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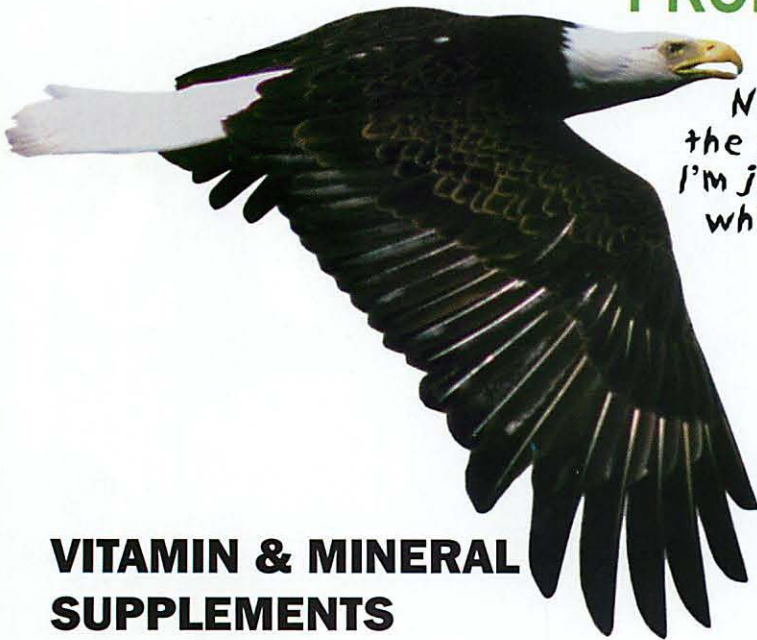
The **Falcons**
& Raptor Conservation Magazine

THE ICE CASTLE
BY MARTIN HOLLINSHEAD

PEREGRINATIONS
WITH BOB DALTON

MARTYN BROOK
ARTIST





No! look down there, thats the stuff the vet said to get. I'm just off to sit in that tree while you run round in demented circles.

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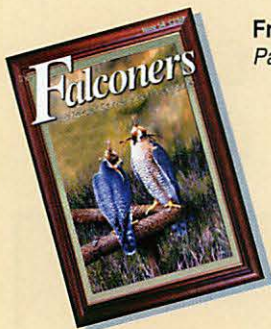
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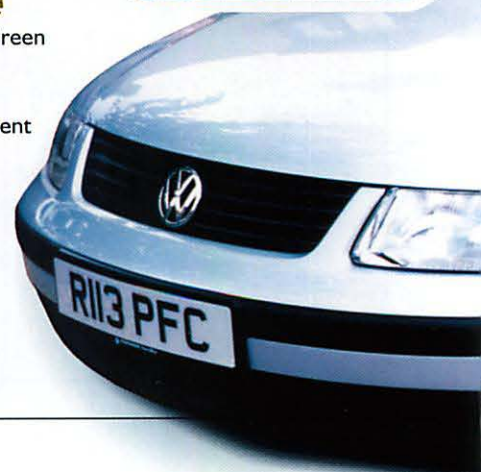
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editorial

Well, here we are again - birds are finishing their moult and it will soon be time for the flying season to start. First timers who have come into the sport must be excited about getting their first bird and all the trials and tribulations of training and then entering their bird on quarry. I hope that the new falconers have everything in place ready to receive their new charge.

I am looking forward to getting another bird, a redbill, in August and I am busy getting the second aviary up to scratch ready for its new resident. Fingers crossed!

In this issue there is an unusual article for a falconry magazine concerning off-road vehicles written by motoring journalist, Maurice Hardy. Some of you may already know or have seen Maurice as he commentates on some of the flying demonstrations at the Hawk Conservancy.

The time has come for the CLA Game Fair to arrive, this year at Harewood House, Yorkshire, and I hope that many of you will make the effort to come along and enjoy the wide variety of country sports that will be on show. Please come and give support to the falconry section and the CFF and thanks must go to Mitsubishi for sponsoring the falconry section. Also come and say hello to us on *The Falconers Magazine* stand, we would like to see you.

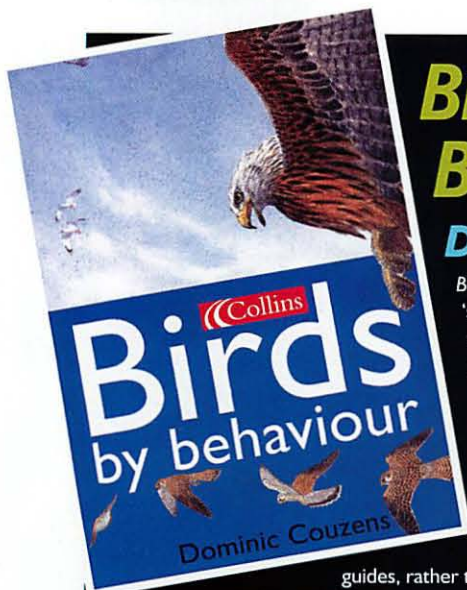
In this issue I was hoping to have a couple of articles from abroad, but alas, we can only publish one - an excellent piece on Golden Eagles in California, USA. The other article I was hoping to get was concerning birds of prey in Liberia, but with all the troubles out there, the story was out of the question. I hope to get the article in a future edition when things have settled down out there.

In the meantime, have a good read.

Peter Eldrett

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news & products



Birds by Behaviour

Dominic Couzens

Birds by behaviour is more than just another bird 'spotting' guide. Whereas most identification manuals concentrate only on the plumage and patterns to aid you in identifying species when out in the field, Dominic Couzens has compiled his book so that it dispenses with that theory and instead concentrates on behaviour characteristics, shape and ecology. This 250 plus page book is intended to be used as a complimentary book alongside more conventional field guides, rather than a sole reference source.

Birds by behaviour is very pictorial in its approach with the text kept to a minimum and only annotations shown with each drawing. The beautiful illustrations (and they really are striking) have been primarily drawn by Philip Snow, together with Tony Didley, Richard Jarvis, Dave Wurner and M. Webb

The other area in which this publication differs from other 'field guides' is that there are no distribution maps or references to the sounds the birds make. However, this does not mean that accuracy and comprehensive information are lacking. Covering just about every species from sea birds, through Raptors, Waders, Gulls, to Woodpeckers, Thrushes and Warblers and just about everything in between, you won't go far wrong with this whether you are an armchair enthusiast or an active 'field' goer.

The section on Raptors spans some 20 pages providing a wealth of information on types, feeding techniques and like the rest of the book is beautifully illustrated with plenty of detail and brief explanations of characteristics and behavioural traits to help even the newest bird enthusiast identify successfully. A useful glossary of terms rounds the book off well, as does the section on recommended reading should you wish to delve further into the subject of bird behaviour.

Published by Collins, priced at £16.99 *Birds by behaviour* is available from all good book shops and is certainly a book worth giving a second look.

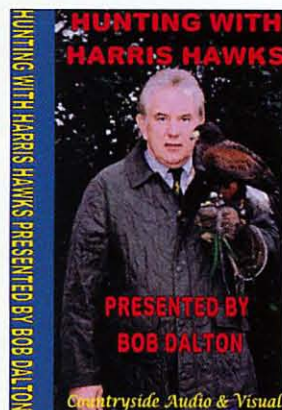
New Video

HUNTING WITH HARRIS HAWKS Presented by Bob Dalton

This is an excellent video. Its production quality is, for the most part, good (unlike many other falconry videos I have watched). The commentary by Bob Dalton I found easy on the ear – his tone is quietly authoritative but not in any way condescending or "preaching" to the listener. The video will appeal to both novice and experienced falconer alike. The basics are covered in sufficient detail to be informative to those thinking of taking up the sport, but also will be of interest to those who have been practising it for some time.

For the experienced falconer, the video is full of useful tips and wonderful shots of Harris' Hawks in action. For anyone who has yet to experience "the thrill of the chase", the video will definitely "whet their appetite". I was particularly pleased to hear Bob's comment – "good falconry is not about killing its about having good fun, good sport and good chases" as I feel that this is the essence of modern day falconry but something which is all too often forgotten by so many "so called" falconers. It is something which, to Bob's credit, definitely comes across loud and clear in this video. As he says later in the video, "After all, falconry is a sport so we need to be sporting in how we carry it out. So we owe it to the rabbit to despatch it as quickly and humanely as possible".

In this respect, he is a great advocate of our sport. This is a truly enjoyable video and would be a great addition to any falconer's collection. Highly recommended.



25th Anniversary Raptor Rescue

On August 31st 2003 the Raptor Rescue celebrates its 25th Anniversary. As a result, this National Charity for Birds of Prey is holding a day at Wrest Park, Silsoe, near Bedford, 200 yards off the A6.

Wrest Park is an English heritage site of approximately 100 acres and of extreme beauty with a very impressive old house as its centrepiece. The gardens are said to be inspired by Versailles and later adapted by Capability Brown. These gardens are perfect for picnics and a family get together making full use of the beautiful setting.

During the day, Raptor Rescue and its members past and present, along with the public will be able to enjoy seeing around 35 different species of Birds of Prey and furthermore see a large proportion of them fly. We have flying teams of national renown.

The Trustees of Raptor Rescue have worked hard

along with other rurally based charity interests, e.g. Badgers, Ferrets (with racing), Butterflies, Reptiles, Hedgehogs, Artists and Photography to provide a very special day for all.

The thinking behind the day is not only to celebrate our achievements over 25 years, but to place our charity more prominently in the public eye because it is the public eye as well as industry and specialised bird handlers along with the veterinary circuit that find birds needing our help and causing them to ring our National Help Number 0870 2410609. When that 'phone rings, the work of the Raptor Rescue and all of its helpers comes into its own - and we thank you for your help and support over the years and those to come.

We have received much encouragement from the folk at the English Heritage and indeed the National

Press for this day, which is Sunday August 31st 2003 and not the 30th as the English Heritage Events diary published.

For more information you can contact our web site at www.raptorrescue.org.uk or George Duncalf on (01945) 581682 or Michael Heath on (01628) 520243. Anyone wishing to participate in the day, even at this late stage, should contact the above. We are a small group of people and may have forgotten some past supporter or another, so here is your chance to let us know.

Otherwise, we look forward to seeing you there on the day at Wrest Park, Silsoe, Beds, 200 yards off the A6.

DON'T FORGET AUGUST 31ST - BRING THE FAMILY AND A PICNIC AND ENJOY THE BEAUTIFUL SURROUNDING GARDENS.



Allegations made by TV programme



The New Forest Owl Sanctuary at Ringwood, Hampshire, run by Bruce Berry, was the subject of a BBC television documentary screened on June 30th amid allegations of cruelty to birds of prey.

The programme, *Inside Out*, was presented by well known wildlife and ornithologist expert Chris Packham. It was secretly filmed behind the scenes showing the alleged mistreatment of birds and featured former employees of the sanctuary commenting on things that had occurred during the time they had worked for Mr Berry. Chris Packham said, "As a bird lover, I was sickened by some of the secret filming".

The sanctuary has a policy of releasing birds back into the wild but the programme showed a hack site on the edge of the car park in full view of the public and not in a wooded area. It was alleged that owls rescued from the wild were taken to various country shows and other events where the birds were subjected to contact with people, after which the owls showed signs of being imprinted on humans and therefore could not be released.

It was also alleged that on Mr Berry's instructions, birds that had to be put down were 'knocked' - that is to say the birds were hit against a wall or bench to kill them to save money on calling out a vet. A staff member on film reported that they also sometimes shot birds in the back of the head using an air rifle. The programme also alleged illegal trading of protected species and showed dirty conditions in aviaries hidden from the public.

Vet John Chitty of Andover, Hants, visits the sanctuary once a month and he was also filmed for the programme but without his knowledge. He has

since said in newspaper reports that he had found no evidence of cruelty to any of the birds that he saw. But former staff have said that they rushed him around because it meant that he spent less time at the sanctuary and they did not have to pay so much money in vets fees.

A zoo inspection was held last year and The New Forest District Council re-newed the licence to continue to run the sanctuary under the recommendation of the zoo inspector. However, NFDC have now said that they will further investigate the allegations.

Jemima Parry Jones also appeared on *Inside Out*. She was shown the undercover film footage and passed comments on what she observed. She said that, given the evidence before her, there was no way the sanctuary should be open to the public or have passed a zoo inspection.

Mr Berry denies the allegations laid before him and has been quoted as saying that he will, as a result of the programme, hold his own investigations. The Police have also re-opened an investigation, as the sanctuary was under observation some time ago and all enquiries were at that time dropped.

Police and RSPCA inspectors, along with an avian vet, raided the Owl Sanctuary on 11th July and took away various paperwork together with a number of birds for inspection. They also visited two other addresses including the home of Mr Berry. The sanctuary was closed to the public for the weekend but re-opened on Monday 14th July.

We await further developments.

Disgruntled Observer of Falconry Demonstration

Dear Sir,

Another Bank Holiday has come and gone with the usual Country Fairs and Shows. This is probably the only chance for the majority of people who attend to get a glimpse of country life and its associated sports and activities. Hence, demonstrations of sheepdogs, fly-fishing and of course, falconry, are warmly welcomed and, for many, are the main reason for attending. (At this point, you can probably guess what's coming!)

This Spring Bank Holiday I attended a country fair at Broadlands in Romsey, Hampshire, and was unfortunate enough to witness probably the most appalling demonstration of flying birds of prey (I won't call it falconry, because falconry it definitely was not!) that I have seen in a long time. The man in charge (or not as it turned out to be!) - a Mr. Chris Neal of Hagley Falconry - did absolutely nothing to educate the public. There must have been 10,000 people attending the show, the majority of whom probably knew very little or nothing of the sport of falconry. What an opportunity to impart some knowledge so that they could go away with an insight into the sport. What an opportunity missed!

He flew two falcons. They flew reasonably well and, whilst not particularly impressive to anyone who knew a bit about falconry, they probably put on a show good enough to impress most onlookers. The accompanying commentary was sparse, uninformative and unexciting. However, the "pièce de résistance" was the Harris' Hawks - these "most biddable and gregarious" of birds of prey!

Now demonstrations of Harris' Hawks can often be a bit 'samey' once you have seen a few - not so this one! Whilst one bird went through the motions, albeit very reluctantly, the other was simply 'not playing ball'. It started by sitting on the fence "eying up the spectators' chips" as Mr. Neal informed the audience - "Put your food away, or it'll have it!". The other hawk then took off and landed on a nearby gentleman's head - oh, wasn't that funny! The 'chip-seeking hawk' then decided it fancied something more meaty - and it headed straight for the burger van and alighted on the hot counter! "She fancies a burger - watch out lads!" The hawk grabbed a piece of meat (which at a later demonstration Mr. Neal proudly

announced to the crowd was a piece of bacon - wasn't she clever?!) and flew off to sit on top of a nearby marquee. Mr. Neal eventually got the bird back on his fist and continued with his demonstration - it didn't go completely according to plan (if there ever was one!) but, thankfully, there were no more near disasters.

Now, whilst I appreciate that you can never totally rely on a bird of prey to act according to plan, you can at least give some informed comment, both when things are going well but, perhaps more importantly, when things are going wrong. Also, if you are in the privileged position of being asked to give a falconry demonstration at a show, the very least you can do is to try to impart some little knowledge to the onlooking public. I visited Mr. Neal's stand to see his birds and to perhaps meet him - there was no-one there. No-one to answer any questions that the assembled public might have. No-one to encourage, or discourage, the public to take up the sport. No-one with whom to discuss birds of prey in general, and falconry in particular. All that was there was a few posters and, of course, the birds. (The fact that they were left unsupervised was worrying in itself!)

In your last issue, Paul Manning expounded the view that we should all do what we can to act as good ambassadors for our sport. I have to say that Mr. Neal, in his role as a professional falconer, did little or nothing for our sport. To the contrary, I would think that many of the public left the fair that day with a totally wrong idea of what falconry and flying birds of prey are all about. The opportunities for us amateurs are limited, but the professional falconers have opportunities presented to them almost daily and have a responsibility to promote our sport. The Campaign for Falconry is going from strength to strength and I know that the many true professional falconers do all they can to support the cause. Let's hope, for the sake of our sport and its future, that the few "so called professionals" do not prosper at the expense of the real professionals.

Martin Ford,
Southampton

Wrong Number

The telephone number for C J Hall, veterinary surgeons, has appeared incorrectly in previous editions of the magazine. The correct number is 020 8876 9696. Our apologies to all concerned.

Honeybrook Animal Farm Foods were once again the main sponsors for the Falconers Fair which was held at Chetwyn Park, Shropshire, on May 4-5.

The weather forecast was not very good (showers were predicted) but, as it turned out, the weekend was dry breezy.

The number of people attending the fair seemed to be down on last year but those who did go were treated to some excellent flying displays.

Terry Large, Bryan Paterson and the South East Falconry Group all put on some great flying displays despite the slightly strong wind. Some demonstrators had difficulty putting a lure kite to any great height but the South East group had theirs at a good altitude on the second day of the fair.

But the highlight of the demonstrations must go to Jemima Parry Jones and her Merlin. What a terrific display of lure swinging, the bird turning "on a sixpence" and Jemima comentating at the same time. No wonder [JPJ] was tired after she called the bird to the lure on the ground and falling onto her knees at the end quite puffed.

My wife, Marian, and I were kept very busy on the magazine stand for most of the two days with people subscribing and re-newing their subscriptions.

Brinsea Incubators were on show demonstrating their new incubators and first time stand holders, amews.com, were also kept busy. Other traders such as Garlands, the IBR, Crown Falconry and Martin Jones all reported having done well over the two days.



Marie-Louise Leschelles & Guy Wallace



FALCONRY 2003



Garry Beddis, Gordon Mellor, Iain Timmins & Andrew Knowles-Brown



The Falconers' Magazine and International Falconer get together

FOR FALCONERS
PROTECTING
THE FUTURE



Falconers from all over the world attended the fair



ERS FAIR

Legal Eagle

From the RSPB's investigations newsletter.



SENTENCING GUIDELINES FOR WILDLIFE CRIME

David Cowdrey, Wildlife Trade Campaign Director for WWF, reports on the new wildlife crime sentencing guidelines for magistrates.

On November 2002 the Environment Minister, the Rt Hon Michael Meacher, launched an environmental crime tool kit for the Magistrates' Association, including guidance on sentencing wildlife crime. WWF and TRAFFIC took an active role in developing the guidance along with the police, Customs and other organisations.

Michael Meacher said, "Environmental crime needs to be taken very seriously, and the penalties for environmental offences need to fully reflect the damage caused by the crime, in all its aspects."

Harry Mawdsley, chairman of the Magistrates' Association, said, "The Magistrates' Association has recognised that the sentences for environmental crimes imposed by magistrates play a key role in protecting the environment through influencing the future behaviour of both companies, small and large, and individuals".

He added, "The sentencing guidance being launched today is crucial in ensuring that magistrates are aware of the issues involved and the seriousness of these crimes. The guidance will be able to steer the judiciary and encourage magistrates to use the full range of penalties at their disposal".

The Magistrates' Association also sent out a message to all prosecutors that they can act only on the evidence brought before them in court and it is vital for all prosecutors to be familiar with the environmental training materials and sentencing guidance.

It is also important to state the seriousness of these crimes and the huge environmental impact these actions may have.

JAIL FOR PROLIFIC COLLECTOR OF EGGS

On 4 September 2002, Carlton Julian D'Cruze, Whitemeadow Drive, Thornton, Liverpool, was sentenced to six month's imprisonment by South Sefton Magistrates' Court on a total of 13 charges. These related to the taking of 24 birds eggs and possession of 453 eggs, 29 taxidermy specimens and egg collecting equipment. PC Andy McWilliam of Merseyside Police reports on the case.

"Back in 1996, I helped the RSPB arrange a warrant on D'Cruze and although no eggs were found, it sparked my interest in wildlife crime and this man in particular. Later information indicated the D'Cruze was one of our most

prolific egg collectors, targeting rare breeding birds.

"Trying to pin down the location of his collection proved very frustrating, but on 12 March 2002 Merseyside Police, assisted by the RSPB, executed warrants at two Liverpool addresses. Entry had to be forced into D'Cruze's home and he was caught in the bathroom trying to flush eggs and paperwork down the toilet. Fortunately, the RSPB was on hand with its DIY plumbing skills to take the toilet apart and the remains of over 100 eggs were recovered. More than 300 intact eggs were also found with detailed documentation showing the activities of D'Cruze and his associates. Egg collecting equipment and a number of unusual taxidermy specimens were also seized".

Among items McWilliam and the RSPB found in D'Cruze's collection were eggs from Schedule 1 species (including white-tailed eagle eggs taken from the Isle of Mull in 1998), and eggs from golden eagles, avocet, osprey and peregrine falcons. The taxidermy specimens had evidence of having been shot.

Andy McWilliam takes up the story again. "D'Cruze entered a guilty plea. In sentencing, the court stated that due to the seriousness of the offences, the time period over which they took place and the fact that D'Cruze was fully aware of the impact, only a custodial sentence could be imposed. D'Cruze later entered an appeal, which reduced his sentence to five months in credit of his guilty plea. D'Cruze has been one of the UK's main egg collecting targets in recent years and we hope that this conviction will signal the end of his criminal activities".

DISTURBING DIARIES OF DAVIDSON

In August 2001, Michael Terrence Davidson of Lanton Street, Haughton-le-Spring, Northumberland, was convicted of selling 155 eggs from owls and birds of prey, contrary to the Control of Trade in Endangered Species Regulations 1997 (COTES).

These eggs were part of a larger collection that he had sold to another collector for £750 in 1996. Davidson received a three-month suspended sentence, although he was later sentenced to 41 days' imprisonment for non-payment of £1,100 costs.

In addition to the COTES offences, there was the outstanding matter of possession of items for the purpose of intentionally disturbing Schedule 1 wild birds, contrary to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The items in question were a computer, extensive

documents, photographs, a camera and climbing equipment.

It was alleged that they had been used by Davidson to visit nest sites of Schedule 1 species for which he had never held an appropriate licence.

His detailed diaries illustrated his disturbance of breeding peregrines, merlins, ospreys, golden eagles and goshawks over a number of years.

On 19 August 2002 at Haughton-le-Spring Magistrates Court, he accepted that he had illegally disturbed birds in the past. However, he claimed that due to a heart attack, he was no longer capable of visiting nests and therefore could not possess the items for the alleged purpose.

The court did not accept this account and imposed a two-year conditional discharge and £500.00 costs. They also ordered forfeiture of all the items other than his camera. Davidson has since entered an appeal.

RODENTICIDES KILL FIVE RED KITES

Ten red kites were found dead in the UK during the 2002 breeding season. Three were poisoned through pesticide abuse. Five contained levels of rodenticide recognised as likely to be lethal.

A red kite found in Wales in May died through the approved use of the rodenticide Difenacoum. One found in March in Scotland also contained lethal levels of Difenacoum, likely to have been caused by rodenticide misuse.

Two adult birds from the Midlands were poisoned by Difenacoum and a juvenile by Bromadiolone. Despite the losses, the breeding season in the Midlands was very good, with more than 40 young fledging from 25 breeding pairs.

PIGEON FANCIER SHOT PEREGRINE

Pigeon fancier James McCormick was fined £400.00 at Kircudbright Sheriff Court on 26 September 2002 after shooting a peregrine near his pigeon loft at Ringford in May.

He also handed in his shotgun and firearms certificate. The peregrine suffered a broken wing and will never be able to be returned to the wild.

Sheriff James Smith said that he had to take into consideration the public concern about the protection of birds and mark the seriousness of the incident by way of a fine.

Independent Bird Register

LIST OF LOST, FOUND, REUNITED AND STOLEN BIRDS FROM THE IBR. BETWEEN 6 APRIL AND 9 JULY 2003

STOLEN x 7

BARN OWL
GYR/SAKER FALCON 4268X 8JA01X
HARRIS HAWK 3051W
IBR11269V
PEREGRINE FALCON 12212V
24585W
PEREGRINE FALCON 22554W
IBR24794W
TIMNEH GREY PARROT IH02071
TIMNEH GREY PARROT IH01792

REUNITED x 86

AFRICAN GREY PARROT x 4
BALD EAGLE x 2
BARN OWL x 11
BLACK VULTURE
COMMON BUZZARD x 3
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL x 5
FERRUGINOUS HAWK x 5
GYR FALCON
GYR/PEREGRINE FALCON
GYR/SAKER FALCON x 4
HARRIS HAWK x 23
KESTREL x 4
LANNER FALCON
LUGGER FALCON
PEREGRINE FALCON x 3
PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID x 3
RED-TAILED HAWK x 6
SAKER FALCON x 5
TAWNY EAGLE
TURKEY VULTURE
WHITEBACK VULTURE

LOST x 97

AFRICAN GREY PARROT x 10
BARN OWL x 12
BENGAL EAGLE OWL
BLACK VULTURE
CARA CARA
COMMON BUZZARD
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL x 2
GOSHAWK
GYR/PEREGRINE HYBRID x 2
GYR/SAKER FALCON x 2
HARRIS HAWK x 23
KESTREL x 9

KOOKABURRA
LANNER FALCON x 3
LUGGER FALCON x 2
PARAKEET
PEREGRINE FALCON x 2
PEREGRINE/BARBARY HYBRID
PEREGRINE/LANNER HYBRID
PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID x 3
RED-TAILED HAWK x 4
SAKER FALCON x 8
SENEGAL PARROT
SNOWY OWL
STEPPE EAGLE
TIMNEH GREY PARROT
TURKEY VULTURE
UNKNOWN PARROT

FOUND x 60

AFRICAN GREY PARROT IBxx6015V
AFRICAN GREY PARROT
BARN OWL x 12 IBxx799U
BENGAL EAGLE OWL IBxx0153Z
CARA CARA
COCKATIEL 15xx02P
COCKATIEL 24xxS99P
COMMON BUZZARD 24xxDOEW
COMMON BUZZARD 10xx4W
COMMON BUZZARD 12xx0DOEW
COMMON BUZZARD 10xx4WDOE
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL 07xxC02Z
FERRUGINOUS HAWK 00xxX
HARRIS HAWK IBxx212W
HARRIS HAWK IBxx509W
HARRIS HAWK 59xx
HARRIS HAWK 20xx8DOEV
HARRIS HAWK 95xxW
HARRIS HAWK 3Pxx0W
HARRIS HAWK IBxx8637W
HARRIS HAWK 11xxYDOE
HARRIS HAWK 59xxLE26LF
HARRIS HAWK LExxLF798
KESTREL 76xxS
KESTREL IBxx8440S
KESTREL 11xx7S
KESTREL IBxx9567S

KESTREL 10xxDOES
KESTREL 30xxBA96S
LANNER FALCON IBxx2975W
LUGGER FALCON 24x
MACAW ASxxE00W
ORANGE-WINGED AMAZON 15x
PARAKEET 1Jxx95S
PEREGRINE FALCON 26xxVDOE
PEREGRINE FALCON IBxx8931W
PRAIRIE FALCON 14xx7W
RED-TAILED HAWK 11xxDOEX
RED-TAILED HAWK 5WxxR00Y
SAKER FALCON IBxx0911W
SAKER FALCON 12xxINGSW
SAKER FALCON 23xx4W
SAKER FALCON 3Pxx00W
TAWNY OWL IBxx1835U
UNKNOWN BOP 21xxY
UNKNOWN BOP SILVER RING
UNKNOWN PARROT L1xx16497

DEAD x 49

BARN OWL x 15
COMMON BUZZARD x 3
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
GYR/PEREGRINE HYBRID x 2
GYR/PEREGRINE/LANNER
GYR/PEREGRINE/SAKER
HARRIS HAWK x 7
HOODED VULTURE x 2
KESTREL x 4
LITTLE OWL x 2
LUGGER FALCON x 2
SAKER FALCON x 2
SNOWY OWL x 3
SPARROWHAWK
TAWNY OWL
TURKMANIAN EAGLE OWL
UNKNOWN BOP

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THE ICE CASTLE

Mountain Challenge Part 5

Martin Hollinshead



As mentioned in the last article, things at the castle had been slowly easing down. Now we'd come to a dead stop. The castle was finally closed. It was hard to believe the demonstration season was over. We'd gone from total madness to total stillness. The contrast was staggering. The once bustling, noisy, tourist-crammed building was now totally deserted – ghostly almost. Ahead lay a winter of deep snows and total isolation.



The plan for winter had been drawn up months earlier. Most of the birds would go to our sister centre in Lower Austria. However, a few would stay at the castle, tended by the only three members of staff to remain, Tonya, Hanni and I. Providing suitable winter accommodation for these birds was something of a problem. We needed to build aviaries, but where? The difficulty when adding anything foreign to an ancient building is getting it to blend in. We'd had to wrestle with this when planning the small shelters for the demonstration birds before the season started, but got away with it by keeping things modestly sized and using suitably old looking materials. But aviaries were different, they would be very difficult to lose.

So Where?

We came up with two possibilities: 'The Shooting Range Courtyard' and the 'Hanging Garden'. The Shooting Range Courtyard got its name from one of the many chapters in the castle's past. The place had once been a police training school, and in this courtyard firearms practise had been conducted. There were even the remains of the target range, *remains* being an apt description – wow they'd let off some steam! For the inquisitive, the courtyard had another story to tell. As your eye followed its rear wall up, starting on a natural rock face and eventually meeting the looming bell tower, you noticed various rusted metal fixtures. Your mind immediately said: *hand and foot holds?* Dead right. Remember the *Where Eagles Dare* connection? It was here Richard Burton and Clint Eastwood made a perilous climb to a high window. In the movie the climb is done by rope and there is no courtyard, but this was the spot.

But that was all in the past. Now this courtyard was its own secret kingdom locked away behind a giant metal-clad door. Never seen by visitors – never visited by anyone – Tonya and I had used it all summer as a retreat from the madness of the main centre. Up here, you heaved the door slowly open to be in another world. You were no longer in a tourist-filled castle, you were in some peaceful alpine meadow with long grasses, flowers, butterflies and lizards. The lizards! I've never seen so many. They were everywhere, their lithe bodies weaving through grass stems and basking on the film-climb wall. And with them, voles, lots of voles, who scurried about the rock face looking like tiny hyrax.

The idea was not to build in the courtyard itself – which would have been a terrible tragedy – but to convert an enormous tower that sat at its furthest end. It was an easy job: a suitable door, slatted windows, a few perches – finished! And the kites that went into it gave it an immediate thumbs up, whizzing around its circular interior like a fairground wall of death.

The Hanging Garden was a bigger challenge. Imagine a swallow's nest slapped high on an outside wall of the castle, just clinging to the sheer face. *This* was the Hanging Garden. It had once been the secret courting place of a long-ago castle official. You could imagine the clandestine meetings, see the lovers entwined on the little lawn, shaded by the small fruit tree. And they were safe, for nowhere on the castle would you be less likely to be disturbed. And the guarantee of this? The staircase down to their hideaway.

It's impossible to describe the staircase. Like the garden, it clung to the sheer wall, a desperate caterpillar set to lose its grip at any moment. It started high above the garden, plunging steeply. And as it went down, it paused at a crazy

mid-descent change in direction. It was almost as if testing you, giving you time to think about what you were doing. Then on you went, white-knuckle hands clinging to the rail, the mere wooden rail to go with the mere wooden staircase – yes, just wooden steps between you and a one-way ticket into the blue! Believe me, your feet were planted on those steps like your life truly did depend on it. And down *this staircase* we carried the building materials for three small aviaries!

Free as a Bird

With some members of the flying team there was no accommodation worry. The vultures just went free! They were released in their upper courtyard and allowed to come and go as they pleased, flying up and over the high walls that surrounded them. It wasn't quite the act of lunacy it appears. They had flown all summer at the castle and were strongly bonded to the building. This, complemented by careful feeding and monitoring, would avoid any tendency for them to roam. It was an approach I had known used very successfully at other castles.

It was weird having the vultures loose. They became ghostly figures, appearing and disappearing, leaving you never sure where you might encounter one; you'd pass under an archway only to have a rustle of feathers frighten you out of your skin. They tended to favour the rooftops near their courtyard. Here they sat, living gargoyles from some fantasy novel: monstrous griffons, guardians of the castle.

And when the weather was right, the guardians flew. They lived for winter storms, and the rougher it got, the more it suited them. Deep purple skies, wind enough to tear the roof off, and against the mountains they rode the elements in full command, excited, electrified. And how right it was, great prehistoric birds in a Land That Time Forgot setting. Summer flying paled by comparison, and it was ours alone.

Snow Arrives

Before long we had our first snow. I'd spent time in places where you got heavy snow, but I wasn't prepared for what fell on the castle. It started to snow and it didn't stop. We peered from our tiny bedroom window, children mesmerised by the great heavy flakes. We'd had warning, had watched the mountains opposite gradually change colour – the white line slipping ever deeper – but it still left us open-mouthed. You've never seen so much snow. You dug yourself out of the front door – then you had to dig yourself back in!

More snow. And more digging. Everywhere you went – or *attempted to go* – you took a spade. You didn't walk anywhere – you dug a passage. Before long the place looked as if some giant burrowing creature had gone mad. And on regularly used routes, the repeated clearing operation resulted in deep wartime trenches. It was exhausting. Your arms and shoulders ached with the workload. During the summer we'd gained massive legs to cope with the gradient and the gruelling always-on-a-slope maintenance work, now we were going to get the upper body to match!

Getting to feed the birds was a nightmare. They were just such a long way from our accommodation in the main falconry centre courtyard. The trek to the kites was nothing short of an expedition: in through the base of a tower (the one used to get to the vulture courtyard), up the stairs, out, past the cannons, through the giant door – and then snow-battle your way the entire length of the courtyard. And then, totally

exhausted, you were put through slow torture. To maintain tameness, the kites had to be occasionally fed on the glove. Imagine it. You're high in some desolate arctic ice castle in temperatures so low that any bits of you not moving are immediately frozen solid, and you have to stand and glove-feed birds! I'll never forget the agony of those feeding sessions: the glass fingers – the ears to go with them – and a body shaking so badly it loosened fillings. Winter ferreting sessions? A tropical treat!

The Hanging Garden offered a different experience. You still got the shaking body, but this time more from terror! That treacherous staircase was now covered in snow, and when it was cleared, it grinned and settled for ice! You shovelled, you ice-picked, you gritted – you drew straws to avoid the descent – but that staircase was just waiting to send someone to the next life.

All in the Mind

Lone feeding trips could be a bit eerie. The castle was a massive building – some of it we hadn't even seen due to the pressure of work – and the high courtyards and connecting passageways could be a little unsettling. Imagination easily got the better of you, and as it tightened its hold, in crept a feeling of being watched by more than vulture's eyes. Across every open area you scanned the snow for foreign footprints, and every wind-rattled shutter and every creak had you wire-tight with tension. You got things under control with rational cool-headed *adult* thinking. Then imagination came back with how easy it would be for someone to remain hidden all winter long in this vast place; a Phantom of the Opera living a secret existence. And you were reminded of those autumn-discovered clothes in an abandoned tower, a tower where someone had obviously been sleeping rough. Then there was... *Enough. Enough!*

Day to Day

Days at the castle were pretty quiet. There was the odd chore – a bit of equipment making, and of course, snow clearing – but by and large, our time was our own. I was quite busy with writing, adding the last touches to a manuscript and doing some articles, but more than anything we used the time to explore. I've always been a keen walker – a pair of boots and a rucksack and I'm in heaven – but getting anywhere in the deep snow was a bit of a problem. But if you could dig yourself out of the castle, there were numerous clear-kept mountain roads you could walk right into the high country. It was fantastic! The crystal mountain air, the space, the altitude – the sheer rush from all that glory. And the snow covered forests, their floors littered with evidence of the previous night's wildlife. It was a tracker's paradise. Hares ruled and their prints crossed every clearing. At the castle we had one of our own. He came over from these very mountains, our wooded grounds being part of his nightly wanderings. We would follow his route, always excited to see he had been about, always that bit of worry that his visits might abruptly stop. They were wonderful times, just the mountains and no need to do much of anything. We were in a white winter escape.

Then one day, winter was over. The line that had slipped down from the high tops, slowly started to recede. Spring was on the horizon and soon our ice castle would once again be baking under the heat of an Austrian summer. Birds would be coming back, costumes dusted off, routines rehearsed. It would be time to do it all again.

club directory

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www.central-falconry.co.uk



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NORTH WALES, Chester
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SOUTH WEST, Exeter
Contact: *Dave Scott* Tel: 01752 830382
BATH, Hinton
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Contact: *Shaun Healey* Tel: 01386 832812
YORKSHIRE, York
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738369
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Contact: *Andy Hulme* Tel: 01206 729363
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Mike Clowes, secretary, 01529 240443

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Northern England Falconry Club

Club meetings are held at:-

“The White Swan”

Public House.

High Street, Yeadon.

(2 mins from Leeds & Bradford Airport).

Or contact: **G Shaw** on
01274 780800

E-mail: NEFC@lineone.net

Lancashire Falconry & Hawking Club

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For more information please telephone:

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- **Keith Wicks 01454 315810**
- **Tony Ellis 01666 510067**

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Meetings take place on the last Tuesday of the month at Tilbury in Essex.

For members in our Southern region informal meetings take place nr Winchester, Hants.

For further information or an application form please contact -

Dean White (secretary) on 01489 896504

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Meetings are held Nr. Brigidend in the South Wales Valleys.

For further details please telephone our secretary, Martin, on 01656 745008 or 0797 0397 466/0793 1639 178

E-mail: glamhawkingclub@aol.com

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Tel: Lee Copeland on 07802 251502

e-mail: falconer55@hotmail.com

Web site: www.clevelandhawkingclub.20m.com



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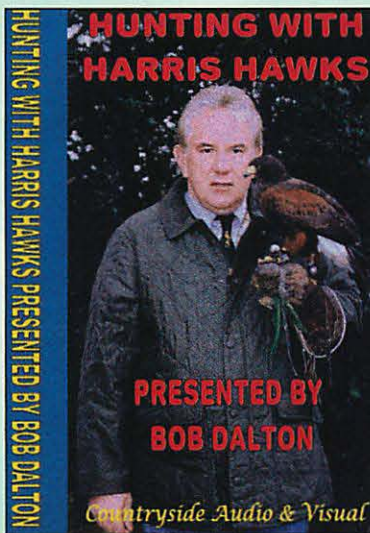
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freedom

Time and time again wherever and whenever I've done a falconry display, the one question that people ask after the display is, "Do they mind being tied up like that?"

you know that spend their weekends as couch potatoes? They have two legs but unless they have to work they are happy to just sit down and watch the world go by. Birds of prey have two wings but that does not mean they want to fly all the time. If I offered to pay your mortgage off, give you a car and feed you for

the bird understood freedom and wasn't happy it would just fly away and the few that do get lost usually crash into someone's house when they realise how hungry they are. I hope my fellow falconers can get this point across to Mr and Mrs Public the next time they are asked . . . "does it mind . . . ?"

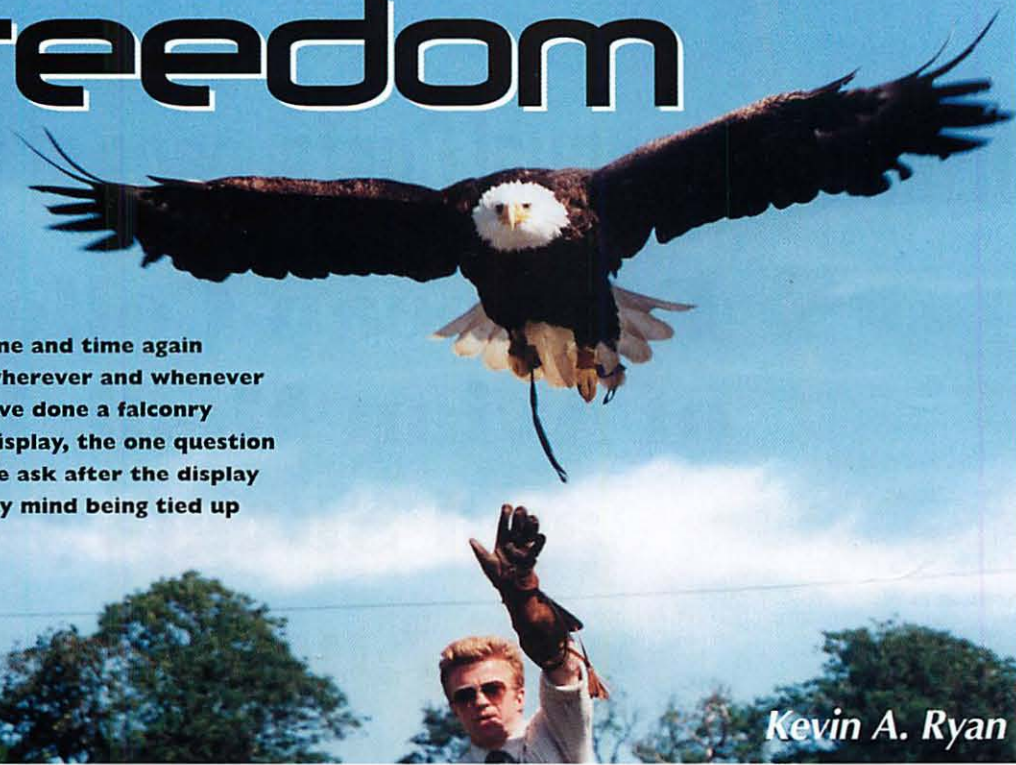
life, I doubt very much that you would drag yourself out of your cosy bed and earn a living, would you? Of course you wouldn't. The same applies to birds of prey.

I like to point out to people that when they take their dog to a park, or the kids to a zoo, the animals have a barrier! It might be a park wall or a cage they are limited to where they can go.

But when a falconer flies his or her bird, they have the sky to fly in which equates to limitless space. If

I would have thought that the fact the bird is sitting there says it doesn't mind in the slightest!

I do like to point out to people that when they have seen a Kestrel hovering it is 'hunting', not going 'wheeee, this is fun'. Birds of prey are lazy creatures but how many people do



Kevin A. Ryan

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Report from the biannual Conference of the...

On alternate years the two bird vet organisations shown above have a joint conference at a different European location, on this occasion it was on the delightful island of Tenerife. Avian medicine and surgery is a young science and as such is advancing fast with new discoveries, treatments and medications becoming known on a regular basis. The time taken in preparation of any text book means it is 18 months out of date by the time it is published, so for vets at the 'cutting edge' the attendance at such a conference is the only way to keep on top of the discipline. During five days of conference, 89 papers, two Master classes and eight wet labs were presented, over 200 delegates attended from 20 or so countries. Although the meeting covered a wide variety of avian species, Neil Forbes brings you the latest developments which relate to birds of prey.

The first raptor paper was delivered by Neil himself on the subject of the on going control and prevention of *Caryospora* (a form of coccidia - a protozoal parasite) infestation in falcons. Many readers will already be familiar with the problem, which is the largest and most significant parasitic disease of captive falcons, but rarely found in free living falcons. The disease predominantly affects young birds when undergoing initial weight reduction and training. Neil has been researching this disease for a number of years, looking at the incidence, age and season of infestation, effective treatment protocols and finally the hopeful development of a safe and effective vaccine. This paper described the completion of a vaccine trial. The results of the trial prove statistically that the use of the vaccine achieved at least a 45% reduction in relative risk of vaccinated birds suffering from the disease compared with non vaccinated birds (the trial results reported showed that 47% of non vaccinated birds suffered clinical disease when challenged with *Caryospora*, compared with a 0% incidence in vaccinated birds). A considerable amount of further work is required (in particular DNA identification of all the

European College of Avian Medicine and Surgery and European Association of Avian Vets

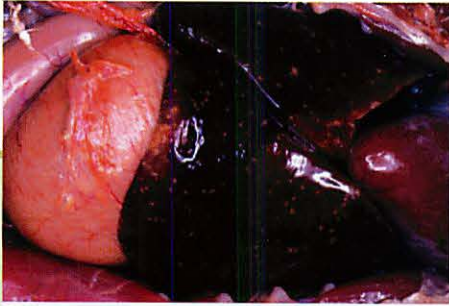
pathogenic species of *Caryospora* which affect falcons), before a commercial vaccine could be produced. This ongoing research project has benefited from the receipt of research grants from the Campaign for Falconry and the SE Falconry Group, for which Neil is extremely grateful.

Petra Zsivanovits (a European College of Avian Medicine and Surgery Resident working and studying with Neil Forbes in Stroud), next spoke on a research project which she and Neil have been conducting looking at the serological incidence of falcon and owl herpes virus in captive and free living raptors in the UK. The research was triggered by a dramatic increased incidence reported in Germany over the last few years, which coincided with a perceived increase in clinical cases in the UK. Although the overall incidence was low (4.7% and 7.4%) in both groups of birds, the levels in free living birds was significantly greater, which reinforces the need for the quarantining of ex wild injured raptors. The inclusion of injured wild raptors into a falconry centre is shown to constitute a potential risk to the resident birds in the centre. It is worth remembering that the commonest route of infection of falcons with falcon herpes virus is by the feeding of fresh or frozen pigeon carcass. Falcon herpes virus is a rapidly fatal viral infection for which there is no effective treatment.

Tom Bailey is an English avian vet who has been working in the Middle East for the last 9 years, currently positioned at the Dubai Falcon Hospital. Tom has recently completed an MSc in Wild Animal Health, for which he conducted research with Nick Fox on the management of small populations of falcons (New Zealand falcons) as well as research into field techniques required for the freezing of raptor semen (as a tool for the preservation of genetic material). Tom explained that the key to

any controlled breeding project, but in particular one involving an endangered species, was the maintenance of good records, including a complete stud book and commencing with divergent genetic individuals. The study population had been derived from 6 wild caught birds, although the subsequent population was only generated from 5 of them, (the other bird having died before it had bred). Subsequent DNA analysis of the New Zealand falcons had shown that despite initially requesting birds from different geographical areas, 4 of the birds were so genetically similar that they were in fact likely to all be siblings. Inbreeding coefficients and other population statistical analysis were performed demonstrating an excessively high level of inbreeding. It is evident that for this population to be viable and sustainable long term, fresh genetic material is essential. Tom concluded that it was only because this colony had over the years been managed in a scientific manner that such an accurate and objective assessment could be made. In relation to the semen freezing, Tom described how he had compared three methods of freezing. Good quality semen samples were equilibrated at 5°C for 15 minutes and then mixed with an equal volume of diluent containing 18% DMA (82 parts Lakes diluent with 18 parts dimethylacetamide) in a cryovial. Then three different freezing methods were used.

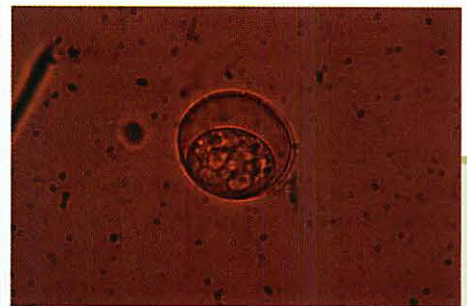
1. Samples were inserted in a Mr Frosty (5100 Cryo 1°C Freezing container, Nalgene), placed inside a freezer (-20°C) for 1.5 - 2 hours and then plunged into liquid nitrogen.
2. Samples were inserted into a 'Mr Frosty' and placed inside a domestic freezer (-12°C) for 1.5 - 2 hours and then plunged into liquid nitrogen.
3. Samples were plunged directly into liquid nitrogen.



● Post mortem of falcon which died of Falcon herpes virus showing typical white spots in the liver



● Bumblefoot lesion



● Sporulated cyst of *Loryospora henryae*

Tom later thawed all samples and analysed the sperm motility and viability. Whilst the levels were low (4.3% and 16.4% respectively), such levels have been proven sufficient to achieve egg fertilisation. There was no statistically significant difference in post thaw motility and mobility using the different methods, although there was a significant difference between individual birds.

Richard Jones is a former protégé of Neil Forbes, who having spent two years studying for an MSc with Professor Pat Redig at the Raptor Centre in Minnesota, returned to work in Cheshire. Whilst in the US Richard conducted a project to assess the feasibility and safety of endoscopic vasectomisation of neonate quail. This project was stimulated by the current debate regarding the use of hybrid birds for falconry. Vasectomy was chosen over castration as he does not want to interfere with secondary maturation and muscle development in the patients, which could have a subsequent deleterious effect on flight ability. Although such techniques would remain a relatively specialised procedure, Richard was able to show that the technique could be safely performed in young birds (at any age prior to leaving a breeder), without any apparent adverse side effects.

Michel Lierz a German graduate, who having worked in the Middle East for two years has now returned to Germany to run the avian clinic at Berlin University gave the next raptor related paper. Michel had conducted a study using the 'Buddy' (Vetronic Services UK) digital egg monitor to non invasively monitor turkey and chicken embryo heart rates during incubation. The Buddy comprises of a plastic body (measurement chamber), battery, monitor and computer chip. The Buddy emits infrared rays at the egg, blood flow in the embryo alters the infrared rays, enabling the Buddy to measure the heart rate. Detection of heart rates was possible from day seven throughout incubation (in contrast to candling). Embryo heart rates were artificially slowed by egg cooling and then re-warmed and the effects on heart rate were readily monitored. Michel noted that embryo movements were increased if any noises were made (including talking) in the incubation room. Unfortunately the design of the Buddy is such that larger eggs do not fit into the measurement box, moreover it is not effective in some larger thicker shelled eggs such as eagles. Despite these reservations the equipment will obviously be very useful for many raptor breeders.

Michel Lierz then spoke again regarding a study which he had undertaken on the incidence of bumblefoot in falcons in the Middle East. Michel had become aware that the majority of bumblefoot cases in the Middle East occur in falcons shortly after the end of the flying season. He described a study in which he had divided falcons into two groups. One group ceased exercise suddenly at the end of the flying season and tended to increase weight fairly swiftly whilst in the other group flying (and hence exercise) was gradually reduced over a period of 3-4 weeks at the end of the season, with a slower increase in body weight. There was a clear differential in the incidence between the two groups, with those whose season was gradually curtailed, suffering a significantly reduced incidence of bumblefoot. There is perhaps a useful and important lesson which should be learnt for all long wingers from this interesting study.

Nigel Harcourt-Brown will need no introduction to readers (an avian specialist with vast experience based in Yorkshire) then gave a paper on an incidence of microphthalmia in artificially incubated falcon chicks. An experienced falcon breeder had produced a number of chicks (some 4.5%) of his production of that year, with one or both eyes being abnormally small. Careful post mortem investigations revealed that these eyes had failed to develop correctly. The incidence of this abnormality is rare in both falcons and poultry. All aspects of bird husbandry, diet etc. was identical. The only change had been a 0.2°C increase in incubation temperature. Moreover it appeared that the thermometer used for mapping the incubator temperature had never had part of its wrapping transit material removed, so that it had been reading a temperature lower than it actually was. Research has previously shown that an elevated incubation temperature (even a very slight one), will cause developmental, including eye abnormalities. This was a useful paper, reinforcing the importance of paying attention to every small detail when carrying out artificial incubation.

Readers will be aware that birds often become very rapidly sick and that for vets to restore the bird to normal health, they must make a specific diagnosis, i.e. to know exactly what is wrong with them so that appropriate therapy can be administered. Various speakers (Ulrica Hofle

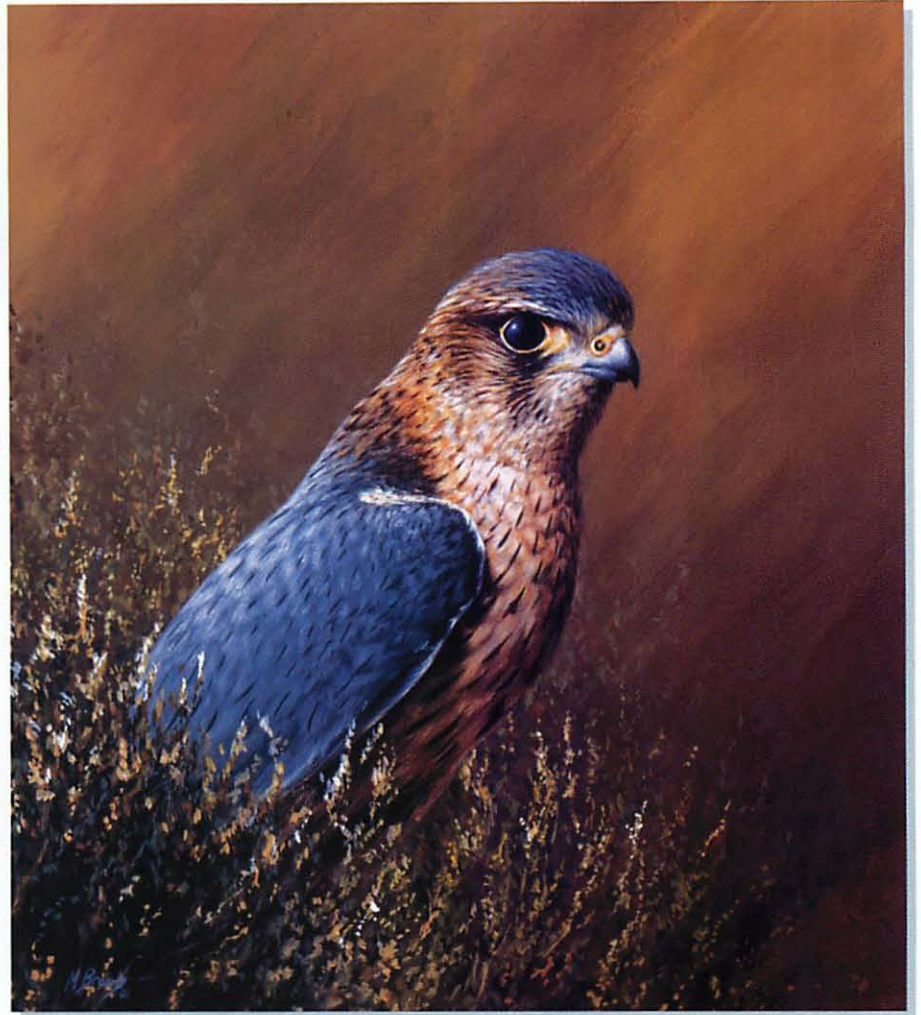
from Spain, Jaime Samour from Saudi Arabia and Peter McKinney from the United Arab Emirates) all gave papers on advances in diagnostic blood testing in raptors. These papers covered blood protein, liver function, acid: base and ion disturbance investigations. Whilst fascinating to the audience they have little relevance to the readers of this magazine and hence are omitted from this article.

Various speakers referred to ongoing research and clinical uses for the newly available disinfectant F10. This product seems to continue to show great promise and application in raptors. John Temporely from Health and Hygiene (manufacturers of F10) was present at the conference and discussed use of the disinfectant with many delegates. This disinfectant has the efficacy range of other well known disinfectants but is non corrosive to metals, is stable when mixed for one month and has a broad range of activity against bacteria, viruses and aspergillus. The product is fully licensed, it is very non irritant and can even be breathed in or drunk by birds.

Lastly there was a paper presented by Cheryl Greenacre from USA. She had conducted a study investigating the effect of the manual restraint of birds on their body temperature and respiratory rate. She was able to demonstrate that there was a statistically significant increase in body temperature and respiratory rate after just 5 minutes of manual restraint. Furthermore after 15 minutes manual restraint, the body temperature had risen on average 2.5°C and respiratory rate had increased by 95% (i.e. nearly doubled). Whilst we are all aware that manually restraining birds is stressful to them, it is useful to quantify just how stressed they become. The take home message from this study is not to manually restrain birds for excessive periods of time. If a lengthy procedure is essential, i.e. imping several feathers, placing a tail mount, then the keeper should consider splitting the restraint period into two or more shorter periods, or performing the procedure under veterinary induced anaesthetic.

The author hopes that this article gives a flavour of the research and advances which are constantly ongoing in the field of raptor medicine. The tragedy is that funding and support for such projects is typically non existent in the UK, with no full avian medicine and surgery departments in UK veterinary Universities, in contrast to the situation in Europe and America.

I was born in 1964 in Nottingham. I was fortunate that I lived on the outskirts of the town and that my house was surrounded by fields. Spending most of my time playing in the fields, it wasn't long before I started to take an interest in the animals and birds that I saw there. The primary school that I attended at the time took a big part in developing my passion for the natural history, as this took in injured animals and birds that I spent many hours looking after. Adjacent to the school there was a small wood that was owned by the local council. One of the teachers being interested in natural history gained permission to allow the school to develop this into a nature reserve. A group of the children, including myself, undertook the task of developing the wood to be wildlife friendly, ie. pond construction and the placement of nest boxes around the wood for different species of birds. Being involved in this spurred on my interest for the natural world around me.



MARTYN

First encounter

Art has always been a big part of my life and drawing the birds that I saw out in the fields was always an ongoing passion. Birds of prey in particular were always an inspiration. The first Barn owl I encountered was on one winters day when the fields were deep in snow and I remember watching the owl drifting over the fields searching for its next meal. Slowly as the years went by I spent many hours out in the field bird watching and learning to understand their characteristics. My parents were always

encouraging me in my interest and often brought me books. One in particular was the AA book of British Birds. To me this book was stunning, a great inspiration as the plates inside were exceptionally detailed and captured the

My first paintings were in watercolour and in the style of Thorburn and Lodge

character of the birds well. Many artists illustrated the book, but the plates by Raymond Harris Ching were stunning. I copies these over and over again trying to produce the same

softness and detail of plumaged.

Later I came across paintings by George Lodge and Archibald Thorburn. These artists gave me a new concept of art as they involved their animals and birds within their

environment. I was always good at art as a child and was encouraged to take my talent further by my art teacher at secondary school. But I didn't like the school environment, the thought of more years in education did not appeal to me. I didn't go to art college and so I missed out on formal training in composition



As the years went by I became more involved with field sports, such as fishing, shooting and ferreting. It was then inevitable that along the line I would cross the path of falconry

BROOK

Falconer & Wildlife Artist

and art techniques. I don't regret this as most art courses cover a wide variety of art subjects and I would have lost interest and not followed it to the end, as the art that inspires me the most is wildlife art.

First Bird

As the years went by I became more involved with field sports, such as fishing, shooting and ferreting. It was then inevitable that along the line I would cross the path of falconry. When I did, I could not resist finding out more about the sport. It wasn't until I got my first house that I would have the chance to acquire my first bird. That bird was a Common Buzzard and so I

learnt a lot from that bird, which I called Able, (because was I ABLE to get her to catch rabbits? No!). This was not through lack of trying, as I bolted rabbit after rabbit. She would never attempt to make contact and would veer off at the last minute. So an upgrade was needed and I purchased a Redtail. This proved more fun than I ever imagined. She took rabbits, hares and pheasants when fit. Over the next four years of flying the Redtail, I encountered through my friends the Goshawk and grew more excited by the challenge of this bird. I acquired my first Goshawk, a male that flew at 11lb 10oz. The Goshawk and Sparrowhawk have become my main interest in

the sport. I still have the Redtail and fly her at the beginning and at the end of the flying season, although this is not enough to get her fully fit, but I cannot face parting with her.

Returned to Painting

Falconry and my art seemed to take the same path at the same time. Having my first house enabled me to start my education in falconry and having several bare walls to full, I started to paint again. My first paintings were in watercolour and in the style of Thorburn and Lodge. Slowly the paintings grew in number and wall space ran out. At this point friends and relations started to ask for pictures and so my

MARTYN BROOK



first commissions were undertaken.

I started exhibiting at small country fairs. These went well and I got better which built up my confidence. Being a falconer I inevitably visited the falconry fair, right from its first early years. The art marquee, run by Chris Christoforou, immediately caught my eye and as the fairs went by, friends and my wife encouraged me to find out about exhibiting in the art marquee.

In 1997 I approached Chris with an interest in joining the art marquee. I was asked to forward a portfolio which I did in 1998 and so I exhibited for the first time at the international falconry fair. Over the next couple of years, Chris gave invaluable help and

guidance to me and introduced me to acrylics.

Acrylics allowed me to gain more detail and depth. Over the period of time that I have exhibited at the falconry fair, I hope I have gained respect as a raptor and wildlife artist, this has helped me to sell to clients all over the world.

Working with oils

At present I am producing some exciting work in oils, which I am enjoying, as they allow me to be free with my brush to achieve a soft but realistic impression. The Peregrine falcon is the bird that inspires me at present, as its beauty and sheer power is a challenge to capture in paint.

To find out more about Martyn's work and forthcoming exhibitions telephone 0115 961 8980. The next exhibition is at Chatsworth Country Fair on 30th and 31st August.





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Teaching
GOLDEN EAGLES
to survive

Joe Atkinson

In California, USA, golden eagles are very numerous, in fact, quite common. With a large population of deer, ground squirrels and black tail jack rabbits to prey on, the golden eagles thrive.

With as many eagles as there are, some will inevitably get into trouble. Be it through injury, sickness or just plain bad luck, a certain percent will need man's help to get going on their way. Golden eagles that had a major injury requiring the loss of a wing or other body part have little options and certainly cannot be returned to the wild. Adult eagles that have a more treatable problem, and will most likely fully recover, can be released, as they already have the skills to survive. But what about the very young golden eagle that either falls out of the nest, flies into someone's back yard, or is sick and recovering? These eagles pose a different problem because once deemed physically healthy, they still do not have the necessary skills for survival. In the past, these young eagles were placed in a large flight chamber and offered live food, the idea being that they would learn enough about catching prey to make it, once released*. However, a large percentage of this group was showing up in re-hab centres because they were starving. They just did not have the skills to make it on their own. So, the question was what could be done?

Illegal falconry used

Dr Vicky Joseph is a avian veterinarian that founded CFBP, the Center for Birds of Prey, a rehabilitation center in conjunction with her veterinary practice in northern California. Dr. Joseph and her falconer husband, Andy, realised that falconry could play a very important role in successfully returning these young eagles to the wild. Through the use of falconry, young golden eagles could be flown and hunted for a given amount of time, thus allowing them to gain the necessary skills to survive, and then released. After all, falconry has been useful in returning many other species back to the wild...why not golden eagles?

The idea sounds very simple. However, Dr. Joseph had a few bumps in the road to overcome. The first major bump was that the golden eagle is not a legal falconry bird in California. In some states, American falconers can, under certain conditions, fly golden eagles, but not in California. The second problem was a product of the first - if falconers can't fly eagles in California, then where does CFBP find falconers who have experience with eagles? As anyone who has handled a golden eagle knows, they are dangerous, not only to the handler, but also to every other animal that might come in contact with them.

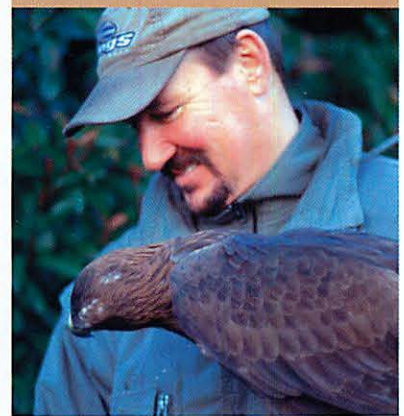
I have been a falconer all my life, and living in the foothills of California, I have come across many golden eagles. From the time I was a young college student, I have handled and flown golden eagles, whether in a free flight bird show at a local zoo or on a film location for a wildlife

movie. Dr. Joseph and I crossed paths at a local TV station. We both talked about golden eagles and one thing led to another. Soon I was to be one of only two falconers flying eagles in California for CFBP. For me, this was a dream come true. Although I do enjoy flying falcons at game, the golden eagle holds a big place in my heart. But please don't tell the falcons that!

Once the young eagle is trained, meaning it can be flown with a reasonable amount of

The reason for this is that adult golden eagles, the females in particular, are very good at rolling over in mid flight and snatching the stooping red tail out of the air. I have witnessed this many times, including one time in particular when I was able to get the eagle to step off the red tail hawk before she began to eat it. That was one very upset red tail hawk! So, the red tail hawks concentrate on the immature eagles. One good hit, or even a glancing blow, can

Photos by Chrissy Atkinson



confidence that it will return, the education process can begin. Young eagles are shy and very unsure of the world, which makes sense, because, in the wild, mistakes can be very costly. For a young eagle that is learning by watching how its parents handle things, life is somewhat easier. But for a youngster that has only a human as an example, life will be harder and slower.

Eagles and the redtail come together

In California, as in other parts of the world, young eagles are harassed without mercy by a whole host of attackers. The biggest lesson young golden eagles must overcome is the almost constant attack from red tailed hawks. Just as the red tail is the hated enemy of the kestrel for the taking of young kestrels, so is the eagle to the red tailed hawk. I have watched many a young, trained eagle soaring with a red tail hawk stooped at it time after time, and all the while a kestrel is stooping just as heard at the red tail hawk. Adult golden eagles do not get too excited over the attacking red tail hawks, even though they could deliver a serious blow, sometimes causing great damage to the eagle. Red tail hawks seem to know that it is best to leave the adults alone, maybe going into a not too serious stoop, just to send a message.

freak out a young eagle to the point that anything and everything becomes a stooping red tail, even a bee or a swallow! The end result is that the young eagle is driven to the ground and is afraid to show itself for fear of more attacks.

Troubled at a young age

This, I believe, is the biggest threat to young golden eagles that have been released without being flown. The scared young eagles stop hunting and learning and time is not their friend. They only have a given amount of energy and strength, and once used up, they are in deep trouble. Flying these young golden eagles using falconry allows them to have all the traumatic experiences life has to offer, and then be called in and fed and ready for another day.

To take a young and scared eagle through its first free flight and watch it as it learns to soar, gaining control of the wind, then making its first kill, and having played a small part in the life of that once scared eagle, is an experience that gives me immeasurable satisfaction. And to finally watch as the eagle flies off, a confident, skilled hunter with a chance to become an eagle is, for me, something deeper than words can express.

*Please note that is illegal to feed a bird live game in an aviary in this country.

I have been meaning to write an article for sometime now. I confess to being a little apprehensive, but with spell checker in one hand and a borrowed pen in the other, here goes.

I would like to share my experiences with my female Lanner, Xena. This is our 4th season together, as she is a 1999 bird. I work nights so this allows me time to fly her every afternoon, weather permitting.

Xena

Dale Fairbrass

I began practising falconry back in 1983 when I started with a Kestrel and a Buzzard, (these were all I could afford at the time). I was still living at home and spent a lot of time on the dole. I learnt my trade with these two, flying one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Nothing exciting but I still look back to those times with fond memories.

Then work took over. Aso marriage, children, more work and moving around with new jobs meant I had no time for my birds. So I had to give up and concentrate on family matters (not easy, but it had to be done). Anyway, back to 1999. I settled into my new night job, children growing up and happy, house decorated (well, sort of) and wife content with her lot (not an easy feat). I was now in a position to take up the sport again.

I wanted to progress and I had always fancied a Lanner falcon, they always fly well at all the shows I had been to, so I thought I would pit my wits against a falcon (also I could not believe how reasonably priced they had become).

1999-2000 Season

I obtained the entire equipment needed, aviaries built and collected Xena in July. I had forgotten how hard it was starting from scratch again but it wasn't a problem. Right from the first day I was just so impressed with how gorgeous she was. She tamed easily, training went well and she was soon flying free. I hadn't lost my touch! I did have a bit of trouble getting the hood on, having not done this before, but with a bit of patience and timing I slowly improved. I confess to finding this a very fiddly process. I worked on her fitness and did not really bother about hunting. I had read the books, watched videos and realised that we did not have the correct quarry to go after. Lanners are intelligent and would only hunt if they felt they could kill easily. So I was just happy to see her fly well. I wanted to see good height, waiting on well and a good work out to the lure.

The first thing that I noticed was how the weather affected her performance. If the conditions were bright, with no wind, she would soar away, sometimes just becoming a dot in the sky. Then it was a question of how long my nerve could hold out until I lured her in. I think back to those times now, she must



have some distance away because she would always drop down at distance. Then it was a case of how long she took to get back to me, but bad weather, i.e. cloudy, windy and cold, she would fly but stay close and just wait for the lure, a little disappointing to how I imagined her flying, again comparing her to the Lanners I had seen flown at the falconry shows.

I stayed at the same flying ground a short distance from my home and was fairly content with what I had achieved. I had put a lot of time into her and she was very pleasing to watch. We had 167 trips out with no kills.

2000-2001 Season

The first half of the year was pretty much as I'd left the last. Retraining was no problem after the moult and we soon got into the swing of things again. I felt we had both improved - my lure swinging and her flying. But then I had a bit of luck. I had managed to negotiate some new flying ground. This was a large pig farm set in a valley. It has to be two and half miles long, about a mile wide with grass fields sloping up both sides. Excellent for flying as you can watch her soar, making height and was genuinely a nice area. The one thing I didn't take any real notice of, apart from the fact that we could scare them all off for a while, was the rooks and gulls. They loved it here; no exaggeration there has to be 500+ every afternoon at around 2.30pm. The farmer feeds the pigs and the rooks come in from all different directions.

It was in November that she is just getting fit, but today Xena pushed off. She has disappeared before, maybe for 10 minutes or so, but always came back looking for me, so after 20 minutes I was starting to worry. The rooks were going

mad in the distance, much more than usual so this was the direction I headed.

I actually had to get out the telemetry. This was the first time I'd used it and it took me the best part of an hour wandering around, following the signal. I knew I was getting closer but she had headed back towards the village a couple of miles away and it was awkward to get to where I needed to be. Then I spotted her. I

lured her in but she was a little apprehensive. As she got closer I could see she had a full crop. I couldn't believe it. I threw the lure out and retrieved her. I was so cross; her first kill and I had missed it. I had no proof, except for the big black pellet the next day. It had to be a rook.

We carried on through the season and she continued to be a display bird just for me. But she caught three rooks, one I saw her take in a tree (as he had just perched), the other two I had to track her down. Nothing happened close or in view. I guessed she was taking them in trees and bushes because I always came across her next to these, never in the open. If I could get there fast enough I could help her, but I

October - 1
November - 2
December - 2
January - 2
February - 0
March - 6

Notice six kills in March, before I put her down to moult. She just clicked. This was six kills out of 13 trips out. When the whole season was 13 kills out of 97 trips, but are the rooks not harder to catch in March, when they are fitter? It makes no sense. When she's in the mood I have seen some great chases, I have watched rooks dive into pippens,

She was coping with them a lot better; she had developed a headlock that Mick McManus would have been proud of. Then she went off the boil again, only four birds during November/December. So frustrating. Some days she really tried and I had seen some enjoyable chases, other days she was happy just to float around. I felt as though I was back to square one.

December and January the telemetry conked out - no flying.

In the months of February and March we were fighting fit again, but no joy with rooks.

This brings us up to date; she looks great and is really fit. We get out most afternoons but with the odd chase thrown in it's been very disappointing. I thought, perhaps we have over hawked the pig farm and the rooks have become used to us.



September - retraining
October - 2 rooks, 20 trips
November - 2 rooks, 12 trips
December - 1 rook, 6 trips
January - 1 rook, 7 trips
February - 0 rooks, 21 trips
March - 1 rook, 25 trips
April - 1 rook, 11 trips

I carried on hawking into April to try and make up for some of the time we had lost when the telemetry was on the blink and also to make the most of the good weather.

I have seen some super soaring and that first stoop to the lure has been breath taking. As for the rooks - she had a few chases, she even chased a partridge one day, which was a first. That's another season over, here's looking forward to the next!



Zena passing the lure

Sometimes she would just fly straight into them, taking the quarry as they took off from the ground and sometimes she made height and soared

wondered how many had got away. Foot and mouth cut in just as things were starting to get interesting. We had 121 trips out, three kills and three escapees.

2001 - 2002

Once again this season we both improved. The one thing I had learnt was that she needed to be fit to tackle rooks. Basic stuff I know, but what I mean is you could tell if she had missed a few days through bad weather. I still could not put my finger on what triggered her to be in the mood to hunt so I tried lowering and increasing her weight but this did not seem to really matter. She made kills from 1.4 - 1.7oz and I really think she just picked flights herself. She knew if she had a chance or not. 10 rooks, two jackdaws and one wood pigeon were our total for the season. The other thing I had noticed was that all the rooks were immature (black faces) so these were obviously easier to handle than the older birds.

under water troughs, or even under a pig. Anything to avoid capture.

It is just so puzzling that she can soar around them one day and take one out the next. 97 trips out and 13 kills.

2002 - 2003

I started retraining at the end of September. By the end of October we already had 11 rooks. I couldn't believe it, and better still, I was getting to see a lot of the chases. She was now taking them in the open and I could see her different styles. Sometimes she would just fly straight into them, taking the quarry as they took off from the ground and sometimes she made height and soared. Then you could see her slip into another gear and speed off, and you knew she had one in her sights.

As before there were times when I had to track her down but at this moment in time I was on top of the world and really thought I had cracked it. Yet again they were all first year rooks.

Summary

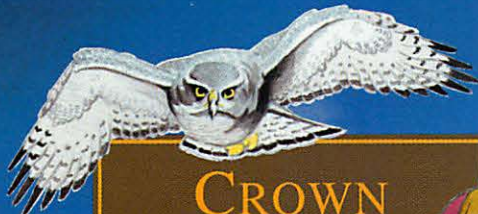
In the last four seasons you can see the steady progress Xena has made. We have stuck at it through thick and thin.

I hate the phrase "on her day", but it really is a case of on her day she is a cracking little falcon. Her size is against her and I'm sure there have been many occasions when the cloud of rooks attacking her on the ground has pushed her off her victim.

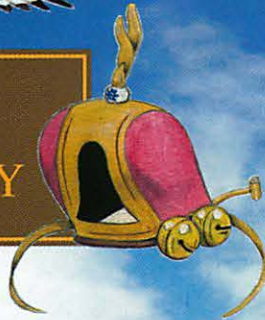
I know I do not always get to see the action, but you can hear the roar go up and she can sometimes be half a mile away. Getting over to her to help can be very difficult.

The weather is also of great importance for her to go well. I have made mistakes but all's well that end's well. Sometimes I get carried away and expect too much of her, rooks are a tough quarry and I would hate to see her hurt.

So there you have it. I can now put away my spell checker, give back the borrowed pen and I will keep you informed of further developments. I am sure there will be much more to come.



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The last flights of the game hawking/shooting season are usually spectacular, as the game that have survived are usually of the highest quality. Strong and wily, the fittest birds will usually make up the breeding pairs for the spring. The hawks are usually good too, as they have a season behind them and have worked out strategies to out-maneuvre seasoned birds.

GP (General Purpose) – my gyr/peregrine - in his first year, flew as good as an older bird and got very deadly towards the end of the season. The last day was on a kept estate, where red-leg partridge ruled the day. He'd already knocked a grey down which had escaped into cover, so I was trying to find a good set-up for his last flight. Ash, my old pointer, was working a massive field of onions when he came on point. I released GP who made his way up effortlessly. At around 500ft he circled, waiting for the flush – but red-legs being red-legs, they had run! I urged the dog on but even after a few hundred yards they still did not flush. Meanwhile, a bunch of wood pigeons had caught GP's eye and



our way there. It was GP's last flight, as time was pressing. As I unhooded him he stared intently into the sky. A dot became bigger and materialised. It was the peregrine. She flew past at about 400ft. I put the hood back on GP until she had disappeared (to our eyes!). When I struck the hood, he again stared intently in the direction that the peregrine had disappeared. Even with binoculars I couldn't see anything, so I released him. We were a few hundred yards from the pond so nothing had been disturbed. GP shot straight up in the direction the falcon had taken. At about 3/4 mile and 800ft up, the falcon was seen again. GP was with her in a flash! They circled each other kekking. To bring him back over, the other falconers present and myself swung lures frantically. He wasn't interested. This was a much more entertaining game, wooing a big

excellent but they had lost a lot on the ground after knocking them down. This is where the saker part of the hybrid came into play. She was really tough on the ground – reminiscent of a goshawk. If a cock and hen were flushed together, she'd always take the cock. In her third season she had a good bag already under her belt when we made a last trip to some ground that had been earmarked for development. A few wooden marker pegs had even been stuck in the ground. Ash, the pointer, worked out into the middle of what was a weed seed field. He jack-knifed on point, dead centre. The hybrid was released and my falconer friend and myself sat back to watch the flight. The pheasant would have to fly a couple of hundred yards to cover so it should be a good flight. She went out and turned at 1/4 mile, rising in the wind all the time. Most of her kills were not from great pitches as her wing loading was such that she could fly down and catch them with relative ease. As she came over, a small flock of wood pigeon floated slowly under her, disturbed from the field. This was too good to resist. She turned over, and stooped from about 400ft, which was a good pitch for her. The pigeons flared and

Last Flights

Ellis Phythian



he had flown off to investigate. At this point the partridges decided to go. Well out of position, GP spotted them and turned. Instead of stooping at an angle from where he was half a mile away, he shot across the sky at the same pitch until within a few hundred yards of the departing birds. One partridge decided to leave the covey and make for cover. Mistake! He turned over and dropped like a teardrop. The partridge was dead when we arrived. Moulting time!

Of all GP's flights, his most dramatic was on another estate where partridge, duck and pheasant were in plentiful supply. The keeper said that a wild peregrine falcon had been seen regularly of late. Cover had prevented the conclusion of a successful flight at partridges, so he suggested we tried for ducks. A small pond in the middle of a field usually held a few. So we made

female! I urged the keeper to flush anything that might be on the pond in the hope that it would bring him back over and we might flush a late one. The keeper ran across the field and flushed half a dozen mallard that were hiding in the reeds.

Looking back towards the hawks, only the falcon (presumably) could be seen. The sound of tearing paper issued from the same direction. The bird got bigger as he stooped at an acute angle towards us. He was definitely doing more than 100mph as he flashed past. The ducks were going well too. They were well out and going top speed. GP knocked the tail end Charlie out as if it was standing still – which was a large mallard duck!

Sometimes the last flight of a falcon's career can end not as anticipated. My first peregrine/saker falcon turned out to be the best cock pheasant killer I'd ever had. Female peregrines had been

she picked one out. The birds merged with the cover at the end of the stoop. Had she caught it? We ran over to find nothing, not even a feather. A search in the general area revealed the falcon was dead! I picked her up and walked back along her line of flight. A marker peg lay on the ground. She had hit it 1/2" from the top where it had stuck up through the grass. A crushed skull had killed her instantly.

Looking around, we noticed that Ash was still on point. My friend was flying a tiercel, but I still urged him to fly the point as it could turn out to be a partridge. The tiercel made a good pitch, we flushed a pheasant. The tiercel acknowledged it but it was too big for him.

Had the hybrid been flying it would have put the quarry in the bag.

So you've got your land, built the weathering for your hawk, actually acquired the bird, and want to get out in the field.

It's then that falconers start thinking about what vehicle they should buy, and the natural assumption is that it should be something with four wheel drive. But it doesn't have to be unless you intend to do a lot of off-road work. Provided you aren't dealing with masses of ruts or boggy ground, then an ordinary estate car might suffice, or maybe something like a Subaru.

True, the Land Rovers, Range Rovers, and Toyota Land Cruisers of this world look the part and are superb at getting to places other vehicles cannot reach. But they cost a lot to buy, a bundle to run, and are not that practical as everyday transport, a factor you need to bear in mind if

you can't run to the luxury of two cars.

Assuming that you can, or that you can cope with a bulky four wheel drive as your main car, then what should your choice be?

Life is not as easy as it may seem at this point. There's a vast choice but not all are suitable for the hard life you have in mind. Doubling as a family car may mean you have to choose something with a bit of comfort. On the other hand, if this is to be purely a vehicle for hawking, then a more utilitarian approach will be the order of the day.

A short or long wheelbase Land Rover could be your ideal hunting partner. There's room for a boxed bird or two plus dogs and ferrets and if you buy a long wheelbase model you can take a few people along, too.

Now known as the Defender, the original style Land Rover is a hard worker but the best buys probably come between 1990 and 1998, when Land Rover used its own Tdi series

engines, first the 200 and then the 300. The 300 is slightly more powerful but most Land Rover experts will tell you the 200 is more durable, and that's what you want. So in the Land Rover stakes, you can narrow the field down from 1990 to 1994, which should get you a vehicle that's affordable. Budget £5,000 to £6,000 to get a good one. Condition is more important than age, so price guides are not a reliable indicator of true values. Study some of the specialist four wheel drive magazines or check your local Auto Trader for a few weeks.

Don't think that because Land Rovers have aluminium panels rust is not a problem. The chassis and bulkhead at the front of the cab are made of steel and these can go rotten quite quickly. The good thing is that Land Rovers are built like Meccano kits and you can chop off the bad bits and weld in new ones. With plenty of pattern part suppliers around, the bits are not expensive. What you should try to avoid is any

When you want to

Volkswagen Passat TDI 110 Sport

Land Rover made after the 1998 introduction of the Td5 engine. It's great while it's going well but I've heard some horror anecdotes about it. It's also computer controlled everywhere you want





to look while older Landies can be fixed with a bag of spanners and a couple of screwdrivers, much easier in a muddy field than wondering how to connect up the diagnostics plug!

The other good thing about choosing a four wheel drive is that now's a good time to buy one. The market is depressed as the weather's good - or as good as it gets in Britain, more likely - but as soon as October and November come around a hint of bad weather means that everyone's looking for 4x4s again. And if you buy one now, you have time to fit it out just as you want. Some clever lateral thinking will mean you pack a load of gear even into a short wheelbase Land Rover.

There's plenty of Japanese tackle in the 4x4 sector, vehicles like the



Mitsubishi Shogun 3.5 V6



2002 Subaru Legacy 2.0

built like a car, and often fitted with light shades of interior trim, they can soon look more like a dog than your GSP.

Among the ranks of ordinary estate cars, my favourites would be the Peugeot 406, Ford Mondeo, and Volkswagen Passat, although not necessarily in that order.

Diesels will offer the best running costs, but the earlier Mondeo diesels are rough to drive. Later Mondeos with the TDCi engine are much sweeter but they are still the wrong side of £10,000. The 406 is fine and has good diesel engines, but my money would be on the Passat, which has a strong body, good trim, and excellent diesel engines, just the combination you should be looking for. It also has a roomy load bay but, as with all these estates, make sure you bird boxes or caddies will fit in the back.

get out in the field...

Maurice Hardy

Mitsubishi Shogun and Isuzu Trooper. The latter has always been bought as a workhorse, so early ones may now be suffering a bit from heavy use.

The Shogun is very popular as a used grey import from Japan - you'll see plenty of these around and the

giveaway is often the Pajero name badge and the small bonnet-mounted rear view mirror on the nearside. Shoguns like this can be fine, but

bear in mind that you'll be able to make few checks on their histories and that not all the parts may be easily available when the thing inevitably breaks.

Shoguns also seem to be popular with thieves and I know two falconers living in the same small town who have had theirs stolen.

Where estate cars are concerned, the obvious

hybrid between big 4x4s and the ordinary models comes from Subaru. These cars, not all of which actually have 4x4 systems, so watch out, will tackle some pretty rough going and the beauty of them is that they are light enough not to cut up the ground. The downside is that being



Isuzu Trooper LWB 3.5 (petrol) DOHC Citation



Nissan Navara pickup



Land Rover Defender 110

Those of you who are really lucky and qualify for a company car, or maybe have their own businesses that are VAT registered, may also like to spare a thought for the latest generation of double cab pick-ups.

The Mitsubishi's are the biggest sellers, but are also cursed with a big thirst, and the Toyotas have long lost their supremacy in this sector, although they still command good values secondhand.

Of the current crop of pick-ups, the Nissan Navara is probably the best. It has a 2.5 litre turbodiesel engine and rides better than its opponents, so you should arrive in the field without finding that you hawk's tail has been shaken out on the way there.

The advantage for company car users is that these pick-ups are classed as commercial vehicles for taxation purposes at the moment, so you don't pay anything like the personal tax penalties that you do with a car. For VAT-registered people there's also the possibility of claiming back your VAT, provided the vehicle has a payload of more than one tonne. Check carefully, as while the current new ones do some of the older used ones don't.

Stick a hard top on the back of your pick-up and you have a really versatile vehicle that will double as family car and workhorse too. Just watch the bone-hard ride and the dodgy wet weather on-road handling, that's all.

Peregrinati



I realise that I am very fortunate in that my pursuit of falconry takes me to some fascinating places around the world and a great many interesting locations here in the UK. As well as enjoying seeing a wide selection of trained hawks and falcons being flown at various quarry species I have also been fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to see various wild raptors in their natural environment.

The raptors I have seen vary considerably and cover species from the magnificent Golden eagle down to the beautiful, but diminutive, Taita falcon. As my own personal falconry preference is for flying longwings then it is only natural that this preference should follow through in my enthusiasm for watching wild hawks. I have been lucky enough to have observed Gyrs, Peregrines, Barbaries, Sakers, Lanners, Hobbies, Merlins, Taita's, Prairies, Aplomado's, Bat falcons, Kestrels (both European and American) Laughing and Collared Forest falcons. Although the last two species are not what most falconers would think of as falcons.

On the hawk front, I have been fortunate enough to observe Goshawks, Sparrowhawks, Red Breasted Sparrowhawks, Gabor Goshawks, Sharp Shins, Coopers, Redtails, Harris Hawks, Ferruginous, Pale Chanting Goshawks, Auger Buzzards, Ornate and Black Hawk eagles.

My eagle observations are somewhat limited as they do not hold a massive appeal to me as a falconer and therefore I have never gone out of my way to go and observe them in the wild. Normally I have seen them as an incidental whilst being in pursuit of falconiforme of some description or other. Those I have been lucky enough to see are Golden, Black, Tawny, Steppe, Martial, Crowned, Bald, Snake, African Fish and Bateluer.

Eagles in Mexico...

Whilst I appreciate that eagles are magnificent birds of prey, and have nothing but admiration for those that fly them well in suitable country, they just don't tend to excite me in the trained state. Nevertheless, I do have several memories of encounters with wild eagles that do stand out in my memory though. When hawking in Mexico a few years ago a pair of Golden eagles put on a magnificent flying display that lasted all of 20 minutes. It was a very hot afternoon in a steep valley just south of Agascalientes. Our party were flying a team of intermixed passage Peregrines at ducks. We had stopped to take a drink and to let the burning heat of the midday pass before continuing with our sport. We spotted

a female Golden eagle soaring over a ridge at a considerable height. She hit a thermal and rapidly gained height until it was getting difficult to spot her with the naked eye.

All of a sudden she closed her wings and stooped till he was just over the ridge again and then glided effortlessly along it. Then she hit another thermal and went up again. As she did so a melee drifted across and joined her. The pair then proceeded to perform the most amazing aerobatic manoeuvres all across the sky. They would stoop together and then rise back up to a tremendous height again. They did this repeatedly until the male broke away and flew down to the ridge and was lost from sight for a couple of minutes. When we did spot him again he was working his way back up to get level with the female. But this time he had a stick held firmly in his beak. When he reached the female he dropped the stick and then stooped after it.

Having recovered the stick he flew back up with it and dropped it again. Twice more he repeated this display of prowess to his would be partner before eventually letting the stick fall to the ground. Eventually the pair drifted off and left us to get on with our hawking. But as an example of controlled and powerful flight it had been a stunning example.

...and Scotland

Another slightly more fleeting encounter with a Golden eagle was in Scotland a couple of years ago. Whilst driving along a dual carriageway in Perthshire my eye was drawn to a covey of grouse that crested a rise to one side of the car. A Golden eagle was in hot pursuit and was stooping at the covey just like a falcon. To see such speed and manoeuvrability in so large a predator was very impressive. Many people think that eagles are lumbering creatures with no great speed or finesse in their flight. Those that think like that are very much mistaken.

Eagles on the hunt in Africa

Eagles, generally speaking, are master of the air and lords of all they survey. Often making spectacular kills in fine style using their raw power.

ons

Part 1

This is not always the case and there are a number of species that are as happy scavenging as they are putting the effort into hunting. I well remember seeing my first Lion kill in Africa. A lone lioness had killed a young zebra. Within literally a couple of minutes of the kill taking place several Tawny eagles had gathered around the lioness.

In an effort to eat her meal in peace the lioness had dragged her kill to the shade of a tree. After what seemed like no time at all the tree above the lioness was quite literally festooned with Tawny eagles. As well as those looking on from above a few more eagles gathered and sat patiently around the lioness waiting for any scraps that may come their way. By the time the lioness had finished her meal there were no less than eleven Tawnies waiting for a free meal.

My other lasting memory of eagles, this time an example of sheer power, was seeing a Martial eagle capture a Vervet monkey. A friend and myself were watching wildlife in The Kruger National Park in South Africa. A group of Vervet monkeys were feeding in some bushes a few yards from our vehicle. All of a sudden a few of their number gave the alarm chatter and the troop dashed for the safety of some nearby acacia trees. Here they sat silently looking skywards for a few minutes. All we could see was a distant Batleur. We knew it couldn't be this that panicked the monkeys but couldn't see anything else in the vicinity that could pose a threat, not even with the aid of binoculars.

Eventually the monkeys regained their composure and descended the trees and returned to their feeding. After a couple of minutes the lookouts (Vervet monkey troops act very much like Meerkats when they are feeding in that they always have at least one look out) became agitated again. Before the troop could scurry off a Martial eagle appeared from literally nowhere and scooped up one monkey with consummate ease. It was a devastating display of raw power. The speed with which the eagle had closed with the monkey had to be seen to be believed. Also the way that having plucked the monkey from the bush the eagle hardly faltered at all in its progress.



Laughing Falcon

Little wonder that many African natives regularly claim the Crowned eagles have been known to take small children on occasion. It is a matter of recorded fact that they have taken small dogs from villages.

A beautiful bird

My own particular favourite of eagle species is without doubt the Black eagle or Verreaux's eagle as it used to be known. These are stunningly beautiful both

in immature and adult plumage. To see them hunting in their natural surroundings is superb. I have not been fortunate enough to see a wild one make a kill but I have seen a male returning to the nest with food on several occasions. Each time the kill had been a Rock Hyrax.

I remember one nest site a friend and myself came across quite by accident. We were actually scouring rocky outcrops in southern Africa looking for signs of leopard. We would drive from outcrop to outcrop and spend a while at each one scanning them with binoculars. One particular group of rocks we looked at carefully had an eagles nest on the top and we were rewarded with the sight of an eaglet doing its wing exercises in preparation for flight. The nest was not particularly high and we would never have thought of looking at such a group of rocks for an eagles nest.

At home in Scotland

When I used to live in Scotland there was a Golden eagle eyrie relatively close by. Although it was pleasant to see eagles on the wing on a regular basis it also meant that great care had to be taken when weathering hawks and falcons on my lawn at home. Perches had to be placed so as



Black Eagle

not to present a passing eagle with a free meal. It also meant that care had to be taken when grouse

hawking on the moor behind my house. Many falcons are under the impression that a good high mounting game hawk can easily evade the unwanted attentions of a Golden eagle. They would be wrong and eagles do regularly take falcons, both trained and wild.

When it comes to watching hawks in the wild then the total number of species and occasions are somewhat limited. Again this is probably because I am a longwing at heart and therefore these are the species that I go out of my way to watch. But in the course of hawking over the years then the law of averages states that I will get to witness some accipiters and their like hunting in the field.

Impressive accipiter

Without doubt the most impressive accipiter I have ever personally witnessed in the wild is the African Black Sparrowhawk. These are the same size as a European Goshawk but are without doubt faster and more persistent when it comes to hunting. They are also amazingly aerial and will ring up after their prey. They live exclusively on birds and will take on a wide variety of prey species. If it moves by flying then there is a fair chance that a Black spar will think it is fair game.

I have seen them kill Pigeons, Francolin, Guinea Fowl and Hoopoe. I have witnessed one chasing a trained Peregrine falcon and another chasing a wild Peregrine. On both occasions the Peregrines were extremely lucky to have finally managed to evade the clutches of the hawk. The chases were very long and the tenacity of the Black spar was staggering.

Having had the pleasure of watching the Black sparrowhawk in the wild, I am now quite keen to try one myself at Pheasants here in the UK.

The Hawk & Owl Trust was formed in the sixties by a group of conservation minded falconers, including Jemima Parry Jones's late father Phillip Glasier. It is the only charity in the UK dedicated to the conservation of all birds of prey and owls and is now a leading advisor to landowners and government departments on issues affecting this group of birds.

The Trust prides itself in its active work, including its nestbox projects, where thousands of wooden best boxes have been installed around the country for Barn Owls, Tawny Owls, Little Owls, Kestrels and in some cases, Peregrine and Osprey. Combined with a sustained effort to encourage landowners to create vole rich habitat, this work has been of tremendous benefit to declining birds such as the Barn Owl.

The Trust also researches persecution issues affecting different raptor species and the results are presented to government and other bodies.

**Ian McGuire -
Chairman South
Glos & North
Bristol Group**

Projects covered in the past include Peregrine/Racing Pigeon conflicts, the effects of Hen Harriers on Grouse populations and the decline of farmland birds, relating to the Sparrowhawk. The Trust is currently campaigning against the shooting of raptors in the Mediterranean, where hundreds of Honey Buzzards, Harriers, Eagles and Osprey are shot whilst on migration.

With just a small number of paid staff, the work of the Trust is supported by a network of volunteers in various parts of the country. Local groups run local nestbox projects, hold regular slide shows and organise events where there is an opportunity to educate landowners and the public in bird of prey conservation. These enthusiastic volunteers also assist in surveys.

In 2001, the Trust acquired the shooting rights to Sculthorpe Fen in Norfolk, and the Trust's first reserve was opened. This important site has breeding Marsh Harriers and Barn Owls, with Hen Harriers regularly seen. Funding enabled the

Working for the conservation of all birds of prey and their habitats.

appointment of a Norfolk Conservation Officer, and the reserve is now run by the newly formed HOT Norfolk Group. The Trust hopes to raise enough money in the future to open more reserves, where it can then extend it's education and conservation programmes.



Despite it's standing in UK conservation, the Hawk and Owl Trust has a membership of only 2000. It is working hard to raise it's public profile and encourage bird of prey enthusiasts to become members and support it's work. With a single member

rate of just £15, membership of the Trust is great value and gives free entry to local group events through the year, an opportunity to get involved in the practical conservation work and a twice yearly colour 'Peregrine' magazine. A membership form and more details of the Trust's work can be found on the Trust's website at www.hawkandowl.org or by ringing Barbara Handley on (01761) 462017.

Join us today - we need your support

Yes, I would like to help conserve threatened wild birds of prey and their habitats by joining The Hawk and Owl Trust

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Falconer, conservationist and legendary display giver, Jemima Parry-Jones, was caught unawares at the Falconry Fair (4th May) when Marie-Louise Laschallas, founding president of the Campaign for Falconry, presented her with an engraved decanter on behalf of the UK's falconers and bird of prey keepers. Mima, as she is popularly known, leaves the UK at the end of the year for a new opportunity in America, and will stand down as the chairman of the Hawk Board.

Campaign for Falconry makes surprise presentation at Falconry Fair

Nick Kester

In her typically blunt style, Jemima Parry-Jones said: "I was staggered. To be recognised by your peers is very humbling, something I don't have much of a record of! I hope that I have made a contribution to the future of falconry through my chairmanship of the Hawk Board, and, through the National Birds of Prey Centre, to conservation and a better understanding of raptors the world over."

"I have marched, argued, cajoled and, on occasion, pleaded for birds of prey. It has been fun and frustrating in equal measures and, perhaps, has made some small contribution to the future of falconry."

Second presentation at Falconry Fair

Campaign for Falconry (CfF) treasurer, Derek Starkie presented Neil Forbes FRCVS with a cheque for £1000 as a substantial contribution to his research into the clinical disease caused by a protozoal parasite named 'Caryospora'. Caryospora is a type of coccidia. Forbes and others have previously demonstrated that it is the single largest cause of death in merlins and is responsible for the disease and, on occasion, the death of a significant number of young falcons. Indeed Caryospora is the commonest parasitic disease of falcons. The parasite can affect owls, but is commonest in falcons. It has not been recorded to affect hawks in the UK.

Forbes' research project has until now been entirely self-funded and the Campaign's contribution constitutes some 10% of the likely overall cost.

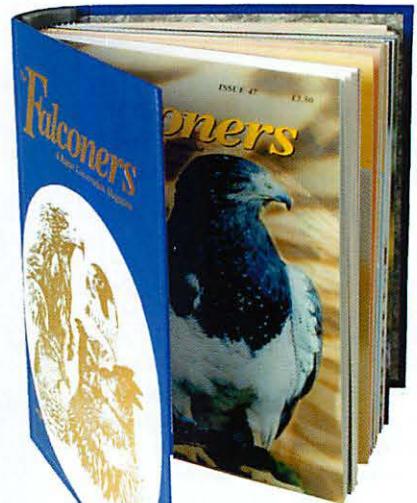
Campaign chairman, Terry Large, said: "There were many reasons why we set up the CfF and this is one of the most important. It's all very well fighting for the right to keep and fly birds of prey, but it is also critical to ensure their good health. Neil has been a long-term supporter of falconry and is one of the greatest authorities of raptor medicine. We are thrilled to be able to provide him with some tangible assistance."



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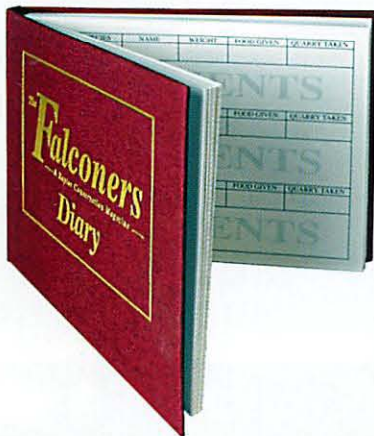
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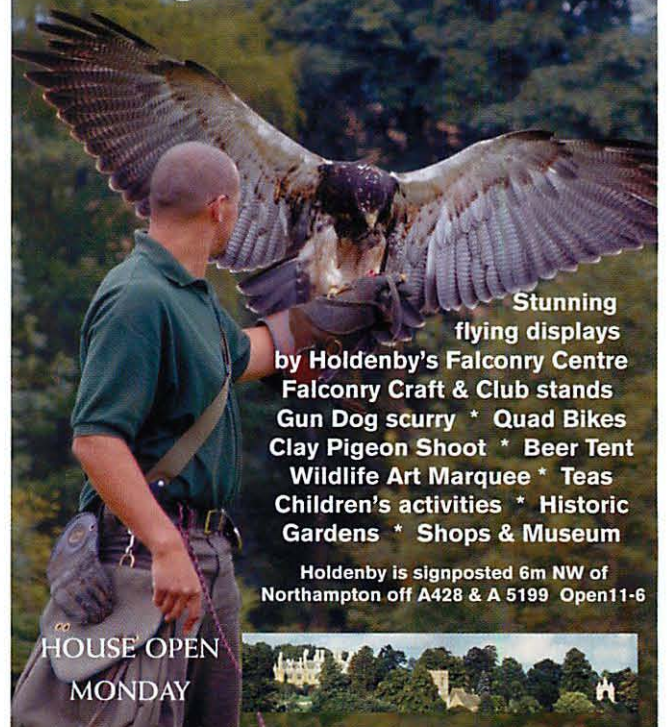


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Elmley Raptor Education Programme

Dave Green

The last flights of the game hawking/shooting season are usually spectacular, as the game that have survived are usually of the highest quality. Strong and wily, the fittest birds will usually make up the breeding pairs for the spring. The hawks are usually good too, as they have a season behind them and have worked out strategies to out-manoeuvre seasoned birds.



FREEING THE JAIL BIRDS

Behind bars at H.M.P Elmley on the Isle of Sheppey, lays the newest and most innovative education programme combining birds of prey and key skills.

It took two and half years of blood, sweat and major grovelling skills, but on Saturday 21st June 2003 The Elmley Raptor Education Programme was finally officially opened by David Van Day. The day was a huge success with over 100 visitors including, Dr Nick Fox, Dr Mike Nichols, Lee Holmes from the Hawking Centre and Wesley Moon from Eagle Heights.

Senior Officer Dave Green, a keen falconer himself, put the project in motion after meeting with an ex-prisoner who had taken up falconry and had since learnt to read and write, but more importantly through the love of the birds had not re-offended for some fifteen years.

Gaining permission from the Governor to use a waste piece of ground within the prison walls was the first hurdle. A business plan was put together, along with the promise that most of the centre could be established without cost to the governor's budget, and would eventually with any luck be self-supportive, so the permission was granted and work began.

A team of specially selected inmates were chosen

to help build and organise the centre and a barrage of begging letters sent out to companies, large and small and many individuals within the hawking world asking for help of any kind.

With the exception of just a few, everybody who received a letter was more than generous and everything from the buildings down to the grass seed, to the incubators and the actual birds were donated or given at cost. In today's world this in itself I find amazing.

Both Dr. Nick Fox, and Mike Nichols from Canterbury University fully support this programme, and along with Dave Green and the Open College Network, are currently putting together the education and correspondence courses that will be available not only to prisoners, but eventually to anyone wishing to gain qualifications in this way.

The aims and hopes of The Elmley Raptor Education Programme is to provide a sanctuary behind bars where staff can go and relax and where offenders can learn to care for and fly the birds, in a controlled space, and learn key skills such as numerous, literacy and communication, thus gaining qualifications and life skills to help them after their release.

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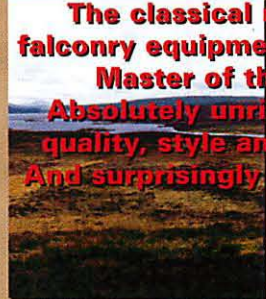
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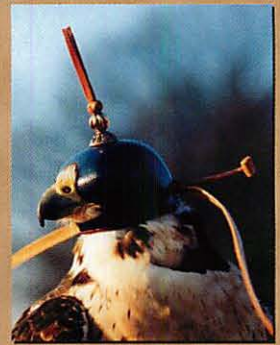
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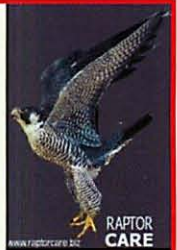
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Over many years of keeping and being responsible for many predatory birds, I have tried to better things in relation to training, flight, and general husbandry, both for myself and the birds themselves. For a long time I religiously stuck with tradition. However times, attitudes and materials have changed, and in this ever-changing world Falconry like so many things must evolve. In the practise of this sport, one major aspect has been with us since its origin; its very essence instantly conjures up a view of times gone by - it is of course tethering.

The tethered Hawk or Falcon for many is the "be all and end all" of their Falconry world. The reason being that you have full personal contact with this awesome creature. This alone sets it apart from many other domesticated animals in captivity behind bars. First let's dissect what we are dealing with. For a start a predator that uses speed, power and agility to eat requires motivation and energy, and their performance is greatly enhanced by good feather condition. The bird is motivated into flight through hunger, which by definition means it is not motivated when it's fat. Bearing this in mind, a predatory bird at a reduced weight in a caged environment will want to hunt! Sadly just like their wild cousins they do not understand mesh or glass, so

will consequently try to fly through it to catch what they see - food. My own peregrines sit in their chambers during the summer months, moulting at a slightly increased body weight, quiet and steady. The last week in August I start to reduce rations. After a few days they start to become restless, and eventually will fly from the back of the chamber to the barred window at the front to pursue the pigeons they see on the tennis court in the garden. Now they are ready to catch up again and within three days are once again hunting for the season. Two things are happening during this time: one, the bird is wasting valuable energy, and two the bird will eventually damage its feathers - both being useless for the sport of falconry. Obviously an alternative is needed and into play comes the tethered bird.

I have watched tethered hawks for as long as I can remember, seeing my first one with the late Phillip Glasier on a school trip. On asking why they were tied down I was promptly told, to stop them flying off! Only now do I understand the real logic. I know many birds do realise that they are tethered, if only after repetitive bating, but I am positive in thinking that they also bate on instinctive behaviour, realising only after the bate that they are tethered, otherwise why bother in the first place! In fact as I write this I have just witnessed one of my merlins bate towards a robin, having been sat on his block all morning. Emphasising what I have just written, for that split second he assumed he was loose.

So we now have the concept of why the tethered bird - to conserve energy and protect feathers is the goal - so, now it's back to how. Block perches, bow perches or any perch that serves the above will do. From a bow stuck in the ground, or the handle of a sword, to many of today's modern elaborate designs - the end result being the same, a hawk that is fit to fly. One of the more modern of perches is occasionally still in use today - it is the renowned



screen perch, designed originally as a means of keeping a large number of hawks in close proximity under one roof. It is an ingenious method of keeping a hawk in a tethered environment, revolving around the fact that at your eye level the bird feels less intimidated. Restriction of movement ensures conservation of energy, in turn minimizing feather damage. I have often pondered on the reason for its height - ease of use by the falconer, steadier falcon or just high up from the rats! This perch has been

MODERN

Kevin Riach

ALTERNATIVES





highly praised and deeply frowned on for many, many years, but on occasion will still be used on a daily basis by some of us, albeit for different purposes. I still use it today to keep a young hawk steady in the early stages of training, and as I write this article there is a young Harris six feet away from me on one leg, watching me tapping away with one finger! However, as superb as this design is, there is one major flaw - if a hawk wishes to lie down through sickness or rest they cannot, therefore the poor wretched creature would hang upside down and die. This fact and this fact alone has over the years banished the screen perch from modern falconry, sadly not remembering its better attributes. Its height and its restriction of movement, coupled with the fact that birds hate hanging upside down is what made this form of tethering so unique. However the view of a hawk frantically thrashing about and hanging upside down to the untrained eye is perceived as the height of cruelty and of course in this day and age would be totally unacceptable. However could we utilise its better points by eliminating its bad one? The

answer is yes, by combining the best two perching systems we have thought of so far and hybridise!

The Screen Ledge, four feet from the floor, puts the bird at my eye height, it also puts it 48 inches away from its own mutes. Of course the picture I wanted to show you I could not get - one of my Falcons spread out lying down on the ledge. Yes occasionally they bate, then scramble back up the screen to resettle, but about 90% less than they used to, which even then was not a lot. So you see what I am saying, in the middle of winter when I have about eight tethered Falcons in the mews at the same time, I perhaps have to tolerate only about six or so bates in total per week! I have been using this system now for about 18 months and as yet

scratch but believe me when I say it's going to be the ultimate tethering facility, providing that is we can still keep tethered birds. What you must remember is a mews is a nighttime roost for your bird.

Therefore unless you put your bird away at last light and put her back out at first light (about 5am in the summer!) keep the mews dark - you do not want about 50 daylight induced bates before you even get up!

As for the hawk species what can I say, apart from do your very best to keep them separate at all times - in particular our South American friend! A

more relaxed species can of course have a more relaxed life, and as for picking up and putting out and picking up and putting in forget it! I once thought that if these guys could do that themselves then they would, so I gave them the opportunity, and they do, sometimes stopping off in the summer at about 6am for a bath on the way! Again the Running Bar System is pretty self explanatory: hawk comes out or goes in at will. But what may not be so obvious here is that again this perch helps to alleviate bating, by turning a negative bate into a flight to a perch,



have had no problems with the perch, only the attachment of swivel to fixed leash, which eventually I'll get right. Never one to shun work, as for maintenance mutes are in a tray filled with silver sand and quickly scooped out, to be truthful once a week (my old method of tethered Falcons saw me pressure washing every two days!). Sadly I have not had the opportunity as yet to build my mews from

hey presto, fitter hawk, zero feather damage. I am lucky in the fact that my Hawks have a six-foot wall around them, but you could easily erect a mesh fence around the area, or doors could be closed on the boxes at night. Boxes, ledges, blocks, cades, and even an entire chamber, made of hard durable plastic. If I can't pressure wash it, I don't want it, that's what I said a few years ago, and I am sure that's what Gilbert Blaine would have said today were he around.

I do hope some of you out there will experiment a little and try different ideas. Remember this is how things evolve. If you do try any of the tethering techniques described then good luck, but they have been designed to enhance the hawk's life rather than your own!

Thanks go to Raptor Box UK and Godfrey Bragg for the photos.

From a bow stuck in the ground, or the handle of a sword, to many of today's modern elaborate designs - the end result being the same, a hawk that is fit to fly.



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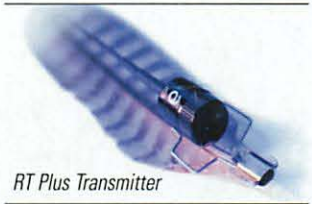
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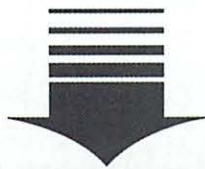
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