

The **Falcons**

& Raptor Conservation Magazine

interview with  
*Charlotte Hill*

**The Sound  
of Bells**  
**We were  
Falconers (Pt2)**



58 > **Issue 58**  
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Photo by Peter Eldrett

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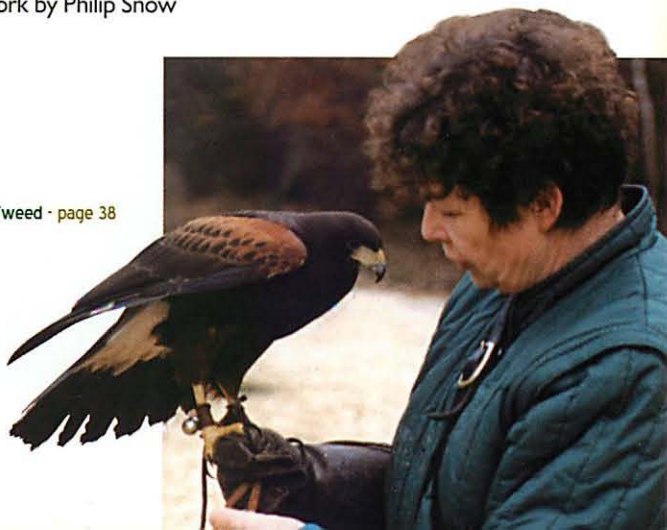
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# editorial

**W**elcome to another edition of *The Falconers Magazine*. I hope that all of your birds are in good health and are moulting without any problems. My own Redtail has a damaged cere and a weekly trip to the vets in Andover (thank you John) is required. This weekly journey has been going on for quite some time now (since about March) and I was warned that it would be a long process to restore the damaged part of the cere. An F10 wash and daily tablet medication is required, in consequence of which he is still bowed down and not free-lofted as I would have liked.

Thank you to all of you who have contributed to this edition. Another mix of articles for you to enjoy but I must point all of you to the article on page 35 (Hawk Board News) as Nick Kester has some information for all those of you who fly your birds at rooks or crows. A new quarry license may be required if DEFRA's review of the situation goes through.

The other day, someone asked me why there is no letters page in the magazine. I explained that the simple reason was that no-one sends any letters to me for publication. So, if you want a letters page, get writing! If you feel strongly about any aspect of our sport, why not put pen to paper and send in your thoughts, no matter how controversial they may be, and then perhaps we can revive our lively letters page.

You may have noticed that the cover price has increased from this issue but does not affect existing or new subscribers which remains at £16.50 per year. Please take time to complete the reply card in this issue to take advantage of the offers.

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](mailto:peter.eldrett@tiscali.co.uk)

## New Blood

Every now and again all working breeds can benefit from an injection of new blood. This is particularly true if the new blood in question is of the very highest calibre.

Renowned falconer and dog breeder, Diana Durman-Walters, has just done exactly that with a breed that she has long been closely associated with. Diana, president of the German Wire Haired Pointer Club, has recently imported a top field trial bitch from Germany. "Erle vom Alten Berg", Erle for short, has produced a litter of superb quality puppies since coming to the UK. The sire of the litter is "Olaf von Richtof" and he is one of the very few high scoring dogs at top trial level in Germany and he has been a top line stud dog as a result. The litter have some of the finest working genes of German dogs in their pedigree.

This exciting news means that we now have a litter of exclusively top field trial offspring that are not related to anything we have previously had in the UK. Diana says that she has been concerned for some time that the input of high achieving working dogs has been in decline and needed a better balance. She has always imported dogs of quality, but in this particular bitch she has an exceptional achiever in the field as well as a dog of outstanding temperament. Erle is part of a long-term programme to improve the availability of high-class dogs in the field.

Completion of the import arrangements has taken just over one year for entry into the UK. The preparation work and pet passport requirements mean that a lot of prior work goes into an import of this calibre. Diana stresses that the importation would never have been achieved without the unflagging help of Hilde Hilson. Hilde has always had a very keen interest in working German Wire Haired Pointers and has previously imported some dogs together with Diana.

Hilde and her husband Ron accompanied Diana when she went across to Germany in February of this year to see Erle working on her home ground. The crisp, cold weather meant that conditions were ideal and Erle was able to give a first class display of her outstanding ability over a two-day period.

Erle will be joining Diana and her other German Wire Hairs on the grouse moors providing flights for her falcons later in the year.

For further information on the availability of puppies, please telephone Diana on 01267 229158.



## Peregrines in a quarry

RMCC's Leyburn Quarry is home to two peregrine falcons, which returned a while ago to build a nest on nearly the same spot where someone blasted three chicks with a shotgun last year, despite the watchfulness of quarry workers. The falcons have perched their nest on top of a quarry face and an army of angry volunteers has now been mobilised to keep watch over the pair in Wensleydale.

Leyburn Quarry's area director, David Gordon, said: "We are delighted to have the falcons back. We were all truly shocked that people could kill these rare and beautiful birds and are pleased that volunteers will help us keep a close eye on the falcons to ensure that the birds are left in peace this time. The fact that we put up a £1,000 reward for the identification of the falcon killer is a measure of how strongly we feel."

Workers are still hopeful of catching the person responsible for last year's killing and the reward still stands at the time of going to press.

Wildlife Crime Officer Mark Rasbeary said: "The police are also keen to catch the killer and the enquiry is still open. On behalf of a great many people I have this message for anyone thinking of attacking the birds - day and night someone will be watching. Local people were disgusted by what happened last year, and now that feeling has been channelled into a positive intention to protect our endangered wildlife."

## First Aid Course with Neil Forbes

(Arranged by the Central Falconry & Raptor Club)

This will be held on 12 September 2004 at the Sports Connexion, Ryton-on-Dunsmore, Nr. Coventry.

We will meet at 9.00am, to start at 9.30am. There will be an hour break for lunch (finger buffet), included in price. The course will finish at approx. 4.30pm.

It will be an illustrated day course and all participants will receive a set of notes. A practical session will be included. First Aid Kits will be available on the day at a discount.

### The course contents include:

Legal implications, legs & feet, health & disease, parasitology, training to avoid illness, water-logging, drowning, electrocution, recognition of ill health, bites & wound management, shock assessment & therapy, concussion, crabbing, haemorrhage, chick & neonates, nutrition support, breeding adults, gut obstructions, examination of injured bird, damage to surface of head, respiratory disease, cere & eyes, fitting

& nerve disorder, wings, poisoning, avian bone repair plus physiotherapy, accommodation, feather and beak damage, hygiene for rehabilitators, assessment of viability, rehabilitation techniques, acquisition of a new bird, wing tip oedema & blaine. The cost for the day including course notes & finger buffet lunch is £35.00 For tickets, please email [doreen.page@btinternet.com](mailto:doreen.page@btinternet.com)

## Battles on the High Ground

Produced by Roy Lupton with Plucked Turkey Productions

Reviewed by Peter Eldrett



Mainly shot in the Highlands of Scotland, this film shows birds taking quarry such as rabbit, blue and mountain hare, and squirrel. The birds flown were Golden Eagles, Harris' Hawks, Goshawk and Redtail. Unfortunately, the commentary is rather lacking in information and instruction and the music soundtrack tends to overshadow the action being filmed, and I did find the whole experience of watching this film a bit overlong at approx 60 minutes in length.

The actual camera work is quite good but the final product isn't of the greatest quality. However, shooting footage of birds of prey chasing down their quarry must be difficult, particularly in the differing weather conditions that you get in the Highlands and the people behind the lens must be congratulated on their efforts. The scenery, as you would expect, is stunning and the birds featured are in their element.

On the lighter side, falconers falling over whilst running to get to their birds after locking onto quarry brought a smile to my face, as I have done this myself and can understand how they feel at the time. Thank goodness only pride and nothing else usually takes a tumble.

I have one big worry about this video. Near the beginning of the film, a deer carcass being used as a lure is shown being pulled along by an all-terrain vehicle whilst training a Golden Eagle. This footage did not seem appropriate to the rest of what was to come.

The lack of a good commentary and the overbearing music did spoil this video for me, but others may have a different opinion. If watching birds working in a stunning setting is your thing, then you should get a lot of enjoyment from it.

To purchase this video contact Plucked Turkey Productions, Old House, Whiteheath, Ashford Road, Hollingbourne, Kent ME17 1XG. Telephone 01622 633034.

## The Imprint Goshawk - Part 1

Dave Jones

Reviewed by Peter Eldrett

This video has been four years in the making and the efforts and care put in during that time have resulted in a very professional and informative video. It shows how to imprint a goshawk, right from the insemination stage. It stresses the importance of the relationship between owner and bird: Dave is seen helping the female with nest building in her aviary using sprigs of Rosemary. He is constantly talking to her, stroking her and whistling to her to reinforce the bond that is needed for a successful imprinting.

The film also shows how Dave goes about imprinting the chicks from the day they hatch to the first hack in his garden. He develops a strong bond with them through having them live in his house. He demonstrates the equipment needed, how to feed the birds without them seeing him, and when to put on the breeder's rings. He then goes on to show how he introduces the lure and how he starts training his Gos in the garden.

One scene which will be viewed with amazement by anyone who has not worked with an imprinted bird is when Dave attaches anklets and bell to the bird without it being cast – it just stands there on one leg without baiting or showing any fear.

The camera work on this film is of extremely high quality and the camerawoman, Lindsey Graham, must be congratulated on her efforts. This is Part One of a two-part set and I eagerly await the release of Part Two.

This film is available from Morgan Jones Film Productions, Southern Lights, Windmill Hill, Hutton, Somerset BS24 9UP.



## Robust, Advanced, Temperature-controlled Veterinarian Life Support Chamber

Brinsea Products Limited has extended its TLC family of Thermal Life-support Chambers with the TLC-5M. The TLC5M, a larger version of the very successful TLC-4M, is an intensive care unit with accurate control of temperature and humidity, built in connections for an oxygen supply and a nebuliser and the option of a temperature alarm with a phone dialler.

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The whole unit is made in Britain from moulded plastic and is light (only 10 kilo when empty), robust, easily cleaned and easily disinfected.

"The TLC4M is now in use by many vets' surgeries in the UK and abroad," said Ian Pearce, Managing Director of Brinsea Products Limited. "Conversations with our users revealed that they would also like a larger version to cope with larger animals, or a complete litter of kittens. The TLC-5M is now available for this."

The TLC5M is available from veterinary suppliers or direct from Brinsea through the Internet. It is being launched at an initial offer price of £485, rising to £550 plus VAT in September 2004.



The winner of the Brinsea Products prize draw was Peter Burden. He won two tickets for British Falconry and Raptor Fair, and a voucher for £50 against purchase of Brinsea Products. Seen here, receiving his voucher at the Fair on May 2nd, is Peter, with Andrew Bedford, Sales Director of Brinsea.

**C**hetwynd Park was once again the venue for this years falconry fair and judging by the number of people who attended, a successful one. The weather held out despite the forecast of rain during the two day event. The only real downfall occurred during Sunday night and the traders had to park their vehicles in the public car park on the Bank Holiday Monday because of the soggy ground in some places.



# Falconry Fair 2004

The fair did not get off to a good start in the main area with Charlotte Hill opening the proceedings and losing her peregrine falcon, in consequence of which, put a bit of a dampner on the rest of the flying displays for the rest of the day - just in case the bird returned to 'nail' any other bird flying in demonstration. She did, thankfully, get her bird back but not until the following morning.

Unfortunately there were long time gaps in-between displays.- in the past years, something was more or less going on all the time. Brian Paterson, Terry Large and South East Falconry Club were once again the main stays of the flying demonstrations.

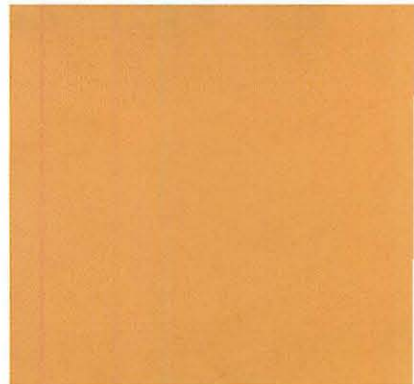
A real colourful event was provided by The Knights of Arkley. A medieval jousting and simulated fighting team displaying their great horsemanship and skills which drew a good crowd on both days of the event. A parachute team also provided some entertainment with their skills at landing from a great height onto a cross in the main arena.

There are, of course, a great many stands at the fair and all the other traders that I have spoken to, had a busy two days because of the number of people who attended the event.

On a final note, a big thank you to Ron Morris and his 'army' of helpers for their help in keeping the two days run as smoothly as possible with the number of vistor and traders that attended the fair. I do hope that Ron has a good year next year as well.







**O**ver the last four years I have been trying to design a bell that is not only good looking but will last for a good four or five seasons.

I was fed up with buying bells that cracked and broke within a season and have to go a buy another pair for the following season. I asked a friend to make me a block and punch on his lathe to a given dimension for the size of bell that I was happy with for my bird. At that time I was flying a male Harris hawk. With a digital vernier I measured a ball bearing which was in the tools stores at my work. I got the diameter and made the hole in the round piece of mild steel bar, which was about four inches across. I got a

the punch which is the same as last time 0.022". Once again you will have to keep on hitting the material in through the hole and flattening it as the material is drawn through the hole. Cut the excess material away and finish the two halves to remove all burrs. The two parts should screw into each other.

Next you need to make you clanger. I make mine out of mild steel for the black bells. The clanger should be about 15% of the size of the internal diameter of the larger half of the bell. I use hex icon bar, which you can buy from any model shop, most people use this for gears in their steam engines. Pinch part of both ends so they go to a point, this then makes the clanger ring when moved slightly as it can not keep still in side the bell.

Get some rough sandpaper and score

Also you can see small cracks where the three dots are punched in. Another way that the bells loose tone is that some bell makers put a softer material in rather than mild steel; this makes the bells sound great when you receive them but over time the material wears and the sound goes fainter and fainter. The bell will never crack and stay together but you will have no sound a season or so later.

Next you need to drill two 1/16" holes in the top of the bell so you can make the distance between the holes any size you want as it all depends on which leather you are going to use and how thick you want it. I use kangaroo leather and I find this to be the strongest and the lightest, which is great for the spars and merlins as all the weight on the bird counts. Once you have drilled the holes you need 1/16" brass welding rod.

# The sound of bells

*Andy Peel*

piece of brass which was 0.022" thick and cut it in to a circle. The punch then had to be 0.022" smaller than the hole so the material could slide in to the die, see **Fig. 1**. This then gave me a half circle after a lot of tapping the excess material flat, every time I hit the brass because the excess material has no where to go except up.

Once you have got a shape that you like you can then cut the excess material away. This then gives you half a bell, which is dull in appearance and has been work hardened with the hammering. Next you need to make the other half of the bell. This time you have to measure the inside of the half-bell which you have just made - this will give you the inside diameter. Then take away another 0.002" plus another 0.002" and this will give you clearance so the bell slides into one and other. This then is the size of your new dies for the second half. Once again for the punch you have to take away the thickness of the material to make the size of

the inside of the bottom half of the bell. This stops the clanger from sliding and gives it a good surface to move on. Once you have finished put the clanger inside and press the two halves together. If they don't fit sandpaper the inside of the rim of the bottom half. Squeeze them together and silver solder them together. Put the bell on a cold surface and leave it to cool down to its natural state, whilst you are waiting start making the other bell. I know the method may seem a little long-winded but that's how I make all my bells.

If you look at other bell makers they use a three dot punch system. This is where you use a fly press to make the two halves and put three dots in your material to hold the bell in place as they are not an exact size and the dot leaves a gap all the way round once the two halves are put together. Then they back fill with silver solder. I think this way you loose tone as the materials are vibrating through the silver solder and not the bell.

Using a pair of pliers and long nose pliers you can bend the rod round the end of the pliers as shown in the picture below which should then fit perfectly into the two holes drilled before.

Once you have achieved the correct gap for the leather you can silver solder the joints. This then gives you a great joint and also helps release stress in the material. Other people cut a thin piece of material and weld to the top, it's up to you but I don't trust it as it can open the weld as they can come apart and you loose your bell. Always use a good flux as this gives you an excellent chance of a good strong weld. Place the bell on a cold surface, I use the garage floor, as this brings the temperature of the bell down slowly. Once you have let the bell cool down you can begin to cut the slot.

Using a junior hacksaw cut the slot down to the soldered joint leave about 0.2" from the joint - this is when you are releasing the

press in the bell and the tone is determined. If you cut too far you will cut into the solder and the tone will be very low and tinny. When you have cut the slot, drill both ends of the slot with a 3/32" drill. Then you can ring the bell. You need to remove the burr inside where you have just cut, get a thin piece of material and run along the inside of the bell. I use an old pair of feller gauges this gets rid of any burrs.

You then need to 'gap' the bell, I set the gap in my bells at 0.025". This also can change the tone of the bell so, have a play around and you will come up with the sound that you prefer. The bells are finished and now its up to you to polish them.

To polish my bells I take the grinding stones of my grinder and drill two holes in polishing mops from the model shop. Push them on the spindles and use the locking nuts for the stones. I have been using these for the last four years and they are still going strong. You can also use Brasso or any other brass cleaner. At the end of the season all the bells look like they need a good clean, drop them in a cup of Coca-Cola and leave them overnight - you will see the difference in the morning. Run some water over them, dry them off and put them away for the following season.

If your bells do not sound as good as you want heat them back up until they are cherry red and leave them on a cold surface and this will change the tone; you can keep doing this with my bells for a good few seasons and it will help them as you are annealing them each time.

Depending on which material you use you can get a good two to three seasons out of the bells if you look after them. You can get all the materials you need from model shops all over the country. Brass is about £24 for a sheet of around 16" by 16" in size and you should get eight sets out of this as you waste a lot through the shape of you first cuts.

Remember this is just normal brass, you will pay more for different grades, which will give different tones and quality. I think nickel silver is a lot cheaper to buy but you get what you pay for.

I think that everyone should learn to make their own falconry equipment as it will help you to appreciate the sport and skill that is in British falconry. If anybody needs help with making bells please e-mail me on [andy@peelsbells.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:andy@peelsbells.fsnet.co.uk). I hope that you all have had a good breeding season and that the next hunting season is as good as the last!



● Fig.1



● Pushed two halves together



● Drill 1/16" hole



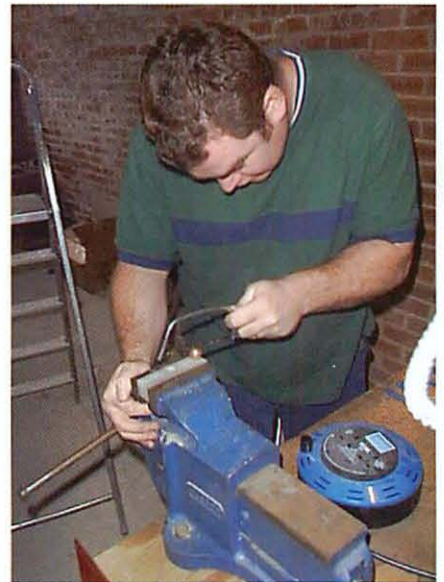
● 1/16" Welding rod



● Hitting the material flat



● Joining the two halves



● Cutting the slot



● Polishing the bell

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Warwickshire, Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, & the West Midlands.

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We meet on the second Sunday of each month at 8pm, throughout the year, at the Sports Connexion, Leamington Road, Ryton on Dunsmore, Coventry.

### CLUB MISSION STATEMENT

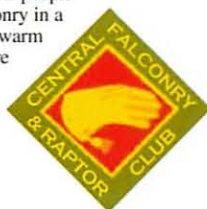
The mission statement of the C.F.R.C. is to offer people the opportunity to embrace all aspects of Falconry in a spirit of good companionship. There will be a warm welcome to people of all ages, whether they are experienced falconers, novices, or families.

For more information e-mail:

[cen.falc@ic24.net](mailto:cen.falc@ic24.net) or phone

John Hill 07973 224609

[www.central-falconry.co.uk](http://www.central-falconry.co.uk)



## The Welsh Hawking Club



**SOUTH WALES, Usk**

Contact: *Helen Scourse* Tel: 01600 860458

**NORTH WALES, Chester**

Contact: *Neil McCann* Tel: 01512 930364

**SOUTH WEST, Exeter**

Contact: *Dave Scott* Tel: 01752 830382

**BATH, Hinton**

Contact: *Dave Jones* Tel: 01934 811300

**THE MIDLANDS, Loughborough**

Contact: *Mike Kane* Tel: 01773 811491

**COTSWOLDS, Evesham**

Contact: *Shaun Healey* Tel: 01386 832812

**ESSEX, Colchester**

Contact: *Andy Hulme* Tel: 01206 729363

★ FOR ALL GENERAL ENQUIRIES CONTACT ★

**Jan France, secretary, 01279 842440**



## Brittany Club of Great Britain

For information and help on all aspects of this versatile breed phone:-

**01788 860048**

or e-mail:- [bcgbsec@aol.com](mailto:bcgbsec@aol.com)

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Contact our Falconry rep, Tony Ellis, on:-

**01666 510067**

or visit the club website [www.brittanyclub.co.uk](http://www.brittanyclub.co.uk)

## WEST OF ENGLAND HAWKING CLUB

We are a fast growing club with members ranging from complete novices to seasoned falconers.

We meet the first Monday of every month at the Bull Inn, Hinton nr Bath. Our meetings are informal and friendly and provide an opportunity to exchange experiences, arrange field trips and establish contact with local falconers.

Guest speakers and falconry furniture suppliers regularly attend. We also run beginners' workshops.

ALL NEWCOMERS WELCOMED.

For more information please telephone:

- Rob Kelly 01275 891813
- Keith Wicks 01454 315810
- Tony Ellis 01666 510067

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For information contact:

**07711 514073**

[www.lancsfalconry.co.uk](http://www.lancsfalconry.co.uk)



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**Monthly meets on the first Sunday of the month at 6.30pm.**

Venue:-

**The Falcon Inn, Hilton near Thornaby-on-Tees**

For further information contact:-

**Lee Copeland on 07802 251502**

or **Jono on 07760 225555**

E-mail: [clevelandhawkingclub@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:clevelandhawkingclub@yahoo.co.uk)

[www.clevelandhawkingclub.20m.com](http://www.clevelandhawkingclub.20m.com)

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or

**Jenny on - 0151 424 7217**



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or

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**Mr Graham Irving**

**Membership secretary**

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# club directory

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Further details from:

**Tommy Bryce 01620 850209**

★ We are a D.E.F.R.A. recognised club ★

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AIMS TO SUPPORT FALCONERS IN THE CONTINUATION AND PRACTICE OF FALCONRY.

Drawing its membership from around the South and East of England, the SEFG provides a forum for falconers and would-be falconers to meet, discuss and practice the art. Members benefit from having access to a wealth of experience and knowledge, good facilities and field meeting opportunities throughout the winter months.

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

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

For further information or an application form please contact -

Dean White (secretary) on 01489 896504

E-mail us at [enquiry@sefg.org](mailto:enquiry@sefg.org) or visit our web site [www.sefg.org](http://www.sefg.org)

## Northern England Falconry Club

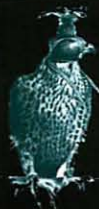
Club meetings are held at:-

“The White Swan”

Public House, High Street, Yeadon.

(2 mins from Leeds & Bradford Airport).

Contact: G Shaw on **01274 780800**



New from

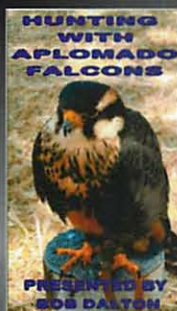
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**L**ast year Brinsea introduced the Contaq X8, the first incubator to use Contact Incubation Technology. Ian Pearce, Managing Director of Brinsea looks at breeders' results in the first season.

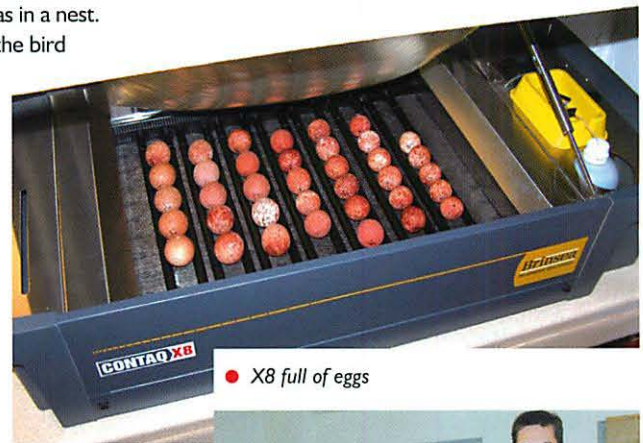
At Brinsea we have long felt that while conventional incubation technology, surrounding an egg with warm air, is good for many breeds, it isn't the best way to incubate falcons and other wild and valuable species. In nature, a bird sits on the eggs and passes body warmth to them through a brood patch, making the eggs warmer at the top than at the bottom. At irregular intervals the bird gets up, exposing the eggs to cool air and then

2003 Falconry fair.

The brood patch is a plastic membrane filled with warm air, which presses on eggs sitting between rollers on a moveable base. Air flows through this base, as in a nest. Deflating the skin simulates the bird standing and moving the base reproduces the egg movements: CIT is the complete combination of bird and nest, with none of the hazards.

So how has this theory translated into improved breeding results? We are still gathering data from breeders who have used the Contaq X8 this season, and we are also waiting

work. We assembled and thoroughly tested a replacement machine and, on Good Friday, drove it to Yorkshire. (The broad fabric belt that moves the eggs had



● X8 full of eggs



● Ian with X8

# Contact incubation - the first season

rearranging them, so a different part of the egg comes in contact with the brood patch. Some species even leave the eggs exposed and cooling while they forage for food or defend their territory.



● Heat flow through egg.

Recent academic research on egg incubation shows that for some species in the nest there can be a temperature difference across the egg of as much as 20 degrees. How the heat flows within the egg has proved to be far more complex than previously suspected and the complex interaction between heat flow, the developing embryo and the brood patch plays an important role in embryo growth and successful incubation.

## Theory to practice

We used this research to guide us in developing the Contact Incubation Technology (CIT) that is at the heart of the Contaq X8, launched at the

results of academic research, but already there are some clear trends emerging. And we are overwhelmed at the success. One measure is that we estimate that around 30% of all commercial falcons bred in the UK in 2004 were incubated in the Contaq X8. Not bad for the first season of a machine using new technology!

## Breeding results

Two of the largest commercial falcon breeders have allowed us to share some of their results. One breeder, based in Wales, used the Contaq X8 for species that are more difficult to hatch. Of 50 viable, fertile eggs in the machine, only three failed to hatch. This is almost 95% hatching, higher than their normal average of between 85% and 90% across all species. They plan to add a further Contaq X8 for next year's season.

The second breeder, in Yorkshire, started the season with a single Contaq X8 and then added a second. All their eggs were incubated in these machines, and there was a 10% increase in hatch rates. They too plan to add further machines for next season.

The second machine for this customer had some teething problems. It was delivered in the week before Easter and, after it was assembled, the turning mechanism didn't

become stuck to the drive roller – we now stitch the belts rather than glue them).

## Incubation lessons

The best results when using the Contaq X8 appear to be when the air in the membrane is at a higher temperature than with conventional incubators. We would normally recommend around 37.2° C for our incubators, but with CIT the optimum appears to be at least 39° C, close to a birds' body temperature of around 40° C.

The independent research programme, which is comparing CIT with conventional incubation and looking at the results of different temperatures on hatch rates, has found that the shell of the egg in contact with the membrane is measurably cooler than the membrane temperature, which may explain this.

The breeders were not wholly uncritical. Turning, both timing and amount of turn, is programmed into the incubator by the user, but the breeders want confirmation that turning has happened. We are looking at this and plan to implement recording in the next upgrade to the control system.

The general feeling among the other breeders we have spoken to echoes that of the Yorkshire breeder, "It (the Contaq X8) is as good as, if not better than, leaving the egg with the bird." Any serious falcon breeder should look closely at CIT for their next season.

an interview with

# Charlotte

# Hill

**Charlotte Hill first took an interest in birds of prey whilst at school, attending work experience at Cotswold Falconry Centre and the Birmingham Nature Centre. She studied animal care at agricultural college in Moulton, Northants, and during her course spent time at the National Birds of Prey centre where her interest developed.**

When she finished college she went to Eagle World in Denmark for three years. She helped in general management of the birds, training and breeding, and took part in daily demonstrations to crowds of up to 1,500. She has spent time with falconers from around the world, including the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Australia and Japan, as well as working back in the UK at the National Birds of Prey Centre. Charlotte has now put together her own team of birds of prey to display at events around the country. She is aided by her father, John, who is Chairman of the Central Falconry and Raptor Club. He also sits on the Hawk Board and is active on the Campaign for Falconry. I took the chance to have a chat with Charlotte, who celebrated her 26th birthday in June, as she starts on her new

venture – CJ's Birds of Prey Demonstrations.

**When did you first have an interest in birds of prey ?**

In 1993 Dad and I visited the National Birds of Prey centre and then the Cotswold Falconry Centre. We just watched the demonstrations and I was addicted to it - and I've had the addiction ever since.

**So what made you decide to take up a career in working with birds of prey ?**

I was no good at anything else ! No, it was just a love of the birds and an addiction to falconry. If I could do a job working with birds of prey, that way I could enjoy life to the maximum – no worries !

**You've worked in different countries – can you tell me a bit about them ?**

I've worked full-time in two countries – Denmark and here. I did a short stint in Japan for four weeks to help the falconer set up the birds for the season – and I also did a few shows there. Also, whilst I was holidaying in Australia for six or seven months, I went and helped out in a centre

there a few times. I got the Denmark job through Dad – he knows Emma Ford and whilst he was talking to her she mentioned that Frank Wensel of Eagle World in Denmark was looking for staff.

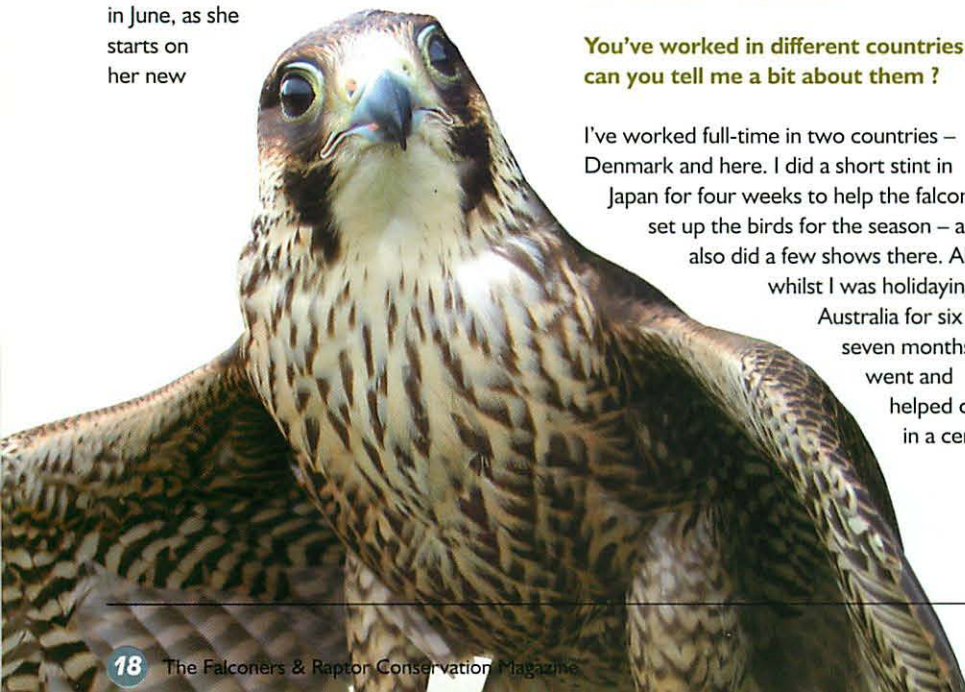
**How did you get on with the different languages ?**

In Denmark they want to speak English so that wasn't a problem. Japan was a big problem because hardly anyone spoke anything other than Japanese. I had to learn a bit – but only enough to say who I was at the beginning of the shows and we had an interpreter. But we picked up enough to get by. In Austria they all speak German and I can speak a little, so no real problems there.

**In your experience, is the approach to birds of prey different in other countries ?**

The way they respect their birds is at a different level. I've been out hunting in Czechoslovakia with the Germans and their passion for their eagles is something you just don't see over here. It's all one to one – they just have their one eagle and the passion they have for that bird is just incredible. They pick a golden eagle up with their bare hands and they wash their feet with a nail brush and manicure them – they're just absolutely fascinated and obsessed with their birds – it really is an obsession.

In Japan I only really had contact with one falconer because the birds were Jemima's,





*Jemima agreed that if I took the job in Japan then she would take me on for the summer - and I ended up being there for three years*

which we either took out with us or were already there. But I met this one gentleman who made falconry equipment to an incredible standard – the fine detail that had gone into it was unbelievable. But generally it seemed that they viewed the bird of prey as a “killing machine” – I didn’t get a feeling of passion through talking to them like I did with the Germans and the Austrians – or the Slovaks, whose birds are so steady. We went on a protest against the banning of falconry in the capital city centre of Slovakia and there were Goshawks, Gyr Falcons, Golden Eagles all sat on the bus, one behind the other, without hoods on – it was amazing !

**How did you get your job at the National Birds of Prey Centre ?**

I’d just started my first proper full-time job working for a company called RCI, who were involved in selling on time-shares. I did my full one month’s training and then went into the main office on the Monday. That day Dad got a phone call from Terry Large asking whether I would like to go to Japan for six weeks to help Jemima. She had a contract to supply the birds and staff to a centre in Japan. The birds stayed out there

permanently and she only had one member of staff to send out and needed another. I took all of about two hours to decide but I was bound by a contract whereby I had to give a month’s notice so it took me a little while to wheedle my way out. It didn’t go down well, particularly bearing in mind the amount of money my one month’s training had cost, but I decided I had to give it a go. Jemima agreed that if I took the job in Japan then she would take me on for the summer - and I ended up being there for three years.

**Jemima is well known for her conservation work – are you interested in conservation ?**

Yes, I am interested in conservation. I don’t like the new laws about barn owls, where if a wild barn owl comes in injured you can’t release it unless you’ve got the right paperwork. That doesn’t make sense – it’s a wild bird and it has to go back to the wild. I think there are too many people in the country “doing” conservation incorrectly and therefore it is a

problem. There are people doing good work and they get bad-mouthed – they all get grouped together. I don’t have the time at the moment to become actively involved in conservation. However, if someone came to me with an injured wild bird, I would do my absolute utmost to get it fit and healthy and back into the wild – just as I would with any captive bred bird which came to me injured. I would do





# Charlotte Hill

everything I could to get it back to as healthy and fit a life as possible.

I don't agree with keeping numbers of wild birds for no reason. If you're going to keep a wild bird in captivity there definitely has to be a good reason for it. I don't agree with keeping, say, six or seven injured wild birds in one aviary – half have got one wing, some have no eyes – that's no life; those birds had freedom. If any vet said to me that a bird was not going to recover enough to have a

truth needs to be told about these birds. Yes, there are a lot of people in this country who are educating the public about birds of prey but I just want to do all I can to help promote the truth.

### What is your favourite species of bird and why ?

I've never really had a favourite species, but I have had individual favourites. Like Ruby, a Burrowing Owl which I hand-reared and flew at Jemima's. She just thrived for the public and performed for the crowd. If there was no crowd there, it was just not worth taking her out of her aviary, but with a crowd she's just superb. Then there's Tulsa, my female Harris who just has a comical character about her. We were out hunting last year and we were walking along eating scotch pancakes and she just took a chunk out of mine and then promptly spat it out. Not content with doing it once, she then went and did it again !

### What is your opinion on banning hunting with dogs ?

I think it's a complete and utter waste of time trying to ban it. For one reason, the police aren't going to be able to enforce it. Also, if you have got more than three dogs as pets and you take them out walking in the park, they are going to chase birds and rabbits – it's their natural instinct to do it – you can't stop them.

As regards fox hunting, I think we have to support it as falconers even if we're not behind it 100%. I personally don't have a problem with fox hunting - I've been out fox hunting, not on horseback but with the vehicles, and I've enjoyed it. But I think we have to support it because if they ban that then it will soon come down to falconry and that would be devastating.

### What has been your worst moment when flying a bird in demonstration ?

The most recent and one that sticks in my mind is at the Falconers Fair with my one year old Peregrine, Oban. People have said since that he sat there too long before taking off, but I knew that that was his nature. He always takes for ever to take off – he always has done. One thing I must say is that I was disappointed at the lack of support when he went missing. In fact, when he first went missing I had no support at all. I was shocked that, with the number of falconers who were there, not one supported me initially, when I would say is



good life, then I'm strong enough to say that it has to be put down. I really feel strongly that wild birds deserve a good life. In Austria I went to a private collection where the owner had 56 kestrels in one small aviary – all were injured and could not be released back into the wild. I hated that.

### So what decided you to have your own flying display business ?

Jemima was going to America last year and I stayed until the last day of work. I then thought that as I'd worked in a few centres and got experience from lots of different people, not just one person, perhaps the time was right to set up on my own. People still believe that the Peregrine is on the endangered list in this country. I think the

It was so comical. I don't have a favourite because, if you have a favourite then it's not fair on the others. But every bird is different. In Denmark I used to love watching the Peregrines and Gyrs fly – the power behind them was just breathtaking. When one is flying straight at you to the lure it's incredible to watch. But, as I've said, I don't have any one favourite species - I just love 'em all. My current team of birds consists of Lazurite (a female Saker), Oban (a male Peregrine), Morangie (a male Lanner), Laphroaig (an Indian Tawny Eagle) and Jack, Dan, Tulsa and Jallard (my four Harris' Hawks).

***I was shocked that, with the number of falconers who were there, not one supported me initially, when I would say is the most critical time***

the most critical time. Later in the day, he came towards me and flew through a deer fence – this ripped my heart out because I thought he had badly injured himself. And after that we lost the signal. It wasn't until the evening when we were talking with people, that Bryan Paterson and Jose Souto from the BHA, offered to help – they hadn't realised that the bird was still missing and were upset that no-one had told them. George, the Chairman of Raptor Rescue, also volunteered to help – he was unaware that the bird had gone missing at all. So we all

went out to try and triangulate the position of the bird. We did pick up a signal but because of the hills and valleys we couldn't pinpoint it. We had to return when it got dark.

We all went out again at 5.00am next morning and eventually George located him in a little copse, sat in a tree, absolutely soaked. I went out into the field to swing the lure and try to entice him out, but he wasn't budging anywhere. We tried to work out whether we could climb the tree safely, but there was no way. Eventually he came out towards the lure but, unfortunately, the grass was long and every time he bound to the lure and came down to the ground he let go – I found out the hard way he doesn't



like long grass! He then went and sat in another tree and exactly the same thing happened – he came out and bound to the lure and as he came down to the ground he let go and went off. As he has always jumped to the fist, I then thought I'd try to call him down to the fist. However, I couldn't get far enough away to get an angle which wasn't too steep. He took off from the tree and came towards me but was two or three feet too high and flew over me and away until we lost the signal again.

Jose had to get back to the Fair to open his stand, but George stayed out with us. We then went through the boggiest field you can imagine – the cows were up to their knees in s\*\*t and even they were struggling! We carried on and picked up a signal in a far off

wood. We then came across a flooded brook which we could not cross, so we had to go back to the van and drive round. On the way we drove through a farm yard and came across a bull standing in the middle of the path. George was just going to get out to shoo him on, when a turkey appeared and started attacking the wheels of the van. Every time the van moved, he attacked the tyres. I tried to drive up slowly to the bull, but he would not move. Eventually, I distracted the turkey on one side of the vehicle, while George got out of the other and shoo'd the bull away. It just seemed that everything that could go wrong, was going wrong!

We carried on but we couldn't then pick up any signal – we'd lost him completely. We drove around in the van with an omni-directional aerial on top (this had been lent to us by Jim Chick who had helped us try to find him the previous day) and, after changing frequency, managed to pick up a signal. So we went up to the farm to ask whether we could look around the land and the biggest Alsatian you have ever seen in your life came bounding up to us, teeth bared and growling! So no-one dared get out of the van!

So we turned around and drove away, and then walked across the fields. We found him on the floor in a wood. Everyone had been looking up for him in all different directions because the signal was bouncing around, and we found him sat on a root on the wood floor. He actually ran towards me in



desperation and came instantly to the fist. He appeared to be uninjured – and Raptor Rescue checked him over for me later and he seemed OK. I am so grateful to Bryan, Jose and George, and the BHA for their help – I can't thank them enough. I don't think I would have been able to pick up his signal with my telemetry because of the terrain – I'd probably still be there now!

### Would you like to own your own falconry centre?

No. I like the freedom that we've got now – if we want to do a show, we can. But, if we've something planned, or if we want to go out hawking on a day and we don't want to do a show, we can say no. I don't want to be tied down 200% instead of the 150% we are already.

### What are your ambitions for the future?

To do what I'm doing now full-time. Educating people about the facts of falconry – why we do what we do and how we help in conservation of the birds. How keeping birds in captivity for breeding can help the wild population. It's a good feeling when people say they've seen these birds in the wild but they've never been this close to the birds and felt the emotions that we do about them – that's really good, it just blows my heart. Education is important. If someone comes up to me at the end of a show and says they've learnt something, that's good enough for me. I've done my job then – it's not finished, and it never will be.

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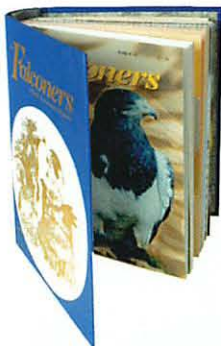
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# Independent Bird Register

List of lost, found, reunited and stolen birds from the IBR between 6 April and 21 June 2004

**A**s I write this it's late May and the past hawking season already seems an age ago. Summer's a strange time for the hunting falconer; the demo flyer has his displays, the breeder his broods, the hunter just bobs about becalmed, reflecting on all that past action and looking ahead at what's to come.



# Scarce Rabbits and welcome Pheasants

During the closed season I do a lot of walking. In fact even during the season, if I'm not hawking, I'm walking. I find it therapeutic, a great unwinder: a rucksack, map – dog of course – and off! A big part of the pleasure is wildlife watching, even focusing on areas where specific animals or birds are likely to be encountered. And when out on hawking ground, it's impossible not to have a keen eye on the various quarries, summer observations hinting at what the season might hold. I'm almost terrified to whisper it, but judging by the number of rabbits I'm seeing on my hill ground, things are pointing to a very good year. And I need it – badly. Last season saw me really struggling to bring a respectable bag together. And the reason was mixy.

## The Arrival

I remember its arrival, an enemy I hadn't seen for some time, a forgotten threat now creeping back an evil plague. I didn't see the first casualties, had no inkling of what was on the horizon. Then one evening the phone rang. It was the landowner, a friend of many years. I could immediately tell something was wrong as he slowly eased into what he suspected but really knew to be a fact – mixy

had come. One oddly tame, confused animal on the drive had been the herald, and then the population fell as pathetic creatures with blind and seeping eyes marked the land.

You have to see myxomatosis up close to appreciate its wickedness, see just what it does, the stricken creature blundering about a world it no longer knows, unable, if it does attempt to flee, to even get back to its warren. Then you handle it – as you must to put it out of its misery – and fully register all that suffering: the puss, swellings and massive flea infestation. It's man induced and you can never get the stench from your skin. The foxes did well, the buzzards, ravens and crows too. But I saw a season I might be sitting out.

## Worrying Picture

The countdown to the first hawking trip was torture. Summer was past, taking the mixy with it, and very soon we would know what the season held. How many rabbits had been spared? Would we be doing any flying at all? I'd watched these rabbits bounce back from disaster before, seen them restock this ground – ground their kind had inhabited for centuries – as only coney can, but still my stomach was on edge. It was like waiting for

an exam result or the outcome of a job interview. You were desperate to know, but terrified at the same time. I remember the journey there, the sombre mood and funeral procession pace. I'd already resigned myself to the worst. There was going to be no university, and the hope of that job would end with a polite letter. I looked at Rob our border collie. He'd picked up the vibes but remained his ever-positive self. He loved this hill, loved the hawking, loved the rabbit numbers – loved the full days packed with action. Things would continue as they always had. I hoped he was just a bit right, I really did.

By the end of that first session we had a pretty clear picture of the situation. As I feared, rabbit numbers were way down – cover hunting indicated it but it was with ferreting that the true picture was seen. The most striking thing was the low yield per warren; many sites saw just one rabbit in occupation. You could visualise these lonely individuals trundling about the empty echoing corridors of their huge ancestral homes, mansions they'd inherited but now struggled to maintain.

And quite a few warrens were empty, Rob speedily sweeping sections that would have previously had him halting at mark after mark. It was a strange business – for dog and man. To start with I questioned his reliability: could so many warrens be barren or had something gone wrong with his marking? This collie is very sensitive with his work and I'd once unwittingly triggered a problem with his marking, a problem I then made worse by not recognising I'd triggered it to start with! Was it me again? Had he picked up on my worry that he might not be marking correctly, feel he was doing wrong? But no, it wasn't me and it wasn't his nose, there were just no rabbits! One thing's sure, that season boldly underlined Rob's worth. His ability to sift unoccupied from occupied warrens had always been valuable – was one of the main reasons for his acquisition – but now it was priceless. Without him many hours would have been wasted at barren sites.

With so few rabbits, to use the farm all season long would require us to tread very carefully; the last thing I wanted to do was add to the rabbits' struggle. And so, the normal three rabbits per outing rule was altered to two, often settling for one if the bird had enjoyed enough flying. And we did a lot of 'hunt stretching', before looking for that single kill, deliberately flying over areas where there were poor chances of success but which gave the Harris' some free-flight time.

Operating this way, and pencilling in a short season, I didn't feel we would drain the





farm's resources too much. And as with every season there was another safety factor: this farm has countless rabbit strongholds that can't be ferreted at all – the forests of gorse being a perfect example – and from these areas would come the restocking troops.

### Closer to Home

Away from the hill, local arable-land hawking began to play a more important role than it had for some years. I'd neglected my near-to-home patches a little due to the problem of finding rabbits – or at least rabbits in the right spots. It's the same for any arable land rabbit hawker. You find the perfect field, a field bursting with the type of cover to tempt rabbits away from their warrens, and there aren't any warrens for them to be tempted from! Then you get a field so bare it wouldn't shelter a mouse, and it's got warrens all along it! Ferrets can help – often a lot – and you may even find that rarest of things on the modern farm – a rough corner – but things are often stacked against productive enjoyable hawking.

But now I started to look at some of my local arable patches with a keener eye and the renewed association with one particular farm revealed quite a promising picture: some good root field setups for rabbits; a few more hares than normal; but most importantly, pheasants were in overflow. This farm always had pheasants but that mixy year they ruled.

### One Sided Love Affair

My relationship with the pheasant has always been a bit strange; for the most part a one-sided love affair, it wanting me so very much more than I wanted it. I've just never found 'feather' desirable. It's a kind of programming: I came into the sport with 'fur', have spent most of my time with those who hunt it, and will no doubt have a

*My relationship with the pheasant has always been a bit strange; for the most part a one-sided love affair, it wanting me so very much more than I wanted it*

headstone with two neatly carved long ears! Also I've experienced trouble with pheasants. Big trouble. In the last issue I talked about all the undesirable places pheasants can take hawks to, or over – the rivers, canals, gardens. And they've taken me there too, many times – especially those gardens! No, one way or another, pheasants have never been high on my popular quarry list.

However, I have to confess they have been gaining ground. With fewer rabbits to pursue on the local farms, I've been forced to take the big game bird a bit more seriously, and that mixy season had me very attentive indeed. The dog of course was up for it: forget empty rabbit warrens, let's bust some cover and send some pheasants up and into the blue! It's surprising how effective the collie is on pheasants. Whether working roots, marking them in hedgerows or

relocating them for the reflush, he has become quite a pheasant provider. There's something about the rattling rocketing departure of the longtail that gives him a real buzz. He's like it on most feathered targets, just the thrill of startling them into wild flapping panicked action has him beside himself with joy.

And if the dog was up for, the Harris' was up for it too. Flown primarily to furred targets for most of her career, she'd been slowly forced to widen her interests to meet our new circumstances. It was an interesting transformation, the growing drive, the grasping of the reflush; simply my commitment and focus providing her with flights and successes she needed. Top

pheasant hawk? Maybe not. But a lethal mediocre!

That season, and with her revved up by the mad band she was working with, she went at her pheasants as if starving. We had quick ones from trees, follow-ups and reflushes, some caught out in the open, some beaten with sneaky tactics, some caught by luck, and many who had the luck on their side. And of

course some of those gardens got visited – and a good few flower borders modified – but we'd got the bug, had gone pheasant mad!

What pheasant numbers will be like this season I don't know. And I'm hoping I don't need to find out. With luck the hill ground will be back to its old self, rabbits crammed into warrens like sardines, and the dog like a kid in a sweet shop, not knowing which one to mark first. I was out there yesterday – a good day for walking and rabbit counting. And I couldn't have wanted more reassurance, grey forms of assorted sizes lightening my step. And for a moment a soaring buzzard became the Harris' as I visualised the plummeting stoops and the sizzling direct pursuits. I could see it all – and feel the weight of the rucksack. Things will be back to normal. And if they aren't, well, you know the plan.



**I recently had the good fortune to spend the last few days of the French partridge Hawking season in some very good company and, as a result, enjoyed some first class sport. My good friend Diana Durman-Walters shares a Gyr/Peregrine tiercel with Henri Desmonts. Henri is a very accomplished and respected falconer who flies both game and sable quarry with falcons. He also has a well established kennel of English Setters. As I fly both Grouse and Partridge myself over setters as well as pointers I was very keen to see Henri's dogs in action on their home ground.**

Diana was going over to spend the last few day of the season with Henri and then bring the tiercel back to the UK with her at the end of it. She very kindly invited me to join herself and Henri for some hawking just north east of Paris. Diana was to do the driving and I would be navigator. As I loathe driving this suited me down to the ground. There were to be two falcons flown at Partridge and another, which was to be flown at Rooks and Crows. All three falcons had enjoyed a good season so far and therefore I looked forward to enjoying some flights.

### Arrival

With the aid of the channel tunnel and the superb French motorway system it took no time at all to reach our destination. The countryside we passed through looked to be excellent for game hawking, nice and open with plenty of cover strips and patches of rough ground. It was also very evident that there was an abundance of Rooks and Crows. I could see that things looked good for the possibility of some first class falconry over the next few days, but the one possible fly in the ointment was the weather forecast. Rain was predicted and apparently a great deal of it.

Thanks to some superb navigation we found our hotel with no bother at all and over dinner that evening discussed hawks and dogs until the early hours.

### Introductions

Next morning we made our way to the rendezvous with Henri and his party. He was accompanied by his good lady, his son who acted as under falconer, dog handler, four

setters and three falcons. Quite how they all managed to fit into a Citroen estate is still beyond me. Also, at the rendezvous, were the landowner, whose ground we were about to fly over and his sons. After the lengthy introductions it was time to start hawking.

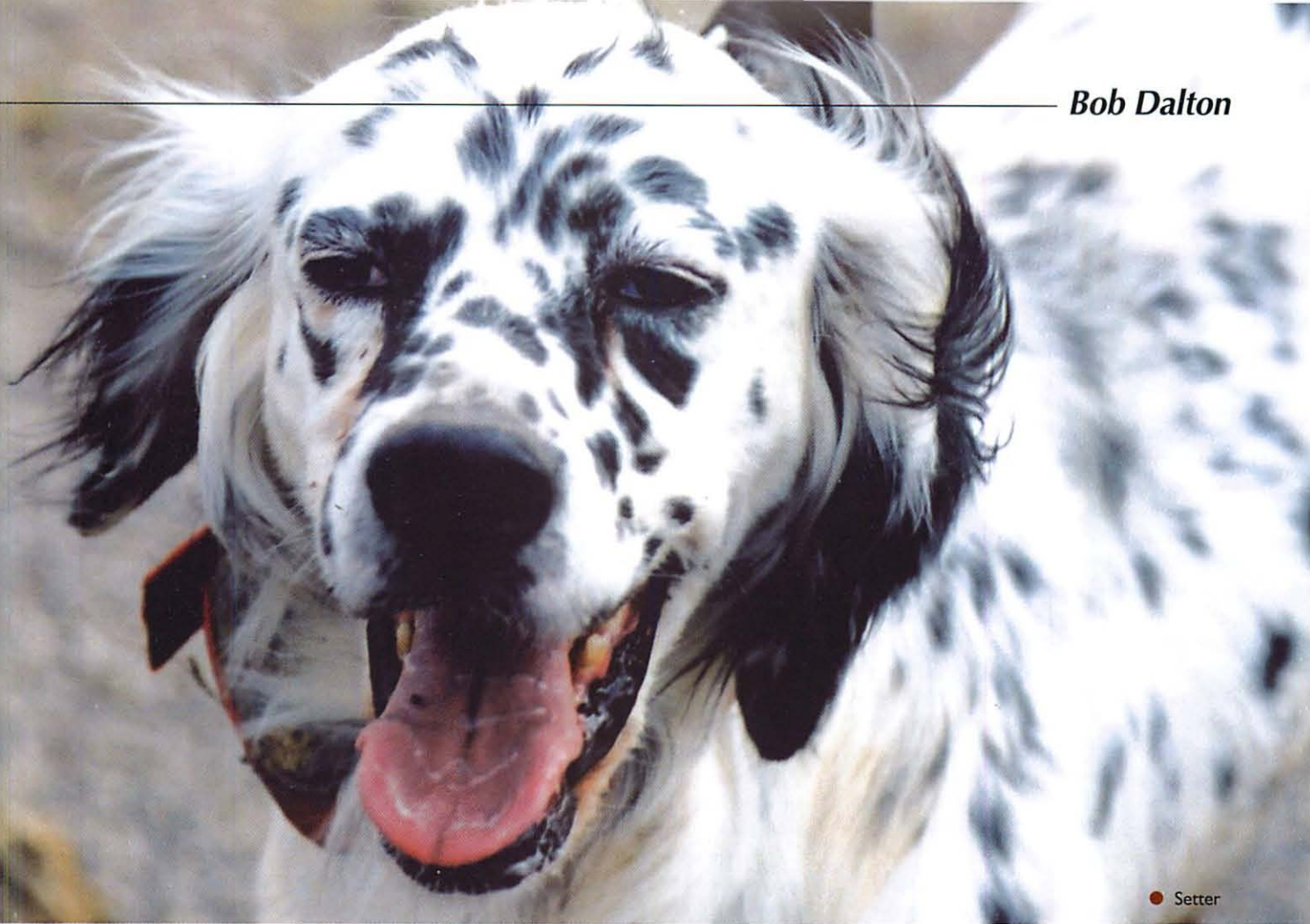
First to fly was the Gyr/Peregrine tiercel 'Ugolin' that Henri and Diana share. The landowner, when on his way to meet us all,

had marked down a covey of partridge. We made our way to the spot and the ground was carefully swept with several pairs of binoculars to make sure that they were still there. Once this fact had been established the tiercel was fitted with his telemetry and allowed to take to the air. Once the tiercel started to mount, two setters were cast off and encouraged to locate the game.

This they did very rapidly and very soon

# setting an example





● Setter

we had the superb sight of one of the setters adopting a classic pointing pose and being honoured by the second dog. In the meantime the tiercel was climbing well and soon it was at an extremely good pitch, but he was slightly downwind of the point. The partridge decided that now would be an opportune moment to try and make good their escape and subsequently took flight. The covey consisted of 11 birds and they barrelled away into the wind for all that they were worth.

### The stoop

But the tiercel was a match for their guile and their speed. He stooped as the partridge initially rose and the angle was a shallow one which meant he closed rapidly despite having

time there was no escape.

It had been an excellent flight and Ugolin had certainly deserved his prize. Diana was extremely pleased that her tiercel had flown so well. I had been impressed with his power as well as his determination.

### First year Peregrine

Next up to fly was a young peregrine falcon. This eyass had been doing well and had achieved a very reasonable score for its first season. The same tactics as before were employed for obtaining a flight. We searched for a covey of partridge with binoculars from our vehicles. Having found one we then withdrew a short distance and prepared the falcon. Once the bird had taken to the air another brace of setters were cast off and

put any effective pressure on the partridge. As she returned overhead the dogs locked up again and this time a controlled flush was carried out and the peregrine stooped almost vertically and knocked down a partridge in fine style.

### Unwanted guest and then lunch

As she started to pluck her kill, a Marsh Harrier appeared from nowhere and gave her a hard time. The young falcon surprised us all by actually leaving her kill and chasing the Harrier away. Having done so she returned to her partridge and calmly continued with her meal as if nothing had happened.

Having enjoyed two extremely good flights it was time to adjourn for lunch and take advantage of some legendary French hospitality. The land we were flying over was a traditional French arable farm, which had been in the hands of the same family for a number of generations. Our hosts had laid on a splendid lunch accompanied by some excellent local wines. As we were to do some more hawking in the afternoon the wines were passed over by Diana and myself but everyone else seemed to tuck in quite freely.

### Another hybrid's turn

The post lunch flight we would be looking for was one at rook and crow with another

***He closed on the covey at an awesome rate and struck the partridge he had singled out a decisive blow***

to stoop into the wind. He closed on the covey at an awesome rate and struck the partridge he had singled out a decisive blow. The tiercel then threw up and flipped over in an attempt to grab his prize on the ground, and the partridge waited until the falcon was at the moment of stall and then tried to fly off to some nearby cover. However, the bird was more than a match for the wounded quarry and within 20 yards had caught his prize. This

encouraged to find game.

They unerringly did so and once again we had the lovely sight of the dogs drawing onto their quarry and then locking up on point.

The young falcon was mounting well but she was quite some distance down wind from us. The partridge decided that discretion was the better part of valour and flew away whilst the coast was clear. The falcon gave chase but she was too far out of position to be able to

# setting an example

Gyr/Peregrine tiercel. The sable quarry was everywhere in abundance but it took a while to find a group that would actually offer a good slip in terms of wind direction and available cover. Eventually we found a group that filled all the criteria we were looking for. The falcon was unhooded and cast off at them.

For whatever reason the group of rooks obviously failed to measure up he was looking for and flew off in the other direction and ignored them completely.

The falcon had not come back after ten minutes or so and it was a case of out with the telemetry set and tracking him down. It did not take too long to recover him and we set off again looking for a decent slip. Twenty minutes later he was slipped again and this time everything appeared to be to his liking as he flew the quarry immediately. The flight was a very direct one and no stooping or shepherding of the flock was involved. The tiercel flew directly at the rook he had singled out and grabbed it and pulled it to the ground. Being a powerful falcon he dispatched the rook long before we arrived and was happily eating his prize as we drew up.

## Different location

Arrangements were made for meeting up the next day at a different farm and this time some of our field were to be mounted. Needless to say I was not going to be one of them. Having hawked from horseback in USA and Mexico, I am now truly wedded to four-wheel drive as opposed to four-legged drive. But Diana was going to join the riders and act as a flanker for the partridge hawking and a marker the rook hawking.

The rain that had so kindly held off for our first day's hawking had decided to join us at last. Fortunately although it was constant, it was not too heavy. We set off in search of some partridges again and this time had spotters on horseback as well as in vehicles. Soon a covey was marked down and Ugolin was prepared for the flight. He mounted well and a brace of setters were cast off. They drew onto the partridges almost immediately and things were looking good for a truly classic flight.

But over the horizon came a group of people, (I call them something else but is not printable here) in some four-wheel drive vehicles who were trespassing. Their selfish activities caused the partridge to flush prematurely and the possibility of a good flight was ruined.

Fortunately for us the tiercel maintained his pitch and the setters quartered the ground in search of another covey. The

setters were extremely wide ranging and found and pointed a covey a long way out on our flank. The tiercel was a long way out of position but he was extremely high. The partridge obviously felt that now was the time to move on and burst up in front of the dogs. There then followed one of the longest and most exciting stoops I have ever seen. It seemed to go on forever.

## The kill

When Ugolin finally hit his partridge it just seemed to explode in mid air. It looked like a stone dropping to the ground and the tiercel was on it immediately. An incredible stoop that had been a joy to watch and the whole field was spellbound. Fortunately the flight ended close to one of the field tat was on horseback. So they were able to keep an eye on the falcon till the rest of the field had time to get to the spot.

The young peregrine was next to fly and she was just not in the mood to hunt. A decent sized covey had been marked down in a patch of cover and two setters were being readied whilst the falcon was cast off, but the bird flew a short distance and then sat on a car. Eventually she took off again but merely flew to another vehicle and sat there. All the time the rain was still coming down and it looked as if she would soon be too wet to fly anyway. In desperation she was chased off in an attempt to get her in the air, but the falcon merely circled us once and then sat on the ground. At this point she was taken up and put away for the day. Obviously she was not fed there and then, as a bad lesson would have been learned.

The rain was increasing in intensity and it was decided to try and get a quick flight with the rook hawk before things deteriorated anymore.

## At the end of the day

A small group of rooks was spotted in open country and in a good situation with regard to the wind. The falcon was cast off at them and a really good flight ensued. The falcon singled out his intended victim and had to work extremely hard to get on terms with it. A series of short shallow stoops followed and eventually the rook was grabbed from below and both it and the falcon tumbled to the ground. One of the riders was first on the scene and on arrival at the kill was unceremoniously dumped by their horse into the mud. Was it Diana that was unsaddled? I couldn't possibly say.

Another day had come to an end all too quickly. We had again enjoyed some excellent sport, other than the young peregrine who just appeared to be having an off day, and



● Henri Desmonts with Ugolin



● Gyr/Peregrine on Partridge

then it was back to the hotel where one of us went out and enjoyed a beautiful meal in a charming little restaurant and the other person stayed and soaked in a hot bath in an attempt to minimise any bruising resulting from a fall.

## The peregrine and back home

The following day the young peregrine was the first to be flown and she promptly disappeared on us. Having given her a few minutes to return, which she failed to do, it was out with the telemetry. Unfortunately there was a fault with the receiver and no signal could be picked up. The field was divided into groups and a search was begun to recover the errant falcon. We all searched for the rest of the day and for most of the next but without any luck.

It was time for Diana and myself to return to the UK and Henri himself had to be back in the office the following day. So it was on a sad note that our few days hawking together had come to an end.

My own impressions of the trip were that the standard of hawking and dog work are very high in France, certainly in Henri's hands. Hospitality of the local people was also excellent.

As a footnote, Henri recovered the young peregrine just over a week later, which is good news. The bad news is that the Gyr/Peregrine that was flown at rooks was killed a few days after we left. He had stooped at a rook and cut it down and then died himself. Whether he was injured in the stoop or had something else wrong will never be known. But either way, a fine falcon has passed away.

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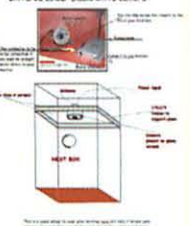
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If you hunt your hawk I can see the attraction of owning a ferret. You've got a hawk, negotiated land to fly over and that's all you do, fly over it, plus develop your leg muscles! Relying on walked up game is hard work for small rewards, unless you have a lot of game plus a line of beaters.

You could get a dog, a pointer perhaps. This costs money, maybe twice what the hawk cost, even if you train it yourself. And, if you do, it will take some time before it will be of much use. Or you can buy a ready trained one, which will cost a lot more, maybe six times what the hawk cost. And a pointer is only of use



# On buying

**This is not intended as a complete guide to buying and housing a ferret but a basic, guide to get your imagination working. For more in-depth details buy a book, but avoid ones imported from the USA that are available in many pet shops. Ferrets in the USA are a whole different ball game to ferrets in the UK.**

digging whilst keeping an eye out for the ferret and on the hawk. The first clang of spade on earth often livens things up when another rabbit bolts just as the digging starts. To start with I suggest you try to get an assistant as ferret handler, even a fellow hawker would do if you took turns to fly.

## Let's go get a ferret

You've sorted permanent accommodation then, after all a ferret can live for ten years so it's not a temporary arrangement. Traditionally it's called a cub or for larger structures a court but these days cage and hutch are more commonly used. You'll need a minimum of about 1.5 square metres of floor space for one or two ferrets and the addition of a caged run would be a welcome bonus. Hutches do not have to be on one floor, mine has two levels with a connecting ladder. I've seen a hundred versions from converted aviaries, to rabbit hutches, to sheds, to packing cases, even oil drums – you name it, it can be used. I've seen hutches with pipe systems buried around the garden with entrances in the hutch floor and I've seen hutches in sheds connected to a ceiling mounted pipe system. I've seen them kept indoors,

on above ground game.

Then there are running costs, vet bills, feed bills, exercise routine, kennelling fees when you want to go away and the 'can't leave it all day on its own' aggravation. Not to forget the estate car to move it around, and the time.

With a ferret on the other hand you could buy a litter for a fiver at the local market, it eats next to nothing, lives outside in a rough old hutch and needs no exercise. And it can travel the world in a small box. Plus bits of land with a few rabbit holes are commonplace and farmers are desperate for hawkers to come in and clear their fields of conies aren't they?

Like I say, I can see the attraction of

owning a ferret and can see you've set your mind on getting one. At this point remember, as with hawks, "lack of preparation is preparation for failure".

## Preparation?

So, have you considered how practical it is to properly handle hawk and ferret simultaneously? I suppose if you set a Harris in a conveniently positioned tree whilst you work the ferret it might be possible to get away with it. But it can only be done on buries with a tree in the right place, which can be somewhat restricting, or if you buy one of the portable perches. Also the ferret might grab a rabbit a bit prematurely and you'll need to start

sleeping in the bottom drawer of a sideboard and trained to use a litter tray. Not for me perhaps, but lateral thinking is good, be individual, go your own way. Town centre shopping areas may all look the same now but ferret housing doesn't have to go the same route. Just keep your ferrets dry and free from draughts. Like me and the rabbits they hunt, ferrets don't like to be cold and wet. Do you?

Remember the psychotic behaviour of caged polar bears pacing up and down the bars, spirit and brains destroyed by boredom? Ferrets can react like that too. Give them room plus daily attention and a way to exercise their imagination

then they'll flourish.

It is often said there is no such thing as a dirty ferret, only a dirty owner. In themselves ferrets are very clean little creatures and will designate one corner as a latrine. This makes it easy to clean out if they adopt the right corner, but 'Sods Law' says it won't be if you leave it to them. One dodge is to collect a few faeces from the ferret and smear them around the corner most convenient for you to muck-out before introducing the ferret, which will then usually use that corner.

On the subject of accommodation, if you make the sleeping section too large they may use one corner of that as a latrine. Try

to simulate the size they would get in the wild, perhaps in an adopted old rabbit bury. I use an open plan design in conjunction with a separate removable sleeping box, which makes it much easier to keep the whole area clean. Keep the entry to a sleeping box off floor level, it makes it warmer and put some ventilation holes at the top to prevent condensation forming. Not big enough to cause draughts though.

A supply of clean wood chips/shavings for the floor and dung corner is essential, so get one of the big compressed sacks meant for horses rather than the small bags you see in pet shops - it saves a lot of money. I bed mine down on barley straw, which is much softer than other varieties because I find shredded paper gets rather damp and hay is hot in the summer tending to make the ferrets smell, well, more 'ferrety' if you know what I mean.

And the last words on accommodation - location, location, location. Ferrets are not great lovers of too much heat so don't put a hutch where it will catch the sun all day. And in the other extreme not where rain will drive straight into it. A hutch with a view helps occupy their minds. And make sure fresh clean water is available at all times. I use a cage mounted rabbit drinker because give a ferret a bowl of water and inside ten minutes there will be a dry bowl and a wet floor, but they will have a glorious time doing it!

### Time to go

Time to get your ferret but have you got a carrying box with you? Well you'd better get one then hadn't you. Wood is best, plastic tends to sweat. Most ferreting is done in the winter months so the box needs to provide warm, dry, temporary accommodation. Get something reasonable sturdy but not too heavy - don't forget you have to carry the thing across fields once your ferret starts working. A good box can double as a seat when eating lunch, nothing like a touch of luxury.

This is the end of part one of Robin's article, so make sure you get the next issue of *The Falconers Magazine* to find out how to care for your ferret.

# a Ferret



*Remember the psychotic behaviour of caged polar bears pacing up and down the bars, spirit and brains destroyed by boredom? Ferrets can react like that too*

**K**im was a person who was willing to experiment with birds. Heron hawking was well known but not too many people have tried it. Fewer still with a Goshawk. Kim did try it whilst in Scotland but it was not successful and the Goshawk came off second best. Gordon Robinson, a contemporary of Kim's, does report in his book *The Sinews of Falconry* that Kim was successful with his Gos on lesser quarry, taking 26 rabbits on one occasion.

In 1939 the clouds of war loomed over Europe and things began to change. On August 26<sup>th</sup> 1939 Lodge recorded in his journal:

*'Had to cut short our holiday on Salisbury Plain (with Kim Muir), as owing to the*

We  
were

*exercising them. "Hector" was sent to Kim Muir at Newmarket this morning to be flown at Partridge'.*

It is doubtful that Kim had much time to fly Hector as he, along with many others, were preparing for war. Kim was probably aware this was to be the case and he passed one of his Tiercels to Blaine that was named 'Victory'. One wonders the significance of this name with the outbreak of war.

Kim was stationed at Tidworth prior to the war and was busy teaching others to read maps. Kim was a Lieutenant by this time in the 10<sup>th</sup> Royal Hussars. Ron Huggins, who at the time was a Sergeant Tank Commander, served with Kim. He recalls Kim as being well liked and respected by the soldiers and officers in his unit, which is something that is not easily attained. He also remembers Kim being a boxer for the Regiment and that he was good.

In September 1939 World War II was declared and many members of the B.F.C. suddenly found themselves in other parts of the world. For Kim Muir it was France. Prior to leaving there was one ambition that he wanted to fulfil. He was already regarded as an excellent horse rider and steeplechaser and he wanted to take part



*Kim Muir*  
1916 – 1940

# Falconers

part 2

*imminence of war, Blandford (Dr H.O.) had a wire recalling him back to his Sanatorium. So we packed up and went off. On the way we cut off the bells and jesses of our hawks (merlins), and enlarged them half way between Heytesbury and Chitterne, each with a good lump of beef, and trusted to luck.'*

This was the last recorded mention of Kim flying his bird(s) although in all probability he was still able to continue for a short time. Kim was still in England in November 1939. Blaine's journal records the following on Tuesday 14 November, 1939:

*'Lower Lotts, Hard, strong S. wind. None of the Hawks scored, the day being only fit for*

in one particular race, The Grand National. He did just that on 5 April 1940 riding "Away" a horse he both owned and trained. Kim was placed a very respectable eighth.

On 10 April 1940, just five days later Kim left for the battlefields of France. Prior to leaving he said his 'goodbyes'. He knew he was to never return and this he told to his family.

On the 27 May 1940, Kim was involved in a battle at Huppy-sur-Seine on the Somme. He was in a 6-ton light tank (as Betsy would say, 'Tin Pot Tanks against the Panzers'), which was knocked out by enemy fire and was ablaze. His Troop Sergeant, who was also his friend, was

severely wounded. Sgt. Ron Huggins recalls, "they were out of their damaged tank on the grass in a field sheltering near the burning tank. Lieutenant Muir, who was uninjured at this stage, was protecting and supporting his wounded Sergeant. I passed them in my Cruiser Tank and I saw Lieutenant Muir and I gave him a wave of support which he quickly returned".

Sergeant Huggins never saw him again. In the evening the fighting had stopped, by which time Kim had carried his Sergeant down a hill and had hidden in a wheat field. The 10<sup>th</sup> Royal Hussars had camped for the night and efforts were made to find him. He was located by voice still lying in the wheat field. Above the field was a line of



trees and within them there was enemy snipers. It was too dangerous for Kim to come out, especially with a wounded Sergeant who he would have to carry, and the decision was made to remain there until morning. He was trapped in no-mans-land.

It is known that his Sergeant did not survive the wounds he had received and Kim decided that he would crawl back to his own lines. He

headed in the direction of the voice he had previously heard.

Crawling in a field and knowing you are permanently going in the right direction is not easy and Kim was forced

to check by raising his head above the wheat from time to time. The snipers were watching and Kim was tragically shot in the head and immediately killed.

Kim was 23 years old when he died. He had owned Postlip Hall for two years. Another tally mark for the monk's curse.

As Kim predicted, he never returned to England, even in death. He is buried in France, at Hodeng-au-Bosc Communal Cemetery, in the village of the same name. After the war, his sister Gillian and cousin Betsy travelled to the churchyard in France to say their last farewell. They said a prayer by the grave marker that Gillian had specially engraved by a local mason and talked of his life between laughter and tears. It was a poignant moment in both their lives as they realised with sorrow he was truly and forever gone.

Following Kim's death the journal of Gilbert Blaine records the following:

### Season 1940.

*Kim Muir's sister wished me to take his good young game Tiercel, and so the hawk is here now. Kim was killed in action in France. Ronald Stevens has sent up Frank Muir to look after the hack hawks. He has also been in France in an R.F.A. battery. The first young falcon flew on June 20th August 1940. It was impossible to fly hawks until near the end of the month owing to the high winds and bad weather.*

*I sent one young Sanaig falcon to Robert Spens, who is marking time with his battery at Doncaster. The other young Sanaig falcon,*

*the darker one, I retained, with the two Tiercels. ("Perseus" and "Juniper" alias "George", Muir's Tiercel.)*

*The first time I took out the hawks "Perseus" caught an old partridge, the young falcon a grouse, which she unfortunately failed to kill and let go. This did her no good. K. Muir's Tiercel is a high mounter, but does not wait on, and is troublesome to fly.*

### August 1941.

*"Jupiter" alias "George", the Tiercel given me by Miss Muir in the summer of 1940, did not winter very*

*well. War conditions were against providing him with the best of food. In the spring and early summer he contracted a kind of wet frounce, which he got rid of later in the summer.*

In 1946 his sister Gillian in memory of Kim, introduced The Kim Muir Amateur Riders Chase. In 1991 it was renamed The Fulke Walwyn Kim Muir Handicap Chase and it is still run at Cheltenham today.

In the July 1949 issue of *The Journal* Kim's friend and hawking companion, H.O. Blandford, began his notice of Kim's passing with the poignant words Rudyard Kipling penned for his own son and other soldiers killed in the battles of the First World War:

*"They shall not return to us, the resolute, the young, the eager, and whole-hearted"*

And so it was with Ian Kay Muir, "Kim", as true a soldier, countryman, sportsman and falconer as ever there was. Sadly he was fated never to return to us, to train and fly his hawks for decades through the 20th century and into the 21st, to join us today in the field as one of falconry's "grand old men". But having read this, we hope that now and again you will think about young Kim when you are training your hawk, flying her across the autumn fields, or bragging about her exploits in the pub at night. And should you

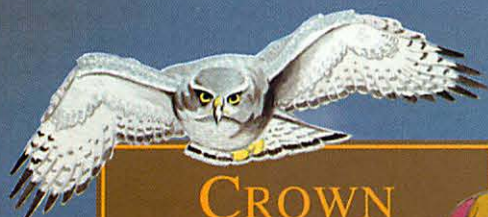
***"They shall not return to us, the resolute, the young, the eager, and whole-hearted"***



journey to far off France, and come upon his gravestone in Hodeng-au-Bosc, we hope you will run your hand gently across the image engraved at its top. It is the timeworn, but still a distinguishable picture of his well loved falcon Black Jess herself. The hawk that Kim looked after for far too short a time in life, now watches over him in death, protectively, for all eternity.

### further info

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*Avian and Exotic Animal  
Medicine and Surgery*

By Nick Kester,  
Communications Officer



So what does this mean to the man who flies his falcon, goshawk or even sparrowhawk at rooks? Well, it could mean that you have to apply for a special licence similar to that required for skylarks and blackbirds. Alternatively, we could rely on farmers' representatives making a good case for them to remain as pest species. Finally, we might consider fighting our own corner and telling DEFRA that it is quite absurd to permit hunters to take blackcock (at crisis levels) and not rooks (which may be declining but hardly enough to be affected by the odd falconry take).

What we need to stress is responsible sporting use. Here is a parallel. The pigeon is an agricultural pest but only in areas of arable crop production. It is certainly not a pest in my part of Wales where no crops are grown. So can I shoot pigeons in Norfolk and not in Carmarthenshire? Absurd you might say, but taken to extremes that is where the law could be heading. Hardly surprising that the Hawk Board is taking a very dim view of the consultative process and is looking to make a most vigorous response to the consultative document.

Talking of consultative documents... After four years of trying to find a solution to the registration fees process, DEFRA are still trying. Here is an issue for falconers. What increases by a factor of ten over five years? Is it the price of falcons? Perhaps it is the

number of rabbits taken by the average Harris hawk? Or is it the cost of DEFRA fees? You guessed it.

A falconer who breeds one peregrine and sells it outside the EU would currently pay £17 for registration, nothing for the Article 10 certificate and £10 for the CITES export licence. In five years time, these fees could be £60, £100 and £100 respectively, adding a cool £233 to the price of that peregrine. To be absorbed in the cost? Unlikely.

Raptor breeding serves you and me; it provides us with the means to go hawking. It is a rural business that makes a valuable contribution to the countryside economy; it also provides a knowledge base for much of global raptor conservation. Apply this sort of stealth tax and you do one of three things: drive it underground, force it out of business, or make the price of raptors unacceptably high with all of the attendant implications.

If you are a raptor breeder this will affect you. Why not tell the Hawk Board how you feel, or better still tell DEFRA and copy us in with your comments. By the way, if you still want the Hawk Board to fight your corner, and you are not a member of a Hawk Board affiliated club, how about sending a donation to the Campaign for Falconry, 262 Luton Road, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU5 4UF. Would it be too much to suggest 5% of the cost of your last hawk?

**W**hat we hunt, when and how affects every falconer. There is a season for game birds, there are specialist quarry licences, and there are pest species. A DEFRA review is currently considering this latter category and plans to take some off the quarry list, including the noble rook and jackdaw. Yes, someone inside of government says not only have these two species been in decline but also they do no harm on either agricultural, aviation or health grounds; so let's take them off the general licence for so-called pest species? Not that the general licence has much of a future because it doesn't conform to the EU Birds Directive, and as we all know, when Brussels speaks we stand to attention.



Photo by Andy Thorn

**I am sure that at some point everyone who has ever kept and flown birds of prey must have had the thought “What would it be like to make my living doing this?”. Well let me tell you that the reality is a far cry from the idea, as anyone who has taken that plunge will no doubt tell you.**

For me that day came in November 1993. After six fantastic years working as a falconer at the Hawk Conservancy in Hampshire, I returned home to a not so sunny Cumbria with my partner Julie, to set up the Cumberland Bird of Prey Centre.

In my naivety, I thought I had a good idea of what was to come. I already had eleven years experience flying birds, beginning with

important”. Well the first lesson I learned is that without money there is no quality of life, or do I mean quality of wife? I think both require a small amount of financial input, but that’s another story!

We eventually left Hampshire in a duo of Mini Metros stuffed to the gills with house contents, birds, a dog, and a newly acquired state of the art word processor for all those important booking confirmations. We arrived 11 hours later, very tired but ready to start our new life and venture.

Fortunately for me, Julie had transferred her position in the HSBC bank to a branch in Carlisle so we still had one income to fall back on. This was fortunate because our first booking did not come for nearly six weeks!

Some events will stick with you for the rest of your life, and the call from the local Young Farmers chairman ringing to book a £35 evening talk felt like winning the lottery.



think the fact that we lived in the caravan for nearly nine years will give you a clue as to where this story is heading. However, I will plough on.

With the procurement of an even bigger bank loan the work began building aviaries, mews and shop. There was also much landscaping to be undertaken including laying lawns, planting what seemed like million of flowers, shrubs and trees and graveling paths. On 1 June 1996 the Cumberland Bird of Prey Centre was officially opened by local news reader Sue Radford. This was another

# A PLAN IS HATCHED...

a course at the Scottish Academy of Falconry in the borders where I was subsequently taken on as the country’s first YTS falconer at the age of 16. Later, I moved onto the World Owl Trust at Muncaster Castle for a time, before being employed as the Head Falconer at Littlecote Manor in Berkshire, managing a large team of flying birds. Littlecote was a Medieval Theme Park and my first real foray into the world of display falconry. It involved, amongst other things, the need to wear the woolly bloomers and frilly shirt of a medieval falconer (a dress code that seems to reoccur on a regular basis throughout my career!).

## Advice taken

During my time at The Hawk Conservancy, my bosses Ashley and Reg Smith had given me countless nuggets of advice on the peaks and pitfalls of running a business. However, initially I was definitely working under the misguided notion that “It’s not a business it’s a way of life”. This was what I kept telling myself and to my long suffering wife; “It’s about quality of life. The money is not

We both danced around the room, overjoyed at the prospect of earning our first self-made money! I would like to be able to say that I still have that cheque mounted and framed, but do I hell! It was just one in a long, long line that was spent on a new glove, new bag, new ferret, dead rats etc.

## The purchase

Shortly after we moved back to Cumbria, a small 3-acre plot of land close to my parents farm came on the market. With a small loan (which felt colossal at the time) we were able to purchase what would become the centre. Over the course of the next three years we begged, pleaded, and eventually compromised with our local planning office to allow us to establish our business on this site. This involved creating around 20 aviaries, a block mews and a two story building to provide a shop & café, an education centre, and toilet facilities. The compromise was that we had to live in a static caravan on site until we could prove to a highly sceptical Local Council that we really did intend to run a Bird of Prey Centre. I



day that will stay firmly lodged in the ‘good days’ memory bank, as friends, family and the paying public turned up to support us in return for seeing our blood sweat and tears displayed as an immaculate centre.

## Getting the public through the gates

It was shortly after this that someone knocked off and trod on my rose-tinted spectacles. I realised that spending the bank’s money was the easy part, we now somehow had to make people want to keep visiting the centre and compete not only with other Bird of Prey Centres but every other visitor attraction in the area. Ashley and Reg at the Hawk Conservancy had often said that it didn’t matter what your centre is about, so long as you can provide a good value day out. All too quickly I was beginning to take on a look I had seen often on their

faces but never really understood before. The 'will the sun shine on the bank holiday?' look which, incidentally, is almost identical to the 'will the sun shine through the summer holidays?' look, and the 'Oh God, how will we ever manage to make ends meet when the visitors won't spend more than 50p in the gift shop?' look.

At this point I would love to share with you the magic formula of a successful centre, but I am still busy chasing that one myself. All I can say is that for the next six years we both worked seven days a week to make our dream a reality. We hardly saw each other, and would spend the evenings tearing our hair out when the days takings totalled less than the cost of a box of dead day old chicks.

Armouries in Leeds. (Once again a welcome return to the woolly bloomers and frilly shirts of my time at Littlecote.) We knew this would be a stretch for us as Leeds is a three hour drive from Carlisle, but we decided to meet the challenge and employed a member of staff to assist with the daily displays. This turned out to be a most fortuitous move as in February 2001 the centre faced its most difficult challenge to date. The countryside was facing a foot and mouth epidemic and the Government announced that movement of both animals and people would be restricted. For a business that makes its living from tourists, this was the most terrifying news possible. That time was every bit as difficult as we feared it could be, and had it

mention of 'bat-the rat' brings on a nervous twitch that has taken years of therapy to overcome.

### Life is good

Looking back over the last ten years, my overall experience has been a positive one. As with any new venture, we have had our highs and lows, which have provided us with some incredible experiences and opportunities. I also have a wealth of embarrassing after dinner stories, such as the time my Harris Hawk chased a pigeon from the building where I was doing bird clearance, through a busy shopping street, in through a newsagent's open door and despatched the poor thing on the counter



Not to mention the horror of birds getting ill, flying off, coming back (usually) and doing their best to eat each other. The days slipped by in blissful harmony...not!

It wasn't all doom and gloom though. Every job that we secured made us feel proud that we had established a good reputation and that people wanted to employ us. Each bird trained and flying free in display was intensely satisfying because it was the culmination of an enormous amount of time and effort on my part.

On warm summer evenings when Julie and I walked around the Centre to check the birds, it gave me a feeling of amazement that we had birds that I only ever dreamed of owning when I started down this path as a teenager. It has also been a joy to see the grounds develop and mature over the last ten years. It is inspiring to see how the gardens change from stark and bare in the winter to glorious riot of colour in the summer.

### Foot and mouth

In March 2000 we won the contract to provide falconry displays at the Royal

not been for the income from the Armouries displays, we would probably not have survived.

The foot and mouth outbreak did have some positive effects though, the most significant being the realisation that we could never again place all our proverbial eggs in one basket. We couldn't rely on one specific element of the business to support us, and so we proceeded to diversify into other areas. This involved taking on different kinds of work such as courses and 'hands on' days at the centre, falconry displays at shows and country fairs, and even some pest control.

Each of these areas has positive and negative aspects to them. Some of the shows we have done have beautiful rural settings with traditional local crafts and home made fare. Others are represented by the kiss-me-quick hats and synthetic ice-cream and we are usually situated in between the bouncy castle and the bungee jump. However, it does become a measure of the success of a business when you are able to say no. These days I usually shy away from anything that involves the words carnival or gala, and the



amongst piles of feathers, tobacco and chewy sweets (much to the horror of the queuing customers!).

Another equally embarrassing moment was discovering that the hawk that should have been removing starlings from the railway station was in fact enjoying eating one of the little blighters on top of the 5 o'clock commuter train. As if this wasn't bad enough, I was forced to wander up and down the platform in front of the packed train tossing a dead day old chick into the air in an attempt to get the thing to come down. If you ever want to persuade a large number of people that you are as mad as a box of frogs, this is definitely a fast track way to go about it (no pun intended).

Currently, our core business is providing falconry displays, courses & activity days, and bird clearance. However, I am always keen to rise to the challenge of new kinds of Falconry related work and have had some interesting experiences working on TV and film and flying the official mascot of the Newcastle Falcons Rugby Team in front of huge crowds before each match. Ironically despite all the prior talk about business it really is a way of life and I cannot imagine living any other way. People constantly point out to me what a great life and job I have and this is true. If I was asked the question 'Do I love my life?', the answer would be a resounding 'yes!'. If asked 'Would I do it all again?'...not a ruddy chance!

have been a falconer for 18 years and have flown a great variety of species in that time, but I still think that if a day goes by when I learn nothing new about raptors, or the art of hunting with them, then it's been a wasted day.

Over the years I have had the pleasure of owning and hunting several very good Harris' hawks. From my own point of view you could not have a better partner in the field than a well trained, fit, muscled-up Harris'. Their efficiency and dedication to a variety of quarry species is unrivalled and to enter the field with a well trained raring-to-go Harris' really gets my adrenaline going.

# Tweed

## -a Harris' in Wales

### Building accommodation

In December 2002 we moved to Wales and now live halfway up a hill with views and surroundings to die for. One of our first major jobs when we'd got settled was to build mews, which was something we'd always wanted. It was great to have a blank canvas and build the best we could.

We already had the building, a barn of 60 x 30ft with views over the mountains and this became the chosen spot. Each of the three mews would be 10ft square x 8ft high with a big hawk room for all the paraphernalia. Two moult chambers were also constructed with cantilevered sections built out from the body of the barn to allow the hawks access to the weather.

These sections were laboriously constructed by my long-suffering husband out of galvanised bars, thus cutting down on possible feather damage. A walkway would run down the length of the mews

allowing access to each of the compartments and feeding tubes for the moult chambers.

All the floors were membrane and peashingled and wooden half-rounded perches covered in Astroturf were put in about 2ft from the ground with heaters operated by frost-stats. Internal doors were also fitted which could be closed at night in the worst of the winter weather and we do get that

in abundance up here. We also get storms that rattle up the valley and hit with phenomenal force

making us glad that the walls of the cottage are three feet thick.

So, there we were with our super-duper hawk accommodation.

### Re-purchase

Some years before moving, I had sold a very good female Harris' called Killlem to a friend to make way for a Goshawk who unfortunately died in her second year from Aspergillosis. By moving to the Cambrians we had unintentionally moved very near Killlems new owner whose circumstances had changed and he was no longer able to fly the bird.



I was very excited to be able to buy her back knowing what a brilliant bird she was. Just before I found out about her, I had purchased an extremely good looking female Harris' from a local breeder and so now I had two very good birds to fly.

### Good flying ground

Hunting land comes in huge quantities here and this year included both sides of a four mile valley with thousands of open buries on both sides and within a month we had secured further large tracts offering a plentiful and varied supply of game. With the ferrets fit and the Brittany dog on top form, we were all tuned to a high pitch – let the hunting commence.

Although Killlem had not been flown for a year, it didn't take us long to get reunited and after a week or two of success on rabbits she took her first brown hare. It was an excellent flight which really pushed her to her limits and almost beyond. She also excels at the soaring style of hunting which is easy to attain at some of our coastal sites. Even in gale force winds she

*It was an excellent flight which really pushed her to her limits and almost beyond*



keeps her station at about 200 to 300 feet above the Brittany, stooping as soon as anything moves. I find this a most invigorating style of hunting, with so much going on it's hard to take it all in. When the hunting is finished for the day, to sit on those gorse clad hills with the sound of

waves lapping on the beach below and Snowdon in the distance, is beyond belief.

### Tweed the Harris' hawk

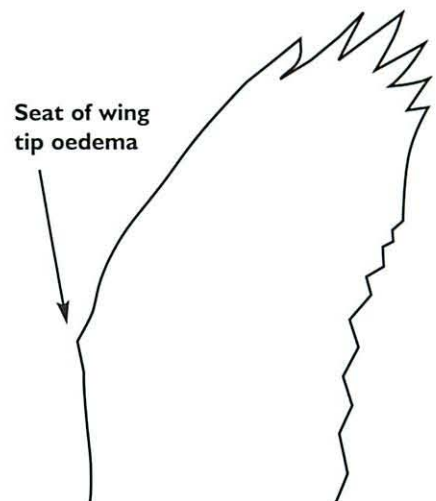
Whilst flying Killlem, I was also bringing on the young Harris, now named Tweed, on easier land where slips abounded and the rabbits were so jittery and quick they were almost impossible to catch. These fast, difficult slips taught young Tweed a lot and it was only a short time after coming off the creance that she marked up her first success. Although small, she combines very large feet with the agility of the male Harris' which is a very handy combination.

The season was shaping up well, but as I'm sure some readers will appreciate, things don't go smoothly for long and I was about to learn something completely new.

### Hard frost takes it's toll

We had had several hard frosts and I had taken care to shut the inner mews doors and check the heaters were working, but one morning when I picked Tweed up, I noticed that her wings were very slightly drooped. On closer inspection, I found that she had a small swelling on each shoulder (referred to as wing-tips). These swellings were icy cold to the touch and filled with fluid. The dreaded wing-tip oedema/dry gangrene I had read so much about.

I decked out a room indoors with tarpaulin and bought her in and then telephoned the vet. Years ago when a friend's bird got this same problem the advice then was to massage the affected area with Preparation H, give anti-biotics and exercise the bird. But things have changed over the years and it is now thought that a virus could be the cause (although specifics are a bit thin on the ground) and as well as antibiotics, I was advised to administer Navilox powder twice daily with no exercise as this can lead to damage of the



compromised and now very delicate tissue on the shoulder. Wing-tip oedema also, it seems, usually affects first year birds although not always.

Another good piece of advice is never to allow access to water after mid-day and obviously dry the bird thoroughly should she get wet whilst out hunting. This is easily achieved with a hair-dryer and my birds actually enjoy a good blow of warm air.

### Getting better

On the fifth day of this treatment the 'blisters' started to reduce and feel warmer and after eight days the swellings had all but gone. Having had such a close call, I kept up the Navilox and kept her indoors for another five weeks.

I had done her initial training following a new American recipe which meant that I had hardly had to reduce her weight and I felt, rightly or wrongly, that this may have helped her to overcome her problems more swiftly than a bird with reduced weight. This is only hypothesis – I feel that a bird working at a reduced weight could be more open to infections. She worked well on an abundance of high protein foods at a high weight and was one of the most obedient and easy going birds I have ever had.

### Same problem heard of locally

Just recently, I heard of another case locally where the falconer did not notice the problem until the birds wings were hanging completely down. This was an immature male Harris', much reduced in weight and he had since sadly lost both wing tips. This just proves what a horrendous affect wing-tip oedema can have if not spotted early enough.

I started to fly Tweed again over short distances and after a week or two of this,

# Tweed

## -a Harris' in Wales

she took a rabbit after a stunning flight. She was back to her sparkling self again, but I was still keeping her indoors, not willing to take any chances.

### Ending the season

As the buries were now full of young rabbits and the hills were littered with new-born lambs, we decided to end our hunting after Tweed's most amazing flight of our short season. It was a chance rabbit. We had decided to call it a day, it was almost dark and the wind was blowing a gale and fortunately I decided to fly her back to the car instead of re-equipping her. She was happily following on back to her portable Jeep mews when suddenly everything started to happen. Dixie, the Brittany, went on point and put up a huge buck rabbit which belted down the side of a stock fence with Tweed in hot pursuit. It ran between two tree trunks which were no further than four inches apart – we measured the gap before we went home – and she grabbed it the first time actually in this gap but it shrugged off the initial attack

and charged on. The rabbit made a sharp left turn through the fence and into a ditch and Tweed just kept above it as it jinked left and right. We got the impression at this stage that she was herding it into the open as she had been keeping herself between it and the safety of the hedge. And it worked.

As it made a mad dash across the field and changed up a gear, Tweed just kept right behind it and when she was quite ready she closed in for the kill.

### A helping hand

Us land-bound creatures trying to be there to help fell into ditches full of water and, worse still, got hooked on wire. Trousers ripped and covered in mud and scratches, we were breathless by the time we got to her. She was found calmly sitting with her prize and I thought that she had a smile on her face. What a finish to the season!


Some of our adventures with these two Harris' included doing a handstand in a rancid cow carcass, hanging upside down over a cliff and climbing a 30ft tree to untangle Killem who managed to get herself free just as Chris reached out to help.

Also, digging a ferret up from a 6ft deep




lie-up with a screw driver, a pair of secateurs and a walking stick (which broke) only to see the ferret pop up in a chadlike fashion "what, no rabbits?" from a bury fifteen feet away.

Thank you Killem, Tweed, Dixie the Brittany, Beano and Sandy the ferrets and, of course, Chris my husband, for some brilliant hunting and some good laughs and the best of luck to falconers everywhere.



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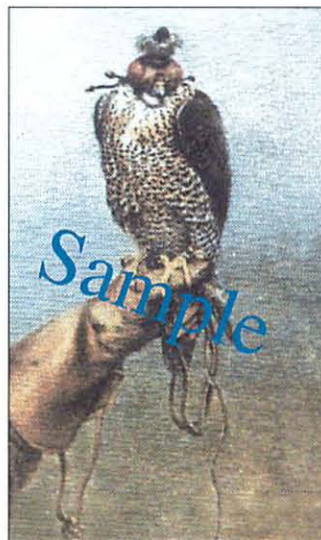
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'Black Jess' was taken from an eyrie in Pembrokeshire, South Wales by the late Kim Muir. He trained and flew her at grouse and partridge in the period before the Second World War. He was a close friend of George Lodge, who was also a keen follower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

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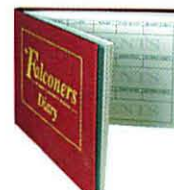
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# Hunting Raptors (Part 2)

By Philip Snow

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



**Hovering:** The Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) is one of the best hoverers, either hanging on the wind or flying into it to remain in the same place. It is a very specialised technique that enables the raptor to focus on one spot, for even if the body is moving the head remains rock steady.

**Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*)** - very like Kestrel, slightly smaller, tends to flock and hovers for briefer periods. Migratory to Southern Europe, mainly insect eater.



**Eleanora's Falcon (*Falco eleanora*)** - often seen hovering over the sea around Mediterranean isles, waiting for tired migrants. Consummate wind hanger, has two colour forms, dark phase here.



**Quartering:** The Levant Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter brevipes*) - rather than using the ambush technique of Sparrowhawks, they fly at moderate heights and dive down on prey, from reptiles to birds. Eastern Europe mainly, migratory.

**Red-footed Falcon (*Falco vespertinus*)** - often hovers and with deeper wingbeats than the Kestrel, will often drop to the ground beside prey and run to catch it. Another bird liable to be seen in flocks, especially on spring migration. 1st year bird here, adults spectacular plumages.



**Black-winged Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*)** - another bird that hovers like the Kestrel, but on much broader based wings. Appears like an origami bird with its tilting flight on unswept wings. Elegant raptor now rare in south west Spain's 'dehasa' Cork Oak plains, but common elsewhere in Eurasia.



Serpent or Short-toed Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*) - very large bird, only Eagle that hovers. Hangs about 15-30m up, over rocky ground and hillsides, dry plains. Often 'step hovers' like other raptors, descending slowly and adjusting for final lunge. Mediterranean migrant.



Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) - hovers with long legs dangling, always over water. Folds wings just before entry. Increasing migrant through the UK, now breeds England too.



Rough-legged Buzzard (*Buteo lagopus*) - uncommon winter visitor only, from Scandinavia. Only Eurasian Buzzard with white tail base. Hovers heavily over rough ground, takes mainly mammals.



Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) - hovers regularly, but not as often as Rough-leg. Prefers to hang on the wind over some hillsides.



Quarrying: The favourite hunting method of all Harriers, slowly and methodically flying low over moors, marshes, rough pastures and crops. Marsh Harriers (*Circus aeruginosus*) and Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) shown here, will both drop on birds or small mammals, etc. or to check and chase. Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) pair shown here hunting in tandem over Scottish moors. One will flush for the follower to grab - highly effective!



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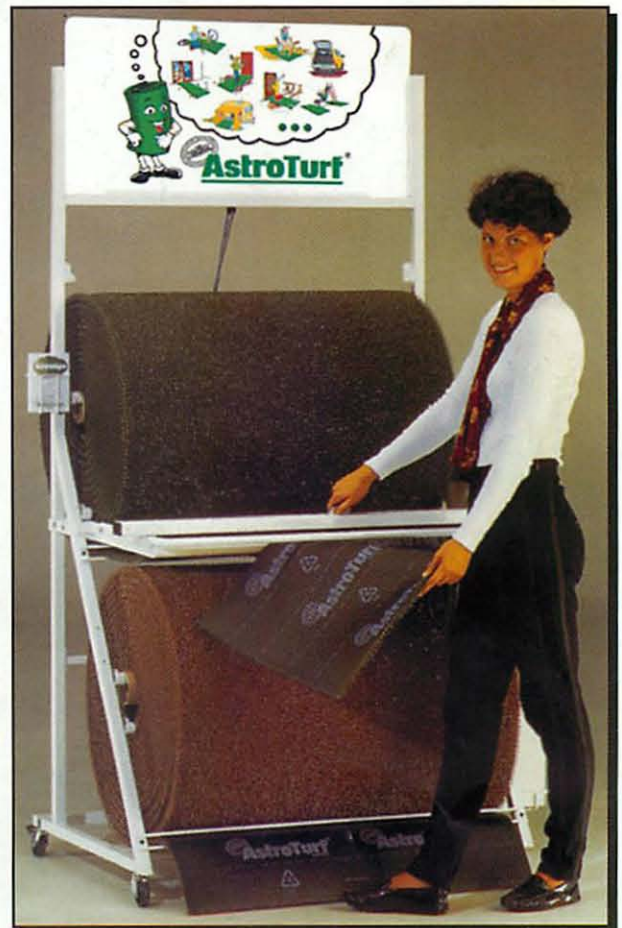
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