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Issue 57 £3.50

The *Falcons*

& Raptor Conservation Magazine

Highwire act

We were falconers

Hunting raptors - art

How to avoid meeting *Clostridium Tetani*

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TEMPLEMAN**



Falconry
Fair
News

BOB DALTON



POINTER AND PEREGRINES



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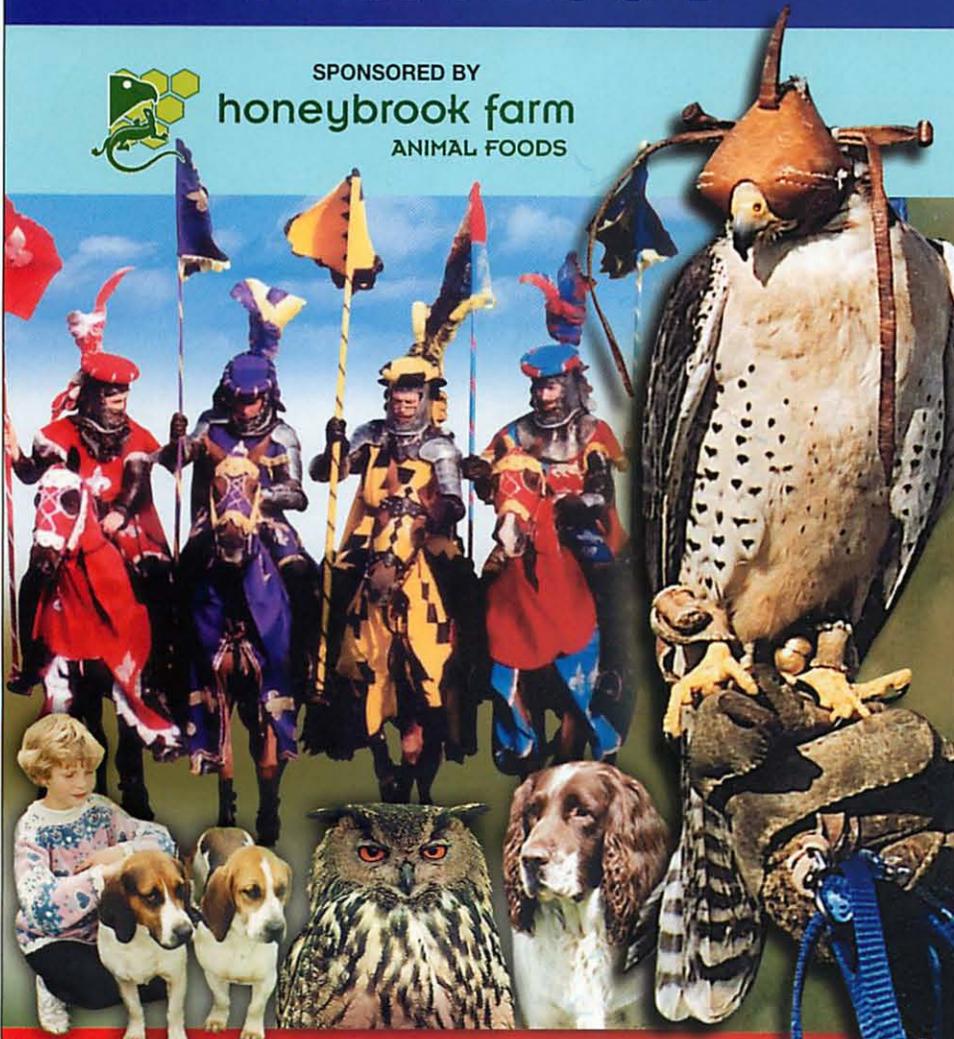
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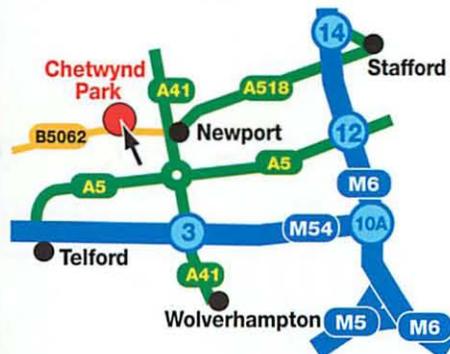
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editorial



Doesn't time fly when you're having fun. Already we are at that time of year when the falconry fair is upon us once again. *The Falconers & Raptor Conservation Magazine* will, of course, be there and I hope that you can come to the stand and say hello. I hope to see some of you who are new to the sport as well as those of you who have been falconers for some time.

In this edition there are some very good articles that look back to falconers in history as well as those falconers who have a story to tell. Also there is a page from the Hawk Board which all falconers should take note.

Talking of articles, I must say a very big thank you to Bob Dalton, of Falcon Leisure, who has been a keen contributor and supporter of the magazine for quite some time now and I hope that he can submit many more articles in the future. Many thanks Bob.

I have been on a trip of a lifetime to Nepal to see Mount Everest and I have written a short article about what raptors I saw.

Many of you will have your birds down to moult at this time of year after, what I hope was, a good season for you all. In the meantime, have a good read.

Peter Eldrett

Falconers

news and products

Send all your news and product information to peter.eldrett@tiscali.co.uk

A New Product

Bob Dalton

I have been trying out a range of new travelling boxes manufactured by FC Falconry for the last nine months or so. The new boxes were introduced at last year's Falconers Fair and, it would appear, have proved to be a major success both for the manufacturers and those that use them.

What makes these boxes different to all the others that are currently available and how did they come about? I spoke to Martyn Furbar about the design and development of the boxes and he took time out to explain the situation to me. It seems that the creation of the first box was out of frustration that Martyn simply could not find a box he felt was totally suitable for transporting his own hawk to and from the field. Consequently, he sat down and designed the original prototype. This was made up and field tested by Martyn himself.

After several months' usage, one or two shortcomings of the design had presented themselves, as had several suggestions as to how the box could be improved. Another design prototype was built and put to use for a season. At the end of this period, it was felt that any shortcomings had been ironed out and the first proper model was made up out of 6mm welded plastic. Again, this was extensively field tested by practising falconers before it was finally decided to go ahead with production of the boxes on a commercial footing.

The obvious place to launch any new product is the Falconers Fair and so it was to be with the FC Falconry Box. The reaction from the public was certainly a favourable one as the boxes sold extremely well and demand outstripped supply.

I purchased one of the boxes myself and have used it constantly over the past nine months. I can honestly say I have been extremely pleased with it and cannot, try as I might, find fault with any part of the design. There are probably a few sceptics out there that think I am bound to say nice things about the box because I was given it. Well, let me assure you, they would be wrong. I purchased my original box and have since been so satisfied with it, that I have ordered five more.



The original box came in one size only, 660mm high by 420mm wide by 540mm deep. This was for the larger species of hunting hawk, such as Gos, Red Tail, Harris and Ferruginous. But now there are two more sizes available. The medium size is eminently suitable for large falcons as well as medium sized hawks and the small is excellent for Merlins and Spars.

What is it about this particular design of box that is so good? There are several design features that put this box head and shoulders above any competition. Probably the two most important are the total blackout effect due to rebated door and baffled airflow, the other being the air through system, which maintains airflow and condition. But the overall strength and quality build of the box is immediately apparent and this cannot fail to impress.

The basic construction is from 6mm durable black plastic. All the fittings are high quality stainless steel and are nice and solid in feel and operation. The door is laser cut for a precision fit and added overall strength. The carrying handle is bolted to the box and has a reinforced steel grip. There is a drainage hole for releasing water after cleaning, which comes with a fitted plug to maintain total blackout. There is one final feature, which really does help this box be number one in my opinion. A simple thing, but one that is so very effective. The base has a 30mm recess so as to add strength and stability during carriage. So many other boxes I have used have had to be wedged in position when travelling because they are so unstable when they have a hawk inside them.

As with most things in life, quality comes with a price tag and so it is with the FC Falconry Box. At £130 they are not cheap, but such is their quality, with regard to materials and construction, that you should only ever have to buy one once. As well as the three standard sizes, Martyn will make up special orders on request. There will also soon be a range of new product additions, including a travelling cage, dog boxes and ferret boxes.

For further details on any of these products, contact Martyn on (07971) 285882.

Complete British Birds - Photoguide

Paul Sterry / Reviewed by Donna Vincent

Not another bird identification book I hear you cry - but wait, this one is well worth a second glance. Published by Collins *Complete British Birds - Photoguide* offers more than just an identifier reference to the avid birdwatcher. Within its 287 pages are hundreds of specially taken, detailed photographs showing every species of British bird (including Falcons, Eagles, Buzzards and Owls) with juvenile, adult, male or female varieties described. Each entry provides a description on habit, home region, maps and observation tips as well. In addition to the species classification is a useful introductory chapter containing a glossary, details on how to use the book, bird topography and a comprehensive section on habitats.

Presented as a field guide *Complete British Birds* provides a useful reference for the keen birdwatcher but would equally be at home in the gaze of the beginner. The way in which this book is presented makes it a good armchair read too, a great way to familiarise yourself with species to spot before venturing out.

All-in-all *Complete British Birds* is visually pleasing and easy to read, making it a good reference source and one that all bird watchers should take a look at.

Complete British Birds is available from most good bookshops priced £14.99



Ceremonies for Falconers

Following the restoration of the grave and monument of The Hon. Gerald Lascelles and the memorial stone that has been laid for E.B. Michell, both renowned Falconers from the 19th and early 20th centuries, two memorial services will be held on Saturday 1 May 2004. Appropriately this is the eve of the Falconers Fair. The first service, for the Hon. Gerald W. Lascelles, will be held at 11:00 a.m. in the chapel at Boltons Bench Cemetery, Lyndhurst, Hampshire. Falconers from both the US and the UK will be attending along with local dignitaries including the Deputy Surveyor of the New Forest, a position once held by Lascelles. If possible please bring a falcon or hawk with you. Following the Service, a social gathering with the opportunity for lunch is being arranged at a local hostelry. The second service, for Edward Blair Michell, is to be held at 5.30pm

in The Holy Trinity Church at Wyke Champflower, near Bruton, Somerset. Again, this will be attended by Falconers from the US and UK. Anyone flying a Merlin is welcome to bring it along. Following this there will be another social gathering where refreshments can be obtained. A small donation to the Church for this will be greatly appreciated.

There is an open invitation to all Falconers to attend one or both of these ceremonies to honour these people. If you wish to attend please contact one of the below named by 16 April, as it is important that we be aware of numbers attending.

Peter Devers email TIERFALC@aol.com Tel: 845 677 5076 (For US Residents)

Paul Beecroft email Raptorlife@aol.com Tel: 0118 901 6990 (For Lyndhurst venue)

Brian Bird Tel: 01747 840923 (For Wyke Champflower venue)

Falcon of the year award rejected

Kevin Ryan

After having lengthy discussions with members of the Hawk Board and the Campaign for Falconry, we have decided that due to the potential "can of worms" that could be opened, the Falcon of the Year award as reported in the last issue of *The Falconers & Raptor Conservation Magazine* will not take place. It is not worth the risk to falconry in the future.

Some people will be disappointed I know, but homework is always best done before the event rather than after.

Maybe in the future people's attitudes will be more open minded to respect others interests and hobbies or even way of life! But for now a falcon award is not going to take place for reasons which could be far too lengthy to write down and print in this magazine, but your opinions will still be welcome on where you see falconry going in the not to distant future.

The Imprint Goshawk

The video deals with the relationship with your hawk before, during and after insemination. Imprinting a chick, dual imprinting a chick, lure training, tame hacking a Goshawk, the relationship with a dog on your imprint, training a Goshawk to wait on, mountain flying, following on, flying a cast of Goshawks and hunting.

The film was made over a period of four

years by Dave Jones during which time he suffered the loss of Briar, his first German Shorthaired Pointer and Nomad one of his favourite Goshawks. "Making and editing this film has shown me the good times and superb sport you can have with a good Imprint Goshawk", said Dave.

The video will be available at the falconers fair. You will see Dave on the Wildlife Tracking stand.

Ye Olde Redtail Falconry Display Team

Ye Olde Redtail Falconry Display Team is one of the most exciting and innovative bird of prey shows on the touring circuit.

It is the only team in the world to fly five Harris Hawks simultaneously and invite the audience into the arena for a 'mouse's eye view' of an Eagle Owl in flight so close to the ground you can feel its feathers brush your face!

The team's front man is the popular Ray Alier. He claims the show developed as a series of happy accidents but this detracts from his position of being one of the country's most experienced and knowledgeable "birdmen".

What he doesn't know about birds of prey is really not worth knowing!

Ray has developed an uncanny rapport with his birds and is dedicated to the incredible amount of training and preparation that goes into every event.

It's an unmissable show as the visitors to last year's Midland will testify. They were swooped on by Ray's superb owl and even hen pecked by his pet Vulture!

Ray always dresses the part as a Falconer from bygone days and shows off his sturdy thighs in a natty pair of boots and coloured tights. His shows are fun, informative and thrilling.

If you want to feel an owl, silently brushing your face with his wing feathers in flight then get into the arena quickly as places for the audience participation are usually limited to around 30 people. You'd have to be a birdbrain to miss it!

Ye Olde Redtail Falconry Display Team is a main arena event at the Gamekeeper and Countryman Fair at Kelmars Hall, Northamptonshire on April 11 and 12, 2004.

For further information contact Tony Harris at the Countryman Fairs press office on 0121 5259049 or 07702 306670.

One man exhibition of wildlife paintings by Mark Chester

Mark Chester, the well known wildlife artist, will be holding a one man exhibition of his paintings on Saturday and Sunday 22, 23 May 2004. The event will be held at his studio in Suffolk.

The exhibition will feature original paintings with subjects including gamebirds, garden birds, owls and big cats. Also, there will be pencil drawings, several new limited edition prints as well as open edition prints and cards.

Examples of Mark's work can be seen on his website www.markchester.co.uk

You can find Mark's studio at:- Greenlands Farm, Hoxne Road, Denham, Nr Eye, Suffolk IP21 5DN.

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continuous series of displays that will feature, amongst others, flying displays, falconers' dogs and something new this year, the spectacular Knights of Arkley.

Many of you will have seen the Knights of Arkley at various shows around the country. The display they put on is truly awesome and as a spectacle is very hard to beat. The colour, movement, horses and sheer daring all add up to some truly first class entertainment. The jousting is very much for real and is extremely impressive. I always walk away at the end surprised that none of the contestants were killed.

The central theme of the main arena events will obviously always be based around flying displays given by experienced falconers. For the last couple of years Jemima Parry-Jones has been at the Fair and entertained us all a couple of times each day. Unfortunately, due to her on/off delayed move to America, Jemima will not be presenting any of her almost unique flying displays at the Fair this year.

Once again the Falconry and Raptor Fair is almost upon us and the eagerly awaited yearly get together of falconry enthusiasts is nigh. The Fair will again be in the superb setting of Chetwynd Park, just outside Newport in Shropshire. Sunday 2 May and Monday 3 May will see the largest annual gathering of falconers from all over the world take place.

The Fair itself is without doubt a major success story and it should be a source of pride that it is Britain, so steeped in history of falconry, which plays host to the event. This is in no small part due to the hard work and sheer belief in the Fair by Ron and Cheryl Morris

and the late

Peter Wainwright. Without them and their determination, the Fair would simply not exist. Now that it does, several have tried to copy it, but none have succeeded. I suppose that Ron and Cheryl can take comfort from the fact that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

Honeybrook Farm animal foods are again the sponsors of the event and they will have their usual superb stand to welcome all customers new and old. The quality of their products and excellent service provided by Honeybrook needs no introduction to established falconers and raptor keepers. Founded by practising falconers to service the needs of falconers the company is second to none when it comes to understanding the needs of their clients.

Knights in the arena

This year's event will be bigger and better than ever before. The main arena will have a

Club presence

Amongst them will be the long standing friends of the event, The South East Falconry Group. Each year they come along and lend their support to the event and do what they can to help out. They also put on a first class flying display each year and their efforts are very much appreciated by the organisers.

Another club that always lends support to the event in a very positive way is The Central Falconry and Raptor Club. They will once again be manning the weathering ground at the Fair. This is a long and sometimes tedious task that the club take on each year with good cheer and very little moaning. They police the weathering ground and are there to help members of the public with queries and photographs. They do an excellent job and again their efforts are genuinely appreciated.

The weathering ground will hold the normal mouth watering display of trained raptors and it is hoped that a very wide selection will be on view. Each year the organisers invite falconers from all across the UK and hope that a really varied cross section of hunting hawks, falcons and eagles will be the result. For many it will be the opportunity to see a species they haven't seen first hand before. Normally a word with one of the weathering ground attendants from The Central Club will ensure that a decent photograph can be obtained if required.

Another smaller, but equally professional, display of raptors will be put on by Raptor Rescue, the charity devoted to the care and well being of injured birds of prey. Each year they attend the event and raise a considerable amount of money, which goes to aiding them in the work they do. Every penny raised by Raptor Rescue does go entirely on their work and none gets swallowed by administration costs. The volunteers from the charity do an extremely worthwhile job and all those with an appreciation of birds of prey recognise the service they perform on behalf of all of us.

Meet the artists

A feature of the event that has become an absolute essential for the visitors to the Fair is the superb Art Marquee organised and hosted by the multi-talented artist Chris Christoforu. Chris has the knack of blending new talent alongside established artists and always manages to create a superb and highly varied exhibition. Not just varied in style, but also in content.

The range of content is focused primarily on falconry and falconry related subjects. But there is also a good selection of general wildlife pictures on view.

I must admit my one weakness at the Fair is the Art Marquee. With superb works by the likes of Martyn Brook and Carl Bass on show it is all too easy to end up spending far more than you originally thought you would. Both of these particular artists are still very affordable and perhaps to get one or two of their pictures now could prove to be a wise investment for the future. After all, look back some ten years or so and remember what you could pick up an original Andrew Ellis work for. Personally I am glad to say that I did just that and did so a great many times.

Trading stands relating directly to falconry products will be present in an abundance and just about everything the falconer could ever wish for will be there at the event. From gloves, bells and swivels through to leather and avian health care products. If a falcon or falconer can wear it, eat it, look at it or practically use it then it will be there.

Not only for falconers

But it is not just falconry and falconers that are well covered by trade stands at the fair. All the normal items associated with a Game Fair will be there. From fly fishing through to stick making. From gun dog agility events through to dog scurries. There will be a novelty dog show, an invitation Beagle show, Terriers and Lurchers, dog carting display, a knife collectors fair, sporting clay shoot, helicopter rides, air gunning, black powder shooting, archery, craft fair, antique and collectors fair, children's quad bikes, bouncy castle and amusements. The list is endless. There really is just about something for every member of the family to find occupying and worthwhile.

Admission is only £9 for adults and £3 for children and car parking is free. The Fair is open each day from 10am till 6pm with arena events starting each day at 11am. For more information contact the show office on (01588) 672708.



In the UK the Harris' has long had a reputation for being difficult to lose. It seems its attachment to its trainer and willingness to follow – even return uncalled from huge distances – has earned it the title 'idiot proof', a bird for which no telemetry is needed. It's a tag no other bird has been given and is, of course, total nonsense. A huge number of Harris' hawks get lost each year: some are found, some die and some go feral. You only need to look at the figures published by the IBR to see how big an issue this is. Harris' hawks get lost – and they get lost easily!



Many Harris' hawks get lost at the start of their careers due to a lack of care and experience on their handler's part. It's just a fact that each year lots of Harris' hawks are acquired by would-be falconers who haven't a clue about basic management and training, and their charges simply fly away!

Or a step up from this, the novice falconer puts his equally novice bird in a situation beyond its ability. The obvious example here is rough weather, or rough weather coupled with difficult ground. Young Harris' hawks need to be allowed to develop flying skills in all kinds of environments and under all kinds of conditions, but they have to be eased in by a falconer who understands what's safe, what's not, and how far to push the pupil. Without this, the 'lost' Harris' might just be the Harris' that wants to get back but can't. At the end

of the day, for the less experienced falconer, things just go wrong.

But many Harris' hawks get lost later, often much later, and by falconers who are beginning to feel comfortable in the sport or may even have had years of experience. And the reason is the bird's excellence in the field. If, as is so often depicted, the

between hawk and falconer. Or it might notice something more easily captured – a moorhen maybe – thus killing and feeding to become truly lost.

Another worry of pheasant pursuits is where they can finish. The pheasant of the English countryside has a great fondness for the English country garden. Now the

Highwire Act

Harris' couldn't or just didn't chase far, all would be well. But it can and it will. The fit, experienced and determined Harris' can really cover some country; take one out, show it some quarry and watch it fly into the record books!

Long chases to Longtails

The quickest way to see such a demonstration is to flush a pheasant. The pheasant has become quite a popular quarry with Harris' hawkers but unless the target is caught quickly on the initial attempt, these flights can go a long, long way and quickly have hawk and quarry out of sight. It only takes a few hedges or plots of timber, and they're gone. And that's under 'safe' conditions! Flush one in the wrong place and it can mean real trouble as fumbling hands try to keep the binoculars steady on two dots crossing maybe a nice canal or river.

If the Harris' is unsuccessful it may return of its own accord. But quite often these long pheasant pursuits are just the first stage of a longer hunt involving whatever the bird spies from the point it lost contact with the pheasant. It might spot another pheasant, perhaps far away on some open field where another failed attempt and follow up chase puts still more distance

pheasant that takes a Harris' to a garden is a very dangerous pheasant indeed. Should the pheasant get caught, or the Harris' kill some other garden dweller – moorhen, chicken, duck, etc. – then the stage is set for disaster, for a hawk doing murder on someone's lawn can cause people to react quickly and violently. Quite simply, the longer the telemetry-less falconer spends searching for his pheasant-hawk, the more time there is for something unpleasant to happen.

Pheasants abduct huge numbers of Harris' hawks each season. And it's difficult to avoid trouble. Pheasants are everywhere, an army that floods the



countryside each year. You may be looking for rabbits, but that's not what you might get. Flying only from the glove would rule out trouble. But in so many spots, it would also rule the rabbit out too. There's no way over it: without telemetry pheasants can be very bad news.

Pheasants with four legs

Brown hares can be dangerous too: pheasants on four legs, also ready to take the Harris' on dangerous missions. The risk involved much depends on the landscape.

In totally treeless plate-flat country – something from an American movie, or just Lincolnshire – hare flights don't insist on telemetry. However, just break that ground up a little and it's a different matter. As with the longtail, it doesn't take much, a few hedges, a few undulations in the terrain, maybe a plot of timber, and what appeared a very large target and easily visible hawk can be totally swallowed up. And there's no playing safe. Even if you fly from the glove on nice short slips, a flight can easily unravel into a marathon with the target being missed and re-assaulted several times.

Some of the longest flights are when the hare has been missed and the bird goes up into a tree from where it once again spots the fleeing target. Some of these hunts – for hunts rather than flights better describes them – can cover an awful lot of ground with the falconer struggling to keep up. Of course, unlike the pheasant, the hare won't take the bird over impossible to negotiate water (though hard pushed hares hounded by dogs will swim), but it can still take the bird into places and near to targets better avoided.

Rabbits

Rabbits must be safe? They're not. Unless being flown at in the most straightforward manner – maybe ferreted from the glove in open country – the rabbit can, for all its lack of enthusiasm to run far, result in a lost Harris' faster than you might think. Cover is often the culprit. If a rabbit gets caught in heavy cover at any kind of distance, and especially when the flight-finish has not been noted, trouble is on the cards.

The most dangerous of these rabbits for the telemetry-free flyer is the one taken over vast country by the high-soaring hawk. The less experienced falconer just can't imagine how easily a Harris' can be lost in such terrain: a long shallow stoop takes the bird over a slight rise in the distance and into thick bracken, or maybe a steeper dive into gorse, and it's gone. Now add some wind – the stuff that got the bird up in the air to begin with – and you can't even hear the quarry's calls. It's vast open country and the bird's gone. If you have a dog it might save the day by tracking the kill-holding bird down, but it's not a game I recommend.



Rabbit holes can be trouble too. The parabuteo's willingness to enter holes after prey has long been recognised – and this can lead to serious trouble. But the more frequently encountered problem is where the bird hits a rabbit near the entrance of a hole and gets pulled in. This is normally nothing to worry about: the bird's wing spread each side of the hole and the rabbit some way down the tunnel at the end of the bird's very long legs. However, birds can end up fully underground and totally invisible. Just recently, I had a female Harris' so deep in a rabbit hole, I passed it over twice even though the dog was marking it. When I finally registered one or two feather tips I couldn't believe it. The odd thing was that the rabbit had actually pulled free but in doing so had caused the bird to become wedged in the most peculiar way. There was no way she would have got free.

Whatever the reason for them ending up below ground, no small number of hole-trapped Harris' hawks have been found by telemetry. This magazine carried a dramatic example in issue 41, when Martyn Holland gave an astonishing account of telemetry-locating his underground Harris'. It was a terrifying tale involving her being underground seventeen hours and

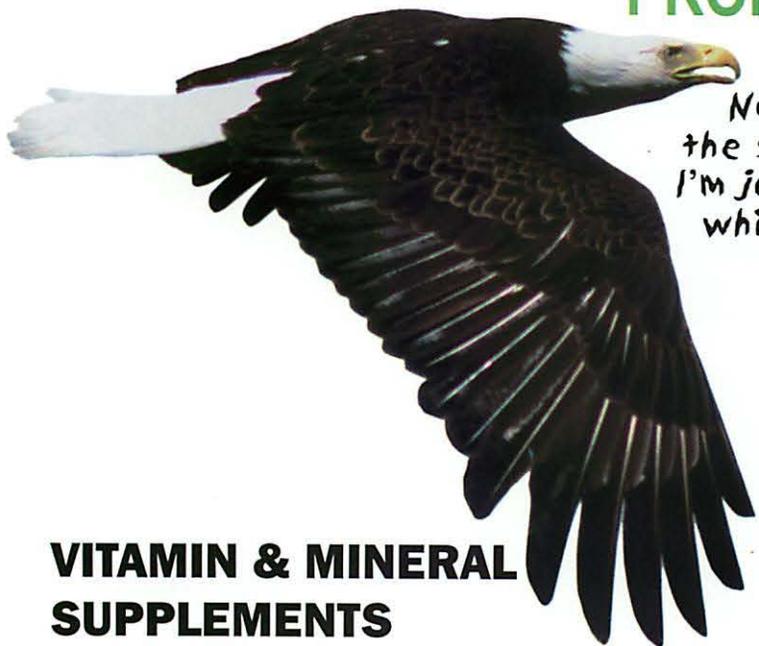
requiring the help of a J.C.B to dig her out – thankfully in one piece.

Better Falconry

The reassurance a transmitter gives helps you enjoy your sport and the Harris' more. I'm not talking about becoming a foolish risk-taker but having that little bit more confidence to explore and test, to give the bird its head to learn about its own abilities. I have done a lot of Harris' flying without telemetry, enjoyed – if at the cost of nerves – some really good flying. But the move to telemetry took the good and made it great.

Truly, when the bird's a dot in the sky over cover so thick it could swallow an elephant, that bit of extra gear I curse for having to carry, feels so very comfortable!

The key with telemetry is not to see it as some kind of answer in itself, an excuse for sloppy management or some way of shortcutting the learning. And of course telemetry has limitations: in some situations its use is complicated by geographical features – either limiting its effectiveness or preventing the user getting to the 'located' bird. It's an additional aid, nothing more. But grab it, for without it you're treading a high wire with no safety net at all.



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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hawk board news

By Nick Kester,
Communications
Officer, The Hawk
Board



It's election time for the Hawk Board ... but first the news

Even if you don't fly a gyr hybrid this is an excellent example of both the work of the Hawk Board and the amazing ability that a threat has in bringing people together. It also proves that when you have a good relationship with someone they are more inclined to be co-operative and understanding than if you eyeball them with abuse and emotion. And who knows, we could be talking Harris hawks in the future.

The Hawk Board has an excellent relationship with DEFRA, and that is essential. This government department is central to all matters to do with falconry. They are working on an Animal Welfare Bill... with us. They are reviewing the Wildlife and Countryside Act... with us. They are negotiating the whole business of bird registration... with us. Yes, we spend a lot of time talking with DEFRA. If we didn't falconry would be overlooked and all those slippery little government amendments that enable us to carry on would not take place. This means that you would probably find it very hard to do tomorrow all that you do today.

So when DEFRA started to impose a restriction on breeders importing American gyr falcons into the UK everyone started to get jumpy. The restriction, which had actually been on many, but not all, Article 10 certificates since the turn of the century states that gyrs imported from non-CITES registered breeders could only be used for the future conservation of the species. And that meant no hybrids. Oh, by the way, they weren't just picking on the UK; this was an EU wide rule.

The trouble is DEFRA had not been administering the rules with any consistency (which is why it wasn't picked up) and some breeders had produced hybrids with these gyrs, had obtained A10s and had exported them outside the EU on CITES export licences. Bit of a problem here!

Of course the breeders were up in arms. They got together, which is what people do in adversity, and made furious representation to DEFRA. The Hawk Board pitched in with a blunt analysis of the issues and, because we falconers have good relationships with them, they agreed a one-year stay of execution to allow us to meet, discuss and find a solution. Actually, the solution is probably over the pond. If more American breeders took the trouble to become CITES registered then their export licences would have a 'captive-bred', rather than a 'source unknown' code and the problem would be solved. In the meantime, we, the breeders and the Hawk Board, have to find a solution for those gyrs that are currently in the UK. And that is where the good relations will come in.

Election

It is election time again and I bet you know of someone who could save

falconry for the future. Probably not the guy who mouths off at the bar, but the quietly firm bloke who understands the issues and who may well have a solution to share. All that is needed is for you to persuade him or her to stand, get a couple of Hawk Board affiliated club members to sponsor them and bingo, you have done your bit for falconry and you can go hawking knowing the sport is safe in someone else's hands. So here is what you need to do as written by the Hawk Board's excellent co-ordinator, Mike Clowes. In the immortal words of an irritating comedy character "Go on, go on, go on, go on, go on..."

Hawk Board Elections Tuesday, 31 August 2004

Applications are invited for candidates to contest the forthcoming Hawk Board Election for six specialist members who will serve on the Board for a period not exceeding three years. Candidates must be proposed and seconded by members of a Club or other Association affiliated to the Hawk Board although the candidates themselves need not be members of an affiliated Club.

Each candidate must provide a CV of not more than 100 words to cover his/her background and to outline why he/she would be an asset to the Hawk Board. CVs will be circulated with the voting papers.

To quote the Hawk Board Constitution: "Candidates will be expected to have an understanding of national and international legislation, and policy from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA); and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), relating to birds of prey, and an awareness of the threats against falconry and hawk keeping."

Candidates must not be subject to nor have been convicted of any criminal charge in any country for offences concerning birds of prey.

Nomination forms and CVs are available from and should be returned to:

Mike Clowes,
The Hawk Board,
10, Birthorpe Road,
Billingborough,
Lincs. NG34 0QS.

CLOSING DATE Tuesday, 6 JULY 2004.

Forms received after this date will not be accepted.

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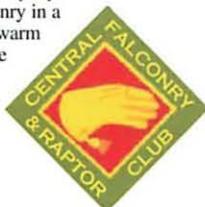
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www.central-falconry.co.uk



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*For further information or an application form
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Dean White (secretary) on 01489 896504

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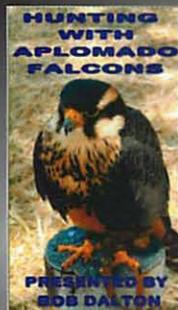
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To get this discount just quote *The Falconers Magazine* when ordering the radio.

What on earth is an article on radio doing in a falconry magazine? Well, if you read my story of a day with longwings and members of the British Falconers Club, (see issue 56) you will know that the flying day took place at Devils Dyke, Sussex, where the ground was undulating and covered over 200 acres of farmland.

The falconers were in a number of 4 x 4 vehicles and were keeping in contact with each other by mobile phone. This, of course, can prove expensive when paying the phone bill. This gave me the idea that perhaps small, licence free radios, would be a far better option for falconers to use.

Well respected Icom

Icom, a well established radio company, has very recently brought out the IC-4088SR PMR-446 communications radio which can be used in all kinds of terrain. Falconers can keep in contact with each other through a maximum of eight channels - e.g. telling each other where a certain quarry might be, that elusive covey, or even looking for that bird that might have flown a bit further than it should.

You do, of course, need a minimum of two of these excellent units. They are very solid and are built to a very high standard being rugged and will stand the odd fall. The weatherproofing is also important and the LCD display is protected with a solid transparent cover.

Peter Eldrett

Powered up

The units are powered by three AA cells but an optional high speed charger can also be purchased as well as a cigar lighter lead for your vehicle. A hands free headset and microphone are also an option.

I have had the opportunity to try out these rugged radios and found them excellent in all sorts of countryside; valley and wooded areas. Total reliable communication is up to 1 km and sometimes even further depending on the type of terrain.

It should also be noted that no radio licence is needed to use these radios, a factor that some people would find attractive.

If you find the cost not to your liking, then perhaps your club could purchase these units for use on the organised hawking days.

Extra reading

If you want to know more about these Icom radios, you can read an in-depth review in the May 2004 edition of *Radio Active* magazine. Telephone 0870 224 7830 for your copy (£3.25 inc P&P).



A feature of this years' falconry fair will be a slightly different display of falconry moments that have been frozen in time. For as well as the various artists that will be displaying their wares in the raptor art marquee, professional wildlife photographer Steve Magennis will be exhibiting and selling examples of his stunning work.

Well known and respected for specialising in wild raptors, Steve has recently turned his attention to falconry and the results of his meticulous efforts will be on show at the fair. Because Steve has spent a lot of time in the company of falconers, watching hawks hunting on a regular basis, his photographs reflect his understanding of both the hawks themselves and their effort when hunting. Also his portrait shots bring a new dimension to falconry photography.

As well as building up a library of falconry related shots, Steve is very busy at the moment with commission work for falconers. We all like to have long lasting mementoes of favourite hawks but unfortunately it is not always practical or affordable to have a first class painting commissioned specifically.

Added to this is the fact that a painting is open to the individual artists' interpretation. But to have a series of photos that are an accurate and lasting reminder is a much more cost effective option.

It sounds expensive to have a photographer come to your premises and take a series of photos to your instructions, but with highly sophisticated digital cameras and a photographer who understands his subject the whole process is considerably cheaper than most people would credit.

When you visit the falconers fair take time to visit Steve on his stand and have a chat with him. If you cannot make the fair for any reason then you can contact him on 01604 467848 or visit his web-site at www.stevemagennis.co.uk

frozen moments



This is part two of the excellent article from well known falconer, Bob Dalton of Falcon Leisure. Bob has travelled extensively all over the world for many years and here he shares some more of his stories.

The next morning we completed our journey to Patrocinio and visited with a falconer that had two Bi-coloured hawks and an Aplomado Falcon. The Aplomado was not being flown at the moment and the male Bi-coloured had a slight swelling in one of his legs and so he was being rested. But the female Bi-colour was being flown

The actual chases were quite exciting with both the hawk and quarry showing very good initial acceleration.

daily and had taken a great many quail during a relatively short season.

We were fortunate in that we did manage to get several slips at quail and managed to take three out of five flights. The flights themselves were very reminiscent of the kind you would get with a female European Sparrowhawk. The actual chases were quite exciting with both the hawk and quarry showing very good initial acceleration. The quail did not try and fly too far when being pursued by a hawk and all three that I saw caught succumbed when flaring their wings to land in cover. Just as the quail slowed momentarily the hawk would make one final push and grab her quarry.



Immature Bi-Coloured hawk

Quail and more quail

Of the two quail flown that weren't caught one simply got up too far away but the other was a very good flight even though the quarry was not caught. Four quail had jumped a few yards in front of us and the hawk was off after them in an instant. Three baled out almost immediately into some long grass and scrub. As the Bi-colour flew past them intent on her pursuit of the fourth member of their number they got up again and flew back in the direction they had come from.

The fourth quail was intent on getting into a hedge, which was some eighty or so yards distant. It was aware that to make a straight dash for it would certainly result in getting caught and so it used cunning instead of speed. The area we were in held a number of scrawny looking cattle and the quail dived between their legs and landed on the ground. As the hawk passed over the cattle looking for its prey the quail would take off again and head for the next group. Three times in all the quail used cattle to ensure that the hawk did not grab it before it made the safety of cover. A good sporting flight and one where the quarry deserved to get away.



A new venue visited

In the afternoon we moved on and visited a raptor-breeding establishment that had recently been set up as a commercial venture. It was too new at the time of my visit to have experienced any success yet although several pairs had shown good signs for the future. There were several eagles and hawk eagles but the majority of pairs were Aplomado falcons and Cassini Peregrine Falcons.

After the conducted tour was over it was time to make the final, and thankfully short, leg of our journey. Uberlandia was our destination and we reached it just as it was growing dark. My companion had booked us accommodation at a five star hotel and we duly made our way through the city to our home for the next week to ten days, depending on how good the hawking was.

Bright and early the next morning we left the city for the short journey to meet the falconers we would be hunting with for the duration of our stay. One of these falconers runs a small falconry centre that only operates because it has government approval. The environment police needed somewhere to take injured raptors to and a licence was therefore granted to a falconer to open a small centre with rehabilitation being its primary reason for existing. But in

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PART 2

SOUTH AMERICAN MAGIC



Aplomado falcon on Spur Winged Plover



The Grackles would be flown at by a single falcon but the Plovers would be hunted with a cast. I love to see falcons flown in a cast having flown several back in the UK. Consequently I could well appreciate the amount of work required to bring two falcons to the desired level of fitness and understanding needed to be successful together

time education has also come to play a part for the reason of the running of the establishment. Schools from all parts of the surrounding region bring parties of children to learn about native raptors.

Sponsorship given

Two local businesses have kindly sponsored the project and it is the only centre of its kind in the whole of Brazil. Unfortunately its future is far from secure, as the level of sponsorship only just allows the centre to run very much on a day-to-day basis. There is not sufficient cash for any improvements to be made, new equipment purchased or for any sort of contingency fund against future ill fortune. But even so the centre does a lot of good work and rehabilitates a great many hawks, owls and falcons.

Having been shown round the centre it was time to meet the falcons we would be hunting with. These were five Aplomado falcons, four females and a male. Two of

the falcons were intermewed once and the other two plus the male twice. Aplomado falcons are extremely colourful and the difference in plumage between young and adult falcons is relatively slight. Sexual dimorphism is as with most falcons, in that the male is approximately two thirds the size of the female.

Probably the first thing to strike visually about Aplomado falcons, other than their vibrant colouring, is the length of their tails. They are long for a falcon and look as if they would be far more suited to an accipiter. They are similar in stature to that other odd ball of the falcon world, the New Zealand falcon.

Grackles

I had been hunting with Aplomado falcons on previous occasions in Mexico and had not been terribly impressed with them. Most had not chased quarry hard and often would check at locust and other large

insects. But these five falcons, or so I was assured, were all extremely good hunters and had taken a large number and variety of quarry.

For the duration of this trip we would be after two principal quarries. Grackles and Spur Winged Plovers. Grackles are a bird very similar to our Magpie and come in two main varieties. The boat tailed, which is totally black, and the pied, which is predominantly black and white but also has streaks of red in it.

The Grackles would be flown at by a single falcon but the Plovers would be hunted with a cast. I love to see falcons flown in a cast having flown several back in the UK. Consequently I could well appreciate the amount of work required to bring two falcons to the desired level of fitness and understanding needed to be successful together.

The flights at Grackles were similar in style to our hawking magpies with a Sparrowhawk. The intended quarry was

A cage of Aplomados



stalked whilst feeding on the ground and the Aplomado shielded from view until the last possible moment. As soon as the Grackle felt threatened by our presence or spotted the falcon it would make for the nearest cover of a hedge or tree. In the area we were hunting there were plenty of small trees and many hedges. Also the fields were divided by wire fences and these fences had long grass and other vegetation growing up around them. Accordingly there was plenty of cover for the Grackles to be able to reach quickly, but it was also the sort of cover from which they could be dislodged without too much trouble.

Our first flight was at a Boat Tailed Grackle which we had spotted feeding on the ground the other side of a large hedge. We crept as close as we could and got within thirty metres before the Grackle took flight. The Aplomado was off in pursuit as soon as the Grackle's wings had flickered. The Grackle made the cover of the hedge and the small falcon circled over the spot. Our small group got to the spot as quickly as possible and made strenuous efforts to reflush the Grackle for the falcon. Needless to say the Grackle took flight

when the falcon was out of position and managed to get back into the hedge some 80 metres further along. Again the human element of our party rushed up and managed to flush the Grackle once more. This time the falcon was well placed and snatched the Grackle from the air before it had covered twenty metres.

The Grackle is a worthy adversary for a female Aplomado and there isn't a great deal of difference in size. I was very impressed by the speed of which the falcon despatched its victim. I had visions of having to aid the falcon in this task. But over the next 10 days or so not once was any help required on the part of the falcon in administering the coup de grace.

The next flight was at a Pied Grackle and this really was exceptionally good fun.

Again we stalked the feeding bird until it took flight and was chased by the falcon.

The Grackle made the safety of a 30-

metre strip of long grass and small bushes that had grown up around a fence. The little falcon circled the spot and we managed to reflush the Grackle. A good short sharp flight ensued with the falcon making a grab for the Grackle. A last minute change of direction by the Grackle ensured that the flight went on a little longer. Having been very hard pressed by the falcon the Grackle was, very understandably, somewhat reluctant to make an appearance again.

Eventually after much crashing about we managed to get the Grackle to fly again and the falcon was instantly on its tail. Despite some very rapid changes of direction by the falcon the Grackle quite easily evaded two further attempts to snatch it from the air.

Again it made the safety of some cover. Now followed a scene that would have looked farcical had there been any onlookers. Four grown men crashing

The Grackle is a worthy adversary for a female Aplomado and there isn't a great deal of difference in size



Aplomado falcon

around in the long grass trying to dislodge a small bird. The falcon was constantly overhead and would even briefly hover in its attempts to stay right at the scene of the action. The Grackle would break cover momentarily and then duck back in again. The falcon just wasn't getting a clear opportunity to grab it.

We decided that enough was enough and the Grackle had deserved to get away. It had not panicked under pressure and had successfully evaded our attempts to bring him to bag. To carry on and on would not be very sporting and we decided to leave the Grackle and go and try our luck elsewhere.

More Grackles

Our next quarry was also a Pied Grackle and this one also initially made the safety of some long grass. But on the reflush it flew to a small tree from which we managed to push it out by the sophisticated method of shaking the tree with all our might. The Grackle made the safety of a slightly larger tree and the falcon was obviously getting a little tired now as it took stand on top of a telegraph pole. The pole was quite close to the tree and actually gave the falcon a slight height advantage.

The smallest of our number was elected to climb the tree and this promptly caused the Grackle to take flight. Fortunately for us he took flight across some open fields. The falcon got on terms with him very quickly but the Grackle was extremely agile and managed time and time again to evade the best footing efforts of the falcon. But the inevitable did happen and the Grackle mistimed its avoiding manoeuvre and the falcon finally managed to grab him. A really good flight and one where the falcon deserved a kill. Especially after the flight that had recently gone before. The falcon was now fed up, as it was time to move on and fly a cast at Plovers, providing we could find some.

Spur Winged Plovers are a great deal larger than the ones we find in the UK. They also have a very deadly protrusion of bone on the main wing joint, which gives them their name. They apparently use these to great effect when either courting or fighting of predators. A female Aplomado falcon and a Plover are more or less the same size. I had been told that the South American falconers consider this particular flight miniature Houbara hawking. Some Plovers will stand their ground when they see the falcon coming and fight with them. This is particularly true of older male Plovers.

The other alternative for the Plover is to take to the air and ring up in an effort to out fly the falcon, or in our case falcons.

The actual flight of the Plover is very deceptive visually and somewhat similar to a Heron. They never seem like they are trying very hard or going very fast. That is until you get a falcon chasing them and then you realise just how quick and agile they are.

Moving onto Plovers

We duly found a small group of Plovers out in the open and the first cast of falcons was readied. This time the approach was very open as the intention was to give the Plovers plenty of time to take to the air and thereby get a ringing flight. Several did take to the air and both Aplomado falcons gave chase immediately. Unfortunately the group of Plovers contained one old cock bird that decided to stand his ground and see off the intruders. He puffed himself up, arched his wings and started to call aggressively.

Against one falcon he stood a very good chance of getting his own way, but against a cast he didn't stand a chance and it really was a great shame that he died so needlessly. But obviously once the cast had spotted him it was not possible to call them

sporting side of the flight really began. The falcons had managed to get above the Plover and now put in a series of short stoops. The Plover shifted from side to side and managed to make avoiding the falcons look easy. He had a knack of jinking sideways just as the falcons put out their feet to grab him. It would then take the falcon a little while to get into position to make another attack. In the meantime the second member of the cast would be taking their turn in trying to grab the Plover and would be thrown off with the same tactic. The flight seemed to last forever although it was probably nearer six or seven minutes. Stoop after stoop was made and this really was very exciting stuff.

The Plover was forced to within a few feet of the ground and was eventually taken when his sideways jink was anticipated and a foot made contact with him. Once on the ground the second falcon piled in and it was all over for the gallant Plover. The flight had been truly excellent and one of the most enjoyable I have ever witnessed. The falcons were fed up on their kill and water was liberally poured over the breast of the Plover to help prevent the falcons from dehydrating.



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off. No amount of calling and lure swinging detracted them from their quarry. The only good thing is that the falcons despatched him almost instantly.

So my first flight with Aplomado falcons at Plover had been a major disappointment and not what I rated as a sporting flight at all. It was with less than burning enthusiasm that I joined the others in looking for another flight.

Again we found a small group of Plovers out in the open. The same open approach was made and this time the old cock bird of the group actually flew towards us whilst the rest of the group made good their escape. As soon as the falcons started to chase him he took to ringing up for all he was worth. The falcons pursued him and it took them several minutes of very hard flying to get on terms with him. Then the

An enjoyable time

Over the next 10 days or so I was to enjoy many more such flights and nearly all were true ringing flights that tested both quarry and falcon to the full. A good number of Plovers were caught but equally a good number got away. The important thing was that all the flights were truly sporting and showed off the power and determination of the little falcons. I had arrived in Brazil a little sceptical as to what sport the Aplomado was really capable of showing. I came away convinced that in the appropriate environment they are superb little falcons.

Some of the things that could ruin a flight would probably come as a surprise to British falconers. Two of the problems we encountered were Emus and Armadillos. Emus because when they saw a group of

humans approaching they would run off, but the family would split and run off in different directions, thereby clearing the area of any potential quarry. Armadillos live in holes in the ground and it was very easy to trip on one as you ran after the flight of the falcons.

The other major problem was Burrowing Owls. These were everywhere in large numbers and like Little Owls are very weak and slow fliers. Aplomado falcons are attracted to them and can't resist the opportunity of taking them when possible. Fortunately it was nearly always possible to get the falcons off of them and let them go again. But they ruined many a flight.

Brazil is a lovely country with a superb climate, a good standard of living for foreigners and a tremendous potential for falconry. Well worth a visit.

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A simple question, from a friend to a friend, a Falconer to a Falconer, "What do you know about Kim Muir"? We could not have imagined the consequences of that question and what it would lead to.

Falconry is steeped in history. In some countries it is ancient, in others it is more modern but never-the-less, it is history. Over the years much has been written about Falconry. There are more books than most people can imagine. There have been many Falconers. Some are well known to many of us, such as Mavrogordato, Michell, Blaine and Lascelles to name but a few. There were however, other falconers that are not so well known and yet they also have played a significant part in falconry and helped shape it into what it is today.

This article took time to research, often a difficult task. Numerous 'phone calls, hours on the computer, letter writing and yet, as the information became available the stories and history unfolded. Often tragic, sometimes humorous but for Peter and I it was interesting and exciting as contacts were made. The falconers we researched were suddenly in a strange way with us again and although we had never met them we would come to know them and this is especially so in the case of the first two falconers from the past.

It is hoped that this article will in a small way honour the falconers whose lives were tragically cut short due to the circumstances of the day and one wonders just how much more they could have offered to Falconry had they lived. One of the most difficult things was to think of a title, especially one that had not been used before and we therefore make no apologies for the simple title of:

We were Falconers

Paul Beecroft (U.K.)
& Peter Devers (U.S.)

Kim was christened Ian Kay Muir, the Kim being formed from his initials. He was not named, as some supposed, for Rudyard Kipling's more famous Kim, but he did possess the same litheness of body, agility of mind and yearning for adventure and activity as his more famous namesake.

Born in 1916, Kim was the son of Matthew William Muir, youngest son of Sir John Muir of Deanston and Clara Gardiner Muir. His father was a well-known polo player and was also the second of his family to be a Master of the Cotswold Hunt. Kim's older sister was Gillian and they were very close. Kim lived with his family at Postlip Hall near Winchcombe, Gloucestershire. Postlip

Hall, an ancient manor house dating to the 14th century, had its own turbulent history and also a curse that went with it. In the time of Henry VIII it was a monastery. When the King dissolved the monasteries the Monks were removed and they reputedly placed a curse on Postlip Hall that has an eerie ring of truth to it. The curse was to the effect that whoever owned it would die within two years. The two years were not quite correct but the curse of untimely or violent death seems to have been. Judge for yourself: The Muir family purchased Postlip Hall in 1917/18, the previous owners having both died in tragic circumstances. The husband had fallen to his death from a ladder



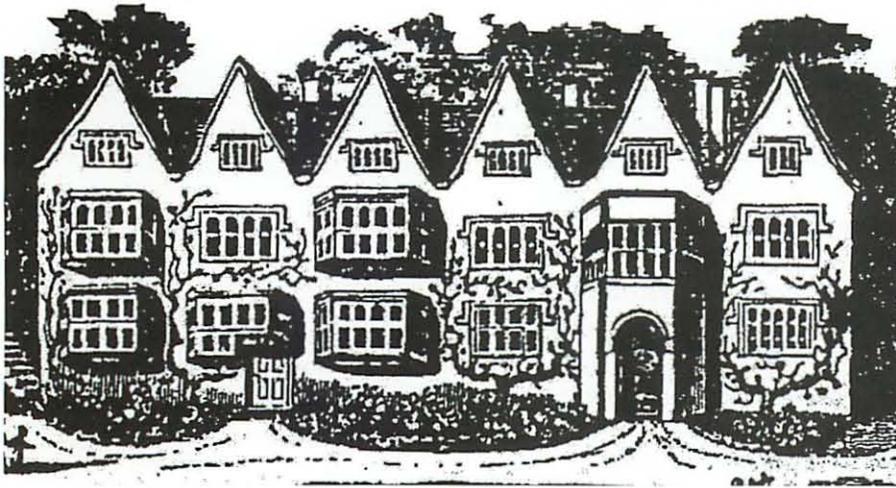
Kim Muir

1916 – 1940

whilst clearing out the gutter and his wife, who then became the owner, died when her clothing caught fire whilst standing in front of the fireplace. She burnt to death. Tragedies attended the Muirs as will be told.

Not photogenic

As a child Kim was keen on hunting and by the time he was eight years old he was riding a pony. Tragically, when he was only nine years old, his father was killed following a bad fall from a horse whilst on the hunting field. At this impressionable age he was suddenly confronted with the unexpected and devastating loss of a loved one, an event



which may have sparked his decision to live flat out and fast, every minute he was given. Dr. H.O. Blanford, writing in the July 1949 issue of *The Journal of the British Falconers' Club*, has this to say of young Kim:

"I first met Kim at Avebury, when he was a boy at Eton, and later saw much of him as a cadet at the R.M.C., Sandhurst. I have many delightful recollections of his youth, his resolution, and his whole-hearted eagerness, more particularly in relation to falconry. His ardent temperament brought him into frequent collision with authority, and few indeed were the occasions when he was not in trouble of some sort or another, borne with a whimsical resignation and philosophy. These collisions were the outcome of some daring and sporting escapade, as when, having placed a dummy in his bed to cover his absence, he dashed off in a high-powered car to the wilds of Wales, to take eyass peregrines, aiming to return before dawn and possible detection. This design was not fully achieved and outraged authority had the last word, as usual. I have little doubt that the same reckless indifference to risk accompanied him to, and may even have contributed to, his untimely end. His death in the service of his country leaves a void in the ranks of British falconers which will be impossible to fill, and must cause enduring sadness in the hearts of all who had the privilege and pleasure of knowing Kim Muir".

Upon his father's death Kim inherited Postlip Hall but technically he did not 'own' it until he reached the age of 21. In 1925 his mother married Captain David Mitchell, 60th Rifles, whose family owned what is now Prince Charles' estate, Highgrove, near Tetbury. He too was of a sporting inclination and evidently was welcomed by young Kim and his sister into the fold. The curse reputedly took him many years later in a

motor accident in 1954, two years after Kim's mother died after an agonising bout with cancer.

At the age of 14 or 15 Kim became interested in hawks and falcons. Falconry became his main passion although he was still very active in foxhunting and horse racing which will become self evident as you read on. Kim was educated at Eton College leaving in 1934 to enter Sandhurst. Whilst in the Army, Kim still managed to pursue his interests, falconry, steeple chasing and also polo. *The Times* newspaper records the following events:

In March 1936 Kim won The Garth Hunt Point to Point race on his horse The Griffen and in July he took part in The Beaufort Tournament playing for the 9th Lancers and beating Sandhurst in the first round by 13 goals.

In March 1937 at Aldershot he took part in the Subalterns open Race riding Dramatist. Later the same month he was at Sandown Park, again on Dramatist, in The United Services Hunters Steeplechase. He placed sixth. In July he was back on the polo field in the Beaufort Tournament for the 10th Royal Hussars. He was playing for the Quads and won the Junior Cup. Kim was No. 1 for the Quads.

In 1938 at Aldershot he came second in the Aldershot Open Cup Race riding Happy ChoicIn February 1939, Kim took part in the Salisbury Plain Bona Fide Military Meeting and on this day he completed a Double. His first success was gained on Port Glenone who won the Windmill Hill Cup and then he rode Jack of the Vale who was first to cross the finishing line in the 2nd Cavalry Brigade Subalterns' Race.

BFC member

Kim was a member of the British Falconers' Club and is recorded as such in the first copy

of *The Journal*, which was May 1937. He was an active member up until 1939 flying Peregrines and Merlins. Kim's love of falconry was paramount in his life and his name is recorded many times in journals of other falconers with whom he flew his birds with many times over the years. One of these Falconers was Gilbert Blaine and his hawking journals reveal a number of entries where Kim is mentioned:

September 10th. [1936] Laggan boundary. Strong N.E. wind. There was too much wind for Muir's Falcon, and she was unlucky. Mrs. Johnstone, K.R.P. [Ken Palmer] and Kim Muir out.*

Saturday September 12th. [1936] Leorin Loch. Fine, E. wind. A red letter day. "Diana" rang up to a great pitch, but nothing could be put up in front of 'Mandarin's' point. A grouse had run into a patch of bracken. At last a grouse and a young pheasant were flushed from the bracken, but the Falcon was then playing with a wild one, and did not see them. She was then very wide, almost out of sight. A covey was then flushed and she put them in a long way up a glen. She was then taken down. Flown again, by the loch side, she again went very high. A single grouse being flushed, and crossing the loch, she struck it into the water with a tremendous splash, and threw up again very high. Kim Muir ran round with his black dog and retrieved it under the opposite bank, and threw it out to the Falcon. It was a very beautiful and spectacular flight. Muir's Falcon killed a grouse put into bracken by "Hector", he having just killed another one very cleverly. "Drusilla" trussed a brace in two flights, going with terrific speed, and carrying one right across a valley after her stoop. "Katherine" was twice unserved, and went off disgusted down towards Brahanisary, but came back again after some time. Mrs. Johnstone, K.R.P. and Kim Muir out.*

Monday September 14th. [1936] Fine, S.W. breeze. Upper Cragabus. "Diana" put down a grouse, which beat her a long way upwind when she tried to sit on it. She came back and struck another into rushes, which the black dog retrieved. Its head was half cut off. "Drusilla" killed an old cock after a hunt. "Hector" was beaten by a young grouse, after putting it down, in a very long stern chase. Muir's Tiercel refused. "Katherine" cut over an old cock, which got to heavy cover and defeated her. Muir out.

Season 1937.

Another nest was found on the Oa on the old fort promontory. It contained three Falcons,

and was taken a week later. One Falcon was lost among the rocks at the base of the cliff, and caught by Campbell the Shepherd a few days later. The other two Falcons were sent to Kim Muir, to be hacked at Tilshead. The Sanaig Tiercel [caught up] on the 25th after six weeks, and the Falcon from the Oa on August 4th. after nearly seven weeks hack. The latter appeared to have had an injury to the side of the beak, and was not in quite such high condition as the others. The Tiercel was sent to J. Mavrogordato and the Falcon to Kim Muir.

Famous falcon

Blaine mentions "Muir's Falcon" in his 1936 journal entry. This must be none other than Black Jess, owned and trained by Kim Muir, immortalised forever in the famous painting by George E. Lodge. Kim could never have known that his falcon was to become so famous, his portrait being used in many books on the sport, including the frontispiece to Lodge's own autobiography. Prints of the original hang on the walls of many falconers today, some seventy years after Kim flew it on game for the last time. The original painting was commissioned by Peter Miller Mundy, the father of Andrew Miller Mundy, late member of the British Falconers Club. Both Mundys were falconers, with Andrew's father being a personal friend of Lodge's. Kim himself was a friend of George Lodge. He flew birds with Lodge in attendance and is mentioned in the journals Lodge kept and also in Lodge's own book: Lodge writes,

'An abnormally coloured merlin came under my observation a few years ago. It was abnormal in two respects: first, it was half albino and second, what coloured plumage it had was the fully adult plumage of a male merlin, although it was a bird of the year and so had never moulted. It was taken from a nest in Yorkshire in which it was the only abnormally coloured one. Another youngster in this nest had whitish-coloured claws. The bird came into the possession of Kim Muir, who let me have it for a week in order to take as many sketches as I wanted. I ultimately painted a life-sized portrait of it sitting on its block.'

During his late teens Kim was avidly hawking at every opportunity. His cousin, Betsy Muir, who he was very close to, recalls many an adventure she shared with Kim. Though she is now 87 years of age I found her delightful

to talk to, her memories of Kim and his hawking exploits bringing back a bit of her own youth as we discovered more about the young falconer.

Betsy spent many a time on Salisbury Plain with Kim and the falconers of the day. She told of the beauty of watching Kim's falcons fly, but also spoke of the times that she was left behind, sitting under trees, because the falcon above would not come down and it was her job to keep an eye on it whilst everyone else continued hawking with other birds. These duties always seem to befall the youngest.

Tales to tell

Other memorable stories include the time she went with Kim and Peter Miller Mundy to Wales to obtain Peregrine chicks. She was normally the 'lookout' whilst Kim was lowered down the cliff face on a rope and the pilfered chicks were taken up in a basket. It was perhaps on this occasion that Kim took 'Black Jess'.

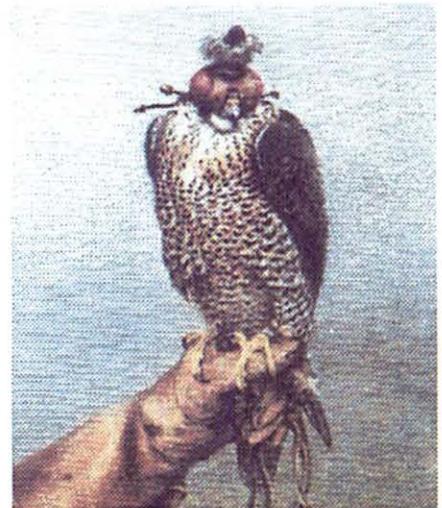
There was also the time when a hawking trip was made to the Orkneys. On arrival there a taxi was needed to take them to the hotel. This was not so easy as the hawking party consisted of herself, Kim, Kim's sister Gillian, another falconer, two setters, one pointer, a black Labrador named 'Shitty', a

The upshot was that everything got into the taxi except for Kim who sat on the roof with the cadge of Falcons. Can you imagine a taxi driver agreeing to that today?

tame Badger that was owned by Gillian that was on a lead, a pet Guinea Pig and a cadge that held a total of eight falcons. One of the falcons was a Merlin that went everywhere with Kim and was probably the one that is mentioned by Lodge. The upshot was that everything got into the taxi except for Kim who sat on the roof with the cadge of Falcons. Can you imagine a taxi driver agreeing to that today?

Pheasant taken

Betsy also recalls Kim's sense of humour and his constant thoughts of his birds. On one occasion they were driving home over the Cotswolds and the vehicle in front of them knocked over and killed a pheasant. Both cars stopped for this event. Kim berated the driver with words of, "What frightfully bad



driving" and "How dare you kill one of my Pheasants". The driver apologised and left. Kim promptly took the pheasant. Of course, said Betsy, he did not own the pheasant, it had nothing to do with him, but you can imagine his thoughts at the time... 'meat for the birds... meat for the birds'.

Mind you, Kim didn't always have a driving licence to travel across the Cotswolds. Shortly before the war Kim lost his driving privileges for some infraction, possibly speeding, and his automobile was decommissioned. His professional falconer, Leonard Potter, was reduced to carrying

Kim's falcons to the field on an improvised cadge attached to the back of an old bicycle. The sight must have been quite humorous to see, the bike wobbling first left, then right, with the falcons spreading their wings to catch the breeze

and maintain their balance. Potter had come to Postlip Hall after leaving service with Gilbert Blaine, and later went on to work for many years with Jack Mavrogordato. Both of these falconers must have seemed quite tame when compared to the effusive and headstrong Kim.

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Betsy Muir
Sgt Ron Huggins 10th Royal Hussars
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Yousef Bahnas (Photo of Gravestone)
Dave Nurse of www.theracingpages.org.uk

Although this article is written by Rupert Templeman it's inclusion has come from an idea from Wendy Alikor, of Ye Olde Redtail Falconry Display, and he passes on some practical advice and precautions on how falconers and breeders can avoid the attentions of the Tetanus Bacillus - the 'Lockjaw' bug to you and I! He suggests precautions, and provides a little background on the bug, and ensures that you're aware that you have to be properly protected by vaccination and common sense.

Don't worry - this article isn't going to be one of the boring medical lectures! Instead, it's written from practical experience by someone who could have easily have got himself into real trouble - if it wasn't for modern medical vaccination. However, in re-telling the story the same person could have had less worries if he'd remembered that his tetanus 'booster' vaccination wasn't overdue!

Twenty years ago I was working in broadcasting as a Medical Journalist and researcher in the independent sector - the work was fascinating and we went literally anywhere in the UK, Ireland and the near Continent for a story or a programme. In those days we were using the first of the new Electronic News Gathering Equipment (ENG) and outside broadcasting vehicles equipped with video rather than traditional film. These are the impressive space age looking vehicles which are so often visible in the background literally any time you see politicians being interviewed outside of Number 10 Downing Street, or wherever the natural habitats of such animals are to be found!

At that time we were also starting to use satellite link points - although the mobile set-ups so common nowadays were still not reliable enough. Instead, the broadcasters were still using fixed microwave link stations, often sited in some very unusual places indeed.

Turkey Farm

One of the regular satellite link-test input points used by our headquarters based team was on a turkey farm! Working in the independent - non BBC broadcasting side of the industry meant that we did our

own driving, and our teams 'multi-tasked' - each doing many different jobs. On a remote site I could be sharing jobs with my colleagues, doing anything from brewing the tea to writing up my medical report script for the front-of-camera presenter.

Because of the multi-tasking I found myself allotted the task of looking after special measuring equipment on the satellite test site, not far from our headquarters. The equipment - complete with large parabolic (dish) antenna was set-up inside a horse box trailer, located within a huge fenced arena which was teeming with literally thousands (up to the end of November anyway) free range turkeys.

A single-animal sized horse box was adequate to hold all the measuring equipment. I attended several times a week to check temperatures, incoming field strengths as measured on chart recorders, and also used a short ladder to climb up onto the roof to check the rain gauge and unblock it. Yes, the turkey droppings got everywhere - even into a rain gauge mounted three metres above where you would normally expect a ground living bird to spend most of its time.

During one visit after a heavy shower of rain I had to literally wade through the muddy droppings to get to the fancifully named 'earth station'. Half way up the ladder my Wellington boot instep moved sideways on some droppings and I half fell, half slid down the ladder, ending up in a heap and covered with the smelly muck at the horse box door.

It was a minor accident, and I was only a little shaken - I also had a small open cut on one of my legs, and on my left hand. Obviously, being medically qualified, I quickly realised the risks of tetanus especially as I'd thought I had forgotten to have a 'booster' injection the previous year. It was embarrassing, but I had to report back to the office, only to be told to get myself to the local county hospital for a treatment by my senior colleagues who thought it was all very funny indeed!

At the hospital I was fortunate enough to review my mental arithmetic and discovered that the 'booster' injection was due soon. It was applied on my behalf in the tail....and I lived to tell the tale. But what is tetanus - the dreaded 'Lock Jaw' of the past and what precautions should the falconer take?

Where there's muck!

The old saying 'Where there's muck - there's brass' can easily be modified to say 'Where's there's muck you'll find the tetanus bacteria (*Clostridium*

Tetani). The microscopic life form is abundant in farm yards, and literally anywhere you find animal and bird faeces.

However, one old wife's tale that - "only wet muck carries the danger of Lockjaw" can be discounted - this is because the Tetanus spore can live in dried dung and soil for a long time. So, it's wise to always handle such material with full hand-washing precautions and protective gloves if at all possible.

Infection caused by *Clostridium Tetani*, known for centuries as the 'Lockjaw' killer, actually causes a neurological disorder which increases muscle tone and spasm - hence the 'Locked Jaws' caused by the victim's jaw muscles going in to tight, uncontrollable spasm. This effect is caused by a powerful protein toxin produced by *Clostridium Tetani*.

The organism itself is an anaerobic (not requiring the presence of oxygen), motile (capable of movement or motion) rod-shaped microscopic bacterium. It forms an oval, colourless terminal spore creating a shape that resembles a microscopic tennis racket or drum stick.

Throughout the world

The Tetanus bacillus is found throughout the world in animal faeces, and occasionally in human waste. And, importantly, the spores are very tough - often surviving for years in some environments. They're also resistant to various disinfectants and live up to 20 minutes in boiling water! Fortunately though, vegetative cells - those that are in an active state - are easily inactivated and are susceptible to several antibiotics including penicillin.

Contamination of wounds by *Clostridium Tetani* is actually probably quite frequent, although active infection often seems only to take place where the tissue has been damaged and already compromised, i.e. by a cut, or a thorn/splinter with an infection already present.

The localised infection then enables the Tetanus bug to start its deadly work because the often minute blood vessels bringing the necessary supply of oxygen to the human tissue have been damaged. It's then that the *Clostridium Tetani* can grow, producing the dangerous toxins.

The Symptoms

The average onset of symptoms can be up to seven days after the original infection, although they can occur as rapidly as three days and as long as 16 to 17 days after infection. And

How Clostr

although there are many symptoms, it's important to know those which are most often seen.

For example, persons suffering from an infection can notice they've got a mild fever and increasing stiffness when opening and closing their jaws. A stiff neck, and back muscles, and stiff shoulders are often accompanied by spasms as the toxin levels increase.

Sometimes, sustained spasms produce the medically classic facial grimace or sneer known as the *risus sardonius*. Another famous symptom - often shown in medical text books from the Victorian period - show affected patients with a prominently arched back. In fact, the back was often so effectively arched it lifted the patient....leaving the affected person's trunk away from their bed.

The patient can end up sweating profusely and be in great pain. There's the risk of severe complications, even death if the infection is not treated quickly, and correctly. Fortunately however, nowadays we don't have to worry unduly - because immunity is provided by the correct vaccination and regular 'booster' injections to maintain the level of protection and an immediate injection of Tetanus antitoxin can reduce the effects of the unpleasant toxin rapidly.

Horses help out

It's ironic that horses are themselves prone to the Tetanus infection, because specially bred horses are actually used to produce the Tetanus Antitoxin. Indeed, for many years now the powerful auto-immune systems of the specially bred and cared-for horses have produced large amounts of the antitoxin, saving many humans (and horses!) from painful suffering.

The manufacture of the final antitoxin is initiated by injecting carefully controlled amounts of the toxin produced by the *Clostridium Tetani* into the horse, and eventually 'harvesting' the antibodies produced by the animal's powerful auto-immune system to make the commercial antitoxin. Although nowadays it's not the only antitoxin available, it has been a traditional source for many years. It's also relatively cheap to produce - a fact which helps underdeveloped countries where Tetanus can be a potential (and totally unnecessary) killer.

Once purified, the antitoxin can be injected directly into humans, and also horses, to overcome the effects of the toxin. And as I've already mentioned - it's ironic that horses can be infected (often through a

cut on a leg, or along a flank) and it seems entirely appropriate that infected animals have been returned to full health because of the healthy immune systems of other horses! But, as in humans - the best way is to avoid infection in the first place by ensuring that a much loved horse is always kept fully immunised.

Long term use of the equine-derived antitoxin has its problems for humans though - because frequent exposure to the treatment can result in the human patient becoming over-sensitised to the antitoxin. Sensitisation can lead to anaphylactic shock (a term you may be familiar with resulting from the well publicised cases of peanut allergies, wasp stings, etc). Fortunately, modern vaccines are available and are extremely effective. So, there's no real excuse for anyone to avoid this vital protection - remembering that 'boosters' are required at intervals

It cannot be stressed enough that everyone should ensure - whatever their interests - that the necessary vaccination against Tetanus infection is kept up to date. But apart from this eminently sensible advice - you're probably wondering... "What can I, as a raptor handler or owner do to minimise the risk of any infection likely to come from handling my bird...or its food sources?"

Inside and out

In answering your probable question - literally speaking, the risk of bacterial infection resides both inside and out! I've already mentioned the dangers which can - and most certainly do - exist under your feet in the farm yard and field. They're naturally messy places of course, but do you realise that there's a chance of you picking up an infection from inside an animal or bird?

Obviously, the greatest risk of infection will come from direct contact between yourself - especially if you have an unprotected cut or scratch - and animal or bird faeces. You'll certainly do your best to avoid putting your hands into a muck pile won't you? However, what happens if your particular raptor catches prey which it then disembowels, possibly spreading almost liquid faeces (because the predated animals intestinal tract hasn't had enough time to fully re-absorb the water content) over your hands?

In the scenario I've outlined, the possibility of infection from many different bugs (not just *Clostridium Tetani*) is possible - so it's best to avoid infection for yourself and your bird. Not being a raptor keeper myself, I took the

opportunity to talk over precautions with one experienced keeper - and he offered sound practical advice.

I asked him what he did when his raptor caught a small animal, and he was able to get to the catch before the bird had started its meal. Eminently sensible the seasoned owner quickly confirmed to me that he made a point of scooping out the intestinal tract... "And all the other gungy bits" (as he so aptly described them) so that his treasured bird would not risk infection from eating meat contaminated by the (from an often perforated bowel) liquid faeces which is likely to be present in the carcass.

Sensible precautions

You might think I'm 'talking down' to non-medical readers - but in all honesty it's so very easy for anyone to make a very simple mistake when it comes to picking up an infection, directly due to touching of a dead animal or bird. In fact I can pass on a story which was told to me by the very person who had suffered from his own mistake. His embarrassment was tempered by the fact he was able to pass on the story to help generations of young medical students to avoid making the same mistake as he'd done so many years ago.

The man concerned was a pathologist - a doctor who specialised in dealing with dead tissue and establishing just why it had died. It can be fascinating work, especially with the growth of forensic pathology. However this wonderful man who passed on so much knowledge to me - once made a mistake which nearly cost him dearly. He worked on a 'fresh' corpse (in other words - not obviously decomposing) - while wearing a damaged pair of post mortem gloves.

The result was a 'Post Mortem' infection which laid him low for several weeks and was only brought under control with powerful antibiotics. Needless to say - he and the hundreds of students that passed his way during many years of teaching - were much the wiser for his mistake.

You can do the same - by taking sensible precautions. Obviously, unlike a pathologist you'll not be in contact with decomposing or contaminated flesh very often. But when you are - I have no doubt you'll be careful to wash your hands and take every precaution you can to save yourself - and your valuable bird - from possible ill health. And above all - you'll ensure that your Tetanus vaccination is up to date, won't you?

To Avoid Meeting *Clostridium Tetani*!

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'Black Jess' was taken from an eyrie in Pembrokeshire, South Wales by the late Kim Muir. He trained and flew her at grouse and partridge in the period before the Second World War. He was a close friend of George Lodge, who was also a keen follower of falconry, but sadly, Kim Muir was killed while serving with the 10th Royal Hussars.

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Black Jess
(Intermeved Eyass Falcon)
by
George Edward Lodge

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But as with which hawk it all comes down to what land you have available and what quarry you're after, but both live for a long time, all being well, and life rarely stays constant. For me the choice of dog and bird were made for me when I was working in NE Scotland and the offer of a year old English Pointer and seasoned tiercel peregrine came my way. There was little to think about - I had access to a grouse moor and arable land with partridges.

The bitch was called Spurge and being a yearling still had much to learn. The tiercel though knew it all, he was imprinted, had been used at an R.A.F. base, had been flown to the swung lure, hunted at grouse and partridges, been kept at tame hack and was called Sidewinder. Now I'm a bit of a romantic at heart and I don't like changing

their name. Over the years she's been called splurge, spudge, splodge, sludge, birdge and bed (probably as she rarely stayed there long when I had company and I would regularly tell her where to go). There is a group of plants with the same name.

In love with William

Having taken charge of them in late February, I wouldn't be doing too much other than ongoing training with Spurge. Time flies when having fun and so it was with William; he was soon doing displays while I got my head around my first bird and dog.

We had a regular group of ladies that ran a hotel for people with Multiple Sclerosis, who fell in love with William. Due to his days at hack he would regularly do the off! But when I got things right he would fly the lure like no other falcon I've flown, the friction burns from the line were only bearable while the adrenalin was still pumping. The weekly visit from the hoteliers always started on the bus as I welcomed the new visitors and gave an update on William's antics. It was on one of these updates that I admitted I'd lost him the day before when



Grouse had been elusive but partridges tasted great, both dog and bird were working well. In Scotland there is standing corn in September, where as in the south of England most stubble has been ploughed in before the 1st, as I learnt when I came back. However, on this occasion I was working Spurge in stubble by the side of a hill (Scottish!). When Spurge drew onto point the hood was removed and William was off, sadly to the nearest perch. So in a desperate attempt to teach him the best place would be above me, I flushed while he was out of position. Some days things just don't go to plan, the partridges obviously had not seen William, as they took off straight for him and true to his name he tail chased them around the hill like a sidewinder. It was then I wished I'd waited for the centre's telemetry

Pointer and Peregrine

any animal's name for the sake of it, but there's an exception to every rule! I've always thought of Falconry as the past time of Kings and yet I couldn't conger up any Royal thoughts for King Sidewinder. So after much deliberation I decided on William the Conqueror.

Spurge was also a bit of tricky one, but I do think dogs respond a little more to their name than a bird and after many hours and a Thesaurus I couldn't find a replacement with the same sound - as cleverer people than I have proved, they respond to the sound not

sadly the telemetry failed. The joy on their faces was matched by mine when, in the middle of a display, an osprey/ferruginous bird came back to perch in the arena without being seen.

More stories

Another very memorable recap came on the 2nd of September when I jumped on the bus and announced proudly that I'd been out the night before and my Willey caught something!

as I ran as fast as the Conqueror. When I rounded the hillside I was face to face with a sea of standing corn, no sign of a partridge or a peregrine, and with no telemetry! Just when I thought things couldn't be worse I realised how alone I was, when there was also no sign of the dog!

Well what do you do? Exactly, panic! I was yelling at the top of my voice (no wonder Shakespeare wrote "Oh for a falconers voice"). Well no I wasn't shouting - I was calling for them both. That's when I wished I'd trained Spurge to come off of point.

Sadly, when training I couldn't imagine a scenario where I wouldn't be able to see her!

If William hadn't made a kill, he would be in view and returning to the lure now being thrown almost into orbit. If Spurge wasn't on point she would be returning to my now frantic calls or I would at least see her trampling the corn. But no - all the eye could see was standing corn!

On point

All I could do was look and then it came to me, not a dog or a peregrine but how Spurge always wanted to please and when on point she wouldn't come off of it but would wag her tail like it was going out of fashion, and there in the sea of corn a one tailed thrasher. I quickly made my way to her wondering what was holding her attention so well and also reminiscing the time she pointed a tree creeper caught in long grass. I pushed my head through the corn down her black and white back and there six inches from her nose was William on top of his partridge! Was I pleased or was I pleased. I hadn't taught her to come off of point.

Proud falconer

On trips home to Milton Keynes I was so proud of my pair of hunting companions I took many none hunting friends and family on hunting trips. Whilst proud of them both I must confess to being more in awe of William probably because of the relative rarity of hunting with a peregrine. So I was amazed when those I took out told others how absolutely amazing the dog was! Not how high or how far or how hard or how easily the peregrine flew, just how the dog stopped turned or re-turned to the whistle and stayed so still until it was told to flush! I guess I should have been more proud of Spurge as I had done more of the training than with William.

Winning her class

The other time I was proud of her was the one and only show I entered and she was awarded first place. Personally I think entering any competition to be the best of those that are there only undermines the real pleasure of working with any animal.

The category we won was the dog most like his owner. The judge announced the lanky dog with the lanky owner!

When I moved back to sunny Milton Keynes and started taking people out with Hawk on the Wildside, sadly William had done his last disappearing trick on Towsers



Estate, Hampshire, after Steve Williams had said "at ten he was past catching partridges" he was beating Tommy after the first weeks bag. Spurge had to be educated that it was now OK to point ground game.

Spurge held in awe

On many occasions the guests were just as much in awe of Spurge as they were of the Harris Hawks on their wrists. The times she pointed trees, only to have guests ridicule her for pointing squirrels, sometimes her head would be straight up, but with a good poke about a rabbit would run for the hawks to chase. For an English pointer she was great at finding quarry above ground but where she saved so much time was being able to let

me know if a rabbit was at home. On the odd occasion when fresh pooh and digging were evident I would over rule her, only to waist valuable time waiting for the ferrets to check the whole warren. I've taken many guests out without any knowledge of field craft and some with a wealth of experiences but none that could match Spurges nose. One gentleman who thought he knew it all announced as he tried to lead the group "nothing in there", but Spurge drew up on a hole and I said "it's worth a try"

"Wasting your time and ours!" he exclaimed. After two great bolts and



pursuing flights there were no more certain statements.

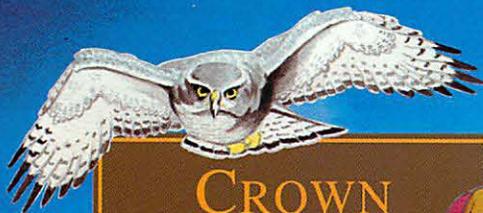
The demise of Spurge

Sadly after twelve years at my side and at the age of thirteen, Spurge had a massive stroke and was put down. In the many and ever changing roles she played (even guard dog) she never let me down. Her only real let down was her love of forbidden food, she came to love any fruit or vegetable, but the time she nearly came unstuck was the day she opened the cereal cupboard and ate 48 weetabix without milk and only one bowl of water! A large ball of solidified weetabix stuck to the inside of the roof of her mouth would have choked her

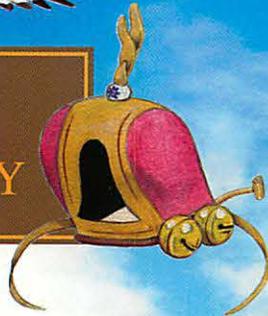
For an English pointer she was great at finding quarry above ground but where she saved so much time was being able to let me know if a rabbit was at home

if Tracey, my wife, had not returned home when she did.

I was introduced to German Wirehaired Pointers while working at the Hawk Conservancy near Andover. I was extremely impressed with the way they will crash through cover almost regardless of scent, wait patiently while the ferrets do their bit and will hold point for as long as it takes to get hawk and guest into position. So that is the breed I've gone for this time. I hope things don't change. I would love the G.W.P. to be as good as Spurge ever was, my number one dog.



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A dream comes true

It was around 6.45am and I opened the curtains of my hotel bedroom and gazed upon part of the hotel grounds and two water fountains which were in need of cleaning up. I then turned my gaze skywards and saw two Black kites circling about 40 feet above ground. This was my first morning in Kathmandu, the capital city of the Kingdom of Nepal.

As my 50th birthday was going to be celebrated in March, I decided, with the good wishes of my wife, to realise a dream that I have had for about 30 years; and that was to go and see Mount Everest, the highest mountain above sea level on earth.

I was with a party of 14 other people who all had the same goal in mind and that was to ascend a small mountain called Kala Pattar which overlooks the Everest base camp, the Kombu ice glacier and the summit of Everest itself.

The trekking party consisted of people of various ages and professions; ages ranging from about 22 years through to 69 years.

Cremation and birds

We were due to leave Kathmandu for Lukla on an internal flight which should take about 40-50 minutes on Monday 23 February but as there was a strike at the airport we could not go that day. Instead we were taken on an excursion to a couple of temples within the Kathmandu valley. One was by a river where human cremations took place at any time of the day or night. There was a cremation in progress when we were there.

One of the party pointed to the sky and asked what sort of birds were circling high in the sky. "Buzzards", I said, and the person was a bit disappointed saying that they could see them at home and didn't come all this way just to see buzzards.

Lukla airstrip and landing

The following day we travelled to Kathmandu airport for the internal flight but the weather was not good. The aircraft had to come from Pokara first but it was very foggy. If the weather did not clear before around midday we would not be going because no planes can land at Lukla airstrip after 1.00pm because the clouds come in at around that time and all air traffic is grounded.

Anyway, the weather did lift sufficiently and off we went to start our adventures in the Himalaya. It was quite cloudy and we circled for a time, and I was wondering if we had to return to Kathmandu or not. Eventually we did descend and the one runway at Lukla came into view. I would not say the approach and landing was perfect, but with a runway at about an angle of 35 degrees or so, in an upwards direction, we landed with more than a bit of a bump. (I suppose I should have known something was not great when the pilots started praying!). One of the trekking party shouted "there's a brick wall", and we turned a 90 degree angle very sharply to taxi to a standstill. We had arrived in one piece.

The start of the trek

At Lukla we were given lunch and a hot drink

before we started walking towards our first night under canvass. There were a lot of ravens flying about along with red billed choughs - with a backdrop of the mountains, they made for a great sight.

Lukla has a big army presence because of the Maoist threat and as we were leaving we saw three soldiers lay a goat down on its side and cut off its head with one swift blow with a sharp machete. The goat was going to be curried and eaten that night in a feast but we were not going to be there to join in.

Our camp site was about 3 1/2 hours walk away and this was to be one of the easiest times of walking that we did. I had not slept under canvass since I was in the Scouts in 1968 and so I did not get a lot of sleep that night.

Namchee Bazaar and first glimpse

The next day we went on a very hard walk to Namchee Bazaar, gateway to sherpa country, and on the way we saw our first glimpse of our goal, Mount Everest, over 60 miles distant. What a sight!

After another sleepless night at our camp because of howling dogs all round the village, we walked above Namchee to a museum and next to it is a small army post. As we got there some of the party shouted my name and pointed to the sky. "Peter, Peter, what bird is that?" I looked up and had my very first look at a Bearded Vulture, otherwise known as a Lammergeier.

With a backdrop of Everest, Lhotse and Abu Dabhm in the same view I just could not believe I was there; I thought I was in a dream.

Then, to my amazement, three Himalayan Griffon Vultures came into view, winging their way on a thermal and stayed in view for about 4-5 minutes before going behind a mountain. I could not take my eyes off them, it was just a fabulous sight.

More walking and raptors

A few days later we were trekking to our next camp and we saw a Golden Eagle. It hasn't got the same plumage as the eagles found in England or Scotland. They have a more prominent white 'line' on the underside of their wings.

One day we were walking on a trail and Rob shouted, "Look left, look left", and there, at about 200ft below us, was a golden eagle gliding along a valley with not a wing beat until it disappeared in the distance. It only lasted about a minute but it was a case of being at the right place at the right time.

One day we did get a glimpse of a Steppes Eagle and a Black Eagle. To see these birds on the same day in their natural environment was a real treat; something that will stay in my mind for some time to come.

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It is often said that you know you're getting old when policemen seem to have been recruited from amongst the ranks of schoolboys. It certainly makes me feel old when I look back over the past forty years and realise just how long I have been involved with falconry and birds of prey. I am sure that, on the whole, the standard of falconry currently practised here in the United Kingdom is as high as it has ever been during that time. I have been very lucky to have witnessed over that period many tremendous flights and shared great sport and hospitality with both the good and the great and believe me those two categories are not necessarily synonymous.

When I first became involved with the sport birds could be taken from the wild under license, these had to be applied for from the Home Office in Marsham Street. Each year requests would be made and a small number of licences would subsequently be granted. For the lucky few who were successful this was when most of their problems would begin. For those able to take peregrines and merlins they would set about making their plans to travel north to obtain their bird. This could be fraught with difficulty and fulfilling the license was sometimes a very frustrating venture. The conditions imposed on licences were stringent; most licence conditions stipulated it was only valid where a minimum of three chicks was present.

Imagine the frustration that this could cause when, after a long journey from the south and a lot of time and cash spent reconnoitring the venture plus a heart-stopping ascent up a sheer cliff, you

discovered that what on the first visit had been a three eyass nest now only contained a single chick. How much easier it is now with the advent of captive breeding to enter the breeding pen and remove your chosen eyass at precisely the correct point of development and to take it up for training.

Lucky Licences

I have been lucky enough over the years to be granted many licences for peregrines and merlins and I have to say that I have never noticed any real difference between wild taken eyasses and those which we are now producing in our captive breeding programmes. For several years I was also able to take sparrowhawks from nests reasonably close to home and hack them from the apple tree in my back garden until I was ready to begin their training.

From time to time we still hear from

falconry memories

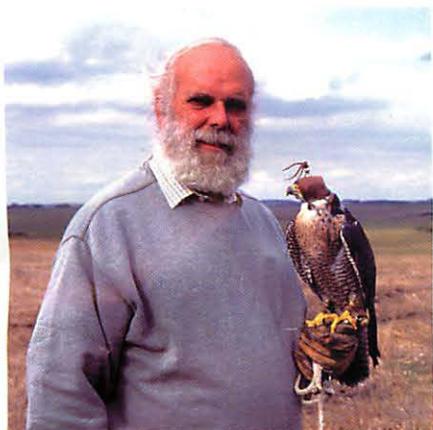


falconers who would like to see this practice resumed, even though we are now totally self sufficient in captive bred birds, but I believe that this would be a retrograde step that would inevitably bring us into conflict with the conservation bodies. There is much merit in being able to totally divorce our sport from such criticism and to be able to maintain that all the birds we are flying are truly captive bred stock puts us in a very strong position.

Cheap birds

In the falconry world, the 1960s was a time free of almost all restrictions, when large numbers of birds were imported into the United Kingdom for falconry purposes. This of course was before the advent of import restrictions, and prior to the introduction of quarantine. The "regular" hunting birds, Goshawks from Germany and Finland at £15 each and Spanish and Libyan Peregrines at

photos courtesy of Liz Chick



£25 were now vastly outnumbered by White Eyed Buzzards, Black and Brahminy Kites and a large variety of eagles which were flooding into the country. Although frequently described as "suitable beginners' birds" in magazines many of these birds proved to be totally unsuited to our climate, or for the sport in general and were often lost into the wild by disillusioned would-be falconers. This in itself caused problems, at one point the numbers of Lugger falcons, and to a lesser extent, Redheaded falcons flying loose attracted the attention of conservationists which probably hastened the introduction of the current Import and Quarantine Restrictions.

In the meantime, our own indigenous population were facing the most catastrophic decline due to long persistent pesticide poisoning. Chemicals, which were used to prevent damage to grain by wire worm and other pests were contaminating pigeons and other grain eating birds. These weakened birds in turn were being eaten by Peregrines and Sparrowhawks and the pesticides residue damaged and eventually killed the predators. Because of this situation, falconers made a conscious decision not to apply for any more licences to take birds from the wild and to concentrate on attempting to breed a captive population. This was a new and groundbreaking development, captive breeding, had never been tried as a large-scale exercise and a great deal needed to be learnt in a short time if falconry was to continue here in the United Kingdom.

Secret Breeding

Many of the early breeding attempts were shrouded in secrecy and very little co-operation was involved in the beginning. However, following some early success in breeding kestrels, the various projects started to show results. Today the UK

falconers can rightly claim to be high amongst the world leaders when it comes to breeding birds of prey.

The introduction of the Wildlife and Countryside Act in the early 1980's imposed a whole new set of disciplines on falconers and those involved in keeping birds of prey in captivity. Now for the first time, keepers were required to register all diurnal birds of prey, with the exception of vultures; this was a mammoth undertaking for the Department of the Environment and involved creating an entire wildlife division solely devoted to this task. This single Act had a very profound effect on falconry, both with its requirement for registration, and the restrictions imposed on the quarry we were used to traditionally

Falconry has faced many challenges over the past few years and will undoubtedly change and evolve in the future

pursuing. It required that in future, keepers should keep detailed and comprehensive records in order to prove the legitimacy of their birds.

Heavy penalties were prescribed for anyone who transgressed and this caused a great deal of concern to most falconers who viewed much of the pending legislation as heavy-handed. The Hawk Board was formed following a national meeting that was held at Stoneleigh to discuss the problems that this Act presented and it continues to this day working on our behalf to protect the future of our sport. This single piece of legislation during its passage through Parliament had more amendments than any other Act in our Parliamentary history. The final outcome proved to be an immensely complicated piece of legislation, with many grey areas,

some of which still remain unresolved twenty years later. When I recall the concern and opposition that this Bill aroused I find it surprising that a small number of people opposed de-registration of some species when it occurred a while ago, suggesting that it might in some way leave falconers in a vulnerable position.

What does the future hold?

So, what of the future? At the moment we find ourselves facing a review of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, a new Animal Welfare Protection Act as well as several issues concerning the use and production of hybrid falcons. Quite rightly the subjects of animal welfare and husbandry are high on the agenda. The standard of veterinary care which is now available is excellent and as a result most birds are more healthy and living longer than they have ever done before. Much of this is due to the advances which have been made in veterinary medicine. Fewer birds are being lost thanks to better telemetry technology and those that do get separated are much more likely to be recovered quickly. I certainly believe that the future of our sport is bright, we are for many members of the public the acceptable face of field sports and we need to maintain that support. Falconry has faced many challenges over the past few years and will undoubtedly change and evolve in the future.

However, it is very likely that if we could project any of our predecessors from the Middle Ages forward into the present day he would have little difficulty understanding what was taking place in the hawking field. The language, furniture and training routines would all be familiar to him, as would the hunting techniques we still employ. Perhaps the only significant difference is the motivation, he may well have applied his skill to provide himself and his family with a meal whereas we simply enjoy it as a sport.

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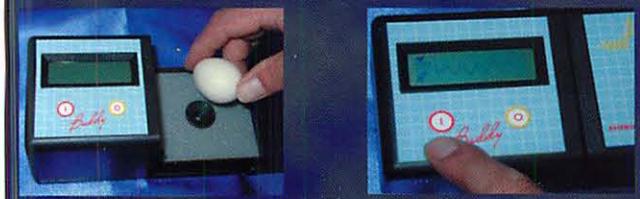
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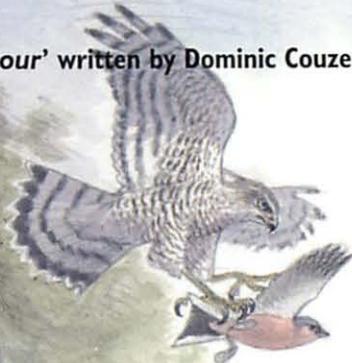
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Hunting Raptors (Part I)

By Philip Snow

Adapted from Collins 'Birds by Behaviour' written by Dominic Couzens 2003



Peregrines (*Falco peregrinus*, female left) are celebrated for the c175mph stoops at pigeons, waders or ducks, etc. Probably now almost at saturation point in the UK and ironically persecuted only by the pigeon breeders who so helped their comeback!

The Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*, female chasing Chaffinch top) is especially famed for its rapid and twisting flights after birds from tit to Wood Pigeon size, using every bit of arboreal or garden cover. The Goshawk (*accipiter gentilis*, male above) likes wilder country of mixed woodland and rough fields, etc., taking virtually anything from rabbit to magpie. Now re-establishing from released birds.



The Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*, above) loves to chase down dragonflies, Swallows or House Martins in aerial dogfights, whereas Merlins (*Falco columbarius*, female left after Skylarks) prefer low chases, but will 'ring up' persistently after larks or pipits, etc.



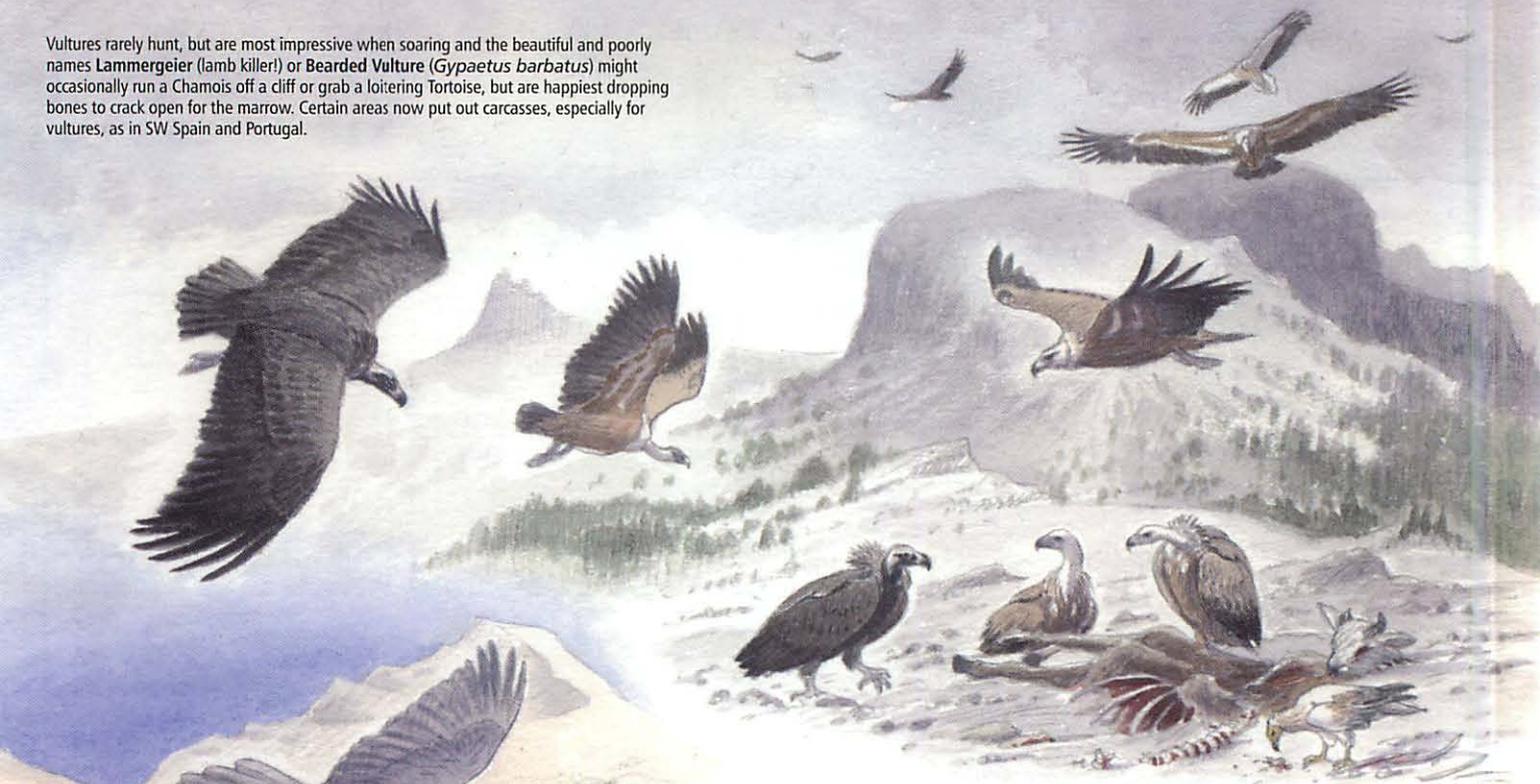
Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus* above) hover and plunge after virtually any fish from flattie to Pike and are now returning to England as well as Scotland. The massive Gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolous*, immature right, after Ptarmigan), doggedly chases large birds or takes Arctic tundra mammals like Lemmings, etc.



Whether ambushing from trees or soaring over Mediterranean wooded hills, the adult 'Partridge' or Bonelli's Eagle (*Hieraetus fasciatus*) is usually unmistakable. Spain is a stronghold.

White-tailed or Sea Eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*, adult chasing Elder) simply exhaust their prey by harrying ducks, take fish from the water or feed on deer/sheep carcasses, etc. Breeds in the Hebrides where re-introduced over the last 20 years, some winter around UK coast. Surprising turn of speed at times. I have seen one nearly grab a Peregrine!

Vultures rarely hunt, but are most impressive when soaring and the beautiful and poorly named Lammergeier (lamb killer!) or Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*) might occasionally run a Chamois off a cliff or grab a loitering Tortoise, but are happiest dropping bones to crack open for the marrow. Certain areas now put out carcasses, especially for vultures, as in SW Spain and Portugal.



Four vultures are found in Europe, with Spain and eastern Europe amongst the top spots where sheep/goats/cattle are still pastured. One Pyrenean valley alone has boasted 37 Lammergeiers (left), although the equally massive Black Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*, above left) is largely confined to far western or eastern parts of Europe. Griffon & Egyptian Vultures (*Gyps fulvus* and *Neophron percnopterus*) are more widespread and common.



Red Kites (*Milvus milvus*) are now a familiar and welcome sight in many parts of the UK, mainly due to reintroduction.

Migratory Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*) like their red cousins, will eat almost anything, especially if dead. Rubbish dumps attract both, although Blacks also take fish and like the Reds, insects and small mammals. Their colouring, twisting flight and flexing tails make them form birdwatcher's favourites.



Dark or pale phase Booted Eagles (*Hieraaetus pennatus*) are the smallest and probably commonest. European eagles, dropping spectacularly onto small mammals or birds, often form stepped hovers. NW Mallorca is a favoured wintering area.

Imperial Eagles (*Aquila adalberti* and *heliaca* (Spain, above) are usually less spectacular than Golden Eagles, (*Aquila chrysaetos*, above Imperial) stooping at Red Grouse at far left). Goldies will soar or contour hug, taking varied prey deer to grouse, etc., whereas the Imperial likes less upland areas and more mammals.

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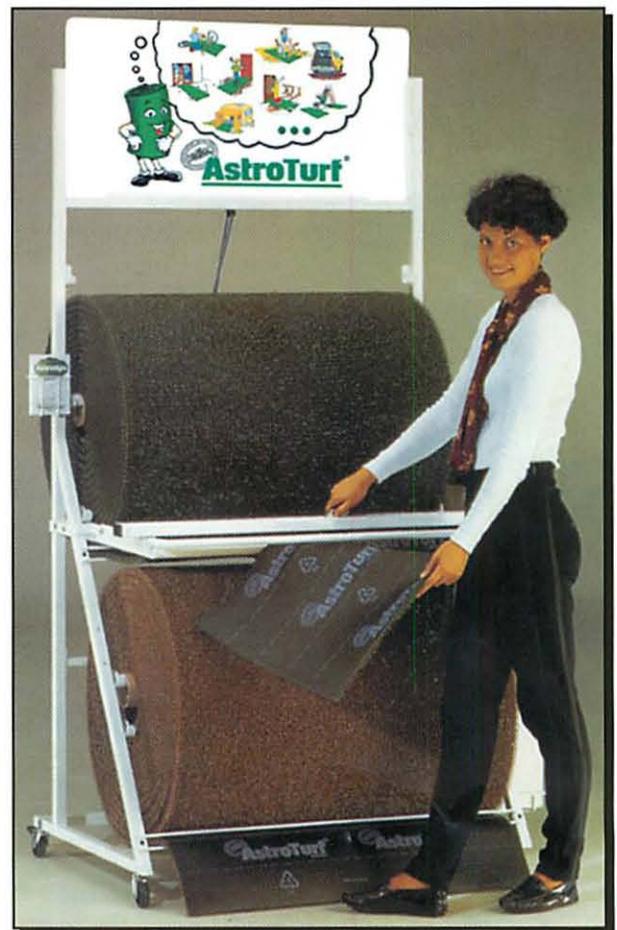
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