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COMMENT

Hello All,

Things have finally settled down here and the mag is just about on time. Thanks everybody for your patience and best wishes.

The next big event on the Falconry calendar is The Falconers' Fair 30th & 31st of May at Offchurch. Hope to see lots of you there.

Congratulations must go to Andrew Knowles-Brown on his new arrival (see page 36). Also a welcome back to Mik Standing who has written for us in this issue.

We have game cookery from top chef Jose Souto with more recipes to follow in subsequent issues, if you have any, please feel free to send them in. Climbing for Sharpshins from Mike McDermott, news of the Phillipine Eagle from Jemima and advice on courses from Lee William Harris. Important information about Caryospora (Coccidiosis) from Neil Forbes who is currently researching this virulent and far reaching problem.

OK. That's enough. See you soon.

Keep Falconry Safe

David & Lyn

EDITORIAL TEAM

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COVER: Goshawk, belonging to David Wilson. Photo D. Wilson.

Lost, Found & Stolen. From The IBR & Raptor Lifeline.

LOST

Buzzard	152RR95W
Buzzard	82W
Buzzard	5RSA98W
Goshawk	6667V
Goshawk	6232V & 17013W
Goshawk	5858V & 17936W
Goshawk	UK89117
Harris Hawk	RBA1000W
Harris Hawk	IBR2952W
Harris hawk	396W
Harris Hawk	IBR1000W
Harris Hawk	37RPRF98W
Harris Hawk	11PJB97W
Harris Hawk	12W
Kestrel	1DP97S
Kestrel	11761S
Kestrel	6JEN98
Lanner	6RAH96W
Lanner	4MB97W
Lanner	485RBA97W
Lanner	IBR2910W
Lanner	IBR2347W
Lanner	19RAH97V
Lanner	3914V & RC4
Lanner	5189V & 9RC
Peregrine	4138V
Peregrine	8547V
Peregrine	1693V
Peregrine	2372W
Peregrine	16785W
Peregrine	3758V & 7439W
Redtail	2088X
Redtail	1RAH96X
Redtail	1635
Saker	HE0102502
Saker	3HE98
Saker	5098W
Saker	5498W
Saker	10GJB97W
Saker	4734W
Sparrowhawk	4031RR98R

HYBRIDS

Peregrine X Lanner	1745V & 12245W
Peregrine X Lanner	16208W/V
Peregrine X Saker	18860W
Peregrine X Saker	7554V
Peregrine X Saker	16336W
Gyr X Peregrine	6162V & 17266W
Gyr X Prairie X Saker	2916X
Barbary X Shaheen	9514V
Gyr X Saker	17754W
Eur. Eagle Owl	996Z

FOUND

Buzzard	32??RR97W
Buzzard	UK778??
Buzzard	106??W
Buzzard	24??RR98W
Buzzard	UK600??
Buzzard	UK888??
Harris Hawk	?TS98W
Buzzard	?DLG9?V
Harris Hawk	2CC97W

Harris Hawk	IBR??43W
Harris Hawk	??RAH97W
Harris Hawk	??2BL98W
Harris Hawk	97??W
Harris Hawk	?NCF95W
Kestrel	05?BCS
Kestrel	1??98S
Kestrel	7??RBA98S
Kestrel	108??S
Kestrel	37??BR97S
Lugger	30??W
Redtail	11??X
Sparrowhawk	68??R
Snowy Owl	??PC98Z
Tawny Owl	2??IOA92U

STOLEN

Harris Hawk	4186W
Harris Hawk	UK77311
Harris Hawk	6521W
Harris Hawk	2693W
Harris Hawk	1318W
Harris Hawk	?TS98W
Harris Hawk	2CC97W
Lanner	6TS98W
Peregrine	8400V

Stolen from W. Mids 26.4.99

1. Peregrine x Saker Ring No. 2755V
2. Barn Owl Ring No. 16857U
3. Barn Owl (Not Ringed)

Contact The IBR on: 0870 6088500 or Raptor Lifelineon: 0118 9016990

CONVICTIONS

On 18th November 1998, Haydn WILLIAMS of Pontrilas, Herefordshire appeared at Hereford Magistrates Court and pleaded guilty to the following offences: -

1. Possession of a Female Goshawk
2. Possession of a Male Goshawk
3. Possession of a non registered Goshawk
4. Possession of a non registered Goshawk
5. Possession of two Barn Owls

In mitigation, Williams' defence stated that he had caught the Goshawks at his release pens to reduce predation on his pheasant poults. He was however intending to return them to the wild after the shooting season. Both Goshawks had however been found fitted with jesses and tethered to perches.

In respect of the two Barn Owls, Williams stated that one had been accidental caught by his Redtail and the other had been picked up nearby. One was found at the time to be fitted with jesses. They were both found to be in good health and showed no signs of being attacked by a Redtail.

WILLIAMS was fined a total of £500.00 plus £40.00 costs.

On 18th January 1999, Mark WARDLE and Michael MATHER of Worksop, Nottingham appeared at Newark Magistrates Court and pleaded guilty to the following

offence: -

1. In March 1998 did use an article, namely a cage trap baited with a live pigeon, for the purpose of killing or taking a wild bird.

In March 1998, a member of the public walking through Worksop Manor Estate came across a cage trap with a white pigeon in it. The site was visited and it became apparent after a few minutes that there was a pair of Goshawks in the immediate vicinity of the trap. Also, located within 70 yards of the trap were a Pheasant release pen and a small enclosure holding hen Pheasants.

For this offence WARDLE was fined £600.00 and MATHER £400.00

A total of £1400.00 costs was ordered to be paid in respect of this matter.

THE BATTLE CONTINUES

Prime Minister Tony Blair has been urged to ban hunting with dogs in response to a report showing Labour backbench support for such legislation.

According to a report by Chairman of the PLP Home Affairs Committee, Ian Casey MP

● Two-thirds of Labour backbenchers took part in the survey.

● All but one wanted to see legislation introduced to ban hunting with dogs.

● A majority of 62 per cent wanted to see an outright ban.

● And 90 per cent would only support a referendum if it is to opt out of a national ban.

John Rolls, Chairman of the CPHA said, "We are writing to the Prime Minister urging him to introduce a legislation.

In November 1998, the CPHA launched Deadline 2000, a broad-based campaign to persuade the Government to commit to banning hunting with dogs before the new millennium.

We may think they have given up but they haven't. As country sportsmen and women we must do all we can to oppose this and support the Campaign for Falconry in their efforts to protect our sport. Complacency will lose us what we as falconers value the most, the freedom to hunt our birds.

Details about the Campaign for Falconry and how you can help are available from: <http://www.falconers.com/campaign.for.falconry/>

The Campaign for Falconry would like to thank Biff Norman of Martin Jones Falconry Furniture, for her huge generosity in donating back the Andrew Ellis painting she won in last years raffle.

The painting will be auctioned at this years Falconry Fair to raise more funds for the Campaign.

Many thanks also from all the rest of us who know and love her.

**THE FALCONRY FAIR
BY RON MORRIS**

This May bank holiday weekend of the 30th and 31st will see the tenth consecutive staging of The British Falconry and Raptor Fair at Offchurch Bury, Nr Leamington Spa. Who would have thought how large an event and so important a date in the world of international falconry the humble beginning in 1990 would have become.

Sadly missing from this years proceedings will be Major Peter Wainwright, who sadly passed away last year. Peter was always very enthusiastic about the whole event and this was reflected by the amount of effort he put into making the whole thing a success. He will be fondly remembered by those of us that worked with him over the years. But his legacy lives on in the success of the Fair.

All the ingredients that have contributed to the fair's success will be there again this year. After all why change a winning formula? But what we, as organisers try to do, is fine tune things each year so as to improve the overall event. With that in mind we would like to thank all those that have come forward with genuine constructive criticism over the years. Feed-back helps us to get things as you would like them.

The flying displays will be exciting and extremely varied as they have been for the last couple of years. Not only will our normal cast be flying their hawks and falcons but some new guests as well. We try hard to make each Fair a little different and a little more exciting. But the event is certainly not a closed shop. But let me please add this proviso. Do not turn up on the day with a hawk unless invited to do so. I'm afraid that if you do you will be refused admission.

The same holds true of the weathering where we strive to put on as varied a selection as possible of trained hawks and falcons. Again we accept that there have been one or two obvious blanks over the years, but normally for a good reason. For example it is difficult to find someone with a Goshawk that is manned sufficiently to be rock steady on a weathering in front of thousands of people in May. But generally speaking we manage a first class static display each year and this is safely and effectively run for us by members of The Central Falconry and Raptor Club.

When it comes to clubs, these again will have an extremely impressive representation. This year we have clubs of regional, national and international stature. It is surely a mark of the Fair's success that three international clubs feel that a presence is not only desirable, but essential. So all those looking for advice or a contact in their area should be well catered for. The visitor will find that the clubs are friendly and will help wherever they can.

Those that are also very well catered for are those with an interest in raptor and wildlife art. Chris Christoforou has, yet again, managed to gather together an extremely impressive array of talent in the art marquee. Chris has boundless energy

when it comes to the Fair and his hard work benefits all of those that enjoy top class art. Such is the renown of the art marquee that it has almost become an event within an event.

Our good friends Raptor Rescue will have their normal excellent static display and information stand. Go along and have a chat with them, their stand is always manned by friendly people who care passionately about raptors. The work they do is truly excellent and benefits all of us who enjoy seeing raptors in the wild. As you are probably aware all the funds that are collected by Raptor Rescue go directly on rehabilitation work. They are not swallowed up by administration charges. So please give generously.

What would the fair be without it's wide and varied selection of falconry related vendors. This year will see a larger than ever number of both British and foreign exhibitors. As well as several exhibitors from North America we also have stands from Germany, Belgium, Italy, Holland, France, Spain & Finland. A new magazine devoted totally to falconry will also be launched at the fair.

Catering will be up to the normal high standard and the choice will be varied, from the food to the toilets, from the arena entertainment to the general value for money.

For the falconer or general bird of prey enthusiast the Fair has just about all there is to offer. But the general field sportsman and countryside devotee are not forgotten either. The Fair incorporates it's own game fair and all that you would normally associate with such an event will be present. Everything from clay pigeon shooting and archery to stick dressing and fly fishing, helicopter rides, pipe bands and a parachute display team all go to make up an excellent weekend.

The event is sign-posted from junction 12 of the M6 and junction 12 of the M40. Once there, the car park is free. Admission prices have been held down to only £6 for adults and £2 for children. For further details call the show office on 01588 672708.39



**THE WILDLIFE AND RAPTOR ART
EXHIBITION 1999**

The Wildlife & Raptor Art Exhibition has grown to become an important wildlife art event and continues to draw the attention of serious art collectors and artists alike. The exceptionally high standard of work on show attracts buyers from as far afield as North America, Saudi Arabia and Europe.

Conceived by Chris Christoforou with the support of Alan M. Hunt, it is now in its ninth year and a major attraction within the British Falconry & Raptor Fair, held at Offchurch Country Park, Offchurch, Nr Leamington Spa, Warks. Subject matter ranges from realistic paintings of Birds of Prey and traditional Falconry Art, European and Exotic Wildlife, Equestrian and Canine Art. Many of the artists listed

below have travelled extensively to research their subject to paint!

This year's contributing artists are: Andrew Ellis, Dave Scott, Michael Kitchen-Hurle, Jay Presnall, David Matthews, Martyn Brooks, Charlie Barratt, Chris Saunderson, Roy Aplin, Jean Evernett, Peter Bainbridge, Sue McDonald, Chris Christoforou, John Wynne-Hopkins, Peter Kinch, Toni Hargreaves, Sarais Crawshaw, Alan M. Hunt, Judi Kent-Pyrah, Claus Rabba, Bernd Poppleman, Annette Isort, Rudi Kohl, Laszlo Szappan, Adrian Ventura and Michele Vitaloni.

For further details of the exhibition please write to: Christo Exhibitions, 14 Seymour Court, Whitehall Road, Chingford E4 6DZ. Tel/Fax: 0181 5291311.

**AVIAN SEX
DETERMINATION**

Avian Biotech International are world leaders in the field of DNA sexing, fingerprinting and disease testing. Their tests were developed in Florida State University by Professor Siwo De Kloet and the company continues to invest 20% of their profits in funding further avian research. Over 170,000 samples from over 650 species of birds from parrots to penguins have been sexed at a greater than 99.9% accuracy. Collection kits for obtaining samples are available free on request.

Test results are usually available within 6 - 8 working days after the sample is received by them. The results can be phoned or faxed at no extra cost.

Due to new technology they are now able to use feathers for sex determination as long as they are freshly plucked.

Other wise a blood sample can be sent. The recommended way to obtain a sample from your bird is to take it from the talon. Clip it back a bit at a time until you see a drop of blood form and take the sample from here and put it in the tube supplied.

This is a break through as previously birds have had to be anaesthetised to be surgically sexed and this carries quite a big risk. The cost is also economical as the whole process costs less than just the anaesthetic would for conventional sexing.

NOTICE

LEE WILLIAM HARRIS WILL BE ON OUR STAND AT THE FALCONERS FAIR SIGNING COPIES OF HIS BOOK 'FALCONRY FOR BEGINNERS.'

☆ CLUBS ☆ CLUBS ☆ CLUBS ☆ CLUBS ☆ CLUBS ☆ CLUBS

THE HAWKING CLUB NEWS

Presidents Nancy de Bastyai, John Buckner and Lawrence Workman.

The Club has celebrated its first year and held its Annual General Meeting at Ross on Wye in February, where officers reported on the progress of the Club during that first year. These included comments from Presidents Nancy de Bastyai and John Buckner, who expressed pleasure at the progress of the Club and thanked officers and members for the part they had played. Craig Thomas and Adrian Williams gave their reports in which they thanked all for their support on the founding of the Club, which had resulted in a large membership in a very short time, over 100 members, mostly from the UK but with several from overseas such as Europe, the Americas and Africa. The Treasurer, Jane Thomas-Protheroe reported that the Club was in a healthy financial position thanks to the efforts of everyone contributing.

The Club had attended both the CLA Game Fair and the British Falconry and Raptor Fair along with smaller events. Attendance at selected Fairs is likely to continue this year. Most Club members were active falconers and this was reflected in their comments and appreciation of the provision of some 16 field meets at locations in the Midlands. We also held meets in South Wales, Devon and Hereford where we were pleased to be joined by our old friend Fred Taylor of Shooting Times. Thanks to all those

who helped with arrangements and a very big thank you to the Head Keeper, Richard Clarke at Six Mile Bottom, the well-known Cambridgeshire shoot, one of the most prestigious in the country, where we held our last meet of the season.

We are pleased to announce that well respected Austringer, naturalist and all round sportsman Lawrence Workman has augmented our Joint Presidency of Nancy de Bastyai and John Buckner.

We look forward to seeing members and supporters alike at Country Fairs throughout the summer.

We currently hold evening meetings at Llantrisant: South Wales, at South Brent: Devon, and at Northampton: Midlands.

(Hawk food available at some meetings by prior arrangement.)

If you would like to add your name to the influx of new members this year or want more details of the Club, fax or email our Secretary, Adrian Williams on 01443 206333, adewilliams@saqnet.co.uk



Scottish Hawking Club Report Summer '99

Well another season over again, time does fly when you are having fun. We had another good crop of field meetings this season, but the weather wasn't as kind as it has been in other years. Most of the winter was plagued by copious quantities of rain and winds, which kept everyone guessing as to what to do, game was plentiful and rabbits in plague proportions in some places. Fortunately the weather didn't result in any cancelled meetings but we did a lot of ducking and diving to try and keep dry. Our last meet of the season had us sheltering from blizzard conditions, but a good day was had to finish the season. Anyone able to suggest any venues for next season field meetings please contact the club. A most important point in Scotland's history will have occurred by the time you read this, I hope it will not affect our sport at all, in fact I hope with the new Scottish parliament we can make the laws that govern our sport a lot more user friendly. It needs everyone in Scotland to pull together so we can lobby as one, the SHC has the support of the Hawk Board and IAF, and so if you don't belong to a club, join now we need you. We shall once again be attending Scone Palace for the Game Conservancy game fair at the beginning of July, come along and see us. This will give you a chance to quiz some of the committee if you wish, as well as buy the equipment that you need now rather than when you need it next season. For those of you south of the border this game fair is the best in Scotland for falconers, there are good displays as well as a good selection of birds on static display. We shall also be representing Scotland at this years CLA game fair, which the Hawk Board is overseeing, this is the first time we have ventured south of the border so pay us a visit. Have a quick moult and good hawking.

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AVON & SOMERSET RAPTOR GROUP

A well established club with a pool of experience in our membership whether hunting, breeding or an interest in raptors all are welcome, families, juniors and seniors alike. Regular speakers, work groups and excursions are just a part of our programme. Informal friendly meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month at The Old Down Inn, Emborough.
For further information please contact myself, Rob Cooke on 01749 870004

BRITISH FALCONERS CLUB

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**THE BRITISH FALCONERS CLUB,
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THE BRITISH HAWKING ASSOCIATION

A New Committee

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Contact:

Paul Beecroft: 0118 9016990

Wendy Alikar: 01945 450648

Rita Lippard: 01582 615741

THE CHESHIRE HAWKING CLUB

Meetings:- Held 2nd Tuesday of every month at 8pm. Venue:- Railway Hotel, Mill Lane, Heatley, Nr Lymm, Ches. We have speakers and Falconry Furniture Manufacturers in regular attendance.

Experienced and novice falconers welcome.

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

The Hawking Club

Welcomes experienced Falconers and Austringers but offers assistance to the newcomer to the sport.

Membership £20.

We meet each month at the following locations:

South Wales: Llantrisant. 8pm 2nd Friday

Devon: South Brent 8pm 4th Monday.

Midlands: Northampton. 8pm 4th Monday. and have members throughout the UK and overseas.

For further information call our Secretary Adrian Williams on 01443 206333 or our Chairman Craig Thomas on 01327 261485

Northern England Falconry Club

**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:

Keith Channing
2 Amesbury Road, Cholderton,
Salisbury Wilts SP4 OEP
Tel: 01980 629221

e-mail: rba@redtail.demon.co.uk

Web Site: <http://www.redtail.demon.co.uk/rba/>

THE SCOTTISH HAWKING CLUB

FOR THE DEDICATED FALCONER

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

STH GLOS & 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).

Telephone
Martin 0117 9710019
Gary 01454 201702

The South East Falconry Group

aims to support falconry and falconers, drawing its membership from around southern and eastern England. The SEFG provides a forum for falconers to meet, discuss and practice falconry.

Members benefit from access to a wealth of experience, good facilities and a range of field-meeting opportunities.

Contact Dean White for further information: 01489 896504

e-mail: WhiteGos@compuserve.com

MEETINGS of The Welsh Hawking Club

are held monthly, 8pm at:

H.Q. The Foresters Oaks, Llandevaud. A few miles off J24 of the M4 held 2nd Mon
N.Wales. The Goshawk, Mouldsworth, nr. Chester. 1st Mon

Exeter Group. The Ley Arms, Kenn, nr. Exeter. 3rd Mon.

Essex Group. The Whalebone Inn, Fingeringhoe, nr. Colchester. 1st Tues.

Bath Group. The Bull Inn, Hilton, nr. Bath. 1st Weds.

The Welsh Hawking Club is internationally recognised and has members throughout the UK.
For further information ring Secretary: Mike Clowes on 01529 240443

To Advertise your Club in our Club Directory send your Advert to:

The Falconers Magazine,
20 Bridle Road,

Burton Latimer, Kettering.

Northants. NN15 5QP

Tel/Fax: 01536 722794

email: kbu77@dial.pipex.com

'GOS-GOS'

David Wilson



Being born into a farming family meant that much of my early childhood was spent with animals, but it was birds and especially birds of prey that fascinated me.

I kept Kestrels and owls for two or three years and at the age of eleven I attended a falconry course. It was here that I was to encounter for the first time a species of bird that would capture my imagination more than all the others, a bird that I wanted above all others and one that I would have wait 26 years to finally own. This bird was a Goshawk. As soon as she entered the room I ceased to hear anything the instructor was saying. I was mesmerised by her. Scanning every inch of her perfect adult plumage. Watching as she raised her tail and muted across the laps of all the students leaving us with a nice white chalk mark.

After the course was finished (eight Saturdays at two pounds a day) I stayed on to work at the centre and flew a variety of birds in the five years I was there, including Goshawks. However, until 1998 I never owned one of my own. Something always seemed to make it impossible to give a Goshawk the time and effort needed to fly it successfully.

My intention was to buy a female eyass, a clean sheet, but a four year old German tiercel came up for sale locally and curiosity got the better of me. I arranged for the owner to bring him over for me to see. The reason I originally wanted a female was because most of my hawking is rabbits, but this male was a proven, consistent rabbit hawk.

'Gos' as he had been named by his first owner, arrived with his current keeper. He was boxed as he had been put up for the moult. It transpired that he was being moulted on a bow-perch and that in his four years, apart from when he was a downy, he had been kept continuously on a bow, both day and night, and never free-lofted.

As he was removed from the box the first thing I noticed was that his lower mandible was overgrown and had pushed the top mandible to one side. This had in

turn, worn a groove in the top of the bottom mandible. Although it had been coped by a vet it still needed a considerable amount of work.

Secondly one of his anklets was made of a denim-like material. The owner informed me that due to a 'bite', the leg had some swelling and an infection. The bird was on antibiotics for it but

because he was permanently tethered there was constant pressure and the wound wasn't healing up.

Finally, although he was in good feather elsewhere, his tail was virtually non-existent.

Not exactly what I had envisaged for my first Goshawk. But in spite of all his problems he still had that 'look', that certain air about him that had me hooked the very first time I laid my eyes on one of his kind. So I decided to go for it. To give him the care and attention he had so obviously been lacking. I finally took possession of 'Gos' on 28th Feb 1998, and on 1st March I attended 'The March' in London. As you can imagine it was a weekend of mixed feelings. One day I acquire the Goshawk that I have waited so long for and the next day I am marching for the right to fly him.

The first thing I did was design an anklet to reduce the pressure on his leg wound. It was extra wide with a hole in it where the lump was. The swelling reduced by fifty per-cent in the first few days and after two weeks had healed completely.

The jess was left on right through the hunting season to be sure of no recurrence.

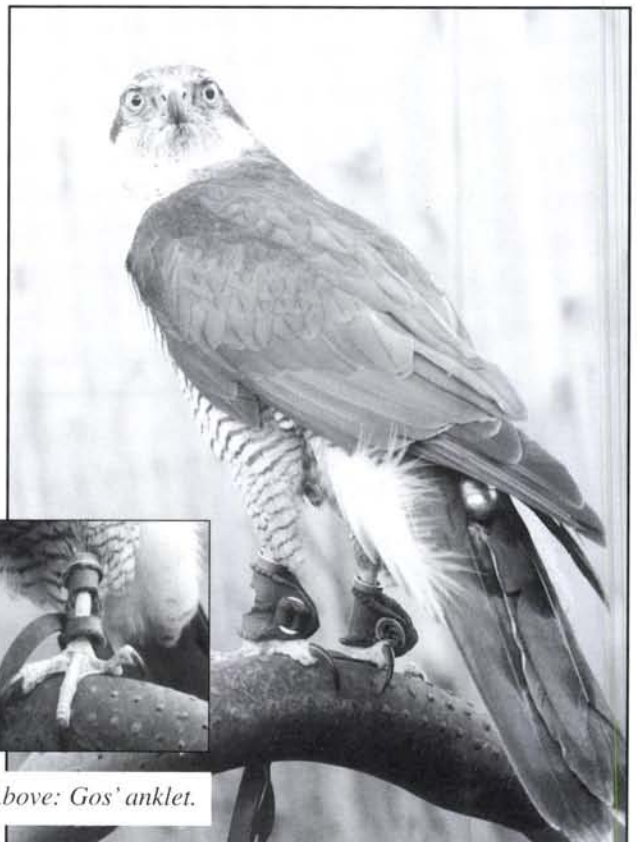
The beak was coped at six week intervals over the next 6 months and once the pressure was relieved the top mandible eventually grew straight. Also tail feathers were impeded in to support his new ones as they were pushed down.

I boxed him every night and pegged him out every day. Feeding him on the

fist in the evenings and spending every spare minute with him, even if it was just wandering round the garden. It took him about six months to settle down.

Gos was flown and hunted through the '98-'99 season at 11b 61/2oz, although on his regular exercise grounds he could be flown at any weight up to 11b 81/2 oz. He was a little reluctant to return to the fist at this weight but would come quite readily to the lure. His previous owner told me that he flew at 11b 4oz.

He has now been put up for the moult and after much debate I decided risk putting him in an aviary, I was worried how he would cope with the freedom of movement. Would he smash himself up? I decided to risk it, watching him from a distance, listening, waiting. I was amazed. He never once flew at the roof or sides of the aviary, he is relaxed and when stressful situations occur, ie. mowing the lawn, he just goes down onto the floor at the back of the aviary, returning to his favourite perch as soon as the situation has passed. Although he is being fed a very good diet, rats and grown on chickens, he still comes every day to the food ledge to take it. My relationship with this bird is everything I could have wished for. Waiting six months for him to moult may seem a long time but as I have waited for 26 years I think I can manage a little longer.



Above: Gos' anklet.

CINDERELLA

Martin Hollinshead

The other evening I was on the phone to a friend on Scotland. It was our once a month 'keep in touch' call. As always we ended up wrestling with a familiar theme and this time he openly confessed he had completely given up on me. "How can you fly those damn Harris' Hawks?" I felt like a little boy being told to put his toys away!

Many Harris' devotees will have experienced the same kind of thing, disapproving friends trying to make then see sense, and they, like me, will have quietly chuckled to themselves about what seems to be the best kept secret in British Falconry - these birds can give the most discerning falconer the ride of his life!

The Harris' hawk's problem is how it is portrayed. Everybody knows it, and anybody can fly it. The parabuteo is a victim of its own accommodating nature. It'll suffer a bit of abuse, won't get shirty, won't fly away and generally won't die on you. Why bother testing what this *beginners bird* is capable of when it's doing quite nicely flying back and forth? Why let Cinders go to the ball when we can keep her in the kitchen? Harry McElroy gave us the real Harris' years ago, a fascinating and versatile raptor. Have we lost it, forgotten about it, or is the Harris' simply suffering from a lack of glamour brought about by its accessibility and 'undemanding' tag?

There's no denying that the Harris' is readily available, breeding projects are overflowing, and let's face it when it comes to fashions and trend's falconry can rival the clothing industry! The short - or broad wing faces an image problem that has deep roots. The historical west-European obsession with falcons lives on, their 'value' their 'status' will always overshadow the 'lesser' birds. Quarry creeps in too. The mammalian quarries, so often associated with the short - and (particularly the broadwings, simply don't count as much as something with feathers on it! No, in the world of short - and broadwing falconry, only white Goshawks and Golden eagles are headline grabbers. However, it's not an issue the Harris' owner worries too much about. He's too busy having a whale of a time!

So the Harris' isn't glamorous. But the undemanding bit, well, here the wrangling starts. Is the Harris' undemanding because it is easily tamed (the word easily being used with caution in the case

of the aviary-abandoned, parent-reared bird) and quickly taught? Who in their right mind would want the 'challenge' of a stubborn, two-steps-forward-one-step-back wild thing? Not I that's for sure. For me, it's through the basics as quickly as possible and on to the real challenge - advanced training and hawking. There's enough scope here to keep the average novice scratching his head for about ten years!

To fully appreciate the Harris' a falconer must have hunted with other species. I served my own *apprenticeship* with Goshawks and Golden Eagles. What a shock that first Harris' was. I'd discovered a mini-eagle! There's so much of the eagle in the Harris' (Harris' in the eagle?) that it's impossible to admire one and not the other. The brain power, the bonding, it's all there. As is an eagle-sized heart. This bird insists on doing jobs that aren't good for its health! No, I have no problem about linking myself to this bird. With a myriad of other options open to me, I fly Harris' hawks not because I have to, but because I want to.

Several of my German eagle-owning friends have also fallen under the spell and, because the Harris' has suffered less of a pounding through over-exposure on the other side of the Channel, they are quite happy to talk about their passion in public! The ironic thing is, the experienced British falconer, who won't have the Harris', is in a far better position to explore the bird's potential. It's all to do with hawking land. In Britain we're spoiled rotten. The average German (or Austrian) falconer dreams of the kind of freedom we have, and thus, the kind of freedom we can give our birds. It has long been recognised that to really develop a Harris' it must be

given as much freedom as possible. It doesn't grow when limited hunting opportunities, and with them lots of group hawking, dictates that it must be flown from the glove. The Harris' that isn't allowed to think for itself is severely handicapped.

The lure of the Harris' is its intelligence. The Harris' isn't bright it's a Wonderchild. In the correctly handled bird, this quickness results in a unique field experience, the bird quickly grasping procedures and freeing its trainer to concentrate on the hunting, and its performance is staggering. In the field the parabuteo explodes with pazazz. Heavy-flying and hardhitting, Cinders hasn't arrived at the ball, she's burst through the doors! Howling gales, mountaintop flying, or body slamming brown hares, she'll deal with the lot. Does it matter what the bird's called if it's a dot in the sky ready to stoop at anything moves?

However, intelligence is a sword that cuts two ways. The carefully handled Harris' faces hell and high water because the business makes sense. Carefully rewarded and sensitively handled, the round-as-a-barrel bird is having as much fun as its owner. This bird hunts on autopilot, but let abuse creep in and the picture starts to lose focus. Mistakes made with the glove - lure - or kill rewards are noticed immediately. The problem is, the bird's disgust is not always clear. There's no aggression, no grabbing, just a quietly smouldering resentment that steadily burns away at the embryonic partnership. The quick Harris' brain has started to think about things and it doesn't take long for it to register that this team has one worker and one bully. The autopilot is off before it's been fully tested and the bird needs to constantly be instructed and controlled with food. And forget the flying barrel, that bird is part of the autopilot package. There are two types of Harris', the 'I'll burst my heart for you' bird, and the mistreated, weight manipulated tool. Both will catch game but for the falconer who wants his cake fully iced only the one will do.

Operating a silky smooth reward system is essential to good Harris' falconry. It's easy not to rob on the glove, it's easy not to cause offence with lures, but with kills, feeding from them and removing the bird without incident, takes skill. The Harris' may not be the most difficult bird to physically separate from a kill, but it's certainly the most difficult



to fool. This bird reads your thoughts. A few blunders and that double-bladed sword will hack your efforts from under you. There are several key elements to my Harris' falconry, but worthwhile kill-rewards and smooth pickups form the backbone. I learned the basics with eagles. The polish was put on with Harris' hawks.

I confess it's become something of an obsession. Always hard on myself when it comes to hawking, this is one area that has me satisfied with nothing but perfection. The slightest mistake, the hint of a questioning glance from the bird, and it's a sleepless night. An Austrian friend remarked: "Your life must be hell!" I sense something primitive at work. My falconry

is all about pot-hunting. I only pursue quarry that will be of some use in the kitchen, and I'm desperate about it. Every rabbit, every hare is priceless. With this thinking I put myself on the same wavelength as the bird. I understand her reluctance to accept anything but the fairest of trades.

Getting the pick up right with the Harris' isn't down to trickery, it's down to sensible discussion. Get it right, lay a foundation of trust, and the rewards are immense. The well-educated bird is a joy to work with. The depth of the understanding is astonishing, and it's there as soon as the bird leaves the glove on a quarry flight. It's not hunting for itself it's

hunting for the team, and when contact is made, it's looking for help. Watch the hare-hunting Harris' hang on for grim death because it knows help is coming. Watch it switch from a poor, to a good grip as soon as its helper has the quarry under control, and then watch it willingly accept, no - expect - still more help with the business of feeding. And believe me, eyes shining, muscles bulging, this bird isn't really hungry! For me there's no discussion, the Harris' is the ultimate all-terrain, all-rounder.

A closer look at the Harris' is taken in my new book, *The Complete Rabbit and Hare Hawk*, published in June by The Fernhill Press.

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JESS

Jess is a five year old female Harris Hawk who has always been fit and healthy. She was parent reared and fed a diet of rats as a youngster. When she was taken to her new home she had a good varied diet. This however, did not stop her becoming a victim of what we all fear may happen to Harris Hawks. A broken leg. We went out for an hour, (no more because we had to be back for the kids from various places) and when we got home she had got one leg caught behind the other, when bating we presume, and it was broken. Now we use Neil Forbes but he was a two and a half hour drive away

would take about two hours by the time she had sterilised all the necessary equipment etc and she would ring us a soon as she had finished. Her parting words were "if I ring sooner you know we have lost her!"

We got home about 6.15pm and set about waiting for her to phone. Every time it rang I snatched it up, heart pounding, then huge amounts of relief when it wasn't her. At about 8.10 the phone went. It was the vet. Would David get over there and look at the second x-ray before she brought her round from the anaesthetic? He went and it looked OK so Jess was brought round. It took quite a long time, much longer than we were used to but she seemed quite well and we brought her home.

We gave her the prescribed antibiotics religiously, our vet was amazed at the high dosage birds of prey need compared to a dog or cat for example. Jess ate little and often, all her food broken up into bite-sized pieces, and took the antibiotics with no problem. We kept her clean but disturbed her as little as possible. We took her back to the vet on the following Wednesday for a check up. She was doing fine. On Friday afternoon David lifted her out to change her bedding and as I was there he suggested I look at the leg to see how it was. I wasn't prepared for what I saw. Her leg was green! And I mean 'green'. In retrospect it was the most beautiful shade of dark green not quite bottle but very nearly. I felt my

gorge rise and turned and left the mews at speed. I was almost in tears. We rang the vet and were told to go in immediately. I stayed with the children and David took her in. As I sat here I looked through some books. A couple of things didn't add up. For a start there was no smell! Also the leg certainly didn't look like the ones in the books I was looking at captioned 'gangrene'. Still I was very worried, what on earth could it be? I waited and waited, fully expecting David to return home birdless, either because she had been put to sleep or was staying in to have

her leg amputated.

About 90 minutes later he returned. "Well?" "Oh, it's just bruising" he said Well, relief flooded over me, then came the tears. David told me I was silly and gave me a cuddle. We washed Jess' tail and returned her to her box.

He said that our vet had never seen anything like it but that a vet who was over from Australia had worked on raptors and he said it was because of their extremely fast metabolism.

Over the next couple of weeks Jess went from lying down to hopping around in her box, then she started moving the leg and flexing her talons, then bearing a little weight and then standing on her leg. Soon she was putting her full weight on it while she used the other to pin down food while she ate. She is now in an aviary and is due to have the pin out shortly.

Our thanks must go to our vet who has done a wonderful job and found a talent she didn't know she had. Maybe we can get her further down the road of raptor medicine by utilising her skills for other problems. Our immediate area is sadly lacking in good raptor vets and the amount of people who own birds of prey in our area is growing apace. (Nothing to do with us I might add!) So perhaps with the right support and encouragement this lady can become one of a growing breed of skilled and knowledgeable raptor vets. Let's hope so!



Jess' first x-ray showing the break

and it was four o'clock on a Saturday. So we rang our local vet. She is not a raptor vet and the only dealings she has had is to dispense antibiotics when requested. She said she would see us straight away. When we got there she examined Jess confidently, the bird's leg was x-rayed and it was definitely broken. It needed pinning! The vet's first reaction was that she wouldn't be able to perform this operation as she had never worked with a bird of prey before, secondly she only had fluorane, not isoflurane so this would make anaesthesia risky. We told her we had total faith in her (she had saved my Great Dane from a Gastric Torsion) and also we would take full responsibility if anything went wrong so she went ahead. She said it



Jess' second x-ray showing the pin.

CLIMBING FOR SHARPSHINS

Mike McDermott



Five day old Sharpy straight from the nest.

It's hot. It's so hot that a fog of humidity is literally being steamed out of the vegetation as we plod through the woods, just enduring. The heat is like an annoying relative that won't leave; it invades you completely and extinguishes any promise of relief from an errant breeze. At day-break, when the sun had just peeked over the horizon the temperature was already eighty and rising. The heat aggravated other problems too; drenching sweat washed away whatever effectiveness our insect sprays may have once had. Spider webs, mosquitoes, biting deer flies and seed ticks are always a constant annoyance in this place. By twelve in the afternoon the group had walked only five miles in as many hours. Climbing over deadfalls and searching through brush choked southern pine thickets for sharpshin nests high above isn't ever easy. You tend to stumble often while swatting at the mass of carnivorous insects swarming about. Everything here is hostile, it bites, stings, burns, cuts or poisons you. The nests are found by constantly looking up into the very top portions of the trees. Occasionally you can find a moulted feather, spot some mutes or the holy grail of nest hunting - eggshells. Experience helps, but perseverance and sheer will found us two other nest the week before. Four exuberant falconers had gone home with new imprint accipiters and the start of a fresh season. This was reward in its finest form.

Today our sunburned faces were aimed high above into the steaming forest canopy. Eventually single minded effort paid off and we were able to spot a new, plate sized nest deftly tucked against the tree trunk. Binoculars revealed the white tipped, square tail of the brooding female barely protruding over the nest lip. Seventy feet up, the tangled vines and poison ivy leaves camouflaged the diminutive nest well; but the experts that I was accompanying spot-

ted it easily. Well not easily; when blue jeans get soaked from the sweat that your t-shirt can't hold; you've earned it. At three in the afternoon; the stifling heat was a force to be endured and considering the climb ahead - feared. Up the tree thirty feet your butt goes numb from the woven safety harness biting in your inner thigh. About sixty feet up; your legs begin to have that lead filled feeling while the spurs are repetitively jabbed into the trunk. Refined movement is now lost, your body is relying on large muscle groups to mechanically lift one foot higher than the other, sink in the spur, and step up. The heat takes all the pleasure out of breathing - it's like working in a foundry with molten iron; you choke down your breath just because you have to. I'm nearly up to the nest now. A little break, to ease my back, and finally that wonderful moment arrives. I peek over the lip and see five little blue eyed chicks simply looking back. Very special. Those still on the ground can never capture the wonder and excitement of this moment - it's all mine.

The eyasses are tenderly placed in a towel lined knapsack and gently lowered down with a long cord. Every time a pack-full of chicks goes down; I can see the outstretched arms of the falconers reaching, stretching up. I cannot help but notice the parallel of a mother sharpshin feeding the young brood as they stretch and reach up to receive food, their very existence...

Are those on the ground so different? The falconers rapidly encircle the pack and debate the ages and sex; the size of this ones feet and that ones head. I imagine the wild branchers in the nest rapidly encircling the kill brought in by the mother sharpy, madly tearing and consuming their food; just to continue life....

Eventually the falconers choose their birds and the remaining three are replaced back in the nest. With rubber knees and dead

feet I begin the long climb down. Nerves are shattered; and my arms tremble when they're not straining against the trunk. For the first forty feet these tall pines only have broken stumps where a branch could have been. They are typically just about wide enough to get the tips of three finders hooked onto - if your grip is strong enough. My eyes are stinging from the sweat, laced with sharp bark chips. I know from past climbs that they're actually very small, they just feel huge. Vision doesn't matter much at this point anyhow; you feel your way down. It's the fear that keeps you hanging on, regripping, and allows you to ignore the skin being ground away on your forearms. Fear is good.

I wonder how many more years I can get my body to keep doing this. My wife doesn't like this particular spring ritual at all. I must admit since becoming a parent I do climb more cautiously and I tend to think of my kids as I'm climbing up; coming down I'm just trying to survive. Fear is good. After touching down to earth all those thoughts fade away. There are no doubts here - no questions; you know why. It's just extreme exuberation; you feel so alive, every little pore on your skin just tingles. You feel everything. The pine pitch stuck to your hands and the scrapes on your forearms, the sun and shadows falling across your face. This is what spring is to me.

It's always rewarding to help falconers find sharpshin nests. Left in the wild only twenty per cent survive through their first year. Having a falconer dedicate themselves to a single bird radically increases their odds of survival. We've already been to 2 active sites this year; helping other falconers find nests and acquire chicks. Each new bird is an adventure waiting to uncoil itself around our lives. Isn't it wonderful that the journey of raising a new eyass starts with such a mixture of friendship, intense emotions and physical effort.



Male Sharpshin on starling



1st yr bird -
nominate race
'gentilis'.
Paler race
'butzoides' in far
N.E. Europe,
smaller, darker
'arrigonii' in
Corsica &
Sardinia.

Adult ♂
'gentilis',
typical of
N. Europe.



adult in flight,
1yr bird,
slightly
more tawny
than is
usual.



told from
Sparrowhawk
by longer &
narrower wings,
more rounded
tail & more
projecting
head.



adult ♀,
- has redder eye,
finer barring
up to 1/3rd larger
than ♂. Usually has
brownier back. p.snow.

RAPTORS

of Britain & Europe
by PHILIP SNOW.

The **GOSHAWK** [*Accipiter gentilis*] is one of our elusive & most charismatic raptors, & still [largely due to deliberate reintroduction by falconers] coming back from the brink of extinction. Its wide range of prey includes game birds, so It is still persecuted by some sporting estates, who ignore the advantages of having a predator of "pest" species, like corvid, pigeon, Grey Squirrel & Rabbit, & even other raptors, around! Its strongholds are Scotland, Wales & Central England .

Hawk Talk

Melanie's Miracle

John
Matcham

You may remember that in 1997 I wrote of a complaint made by, myself and Andy Bartholomew MRCVS. The story about another so called vet that had not taken what we considered to be sufficient care of a seriously injured wild Buzzard. That keeping it in a box for "twenty seven and a half hours, on the 14/05/97 without proper treatment", was not acceptable. I hope that you also remember the reply that we received from the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons charged with maintaining the standards of its members. It read 'I am asked to say that in all the circumstances no misconduct issue has been identified'.

The attitude towards this bird was always one of complacency due to the seriousness of its injuries. We argued that, 'In this case the bird should have been euthanased'. I was left with a decision I must admit I did not enjoy taking. Keep it alive to prove it was capable of survival not only in captivity but also in the wild, or end it and lose any evidence we may have? If I got it wrong I could lay myself open to the same accusations we had just made about a vet, even if a poor one. As you can see the result of the complaint went nowhere save downhill, but the Buzzard went on to survive its injuries and I predicted a release in 1998. Whoops! How stupid of me. What follows was a great lesson in rehabilitation.

I am driven to write this article because I now to a small degree understand the sentimental attitude to, "saving something", I suppose "it makes us feel good" in the end. An attitude I still find extremely selfish and rarely beneficial to the bird. I still believe that if in the vets and my opinion it has little chance of survival, "euthanasia".

Yet an element of doubt has been placed in my mind by the determination of this wild Buzzard, nothing short of a miracle.

Having been placed in an aviary for a few days alone, little progress was seen. He lay on the ground most of the time. On the few occasions he was seen sitting on a perch a few inches from the ground, he would fall to the earth and lie very still the instant he felt the presence of another creature. A behaviour pattern he was to repeat at a most inopportune moment in later life.

He desperately needed to be with his own kind, the psychological shock of being comatose for a period of five weeks and a week semi-comatose and in the company of Melanie and myself, had been just too much. Feeding him was also a pain in the bum! Some days he would heartily tuck into a Rabbit, others he would just sit and stare at it for days and

we would have to return to minced rat and quail by force. At this point and with the results of the complaint case looming I felt the only reason for keeping this bird alive was to prosecute a human that did not deserve this level of attention. I called my old friend Geoff Dalton and asked him what he felt, I had remembered him peeking over the top of his weathering ground and shaking his head as I informed the public of my understanding of Raptor psychology, attempting to push back the barriers of human ignorance. He confirmed what was in my mind with his usual "wooh", which means, "that's a tough one". But again as always he gave me a little more confidence and encouraged me to go with my initial gut feeling. By this time Melanie had stepped back a bit, she had nursed this bird back to a very basic existence at my request, basically because I could not watch a zombie being force fed three times a day. Now once again the responsibility was all my own, and I could see a serious situation getting worse.

This is the point where humans would have without question failed, and the point where I realised that it should have all been ended earlier.

Time to call in the Cavalry.

Megan and Wantage (Female Common Buzzards).

Megan had flown displays and never really got the hang of it while I was at Geoff'. She just wanted to be unreliable, however when I moved to Wales she found new friends and made life very easy for me. Released at the beginning of a display she would go up, the wild ones would come out, up to seventeen of them on one occasion, I would lie on the ground and describe what was going on and get paid for it. Brilliant!

Wantage was a rescued bird, she had spent several days being chased by children and pelted with stones in a housing estate. The local police called me and Melanie got a taste of high speed driving behind a Police car through Saturday shopping

traffic. She now refuses point blank to follow a Police car anywhere, preferring to be left on the side of the road should the occasion arise to go somewhere in a hurry. Wantage took some persuading even though the Police had cleared the housing estate within one hundred meters save a young couple who were still in bed having just got married. We just didn't have the heart! After realising some madman in his bare feet, (so as not to make a noise), was creeping around behind me for up to half an hour and subsequently having him taken away by the boys in blue, Wantage finally came down to my fist and promptly had her feet swiped from underneath her.

Megan was parent reared and behaved just like any other Buzzard if perhaps a little more stubborn, as for Wantage this bird was an imprint, no noise just lots of patience with humans. Between the two of them they have helped me teach a lot to budding falconers and can always be relied on to offer up the best and the worst kind of behaviour you can imagine. Weights mean nothing to these two. Kept in a large sky light and seclusion aviary together when not at work they might just be the answer to my problems. But would they kill this small and very sick male?

Christmas arrived early that year for Megan and Wantage as a ton of Quail, Rat and Rabbit poured through the door for days. A week later with the wildest looking pair of Buzzards I have seen in a long time I placed our injured friend in with the others. Megan was as wild as ever and was more worried about my presence in the aviary, Wantage watched me carefully.

Once in the aviary, his behaviour was worse than ever not only was he afraid of me, he appeared terrified of the two females Buzzards. I suppose being locked



The bird is examined before release. (the man in the green coat is on the left)

in a confined space with two very large women didn't appeal to me much either, but I didn't suppose I would come to any long lasting damage, so he could stick with the program. After about an hour Megan had lost interest in him entirely and Wantage fell asleep. Four more days of him now sitting on the floor day and night, at least the aviaries were secure and Megan would sort out any intruders. To help them out I left an outside light on, the sight of anything untoward and I could be sure the ladies would let me know. Each morning I half expected to find him dead, from the cold or eaten. Then one day about two weeks later there he was, sitting between the two of them on their favourite perch. Again the responsibility was out of my hands now only time, good food and the best of company would tell.

Winter came and went, as did the hope of a 1998 release, his feathers had so much shock damage that at least another year in captivity would be required. Spring 1999 would be the next good release time, when young Buzzards are driven from their parental territories and it is politically correct to be on the move looking for a mate or a patch of real-estate with Rabbits. To move or be released at any other time would be very risky for a relatively weak bird. No matter how big the aviary or how well you have flown a bird, they are just not as fit and healthy as a wild one when they first go out. If they survive a week in the wild when released during a lean time of the year, it's just luck. Never release a bird into an established breeding territory. I made that mistake once and spent a week following a bird day and night so that the residents didn't kill her. It wasn't pretty. A year later she returned to us at home still carrying the identification tag, she tried to chase Megan and Wantage out of their aviary, and she had a mate in tow. The two of them dive-bombed the aviary for a few days, got in to another argument with the locals and then left.

In June 1998 having searched for three and a half years Melanie and I finally found a house hidden away on the edge of civilisation and in the middle of a conservation area, with enough room for all the birds and my school. This created a real

problem, to move my other birds would be easy. Geoff and a few others, who shall remain anonymous, had offered to keep some of them for me, while we moved and built aviaries. Thanks to you all, I know it was just for a few weeks and that it turned in to months. But moving a very wild Buzzard who was not quite fully feathered was going to be very difficult and could mean another year or even two in captivity if it went wrong. The calming effects from Megan

and Wantage could be completely lost and they themselves were already becoming less patient with me. There was only one solution. I begged the vendors of our new house to let me move in with a digger, bricks and mortar before the deal had been struck and they had seen a single penny. The footings were built and a local farmer helped putting in the eight tons of gravel. A friend who keeps birds of prey (JT) and who runs his own farm came along with his farm hand (Kevin) another Landrover and trailer, and the lot came down and was moved in a day, birds and all. On arrival at the new site the aviaries could not go up, in the panic to move I had miscalculated the footings and the birds went back to JT'. He only had an open mesh aviary and the inevitable happened, two broken primaries on the left wing, feathers numbered two and three.

JT is one of the most kindly and patient men I know and slowly each evening he would approach the aviary with a great deal of caution and place food through the mesh and quietly sneak away. After a few weeks the birds began to settle down and would allow him to approach without too much excitement. Then came spring 1999.

Nearly two years on and with the least possible amount of human contact, he sat there on the perch as though nothing had happened, still with two broken primaries on the left wing from the previous moult it was now or never. I had to test his ability to survive. After all of this time did he still have the fight to tackle the wild left in him? He certainly did not like humans we had achieved that much and he did



Andy's expression said it all

not show any of the original psychological problems, swaying and lying down on the ground. By slowly reducing the food in the aviary we saw that he would make every effort to get his share and so Christmas came early again, Quail, Rats and Rabbits in good spring quantities, for a healthy release.

The Gamekeeper from the Estate where he had originally been found was not keen to see him returned home, the risk from a lead overdose seemed far too high. A new site had to be found.

Wildlife Liaison Officer Sheila Wright went to work and went to see the man in a green coat and cap, (for obvious reasons his and others mentioned in this article remain anonymous and their whereabouts kept secret) seen in one of the photos. He is well known for his care of Raptors keeping an eye on our population of Red Kites over the Chilterns. He would be charged with keeping an eye on our Buzzard.

Conditions were good over the Chilterns, with the weather calm for several weeks and a similar forecast. A guardian to watch over him and an Andy Bartholomew BVSc MRCVS who had been great throughout and who had now more or less recovered from an altercation with a large horse, was ready to walk up an even larger hill, we were off.

Early one morning this April I entered into the aviary for only the third time in nearly two years, Wantage was there to greet me landing just over my shoulder only moving away if I moved towards her. Megan as usual tried to find a hiding place to avoid capture at all cost. The wild one, still not named, as I thought it would bring bad luck, went nuts! Fortunately I have caught hundreds of birds and there is a knack to it if you are really quick and have good eyesight. It has a degree of personal risk involved and I do not recommend it to anyone. I normally move in waving my left hand in the air to attract the birds attention and with my right hand whip away his feet. However he was not having any of it. Plan B is usually more dangerous, as he flies over my head grab his feet. However it is extremely impor-



He just lay there for what seemed like a lifetime.

tant to go with the flow so as not to cause injury to the bird, especially if I only get one leg, this has led to being grabbed in the groin on several occasions narrowly missing certain particulars over the years. This was the method used and a clean capture resulted in no more feather damage. We all left for the hills.

Fortunately for Andy no walking was required and a Landrover took us all the way. High on the hill at about eight O'clock I reached into the Landrover and removed the bird from its box, once under control Andy moved in for the final pre-flight inspection. Just a closer look at an odd growth the bird had always had on its tongue Andy checks the Keel and gives me his opinion carefully watched by our Buzzards new guardian and Photographed by Sheila.

Andy's expression as I walked away from the Landrover said it all, "Its alive and physically whole, mentally who knows and I don't believe what I'm seeing". If I had seen Andy's face as I walked away I would not have released the bird. He is no expert on Raptors as he always reminds me but he is a damn good vet.

I carefully laid him on the ground, (throwing a bird in the air may be spectacular but it is very stupid), I slowly and quietly stepped back out of sight behind him. What came next was possibly the loneliest time of my life. He just lay there for what seemed a lifetime. Just me and this Buzzard and I got it wrong! BIG TIME!

I dared not move in to grab him in case

he was just making up his mind, yet if I left it too late he could fly off to a tree, go into shock and die or be killed. "Go on mate off you go, don't let yourself down now". And in a second, hardly time for Sheila to take a photo, he was gone.

He landed about three hundred meters away and about twenty feet up in a tree. The wind was high on top of the hill and the landing precarious, he let out a loud Keeeoow proclaiming his return. In the distance we heard another Buzzard return the call and for the first time I walked away from a release without watching the results and left him to his new guardian. Perhaps at that point both Melanie and I were tired of watching over him after such a long time with few signs of hope, walking away was too easy.

We heard nothing from his guardian for weeks and I must admit I sentimentally for the first time did not want to hear the worst, I had never been sentimental about any living thing before. Then he was sighted, a month after the release, with three Red Kites and another larger Buzzard scavenging on a Deer carcass,



.....in a second, hardly time for Sheila to take a photo, he was gone.

good news at last. Then three weeks ago he was sighted again and a phone call from Sheila confirmed that he has a mate and a nest and she is sitting.

Soon he will lose the broken feathers that identify him and he will be on his own for evermore.

For "Melanie's Miracle" I thank you all especially Pablo Nart from Spain the vet who worked with me through the night of 14/05/97 and trusted my judgement. I believe we were very lucky or was it really a miracle?

Till next time
John Matcham

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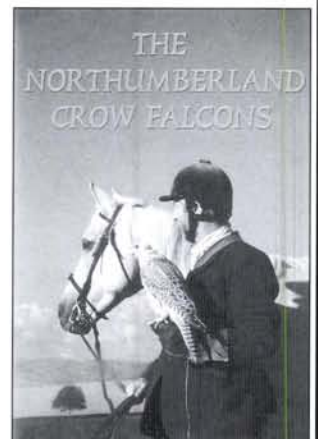
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Game Cookery

Jose Souto

Many of us who practise falconry tend to allow our birds to reap all the rewards of a day out hawking. I agree that the hawks and falcons deserve their just reward, but now and then the falconer could put one in the pot if he or she knew what to do with it, but to my amazement not many do.

I, by trade am a Chef and have been a falconer for the past eight years. Because of my job I have always been interested in the cooking and eating of game to the point that I have eaten a lot of the game caught by my hawks.

We can trace many of the game species in this country back to Roman times. The Romans enjoyed all sorts of game and if they went to a country that did not have a species that they were partial to, they simply took it with them as they did with the Rabbit and Pheasant. Some of these animals escaped and set up home in their new environments (good old Romans' I say, where would most of us be without rabbits?).

Game is not difficult to cook if you understand what you are cooking and how to treat it. With feathered game, the big question is usually "do we hang it and if so, for how long?" When a hawk catches a game bird or it is shot they are in 'getting away' mode, therefore the adrenaline levels are high in the bird's body. If the meat is then not allowed time to relax, this can affect the flavour and taint it. So, going by this, to answer the first part of the question, yes, game should be hung. The second part is harder to answer and has been argued about from country to country and person to person. Another reason for hanging game is to tenderise it; the gut of a dead animal is the first part of it to decompose. As the gut decomposes it releases enzymes into the animals' body, these enzymes will tenderise the meat and give it its 'gamey' flavour. The longer you hang game, the stronger the gamey flavour or, to use the proper word the high-

er game will become. Game should be hung in a cool dry place with good airflow and should be hung for between one and seven days depending on what it is. I only hang my game for one, but no more than two days, then I pluck, gut it and place it in the freezer this also helps to tenderise it. This I find, is a good rule to follow for feathered game but when it comes to furred game, this should be gutted and hung for one day with small items such as rabbits and hares. Venison should be hung for longer because of the sheer size of the beast. Bleeding large game such as venison is very important so that the blood drains and does not taint the meat. Game birds such as pheasant and partridge can be jointed in the same way you joint a chicken and furred game can be jointed in the same way as a lamb carcass.

Cooking game can be challenging but very rewarding. Because game is of different ages, it can be very difficult to judge how old it is and how long to cook it for. This is what I enjoy about game, the fact that it is not prepacked and artificially bred, it is a wild animal that has had to survive by its own wits and fend for itself. Game is probably the healthiest meat you can eat, it is very low in fat, in fact in many recipes larding fat, or strips of bacon are added to the game before it is cooked to keep it moist.

All game should be handled with great care and should not be overcooked, in fact venison and hare should be served pink. Remember these points and cooking game will be no problem.

RABBITS

(Lepus caeniculus)

Most falconers who fly shortwings or broadwings in this country catch more rabbits than any other quarry.

Rabbits believe it or not originates from Africa and, yes you guessed it, the Romans did as they did with the Pheasants and took rabbits with them all around the world, allowing a few to escape here and there to the frustration of the farming community. Rabbit was widely eaten in this country until myxomatosis hit the wild population and put many people off the idea of eating them. Rabbits have very lean meat like most furred game but unlike other furred game its' flesh is white. The flavour of its flesh, depending on where the rabbits live, can differ. For example, here in the U.K. our rabbits live mainly on pastureland so the rabbits are large and have a very mild flavour. Where as in Spain and Italy, the rabbits are smaller and live in sparse wild scrubland with plenty of wild thyme to eat, which flavours their meat. Again, as with all game the young animals are the best to eat. These are the points to look for when choosing a rabbit for cooking: -

In Young rabbits the ears should be soft and tear easily.

Their teeth should be white and the fur smooth.

Young rabbits are best for roasting and

sautés, the older ones are best left for braising.

This recipe lends its self-well to rabbit although it is a derivative of the old chicken in white wine sauce recipe. Depending on how old your rabbits are, the cooking times may differ slightly so allow your self plenty of time. Because all game is wild and we can only roughly gauge its age, it is hard to put an exact time on how long something will take to cook so don't back yourself in to a corner, allow time to spare.

RABBIT WITH MUSHROOMS, CREAM AND WHITE WINE SAUCE 8 PORTIONS

Young Rabbits
8oz Cup Mushrooms
Small onion
1 Clove Garlic
2/3pt Chicken stock
1pt Double Cream
1/4 pt White Wine
Butter
Salt/Pepper
Parsley

- 1) Skin, gut, and joint rabbits
- 2) Melt some butter in a frying pan and seal the rabbit pieces.
- 3) Remove rabbit from pan and place

in a casserole dish

4) Using the same pan you sealed the rabbit in, melt a little more butter and fry off the finely chopped onions and garlic, followed by 4oz of the mushrooms.

5) Cook mushrooms for two to three minutes, add wine, and reduce by half.

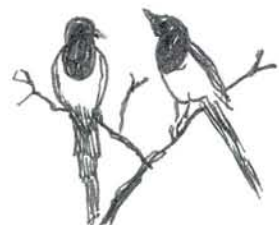
6) Add the stock to the mushrooms, bring to boil, remove from heat and stir in cream.

7) Return sauce to stove and bring to boil pour over rabbits and place them in to oven at gas mark 7/8 or 250/300(C for 1hr then test meat to see if it is cooked and tender.

8) When cooked, remove the rabbit and mushrooms. Place the sauce in a pan to reduce until it is the consistency of double cream so that it coats meat.

9) Discard cooked mushrooms; take the 4oz of the mushrooms you have left and cook them in a little butter, then add them to sauce.

10) Place rabbit in a serving dish coat with sauce and garnish with chopped parsley and serve.





RAPTOR RESCUE

Registered Charity No. 283733

Raptor Rescue is an organisation dedicated to ensuring that all sick and injured birds of prey are cared for by qualified persons and whenever possible they are released back into the wild.

NEST CHECKED - JUST IN TIME

A local farmer (and member of our Charity) telephoned to inform us that he had just caught up a Kestrel which had an obvious problem with one of its wings and was unable to fly. On arrival at the farm I was met by all the family who were eagerly awaiting my verdict on the bird's condition. It was nice to see such genuine concern. The farmer told how they had all spent many hours watching a pair of Kestrels, which were nesting in the field opposite their house and were sure that this bird was the resident male. They also suspected that the nest might contain young.

The injured bird was already in the house and covered with a towel. Obviously handling was kept to a minimum, but whilst transferring the injured bird into the transport box I was able to see that it was a mature adult male (EURING 6^{*}). So it was likely to be one of the birds they had all been watching. It felt quite plump, which immediately gave it an advantage over the often emaciated casualties we usually pick up. However, a particularly nasty looking compound fracture to the ulna (broken wing bone, which has penetrated through the skin) revealed the reason for its lack of flight.

Once the bird was home, glucose lectade was given orally using a syringe and crop tube. Initially 1% of the bird's body weight was given (1ml. per 100g of weight). It was then placed into a darkened and heated hospital unit (ambient temperature between 21-26°C) and left to rest for approximately two hours, hopefully allowing its condition to stabilise. Following this rest period a more detailed examination did not locate any further injuries. After more glucose was administered and a sleeve attached to the tail to prevent any feather damage, we then made the short journey to my vets.

X-rays showed the radius (another wing bone which runs parallel to the ulna) to be intact. This was a bonus because it would act as a natural splint helping to support the fracture. The ulna was broken in more than one place so surgery was employed to insert a stainless steel IM pin^{**} and the wound was closed by stitching. The bird was then placed back into the hospital unit where it received antibiotics, food and lots of rest.

A couple of days later the farmer phoned to say he was concerned because there had been very little activity at the nest. Once a long ladder was located, a nest inspection was carried out and his worries were confirmed. The nest contained three young birds approximately 12 days old, one had died very

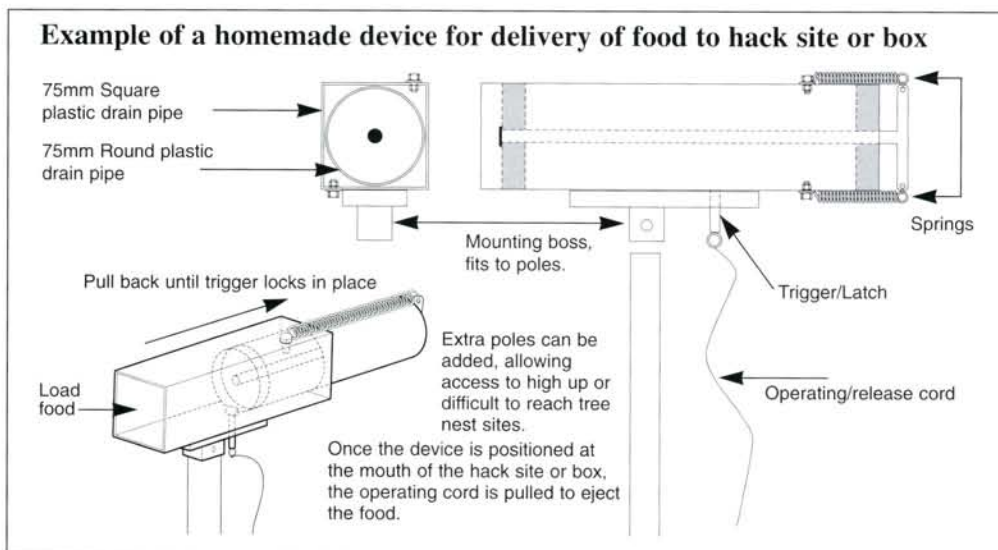
recently. The others were wet and very thin with empty crops and stomachs. It would appear that we checked the nest just in time. The two survivors were taken home and received the usual supportive treatment. Once they had proved they were capable of feeding themselves and they had been marked with BTO rings, it was decided to place them out to what we call a "traditional hack" at their original nest site. This means we have to provide food for the youngsters until they leave the nest and learn how to hunt. This basically involves putting the birds back into their nest, which was a hole in a tree and placing food in the nest in such a way as to minimise any association with people being the food providers. This was achieved by using a food delivery device as shown in the sketch.

After a couple of days out at hack, another nest inspection was carried out. It was good to feel bulging stomachs and I was delighted to see a field vole and the remains of a small bird in the nest, obviously a tell-tale sign that 'Mum' had been paying visits. As the chicks became older more care was required if incorrect imprinting was to be avoided and as branching started (first leaving of the nest before they can fly) great caution was needed to avoid scattering the birds prematurely, which could have been disastrous.

The male bird, now having had the IM pin removed, was looking quite good, flying around a small aviary although obviously not yet fit. Assuming that he would still be attached to his territory and that a visit to the nest site would be inevitable it was decided to continue placing food into the nest and simply release him where found. It was envisaged that he would find continually left food which would keep him going whilst he got fit enough to hunt for himself. The young Kestrels were still in the area, as was the female, when he was released. Food continued to be taken for almost another two weeks before starting to be left. Thereafter, weekly inspections showed no disturbance of any food left, so food back-up was stopped. The male was also marked with a BTO ring, so we may yet hear about this bird again. Should that happen, let's hope that it is in a few years time!

**EURING - Code used by BTO ringers to age a bird.*

***IM pin - Intramedullary pin. Stainless steel pin which is inserted into the hollow section of a long bone to hold it steady whilst it heals.*



For membership enquiries or further information about the Charity please contact any of the Trustees listed below:

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PERFECTLY WONDERFUL

Jemima Parry-Jones

This year has been somewhat hectic for me personally in terms of travel. Normally I manage about one trip a year away from the Centre. I have to go abroad as it is the only way I can actually let go and not think about, phone, or rush home to the Centre! I hasten to add that I do not go and lie on a beach somewhere, I can't think of anything that would drive me round the bend quicker than sitting doing nothing.

I usually go to a conference somewhere in the world. I am lucky enough to be one of the international Directors for the Raptor Research Foundation which is based in the US. This as well the fact that these days I get asked to chair or run sessions gives me a good reason to go. Add to that, most of my most beloved friends come from a very long way off and I love to see them, plus I can put the travel off against tax, and that is a good reason for going. Over the years the Centre has gained a name and credibility in the raptor conservation world and part of this is due to my being able to attend these international conferences. Well that is my excuse for leaving the UK once a year!

But since last August I have been to Africa, Japan, South Carolina, South Carolina, India, Japan and the Philippines - in that order! Probably one of the most interesting trips for others is the one I was lucky enough to make to the Philippines. I had to go to Japan to discuss and finalise a contract that we are doing out there this year, John who was going to be in charge out there at the start of the contract came with me. It seemed silly not to take the chance of going back via the Philippines as we were in their neck of the woods so to speak.

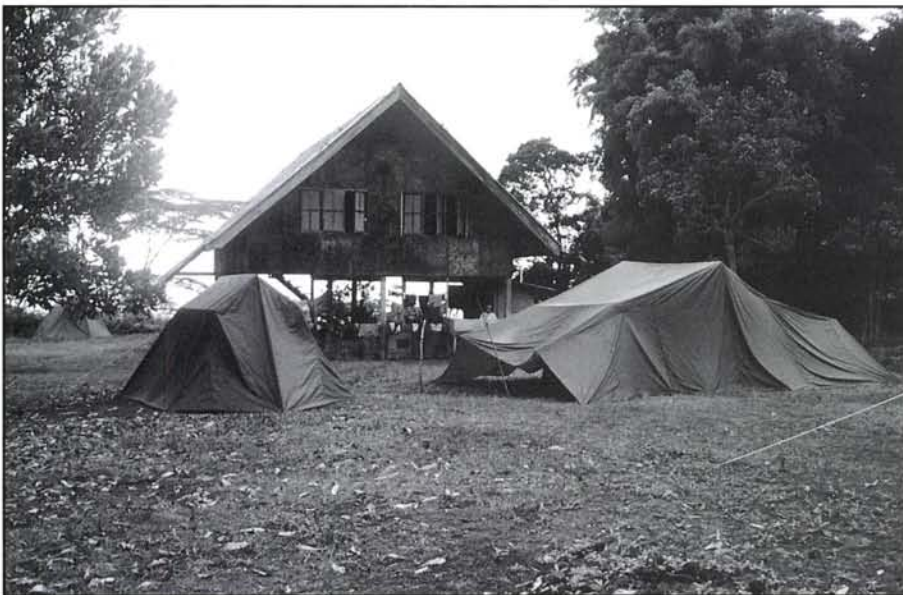


A baby Phillipine Eagle and its 'Mother'

I am a little fanatical about taking hand luggage only, I have lost my luggage five times, once I didn't see it again for over a week and had the telemetry that was in it stolen. So I hate not having my things under my control at all times. The difference between the climate in Japan and the Philippines in February made this interesting packing! It snowed in Japan and was freezing cold, it was wet, warm and muggy in the Philippines. However we managed, although we did not stay in the same place for more than two nights in the whole 13 days of travel and by the time I had packed my hand luggage for the eighth time I would happily have thrown the whole bloody lot away!

We arrived in Manila, which is the capital and is in the north of the Philippines. The Philippine Eagle Foundation is based in Davao, on the Island of Mindanao which is in the south. So we had to stay the night in Manila and fly out the next morning to Davao. The plane left at 5am! So we had to be at the airport at 3am - great! My favourite sort of time to be at an airport. Still it didn't really matter as I get very little sleep abroad anyway. As we sat at the airport, with every seat and standing space full of people, I chanced to look at the newspaper the man sitting next to me was reading. And there, right on the front page was a picture of a newly hatched baby Philippine Eagle! It had been hatched a couple of days before. It turned out that everyone at home actually knew this before I did, as Dennis Salvador - the Director of the Philippine Eagle Foundation had emailed everyone involved with the news. But because of the time difference and the fact that we had been travelling for four days, I had not been in email contact with home and so did not have the news forwarded to me. It was a lovely surprise and I grabbed a newspaper on the plane.

We got to Davao and were met by Dennis who took us for a great breakfast and then to the offices of the Philippine Eagle Foundation. They are well organised with good space and also a very nice truck sponsored in part by The Peregrine Fund. After chatting to various people at the offices and watching a video of the baby Philippine Eagle hatching, we put our luggage into a van and were driven about an hour out of Davao to the town outside which the Center where the captive eagles are kept. We were put up in a



Study and bird watching campsite.



The Phillipine landscape

really nice resort with glorious gardens and large wooden chalet type housing dotted around the grounds. After dropping off our gear we went straight up to the Center and I saw my first Philippine Eagle. Actually the first one I saw was the baby and perfectly wonderful it was too.

Especially as last year I changed over all my incubators to the Brinsea Octagon 20 and had a really good year hatch wise, far better than previously with my old incubators. Denis had visited us last year and between the two of us and Brinsea we had managed to get two incubators subsidised and out to the Philippines. The new baby hatched in the Brinsea Octagon 20 - and this after a break of six years since the last successful hatching. Not only that, but it was the first baby to hatch without assistance. So pretty well done Brinsea and the Philippine Eagle Foundation I would say!

We then looked round the Center and saw the full sized version. Boy are they spectacular!!!! They really are stunning eagles, although not as heavy as the Steller's Sea-eagle or the female Martial Eagle, their very long tail and that huge slender beak makes them look enormous. Sadly the two slides that I have of me in the same picture are very out of focus, but they do at least give an impression of size. After we had seen all the eagles - some are on view to the visiting public, some are in private aviaries to assist with the breeding. They also have a number of other raptors. White-bellied Sea-eagles, Serpent Eagles, a couple of Philippine Hawk Eagles, Brahminy Kites, Grey-headed Fishing Eagles and the Giant Scops Owls and I forget what else!

We talked, looked, sat in the sun and generally relaxed, which was nice, as things had been a little hectic up till that point. Denis knew that I really wanted to see Philippine Eagles in the wild, so after various discussions on the phone it was decided that three of the research team would take John and I out into the field to see eagles. The only problem was that in the area closest to the Center, an army

Brigadier General had just been kidnapped and was being held hostage in exchange for political prisoners. Consequently the Philippine Eagle team did not want to take us in there in case we got grabbed and used as hostages - although who the hell would want to pay anything for me is another matter!

So it was decided to take us to an area that was safer, but farther away - five hours away in the P fund truck! The catch was that the road there was a bit rough - that was the understatement of the flaming century. We left at 9.00am in the morning and drove - the road seemed OK to me - but that was just to lull us into a false sense of security - then we hit the rough stuff, and boy was it rough!! Three hours of literally hanging onto the seat or straps, depending on where you were sitting. It was exhausting!!

However we got there and then waited for a guide to take us in. We switched into another somewhat older vehicle and drove through the rain - well it was a tropical RAIN forest and it did rain - almost all the time we were in there! We drove to where we were going to collect a pony which was going to carry all our stuff, and boy was it loaded, although I hasten to add - I carried my own stuff! Then we climbed the hill / mountain where the eagles lived. It was very odd to see this mountain which should have been covered in rain forest but only the very tip was still clothed in trees. All the way up we could cross huts and fences and land

tilled to grow crops. Even in the most unlikely places, it was really very sad. You could see how the eagles and everything else that relied on the forest had slowly been pushed and squeezed out.

Although I have seen many films and slides of deforestation, it is not until you see it for real that it really sinks in. But on the other hand there are people who need to farm to be able to survive. The old policy of slash and burn has changed a little too. Where once the land had been used, it was then left and eventually secondary forest would re-grow, now with the pressure from high population the land was kept in use and so nothing had the chance to re-grow.

We got up the mountain and to a lodge where we stayed the night. It was getting close to dark when we arrived, so although we had a short walk into the forest, we could not go far before returning to the lodge. There were a group of bird watchers staying in the bedroom area of the lodge, so we slept downstairs, which would have been fine although I did get a little damp. However the flaming bird watchers decided they wanted to see an owl before it was light so they asked for Breakfast at 4am!!!!!! This meant that the people looking after them had to be up and getting breakfast in the downstairs bit at 3.30am and this was where we were sleeping. So we had to get up. I was not amused, then can you believe it about 12 bird watchers trogged off in the pitch dark with torches on their heads towards the noise of a scops owl and wondered why the damn thing flew away long



The Phillipine Eagle

SERVING EVERYBODY?

Mik Standing

Laws are funny things. I've always held the view that laws are meant to be guidelines that tell us how we should behave rather than how we must behave. I see a clear distinction in say, doing 100mph along an empty M4 at three in the morning and driving past my local primary school doing 40mph at home time. Both scenarios break the law but one is mind numbingly more stupid than the other. Unfortunately, more kids are run down leaving school than late night accidents occurring on any stretch of the M4. Well, that's what I'll tell the judge next week...

Some laws can be instantly recognised as sensible. Murdering your husband is not an acceptable alternative to divorce; using a suitably modified side by side to make an unauthorised withdrawal from your local Building Society is considered impolite; and the restricted broadcasting of Eastenders, no more than three times a week, are undeniably sensible laws accepted by the majority of society (actually one of these isn't a law but should be). Then there are the laws that on occasion we may not see in quite the same way; failing to be less than honest with the Inland Revenue, forgetting to renew our MOT, driving at 35mph in a 30 zone. After all, these aren't very important laws, you've no evil intent, and nobody gets hurt. Until a child runs out from between parked cars...

My view of the law is wrong. All laws, whether you agree with them or not, are there for a reason. The reason may not be blindingly obvious but that doesn't mean they don't apply to you.

Once upon a time, in a land far, far-away I was a falconer just like you. I don't consider myself to be one now but that's not your fault. When I flew my hawks the last thing I wanted was legislation that would stop me from doing what I lived to do. Apart from anything else, I didn't see that I was doing anything wrong and I certainly did not want my chosen lifestyle to become a politicians platform for reform. Everything changes, nothing remains the same and I've swapped field and moor for four walls and a wheelchair. I try to fly my merlin but that's another story...

These days I welcome legislation that ensures I have the right to be doing what I want to do. I positively endorse a law that enables me to interact on the same level as you, to make use of the services that you take for granted and to give me

the power to create change beyond your goodwill. You take to the streets to protest against change, I handcuff myself to a bus to promote it. One citizen's shackle is another's freedom.

On December 2nd 1996, parts 1 & 2 of the Disability Discrimination Act came into force with a resounding whimper whilst doing a poor imitation of anti-discrimination legislation. For those of you who have been visiting other dimensions, don't give a damn or think it doesn't apply to them, the DDA is intended to prevent discrimination against disabled people in Employment and our Access to Goods, Facilities and Services.

When the DDA was announced, the UK's disability organisations rushed forward to prove that evolution comes through conflict by arguing amongst themselves. Some said we should accept the legislation as, after all is said and done, any Act is better than no Act. Unless you're the Spice Girls of course. However, others felt that it would be more appropriate to reject the DDA and carry on campaigning for full and enforceable civil rights. To some extent the argument was left unresolved as, like it or not, the DDA exists and the fight for civil rights has gone on unabated.

The list of laws for the DDA is impressively long. Trifling points such as confusing definition of disability and the persistent use of terms like 'justifiable discrimination' and 'reasonable adjustment' are only slightly less infuriating that the initial absence of any enforcement agency. Add to this the lack of Legal Aid and the virtual escape of transport and education and the Act is almost as useful as a chocolate fireguard.. Perhaps DDA should stand for Doesn't Do Anything.

But wait for it, its 30 months or so months since the Act came into force and the Labour government has a tougher, more aggressive view of the DDA. Sitting comfortably, something to hold on to? Good, I've a bit of startling news for you and we don't want any unpleasantness, do we? Before the last General Election the Labour Party made some pretty big promises to disabled people. Little things like full and enforceable civil rights and a 'beefing up' of the DDA (considering the BSE scare at the time this may or may not have been the best way of putting it) and, believe it or not, the Labour government has actually come through with a few of its promises. By the by, and anagram of Prime

Minister Tony Blair is I'm irritably omnipresent. Honest.

On 1st October 1999, Part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 will come into force. "So what?" I hear you ask. Well, if you provide any service to the public - whether paid for or provided free of charge - from October 1st you'll have a duty under law to provide auxiliary aids and equipment to enable a disabled person to use that service.

Of course, since the DDA came into force you've had a duty to provide a service to disabled people on the same terms and conditions as non-disabled people. Also, if you employ 15 or more staff, you've had duties under Part 1 of the Act. But you knew that, didn't you?

The DDA has been a controversial piece of legislation. The commercial sector, with a few notable exceptions, has tried to find ways out of its responsibilities by employing increasingly imaginative ways to use the Act's inherent get-out clauses. Disabled people and their organisations have been pretty down on the Act as it is vague, easily misunderstood legislation that fails to ensure equality of opportunity for disabled people. Solicitors have welcomed the DDA 'though I can't imagine why.

Whatever our opinion of the DDA up until now, October 1st sees a dramatic change in the responsibilities of service providers in the UK. The Act covers all service providers irrespective of size, turnover or service. It applies as much to the small corner shop as it does to the national supermarket chain, to the SME as much as the multinational conglomerate. The only important difference will be the service provider's available resources to make reasonable adjustment. Basically, if you can afford to do it then the courts will expect you to.

The tricky bit is deciding what auxiliary aid or equipment is appropriate in each situation, the Act doesn't actually define this so it's up to the service provider to decide. Let's hope you get it right as there's no ceiling on the amount of damages a court can award. Auxiliary aids are things like infrared loop systems for hearing impaired people, literature in an accessible media for visually impaired people or people with learning difficulties, or temporary ramps for wheelchair users. Why only temporary? Well, Part 4 of the DDA is all about removing physical barriers that prevent a disabled person from using the service and that doesn't

come in until 2004. Nothing to stop you doing it now though, it's far more cost effective in the long run.

Still unsure if this has anything to do with you? Well, apart from the fact that a minimum of 6.5 million people in the UK have some form of physical, sensory or mental impairment - so this law may directly affect you or your family - if you provide any form of service to the public you have a duty under the DDA. That includes falconry equipment suppliers, falconry centres, falconry schools and any other variety of visitor attraction. Falconry Clubs may also be included depending on your definition of private.

That's not all folks. From October 1st you'll need a policy that enables a disabled person to use your service, yet the common practice of giving disability a brief mention in your equal opportunities policy (you do have one don't you?) will not suffice. If you end up in court you'll also have to prove that your policy has been put into practice, if it's stayed on the shelf you are likely to lose. You also need to review all your other existing policies to ensure they enable a disabled person to use your service.

Come October 1st you'll have to have all this in place, not begin thinking about it then but actually be ready on that date.

I suggest you call me, Mik Standing, at Inclusive Practice on 01222 867294 or email me at mik@lspace.demon.co.uk Inclusive Practice isn't there to make you feel guilty or just tell you where you've gone wrong. Inclusive Practice exists to help you get it right, to work with you to create an inclusive practice of your own.

**IF YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT
DISABILITY EQUALITY IS JUST
ASK A DISABLED PERSON,**

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COMMITMENT

Doug McCarlie

This article is aimed at giving prospective falconers an insight into some of the everyday problems and turmoil he or she may come across. If you don't then consider yourself extremely fortunate. I know quite a few falconers and most, if honest, can relate to what I am about to write.

Just for the record I am 31 years old with a partner and three kids aged from two and a half months to eleven years old. I work five and a half days a week as a landfill supervisor. Landfill is a posh word for a rubbish tip, and at present I am flying both long and broadwings. My day usually starts at 5.30 am. The birds are boxed and put in the car, yes in the car, they come to work with me. Because landfill is such a controversial subject the operators must try to keep scavenging birds to a minimum, so my longwings get to fly, weather permitting, once or twice a day. I also employ a full-time falconer. At this point you are probably thinking what flipping problems can this lucky sod have, flying his birds every day and yes as far as that side of things go I am extremely fortunate.

Right then, down to the nitty gritty. Your family, her/him indoors, the ankle-biters (by that I mean the dear children). Trying to maintain a happy balance between keeping birds of prey and family life is the hardest job I have ever done.

Now Mel, as she is affectionately known, is pretty patient, but on most days at least six out of seven, I drive her quite mad, dashing about after birds, dogs and ferrets. Mel is also the MkII model, more advanced than the MkI, who couldn't cope with firstly me and secondly falconry, and I only flew a Harris hawk then so Mel has saintly properties.

Most problems really arise when I return home after a hard day flying the falcons. Oh and supervising landfill operations, this is usually about 5.45pm. The family want to eat but first I have to attend to the dogs, then put the birds into their night quarters and lastly feed the ferrets, by which time it's nearer 6.30pm. I'll then sit down to feed myself after something like, "don't blame me if it's shrivelled up", or "your son needs feeding too". At this point I normally do some creeping and promise to wash up or make a nice cuppa.

Other problem times are holidays, not just any Tom, Dick or Harry can look after our feathered friends while we are away. Another classic is Christmas time, while you're visiting family and itching to get back to feed the birds and put them away. I do tend to let the birds have Christmas day off from flying, no sorry Mel stops me from flying them!

If you can't do much flying during the week then weekends are your only hope, just when the grass needs cutting, the windows painting, and the car mending.

Well having considered the time involved, how about the dosh?

Let's consider you've got the money for your bird. It will need quality furniture and quality food. Where will it live during the day and then

there's its' night shelter. This has added up to a lot more than just the birds' purchase price. Don't forget in the meantime the kids need new shoes, the car needs taxing and the mortgage interest rate looks set to go up again. Falconry is a pretty expensive obsession, and that's what it will become if you want to overcome the problems it will cause in your life. Guns and fishing rods can be cleaned, put away and forgotten until another day, the bird requires your care and attention and is never far from your thoughts 24 hours a day, just as your family require you too!

So before you go to the expense, the sweat and the tears of falconry, make sure that come hell or high water your family know the commitment that owning a bird of prey requires and that they support you. Then you will enjoy the most fulfilling field sport that I have ever taken part in. Otherwise be warned solicitors are very expensive as is child maintenance.



Dougie with his son Patrick and his lanner Calder

Food Maketh The Ferret!

James McKay



Ferrets have been around for thousands of years - they're even mentioned in the Old Testament. Because of this, some (too many) ferret keepers seem to think that there is nothing new, and many old-timers insist on doing everything exactly as did their fathers, and their fathers before them. This is NOT the way to go on at any pastime. If we can't move with the times, and adapt to modern ways, we can justifiably be referred to as dinosaurs - and we all know what happened to those wee beasties.

When it comes to feeding ferrets, many people are so entrenched in their beliefs that they are being foolish and unfair to themselves, their ferrets and their bank balance. I'm sure that readers will realise that any animal that is fed a top quality balanced diet is obviously going to be fitter for working and also for living; this means less illness and, therefore, fewer vets bills.

It is of course true that, until recently, ferret owners in the UK had little choice as to the type of diet which they gave their animals. In the absence of any true ferret food, owners fed butchers' offcuts, "pet mince", road casualties, rabbits, game, tinned cat and dog food, complete cat and dog food, or even milk sops (bread and milk). Although feeding complete carcasses will give a reasonable diet, that ferrets survived on such diets as milk sops is testimony to the hardiness of the animal, rather than the informed actions of the owners. Unfortunately, because so many ferrets did survive on such poor diets, many owners did - and still do - believe that the diet must be satisfactory. Indeed, I have had several discussions with ferret owners who are convinced that milk sops are the only natural diet for ferrets, and all else is wrong

and harmful (not to mention a waste of money).

The main problems associated with feeding complete carcasses, such as rabbits, are supply and demand, smell and flies. During the summer, when ferrets breed, more food is needed, but fewer rabbits are available, because the ferrets are incapable of hunting - they're too busy breeding! And during the summer months, every ferreter knows that, within minutes of placing a rabbit carcass in a ferret's cage, a huge swarm of flies descend from nowhere. Combined with the extra smell that warm weather brings with it, little wonder that many ferreters suffer regular ear bashings from their wives during the long summer months.

A WIND OF CHANGE

In 1994, British ferret keepers saw the biggest advance in ferret keeping since polecats were first domesticated to become ferrets. In that year, UK shops began selling the first British food designed as a complete diet for ferrets - "Ferret Complete" - manufactured by James Wellbeloved, a company much respected as a manufacturer of top quality dog and cat foods. The credit for this action rests squarely with one of the company's sales staff - Mrs Maxine Quill. She convinced her employers that many ferret owners thought just as highly of their pets as did the owners of dogs, cats, horses and other animals. And so, after thoroughly researching the subject, the company began to manufacture a complete ferret food. Rather than simply "tweak" existing diets, designed for either dogs or cats, the company started from scratch, using and extrapolating data gained from mink and ferrets foods from various countries.

In the spring of 1994, just before its launch, senior directors from James Wellbeloved approached us here at the National Ferret School, to see if we could offer any constructive criticism and/or advice on the new feed. I admit that I was highly sceptical, especially as the food was being marketed as being suitable for all life stages of the ferret, but as the School, (which was formed in 1991) has the motto "Improving the ferret's lot through education", we were very interested in the project. Consequently, we launched long-term (ie open-ended) feeding trials using our own quite extensive collection of ferrets.

FEEDING REGIMES

At that time, we had approximately 40 ferrets, all of differing ages and consisting of both sexes. These were split into 3 groups, viz:

GROUP A - Fed on Ferret Complete ONLY

GROUP B - Fed on a diet of flesh (mainly whole carcasses) of rabbits, chickens, game birds etc, with NO Ferret Complete.

GROUP C - Fed on a combination of the two aforementioned diets, ie Ferret Complete was fed on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and flesh (as above) on the rest of the week.

All three groups consisted of ferrets which were regularly used in ferreting operations, and also in displays and demonstrations. With the exception of young (ie less than 9 month old) stock and nursing jills, all ferrets were fasted on one day each week (usually Sunday). Every ferret used in the test was positively identified with the insertion of an Identichip. This was placed under the skin above the rib cage. As young animals were added to the colony, they too were chipped (at about 12 weeks). All records were stored on a PC.

The amounts of food given to the ferrets were varied according to the individual animal's condition, in an attempt to maintain all of the ferrets as "normal". Simple condition scoring techniques were used to divide the animals into one of three categories - underweight, normal or overweight - and the amount of feed adjusted accordingly. Throughout all of the test period (which is continuing), every ferret was given constant access to a supply of fresh, clean drinking water, delivered via gravity feed bottles for animals in individual cages, and from poultry drinkers in courts, where up to 15 ferrets may be housed together in a "business" (the collective noun for ferrets).



HOUSING

All ferrets - hobs (males) and jills (females) - are housed together in courts during the non-breeding season, ie September to March. As the males come into breeding condition (in early spring), they become more antagonistic towards other males, and so they are moved into individual cubs (hutches), where they remain throughout the breeding months, until their testes go back.

As jills come into oestrus, they are placed with an appropriate male - either a hob or a hoblet (a vasectomised male) for between 24 and 72 hours, after which they are returned to their own court. They are removed from this court and placed in their own cub about 14 days before the expected birth. When the kits (young) are about 8 weeks, the whole family is then moved back into the relevant court, along with other ferrets.

RESULTS

During the test period to date, we have not experienced any major problems associated with the feeding of "Ferret Complete". There is only one group which shows any marked differences, and that is Group A, the one fed exclusively on "Ferret Complete". This group attracts fewer flies and produces fewer faeces than the other groups and - to many most important of all - smells less! This latter result must surely be attributed to the extract of yucca in the complete food, which acts as a deodorising agent.

No breeding ferrets fed on "Ferret

Complete" have shown any abnormalities which can be linked to diet, and all kits produced by such animals have grown into sound, healthy adults; we have never had one case of the 'staggers' (osteodystrophy), where kits have poorly developed bones, and so cannot walk properly. The ferrets have been more than able to carry out their working duties adequately, and show no disinclination to hunt rabbits. All ferrets, including kits, are fed on dry "Ferret Complete", and this has caused no problems.

We take in quite a few ferrets from the local RSPCA and other shelters, and some of these ferrets would not initially eat the food offered in this manner. The problem was easily solved; we simply wet the kibble with warm water. This makes it more palatable (the difference in taste is the same as that between a cold and a warm sausage roll). Once the animals are feeding on the food, the amount of water is reduced over a period of a few days, until they are eating it dry.

CONCLUSION

So impressed have we been by the results of our ongoing feed trials, that we



can now thoroughly recommend the food to all ferret owners. We feel certain that owners, vets and ferrets will all see the benefits of feeding such a premium quality complete diet.

James McKay is a zoologist and director of the National Ferret School, which runs courses and publishes articles and leaflets on all aspects of ferrets. Further information is available from the School, on receipt of an A4 size sae with 50p stamp.

The National Ferret School, PO Box 61, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S45 0YU. Tel/Fax 01246 591590.

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THE COMPLETE RABBIT AND HARE HAWK Martin Hollinshead

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Top falconers comment on specific issues. Ernst Lutger gives his thoughts on Siberian Goshawks and also tells of some fascinating rabbit hawking with a saker falcon. Craig Culver adds positive flavour to the ferruginous hawk text, and Don Hunley gives a thrilling account of hawking snowshoe hares in Alaska with a goshawk.

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Modern day FALCONRY COURSES

A must for any serious beginner

Lee William Harris

**Owning a raptor
is not an extension
of our own pathetic attention.**

Without doubt, both the sport of falconry and birds of prey are receiving increased TV, media and public exposure. Game fairs and country shows often appear barren if there is not a bird of prey flying display team embellishing the arena throughout the day. One such show that I attended saw the falconer unexpectedly taken ill. There was no alternative but for the display to be cancelled. Never had I heard such shouting and screaming from the paying public, who demanded their money back, arguing that they had only come to see the birds flying. People really were quite perturbed and they made the fact known, most of it in an undiscerning way, to the poor old stewards, *as if it were their fault*. Although many other events were going on in and around the arena, it is the melodrama of observing raptors and owls flying which people find most tantalising. I'm sure few would have remonstrated in quite the same manner if for instance the ferret racing had been called off.

People from all walks of life are mesmerised by the talents of birds of prey. The beauty, stealth and majesty of these winged hunters lends itself to thousands as they emulate the pinnacle of power and freedom. The majority of admirers will never expound the desire to look into hawk ownership, as observing them at display is delectation enough, but many others will seek the principles of becoming falconers. Although it is flying displays which bring falconry to the attention of the majority, this is never without worry, as they may envisage our sport as easier than it actually is. This would prove complete folly as we are all aware that it is of the most demanding entertainments in the world. People only see it as flying birds at displays and not the limitless time, effort and commitment which the Austringer would have put into each and every one. Although the good which comes from displays far outweighs any bad, I have often been concerned that a few will see the barn owl for instance as making a viable pet, when in fact nothing is further from the truth. Personally I am a big fan of displays and, when not working myself, will go out of my way to frequent shows and see old friends, if only to discuss some of our more embarrassing moments within the dreaded arena. If displays do in fact bring more people into our sport, then I for one welcome this, as new blood is something that all sports require. Fresh faces will help our sport grow and give it more stance in modern day society, as

there is safety in numbers *as they say*.

It is vital that if newcomers do wish to get involved, and take on the ownership of a raptor, then it should be for the right reasons. Possession of a bird of prey is not an extension of ones' ego nor are the birds status symbols for our own pathetic attention. They are to be respected and given the high quality of life which they richly deserve, and used for the ancient sport and/or educational and conservation purposes. For if not, any casual interest could leave enduring damage to our sports' standing and those of us which try to carry it out to the best of our ability. The beginner must appreciate the merits of falconry and its values. It is here that attendance on a well-structured falconry course will prove most beneficial as it will give one a very good grounding. Realising that falconry would not suit your current lifestyle whilst on a course and before any solid commitment and unnecessary financial outlay has been incurred, is far better than buying a bird, constructing a weathering, and purchasing all the necessary equipment, only to realise that you do not have the time to enjoy the sport as it was intended. Early recognition of these and many other facets is better for you and any bird which you may have prematurely purchased.

Do not attempt to learn from a book(s) and/or videos alone. Because few are lucky enough to personally know a practising falconer, occasionally one may be inclined to gain information the cheapest and easiest way. If you want to progress in the right direction, and benefit from falconry then you must attend a well-run course. If it is the price tag that puts you off then forget falconry altogether as you will never be able to afford a bird of prey and all the initial and ongoing expense that comes with it.

One year we had a student attend a three-day course. He told me that he had saved for many weeks to pay for a few days, and that afterwards there was no way that he could afford to purchase a bird of his own. His philosophy was however, to attend a course and then join a club where he could be around raptors and falconers. By attending their field meetings there could be the possibility of flying a club bird. He could practice the many basic skills which he was about to

learn on the course and next year, once he had bought all the necessary equipment and constructed a suitable weathering, he would purchase a red-tailed buzzard. This guy had obviously put a great deal of sensible thought into his overall structure. I can tell you this, he did acquire a Retail and is now a very, very competent falconer and enjoying the sport to the full.

Today's beginner is in a rather favoured position. Never before have so many helpful books and videos been available, and never before have there been so many organisations running courses. Equipment suppliers are in abundance and more and more clubs are accessible to help and guide those who wish to be a part of this rewarding pursuit. While books and videos are extremely helpful, unfortunately they are unable to answer individual, specific questions and it is here where a falconry course is again advantageous. The beginner will be receiving professional guidance from those who have not only been participating for many years, but moreover, they will be experienced and proficient in all departments.

Before booking a course the beginner must put some thought into *course selection*, making sure that the final choice covers the aspects which they envisage as most important. Attending a course will not be cheap so one will require precise tutoring within these key areas. After all, they intend that one is skilled enough upon completion to warrant ownership of a bird of prey, train her and get her hunting. It would be foolhardy to allocate your time for a course and on completion feel they have let you down as it did not cover your own individual needs. I'm sure that most falconry schools are committed to excellence and endeavour to offer the best possible service. However, I have also known of individuals who have only been practising falconers themselves for a few years and set up business tutoring others. This is an alarming thought as it means the next cohort of falconers would not have been taught as thoroughly as they could and should have been. This cannot be justified as after a measly couple of years no one could be competent enough to set up shop. I believe the sport of falconry to be so in-depth that no one ever truly understands its' many specialised areas. Personally I have been around raptors for more than twenty years and still I feel I know only a fraction of what there is to know. For me, however, this is one of the sports' appeals. One never stops learning

Attending the right school.

unless one chooses to.

The beginner who is looking towards attending a course should contact as many outlets as possible, asking for pertinent literature to be sent. You should receive an information sheet from each school which will detail the principal areas that the course will cover. Here at the Eagle Owl School of Falconry, we host either one day, three day or five day courses. The one day is generally an experience day. Aimed towards those that do not wish to take up the sport but are attracted to the birds and how they are trained etc. It gives people the opportunity of handling and flying a bird of prey. The one day course can however, be informative for those who are thinking earnestly towards hawk ownership. For a minimal outlay, one will receive a far better understanding towards ownership in key areas such as time, commitment and financial cost. If all goes well, one can then book a more in-depth course with a view to purchasing a bird of your own.

Once you have studied each school's information pack, you should be in a strong position to decide upon the course which would be most likely to meet your own specific requirements. Should you have further questions, or require anything clarifying, telephone the school who I'm sure will be only too pleased to help. Do not leave anything to chance. Cost ought to be irrelevant to your final choice. If your preferred course is a little too expensive wait until you have sufficient funds. Do not book something which you feel to be second best.

As a guide all *Falconry courses* ought to cover such aspects as bird selection, diet, basic health care, aviary construction, equipment, training, hunting, legislation, coping and imping. These are

points which should be spoken about at length throughout the duration of the course and the student should understand the meaning of each one thoroughly. Students should also be proficient in making simple items of equipment such as anklets, jesses and the leash.

As a person who teaches falconry to others, I am always questioning my own teaching ability. This is a very important skill which all instructors should possess, but a concept which may be given little or no thought. Capable teaching is a difficult proficiency to master, but incompetence here will inevitably reflect onto the students. One may be a gifted Austringer but that does not mean one has the ability to relay information clearly to others. If you do not have the ability to teach, hence assess each student individually, immediately recognising any weak areas which need further explaining then the shyer student will leave confused. It is very easy to tell all in attendance; *"if you are unclear about anything, ask,"* but not everyone does.

It is important to us that we treat our students as individuals as each will have their own needs. Some grasp the tying of the falconers knot within minutes, others take all day and others not at all. Some are overtly worried about weight control while others take it in their stride. Everyone is different. For the above reasons, and many, many more, we only accept five students per course as I think we would struggle to give every attendant our personal time.

From a teaching point of view I believe the most important point to impregnate into a student is the time and commitment which must be found for the bird. This is required on a daily basis for as long as the bird is in ones' possession. The ownership of a raptor is extremely time consuming even for those of us who make a living from their keeping. For those who work full-time I have nothing but admiration. Also, although we try not to think about it, it is inevitable that a

bird of prey will require specialist veterinary attention at some time or other. This is never cheap and an issue which must be thought about before they purchase a hawk. Avian medicine has come on in leaps and bounds over the years and modern day techniques and drugs can briskly turn a declining birds life around. The beginner seriously contemplating hawk ownership must thoughtfully take all the above points (*cost, time and commitment*) seriously as complacency may end your hawking days before they have even begun.

The many skills which the beginner has to acquire will take innumerable seasons to achieve. One is never an expert on falconry and related matters after a season or two as its alternate facets are just too complicated. What is important is that all students are taught clearly and correctly and that their career begins with the right information. Those of us who do this are in a very important position, for if the genuine beginner fails perhaps we have failed also.

It is without doubt highly rewarding to take a beginner through a course and to see them go on to purchase and train a bird. It is at times like this when my job is extremely worthwhile and beneficial.

The splendour of falconry is available to all those who wish to pursue it. Solid groundwork from the novice is required to locate and attend a well-structured course thus from here one will be in an ideal position to benefit from all that falconry has to offer.

Those who choose to pursue falconry in all its glory must realise that it is a sport that will push ones ability to the very full. Be prepared for many ups and downs throughout your career and learn by your mistakes. Those who choose to start correctly (*by attending a falconry course*) will be part of a wonderful sport, meet many interesting people, visit some breathtaking countryside and be rewarded with memorable flights resulting in a feeling of ultimate achievement.

RAPTOR RESCUE PUBLISHES CODE OF PRACTICE



National Charity Raptor Rescue have recently published a new booklet setting out guidelines for minimum standards of transportation, handling, treatment and care for injured birds of prey.

Entitled **"Guidance Notes and Code of Practice for Raptor Rehabilitators"**, this 36-page document has been produced over a period of many months involving consultation with active rehabilitators and advisors, both from within and from outside the Charity.

The book covers subjects such as facilities, husbandry, types of casualties and rehabilitation techniques, as well as a chapter on the relevant law as it applies to the care of wild raptors.

One main reason for producing this guide was to set out the list of minimum standards which emerged in response to a questionnaire sent out to all practising rehabilitators within the Charity. Those members who attain these requirements will be

eligible to apply for "Raptor Rescue Approved Status" - which can then be confirmed by a simple inspection involving a 'tick-box' style checklist.

Raptor Rescue have long made it a priority to promote high standards of care and responsibility, but no organisation concerned solely with the rescue of birds of prey has ever set down such standards. It is hoped that this publication will unite all those involved in raptor rehabilitation work.

The Guide is on sale for £1 to members and £2 to non-members (plus postage).

For further information regarding the Code of Practice or membership, please contact any of the Trustees listed here:

• Mr M. Cunningham (*Chairman*) Tel: 01543 491712 • Mr M. Robins (*Secretary*) Tel: 01992 505327 • Mr B. Stone (*Treasurer*) Tel: 01992 621205 • Mr R. Barnard (*Newsletter Editor*) Tel: 01438 728273 • Mr I. Taylor Tel: 01298 70959.

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE SEASON

Dr Nick Fox

Are you a plotter and schemer? I bet you are! I am. This is the time of year when I'm plotting for the forthcoming hawking season. Right now our breeding season is in full swing; we have ten voluntary semen donors to attend to three times a day and we are setting 4-8 eggs per day. The first chicks hatch in April and then life will get even more hectic. Meanwhile, with the wet winter I got hopelessly behind with the hedge laying, just about managed the tree-planting and now the ewes are busy squirting out lambs right, left and centre. I have one of those insulated mugs as there is never quite time to drink a whole cup of tea at one sitting.

It is also the time for resourcing and organising the falcon conservation projects in Asia. We have two biologists surveying the high Arctic peregrines in Siberia, other teams on sakers in the Crimea, the Siberian



Saker Falcon just after release



Falcons waiting for transportation to release site

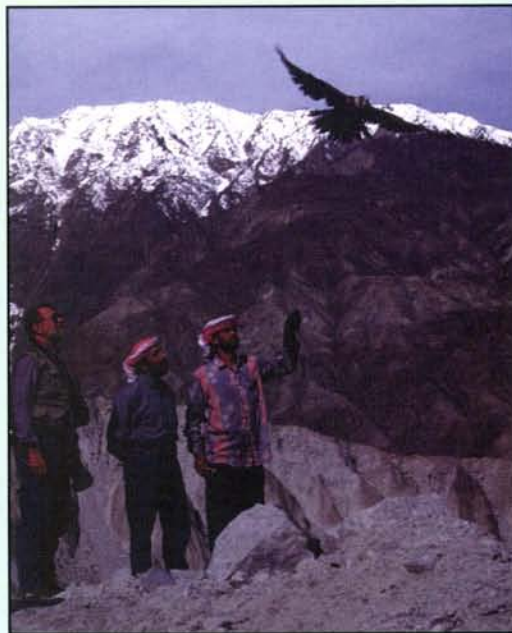
Altai, eastern Baikal, the Mongolian Altai and the Kazakh Altai, and in the Tien Shan in Kirghistan. Today, as I write, some of our National Avian Research Centre staff are releasing 87 sakers in the southern Himalayas to join the spring migration north, falcons which Arab falconers have donated at the end of the hawking season, at the request of Sheikh Zayed. The project I'm

looking forward to most is an intensive radio-tracking study of nesting sakers in central Mongolia, using about eight students on horseback. Gradually the young people are learning the techniques for field research and the ethos of sustainable use of wildlife. At a time when Asia faces so many economic and political challenges the pressures on the people and the wildlife are almost unbearable.

However, back to my hawking plans. Our crow hawking team already consists of five peregrine/sakers: *Banshee*, *Fury*, *Megan*, *Candace* and *Gloria*, and a peregrine/prairie, *Venture*, a white gyrfalcon male, *Quicksilver* and our peregrine/New Zealand male, *Spitfire*. We are gradually changing the type of hawks we are flying, moving away from the large long-range falcons such as the gyrfalcons towards falcons which are able to come to terms with their crows more quickly. This means we can fly in poorer country which is not so much enclosed as spoiled by the occasional tree. It is rare in Britain to find places where flights of 2-3 miles can be enjoyed, with everyone present at the kill. Most of our ground just isn't this good. Also there are more crows on the lower ground than on the higher ground where sometimes we ride for more than twenty miles to get all the hawks flown. So the peregrine/prairie is a venture for us. She killed a few crows



Khalifa Saif about to release a saker

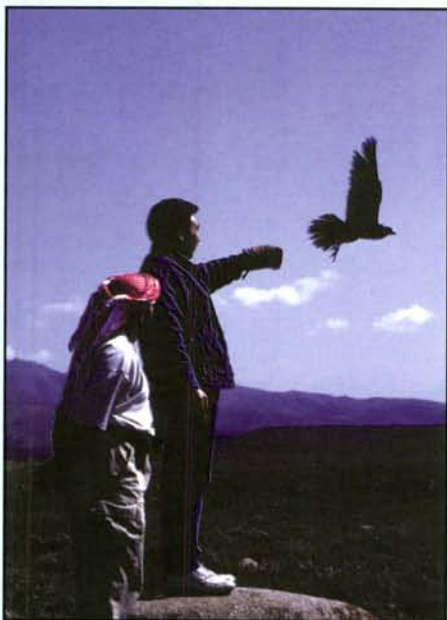


Saker Falcon just after release

last season and hit them well with the conviction of the prairie, but was greatly hindered by being unhacked. We have put her in one of the 25 x 25 metre pens all winter and I am expecting to see a big improvement on her accuracy. She was also rather erratic last season, but I think she will be easier this year once she settles down into killing regularly. *Quicksilver* on the other hand is a reliable performer but takes up a lot of sky and is fumbly at close quarters. He will be white as snow this year but if he doesn't tighten up his turns we will retire him for breeding at the end of the season. We will draft any others which don't make the 'A' team out at the end of the season to make way for young entry. We are trying hard to breed some more New Zealand hybrids, not to mention pure-breds. *Spitfire* is able to operate in more confined places and the benefit of these birds which have good acceleration, tight turns and steep climbs is that not only can you use them in these difficult places, but also they absolutely excel in good open country. There you can afford longer slips at crows on passage and time the slip with accuracy. With a slow falcon on a longer slip, the crow has time to see her coming and take serious evasive action. Usually you end up with a chase for cover, with the falcon making stoop after stoop without concluding. But using a faster falcon with a good climb, I can get more under the crow, with the crow higher in the air. This means the



Saker being released



Saker being released

crow is already cut off from many of its horizontal escape routes and is more likely to try to outclimb the falcon. The stage is set for a ringer.

We also have a Harris Hawk called *Grapple* for rabbits. Although we've now sold all our breeding Harris apart from one old imported pair, it looks as though *Grapple* will be pressed into service to help rear the first five youngsters as a foster mum. The old buzzard, *Omelette* hasn't started laying yet, and anyway she is likely to have Welsh kites dumped on her. It is important for the young Harris to get a good start. Many buyers worry a lot about screaming, because they live near neighbours, but screaming is natural for young Harris. They are social predators and the youngsters learn to hunt in family groups. When a falconer takes on a young Harris from a breeder, the poor thing essentially becomes an orphan. The falconer has to sub-

stitute for the family group and, as well as providing a secure home life, teach the youngster to hunt. Only then will she become a secure, independent, mature adult. If her psychological

development is delayed or arrested, she may remain a screaming dependent 'teenager' for years. I prefer to see the youngsters out flying for hours in the summer, and catching a lot of naive summer rabbits. She is at the best age for learning then, and the daylight time is long. She may well scream to start with, despite the efforts of the most conscientious breeder, but she'll quickly mature and come through the 'pain barrier'. Shutting them up all summer in pens allows them to mature physically but does not progress their mental development.

It is easy to focus one's thoughts on a new hawk and not make proper plans for hawking grounds. What's the point of being all dressed up but with nowhere to go? The good name of falconry depends on you obtaining proper permission from landowners. We don't want to get the reputation of some of the illegal hare-coursing fraternity. First identify land which is suitable for your type of hawking (or vice versa), visit the land owner and explain your needs. If you get the go-ahead in principle, then check on further details; **who** exactly has got permission - you personally, or a carload of mates?

What have you got permission to hawk - rabbits only, or some other species too?

Where exactly have you got permission to hawk - bring a 1:25000 series map with you which shows field boundaries and mark in the boundaries of the farm in consultation with the landowner. **When** you have got permission to hawk, once? Specified days per season? Until the farm is sold? Has the farm changed owners since last season? There are parts of Britain, particularly in the south east, and particularly amongst those flying rooks, where falconers have not properly obtained permission. If this applies to you, hang your head in shame - you are letting us all down. Get off your butt, brush your hair and spend some days making farm visits. And look for ways to help the landowner, does he need a hand at peak

times? Is there some management you could assist with? At the very least don't forget the traditional bottle of whisky. We give a summer barbecue for our landowners and their families; with 120 people in the mews, plus us and the falcons, we have a party which they appreciate, and it's much better than reducing everything to that miserable common denominator, money.

At this time of year two of our senior members are doing farm visits, to renew old acquaintances and to open up new country. We have two mounted meets per week throughout the season and five foot/car meets per week. Putting the meet list together takes much preparation, but it cannot be shirked. In the autumn, as each meet approaches, I still have to ring each landowner to confirm.

Remember basic etiquette in falconry. Just because a friend has permission on a farm doesn't mean he has permission to bring you with your hawk, or for you to hawk there without him. If you ask permission on a farm and a falconer already has permission there, then defer. The farmer may feel obliged to give you permission out of politeness, but back off, go and find fresh ground of your own rather than tread on other people's toes. Similarly, if your Club goes to a lot of trouble in arranging a field meet and you have a pleasant day's hawking, don't then imagine that you have permission to hawk there again. There have been cases of people returning to poach on meet venues and there is no quicker way to blacken your Club's name. Similarly, if you are organising a Club Meet, make sure you ring the landowner to confirm personally. If you just drop him a letter (So and so's as good as gold, he won't mind...) and get no reply, you may be horrified to find that half the cars drawn up in the front drive are not your members, but a shooting syndicate. You can be sure that they'll be even more horrified. It has happened! Finally, if you are fortunate enough to be given permission, don't wear out your welcome. A visit once a fortnight is a lot. Do not be like the proverbial fish (after three days it begins to smell). Get permission on plenty of land and visit sparingly, then you will always be welcome.

INSTRUCTIONS ON NYLON KITES FOR TRAINING FALCONS

Julian Stevens

Training game hawks to attain pitch and fitness by flying to the kite needs to be started at an early stage in the falcon's training. When introducing your falcon to the lure, it is important to use the same lure that you will be attaching to the kite later on. Whilst still being flown on the creance when she is coming to you immediately on being unhooded and shown the lure (and more importantly catching it in the air), you can now move on to introduce the kite.

We always use a kite where pitch can be varied in line with different wind speeds to obtain lift in even the lightest of winds. When looking at the underside of the kite you will see that there is a ring to attach the kite line to. This ring is attached to the kite by a nylon 'bridle' and makes the kite fully adjustable and able to lift a lure and release mechanism, (dependent on what line is used) from a wind speed of 3 to 20 knots.

The rule is the calmer the wind the greater the rake, ie. in a light wind the ring has to be set further toward the trailing edge (back) of the kite.

With Dynema line (120lbs/55kg breaking strain) this should only be used in breezy conditions up to approximately 12 knots Ground Wind Speed (GWS). The heavier line available should be used from 12-20 knots GWS.

When ready to fly the kite go to an area where you have obtained permission both from the landowner/s and any relevant authorities, eg CAA.

The CAA section that you need to speak to with regard to obtaining a permit is the Air Space Utilisation Section which is based in Uxbridge, Middlesex. I have always found them to be most helpful and apart from the legal requirements of obtaining a licence there is the added bonus that the CAA notify all relevant authorities eg, Police, Flight Control, any military installations etc. and in previous seasons when flying a falcon on a couple of occasions without the kite I have had aircraft flying under her while she was still making pitch - rather unnerving, when once this was a Tornado on low level flight!

To set the kite up follow these guidelines: Unwind and walk out the line in the direction of the wind to approximately 100 feet beyond the ring which attaches the release mechanism or radio control, taking kite, lure and aforesaid release mechanism or radio control drop mechanism. When you have done this you will have unreeled about 200 feet of line. Set the brake so that no more line can come off the reel or winch. Put the kite together, adjust the pitch to the local ground wind speed (GWS) and attach it to the line.

It is best to get a helper to hold the kite upright and walk back to the attaching ring

and fit release mechanism and lure.

Now give the line a gentle tug and the kite will become airborne, gently let the kite take up the weight of the line and lure and then walk the line with your glove or piece of leather back to the winch. When you get back to the winch let out the line to the required height and reapply the brake. Dynema line on the kite is designed for winds from 4 - 12 mph. If ground wind speed is above this you will need to use a heavier line such as (150lb/70kg breaking strain) deep sea fishing line.

After the ring which attaches the release mechanism or radio control, mark the line off in one hundred foot marks, ie. 100' = 1 black mark, 200' = 2 black marks, 300' = 3 black marks etc. the colour then changes to red then blue hence 900' = 3 blue marks.

On the next training session put the kite up and attach the lure via the release mechanism to the line below the kite. Once the equipment is set up, fly her to the lure out of the hood and still attached to the creance. Great care has to be taken at this stage so that nothing upsets the falcon as if it does no amount of effort will persuade her to fly to the kite in future. This should be done at a height where the lure is dangling about 20 feet above the ground.

If she flies straight at the lure and binds to it (even if it does not come free from the release mechanism, which means you have set it too tight and need to slacken off the adjustment) call it a day and let her have most of her ration on the lure. When training a falcon to the kite make sure she flies to it only once per day. This is for two reasons. First she will increase in motivation and second you will not be over stretching her. Depending on what month you are at this stage of training there is no reason why you should not be going out with her and attempting a flight at grouse or partridge, (if you are at this stage in September) but it is important that you make her ONE AND ONLY flight to the kite the last of the day as this is when she will eat most of her days' ration.

It is a good idea if you are going to be using a dog to have it introduced at this stage at the latest. The dog being fully trained already.

On day 3 do the same to 20 feet
On day 4 do the same to 20 feet
On day 5 do the same to 40 feet
On day 6 do the same to 60 feet
On day 7 do the same to 80 feet
On day 8 do the same to 100 feet
On day 9 do the same to 150 feet
On day 10 do the same to 200 feet
On day 11 do the same to 300 feet
On day 12 do the same to 300 feet
On day 13 do the same to 300 feet
On day 14 do the same to 400 feet

On day 15 do the same to 500 feet
On day 16 do the same to 600 feet
On day 17 do the same to 700 feet
On day 18 do the same to 800 feet
On day 19 do the same to 900 feet
On day 20 do the same to 1,000 feet
On day 21 do the same to 1,000 feet
On day 22 do the same to 1,000 feet
On day 23 do the same to 1,200 feet
On day 24 do the same to 1,400 feet.

Once a pitch of at least 1,000 feet is being achieved on a daily basis then introduce the radio controlled drop mechanism which helps improve the falcons' footing skills. After two to four weeks start flying the kite above cover crop that you know hold (preferably) English (grey) partridge for tiercels and pheasant for falcons. Put the kite up in the normal way and fly the falcon directly above the cover where you know you can flush game from (you will need to base the winch in different places each day as wind direction and speed change) Put the kite up as usual but this time without the lure and you will find that your falcon flies up to the kite, even goes above it looking for the lure, by this time your dog should be on point ready to flush on command. After the falcon has gone above the kite for about thirty seconds it will automatically look earthward. Now is the time to send the dog in. My reason for using cover crop at this stage is if for some reason she misses the first bird or covey, you should have a second chance. During training it is always a good idea to shout (I use the old adage "Ho!") or whistle when producing the lure and then when game is presented for her, so at a vital time such as this, you can draw her attention to the game that has been flushed. From this point on we would fly her without the kite over cover crop for the next couple of weeks. She will be really fit and well motivated to gain pitch. However, do not be downhearted if she does not attain the great heights that she has done to the kite, once the game gets fitter she will alter her pitch accordingly. I wish you well and hopefully with these guidelines you will not go too far wrong. As a footnote to this another advantage of using the kite for training is that last autumn I lost my prize falcon about an hour before dusk, within five minutes of losing her we had lost any signal on the telemetry (we subsequently found that the plectrum we attach the telemetry to had been bent and broken, presumably when she stooped into cover after game at check) at dawn the next day we put up the kite and by the time we had let out only 3 - 400' of line we heard her bells as she was homing in on the lure even though she was six ounces over her flying weight with a full crop. Therefore this is also another very useful tool for the safe return of a lost bird!

Lisa By Lee Copeland



Lee, Will & Trevor with Lisa.

I remember leaving Abingdon at the end of December '97 buzzing at the thought of training her. The topic of conversation on the way back to Tidworth never changed. Tim, a friend of mine, had driven from Aldershot to get a good look at this Harris Hawk I was buying. "They're brilliant," he said "better than that b****y Redtail you had". I was full of optimism. Before we knew it, we were home. Tim said cheerio, I put the bird away and turned in.

Over the next few weeks the training went like clockwork, Lisa as I called her, was coming on well.

Then in January at a weight of 2lb 2oz it started. The bird began to be very aggressive towards me, footing me at the first opportunity. Flying past and hitting my head, her head down low all puffed up, flapping her wings nastily at me on the fist. Changing her jesses was a nightmare because I

knew she'd have me.

Lisa chased well but was very unlucky. She had so many near misses on rabbits and all the time she was getting nastier. Then on one trip to Trowbridge while changing her jesses, came the last straw. She struck out and put her talon through my lip, my mouth poured with blood. "You want to get rid of that bird" said Trevor, as I mopped the blood from my mouth.

Rosie, Trevors' bird sat there quiet and content as Trevor stroked her feet and legs. Lisa however, was sitting on the ground all puffed up ready for round two! "There's something 'imprinty' about her" said Trev. I had a horrible feeling that he was right. Lisa never screamed though, she chased well and even went up on the soar, which I thought was good for a first year bird, but I was getting cheesed off with her.

We got into March and she'd caught three rabbits and a

weasel but she was still nasty. I took a ride to Andover and visited Ashley Smith at the Hawk Conservancy. I told him about Lisa's behaviour, before I could finish he said "Not enough kills by the sound of it". He gave me a few tips and told me the bird was frustrated. He said that the best thing I could do would be to put her down for the moult and next season serve her as much quarry as possible. I listened.

After the moult the army sent me to Cyprus so Trevor agreed to train her. I returned and Trevor said the bird had gone for his face but luckily missed.

I thanked him for his work and took Lisa home a little disappointed. It was now time to put Ashley's tips into practice.

1) The bird was to be tethered in her aviary, although it was her home I controlled where she flew.

2) No tidbits given when picking her up in the aviary.

This stopped her bating at me when I opened the door. I could now walk in, walk around her and leave, no problem.

3) When out flying I would take only five tidbits and try not to use them. The bird soon learned that I'd stopped supplying the food and began to look at the quarry I was flushing.

4) Feeding up. Lisa was fed up on every kill for about the first 20. She is now chuffed to see me when I enter the aviary and does not see me as the food supplier. The aggression has gone.

I have now left the armed forces and work as a vehicle recovery driver so much of the time I'm waiting around for something to happen. Lisa comes everywhere with me and I fly her daily.

She is a brilliant bird and her bag currently stands at 35 rabbits, 6 rats, 3 pheasants, 1 hare, 1 woodcock, 1 starling and a stock of mice.

I would like to thank Trevor and his cousin Will. Ashley Smith and Ralph up in Sedgefield who gave me advice on the phone.

Should anyone experience a similar problem my number is with David and Lyn

Good Hawking

Below: Lisa



COMPETITION RESULTS

The Answers Were:

Head: Peregrine
Right Wing: Goshawk
Tail: Kestrel
Left Wing: Harris Hawk

Prizes are tickets for the Falconers Fair. Congratulations to you all.

The Winners Are:

C. Baldwin, Henley on Thames.
Ian Johnson, Wimborne.
G Baxter, Oundle,
Mrs G Baldwin, Oxon
Mark Springthorpe, Ripley.
P. Watson, Swindon
M. Williams, Aylesbury
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W. Smith, Preston.
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LETTERS



Can You Help?

Dear Lyn & David,

I am appealing to all those falconers which were active during the 1960's. I am currently researching my next book and hope that someone, somewhere could answer the following questions.

- 1) When was the first Harris Hawk imported into the UK and by whom?
- 2) Approximately when did it start becoming popular in the UK?
- 3) When was it first successfully bred in the UK and by whom?

I am working on the understanding that a handful of UK falconers were flying the Harris Hawk during the 1960's, but more commonly so during the 1970's. I was only a wee lad throughout these years so memory does not serve. Therefore, should anyone know the answers to any of the above questions please contact me on 01708 374402 or email leewharris@aol.com or else in person at the Falconers Fair where I will be signing copies of my last book throughout both days on the Falconers Magazine stand.

Many thanks
Lee William Harris.

"I Beg to Differ..."

Dear Lyn and David,

My letter is directed at John Matcham and his Hawk Talk article. Hi John, it's me again - hope you're keeping well. There's a few points in your last article upon which I would beg to differ.

Block perches - As can be seen in your photograph, (page 19, last mag.) There is no logical reason why an astroturf inset to the top of a block perch should foul a leash. If the astroturf is inset so that it is flush with the perch top then the leash simply slides across the block top without touching the inset. Presto! Astroturf can, and I believe probably should, be left loose so that the block top underneath the astroturf can be varnished and the astroturf removed for cleaning/disinfecting. Cork tops will hold bacteria if they look anything like the one in your picture - also page 19. I am not a fan of cork tops but everyone to their own.

Bow perches - A bow perch is presumably made with a specific bird species and /or size in mind. No bird that can justifiably be

placed on the bow perch shown would have any difficulty in hauling both ring and leash over any well constructed perch with a perching surface that is tapered at both ends. Quite obviously you would no more expect to put a merlin on the bow perch shown, than you would eat a British Rail sandwich. Incidentally, I own and use three of the stippled, rubber surfaced perches as shown in your photograph, I stock them and have sold many to delighted customers. Not only do the birds show a liking for them but they are inclined to perch on them even when given the freedom of the aviary with other higher perches available. I have never experienced any problems with any of my birds feet using these perches and the construction is unquestionably second to none - an excellent product. (Damn it! Wish I'd thought of it first) Last word from me on this subject - do we know for sure that the archer's bow was pushed into the ground in the fashion shown in your illustration. Could it maybe have been pushed into the ground to give a semi-circular bow? Food for thought?

Perch rings - I have been using brass, nickel plated and stainless rings on various perches for many years. None of these rings has shown appreciable wear and quite honestly, if my brass rings snapped at a joint, I would be unable (let alone a bird) to open the ring at the break without the use of a vice. I think it would be safe to say that the same would apply to other good rings.

Jesses - You encourage everyone to buy only from a person who has been commercially producing jesses for a minimum of ten years and then follow up by saying that you would like to see everyone making their own.

Everybody will ultimately make a mistake when making their own equipment and we can only hope that the results of this are not to the detriment of any bird, but I agree - try they should, as it is only practice that makes perfect. Incidentally, it would appear that I, and many others, should not be supplying jesses until our ten year 'apprenticeship' is up. Watch out Westweald customers, I've been making them for seventeen years but only eight years commercially. Will I ever sell another jess? Should I organise a product recall for the 1000 odd pairs I've made and sold? (Yes! the singular is jess not jesse or jessy)

Finally John, you say at the end of your article, with regard to perches generally, 'we give perches the least amount of attention when buying a bird'We do?..... I don't..... Do you?

If this can accurately be stated to be the case, then it is surely up to the schools of falconry to put the budding falconer straight on this point before Neil Forbes is inundated with bumblefoot cases.

I would conclude this letter by making it clear that the comments I have made are my

own opinions, based on my own experiences. I would no more force them on anybody than turn my back on Julian Clary. I would say however, that as falconry trudges towards the new millennium, and with so many new people taking up the sport, it is essential that we are all seen to be doing things correctly and with our bird's welfare at heart. (If in doubt, be guided by a competent professional) Enjoy and protect your sport; and make your choices of equipment based on your own common sense judgment.

All the best John,
Regards,
Brian
(Westweald Falconry)

"...So do I."

Dear Lyn & David,

It is not very often I feel the need to put pen to paper, but having read (no less than seven times) Hawk Talk by John Matcham (last issue pages 18-21) I found much of the article both misleading and somewhat contradictory, also with reference to some of my own equipment.

I begin with the paragraph on jesses: "If you're just starting out it's a good idea buying them from a falconer who's been making them commercially for at least ten years", then in the next sentence; "personally I would like to see everyone who keeps a bird, making his or her own jesses", what does this tell anyone who is just starting out, that they are more proficient than a falconry equipment supplier with less than 10 years experience?

Next comes the bow perch. Was it by coincidence or design that the Long Bow was not only suitable for shooting arrows, but was exactly the right shape for a perch? I personally feel that a perch of this shape gives little or no control to the ring passing from one end to the other should the bird bate, and consequently could be looked upon as an extension of the leash. We should all know the potential consequences of a leash that is too long. The semicircular perches that I have designed (note designed) are to bring the ring to a more controlled stop, and because the ring has to stop somewhere, I am of the opinion that provided the leash cannot tangle, and the ring can drop down to the end of the Bow it is of no detriment to the bird where the ring stops.

Block Perches/Materials. I don't understand why if fruit wood, Apple (a hard wood) is suitable for aviary perching but is 'hard like concrete' when used on a block perch, we then read about the use of other types of wood, Oak (hardwood) and Yew (softwood) and Cork, how do we know which of these are too hard or too soft? I would think if a bird is cleaning its beak on a tree, surely it would be on the bark and not directly on the wood itself. We also read that

Oak and Yew are poisonous, but where do we get Cork from? The bark of the Cork Oak (*Quercus suber*). I would think that it is the leaves (Oak) and needles (Yew) that are poisonous and not the actual wood, although I have never had any reports of a bird eating one of my block perches. Talking of block perches, we read about wire brushing, Hammerite and Zinga but not one mention of Stainless Steel, which is virtually maintenance free.

I don't intend going on forever, however, one last point I would like to raise and I quote "Rubber is now being used for block tops and perches. It seems to have overcome the cleaning problems with Astroturf but beware of toxic materials often from recycled supplies."

I sincerely hope that Mr Matcham is not suggesting that I am using either toxic or recycled materials in the construction of my products. This product has now been on the market for almost two and a half years and somewhere in the region of 270 are now in use.

Yours sincerely
Jim Moss Crown Falconry

P.S. If John Matcham would like a list of names and telephone numbers of prominent falconers who are using both Rubber topped Bow Perches and Blocks, I would be pleased to supply this.

OUCH!

I knew it! The minute I agreed to tackle the perch article I was in for trouble, but I suppose that's the nature of the game as they say.

In reply to the letters received from Jim Moss at Crown Falconry and Brian at Westweald Falconry, thanks for the comments, I hope that I can clear up any misunderstandings, dot some I's and cross some T's with this reply.

Jim you seem certainly the most upset, although I find it hard to understand why, I gave your perch with a rubber top the thumbs up, only attempted to warn prospectors seeking a cheaper imitation to be aware of toxic rubber. Until someone informed me that you are the only manufacturer of rubber topped perches in the UK. That's what you think, I have a rubber bow perch given to me some years ago and then it was at least ten years old. I tried it for a while but the rubber hose leached a form of bitumen like material that discoloured the bird's feet and perhaps by coincidence it lost condition. When I stopped using it the bird slowly recovered, as did its feet. Your comment about a long bow was a little out of context as the longbow came in as a weapon of war and was rarely used for hunting. A traditional hunting bow much shorter than the long bow at (six to eight feet long) and far more accurate would have been used for hunting. The long bow was designed for laying down large numbers of arrows over a great distance and was normally shot into the air so as to rain down arrows on your enemy. In respect of leash length I mentioned Neil Forbes' previous

article and like many others stand by that, your comment "it is of no detriment to the bird where the ring stops" I have to strongly disagree with. If the ring is halted on route on or around the top of the perch and the bird lands on the ground the leash will be directly through the tail and we all know what that means. The information I gave on wood types for perches was given to me by one of the countries top avian vets who cares primarily for Parrots, renowned for their ability to tear up wooden perches. Having given several lectures with him some years ago I learnt of the risks using cut and seasoned timber of any kind, bumble foot and other foot disorders are rife in the Parrot and Songbird world. I had hoped to give the impression that fresh cut timber with its natural coating of bark should be used. I had not realised just how many people still use a lump of two by two from B&Q. Which is just as bad as any seasoned hard wood without a suitable covering. As for cork it is the dead bark that we use to stop our wine bottles with and make block tops whereas the sap is poisonous and not found in the dried bark. In the case of the Yew it is also the sap but most dangerous to some birds and animals it is the seed at the centre of the fruit. This information was gathered from a National Trust arborist. Of course a seasoned block would only be poisonous if a bird were to suck for a very long time, getting through the varnish would be difficult enough. Finally I was sorry to read that only 270 of your perches have been sold. Having seen both the prototype and the final version I cannot understand why, a great deal of thought went into its design. Has the world gone insane, there are now at least two perches I would recommend Ray Prior's and Jim Moss's, I'm sure there are others they are just not advertised enough.

The point both Brian and Jim make and seem most annoyed about is the bit on Jess—. I'll leave the spelling to you Brian, historically I have found far too many variations that all scare the hell out of spell checker and none are found in a dictionary. In answer to your question could a Falconer with only a few days experience make better Jess— than a manufacturer with four years trading? Yes! Yes! Yes! When you consider that craftsmen like yourselves are in the minority on a global scale and that many of your competitors can produce as many Jess— in one second as you can produce in a week. With a loud bang the punch comes down with little or no consideration for the quality and grain of the leather and hey presto 100 Jess—. Instant money! Brian as you yourself point out buyers of Jess— should use their common sense, however if they have not been given the information in the first place, how are they to know? If they are capable of making their own to a high standard they can examine yours and see that they are of a high quality as I am sure they are and be as lazy as they like. A friend of mine pointed out to me "If they've been selling Jess— for ten years and they are still in business they must be doing something right" how many cowboys last that long? I had one visit me at home a few years ago, he produced a box of Jess— and boasted that it contained 5000 pairs of various sizes, he had only been selling them for

a year. I purchased a glove from him as an example to my students, the forefinger fell apart after a days work. He has given up the business recently and is now the proud owner of a box full of bits of useless leather. Be warned there are others like him.

I could go on and attempt to pick the nitty gritty out of your letters and dot some more I's and cross more T's but 900 words on between us I think we have set a record for perch literature. This article was not pointed at either of you, and I did not supply the photos, I saw them when you did. I will be more careful so as not to cause distress from now on. I wish you both the very best of success in the future and wish there were more like you.

Regards
John Matcham

Ps. Jim I have heard about your new rubber non-toxic block top. Will it be at the Fair and can I have one or two please?

CUSTOM BUILT

Dear Lyn & David,

The loss of a hawk or falcon fills the heart with despair when it is apparent that they simply are not coming back. Transmitters really have become the falconers extra heartbeat as they kick into action when the receiver is turned on.

Sometimes transmitters can fail through one reason or another but rarely do the receivers give up the ghost. I have used custom electronics for 20 years. This system has been put to the test in some of the most difficult and inhospitable landscapes in Scotland. It has been consistent and excelled in finding lost hawks.

To my mind little has changed in the interim years. Many other telemetry firms have tried to emulate this prestigious company and although the sets may have become smaller and more compact they have a long way to go to beat this track record.

As many of the telemetry companies are foreign and in particular those from the USA, returning the receiver for repair can be a chore. Recently I had to return my receiver for an overhaul. At 20 years of age one or two things were starting to need refurbishing and the set had to be returned. Having emailed Barbara Szelpal that it was arriving she acknowledged it's receipt which was 5 days later on a Sunday and got to work on it there and then!

It was air freighted to me about turn, with various pieces of additional equipment that I had ordered. The whole process took just 10 days. Not only was it back to it's vital functioning, it had been dealt with at source and the service was excellent. This company have been making telemetry for 39 years. They are renowned in the US and a large number of falconers in the UK and Europe have their sets. For those of you out there that are debating which set to use then I can highly recommend this product for it's power and excellent after sales service.

Yours sincerely
Diana Durman-Walters.

WOODN'T HE LOOK WONDERFUL ON YOUR MANTLEPIECE?

In the last issue we featured American woodcarver, Steven Duryea. He made a wonderfully generous offer to donate his latest carving, of a Harris Hawk, (Walker Jr) to the Campaign for Falconry, to be auctioned to raise funds. Walker will arrive here late May and will be on display at the Falconers Fair for everyone to see. Completely hand carved and painted by Steven, and mounted on a burl stand he will make a wonderful addition to someones' collection of Falconry Art. We are hoping to persuade Steven to make a personal appearance at the Falconers Fair next year.



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VICES AND SUCCESSES

Everyone loves to see their hawks perform well and to reward them after successful flights, but a symptom of how easy it is for modern falconers to catch quarry is the number of vices one sees that are connected with feeding and feeding-up, vices mentioned almost only in passing by the old authors since they were so uncommon - footiness, mantling over kills, refusing to give up kills, dragging prey into cover etc.

One of the reasons we are seeing more of these vices is that it is now a simple matter to obtain hawks of relatively ease to train species and beginners no longer need to seek the help of someone with years of experience in order to get into the sport. The difficulties of getting a Goshawk or a Sparrowhawk to the stage where it kills regularly are such that a long apprenticeship is and always was naturally served, either to a more experienced falconer or (sadly) to a succession of spoiled and lost hawks. The stress and tension involved in all this is probably the reason the best austringers and sparviteres are nearly all nervous wrecks and avoid the company of others in the field. It is never such a big deal to get a Harris or Redtail to the stage where it kills on most outings, but it is a big deal to do it well and as often as it should be done.

Anyone contemplating a Redtail should read all the American literature he can get on the subject. Why are the Americans so good at Redtails? Not because they have an unlimited choice and only fly good birds, but because they are obliged to serve an apprenticeship to an experienced falconer and avoid the mistakes others have made before them. Every bad Redtail I have seen here has been spoiled by its owner who bought it as his first bird. The worst cases of footiness seem to arise from tidbitting on the fist from the bare hand. You may get away with this at the start when a fat hawk phlegmatically takes morsels from your fingers, but look out when he is hungry, which he will be by the time he starts creance work. In nature these birds are hatched to catch rabbits and hares, they have to be aggressive and quick footed or else they starve. Aggression is a true virtue when channelled into hunting, but what a terrible shame it is to see an owner frightened of such a magnificent rabbit killer when he himself taught it to associate the bare hand with food. The hunting potential of most Redtails is never realised because they have been spoiled before they ever get the chance to learn to hunt properly. If a trainee Redtail is only ever fed from the glove, on the glove

whether in training or not, it is far less likely to get footy towards the other hand.

Feeding on the fist is one of the chips on my shoulder anyway; the only hawks that should not be fed on the fist are those that are in breeding flights. All others benefit from close manning and since people already spend too little time with their hawks, simply tossing them their food on the block or perch is very stupid and leads to vice in itself. Redtails can be taken up from kills, quite effortlessly by offering a nice gory pick-up piece in the gloved fist from the start and multiple kills should not be a problem, but don't expect them to be happy with a small tidbit, something the size of a good half chick or the liver off a previous rabbit is more appropriate.

Feeding up on a lot of early kills is also a definite mistake, particularly in the case of accipiters where several head of quarry may be taken in a day provided the flights are short and sweet. For broadwings too it seems a waste to feed the hawk up on its first kill of the day, for the preparation for a days hawking can take several days in itself and if the first flight end in success without effort it can be almost an anticlimax, especially if you have to drive a distance to your hawking grounds. The best thing about these two groups of hawks is that they can provide food for both the falconer and themselves and they cannot do that on one kill every Saturday. One of the most amusing put-downs I ever heard was after a long discussion on the relative feeding merits of day-olds, turkeys, quails, shin-beef etc. The 'quail-man' asked "What do you feed your hawks?" the 'silent-type' answered "What they catch."

Game hawkers rarely give more than the head at a kill and even if the falcon is to get a full crop it does not get it from its catch, a gorge on game would throw its weight up too much. A pick-up piece is substituted and because this has been done from the earliest stages of training, vices rarely set in, you do not get a lot of time to train an eyass before the 12th August arrives. Of course longwings are almost never required to go up again after a successful flight, their way of hunting requires so much more energy than the quick dash of a short or broadwing and they do get exercise every time they leave the fist, which is a great deal more than the latter do.

Taking a rabbit or a crow from a redtail or Harris is just as easy, but not often practised because the typical person who flies these birds does so only at weekends and is so over-the moon that his unfit hawk has actually caught something he lets it gorge up and takes it home. How is the hawk ever to get any degree of fitness like this? By the time the hawk has three rabbits (usually taken over a period of several weeks) vice has set in and it is impossible to remove the kill for human consumption or to fly a second time. What is more the falconer is quite happy with this state of affairs! A friend of mine who regularly takes five or six rooks a day with a male Harris has a useful technique of dispatching the rook with a keepers humane killer, then covering it with his bag and pulling off a leg at the same time. He offers the fresh leg above the bag to the hawk which steps neatly onto the glove and is ready to go again in a minute or two. He jokes that the Harris thinks "Rooks taste great but there's not a lot of meat on them."

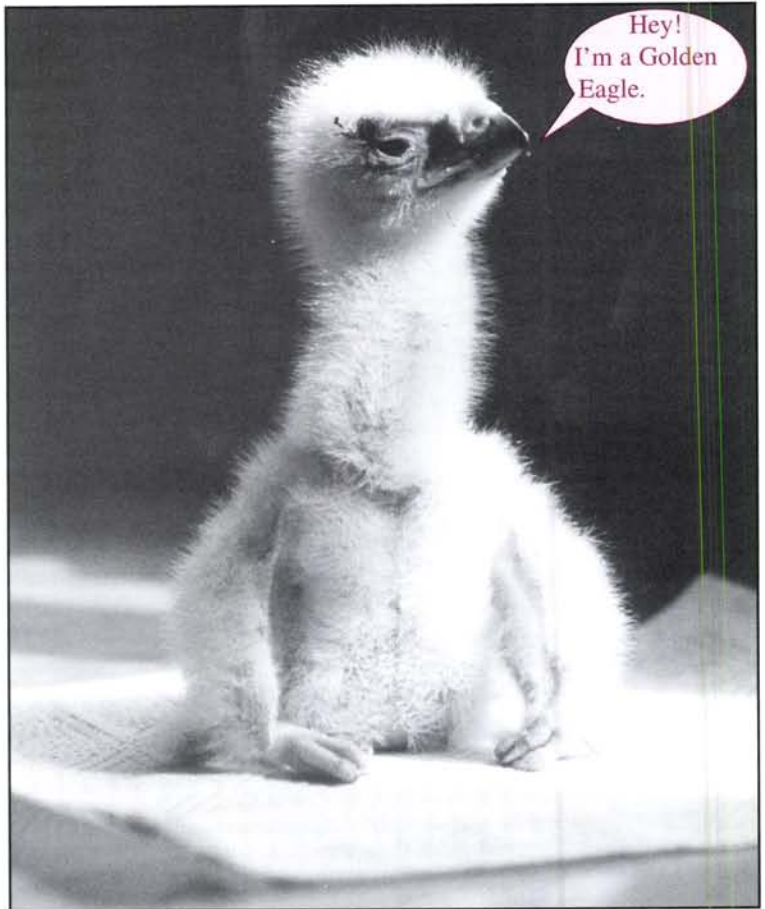
I am sure that if beginners were required to see and practice a variety of hawks and hawking techniques before buying a hawk capable of catching large quarry, they would be much better at drawing the potential out of their hawks and cease to be happy with one ferreted rabbit nailed after a twenty yard dash.

Any hawk being cared for properly by a falconer has to be taking sufficient quarry to be capable of feeding at least itself, if it is not then it is not going out often enough, is not fit enough, is flying at the wrong weight (usually too low) or is being mismanaged in some other way by the fool who keeps it.



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“Gorby” Knowles Brown is proud to announce the arrival of his first born on Monday 19th April at 7.30 am. With a tense 40-day gestation period, hatching started on day 38. Gas and air as well as a few drams were required for the delivery staff. After a nail biting 55 hours labour, a forceps delivery was administered and the 5 minute delivery was completed successfully. Junior weighed in at a very respectable 100grammes, and was eating well at 24 hours old. Dad in the meantime celebrated with a favoured dinner colleague “Thumper” who, a little reluctant to ‘do lunch’ finally succumbed to Gorby’s persuasive handshake to become the main course. Mother and eyass are doing fine and expected to be out of confinement in the near future.



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CARYOSPORA NEOFALCONIS

A CONTINUING THREAT TO CAPTIVE BRED RAPTORS

NEIL FORBES

Caryospora is the name of a family of coccidial parasites, which predominantly affect raptors and reptiles. Caryospora is now recognised as a major disease threat to captive bred raptors both in the UK, Europe, USA and the Middle East. Although the presence of this parasite has been previously reported in this magazine as causing disease and death in merlins (especially young birds), it is also now a common cause of persistent, often recurrent parasitic disease in other species.

How does infestation occur :

the commonest scenario is when parent birds shed oocysts (coccidial eggs), in the breeding environment, which are then ingested by their young. Young birds may have a degree of initial immunity from the parasite derived from their parents, but as this wears off (between 10 - 20 days of age), they become susceptible to infection. Initially young birds are infested, the coccidial life cycle starts within the bird's gut, leading to clinical signs of illness some 10 days later. If the young bird remains healthy and undisturbed through the period from 25 - 50 days of age, it may well develop its own immunity to the disease, and hence not become clinically ill, although it will carry the parasite and may shed the organism (contaminating its own environment) at some future date. Any other bird, which has not met the parasite before and hence has no immunity against the organism, will be susceptible to it, and may develop clinical disease.

With some species of Caryospora, especially when considering wild birds, raptors may become infested by ingesting the 'paratenic host' which are often rodents, but may also include earthworms, insects and invertebrates. However in captive bred birds, the important source of infestation is from the birds own direct environment, following contamination of that area by previously infected birds.

The condition is becoming more and more important as captive breeding and the maintenance of infected birds in confined aviaries, is leading to an increasing contamination of not only our birds but also their environments. A recent and on going survey conducted by the authors has shown a 15% incidence among a mixed range of birds of prey.

The Clinical Problem : disease most commonly occurs in young birds, once they have left the breeder, once the stress of body weight reduction and muzzing commences. Clinical signs will vary from acute death, a very sick bird fluffed



Left: single caryospora.



Right: multiple caryospora

up passing dark or bloody mutes, severe abdominal cramps, to mild signs of poor performance. However for any bird which has once been infected, here is a chance that whenever it is stressed in the future it will recommence shedding oocysts. Any bird which is shedding oocysts may potentially lead to the infection of any other, previously non-infested birds in its immediate environment.

Diagnosis of the disease : this is not as easy as it might first seem. In the initial days or days of infection, there may well be no coccidial oocysts shed in the bird's mute. This occurs as the initial pain and hence clinical signs are caused at a stage of the parasites life cycle prior to parasite maturity and oocysts (egg) production. So if the clinical disease is suspected, not only should the mutes be tested on initial presentation, but also 2 - 3 days later. Moreover even actively infected birds do not shed oocysts every day. A recent study has shown that infected birds will shed oocysts between 3 and 7 days of every 10 day period. So if an attempt is being made to screen for the disease, mute samples should be collected from at least a three day period, and mixed together in order to stand a realistic chance of finding the parasite if it is present.

How do you avoid the disease : any young bird should be tested for parasites both on initial arrival and again two weeks into flight training. Mute samples should be collected over a three day period, and despatched via your vet or direct to a veterinary diagnostic laboratory (e.g. Lansdown Veterinary Surgeons). Any pathological samples should now be enclosed within a sealed rigid container, which is surrounded with absorbable material, and itself then enclosed within a further rigid container, which would withstand impact if dropped from a height of several feet. The sample should be labelled 'Urgent Pathological Specimen'.

Until you have received back two clear

faecal tests, this new bird should be kept isolated from other birds, and should be kept where the substrate can be easily cleaned such that it would not be permanently contaminated.

Some breeders who are taking part in these authors ongoing research programme into this disease, will arrange for these samples to be tested for you, even supplying you with stamp addressed envelopes for despatch of samples.

There is a great benefit in having mute tests conducted on all captive birds at least twice annually

(preferably before and after the moult). Before the moult so that if parasites have been contracted from quarry that the bird has caught, and after the moult in case it has become infected from parasite intermediate hosts in the aviary. It should be remembered that there are several different forms of internal parasite which can affect raptors, and there is no one treatment which is effective against all of them. It is far preferable to test mutes and then to use an effective treatment for that specific parasite, if in fact any parasites are present.

Any birds which have been previously infected with Caryospora should be mute tested monthly, in order to check for reoccurrence. The authors are still prepared to test such birds, and all merlins on a monthly basis free of charge, as a part of this on going research project (telephone for more details).

Having a solid floor to aviaries or weatherings, preferably with a brick or stone base to the aviary walls, so that earthworms, slugs, snails and other invertebrates can be kept out is preferable, and will reduce the incidence of parasitic infestation.

How should the disease be treated : at the time of writing this is still a debatable point, and is an area in which the authors research is concentrating. No previously reported therapeutic regimes are wholly effective. Current treatments can certainly save a bird's life and temporarily cease shedding, new strategies are currently under test which will hopefully lead to a full and long-term solution to this scourge of captive raptor breeding.

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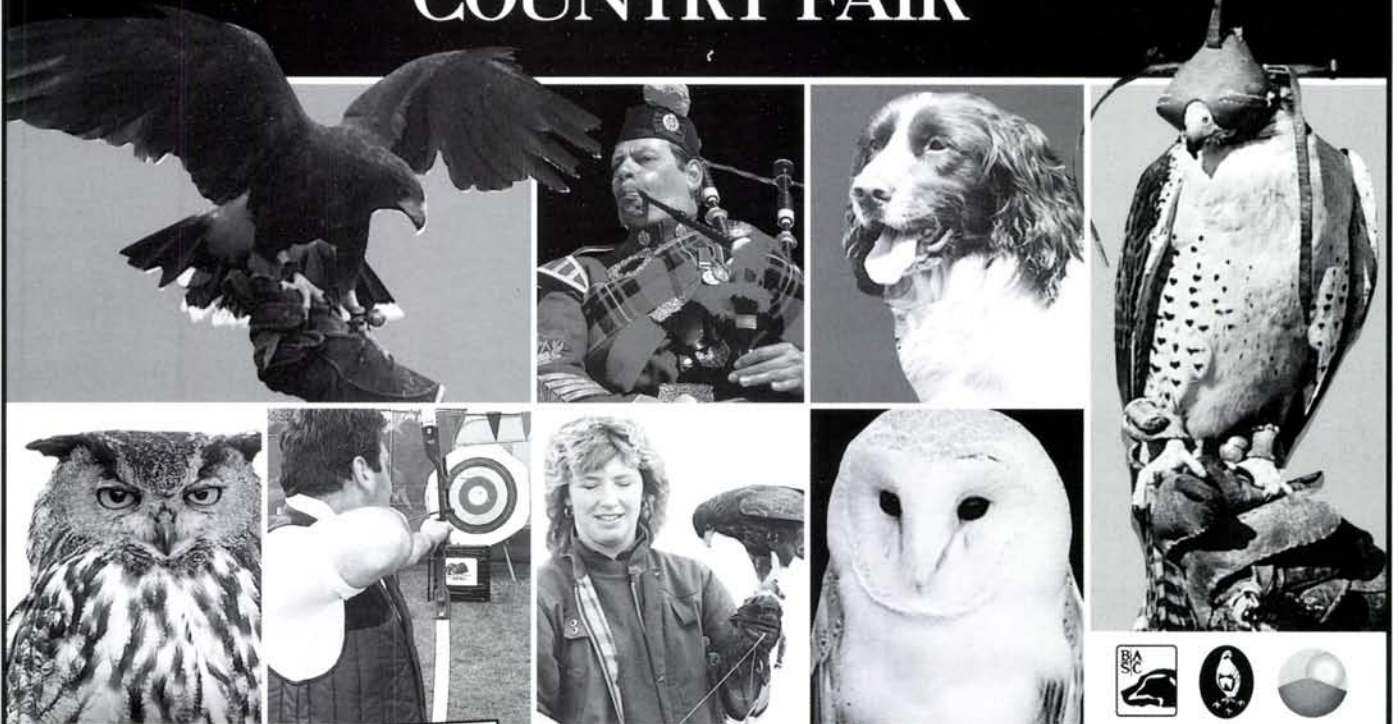
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THE NATIONAL FALCONRY EVENT

The
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FAIR
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Bank Holiday Weekend

Sun 30 & Mon 31 May 1999

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**Signposted
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- **Continuous Arena Events** ■ **Falconry Displays** ■ **Falconry & Associated Exhibitions** ■ **Sporting & Wildlife Art Exhibition**
- B.A.S.C. Gundog Events ■ West Midlands Police Pipe Band ■ Skydiving ■ Hounds
- Craft Fair ■ Gundog Advice Centre ■ Sporting Clay Shoot ■ Shooting School
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With Displays from The
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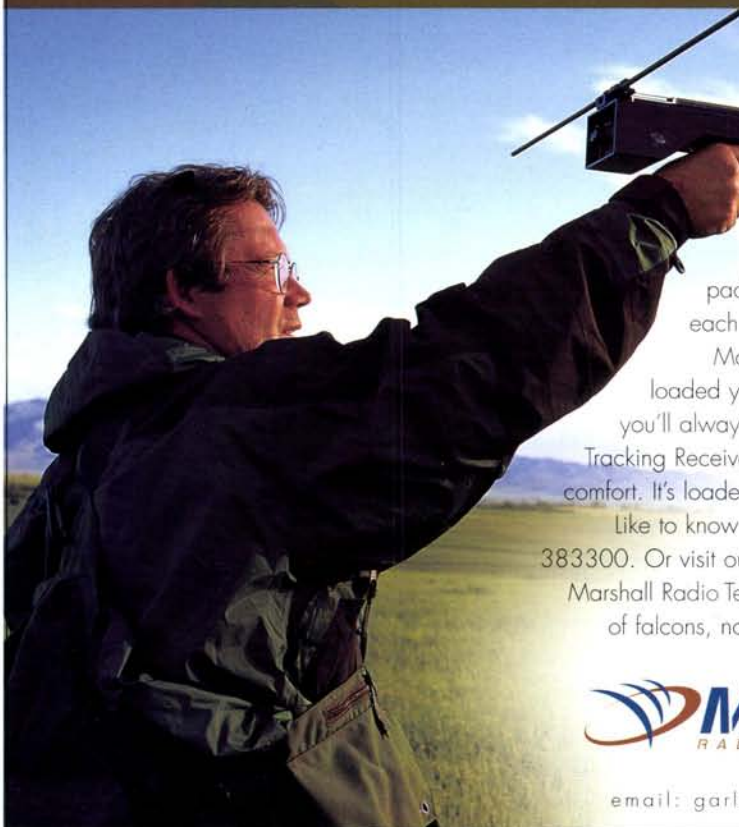
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