials during a display when it wandered off and failed to return. When lost, it was wearing a DoE ring and a Falconry Bell.

The main witness for the prosecution Mr Ken Daniels a Bird of Prey Keeper himself stated that he had met with LINDEY-JONES, who offered to sell him the bird for £150.00, believing it to be a Buzzard or Lanner Falcon. The witness saw the bird and agreed to take the bird and pay for it the following day. Mr Daniels then contacted the organisation Raptor Rescue who in turn notified the Police.

The Falcon was formally identified by the owner which then led to the arrest of LINDEY-JONES.

LINDEY-JONES told the Court that the bird had been handed in to him at his Sanctuary by a couple who had found it in a field being attacked by crows and that the only item on the bird was a pair of anklets. There had been no ring or bell. He said that his only concern had been for the welfare of the bird and that he had offered the bird to Mr Daniels to look after as he did not have the facilities himself to do so. He said that he was not offering to sell the bird and that the price of £150.00 was what it would cost to insure the bird as they had to be insured to fly them.

The Jury found LINDEY-JONES guilty of the theft of the bird and not guilty of the second charge.

After hearing about the defendants financial status he was ordered to pay a fine of £75.00

FORMATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL OWL SOCIETY.

At a meeting held on 16th December 1995, attended by Bruce Berry, Kim Hickman, Frank Keens, Bernard Sayers and Peter Stocks, it was decided to form the International Owl Society. The intention is that this should provide a worldwide forum for all those interested in Owls. Set out below are the objectives and intentions of this new organisation and everybody with an interest in this Family are cordially invited to apply for membership. Most certainly the International Owl Society cannot succeed without an energetic and committed membership, and the Council look forward to receiving your active support. Any suggestions as to how the objectives and intentions may be expanded or amended to better reflect the interests of the members are most welcome, and will be carefully considered.

1. Objectives of the organisation
 - a) Advancing the husbandry of owls in captivity.
 - b) Assisting in improving breeding results with captive Owls.
 - c) Assisting and advising in the conservation and preservation of Owls; involving both in-situ and ex-situ schemes.
 - d) To provide a forum for the dissemination of information relating to Owls
 - e) To encourage and assist in research programmes involving Owls.
 - f) To provide well informed spokespersons to represent the interests of those who exhibit, display, keep and breed Owls in discussion with legislators.

2. Means of achieving objectives.
 - a) To publish a bimonthly magazine entitled 'Tyto', the first issue is due Spring 1996.
 - b) Permit members to advertise surplus and wanted stock in the magazine free of charge. Commercial interests could also insert paid advertisements.
 - c) Circulating information, via the magazine, about: study programmes in the wild; captive care and breeding; taxonomy; relevant legislation etc.
 - d) To compile and maintain a register of surplus and wanted stock and unmated birds to assist in establishing additional breeding pairs.
 - e) Hold stud books for sensitive species where these do not already exist. Encourage participation where it already exists.
 - f) Diversify the genepool by encouraging the movement of captive stock both nationally and internationally
 - g) Seek to introduce additional species into captive breeding programmes.
 - h) To provide quarantine facilities and co-ordinate and combine small ship

ments which will assist the conservation of Owls.

- j) Become involved in in-situ and ex-situ captive breeding programmes to assist conservation.
- k) Encourage the study and research into Owl behaviour, taxonomy etc., by allowing students access to captive birds, making reference material available (photographs, sound recordings, failed eggs, bodies of avicultural casualties etc.) and, when funds permit, offering grants.
- l) Suggesting how unreleasable Owls, rescued from the wild, can best be used.

3. The officers appointed for the first term in office were:

Secretary: Kim Hickman
Gnomes Cottage, 140 High Town, Ringwood, Hants. BH24 3DY.

Membership

Secretary: Frank Keens
202 Noak Hill Road, Billericay, Essex. CM12 9UX
Tel: 01277 655165

Treasurer: Peter Stocks
Sheraton Lodge, Station Rd Southminster, Essex. CM0 7EW

Chairman &

Magazine Editor: Bernard Sayers
164 Chelmer Road, Chelmsford, Essex. CM2 6AB

Other officers and members of Council may be appointed if this becomes necessary.

4. Terms in office and method of appointment.

Initially officers have been appointed for the following terms.

Chairman & Editor	3 years.
Treasurer	4 years
Membership Secretary	4 years
Secretary	5 years

All other officers or members of council 3 years.

When these terms expire all officers will be democratically elected for three year terms at the AGM; all members of more than twelve months duration will be eligible to vote.

5. The Annual membership fee is £20.00 and is due on 1st April. Members joining midway through the year will receive, when possible, all back issues of Tyto for that year. The Council reserves the right to decline to accept membership applications from those found guilty of dishonesty or malpractice or those whose activities may be judged to be against the objectives of the society.

6. Applications for membership of the International Owl Society should be sent to the Membership Secretary together with payment of the membership fee.

Review of Registration Fees.

The Department of the Environment has been reviewing the scheme of fees for registration of certain bird species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Wildlife and Countryside (Registration and Ringing of Certain Captive Birds) Regulations 1982 Statutory Instrument No 1221.

In the light of this review uncertainty has arisen concerning the power to charge for registration of certain bird species under Regulation 3. We have concluded that certain changes are required.

Accordingly, I propose to introduce a Bill, at the earliest possible opportunity, to clarify the powers to charge such fees. The Bill will, if Parliament agrees:

Provide a clear statutory basis for the charges levied in the past under the 1982 Regulations.

Enable the Department to seek to recover fees in respect of registrations date and when the Bills provisions come into force; and enable the Department to continue to levy charges in the future in respect of these registrations.

As from today (21 May 1996) therefore I shall not be requiring a payment of any fee in respect of registrations under the 1982 Regulations, pending the commencement of the proposed new statutory provisions. However, if and when this legislation comes into effect, my Department will be seeking to recover fees in respect of registrations made from today until the new statutory provisions come into force.

This announcement and the proposal to legislate does not affect the requirement in Section 7 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 for keepers of specimens of bird species listed in Schedule 4 of that Act to ring such birds and register them with the Department. It relates solely to the power to charge for such registrations.

The proposed legislation will also cover fees previously collected by the Department under Statutory Instrument No 1219/1982, the Wildlife & Countryside (Registration to sell etc certain dead birds) Regulations 1982. The scheme was discontinued on 1 January 1995.

SUCCESS FOR SCOTLANDS' OSPREYS

Three Osprey chicks at the Scottish Wildlife Trusts (SWT) Loch of the Lowes reserve should have now fledged successfully. They were six weeks old on the 4th July and could be clearly seen from the observation hide close to the SWT Loch of the Lowes visitor centre where they put on a captivating performance as they eyed up the open space below their nest and started to flex their wings in anticipation.

Ospreys first nested at the SWT Loch of the Lowes Reserve in 1969 and have returned regularly. This years mating pair arrived in late March and eggs were spotted in the nest by the middle of April. SWT rangers staffed a twenty-four hour watch over the rare and precious eggs for over five weeks until the three chicks were hatched on the 23rd May.

Dr Alan Barclay, Warden at the SWT Loch of the Lowes Reserve said "I've witnessed dozens of Osprey chicks taking their first flight over the years, yet the spectacle has never lost its magic.

MAN LOSES APPEAL

David Hopson, whose conviction for cruelty and illegal possession of three separate birds of prey appeared in the last issue of the magazine has lost his appeal. The judge hearing the case overturned the conviction for cruelty to the Buzzard but he doubled the fines on the other two offences leaving Hopson owing the court another £50.

HIGH AS A KITE

Sixteen more Red Kite chicks were brought over from Spain in June and were released at a secret location in the Midlands on 23rd July. The two men who brought them back from Spain had to climb 40foot trees, Pyrenean Oak and pines, to reach them. The project is being run by Forest Enterprise, English Nature and the RSPB.

Sadly, just before we went to press we heard that another Red Kite has been found shot in Bucks.

A FUTURE FOR OSPREYS AT RUTLAND WATER

Ten young Ospreys were brought down from Scotland on 10th July and hatched back over Rutland Water. The birds will be fed by a warden on a platform around 15ft off the ground and will be guarded twenty-four hours a day and be monitored by close circuit television. The television will allow visitors to see the birds from the visitor centre. Hopefully they will return to Rutland with the Autumn migration back to the UK. this will be the start of the first breeding population of Ospreys in England for 150 years.

AVON & SOMERSET RAPTOR GROUP

Our aims, much like other clubs, are to promote all aspects of Falconry, including keeping, breeding and hunting Birds of Prey.

We meet on the first Tuesday of every month between Bristol & Bath.

For further information contact Guy Whitmarsh on: 01272 660770

THE BRITISH HAWKING ASSOCIATION

Social Meetings held regularly at the Hogs Head Hotel, Awsworth, Notts.

Regular field meetings, novices welcome, (apprenticeship available) and many other Regional Social Meetings are held.

Changing attitudes to improve standards

George Roach 01623 751339
Garry Balchin 01159 300135

THE CHESHIRE HAWKING CLUB

Meetings:- Held 2nd Tuesday of every month at 8pm. Venue:- Railway Hotel, Mill Lane, Heatley, Nr Lymm. Ches.

We have speakers and Falconry Furniture Manufacturers in regular attendance.

Experienced and novice falconers welcome.

Contact: Phil on - 01204 523622 or 0374 691498 (mobile) or:
Rob on - 01706 845731 or 0378 609467 (mobile).

BRITISH FALCONERS CLUB

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HOME FARM F.M., HINTS, Nr.
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THE LONDON HAWKING AND OWL CLUB

The only Falconry Club in London with flying and breeding experience with birds of prey.

**For more information call:
Paul Barham on 0171 515 7754
or
Bill Fiveash on 0171 639 9087.**

NEW FOREST FALCONRY CLUB

Est 1990, affiliated to the BFSS & NAFA. Membership currently covers the southern counties. We have access to 98,000 acres of land and organise regular meetings throughout the hunting season.

We meet on the first Wednesday of each month in the relaxed atmosphere of a New Forest Pub. The forum of the meetings is to get together with like minded people to discuss & practice methods of falconry & hawking.

Please feel free to contact either
**Rick on 01202 471388 or Paula:
01202 380926**

We look forward to hearing from you

RAPTOR BREEDERS ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1976, the Association aims to facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences relating to the breeding of raptorial species.

Interested persons are invited to seek further details from our membership secretary: Robin Pote
2 Old Bell Cottages,
Ludford, Ludlow,
Shrops. SY8 1PP
Tel: 01584 874874

THE SOUTH EAST FALCONRY GROUP

Established 1981

'Supporting & promoting falconry in the south and East of England.'

Based at Tilbury in Essex, the South East Falconry Group continues to provide a forum for falconers to meet, discuss and practice falconry. The club caters for both the experienced and novice falconer. Meetings are held on the last Tuesday of every month.

For further information please contact:
Gary Biddiss: 01245 226057
Dean White: 01375 671302
or write The Tilbury Community Ass.
The Civic Square, Tilbury Essex

THE SCOTTISH HAWKING CLUB

FOR THE DEDICATED FALCONER
Benefits include:- Individual insurance to £25,000

Affiliation to British Field Sports Society & North American Falconers Assn.
£2,000,000 Public Liability at field meetings.

For Further details send S.A.E. to:
**THE SCOTTISH HAWKING CLUB
CROOKEDSTONE ELVANFOOT,
BY BIGGAR LANARKS
ML12 6RL**

NORTH AVON & WEST WILTS RAPTOR CLUB

Our club is one year old with a variety of members with hunting & breeding birds of prey.

We all try to help each other and encourage youngsters into falconry.

Every month we have a guest speaker and in the hunting season we will be holding field meetings over 11,000 acres of woodland and open land.

We meet on the first Monday of every month. 400 yds. J 18 M4. Compass Inn.

Give us a ring for a chat.
Andy 01179 400373
Keith 01454 315810

MEETINGS of The Welsh Hawking Club

are held monthly, 8pm at:

USK The Newbridge Inn,

Tredunnock. 2nd Monday

CHESTER The Goshawk,

Mouldsworth. 1st Wednesday

BANBURY The George & Dragon,

Fenny Compton. Last Monday

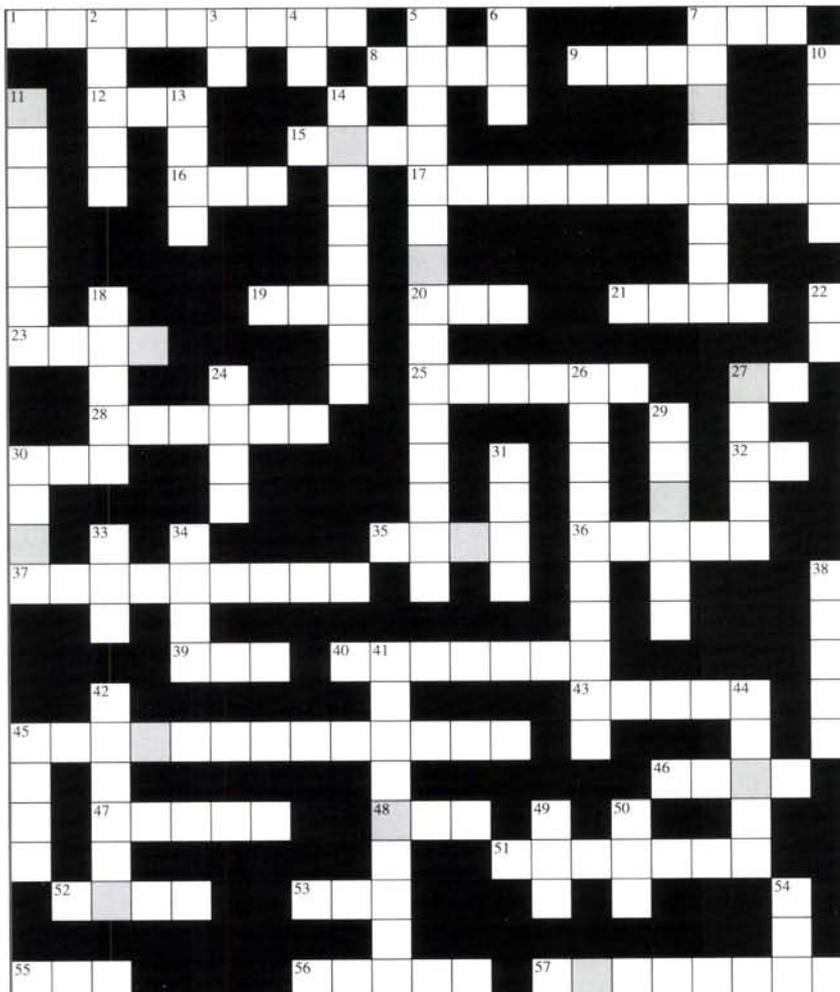
PLYMOUTH The Woodpecker, A38.
3rd Monday

The Welsh Hawking Club is Internationally recognised and has members throughout the UK.
For further information ring Secretary:
Adrian Williams on 01443 206333

**IF YOU WANT TO ADVERTISE
YOUR CLUB IN THE CLUB
DIRECTORY SIMPLY CONTACT
LYN WILSON ON 01536 722794
OR WRITE TO:**

**THE FALCONERS MAGAZINE,
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NN15 5QP.
DEADLINE 30TH SEPTEMBER**

COMPETITION



WE HAVE TEN PRIZES TO GIVE AWAY, IN OUR CROSSWORD COMPETITION, EACH DONATED BY THE MAKER OR STOCKIST MENTIONED, THEY ARE:

- A Steve Halsall Hood*
- A £20 Ray Prior Gift voucher**
- A Martin Jones Glove*
- A copy of City Peregrines**
- A copy of Some time with Eagles & Falcons* **Both Donated by The Owls Nest Bookshop.**
- A Normark, Stainless Steel, Field Knife Donated by Westweald Falconry.**
- A Falconry Originals Hawking Bag.*
- A Pair of Binoculars given by Simon Rumble.**
- A Block Or Bow Perch donated by Crown Falconry.*
- Print by G Baldock: Peregrine on Rook.**
- In addition to this, the Independent Bird Register is giving away TEN FREE bird registrations, one for each of our winners.**

Simply complete the crossword and unscramble the letters in the shaded squares to give you two words (Clue: they should be written in italics). Answers on a postcard to: Falconers Magazine Competition, 20 Bridle Road, Burton Latimer, Kettering, Northants NN15 5QP. Please include your name, address and telephone number. All entries in no later than 16th September. Draw will take place on 20th. Winners will be notified as soon as possible.

ACROSS CLUES

1. This 14th Century Princess of Arborea gave her own name to this Falcon (9)
7. The tally at the end of the day. (3)
- 8 Beware! If legislation and this bird (formerly of Mauritius) get together, our fate is the same. (4)
9. Made of Silver and Brass (4)
12. Big, powerful, White, Black and sometimes Green (3)
15. When a hawk is completely trained/or to the hood. (4)
- 16 A 1960's car, useful for feathers (3)
17. A coloured buteo (11)
19. A condition of a bird. (3)
20. A type of dog (3)
21. Old Arabic method of quieting a trapped hawk (4)
- 23 Young bird (4)
25. Recommended in 1610 as a method to condition a hawk (6)
27. Chemical symbol necessary for good quality egg shell. (2)
28. See "25 across" (6)
30. Alternative to "12 Across" (3)
32. Thirty-Seven is the num-

- ber, as a supplement, it's also good Welsh beer. (2)
35. The breast feathers of a hawk (4)
36. A good shake out (5)
37. Son of the 4th Earl of Harewood, and past President of the Old Hawking Club. (9)
39. A young ferret (3)
40. Welsh, English or Breton (7)
43. An island, but also a fine rook hawk. (5)
45. (G)reat (B)ritish Falconer who knew best. (7 & 6)
46. Swing this (4)
47. Part of wing you bastard (5)
48. Form of imprint (3)
51. It's a book and a film (7)
52. Male Merlin (4)
53. It's where it all starts, or so says the chicken. (3)
- 55 Welsh Centre and established Club. (3)
56. Arabic word for "Hare", also the name of the young Gyr in the film 'The Falcon Gentle'. (5)
57. A Hampshire market town in the New Forest associated with Owls. (8)

DOWN CLUES.

2. You'll need space to fly this (5)
3. "To Wait __" (2)
4. Hybrid function (2)
5. One of Henry VIII's Falconers (6 & 9)
6. Bristolean Deer. (3)
7. "2 Down" regularly takes these. (8)
10. Old word for the disease "Croaks" (5) (Clue, it starts with a K)
11. Disease of the mouth and throat. (7)
13. Sounds like a proper name for wing-of-bird, but belongs to a family of water birds (4)
14. Drifting off whilst waiting on (4&4)
18. Good at fur and feather in the desert. (5)
- 22 See "3 Down"
24. A professional falconer who died in 1st March 1929 (4)
26. Title "The Falcon _ _ _ _ _" (2&3&5)
- 27 17th Century writings "thy hawke doth from within her crope" (5)
- 29 Quarry for the noble Falcon (6)
30. "Sea" quarry (4)
31. Female Ferret (4)
33. The home of NAFA (3)
34. A matelots feather (4)
38. Named painter of "Nowhere to go" (5) (Clue, see Falconers Mag Summer '96 p6)
41. Don't Grouse, it'll be all white. (9)
42. Part of a hawk, the underside "vent". (6)
44. Ready to hunt in all respects (5)
45. Coloured rodent in trees (4)
49. Male Ferret. (3)
50. Formed in 1863 (3)
54. It can hoot, screech and make all manner of noises, but this one is backward. (3)

THE GOLDEN EAGLES

GOOD FOOD GUIDE

The telephone rang for the umpteenth time that February morning. This time a call of comparative interest. The BBC wanted to do a live programme for their Radio 4 slot, featuring our Golden Eagle, 'James', taking a blue hare, which we would then bring back to the kitchen to cook.

Yes that was possible, but the weather was pretty grim for the high moor ground and James had only attempted hare on a couple of previous occasions. I had no doubts as to his ability to take them as his previous kills on rabbit had been matter of fact, he enjoyed the prospect of attempting anything on the run (with a fur coat) combined with an eagles natural tendency to tackle ground quarry.

Tell me more about the programme I enquired. It seemed quite unique. A series of six programmes which were to be recorded live in the field. They would feature blue hare, squirrel, eels, Arbroath smokies, amongst other items, all caught in their natural environment and then taken back to the kitchen to be cooked by the chef who was also the programme presenter.

We decided upon a date to record the blue hare hawking, which would also provide plenty of time to get James wedded to them. During February the weather here in Scotland deteriorated. We already had snow which had lain for eight weeks. On the uplands this was quite deep, which meant carrying the eagle up onto the prevailing wind faces was an arduous task. As the days slipped by into weeks I could see that the prospects for keeping the eagle focused on blue hare were getting a little thin. To make matters more difficult the timing had to be the second week in March as after this the lambs would start arriving and within a week of that they would need to be up on the hill. Definitely not a time to be flying the eagle.

A break in the weather in the last week in February saw Mike Reynolds and I in the 4x4 up on the Lammermuirs. These well-kept areas have some of the finest grouse moors in Scotland. Ground that is managed for grouse that has a low incidence of predators supports a good, strong population of blue hare. At one time hare numbers were so high that annual culls could account for 1,000 being shot off the high ground. This was in direct policy with the keeping of sheep on the high ground and the fact that the hare is a com-

petitor for feeding. Today sheep on the high ground are kept to sensible levels which is in balance with the hares requirements, and of the sporting estate providing a very liable economy for continental guns who seek ground quarry.

We entered into a good westerly facing hill. The steepness of the slopes meant that the eagle, who was very fit, could use the wind to his advantage to gain height whilst Mike and I beat the heather. The German Wirehaired Pointer worked quickly on for a point on one. Hare on this ground are plentiful. It wouldn't be necessary to go more than 500-800 yds and put up at least a dozen hares.

The day was brilliant sunshine with a breeze blowing down in the valley. On reaching the top at 1,800 ft we might as well have been on the north face of Annapurna, a wind of such force was created that it would be difficult to walk in. The eagle was cast off. He immediately took advantage of the lift and soared effortlessly to approximately 500ft. In the seconds it took him to reach this it took my breath away, literally. There is nothing that can give greater pleasure than seeing any of our birds using their natural tendencies to want to go up. From such heights they have enormous advantage.

From this pitch he could view anything moving. Within seconds that was put to the test. He went into a stoop, descending vertically towards the valley floor. Surely there couldn't be a hare way down there?

A rabbit had taken the opportunity to make good its escape with the eagle in hot pursuit. Thankfully it reached its burrow. The eagle was called back to the lure. He made the journey halfway up, then decided to go back down and check out where the rabbit had last been seen. Meanwhile, drifting downwind, doing his own thing the dog had by now located the first of the hares and sent it into a full flight across the moor. As it sped across the snow-covered heather, small flurries of powdered snow were kicked up, leaving a visible trail as it hurriedly departed. James spotted the activity and made his way across the sky to dip his wings in acknowledgment of it, but made no commitment. I didn't like the look of that, obviously a tad too high.

With our concentration firmly on the eagle, who was by now starting to move further afield looking for rabbits, the dog took matters into her own hands and decided to run the Waterloo Cup a bit earlier this year. If the eagle wasn't game for the hares, she was. As I turned to call the eagle once more, she coursed past me, oblivious to the expletives shouted in her direction, which just seemed to make her go faster. As she disappeared over the horizon, I cursed my decision to make this programme. Dog and eagle out of control.

Trudging through the crusty deep snow to locate the dog might be, she returned to my left, carrying the hare. This greatly impressed our keeper and landowner, the latter asking, quite innocently, whether I'd



Putting telemetry on James' deck feathers.

All 3 photos by Bill Ward.

DIANA DURMAN-WALTERS

ever thought of crossing her with a deerhound. Words failed me. However, the hare had given up the ghost and that would provide me with a lure for the eagle, to which he dutifully returned and was fed up on.

We returned to the hill several days later and realised that the eagle's weight needed to be brought down a touch. Flying at 7lbs 2ozs. At home on the low ground he was OK, but on the high ground he needed the extra 2ozs. taken off, otherwise he would go off, self hunting looking for rabbits, and wouldn't concentrate on the prospect of catching hares. During the ensuing days of working him on the hill he took on many good slips and became educated in the tactics that the hares have evolved to escape formidable hunters like him. All this was so different from hawking rabbits, but it was registering with him and was put to good use the minute the opportunity arose.

front of weather moved in however and the programme went ahead as scheduled.

James was in great flying order and seemed to have his concentration firmly on the job in hand. The day itself, although sunny, was bitterly cold, with snow clouds gathering from the north. Lilli, the Wirehaired Pointer, was cast out into a check wind to begin her search for hare. Once more the prevailing winds cut through to the bone and it was now easier to cast the eagle off so he could



Casting James off into the wind.

keep up with the action rather than sit on the fist, which he was not in favour of doing.

The visibility was also declining as the sun disappeared and the snow clouds created an icy gloom. As James began to fly higher into the wind he side stepped behind a hill to the left and found a hare that Lilli had put up for him further down the valley. There was no mistaking his intention or his skill on this one. He quite simply stopped it in its tracks.

That hare was the most deliciously cooked game I have tasted. Marinaded in cider and slow roasted, washed down with a wee dram, has to be the very essence of a spectacular days hawking. Listeners will be able to form their own opinions but it will be difficult to escape the fact that the eagle taking natural quarry, in its natural surroundings and 'sharing' his meal with you is the perfect embodiment of falconry.



Questing forward in search of a Blue Hare

I have never doubted James' power. Rabbits seem so insignificant in his talons. The size of the hares and the greater effort required to dispatch it, brought out the full adrenaline rush in him. Rearing back on his wings and tail with his golden head erect like a crowned eagle, his very posturing said 'stay back'.

Allowing him to calm down, then begin to pluck and draw some of the warm flesh reassured him that we were not to steal his prize from him. Having trained him to feed purely from the lure and nor the fist, the transition was easy enough and he stepped up finally onto the gauntlet.

Our plan had been now to continue flying him for the next six days, prior to the programme. This wasn't to be. A further snow storm erupted making it once more impossible to get onto the hill. A warmer



Sketch by Richard Rossiter



RAPTOR RESCUE

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One step forward, two steps back... by Mik Standing

I am a falconer. I train birds of prey to fly free and, if I'm lucky, they come back to me. I also place trained birds of prey in a near-normal hunting situation and, if they're lucky, they catch their prey. And that is really all there is to it. Okay, there is a hell of a lot of preparation before you reach your objective, the hours of bone-numbing manning, the hair-tearing frustration of early creance work and the gut-twisting anxiety of that first free flight most definitely exist, but basically you train 'em, you fly 'em and, if you're that way inclined, you hunt 'em.

I've been trying to get the hang of falconry for some time now. I've flown all manner of long, short and broadwing, not to mention a plethora of owls, I've earned my living by my craft (although this may be stretching the definition of the word) and I even met my wife Jude through our mutual love of the 'Old Sport'. So it would be fair to say that falconry has been, if not good, then tolerant of my existence. I do not believe that there is such a thing as a free lunch and so have always been readily prepared to give something in return for the overwhelming pain of a lost hawk and the triumphant elation of fairly caught quarry. This, for me, has been the willingness to give aid and rehabilitation to any injured bird of prey.

Admittedly, as an advocate of euthanasia for those cases where a raptor will not return to the wild, I have found that aid often takes the form of an informed and conscientious decision and is less likely to involve extensive nurturing and rehabilitation. Not to say that I look to Pentobarbitone as a solution for the trials of life every time, I still find euthanasia a stony path to walk along, but I am very much against one-winged spars, impaired peregrines and cuddly tawny owls incarcerated for life-sentences in even the most palatial of chambers for, no-matter how you dress it up, an aviary is nothing more than a cell. The only place for a wild bird of prey is the wild. No exceptions.

Of course, if you can combine these two seemingly similar, yet undoubtedly dichotomous disciplines, so much the

better. Talk about having your cake and eating it...

One of the nicer aspects of living in the rural hinterland is the easy access to the flora and fauna of Snowdonia. Look out the window and there it all is, larger than life and twice as vindictive. For the falconer it is a veritable 'I-Spy Book of British Birds of Prey' paradise. From red kite to merlin, peregrine to hobby it is just a case of sitting on a rock and waiting for something interesting to pass by.

One of my sweetest memories is of watching a Jack merlin chase a skylark around a cairn of granite beside a 'B' road as I crossed over a moor. I'd spotted the protagonists as I'd amiably driven along - as yer do - and had pulled over to watch the show. I'd expected the two of them to get away from me as fast as possible but instead I was treated to a magnificent display of aerial agility as they continued to weave a complex dance about the stones. Mawkish as it may sound, hunter and the hunted really did become as one, their movements merging into a synchronic ballet, a sequence of flicks and rolls as old and new as the first flight. Perhaps thirty seconds passed, a final twist over the brow of the hill, and I breathed once more. Precious moment. A few weeks after this, not far from the same cromlech, I stepped into a peat bog whilst flying my lugger. Floundering waist deep in freezing, stagnant water has a certain ability to restore a true perspective of life.

But that's another story...

In the September of '93 I was made an offer I could not refuse. Our local veterinarian Mike Dallimore, an experienced falconer and rehabilitator, asked me if I'd like to think about having a wild goshawk that had come into his keepership. All of thirty nanoseconds later I had said yes.

Well, what could I do? A dirty job but someone had to do it.

Known to just about everyone in the area, Mike is the person the Police, RSPB and Women's Institute contact if anything vaguely reminiscent of a raptor turns up injured. This time not an

injured bird but a bewildered gos had been encountered by agents of the Forestry Commission. When felling swathes of valuable coniferous woodland the Forestry workers display an unexpected respect for the local wildlife, which in the case of nesting raptors usually means waiting until the young have fledged. In this particular instance an unknown goshawk nest was found just as the young were striking out on their own, all except one that is.

When the logging crew reached the location parents and siblings had done the sensible thing and hied deeper into the forest, leaving the youngest female clinging in fear to a branch. Captured, banded and hustled off to the ministrations of Mike, progress was free to slash and burn without restraint.

Although uninjured it was obviously impossible to simply find a suitable location and expect the bird to fend for itself, it was unlikely that she had ever witnessed her parents hunting let alone caught owl herself, and so Mike embarked on the time honoured path of manning a gos. Those of you who have also gambolled down this road will know how likely it is to lead to insanity. Hours in quiet, dimly lit rooms with psychopathic eyass goshawks, scimitar hind-talon exerting enough pressure to puncture the best rhinoceros hide glove, can make a grown man cry. When the bird finally deigns to stand on the fist, and not hang limp as three-week-old celery or thrashes in manic seizure, the battle of wills really begins. The hawk is hungry, you know it, the hawk knows it, the hawk knows you know it. The bird ignores the tightly held meat on the fist and studies the far wall. After an age the yellow gimlet eye finds the offending item, the aquiline head slowly lowers and the hooked beak swivels to rip and tear. At the last moment you stifle a cough, a sudden noise startles or offence is taken at the colour of your fashionable tassel and the apparently docile hawk becomes a ball of scything razor-sharp claws and pummelling feather tips. Knitting is said to be an interesting hobby.

Mike never mentioned any unusual dif-



Photo by Mark Chester

ficulty in manning the gos. If there was it didn't show as she was a pleasant enough hawk for the fist when passed on to me. He had fully intended to rehabilitate her himself, had even taken her out to hunt a couple of times, albeit unsuccessfully, but pressure of work finally forced him into forgoing that particular pleasure. If you're intending to pursue falconry whilst employed as a doctor or vet I suggest you give the idea a bucket full of thought, you'll never have enough free time.

I gave Gos (I never name rescue birds - makes them harder to part with) a few days of gentle manning and ample feeding so that she could settle into her new surroundings. I also took the opportunity to fit her with a dummy telemetry transmitter (this can save an awful lot of money later) and to imp in a new deck feather, her only discernible imperfection. When, after a few days, I took her up it was with the intention of going right back to basics. I am sure that Mike had been more than competent and thorough in his training, I do not wish to imply otherwise, but we all have our different ways of doing things and only by starting over could I be absolutely sure that nothing had been overlooked. Of course, the following two weeks of creance and lure work were much easier than they could have been, but better safe than sorry. One of the things where Mike and I had differed was in the use of a rabbit lure in training. Mike had not introduced Gos to the delights of the dummy bunny, preferring to rely upon the innate killer instinct of the goshawk to ensure speedy entering. With the accipiter tendency to kill anything that moves I can understand his reasoning, yet I am of a more cautious frame of mind and always feel that solid lure work can not only trigger prey recognition prior to field work but also installs a fairly reliable recall failsafe - even with a goshawk. And anyway if lure training is done as part of manning and creance work you end up ready to fly free without taking too much longer to reach your objective.

I always thoroughly enjoy training a bird of prey, possibly more than hunting with it. May sound a tad odd yet I never tire of the challenge presented by a creature that feels nothing but fear and distrust for me and, with patience, understanding and knowledge, persuading the hawk to at least accept my unrealistic part in it's life. A wild, or fresh from the aviary, raptor is a blank page; the manner in which you care for and train that bird will directly influence the end result. There's no such thing as a 'bad' hawk just inept falconers.

It wasn't long before Gos and I were out in the fields looking for rabbits. She began to chase prey almost from the outset, quickly learning from her mistakes and soon catching more than she missed. If you've never flown a goshawk than you've been deprived of one of the most exhilarating experiences to be had with your clothes on. Whether from tree or fist she continually displayed that quintessential gosness that can only be seen with the true hawk. The slightest movement would trigger the headlong direct flight at her prey. Short wings cleaving the air, eye fixed on her target, she would cover the intervening ground with incredible speed, never wavering from the quarry. Sometimes the bunny would find reserves of desperate energy and appear to be getting away but, when it seemed as if Gos had lost that one, a few sharp flicks of her scooped wings would increase her speed. I've seen it so many times before and yet never believe it when it happens again. Large dollops of the famed goshawk tenacity were hers too, when she hit earth instead of prey she'd be up and away from a standing start sometimes two of three times in a slip. I purposely left Emma, my Munsterlander, at home on these expeditions as I'd not had sufficient time to make hawk to dog and she wouldn't have Emma's help upon her return to the wild. And yes, it was always my intention to rehabilitate Gos although I'd be a lowdown liar if I denied ever considering otherwise.

For the serious shortwinger, a wild

goshawk has to be the ultimate hawk and I'm not immune to the temptation of such a prize possession but, at the end of the day, she was entrusted to my care and that meant doing the best for her. No, there wasn't anything extraordinary about Gos, she was a solid and capable hunter who gave me immeasurable pleasure in the time we were together but, after all she was simply a damn fine goshawk - which may well be the understatement of the year. Nothing remains the same, everything comes to an end and so did Gos and I.

I had intended to fly Gos through the winter and release her in the warmer weather and bountiful food supply of spring but the best laid plans usually go awry. Before Christmas my health began to fail and, having learnt from prior experience, knew I wouldn't be able to keep to my agenda. She was ready to go back but I had wanted to give her optimum conditions on release. Unfortunately, illness came upon me sooner than anticipated and so Mike was asked to set up a release site as soon as possible in order to get her out and settled before the cold set in. By using his RSPB contacts he was able to find a suitable site not far from where she had been found, a site far enough away from settlement and with a adequate food supply. For the five days prior to release Gos was fed to bursting so that she'd have an abundant fat reserve to carry her over the initial release period. Far too ill to say goodbye, Mike collected her on Sunday the 16th of January, 1994 and that, for me, was that.

When rehabilitating, the release should be the end of the story. You've done the best you can, the rest is up to the bird, Nature or fate - whichever is the stronger. This time fate decided the outcome. Two months after release the carcass of Gos was found on farmland some way from the release site. She was full of shotgun pellets.

One step forward...
...two steps back.

**ARAB STYLE
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• The Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*) is a largeish falcon of medium build, (wingspan 85-110 cm) almost global in distribution. Adults (top) look quite pale in good light, when soaring high. First year birds look progressively browner as their plumage fades, streaked instead of barred below. Its stocky & powerful shape tends to dominate the skies.

• The most accomplished kill I have ever seen, from two adults on their home territory, Anglesey. The ♂ struck from above, the ♀ from below, almost instantaneously. The next morning they killed & food passed a Redshank in front of my window!



• Adult ♂, typical plumage, N. Wales.



• Juvs start off purple brown, but fade
• adult



• The spectacular stoop of the Peregrine is one of the more favourite sights of bird watcher & falconer alike, a fitting trade mark for this great survivor. Only pigeon fanciers still threaten it in Britain today.

NO 1. PEREGRINE FALCON

RAPTORS of Britain and Europe

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A new series of profiles by PHILIP SNOW

THE FITNESS FACTOR OR

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

RICHARD NAISBITT
HEALESVILLE
AUSTRALIA

Trying to eliminate all the variables from the overall survival equation has been something of a nightmare. Making sure that all birds are competent at foraging before final release has been one priority (thus starvation due to an inability to find food can be discounted). In addition it was (or is) necessary to ensure that there are no physical complications such as wing extension deficits or any other flight impediments prior to release. This study has become quite complicated and if anything it does prove that survival is far more complex than sim-

Electra couldn't catch the black duck that left the small dam, flying into the wind the duck flailed hard and left the struggling Peregrine far behind it.

Electra was unfit and inexperienced and survival in that state was highly unlikely. Fitness is undoubtedly an important survival prerequisite, but proving it is quite difficult, particularly if one considers all the variables that can complicate long-term survival.

Fitness in standard falconry is important and I am sure many falconers have seen their hawks or falcons outflown by quarry, when a kill should have been a foregone conclusion, and a lack of fitness in these situations has been the cause of failure to secure prey.

Going back to Electra for a moment, her tame hack period did allow her to build up her fitness to a point when she could choose whether or not to continue a pursuit and subsequent flights at waterfowl proved this. The underlying factor here is that Electra had the luxury of time on her side,

Top: Little falcon with Camille.
Middle: Black Falcon, (released).
Bottom: Peregrine Falcon (released)



ply flying and finding food. New questions are constantly asked (mainly by myself, directed at anyone who is stupid enough to listen) and although they are generally philosophical it does provide food for thought. Questions such as what constitutes natural death, what is a successful release and, in today's modern world, do we include death by decapitation on a barbed wire fence as natural death? Even after looking into all the statistics (birds that have been brought in to the Rehabilitation Centre) it is difficult, if not damned impossible to differentiate between natural attrition and unnatural attrition. For example many young Brown falcons (*Falco berigora*) are hit by cars and subsequently killed and in fact we had a case recently where three out of three newly fledged Brown falcons were hit by vehicles two of them were also starving and one was reasonably healthy. All three died.

I honestly wish that rehabilitation was as simple as some make it out to be, but it is not, and in today's modern world survival is all about the quick and the dead.

I was always there as a backup if things went wrong. Electra finally did become independent but it took six weeks of comparatively hard slog and repeated failures for her, to work out some sort of hunting strategy, she can now outfly anything and she is incredibly physically fit.

With the rehabilitation debate still dragging on (here in Australia) it has become important to try and prove that physical fitness before release is indeed vital.

Measuring blood lactate levels before and after exercise is one way of ascertaining fitness levels. Releasing birds that are both fit and unfit and then monitoring them, telemetrically is also important, the theory being that unfit birds will not cope as well as those that are fit. We have released two raptors so far, one in each category, and whilst we cannot base any conclusion on this first trial it did show that fitness is important.



MEDITERRANEAN HAWKING

ANDREW KNOWLES-BROWN



*Left: Hawking through the Majorcan scrub.
Below: The north end of Majorca had large numbers of Peregrines & Eleonoras Falcons*



With a family holiday coming up, and falconry always on my mind, I had ulterior motives when I suggested we should go to Majorca. I have, for the last few years, been sending Harris Hawks over there and thought this would be a good opportunity to meet my contacts and perhaps see how the hawks work in conditions more in keeping with their natural habitat.

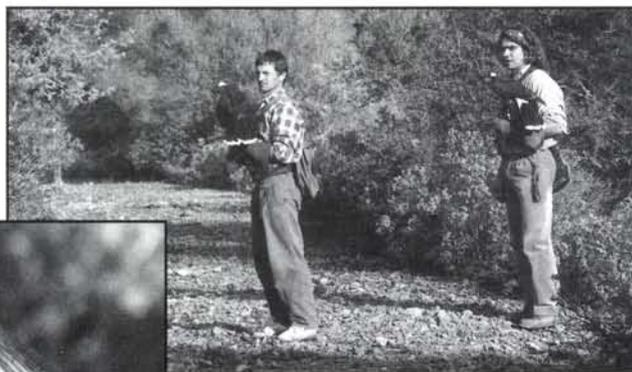
It was mid October when we arrived at Palma Airport to a hearty welcome from the Spanish falconers, people to whom I had only spoken on the phone via translators, but who welcomed us like old friends. After being escorted to our villa, arrangements were made to see the hawks and to be taken out hawking. There is apparently a strong following for falconry on Majorca, but with a small island the biggest problem is getting flying ground. The large number of shooters have most of the available ground tied up. I was taken to a large area of ground in the south of the island, close to the sea, which was government owned. It had been leased to the same family for generations and was primarily used for shooting. However, this owner was sympathetic to falconry and allowed the occasional meeting to take place. The farmland had been left to revert back to natural scrub due to contamina-

tion by salt from the nearby Mediterranean sea. The gnarled Olive trees that used to be the living of some peasant farmers could still be seen in rows where the old groves used to be, and Almond trees grew around the broken-down, primitive buildings that were once someone's home. Time had turned this back into great hawking country and the area had good populations of both rabbits and hares, also partridge and grouse-like birds (I wasn't close enough to see what they were and the translators couldn't help me). Our quarry was to be rabbits and I now understood why about fifteen people had arrived. With no dogs and ferreting illegal, we had to find our quarry sitting out in the scrub by walking

it up. The birds flown were Harris Hawks I had sent out the previous year, so I enjoyed seeing how they had fared in their new country. The rabbits seemed confined to the thickest scrub and when flushed would straight line it away rather than find a hole to go down. The Harris' knew this and would follow the quivering line of sage until the rabbit showed itself in open ground, when the classic folded wing stoop would happen. At the same time the whole beating line would crash forward shouting encouragement and watching the bird, as without

telemetry birds can get lost in the deep scrub should they bind to a rabbit. It was really wonderful walking through such strange terrain, smelling the pungent aromas of sage and lavender from the crushed stems that every footstep produced, with the warm Mediterranean breezes through the Corsican pines keeping you cool. The whole day was finished off with a huge barbecue washed down with copious amounts of beer, local Rioca and herb liqueur. As well as hawking there are at times large numbers of raptors to be seen. I was there outside the migration season. Nevertheless, I was still able to see many Peregrine and Eleonoras Falcons on the cliffs at the north end of the

island on the way to Formentor Lighthouse and, after a superb horse ride up into the mountains by Bunyola I was shown where all the Red Kites roosted and was able to see about 25-30 wheeling in the thermals of the late evening sun. The whole experience is one I recommend, so if you get the chance to see some of the alternative sights, away from the beaches of Majorca, take it. Many thanks to Miguel, Marguerita and Cati for their hospitality.



Above: Miguel & Pepe waiting for the flush.

Left: Although ferreting is illegal in Spain this is a ferreting box they use when they are allowed.



Sakers Second Season

Having recently started rook hawking and already become an addict, I very much enjoy reading others experiences. It does seem however, that in comparison to game hawking, very little is written, and so to help redress the balance here is my contribution - for what it is worth. The aim is simply to describe a Sakers second season, it is up to the reader to draw their own conclusions.

My wife and I have flown a Saker Falcon, very generously loaned to us, for two seasons. The first season resulted in four rabbits, followed by 26 rooks/crows. Our 'season' extends from mid-September to mid-February, thus avoiding potential migration problems. Throughout the second season we kept reasonably detailed records of our flights and hope these may be of some interest. Our rook hawking is certainly not the classic style of past times, but rooks and crows are always a worthy quarry and hawking them in our enclosed countryside poses definite challenges.

OUR SECOND SEASON RESULTS

Number of days flown:- 89 (15th Sept - 15 Feb)

Number of kills :- 40

We have been satisfied with one kill per day and never flew for a second, preferring instead to feed her up immediately. If however, she was unsuccessful on the first, a second flight, if available, was tried and on a handful of occasions she was given a third, obviously depending on work done, weather, quarry available etc... We have complete records for 99 flights, but we are certain that few insignificant flights went unrecorded, thus the kill ratio of 40:99 is optimistic, a 40:120 ratio is more likely although probably pessimistic.

The 40 successful flights ended as below with the rook or crow caught as described.

Along fence/hedge	7
Along stream/river	6
Around farmstead	5
Amongst sheep	5
In the air	5
In a garden	4
Within copse/woodland	3
In open field	2
Within a bush	2
On a roof	1

Total 40

From these figures it can be seen that all but 5 rooks were caught on the ground. A

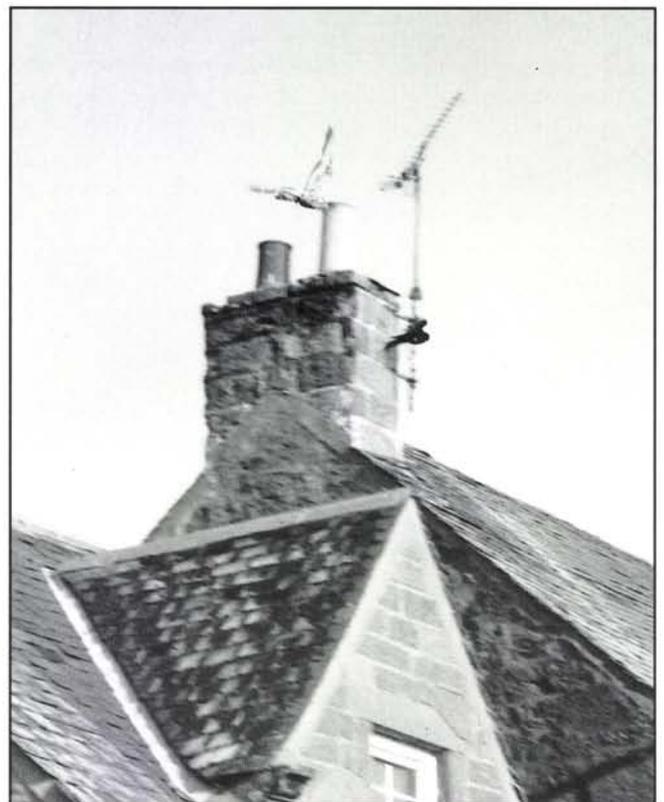
typical flight would proceed as follows: The falcon was slipped at a flock of rooks feeding 500-600 yards away. She was never cast off. The glove was held steady for as long as necessary and her routine of muting, rousing, bobbing and then leaving became a strict habit, the strength of which was demonstrated when mistakenly slipped whilst still tied to the glove!! On regaining the fist she did not leave again before another rouse. The time she would take to leave occasionally frustrated us and we questioned whether we should have cast her off immediately. However, in contrast to conventional rules of rook hawking, we often unhooded her with rooks in all directions, and she used this time to choose her quarry. This had two advantages: 1. She had the freedom to pick the easiest available rook and; 2. We learned from her, more quickly than from any book which were the best slips. A disadvantage was our limitation with flights at rooks on passage, she simply would not leave in time. However, on a couple of occasions unsuspecting rooks flew past whilst she was on the glove (having finished her routine!!) and she took them on. One memorable occasion resulted in a head on flight.

Having left the glove, invariably quite lazily for the first 10 yards, she would then set off with real purpose and a deceptive speed, before long catching up with the climbing rooks. As soon as she climbed above a rook it would drop like a stone for cover, normally the farm buildings, where a furious chase developed around the rooftops. The falcons' power and speed against the rooks agility - but far more important was the mental battle. Missed stoops and passes were insignificant providing they put the rook under increasing pressure, this was compounded by us arriving in the landrover, leaping out and trying to prevent the rook entering the buildings. The fal-

cons' persistence was astonishing to us (and many a rook) eventually forcing the disheartened quarry to seek refuge in the farmers garden and being taken on the ground amid much celebration.

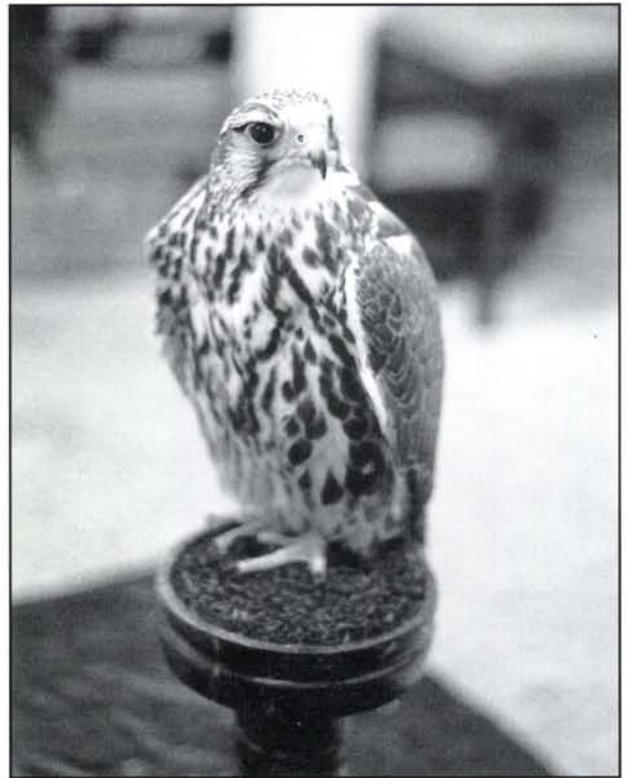
One battle royal involved both rook and falcon resting on the roof tops three times in a stand off before eventually being caught. Such was the intensity of the struggle that a guest with us remarked that she did not know whether to laugh or cry. A worthy sentiment that we could relate to. These were not ringing flights, but with the contest sometimes only feet above our heads they were very exciting. It soon became apparent just how much this was a mental battle, a duel of wits and concentration - panic was the quarry's deadliest foe.

The Sakers cunning and intelligence was a revelation, using hedges for concealment, shepherding from cover or just climbing immediately to dominate. Perhaps her time plotting on the glove prior to leaving, developed her tactics to a greater degree than a falcon unhooded and cast off immediately? She was ever alert to the easiest option and would sometimes switch to easier quarry during a flight - always to her advantage.



The Saker chasing a rook around the farm buildings.

JAMES KNIGHT



There were two notable exceptions to the 'typical flight'. Both occasions were with unsuspecting rooks and slips of only 30-40 yards. Both flights were exactly the same. Once unhooded her body language was immediately different: feathers held tight to her body, hardly moving, almost crouching on the glove, no mute, no rouse, no bobbing - just pure concentration and tension. She knew how close she was and she knew she couldn't afford to move. There wasn't the slightest jingle from her bells to give her away. When the rooks flushed she powered from the fist more like a hawk, a very fast, strong wing beat, keeping low, but to one side, shielding the hedge. She quickly caught up with her rook and sweeping up from beneath she bound to it in the air. This tactic was never used on any other occasion.

All catches in both seasons were from binding to the quarry, never chopping and never losing a rook once a foot had got hold. Neither did she receive any injury from a rook or crow or even look uncomfortable dealing with one. It was extraordinary how a rook would disappear beneath her when she grabbed it.

Her tameness was remarkable and she would return promptly to the lure and glove over long distances, as well as 'homing' to the vehicle, providing of course that there was no more quarry in sight. One tremendous asset for us was her willingness to return to the glove: On the side of a sunken country lane with barbed wire fences each side, occasional traffic and everything else that magically appears, throwing a lure down is a nightmare plus time spent making in, picking up etc... A controlled landing, a little reward and hood on saves a lot of bother as well as keeping feathers out of muddy farmyards and wet grass. This started by swinging the lure up into the glove, but trying to make it then disappear under the feet of a hungry falcon wasn't easy, so we progressed to offering half a chick and often nothing at all. It was always a pleasure to see her flutter down onto the glove with so much control.

Having dealt with her successes and positive attributes, now onto problems and unsuccessful flights which are listed below:

Beaten to cover	32
Lack of commitment (falconers error)	8
Unknown	5
No quarry	4
Beaten fairly	4
Chased rabbits	2
Chased hare	1
Frozen dead rook	1
Hid in flock of sheep	1
Too windy (blown off glove)	1
Total	59

The 20 or so unrecorded flights can all be classed into the 'beaten to cover' category. A typical unrecorded flight would, in short, be a slip that should never have been attempted, with no chase and instant return of the falcon. If anything noteworthy occurred it was always recorded be it positive or negative.

The first category then needs a little explanation, the single biggest problem for rook hawking, too much cover, no fault of the falcon. There is however, another factor here - that being the frequency of flights on a given area. No one who hawks rooks needs convincing how quickly these birds learn, not only singly but collectively as a flock. The mainstay of our hawking is one farm, approximately 8 large, very open flood meadows - the whole area extending to perhaps 300 acres. In fact, 54 flights took place here with 28 kills. The rooks became so jumpy that longer and longer slips had to be taken. In some instances speculative slips with no rooks in sight, but hopefully hidden around the corner or over the rise, had to be chanced. Hence the "no quarry" category when the gamble didn't pay off.

Eight flights were unsuccessful due to falconers error:- falcon too fat, too early in the day etc... Obviously these errors are relative, who is to say how many small errors we made and paid for - these were the big ones when the falcon refused quarry. Most occurred in what proved to be a difficult week early in the season, things had been going well and we just needed reminding that we didn't know much about falconry after all!! We came through it, frustrated with our shortcomings, simply by giving the falcon a couple of days off.

Four flights ended with the rook still flying, having beaten the Saker fairly - always by using cover, but not actually remaining hidden. One notable rook, put down by a tremendous stoop, dived into sparse cover by a stream. Despite us arriving and putting the rook under huge pressure, it kept its head and after an exhausting chase with beak wide open it demoralised the falcon who landed dejectedly back on our empty glove. These types of flights were hindered by the fact that the Saker would not wait patiently to be served, but rather dive headlong into bushes and trees. On two occasions she was successful, but normally would appear out several seconds behind the

rook with a lot of work to do. She never became tangled but her size was a problem compared to the nimble rooks.

A further effect of size was performance in different wind levels. For each flight a purely arbitrary personal guess of the wind strength was recorded. It turned out to be a surprisingly regular scale. The table below gives the information:

No of unsuccessful flights	Wind level (0-10)	No of successful flights
12	0	16
5	1	5
5	2	6
4	3	4
2	4	2
2	5	3
3	6	2
3	7	2
4	8	0
1	9	0
2	10	0

Total 51 40

(Excluding the eight flights that failed due to lack of commitment)

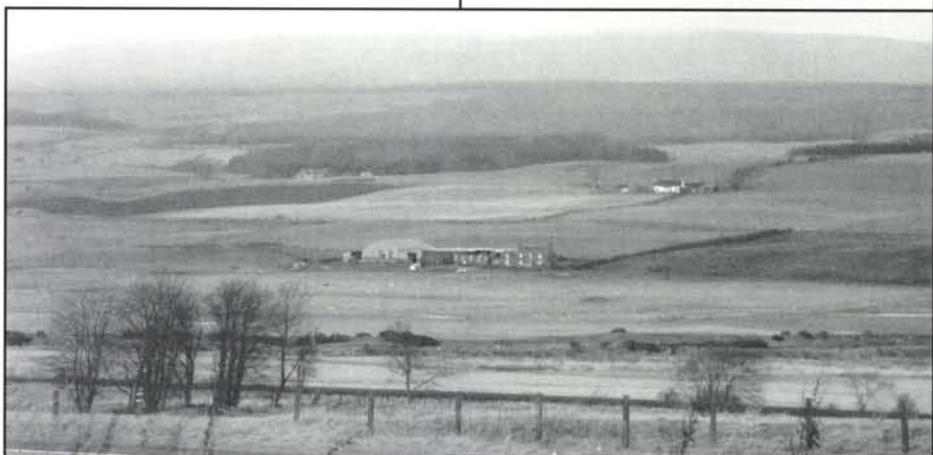
The most noticeable fact is how many days no wind was recorded, not a very windy season but very, very cold!! Of more interest is that the higher winds seem to handicap the falcon. The rooks used strong winds to shift from stoop more easily, climb more easily and race away downwind. Although the falcon could still outpace the rooks they developed more heart, risking the open ground to gain the safest cover, rather than dive into the nearest and relying on their wind

enhanced speed and agility. In her first season she did catch a couple of rooks in howling gales but these were unusual, despite this we relished strong winds which often produced spectacular flights. Although generally very good at returning, on three occasions she was lost for over 30 minutes self hunting. This transformed her from complete tameness to a very worrying wild state, and according to the telemetry signal - flying off just as we were approaching. She was never out over night, although was once called to the glove in headlights. Her safe return was always greeted with huge relief as it always seemed that this was the end!! A further problem was her liking, or rather complete and utter devotion to rabbits. She loves them! Preferring to chase them above all else. This further restricted our flights, suitable slips are rare enough without having to make sure there are no rabbits. We didn't help ourselves (understatement) by feeding her off her first kill - a rabbit. But we were so delighted, after 3 fruitless weeks, to catch anything. It always amazed us the struggle one can occasionally face getting a buzzard or hawk to hunt rabbits using lures, dead ones etc.. and yet this female Saker only ever flown to a rook lure catches the first rabbit she sees. She caught four before her first rook but, thankfully, none in her second season, given the choice though - she loves bunnies!

Her biggest criticism would be one of style, to say she flies cunning would be an understatement, I have no doubt however, that without this she could never have scored 28 kills out of 54 flights at the same place and at the same rooks. We would like to think that the lack of style is a product of the country and quarry - we don't know. What we do know is that we are having fun and looking forward to next season.

Right: showing the dominating size of the Saker against the rook.

Below: The hunting ground.



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Hawk Talk

John Matcham.

O.S.F.R.C.

RAIDER OF THE WELSH DARK

Hey! 'The Sun has got his hat on', and the birds are having a field day dropping out their feathers, they must have read my last article. However someone should have told them we can't imp a moulted feather. I only bring this to your attention as many have been in a bit of a panic wondering if something were afoot. The problem (and it's only in my opinion) is good weather, good food, and the opportunity of getting through a moult as fast as possible, naturally. Although I must admit I did have a little snicker at Terry Large explaining his Female Harris' sudden shortage of tail feathers at the Welsh Game Fair a few weeks ago. Sorry mate! I suppose I fully deserved the same treatment from my Male Harris the very next day. Feathers do come in to this issues article, or should I say the cost of keeping them in good condition and of course the accompanying bird.

Since moving my work to Oxfordshire and opening our school in 1995. Melanie and I began to realise that the frustrations I had known while at the Cotswold Falconry Centre and again at the Zoo in Wales, of never seeming able to make a significant difference in improving the ways in which people cared for and respected wild or captive bred birds and animals, were always going to be with us. It is with this in mind I would hope that you find this article helpful and not dictatorial.

This particular story begins with a visit to the Zoo from a very large and unidentified creature, where I was unfortunate enough to be the head keeper at the time. For weeks all of our keepers, local farmers and the councils pest control officer, had been accusing Freddy Fox for the mysterious disappearances of Mara, Agouti, Acouti, a pair of Black Swans a host of rare Ducks and Geese, and then finally to my amazement a single Meerkat. This for me was the final straw. I had spent a year studying and building a relationship with our Meerkats and knew them all individually as friends, to the point of the matriarch bringing her offspring to me for my approval. So the loss of a friend had struck a deeply personal note.

War! was declared on the perpetrator, who had so far cost us several thousand pounds. Traps set and guns loaded we trapped we waited. In the end we caught a Mink, an old dog with one eye. Promptly dubbed Nelson accused and found guilty by the lynch mob he was sent to the gas chamber and put to death.

That evening feeling well pleased with the days work, I did my final tour of the Zoo. For some unknown reason I made the mistake of walking in to the range of one of the security

light sensors, the sudden bright light blinded me as a large set of wings passed just over my head, at first I thought I had flushed a Wild Buzzard from it's roost, so I shone my search light across the valley in the hope that it would find a perch in the trees on the other side and not end up on the ground as lunch for the Fox. I had got to know the local Buzzards well while flying my own birds, and although we had never fed them up to seven would regularly join my old Buzzard Megan, seeming to take great pleasure in flying with her. So I felt quite guilty about waking it up and abruptly sending it off in to the dark.

I returned home and put on the kettle as ordered, Melanie was waiting for her cup of tea. She could see I was troubled by the experience. Somehow I had a feeling that something was not quite normal about that Buzzard and in the morning my suspicions had been proved valid. Having trapped and killed the Monster of Pleasant Valley we had released the Pheasants and Peacocks back in to the zoo once again, only to find a dead pheasant laying in the middle of the path. This carcass was very special, it had all of the bones and the wings intact, and laid on it's back neatly stripped of every last morsel of meat, almost as though someone had dipped it in acid, this hunter was well equipped with fine surgeons tools. This was not the work of a ruthless old Mink. The Monster had returned.

In South West Wales and in the closed tourist season, News travels fast and soon we had reports of Wolverine escapes from the Welsh mountain Zoo (unfounded), and that soon exaggerated to Wolves (unrelated). Then our visitor left as secretly as he had arrived only to attack and destroy over period of weeks the entire free range stock of chickens on a neighbouring farm. That task complete he returned to the Zoo.

By now I had begun to see things in the dark, including a large black cat, you know Leopard size and so did two others, I'll save them some embarrassment by not telling you who they were, as it turned out to be the local poachers Labrador.

You're bored with this story, I can feel it. Well so was I at this point.

Spring arrived quickly that year as our visitor had kept us busy.

On the opening day of the new season, April the first, a human visitor reported one of our birds had escaped. "Balderdash!" I exclaimed, "Not possible". Yet I still followed the fool to where he claimed he had seen the bird sitting in a tree. Well you never know do you?

I could not believe my eyes, sitting just twenty feet up in an Oak tree was biggest meanest looking Great Horned Owl I had ever seen. He was without doubt the most incredible sight I had seen in a long time. He looked at me briefly and as though he recognised me and the fact that the game was finally up, he silently disappeared in to the forest beyond.

An old saying says; "Know your enemy well", and I now knew mine, although I must admit to the fact when given the orders to 'Shoot to Kill', should he not be caught in the next few days, by the Zoo's owners. I had expressed my admiration for such a handsome and worthy opponent, who after all had just found a source of food for his survival.

We tried various sprung loaded nets to trap him, but he just destroyed them before anyone could travel the few yards to the nets to complete his capture. In the end I had to resort to a very old method used by falconers when it was legal to take wild birds. Needless to say it was under constant surveillance and only took one evening to capture our friend, who we had now named



Raider.

How he had managed to avoid detection in the past year was about to become apparent. He was as wild as any creature I had ever encountered. In the following few weeks I listened to him pound the walls of a total seclusion aviary every evening, even the company of his own species did not calm his urge to be free. I tried every kind of enclosure imaginable in the following year in a poor attempt to find him peace in captivity, this was the battle in the war I would never win, after all he had escaped once before so why should he not succeed again. He had known his enemy all along. Today I have accepted that his true owner will never come to claim him and that with all the facilities we have at our disposal I can not create a home for him that is as complete as the wilds of Wales. Now we simply contain him in an aviary that is large enough for limited exercise yet too small for him to damage anything more than his feathers. Even the mesh has to be extra thick as sixteen gauge is like paper to him. The saddest part of this story is that although we have advertised and reported on the fact that he wears a closed breeders

ring, the breeder refuses to come forward and we can not trace the manufacturer of the ring. Raider had spent at least two and possibly three years in the wild, the local owl population had been decimated and many other species had been directly affected by his presence. Sadly the law states that I nor anyone else has legal title to this bird, save his legal owner. Yet I am legally responsible for his welfare for the rest of his days. If it were possible I would send him home, to North America, but he could do more harm there. Sometimes I wish I had never caught him. The moral of this story is simple. If you know someone who has lost or found a bird, please beg them to report it to PC Paul Beecroft on 01734 536257 or Philip and Jenny Wray at the Independent Bird Register on 01926 50000. I am told they work very closely together, and also call Peter Mulholland at Raptor Registration on 01652 678492. If the bird has been reported lost or stolen within twenty four hours to the aforementioned I am one person who is happy to make great efforts to capture and return the bird ASAP. However those who do not report their losses will and do by law have to pay for

their capture and care. I charge twenty five pounds for a call out and then sixty pence a day for housing and feed, vets bills are additional. Some of the birds brought to us have now cost more than the birds are currently worth, in human terms. I hope that others like Rescue Groups, Falconry Centres, and Individuals caring for these lost friends also begin to charge for their services in the absence of their owners. Maybe this will encourage the owners to look a bit harder in future and to report them missing. Until such time that the laws change we can not claim legal title and give them a permanent place to call home, but we will care for them and they will not go without. A few simple facts;

- a, The largest number of lost and found, unclaimed birds are Barn Owls.
- b, Eighty percent of long wings lost, found and unclaimed are Lanners and Sakers. Nearly all of them are beginners birds.
- c, Kestrels still feature high on the lost and found list and are rarely claimed.
- d, Nearly all falconers are caring intelligent people. Together we can make a difference. Till next time have a really great summer.

It's nice to see Bryan Paterson and friends having it a little easier this year (well can you remember the size of the arena in the early years of the fair? SMALL), so the birds, especially the long-wings, would be over the marquees and on the falconer in a flash, keeping them on their toes. Because the fair has grown over the years, with many more exhibitors taking stands the arena has grown considerably. Now Bryan and friends have plenty of time to see the birds coming, so much time in fact that Bryan has even taken to playing with a remote control toy. This was

supposed to resemble a rabbit even though most of the Harris Hawks flown didn't think so. Only one little male Harris Hawk was brave enough to take on this fur-clad robot. On a serious note, Bryan and friends worked very hard over the two days to keep us entertained the weathering has grown to about 30 birds, from a Golden Eagle, to a Jack Merlin, belonging to Gary Biddis. For those of

you that were lucky enough to see this exhilarating little bird fly, whether you were layman, novice or expert you cannot help but marvel at what this tiny, 5oz bird is capable of. Thank you very much Gary for sharing him with us. There were a number of hybrids flown this year, you can see, by their style of flight and tenacity, why they are becoming so popular.

FALCONERS FAIR 1996 or THE LURE OF THE BIONIC BUNNY



Roger James and his Wirehaired pointer, Face, were there to show how dogs are used in falconry, hunting, pointing and flushing.

This is where Bryan's other hobby comes into play, on the flush Bryan's bionic bunny bolts or wheelspins from cover (just like they do in the wild to be pursued by the brave.

Although there is a serious side to falconry it is nice to know that a day out at the Falconers Fair can be fun.

It was good to see so many people from abroad, both traders and visitors and we hope we can welcome them all back again next year.



Above: Gary Biddis with his Jack Merlin.
Below: Bryan checking the tyre pressure on the B.B.



Above: The presentatin of all of the stands was excellent.
Below Right: This doesn't taste remotely like a rabbit.







For me the word 'meadow' conjures up visions of wild flowers and warm sunshine. I wasn't disappointed, and the threatened rain never arrived. The Hampshire countryside had never looked better and was thoroughly enhanced by the presence of two Bald Eagles floating on the breeze. Not an everyday sight, unless you spend every day at the Hawk Conservancy for here it is a daily occurrence, "and", we were told "there is more to come, this is The Valley of Eagles."

Danebury is a mature male Bald Eagle, his white head and tail showing up against a blue sky. Cheyenne is a female, Bald Eagle in immature plumage but already asserting herself over Danebury.

These are called down and from behind comes the speeding shape of Fraggie, a White-bellied Sea Eagle. She is so obviously in her element it is a joy to see her flying around, coming in every now and then to catch a piece of meat thrown high in the air by Ashley. Gandolph, a European Black Vulture is next to take to the skies, he makes a couple of circuits, then disappears. As we try and spot him our attention is caught by the marvellous colours of Mowgli, the

REG'S MEADOW

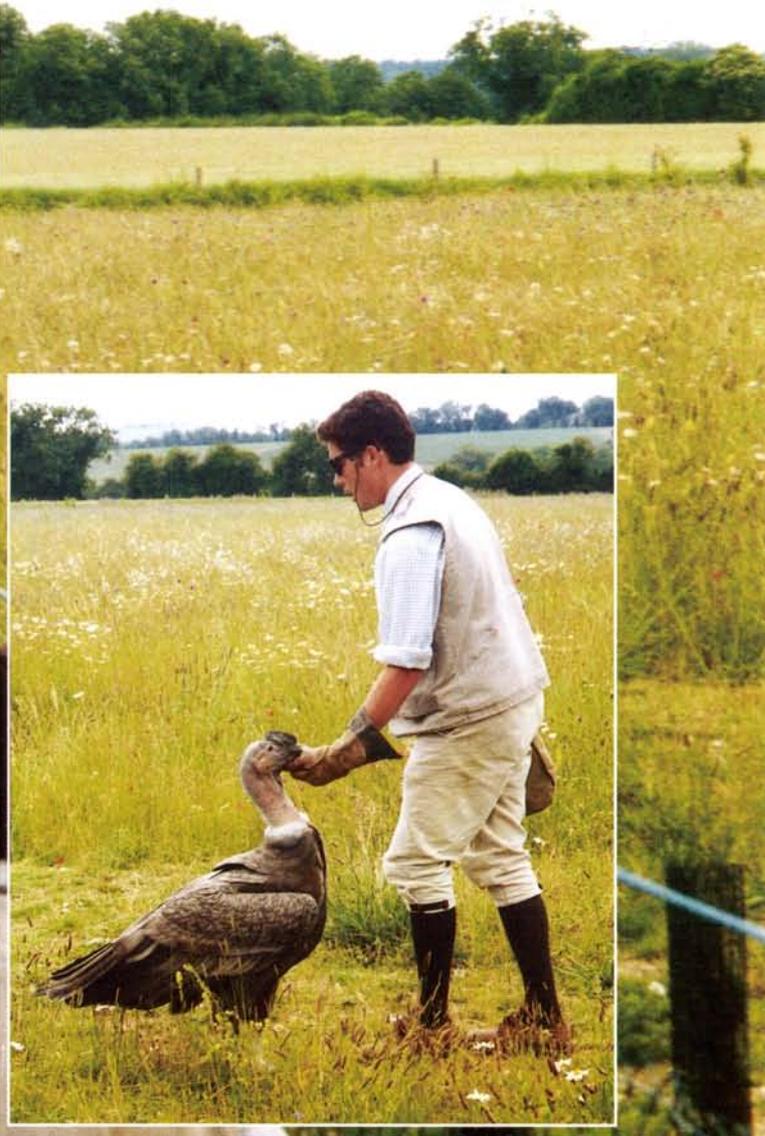
Bataleur. He looks somewhat different with his short tail and goes on to display his unusual method of steering, tilting from side to side (canting).

The last bird to enter is 'George', at 28lb and with a 10ft wingspan he is an Andean Condor, the worlds' largest bird of prey. His biggest problem is lift and with a North-West wind, conditions were less than ideal. Nevertheless, he tried. He had three attempts but found himself unable to get up. Ashley decided to call it a day and then, much to everyones delight, George was airborne. Not the most agile of flights, not the highest, but maybe one of the most satisfying I have seen.

The birds were called back in, one by one, Fraggie, Mowgli and George.

"Where is Gandolph?" we enquired, he was still nowhere to be seen. "Oh, he'll be back," smiled Ashley, "he likes to make a grand entrance at the beginning of the next display".

For those of you that do not know it must be explained that Reg Smith was the founder of the Hawk Conservancy, sadly he died in January 1995. One of the last things he did was to buy the meadow. His son Ashley now runs the Hawk Conservancy and flies the eagles in The Valley.





FERREIRA'S FALCONRY

Ferreira's Falconry is a very old book written by a Portuguese gentleman of the same name and translated into English by Anthony Jack. The writers love of a respect for the birds is obvious and the similarities between his methods and the traditional methods we know are unmistakable. It seems that it is only the last few years that falconry has moved on at all. Tame hacking is used extensively for Sparrowhawks and Goshawks and his concerns for the welfare of the birds being flown by other people mirror the same concerns many of us have nowadays. To quote "So I come to examine the abuses and errors of practice made by so many inexperienced falconers one meets now-a-days." It continues in this present year of 1613..."

The chapters on health cover everything from how to moult your bird properly right through to repairing something

as drastic as a broken leg or wing.

The book also covers things such as entering your bird onto different quarry species, some of which I must admit I was not more than a little surprised. Here it is evident that we are poles apart, the species and methods used to enter the birds are somewhat barbaric to say the least.

Throughout the book he always explains why! There is rarely a statement that is not qualified or given an instance to prove its correctness. Towards the end of the book he covers many birds explaining how and where they live and and whether they are hunters or quarry.

Although many of the things in the book are outdated the main thread that runs through the book is one of great respect and love for nature and especially birds. To read of such dedication makes one feel quite humble.

The book is a limited edition of 900 copies. £30 each inc p&p and 100 De-luxe copies, sign by Anthony Jack and in a distinctive binding. Price £50 inc p&p.

Available from T.A.M. Jack, Blue Heron Cottage, Muckton, Nr Louth Lincs. LN11 8NX. UK

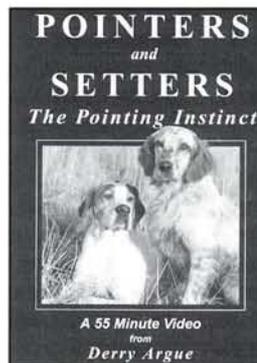
REVIEWS

POINTERS & SETTERS *The Pointing Instinct*

This video takes a look at the English Pointer and the Llewelyn Setter, bred and trained by Derry Argue. Some of the older dogs can be seen working on the Scottish moor, but the video is mainly about puppies.

Watching them grow up and observing their early behaviour. Some puppies, as young as five weeks will instinctively stalk, point and pounce.

For older dogs it shows the importance of working with live game and suggests ways in which you can put out game without their being any human scent on them.



Most of all the video shows that learning and play are very closely connected. The video is not about how to train a puppy, but how one trainer raises puppies to become stylish hunting dogs. The video is available from Firth Productions, Miller's Place, Fendom, Tain, Easter Ross IV19 1PE Scotland. Price 18.95 (£1.50p&p UK, £2.50 p&p Europe, £5 Air Mail elsewhere).

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE BOOK REVIEWED IN THE LAST ISSUE 'BUTEOS AND BUSHYTAILS' IS AVAILABLE IN THIS COUNTRY FROM - PETER MULHOLLAND, BECKSIDE COTTAGE, MOORTOWN, Nr CAISTOR. Lincs. LN7 6JA.

NEW STYLE CLOSING TOOL

It is nice to see that people are using their brains. Every year something new or different comes onto the market and this year Double 'R' Products have designed a new eyelet closing tool. It incorporates two closing tools in one. Tool 3/4 does PP23 & PP24 eyelets (8mm & 9.5mm) Tool 2/5 does PP22 & PP25 (7mm & 11mm). As you can see from the photo one of the locking bars is solid to the tool and the other is removable. This makes it very quick to screw together. The bar can then be used to close the eyelet when the tool is set for the size eyelet you require.

The medium/large and very large eyelets are annealed which means heated to red hot and then cooled in water, this helps to stop splitting

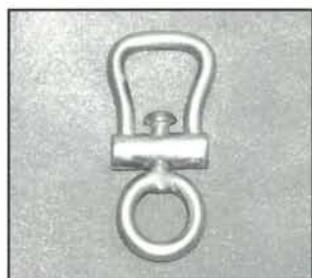
when crimped. There is a sample of the closed eyelet with each tool so you can see that it works. When working with the tool I found that the small eyelets when used with very thin leather needed two leather washers to bulk them out, one either side of the ankle. This stops splitting and gives a better fit.

After a little practice I found the tool very easy to use and such a simple idea as annealing the eyelets works very effectively.

The tool comes as a complete set including a case and two packs of eyelets.

At £25 with £1.50 p&p it is very good value for money.

For an information sheet and prices please contact Roger on: 01582 615741.



THE STRESS FACTOR

If you went to the Falconers Fair this year, on the Double R Products stand you will have seen a weird contraption. For those of you that did not go to the fair or did not stick around long enough to see it in action I will explain. It was a stress gauge for testing their swivels, mini (Hobby/Merlin) to extra large (eagle), in either stainless steel or brass. Each swivel is hand made and the

welding is done by a time served welder. The finish on the two welds on the crossbar is proud, but I am told this is for strength as removing it would weaken the joint. Each swivel is individually tested on the gauge which exerts a stress far exceeding any strain a bird could put on it. It is nice to know that the vitally important piece of metal between your leash and jesses is tested to such a standard.

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CUMBRIAN FALCONRY CLUB NEWS.

The Cumbrian Falconry Club had a busy 95/96 season and continues to thrive, we now have almost double the number of members compared to the same time last year! Our programme of field meetings continued through until the end of February. January 7th saw us at Barras where the weather was typically arctic, however we managed to nestle ourselves into a sheltered spot where the Ferrets, worked by David Thomson and Andy Stewart, got down to business immediately. The rabbits bolted really well, providing us with some quality slips and some excellent flights. Tony Shackleys first year male Redtail showed his youthful enthusiasm by crashing down a bury and almost through a dry-stone wall before taking a well earned bunny. Gareths Dargues Redtail also took a rabbit and put on a good exhibition of the soar and stoop, a style of flight that this particular venue lends itself well to. Michael Calvin's female gos took a couple in typical fashion rounding off a good day despite the polar bears and brass monkeys that were in abundance. We ended the season a Brough Sowerby on February 25th when our guest for the day was Andrew Knowles- Brown with his male Golden Eagle. Gorby wasted no time in finding lift and was quickly several hundred feet over-head. We were all hoping something would move underneath him but before he could be served he set his wings and bee-lined it, having obviously spotted something in the distance. Andrew returned a while later with Gorby safely on his fist and his hawking bag some-

what heavier by the weight of a rather large Brown Hare. Then the other hawks, A Harris, a Redtail and a Goshawk were brought out for some bunny hawking. After a slow start with the rabbits refusing to bolt, things improved when we moved down onto some lower ground. Tony Kenmares male Harris did exceptionally well to hold onto his rabbit, having ridden it bronco style for some 30 yards or more. Michaels Goshawk, after earlier demonstrating to a rabbit how to hanglide over a 40 foot overhang, finally got down to business and showed no mercy to the next two. A word of mention must go to David Thomson who Ferretted, dug-out, rebuilt a dry-stone wall and generally worked his butt off all day long.

Our attention is now turned towards putting

on our club stand at the Lowther Country Fair, where we will again be the Falconry representatives in the BFSS tent. If you are visiting the show this year, which is on August 10 & 11 pop in and see us, everyone will be made most welcome.

Our plans for the 1996/97 season include a couple of Grouse hawking days in August then it's off to Sutherland for a week in September for our club hawking holiday. After this our busy programme of field meetings will continue with a Grouse, Pheasant/Partridge and Rabbit Hawking weekend in early November, then we have several other meetings throughout the season to look forward to. We welcome membership enquiries from beginners and experienced falconers alike, whether you're in Cumbria or any of the neighbouring counties. If you want friendly, relaxed hawking outings in some very spectacular countryside or any further details about the Cumbrian Falconry Club telephone Michael Calvin on 01946 592339 or Geoff Whitehead on 01900 816311.



BRITISH HAWKING ASSOCIATION

The British Hawking Association continues to expand with a further two International Clubs affiliating in the past few months, giving even more opportunities to attend field meetings. The last Field Meeting, held in March, near Boston, was a great success with six falconers fully satisfied with slips but only one bunny in the bag. This was secured by Doug's Redtail flying across a pheasant pen (still fully occupied) and ding into a ditch. The first occurrence of a raptor knowing the seasons? For this year a fixture list has been prepared to allow a more controlled method of attending field meetings, to

avoid the disappointment of not being able to attend due to over subscription. In 1996 some longwing events are also planned in addition to the more normal shortwing/broadwing meetings. A new Field Master, Doug Smith, and Assistant Field Master, Lee Sanderson, have been elected for the forthcoming season and we wish them success and good hawking.

We have arranged for Neil Forbes to come and give a days course on Raptor First Aid, this is on 16th November '96. As this goes to press there are a handful of places spare so ring if you are interested, regardless of

whether you are a member or not. This talk is highly recommended by the Members who have already been to one.

The second edition of the Associations magazine, Yarak, is shortly to be published, containing approximately 35 pages of falconry articles. Some extra copies will be printed for sale to non-members and should be available at £2 each from us at Kennel Farm Cottage, Annesley Park, Annesley, Notts. NG15 0AU.

Peter Mulholland has kindly offered to microchip raptors at a forthcoming social meeting to be determined, if enough subscribe this will be at a reduced price, also the number can be recorded on your licence.

The Association is issuing all

membership cards in the new 'licence' format, when subscriptions are renewed in August.. Some members will have graduated to the next grade, so congratulations to those who do and keep on learning, it never stops.

In an attempt to provide raptors for novices at field meetings the Association is going to obtain a pair of Harris Hawks, additionally, other birds have been promised which require more experience to fly hence allowing falconers the opportunity to hunt a different bird for a season or more, without the long-term commitment.

I would like to conclude this article by thanking all members that attended the various functions over the last few months, it's you who make the Association what it is.

SCOTTISH HAWKING CLUB REPORT-AUTUMN '96.

The Summer sees the Club winding down for a few months. The only event put on by the club is our attendance at the main game fair in Scotland at Scone Palace, Perth. This is the third year we have been to the fair and each year it seems to get better. With the commercial companies, on our own display there were 6 Eagles and between 30/35 other birds on display. Many thanks to Adrian Hallgarth of Perthshire Falconry Services and Julie Ross of Edinburgh Bird of Prey Centre for kindly loaning us some birds for our

stand, some people criticise commercial enterprises but those that assist the ordinary falconer without trying to take advantage deserve a mention. We also had 'Falconry Originals' on the stand showing their goods as well as two other manufacturers elsewhere at the fair. This is really turning into a major event for falconers in Scotland and the north of England.

The moult seems to have occurred quite late for some of our members, I have had people on the phone in early July whose birds have only dropped



a couple of feathers, so it looks like some people will be late in starting this coming season. Our field meetings are looking good for the coming season with our main 2/4 day

meeting and AGM in the Borders this year. Let's hope the weather is kind to us. So to those of you with new birds and the rest, good hawking for this season.

WELSH HAWKING CLUB NEWS

The Welsh Hawking Club had a very enjoyable and successful bank holiday weekend at the British Falconry & Raptor Fair at Althorp in May. We met up with members, non-members, friends old and new from the UK and abroad who came to talk (and drink) and plan for the season ahead. We received countless enquiries and applications for membership. The results of our breeding season were less eggs than last year but a high fertility rate resulted in the production of Goshawk, Harris Hawk and Merlin, the majority of which have already been passed on to their new keepers. Some of our imprint goshawks were displayed at The Falconry Fair. Our plans to relocate our annual field

meet to the midlands this winter are well under way and our field meet officer, Roger James, is progressing with the finer details. The regional group at Plymouth recently elected John Rundle, Martyn Cook and Simon Berner to office and at Chester, Bob Antonio, Roland Evans and Phil Hudson were returned. The regional groups will be arranging local field meets during the Autumn and winter. Any non-members who are patiently awaiting the opportunity to purchase one of the exclusive limited edition prints by Andrew Ellis entitled 'Nowhere to go', (Peregrine pursuing Grouse) should now contact us quickly while stocks are available. cost £40 mounted (for collection only) £30 unmounted.

For further details or applications to join the Welsh Hawking Club, please contact The Secretary, Adrian Williams on 01443 206333.

HAWK BOARD NEWS

The DOE have announced that from now on the Department would bear liability for deaths or injuries resulting from hawks being caught up for the purpose of DNA testing. This news was welcomed by the Board.

The Department plan to carry out further DNA testing later this year, but in the meantime,

they have agreed to work with the Hawk Board to refine a protocol for catching up hawks in aviaries. These new guidelines will be distributed to the inspectorate and will also apply to catching up hawks for the purpose of DOE inspections.

Emma Ford.
Joint Press Officer.

HAWK BOARD SYMPOSIUM.

The Hawk Board is holding a Symposium on Saturday 19th October 1996, 10am. The Symposium is open to Hawk Board Club members and affiliated clubs. 150 seats will be available.

There will be various speakers: members of the Hawk Board and a variety of Guest speakers, covering a wide range of falconry related subjects.. Also there will be an open forum

to air peoples views with a special panel.

The venue is Staff House, Birmingham University. The price, to include a buffet luncheon, is £12.50 for the day.

Derek Starkie the Hawk Board Secretary will be writing to all the affiliated clubs with details. In the meantime any enquiries should be made to Derek Starkie on: 0181 9770304.

IF YOU WISH TO WRITE A REPORT ABOUT YOUR CLUB PLEASE FEEL FREE. SIMPLY SEND IT TO THE FALCONERS MAGAZINE, 20 BRIDLE ROAD BURTON LATIMER, KETTERING. NORTHANTS. NN15 5QP. THE DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS THE 30TH SEPTEMBER. ALTERNATIVELY A BOX ON OUR CLUB DIRECTORY PAGE WILL COST YOU JUST £20 PER ISSUE. FOR MORE INFORMATION RING LYN ON: 01536 722794

MORT

Experiences with a Harris Hawk

RAY TURNER

Almost four years ago I made a major purchase, in that I acquired a young male Harris Hawk. Having seen these in action at various show venues and admiring the expertise with which the birds were handled thought "that is the one for me." Apart from that, my wife and I have made many visits to the United States and many times on our visits we have watched Harris Hawks in the Sonoran Desert in Arizona, and in Texas. One memorable morning, at Picacho Peak south of Phoenix, we watched no less than five Harris Hawks engaged in the pursuit of a Cotton-Tail Rabbit that kept hiding in the brush, only to be chased out by one of the group of hawks that would run along the ground and chase the rabbit out into the open. This went on for about ten minutes, and I guess that the poor rabbit did not stand a chance really.

Prior to Mort arriving on the scene, I had for several years, both trained and kept birds of prey, so I was not exactly a novice. However, my thoughts (and experiences) may prove to be of interest to some.

Lesson number one "Harris Hawks are very easy to train". (Which can be construed as a piece of misinformation). An experienced falconer friend remarked that "you should be able to train it up in about 10 days". Now this might be true of Harris Hawks in general, but my Mort had not read that book! For the first 5, 6 months he was the most ill tempered bird that I have ever experienced. Putting on the Aylmeri jesses in the morning was a traumatic experience, and one that I came to dread! Every day he would 'foot' me rather badly and, operation completed, I would go indoors to dress my wounds. I would explain to my wife that once again I had been 'mortified! Brings me to the basis of lesson number two really, "Be patient and keep trying."

Twice a day I would take him up into the field, slip on the creance, and place out food on an adjoining fencepost. Now the idea was that he should learn to trust me, so that he would learn to eat off the fist. At first he would not eat if I were in sight, so I would hide myself away and spy on him. At least in this I was able to get a measure of success, in that I eventually he would eat even if I were in sight. It must have been another four months before he would deign to eat off the fist. Novices will be astonished with the speed of reaction too! Even at this stage he would strike like lightning. One memorable say he struck with the rear talon, and sliced a long cut in my finger, blood everywhere. (that needed four stitches) Perhaps lesson number three is to marry a nurse, as

my wife put the stitches in for me.

However, lesson number four is most important. No matter how stubborn or belligerent your charge may be, never ever lose your cool. Even if you think that your charge is an aggravating little so-and-so, don't let it show. If you have to get it out of your system, then kick a fence post or anything else that comes to mind, but so not ever vent your frustration on your hawk. You have to build up a sense of rapport and trust, and the best way to undo all the good work you have been doing up to date is to vent your anger on the bird. Perhaps, like elephants, he or she will probably never forget. So be warned.

Back to the training of Mort. Time came when, now 50 yards of creance, he would come sailing up to take the food morsel, and then shoot off again and take up his stance on the fence. Repeated twice daily flights eventually got me to believe that at long last he could be trusted to do his own thing, how wrong I was!

Fitted with a radio transmitter, I took him out one fine morning with the intention of doing away with the creance. This is what I like to think is the 'moment critique' that every austringer must experience. Will he? Won't he? For me it was the latter. Mort soared off into a tree some 100 metres away, I approached the tree, out shot a rabbit. It streaked across the field and took sanctuary in some very dense and boggy marshland, pursued by one very keen Harris Hawk! I watched him dive into the bog, and he did not reappear, I waited and waited, but not a sighting of my Mort.

It was out of the question to wade into that thick morass, so I just watched and waited at the edge. Nothing to do but go home and get the radio detection apparatus. Switched it on at the edge of the marsh. Click ...click ...click, point the aerial. Appears that he is in the thicket of willow. High up on a branch there he was, having a nice preen.

The fact that he had a fat tummy showed that he had eaten well. Nothing more to be done, so I walked home and left him to it! Returned later on in the afternoon, he had moved up into an Oak tree. I showed the lure, but not a flicker of interest. At last my faithful friend in the form of a Welsh Border Collie seemed to think it all wonderful. Lovely long walks in the country for a change! Lesson number five. You can bet your bottom dollar that as long as you fix your eyes on the hawk/falcon then it will stay where it is. Take your eyes off for a moment, and there it is, gone! So you point the aerial and go on the hunt again.

A very important thing to remember is that whilst books tell you all sorts of interesting things about your choice of bird of prey, such as how they hunt, what they eat, where they live and how they nest etc., (all very interesting) one important lesson is never spelled out. Birds of prey are individuals in their own right and you cannot expect all of them to be the same. So lesson number six is to treat and expect your bird to be an individual. Over the years I have trained quite a few birds of prey and every one of those was different.

Back to Mort again who, you will remember, has absconded on his first flight. For the remainder of the day 'Bella' (my collie) and I kept watch on Mort. During this vigil we are nourished from time to time by the appearance of the wife who brings up a very welcome flask of coffee. Lesson number seven, if you must waste hours of your time flying a hawk or falcon make sure that you have a supportive wife, it really does make a great deal of difference in the long run. At long last the remnants of the sun give way to the darkness of night, it is safe to leave Mort now and we can go home to get some sleep. Not easy this, you lay in bed and wonder how Mort is getting on or how will you get him back. Lesson number eight is to think positive, of course you will get him back (sometime).

The foregoing is based on the assumption that you do not have a job to go to! In any case you are up well before dawn, prepare some coffee, bring the electronic tracking device and resume the fray. It is very useful if you can be on the scene just before first light, the idea being that you have food on offer before he finds some food himself. There is Mort, still in the same tree. I show the lure, that elicits a negative response, so I have a sip of coffee and wait. It gets lighter, and warmer (even in the Summer it can be cold standing around). Time comes when you show the lure and you DO get a response! Mort hops down a couple of branches and watches with a beady eye. Then all of a sudden he launches into the air and is on the fist. Jubilation!

That first sortie of Mort's has been the first of many when he exercises his own personal prerogative. They have become fewer over the years, but he still has a penchant to do the occasional 'walkabout'. He has been 'missing' for no less than eight days at a stretch, and several times for just three or four days. The interesting thing is that he is always flown in the same area, that he now knows well. In essence, his patch is comprised of about one acre of mature wood-

land, on one side of which is a 200 metre of rough willow scrub, and the dreaded marsh. He does not appear to wander far out of this area, in which can be found lots of mice, grey squirrels and quite a few rabbits. Only a thought, but perhaps hawks are more territorial than longwings? The latter have what I may term 'distant horizons' and in just a few seconds can be far out of sight. As it is, I no longer fit Mort with a radio tracking device, since the batteries last only about 60 hours and Mort frequently is absent for longer than this period. Apart from his bouts of wanderlust Mort exhibits some interest in traits or habits, that I did not associate at all with Harris Hawks.

Perhaps at this point it should be explained (possibly to the disappointment of some) that I do not hunt Mort but fly him for the pure enjoyment of it all (even if he has been a cantankerous little devil at times, it is still FUN!) He is taken out into the fields (usually twice a day) and there released where, for the most part, he follows me from tree to tree.

I offer the occasional morsel as we walk along, and he immediately comes to fist, has his feed, and then I launch him off into the nearest tree. For most of the time this works well, though if a startled rabbit breaks cover than Mort is in hot pursuit. He has never been 'trained' to hunt rabbits, but his instinct tells him that perhaps they are good to eat.

If we are in the vicinity of the willow copse, it is found all of a sudden he is 'missing'! This no longer worries me for I realise that he has gone to have a bathe in the small streams that are to be found there. I know that he will be some time and that he is reluctant to fly until his wings have dried out, so I walk home and have a cup of coffee. Because Mort knows the area I know that the most usual place where he will be is high up on a branch of an old dead beech tree, his favourite spot. So I give him a couple of hours, walk back and show the lure, and we are united again. The peculiar thing is that at home the hawk bath is placed out for him, and he seldom uses it. Take him out on a flight however and it is a different matter. At one place in Hampshire I asked the demonstrator is the Harris ever nipped off? He admitted that his Harris does, to have a bathe! So it seems that Mort is not the only one that does this.

Despite the fact that I do not hunt with Mort as such, he sure has a neat line when it comes to killing. I have seen him pluck a scampering squirrel from the branch of a tree as easy as if one was plucking a peach. Last year I heard the scolding of magpies who were upset by Mort. He had driven them off their nest and was busy scoffing the young. Although he could see the young magpies he was deterred from entering at first by the dome of sticks over the nest and the rather small entrance. However, he overcame this small obstacle and suffice to say that replete with baby Magpie it was about eight days before I could coax him back. So there he would sit, high up on a dead beech tree with a fat tum trimming his feathers in the bright sunshine, ignoring me.

Duringt this particular episode we had a very long spell of fine weather. So each morning Bella and I would go out early, traipse the fields, swing the lure and blow on his whistle, but often not a sniff of my Mort. So, back for some breakfast. Then fill up the thermos flask with coffee, make some sandwiches for me to withstand the long vigil. My wife was very understanding, never mind all those chores, this is serious stuff! So Bella and I would sit near Mort's favourite beech tree and relax in the sun, with ears attuned for the bells. So there we would be, in the peace and the quiet, sipping coffee and having a munch at a sandwich. A certain pair of friendly brown eyes would gaze at me intently! Now unless you have a heart of stone I defy anybody to eat a morsel in front of the dog and not share it. So I would offer Bella a crust which went down like there is no tomorrow.

This little drama went on for several days; occasionally I would either hear the bells, or spot a speedy shape flashing in the trees. In high summer with all the tree in their summer garment a Harris Hawk is very hard to spot. However, persistence pays off. Swinging the lure on one quiet evening and there is a jangle of bells over my head. there he is, beady eye and very keen. Offer the lure again and 'zap', down he comes, straight on to my fist. Perhaps this is the final lesson (if there is such a thing as the last lesson), be persistent.

Now, whilst I can put up with Magpies, there is one species in the avian world that I really despise and that is the Crow. I regard crows as being the 'bully boys', they come up waving their black pick axe of a beak in a menacing manner that intimidates most others. I can never forgive crows either for killing my lovely female Buzzard 'Belinda'. She used to love to sit in an oak tree and preen herself in the sun. Crows are stealthy killers, they will land a few feet away, sidle up and then give a sudden stab at an eye. My lovely Belinda lost both her eyes to a gang

of crows. With this in mind I am so pleased with Mort, in that he stands no nonsense with crows.

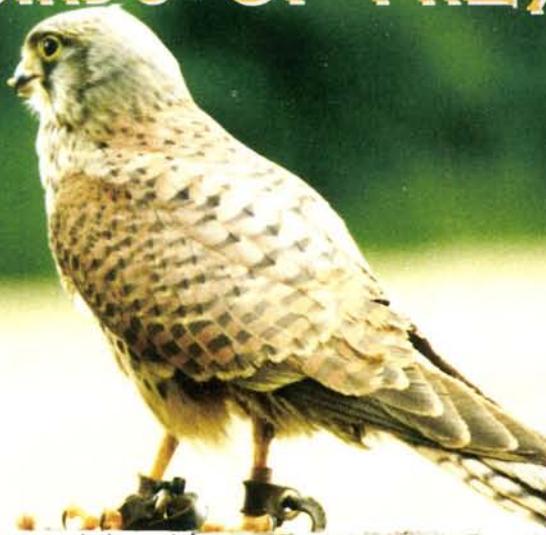
A group of them did try to dominate him in the top of a dead pine tree. There was a very quick 'strike' with a foot, the result of which is that a crow falls out of the tree before it knows it is dead. It is done so quickly and with such deadly expertise that I suggested to my wife that we call him "Kung-Fu" Mort! On four separate occasions I have seen him kill a crow. There is no struggle, no tussle at all, just 'zap'. As far as could be seen the killing is done with just the rear talon, where the crow is hit on the back of the head and I can only assume that this deadly and long rear talon penetrates the brain, with disastrous results for the recipient.

At long last Mort and I have achieved a rapport in that he trusts me and even 'talks' to me in his own way. We have now arrived at the stage where I can really trust him and he hates to be left on his own. If I walk more than 100 yards away he speeds through the trees to catch me up.

Having said that I know too many people reading this will have had lots of experience with various species of hawks, and not just Harris Hawks. I hope that they will be tolerant and trust that some of the things I have said will invoke pleasant memories of similar things happening to them. For the novice, and the would be falconer or austriinger who fancies his chances of flying hawks of falcons, I hope that they can read between the lines. It is not at all like keeping a 'pet'. Birds of prey should never be regarded as 'pets', as each is a regal creature in his or her own right. Keeping a bird of prey is a way of life that requires both dedication and a continuing total commitment. The rewards are what you what you make them, but like all good things in life they have to be earned. If you are not prepared for that then perhaps keeping any bird of prey is not for you



CASTING AN EYE OVER THE BRITISH BIRDS OF PREY CENTRE



Above: This young male kestrel hovers beautifully.

Left: Barn Owl.

Below: This Lanner Falcon did its best to outwit Michael.

Right: These Redtails look totally at ease in their hexagonal aviary.

Below: These east facing weatherings capture all the morning sun.



If you have ever spent any time in the east of England one of the things you will have noticed is the wonderfully slow pace of life, people seem so relaxed. This is reflected in the birds at the British Owls and Birds of Prey Centre. Several of the birds were sunbathing, seemingly oblivious of the activity around them. All were at ease with the public, even though the centre has only been open for 11 months. Most of this is due to the patience and expertise of Michael Raphael, ably assisted by Crispin Worledge, John Finnis and John Gallagher.

However, once in the flying arena things speed up somewhat, here Michael shows his skill with the swung lure as he flies a cast of Lanners. These birds a male and a female put him to the ultimate test as they skillfully 'hunt' the lure. Harris Hawks too, are flown in a cast, with plans for a cast of Sakers and a companion for their male Luggar, who already flies like a demon on his own. Regal and Utah are

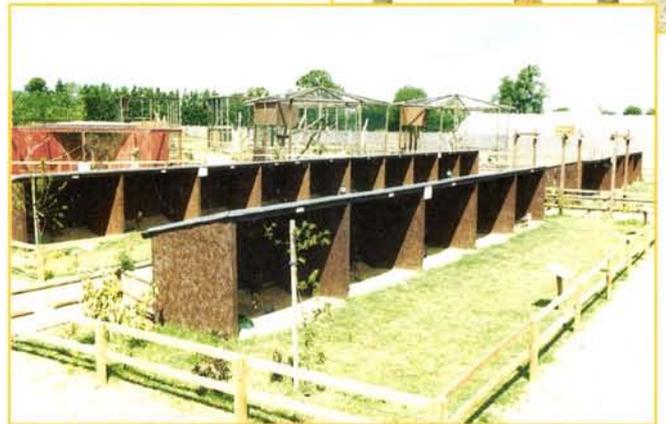


Ferruginous Buzzards and both fly but at different times. Then we have a trio. A Barn Owl, a Tawny Owl and a Kestrel. These are flown together so the public can compare the three birds they are most likely to see in the British countryside, illustrating the different sizes, plumage and flight patterns and explaining the different

hunting methods and the times of day, or night, they are likely to see them.

All of the display commentaries, as well as being entertaining, are very educational and informative.

The centre is well laid out giving it a spacious feel and



the large hexagonal aviaries make it possible to see the birds at almost any time, although they all have nest ledges where they can evade the public eye if they so wish.

Situated five miles from the A14, it is very easy to find and it is part of Stonham Barns which is a group of establishments incorporating other attractions including a Bonsai shop, a wood turning shop, pet shop, restaurant and several others. The centre itself has a well-stocked gift shop and also supplies Falconry Furniture. Courses are available and also hunting days.

All in all the British Owls and Birds of Prey Centre is well worth a visit.



THESE THREE PHOTOGRAPHS ARE JUST TO KEEP YOU GUESSING. NO PRIZES FOR THIS ONE, ANSWERS IN THE NEXT ISSUE.



Above: This Savigny's Or Pharaoh's Eagle Owl has the most beautiful markings. Right: Crispin in his element talking to the audience about the birds.



Above: 'Sunbathing!' Left: Regal a 10 year old Ferruginous certainly lives up to his name. Below: Here two of the trio perch together.



Photo: David Wilson

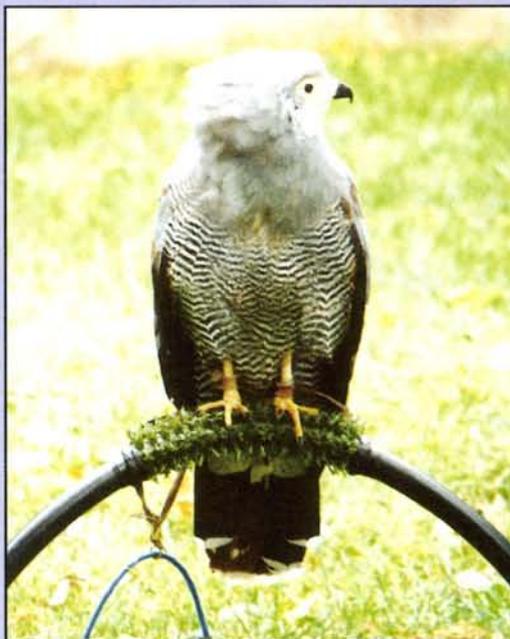


Photo: Andrew Knowles-Brown



Photo: Alan Gates



HORSES FOR COURSES

As a breeder of hybrids, could I have a go at answering some of P.M.'s queries in the last issue?

Most Falconers would agree with him/her in that the charm of falconry is in hunting a natural quarry in its natural state, and in maintaining a fine balance between predator and prey. I have written about this in my book "Understanding the Bird of Prey" p278 and about the ethical issues of hybrids on p321.

Exactly what a *natural* quarry is and what its *natural* state is, is open to interpretation. Think about it for a moment. The main quarry for coastal peregrines for example, is seabirds (see Derek Ratcliffe's book "The Peregrine".) Inland, pigeons are one of their principal preys. And what is a natural state - 99.5% of Britain's land area is managed land, not natural, and in evolutionary terms, the peregrine is now surviving in unnatural habitat here. But, broadly speaking, one can accept that, in waiting on over a falconer on a Scottish grouse moor, the peregrine is behaving very similarly to its wild *calidus* brethren on the Siberian tundra.

Not such an easy comparison with the Harris Hawk. Not only is it a non-native, but its common quarry, the rabbit and the pheasant are also non-native too! And the hunting ground of lowland Britain, strewn with barbed wire fences, electricity poles and speeding cars, is a far cry from the Sonoran Desert. But it has proved a very popular bird with falconers, not because it is a superb killer - the Goshawk can outclass it in sheer athletic ability - but because it is biddable and fits in better with modern man and all his works than does a gos.

So what we are judging our birds by is not just sheer killing ability, but their ability to be useful hunting birds at the quarry we have available under the conditions that we have available. We may even accept, as in the case of the

Harris Hawk, a reduced hunting performance, if this is offset by other characteristics. My own preferred quarry for example is carrion crows. These are not a common quarry for wild peregrines, and need a falcon with more tenacity and more prepared to tackle such a strong quarry on the ground or in confined places. Sakers on the other hand, are often rather slow so that the flight goes too far, resulting in a lost hawk or the flight going off our hunting area. Unlike the wild falcon I cannot hunt wherever I please and have to limit my activities within certain boundaries. The gyrfalcon is often too big for crows, frightening them so that they will not attempt to outfly it high in the sky, and the gyrfalcon takes up a lot of space. We had one fly 150 miles in one day last season. The peregrine/saker, and to a lesser extent the gyrfalcon and the gyrfalcon/saker, have proven time and time again to be better suited to hawking crows under British conditions. They even up the balance so that crow hawking becomes a realistic proposition, but is still a lot harder than say rabbit hawking.

I can sense that P.M. will be unconvinced by this. Therefore I would like to invite him to a day's crow-hawking this season in Northumberland. If he can ride, I will provide a horse, if not, he can follow in the hawking van. Then he can decide for himself whether there is a fair contest and a respect for the prey. Actions speak louder than words.

As a breeder, yes I do wish to produce birds which are more manageable, although this is done not by hybridising but by the way in which the bird is reared (p185). To me there is little joy in 'taming the untameable wild and noble spirit', whether it is a hawk or a horse, I prefer it to be steady and well-adjusted and therefore less prone to stress and the health problems that arise from stress.

So we breed hybrids just to show what good breeders we are? No, those of us who breed more hawks than we need ourselves, breed them for other falconers. What the

market wants, we aim to produce. For example, look at the statistics on production of captive-bred birds in UK 1980-1993(p323). The production of Common Kestrels, European Sparrowhawks and Common Buzzards has fallen dramatically since 1987. Why? Because the sale price does not cover production costs and the demand is not sufficient. The price is an index of supply in relation to demand and obviously breeders will try to produce birds in demand by falconers, rather than something which cannot be sold. Funnily enough, our work on pure bloodlines of New Zealand Falcons and Altai Falcons, is funded by sales of hybrids.

In the case of hybrids between *buteos*, *parabuteos* or *accipiters*, I personally believe that they will never be anything more than a curiosity, such as the hybrid Coopers/Harris on p131 which I photographed at a recent NAFA Meet. Some, such as the Common Buzzard/Redtailed Hawk hybrid, I actively disapprove of because of the risk of genetic pollution here in the UK. Nor am I keen on subspecies hybrids of peregrine, for example *peregrinus/brookei* or *peregrinus/pelegrinoides* for the same reason. On the other hand, one hybrid I do like in the UK is the gyrfalcon/saker because it does not risk genetic pollution, breeds well in captivity to many generations, and occurs naturally in the wild anyway and this may not be a hybrid at all.

On a completely different subject, could I just be allowed to thank Shaun Healey for his kind comments about the Hawk Board? I am sorry if we are the 'same old faces', but we are doing our best to encourage new ones. And he's right, if we only had our own interests at heart we wouldn't be spending our energies helping everybody else, we'd just spend our time looking into our own interests. Good on you Shaun. Keep them coming!

Sincerely
Nick Fox.

FIRST GENERATION

I am writing with regard to the letter in the Summer issue entitled 'Why breed hybrids?'

I feel it is necessary to dispel the strange ideas which have obviously led to the writing of this letter.

Firstly any hybrid is by no means an easy bird to train or maintain, we all appreciate the fact that all falcons are individuals but in the case of hybrids each is entirely a law unto itself, a separate entity. I fly a hunting team which includes both hybrids and natural species, the hybrids are by far the more difficult to train and fly yet they are also the top team members. The simple reason for their difficulty is they have no track record. If I take a Peregrine and train it to hunt I not only have the benefit of my own experience with them but also the benefit of many generations of falconers before me. We are the first generation to fly hybrids and are therefore learning and setting standards for others in the future to use to their advantage.

As for the hybrids being better hunters, this depends on the individual. I have often stated the fact that there are many poor quality falcons and hawks in captivity, in the main this has nothing to do with the falconer flying them or the breeder, but due to the low mortality rate in captive breeding and lack of natural selection in captivity. In other words many of the hawks flown in captivity would simply not have made it in the wild, this rule is no different with hybrids. The thing that is different is the 'Hybrid Vigour'. There is no biological reason for young hybrids to perform better than either of the parent species, they just do! I have heard people who don't fly hybrids say it is just a term invented by Martin Jones. That is complete nonsense. Hybrid vigour was first noted in pigs over 200 years ago, the hybrid we are all best acquainted with is the *lurcher* and nobody questions their ability as superbly fast and agile hunting dogs. The reason?..... Hybrid Vigour!

Basically the main reason for producing hybrids is not to make training or hunting any easier but to relax your restrictions on where you can hunt and with

what. My top falcon is 'Speed', a peregrine/lanner/lugger. He starts each season on grouse in the Scottish highlands and finishes every season hunting partridge in Hampshire, Berkshire and Warwickshire. To attempt a similar scenario with any of my peregrines or Sakers falcons would be sheer lunacy. Their adaptability is phenomenal but they require an experienced handler with mountains of self confidence, they are not for the faint-hearted.

I have heard people say "What about lost hybrids breeding with our wild populations of natural species?" The simple answer to that is the environment would have to be totally saturated with hybrids for there even to be the remotest chance of that happening. A wild peregrine would not give a Saker/peregrine a second glance.

Finally to use a quote from Dr Nick Fox:

"Hybrids are the closest thing to a domestic falcon" That phrase alone takes a good deal of weight off falconry's shoulders. Public perception of falconry is a strange thing but nobody complains about captive bred dogs because they are 'Domestic species', equally the hybrid falcons occur nowhere naturally in the wild.

Yours Sincerely
Rick Gerard.

NATURAL CURVATURE

Dear David & Lyn,

Having read the article on imping by John Matcham (Summer '96 issue) I thought I would mention a method that we sometimes use 'down under'. For a perfect imping pin consider using the stripped shaft of an old feather taken from a point closer to the feather tip. This slightly thinner section of feather shaft fits perfectly inside the broken portion and has all the strength and most importantly, the natural curvature of the real feather.

It did occur to me that John mentioned the importance of casting a bird and gaining the help of an experienced falconer. If a "falconer" does not have the knowledge to perform a basic operation like casting a bird they certainly should not be attempting to imp. After all, without the ability to cast a bird, how does one fit the furniture?

It should be said that imping should be carefully considered before proceeding. Wild birds in the moult survive admirably with whole feathers missing so don't feel that one missing feather justifies giving the bird the stress of imping a new tip in.

Be sure also that the imping pin is not so long as to pierce the follicle or feather root.

Having said all this I thank John for the article which I did enjoy and look forward to his column in the future.

Yours sincerely
Lee Fern.
Nelson, New Zealand.

IT'S GOOD TO TALK

Following my letter in the Summer issue, I received a telephone call from John Matcham (the gentleman to whom I directed my last letter). We had a lengthy conversation covering many falconry related topics and spanning some 1 1/2 hours! And people say women can talk!

I found John to be a very knowledgeable and likeable man with an obvious wealth of experience and a caring attitude. He answered my doubts with courtesy and humour. What more can I say? Thank you John for putting my mind at ease and being the recipient of the telephone bill!

What a great turnout at the Falconers Fair this year - shame about the weather and the cheque book - well, what's left of it! Nevertheless, it was nice to meet the many people to whom I have spoken but never met, even though I did miss one or two. (where were you John?) Maybe next year.

Happy Hawking to all for the forthcoming season.

Regards
Brian Smith.

MANY THANKS

I would like to thank the Scottish Hawking Club, especially Andrew and Graham, for their hospitality and for the opportunity to attend the Scottish Game Fair at Scone Palace.

It was nice to meet all the people to whom I have spoken on the telephone over the last few years.

Regards
Ian Falconry Originals

THE BIRD WIDOW.

He leaves me early morning
to go to her, I know.
No matter what the weather is,
come hail or sleet or snow.

They make a lovely couple
They make a real good team.
She, in a brown overcoat
and he all dressed in green.

But really I'm not jealous
of that you know I'm right.
He's with her early mornings
He's with me every night.

If someone calls I tell them
"He's gone out with his bird".
I hear them gasp with amazement,
That's something they've not heard.

So I suppose I ought to tell you
about his bird, you see,
the other female in his life
is mostly up a tree.

Her brown overcoat is plumage
and her weight must be maintained.
She gives him all her loyalty,
but the skies are her domain.

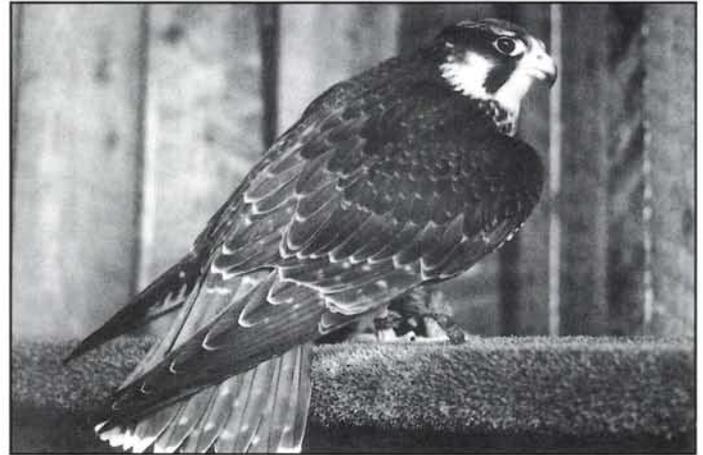
W Hey.

THE BREEDING OF LARGE FALCONS & THEIR HYBRIDS A BRIEF HISTORY.

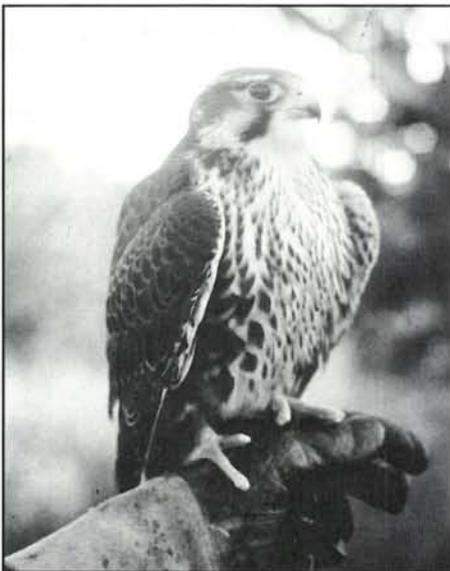
CARL G JONES

The breeding of large falcons in captivity has a relatively recent history. The first peregrines were bred by the German falconer Renz Waller in 1942 and 1943. Following this it was many years before the breeding of large falcons became straight forward. The motivation for the captive breeding of falcons was primarily scientific research and conservation and to a lesser extent to provide birds for falconry and aviculture. Following the crash in the Peregrine population in Europe and North America in the 1960's, (now known to have

private breeders who were also trying to breed falcons in captivity. Several private breeders and institutions obtained limited success in the late 1960's and early 70's but the breakthrough came in 1973 when the Peregrine Fund, then based at Cornell University, USA, succeeded in breeding twenty Peregrines from three breeding pairs. Although the breeding of the Peregrine was the aim of these projects, they experimented with other large falcons, which they used as model species to help perfect breeding techniques. In the early 1970's the Peregrine



A hybrid between a Prairie Falcon and a Red-naped Shaheen (babylonicus race of peregrine) in immature plumage. This cross is called a Sharie. This is a male.



A tribird, a cross between a Prairie and a Red-naped Shaheen (Sharie) crossed back to a Prairie Falcon. (ie. 3/4 Prairie 1/4 peregrine) this is a juvenile male.

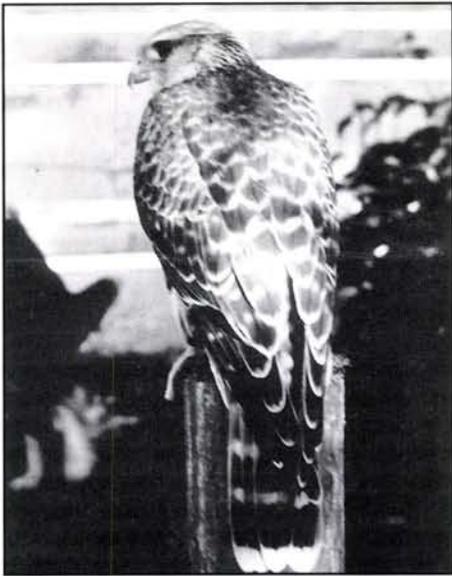
been due to contamination by pesticides) falcon biologists gathered in Madison, Wisconsin, USA in 1965 to discuss the fate of the species. At the meeting it was agreed that the propagation of the Peregrine in captivity for possible restocking in the wild was a high priority. Consequently institutionalised breeding projects were set up in the United States, Canada and later in Europe. At the same time there were many

Fund bred Lanners, Prairie Falcons, and in 1974 were the first to breed a Gyr Falcon. During the 70's the techniques for breeding falcons in captivity were developed and largely perfected. The first large falcon hybrids were produced because suitable partners of the same species were not available and the birds were being used to develop the techniques for the breeding of large falcons. The first hybrids were bred in Ireland by the Hon. John Morris and Ronald Stevens and they were the

result of natural mating between a male Peregrine and a female Saker. Artificial insemination, which was then still in the pioneering stage of its development for the breeding of falcons, was used by Les Boyd in America in 1975 to produce a hybrid between a male Prairie Falcon and a female Red-naped Shaheen. This hybrid was called the "Sharie". In subsequent years the Sharie was used to hybridise back with a Prairie

Falcon to produce the first ever falcon "tribrids". I saw these hybrids and tribrids in 1976. The Sharie in immature plumage looked very much like an immature Lanner, but flew like a Peregrine. The adult Sharie had plumage characteristics of the two parents but the Peregrine flight characteristics were the more dominant. At first impression the adult plumage was also Lanner-like. The tribrids showed extreme variation in both plumage and anatomical characteristics. Some were lighter in colour than Prairies and others darker than the original hybrids, there were intermediates, some appearing inseparable from Prairie Falcons. In 1977 the first tribrid between three species of falcons was produced when a Sharie was hybridised with a Merlin and the resulting offspring was called a Shamerie. This bird weighed 300g and most closely resembled a Merlin in plumage but had heavily developed tarsi and large feet. The first Peregrine x Gyr hybrid was produced by the Peregrine Fund in 1976. In Britain the captive breeding of large falcons has always lagged a few years behind that of the Americans. In the 1970's the Lanner, Lugger,

Peregrine and Saker were all bred for the first time and in the early 1980's the Prairie Falcon was bred. Gyr Falcons were not bred until 1989, when they were bred by Steve Tolley. Today many species of falcon have been domesticated and worldwide thousands are being maintained and bred in captivity. The production of hybrids by artificial insemination became increasingly more widespread during the 1980's. Breeding of hybrid falcons has now become common among raptor breeders although the breeding of tribrids has not been, and probably will never be, frequent, due to the genetic fitness of hybrids. Many different combinations of species have been bred but the most extreme that I am aware of being the Peregrine x American Kestrel, Merlin x Gyr, Merlin x Peregrine, Peregrine x Bat Falcon and Peregrine x Orange-breasted Falcon. Hybrids have been produced in other groups of raptors including an intergeneric hybrid between a Harris Hawk and a Redtailed Hawk, and a Coopers Hawk x Harris Hawk. Most of these extreme hybrids have only been produced once or on a few occasions.



A Shamarie, the first three species falcon cross, which was bred in 1977. It is a Prairie x Red-naped Shaheen xcrossed with a Merlin (ie. 1/4 Prairie, 1/4 Peregrine, 1/2 merlin)

The most popular hybrid among North American falconers is the Peregrine x Gyr, although Peregrine x Prairie and Prairie x Gyr are also frequently seen. In Britain the Peregrine x Saker hybrid is the most favoured but this is because until recently Gyr

The identification of hybrids is extremely problematical since they can express the anatomical and plumage characteristics of both parents to varying degrees. Most Peregrine hybrids in adult plumage have some grey/blue tinges to their dorsal plumage. A number of hybrids display a rangy, almost stretched confirmation of tarsi and wings and are not as heavy as their size may suggest. Most people familiar with falcon hybrids will agree that a large percent-

age cannot be reliably identified. Most falconers who fly hybrids like them because they express hybrid vigour and are often superior to their parents in stamina and tenacity. Most falconers hope that the hybrids will show the good qualities of



Les Boyd with a Sharie, 1976.

Falcons were not readily available. It is likely that in future Peregrine x Gyr hybrids will become more commonly bred. Most hybrids are produced by artificial insemination but some have been bred by natural mating. Besides the Peregrine x Saker mentioned above, Lanner x Lugger, Saker x Gyr, American Kestrel x Kestrel and Peregrine x Gyr have all been produced by natural mating in captivity. I have also heard of a fertile egg produced by a Hobby x Merlin pairing.

both species, although this is often the case, not infrequently the hybrid has shown the bad personality features of both parents. The Gyr x Prairie hybrid is known for its difficult temperament. The Peregrine x Gyr cross is regarded by most western falconers as the best, combining speed, stooping and "waiting on", of the Peregrine, with the weight, intelligence and tenacity of the Gyr. The Peregrine x Saker hybrid combines Peregrine speed and trainability with Saker manoeuvrability

and tenacity. Arab falconers have always preferred the Saker to the Peregrine since they are larger and are better adapted to their climate, and can more readily capture and subdue the main prey species, the Houbara Bustard. They have, in recent years, started to show an interest in hybrids between white Gyrs and Sakers. These beautiful pale birds, which the Arabs have a penchant for, are larger and stronger than Sakers and are more able to cope with the heat of the Gulf States than are pure Gyrs.

The breeding of hybrids between different subspecies of falcons is also a fairly widespread practice, especially in the USA. In 1986 I visited breeding facilities where falcon strains were being bred for gamehawking. Two of the most distinct subspecies of Peregrines were being hybridised together or bred to other races of Peregrines. The small Barbary Falcon (pelegrinoides) from north Africa was being crossed with the large Peales (pealei) p from the northwest Pacific islands to produce stunning looking large, strong birds, with the well-developed sternum and shoulder girdle of the Barbary Falcon.

The use of hybrids between subspecies of Peregrines has been used to good effect for conservation. Following the widespread use of pesticides in the 1960's the distinctive eastern form of the anatum Peregrine became totally extinct throughout its range in the eastern United States. Captive bred Peregrines of seven different subspecies have been released into this area. (However almost 80% of the birds were from the four recognised subspecies from North and South America). The rationale behind this work was simply to provide a Peregrine stock with a diverse genetic background so that natural selection would be

able to select for those characters most suited for the region. Many researchers speculate that once the gene frequencies between these different races stabilise within the population then the resulting birds will be similar to, if not indistinguishable from, the eastern anatum Peregrines that were once found in the area.

The breeding of hybrids raised ethical questions. In most cases accumulated wisdom has shown the desirability of maintaining captive stocks of animals, whether they are Przewalski's Horses, Orangutans, Macaws or races of Eagle Owls, as genetically pure as possible. This however does not detract from the fact that the breeding and trading in hybrids is a legitimate activity and since the greater majority of birds involved are domesticated it is not usually a conservation issue.

The threat that intraspecific hybrids may cause danger to wild stocks through genetic swamping is highly unlikely due to their reduced genetic fitness. Further to this all hybrids flown in North America are, as a result of legal obligation, hand-reared and imprinted upon humans and behaviourally unlikely to breed naturally with another falcon. In Britain many hybrids are also imprinted to humans.



The Shamarie (right) being compared with a male Richardson's Merlin. (North American race of Merlin)

ARMCHAIRS, YARNS AND ALEHOUSES

S B Gollidge

Until the Summer leaves are kissed good-night by Midas, we have little to do but sit in our armchairs and wait.

The ferrets are becoming increasingly restless, and I'm sure they must be wondering if they are aver to investigate the Coney Caverns again.

Oh God, give us back the cold frosty mornings. Who wants to breathe the sticky, stale air of summer.

During this stagnant season, the million dollar question must surely be; how do we busy ourselves with all things falconry, until the frost permit us to once again fly at quarry.... Game fairs are great fun, and a very good to spend the occasional summer weekend. But how depressing the journey home, thinking about all the things we 'cannot' do for another three or four months.

No;.....there are only a few things we can do to combat the mid-summer falconry blues, and one of those is to surround ourselves with as many field sport enthusiasts as possible and head for the pub. Ale house environments are tailor made for the most amazing sporting tales. We all know how alcohol loosens the tongues of the shy and increases the imaginations of the extroverts. Well, every falconer must surely have an amusing tale to tell. I know some that have tales so extravagant in their content, that they should most definitely be filed in the fantasy cabinet alongside those of the fishermen. These story-tellers will skillfully embellish and develop their tales to captivate the imaginations of their audience. I personally think

these expanded yarns are always the most satisfying to listen to.

Ale house hangovers permitting, we should be spending a little of our time roaming the fields, for their is nor better time than summer to be doing a spot of detective work. With an abundance of juvenile rabbits willing to dash back and forth between their feeding grounds and their homesteads, you can see how you wouldn't need to be a top notch Sherlock Holmes to discover a few extra warrens for the winter.... Have you ever noticed how it is we always seem to find these perfect warrens in the wrong season. In the winter we are constantly on the lookout for warrens with four or five holes. We seek the burrows with paths to their entrances like they might have been made by rabbits on tractors. In the summer we can find these little gems two a penny, where do they go in the winter? My hand still itches like crazy every time I stumble on such a find. I am constantly being telephoned by like minded friends who have found some great new warrens that are absolutely crawling. Isn't it strange though how these same burrows are always netted with cobwebs and filled with leaves the very first day you arrive armed with a sharp set hawk and a box of ferrets.

Incidentally, I have recently noticed a distinct difference between the married falconer and the single falconer - the married falconer has a hawk on one hand and a Jeye cloth in the other, and of course as we all know, the single falconer can wipe it up later.

I cannot finish this article without a tiny little tale to whet your hawking appetites. this story is one hundred per cent true, and was told to me by my good friend David Edgell.

On one of our finer winter days David took his wife Sally out hunting with Kia the Harris Hawk.

Now Sally is not a hunt supporter, she just tolerates it. I believe she was coaxed into a partial acceptance of the sport by David's continual reassurances of 'we are lucky if we ever catch one'. The burrow they worked is one I am familiar with. It has four holes and is quite reliable for bolts. David threw off Kia, who immediately winged her way to a convenient branch... I do make up the bit 'con-



venient', but because on the whole hawks don't land where you want them to, and on this occasion Kia probably didn't. Anyway I digress, we must move on; Ferris the ferret was entered and immediately went to work expelling the occupants. A three-quarter grown rabbit made a dash down the centre of the hedge and popped into the field about ten feet from the burrow. Unfortunately for the rabbit, its progress down the middle of the hedge did not go unnoticed, for just under two pounds of raging gristle was already hurtling down from its branch to meet it. The hawk made contact immediately after the rabbit left the safety of the hedge. Now here comes the truly amazing part. David made in to dispatch the rabbit and there found that Kia had nailed not one, but two, three-quarter grown rabbits by the head. One had obviously left the burrow unnoticed by David, Sally 'and the hawk'; and there moved carefully down the run to wait at the hole in the hedge for a safer moment to make off. Nice and smart you may think, problem was it hadn't banked on a shove from behind from one of its speeding relatives. Both rabbits must have spilled into the field; and as they say, the rest is history. Few people I believe, will be witness to such an event as this. Sad thing is Sally, who had been repeatedly pacified by the failure rate of hawking 'was'.

Anyway my falconry friends, the fact remains; it is still the middle of summer, so until the leaves abandon the trees there is nothing but 'armchairs, yarns and alehouses'.

Wishing you and your quarry equal success for the coming winter.



PERSECUTION OF BIRDS OF PREY IS STILL RIFE.

Illegal persecution still continues to claim the lives of birds of prey, says the R S P B, in a newly published report.

'Birds of Prey persecution in the United Kingdom in 1995', reveals a disgraceful and all too familiar pattern of poisoning, shooting, nest-robbing and nest destruction, with virtually all of the UK's birds of prey involved, including osprey, red kite, white-tailed eagle, goshawk and peregrine.

Persecution has limited the range and distribution of species such as hen harrier, red kite and buzzard.

Persecution is a nationwide problem, but is heaviest on grouse moors and in areas where pheasants are reared for shooting. Hen harriers, buzzards and peregrines are the principal victims. Pole traps, illegal since 1904, were found at or near pheasant release-pens in no fewer than 24 instances.

Despite the Government led campaign against illegal poisoning, at least 32 birds of prey, including 15 buzzards and five red kites, dies in 27 illegal poisoning incidents. A minimum of 50 birds were shot, including 16 buzzards and 11 peregrines. An estimated 50 eggs or chicks were lost in 33 instances of

nest robbery. Peregrines were involved in 17 of these and among the remainder were five osprey nests and one of the extremely rare, reintroduced white-tailed eagle.

Barbara Young, RSPB Chief Executive said: "It is disgraceful that after 40 years of legal protection birds of prey are still being slaughtered and their nests pillaged. The figures, which show no signs of decline, represent only a fraction of the true level of wildlife crime. Many cases simply go unnoticed or unreported.

Most landowners and the major field-sports organisations regularly condemn illegal persecution, but it is clear that a substantial minority in the countryside are prepared to flout the law," continued Miss Young.

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Independent Bird Register

In 1994 the DOE decided to cease registration of non-native and common birds of prey. If lost, these birds would no longer be able to be returned to their owners via the DOE computer database. This worried many falconers, including ourselves. Having been in the computer business for the last 13 years and running databases for various organisations, charities and pension fund groups, we wanted to help. We had the knowledge to be able to offer our services to falconers, so we wrote to several official bodies and offered to run the database for them, no one replied to our offer so we started the IBR two months before the DOE registration ceased.

We set up to register anything with wings that could fly away, but mainly birds of prey and owls. We even have quail registered, not the edible sort, the pet ones. We issue split rings free. As a responsible owner you should ensure that every bird in your care has a ring with information that will guide it back to you. How on earth does a ring saying ABC123 get any further than the finder? We provide closed rings throughout the breeding season as part of our registration. The registration document gives information of hatch, parents, captive bred, identichip and other details. This document goes with the youngster when sold or given and provides background, maybe for a potential breeding programme in the future. How else can you tell who the parents are? The bottom of the registration form has tear off transfer slip. The same system as the DOE used. The system worked so we didn't see the need to alter it. Falconers send in the tear off slip and get the new document back with their change of details.

The first week we started the IBR we had a phone call via the police that pub in the West Midlands had found a Black Kite!! Not your usual Barn Owl or Lanner. We had started in earnest. We rang all the places likely to lose a Black Kite, Not hard. We covered zoos, Theme Parks and Falconry Centres. We came up trumps. It was a zoo. Happily reunited later with its keeper. The pub landlord also kept Birds of Prey! Coincidence? We were certainly pleased, success within one hour and fifteen minutes. We were also able to contact the same zoo keeper twice later in the year to tell him where his lost falcon had been found.

We had done our homework before we started the IBR. We had informed LRK's, RSPCA, PDSA, various vets, Police and Falconry Centres throughout England, Scotland and Wales. This network has

proved invaluable. Daily we get reports of lost, found, seen and, sadly, stolen birds. We regularly liaise with PC Paul Beecroft of Raptor Rescue and the information given in his column is a joint compilation with ourselves. This way we can both keep an up to date record of what birds are still out there. We could do more for you if you told us what you or your friends had lost. Let us help.

Even if they are not registered, we can help. Speed is always the most important factor. If you lose a bird, phone us. We will put it on the system as lost and then when someone has found it we know who it belongs to and can phone. This service works, why not use it? When you register your birds with the IBR, the extra service you are paying for is the documentary evidence of its existence, history, breeding etc. You also get the finder service. We don't sit and wait for someone to find your bird, we get on the phone and fax and tell people your bird is out. We check you have thought of all your local people to tell and we contact the rest. We broadcast the details of your bird and use

**WE CHASED A REDTAIL
ACROSS FOUR MILES OF
GLOUCESTERSHIRE
WOODLAND, BY
TELEPHONE.**

our contacts all over the country where appropriate.

Two years on and the system works very well. The network is now set up and we get frequent reports. We chased a Redtail by phone across four miles of woodland and farms in Gloucestershire last year. Sightings came two or three times a day, passed on through the police giving our number to every person reporting a sighting. We were able to call the owner and report the latest news. We then had a call from a farmer who saw the Redtail in one of his trees. He must have been the only vegetarian farmer, no meat in the house, no yellow Swan Vestas match boxes and couldn't remember where his welding gloves were! He went into his nearest village, bought beef and hurried back only to find the bird had flown. Typical! The poor owner of the bird had by this time become very fit and his patience had been sorely tested. Luckily the bird returned to the farm the next day and the falconer was able to get it down.

A Lanner was lost last year, one of many, it was wearing telemetry and bells and

should have been traceable. Guess where it turned up two days later? On Sizewell B power station, very content and warm! It was caught by one of the employees and was phoned through to us via the police. We were able to get the bird back to the owner within two hours of being found. On checking the telemetry later one of the batteries was upside down so not working. This is quite common so double check or there is no point in using it. Another success, was the man who lost his Harris Hawk temporarily and found a Saker. He brought it back home using his Harris' leash and swivel and phoned us. The Saker was registered with us as lost and we were able to tell the owner where to fetch it from. The Harris owner then went back and retrieved his Harris Hawk from not very far away. This happened more than once. In April we had a phone call from a Falconry Centre, they had mislaid their Bald Eagle! It had flown out of sight of the Falconry Centre. We took note and passed the word around and it was sighted regularly for a couple of days then recaptured. Not the run of the mill bird to miss seeing.

Sadly a few lost birds end up poisoned or dead from impact. These things happen but at least if we can trace you, we can tell you. It is much harder not knowing what has happened to your bird. We are surprised by the number of falconers who ask for advice. If we can't help "we know a man who can". Any information you give us as a keeper is secure and covered by the Data Protection Act and would not be passed to any third party without your consent.

Short Term registration for a youngster for nine months prior to sale including a closed ring and registration document and is £3. There is a 100% refund if the ring is returned to us.

5 Years registration of an adult bird, or youngster just bought from a breeder, includes a registration document and split ring, if needed, (the bird may not have been rung by us previously or may be a bird with no telephone number on its ring.) The cost is £10. This works out at £2 per year. Your bird must be worth it. We will then, after five years, send a reminder to renew. There is a discount for 10 or more birds, bird hospitals, injured birds and Falconry Centres.

For further details ring Philip and Jenny Wray on 01926 850000.
IBR 184 Warwick Road, Kenilworth, Warks. CV8 1HU.



DAYS WITH DOROTHY

I first went hawking with Steve Williams in early January 1995. It was very cold, with an icy wind and a scattering of frozen snow still on the ground. Steve spotted some partridges in a hedge and quietly dropped off a 'stop' at one end of the hedge, and me at the other, to cut off their escape. He then disappeared over the brow of the hill to put up the falcon, out of sight of the partridges.

I could see one of the birds crouching by the hedge as the falcon came into view, already quite high but still climbing to her pitch. When Steve gave the signal we ran in to flush the partridges which sped away, keeping low and heading for a small wood across a large open field. The falcon, Dorothy, stooped at 45 degrees, seeming to anticipate the partridges' position at the point of impact. With a couple of wingflips she caught up with her chosen bird and bound to it neatly in a cloud of feathers, then they were down.

As we approached, I saw one red leg give a last twitch and the falcon started plucking feathers from the partridge's neck. Dorothy seemed perfectly at ease, though a bit puffed, and was allowed plenty of time to plume and settle down before being picked up.

I was impressed to say the least, and though I saw more flights with different birds that day, this first one stayed in my mind. As I drove home that evening, I could still picture that magnificent falcon on the frosty field clutching her prize in her foot.

It was not until December that I went hawking with Steve and his friend Paul, flying his tiercel gyr/peregrine 'Hob'. The weather was cold and wet and a couple of the hawks had to be dried with a hairdrier

before going out. Steve soon found a covey of partridges out in the open and Paul unhooded Hob for the first flight. We watched from the landrover as Hob climbed steeply, not circling like a Peregrine, but powering straight into the wind the whole time. As he started to disappear into the clouds he set his wings and waited on directly above Paul who was running towards the partridges. He was slightly off line but they flushed anyway and Steve counted the hawk down: seven seconds in a vertical stoop! Hob was wet when he was picked up from his partridge and it continued to rain as we walked back over the field.

The landrover slipped and slid along, sometimes dirty water sprayed spectacularly over the bonnet and windscreen as we plunged through the puddles. The hawks sat tight, hooded on the cadge, bells tinkling as we jolted along. The heater was on full and the windows steamed up, we were damp and cold, but later things did improve and we saw some more flights.

When Dorothy's turn came there was just a slight drizzle, though things were still pretty dismal. Having been cooped up in the landrover all afternoon she decided she would sit down and sort herself out before flying, unfortunately she chose to land on the grey box on the side of a post carrying electric wires, I saw an arc of red sparks and she was thrown on her back and lay still. At first we were as stunned as she was but then, as we ran forwards, Dorothy started screaming, she

gave a huge flap and slid to the ground with a thump! I thought she must be dead but she got up and hopped towards Steve, fluttering onto the fist and then glaring up at the post as we left. What an end to the day; almost disaster! Dorothy survived and was soon back to her old self - though hopefully more wary of pitching on poles.

The next time I saw her fly it was a bright sunny day, but the ruts and puddles were frozen solid and ice crackled under the landrovers wheels. When I wound down the window, to look for quarry, the freezing wind made my eyes water so I could hardly see anything. A Sparrowhawk glided across in front of us, a little grey bundle dangling from its talons. There was not much about; with the ground being frozen there was not much food either - except for the Sparrowhawks, Dorothy's flight was the last of the day. Steve had spotted a cock pheasant picking amongst some straw in the corner of the field. As we approached in the landrover two crows flew up from the straw and we wondered if there had been a pheasant after all. Then I saw him, only head and long tail visible. As we watched he got up and wandered into the hedge - that would do nicely!

I got out to stop him running away down the hedge and Steve circled right round to approach from way above the pheasant. Time was getting on as Dorothy mounted to an impressive pitch, the moon was up and her silhouette crossed it from time to time as she circled, her wings set. I was shivering with the cold and I think just the noise of my teeth chattering was enough to stop the pheasant running past as Steve beat the hedge towards me! There was a sudden whir of the pheasants' wings as he flushed, a shout from Steve, and Dorothy folded and plummeted vertically down right above me. I heard the sound of her wings slicing through the freezing air as she levelled out for the strike. A whack and a cloud of feathers, but although the bird was knocked off course, he kept going as the falcon threw up. The pheasant kept a level flight across the field and I lost sight of both birds below the darkening horizon.

We scanned the fields with binoculars but we were fooled by lumps and tufts out in the frozen plough so had to resort to the telemetry. Dorothy had not gone far - she was pluming the cock pheasant just out of the field, on a strip of hedge under a barbed wire fence.

What a flight, the highest I had seen a falcon go - the tiercels go up almost out of sight but perhaps because of their greater size the falcons do not seem so high - however this was a tremendous pitch and Dorothy had certainly earned her pheasant.

STEVE RADFORD

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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:

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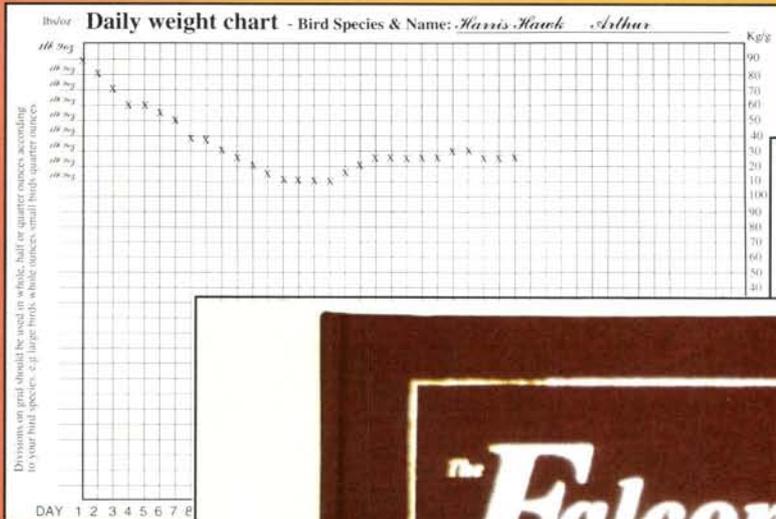
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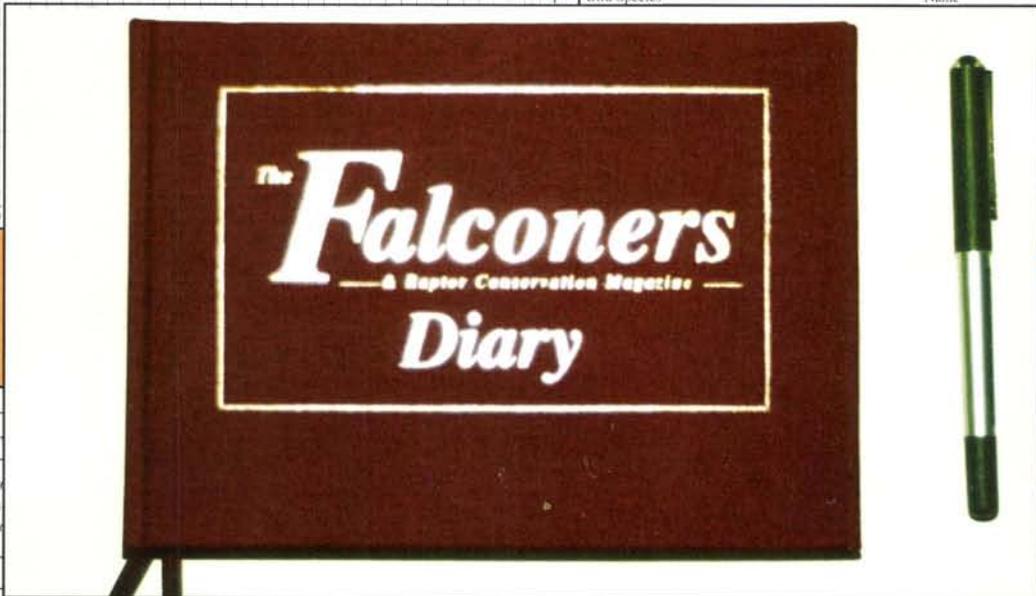
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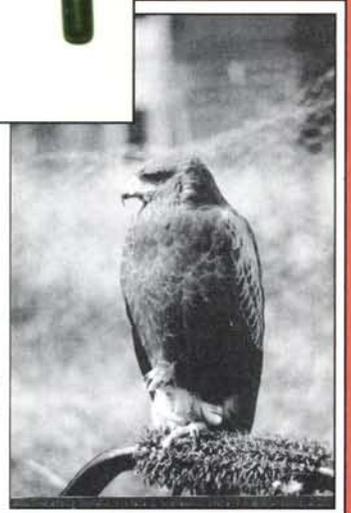
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DATE	SPECIES				
18.11.94	Harris hawk				
Left the house at 7am. Cold, frosty morning, a little misty at first but the sun came through later. Had four good slips and two were successful. Looks like tomorrows lunch is sorted out. Meet John tomorrow to fly his Redtail, plenty of this morning, fingers crossed for tomorrow.					
DATE	SPECIES	NAME	WEIGHT	FOOD GIVEN	QUARRY T
19.11.94	Harris hawk	Arthur	1lb 5oz	2 chicks	
Left the house at 7am. Cold, frosty morning, a little misty at first but the sun came through later. Had four good slips and two were successful. Looks like tomorrows lunch is sorted out. Meet John tomorrow to fly his Redtail, plenty of quarry this morning, fingers crossed for tomorrow.					
20.11.94	Harris hawk	Arthur	1lb 5oz	3 chicks	

extremely tolerant of each other, and will hunt regularly in pairs. Their main quarry species in this country are rabbit, pheasant, magpie and partridge, although females will also take hare. They have become commonly known as the 'weekend hawk', as once trained they seem to require very little manning from one weekend to the next, although if left for long periods of time they can easily become bored and feather plucking is becoming a common problem in Harris hawks when put up for the moult.

As they are from warm countries we tend to find that they do not tolerate our cold winters readily and some provision needs to be made for them when there is a lot of frost about. It would be a mistake to think that because Harris hawks are so sociable that they do not have that same hunting instinct that is so obvious in, for example, on the accipiters. Far from it, if left unserved with quarry they will take it upon themselves to try and catch the nearest available, suitably sized creature, be it a rabbit or someone's Jack Russell. If flown properly and kept fit these birds are the very capable and proficient hunters, and, should you decide to buy one there is no reason why you should not have many years of fun and companionship.



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