

The *Falconers*
— & Raptor Conservation Magazine —

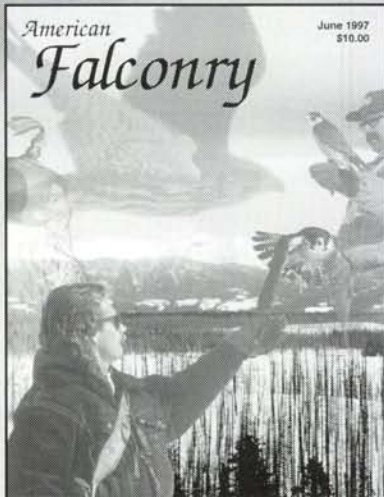
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COMMENT

Hello Everybody,

Well, some important things to be taken note of. Firstly the new CITES regulations which come into force on the 1st of June. **Everybody** who buys or sells **any** bird of prey is subject to them. Both nocturnal and diurnal species. Details are available from the DOE.

This year sees the Seventh Falconers Fair. It is great to see it going from strength to strength. They were in much the same position as the magazine when they started, and we know just how hard it must have been for them. Well done!

We have some really good articles for you this issue, a big thank you to all the contributors, and congratulations to our competition winners. We hope to see you all at the Fair.

Keep Falconry Safe. Have a good Summer.

David & Lyn

Cover: Top right Albino Redtailed Hawk, see page 12. Middle & Bottom Right: Albino Kestrel, can be seen flying at the National Birds of Prey Centre. Bottom Left: White phase, grey Goshawk, belonging to Richard Naisbitt. Healesville, Australia.

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LOST BIRDS

1. Peregrine 8788V & 12458W
2. Peregrine 2634V
3. Redtail 3PCW95
4. Redtail 1257W
5. Harris 8370W & IBR6
6. Harris 9327W
7. Saker 5WP95
8. Saker IBR432W
9. Saker 153W
10. Saker 7093W
11. Lanner 2019W & 2241W
12. Goshawk N98750928
13. Buzzard 11475W & IBR37W
14. Sparrowhawk 396R
15. Sparrowhawk 7109P
16. Barn Owl 410IOA93
17. Barn Owl IBR415
18. Barn Owl 6896BC93U
19. Lanner 14587W
20. Harris 8300W
21. Barn Owl 309596U
22. Luggar Netherlands ring starts NL

FOUND BIRDS

1. HARRIS 96??? DOE Ring
2. Harris 142??? DOE Ring
3. Harris ??HTH96W
4. Buzzard 28???
5. Buzzard 104?? Doe Ring
6. Redtail 19??? & 26???
7. Ferruginous 7WBP???
8. Barn Owl 5764U
9. Barn Owl 3541 IOA
10. Barn Owl 0173BC
11. Kestrel 108??? DOE Ring

DEAD

1. Kestrel 11674S
2. Sparrowhawk 129FJWR
3. Unknown 5HHH96S
4. Harris Hawk 6MH96W

STOLEN

1. Harris 1284W
2. Harris 1546W
3. Harris 2422RR96W
4. Harris 2432RR96W
5. Harris 2440RR96W
6. Harris 13841W
7. Harris 14511W
8. Harris M19956
9. Redtail GJB395Y & GJB285Y
10. Redtail 1135X & 0090Y
11. Redtail 1131X & 0050Y
12. Redtail 0081X
13. Redtail UK81627
14. Goshawk 1687V
15. Barn Owl 1664BC96U

BREEDERS

Can I once again ask all breeders of Non-Schedule 4 birds to please be responsible when it comes to ringing chicks. Please put something on the ring that will assist in tracing the owner if the bird becomes lost. When you sell or give a bird away please

make a note of the persons Name and Tel No.

In an effort to reunite birds with their owners will the following breeders please come forward and identify themselves:
 1.PCW 2.HTH 3.HHH 4.FJW 5.GEB 6.PSD 7.DWG 8.DWW 9.JRH 10.ART 11.PJW

STOLEN BIRDS

Once again the year has started off with a spate of thefts consisting mainly of Harris Hawks and Redtails. Not only is it bad enough that they have been stolen in the first place, but some of these birds were breeding pairs that were preparing for the season. One pair was actually at point of lay. The people responsible are probably Raptor Keepers themselves (past history has proved this) and are fully aware of the breeding season but his means nothing to them. They snatch birds off the perches and stuff them into sacks to carry them away. Some do not survive this treatment. Some die before they even get into the sack and are left dead on the aviary floor for the owner to find in the morning. Someone, somewhere knows the who people are, or has a good suspicion. Where are all of the stolen birds? If you have any information, no matter how insignificant you think it is please contact me. All calls will be treated in the strictest confidence and your identity will not be known to anyone but myself. I must stress however that I cannot and will not act on anonymous information unless it is substantiated by other means.

CONVICTIONS

On 3rd March 1997 Keith Sherry of Wigan Lanes appeared at Wigan Magistrates Court in answer to the following charges in relation to a Goshawk.

- (1) Possession of unregistered Schedule 4 Bird.
- (2) Possession of a Schedule 4 Bird while Banned.

For these offences he was fined (1) £800. (2) £400 plus £90 costs.
TOTAL £1290.

In February 1997 a breeder appeared at Magistrates court for an offence under C.O.T.E.S legislation. The Court heard that in October 1996 the breeder had sold a Harris Hawk to the witness for £650. The breeder had not passed with the bird a Certificate of Captive Breeding. Although repeated requests were made by the witness for this to be supplied it did not materialise. In answer to this charge the breeder apologised to the Court stating that he had intended to pass on the Certificate but pressure of work had caused him to forget. The Chairman of the Bench in passing sentence stated "You have failed to comply with a very important piece of legislation for which there is no excuse. It would have taken no more than 5 minutes of your time.

I therefore order you to pay a fine equivalent to the price of the bird, namely £650. Perhaps in future you will give this more thought and find the time and not forget."

Five men from the Liverpool area have been jailed after carrying out a raid on Blean Bird Park. Maidstone Crown Court heard how they broke into the park now known as Davidstone, during the night in April 1995 with the intention of stealing exotic birds. After leaving three open cans of dog food near the kennels where Rottweiler dogs were sleeping, they broke into aviaries and proceeded to bag up birds, including a Molaccan cockatoo worth in the region of £1000.

The barking of the dogs coupled with the squawking of the birds alerted the owner of the park.

Nigel Tabony arrived on the scene and found aviaries damaged and padlocks smashed. He jumped into his car and blocked in the thieves as they tried to make their getaway. Police were soon on the scene and promptly arrested the suspects.

Paul Carmichael, 33 admitted burglary with intent to steal, Nigel Poyner, 31 Joseph Thompson, 33 Leslie Parr, 31 and Raymond Bennet, 29 all denied the charge.

Thompson, Pary and Bennett were jailed for two years, Poyner for 21 months and Carmichael a year.

Judge David Croft, QC said the proper sentence would have been three years but he reduced it because of Parry's tragic family circumstances. He said "I am quite unable so far as the offence is concerned to distinguish one from the other as you all persisted in lying about the matter to the bitter end. It is clear this was a planned job.. There must have been a reconnaissance. You came fully equipped to carry out the offence.. The profits were going to be considerable, clearly into five figures."

During the night of 22.23 March 1997, the Falconry Centre at Hagley, owned by Chris Neal was attacked resulting in Ferruginous Hawks and Snowy Owls being stolen. One of the Owls was later seen in a field and was recovered by Chris. Following information that Chris was able to supply in relation to a vehicle and occupants that visited the centre before the theft, all of the birds have now been recovered. P.C. John Matthews of the Rural Crime Unit in Staffordshire reports that 3 persons are helping Police with their enquiries.

OPERATION FOLKESTONE.

In September 1996, South Wales Police executed the above named operation. A number of search warrants were carried out at addresses throughout England and Wales in relation to Goshawks, Peregrines and Merlins. As a result of this operation three persons are facing a total of twenty plus charges ranging from Possession of wild birds, Unregistered birds, firearms offences, drug offences, theft and C.O.T.E.S offences.

Eleanora's Man gets eight months

On the 4th April 1997, following a ten day trial at Luton Crown Court, Paul NOBLE of Sandy Beds, was found guilty in respect of three charges of Criminal Deception and four charges under The Control of Trade in Endangered Species (COTES).

All of the charges were in relation to Eleanora's Falcons.

In October 1995, Inspector Phil Cannings, the Wildlife Liaison Officer for Bedfordshire Police and assisted by the RSPB, executed a search warrant at NOBLES home and seized six juvenile Eleanora's Falcons. NOBLE stated that these birds were captive bred and had been imported legally from France. A further six falcons were then traced from 1994 having already been sold to other raptor keepers for a total sum of £4000.

The evidence heard, however clearly suggested that the birds had in fact been wild taken from Majorca in 1994 and 1995.

In sentencing Judge Moss stated it was a serious matter involving protected, endangered birds and a custodial sentence was necessary because of the gravity of the crime and need for deterrent. NOBLE was then sent to prison for 8 months.

The case high lighted the difficulty of investigating illegal trade within the EU following the relaxation of controls and it is very significant that these birds were smuggled in within weeks of their de-registration from Schedule 4 Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.

The six birds that were found in NOBLES' possession were made subject of a seizure order. The six that had been sold in 1994 were not, and they will remain with the keepers, who purchased them in good faith believing them to be captive bred.

SCOTTISH GAME FAIR

Scone Palace will become the focus of international attention this summer with the launch of the Game Conservancy's ninth Annual Scottish Fair.

Over 25,000 visitors, many from throughout Europe, the USA and further afield will descend on Scone Palace for what promises to be one of the UK's leading events for countryside and field sports enthusiasts.

To be held on July 5th and 6th, the Game Conservancy Scottish Fair aims to highlight the importance of game and wildlife conservation to the Scottish countryside as well as raising the profile of the valuable research and advisory work carried out by the Game Conservancy Trust.

There will be a wide range of displays from Falconry to Clay Pigeons, stags to alpacas, angling to archery and gun dog trials to terrier racing.

The theme of this years event will be Lowland Game, offering an insight into pheasants, partridges, songbirds, trout and salmon.

A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

The seventh British Falconry and Raptor Fair should prove to be the biggest and most exciting to date. A great deal of time and effort has gone into talking to visitors and participants alike, with the idea of organising a new series of events for the main arena that should prove to be to everybody's liking.

We have always strived to give all of those interested in birds of prey the feeling that this is their event. Consequently we have actively sought opinions from as many people as possible as to what they would like to see at the Fair. Wherever possible this feedback has been catered for and incorporated in our plans.

The features that have proved to be popular have been retained and, where possible, expanded upon. But, as organisers, we recognise that certain areas could be improved upon. With this in mind the format and the content of the flying displays have been totally re-thought and revamped. The public have expressed a desire to see different hawks and falcons and different people flying them.

Over the years we have had several invited guests join the two main participants in the arena displays with a hawk or falcon that has been brought to our attention. This year will see, what we hope will prove to be a very exciting format. There will be three main displays with each one being coordinated by a different person. Guest falconers have been invited and they will hopefully bring along some first rate performers.

The outstanding star of last years fair was a beautiful little Jack Merlin, flown by Garry Biddis. Unfortunately this stunning little falcon has passed on, but hopefully Garry will be flying a replacement. Garry is chairman of the South East Falconers Group and through his services the group will be taking a very active part in one of the displays. It is hoped that one of the groups members will be flying a peregrine to a lure suspended from a kite many hundreds of feet above the arena.

Also making a re-appearance in the main ring will be Diana Durman-Walters. Although very busy at this time of the season with all her activities at the Scottish Academy, she has very kindly agreed to fly

one of her falcons and a tawny eagle. Together.

The weathering ground should also hold one or two guests that visitors to the fair will not have seen before. It is hoped that a red-headed Merlin will be in attendance. We are pretty certain that it will be on the weathering ground and we are currently trying to persuade its owner to fly it in the arena. Another guest falcon we are trying to arrange is a pure Barbary tiercel. As in previous years, the national and regional clubs will be well represented with a few foreign clubs joining the throng. The appeal of the fair is spreading further and further afield as we here in the office know only too well from the correspondence we receive..

Raptor Rescue will be putting on their normal first rate static display, including a lovely long-eared owl belonging to Mick Robins, and their stand, which could put many professionals to shame, will again be manned by members dedicated to saving our wild birds of prey. This really is one organisation that all those with an interest in birds of prey should support wholeheartedly. All the money raised by the organisation goes on treatment of injured raptors and is not swallowed up with administration and other costs.

Chris Christoforou has again managed to put together a truly amazing wealth of artistic talent in the Wildlife Art Display. I know that, like ourselves Chris is already working on the content of next years fair within days of the previous one finishing.

Chris has a knack for finding new talent and is very generous in the help he gives in bringing it along and getting new work before the public.

The trade stands will be as varied and as all encompassing as normal and there should be just about every item a falconer or raptor enthusiast could ever require, on sale. Plus of course, the large selection of trade stands dedicated to other country pursuits, as well as those that cater for visitors hunger or thirst.

This years fair should prove to be a breath of fresh air. So we look forward to seeing you at Althorp on May 25th and 26th.

ROYAL SHOW

This years Royal Show will be held on 30th June -3 July. Stoneleigh, Warks. The sports arena will be hosted by Peter Purves and feature famous sporting celebrities testing their skills at fly casting, sheep dog handling and clay shooting.

Eagles, hawks and falcons will be displayed thanks to the International Falconry and Gundog Display Team.

25% can be saved on the normal ticket price by calling their ticket hotline on 0121 7674055 Mon-Fri 9am-8pm and Sat-Sun 10am - 5pm. Until 22nd June.

Raptor Rescue Show

This years Raptor Rescue Open Day will be held at Hertford Castle on Sunday May 11th. The event will be raising money for both Raptor Rescue and the Mayor of Hertfords Charities.

Featuring Ye Olde Redtail Falconry Display, and a pair of Golden Eagles courtesy of the British Hawking Association.

Wildlife artist Mark Chester will be there as will the International Owl Society. With free parking, stalls, side shows, terrier racing and refreshments it looks set to be a good day out for all the family.

OSTERLEY COLLECTION

Is an event organised by the British Decoy Wildfowl Carvers Association in conjunction with the National Trust.

The organisers of The Osterley Collection would welcome all carvers to participate and support this event, indeed, all carvers looking to promote their work.

It is being held 29th June - 6th July, and is named after the superb location of the National Trust Osterley Park, Middx.

Many of the carving subjects will be falcons etc.

If you wish to exhibit please write to the organisers and tell them how many carvings you wish to enter.

The Organisers, Osterley Collection, Bradfield, 38 The Paddocks, Normandy, Guildford, Surrey. GU3 2HA.

picture this

The Artist Magazine has launched a new greetings card competition, in association with The Paper House Group and Royle Publications, to discover new images for greetings cards in five categories: Wildlife, Fine Art, Transport, Floral and Animals.

Prizes

The winners in each of the five categories will receive awards of £500 cash each, plus the industry's usual rates of pay if the work is also selected for publication. The overall winner will also have their work reproduced on the front cover of The Artist magazine. In addition, all winners will have their work reproduced together with a short profile, in The Artist.

To enter

Artists must submit good-quality colour transparencies or colour prints of their work by 22 July 1997. These must be accompanied by the entry coupon printed in The Artist magazine (May, June, July) which also contains full entry details and conditions.

NEW REGULATIONS FOR ALL RAPTOR KEEPERS

New Regulations will be coming into force from 1st June 1997. Amendments are to be made to Euro council regulation no: 3897.

The changes will be in sales controls and import and export. Birds covered by the new sales and display licence must have an article 10 certificate. They will apply to all Annex A birds. (A list will appear in the next issue). They **MUST** be complied with. For all keepers of non-schedule 4 birds the onus, at the moment, is on them to get in touch with the DOE. You can do this by phoning their help desk on: 0117 9878692.

The DOE will do their best to keep you informed when the regulations come into force. See them on their stand at the Falconers Fair.

POLICE WATCH OVER PEREGRINES IN NEW PARTNERSHIP SCHEME

As the bird nesting season approaches, South Wales Police are continuing their policy of targeting wildlife crime by setting up Peregrine Watch in a bid to protect peregrine falcons breeding in the area.

The force has teamed up with Gwent Police and the RSPB and ADAS (Agricultural Development and Advisory Service) to form Peregrine Watch as a response to the increasing level of persecution suffered by the birds, particularly at this time of year.

In recent years, police in South Wales and Gwent have become increasingly concerned about reports of mistreatment of peregrine falcons at nesting time, although officers believe that only a small number of individuals are responsible for victimising the birds.

Reports have been made of rocks being thrown onto nests, fires being lit under nests and in one instance a net was thrown over a nest to prevent the adult birds from returning to it. Last year there were also four confirmed instances of peregrines found poisoned by both legal and illegal substances.

Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, anyone deliberately interfering with or destroying a peregrine falcon, its eggs nest

could face a fine of £5,000 for each offence committed.

"We have the ways and means to catch culprits and enforce this legislation and Peregrine Watch indicates the commitment of police and other agencies to protect the peregrine and other protected species," said sergeant Ian Guildford, a South Wales Police Officer.

"I am convinced that it is just a small minority of people who aim to eradicate the peregrine from the skies above South Wales. By their actions they are not only breaking the law but are depriving many more people of the opportunity of watching the grace and beauty of the peregrine in flight", he added.

Anyone with any information about any incidents of damage to peregrine falcons, their nests or eggs is asked to contact their local police station with details which will be dealt with in confidence. Alternatively they can contact the following people:

Sergeant Ian Guildford: South Wales Police 01443 224281
PC John O'Connell: Gwent Constabulary 01443 813146
RSPB Wales Office: 01685 626678
ADAS Wales :free phone 0800 321600
Crimestoppers 0800 555111

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE GETS NEW FALCONRY CENTRE

Many of you will have read about Daniel Keeber over the past years in this magazine. For winning the Livewire award for young bounteous achiever of the year in 1994. Also you will have seen him flying his birds at the Falconers Fair for the past few years. One of Daniels dreams was to own his own Falconry Centre. He has helped out at two other centres, and has his own mobile display team, which for the past three years has taken him all around the country and even to Germany. Daniel and his grandfather, Kim Oakeshott, have over the last few years been looking for a site to build a centre, considering Stately Homes, Park Farms and Garden Centres, to no avail. They were introduced to the Dee family, who for the past 18 months have been running a rural centre at their farm, just outside Desborough, Northamptonshire. The Dees were very interested in the idea of having a falconry centre there as well.

After a few meetings things started to move - 'move' being the operative word. Soil, hardcore, sand, pea-gravel etc, and, a lot of hard work from volunteers, who had been coaxed into helping.

From a field to stage one in just

Top l: Daniel Keeber with Tawny Eagle. Top r: Daniel Rochester. Bottom: The Weatherings.

two weeks!

30' x 20' shop, 6' fence, enough weatherings to house 20 flying birds, a very large weathering lawn, five aviaries near completion to house Burrowing and Barn Owls, a pair of Kestrels, and a pair of Redtailed Hawks.

Stage two will get under in the second half of the year with more aviaries, some being designed so birds can be flown from them, to remove the need for tethering.

In just three weeks Daniel has seen his dream come true.

To make things just a little confusing Daniels' under falconer is also called Daniel.

We would like to wish them all the best of luck.



It's hard work building a falconry centre!



SCOTTISH HAWKING CLUB REPORT

Once again, most club members find themselves in the doldrums at this time of year, the hawking having finished a few months ago, and the new season not ready to start for a few more. And those last pair of tail feathers just never seem to want to drop, it happens to us all, the countdown to the new season. But we can busy ourselves in getting the mews cleared of all that accumulated junk and how about some new equipment? Those of you who live in the sunnier part of the UK are fortunate enough to be able to visit a game fair on any summer weekend and have a furniture manufacturer on hand to be able to pick up your new item with ease. Up

here in Scotland there is only one such fair, and that's Scone Palace in Perthshire. The SHC has, over the four years we have been attending, made this a fair for Scottish Falconers to attend, (as well as quite a few from south of the border). There were six companies attending with their birds and wares last year. This year again we will be attending and hopefully there will be an equally large attendance by the professional brigade. "Falconry Originals" will be on the club stand with their furniture so come on up and visit Scone Palace on 5th and 6th July.

The hawking season went well again this year with six



meetings taking pace, although the end of the season was dogged by high winds and bad weather. Our two day meetings in October and January were very well attended, the January meeting at Braco produced, as always, a very good bag of pheasants.

Remember if you are buying a new bird this season the

bird must be accompanied by a breeder's declaration certificate, whether this is an eyass or adult bird. You and the seller will be breaking the law if you don't have an individual exemption. Does anyone know of a breeder with the initials HTH on his rings, if so could they get in touch with the club. Good Hawking.

YORKSHIRE FALCONRY CLUB

The last few months for those of us at the Yorkshire Falconry Club, have been very busy. Membership recently reached 71, which has delighted all existing members. We now have members from Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Staffordshire and Derbyshire.

The flying season came to a successful conclusion with Phil Davies and his female Redtail taking 75 head, closely followed by Glyn Treloar and his 'infamous' Harris Hawk. The top falcon was a tiercel Saker/Peregrine owned by Ray Phillips with over 30 rooks, crows. Once again we would like to thank all the landowners who have given us permission to fly on their land. All members of Yorkshire Falconry who fly birds must, under the rules of our constitution, be full members of the club which automatically affiliates them to the BFSS with £2m legal liability. The club would like to arrange for the next hunting season, a number of inter-club field meets. If you are interested please contact Richard Hill on 01226 360353 in the first instance.

Since I last wrote the club has held its annual auction, this year it was incorporat-

ed with a Christmas buffet, although competition was not as strong as last year, bargains were there for the taking. January saw a quickly arranged quiz night, due to the inability of Graham Butterworth to attend. Due to the haste of its construction, members had a slightly easier time answering than of late!! The winner was suitably rewarded.

February brought us Paul Clewes, the BFSS' County Chairman for South Yorkshire. He spoke to us about the strategies of the BFSS, and about the anti-hunting policies of the Labour Party. He encouraged members to write to their local MP's. After showing a video, Paul chaired a lively discussion.

Bruce Haak and his wife visited us in March, our thanks to Rowland Evans who arranged the five talks that Bruce made in the UK. He spoke at great length to an enthralled audience on 'Falconry in the USA' touching on the interchange of ideas between the USA and the UK. He slipped into the talk facts to make any falconer in this country green with envy, eg the USA has 300 million hectares of public land for the use of everyone and that game is public property. He described the 3 level monitoring system that falconers follow. His talk was so full of information that it is difficult to pick out specific items. The evenings

entertainment was enhanced by the quality and quantity of slides that Bruce used to illustrate points from his talk. He spoke to us for two and a half hours with a short break (here we managed to increase Bruce's knowledge of 'real ale'). He gave the club a signed book, information booklets and cards to raffle, an added bonus for the club was the appearance of Andrew Ellis (who is working with Emma Ford on her new book) who came to the meeting to link up with Bruce who is an old friend. Andrew gave a signed print to the club, also to be raffled.

The club is holding a day long vets course with Neil Forbes, on Sunday September 21st. The cost of the course will be £20, this does not include lunch. There are a few remaining places, anyone wishing to participate please contact Kim.

The club is putting together a directory of speakers who would be willing to come to Yorkshire and speak to the club. If you are interested please send full details of your talk and any special requirements that you would need, plus any charges that you make.

Anyone wanting further details of our meetings or items raised please send an SAE to Kim Myers, 8 Belford Drive, Bramley, South Yorkshire. S66 3YW. or Tel/Fax: 01709 549896. We look forward to hearing from you.

HAAK TALK

The Central Falconry & Raptor Club were kind enough to extend an invitation to David & myself to attend their meeting at which Bruce Haak spoke.

I was looking forward to meeting him, having reviewed his book 'Pirates of the Plains' which I thoroughly enjoyed.

His talk was very comprehensive, covering many aspects of American falconry and the slide which accompanied it were very explanatory.

The one of the VW Beetle would have been recognised by many who read his book. Prairie Falcons are great birds, although their temperament makes them too hot to handle for a lot of people. As Bruce knows only too well.

I am hoping to persuade him to write for the magazine in the future and will be keeping you informed.

Thanks must go to Bruce for a very enlightening visit. We hope to see him again soon.



FLYING GOLDEN EAGLES IN THE UK

Running a bird of prey centre does not give one much time for reading books, but having been given 'Hawking with Golden Eagles' by Martin Hollinshead as a Christmas present, I made a special effort to find the time to read it.

It soon becomes obvious on reading this book that the author rates British falconers flying Golden Eagles as second class, when compared to their continental counterparts. He states that "one has to isolate Britain" where the Golden Eagles "are less well understood". As one who has flown

his continental colleagues fly them mainly off the fist, a far less spectacular flight. From these waiting on flights I have caught a variety of quarry such as rabbit, brown and blue hare, fox and pheasant, (in flight). I think there is no better sight than an eagle corkscrewing down in a stoop from several hundred feet and, whether it is after a rabbit, hare or fox is of secondary importance, it is the style of flight that gives the most satisfaction.

The author also writes about the benefits of hand rearing Golden Eagles, as if it is some-



Above: Eagle being taken as a downy by myself under licence on the West Coast of Scotland in 1980.



Left: Golden Eagle on fox.

Below: Martial being removed from quarry by myself.

Eagles for 20 years, most of them Golden Eagles, I would like to take issue with him on this and one other point.

I consider that the British falconers flying these birds, with whom I have associated, have understood them very well and hunted with them to their full potential. Surely the best flights with any falconry bird are the most spectacular one and as far as eagles are concerned, in Martins' own words are made by "high soaring eagles". This is the type of flight that I and many British falconers have achieved for many years, yet the author and

thing new, or unique to the continentals. He quotes from a letter supplied by a Mr Clowes, the chairman of the Welsh Hawking Club, who states that in Britain when eagles were taken under licence taking a downie and hand rearing it was taboo. Well, in my experience, this was not the case and in 1980 I took my own Golden Eagle under licence as a downie. I hand reared it and enjoyed the resulting benefits from having done so when I hunted with it. The British falconer who taught me how to train and hunt with eagles had been hand-rearing and deliberately



Tony Scott

Northumbria Bird of Prey Centre.

imprinting Golden Eagles since the early 1970's and had a high success rate when hunting quarry such as fox and roe deer. Indeed in the late 1980's when I attended a meeting with the Scottish Office, the Nature Conservancy Council and other interested bodies, in an attempt to have Golden Eagle licences issued for a breeding project, it was the consensus of opinion around the table that the majority of Golden Eagles in captivity in Britain were imprinted and not suitable for breeding. Since 1980 I have made a number of Natural History films featuring Golden Eagles for both British and American TV,

and on four separate occasions I have been invited to assist in the making of films with Golden Eagles on the continent, not bad for a Brit, "who does not understand them as well as others".

Other eagles I have hunted with are Steppes, Martial and Verreaux, but in the British environment none have come up to the high standard of the Golden Eagle.

The book, I am sure, is a valuable asset to anyone wishing to take on a Golden Eagle for the first time. I only wish the author had researched more thoroughly the recent history of hunting with Golden Eagles in Britain.



Filming for close ups in the making of the American film: 'The Ultimate Guide to Birds of Prey.'

A Normal Hawking Day?

Martin Perryman

It was a fine, frosty Saturday morning. I put the two Harris Hawks, Atlanta and Jack, in the car with the two ferrets and set off. I had arranged to meet Dave at the black barn for a day hawking with the ferrets. He was to fly Jack, my five-year-old male Harris, I was to fly Atlanta, my female eyass. She has proved a good rabbit hawk, quick to learn but with a tendency to self-hunt. I sometimes wonder who is controlling whom, as I do my Steve Cram in wellingtons impression.

As I drew up to the barn, I noticed a cock pheasant in the grass under some trees. I launched Atlanta into the trees, she perched high up as usual. Dave arrived and we started to beat the rough. The pheasant took flight in a perfect curving trajectory towards the bramble. The sun shone on his red/gold plumage as he headed for safety. Atlanta launched herself after him, and bound to him just before he reached cover. These particular brambles are on an island in a shallow pond. I started to wade across, breaking through the thin ice as I went. Unfortunately just as I thought I was going to stay dry I plunged into a hole and water and ice went over my knees! I floundered to the island, picked up the birds and waded back. Dave laughed loudly as I emptied my boots, wrung out my socks and steamed in the sun.

I got my revenge by getting

Dave to carry the ferrets. We set off to ferret the buries in the middle of the sheep field, the rabbits have to run quite a way to the next bury so we get some good flights. Out came the ferrets, up into the trees went Atlanta and Jack and we stepped back to watch the action. We bolted eight rabbits from various holes, catching three. We caught two simultaneously with a bird on each. We boxed up the ferrets and set off to the hill where there are several more buries. As we approached the chain of ponds, the two hawks flew after something on the pond. Looks like another bath laughed Dave! We could hear a strange noise and as we approached the pond we understood why. A young cormorant was on the ice trying to fly off, but as he flapped his wings he fell flat on his beak. The two hawks had decided that this was too fierce to tackle and flew on, we followed and left him to his endeavours. The farmer does not like cormorants as they, along with the herons take a lot of his fish, they are protected so he can only scare them off. As we neared the hill Jack swooped on something in a ditch and took a moorhen, Atlanta watched from a distance. I am pleased by the way they respect each other and we have had no squabbles over quarry - yet!

We ferreted the hill buries and bagged one more rabbit. We

spotted some roe deer and a sparrowhawk being mobbed by crows. We have seen a Goshawk and a Buzzard locally so know it is good raptor habitat. We agreed that we are fortunate to be able to hawk in these places where normally access is impossible. It is part of the appeal for me to be out in the quiet parts of the countryside which you would normally not get to see. We walked back to the barn for lunch, and to give the ferrets some milk, and look forward to the afternoon. Leaving the ferrets to doze in the barn we set off through the woods it was a bit slow to start with but we soon found some rabbits and pheasants. Atlanta took a rabbit and Jack took a hen pheasant. As we moved into some brambles near the edge of a wood, I flushed a woodcock which had difficulty in flying through the brambles and low branches, Atlanta was on him before he could struggle clear. We had flushed several woodcock over the years but this was the first time we had taken one.

Jack has had some feathers out before now but no closer until today. There have been more woodcock about this year, possibly the cold weather up north has pushed them farther south. As we admired the delicate plumage, we noticed a police car approaching. The burglar alarm was sounding at the nearby house and we were acting suspiciously, as they say. I pointed out that the hawks and ferrets are not usual house breaking equipment and that my brother is a policeman. Luckily they knew my brother and after discussing the hawks they left. It proved to be a false alarm so no damage was done. We started back to the cars feeding up the hawks as we went, two partridges flushed as we walked, they must have known they were safe as they did not fly far. We agreed it had been an eventful and enjoyable day, both hawks and ferrets had worked well, they had behaved themselves and we were going home with the same number of animals we had started with!



THE HAWK BOARD BULLETIN

This bulletin is to cover two meetings of the Hawk Board because unfortunately the deadline for the last issue of *The Falconers Magazine* came on the same day as the meeting.

As the Vice-Chair of the Hawk Board I would like to wish all falconers and bird of prey keepers a Very Happy and Prosperous New Year from all at the Hawk Board and wish you all a successful breeding season, breeding plenty of those birds for which there is a good market. None of those that are being over bred like the Barn Owl!

1. RSPCA REPORT AND SUBSEQUENT MEETING

Earlier last year a subcommittee met with two representatives of the RSPCA to discuss the report on the Welfare and Conservation Aspect of Keeping Birds of Prey in Captivity that they had commissioned and accepted by Dr Ruth Cromie and Dr Mike Nicholls. The RSPCA felt that one or two areas needed some attention and we, as the Hawk Board, were delighted that they were prepared to discuss matters. We held the meeting at the National Birds of Prey Centre.

The report was summarised by the RSPCA and a copy of the summary is, I imagine, available to at least RSPCA members should they write and ask. There were some interesting results that falconers should take note of - for example of the 56% of the people who answered the questionnaire said they used mews' jesses to fly their birds. 27% had a bird tangled as a result - for those 56% who are daft enough to still be using Mews jesses for flying - take note and change your practices.

I have to say that I was staggered that only 30% of falconers considered that birds of prey should have water daily - 7% actually said in the questionnaire that they never needed water - get real you people! There is more than enough information around to tell you that all raptors (yes, owls included) should have clean drinking water available at all times, and anyone who says otherwise is an idiot.

Overall the report said that the standards seen varied from excellent to very poor as with the keeping of any other animals (and the rearing of children!) The main problem was that there was no way to ensure that everyone did know what the minimum standards were that were set down in the various codes of conduct. We at the Hawk Board have known this for a long time, but then the same could be said for the keeping of dogs, fish, farm animals and so on ad-infinitum.

The meeting with the RSPCA was amicable and we covered a number of topics from the report. It was pointed out that those places open to the public should come under the zoo licensing and if there were any problems they only needed to be

reported. Then, with some pushing the standards could probably be improved - or the collections' licence revoked. The Federation of Zoos has produced Welfare and Management Guidelines for demonstration birds in collections. These have been accepted not only by the Federation of Zoos, but also by the British Veterinary Association and now should be in use by the DOE inspectors.

It was agreed that collating all the various guidelines would be a good idea, to produce just one standard. JPJ was concerned that this might dilute the existing guidelines as the Zoo guidelines are probably higher than some others.

Sadly we then came to the crunch time and although the RSPCA was pro this move they were not prepared to actually have their name attached to any such document in case it was taken to be a positive support for bird keeping!!!

Clubs were discussed as were owl keeping, and demonstrations at shows. It was agreed that statutory regulations were a non-starter with the government reducing their legislation rather than increasing it, and what was really needed was more education and a better way of getting that information to the private sector.

However, without the active help of the RSPCA, which they seemed unprepared to give at least at this time, the whole meeting was a bit of a waste of time, because the Hawk Board and its various individual members are already doing all they are legally able to do to increase awareness and understanding. No further meeting was expected.

2. HAWK BOARD SYMPOSIUM

There were discussions on the forthcoming symposium, with tickets handed out to those who had paid for them and instructions about how to find the place. The Hawk Board thanked those who had been involved in setting up the symposium.

3. RAPTOR FORUM MEETING HELD IN LONDON BY DOE

Peter Voute and Jim Chick were at this meeting which is a group of people including such as the Racing Pigeon Lobby, the Shooting Lobby and others who have supposed problems with wildlife affecting their business or hobbies. The falconers have representation on this group.

Ian Newton gave a first class talk on why Britain's farmland birds are declining and popular to report where Magpies and Sparrowhawks are being given the blame, he fairly and squarely showed how the changes in farming practices have caused the decline in many species. To give just one example; stubble fields used to be left until the spring before being ploughed under and re-seeded. This gave a huge and irreplaceable food source through the winter for thousands and probably millions of

small birds. Now the plough arrives as the combine leaves and that food source is gone and consequently so are the birds that relied on it.

The racing pigeon boys, whose well-known love of peregrines leads them to come out with scientifically proven facts and figures, stated at the meeting that there are 7,000,000 domestic pigeons in captivity and Peregrines kill 225,000 every year! I have to say I am always delighted when people come out with such ridiculous and unsubstantiated facts, as it removes yet more of their credibility.

The meeting was just an airing of view, and until such research as is going on is completed there is no evidence that wild raptors are damaging people's business or hobbies to any great effect.

4. BFSS FALCONRY COMMITTEE

The committee has some members who are also members of the Hawk Board, so they try to meet in the morning of the same day as the HB to help dual members with travel and funds.

The committee had decided that the BFSS Show Guidelines for Falconry Demonstrations were going to be updated in the New Year.

There was some discussion on the Cobham Report and they would be working on a policy statement as to the flying of Owls as a Field Sport.

Peter Voute then gave us all a political update on what is going on with all the parties as far as field sports are concerned. The BFSS had been to major party conventions.

5. AGRICULTURAL COLLEGES

The Vice Chair mentioned a new concern that had come to her attention which was the number of Agricultural Colleges that are now obtaining birds of prey to use as teaching aids in small animal management courses. Two particularly had come to her attention and two phone calls showed that both colleges had an appalling lack of knowledge, especially as they were supposedly going to be teaching on this subject. It was suggested that we should contact the Ministry of Education to find out about minimum standards and that a letter would be written to the Principals of such colleges stating our concerns.

6. DOE SUGGESTION

In answer to a letter from an interested person, Nick Williams from the DOE suggested that all buyers of raptors obtain a written statement that the birds they buy were captive bred. It was pointed out that this might be difficult if a bird was bought from other than a breeder. However, it was suggested that anyone having such a bird should normally have a written statement from the breeder and could then pass it on with the bird. Problems might arise if a bird was old, or had passed through many hands, but the purchaser should make sure that he or she was covered in case of a problem and if he or she were concerned about the origin of the bird it was probably advisable not to buy it, or to try and find out some history from the DOE.

The meeting was closed at 4pm . The next meeting would be on Jan 15th, followed by April 9th, July 9th and October 8th.

THE HAWK BOARD SYMPOSIUM

Held at Birmingham University on October 19th.

After the de-registration of the various species last year, the Hawk Board changed its constitution. One of the things it said it would do was have an open meeting, once a year, for all those clubs who were affiliated, to disseminate information and give people the chance to air their views. This was the first one and I have to say as one who attended and spoke, I thought the whole meeting went really well.

There could have been a few more people and it was a bit disappointing that not all the clubs, particularly the largest (!) took up their allocation of seats, nevertheless, for a first meeting it was OK. There was a welcome by Adrian Williams as the Chair Person of the meeting. Then Jim Chick, as the Chairman of the Hawk Board gave people a potted history of the Hawk Board and how it came into being as the Voluntary Panel in 1979. He followed it through to the present day with a list of some of the things it has achieved, which for those of you who think it has done nothing were quite impressive.

John Gardiner then gave a talk on the BFSS and stressed that all of us should understand that all field sports must stand together and not argue against one another or get fragmented. They now have 350 constituency organisers. We were asked as falconers to contact our local person so that we could help in making sure that all possible MP's could be shown what falconry was all about.

We have to get Proactive rather than waiting for the to hit the fan!

Clarissa Daly, also from the BFSS then gave an interesting talk on PR and how to deal with the media. The main message was to get to know your local media as much as possible - especially local papers and radio and help them with good stories and even Phone-ins. However, there were a few programmes to be avoided by all of us, because they were just organised slanging

matches - Central Weekend Live being the main one to avoid.

One or two words of advice were passed on - always check if someone contacts you for information - they may be on the anti lobby - they may be taping you. Phone the BFSS to see if they know the reporter and in a crisis situation always inform the BFSS.

Always be honest and say enough but don't over do it. Any clubs or societies sending out press releases should let the BFSS have copies. For a lesson in how to avoid questions listen to Michael Hesselstine. He is brilliant at not being led, or answering what he wants to answer and not other stuff.

Write to your MP they take particular notice of letters.

Tony Warburton who is the Chair of the Owl TAG and the director of the Owl Centre at Muncaster Castle then gave an excellent and very long, talk on Owls. Covering breeding and housing, worldwide issues such as rare owls in the Phillippines. He also touched on the problems of over breeding of some species such as the Bar Owl and the European Eagle Owl.

Lunch was included in the ticket, as was tea and coffee. The meal was excellent and very generous, wine and beer was available for those who wanted it and most did!

After lunch JPJ gave a talk on the 29 years of the National Birds of Prey Centre, what they had achieved in the nearly three decades and what plans there were for the future.

Guy Wallace then gave an excellent talk on training dogs for falconry. Pointing out that a good dog will definitely find more than most falconers, who don't really have the nose for it! He went through the different species of dogs and suggested that for shortwings Spaniels of Hunt/Point/Retrievers were the best for the job. For the longwings either a pointer or HPR such as the German Pointers were the dog best suited.

After going through the training he suggested that all falconers should get a dog first, get it trained and then worry about the bird. As a dog owner myself, I am convinced that training the dog well is harder than training the bird. But then Guy sug-

gested the only remedy for my five labs was a twelve bore (Of course he is quite wrong but you can't know everything, however good you are!)

The last talk before tea was by Neil Forbes FRCVS, who is one of the only two specialist avian vets in the UK. He gave a very quick run through of the veterinary problems that raptors can have and by the end of his talk we were all left breathless! There can be no doubt about Neils commitment to the health and welfare of our raptors, nor his expertise in this difficult field.

A raffle followed the tea break, with donated prizes which was much appreciated by all. Those who won more than once asked for a redraw to give others a chance - good sportsmen and women - I was very proud of them all.

Nick Williams, the Chief Wildlife Inspector for the DOE, gave the final talk on the current changes in the legislation both recent and coming up. He pointed out that the Hawk Board is almost unique in the world, in its position of liaison with the government bodies that affect the keeping and flying birds of prey, and that the DOE was very glad of the good rapport between the Hawk Board and the DOE.

He went through the various projects the DOE is involved in, such as the DNA testing of certain species. Data Management with police customs etc., providing contact groups on such interests as Country Sports, Problem Wildlife and so on. There was much new information for many of those listening and it made for an educational session.

The day closed with an open forum which got everyone going with many questions to the panel. In hindsight, which as we all know is a wonderful thing, we should have given more time for the open forum and we will remedy that for the meeting this year.

For those of you who did not know the seminar was going on - it was given out to all the clubs to inform their members and it was advertised in this magazine and in the Cage and Aviary Birds. Should anyone be interested in coming to the next one or have any requests for topics to be covered, please contact either myself - JPJ as Vice Chair or Jim Chick as the Chair of the Hawk Board.

Westweald Falconry

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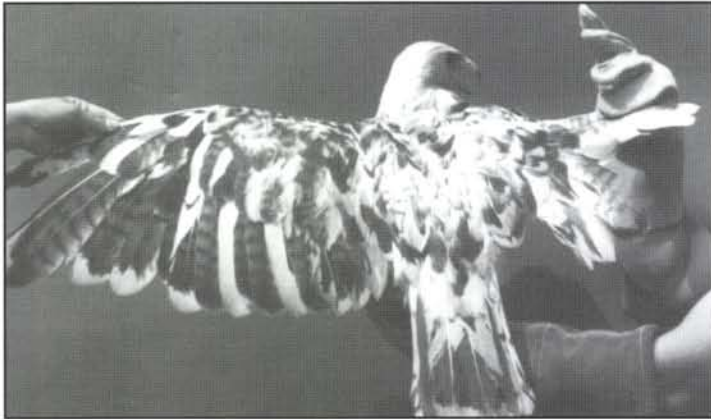
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TALE OF A WHITE RED-TAIL.



Left: The Red-tail in 1991. A partial Albino.

Below: The Red-tail in 1996.

On the afternoon of May 8, 1991, New Jersey State Conservation Officer, Timothy Williamson was checking Drake's Brook, a trout stream in Mount Olive Township, Morris County. While patrolling on foot along the streams' bank, he noticed a large white bird conspicuously perched in a nearby tree. As he approached to have a better look, the bird tried to fly, but fell to the ground a short distance away. Realising something was very wrong, Williamson pursued it. The bird flapped weakly as it ran along the ground but couldn't get airborne and after a short chase he caught it. Williamson carefully picked it up and stared in amazement. He was holding an albino Red tailed Hawk! But it was very thin and weak - and the entire tip of its right wing was missing. Tim took the hawk home, fed it, and the next day brought it to The Raptor Trust rehabilitation center for care.

This Red tailed Hawk is an adult bird (at least in its third year of life), and from its size I believe a female, but I'm not certain of that as yet. About 50% of its normally brown dorsal feathers are pure white and its underside is almost completely white, a red and white tail, white talons and chocolate brown eyes. Seeing it in the wild, many birders would have been searching for their field guides for help in identifying it. A spectacular bird and a rarity in nature it is.

By definition an albino has white feathers instead of the usual colours of its' species. The white feathers may covert he entire bird, or just parts of the bird, because albinism occurs in varying degrees. The four degrees currently recognised by science are:

1) Total albinism - When all pigments are completely absent from feathers, eyes and skin. Totally albino birds have all white feathers and very pale or white feet, legs and bill. The eyes appear pink because without colour pigment in the irises, the blood in the eyes shows through.

2) Incomplete albinism - When pigments are completely absent from either feathers, eyes or skin, but not from all three.

3) Imperfect albinism - When pigments are

partially reduced, or diluted in feathers, eyes or skin, but not totally absent in any area.

4) Partial albinism - When pigments are completely or partially absent from parts of any or all three areas. Often this type involves certain feathers only and is sometimes symmetrical. By far the commonest form.

Thus, the Red tailed Hawk described here is a partial albino.

Most frequently albinism is hereditary. It results from a genetic change that inhibits the formation of the enzyme tyrosinase, which is responsible for the synthesis of the brownish-black pigment, melanin. Melanins are the most common bird pigments which give colour to feathers and tissue. Certain types of albinism do not have a genetic origin but rather result from malfunctions in body chemistry. These malfunctions can be caused by dietary deficiencies or physical trauma.

Albinism, although relatively uncommon in birds, has been recorded in over 40% of the nearly 700 species of North American birds. It has been recorded in several species of raptor: Turkey and Black Vultures, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Coopers Hawk, Red tailed Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Swainsons Hawk, Golden and Bald Eagles, Prairie Falcon, Peregrine Falcon, Merlin and American Kestrel. It occurs more frequently in Redtails than in any other hawk. It is very rare among owls.

Birds such as several species of swans, herons, egrets, gulls and others that are normally white, are, of course, not albinos. Oddly albinism occurs far more in birds which normally have dark pigmented feathers.

Albino birds may have weak eyesight, brittle feathers and possibly even weak bones. Lacking normal colouration, which often serves as camouflage, they are more likely to be detected, be they predator of prey. Often they are even harassed by their own kind. These conditions aren't conducive to living a long life, and surely most albinos do not. In fact, from what little published information I could find, albinos don't seem to live long in captivity either. We may be able to learn more about that by having this Red-tailed Hawk at the Raptor Trust as a permanent resident.

This beautiful, unique bird's story is a bitter-sweet one. I'm sure that without Tim Williamson's rescue and without the professional care it received at The Raptor Trust, it certainly would have perished. We were able to save the hawk, but not its wing. It will never fly free again.

Like many other unreleasable birds which reside at our center, the white hawk will live a life of quality and dignity. That's the least and the most we can do.



*Written by & reprinted with
the kind permission of
Len Soucy*

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: 0117 9660770

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HOME FARM F.M., HINTS, Nr.
TAMWORTH, STAFFS. B78 3DW.**

THE BRITISH HAWKING ASSOCIATION

Social Meetings held regularly at the Hogs Head Hotel, Awwsworth, 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: Rob on - 01706 845731/
0378 609467 (mobile). or
Jeff 01942 201995

HOME COUNTIES HAWKING CLUB

Affiliated to the British Field Sports Society

Sandhurst on the Surrey/Berks borders is where the Club meets on the third Wednesday of the month.

Good husbandry and practices in raptor keeping and flying are promoted by way of education and assistance.

Our programme includes guest speakers, demonstrations, outings and members' issues, and the membership encompasses all levels of experience and knowledge, from novices to seasoned falconers

Ring: John & Laila on 01276 23429
or Sue on 01344 423988 after 6pm

NEW FOREST FALCONRY CLUB

Est. 1990, affiliated to the BFSS and 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 and practice methods of falconry and hawking.

Please feel free to contact:

Rick on 01202 471388

CLUB MEETINGS ARE HELD AT



**"The Falconers Rest"
Public House.**

**Thorpe Lane, Middleton, Leeds.
Or Contact: Mrs Alice Douglas,
Secretary. 0113 2777347**

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.

Parsley Patch, Scotts Lane,
Knowbury, Ludlow,
Shrops, SY8 1PP
Tel: 01584 890496

E. Mail: Robin@cherrug.demon.co.uk

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: 0245 226057
Dean White: 01489 896504
or write The Tilbury Community Ass.
The Civic Square, Tilbury Essex

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CROOKEDSTONE ELVANFOOT,
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ML12 6RL**

GLOS AND WEST WILTS RAPTOR CLUB

We are a fast-growing club with members ranging from complete novices to seasoned falconers.

Our informal, friendly meetings provide an opportunity to exchange experiences, arrange field trips and establish contacts with local falconers. Guest speakers and suppliers of falconry furniture regularly attend. We also run beginners' workshops and organise outings to places of interest.

Meetings are held on the first Monday of every month at the Compass Inn, Tormarton - 800yds off M4, J18 (Cirencester direction, then first right).

**For further information
please telephone:-
Martin 0117 9710019
Gary 01454 201702**

MEETINGS of The Welsh Hawking Club

are held monthly, 8pm at:

USK The Newbridge Inn, Tredunnoch. 2nd Monday
CHESTER The Goshawk, Northworth. 1st Wednesday
NORTHAMPTON RedLion, Kislingbury. 4th 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

Common Buzzards, Prey and hunting behaviour

Carl Jones

Traditionally buzzards were rarely used in falconry and historical references are not very complementary. Chaucer wrote "Man may for no daunting make a sparrowhawk of a buzzard". However this comparison was a little unfair since each species needs to be considered on its own particular merit. Captain Charles Knight, the famous falconer who knew buzzards well wrote in *Aristocrats of the air*. "The Buzzard is popularly regarded as being a lethargic, lazy bird of the "simple" order, a poltroon, but I sometimes think he is not such a dullard as his reputation suggests."

Buzzards are exceedingly adaptable and very generalised in their feeding habits. They take a wide range of prey mainly small mammals but also birds, reptiles, amphibians, insects, earthworms and carrion. As a schoolboy I was able to record this versatility in feeding. A friend, David Siggery and I used to keep a watch on some buzzard pairs in the woodlands around our homes. At weekends and during holidays we used to climb to the nests to check their progress. This was unnecessary at one nest since it was in a large ash tree in a deep ravine and we could look straight across from the edge of the ravine and see into the nest.

We examined about a hundred food items delivered by six pairs. The main food items were voles and rabbits, but moles and wood mice were also frequent. Voles were the most common and formed nearly a third of all items, but by weight rabbits were by far the most important. About a quarter of the items were rabbits and a fifth were birds. Fledgling birds were often caught especially later during the breeding season when they were more available, and at a time when the adult buzzards were feeding young. We recorded thrushes, wood pigeon, jay, magpie, jackdaw, carrion crow and once an adult barn owl. Occasionally the buzzards would deliver a shrew

to the nest and once we found an slow-worm and once an eel. Some pairs used to show a preference for particular prey. One pair used to regularly catch grey squirrels and another frogs. We found no snakes but some buzzards regularly kill vipers.

Although buzzards will take a wide range of different prey they are attracted to some species more than others. My trained birds found moorhens irresistible and chased them persistently. Even a naive bird that had never seen a moorhen before would go to great lengths to try and catch one, yet ignore other birds of similar size. A moorhen that one of my buzzards was chasing was so intent on escaping that it failed to negotiate its way between the well spaced bars of a five-barred gate, collided with a cross-piece and killed itself, saving the buzzard the job. I think it is the moorhen's flight style that buzzards find so attractive, since they are also attracted to the "fluttery" flight of fledglings or disabled birds.

Trained and wild buzzards will readily catch rabbits especially young ones, but they usually do not have the speed and strength to catch and hold an adult. Captain Knight had a trained female buzzard and in *Aristocrats of the Air* he wrote: "The best plan with such a

slow-flying bird was to sit her on the fist and walk through grass where rabbits were likely to be lying out. If a rabbit got up she always did her best to catch it. If she failed, she would sometimes mount into the air and soar round on the look out for another victim, and occasionally from this position pounced on a small rabbit." They caught some thirty rabbits in about two months, but only two were well grown.

Captain Knight further wrote in *Wildlife in the Tree Tops*, "the Buzzard is not in any sense cowardly or sluggish... exerting every ounce of strength, he makes a bee-line for the selected quarry. Almost stooping as he comes down from his 'pitch', he swings along at considerable speed, and binds to his victim with a grip from which there is no hope of escape.... It is a quaint fact that the Buzzard will attack such modest opponents as lizards and Moles, with such fierceness and impetuosity as he does the strongest rabbits; although in the case of the smaller quarry he, in his ardour, usually grasps handfuls of grass, among which the victim is literally crushed to death."

Buzzards and other buteos are capable of a ferocious grip, despite the relatively small size of their feet, as I and many fal-

coners who have been grabbed by a buteo can testify. This reminds me of an incident many years ago while a member of a hawking party. A particularly obnoxious young fellow known as Muldoon was trying to remove his red-tailed buzzard off a rabbit she had just caught. He was being particularly heavy-handed and the hawk was upset that she was being robbed of her just reward. The hawk ran up Muldoon's trousers leg and sunk her claws deeply into his crotch. This made Muldoon gasp and his eyes water, much to the amusement of the rest of the party who were too incapacitated by their mirth to help him remove the furious and uncompromising hawk.

Buzzards can be surprisingly agile when they need to be, however most active prey, such as squirrels, are I suspect, caught by surprise. I once watched a wild buzzard flying through a copse, weaving its way rapidly between the closely spaced trees in much the same way that an accipiter would. Buzzards however usually use sedate forms of hunting. Much of their searching is from a perch from which they pounce on unsuspecting prey. My tame buzzards at hack, used to spend a large part of their time walking around in open areas picking up insects (especially beetles), insect larvae and earthworms.

My favourite buzzard Russ, when being trained, even with the strictest dieting would not lose weight. I was puzzled, even more so when he started bringing up pellets of mud. I kept a close eye on him and found that at night he was catching earthworms that came to the surface around his perch! This nocturnal "hunting" although unusual, is not unique since there is a record of a wild buzzard catching a Manx shearwater during a dark moonless night. I have always been intrigued that some hawks may occasionally hunt at night. There is an observation of a common kestrel hovering by the light of the moon and I



Wild Buzzards eat a wider variety of food than any other bird of prey. Photos: Carl Jones



Not many people rate buzzards as good hunters, but with patience and determination they make excellent hunting partners.

have seen kestrels hovering at dawn when they were only just visible in the gloomy light.

Buzzards usually locate food by sight and they are very receptive to any movements likely to have been caused by prey. They have keen hearing and my trained birds used to investigate any rustling noises likely to have been caused by small mammals, and sometimes located prey before they could possibly have seen it.

In Britain buzzards are typically birds of hilly and mountainous country with wooded valleys. Here they use the topography of the land to advantage. While hunting along hill sides buzzards slope soar using the available updrafts, usually about 10-30m above the ground but sometimes much higher. They often stop in flight to poise motionless in the wind or to hover over suitable areas looking for

prey. Buzzards are good at hovering but not as adept or elegant as kestrels. Hovering and poising are usually interchangeable depending on the intensity of the updrafts, and are common modes of hunting in hilly terrain. Trained buzzards will poise overhead if the conditions are right, but it is harder to get them to hover.

The most common attack technique is a direct flying or glide attack. The experienced buzzard may make full use of any cover to conceal its attack, and approaches its prey hugging the contours, only a metre or so above the ground. An attack often develops into a tail-chase, with the buzzard following the prey in flight or even on foot. I have participated in some exciting rat chases and flights at young rabbits and moorhens which may entail a combination of running and flying as the determined buz-

zard will go to great lengths to try and catch its quarry, often chasing the victim in and out of patches of vegetation.

Buzzards are opportunist hunters taking whatever hunting opportunities arise. Russ once caught a storm-blown Manx shearwater and gorged himself on the fatty meat which made him listless for days. Manx shearwaters are however a favoured prey of the buzzard on the seabird islands off the Pembrokeshire coast.

Buzzards will feed on fish when the opportunity arises as illustrated by the eel that I once found in a nest. As a teenager I used to tickle trout in our local stream and Bertie used to wait on the bank and would consume any fish that I offered her, swallowing small trout whole, head first. She would also do some of her own fishing. At the edge of the stream Bertie would investigate any movement she detected in the waterweed and grab at it with a foot. Twice she caught a eel nearly a foot long which had been moving just below the surface of the vegetation. The eels were difficult for her to handle and wrapped themselves around her legs as she tried to subdue them with convulsive grips. She ate them with some difficulty since she could not stop them wriggling, and even after they had been swallowed I could see the contortions of the eels still wriggling in her crop.

Young inexperienced birds often try and catch prey that they have no hope of catching, or that is too big for them to handle. The first thing Jasper, a hand-reared male buzzard, tried to catch was a tom cat which he chased into a tree and was preparing to press home an attack when I intervened. It is quite likely that the buzzard

would have come off much the worse from the attack. Bertie, grabbed and held a full grown cockerel, again I interfered before the attack had a chance to reach a conclusion. She also tried to catch a snipe which was lying in some grass. She dropped out of a tree and flew at the snipe which flushed, and which she vainly tail-chased until she was hopelessly out-distanced. Russ similarly attacked and tried to tail-chase a cock pheasant!

All good falconers have to try and appreciate the world through the senses of their birds. We have to try and understand how our birds use the air currents and make use of the landscape. A broad-winged species with a low wing-loading such as a buzzard probably relies far more on the wind currents for flying and hunting than do hawks with a higher wing-loading. Buzzards develop a mental three-dimensional map of their territories or regular hunting grounds; they learn where the updrafts are likely to be and the vantage points from where they can hunt. With experience buzzards develop their hunting techniques and become more tactical in approaching and intercepting quarry making use of the terrain and wind conditions.

Buzzards are relatively straight forward to train and to fly free but are not easy to hunt with successfully. They are excellent beginners birds and provide a good introduction to falconry for anyone wishing to advance to one of the other more rapacious buteos or a Goshawk. Some however who are not very interested in hunting may wish to continue flying Buzzards, and will find them interesting and rewarding birds to keep and study.



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EAGLE HEIGHTS



Despite only opening in August last year, Eagle Heights is rapidly becoming a favourite with bird of prey fans throughout south-east England. Situated high on the North Downs, overlooking the picturesque village of Eynsford in the Darent Valley, Eagle Heights, even without the birds is worth a visit for the views from the flying ground alone.

Out of the ninety odd birds that are on view at Eagle Heights, there are some twenty five birds that are flown daily during the displays at 12, 2 and 3pm.

The centres' star is Alaska, the Bald Eagle, who when conditions are right spirals up on the thermals to a height of three thousand feet, before hurtling in over the heads of the crowd at phenomenal speed. Other eagles that can be seen flying are a pair of Russian Steppes', a White Bellied and a Bataleur.

There is also 'Harold' the Griffon Vulture, who when he isn't behaving like a spoilt child, lumbers into the air to soar around the valley giving a superb display of his immense wingspan.

The group of five Harris Hawks are also great fun to watch as they chase Legless, the electrically driven rabbit through the crowd and climb in unison for the titbits of food that are fired into the air. The other hawks that can be seen flying are a Ferruginous and something I have not previously seen in a display, a Female

Goshawk. A trio of lanners, a Peregrine, Saker, Kestrel and Lugger make up the falcon display. While their close relative 'Johnny' the Striated Caracara, is definitely the centres' comedian. Running down tunnels, turning over pots and stones shows the how he would find food in the wild.

There are a variety of Owls which are flown in the centres' lecture room which is also used for other birds during bad weather. Though saying this the Bald Eagle apparently likes nothing better than taking to the air in the pouring rain and playing around in 50mph winds. And, if you are prepared to sit there in such weather, Alan Ames the centres' director is prepared to stay out there with you until you are soaked to the skin!

The unique thing about Eagle Heights is the fact that everything is under cover. The tea rooms, shop, lecture room, mews and aviaries are all housed in

what was once a huge dairy shed. So even if you don't wish to get wet with the diehards outside you can watch the display from the tea room or just sit and admire the view.

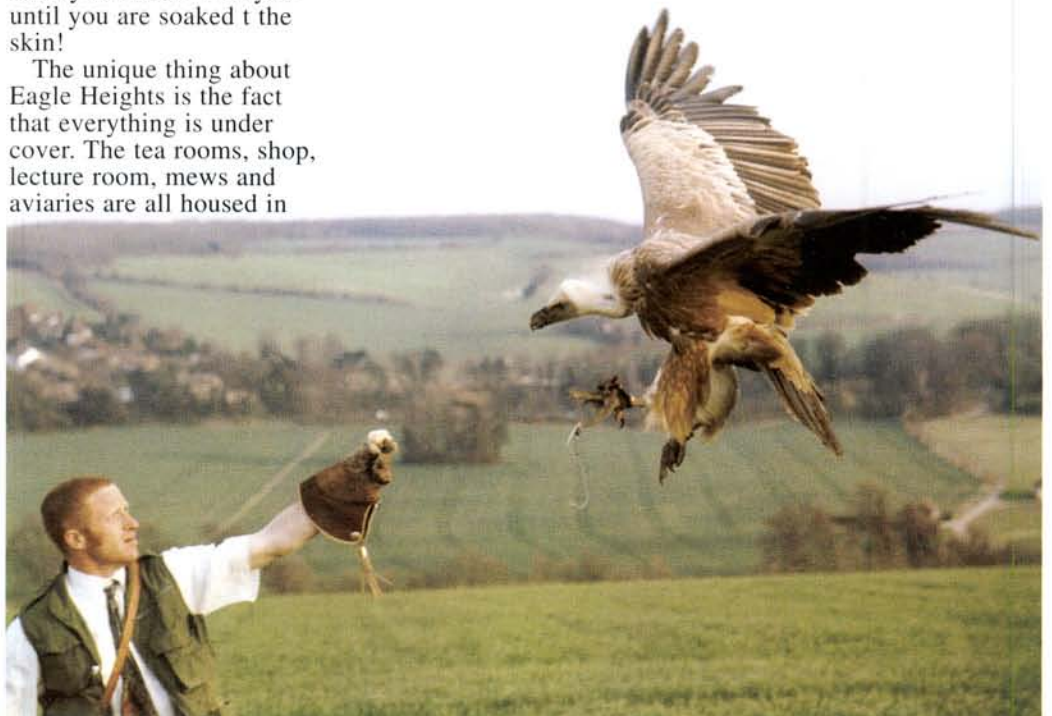
Like many centres, Eagle Heights offers Hawking days and five day Introductory Courses and with 2,000 acres of downland on which to fly "your bird" it is the ultimate escape, even though you are only two miles from junction 3 of the M25.

The serious side of Eagle Heights is the conservation projects that are already being undertaken. This year Barn Owls will be reintroduced to the valley below the centre by utilising an owl box that has lain dor-

mant for 5 years as a release point for the birds bred at the centre. The "North Downs Buzzard Project", is a privately financed scheme to reintroduce Common Buzzards back on to the North Downs where they were once common, prior to being persecuted out of existence.

Also, if you like reptiles there is a wide variety of scaly beasts. The most notable out of the dozen or so that you can hold if you wish are "Kevin" the four foot Iguana, "Arnie" the ten foot Indian Python and a huge African Rock Python.

For further details about Eagle Heights please contact Alan Ames on 01322 866466.



ON THE TRACK OF ARCTIC PEREGRINES

Dr Nick Fox

If you are looking for a new home for someone you particularly dislike, look no further than Norilsk. Norilsk has everything. Isolated from the rest of Russia by miles of taiga pine forest, its main contact with the outside world is by ship through the Arctic Sea. Or you can fly there, in 4 and a half hours from St Petersburg, as we did. Flight arrangements? You just sleep on the airport floor until there are sufficient passengers for Aeroflot to lay on a plane, snack (lightly) on a cold pre-packed meal of European items purchased cheaply because they have passed their sell by dates, and



Three well grown young peregrines in their ground nest

they have two months of continuous daylight in which to fledge their broods before the first autumn storms in early September.

The Taimyr is also the breeding stronghold of the tiny, bright coloured Red-breasted goose *Branta ruficollis*, a globally threatened species which has a unique relationship with *calidus* peregrines. Chris Eastham and I, from the National Avian Research Centre in Abu Dhabi (now the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency), and Dr Jeff Black, John Quinn and Janet Hunter from the Wildfowl and



Jasha in his waders holding our trapped female peregrine before release



Chris Eastham (left) and Jeff Black taking blood for pesticide analysis from a brood of Rough-legged Buzzards

there you are, struggling across a piece of rutted tarmac laid on permafrost and already into battle with unsophisticated Siberian mosquitoes.

At 350 km north of the Arctic Circle, Norilsk has two months of solid darkness in winter, when temperatures reach -50C. It was built in the 1930's - by convicts with no idea about brick-laying. Once it was nesting habitat for Gyr falcons, now it is a run-down copper and nickel mining town, fifty kilometres of dereliction, devastation and heart-breaking pollution. Norilsk is hell on earth.

Norilsk was also our last contact with the human race before heading a further 400 km north into the high Arctic; the Taimyr Peninsula, breeding ground of the Arctic *calidus* peregrine. The Taimyr is further north than north Alaska; too far north for nesting gyrfalcons. But here, in the brief Arctic summer, waders and waterfowl come in their millions for their brief and hectic breeding season. Arriving in June when the snow is still in control,



Sabooka's male, showing his sun-bleached primaries and tail feathers

Wetlands Trust (UK) had come to study this strange relationship. The peregrines nest on small hillocks on the tundra surrounded by goose nests. When a Polar Fox approaches, it is soon spotted by the colony of geese who raise the alarm. Then the falcon stands up stiffly, rattles out her feathers and takes to the air to strafe the intruder until it has scampered away, tail held erect to distract the falcon from a body blow. It is an interesting and ancient symbiotic relationship.

John, Janet and Jasha, our Siberian biologist/hunter guide, had already been at base camp near the Pura river for over a month, so while we were in Norilsk we purchased some 'fresh' food of dubious origin from street vendors who saw our dollars walking down the road from a mile off. Then we haggled with the owner/pilot of the only private helicopter to take us north. Smoke-stained, built from bits of two other helicopters whose pirated corpses lay nearby, our transport, with all our gear on board was unable to

take off vertically. We bumped along the tarmac before lurching uncertainly into the air. Once airborne, the vibration was tremendous. It was like being in a spin drier full of tin cans and flies. We left behind the acid-stripped and stunted pine-forest with Norilsk, and sputtered above bare tundra, disturbing Snowy Owls and Rough-legged buzzards. Our Russian pilot Nikolai spoke no English (he didn't speak at all) and navigated across the tundra dotted with small lochs using a tatty map resting on his knees. After two hours or so, with only ten minutes of fuel left, we spotted the camp with the others waiting to greet us. The pilot promised Jasha he would come back for us in August. Then he re-fuelled from some rusting drums, and left.

Our aim was to catch two nesting female peregrines and fit them with satellite tags so that we could follow their migration south in the autumn and see if this population was supplying birds which are used in Arab falconry. We also wanted to find as many nests as we could, to see how well they were breeding and to take a few samples for pesticide analysis and for DNA analysis. John and Jasha had already found a few nests; all we had to do was to catch the adults. No problemo.

Of course, there were no pigeons in Norilsk. We had no bait animals at all. There were quite a few lemmings in their tunnels in the soggy tundra, and we trapped some using Longworth traps to bait bal-chattris. Chris inadvertently trod on one, and transformed it instantly into an airmail lemming. As the snow thawed, the tundra was like a sponge, so we lived in thigh waders. But we had a secret weapon, a plastic Horned owl, painted to look like a Snowy Owl. His main advantage was his ability to withstand physical abuse and to not need food. We named him Snodgrass. Snoddy watched impassively as we prepared our dho-gazzas. Jasha and I delighted in carving netting needles from bits of packing case to repair our nets. Then we loaded our gear into two aluminium open boats and headed off up the Pura river. Ranging from 100 metres to a kilometre wide, the Pura drains the country to the north of the mighty Jennissej. It is full of shoals and banks and, despite Jasha's careful reading of the currents, we often jarred to a halt: it soon became clear why the outboard propeller had only



The biological station. HOME!

stumps left for blades.

Huddled in the boat with bits of clothing wrapped round us to fend off the chilling wind, we passed many broods of geese - Red-breasted, White-fronted and Bean Geese. Jasha noted down all the brood sizes using a decrepit pair of field-glasses. We passed reindeer and nests of Rough-legged buzzards on low promontories. We saw juvenile white-tailed sea eagles. Occasionally we saw families of Polar foxes by their dens on little hummocks, the only land which thaws enough for tunnelling. After a couple of hours we reached the Peregrine nest on a bend in the river and seeing that familiar anchor shape in the sky brought back a feeling of familiarity. The nest itself was on the back-face of a sharp, eroded little ridge, surrounded by geese nests which by now had hatched their young and been abandoned.

With both parents in the air kekking angrily, John and Jasha swiftly recorded data on the goose nests while Chris and I put up the dho-gazzas on the ridge a few metres away from the white downy chicks huddled in their scrape on the ground. We spiked Snoddy on his pole and descended across a boggy gully. The old birds were still circling very high but as we left the area the female started false stoops, yoyo-ing

high over Snoddy. Although we were 400 m or so away, we felt we might still be putting her off, so Jasha hastily erected a little canvas Russian tent. Just as we all piled in to escape from the mozzies, the female stooped at Snoddy with conviction and did not come back up. A quick check with the field glasses told us that one of the nets was down. We scrambled out of the tent and charged across the boggy tundra. A four hundred metre sprint in waders, followed by a climb up a steep bank does not leave you in the best condition for extracting an irate peregrine out of a dho-gazza and my-oh-my do those mozzies home in on sweaty flesh! She was a large, pale peregrine weighing 1170g. We laid out our equipment, and then carefully measured the falcon, took a blood sample and smears, ringed and micro-chipped her and then fitted a body harness carrying a backpack satellite tag. We activated the tag's transmitter programme using a magnet and checked the transmission using a small radio receiver. Placing her in a casting jacket in a quiet spot we ringed and chipped the three chicks and took blood samples and collected pellets. Chick blood would give us data on pesticide levels of prey on the breeding grounds, whereas blood from the adults gives us information



Three chicks huddled together in a typical ground nest site, here by the Bystra River

on pesticide exposure on the wintering grounds. We took photo's of the nest site in bright sunshine. It was 2am.

We took the female with us down to the boat and then released her. She flew off strongly, rousing in the air and then soaring over the nest. We floated quietly off down river delighted with our good start and wishing her well.

Back at the camp we had to sort out our gear. Jasha's idea of provisions consisted primarily of reindeer meat and fish and our deep freeze (a hole dug in the permafrost) was almost empty. I scanned the horizon with the Zeiss and spotted the velvet antlers of a young reindeer protruding behind a cutbank of the river. Soon Jasha was crabbing his way across the flat. I saw him freeze and a puff came from the rifle muzzle followed by a crack. He skinned the reindeer on a sand flat and we lugged joints and cuts back to camp, where we gorged ourselves on steaks and liver and on chunks of Russian bread, which never goes stale. Then we crashed in our tent. It was 7am.

Over the next few days we checked nests within 50km of the base camp, before packing the two boats and heading 60km down river. We found more nests with chicks, but many were in difficult places for trapping, and rock climbing in waders without any ropes is no bundle of fun. As we rounded one turn in the river, we saw the classic silhouette of a sentinel peregrine on a rocky pinnacle high above us, her pale front gleaming in the sun. We floated past her and set up camp in a side creek. Then we came back and climbed up the back of the cliff to her nest. She had three chicks, two with blue feet and one with yellow feet. We quickly set up the nets and retreated out of direct view. As she soared over the nest I took a steady look at her. She had something trailing from her leg s. Intrigued, I studied her carefully. Sure enough, she was wearing Arab jesses! We christened her 'Sabooka' after the Arabic for jess, and we determined to catch her to see if she was micro-chipped. An Arab falconer must have lost her out hawking and she had made her way back to breed.

Sabooka evidently knew what a net was. She stooped at Snoddy but she wouldn't come in low enough. We caught the male instead, and what a little beauty he was! Weighing 625g, in lean hunting condition, his primaries

were bleached to beige by the sun, leaving dark shadows where each feather overlapped. His toes were gnarled and scarred. No spring chicken him. But we couldn't catch Sabooka. We set a bal-chatri with a lemming in it right at her look-out perch, but she disdained it. We wrapped a dead lemming in nooses and set it by the nest but she preferred her own fresh food. Then we ran out of food ourselves and filed wire into fish hooks to try to catch some supper. Things got desperate. We had left the gun at base. I was all set to jump in the boat and knife a reindeer as it swam across the river. Chris and Jasha went down river and found an abandoned trappers shack, returning triumphantly with three rusty tins dated 1985. One was pork, one was jam and one was fish. They gave us more time, but Sabooka wouldn't co-operate. In the end our fuel ran low and we had to say farewell.

We chugged back up stream and a thunder storm rolled in. Squalls lashed our boats. Because most of my luggage had been full of scientific equipment I had no waterproof coat. One day I may buy a Goretex, but just then all I had was a bin liner used for gear. I cut armholes and it

on, using the bungee from the falcon trap as a belt. Jasha's face cracked into a broad grin. Fumbling in a little cupboard at the front of the boat he pulled out his own bin-liner coat and put it on! What entente cordiale! The international fashion scene hits the High Arctic!

About 25km from our fuel cache, our petrol ran out. Jeff, Chris and I drew our boat up on the bank and John and Jasha continued onward. We waited patiently on the bank. We had no food, no fuel, no wood of any



Above: The study area - Just after the thaw. At this time of year, Peregrines have returned to the Taimyr and are defending their breeding territories

kind for making heat. The nearest humans were 450km to the south. Unknown to us, the other boat ran dry too and they had to row. It was a day for musing.

But they got to the fuel and loaded some for us. We waved as they hove into view round a bend in the river. A few hours later we were back at base, fulfilling our fantasies with reindeer steaks. We broke out Jasha's industrial strength vodka from a plastic drum and badly sang some incredibly ancient pop songs, passing round Jasha's gui-

tar.

In ten days we visited seven active peregrine nests, all of which were crammed with young, most of which we had ringed, sampled and fitted with microchips. Just before we left, we had to catch another adult female and Chris and Jasha and I set off upstream to try another nest. On the way we spotted a peregrine and found a new nest on a hummock. It was in a good spot and we could site the nets close to the nest. Scarcely had we got out of range when the female punched into both nets and knocked Snoddy for six! We put a satellite tag on her and returned jubilantly to camp. Mission accomplished!

The helicopter came just before the snow and we sneaked beneath a menacing duvet of low cloud. After a few more days in Norilsk and St Petersburg we made it home to Britain. We left Snoddy behind to face the Siberian winter. And the peregrines? One of them crossed the Russian taiga and the steppes of Kazakhstan, she found her way through the high passes of the Hindu Kush and the Karakoram and down the fertile Indus Valley in Pakistan. But that's another story...



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SETTING IT STRAIGHT



Jerry Lee is a second year male Harris Hawk. At the end of 1996 we received a phone call from his owner who said he wouldn't put his right leg down. We advised him to consult a vet. The vet said that the leg had started to heal nicely and was best left. What wasn't evident was that the bone was knitting back together totally out of line.

In January '97 the owner brought the bird to see us and we realised the leg was

crooked (Fig 1)

We arranged to take the bird down to Neil Forbes to have the leg broken and reset.

We arrived at the surgery at the appointed time and were greeted by Neil who took us down to the operating theatre.

Neil anaesthetised the bird and attached a respiratory monitor. (Fig 2)

He then took an x-ray. (Fig 3)

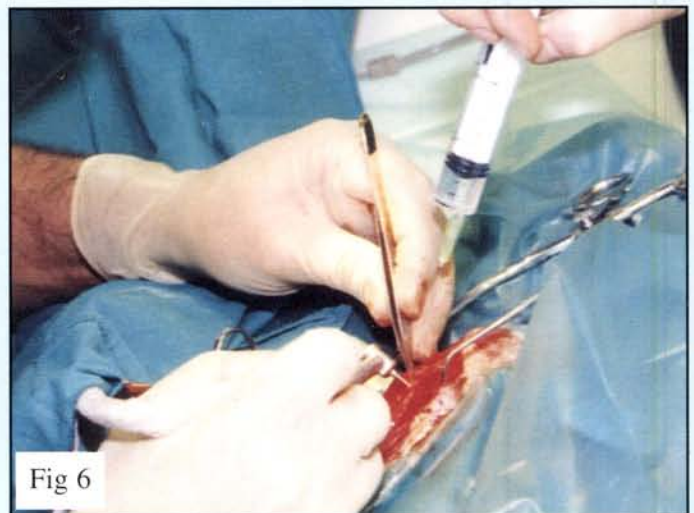
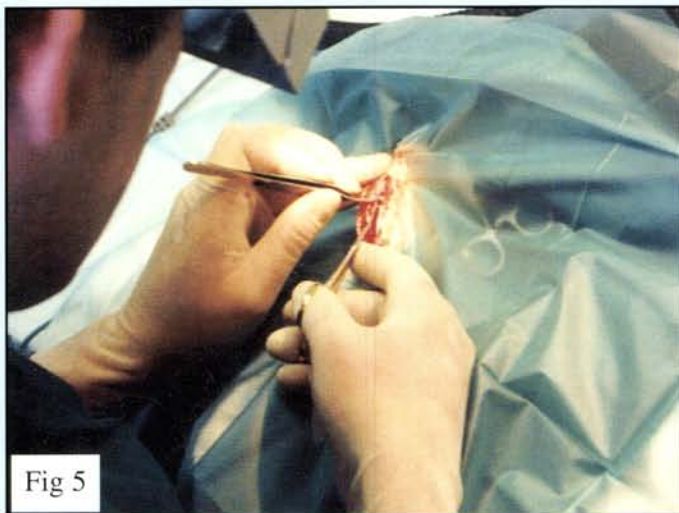
He told us that the bone had broken and

had healed slightly to the right and twisted outwards.

Fluid therapy and antibiotics were administered. Then the leg was plucked free of feathers. (fig 4)

After considering several options, ie breaking above or below the original break, Neil decided to go back in at the original site. The leg was then cleaned.

A see through sheet was used to cover the bird so that they could monitor it all



Written by Lyn Wilson. Photographs by David Wilson

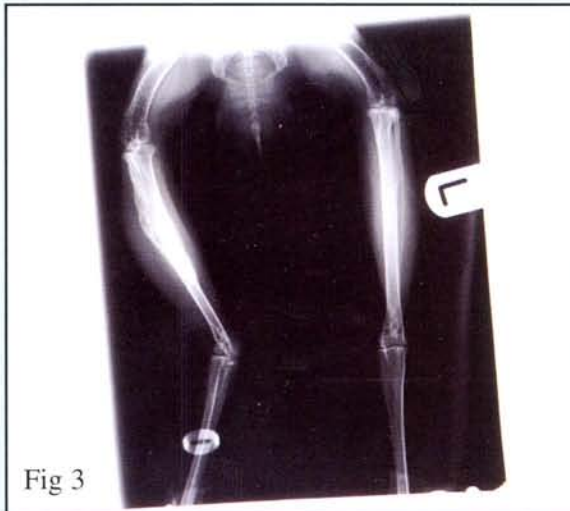


Fig 3



Fig 4

the way through the operation.

Neil cut through the skin and down between the muscles either side of the bone. (Fig 5) He then detached the muscle from the bone to expose the break. He discovered extra callous build up above and below the old break due to movement before and during setting. Also abnormal muscle attachment and increased blood flow due to the abnormal bone.

The muscle was held away with protractors

and Neil proceeded to drill holes around the circumference of the bone with a dentist drill. Saline was squirted on, to help keep the site cool. (Fig 6) When he had finished drilling the bone broke easily.

The bone must now be turned back into the correct position and pinned.

Holes are drilled in strategic places in the bone. (Fig 7)

Then wire sutures are put in to stop the bone from sliding about. The muscle and

some skin were then sewn up. (Fig 8)

Neil then drilled holes through the muscle and bone and inserted metal pins, two above and two below the new break, through the middle of the bone. (Fig 9) Neil actually uses pins to drill the holes because they are very thin.

The final skin area was closed up, with dissolvable stitches.

The pins were then bent, the bottom ones up and the top ones down and then tied in place with more metal sutures. (Fig 10)

Neil then wrapped plastic mesh, which softens in warm water, around the pins and metal sutures, to cover them and hold the whole thing steady (Fig 11) and a dressing was put on to stop the bird damaging itself, ie pecking.

More fluids were then administered before the bird was brought out of the anaesthetic. The Anaesthetic, Isoflorane, was stopped at 13.47 and by 13.50 the bird was awake.

After four weeks the pins were removed and the bird after a few days was able to stand with its feet together.

A day of triumph for us all.

Photographs taken by kind permission of Neil Forbes.

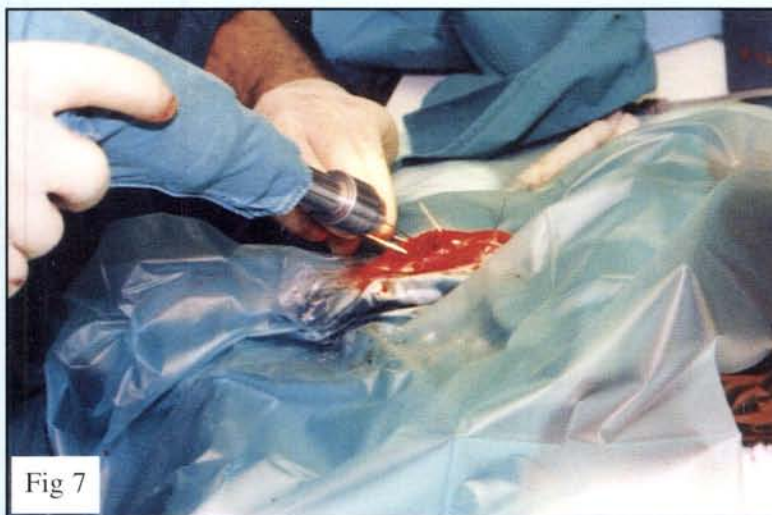


Fig 7



Fig 10



Fig 11

INCUBATION

David Le Mesurier

Avian Incubation Management Services

Following the review of our incubation management program, AIMS, in the last issue of *The Falconers Magazine* we have received a lot of enquiries regarding egg weight loss. I hope the following article will answer some of these questions and help you understand why weight loss control is so important during incubation if you want to obtain the best hatch rate.

Why do eggs need to lose weight

A large percentage of the avian egg is water, 79 - 88% in altricial species (those which are fed by the parents after hatching) and 69 - 76% in precocial species (those which feed themselves after hatching). The water concentration of the chick on hatch is about the same as that of the fresh laid egg. However, during development, the embryo produces water as a by-product of metabolism. To maintain the water balance this excess water must be removed from the egg during incubation.

Also, before it can hatch, the chick has to inflate it's lungs and airsacs fully before it can go from using the chorio-allantoic membrane as the gas exchange organ to lung respiration. Within the rigid confines of the egg, the only space available to the chick for the inflation of the respiratory system is the air cell, which has a volume equal to the water removed from the egg. Too little water loss may prevent proper inflation of the respiratory system.

How does this weight loss occur.

To understand how eggs lose weight one must first understand what relative humidity is. If you take a tall jar containing air with no water molecules in it and stand this upside down in a bowl of water, water molecules will come off the surface of the water and rise into the air in the cylinder due to evaporation. This will continue until the air has so many water molecules in it that some are returning to the water by virtue of their movement and others are knocked back into the water as they come off the surface because they collide with molecules in the air. At this point the number of molecules leaving the water and those returning to it are equal. The air in the cylinder now contains as much water as it can hold and is said to be saturated. If one increases the temperature the water molecules will have more energy, the air in an open space would become less dense, and a given volume of air would be capable of holding more water molecules.

The water molecules by virtue of their movement exert a pressure which can be measured. This is called the vapour pressure. When the air is saturated with water vapour the vapour pressure is called the saturation vapour pressure. This will increase with temperature.

The percentage relative humidity we are all so used to seeing is defined as 'The percentage ratio of the vapour pressure to the saturation vapour pressure at a given temperature'.

Example

I have a % relative humidity of 42.79% in my incubator. What does this really mean ?

If your incubator were running at 37.4 degrees Celsius, the saturation vapour pressure of air at sea level and at a temperature of 37.4 degrees Celsius is 48.75 torr, (torr is the unit of vapour pressure and is equal to 1mm of mercury in a barometer).

$$\% \text{ Rh} = 100 \times \frac{\text{Vapour pressure}}{\text{Saturation vapour pressure at the given temperature}}$$

$$42.79 = 100 \times \frac{\text{Vapour pressure}}{48.75}$$

By rearranging the equation we get:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Vapour pressure} &= \frac{42.70 \times 48.75}{100} \\ &= 20.82 \text{ torr} \end{aligned}$$

Thus at 37.4 degrees Celsius a %Rh of 42.79 mean that you have a vapour pressure in the incubator of 20.82 torr, i.e. a vapour pressure equal to 42.79% of the saturation vapour pressure at that temperature.

It is called relative humidity because it is relative to the temperature.

The interior of the egg is always at 100% humidity. Therefore it's vapour pressure is equal to the saturation vapour pressure at the incubation temperature, (it will increase slightly during the second half of incubation due to the heat produced by the embryo taking the internal egg temperature above that of the incubator.)

If you have an egg at 37.4 degrees Celsius and the incubator has a relative humidity of 40 % the vapour pressure in the egg will be 48.75 torr (the saturation vapour pressure of air at 37.4 degrees Celsius) and the vapour pressure inside the incubator will be 40% of 48.75 torr, or 19.5 torr. You will therefore have a difference of pressure from the inside to the outside of the egg of 29.25 torr (48.75 - 19.5).

It is this difference in pressure which causes the water to be forced out of the egg. Once the water is on the surface of the egg it is then removed by evaporation. Therefore, contrary to what some people believe, the speed of the air moving over the egg has no effect on its weight loss, this has been verified using eggs in wind tunnels. The weight loss from the egg is purely a result of the relative humidity inside the incubator. The lower the relative humidity the greater the difference in vapour pressure between the inside of the egg and the incubator and hence the greater the weight loss.

How do we control the weight loss ?

The 'ideal' weight loss for the eggs of raptors is thought to be 15% of their initial fresh weight, i.e. the weight of the egg when it is laid, not that when it is set. Much work still needs to be done on obtaining accurate figures for the optimum weight loss for many species.

There are several ways one can obtain the fresh weight of an egg. The ideal is to weigh the egg as soon as it is laid. Unfortunately, this is not always possible. The next is to use an egg weight coefficient, or Kw, value. The fresh weight of an egg can be calculated using the formula $Fw = Kw \times (L \times B^2)$, where Fw is the fresh weight of an egg, Kw is the egg weight coefficient for the species in question, L is the length of the egg in mm and B is the breadth of the egg in mm.

Example

You remove a Lanner Falcon's egg from the aviary on day ten of incubation. It measures 48.45 mm by 40.56mm.

Using a Kw value of 0.00055647 for the Lanner Falcon from AIMS' database, based on a sample of 58 fresh laid eggs, the fresh weight of this egg would have been:

$$\begin{aligned} Fw &= 0.0005564 \times (48.45 \times (40.56 \times 40.56)) \\ Fw &= 0.0005564 \times (48.45 \times 1645.1136) \\ Fw &= 0.0005564 \times 79705.75392 \\ Fw &= 44.35g \end{aligned}$$

This method is usually accurate to about 2%, not enough to effect the hatchability of the egg. AIMS actually constructs female specific Kws and so increases this accuracy considerably.

To obtain Kw values for different species we either obtain data from fresh eggs, or re-hydrate infertile or dead eggs by injecting water into the air cell to bring the egg back to it's original weight. The data is then substituted into the equation to give us the Kw values

The third method is to use regression. In this one assumes that the egg was losing weight normally during the time it was under the bird.

Example

You remove an egg on day 10 of incubation. It weighs 41.54g. You want a loss to pip of 15% and the incubation period to pip is 31.0 days.

$$\% \text{ egg weight now is } \frac{15}{31} \times 10 = 95.16\%$$

$$\text{Fresh weight} = \frac{41.54 \times 100}{95.16} = 43.65\text{g}$$

This method is the least reliable of the three as eggs do not always lose weight correctly for the % loss you want to achieve at pip when incubated under the bird.

Okay, we now have the fresh weight for our egg, what next. You now need to construct a graph to monitor your weight loss. The graph has the days of incubation along its X axis and the weight of the egg on its Y axis. Onto this you plot a line for 15% - the optimum loss, 11% the minimum allowable loss and 17% the maximum allowable loss and a vertical line for the day of pip, as shown in figure 1.

Each time you weigh your egg you plot it's weight onto the graph. If it losing too much weight you need to increase the humidity the egg is in and conversely if it is not losing enough you need to decrease the humidity.

It is possible to calculate the exact humidity in which to place the egg in order to achieve the optimum loss at pip, but this is too involved to go into here. AIMS does this for you and tells you which incubator is the best for your egg. If you have only one incubator then knowing the required ideal humidities for each egg allows you to set the machine's humidity to the average required for all of your eggs and thus optimise the weight loss for them all.

If the egg is going off the 15% line do not be tempted to bring it sharply back and then try to keep it there. It is better to bring it back

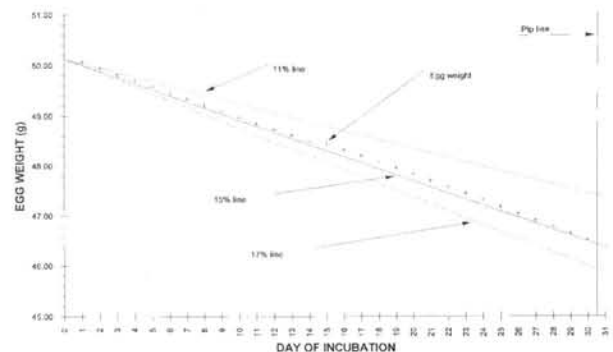
slowly so that it reaches the line on the day of pip, as shown in figure 1.

The problem with using hand drawn graphs, apart for the time involved, is that one must weigh the eggs at the same time each day, or the time difference between weighings will make the results inaccurate. You can try to plot the point on the graph roughly where time is, but you must be as accurate as possible with this. AIMS calculates the loss to the nearest minute.

By controlling the weight loss one can optimise the hatch rate. We are finding more and more that raptor eggs are having to be incubated in very dry incubators, by dry, I mean low humidities rather than a machine just containing no water. I often hear people say for example that a friend runs his machines dry with Harris hawks eggs in and gets a good hatch rate, so I do the same with mine. If the friend lives in a dry area of central England and you live at the top of a misty mountain then his 'dry' machine may have a %Rh of 25, whilst your 'dry' machine may be at 60%Rh. You need to measure the %Rh in the machine. This is best done using wet and dry bulbs or a modern electronic hygrometer.

I hope this has shed a little light onto the subject of weight loss. We are currently working with breeders and zoos around the world to compile an incubation database containing accurate Kw values and pip times for all species. If you would like to take part in this please drop me a line for the forms, see our advert in this issue for the address.

WEIGHT LOSS GRAPH



RUSSIAN FALCONRY

This article is not an abstract discourse and not a work of art. This is a little story from my life. The main heroes of this story - my wife Mary and myself (and bird of prey of course).

We started to practice falconry in the Zoo, when we did a study of the behaviour of raptors. It was like cold beer on a warm afternoon. Now we cannot imagine ourselves without falconry. That's the way it is.

In those days we had to take things slowly. Sometimes we went out hawking. This and talking about falconry with friends was enough for us.

Things changed when the Zoo got a few books on Falconry in the UK and a pair of issue of journals (Falconers) from a bird dealer. Then we discovered a whole new world of traditions, people and way of life. Like minded people all over the world. It inspired us and the Director of the Zoo to try and arrange up a show with birds of prey, for the visitors to the Zoo. A lot of different things were granted for the show. Birds: Goshawk, Golden Eagle, Imperial Eagle, Buzzard, Black Kite and Peregrine. also Shelters, Flying area, scales and gloves (motorcycle ones though).

The Director even showed us telemetry which was bought when a flock of crows drove away a male Saker. This male was brought back by fowlers who had caught him. We were shown the telemetry but we were not allowed to put it on, the Director said "Do you know how much it costs?"

But work went on. We got the leather necessary for gloves, jesses, hoods by exchanging Golden Eagle feathers and other bird feathers with Russian 'Indians'. Work went well. Sometime it was funny, sometimes very interesting.

One day, during flights on the lure, when many people were watching, the Goshawk caught a drake, which flushed off the pond. A fact which didn't please everybody but the drake was very tasty. Until then she had not been flown at the Zoo, just in the hunting field.

Following this when we worked with the Eagles it quickly annoyed them just flying from fist to lure and back. We attempted to set the Imperial Eagle on rabbits once a week. The results surpassed all our expectations. The previously vexed eagle rent not one lure after that.

We realised the shows were not quite suited for after about six months. Trying to answer questions like, "Oh, how much does this bird cost?", and "Which are the stronger hawk or kite?", and when one of the visitors allowed his son to pull the tail of a hooded bird, after that he declared "I can because I had purchased a Zoo's ticket."

We wanted to simply have hawking.

We decided to use our knowledge and

ability in another field, when we had comprehended show business was not for us.

Now we sometimes train birds for other people. This pastime is very enjoyable, various people, various birds, various places, that what's called experience. Our hope is to found an association of Falconers which civilizedly practices falconry in Russia. Don't desert us!

We have a shortage of intercourse with other falconers, and we don't come readily into contact with other Russian Falconers, besides that there aren't very many. So we are addressing Falconers and conservationists in other countries. We would like to thank Jemima Parry-Jones, Mary Reynolds, Adrian Williams, Ricardo Velarde, and Dmitriy Shelgunov, for already responding.

We would love to hear from you, and will reply, if you would write to us:

Yuriy & Mary Magram
C/O The Falconers Magazine,
20 Bridle Road, Burton Latimer,
Kettering, Northants NN15 5QP



The Peregrine Fund's World Centre for Birds of Prey

Alan Gates

As a species, man has the intuitive ability to mess up his environment at an ever increasing pace. One man made disaster after another seems to avail our sensors via the television medium. As a mere individual we can often feel inadequate as these terrible events unfold, with a feeling of helplessness to the prevention, and an inadequacy to the enormity of the task of recovery.

Not all environmental disasters are of such immediate impact, some insidiously creep up on us, unaware of the cumulative effect our attention is not focused until a sudden species population crash alerts dedicated indi-

viduals monitoring the environment. Then, these same dedicated few, face an enormous uphill struggle to convince the rest of the population to mend its ways before it's too late.



viduals monitoring the environment. Then, these same dedicated few, face an enormous uphill struggle to convince the rest of the population to mend its ways before it's too late.

In 1970, one such scenario faced Tom Cade then a Professor of Ornithology at Cornell University in the United States.

After the widespread use of DDT and other chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides, the Peregrine falcon population plummeted during the 1950's

and 60's. By the end of the 60's the peregrine was extinct in the Eastern United States and reduced by 90% in the West.

The Peregrine Fund was born from the shared concern of Cade, his students and other eminent falconers, who developed a method of breeding peregrines in captivity.

Together with pioneering successful methods for the release of the captive bred falcons to the wild, made this the most successful breeding and progeny release conservation program of the 20th century.

To date the Fund has released over 4,000 captive bred falcons in 28 states, the

they played, which achieved the largest and most successful captive breeding and release project of an endangered species, anywhere on the globe.

In 1984 The Peregrine Fund consolidated the Cornell facility and the Ft. Collins, Colorado facility to

the current location in Boise, Idaho. Following the success with the propagation and release of Peregrine Falcons, together with the first successful releases of Bald Eagles and helping to save the Mauritius Kestrel from extinction. The Fund was able to expand its expertise

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Above: Birds eye view of The World Centre for Birds of Prey. Photo: Peregrine Fund.

Left: Young Aplomado Falcons. Photo: Peter Jenny.

Below: Harpy Eagle chick being weighed. Photo: Carl Sandfort.

Peregrine faced extirpation, its fate has been turned around by those dedicated individuals whose foresight and dogged determination helped repair the damage caused by Man's careless assault with chemicals on the delicate ecosystem.

The Peregrine is well and truly saved in the United States and has now been proposed to be removed from the list of endangered and threatened species.

Falconers should be proud in the knowledge of the part





Incubator room for Falcon eggs. Photo: Bruce Haak.

within the new facility at Boise, named the World Center for Birds of Prey.

The endangered Aplomado Falcon, a medium sized steel grey falcon once ranged throughout the southwestern United States and Mexico. When the Spaniards came to the grasslands of Texas and New Mexico the Aplomado falcon was part of the landscape. It declined dramatically during the early part of this century and any that

for the Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) near Corpus Christi, Texas. The young falcons were released on Matagorda Island with great expectations after the previous years discovery of the first Aplomado Falcons nest in 54 years. It was a great boost for conservation, with the Centers continued improvements in captive propagation and the apparent desire of the

contamination found in their habitat. Contaminant levels are of particular concern in south Texas, which exhibits the highest incidence of human brain stem birth defects found anywhere in the United States. Blood samples taken before the Aplomados were released and every six months thereafter may provide some answers to this problem.

In the 1980's there were only 21 or 22 California Condors total left in the wild or captivity. It became clear

ful breeding of California Condors was accomplished in 1988. By 1995 the condor population had grown to 103 individuals, and in 1992, recovery program biologists began releasing captive-produced young condors back into the wild at wilderness sites in the species former range in California.

The World Center currently houses ten pairs of this rare species, which consists mostly of immature condors just now reaching reproductive age. Success came in the



Young Californian Condor. Photo: Carl Sandfort

to conservationists that emergency measures would have to be taken to save the species from extinction. In 1987, all of remaining wild condors were captured to ensure their safety and to serve as parents in captive breeding programs at the Los Angeles Zoo and the San Diego Wild Animal Park.

The Condors soon adapted to their captive environment and the first success-

1996 season with the Centers first hatching of a California Condor and the first of this endangered species known to have been hatched outside of the State of California since the 1930s, when a small population still occurred in Baja California, Mexico.

The parents of the chick, Tecuya and Shasta, are the oldest pair of the Centers condors (12 and 6 years old, respectively), and this was their first fertile egg. The pre-



Bank of Video monitors which are connected to each breeding chamber. Photo: Bruce Haak

remained in the United States were finished off with the wide spread use of chlorinated hydrocarbon insecticides that had so effectively accounted for the demise of the Peregrine. Now rarely ever seen in the U.S. and Northern Mexico since the 1940's. the Aplomado Falcon was a prime candidate for the Centers attention. They have released over 100 Aplomado Falcons.

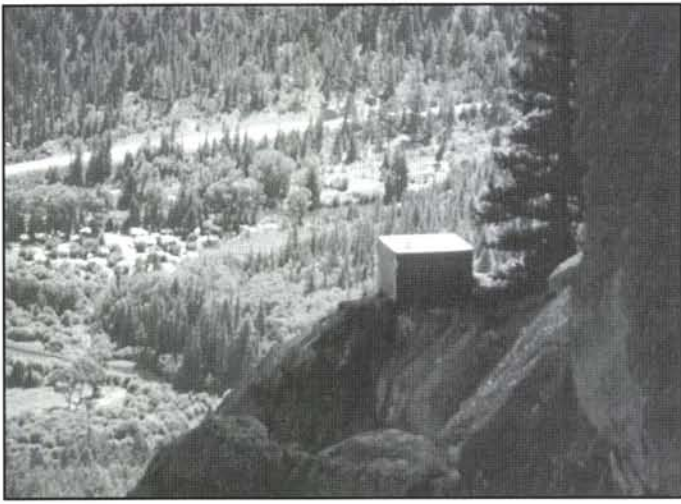
In July 1996 six young captive bred Aplomado Falcons chicks left the Boise Center

falcons to nest provides the hope of the species eventual recovery.

Continued research may prove beneficial to all as the Aplomado Falcon represents an important "indicator" of environment quality. With its unique ecological position at the very pinnacle of the food pyramid, blood samples taken from this species, over time, can provide biologists with important insight concerning the relative level of environment



Condor incubator room, Photo: Bruce Haak.



Peregrine Falcon release site. Photo: Bill Heinrich

vious year this pair had laid two infertile eggs, and the second egg was replaced by a fertile Andean Condor egg obtained from the National Zoo. The Andean Condor is a similar large vulture from South America. The pair successfully hatched and raised the young condor. This excellent result gave the Center confidence to leave the condors with their own egg the following year, which was successfully reared. Other pairs of condors at the Centers facility have laid infertile eggs, and one more pair have hatched and raised a foster Andean Condor.

In Cooperation with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, California Condors propagated at the San Diego Wild Animal Park and Los Angeles Zoo, together with the young condor from the Center were flown to a new home in Arizona on the Vermilion Cliffs near the Grand Canyon. The condors were placed in six adjoining plywood "apartments" facing a 20 by 40 foot release pen. After an acclimatisation peri-

od of several days the condors were allowed into the release pen to mingle and to become better acquainted as family members.

The release was supervised by The Peregrine Fund, and these condors are the first of their species to be seen in Arizona since 1924. The Fund is developing its release expertise gained over the past twenty years, as this is the first time a group of non-human reared condors have been released to the wild. Researches will closely monitor the development of social and survival skills of this population to refine captive breeding and reintroduction techniques.

The Harpy Eagle is vulnerable to local extinction because its reproductive rate is very slow. Three years pass between the production of a chick at a nesting tree and the following nesting attempt. These powerful raptors are threatened by the fragmentation and destruction of forests and by people who shoot them. The Peregrine Fund keep records of sightings of

these rare eagles to improve understanding of their distribution. Field work in Venezuela and Panama is yielding important data on the species in the wild. Eleven nests in Panama and twenty nests in Venezuela are currently being studied. With assistance from NASA, satellite transmitters have been attached to eleven young eagles and are being tracked by ARGOS satellites. This information will be used to determine how much area they need to survive.

The World Center is approaching the Harpy Eagle Conservation Program in a two pronged effort, as well as the important field work, this species is being successfully bred at the World Center. Two of the four Harpy Eagles to be hatched in captivity in the U.S. were born at the World Center from the five pairs of unreleasable eagles housed there. This progeny will be used to build the breeding stock or for release in areas where the species is extinct but suitable habitat remains. The first release of captive produced Harpy Eagles is planned for 1997.

The Peregrine Fund is involved with a number of additional conservation projects around the world with species such as the Philippine Eagle, Mauritius Kestrel, Madagascar Fish-Eagle, Orange-breasted Falcon, Alala or Hawaiian Crow and Hawaiian forest songbirds.

The Peregrine Fund's facility in

Boise, Idaho may have an august title, but there is little doubt that it is a world class organisation with a first rate dedicated team of highly motivated people. Although it will always be remembered for its successful role in the reversal of the peregrines fortunes in the United States, its continued commitment to research, education and improved propagation and release techniques of endangered raptor species throughout the world ensures the Peregrine Fund a place at the heart of raptor conservation.



The Peregrine Fund



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This is the latest in Raptor Rescue's continuing series of surveys and is based on the information supplied by rehabilitators in answer to our specially created census form.

The pie chart and figures opposite illustrate the general picture in terms of total numbers of birds and the species involved. Our investigation also provides the opportunity to collect further data, where possible, regarding the sex and ages of the casualties, as well as a more detailed analysis of the types of injuries sustained. These additional statistics are being analysed and prepared for publication later this year.

Accompanying the results are the observations of Raptor Rescue's Chairman, Mick Cunningham, who has once again organised and compiled the results of this year's survey.

During the survey period 261 wild casualties were taken into care by our rehabilitators. Of the total of 10 different species encountered, the Tawny Owl was the most numerous - more than double the number of any other species.

Sparrowhawk numbers exceeded those of the Kestrel for the first time since our surveys began. If one accepts that the status of a species in the wild can be reflected by the casualties taken into care, then it would appear that the Kestrel population may be starting to decline, given the results of our last two surveys.

Non-fledged birds made up over a quarter of all the birds handled. These young birds are not normally injured and therefore have an excellent prognosis. Due to maladaptive behaviour, 9% of these birds were not suitable for release. Of the remainder, 94% were returned to the wild.

Once again the number of mature casualties peaked in July and August, clearly showing adult birds to be more at risk during this time of year, when trying to locate food for their offspring.

The percentage of released raptors varied only slightly from previous surveys at

54.8%. Long stay casualties suffering from fractures made up 17% of all the birds handled. Due to the seriousness of their injuries 55% of these had to be euthanased.

A further 18% were eventually returned to the wild.

Of the three Peregrine Falcons taken in, one is still in care but may be released. A second had a fractured metacarpus and was released following a full falconry hack. This proved the bird to be fit enough to pursue and capture its natural quarry on a regular basis.

Of the Goshawks, one had a fractured leg and was also emaciated. Unfortunately it died. The second is being prepared for release following a neurological problem.

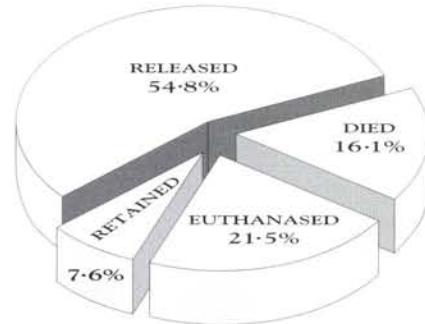
Of the Merlins, one was unsuitable for release due to restricted flight. The second has already been returned to the wild.

The only Hobby treated had no serious injury and was released.

Our main objective is to rehabilitate wild raptors. However, it is inevitable that we will continue to come into contact with domestic bred birds. During the survey period our members took 31 lost or escaped domestic bred birds into their care.



Annual Survey 1995/96



THESE STATISTICS HAVE BEEN COMPILED FROM REPORTS BY 14 REHABILITATORS.

Wild Casualties	261
Domestic Bred Casualties	31*
Released	143 (54.8%)
Died	42 (16.1%)
Euthanasia	56 (21.5%)
Retained	20 (7.6%)
Total number of species encountered	10
Tawny Owl	108
Sparrowhawk	45
Kestrel	39
Little Owl	30
Common Buzzard	19
Barn Owl	12
Peregrine	3
Goshawk	2
Merlin	2
Hobby	1

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

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ARE YOU FOR THE HIGH JUMP?

Dear Lyn & David,

My enquiry is directed at Nick Fox, following the publication of his brilliant and innovative book 'Understanding the Bird of Prey'. Having read this book cover to cover, I would draw attention to the chapter on Training and Conditioning and in particular the section covering high jumping. Although I can fully understand the benefits to be derived from this form of exercise, especially when darkness or bad weather has halted flying for the day, I need to ask Nick whether he feels that this method of fitness training can have a derogatory effect on the hawk's mental attitude in so much as to encourage the hawk to land on the ground in the hunting field in the belief that food may be forthcoming. I am linking this train of thought with your ideas on positive and negative reinforcement which seems entirely logical, but is this not a form of positive reinforcement?

I notice that you recommend the use of a deflated basketball for the bird to land on

and I assume that apart from possible damage to feathers, this will stop the jarring effect of so many ground landings on the ankle and leg bones?

Do you feel that it is therefore the case that due to the complete decimation of our wild population of deflated basketballs in the hunting field of Kent, the hawk will understand the difference between a training and working environment and this problem is unlikely to arise?

I am not sure whether I can wait three months for your reply, but using acquired falconry skills, I will apply patience and await your answer in due course. Once again Nick, this is a truly exceptional book which must surely rate as the new falconer's bible (no offence intended Mr Glasier - these two books will always sit side by side on my bookcase!)

Regards

Brian J Smith
Westweald Falconry

NB I need reassurance that I need not suffer sleepless nights with the recurring nightmare - Quarry recorded for 1996/97 season - 79 deflated basketballs, one rabbit (died laughing!)

SAND OR SHINGLE?

Dear David & Lyn,

Regarding the question asked by one of your readers in the last issue of 'The Falconers' as to whether to use sand or shingle on a weathering floor, there is and can only be one choice, and that is of course sand.

Under no circumstances must shingle or gravel or any stony material be used in a weathering, particularly for hunting birds for the following reasons:

1. It freezes and remains frozen for long periods (in cold snaps it will often remain frozen for days at a time). Any bird exposed to, and tethered above such a surface runs a very high risk of frost bite.

2. It blunts the talons, and in some cases can wear the talon down to the quick, particularly with a bird which bates a lot.

3. Most aggregates will contain some sharp material which may be ingested or cut at the feet.

Here at the centre we do use pea shingle, but only in our aviaries were birds spend very little time on the floor and can perch high above it in winter. All weatherings are floored with soft sand, the soiled parts of which are easily removed daily and topped up as necessary

Yours Mike Raphael

Falconry Operations Manager,
British Birds of Prey Centre.

PHEASANT HAWKING WITH GOSHAWKS

It has to be said that without a well conditioned Female Goshawk in Yarak really takes some beating when it comes to hawking Pheasants with Short or Broadwinged Hawks. Of all the birds in the Shortwinged group, once she is experienced and confident she really is in a class of her own, and nothing can compete with her. I have seen some really tremendous flights with Goshawks, both male and female and their style, speed and determination, once witnessed, is something never forgotten. Male Goshawks, especially if on the small side, may struggle to hold some pheasants, but the larger males from Finland and the like are very capable of holding troublesome birds and seem to be as good as females once they gain experience. I have flown all types of gamebirds with a small, male Goshawk and although he has no trouble holding Hen Pheasants, Partridge, Teal and even Drake Mallard, he soon learned that cock Pheasants are real tough customers and gave them up midway through his second season. Female Goshawks however, are different altogether, they have the strength and determination to deal with any on the large Gamebirds and do so with great enthusiasm. Pheasant hawking in open country on well stocked ground really does take some beating, really excellent flights can be had if the terrain is suitable. It must be said that a Goshawk will become wedded to Pheasants if early and regular success can be had, being fortunate in having well-stocked ground to hunt over, I have no trouble in finding easy slips to get the hawks entered at the beginning of the season. However, as the season progresses, and the Pheasants become fitter, then flights become more difficult and of course more exciting. Goshawks, if entered properly, will become so wedded, it will soon become

apparent just how deadly they are at taking Pheasants on upward rising flights or over a great distance, by tail chasing. The best way to teach a Hawk to take Pheasants in the air is to always try, right from the outset, to get right above the quarry and flush the Pheasant right underneath the hawk, thus giving the hawk a greater chance of early success. Once the hawk become experienced at catching Pheasants over a short distance the Falconer can then start to increase the distance he stands from the dog which is than commanded to flush the Pheasant. The hawk, having become more confident, will now pursue the fleeing bird with great enthusiasm, giving classic rising, pumping flights, taking the bird from underneath and bringing it to earth with great skill. Some Goshawks, if entered incorrectly and slipped at any Pheasant no matter what the distance, will invariably become tail chasers and will be quite happy to leave the fist and immediately hug the contours of the ground looking skywards. It will eventually get underneath its quarry and just tag along waiting for the Pheasant to come down where the hawk will put on a final burst of speed to try and take the Pheasant on the put in. Although this type of flight is exhilarating to watch, the Falconer will have to travel quickly, and over great

distances if he wants to fly his bird again that day. A good telemetry set is obviously a must with a bird of this nature. This type of flight is also fraught with danger, the contour hugging Goshawk will often come to grief with fences and the like. Anyone who wants to top fly gamebirds with style and has the time and ability to train and enter a Goshawk will soon come to realise that hawking with a broadwing at gamebirds just isn't comparable. A well trained Goshawk who has learned to take Pheasants on the rise and knows it's capabilities really is in a class of its own.

D. L. FLETCHER.



TAKING IT FURTHER

Dear Dave & Lyn

With reference to the letter in the Spring edition 'Hybrid Debate' I would first like to apologise to Steve Williams for not making fully clear the ability of the individual hybrid 'Speed', the peregrine/lanner/lugger, who not only caught Scottish Grouse, Yorkshire Grouse (which are substantially bigger and more difficult to catch), English Partridge, Ptarmigan, but also Wood Pigeon, Rooks and Duck. I have yet to read of, or hear about any straight falcon that will take such an array of quarry in so many different environments. So would therefore like to know on what facts he bases his statement; "many good falconers have been doing it for years, with great success."

His other statement; "But better than a peregrine, you must be joking." Leads me to believe he is suffering from acute peregrinitis. The simple facts are that in sky trial after sky trial (The only real form of direct competition where the slips are as close to identical as possible) the peregrines entered rarely come in the top ten. Out flown and out manoeuvred by the hybrids that share the spoils. My only experiences of people trying to catch Wood Pigeons or Rooks with the same falcon they use on grouse have always ended in the falconer running across fields watching their bird tail chase into the distance. This is what is meant by 'Sheer lunacy'.

As for the reference to 'Flashy sales talk', which eases the use of peregrines out of the way, I can only say have you ever seen a hybrid being flown. Because it is their sheer ability that eases the use of peregrines out of the way. I have often

invited people to bring their birds to compare with 'Speed' in the field and the two statements that probably say the most are both from German falconers. One said; "I have been flying peregrines for almost thirty years but your hybrid is by far and away the fastest bird I have ever seen." The other who didn't speak much English said 'sir, your wandervalk flies like a jet, Yarr!'

Dr Nick Fox will probably write in as well. Nevertheless I would like to put a word in for him. Falconry around the world (not to mention wild birds of prey) owes a great deal to people like Nick. He has pioneered both breeding techniques and programmes and quite frankly I am disgusted that anybody could liken him to an second hand car dealer who would say anything in order to get a sale. I feel I should ass that I do not promote Hybrids nor shun straight falcons. I fly both and get a great deal of enjoyment form both. People should fly what they want to fly in the environment they have available, and if they enjoy themselves and get results that is all that matters. I enjoy flying hybrids and non natives because they represent a greater challenge, after all as any good falconer knows, if you fly the enough birds for long enough everyone will come to the same conclusion. The easiest birds to get the best results from are those that are native.

As for hanging up my glove, well I do that every night! Safe in the knowledge that I will 'unhang' it the following morning and go out to enjoy what I do best.

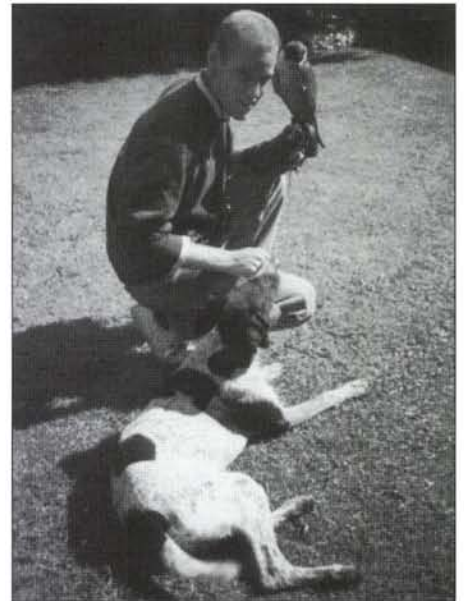
Yours sincerely
Rick Gerard.

P.S. Speed had to be put down last August due to a severely damaged tendon. He hunted with me for six long seasons and will be sorely missed.

His kills totalled 935, which included almost every quarry species.

His best season was 1995 with 86% of flight resulting in success.

I was very lucky to be the owner of this bird and will be backed up by most of those lucky enough to have seen him fly when I say "It will be a long time before my skies are graced by a Falcon of similar ability."



SPRING ISSUE COMPETITION RESULTS

The Winners of the Spring competition are as follows: Jason Nicholson, **Somerset**.

Mrs A Woods, **Devon**. Brian Noble, **Northants**.

Anne Parsons, **Sunbury on Thames**.

T R Cobb, **Beds**. G Roberts, **Rhuddlan**.

Christine Wildman, **Beverley**.

Richard Allman, **Burton on Trent**.

Colin Henderson, **Aberdeenshire**.

Annette Jacobs, **Herts**.

These ten all win a free ticket to the Falconers Fair at Althorp House, 25th & 26th May.

The Answers were:

Aylmeri, Bath, Bewit, Bells, Block, Bow Perch, Cadge, Creance, Dummy Bunny, Glove, Hawking Bag, Identity Tag, Jesses, Knife, Leash, Scales, Swivel, Telemetry, Whistle.

19 in all.

(Hat & eyes were not answers.)

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UP DRAUGHT



David Rampling with White-tailed sea Eagle in Scotland

Six years in Scotland is just a distant dream now. The hawking I had there was some of the finest and most demanding I can imagine. The amount of Rabbits, Hares, Grouse, Pheasant and Hooded Crows we had in the areas in which I lived at that time were enough to make it a paradise for a man like me. It takes a harder man than me though to put up with more than five winters. Perhaps you have to be born to it. But in the end the weather made me seek warmer climes.

North Devon is home for me now and I I have found my own piece of paradise here. When I arrived four years ago, the whole place seemed warm and welcoming, the people, the landscape, the weather, and game, not so much as in Scotland, but more than enough to keep me busy for years to come. I expected Horses and Carts, Surfers, Thatched Cottages, Clotted Cream and Sunshine, and I got just that. OK, not too many Horses and Carts, but enough.

I arrived here with only my old working collie, 'Amy'. I had a place to stay and a local girlfriend, but I had no job and very little money, with winter coming. The large caravan I moved into was (and thankfully still is) perched on the edge of the cliffs, overlooking the blue Atlantic Ocean. And from the living room window, out at sea, could be seen Lundy Island, where I once spent a year with 'Amy' as a shepherd.

A job was a priority, so I wrote a few letters and was finally offered a job at a Wildlife park, giving flying displays for the following Summer. My new boss would buy the birds and I was to start the team from scratch.

Now I had to get a hawk to see me through the coming winter, something I could have a bit of fun with and, if I could get something to slip into my summer dis-

play team too, well so much the better, and that of course meant whatever I paid for a bird now would be reimbursed in the spring when I started work. An important consideration for a man in my financial state.

A male Harris Hawk would fit the bill nicely, and an advert in Cage and Aviary birds for 'Male Harris, No vices', and the phone, for a while, went mad.

I agreed to go and look at one bird, in the midlands. The owners change in shift patterns meant that he could not give his Harris the amount of time he felt he should, and so he had decided to sell. Now I must at this point tell you that I didn't really rate Harris Hawks, not one bit. I had flown many myself, for work and sport, and although I admired their intelligence, the ease with which they could be trained took much of the fun out of it for me. They were ugly, a crow with a hooked beak, and I have to say it, compared to my beloved accipiters, Harris Hawks are infuriatingly slow. But at the time it was all I could think of to suit the terrain, the local quarry and it should be able to cope with its summer and winter job adequately too.

When I arrived at the address I had been given I walked over to the Harris who was sitting relaxing in the sun on his bowperch, and I had to admire his beauty, he was incredibly handsome, despite his species. Fresh out of the moulting pen, with a lovely bloom on his feathers from head to tail. He was two years old, silent (thank God), and had had a reasonable tally of feathered quarry, but as yet no rabbits.

Despite just being removed from the moulting pen where he had spent the previous summer on a diet of Pheasant, Rat and Quail, he was very steady. I crouched and approached him, to get a closer look, he stood on one

leg and turned his head upside-down, to greet me it seemed. He stepped willingly onto my glove and in that moment was sold.

We travelled home without incident and on arrival I took him in to meet Louise and Amy. The ear shattering scream he let out when he saw the dog told me some work would be needed there!

He was turned loose into his new home, an old summerhouse, converted with bamboo slats to make an ideal weatherproof pen. As he was already quite steady there was never any need to tether him, training went swiftly, he was only on the creance for one session, then he was flying free.

Amy was beside me at all times during Harry's (not my choice of name) training, she is obedient and unobtrusive, and as usual the hawk began to lose his mistrust of her and began to see her as just a part of the scenery. At first though, when flying free, he would often dive at her and remove a foot full of fur from her back, 'Amy' took it all, as usual, in good part and learned to duck when she heard bells coming her way. That stage passed and the job of getting him fit arrived.

Now Harry, you must remember, had been flown before in relatively flat countryside. Here in North Devon, things were very different. The land over which I hunt here stretches for two miles along the cliffs and coast, with rough hilly pasture, gorse and bracken filled fields and patches of windswept scrub. Some of the bigger cliffs are 200ft straight down to the rocks and

crashing Atlantic below. Here is home to Peregrines, (more common than anywhere I have lived before). Ravens, Kittiwake and Fulmar. The prevailing onshore winds smash into the cliffs and cause the most amazing updraughts, that many birds use to good effect to travel up and down the coast or to hunt or find a mate etc. Our routine would be first open the hatch to Harry's pen, with rewards he flew into the shed to be weighed, then he would follow 'Amy' and I along the coast path, a little farther every day.

At first, when windy, the updraughts at the cliff edge tossed Harry around like a piece of tissue paper, but as he grew fitter and stronger he improved fast. He would often go hundreds of feet up on a good day and hang like a kit overhead. He followed well and became more and more aerial as time went on. I rewarded him when he was well placed and then made him wait longer and longer between



David with Harry doing his Summer job

DAVID RAMPLING

rewards. He returned to the fist beautifully, folding and diving, looking like a teardrop, to land gently as a butterfly on my outstretched hand. I could just lay down on the soft grass and watch for what seemed like hours. My respect for this ugly brown bird increased as his flying skills improved by leaps and bounds.

I will remember his first rabbit. A sunny day with a moderate North Westerly, and it was a joy to be out on the cliffs. Harry had followed me out along the cliff path to our hunting grounds. On our first few ventures that far Harry had shown no more than a passing interest in rabbits so I knew this would be no easy task, and I had lowered his weight slightly to give him a bit of edge. I had high hopes of getting him a few slips, the warmth in the winter sun meant some rabbits would be above ground in the gorse, soaking it up.

Just inland from the first cliffs is a little valley. A line of wind-blown shrub stretch along the valley floor and gorse patches the two hillsides, thicker and more rabbit infested the higher up the hillsides you go. In this valley live foxes, badgers, the odd roe deer, buzzards and stoats all undisturbed for years. Dry stone walls and high Devon hedges (full of wild flowers in the summer), cut up the valley like a huge Jigsaw and provide valuable wildlife corridors for small mammals and birds.

As 'Amy' and I headed inland to the valley, Harry left his cliff edge updraught and sailed overhead to land on top of a Gorse bush, high on the windward side of the valley. Amy and I set about working the patchy gorse along the valley edge. Taking into consideration the wind direction I concentrated only on an area with a workable updraught. Although Harry had not at this point caught a rabbit, he could still be relied upon to come overhead nicely in such conditions. However, I couldn't guarantee he would keep that position for very long without drifting. So rather than call him yet I decided to leave him high up on his gorse bush, where he could watch Amy and I working below.

Amy was born and raised a sheepdog, she comes from a long line of Scottish working hill collies. By the time she was eight months old she could out-work

my old collie Ben. Amy works sheep and cattle very well and she and I have a lot of history behind us. She also, strangely enough, had a natural hunting ability. She is incredibly biddable and she points beautifully. She has been raised with hawks and understands and respects them and she enjoys her hawking just as much as sheep work.

To my joy she was on point now. She was pointing an isolated gorse bush. Head down, tail down, one foot raised and ears quivering, apart from that Amy was like a statue. This was no pheasant, no woodcock, but a rabbit, in the perfect bush, no cover up or down the valley for 20 yards, no warrens or holes for 50 yards - perfect. The updraught on Harry's hill was nice and steady. Amy would hold point indefinitely, no need to worry there. I just had to get Harry into position and then I would really see if he would take a bunny or if I needed to start lure work with him from scratch.

I whistled, one eye on Harry, the other on Amy and the gorse bush. Harry sails out from the hill towards me. I keep my hands hidden to stop him losing height. He catches the updraught and I watch him go up, as if pulled by elastic, effortlessly he comes into position overhead and hangs there, perhaps 150 foot up. His wings half closed against the wind, he looks down at me and the pointing dog.

It is a wonderful moment, when just for one everything goes right. Thousands of hours reading and thinking, of work, triumph and utter despair, all led me to this moment. So many times it doesn't go right, so many failures. Falconry and Hawking is such a hard, unforgiving sport, with the severest of lessons but the rewards are so great. Persistence, determination and patience, if you are constantly prepared to learn, will see you through to that wonderful, awe-inspiring moment when just for once everything falls into place and you end up exactly where I am now. On the side of a beautiful sunlit hill, with only the sound of the wind and sea in my ears. A dog on point beside me and a Harris Hawk waiting on perfectly overhead.

I gave the command to flush the rabbit. Amy went into one side of the gorse bush and the rabbit shot out of the other. I

switched my attention to Harry.

He was on his way down already. His wings almost closed, he fell through the sky like a teardrop, a stoop fine enough to make the hairs stand up on the back of your neck. He closed with great speed on the rabbit who had chosen to go hell for leather downhill, across completely open ground, to the scrub on the valley floor. Almost as the rabbit reached sanctuary Harry slammed on the brakes for impact. They rolled down the hill together, a flurry of wings and legs. I ran in to assist him. He had just one foot to the rabbits head, his leg was extended fully as the rabbit used its hind legs vainly to try and break his grip.

I dispatched the rabbit carefully and gave him as much as he wanted to eat. I didn't walk home that day. I floated on a wave of euphoria and I couldn't wait to get out with him again for more flights.

With an abundance of rabbits that winter and much ideal weather Harry became good at this kind of flight. Because he seemed naturally aerial and was flown daily, he got very fit indeed. By concentrating on finding the right cliff or hill for the wind direction, I was able to serve him several times and he just clicked. We went out every day, only the heaviest of rain kept us in. The fitter he became, the rarer it would be to see him land at all. On still days we would go ferreting for rabbits, but with no height advantages Harry is still (let it be whispered), slower than I would like. But his versatility more than makes up for that these days.

In a dive Harry is quick. From a good height on a cliff updraught, which can take him 300-400 ft up I have seen him stoop inland and downwind and overhaul, Rooks, Crows, Magpies, Pheasants and many rabbits. With no height advantage, unless he catches then unawares, the flying skills of the corvids more than match his own. Going hawking now with Harry, when there is a good wind, is like being out with a very obedient and patient falcon, but without the stress. He now looks for, and can find, an elusive, updraught and soar

overhead. He can even soar well in some areas where it seems to me (with my limited earthbound knowledge of wind) no updraught is occurring. He took, last season, over a hundred head of quarry, my best season ever. Mostly rabbits and many from a waiting on position. And that is never more than one kill a day however hard or easy the flight. I feed him his rations from every kill, always have always will. He flies now, four years on, as fat as a pudding, and because he has never been robbed, not once, he trusts me implicitly.

Harry has only two vices, ones is a desire to chase after any Buzzard that deigns to intrude in his flying space, and the habit he has of flying home if one of the local characters decides to walk her pet Llama in the field we are working. But I can forgive that, as not once has Harry ever let me down during a flying display in the summer. He is silent, gentle as a lamb and very handsome to me. Needless to say, although my boss offered to pay me for Harry, he wasn't for sale. I have never had an understanding with a bird of prey like I have with Harry. He is more a part of my family now than any longwing, shortwing or eagle I have ever had the pleasure of sharing my life with. We are now bonding somehow, and on these winter afternoons as I stood on the cliff edge looking out to sea Harry often stoops in from behind, past my ear to hang for just a second in the air in front of me, before the wind lifts him up high above, and its almost as if a piece of me goes with him.



Harry, with rabbit near cliff edge

Hawk Talk

John Matcham
O.S.F.R.C.

"All comes to he who waits", my grandfather repeated those words so many times in my younger days, to the point of distraction. Yet today I teach all of my students that, "when working with any animal or nature, 'Patience' is the most important piece of equipment a Falconer can possess.

So why am I so sick of this winters weather, why will it not go away? Mr. Wind & Mr. Rain! Go away, leave us alone, what did we do to deserve this? STOP!

It did for about two days, just enough time to organise a good days hunting, then the wind returned with a vengeance, followed by reports of Newcastle Disease.

I'm ranting now!!

In fact the message was, "Jemima is ranting on about the threat of Newcastle Disease", trust me she was not ranting. I have only met her a few times and I wouldn't say she was the kind of person taken to ranting, although she is well known for speaking her mind.

It was a while since the last noticeable outbreak of Newcastle Disease and I must admit I dived for the medical books to refresh my memory. "Not contagious to humans, certain strains are fatal in most birds, lethal to the chicken and turkey industry", on which almost all of the available current research data is based. My first point of call to discover exactly how close any outbreaks were, was the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (MAFF). I spoke directly to the Duty Vet who described to me, town by town, road by road, junction by junction, MAFF use these as a simple way of marking on a map the two Zones of greatest importance when dealing

with an outbreak of Newcastle Disease. The closest zone to the outbreak is called the 'Protection Zone' (3km radius), nothing moves in or out of this zone during the outbreak period, a period lasting twenty eight days after the normal and complete destruction of the infected population of birds and complete disinfecting of the premises concerned. In the 'Surveillance Zone' (10km radius), only MAFF licensed birds may be moved. That includes all domestic stock and all exotics, this means you and your birds if you are within the Zones. On the 07/03/97 and since 01/01/97 outbreaks had been recorded in, Hereford, Monmouth, Newent Glos., on the border of East and West Sussex, Lincoln and others not yet published.

So what can you do about it?

I contacted my local vet and asked his opinion, he said "vaccinate now", I then asked all the usual questions like, What side affects? How long will it last? How much will it cost? What are the risks if I don't? he said, "I can only answer the last question. If you don't vaccinate there is always a risk of infection from wild migratory birds and other means, almost anytime and anywhere. For the answers to the rest of your questions I will need to talk to the vaccine manufacturers Intervet".

My next stop was obviously Intervet UK Limited, manufacturers of the vaccine and a Mr. Cserep. A nice man from Hungary with time to talk about the problem. "In answer to all your questions", he said, "There are two types of vaccine and they are administered in two different ways. The Eye Drop method and the Injection method. We recommend that they are used in conjunction with one another and are initially administered at the same

time. The Eye Drop method uses a live vaccine which provides protection almost immediately, lasts for up to three weeks and is normally only used once. The Injection Method is used at the same time and contains a dead vaccine, which will begin to take best effect in approximately two to three weeks. It lasts approximately ten weeks and should be repeated at eight to ten weeks, boosters should be given at least every six months. Initial side effects are in some cases, drowsiness, loss of appetite, increased soft shells in egg production and possible but rare eye infections from the live vaccine, but the birds normally recover after a week to ten days. (eye damage from direct infection can be permanent but is thankfully rare). The cost of vaccination is based on the number of birds to be vaccinated as the vaccine is normally sold in batches for inoculating up to e.g., 100 chickens or the equivalent in turkeys".

I should point out at this stage that nearly all the data available on the use of any vaccine is based on commercial needs and therefore the drugs used are licensed for that purpose (use in poultry). Little data has been gathered from their use in Raptors (in this case, vaccines for Newcastle Disease) and as they were not originally developed for this purpose, the drugs are used in Raptors on an unlicensed basis. Mr. Cserep informed me that Neil Forbes was probably the best informed person to speak to (guess who vaccinated Jemima's Birds).

In a nut shell, if you do not vaccinate and your birds are found to have or carry Newcastle Disease, they will be destroyed. Compensation in the chicken world is only given for non-infected birds that have been destroyed. Who knows if you would get any for your Raptors. Vaccination does not protect you

from a 'total destruction order' and the virus officially need only be discovered on your premises to trigger the chain of events that will apparently destroy your tranquil world. Vaccination is not bomb proof, but it is 99.9% better than nothing at all and MAFF do take it into consideration when deciding just where and how many birds to destroy, in any single particular protection zone. They will come knocking to check for the virus if you live in the immediate area, that you can count on.

So you see, Jemima was not ranting and Neil Forbes does know what he is talking about. I feel for Jemima at this time of year, being in a situation where you are surrounded by a virus that can destroy 'The Nations most important Bird of Prey Collection', in the space of a few hours. Knowing that even with vaccination, the effects on a world known collection could be far reaching into the coming breeding season. In that respect what she and Neil discover in the next few months will be new data to help us all, in the future understanding of Newcastle Disease. What a nightmare responsibility.

Newcastle Disease comes in various strains, some more deadly than others, some prefer certain species and travel freely on others without ill effect. John Cooper wrote in *Veterinary Aspects of Captive Birds of Prey*, "A recent report suggest that House Mice (*Mus musculus*) may also, occasionally, be hosts of Newcastle disease".

NB. Do you know if the Pigeon Fancier next door vaccinates his birds, does the Finch Keeper down the road? How many wild birds visit your garden everyday?

Until next time thanks Jemima!

Merlin Parasite Survey - Help Required.

Previous research has shown that merlins commonly suffer from internal parasites, in particular coccidiosis. Coccidiosis is the commonest cause of death of young captive bred merlins in the UK.

During the 12 month period 4/96-4/97, we tested monthly samples from some 30 single pairs of captive merlins. The results revealed

that at any one time 30% of all captive merlins are carrying a parasitic burden, which is often coccidia. It is the contamination of the aviary, which leads to infection of the young, frequently leading to death of young merlins at 28-42 days of age.

We require further samples from additional captive merlins during 1997. All details will be kept with absolute confidence. If you are prepared to send us a faecal sample from your merlin, or a joint sample from a pair of merlins (if in a breeding

aviary), once a month, we will test that sample for you, give you a result and advise you on any necessary treatment that may be required, all free of charge. we will supply you with the necessary sample pots. Apart from ensuring the health of your own birds, you will be assisting in the control of the greatest threat to captive merlin propagation.

If you are willing to help, please contact Neil Forbes or Jenny Morgan on 01453752555 (day time).

STARTING AT THE BEGINNING. Pt II

NEIL MACKINNON

When I last left you I had an aviary or should I say weathering, I had a bird, a male Harris Hawk, 16 weeks old and he had a name - Jax. Since arriving he has also gone under the name of 'Speckled Jim'.

For two weeks after his arrival Jax was blind fed, tethered and introduced a little at a time to his owner, with a number of marning sessions prior to my going away for a week on business, that's planning for you.

On my return his food was reduced to nothing, all boarding was taken down from the 'blind' end of the weathering and work began on feeding from the fist.

According to everything I had read, from some well respected names, a matter of a few days would see him and his owner bonding nicely as his trust grew and food was forthcoming.

I should have known better. His breeder had warned me that I would need to be quite severe in my initial handling to get him to feed from the fist. This man obviously knows his own stock.

It is common knowledge that Harris's are intelligent, gregarious, quick to learn etc, the list of positive attributes goes on and on. Jax has an additional trait not often talked about, he's stubborn. Ray Turner in his article about 'Mort' mentioned this, but I was completely unprepared for this in my bird.

After two days of me standing statue-like with Jax and a prime

piece of slashed shin beef on my glove I phoned Dave for reassurance. Perseverance was advised and on I went.

I tried bits of chick on the glove, offering him a chick leg with my right hand, all rejected. At least he was getting much steadier on my fist!

On the fourth day with my resolve still solid we tried the 'tying a piece of meat to a bit of wood and retiring to a safe distance' ploy. He did jump down and look at the meat, here we go I thought preparing to gently make my way back in as he started to eat, like the books said. He shot a contemptuous glance at the bush I was hiding behind and retired back to the bow perch.

Ahh, the bow perch. I forgot to mention that. He would not even consider using a bow perch for his first week, even when placed onto it. He would sit there for about five minutes and then return to the ground. Alarm bells should have rung then!

After six days my resolve was starting to crack, so I used a bit of common sense. He was used to day old chicks, he MUST be hungry, try a chick tied to the wood block. Success, to a degree. I hid, he looked for a bit, he jumped down and started to eat. I approached as slowly as I could, he started to eat as fast as he could, I put out my glove to pick up the wood, he mantled like a good 'un. I grasped the

wood, he bated away leaving a half eaten chick!

I put him back onto my fist, with what was left of the chick, he looked at it for a while but would not touch it. I did manage to get him to take a couple of small pieces out of my right hand but no more, pack it in for the night.

You may have gathered that all the above was taking place after work, in the evenings. In late October, before the clocks changed, the nights were drawing in a bit quick. The last thing I needed the following day was to be late home, as I reckoned we could crack it with one more session.

Due to an accident on the motorway.....need I say more.

It was just getting dark when I got home, I ran around getting changed, picking up chick, glove and weathering key, and made it with about fifteen minutes of daylight.

He looked at the opened chick with all its internal dribbly bits on show - yum-yum , for about ten of the fifteen minutes and then.....stuffed his face.

I don't know who was the most relieved, him for food, or me because he'd finally eaten on the fist.

For those with far more experience and who may be tut-tutting at Jax's enforced starvation, I must add that I was keeping a VERY close eye on his general condition and had I thought for a moment that he was getting in trouble due to his lack of food I would have rectified the situation straight away.

My next step is to get him used to the area out and about, and, just to horrify the experts further, get him on the scales!

At this point I purchased a ledger book and started a daily log. I list his weight, what he eats, his behaviour and progress. This has proved invaluable in assessing his level of performance in relation to his weight and is recommended by all of the authors I have read but not all of the people I have spoken to. I put it down to the fact that years of experience allows you the luxury of prior knowledge, something us beginners are short of.

Progress since then has been rapid. So rapid in fact that you would think it was a different bird.

I brought him into the house on the day after he first fed on the fist, and started into a routine. Pick him up form his perch, onto the scales, off the scales for food and then walking around the area encountering cars, trees, children etc.

On the fourth day he jumped the length of his leash and I think the creance will be in full use within the next few days.

Jax has defied all written and most verbal information to start with and has since progressed so fast it's staggering. The two most important things that have helped me so far have been my new found friend Dave and huge amounts of common sense. I am still assured by those in the know that 'Harris Hawks' are EASY. Good thing I didn't start with a Gos then!!

As a post script to the above, another raw beginner at the club got his male Harris a few weeks before I got Jax. Using similar methods to me he had him feeding on the fist in two days and flying free a week or so after that. Must just be my good luck.

TALONS

DEAR NEIL

When flying my two year old female Harris Hawk in January of this year she tackled an exceptionally large dog squirrel. Before I was able to get in to assist her it had badly lacerated the hind talon of her left leg, and stripped most of the keratin casing from it. After applying an antiseptic dressing to the area the bird was placed in her pen for the evening, but next morning when I examined the talon, approximately two-thirds of it was missing, and to date does not appear to have even started to re-grow.

Could you please tell me whether this is normal, or do you know of any case where the talon regrew, and if so did it return to it's normal length and shape?

I would also be interested to know if

you are aware of any cases in which a talon has been so badly damaged that it did not grow back and some form of prosthesis was possible

Keith Webb

DEAR KEITH

Talons, like beaks grow from the germinal epithelium, in the case this is at the base of the talon. As with your own finger nail, if it is pulled out, it may or may not regrow (depending on whether the germinal epithelium has been damaged). If it does re grow, if little or no damage has been done it may grow normally, whilst if there is any significant damage, the talon may grow at an abnormal angle, length or shape.

In order to encourage a nail to grow back the 'nail - bed' should be protected with a moist vapour seal dressing (eg. Granuflex), which will keep the tissue moist, preventing dessication which would

further reduce the chances of regrowth. The oral administration of a B vitamin called 'Biotin', can increase the rate and strength of regrowth.

A bird with a broken talon, should not be flown further whilst the talon is regrowing, as repeated trauma to the damaged talon will reduce the chances of a satisfactory outcome. A talon will usually take 6 - 8 weeks minimum, to grow back down to a short stump (which would enable flying to recommence), some talons take very much longer to completely regrow.

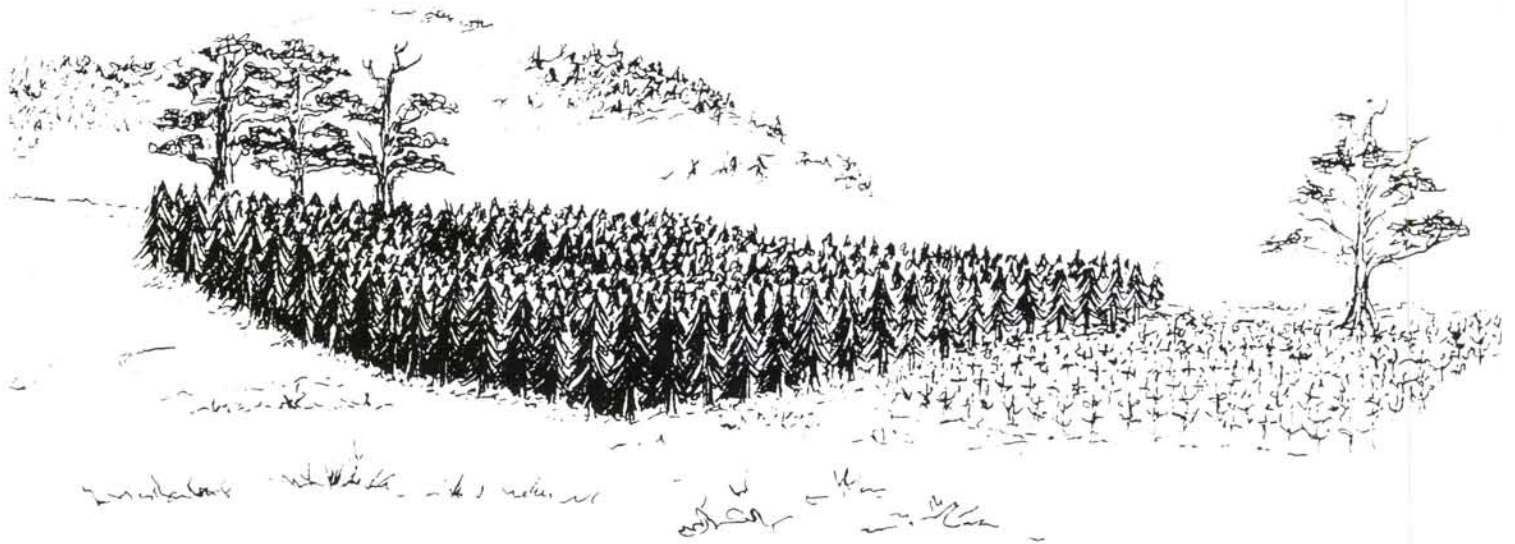
Prosthetic toes, to hunt with are not currently realistic. If it were purely for cosmetic purposes it would be possible. The pressure placed on a toe when the talon is clenched against a hard object would mean that any prosthesis would break off in a short period.

Neil Forbes FRCVS

LEARN FROM THE



HAWK



The Saker mantled over the lure panting, glancing wild eyed from left to right, whilst repeatedly clenching one foot. Looking not the least like a prize fighter that had just pumelled an opponent to the floor and was looking round for the next fight. A fantastic end to a perfect day.

Where to begin? I am a member of the local group of the Hawk & Owl Trust. We attend various country shows throughout the year raising funds and it was at one of these that I met Debby & Chris from the Hagley Falconry Centre. In conversation I mentioned that I had been interested in falconry for some while and that when I get a bird (When??) I really fancy a Red-Tailed Hawk. I had seen their video on hunting Debbie's Red-Tail and was suitably impressed. Why don't you come up some time when I am going to fly her.' Debby suggested 'Come out with us and see her in action'. I thought that she was just being polite so thought no more of it, although over the next few years the idea lingered in the back of my mind. At the precise moment when I was in the position to seriously consider taking a falconry course and get a bird, the world changed direction on me.

I should explain, I am in the Fire Service and for an aspiring falconer the shift system, plenty of daylight hours available etc., seems ideal. I remember walking out into the garden one June evening and hearing the familiar screaming call of a Bird of Prey. Straining my eyes looking into the evening sun I could see ring-ing up overhead were a pair of

hobbies. What a good omen! I could see the future. I was settled, contented, I knew where I was going!

Know that feeling, know what comes next? You've got it in one.

I was moved on to day work and my job moved further from home, which meant I spent more time travelling. The hours became longer and generally left me less time for 'other' interests. Six years down the line, getting a bird is still a dream. But the picture of hunting the woods with a Red-Tail still stays with me.

A short while ago I made the conscious decision, 'What the hell, If I can't get a bird now there's no reason why I can't see one in action'. So I plucked up courage, rang up Chris and Debby and arranged to go out hunting with them.

The appointed day came, I couldn't believe it, it wasn't pouring with rain. The sun was shining and in fact it turned out to be the hottest October day on record. The trip from darkest Buckinghamshire up to the West Midlands was relatively painless for me, apart from at the M5/M42 interchange, where I discovered I had the directional aptitude of a badly thrown boomerang. Somehow I found myself on the right motorway going in totally the wrong direction. If I had been a Hobby heading for Africa's winter warmth, I would have soon been shivering in Siberia. I'm sure that that particular junction is the result of a motorway designers penchant for practical jokes.

When I arrived at the centre a familiar call made me look up. A

welcoming committee of local buzzards had decided to put on a display overhead. 'A good omen if ever I saw one!' I thought. Five Buzzards circling less than fifty feet over our heads and just over to the right a sparrow being harangued by a rook, 'things can only get better!' For once they did.

Shortly after an early lunch Debby picked up Rani her Red-tailed Hawk and we headed out in the cars toward the local woodland. I thought that I understood the expression 'keen', but one close look in Rani's eyes showed me that I had clearly underestimated the phrase. The afternoon was bright and clear with just the hint of a cool breeze to take the warmth out of the sun. As we walked up the bridlepath alongside the wood we met a breathless woman with a bouncy(?) Newfoundland, which she was struggling to prevent jumping up to greet a clearly unimpressed Rani. 'It's alright' she told us, 'He's friendly'. I recall wondering if the dog would remain friendly for long, with an angry hawk embedded in his nose.

We entered the wood and immediately the pictures of hawking I had carried with me for years vaporised. I suppose I had not really considered the practicalities of it. In order for rabbits to be present they had to have some sort of cover in which to hide, and in woodland this would have to be either bracken or bramble. You can guess which of these we were going to be beating our way through! The woodland was also more dense than I had imagined. Although I had seen

film of Red-Tails hunting squirrel in the wild, I had not considered how enclosed an area we would be hunting in. Gone were the thoughts of long flights through airy open beechwood. 'At least we won't get out of breath and sweaty chasing the bird' I thought to myself. Funny how many times you can be wrong in one day.

Rani was cast off and duly positioned herself on the branch of a convenient birch tree at the edge of a deep patch of, you guessed it, bramble. She roused, got rid of some excess body weight and look down at us as if to say 'well come on then I'm waiting'. As we spread out in a line around the bramble patch, Rani's whole demeanour changed she leaned forward and bobbed her head, focussing on something we had absolutely no chance in seeing, the cover was that thick. However Chris obviously had a better view as he shouted 'There it is!' and as we moved forward Rani dropped from her perch. That moment was difficult to describe. Her whole action was fluid and effortless, she just dropped into a shallow glide, not a wing beat, but the movement just oozed power. You see films which use slow motion to try and illustrate action, but until you experience the sight first hand you just can't imagine things happening in real time, whilst remaining slow enough to catch every instant at the same moment.

Her power glide broke just before she would have crashed into the briars and she swung up over the bushes and back up into

ROGER PARKER

another tree. She roused herself again, a quick shake which seemed to start with her head and end with a flick of the tail, the clear note of her bells ringing through the woods. She had missed, but it didn't matter, at least not to me. One look in her eye and regardless of how aloof she was trying to look, it mattered to Rani.

We had three more flights without success (depending upon your point of view). One of which was amazing if not a little hairy for me. Rani had missed a rabbit in yet another patch of bramble, but Chris and Debby had moved to the opposite side of the patch and it had no where to go. As they moved in the bunny broke cover and headed straight at me. I was about thirty yards away from where it appeared and I was privileged(?) to see both the rabbit and Rani weaving in and out of the trees, heading straight for me. The rabbit didn't run between my legs, but it could have run right into my mouth as I was standing there trying to think of something to shout at the same time as thinking 'is it ok to dive for cover and if so which way do I go?'. Fortunately the rabbit turned and the bird followed, but I am sure I saw a contemptuous glint in her eye as she passed. She missed that one as well, but I didn't have so much sympathy that time.

As we walked through the wood and Rani moved from tree to tree, I became more and more impressed. Having found herself a good vantage point, if you watched her attitude you could tell the availability of game. Even if you thought one particular patch of brambles looked so good it must contain loads of rabbits, if Rani didn't look interested you were wasting your time. Stupidly I suppose, a number of times we had to prove we knew better (except of course we didn't).

We were approaching what, after the jungle we had already ripped our way through, appeared to be a flat area devoid of vegetation, when Rani's manner abruptly changed. Once more she became focussed. For the life of me I could not see the object of her interest. The brambles were not even ankle deep and so widely spaced you could have thrown stones into the middle with at least a fifty-fifty chance of missing all the leaves. You just couldn't hide even a mouse in that lot.

So, how many times do I have to own up to being wrong. The rabbit shot out and Rani shot away with it. She flew straight after it and at the instant her foot bound to its rear quarters, they

both disappeared over a bank. Running up we found her mantled over the coney, beak open, glaring round and up at us. Woe betides anyone who tried to take her prize. In fact her hind talon had pierced the rabbits skull and her foot was so firmly clenched it took very careful manipulation to remove bird from rabbit.

Deciding to end on an up note we returned through the wood, to the cars. A cynic might think that the day was not the most successful, but I wouldn't have minded not catching a thing. To see Rani in action, watching the silent, powerful,

purposeful flight, regardless of the outcome, was reward in itself.

I had thought the day ended when we arrived back at the centre, however Chris suggested that we take Jay, his Saker, to catch the last light. Once again I found myself heading out in the car, not knowing what to expect. We left the vehicle at the base of a large hill and arriving at the top, somewhat breathless, were greeted with a marvellous view of the country side stretching out in the evening sunshine towards the Malvern Hills.

We crossed rough grassland, beside a small plantation of conifers, heading toward a hedgerow overlooking a field of beet. 'There's normally something of interest for Jay, around the beet field at this time of the evening,' Chris told me as we approached. Well it wasn't my turn to be wrong this time.

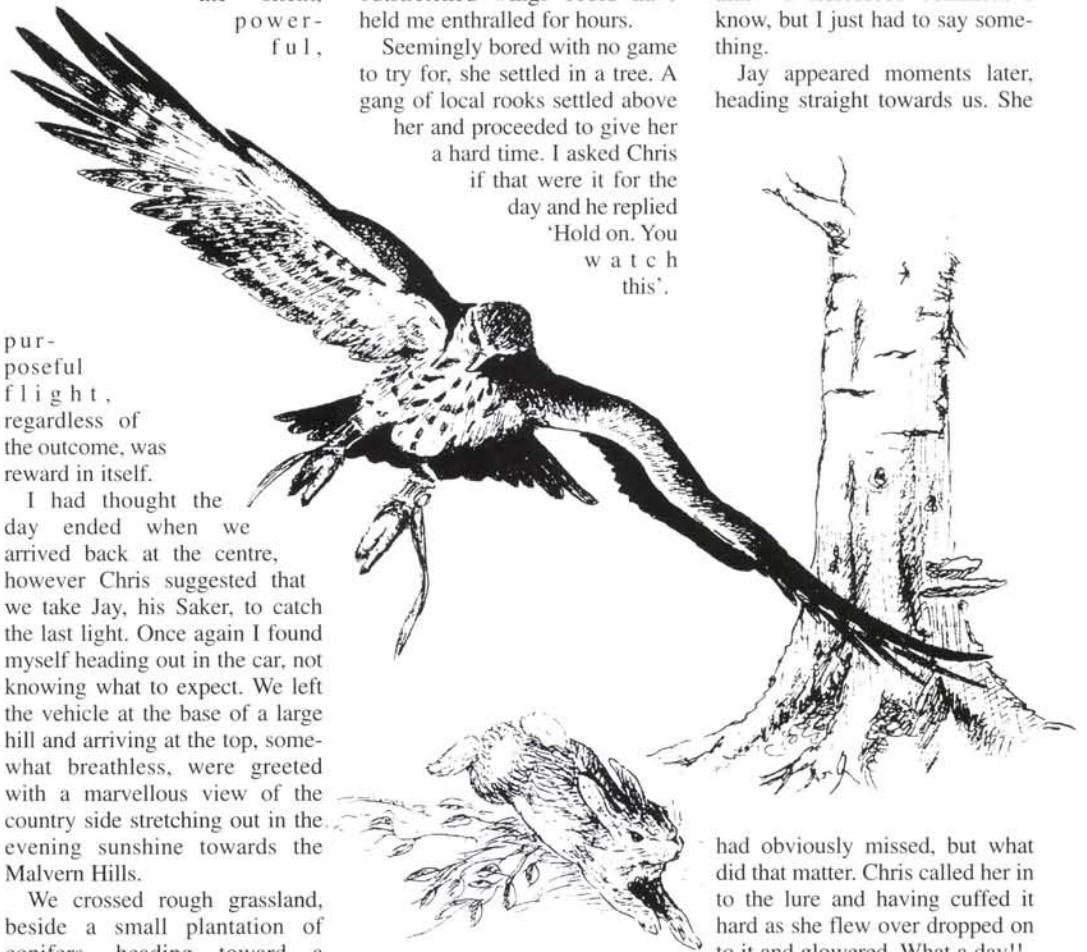
Chris removed Jay's hood and held her aloft. With a disinterested look she glanced around and roused (I must remember not to stand within firing range when a bird relieves excess pressure!) Almost leisurely Jay took off from Chris' fist and then did an immediate U-turn. Pulling herself through the wind, she headed away from the beet field, eyes on

more interesting things.

Once over the conifer plantation, she casually circled as she tried to gain height. 'She's seen something' Chris called as she dropped towards the trees, but by the time he'd finished speaking she had thrown up and was gaining height again.

I suppose if you have a short attention span you could get easily bored watching a bird circling, at times right on the edge of sight, and not appearing to do much else. But to see this magnificent creature use the wind like a tool, pushing her upward and along, with hardly a movement of her outstretched wings could have held me enthralled for hours.

Seemingly bored with no game to try for, she settled in a tree. A gang of local rooks settled above her and proceeded to give her a hard time. I asked Chris if that were it for the day and he replied 'Hold on. You watch this'.



Sure enough after listening to the raucous calls of the rooks for a few minutes, Jay left her branch apparently chased off by the crows. 'Watch her, see what she does now' Chris encouraged as a paper chase of one nonchalant Saker and three barracking rooks circled the oak tree they had recently vacated. Slowly the circles they flew got wider and higher, always the rooks above. The Saker twisting lazily to one side or the other as one rook came a little too close. 'She's egging them on, you watch' Chris was

getting as excited as I was.

The rooks couldn't see that Jay was leading them farther and farther from cover. Almost in an instant, Jay was above the rooks and I could imagine the realisation hit the rooks mind 'Oh ****'. Looking round, nowhere to go, all three rooks dropped towards the distant ground in a starburst of action. No messing around now! They hadn't realised that Jay had led them over the ridge and that the ground had dropped hundreds of feet further away. Jay swung up, turned, folded her wings and plummeted after. It was only after she disappeared from view, behind the ridge, that I realised I had been holding my breath. 'Did you see that?' a ridiculous comment I know, but I just had to say something.

Jay appeared moments later, heading straight towards us. She

had obviously missed, but what did that matter. Chris called her in to the lure and having cuffed it hard as she flew over dropped on to it and glowered. What a day!!

Well that was where I started. I have little else to say but to thank Debby & Chris for a marvellous day and not only giving me the opportunity to watch their birds at work, but also to put the sport in its proper context. Unfortunately it hasn't quenched my desire to get more involved but it has shown me that I can't go in for half measures. If I am to take up this wonderful, but incredibly demanding sport, I need TIME!

For now I'll have to take a leaf out of Rani's Book. Don't waste valuable energy chasing the unattainable, bide your time, but seize an opportunity when it comes.

PARQUE ECOLOGICO, LAS AGUILAS DEL TEIDE

Alan Ames



Set on the barren slopes of Mount Teide, near Arona on the south side of the island, Las Aguilas del Teide is a must for anyone who enjoys seeing large raptors flying at their best. Upon arrival you will be greeted by two huge angular stone eagles that stand guard at the entrance to the park. Once inside, the park transforms into a tropical paradise with hundreds of plants from all over the world, the most striking of which are thirty foot palms and the Cacti. In this oasis in the desert are enclosures with lakes and waterfalls, creating near natural environments for the Nile Crocodiles, Mississippi Alligators, Humbolt Penguins and Pygmy Hippos to name but a few.

The twin forty foot, stone, circular towers either side of the arena from which the birds are flow, combined with the thermals and general topography of the park, make for truly spectacular displays. The first begins with a variety of vultures. Griffons, Hooded, Turkeys, new world Blacks, an

Egyptian (complements of myself) and a superb Andean Condor. After the smaller vultures have gone from tower to tower, the larger birds are brought out to join them. Though it was January, the thermals were rising well from the slopes below the park, lifting the birds to about a thousand feet. The Griffons are the first to return, wings partially closed, primaries bent, legs down and swaying from side to side like a squadron of stricken bombers. The eagles are the next to appear, joining the spiralling Condor. On this occasion there were two Baldies, a large Steppes, two Imperials and three immature African Fish Eagles. The Fish Eagles hung around a few hundred

feet above the arena dropping only to snatch food tossed for them in the purpose built pond. Once these birds were down there were eagles everywhere. The first to come in, from about half a mile away, were the Baldies, very fast at a low angle straight over the heads of the crowd, before throwing up and somersaulting on to the glove. Immediately after the Baldies came the Steppes and the Imperials. Within a matter of seconds these specks in the sky descend to the arena with wings folded like a form of giant falcons. Much faster and at much more of an acute angle than the other birds, slamming the brakes on at the last second to land on the glove. The Condor by this time is starting to gain height after earlier having to put up with being dive bombed by one of the Baldies. This unprovoked attack forced him to roll, and present his talons in defence, causing him to lose 30 or 40 feet as he slipped through the air to escape the conflict. He spent the next five





Alan Ames with White-tailed sea Eagle.



minutes, primaries spread, feeling the air, climbing on the thermals to some 1500 feet above the park. When he was called in, this huge bird's descent was nothing less than awesome. With wings half closed, body angled over at 45 degrees, he spiralled in, dropping like a stone until he had about 200 feet to go. On which he hurtled out over the side of the hill, turned into the wind and came in above the head of the crowd in similar fashion to the Griffons, with legs swinging before bounding into the middle of the arena. Once this master of the air is back on his perch, two male Harris Hawks enter the fray. Behaving in typical fashion, they fly back and forth throwing up to catch the titbits of food catapulted above the heads of the crowd. Having done their bit they are retrieved, during which time the visitors are enticed down onto the lowest step of the seat of the arena and made to sit with their legs stretched out in front of them. Enter another Griffon, No flying for this one. He gallops out from behind one of the towers lured on by a falconer, and proceeds to do a circuit of the arena, gambolling over the outstretched legs of the crowd, before disappearing back into his mews. The finale of the display, much to the glee of the younger



guests, is a young, over friendly African Elephant. This ponderous pachyderm, who having barged his way gently into the crowd, delights in nothing more than sticking his prehensile proboscis up every human orifice imaginable to purloin anything that isn't fixed to the person.

The next display was very different. The only raptors were Common Caracaras, which trotted in and out among the crowd, a pair of Chimangos which jumped from one head to another of the visitors seated around the arena and a Lanner Falcon. The remainder of the display consisted of a couple of real oddities and graceful exotics. The oddballs were a trained pheasant and a cockerel, which dutifully flew from glove to glove! When talking to the handlers later they informed me that these birds are

trained and weighed in the same way we all train raptors. The exotics though were marvellous to watch. Crowned Cranes danced around the arena, White Storks floated above the heads of the crowd while immature Sacred and Scarlet Ibis were coaxed into this avian ballet by the handlers. Definitely worth waiting for, even I had been a little sceptical at first. These exotics incidentally are trained and flown at top weight.

When the display was over, we adjourned to the bar (as you do) for a drink and a chat. We

were all busily trying to converse through Carlos, the parks' English-speaking vet, when the head falconer suddenly disappeared into a nearby secluded weathering that I had previously and intentionally not been shown. Moments later he emerged with a magnificent White Tailed Sea Eagle, which was obviously his pride and joy as he was grinning from ear to ear. After declining my offer of 10,000 pesetas for her he stuck a glove in my hand, gestured that I take her from him and allow him to take a photo of us both with my camera. A nice parting gesture I thought. All in all the place definitely gets the thumbs up (for whatever it might be worth) from me. So next time you want to take your long suffering partner on yet another busmans' holiday and subject them to yet more birds! Go to Tenerife.

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Protecting Wild Birds

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published a leaflet on wild birds and the
law.

The aim of 'Protecting Wild Birds' is
to seek the public's support in the Met's
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Owl Centre and Grounds open every day of the year 11a.m. - 5p.m.

SAE for further details from The Owl Centre, Muncaster Castle, Ravenglas,
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1 hour from M6 Junction 36.

FIELD SPORTS RALLY

Whether you are a member of the BFSS or not, please make plans as an
individual or as a group/syndicate, to come along to Hyde Park on 10th July
for a Countrysports Rally. This show of support is to coincide with the
earliest passage through Parliament of a most hostile bill.

Don't think Falconry is safe - just remember the Pistolshooters and
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