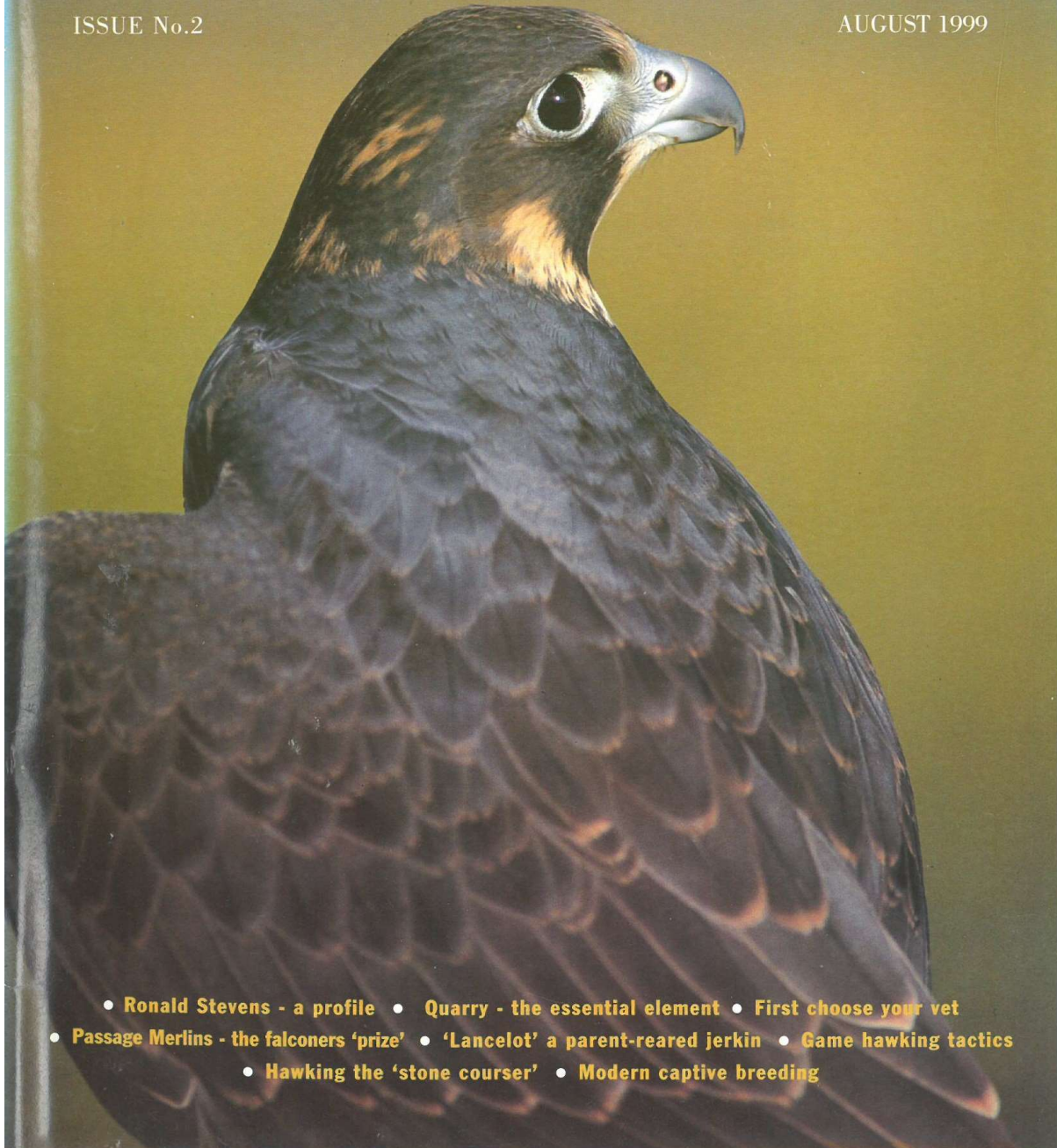


INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

ISSUE No.2

AUGUST 1999



- Ronald Stevens - a profile
- Quarry - the essential element
- First choose your vet
- Passage Merlins - the falconers 'prize'
- 'Lancelot' a parent-reared jerkin
- Game hawking tactics
- Hawking the 'stone courser'
- Modern captive breeding

INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

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Cover photo by Seth Anthony
'Aisla' juvenile female Scottish peregrine

EDITORIAL

August is an exciting time. The long wait through the summer months is coming to an end and we can start putting into practice, those great plans that we've set ourselves for the coming season, be it with a young impressionable eyass or a newly moulted seasoned hawk. Just the other day at my local falconry club's summer barbecue the conversation was full of eager anticipation for the months ahead. There was talk of Harris hawks and squirrels, redtails and rabbits, goshawks and pheasants, peregrine/merlins and larks and peregrine/prairies and magpies. This sport of ours offers a huge variety of opportunities and experiences and if the enthusiasm and dedication I heard at that barbecue in our small part of the world, is anything to go by, falconry is in very good hands for the years ahead.

There is however that constant threat from the new wave of animal protectionists. This very week, our government here in the UK has reinforced it's commitment to ban hunting with hounds, and Scotland, that mecca for hunting of all types, could be the very first to be affected, as soon as next summer. There is a serious fight ahead here in the UK, these present threats are unfortunately just the tip of the iceberg. Such problems are faced one way or another by falconers across the world, from outright bans on falconry to the placing of restrictions on the taking of certain quarry species. Falconry is no longer a quaint little pastime, it has become more than that, and we need to make our presence felt on the political stage. It is now more important than ever to back the organisations that are in our corner.

On a lighter note, the response to *International Falconer* over the last couple of months has been tremendous and has really exceeded all our expectations. Already at just issue number 2 we can truly call ourselves international with subscribers from 25 different countries! Thank you for your support, and your many letters of congratulations which are greatly appreciated.

I'm pleased to say that the first issue of *International Falconer* has already created some discussion, as can be seen in the first letters page. This is a good thing; the magazine is there to share opinions and ideas, keep them coming. We do need regular information for the news and updates section, so please contact us with any news you hear of relating to falconry anywhere in the world, we can then follow it up.

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this second issue of *International Falconer*, and wish you a great start to your hawking season.

Seth

International Falconer welcomes contributions for articles both written and photographic. Please send for a copy of our Writer's and Photographer's Guidelines before sending material.

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INTERNATIONAL FALCONER



Photo: Seth Anthony

NEWS, UPDATES AND INFORMATION FROM AROUND THE WORLD

The section to keep you informed with all the latest news on a variety of relevant topics from around the world.

If you know or hear of any information that should be featured please let us know. We also welcome manuscripts for this section.

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England

email: seth@intfalconer.com

UPDATE FROM THE UK



Campaign For Falconry

PROMOTING THE ART • PROTECTING THE FUTURE

The first year

The Campaign For Falconry had its first anniversary at the British Falconry Fair this year and we would like to once again thank everyone who visited our stand. As everyone who was there knows, the conditions were dreadful so we were even more grateful to those people who faced the elements that weekend.

The number of Supporters, Trade Sponsors and Supporters is growing daily and we are gradually setting up a much needed network of Representatives around the country, some of whom are already supplying us with local information and news cuttings together with raising money.

The profile of falconry has improved tremendously over the past year and the united front we are now presenting is becoming a force to be reckoned with. The CFF strongly believe that it is time to put old battles to bed and join forces in an organised fashion, this is the only way to defend the sport.

Once again falconry is threatened by various proposed changes in legislation, and we are grateful to the Hawk Board for their time and energy in picking up the endless papers, working them through and helping to provide, where possible, a practical and workable result. We are also grateful to Richard Burge and the Countryside Alliance (Mark Hinge's work on the petition was unbelievable) who are now taking an active interest in falconry and are proving an invaluable help.

This sounds like the same old

articles you have been reading over the past year but until the threat to falconry vanishes, the battle cry of unification, more money and thanks will continue unashamedly.

If you have an idea of how to help please let us know, for those of you who have been kind enough to offer, please bear with us, we have a list with your names and addresses on it and you will be called on when we need you. If you are having a fund raising event let us know and we can supply you with merchandise, leaflets, newsletter etc.

In closing we would like to thank two people in particular; first Steven Duryea; Steven lives in America and was kind enough to donate the most beautiful carving of a Harris hawk which was sold at the Falconry Fair.

To this day I am not entirely sure how he heard of the CFF or what made him decide to help, but he did and for that we thank him. If there are any more like him around the world please get in touch.

Secondly we would like to thank Neil Forbes for his work in producing the Field Veterinary handbook; Neil is living proof that the busier you are the more you can get done. Thank you.

The CFF may be contacted at:
PO Box 36
Crediton
EX17 5BY
ENGLAND

Or visit our website:
falconers.com/campaign.for.falconry/

Falconry Book Exhibition

The Royal Armoury of Sweden is presently holding an exhibition of a unique collection of falconry texts, all of which have never before been on public display. A large part of the collection being exhibited is a separately held library which was acquired for the Royal Armoury Library in 1944 from the soldier/naturalist Thorvald Lindquist.

The Lindquist Falconry Library holds 114 works bound into 94 volumes with titles of such note as: *Falconry in the British Isles*, By Salvin & Brodrick, *Latham's Falconry or The Falcon's Lure, and Cure*, By Symon Latham and *Observations upon Hawking*, By Sir John Saunders Sebright.

To accompany the collection, a 72 page, illustrated paperback Catalogue (in English) has been published, listing all the titles presently held. Copies of the catalogue are available from:

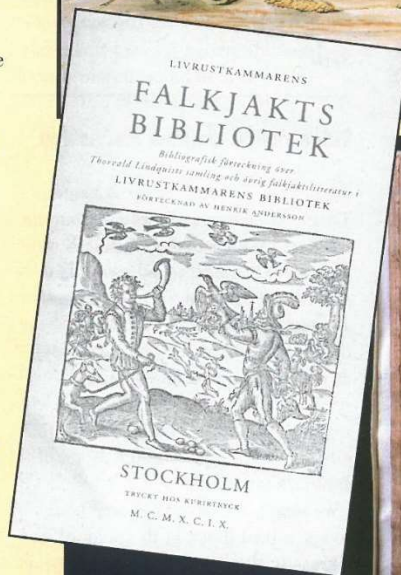
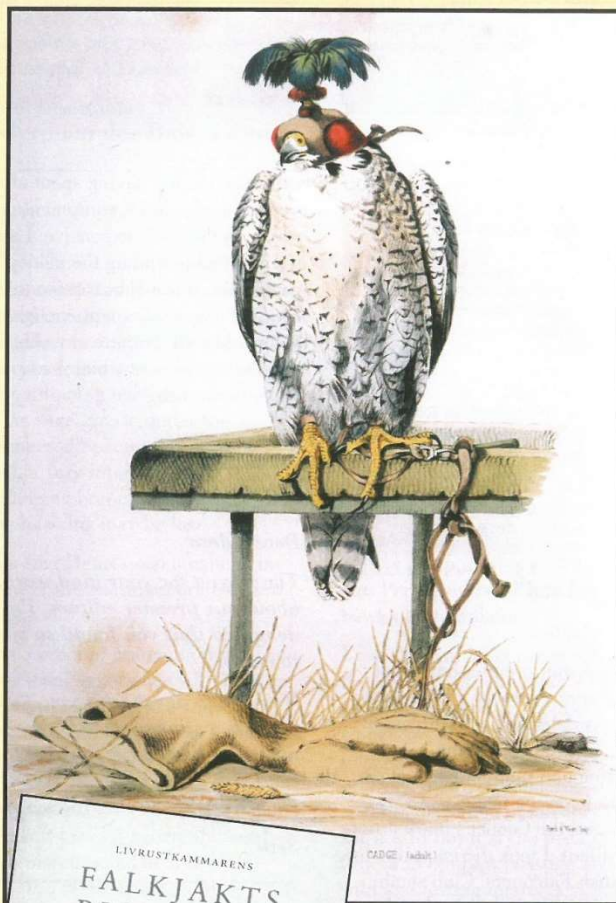
Livruskammaren
Slottsbacken 3
111 30 Stockholm
Sweden
 Priced: 75.00 Swedish Crowns +p.p.
 The Exhibition is open until
 31st October 1999.
 For further information:
Tel. +46 8 519 555 44
http://www.lsh.se/livruskammaren/

ILLUSTRATIONS

Top: From *Observations Upon Hawking* by Sir John Saunders Sebright. 1828

Right: From *L'histoire De La nature Des Oyseaux* by Pierre Belon du Mans 1555.

Left: Exhibition Catalogue



LETTERS

letters@intfalconer.com



If you have a comment to make about anything we would love to hear from you. This is your page and it's up to you to supply us with the necessary material. Unfortunately we can't promise to publish every letter, but we will read them all with great interest.

You can put pen to paper, send a fax or E-mail us your thoughts.

Please send to:

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Maidstone, Kent ME14 5PP, England,
Fax to: +44 (0)1622 664465
or E-mail: letters@intfalconer.com

The Editor reserves the right to edit letters as he sees necessary.

'Stingy old sod'!

Dear Mr Anthony,

I received your premier edition of *International Falconer* a few months ago. I was delighted with the quality of the photographs and the interesting and informative content. The article on the moult was very helpful and the Cooper's hawk article was brilliant. I took the magazine to the British Falconers' Club south west spring meeting and showed it around. Every one was impressed with it. Hopefully you will get some more subscriptions.

I am thirteen years old and my uncle joined the British Falconers' Club on my behalf in January. We fly a male Harris and have had an enjoyable and exciting first season. 'Monty' accounting for four bunnies, two at the spring field meet and numerous rats.

He was put into the moult in the beginning of April and I have been frantically catching pigeons, starlings and rabbits to feed him in addition to our supply of chicks and laboratory rats. Nick Kester mentioned in his article, of hawks catching small birds in the aviary whilst in moult, Monty caught a robin last week.

I thoroughly enjoyed your first magazine and would like a year's

subscription, but having spent all my savings on the hawk equipment which you know is expensive, I am having trouble finding the money to pay for the year's subscription (and my uncle says he's spent enough, stingy old sod). Is there any chance of a junior discount which I can badger him with.

Yours sincerely
Adam Kennedy
Dorset, UK

Dear Adam

Thank you for your kind words about our premier edition. I'm delighted that you found so much to enjoy.

We have to agree with you, "your uncle is a stingy old sod", so much so, that we've decided to send you the next three issues free. Keep spreading the word.

Seth

Video review creates discussion

Dear Seth

Thank you very much for sending me the first number of *International Falconer*. I think the magazine is a great asset for modern falconry as it shows no compromise to shows, displays or other misunderstandings of what falconry is and should remain: "The art of catching wild quarry." Maybe a quotation from your editorial could become the motto of *International Falconer*:

"We nearly all have the same goal; to see a bird flown at the peak of its fitness in the best possible style at a wild and testing quarry."

May I say that whilst I enjoyed very much reading the article by Charles Schwartz about sage grouse hawking his review of Nick Fox's video made me feel a bit uneasy.

I have that same video, and am also fortunate in having some experience of rook and crow hawking, and last but not least, I have had the privilege to enjoy several times, the hospitality of Nick, his wife and friends.

The Northumberland Crow Falcons is a small club; Nick is the master and, as such, the one who slips the falcons. Nobody can imagine that such a good team of birds could be fully trained by a single man involved in many other occupations. This club is a very friendly team including some very able and keen falconers. Rook and crow hawking is an expensive sport and I feel it is a mistake to criticise ironically the one who earns by his work the means to offer this sport to his guests for love.

In Europe, all our hunting is on private land, so, we have to be very careful to maintain good relationships with farmers and land owners; one cannot afford to have guests and more or less trustable falcons risking to ruin this relationship. This is also certainly a great contribution to the social side of hawking in Europe where very often flights are followed by guests who enjoy watching the sport (sometimes from cars or four tracks) without taking active part or interfering in it. But for this social part of the sport, our politically correct protectionists would have since a long time succeeded in having hawking and hunting (European meaning, with hounds) banned.

The recollection of Charles Schwartz's literary experience leads to many questions which would be asked and answered differently by someone with a little practical experience of rook and crow hawking in Europe. Rook hawking was practised in Spring because 1) rooks nest in colonies and it is easier to

find good slips in the plains surrounding these nests 2) In summer, crops are still standing in the south of England. Although he is able to kill a crow, 'Spitfire' in this video is flying starlings, rooks, magpies and jackdaws, whose flight and evasion tactics are very different from the crow's.

Actually, although Spitfire's flights in the video were high and dominating rooks and jackdaws, they were, if my memory does not fail, not proper high ringing. Such a flight is provided by a single prey - and not a flock - trying to save its life by outflying the falcon in the sky. In a flock, there are always one or more birds not so bold as the others which are bottling first. After watching again the video, there is at least one ringing flight with a big falcon and parts of others.

The size more than the speed of the falcon can influence the style of the flight as crows and rooks are not fast birds. Having been "the falconer" in one video about game hawking and of another about rook and crow hawking with some shots taken hawking from horseback, I can assure that the great diversity of flights in rook and crow hawking makes a "non acted or faked" video much more difficult to "engineer" with the black birds than with game which can be produced by pointing dogs. Reading again these lines, I fear that, although I am not totally ignorant in pointing dogs and game hawking, my written approach of a sage grouse video would probably be felt inadequate by someone acquainted with this game.

If you are acquainted with classical dressage you are probably aware of the rivalry between the french and the german school. Yet, when I was preparing for my horse riding Instructor exam, one of our teachers told us about the visit he had in the Spanish Riding School in Vienna. At the time of leaving, the great Alois Podhajsky took his hand and told him "Please Sir, remember that there is only one Equitation."

I feel that the great thing with *International Falconer* is that it will

probably make all of us feel that there is only one Falconry.

Best regards and good luck to *International Falconer*.

Henri Desmots
St Germain des Bois, France

In reply to Henri Desmots:

Dear Seth

I am pleased that Henri Desmots enjoyed my sage grouse article. The sport described therein may soon be history, as environmental groups are now petitioning our government to list the sage grouse under the Endangered Species Act. If it is listed, a very interesting and challenging branch of American game hawking may be lost.

Regarding Henri's comments on my review of the Northumberland Crow Falcons video:

He is correct in assuming that I have no personal experience with rook or crow hawking. Nor do I know anything about hunt clubs, hunt masters or Nick Fox. I assumed that you were aware of my ignorance when you asked me to review the video and looking for an unbiased impression from a falconer on the other side of the Atlantic. My review accurately conveyed my impression of the video.

I suspect that the differing interpretations of the video between myself and Henri, may have more to do with cultural viewpoints than my lack of, or Henri's possession of, experience with the 'haut vol'. Like many American falconers, my hunting is usually done alone, on foot, with only my dogs and a single falcon to accompany me. I am always on public land. Each day, I try to understand and appreciate what I experience.

The hawking shown in the Northumberland Crow Falcons was very interesting, but the technology (vehicles, radios, ATV's, etc.) and staff arrayed against the crows left me wondering if something very essential had been left out.

I thank Henri for explaining some

of the problems European falconers encounter in obtaining permission to hunt on private ground. It sounds terribly difficult to arrange. I would love to learn more about the important points of the 'haut vol' that I missed in the Fox video. I obtained a copy of Nick's book and will be reading it soon.

In the past, I have flown both imprinted and passage merlins at starlings and various blackbird species and the most important lesson I learned was that the country, not the quarry, makes the flight. The more open the landscape, the better the action. Although not as formal as crow hawking, our annual merlin get togethers (usually in March) are very exciting. We hunt starlings on the open desert with most slips in excess of a quarter mile. The flocks always go up until one bird is forced out. Perhaps this is like crow hawking in miniature?

I can think of no better venue than the pages of *International Falconer* for us to learn more about our respective views of this endlessly interesting sport. Like Henri, I praise you for your adherence to a specific definition of falconry ("...to see a bird flown at the peak of its fitness in the best possible style at a wild and testing quarry").

Sincerely yours,
Charles Schwartz
Pingree, USA

Congratulations

Bravo !!!! Great job, I really enjoyed the premier edition. Keep up the good work,
sincerely

Jim Bonelli USA

Dear Seth

I have received the first issue of *International Falconer* and it is really great. I am very happy due to the quality of the first number, I really love Mike McDermott's article, it is very good. With articles from these kind of falconers the magazine will be PERFECT.

Inaki Urdangarin
Spain

FIRST FIND YOUR VET

An ill or injured hawk is something that every falconer will inevitably encounter at some point in their hawking lives. *Nicholas Kester* explains the importance of being prepared for the event.

Preparedness is everything in falconry. It pays to second guess a hawk's flight; her reaction to the unexpected (will she bate at that tractor or not?); her weight; her jesses (are they sound?); and more than anything her health and any potential hazards. For should something happen, we must remember that vets have something of a monopoly on putting them to rights - with a repair bill to match.

Of course nothing is ever as expected in falconry; indeed that is half the pleasure - the uncertainty of it all. But we must be prepared for the worst at some time in our hawking lives. Sickness comes to us all, and in such a focused thing as the flight of a hawk at quarry, accidents will inevitably occur. It is at this moment that we may wonder where to turn.

Good raptor vets are rare animals indeed. This is not a negative reflection on the profession. Not only is your vet unlikely to be regularly exposed to raptors, but the birds are so constructed as to make comparisons with other avian species impossible and raptor biology makes

up a small proportion of their overall training. To remove the frustration that may occur when you arrive in something of a lather at evening surgery, it pays to have made a few local enquiries before acquiring your first hawk.

When you become a point of contact (but not necessarily an expert) for aspiring falconers, it is best to alert them to the vet issue and the need for a certain amount of self-diagnosis. This is when the club network comes in handy. Contact with other falconers can provide a local surgery that can save a hawk's life. The veterinary profession is coy about recommendations on ethical grounds. So it pays to ask up front how many raptors your vet sees in a year and whether they have a raptor specialist on board. Simple ailments can then be dealt with as they happen, but the serious problem is more likely to cause a long round trip to such alumni as Neil Forbes.

A useful tip for finding a vet in your area is to contact a local falconry school, display giver or bird of prey centre. They will have more hawks

and falcons than you are ever likely to own, and will therefore have a proportionally higher need for a vet. Make contact with their recommendation and give the vet your details in advance. It could buy valuable time when things go wrong, and may enable you to seek advice over the telephone (I have several vets' numbers stored in my mobile phone).

Most good falconry manuals contain excellent chapters on general health, welfare and preventative medicine. But for real self-diagnosis look for books on veterinary medicine and raptor biology. The first was written by John Cooper in 1968 but it is now rather out-of-date. It also targeted the practising vet rather than the jobbing falconer and as a result the practical advice and self-help is over complex and, I might add, appallingly badly indexed for the layman. More recently, Manfred Heidenreich has published his weighty title (with a price to match). *Birds of Prey - Medicine and Management* (Blackwell Science) falls down due to its over bias on falcons, but is a valuable addition to

the library where it will hopefully gather dust.

There is a risk with all such books of over-diagnosis by the falconer leading to acute paranoia. Unless every mite and casting matches the written description, or worse still the illustration, the hawk must surely be on its last legs. How well I recall a redtail producing castings containing what had to be parasitic eggs, only to find they were in fact seeds from the floor of the aviary picked up as she plumed her feed ration.

Be careful about brandishing such publications in the face of your vet, especially in times of crisis. It can understandably offend. Rather, check which titles they have on raptor medicine and ask if it would help to lend them yours - which you happen to have in the car. They could be very grateful. Also keep with you the number of a real specialist so that your chosen vet can refer and confer as needed.

It is first aid in the field or in the first few hours of illness that can save a hawk's life. At this year's British Falconry and Raptor Fair, the Campaign for Falconry launched a most essential *Field First Aid for*

It is first aid in the field or in the first few hours of illness that can save a hawk's life.

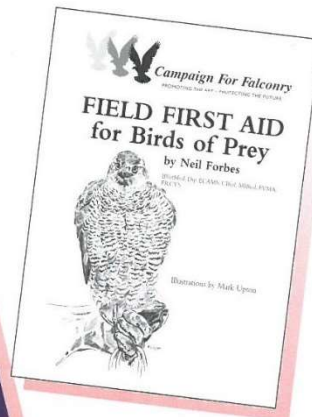
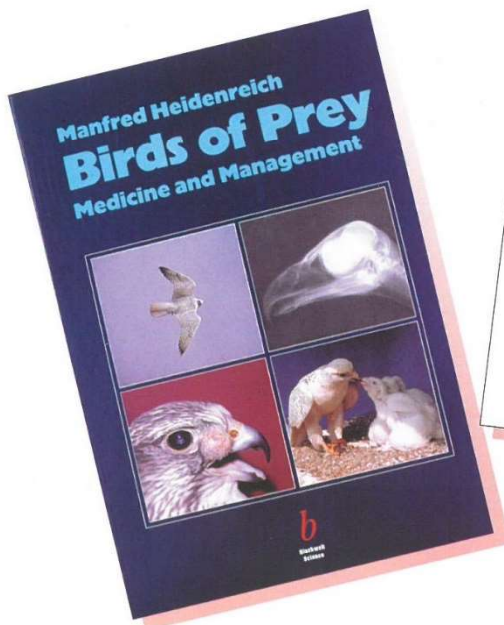
Birds of Prey by Neil Forbes, with illustrations by Mark Upton. A sixteen page ABC of problems and ailments with some rapid action tips and advice on when to refer to an expert. It also restates in simple terms some things about husbandry that lead to bumblefoot and sour crop that we should all re-read. I intend to keep a copy in my hawking bag, the glove compartment of the car and at home for two reasons. First, I will be certain never to mislay at least one of them, and secondly, it will provide a valuable donation to the Campaign which does so much in raising enough money to keep the endless waves of legislation and anti falconry feeling at least on the beach and below the high tide mark. I think £3.00 is a tiny price for supporting our sport and our hawks' good health.

Raptor biology has made a quantum leap in the last twenty/thirty years. Gone are the days of purging with rhubarb, forced ingestion of rangle (small stones to clean the crop) and other doubtful remedies. (Although I have recently discussed rangle with Nick Fox, as he still uses it in carefully controlled conditions at the end of the moult.) The modern falconer has to be scientifically aware for he cannot claim ignorance of many of the ailments that besieged his forbears.

Of course the bulk of all ailments can be avoided through careful management - which really means keeping everything spotlessly clean - I have never forgotten this, but I have also made certain that the local vet knows I keep hawks and is alert to a possible referral to an expert colleague. ■

Field First Aid for Birds of Prey
available from
The Campaign for Falconry,
PO Box 36, Crediton, EX17 5BY
price £3.00

**Birds of Prey -
Medicine and Management**
available from
Langley Mews Bookstore
price £89.50



**Two modern veterinary titles;
be careful about brandishing such
publications in the
face of your vet, especially
in times of crisis.**

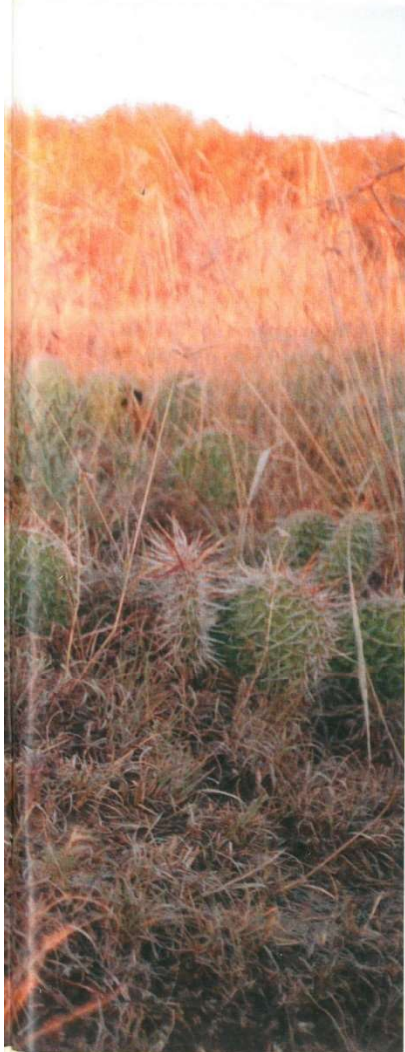
OBSERVATIONS ON TRAINING C
‘Lancelot,’ a parent-



Photo: David Moran

GYRFALCONS by David T. Moran

reared jerkin



'Lancelot' - first season, first duck.

I saw my first gyrfalcon in the fall of 1970. She was a large, wild, adult grey female flying into the teeth of a 60 knot gale way up in the high country of Colorado's Rocky Mountains. As I watched her put on that breath-taking air-show, time stood still. She'd power into the wind toward a 1,000 feet granite cliff face, pull back on the stick, stand on her tail, and shoot straight up in the air until she looked like a swallow in size. Then the massive falcon would hurtle off downwind, turn around, and repeat the performance! She raked across the stormy skies for half an hour before lighting on a ledge to survey the alpine valley below. A quick look through the spotting scope showed she wasn't even panting.

It was clear the wild gyrfalcon was not hunting: She was flying for the sheer fun of it. What made her strength and endurance all the more impressive was that she performed these incredible feats of strength and endurance at an altitude of 12,000 feet! Two miles above the ocean, the air is thin, lending less force to her wing-beats and delivering much less oxygen to blood and muscle than the dense atmosphere would do at sea-level. (If you've ever climbed up a mountain at 12,000 feet, then you



Photo: Jeff Johnson

David with 'Hotspur' a white chamber-raised jerkin, half-brother to 'Lancelot'.

know how quickly thin air can sap your strength.)

Humans seek to immortalise life's peak moments. We attempt this by taking pictures, writing books, making sketches, painting, or telling stories to our friends around the campfire. Being a falconer, I wanted to capture this peak moment as a participant, not as a spectator. To that end, I vowed I'd fly a gyr in falconry one day, enjoying its speed and strength as we hunted wild game together.

More than two decades later, my dreams became reality. In the summer of 1991, I received a first-year, chamber-raised (or parent-reared) jerkin from my good friend Dan Konkel ⁽¹⁾. My grown son Dave Jr., a falconer since he was a young lad, travelled with me to Dan's to pick up the new gyr-tiercel. Dan ushered us into the room where the hooded hawk was perched. The sight rocked us back. There stood a brown, barrel-chested bird with shoulders like a linebacker, a big rongeour of a beak, and thick-toed feet like a red-tail. That mesomorphic jerkin reeked of raw power. Tipping the scale at 37 ounces (1036 grams), he dwarfed my female peregrine, 'Guinevere.' His regal bearing called for a

**If you have plenty of time,
lots of patience, miles of
open country, and a good
supply of game, you'll love
flying a gyr. If any one of
these ingredients is missing,
you're in for a rough ride.**

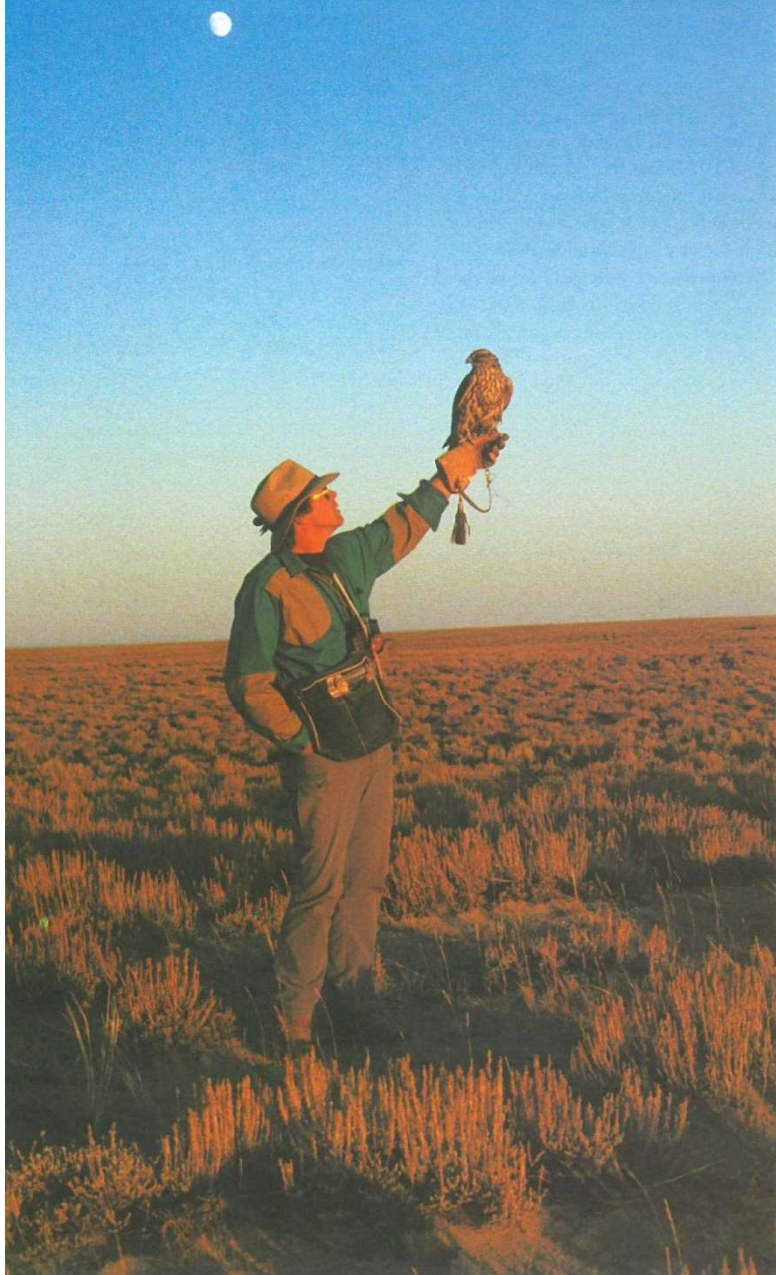


Photo: David Moran

knightly name. We dubbed him 'Sir Lancelot' on the spot.

When I took Lancelot up on the fist, he stiffened, hissed, and squeezed my gauntlet with surprising strength. Dan – quick to notice my surprise at his wildness – said, "*You gotta remember, Dave, these chamber birds are wilder than passagers. But he'll tame down. Just give him time. If you can train a passage gos, you can train this bird!*"

Dan went on to offer some other bits of advice which turned out to be invaluable:

- 1. Gyrs are irascible Arctic birds. They overheat easily, especially in the hot Colorado summer. Keep him cool. Don't let him bate.**
- 2. Gyrs frequently refuse to recover the fist when they bate. Instead, they hang upside down, screaming with rage, thereby overheating and learning to hate the offending primate to whose arm they are tethered. Should the jerkin get into a bate, go to the ground with him, let him recover his composure, and pick him up on the well-garnished fist.**
- 3. Gyrs, equipped with indelible memories, can hold a grudge. Don't get him mad. (This is difficult. Gyrs in general – and jerkins in particular – are hot-tempered.)**
- 4. Hooding is critical with gyrs. If you can't hood your jerkin, you can't hunt with him. Being hot-tempered and independent, the time will come when he will refuse the hood. Not because he's hood-shy, but because he just doesn't want it on. Be prepared!**
- 5. Gyrs are prone to contract fatal avian malarial infections from mosquitoes. Keep him in a tightly-screened enclosure, and medicate him weekly with anti-malaria medicine.**
- 6. Gyrs, being Arctic birds, have immune systems that can't cope**

with many of the pathogens presented at lower latitudes. Don't weaken him by cutting his weight down, thereby making him more prone to aspergillosis and other horrible spores and microbes.

Armed with these caveats and suggestions (Dan proved to be right on all counts), my primary goal for my new jerkin's first year was clear: Keep him alive, healthy, and happy. To accomplish this, I decided to take things slowly, training him just as I would a freshly-caught passage goshawk. I'd keep him hooded by day, feed him on the fist in dim light at night, and make him to the hood as quickly as possible during the meal, keeping his weight constant all the while. It would be crucial to have my new jerkin associate me with pleasure, avoid any painful experiences, and ease him through the torrid days of summer until the cooler days of fall arrived. Then he could be flown free and trained to wait-on.

Dave Jr., Lancelot and I arrived home in Boulder that evening, where a nice plump quail was on ice for the first meal on the fist. Well after sunset, we all retired to the drawing room and locked the doors to prevent interruption. Re-enacting the ritual followed by falconers over the centuries on the eve of a wild hawk's first feeding, we lit a candle to provide just enough light to see by. With Lancelot on the fist, I eased off the hood. His big, blocky head was breathtakingly beautiful. He looked around the room with quizzical onyx eyes, took note of the fresh quail beneath his feet, straightened up, arched his neck, and proceeded to produce an enormous casting. "Good", I thought. "An auspicious beginning".

Digestive tract now empty, the hungry gyrfalcon tore into the quail and polished it off in record time. Only then did I realize how quickly gyrs consume a meal. (That's biologically sensible, for they've got to eat fast out on the polar ice cap where quarry will flash-freeze within

minutes of capture.) His fast feeding could present a problem in early training, for – needing to avoid a bate at all costs – I could only carry Lancelot while feeding him to maximise the pleasure and minimise the pain he would associate with me. Some tough, tasty tirings were needed.

I blew out the candle, hooded him in the dark, and set him on his indoor block. The training of Lancelot (and me) had begun.

We repeated this regimen daily for several weeks, feeding him earlier in the evening each day, thereby letting him get accustomed to his new life in ever-increasing levels of light. When Lancelot had settled down, I blocked him outdoors in a spacious mosquito-proofed weathering yard. I'd heard jerkins were particularly 'electric,' and Lancelot proved to be no exception. He was tremendously energetic, bating incessantly while weathering. It was apparent my new charge would have to spend more time in the hood until he became comfortable with his outdoor setting. Over time, I trained him to weather bareheaded by walking around his block and giving him tidbits, occasionally jumping him to the fist. I'd have him take the bulk of his meal on the lure. When he was convinced all the food was gone, and started looking toward me expectantly, I'd blow the whistle, hop him to the fist for a tidbit, hood him up, and put him in his mew for the night.

Before long, Lancelot started paddling his wings with anticipation at my approach. It was time to fly him to the lure for ever-increasing distances on the creance. Everything went according to Hoyle (or Mavro, actually) until I moved the training site from my back yard out to the field. Out in the country, Lancelot became terrified the moment the hood came off. Feathers slicked down, all he wanted to do was head for the horizon.

Several tidbits calmed him down enough so I could set him gently down on the ground, walk away a few

paces, blow the whistle, and throw out the garnished lure. Big mistake. The spooky jerkin overshot the lure, picked up speed, reached the end of the creance, and dragged its weight for quite a distance before his first 'flight' came to an unceremonious end in the wheat-stubble. Naturally, he (quite rightly) blamed all this on me, became enraged, and had his first temper tantrum – just the kind about which Dan had warned me. I backed off immediately and let the irate jerkin have his tantrum alone. When he'd vented his spleen and started to look around for something else to do, I crawled toward him on my belly like a reptile, preceded by a well-garnished, outstretched fist. At this point I was acutely aware of my new status: Manservant to a flying dinosaur. Lancelot gave me a strange look as if to ask: "Just what the hell are you doing down here?" He hopped to the fist and ate heartily as if nothing had happened.

From that ill-fated beginning, Lancelot's flight training progressed rapidly. He soon flashed across the field to the lure the length of the creance the instant I blew the whistle. At that point, I decided to work him twice a day – morning and evening, the only times when it was cool.

When I dispensed with the creance – a device I despise – his progress increased exponentially. After making sure he'd come several hundred yards instantly to the swung (and lavishly garnished) lure, I took him out to the field, unhooded him, and held him high on the fist. He roused, muted, and sat there for five minutes, head bobbing, surveying the surrounding landscape. When he finally launched himself into the air, Lancelot flew off for about a quarter of a mile, gaining altitude all the way. When I blew the whistle and swung the lure, he looked over his shoulder, turned, and came back immediately, attacking the lure (which I always threw out on the ground ahead of him) with unusual ferocity.

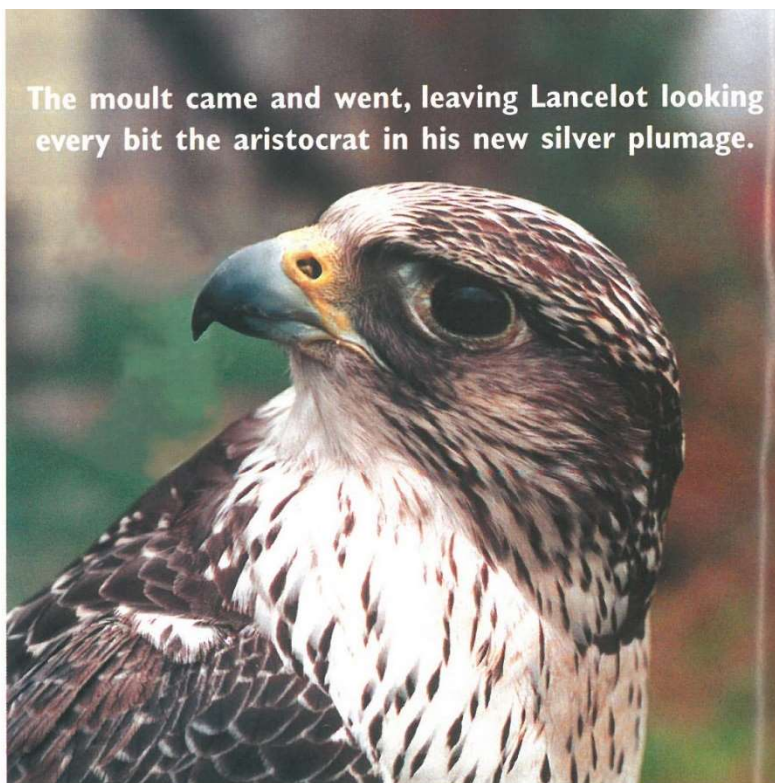
Lancelot was more serious at

eveningtime; during our morning flights, he seemed quite playful. After several nerve-wracking early-morning telemetry incidents, I decided to scrub the 'training' aspect of the morning session and simply let him fly. When I did that, Lance would take off from the fist, fly into the wind, climb up at a surprisingly steep angle, and disappear into the clouds. I'd track his course with telemetry, but stay in the same spot.

After a half-hour or more (during which time I was more than a little bit anxious) I'd hear the 'ching-ching-ching' of bells and Lance would land in the field near me, bob his head affectionately, and look at me as if to say "O.K., it's breakfast time. Where's my lure?" I'd feed him a tiring on the lure. When he was finished, I'd blow the whistle, jump him to the fist (he'd usually bring the lure up with him), hood him up, take him home, put him out to weather and bathe, and fly him at homing pigeons⁽²⁾ in the evening.

As the days of late summer passed, Lancelot got stronger and his footwork came together; it was high time to go game-hawking. During the coming weeks I flew him at ducks, pheasants, and prairie grouse. As the season progressed he flew higher, waited on longer, and chased harder. During that first season, Lancelot was quite playful, occasionally catching a pheasant and letting it go so he could chase it again. (Great fun for him, but rather frustrating for the falconer). Whenever he took game, I would let him gorge on it. Consequently, all hunts were single-kill hunts. When he missed, I would reward him in proportion to his effort. Good effort, big food-reward; poor effort, minimal reward, but always enough to make his returning to the lure worthwhile.

By season's end, Lancelot was a joy to work with. When I'd stroll into the yard, he'd paddle his wings and bate toward me, raring to go. I'd jump him to the fist for a tidbit, put the hood in front of his face, and he'd eagerly insert his beak into its opening knowing that the hood meant hunting.



The moult came and went, leaving Lancelot looking every bit the aristocrat in his new silver plumage.

Photo by David Moran

A natural athlete and an extremely aggressive, intelligent predator, Lancelot was clearly the best game-hawk I'd flown. He was never easy, however. Being a chamber-raised bird, he remained somewhat high-strung and hot-tempered. A bit one-mannish, he would allow me to approach him at the block, yet was quite wary of strangers. He was not nearly as tame and biddable as an imprint. Still, if I was careful, never annoyed him, and always met him on his terms, he was absolutely reliable. His keen intelligence showed through in all phases of training and hunting.

The moult came and went, leaving Lancelot looking every bit the aristocrat in his new silver plumage. During his second season, my jerkin became more serious and more deadly. He proved to be a superb grouse-hawk, taking many cock sage grouse in the 5 - 7 pound (2240 - 3136 gram) range. Not bad for a 36 ounce (1008 gram) jerkin! His pitch ranged from about 800 feet to out of sight, depending upon his mood and the weather. Although he

flew well in still air, flying in the wind was his forte. It was a thrill putting him up over the pointing dogs, watching him climb up amongst the billowing cumulus clouds, and running in to flush, not knowing whether he was there with us or off elsewhere sitting on some errant quarry he'd seen on the horizon⁽³⁾. During one particularly exciting flight, he hit an adult cock sage grouse so hard from such a towering pitch it not only killed the grouse in mid-air, but also knocked Lancelot completely unconscious, making those in the field fear he was dead⁽⁴⁾.

Lancelot's magnificent performances as a falconry bird were due not only to his genetics - I do believe he was a superb example of the species - but also to the caveats Dan Konkel gave me pertaining to the nature and training of gyrfalcons. The most important points in the training of Lancelot - and, I think, of most parent-reared gyrs⁽⁵⁾ - would be these:

1. Since Lancelot was an Arctic falcon living in a warm climate,

great care had to be taken to house and manage him correctly to prevent him from becoming overheated, over-stressed, and sick.

2. Given his keen intelligence, no mistakes could be made – especially during hood-training. (Example: Had I let him associate being hooded with the end of the meal, he would have learned to avoid the hood in short order).

3. Given his hypervigilant nature and hot temper, it was necessary to cater to him to avoid tantrums, always providing pleasure and never producing pain.

4. Given his tremendously high energy level, it was necessary to keep Lancelot hooded during the early days of his training, or he would have bated incessantly, thereby damaging his legs, feet, feathers, and psyche. When game-hawking began,

daily flying served as an outlet for that energy, and he would weather and bathe outside very nicely.

4. Gyrs have great speed in level flight. Their normal mode of hunting in the Arctic is not from a pitch. Instead, gyrs tail-chase their quarry – often for many miles – and fly it down. Consequently, to get them to take a high pitch, as Lancelot did, it's necessary to flush only when the gyr is far away and climbing. In the early stages of training, gyrs tend to hover overhead like kestrels. (They know who's got the food!) Should you flush when your gyr is directly overhead at a low pitch, he will inevitably catch the game, thereby learning to hover at a low altitude over your head. This produces a full bag but few high-quality flights.

If you have plenty of time, lots of patience, miles of open country, and

a good supply of game, you'll love flying a gyr. If any one of these ingredients is missing, you're in for a rough ride. Should you elect to fly one, best of luck! ■

FOOTNOTES:

(1) Dan and Jeannie Konkel operate 'Sage Country Falcons' in Sheridan, Wyoming. They produce magnificent gyrfalcons, and are among the finest breeders in the world today.

(2) At that time I didn't realize that many pigeons are asymptomatic carriers of an avian Herpes virus lethal to gyrfalcons. I will never let a gyr chase and/or eat a pigeon again.

(3) For a detailed description of one such flight, see the story 'The Silver Cross-Bow' in: 'Life on the Wing: Adventures with Birds of Prey', Moran, D.T., 1996. Round Table Press, P.O. Box 18642, Boulder, CO 80301 USA. (See website at www.roundtablepress.com)

(4) For the complete story of that adventure, see 'A Jerkin, a Cock Sage Grouse, and Kelly the Wonder Dog' in 'Life on the Wing: Adventures with Birds of Prey.'

(5) Beware: The training of imprinted gyrfalcons is very different. The suggestions given herein would apply only to parent-reared or passage gyrs.

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Editors Note:

For the sake of readers new to the sport, the Editor wishes to point out that using bagged quarry (eg. homing pigeons) as a training aid is illegal in many countries, including the UK.

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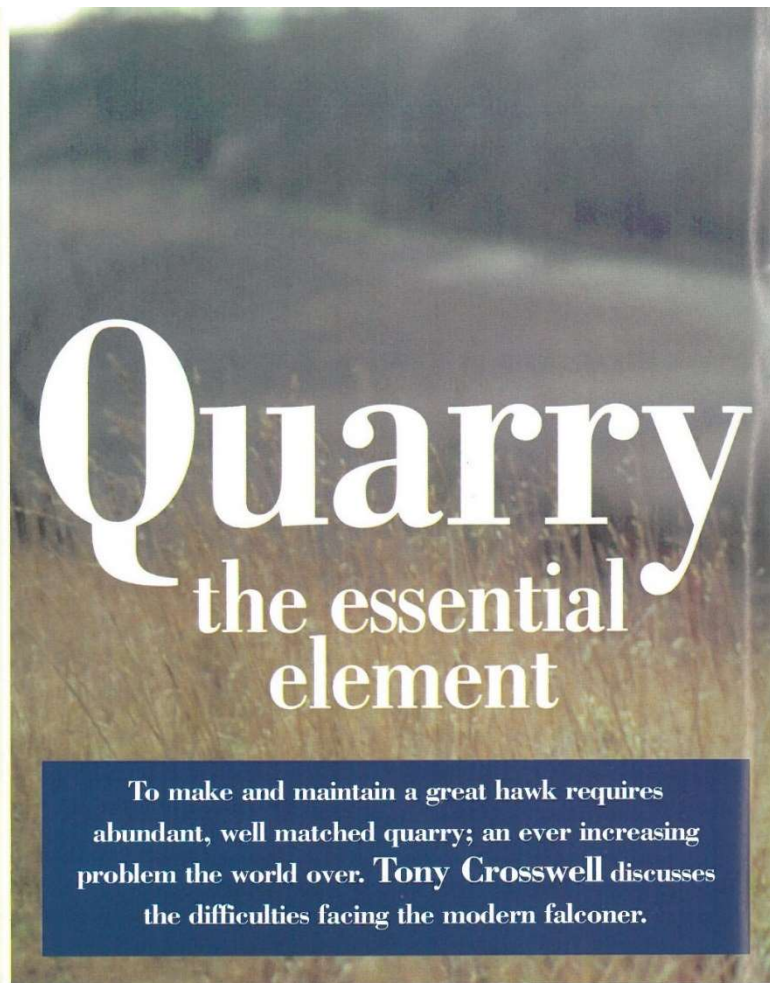
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We have all worked hard in the UK for many years to secure falconry against the attacks of the 'antis'. Many people have come forward and contributed to the reorganisation of our structure with some great results for the sport: restoration of Lark Licences, regaining access to National Trust land, the creation of the Hawk Board co-ordinator post and the creation of the Campaign for Falconry. We are now stronger and more aware than ever before and better equipped to face the challenges as they arrive. Falconers can be proud of their effort in the UK.

Internationally there have also been great changes with a restructured International Association for Falconry under its new president Ferrante Pratesi with a very active team supporting him. Their first challenge has been the hybrid issue, seeking some harmony and common purpose with great effect. Following hard on the heels of this subject has come the Sky Trials and the Falconry World Championship in Spain where traditional falconry values have been challenged by events taking place in the public arena. It has stirred many emotions and much debate.

President of the British Falconers' Club, Robbie Wilson responded most eloquently with a well respected and reasoned statement on the subject, voicing our own traditions and clearly setting out the true values of falconry as the sport of taking wild quarry with trained hawks.

Some of us have been privileged to travel the world flying our falcons in pursuit of the dream of falconry. The stories of how much better falconry is in some far off land is a constant pull to those who find frustration in their efforts at home. It certainly is exciting to fly the fantastic prairie chicken, sharptail grouse, sage grouse. The list is long: morning doves, a multitude of ducks, cranes, red grouse, ptarmigan, rabbits, jacks, hares, roedeer, houbara, quail, green pigeon, partridge, squirrels, gulls, larks, rooks and crows; one can go on and on. The difficulties which face



Quarry

the essential element

To make and maintain a great hawk requires abundant, well matched quarry; an ever increasing problem the world over. Tony Crosswell discusses the difficulties facing the modern falconer.

the modern falconer are largely practical as the same story arises in every country; the difficulty of finding enough quarry to make good hawks and keep them at their peak of performance when lack of quarry or poor quarry rapidly lowers the performance of our hawks.

The average falconer today has more information available to him than has ever been before. If he travels he is able to try out all shades of experience and quarry. Idle speculation is no longer needed as the world experience is now available to many so the real truths and values of our sport are quickly revealed. Different cultures have different solutions and acceptable standards which often jar the sensitivities of others. In the UK we have found it difficult to accept that

bull fighting is still the national pastime in Spain and from our own standpoint it is hard to see its relevance. In South Africa a pigeon loft is a condition of being a falconer, the public Sky Trial with pigeons as the quarry was invented in the US and is readily accepted there. As the world grows ever smaller and each country is more effected by the actions of another so we are all faced with having to consider other peoples sport and it is only too easy to draw inappropriate conclusions and apply inappropriate solutions when trying to overcome our own difficulties.

The Game hawker world-wide is ever seeking the high flying hawk and so looks for the magic answer but his vision is clouded by his own experience and difficulties. The rook hawker is ever seeking the

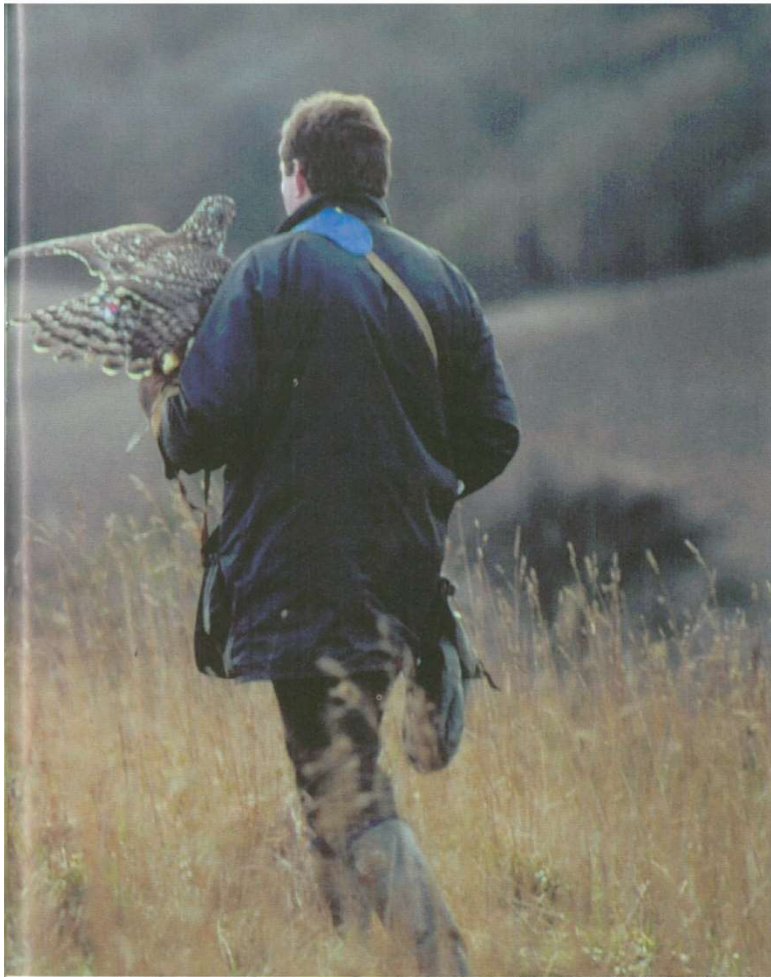


Photo: Seth Anthony

courageous falcon that will take on a ringing rook into the heavens. The austringer is seeking that sparkling athlete that can deal with a rabbit on a frosty morning or fly down the cock pheasant and take it out of the air. The very act of speculation amongst falconers when tempted by the false values of the sky trial or the 'magic' of the 'recipe' imprint accipiter has already accepted and ignored the basic problem with which we are all ever more confronted and limited.

The basic requirement to make a great hawk is the regularity of flushing appropriately matched quarry that tests the hawk to the limit of its ability and potential. Inferior quarry will make an inferior hawk. Superior quarry will overmatch the hawk and dispirit it into ignoring the slip just as will too

many disappointments at the flush. The primary problem faced by all falconers is how to provide sufficient quarry for his hawk and for most of us we are only too well aware of this right from the start.

Today the problem is becoming even more serious the world over. In the US, supposed heaven for falconry, grouse numbers are falling so fast that restrictions are increasing annually and there is now talk of many being taken off the quarry list! In much of Europe the partridge has all but disappeared and even the rabbit might be a rarity. Bird numbers in general are falling everywhere and led to our own problems with the skylark. In the UK the sheer cost of providing game can be enormous. The logistics of organising pheasant hawking on a regular basis to make a

good hawk was brilliantly captured by Ray Turner but is frightening to those whose pockets and available time do not match their aspirations and dreams. Even Ray himself appears to have given it up rather than attempt to make another falcon!

The ever increasing problem for falconry is the availability of our quarry. Short cut solutions and slick training techniques imported from other cultures fail to create that fulfilling hunting experience we all seek in our hawks. The problem is going to get worse if we are not more thoughtful about our sport and more committed to nurturing our quarry. Breeding a new type of hybrid can be counter productive when not properly thought out. It is no accident that our traditional classic flights have evolved. It is the perfect match of quarry and predator.

The next big challenge for falconry everywhere is in confronting this problem. To find a quick fix solution as they have in Spain and the US is a pale imitation of the true values of our sport. We are privileged in the UK in having the greatest opportunity and variety of suitable quarry of anywhere in the world. It is even the case that under EU law our government has an obligation to ensure our quarry is provided for us. The species available to us provide a complete spectrum for all our hawks if only we can see clearly enough how to make it work. Whether we have to breed and release partridge or drive miles to find the right slip for a tiercel at golden plover it is still all possible and will create a brilliant hawk although what it takes may be more than the falconer is willing or able to give. Falconry has never been easy and it looks like it is set to become ever more demanding for those who are blessed with the burden of the falconers' way of life. Alternatively we can bury our heads in the sand and just aimlessly prey for a miracle. ■



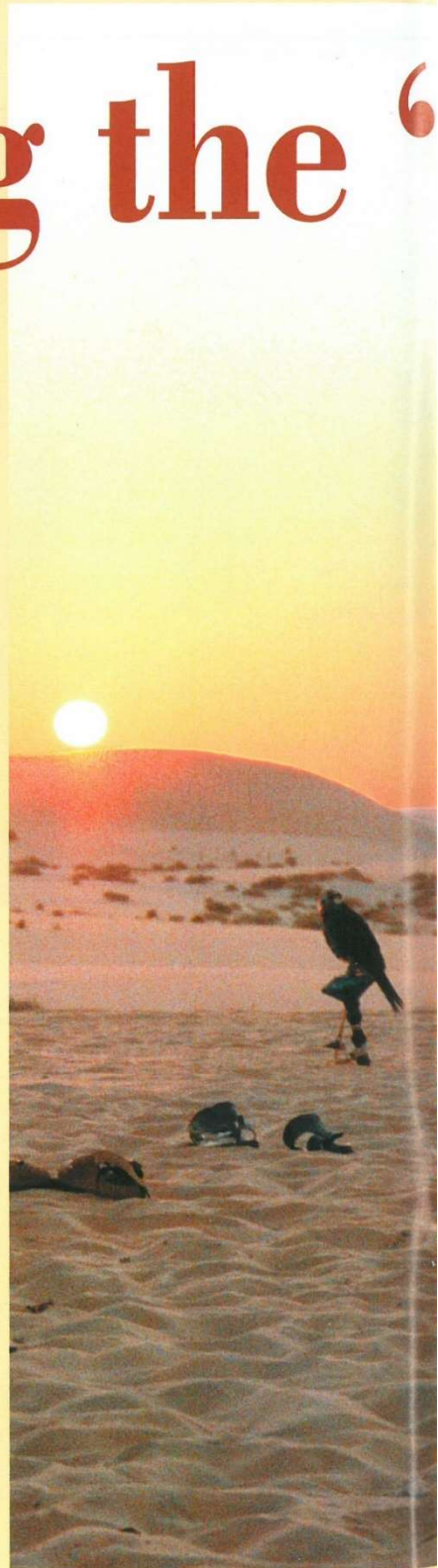
Hawking the '6

Every sense shocked into alert mode, co-ordination lagging way behind, I struggled, fumbling, to an elbow-propped position.

I'd drifted into sleep under a velvet blanket of stars only minutes ago it seemed, and now the harshness of the dawn sun assaulted my eyes along an alien underbelly.

Nerves screamed as an intermittent blaring sound befuddled the brain.

It was to be the start of a great days hawking!



stone courser⁹

Story and photos by Michael Ratcliffe



The brain struggled to locate familiarity. A sand tire - a Cruiser grill - a disembodied question - "Enta Mike?" (You Mike?)

I'd arrived at the prearranged coordinates about 70 kilometres to the NW of Jubail and about 40 kilometres from the Arabian Gulf at 03:00hrs that morning, rolled out my bedroll and slept with the triumph of a Manchester United victory over Inter Milan still fresh in my mind. It was no surprise to find nobody there!

The horn stopped blaring. A cheerful but unfamiliar Bedu face looked down across a crooked elbow as he leaned out the window of the white Cruiser.

I'd fallen asleep with a lifetimes experience to back up the view that I was indeed Mike. Now, three hours later, I would have been willing to swap a lifetimes identity for another couple of hours of sleep.

"Yes", I replied

"Where's Barqash?" was the rough and ready reply.

"I don't know. I was supposed to meet him here last night." I mumbled, trying to assert myself in this rather unequal conversation.

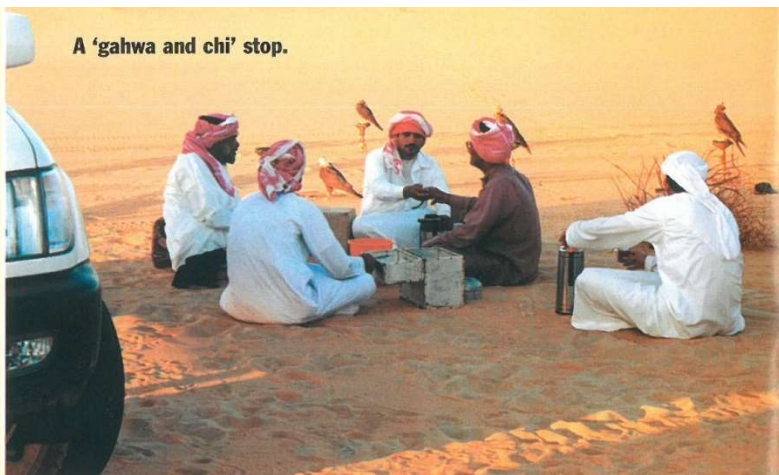
"Why didn't you sleep in my tents?" he said with a casual wave at the cluster of tents and one hundred and twenty camels that were about 100 metres to the North!!

"I didn't see them" I said, with the loss of all hope that this relationship could ever be put on a more equal footing.

The engine revved and Abdullah was gone with a "Qum! Qum! (Get up! Get up!) We're milking the camels."

It soon became clear that kairowan hawking didn't begin until the chores were done and first on the list was the milking of seventeen varyingly reluctant camels. With the Sudani herdsman holding one backleg and me the other, Abdullah Bijad, did the milking into an aluminium bowl. To let go of the leg was to suffer another

A 'gahwa and chi' stop.



'Alia'-
Kairowan hawk
of the day.
A captive bred
British peregrine.

blow to my already shattered self-respect. To hang on at all cost was to face the inevitability of a bite from the yellow teeth of the current reluctant donor. It seems that camels have especially long necks so that they can turn round whilst being milked and bite me!

Timing their entrance perfectly, Barqash and Nasser appeared on the Eastern horizon just as we were finishing up. It was 07:00 hrs and clearly the hawking was about to begin. CB radios crackled and the two new Cruisers joined Abdullah's in front of the tent.

The main body of camels had now set off on their daily search for pasture and the stage was set for the last chore of the morning. The five camels remaining were enclosed in a trailing barbed wire enclosure. Four females at one end and one seriously hobbled male at the other. Pink skin balloon trembling feverishly at the corner of his mouth and a white froth spraying everywhere, he issued a deafening burbling sound. He was clearly looking forward to something a bit more exciting than chewing the cud. As soon as the hobbles were removed he waded into the shy, swirling group of young females that were today's offering. Finding the beige beauty to be emitting odor of choice, he quickly shouldered her out of the group and invited her to assume the camel version of the missionary position. No-one observing this could doubt our Makers sense of humour since it is exactly the same position that she is always crouched in. You've seen the picture postcards. A lifted tail is her only concession. Standing astride her, and now beginning to show his regrettable lack of experience, it took awhile for him to lower himself into an upright sitting position behind her with his front legs on her back. Take a little time here to picture the position and you'll share with me, the Kamasutra-not-withstanding view that the perpetuation of the camel species from this position is highly unlikely. Not so! Abdullah assures



The houbara (bustard) is the classic quarry of choice for the falconer in Saudi where falconry can truly be described as a national pastime. The kairowan, (stone courser) is definitely second best. Both of these prey species and their natural avian predators, the saker and the *calidus* peregrine, enter Saudi in the area around the northern Gulf and the Kuwait border around late October on their southern migration. The kairowan tend to precede the houbara on their southward migration and vice versa on their northward move. On their return journey the kairowan exit Saudi in March. With Saudi Arabia being towards the southern end of their migration, many kairowan and houbara make this the end of their journey and disperse into the vast expanses of the Saudi desert to winter. Throughout the months of October through March kairowan and houbara are the focus of falconry throughout the Kingdom. The quarry follow sporadic rainfall patterns, to be where the new growth of vegetation and the accompanying insects can be found. The huntsmen aren't far behind. Certain areas around the Kingdom combine attractiveness to the quarry with suitability of terrain for the motorized hunt. In March, though, they congregate in the North of the country prior to migrating back across the Gulf to Iran in number. By the time they reach this area, the temperatures have begun to rise and daytime temperatures range between 65° Fahrenheit at dawn, 80° Fahrenheit at midday and around 70° Fahrenheit at dusk.

The hawking is done up to about 11:30hrs in the morning and from around 15:00hrs till dusk in the evening. For the falconer this congregation of kairowan in March offers the last opportunity to enjoy the last of his sport for the hawking season. The sightings of the first groups are eagerly awaited.

The kairowan (*Burhinus oedicnemus saharae*) is largely an insect eater. It has a cream base colour, vertically flecked with brown. The wings and tail are white on the underside and brown-flecked cream on the upper. The wing primaries are black and the outer side of the upper wing have transverse bars of white and black. The head seems disproportionately broad and heavy especially in the males and the yellow beak is pointed, about 2 - 3 centimetres long with a black tip. The legs are long and end in a front-pointing three-toed foot. The track of the kairowan is simply a smaller version of that of the houbara. Perhaps their most distinctive feature close up is their large golden eyes with a small black pupil. There's a white band above the eye and a dark band immediately below. It gives them the same sort of slightly mad gaze of the accipiter. In terms of statistics, adults range in weight from 400 - 450 grams (14 - 16 ounces). Wingspan is approximately 60 centimetres. A short brown tail means they measure only around 30 centimetres from head to tail tip. With long legs they stand around 25 centimetres tall at full stretch.

They are largely a nocturnal feeder and flier using most of the daylight hours to rest and forage in a relatively small area. During the heat of the day they are often found resting and very well concealed in the shade of the desert thorn (*solanaceas lycium shawi*). The kairowan and the houbara are always associated with this bush, known locally in Arabic as 'harum'. It grows up to 70 centimetres tall. It's size and shape may simply be a product of grazing by camels. It is a member of the nightshade family and is therefore a relative of the tomato and potato. Depending on rainfall it has tiny star shaped blue flowers and small fleshy, seed-filled orange berries. The camels grazing notwithstanding, it has fearsome stiff black thorns which pose a constant threat even to tough 4x4 tires.

As a prey species, they have developed a number of strategies for evading the wild falcons to which they are well accustomed throughout their range. Camouflage and total stillness, preferably in the shade of the desert thorn, are their first response to airborne danger. If this doesn't serve to evade detection they take to the air in a low ground hugging flight that gradually gains height and momentum. If the falcon is up to this and gets within range the kairowan will plunge back into cover below the thorns. The skills learned so well for the one-on-one wild scenario are well known to the Saudi falconer. He has developed strategies to combat them in aid of his falcon.



Photo: Manfred Pfefferle/Oxford Scientific Films

the admiring crowd, as he strides across to the obviously perplexed pair. With a few minor adjustments here and especially there! a satisfactory outcome can be observed. My attempts to express my admiration at this display of hands-on camel husbandry were brushed aside as he led us straight into the tent for breakfast.

Fresh camels milk, a special bedouin winter breakfast dish of lightly fried bread, dates, onions and various other bits and pieces accompanied the excited chatter. Kairowan were plentiful, it seemed.

Bargash bin Mohammed and his young falconry buddies stretch the patience of their fathers, university lecturers and employers, to the limit as they try to make use of every available day to test the speed of their falcons against the kairowan.

The bigger sakers and lanners, especially the slower haggards, are already put up and the focus is on the smaller passage shahin bahries (*calidus peregrines*), female shahin jebelis (barbaries) and, increasingly these days, captive-bred gyr/shahin hybrids and European peregrines.

The official hawking season ended in February and the legality of this traditional kairowan hawking in March is always the subject of some debate.

It seems that the leisurely breakfast and the painstaking preparations which include connecting my car up to the CB network! are deliberately designed to get the last ounce of pleasure from anticipation. Falcons to fly have their transmitters attached mostly with plastic lock ties round the leg but also on an occasional tail mount. We have three Landcruisers and my short-wheel base Pajero and a great selection of birds: two captive-bred British peregrine falcons (Rings still on one!), two gyr hybrids (adult plumage British

peregrine/gyrfalcon and an immature saker/gyrfalcon bred in Muller's old breeding facility in Germany), a passage saker falcon, two lanner falcons, and a haggard barbary falcon.

Finally, at 09:00 hrs, we were away (Their fathers would be ashamed of them) We set off in two groups in different directions. Just a few hundred metres from camp the drivers slowed down and started to quarter the ground for the give-away three-toed tracks. It seemed the herdsman had disturbed two kairowan with his flock of sheep on their way to pasture. All eyes now scoured the landscape in the direction of the tracks. The kairowan move very little during the day and can therefore be relied upon to be in the vicinity. At this point the kairowan will be in stage one of the escape plan - camouflaged immobility. This needs a well trained but young pair of eyes. I have never been able to spot one first and on many occasions have had them vainly pointed out to me at what transpired to be a 3 metre distance. Suddenly there was a muffled "Shuwf!" (See!) The haggard *calidus* was unhooded and the cars manoeuvred so that the falcon would have a clear view from the passengers window. The other car, with its horn blaring, hurtled towards the kairowan. Escape plan two was triggered and the kairowan took to the wing in a low flight skimming the tops of the bushes. The falcon was cast off. The kairowan immediately recognised at least one familiar quarry and as the peregrine rapidly made ground on her she sought cover under the nearest desert thorn. The flushing Cruiser bared down on the bush with his horn blaring whilst the falcon glided in the vicinity. The prey was now extremely unwilling to take to the air again and waited for an advantage moment, when the falcon was at the furthest point of her circuit and the immense front of the Cruiser was virtually overhead to take to the air again. With the car in hot pursuit to prevent her putting in under another bush and the falcon

Passage saker on standby.



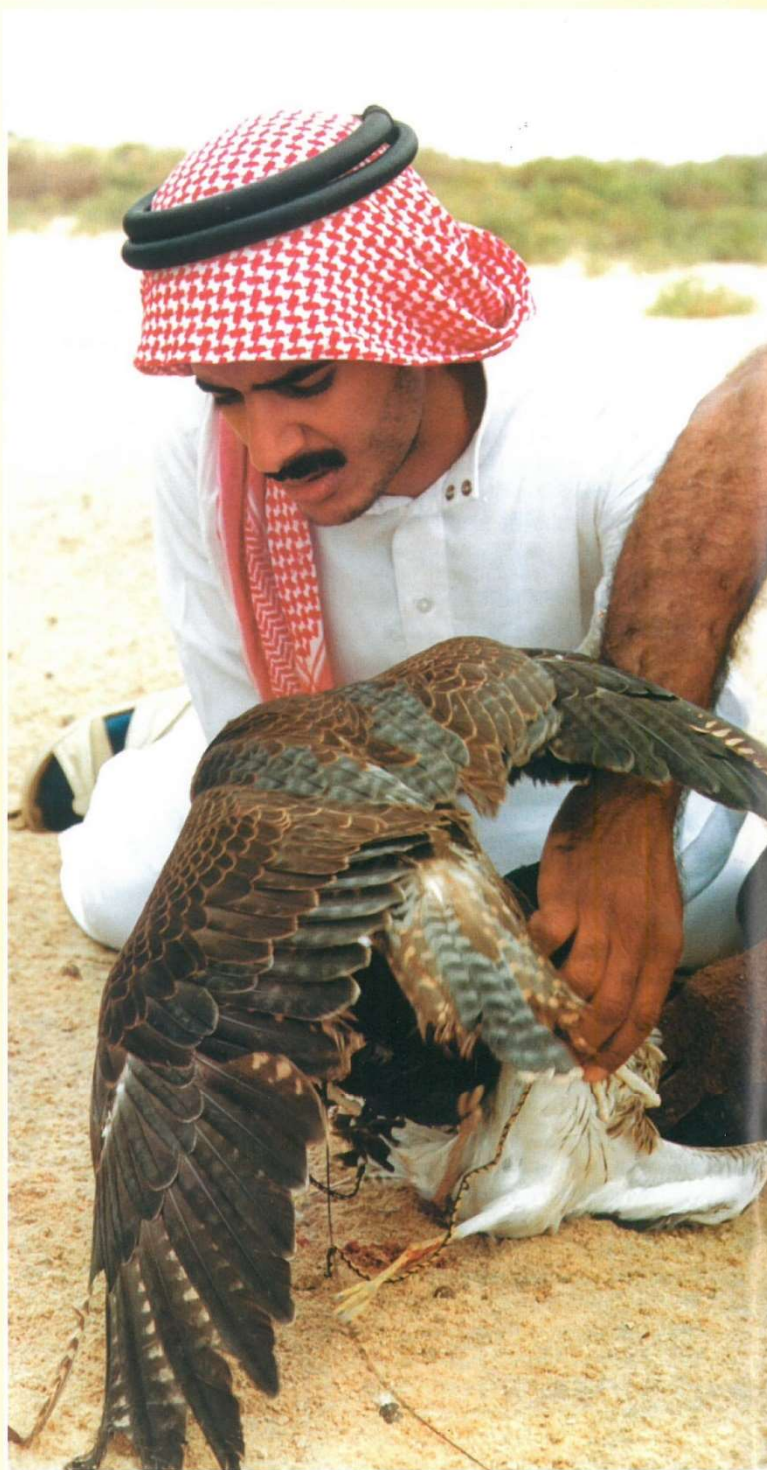
once again making ground fast, she started to try putting the falcon off with an intermittent piping alarm call. At the same time she began to accept the inevitable and moved up a gear. It wasn't enough, and the falcon overhauled her and bound-to. In an instant the nearest man leapt from the car and sitting beside her deftly switched the still unharmed kairowan with a luckless and headless pigeon.

A live kairowan was popped in the bag and congratulations were the order of the day. As the falcon got her carefully measured reward the rest of us now quartered the ground for the second kairowan. Since the kairowan don't move far, the small area in which they have located for the day soon becomes criss-crossed with their tracks making exact tracking virtually impossible. Once it

is clear that tracks are fresh, tracking is abandoned and quartering of the area commences. The second kairowan would now be exceedingly unwilling to show itself. We quartered the area for over an hour, knowing that the quarry was within 1,000 sq.metres and had all but given up when Abdullah called on the CB to say that a group that I hadn't met before had found four about 10 kilometres away and were waiting for us.

Persuaded to abandon my car at the camp since it was serving no obvious purpose in my hands, I boarded Abdullah's Cruiser fully aware that the Bedouin expertise in desert driving can often be mistaken for reckless abandon. In this case I had grossly underestimated Abdullah who, through the course of the remainder of the day progressively raised my fear and pain threshold. We covered the 10 kilometres at speeds only allowed on German autobahns, CB crackling and the constant blare of Arabic music. Forced, in the back seat, to abandon all the scientifically placed Toyota handholds, I opted for the aircraft crash recommended position and found myself a human ball cannoning round a very confined space with three hooded falcons who had the advantage of sharp talons to hang on (to me) with. Later in the day I was to discover that this was Abdullah in leisurely mode!

The brothers Mubarak and Mohammed were parked up and drinking tea in the middle of a particularly beautiful patch of desert with a huge shallow salt lake as a backdrop and particularly green desert thorn in profusion. No one mentioned kairowan in the welter of kissed greetings and handshakes until I could restrain myself no longer and interrupted this picnic-like scene with "Where are the kairowan?" They'd spotted the kairowan over thirty minutes ago and had devoted the intervening period, whilst waiting for us, to discussing strategy. A waste of time as it turned out since Abdullah is not an advocate of democratic decision



The tried and tested 'two-handed steal'.

making and now proceeded to organise things in a way well understood in the military all over the world.

None of the kairowan had moved in the thirty minutes since they had been spotted. Now gently herded by Abdullah's car they were all up and running. Expertly he got his car between one and the rest of the group and signalled one of the other drivers to herd the others away and then stay with them. A lanner was now prepared for flight and suddenly Abdullah's Cruiser surged forward in a headlong pursuit of the kairowan. Sensibly it took to the air. Almost immediately the lanner gave chase. With Abdullah always at hand to prevent it from putting in, the kairowan drew away with the falcon rapidly gaining ground. Each time the falcon got within range the kairowan gave her insistent piping alarm call which seemed to give the falcon momentary pause for thought. Finally predator was upon the prey and a turn was forced and then another. Increasingly hard pressed, the kairowan used the cars to turn around and make space for herself. It was clearly a tactical battle taking place before us. Almost imperceptibly the kairowan began to pull away and now weaving evasion was replaced with headlong flight. The lanner flicked her wings and glided into defeat. With the kairowan now gaining speed and altitude about 200 metres away the interior of our car exploded into action. The car took over her own steering at about 50 kilometres an hour, Abdullah reached back and grabbed his hooded saker by the nearest bit - a wing - with one hand, dragged the hood off with the other and threw her through the roof light. The car which had just begun to display an odd error of judgement in steering itself, had control wrenched from it, and we surged forward in total disregard of the natural terrain. With his eyes fixed firmly on the dot that was his bird, Abdullah put all Toyota's engineering skills to tests they could never have imagined, and managed to get us back in the scene just in

time to see his saker pull the quarry out of the skies. This was a pattern to emerge as the day went on. The saker and Mubarak's excellent British peregrine, Alia, were used as sweepers. Whenever the kairowan had defeated the first falcon, one of them was cast off and never failed to redress the balance. In the notable last flight of the day. A passage Turkish peregrine had coursed the quarry round and round a relatively small area. At least six times it seems the falcon must triumph only for the kairowan to side step. At one point both she and the falcon flew straight under one of the cars. With the first signs of tiredness in the falcon the kairowan headed for the skies. The Turkish peregrine still didn't give up and flew up with her. Finally about, 300 metres away and a similar distance up, the telltale flick and glide prompted Mohammed to slip his renowned captive bred British peregrine, Alia. The kairowan was a dot by the time Alia was airborne. She flew in a direct angled assault on the circling Turkish peregrine, briefly bound to his feet and then abandoned him for the kairowan. There were no majestic stoops or arty manoeuvres. She simply overhauled and grabbed the quarry first time before gliding back to earth on the edge of the salt water lake.

**It was the end of a great days hawking.
We'd had fifteen flights and taken twelve kairowan.
No-one there had had a better day.**

The next day didn't go so well! In the first and only flight of the day, the immature gyr/peregrine hybrid that Bargash had acquired only three weeks earlier after it had been blocked out idle for three months and was at best hurriedly trained, declined the chance at kairowan and Abdullah cast off the saker 'sweeper'. After frightening the life out of the hybrid it set off after a very distant kairowan. Even Abdullah

resisted the urge to drive through the saltwater lake and suddenly the telemetry was out. The saker was out of range within a few minutes and although we picked up the signal intermittently over the next four hours, it was 13:00 hrs in the afternoon before we got a clear signal showing she was heading for the coast 40 kilometres away. Had she got the urge to join the migration? With Abdullah in hot pursuit as only he knows how, he arrived in time to find her on a seagull kill on the beach. In six hours of freedom she'd changed from a bombproof trained falcon to one unwilling to let him make in on her. After a number of failed attempts that took her further and further along the beach, he slipped another falcon on her. In the ensuing tussle over the seagull, he was able to pick up both birds. ■

FOOTNOTE

There seems to be a growing trend for trained captive-bred falcons finding their way into the Saudi market via the Emirates. It is having the effect of showing sceptical Saudi falconers what captive bred birds can do. It seems the Emiratees have got round the problem of adopting different training methods for captive-bred birds by having the breeders come out and train and enter them in the Gulf. This in turn is resulting in a cross over of techniques. It seems that weighing birds before flying is now common practice there. In contrast, I'm not aware of any Saudi falconers who use the scales.

Passage merlins - t



Passage female Col

the falconer's prize

By Warren Al Ross

Photos by Charles H. Schwartz



Columbarius Merlin (*F.c.columbarius*) with starling kill.



Al Ross with 'Byrd', a passage Black Merlin.

04:55 hrs. I reach over to disable the alarm. I've been awake for fifteen minutes thinking of my good fortune to have a 07:00 hrs. to 15:30 hrs. shift in midwinter, just enough daylight at day's end to fly the 'Prize.'

I make my way through the dark house toward the smell of fresh brewed coffee. Forty minutes of solitude, contemplation and coffee and I'm ready to begin my day. Shower, pack a lunch, and out the door. Scrape the ice from the windshield and head for the freeway for the thirty minute drive to work. The Prize sits hooded next to me on her car perch.

Quitting time finds me bone weary, another tough day, but when I reach the parking lot, I get my second wind. I weigh the Prize, 211 grams (7.5 ounces), or about 95 per cent of her capture weight nine weeks ago in October. Perfect.

Back to the freeway to meet some friends at exit 263. Some quick conversation while I check my telemetry. The new Marshall micro is quickly mounted on my eager Black Merlin, the receiver tuned and we're on our way in search of a slip. The road winding west along the shore of Utah Lake is surrounded by small farms planted to corn or alfalfa, cattle feedlots and a few large dairy operations. This is one of the fastest growing areas in the US and the farms are disappearing at an alarming rate, giving way to industrial complexes and large housing tracts. In another decade, I'll no longer be able to hawk here.

We stop a few times to glass the fields for starlings, finally spotting a large flock at a feedlot two miles off the pavement. Our convoy of three cars turns off the road.

"What's the plan, Al?" asks my friend Dale.

"This is a great place. I've flown here many times. It's a perfect upwind slip and very predictable. In fact, if you guys would like to drive on down and park at the feedlot you will probably have a grandstand view."

"What about that flock to the south? How can you be sure she won't fly them instead?"

"Merlins usually hunt upwind, never downwind," I reply.

When they are in position at the feedlot, I unhood the Prize, give her tidbit and set her on the side mirror. I note the time to be 16:20 hrs.

Starlings are all around the feedlot; the power lines are sagging and hundreds are feeding in the mangers and the adjacent stubble field.

The Prize rouses, fans her tail, and looks back at me still sitting in the truck to see if any more tidbits are forth coming. She bobs her head three or four times and launches off the truck mirror. Instantly the air at the feedlot blackens as thousands of starlings scramble for the sky. As I step out of the truck with my binoculars in hand, it crosses my mind that my friends will see a real show today.

The Prize drops down to the deck skimming the gravel roadway for 100 yards, then rockets into the sky climbing steeply into the wind. By now the biggest group is high above the barns and tightening into an ever more compact ball, the roar of their wings easily heard from my position at the top of the lane. A few starlings make their escape by rushing downwind to the trees and dense brush not far from where I stand.

The main flock continues their speeding swirl into the sky. When the Prize reaches them she turns downwind and it seems for a moment that she might check, but then she throws up, standing on her tail and is suddenly towering above them. She side slips and enters the swirling mass, throws up again and makes a vertical twisting stoop that cuts the ball in half. She throws up again, stoops and drives the lower flock almost to the ground, binding to a starling and gliding to a rest 100 feet from where my friends stand watching. A cheer goes up from the audience.

I drive down the lane, talk to my friends about the flight for a minute or so, while the Prize eats the head of her kill. I tidbit her, then offer the glove garnished with a plucked starling breast. She immediately jumps to the fist to trade her starling

for mine. A few more minutes of small talk with my friends and we say our good byes.

I'm back in the truck for the twenty minute ride home, the Prize eating her reward bare headed on the perch

The Richardson's is a large, pale merlin that prefers open rural areas.

Eyass female Richardson's Merlin (*F.c. richardsonii*) on glove.



next to me. The last bit of sun slips over the horizon. Another gorgeous Utah sunset. It's great to be alive. It is 17:35 hrs. when I place her on

the perch next to the TV in the living room. My supper is waiting. No duck, pheasant, or grouse tonight. Not even roast starling. Oh well, you can't have everything.

My obsession with merlins began

identify, a small falcon in a tall cottonwood tree about a quarter mile off the road. Could it be a pigeon hawk? No, the only two falcons I knew back then had told me that merlins weren't found in Utah. I set for it out of curiosity and had it in

continue on with my plan to trap a prairie, but I decided to keep it long enough to show my falconer friends. By the time the opportunity came the merlin was well on the way to being manned and I was hooked. Our relationship was, however, short



soon after sunrise on a frigid January morning in 1967. I was driving to my favourite prairie falcon trapping area, when I spotted, but could not

my net almost instantly. I had just trapped the first merlin I had ever seen.

My instincts told me to release it and

lived. She disappeared flying a flock of passing starlings in a stiff wind forty-seven days after capture. This was to be the scenario with most of the merlins I trained until 1988

when I began using telemetry.

In the 60's and early 70's, merlins rarely wintered in central Utah. In 1968, I acquired a copy of E. B. Mitchell's *The Art and Practice of Hawking*, which served to reinforce my obsession. I spent countless hours and hundreds of gallons of gasoline in pursuit of these tiny falcons. I had some success with those I managed to trap, but was plagued with problems of premature loss, mysterious illnesses and a few instances of toe biting.

In the late 70's, merlins increased dramatically and my ability to spot and capture them improved.

Migrating merlins begin to arrive in Utah in early October. Most continue on south but good numbers of all three North American subspecies winter here: the Columbarius or Western Merlin (*F.c.columbarius*), the Richardson's Merlin (*F.c.richardsonii*), and the Black Merlin (*F.c.suckleyi*).

The Richardson's is a large, pale merlin that prefers open rural areas. The Columbarius and Black Merlins are more likely to be found in the older parts of towns where mature trees and shrubs abound, along with a plentiful prey base. Merlins are most easily spotted and trapped in the first two hours of daylight when they are actively hunting. Merlins are constantly on the go at this time of day, stopping only a minute or two after each unsuccessful flight. The trapper's goal must be to get in front of the merlin and make his set as quickly as possible.

My first choice for a trap is a type of dho ghaza that can be instantly deployed. It consists of a steel base with vertical poles, a net, a uniquely suspended bait cage and a drag all in one unit (see *The Ross Merlin Trap*, Hawk Chalk, April, 1991). On my first outing with this device I trapped five merlins. The suspended bait cage makes it impossible for the sparrows to remain still and they are in almost constant motion, which is irresistible to a hungry merlin.

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Passage male Black Merlin
(*F.c. suckleyi*) with starling on fist.



For the past seven years I have flown Black Merlins exclusively and have a definite bias toward them.

The bait sparrows were unharmed. Two sparrows can be kept in perfect health for weeks in this trap, and I always keep one ready inside my truck. This allows me to set for any merlin I see while travelling.

My second choice is a noose jacketed starling or house sparrow. One of my best hawks, a Black Merlin I called 'Grand Prize' was trapped on a harnessed sparrow. This wild merlin had interfered with several hunts and insisted on making one of my favourite hawking areas her winter home.

After seeing her bold and aggressive style in attacking on my bird as well as several of her flights at quarry, I decided I had to have her.

I set for her when she was perched on a power pole only 50 yards away. I had barely set the trap down when she came for the trap. I ran and ducked behind my truck. Just as she reached the dho ghaza, she flared, hitting the top corner of the net. Down it came in a tangle. In the corner of my eye, I caught the blur of a rapidly approaching Cooper's hawk. I chased the Cooper's from the area and re-set for the merlin. Four times she came in and threw up over the net. Finally, she left and I gave up, resolving to return the next morning.

My son Todd and my apprentice Doug went with me the next day. We found her about a mile from where she had been the day before. We made a perfect set and once again she threw up over the net. And then the Cooper's came again! After several more sets, it became apparent that the merlin was now shy of my dho ghaza. I decided to harness one of the sparrows for a last ditch attempt. We drove by the merlin and tossed the sparrow into a stubble field next to the roadway. As she left her perch, the sparrow 'froze' and she circled around for several minutes looking for it before taking a perch again. Several times I served the sparrow to get her attention. Finally, the sparrow came to rest in an open area and the merlin bound to it. She tried briefly to carry, then settled down to plume

it only a few yards from the truck. We marvelled at what a beautiful specimen she was as we waited in the truck.

"Is she caught?" asked Todd.

"Can't tell. She hasn't shown any sign yet. We'll give her a few more minutes and then we'll bump her and see."

I stepped out of the truck cautiously and approached to within 50 feet before she decided to bolt. She dropped the sparrow and flew back to the tree. My heart sank. She now sat oblivious of the harnessed sparrow and seemed to be looking at something off in the distance.

"Dad, I'm afraid we've blown it now. Maybe you should toss it again to get her attention."

As I picked up the harnessed sparrow and swung it like a lure she started in the opposite direction. I threw it in the air and miraculously she turned and headed back for it. She picked it up, turned into the wind and down she came. Twice more she tried to carry it before the drag pulled her down. She was caught! After some fancy footwork trying to pick her up I finally had her in my grasp. I quickly hooded her and then noticed that she had been caught by a single noose, around a toe pad.

Merlins trapped in autumn or early winter are preferable to those trapped later. They are less likely to have developed specialised hunting techniques. With the onset of hard winter, many merlins develop a style not unlike small accipters, attacking their quarry in a stealthy manner. They tend to make low level attacks taking advantage of any available cover. If the flight is unsuccessful they continue on and can quickly become lost. A telemetry chase becomes the order of the day with these birds. Judicious planning of slips can generally overcome this behaviour.

Merlins trapped later, on their winter territories can, to a large extent, be depended upon to return to that area

if lost or released, even for successive years. I have personally had the pleasure of recovering one individual three years in a row!

For the past seven years I have flown Black Merlins exclusively and have a definite bias toward them. That is not to say that the Columbarius and Richardson's are not equally good performers, but there are subtle differences. Richardson's, in my experience, are somewhat more nervous, prone to carrying and foot biting, as well as being difficult to man.

Some behave more like prairie falcons than merlins. When flown in open terrain, they seem to range farther out and telemetry chases are more common than with Blacks or Columbarius. The Columbarius Merlins seem to be intermediate between Blacks and Richardson's.

Of the few legal quarries available, starlings seem to be ideal.

Intelligent and ubiquitous, they can provide high ringing flights or exciting tail chases depending on the type of terrain and time of year.

They are not so difficult as to be discouraging to inexperienced birds and most merlins wed to them quickly. Farmers who wouldn't dream of allowing me to hawk pheasants on their land, welcome me once they know I am hunting starlings.

In late spring, after the great flocks break up, good sport can be had at single starlings on passage. Some birds adapt to this flight readily.

'Isis', a Richardson's Merlin trained by my former apprentice, Doug Doane, and trapped in January had a predilection to this type of flight. On one occasion after a couple of unsuccessful slips at flocked birds, he set her on a fence post in an area where starlings were passing between two feedlots about 2 miles apart. She sat very relaxed, preening and enjoying the spring weather. Suddenly a single starling left a small flock in the distance and made a half circle about 40 feet above her giving the 'marking' call to warn

other starlings of her presence. She was off in a heartbeat and hot on his tail. About 60 yards out they were climbing rapidly into the sky, the 'Isis' closing on him. Now the starling gave a series of distress calls and began to drop toward the cover of a fence line some 100 yards away. The merlin easily caught him with yards to spare and came to ground in the open field. It was a real surprise as only the most bold and confident starlings will do this marking ritual.

Merlins are considered by many to be extremely delicate birds and difficult to manage. I believe them to be a hardy species. Over the years I have learned that most problems with health arise from an improper diet and poor weight control. My birds are housed indoors during the cold months and fed a diet of fresh or frozen whole starlings with a few house sparrows along the way. They adapt well to life with my family and become quite tame. I trap hundreds of wild starlings each year and believe them to be the ultimate food source for any small to medium sized raptor.

I never rob my merlins of their kills and believe that one good ringing flight and kill is enough for one day. As a result, some of my birds, especially if there is a threat from another raptor, will carry their kills to me where they know they will be able to eat in safety.

I believe that any falconer who has access to merlins and starlings can experience a very high level of falconry, even with all the time restraints of making a living and raising a family. Passage merlins are truly the falconers' 'Prize'.

Good Hawking

Warren Al Ross

Editors Note:

For the sake of readers new to the sport, the Editor wishes to point out that whilst trapping wild hawks for falconry is still possible in the US, it is not in many other countries.

A PROFILE

Ronald Stevens



Story and photos by Derry Argue

Ronald Stevens was without doubt the greatest influence to me as a falconer. Who was Ronald and why is he such an important part of the history of falconry? One opinion might be an eccentric Englishman with a passion for birds and, most of all, for falconry. But there was much more to him than that!

I first made contact with Ronald by correspondence in the early 1960's. He must have been about sixty-two then. The subject of mutual interest would have been bell making, or braceless hoods, or captive breeding or something along those lines as Ronald had an insatiable curiosity and was by no means a Luddite. Ronald's modesty, his great fund of knowledge and his wide range of interests, made him a fascinating person to communicate with. I would describe Ronald as the archetypal English country gentleman who I can imagine might have been more at ease back in the Bertie Wooster era of the 30's. He had a mischievous, puckish sense of

humour which made him a wonderful story teller. Ronald's deadpan expression and precise characterisation embellished the story teller's art he had mastered to perfection.

I am told that Ronald's grandfather, or perhaps it was his great grandfather, had invented the aluminium saucepan. But that might have been myth. Certainly, Ronald was comfortably well off - though he always grumbled about money, had neither telephone nor TV, and warned his friends never to send him a telegram - because the postman had to cycle 5 miles in each direction and expected afternoon tea and a

large tip for his trouble.

A bachelor, who had the time and inclination to indulge his passion for birds, Ronald preferred to live in the remoter parts of the wildest countryside. A non-driver, Ronald employed an Irishman who acted as part-time chauffeur/gardener and the son of a local farmer, Peter, as a butler. Ronald delighted in the contrariness of the Irish character. He told how he had lost a parcel. "Peter, have you seen the parcel I was wrapping earlier?" Peter: "Ah now, Mr Stevens, would that be the one in brown paper with the white string?" Ronald: "Yes, yes! That's the one! Where is it?" Peter: "Oh, I don't know. I haven't seen it". And of his chauffeur who would draw the car into the side of the road and stop whenever there was a thunderstorm in the conviction that a moving vehicle attracts lightning as surely as the flick of a pigeon's wing catches the falcon's eye.

Ronald went to view a property in Belmullet in the extreme north-west corner of Ireland, even remoter than Connemara and inhabited only by wild geese and sea birds. To Ronald's mortification, the caretaker had fallen about laughing when he said he was thinking of buying the place. I once visited Ronald to find the lodge deserted. Then a small voice came from some thick bushes. "It's all right, Madelaine, it's only Derry. We can come out!" Ronald had been expecting an invasion of visiting salmon fishers and had taken refuge in the shrubbery! Although Ronald needed the occasional companionship of his fellow falconers, he preferred the peace and quiet of a relatively solitary life.

Before the war, Ronald had built up a unique collection of wild ducks at his home at Walcotte Hall in Shropshire, England, imported from all four corners of the world. Then, during the war, the hall was requisitioned by the army and the officers shot all the ducks. Ronald

was posted to the Isle of Wight where he was detailed to use his falcons to intercept homing pigeons which might be carrying messages to the enemy. It seems strange to us now that the government's policy at that time was to systematically destroy every peregrines' eyrie along the south coast of England in case falcons killed pigeons returning to Britain with a message. To satisfy

While in Shropshire, Ronald flew peregrines at red grouse on the Long Mynd. His neighbour in Shropshire was the Llewellyn setter breeder William Humphrey who also flew peregrines at grouse. Ronald always used Llewellyn setters and expressed surprise when I once asked who trained his dogs for him. "Why, no one", he replied, "they just do it"! It is certain that Ronald was no dog



Fermoyl Lodge - weathering lawn and Ronald

protocol he was elevated to the rank of sergeant. Ronald told me that the falcons had not actually caught any pigeons with messages attached but some had odd flight feathers missing which might have been a more effectual and subtle way to pass messages in war time. As any falconer knows, birds do not moult haphazardly but to a predetermined pattern so a feather missing out of sequence was highly suspect.

trainer and they just had to "do it"! Ronald imported several gyrfalcons which he flew at red grouse and his experiences with these and the peregrines are recorded in his books, "The Taming of Ghengis" and "Observations of Modern Falconry". Ronald had just completed his last book, "All My Life with Birds", at the age of ninety.

When I met Ronald he was living at Fermoyl Lodge, a fishing lodge in



Ronald, Colonel Henry Swain, The Hon John Morris (with peregrine falcon) and friend.

the middle of Connemara, County Galway in the Irish Republic. If you have ever visited Connemara, you will know that it is a wide open barren countryside, more rocks than heather, with some excellent fishing and a very few grouse. Fermoyle had been securely fenced against the marauding sheep which eat everything in the West of Ireland and the grounds were densely wooded; an oasis in a veritable desert. In this haven, wildlife and Ronald's free flying foreign birds flourished. I once blotted my copybook by doing the morning feed round of the aviaries. I thought I was helping but quickly realised that I had intruded on a morning ritual, a labour of love of someone whose life was totally centred around these birds.

Golden pheasants and Guinea fowl (*"to warn against trespassers and foxes"*, said Ronald) stalked the lawns at Fermoyle where the falcons weathered on fine days. The foxes took all the pheasant hens as soon as they had laid a clutch of eggs and had gone broody, Ronald said, so he had donated some fox terriers and

some magnificent Irish red setter lurchers (IRS x greyhound) to his neighbours in the hope that a bobbery pack would control the menace, but without much effect. Ronald's way was to plant seeds of an idea, carefully nurture the embryo and hope that it would flourish. There were many failures, but occasionally a dramatic success. I cannot help but feel that Ronald, in his quiet way, should be accorded much of the credit for the current world-wide interest in captive breeding. Sometimes it is those who fail who contribute most by blazing the path for others to follow. But more of that later.

Ronald was probably the last tangible link between The Old Hawking Club and modern falconry. To see Ronald do something as simple as cut up a pigeon to feed his hawks was like watching a surgeon at work. The bird was killed swiftly and humanely by breaking the neck and then rough plucked into a lined waste bin. Not a single feather was allowed to litter the food preparation area. Next an incision was made

below the crop which was removed, with the head with one smooth movement. Further incisions were made around each scapular or shoulder blades and the two wings drawn apart with breast muscle attached leaving a clean meatless sternum or breastbone. I tried and failed. Ronald showed me the key. As the wings are pulled, shiny white sinews are revealed between the thorax and the breast meat below the shoulder blade. When he cut these tendons with the single sided razor blade saved for the purpose, the bird could be quartered neatly. The wings and breast meat would each feed one falcon, the body, with intestines and breast bone removed, would feed a third. Ever since learning this I have winced when I see some falconer quarter hawk food with an axe. What would Ronald have thought?

Ronald was every inch a gentleman, and a gentle man in all things to do with falcons.

If you passed the oral tests, the day might come when you were invited into the inner sanctum, the holy of holies, Ronald's mews. Freshly raked sand was spread under the screen perch for ten or a dozen falcons which stretched the length of the hawk house.

While I was at Fermoyle, Ronald had magnificent Peale's peregrines from the Charlotte Islands, Tundra peregrines from friends in Canada, Brookei peregrines from Spain, and probably a peregrine or two taken from Irish cliffs before the days of active conservation.

One afternoon we were visited by some young men, sons of influential Irish landowners, anxious to become falconers and to learn from Ronald. One playfully sat on a falcon's block. I glanced at Ronald and noted the look of shock; but as was his nature

he said nothing. Later, after they had gone, he remarked on it in hushed tones.

"He sat on my falcon's block! He sat on the falcon's block!" A week later, Ronald was still remarking on it, as if some careless person had walked into church with his hat on and had spat in the font... His falcons, and everything about them, were treated with the greatest respect, almost reverence, and I think it was this attention to detail, without fuss or embellishment, which set him apart as a falconer and made his falcons such exceptional performers. The peregrine falcon. The falcon gentle. The gentleman's falcon? Ronald was every inch a gentleman, and a gentleman in all things to do with falcons!

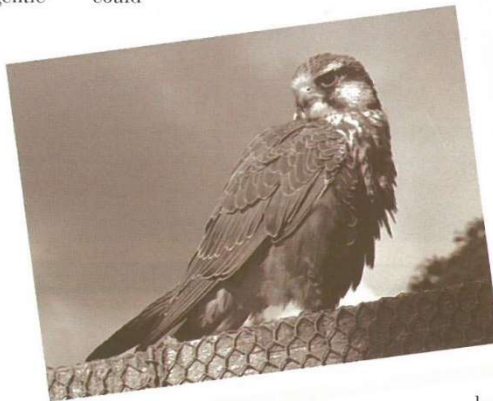
But though Ronald could be generous to a fault and loved to welcome visitors to Fermoyle he equally loved to see them go!

He commissioned a famous artist to paint a mural of a falconry scene for the wall of his diningroom. The artist started the painting with a flourish, then fished, ate, and drank his way through a lazy summer, enjoying the hospitality, the falconry, the company of fellow guests, and not least Ronald's stories, without once again touching his brushes or the canvass. Ronald was too polite to say anything. You knew you were near the end of your welcome when Ronald would gently ask, *"And how much longer do you think you can stay?"* as if to remind you of some appointment you might have forgotten.

Ronald missed being the first person in the world to breed falcons. I believe that privileged position must be due a German falconer, Renz Waller, who bred peregrines but I have no doubt that the unselfish way Ronald shared his knowledge was a major contribution and encouragement to those who did

succeed. Ronald's experiments to breed falcons started in 1958 with a pair of eyasses. The falcon laid three eggs in 1961 when she was five years old, then again in 1962 and 1963. But each time the eggs were infertile. Of course, these days it is no great accomplishment to persuade a falcon to lay eggs but in those days it was almost unheard of. In 1964 he tried another tiercel and in the following year the falcon laid nine eggs (again infertile) in eighteen consecutive days!

What followed then was a remarkable experience with homing falcons. The tiercel, a Peale's, was trained and flown at semi-hack until it could



Plunkett, the Luger falcon waiting above aviaries at Fermoyle for parakeets to emerge.

be released in the morning and called down in the evening. In February 1966, Ronald took several bars out of one of the windows in his purpose built breeding aviary and released the falcon to fly free with the tiercel at hack. The hope was that both birds would remain dependent on Ronald for food and would roost in the aviary and eventually breed there. This was a success in so far as the birds flew in and out of the aviary to take feed from the blocks daily but they did not get the chance to breed. The falcon was stolen away by a wild

tiercel and that was that.

Ronald decided to try again. Another falcon was acquired and shut up in the aviary to await the arrival of a new tiercel. The Peale's would be left at liberty. But that was not to be. One day when he was cleaning out the

aviary, the Peale's came fluttering at the window, apparently desperately seeking to be admitted! The wild bird caged in reverse! This tiercel sought to return to captivity, not escape from it!

Soon after this event in 1967, Ronald received a letter from America informing him that two broods of young had been raised under falcons that year. One brood, prairie falcons by Henry Kendall and the other peregrines by Frank Beebe. Ronald had been pipped at the post! Later, Ronald succeeded in crossing a peregrine with a saker but by then captive breeding was no longer pioneer territory.

When I visited Ronald I had an eyass peregrine tiercel that had

been taken illegally by a Scottish gamekeeper and turned over to me at the age of ten days. It was reared in my bedroom in London while I attended college just a stone's throw from Queensway tube station! I knew enough to feed the bird while wearing a face mask and he grew up what I now know to be a social imprint. One day, this tiercel went up in the thermals about 4 miles from Fermoyle until he was out of sight. Dismayed, I walked back to Fermoyle and found Ronald and a visitor, Colonel Henry Swain from the USA, having tea in the kitchen as usual. I announced that I had lost the tiercel. Ronald looked up, *"Oh, have you? Bad luck!"* and went back to chatting with Henry. Torn between anger and frustration at this lack of sympathy, I sat down and helped

myself to tea. After a few minutes, Ronald took pity on me and said, "Have you looked at the hawk lawn?" Yes, I replied, on my way in. "Then go and have another look", said Ronald gently. I went and looked. A dozen blocks, a dozen falcons. So what? Then the penny dropped. There should have been one vacant block. My tiercel had not only homed 4 miles to Fermoye but had returned to his block on the lawn! After that, I realised he was unloseable and whenever I turned towards home he would be ahead of me!

On a similar theme, Ronald had a free flying lugger falcon called Plunkett. None of us thought much of luggers which were imported from India at that time by the bird dealers en masse. They could be purchased from the pet shops for about a tenner (£10.00) but no serious falconer bothered with them because they

seldom caught anything when trained. Ronald thought differently and kept Plunkett at permanent hack. Plunkett would laze around, taking stand in his favourite perch on an upstairs window ledge, waiting to be called down to be fed around 16:00 hrs each day. Then he would stoop at Ronald's bald head and Ronald would come in laughing, streaming with blood. His strange stance while calling this falcon was to protect himself from the falcon's blows.

Plunkett showed his true metal when Ronald's free flying parakeets took to the air as they did on fine days to escape from the cramped quarters of their aviary. When the mood took him, he would ring them up after them until almost out of sight and put in the most spectacular stoops.

My experiences at Fermoye taught me that anything is possible if you

treat hawks with patience and respect. If they get lost, they are usually much more worried than you will ever be. I learnt that to be a falconer, an old jacket and welly boots are just as good as anything and if the hood is a bit battered and without a plume, it doesn't really matter so long as the falcon finds it comfortable and it excludes the light. A falconer should be judged on the condition of his bird and it's performance in the field and not by the elaboration of his equipment. Ronald taught me that fastening the hood to your coat with a large nappy pin works as well as anything but by far the most important thing is to get your birds to trust you so that they go up and fly well! ■

Ronald Stevens died in Connemara, Ireland, on 11th December 1994 aged 92.

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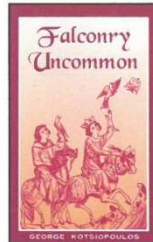
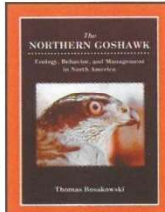
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Copulating Northern goshawks.



Photo: Bernd Pöppelmann

Modern Captive Breeding

In the first article of this series of four, I covered commitment, planning, choice of breeding stock, housing and nutrition. In this article we will look at breeding methods.

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are two primary methods of achieving fertile eggs from a female raptor within captivity. These are:

NATURAL BREEDING

A male and female bird are placed together in the breeding chamber. Copulation takes place between the two birds and fertile eggs are laid.

ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION

Semen is inseminated into the female. This can be either:

Voluntary, if she is an imprinted bird who stands and presents herself for voluntary copulation toward her human mate.

Involuntary, in the case of females who fail to copulate with their intended mate in a natural pair breeding project, or an imprinted female which refuses to stand for voluntary copulation with a human mate.

For anyone considering beginning a breeding project, a decision has to be taken on what approach to take. Generally speaking this will depend on the amount of time and resource you are able to put into the project. If you have limited time then a natural breeding project might well be your choice. The main advantages are that far less time is needed in terms of observation and interaction with the birds. The disadvantage is that fewer birds are likely to be produced and you will have far less opportunity to produce specific types of bird, and in the case of specific hybrids use of AI is the norm. Of course for many aspiring raptor breeders this will not be an issue, as they will be aiming simply to produce enough birds to meet their own falconry needs, and perhaps, also those of a friend or two. On the other hand if you are aiming for a commercial operation, or to selectively breed e.g. different hybrids from the same female, then you will almost certainly want to acquire the skills needed to collect semen from male raptors and inseminate the female.

NATURAL BREEDING

By far the most popular method of captive breeding in the UK is placing a pair of birds in a suitable breeding chamber and hoping that nature takes its course. To the tyro breeder the initial act of releasing two birds into a chamber is generally quite daunting, as fear of aggression and fighting is generally in the forefront of their mind. The truth is that this rarely occurs if the birds have been reared correctly in the first place. In the case of falcons, buzzards and eagles a few threat displays and some mild harassment may occur, but this should sub-side over a short period of time. In the case of accipiters however, they should be kept in adjoining pens with a window between them and only allowed together once both birds show full breeding display. It always amazes me why this double pen system is accepted for goshawk breeding, but is used less often for sparrowhawks, especially when you hear how many muskets are killed by their intended female partner.

Best time to pair up.

We are often asked to advise on the best time to pair birds up. Our approach at Falcon Mews is, if possible, to put birds together in the early autumn. This allows time for them to settle into their accommodation and become used to the daily sights and sounds of their new environment. Stress, or rather lack of it, is crucial to successful raptor propagation whatever approach is used. So the more time to settle in the better is the general rule. Of course there are many falconers who want to fly their birds and then breed from them in the non - hunting season. The question then is how long can the hunting season go on before pairing up. We have currently bred from Harris hawks and peregrines paired up in late January, but rule of thumb is that the earlier you can put the pair together the better the chances.

Birds put together late in the season who do not breed can be tried earlier. Once a successful pattern has been established it can usually be followed with success every year. Bearing in mind the importance of the stress factor, it is probably true to say the species which are naturally tamer such as Harris hawks can be paired up later, though there are always wide variations amongst individual birds. Another factor to take into account is that there is variation in the breeding season between different species. For example lugger falcons often lay in February whilst merlins lay in late April or early May.

We always place pairs into a breeding chamber or pen at the same time. It is not a good idea to place a male into a chamber where the female has been resident for any length of time as she may show territorial aggression toward him. All birds should be approaching or at top weight when paired up.

Compatibility and natural attraction.

The question of compatibility between paired raptors has often been debated. One school of thought is that, if both birds reach a high enough breeding condition, then they will procreate. However, if they are not at ease with their mate, the stress level and hormonal imbalance which associates itself with stress, will suppress the hormones which are required to bring the bird into breeding condition. There is also the question of natural attraction. Forecasting this is extremely difficult if not impossible and placing two birds into a breeding chamber is a bit like a blind date, sometimes they work and sometimes they don't. Natural attraction in raptors definitely exists, and this is recognised by some of the world's leading breeders of gyrs and peregrines, who have pioneered a very successful method of pair selection for large falcons. This involves placing several unrelated

pairs of eyass falcons in one large pen together. A single nest ledge is put in the pen and the birds are observed closely over the first eighteen months of life. As soon as a pair takes over the ledge territory, and defends it against the other inhabitants, the other birds are removed from the pen. Thus, the pair have had the choice and chosen their mate.

Observation of breeding behaviour in natural pairs.

Close observation is required to assess what breeding behaviour is taking place. This should begin in January or February at the latest. You should undertake some research before beginning observation to check what behaviour should be occurring if all is well. There are now numerous articles and papers written on a multitude of breeding successes with different species. Unfortunately, if you read accounts written on a particular species bred in captivity it is easy to fall into the trap of expecting your birds to be doing exactly the same. It should be remembered that all birds are individuals and although a species will follow similar breeding patterns there are variations. For example one pair of peregrines we breed from are very vocal when copulating, whereas another pair we have, don't make a sound. Some male Harris hawks are ardent nest builders and others never pick a stick up, but yet both can be equally productive in the eyass production stakes.

Period of time from start of courtship to egg laying.

The period of time from when the first sign of courtship begins through to egg laying will vary enormously, not only between species but between individuals within a species. First time breeders usually start their courtship slightly later than experienced pairs but in subsequent seasons they will start earlier and for a longer period.

Age at which different species breed.

It is generally considered that parental stock bred in captivity, regularly breed at younger ages than their original wild taken ancestors. A few examples of this are golden eagles breeding at three years of age, prairie falcons at one and Gyrs as young as two. The general view on this is that if the right conditions are created, stress levels can be lower in captive-bred birds and nutritional intake higher. This phenomenon has occurred in the captive breeding of many other species of birds such as psittaciformes.

Photo: Richard Hill

ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION

Semen Collection.

The two methods of obtaining semen are by manually stripping a male or by an imprinted male copulating on a human voluntarily.

With regard to the technique needed to strip a male raptor, there are written descriptions, but you should certainly aim to see it done by an experienced breeder. The quantity of semen given will vary not only from different birds, but also between each stripping session from the same bird. Although the stress involved in being caught up and manually handled is kept to a minimum, most

males will only stay in breeding condition if stripped every couple of days or so.

For an imprinted male who voluntarily copulates with its human mate there is no stress involved. Our voluntary males donate semen at least twice daily for up to two months. To give you an example of what one of these males is capable of, during the past breeding season, a three-year-old white jerkin that voluntarily produced semen for the first time this year, managed to fertilise forty-five eggs for us. This is by no means a record, but when you realise that up to forty percent of his semen was not used, it gives you a good idea of what a good voluntary



**White jerkin
copulating on hat.**

donating male is capable of.

We do not have space here to go into any depth on the techniques used to produce a male voluntary donor, but in very basic terms it involves interaction with the imprint male on a daily basis to establish a strong bond between human and bird. The human "partner" mimics the breeding behaviour of a female of the same species of the male. Typically this involves the human partner copying as far as possible the breeding display behaviour of the female by making bobbing movements of the upper body and or hand, and by making noises which simulate the breeding call of the female. This has to continue until the bird reaches sexual maturity and maintained for as long as semen is needed from that particular bird.

When the breeding season arrives, the males are encouraged to copulate and deposit semen onto a hat, glove or pad of a suitable size and shape to suit the male. This is designed and made of a suitable material to ensure collection of all or most of the semen deposited. You will find that the quality of semen produced by different males varies enormously. Some males produce excellent semen for many years, but variations are



Photo: Richard Hill

Female imprint accepting voluntary insemination.

possible even in the best producers. Most breeders, to assess quality, use microscopic examination of semen. It is important to note here the importance of having some back up in any breeding project, which relies on semen collection by stripping or voluntary donation. If you have several females, but only one male who produces semen, then you are risking all on one shot. The answer is either to have a team of males or to make arrangements with a fellow breeder to provide "mutual insurance". This is a real issue and

Photo: Seth Anthony



even projects with a number of males can find themselves short of semen at particular times of the season. This tends to happen in particular at the start of the season. There is nothing that will drive you up the wall faster than having two or three females begin laying but no semen to inseminate.

Voluntary A.I. with imprinted female raptors.

The use of voluntary AI with imprinted female raptors has grown enormously in recent years. Although its use has mainly been with falcons and to a lesser degree golden eagles, some success with accipiters is now being achieved, particularly with goshawks. Apart from being the most stress free (for human and bird) approach, voluntary AI can be a highly productive method of propagation. To achieve this desirable state of affairs, the breeder must be prepared to put in a substantial amount of time with the female imprinted raptor from an early stage in the bird's development. This is necessary to give the best possible chance of establishing the strong pair bond between human and bird required to make voluntary insemination possible. Generally speaking the earlier the process of

imprinting begins the better. We like to start with our female imprinted falcons from ten days of age and daily interaction with the 'human partner' continues from that point. To be successful, the human must have fully or very largely assumed the role of the male bird. The technique used to produce an imprinted female who will stand for voluntary insemination is similar in many ways to that used to produce a male semen donor. Again pressures of space do not allow me to go into any greater depth on the techniques used. In general terms the whole process can be divided into three stages :

- the first stage is the initial hand rearing and imprinting.



- the second stage is from fledging through to the birds first breeding season. Many breeders find that flying the bird for falconry is a very productive procedure, as the bird is handled daily and the close bond between falconer and bird that is established is the perfect catalyst for this type of breeding. The other approach is to keep the female imprint in a pen and visit her several

times daily to reinforce the bond and ensure that no fear response toward its human mate is allowed to occur.

- the third stage is the breeding season itself. In the majority of cases the female will lead you through the whole process and start soliciting copulation as you enter the breeding chamber. It is not unusual for the female to start soliciting for the first time, after laying one or two eggs during her first egg-laying season.

It should be noted that if either of the first two stages are not fulfilled, then the last stage will not occur. When you have reached the point where the female will allow you to place your hand on her back while she presents herself for copulation then you can feel confident that the imprinting process has been effective enough to make voluntary AI a success.

When things go well it is possible to produce many fertile eggs from the same female. It is not unusual to be able to produce ten or more eggs from one female falcon and to achieve 100 per cent fertility.

Voluntary AI is generally only achieved with 'human imprinted' individuals. However raptor breeders know of many exceptions to this rule.

For birds intended for voluntary AI, many breeders find that flying the bird for falconry is a very productive procedure.

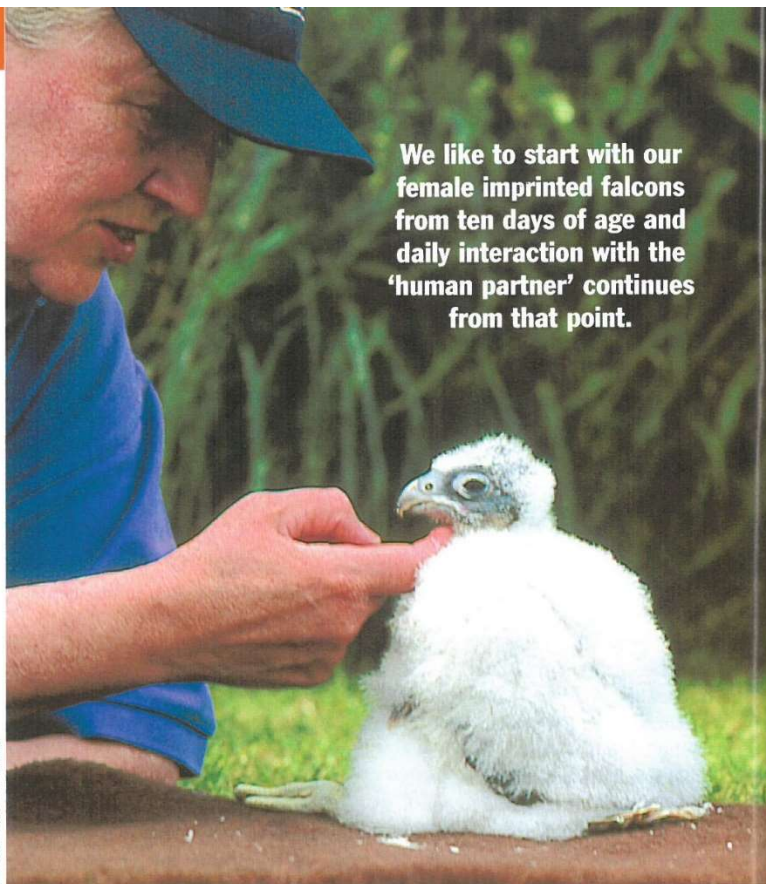


For example, a few raptors which have come into falconry from the wild as adults, have been known to exhibit exactly the same behaviour towards the falconer as captive bred imprints. This leads us to ask many questions as to how much we really know about the psychological side of imprinting. There are several theories but that will have to wait for a later article.

Involuntary AI

Involuntary AI is an approach normally used when the other two methods are not going right for some reason. It might be that you have a pair intended for natural breeding, but over several years, although eggs have been produced none have been fertile. In this case involuntary insemination of the female can transform a totally unsuccessful project into a very successful one. The other situation where involuntary AI is used is where a female imprint intended for voluntary insemination, refuses to stand correctly. In this case the use of involuntary AI can produce success rates almost as high as that achieved by the voluntary imprint. Skill in carrying out involuntary insemination is something which takes some time to acquire and master, and even then some people will always be better than others. It is essential that you see it done by an experienced practitioner before attempting it. It is also true to say that the more inseminations you do the better you are likely to become. Views on precisely the right technique vary even amongst the most experienced breeders, but most manage to achieve a high level of fertilisation. Timing is a crucial factor as it is preferable to inseminate the female within two hours of her laying, so constant observation is required.

Photo: Seth Anthony



We like to start with our female imprinted falcons from ten days of age and daily interaction with the 'human partner' continues from that point.

SUMMARY

Like most situations, careful planning of the approach to adopt is the most sensible policy, and will save disappointment in the long run. Natural breeding is a good option for many people, particularly if time is limited and expectations in terms of numbers are modest. If you are lucky and find a good pair they will produce one or more clutches for you, year in and out, and also incubate and rear the young with no problems. A treasure indeed !

Voluntary AI has much to recommend it in terms of productivity, and control over the kinds of birds produced. At the same time the co-operative and interactive aspects bring the breeder and raptor very close together and this is rewarding in itself. It is of course very time

intensive, both in terms of the number of visits required each day and the daily routine. For this reason it tends to suit the smaller breeder who has time to spend with each individual bird each day. On the other hand many of the larger breeders have shied away from keeping a large number of imprinted females because of the work involved.

Generally speaking involuntary AI is an approach which is used when the other two have failed. Skills in its use are valuable to both breeders operating natural breeding projects and those working with imprints. However the skills needed are not acquired easily and for the small breeder inexperienced in its use, obtaining some expert advice and help is essential. In the next issue, we will cover various aspects of incubation.

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Game Hawking Tactics

by Ray Turner

The grey partridge (*Perdix perdix*) also known as the English partridge in the UK and elsewhere as the 'hun' has been a favourite quarry for both austringers and falconers throughout the centuries and throughout the world. Avidly pursued by hawks and falcons alike, but generally this plump and exceedingly tasty little gamebird is regarded by falconers as ideal quarry for tiercel peregrines and it is easy to see why this point has been taken.

The size and weight of prey and predator are reasonably similar, where as the larger and more powerful falcon may suggest an unfair contest. In the field however, no advantage seems apparent or if there is one it is more likely to be conferred on the smaller, more nimble and adroit tiercel! I would not disagree that the tiercel peregrine makes both a



Photo: Tony Tilford/Oxford Scientific Films

traditional and sensible choice for the falconer with ready access to partridge hawking yet for many gamehawkers partridge numbers may not support a full seasons falconry campaign and to be certain of finding the ideal slips throughout the winter some falconers may need to include both pheasants and ducks on their list of legitimate quarry thus for them the larger and stronger peregrine falcon deserves more consideration when making a choice of hawk for the gamehawking or waiting on flight - she may need to become an allrounder!

In common with pheasants (the subject of first article in this series) the grey partridge may be sought either on foot or from the shelter and comfort of a vehicle. Other choices open to the falconer are whether to use a dog and whether, if he chooses to use a dog, should it be used to locate and flush quarry, in which case it will probably be a pointer; or will it be required only to flush quarry already 'pinned down' under his falcon, in which case a sensible decision may be to use a spaniel of a type noted for 'nose' and thoroughness at hunting - up tightly sitting gamebirds.

The advantages and disadvantages of the various combinations are beyond the scope of this feature but are important and are discussed in more detail in 'Gamehawk'.

The most obvious and most desirable quality of the grey partridge as far as the falconer is concerned is it's natural predilection to remain grounded whilst there is a falcon in the air; a trait that I hope is adequately depicted in the following account of a partridge flight that took place over my hawking ground at Great Lodge.

TOP TIPS

1. Observe the covey through binoculars or a telescope.
2. Ascertain whether they are grey partridges - the 'right' partridges! - if not retreat to read 'Gamehawk' or wait for the next issue of *International Falconer*.
3. Do not fly partridges that appear unsettled or alarmed.
4. Count the members of the covey. If they fly prematurely you can calculate if there are any left and the flight is a possibility for consideration
5. Ask a friend to keep the covey under constant binocular vision whilst you stalk them for the flush. His helpful directions may be required in some circumstances.

An Educated Guess

"The English partridge is reluctant to move at all when there is a hawk in the air."

A covey of English partridges has often been flushed accidentally from the corner of a grassy area. They cannot be spotted from anywhere beforehand and so a flight has never been contemplated.

Today, hard pushed to show falconry to a guest, we wonder if we can assume that they will be there again. If this is not a speculative flight, nothing is. If we take it we shall be breaking our own rules - through desperation comes stupidity.

250 yards from the favourite spot of the covey we cast the falcon off. We wait until she is at five hundred feet or thereabouts, and then advance in line abreast, moving smartly forward when she is above us and pausing when she is not, just in case we find them or other quarry on the journey in. We arrive, and very soon are standing, a little puffed and a lot dismayed, at the spot just mentioned. The three of us look up at the falcon. She is at least eight hundred feet above us, a marvellous sight, but not one to be mindlessly admired. As soon as I accept that the partridges are not there and any amount of beating, or of hoping, is not going to produce the reward that such a pitch cries out for, I start to curse.

It has been said that it is the loudest and not the foulest, bad language that is to be heard in the hawking field.

My oaths certainly ring out. Andrew is only six feet from me, his animated expressions of pent - up excitement and tense yet optimistic apprehension have quickly subsided and his face thus previously alarmed has taken on a crest - fallen appearance that clearly portrays his

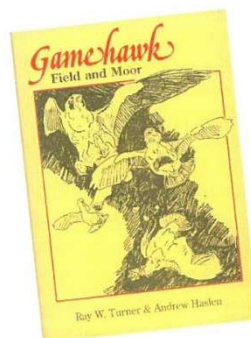
feelings of helplessness to change the course of events about to unfold before him and his resignation to accept what now is destined to be a disappointing, inevitable anti-climax that bears no resemblance to our vision of the conclusion to this flight that we had planned only minutes earlier.

Whilst inwardly and silently condemning myself for my recent recklessness and lack of judgement that lead me to accept this 'opportunity' as a slip, I simultaneously continue to show my frustration through a childish display of foot-stamping accompanied by a continuing stream of curses!

Which is all too much for a brace of partridges that spring from the grass at our very feet.

We shout to the falcon, but really for pure joy, and I jump into the air as she starts to fall from right above us at the fleeing partridges so far below.

She kills one dead in the air and it falls on the plough about two hundred yards from us. From despair to ecstasy; the relief is indescribable. ■



BOOK

by John Loft

FALCONRY UNCOMMON

George Kotsiopoulos

Published by Hancock House

Price: \$40.00 US

ISBN 0-88839-450-3

A reader, or possible buyer, needs to be told what the book's title fails to convey: it opens with the author's dedication to six friends and a prologue in the form of a brief essay on the historical development of falconry. Part 1 is a thirteen-page account on the practice of falconry in Japan, with twenty drawings of falconry-related subjects done with all the elegance expected of Japanese art; and Part 2 is a translation into English of a 19th Century French publication by H. Martin-Darivault of three medieval treatises, followed by a selection of titles from Kotsiopoulos's extensive library of books on falconry. Additional illustrations are delightful contemporary woodcuts of a mounted king, with companion and spaniels, casting off a hawk; a mounted knight carrying one; and a later portrait of a white gyrfalcon (by Bewick?).

Anyone in possession of Kotsiopoulos's *The Art and Sport of Falconry*, published in 1969 must be warned that Part 2 of this book is a transcript, without deliberate alterations, of that text. Unfortunately, the original page-references remain, despite the altered page-numbering. It has also

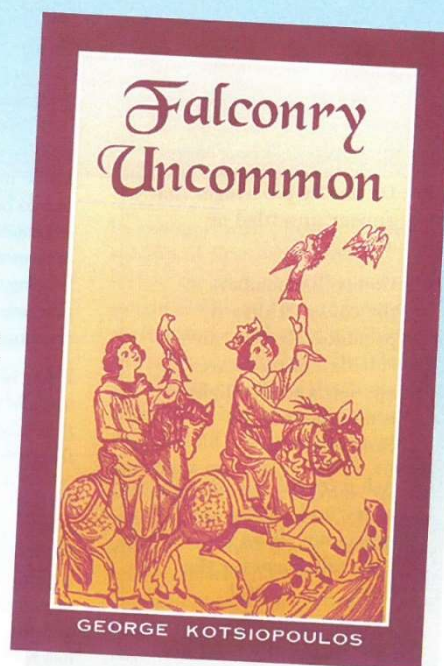
to be observed that no commentary or notes have been added to those in the 1875 text.

Part 1. *The Taki-Gari*, opens with a very brief survey of historical falconry in the Far East up to the present century, and continues with a description of the taking (by a bird known as Ootaka, presumably a goose) of six quarry: wild goose, pheasant, moorhen, heron, duck, and rabbit. The peregrine is referred to as Hayabusa, a taker of wild geese and pheasants, but the only flight mentioned is our waiting-on, known as Age-taka. The whole account is clear and vivid. The evidence points to its being a 20th Century work.

Part 2. A reader's fears that weird medicines and unacceptable advice will figure largely in the ancient treatises are well-founded. King Dancus was the imaginary authority given for the confusions and mumbo-jumbo of the first treatise, while Albertus Magnus is the much more reliable source of material in the second. It is an interesting and not unfruitful exercise to try and identify the seven types of falcon which he describes. His advice on the general management and care is, apart from its quaintness, recognisably sound to falconers of our day, who would, however, turn pale if anyone suggested applying his

outlandish cures, which include bear's meat, goose dung, man's spittle, cooked snake, aloes, strong vinegar, and brutal surgery. The third treatise is a fragment of an Anglo-Norman poem which is positively exciting because its instruction for the taking from the nest and initial treatment of eyasses is eminently practical and based on nothing but common sense.

This is not a book for casual reading, but for study by anyone with a passion for falconry and the inquisitiveness of a scholar. It will stand as one of the curiosities of our literature. ■



REVIEWS

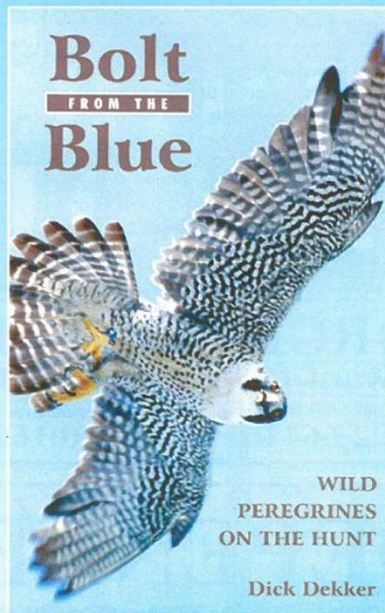
BOLT FROM THE BLUE

Wild Peregrines on the Hunt

Dick Decker

Published by Hancock House
Price: \$16.95
ISBN 0-88839-434-9

Considering that Decker and Treleven have both spent unimaginable lengths of time watching wild peregrines is it just coincidence that they are both called Dick? It is no coincidence that, with such a wealth of recorded observations, they both had to write books. But there the comparison must end, for Decker's watching has been done in Canada, over more than thirty years (He mentions 'five decades') and the bulk of it away from the eyrie. If he declared all the hours he has logged in the field no-one would credit it, but without spending so long, over so many years, in finding falcons and keeping them in view, he could never have arrived at the stage where he has to struggle not to sound repetitive. He does not give the grand total of flights in the thousands and kills in the hundreds that he watched, but he does vividly describe scores of 'hunting' flights in four areas: Beaverhills Lake in inland Alberta, Langara Island in the Queen Charlottes, the coast of Vancouver Island, and a powerplant near Wabamun Lake. His records



emphasise the different circumstances, landscapes, tactics, quarries, and success-rates. He sets clearly before us a detailed picture of the interwoven lives of the predators and their prey, and scrutinises it for whatever may be learnt. (Falconers may be surprised that few flights were classic stoops, or 'knockdowns', and most were low-level binds or even clutchings on the ground or snatchings from water). Most of the tiercels concentrated on shorebirds - i.e. small waders - and passerines: falcons on shorebirds also, and the smaller ducks. Pigeons, absent from the open sites, were seldom seen to be taken.

These concentrated observations are the heart of Decker's book. The first four chapters are a lucid survey of the appearance, behaviour, and biology of the peregrine. Falconers may have heard most of it before, but it is always worth reading such a fresh, individual, and well-presented version. In a later chapter, *Peregrines and People*, falconry gets approving notice, as does the well-documented story of the rehabilitation of the wild peregrines of America. The few illustrations, used as tail-pieces to the chapters, are mostly simple but eloquent line-drawings of peregrines and prey in the air together, but, wisely, not of the stoop itself.

The author is a loner (How many people could be persuaded to share more than a few of his day-long vigils?). It shows in his writing. There is no bibliography, and too little use of other authorities. On points of debate, such as whether peregrines fly, or hunt, after dark, or the role of the parents in 'teaching' their young to hunt, he should have made more use of the pool of published research.

Finally, when the author admits that, for him, being able to watch wild peregrines hunting is preferable to flying trained falcons, most of our readers would scarcely sympathise - but not, perhaps, after they had shared, through the written word, these thrilling experiences of his. ■

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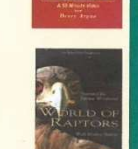
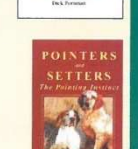
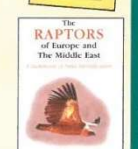
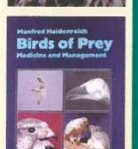
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