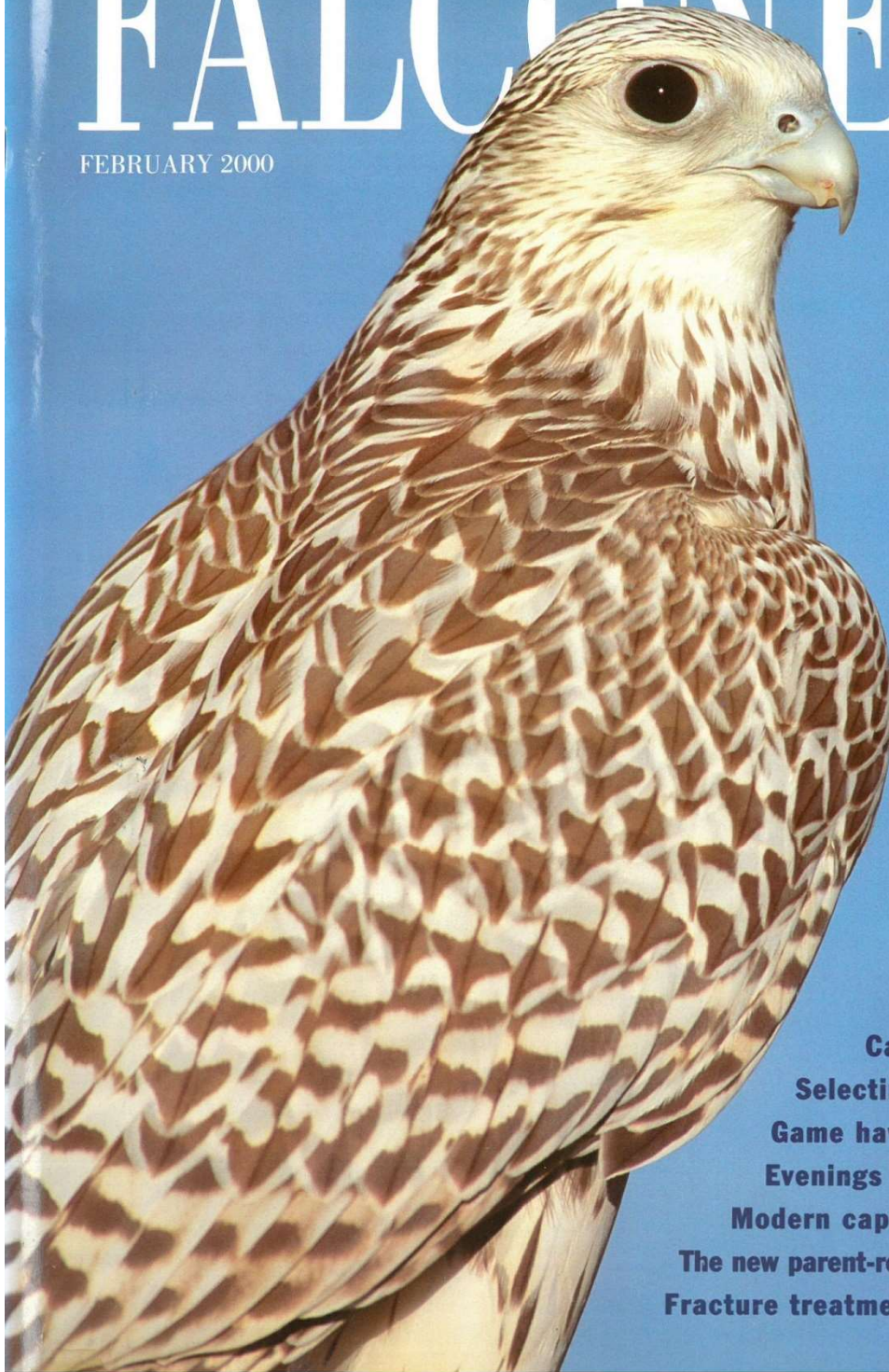


# INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

FEBRUARY 2000

ISSUE No.4



**The Pick-up  
California Gold  
Selecting a hawk - II  
Game hawking tactics  
Evenings on the sands  
Modern captive breeding  
The new parent-reared goshawk  
Fracture treatment in raptors**

# INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

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Production: Pound & Merlin Ltd  
Advertising: Terry Anthony  
Subscriptions: Christopher Pound  
Print: Hastings Printing  
Company Ltd  
Published by: Merlin Publications  
Turkey Court  
Ashford Road  
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Cover photo by Terry Anthony.  
'Pascoe' eyass white jerkin.

# EDITORIAL

It has been a tremendous nine months for *International Falconer* since our launch in May 1999. The most testing time for any new publication is the first year. Thanks to all our subscribers, contributors and advertisers for your support.

I am delighted to announce that Emirates Airlines is now taking *International Falconer* for in-flight reading material, which reinforces our view that it is a publication of international standing and appeal.

Last November saw the annual North American Falconers' Association field meet at Waverly, Iowa. It was attended by one of our team, Val Anthony. She had a great time and was overwhelmed by the hospitality she received from the American falconers. As usual it was a great meet with a healthy international contingent present from Australia, Germany, France, Spain, Japan and the UK. Credit must go to Bill Murrin, chairman of this year's meet for the superb organisation, to George Kotsiopoulos for looking after the overseas visitors and to NAFA for undertaking such a project every year.

Another truly international event is the *British Falconry Fair* this coming May (details on page 8). I thoroughly recommend it. *International Falconer* will have a stand there again this year and we look forward to meeting as many of you as possible.

Unfortunately this time of year sees the winding down of the hawking season for most of us. I hope the past few months have been all that you aimed for and that your charges have come through safely. For many, myself included, thoughts now turn to the breeding season - let's hope that everything does what it's meant to!

All the best  
*Seth*

#### IMPORTANT - NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

The Editor wishes to point out that *International Falconer* features articles from across the world which inevitably include a variety of management, training and hunting methods. Some practices in one country/state may not be legal in another. It is the responsibility of the falconer to know and strictly adhere to the laws and regulations relevant to the area(s) he/she lives and hawks in. For the good of the sport NEVER do anything that you are not entirely sure is legal.

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

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## INTERNATIONAL FALCONER



Photo: Terry Anthony

## THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR FALCONRY AND CONSERVATION OF BIRDS OF PREY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1999

At the 30th AGM in Portugal 1998 the Hungarian Falconers' Association kindly offered to host the next meeting of the IAF at their international field meeting 1999. Our new President Ferrante Pratesi gratefully accepted the kind invitation and in the last week of October 1999 members and observers met in Oroshaza, south-eastern Hungary, about 70 miles south of Budapest on the fertile plain of flat agricultural land. The area is rich in game and the potential for high quality falconry is immediately striking. There is a large population of wild pheasants in huge fields of wheat and maize bounded by cover strips. Hares and Roe deer abound drawing those who fly eagles as well as austringers and longwing enthusiasts. The scene was set for an exciting week and with the arrival of perfect autumn weather of blue skies and crisp sunshine everybody thrilled to the spectacle.

The field meeting was well attended and wonderfully organised by our hosts. There were falconers from most of the European countries as well as many of the Russian states with perfect flying conditions. Of course we were all saddened not to find the Hungarian partridge, it mostly died out in the seventies but there were abundant wild pheasants in the most perfect agricultural environment for falconry and good flights were seen out in the field.

The IAF was very encouraged by the response to our new constitution and re-organisation as we found some 16 applicants to join the Association at this meeting. The result was that we now represent 31 countries internationally and have some 36 member organisations who sent 39 delegates and observers to this meeting. The result was the accomplishment of a lot of business and many new contacts cemented.

Personally I found it amazing how falconry thrives in adverse circumstances as I listened to the delegate from Croatia who only a few months before had been an artillery officer in the war. Now here he was with his wife enthusiastically bringing their country to the IAF, putting all the hostilities behind them to get back to flying hawks.

The Italian delegate Umberto Caproni attended the very first meeting 31 years ago organised by Jack Mavrogordato and as he remarked at this meeting it is now a different world from that initiative, very satisfying to those concerned. The IAF's value to falconry as an international voice talking to governments and international bodies is tremendous and has real influence in the regulatory process worldwide. Our involvement in the many international conventions has helped many countries in the framing of their own laws to maintain falconry in this modern day and age. The IAF is able to bring a shared experience of falconry and conservation of birds of prey in a constructive and positive manner with results of benefit to all.

This year's agenda for the IAF was particularly pleasing as we saw the application to join from many new countries amongst which were Canada and the US, countries essential to our work with their wealth of talent and expertise in their membership and long missed. The recent down-listing of the peregrine falcon within the US seemed to make this an even more opportune moment for US involvement in our work. NAFA General Counsel Frank Bond has been a member of the IAF Advisory Committee for the past two years and it was with real pleasure that the Association voted him to the post of Vice President beside Patrick Morel (Belgium). We now have 36 members from 31 countries

representing 7683 falconers worldwide.

The IAF intends to be as inclusive as possible to all shades of involvement. For many countries membership of this kind of organisation is simply too costly and difficult. Their involvement is however very important on the world scale. Our President therefore proposed a further modification to our constitution to allow such nations a 'cost-free corresponding membership' which without voting powers would never the less include them in most of the activities of the Association and give them international support and representation. This proposal was warmly welcomed by the members and is being put into effect through a working group who will present constitutional modifications for approval by the next AGM.

The IAF has had a busy year following its re-organisation and the new members of the Advisory Committee along with the officers have done a lot of work with positive results. The hybrid issue and Spanish Sky Trials both created working groups amongst the membership to find consensus and help in the way forward. Activities during this year have involved drafting documents on hybrids and sustainable use, liaising with Birdlife International to reduce risk of public relations problems, and attending meetings of the Bern Convention and IUCN groups.

### Hybrids and Trade

The hybrid document is the 9th re-draft. It has taken a great deal of work by Patrick Morel, Tony Crosswell and Robert Kenward to try to find a consensus among all the interested bodies. Our efforts included a huge E-mail discussion group as well as a visit to talk with

Prof. Tom Richter and Herman Doettlinger of the DFO in Germany. We were unable to reach complete agreement with DFO on the preamble, which the DFO (supported by the leading German molecular geneticist Prof. Michael Wink) consider too lenient but more importantly we have all agreed on a position statement on the subject for general consumption.

Tony Crosswell took a document, which we had prepared with Robert Kenward and Patrick Morel, to the CITES Animals Committee meeting in Madagascar. The document built

use of these wildlife resources is not sustainable in some parts of the species' ranges.

Bern Convention of the Council of Europe - At the annual meeting of the parties in 1998, a brief questionnaire provided a short-cut for getting to know delegates' viewpoints and open discussion with them. They found the questionnaire interesting and its systematic use introduced IAF to half the countries . represented (with the other half to do in

#### World Conservation Union (IUCN).

Christian de Coune kindly helped with introductions to the IUCN's new Director General, and a number of other IUCN staff, at a reception in Brussels, after which two meetings of the European Sustainable Use Specialists Group were attended, and one European Regional meeting to prepare for the World Congress in Amman in 2000.

#### Raptor Research Foundation

RRF was started by falconers in North America and was a contributor to the good relations enjoyed between falconers and other conservation interests there. It is developing strongly in Eurasia, with its 3rd Eurasian meeting in the Czech Republic. NAFA's Brian Millsap chaired the RRF committee on downlisting of peregrines under the Endangered Species Act, and Robert Kenward attended two meetings as a Board Member. Tim Kimmel is keeping RRF informed of NAFA's efforts to persuade US Fish and Wildlife Service to permit relicensing of wild peregrines for falconry.

The IAF goes from strength to strength as more and more people bring their talents and experience into the process. As new members NAFA has offered to host the millennium Annual General Meeting in 2000 at their field meet in Amarillo, Texas. It promises to be a spectacular meeting at which we hope to have a record number attending. Of course it will be difficult for many of the members to send delegates to such a costly venue so we are looking for sponsors who can fund an air fare and maybe hotel bills for many of the nations who simply cannot afford it on their own. Already several have stepped forward and with our American hosts already proving great we are very excited at the prospect.

**Tony Crosswell** (Secretary IAF)



**Left to right: Tony Crosswell (Secretary) Antonio Carapucid (Treasurer) Ferrante Pratesi (President) Patrick Morel (Vice President)**

on the 'falconry passport' idea of Christian de Coune. The idea was to propose one-off registration of high-value resources, like live raptors. The aim is to simplify proof of legality and control of movements (no paperwork), with conservation benefits from sustainable use of wild raptors. This and other initiatives from IAF help to convince people that it is worth listening to falconers, such that we are now as an NGO body included in CITES and other working groups for regulatory development.

There has been liaison with LPO, the Birdlife International partner in France, concerning impact of Arab falconry on sakers and bustard species. IAF has routinely kept WWF, IUCN and Birdlife International informed on these issues to try to prevent development of international scandals, but pressure continues to grow because

1999). Help from FACE was invaluable in this process. The questionnaire tested the strength of support for a view that conservation will succeed best if based on all human resources, including falconers and other hunting interests. The delegates now tend to be government biologists, and favoured a pragmatic approach more strongly than expected. There seems a growing realisation that conflict between resource users and other conservation interests is undesirable. The Bern Convention is currently dealing with conservation issues arising from hybridisation of North American ruddy ducks with Eurasian white-headed ducks, and North American grey squirrels introduced in Italy. Falconry benefits from involvement in these issues politically as they progress and relate to our own problems.

## NEWS FROM THE UK

Firstly, may I wish you all a Happy New Year.

Now I am sure you are all as fed up with the millennium as I am. In my case however, it certainly led to some reflection on life in general which naturally included falconry and my animals. Whilst this may seem to have no bearing on the Campaign for Falconry I came to the conclusion that it did.

My first thoughts were probably fairly obvious, I am glad I am not living in a country torn apart by war, I am glad I live in a country where there is freedom of choice and public debate, I am glad I live in a country where tradition lives on - for a while anyway.

My sadness is that everything is changing, faster than I ever thought it could. Particularly if your passion is the rural way of life and field sports. It would be nice to be governed by people who understand that a 25% levy on petrol over three years is crippling and that to get a bus would mean most of us having to walk a minimum of two miles in order to find one. Bicycle lanes on single track roads - what a strange world we live in. But we do.

As far as field sports are concerned, the debate continues and the inquiry into hunting will affect us falconers as much as anyone else. Once again I remind everyone that should hunting with hounds fall by the wayside it will have the most devastating domino effect on all field sports in this country.

This really is not the moment to



**Campaign For Falconry**

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impersonate an ostrich. I am constantly amazed by how much money is raised by those who oppose us yet it is an ongoing battle to maintain the minimum funds required to fight back.

I would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate - every penny is needed - if every falconer and raptor keeper put £1.00 into the pot we would be in a better position to help the Hawk Board and the Countryside Alliance to work on our behalf.

This has to be our year to raise awareness and money to maintain the ancient tradition of falconry. So it is over to you.

For those international readers who are mystified by all this, especially those who live in countries with tolerant field sport legislation, remember that the UK is the home of the grouse moor. Red grouse hawking is one of the most demanding and challenging disciplines, and along with rook hawking, makes some of the best hunting falcons there are. Many Europeans, Arabs and Americans visit Scotland every year for the 'noble art' that is falconry. We welcome you and would miss you should your pleasure be banned.

Let us know how you might help protect this unique aspect of falconry.

**Marie-Louise Leschallas**  
Chairman

## NEW PRODUCT NEWS

### Improved incubation hygiene for healthier chicks

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# NAFA

Attending the annual NAFA meets has become a regular holiday for me and several other UK falconers.

Having attended the last three, Chris Henden, Harry Gilbert and I planned to attend the 1999 meet in Waverly, Iowa. We were accompanied by Jeff Thomas and Roy Bently, neither of whom had attended before.

Arriving in Des Moines, we rented a 4x4 Ford to accommodate all of us and our luggage, and made the drive to Waverly, where we called in at the meet headquarters, the Red Fox Inn. In the past we had easily obtained accommodation by simply checking into a nearby motel, no prior booking required. Imagine our surprise to learn that, not only was the Red Fox fully booked, but the local motels (only few in number anyway) had virtually no available space. The early signs of panic began to show! The staff at the Red Fox were excellent however and referred us to a nearby possibility. As we began leaving, Chris returned to the desk to ask for any cancellations to be held for us. After a while he returned, an impish smile on his face. "They've found us a room" he said "Do we want the Bridal Suite". There was instant assent as we all realised the advantage of being in a room as opposed to sleeping in a car for the week!

So, for those of you US falconers who wondered, it was us, the 5 crazy Brits who shared the room with the mirrors on the ceiling. Waking up each morning was like the scene from the John Candy and Steve Martin movie, *Trains Boats and Planes* where they wake up cuddling each other. It was cosy in there!

One feature of the NAFA meets for us is the warmth and generosity of the US falconers. On Saturday afternoon we met Jack Stoddart, a

# Meet 1999

Waverly, Iowa - by Dave Jackson

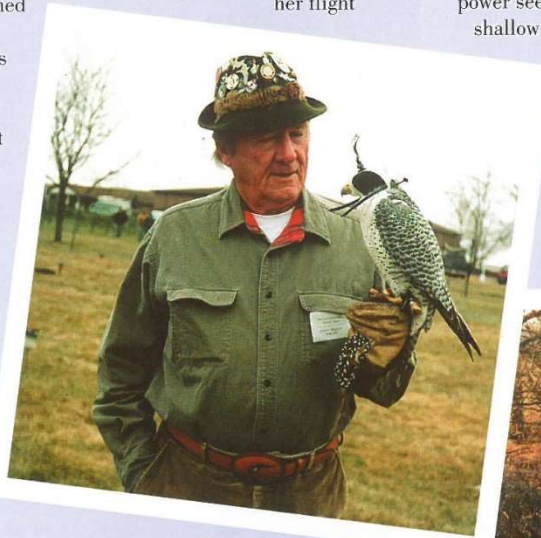
gentleman who has a special place in my memory. He was the first person I spoke to in Lamar four years ago, and he has proved a font of wise advice since. He was shortly joined by Lou Woyce who we met in Dodge City. These two characters came to examine our sleeping arrangements (having heard it was the Bridal Suite!) and we sat talking for ages. The irrepressible Lou is a real character and a natural raconteur, but in addition is embarrassingly generous. We'd not been together long when we were all presented with a beautifully crafted Dutch hood each (Lou makes GREAT hoods), and as the session progressed Jack's dry humour combined with Lou's stories to make it a memorable start to the meet.

Although most of us in the party fly goshawks, we try to see as much longwing flying at the meets as possible. One of the main reasons for this is that seeing the falcons fly at game in the huge skies is a treat which we cannot often witness here in the UK. Having said that, we always get out with shortwing hawkers. Being interested in dog work too, we were keen to see Teddy Moritz and her friends hunt with their mini Dachshunds, flying their Harris and red-tails over them. We accompanied them on two occasions and each time were very impressed with both the dog work and the quality of the hawking. I have to say that Teddy has a really impressive male Harris. I recall that he finished the week with nine cottontail rabbits, and he showed a clinical efficiency in his hunting. It was unusual to see Dachshunds working, but I really enjoyed their style and obvious enthusiasm for the job. It was also excellent seeing them go to ground

after the odd rabbit too. Ben Ohlander showed us pheasant hawking with a passage female gos and, although 'Heidi' failed to kill, her flight

beautiful and impressive tiercel made his last flight and the terrible memory will stay with us all. As he stooped the ducks on a pond, his power seemed to scorch the sky. His shallow throw up at his chosen

duck was breathtakingly fast, only to be cut short in the most dramatic and awful way as he collided with an unseen fence. Our initial stunned silence was replaced by a frantic attempt to get to the stricken falcon. Still



**Above: Lou Woyce**  
**Right: Ron Krupa, gos and cottontail**

Photos: Val Anthony

powers were obvious.

We went out with Tracey DeWitt with his female peregrine a couple of times and saw her succeed on each occasion, on pheasant and partridge. Rick Woods, a local longwinger with long experience of the local game location, accompanied Tracey, and he flew his young female peregrine. Very powerful, she looks to have a great future. Tom Ennenga and Rick Wenneborg took us out flying their gyr hybrids and 'Aku', Tom's male flew with great style, just missing his cock pheasant. Having seen this tiercel fly at the Dodge City meet, it was good to see him fly again.

This was a meet which seemed fated with an usually high level of tragedy. Several hawks were to meet their end in Waverly. One of them was 'Pedro', a 5 times intermewed tiercel peregrine, owned by Bill Read. We were all present when this



living, Pedro was taken to the meet hotel where Pat Redig (world class raptor vet) operated within a short time. Pedro lived for two days but died from complications, leaving Bill grieving for an irreplaceable hawk. Sadly, Steve Jones (*editor of American Falconry*) had the prairie falcon member of his famous cast killed in a collision, exactly a year to the day when she was wounded by shooting at the Vernal meet. Having this follow the death of his beautiful setter 'Sedona' in a road accident some weeks before seemed to leave Steve in a stricken state. We all felt for you Steve! A red-tail was electrocuted and was euthanased

shortly after and I believe there was another bird seriously injured, though I don't have the details. All in all, a high level of tragedy, underscoring the thin line between joy and despair which we constantly straddle when flying our hawks.

The Waverly meet seemed to us to lack the abundance of quarry found at other venues. There were virually no ducks and we saw no duck flights during the week. Everyone knew there would be no quail or upland game present, but the partridges seemed hard to locate and get on terms with. It was probably no help that Waverly followed the Vernal meet which everyone agreed would be hard to beat in every respect. Some other UK falconers present seemed disappointed in the quality of the hunting, but we viewed things in a different light. Taken as a whole, we enjoyed the meet as much as the others we've attended. For us it is not just about seeing loads of game

**Donna Vorce with her red-tail, one of the many lady falconers attending the meet.**



Photo: Val Anthony

taken in great style. We accept that things in falconry often do not go our way. For us, the feeling of being in the company of like minded

obsessives, of being part of the fellowship of falconers, compensates for any slight shortcomings in the field. The organisation was good and the evening talks were great. Heinz Meng and Dan Cover were excellent, allowing us into their golden yesteryears. The emotion exhibited by Dan when reminiscing about his famous cast 'Speedy' and 'Tiger' was humbling to witness and I felt privileged to be there.

Our little group was abuzz with memories of the meet and plans are already being laid for the next meet in Texas. I know that several more UK members of NAFA are planning to join our annual pilgrimage to the USA and long may it continue. I would like to sincerely thank all those NAFA members who made our stay, as usual, so memorable.

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# CALIFORNIA GOLD

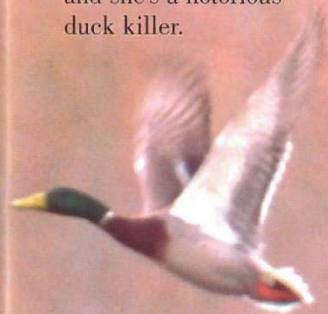


Photo: Scott Timmons

Story and photos by Joe Roy

# NIA

**D**ecember 1978.  
A small caravan of cars and trucks pull up to a diked pond somewhere in a remote portion of California's Central Valley. A falconer emerges and a small band of onlookers gather in a hushed reverence. The focus of attention is a peregrine falcon, and she's a notorious duck killer.



A young austringer with an obviously fresh trapped passage red-tailed hawk quietly slips to the far end of the pond unnoticed.

The peregrine's hood is removed and the falcon is cast into a chilled winter sky. All eyes are riveted on the duck hawk as sickle wings beat a rhythm, bells making soft music. As the falcon spirals several hundred feet into the air, the melody becomes faint like the ending of a favourite song. The quiet moment is shattered by the harsh yell of the falconer as the pond is rushed and ducks scatter. The

young austringer at the far end of the pond watches the falcon plummet from the sky and then disappear behind the steep embankment of the pond. More yelling, a lone mallard sneaks out the far end of the pond and well on its way before the duck realises it has attracted the full attention of the peregrine. As the mallard makes a sweeping turn the falcon pulls in behind the duck and both birds head back directly towards the pond at a tremendous speed. Only now are the onlookers aware of the boy as they watch predator and prey in heated competition. It is now that the young austringer has the best view as both birds are barreling in, heading straight towards him. The image is surreal and like nothing the boy has seen before. Hunted and hunter streak across grey sky, close enough to hear the sound of wings shredding air, close enough to see the expressions on their faces, close enough to somehow feel the desperation and the determination. The boy's head snaps back as duck and falcon flash by and once again disappear from view. Then, all is silent. The boy is unaware of the final outcome of

the flight. The enormity of what he has just experienced, however, does not escape him, and leaves him with a life altering impression.

### ***This was my introduction to duck hawking.***

Now, in my late thirties, I have been hawking waterfowl for nearly two decades, employing a variety of hawks and falcons, predominately peregrines and hybrids thereof. To this day duck hawking still generates the same level of intrigue, awe and excitement for me that it did on that memorable day in '78. Just this morning after dropping my three boys off for school, my daughter, Cassi, and I spotted a small group of ducks on a favourite pond less than one mile from home. We live in the foothills, 2,400ft up the western slope of the Sierra range in Northern California. At this elevation, the foothills are covered with a dense growth of mixed pine and oak trees and a thick coat of underbrush. My intermewed falcon, 'Shaman', a gyrfalcon/peregrine hybrid with hundreds of ducks to his credit, is released and flies through the trees and is quickly out of view. Shaman's bells fade almost as quickly, I unload the dog 'Latham' and the three of us, Cassi, Latham and I wait, watch and listen. After a couple of minutes I become very uneasy, fearing Shaman may have been distracted by local bandtail pigeons. Apprehension dissipates as I catch a glimpse of Shaman, wings flicking 700ft straight up, feathers glowing in the

rays of the morning sun. Latham is sent ahead, he knows the way to the pond. I follow with Cassi taking up the rear. It's a mixed flock, four or five mallards and a pair of wood ducks. They are well aware of the falcon and the danger it presents. The pond is very small and the ducks have no options, they must fly and take their chances with the 'aerial predator'. In a more open setting one of the 'woodies' would likely be selected by the falcon due to its smaller size and slower speed. However under these 'tight' conditions it's more a matter of which duck presents the cleanest target between trees.

As expected, the ducks lift off heading north clearing the cattails in an all out sprint towards the next pond, 120 yards into the woods. Shaman rolls into a slanted stoop, experience has taught him a thing or two about timing and trajectory - both especially critical in enclosed country. Shaman lines up on a drake mallard, gets in a fairly clean hit, but doesn't deliver enough force to knock the big duck down. He does however manage to slow him considerably. Shaman maintains good airspeed with a shallow outrun and is immediately pressing the mallard from behind as both birds are swallowed by the forest. Cassi, Latham and I follow the flight path, once again watching and listening. 100 yards away a tinkling bell leads us to Shaman whom is calmly plucking his drake in the underbrush. So far its been a great morning.

"Falcons that are large and powerful enough to fly mallard with success provide what is probably the finest sport to be obtained in Britain. She is an exceptionally good hawk that is not outflown by them." Ronald Stevens, *Observations On Modern Falconry*. I suspect this sentiment is shared by many Californians as well.

California is a very large state sporting some of the most diverse terrain and climate on North America. From Death Valley, sinking 282ft below sea level to Mt. Whitney, soaring to a height of 14,494ft above

**Shaman rolls into a slanted stoop, experience has taught him a thing or two about timing and trajectory - both especially critical in enclosed country.**



sea level and a whole lot of in-between. California truly is a golden state. California supports a variety of upland gamebird species including quail, chuckar, pheasant, dove, and a small population of sage grouse. Waterfowl, however, is the most commonly pursued quarry flown by

Californian longwingers namely for three reasons; quality, quantity and proximity. With millions of ducks produced annually to the north, California provides a major corridor as migrants funnel into the state each winter much to the pleasure of California duck hawkers. This year California is expected to see the largest waterfowl migration in at least several decades. Great news for those of us whom love to pursue such swift and graceful quarry. Ducks offer high flying falcons, outstanding opportunities, generating awesome stoops. Ducks are not prone to being killed after lengthy tailchases, they are generally knocked down and killed in close proximity or not at all. And then there is variety - I can think of no other form of gamehawking that can offer the diversity that duck hawking enjoys. California duck hawkers pursue well over a dozen different species of ducks ranging in size from 200 grams (7oz) to 2000+ grams (71oz). Californians pursue puddle ducks and diving ducks, both groups are comprised of many species. Most species differ significantly from one another not only in obvious terms (size, colour, wingload, etc.) but also in somewhat less obvious ways - some of which will have a dramatic impact on the viability of a particular set (slip). Mental and emotional factors greatly effect the flushability of any given species of waterfowl and it is an understanding of all factors combined that will allow the falconer to assess the merits of each set. When actually hawking, one quickly realises that it is extremely important to reasonably calculate the level of difficulty expected, and the feasibility of a successful outcome. So how is this done? In a nut shell, by considering the weather and the particular species of duck or ducks on the set. We also consider the actual numbers of duck present, (the higher the number, the easier the flush). We of course are very concerned with the size, shape and depth of the water (assuming we're flushing from aquatic habitat as opposed to dryland etc.). Then there is the emotional; hunting pressure

plays a role here. Ducks that have been shot at heavily, are likely to have an intense fear of man - making them more likely to flush well. On the other hand, ducks that have been hawked by falcons a few times (or less) may regard man as a lesser threat than the falcon, which perhaps has struck down comrades before

'nasty falcon' began! The falconer (and preferably dog) is obligated to force ducks away from water, and keep them away. Not always an easy task. A couple of years ago, I was pleased to find a hooded merganser on a small, isolated pond. Mergansers are wonderful diving ducks, hens are dark and drab, the

up and was a bit lackadaisical on the wingover (overconfident), and provided the merganser enough time to get airborne, of course she headed directly for the pond. This is something we've seen countless times before, so by no coincidence

I had positioned myself between the pond and the merganser. The



Shaman with drake mallard

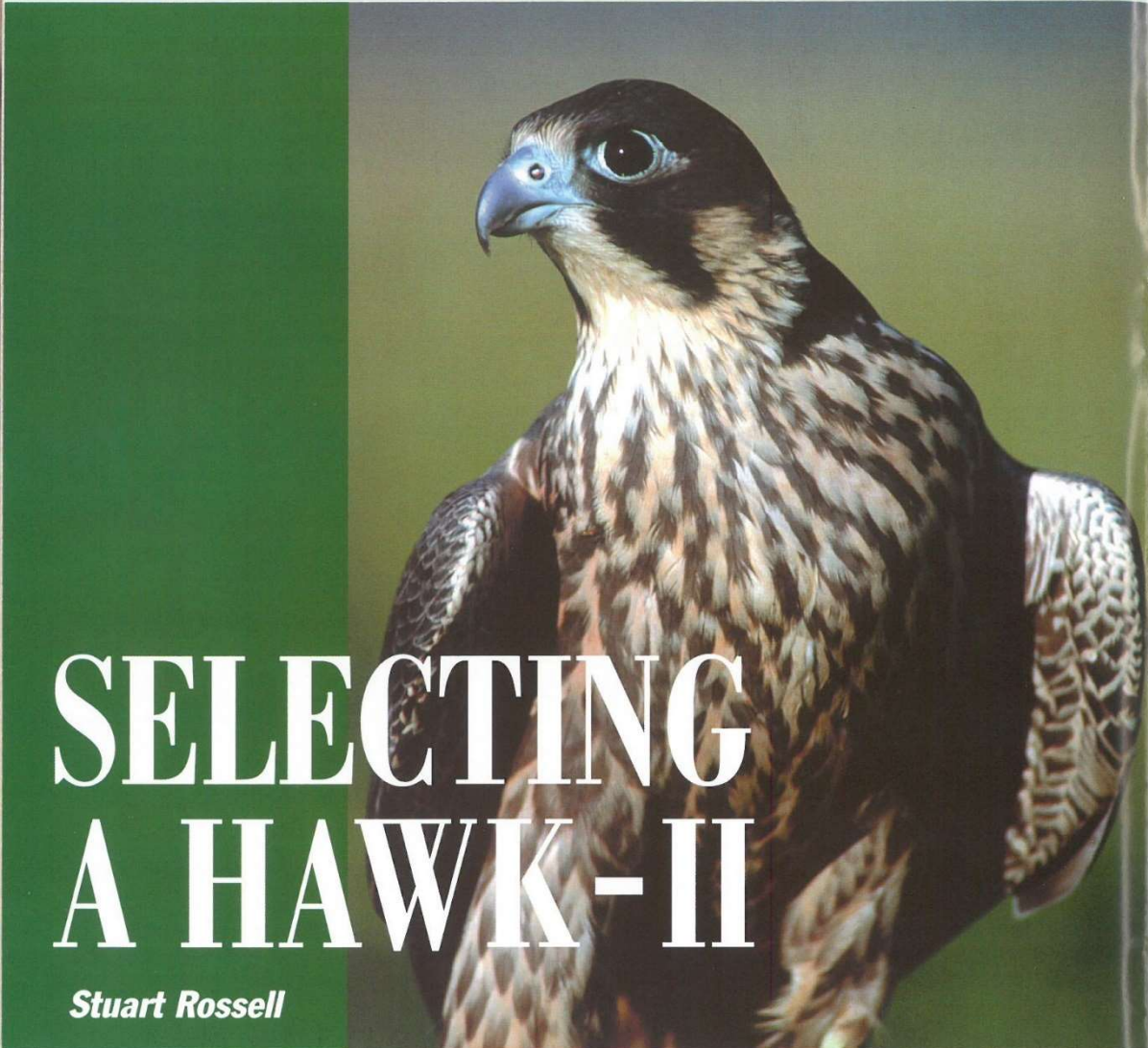
their very eyes. This information is weighed against the level of expertise as well as recent successes and failures of the gamehawk in question when deciding whether to fly a particular set. With so many variables and such a wide variety of ducks, the falconer can experience something different on a regular basis. The habitats in which waterfowl are found, may be equally diverse. I hunt ducks on mountain ponds at 8,000ft elevation down to coastal estuaries and anywhere in-between I can find them, including desert ponds, flooded rice checks, stream, sloughs, open field rain puddles (my favourite) and elsewhere. Inevitably, accomplished duck hawks acquire a certain degree of versatility.

Duck hawking is an 'in your face' art. Ducks are constantly trying to return to the security of the water from which they just left, after all, that is when their troubles with that

drakes are stunning. They possess a serrated bill which aids in catching fish and frogs. Best of all, hooded mergansers usually flush nicely, so I enjoy the occasional opportunity to fly them. With a great deal of optimism, I slipped the falcon, collected a couple of rocks and surreptitiously approached the pond keeping well hidden. With the falcon waiting overhead, I sprang to the top of the dike, yelled, threw rock and waved my arms in typical duck flushing fashion. As expected, the merganser immediately paddled into a take off headed for 'parts unknown'. The falcon snapped into a stoop and I ran along the edge of the pond to ensure the duck was fully committed to leaving. The falcons stoop was swift and accurate, pummeling the duck to the ground but inflicting no damage. At this point one thing was absolutely clear; the merganser's only hope was to regain the pond. The falcon pitched

only way back into the pond would be through me, or around me (which would cost the merganser precious time with the falcon bearing down). I made an imposing obstacle, legs spread, arms waving, trying to take up as much of the pond's width as possible, all the while yelling like a madman. The little merganser was unimpressed, she had made up her mind just whom the real threat was and it certainly wasn't me! I guess you don't fully appreciate 650 grams (23oz) of duck until it hits you square between the legs at full speed. Needless to say, I doubled over in considerable pain and yes, the merganser did make the pond, where she would wisely remain at least until dark. In spite of overwhelming odds, the little merganser bested us on that day and certainly earned my respect and admiration.

***So it goes, with duck hawking.***



# SELECTING A HAWK-II

*Stuart Rossell*

Photo: Seth Anthony

**I**n the last issue we discussed selecting a hawk and the basic parameters that should be used before any new hawk is obtained. Most of the article was aimed at beginners choosing their first hawk with the recommendation made that they either choose a female Harris' hawk or, where available, a passage red-tailed hawk. In this article I'd like to address the next and subsequent stages after the beginner has successfully trained one of the above.

Before moving on I must again

stress that there needs to be a very valid reason for giving up flying an individual hawk. Such reasons include putting the hawk into a breeding project or passing the hawk onto someone else because you are switching quarry species either to exploit a different species available locally or because you have moved or your original main quarry species has changed. Few of us have much respect for a falconer who flies a hawk for one season or less and is then looking to replace it with 'something better'.

To give you an insight into my own plans for the next few years I am presently flying a falcon which has reached breeding age. She is on loan to me from a good friend who wanted me to fly her because he lacked the space and quarry. Very mature decision on his part, putting his hawk first, and very lucky for me! She is in her third season with me and will shortly be put into an aviary with a tiercel so they can hopefully breed. This means that next season I will be looking for a new hawk to fly. I have to admit that after years of

training hawks for other people, for demonstrations or for bird control I have to admit that I actually look forward to only having one hawk to fly at quarry during the hawking season. When I was younger I used to fly more and there is nothing wrong in that as long as each hawk is flown to its full potential. I simply don't have the energy anymore to fly two hawks and I know that I would not do them both justice by flying them at the very limit of their and my, capabilities and so at present I only fly one hawk at a time for my own personal falconry.

My situation is such that I cannot guarantee to be able to provide daily flights for a large longwing for the next year or so, I'll just be moving around too much. By default that means my choice will come from the broadwings and shortwings. I have flown both and so lack of experience doesn't rule out the shortwings. Available quarry will likely be quail, waterfowl, some pheasants and chukars, rabbits both jackrabbits and cottontails and small birds so none of the broadwings or shortwings needs to be ruled out because of lack of quarry. As I have a preference for accipiters my choice will come from one of them.

Now the choice gets narrower and I can start to decide between the various accipiters available to me. They are eyass of either sharp shinned hawk, Cooper's hawk or American goshawk, the same three species as passagers or a captive bred European goshawk or European sparrowhawk. Still quite a wide choice. At present I am able to hawk everyday weather permitting and I expect this to continue for the next few years at least and so there are no restrictions on time restraints. I have flown both the large and the small accipiters and so do not need to rule out the smaller ones because of lack of experience with the larger ones. If however, I did not have experience with the larger goshawks I would be running the risk of injuring or killing a smaller hawk such as a European sparrowhawk or sharp shinned hawk. This is something newcomers to accipiters, especially in the United

Kingdom where European sparrowhawks are relatively cheap compared to goshawks, should remember. Start with the larger goshawks. Simply put, because accipiters are more difficult to man than other species many newcomers compensate for their lack of experience by flying the hawk at a lower weight than is safe for the long term health of the hawk. The bigger goshawk is less likely to succumb to such measures than her smaller cousins. Remember, a cheaper hawk or one more easily obtained is no less important than a more expensive kind and while I realise that budget does play a part if you space the price of a hawk over ten years, which is not too long for a hawk to last, even a captive bred European goshawk is not that expensive.

For the time being I have not made up my mind but I am leaning towards either of the European hawks depending on availability. I have experience with both and have a particular liking for the sparrowhawk and, as I have quail available, I could provide one with plenty of slips. My only reason for going with the larger goshawk would be the amount of jackrabbits I have available as well as pheasant and waterfowl but that's a decision which can wait for a few more months. Whichever hawk I choose however, I am planning on flying it for several seasons at least, barring its loss through accident or death. I am not planning on passing the hawk onto someone else unless it is for captive breeding, she will be with me for life. If I were planning on flying a hawk for only one season then there would be a good argument for flying a passage hawk and releasing it at the seasons end. Passagers are able to revert much more quickly and successfully to the wild having already survived there. However, I am in agreement with Beebe that the only reason for preferring a passage accipiter over an eyass is where eyass hawks are difficult or impossible to obtain. On the East coast where I spend my summers there is no difficulty in trapping a passage Cooper's or sharp shinned

hawk although the latter can be a bit difficult to find when nesting. Nesting Cooper's hawks and goshawks can be found with a bit of searching however and so the preference there would be to take an eyass unless, as pointed out above, I was planning to release the hawk after one season.

I hope it can be seen from the above that deciding on which hawk to obtain is a very serious, thought out process of elimination. I speak to many who have been in the sport only a few years, especially new general class falconers here in the US who think they want to fly a particular species because they have read about it and it excites them. While your ego may want you to parade around with a peregrine or other large longwing, if you don't have the experience or time to fly it your ego is going to be pretty deflated when all you achieve is getting yourself a reputation as a hawk keeper rather than a falconer. I was asked once who I classed as good falconers and without exception those I named had all flown the same one or two hawks over several seasons and had consistently taken quarry with them. In short, falconers to who I would give one of my hawks to fly. They were surprisingly few in number! So, make this decision very carefully and honestly and make sure it is not being made by your ego. Plan on keeping the hawk for several years at least and only fly those hawks for which you have time, quarry and experience.

To sum up, remember these points when choosing a hawk:

1. Get a hawk that you can plan on flying for several years, think long term. Many of the best hawks in past and present day falconry only became such after several seasons of flying by the same dedicated falconer. A hawk is not made in a few short weeks but over several seasons.
2. Remember the criteria in my first article. You pick the type of hawk you intend to fly in relation to your experience, flying ground available, the type of quarry it holds in hawkable numbers and

time you have available for hawking. If you fail to take quarry consistently with your hawk it will normally be as a result of failing to recognise one of the above limitations. I'll bet my next hawk on it!

Regarding experience, I feel that a falconer should not fly accipiters until he has achieved at least one full season of taking quarry consistently with a broadwing. For the first accipiter I recommend a female goshawk. Flying a male goshawk successfully normally entails finding and exploiting quarry species that require experience in setting up slips. Such experience can more easily be learned while flying the larger female at rabbits, a quarry for which many male goshawks require to be flown at the very limit of their capabilities and such is beyond most beginners. When you have flown a female successfully you will be in a better position to appreciate the experience and advice of the likes of Andy Reeve. Do not however think that you fall into the same category as Andy until you have achieved similar success in the field. I have a couple of friends that I swear if you gave them a macaw they could catch rabbits with it but I cannot, dare not, use them as an example of what is achievable by the rest of us. So, the fact that you may know or have read of another falconer achieving such and such with a hawk doesn't mean that you are capable of the same until your experience and successes matches theirs.

When it comes to longwings most of those who fail do so because they fail to understand the absolute necessity and the difficulty of providing top quality slips on a daily basis. Ducks are probably the easiest of quarries to fly with a large longwing here in the United States but even here, many falconers completely underestimate their ability to find good slips each day. And remember, in the US we are allowed to use bagged quarry which makes the whole thing several degrees easier than when I lived and hawked in the UK. Ask yourself in

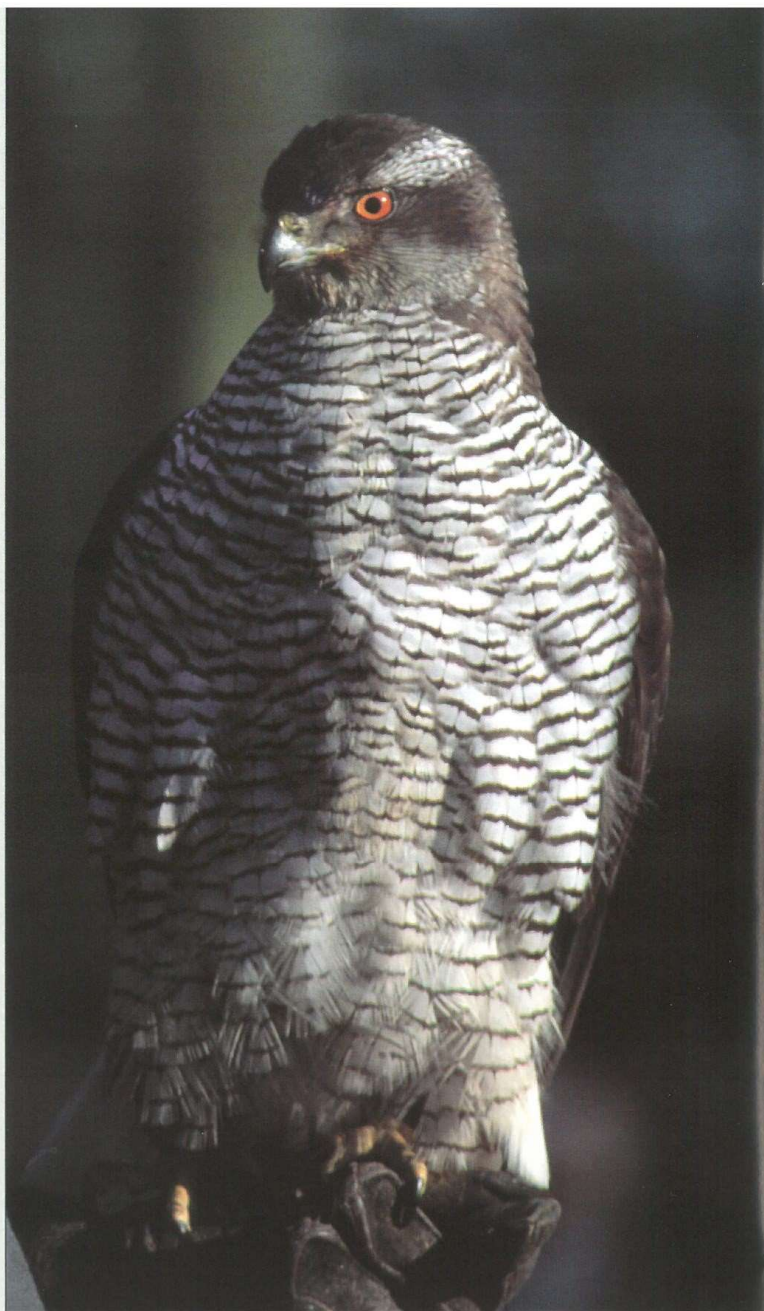


Photo: Seth Anthony

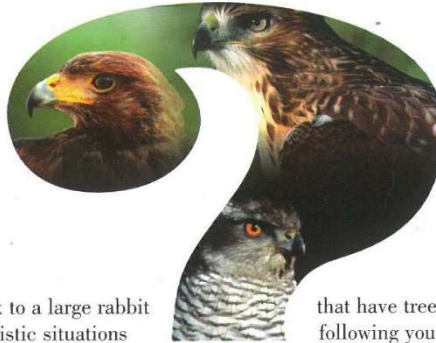
all honesty, do I have the time and the access to a suitable number of ponds to provide slips for a large longwing four or more days a week. If you don't, fly something less demanding. It does not make you less of a falconer, in my eyes it makes you a better one. If I found it necessary to give up falconry tomorrow I would not give my hawk to someone who spent a week or two

in Scotland flying at grouse every year but to a friend who has for the last seven years flown the same goshawk. Before her he flew a Black sparrowhawk for two seasons before placing her in a breeding aviary. In my mind he epitomises what a 'good falconer' is as much by what he doesn't try to do as by his consistent successes in the field.



# QUESTION TIME

with Stuart Rossell



## QUESTION

*My question is in two parts. I recently started flying an old, made Harris' hawk that had been in a breeding project for a number of years. She was flown early on in her life and took jackrabbits. When I started flying her she would land on the ground and walk after me rather than fly to me and secondly she would fly up to jacks but would not bind to them but rather land short. Any suggestions?*

## RESPONSE

First of all, when you take on an older hawk it can be hard as well as frustrating trying to figure out what they are thinking but here goes. If she flies up to a jack, has a chance to foot it and doesn't it means one of three things in this order:

1. She is overweight, maybe only slightly.
2. She is unfit. That sounds strange since she flies up to them but a hawk with previous experience with large quarry will often refuse it early on in the season because it lacks the muscle tone for the struggle it knows is coming.
3. She's been beaten up by too many jacks and won't bind anymore.

I'd start at number one while simultaneously working on number two. If it is number three flying her with other Harris' hawks may help her get her confidence back. Failing that,

lots of work to a large rabbit lure in realistic situations should help.

Now onto the walking. Firstly, NEVER feed her when she lands on the ground. Pick her up with both hands around her body and throw her towards the trees (don't try this with anything other than a Harris!) or, if you are in open country simply grab her jesses and scoop her up off the ground. If she is walking because she is feeling tired that will pass as she gets fitter but it will also do her some good by building up her leg muscles. Not all falconers remember that a shortwing or broadwing relies on these muscles to subdue its quarry and if they are flabby she will lose hold of things until she gets stronger. If you are not careful though by the time that stage has come she may well have become disillusioned and be refusing quarry for that reason. A Harris', more so than any other hawk needs to know that the ground is an unacceptable place to be. My Harris' quickly get to the point that if they land on the ground they expect to see me running towards them in preparation to throwing them unceremoniously up into a tree. Once they know what's coming they fly up to a tree on their own when they see you running towards them!

Secondly, and this will help while you work on getting her fit, you should select areas if at all possible

that have trees she can use for following you. This will give her less incentive to land on the ground. If you are flying over relatively treeless terrain then I would recommend using a T-perch. Not only will this give the hawk extra height to see the quarry but it will be more inviting than either the ground or the fist because of that height. But the first point is the important one, never, ever reward her for landing on the ground. Don't even flush a rabbit for her while she is there.

## QUESTION

*Can you offer any advice on what type of creance to use?*

## RESPONSE

For the last fifteen years at least I have used 50 yards of either braided nylon or braided dacron with a breaking strain of between 120 and 150 lbs. This is for all species except eagles when I use a slightly heavier line. When not in use this is wound around an 8 inch piece of dowel about 1 inch in diameter. This is the type of creance recommended by Phillip Glasier in *Falconry and Hawking*.

When using this type of creance there are a few things to look out for. Firstly, pick a flying field with relatively short grass so that the creance does not get caught up and drag the hawk down, thereby discouraging her. Secondly, never tie

the end of a creance to a solid object. The end of the creance should either be looped once or twice around your gloved little finger or you should be standing on it. I loop it around my finger until the hawk is flying ten yards or so and then progress to standing on it. Thirdly, while walking away from the hawk in preparation to calling her to you run the creance through your gloved hand. In this way if she starts towards you before you are ready and you don't have time to either throw down your lure or raise your fist you will be able to gently bring the hawk down like playing a fish on a hook. Treat this as a mistake on your part, you should have anticipated her coming and had food in the fist or the lure ready to throw out. When a hawk gets brought down by a creance it is a mishap that nine times out of ten could have, and should have, been prevented. A creance is like an insurance policy that you have, but never want to use. Fourthly, make sure the hawk can

reach no trees, hedgerows, fences etc.

You should never, while calling a hawk to the fist, relinquish the other end of the creance. I tie the creance to the leash ring of the swivel with a falconers knot. Do not use spring clips. I do not see the need to remove the swivel and tie the creance to the jesses.

A wise old falconer once told me that you could judge the quality and skill of a falconer by how he handles a creance not just when it is being used but when he needs to get to it in a hurry and there it is, neatly wound in his hawking vest. For more information see Phillip Glasier's *Falconry and Hawking* and Emma Ford's *Falconry, Art and Practice*. Both these books should, in any case, be considered required reading.

## SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO:

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# Modern Captive Breeding

# RE

Once eggs successfully start to hatch then the propagator's work really begins. Yet again a little pre-planning will greatly assist in this, the most labour intensive area of captive breeding. Chicks hatching under parents will require close monitoring and for those hatching in incubators where a modicum of hand rearing is needed, a regular schedule of feeding and cleaning is needed.

The rearing methods and nutrition employed for each chick over the next couple of months, will have a heavy bearing on its physical and physiological qualities for the rest of its life.

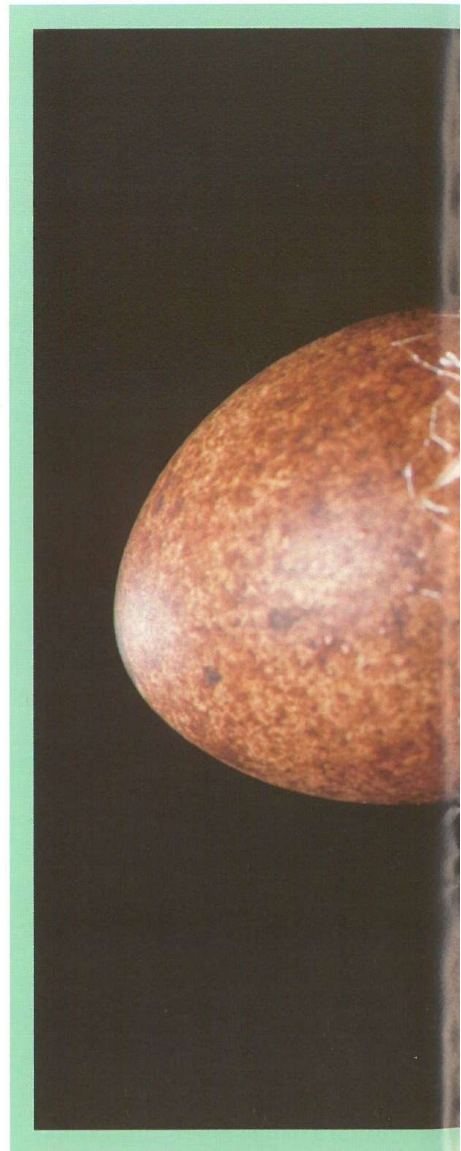
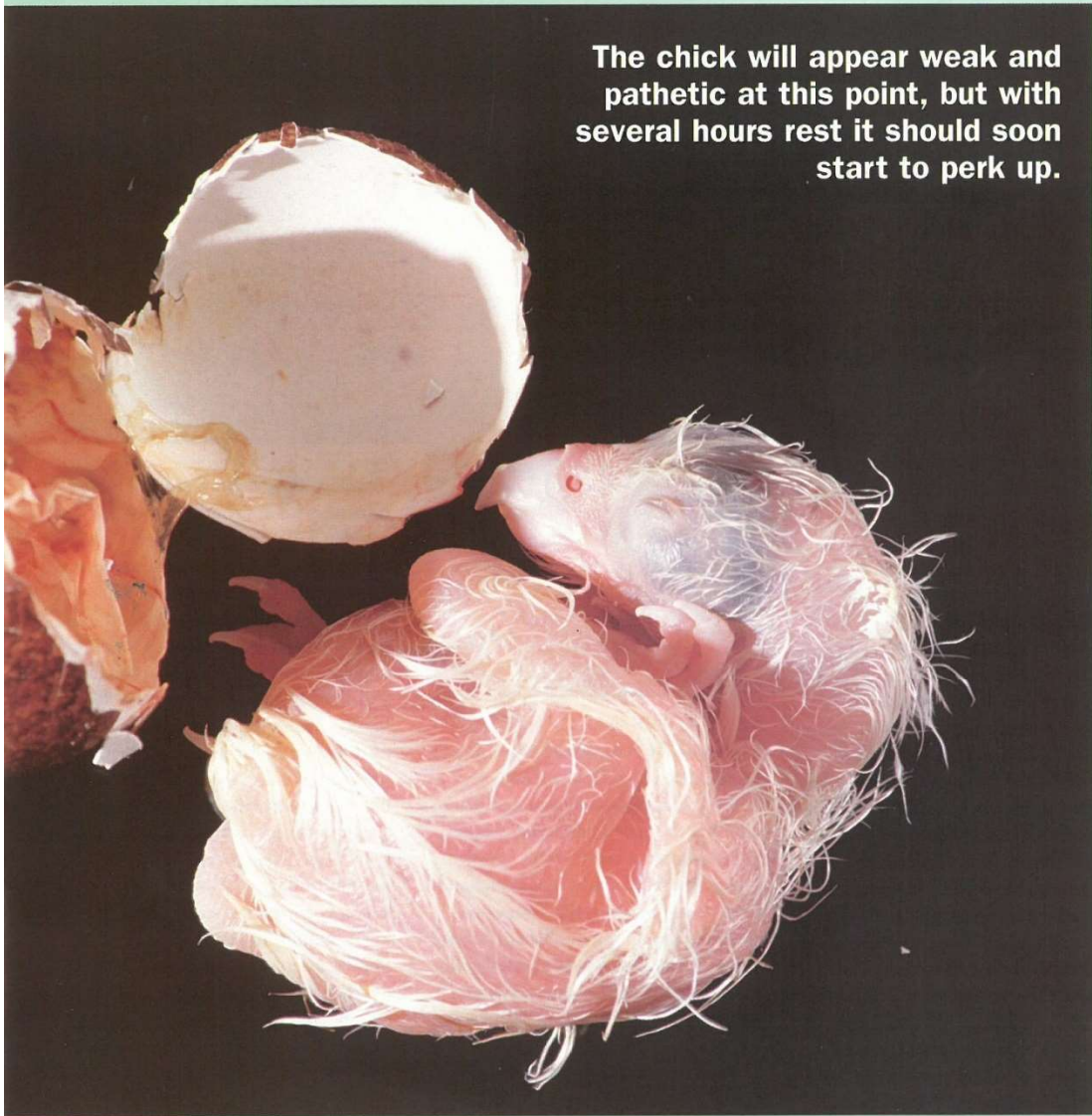


Photo: Seth Anthony

# REARING

The chick will appear weak and pathetic at this point, but with several hours rest it should soon start to perk up.



## HAND REARING

Neo-natal raptor chicks are semi-artificial and thus require an outside source to provide warmth and nutrition (usually its parents). To successfully hand-rear chicks from hatching the three main areas that need to be addressed are:

1. Temperature Control
2. Nutrition
3. Hygiene

### Temperature Control

Due to the 100% humidity level within the egg, a freshly hatched chick will be wet at the time of hatching, and should be left to dry in the hatcher for several hours. The chick will appear weak and pathetic at this point, but with several hours rest it should soon start to perk up. Raptor chicks are unable to self control their own body temperature post hatching, so provisions have to be made via the use of a brooder to keep the chicks warm.

On visiting many breeding projects, I am regularly disillusioned at their brooding systems. These same projects have installed state of the art incubation systems with all manors of fail safe systems, only to put their hatchlings into what can only be described as 'Heath Robinson brooders'. These range from home-made still air boxes through to a single light bulb. When one considers that a two day old chick will die from hypothermia faster than an egg would perish due to loss of its heat source, it should be obvious that the quality of the brooding is at least as important as the incubator the chick was hatched in. There are times when all propagators should stand back and look at any areas which may be a potential 'weak link' in their breeding strategy, and this seems to be a common one.

There are numerous good quality brooders available on the market

today. Over the last four years we have used the 'Animal Intensive Care Unit' (AICU) manufactured by Lyons Electrical Company. This unit has proved to be very reliable and

each chick is colour coded using a felt tip pen on their backs and, or top of the head for individual recognition purposes. Each chick is placed into its own thoroughly cleaned open



Photo: Seth Anthony



Photo: Seth Anthony

fulfills all the requirements we need.

Another suitable brooding method, is the K-pad system. It is simply a thermostatically controlled pad, containing warm water. A towel is placed over the pad and the chicks are placed on the towel. Some breeders are sceptical of this system, as most of the heat is generated from below the chick. However enough breeders use this system exclusively to make it worth considering.

Once dried, the chicks are moved from the hatcher to the brooder which is holding a temperature of 36.5°C (98°F). At the same time

topped plastic container (130 x 80 x 60mm), with several pieces of kitchen roll as a substrate.

We never mix *buteos* or *accipiters* with *falcons* in the same brooder. This is due to aggression from the shortwings in the form of the 'Caine and Abel' battle. *Eyass* shortwings will fight from the second day of life, to establish a hierarchy within the nest and once a chick is overcome by its aggressor, it will lie still with its head down and the battle will cease. *Falcons* do not fight, so if attacked by a shortwing a young falcon will keep lifting its head until it is severely injured or killed. If you do keep them in the same brooder make totally sure they cannot reach one another.

The brooder temperature should be decreased gradually. The rate of decrease will depend on the species being brooded. As an example *gyrs* and *Peales peregrine* come off heat at a lot faster rate than *barbary* or

lanner falcons. There is no magic temperature that any eyass should be kept, but their behaviour will indicate whether they are too warm or too cold. Chicks which are too hot

gape, waiting for food to be placed in its beak. The feeding technique for accipiters and buteos is totally different as they respond visually to the sight of food held within tweezers

old eyass. During the first three days of life the major growth and development takes place in the digestive system and the liver, so small easily digestible pieces of meat are required. Hence we feed small pieces of lean quail meat from the chest or leg muscle.

From the third day, the diet is changed to finely minced full-bodied carcasses. This falls in line with the start of major skeleton growth where calcium and other nutrients are required. Our diet from this point consists of 50% prime quail mixed with 50% laboratory rat. All food is prepared once daily, split into four and refrigerated until used. Each carcass is skinned, the head, feet, wings (where applicable) and digestive tract removed before being finely minced. At the time of feeding, a small amount of warm water is added to warm up the food and to lubricate the food for easy swallowing. The eyasses are kept on this diet until they are either put back with parents, or if being imprinted, are pulling large items of food for themselves. Some breeders state that roughage should be included from around day ten, we have not found any problem with excluding this until they are feeding from complete carcasses.

When unfamiliar with hand rearing eyasses, it is human instinct to over feed. A very common cause of death is from over feeding, this may be due to either too greater quantity of food being fed at a single meal or by feeding too often. From the time of hatching we feed the majority of our eyasses four times daily with approximately five hours between each feed. With small raptors such as merlins and sparrowhawks we increase this to five feeds at four-hour intervals. No eyasses are fed through the night. The quantity of food fed at the first feed should only be three pinhead sizes of meat. Then four at the next feed and so on. Once enough food is being fed as to discernably see it in the crop, then the crop must be checked at the beginning of each



will lay stretched out with their legs out behind them or on their side with legs out stretched to their side (this can be an initial cause of splayed legs). The most obvious sign is the chick panting. The major sign of a chick being too cool is when it is sat hunch backed and vocalising with a groaning sound. This behaviour is generally observed just after feeding, but should cease within fifteen minutes. A common cause of chicks failing to turn their crop over in the expected time can be due to the brooding temperature being too cool.

### Nutrition

Nutritionally, a freshly hatched chick is fuelled by the yolk sac, which has been drawn into the abdomen just prior to hatching. No attempt should be made to feed the chick until it will voluntarily beg for food. To initiate a feeding response from a young falcon simply 'chup' at it and it should then lift its head and

directly in front of them and will lurch forward and snatch at it. At first, their sight to snatch co-ordination can be a little haphazard but they soon get the hang of it.

The period of time from hatching to the first feed will vary enormously between individuals, from as little as two hours up to fifteen.

Individuals, which have had problems hatching, may be weak and dehydrated and will require fluid replacement both orally or via subcutaneous injection.

When considering nutrition, the tyro breeder is faced with a number of questions, What type of food to feed? Plus what amount and how often does the eyass require feeding?

As to the type of food, the easiest line to take is to ask oneself what type of nutrition a chick needs, at each stage of development. As an example the nutritional requirement for a two-day-old peregrine is totally different to the needs of a ten-day-



Photo: Seth Anthony

feeding session to make sure it is empty before the chick is fed again. If food is still in the crop, do not feed for a further hour and check again. It is always better to leave the chick a little hungry at the end of the feeding session than to over feed it. If you find yourself thinking, 'just one more piece' then stop at that point. Food which stays in the crop for too long will ferment resulting in death. When observing an imprint falcon brooding chicks in the first few days after hatching, it is easy to become very anxious at what appears to be a total lack of interest in feeding the eyasses very often. But due to them absorbing the last remnants of the yolk sac coupled with a low nutritional requirement, they simply do not need it.

Weighing each chick both prior and after each feed will depict how much the chick is eating and its weight gain since the last meal. Several breeders have published a number of weight gain charts, plotting a specific chick's growth. Although these are very interesting, it is important that direct comparisons between them and your own chick are not made. Too many outside parameters such as type of food, amounts fed, frequency of feeding, brooder temperatures, humidity levels etc. will affect a

chick's growth trend for any true comparison to be made.

We try to get as many eyasses back with parents by day seven as possible. Not only does this cut the workload down but we have also found that the parents can do a better job at feeding than we can from this point in development. Experience has shown that if we feed a chick at this stage while food from the previous meal is still in the crop it usually leads to major problems. But an eyass only has to yawn under a parent and it is fed, crop full or not with no adverse effect. How parental birds get away with this feeding behaviour is a mystery.

### Hygiene

As with incubation, hygiene is of paramount importance when rearing eyasses. Raptors have little natural immunity to outside pathogens, particularly those they may meet in the alien environment of a brooder room. Brooders should be kept as clean as possible with any substrate changed regularly. Close alliances should be made with an avian vet prior to the breeding season, as if a chick shows signs of illness, immediate medical assistance must be at hand. Any chick showing signs of illness must be quarantined away from the others immediately.

Food storage bowls, feeding utensils and the propagator's hands must be clean and sterile (as possible) before any contact with the chick. Common problems like splayed legs can all be eradicated by using the right sized brooding tub and substrate. Unfortunately, some breeders have taken the direction of the prophylactic use of antibiotics when rearing some species in particularly merlins. This course of action is usually based on problems, which have occurred in previous seasons. My own opinion is that if we can only breed certain species with the indiscriminate use of drugs then it is time to pack up.

To help with the cleanliness of the nest ledge our imprint chambers have a double nest ledge system, the chicks spend the first two weeks on the top ledge and then are moved to the bottom one for the remainder of the rearing period.

As with all animal husbandry, close detail to cleanliness and hygiene is just a case of common sense.

### Placing back with parents

Placing chicks back with parents, particularly for the first time, can be nerve racking. But again there are certain safe guards you can take to at least improve your chances of the chicks being accepted. Over the years we have experienced all manner of behaviour with parents when chicks have been introduced, from perfect acceptance through to all out aggression. It is important not to place eyasses back with parents at too later stage of development. Small and medium size raptor chicks will show fear responses toward parent birds if introduced beyond 14 days of age. Generally we place all our eyass falcons with imprinted females to start with (around day 7), some will stay with these and others will be moved on to natural pairs at around the twelve-day stage. By placing the chick with an experienced parent for a few days teaches it to feed and act



normally around a parental bird, this is a great help when finally placed with a novice parent.

A natural assumption is to try parents with a single chick to start with, however slightly aggressive parents are more likely to attack a single chick than a group of them. With this in mind we always place at least two chicks in with first time rearers. One option is to try parents with young kestrels if they are available.

When introducing chicks back with parent(s) for the first time, we try to choose a warm morning and with the eyasses slightly hungry, so as they will soon solicit feeding. Watching the parental bird's behaviour should give you an idea of their intentions. When dealing with imprints the whole scenario is a lot easier as you are in the pen and it is easy to intervene should there be problems. A common occurrence is for the female to gently bite at the chick's neck and sometimes they pick the chick up with their beak and walk across the nest ledge, very much to the chick's annoyance. However if there is any sign of the

parent grabbing with a foot, intervention is needed immediately as this is outward aggression. On a number of occasions when we have tried individual imprints with chicks for the first time, they have totally ignored them, even when left with them for several hours. Some of these falcons have been tried several weeks later and took to rearing duties immediately. One female barbary refused to rear for her first three egg laying years, on trying her in her fourth season she took to rearing like an old pro.

When positioning falcons in our imprint pens, we try to place one-year-old females opposite older experienced birds. Through their respective widows they can look across the service passageway onto each other's nest ledge. We soon noticed that several of the young female peregrines would vocalise and try to pass food through their bars as they observed the older falcons feeding chicks. Once this behaviour is seen we introduce a couple of chicks in with the young falcon, which has resulted in a number of one-year-old peregrines rearing

chicks.

This occurred again last year and due to having a lot of chicks of the same age, the young peregrine ended up with a brood of five ten-day-old hybrids. Usually we would not tax an inexperienced falcon with such a large brood size and especially when all five young turned out to be females. But she was a very attentive mother and as the chicks grew she had to stand on a rock to be able to reach when feeding. One female gyrfalcons/peregrine of the brood was the largest (by far) individual of this hybrid that we have ever produced, with an empty fat weight of 1600 grams.

Not all young imprint females will show willingness to rear in their first year, but if they do, they should be given the chance. Although not suitable for brooding young chicks, some male imprints will rear chicks, if introduced once they are past the brooding stage.

When dealing with natural pairs of some species, in particular goshawks and merlins, it is not uncommon for the male to be aggressive with chicks. Subsequently

Photo: Seth Anthony



some breeders remove the male from the breeding chamber prior to introducing chicks.

We try wherever possible to rear pure species under a female of the same type. This will help in the chick's perception of his or her own species if destined for future breeding. From learned behaviour it is often seen that eyasses reared under a female who is of a nervous temperament, will themselves be more reserved when first manned for falconry and vice-versa. When rearing chicks in open fronted chambers this learned behaviour can lead to problems. If we take a pair of Harris' hawks rearing chicks, any aggression or fear shown toward dogs etc. that they view, will lead to the eyasses having a deep distrust in them (even more than they usually do).

All eyasses should be left with their parents until at least two weeks post hard penning unless they are destined for a wild hack.

### Independence Chamber

A small number of eyasses when manned, immediately after being removed from the parents may start to show classic imprinting signs. I put this down to the eyass switching its dependency from its raptor parents to its new handler. With this in mind once two weeks post hard penned we started to move eyasses into a independence chamber away from both their parents and any human contact. These pens are constructed as large as possible to assist in early flight lessons and to accomplish a modicum of fitness. But the major advantage of these chambers is the eyass has to learn to look after itself and gain a more independent state of mind. We regularly keep up to 25 eyass falcons in each chamber for the short period.

### Closing Notes

I hope this series of four articles have been of interest. If they have at least prompted some questions and debate on any of the subjects covered, then it has been worthwhile. When covering such a vast subject in so few words, it is always difficult to consider what to say and what to leave out. Several recent falconry books have included excellent chapters on breeding, but with the exception of *Falcon Propagation* published by the Peregrine Fund, no single book has been written solely on the subject. I feel sure that one must be in the making. Good luck with your future breeding aspirations in the new millennium, I'm off to start the whole cycle over again.

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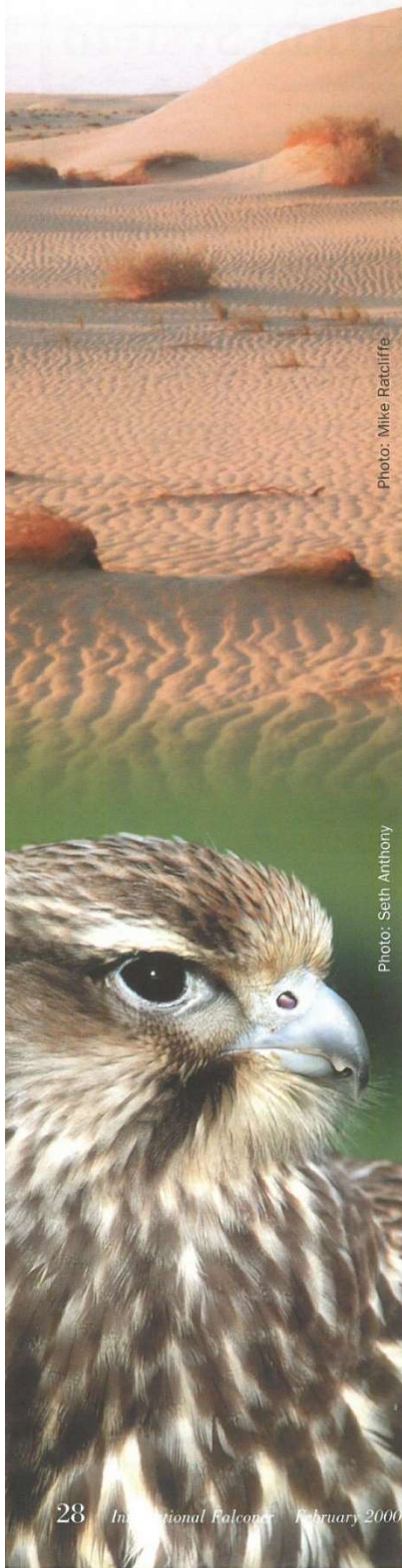


Photo: Mike Ratcliffe

Photo: Seth Anthony

# Evenings

by Charles H. Schwartz

*To be a falconer in the Gulf is to see the Arab world in ways the average tourist or expatriate never experiences. Doors open to the Westerner with a falcon on his fist.*

"Salaam Alakum, Charles! *Khayfhalik?* How are you?" Nassar pumped my hand, his quick grin flashing beneath his glossy black mustache. He held my hand tightly, then embraced me and kissed me quickly on both cheeks. He knew I was uncomfortable taking it that far but he couldn't help himself. It was Nassar's way and I chose to take it as a compliment.

"*Alakum Salaam! Zein, zein.* I am fine Nassar," I replied, laughing. "*Shlonik, Mubarak?* How are you?" I asked his companion who stood smiling behind him. I knew enough Arabic to be polite and was pleased to see the two of them after my summer leave. We asked after each other's families and I offered them refreshments as custom dictated, but the peregrine perched in my garden had captivated them already and we gravitated to it as falconers will.

Nassar was tall and thin with the sharp, lean face of a proud Gulf Arab. He moved with the idle confidence of a young man who knows his exact position in the scheme of things. Mubarak was shorter and more powerfully built. Where Nassar flowed, Mubarak stood. Nassar was often clever and charming, but Mubarak had a serious

demeanor and quiet intelligence that many ladies, to Nassar's constant irritation, could not resist. The two of them were often in some sort of trouble. They were the closest friends I had.

We sat on the grass next to my peregrine and discussed our summer adventures. Twenty minutes passed before Mubarak revealed the reason for their visit.

"Charles, we have a *hurr* we want you to see."

"Fine" I replied. "Where is it?" I expected a short drive to visit a sick saker or a bird with broken feathers.

"We trapped it this morning. It is in my truck."

"A wild saker? My God man, go get it! What are you waiting for?"

Mubarak returned with a hooded passage saker that hissed and occasionally struck as he stroked its breast with his open hand. Larger than average, it was a pleasing pale color, but its toes and the tips of its wings and tail were covered with black, sticky crude.

"Charles, how do you clean this?" Mubarak asked. "Nassar wants to use the petrol from the cleaners, but I told him no. What do you think?" Mubarak always asked his questions in a straightforward way and then



# on the Sands

listened attentively for your answer.

Petrol from the cleaners?  
Gasoline? Carbon tetrachloride?  
What were they talking about? I had learned not to take their English too literally ever since the night they had brought over a “goose” dinner. It had turned out to be fresh flamingo shot by moonlight.

I suggested we start with warm water and soap and see how it went. Mubarak was relieved at my suggestion and spoke sharply to Nassar in Arabic. I sensed they had been arguing. As we carefully cleaned the soiled falcon, their story unravelled. I learned they had trapped the saker just at dawn using a tethered kestrel as a *barak* hawk. They had been driving a ridge along the beach where they knew migrants occasionally rested and had gotten lucky. The kestrel was a pet belonging to Nassar’s little brother and Mubarak laughed as he described how Nassar had pinched it the night before as his brother slept. The unsuspecting kestrel was tossed out the truck window with a bundle of feathers and nooses fastened to its legs and the saker was on it like a bobby on a biscuit, intent on stealing the smaller raptor’s ‘kill’. Nassar and Mubarak quickly scooped up their prize as the falcons struggled to be free of each other and the noose bundle that joined them.

Then more sharp words in Arabic. Mubarak explained to me that Nassar wanted to present the falcon as a gift or tribute to the shaikh that had traditionally employed his family. It would be especially valuable because it had been captured locally. Nassar insisted the shaikh would reward them, but Mubarak felt no such allegiance to Nassar’s shaikh

and wanted to keep and train the saker for their own enjoyment. I stayed out of it.

Once the saker was as clean as we could make it, we drove over to Nassar’s house to work with our falcons. Nassar’s father, Isa, trained hunting falcons for the ruling family. Isa was a patient man with a good sense of humor but he often seemed weary. I suspect the shenanigans of six sons kept him busy. One of Nassar’s younger brothers offered me *chai*, a sweet red tea served in tiny cups from a Thermos.

Isa’s *majlis* was a simple cinder block room lit by a single floor lamp and a dim bulb hanging overhead. Worn Persian carpets covered the concrete floor and thin mats for sitting and sleeping were pushed against the walls. An old television stood in the corner and pillows lay strewn about, several with falcons perched upon them. The ubiquitous box of facial tissues, found in every *majlis* and Mercedes in the Gulf, was there as well.

That night we sat for hours, each of us handling a falcon. My friends stroked and spoke to their birds, all the while chatting and laughing in two languages as the TV blared in the corner. Dallas, the evening news, the Indian movie of the week. The falcons seemed mesmerised by the noise, the movements, the shadows. No wonder the Arabs tame their birds faster and more thoroughly than Western cultures. They integrate their falcons completely and totally into their intensely social lives and the falcon has no choice but to accept. As soon as it does, it is rewarded with food and its wildness begins to dissipate.

The falcons were in various stages

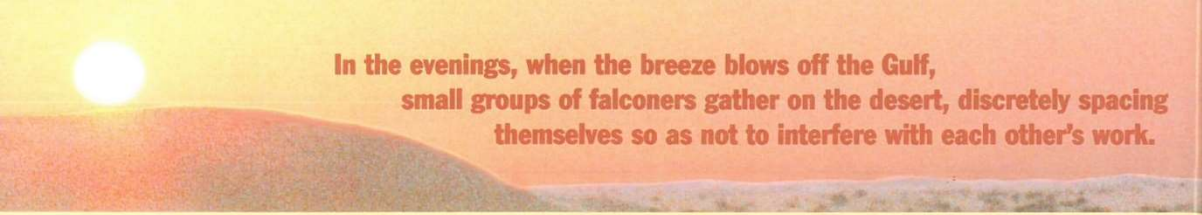
of training, but were treated essentially the same. If a bird bated, it was the falcon’s fault, not the falconer’s. The reverent approach to training typical of Western falconry did not exist here. A pragmatic, “get on with it” attitude prevailed and it was the falcon’s job to adapt quickly. If an untrained bird in high condition bated continually and the falconer’s arm grew tired, he would simply hood the bird and set it down for a few minutes so they both could rest. When calling a falcon off a pillow or knee the falconer would shout his falcon’s name; “Nawaf! Nawaf! Huhhn! Huhhn!” If feeding his falcon he would lean in close and make a quiet “Shush, shush, shush,” noise. The falcons soon associated these sounds with specific activities and even learned their own names.

By 11pm, the soiled saker had settled down enough to take a few bites of pigeon breast after watching the other falcons being fed. Isa’s interest in Mubarak’s handling of the new falcon was apparent and I could detect a stiffness in the way Mubarak reacted to Isa’s comments and suggestions.

---

Two weeks later I was heading south on the beach road, past the old villas facing the sea. I kept on driving until I reached a vast expanse of marl and sand before turning off the main road to run cross country toward Mubarak’s truck parked far out on the open desert. Tonight we were training hawks Arab style for the flight at *houbara*.

In October, when the intense heat of summer begins to wane, one can sense the mounting excitement as



In the evenings, when the breeze blows off the Gulf, small groups of falconers gather on the desert, discretely spacing themselves so as not to interfere with each other's work.

last year's falcons are brought out of their moulting houses and new birds begin to arrive from distant markets in the north. The shaikhs' *diwans* (offices) now contain two or three falconers during business hours, each man carrying a reclaimed *hurr* or a newly acquired passage saker. In the evenings, when the breeze blows off the Gulf, small groups of falconers gather on the desert, discretely spacing themselves so as not to interfere with each other's work.

Mubarak and Nassar were sitting on a carpet next to their truck and the falcons were blocked out in the lengthening shadow cast by the truck. I kicked off my sandals before stepping onto the carpet as they stood to greet me. Moments later, Isa arrived with more falcons and an older falconer named Abdulla. Abdulla did not speak English and I was dependent upon Nassar and Mubarak for my communication with him. I noticed the soiled saker was now riding in Isa's truck but thought better of saying anything. Greetings and *chai* were dealt with quickly and we got on with training the falcons before the light was lost.

Abdulla was short and snaggle toothed with a neatly trimmed white goatee. A favorite of the ruling family, he was capable of inflicting serious mischief in the daily verbal struggle of these men to curry favor with their shaikhs. The other falconers treated him with a cautious deference but often disparaged Abdulla behind his back. It was a constant education for me to be around these falconers. Everything they possessed came one way or another from the benevolence of the shaikhs who retained them. Was it so different where I came from?

The falcon training was

straightforward; Nassar or Mubarak would drive several hundred yards to a half mile away to stand and hold a falcon aloft as Abdulla or Isa called it back with a swing of his lure. The rest would watch as the falcon whipped in to snatch the lure and earn its meal. The distance flown depended upon the stage of training for the individual bird. For the intermewed sakers, this was mere exercise meant to build muscle after a long summer of sitting on the block and the birds were called off from very long distances. For the new birds, the training conditioned a response to the lure and accustomed the falcon to allow the falconer to make in as it ate on the ground. A falcon eventually had to tolerate the rapid approach of several trucks as it struggled to subdue a *houbara* twice its size. If it wouldn't do this, its training was not complete.

My peregrine started from Mubarak's *mangala* as I swung my lure and shouted its name, then flared and flew over the trucks, confused by the cluster of men, hawks and vehicles. As the falcon flew off I quickly produced a tethered pigeon and it instantly turned and struck the fluttering bird. Abdulla spoke to me in Arabic from where he sat on the carpet and I asked Nassar what he had said.

"He says, If your falcon won't do what you want, do not feed it one more day." Abdulla smiled at me as Nassar translated. I suspected that Abdulla knew more English than he let on.

Abdulla and Isa deemed the soiled saker ready to be entered to *houbara*. This was the reason I had come this evening as I have always believed that entering is the heart and soul of falconry. If a falconer knows how to enter his bird well and

quickly, nothing else matters. He will have a good hawk. If he cannot do this one thing correctly, the bird will never become a true hunting falcon.

Abdulla produced a large *houbara* from a sack in the back of Isa's truck. Where they acquired such a valuable thing, I do not know. It was too early for *houbara* to have migrated this far south, so I can only surmise that Abdulla's shaikh had purchased it at great expense or had somehow kept it alive from last year. The two old falconers knelt in the sand, one with the falcon and the other with the *houbara*. Abdulla pulled feathers from the *houbara*'s bony back and made a small incision with his knife so that it bled just a little. Then he held it by its wings with its breast in the sand.

Isa removed the *burgha* (hood) from the saker's head and shouted its name, "Sultan! Sultan! Huhhn! Huhhn!" and showed it the bleeding back of the *houbara*. Sultan looked around for a second, then saw the blood and instantly leaped upon the quarry, viciously pulling at the armored back of the *houbara*. Isa kept shouting its name, and then ripped the saker away by its *spug* (jesses). Sultan bated frantically to reach the *houbara* still struggling in Abdulla's hands. Isa backed up and released the saker, which again slammed into the *houbara*. They let it have another taste of blood and then Isa dragged the falcon off and waited patiently until Sultan had regained the *mangala*. When Abdulla released the uninjured but frightened *houbara*, the crazed saker overtook it within thirty yards. Abdulla and Isa made in together as the falcon and the *houbara* tumbled in the sand and Isa slit the *houbara*'s throat.

Sultan ripped into the *houbara*

with an urgency that reminded me of the Biblical phrase, "the quick and the dead". Isa had clearly applied Abdulla's philosophy, "Don't feed the falcon one more day" and the falcon had done exactly what he wanted. As Isa fed Sultan exactly the right amount of meat so that the falcon would be ready to fly again in two days, Abdulla slipped a small square of canvas over the carcass and tricked it into thinking it had eaten all of the *houbara*.

I parked alongside the curb next to a cluster of expensive sedans and four wheel drives jammed helter-skelter beneath a grove of mature acacias in the older part of town. It was past 9pm, late for me but early for Shaikh Mohammed. I seldom enjoyed the refreshment of the Arabs' long afternoon naps. I found a doorway littered with loafers and sandals, enough Italian leather to buy a fine saddle, kicked off my footgear and walked on in.

The room was filled with Arabs, perhaps thirty people, half of which I knew. I walked straight to Shaikh Mohammed bin Khalid and shook his hand, even though I had visited with him at his *diwan* only that morning. We exchanged greetings and then I shook hands with the other two shaikhs in the room, both of whom were also named Mohammed. The rules governing the order of greeting were complex, involving both rank and age and I was never quite sure if I got it right.

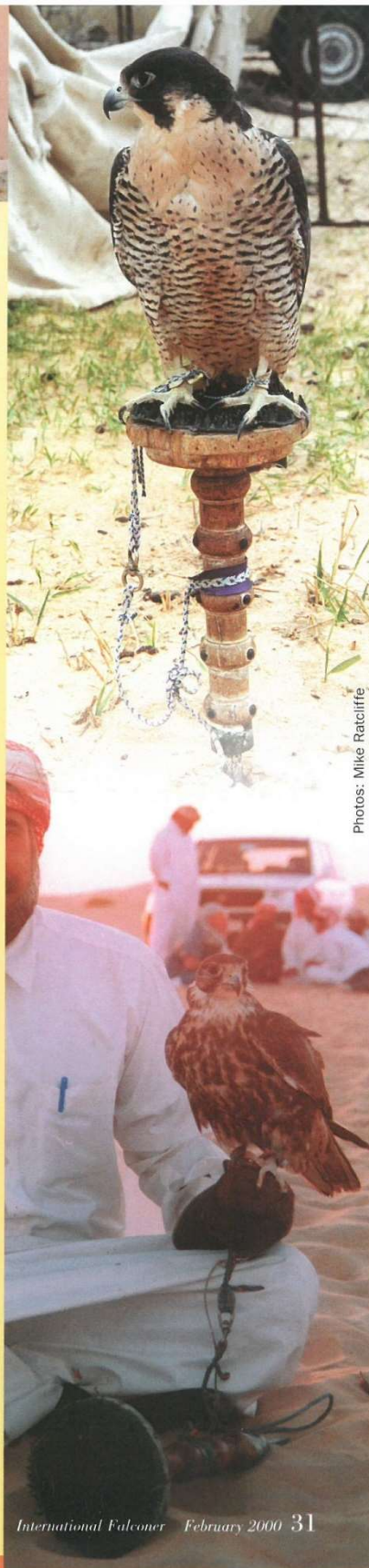
Shaikh Mohammed's *majlis* was functionally the same as Isa's, only larger and finer as one might expect. A luxurious carpet covered the floor and thick padded cushions surrounded the walls. Men lounged

on the floor playing cards, chatting or watching television. Several of the falconers carried falcons, new birds that would benefit from this noisy exposure to men. I almost didn't recognise the soiled saker, Sultan, with its new *burgha* and *spug*. A man I did not know was carrying it.

As I did not speak Arabic, I had long since learned to sit and watch. Mohammed bin Khalid was showing the others the new telemetry equipment I had brought, and I noticed several dozen hoods being passed around. Plans were being made for the hunt in Pakistan, which began in a few days. A card game was going fast and furious next to me with much shouting and slapping of cards.

I sat by myself and thought of the world in which Mubarak and Nassar lived. I sympathised with Mubarak's desire to train and hunt with a falcon he had trapped by his own hand. But tradition is a strong force and Nassar had done what he had to do. I knew the system well enough to know that Nassar and Mubarak would receive something valuable in return for their gift; perhaps a new truck or the opportunity to serve as a falconer to one of the ruling shaikhs on a hunting trip. And they would always enjoy the prestige of having trapped the falcon in the first place.

So as the three Shaikh Mohammeds eagerly laid their plans, I sat and sipped *chai* and thought about Mubarak. This year, I was going on the hunt as well and was as excited as anyone in the room. Perhaps I would see Mubarak in Pakistan and we could fly our falcons together...



Photos: Mike Ratcliffe



# THE NEW PARENT REARED

In the second of my conversations with Andy Reeve we fell to discussing the new goshawk. Or, as it often is, the first goshawk. Much has been written about imprint goshawks, especially social imprints. But this in-vogue topic was not on our agenda. Austringers still desire fully parent-reared hawks to provide their sport; there is even a chance of importing a wild-taken goshawk from Europe into the UK, provided you have the contacts, can handle the paperwork, and are prepared to make the journey to southern Germany.

These falconers may be traditionalists, the subject of much debate, which is why the training of such hawks is so fascinating when contrasted with imprints. Not that the traditional methods have been left unexamined, for that is what Andy has done. Distilling, as he has, his observations of others and then adding a few of his own. He would be the first to admit that little is ever original and nothing, except the character of the hawks themselves, is unique.

The concept is one of positive reinforcement: conditioning the wild hawk so that she comes to want to be with you without undergoing the stress that older methods invariably inflict. Sitting until exhausted with an hysterical hawk on your fist in the light of a



# GOSHAWK

The second interview with Andy Reeve by Nicholas Kester

flickering candle in the vain hope that it will eat, or better still sleep, is something that even T.H.White found onerous and unworkable. Veterinarian Neil Forbes, UK raptor specialist, has commented often on the levels of stress in these early days and it behoves our new austringer to minimise this.

So you have a goshawk, some ten weeks old, hard-penned and wild as, well, a hawk. You will subject her to one brief period of stress as you put on jesses, bells and tail mount. Attempt a brief but accurate weight. A semi-dark room with electronic scales and an LED display gives a fairly rapid read-out without the need for

fumbled weights and clanking counter balances.

Whether the hawk is actually fat at this time is something future weighing will reveal. As your eyass has been competing with its siblings for food, it is unlikely that she will need ensecaming like an intermewed hawk.

Anyhow, at this moment all you are seeking is a benchmark.

Put your hawk into the weathering; the design of which is critical. Some six foot square with three solid walls and a solid roof, the door should be at the front and also solid. The remaining two thirds of the front are weldmesh covered in thick green 'Netlon' - which serves as a wonderful see-through security screen and replicates leaf cover.

The distance from the house depends on your garden but it should be sufficient for spouses, washing, dogs and children all to be seen but not confronted. Place the perch in the centre, a bath and astroturf matting where you will be throwing down food.



Photo: Seth Anthony

That the next steps work is evidenced out by Andy's undoubted success with his last five hawks. In one case, a male goshawk, flew free and at quarry ten days following two weeks conditioning'. Twenty four days after being caught up. The process is food and security based with a whistle as bridging stimulus. "Do not," he says, "be tempted to overdo the personal involvement at this stage. Quite the opposite. Delay can be beneficial"

On the next day, with the hawk on the bow, walk down the garden advertising your presence. Sing (if you must), talk or whatever. Be alone. The hawk will bate. Probably behind the door to hide from you. Whistle, throw down food and leave immediately. Do this once a day for at least a week. (Sounds like a 'recipe', which it is.) Feed ad lib and of good quality - mice, rats, quail. If there is surplus, feed less and vice versa.

"Initially, it will be stressful," says Andy. "But not half as bad as being marched around on the fist in

the vain hope that it will eventually give up the fight and feed. After all, you intend to keep this hawk, barring accidents, for life, and that could be twenty years. To establish a negative bond for the sake of getting into the field a couple of weeks earlier seems desperately short-sighted."

During this week, stress will balance ad lib feeding. She will eat, possibly drink more yet lose weight until she comes to accept your daily visits. There is the chance that she will not eat at all for one or two days. No matter, it will come. Eventually, and you must be the judge, she will come to anticipate your arrival. She will hop down onto the food. Now is the time to lower the food quality.

Food is one of the things falconers often pay scant attention to. Andy weighs all his food with particular attention to quality. At the top of the scale is quail, rats and mice. Mid-way, chicks. Lower still, cleaned chicks. And at the bottom, rabbit. On the negative side is washed rabbit. So you have five levels before you need to reduce the

quantity. (Cleaned chicks means no feet, no skin, no guts. Run the result under a cold tap for a couple of seconds, squeeze and dry on kitchen towel.)

"Animals (and humans) grow accustomed to reduced rations and their stomachs adjust accordingly. By the same token you could eat grapes all day, feel full and yet the nutritional effect would be reduced - although your trips to the lavatory would increase!"

"The same applies to hawks and it must be our aim to go through the levels of quality before reducing the quantities."

Once the hawk is hopping down regularly, instead of departing immediately leave the door open, back off twenty paces and see if she will continue to feed in front of you for a few moments. If she does, increase the period and the proximity until she has eaten everything. And finally, during the latter half of the second week, if you are lucky she will jump back onto the bow perch and rouse in front of you. Time for



the next stage for which we might cut down the food a fraction the previous day.

Enter the weathering, with scales and food. Close the door on her safe environment. Pick up the hawk. Don't expect her to hop up. She won't, rather she will bate. Make it quick and let her settle. Pop her on the scales, get a weight and then open your fist to reveal food. It is Andy's experience that she will eat. But only wait five to ten minutes to see if this will happen. Any longer and the stress factor is increased turning a positive into negative reinforcement with a bate. If she eats, great. But on the first sight of nervousness or reluctance, finish, put onto the perch and leave. All food will now be taken on the fist.

Slowly, by using lower quality food reduce her weight in direct proportion to the enthusiasm to feed but still feeding as much as she will attempt to eat. It is Andy's intention that we fly this hawk as high as possible and that food is a reward triggered by the whistle, without the worry of low condition.

By the start of the third week, it should be time to move to the final two stages of training. The first of which is straight forward, traditional, on-the-fist manning. Initially with food. And jolly difficult this is. After all, your goshawk is so used to you that she will gobble food and then expect to return to a position of safety - the weathering. But with the aid of rabbit legs and other tiring this can be achieved. Have lots of company and don't be the only one to carry her. The more people she is with and the greater the variety, the steadier the hawk.

"The great thing is that we have not taught this hawk to bate off the fist," reminds Andy. "If you have managed the initial two weeks with care and consideration, your hawk will sit steady on your fist for as long as it has food. Then she will do the same without."

There is a huge temptation to expect the hawk to jump to the fist from the perch for a pick up piece. Andy recommends otherwise. "Firstly," he says, "the hawk will

bate towards you for food - and bating in the weathering is bad. Secondly, she will expect food whenever the fist is presented, something you are seeking to avoid in the field and which undermines your control. Step up to the fist is all you ever need."

During this manning period introduce the travelling box (you can feed into it but never out) and travel her to different places for manning and feeding. Go to a field, get her out, feed up and go home. Another time walk a bit but feed at home. Ring the changes. Again there are some simple steps here. More people makes for better hawks and avoids that moment of panic as the rambles erupt over the horizon like a flock of luminescent starlings sending the goshawk into the next county.

Andy reminds me of something I am particularly prone to: "We have a habit of hawking alone, but the best hawks, the ones that look good at field meets, have all hawked in company. So keep introducing other people and animals."

Now for the creance, something Andy believes people over-use. They also wait too long for a response from the hawk. The rule is onto the fence post, walk away, blow whistle, offer glove (with no food in sight). If you get an instant response, feed up and go home. You have achieved what you set out to - obedience not fitness. If the opposite applies and the hawk stays where it is. Walk back, pick it up without reward and go for a walk. Then try again. Hawks, especially goshawks, are highly intelligent. What you are teaching is instant response means food, lack of response no food. Teach it now, when you can quickly recover a hawk, and the period you spend standing under 50ft oak trees will be negligible. Hidden food creates variable reward, or no reward at all. Equally, quality food for good response has a better effect than washed rabbit. Hawks know when they are being fed crap!

When you can fly the goshawk at a reasonable weight in company from yourself to a friend or wife, you are ready to go hunting. Do not delay as there is a strong risk that she will

become difficult to enter - wedded to the fist. Conditioning has to result in instant response but not a reluctance to do more. So as you are manning her, watch what she is looking at. Does she bob her head at the rustle in the hedgerow, or is she constantly peering into the closed fist for food or worse still eyeballing every movement of your right hand in expectation of food?

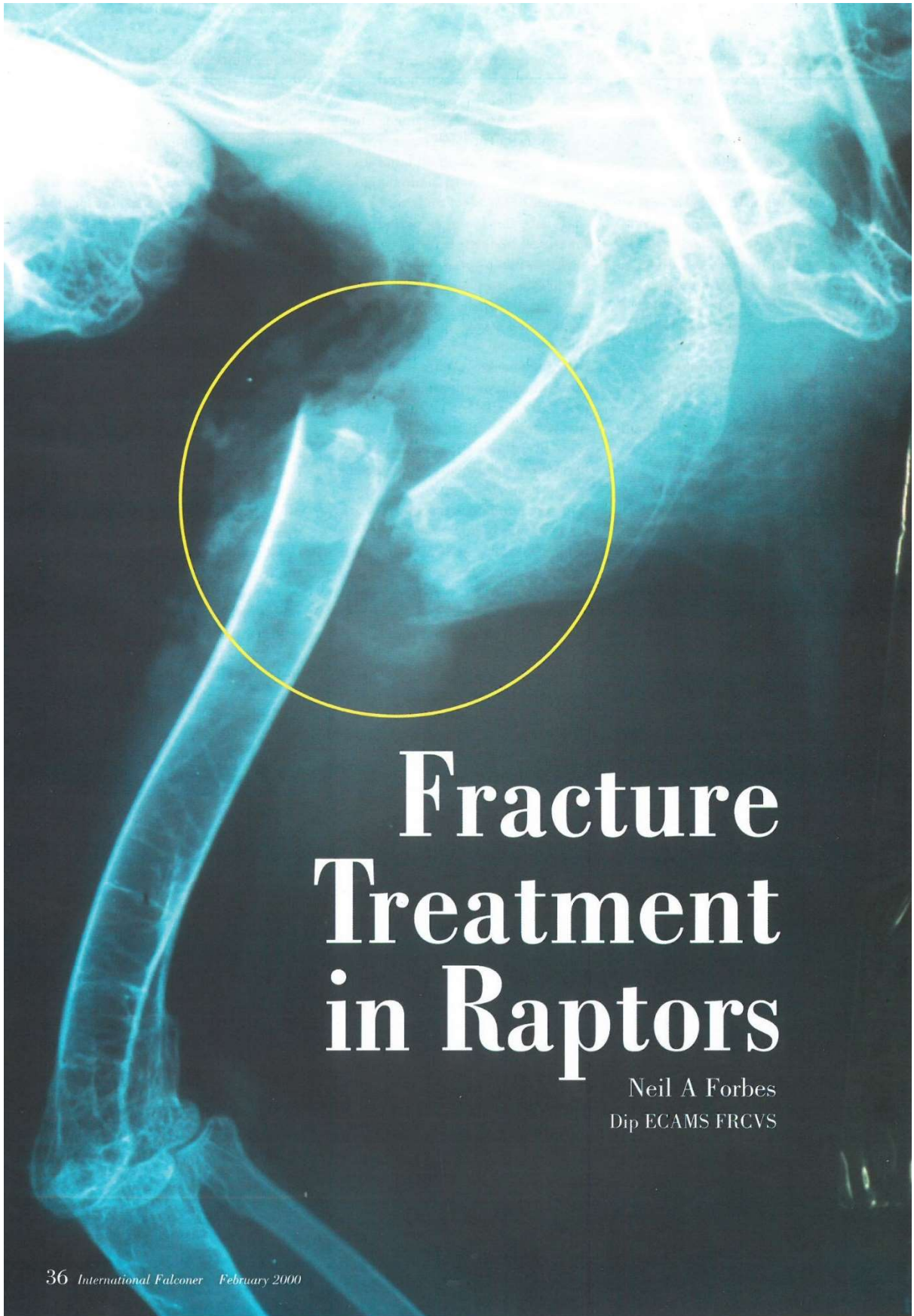
Variable reinforcement is the most exciting discipline of hawking. Dolphin trainer, Kees de-Groot, accurately compares it to a man playing a slot machine. He continues to play in the hope of a pay out - sometimes nothing, sometimes a small amount, and, occasionally, the jackpot. Here we have a goshawk that will come back to a seemingly empty fist in the hope that something is hidden therein: the choice that enhances the flight. You do not have the distraction of the hawk eating on the fist when a second flight might be available. Consider ferreting. The rabbit bolts, the hawk misses, lands on the ground and you offer the empty fist. Up flies the hawk, instantly. There is nothing to eat so she is at once ready when that next rabbit bolts.

"But there are exceptions to the rule," warns Andy. "Nothing is set in stone."

Your hawk is in a tree and a scrambler bike comes over the brow of the hill. Every austringer's nightmare. The chances are the hawk will be scared and may even fly off. At this moment, you wish to reinforce the safety aspect of your fist and this is when a lure comes in handy. Out it goes, down comes the hawk and onto the fist for reward. She will remember that in times of crisis you are a better bet than the distant tree.

Ready for the field? You should be. So what should we fly at, what field craft is needed, and why does the barometer become an essential aid to all falconry?

**To be continued.**



# Fracture Treatment in Raptors

Neil A Forbes  
Dip ECAMS FRCVS

**M**any raptors, both wild and captive birds are presented to veterinary surgeons for fracture repair. Wild birds of prey are one of the commonest groups of birds presented for fracture repair. Previous surveys of presented wild raptors (*Howard and Redig 1993*), have shown that 33% are likely to have suffered a fracture incident, of these 40% are likely to be euthanased on account of the fracture, 10% euthanased for other reasons, and 15% die spontaneously. The percentage of wild raptor fracture cases that are eventually released is 36% for closed fractures, but only 15% for open fractures. The author believes strongly that permanent flight impaired wild casualty birds, of any species, should not be maintained in captivity, but should instead be euthanased, (except in exceptional circumstances). The approach to an avian orthopaedic case, requires initial consideration of the following key factors, is it a wild or a captive bird, is complete repair and return of normal function possible, and what degree of functional disability is acceptable for the species and individual bird to live a compassionate future life. A parrot who is accustomed to life in a small cage, is not dependent on a perfect flighted wing, contrast to a falcon. One must consider: how did the fracture occur, was it caused by trauma. If so have any other structures also been damaged. Or was it a pathological fracture, i.e. occurring secondary to neoplasia (tumour), metabolic bone disease (incorrect Calcium/phosphorus/vitamin D3 balance, due to incorrect diet, parents diet or kidney disease), osteomyelitis (i.e. bone infection, in particular Avian tuberculosis).

Which bone is affected. Is the fracture compound (i.e. the skin broken by the trauma or a sharp bone splinter in which case infection is almost inevitable) or closed (i.e. the skin is still intact, infection is unlikely, hence healing and release rates are much improved). Avian

bones have thin walls and a wide hole down the middle. In consequence they are brittle and susceptible to shattering or splitting, and are surrounded by only a small amount of soft tissue, hence many fractures are compound (i.e. the skin broken - 62% of all wild raptor fracture cases,) (*Howard and Redig 1993*), soft tissues (i.e. muscles, blood vessels, nerves and tendons), especially of the wing are prone to drying out. Once this has occurred the tissues are irreparable. If the skin is broken how contaminated or devitalised is the fracture site. Is there significant soft tissue damage. Is nerve and vascular supply intact. There is no point in attempting a difficult bone repair, if the blood supply is lost and all the muscles are going to die. Does the fracture involve a joint or is it close to a joint (if so almost certainly the joint will be stiff after the bone is repaired, and despite physiotherapy, the bird may not be fully flighted). After due consideration, if the case is to be treated, rather than euthanased, the condition of the bird must be assessed. Fluid imbalances must be corrected, the patient stabilised, pain killers and antibiotics administered, prior to surgery. Generally it is preferable to delay surgery for 24 hours following the initial injury. The aims of surgery should be to:

- Treat contaminated or infected wounds.
- Preserve soft tissues, if necessary by applying splints or other dressings. In view of the extreme fragility of avian skin, and the small volume of soft tissue, special care is required in many cases to prevent the drying out of muscle and tendon tissues.
- To realign fractures or replace dislocations.
- To rigidly stabilise the fracture site, preventing any movement or rotation, (this may require a combination of surgical techniques together with a full understanding of the husbandry of the bird, such that it may be properly controlled during its convalescent period).

- Maintain full early function of all joints and tendons (to prevent joint stiffening).

- Return the limb to full normal function, without adversely affecting the healing process as quickly as possible.

An important point to remember is that wing amputee male birds are highly unlikely to ever successfully copulate. Leg amputee birds over 150 grams (5oz), almost inevitably develop bumblefoot or arthritis in their remaining foot sooner or later. In such cases the preferred option is typically to euthanase the bird.

#### Methods of Fracture Repair

- **External coaption** (splints, extension splints, bandages etc.): on occasions effective. But often the bone is not sufficiently immobilised, or a joint is deleteriously restricted leading to post repair joint mal function.

- **Internal fixation:** traditionally the method of choice, usually involving the placement of stainless steel pins down the length of the fractured bone. It is now recognised that the degree of surgical intervention and trauma should be minimised.

- **External fixation:** a technique which involves the placement of at least 2 pins above and below the fracture, at right angles to the length of the bone. These pin ends are then stabilised by a system of scaffolding, running alongside and parallel to the bone.

- **Hybrid fixator:** this system combines a single intramedullary pin, together with and fixed to an external fixator. This system gives tremendous post surgical stability, without necessarily causing much surgical trauma. This system is now considered to be the method of choice in many avian fractures, especially those of the humerus (see below).

#### Bone Healing

- In correctly aligned and opposed bones, repair is by endosteal callous, i.e. new bone forming within the centre of the bone.

- If not rigidly fixed, periosteal callous (on the outside of the bone) will also form
- Stable properly aligned fractures heal more rapidly than in mammals typically being fully stable in 3-4 weeks

## TECHNIQUES

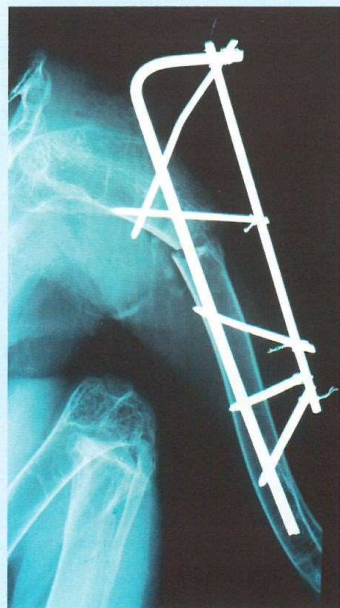
Surgical approaches for avian fracture repair have been discussed by Orosz et al (1992), Harcourt-Brown (1996) and others.

Orthopaedic techniques are very varied, depending on the bone, fracture type and the size and species involved. For surgical techniques the following references should be referred to (*Howard and Redig, 1994; Hess, 1994; Harcourt-Brown, 1996*).

**Thoracic Limb - Coracoid** (part of the shoulder joint) - If there is little displacement, especially in birds less than 250 grams (9oz), conservative treatment may be used, if the fragments are displaced, intramedullary fixation is required. The cranial pectoral musculature is elevated, a pin is passed retrograde, then after reduction of the fracture a blunt end is passed into the proximal fragment.

**Humerus (upper arm)** - This is the commonest fracture in free flying raptors. The humerus is pneumatized (i.e. air filled), being connected to the clavicular air sac. These may be repaired by single intramedullary pinning, stack pinning (i.e. several pins which helps to prevent rotation at the fracture site, or a hybrid fixator (see photo). The natural curve of the humerus, lends itself to pins being exited either proximally near the shoulder or distally near the elbow, without interference with the joints. When this bone is broken, the skin is often damaged, permitting infection to enter the fracture site, which will delay or prevent healing.

**Ulna & Radius (fore arm)** - 30% fracture only the ulna, 60% suffer fracture of the ulna and radius and 10% fracture only the radius (*Redig 1993*). These bones have little soft tissue support, the soft tissue being prone to drying out. In birds with a



fracture of either the ulna or the radius, if there is little displacement, box rest alone, (with or without support), is usually adequate. The bird should be able to move its wings but not extend or flap them fully, for a period of 2-3 weeks. If internal support is required, then a single pin placed down the length of the bone is usually sufficient. This is usually inserted into the ulna, gaining entry from the level of the 2nd or 3rd from last secondary feather, on the top - hind aspect of the wing.

**Pelvic Limb - Femur (thigh bone)** - these require surgical repair. The femur is pneumatized (i.e. air filled). Proximal femoral fractures may be repaired with a tension band technique. Proximal to mid shaft fractures may be repaired using single or multiple stacked intramedullary pins. The standard technique involves placing the pins into the bone at the fracture site, pushing them up the bone, to exit at the hip, then once the broken bone ends are apposed, the pins are pushed down into the bottom of the bone. Distal fractures of the femur may be repaired using crossed pins in a 'Rush Pin' technique.

**Tibiotarsus (mid leg)** - these are the commonest fracture of captive birds of prey. The fracture occurs at

the junction of the first and second third of the tibiotarsus, within 3mm of the fibula crest. Repair is most commonly achieved with either single or multiple intramedullary stacked pins, inserted at the fracture site, exiting at the front of the stifle (knee) joint, once the fracture is realigned, the pins are pushed down into the bottom section of the bone. Stack pinning (several smaller pins) is preferable to a single pin, as the combination of several pins tends to help prevent rotation around the fracture site prior to healing.

**Tarsometatarsus (lower leg)** - these fractures are commonest in nestlings with closed rings on their legs, if a twig becomes trapped between the ring and the leg. These fractures may often be treated using coaption (i.e. a splint), applied to the outside of the lower leg and then wrapped round under the foot. Alternatively an external fixator may be applied.

**Toes:** these are frequently broken in flying accidents or in bite wounds from squirrels etc. Any bird with a bite wound which also involves a broken bone, should receive suitable antibiotics for at least 14 days. Treatment of the fracture is with external coaption. However it is impossible to immobilise one toe alone, instead all the toes and ankle must be immobilised. A firm ball of cotton wool, or half a tennis ball (depending on size of the foot), is placed in the ball of the foot, and the toes are then taped against it. In this manner all the toes are immobilised. However, such immobilisation should only be permitted for 5-6 days, otherwise any new healing callous which forms is likely to entrap either tendons or nerves, and hence prevent future full normal use of the foot. After the initial 6 days immobilisation, the bird should be maintained in darkened accommodation, so that it keeps still. One wants it to flex and extend the toes, but not to knock them in any way which might upset the healing which is still on going. 3 weeks after the initial fracture, the bird may be free lofted or tethered again, although it should not be

flown at quarry or the lure until 4 weeks after the initial trauma.

**The hybrid fixator:** as stated above this technique combines a single intramedullary pin, together with and fixed to an external fixator. Although this concept is not totally new, it has been further developed and refined by Redig (2000). The single intramedullary pin may often be placed without even opening up the tissue over the fracture site, thereby reducing the potential for surgical trauma which can increase the chance of the loss of blood supply to sections of damaged bone. The aim is to maintain longitudinal alignment and stability whilst permitting rapid return to normal function of all joints and soft tissues (see photographs).

**Conclusion:** so we have discussed what your vet is going to do for your bird, but what should you do first. The bird is likely to be shocked and traumatised. It is good practice to give the bird suitable oral fluid therapy using a crop tube (at a dose of 10 ml/kg, which may be repeated after 2 hours).

The bird should be presented at the earliest opportunity to a suitably qualified and experienced avian vet, who will assess the bird, treat for shock, pain and infection and schedule surgery if required. In the meantime if there is any open or bleeding wound, a suitable disinfectant should be applied. If it is the bird's upper wing (humerus) which is fractured, then there is a risk that in flapping the fractured end of the wing may twist around through 180 or even 360 degrees, thereby restricting the blood supply and rendering the wing non viable. If possible the wing should either be strapped against the body, or the whole bird may be placed in a body bandage (e.g. 'pop sock', tubigrip, etc.), taking great care not to restrict the birds breathing at all. In essence the bird is placed in a tube made of material, it may be left so restricted, or additional holes may be made for the legs, beneath the cloaca etc., so that the bird can stand up.

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# The Pick

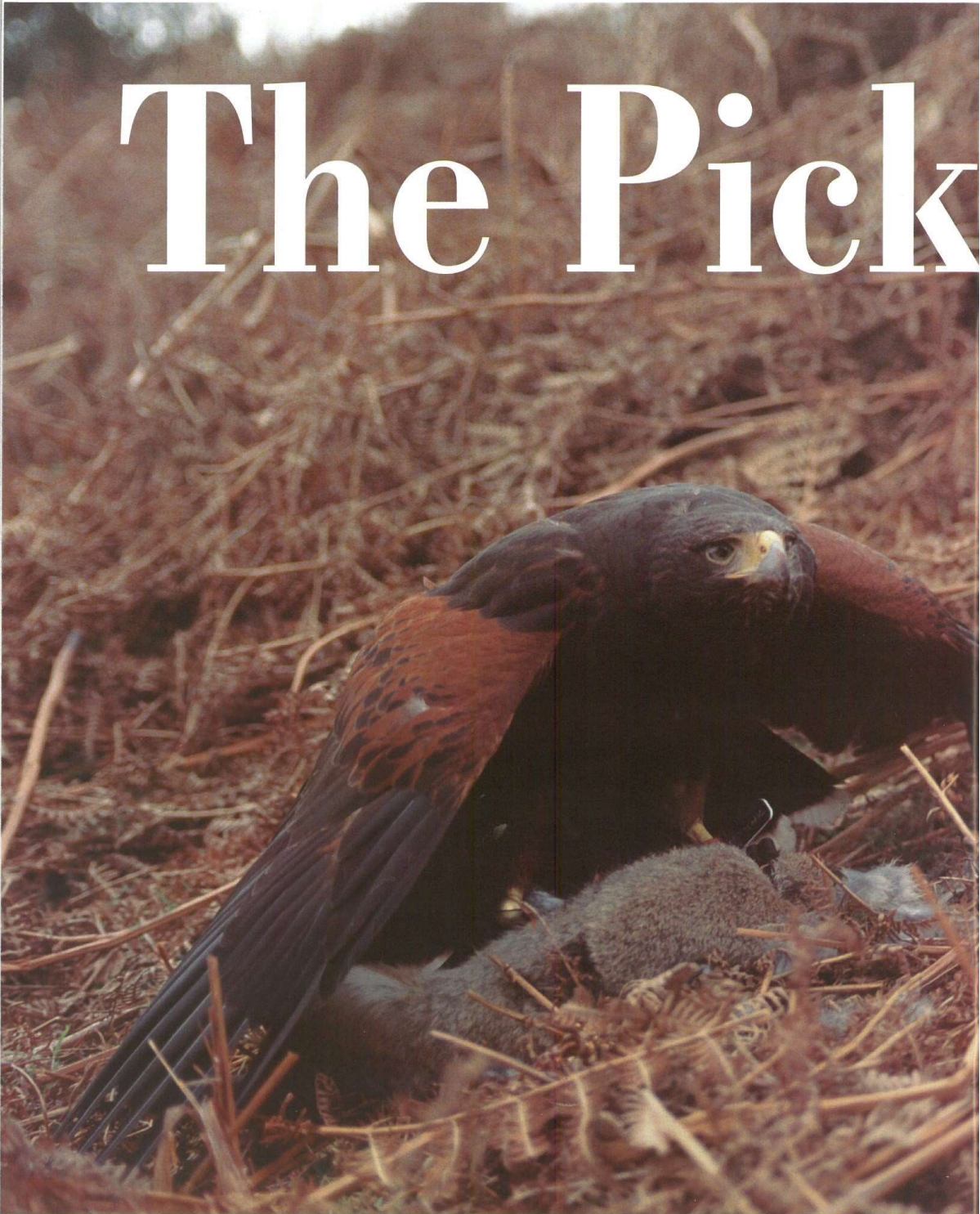
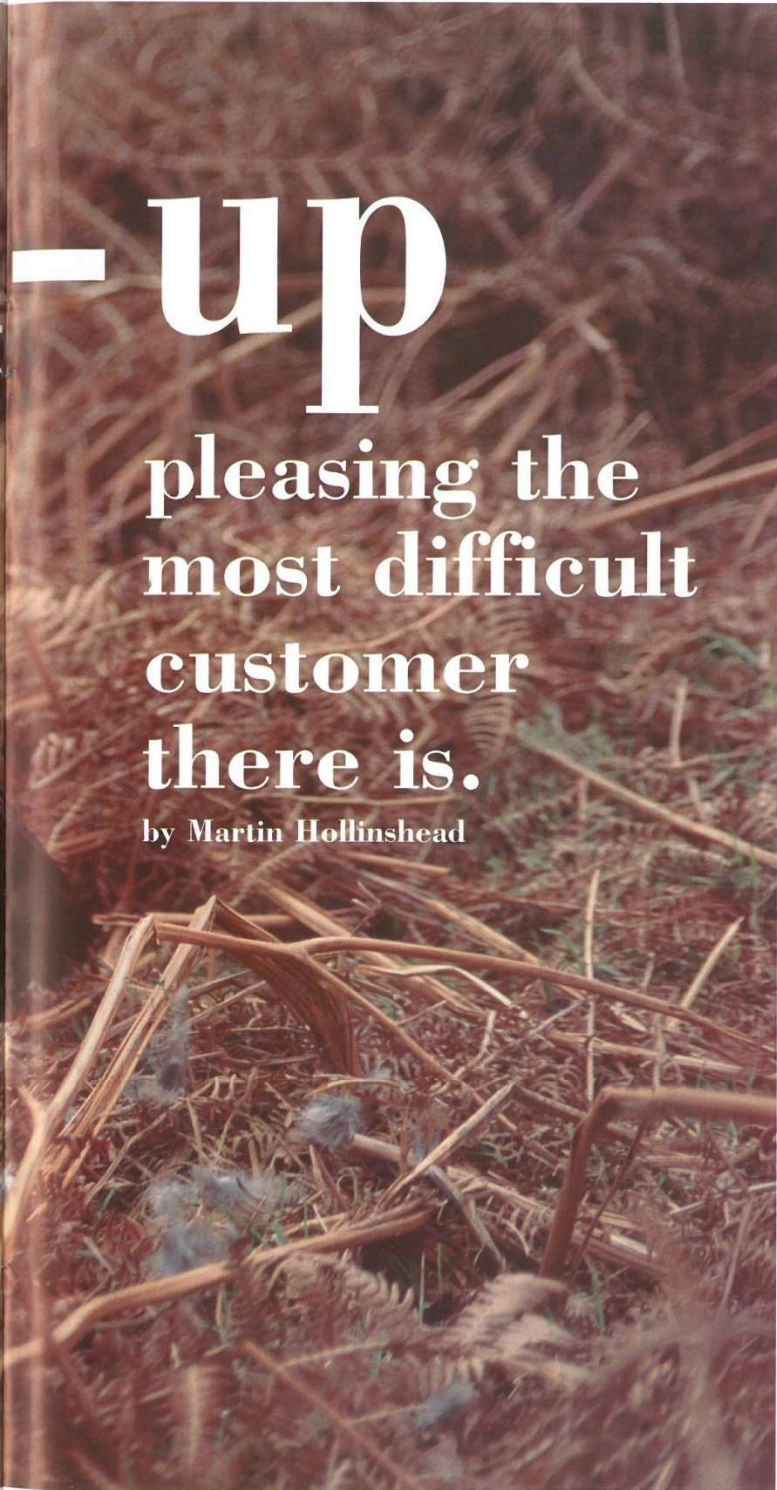


Photo: Martin Hollinshead





# - up pleasing the most difficult customer there is.

by Martin Hollinshead

It's impossible to progress through falconry and not develop a mania for some particular aspect of the sport. It might be a type of hawk, flight, or quarry. It might be a type of rearing or training, but, while trying to gain as rounded an education as possible, the hapless falconer will inevitably find that undoer of so many a sane person, obsession, inevitably showing its head. My own weakness is the pick-up. I'm absolutely enslaved by this area of hawk management. I can have the most dramatic flight, see my bird master the most demanding quarry, but unless I operate the very smoothest pick-up, none of it will count for anything. If I get the slightest inkling that I may not have totally satisfied my companion, I'd rather not have killed the quarry. I train with precision and I fly my hawks hard but everything revolves around the pick-up. A visiting falconer recognised the extent of the problem: "Your life must be a nightmare!" And the cause of all this misery is the Harris' hawk, for no bird in falconry requires more skill.

The Harris' views the pick-up through a magnifying glass - it doesn't miss a thing. It's no great task to forcibly rob a Harris', to bully it into giving up its prize, but achieving a smooth pick-up requires a good deal of thought. The pondering starts with a common misunderstanding about this species. While often considered a pushover in all respects, the Harris' is actually quite a complicated bird, and one that requires precise handling. It's all that fabulous brain-power that makes this so. As one associate put it: "They're a bit too clever for their own good." Closer to the truth is that they are a bit too clever for the good of most falconers!

The carefully executed Harris' pick-up is about striking a deal. However, a big problem for the less experienced falconer, or indeed, the falconer used to dealing with easier to bargain with species, is that the parabuteo isn't always easy to read;

when things are going *slightly* wrong the bird's displeasure is not always clear. The scrutinising and thinking-about is a quiet, difficult to detect thing. But rest assured, the mistakes are being logged and it doesn't take long before the bird registers that things are not being run fairly. The result is that the once easy to pick-up bird not only starts to be possessive with its kills, but also begins to show its lack of interest in other ways.

Normally the Harris' is a team player. It likes to hunt with its human partner. Group hunting is natural to it. But this is not a game it has to play, and, as kill-stealing creeps in, the bird decides it's time for a solo act. Now the once willing to please Harris', the friend, companion and free-following ally, needs to be constantly instructed and manipulated with food - *told* to do things it once did as a matter of course. The problem shows itself most strongly when things are at their most difficult. The bird that would battle over every hurdle, face the strongest winds, the most demanding terrain, just to work with its partner, now just can't be bothered. There is absolutely no question, top-quality Harris' falconry will only be experienced by the falconer who understands the importance of the pick-up.

### Feeding From Kills

It is often argued that kill-feeding makes birds possessive over quarry and difficult to pick up. The procedure is often reserved for novice birds or as a reward for an exceptionally impressive deed. My own policy is to do a lot of kill-feeding. I don't feed from every head of game caught, but I do feed the bird something from the last kill of the day or, if this kill doesn't come, let it take a reward from one of its earlier victims. This kind of kill-feeding, coupled with a sensitive pick-up, will create a problem only for the quarry - the bird will pursue it as if its very life depended on it.

### The Traditional Pick-up

The fundamentals of the pick-up

are the same regardless of the species being worked with: the bird must willingly give the quarry up, and be kept from seeing it, and therefore trying to get back to it once the transfer has been made. A silky-smooth operation is what's being aimed for. There are a couple of ways to achieve this. The traditional pick-up method in Europe is to offer the bird a glove-held reward, while concealing as much of the kill as possible with a hawking bag. As the bird comes onto the glove, the bag-covered quarry is moved over, or turned away from, and discretely moved by an associate or stowed away by the falconer. It's with this method that most problems occur with the Harris' - there are simply too many areas where things can go wrong. The falconer thinks he is being careful enough but the bird is noticing more than its partner is aware of, is still thinking about the kill, is giving that poorly concealed bit of leg or ear, corner-of-the-eye consideration. You can almost hear the bird thinking: *This isn't quite right but I'll go along with it anyway.*

Linked to the falconer's lack of watchfulness is rushing. Moving away from the scene of the kill too quickly is a serious error with the Harris' and gets it thinking again: *There's something definitely wrong here.* Now the seeds are sown and the result is a bird that starts to become reluctant to accept the transfer, eventually keeping hold of the quarry with one foot and the glove with the other. It's at this point that the less experienced falconer goes down the road of no return - he tries to force the issue. Now the bird knows it was right all along and is more determined than ever to hang on to its prize. The good Harris' falconer sees potential problems before they arise, and should he make a mistake, his corrective action is so fast and fluid that the bird registers no chance to object. The Harris' Master's real secret is that he lets the bird think it's running the show, while at the end of every performance he ends up with the quarry.

### The Reward Itself

The biggest sin with the Harris' pick-up is offering the bird too-small or too-unappealing a reward. Allowing the bird to calm down after its battle is perhaps an obvious action, but thinking about the reward, its size and type, is a less quickly grasped consideration. That said, it has to be recognised that the kill-fed bird, the bird that knows the joy of eating warm quarry, is obviously going to require more thought than a bird that is never fed from its kills. The carefully handled, kill-fed Harris', flying at a high weight, makes its feelings about what it considers an acceptable reward very clear. Hunger isn't making this bird respond for any old offering. Food-type is registered in a flash; from one offering it turns away, while for a similar-sized offering of a different type, it can't respond quickly enough. This bird would rather have a chocolate than a slice of bread!

It's surprising how the bird's liking for a particular quarry will play a part in all of this; one quarry species might be left quite willingly for what the bird considers a more desirable alternative, another might require extreme thoughtfulness on the falconer's part. Essential, however, is that one very important foundation stone is in place; the bird should never be allowed to gorge itself to a standstill on its prize. The bird must be programmed to expect to finish its meal away from the kill, and this can only be done by enticing it away while it is still keen to feed.

### The Ground-reward - The Harris' hawks' favourite

With the traditional pick-up or glove-reward transfer noted, the alternative and very successful ground-reward approach needs to be discussed. With this option, the dispatched quarry is held by the falconer and a reward is thrown down a little way off. To get the reward the bird must let go of its kill, which the falconer then quickly tucks away.

Before praising this method, I must draw attention to its limitations. For example, when hunting over thick undergrowth, something the Harris' excels at, a kill may be made in a patch where there is no room to use a thrown reward. Then what about kill-feeding? It's obvious that this method works best with a bird that is sitting on top of an unopened kill; compared with a thickly furred or feathered carcass, a bloody and easily consumed reward looks very appealing. Thus, although it is possible to train in such a manner that an experienced Harris' will leave an opened kill for a ground-reward (something I will be looking at shortly), this type of pick-up is at its strongest when being used with unopened quarry.

These limitations accepted, the ground-reward pick-up is without doubt the best routine for the Harris'; it provides the perfect market place for any bargaining that needs to take place. In possession of its quarry and not being glove-reward pressurised, it can sit and inspect the falconer's ground-placed offering and move when it wants to. Or not move, if that horrible bread is on the menu! If treated fairly, offered a tasty reward of sufficient size, a Harris' won't be able to leave its kill fast enough. The bird that has been educated to expect only the best of trades will leave its kills or drag them towards its trainer. And this desire is put in place and nurtured by never deliberately allowing the bird to break into its kills, it is programmed to expect its trainer's help, to see the furry or feathered bundle as almost useless without his help. For this bird, a trade makes perfect sense. If the quarry isn't going to be opened it doesn't want it. Much better is what its trainer's got!

Another benefit of the ground-reward is that it guarantees things don't move too quickly. As noted, the Harris' hates being rushed from the scene of a kill. When hunting free-flight fashion, the ground-reward bird can be allowed to nose around and satisfy itself that all the food has gone - and check the quarry isn't going to make some miraculous

reappearance! Having gone into a tree, it can even come down for a last look before moving on.

The biggest challenge the ground-reward has to meet is luring a Harris' from quarry that has been opened and partially consumed. How can any offering match what the bird has in its feet? As a dedicated rabbit and hare hunter, my own method is geared for dealing with these two types of quarry. All of my training is aimed at developing a bird that sees rabbits and hares as the most worthwhile prey available to it. And just as the quarry is specifically targeted, so too is the reward. Training and hunting orientates the bird to the quarry's head (essential when pursuing ground game), but all feeding takes place at the chest. A small incision made behind the quarry's shoulder will immediately grant the bird access to the vital organs of the upper body, a reward it will come to rank above all others. And with repetition, we soon have a Harris' that is only interested in these bits of the quarry. What then could be a more suitable ground-reward?

So we have the *what* part organised, now to the *how*. Let me use a rabbit hawking session as an example. The bird has caught one rabbit and has come off this (unopened) for a chunk of rabbit meat on the ground. After further hunting a second rabbit is secured and, with the light fading, it is decided to call a halt. Now, I open the rabbit the bird is sitting on and leave her to make a start on her reward. While she is thus occupied, I remove the reward organs from rabbit number one and stash these away ready for the pick-up. I now return to the bird to offer help and, depending on the hawking schedule for the next few days, give her time to eat some of the surrounding carcass. The gloved hand is then placed over the feeding area to cover any exposed flesh, securing the rabbit at the same time, and the reward is put on the ground just out of reach. Off the bird goes for her dessert and into the hawking bag goes the rabbit.

Let me underline the value of the

organ reward. While a well-trained Harris' will leave an opened kill, *even a very opened kill*, for all manner of rewards, NOTHING encourages it to move faster than its favourite trade. With other rewards, even those that have been especially selected to mimic the vital organs, there is often a bit of hesitation while the bird weighs-up the deal, and weighing-up is something I would rather not have.

Obviously, with single-kill quarry-feeding sessions things need to be handled differently. The reasons for such outings are many and varied; challenging quarry, tough battles, the falconer has to consider the demands on the bird and act accordingly. But one thing is sure, with no previous kill to take the final exchange from, the operation is a real talent tester. There are a couple of options. A suitable reward, taken from the victim of some other outing and frozen separately, can be used, or the reward can be sneakily removed from the bird's opened kill as it begins to feed. The latter is, of course, only feasible with the experienced bird who sees its trainer's bare hands as helpers, but it can be done.

A full account of rewarding Harris' hawks from kills and removing them without incident is found in my new book, *The Complete Rabbit and Hare hawk*, but let me emphasise that attention paid to detail is an investment that returns unimaginable rewards. When Harris' and human really pull together nothing is beyond them. It's true that my approach is rather elaborate and I recall one chap arguing: "Don't you make a fuss!" Well, my advice is, when it comes to the Harris', make a fuss, make a big fuss.

# Game Hawking

by Ray Turner

The gamehawking season is over; at least in Britain, and a month too soon for my liking!

The intermewed falcons were at their best, the falcons of the year had grasped the basics and knew their game, the falconers' 'eye' for quarry was laser sharp and well-proven strategies were consistently tuning his vision of how the flights should unfold into solid, tangible, reality; so when quarry still abounds and if the weather is kind, what falconer would not trade next September for this February?

However, I digress no further and begin this, the final part of a series intended to aid and abet the falconer new to lowland gamehawking.

Three of the quarries that sustain lowland gamehawkers have already been dealt with in previous editions of this magazine. The fourth, in no way resembles the pheasant, the grey partridge or the red-legged partridge, in life-style or appearance, yet fortuitously, as it often occurs on the same hawking-ground that supports the gamebirds, it does sometimes offer the falconer similar opportunities for a sporting flight followed by a slap-up meal. Arguably one of the most traditional quarry and now one of the modern lowland gamehawkers 'Big Four' - the mallard or wild-duck.

The flight at wild-ducks was popular enough and sufficient fowl

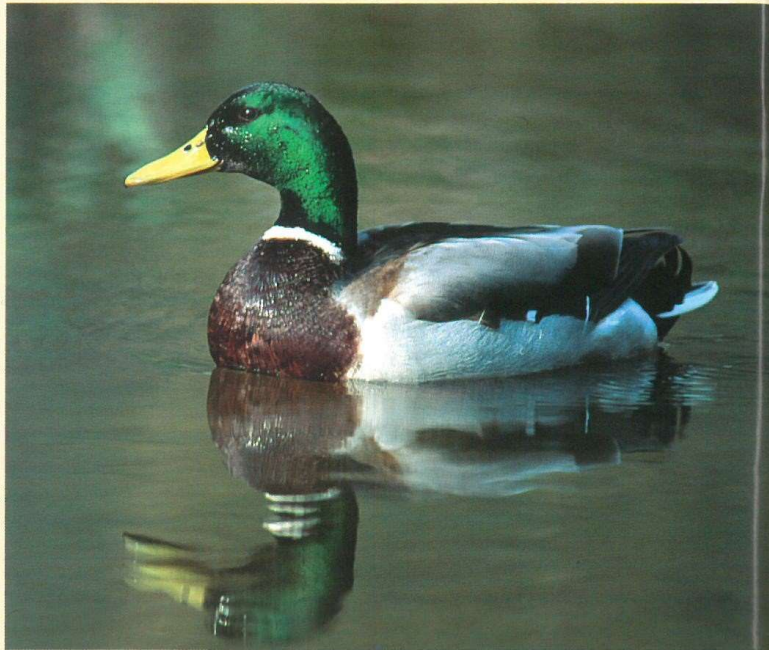


Photo: Seth Anthony

existed to make it worthwhile for our ancestors to maintain special hawks for the job; peregrins, almost without exception, often referred to as 'river-hawks' which differentiated them from the falcons that were flown mainly at partridges or pheasants and which were known, (perhaps predictably), as 'field-hawks'.

However, the modern falconer, unlike Latham the sixteenth century duck-hawker with three cast of river-hawks under his control, is more likely to have just one falcon in the mews and ducks may be welcome but only occasional chances for a flight with his falcon.

Fortunately, it is quite possible to stage flights at gamebirds and ducks using the same falcon as long as routine management procedures and interaction with the falcon remains consistent in the hawking-field.

Ducks present opportunities for a flight, whether on land or water, as

long as it is possible to bring the falcon over them and then to flush and out-manoeuvre them so that they cannot reach (or return) to the refuge of water before the falcon can strike or bind to one of them.

The falconer should bear in mind that ducks flushed under a falcon may make use of the cover of hedges and trees to shield themselves from the stoop of an over eager or less experienced falcon that has not learnt to 'track' ducks from overhead and not to stoop until the ducks have cleared these obstructions. If this seems likely to occur the falconer may decide to place one of 'the field' in a position from where he can at least try to keep a duck out in the open for the benefit of the stooping falcon.

Small ponds offer the best chance of success to lone falconers and inexperienced falcons. A large area of water invites ducks to remain on it

# Tactics

or make attempts to return to it when flushed and in this way they are able to frustrate and outwit the combined efforts of the team to take one of them over land.

Streams harbouring ducks usually demand that the falconer has assistants to drive the ducks out over land, prevent their return by circling back, up or down stream, or indeed from simply flying along the stream itself with the intention of dropping into the water just ahead of the falcon's grasping talons.

On occasions a falconer will be distraught to find that the duck he had spotted minutes beforehand is, now that his falcon is overhead, nowhere to be seen. Ducks are adept at hiding in, or escaping undetected from, ponds, streams or dykes and they are likely to take this course, if they have any suspicion that they are about to become the focus of a nasty conspiracy.

Mallard about to be flown from puddles, splashes or stubble fields

## TOP TIPS

1. Know your ponds etc. Negate obvious 'escape' routes. Enhance your chances for invisible and silent spotting and flushing routines in the future.
2. Check for ducks with extreme caution.
3. Cast-off your falcon at a reasonable distance from the ducks and allow her to attain some pitch.
4. Flush hard, with commotion and a great element of surprise.
5. A dog is good back-up.

should be treated with equal care as they are also likely to react similarly to 'suspicious circumstances' by departing at a time most inconvenient to the falconer. To counter this tendency every effort must be made to remain unknown to the ducks or at the very least unconnected to the falcon, until the

moment of the flush.

In past issues I finish with a real-life scenario taken from my own experience in the field and chosen to illustrate in practice one of the tactics that has been discussed in these pages.

## Tassa's First Duck

What's that? We can hardly believe our eyes! The Landrover stops abruptly (as abruptly as it can in the infamous sticky clay of our region). Yes, there is no doubt about it. Mallard, a drake and a duck, are paddling on the flooded track a hundred and fifty yards ahead of us!

Into reverse, and back we go. We need to think about this one. The chance has never occurred before (And it's not happened since the farmer has improved the drainage). We have never even considered the eventuality. The falcon has certainly never had a duck flushed beneath her.

It is not a good flying day. There is quite a gusty wind blowing, strong enough to cause problems, but at least it is a warm one and we have a little shelter from it, being in a shallow valley. We both know that we are going to fly them, come what may, and still would if the prospects were worse. The novelty is too much to resist.

How are we to tackle the situation? They look settled; they are in the open; and the wind is blowing straight from them to us. It looks like a case for the 'falcon follows Landrover' technique, but these are ducks, not partridges, and we have no idea how the sight of an approaching vehicle may affect

them. They may leave far too soon for a worthwhile flight.

A rivulet, running alongside the track on which we and the ducks both are, suggests a better way. It is really a deep ditch, deep enough to conceal a man, and is the obvious route for our approach.

We slew the Landrover sideways to conceal our exit from the mallard, and launch the falcon.

The ducks stay.

We feel keen excitement, but contain it. Our doubts that we were not far enough away have vanished. These ducks are not 'educated' to falconry. For them there is no *deja vu*.

Beyond the ducks, a 'green lane' bordered by a line of ash trees cuts across our muddy track and bridges the important ditch. The line of trees is also going to play an important part in the action.

The falcon makes surprisingly good progress into the sky. Something about the lie of the land or the warmth of the wind, unexpected by us, must be in her favour.

Very soon she has a good vantage, and it is time to slide into the ditch.

As the falconer walks along it, the falcon draws on with him. From time to time he directs his gaze

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skyward and notes with pride how she flies with attention to his progress. The wind direction allows her to make her turns ahead of the falconer, and by 'buffering' into it she is soon nearly over the ducks and in a commanding position.

If her presence is making the ducks anxious, their unease soon turns to horror as a man clammers out of the steep-sided ditch next to them. They rise into wind, as always, but not too steeply.

The falconer having drawn level with the ducks, the falcon is nicely upwind of them, high, and just beyond the trees. She appears to be perfectly placed. She does not stoop at once! Dismay and disbelief almost overwhelm us. She cannot be waiting in hope that they will turn and offer her a longer downwind shot at them. She has never waited in such a way before. She may be hesitating because they are unfamiliar, and, taking this to be the

cause of what is beginning to look like a refusal, we start shouting, or it may be screeching.

During the brief moments of her delay the mallard have gone forward until they are almost underneath her and heading up through the gap in the tree-tops where our track crosses the green lane. Soon, every stroke of their wings is going to force them further upwind of her. It may be that our persistent and desperate cries of "Hey!" do persuade her that the strange birds below are quarry after all, for at last she folds into her stoop.

It does not occur to us until the excitement has subsided and we are chewing over the flight that she may have been so sure that the quarry would 'put-in' amongst the trees in a moment that she did not bother to molest them until, to her surprise, they passed through the gap in the trees and appeared in the open on the other side.

The ducks do not hesitate. The moment before the stoop began they were climbing confidently, but now they shed height at once and veer across the wind, swinging away to seek the protection of a backdrop of trees, with the falcon falling and swiftly closing the gap behind them. The trajectory of her flight bends towards the ducks. The two arcs are drawing together. At the crucial moment, with only a few feet between them, all three sink from view below the tops of the trees.

Did she strike or merely pass over them?

A mad run through the mud of the track brings us to the green lane, through the line of trees and out beyond them. There we spy the falcon wrestling with the drake on the ground, sixty yards away up the hill.

When I try to, I am so hoarse I can hardly speak. I had no idea that I had been shouting so much.

# BOOK REVIEWS

## GYRFALCON

by Emma Ford

Published by John Murray  
London 1999  
Large format (280x330mm)  
Illustrated  
190 pages  
Price £65  
ISBN 0-7195-55140

Reviewed by Dick Treleaven

This handsome volume is in the grand tradition of the fine old books of the past; full page colour plates of paintings by a wide variety of artists and liberally sprinkled with quality photographs. It consists of eleven chapters: one by Professor Tom Cade on the Gyr Falcon's Adaptations for Survival in Arctic Regions, three by Robert B. Berry dealing with North American Falconry, Captive Propagation, and the end piece, an evocative 'no nonsense' description of a hunt.

Emma is quick to point out that the book it is not intended to be a scientific monograph on the gyrfalcon, but a celebration of it. Gyrfalcons have always been surrounded with the myths of bygone days; fact and fiction have been hopelessly interwoven. That it was a highly prized bird has never been in doubt. King's ransoms have been paid with them; but their prowess in the field has often been questionable. Their taxonomy too, has been repeatedly revised, and is still a subject for debate. The late Ronald Stevens was emphatic that there could be no connection between gyrs and sakers. Sakers, he said, were dry feathered wretches not worthy of their keep. (Somewhat curiously he later went on to breed from a saker crossed with a

peregrine.) Emma neatly puts every thing into perspective with a chapter devoted to discussing both problems and comes to the conclusion that it is all very, very confusing; in fact totally foxing. If she does not know the answer then she certainly knows of a man that does. She generously acknowledges, and quotes from the writings of: Ronald Stevens, Ernest Vesey (Lewis), Stanley Cerely and a host of others.

A key feature of the book are the copious illustrations, and in a chapter on the gyrfalcon in art we are treated to examples of the works of the great masters: Joseph Wolf, George Lodge and Archibald Thorburn (As far as I know Bruno Liljefors never painted any gyrfalcons). It was Wolf, who was the true renaissance man and set the path for others to follow. For me, one of the highlights in the book is Wolf's painting of the clamouring eyass Greenland gyrfalcons awaiting feeding. One of this series of three pictures was on show in the Moorland Gallery in the mid 60's. The superb colour and dazzling draughtsmanship created a wonderful sense of excitement and tension.

There is a great deal of difference between the art of bird painting and what is now termed wildlife illustration. The invention of quick drying acrylic colours has meant bird illustrations can now be reproduced with deadly accuracy and at great speed to meet publishers deadlines, as a result some times too little thought is given to the living bird. Falcons are recreated to a formula



and the images are crucified with the minuscule detail which the public now seems to demand.

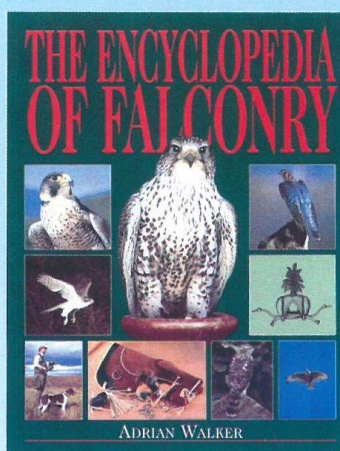
Andrew Ellis is a superb technician but occasionally his technique seems to almost suffocate the bird he is trying to represent. Antony Rhode's little vignettes are a delight to the eye and more relaxed and lively than some of his larger work. Lars Jonsson is as usual, brilliant, catching both the light and mood of his subject.

I spent many hours in George Lodge's studio in his latter years, and remember his advice. "When you think you have finished a painting, prop it up in front of you, light your pipe and all manner of improvements will come to you." Art and art appreciation varies with age. My generation will savour the old school of painters; whereas the young will fall at the feet of the new super wizards of the acrylic age. Happily, there is a vast range of pictures from which to choose.

An impressive amount of research has gone in to the preparation of this book. The printing and production are of the highest order. We have all waited a long time for it and the wait was well worthwhile. It is a collector's item in the making; a feast

of handsome paintings and exquisite photographs accompanied by a polished and informative text. The myth of the gyrfalcon has at last been laid to rest. Few of us will ever reach Greenland's icy shores or Iceland's snowy mountains; but we can now dream about them with renewed confidence - **unreservedly recommended.**

*PS. In 1960 Tom Cade found five Greenland falcons feeding on a dead cod, so never turn your nose up at Fish Fingers.*



## THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FALCONRY

by Adrian Walker

Published by  
Swan Hill Press  
Price £39.95  
ISBN 1-85310-997-5

Reviewed by Nicholas Kester

**E**ncyclopedias are a reviewer's nightmare for, in truth, they are not written to be read. Rather they should be delved into to answer a question or to settle an argument. So wading through interminable cross-references rather put your reviewer off the nuggets that this work inevitably contained.

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Indeed there are too many cross-references and yet most of them are necessary if the work is to be described 'comprehensive'. I just wish they were in a smaller font so that the eye was not constantly drawn to them. After a while they fill the page and detract from the core data.

Then there is the major omission: William Shakespeare who through his mastery of the English language turned the most mundane of falconry terminology into the beautiful and emotive verse. Why none of his quotes? After all he wrote during the golden age of falconry. A further weakness is the lack of humour in the work. Every school boy will know that 'bate' is what young Atkins flies into when he loses at conkers; that 'boozing' is what falconers do to drown their sorrows or to exaggerate their tales of hawking prowess. And what of the many other words that have come to common parlance from the mysteries of the mews and field? Scant mention, I fear.

Indeed, the language of falconry seems not to have grown with the years, but rather shrunk. How infrequently do we hear our falconers call 'Ho!' as she turns over to stoop on grouse or partridge? How rarely are austringers so named? What a tragedy it is that I find myself in the company of people flying 'Harrys' and 'reds'. Mea culpa for the occasional 'gos' but 'peri' has to be beyond the pale.

Our sport has a rich history and (omissions aside) it has been bravely captured in this book. Well illustrated - although quite why we need two photographs of falconry equipment and none of a goshawk in 'screaming yarak' - and painstakingly researched, this is a useful bringing together of all those glossaries that are the final appendix on every falconry manual ever written.

Such a labour must not be taken lightly. The appendix on diseases and ailments is fascinating but it is the final entry in the main text that warrants quoting here.  
*"A brefe Rule to a keep a hawke by for him that hath knowledge. Tyringe after fedinge Water and wether at her nedinge*

*After every gorge fasting  
With twice a week casting  
Makes her sound and long  
lasting"*

This from 1575. All you austringers learn and inwardly digest.

And it was then that I made my discovery. Readers will recall my bewailing in a review of *The Pointer and his Predecessors* that I could not find out who Stonehenge was and why should the author (Arkwright) so disdain his opinion. Well success within the pages of this Encyclopedia. Stonehenge was the pseudonym of J. Walsh, one-time editor of the *The Field*, who wrote *A Manual of British Rural Sports* in 1856. But then I did say that encyclopedias were for answering questions and not reading straight through. Point proven, I think.

## THE NORTHERN GOSHAWK, Ecology, Behavior, and Management in North America.

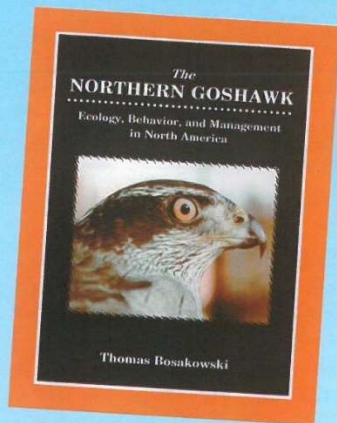
by Thomas Bosakowski

Published by  
Hancock House  
Price \$35.00  
ISBN 0-88839-454-3

Reviewed by Stuart Rossell

**T**his softcover 80 page book is well researched and written. It provides a mine of useful information for biologists studying this species and for North American falconers looking for an eyass to fly. Of particular interest to the reviewer was the mention of 'pepperspray for grizzly bears' in the list of field equipment! Also one wonders what the goshawks themselves are thinking when they approach a cassette recorder broadcasting tape recordings of their calls at over 100 decibels that can be heard by humans at over half a mile away! Do





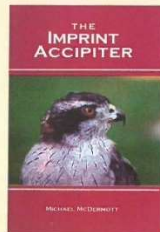
they expect to find a huge goshawk awaiting them. Having bred European goshawks in captivity many years ago I am grateful that the hawks themselves are not quite as noisy.

Breeders of goshawks will disagree with the '30-32 day' incubation period. In my experience with German goshawks it was 34 days. However, it must be noted that ascertaining the exact start and end of incubation while studying wild birds is notoriously difficult and in most books vague and inaccurate figures are given for many species. Perhaps this is an area where breeders can assist wildlife biologists more in the future. Also, regarding breeding behavior, there is much in here to help falconers understand the difficulty encountered in trying to get this species to reproduce in captivity. Mention is made of a 'dismissal call' which the female gives to the male before she commences feeding the young. In the confines of an aviary it is easy to see why some females become angry and aggressive towards the males when they are unable to leave. Falconers will, I hope, note that young goshawks sometimes remain dependent on their parents for food for as long as eight weeks after fledging while they are learning to hunt.

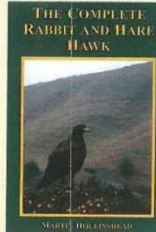
My only complaints are that some of the photographs are a bit fuzzy and that if you are not particularly interested in the subject it can, as do many scientific books, make for a rather dry read.

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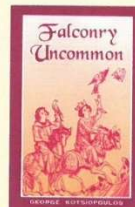
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# LETTERS

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.

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

## In defence of 'minority breeds'

Dear Seth

Derry Argue's articles should be essential reading for all falconers/austringers. Only by obtaining a better understanding of the canine mind can we ever hope to produce the perfect working companion.

I would like to take this opportunity to comment upon a point (no pun intended) he made within his last article 'Falconers Dogs, which, how and why?'

Derry stated "I would avoid the minority breeds. You could get lucky but the gene pool is generally too small."

As an austringer who owns, works and occasionally breeds a minority breed, the Hungarian wire-haired Vizsla, I have to disagree with this assumption.

Many of the numerically superior breeds here within the UK have suffered greatly through indiscriminate breeding. Sadly quality has been sacrificed for quantity and the desire to make a quick buck. I'm afraid many within our own sport have been guilty of this, simply putting two dogs together without even giving serious thought as to what benefits the mating would

produce.

My advice to anyone contemplating one of the minority breeds would be this. Firstly get to see an example of the breed in the flesh, you obviously have to actually like the look of them as you will hopefully be living with one another for many years to come. Contact and visit an owner who actually works his dogs, preferably a falconer/austringer. Go out and see the dog working in the field and ask every question, no matter how insignificant you might think they may be, regarding the breed's suitability as a hawking companion.

As for Derry's "You might get lucky", this applies to all breeds. Putting together two champion dogs is no guarantee that the progeny will follow suit.

The double standards sadly applied by many within this sport towards their canine companion needs addressing. Whatever breed you choose, do your homework.

Roy Bebbington  
Yorkshire, UK

## Heinz Meng - falconer and environmentalist

Dear Seth,

At the North American Falconers' Association meet this past November in Waverly, Iowa, I had the honor to introduce Heinz Meng our guest speaker and now I would like to take this opportunity to write something about Heinz for the international community about this special person. This year 2000 will be Heinz's fiftieth year as a professor of biology at the New Paltz university in New Paltz, New York. What has made Heinz so special to the falconry community in America is that he was

the first to captive breed falcons and to assist others across the country in breeding projects which last year saw the delisting of the peregrine, a miracle many falconers thought might never happen.

His work as environmentalist was so significant that our Auduban society nominated him one of the most important environmentalists of the century along with 99 other candidates. In a country such as America honors of this distinction are not easily won and all this from a boy who came here at the age of five from Germany.

Heinz Meng is a Doctor of Biology, falconer, environmentalist, father, husband but all of the above have a mundane ring to it without the real drama attached to his life. I should rather say that Heinz is an *'Excitator lacrimae rerum'*. This translates to *'he excites and tears for the nature of things'*. If you are in his presence you will demand to see more of him for this is how he will effect you. This is Heinz Meng.

Sincerely,  
George Kotsiopoulos  
Illinois, USA

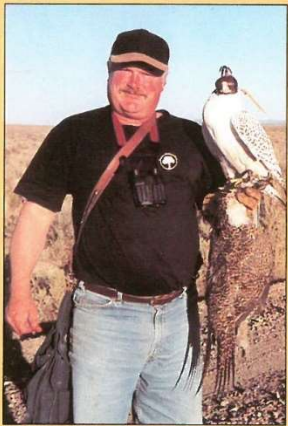
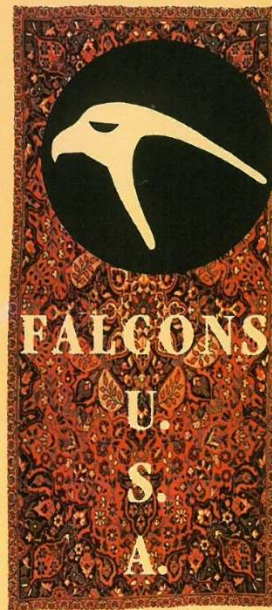
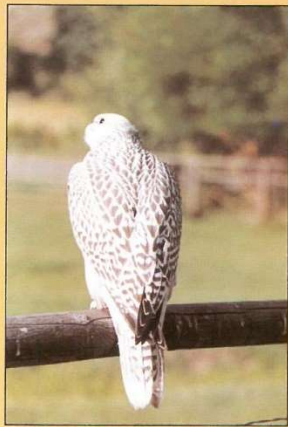
## Domestic breeding?

Dear Seth,

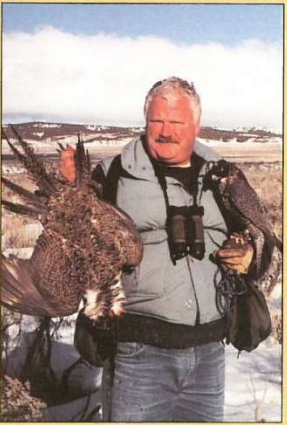
I thank Mr l'Anson for his comments in the last edition of *International Falconer*.

I agree that that the term 'Domestic Breeding' does sound a little less harsh than that of 'Captive Breeding'. However the former description would not be politically correct, as under international law no species of raptor, including hybrids, are classified as domestic.

Peter Gill  
South Yorkshire, UK



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