

Issue 53

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Spring 2003 / No. 53

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Front Cover:
Falconry at sunset
Photo by Shaun Healy

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editorial

Well, it's that time of the year already. The Falconers Fair is once again upon us. It doesn't seem that 12 months have passed since the last one. We are now in the season of country shows and game fairs of various kinds up and down the country, most of which hold a falconry display - static or otherwise.

It is also the time of year when all the breeders are busy and unfortunately cannot attend the country events and we must think of them, particularly if we have ordered a bird for the coming season.

In this issue we have a varied number of articles which have been penned by various people, from the story to tell, conservation, report from the CFF and an article written by Paul Manning on how a falconer should behave when giving a display at a show in front of the public. I hope that all the articles make great reading.

The next edition of your favourite falconry magazine will hopefully be published in time for the CLA Game Fair, which this year will be held at Harewood House, Yorkshire, in August. I have already started to get articles in from both home and abroad and if you have anything to say, please do not hesitate to send it in.

If you are attending the Falconers fair, come along to the stand and say hello. We will be pleased to see you.

In the meantime, have a good read.

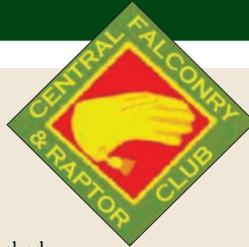
Peter Eldrett

COMPETITION WINNER

Congratulations to the winner of our wordsearch competition who is **J Lennard**, of Cleveland.
Thank you to all of you who entered and many thanks to Martin Jones for providing the £10.00 voucher as a prize.

The Central Falconry & Raptor Club

Chairman's Report / April '03



Once again we say goodbye to the field meetings. This year has been very active once again with some new land that went down well with members. Heath, our field secretary, organized a meet virtually every fortnight through the season. The only difference being this year, he asked members to ring him if they were interested in going, instead of him ringing round. The last big field meet we had was at Holdenby House, where there was enough people who turned up for three groups to go out. The land was excellent and I hope we can make it an annual event.

The social evenings are going down well with some excellent guest speakers which we are getting most months. The new idea of having an Open Forum at the start of each meeting for twenty minutes seems to be going down well. This is a time where each month we name a subject which we then can discuss the following month. It is a strict twenty minutes; if not, I think we could go on all evening. It would be a good idea for different members to chair the meeting each month.

On May 11th Mark Hinge is paying us a visit. Mark is Political Director for Wales, working for the Countryside Alliance. He also is a practicing falconer who is a member of the W.H.C.. Mark has also just recently joined the Hawk Board, and because of his political knowledge, is a valuable asset. On Saturday July 12th we will be back down the Cotswold Falconry Centre for our Summer BBQ. Please bring the family with you. They are more than welcome.

On Saturday August 9th we will be having our meeting at the National Birds of Prey Centre to say our goodbyes to Jemima and the Centre. For those who don't know Jemima will be leaving for the United States once the season is over, and the Centre will also close. So in August we will be holding a Hog Roast between 7pm & 9pm with a private flying display.

The event will cost £15, 4-15, £8. This price will also include entrance to the centre during the day. The idea is to say goodbye to Jemima and the Centre from the Central Club and friends.

I have just booked Roger Upton for March 14th 2004. Roger is an author and has written many books on the sport of Falconry, and can go back many years when he went out with many famous falconers. His experiences with his travels to the Middle East also go back a long way. Roger is a very entertaining speaker for those who have never seen him.

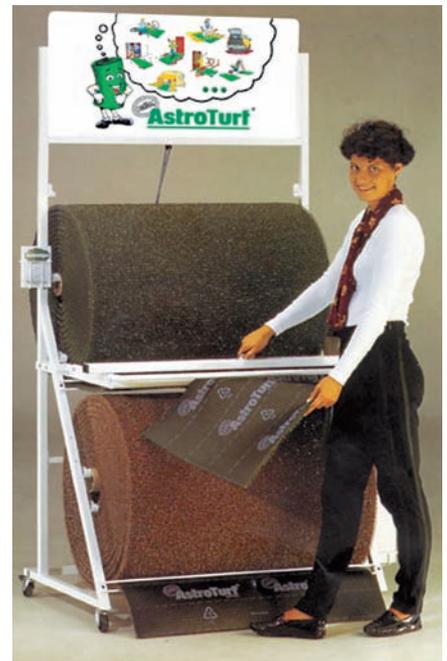
Hope to see you all at the Falconers Fair in May.

For anyone interested in coming along to our club social evenings, we meet at the Stoneythorpe Hotel, Warwick Road, Southam, nr. Leamington Spa on the second Sunday of the month at 8pm. For any more information please call John Hill on 07973 224609

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Contrasting opinions

Dear Sir,

I read issue 52 of The Falconers' magazine with a whole range of feelings. Firstly, sadness, that Lyn Wilson had relinquished her editorship of the magazine after so many years. She will be missed.

Secondly, satisfaction, her mantle seems to have fallen onto very capable shoulders. I, together surely, with all of your readers wish you every success and satisfaction in your new venture.

Thirdly, shock at the news that the NBPC was going to close to the public at the end of the year. All things, even the best, come to an end at some time or another.

Lastly, disappointment that two pages of my favourite magazine had been hijacked by a religious eccentric. I refer to Mr Philip Snow's piece on pages 12 and 13.

The article was not clearly written and it took some time to fathom that he

was a Creationist, i.e. someone whose religious beliefs lead him to deny Darwin's theory of evolution, in favour of the view that all things were created, in the same state as they are today, in six days.

The article was also unbalanced, giving the impression that scientists were simply queuing up to refute Darwin. In fact Mr Snow would probably find it difficult to muster 0.1% of biological scientists.

In addition, it was entirely negative, seeking to destroy a theory without putting anything in its place. Mr Snow seemed unwilling to tell us about his own beliefs.

Darwin's Theory of Evolution has not been proved, true, although there is a lot of evidence for it. Mr Snow's ideas are unverifiable, the only evidence being a primitive creation story in the book of Genesis.

Everyone has the right to express his or her own religious opinions, but not, please, in The Falconers magazine.

K F Loates

The CLA Game Fair 2003



The 2002 Game Fair was held at Broadlands Estate, Romsey in Hampshire and attracted a record 126,000 visitors over the three days of the event.

This year The CLA Game Fair will be held at Harewood House, Nr. Leeds, Yorkshire, this summer on Friday 1st - Sunday 3rd August. Harewood House has been the northern venue for the Game Fair on a number of occasions and has proved to be a very popular location for what has become the world's largest country sports event and the UK's largest countryside show.

Last held at Harewood in 1999, this will be the first time the existing Game Fair organising team, under the directorship of David Hough, have returned to a venue. This previous experience has enabled them to introduce a number of improvements, which together with new features are coming together to create a spectacular three days. Shooting, fishing, gundogs, gamekeepers row and of course, falconry, remain the core elements of the show, which year on year grows in importance on the country sport calendar. Each of these exhibition areas are major shows in their own right and would individually keep enthusiasts entertained for a full day in view of the number of

features, display, demonstrations, have-a-go events and competitions along with the comprehensive row of exhibition stands that are to be found in each.

But over the last five years', The Game Fair has truly become the shop window for everything related to the countryside and country living. Whilst in no way detracting from its ethos as THE country sports event, new shows and features have nevertheless added more to interest its followers as well as bring in 'fresh blood'. With areas such as The Totally Food Show, Hooked on Horses, Elegant Gardens, Village Life Experience and the 'New Countryside', The CLA Game Fair is able to appeal to a wider audience and provides the best possible opportunity to introduce many more people to country sports and the many pleasures to be enjoyed in the countryside.

This year The CLA Game Fair will be mounting a fascinating new feature. Called 'The Moorland Experience' is particularly apt with the event being held in Yorkshire. Portraying some of Britain's most valued, yet vulnerable conservation areas, this feature will be of great interest to all visitors.

Council Grant Helps Falconry Business Take Flight

A specialist falconry business in Test Valley has been given a chance to spread its wings and take flight internationally. In less than a year it has received several worldwide orders, attended a major international trade fair and is now celebrating its receipt of a small business incentive grant from Test Valley Borough Council.

Mandy Manning, a former retail manager, is the mastermind behind Amews.com, which she set up with the support of husband Paul, a keen falconer. The company, sells quality products for falconers and raptor keepers via its website.

Mandy, who lives near Romsey, Hampshire, said that she is delighted that the business is already doing well. "We have already had many overseas orders from the US, Japan and the Middle East. Our first customer was from California! However continuous marketing is very important for an e-business and hence a cash injection like the Incentive Grant will make a big difference".

"We enjoyed a substantial boost to sales during our first Christmas thanks to the annual Game Fair which was held in Test Valley last year. It has helped us realise the importance of attending such events and we want to maintain our profile within our specialised sector. Thus we will put some of the grant towards a stand at the annual Falconry Fair in May. The rest will be spent on updating our website and further developing our product range."

The annual Game Fair, which was held at Broadlands, near Romsey, attracted over 800 exhibitors and over 126,000 visitors from the UK and abroad.

David Gleave, economic development officer for Test Valley Borough Council, was pleased that such an event had a positive impact on Test



Valley businesses. "Having the Game Fair in Test Valley helped put the borough on the international map. As Amews.com proves hosting such an event helps local businesses gain recognition in specialist markets.

"Test Valley has a diverse business community, which is one of its great strengths, and it is important that the council shows its support through initiatives such as the business incentive grant. The grant provides a little extra help in the crucial first year of a business' life. It can also enable smaller businesses to compete at events such as the Game Fair, which benefit not only exhibitors but other local industries such as tourism," concludes David.

Test Valley Borough Council started the Business Incentive Grant scheme over four years ago to help new businesses starting up.

New from Brinsea

Contact incubation: reproducing the natural incubation environment

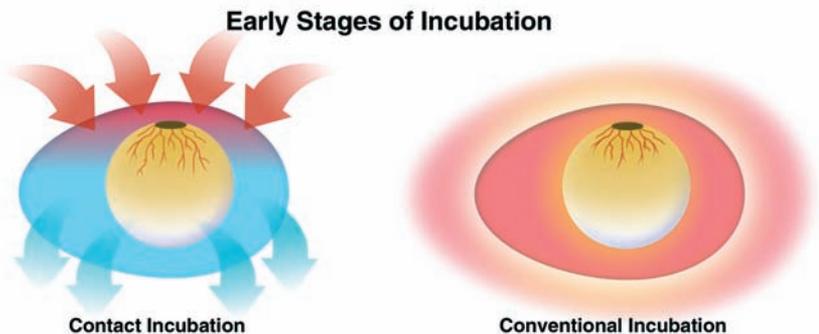
Think how a bird normally incubates a clutch of eggs. It sits on them with a brood patch, often plucked to bare skin, passing body warmth from the bird to the egg through a small contact area. At irregular intervals the bird gets up and rearranges the eggs. This exposes

them to cool air and when she settles down, a different part of the egg is in contact with the brood patch.

Now contrast this with artificial incubation, where the eggs are kept at a consistent temperature and rotating the eggs does not produce any change in the way in which heat reaches the embryo.

Academic research has suggested that the heat flow through the egg, passed downward from the contact point, is important in determining embryo growth and successful incubation. Building on this research, Brinsea, the Incubation Specialists, have created Contact Incubation Technology (CIT).

This faithfully reproduces the contact area on the egg surface and electronic controls replicate the bird's random movements and egg turning. The first field trials, with, amongst others, Hunting Falcons International in Wales and the National Bird of Prey Centre in Gloucestershire, showed convincingly both that more eggs hatch and the resulting chicks are stronger with CIT than other artificial methods. Jemima Parry-Jones at the NBPC used the prototype CIT machine to incubate Verreaux Eagles, African Fish Eagles, Tawny Eagles, Merlins, Lanners, Hawk Owls, Great Grey Owls and others. She says, "We were delighted with the results."



Hawk Board appoints Communications Officer

The Hawk Board, the representative body for falconry in the UK, has appointed Nick Kester as its first Communications Officer.

Hawk Board chair, Jemima Parry-Jones MBE, said: "We are thrilled that Nick has agreed to take on the post. Over recent years the legislation and politics that affect falconry and raptor keeping have become as unrelenting as waves on a beach, so we have long thought that a constant point of contact for the media was essential. With anti-field sports emotion currently running high, and new Bills coming up, both in the UK and Europe that could affect raptor keeping, this has now become critical."

Nick Kester has been a practising falconer for some twenty seasons, and has been the voluntary press officer for the British Falconers' Club (BFC) for twelve years. He is an elected member of the Hawk Board, a council member of the BFC and past chairman of the old British Field Sports Society falconry committee (now merged with the Hawk Board). He writes regularly on falconry for the specialist press.

Commenting on his appointment, Nick said: "I am delighted to be able to work with Jemima and the Board in the promotion and defence of falconry and the keeping of birds of prey. For far too long those outside our sport have had little knowledge of what it entails or the onerous legislation under which we operate. Many would have us banned, and falconers are under no illusions that we are up there in the firing line along with the other field sports."

The Hawk Board enjoys exceptional relations with DEFRA, JNCC, CITES and other influential bodies whose conservation and legislative programmes may impact on falconry. Its sub-committee, the Campaign for Falconry is the principal fund raising body for the protection and promotion of falconry and raptor keeping in general, and is a logical first point of reference for many un-affiliated falconers. It works closely with the Board at country fairs and other events at which the public comes into contact with birds of prey.



For more information contact:

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Hawk Board
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Tel: 01267 281448

Jemima Parry-Jones
Chair, Hawk Board
National Birds of Prey Centre
Newent
Gloucestershire GL18 1JJ
Tel: 01531 821581



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www.midlandgamefair.co.uk

Well, 2002 has been a good year for the Campaign For Falconry. Starting at the BASC

Game Keepers Fair at Shugborough and followed by a very well attended two days at the British Falconry and Raptor Fair at Newport, Shrops. The CFF was pleased to have the opportunity to both see and host so many home nation and international falconers.

Our grateful thanks for their generous sponsorship go to Honeybrook Farms for their wonderful Bar-B-Q's and to KKK from Holland which allows the CFF to invite (from the Countryside Alliance) the Campaigns for Shooting, Hunting and Fishing, to help run the mini arena and the CFF hospitality tent. Almost every weekend the CFF support team along with (Santa) John Hill and Ann Beckett-Bradshaw (supergirl) attended game fairs and agricultural shows right through until late October - many thanks to all those who gave up their time to help.

Funds raised at shows and club nights have given the CFF its best year so far, along with a generous donation of £1000 from C.A. Cheshire Game and Angling Fair. The CFF is only too pleased to see any supporter who would like to help at shows and weekend events.

Campaign for Falconry

REPORT

Terry Large

The CFF has attended several Countryside Alliance meetings at both Marlborough and Kennington Road with the other CA campaigners and is currently working with CA regional directors to place a falconry representative on all regional committees and where possible, county committees. Throughout the year, the CFF banner was to be seen at the forefront of many of the marches in London and around the country.

The Campaign For Falconry supported the vigil outside parliament and I would like to thank the following for their attendance: Paul Dillon, Dave Jones, Bryan Paterson, Mark Hinge, David Horrobin, Nick Kester and Marie Louise Leschallas for co-ordinating representatives from the House of Lords who joined us on the pavements. Lastly, I would like to thank our 24 hour 'tea lady' Ann Beckett-Bradshaw and husband Mick for driving in and out of London and providing our refreshments. Sorry Mick to hear you were caught for speeding by the only electric police patrol car in London!

The sale of the Campaigns badge helps to raise

funds and has sold well again this year. Funds raised from the badge go a long way to meeting the CFF's set expenditures. It is now becoming quite a collector's item. With this in mind, John Hill (stock co-ordinator) has produced a set of the past years' badges mounted in a framed plaque. For more details see the CFF's web site.

As the Campaign starts in 2003 it looks forward to another active year supporting the Hawk Board and fund raising around the clubs and shows. I would like to say a big 'Thank You' to all those who, year in year out, have put their hands into their pockets and bought a raffle ticket, something from the stand, or popped their change in a collecting can.

If you are looking for something related to falconry, look up the CFF web site and check out the substantial list of Trade Supporters who kindly support the CFF each year. If you wish to join the weekend team or would like the CFF to visit your club, please contact either myself or Ann Beckett-Bradshaw. Thank you once again for all your support.

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I own a female redtail hawk call Briar. I am no expert, but I try to look after my bird and keep her in tip-top condition. I always look forward to the hunting season as I love to watch her slope and soar and fly from tree to tree. At the end of her session out she has caught a rabbit which is to me a bonus. If she doesn't catch one then there is always another day.



A season

I don't fly her by myself as my husband, John, helps me and is very supportive in what I do and he also enjoys the sport. We have a wide area of hunting ground so John and I keep in touch by hand radios. Communication is very important when out in the field and the radios do help a great deal.

I have had Briar for 12 seasons and every season is different. This one especially so as I haven't been able to fly her at all! It all started in the middle of November last year when I trapped my sciatic nerve so you can imagine that the pain was indescribable. I wasn't even able to walk 100 yards at any one time. The doctor said three months of physiotherapy and exercises was needed to get back to full mobility which was very disheartening – no flying my beloved Briar. Just when things were getting better after a month or

so, I trapped the nerve once more, and I was devastated. Time was pressing on and my redtail had still not flown.

Christmas came and went and in January I did start to walk further – two miles or so. Great, if I can walk that far I can fly Briar. I imagined she was there, slope soaring, going from tree to tree as she regularly did, then with luck, making a kill. When I was imagining this, tears were running down my face – the frustration of it all. This season would never be, but I still thought there was hope. John gave me much encouragement and hope.

The second week in January I weighed her, the plan was to fly Briar at the end of the month. I know it was getting late into the season but I thought there was still two months left.

The horror!! Little fluffy feathers seem to appear and stick to the wire, the moult was kicking in while I had been unable to take her out. I had kept the weight up and the

weather had been warm.

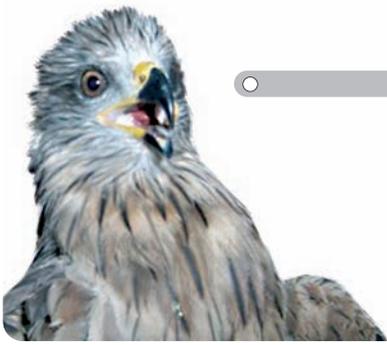
Then came the decision to fly or not to fly. What was I to do? Firstly, I got advice from our good friend and falconer, Steve. His advice was to put her to moult, so that is what I have done.

For those who do have birds of prey, can you imagine the frustration and anguish of not flying your bird for a whole season? I can only now wait until next season when my devoted husband will be with me with his unflinching support to help me fly Briar. It's going to be a long summer so roll on October.



that never was





About two years ago the Peregrine Fund in the US contacted us at The National Birds of Prey Centre to discuss a species of bird of prey that I had not really given much thought about, the Cape Verde Kite.

Cape Verde



Kites

Jemima Parry-Jones
Founding Trustee
The National Birds of Prey Trust

At this time, the Cape Verde Kite is listed as a subspecies of the Red Kite. A number of people working in the Cape Verde Islands felt that generally all the species of raptors on the islands were so different from the nominate race, that they should probably have species status, rather than remain subspecies. The Cape Verde Kite was a species they felt fitted the bill.

One of the reasons for a subspecies gaining species status, particularly if it is rare, is that it is sometimes easier to get protection and interest in a species, than it is for a subspecies.

The Cape Verde Islands have kites, but we are really not sure what they are – are they the pure Cape Verde Kite, the subspecies described in the books, or have Black Kites got over to the islands and interbred with the CV Kites? As yet we do not know. However, what we do know is that all the raptor species on the islands are declining for a number of reasons, which need to be studied and documented.

The Peregrine Fund decided that it was worth while trying to find the CV Kites first and if that was possible, as they had not been observed very much in

recent times, to see about catching them to see a) what they actually are and b) initiate a captive breeding programme.

This is where the centre came in. Because we have bred both black kites and red kites and so have some experience with kite species.

After a shaky start of not finding any kites finally five birds were found on one of the islands. They then disappeared! We think they flew to another island. So a year was lost, which is often the case in conservation programmes that are trying to work with time

quarantine they arrived at the National Birds of Prey Centre. I have to say, they look pretty much like Black Kites, but there are differences.

Sabine Hille, one of the researchers, who leads the team, came over to the Centre in December and we took all the kites to Neil Forbes for checking over, laproscoping and taking blood for sexing and DNA testing. The laproscoping turned out to be very useful as not only did we know what sex the birds were, which did in fact coincide with the information we had, but told us which birds were getting sexually active.

We have four females and one male. Two are paired up and the other three females have a Black Kite to keep them company. If any of the birds show any signs of breeding we will remove the other two females and leave the pair to see if they will lay eggs. It is highly

unlikely that there would be any young at least this year. But we want to encourage more than one female to lay.

We are waiting for the DNA results to see exactly what these birds are. Black Kites, Red Kites, Hybrids of either, a fully fledged species of Cape Verde kite, or what. However, whatever the DNA results are, it must be remembered that these birds really are Cape Verde Kites as that is where they came from.

limitations and seasonal changes. The following year more Kites were found and the Peregrine Fund sent out a larger team of people to help with the trapping.

In the meantime, an MOU was drawn up and signed between the Peregrine Fund, the Cape Verde Island Government and the National Birds of Prey Trust. Then the difficult job of paperwork to move birds was initiated as well.

The upshot of all this is that the CV team managed to catch five Kites. These were shipped to the UK and after going through



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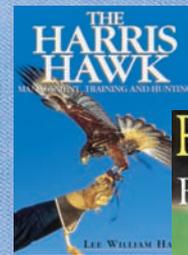
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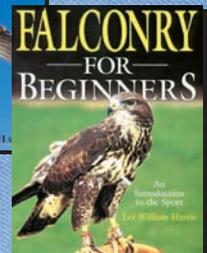
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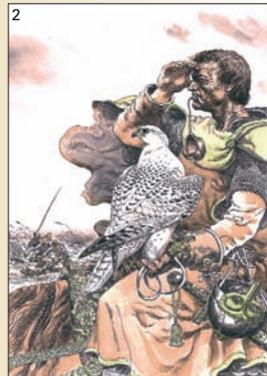
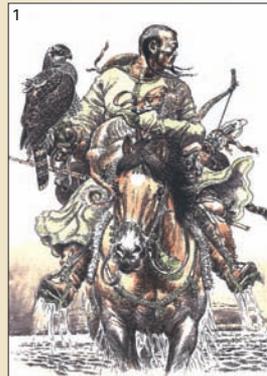


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The zoo collection that eventually became the Hawk Conservancy came about quite by accident. Reg and Hilary Smith were a farming couple who also took in injured birds and animals at their small-holding near Andover, Hampshire. After a *Blue Peter* programme featuring Reg talking about his unusual collection, the presenter suggested that anyone interested should go along to Sarson Lane Farm to see for themselves. Hundreds of people took up the invitation and, prompted by threats from local police

Are you hoping that your two sons will be involved in the future of the Conservancy?

If they're interested, then I'd love them to become involved, but I certainly wouldn't push it upon them. There are so many aspects of running an organisation like this: catering, education, gift shop, courses, marketing – it's like juggling lots of balls in the air at the same time. And the last thing I would do is to wish my children to have to keep juggling all those balls like I have done for the last 25 years. If they were interested, I'd like to see them become involved within an aspect of the work of the Conservancy, whether that be conservation or marketing or whatever, but not to feel as though they had to take on all of it.

to our day-to-day running. Although not on the staff, another important member of the team is John Chitty, our vet – he has played an important part in the development and opening of our bird of prey hospital. I am so grateful for his support and assistance.

The Hawk Conservancy isn't dependent on one person. Just like Jersey zoo - whether Gerald Durrell is alive or not, the collection will carry on because it's a fantastic collection. It's the same with this place, when my father isn't here, when I'm not here, it will still go on – it is a true team effort and it mustn't lose its family feel.

How vital is the role of conservation to the Hawk Conservancy?

Conservation has to go hand in hand with education. If you want people to care they have to understand what the problems are and how they can help. For that reason education is vitally important, and I think we do that very well here. The conservation message can be put across in many ways: from fun but informed commentaries at displays and feeding sessions, information packs and worksheets supplied to school visits, holding birds for children, to the lectures and training courses we run via the Trust. I have ambitions for us not to just succeed as a bird of prey centre; in my career here I really want to see

The Hawk Conservancy

for obstructing the highway, the farm opened as a zoo with a proper car park. From its opening in 1966 The Weyhill Zoo developed a varied collection of species – and birds of prey were part of it right from the start.

Our intrepid reporter (that's me – Ed.) recently visited the Conservancy to chat with Ashley Smith, present director, to find out a little more about 'The Park' today. Here's what I discovered.

Firstly, Ashley, what prompted the change at Weyhill from simply being a wildlife park to one specialising in birds of prey?

It was my fault. When we were children we were allowed a hobby each. I have an elder brother, Martin, and he was more interested in snakes, lizards and books. He became an antiquarian book dealer and he is very successful, specialising in natural history books. My hobby was birds of prey and I started flying them in 1975 when I was nine. I would fly the birds after the seal feeding - Dad would feed the seals and then he'd do the commentary while I flew a kestrel and/or a buzzard. So, I've been doing it a long time.

committed to raptor

How important are the staff to your success?

I've got a great team – the best. I think it's the most professional team of people that we've ever had here in the history of the Conservancy. Everybody here is passionate about birds of prey and their enthusiasm is infectious. In front of the audience at demonstrations, they give their all and they are consummate professionals. They are all very dedicated and want to achieve something in their career while they're here, rather than just exist. Each member of the staff plays an important part in the success of the Hawk Conservancy. They are ably assisted by a stalwart band of volunteers who give freely of their time and who are vital

our mark put on the world of conservation. Being actively involved in many breeding programmes for birds of prey, we are at the sharp end of conservation. I

have nothing but praise for the hard work of our conservation co-ordinator Campbell Murn in this area, it is extremely important to us. The information that is being collated through these programmes and research is being used to provide guidelines for others to use as a benchmark in the future. One area we are currently making inroads into is the area of rehabilitation, over many years we have learnt from our experiences, both good and bad, as well as our successes and failures. If we

want things to improve in the future we have to use our knowledge to help educate others, e.g. how to rehabilitate, when to do it or when to do nothing and best release methods. For this reason we run rehabilitation



day courses for our members and interested parties, as well as running training days for all new R.S.P.C.A. inspectors on restraint of raptors.

How important to you is it to be the first to breed a species in captivity?

This is one of the aspects of the work that I really enjoy – I love it when we breed a new species. To be the first in the world to breed a species is absolutely wonderful. Even after doing it for many years, I still find the breeding of birds fascinating and I would forego a whole breeding season of all the other birds to breed one critically endangered species. That really excites me - breeding something that really needs to be bred.

For example, if we can breed Indian White-backed Vultures in captivity then it will help save the species from extinction. The species in the wild at the moment is in a catastrophic decline and they still can't work out why – whether it's viral or toxic. If they become extinct in the wild, then the only hope for the species is the captive population which is left. That's why I'm so passionate about their breeding. Campbell runs the stud book for Indian White-backed Vultures and is working with the scientists in Bombay and around the world. Our birds



What are your views on artificial insemination (AI)?

I'm not experienced in Artificial Insemination and if we were to consider doing it I would probably go to somebody like Dr. Nick Fox. In our situation, our birds are colony breeders and they're just starting to pair up.

What we've done is to try and bring Indian White-backed Vultures from zoological collections from all around the world to set up a colony of birds that will breed. So at the moment we're not thinking of AI as a way of reproducing. We've got a huge 'meet and greet' aviary, so that the birds can start to pair off and hopefully naturally reproduce and produce parent-reared birds.

Falconry centres seem to be cropping up all over the country nowadays. How do you feel about this?

A lot of these places start up and then they go after a few years – time will tell. I hope that those bird of prey centres which remain and become established, will join the National Federation of Zoos and get involved in some of the work that's carried on there. We should start to work together on some of the breeding programmes of the future and share information on rehabilitation, that sort of thing. The Hawk Conservancy isn't a falconry centre – it's a bird of prey zoo. My background is zoological, I fly birds of prey and privately I hunt with my birds. I'm probably more of a

conservation

regularly give blood to match against those birds that have the disease.

So although being the first to breed a Brahminy Kite in captivity was lovely and really exciting, it's not an endangered species. But, to breed an Indian White-backed Vulture would probably be the pinnacle of my career here as far as breeding a rare species was concerned.



zoo man first just because of being brought up within a wildlife park. I'm passionate about falconry and I always will be, but I think the emphasis of the Hawk Conservancy has gone more towards the zoological side of things. For instance, in our demonstrations nowadays we fly vultures and owls and very few falconry birds. I need to provide a good, all-round entertaining day out for the visitors. They're



not falconers – they're members of the general public who are as interested in vultures, eagles, owls and kites, as they are in peregrines and goshawks. The idea is to try and show them a good varied cross section of birds of prey in demonstrations.

I would hope that as a falconer if you came here to visit you'd have a nice day, but equally I'm probably more concerned, running a visitor attraction, that your family enjoy themselves... If your wife and children have a good day, they'll let you come back again – and they'll also tell other people. If I relied on just falconers here, we wouldn't survive. It's got to be an attraction for the general public – an entertaining day out for the whole family. Without the people coming through the door, and the income generated by our membership and sponsorship schemes, we would not be able to continue.

Children are really important, they hold the key to raptors' futures. They want to enjoy themselves on a day out, so we try to make their visit fun but educational too. During school holidays we offer Raptor Safari's, a tractor and trailer ride through the countryside to view young buzzards in release sites. Every child visitor is given a Raptor Passport where they have to find ten information boards around the grounds and stamp their card with the Bird of Prey stamp they find there. New for this season is a nature trail where children have to find 20 species of British wildlife hidden in a woodland setting, and then answer questions on their lifestyle and habitat.

What are your views on Hybrids ?

I have absolutely nothing against hybridisation from a falconry point of view. My father always used to say that he could never understand it and that if you wanted to produce something that was faster and better, then why not get a twelve bore and shoot whatever you were trying to catch! So I was brought up with this attitude from my father who was very much a purist - you flew the

natural bird against the natural quarry. But I've seen lots of hybrids fly and been incredibly impressed with them.

However, as a zoological facility (going back to my zoo days again) I am not very keen on showing hybrids because I feel as a zoological collection we're better off to show natural species. It's happened in the zoo world before, where people were hybridising

macaws and now they're all trying to get them back to being pure macaws again. I don't think it's wrong for people to produce hybrids, I just feel that as a zoological facility open to the general public we should show pure species.

How has licencing changed your operation ?

My licencing for a bird of prey zoo is far more rigorous than any other piece of legislation involved in raptors. From my point of view it's becoming more restrictive and we're having to



become more accountable as an organisation. However, I think accountability is a good thing. Under the new licencing for zoos, we can't hide behind the flag of conservation. Our inspectors now are far more probing to show that we cover education, conservation and research as well - you will not be given a licence unless you show that you are committed to these sectors, conservation and research. If you're going to open up to the

general public and you're going to keep birds in captivity, then as a zoo you need to justify what you're doing, and I think the inspection scheme is a good one for zoos. (I'm commenting as a zoo operator, not as a private falconer.)

Any plans for bringing any other species to the park ?

I'm not a stamp collector – and if we have a new species that comes to the Conservancy now it has to be of conservation importance. It can't be a 'Picasso on the wall' – everything here has to earn its keep, one way or another.

The birds fall into categories here. Firstly, there's the working birds, which are birds which give flying displays – which are probably the most important birds at the Conservancy, because without them doing their work we couldn't support all of the other birds. The public wouldn't come here in the numbers that they do just to see rare birds – they come for an entertaining day out and our biggest draw is the flying demonstrations that we give. So all the teams of birds are vitally important.

Then there are the endangered species, even these have to work because if you don't breed you get moved on quite quickly and a new partner is found for you.

Then we have the foster parents. The hospital is taking in nearly 200 birds a year from around the country, 40 -50 of those are babies. So we have about 8 pairs of birds here that foster, e.g. the Boobook owls who rear

Tawnies for us every year. Fostering means these babies can all be returned to the wild.

Then there's the last category, which are the 'old crocks' – that's birds that have worked here all their lives. We owe a debt to them and they're just seeing their days out. I always thought that birds that I knew when I was a small boy lived forever. When I was young they were young and they have grown up with me.

Now 30 years on some of those birds are starting to die, which is very sad. We lost an old Bateleur Eagle the other day which I remembered as a boy. However, it's a fact that after 30-40 years they do start to drop off the perch !

There's a lanneret here, Jamie, with whom I have great sympathy because we've both worked here together for 22 years full time. He's got a dodgy left leg and an ulcer on his

left eye, and I've got a dodgy left eye – when we pass left to left when I'm stooping him to the lure, neither of us have a clue what's going on! But I love him and he still flies his heart out every day. I have great sympathy for Jamie because we've both been here for such a long time. I do love flying some of the old birds and keeping them going.

Another old bird, Mouse a lanner falcon, is in with Amy. They have just had their aviary refurbished and I'm hoping they're going to foster young kestrels. They've not laid but they've bonded together and I think if I put chicks in there, they'll rear them. The birds do live a long time here – Mouse is about 24. So even when you're a bird that's retired here, if I can get you to foster I will do. But that's a lovely retirement, isn't it.

The Hawk Conservancy has recently set up a Trust. How has this changed things?

As far as the day-to-day running is concerned, it hasn't made much difference. The Trust is a charitable arm of the Hawk Conservancy and I



it could have taken me ten years to raise the money. By having the Trust we've become eligible to apply for grants and nowadays I'll be applying for a grant to become involved within a conservation programme.

Also, in the past when people wanted to give money to the Conservancy, either in their wills or by simple donation, they had to give it to me. I wasn't happy with that responsibility. Now people can give their money to the Trust, which is an accountable body of people. We do receive quite a few donations and legacies, particularly from the 2000 strong

breeding some of the endangered species, and having the Trust will hopefully enable us to do that. We've got some big projects in the future and there is no way we could carry out those projects and see them blossom if we had stayed as a family concern. Also, from a personal point of view, I wouldn't want to do it all on my own – I don't think it's possible for one person to see it all through – the Trust will enable us to do that with a body of people who are prepared to help and work to see it through.

I left the Hawk Conservancy feeling that it is in safe hands. Ashley's enthusiasm and commitment to conservation is clear and this is

The Trust is run by a group of people who are not only interested in birds but are also passionate about what happens to the park, its birds and visitors. It's very much in its infancy at the moment, but it is really important for our future.

think it's fantastic from the point of view that we've now got a part of the Conservancy that can get involved within the conservation world and work with endangered species. If we didn't have the Trust we couldn't do this sort of work. To operate and be open to the public, we must get involved in conservation projects and having a Trust enables us to do that. The Trust is run by a group of people who are not only interested in birds but are also passionate about what happens to the park, its birds and visitors. It's very much in its infancy at the moment, but it is really important for our future.

The Trust opens so many more doors for us. For instance, if I want to build a rehabilitation aviary, mobile release aviary or just a new aviary for an endangered species, the only way I could do that as a small family concern was to get as many people as possible to come and visit the Conservancy to hopefully generate enough income to build that aviary –

membership who are friends of the Conservancy and who are very passionate about it. I'm sure that they will be far happier giving their money to a Trust rather than leaving it to me. I could get run over by a truck tomorrow, but at least then I know that the Hawk Conservancy would carry on and it would still be here.

Another example is the wild flower meadow that we have. The area was purchased from a local farmer in 1995 to turn into a wild meadow and to enable us to put on the Valley of the Eagles display. We spent thousands of pounds on seeds and the meadow is now full of wild flowers and plants. 45,000 visitors a year come and walk round the meadow whilst they are here – it's absolutely unique. If we didn't have the Trust, that could have gone, whereas now we know it's there for the future.

I hope that the Hawk Conservancy will become a world centre for excellence in

obviously shared by all his team. The Conservancy has a friendly feel which, in my experience of Falconry Centres and other bird collections, is unique. If you've visited, you will have experienced this – if you've not, then I strongly suggest you put it on your 'to do' list – you won't be disappointed.

The Hawk Conservancy can be found near Andover, Hampshire, just off the A303. You can find out more information by telephone 01264 772252 or e-mail: info@hawk-conservancy.org and the web-site: www.hawk-conservancy.org

Hawking in the time between late winter and spring is often a tricky affair. Days that seem unsettled often with chilly winds are frequent, hence slipping out for the afternoon to get a day's hawking can be as thorny as crossing the main road at rush hour. The phone call was one of usual optimism and excitement. "We're going out with the Harris hawks at the weekend, hope you can make it".

The day started promising with a hint of sun that always makes it seem far more inviting, despite the cold wind. Here are 200ft high sea cliffs covered with the scarcity of grass so

Ritual Gathering

The gathering of all that accompanies the hawking day is as much ritualised as the hawking itself. Equipment checking, telemetry, hawk boxes, dogs whistles, leads, hawk food, hawking bags and so it goes on . . . and when these are all in the vehicle go through it all again just to make double sure everything is intact. One has to be patient at times like these, as I have been in a friend's vehicle driving to the hawking ground when a half-mile down the road screeched to a halt as he'd remembered that the hawk had been forgotten to be put into her hawk box. A certain casualness is evident once we arrive at the starting point. Gone are the regimented tasks of loading the hawking vehicle. Instead, the party begin to make assessments of the weather and recall previously how the dogs

pointed; the ferret worked well, how the quarry ran this way and that. When hawks were slipped and how they capitalised on this.

Field Craft

Total recall of the last hawking day is a kind of main artery 'fix' which falconers do unerringly. It bridges the gap between success and failure. The element of chance is the very factor that the hawks have learned to use so well. Much of the discipline of field craft, dog and ferret work is used as an important part of rabbit hawking. Yet on walked up slips the hawks need many factors in their favour to catch the quarry and it is these slips that are testing and exciting.



Lands End Hawking

By Diana Durman-Walters

typical of weather beaten exposed areas. These are ideal grounds to find rabbits. Warrens abound in the loose easily excavated soil that is protected by small banks of gorse. Rabbits will often feed well up to 150yds away from the entrance to their burrow, as they are expert in knowing all the angles, twists and downfalls in diurnal eating. Local buzzards make predatory sorties along the windward shores and make the rabbits aware, on their guard, with well-tuned reflex action and responses.



The bright, late winter sun made the walk toward the sea cliffs really pleasant, but the wind instead of coming in from the sea was blowing at our backs straight out over the cliffs. This was going to be a testing day for the young hawk.

to point, which might be sitting in cover. Several moved rapidly well away in front of her, giving the young hawk little chance to even see them. It was time to try the ferrets as they might well bolt rabbits within striking distance of the slip. There's an air of expectancy when a ferret has gone to earth as no one can be sure just when the bolt will happen.

Youthful Bird

The young hawk with typical youthfulness was fidgeting on the glove, through

well and bolted several more, which the young male found exciting to chase, but couldn't get into a commanding position with them. It's at moments like these that you wish you had the female instead! It was decided to rescue the day and get the female out onto some ground further inland away from the buffeting wind. She was street wise enough when it came to providing her own lunch.

Rain and Cold

The weather had now decided to close in as spots of ice-cold rain were beginning to sleet



Male First

The male juvenile Harris hawk was chosen to fly first. Although we had an experienced female Harris hawk as well, she had already shown signs that she would take an aggressive stance if flying with him. Better be safe than sorry. The bright, late winter sun made the walk toward the sea cliffs really pleasant, but the wind instead of coming in from the sea was blowing at our backs straight out over the cliffs. This was going to be a testing day for the young hawk.

Working Dog

The Brittany dog made good her ground and busied herself in the task of locating a rabbit

inexperience and a strong blustery wind. A rabbit bolted, the speed of which made the possibility of being caught by a hawk seem questionable. It accelerated rapidly for the next piece of cover. The hawk sped off after it and seemed to be gaining ground when a large bank of gorse loomed up in front of him as his intended quarry disappeared underneath. Instinctively he flew over and around the cover in order to see where it had gone.

In time he would learn this might well pay off as rabbits often keep on running through the cover to get to safe burrows. But today the quarry was going to have the edge on experience. The ferrets worked their burrows

into the wind. The carefully manicured fields of the local estate had inviting banks of saplings and mature trees, which were pock-marked with rabbit holes. The bank tops were ideal for getting a vantage point from above which the Harris hawk would be able to be slipped.

The ferrets, once again in their element checked out the neighbourhood. The hawk had by now on one abortive slip gone into a tree, suddenly spotted some action a good _ mile away. A squirrel proved to be the distraction. As the falconer made after her, the inevitable convenient rabbits bolted, followed by the rain, closing down the remainder of the day.

The hawking party made their way back to the vehicles undaunted. The prospect of tomorrow was already high on the agenda. The company had been good and the craick entertaining. As with all hawking days nothing is certain. Even accomplished hawks need to have the day in their favour and getting it all together is the very pulse that falconers beat to.

Hawking can be feast or famine, either way these provide exhilarating and often inspiring days no matter what the weather.

At Burg Hohenwerfen the summer was slowly winding down and a different kind of flying was on the horizon – hawking. After the madness of the demonstration arena and swarming visitors, the thought of getting out to do some hunting was a reward I would have walked on hot coals for.

I had one bird at my disposal, Astur, a nine-year-old male golden eagle. I knew him well enough – had hunted with him before – and I also knew he had done very little since the previous season. He would need some serious fitness training if he was to shine.

The best way of getting an eagle fit is having it chase a lure being pulled by a jeep, motorcycle or horse. This is how Astur was normally prepared, the usual setting being our

sister centre in Lower Austria. There all our hunting eagles were trained. There, horses were used on nice flat areas to pull lures as far and as fast as you liked. *There* was perfect. But *there* wasn't *here*. Here we didn't have flat, we had straight up, straight down. Here was the worst place in the world for such lure training. *Here* I had a big problem.

I contemplated trying to get off the castle for some flying on the flat ground of the valley bottom. But the more I looked at it, the more I realised it just wasn't practical. The driveway was the problem. As I explained in earlier articles, the driveway was so steep, and squeezed so tightly through various portcullis-type gateways, that it was always a case of foot to the boards to prevent stalling, joined by prayers to get you through the inch-to-spare gaps. And when – *if* – you got up there was nowhere to park. Indeed, the rule was no vehicles on the castle at all: after unloading whatever you had driven up, you had to take

the vehicle back down. And there was another problem. Whichever way you were going, the driveway was frequently heaving with visitors. Trying to fit in *quick* training sessions away from the castle just wouldn't work.

The Solution

So what to do? The answer was staring me straight in the face. The answer had been crippling me all summer! The demonstration lawn. I would fly the eagle up its steep slope. If I could get Astur to power fly up *that* lawn, we would be in with a chance.

It was obvious things would have to be carefully eased into. It was even more obvious when I carried the dead weight of this large and very unfit eagle down to the starting line. I looked at the slope – I looked at the bird – and as our eyes met – we both mouthed 'You've gotta be joking!'

But there was nothing very funny about our

Golden Eagle Days

Mountain Challenge

Part 4

Martin Hollinshead



intended quarry: flatland, off-the-glove, out-of-the-hood, fastest-thing-on-four-legs brown hares. This quarry doesn't run, it rockets across the landscape, doesn't manoeuvre, it defies what flesh and bone *should* be able to pull off – and it never *just* escapes, it makes the ill-prepared eagle look pathetic. No, there was nothing very funny about this at all. And I had the castle's reputation to uphold. I had invites to meetings where a rival centre would be present. I *had* to get this training right. I looked back at the lawn, and felt ill!

But I had help: Tonya, of course, and Hanni, an ex-ski instructor who had joined the troop earlier in the summer. Together we would train,

at its end the suitably equipped and adventurous went on, and the less bold eased their way back. It was fantastic country, a giant slab of wilderness stretching up and over right into Germany. And the scenes! We gazed out over open meadows skirted with forest, looking right across to the massive bulk of the opposite mountain range. I couldn't see Julie Andrews, but any moment that music was going to start.

We were soon at our training camp. It was perfect, had been sketched exactly to fit everything else about the day, a plateau of even meadowland dropping off into nothingness, and beyond, those colossal mountains again. You couldn't have had a more

small wiry figure with features chiselled so sharp he could have been fashioned from one of the farms' enormous beams. And the clothing was right too: the leather, the heavy shoes, the neatly cut alpine jacket. But here the script was lost, for no one had written in he would be as drunk as a lord! He really was drunk. *Really, really* drunk. It was the middle of the afternoon and our mountain farmer had got himself well and truly plastered.

We put our case to him – wondering if his condition would allow him to understand a word – then waited. His expression looked promising. Yes, he'd registered my request to fly the eagle, understood that we were from the



together we would hawk. So we got to work. All flights were kept one way – up. After each flight (a strong word for what we initially got!) – Astur was carried back into position. Flying both to the glove and a fox lure, the distance he could make gradually increased. But so demanding was the training that no mistakes regarding distance could be made. Too great an increase too quickly and we would have had the very worst thing: the disgusted and disappointed bird landing short. And so we continued. Up. Down. Up. Down. Up. Down. Repetitive, but effective.

The Great Escape

With the eagle now in pretty good shape, a training trip into the mountains was decided upon. More of a reward than of practical value – we deserved a break from *The Rock*. And so off we set, down and off our own little mountain, across the valley floor – so narrow here it could be covered in one long stride – and up into the high country proper. We were kids on an adventure, the little road – straight from a Bond movie – carrying us through glorious alpine landscapes, all the while travel-brochure weather beckoning us on.

With the only turn off behind us, we were now on a sliver of a track going one way only;

I couldn't see Julie Andrews, but any moment that music was going to start.

impressive setting to fly a golden eagle – an eagle that truly belonged here, whose kind we had watched fly back and forth across this monumental valley all summer long, passing like dots over the castle. And the property that went with it slid right into place: a timeworn dark-timbered alpine farmstead that was just bursting with that currently so very popular 'WOW' factor. Yes, the whole thing was truly perfect.

I Forgot to Mention...

I've neglected just one tiny detail – the owner didn't know it yet! I'd never seen this farm before, never met the owner before. The whole trip had been done on spec. I'd stopped almost without registering pulling off the road, because it was *The Place*. Convincing the owner of the fact would be a minor detail – on this special day, in this extraordinary location, he would find nothing odd with our request at all. He came to the door, following the script perfectly. Everything about him was right: a

castle and not a band of lunatics led by some crazy foreigner, but before being giving the nod, it became clear we would need to submit to *The Tour*. Suddenly we were all in motion.

It's difficult to follow someone who's drunk. Walk alongside them and you have to match their weaving to prevent collisions, walk behind, and you feel seasick! The odd arm waving didn't help, nor the heavy dialect daubed a most interesting colour by the booze! But, weaving, dodging, and straining to understand, on we went. We'd done the under-the-eaves-mounted hunting trophies (and what stories with them!), had been shown some strange contraption that puzzled even native Hanni, and were only just past the hens when we came to a stop at a dilapidated wooden outbuilding. And immediately the drunkenness eased away as the mood became more sombre. Slowly, our host began to tell of how he had once trapped an eagle and kept it captive in this frightful prison, how he had taken the wonderful bird from its mountain sky and shut it away in the darkness. We all stood silently staring at the

Golden Eagle Days Mountain Challenge

empty pen. Then quickly the tone changed again, and as the colour and the flailing arms returned, we were given the badly needed happy ending. Disgusted by what he'd done, our host had released the bird. Thank God – we were all close to tears!

And now, as the farmer wobbled back indoors, it was finally time for our own bit of releasing. It was time to



train. The build up created by the drive, the country, and our special training location, had us march back to the range rover buzzing with excitement. And somehow Astur could feel it too. He came out of his transport box, excited eyes telling him what was to come. Hood on, and another march out and onto that incredible meadow, still buzzing and now fully charged with the magnificence of the setting. Then hood off, and as those eyes lit up again and great wings embraced the freedom, the orchestra came in right on cue.

And...?

Oh, did our training work? Well let me take you away from the mountains and onto flat arable

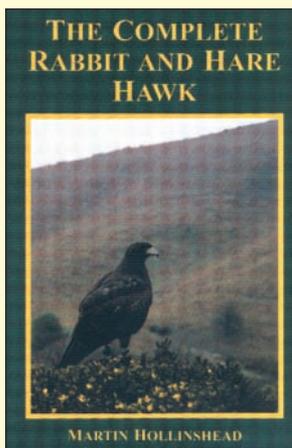
landscapes some hours distant. From a field devoid of life, a monster hare is up and running. My companions – the rival castle – don't react.

They're sleeping. Let 'em sleep! It's a long hare but I see a chance and with a cautionary 'Eagle free', snatch the hood from Astur's head. And now, the wings that fought up that demonstration lawn – that were just spread in that blue alpine sky – get down to the deadly job at hand. They aren't the

same wings – it isn't the same bird – every feather, every nerve is now in screaming hunting mode. As it powers in behind the target you can feel the drive and determination. There's enough force here to carry the bird through a brick wall. The hare's good, but the eagle's better and it piles in like a runaway truck. Did the training work? Not half!

As it powers in behind the target you can feel the drive and determination. There's enough force here to carry the bird through a brick wall

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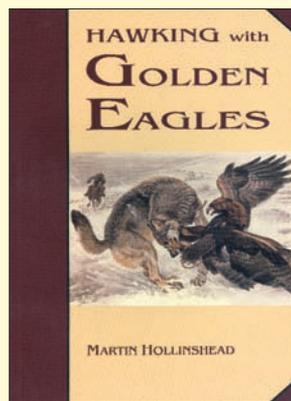
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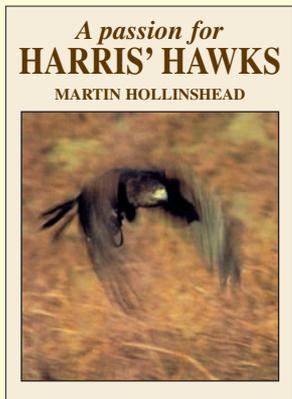
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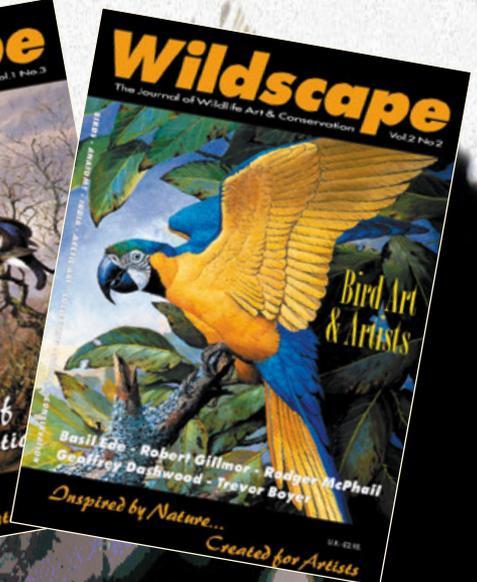
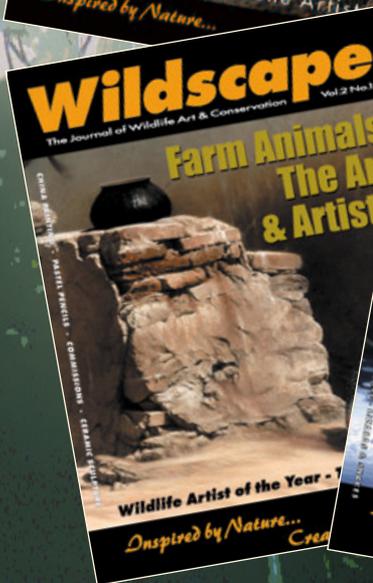
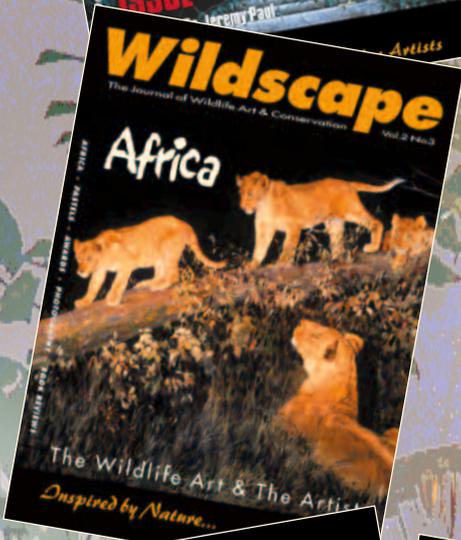
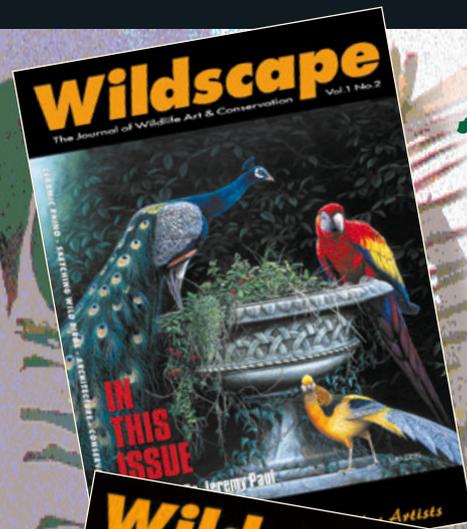
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Inspired by Nature... Created for Artists

So, where did I leave it last time . . . ah yes, that was it, there I was a couple of weeks after taking delivery of a Female Harris Hawk/Redtail hybrid, bred between a naturally bonded pair of a Female Redtail and a Male Harris, parent reared and now about 14 weeks old. In the two weeks or so since I got her, I took everything nice and slow, weathering her out on a bow, getting that odd bit closer each time I passed and occasionally dropping a piece of food down whilst she wasn't looking. I have to say, she was really quite settled on the bow and would spend most of her day, sat with one leg tucked up and hardly any bating. I never heard a peep out of her save for about three occasions when she let out a long piercing scream, when I was out of sight, in the house, as if to say 'Hey I'm still a juvenile, someone come and mother me'.

been doing it for years.

This progressed for about a fortnight, at which time I introduced the creance. I normally would start creance training earlier or quicker than this, but was still a little concerned about her on day/off day mood swings and wanted her to be comfortable being picked up, especially if we were soon to move onto lures and quarry.

Anyway, she still acted the same so we carried on with the creance. Amazing . . . put her on a training perch and it was all I could do to get 30 metres away before she was coming after me! Was this the same bird that minutes earlier had been bating away from me on her bow in a wild frenzy?!

With a few days of very similar response I thought it time to introduce the rabbit lure. Oops, my mistake, was I currently working with the first recorded vegetarian bird of prey known to man? Would I be better producing a dragged lettuce or pot of tofu? What ever it was, she was not having any of it, and even though the lure was only a hop away, adorned with chicks on both sides, she greeted this with sheer paranoia, bating and a serious attempt to get as far away from that rabbit as possible.



Photos by Richard Crease, courtesy of the Daily Echo B'mth

here' type manic bating with no hope of jumping to fist or onto the chicks that I had thrown onto the ground next to the lure.

About this time I had a chat with the other guy who had collected the other Red/Harris, about a week after me and believed it to be a male - Mr Pete Tudor. An

uncanny amount of similarities cropped up in this conversation, not least the fact that he too was experiencing the same on day/off day routine as I. He summed it up by saying that it was quite simply, 'One week forward,

Red/Harris

-was it meant to

Things progressed nicely and it wasn't long before she was able to be picked up with a proffered chick or similar. Then something odd started to happen - one day I could go to her and she would step onto or foot the glove as it was offered, the next day she acted as though she had never seen a human, bating for all she was worth and having to be picked up on the leash rather quickly. Whatever method she adopted, as soon as she was on the fist, she just got on with the business in hand - eating - as though she had

Next day it was the same set up, that looks good, lets jump on that, foot the crap out of it and polish off those chicks that some dope is trying to suggest are a natural necklace on the rabbits around here. Ok, you are doing well bird, who knows you may have even grasped the idea. . . slowly, slowly here, lets make a nice low approach and go for a pick up. Wrong again. Not the usual possessive 'You're not having this rabbit' keep your distance thing, but instead a 'Who the hell's that bloke, sod this rabbit I'm outta

two weeks back' and added further, that he could have manned three Goshawks in the time that it had taken to get this hybrid even steady.

Now, the next part, I really hadn't expected or planned for. She was out on her bow, as usual, quite happy, taking the odd hosepipe shower, preening and generally relaxed, and I was happy just to sit there in the sun, watching, with thoughts drifting off onto what she might turn into.

I then glanced a little bit harder at her

feet. Now I know, as I said in my previous article, this bird really did have an awesome set of feet, lovely long toes, with a distinct Redtail thickness to them . . . but today, they looked different. Big, yes, but a very slight pinky/purple colour. I picked her up (after the obligatory bating!) for a closer look, and sure enough, I wasn't seeing things. My mind immediately was cast back to one of Jemima's earlier books, where she states to be aware that certain types of sand used in weatherings may release a dye that can turn your birds feet pink. Apart from that, there were no other worrying signs, they weren't warm or swollen and she was happy for me to touch them. Having laid new sand for her arrival, I put it down to that and thought it best just to keep an eye on it. A couple of days later, with regular bathing, this was either a pretty strong dye or something more sinister. Oh, silly me, how could I ever have assumed that there would be anything other than the 'more sinister' angle to consider. Sure enough, a couple of days later still, and these purple feet were now also looking a bit fatter than normal. On inspection it was quite obvious that

These obviously did the trick, because within a few days the swelling had completely gone down . . . and down and down and down . . . Within a week, both outer toes on each foot, had completely shrivelled away almost to nothing. The way I have described it to most people is like that chip you find behind the cooker that has lain there for five years or more. The two outer toes were a charred brown/black colour, with absolutely no movement in any joint and honestly looked as though they had just wasted away in some form of avian

leprosy. What was perhaps the oddest thing was that it was the same two toes on each foot, going from the tip of the toe and stopping just short of the joint with the leg. The main and rear toe were completely unaffected. It was now quite apparent that these toes were all but dead, they were not coming back, and within seconds of placing the bird on a bow, it would tuck one leg up. This was not good, not good at all. On again speaking to Pete Tudor, he luckily, had no such problems with his bird, other than the continuing and frustratingly

juvenile behaviour. I

decided to ring Steve at the New Forest Owl Sanctuary, who had bred the bird. He suggested bringing the bird straight over, as their vet - John Chitty from Andover, was visiting the following day and would be able to take a look.

On arrival, Steve too was mystified, having never seen anything like it, and even more confused that the bird seemed so fit and healthy otherwise.

The following day, John Chitty attended and following inspection, immediately

euthanised the bird. It was quite obvious that these symptoms would not repair, but if anything, infect the rest of the foot. Being a great believer in quality of life, I too was happy with this decision, being in the best interests of the bird itself. Taking the bird away for autopsy, John would report back his findings in due course. A couple of weeks went past and John stated that of all the tests he had done, and try as he might, there was nothing really conclusive and that the only diagnosis he was able to offer was one of 'Bacterial Infection'. Now as many of you will know, bacterial infection covers a multitude of sins, and literally hundreds of possible causes, including genetic, food, perching, cuts etc., etc., etc.

So, by way of a footnote, I feel it a shame that the bird never went the distance, was it a genetic thing that this bird inherited through the hybridisation process? Why was it the same two toes on each foot? What would she have turned out like? Was it really meant to be?

Having just spoken to Pete Tudor, his bird is now flying free and although not yet entered it is following on well. It is an invertebrate screamer, although pretty silent on its own, it only has to see another bird or him, to start screaming for attention. It has had the odd chase of pheasant, but with no real conviction, and he states that it is still incredibly juvenile.

Certainly from the experiences I had with mine I would have to agree. If my bird had regressed any further she would have found an eggshell to climb back into! And lastly, a word of advice (if it were needed after the above!) to anyone considering one of these birds. Ask yourself why. Why do you want it, what will it be able to do that either species as an individual can't do already? Don't be too

hasty, don't go for the gimmick or the 'this could be the best thing since sliced bread' angle, and if you really really must . . . I wish you the very best of luck.



o be?

there was some form of fluid just under the skin on the toes, more especially on the outer two toes of each foot.

Right, this was well out of my field and one that needed some expert opinion. So it was off to the vets, but the symptoms certainly had the vet in something of a dilemma. The bird appeared so outwardly normal, happy, content, bright eyes, good appetite, good conformation, no problems in the mute sample etc., etc. So I returned with a general course of antibiotics.

Why was it the same two toes on each foot? What would she have turned out like? Was it really meant to be?

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BETWEEN 15 JANUARY AND 5 APRIL 2003

STOLEN x 7

BARN OWL IBR20032U
HARRIS HAWK IBR5583W
HARRIS HAWK UK77189 IBR18257V
HARRIS HAWK 1ND02W IBR24758W
HARRIS HAWK 29JWB02W
HARRIS HAWK 3678W
SAKER FALCON 2082W 2060W

REUNITED x 89

AFRICAN GREY PARROT
BARN OWL x 6
BENGAL EAGLE OWL
BONNELLIS EAGLE
COMMON BUZZARD x 5
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
FERRUGINOUS HAWK
GOLDEN EAGLE
GOSHAWK x 2
GYR/SAKER FALCON x 5
HARRIS HAWK x 23
KESTREL x 6
LANNER FALCON x 8
PEREGRINE FALCON x 6
PEREGRINE/BARBARY
PEREGRINE/LANNER
PEREGRINE/PRAIRIE
PEREGRINE/SAKER x 5
RED-TAILED HAWK x 3
SAKER FALCON x 11

LOST x 98

AFRICAN GREY PARROT x 2
AFRICAN HARRIER HAWK

AFRICAN PEREGRINE FALCON
AFRICAN SPOTTED EAGLE OWL
AMERICAN BARN OWL
BARN OWL x 15
BENGAL EAGLE OWL
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL x 3
GOSHAWK x 5
GYR/PEREGRINE/SAKER
GYR/SAKER FALCON x 4
HARRIS HAWK x 19
KESTREL x 3
LANNER FALCON x 3
LITTLE OWL
LUGGER/LANNER FALCON
MARTIAL EAGLE
MERLIN
PEREGRINE FALCON x 4
PEREGRINE/BARBARY
PEREGRINE/LANNER x 3
PEREGRINE/PRAIRIE
PEREGRINE/SAKER x 7
PERLIN
RED-TAILED HAWK
SAKER FALCON x 7
SPARROWHAWK
STEPPE EAGLE
TAWNY OWL x 3
TURKEY VULTURE
WHITEBACK VULTURE

FOUND x 65

AFRICAN GREY PARROT NLx002/2198
AFRICAN SPOTTED EAGLE OWL 01xxB92X
BARN OWL x 22

BENGAL EAGLE OWL IBxx564Y
COMMON BUZZARD IBxx7979W
COMMON BUZZARD 38xxDOEW
COMMON BUZZARD 14xxDOEX
IBxx4917W
COMMON BUZZARD 19xx
COMMON BUZZARD 6Cxx6W
EUROPEAN BARN OWL BCxx11
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL 2Pxx94Z
IBxx1880Z
HARRIS HAWK IBxx0058W
HARRIS HAWK 01xx3206333
HARRIS HAWK 0Hxx97W MRxx7W
HARRIS HAWK 53xx
KESTREL 6 R
KESTREL 29xxV IBxx5373V
LANNER FALCON 05xxBCR
LITTLE OWL 24x IBxx4875W
LUGGER FALCON 17xxR00G
OTHER BIRD SPECIES BRxx2L01178
OTHER BIRD SPECIES GFxx084
PEREGRINE FALCON 15xx9W 32xxV
PEREGRINE HYBRID 20xx8W 10xx9V
PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID 26xx5DOEW
PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID IBxx4639W
SAKER FALCON IB392W
SAKER FALCON 6Gxx98W
SAKER FALCON 2Wxx97W
SAKER FALCON 55xxDOEW
SAKER FALCON 20xxO16W
SAKER HYBRID 3Dxx00W
SNOWY OWL
TAWNY OWL 21xxBC96U

TAWNY OWL 18xx
UNKNOWN BOP 76xxW
UNKNOWN BOP 55xxX 24xx3W
UNKNOWN BOP 23xx7W
UNKNOWN BOP 3Dxx0W

DEAD x 37

BARN OWL x 10
GOSHAWK
GYR/SAKER FALCON x 2
HARRIS HAWK x 7
KESTREL x 4
LITTLE OWL
MARTIAL EAGLE
PEREGRINE FALCON x 3
PEREGRINE HYBRID x 2
RED KITE
RED-TAILED HAWK
SPARROWHAWK x 2
UNKNOWN BOP x 2

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Jemima Parry-Jones (Hawk Board Chairman) writes:

In March 1977 the Advisory Committees on the Protection of Birds for England, Wales and Scotland established a joint working party to look into the issues of Falconiformes in captivity.

The Group's terms of reference were to consider the desirability of legislating to regulate the possession of captive hawks, and to consider the practical aspects of operating a control scheme. In the course of time the working party issued a comprehensive report, which the Government agreed to treat as a consultative document for consideration by representatives of those involved with captive birds of prey. The British Fields Sports Society (now the Countryside Alliance) was approached and agreed to form an 'umbrella

liased closely with Government departments and provided valuable advice both of a general and technical nature. Ringing and marking methods were early subjects for discussion and were most carefully investigated; the merits of different rings being debated at length.

The Panel devoted much time to the question of control, as at that time some birds of prey in captivity had been illegally taken from the wild. The Panel sought the view of the RSPB who had prosecuted successfully on several occasions. Registration, inspection and enforcement systems were therefore worked out to ensure not only that a proper check could be maintained over the birds, but that their keepers complied with the legal requirements, i.e. the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Bill, enacted in 1981.

The Panel also gave considerable attention to the drawing up of Codes of Conduct – a general Code for all keepers of captive hawks

(With special thanks to Derek Starkie, former Political Secretary of the BFSS and past treasurer of the Hawk Board who so carefully kept this record.)

Nick Kester comments:

Much of the above is a lasting testament to the dedication of a few falconers and bird of prey keepers who have acted selflessly on behalf of the majority. It is ironic to read Jemima's comments on possession licences (i.e. the registration of individual falconers). In many continental countries there are strict hunting exams and falconers must pass two to be qualified (one on falconry and a second on quarry species). These are tough and require the sort of dedication that fires every teenager to pass his driving test rather than study for A levels. The need for such focused effort might well weed out less dedicated falconers and provide greater welfare for some of the hawks and falcons that are purchased on a whim without the knowledge and experience to look after them.

It is doubly ironic when you read the draft legislation from COTES (European CITES or Control of Trade in Endangered Species) that

The History of...

body' to effect the necessary co-ordination.

And so it was that on a freezing cold day in January 1979 when the snow lay thick and stopped several people from getting to the meeting, some 200 dedicated falconers attended a conference at The National Agricultural Centre at Stoneleigh in Warwickshire to debate a legalised control scheme. The discussion was lively to say the least. From this conference was born The National Voluntary Panel on Captive Hawks. It is interesting to remember that at that meeting proposals to have licenses for individual falconers were put forward, and overturned by the majority of the attendees, who felt that, as practising falconers, they didn't need tests and licenses.

(If only we had known then what we know now, I think many of us wish – myself definitely, then and more so today – that we had gone for individual licensing of falconers and raptor keepers. Instead we have today's incredibly cumbersome and ill conceived, not to say expensive processes, which protect neither the captive birds, nor the people who own, breed and fly them. But history confers perfect vision on those looking backwards!)

The National Voluntary Panel on Captive Hawks was made up of representatives of falconers, zoos, veterinary surgeons and other bird of prey keepers who were accordingly elected to the Panel and the first meeting was held in July 1979.

The Panel's main task was to bring together the differing views of the various interests and to give the Government practical guidance for the legislation that was to come under the terms of the EU directives to which the United Kingdom was committed. To this end the Panel

the Hawk Board

and specialist Codes for falconers, breeders and so on. The well-being of captive birds was the prime consideration but the Codes were also aimed at giving guidance of a general nature to hawk keepers. The Regulations, issued in due course by the Department of the Environment in connection with the Wildlife and Countryside Bill, were expected to give specific directions on a number of aspects of keeping captive hawks.

And so went the history of the start of the Hawk Board...

The initial objects of the Panel were attained under the able Chairmanship of Sir Marcus Kimball M.P (now Lord Kimball), and then Captain Richard Grant-Rennick who took over. By 1981 the name had changed to The Hawk Board, which by this time had an important role to play then and in the future, not only in acting as a channel of communication between hawk keepers and the Government, but also in assisting the Government in implementing its legislation. One of the aims was that hawk keeping and falconry must not be allowed to fall into disrepute, and that hawk keepers should react responsibly to the provisions of the then new legislation.

Today the Hawk Board protects falconry and the keeping of birds of prey from the various and numerous threats posed by potential British and European legislation and attacks by anti groups.

has been submitted to the Hawk Board for comment. One section states that it will become: *an offence to knowingly relinquish a live Annex B specimen without ensuring that the intended recipient is adequately informed of the accommodation, equipment, and practices required to ensure the specimen will be properly cared for. We propose a level five fine and/or a prison sentence of up to six months for these offences on summary conviction, and a fine and/or a prison sentence of up to two years on indictment.* In real English this means that if I sell you a Harris hawk and you do not know how to look after it, I am liable for prosecution. So in the future, how many hawks do you think will be sold to people without references or evidence of experience? A hideous concept that flies in the face of free and fair trade even if it does have some positive benefits on the welfare of sold birds. As with any legislation, responsible breeders will comply by demanding all sorts of evidence of competence, whilst those unscrupulous ones will carry on regardless. Proving once again that the law is too often just a burden on the honest.

So when you ask what the Hawk Board does for the ordinary falconer, the above example should be ample evidence. As always a few act to protect the future of the many, usually by ploughing thanklessly through acres of small print to find items of law that will trip us up and prevent us doing what falconers do best – going out hunting.

6unofn rjra1

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During the second world war the fighter pilots had what was referred to as the 'thousand yard stare', this is exactly the impression you get from the piercing eyes of a bird of prey, they seem to look right through and way beyond you. Nothing will deter these birds from their primeval drive, the ultimate predators, one half of the classic relationship that has honed the instincts of both the bird and its prey to the need for survival.

Such is the very essence of these magnificent birds that must be captured on canvas, the artist must be able to convey this instinctive determination to the viewer of their work.

Birds of prey have been a favourite subject of wildlife artists for hundreds of years, a subject

and habits that make them such outstanding subjects; the tilt of the head, the stooping glare, that look of defiant superiority that marks the falcons, hawks and eagles out from the rest of the bird world.

Observation is always the keyword for any wildlife art, if the artist is to be successful in this genre. They must watch, study and record their subjects long before ever putting paint to canvas. For the bird of prey artist, observation is just the beginning, it is necessary to build up an in depth understanding of the way these birds function, the peculiarities of the different species; and in some cases even those of individual birds. As well as this basic understanding, the artist must also study the birds attitudes, the way they stand and move, their flight, and the particular tactics and approach of each species to the hunt and eventual kill.

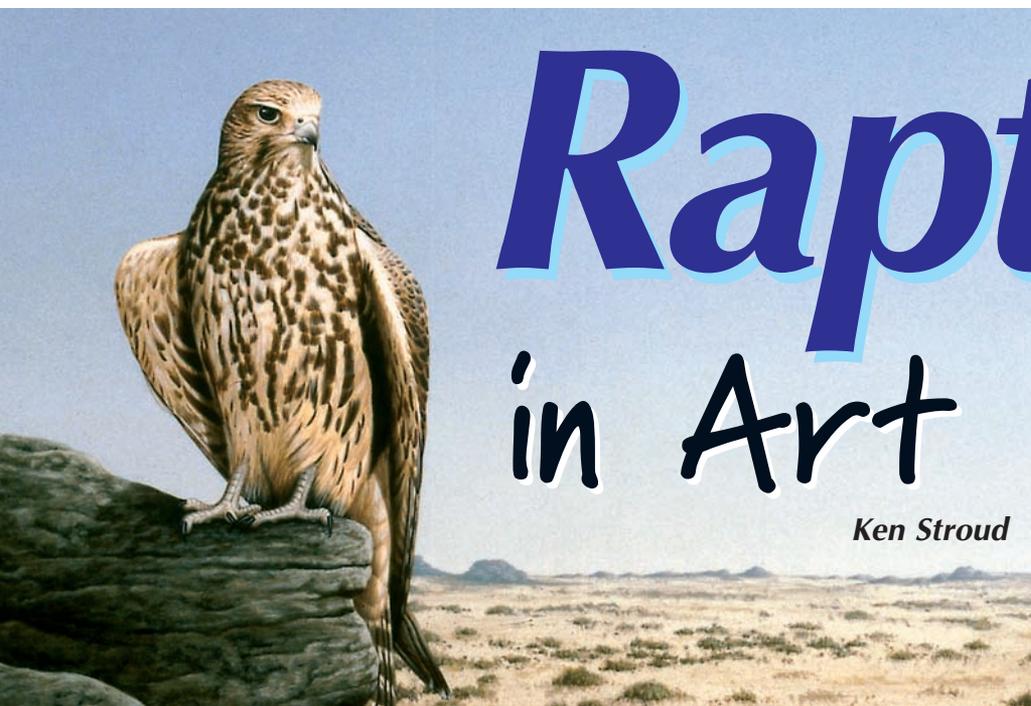
Having tried my hand at painting various raptors over the years, I have discovered how

do say 'you never hear good of yourself if you eavesdrop on conversations', but it can have its advantages. Usually, people will turn away and make their cryptic asides as they walk off, however on this occasion I overheard the conversation whilst they cast a casual eye over my work. 'Nice painting, but the bird looks too stiff, not quite right somehow'. Looking at the piece after they had moved on, I could immediately see what they meant.

Leave it to the Experts

Personally, I have decided to stay with subjects I am more comfortable with, foxes, deer, elephants, buffalo and big game animals, leaving birds of prey to those who are far more knowledgeable about the subject.

Thus, I have the greatest admiration for those artists who have specialised in bird of prey. Their skills and techniques have produced some extraordinary artworks, some of which illustrate



Raptors in Art

Ken Stroud

that offers excitement and drama, as well as the aesthetic beauty of the birds themselves. Many artists try, many fail, and a few succeed to become recognised authorities and experts in portraying these magnificent birds.

Inside Knowledge Helps

Without doubt those artists who do succeed in this particular field of wildlife art, are often falconers themselves, or at least have a close working relationship with falconry. They also have an in depth knowledge of raptors in general. It is essential for the artist to capture the very spirit of these birds, to know the nuances

difficult a subject this is. Painting a bird of prey is one thing, the secret of success is to make it live, to respond to its environment and what is going on around it. Although this is just as relevant to any wildlife subject, birds of prey seem to demand a much deeper understanding.

This came home to me whilst taking part in the art show at the annual Falconry and Raptor Fair a few years ago. I had painted what I felt was a pretty good looking Harris Hawk, complete with a rabbit kill. As always at these events, you have 'experts', those who like to air their knowledge of the subject. In such situations, it is useful to listen-in on conversations that go on about your work. They

this article. Most of the artists shown will be appearing in the art exhibition at the Falconry and Raptor Fair at the beginning of May, so I would urge readers to take this opportunity, should you be attending the Falconry and Raptor Fair, to visit the art exhibition and chat to the artists about their work.

One aspect of this particular branch of wildlife art is the knowledge these guys have of the whole range of species that are to be found in many parts of the world. With 292 birds of prey to choose from it is good to see work containing some of the lesser known species, including those not necessarily associated with falconry.

Raptors in Art Throughout History

Birds of prey have featured prominently in art throughout history and in particular those birds used for falconry. The Bayeux Tapestry bears images of falconry - Harrold is shown with a hawk on his wrist as he approaches the Duke of Normandy. Raptors also feature high among heraldic designs and the trappings of power. It is believed that falconry goes back well before the Battle of Hastings and the Bayeux Tapestry images, back some two thousand five hundred years, with images of the sport appearing on

early decorative panels from the far east.

During the mid-1800's and early 1900's, artists such as Bruno Liljefors, Joseph Wolf and George Lodge were renowned for their paintings of birds of prey. Their work being all the more impressive for the fact that they did not have the modern facilities of high speed cameras to have captured suitable reference material on which to base their paintings. For these artists it was a matter of being out in the field, observing first hand the birds in their natural environment, collecting reference by way of field sketches, even working *en plein air*, or finishing their paintings back in the studio based on their observations and notes.

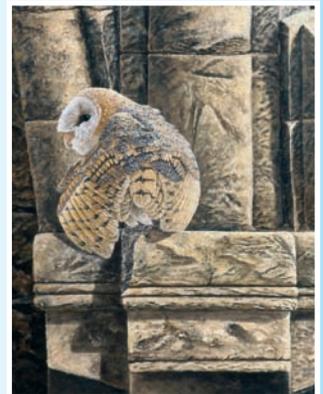
Many of the early wildlife artists were also hunters and therefore frequently at close quarters with their subjects and able to observe and study their behaviour. To obtain the detailed information of feather maps and coloration, specimens were often shot and taken back to the studio as reference. It is recorded that the famous American wildlife artist Audubon usually ate his specimens after he had finished with them as reference. Considering the fact that he painted most of the American species of birds during his lifetime, including some now extinct, he may have unwittingly contributed to their demise.

The Birds

Probably one of the most painted of all raptors is the peregrine, not only for its stunning appearance but for its dynamic performance as an elite hunter.

My personal introduction to the peregrine occurred at a falconry show a few years ago, when during one of the demonstrations, the bird was lofted until it was a tiny dot in the sky. It then began its stoop, plummeting in an almost vertical dive. As it streaked in over the heads of the crowds, there was a unanimous gasp of amazement as the screamed across the arena at an incredible speed to take the lure. Even though I had heard about the phenomenal turn of speed achieved by the peregrine during a stoop, nothing had prepared me for this experience, the sight was just breathtaking.

The peregrine kills its prey primarily by high impact strike as it stoops at speeds of 150 mph. plus. Prey not killed by the first strike are despatched on the ground by a swift bite to the neck.





Raptors in Art

Such is the hunting prowess of the peregrine that records made back in the 1800's show impressive bags of partridge, grouse and woodcock. For one particular tiercel, it was officially documented that out of 134 flights it achieved a phenomenal 129 kills.

There are 35 species of falcons world-wide, but only four are resident in the UK - the Peregrine, Kestrel, Hobby and Merlin. Two other falcons that make occasional forays into the British airspace are the Red-footed falcon and the Gyr falcon - usually the Greenland form. Most falcons are relatively small, the Gyr falcon being the largest, but even so the Gyr is still not much bigger than a crow. All are built for speed, having streamlined bodies and long pointed wings.

However, my brief for this article is not to preach to the converted about falconry or the raptors themselves, as most readers will probably be well versed in all such matters. I will therefore concentrate on the art aspect, which hopefully will provide an interesting diversion.

Back to the Art

Whilst I am the first to acknowledge a lack of insight as to the birds themselves, I am aware of what is necessary when it comes to the representation of wildlife subjects in art, including the composition, content and presentation of various animals. I would therefore take this opportunity to make the following observation in regard to the painting of raptors. Raptors are birds of action and I am therefore a little bemused to find the great number of static studies of these exciting birds. All too often we see a Gyr falcon on a rock, a Peregrine on a rock, a Golden Eagle on a rock. To depict birds of prey to advantage they really need to be painted in action, the faster and more furious the better. The natural world is full of activity, animals and birds going about their everyday lives. Looking at the prey species of some of the raptors alone proves the point that they can be shown in far more interesting situations than just sitting on a rock. As well as the more obvious prey such as small animals, some raptors go for more specific prey such as bats, snails, snakes, fish, insects - including beetles, wasps and dragonflies in their diet, even bones. So these are aspects we could well include in our paintings to make them far more interesting.

Of course the portraits of animals are wonderful and still require much skill and knowledge to execute them well, but animals in action or going about their daily lives are so much more interesting. Look at the accompanying examples and tell me which of the pieces shown are the more interesting, those superbly rendered portraits or those showing the

birds in action? Perhaps this is where the knowledge and natural history of the individual birds comes into play. Those artists who have studied and know their subjects inside out, and can apply this knowledge to their art will produce the more authoritative work.

The birds are not always chasing after prey of course, they do have periods of quiet. But another personal pet hate of mine is the immaculate bird, the bird with not a feather out of place. I much prefer to see the odd ruffled feather, a few splits in the vanes of primary or secondary feathers - something which should not to be overdone though, all of which add a sense of reality to a painting.

Having got those two criticisms, off my chest - let us take a look at the work of some of the recognised leaders in raptor art and their approach to the birds they paint.

The Art and the Artists

Raptors move fast and the artist must use a number of ploys to convey the impression of speed, some based on the actions of the birds themselves, others on painting techniques. Where the birds are concerned, showing the wings folded close to the body and the bird slightly tilted downwards, the impression of speed is made. Blurring the wing tips or the background also helps convey a sense of movement, and depending on the amount of blurring, the speed of the bird. In Andrew Ellis's superb painting of a Teita falcon chasing swifts at the Victoria Falls, he has used the downwards movement of the waterfall to accentuate the birds appearance of speed.

The Saker has long been a favourite bird with the Arab falconers. It has the ability to soar above the desert in high temperatures and has the stamina for prolonged hunting trips. The Bedouin tribesmen have used the Saker for hundreds of years, originally for hunting and providing food, but now more as a social activity. Chris Christoforou's painting shows this striking bird in its natural environment, ready to launch itself after a favoured prey species.

Bernd Popplemann's superb study of a Goshawk is again shown in its natural habitat of woodland. For falconers, the Goshawk is put to good use when hunting in woodlands. In common with its smaller relative the Sparrowhawk, with its short rounded wings and high manoeuvrability, the Goshawk is able to weave its way among the trees and bushes whilst searching for prey such as woodpigeons or pheasant.

As well as the hawks, falcons and eagles, the raptor group includes owls, of which there are about 162 species world-wide. Probably the most favoured owl for artists is the Barn Owl, due no doubt to its beautiful coloration and markings. Peter Bainbridge has captured the

Barn Owl in his painting with extreme care and attention to detail. I particularly like the choice of setting, placing the bird on a ledge in a church or ruined abbey makes for a nice change from the more obvious setting of a barn or fence post.

The Gyr falcon, the most powerful of all the falcons and considered fit to sit on the wrist of a King is a much favoured as a subject by many artists. The Gyr with its striking appearance, its beautiful markings and regal stance, is the very essence of a bird of prey. Trevor Boyer has captured this striking bird to perfection in his painting, (even though it is shown on a rock - reference my earlier comments), but in this instance the bird is perfectly placed in its rightful habitat, bleak mountain terrain and frozen tundra.

The Future

It is good to see that the raptors are making a comeback following many years of persecution, and problems of habitat loss. In particular the peregrine and osprey, both of which suffered badly in the past but are now making a good recovery. The osprey is once again firmly re-established as a breeding species in Scotland after many years of decline and the peregrine is gaining in numbers following the disastrous effects of chemicals used in agriculture. Wildlife conservation organisations have played an important role in protecting both birds and their habitats, whilst falconers and associated countryside organisations are working hard to ensure a secure future for all our birds of prey and indeed other wildlife and wild places. Hopefully, wildlife and in particular birds of prey, will continue to provide a source of inspiration for artists for generations to come.

Ken Stroud is the Editor and Publisher of Wildscape the Journal of Wildlife Art and Conservation. He is a wildlife artist and the Founder and President of The Wildlife Art Society and a life long enthusiast for the natural world. For information about Wildscape or The Wildlife Art Society contact 01227 360707.

Acknowledgements: Pictures provided by Christo Exhibitions, Leighton Buzzard. All paintings reproduced in this article are subject to copyright by the individual artists.



A series of incidents recently have highlighted to me my ignorance in the area of Falconry best practice and the code by which we are all supposed to conduct ourselves when practising and presenting our sport.

The first indication was a few years ago, when the TV channel *The Cartoon Network* – organised an annual fun-day for the advertising industry. Parents were invited to take their children to The Hurlingham Club in Putney, where they had been set up and a fun fair, bouncy castle, jugglers, and fire eaters to entertain the children. At the time I didn't have any children of my own and so I didn't go. However, the event was a great success, I was told and the following day those that had attended were full of it.

As many of my colleagues knew that I had an interest in birds of prey, I had a constant stream of people coming to tell me that one of the highlights of *The Cartoon Network* event was a falconry display where the falconer got a barn owl to sit on childrens' heads. "How fantastic was that"? It was nice to hear that a falconry display was such a highlight, but I was very uneasy to hear about the bird on the heads. This longing thought stayed with me, as it just didn't feel right, and it was only recently that three similar experiences led me to write this article.

Sunnier display

At a display last summer I saw a child (about six years old) invited into a display arena for a female Harris Hawk to fly over him. The bird having done it a couple of times then flew to the ground near the child but didn't come instantly when called back by the falconer.

The child then walked after the bird and tried to pick it up from behind as you would a chicken. The bird, understandably, walked away and the child followed bending now and again to try to pick it up. The falconer's commentary went something like "that's right pick the silly bird up." The temptation afterwards to share my opinions regarding this display with the falconer

were very strong but I resisted. However, I appeared to be the only person in the audience that didn't think the display was a total success. And after all who the hell am I?

Soon after another incident came to light at a game fair where I watched a person (who would be expected to know what was acceptable and what wasn't) holding a barn owl on the fist, while a group of, admittedly very attractive women came past and stroked the barn owl front and back like a puppy.

The final incident that had me doubting my judgement was a double page spread in one of my local papers announcing the arrival of a newly established Raptor Rescue Centre (can't get more credible than that in the public's eyes). Reading the article, it transpired that the centre was based in a family's garden and had been built using scrap found in local tips so as to keep the cost down. It did, in fairness, mention that despite the impression given in the Harry Potter novels owls do not make good pets as they can be "messy and smelly".

Nobody can doubt the noble intentions of someone willing to commit time, energy and money to helping injured birds of prey. However, the main, almost full page, picture that accompanied the article was of a teenage girl with an owl on her head.

To re-cap

Now, to re-cap, firstly a professional falconer believes it is acceptable for a small child to attempt to pick up a female Harris Hawk from behind without any protection. Secondly, a bird of prey centre owner is happy to have a series of (very attractive) strangers stroke his Barn Owl and thirdly, a Bird of Prey rescue centre encourages Birds of Prey to be carried on the head!

After these incidents, the following thoughts came to my mind, "I must be out of step with what is acceptable in handling and presenting these beautiful, fantastic, highly evolved, brilliantly designed, top predators.

"Should I in each case have explained to them why I believe their actions are to the detriment of my sport?" These are just my opinions, so why should they carry more weight than theirs and just what is the accepted wisdom of UK Falconry as a whole.

The conclusion I came to was that someone should write a code of practice to give everyone some guidelines by which we can all judge/question our actions.

But who has the appropriate authority to write such a code - the answer is, of course, the Hawk Board.

Fired up by my new mission, I accessed the Hawk board website to find out who I needed to contact to get some guidelines written. I soon discovered that there's a whole section devoted to codes of practice in UK falconry covering handling, keeping and displaying birds of prey already in place.

In my defence, I am not a member of any club, and therefore am probably the only person (apart from those involved in the incidents) who have not read this code already. However, just in case there are newcomers to the sport or some that are still in doubt about what is acceptable, I've listed a short extract from the guidelines for show organisers and display teams. For the code of Welfare and Husbandry of Birds of Prey and Owls and the full Guidelines on flying demonstrations of Birds of Prey visit the Hawk Board Web site at www.hawkboard.org.uk

Flying demonstrations of Birds of Prey Requirements from the Demonstrator

10. For a variety of safety reasons the participation of small children in displays is to be discouraged. The flying of birds of prey should be carried out using traditional methods; the flying of hawks to alight on the head, face or any part of the body except the gloved fist is absolutely not acceptable. At no time should the public be permitted to handle the birds.

Falconry is under enormous pressure at present. And while not all of us put in the same commitment as those in the front line (The Hawk Board, etc.) in defence of our sport, surely it is our duty to at least give some thought to what messages we send out to the public through our actions? The very least we should be doing is following our own code of practice. If we can't do that much, the conclusion will surely be that we need external regulation, enforced by non-falconers.

Am I a good ambassador for my sport?

Paul Manning

The town of Dumfries is well known for its wildfowling, salmon fishing and many other sporting pastimes. It takes approximately 30 minutes to drive to the town from the border into Scotland and is surrounded by rich countryside. The River Nith, which runs through the town, spills out in the estuary of Solway Firth.

In the winter the area is very populated with geese and there are also many birds of prey within the area. Quite recently I was on a wildfowling expedition on the estuary and I was thrilled to see three peregrine falcons flying around and going about their business. I have in the past, watched a resident pair of peregrines hunt goldeneye ducks, curlew, and black headed gull.

within their environment.

Looking back I had a rather unhappy childhood and escaped into the countryside almost every day which allowed me to find moments of peace, quite and solitude.

I still remember visiting my local library and discovering an old book on falconry with utter amazement. I realised that with time and dedication, it was possible to form a partnership with a bird of prey.

Information of how to own, man and train such a bird was quickly learnt by reading and how a grubby young boy with no confidence in himself could manage to obtain such a goal. Was this only just a dream?

The years went by and the young boy grew into a troubled man, having been let down badly as a youngster other events were to follow

Her training went very well and she was entered soon after her first free flight, having caught a rabbit. The memory of that flight will stay with me for a very long time. She held onto her quarry like a seasoned hunter, and the feeling I had was one of pride. The achievement was mixed with my childhood dreams and brought a lump to my throat.

As the weeks and months passed, we both



My companion called



I've often wondered why they hunt such a varied prey as there are a large number of wood pigeons here. On one occasion a Barnacle goose was flying along and suddenly got hit by a peregrine and fell out of the sky in a big puff of flying feathers as it fell to the ground.

I have noticed in the last few years, many birds of prey in and around the town centre, even a peregrine which lands on a nearby church spire to hunt from.

I have truly been blessed to have been born and raised here in this part of Scotland and have enjoyed all the many sporting pastimes that are to be had in this idealic area. As a young lad I would watch at all the many birds of prey hunting with wide-eyed wonder at the magnificence of such creatures. I tried to imagine what secret place they were born in and how they learned such breathtaking skills of the chase and the day-to-day interaction

me through life with unnerving regularity. The result was a man who blocks out the rest of the world and the people around him.

I remember the day things changed. I was watching a display of Harris hawks at my local game fair and I found myself dreaming of owning and hunting with a bird. Would it be possible for me to own and train a bird of prey?

Time was pressing on and so I decided it was now that I should seriously look at getting my own bird. I started to construct a large aviary, ordered all the necessary equipment and lastly ordered a female Harris hawk. I kept myself busy reading as much as I could on falconry - there are many books out there to get through - and watched videos many times over.

I was now being completely self-taught but I realise that was not the right path to go down. As far as I knew, there were no falconers in my area and it would have been better for me to communicate with and share information on the subject.

The day arrived when it was time to collect my bird. I was very nervous and excited at the same time. I remember after arriving back home opening the box and seeing the most enchanting creature I had ever set eyes on. For a moment I thought back to that small boy dreaming of a day such as this. With the help of a trusted friend she was fitted with her equipment and weighed at 2lb 9½ oz.

We were later left alone to get to know each other and she eyed me with reluctance and disdain. Things were alright in her world and as time passed, we went from strength to strength.

Kojie

gained more confidence in each other. Rabbit, hare or pheasant were all taken at every outing we made and she amazed me with her intelligence, aggression and boldness.

She would fly over from thorn tickets, trees and small hillocks, working out the best line to attack her intended victim. She hunts on open moorland and thick plantations, in fact, I hunt her from many different types of cover and she amazes me with her confidence to tackle any quarry that she is shown.

Just recently, I have been lucky to meet some local falconers. They have been very friendly and helpful. I have been wary of meeting new people and have really only been interested in my bird, Kojie, whom I count as a friend and companion. The falconers have made me feel very welcome and have shared their experiences and knowledge with me.

As I sit down and write this article, I look back to our season so far with my new falconry friends and their birds - the tally being 40 rabbits, nine hares, eight pheasants and one crow. We have had many memorable flights and catches and I cannot think of anyone or anything I would rather be with than my bird, Kojie.

Wild Dogs and tame hawks

Ellis Phythian

A dog trainer I am not. Like one of my heroes, Ronald Stevens, I just want them to do it! As I fly long-wings, English Pointers have been my main pointing hounds for many years. A G.S.P. tried many years ago, during my shooting era, did not endear itself to me as it used to point/flush then eat everything I shot! As the dog could run faster than me, I was lucky if I was left with the legs of the poor Partridge or Pheasant by the time I arrived at the kill.

When I bought my first Peregrine tiercel some time ago, I had no dog. Partridge were a lot more common then and the main way of obtaining a flight was to walk around the fields until a covey was flushed. I then watched to see where they landed. The tiercel was put up and I would run around the general area where the game had put in. If the bird was at a good pitch, a flight could usually be created but if the quarry could not be flushed, the bird flew lower and the Partridges were not keen to fly.

One flight springs to mind concerning this kind of rough hawking. The ground in question bordered a new council housing estate. A small coppice bordered the estate with the fields beyond. The partridge, a singleton, flushed nicely with the tiercel waiting on approximately 500ft.



Instead of making for the open fields or the safety of the wood, the partridge flew over the wood with the falcon, slightly out of position, stooping down and behind it. The partridge made straight for the housing estate "a toute vitesse".

I didn't have telemetry in those days (still in its infancy) so we trudged the roads swinging lures and looking at rooftops for that unmistakable silhouette. After a few hours we were about to call it a day as it was now nearly dark when we were approached by a man who asked if we were looking for a hawk.

He'd got it in his garden shed! Apparently, a commotion opposite his house had prompted him to investigate. A small play area had been constructed for the local children at the end of his driveway and the partridge had decided that the merry-go-round would make suitable sanctuary. The tiercel must have taken the partridge as it put in. The kids playing on the surrounding apparatus spotted this and were in the process of beating off the falcon when the man appeared. He gathered up both birds and put them in his shed.

Good pointers

The first two pointers I bought were dogs and both seemed to start out brilliantly, pointing early and quartering the ground well, but the problem was getting them to stop after the quarry was flushed. In training they did it well with no quarry about, dropping to whistle or hand signals. But as soon as a pheasant got up all the screaming in the world wouldn't stop either of them.

As game finders they were excellent; one even pointing game in light cover. This one I called "Patch" and he was probably the more manageable of the two. Ash, his partner, was another kettle of fish. A fine looking white, deep-chested dog, he'd find a pheasant in 1,000 acres. The only trouble was the 1,000 acres could be in the next county - as soon as he wended a running cock, he'd follow it for ever! If ever a dog needed telemetry this one was it. If he found a pheasant in cover he'd



point it until it took off or died. No amount of recalling would work. Once, whilst flying a Peregrine x Saker, he did his disappearing act.

We'd had a hard time finding any quarry this day, so he'd gone off to find his own. We found him, eventually, on a disused railway embankment. The pheasant was running away from him so we released the falcon to pin it down. When the falcon was in position, we flushed the cock which hugged the cover then broke out across some rough ground. The huge wings of the hybrid beat down and she grabbed him by the head to come tumbling to earth. Ash was following the flight (in case the falcon missed!) There then appeared two people with a pack of lurchers and terriers. They ran in to the struggling combatants. The hybrid spotted the danger and flew up onto a telegraph pole whilst the pheasant made cover with the dogs after it. A second later Ash hit the scene - bedlam ensued! The people grabbed their dogs and made off. Looking for Ash, he was spotted pointing a patch of ferns. I lassoed him with his leash and flushed the pheasant out from the cover. The falcon followed but to no avail - the cock made it to safety. At that point, I decided to bring her down to the lure.

My present pointer is a bitch. Up to now she's been like a boomerang, always returning and some times actually dropping to flush. Only time will tell ...

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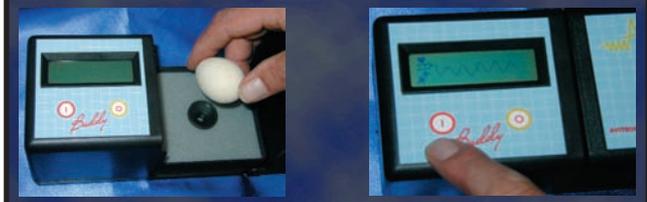
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Now, how about trying to do something with the birds. There's a thought. But what? Earlier, when I was still farming and on Biff Norman's recommendation I had taken in a male Redtail to look after whilst someone went on holiday. I thoroughly enjoyed this and thought that perhaps I could expand on this idea and look after other people's birds whilst they were away. A bird of prey is not like a budgie and

Not all plain sailing

It has not all been plain sailing. There has been a lot of promotional work to do. Leaflets left everywhere, abundant at the Falconers Fair and anywhere else where I thought people would pick them up, not an inexpensive exercise but something that I felt had to be done to appear as a serious set up. A website, <http://www.raptorcare.biz> was set up and linked to the Independent Bird

I was sure that people would appreciate someone with some experience to look after their birds and who would be able to give them back a bird kept at a specific weight should they require to fly it the next day. Hence the launch of Raptorcare.

Difficulties of earning yo

When I became involved in falconry, it was just as a hobby. However, at that time I was still very committed as a dairy farmer. I was a third generation farmer; my grandfather had started the herd some 90 years previous. We all know the story of how farming has been going of late and I am afraid that in 1998 the BSE crisis caused the demise of my farming career. Not that we had any animals with the dreaded disease but the economic situation was dire and I had no choice.

What do I do next? That is a frightening question when all you have done for the past thirty-one years is farming. I had my hedge laying and dry stone walling skills which were fairly in demand but very physical and, of course, I could still relieve milk, not a pursuit that my wife was very keen on, (very unsociable hours you see) but, this was not really what I wanted to do.

can be left with your next door neighbour complete with its cage. I was sure that people would appreciate someone with some experience to look after their birds and who would be able to give them back a bird kept at a specific weight should they require to fly it the next day. Hence the launch of Raptorcare.

Register and a fair bit of advertising. It has to be said that the demand for my service has not been vast but I do have a lot of repeat custom and receive customers from referrals. Added to this I really do receive a lot of pleasure by handling some lovely birds. There has to be a quality in what you do, it is not all about how much money you can make.





couple of years ago and take a bird or two. I actually found that I really enjoyed this. I had a static display with a Gazebo, a couple of perches, a Harris Hawk and a Goshawk. I put up a quite a few photos and had a lot of equipment to show and just talked to everyone. Oh! Yes, I think I did take a couple of hairies (our word for our German Wirehaired Pointers) and a couple of ferrets (the friendly variety). I was just basically having a go at a display.

Harry Potter! What did he do for the Owl? Well, he made every child in the country want one to deliver his mail. I have been asked to do one or two talks at schools and I am particularly keen to do this as a PR exercise for the birds. I did have a Snowy Owl who did not exactly fit into my displays. I could actually write a whole book on her! But at least I can advise the school children that they do NOT want a Hedwig (Snowy Owl) for a pet. I am also at great pains that they do not want a Barn Owl either no matter how sweet they look!

Now back to; "Am I making my living?" Not exactly - not yet anyway, but I hope in time that I will. It does, however, pay for my own birds and I am having fun.

Displays booked

Things are escalating somewhat and there are more displays being booked and I now seem to have gone into falconry experience sessions. These are tailored to individual

our living from falconry

Owls that have real 'Ahhh' appeal and certainly got the attention of the public and in particular children.

Comparable Cost

As to why the demand for this service has not been overwhelming, I think that a lot of falconers only have one bird and have a fellow falconer who is a friend and will take the bird for them. Also there is the expense of putting your bird in our hands whilst you go away. Whilst the cost is comparable with putting your dog in a kennel the knowledge for looking after the birds is greater. I feel that a lot of falconers with a few birds just don't go away or go away on hawking holidays and take their birds with them.

It was obvious that this line of Raptorcare was not going to make my living, so I began to look along the line of display work. Something I had not intended to do as I considered that every falconer was trying to do this. However, it sort of just happened. I was asked to go along to my village fete a

Went down well

The whole thing went down very well and I started to do one or two of these. On one occasion with a very young Goshawk I was appalled to find that they had put me up a tent right beside the Oom Pa Pa band, you know the sort of thing, a few blokes with brass instruments (musical!) making a whole lot of noise. The bird was completely unfazed about it, which was much to my relief.

Whole New Learning Curve

Since then I have branched out somewhat and now have a Lanner to do flying displays and that has been a whole new learning curve. I have also acquired a pair of Barn Owls that have real 'Ahhh' appeal and certainly got the attention of the public and in particular children. There is another thing. . .



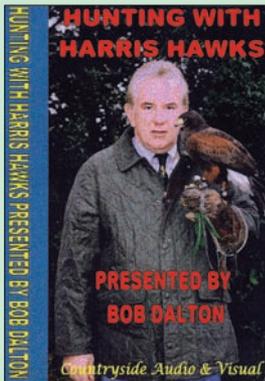
requirements and can extend to a full day. These are not teaching sessions but geared specifically for someone who wants to experience the birds at close quarters and get some idea what working with these wonderful creatures is like.

I will continue with Raptorcare because I love it but I would have to expand a lot more to be able to say that it makes my living. Oh well Sheila, it looks as though I will be milking cows for some time yet!



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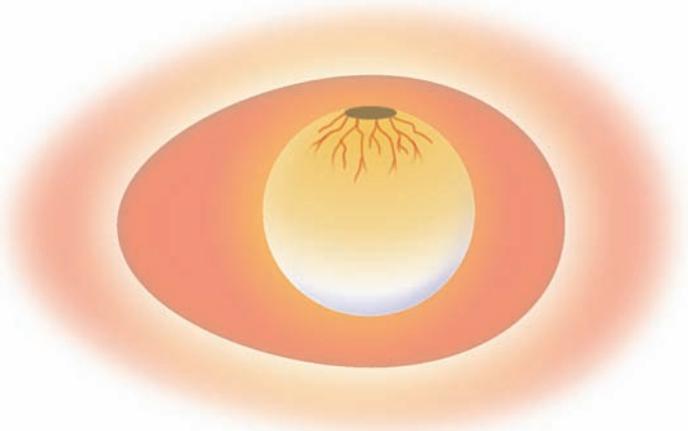
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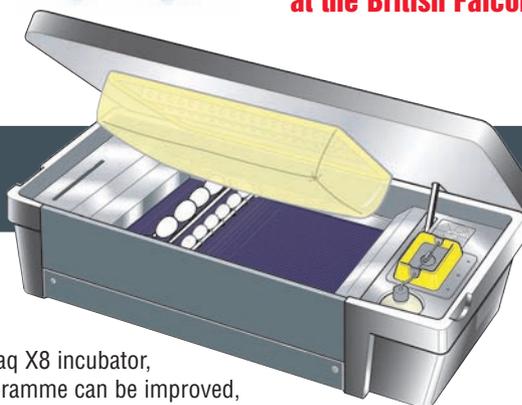
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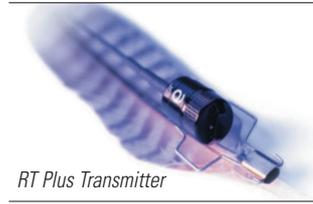
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