

The **Falcons**
& Raptor Conservation Magazine

ISSUE 48

£3.50

**THEY CALL
THE WIND
MARIA**

**TAXIDERM
STEP BY STEP**

**IN SEARCH
OF THAT WHITE FALCON**

**FALCONER'S FAIR
NEW VENUE**

**HAWKING
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Winter 2002 No. 48

On sale 1st February 2002

EDITORS: LYN & DAVID WILSON
 20 Bridle Road,
 Burton Latimer,
 Kettering,
 Northants NN15 5QP
Telephone: (01536) 722794
Fax: (01536) 726815
E-mail: falconersmag@dial.pipex.com

ALL
 EDITORIAL INFO
 TO THIS
 ADDRESS
 PLEASE

ADVERTISING & MARKETING:
Sales: Chris Steadman at ADXtra
 (01305) 759888
Production: Peter Eldrett
 PW Publishing Ltd., Arrowsmith Court,
 Station Approach, Broadstone,
 Dorset BH18 8PW
Telephone: (01202) 659920
Fax: (01202) 659950
E-mail: sales@pwpublishing.ltd.uk

ALL
 ADVERTISING
 INFO TO THIS
 ADDRESS
 PLEASE

Design: Steve Hunt

SUBSCRIPTIONS:
 UK & Eire: £16.50
 Europe: £20.00
 Airmail: £28.00

Send your details to our Subscriptions Department:
Falconers Magazine,
 Subscriptions Dept',
 PW Publishing Ltd., Arrowsmith Court,
 Station Approach, Broadstone,
 Dorset BH18 8PW
Telephone: (01202) 659920
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Crossword answers from issue 47.
Across: 1. BATALEUR 6. ROC 8. CERE 9. MERLIN 10. EGG 12. ROUSE 13. HOUZE 15. HACK 17. BATE 19. ON 20. MILVUS 21. GYR 25. GOS 26. WAITING.
Down: 1. BLOCK 2. TIERCEL 3. LEG 4. CRINES 5. FALCON 7. CRAG 9. MIGRANS 11. GENTRY 14. PLUMAGE 15. HOUNDS 16. KES 18. FLUSH 21. GRIP 22. RAGE 23. AWL 24. GIN.
Missing Bird: RED GROUSE

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**Next issue on sale
 May 1st 2002**



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e d i t o r i a l

It seems ages since the last issue although it has been no longer than usual. Much has been happening on a personal front but unfortunately it has reduced the amount of time I have been able to spend with Polly. Things though look as if they are settling down so I will have to make it up to her now.

This years Falconers Fair has a new venue and a new date, Chetwynd Park, Newport, Shrops. is the place and 5th & 6th May are the dates, so don't go turning up at Offchurch on the Spring Bank Holiday, because it won't be there!

This mag is full again, and with some good stuff. It came together beautifully this time, much to the relief of Steve, not so much tearing of hair and gnashing of teeth. Please keep sending your articles, letters and ideas, we love to hear from you and it makes the mag much more interesting.

So, hope you enjoy the mag and what's left of the season and we will see you at Chetwynd Park.

Keep Falconry Safe. Lyn and David

News...News...News

NORFOLK MAN CHARGED WITH TRADING IN ENDANGERED SPECIES

Ray Humphreys from Norfolk, has been accused of smuggling a large number of exotic birds into the country from Thailand. A vet who examined them said the birds had been caused "gross cruelty and suffering" on the journey. Customs officials found 23 birds in two suitcases. All suffered from asphyxia and hypothermia. Six were dead and two others died later.

Other birds and animals were also seized from Humphreys home including, Crested Serpent Eagles, Blyths Hawk Eagles, Brahminy Kites, a Black Kite, a Booted Eagle, a Philippine Serpent Eagle, seven Slow Loris (mammals) and Elongated Tortoises.

In the dock with Humphreys were Peera Jungthirapanica and Wayne Standley, also accused of smuggling.

Humphreys alone faces, and denies, a



...stop press...stop press...stop press...

On Thursday 17th January Ray Humphreys was found guilty of over 40 charges and on Friday 19th he was sentenced to six and a half years in prison. Hopefully this is a sign that wildlife crime will, in future, be taken seriously.

LOST, FOUND & REUNITED BIRDS 7 October 2001 to 14 January 2002

FOUND (77)

AFRICAN SPOTTED EAGLE OWL 5Axx94W
BARN OWL x24
COMMON BUZZARD 2Jxx95W
COMMON BUZZARD 3xx96W
COMMON BUZZARD 1Bxx9097W
COMMON BUZZARD 35xxRRW
COMMON BUZZARD 48xxW
COMMON BUZZARD 47xxDOEW
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL NO RINGS
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL NO RINGS
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL 1Bxx6970Z
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL 00xxRRZ
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL 2Pxx94Z
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL 40xx01Z
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL 10xxS01Z
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL 48xx098Z
FERRUGINOUS HAWK NO RINGS
GYR/SAKER FALCON 15xx4
GYR/SAKER FALCON 61xxOEW
HARRIS HAWK 1Bxx382W
HARRIS HAWK 1Bxx619W
HARRIS HAWK 1Bxx482W
HARRIS HAWK 95xxW
HARRIS HAWK 1Bxx9084W
HARRIS HAWK 1Bxx3553W
HARRIS HAWK 1Bxx3521W
HARRIS HAWK 29xx
HARRIS HAWK 20xx
HARRIS HAWK 10xxDA00
HARRIS HAWK 25xx00W
HARRIS HAWK 33xx
KESTREL 1Bxx751S

KESTREL 1Bxx5362S
KESTREL 29xx00U
KESTREL 79xx
KESTREL 3Dxx01S
LANNER FALCON 5Rxx00V
LANNER FALCON 08xxW
LUGGER FALCON 21xx2DOEW
PEREGRINE FALCON 12xx1DOEW
PEREGRINE FALCON NO RINGS
RED-TAILED HAWK 00xxDOEX
RED-TAILED HAWK 18xxDOEX
RED-TAILED HAWK 1Axx98X
RED-TAILED HAWK 19xxY
RED-TAILED HAWK 10xxX
RED-TAILED HAWK 34xxE01X
RED-TAILED HAWK 00xx6X
SAKER FALCON 1MxxBB96W
SAKER FALCON 1Bxx475W
SAKER FALCON 27xxM99W
SAKER FALCON 4RxxF01
SAKER FALCON NO RINGS

LOST (116)

AFRICAN GREY PARROT
BARN OWL x15
BLACK VULTURE
CONJURE
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL x4
GOSHAWK x4
GYR FALCON
GYR HYBRID x12
HARRIS HAWK x30
KESTREL x4
LANNER FALCON x4

LUGGER FALCON x2
PARAKEET
PEREGRINE FALCON x5
PEREGRINE HYBRID x11
RED-TAILED HAWK x5
SAKER FALCON x9
SPARROWHAWK x3
TROPICAL SCREECH OWL
TURKEY VULTURE

REUNITED (112)

AFRICAN SPOTTED EAGLE OWL x2
BARN OWL x15
BENGAL EAGLE OWL
COMMON BUZZARD x3
COOPERS HAWK
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
FERRUGINOUS HAWK x2
GOSHAWK x2
GYR BARBARY HYBRID
GYR FALCON
GYR/PEREGRINE HYBRID
GYR/SAKER FALCON x4
HARRIS HAWK x25
KESTREL x7
LANNER FALCON x6
LITTLE OWL
PEREGRINE FALCON x5
PEREGRINE HYBRID x11
RED-TAILED HAWK x11
SAKER FALCON x11
TURKEY VULTURE

further 22 charges relating to endangered species.

Prosecutor, Sir Derek Spencer QC said, "This case concerns the smuggling, keeping for sale and selling endangered species, mainly birds of prey and small animals. They were smuggled into this country by air from Thailand.

"The birds and animals were taken to Mr Humphreys premises in Norfolk where he kept them for sale and then sold them - advertising them for sale in the columns of *Cage and Aviary Birds*. In addition he kept other endangered species and the motive for all this was financial gain. It was done to make money because these endangered species are very valuable indeed."

A Mr David Holmes owned a Golden Eagle called Ben. He advertised in the *Cage and Aviary* for a mate and his ad was answered by Humphreys. The Eagle went to Humphreys for breeding purposes and he was later told the bird had died. During his arrest Humphreys claimed that Ben was the most valuable bird he owned, but later it was identified as belonging to Mr Holmes.

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EDUCATING HETTY

BY DOUG MCCARLIE

Hetty, or 'The Wild Thing', as she is affectionately known is a female Harris' in her second season. She was taken from her parents at 14 weeks, flown in the conventional way, ie. manning, fed on the fist, creance, dummy rabbit, free flights and fed up on kills. All went pretty well to plan if you can have a plan that is. But towards the middle of the first season she was beginning to mantle badly anything fed on the fist and was downright nasty toward me. Oh well, only a Harris' Hawk I hear you cry, I didn't care she was not going to have me in her talons. So I stopped feeding anything larger than titbits on the fist so I could still jump her and fly her to the fist. But what ever was on the glove was gone in seconds. So far so good. Any large food items we put in the weathering/ garden and Hetty was taken to them, not them to her. I must add she never made much in the way of verbal abuse but her stance told you what was coming. Things were beginning to improve when foot and mouth came and reared its ugly head so I put her up to moult, free lofted in an aviary.

She moulted very well and was looking superb in her adult plumage. I fed her through a chute, always feeding enough, but when I put the food in she always attacked it so I knew she wasn't too fat. I started to drop her weight in the aviary just by feeding her a lesser quality diet, mainly rabbit and chick for about 2 weeks prior to taking her out of the aviary. When I did she was damn nearly at flying weight, best crack on then. She didn't take much manning only a day or two and you'd have thought she'd never been put up at all, in fact she seemed to even like me. Perhaps last season was just juvenile delinquency. We progressed quickly and I really did press home the dummy rabbit training but during the pickup process instead of using a bag to cover the lure I used a quarry cover, a 1 foot square, green, washable sheet and also stopped using a half side of bison to to get Hetty to step up onto my



glove. I just covered the lure, held it firmly and gently tossed a gutted chick away from the lure onto the ground, making sure she noticed it. Nothing was put on the lure food-wise (this was covered in real rabbit skin). She came off at lightning speed, I picked up the lure and waited for her to finish the chick, she then jumped to the fist for a small titbit. This was so easy, no wrestling with a big chunk of food on my glove, I could feed her a days rations and have three or four lure flight to boot. After about a week of this we went out hawking proper. There were plenty of rabbits about because they'd gone untouched because of the foot and mouth. She nailed three in quick succession, each time coming off the kill with ease. I also tried a new method of dispatching on this trial day, I normally pulled the neck of the quarry, but this seemed to stir up unwanted aggression toward me so I acquired a spike. This is a stainless steel spike with a deer antler handler and leather carrying case.

This is pushed into the skull of the quarry killing it instantly and causing minimum of handling at this crucial pick-up time. Also it can be pushed into the rabbit/hares hock when dead to stop carrying and allow the bird to be fed up. Hetty really seemed to have grown up, perhaps last season she just showed some sort of sibling rivalry towards me.

I was more than pleased with her.

Just when I thought things were sorted out something cropped up. I was putting Hetty in her night box when she looked like she was upset, as I put her in she had a go at me, this was totally out of the blue. I'd had nothing all season. This became a nightly thing and was most unpleasant, she knew she was getting the better of me, after all the bird is sitting right on a pulse point so she could sense my trepidation. I was getting fed up because she was like a lamb in the field,



and flying well with my mates 1st year

female, in fact people thought I was imagining it, but it was really getting to me so I decided on a course of action. Firstly I placed several piles of dog food in the garage so when I put Hetty in her night box I called in the spaniel. She whizzed around devouring the treats and Hetty forgot about me and watched the dog. Into the box she went, no problem but after about two weeks she started giving the dog the same treatment as me. Plan number two, I saved a titbit for Hetty and placed it on her perch so she would hop into the box. Hey Presto! Shut the door and see you in the morning. She now goes in with or without her titbit, no problems. Plan number three also set about putting her in her place showing her I was boss, not her, because she obviously felt she was dominant. When she had the odd relapse of psycho behaviour I gently, and I mean gently, held her beak between my thumb and fore finger. She was not impressed. I only did it once and the tantrum stopped. I also never let her step up of the perch or off my glove onto the perch, but I scoop her up or put her down. At any given time I would walk very close by her when she was tethered on the lawn, invading her space and generally tried to reduce her dominance in and around my property and her weathering areas.

She has improved 100% touch wood, and I am really thankful I stuck at it with her, because she is a cracking bird. I'm not saying this is the way to go on for all Harris' but this may just help someone in a similar situation, but please be careful. Watch your bird's reaction, don't go getting tagged and then phone me. I can't put my finger on any one thing but just a combination of the above Be flexible, change things and try to be one step ahead. Think Harris Hawk! If you can be that clever.

□



IN SEARCH OF THAT

BY PETER LEEN

I have been flying falcons for over a decade now and thinking back to 'my early years' I realise how happy I was if I could get a bird to fly.

There was little choice and birds were not readily available so, all that mattered was the bird's (possible) capabilities. The looks of the bird were overlooked by this. What's more, here in Belgium, except if you were one of the 60 licensed falconers, you weren't allowed to fly any bird that lives somewhere in Europe! It had to be an exotic species or a hybrid (even between European species).

This meant that I could not fly a Peregrine, Saker or Lanner! No goshawk, Buzzard or Sparrowhawk, no Golden Eagle but I could have a Prairie falcon, Lugger, Red headed Merlin, a Harris Hawk or Redtail and even a Martial Eagle or Ornate Hawkeagle if they were bred in captivity and had a CITES certificate.

I have always been drawn to Falcons; I love their nature, looks, their flying ability, their hunting and maybe it's like 'advanced birdwatching' but to me it's more like an addiction! I get up in the morning with my birds and go to sleep at night 'with them' as well.

But like I said before, what kind of bird and how she looked was not important, only the bird herself was important.

So I flew from exotics to hybrids. Quite a range: Lanner x Saker, Prairie (ahw), Lugger (1 imprinted female, great performance bird except her screaming), Peregrine x Lanner, Gyr x Peregrine and Gyr x Saker.

Later on, and surely for me, the looks of the hawk became more important. Why not fly a hawk you also love to see?

I have always been drawn to Falcons; I love their nature, looks, their flying ability, their hunting

My dream is or has always been to fly a white (white & black) coloured bird. That's why, since Gyrfalcons were not available (and protected by law) at that time, I had to result in flying a Gyr x Saker to come close to the original.

In contacting more breeders, they all bred hybrids that would look white after their first moult and some of them were almost Gyrs, except for the availability and the price asked.

I believed it and thought my dream

was coming out after buying the first hybrid, a Gyr x Saker.

Unfortunately, two birds on, and still I don't believe it any more since all my hybrids are brown (not black) - white/cream!

Not to mention my latest Gyr x Peregrine, yes sure big white Gyr x Peregrine, that looks almost like a Lanner, one size up!

But then arrived the time that everybody was breeding birds of prey so the choice was, and today still is, abundant!

I think that far too many birds are still bred and I wouldn't know where to look anymore for a good and decent bird, also the tribreds and backcrosses are moving in.

I have already heard about Gyr x Sakers up to 7/8 Gyr x Peregrine and you should try sorting out what they are exactly! (Not to mention the question, does the genuine species still exist)?

Could there still be Gyrs without any Sakerblood in them?

After that came the Internet time and

you could even look up birds over the Ocean, see what people are breeding and even talk to the breeders by e-mail.

But here it gets tricky, a lot of birds are advertised on the Net at mostly extreme prices so if I tell my family that I would want such a bird, they want to call me insane! Then I haven't told them yet that I want to fly this bird free!

Also, you don't know any more what's good or fault if you get on the web.

I think I could have a nice Webpage



with lots of pictures of nice facilities and beautiful birds but you will never really know what's sitting in my mews/garden. (I'm not saying that all the people on the Net are like this, definitely not, but some I've contacted definitely are!).

Even if you look at the latest issues of some Falconer Magazines they're evolving to a catalogue for Gyrfalcons!

What happened to the other falcons: pictures, stories?

Only this Magazine tells more stories of other birds that are suited to falconers!

Yet, I have few problems with it and I love to see Gyrfalcons anyway but I don't think that I will ever be able to fly my beloved white/black falcon. After contacting several breeders I must say that it will be not my game. They're simply too delicate, too hard to find, too far away and too expensive!

I simply love falconry and flying my hawks too much to ever take this chance

WHITE FALCON

of losing such an amount. Also, I've seen most Gyrs in breeding chambers and hooded on the fist then I ever saw any of them flying! But maybe I live on the wrong side of the Ocean!

Yet I keep on the look out for an affordable bird every year until I end up so frustrated and disillusioned that I quit and forget about Gyrs for some time until the desire comes back and lets me look again if I, perhaps, could not find this precious hawk to fly!

But then again, all of these birds are destined only for the Arab market! I must admit that I have no problem with them and I feel sometimes more connected to them since they do, like I do, love to fly a falcon. Yet somehow they stand in the way of achieving my dream of flying this white bird!

But I keep praying and hoping that somebody, somewhere would and could manage to breed some big white Sakers someday, birds more adapted to the Arab-heat than the average Gyr and then not only the Arabs but also the birds will be more than happy! Maybe in the future!

Another possibility for me could be to apply at the Canadian government for a license to take me a Gyr and accompany Frank Beebe to its trapping site but this is

another dream, I believe! And what's more I missed him at this years Falconry Fair so there goes my chances.

Maybe, and the best thing to do I believe, I'll have to wait for a decade longer and maybe if not all is prohibited I'll be able to fulfill my dream and take one wintering morning my white falcon on the fist and go out hunting with her!

Why is the one thing you want the most always the hardest to achieve?

if I tell my family that I would want such a bird, they want to call me insane! And then I haven't told them yet that I want to fly this bird free!

PS: When I started to write this article I didn't dare to dream that things would improve for me. Yes, I've found a real true friend on the Net and after the first few e-mails I felt more a friend to him than to most of the falconers I know in person. This Canadian breeder understood my problem and was willing to help me. We discussed our mutual love and admiration for 'the Gyrfalcon' and he is willing to fulfill my dream: hawking a Gyr! I feel like forever in his debt but I hope someday to return the favour and aid him in some way.

If all goes well, I'll be able to hunt with the first Gyr this Autumn and this is something I really look forward to!

I'd like to express my gratitude to him and wish him all the best and luck and what's more 'Thank you so very much for giving me this unique opportunity'

But when we were getting close to shipping the hawk I found out that there were new quarantine guidelines in order in Europe and all importbirds had to go into quarantine but it wasn't possible, neither in Belgium nor in Germany since there were no legal quarantine stations!

It took me quite some efforts to find out all the requirements but an e-mail I

sent to Mr De Coune from the IAF gave me some result and I'm granted a license to import my Jerkin!

If all goes well and after the 30 days quarantine, I just might to take him out to hunt at the beginning of next year!

Thanks to all the people for the support!

A quite happy true Gyr falcon enthusiast. □

THE BRITISH FALCONRY FAIR

BY BOB DALTON

The British Falconry Fair has moved to a new date in the calendar and a superb new venue. The rigours and repercussions of last years foot and mouth outbreak are thankfully just distant memories and the fair will be striding forward as ever. The undisputed premier falconry event in the world is back and is, if anything, bigger and better than ever.

Chetwynd Park, Newport, near Telford in Shropshire, will be the new and very picturesque setting for the event. The site is that used by the Shropshire Game Fair and has proved extremely successful and popular with both exhibitors and visitors alike. Not only is the park an extremely beautiful one, it is also very accessible with excellent road connections.

The change of date from the Spring Bank Holiday at the end of May to the

earlier holiday weekend of the 5th and 6th of May should prove popular with the majority of those that earn their living directly from falconry.

The show office is already inundated with applications from traders, clubs and artists from all over the world. So, as with every year that passes, the event will be bigger, richer in content and more diversified than ever. There is really nothing like the Falconry Fair anywhere

Chetwynd Park, Newport, near Telford in Shropshire, will be the new and very picturesque setting for the event.



else in the world and this is one of the reasons it attracts visitors and exhibitors on a global basis. This year's event will see equipment sellers from more than a dozen countries displaying their wares side by side.

On the club front there will be the representatives from all three national and most of the regional clubs, plus our friends from across the water, the North American Falconers Association. NAFA is probably the fourth largest club in the UK and its presence is always most welcome. The clubs are not just for established falconers. Most will welcome, with open arms, those setting out in the sport. It can be of tremendous help to know that there is a group of like minded people at the other end of a phone, should help be required. Most clubs hold field meets and organise various social functions. The vast majority give extremely good value for a relatively small outlay. For example, The Hawking Club, which is Britain's third largest club, has held its subscription at £20 for the third year running. With regular newsletters, a yearly magazine and a large number of field meets £20 seems a ridiculously small price to pay. But then the club spends its money on its members and their hawking needs and does not seem to waste any in excess administration.

One of the major draws each year is the superb art marquee put together by Chris Christoforou. Quite how Chris manages to keep coming up with new and exciting talent year after year beggars belief. But then Chris has always given 100% commitment to the Fair since its inception. This year the marquee has had to be extended to cope with the demand from exhibitors. But not just anybody can exhibit. Chris sets a very high standard, which must be adhered to. Demand from continental artists for display space is high and this is an indirect pat on the back for Chris and the work he has put in over the years. The fact that the Fair is considered the number one place for raptor art to be seen and exposed to a knowledgeable public shows just what high esteem the event is held in.

Flying displays are the mainstay of the fair and this year the quality will be as high as ever. Jemima Parry-Jones will again be in the main arena twice-daily entertaining the crowds with her excellent display. Jemima is, quite deservedly, a great favourite with the public and is always well received. The selection of raptors she flew last year was different from the run of the mill and was accompanied by an amusing, as well as informative, commentary.

As well as the two flying sessions mentioned above there will be several other displays given by various different groups and falconers. One of these that

comes back each year, by public demand, is that given by the South East Falconry Group. No matter what else is flown at the fair everybody wants to see the Kestrel, flown by Sue van Vynck, go up to the kite or balloon. I have even had falconers in Mexico earlier this year ask me if this kestrel will be there as usual. This little falcon has surely got to be one of the other most famous falcons in the world. Wherever you go people have either seen it or heard about it.

As well as showing a varied selection of hawks and falcons in the air there will be a wide variety of trained raptors on the weathering ground. Each year the organisers try to set as wide a selection as possible for the public to see. It is not always easy to persuade people to bring along something a little bit special or different but we do try our best to make the weathering better each year. The Central Falconry Club always manages the weathering and make a first class job of helping the public with their enquiries and looking after the needs of the hawks. The job they do is not an easy one and it is very much appreciated by the organisers.

Raptor Rescue always erects a weathering of a smaller scale, but it is still first class nonetheless. The raptors they display are the sorts of species they may well have to deal with in the course of their work. As well as the weathering they will also have a stand promoting their organisation and selling goods to help fund its work. Many people forget that Raptor Rescue is a purely voluntary outfit and they need to raise funds to carry on with their efforts to rescue and rehabilitate wild hawks. They are always

their co-operation has certainly helped to ensure the smooth running of the fair.

What is good news is that the falconers dog will again be catered for this year. Guy Wallace will be back with his breed and basic training displays. Last year's circumstances meant that dogs were not part of the event and both they and Guy were sorely missed. If you have never seen one of Guy's displays do try and catch at least one this year. They are not only extremely informative but also highly



amusing. Particularly when things don't go completely

according to plan.

What helps make the fair so special is that the

Falconer wanting to buy equipment can see all the various suppliers' products side by side and therefore make an informed choice first hand. So much better than buying by means of mail order from a catalogue. The fair is unique in this respect. Equipment from all over the world and from all price strata's jostle for the attention of would be purchasers.

There is only one place to be on May 5th and 6th and that is The Falconry Fair at Chetwynd Park. If you require more details then phone the show office on 01588 672708.

looking for sponsors, large or small, so if you can help make sure you have a word with them. The work they do enriches all our lives.

Whilst on the subject of flying sponsors, Honeybrook Farm, the raptor food specialists from Evesham, are again generous supporters of the event and

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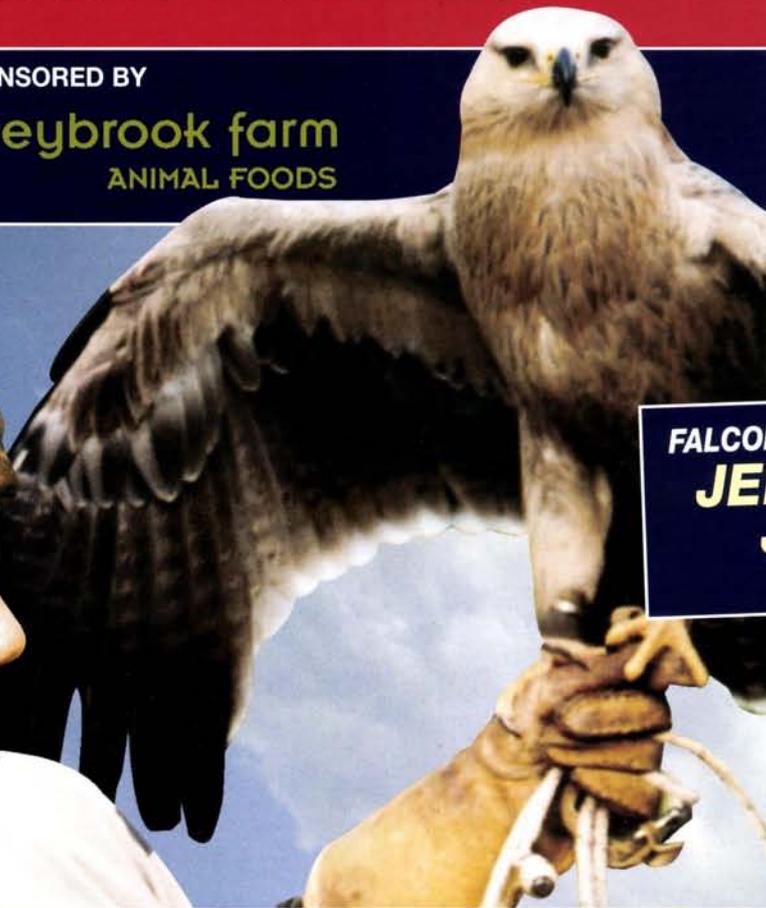
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THEY CALL THE WIND

BY ALAN GATES, MAY 1989

They call the wind Maria. It was those few bars of the song from a sixties hit musical that were repeatedly going through my mind as I hung on to a rope high in the Scottish mountains. At the other end of the rope was that mountain goat and friend Terry Pickford, who, without his help and skilful knowledge of the area and the people, I would not be dangling from this rope, with that incessant tune going through my head. At least it helped to keep my mind off what lay below, not a lot, for an awful long way. I was at that point where it was just as frightening to go on up, as it was to back on down, in a word I was stuck. Terry had crossed this tricky bit as though it was not there. After a few moments which seemed like an age, I was able to collect my thoughts, I remembered that folded piece of paper in my breast pocket which was one of the very first Scottish Home Office licences granted, to take from the wild, a golden eagle eaglet. And so temptingly close within a few yards, were the first sticks of the base of an eyrie.

"Come on! Clear your mind and step across that gap." I told myself. If you slip the rope will stop you." Somehow I did not believe that, but suddenly the adrenaline surged back and the next moment I was face to face with two wonderful eaglets.

No doubt a male and female as the difference in size was quite noticeable, the male was very friendly and I fell for him within minutes, the female was more wary of this strange visitor to the nest, her beak was half open and she reared her head back at the approach of my hand. They were a little younger than I had hoped, but we had tramped the

...suddenly the adrenaline surged back and the next moment I was face to face with two wonderful eaglets.

highlands for a couple of weeks now, and although we had found a number of eyries, some empty, some containing eaglets, we had decided that this was the most suitable site. To leave it any longer would mean yet another journey north to the highlands and with five trips under my belt that year I was running out of



Maria as an eaglet

holidays and excuses for time off work. Anyway I did not relish the idea of struggling with much larger eaglets on this narrow ledge. No matter how engaging this little male eaglet was, it was the female I had come for, I lifted her eight and a quarter pounds into the cane basket, secured the lid and lowered her down. My journey back down was much faster than my ascent. Just a slight hesitation over that gap, I backed the way I had come.

And now, as I look up into the blue sky above me, there hanging on huge broad wings looking straight down at me

is 'Maria.' It hardly seems like fifteen years ago since I plucked her from the eyrie and the company of her brother, I wonder how he made out in the big wide world. Maria and I have hunted these remote and beautiful hills for many years now. I know the tracks, the loose rocks and the marshy ground, and she knows

the strong winds, the updrafts, the quiet perches and the vantage points. And yet every time we are here we find new things to see and explore.

We work as a team but not necessarily always close together, we start early in the morning, after driving many miles over rough bumpy tracks. I leave the vehicle just off the track which is cut along the side of our remote valley.

Here we are perched about one hundred or so feet above the valley floor. Even at this

low height I can get some idea of the strength of the wind, a glance to the sky line above the hills at the far side of the valley gives me a better idea when I see the speed of the scurry clouds. A moment or two to scan the area just to check that we are totally alone. Now she stands on my arm, as I lift her up her concentration is on the distant hills, she rouses her feathers, shakes them all back into place and then the feeling of wind in her face launches her into her true element.

On broad strong wings she lifts on the wind, from where I'm standing I can just see her flying along the opposite hillside, her golden plumage blending so well with the bracken covered hill. She lands, and I mark the place in my mind and then set out to make my way across, negotiating fences and marshy ground. Now at the base of the hill as I look up it seems to climb into the heavens, the gradient is so steep as I dig my toes into the soft peaty soil, I make my way slowly but surely up to where Maria waits peacefully in the bracken.

As I come level with her she greets me with a few soft tones, I stand next to her for a few moments leaning on my short trusty thumb stick to regain my breath. Then as though she decided I have rested enough she opens up her wings and glides out from the hill to climb further on up. Together we ascend the hill, Maria so gracefully, whilst I struggle up through

MARIA

that infernal bracken. I somehow always seem to reach the summit first, although within seconds of catching my breath from the climb, she sails past about fifty feet above me and out over the valley.

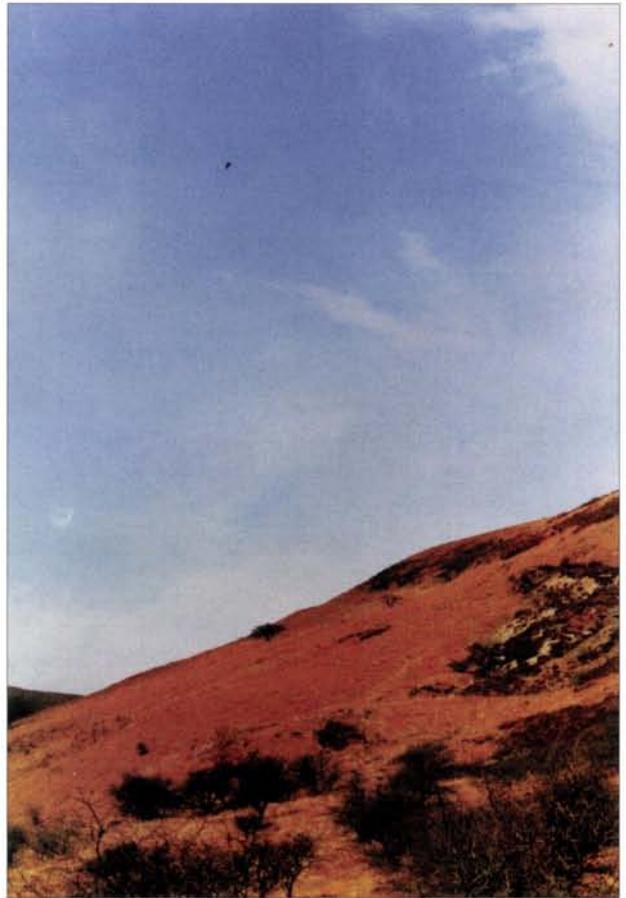
The low winter sun is warming once I round the corner and for a few minutes I am sheltered from the wind, the valley bottom is still crisp and white from the night frost, it will be a couple of hours before the sun will reach down there. This valley runs for miles, but we concentrate on about four miles of steep hill and sheer cliff. From where I am the vehicle looks like a dinky toy, we must be about four hundred feet above the valley floor. At this stage it is Maria who decides which way we go along this high moor ridge, she has gone on ahead up the valley for about half a mile, I follow on along sheep paths, the ground is very steep and these paths offer the only sensible routes. Within minutes she is right above, turning on the wind to repeat the ground she has just covered, backwards and forwards, sixty or seventy feet up scanning the ground below, then she will glide past and check the ground half a mile or so behind me. Every fifty or so yards I stop to watch this mastery of flight. I have flown eagles for the past twenty years over flat arable farm land, sloping fields of the wolds, sand dunes, sea cliff headlands and small islands. There is nowhere better for an eagle to show its skills than in the high hills with a strong wind blowing.

As I gazed up, as though it was the first eagle I had seen, a black arrow drops through the sky straight for her, at the last moment she tilts to one side and the arrow misses her. At the blink of an eye it comes back from below, but then lets out the 'hek-hek-hek' call of our little tiercel peregrine, so intent on seeing off this intruder he has past within fifteen feet of me.

As if by magic there are now two diving at her, the falcon has joined her mate. Maria seems unconcerned, but I can see from where I am her head tilting upwards as she keeps a watchful eye on

them, As this joint attack gets too hot for her, or, she just gets bored with them she tries and often succeeds in out flying them, by what has been so aptly described by Mike Tomkies the wildlife and eagle expert, as jet-gliding. With half closed wings and tail tilted to the wind she jet-glides across the wind, as she passes me I hear the air screaming through the slit in her single leg bell.

What speed does she reach?, I have no idea, whatever the speed it is exhilarating to watch. The peregrines follow for a little



Maria on the nest

while but, could not, or were not interested in sustaining the speed and so flew across the valley and into the blue distance.

Maria kept going for about a mile and then rose high in the sky, right into the morning sun. She was now invisible to me. "Beware of the Hun in the sun" I thought, and carried on my way along the hill. In places the hill has quite a bit of cover, I was approaching a strip of hazel thicket, which is about twenty yards wide

and reaches the valley floor, further on there are many thorn trees. There are badger setts amongst oak trees and out in the open hill, I have kept an eye on these since last season when Maria found a fine young brock lying dead outside one of the setts, he had teeth marks around the neck and head and there were signs of human interference as some of the sett holes were stoned up.

Suddenly a shadow past over me, Maria was back, her head looking down at me, I waved to her, she circled two or three times then moved on along the hill to land in the golden bracken near the top of the hill. Her colours blend so well into the hill that one can soon lose her location, I climbed to the top and made my way along the high moor edge.

The grouse were marking out their territories, their gruff calls toing and froing across the moor, occasionally one would fly out and along the line of the hill, but Maria never took any notice of them, she was more interested in the ground game of rabbits, hare and fox. As I approached where I thought she had landed I had to pick my steps very carefully as the ground sloped very steeply. I was quietly calling her name expecting her to talk back to me. Nothing, I thought she must have slipped back into the air whilst I was looking elsewhere. Then further down the hill, below some large bill oak trees I heard something crash through the undergrowth. Almost at the same time as this sound hit my ears, Maria launched out from the bill above me, I had passed within a few dozen yards of her. Straight out she went across the valley, then as she came above the oak trees she made a superb dive, there was a crashing of branches as she clipped the outer edge of the trees, then from out of the cover of the trees shot at full speed a roe buck. Maria had given him a glancing blow and he was not hanging around. I was amazed, as she had not seen a deer before and to fly with such determination, but she was not finished with him yet, as out of the trees she came flying low and fast.

From where I stood high above the edge of this huge natural amphitheatre, crafted by nature's wonder makers, the glaciers of the last ice age, I was impressed by the speed with which she had gained on the buck and within seconds she had grabbed him by the rear and rode bronco style around in circles. I found myself cheering on the buck as he kicked himself free. I loped down the hillside at breakneck speed, and was gasping for breath as I approached Maria who was sat on the ground. I gently sat next to her and congratulated her on a magnificent effort, she was in a peaceful mood, her beak slightly open as she panted quietly. I offered her my arm for her to step on to and after a rest we went on our way.

It was not for some time, in fact, the following season that Maria came into contact with deer again. The morning dawned with an almost clear blue sky, and by the time the sun was up it was truly a wonderful start to the day. That marvellous clean fresh air, the warm winter sun, a visibility for miles and to

top it all, a good breeze for Maria high above. She so enjoys her freedom, that I wished I could get up here more often. I was enjoying myself looking at the extent of the badger setts on the open hill side and marvelling at how difficult they were to see until you were right on top of them. I was not really paying full attention to Maria who had been cruising back and forth along the line of the hill top about sixty feet or so high. When I did look up I was just in time to see her go into a long shallow stoop. "Oh dear," or words to that effect, "what the heck had she seen." I strained my eyes along the angle she was diving in, I could see nothing. She pulled her wings into her body and the dive became more intense and the speed increased. She was really pulling out the stops on this one, and then she passed over a hazel thicket on the hillside I saw what she was after. In the split seconds before impact I saw a roe deer standing on an out jut so well camouflaged from where I stood.

It had sensed danger, but not from where it came. She hit it in the head so hard that it was lifted off all four feet, and did a complete somersault down the hill with the eagle binding to it. It took me about ten minutes to reach her. She was all right and had the deer well and truly trussed up, I could not see the deer's head as it was under its body. Maria had one of her legs between the back legs of the deer and had hold of the head, the other foot had the deer by the neck. I could not get to the head or neck of the deer to dispatch it, and so lifted the eagle off, fully expecting the deer to explode into life and give us both a good kicking. To my surprise the deer was stone dead, the impact and fall had broken its neck. I left the deer where it lay and carried the eagle back to the vehicle. I then made my way back to where the deer lay, threw it over my shoulders and staggered over the hill back to the car. After I had informed the landowner of our deed and he had kindly donated the carcass to me, I went home and weighed the deer, it came to fifty two pounds. Not bad for a bird at a flying weight of eleven pounds I thought, but then in reality its about as good as a gos with a large brown hare.

For the next few weeks I kept away from that side of the hill as I did not want it to become too much of a habit, there were not enough deer on this estate to go after them on purpose. Some time later in the season we did stray back into that area, but it was later in the morning, and I remember telling myself that any deer would have cleared from the area by now. She had landed just below the top of the hill and I was in the valley bottom, I had decided to call her down and I was waving a juicy titbit and calling to her. She did not respond straightaway, it took a few minutes to attract her attention.



She lifted off and started coming straight towards me, I usually wait as she fly's out from the hill then dives straight at me, I leave it to the last seconds and throw the titbit as high as I can, she pulls out of the dive and catches the reward and lands to eat it. She was just at the point where she was about to pull in her wings and start the dive, when she turned at a right angle to her line of flight and along the hill in a long dive, ending with an almighty crash through the tree tops and into the undergrowth. Almost at once the valley was a loud with devilish screams and growls. As usual I made my way to where I thought she had landed in my stylish manner, at full tilt, tripping over undergrowth and sometimes on all fours, I reached where she was, standing proud with one foot firmly grasping a foxes head, the other the hind quarters.

That was, and is, how Maria and I enjoy the winter months and now with the hunting season over, here I am sitting on a perch, daydreaming of her flying high. Alongside me, a huge nest constructed of load after load of dry sticks, heather and wood rush. She fly's back on to the perch on which I sit, to relieve me of my duty of minding her eggs, while she has a break from the long and boring job of incubation. As she so carefully steps into the centre of the nest and with her beak pushes the eggs into position, fluffs up her breast feathers and settles, I leave her in peace and look forward to next season when she is once again winging her way through the sky. □



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TAXIDERMMY *STEP-BY-STEP*

BY RICHARD ROSSITER

1 SKINNING THE BIRD.



1. This is the bird to be mounted, and all the tools required to do the job.



2. Take your measurements and make the first incision in the centre of the body, using a scalpel, travelling either up or down.



3. Start peeling the skin away from the body, moving down the legs, when you reach the knee joints invert them (turn inside out) and cut through the joints. Draw round the muscle to give a guide for the size of the replacement. Then strip all the meat from bone. Move onto the tail and cut through the base. Peel the skin up the back, being careful not to rip it, and around the body, working towards the wings.



4. Cut the wings away from the body at the joint, draw round them as for the legs then remove all of the flesh from the bone, again by inverting the wing.



5. Continue to peel up towards the head. Care must be taken whilst doing this because the skin around the ears and the eyes is very thin. With the eyes being one of the main focal points of the bird it is important not to damage any of the surrounding tissue. The whole skin is removed until you reach the beak and then you sever the head where it joins the neck. Remove all flesh and muscle from the skull and also the brain.



6. One of the differences between owl and other birds is the fact that their eyes are so large and also forward facing. With an ordinary bird you would remove the whole eyeball, with an owl you just remove the lens and the sclerotic fluid from inside the eye.



7/8. Now go back to the feet, make an incision on the ball of the foot and remove the tendons. This is done by a crochet hook being inserted into the foot and the tendons being pulled through.



9. This shows the bird skinned out with all the bones inverted, the body was used to draw round to get the size for the mannequin, noting the placing for the wings and legs. The skin is now ready to be degreased and washed.

Richard Rossiter has been in the magazine before when we have featured some of his paintings and he has also written articles for us. His latest passion, aside from hawking, is taxidermy and he is really quite good. Consequently we have collared him to explain the ins and outs using a road-kill Tawny Owl as his subject. The damage to the Owl was quite extensive but as you can see the result is superb. Richard is a member of the Guild of Taxidermists.

2 PREPARING THE SKIN.



1. Using a regular washing up liquid to wash the skin, removing all the fat and grease from the inside. Most of the fat lays along the feather tracks, this can be removed with the careful use of a small wire brush. Turn the skin out the right way and wash the feathers. Once you are happy the feathers are clean you rinse out all the detergent then squeeze out the excess water and place it in a tanning solution, (available from taxidermy suppliers) for approx 24 hours. Remove the skin from the tanning solution, rinse off the chemicals from the feathers using warm soapy water, rinse out turn the skin inside out and rub a preserver (borax) into the skin.



2/3. Turn the skin back out the right way and with a hair drier blow dry the feathers the wrong way. This will fluff them up and bring the owl somewhat back to normal.



4. Check over the skin and repair any damage, wiring broken bones and sewing up any tears in the skin.

3 MOUNTING THE SKIN.



1. Making the mannequin. I use balsa wood for the owl, but you could use wood wool or order one from a supplier.



2. Make the body and the neck using the measurements taken during skinning. Gently insert the body when you are finished to make sure it will fit and then make any necessary adjustments.



3. Starting with the head inside out, fill the eye orbits with clay, then (again available from good suppliers) place the glass eye on the clay, turn the head over and fill the brain cavity with glue from a hot-glue gun and then insert the neck and hold in place until the glue goes off. Once the glue has gone off turn the head out the right way.

Continued on page 18



4/5. Now turn your attention to the muscles of the legs and wings. Running wires along the bones you attach the wire to the bone using raffia and then reconstruct the muscle using wood wool, referring to your measurements again.



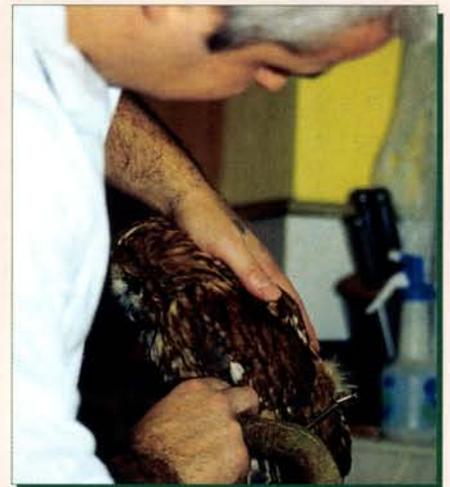
6/7. The wire on the wings and legs must be inserted into the body at the points at which you need to reattach them. The leg wires are generally thicker than the wing wires.



8. You can now sew up the body. It should resemble a dead owl again.



9/10. Attach a branch to a base, drill two holes in it for the leg wires, push the leg wires through the holes and bend over the ends and the owl should sit on the branch. Now start to position the bird how you want it.



11/12. Once the bird is in position just tidy up the plumage, using tweezers to get the skin where you want it and hold in place with pins. A brush can be used to realign the feathers. Particular attention should be paid to the eyes, once the eyelids are how you want them pin them in place. The pins can be removed after about two weeks.



THE FINISHED ARTICLE!





THE VULTURE THAT WOULD NOT FLY AWAY

BY MARTIN FOULDS

There has been so much in the press recently about captive vultures getting loose and escaping from their keepers, roaming the English countryside for days before capture, what happened to me recently was quite the reverse.

While in Saudi Arabia based at the National Wildlife Research Centre (NWRC) making final adjustments for my Mphil/PhD on the Eurasian griffon vulture, we got a call from a local farmer in the mountains who had spotted two large birds lying on the ground, not moving. Could we help?

Off we went in one of the government's four-wheel drives and into the mountains to see what we could do.

We knew there was a colony of vultures in the location and the description appeared to match a Eurasian griffon.

We arrived very quickly, met the farmer, and after the traditional Arabian welcome he took us to the birds.

Yes they were Eurasian griffons, both juvenile, sadly one was dead, but the other was alive. It looked like poisoning but we needed to get the bird back to the research centre fast for the vet to confirm this.

I held the bird in the back of the vehicle and off we went.

It was confirmed both birds had been poisoned. We put the single bird into the hospital and waited. Two weeks later the bird was fit flying in the aviary, so we decided it was time to release it back to the wild.

We took the bird to where we found it,



knowing there were other vultures in the area.

As we arrived the farmer met us again and went through the local traditional welcome, which I was getting used to by now. I positioned the bird on the side of the mountain and waited for a gentle breeze to help him on his way. We waited, and waited and waited, nothing happened apart from a few flaps, a yawn, a preen, an occasional stare at us, as if to say, I've forgotten how to fly.

He suddenly saw his friends soaring above, he stared vigilantly at them, beat his wings, now we thought, he will fly, but no he turned around to us one more time as if in total confusion.

After two hours, we put him back in the four-wheel drive and went further into the mountains - 8,000ft up to be precise. This time we found another

colony, and tried again. I positioned him so close to the cliff edge that with the strong wind he had to fly? We were not going to give up. Again more vultures flew overhead as if to say, come on, fly with us, so I suddenly picked him up and launched him into the air. Then after two wing beats, he began soaring, and climbed and climbed and rejoined his friends. It was an emotional, but rewarding, thing to see him flying at last but then, all of a sudden, the bird turned and reduced height and came back low over our heads. Oh no, we thought, he was going to land again, suddenly he climbed past our heads and headed off high over the mountains, and into the distance. Maybe as we would like to think, he flew back to say thank you for returning him back to where he belonged. □

WANTED

We are looking for people to participate in an ongoing series about the training and flying of a bird. Ideally we would like to use a bird of the year and follow it through its first season (maybe longer). More than one species would be used, hopefully at least one falcon, one buteo and one accipiter, but we would like to compare also parent reared to imprinted so maybe two Goshawks, also it would be good to see the differences between a Harris' Hawk and a Redtail. If you are a reasonably experienced falconer and are getting a new bird for next season please contact us on 01536 7232794, or write to Falconers Magazine Editorial, 20 Bridle Road, Burton Latimer, Kettering, Northants NN15 5QP. Or email: falconersmag@dial.pipex.com We look forward to hearing from you.



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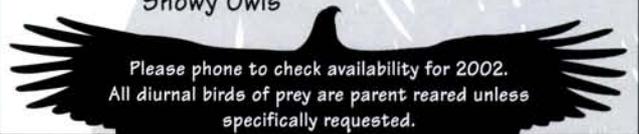
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VIROLOGY

BY NIGEL BARTON

In last few decades the increase in captive breeding programmes and falconry has highlighted an increased awareness of the health aspects related to these activities. Most species of birds are thought to be susceptible to certain viral infections, it has been reported that at least 254 species can be infected with Newcastle disease virus alone. In the last few years several new viral diseases, as well as the detection of well established viral infections, have been reported in raptors. Influenza virus from a falcon and paramyxovirus 2 from martial and crested eagles have not been documented before but were isolated from clinically sick birds in different countries.

In recent years it has become apparent that the possibility of increasing the isolation rate of viral pathogens in raptors would be useful and beneficial when screening prospective breeding birds,

production of a falcon cell culture could enhance the chances of finding specific viruses and raise the possibility of isolating viruses not previously reported before in raptors but particularly falcons.

Eggs produced from a Saker female and a Saker/Gyr male at the Falcon Facility were transported to the Avian Virology Unit at the Veterinary Laboratories Agency



...the production of a falcon cell culture could enhance the chances of finding specific viruses...

imported species and sick or diseased birds. Using cells from the same host can increase the isolation rate of viruses this is due to the cells being more susceptible to the viruses and their ability to replicate in the host cells. With this in mind it was decided that, in conjunction with the Falcon Facility in Wales, U.K., the

(Weybridge) in an attempt to produce the falcon cell culture. Embryonic fibroblast cells were prepared by an established method and incubated at 37°C to form a monolayer of cells in plastic tissue culture flasks. The primary falcon cells were sub-cultured and aliquots from various passage levels were placed in liquid



nitrogen (approx -194°C) for future use. By doing this an aliquot can be thawed and cultured for use when samples are received from material submitted from falcons or raptors. Preliminary results indicate that the cells remain viable when stored in liquid nitrogen and are capable of supporting viral growth when taken out of the nitrogen and placed for incubation at 37°C.

Confluent monolayers of cells can then be infected with sterile preparations of homogenised tissues or from cloacal and tracheal swab material in an attempt to produce a cytopathic effect (CPE) in the cell layer. Some viral isolates fail to produce a detectable CPE in infected cell cultures even though virus particles can be visualised by electron microscopy (EM) but multiple passages may also be required before CPE is observed and viral replication is detected.

Preliminary identification of the isolated viruses can be obtained by EM examination of the concentrated cell culture fluids.

Haemagglutination/haemagglutination inhibition and virus neutralisation tests using specific sera can also be helpful in making a preliminary identification of the isolated viruses.

To date the new falcon cell cultures have supported the growth of herpesviruses, influenza viruses and Newcastle disease virus. Further work to evaluate the susceptibility of these falcon cells to known and unknown viral infections will be carried out as an ongoing project as and when samples from these birds are received.



MEXICAN WARMTH

BY BOB DALTON

I recently received an invitation to pay a return visit to Mexico and join a group of friends duck hawking. Here in the UK the grouse hawking season had all but finished and the weather was gradually turning cold and nasty. Therefore three weeks in the sun, hunting ducks with passage peregrine falcons, seemed a far more sensible and enjoyable way of spending time.

Mexico was also due to hold its first national combined short and long wing meet towards the middle of December and my trip was planned so as to be able to take in the event. The organisers were all friends of mine and it would be good to enjoy their company and go hawking with them again.

I flew into Mexico City to spend several days there with friends before heading north to hunt ducks. Whilst in the city I was keen to meet up with a falconer I had corresponded with for quite some time but had always failed to meet on my previous trips. His name is Alex Franco and I was eager to meet him because, like me, he flies Barbary falcons. Fortunately the falconer I was staying with had organised things so that Alex and I could meet up and go flying together. Also, I was informed, that after the flying something rather special had been laid on for me to visit. But no more details were forth coming and I would just have to wait until after the hunting to find out what it was.

Two days after my arrival in Mexico I was woken at 4am so as to be able to meet Alex on the motorway outside the city at 5.30am. After introductions and exchanging pleasantries we set off to get to the hunting grounds before daylight. The reason for the incredibly early start was that Alex likes to have finished his hunting before the ground warms up sufficiently for red tailed hawks to be thermaling and hunting with serious intent. Red Tails can be a nuisance when flying the larger

falcons but they are positively dangerous when flying the smaller species like barbaries.

Our chosen hunting ground, Pachuca, consisted of huge open fields close to the Aztec pyramids at Teotihuacan. A wonderful area that is steeped in a very colourful history. We had arrived early

extremely attentive to any move made by Alex. As the falcon approached the doves we rushed forward and flushed them for him. He put in a couple of short stoops at one dove but it made the cover of a large spreading cactus.

Alex then called for reinforcements in the shape of "Sabrina" the golden

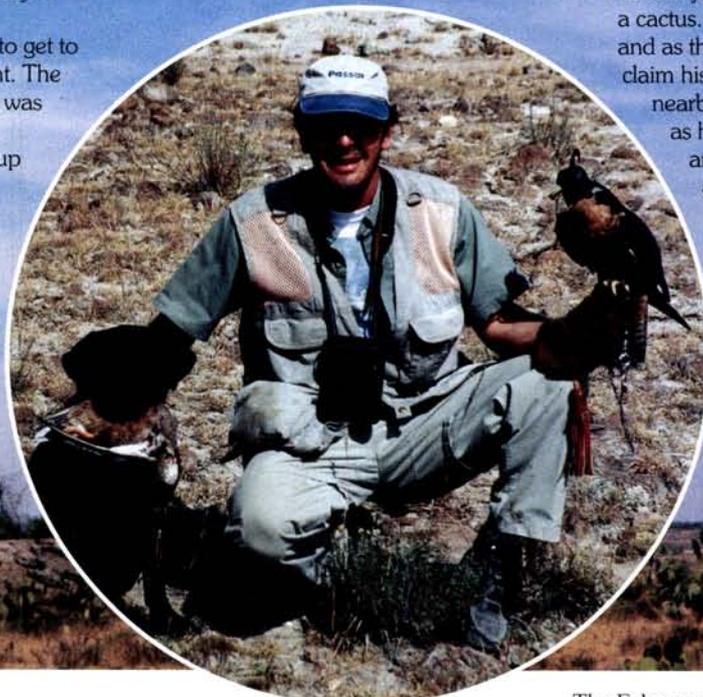
Bob Dalton reports on his recent visit to Mexico. Three weeks in the sun and plenty of hawking can't be bad during a cold English winter!

enough that we sat and waited for dawn to break. The quarry was to be Morning Doves. These are small, but incredibly fast little birds and would make an admirable adversary for the Barbary tiercel we were going to fly. "Pedro" the tiercel is an intermewed social imprint in his second season. Morning Doves are a quarry he apparently relishes and it looked like we were going to enjoy a good couple of hours sport.

The fields we were going to hunt on were very large and open and bordered by shallow ditches, which were littered with cactus. We looked for groups of doves feeding out in the open and far enough away from cover to give a decent flight. Once we had spotted such a group "Pedro" was put on the wing. He did not go extremely high but he did get to his chosen pitch quickly. Once there he was

Labrador. The dog snuffled around in the roots of the cactus and finally managed to flush the dove. The falcon was instantly in pursuit again but somehow the dove made the safety of another cactus. The process with "Sabrina" was repeated but the dove took flight when the tiercel was out of position. The Barbary was brought down to the lure and given a rest of around twenty minutes before we started hunting again.

When Alex judged that "Pedro" was ready to fly again we started to look round for another group of doves in a suitable position. That didn't take too long and the tiercel was soon back in the air. We flushed a group of around thirty doves, which broke into a main bunch of around 23 or four, and the rest flew off as individuals. The tiercel had selected one of the individuals as his target and managed to strike it just as it was reaching the safety of a cactus. But the blow was not a fatal one and as the Barbary made his way down to claim his prize the dove hopped into the nearby cactus. The tiercel was now low, as he had lost his height in anticipation of landing on his quarry. The dove made good its escape from the other side of the cactus and the Barbary gave chase for a short distance



before giving up.

On his way back to us the tiercel suddenly veered off and started to call. He landed in a tree and started to make the sort of sounds you would expect to hear if he was soliciting a female during the breeding season. We thought this was very strange behaviour on his part. A minute or so later the reason for this display made itself apparent in the form of a beautiful dark passage peregrine falcon. She landed right next to him in the tree. Despite the fact that she was a young falcon and so very much bigger, she did not show any signs of aggression towards him. In fact quite the opposite. As he bowed and chucked she responded with equal enthusiasm. We watched for a while as the mismatched pair went through their courtship. The falcon did not care about us and allowed us to get within 20 metres of her. She eventually moved a little distance away but kept on calling. Our tiercel ignored the lure proffered to him and followed the falcon. After some 30 minutes of this weird courting ritual the Barbary eventually broke away and came back into the lure. But the falcon still wanted the company of her new found friend. She hung around us and despite our clapping and shouting she would not go away.

By now the sun was getting warm and red tails and caracaras were on the move. The flirting session that our tiercel had been happy to indulge in had eaten up the time available to us. So hunting for the day was over. But the little I had seen had been fast, furious and most enjoyable. I returned to Mexico City for a late breakfast before going on the special visit that had been arranged for me.

This turned out to be something truly amazing and certainly something that will not be forgotten. I was taken to a private breeding foundation for endangered birds on the outskirts of the city. The

emphasis is on Mexican birds but certain endangered species from other parts of the world are also part of the program. There are over five thousand birds at the foundation and a small collection of mammals. These are mainly the smaller species of monkeys found in Mexico. But there were a couple of surprises that were saved to the latter part of my visit.

Whilst I enjoyed seeing the birds shown to me my real interest was obviously the raptors. These turned out to be very exciting indeed. The aviaries are laid out in tree shaded walk ways in such a way that about 10 large aviaries are in line and then you move on to the next walk way. The first bird of prey walk way was interesting with Red-shouldered Hawks, Swainson Hawks, Bat Falcons, Aplomado Falcons and some Harris Hawks that are used as foster parents for other species. The next walk way was truly awesome.

Seven pairs of Golden Eagles, a pair or Ornate Hawk Eagles and two pairs of Harpy Eagles. I have been



fortunate enough to see Harpy

Eagles before but I was so totally unprepared to see them this day that they really took me by surprise. They are magnificent birds and extremely powerful. Of the two pairs I saw, one had produced fertile eggs the previous breeding season. But unfortunately the female had broken them. So this year the first clutch will be taken away and put in an incubator. It will be a very brave man, or a very stupid one, that goes in and takes the eggs from a sitting female Harpy.

As I stood outside the aviary of one of the pairs, the resident female flew down from her high perch at the back to a low one at the front of the enclosure. As she landed she dropped a deck feather and then preened out a primary. I asked my host if there was any way I could get a Harpy feather as a souvenir. He informed me that if I wanted to I could go in the aviary and recover the two feathers dropped by the female. It was an



opportunity too good to be missed. The two feathers are now proudly pinned up on my office wall. Should you ever find yourself in need of a laxative I can recommend one from personal experience. Go into an aviary with a female Harpy Eagle and get within six feet of her. Then watch in disbelief as this powerful but placid eagle suddenly puts her fright mask on and starts her aggression display. You will be amazed how quickly and how many parts of your body can suddenly work at once.

Having moved on from the raptors I have to say that the rest of the birds at the foundation tended to pale into insignificance when measured against the Harpy Eagles. I don't mean that disparagingly but how do you top a Harpy, or rather 4 of them. But I needn't have worried; very shortly I was shown the couple of surprises that were being held back till the end. If you think being within a few feet of a Harpy is awesome how about actually stroking Siberian Tigers and Jaguars. I don't mean little fluffy cuddly cubs that you can hold in your hands. I mean full-grown pairs of adults that have produced several litters of youngsters over the years. I ended up more or less speechless with the thrill of it all. Jaguars are part of the foundation's work and youngsters produced there are part of a reintroduction scheme. Siberian Tigers are produced and the sale of the young to responsible outlets helps fund the work done by the foundation.

Like most falconers I have an admiration for predators in general and big cats in particular. Consequently I was in my ideal heaven. Accordingly the rest of the day just flew past and all too soon the experience was over but it is one I will never forget. Fortunately my host has been kind enough to invite me back and offer me an extended stay at the facility. So I will be going back in February to repeat the experience.

The next morning it was time to say goodbye to all my friends in Mexico City and head north towards Aguascalientes and a couple of weeks duck hawking. I was going to stay with a group of friends that I had stayed with earlier in the year. We had had such a good time together we vowed to do it all again as soon as possible. Between my two visits a couple of them had been over to the UK and had spent some time with me grouse hawking in Scotland.

The area around Aguascalientes is ideally suited to duck hawking and the rainy season had been kind to falconers.

That is it had filled most of the duck ponds with water. The economic mainstay of the area is raising cattle with the emphasis on fighting bulls for the ring. Therefore there are vast tracts of land with very little on them other than cactus and isolated ponds.

The ponds tend to be close enough together that if you flush ducks from one you can watch, with binoculars, which one they take refuge in. So once you have found a raft of ducks it is normally possible, with care, to get two or three flights at them before they go all together.

The four falconers that I was to spend most of my time with flew five *anatum* Peregrine Falcons. All were taken originally as passage hawks. Their ages ranged from four to 10 and they were all vastly experienced and between them had killed many, many ducks. Like good falconers anywhere in the world my friends make what they do look extremely simple. That is because they are so experienced at what they do that most things are done smoothly and without what seems like a great deal of effort. In fact it was easy on some of the days to almost feel sorry for the ducks. Success rate is something like 90% once the season is in full swing and the hawks are truly fit again.

The method of hawking is to drive round surveying the ponds through binoculars. Once ducks are spotted, we move ourselves and the vehicle, so as to be out of sight to the ducks. The falcon to be flown is then readied with telemetry, etc. and allowed to take to the wing in her own time. The weather is nearly always hot without much wind. Therefore conditions are ideal for falcons to get very high very quickly. They will invariably find a thermal and rise up on it to some very good pitches.

Once at a height they are happy with the falcon will come back overhead. In the meantime our group of falconers, accompanied by "Rosa" the black Labrador, will have got ourselves into position in readiness to flush the ducks. Two-way radios are a standard item of hawking equipment and so the flush tends

to be a very controlled and exact affair. The beauty of everybody being in touch with each other is that often we can get two flights off of the same pond. If all the ducks don't jump at the initial flush everybody drops back out of sight so as to get another chance.

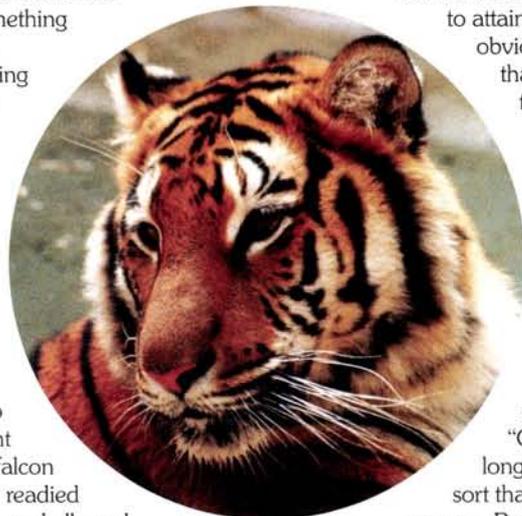
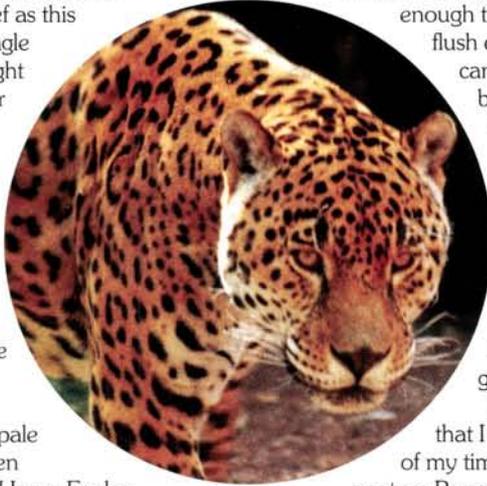
The sight of the falcon stooping at the chosen duck is a superb one. Made better by the fact that against the background of blue sky it is possible to enjoy every second of the spectacle. Three of the falcons in our group nearly always bind to their quarry. But two of them invariably strike the quarry and knock it to the ground. "Golondrina" and "Tina" are the two falcons in question. Both are intermedial falcons of four seasons. Tina in particular hits very hard and is exceedingly quick on the throw up and turn over. Normally she is on her prey almost as it hits the ground.

The falcons take a full range of ducks and on this last trip I saw them catch nine different species. The prize quarry for Mexican falconers is the pintail duck. These are considered the hardest to catch and the most difficult for the falcon to kill even if she does get a foot on one. On my last trip to Mexico earlier in the year we had failed to catch one. On this trip we caught two, the day before I was due to head off to a falconry meeting. "Golondrina" caught a female and "Tina" a male.

Both flights were unusual and will long live in my memory. "Golondrina" was cast off and allowed some time to attain her pitch. It was obvious from the start that she was not going to go up to her normal pitch and was happy at around three hundred feet. As she came back overhead the ducks flushed of their own accord before she was in position.

"Golondrina" put in a long shallow stoop, the sort that rarely meets with success. But the falcon was pumping as she was falling, piling more speed on. The ducks headed, quite literally, straight at Martin Guzman the owner of the falcon and myself. At the last minute the ducks saw us and flared upwards to clear us. As they rose "Golondrina" hit the leading duck and knocked her to the ground. The falcon threw up and turned over very quickly, but it was obvious the duck was already dead. A very impressive stoop with a deadly and telling punch at the end of it.

The male pintail that "Tina" caught was probably more spectacular from a



spectator's point of view. Again there was a stiff breeze but the falcon still went up as high as usual, it just took her slightly longer and used more energy. The group of pintails we had spotted were in amongst a larger group of teal. Whilst we were still working our way to get into position for the flush one of our number tripped and fell over. The ensuing shouting and cursing that followed prematurely flushed the ducks. "Tina" was out of position but she turned over and started to stoop as soon as the ducks took off. One male pintail broke away from the group and flew down a three-stranded barbed wire fence line in the hope of throwing off the falcon. As "Tina" got close the duck nipped between the middle and top strand to evade the falcon. But it was to no avail. "Tina" had second guessed his intention and hit him so hard that he quite literally hit the ground and bounced 10 feet back in the air before falling dead on the ground.

Victor Caucedo, "Tina's" partner had a grin from ear to ear which seemed to stay in place for the rest of the day. Another factor that contributed to his grin was the reason behind our friends shouting and swearing when he fell and flushed the ducks. He had fallen into a patch of Fortuna fruits. These come from cactus and are beautiful to eat but they are literally covered in very sharp spines. Our friend needed protracted help with a pair of tweezers to remove all the spines that had embedded themselves in him. Some of the removals would have been better if his wife had carried them out, such was their positioning. But the spines have a tendency to break up once under the skin so it was important to get them out quickly. True friendships know no bounds, or so it would seem.

One of the beauties of hunting in Mexico is the abundant wildlife to be seen. As well as a great diversity of raptors there are many birds, snakes and insects to see.

Plus one of my favourites, the coyote. These are beautiful creatures and, unfortunately, still much persecuted in Mexico.

As well as a wide selection, raptors are also a common sight. On one particular day I saw 13 different species, ranging from Merlin to Golden Eagle. Vultures and Redtails are everywhere with Caracaras and Harris Hawks also very common. But one of my personal red letter birds is not a raptor at all but a species of Cuckoo. It is the Road Runner. An amazing little bird that is full of character. It looks ridiculous, behaves in a strange way and looks as if it would be very easy to catch with any sort of hawk. Well I can tell you they are virtually impossible to catch with a trained hawk and apparently wild ones rarely take them.

I have twice watched falconers make earnest attempts to catch them and both times they failed miserably. Even getting photographs of them is not easy. But on this trip I had one who was so busy trying to persuade an Osprey to move from a small tree that I managed to get a couple of half decent photos of him.

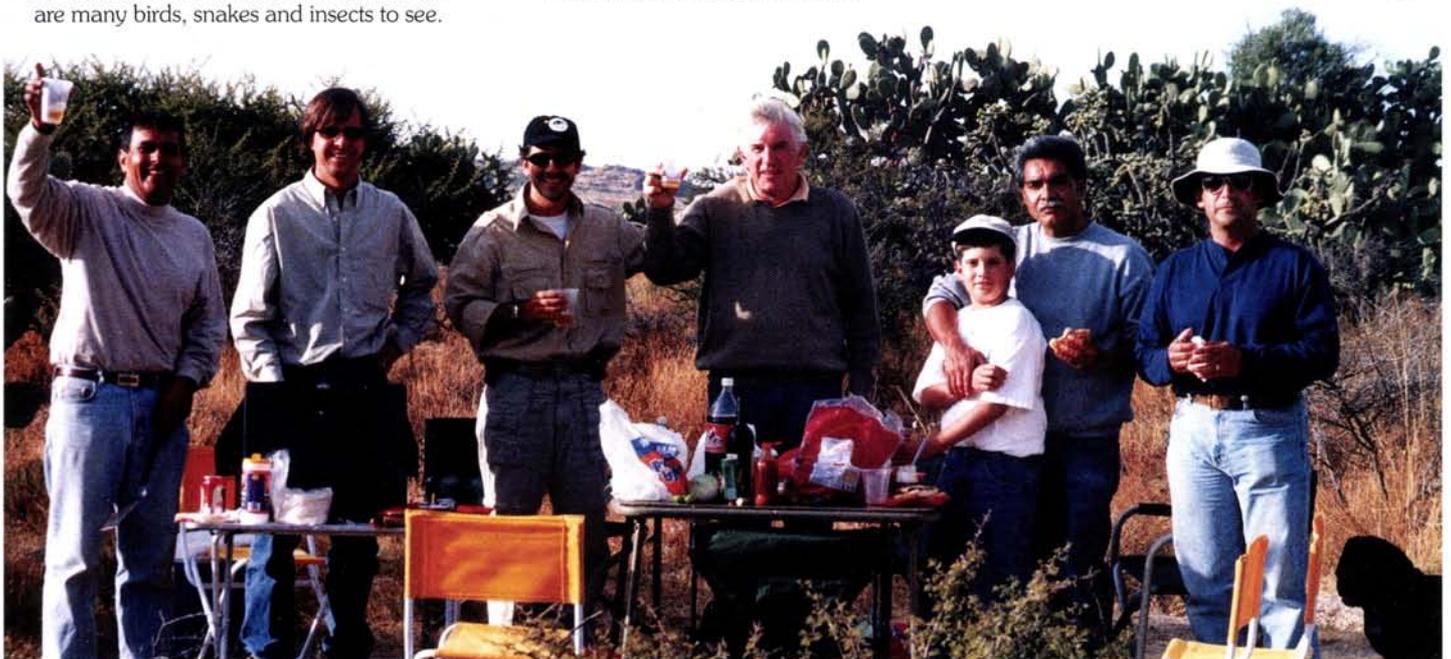
One of the customs that I wholeheartedly approve of when hawking in Mexico is the cook up at the end of the day. When a group of us go hunting we take some basic supplies and all the paraphernalia for cooking outdoors. Plus of course plenty of alcoholic refreshment to wash the day's catch down with. The breast meat is removed from the ducks we have caught and this is cooked up with some beef, onions, tomatoes and chilli peppers. The resulting mixture is put in Tortillas and topped with cheese. Delicious. Everybody then sits around discussing the days hawking until the sun has well and truly set. A very civilised way to end an excellent day in the field.

Having spent a couple of weeks

hawking around Agauscalientes it was time to move on to San Luis Potosi for the first national combined long and short wing meet. Last November saw the first national short wing meet and such was its' success that this combined event had been organised. The short wings, or low flight as the Mexicans refer to them, were almost exclusively Harris Hawks with the odd Red Tail to make up the numbers. The falcons were all Peregrine Falcons with the exception of one tiercel and two Prairie Falcons. But the falcons, or high flyers, were not really hunting. They would be competing in a sky trial.

The hawking side of things went very well with rabbits and jack rabbits being caught. The sky trial was not so good. First of all it was extremely windy so a lot of the falcons did not go up, as they normally would have done. Several falcons were lost, albeit temporarily, due to the wind. Some falconers even pulled out. But the winds are very uncommon during the hawking season here. So the falconers themselves as well as the falcons are just not used to it. But those falcons that are hunted regularly can cope well with the conditions even if they are not used to it. My good friend Martin Guzman won the event flying "Golondrina". A good falcon will perform no matter what the conditions, within reason, of course.

After the meeting I had a couple more days to look up friends in Mexico City then it was time to catch the plane home. Back from warm sunshine and excellent hawking the rigours of a British winter. The thought that cheered me up, as I crossed the Atlantic on my way back, was that in eight weeks I would be flying back the other way again. The sunshine is not the only thing that is warm in Mexico. The people are friendly and always make me feel most welcome. □



John Chitty

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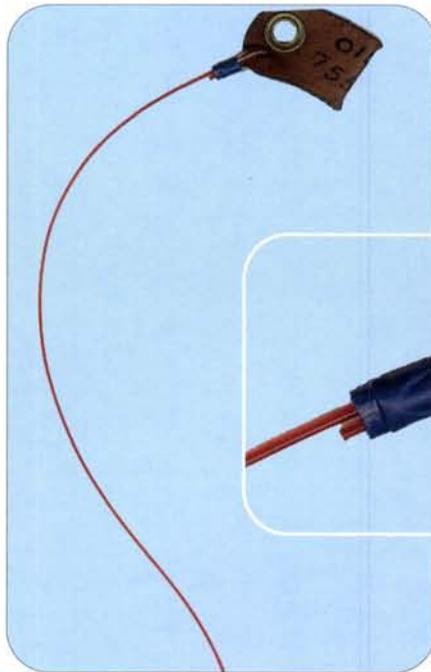
FLYMORE

GRAHAM CHORLTON, GWENT HAWKING CLUB

I read with interest the article on "Jesses, Anklets and All That" by Dave Wilson, in the last issue, most of it was good sound stuff but I'm sorry Dave, in my opinion leather is not the best thing to use for flying jesses, perhaps my experience will explain why.

I held up my arm and whistled, my bird dropped from the tree, wings half folded ten feet from the ground his wings flicked open and he glided the six hundred or so yards down the hill towards me, tail flicking from side to side to encounter the stiff breeze coming up the hill from the reservoir below.

I continued to walk down the hill with my arm outstretched, I glanced back to see him rapidly gaining ground on me, then fly past missing by a good six feet and continue down the hill towards a small wood on the valley floor some half a mile away.



Where on earth was he off to? At this stage I wasn't too worried, he was wearing Telemetry and I had flown the bird many times in this wood.

Some ten minutes later I arrived at the wood expecting to hear the jangle of bells as he chased Squirrels around the trees, but I was greeted with silence, no bells, nothing. Where was he?

I whistled and there was a clatter of bells but he did not return. I walked on in the direction of the sound and after a minute or two I whistled again. Again the sound of bells but no bird. I walked on

looking up expecting him to show himself, then I spotted him, my heart sank to my boots, the worst sight a Falconer can see. My best redtail was hanging upside down in the tree, caught by a single jess made from a leather bootlace, which had wrapped itself around a branch.

What the hell do I do now, shake the tree, ring home for a ladder?

No chance, this tree was four feet thick and the bird was about forty feet off the ground, well out of range of your average ladder.

Panic was beginning to set in as after some ten minutes or so the bird was hanging seemingly lifeless. I remember thinking he can't be dead after such a short time. I made up my mind, I would have to attempt to climb the tree but suddenly there was a flurry of activity high in the tree and he got free.

He landed in a nearby field, I picked him up and walked back up the hill, he was looking none the worse for his ordeal but personally my nerves were a mess to say the least. I remember

thinking that there has to be some material better than leather for flying jesses. Now after some eighteen months of searching I believe I have found the answer, sitting on a shelf in a corner of my garden shed. Strimmer Wire. Nylon to be more precise.

This amazing stuff has a mind of its own, try winding it around your finger, the instant you let go it springs back to its original shape.

Here's how you use it.

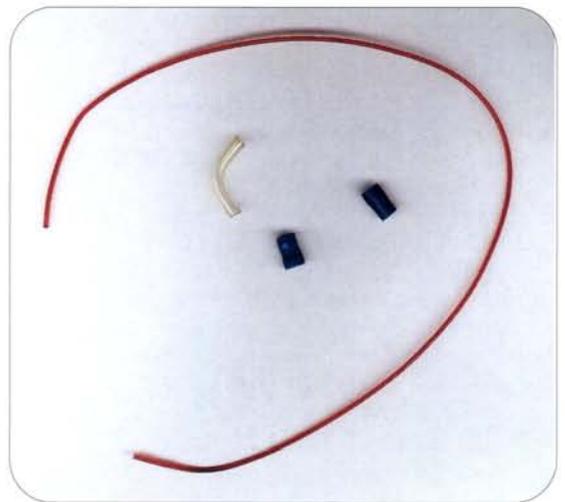
You will need the following:

- Strimmer wire (Flymo)
- Plastic tube (Crop Tube)
- Electrical spade connector (file or break off the spade)
- Crimping tool (pliers if you don't have one)

Take as much as you need off the roll to make a pair of jesses. The first thing you will notice is it looks like a coiled spring, this is not the shape you want so pop it into a bowl and pour on boiling water and within a few seconds it will straighten itself.

Next punch a small hole below the eyelet in the Aylmeri Anklet, slide a one inch length of crop tube through this hole then slide a length of strimmer wire through the tube until it protrudes approx one inch.

Slide an electrical Spade Connector (with the spade filed or broken off) onto both ends of the wire. Pull tight on the strimmer wire to form a loop and crimp



the connector on using a crimping tool or pliers.

There you have a set of Flying jesses, lightweight, low drag, maintenance free, but above all tangle free.

Make your jesses two or three inches longer than usual leather jesses because Nylon is virtually impossible to hold in a gloved hand so you will need this extra length to wind around your fingers.

If for any reason a jess gets damaged just cut it off and leaving the tube through the Anklet insert another length of strimmer wire and crimp it on. This operation takes about thirty seconds and can be done whilst the bird is standing on its perch or block.

My two redtails have been wearing these jesses for four months without any



problems. The birds look more natural as the jesses are virtually impossible to see when in flight. Also the birds seem to fly faster although I think that is wishful thinking on my part.

Don't take my word for it, give them a try!

Note from the Editors.

Thank you Graham for sending me your idea. Having spoken to quite a few falconers we have had some very

positive feedback, and as you'll know from previous magazines, some people have had trouble with the traditional leather flying jess and will be very keen to try them out. However, not everybody wants permanent flying jesses so I have modified your idea using the button of a traditional jess and attaching the flymo cord to it. As you can see in the photograph to stop it slipping through the spade connector I burnt the end to make a ball which solved the problem.

Once again thank you very much.

After 30 years in falconry I am amazed that people still keep coming up with new ideas.

We would like to hear from other people about different or unusual things which they use, which work.

Alternatively, if you are having a problem with something then write to us and we will see if we can't find someone to sort it out for you. There are some very clever people out there and a solution can generally be found for most things. □

RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL HARRIS HAWK

BY JULIAN WATSON

I don't know how many of you out there have lost your bird but believe me it's no fun unless you're one of the very few who say 'Sod it!' and go and buy a new one.

It all started as an average flying day, which luckily for me is every day. All was fine, Amber was on and off the scales at 2lb 11/2oz which is good as she normally hunts at 2lb2oz, she was as keen as any falconer could want. A good signal from my telemetry so off we go.

It was only a five minute drive from home so by 1.30pm Amber was on her first flight, which she always has before we hunt to get the cobwebs out of the feathers and the rigour mortise out of the joints. With the fly around over she was back on the fist to find the first bunny of the day. After a short walk the first one ran along the hedgerow, Amber saw it before me as usual and bated, me with reactions on par with that of a striking slug it was down another hole before she was any where near so up a tree she went.

I don't normally hunt her from trees but I thought she would have a better chance at hitting one or two without me handicapping her. Anyway, we beat the hedge towards her and she dropped like a stone, we were about 30 yards up the field and by the time we got there which was about 10 seconds I guess, she was gone. No bird, no bunny, no bell. So I clambered through the hedge to get her

on the other side but, Oh S**t, no bird, no bunny, no bell. So out came the telemetry and a sweep round with the yaggi andOh Yes...NO SIGNAL!!!

That's put the cat amongst the pigeons, now was it the transmitter or the receiver? It worked before I left home, I'll have to do it the old way, use my eyes and ears, but nothing. By now one and a half hours had passed and still no bird. I need help methinks so home I went and phoned David. "What do you mean he's still fishing!" back down the field I went, 'til dark but nothing. That's it then, I've lost my girlie and I really thought I wouldn't see her again so off I went home empty gloved.

David hadn't rung back so I rang him again, he was in this time but hadn't been given the message (thanks Emma!).

Anyway, over he came with his telemetry in case there was a problem with mine, back down the field for an hour or so and still nothing, so it had to be the other bit on the bird. There was no more we could do then, but go home and try again in the morning.

At 05:30 the alarm goes off, no problem getting up as I had to go and find my pride and joy so it's down the stairs, kettle on, pot of tea made and I got



Nathan up.

At 06:28 the mobile rings, David and Lyn are two minutes from the house, they were there for me yet again, so by 06:35 we were back down the field.

The plan was drawn and we were off searching, an hour passed, we had walked three fields and then my phone went, it was Lyn. They were standing next to a tree with a female Harris in it, and would I like to nip over a couple of fields and get her. I couldn't get there quick enough. I left Nathan to follow on. I got into the right field and saw her sitting in a large, dead tree, wiped the tears off my face, because believe me when Lyn phoned I cried with joy. I put a chick on my fist and tried to whistle but nothing would come out so I used a bought one, she was out of that three and straight to me. I don't know who was the happiest, Amber or me, but does it matter at the end of the day? I'd got my baby back and we were back at my house for tea and biccies before 08:30.

Thank you, again, David and Lyn from the bottom of my (and Ambers') heart. □

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