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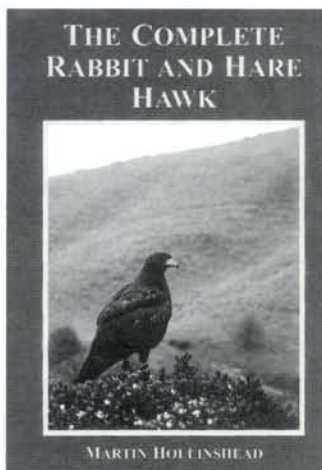
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## COMMENT

Hello Everybody,

I hope this finds you and your birds all well and looking forward to the Summer.

The Falconers Fair is at Offchurch again and is on the 28th & 29th May.

We have some interesting and entertaining articles for you again and I would like to thank all the contributors for their efforts, and for sharing their views and experiences with us.

We look forward to seeing many of you in May at the Fair and wish you all a productive breeding season and a speedy moult.

David & Lyn

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**COVER: Juvenile Bald Eagle By Richard Rossiter.**

# Rosies' Rescue

MARTYN HOLLAND

My name is Martyn Holland, I fly four long-wings on a landfill site in Northampton as a bird controller. The day, Wednesday the seventeenth of November, went normally enough, flying my four falcons twice each. I also have a female Harris' Hawk called Rosie, who I've hunted with for the last six seasons. It's 3pm in the afternoon and time to fly Rosie. There's a tree plantation on the site boundary and usually a few rabbits down there. After putting her in a tree I started beating some cover, the next time I looked up in the tree she had gone, I waited for a few minutes and called her but to no response. Time to get the telemetry out. A signal was received as soon as it was turned on, the signal was a little confusing as I was getting about the same strength signal in front as well as behind me. I turned the gain control down and removed the aerial and still received a signal. Moving along the hedge from the tree where she had flown the signal got stronger. I was expecting to find her mantling over a rabbit on the hedge bottom. With the gain turned right down and the aerial removed I knew she was very close, then my worst nightmare was realised, she had gone to ground. I quickly went back to my landrover and got a spade, I also called the site supervisor who came and helped me dig but it soon became too dark to carry on. After putting my jacket near the hole where she had gone down in the hope that it



*Martyn and Rosie waiting for a slip.*

would keep night-time predators away I went away with a heavy heart. After the longest night of my life I returned to the sett at six o'clock, armed with spades, saws and heavy duty tree pruners. By the time it was light I had cleared an area around the sett where I needed to dig. Tree roots from an old elder were the biggest problem as the main hole where it looked like she had gone down went directly underneath the. After clearing the soil and cutting through the tree root I started to dig. It soon became clear she was a lot deeper than I had first thought and after digging for about two hours I realised more drastic measures were called for. There is a housing estate being built around the tip and I had often spoken to one of the site supervisors, whose name is Ian, about my birds and he was always very interested in them. After telling him my dilemma he arranged for a J.C.B. to come over and help. There are two main entrance holes where I got the strongest signal from. I used the receiver with an ear piece as you would a ferret locator and pinpointed above where I thought she was. Flexible plastic pipes about five inches in diameter and about three feet long were put in these holes in the hope it would stop the earth falling in on her and give her some air. The digger driver gently started digging about six inches at a time, each time earth was moved a check with the receiver was made, as other holes appeared more flexible pipe was put in them so they could be followed. By now we had dug about six feet and it was not looking good. Another check with the receiver gave me the strongest signal from the left side of the trench. I put my arm down that side but could not feel anything. It was decided to go a little deeper, the flexible pipes were pushed in further as we dug deeper. After a few more very gentle scrapes we were about



*Martyn (R) with friends Dougie (L) and Kevin (M) after a successful days' hawking*

seven feet, another check with the receiver gave the same signal so a little deeper we go, another couple of gentle scrapes and despair turned to elation. As if by magic she seemed to burst from the ground, covered in earth, her legs plastered in wet clay. She shook herself and two or three secondary feather fell out, I couldn't believe she was alive let alone seemingly uninjured. I took her back to our canteen which is heated, washed her legs and out her on a bow perch to settle down. Other than looking a little bit light on her left leg and a few broken feathers she seems OK. I fed her a nice crop of fresh quail and left her quietly on her own. She was under ground a total of seventeen hours and I cannot believe she is sitting on a bow perch looking fairly contented. I finally sat down myself with a cup of coffee and it all suddenly hit me. To say I felt a bit emotional would be a big understatement, I don't mind admitting I had a few tears in my eyes. Rosie has always given me one hundred percent in the field and it is a nice feeling to give her a little back. My thanks go to Ian the supervisor, Van, our supervisor and mostly to the digger driver, whose name I don't know. Thank you for reading this article.

## COMPETITION RESULTS

The winners of our last issues competition were:

William Dodd, Manchester  
Mike Woodcock,  
Patricia Worden, Norwich  
Rod Hughes, Anstruther  
Ian Johnson, Windsor  
Gerald Ruffin, Sevenoaks  
Paul Beecroft, Reading  
Steven Hurst, Saltburn  
Lee Sparey, Somerset  
R. Leach, Bath  
Ian White, Preston  
Rob Rix, Kings Lynn  
A. C. Leach, Somerset

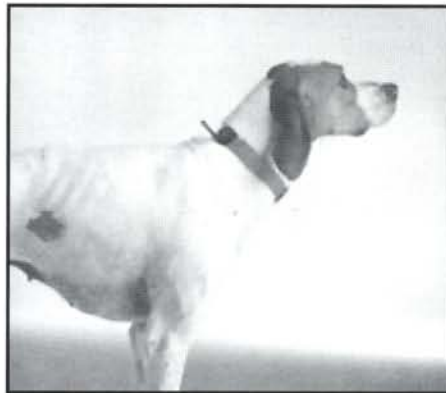
Congratulations to all.

Prizes donated were:

Glove - Martin Jones  
Transmitter - Marshall Telemetry  
Limited Edition Print - Ron Digby  
Solid Silver Bells - Barry Schofield  
Hood - Steve Halsall  
2 Free Registrations - IBR  
£15 Gift Voucher - Ray Prior  
Scales - Westweald Falconry  
£15 Book Token - Frances Mulholland  
Complete Rabbit & Hare Hawk - Martin Hollinshead  
Food Voucher - Honeybrook Farm  
Pair Asborne Bells - Leon Mulholland  
Hood Case - Woodland Falconry

**POWERPOINT  
Dog Tracking System  
From Marshall**

We all know how important telemetry is for keeping track of our birds, but what about our dogs. Under certain circumstances it can be just as hard to find the dog, especially if it is on point. To solve this problem Marshall have produced PowerPoint, a collar for tracking your dog. It uses the same technology that is used for the Marshall telemetry system. It is a button sized transmitter, which comes with it's own collar but can be



used with any other collar. It weighs only 1/2 oz. Switches on and off with a magnet, and the signal changes to indi-

cate whether the dog is moving or stationary. The collar is used with your Marshall Telemetry Receiver. It has a range that has exceeded 20 miles.



It was brought to my attention that a falconer had made an official complaint about the IBR. Knowing what a valuable service they provide and in light of the complaint I asked them to write and explain how their system works and what their fee covers.

## Can you do it better?

**Philip Wray**

In 1994, after the DOE ceased registration of common birds of prey, Jenny started the IBR. This was at the request of a number of falconers who were concerned that there would now be no way they would be able to easily recover their lost birds. This reuniting of found birds is one of the main aims of the IBR. During the past six years Jenny has helped reunite about 600 birds with their keepers

There have been, on very rare occasions, situations where she has been accused of 'holding a bird to ransom' by a keeper. Her interest is in getting the bird back to its keeper. This is not done for purely financial reasons although, of course, without funds she would not be able to continue.

Since she started she has gained thousands of contacts, the vast majority of whom, have been very grateful for the assistance she has given. It is often through these that she is able to gather enough information to help reunite a found bird. She spends many hours each week helping falconers with their questions and giving advice.

The following figures are to give an indication of the numbers of lost, found, stolen, reunited and dead birds recorded by the IBR each year. From this you can see that as each year goes by the IBR is the major organisation that falconers use to report their misplaced birds.

1995	164
1996	269
1997	344
1998	448
1999	598

Basically there are three categories of found birds.

Found birds that have been registered with the IBR and subsequently reported as lost. i.e. £10 has been paid by the keeper to reg-

ister the bird for 3 years. If one of these is found Jenny phones the keeper and arranges the time and place for the finder and keeper to hand over the bird. This is a free service included with the registration. The majority of these birds have an IBR ring that has our phone number on it. This enables the public to contact us without delay. There has never been any problem with these. Many very happy falconers.

Unregistered found birds that have been reported lost. If a falconer loses his bird he often phones Jenny to report the loss. For this there is no charge. Jenny makes a note on the database and offers advice on the best options for recovery including notifying the police, RSPCA, locals, bill posting, and other adverts such as with vets and local papers. She also says that the bird can be registered now for £10 in which case if she finds it there is no additional charge payable to the IBR. Alternatively there is no need to register the bird now but should she be successful in finding the bird there would be a charge of £40. £10 would be paid to the finder, £10 would go towards registration and the remaining £20 would be for administration. Often £10 of this £20 is paid to a second finder/collector. There has never been any problem with any birds in this category.

If a falconer in this category finds his bird using his own or other resources there is no obligation to him to pay anything to the IBR. We do recommend he registers the bird and fits a split telephone ring which we supply at no additional charge with registration to assist him get the bird back more quickly should he lose it again. Many are lost more than once.

This category is the potential problem one. These are birds which are often reported to us as found by members of the public. There is no record of them on the system as

being reported lost. Often they are with someone who has no idea what to do with the bird. In this case Jenny will phone around the local falconers asking if there is any knowledge of anyone losing a bird. If necessary she arranges for a local falconer to go out to collect this bird whilst enquiries are made to trace the owner.

On many occasions she has been able to find the keeper. At this stage she explains what she does, if the keeper does not know, and asks for the £40. The vast majority of keepers for these birds have been thrilled to know their bird is safe and well and have paid the £40 with no problem. Many have gone on to register their other birds and recommend their friends to do likewise.

Very occasionally there is the exception. Whether some falconers consider it their right to do what they want and have a totally free world I don't know. Perhaps they have never heard of the IBR. Perhaps they can not admit they could lose a bird. Perhaps they would rather pay for a replacement bird rather than pay £40.

We have to ensure the £40 is paid before information is passed on to the keeper as regrettably too many keepers have proved to be less than totally honest. I expect that is common throughout the general population. Many promises have been made but very few have been kept. Falconers have in general proved to be their own worst enemies. From the IBR point of view it would be so much easier, quicker and require fewer phone calls if we could just put the two parties in touch. During the first year we trusted falconers to our great cost.

Until 6 months ago there had only been three complaints from keepers within this category. One was from a man who after the event complained that his 11 year old daughter's barn owl was not worth £40 although she had been crying for three days over its loss. Another concerned a lost club bird at a display some 60 miles away. We released details of the bird to the committee so saving them an additional 120 mile drive. They had to have a club meeting to determine whether they would pay. The club members voted to pay and many members have since registered. The other concerned a Peregrine where the owner felt that as the bird was about to be registered

with the DETR why should he pay the IBR for all their time and effort involved even though the bird was not initially identified as a Peregrine.

This year there have been three incidents that have left a nasty taste. The first concerned a sparrowhawk for which, after a lot of time and effort, Jenny traced the owner who said 'the bird isn't worth £40 and it didn't fly very well anyway'. He had been given it. What responsibility!

Sakers have a reputation for being difficult to find, as many seem to disappear off the face of the earth. During the latter part of last year Jenny was lucky to be successful with many sakers and reuniting them. Here was another saker challenge. To cut a very long story very short Jenny located the owner who felt that after 5 weeks he was still going to find this bird and did not need the help of the IBR. He was not prepared to pay the IBR fee but was offering a substantial reward. The bird was returned and it comes as no real surprise that no reward has been forthcoming.

Reviewing the above it is only with a tiny percentage of birds from category 3 that there is ever any problem. It is natural that the more successful one becomes the

greater the likelihood of being sniped at. Additionally if say X% of birds are going to be a problem then numerically the greater number of problems will occur with greater numbers of birds being handled. The aim that Jenny has is to reunite birds with their keepers. If keepers don't want this then perhaps it would be a lot less time consuming if she took no positive action to find a keeper for any bird which she had not been advised as being lost. This would deprive many keepers of their birds.

There are now over 450 found birds of prey that the IBR has no owners for. They are still being looked after in the region where they were found. Is one of these birds yours?

It has taken 6 years to build this high level of trust and support to create this network of falconers who help reunite these birds. Such a system has not existed before that works so well. Use it!

Maybe Jenny should disregard all birds which fall into the third category or at least make no effort to locate the owners. Although I think the following gentlemen would say differently!

I rang a couple of falconers who have been re-united with their birds by Jenny. These people were not expecting my call and were given the opportunity to state exactly what they thought. Here's what they said:

**Eddie Anthony:** If it wasn't for Jenny I wouldn't have got my bird back. The people who had it hadn't reported it, Jenny heard they had the bird, put us in touch and I got my bird back. The money just wasn't a problem, I would have paid more, I can't put a value on my bird.

**Lee Bryant:** The service was excellent, I am really chuffed and the money doesn't come into it.

**Chris Price:** The service is brilliant. The money is just not a problem. I would recommend it to anyone. At a recent club meeting somebody shouted out that the IBR was better than any telemetry system as it could not fail or fall off.

## THE NATIONAL TRUST

As you know, we have battled with the National Trust for about four years to reinstate falconry on Trust land. Finally, after tortuous negotiations, we won our case last year. But it has proved a hollow victory. At the last minute a member of the Conservation Committee who was anti-falconry managed to get included a clause which said that falconers had to prove that falconry was practised every year for the ten years prior to the ban on the exact piece of land in question. It turns out that few falconers have records that far back, neither does the Trust. Personnel on both sides have changed or moved. So theoretically we are allowed, but in practice, we can't.

In 1999 I managed to obtain a National Trust licence on behalf of the Northumberland Crow Falconers to hawk on some Trust farms right in the middle of our southern block of country. Fortunately for us, the Trust did not own those properties at the time of the ban, and we have a record of hawking all the surrounding land. Also, fortunately for us the Regional Officer was a shooting man and sympathetic to the cause. So we hawked the land under the conditions of the licence and had two mounted meets on those farms. At the end of the season I filed a Return. We have therefore established a precedent of current falconry on National Trust land.

Others have been less fortunate. Several people have approached the Trust in the wrong way. It is no use saying 'I want to go hawking - what land have you got to offer

me?' You really have to do your homework, get all the tenants on side and so on. The question now is, is there sufficient Trust land of falconry interest for there to be a real demand? Nick Kester, Iain Timmins and I can go back into battle, but it needs to be done soon, as a first annual review. We cannot let it lie for two or three years and then try to re-ignite the flame. Who has made an approach to the Trust and what problems did they meet?

If any body has any feed back perhaps they could contact Iain Timmins at the Hawk Board and we will see if we can prise the door open a bit further.

Nick Fox

## ANNOUNCEMENT

Unfortunately this year there will be no Hawk Board Symposium. Instead there will be an Open Forum where members of Affiliated Clubs, Clubs who are considering affiliation and invited guests will be able to sit and watch a Hawk Board Meeting to enable them to see exactly what the Hawk Board does.

There will be also be guest speakers.

The cost will be £10 per person and will include a buffet lunch, morning coffee and afternoon tea. The Forum will take place in Litchfield on the 21st October.

## Geoff's Back At The Helm

It should please everybody to know that the flying displays at The Cotswold Eagle, Hawk and Falcon Park will now be given by Geoff Dalton on a full time basis.

Geoff has had a break from the centre and has been running the Aquatic Centre situated within the grounds of Batsford Arboretum, as is the Falconry Centre but this year he has decided that he can't do without the birds any longer and is back at the helm.

Geoff is a very charismatic speaker and he has a real talent when it comes to entertaining the public as he flies his birds of prey. There are no gimmicks, it's just the way he is. Also he aims to train the birds during the displays so you can see birds in various stages of training including their first free flight. Some of these birds are older birds being re-trained for the Summer season and some will be new birds. This should be very exciting.

Go and see for yourself.

Enquiries on 01386 701043.

If you have anything for our news page please send it to:

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# ALTERNATIVE LURES

RICHARD ROSSITER

I decided after a few years, to get back into falconry. It had been a while and I had forgotten most, if not all that I had been taught. I ended up with a food imprint Redtailed Hawk who didn't know how to hunt. I had endless hours of fun flying though until my nerves couldn't take any more screaming. As luck would have it I met Mick, a local falconer who knew who had what in the area. Mick was probably one of the best falconers I knew, if I asked he answered! If I did something odd he would ask me to explain why and so on. For whatever reason Mick gave up flying and I ended up on my own with a male Harris' hawk. This bird would fly any distance to me but the only thing I ever caught with him were voles and mice, of course he chased other things but he never quite got there. Was the bird fit? Yes!..I think so. I went to Mick and he told me to "Teach him". "Oh yeah, like hawks don't know how to hunt.!!!" I tried everything I knew but still to no avail.

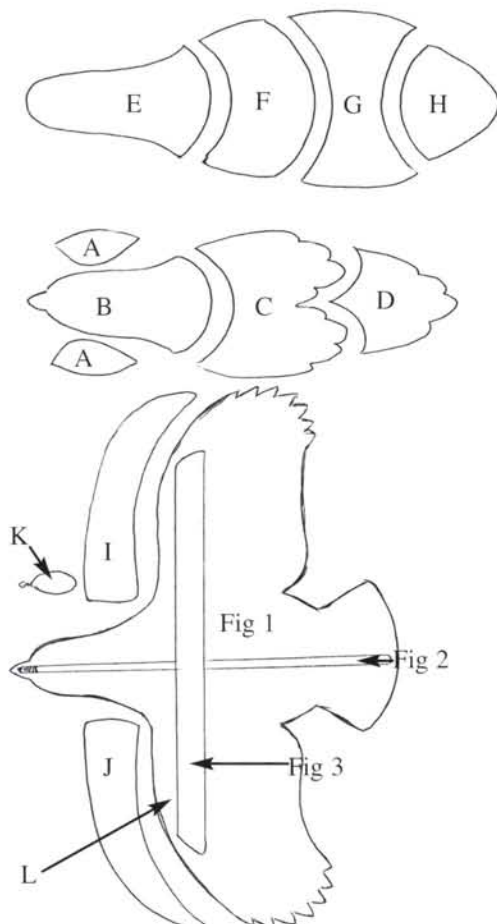
Some time later a piece on pursuit training caught my eye. The author, Frank Beebe really opened my eyes. The

first thing I did was to change all my lures. By this time I had had a number of birds. Feather, a young male Harris' hawk was my new pupil. He was put in a pen for a week to settle in and get used to eating on his own and gain his independence, then I got him out and sat him on my fist but with no food. When food was offered by me it was always on a lure. First from his bow with me trying to sit nearer all the time. Once he would take the lure with me very close we started in the field. At first no joy but he soon got the hang of it. I have notice that the males seem to come long distances for food more readily than the females. If I dropped the lure close he would just look, but if I walked away about 10 yards and dropped it I would get an instant response. Once he started chasing I set up all manner of things. I made the situations as real as possible and once he'd mastered it, each new challenge was made more difficult. Rabbit lures were always pulled from cover e.g a hedge or long grass and usually ended up in cover, as do most rabbits. This got him used to two things flying away from me and entering cover.

I also used flapping lures. These are based on the design in Frank Beebe's book *The Compleat Falconer*, but they are made from leather, stuffed with carrier bags and painted to look like birds. I also weight the head with a fishing weight. These are used in a similar way to a falcon lure but are made completely differently. As with the falcon lure you swing it but high up around your head until the bird is close enough and then you throw it out or up. Again once he cottoned on I used to throw it in all different directions to get him used to turning sharply or banking upwards etc. It wasn't long before he started hunting properly, first mice and voles, then the odd rat, stoat or weasel but what he shone at were pigeons and pheasants. He will take a cock pheasant anywhere anytime, and he knocks pigeons out of the sky!

The advantage of the flapping lure is; they really do flap. They can be made to represent any bird you wish, from Sparrows right up to Ducks or Pheasant.

To make these lures following my design please see below.



Step 1. Decide on the bird you wish to make and cut out the appropriate pattern, this piece of leather runs through the middle of the bird for the wings. (the example shown Fig 1 is a partridge {not to scale}.)

2. Cut a length of net curtain wire for a spine Fig 2.

3. Cut a length of metal retractable tape measure to the length of the span of the wings to the elbows. Fig 3.

4. Cut out the top Fig 4 (this consists of five pieces, A - D)

A: eye

B: head

C: shoulders

D: upper tail coverts

and the bottom Fig 4 (This consists of four pieces E - H)

E: throat

F: crop

G: belly

H: under tail coverts.

and wing covers.

(Two I & J).

5. Sew the top pieces together in the order shown, and do the same with the bottom, you should end up with two slightly curved pieces of leather.

6. Place Fig 1 on the table glue the curtain wire down the centre, next place the metal tape across the spine and along the wings (do not glue).

7. Glue the wings covers to the top edge of the underneath of the wings, to cover the metal tape.

8. Sew the top and bottom sections either side of Fig 1 making sure you have the pieces on the correct side of Fig 1.

9. When sewing start at the neck, sew down the inside of the wing, across the tail and up the other wing. Up the neck, round the head to the eye.

10. Stuff the bird with the carrier bags ( these are light and do

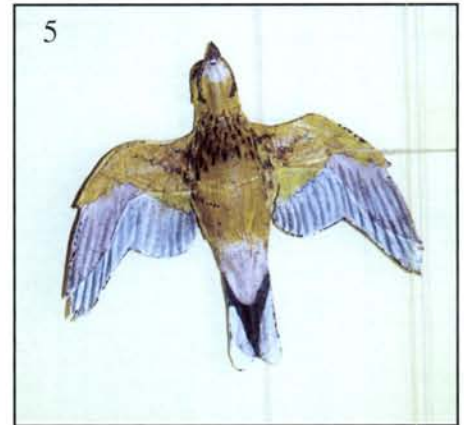
not rot). Place the fishing weight (K) heavy enough to balance the body (ie, 1/2 - 3/4 oz for a partridge) then test fly the bird. It should, when swung in a circle fly head first. If the tail comes up you have too much weight, if the head comes up it is not heavy enough. Once you have balanced the bird you can now finish sewing it up.

11. Attach a piece of string to the left hand wing at point L.



Pic 1: Woodcock from the bottom

Pic 2: Woodcock from the top



Pic 3: Woodcock. This shows how well the birds balance.

Pic 4: Yellowhammer from the top.

Pic 5: Yellow Hammer from the bottom. (Not a typical example of the type of bird you would make)



## Rabbit Lures

I have also been making my rabbit lures slightly differently as you can see from the illustration on the left.

The base of the lure is a squeaky, rubber dog bone (1).

This is wrapped in carrier bags (2) which are secured with thread (3).

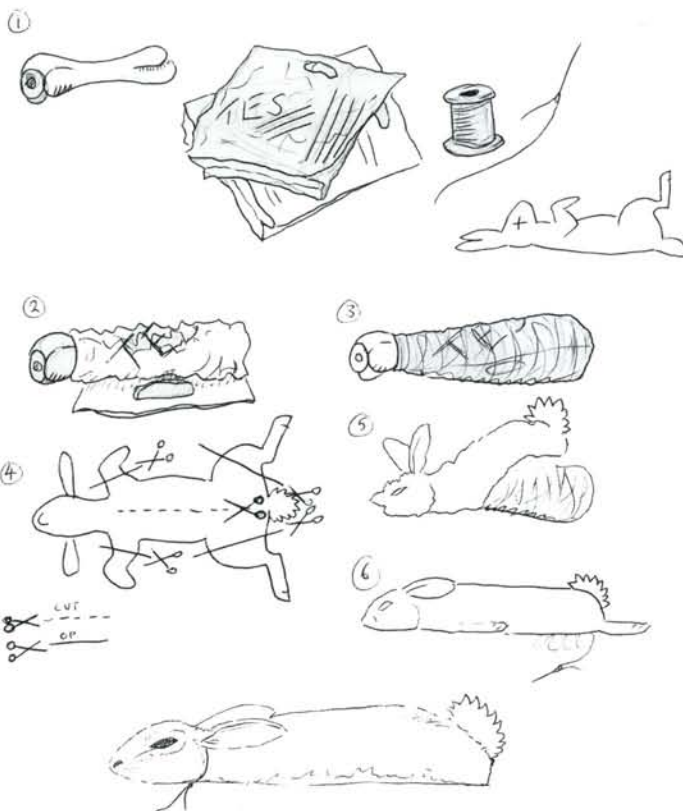
A rabbit skin is laid out and the legs cut off at the points marked(4).

The rabbit skin is stitched up half way and the squeaky bone pushed into the end (5) and then the remainder of the skin is stitched together(6).

A length of string or rope is tied around the neck of the dummy bunny to pull it along(7).

The food should be attached to the head of the rabbit. When the bird catches the rabbit and squeezes the rabbit will 'squeak'.

All illustrations by Richard Rossiter





# TILLY 'N' ME

Lyn Wilson

Sunday 23rd november, we went out looking for magpies. We only found two but what flights we had. The second one was tremendous. Tilly bated and I slipped her, I have come to know when she is bating at something and when it is just for the hell of it (she loves sitting in tall trees). Out of the hedge on our right came a magpie, it flew up and over an opposite hedge and Tilly flew vertically to try and reach it, a quick flip and it was off, she pursued it a little way and then let it go. Had she caught it, it would have been her seventh magpie and her 20th head of quarry. Today though she was flying a little heavier than usual, not in weight but in attitude.

She started her hunting career at 9 1/8 oz, yo-yoing between that and 9 oz and occasionally 9 1/4. As we progressed through the season I found that halfway

mode.

The weather warmed up however and her weight had to come down, by thursday she was 9 1/4 and we went out at about 3pm. We walked our usual weekday land and came home through a small wood, I was beating and Tilly bated for something, I didn't see anything but I let her go, she made for a tree ahead and to my left. The next thing I know she is heading back but over to the left and then I heard a by now familiar noise, she had caught a magpie. I ran over and dispatched the magpie, let her pluck for a few minutes and then fetched her up. The following afternoon was one of those when I seemed to run out of time so it was 4.05 before I eventually left the house, I only had about half an hour, today David came with me. It was quite windy and as time was short we decided to go straight into the wood because it was sheltered. She had a couple of slips on small birds but no success, as we came to the corner of the wood, where it meets a field she bated hard, I released her and then came that noise again. "Did you see the magpie then?" asked David, "no I didn't, but Tilly obviously did," I replied. I don't think the magpie realised she was on her way, she must have hit it where it sat. We found it very odd because magpies are very noisy and that is usually how we find them, sneaking about and pinpointing them in a particular hedge or group of trees.

Magpies are probably Tilly's only downfall, she will fly up to half a mile for them (a long way for a sparrow). Her favourite place to disappear to at the moment though is over the river and a railway line into the next village. Due to fact that the magpies are now wise to her and flee across the river. she

refuses to let this stop her though and has started catching them over there instead. She is totally unfazed by the trains now but she flies so low to the ground I am worried she may get hit by one.

As far as her training is concerned I took the advice of the author of the book about accipiters and fly her exclusively to the lure for food and I am pleased to say it works very well. However he suggests you don't call it back too often but Tilly will come back over a dozen times in any one flying session, sometimes 100 -



*Quite contented, at home on herbow perch.*



*Tilly, Mistress of all she surveys*

through I was able to fly her higher, up to 9 1/2 oz, especially as the weather was far colder than it had been. Then as she became more confident her independence grew and her weight had to be brought down to 9-9 1/8 oz to ensure she was reasonably responsive to the lure. Her hunting instinct is not lessened at the slightly higher weight but her willingness to come back to me is. We still have days when her weight is up at 9 1/4 though, because although her weight is up if it has been lower her head still seems to be in 9 oz



*Out hawking.*

the field. She accepts all of this quite happily. When fetching up off a kill she comes off easily for the lure, here however, I tie a piece of meat equivalent to the size of a chick head to it, she eats this once again I use the bag to cover it complete with titbit and up she comes.

**M**y relationship with this bird is wonderful, she does odd little things which are hard to explain. Because we are led to believe that accipiters are so scatty that it is hard to maintain any sort of relationship I was totally unprepared for what I got. For example the other day we were out hawking she disappeared off after something. She went out the top of a tall tree and it was very windy. I was getting a signal but not a strong one and I couldn't pinpoint any sort of direction. After a few minutes of walking I lost it completely. I swung the lure and called her but nothing, so I walked back to where I last had a signal and sure enough picked it up again, as I was concentrating on the telemetry I had the lure hanging down by my legs. suddenly the signal got stronger and stronger and she was there hanging on to the lure. On another occasion she flew into a wood and I lost the signal. Where we were flying there is only one way back to the car. I walked and walked and was giving up hope of finding her as it was dark by now. Then I got a signal, faint but there. It was in the wood. Then it had gone again. I began to walk back to the gap off our land and up a bridle path when I got a signal. The closer I got to the gap the stronger it became. She was sitting up a tree just to the side of the gap. I got out the lure and she made an effort to come down but she couldn't see it on the ground and I was worried about swinging it as I might have hit her. She flew round and sat in another tree but still wouldn't come down to me. Then she moved. Into a smaller tree. I ran round and walked up to her, talking quietly to her all the time and she sat completely still while I found her flying jesses and picked her up. Again it was very windy and I held her close to me with my hand across her back as we walked home. She has no problem with physical contact. Because of the time of year it

*Right: Tilly with Squeak, her sibling. Below: Tilly with Thomas. The children had as much fun and I did.*

was usually dusk before we get home. I can't tell you how good it feels to walk home with a sparrowhawk on your fist all roused up and preening. I have never really wanted to fly a harris hawk or a redtail, the falcons have been the ones to fascinate me but due to bad luck with Lady last year I decided to give a sparrowhawk a go. Why oh why didn't I do it sooner? Don't get me wrong, she is not an easy bird to fly, she can be bad tempered and stubborn, she is quite scatty and hates anything with two wheels. Two of our dogs she tolerates the other she can't stand. Oddly enough though when she was a downy she loved him, he would lay with her and she would preen his tail, but now she bates when he goes past. (Unless she is eating in which case she runs at him). I think maybe the other reason this relationship has worked so well is because I fly her every day. It is hard work though. A dog is no good with a sparrowhawk, they spook them and generally don't put stuff up close enough for decent slips, if our pointer works 10 yards ahead of us everything is 10 yards ahead of her so it all has a 20 yard head start. No good at all. Not only that, although she has, to be fair, had some good chases when working with the dogs, all her kills have been either from beating or as with the magpies above, when she has spotted something and gone for it. Tilly will now fly partridge but has yet to catch one and it has only been this last few weeks(Dec) that she will fly them before they are airborne. Previously she needed the stimulation of the other birds flight to get her going. Then they out fly her. She buzzes pheasants but obviously will not tackle them as they are far too big.

## EARLY DAYS



Pigeons are fair game but too much of a head start and she won't even look at them. Magpies are her favourite and she has caught eleven. Her head count to date is 28.

**A**s the season progresses she is becoming more and more independent when flown in familiar territory and regularly disappears. Due to this I have to keep her weight quite tight. She wears a transmitter every hunting trip and what a godsend it has been. First an Audio Precision one and lately a Martin Jones both of which are equally good. David has made me a small aerial which is coiled onto a piece of plastic and put on the front of the transmitter in the case, as shown in Nick Fox's book Understanding the Bird of Prey. She never strays far though and I can usually guess where she is. The other day though I pre-empted her and went across the river looking for her. I walked along the field heading back towards the second bridge and as I was climbing over a fence she appeared out of nowhere from the direction I was heading, towards home. Had she come looking for me? When we go to somewhere we haven't been before or don't go too often though she is really good, following on and staying close. Or flying ahead a little and then waiting until I catch up and moving on. Although she goes off self hunting she doesn't catch anything on her own. She has had magpies when I get there but I believe she makes the advantage by sitting very still near the magpies and they settle down, when I appear they move and she catches them.

**N**ot all her catches have been like this though, some we have flushed out through deliberate beating, some we have almost bumped into. One other species she like are starlings, these she will fly when they are flocking but to enable her to stand any sort of chance I have to take her bell off, this is attached with a button bewit for easy removal. It is truly spectacular watching her hugging the contours of the ground covering an enormous distance before

*Middle: Tillys favourite 'perch' a basket of washing.*

*Below: When the weather was right, like all of us she headed for the nearest deck chair.*



she reaches them and then.....puts her foot down.

One of her early flights involved a cock pheasant. When she flies pigeons she slips on the noise they make leaving cover, the same went for this pheasant. She flew hard up behind it and then eased off and David and I fully expected her to peel off and sit in a nearby tree but no she caught up with the damn thing, dropped, flew underneath and started to turn upside down ready to strike, only then did it seem to dawn on her that this bird was far too big for her and she then headed for the tree. Big sighs of relief all round.

Imprinting a bird is not for every one. Land flying them is not easy either, you have to be fit (lots of running) patient and have a very understanding family, (as I have) for the first five months after she went loose she was flown almost every day. I am lucky because I work from home and could give Tilly my full attention, she went everywhere with us, visiting relatives and friends, school sports day etc.

She also dominated the household for quite a few weeks and we had to revise our schedule more than once to accommodate her. Preparation of food was another consideration. The thing which I believe was a great advantage was the constant presence of our three dogs and four children plus friends. The house was very rarely quiet except when the children were at school. Tilly took it all in her stride and sleeping was not a problem. I swear she could have slept through world war three. The kids had the greatest respect for her and looked after her and although she has grown up now and is not the lovable and tolerant downy she was they still love her to bits and are very proud of her

I can't wait for next season, I have been

assured that her independent nature will return immediately and in full force but I can live with that, because along with it will come all the experience she has gained this season. The amount of fun, and excitement I have had with this little bird I would challenge anyone to try and beat.



Pod, a Guardian angel of the best sort.

## SIMPLE AERIALS FOR SHORTWINGS

Reproduced courtesy Dr Nick Fox

As I mentioned in my article about Tilly, the Sparrowhawk, I use a home made aerial with my telemetry. The design was taken from Nick Fox's book Understanding the Bird of Prey and after talking sweetly to him he agreed to let me reproduce the diagrams and text in the magazine.

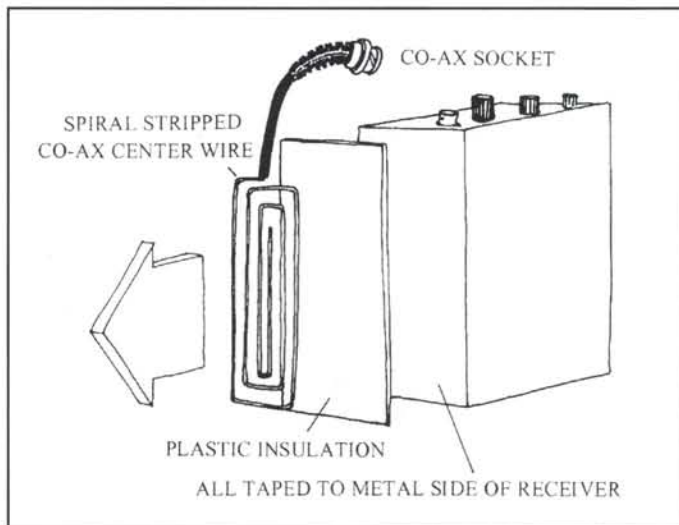
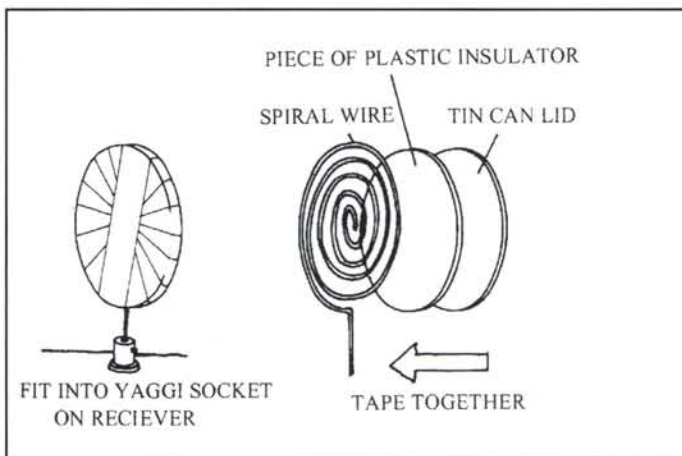
The aerial I use has a range of about half a mile and this is adequate for locating the spar. One of the things about it is that if you are getting signal you can be certain she is no more than half a mile away and although it is not terribly directional, as you will get a signal around 180 degrees by making 360 degrees you can generally be sure that when the signal stops or is at its weakest the bird is generally in the opposite direction. You must use the body as a block, always hold the receiver right up against your body as you get closer to the bird turn down the volume and do the 360 test regularly. I find that if I am misled by the signal ie in wooded areas etc if I go back to the last place I got a signal, unless she has moved on any real distance, I generally pick the signal up again. It has taken some practice to get it right and knowing the area

we fly and the birds' preferences as to area and quarry (magpies) helps, but it has been extremely useful when she has gone down in thick cover or flown off through the wood. She is small and blends very well so it is hard to see her, especially in the late Summer early Autumn.

Pic 1 is the first suggestion in Nick's book and instructions are as follows:

A small piece of spiral piano wire is fitted into the yaggi socket on the receiver. On one side of it is a metal tin lid separated by a piece of plastic as insulation. This shields it from incoming radio signals from behind, thus making it directional. It is excellent for ranges of about 500 metres and handy for locating hawk kills in woods of hawks on kills in farm crops.

Pic 2 is the version I use with Tilly, and a progression from the one above.



## A Year in the Life of the Central.

A lot has happened in the last twelve months with the structure and venues at the Central Falconry & Raptor Club. We now have a Board that oversees the tree regions.

The Warwickshire Region is held on the second Sunday of the month. The venue being The Stags head at Offchurch, near Leamington Spa, (contact John Hill 0973 224609 for details). The Gloucestershire Region are in the process of changing venue (please ring Jenny Cantrill on 01386 832812 for details). Our latest region which has been operating for 18 months is in Oxfordshire and is held at Sturdys Castle near Tackley and is held on the fourth Sunday of the month. The contact is Derek Yates on 01608 677927.

The Warwickshire Region had had various speakers at their social evenings including the D.E.T.R. and Jim Chick, Chairman of the Hawk Board.

Jim Chick spoke about the whys and wherefores of telemetry. A few

evenings were spent discussing various aspects of husbandry, including hooding, imping and coping.

This coming year there are speakers giving talks on nutrition, slide shows on Gyrs in Canada and a vet who will be microchipping and giving a talk on Raptors.

The Gloucestershire Region last year held various social evenings including a talk from Roy Hart on falconry equipment. This year they will be holding a meeting at a Falconry Centre, a First Aid Course (which is a joint venture), and a Summer B.B.Q.

Our newest region, Oxfordshire, will carry on the good work this year having had interesting social evenings with a visit from Ben Long (Falconry Equipment), and Martin Jones.

A get together was held at the Cotswold Wildlife Park where all regions were able to look behind the scenes and were able to take their birds for all to see. The hunting season was highlighted by members being invited to the Yorkshire Falconry Clubs' meet.

We will be having a stand at various Game Fairs this year including the Falconers Fair where once again the Club has been invited to man the weathering ground and will be at the C.L.A. Game Fair

where we will have a stand and help with the Campaign for Falconry.

If any of you have any money left over from the festive season then don't forget that we have many items of club merchandise for sale. These include sweatshirts, polo-shirts, mugs and badges.



## The Northern Ireland Hawking Club

I was approached early in 1999 by a number of keen falconers about starting a club in Northern Ireland. There was not much happening in the club scene in our country at the time and it was decided to try and start something that would benefit and promote the sport of falconry, whilst also educating the unaware of our particular past time.

The first meeting was held at my home and nine people attended. A debate lasted some time into whether or not we should concentrate all our efforts into the old existing club or to start afresh. The latter was agreed upon and after a struggle we have set up and established the new club. Our numbers have grown from nine to a membership of about forty and another twenty world-wide. These numbers in such a small amount of time is very encouraging.

Now a problem that we are still faced with, is that some people are mistaking the two clubs for one. Although some members belong to both clubs we are not an amalgamation.

There are now two clubs in the Island of Ireland. The Irish Hawking Club and ourselves, The Northern Ireland Hawking Club. Both clubs are open to anyone that has an interest in falconry and birds of prey, with the intention of promoting, educating and conserving our chosen sport.

Anyone wishing to join the 'Northern Ireland Hawking Club', can do so by contacting myself.

Mike Gibb on: 01247-472413

## Scottish Hawking Club Report Spring 2000

This years hawking season has gone well despite the Scottish fickle weather, we started off with an early day at rabbits in September in southern Scotland followed up with a day in Cumbria during October. Both meets showed a good population of bunnies for the birds to fly at with a couple of pheasants seen in Cumbria.

Our 4 day meet and AGM saw us once again back on the Isle of Skye, rabbits, hares and grouse were all taken in good style, with a record turnout of falconers.

The hospitality shown to us was just as good as before, so we will definitely be back. A couple more short wing meets before Christmas saw the end of the century out after the tra-

ditional Crookedstane meet on the 30th December.

The New-Year field meets have all taken place, but wind and showers has made hard work for the birds. We have a couple more meets to take place before the end of the season lets hope we can get some crisp, blue sky, no wind days to make it enjoyable for everyone.

On the political front, the Scottish Hawking Club has been instrumental in the formation of the Scottish Hawk Board. We felt that with the new Scottish parliament, and the threat it imposes with putting forward new legislation that may be detrimental to falconry, this new group should be formed. The new board consists of the Scottish Hawking

Club, British Falconers Club (Scottish Group) and the Campaign for Falconry, our remit is to concentrate purely on Scottish matters, leaving the UK Hawk Board which we are still affiliated to, to assist us, and be responsible for EU and CITES legislation. We need as much help as possible and anyone who is prepared to help us especially in regards to the communications network we are about to set up please get in touch with the club. The Watson Bill is still alive but until it is published we do not know its content,

we have been assured by MSPs that falconry will not be affected, lets hope they are right. Good Hawking.



Scottish Hawking Club new entry, Jemma

# THE APPRENTICE

By Francis Allen

High in the clear blue sky the continuing melodic song of the ascending skylark seemed to typify summer. Jack Fraser watched the lark out of one eye as he drank orange juice from a bottle, he lay down on the bank side, resting for a minute from his labours of scything the long grass. Resting his head in the new cut grass he listened to the sounds around him, bees busied themselves in and out of the many wildflowers, and at his feet he heard a rustle, then the tell-tale high pitched squeak of a shrew. A cock chaffinch chinked, chwing, chwing its metallic call seemed to be competing with the chiff chaff somewhere in the thorn hedge at the top of the bank, and all around the air was perfumed with the smell of new mown hay.

The sound of a twig cracking indicated the presence of a boy he had seen earlier, walking alongside the bottom hedge of the fourteen acre wheat field, he had now made his way up to the farm roadside.

Without looking up Jack greeted the boy's arrival, "Lovely day to be walking the fields young'un", said Jack startling the boy.

The boy had not seen Jack lying in the grass, and almost fell off the gate he was climbing over in an attempt to see where the unexpected greeting had come from.

Jack climbed to his feet and walked over to the boy, "Look lad if you must climb over wooden gates, climb over at the hinge end, you'll put less strain on the post, and me as I has to fix 'em. Anyhows where's you come from lad, I've not seen you on this farm before?" quizzed Jack.

"Yes sir, I'll remember that, I come from Orchard Fields in the village", said the boy looking up at Jack.

"Orchard Fields? Oh you mean those new houses", said Jack remembering some building work going on in the old orchard the last time he was in the village.

"New houses" exclaimed the boy. "I moved here when I was eight and I'm fourteen now".

"Well let me welcome you boy, I'm Jack Fraser, I looks after all the hedges and bank sides and all the game birds on these farms hereabouts", said Jack offering the boy his hand to shake.

"I'm Gary sir, Gary Jennings", said the boy offering his small hand into the grasp of the hard, weather-beaten grip.

"Well Gary, we will have less of the sir, most call me Jack and some calls me Hawk", he said tucking the back of his shirt into his waist belt.

Jack walked to where he had left off work and continued scything the grass.

"Why Hawk?", inquired Gary.

"Well one reason some calls me Hawk is on account that I see's everything just like a

hawk", replied Jack with a wink.

Gary laid down in the grass whilst Jack continued rhythmically scything the bank side, the suns rays were warming as they bathed his body. Turning over to lie on his stomach he plucked a seed head of grass and chewed the fleshy stem between his teeth. He was gazing out across the fourteen acre wheat field when suddenly a dark silhouette of a bird swooped out of the deep blue sky in a large arc, the bird levelled out at about twenty feet and heading on fixed wings approached them at speed. "Look at that hawk", screamed Gary. "It's coming this way Jack", he exclaimed pointing at the bird.

Jack carried on scything, Gary had not taken his eyes off the hawk and was astounded as it kept approaching. "Jack, Jack", he kept saying as the hawk swept straight over his head, turned into the gentle breeze and landed on the gatepost.

"Back are you 'Odin' did you find a nice cool breeze high up there old lad?" inquired Jack of the tiercel peregrine, who now leaned forward on the gatepost as Jack approached him.

"You gave my young friend here a bit of a turn 'Odin'," Jack place his hand against the peregrine's breast and it stepped up onto it. Moving his arm towards Gary he brought the tiercel closer to the boy.

"Gary this is 'Odin' say hello to him", said Jack as the tiercel looked Gary straight in the eye.

"G o s h !"



gaspd Gary "He's magnificent, where did he come from, is he yours?"

"The sky", replied Jack "'Odin' is a sky god, he lives in the sky when he's not spending time with me", said Jack placing the peregrine back on the post. "We'll leave him to have a rest now, he's been up there for hours", explained Jack returning to work.

Gary sat down in the grass and watched the tiercel intently, he was fascinated as it stretched up its neck to preen its neck and chest feathers, then fluffing all its body feathers, roused itself in a great shake. Clenching one foot, it stretched out a leg forwards, shook the leg a little, then withdrew both the leg and the clenched foot into its body feathers.

Jack kept an eye on the boy as he worked, he could see how mesmerised he was with the tiercel's presence. When he stopped working to take another drink from the squash bottle he was bombarded with questions. He found Gary's enthusiasm infectious and found himself telling stories and re-enacting flights to the lad he had probably never mentioned to anyone before. Jack had been a solitary falconer most of his life, living and working mostly alone he had the opportunity to take a hawk or falcon with him and fly it during his work breaks. He had been hawking since he was a boy, younger than Gary, now it was just an instinctive part of his life and he really had to think hard before answering some of the questions Gary was throwing at him. Jack was a little unorthodox in his methods of hunting, especially with his longwings like 'Odin', in a way he kept them on an extended hack. He hacked all the falcons he trained, but it was a daytime hack as opposed to full-time.

As he worked in the fields most days he could take an eyas with him and sit it on a hedge post whilst he worked, the eyas would soon be exploring the field, flying from post to post, and then into the trees, soon it would be flying up on the thermals. Jack would feed the eyas in the mid afternoon by calling it to a weighted lure lying on the ground, the eyas would feed whilst Jack continued to work. Then he would gather it onto his fist and return home, the eyas would retire to sit on the back of a high backed chair in his living room and sleep until morning.

The following day Jack and the eyas would repeat the performance until finally one day the eyas would return with a full crop. Jack would carry on with these free flight periods, but now using his collie dog to point partridges, the eyas learned that it was more profitable to hunt with Jack and the dog. The falcons would wait around until late morning when Jack felt it was

look far as he knew where most of the coveys were, he always knew where they nested and lifted their eggs to place under broody bantams, he then released the reared youngsters and watched their progress.

It was the school summer holidays for Gary and he spent every day thereafter with Jack and 'Odin'. Gary became totally hooked as 'Odin' demonstrated his immense skill on both partridge and wild pheasants. The tiercel's experience had been hard learnt, and he made hunting look easy, Jack would explain to Gary that it had taken a long time for the tiercel to learn that by hitting a wild pheasant precisely in the head he was thus able to dispatch even an old cock bird in the air. Many falcons don't learn this skill, let alone tiercels and many a pheasant recovers from a body hit from the heaviest of falcons.

Jack was a true countryman and his knowledge of the countryside and its flora and fauna was learnt over a lifetimes' observation. It was his intimate knowledge of the particular land over which he had worked for most of his life that was a special advantage to his success at putting up quarry for his falcons or hawks.

Jack knew where virtually every bird and mammal lived and breathed on all the farms. He paid a keen interest to the comings and goings of every roe deer, fox, badger, hare, rabbit, pheasant, duck and partridge.

The pheasants, duck and partridge were his special concern and he helped their continued production where and whenever he could. Working the hedges, banks and ditches as he did he found many if not all their nests, where he would lift half, not all, of the clutch of eggs to artificially incubate or place under any available broody bantam or hen. The eggs he left usually had a higher success rate of survival, and the ones he reared were all released back on the individual farms. The other species, the deer, fox, hare and rabbits had to have their numbers controlled, together with the corvid population, and the farmers expected Jack to see to it. The badgers were on the whole Jack's secret, all the farmers knew there were badgers but no one knew where they were except Jack. He would lay for hours face down on a plank of wood secured about six x feet up in a tree at dusk awaiting the emergence of the sow and her cubs from a sett. Here he would spend many an enjoyable hour or two on moonlit nights watching the young cubs gambolling about.

As late summer arrived, Gary was as keen as ever and Jack had decided to take on an eyas goshawk to train. The rabbit population was exploding and Jack much preferred a natural method of control as he called hawking or falconry. He had decided that if Gary's enthusiasm continued it would be valuable experience for him to participate in the training of a young gos. This was unbeknown to Gary whose first encounter with a gos was one Saturday morning in late July, when he strolled up the garden path of Jack's farmstead to find Jack sitting on the back doorstep with a huge female gos feeding on his gloved fist. The gos stopped feeding as soon as Gary

appeared and Jack indicated to Gary to sit where he was and to keep as quiet and still as he could. Soon the gos was feeding again but every mouthful was punctuated with a cold stare at Gary.

The gos, a Finnish female, had arrived the previous evening. She had just been caught up from a breeding chamber, and the breeder had delivered her on account that Jack had no transport. He had jessed her on arrival and sat up all night with her on the fist, although this was an old, outdated method of manning a short-wing, he was a slow one to change. As he sat on the doorstep in the early morning sun with the gos feeding, 'Mungo', Jack's collie dog sat beside him with his head laid over his right knee. Already the gos paid little attention to the dog and Jack pointed out to Gary that this happy state of affairs was partly due to the dog being constantly present since the moment the gos emerged from the travelling box.

She was a large, powerful hawk in feather perfect plumage, with a deep chest, wide head, strong beak and large, sturdy legs with wide spanning feet armed with the most ferocious talons Gary had ever seen.

"Take a good long look at her now Gary, she's in brand spanking new condition, hopefully we will keep her that way", explained Jack, and went on with tales of the methods of young goshawks daredevil attitude to hunting, giving little regard to their own safety in their determined pursuit of quarry.

As they entered the living room, Gary noticed that in the opposite corner to where 'Odin' was sitting on the high backed chair, a mobile screen perch had been erected. The floors and walls were covered with opened paper feed sacks, these were to protect the furnishings from the splicing mutes of the hawk.

Once the gos had finished feeding, Jack placed her on the perch and tied her swivel tight to the perch with a special knot in the leash. This was then tucked in between the two layers of hessian screen, in there it would be well out of the way should she bate and climb back to her perch.

Jack then presented Gary with a double thickness gos glove he had made especially to fit Gary's small hand. Excitedly Gary tried it on, a perfect fit. He was now instructed to carry 'Odin' around the farm for practise. Gary never questioned an instruction, but could not see the point. When he returned after an hours walk his hand ached, and Jack explained that although the buckskin glove was soft, the two layers of leather needed to protect your hand from the powerful grip of a gos was a handful when gripped on the fist for hours on end. This exercise was to get Gary's hand strengthened and to mould the glove to shape, not until Jack felt sure Gary was ready would he allow him to help manning the gos.

Such a big, powerful hawk needed a firm grip, Jack made a small hessian sack and filled it with three pounds of corn, to this he fitted two leather straps and instructed Gary to carry this about on the gloved fist for hours on end.

Gary felt a right twit and hoped no-one would see him. Jack was very strict with him, and insisted that he kept his forearm and fist straight at all times, "You must learn instinctively to keep your fist as level and as still as you can, the hawk's ride on your fist must be as comfortable as possible. Otherwise it won't want to return to a bone shaker ride on the fist from a nice gently swaying tree perch", instructed Jack.

"Think of it like this, remember when I showed you when 'Odin' fixed his gaze on something in the distance and how if I moved my fist about his head stayed locked in space even though his body was moving with the fist! Well, that's how your arm must become, as you walk over rough, undulating ground, your fist must stay locked in place. Your body becomes a suspension unit, soaking up all the bumps and jolts, even if you fell flat on your face in the mud I don't want to see the hawk even flick its wings."

Gary looked at Jack and he detected a slight glint in the eye. He carried that sack of corn about for days, every now and then when Gary was least expecting it Jack would grab the sack and give it a hell of a yank. If the straps slipped though Gary's fingers Jack would bark "Hawk lost".

At first this disheartened Gary as he was caught out every time but he was determined to beat Jack at this latest game, and soon it was a rare chance if Jack snatched the sack he was able to pull the jesses from his grip.

At last the day came, Jack introduced Gary to 'Oulu' as he had named the gos. Jack explained that 'Oulu' means water in Finnish, and he hoped that naming her so might be a good omen and she would turn out to be a good duck hawk. Gary asked why he had called the tiercel 'Odin'.

Jack explained that although the tiercel was now a perfect gentleman, in his younger days he would get very angry if he hit game and it got away from him, and would return to the fist in a real paddy. So he had named him 'Odin' after the mythical Norse god which means fury. 'Mungo' the collie, well it's an old Scottish word for amiable, he's such a soft old mutt, what else would I call him?

"Well lad, what are you waiting for? Pick her up on your fist. I want you to walk her down the farm road as far as Lofthouse Farm and back again. Then when you get back tie her to the bowperch on the grass by the back door. I'll get her a fresh bath of water, with luck she'll bathe today", ordered Jack.

Gary was impressed by the sheer presence of the gos so close, she bated once as he left the drive and turned onto the farm road, the explosive force was more violent than he had expected and as she returned to the fist he well understood why Jack had put him through the gruelling exercises of the past week. As she stood on the fist glaring around her, her beak was level with Gary's eyes, as she panted gently the pungent smell of her breath filled his nostrils.

Later that day Jack said they would try and see if 'Oulu' would jump to the fist outside, she had been coming well indoors and Jack wanted Gary and Mungo present, so

Jack wanted Gary and Mungo present, so as to add to the distractions.

Jack removed her swivel and tied the creance to her jesses, he then carried her to an old post in the middle of the paddock. She jumped onto the post, the creance was about twenty yards long and the other end was tied to an old three pound retrieving canvass dummy, Jack dropped this on the ground. He explained to Gary that if 'Oulu' flew off, she would drag the dummy a little way before it slowly, but gently forced her to land. Much better than if the creance was tied to a peg hammered into the ground which would pull her up sharp putting undue strain on her legs. He stepped back from the post about three yards and offering his fist garnished with a rabbit hind leg he let out a high pitched whistle. 'Oulu' hesitated for a moment and Jack whipped his fist back and out of her sight. He stood still for about thirty seconds, 'Oulu' glared at him, then quick as a flash he again held high his fist and whistled, this time 'Oulu' was on the fist instantly. Jack cooed to her as she fed and then repeated the same whistle every minute or so, he sat down on the grass with 'Mungo' and called Gary closer.

"Why did you take your fist away like that, I thought she was going to come to you?" inquired Gary.

"She probably would have, but I'm not going to teach her that if she hangs about the food will always be on offer. You see, in the wild a goshawk learns that by making an instant decision on seeing prey to attack it is more often successful. The same way the instant it sees the fist it must come, or else it's gone.

All the while, as Jack explained he let out the same high pitched whistle as he the gos fed. "Why keep whistling now she's on the fist?" asked Gary.

"Ah well that's what's called food association, you see, 'Oulu' will learn the only time she hears that whistle is when she is on the fist feeding, later on when we are flying her, that whistle means one thing, food, and she should return to the sound even if she is out of sight of us", said Jack crossing his fingers and winking at Gary.

"I thought you would fly her further", stated Gary.

"She might well have come a bit further, but as this was her first time outside I didn't want to make it too daunting for her".

"Also you see, I am letting her have the whole leg as a reward, there is no point in offering her a large tempting reward only to r o b her

of it when she gets to the fist. She would soon learn that you are only teasing her, much better to teach her that she'll get a good reward for coming, that's why we will only be flying her once or at the most

twice each day for her daily rations."

Soon 'Oulu' was coming so quick to the fist that Jack couldn't get more than ten yards from her, so they abandoned the post and flew her from one to the other.

Her rations were split into two portions so each could take it in turns to call her, once she was coming forty yards instantly Jack declared she should fly free. Gary was horrified. "What if we lose her?" he cried. "Not to worry she'll not go far", replied Jack with confidence.

In fact she never showed the slightest inclination to fly off into the great blue yonder as Gary had feared. Her training went ahead in leaps and bounds, her introduction to the lure, a rabbit skin wrapped around a one pound canvas dog dummy, went without a hitch. In fact Jack remarked that he thought this bird had read the books herself.

Finally the day came to enter her at wild quarry. Jack explained that they needed a fairly easy flight to build confidence. It was decided that the rough pasture on Jacobs Farm would be the best option. The rabbits were fairly plentiful and often sat quite a way out in the field concealed by the large tussocks of grass. "We could get a good long slip", suggested Jack.

They left the assault on the rough pasture until mid-afternoon, the same time as they normally flew 'Oulu'. The day before she had had a little less rations, just to give an extra edge.

Jack walked through the tussocks with 'Oulu' on the fist held high above his head, his fingers lightly gripping the jesses, this was to give her the best advantage for take off.

'Mungo' quartered ahead just like a pointer, suddenly he crouched low to the ground and crawled along towards a tussock. Jack motioned Gary to come in slightly from the right side as Jack slowly walked forward. Quick as a flash there was a blur of rabbit and 'Oulu' was away in a jangle of bells. The rabbit jinked around a group of large tussocks momentarily throwing the gos, she overshot, tipped her wings, and using her speed, lifted about another five feet or so, turning on her left wing, swooped directly at the fleeing rabbit and had it by the shoulders. The struggle

was slight 'Oulu' had a



Drawing by Richard Rossiter

deadly grip, but Jack made in and dispatched her first rabbit, he called both Gary and 'Mungo' and they sat on the grass in front of the gos and watched her break into the rabbit and take a full crop.

The next afternoon after 'Oulu' had cast they were out again looking for rabbits, the rough pasture was no use as Jacob had driven some sheep through it and the dogs had put all the rabbits to ground. As they walked the hedge rows a rabbit bolted ahead, 'Oulu' turned.

"Hold up your fist", Jack shouted to Gary, 'Oulu' returned straight back to the fist.

"Magic" shouted Jack.

"She's a beaut" exclaimed Gary.

'Mungo' was pointing into a culvert running under the field entrance, it was too small for the dog to enter.

"The rabbit's in the drain, we'll not get him out", cried Gary.

"You just stand back a bit my lad, lift that gos high, and old Jack will show you a little trick".

Stepping down into the dry bottomed ditch Jack found the end of a length of thin wire.

"Ready now my lad", he said, gently pulling the wire hand over hand. "The other end has a loose ball of barbed wire, all the culverts are fitted out like this", he explained as the rabbit bolted. 'Oulu' was after it along the ditch bottom, and was just about to make contact when the rabbit turned and made its escape through the hedge and into the corn.

'Oulu' was left standing in the ditch bottom footing the leaves in frustration. Gary was off the mark in an instant, glove baited he called her and she returned.

"Good lad", called Jack. "Let's cross over the river and try that corner of buckthorn scrub, 'Mungo' might flush a rabbit from there" Jack said as he strode through the field gate and made his way down the side of the corn field towards the river.

Gary, 'Oulu' and 'Mungo' followed in his path, as they reached the river 'Mungo' was off, it was a warm day and he loves any excuse for a swim. As he ran down the bank he came on point in the reeds.

"Hold it" said Jack softly. "Hold her high, go on 'Mungo' see 'em up".

With that the edge of the reeds exploded as two drake Mallards lifted from the water. They were up and flying along the river when 'Oulu' hit the rear one, and straight into the river together. For a second she was under the water, as she surfaced she started paddling with her wings towards the bank. Gary slid down the bank and straight up to his waist in mud and water, he scooped his gloved hand under 'Oulu' and lifted her and the drake onto the bank.

As he looked

u p , there stood Jack at the top of the bank, his face beamed a smile of pure happiness "Aye lad, you've the makings of a fine falconer".

# FOCUS ON ART

## STEVE MCQUEEN



Steve McQueen is a Glasgow based artist, working in various media, teaching part-time to support himself. He has always been fascinated by nature.

Steve is interested in how we define our place in nature, as component, user and guardian and parallels between humans and animals regarding territory, communication and construction. I'm particularly interested in how nature is presented in art and television.

With these preoccupations in mind he began to create semi-natural tableaux, using gathered knowledge of bird territories to identify perches, plucking posts, dust baths etc of particular species, and making scale models



*Above: Pygmy Owl, (life size sculpture)*

*Above Left: Pygmy Owl displaying.*

*Top: Peregrine, (life size sculpture).*

*Above Right: Peregrine on Rannoch Moor.*

of the birds to suit. Having no training in sculpture he could have used stuffed specimens to make things easier, but he wanted to learn about the practical problems of construction and materials that would best render life-like 3D subjects. He also wanted to work in the tradition of bird carving, but

find new material that would be light and low on cost. He found that certain types of paper tissue were ideal.

He starts with a scrunched up mass and covers it with tiny cuttings coated on one side with PVA. When the glue sets it provides a fairly robust base to build on. This technique went through various changes but the birds are now made exclusively from tissue and glue from beak to talons. They have become increasingly detailed and specific, incorporating postures, seasonal and sexual changes in plumage and other adaptations peculiar to each bird, even so far as to find perches in favoured trees at exactly the right angle to maximise authenticity within the projected composition.

Most of his time is spent constructing models and exploring likely locations in which the actual bird lives. This often takes him to remote and wild landscapes; mountain tops or bleak moors, and in Spring of last year he took two models to the Carpathian Mountains in Romania.

## GARY SLEIGH

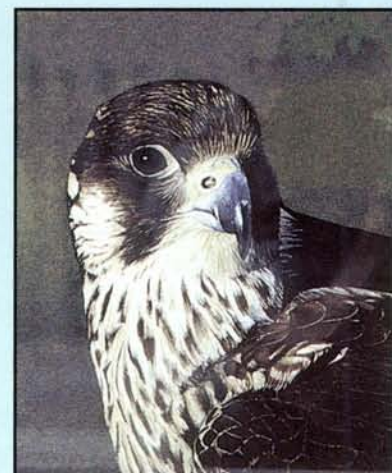


*Left: Kingfisher.*

*Above, Tawny Eagle montage.*

*Right: Peregrine.*

Gary Sleigh has studied natural history Illustration at Bournemouth and Poole College of Art and Design and he is now currently living on the Isle of Wight. Since College he has



been doing commissions, both wild animals and birds and domestic pets. He uses a variety of mediums, including water-colour, oil pastel and ink.



# SHANGANI & SCULLY

## Steve Lodge

I have been an avid reader of the Falconer Magazine for a few years now and I have read many articles on all varieties of hawks and problems, thus I have decided to share my own story about a unique Black Sparrowhawk and a Jack Russell.

I move to the UK from South Africa in 1991 and took up falconry shortly after arriving, whilst working at a small animal centre near Gloucester. Initially I helped out with the few Harris' Hawks that were there just taking my time learning the ropes. Shortly after starting an injured female Gos came in and she was passed into my care. My passion for accipiters began there and I had two years of superb hunting and fun with her. My career at this stage began in earnest and she remained at the centre while I pursued my career as a pilot with HM Forces. During training I visited the Hawk Conservancy near Andover and it re-kindled my burning passion for another bird but with the amount of time I had available, I decided to buy a Harris' Hawk and dedicated at least two hours a day to him after the initial marning. He was the ideal bird and even my girl friend, now my wife, thought he was great fun and flew him. Sadly he was lost whilst I was away and I was heart broken as was Elaine. That signalled a break from falconry, but once you have the bug it just won't let go and after a search I found one of my dream hawks, a Black Spar.

I ordered the Black Spar from Griff at the Welsh Hawking Centre and waited with anticipation. At last the phone call came and I could go and pick up the 3-week-old chick. In the meantime I had been receiving all sorts of advice like "don't imprint it, just leave it be for the first few months," but after reading all I could, the chick, which was nameless moved into the lounge. Now at this stage I must mention our other pet, a Jack Russell called Scully (my wife is waiting for her to bring Mulder home) that could be vicious with other animals but is very cute around humans. For the first few weeks Scully was not sure of this very cute ball of fluff and we never left them alone for fear of Scully shaking the now named Shangani to bits. My wife and I were moving about the house one morning and had not been watching the hawk as close as we had been, and with the realisation that Scully was in the lounge with Shangani I walked in with trepidation. On entering the lounge I expected the worst and it was with complete dread that I looked around the room, expecting a bloodied mass of feathers and an innocent looking Jack Russell with feathers

around her mouth.

The sight that met our eyes was worthy of a photograph, as on our new sofa was a ball of feathers cuddled up to a very contented Scully. Ever since that day they roamed the house at will and whenever Scully entered the room out came Shangani on foot to play with her. Scully was so incredibly gentle with him, never so much as bumped him over. Scully is rather spoilt and sleeps on the bed so it was no surprise that one morning Scully was followed into the room by a walking feather duster that proceeded to flutter onto the bed and settle down on the pillow near my wife who was not too sure about Scully's new found friend. It was a pleasure to see and even now when I enter Shangani's pen Scully comes with me and Shangani flies down onto the ground and runs around on the floor for a short period before deciding that Scully is boring and lands on the perch.



*Shangani & Scully*

As imprinting goes it went fairly smoothly and Shangani was exposed to all I could find including very noisy helicopters that even a Harris would have hassle coping with, but my little Black Spar didn't flinch. Training was slow to begin with but once he got the gist of what was happening he improved rapidly. I didn't rush the training and in retrospect I should have picked up the pace as I am sure that he could have been entered a lot sooner. If he had been entered sooner he may not have been so keen to chase everything that moved including on one occasion a hare that broke from some long grass approximately 30m from his position mid-way up a tree. Luckily he decided that it was a bad idea and returned. A hen pheasant was his first kill and this was followed by a few partridge that roam the airfield and as such have never been hunted. The partridge were not easy kills but they served to give him a good technique which was to hug the ground for a long as possible and as they broke cover and tried to gain height he rocketed up from below and the result was an explosion of feathers. Once he was entered I became, possibly a little too keen on the hunt and after a successful hunt in which Shangani had already taken one pheasant, another crowed from a kilometre away. I was taking him off the first and he was off like greased lightning even a few mouthfuls of pheasant heavier. He was poetry in motion but the motion was carrying him a touch further than I would have liked, but this persistence was amazing. I tracked him for a short period and found him high in a tree line, and not interested in coming down. I spent most of the night there but in the morning no signal could be found and that was the last I saw of him. Every day



I went out but to no avail and after phoning everywhere it came home that he was well and truly lost.

Winter was not particularly cold, but for a Black Spar I was sure it would be deadly. Work continued and phone calls occasionally came in from the leaflets distributed about the area but they inevitably turned out to be Buzzards or Kestrels. One February afternoon Griff called and said that someone had phoned him saying he had a Spar and it was too big to be a European Spar. The gentleman was in North Derbyshire and described Shangani down to the feather. I was off and driving, with my heart in my mouth hoping that it was him. On arrival at a lovely estate I was given an outline of how he was caught by the landowner. Apparently the estate was a game shoot and the landowner had noticed a number of pheasants taken

near feeders by a hawk and he suspected a Goshawk. He also flew racing pigeons and whilst they were returning from a long haul race a Spar trailed them and dashed down into the aviary amongst them and killed one. The landowner suitably miffed at this stage ran in trying to scare the hawk off, but it glared at him and remained right there where it was and proceeded to pluck his fine racing pigeon. Fortunately for me he realised the hawk was not wild and threw a sheet over the bird. He then kindly cleared an aviary for the hawk and that was how he stayed until I arrived. I caught my now wild Spar in the aviary and jessed him up. He flew onto the fist and stayed there, not bad for a Black Sparrowhawk that lived wild for four months. Once back at the house I examined him and he had serious bumblefoot but that was treated straight away. Other than a few broken feathers he was in good condition.

He settled back home very quickly and he is a dream to be around. At the time of writing he is in the middle of his moult and is changing his brown fleck suit for a dinner jacket of black and white. For an accipiter and an imprint I am surprised and very pleased with this gorgeous bird of prey and he is certainly not the maniac that I was led to believe he would be. He is certainly fairly robust and swift as in October when he was lost, he was being hunted in Hampshire and was found in North Derbyshire, a long way from a Spar. They need patience and a lot of care, but I would not change my Black Spar for anything. I am looking forward to the new season when Shangani will strike fear into the hearts of the Hampshire pheasant population. My thanks go to Griff at the Welsh Hawking Centre and to those landowners that do not see hawks as competitors.

## A 'WILD' ENCOUNTER

Rod Hughes.

This is a true account of an incident involving a musket sparrowhawk that came into my possession.

On 1st November last year I received a phone call from a man at our local golf club saying they had a kestrel trapped upstairs in the clubhouse. I told him I'd be down in ten minutes and quickly gathered together a cardboard box, gloves etc.

It was about 8pm and it was a pitch black, windy stormy night. The man was waiting at the doors of the clubhouse when I got there.

He said "It's upstairs flapping against the window," he offered to put the lights on but I told him it would be easier to catch it up in the half dark and the lights in the car park would give me all the light I needed.

I went upstairs and without any effort at all I more or less just picked up the bird while it was flapping against the window. With the light shining through the window I could clearly see it wasn't a kestrel, but a male sparrowhawk.

I don't think he was an immature bird as he had a faint white streak of feathers above the eyes and he was also quite colourful on his flanks, a nice pink rusty brown colour.

I decided to take him down and inspect



*Quite at home in the kitchen.*

his condition and release him the next day if he was OK. When I got home I went into the garage to check him over. He was beautiful, quite small and in perfect feather with talons like needles. He also had plenty of muscle on his chest and I couldn't even feel his breastbone. I decided he must have flown into the clubhouse that day, probably in pursuit of a small bird and couldn't find his way out again.

That morning I'd been out hawking with my two male Harris hawks and I had three gutted rabbits laying on the garage floor. I noticed the spar looking at them and I wondered if it would take any food from me.

I had the spar wrapped in a towel in my left hand and proceeded to offer it a bit of rabbit liver. I couldn't believe it when it took it out of my fingers, so I offered it more.

It was eating the food as quickly as I could produce it, so I gently opened my hand and it just stood there more or less ignoring me and continued feeding.

It ate, I guess about three quarters of an ounce of rabbit then when it had had enough it flew up onto the garage door runners. While this was going on I had called my wife to take some photos.

I switched off the lights and was able to recapture the bird which I released into the kitchen where it buzzed about at a speed which your eyes and brain couldn't keep up with. It landed on top of the kitchen units and after we had dimmed the lights right down and left the kitchen it was content to rest.

In the morning I was pleased to see it was



*The sparrowhawk eating out of my fingers.*

OK when I entered the kitchen. I quickly caught it up again, trying to minimise stress etc.

After giving it a couple of minutes to settle down I offered it another tidbit of rabbit, which it took with no hesitation. It ate maybe 6 bits all whilst I held it firmly but gently in my left hand. I then took him out into the back garden, followed by the rest of my family and gave him back his freedom.

In a flash he was gone, effortlessly reaching some trees in a matter of seconds. I couldn't believe how little fear this little hawk had of humans. Every year my five and six year old male Harris Hawks take about three days manning after the moult before they will feed off the fist, yet this little bundle of (fury?) was eating out of my hand within half an hour.

This hawk had no rings on it and showed no signs of ever having been touched by anyone and anyway it is a small community I live in and I know all of the falconers within about fifteen miles and none of them have ever flown sparrowhawks let alone lost one.

Can anyone offer an explanation for its tameness?

# NEVER TRUST ANYONE!

Helen Scourse



*The Snowy Owl*

When I was little my father was fond of relating a story told to him by one of his Jewish doctor friends. It concerned a little boy who, full of misgivings, was persuaded to jump from the top of a flight of stairs into his fathers arms. When his father failed to catch him, the sobbing child was told "My son, you have learned the first lesson in life, : Never trust anyone!"

I could not appreciate this story either then or now. Perhaps my father, an intensely pragmatic medical man was exasperated by my childish credulity and idealism. I know he was disappointed when my career did not follow the family tradition of doctors, or nursing, nor even veterinary medicine.

Without any veterinary training or qualifications we at Gwent Hawk Rescue rely heavily on vets - in particular our local vet, a man of lugubrious aspect but immense kindness, and also the firm of avian specialists in Stroud. But they are not all like this.

It is worth remembering that in all their long training most vets will have perhaps one day on birds - probably poultry, where the treatment will consist of killing one bird for a post-mortem examination to diagnose the problem with the rest of the flock. If they are lucky they will have another half day of budgies and cockatiels, trimming beaks and clipping toenails.

Many practices do not have even a good identification book, and so will not know what the bird in hand is, let alone

what it should be fed on, or most importantly what it should weigh. The best book for this is the Collins new generation guide "Birds of Britain and Europe" by Christopher Perrins. We have received a cuckoo described as a kestrel, a dipper as a nuthatch and a swift as a sparrowhawk!

Even sadder, we have had birds brought to us in the last stages of dehydration and emaciation after several days in veterinary care - notably a barn owl, two kestrels and a fine 16 year old redtailed buzzard. One poor little tawny owl had been sitting pathetically squeaking for five days in a vets surgery, in front of a tin of A.D mixture which it did not recognise as food, it took several days to recover.

We still have a sad little kestrel who was described as a road casualty by a vet. She has a visual impairment, a moth-eaten appearance and never flew well, but it was not until six months later that our request for an x-ray revealed she was carrying five lead-shot. A buzzard picked up on a windy day under an electricity pylon was also found to have been shot. So, the 'presenting problem' is not always the real one!

Perhaps our most distressing case in 1999 is that of a snowy owl. This had been repossessed by an RSPCA inspector from a keeper in mid-wales who said he "found it a a stray" and who was in the habit of throwing stones at it "to make it stand up." The unfortunate bird had been left for two days with a vet who was said by the inspector to have examined it and found no injury.

It weighed 2lbs 9oz, had a keel like a razor, not a single primary or tail feather intact and had abrasions on every wing front. Unringed, except for a single aylmeri anklet it had obviously been tethered by that leg which was very lame.

Our own vet confirmed its appalling condition

and having tested the reflexes in two still very useful feet was content to concur with the first vet's verdict. However, after five days we were more than ever convinced that its disability was more than 'just a strain' and requested and x-ray. This revealed a long-standing mid-shaft fracture of the femur, now so grossly displaced that the rib-cage was distorted. The RSPCA who had placed it with us only temporarily, until transport to a wildlife centre could be arranged, would not agree to our seeking further advice or to funding a repair which might not be successful and so insisted it was euthanased.

If only this poor bird had been properly examined and x-rayed at first it might have been helped and its keeper possibly prosecuted. As it was, I feel we all failed him. All we could do was to keep him quiet and give him a good feed - he was even starting to hop towards us for food - before his final journey.

It has been a lesson to us of the dangers of making false assumptions. Perhaps we should have remembered - "Never trust anyone".



*The Snowy Owls' X-Ray.*

# TAKING THE MOUNTAIN TO MUHAMMAD

## THE HOME COUNTIES HAWKING CLUB TAKES FALCONRY TO THE FUTURE GAME KEEPERS AND LAND MANAGERS OF BRITAIN

The land based Brinsbury College near Pulborough in West Sussex runs many courses in land and livestock management and conservation. Courses also include the study and management of field sports, indeed the college hosts a number of BASC courses. Studies in to the development of better cover crops and game management are well advanced. Some of this country's finest land and game managers of the future will gather much of their knowledge of the countryside traditions, skills and methods at Brinsbury College. In addition they will also discover the business acumen required to ensure those traditions are sustainable in the modern world.



*Alan Greenhalgh (Above) and Bill Pearson keeping the audience captive with their relative subjects on falconry.*



A few months ago a Home Counties Hawking Club (HCHC) member attending a course at the college began a discussion with his college tutor over lunch. The result of that conversation was for the HCHC to develop a unique opportunity. The intention was that the HCHC through education would encourage a significant audience of future land managers and keepers to consider Birds of Prey, their conservation and Falconry as a field sport, in a fresh, informed and positive light. Taking the mountain to Mohammed indeed!

The HCHC rallied to the challenge and set about preparing for the event within a relatively short period of notice. A programme of lectures, species displays and informal question and answer sessions were soon in place. Given that the day was to be during the working week the club members responded magnificently, producing 16 birds of several different species for display on a weathering lawn and later during the field programme.

All of the birds were in fine feather and well presented, as were the club members, many of whom sported apparel usually reserved for the Falconers Fair.

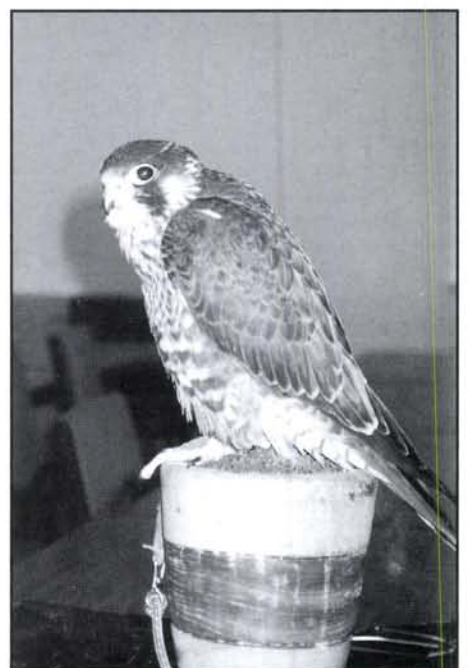
The audience was extremely varied. A course of twenty budding Game keepers were very soon joined by classes from throughout the college, taking time out from their scheduled programmes to attend lectures and view the birds. A great deal was achieved by the informal questions and in some cases hands on experiences by visitors to the weathering lawn. Club members patiently dealt with all of those questions guaranteed to be asked of a Falconer and took the initiative to deliver 'the truth' about birds of prey and Falconry to captive audiences. It very soon became obvious that we were attracting many school groups on day trips to the college. The weathering lawn and the lectures held in an adjacent

lecture room, became very popular attractions during the morning.

The clubs' Secretary Pauline Hooley introduced the HCHC, outlining its origins, intentions and aims before inviting our first club speaker, Bill Pearson, to take centre stage in front of a now full lecture hall. Bill, a

club representative member of the Hawk Board spoke on a range of subjects from the origins of Falconry, through its commitment to conservation and on to the legislation surrounding Birds of Prey both wild and captive. The lecture was inspiring and evoked much discussion amongst the audience. Bills steady and authoritative voice advertised his depth of knowledge whilst he went on to explain breeding programmes and other environmental issues associated with Falconry until finally it was time for a break and a well earned cup of coffee (some falconers on the weathering lawn taking advantage of the frosty start to the day to indulge in more traditional potions, guaranteed to warm the tips of your toes).

After coffee it was back to the lecture hall for another inspirational and straight from the heart ration of experience and knowledge, delivered by our club Chairman Alan Greenhalgh. Alan presented a very personalised perspective of falconry in easy to chew bite-sized pieces. Starting with the thought process involved when considering pursuing Falconry as a sport, he moved on to the practicalities of obtaining and housing a bird. Equipment, terminology and daily bird maintenance featured next, before Alan entertained his audience with methods employed by



*Alans tiercel peregrine who behaved perfectly, unhooded on his block at the front of the hall.*



*Above: A small selection of the many Home Counties Hawking Club members and bird species that supported the event gather and prepare for an afternoon of sport.*



*Above: Liala Green answers questions from one of the many school groups visiting the College, Assisted by her female Ferruginous Hawk.  
Left: A frosty start to the day - The weathering lawn.*



Falconers to man and train bird of prey. Alan was ably assisted by his tiercel peregrine who behaved perfectly, unhooded on his block at the front of the hall (a bit of a change when you consider the taxi fares back to the car he has cost Alan whilst flying on the downs!) Again, this lecture attracted many questions and provoked extensive and valid discussion. Both lectures and the question and answer sessions that followed did a great deal to dispel many of the myths and preconceived ideas about bird of prey and Falconry held among the mixed audience in the hall. Many club members contributed significantly to the very involved debate that preceded lunch, highlighting the depth of knowledge, commitment and patience demanded by their sport.

Lunch was provided by the college and very nice it was too, throughout which a lively debate continued. Post lunch it was time to show off the birds' natural abilities in the pursuit of quarry. Three distinct groups were formed by the club HLO Danny Ringham, each comprising of a varied and complimentary grouping of bird species. Harris' hawks, Redtails, and Ferrets would cross the road to the lower fields in search of the fast running ones. In the upper fields, woods and cover crops the Goshawk and the longwing groups accompanied by dogs would flush the end of season game and dabblers.

A selection of potential game keepers were duly assigned to each group and battle commenced. Without exception all of the groups were rewarded with some very

special slips and although not always successful, heart stopping nevertheless. Not least for our guests, who had become unwittingly bewitched by the variety, tenacity in pursuit and sheer evolutionary perfection of the birds. A respectable bag of both fur and feather was accumulated at the conclusion of the afternoon, with slips being recounted by gesturing and swerving hands (do you suppose the hands all belonged to club members?) as we returned to the college campus.

There cannot be a falconer and therefore conservationist (for we are one and the same) in Britain, who is unaware of the many unfounded and often mythical prejudices maintained by keepers and managers in respect to birds of prey in this country. It is not however, this articles' intention to deal with those issues directly, but to advertise our efforts as a club, part of a larger movement, to encourage better understanding of our sport, its intentions and concerns for the future. Opportunities to redress some of the prejudices against both our wild indigenous birds of prey and the broad-

er collection of species with which we share our sport are rare. Our sincere thanks must go to Mick Smith who runs the Game keepers courses, the Principal and staff at Brinsbury College for their enthusiasm, support and open minds, without whom this event could not have been made possible. It is hoped that the event will develop still further to become an annual affair, for it has the potential for a greater and wider influence. For the Home Counties Hawking Club as an organisation, it has undoubtedly helped us to reconfirm our aims and to grow a little closer as a community. Such rallying to the common cause has reassured us of our depth, most definitely a Hawking Club and not a Talking Club.



# CLUB DIRECTORY

## BRITISH FALCONERS CLUB

Founded in 1927

**The oldest and largest Hawking Club in the country.**

### Nine Regional Groups -

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**THE BRITISH FALCONERS CLUB,  
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*Changing Attitudes to improve standards*  
Contact

Paul Beecroft: 0118 9016990  
Wendy Alier: 01945 450648  
Susan Smith: 01494 817305

## 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: Jeff on 01942 201995 or:  
Rob on - 01706 845731 or 0378 609467 (mobile).

## LONDON HAWKING & OWL CLUB

Affiliated to the Hawk Board and Countryside Alliance.

For more information phone:

Paul Barham on 0171 515 7754 or Bill Fiveash on 0171 6399087

## THE HAWKING CLUB

meets each month at the following locations

South Wales Hensol Golf Academy.  
Llantrisant. 8pm 2nd Monday  
Plymouth. The Woodpecker, South Brent, 8pm 3rd Monday  
Northampton. The Red Lion, Kislingbury, 8pm 4th Monday.

For further information on this recently formed and fast growing hawking club with members throughout the UK and overseas call our

Chairman Craig Thomas on 01327 261485 or our

Secretary Adrian Williams on 01443 206333

## Northern England Falconry Club

**CLUB MEETINGS ARE HELD AT**

**"The Stickler"  
Public House.**

**Stickler Lane, Bradford.  
Or Contact: Jeff Thelwell on:  
01274 612334**

## THE NORTHERN IRELAND HAWKING CLUB

Members of the Countryside Alliance.  
**To Protect, Conserve and Educate.**

**For all aspects of Falconry, the keeping and breeding of birds of prey.**

Contact: Mike Gibb, Hon, and Sec:  
Tel: 01247-472413  
Or: 07713-887551  
E-mail: HYPERLINK  
mailto:mike@bustop18.freemove.co.uk  
nirhawkingclub@hotmail.com

## 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 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  
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## 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 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

## 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

# The Fitness Factor

*By Martin Hollinshead.*

**That a hunting bird needs to be fit to perform against quarry is one of most easily grasped rules of falconry, but just how much fitness is needed and how best it is gained, opens a topic where there is plenty of room for debate. And, as the most popular all-rounder in the UK, the Harris' Hawk finds itself in the thick of it. Just what sort of gym program should the parabeuteo be pencilled in for?**

## **Unfit, Unskilled - and super successful**

It seems an insane statement, but tot he ready-to-hunt Harris' doesn't need to be fit or very skilled to be effective in the field. If it has to be super-fit then it's being asked to hunt either the wrong quarry of the right quarry in the wrong place. Entering a Harris' has nothing to do with its physical condition, it has to do with presenting the bird with the easiest - most unsporting - quarry as possible. All my Harris' hawks are entered on what the diary records as 'plop jobs'! It doesn't take much imagination: profuse ground cover, a motionless or slowly creeping rabbit, and a free-flying, high-perching hawk. What could require less effort?

When employing the free-flight style, the rabbit-hawker doesn't have to worry too much about fitness, it develops slowly as the bird follows its trainer and picks off easy targets. Powering up to perches, pushing to follow against a breeze, the free-flying Harris' develops fitness in the most natural way. And free-flight brings so much more. That Harris' Hawks only really blossom when given the freedom to follow, lead, choose their own perches, in short, think for themselves, has long been recognised. Free-flight relieves boredom, free-flight lets the Harris' use its brain. When flown only from the glove, the parabeuteo stagnates in all respects. Once sampled, the free-flight style is addictive. To experience the bird really working with you is a true thrill. It an, however, isolate the club falconer. Keen to fly the bird the way it wants to fly, many Harris' owners reject meet offers due to the restrictions imposed. I had a call from one chap who was becoming a true recluse!

The free-flight style can be practical over all types of terrain, the bird setting down on anything from boulders to barns. nevertheless, the ultimate environment must be woodland. Woodland flying, with its ups and downs, and

going arounds, makes demands on the Harris' that few arenas can match. And with fitness comes super manoeuvrability, the thing that matters so much with those tricky flights to nimble targets. Here, as with so many things to do with Harris' falconry, we find a similar approach used with young golden eagles. The hare-hunting eagle of Central European falconry might be pursuing its prey across flat, open country, but it will very often have had woodland training to develop its fitness and flying ability.

The Harris' that hunts regularly in woodland develops great power, and the denser the timber, and more difficult the flying the more impressive the result. A common misconception about "tree-flights" is that they are undemanding. However, flights from trees are a sliding scale; at one end (our 'plop job' end) criticism might be excused, but not at the other. Let's have tangled forest with fallen logs, numerous brush piles and patches of cover, and let's gently mix in some keen-to-get-home rabbits. Now the scene is set for anything but undemanding pursuits. The Harris' that misses on its first attempt, thwarted by a mesh of branches has to pull up, or lift off again - and again - and such hunts are power drainers of the first order.

What about that other form of free-flying - soaring? A misunderstanding as entrenched as the tree-flight delusion is that soaring requires no fitness. Soaring is hard work. Believe the storm-battered, desperate-to-rest wings of any young Harris, windy weather flying requires strength and builds fitness, and yes, to look at Continental training techniques again, top hare-catching eagles have plenty of soar training. And the benefits of wind-flying aren't restricted to the high ground. A flat field with a strong wind running over and around outbuildings and belts of trees, becomes an aerial assault course, and the stronger the wind and the more

it is deflected by obstacles, the harder the bird will have it; one second it's pumping relatively calmly through the air, the next being bulldozed sideways, and struggling to compensate. Harris' hawks love it. The strong-flying Harris' revels in the wind; it's up, it's down, it's here, it's there, it's having the time of its life.

## **Lure pursuits**

So, if taken out several times a week, the free-flying Harris' will get itself pretty fit. However, I like to go a bit further. To complement general flying and put a razor's edge on straight-line performance, I use lure pursuits. With young birds they simply form part of basic training, while with seasoned field veterans they are looked to whenever hunting is not possible. Arranging these flights is simplicity itself. While mechanical aid can be used, a fit friend is really all that's required! Off goes the lure-puller and off after him/ her goes the Harris'. Naturally, early flights are made easy, but as fitness develops (in bird and human!) the level of difficulty is gradually increased. Now the bird is required to take on ultra-long chases and flights into the wind. Into-the-wind pursuits are very demanding but it's amazing just what a really fit Harris' can battle against. And to keep the bird on its toes, vary things. All those obstacles that helped with windy weather-flying can be roped in again. Flights can lure the bird over or around trees, or have it climb to negotiate your house roof! Even sound pursuits are possible, the bird locked in on nothing more than the lure-persons call. And the beauty of this training is that it's fun - for everybody.

## **Hard Muscles for Tough Customers**

It's all too easy to think of fitness in terms of the birds ability in the air. However, with the Harris' that's required to deal with rough ground battles, there another consideration - physical injury. The soft-muscled bird that finds itself attached to a kicking, fighting bouncing-all-over-the-field victim can also find itself damaged. The Harris' hawks biggest flesh and bone tester is the brown hare, an eight pound powerhouse ready to deal out frightful punishment. The Harris' that squares to this mighty adversary has to be in truly top-notch condition. But there are also challenges further down the scale. Rabbits are normally fairly easy for female Harris' to bring under control,



### Fit, Fast and Fabulous.

The challenge the parabuteo has to meet will vary from location to location and from falconer to falconer. But be assured, whether being flown to 'fur' or 'feather', the truly fit bird will return record performances. As I write this it's mid-January and my own birds are dealing with the biggest test they meet all season; off the glove flights to brown hares and ferreted rabbits. Both quarries throw down the speed challenge written in bold. A winter hare is quite simply one of the fastest, most manoeuvrable animals on earth. Add to that its strength, and the challenge is clear. Less obvious is the challenge of the ferreted rabbit - that is until you see a few of my rabbits run! These hill rabbits, flown at over short, 'race-track' turf, flash from below ground, sizzle across it, and are back underneath it with eye-widening suddenness. If their early season brethren went into the game book as 'plop jobs' these go in as a row of exclamation marks! Such flying calls for hair-trigger reactions, and explosive acceleration. It requires the Harris' to stifle its buteo half and let its accipiter side take over. More than anything it requires a level of fitness that tells the bird it CAN do it. Such a Harris' is dazzling in action. Such a Harris' beams confidence and bristles with courage. Such a Harris' can take on the impossible and make it possible. But most important of all, this bird really loves its hunting. Could there be any greater prize?

but normally isn't always. Take three and a half pounds of speeding, downhill rabbit and swiftly attach two and a bit pounds of Harris', the result can be, well, lively!

to be free-lofted. Nor is size a big concern. To keep a Harris' ready for action doesn't require acres of space. My current pen is just 10 x 10 feet and works surprisingly well.

### Keeping fitness captive

Forcing its way into the fitness issue comes free lofting. It's a simple fact that keeping a Harris' loose in some form of chamber/aviary will help maintain its fitness, and it's not just wings that benefit. think of ground battles and nice, strong, constantly-being-used free-lofted legs. And, of course, there are a number of other benefits, like keeping frost-bite at bay.

With some species, free-lofting can be difficult and some restless birds can certainly do themselves more harm than good. Not the Harris'. The parabuteo is very easy to accommodate and will remain happy and healthy in all manner of pens. Truly, this species begs





# RAPTOR MANAGEMENT

## Dr Nick Fox

Falconry is more popular now than it has been ever since Shakespeare's time. Captive-bred raptors are readily available and affordable. More and more people are taking up the sport in one form or another.

But falconry is a hard and demanding pastime. It requires both technical know-how and practical skills. These are very hard to acquire, not least because there is no real systematic way of learning them. Other sports such as golf are more widespread so it is fairly easy to have tuition from a 'pro' nearby and affordably, when needed. Also competitions help define the best practitioners - if you've ridden at Badminton you probably know a bit about horses, but in falconry it is possible to set yourself up as an 'expert' just for the price of a few advertisements.

Various courses are available but many are of questionable standard, some are expensive, and all are too short. Trying to cram in so much information in one or two brief weeks is bound to lead to confusion and poor recall.

Some clubs have apprentice schemes, but these are only as good as the volunteer sponsors - if you can find one. He or she may not be a very skilled exponent in the first place, and may be even less of a teacher.

Or there are books. You can learn a lot from books, there are there when you need them, waiting patiently on the shelf to be consulted. But many people don't read much nowadays or manage to misunderstand what is written.

The problem is not just a British one. Non-English speaking nations, such as Arabia, Spain and Mexico have large numbers of falconers with no ability to access information written in English and very little progressive literature in their own language. So many raptors die or are mistreated simply out of well-meant ignorance.

In response to this problem we have secured a small budget to produce a series of videos on raptor management in English, Arabic and Spanish. At present there are twenty titles in the series covering all the main aspects of training, flying and breeding raptors and keeping them healthy. About four of the titles are on health, disease and first aid. Accompanying each tape will be either a booklet or a disc providing back-up information. To help the person with his or her own problems we can either add a tuition system, probably using tutors or advisors electronically, or we could franchise with tutors in each country who could run tuition courses with live birds using the series as a syllabus.

We started filming last year and are archiving material all the time. We hope by the time you read this that a new cameraman/editor will have been appointed and we would like to get the first title out this year. Although we plan to sell the videos, the

whole project is bound to make a financial loss because even world-wide the falconry market is only small and the actual costs to produce this type of material is very high. However the benefit to the birds and to the sport of falconry is our first priority and the main funding is coming from the NARC Falcon programme from the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency in Abu Dhabi. When I see the numbers of beautiful falcons arriving sick at the falcon hospitals in the Gulf one can't help but feel that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. And if one is going to produce something for Arab falconers, one might as well make it available to all falconers, because many of the problems are universal.

We have a strong in-house editorial team. Dr Nigel Barton who worked in the Falcon Hospital in Dubai for six years and did his PhD on digestive rates in raptors is based at our office here in UK, as is Dr Eugene Potapov who heads up our field research on sakers and has worked on a wide variety of raptors including peregrines and gyrs. Diana Durman-Walters is also based here and adds expertise in teaching and experi-

falconry or other aspects of raptors from countries as far afield as China, Zimbabwe, eastern Europe and Mexico. We are on the lookout for anyone with good quality falconry sequences, especially action shots filmed in digital, from any country. The theme generally is that what we do in a captive situation mirrors that which occurs in the wild. So we take the viewer out to the wild and show how the hawks live. Do you know where peregrines sleep, or where Harris Hawks nest? When you understand them as wild birds you can attempt to meet their needs and make them as comfortable as possible in captivity.

As well as footage, we are also looking for feedback and information from viewers. Clearly there is a big difference in making a film for a total beginner and one for an experienced falconer. We are trying to cater for the needs of both, even if we have to split some subjects into two parts. For example when looking at food and nutrition, at the basic level one needs to cover the requirements for casting material and its mechanical effect on the digestive system. But more advanced falconers and breeders need to know calorific values and protein levels of different diets and how to match these to the nutritional needs of each bird. We would also like to film a wide variety of raptors being used in falconry, so if you know of one going well then lets get it on film.

This is a big undertaking and no doubt will be beset with delays and frustrations. You can follow progress and provide input via our website on [www.falcons.co.uk/](http://www.falcons.co.uk/)



ence of running courses. Drs Tom Bailey and Tim Sullivan are falcon vets at the the new Abu Dhabi Falcon hospital with experience in both clinical work and research in avian diseases. We can also call on input from well-known specialists such as Neil Forbes FRCVS here in UK and Dr Jaime Samour in Riyadh.

Because this is a truly international effort we plan considerable input from North American falconers, rehabilitators and behaviourists and plan to film them on their own turf. We are also filming in many countries and will include footage of



# Education and Conservation - The Role of Birds of Prey Centres

Dr Mike Nicholls, Ecology Research Group,  
Canterbury Christ Church University College.

Many birds of prey establishments advertise themselves as conservation centres. Keeping animals, including birds in public collections (zoos !) is said to have three major wildlife conservation roles:

*captive breeding*      *research*      *education*

To be of conservation value, captive breeding is not merely breeding birds in captivity; it must be part of an overall strategy which seeks either to establish gene banks in conjunction with other establishments or to reintroduce a particular species into a former range where other restraints on its survival have been accounted for. Obviously the number of opportunities for these are limited and merely the captive breeding of common species cannot be construed as conservation. Similarly with research, although there are opportunities in bird of prey centres for research into behaviour, reproduction, physiology, health and welfare, unless the results of this research are published in internationally recognised journals then the impact on raptor conservation is small. Few centres seem to be involved with this aspect.

Bird of prey centres, and indeed other kinds of zoo, do however have a viable educational role in providing the public with knowledge and understanding to enable them to form realistic views as to how they can help in species conservation. But how realistically do centres in Britain fulfil this potential role? The data I present here comes in the main from the RSPCA report *Welfare and Conservation Aspects of Keeping Birds of Prey in Captivity* (1995) by Dr. Ruth Cromie and myself. Inevitably, the role of the so called "falconry centres" in conservation and public education was prominent in that study which sampled 38 centres open to the public in Scotland, England and Wales. This sample represented just less than half (40%) of the 95 zoos, and bird parks with birds of prey and falconry and specialist bird of prey centres which we could identify at that time. That work was carried out 5 years ago and things may have since changed; there are certainly many more centres now than there were then. So as to check the validity of the conclusions, during 1999 my student Alex Horrocks for her project on the National Birds of Prey Centre Diploma in Raptor Biology Course (validated by the University of Wales), carried out a similar survey of 12 centres in south east England.

Both studies used a method of scoring the potential broad educational value and also the conservation message of bird of prey exhibits and flying displays using a list of "common sense" criteria. Thus Cromie and Nicholls used a 7 point scale of very poor to excellent, while Alex Horrocks used a simpler, 5 point scale of poor to very good.

To give a feel for some of the results obtained, the criteria we used, examples from our records are cited below:

## Educational Value of a Flying Display:

Not all centres had flying displays, but the 1995 survey sampled 24 that did. A flying display without a commentary scored poor on our list, while one which was misleading, sensationalised falconry or mocked the birds being used, perhaps to make the falconer "look good", would score very poor. By contrast, a nicely balanced engaging commentary, which was informative and accurate scored highly; very good or excellent.

Examples of contents of actual displays	Score given
<i>"A range of birds of prey species flown with a commentary and style which drew the public's attention to structure and flight style of each and something of its nature in the wild. Commentary style interesting and amusing, but with the clear intention to educate rather than merely entertain".</i>	"Excellent"
<i>"Commentary style that of a casual chat with little intelligent content rather than a professional display. A group of Harris was flown through the watching crowd. The birds were continually shown food to get them to fly; then food hidden once bird was air borne. One male which thought it had grabbed a piece of food mantled on the grass The handler proceeded to ridicule the bird by telling crowd that this particular Harris' was 'educationally sub normal'. Dreadful!"</i>	"Very poor"

Thus, to score excellent according to our criteria, a display needed merely to convey something which was accurate and informative as well as entertaining.: quite a modest demand.

Our results show that with the exception of the very poor category the educational value of most flying displays were what you would expect; over half (14 / 24 or 58% of centres with flying displays) were satisfactory or moderately good; a few (2 / 24 or 8%) were good or excellent and a few more (3 / 24 or 14 %) unsatisfactory or poor. Sadly however, there was a further peak (5 / 24 or 21%) of results for displays which were very poor. Thus, from an educational point of view, a third of the displays were unsatisfactory or worse and nearly a quarter, in our opinion, certainly did more harm than good !

## Conservation Education Content of Flying Display Commentary

Criteria for conservation education content of flying display.	Score given
Accurate information which informs public of threats to wild raptor populations and the role of zoos in conservation. Commentary accompanies demonstration or display of suitable domestic bred species.	"Excellent"
No mention of conservation of birds of prey. Alternatively, boasts a conservation role of the Centre, but without justification or uses word 'conservation' without explanation. Conservation used to justify captivity of a very rare or endangered species used in the display.	"Very poor"

As the words “conservation” and “education” slip into the *raison d’être* of many centres it was surprising that conservation was generally a disregarded topic in flying display commentaries.

The majority (14 / 24 or 58% of centres scored) disregarded this topic entirely or gave misleading information and thus scored poor or very poor. Only a very few (2 / 24 or 8%) included a conservation message in a meaningful way and scored good or excellent!

### Educational Value of Aviary Displays and Tethered Birds.

Not all centres have birds in aviaries. Some for example keep all their birds tethered. The Cromie and Nicholls survey scored at total of 340 aviaries at 36 centres, while Alex Horrocks scored 147 aviaries and 71 tethered birds in 12 centres.

### Results for aviary and tethered bird information and interpretation.

Criteria Score	Aviary interpretation (Cromie & Nicholls 1995)	Aviary information (Horrocks 1999)	Tethered bird information (Horrocks 1999)
<i>Very poor</i>	9%		
<i>poor</i>	35%	13%	21%
<i>unsatisfactory</i>	27%	25%	28%
<i>satisfactory</i>	26%	42%	42%
<i>moderately good</i>	2%		
<i>good</i>	0.6%	17%	4%
<i>v. good/excellent</i>	0.4%	3%	4%

The majority of aviaries (71%) in the 1995 survey scored less than satisfactory, with nearly half (43%) in the poor or very poor categories for interpretation and educational design. In the smaller 1999 survey, this figure was similar with over a third (38%) scored as poor or unsatisfactory.

Justification to the public for the tethering of birds of prey by their legs has always been a sensitive issue. The 1995 RSPCA report acknowledges that tethering is the best method of controlling birds while they are being trained as they are least likely to damage themselves. The issue however, deserves special attention in explaining to the public why this is so. Yet in Alex Horrocks’ survey, few (8%) exhibits had good information and in virtually half (49%) the exhibits, information associated with tethered birds of prey was either lacking, misleading or absent and so was judged to be poor or very poor!

### Conclusions

Birds of prey are enigmatic, beautiful creatures. Previously many species were endangered, now not all species in Britain are rare: far from it, as many are now as abundant as they have ever been. Paradoxically, this increase in raptor abundance seems to be fuelling a change of public attitude towards them. Thus, as sparrow hawks now frequently prey in suburban gardens they are accused as being solely responsible for the much publicised decline of familiar birds such as sparrows, starlings and song thrushes. Moreover, the peregrine population is once again being accused as being a pest of racing pigeons and game birds, whilst the hen harrier is seen as a threat of grouse stocks.

*The need for sensible, accurate conservation education prey for the general public about birds of has never been greater.*

Birds of prey centres should be admirably placed to meet this conservation education need. With the added dimension of well presented flying displays they should be well able to pass on positive educational messages which would sensitise the public to the special characteristics and conservation priorities of these beautiful birds. Despite bird of prey centres and other collections with bird of prey displays publicising themselves as providing conservation and educational experiences, sadly

our data show that this is not always, and sometimes rarely the case.

Education is much more than just the imparting of facts. It is also much concerned with the shaping of attitudes and values. The public by and large may be uninformed as to the finer points of raptor biology and conservation when they enter a bird of prey centre for the first time. But what if they receive indifferent, incorrect or misleading information? As an example, one centre mentioned in the Cromie & Nicholls report had bred a hybrid from a Little Owl and a Burrowing Owl. The owner of the centre gave a relatively formal talk to the seated audience and informed them that he had “created a new species”. Even more, at that very time he reported that “Tony Soper, Gerald Durrell and David Attenborough” were apparently “meeting to decide what this new species should be called!” (This was particularly clever given the fact that Gerald Durrell had recently died!). This sort of misinformation serves no purpose (except perhaps to create an illusion of importance for the owner) and merely misleads and confuses the public.

### Recommendations

Conservation education is about sowing seeds, but these seeds have to be appropriate. If the take-home message is misleadingly that conservation equates with captivity or, worse still uses raptors as props in some sort of flying circus to degrade and humiliate, then there is no conservation value.

The pages of the Falconers’ & Raptor Conservation Magazine run features on particular Centres, and sometimes giving them glowing reports. But what criteria are being used when these reports are given? What is needed is an agreed system or check-list against which centres can score themselves, and more importantly, can see how to improve if deficient in some way. The check lists which we used is given as an appendix to this article.

It is much easier to be negatively critical than positive. This article has however consciously avoided listing a “horror show” of examples and pointing the finger at, and naming those centres which came out poorly in our surveys. Other than to ostracise some centres and make others complacent, what purpose would that serve? The whole spirit of the research carried out wasn’t to show how awful falconry and raptor keeping are. Rather it was to identify the valuable resource and expertise which exists in bird of prey collections, and also to identify problems and seek methods of rectifying them. The following observations and suggestions are offered: Bird of prey collections and centres are a potentially bountiful resource for conservation education, but merely displaying birds of prey is not automatically a positive educational experience in itself. It must be worked at.

The attitude at many of the poorer centres seemed to be that education is something anyone can do! As professional educators well know, an important part of the art of teaching is ensuring that learners are not exposed to negative “hidden agendas”, or in simpler terms, they do not “get the wrong end of the stick”. Centres need to take care as to what educational messages their exhibits convey and devise techniques to continually improve upon these.

Perhaps a “National Curriculum” for raptor conservation education is needed. This could be devised by interested bodies, may be through the Hawk Board or Falconers’ & Raptor Conservation Magazine.

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# KEEPING A BIRD AT LIVERY

## A NOVICE FALCONERS EXPERIENCE

Johnny Rickett

When serving in the Middle East in the 60s I became aware of the sport of falconry. It is very popular in certain areas, particular in the Gulf and I knew one or two British army officers who practised this in Aden. Little did I think at the time that I myself would succumb to falconry. I have shot a great deal over the years and hunted to hounds many times, I am also a pretty inept, but keen fisherman, but I had never tackled the most ancient and challenging of all the country pursuits.

My interest was aroused when my wife and I had to look after the son of some friends for a day. What should we do with him? My wife had the brilliant idea of taking him to the Falconry Centre at Batsford, which is only some four miles from our home. Guy, the boy, was not particularly interested, but I was fascinated by the extremely professional display given by Geoff Dalton, who has since become a firm friend of mine. Sensing my interest, my wife gave me an Introductory Day at the Centre for a birthday present and in October 1998 I attended this course run so ably but Stewart Walsh. Having eventually mastered the falconers knot (it took me a long time!) and gained the confidence of walking around with various types of falcon, eagle, hawk and owl on my fist I was well and truly hooked. It seemed natural that the next stage should be the three day "Hands on Course" at Batsford and I was lucky enough to be given this as a Christmas present.

I began now to come up to the Centre

more often ( the magic was working on me!) Geoff Dalton very kindly allowed me to handle the birds (under strict supervision of course) and on one of my visits I met David Wilson; I asked him how many falconers he knew who kept "birds at livery". He replied that although this rather cut across the concept of falconry, he rather believed that this would happen more and more in future, as people simply didn't have the time to look after their own birds while holding down a full time job. I put the idea to Geoff, who thought about it and later agreed to my doing this in some way at Batsford. The next step was obviously to decide what sort of bird I would be capable of handling and we decided to leave this until after my completion of the "Hands on Course". I was extremely lucky on the course as no others came forward and I therefore benefited greatly from direct one to one instruction. The zenith obviously was flying a bird free which I found totally exhilarating. By now I had mastered Geoff's "dolly knot" and I was beginning to feel quite confident at handling the majority of the birds at the Centre; although my instructors eagle eye was constantly watching my progress - I was still not to be fully trusted! As to the bird we would share, Geoff initially thought that we should obtain a pair of Redtails, but, probably wrongly in retrospect, I persuaded him to raise our sights and go for a Goshawk.

After three weeks absence from the Centre I realised that I had forgotten many things and a number of lessons had to be painfully re-learned; unless you have "Hands On" continually as a beginner you so easily forget the simplest handling techniques. However, with the imminent arrival of our goshawk my mind soon became focused. I noticed now that I was being allowed to handle the other birds at the Centre without supervision; it seemed that I was trusted at last! Our tiercel goshawk was 12 weeks old on arrival and Geoff decided to put him in a holding pen until the time was completely right for the manning process to begin, although we cast him then and there to put on his bells and jesses.

On the first day Taffy, as we called him, was hooded and after about 20 minutes or so of falling about he stood up on my fist; we kept him hooded for that first weekend and changed one of the bells. I have become a little deaf due to my days as a soldier and

as a result I couldn't hear the high pitched bell; now we have compromised, with Geoff being able to hear the higher pitch while I can just make out the bass bell.

It was fascinating to see what progress Geoff made with Taffy's manning and training during the weekdays when I was away in London. He was extremely generous (and indeed subtle, as I was being trained as well as the bird); every time I came home Taffy was ready to begin the next important step in the cycle which I led on. I used to telephone anxiously from my office on a daily basis to find out how progress was going and I was amazed in the transition of our goshawk from being a terrified "manic" bird, which continually bated, to one which was totally calm (or as calm as a goshawk ever can be!) and which was so obviously interested in what was going on around him.

Feeding from the fist came pretty easily and it was highly satisfying to see how he grew in confidence; flying with the creance was more tricky, particularly the longer "leaps" but the time soon came when he flew out of doors on the full length of the creance, which was a major step forward. Excitement rose as the great moment came for him to fly free as this was obviously to be the peak of training so far. Luckily it all went well and we increased the distance of flight satisfactorily without much difficulty. Next came the rabbit lure which he took to like a duck to water; however looking back, Geoff now feels that he should have been entered into the quarry at that particular moment, as he was so keen and he was raring to go. By delaying this for me to come home two days later, Taffy probably came off the boil and this could be the reason why at the time of writing he has still not been entered. Maybe he is a vegetarian, as he has always flown in the opposite direction from my fist when a rabbit bolted! Most probably the simple answer is that he is a goshawk, for as everyone knows they are so unpredictable.

I have found it quite fascinating to have been able to share in our goshawk's manning and training, however it is now abundantly clear that I am not to be trusted (quite rightly) by my mentor with this anymore. I have been relegated to a Harris Hawk called Tonic, which is both obedient and a wonderful hunting bird; how easy it all seems in comparison! He was entered very recently when we were hunting near Stoneleigh with Keith Jones and Bob Edwards two falconer friends who help Geoff with hunting clients. I was duly blooded by Geoff and on a high note we all returned for home and "a dram", perhaps the first stage in my apprenticeship is over, only time will tell.



Myself & Tonic, Geoff with Taffy & Quarry & Bess the pointer.

# Stealths' Debut

Chris Hood

I would like to share with everyone the experience I had when my redtail made her first kill.

It all started on the evening of Tuesday 11th of May 1999. My mum, step-dad and myself set out from home at about 7.30pm and headed to a disused quarry near Bestwood Park, Notts. The journey took about 20 minutes and all we could hear were the calls from the travelling box in the back of the van from Stealth, my red-tail. By coincidence it was her first birthday.

We arrived at our destination at about 7.50pm and were hoping today would be the day because over the last week we had observed the area and worked out that the most activity from rabbits and other types of prey was from about 7pm onwards. What we didn't take into consideration was the fact that if there was prey about there might be other predators as well. It didn't matter though in this case because it was the predator we hunted.

We headed to a corner, which was renowned for having several rabbits sitting out at any one time. On the way we encountered five partridges which Stealth didn't seem at all interested in. This was strange because the day before Stealth, being Stealth attempted to catch two at the same time (she's greedy like that). After a couple of minutes walk we entered what I call rabbit corner because of the amount that graze there to find a mass of 'one' baby rabbit which soon took cover after realising Stealth was there. The reason there weren't any rabbits out was because half round the valley we found that a vixen fox was out on the prowl as well as us. This valley was one one side of the quarry and Dave suggested that we make our way round the top of the valley because this was where Stealth went after the two partridges. We began to walk off just as Stealth took off out of the tree she was sitting in and made her way along the edge of the field, before somersaulting up into the air and hitting the deck. We assumed she had caught something because as we got there she was in the mantle position, but as I got closer I found that she had actually just 'killed' some grass. I gave her some food because for all I knew she could have missed something.

I let her go again until we got further up the valley, where the valley was at its highest and then cast her off over the edge so she could have a little soar and look around before making her way back to where I was stood. When she got back to the top she was on the floor because she landed half way up the valley wall and then decided to run the rest of the way (I didn't mind because she wasn't too fit.) We continued to walk off, leaving Stealth where she was and it was at this point when the hunt really started for Stealth.



*Me, with the fox cub Stealth caught.*

All of a sudden we heard the tone of her bells jingling as she took off. We spun round to see where she was going. The only wing beat she made was of that to take off, after that the stoop was on. It was brilliant to see her head pointing forward with concentration, her body straight and her wings at ninety degrees, gliding across the valley and straight into the thickest, thorniest, most difficult of bushes to get into, on the other side of the valley. A cry echoed round the valley as she connected. Success. Was it a partridge?.....No. Was it a rabbit?.....No. After stumbling, tripping and on three occasions Dave ending up on his backside down the valley wall and across the bottom, we arrived on the other side, relying on the noise of Stealth and her quarry to lead us to where they were. I arrived first to find that Stealth had caught something that I wasn't quite expecting. Dave shouted "Have you found her, what's she got?" I don't think Dave was expecting the reply when I shouted back "yes, a fox, only a baby one like, but still a fox". Luckily Stealth had it by the neck because although it was a young one it still had razor sharp teeth and could have proved to be quite lethal, also luckily for me I'd just bought a new glove because the little devil clamped onto my thumb.

After dispatching it I fed Stealth some of the fox and then we headed home, ending a most successful evening of hawking. Funny thing was, remember the fox we saw earlier that scared off all the rabbits? Bad move. Who needs a pack of hounds and men on horseback when you've got a bird like Stealth?

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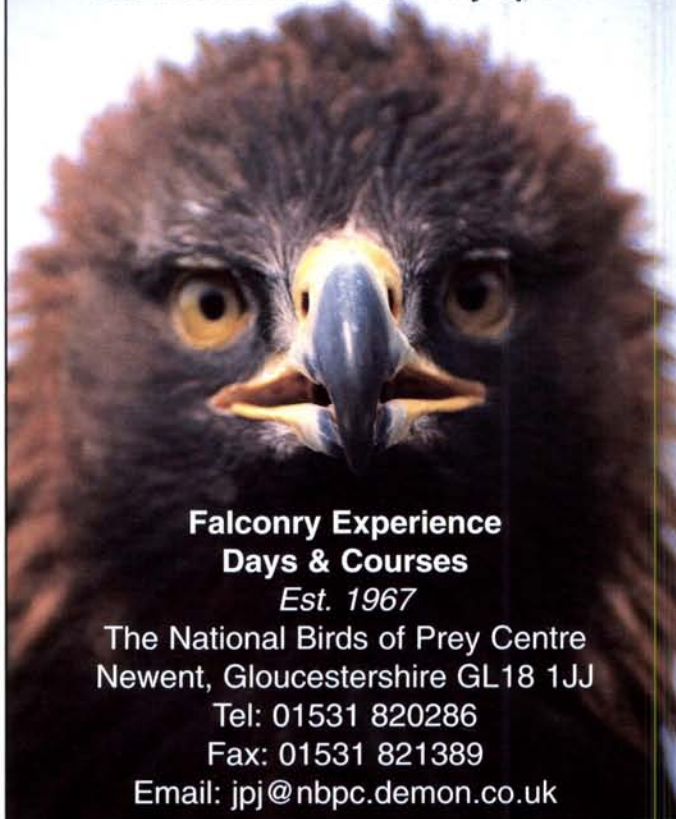
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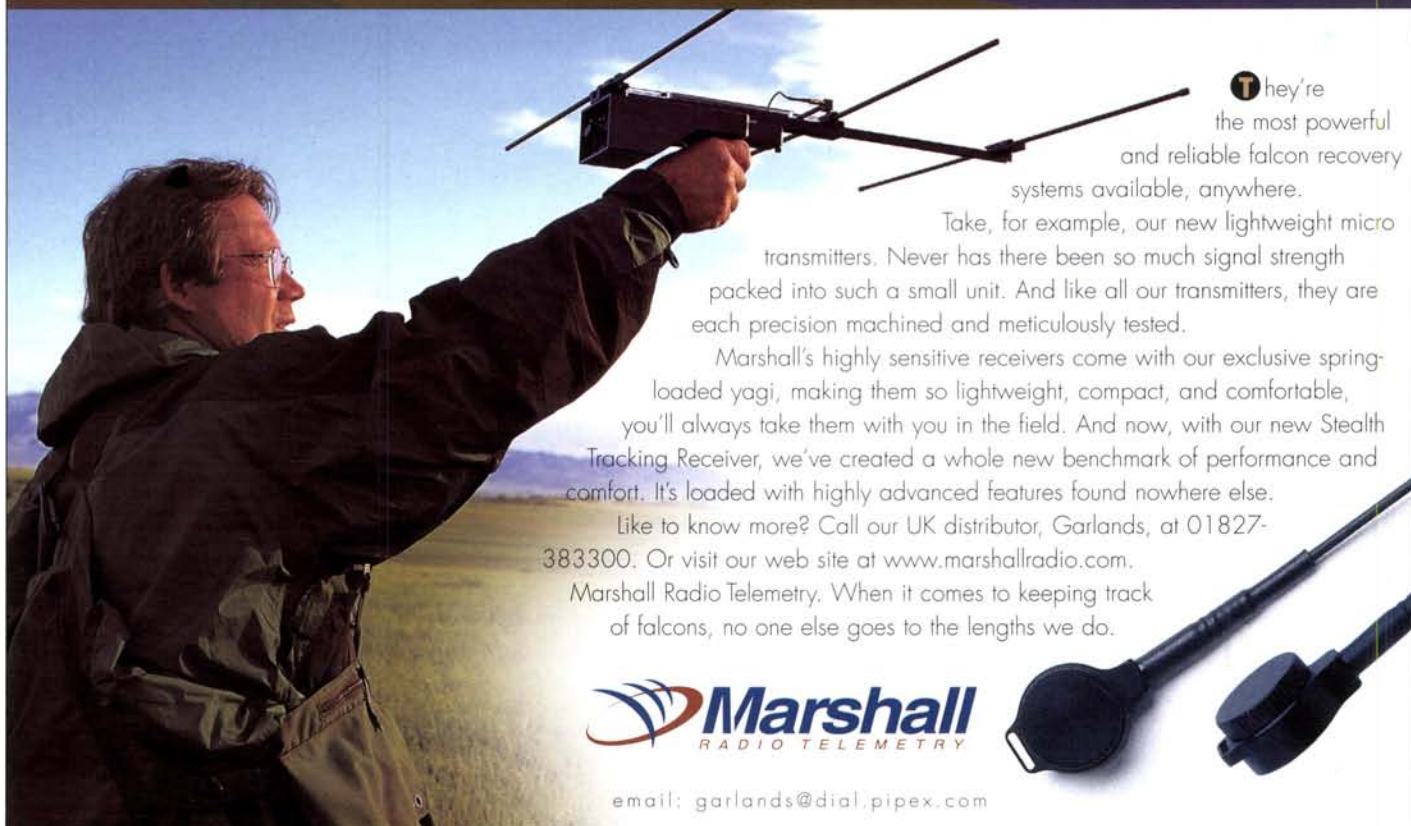
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