

The **Falcons**
& Raptor Conservation Magazine

ISSUE 50

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A Season to Remember



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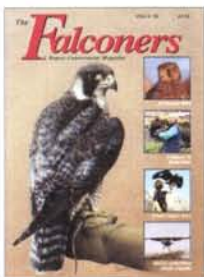
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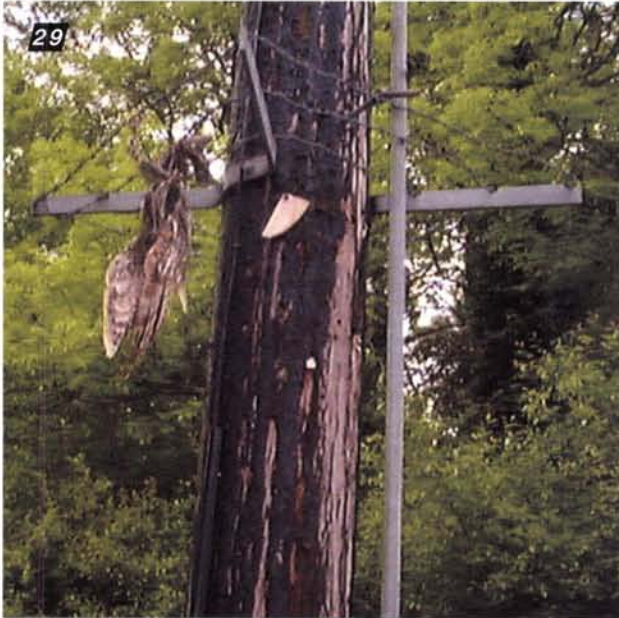
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Hello All,

Did I blink and miss the summer or is it yet to come? The weather seems determined to undermine falconry, confusing breeding birds with sharp changes in temperature and leaving the warmer weather until we are trying to get the birds weight down for the coming season. These problems will have to be addressed if things continue as they are, suggestions welcome.

The new look to the magazine has been well received, subscriptions are up and confidence among advertisers continues to increase. We have a new subscriptions agency (Webscribe), they can take your details by 'phone, Fax, e-mail and even an on-line renewal service is available if you have internet access.

We are hoping to include a questionnaire in the **next issue** to ascertain **your** views about the magazine. Please take time to fill it in and return it to us, the results will tell us **exactly** what you want from us and can help us improve our product even further.

One last and very important thing.

DON'T FORGET THE MARCH on the 22nd September. Please show your support, we could be next. Solidarity is paramount amongst participants of all field sports.

*Keep Falconry Safe.
Lyn and David*

*Next issue on sale
November 1st 2002*

News & Products

Falconer's Business Takes Off With Help From Business Link

A West Country falconer is turning his passion for birds of prey into a commercial venture - with help from experts at Business Link.

Nick Wallis, aged 40, trains birds of prey at his home in Kingston Seymour near Yatton and displays them at countryside events across the Bristol area. They include falcons, buzzards, kestrels, owls and hawks.

Until recently his feathered pursuits have been little more than a hobby but demand for his services has been growing.

So Nick decided to turn his interest in wildlife into a commercial venture but soon realised he lacked the necessary skills to launch his new business, N W Falconry. So he turned to Business Link and its business support manager Terry Gilbert for help.

"I enrolled on a business start-up course which covered a range of issues including business plans, accounts and I learned how to cost my services properly," said Nick.

"It was very useful to be able to bounce ideas off Terry and he was able to advise me on how to proceed and grow my business. One of the major benefits was learning how much to charge my customers. Previously I had been charging a third of what other people were asking. I now charge a sensible amount for a service I am proud of.

"The start-up course has given me the confidence to go out and expand my business. I now plan to breed and sell birds and open a number of bird parks in garden centres in the area. Families could make more of a day out of their visit to garden centres and find out more about birds of prey.

"I am currently negotiating with a garden centre in the Bristol area which has shown an interest in my plans. The idea is to employ and train someone to run each centre which would leave me free to continue with my bird displays and bird walks, which people can go on and fly my hawks."

Terry Gilbert said: "We offered Nick one-to-one business advice through the New Deal scheme. This allows him to test his business foundations and build up customers with a safety net provided by the Employment Service.

"It has given him the confidence to have a go at starting up his own business. Launching a new venture can be a daunting and stressful experience, particularly for people like Nick who has limited business experience.

"Business Link can offer the support and expertise to make this process as easy as possible and help ensure that firm business foundations are laid."



Chinese Dino-Bird Fossils Arrive in London

Urgent conservation work to commence before first European public display.

Thirteen Dino-Bird fossils, never before seen in Europe, have arrived direct from China for vital conservation by the world-leading Palaeontology Conservation Unit (PCU) at The Natural History Museum.

To clean and restore the fragile Dino-Bird fossils, some of which are the only examples of their particular species in existence, the PCU team will use modern contaminant removal methods involving chemicals and synthetic resins applied under microscope. Beautifully preserved, yet only paper-thin in places, the fossils distinctly display delicate feathers surrounding the skeletons of small meat-eating dinosaurs.

"With millions of years in the making, specimens can be destroyed in minutes if the wrong treatments are applied. Work must be meticulously planned. However, with its world-class facilities and unmatched team of experts, the PCU is perfectly suited to working on such scientifically significant material," commented Lorraine Cornish, Acting Head of The Natural History Museum's Palaeontology Conservation Unit.

For more than 140 years scientists argued modern birds were linked to dinosaurs but lacked the proof. In 2000 local farmers in Liaoning, northeast China unearthed the final piece of the puzzle, the affectionately named Fuzzy Raptor. With characteristics of a predatory raptor, dinosaur and Archaeopteryx, the earliest bird, and with feathers too, Fuzzy Raptor's, exciting discovery finally solved one of nature's great mysteries how birds evolved from meat-eating dinosaurs.

Fuzzy Raptor, plus another 12 Dino-Bird fossils, loaned by the Geological Museum of China, will feature in Dino-Birds: The Feathered Dinosaurs of China, The Natural History Museum's new exhibition, which opens on 18 July.

"The international respect held for The Natural History Museum's Palaeontology Department certainly helped secure the loan of the Dino-Bird fossils from China. The team are thrilled at the prospect of making these exquisite fossils look their best for the public in July," said Associate Keeper of Palaeontology, Dr Angela Milner, who personally collected the Dino-Bird fossils from China.

Game and Country Fair Launches in Malvern

The Malvern hills in Worcestershire is to be the setting for the UK's first ever Game and Country Fair of its kind to celebrate the vibrant life and work in the countryside.

Organised by Outdoor Events Ltd. and endorsed by the Country Landowners Association (CLA), the National Farmers Union (NFU) and the Countryside Alliance (CA), the event will run over three days from 6-8th September 2002.

In promoting the countryside and all aspects of rural life, the Game and Country Fair will host variety of features and exhibitors across a range of interests including country sports (including fishing and shooting), food, drink and fashion.

The event will also provide a forum for discussions on key issues affecting the countryside such as land usage and access.

Some of the top exhibitors signed up for the event at the Three Counties Showground to date include: Hereford Land Rover and CD Bramall Subaru; country fashions including Jeeves Country Clothing and P&D Taylor Designs; Fisherman's Workshop and other manufacturers of fishing luggage and clothing; a wide range of food and drink such as Farmhouse Direct, Gwatkin Cider and Hughes Fresh Fruit; arts and crafts; gardening equipment and furniture, gun makers and much, much more.

The showground itself sits at the foot of the Malvern Hills and provided 80 acres of flat outdoor exhibition space and excellent facilities. The ground is centrally located providing easy access for visitors from all over the country as well as more locally. The town of Malvern itself is nationally renowned for its heritage, picturesque scenery and has become a travel destination because of its good hotels and restaurants.

"We are very much looking forward to the first of many outdoor shows this September with the launch of The Game and Country Fair. We have had a great response from all sorts of people who are keen to get involved with the show, all of whom will be able to provide the public with a variety of interests and attractions. We are confident of having a good turn out as the countryside is such an important issue at the moment"

Peregrine Eggs Receive Smart Protection

The RSPCA aimed to deter wildlife burglars by marking this year's newly laid peregrine falcon eggs with a unique traceable liquid known as SmartWater.

A persistently targeted falcon's nest, at an undisclosed location in south Shropshire, is also under surveillance in a bid to protect the eggs from thieves who have struck each year for the past decade. The chicks will also be marked with SmartWater once they have hatched, as part of a combined operation by the RSPCA and the Shropshire Peregrine Group.

The clear, non-hazardous, water-based solution is simply painted on and is virtually undetectable under normal lighting. It cannot be removed and the liquid is encoded forensically with a unique SmartWater Identification Number that will identify any eggs or chicks that fall foul of nest robbers.

RSPCA West Central Regional Superintendent Tom Austin said: "These thieves will try anything to steal the eggs. However, we are determined to protect them and see that the baby peregrine falcons

emerge from their nest unscathed this year."

John Turner, from the Shropshire Peregrine Group, said volunteers had watched this particular nest, along with 13 other peregrine nesting sites around the county, to ensure the safety of the eggs.

"This nest is particularly vulnerable and we are pleased to be working with the RSPCA to protect these eggs. It has been very disappointing for the thieves to be successful for so many years. Hopefully the investment in SmartWater will now bring an end to their illegal looting," said Turner.

Phil Cleary of SmartWater said: "Over 100 criminals have now been convicted because of SmartWater technology and, as a result, it is now regarded as one of the most powerful deterrents in the country."

Posters are being put up around the nesting site to outline the SmartWater operation. Thieves hailing from outside the area will thus be made aware the eggs are marked.



Hawk Conservancy Receives Major Tourism Awards

Staff and volunteers and The Hawk Conservancy and Country Park nr Andover, have won praise for their efforts, which have resulted in the Conservancy receiving a major national tourism award as well as a regional award for the second time.

The fact that the Conservancy had won a silver medal in the national England for Excellence awards, given recently at a ceremony at the the Royal Opera House in London, and had twice become Southern Tourist Board regional winner was largely down to what staff and volunteers put into assisting the Conservancy on a day-to-day basis said Conservancy director Ashley Smith.

"We draw people from a wide cross section of society - our regular volunteers include an actress, a chemist, a carpenter, a retired bank employee, and a former London print worker," he explained.

"They all give their time and energy

regularly so we invited them all to come along to see the regional award given to us by Southern Tourist Board chairman, Michael Green and then the staff came with me to London to receive the national award.

"It's a big thing for us to win the national award, one of the ultimate tourism awards in the country, and we have won the regional award both times we have entered. Although we are primarily a conservation centre, appealing to tourists is vital to fund the work that we do.

Hope for Hen Harrier

English Nature has become increasingly concerned about the status of the Hen Harrier in England. Following a prolonged decline, the English population now consists of just a handful of breeding pairs, and there is the very real danger that the species will become extinct as a breeding bird within the next

few years. English Nature is committed to restoring the English population and had set up a hen harrier project which will run for at least three years. The project aims to:

Monitor the remaining hen harrier population in England and their breeding success.

Identify the factors that are currently restricting hen harrier numbers.

Take subsequent measures to increase the hen harrier population in England.

In mid April 35 hen harriers were seen across the moors of northern England in a fortnight.

Sir Martin Doughty, English Natures Chair said "This is very encouraging news as we launch our hen harrier project, and we hope that these birds will be able to successfully breed and produce chicks in safety. The hen harrier is one of England's most

spectacular birds of prey and nothing can be more memorable than seeing males 'sky dancing' in front of prospective mates in their annual courtship displays.

As part of this survey, English Nature would like to hear from anyone who has seen hen harriers in England this Spring and Summer. Please phone **Richard Saunders, Hen Harrier Project Officer, English Nature Cumbria Team.**
Telephone: 01539 792800

New Club for Young Falconers

The English School of Falconry has set up, as far as they are aware, the first ever, club aimed exclusively at youngsters. There are two age groups; 7-11 years called the Eyass and 11 - 16yrs called the Falcons. The meetings are held once a month on a Saturday, from 10am to 12.30pm.



Under the guidance of practised falconers they will be able to learn about training methods, have a go at making some equipment and work towards certificates.

There are lots of other activities and it is designed to be fun for the children, whilst promoting good falconry practice. At the end of a year each age group will have the opportunity to perform their own flying demonstrations.

The English School of Falconry is based at Shuttleworth in Old Warden Park.

For more information please ring 01767 627527.

Midland Game & Country Sports Fair

Terry Large, national chairman of the Campaign for Falconry will be taking centre stage in the Falconry Arena at this year's Midland Game & Country Sports Fair at Weston Park, Weston-under-Lizard, on Saturday and Sunday, September 14th & 15th. He has acquired something of a celebrity reputation in the raptor world with TV talks and appearances, including on BBC's Clarissa and the Countryman, and Terry will be offering the public - particularly youngsters - real hands on instruction with various Birds of Prey.

The Midlands has built a reputation as possibly the country's biggest and best falconry show. There will be a full programme of events in the arena on both days, organised as usual by the Midland's resident falconer, Bryan Paterson from Bridgnorth.

"One of our main aims will be to try and convey to youngsters just how magnificent these birds are and just what a huge thrill it can be

to fly and work them," said Bryan. "And we think the best way of doing this is to let them have a go for themselves...because it is certainly something they will never forget."

Display and presentations already scheduled for inclusion in the programme include: a parade of birds of prey, training birds of prey, the Falconer's Ferret and the Falconers dog, the Hawk

birds of prey. They are the only team to fly up to five Harris' Hawks simultaneously and invite the audience into the arena to get a "mouses-eye view" of an eagle owl in flight - so close to the ground you can feel its feathers brush your face.

Young visitors to this years Midland Game Fair are in for a treat. Anyone aged 16 years or under will be able to have a go at a full complement of field sports...free of charge!

"We have never had any sort of theme before at the Midland," said Fair organiser, Tony Scutt, "but 2002 is now officially the 'Year of Youth' as far as we are concerned.

Free have a go activities, or organisations

arranging them already confirmed include: angling, airgunning, British Association for Shooting and Conservation, clay shooting, Countryside Alliance, falconry, ferrets, Game Conservancy, Gundogs, heavy horses, lurchers, pet dog shows & agility competitions, Salmon and Trout Association and terriers.



Board, Raptor Rescue on the Barn Owl and regular Falconry forums.

Also Ray and Wendy Alier will be making a welcome return to this year's Midland Game Fair.

'Ye Olde Redtail Falconry Display' is one of the most exciting and innovative of shows and a must for anyone with even a passing interest in



Barbour employees queue up to help countryside conservation initiative

Employees at leading outdoor country clothing brand Barbour, are queuing up to help kick start the company's new initiative aimed at supporting conservation in the British countryside.

Over 50 factory and office workers handed in their old wax cotton jackets at the company's factory shop in South Shields to have them reconditioned and given away to deserving conservation charities across Britain.

Aptly named, Jack'et all in for Countryside Conservation, the campaign aims to encourage members of the public to dig out their old wax jackets and hand them into participating country clothing retailers.

Barbour believes there are hundreds of thousands of jackets out there hanging in peoples wardrobes, garages and potting sheds and the company wants to bring them back to life.

Says, Barbour's Andrew Geere, "We asked a number of countryside conservation charities if they would be interested in receiving reconditioned, re-waxed jackets and the response was astounding."

"Most of these organisations have thousands volunteers working in the outdoors and they presently receive no help with the provision of protective clothing."

"We have the resources and expertise to do something about that and all we need is the publics help."

Of course the Barbour wax jacket is the ultimate recyclable product, with careful maintenance they can give many years of service.

As an added incentive Barbour will reward everyone with a special Donation Certificate and give them £25.00 off any new Barbour wax jacket purchase from the company's exciting and newly expanded collection, so you don't have to worry about going into the countryside unprotected.

The 'Jack'et all in' campaign will be rolled out to the general public in September when hundreds of countryside retailers will display collection points in their stores.

Any countryside conservation organisations not yet part of the scheme can contact Keeley Holmes on 0191 265 7765 and apply to become a beneficiary.

Hospital Opening is Culmination of Years of Effort

After years of effort in fund raising and building, the long-awaited official opening of the new bird of prey hospital at the Hawk Conservancy by HRH the Duke of Gloucester, took place on July 4.

Ever since it was started as the Weyhill Zoo in 1966 by Reg and Hilary Smith, the Hawk Conservancy has played a major role in caring for injured birds of prey and, wherever possible, treating them and releasing them back to the wild.

The new hospital facility is home to The Hawk Conservancy Trust. With a board of six Trustees, including Chris Packham, the naturalist and broadcaster, this newly formed charity will not only continue to care for injured birds, but also aim to do much more in the field of bird of prey research.

Under the day to day control

of directors Ashley Smith and Campbell Murn, who have many years experience of birds of prey, including studying species in their native habitats, the hospital facility will expand and grow, becoming a centre of excellence and base of international renown for raptor research. It is will continue to working alongside universities and colleges, directing students into research on birds of prey.

Each year the Trust already receives nearly 200 wild-injured birds of prey, brought in by farmers, members of the public, the RSPCA and Police Wildlife Liaison Officers. Many of these are orphaned birds, in addition to those injured by cars, fences, powerlines or other accidents. All these patients form the nucleus of a growing database on British birds of prey, and also lead to continuing improvements in veterinary and rehabilitation



techniques.

The Trust runs numerous projects for British birds of prey, and future plans include the development of mobile release aviaries for rehabilitated birds, plus habitat restoration and ecological studies. The key focus of the Trust will be on British species and habitats.

The Trust will also become more involved in international efforts to save rare and

threatened species. Projects director Campbell Murn is at work on an international scheme to help conserve the Indian White-backed Vulture, a critically endangered species on the verge of extinction.

The Trustees and directors are excited about the future potential of the Trust, and it's contribution to the areas of conservation, education and research into birds of prey.

Were you at the Falconers' Fair?

The 2002 Falconers' Fair saw yet another new venue. Everybody seemed to be very pleased with it though. Situated on a hill which went up in tiers, one side of the fair overlooked the other, with the flying ground in between. It gave a different perspective on the flying depending upon where you were. There was the usual abundance of stalls, with all falconry requirements well catered for. Chetwynd Park will also be the venue for next years Falconers' Fair, details will be in the magazine early next year.



Audience participation featured highly at this years Fair with Terry Large helping youngsters experience the thrill of holding a bird of prey.



Jemima Parry-Jones was at the Fair again this year, giving her usual high quality displays.



This little bird has been the star of the show for a long time now, reputedly the most famous kestrel in the world. Nobody was disappointed this year either.



As you can see, the art marquee attracted the usual crowds, all of whom were treated to a feast of visual delights.



Once again audience participation is encouraged, this time with the hounds.

Guy Wallace imparts valuable advice to spectators about 'Falconry Dogs' in his own inimitable style.



As last year, this Golden Eagle demonstrated the true majesty and sheer size of its genre.



The weathering ground was once again well presented and well manned.

Independent Bird Register.

LIST OF LOST, FOUND, REUNITED AND STOLEN BIRDS FROM THE IBR. 1 MARCH 2002 AND 9 JULY 2002

DEAD - 50 birds reported or found dead

FOUND (Total 78)

BARN OWL	x19
BENGAL EAGLE OWL	
COMMON BUZZARD	IBxx461W
COMMON BUZZARD	5Lxx95W
COMMON BUZZARD	5Wxx2W
COMMON BUZZARD	38xxDOEW
COMMON BUZZARD	60xxDOEW + IBR
COMMON BUZZARD	15xxR95
COMMON BUZZARD	UKxx207 + 58xx
COMMON BUZZARD	4Jxx96W
COOPERS HAWK	1Gxx7W
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL	IBxx92Z
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL	IBxx2137Z
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL	81xx
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL	17xx7650
GOSHAWK	18xx0
GOSHAWK	06xx2V
GREAT GREY OWL	
HARRIS HAWK	IBxx8360V
HARRIS HAWK	7Nxx99W + IBR
HARRIS HAWK	2Axx99W + IBR
HARRIS HAWK	IBxx9355W
HARRIS HAWK	IBxx8352V
HARRIS HAWK	13xx2
HARRIS HAWK	8Wxx97X
HARRIS HAWK	6Jxx99W
HARRIS HAWK	CRxxW
HARRIS HAWK	16xxS
HARRIS HAWK	5Axx
HARRIS HAWK	3Sxx1W
HARRIS HAWK	2LxxW98
HONEY BUZZARD	25xxW
KESTREL	IBxx1095S
KESTREL	01xxC98T

KESTREL	10xx7S
KESTREL	13xxC00S
KESTREL	2RxxH98S
KESTREL	56xxS00S
KESTREL	15xxC98S
KESTREL	16xx8S
LANNER FALCON	26xxW
LANNER FALCON	9Jxx01W
SAKER FALCON	IBxx458W
SAKER FALCON	IBxx561W
SAKER FALCON	2RxxK00W + IBR
SAKER FALCON	31xxW
SAKER FALCON	9Dxx5W
SAKER FALCON	22xx8W + IBR
SAKER FALCON	59xxW
SAKER FALCON	2Pxx00W
SNOWY OWL	
SPARROWHAWK	DAxx430
UNKNOWN BOP	28xxA95W

LOST (Total 98)

BARN OWL	x13
COMMON BUZZARD	x3
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL	
FERRUGINOUS HAWK	
GOSHAWK	x2
GYR/PEREGRINE HYBRID	
GYR/SAKER FALCON	x4
HARRIS HAWK	x17
INDIAN SCOPS OWL	
KESTREL	x9
LANNER FALCON	x10
LANNER/SAKER FALCON	
LITTLE OWL	x2
LUGGER/LANNER FALCON	
MERLIN	x2
PEREGRINE FALCON	x6

PEREGRINE/BARBARY HYBRID	
PEREGRINE/PRAIRIE HYBRID	
PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID	x6
PERLIN	
RED-TAILED HAWK	x5
SAKER FALCON	x5
SAKER/LANNER HYBRID	
SPARROWHAWK	

REUNITED (Total 75)

BARN OWL	x7
CARACARA	
COMMON BUZZARD	x2
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL	x4
FERRUGINOUS HAWK	
GOSHAWK	x3
GYR/LANNER FALCON	x2
HARRIS HAWK	x18
KESTREL	x3
KESTREL	x2
LANNER FALCON	x12
LUGGER FALCON	
PEREGRINE & HYBRID	x10
RED-TAILED HAWK	x3
SAKER FALCON	x7
STEPPE EAGLE	x2

STOLEN

BARN OWL	IBR18929U
CAR KEYS	IBR16727Z
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL	
GOSHAWK	22997W
MERLIN	8138R
SAKER FALCON	10GTA02W
SPARROWHAWK	294R

Independent Bird Register

<http://www.ibr.org.uk>

44 (0)870 60 88 500

*Immature
kestrel*



An Unsung Hero

Alan Gates

For some months now Kestrel moments have been periodically surfacing in my mind, most of these images or short bursts of motion pictures are from the distant past. They are in the main, fond rose tinted memories of sunny carefree days of my youth.

Why they are floating to the surface of my recollection, I have no idea, and to be honest I don't give a dam, they are just pleasant daydreams that take me back to a less complex time of British falconry.

In the mid sixties falconry was practised by less than two hundred individuals in the UK, good hawks and rarer still good falcons were extremely difficult to come by. Goshawks were

the most available European species, and were obtained freshly trapped from our continental falconry colleagues. Peregrines were available to a lucky few who had contacts in the middle east as well as some Sakers. Bird dealers supplied a large variety of species from all corners of the globe, including some species completely unknown in scientific ornithological circles.

Hard work keeping a brood fed.



Ready to leave the eyrie.



Shunned Dealers

To the wise, dealers in general were shunned, but to the inexperienced their advertisements were tempting. Sadly these encounters often resulted in the purchase of pitiful individuals that required more intensive care than falconry training.

My initiation into the art was a little more idyllic, thank heavens. I was already bird orientated so when my intentions turned towards Kestrels my knowledge was sufficient to allow me a number of options.

School summer holidays seemed to be endless and I spent many hours laid amongst the sea pinks on top of the granite sea cliffs, watching parent Kestrels hunting rock pipits and basking lizards on which to feed their hungry brood. I marvelled at their agility and adaptable hunting methods, they were good entertainment as I lay cooking in the hot summer sun.

Beginners Hawk

I had no conception of falconry when a young eyes Kestrel 'fell into my lap', I had thoughts of a free flying pet hawk but this expanded the moment I found literature on falconry in my local library. The general consensus of the few modern volumes that I read at the time, indicated that the Kestrel was the beginners hawk due more to its availability rather than its suitability.

Its failings were listed as being a 'little too delicate' for a beginner trying to come to grips with weight management, but its overriding downside was its lack of hunting prowess. In other words as a beginner progressed through the manning and free

flight stages they were to be frustrated in trying to enter their Kestrel at quarry.

The Common Buzzard was considered a more suitable candidate, more robust and more likely to catch something. Despite its name it was far from common and its restricted distribution within the British Isles pushed it into second place to the European Kestrel. With 70,000 breeding pairs she was by far the commonest bird of prey on mainland Britain proving her versatile adaptability she thrived whilst other raptor species struggled to regain lost ground.

All these facts and figures were above my head when I started out, I had a hawk and I had a book. What more could a creative young mind need? I had no great plans I just took each day and each step as they came.

With abundant enthusiasm the little Kestrel was manned rock solid but the early elation of free flight in our orchid fields produced daisy cutting flights and my enthusiasm began to wear a little thin. I longed for the aerial displays which had entertained me on the sea cliffs and



WHAT?!! You want me to go up there?

Taking a rest from the hungry family





Young sea cliff eyass kestrels, ready for training

realised what we lacked was sea breeze, my Kestrel need LIFT.

Our western beach was backed by large rolling sand dunes, one known as the 'Hundred Footer' gave just the elevation and breeze I was looking for. At my first attempt, stood aloft with a stiff breeze filling my nostrils with ozone, I bottled out. This was a whole different ball game from my sheltered orchid fields, I would play safe and connect the creance.

Well I certainly got what I was after, my little Kestrel rocketed skywards with the creance, all one hundred yards of it streaming after her. When the reel

Exhilaration

From then on I cast caution and my Kestrel to the wind, free flight became exhilarating for both of us. Stood at the top of the 'Hundred Footer' I would open my hand and release the grip on her jesses, she would kick forward and skywards. I would race down the dune and produce the lure before she was lost in the heavens. As my confidence grew and she learnt the drill, I would make her wait and follow me a little way before giving her the reward.

I loved every minute of it and I'm sure she did too, but she never showed any

"Then the full folly of my actions became apparent, I was flying my Kestrel like a kite and becoming only too aware of the strain on her legs."

emptied I was glad the end was tied, for having never dispensed the full line before my anxiety momentary peaked with the reassuring jerk. Then the full folly of my actions became apparent, I was flying my Kestrel like a kite and becoming only too aware of the strain on her legs. I threw out the lure and to my amazement she dropped like a stone.

inclination to hunt. To be honest neither did I. I was just wrapped up in the exhilaration of her new power of flight.

Most falconers pre-domestic breeding learnt their basic skills with the Kestrel, only a handful successfully entered these little falcons at wild quarry. The most interesting account I found was published in 'The Falconer', The Journal of the British Falconers Club,



Missed! Where the hell did that go?

December, Volume 3, No.5. 1958.
Notes on the Career of a Female Kestrel
by David Ried-Henry.

In this article David explained his torturous route to succeed in taking starling with his female Kestrel. Most flights were goshawk style from the fist, and he entered her at puddle bathing starlings which were hampered by their wet plumage when surprised by the Kestrel. Once she succeeded with a few wet starlings he finally took a few dry birds feeding in ditches or hedgerows.

I feel this little falcon has been unjustly down graded, after all she was consigned to the beginners bird at a time when modern falconry was probably at its most stagnant.

Suitable or not, a great many falconers today may never have taken that first step and to them she is still thought of with great affection. I feel that to dismiss her out of hand smacks to much of a bad workman blaming his tools.

In the last forty years advances in domestic breeding, have reproduced large numbers of new and old world raptors suitable for the pursuit of wild game. Much more suitable species are available to the beginner which has all but removed the Kestrel from British falconry. These advances in domestic breeding have been coupled alongside a new approach to training methods. A few talented individuals have expanded our knowledge of training with recipe imprints and operant conditioning. In this period I have seen species once

denigrated by our peers, today are now revered as good hunting hawks.

I am not advocating that the Kestrel is a super falcon waiting to be discovered, my feeling is that we have not yet found the key to unlock her full potential. She awaits a rare individual with that unique talent of lateral thinking to apply it in her direction.

If anyone doubts what results modern training methods can have in improved performance look no further than the dazzling display of one little Kestrel at the British Falconry Fair. For a handful

“If anyone doubts what results modern training methods can have in improved performance look no further than the dazzling display of one little Kestrel at the British Falconry Fair.”

of years this little falcon has stopped everyone in their tracks, no matter how engrossed the conversation or haggling may be, everyone at the Fair watches his performance. He is the little star of the South East Falconry Group's excellent display and out performs anything flown in the arena every year.



My first kestrel

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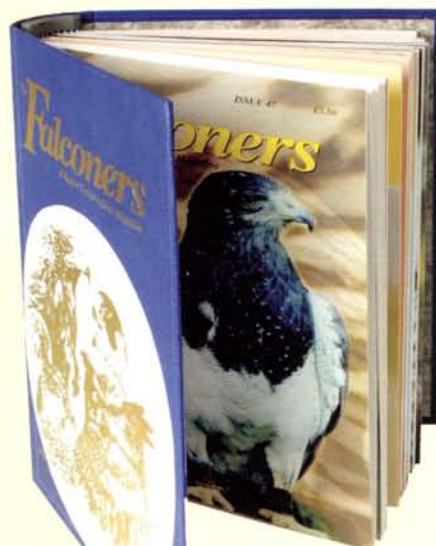
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A Paradise for the

Martin Foulds

Mahazat as Sayd reserve in Saudi Arabia is the second largest fenced reserve in the world, located on the arid plains of western Saudi Arabia. The reserve has been protected since 1989 and covers an area of 2321km. The protection from human disturbance within the reserve has attracted many species of birds. In particular birds of prey to use the reserve for breeding, and one of these is the Lappet-faced vulture.

The Lappet-faced vulture has apparently been quick in reacting to the favourable nesting and roosting sites available and the conditions within the reserve.

In 1992 only four active nest sites were counted, whereas today over 26 sites have been recorded.

Mahazat as Sayd probably contains the highest density of Lappet-faced vultures in the world, and when I recently visited the reserve it was clearly obvious why.

I was in the Saudi Arabia carrying out research for my MPhil/PhD on the Eurasian griffon vulture and while there my supervisor, Dr Shobrak who is carrying out research on the Lappet-faced vulture, invited me to accompany him on a visit to Mahazat as Sayd. I jumped at the chance as I had heard so much about the reserve and the breathtaking scenes you can see of the Lappet-faced.

My Experience

From my experience while in Africa studying vultures I was expecting to see a maximum one or two of these vultures, perhaps flying or at active nest sites, or at a fresh carcass, but what took place was unbelievable.

This is a vulture that does not nest on cliffs but in trees, and in the kingdom mainly acacia trees.

As we left camp before sunrise after a



I thought how could such a small tree support such a large bird? I could not comprehend this amazing sight in front of me.

traditional Arabian breakfast, we headed deep into the desert in search of the Lappet-faced vulture. No roads just miles and miles of acacia trees and sand. How, I thought, could anything survive in such primitive conditions?

Truly Incredible

Suddenly after some two hours driving in the four wheel drive there, in the distance, were not one but many acacia trees proudly standing erect. Perched on top were masses

of lappet-faced vultures.

They also sat proud as if to say to me "well you have heard about us here, now believe your eyes" and truly, what I was seeing was incredible.

I thought how could such a small tree support such a large bird? I could not comprehend this amazing sight in front of me. Was this a dream or was what I have been told before my visit a reality in front of me, unfolding before my very eyes?

We needed to get closer to the birds to identify the coloured wing tags that were

Lappet-faced Vulture



already in place and we needed to do a confirmed count of adults, juveniles and chicks. As we approached the vast array of acacia trees suddenly, they shook from side to side causing silent sand beneath to explode into a tremendous dust storm. There in front of my very eyes over sixty lappet-faced vultures began filling the Arabian sky, blacking out the bright Arabian sun with their dark plumage.

Hitting the thermals they went higher and higher, hardly flapping their powerful wings at all, but using nature's natural elements to gain height. Luckily for us, before they gained height, data was successfully collected although our hearts did stop occasionally.

Now was the opportunity to assess the success rate of numbers of chick hatchings, and this was also proving to be higher than the year before.

Once we collected all the relevant



information we decided to move out of the area as quickly as possible.

Stop and Wait

We stopped some distance away and waited for these impressive vultures to return from the high thermals of travel to their home of the acacia trees of Mahazat as Sayd.

By the time all the birds had returned to their nest sites the Arabian sun was

beginning to set.

We returned to camp exhausted from the day's heat of the desert, but what a very rewarding day it was.

I will probably never see such a sight again but what I did see will remain with me for always, an experience as a vulture biologist I will never forget.

Mahazat as Sayd is truly a paradise for the Lappet-faced vulture.

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Dealing with the Topic of Reintroduction

Martin Foulds

With an ever increasing amount of environmental and countryside management courses springing up in colleges all over the UK, one of the most common questions asked by students to me as an educator on birds of prey is if you captive breed birds of prey do you release back to the wild, or are you involved in any release programmes?

Because this is a popular topic in colleges in animal care it is an increasing area that students need to cover in their course work so it is important to deal with this subject head on and clear. There are many ways of achieving this and here I will cover some of the key important points to highlight which I often use when asked this frequent question by students and hope it may be of use to all you educators out there.

Reintroduction is a word that students have heard of but do they fully understand the correct definition?

Define what Reintroduction means

It is an attempt to establish a species in an area which was once part of its historical range, but from which it has been extirpated or become extinct.

Aims

The principal aim of reintroduction should be to establish a viable free ranging population of whatever species released in the wild, which has become globally or locally extinct.

It should be reintroduced within the species former habitat and range and should preferably require minimal long-term management.

Objectives

To enhance the long term survival of a species or re-establish a keystone species in the ecological or culture sense in a ecosystem, or to maintain or restore natural biodiversity and provide long term economic benefits to the local communities and provide conservation awareness, or a combination of these.

Just covering the aims and objectives can open up all sorts of open discussions.

Once this has been covered explain the important areas involved in setting up a reintroduction programme.

Pre Project Research

The first and most important area to look at is to carry out a feasibility study and background research, then to examine previous re-introductions of the same or perhaps similar species undertaken.

Then examine the proposed release

site/sites, looking for example at the availability of suitable habitat and the importance of it being long-term.

Then look at the availability of suitable release stock of the species, examine the legal requirements involved which can involve a lot of red tape, the financial support available to the project, co-operation from institutions and very importantly public relations and education, which for example with the Californian condor and the Eurasian griffon vulture in Europe played a vital role in their reintroduction success and still does.

Once this has all been accomplished and after a release has been carried out, monitoring of the species has to be maintained, examining areas like success rate, mortality, intervention if required, continuous habitat protection and public relation activities, cost, media coverage and long-term regular publications in scientific journals on the species which will ascertain the continuous population status, etc. of the released species. ■

Summary

What I have briefly covered here, and I mean briefly, is only skimming the surface and as an educator you can go further in depth into the subject if you wish, but highlighting these areas that I have covered will hopefully aid you when asked to lecture on this common question within your role as an educator.

Above all as I state to the students that I lecture the term reintroduction is not always about releasing of a species, but in many situations about long-term research on a species before even the question of release is considered and only then if the criteria is met for a possible release programme to begin. Reintroduction because of the long-term financial commitments and active collaboration so desperately required from governmental and NGO's from all over the world is not always a viable option for a majority of endangered species.

For further help on how to tackle this ever-increasing topic you can ask for an excellent booklet on the subject by writing to

**IUCN Publications Services Unit
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Mountain Challenge

Martin Hollinshead



Dig deep and use all your imagination to conjure up the most extreme setting for a castle you can put together. Make it something right out of a fantasy novel or throw us into Indiana Jones territory. Or maybe it's the setting for a computer game, a game where huge vultures fly back and forth against a backdrop of snow capped peaks. Now go back and emphasise all the impossible features - use a big black marker to make them bold - make your castle something truly wild, something that could never exist. Pretty impressive. Now let's visit the real thing - Burg Hohenwerfen in Austria.

1994 - First Impressions

I've been involved with some impressive falconry centres, but when I stepped off the train at Werfen and got my first view of Burg Hohenwerfen I felt myself groping for a seat. That I'd seen the place before was slow in dawning, but there was no mistake, this was Schloss Adler of the film 'Where Eagles Dare'. Many of you will know the film - the wartime action movie with Richard Burton and Clint Eastwood - and many of you will remember the hair-raising cable car sequence, and a castle that, to borrow a line from the script, 'can only be reached by eagles'. If you've seen the film I don't need to say much more - the place is just staggering. Okay, the film does exaggerate a little, the place isn't quite as 'eagles only' as depicted, nevertheless, I defy anyone to look at it and prevent their mouth dropping open with astonishment. The castle clings to the tip of its own steep-sided mountain slap in the middle of the most dramatic valley you've ever seen. Left and right, colossal mountains rise vertically straight into high alpine country, a land of marmots, chamois and golden eagles - the mountains of the film's opening sequence. The whole scene is unreal, a fantasy. But there it is.

e - Where Eagles Dare

The Plan

My arrival at Hohenwerfen was down to business. I had been roped in to help get something special launched. My old friend Josef Hiebeler had decided, after much cajoling from the local authorities, to launch a new falconry centre. There had been raptors at the castle before but local officials had visited Hiebeler's other centre at a castle in Lower Austria and wanted something of what was being achieved there: big birds, high flying and lots of drama. And they wanted history and costumes, the full tourist attraction package. They wanted everything, and that's what had to be delivered.

By the time my partner Tonya and I arrived most of the building and landscaping had been done, now the emphasis had to be placed on getting the flying to work. That there were going to be difficulties was

obvious just looking at the place, but it was the white knuckle drive up to the castle itself that truly drummed the message home.

Hohenwerfen wasn't built to take any kind of wheeled vehicle: its entrances are narrow and the track to it so steep as to be almost vertical in places. You don't make mistakes on this drive, you grip the steering wheel and pray! You approach quickly through a gradually climbing forest track - vertically sided of course - and then put your foot down as you hit the steeper section, lining up for the 'two



inches to spare' archways as you go. Small cars

that stop on this driveway go

no further, and even in a 4x4 you bargain with the devil for a clean run. This is a castle where building materials are flown in by helicopter! From a flying demonstration point of view it added up to one thing: if things went wrong they would go VERY wrong. Here, 'lost bird' took on a whole new meaning, in fact the nature of the terrain meant that a bird could be quite close yet extremely difficult to get to or even locate. Telemetry? Not much comfort here.

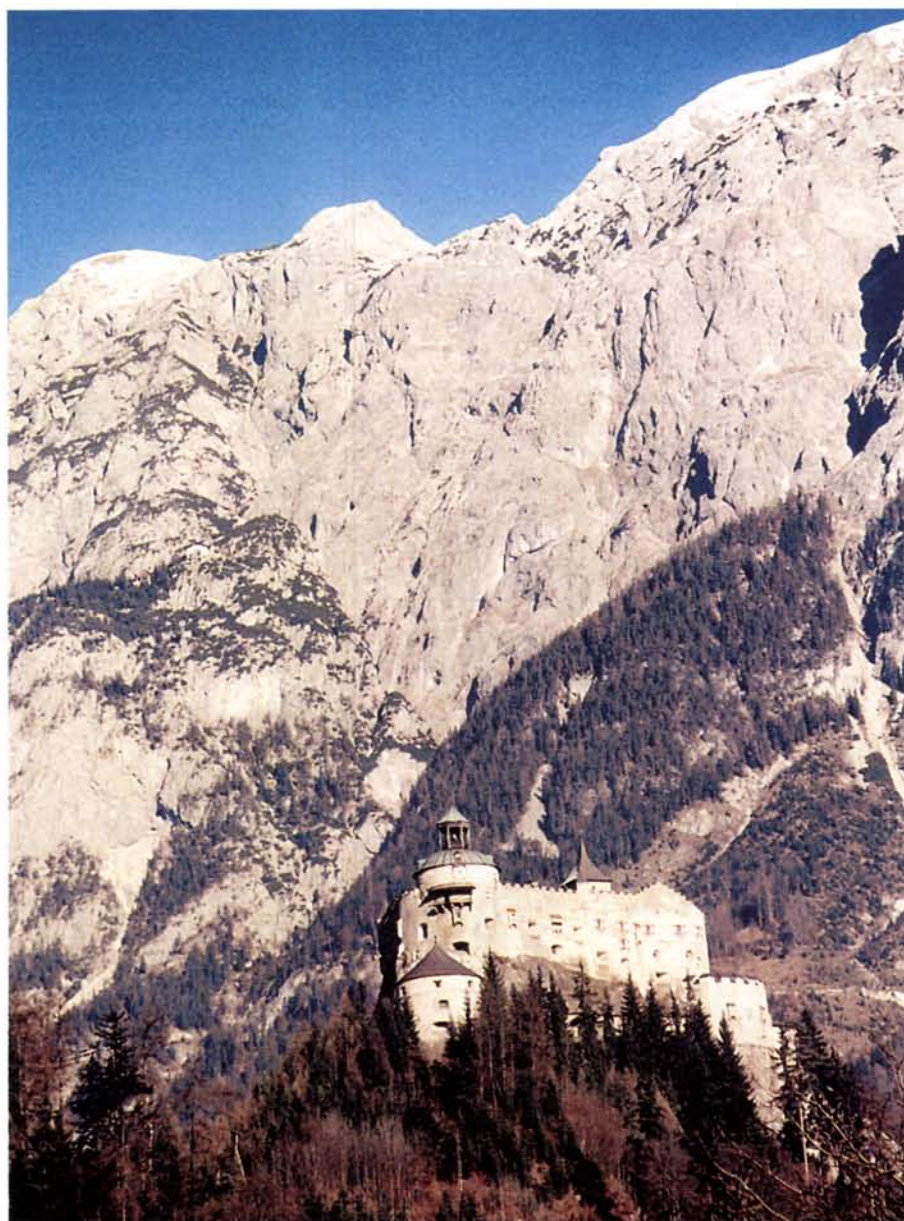
A coward would have tried to keep the action within the castle grounds. A coward would have had some pretty boring flying. Hiebeler was clear, he didn't want to hide from the risks, he wanted to turn them to his advantage. In this extraordinary setting he wanted extraordinary flying - nothing else would do.

Positive Thinking

Once you throw yourself into a project ready to turn impossible into fantastic, then a new world unfolds. All the difficulties - all Hohenwerfen's strange features - become allies. The castle had countless ideas just begging to be examined. Just the way the place was laid out was enough to set the brain buzzing. The castle is essentially a building of climbing tiered courtyards. It's like an elaborate wedding cake, it just keeps growing upwards. There's hardly more than a

"You don't make mistakes on this drive, you grip the wheel and pray!"





few yards of level ground on the whole place; if you weren't climbing steps, you were leaning against the gradient.

The most interesting flight set-up to come from all of this had to be The Vulture Courtyard. Overlooking the display area was an enclosed courtyard. Here it was decided to house the European griffons and fly them from a small platform, 'the plank', as it became known, which extended out from a tiny doorway in the vertical wall. It was quite insane: no barriers, no way of hanging onto anything, and a drop that would have made any mistake your final performance. But we were looking for impact and this the set-up most certainly gave. The crowd, far below, facing away from the castle and watching one section of the demonstration come to a close, were alerted to the door opening and turned to see man and vulture perched high on the platform. Then out would fly the first vulture, straight over their heads and into the valley, the next following moments later.

They looked fantastic against the mountains, great prehistoric creatures in a 'Land That Time Forgot' setting. Reality returned with their flight back to the castle. They had to come - all eight foot across of them - back to that tiny platform. And it was to be no normal landing, the boss wanted a glove touchdown. Flying griffons to the glove is not the easiest of things anywhere: the act is more of catching the bird as it comes in on trust and then just stops flying! There is often much shuffling about involved as the hand, held right over your head to get the bird aiming high, is suddenly dropped into a scooping motion. Now imagine this on the 'plank'. And a typical demonstration might require several flights to and from the platform before the final curtain. The power of positive thinking!

The Daily Tornado

Helping with this vulture flying, indeed, all the flying, was the special Hohenwerfen wind. Strong, galeforce, violent - none come close to capturing the kind of wind we had at Hohenwerfen. It would cruise in every day just in time for the afternoon display. And what an entrance. It would rush up the castle's mountainsides, hit the high walls that surrounded the display area and keep going like a runaway train. I thought I knew about good lift until I got some of this. Many of the birds were enlightened too: flap, flap, flap across the demo lawn, up a little, over the wall and - WHAM wings were almost torn off as a bungee cord sent the bird hurtling straight into the heavens! Now that's lift! You can imagine the lure flying: straight up, straight down. It's surprising how fast historical boots can move!

Star Performers

Under such conditions adventurous birds become showstoppers and we had one or two Top Guns who just grabbed the wind and went mad. All the various groups - falcons, buteos, eagles - had their ace flyers. From the falcons it was an adult male lugger. This bird did things I've never seen a falcon do. The shapes he became defied belief. And his attack angles were truly jet fighter stuff. This little, nothing special to look at bird turned the normal up and down stuff into a routine that had spectators hobbling away with strained necks.

But the queen of the castle was a second-year female golden eagle. Like most of the older birds, she had been trained at the centre in Lower Austria, where during one of our stays, she had been named after Tonya, which at times did cause some me some concern: 'Wow, did you see Tonya perform?' This eagle had been given the full castle treatment. Hand-reared, she was flying as soon as her wings could carry her and the elevated setting of the other centre meant she was soon learning the ropes with experienced vulture teachers. She had a season of hunting under her belt too, with all of that flying skill being tested against hares in various parts of Europe. For all her youth, this bird had seen and done a lot, could really handle herself. And she was ready to prove it.

If you've only seen golden eagles on flat display lawns, lumbering back and forth, it's hard to imagine what a high-flying demonstration bird is capable of. It's impossible to grasp its power and agility, the vertical, twisting, turning mouth-opening stoops, the outruns and rocketing climbs, the low-level sound barrier breaking passes - just the ability to be everywhere at once. In this land of wild alpine eagles, Tonya wanted to deliver the message with a piledriver.

The routine was to give her some freedom then call her in to a few high-thrown rewards. It was sharp, fast flying and it kept the giant falcon on her toes, but it was all just a warm up for the final curtain. Hidden in a tube buried in a bank

was a fox skin lure. At just the right moment, almost like flushing grouse under a game hawk, the lure's cord was grabbed and the lure taken tearing across the display lawn. Nothing so special? Visualise a teeny-weenie circle of turf - the only bit of level ground available to you - and surround it with a few hundred grass-sitting spectators all desperate to get as close the action. Now think of a female eagle coming straight down out of the sky like a charging bull and just bursting into that tiny arena. Believe me, it was

lawn an impossible place to spot any bird struggling to gain height - or losing it. Behind, the entire bulk of the castle cut out everything. Any bird that wasn't high, was the devil to keep track of. Inevitably, some birds had to be retrieved from the treacherous slopes below the castle, and the odd one from the village.

The odd circular set-up and wind also brought the inexperienced flyers other surprises. A bird could leave the front castle under relatively calm conditions and be

"...Lifted by strong winds, the bird's next appearance could be as a dot..."

sledgehammer impact. And pulling it off, the timing, the running, the calculating for where the lure HAD to be taken? Well it was like trying to land a 747 on a ping pong table!

Wobbly Wings

But the wind wasn't all fun. For the less than confident flyer it could be a bit overpowering. Some of the young birds - birds who had not had the advantage of learning their skills in a more balanced environment - did occasionally come unstuck. It wasn't so much the wind as their inability to read it properly and calculate for the odd conditions created by the castle's circular mountain: good lift in one spot didn't necessarily mean good lift in another.

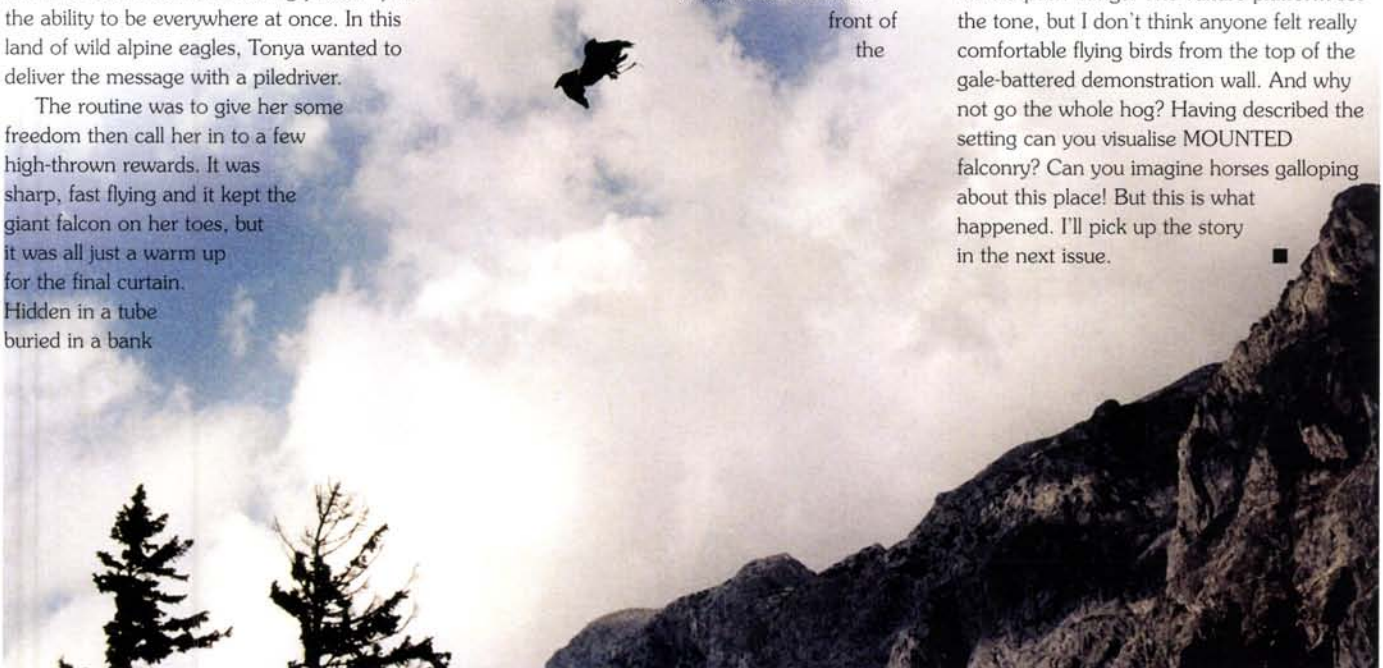
It was with poor flyers that the display lawn showed its biggest weakness. Visibility was frightful. The high wall that surrounded the centre's courtyard, the wall used by the wind, made the whole

front of the

catapulted into the clouds at the back. We had numerous emergency landings in the castle's uppermost courtyard (a beer garden, or in the film a helicopter pad). With time, most of the birds would occasionally go right around the castle, and, of course, those that did would be completely lost from view until they reappeared on the other side of the display lawn. And the reappearance could take a long time. And it could be unpredictable. Lifted by strong winds, the bird's next appearance could be as a dot, high over the castle itself, from there to stoop past towers - and restaurant windows - to make a grand entrance. You just never knew.

Special Displays

That first summer was truly hard work. The investment was massive and everything just had to come together - and quickly. At times we did push things. The vulture platform set the tone, but I don't think anyone felt really comfortable flying birds from the top of the gale-battered demonstration wall. And why not go the whole hog? Having described the setting can you visualise MOUNTED falconry? Can you imagine horses galloping about this place! But this is what happened. I'll pick up the story in the next issue. ■



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Electrocution

Colin Callaby

I have made a little headway into problems faced by Falconers, I am now corresponding with a senior Engineer at the Department of Trade and Industry, who is taking a bit of interest. I feel I must try to get as many numbers of people as possible who have had similar problems as myself because it seems the individual Electric companies play the problem down and the real amount of fatalities is not understood. Below is a picture of a tawny Owl I found hanging below an Electric pole in the village in which I live.

This is probably not the first time you have heard about yet another hawk being electrocuted and I fear it will not be the last. There will always be the freak case, a 'can't be helped' scenario. But this is a million miles from a dead cert, so to speak. There are thousands of old style transformer boxes around with bare wires, easily close enough for medium to large birds to land on, and virtually every one which tries will be electrocuted. In this day and age surely this is not good enough.

In early spring of 2000 my male Harris received a shock, which flung him to the ditch below. Fortunately the shock had thrown him clear and remarkably he recovered. I invited 24Seven, (the electric company responsible) to make an effort to insulate these wires to prevent such a thing happening again. They wrote back saying these old type transformers were gradually being replaced but were not prepared to make a special effort for me. They said when this one eventually came up for replacement hopefully this would solve my problem, then went on to say they would not be held responsible if such a fate happened to my bird and to just keep it away from that pole. I did keep it away from that pole and this year, whilst flying a different bird on a different piece of land my bird was Electrocuted. By sheer chance I was videoing my bird and the whole horrible episode was captured on film. I had asked 24Seven for their help and they refused. I had told them that if they were not prepared to insulate this dangerous appliance and I did eventually have a bird killed, I would expect them to pay compensation. Now this has

happened they simply refuse to pay. After 24Seven were made aware I was doing an interview with a local T.V. station, they decided to meet with me and then agreed to insulate one local transformer, this was all I originally asked of them, had they acted then, my bird would probably be alive today. It is futile saying just keep the bird away from these death traps. They are everywhere. I have permission to fly my bird on several different pieces of ground and every piece has a death trap waiting for the wrong thing to happen at the wrong time. But this is not just about my bird. I know many more falconers' birds have suffered the same fate.

What about all the wild birds. Who speaks for them? If a farmer pollutes a stream and kills the fish, he is prosecuted big time. If peoples dogs cocked a leg up on an electric pole and got electrocuted there would be hell to play, so why are these wires left live un-insulated to kill every bird that bridges the gap with it's wings. These boxes would be an ideal lookout post for a 'stillhunting' Kestrel, Barn Owl, Tawny Owl, or Buzzard. Just because 99% of these fatalities go unnoticed it does not make their deaths acceptable. It seems most electric companies do not intend to take the matter seriously. The only way forward I can see is for them to be forced by law to eventually phase out all close



contact bare wires by replacing them with insulated cables. But more importantly to be immediately accountable for any dangerous apparatus brought to their attention by any group, individual or interested party. To get anyone to listen you need to hit them with numbers. No one is interested in just talking

common sense. You need to prove everything with figures. If we, as falconers can collate all the evidence we know of, regarding deaths amongst our birds that may well be a pointer as to how many native wild birds are killed annually. There seems to be nobody willing to speak for them, not even the RSPB they gave up at the first hurdle. They agreed the evidence is difficult to find as most carcasses drop unseen into the undergrowth below and are quickly cleared away by foxes. They conclude their letter to me by saying "It would therefore render us unable to help with the problem as the evidence we would need would be on wild birds protected by the wildlife & countryside act 1981"

If Falconers can supply information as to the amount of birds killed that we know of, it could be an indicator of the amount of wild birds killed, and could be seen as another positive thing fieldsports have done for wildlife. I now have an interested party who is a senior engineer at the Department of Trade and Industry who is keen to hear of numbers of fatalities or injuries of Falconers birds. These people have great input into shaping regulations that electric companies have to work to, so please, any incidents (your bird or a friends) killed or injured on bare wires or transformers, do let me know. You can email me on colbev@ccallaby.freemove.co.uk or email Jenny from the Independent Bird Register at, <http://www.ibr.org.uk/> or phone the IBR on 08706 088500 or write to, Colin Callaby, c/o IBR the White House Business Centre, Hatton Green, Warwick, CV35 7LA.

All I need is rough location (village or town), type of bird killed or injured, when it happened and a contact name or phone number. All information will of course be treated in confidence. ■



Aerodynamics of Flight

Tizi Hodson

With no intention of delving into the mathematics of flight, present day Flight Instructors could learn so much more about their own subject, should they spend some time in the Falconry field.

25 years ago, after having to learn the theory of flight to pass some flight test exams, I learnt the more mechanical ways to increase lift (needed to sustain flight) meant increasing drag (reduces effectiveness of flight), often in greater proportion than the lift was increased.

For a take off, maximum thrust and lift are required and minimum drag, but with increased power (aircraft) or increased wing beats (hawks), drag is increased proportionally.

For a high speed landing with no power or wing beats, but diving downhill, there is least drag, but here, drag is needed. An aircraft will have its flaps lowered, a hawk will open its airbrakes, (wings)

Induced drag is the greatest drag of all, which occurs at low speed. The lower the speed of aircraft or hawk, the more the induced drag and vice versa. As speed is increased past the 'known speed', the induced drag goes.

Flying into a strong headwind makes little progress in a slow aircraft or Hawk, so to reduce the winds' advantage, an aircraft will be flown lower (since wind velocity usually increases with increasing altitude.) If a single engined aircraft is running badly, coughing

and spluttering over perhaps hostile terrain where a landing is not practicable, this same sick aircraft can often be 'nursed' home, by flying a foot or so above the ground where induced drag is eliminated. (See diagram)

On the first of many occasions in Africa in 1982 I watched a cormorant dive into a river, seize a fish and fly out of the water. (It has always been common knowledge that a soaking wet bird cannot fly) These cormorants would emerge from the water, with their fish attached and fly six inches above the water, flapping their wings for fifty yards or so, then fly straight up to their intended tree, or even back to their nest with the catch.

The fifty yards low flight was necessary, as by flying so low, they were removing the induced drag whilst giving their feathers time to dry.

Steep and Windy

In 1990, on an exceptionally windy day of plus forty knots, I took my kestrel, Xraysay, to the top of a golf course in Royston, Herts. The climb to the top was steep and exceedingly windy on reaching the top, making it almost impossible to stand upright. I released Xraysay at the top and in a few seconds, with barely wing beat, she was downwind, well over a mile away, barely visible, even with high powered binoculars.

I let her catch her breath as I could see she had settled in a tree, then called her to the lure. She took off from the tree, towards me, but got swept further away as the wind was faster than her level flight speed. She was now in a tree still further away and seemed to be calculating something, bobbing her head

up and down, unfolding and refolding her wings. She then folded her wings and dived to the ground, then flying inches above the ground back to me with no induced drag. After some thirty minutes this 'low level' or tactical flying, she arrived back at the top of the golf course - for her mouse.

Amazing determination, but to calculate the 'ground effect - decreased induced drag' for a hawk who has not attended classroom lectures or been allowed the help of calculators?!

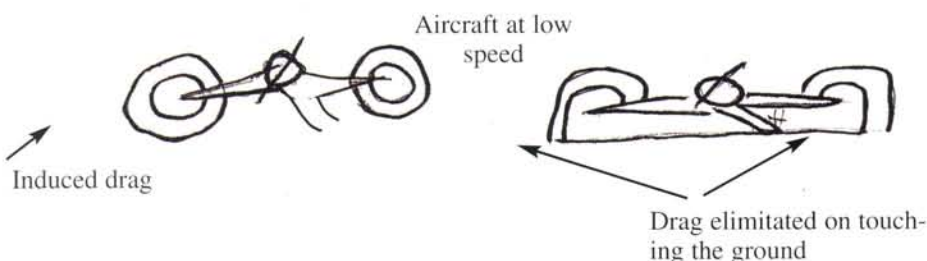
Further effects of flying without induced drag were whilst watching my eagle Xarra, flying in Scotland. Most of 'my' hunting land was vast with hills so steep I called them mountains. Glider pilots learn in a classroom an easy way to stay aloft without thermalling under large thick clouds, is to ridge soar, or to slope soar.

When wind travels over a ridge of hills at right angles, it is forced upward (on the windward side) and naturally downward on the leeward side. Therefore to fly alongside the windward side means the glider is staying airborne with no effort, thermalling or 'engine!' Should the glider fly over the ridge, hill or mountain it will lose the 'free' lift and land, (or crash). Hence the expression "Is the ridge working today?" from glider pilots about to take a launch.

With the wind in the opposite direction, there is no lift (updraughts— so without an engine, a glider cannot stay aloft unless there are clouds with working thermals, or even unseen thermals (blue thermals). Hence glider pilots may not bother trying to glide at airports when the wind is in the wrong direction.

Slope Soaring

In Scotland, releasing Xarra at the top of a long ridge of mountains, she would often slope soar for hours, on the windward side of the mountain, usually a foot or so above the ground. With her seven foot wingspan she could not have flapped her wings from the height she flew, but with no induced drag,



from the proximity of the ground, and using the updraught (on the windward side) she covered incredible distances at speed far greater than those she could have sustained in level flight flapping those long wings. On making contact with a rabbit, she needed to slow right down immediately to avoid being pulled head over tail. This she accomplished by putting on her airbrakes - raising her wings straight out, which acted as a parachute - instant stoppability.

At the beginning of the season I witnessed another spectacular flight, again from Xraysay, some ten years after her first 'low level flight'.

It was her second flight after a long moult and she was not fit. Her first flight had been

the day before where I sat her on a football post and called her twenty feet to the lure with a 'Ho'. She flew easily on a wind-free day. However, this day had a stiff breeze. I offered her the same high football post, she got swept away with a strong and unexpected gust of wind, to the top of a house, which was not far away, but difficult to approach with the fences, gardens and hedges in the way.

I let her get her breath back for a few minutes, then called her once, threw the lure up as high as I could and let it fall, then watched her reaction.

She seemed to be contemplating the How of getting back. Again she looked up and down, bobbed her head and opened and

closed her wings, looking similar to a child making a first head dive from a high board. She finally closed her wings and dived vertically toward the ground, gaining speed then flew in ground effect (with no induced drag) once again back to me. She flapped her wings to clear the hedges separating her flight path from me and made the journey otherwise as a glider. (No engine - no wingbeats)

What puzzles me most is that we the Intelligent Human race need to attend classrooms and read textbooks to rediscover the obvious things in life but Hawks have the same knowledge built in or perhaps we credit them with too little intelligence? ■

COUNTRYSIDE ALLIANCE REPORT FROM THE EMAIL GRASS-ROUTE

1. THE NEXT TWO MONTHS

Between now and the end of September there is a huge opportunity for us all. I want in this note to explain to you why. It is now certain that the process of consultation which the Government is running will include three days of hearings in September, in public and within the precincts of Parliament. These three days, which will be chaired by Alun Michael, the Minister responsible, will be centred on evidence to be given by experts on questions put to them. The starting point will be the Burns Inquiry.

The questions to be addressed by those experts will relate to the areas of utility, cruelty and the practical aspects of any legislation based on utility and the need to avoid cruelty. The experts will be examined by us and others on their evidence. The proceedings will be available to the television channels, including BBC Parliament.

These three days will be extremely important and provide the means to present in public the case for hunting in all its forms and coursing and to bring out how much damage would be caused to the countryside if those activities were banned. The team we will field will need to be backed up by a smooth working (and unavoidably costly) infra-structure so that we are as well prepared as possible and get the most out of those days from every standpoint and particularly from a public relations standpoint. Richard Burge, Chief Executive of the Alliance, will apply his energies and experience to the provision and smooth operation of that infra-structure.

Access to the proceedings will be available to the public on a ticket basis and we will be given a ticket allocation. It is very important that we use the whole of our allocation and that throughout the country the proceedings are followed, and are seen to be followed, by friends and supporters gathered round TV sets which can pick up satellite or cable signals. Further information about that aspect will be given out in due course.

These public proceedings will take place on 9th, 10th and 11th September, i.e. two working weeks before the March on 22 September. For this reason it is now even more important that the March is the largest that London has ever seen. It is also important that it is demonstrably a march by peaceful but determined people pressing for hunting and all rural matters to be dealt with fairly, without prejudice and on the evidence.

It is not possible to over emphasise the significance of the coming two months. We owe it to our countryside and each other to make the most of it and to do so in ways which attract warm public sympathy and support.

John Jackson
Chairman, Countryside Alliance

2. 'PUBLIC HEARINGS' SUCCESS VINDICATES CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

We cannot underestimate the importance of the above announcement - it is, after all, what the CA Campaign for Hunting has been calling for since the consultation process began. We also should not be afraid to give credit to DEFRA for the openness of their approach on this issue.

While there is no place for complacency it is a clear indication that common sense could yet prevail and the perseverance and discipline, which at times we all find extremely hard to bear, now stands a chance of paying off.

This step is unprecedented in any previous Government consultation process. We are under no illusion about the perils of politics and we are taking nothing for granted but the Government cannot ignore the weight of our evidence and knows it must act transparently in finding a solution. That solution must reflect facts, not prejudices and ignorance.

Anything short of this will provoke a response never before seen in this country in modern times, as a significant minority rises up against the spin and deceit of ignorant and deeply intolerant politicians. The real test of our resolve will come should the Government unwisely try to introduce a Bill to ban, or allow the banning, of any form of legal hunting. We must, and will, remain alert for deceit and betrayal and will not rest until a fair future is found for the freedom to hunt.

We must continue to campaign throughout the country to show that we are ordinary decent people, that hunting has nothing to hide and that we can withstand the pressure as tension mounts towards the conclusion of this stage of the campaign.

We must keep our nerve, not be tempted by rash acts that feel good but fail to gain the public's confidence and trust. Developing public support must continue to be a priority over the coming months.

This announcement is a small step in the right direction; we all have our part to play in keeping up the pressure.

See you on the 22nd of September; the March will be the call to arms, a warning to Government to beware of acting unjustly against liberty and livelihood. Let us make it a date this country will always remember.

Sam Butler
Chairman, CA Campaign for Hunting



Should we all be committed?

Brian Smith

A dog is for life, not just for Christmas. We've all seen the sign in the back window of somebody's car, and yet there are people out there who seem unable to liken the notion to the keeping of a bird of prey.

Commitment, according to the Concise English dictionary means: financial obligation, liability, responsibility.

The financial obligation is something that we cannot distance ourselves from, if we are to feed, house and care for our birds adequately. It is a rare falconer who would sooner have his or her bird put down, than spend whatever sums of money are demanded by their local veterinary surgeon to attend to an injury. The exception to this is, of course, the bird that has sustained injury to a degree whereby there will clearly be no quality of life. Indeed, the keeping of a bird of prey, in common with almost any animal, be it working or pet, has a financial obligation attached.

Liability is, once again, a facet of animal ownership. (Assuming that we do in fact truly own our birds?) In a number of senses our birds can be a liability. These can range from the financial liability through to the liability of a bird that takes a shine to next door's ducks or rabbit (fine if you can sneak it out of the garden before they notice!) or a liability on our time and resources, all of which should be required knowledge to the would-be falconer.

Let us, for a moment longer, take a look at a not unrealistic scenario. You are on a hunting trip with your bird when it is involved in a collision with sheep netting, barbed wire or some other 'what the hell was that' obstacle. Your beloved bird is badly injured, and subsequently, on inspection by a vet, the prognosis is that your bird can never be flown again due to the severity of its injuries. What do you do? Do you have the bird put down on the

spot? Do you have your bird patched up and keep fingers crossed or do you have your bird repaired and keep it, if viable, for breeding purposes. If your bird happens to be a common buzzard or kestrel, would you consider the breeding scenario, bearing in mind the ready availability of these species and their lack of real standing in the Harris'/ Goshawk / Redtail orientated world of falconry in which we currently find ourselves? Probably not, I think, and yet, do we not owe this bird something? And this, I think, is where we drift naturally into responsibility.

I have just such a bird. She is a twelve-year-old female Harris' Hawk who, following a hunting accident as described above was retired, in her prime, at the tender age of seven. She had given me six and a half years of pleasure and dedicated service. We, along with the peroxide poofs, (my two albino ferrets) worked as a partnership and it is my belief that there was a mutual understanding of the expected result of a day out.

In my case, my bird appeared to be seriously injured following this incident and it was subsequently found to be so. My best friend (other than my wife, if she happens to read this!) had to be retired on that day. For five years she has resided in a large aviary, (my bird, not my wife!) to which has recently been added a fine male of her species, for their mutual pleasure!

Certainly there have been times when I have thought of moving her on, as I care little for breeding other than to produce one of her progeny so that I may continue to work with the wonderful lineage of this bird. I have been tempted, and resisted. This bird gave me her trust; she graced me with her hunting skills and gave me some of the finest sport that I have seen in my years as a falconer.

Do I not owe her the very best that I can offer for the rest of her life, albeit a life that, in her case, will almost certainly be cut short due to the lasting result of her injuries? I believe so. And yet, I hear on all

too many occasions of people who have bought their first bird on which they intend to 'learn' prior to moving on. What then happens to these birds? Where and who do they get moved to? Who really wants them? Where the hell is the commitment in that? I know that we cannot necessarily start off with the bird that, ultimately, we wish to fly for many years. The thought of a beginner with a Golden Eagle would make most experienced falconers break into a cold sweat. Neither would anybody be expected to build up a vast collection of birds rather than sell them to good and caring homes when they decide to try another bird and another challenge. It may be worth remembering that it is a wise man who has his afterthoughts first - try to plan ahead.

I believe that this is where the Harris' comes into play so well. Whatever your feelings for the species, and I for one think they are, at full fitness, truly superb, it cannot be denied that for the novice who does not aspire to anything more than flying and hunting a single species, possibly only at the weekend, the Harris' is unbeatable. With its amazing temperament and natural ability, why then would any novice feel the need to move on. If the bird you fly does your bidding and gives you what you require, why change it? It must surely be better to own one bird who receives all of your commitment and reaches a high level of fitness, than to try flying two or more birds at a substantially lower degree of fitness?

I would consider it maybe to be a failing of mine, that I find it desperately difficult to part with any bird due to these feelings of responsibility and commitment. I do however, make it clear to beginners, just what they are taking on and the commitment required. I am about to sell a falcon for whom I am unable to find time due to present work pressures and I know that it will hurt like hell. This pain is eased in knowing that he will go only to somebody with the time and commitment to do him justice, as he did for me. ■

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23 August Teacher's Open Day (see 7 June)

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A Season to Remember

Jean Wileman

Just one more week I have been telling myself and then I will stop – and then again, well, perhaps just a few more days. It has been such a rewarding season and it is difficult to let it go. It had started slowly and uncertainly but then it took off magically and I have been on an adrenalin high. Finally I have called it a day and my Hawk is now sitting in her aviary preparing to shed her feathers for only the second time.

I had dreamed of owning and hunting a bird of prey for so many years. When I finally moved to an area where I had access to the sort of land suitable for good flying, I booked a week's course at The National Birds of Prey Centre, Newent. At the end of that course I was fired with even greater enthusiasm. I was also aware that I had much to learn. I started designing my aviary and took my drawings along to a local timber merchant who looked at them with interest. "So what are we keeping then – no don't tell me, exotic birds, canaries?"

I approached Martin Jones with some trepidation – would he entrust one of his birds into my unskilled hands? After I had convinced him I was serious and knew what I was getting myself into, my name went on the waiting list. I went to see him when the birds had hatched and saw the young chicks on a monitor screen from the nesting area being fed by the parent birds. One of those downy bundles would one day be mine.

Everything seemed under control when a thought occurred – would I need permission to build. I was reassured locally. It was a sectional structure, no one ever bothered to get permission to build garden sheds. However, it would be difficult to hide the fact I was keeping a hawk and if

subsequently submitted. I could now probably qualify for an "O" level in technical drawing. The local Parish Council were interested and also had to give permission. However, everything was approved and with a great sigh of relief, the aviary was erected and I waited expectantly and



some anti-hunting type wanted to make mischief at some point in the future, well it just seemed prudent to check it out. The local Planning Officer was very friendly, but very firm. I lived in a protected area and planning permission would be required. Forms and plans in such fine detail were required and

impatently for Martin to release the bird. Came the great day and I collected Sable, my very own Harris Hawk. Just getting her out of the traveling box was fun – and first blood to Sable! The period of acclimatization and subsequent training went well. She was a beautiful bird, and very greedy. I learned the hard way that she was much faster than I, and transferring food from my right hand to the glove made my eyes water more than once. Waiting for a Harris Hawk to finish her breakfast with one foot securely clutching part of her breakfast rat and the other firmly embedded in my right hand was an interesting and somewhat painful experience.

"I approached Martin Jones with some trepidation - would he entrust one of his birds into my unskilled hands?"

ber

The small puncture holes that I later examined in my skin bore no relationship to the pain that had been inflicted. No pain no gain!

That very special day when I took off the leash and swivel and removed her mews jesses to allow her to fly free for the very first time will always remain with me. I hoped I had done enough to let her go. I hoped her weight was low enough. What if she flew off or just sat high in a tree? I prayed that she would return. And she did – it was one of the most exciting moments of my life. Not just that, but she chatted to me excitedly. It seemed that she was as thrilled with life as I was. We have never cast a backward glance.

Fly in the Ointment

There was only one fly which landed squarely in the ointment. Foot and Mouth disease. It seemed that just as she was getting going so well, the disaster struck. I had farmed sheep some many years earlier and knew how serious this outbreak could be.

I took a bucket of disinfectant with me to clean my boots on entering farmland, but within a week it was quite clear that even that precaution was inadequate and an unfair risk for the local farmers and so I stopped flying.

Soon all public footpaths across farmland were closed off. A local couple over whose land I had been flying kindly offered me the use of a paddock adjoining their house. It was filled with very old trees and on a very steep slope. Tramping and scrambling up and down and around this slope would keep me as fit as a flea and would be Sable's training ground for 2001.

She had done little work in trees and on several occasions she misjudged her landings and clung to tree trunks looking like a poor excuse for a woodpecker, but she soon learned to fly in and out and around them like an expert. She would drop down vertically from a high branch on to my fist for a morsel of food and then off again and I hoped she would remember this when hunting started for real. She never attempted to fly out of the paddock, though she did shoot off at a



She had done little work in trees and on several occasions she misjudged her landings and clung to tree trunks looking like a poor excuse for a woodpecker...

lone rabbit one day - but missed. An encouraging effort though. There were few rabbits to be seen as myxomatosis had again decimated the local rabbit population. A high spot for Sable came when a grey squirrel goaded her into action. This creature ran back and forth along the bough of a tree right in full view of her; perhaps she was too near an unseen nest. She sat motionless on my fist until suddenly she took off. The squirrel shot off at speed and Sable's inexperience showed – she didn't quite make contact. Not quite,

but very nearly and she returned with a skinny bit of squirrel tail in her mouth. There is no doubt that she became bored with that paddock after a while and I knew how she felt. The season ended without any game. I was very fearful that her first abortive season would have a serious impact on her hunting abilities for the future.

Picking her up for the 2001/2 season was an exciting time. Jessed and belled, it was back to the training field and everything moved a little faster and with rather more

confidence for both of us. Two months went by and she had caught nothing. And then I had the opportunity to go on to more farmland. We were very early one frosty morning. I stopped as we entered the fields and prepared her to fly. I cast her off into a tree and was pushing the jesses into the loops on my bag when she took off and was down on her first rabbit. I was overjoyed and particularly pleased for her. I gave her a good feed from her first kill, retrieved her to my glove and we went home. She sat on her bow perch in the garden for an hour or two looking like the cat who had caught the prize goldfish.

New Lease of Life

Since then she hasn't looked back. She has chased pheasant through the woods with me in hot pursuit – not quite connected with one yet, but next year.... She has flown at rabbit full tilt through the middle of a pig-wire fence (not be encouraged I will grant you) whilst I held my breath and imagined all sorts of feather problems on her return. I found her under the hedge some yards (sorry metres) beyond the wire, triumphantly sitting upon her quarry. She is so clever at tucking up her wings and no damage was incurred save for a small chip to her leg. Damage was incurred, however, the day she caught a very large grey squirrel (though I prefer the title tree-rat – they are rightly described 90% public relations and 10% rat). It was so large I thought she had a young rabbit. I didn't know grey squirrels could growl. This one was growling like an angry tom cat – Sable was trying to eat it at the time and so I suppose it was understandable. I was horrified to see that the squirrel had latched on to her right leg and was biting her as hard as it could. I grabbed a piece from my bag and made in towards Sable, showing her the piece and inviting her to the glove. Greedy as ever, she came to the glove releasing the squirrel,

which in turn let go of her leg which was cut and bleeding. A trip to the vet, and we returned some hours later, Sable pumped full of antibiotics, somewhat battered and bandaged, but unbowed. We have tree-rats in profusion locally which is very bad news for the wild bird population. Incidentally, this encounter does not seem to have stopped Sable hunting them with even great enthusiasm.

to get this ungrateful beast out of its self imposed trap and, just as I was trying to get it to stand, I heard a familiar tinkling of bells and there was Sable sitting on a large fallen tree looking at me somewhat quizzically. I think she thought I was preparing for her the biggest breakfast of all time. However, I was overjoyed. For once she had come to find me instead of the other way around. And she waited patiently with me as I rubbed the

“I was horrified to see that the squirrel had latched on to her right leg and was biting her as hard as it could.”

One day we put up a pheasant and off she went through the woods with me in hot pursuit. I lost sight of her and stopped to listen for her bells. Nothing! I stood still for a while but could hear nothing at all. I pushed my way through deep bramble and gorse bushes to see if I could find her, still nothing. What I did find was a young ewe teg on its back, head pointing down the slope, perfectly motionless and securely caught by brambles. It was

creature's numbed legs to restore circulation and finally got it back on its legs and pushed it out into the field to stagger off and rejoin the flock.

I am now accustomed to returning home with a bag heavy with rabbit and it is a good feeling. In this, her first real hunting season, I have pulled her out of a large rabbit burrow, where she was being firmly pulled down by a big buck. One wing down the hole and other luckily spread-eagled and fighting hard to hold her ground. Out she came with rabbit still attached. I have lost count of the times I have had to lift her out from beneath thick bramble bushes, she firmly latched on to her quarry, with those early instructions to “approach her slowly and carefully” ringing in my ears – words not forgotten Mark (Parker) but sometimes temporarily on hold! No doubt the stories will increase as time goes on and I am conscious that all Falconers have similar and better tales to tell. I have experienced the absolute joy of stalking quietly through woodland with my hawk following above me in the trees, or standing quietly and patiently together as we merge and become part of nature's background. I am proud to be part of this ancient and noble sport and I hope no politician is going to tell me I am no longer allowed to do this because I am prepared to fight any move which might compromise and threaten my freedom (and that of others) to walk with my hawk and to be a partner with her in what she does naturally and so splendidly.

I am proud of my lovely Harris with whom I feel a great bond and who gives me so much joy. I admire her hunting skills, respect and give thanks for the existence of her prey. It has been her first true hunting season following on from the frustrations of the previous year and a good season too. I am sad to see its end. However, next autumn....



obvious it had been there struggling for some hours and I thought at first it was dead but then its eyes blinked nervously at me and so I set about trying to cut it free. As I was doing so I wondered why I was bothering with this sheep when my hawk was somewhere out there doing/eating/pursuing who knows what. I whistled her, a futile hope that she might hear me. It took me nearly 15 minutes



Your Letters

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TELEPHONE NUMBERS ON TAGS

Dear Lyn,

Colin Forshaw (in issue 49) was lucky to get his Harris back. But a lot of his anguish would have been avoided if he had had his phone number clearly marked on the bird. The Hawk Board, through its Code of Welfare and Husbandry for Birds of Prey and Owls, recommends to all clubs to include in their Codes of Conduct the requirement to tag or mark all raptors with their owners telephone number. Copies of this are obtainable free of charge through the clubs. It is also strongly suggested to use telemetry. Even Harris, killing in cover, can be hard to find and can be lost long enough to cause a problem.

Kind regards

Nick Fox

MAGAZINE ENLIGHTENMENT

Dear Lyn and David,

I have only just subscribed to you magazine but it was just in time to read the Ray Humphreys story. I saw the story on the news but I didn't catch the name of the person responsible for such a cruel act of crime. Your magazine enlightened me, and it turned out to be the very man that we had sold our Common Buzzard, Billie to. Billie went to Mr Humphreys for a breeding programme as we thought it would be cruel to keep him with so little time on our hands.

We didn't see Mr Humphreys directly as at the time he was 'busy' elsewhere. We left Billie with an experienced friend of his until we returned. This experienced friend turned out to be Wayne Standley who was also accused of smuggling.

We're shocked and frustrated and would love to have Billie back. We know it isn't possible as he has probably been sold by now.

It's a shame that two people we had utter faith in could commit a crime like that. It just goes to show that you can't trust anyone.

Yours sincerely
Amy Butcher.

VETS FEES

Dear Lyn and David,

I am writing regarding the alarming difference in the way various vets charge our members, we have recently had discussions on the subject and now have a few case histories with ref to costs. It would seem that there are a few practices in our area, in general, who will look at raptors and there are a few who would seem to be more comfortable treating cats and dogs than injured hawks.

We can assume by the nature of the creatures we keep that they are somewhat special and would create a feeling with some vets (with respect) to leave it to the experts, so we tend to take the injured and the sick to the people who we feel can treat them, it is at this point where this rot sets in. What I am trying to say is that the cost incurred should be very similar for treatment of similar species wherever they are treated, but our findings are that some practices, one in particular, are charging far in excess of others. Some of these practices carry vets who in the general falconry world are seen as "experts" or as we say it "good with birds", but are we paying the price?

There are other practices who also carry vets who are extremely good with birds and have achieved good results with injuries that were, in our eyes, touch and go. This vet and the practice, have been very competitive and fair over the years when it comes to fees, even when it means travelling and taking the bird into another country, (if your living in Wales).

Should we put up with these expensive vets or should we put the business to the capable but competitive practices, we would all agree that the welfare of the bird is paramount whatever the cost, but we can also choose where to get our animals treated.

Regards
Ed Hopkins
Club sec
Gwent Hawking Club

NOW WIPE YOUR HANDS

Dear Lyn,

Isn't it a wonder? If you go to some Bird of Prey centres or any of the many country fairs around at this time of year, how many people are allowed, by so called experienced falconers, to have their birds touched by the general public!

"Can I stroke your bird", they ask. It should be:- "can I wipe my hands on your bird". How do these falconers(!) know where the person's hands have been? Not only do they wipe away the natural oils in the feathers, but they might be adding oils from the beef burger or any other greasy food they have just eaten. Have the people just finished going to the loo without washing their hands?

All of this may seem to be innocuous but don't forget what birds do. They preen themselves. How do we know what is going into a birds digestive system when it is clean-up time? We don't. So, I would suggest that all you professional falconers out there deter the public from wiping their hands on your birds. If they want to stroke anything, go and do it on something or someone at home!

Moving on from the country fair theme, how many of you take your dogs along? How many times have people let their dogs mess right in the place where people walk? What an annoyance to get dog mess on your shoes. You then have to spend time looking for something to get them clean. Unfortunately there are some irresponsible dog owners out there and it does not take much to carry a few plastic bags so you can clean up after your dog. So, come on all you dog owners, think of others as opposed to yourselves for a change.

Kind regards
Peter Eldrett
Dorset



Making Progress

John Snellin

I think I left it last time where the courting process seemed to be moving along quite nicely. Well, that continued over the next couple of weeks, without anything out of the ordinary. Early morning on 29th April I heard the most beautiful and distinctive low call from her.

There was nothing loud or sharp about this call, it was almost a whirring sound like a piece of machinery going ku ku ku ku ku ku, which was followed by a single high pitched but very quiet 'chip' each time she landed. On 5th May I noticed, for the first time, that the male had obviously had a bath and was sat in full view of her proudly showing off his lovely chestnut underparts. She seemed particularly unimpressed by this and, instead, preferred to ignore him completely and go to sleep on her favourite perch.

Unperturbed by this, here we had a man on a mission, and he wasn't going to go unnoticed, so he set to and after a couple of days, all but filled her nest site with any

Leylandi branches on the floor that she seemed to prefer. I don't think I have since seen her eat anywhere other than on the floor. It was around this time that I noticed that his beak seemed to be growing at an alarming rate, and although not yet 'clicking', this was only a matter of time unless something was done about it.

The last thing I wanted to do was go in there, they were now progressing so well, any interference may have been catastrophic. Knowing that his beak had only been coped a couple of months before, and the fact that he had always been on a purely Quail diet providing plenty of tiring, I started to look for a reason for the sudden growth. Now I don't want to tread on anyone's toes and apologies to Falconiform if this looks bad, but I had to put it down to the fact that each day, I gave both their food a good dusting with A1 Raptor Breeding Mix. Now she perhaps, could take on and disperse the extra calcium etc. with what was going on inside her.

On the other hand

He on the other hand, and also being so much smaller, had a problem getting rid of

I can only imagine that they came from him in some sort of offering, or merely a display of his topiary skills, who knows.

There were quite a few changes on Wednesday 15th however. He for a start, was a lot more active and very aerial, buzzing very close to her whenever he did a circuit. He also seemed to be spending all his time in her aviary. An inspection of the nest site now showed it to be completely cleaned out. Not one twig, she obviously decided that if it was going to be done at all, then she would start from scratch and do it her way.

For a few days, nothing much seemed to be happening, and then I did notice the odd small twig or piece of fern appear, again, only in his nest, hers still being used as a macabre larder for all things inedible. I further realised that her coverts were also showing somewhat more than usual, which was quite obviously sending him into a dreadful state of sexual frustration, a feeling that I can sympathise with as the fairer sex really are so good at saying 'Have a good look but no touching'!!! (well they start by saying that anyway...)

By this time, I had once again pulled out 'Hawk For The Bush' and realised that my pair were almost copying word for word and date for date the pair described in the chapter 'Managing a Breeding Pair'. That made me feel a bit better, honestly that book really is still such a good read. By the way, for the uninformed...good condition copies of that book are currently worth £400+ with many average copies fetching £200-£300 regularly. So hang on to it, and get that coffee cup off it!! It's a bit like 'Antiques Roadshow'...But I'd never sell it would I"...would I"...would I"...mnnnnn????

I digress. Drawn inexplicably into the dark and disgusting clutches of material wealth, waiting in the shadows to lure the weak, the impressionable and the corruptable.

Early morning 24th May...where was she, I could see him but not her...aha, a good time to have a quick peep through the spy hole at the nest site. On peeling back

"...she obviously decided that if it was going to be done at all, then she would start from scratch and do it her way."

surplus food he could lay his hands on. By this time he was regularly eating in her aviary, something he had not done before. She meanwhile appeared to be a lot more active, until on 10th May, I saw her in his nest site arranging twigs that I had left there, and occasionally flying down to the floor and back up with a new twig or two.

This continued for a few more days, during which time I noticed that she was now no longer eating at her favourite plucking post but had found a pile of

it, and I am convinced that instead, it went into his beak. Now again, I have no scientific background or anything else to quantify this, but since I have stopped dusting his food, it seems to have started to ease back a little. I would certainly be interested to hear from any other readers who have experienced similar.

Anyway, back to the plot...Sunday, 12th May I heard a lot more ku ku ku ku ku from her, and then noticed a nice little arrangement of twigs left on her food shelf.

the tape over the 10mm spy hole I was greeted with the most orange, most piercing and most condescending look I have ever witnessed! She was indeed only a few centimetres away looking directly back at me, lying flat in the nest. I really didn't need to be told twice and my voyeuristic bend could be curtailed in the interim at least. So backing off, not wishing to breathe, knowing that like the first time a new hawk is about to feed on the fist, an uncharacteristic cough is demanding to be let out. I withdrew.

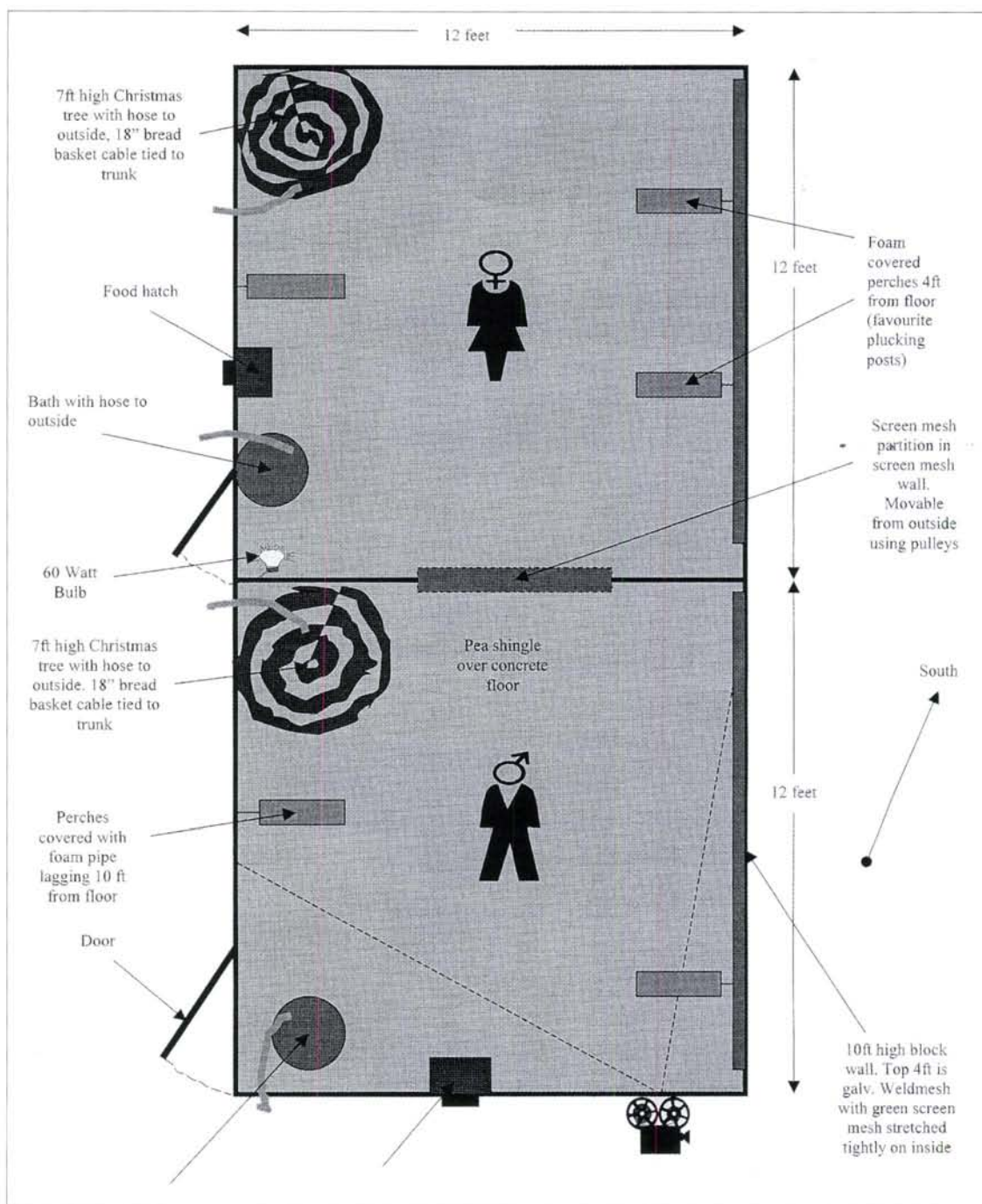
A stifled cough, still appearing to sound like a dropped dustbin lid, and I returned to the CCTV monitor. Now, knowing where she was I could clearly see her dark outline, lying low in the nest. On occasion, he would momentarily alight on the edge of the nest, before flitting off again, he too was now doing the ku ku ku ku ku, only with a slightly higher pitch. Over

the next couple of days it seemed that whenever I went to see them, she would either be lying in the nest or stood up in it, looking rather lethargic, puffed up and head bowed.

A few days after this, she was away from the site, and with expectant gaze I peered in again, with child-like anticipation of seeing a dozen or more eggs, to be met with a totally empty site...not one!

Worry not dear reader, I am not about to leave you with a sad ending.

Saturday 1st June there it was, yes, an egg, a Sparrowhawk egg, better than the one laid by the golden goose and more beautiful than a Fabergé, more valuable



"Worry not dear reader, I am not about to leave you with a sad ending."

than a fertile Dodo's egg! She had done it, I had done it. It hardly even seemed to matter if it were fertile!

Will there be another? Who knows. I do hope so. Monday 3rd June saw them celebrate the Jubilee Bank Holiday, and me witness my first copulation between them, so we may see more eggs over the next few

days. As I write this she's looking heavy-headed again stood in the nest, lethargic. Perhaps I have another egg? Probably laid on the 5th but she didn't move off the nest until yesterday 6th, and there it was!!

She's now sat on seven eggs, due to hatch around 15th July.

Colin Woolf

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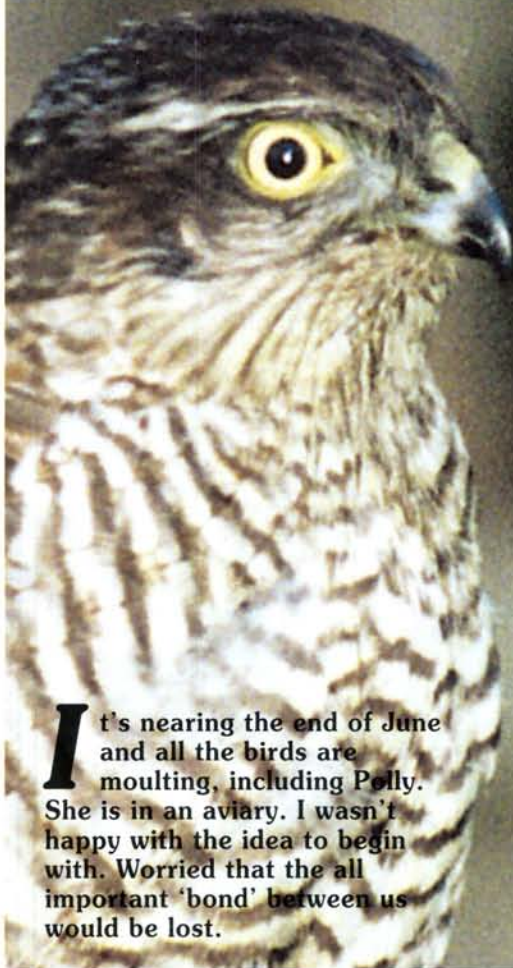


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Polly's Progress



It's nearing the end of June and all the birds are moulting, including Polly. She is in an aviary. I wasn't happy with the idea to begin with. Worried that the all important 'bond' between us would be lost.

I planned to go in every day, at least 2-3 times a day but, as with most things, it hasn't been practical.

Her aviary has a window so she can see out, all wire parts are lined with fine green mesh so she cannot damage herself. She has knocked her cere however. I go in periodically to clean up, change her bath water and give her a fuss. Initially she would tolerate everything, but after a couple of weeks she grew scattier. Now she is much steadier again. I believe her initial change in attitude was in response to her surroundings, firstly her new environment, then her 24 hour freedom, also she wasn't boxed at night as usual so this was quite unnerving for her. She loves the security of her night box. Once she realised that she was quite safe however, her behaviour calmed down considerably.

Every day I go to the window and talk to her. I am reassured by the fact that if she is standing on two legs she will fluff up and put her foot up.

Tonight I went in to do the usual jobs. No flitting about at all. She let me stroke her, only shooting her foot out as a warning and chucking a little nervously. I stood about a foot away and after about 5 minutes she roused and put her foot up. David was mowing the lawn and she started to look nervous and ready to fly, I leant across and shushed her, stroking her breast gently, she relaxed and put her foot back up. The bond is still there. One of the things I have noticed about the imprints is that even though they are bold and become more independent regarding their hunting as they mature, they look to their handler for reassurance in most situations. I have had both my spars come to look for me, my last spar, particularly, when in a situation she found worrying, would almost beg me to call her down. You could see her looking for the lure and leaving the tree immediately she thought it was going to be presented. One such occasion was when she was quite young, I spook a

Muntjac in long grass, she came steaming down from a tree stopping only a couple of feet above it, she did a complete u-turn and sat back in the tree, chucking at me. I called her down and she came instantly. She also had a couple of nasty encounters with rooks and would fly down to be closer to me if any came near, (unless she was hot on the trail of a magpie, in which case all reason disappears out of the window). David, who was brought up with wild caught spars, is constantly amazed by Polly's tolerance of me, particularly when she is at liberty to sit out of reach in the aviary.

Her feathers are coming down nicely, I came out with a handful of secondaries and primaries.

Being one of those people who hate the cold I always used to dread the end of summer, but now, knowing my beautiful girl will then be ready for another season, I will welcome it with open arms.

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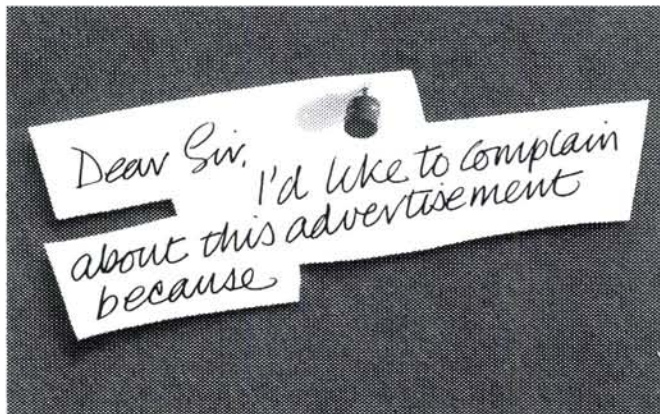
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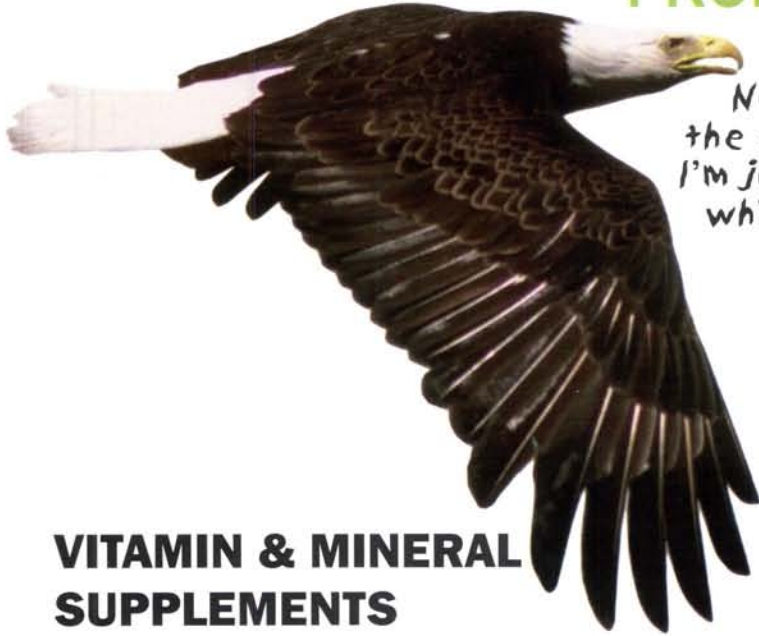
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