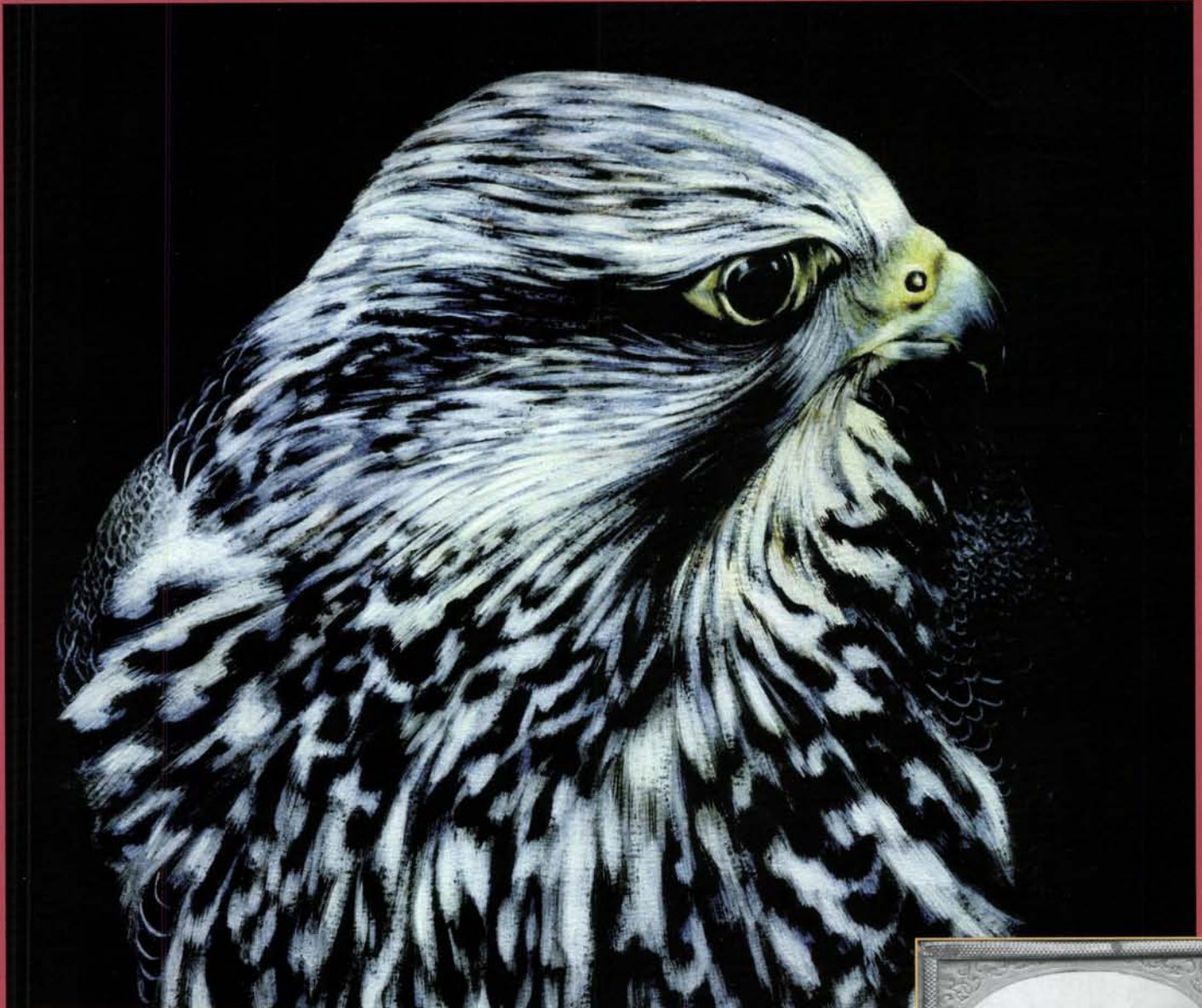


The **Falcons**
— & Raptor Conservation Magazine —

ISSUE 45

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WITH
EAGLES
IN
ZIMBABWE**

**WILLIAM
BRODRICK
WITH HIS
FALCONS**



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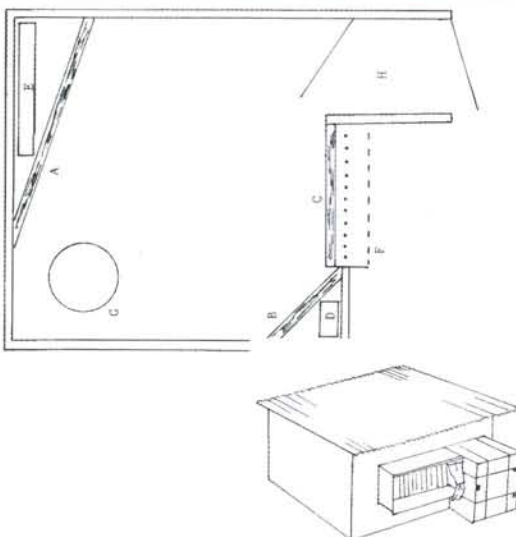
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Scottish Hawking Club

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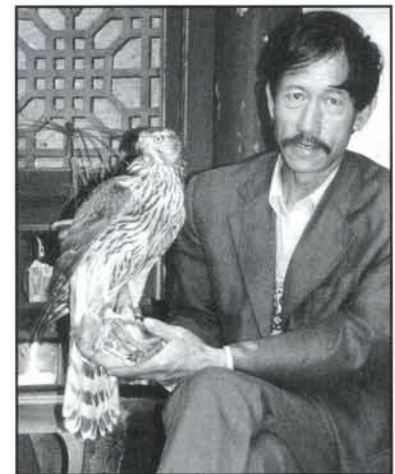
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COMMENT

Hi Folks,

Well, here we are again, surprised? We are. Changes are taking place with the magazine, we will let you all know exactly what as soon as we are 100% sure ourselves (should be quite soon).

Lots of good stuff again, including a brilliant article by Peter Devers in America who has secured pictures of original paintings of William Brodrick with his birds.

A lovely article by Ken Loates about his falconry which made me laugh and then at the end fill up with remembered emotions, which I am sure you will all be able to relate to. Richard Naisbitt has written a poignant article about how he relates his life to his falconry or vice versa, and Andrew Knowles Brown is going to keep us all in suspense until the next issue to see how many of his birds hatched. Plus the usual news & reviews etc. Foot and Mouth restrictions are being lifted gradually so hopefully all will be back to normal for the hawking season.

Good Hawking Everybody & Keep Falconry Safe.
David & Lyn

EDITORIAL TEAM

EDITORS: LYN & DAVID WILSON

DESIGN: D PERKINS

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COVER: Painting of a Gyr/Saker by Carl Bass

IBR

LOST & FOUND

FOUND

1 x African Spotted Eagle Owl
 19 x Barn Owl
 6 x Buzzard
 3 x European Eagle Owl
 6 x Harris Hawk
 4 x Kestrel
 2 x Merlin
 2 x Peregrine & hybrid
 2 x Redtailed Hawk
 3 x Saker Falcon
 1 x Snowy Owl
 2 x Sparrowhawk

LOST

1 x African Spotted Eagle Owl
 14 x Barn Owl
 1 x Bengal Eagle Owl
 1 x Boobook Owl
 1 x Caracara
 2 x Buzzard
 1 x European Eagle Owl
 3 x Goshawk
 7 x Gyr & Hybrid
 24 x Harris Hawk
 3 x Kestrel
 8 x Lanner Falcon
 2 x Merlin
 9 x Peregrine & hybrid
 2 x Redtailed Hawk
 9 x Saker Falcon
 3 x Sparrowhawk
 2 x Tawny Owl

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If you have lost a bird do contact the IBR on 0870 608 8500 who will help you find your bird. They have been running for 7 years and are the only effective nationwide service to help reunite you with your bird. We are certain some of the lost birds have been found but have not been reported. If someone found your bird you would like to know, wouldn't you? Who said you can't lose a Harris?

The fourth volume of the IBR Falconry Directory is now available and this year has listings of almost 600 entries in the breeders section together with a selection of excellent new articles from many well known personalities from the world of falconry. It is still excellent value at only £6.00 post paid and is available from the IBR (as if you could not have guessed).

Independent Bird Register
<http://www.ibr.org.uk>
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44th CLA GAME FAIR TO GO AHEAD

The organisers of The CLA Game Fair have announced that due to the ongoing foot and mouth concerns the CLA Game Fair can regrettably no longer be held at its planned venue for 2001, Woburn Abbey.

However, the Game Fair is definitely going ahead on its original dates, Friday 27th - Sunday 29th July thanks to the Trustees of Shuttleworth Estate - Old Warden Park - Nr Bedford, where we have the perfect venue only 20 miles away from the original site at Woburn Abbey.

With an attractive country house, mature parkland, lakes and woodland, Shuttleworth Estate offers all the desired elements to stage The Game Fair, which epitomises all aspects of rural and sporting life.

The decision to go ahead with this year's show was not reached lightly, and followed wide consultation together with advice on the latest FMD situation. The overwhelming response has been that since the event is not an agricultural show with livestock, it could go ahead as planned.

The general view expressed is that following the months of hardship suffered in the countryside, The Game Fair will have a vital role to play in generating much needed business for exhibitors, rural business and sporting interests, providing a national platform for the countryside following the June election, as well as providing a much needed tonic for everyone.

This year however, the CLA Game Fair will be a real festival of the countryside. David Hough, Game Fair Director, is positive that this year's event will be the tonic everyone will need as the

countryside rallies again. 'With a change of venue at this stage we certainly have our work cut out, but we are confident that visitors will arrive at Shuttleworth and find the Game Fair in its full glory. This year's show will be no compromise and that is a promise.'

The CLA Game Fair is held annually on a different Estate in England. This year the 44th CLA Game Fair will be held at Shuttleworth, Bedfordshire. The first event, held at Stechworth in 1958 had a visitor attendance of 8,500 and last year the visitor attendance reached a record of 125,000.

The Fair has over 650 exhibitors and activities covering all aspects of the countryside.

Including Shooting, Fishing, Gundogs, Ferrets, Estate Management, Woodland Management, 4x4 Course, Food, Archery, Artists, Clay Shooting, and of course Falconry.

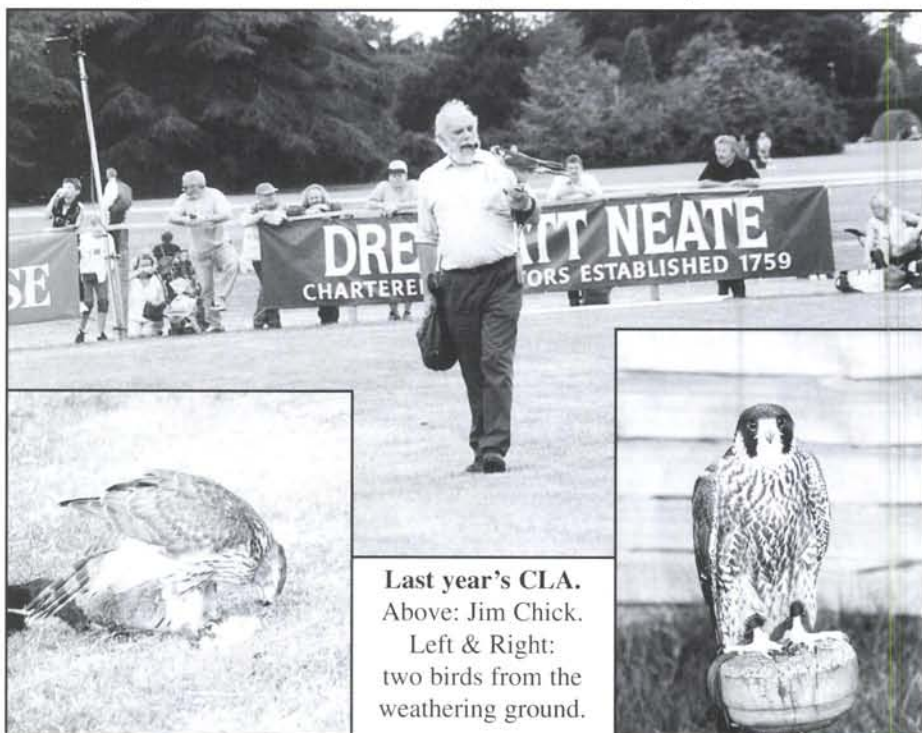
The Falconry will again be sponsored by Mitsubishi. There will be twice daily flying demonstrations in the main arena.

A "hands on" hawk experience area, where visitors, under the guidance of experienced professional Falconers will be able to handle Hawks themselves and fly them under strictly controlled conditions.

Falconry mews with up to 40 birds on display and falconers on hand to answer questions.

A trade area where you can buy equipment etc. , and seven of the main falconry clubs.

Also there is a mini falconry arena which hosts a number of Falconry related presentations throughout the weekend.



Last year's CLA.
 Above: Jim Chick.
 Left & Right:
 two birds from the
 weathering ground.

Scottish Hawking Club Report Spring 2001

If anyone had asked me what the worst possible problem that could occur in the countryside, I would have been hard pressed to come up with Foot and Mouth Disease. As you are all aware this scenario has happened and it has hit far and wide, not only has it hit all rural business's and fieldsports this year, it looks like we may all be affected into next year as well.

Falconry is banned in all infected areas by law, be aware of where you are, fines are heavy. The Hawk Board has issued a statement recommending that no falconry activity should be taking place at all in the countryside. When we are allowed to resume activities, which we advise should not be before September, make certain you have consulted with the farmer or landowner, as well if necessary MAFF. We will do ourselves a lot of damage if a falconer is seen to have inadvertently spread F&M through his or her carelessness.

Scone Palace is to go ahead this year, but later than normal, September 22/23 is now the date. The SHC will be jointly in charge once again, with the same 90 metre square mews area. This year we will be situated on our previous years site at the head of Fishermans row, here we will be able to expand in future years, which we couldn't have done on last years site. It is expected to attract large numbers of visitors due to the cancellation of so many agricultural shows. It is also envisaged that absolutely no animals will be allowed on site, including dogs, but birds should be no problem.

The CLA game fair is also going ahead but at a new venue, Shuttleworth Old Warden Park, Nr Biggleswade, Bedfordshire, as previous years, the SHC has been invited as the Scottish representative, if anyone who lives in that area or is expected to attend and would like to help on the club stand it would be appreciated.

The Watson bill that came to a grinding halt, also due to the F&M, suddenly hit the headlines last week with a leaked story that the Rural Development committee had voted to recommend the bill should fail due to the wide scope of effects it would have on all manner of pastimes other than foxhunting. We cannot start cheering yet, we will have to wait and see what the committee's report says. This is unlikely to be published until after the election.

The review of Schedule 4 birds again is on hold as is the review of DETR charges until the F&M is over, the Scottish Hawk Board has finally got an agreement for a meeting with the Scottish Executive to discuss these matters, so we will be able to put forward our views before a final decision is made.

It is uncertain what our field meeting situation is going to be this year. We had provisionally booked Skye again for this year as it was so successful last year, you will have to wait until the next report before we have any certainty as to what

meetings we can hold.

The Hawk Board is holding its elections this year, so anyone who wishes to be considered for the post of club representative which requires a visit to London 4 times a year or if you wish to put your name forward for the 6 elected positions on the board, then please contact the club so we can get all the nominations sorted out. Should there need to be a vote then ballot papers will be sent out to all club members for voting.

If you should wish to get involved, but not on a national level, then the Scottish Hawk Board elections will come up in 2 years time. There is always something for you to do if you should wish to get more involved and put something back into your sport. In the mean time good hawking (if you can get it).

THE HAWKING CLUB NEWS

The Hawking Club AGM took place at The Four Winds hotel, Nr Aberavon, Nr Port Talbot on Saturday 24th February. The incumbents were all re-elected to their positions: Nancy de Bastyant and John Buckner as Presidents, Jane Thomas-Protheroe as Treasurer and Craig Thomas as Chairman.

The Club will again be attending the CLA Game Fair, held at Shuttleworth, Old Warden Park, Nr Biggleswade. Any club member wishing to help please contact Ade on 01443 206333.

There will be no meeting of the Midland region in May due to the clash of dates with the Falconers Fair, and the South Wales region sees a change of venue, to the Crown Inn in Llantwit Fardre, and the meetings will now take place on the 2nd Sunday of the month.

PLEASE SEND YOUR CLUB NEWS TO
THE FALCONERS MAGAZINE,
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www.westwealdfalconry.co.uk From 25th May.
Well done to all the winners in the Westweald wordsearch in the last issue! Telephone or send SAE (A5) for our 2001 price list to: 'Wildcobs' Long Barn Rd. Weald, Sevenoaks, Kent TN14 6NJ England.
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Contact

**Paul Beecroft: 0118 9016990
Wendy Alikier: 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).**

THE HAWKING CLUB

Meetings at various locations around the country.

For further information on this 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**

HOME COUNTIES HAWKING CLUB

Affiliated to the British Field Sports Society

Hawley on the Surrey/Hants borders is where the Club meets on the third Wednesday of the month.

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

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

**Ring: John & Laila on 01276 503891
or Alan on 01784 250557 after 6pm**

Northern England Falconry Club

CLUB MEETINGS

ARE HELD AT

"The Stickler"

Public House,

Stickler Lane, Bradford.

**Or Contact: Chris Southern
on: 01422 366425**

Email: NEFC@lineone.net

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The South East Falconry Group

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

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

Contact Dean White for further
information: 01489 896504

e-mail: WhiteGos@compuserve.com

STH GLOS & WEST WILTS RAPTOR CLUB

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

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

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

**Telephone Martin: 0117 9710019
Gary: 01454 201702**

MEETINGS of The Welsh Hawking Club

are held monthly, 8pm at:

USK The Newbridge Inn,
Tredunnock, 2nd Monday

CHESTER The Goshawk,
Mouldsworth, 1st Wednesday

PLYMOUTH The Woodpecker, A38,
3rd Monday

The Welsh Hawking Club is internationally recognised and has members throughout the UK.

For further information ring Secretary:
Mike Clowes on 01529 240443

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In At The Kill

By Martin Hollinshead

British falconry is bursting with talent, power and energy. British falconry can match anything seen anywhere in the world. But British falconry has a big problem. Countless novice falconers progress through the beginner stages without understanding anything like enough about the practical aspects of catching and dealing with quarry. I accept that if we use the term 'falconry' in its very widest sense, the sport has many branches that have nothing to do with hunting. Breeding, demonstration work, even the recreational flying of a non-hunting hawk, are all areas far removed from the field experience. Generally, however, the newcomer is drawn to falconry by the thought of the 'real thing'. He wants to catch things! And so starts a journey that begins the wrong way around.

Consideration for the Quarry

Always in British falconry, the hawk comes first. Its needs are met by the most carefully thought out housing, equipment and diet, and its training is scrutinised more closely than that of an



Bonelli's Eagle on a rabbit



Female Peregrine on a partridge

Olympic athlete. And all of this is vital. As a fanatic on management, I endorse anything that makes the captive raptor's life a better one. But what about the quarry? Don't we owe the creatures we are going to pursue some consideration? Shouldn't an obligation to the quarry come first? Shouldn't we perhaps give a little more thought to its needs at the end of a flight?

It's a worrying fact that too many novice falconers enter the field with a newly trained hawk believing their charge will dispatch its victims unaided. And what a shock that first rabbit is! In some branches of the sport the hawk does indeed 'do the deed'. A good example would be the falcon that kills its quarry in the air with a devastating blow, or quickly dis-

patches grounded and severely disabled quarry with a bite to the neck. We might even look to the female eagle that easily kills rabbits. But this isn't beginner falconry. The type of falconry most beginners start with is rabbit hawking with medium-sized birds, very often a Harris' hawk, and this almost always requires the falconer to do the dispatching. And with this statement comes the inevitable novice question, 'so what happens in the wild?' Well, often in falconry we are pursuing quarry a wild hawk would consider too large. More importantly, in the wild, hawk-captured animals sometimes die miserable deaths and get eaten alive. This we do not want to emulate.

This blank spot in the novice falconer's education is not seen in other parts of Europe. On the other side of the Channel, there is no reluctance to discuss this aspect of the sport. Perhaps we have just allowed falconry to become a little too divorced from other forms of hunting. On the Continent, falconry is more closely tied to hunting - is seen as hunting - and so the education of the falconer benefits from the skills of the gun-hunter. You wouldn't go

deer stalking without knowing where to aim or how to use a rifle. Why should changing the type of weapon make any difference? No falconer should be out with a hunting hawk without being fully conversant with the numerous ways in which quarry can be humanely dispatched. This isn't an area where you can learn as you go along.

Fortunate are the falconers who come to the sport from other hunting disciplines, perhaps from 'hunting, fishing, shooting' families. For the novice rabbit hawker, what could be a better grounding than ferreting? With ferreting, the netted quarry always needs to be dispatched. My own falconry had benefited enormously from my association with Continental falconry and from my interest in ferreting and running dogs. My advice to the novice would be, study other field sports and devour their literature.

When it comes to dispatching secured game, the novice falconer has a tougher job than many hunters - his quarry has a hawk attached to it! And as well as considering the game, he has to consider his hawk. The quarry has to be dispatched with the hawk still in possession and without injuring or offending it. And the scene he is faced with may be far from calm. Big rabbits latched onto by inexperienced birds can present the novice with not only the problem of the dispatch, but bringing the combatants to a halt in the first place! And the victim may be loudly protesting and this will worry the novice still more. And a big hawk with small quarry may present a difficult situation due to its excited behaviour and the fact that the quarry isn't any kind of encumbrance. Big birds with small kills can be very silly.

Often the novice is told he'll need a knife. But he isn't always warned strongly enough that a sharp knife will

be as happy removing his hawk's toes as it will killing the quarry. He may also choose a non-locking folding knife and put his own digits at risk. I remember one chap almost taking off two fingers. There are numerous ways of dispatching all manner of quarry without making the victim suffer or putting the hawk at risk - or upsetting it. There are methods involving bare hands and blunt-sided instruments. There are methods that work well for some locations and methods that work better in others. The novice falconer needs to know.

Dispatching Quarry

A full discussion of how to dispatch the various types of game, especially the larger quarry, would be out of place here. However, a few comments on that beginner's rabbit are worth making. There are several ways of killing rabbits. Frequently described is the neck-pull. The quarry's rear legs are secured in one hand while the other encompasses the neck. The head is then pulled forwards and back, breaking the neck. This can be done at ground level with the hawk attached to the victim, but it's better suited to sports where the quarry can be picked up. If the quarry has been caught in cover and by its rear end only, a variation on the neck-pull, sometimes called 'chinning', can work very well. One hand is placed firmly on the victim's shoulders, just easing onto the neck, while the other, with its palm under the animal's chin, forces the head backwards. The shoulder/neck-hold prevents movement and so the neck must break. Interestingly

enough, our editor, Lyn Wilson, tells me that she found this approach perfect for dispatching magpies her sparrowhawk had caught.

If the neck pull or chinning method is impossible to employ, the very best way of killing rabbits is to use a sharpened screwdriver or a thick-bodied bradawl. The thickness is important. A thin instrument will not deliver immediate and lethal damage and is thus not humane. This type of stabbing device is used at the quarry's head and is swift to kill if employed correctly. The rabbit's brain must be penetrated. My advice here would be to use the quarry's ears as a guide and go in right between them, and rather aim a little too far back than too far forwards. And don't forget, a dead rabbit can always be practised on.



Martin making in on a Harris Hawk with a rabbit.

Photo: M Hollinshead

If treated sensitively, the topic of dispatching game should not be worried about. I know from experience that enquiring minds



Female Black Sparrowhawk with a Francolin.

want to know. The other evening I was giving a talk at a falconry club and the very first question from a young falconer was 'if my bird catches a hare, how do I kill it?' I avoided the response

continues. I have seen game treated in the most frightful fashion just because the falconer wasn't conversant with how to render the catch fit for the table. I recall one chap making a start on 'scraping' a rabbit's innards out with a knife! Carefully paunching and skinning rabbits is so easy that there is no excuse for not swatting up to get it right. I remember one non-hunting guest finding the whole business fascinating. While the other members of the party made for the vehicles, he glued himself to me as I attended the day's bag. He'd been an attentive student all day and he wasn't going to miss out on the final part of what he likened to a survival course! With a good number of rabbits to deal with, this guest went home with a better idea of how to treat slain quarry than many new falconers.

Concluding Note

It may be thought that with field sports under pressure, highlighting the need to dispatch hawk-secured quarry might give falconry a less savoury flavour. Perhaps this is why our novices have been kept in the dark. The truth is, sensible advice on how to humanely dispatch game can only benefit the sport. The falconer who knows what he's doing and can act quickly and professionally is a far better ambassador for the sport than the falconer with unsure hands.

Full details of the various ways to dispatch quarry and remove hawks from kill smoothly are given in my book, *The Complete Rabbit and Hare Hawk*, details in this issue.

'first catch your hare' and gave him the screwdriver option. A minute or two later he was back, 'what about deer'!

The Respect Continues

Very closely linked to the business of dispatching game is its treatment once it is dead. I hate to see slain quarry mistreated. Again, we can learn much from the Continent where the day's bag is handled with great respect. Go to any of the big Continental meets and watch how the game is carefully laid out. Observe the ceremony, the horn playing. What more fitting end to a hunt could there be?

And what about paunching, skinning and preparing for the kitchen? Here too the respect



Female Harris Hawk on a rabbit

Photo M Hollinshead

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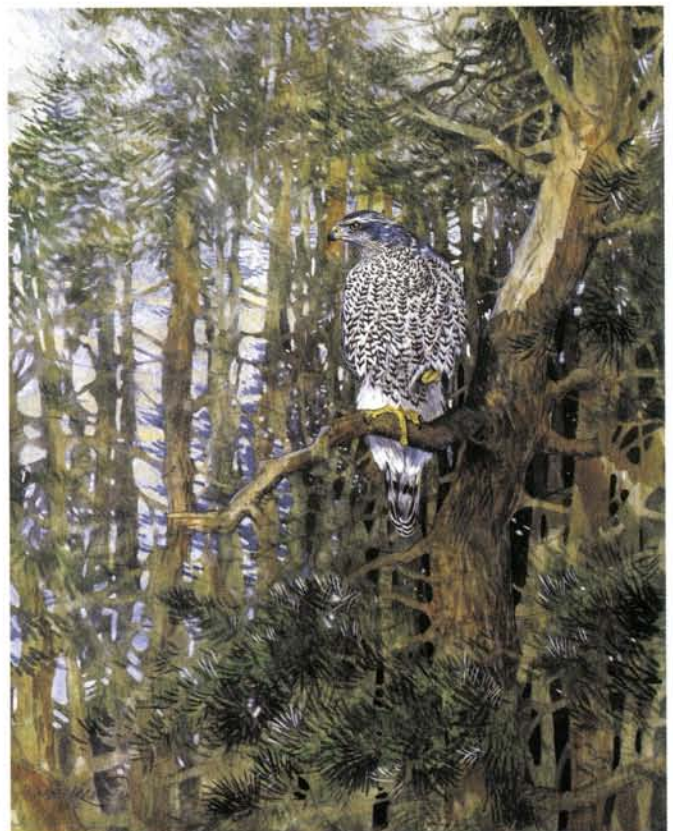
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RED LETTER DAYS

Dougie McCarlie

What is a Red Letter Day for you? As Falconers and sportsmen do ours differ from any other fieldsports persons idea of a Red Letter Day? I think not.

We have a desire to catch various quarry with trained birds of prey. Whether you shoot, fish hunt or hawk, Red Letter Days are absolutely unforgettable. Quality or quantity, do these have any bearing on making RLD's. For many years shooters and game fishermen wanted big bags, 1000 bird days where vast numbers of driven pheasants were put over guns. Game fishermen were also keen to put double figures of fish on the bank. With the anti-field sports lobby breathing down everyone's necks sportsmen have taken stock and have gone for the quality market. 200 bird days - catch and release fisheries are selective management on our part. Just as a stalker selects his stag or hind so too can a fisherman choose to return a fish or a gun leave a hen bird etc.

Hawking is a truly green sport, hunting quarry with

birds of prey, using the bird to hunt as it would in its wild state, so I think quality of sport wins hands down in making a RLD.

I dream of these days when I am at work, or the night before a day's hawking, I run through my mind what could happen. So often reality is a bitter pill to swallow, well thought out hunting fores are doomed to disaster, a date is fixed when the hunters can all be present, and what happens? We have three weeks of rain in one day, or your hawk is just not quite the right weight or the rabbits wont bolt so with this in mind here is a short tale of my last Red Letter Day.

John, David and myself had been scheming to get out over the Christmas holidays for several weeks, Jon and I have small children and so all day expeditions have been in short supply we have both been hawking at first light so as to finish by lunch time in the build up to Christmas and we were both flying Harris's, John a male and I a female. David was 'Stoaty the ferret boy' for the day as he didn't



Hetty with her rabbit

have a bird at the time (someone's got to do the digging!)

The Sunday morning dawned after a night spent dreaming of birds catching rabbit after rabbit and as I pulled back the curtain, snow glistened on the street below, I love hawking on cold, snowy mornings so with kit and bird packed into the pick-up I set off on the short journey to 'Stoaty's', sorry David's house. Nor one for early rising our 'Stoaty', we assembled his ferrets and trusty spade, swapped vehicles and headed for deepest, snow covered Cambridgeshire.

We arrived at the farm and met up with John who informed the farmer we were out hawking and drove down the icy track to our destination. We all donned thermals and woolly hats and trudged off to a small set of holes around a small pond. 'Stoaty', tackled up the ferrets with collars and popped one into the nearest hole. A rabbit did bolt but made it to another hole before a flight could be had. This sort of thing often happens and this is when a really good, quick ferret can persuade the rabbit to depart and not even contemplate re-entry to the same set. To

avoid an early -up, we moved onto another hedgerow that had produced good bolters before. Although there were signs of rabbits we just seemed unable to show the birds a rabbit. So, on we moved, a few hundred yards along the hedge to a nice little corner of the field. This spot really did look promising and David entered a different ferret who quickly got up to her rabbit, unfortunately it was up a dead end and we had to dig out the ferret (she was about a foot down) and the rabbit as well. One to the ferrets. She was put down again and a rabbit darted to the next set, under a rowan tree stump, not the best place for a dig but a David was digging I was keen to follow up the rabbit. The ferret was really on fire by now and was literally inches off the rabbit's backside as they hurtled around the set in, then out of the holes. This only served to excite the birds and I could feel Hetty, my female, tightening her talons on my glove, her neck straining to keep up with the action. Suddenly the rabbit a sprint for freedom across the corner in front of me. Instantly, without any encouragement, Hetty left the glove, pursuing the rabbit, with snow spraying



Fluke is so small at 11lb 4/4oz, he makes this buck rabbit look like a hare



David, Dougie and Hetty show off in front of their booty

from its feet as it ploughed towards the hedgerow. Mistake! No holes for it to disappear down and Hetty piled in. She soon overcame it and I followed up and dispatched it.

John and I had agreed that one successful flight each was all we would have so I fed Hetty up while David retrieved the ferret. Although Hetty had taken rabbit before, this flight stretched her more than any of the previous ones and she deserved her warm rabbit leg. I was very pleased for her, and the boys were both delighted too.

We put her back in the vehicle and continued in search of a good set for John and his male, Fluke. We settled at a small set in the hedge with a dyke on one side. David popped the ferret down and no sooner had she entered the darkness than out shot a very nice rabbit, straight up the dyke. Fluke was hot on its tail as it climbed the dyke-side, he

fresh nets were laid over the holes. Another bolted for us and then we moved back to the pond set to try for the rabbit we originally bolted. We quietly netted up and entered the ferrets. We waited for five or ten minutes and David scanned the ground for a positive bleep on the receiver. We marked the spot of the ferret and waited for a few more minutes, she was still on her rabbit so David gave me the spade, cheeky bugger, that wasn't part of the deal I'm the falconer.

Luckily for me she was only about a foot down< but with the ground frozen was I glad? I got to her and pushed my hand past her to pull out a dead rabbit, John then moved in to see if there were any more and we were surprised to find another and another and another. The frozen soil was thawing and whilst we paunched the rabbits a robin came down to join us and feasted on the worms and

hit it like a Scud missile, at 11b 43/4 oz this little male sure has plenty of heart and he hung on to a very big buck rabbit until John got there and dispatched it.

John fed his bird up and we made our way back to the vehicle at the same time, keeping an eye open for any promising sets we could ferret.

We could easily have gone home and sat by the fire and enjoyed a cup of tea but we had to show the farmer a few more rabbits in the bag than the two caught by the Harris's. The set we chose was just along the hedge from his house so at least he would notice any decrease in the population. We netted up a smallish set, popped in the ferret and waited. The ground was still pretty frozen and we could hear the rabbits banging about in the warren. Two evacuated in quick succession to be meshed in the nets, these were dispatched and two

grubs. After she'd had enough we put a few broken twigs and some grass down the dig and back filled. The other two intrepid hunters wanted to carry on but time was knocking and we had to go and see the farmer.

He was pleased to see a few bunnies less and we offered him the pick of the bunch and he offered us a mince pie and a dram. He told us how pleased he was that we had enjoyed ourselves and reminisced about the pre-mixy days when farm workers spent the winter months trying to keep down the huge rabbit population and then sold the pelts at market to help subsidise their wages. We could have talked to him for ages but we thanked him for the sport and made our way home. We all agreed that the day had been great fun and the weather, the rabbits, the birds and the ferrets had all been unforgettable. A Red Letter Day!



John with Fuke and his well earned rabbit

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A QUIET PLACE IN THE HILLS

FRANCIS ALLEN

When the pressure of work became too intolerable Keith would often mutter to himself, "I'll sell the whole bally bag of tricks, and find a nice quiet place in the hills".

By "the whole bally bag of tricks", he was referring to his electronics company, Maritronics.

It was his own firm, well at least he still had the majority share holding, and as far as electronic companies go it was small, around 150 employees. But Maritronics was a little gem of a firm, specialising in underwater marine electronics, it had an order book with both civilian and the MoD (Navy).

In fact it was a particular project for the MoD (N) that was giving Keith a dangerously high level of blood pressure, so much so that the staff had nicknamed him 'Busta bloodvessel'. Of course such a title was only used in Keith's absence, for he was not to be fooled with, although he liked a laugh and a joke, there were times when it was positively suicidal to throw a wisecrack at Keith.

The culprit of all this stress and sleepless nights was S.L.A.D. MkII and was one of the MoD's most secret projects.

S.L.A.D. Mk I, short for Surface Launched Air Defence, was one of Keith's most advanced inventions, and had proved a great success.

Now Keith had come up with an advanced version which could communicate with similar slave modules of itself, thus giving blanket defence coverage. The Navy boffins went crazy for the idea, but now Keith's technical designers at Armatech that was the secret R&D department of Maritronic, were having teething problems with the test runs on the first prototype.

Sea trials were set for the end of the month and a naval nuclear submarine was booked to launch the Mk II version of S.L.A.D.

As he sat at his desk in the small hours of the morning poring over the results of the previous days test run, his mind kept coming up with the picture of Shaba his African Crowned Eagle.

A mixture of guilt and a longing to be out in the field hunting her, it had been so long since he had had the time, or for that matter the desire to take her out. Work had taken over his life, for the past eight years it had driven his very existence, but now a great tiredness was coming over him. For once the idea of selling "the whole bally bag of tricks" had a compelling appeal and was no longer an idle threat.

Thoughts of early retirement and that

quiet little place in the hills he had always promised himself, started germinating and cluttering his mind.

That weekend as usual, Keith spent a few hours at home after Sunday lunch with Sandra his wife before returning to the plant to evaluate the day's results with his R&D team.

These few hours had become very necessary in preserving his sanity, time spent relaxing, reading the Sunday papers, and if the weather was fine, a short walk with Sandra and the dogs.

It was as they both ambled along the footpath in the local woods the Keith, being offered a penny for his thoughts, decided somewhat hesitatingly to air the idea of retiring to the hills.

To his immense surprise Sandra seized the idea before he could fully explain. She too had become tired with the routine of her life, she had dreamt of keeping horses again, and of living somewhere in the rural hills with an extensive network of bridle paths, where she could ride in beautiful countryside.

Weather permitting they would hunt together most mornings, Keith had obtained permission from most of the local farmers to hunt hares on their land.

As she spoke her whole spirit seemed to ignite, her eyes sparkled and an excitement came over her which Keith had not experienced since their early teens. The realisation dawned just how heavily his work had penetrated into both their personal lives.

Sandra had not only dreamt of moving to the hills, she had her name on a number of estate agents mailing lists. Together they hurried back home to pore over details of many suitable properties. Keith was swept up with Sandra's excitement, never had they spoken of so many personal feelings to one another since they had married, than in those few hours. Together they had come so far, both financially and mentally, but somehow they had lost direction and purpose to their lives.

Keith returned to work that evening with a whole new outlook, life was now for living, he had a spring in his step and a joyful note in his voice.

The tired staff felt an infusion of extra

vitality as Keith breezed through the day's data, and fired inspired suggestion after suggestion. His brain was suddenly back on form, "pure bloody genius", whispered Dave the chief technician, as Keith quickly sketched out a modification to the circuitry of the memory guidance system.

"Whatever you've been injecting yourself with this lunch time Keith, I think we could all do with a shot", cracked Dave. "Whatever it is, stay on it, at this rate we could wrap this project up inside a week", he continued.

"I damn well hope so", replied Keith. "I intend selling the whole bag by the end of the month".

"Really, who to?" gasped Dave, nearly swallowing the pencil that was in his mouth.

"Any bugger whose got enough cash, as long as they are British, I couldn't live with the thought of our lads having to penetrate this sort of defence system. If only we had had even Mk I in the Falklands, those Argies would never have sunk a single ship, just think of the lives that could've been saved".

"You know Dave, I think that is the main reason I have absorbed myself for so many years in this damn project. Soon we will be able to give the Navy a blanket defence system, in which nothing fired at their ship from the air, sea or under water will get through.

A month later a consortium of venture capitalists and company managers had put together a proposal to Keith, which he had accepted, together with an eight figure sum of money.

Sandra had found that "Quite place in the hills" which suited both their needs, with stabling for her horses and paddocks for grazing. A couple of spare stone buildings earmarked for Shaba the crowned eagle, with room for a team of falcons Keith had always dreamed of flying, this was made all the more possible with an option to buy the flat moorland at the top of the hill. As Keith sat on the dry stone wall with Shaba sitting on his gloved arm, he reflected on her magnificent beauty. She alone had patiently waited, uncomplaining, and it was the image of her expectantly waiting to be flown that had saved Keith from many more years of stress.

Weather permitting they would hunt together most mornings, Keith had obtained permission from most of the local farmers to hunt hares on their land.

With each outing Shaba, and for that matter Keith as well, were becoming fitter and more agile. She hunted like a

giant goshawk, leaving the fist on pursuit of a fleeing hare, her short rounded wings propelling her at a deceiving speed, her long tail enabling her to counteract any jinking movement of the hare. She flew about fifteen feet off the ground until directly above the running hare, then suddenly she would shoot up another ten or fifteen feet and power dive. Her first foot usually contacted and broke the hares back, her second foot crushed its skull. Keith would feed her a strip of warm meat from a back leg and she would step onto the fist.

Those landowners who had seen Shaba in action were mightily impressed, but her fame spread far and wide in the area after she was witnessed dispatching two vixens with ease on two separate occasions.

Shaba was famous and Keith a local hero who was now welcome on any farmland in the area.

Keith had purchased the moor and employed two local gamekeepers who were about to be made redundant due to the recession's effects on syndicate shooters.

The keepers' designated task was to restore the moor to its former glory. After years of neglect the heather was in a sorry state, also in large areas the bracken had swamped and choked the heather.

The keepers hired local men for controlled burning and Keith hired a helicopter spray firm to deal with the bracken.

Surprisingly the grouse were present, but were confined to small areas of the moor which were still in reasonable condition.

Keith had acquired two female peregrines and intended to increase this to a team of four or five falcons when the moor was 'fully fit'. Also he had purchased a fully trained Llewellyn setter bitch, a superb bird dog, and was also training a young Llewellyn bitch puppy.

Falconry at last was again an important part of Keith's life, just as it had been when as a teenager he had met and married Sandra.

He had just returned from a trip to Katanga, a region of Zaire in Africa where he had been given the Crowned eaglelet. Katanga was soon to be renamed Shaba and so Keith had named her after her birth place. In the UK she was the first African Crowned Eagle to be falconry trained, and Keith travelled the country flying her over different terrains and at some falconry club hunting meetings.

Keith was well known and he had written many articles on hunting with Shaba. Now the old enthusiasm for falconry was surging through his veins, he once again put pen to paper. He had taken some spectacular photographs of Shaba in

action which fully complemented the dramatic prose which flowed from his pen.

Old and new friends came to stay and enjoy hunting outings with Keith and Shaba, many hours were spent discussing the new trends in falconry. Keith was fascinated with all that had happened since the start of captive breeding of raptors. In a way he had been in a time warp with his head buried in business, although still keeping an interest in falconry much of what had happened in the last twenty years had passed him by.

Keith was surprised and a little irritated by the one criticism that was repeatedly offered to him, and that was his total lack of security for his falcons and in particular Shaba.

Initially Keith's response was that she could take good care of herself. "No-one could get near the bugger without receiving physical injury" suggested Keith. But the seed was sown and as each additional remark about lack of security was mentioned Keith realised that falconry was no longer practised solely by sports-



men and gentlemen. The thief and thug had infiltrated the ranks, it was time to fight fire with fire, after all Keith could design and produce one of the worlds most sophisticated defence systems, surely a small system to protect the mews and weathering lawn would be no problem.

The first, and Keith favourite design was typical to character, a little extreme.

It consisted of four metal columns, about the height of telegraphs poles, positioned around the mews and weathering ground. At the top of each column was a clear plastic sphere, which contained within a very sensitive scanning

device, each covering a 360deg footprint and each linked to a central computer. Anything that approached and moved within the area covered, was first warned of the danger, then zapped. The zapping was performed by a high voltage laser, in fact there were four, one on each column. The power of the lasers could be set from stun to kill or left to the computer to decide.

To save Keith and family becoming victims of friendly fire should they inadvertently step into range, Keith designed small microchips to be injected under the skin for himself and Sandra as well as the falcons, Shaba and the dogs. The scanners would read the microchips as they entered the area and the computer would recognise them as friends.

Sandra was appalled and insisted that Keith removed the kill option from the design, Keith agreeing that it was more satisfying to "package the enemy" rather than eliminate it, somehow did not quite allay Sandra's misgivings about this design.

"Packaging the enemy" was Keith's computer speak for a small modification to the program, which enabled the computer on first detection of an unidentified intruder, otherwise known to the computer as "enemy", to follow a simple sequence.

First a verbal warning over four audio speakers mounted on each tower, a simple word "HALT", if the enemy continued for more than four paces after the warning a single, low voltage laser blast hit the "enemy". This was to be the equivalent to a hard body punch, and would probably knock the "enemy" to the ground.

The intention was to keep the "enemy" conscious as the computer instantly fired all four lasers at full power to burn a small square around the enemy and issued another verbal warning "STAY". If this little demonstration did not freeze the enemy to the spot, a bolter would be stopped by one laser on stun.

From the moment the computer detected the presence of an "enemy" it would phone the request the presence of the local police, if the stun laser had to be used it would also request an ambulance. Only once the computer had followed this sequence would it allow recovery of the "enemy", it would then give a verbal warning to clear the area and return to GUARD mode.

Keith was happy with the design and set about construction, some of the items took a good bit of sweet talking and a little arm bending to procure. Keith was now a civilian and some of these items carried a military status. This slowed down the construction, but Keith now having designed the system seemed to be

in no great hurry to finish it. The weather too was becoming unpredictable, having been lulled by the Indian summer, winter seemed all the more harsh by its sudden appearance.

Wet and windy was the norm, some days it was too bad to put even Shaba out on the weathering lawn, she had roomy indoor accommodation, and Keith had always removed her jesses leaving her free with just her anklets on whilst in the mews. This was if Keith was for any reason incapacitated, Shaba was at least safe from entanglement.

It was a moonless wild night, the rain finally eased at eleven thirty and Keith who had been cooped up for too long, suggested to Sandra that he would take her dogs for a leg stretch.

As he stepped into his wellies out in the kitchen yard the bobbery pack milled about in anticipation. Rick, a cross between a foxhound and a terrier stood by the yard gate and sniffed the air. The hair stood up on the back of his neck and he growled low and deep. "What's up lad?" asked Keith as he stroked Rick's ear while opening the gate. With that he was through the gate and gone into the dark, closely followed by the rest of the pack.

Muttering to himself as he fumbled to switch on his torch, Keith was thinking the Rick had picked up a roe scent, when an awful blood curdling scream slightly more human than vixen, filled the air. The pack was at full bay, barking, growling and snarling and it sounded like it was near the mews. As Keith thundered along in his heavy wellies slipping on wet leaves on the waterlogged lawn, the dogs were at the back of the mews building. As he rounded the corner he could see they had hold of a pair of legs that were protruding from a window grille which had been removed.

All the dogs were hanging on and tugging as though they were fighting over a bone. The legs were not fighting back and as Keith tried to subdue the dogs he realised that the dogs' excitement was increased by the crashing that was coming from inside the building. The window from which the legs were protruding was Shaba's pen and she had joined in the fight, she had both her feet in the upper left arm and was doing her best to take her quarry to the ground. The owner of the legs and arm seemed to be unconscious, Keith rushed back to the house to get his glove and keys, he burst through the kitchen door shouting orders to a star-

tled Sandra to call the police and an ambulance and to come and stop her dogs from dismembering the "enemy".

As Keith opened the door of Shaba's pen he was startled by the amount of blood that had flowed down the back of the "enemy's" neck, Shaba was furious and had her talons well embedded, there were other holes in the back of the wax jacket, but now she had a good hold and was not letting go. Although the owner of the arm was still unconscious Shaba sensed he was still alive by the amount of jerking as the pack were still swinging on his legs. Shaba's instinct was to grip with all her might until the struggling had ceased, indicating that the prey had expired.

Sandra arrived and started to calm the dogs. Keith had managed to slip jesses into Shaba's anklets and was trying to persuade her to step onto the glove. She had released one foot as Sandra managed to pull the last terrier off the legs, as she let go the arm with the other foot it slipped out through the window. Sandra was leading the pack back to the yard as the blue lights came up the drive. Keith was right thought Sandra Shaba could take care of herself, I bet those legs would have preferred to face the lasers.

FALCONRY - MODERN IMPROVEMENTS !

Malcolm Allison

As we all know, falconry has been practised for thousands of years throughout the world, and until relatively recently techniques remained unchanged. Whilst I agree that some modern developments have made life easier for the falconer and, more importantly, the birds under his care, others have in my opinion simply made falconers lazier or more complacent.

Lets deal first with one of the most beneficial - the Aylmeris. These marvelously simple devices have saved countless hawks from a slow lingering death. Simply by removing the mews jesse and replacing it with a slitless flying or field jess you reduce the risk of your hawk getting caught up by virtually 100 %. The fitting of Aylmeris should be compulsory on all raptors which are flown loose be it hunting or merely flying displays. Indeed the traditional jesse is now illegal in the United States. These are indeed, a boon to modern falconry and all falconers owe their inventor Mr. Guy Aylmer an enormous debt of gratitude.

Astroturf - This again is another boon to falconers. There is no doubt that modern perches and blocks covered with astroturf have saved the feet

of many hawks and falcons. The fact that perches can be cleaned and disinfected has reduced the incidence of foot disorders considerably.

Now let's deal with the more dubious improvements - first, Telemetry.

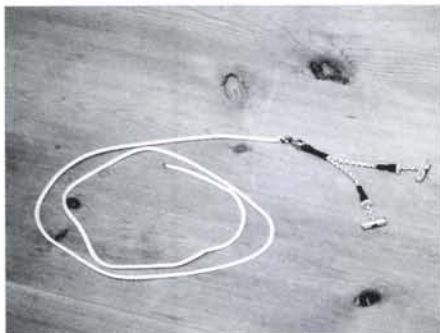
I use it, virtually every falconer I know



Aylmeri's and Astroturf

uses it, but do we depend on it too much ? There is a common misconception with telemetry in that some falconers believe it will magically get their bird back if it is lost. It won't. What telemetry does is tell you where your bird is, which is ideal for rook hawking or game hawking where flights can cover large distances and your hawk can be out of sight within seconds. If it is on a kill all well and good, you simply make in and pick it up (in theory) you may have missed the most incredible flight your hawk has ever had but at least you have recovered her and can fly her another day. However, if it is 70ft up an unclimbable tree miles from anywhere, no amount of high tech electronics will make it come down if it doesn't want to. You have to ask yourself why it is sitting there quite happily preening itself, or sat with one foot tucked up and why it refuses to respond to your well garnished fist or succulent lures? Was it overweight? I have heard falconers say, and have even said myself in the past, 'she's a bit overweight, but I'll fly her anyway, she's got a transmitter on'. Long range tracking devices are no excuse for haphazard falconry. I once attended B.F.C. field meeting where I was flying a female Goshawk, of course she was wearing a

transmitter. Whilst walking through a young fir plantation, I noticed her transmitter had fallen off. (I did not at that time have a receiver but used to rely on friends in Suffolk). I notified the rest of the field. The field-master approached me and said " I suppose that's it then, you won't be flying her now". He looked somewhat surprised when I said "Yes, I'll still fly her ". "You're a brave man flying a Goshawk without a transmitter " he said. I replied that I wasn't brave, I just considered myself to be a competent falconer. The bird flew well and was obedient. Had she been slightly overweight, and I had relied on modern technology, the day could have ended very differently. I have noticed much to my disgust that since having my own receiver, I use it almost every time I go hawking, but that doesn't mean my bird is often lost. What I mean is, when my bird goes out of sight and I don't hear bells for a minute or so I immediately turn on the receiver to get a fix on her position. I no longer rely on the good old fashioned techniques of field craft. I don't wait for the chattering of blackbirds, the sound of magpies uttering their alarm calls or the raucous calls of crows. There is no doubt that many falconers out there can see nothing wrong with that, but I could kick myself every time I turn on the receiver. I keep saying to myself that the next time I go out I'll leave my receiver at home and hawk the old fashioned way, but I know I never will, I've got it so I'll use it. What I don't do now is fly my bird if she is overweight, I would sooner fly her at the correct weight without a transmitter, than fly her overweight with one.



Bullet Jesses - I know falconers who swear by them and use them on all of their birds (Harris's Redtails and Falcons). They think they are marvelous. I once asked what the advantage of them was, and was told that it's a lot quicker changing these jesses and leash. Well, I don't know about you, but it only takes me about 30 seconds or so to change the jesses on my female Goshawk. Are you living life at such a hectic pace that you need to knock 30 seconds off our preparation time? If so, then perhaps hawking is not the sport for you. You spend weeks training your bird, weeks getting it fit, but then feel the need to save 30 seconds to get out and fly it. But of course, there are those that will say "Ah yes, but with the permanently attached flying jesses, you can control your birds feet whilst you prepare her for



Kites - what did we do before we had them?

flying". This is handy if your bird is 'footy'. If your bird is footy then I suggest that this is a fault with your training and manning methods. Your bird should be happy to have you fiddling about with her feet.

Kite Training - I have seen very little of this method of training, but what I have seen has been promising, or has it. I have seen birds trained to the kite rise to remarkable heights, but on the other hand I have also seen birds not trained to the kite rise to great heights which were equally as impressive. Which must beg the question would kite trained birds have gone up without their training - i.e. would they have been naturally high fliers anyway? Should we really be teaching our birds to immediately look to the skies the moment the hood is removed? Or should we allow them to look around and assess the situation and let them decide the best way to proceed.

Harris Hawk - Now this could be controversial, but hear me out before you condemn me. I've nothing against Harris's I have flown them myself. I've seen some fly superbly and put some Goshawks to shame. On the other hand, I've seen some fly appallingly and the latter far outnumber the former. The problem I believe is the Harris Hawks' laid back nature. There is no denying that the Harris's do become tame and this is their downfall. With a Redtail/Gos, hunger is the main stimulus in training, birds have to be keen to respond. Harris's however, being more relaxed, require less weight reduction in order for them to respond. Therefore, a Harris could be flying free and responding well to the fist, but still not be keen enough to hunt. This is where the trouble begins. Many newcomers to falconry will be more that happy to simply have their hawks come to the fist, or follow them through woods. Others will become frustrated with the fact that their bird refuses to chase anything. Raptors, like most of nature's predators, only hunt when they are hungry. Hunger is a great motivator. So if you do fly a Harris Hawk don't be content to fly it to the fist. Fly it sharp, fly it keen, but more impor-

tantly, fly it at quarry.

Harris Hawks, along with other raptors, are now more freely available due to modern captive breeding methods. Whilst this means that it is easier for dedicated enthusiasts to become involved in this wonderful sport, it also means that these marvellous creatures are more likely to end up in the hands of less savoury characters or 5 minute falconers, and are destined to spend their lives permanently tethered to a perch or block as some sort of animated status symbol whose sole purpose is to boost the ego of its owner. And they are just the lucky ones!

It is often said that the Harris is the ideal beginners bird, or worse still, ideal for the weekend falconer. Firstly, if you can only fly your bird at weekends you must think very carefully about whether falconry is the ideal hobby for you. Secondly, I believe that if you do intend to pursue falconry seriously, you can do worse than start with a male redtail. You will learn more about the importance of weight control and keenness, and if all goes well you will have a companion and



Harris Hawks - too tame?

hunting partner for many years to come. But don't forget your transmitter !!!!!!!

Don't get me wrong - I'm not against change as long as it's for the better, what I disagree with is change for changes sake. If it works for you, do it. But don't let modern improvements make you lazy in your training methods or complacent with your weight control.

With regard to other modern techniques such as radio controlled lures, clockwork flapping lures etc, I reserve judgement. You decide if they are good or bad for you.

In love, war and hawking for every joy there are a hundred heartaches.....

LAMPING WITH EAGLES IN ZIMBABWE

David Wilson

As most of you know Lyn and I were lucky enough to go to Zimbabwe in 1998 and one of the eagles they can obtain permits to take from the wild as eyasses are African Hawk Eagles. Females fly between 3.5 - 4lbs and males fly between 2.5 - 3lbs. These birds are flown mostly at night at fur and feather. This was of great interest to me as I have only seen hawk eagles flown in this country and they were at rabbit and hare in the daytime. We also saw Lundi, an African Crowned Eagle flown, this was a rare treat as she is only one in captivity which

Guinea puts in the Spar will mark the quarry by landing where it entered the grass and cocking its head from side to side to try and pinpoint any sound of its escape on foot. The Spar will then run through the grass and flush the bird itself, making it take to the air so it can pursue it on more equal terms, this can happen several times in one flight until either the Spar catches the Francolin or the Francolin escapes. Sometimes the bird will take stand in a tree, and wait for a



Left: Pierre's eagle, Cotsie, flew this rabbit through a very bushy area, to have two near misses getting up each time to pursue it again before finally securing it.

This is Neil using the lamp to call his eagle back to the fist after an unsuccessful flight. Note the warm clothing as the night temperatures drop below freezing.



Below: This is the truck with its customised seating, from which we hawked.

powerful lamp at night. They soon learn to watch the beam of light moving around. Most of the hunting is done on dirt track roads, (of which there are many) and from the back of an open-topped truck. This is made possible by the 10 metres either side of the road which is burnt off. The Scrub Hares which weigh from 3 - 6lbs, look similar to our British hares, and Spring Hares, which weigh from 5 - 10lbs, eat the new

is being flown by a falconer. She was taken illegally from the nest and was confiscated by the authorities and given to Andre Groenwald, due to the fact that she was hand reared and not suitable for release back into the wild. Lundi weighs about 8lbs.

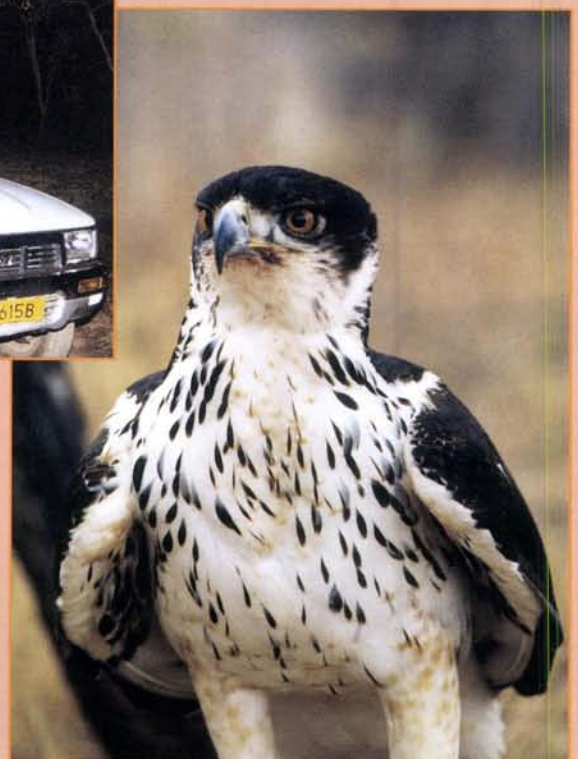
Some people in Zimbabwe do fly their Hawk Eagles in the day but this is done very early or later in the evening as these birds are soaring birds (as with most eagles) and love nothing more than to go up on thermals to 1000's of feet looking for quarry, this is how the wild eagles hunt, and how most of the falconry eagles are lost.

In the daytime the rabbits, spend most of their time in thick cover and are very difficult to bolt, even with the dogs. The Francolin and Guinea Fowl when flushed will drop back into cover, which even in the winter can stand 2 feet high. When pursued with Black Spars, (these birds do not hunt rabbit) if the Francolin or

re-flush from its hunting partner.

The Eagles will also take stand in a tree but are not as tenacious as the Spars and get despondent with this way of hunting.

The African Hawk Eagles are taken from the nest at about three weeks of age and hand reared (imprinted). When they are fully feathered their training starts. Firstly in the daylight, then using a





Above: Part of the hawking safari was going down to Devuri. If you are lucky enough to go and you meet Pierre and his family, this man will have you in stitches for the whole time you are there.

shoots. Spring hares are the strangest creatures, at first glance they look like a small wallaby, but they have ears like a hare, a brush and very large buck teeth. They are much larger than the Scrub Hares, and they use their teeth to good effect, relieving many an unwary African Hawk Eagle of all or part of a toe. One of the Hawk Eagles we saw had all of its main back toe missing but still managed to hold most of the smaller Scrub Hares it was flown at. Adrian Williams was flying an African Hawk Eagle when out in Zim and it caught a White-Tailed Mongoose weighing nearly 13lbs. This illustrates just how capable they can be.

When lamping the verges we sometimes disturbed roosting birds, as soon as the light found them they would take to the wing and the eagles would pursue them, usually straight up. Pierre's eagle Cotsie flew a dikkop flushed out of the top of a small bush taking it some 20 foot up in the air. If the lamp was turned off the eagles would come straight back down to the ground. Telemetry is used at all times and the eagle could be tracked if it went out of sight but none of the eagles we saw flown went very far at all.

African Crowned Eagle.

Most Europeans fly their eagles exclusively in the daytime, at hares, some pursue deer and foxes but how many would consider flying their eagle in the lamp?

Lundi is an exceptional bird in that she will hunt small antelope and monkeys in the daytime and



Left: This is how a high powered lamp lights up the area, shining up to 50yards ahead. All you have to do is keep the quarry in the beam when you are driving along on the top of a truck on a dirt track road at 40mph. Note the short verge and the field behind where the grass is over 4 feet tall.

Right: Lundi flew about eighty yards to catch this Spring Hare, as you can see she has one foot securely on the head. The back feet on the hare have a chisel-like nail on it which can also do a considerable damage as the hares have very powerful back legs.



Left: Andre Groenwald with Lundi. Having just flown her at a Steinbuck, which dropped to the floor when she closed in and then disappeared. Andre calls Lundi back to the fist. (He also flies a 6oz African Goshawk.)

Scrub and Spring Hares in the lamp at night. This is done in the same way as with the smaller eagles but unlike the smaller eagles she has no trouble with the larger Spring Hares. These are usually killed instantly. One of the

advantages of flying hand reared eagles in the lamp is their focus is always on what is in the beam of light, either the quarry or a garished, gloved hand, consequently any aggression is generally directed away from the handler.

Right: Nick Fox was in Zimbabwe with his wife Barbro, and they came out with us on this particular evening, when one of the Hawk Eagles caught a rat, which it proceeded to eat, (we weren't going to try and get it off it!) Much laughter ensued as we all took the rise out of Pierre and his "killer eagle".



The Altai Saker

Dr Chris Eastham and Dr Mike Nicholls

(Ecology Group, Canterbury Christ Church University College)

A large dark saker; a small dark gyrfalcon; a separate species altogether or a natural hybrid between gyr and saker are four possible answers to this question. But which of these classifications is correct? Indeed, is the altai falcon just a myth?

Supposedly found in the Altai and neighbouring mountain ranges of central Asia, the so-called altai falcon has received much attention from falconers, ornithologists and taxonomists and yet its precise classification remains uncertain. Today many falconers in the UK and the rest of the world are fascinated by this falcon; they want to hunt with or breed pure 'altais', and yet the conflicting theories regarding its classification have left many confused as to what exactly an altai falcon is.

Once pictured on the shields of the armies of Attila, perhaps the earliest identification of the altai falcon was by the Mongolian Huns who named it *turul*. The sons of Genghis Khan are known to have hunted swans with these falcons on the plains near Samarkand. In the Middle Eastern classification system, developed largely by Arab falconers, the altai falcon is identified by its large size and dark colour as a *shunqar*, a *sunqur* (also used by some Arab falconers to classify gyrfalcons) or possibly *sinjari*. These falcons are thought to be stronger and faster than sakers of the nominate race *Falco cherrug cherrug*. Because of its larger body-size and darker plumage colour, the altai falcon is considered more valuable than brown *wukra al-harrar*, plain reddish *hurr shami*, and "green" *aukthar saker* types commonly found in the Arab falcon markets.

Arabic classification, however, is based entirely on the physical characteristics of the bird, and because falcons were, and still are, trapped whilst on migration, the exact breeding grounds of these different saker types are unknown. In recent years, however, trappers have started to harvest the large dark and pale falcons from their breeding grounds in countries such as Russia, Mongolia, China, and Kazakhstan.

In the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, the altai falcon was usually considered to be a southern race of the gyrfalcon, derived from a population which had become isolated from the more northerly

gyrfalcon breeding range. It was thought that during the last ice age the gyrfalcon's breeding range might have been forced south due to glacial advancement covering areas of central Asia, including the Altai. Later, when the ice sheets retreated, the breeding range would have moved north again. However, a small gyrfalcon population may have remained in the Altai, where suitable conditions existed for them: colder temperatures, tundra-like vegetation and a source of food, namely ptarmigan. Some believe that this gyrfalcon population inhabits higher altitudes than sakers in the Altai and, therefore, the two 'species' remain separate with only the occasional hybridisation.

A different explanation for the possible existence of a gyrfalcon population in the Altai is that Kublai Khan, the great

losses or deliberate releases on a very large scale is conceivable. Again these falcons may have found suitable conditions for breeding in the Altai and surrounding regions.

Recently the altai falcon has been considered a hybrid between gyrfalcons and sakers. Evidence of such hybridisation came from the discovery of a family of altai falcons by Pyotr Sushkin, a Russian ornithologist, in 1915. From the Kushconur River in the south-eastern Altai, Sushkin collected an adult male and five juveniles of what he initially thought were grey gyrfalcons. The adult male was shot and Sushkin took the five juveniles into captivity, sacrificing them at various ages to document their plumage variation. The variation in plumage of these birds clearly established a link between what Sushkin assumed to

be gyrfalcons and with sakers. One of the offspring developed an adult grey plumage like that of the adult male; three of the offspring were of the dark brown 'altai' type while the fifth offspring developed a red-backed, barred plumage, identical to an eastern (*saceroides*) saker. This discovery provided indisputable evidence that there was a definite relationship between sakers and "altai falcons."

Until recently, hybridisation between species was considered a rare occurrence, but some commentators have now estimated that around 10% of all animal species and 20% of plant species hybridise in nature. In addition, the potential for hybridisation between some species which share a common ancestor may remain for more than 20 million years! Thus hybridisation between gyrfalcons and sakers, species which diverged from a common ancestor only 3-3.5 million years ago during the Pleistocene epoch, may have occurred during the last ice age when a small gyr population was forced south by glacial advances to overlap with the breeding range of sakers.

Hybridisation in the Altai and surrounding mountain ranges may also occur between other raptor species. The Altai and Tarbagatai mountains act as a boundary between two different fauna types: Mongolian to the east and Mediterranean/European to the West. These faunal regions are separated by a taiga-tundra zone extending far to the



Mongol chief, who practised falconry across central Asia, may have lost a large number of gyrfalcons in the Altai and surrounding regions. In the 1200s, Marco Polo reported that Kublai Khan's hawking party included 10,000 falconers carrying a 'vast number of gyrfalcons, peregrine falcons and sakers... and so

south along the mountains, and closely related species and subspecies which meet in this zone may form hybrid populations. In this region eastern upland buzzards are thought to hybridise with western long-legged buzzards. In addition, upland buzzard also hybridise with rough-legged buzzards of the northern arctic range. It has been suggested that a similar situation may have occurred between gyrfalcons, eastern sakers, and western sakers, with gyrfalcons being the foundation of the population of falcons in the Altai region.

Hybridisation may also occur between other members of the subgenus Hierofalco, which includes lanners, luggers, sakers, and gyrfalcons. One Pakistani falconer suggests that sakers hybridise with luggers in southern Asia producing hybrids he calls 'Hodgson's lesser sakers'; with lanners in south west Asia and north east Africa producing wakri al-harrar or jurudy hybrids, and with gyrfalcons in southern Siberia producing shankar hybrids. However, it is not known whether these falcons are the result of 'one off' hybridisation events or from hybrid zones, where one species merges into the other. This story is however further clouded by confusion surrounding the use of these Arabic names, as some authors consider the wukra al-harrar as a small type of al-hur or saker.

There also appears to be some confusion over whether the members of the subgenus Hierofalco have separate breeding ranges. For example, in parts of southeastern Europe and western Asia, some ornithologists believe sakers and lanners breed in the same regions. Other ornithologists believe the breeding range of sakers and luggers to overlap. It may be the case that unknown hybrid zones exist between these species in the more remote, inaccessible or hostile parts of these species' ranges, such as occur in Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran.

Recent morphological analysis has revealed that sakers and altai falcons are physically very similar, and would probably be classified as the same species using morphological criteria (precise physical measurements and colour) alone, whilst gyrfalcons are morphometrically

distinct from sakers and altai falcons. Morphometric comparison of 'altai falcons' with F1 and F2 gyr/saker and B1 (backcross) gyr/saker x saker hybrids does not support the hybridisation theory of the 'altai falcon'. However, the domestic hybrids used in this analysis were merely F1 F2 and B1, whereas natural hybridisation between gyrfalcons and sakers may have origins some 15,000 years ago when the retreating ice sheet may have left a gyrfalcon population trapped within the expanded range of the saker. Any hybrids from that period would presumably have subsequently back-crossed with sakers many times, thus masking most morphological traces of hybridisation in the birds' phenotype (appearance).

Using digital imaging analysis, another similarity between sakers, gyrfalcons and altais has been revealed in there is a strong similarity between the colouration of altai falcons and backcross gyr/saker x saker hybrids. The colouration of altai falcons, then, could be seen as evidence for an ancient hybridisation event.

However a simpler explanation of the distinct colouration of the altai falcon is that it is merely a dark morph of the eastern saker form. Incompletely dominant, dark or melanic plumage polymorphism has been described in other raptors, notably Ferruginous hawks (*Buteo regalis*), Eleanora's falcons (*Falco eleanora*) and indeed other avian species. The altai falcon family found by Pyotr Shuskin in which a single brood contained three differently coloured forms, that is, one grey, three dark brown and one red, eastern saker-like birds, can easily be explained by the segregation (in the Mendelian sense) of two incompletely dominant genes, where dark brown birds are the 'splits' (heterozygotes) for grey/red. Furthermore, the occurrence of dark morphs in other bird species, such as common buzzards (*Buteo buteo*), dippers (*Cinclus cinclus*) and black-throated thrushes (*Turdus ruficollis atrogularis*) in the Altai and surrounding mountain regions, adds further weight to this notion.

The appearance of the dark altai falcon morph has been likened to that of the black gyrfalcon. The plumage on the back

is dark grey / brown in colouration, giving a smokey appearance, with some lighter coloured spots or barring. The tail is also dark grey / brown with light coloured transverse bars. The head can be a totally dark grey / brown cap with lighter flecks under the chin and on the nape. Large dark spots are found on the breast and belly of the dark altai falcon, with some barring on the flanks and undertail coverts. Feathering on the tarsus tends to have an approximate 50% coverage, with occasional feathering between the toes as seen in some gyrfalcons and merlins. This characteristic may have some adaptive significance for falcons inhabiting cold climates by insulating a greater surface area of the feet. The approximate body-weight of female altai falcons ranges from 1200-1400g, and from 800-1000g for males. Another feature found in both dark altai falcons and gyrfalcons is the dark flecking found in the lighter patches of the primary and tail feathers.

Due to altai falcons becoming semi-legendary and very expensive many falcons which bear no real resemblance to their phenotype are traded as such in the UK and in other countries where falconry is practised. Other large dark brown sakers and possibly gyr / saker hybrids are passed off as altai falcons when in reality the geographic origin of that particular falcon or family line is unknown.

We consider, in conclusion, that although the gyrfalcon and saker are closely related and that natural hybridisation between them may be possible if their breeding ranges overlapped, the most plausible classification for the so-called altai falcon is that it is a colour morph of the large eastern saker. Understanding what the altai falcon is has great importance in conservation terms; because these falcons are often darker and larger than sakers from neighbouring regions, especially those to the west, they are under greater threat from overtrapping.

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A Natural Remedy

Keith Loates

The article by Juli Hewins on Aloe Vera in the Autumn 2000 issue has prompted me to write to you about my own experience of its use.

In October 1999 my eyass Lanner, Bobby, succumbed to Wingtip Oedema in both wings. He was my first falcon and I was devastated. For those fortunate enough not to have come across this complaint, it involves swelling along one or more of the root-tips of the flight feathers and severe impairment of flight. The discomfort to the bird causes it to twitch and flap its wings constantly. Its cause, usually in eyass Harris Hawks, Lanners and a few other species, is exposure to cold night air and often results in permanent loss of flight feathers and, in the worst cases, loss of the wingtip itself.

My vet prescribed the application of Preparation H twice a day and an antibiotic to combat secondary infection. Fortunately I had spotted the problem early and brought Bobby indoors to a constant temperature of 20C(70F). On every suitable day I took him out for

short flights but he was unable to do more than skim the ground for 30 metres or so before landing. This lasted right through the winter. By moulting time I was alarmed that nothing was happening, neither a reduction of the swelling nor a moult, in fact I despaired of the future of the bird, except for breeding and I ordered a female to be his eventual mate.

At the Falconry Fair in May I bought a can of Aloe Vera spray and began to use it, as recommended, instead of the Preparation H. It would be nice to say that there was a dramatic improvement. There was not but the twitching and flapping gradually stopped. At the end of June I was horrified to find on the ground in the mews three flight feathers still attached to each other by dead flesh. I examined Bobby, expecting to find a wingtip ready to drop off, as I had been warned might happen but it looked clean and healthy. Within a few days new feathers could be seen emerging, one of which was out of alignment with the others. The latter was pulled out by the bird himself and a new one grew, thankfully in line.

To cut a long story short, it was October, 2000, before Bobby began to



fly with any power or confidence. His flight feathers had by then all successfully moulted and, as of today, he is flying with great style and gusto.

I am by no means qualified to state that it was the Aloe Vera which cured him. I can only say that my vet, who is very experienced in the treatment of raptors, had been pessimistic from the beginning about a good outcome from our efforts to rehabilitate Bobby and yet I now have a bird who is bright-eyed, mad keen to fly every day and gives me the joy of seeing him soar and swoop to his heart's content.

Incidentally, I still spray him each day with the Aloe Vera and his plumage looks great.

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There Are Names For People Like Me

By Andrew Knowles-Brown

Why is it that when things are running smoothly and life is without hassles, we self inflict upon ourselves extra burdens that complicate our lives even more? There I was counting myself as reasonably lucky in having a Golden eagle let alone having one that had a nice temperament and with the added bonus that he flew reasonably well too. I don't put that latter part of that statement down to my ability to fly eagles well, but that the eagle had the aptitude for the job, I just turned him loose in country he liked so he performed well.

Towards the end of his second season he started to take a liking in me, in the sexual way that is, I was flattered, but what to do. The brain then starts working and the damage is done, what if?

The "What if" is what causes the problems; it makes rational thinking take a leap out of the window from the 10th floor.

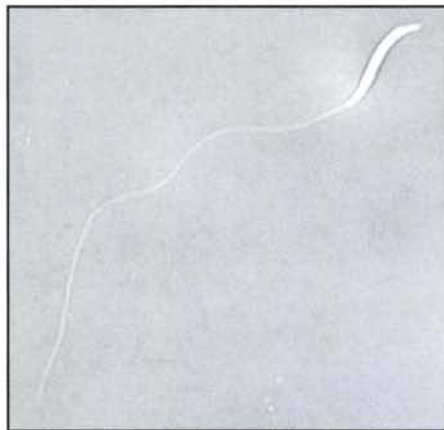
The first thought was can I find a female, well 8 years ago the answer was no, at least not easily and certainly not without a mortgage. And as I had no record of success in breeding with eagles no one was going to loan me a bird. By now my male bird was donating semen copiously, again I got thinking, another mistake, perhaps I could freeze the semen for later use when I could find a female, sounds simple doesn't it?

This took me down the road I am on now, after a number of calls I was put in touch with Dr Graham Wishart at Dundee University, the original absent minded professor, (sorry Graham). He was enthusiastic, he worked within the poultry industry in freezing chicken semen, he also worked in a project freezing Houbara semen in the middle east, for the captive breeding project set up out there. He also said that others were working on freezing falcon semen but no one was working with eagles. He went on to baffle me with words like cryoprotectants, protocols, diluents, liquid Nitrogen, DMA, I liked the sound of all this, see, more complications.

We arranged a meeting and Graham came down here for a couple of days with some equipment and to see the bird along with what he produced. The equipment was quite basic, except for a decent microscope that put mine well and truly in the shade, I could actually see things under it, whereas with mine I was always wondering whether the little squiggly bit was a sperm or just a bit of fluff! His showed perfect detail. Also there was a very large and very heavy metal container. In it was some watery liquid, this was the liquid Nitrogen, dangerous goods, -200 and something degrees below zero I'm told which I think means b****y cold. Fine while in the container, but Graham was pouring it into polystyrene containers, it

bubbled and spat with clouds of cold mist pouring over the sides, all spooky stuff.

Gorby did his bit and produced the semen. Yes, the microscope showed the little tadpoles wriggling away, Graham measured, mixed, cooled, flicked, shook, waited and then dropped from a great height into the Nitrogen the samples of semen. There I told you it was easy, but that is only half of it, the semen is now frozen, what now?



Golden Eagle Sperm.

Photo: Dr Graham Wishart

Defrost it, so the process is reversed, no problem doing that but has any of the sperm survived the process? I looked through the microscope, nothing moved, loads of sperm but none moving. Oh dear, I thought, to put it mildly, Graham urges me to move across the slide to look at the whole sample. I slowly change the field of vision, yes there's one, then another definitely moving. Success I thought, but maybe not, Graham explains, that sperm are not alive as we know it. Star Trek, I thought, are we going into space? No, think clearly, and more importantly down to earth, he says. Everything is a chemical reaction, sperm move due to the chemical reactions going on in them and within the semen, he then adds some buffered salt solution, more confusing scientific words, but more sperm start moving, so something is going right.

There we have it, we have eagle semen frozen and defrosted and some of the sperm are moving, but will it fertilise an egg, have we damaged the DNA somewhere along the way, can the sperm actually do what a sperm should do?

The next stage was to

prove whether the sperm could actually fertilise an egg, so first find your egg-laying female eagle. Over the next couple of years I get hold of a female Golden eagle and female Steppe eagle, both look like standing for insemination, rather than having to forcibly inseminate them. It's bad enough trying to forcibly inseminate a sassy 3lb Saker, but to mess about with a 12lb eagle that doesn't want you to shove something nasty up her cloaca is certainly not to be recommended. While getting the females ready to play ball, I am lent all the equipment to practice with. As with all things, once you think you have cracked it something comes along to upset the apple cart. My upset was the lack of semen from the male, he was producing but miniscule quantities and I wanted to use that as fresh rather frozen. Luckily I had another younger male who was showing promise and this year he came on stream so to speak quite nicely. For once I had enough semen to inseminate the Golden eagle female, with enough left over to freeze so I could inseminate the female Steppe eagle when she started to lay in April. The frozen semen inseminations started about 5 days before the first egg was due to be laid, which happened one day earlier than the previous year, and then every 2 hours after the egg was laid during daylight for 2 days, so as to catch the following egg. The wait was agonisingly long before I could candle the egg at 9 days to see if it was fertile, it was, so was the second, the third, fourth and fifth, 100% success. I now have to wait for between 30-40 days before I can find out if the eggs will develop normally through to hatch and as Lyn wants this article a week before the hatch date you will have to wait until the next issue before you can find out whether there is success or failure. But while I am waiting I was just thinking!!!!



Eaglet.

Photo: Andrew Knowles-Brown

How Not To Do It

Ken Loates

Mid-August each year is when many of us look forward to carrying home a cardboard box containing an eyass hawk or falcon bought with precious savings. Last year I too was one of these lucky ones and this is the story of how I received it. Although it was an experience that taught me a lot, I have not written it to teach anyone anything, God forbid! I just hope that beginners like myself will see from what I write that things are not always as straightforward as they seem, that falconers of experience will perhaps wryly remember their own start in the sport and that both may get a laugh from my problems.

I remember how six years ago I travelled with my wife all the way from Lancashire to South Wales to collect my very first raptor, a beautiful buzzard. At that time I was unaware how lucky I was that the breeder fitted the furniture. I watched him do it and couldn't help thinking how easy he made it look and how cooperative the bird was. I resolved to do it myself next time. It did give me second thoughts when later I had to cast my bird to replace a missing bell. The screeching, footing and biting which ensued can be imagined by any experienced falconer, looking back on his early days, but I took it personally, since I had seen her behave so well in the hands of her first owner.

My relationship with her did not improve, nor did my reputation with the vet when I went to get her wormed. She grabbed my index finger, piercing it to the bone. Again most falconers will have a good idea of the pain as the vet and I tried to remove the offending talon only to be gripped even harder. With blood streaming down my hand I just had to wait madam's good pleasure to release my tortured digit, leaving me with premonitions of an early death from tetanus or at the least amputation of a gangrened finger.

When three years later my second raptor, Maud, arrived she too came fully furnished. She was a Harris Hawk from a well-known source, already entered to quarry, steady as a rock and priced accordingly. I have her still and she has from the beginning allowed herself to be cast without a murmur, except that she will poke her head out of the top of the towel to make sure that everything is done with correctness and decorum. When I first had her wormed I took her to a young vet in the practice who was longing to do the job but a little nervous. Maud did me proud and inflated the young vet's ego no end. The only blip I ever had with Maud was when, after a rumbustious flying session, I struggled for about twenty minutes to remove her transmitter from a deformed tail-mount. Finally the offending object did come away with the mount still attached

to a tail-feather! Maud stood on my glove and gave me a withering look.

Maud has always been a wise bird, willing to teach me all she knows but at the price of always taking the moral high ground. Provided that this is clear, all is well. She should have come complete with a label that said, 'I've been there, done that and taken more rabbits than you've had hot dinners!' After all, she had featured in a video on hawking made by her previous owner. By her croaks she communicates to me her many criticisms of my conduct and skills, such as, 'What's the pick-up today? Not that miserable piece! You must be joking!, No, you can't have this meat back!, 'Surely you don't expect me to jump into that transporter box without a fuss', 'I absolutely refuse to react to that lousy dummy bunny. Let's get on with the real thing. I'm a video star, remember''

All of her advice was unable to prepare me for the experience of receiving my first falcon, a Lanneret, straight from the breeder. He came without furniture, so there was nothing for it but to fit it on him myself. Now here is where experience at a falconry course is of little help. There they use tame Harrises that will practically roll over and let a stranger tickle their stomachs. Looking back, it is easy to see that I should have called in the help of an older hand but I have always had the weakness of thinking that by reading books and using a bit of common sense you can get by.

Having consulted the standard works of the great and the good of falconry, I made a checklist of things to do on the day of Bobby's arrival also noting any problems that could arise:

Fit anklets, jesses and bells.

Clip points off talons.
Apply styptic pencil if there is any bleeding!

Spray with anti-mite.

If feathers are hard-penned fit tail mount for telemetry.

Leave falcon to settle down for a few days. Don't let him associate your presence with food or you could get an imprint.

Well, at last the day arrived. I was up early but the Amtrak van did not draw up until 9.15. I signed for the suspiciously silent box and took it indoors. My next task was to wake up my neighbour, an all-night taxi driver who had generously offered to help me.

Down we went into our cellar, the darkest part of the house to keep the falcon calm. It was clear that my neighbour, in spite of wearing gauntlets, had never touched a live bird and appeared to have discovered a phobia at the last minute. OK, I thought, it's dark and we are not going to get any hassle from what is, after all only a baby bird. Without hesitation I opened the lid partly and plunged my hands into the still quiet box in order to feel for my precious falcon, half expecting him to be feet up on the bottom. I needn't have worried. In actual fact he was just waiting for some soft meat to invade his space! There was an incredibly rapid movement that reminded me of Mohammed Ali (floats like a butterfly, stings like a bee) and a talon inserted itself into the soft part of my left thumb. The pain was excruciating but having gone in, I had no option but to lift the bird out. The next job was to transfer the struggling bird to my helper who was waiting with a cloth to cast the bird. The importance of this cloth was brought home to me several times during the next half-hour as, every time it slipped off the falcon's head, I was rewarded with a sharp peck. With blood running from my thumb and on to Bobby's feathers, I spent the next fifteen minutes realising that I had forgotten how to use the tool that rivets the anklets together. I swore, the taxi driver swore and Bobby swore. I ruined five pairs of rivets before I sussed it. Anklets on, jesses attached, bells tinkling the three of us faced task number two. Amazingly the talons were clipped fairly swiftly and only once was I too slow to avoid a strike as Bobby once more poked his head out of



Maud The Wise

the cloth and caught sight of his adversary.

The anti-mite spray was a problem as the book had said that every part of the bird should be sprayed including under the wings, but how to do this when he was being firmly held and covered by my assistant? Neither of us had the confidence to remove the cloth. Nothing daunted, I sprayed everything in sight and reach, finally emptying the can over the bird, the cloth, the gloves and my assistant's shirt-sleeves.

By this time the taxi driver was seriously questioning my competence, no wonder, and I had decided that enough was enough. I just could not face fitting the tail-mount, so I carried Bobby to his aviary where on release he crashed about against the sides with a sickening intensity before settling down to gaze at me balefully, challenging me to another encounter. Thankfully his feathers seemed intact.

Now came the feeding, unobtrusively the books said. Perhaps the best idea would have been to get someone to do it for me but it was clear that no fellow human being was on hand to commit himself every day, so I thought that, although it was inevitable that I had to pass by the aviary several times a day on various tasks, the falcon should not recognise me at feeding time. After giving the matter some thought I decided that disguise was the best strategy. Before entering the aviary with his breakfast I first put on sunglasses, then covered all my face except my eyes with a tea towel. I looked like Yasser Arafat on a bad day. The result was that Bobby was scared out of his wits, our two dogs ran off howling and even my wife was terrified!

Maud, however, merely gave me a quizzical look, croaked in recognition and seemed to say, 'Well, all you have to do now is scoop him up, make him to the hood and fit the tail-mount. It must be easy. The books say so!' Then she turned her normally unflinching, big, brown eyes on me and (I am willing to swear it) she winked.

Once Bobby was used to the fact that my approach in strange garb meant food, he was greedy enough and clever enough to come towards me rather than to crash into the aviary side the furthest from me in an attempt to get away. After about a week I thought that it was time to introduce myself and went in without the disguise, thinking we would have a big fuss but he seemed to recognise me immediately and was feeding on my glove within three minutes. How do you fool falcons? Later on I found by accident that a hat with a wide brim spooked him no end and perhaps that simple device would have been disguise enough. Since I have read no books on how falcons perceive the world, I do not know.

Anyway no harm seemed to have been done. He was not screaming at the sight of me but usually sat happily on my glove until breakfast was finished and then jumped calmly back to his block.

So now he was ready for hooding. This in theory is perfectly simple. After all you

have got the advantage, haven't you? The bird has no idea what you are about to do, whereas you have read the book and practised. How can you fail? I don't know if Maud was ever made to the hood but when I passed her perch on the way to Bobby, she strained forward as if with gleeful anticipation. She certainly wanted to see this show! I went into Bobby, fed him as usual, then took out the hood from my bag. Immediately Bobby fixed on it with suspicion. Was it something in my body language or should I have chosen less conspicuous colours than red and light brown? Slowly I approached his head and slipped the hood over with a rolling movement. Success! However, the books never told me how a falcon might react first time to a hood. Just as I was thinking about closing the braces (no mean feat if you remember the first time you did it with a live bird), Bobby's beak slowly began to lift higher and higher until, just as slowly, he tipped backwards and fell off my glove! I watched paralysed with amazement because this was the last thing I had expected. The hood fell off, Bobby picked himself up with as much dignity as he could muster and stood glaring at me. I could see that the next time was going to be different. For a start he had no incentive to return to my glove, in fact quite the opposite but I managed to scoop him up and settle him down on my hand, not without protest and with a wary look in his eye. He obviously knew what was coming now.

As the hood approached he tipped his



Bobby

head back, opened his beak and let out a piercing scream. His gape was enough to prevent the hood from fitting over his head, so he simply held his mouth open long after the shriek had died away, thus effectively keeping me at bay. I took the hood away and rethought my tactics, glancing up at Maud for inspiration (Maud could see Bobby but not vice versa). She was straining upwards and forwards to get a grandstand view of the action and making little noises in her throat which I had never heard the like of before. Were they encouragement? No, more likely derision. Gamedly I approached the hood again and Bobby now found that simply by turning his head sideways he could save himself

the trouble of gaping and shrieking. At this rate he was learning much quicker than I was. In despair I held the hood about 2cm away from his head and just as my hand was getting cramp he turned towards me and I slipped the hood over his head again. He stood, wings slightly open like an angel but without movement. I slipped the hood off, he blinked and I put it on again. Off and on, off and on. Triumphantly I carried the hooded Booby past Maud who scratched her head in disbelief. First lesson over! I have never become an expert 'hooder'. I tell myself that my bi-focals just don't cover the critical distance between my eyes and the bird' and I am constantly working in a blur but I do the job when needed and my falcons associate hooding with going out and accept it more easily.

A few days after we were out on the flying field, practising first on a short line to the glove from a perch, then to the glove on a creance, lastly to the lure on a creance with me whistling and calling his name all the time. The use of the lure and creance together was something which Bobby always made a nonsense of, tangling the two together or getting either lure or creance round a wing as he landed. Finally in frustration and probably much too early, I slipped the creance off, removed the jesses as he was finishing his first piece of beef and walked away slowly, my heart in my mouth. For both of us it was a first time. But he didn't even seem to notice that he was free. I watched until he was concentrating on me, then slowly began swinging the lure, called his name and whistled. He came without hesitation and, in free flight, at great speed, which was frightening, even to him. He ignored the lure and carried on upwind, leaving me open-mouthed. When Bobby was about 100 metres away and disappearing fast I jerked into life, called his name again and whistled. Bobby looked over his right shoulder, dipped his right wing and came round in a big semi-circle. I know that to some of you reading this, this is a commonplace but to me it was sublime. My heart rose to my mouth, tears came to my eyes, I felt like giving a big shout. In brief, madly excited, I took Bobby round again.

This time he described an even bigger circle. I remembered you should shout, 'Ho!' (I don't know why) as you throw up the lure. Bobby gave a little swoop upwards, nearly took the lure cleanly and landed a few metres away from me. Breathing heavily and settling his wings before eating, he looked up at me with a glint in his eye. 'Now, that's something to be proud of!' he seemed to say. As I went down to pick him up it was like bending my knee before him. For that day he was king.

Flying a falcon had bitten deep into me. We both went home to parade before Maud, man and falcon preening ourselves contentedly. Her eyes followed us from right to left and, her head on one side, she had the grace to give us a little croak of approval.

A WORLD OF EXPERIENCES

Richard Naisbitt

I saw my first real elephant charge at 17, my first lion kill at 18 and flew my first falcon when I was 14. I kissed a girl for the first time when I was 12 and got shot at once when I was 28 (not by an angry father!).

In the context of falconry, I have tried to put my experiences into perspective. I have tried to sort out the happy times from the miserable days in Zimbabwe when drought sucked up the moisture from every blade of grass that was left unscathed by over grazing, over population and bad management.

It is all about priorities. That sorting process when the happy times (which included a cold beer at sunset) collided with periods of desolation have been hard to extricate.

I can remember dragging the body of a fellow safari guide into the main dining area of the camp, he had been killed by an elephant. Only minutes earlier I had put my falcon down on her perch after she had executed one of the most amazing stoops I have seen. She caught a white-faced duck over a reed bed that bordered a portion of the Zambezi River.

For me, these two memories are inextricable. Ura de Woronin was killed on the day Justine caught her duck or vice versa.

I met my wife on the day that my falcon caught her first double-banded sandgrouse. The falcon was up in one of those thermals that rise over the lake Kariba flood plains, thermals that suck up 6 kilo vultures with ease. The stoop, when it came was long and angled. I counted under my breath as I watched the sandgrouse burn its way up the shoreline, over a herd of buffalo, over an elephant and then into an eroded gully. That stoop took forever, it took an expanse of sky and ended out of sight.

I bought Vanessa a drink that night as we sat in the bar after her safari. I wanted to tell her about that stoop



"ARUSHA"

and the sandgrouse but it was a private experience and I never did tell her. That coveted moment lives with me.

My daughter was born when I was flying Lady Jane Grey, a great peregrine. My father died when I lost a peregrine called Milly and my Mother passed away when my oldest peregrine died of old age.



"SYDNEY"

And my son? Well he was born when Australia beat England at cricket and the day before Big Greta caught her first duck. I got bogged in the mud that day after the heavens opened and the sheep paddock turned into a mess of wet grass and saturated soil. I think the first thing my little boy saw was the shape of great big peregrine eating a lump of pigeon and the first thing my daughter saw was a peregrine eating a big lump of pigeon.

Camille's first experience of the great outdoors was losing her little red gum boots in the mud and then walking a long way in her wet socks whilst her father and good friend yelled and danced around a dam of terrified ducks. Camille helped in her small way by hurling small lumps of mud at some wet sheep.

Times change and that great big clock, that measures the years, keeps on ticking. We start to measure the years by the seasons, by the severity of the winter, by the school holidays and then finally day by day.

All those falcons, hawks and eagles I have flown have special places in my crowded memory. Some of those birds have died, and some were killed, and some faded into the distance like a heartbeat growing ever fainter.

I can remember most vividly, when I brought Arusha home, wrapped in my Jacket. I laid her on the floor of the kitchen and watched, as the tiles stained red.

Camille just stared at the lifeless body and asked -

"Daddy, is she dead?"

"Dead? Yes, she is dead" and that big old clock just ticked away

Camille and I buried Arusha in the garden much the same as my mother helped me bury my first hawk all those years ago and we were careful not to get sand in their eyes.

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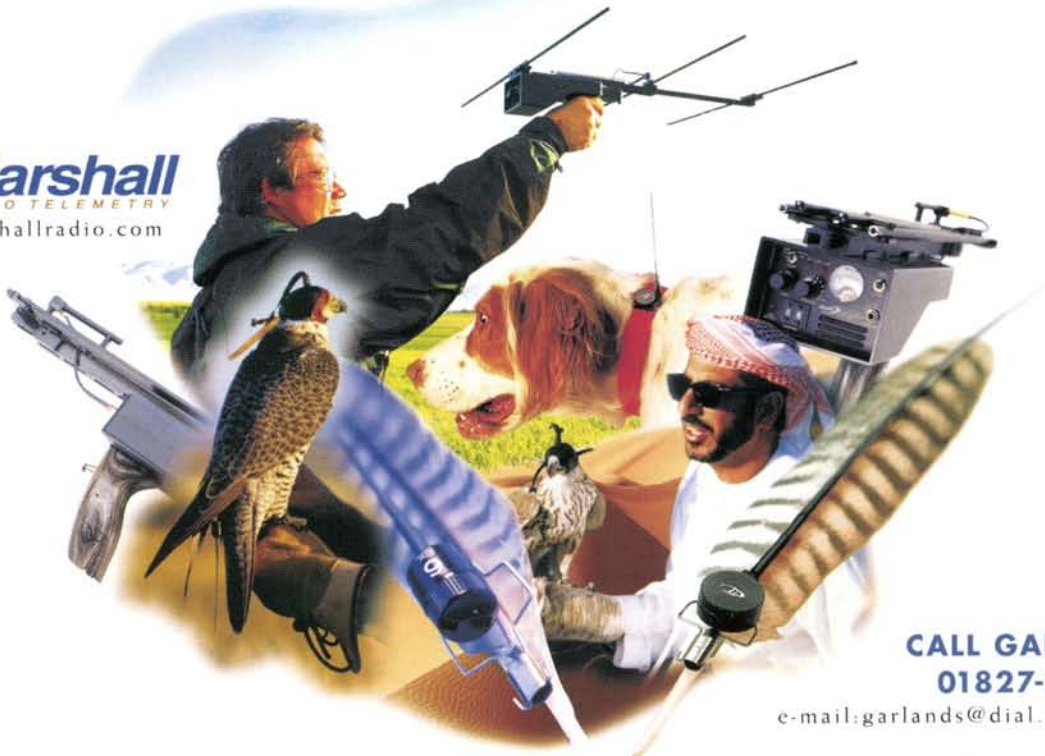
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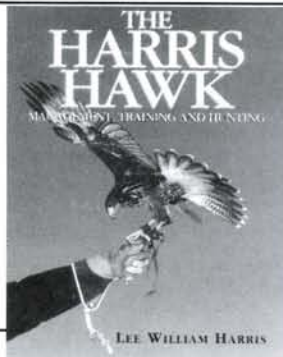
REVIEWS

Book Review by Ade Williams.

The Harris Hawk. Management, Training and Hunting.

by Lee William Harris.

Published by Swan Hill £22.99.
ISBN 1 840371463



This is an easy and enjoyable book to read with plenty of good practical advice for the newcomer to the sport and with enough special interest to justify it for the more experienced.

Well researched in many areas, Lee has taken the time to go into great detail to explain to the tyro the why's and wherefores and the reasoning behind some of our actions. Many of the 'how to' books of recent years have left this out whilst busily recalling highlights of their seasons. In fact much of the book applies to raptors generally, not just to Harris's Hawks.

Another important item in a book on management of hawks is included here, that on diet, food-quality and value but here one must be careful to remember that this book is specifically directed to the Harris's Hawk and the advice would not apply necessarily to other raptors.

Don't use washed rabbit! Further chapters include com-

ments and even plans on weatherings, some historical/geographical writings on the species, sound advice regarding telemetry (i.e. use it!), health, the law (Paul Beecroft) thankfully almost no politics.

Some criticism may be deserved for the comment on Redtails as being only suitable for the mature student and for the usual comments on how difficult Goshawks are too. But wait, there is another joke, the falconer who trains a Harris's Hawk apparently deserves the same respect as the Goshawker. Well I beg to differ (and I fly both regularly) although it is certainly true that commitment is imperative for success with any species of raptor.

I cannot finish without comment on the title 'The Harris Hawk'. Call me pedantic but Harris's Hawk, please.

At just over £20 it's well worth the price.

HAWKING IN CHINA : LAND OF FLYING DRAGONS

Length 53 minutes.

UK Price: £18.00 + £2. p&p

To order see page 20

Land of Flying Dragons documents a trip with Nick and Barbro Fox to seek out falconers in China.

In Yunnan province in the south west they find a tribal minority people who have used goshawks for hundreds of years. They stay with a falconer in his 400 year old house and meet the locals with their goshawks. Their visit coincides with the wedding of one of the falconers and Barbro is made a set of tribal woman's clothes to attend the wedding carrying the traditional pannier of rice as a gift. The falconer's goshawk watches the feasting from her perch in the courtyard.

Still in wedding clothes, they go fishing in the nearby lake



using cormorants, balancing in dugout canoes. We see how the cormorants are handled, a kind of underwater hawking.

We see some of the culture of Chinese falconry by turning the leaves of a fascinating book painted by the grandfather of one of the falconers. It shows the different species of raptor found in

the area a hundred years ago, and many pictures of goshawk behaviour.

Nick helps with the training of one of the Goshawks and you can see him cringing as he releases the bird, leash and all for it to fly to its' trainer.

The falconers hire a bus and they all leave town for a days pheasant hawking in the wooded hills, running up to 10,000 feet. This is the original homeland of the Chinese Ring-necked pheasant, the same species as we hawk in Britain, but smaller and wilder. With an assortment of dogs and hawks Nick follows the action up and down the hillsides. He tells me that at one point he thought he was going to die from altitude sickness and was all set to prop the camera up on a rock to record the event! The Chinese get as excited as we do, and although we can't understand a word they are saying, the meaning is clear enough!

One of the falconers owns a small restaurant so on returning

from hawking the falconers pluck and cook the pheasants aided and abetted by the hawks and dogs.

Moving on to the north east coastal plains, along the North China Sea, Nick and Barbro track down more falconers. Here the falconers use hoods and the arab style cuff or mangala. Falconry and shooting have been illegal in China since 1995 for conservation reasons. Nick visits the Ministry of Forests and finds out about some of the problems facing wildlife and falconry in China.

Then they move west, into the snowy interior of central China. Here they share the hospitality of a family of Muslim falconers. Their goshawks are hare specialists and the go clambering into the steep snow clad hillsides searching for hares.

This video is very informational and gives us and insight into Falconry in another country. It is especially pleasing to see the falconers eating what their birds have caught.

BASIC TRAINING

Module 2 in The Bird of Prey
Management Series

Length 53 minutes

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To order see page 20



Basic Training follows the training of a saker, a peregrine and a Harris Hawk from taking them up for training as far as their first few days of flying free. The emphasis is on safe handling and developing good habits in both falconer and bird. Accidents which could occur, such as the hawk flying off with the leash trailing, are graphically shown, to hammer home the point.

It must be noted that the methods used here for training a Harris Hawk are not always practical in a normal domestic situation. These birds are handled by a variety of people and are entered at quarry very quickly. Also the bird in the video has a make hawk which a lot of you will not have access to. Also the bird is surrounded by a lot of other birds and has lots to look at therefore taking the focus away from its main handler.

Most of the procedures however, such as fitting equipment, feeding on the fist, taking up from the block, hooding, attaching the creance and so on, are required knowledge whatever species of raptor you plan to fly. Many of these procedures, although described in books,

are hard to understand until you actually see them done. With an experienced person to guide you, this film gives you a good practical understanding of how to go about the basic training of your bird.

The film is intended for the international market and we see beautiful footage of Arab falconers undertaking the basic training of their falcons in the desert, and shots of wild sakers in Mongolia.

This film does not cover more advanced subjects, such as weight control, appetite, lure swinging and fitness training. These are the subjects of future modules in the series. But unless the basic training procedures are sound, there is no point in more advanced work. Extra details, including contacts for books, falconry clubs, and equipment suppliers, are listed in the Handbook.

The First

Peter Barry Devers



We falconers practice history. The taking, training, and hunting of a wild hawk has remained virtually unchanged over the millennia that stretch from today to our sport's hidden beginnings in the far distant past. Subtle refinements have been added along the way, it is true, but nevertheless the basics have remained constant. Someone had to come up with the idea of falconry, someone probably young, with time on his hands, who hadn't yet been told by his oldsters what was and wasn't possible. Today, while manning a bird, or sitting with friends after a hunt, talk often turns to questions about who invented falconry, who was the first.

We may never know. A friend in the BFC humorously asserts that the first falconer ever was an ancient Briton named "Gnott, The First". This is probably as good a guess as any. But still, the concept of who was the "first" comes up sooner or later in falconry conversations. 'Who was the first to partner with a wild hawk?' haunts us. Other "firsts" stir our curiosity as well: Who was the first to invent the hood? To put a bell on a hawk's leg? To use a scale? To train a Harris Hawk?

Some of these questions have been answered, and others one day will be. An answer for one such mystery, we believe, has only now come to light:

Who was the first falconer to be photographed?

Two years ago I headed a project to restore the time vandalized gravestone of William Brodrick, the famed 19th century British falconer, author, and artist. The marker, in Devon's Chudleigh Cemetery, had come apart and was lying in sections covered with unmowed grasses. I couldn't leave it

prized peregrine.

There were very few practicing falconers in Britain in the mid century, and in looking at the photograph I felt it bore an uncanny resemblance to the picture of a much older Brodrick that appeared in C.H. Fisher's book. As a test I emailed the image to Roger and Mark Upton in Marlborough, not telling them of my suspicions. After all, who knows more about falconry history than Roger whose off time from training and hunting has been spent delving into the history of the sport in Britain?

Mark Upton wired back, " I got my father to look at the photograph and we are both convinced it is Brodrick. We compared it with another picture of him. He is older in our picture but we are 100% sure it is the same person." This was doubly confirmed when, tracking the provenance of the photo, about ten others came to light. The man in the images was unmistakably Brodrick. On the back of one photograph was writing in Brodrick's hand, which I know well.

The photographs are on glass and quite fragile. The imaging process used to create these pic-



that way, and so with friends effected it's cleaning and reconditioning.

In thanks, I am sure, the ghost of William Brodrick saw to it that I was able to purchase one of his best known paintings at a Sotheby's auction for a mere £90. And more, shortly afterwards, an antiques dealer brought me a great find. Knowing of my interest in falconry, Toby Collins laid in my hands a closed leather case. In it, dating to the very early 1850's, was a photograph on glass of a falconer with his





as subjects in ambrotypes - I have been involved in photography as a dealer for fifteen years (with photographs of animals as one of my interests), and never, before coming across the pieces that come from William Brodrick's collection, have I seen an ambrotype or for that matter any cased image of a falcon, nor has any other dealer whom I have shown these works to. These photographs are extremely rare and, I would venture to say, the only ones known at this time."

Initially ambrotypes were fairly expensive, and thus it was quite a splurge

If anything, the images of the falcons are lovelier! I believe that Brodrick himself helped to compose the pictures as the falcons are as carefully placed as in his watercolours and oils. The composition shows the falcons well. They are alive, with personality, seemingly ready to be taken into the field. The one plate with the unhooded peregrine seen on a glove appearing from the lower right corner of the image is a masterful and arresting picture.

American falconer Ron Clarke, who purchased several of the ambrotypes, writes: "I frequently take these images in hand and just stare, losing myself in the palpable connection to an honored practitioner of the sport I love so well. I feel fortunate to be able to enjoy these earliest photographic images of trained

tures is the wet-plate, or collodion, technique pioneered by British sculptor Frederick Scott Archer in 1850. One of the Brodrick photos bears this date on the back, and could, therefore, be one of the very first pictures of this type ever created. The usual name given to the wet-plate process on glass is "ambrotype", named by James Ambrose Cutting who patented a refined version of Archer's work and gave it his middle name.

The first real commercial photographs were "Daguerreotypes", invented about 1837. A thin layer of silver was plated onto a small copper sheet, and this was sensitized by chemicals. The picture taking process involved a long exposure during which the subjects had to sit totally unmoving for minutes on end. Obviously photographing a hawk, unless it was dead, was out of the question!

The new collodian process, however, required a fairly short exposure period. Brodrick must have heard about this and immediately seized on the opportunity to have several pictures made of himself, a friend, and his falcons. Our estimate is that the Brodrick ambrotypes were taken over a seven year period, from 1850 to 1857.

Charles Schwartz, the eminent American dealer in antique photography, has a special interest in early animal images. He located the Brodrick photos at a country auction in England, evidently the property of some Brodrick descendent. He writes:

"With regard to the rarity of falcons



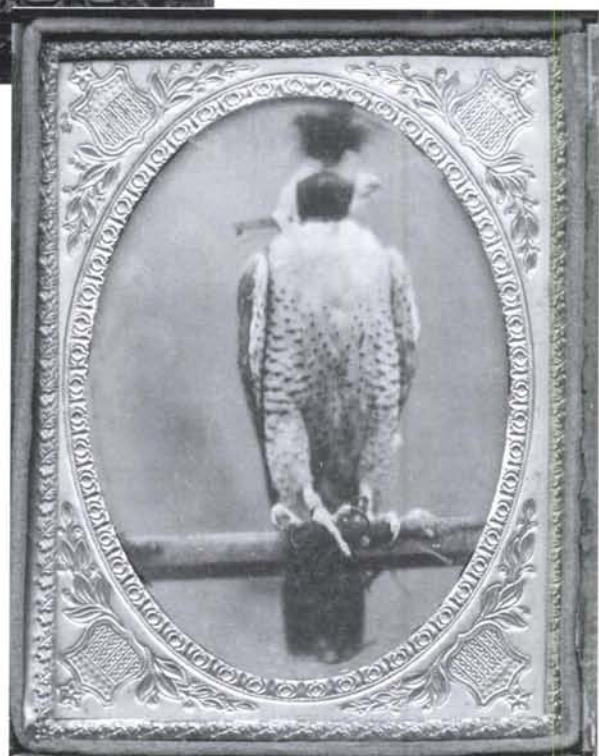
to have a half dozen or so taken of the falcons. Brodrick's artistic bent, however, probably drove him to explore this new medium, possibly with the idea of getting into it himself. Two ambrotypes have been tinted with color, I would guess by Brodrick, given his great talent in painting.

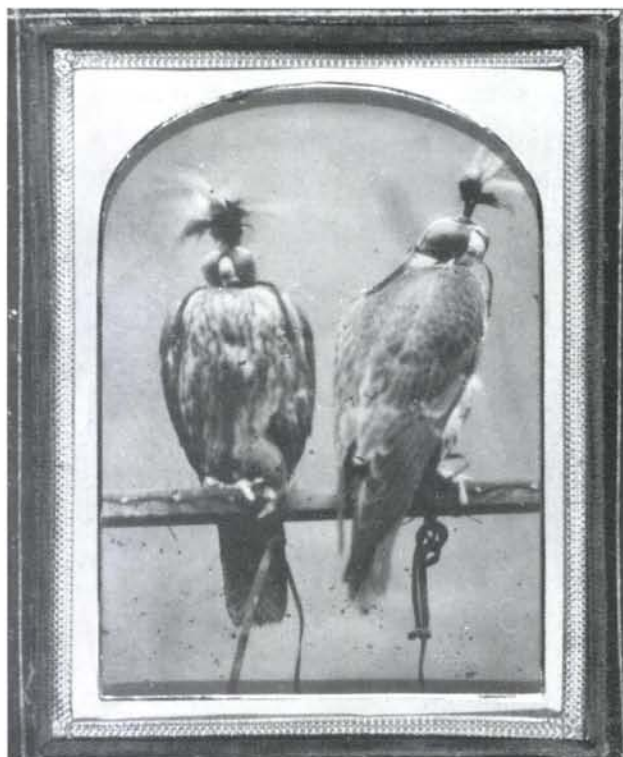
These images of a grand old master of our sport are delightful. With them we can gaze back through time to meet one of the men responsible for keeping the flame of falconry burning. They make real a historical personage we knew only through his books and artwork

falcons, especially knowing they were surely among William Brodrick's prized possessions, probably occupying a prominent place in his home. I hope Mr. Brodrick would be pleased to know his little gems are treasured and appreciated 150 years later away off here in Juneau, Alaska."

Are there any earlier photographs of a falconer and his hawks? Given the date these pictures were taken, and the fact no others have come to light in the past century and a half, it is unlikely. Few people were foolish enough to spend hard earned wages on a whim such as animal photography in the 1850's. It took a man with an artistic bent, and a deep love of his hawks, to do so.

Brodrick was the first.





A MAGNIFICENT FLYING DISPLAY IN CHURCHDOWN

Tizi Hodson

Lying on the grass in my garden, in Churchdown, Glos, patiently awaiting a large lump of venison sizzling on the barbecue from my friend Chris, I was scanning the skies to check the weather pattern for the following day.

Chris pointed out a bird overhead that seemed to be soaring. I looked and saw the bird directly overhead, which on closer inspection was a buzzard, with another approaching from behind.

The date being May 8th, with most eggs laid and many already hatched, I assumed a local, recently arrived, was pursuing an intruder from the territory. Then a third buzzard appeared some 200 feet lower than the first two who were at around 500 feet.

The second hawk was definitely larger than the other, so this was a pair, the third was also similar in size to the smaller of the two, again, because of the date I still felt the female was chasing the tiercel from her territory, and wondered about the third. I was now spell-bound wondering if there would be much, little or perhaps no aggression shown.

Although the skies were fairly cloud free there was a working blue thermal directly above where I lay watching. The buzzards were utilising the large thermal and staying, soaring in a large circle in my overhead. The female buzzard was now ahead with the tiercel following;

chasing?

Soon they joined together in perfect formation flight and maintained a close separation that even the red arrows would have been proud of, as they wheeled and soared together, amazingly still directly above me. Soon the drifted northeast and almost out of sight. The third buzzard remained at his altitude, beneath the pair, seeming to follow.

Just as I felt the pair were reaching the limit of my vision they turned a full 180 degrees and returned, again to the point directly above me. The two hawks now broke off from formation and started fly-

.....the second grabbed the offered talons of the inverted hawk. They then twisted and tumbled head over tail toward the ground.....

ing frantically upward, then vertically downward, tail chasing each other in a combat-like dogfight.

(Watching, I desperately wanted to run for a camera, but couldn't risk missing the show)

Finally they joined up again when one turned upside down and the second grabbed the offered talons of the inverted hawk. They then twisted and tumbled

head over tail toward the ground, breaking off with a sensible margin of safety and closing back into their impressively tight formation to the northeast and out of sight.

I wondered / am still thinking about the possibilities of the "threeship".

The first consideration was a mateless buzzard and mateless tiercel found each other late in the season and paired up for a late hatching time - perhaps they know more about the weather patterns than our met forecasters!

The second idea was a buzzard, having hatched or lost her eggs/young and beckoned by the skies and thermals went soaring, then found a partner, or even her current partner and flew a mating dance.

The third possibility is a barren buzzard whose partner had deserted her or died was meeting a new partner, whilst out soaring on a fine spring day.

The fourth possibility is of a pair of buzzards, egg-less for this year, out for the day and feeling romantic with the incredible thermals and warmth with last years youngster joining the family day out, tactfully disappearing when the parents got romantic.

There are no local buzzards in the area. The only hawks I am aware of are two, unrelated, kestrels half a kilometre away, (as the hawk flies), who live at either end of the one and a half kilometre runway at Gloucester airport.

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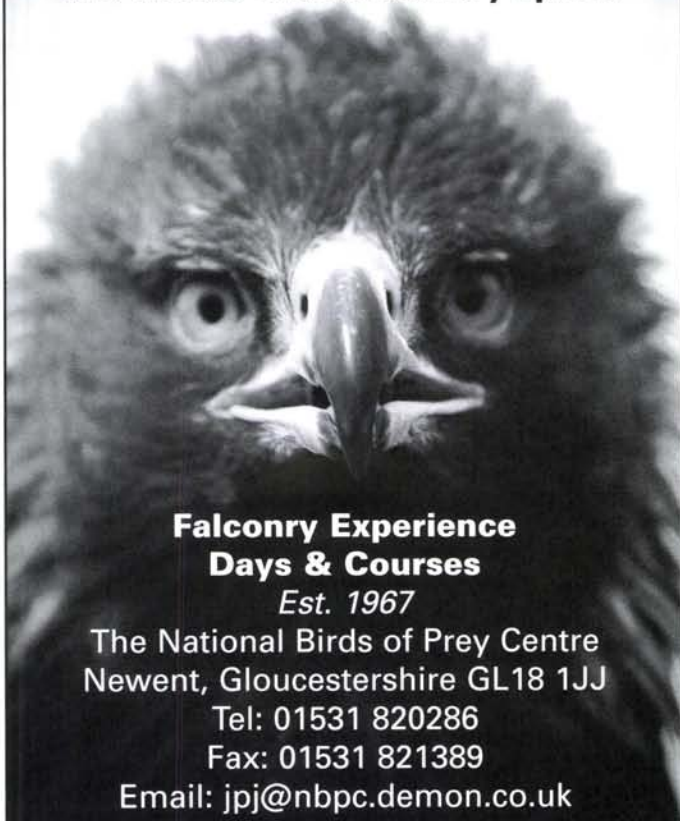
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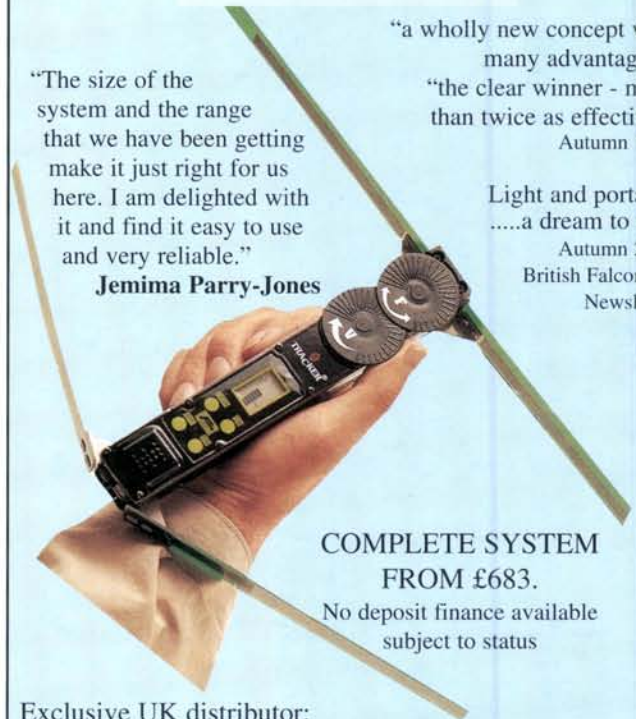
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