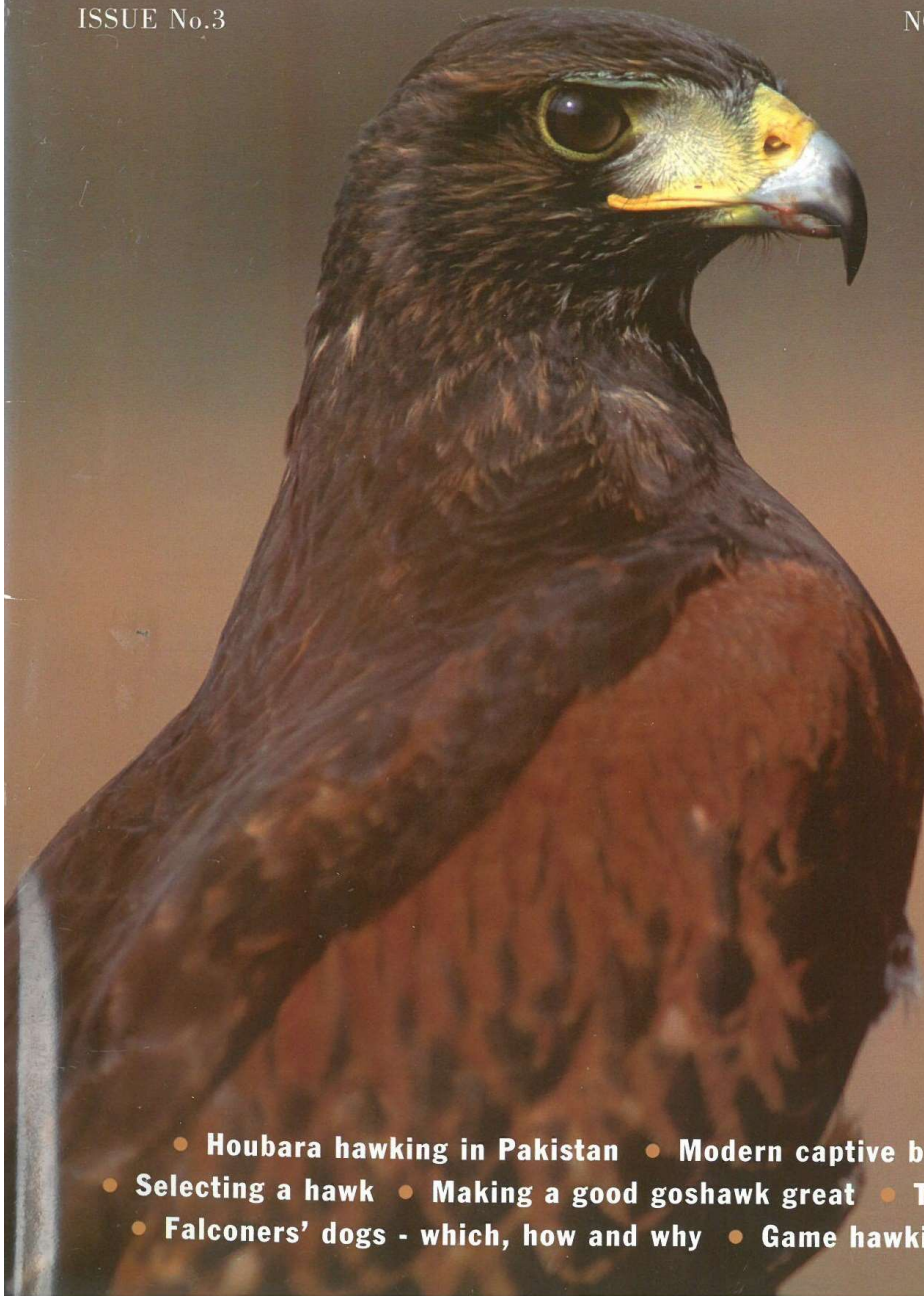


INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

ISSUE No.3

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- Houbara hawking in Pakistan • Modern captive breeding
- Selecting a hawk • Making a good goshawk great • The Austringer
- Falconers' dogs - which, how and why • Game hawking tactics

INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

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Cover photo by Terry Anthony.
Female Sonoran Harris' hawk.

EDITORIAL

I'm cutting it fine with this editorial, it's Sunday evening and we go to print tomorrow! - the time has crept up on me at an alarming rate - the third issue already!

Autumn is now well and truly upon us here in the UK and for most of us the hawking season is in full swing, as indeed it is in many other parts of the world.

Subscriptions have been steadily climbing from literally all four corners of the globe and we are now at 35 countries. The whole concept behind *International Falconer* was to make it a focal point of falconers worldwide and I'm delighted that we are now really beginning to achieve that goal.

Remember that the *Letters* section is a forum for you, so please feel free to create discussion. The *News* section is also an ideal venue to spread the word on all matters relating to this sport of ours. Again, to a certain extent it depends on your input as to how comprehensive it becomes. If you have, know or hear of any items of news that you think may be of interest please let us know.

We have another information packed issue for you with excellent articles from some of our now regular contributors. Also, on page 19 you'll notice an introduction to a new Question & Answer feature. This feature is for all falconers, be they beginners, apprentices or experienced - if you have a question, we'll try and answer it. We plan to start this with the next issue and answering the questions will be Stuart Rossell, a falconer with a vast amount of experience both in the field and teaching the sport. So send in those questions and keep Stuart busy!

Enjoy this edition of *International Falconer* and I hope you have a safe, enjoyable and thoroughly successful 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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CONTENTS

Page

4 **International News and Updates**

National Trust falconry licences.
Campaign For Falconry.
Californian Hawking Club field meet.
BaywingDB - an International database for the Harris' hawk.

8 **Your letters**

10 **Making a good goshawk great**

Mike McDermott explains the key elements that can take the average gos to a whole new level of performance.

14 **Selecting a hawk**

Selecting the right hawk to suit your means and abilities is an important decision to make, particularly for the newcomer to the sport. *Stuart Rossell* discusses his views.

20 **The Austringer**

Andy Reeve has a natural affinity to the accipiters. *Nicholas Kester* meets him to find out more about his views on this most demanding group of hawks.

24 **Houbara hawking in Pakistan**

Charles Schwartz describes one of his most memorable hunting trips.

32 **Modern captive breeding**

Part three of a series by leading raptor breeder *Peter Gill*.
In this issue we look at incubation.

40 **Falconers' dogs - which, how and why?**

Dogs are so often an essential component to successful falconry. *Derry Argue* addresses some of the important issues - from choice of breed to getting the best from them in both training and ultimately the hawking field.

44 **Game hawking tactics**

The third of a four part series. In this issue *Ray Turner* looks at the French or red-legged partridge.

47 **Book reviews**

A Merlin for Me - Reviewed by *Dick Treleven*.
The Complete Rabbit & Hare Hawk - Reviewed by *Stuart Rossell*.
The Pointer and his Predecessors - Reviewed by *Nicholas Kester*.

INTERNATIONAL FALCONER



Photo: Terry 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 can then follow it up.

Please contact:

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UPDATE FROM THE UK

Falconry and the National Trust:

guidelines for those applying for licences.

By Nicholas Kester

Most falconers will know that having banned falconry on its land with effect from 1 January 1987, the National Trust (NT) has agreed to offer limited licences for the sport with effect from 1 May 1999. How to apply and a summary of terms of the licence are set out below.

Licences will not be granted unless falconry was regularly practised on the land in question with NT approval during the ten years prior to 31 December 1986. If the land was purchased by the NT after the ban was imposed, then falconry had to have taken place with the previous owner's knowledge and agreement. If you cannot prove either of these points, you will not be granted a licence.

The NT is understandably concerned that certain of its obligations to the visiting public, to game shooting and to nature conservation are not compromised. You will have to demonstrate to their satisfaction that you will not impact on any of these issues. In return, should an application be rejected, the NT should be asked to give an adequate explanation as to why these areas might now be compromised by permitting falconry to recommence.

Licences will only be granted to falconers who are full members of Hawk Board affiliated clubs.

The licence will be for one year only, cover each discrete area of land and may exclude certain days or periods. Falconers will have to complete a return covering visits made and quarry taken at the end of the season. All licences expire on 30 April 2000 regardless of their

commencement date.

The permitted quarry species are very specific and reflect the Trust's conservation aims. They are:

Pheasant

Red-legged Partridge (not where Grey Partridge is present)

Carrion Crow

Hooded Crow (Northern Ireland only)

Wood Pigeon

Jay

Maggpie

Mallard

Rabbit

Grey Squirrel

Brown Rat

The use of dogs and ferrets may be permitted and hawks/falcons flown must always carry telemetry. Third party field sports liability insurance is also mandatory (Ask your club if they include this in their membership package or join the Countryside Alliance, which does).

A similar set of guidelines is also available for free-flying displays on NT land, although without the quarry implications. The display giver must always demonstrate that he has his own public liability insurance and that he will abide by the guidelines agreed between the Countryside Alliance and the Hawk Board.

It is to be stressed that there has to be an element of give-and-take in the process and the sport of falconry will be greatly enhanced if we are sensible in our intentions; the same applies to the National Trust. Falconers should apply to their regional NT office having first made certain that they can obtain written evidence from the agent, tenant

farmer or similar that NT approved falconry took place on the land in question within the guidelines set out by the Trust. Should your application be successful please advise your club's Hawk Board representative as feed back from

both sides will develop the relationship. Unsuccessful applications should also be reported for exactly the same reason - the more we know the stronger our case for continuance. ■



Campaign For Falconry

PROMOTING THE ART • PROTECTING THE FUTURE

It was a cold and frosty morning . . .

I have an absolute aversion to any articles relating to falconry starting with the sentence "it was a cold and frosty morning and the mist was rising" (or something similar) but needless to say in my own case I shall make an exception.

It *is* a cold and frosty morning and the mist *is* rising as I write this. The season has started and things are finally going well after a slow start - there is plenty of game around but the keepers are still a bit jumpy as it is also the start of their season. Whilst we can use the excuse of dogs, wind and weather if things do not go right - this is rarely an acceptable excuse for a keeper to his boss.

Anyway, I digress, back to the cold, frost, mist and falling leaves. What has this got to do with the Campaign For Falconry some of you may ask. Everything. Whilst we spend the summer bemoaning the workload and the continued struggle to find enough people to fly the CFF flag at the ever increasing number of country fairs and Countryside Alliance events, it is easy to forget the reason for the formation of the CFF. Then, for most of us, Autumn arrives and the answers become clear as we pick up our hawks out of the aviary, or enter young ones and the realisation dawns that our lives

would be incomplete without this Autumnal occupation. My apologies for those of you who fly game hawks and hope that you have the same realisation, only a little earlier in the year.

The CFF had a good 'fair' season this year and continues to go from strength to strength, it is doing its job well spreading the word, raising the profile of falconry and assisting the Hawk Board in its work through both fund raising and heightened awareness. The CFF is working closely with the Alliance and is endeavouring to become a point of reference for falconers.

We do need more volunteers to attend local fairs, if you have one near you please contact us and we will send you money boxes and leaflets - you can then spread the word in your area.

Our particular thanks go to John Hill, Alan and Janet Bick (thanks for the tea Alan), Julie Carey and all at the Central Falconry and Raptor Club who have manned stands and raised an enormous amount of money on behalf of falconers. A few more like them and raising money would not be a problem.

We would also like to thank the Hawk Board, a body of volunteers without whom, don't forget, the battle would have already been lost. ■

The California Hawking Club field meet, January 2000.

Yuba City, California is the venue of the 2000 California Hawking Club field meet. The meet has become a hugely popular annual event and regularly attended by a very large number of falconers from the US and abroad. The 2000 meet promises to be as successful as ever. Situated about 60 miles North of Sacramento and about 120 miles from San Francisco, the area around Yuba City is home to pheasant, jackrabbits and cottontails as well as large numbers of wintering waterfowl. The meet will be held from Wednesday January 12th through to Saturday January 15th. There will also be sky trials held on the Saturday morning.

For reservations or more information please contact:

Patti Castle
P.O. Box 417244
Sacramento,
CA 95841-7244
USA

or E-mail at ladiehawk@pacbell.net

The CHC website can be found at <http://www.calhawkingclub.org>

The site lists detailed information about the meet including available accommodations etc.

You can also sign up on line.

Harris' hawks (*Parabuteo unicinctus*) have become popular as falconry birds because of their uniquely social nature and versatility in the field. They are perhaps the easiest hawk for a beginner to train and hunt, yet in the hands of an expert they are capable of complex and varied flight styles at a wide range of quarry. The vast majority of Harris' hawks flown by falconers are captive-bred, and the cumulative experience of many falconers has shown that there is substantial variation in the physical and mental attributes of the young birds produced. The offspring of some pairs of Harris' hawks are markedly superior to those of other pairs, as measured by their tameness, trainability, aggressive pursuit of game, and development of social skills such as group flying and accepting small dogs as hunting partners. There is good evidence, from falconers who have reared and trained dozens or hundreds of birds in an identical way, that much of this observed variation in performance is genetic, pointing to an obvious opportunity for selective breeding and even domestication of Harris' hawks. Harris' hawks are likely to respond to careful breeding in the same way that gun dogs, homing pigeons, and racehorses have, leading to improved performance in the specialized arena of falconry. The key to progress in any long-term breeding program is meticulous record-keeping. The need for a comprehensive pedigree and performance database for Harris' hawks has been met by the creation of BaywingDB, an international public database accessible via the World Wide Web <http://falconry.cfr.washington.edu/Baywing>. As of this writing (September 1999), BaywingDB contains pedigree information for more than 750 Harris' hawks from around the world; however, this is only a fraction of the more than 4000 Harris' hawks which I estimate have been bred in captivity. There remains a need for

BaywingDB: A pedigree and hunting performance database for Harris' hawks

By Toby Bradshaw



breeders and falconers everywhere to contribute information about their Harris' hawks to BaywingDB. Web-based data entry forms are available on the BaywingDB website, and paper forms may be requested by writing me directly.

Anyone with web access may download the contents of BaywingDB from the website. *Breed Mate* software has been chosen as the primary pedigree database because of its ability to draw and diagram pedigrees, track ancestors and descendants, and calculate inbreeding coefficients. However, it is possible for falconers and breeders who do not have *Breed Mate* to do a great deal of analysis (sorting, ranking, etc.) in the Excel97 version

of BaywingDB.

If you are a Harris' hawk breeder, BaywingDB will allow you to determine the genetic relationship of new breeding stock to your current program and to the programs of other breeders. If you are a falconer, BaywingDB will help you find a breeder and perhaps a particular pair of birds which produce the kind of offspring you'd like to fly. I hope that those who contribute information to BaywingDB will in turn use the database to aid in the genetic improvement of the Harris' hawk.

BaywingDB 17721 3rd PI SW,
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(Mr Gary from Hilli Fun City says hallo to all his friends in AL-AIN, U.A.E)

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:

The Editor, International Falconer, Turkey Court, Ashford Road, Maidstone, Kent ME14 5PP, England.

Fax to: +44 (0)1622 664465 or E-mail: letters@intfalconer.com

Northumberland crow falcons -

the discussion continues...

Dear Seth,

Congratulations on the *International Falconer* magazine and especially the high quality presentation!

The discussion between Henri Desmots and Charles Schwartz about our film on the Northumberland Crow Falcons raises a number of points which I feel are relevant for falconers everywhere.

The concept of 'l'equipage' or Hunt Club, whether on a private patronage basis or a subscription basis, is very old, but not familiar to American falconers. To many falconers a Club means Committees, Magazines and monthly meetings, things like that. NAFA and the British Falconers' Club are good

examples. The Northumberland Crow Falconers, on the other hand, are a small group who meet together solely for crow-hawking using a team of falcons, meeting five days a week by car and two days a week on horses throughout the season. Experience has shown that if we invite private falcons the results are at best disappointing. Mounted crow-hawking is a testing sport and there is a huge potential for a monumental cock-up if every detail is not properly organised. Nor can you hawk crows on horseback on your own.

Filming it was great fun, but difficult to decide how technical to make it because most viewers of falconry films are not too familiar with the subject and we wanted to make it enjoyable for a wide audience. How do you actually show falconry on film? When filming game hawking, do you point the camera at the falcon waiting on and stooping, or at the flushing grouse? You can't get both into the same frame except for the actual moment of contact. Similarly with crow hawking, we rejected most ringing flights because the contestants could not both be held in the same frame, or because they became too small to see. We trialled some footage with 'ordinary people' who all plumped for the closer tail-chasing flights in preference to what we considered to be 'better' flights. We also rejected long flights (the longest was 10 minutes continuous filming) and

instead opted to show flights which either portrayed different styles, or showed young falcons developing from simple flights to harder ones.

On technology versus sport there are two aspects which all falconers should consider very seriously. The first is responsibility to the bird and to falconry as a whole. This comes first. Don't lose your hawk! We use two transmitters on all the larger falcons, receivers with the horses and the cars, backed up by walkie-talkies. Crow falcons go fast and far. If the horses can't handle it we use a car to leapfrog the falcon and find her. Out of 55 falcons killing crows the Northumberland Crow Falconers have only left one falcon out over one night. Especially if you are flying exotic or hybrid species, or unentered raptors with poor survival prospects, it is the falconer's prime responsibility to recover his bird quickly. To do otherwise is to compromise the welfare of the bird and the reputation of falconry both locally and nationally. On this issue I accept no compromises.

The second aspect is the question of sporting behaviour in falconry. My views on this are well known; I have no wish to participate in falconry which involves bagged game or competitions. Mounted crow-hawking is just about as sporting as it gets! If flights-to-kills ratio is a measure of 'sport' we come in as reasonably 'sporty'. Our 10 falcons this season killed 142 out of 234 flights (60.6%). The Old

Hawking Club in a good season (1890) killed 242 rooks in 293 flights (82.6%) and Blaine's best grouse peregrines in 1913 averaged 85-98% kill rate. Generally, once a falcon is killing in about 50% of flights, I start to give her more testing slips. Also with telemetry we have enjoyed flights in winds so strong that the lure line hangs parallel to the ground like a stick. On the other hand, Hawkins-Fisher hawking grouse near us at Riddlehamhope in 1895 without transmitters complained of being able to hawk only 4 days in October due to bad weather.

Finally, as one gets older, one sets oneself more and more difficult challenges in falconry. Nowadays what I enjoy most is seeing other people enjoying the day. At mounted

meets I normally slip the falcons myself, but from cars others also slip; about 30 people have 'flown' Spitfire! They do not face the stresses and responsibilities involved in providing the day. Just arranging the meet list entails visiting our 83 farmers and the land takes an hour and a half to drive across. For some areas we need licences, and after each day we have to repair any damage done by riders with more enthusiasm than expertise. Very few people ever get to do mounted crow-hawking and it gives me great pleasure to share it with friends and guests. I hope that the film has gone some way to spreading this enjoyment.

Dr. Nick Fox
South Wales, UK

Captive breeding - or is it?

Dear Sir,

I enjoyed reading your first two issues which were produced to a very high standard.

However, I would take issue with the term 'captive breeding' which occurred frequently. The birds generally used for breeding have themselves been bred in aviaries and can be considered to be domestic birds.

Thus, I would prefer to see the term 'domestic breeding' used and thereby not antagonise potential Antis to our noble sport.

Terry l'Anson
Arizona USA



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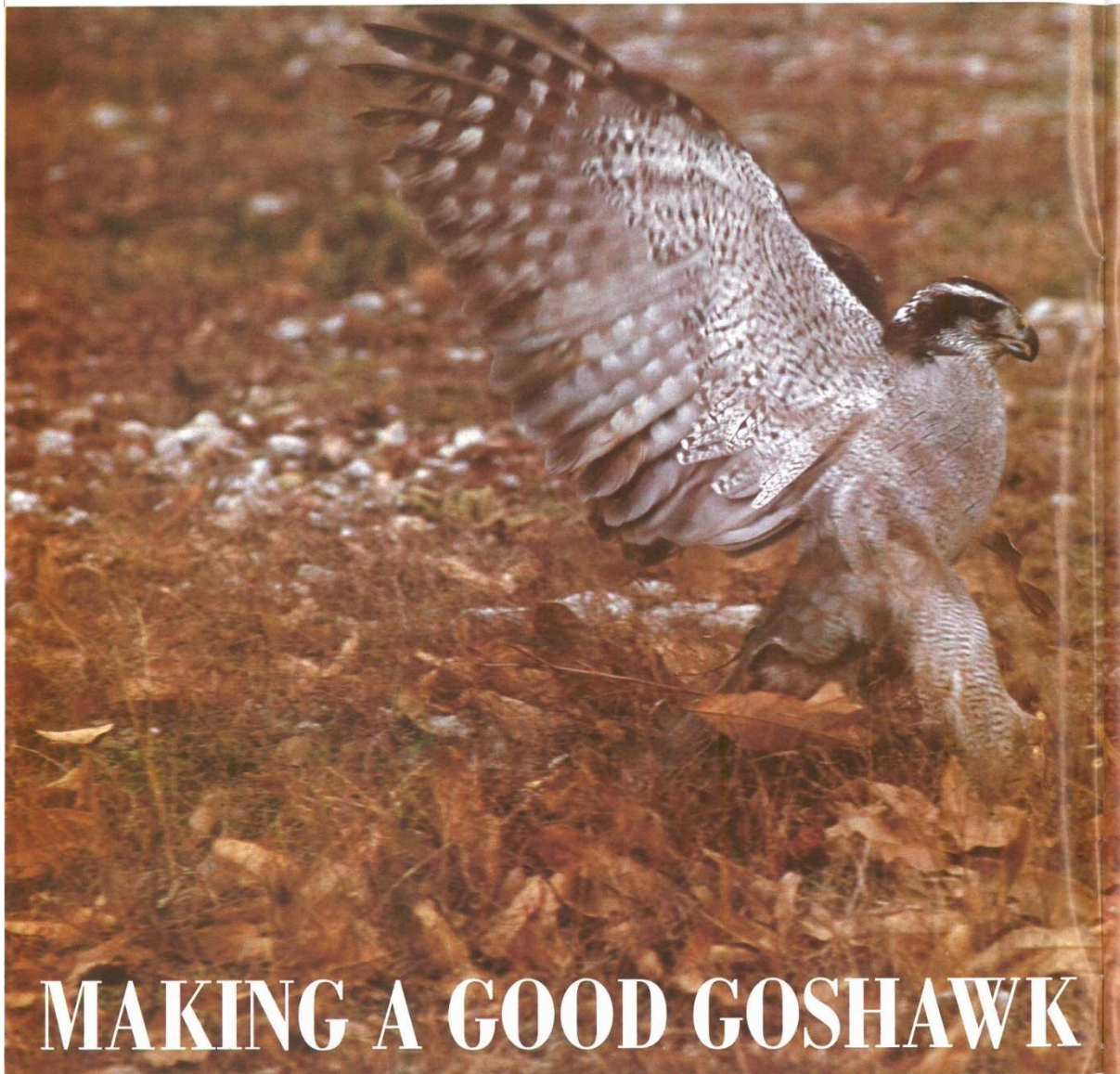
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MAKING A GOOD GOSHAWK

GREAT

by Mike McDermott



Photo: Mike McDermott

Sometimes it can be easier to define what something is by describing what it is not.

This article is not aimed at producing an average, perfectly acceptable gamehawk; but in producing the ultimate goshawk.

Let's assume your gos is already doing pretty good. You're taking game on nearly every hunt; but you still want more. More what? Intensity is a fine descriptor; with components like, game, speed, variety and nicer behaviours all coming along for the ride. These

pleasant side affects are just a bonus of our increased intensity. Did you notice that I inferred the falconer's intensity must increase first, and then the hawks will follow. Lead from the front. A great goshawk has never been made from a barstool in a pub. They are produced from quality time

in the field. You want to shape your bird's experiences and create a new definitive benchmark for the species. The absolute best of the best. Some of us have seen goshawks like these. They are unique specimens that hunt everything with style and pizzazz. I can think of a gos belonging to a

friend that took crows, rabbits, quail, jacks, a pheasant and a duck all in the same week. This example simply defines versatility; what was left unsaid is the confidence and athleticism that has to be present for those accomplishments to have occurred. Another buddy's bird took eighteen jacks (hares) in a week. With this particular example there is zero versatility but an impressive show of tenacity. Those of you that have hawked jacks or hares know that they just don't give it up easily!

Everything about these superior raptors has to be operating at its optimal level. This can be likened to a regular 'go to work' car being compared with a high performance racing machine tuned and tweaked to get every rpm of possible speed. It's not tremendously difficult to make a good gamehawk; but to make a great one takes serious dedication over a span of years. It comes from hunting experience - a lot of field time, success, but most importantly - good decisions. These small decisions made daily by the falconer impact the birds confidence and determination. Simple handling routines affect behaviour which impacts hunting success; truly everything is connected together. Big decisions occur when deciding whether it's time to feed up and when to take multiples. Both mind and body have to be functioning at their fullest capacity to take feathers and fur day after day. Let's briefly dissect a few parts of the whole and their position within the big picture.

MIND: the most important part.

Goshawks are confidence based creatures. This confidence comes from both repetition (experience) and reward. Domination is the mark of a confident bird convinced that it can catch anything; it literally knows nothing but success. Falconers restricted to hawking weekends will just not be able to get their birds to this base level. It takes daily hawking over the course of several freezer filling seasons to develop the

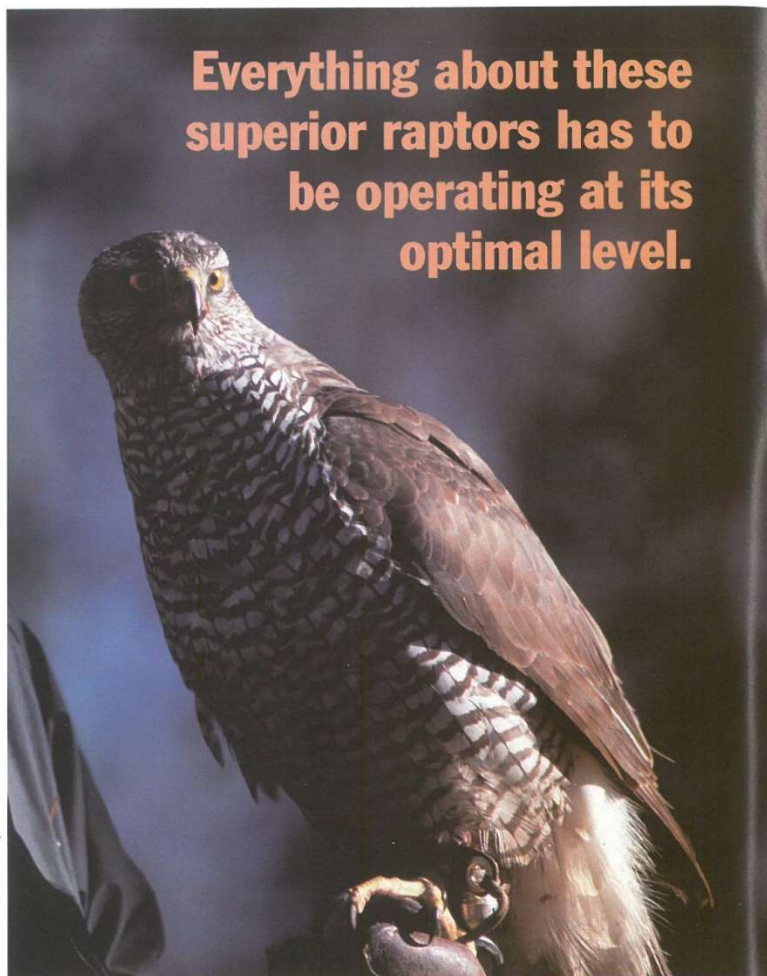


Photo: Seth Anthony

bird into an ultimate dominating mind master. It is able to catch things that it really shouldn't be able to; just because the quarry is so intimidated by the confident, overpowering attack of the raptor. This goshawk knows no failure; and the prey knows it too.

These birds are generally allowed to become very successful on one quarry species before being gradually switched to the next slightly more difficult quarry. As an example; A tiercel gos named 'Ira' had caught about a hundred rabbits before it was ever hunted on quail and at first, only intermittently. Eventually Ira was catching multiple quail every day and was again slowly eased into pheasants. The key is slow steady change that focuses on success. Hawks perform and learn

best with fast action and lots of it (repetition). The bottom line is that the supremely confident bird as purposely made by a skilled falconer who links together successful experiences with gradual increasing difficulty.

BODY: the discriminating part.

Motivation and fitness are intertwined completely; you must have both. These two criteria really separate the wheat from the chaff - the good from the great. We all know what a waste of time it is to take a fat hawk out hunting; it's just not motivated. It learns primarily negative lessons. For instance: when it doesn't return promptly and finally,

Everything about these superior raptors has to be operating at its optimal level.

gets rewarded for coming back, what has it learned? This bird will learn to wait before coming. The fat hawk probably catches little game and shows a steady decreasing interest in chasing those 'fast furry brown things' that run away. You've got to feed it somehow - the gos is likely being taught that you are the food source and will be increasing its screaming. Ever have your gos blast off at a jack (hare) only to veer off before connecting, when it could have easily had it? It's as if the hawk was trying to say 'no way'. What it's really saying is "I'm not motivated" or "I'm not hungry enough yet". The same can be said for a gos that only chases pheasants for a short distance before breaking off. By its very nature, a goshawk should chase a pheasant forever. I'm describing flights of hundreds of yards as being normal, not the exception. Goshawks are designed to take quarry both on the rise and in the long pursuit. What is the fat, unmotivated hawk learning by giving up prematurely? It's learned through repetition that pheasants are impossible to catch and there is no need to even try. Remember vices learned through repetition are the very hardest to fix! What would a hungry hawk be learning - that pheasant tastes good; The consistent use of accurate weight control employing a gramscale will change your level of falconry forever. Sure, goshawks can be flown using ounces as a weight reference - just be sure your ounce scale goes down to 1/30th ounce increments. This degree of precision will give you the consistency needed to help you reach the next level of performance with your goshawk.

Fitness is connected to motivation in every way. After the bird's hunting success is firmly established and its confidence level has reached that "I can kill anything" mentality; it's time to push it farther. We're going to make a good hawk great. Multiple kills interspersed with more challenging quarry will certainly give your bird some impressive exercise. Artificial exercising can take it one step

farther. Repetitive jumping to a T-perch, restrained pursuit and lure flying techniques can all be applied to fitness training. By using a stopwatch you are giving to an exercise programme what a scale does for weight control. Metabolic rates are very easy to measure and can be used to objectively measure fitness levels. Writing down your data will graphically show you exactly what progress you are making. I began a restrained pursuit programme with a Cooper's hawk that burned 'X' amount of food in a 24 hr. period. After 10 days of alternating hunting with exercise days the bird's metabolism had more than doubled! That's an objective, mathematical assessment of a very subjective topic. If you want the best in flying; you must have the ultimate in fitness.

NUTRITION: the easy part.

This final part of the equation is the simplest of all - buy good food. It's obvious that goshawks need a whole animal-bird diet to survive. Bones, organs, flesh and casting are all needed to support life - this is basic. We want to go well beyond minimal survival requirements. We want the ultimate in performance and need the ultimate in fuel. Sound familiar? There are a lot of unacceptable staple foods. Day old chicks top the list, with rabbits only being slightly better. Yes, birds will survive if fed either option but you'll have deficiency problems with both. Pigeons are disease prone and much too risky. Ducks or grouse are both excellent staple foods; availability is the problem. Domestic bred coturnix quail is the easiest, most convenient, readily accessible option. The quality varies with differing grades of quail. The differences primarily have to do with the nutritional quality of the food that the quail were being fed. A good quail will have firm, redish flesh that will yellow up a bird's feet and cere colour; but most importantly, allow it the energy to fly

like the devil herself. The gos fed these quail will literally be flying with rocket fuel. A coturnix quail fed low nutritional rations has a breast that is pale and mushy to the touch. Hawks fed these quail will also have feet that appear sickly white and will fly game only so-so at best. The difference in cost between the very best quail and cheapest is negligible; why even consider anything but the best?

Some individuals have attempted to feed low quality hawk food (chicks) and try to make up the difference with vitamins and calcium supplements. This is being cheap and foolish - it's not even a debatable question. To illustrate the point, just imagine trying to eat nothing but cotton candy and vitamin supplements for a week. How would you feel? Could you run a mile? How fast would you be? I'm sure you get the idea. Here's a more positive experiment to illustrate the nutrition aspect. Go hawking with a buddy who is flying a gos daily and feeding it rabbits or chicks. Let's assume the bird does okay; buy him twenty coturnix quail to feed and then watch the same bird two weeks later. Ten-to-one it flies like a rocket; it's got the fuel. This is an easy situation to optimise your bird's potential - buy the best hawk food.

SUMMARY

The balance of mind and body is precisely what's needed to form the ultimate goshawk. The beauty of this is that the average gos - that probably many of us have in our mews right now; can still be developed into a much better gamehawk. It generally involves just a little more thought or effort, perhaps a small change in food. Some birds start out as superstars right at penning; but most are developed over years. It is never accidental. The differences between good goshawks and great ones - are always based on the decisions and efforts made by the falconer. ■

SELECTING A HAWK

Stuart Rossell looks at making that important decision.

Deciding which hawk to fly is akin to buying a gundog. There are many different varieties available and some are more suited to an individual's circumstances than others. Before even trying to look for a hawk a few questions need to be answered and answered honestly. Remember that you are making a commitment to a living creature that could, and should, last for the entire life of the hawk. Few falconers have much patience or time for those who go through several different hawks each season and never give any of them enough time to achieve anything in the field. Understand right at the beginning that you should be thinking of keeping the hawk for a long time.



Photos: Seth Anthony

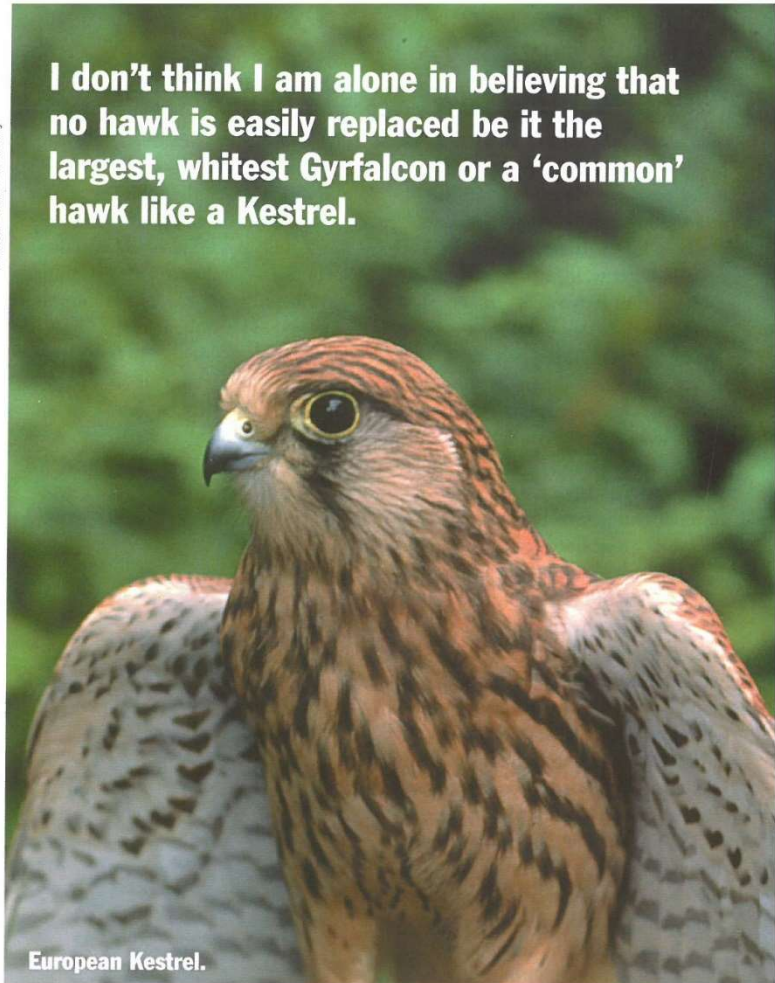


The basic questions remain unchanged regardless of the experience of the falconer but the answers are more restrictive for the beginner.

- 1. Do I have sufficient experience to fly the type of hawk I am thinking about acquiring.**
- 2. Do I have access to suitable country to fly her.**
- 3. Do I have enough time to fly her at quarry.**
- 4. Does the country I have available for hawking hold suitable quarry for her in sufficient numbers?**

The hawks used for falconry are divided into three groups. The longwings, shortwings and broadwings. The term hawk, is generic and covers all the species used be they longwing, shortwing or broadwing. The longwing category includes all those whose Latin name starts with the genus Falco. The species in this group most commonly flown are the Gyrfalcon, (*F. rusticolus*), Saker falcon (*F. cherrug*), Peregrine falcon (*F. peregrinus*), Prairie falcon

Photo: Seth Anthony



I don't think I am alone in believing that no hawk is easily replaced be it the largest, whitest Gyrfalcon or a 'common' hawk like a Kestrel.

European Kestrel.

(*F. mexicanus*), Lanner falcon (*F. biarmicus*), Luger falcon (*F. jugger*), Merlin (*F. columbarius*), European Kestrel (*F. tinnunculus*) and American Kestrel (*F. sparverius*). The shortwings are of the genus Accipiter and include the Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), European sparrowhawk (*A. nisus*), Cooper's hawk (*A. cooperi*), Sharp shinned hawk (*A. striatus*), and Black sparrowhawk (*A. melanoleucus*). The broadwings make up the hawks used for falconry and include species from the genera Buteo, Parabuteo and Aquila, the eagles. Not including the eagles the species most commonly flown are the European Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*), Ferruginous hawk (*B. regalis*), Red-tailed hawk (*B. jamaicensis*), Red-shouldered hawk (*B. lineatus*) and the Harris' hawk (*Parabuteo unicinctus*). It is easiest, and correct, to refer to the

different groups as longwings, shortwings or broadwings. The term broadwing is of fairly recent origin because up until a few decades ago very few of them were flown. The only Old World member of the group, the European or Common Buzzard held no interest for falconers. It wasn't until some of the broadwings found in the United States were trained and flown that this group started to receive serious attention from falconers. Falconers also sometimes refer to the shortwings as accipiters, in reference to their Latin name. This is because in several books shortwings and broadwings are lumped together when discussing training and flying. This is a mistake. Training and flying shortwings, while the techniques are similar to those used for broadwings is far more complicated and requires a higher degree of skill and expertise on the

part of the falconer.

Going back to our list then let's deal with number one first. For beginners choosing a hawk for the first time, avoid both the shortwings and the longwings. The shortwings are very high strung and require a degree of knowledge from the falconer that only comes from handling and training other species. This is not something you can learn as you go along. The problem with longwings lies when, having got them flying free, it comes to entering and flying them at quarry. Even falconers who have experience with a number of broad and shortwings make seemingly trivial mistakes with their first longwing and either end up losing it or with a hawk that refuses to chase quarry anymore. Simply put, there is very little room for error when training a large longwing. It is not easy to go back and correct mistakes once made. A colleague of mine who does not fly longwings made the rather sage comment one day that some of our mutual friends were in a constant state of entering their longwings to quarry. Sometimes they seemed to still be trying several years after obtaining the hawk!

I realise that in several books on falconry published both in the United Kingdom and the United States that Kestrels are recommended for beginners and so I had better address that theory while I'm dealing with longwings. In some cases, particularly in the older English books, the argument is made that Kestrels are relatively common and therefore if the beginner is going to make a mistake let him make it on a hawk that is easily replaced. I don't think I am alone in believing that no hawk is easily replaced be it the largest, whitest Gyrfalcon or a 'common' hawk like a Kestrel. Value, either monetary or perceived difficulty of replacement mean nothing to the hawk concerned and should have no place in this sport. In the American books and in articles published the argument is made, very logically, that it is often easier to find quarry for an American Kestrel than it is for a Red-tailed hawk, the alternative choice for the

apprentice in the US. That may be the case but it doesn't address the fact that the Kestrel, especially the American Kestrel, is a small hawk and any mistake the falconer makes can have disastrous results for the hawk. I suspect that many of those recommending Kestrels for beginners have been flying hawks for a number of years and are themselves, accomplished falconers. They may have forgotten what it is like to be a beginner. Falconry is as much about not making mistakes as it is about

time to overtake their quarry, either in a stoop or in direct flight. The acid test is whether someone else has flown over the type of country you have available and succeeded. If they have tried and failed, all things being equal, the chances are you will not fair any better. I personally feel that this one is a 'no brainer' but there are a surprising number of falconers who continue to try, year after year, to fly longwings in unsuitable country.

Number three regards the



Longwings need to be flown at least four times a week to keep them fit.

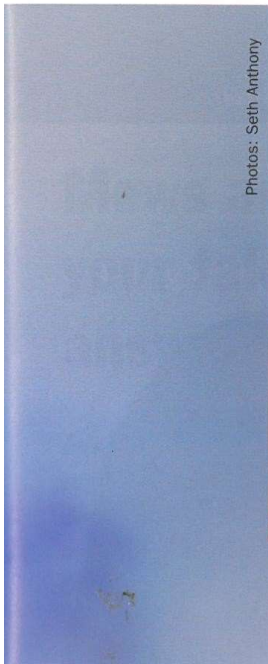
doing things right. Simply put, to an experienced falconer the task of taking and training a Kestrel, be it American or European, and catching quarry with it on a regular basis is not particularly an easy one. For a beginner, I believe it is putting the hawk at risk and setting the falconer up for failure. The fact is there are very few examples of successful Kestrels in the sport either in America or the UK and very few of those are in the hands of beginners.

Number two deals with the type of country available for hawking. This one is fairly simple to deal with and only really applies to longwings. These hawks need to be flown over relatively open country to allow them

amount of time available for hawking. Longwings need to be flown at least four times a week to keep them fit. The same really applies to short and broadwings if you want to see the best flying from them. However, a short or broadwing may be flown at easier quarry only two or three times a week if that is all you can manage. If you are only going to be able to fly on weekends, and especially if you cannot give much time during the week to maintenance training then I would advise sticking to the broadwings. They do not require the manning that a shortwing does to keep them tame enough to respond well two days a week. In fact some Harris' hawks can be flown

successfully on weekends only without even being handled during the week. You will not however see them at their best and not all individuals are suitable. My own suggestion would be, if you only have weekends available, don't fly a hawk of your own at all but try to go out with another falconer and his hawk.

On to number four then. You decide on the species, and to



Photos: Seth Anthony

Tiercel Peregrine.

some extent the sex, of the hawk you intend to fly in relation to the quarry you have available. It is no use training a large longwing to wait-on if you have suitable open country but it holds no game birds or ducks. Similarly, if you have plenty of hares or jackrabbits a large longwing will not be of much use but neither will a male Goshawk or male Harris' hawk. It is a shame that the smaller males are often less expensive than their larger sisters and are therefore more appealing to the beginner. Blackbirds have been taken by muskets as well as Sparrowhawks but to say that it is a regular occurrence or that all muskets in the hands of all falconers are capable of the task

would be a dangerous half-truth. The same could be said of grouse with tiercels, jacks with male Harris' hawks or rooks with Lanner falcons. The fact is the larger the species of hawk and historically the one that has shown most success at the

your chosen quarry.

For beginners the choice then has been narrowed to a broadwing of some kind. In the two countries in which I have practiced the sport, the UK and the US, there are only five. The Common Buzzard, Red-tailed hawk, Harris' hawk, Ferruginous hawk and the Red-shouldered hawk. I have no experience with Red-shouldered hawks but my American colleagues tell me that even experienced falconers do not have much success with them and so I will follow their advice and recommend against them.

I do not feel the Common Buzzard is a suitable bird for falconry. My argument is that falconry is about training a hawk to take quarry and even experienced falconers would be very hard pushed to achieve any success in the field with this species. For a beginner it is simply too much to expect. They are fairly forgiving, strong enough and large enough to take any mistakes the beginner may make as he learns how to handle and control the flying weight of his hawk but so is a female Harris' hawk or Red-tailed hawk. It became very apparent to me after having practiced falconry in America for a few years that the reasoning behind recommending Common Buzzards for beginners in the UK just didn't stand up to argument. The analogy I use, and maybe it is not very accurate but here it is, is that we teach a person to ride with a view of having them going hunting. We then teach them on a horse that won't jump fences. It may if a really experienced rider were to try but our logic was that we didn't want them riding the other horses even though they are just the same to handle becausewhat? What is our argument? We don't want them to try on a good hawk? I've already pointed out my views on the worth of a hawk above. So maybe we want them to try and prove something to us. Why? In the countries where falconry has a well run apprenticeship program, United States, South Africa and Zimbabwe for example, the beginners are allowed to fly relatively easy hawks but ones which

species of quarry you have is the one you are more likely to have success with. Even experienced grouse hawkers do not succeed with every tiercel they train so why handicap yourself by coupling your inexperience with an already difficult task. A more common example is a relatively new falconer getting a male Harris' hawk to fly at English rabbits or at jackrabbits. Not all male Harris' hawks in the hands of experienced falconers take these quarries and those that do are often flying at the very limit of their capabilities which the experienced falconer has been able to bring out of them. Such a task is beyond the average beginner dealing with the average male Harris' hawk. If you lack experience with the species of hawk concerned start with the larger female where there is any doubt as to the smaller males capabilities with

have a reputation for taking quarry in the field. The view, I assume, is that we are trying to make falconers out of them not pet keepers.

Now, before beginners in the UK rush out and buy Red-tailed hawks, I should explain something else. The Red-tailed hawks flown by American apprentices are not captive bred birds but are trapped from the wild as passage hawks. I do not recommend captive bred Red-tailed hawks or eyasses taken from the nest for beginners. Only where passage birds are available do I recommend them. So I guess that covers the Red-tail.

I do not consider the Ferruginous hawk suitable for beginners. The males are not really suited for taking rabbits, and in addition, their habit of sitting on the ground means that they require open country over which to be flown. Flown in enclosed areas they just don't see a lot of quarry from their customary position. The best way to fly them, slope soaring, is an advanced flight beyond the average beginner. This is a flight that needs more attention in the UK, particularly where there are hilly areas with rabbits, but I digress.

That leaves us with the Harris' hawk. It is no coincidence that this species is the most commonly flown hawk both in the UK and the US. A Harris' hawk properly and carefully trained is a very easy hawk to get along with and will take a wide range of quarry under a wider range of circumstances than almost any other hawk. It is a shame that some experienced falconers look down at those who fly them. I see them as a useful addition that makes falconry available to a number of people who might not otherwise, because of time restraints or perhaps ability, be able to enjoy the sport. The other advantage of Harris' hawks is that they can, in most cases, be flown with others of their own kind. This

means the beginner can go hawking with other falconers flying Harris' hawks and both he and his hawk will learn from them. I would, as pointed out earlier, recommend that your first hawk, if you decide to get a Harris' be a female. A beginner is simply more likely to succeed in taking rabbits with a female and as a quarry, these are fairly available to anyone.

So, that is my opinion. For a beginner in the UK I suggest you start with a female Harris' hawk. Before you do that I recommend you make contact with others flying Harris' hawks so that you can see what it is all about. For the United States, a passage Red-tailed hawk would be my choice. If you have access to mainly jackrabbits then go for a female but if your quarry will be mainly cottontails the sex is not as important. Incidentally, I think captive bred Harris' hawks, particularly females, should be available for apprentices in the US. I simply don't believe the logic that as a passage bird knows how to hunt it can revert to the wild without a hitch. Sometimes they can, sometimes they can't, it all depends on the circumstances under which they were lost. ■



Photo: Seth Anthony

Female Red-tail.



Photo: Terry Anthony

Female Harris' hawk

Acknowledgments. I would like to thank Peter Capainolo for reading and commenting on this article.

QUESTION TIME

with **Stuart Rossell**



Mews and Field - your falconry questions answered.

International Falconer is pleased to introduce a new regular feature with **Stuart Rossell**.

We welcome questions from beginners, apprentices or experienced falconers.

Our aim is to help you with any of those problems that you have with the management and training of your hawk, both in the mews and the field.

Please send your questions to:

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or by E-mail: Questions@intfalconer.com

Stuart Rossell began flying hawks when he was fifteen and has been active in falconry for over 20 years. He started his career as a professional falconer in 1982 and has been employed in this field full time pretty much ever since.

He worked as head instructor to the British School of Falconry for 6½ years before being head-hunted to the United States as Director of the country's first full time school of falconry, The Falconry Academy.

For two seasons he worked for Dave Jamieson training large longwings for export to the Middle Eastern market. At the 1998 California Hawking Club meet he taught what is hoped to be the first of many apprentice workshops. This workshop, covering 3 days, was aimed at those coming into the sport as well as apprentice falconers who had already made a start. He is currently working as manager to the falconry programme at JFK International Airport where falconry is one of several techniques used to reduce the risk of collision between birds and aircraft.

He has flown a large number of a variety of hawks but has a preference for the accipiters and has stated that if he could only fly one more hawk in his life it would be either a European or Black sparrowhawk.

His articles have been published in *American Falconry*, *The British Falconers' Club Journal*, and the *California Hawking Club Newsletter*. His particular interest is in teaching anyone seriously interested in falconry believing that education is in the best interest of both the budding falconer and his hawk. His favourite saying of "don't judge, educate" was coined after hearing other falconers criticising beginners while making no attempts to help them.

**Nicholas Kester
visits one of
the UK's most
experienced
austringers
whose ability
with the accipiter
is exceptional.**



Photo: Terry Anthony

The Austringer

I first met Andy Reeve at a January field meet in Norfolk, England some fourteen or so years ago. He sat in my car, fed my son wine gums and confessed to having recently given up smoking. It was, he claimed, not possible to fly a goshawk if you got out of breath. I mistakenly interpreted this as meaning he had to be able to chase the errant hawk as it self-hunted its way across the county.

Out in the field Andy took a slip at a mature cock pheasant. The flight of several hundred yards was unsuccessful and the goshawk took stand. Andy removed a white rat from his bag and offered it on his glove. Without a pause the hawk slipped from the tree and glided back to the fist. On we moved...

But this is not a hagiography. I am forever fascinated by the austringers. Those with a natural affinity to this most challenging of hawks. And it was to better understand his methods that I recently visited him. All our heroes have feet of clay and Andy is the first to admit to this. Having trained a kestrel "back to front" at twelve and a buzzard shortly after, and keeping an incredible menagerie of other creatures he took stock and decided that it was hawks that really fascinated him. If the kestrel was

trained somewhat unusually it also provided an interesting, if unwitting, first exercise in raptor psychology. Fed only shot food - starlings and sparrows - the little hawk actually caught things. Going on a school holiday, young Andy instructed his father that should he fail to shoot traditional food, he may cull some of

In its first season a hawk hunts instinctively to get through that first winter, it doesn't develop the arrogance that you will provide if all else fails.

his fan-tailed doves. His father shot the lot. On returning, Andy found the fattest of kestrels perched in a sea of pigeon feathers. And from that moment on the kestrel would attempt and occasionally take feral pigeons.

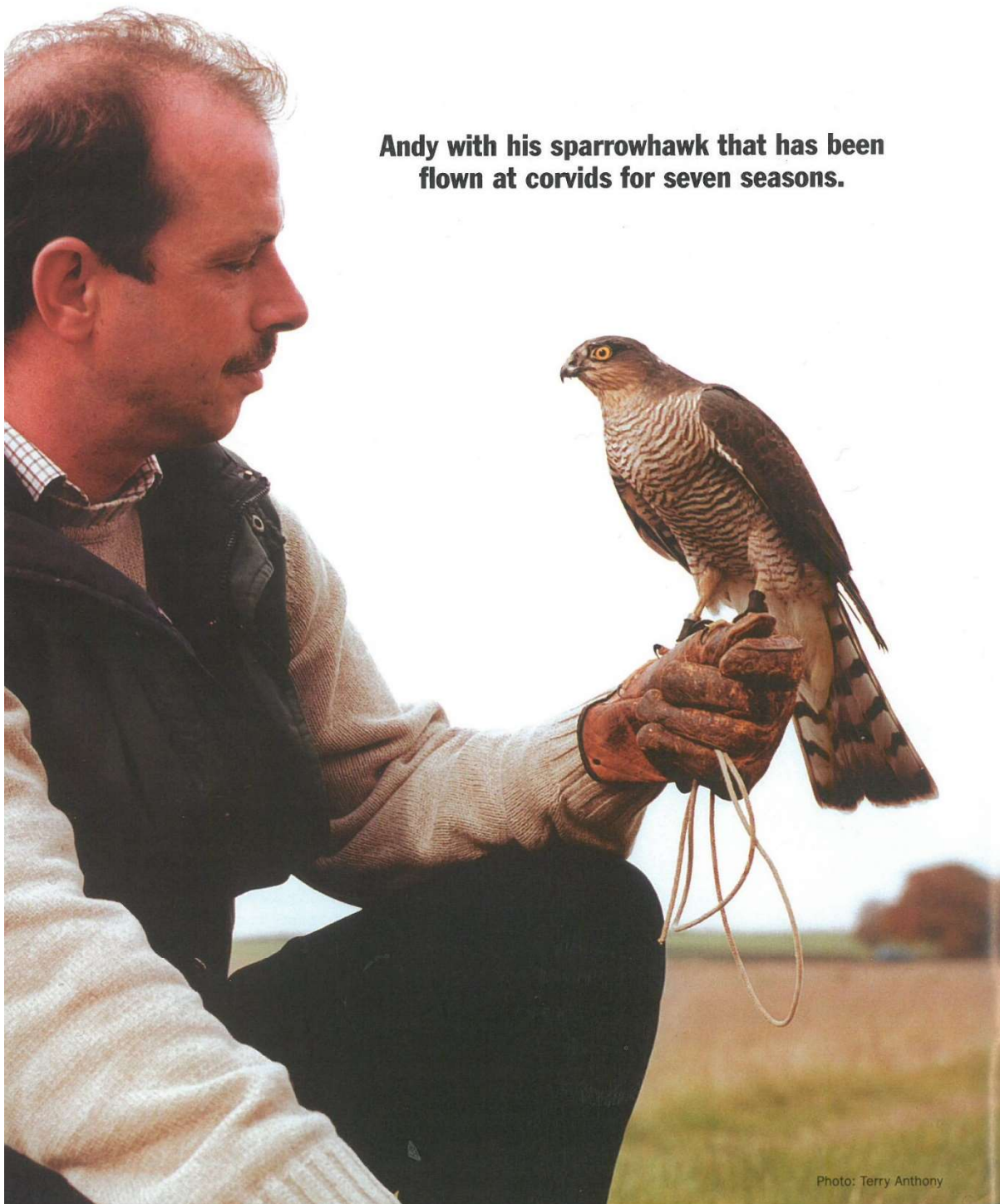
Having known a falconer aged twelve, who flew a goshawk (this was in the 70's when a gos was £30 and ownership and import restrictions non-existent), he vowed to make the

species his own. Eventually in his late teens, armed with £400 (how the prices rocketed in that decade and beyond) and a copy of *Cage and Aviary Birds* magazine, he tracked down a source. The price was £500 and the vendor was delighted to see the over-enthusiastic Reeve coming. He even accepted £400 for a male Finnish bird. If the purchase was a disaster it was to become the trigger for all his subsequent success.

"I was scared stiff," says Andy. "I had read all sorts of horror stories about goshawks. How you had to get them to feed on the fist, keep them in the dark, and walk them for hours to man them, feeding through every trauma."

"I did all this and every day the hawk bated and bated. I got more and more tense and still she failed to feed. The trauma for both of us was intense and I had no-one to turn to. Eventually, I was close to giving up. The hawk hated me and I was hating it. Although everyone in the house could look at him, my every glance sent it ballistic."

But the gos did feed on the fist, and with exceptional manning did steady up. After three or four weeks it responded sufficiently to be flown. "He was like a rocket," Andy remembers. "No-one can imagine it unless they experience it at first



Andy with his sparrowhawk that has been flown at corvids for seven seasons.

Photo: Terry Anthony

ANDY REEVE

An animal trainer by profession, Andy Reeve has over a period of 10 years worked on many highly acclaimed films and television programmes. Andy's work involves a huge diversity of animals and birds and his training techniques are based on achieving only natural behaviour of the species involved. He has found that many of the techniques and theories he has evolved can be used with great effect when training hawks for falconry.

hand. One minute on a friend's glove, before I could turn away he was onto my fist."

For the first three seasons the hawk flew really well and was obedient. But then Andy started to recognise the problems that had been developing, and subtly over the years that followed began to move away from the methods that served him so badly. For a start it began to refuse cock pheasants. Why? In its first season a hawk hunts instinctively to get through that first winter, it doesn't develop the arrogance that you will provide if all else fails. Given that most people are either unlucky with hawks or only fly them to sexual maturity and put them in breeding programmes, they rarely experience the challenges that come after five, ten or even fifteen seasons.

Andy's views are well founded as his current gos, the 'old girl' approaches her fifteenth season. The austringer should seek to fly his hawk as well, if not better, in its last ever flight as it did in its first. These long term/single hawk people impress him, not those who have flown many hawks but only for limited periods.

He knows well the desperation that drives falconers to buy hawks at ridiculous times of the year. The 'old girl' was collected in November but it could easily have been January. "We all know the feeling when the creance is frozen rigid and matches the side of your face as with a grimace you attempt to bluff out a friend's ridicule that this is for fun."

"Waste of time," says he. "Wait until next season. You cannot fly any hawk if you are tired, in a hurry or lacking concentration. All of which occurs at some stage during the brief, dark, winter days. How fatal has the 'one more flight' often proved? How often have you wished you had listened to your instinct? But it is so exciting to catch things. We have all done it."

It is the development of instinct that makes good falconers and which so fascinates Andy. "If you examine the old methods, they are all based on negative reinforcement. Yet it is

Andy resents the claim that goshawks are stupid killing machines. They are, he says, highly intelligent and when handled with sympathy they can be flown by anyone.

perfectly possible, indeed preferable, to make a hawk desire your presence without even having it on the fist."

If this sounds a bit bizarre, the only comparison that comes to mind is that of horse 'breaker' and 'whisperer'. In the latter, understanding the psychology counts for more than the actual activity itself. Placing a hawk in a 'safe zone' (ie. a weathering) and making certain it only receives 'good news' (food) establishes the bond as fast as any walking or wading. Take it one stage further by presenting the safe hawk with the 'bad news' in the form of mowers, children, dogs, etc. further establishes its acceptance of life outside the aviary. Andy resents the claim that goshawks are stupid killing machines. They are, he says, highly intelligent and when handled with sympathy they can be flown by anyone. He has proved this with a gos that, after a minimum period of introduction (a couple of hours at most), he permitted anyone to fly - something most people reserve

exclusively for Harris' hawks!

This 'conditioning' - including the highly desirable returning to an ungarnished glove, making to preferred quarry, weight control, flying in high condition, and the issues of sexual maturity will all be covered in a subsequent article. But before I headed for home, there was one final question I had to ask: What about the male goshawk? How do we create a vogue for them over the traditional desire for large northern European females?

Andy believes too many people have seen females flown and emulation is a powerful incentive. "They simply cannot see themselves flying the smaller males because they have not thought through the quarry issues."

Quarry is the key. Game is hard to obtain and rabbit populations fluctuate, whilst moorhen in anything other than a gale are not particularly sporting and should not be flown. Yet crows and rooks can usually be found in abundance and no landowner resents your flying them. Moreover, whilst game hawking goes over the hedge and out of sight, and rabbit hawking is all at your feet, crow hawking goes across the sky - visible to all.

But with a goshawk? Why not. All it requires is field craft, something many falconers sadly lack. If Andy can fly a sparrowhawk at corvids for seven seasons, there is no reason why a small male gos should not produce quality and challenging sport.

"All it requires is for a few more austringers to fly males with distinction and people will seek to imitate them. A change of attitude is all that is needed."

I look forward to hearing how. ■

To be continued.....

HOUBARA HAWK

Excerpts from
a Journal by
Charles Schwartz.

Photos by the author.

In 1986, it was my privilege to accompany several Arabian Gulf shaikhs on a hunting trip to Pakistan. Our group travelled modestly by the standards of Middle Eastern royalty, but we took enough birds and equipment to hunt and live comfortably. I kept a journal, which I would like to share...

OCTOBER 28

I met Shaikh Mohammed at his majlis and rode to the airport with him and a naval officer in Mohammed's brand new Chrysler town car. As usual, Mohammed drove. After formal farewells in the VIP lounge, we boarded a private Grumman jet with portraits of falcons painted on the interior walls, comfortable swivel chairs and a few live sakers perched here and there. Mohammed's younger brother, Shaikh Abdulla, and a man named Shaikh Khalid were with us. We snacked on plump red strawberries as we hustled over the Gulf at a brisk 600 knots. At the Karachi airport we were greeted by diplomatic officials and whisked quickly through the streets to Shaikh Khalid's villa by an armed escort with sirens wailing and soldiers at the ready. I was impressed.

The vehicles, equipment and falcons had been shipped over the week before with an advance party. My intermewed passage saker, 'Dham', which Mohammed had given me three weeks earlier, was somewhere in Karachi but I did not see her at Shaikh Khalid's. While Mohammed checked the camping arrangements, I looked over the falcons that were there. I was shown a 'sick' saker, razor thin from lack of food. It ate greedily on my *mangala* (falconer's cuff), much to the displeasure of its trainer, a taxi cab driver cum falconer looking for rapid advancement in the eyes of his employer. Like other inexperienced falconers I had met, he believed starvation was the same as training. He wasn't happy with my cure.

In a few minutes we were off to shop for falcons. There is nothing like the sight of fresh hawk feathers to stir a falconer's soul and the baz-wallas (hawk sellers) of Karachi have plenty of feathered beauties to show. We saw many passage sakers and a few peregrines, usually perched on long, low wooden rails holding a half dozen hooded birds each. I was determined to obtain a red-naped shaheen but there none were to be had. Language was a constant problem and a Westerner arguing the finer distinctions of species and sex must have been a treat for the baz-wallas. *Saqr* means falcon, although the word is seldom used. An exceptional saker is

hurr and the peregrine is *shaheen*. A *farkh* is a bird in immature plumage and a *qurnas* wears adult feathers, regardless of its age at capture. The subtleties between peregrines and red-naped shaheens caused great mischief. Peregrines are *shaheen bahri* (peregrine of the sea), while red-napes are *shaheen jebeli* (peregrine of the mountain). A female red-naped, because of its smaller size, is easily confused with the *tiba shaheen* (male peregrine). And of course, there are plenty of lanners (*shaheen wakri*) with red on their heads - enough to cause considerable discussion when I tried to describe a small shaheen

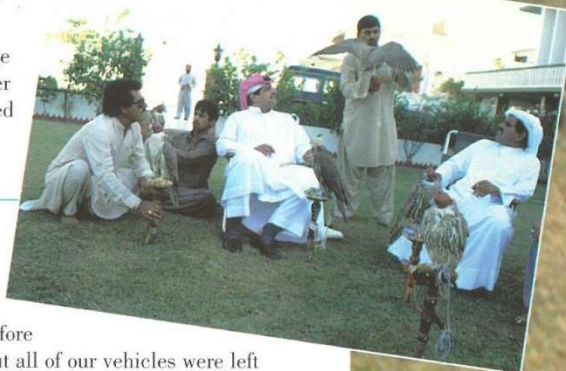


Baz-walla with wares
in Karachi.

ING IN PAKISTAN

with a red head that was not *tiba* or *shaheen wakri*. Sorting this out in three languages was a frustration for me and great entertainment for my friends.

We ended the day with a near *ashgar* (white) male of 780 grams for 3,000 Pakistani Rupees and a 825 gram passage peregrine for 150,000 PR (17 PR = 1 US Dollar). Another saker and a peregrine with broken feathers were purchased as a package for 150,000 PR. In all, we visited six baz-wallahs, but I did not find a red-nape.



Shopping for falcons in Karachi.

OCTOBER 30

We left for the Dadu district of the Sind Province at 0430 with only 3 hours sleep. The roads are less dangerous then and we cleared the suburbs of Karachi before dawn. The Pakistanis drive on the left side of the road but all of our vehicles were left hand drive. The highways lacked signs and lines on the road and we risked our lives every mile. The driver, who cannot see anything but the barrow pit on his left, must determine his steering and acceleration when passing based on verbal input from the passenger in the right seat. That this person may not speak the same language adds zest to the experience. But the brightly decorated lorries and buses loaded to overflowing with humans were a treat, even when travelling 60mph straight at us!

Our field accommodations are grand compared to an American grouse camp. We have thirteen tents, ten vehicles (eight four wheel drives and two large lorries), and about twenty-five people including staff (mechanics, cooks, servants, and a communications technician). I counted thirty-one falcons, approximately ten for each shaikh's group. We have a generator, a satellite linked telephone, hot showers and plenty of cold drinks.



Mid-day break.

Shaikh Mohammed and Shaikh Khalid wanted to go hunting as soon as we arrived in spite of very little sleep and the nerve-racking trip, so we quickly loaded two vehicles with falcons and were off. Mohammed, Sayid, a Pakistani guide and myself took one old *qurnas* that was deemed ready in the Toyota and Shaikh Khalid, Shaikh Abdulla, and Mabrak took four falcons in a Rover. We found houbara right away and killed four out of five, one with a falcon in three short desperate flights and the rest with shotguns.

By 1130, it was too hot to continue so we took a break in the shade of a small grove of acacia trees with the falcons blocked out around us. Lunch and a game of cards on the carpets, followed by a nap. Up and at 'em at 1500. There was no command. Shaikh Mohammed climbed into his truck and started the engine. Everyone else hustled up.

HOUBARA HAWKING IN PAKISTAN

Our Pakistani guide sat in the centre of the rear seat with his head swiveling back and forth as he scanned the ground near and far for houbara. There were no roads to speak of and most of our travel was cross country. Occasionally we glimpsed a distant flashing and eventually found a local herder hiking across the desert, flashing his signal from a burnished tin can or a broken bit of mirror. He would give us the news of houbara seen. Mohammed tipped generously and word travelled fast. No track will go unreported by our guide's network of informants.

This evening I was reunited with Dham. She weighed in at 980 grams, too high for my liking. I inquired if anyone had flown her since I saw her last but their replies were vague and mumbled. I put a radio on her leg and flew her to the lure with no problems. Later I learned that she hadn't been flown since I last flew her two weeks ago! In all, Dham has only been in the air six times since I got her.



Ready for the hunt.
Four sakers.

I spent the evening attaching telemetry tail mounts to Mohammed's falcons and found myself becoming short-tempered with some of the falconers. These men didn't have a clue how to cast a falcon properly. It irritated me to watch a falcon twist out of their grasp and bend its feathers just because the falconer feared a nip on the hand. Mohammed laughed and chided me to be patient. Dinner at 2130 and to bed at 2300. Shaikh Mohammed, bu Jasim and myself are in one tent. We have the only cots in camp. I slept like a dead man.

OCTOBER 31

Up at 0630. A cold breakfast of hard boiled eggs, tinned cheddar and unleavened Arab bread. We travelled to I know not where in the dark. Several punctures delayed us but we finally reached a high gravel ridge intersected by long deep wadis. This land was incredibly barren with only a few trees in the lower spots. I couldn't take photos because I carried Dham on my mangala. We got into houbara, but everything went wrong. We lost two radio transmitters in the field and made some tactical errors. Dham was allowed two slips and managed to put one in but she seemed weak or fat or both. Shaikh Mohammed acted displeased at the way things were going and no-one spoke for awhile. Our truck had scored zero but Hamad's old *qurnas* in the other vehicle had scored two out of two, both caught alive in the air.

After lunch, bu Jasim and I drove back to retrieve the lost transmitters. Then Shaikh Mohammed and I practiced using the telemetry gear. Bu Jasim would hide the transmitters and we would find them. While we were doing this, one of the live houbara escaped and everyone jumped up to hunt it down.

Immediately we were into five more houbara. Dham was given another slip and refused, flying up into the sky as hard as she could. Three eagles dropped out of the blue and one stooped hard, almost snatching her out of the air. I frantically swung my lure as Dham and the eagles soared up out of sight, drifting rapidly downwind. With so many houbara around, Mohammed and the others were keen to go. "Leave her", Mohammed told me. "I'll get you another." But I convinced him to let me have bu Jasim, the guide and a

truck. We agreed to meet at the base of a prominent hill at 1700. I understood Mohammed's reluctance, torn as he was between his obligation to protect me and his desire to hunt down the houbara.

Bu Jasim and I followed Dham's signal in the truck until we were stopped by a deep canyon. I set out on foot across that rugged country with nothing but my receiver, a hood and a lure, certain that I would find Dham's mangled remains scattered below one of the likely eagle perches on the opposite side. But I had a steady signal and was determined to get her back. Three kilometres of rough ground and an hour later, I lured her in from the top of a small ridge. Bu Jasim arrived shortly via a circuitous route and I was damn glad I didn't have to walk back. My feet weren't tough enough for sandals and sand! We returned to the rendezvous point at 1715 and I held Dham down below the window as we drove up to the group. Everyone came walking over looking grim and then I grinned as I lifted Dham above the door where all could see her. Everyone laughed and shook my hand.

NOVEMBER 2

Another full day. So much to write if I can remember it all. We had three trucks today including Shaikh Abdulla's. About twelve hawks. We killed eight houbara, six with falcons. Several really good flights. One where Shaikh Mohammed almost rolled the Toyota on a wild three kilometre race which ended with his *farkh* killing a large houbara. And another at the end of the day



Passage saker with Houbara.

when Shaikh Abdulla's *qurnas* went up and out over the valley chasing a strong houbara. A second insane cross country pursuit in the trucks, ending with me jumping out, telemetry in hand and Sayid beating me to the falcon. Abdulla's *qurnas* had been bested by the houbara on the ground after receiving a direct hit of sticky tamal in her face. She was a mess. Saw two other good flights; the now famous hot *qurnas* flying one down and striking it out of the air, and later in the day - binding to one and riding it down.

Dham got two chances, one a fair slip at two houbara walking about 75 yards away. She started well when they flushed but set her wings several hundred yards out. In comparing her breast and thighs to the other birds, I can see that Dham is still too high. She did not get one bite today and still weighed 860 grams at 1900. Tomorrow we try again.

Sayid lost his *farkh* today after it went into a soar with a wild peregrine. We chased after it until 1630. When last seen, it was high above an escarpment about a mile away. Both Sayid and Mohammed said prayers tonight (to get it back?). There was no transmitter on it. Back in camp, we learned that Shaikh Khalid had lost a bird wearing a transmitter. I don't think he knows how to use the gear. Dinner was served early as Mohammed and

HOUBARA HAWKING IN PAKISTAN

Sayid plan to look for their falcon in the morning. To bed at a decent hour for once. Tomorrow I ride with Hamad and old Abdulla.

NOVEMBER 3

Shaikh Mohammed and bu Jasim were up at 0315 and went out with Sayid to look for the lost falcon. I got up at 0500. Not feeling very well so I skipped eating and made up a bottle of rehydrating liquid for the day. Felt better by noon but couldn't get serious about searching for houbara. It is very much a visual effort requiring constant attention and my throbbing head wouldn't let me participate. Dham did get three slips this morning and twice the houbara broke free from her grasp. So close! She seems very slow in the air. Two of the houbara were big ones and there were other problems as well: too much cover, 'jungle' as the Arabs call it, poor driving and bad luck. Dham is still passing white, so she isn't at rock bottom yet. Everyone says *shnather* tonight. I hope not.

At lunch, I felt the breasts of all twelve falcons. Several of the *farkh* are much thinner than Dham and are considered 'ready'. The hot *qurnas* is also quite thin, but heavier than the rest. Dham is actually one of the fatter birds. I weighed them all. The *farkh* birds were between 800 and 850 grams and the *qurnas* closer to 900. Dham has been hanging her wings ever since her second flight today, even when hooded, so I think her problem is definitely lack of exercise.

Hamad proved to be a non-stop talker and circle driver, constantly eating his own dust. He never saw a houbara today and ignored directions from those of us who did. I hope I don't have to hunt with him again. Back at 1900 hours. Shaikh Mohammed did not recover Sayid's bird but they had killed one houbara with another falcon. Shaikh Khalid returned with a beautiful passage saker which he had trapped while out for two days. A gorgeous 'hisser'. No-one seemed disappointed.

Dham got the *shnather* treatment tonight. I never would have done it on my own but I was a part of this group and could not refuse without being rude. One of the falconers cut a piece off an ugly brown cake called *salmonik*, whittled it down to an oblong bolus slightly smaller than a falcon's casting, then wrapped it in a piece of gauze and tied it with a string. This was forced down Dham's throat followed by a squirt of water. She was then hooded and kept off balance for five minutes in order that she not cast while the stuff did its work. Then she was unhooded and placed in a corner of the tent where we could watch her. In a few minutes, she cast up the *shnather*, followed by a considerable amount of slimy flem, which my companions said was the lining of her crop. It was a foul, greasy mess. She seemed exhausted by the experience. I let her rest for thirty minutes and then fed her a warm pigeon breast. Tomorrow she will stay in camp as riding in a truck all day is hard on a falcon. Shaikh Abdulla told me afterwards that *salmonik* is used to clean pots and pans. I later learned that *salmonik* is industrial grade ammonium chloride, not something I would have used willingly on a hawk I liked!

NOVEMBER 5

Dham weighed 830 grams this morning and acted keen. Big disappointment when I learned that Shaikh Mohammed couldn't go out and I was to ride with Hamad, Mubarak

and Ali with seven hawks to fly. Later in the morning I switched to Shaikh Khalid's truck. Allah was with us and we killed four houbara in six flights and almost got a fifth with Khalid's *shaheen*. Broke for lunch with more houbara marked down. We now have eleven falcons with us.

Dham got her chance this morning about 1030 after a *farkh* broke off a group of three. We marked one down and after collecting the *farkh*, we flushed it with the truck. I quickly stepped outside and slipped Dham. She chased it until it landed and faced her with the usual threat display. Dham never stooped, feinted, threw up or any of that foolishness. She just plowed headlong into the big houbara and that was that. Shaikh Khalid dumped me off and I managed to remember my camera as he roared off in hot pursuit of the other two. Alone in the middle of a strange and suddenly quiet desert, I looked at Dham pluming her prey. My first houbara. It felt as natural as if I had been doing it all my life. I will never forget that moment.



Author with 'Dham' and her first Houbara.

NOVEMBER 8

We have moved our camp 13 hours to the north, near a small village called Bellpat north of Lahri in the province of Baluchistan. This country is much more stark compared to the Sind and the locals here are armed and potentially dangerous. There are no friendly farmers to show us the houbara. The jagged mountains to the northeast seem completely devoid of living plants and the valley floor is a dry lake bed that extends for miles.

This morning as we turned off the paved road just before dawn, bu Jasim accelerated across the flats as the rest of the trucks came up behind us. He slipped his favourite Donna Summer tape into the player and cranked up the volume. Donna's disco beat was pounding as Mohammed pulled alongside and soon all five trucks were racing abreast at top speed across the dry lake bed, each trailing a plume of dust like a desert rat patrol scene out of a WWII movie. The sun cracked through the distant peaks as Mohammed pulled into the lead and the rest of us strung out in a line behind him. I could make out five dark spots in the distance but I had no idea what was happening until I saw the windows roll down and the guns come out. The dark spots were eagles roosting on a pressure ridge only a few feet higher than the pan we were crossing. Our patrol came streaming past with guns booming as the startled eagles took flight. Two fell and I saw another fly off with a leg hanging. We decelerated and circled back to the kill site where bu Jasim collected the eagles' feet for trophies. Everyone thought it was a great way to start the day.

HOUBARA HAWKING IN PAKISTAN

And then again, when we stopped to feed the falcons at sunset, I watched from a distance as Mohammed sat on the hood of his red Toyota and smoked a cigarette, giving instructions and joking with bu Jasim and the others. I realised that in the years I had known him, I had never seen him carry a falcon or actively participate in its training. Although he was clearly knowledgeable about the sport, Mohammed seemed more like a military officer at that moment; conferring with his sergeants and directing his men in his personal campaign against the houbara. He was a shaikh and his troops truly enjoyed his leadership.

NOVEMBER 13

Adel and I made it back to Karachi in 10 hours by falling in behind a police escort for someone in a Mercedes and acting as if we were part of their cavalcade. Breezed into Karachi by 1600. Wish I could have stayed longer in Baluchistan with the rest of the falconers but I have to get back to my job. I did manage to find time to shop for falcons again with two young shaikhs who had just arrived. We took a taxi to Taj Mohammed's where I found a red-nape and immediately bought it for 2,000 PR. It had just arrived from the north and was in high condition at 680 grams. Then we took another taxi to a Qatari shaikh's villa to "borrow his car". I counted forty-eight falcons blocked out on the lawn. My new friends were eager to keep looking so we visited a few more places and eventually worked out a complicated exchange that ended with the shaikh and the baz-walla shouting and pinching each other's cheeks as they consummated their deal. We walked out with a second red-nape for me and a fresh saker for Shaikh Hamad. I couldn't have been more pleased.



We killed eighty houbara in twelve days and hunted over an incredible amount of real estate in southern and northwestern Pakistan. I will never forget the vastness and stark beauty of that country. I was the only Westerner in the group, yet never once did I feel as if I was treated differently in any way. Shaikh Mohammed, his brother Abdulla and their falconers, many of whom I had known for several years, shared their passion for falconry with a cheerfulness and intensity that I had never experienced before or since.

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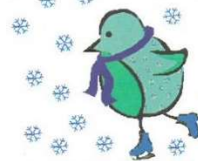
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The next hurdle is incubation. As with other areas of captive breeding, you are faced with several options to choose from as to how to incubate your eggs:

Leave the eggs with the parents for them to hatch.

Place the eggs with another incubating bird whether another raptor, bantam or pigeon.

Artificially incubate via the use of an Electro/mechanical incubator.



Photo: Falcon Mews

Each aspect has its pros and cons and your own individual circumstances may dictate the course you have to take. Many breeders will extol their preferred method, but these methods generally result from a small number of eggs that they have incubated, and from a limited number of females. Only by trying each method over several seasons with a large variety and quantity of eggs, does a true picture become apparent as to the merits of each type of incubation.

NATURAL INCUBATION

To simply leave the eggs with the parent birds would at first glance seem the obvious choice to the tyro propagator. However, like numerous other decisions that you are faced with when captive breeding, this is not as straight forward as it first seems. A primary problem is that not all individual birds make good parents when it comes to incubation. Some will break eggs either by accident or intentionally. Others will stop and abandon sitting at any point during incubation for what seems no reason at all. A particular area of concern is at hatching time, where some parent birds (male or female) will eat their emerging offspring.

A second point to consider is by leaving the eggs with the parents, generally only one clutch will be laid. A few individuals, particularly Harris' hawks have incubated and reared young and then laid and reared a repeat clutch in the same season. For a raptor to be persuaded to lay a repeat clutch, its eggs should be removed from it before or up to two weeks from the last egg laid.

If this is your chosen method of incubation then as well as close observation there are several other

items of management which may be of aid. The clutch of eggs should be checked for fertility once they have received 7-10 days of incubation. If they prove infertile, then by removing them at this point a second clutch may be laid 8-24 days later dependant on species, giving a second chance of fertility in the same season.

As a small insurance policy, a couple of eggs may be removed from the nest to an incubator just prior to hatching, just in case the parents kill the young as they hatch. If all goes well in the nest, then the incubator hatched young can be put back in the nest for rearing at 2 or 3 days of age, thus the old saying "don't place all your eggs in the same basket."

SURROGATE PARENTS

The use of a surrogate parent for incubation whether another raptor, bantam or pigeon is an option open to the propagator.

Imprinted raptors tend to be the best option, as the placing and removal of eggs is straight forward and close observation is easily achieved. The surrogate female should have laid her own eggs and be broody before any eggs are placed with her. The length of time a raptor can be kept broody will vary between individuals, but common sense should prevail on the period of time the bird has been sitting over its normal incubation period. As to the number and size of the eggs requiring incubating, they shouldn't be too dissimilar to the surrogate's own eggs. As an example, most large falcons will sit one another's eggs and red-tails or common buzzards will sit Harris' hawk and goshawk eggs and vice-versa.

Once broody, most imprinted females are very intense and diligent with incubation. Our female golden eagle refuses to even stand up when we remove eggs from her and we have to place a hand under her and feel for the eggs. We have several imprinted falcons that can be

aggressive toward us prior to laying but once broody and with the change in hormone levels, they always become extremely tame.

Some breeders use bantams or pigeons as surrogate sitters. These birds should be kept to an equally high standard as one keeps raptors and there is a high skill factor to be learned as to their husbandry. Most larger breeders tend to shy away from this method as it is another job in itself. An incubator is required to complete the hatching when using non-raptor surrogates.

INCUBATORS

Over the last twenty years the use of electromechanical incubators has grown in popularity not only with raptor breeding but also in many other branches of aviculture.

Major steps forward have occurred in this field not only with the advancement of the machines themselves but also in our understanding and knowledge of the parameters needed to successfully hatch a high percentage of eggs.

It is essential that a deep understanding of the egg's needs during incubation be acquired prior to trying to incubate valuable eggs. Once a good grounding has been acquired then you need to gain experience, which can only be obtained by trying out your techniques. In most cases you are chasing your own tail, as with generally only a small number of eggs being produced and incubated annually, it is hard to gain experience. I have been fortunate in this respect; as well as incubating several hundred raptor eggs annually we also house a large parrot collection and it is rare for us not to have at least a few eggs in the incubators all year round.

As to the question of which is the best type and make of incubator, again experienced breeders hotly debate this. We use the Roll-X and Turn-X incubators produced by Lyon's Electrical Company and during the last season we have added



Photo: Seth Anthony

Quality Fertile Egg

For an egg to stand any chance of hatching, it has to be of the highest quality. Diet is the main contributing factor, and small inadequacies in the female's diet will show up as poor hatchability. Unfortunately, unless the egg has a poor shell quality, which is obviously seen, the egg gives little away optically as to its internal qualities. Eggs which fail to hatch, can be sent for laboratory evaluation of their nutritional make-up, with a view to finding any shortfall. However the results are usually compared with those obtained from poultry and any comparisons should be viewed sceptically.

Fertility can usually be determined by day 5 or 6 of incubation via candling. Candling, is the term used to describe placing the egg over a cool strong contained light source to view the contents of the egg through the shell. At this period of incubation, if fertile, the yolk will become more defined in shape and begin to expand in size. Accipiter, buteo and eagle eggs are more difficult to candle than falcons due to their more dense and thicker shells.

a number of Grumbach S84 incubators which we are extremely impressed with. There are a number of other makes of incubators which some breeders have expressed their confidence in. It is now the accepted view that forced air incubators (ones with a fan to circulate air, as opposed to a still air machine, which relies on convection) are far more accurate when it comes to maintaining a constant temperature.

The five key elements of successful incubation are as follows:

1. **Quality fertile egg.**
2. **Hygiene.**
3. **Temperature control.**
4. **Correct amount of turning.**
5. **Humidity control.**



Photo: Seth Anthony

Hygiene

Although eggs have a mild resistance to bacteria found in the wild nest, the bacteria found in captivity is generally of a different type and can be lethal. As an egg is laid it cools and contracts rapidly, any bacteria in contact with the egg may be drawn through the shell. For this reason nest ledges and platforms should be kept as clean as practically possible and yet again due to easy access this is more easily achieved with imprinted birds.

All incubators must be cleaned thoroughly and fumigated prior to use, and frequently throughout the incubation season. This is also the case for egg transport boxes, scales and any other areas the eggs may come in contact with and particularly the human hands.

Eggs that we find to be dirty or soiled when removed from the nest, are cleaned with warm water before being placed in the incubator. There are a number of commercial egg sanitant solutions available, and if used, it is imperative that the instructions are followed exactly as they have the potential to harm eggs if not.

Types of bacteria found on a tree nesting accipiter egg against a cliff nesting falcon egg will vary, and although it usually doesn't affect its natural host it may well be lethal to another species eggs. With this in mind we try not to have too dissimilar eggs within the same incubators. We have found merlin eggs in particular, to be very prone to cross infection from other eggs.

Eggs that are found to be infertile or which have ceased developing (died) when candled are removed from the incubator immediately.

Hygiene levels cannot be overstated in incubation, and it is a constant battle. In the ideal world each egg would have its own incubator, but we have to be realistic.



Temperature control

The correct incubation temperature for raptors is between 37°C and 37.5°C. Larger eggs (eagles) are at the lower end of this scale and the smaller eggs (merlins) at 37.5°C. If the temperature deviates from this the overall effects will depend on:

1. **The degree of inaccuracy.**
2. **The period of time that the eggs have been running at the erroneous temperature.**
3. **At what stage of incubation the eggs are at.**

Eggs have a higher survival rate if the inaccuracy is below the optimum temperature than above, particularly in the latter half of incubation. A small discrepancy of say 0.5 to 1 degree for a short period of time should have no significant effect. Much more than this and overall hatchability is usually reduced. Eggs run slightly on the high side will pip up to a day early and the opposite for eggs run slightly low. If a slight discrepancy is found,

do not try to equal it out by running the machine on the opposite side of the optimum temperature, just adjust the machine back to the required temperature.

It should be noted that eggs which overheat or cool for excessive periods might show no problem at that point when candled. However, as temperature is the timing catalyst for the vast amount of chemical processes taking part in the development of the embryo, minor temperature problems that occur may not show up until a latter period. So eggs which die several days after any erroneous temperatures have occurred, are more than likely to have died from this problem.

When starting eggs fresh in an incubator, great care should be taken on warming the egg up to incubation temperature. Placing a cold egg directly into an incubator will be too much of a temperature shock. Under a parent bird the egg is warmed up gradually to incubation temperature. If we are incubating an egg from day one we take one of the following steps. When removing an egg from the nest, if it is found to be freshly laid and still warm, then it is weighed, measured and placed

straight into the incubator. If the egg is cool, we then warm it up in a spare incubator, by starting at ambient temperature and turning the incubator up gradually over a couple of hours until we reach incubation temperature. Eggs that are to be incubated from day one in incubators are never stored, as this may complicate the warming up procedure even more.

Turning of eggs

All raptor eggs have to be turned at regular intervals throughout incubation. In the first half of incubation the germinal disc floats on the top of the yolk and feeds from the nutrients that it is in contact with, so by turning the egg it will reach a new feeding area. If the egg is not turned the developing embryo will stick to the side of the shell and the result is death. Research in poultry eggs, which weren't turned at all in incubation, showed a hatch rate of only 3%. In the great majority of cases the chick is mobile enough in the last quarter of incubation not to require turning. However most breeders including myself, keep the eggs turning until they pip.

When being turned, the egg should rotate approximately 180 degrees in one direction, and on the following turn, back in the

opposite direction to its starting point. With regard to the frequency of turning, we know from experiments with electronic eggs placed under raptors, that this occurs randomly every thirty minutes through to two hours. However, we really need to know what's best in an artificial environment. Some people hand turn their eggs between five and eleven times per day (always an odd number, so they are not on the same side each night) with reasonable success.

But if incubating eggs from day one of incubation, our experience is that this is not enough. Some of these eggs will hatch but some is not enough. Most modern incubators turn once per hour, but at the time of writing we are experimenting turning eggs during their first third of incubation every fifteen minutes. The reason for this is that it has been found that some softbills and macaws with a small yolk to albumen ratio, similar to raptors, have a far better blood membrane growth if turned

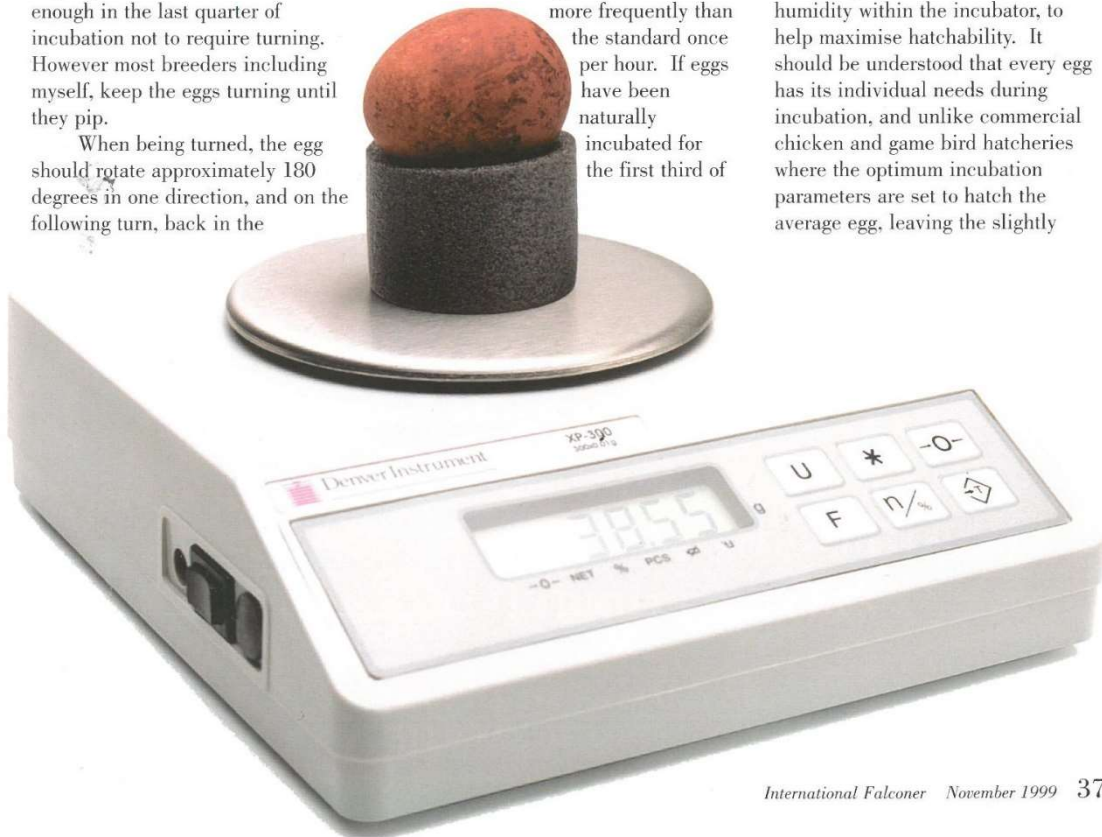
more frequently than the standard once per hour. If eggs have been naturally incubated for the first third of

incubation, then once per hour is frequent enough.

Humidity control

All eggs need to lose a percentage of weight via water evaporation through the shell to hatch successfully. As a general rule, a total of around 15% should be lost in weight, measured from when the egg is first laid to the egg starting to pip, and then a further 3% to 5% to hatch. The main period of time we are initially interested in, is from the egg starting incubation, through to it making its first pip mark in the shell. Why does an egg need to lose weight? The reason is that as the chick starts to respire, a by-product, as well as carbon dioxide, is water. This water must be diffused through the shell to stop the chick from drowning at the internal pip stage when pulmonary respiration starts.

The rate at which eggs lose weight, can and must be controlled by the various methods including increasing and decreasing relative humidity within the incubator, to help maximise hatchability. It should be understood that every egg has its individual needs during incubation, and unlike commercial chicken and game bird hatcheries where the optimum incubation parameters are set to hatch the average egg, leaving the slightly



under par eggs to perish, in raptor breeding we always aim to maximise productivity. Many breeders opt not to weigh their eggs, claiming that it isn't necessary. However it is like training a raptor without weighing it, of course it's possible but the risks of it starving or being lost increases dramatically.

Attention to detail and the closest monitoring are necessary if you are to achieve the high rates of hatchability required. You will find with experience that even two sister eggs from the same clutch may need totally different humidity settings to reach the required weight loss goal. This means individual attention is crucial. There are several excellent commercially available computer programmes to assist in this area. Due to lack of space I cannot delve any deeper at this point, but there are numerous books on incubation covering various aspects of controlling weight loss in eggs (of which there are many). ■

SUMMARY

As can be seen incubation is not a subject to be taken lightly. In a large project a 5% increase in overall hatchability can be the difference between a good and average breeding season. But with pre-planning and close monitoring coupled with lessons learned from previous mistakes, each season should show a steady improvement. As to pre-planning, we are agents for a number of makes of incubators and each season at least 50% of customers order an incubator and expect a crash course in its use, only when their birds have laid their first egg. This obviously is far from ideal. We find that the cause of most failures in artificial incubation, is not the fault of the incubators but of the people in charge of operating them. To think the key to success is that

you simply unpack the machine, plug it in and just fill with eggs (as a lot of people do) usually leads to a disaster.

You may detect that I am biased toward the use of incubators, mainly down to the control factor. But please consider all your options before deciding on the course which suits your own circumstances and expectations. With artificial incubation there are many skills to learn such as how to repair a slightly damaged egg or when and if to help an egg in hatching, to name but a couple. But at the same time as well as some heartache, incubation can be very rewarding even with all the worries associated with it. In the next and final article of this series, we will cover the rearing of eyasses and its associated problems.

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A photograph of a falcon, likely a Common Kestrel, perched in a field of purple flowers. The falcon has a dark head and back with a lighter, speckled chest. The background is a soft-focus field of purple flowers.

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Falconers'

Which, How and

by Derry Argue

With few exceptions, the best falconers I have known have also been good dogmen. Or at least they have known enough to have acquired good dogs and to let them work without undue interference. The contribution of a good nose, a sympathy for hunting and catching things, and a double pair of legs can come in very handy in falconry, regardless of the shape or colour of the body they are attached to.

Some of my earliest falconry experiences were in the company of falconers who had no dogs nor any real understanding of dog work. The technique for game hawking in those days was to drive around the fields in an old car until a covey of partridges was spotted, drive up wind a few hundred yards, put a falcon on the wing, then, when she had attained her pitch, dash off down wind to see

if that covey could be re-located for the all-important flush and downward stoop. The effect was usually muddled and the results seldom satisfying. But I suppose success was so rare that it was valued all the more. Then one day one of these falconers got a pointer. It had been shot over for a couple of seasons and was a moderately reliable worker. The transformation was fantastic and that dog's achievements have grown over the years so it is now the best dog that was ever born!

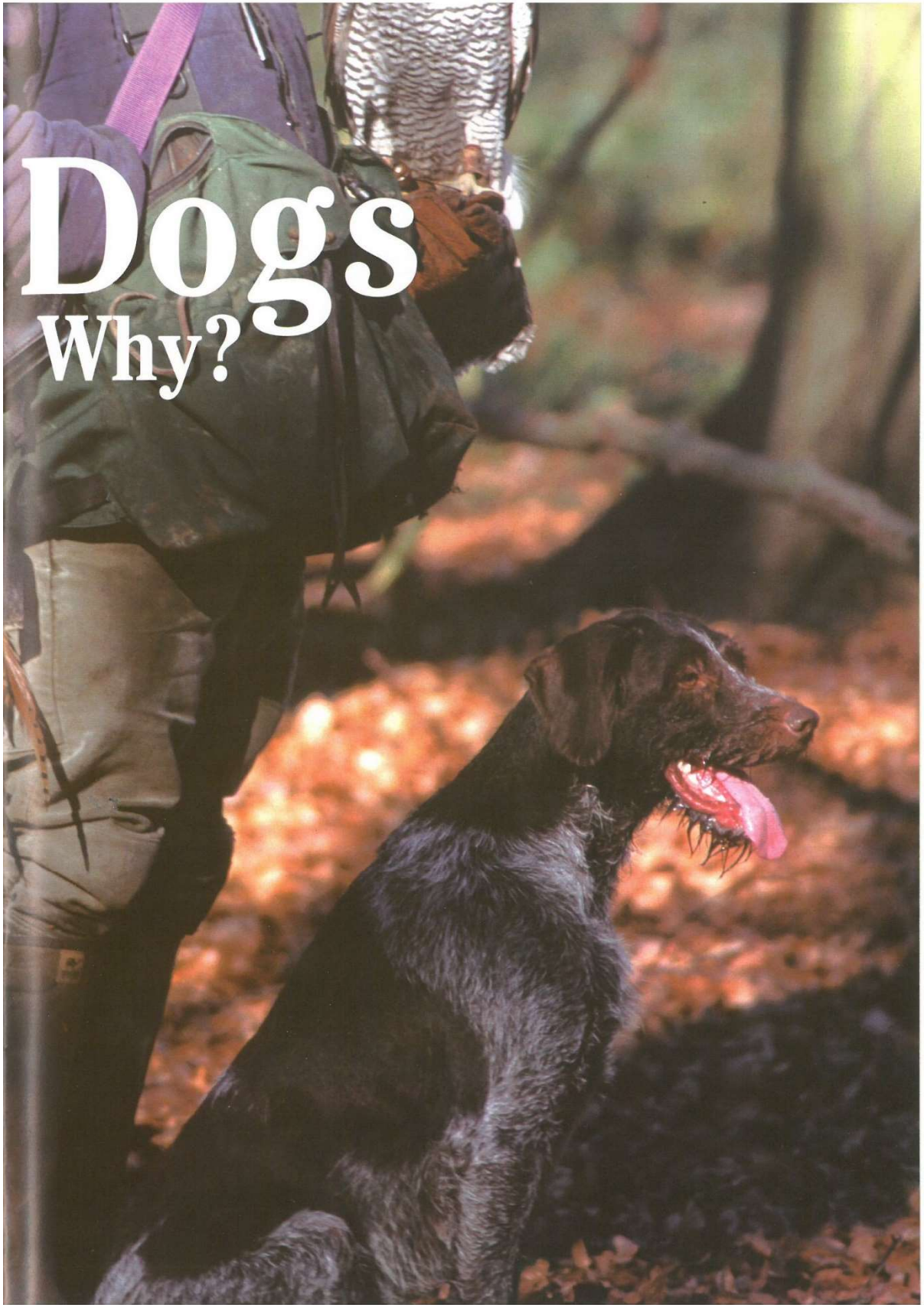
At the one extreme, there are pointing dogs of the calibre of Mr St. Quintin's brace of lemon and white setters in the last century, mentioned by the falconer-writer E B Michell, which were perfectly trained to find and point game for his waiting-on falcons. When the falcon was correctly positioned and at her pitch, the dogs were trained to run in to flush on command and then drop to wing, remaining steady to chase until called up. The setter breeder William Humphrey had five field trial champion Llewelin setters the season he achieved his record bags of red grouse with his falcons. Confidence that a point means game encourages a game hawk to go higher and higher. Nothing disappoints more than a bad dog except perhaps no dog at all. To the other extreme, the New Forest pig William

Arkwright mentions that was trained to find and point partridges within a fortnight might be quite useful for some types of hawking with a shortwing! I mention the last because I regularly hear complaints that "my dog won't point" when this is something most dogs will learn inside thirty minutes, given the correct experience. I hope my videos have shown not only how this is done but that tiny puppies can learn to work, albeit on a reduced scale, if given the right opportunity to learn.

In the first issue of *International Falconer* I wrote 'Talk Dog' which was intended to give the reader some insight into the business of communicating with his dog. Bad communications are at the root of most problems, not just between handler and dog either. Think of Yugoslavia or Northern Ireland. I stressed that dogs are not "meant to do" anything, because they are not built to a specification or pre-programmed like a TV set, a computer, or a family car. It's up to the owner to train the dog to become a useful and reliable hunting companion and learning how to communicate with the dog is the first vital step. It would be a salutary experience for most falconers to go along to a sheep dog trial or at least watch a tape of that popular TV series *One Man and His Dog*. Some

Dogs

Why?



Dogs socialise at between five and eight weeks...

Photo: Seth Anthony



will no doubt tell me that their dog could never be trained to that standard. Perhaps not, but there is still a huge area for improvement in most dog-handler relationships. If a falconer spends, say, thirty minutes a day training his falcon, then ten minutes spent on daily dog training would go a long way to establishing some of that essential control. I have just returned from exercising about thirty dogs, including a dozen youngsters. They all chase the swallows like greyhounds but drop flat immediately on command. It will be no bother stopping the individual dog when a hare gets up or a grouse is flushed on the moor. 90% of the hard work is completed long before I go to the hill. John Nash, the internationally famous Irish setter man, once told me that there are really only two things you need teach a dog, the rest is instinct. A sweeping generalisation but broadly true. Those two pillars upon which all else rests are the "Sit" and the "Come Here". Our American cousins abhor a dog going down, so they use "Whoa!" to stop them in the standing position which is something we in the UK say to horses. Never mind. The effect is the same. "Come here" is self-explanatory. Both can be

Those two pillars upon which all else rests are the "Sit" and the "Come Here"

expanded and adapted to deal with a range of every day situations from calling a dog across in quartering to getting it to jump in the back of the truck or go into its kennel. If "Come Here" is ignored, I use the "Sit" to drop the dog and then a check cord to reinforce the "Come Here". Very cheap and simple. No fuss, no electric collars.

It is my belief that working dogs should be kept outside in a kennel. The reasons are simple. Firstly, the dog will be pleased to see you, excited to get out, and it will realise that you are the link between the kennel and freedom. No working dog, except an occasional old reliable, should ever be permitted to run loose except under its masters eye. At all other times it should either be kennelled (or otherwise confined) or on a lead. Second, living the life of the family pet in my opinion is far too complicated for any but the mature, fully trained dog. There is

too much for the dog to take in and training, work, and handling in the field suffer in due proportion. When not working, the dog ought to be in his kennel dreaming of work. And after work, the dog deserves peace and quiet and a good rest in a deep bed of dry straw. Why make things difficult?

It is rather trite to state that the choice of dog is up to the individual. But I don't believe anyone will succeed, or at least achieve much worthwhile, with a dog he doesn't like. For goodness sake, give it to one of your enemies and don't be such a masochist! Most falconers will opt for one of the pointing breeds. Austringers might also want to consider a spaniel. (Or that pointing pig? At least, if the training doesn't work out, you can eat your mistakes!). Close ranging dogs for short wings and low ground hunting; perhaps one of the specialists for the waiting-on flights and upland game hawking. Personally, I believe our traditional gundog breeds (and their crosses) are under-valued by modern falconers. I would avoid the minority breeds. You could get lucky but the gene pool is generally too small. The selection pressures on the more popular labradors and springer

spaniels is pretty hard and you have a wide choice. Our traditional pointers and setters have suffered from the selection pressures of field trials (don't even consider a show dog) and I believe many strains have sacrificed ease of training and natural working ability for illusions of speed and supposed style for the five minute stake. Many of the imported pointer-retriever breeds are excellent dogs and make a useful contribution, but most cannot compete with a good pointer or setter for the hill and the red grouse. This is country for the specialist. Judging from the popularity of the Brittany, the pointing spaniel is here to stay. At the end of the day, a good dog is a good dog. If it does what you want, there is nothing more to be said and don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Having chosen your dog, you ought at least to be aware of critical periods. Every falconer knows about imprinting which is an extreme example of just one critical period in bird behaviour. A critical period is that period in an animal's life when learning is extremely rapid and often irreversible. It can be quite dramatic in birds (as I discovered when I visited a local gamekeeper and was shown a cockerel which was having a passionate love affair with a bedroom slipper!) and some animals. Dogs socialise (one example of a critical period) at between five and eight weeks so it is usually recommended to acquire a pup around six weeks of age or at least buy one from a breeder who has done that for you. I believe there are other critical periods best suited for different stages in training but you will have to wait for my next book to learn about that. But there are many critical periods, some we are probably not aware of, and canine psychology is a growth area. Falconers, who have learnt so much about their birds, need now to spend a little more time understanding their most useful ally, the falconer's dog.

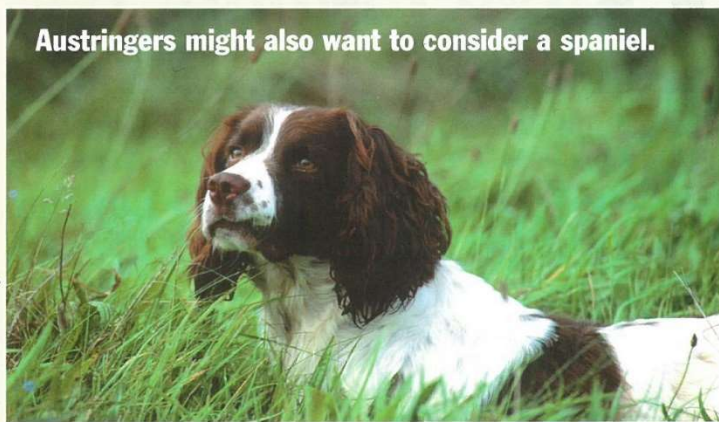
Training a dog is for the most part concerned with instilling that essential control which makes it's natural instincts to hunt useful to man. In my experience, dogs are far

more intelligent and have faster brains than most owners give them credit for. But they are intelligent in their understanding of what concerns them. My dogs will remember a hole in a fence from one year to the next, simply because it is important to them. They will remember a heathery knoll which has held a covey of grouse for two years in succession or an aspen spinney which occasionally shelters a woodcock. 'Don', one of my pointers, runs from woodcock haunt to woodcock haunt, even though it is perhaps a year or two since he was on that ground. That is what is important to him and he remembers.

making mistakes. So have patience and give your dog as many opportunities to learn under the most favourable conditions possible.

The dog must learn that this scent varies according to the atmospheric pressure, the humidity and temperature, the wind speed and direction, perhaps even the mood and health status of the bird which is the source of that scent. Our human powers of scent are so poor that we simply don't know. It must learn that the most efficient way to discover this scent is by crossing the wind at right angles. It must learn to handle the wind in every situation, its whirls and eddies and back currents, rising

Photo: Seth Anthony



Austringers might also want to consider a spaniel.

With this in mind, it is worth pondering what a dog needs to understand. A pointing dog needs to recognise that the game it is to hunt has an individual and recognisable scent. Many dogs ignore snipe and woodcock until they are taught that these birds are important too. A dog needs to know that the bird can be located by hunting for and finding that scent. It must come to realise that the scent carried on the air currents and the scent lingering at ground level are different. Although both possibly smell much the same, they are different because the scent in moving air comes from the living bird and betrays its position up wind and that lying at ground level or on vegetation is merely where that same bird has run, rested, or lingered and fed. In time, it will learn to interpret scent, but it cannot know this by intuition. It has to be learnt by

air and falling air, and air which is scarcely moving at all. Having discovered what it believes to be the air scent from the body of the bird, it must approach as close as it can to be absolutely sure - but not so close as to upset and flush the bird. And when it has mastered this, it must anticipate and understand how an old bird does everything to throw a predator off the scent! There are a thousand things a dog must learn that we will never comprehend because we simple do not understand how dogs unravel the complexities of scent nor how they perceive the world. Then, last and not least, the dog must try to understand what on earth it is we wretched humans are seeking to achieve, and that must be confusing to say the least! ■

Game Hawking Tactics

by Ray Turner



Photo: Seth Anthony

The gamehawking season is now well and truly underway. Here to accompany it is the third of a four part series written for the novice falconer or a new-comer to this branch of our sport.

Game hawking tactics, or if you prefer, fieldcraft is one of the falconers main responsibilities when in the hawking-field, for on it to a large degree depends the outcome of the flight. To develop tactics that can be used to engineer the type of flight he or she wishes to see, the falconer must become familiar with the lifestyle, characteristics and qualities inherent in the quarry. Knowing your quarry's habits, natural instincts and reactions to differing circumstances that are likely to occur whilst in the hawking-field are amongst the essential elements that the falconer requires to know in order to put together and then duly manage a flight for the falcon.

The game-hawking or waiting-on flight is not easy to master but once

the falconers, falcon and perhaps a dog or two have grown into a team, the falcon can be flown over a variety of quarries without any fundamental changes to her management or to the style of flight to which she has become habituated. However, although the falcon's part in the proceedings varies little, whatever the quarry species, the falconer himself if he is to serve the falcon properly and bring about the classic stoop normally associated with flights of this nature, will (perhaps after some consideration or deliberation), need to use tactics selected specifically to deal with the particular species that at the time represents an opportunity for a flight. Readers of previous editions of this magazine will recall that two lowland gamebirds have already received some attention in matters of importance to the falconer in the field. The third species to be examined differs from the pheasant and English partridge already

discussed in that it is the most unwilling and most unlikely of the three to remain in the area while the falconer arranges a flight and because of this the French or red-legged partridge (*Alectoris rufa*) is the most difficult to take in style on a consistent and regular basis. Certainly a very challenging flight.

In the last issue I referred to the English partridge as the 'right' partridge and was subsequently taken to task by a falconer who said, that as far as he was concerned, it was the 'Frenchie' that was the right partridge for him! I knew what he meant, but I had used the term only to emphasise how ideal the 'greys' are for the novice falconer in much the same way that the 'right whale' received its name from the old-time whalers – its complete suitability for their purpose. (I can see that we were both right!)

It was also made apparent in my previous article that the tactics normally adequate for English could

not be relied upon for French partridge and that further explanation could be found in my book *Gamehawk* or in this edition of *International Falconer*.

So now is the time to reveal that unlike the grey partridge the red-leg is very likely to run or fly even with a falcon in the air within its view, furthermore it is very likely to take to its wings or heels at the least sign of danger and that it has an excellent

appreciation of what is likely to constitute such a danger well before it actually becomes a major threat to its own life or the lives of members of its covey.

Bearing all this in mind the falconer has to use more sophisticated or devious techniques to outwit this wary adversary when he attempts to place his falcon in the classical waiting-on position above it. If he fails to complete his part in the plan

or the falcon is not trained to recognise and fulfill her part in the manoeuvre, he is likely to spoil the slip entirely or to turn what could have been a stylish flight ending in an exciting stoop, into a run-of-the-mill tail chase.

In an attempt to take the reader into an actual experience of hawking the splendid French partridge I have borrowed the following extract from *Gamehawk - field and moor*. ■

TOP TIPS

1. Observe the covey through binoculars or a scope and preferably from a vehicle. Identify the species and count them. If they fly prematurely you will at least know whether to continue the flight or abandon it.
2. Do not attempt to fly partridge that are unsettled or alarmed.
3. Match the difficulty of the slip to the experience and pitch of the falcon.
4. Ask a friend to remain in the vehicle to keep the covey under constant binocular vision while you stalk them for the flush. Arrange signals (eg. headlights etc.) to indicate any change in circumstances. Plan your stalk.
5. The falconer and everyone else should remain hidden from the partridges at all times until you wish to flush. Stalk as close as you can before you flush. A flushing dog is seldom necessary and often a hindrance. It's your dog – you decide!
6. Do not release your falcon too close to the covey. Her sudden appearance at a low pitch may alarm or provoke them into premature flight.

A Model Flight

“It is the setting up of French partridges for a stoop that causes the falconer most trouble.”

It is a pleasure to get a visit from Tony H. His outrageous but friendly personality has the children giggling long after his departure. He always takes falconry seriously and is properly appreciative of the more advanced flights.

In mid-winter the last of the cover has died away, leaving no more than a few gaunt twigs in the hedges that flank some of the ditches. The fields are at their most bare and open, rolled and manicured to their usual professional finish.

We have been cruising the tracks and now think that we are in luck to find a small covey of French partridges near a ditch but otherwise in the open. A closer look tells us that their position is so difficult to exploit that it has to be classified as “decidedly marginal”.

We have parked two hundred yards from the covey in order to glass them. They look well settled and are resting a good way up the field, ten yards or so from the ditch. Whether there is enough room for a flight is one problem that we don't have to worry about. There is no other cover of any sort. They will

undoubtedly try to reach the equally bare ditch on the far side of this wide and desolate field.

It all depends, of course, on whether we can get the falcon over them. We know all the tactics well enough, but this will be stretching our methods to the limit. We worry that unless everything goes right the flight will not end with a vertical stoop but a tail chase. We spend about ten minutes discussing possibilities. Everything hangs on whether the birds will go a little early, remain where they are, or, when confronted with their first view of the falcon at her pitch, sensibly creep into the nearby ditch. If they stay where they are it is not likely that we can get the falcon right over them. She will follow the falconer, but when he halts his progress, she will halt hers too. By the end of our deliberations we have decided that if the partridges flush sooner rather than later, inviting a more slanting stoop, from the great height that we hope she will fly, it should at least be a majestic one. On the other hand, if the covey moves into the ditch, the scant cover

offered by the flanking hedge will shield the falconer for longer as he approaches along it on the side away from the birds and their view through it will be most reduced at the shallowest angle. He should get close enough and the vertical stoop will be on.

We decide to accept the challenge, for the outcome should be either good or great, and so we take the flight.

The Landrover is on a track and facing where the ditch meets the track at right angles. The partridges are by the ditch and in front of us, on our left, about sixty yards from the track. We drive forward, past them, to the first place where we can turn round, and come back to stop again, further from the covey than before, but now with the stunted hedge between them and us.

The falcon is released on the blind side. The partridges do not stir as she starts to climb. She has no idea where the quarry is but she knows it is somewhere and that she

will be guided to it. She sets about her task with a will, and in the light breeze centres her rings on the Landrover. When she approaches her true pitch the Landrover starts to move forward, in first gear, with Andrew walking beside it, on the left. She remembers that she has seen this before, and comes along too.

When we reach the intersection of hedge and track, we are elated to see, through the side window, that the covey is moving quietly into the ditch. Andrew, unable to see the partridges through the Landrover, looks questioningly through the other window at us. There is no need to ask. We nod, and say, "They're in!" He crouches and crosses the track round the back of the Landrover, using the line of the flimsy hedge to shield him as he creeps along behind it, further and further from us and nearer and nearer to the partridges. Already he is so close that surely nothing can go wrong now. The falcon is a mere flicker above him.

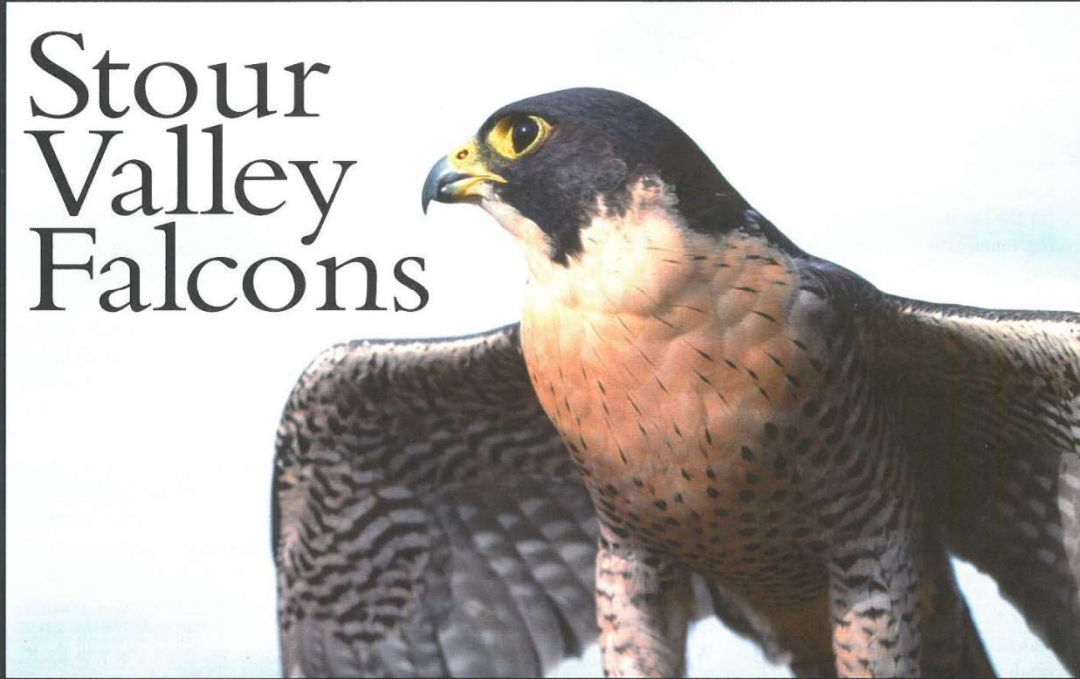
The final dash, the rising of the

covey, the shouts of the onlookers, and the falcon driving down. Falling, falling, falling, falling, falling. She comes in behind them and binds neatly to one.

She throws up, loses speed sharply, and comes down to land with her prize a few yards from the other ditch which now shelters the remainder of the covey that had flown so desperately to reach it.

FOOTNOTE

Train and always encourage your falcon to wait-on overhead. This approach to flight management combined with close flushes brings great benefits. In this way your falcon is always over you and hence eventually also over the covey. She becomes reliable and predictable and what's more – you will get great vertical stoops.



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BOOK REVIEWS

A MERLIN FOR ME

John Loft

Published by the Author
310 pages
Price £25 (p&p £3 UK, £6 overseas)
ISBN 0 9535881 0 6

Reviewed by Dick Treleven

When this imposing tome thudded through my letter box I must admit to picking it up with feelings of trepidation, knowing the author, as a friend of longstanding, who has seldom been noted for his brevity. However I need not have worried, one glance at Helen Macdonald's superbly executed illustrations immediately put me in a receptive mood. They seemed so aptly chosen that they must surely herald a book of quality. (The cover really is a little offputting).

The text is adroitly handled and well structured - mixing good common sense with a blend of wit and candour. However it is the total honesty of the writer which makes it so special. Misfortunes and triumphs are faithfully recorded with equal grace. The author weaves his tale around the exploits of a merlin called 'Em' from the day it arrived in a box on the motorway to the end of its first season's flying. It is a far from simple tale, the author cleverly uses the adventures of Em as a pillar to hang his theories on. The pros and cons of every action are delved into in great detail and embellished with a wide range of anecdotes garnered from the author's years of experience. Merlin men are like fly fishermen; they are not greedy pot hunters, but purists who savour every aspect of the pursuit for their quarry, and revel in



One of Helen Macdonald's superbly executed illustrations.

the arcane delights of mind boggling post mortems.

As a onetime merlin man, be it aeons ago, I have had the good fortune to accompany 'the best in the business' on Bodmin Moor. I was amazed by the large numbers of larks that are found in Lincolnshire and on the Plain compared with the paucity of them in the Westcountry, where a long afternoon's slog may yield only a mere handful of larks. I was also surprised that nowhere in the text did I come across any mention of a hawk 'rousing' before being flown; a sin of omission?

On the subject of how does a merlin evaluate the quality of the lark that it is pursuing. I do not accept the view that it goes through some form of thought process based on the recognition of the lark's state of moult. Professor Gombrich (*Illusion in Nature and Art*) states that as humans we are able to

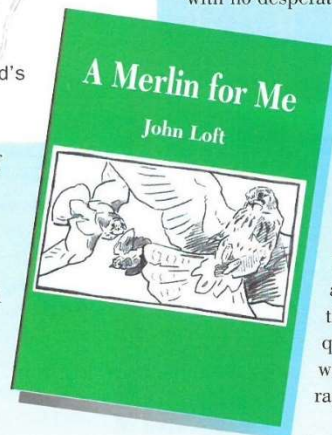
instantly recognise individuals at vast distances by their jizz - and so does a merlin. It is the natural role of predators to discern the weaknesses in its potential victim.

The only other point which I feel the author has missed out on, is that bird-catching falcons are what Tinbergen called 'peak achievers,' and as such they need to hunt at two levels of intensity: high and low. It is only by performing the latter that they can successfully indulge in the former. A wild merlin often hunts with no desperate need to make a

kill but to keep in trim. These chases are triggered by visual stimuli and not by hunger; a combination of the two is needed for a successful hunt. Unsuccessful ones are disappointing for the falconer, but quintessential for the welfare of a wild raptor.

The author is to be congratulated; *A Merlin for Me* is a very considerable achievement: immensely readable, and builds up to a fine climax, which I will not devolve. The book has earned its place to stand alongside Michell and Mavrogordato as being one to treasure and never lend to a friend. Furthermore, I was so engrossed in reading it that I inadvertently allowed my supper to burn; neither of the previous wordsmiths ever managed to cause me any culinary disasters.

A Merlin for Me is only available from the author at:
Briar Cottage, Julian Bower, Louth,
Lincs LN11 9QN England.



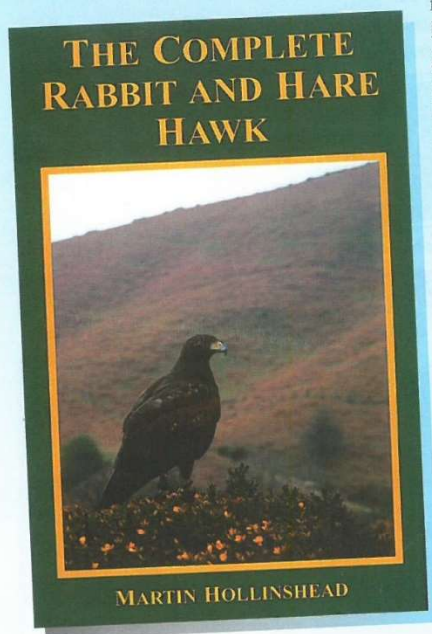
BOOK REVIEWS

THE COMPLETE RABBIT AND HARE HAWK

Martin Hollinshead

Published by
The Fernhill Press
Price £28.95

Reviewed by Stuart Rossell



This book is not, in my opinion, for the rank beginner despite its title. The early chapters on equipment, the hawks used, obtaining a hawk etc. all assume the reader has rather more than a basic knowledge of the sport. One example will suffice on bewits. "I use a standard leather bewit (the bell shank kept away from the leg by the traditional fold)." What remains is a collection of opinions and advice

which will lead experienced falconers to mentally compare notes, sometimes agreeing with the author, sometimes not. The older falconers especially may raise their collective eyebrows at times. The constant use of 'bird' and 'birds' where, 'hawk' and 'hawks' would be more appropriate being an obvious one. Once you learn the author's style however it becomes obvious that this book is written by a very 'accomplished', falconer.

The book deals primarily with five species of hawks, golden eagle, ferruginous hawk, red-tailed hawk, goshawk and Harris' hawk. Goshawk enthusiasts may be a bit disappointed for the Harris' hawk is the undoubted heroine of the book. It is obvious that the author has tremendous respect for his quarry and knows it intimately. I found this approach refreshing for many seem, as the author says, to treat rabbits and hares as a style of flying to move on from. Beginners especially should pick up on this respect.

The chapter on training again, assumes a basic understanding but it is here that the author starts to show his knowledge and expertise. There are tips in this chapter that I have not seen in print elsewhere although experienced falconers do them almost instinctively.

'The simulated struggle' is a fine example. The surprise for me is that lure machines are not mentioned. The machines available in the US are capable of dragging even a carcass at considerable speed, enough to outrun the hawk, over distances of half a mile or more. They also have the advantage that the hawk does not get in the habit of looking for a running person or moving vehicle! Also given scant attention was the T-perch. Many

American falconers use them because of the extra height given allowing the hawk to see quarry which may be hidden from the falconer only a few feet away.

It is on the subject of the Harris' hawk that the author shines and I found myself wishing he had devoted more time to this subject. It is obvious he understands the species in a way in which few falconers do. The comments on soaring in particular are long overdue. As usual with this author the book is complimented by some fine colour photographs including action shots.

In summing up, this book should be compulsory reading for anyone flying, or contemplating flying, a Harris' hawk and I feel anyone flying at either rabbits or hares will enjoy and learn from it. For beginners however, make sure you are familiar with some of the standard works as well and then use this to finish off or polish up the grounding they provide.

I enjoyed it.

THE POINTER AND HIS PREDECESSORS: an illustrated history of the pointing dog from the earliest times

by William Arkwright

Published by
Firth Productions
275 pages. Price £29.95
ISBN 0 906924 03 0

Reviewed by Nicholas Kester

Open the flyleaf of this stylish reprint and note the original date of publication before reading this essential addition to the library of any aspiring dog trainer -

and not just of pointers.

What stood good in 1906 and before, stands good today. The language might have changed and the exacting Edwardian style may put off the less intrepid reader, but stay with it for you will be richly rewarded by the end. Having discovered that the Bible contains no references to dogs used for hunting (I will take his word on this) and ploughed through a wealth of Ancient Greek references, one silently applauds Arkwright's research, whilst begging him to get on with it. But the medieval passages are full of falconry references. From 1387: "There is a kind of dog that is called a falcon dog. It should have a massive head, and a large well made body - they should not be too hairy and the end of the tail should be tufted." What breed of dog can this have been? And in 1481, Caterina Sforza, Duchess of Ferrara in a letter begging a present of "a good pair of brachs (the Italian hunt, point, retrieve breed) for the falcon."

The use of the word 'break' as applied to training might surprise. Initially, the reviewer was appalled by this cruel inference, and I have no doubt, then, as today, there were some harsh handlers. However, horsemen still use the word and the inference is no longer seen as negative. The proof of care comes in this enlightened sentence from 1644, which should be carved above the door to every falconer's mews: "Learn your land and your quarry and only admonish your dog when (and to the extent) he deserves it. Praise being worth more than punishment." Most, if not all, the references in this book are based on this abiding principle.

By Chapter III, Arkwright is up to date and into the swing of things. His sparkling attack on showing and the Kennel Club, plus the use of the

THE POINTER & HIS PREDECESSORS



By
William Arkwright

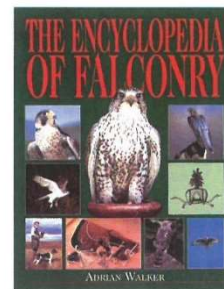
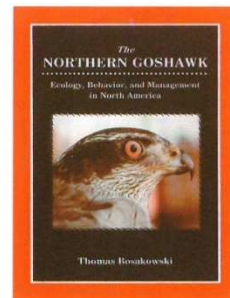
fox hound to 'improve' the breed must have had the show world at the barricades. He is not overly polite about the early field trials either; deploring winning dogs that race down a line to the first point without working the ground and biased judges giving marks on pointing ability rather than game finding.

On the sport, he is equally opinionated, looking to quality rather than quantity from the day and dismissing the businessman who seeks the reverse in his "brief freedom from the Stock Exchange". What he seeks, like all of us, is to be "free, muddy and happy - in Caithness."

I rather wish we knew more about Arkwright the man. A subsequent edition would benefit from biographical notes and textual annotations on some of the more obscure references. Who, for example, was 'Stonehenge', under what authority did he write and why did Arkwright disdain his opinion. But this is not to belittle this excellent illustrated, facsimile edition containing much that is still so relevant.

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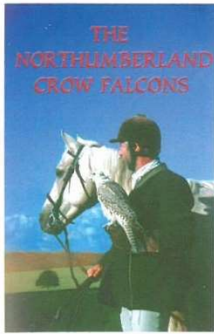
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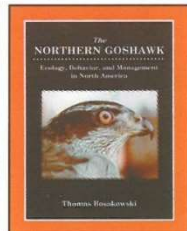
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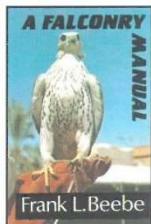
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