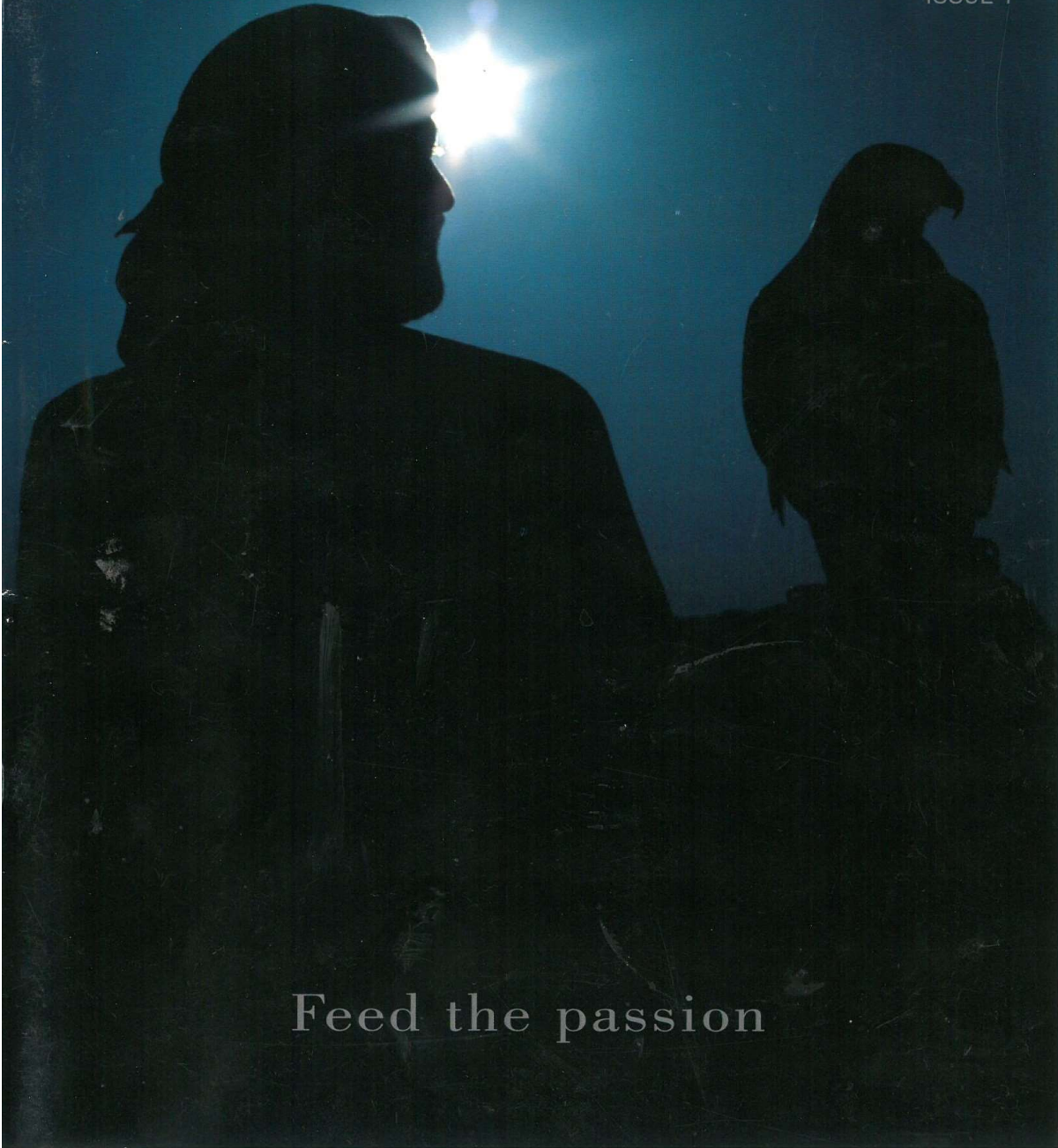


INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

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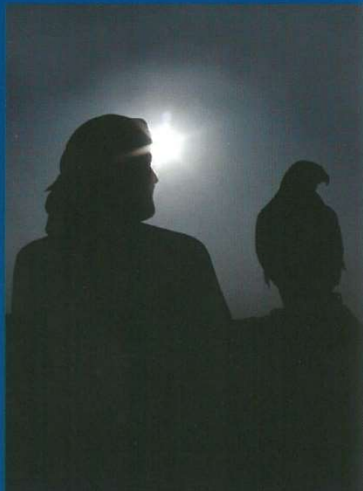


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Cover photo by Nigel Barton.

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the November issue of *International Falconer*.

I'm pleased to be able to feature another selection of great articles including the first one of a series by one of North America's most experienced falconers, Frank L. Beebe. It's a fascinating piece, about the capture of wild gyrfalcons and as you'll find out in future issues, one very special kind of gyr. Some of the manuscript contains observations and scientific material concerning the biology of gyrfalcons that has never been addressed before in a publication. All of the experience presented is real and Frank probably has more field experience in wild gyr capture than anyone else alive. I'm delighted that he should choose this publication in which to present his information and findings.

The new *International Falconer* website is now up and running, www.intfalconer.com - it's taken a while and there are still some more pages under construction but it's a vast improvement - take a look, we'd love to hear your comments. We also now have a Secure Server facility so it's easier than ever to subscribe, re-subscribe and order Back Issues.

In the meantime, hope you are having a good season and great hawking!

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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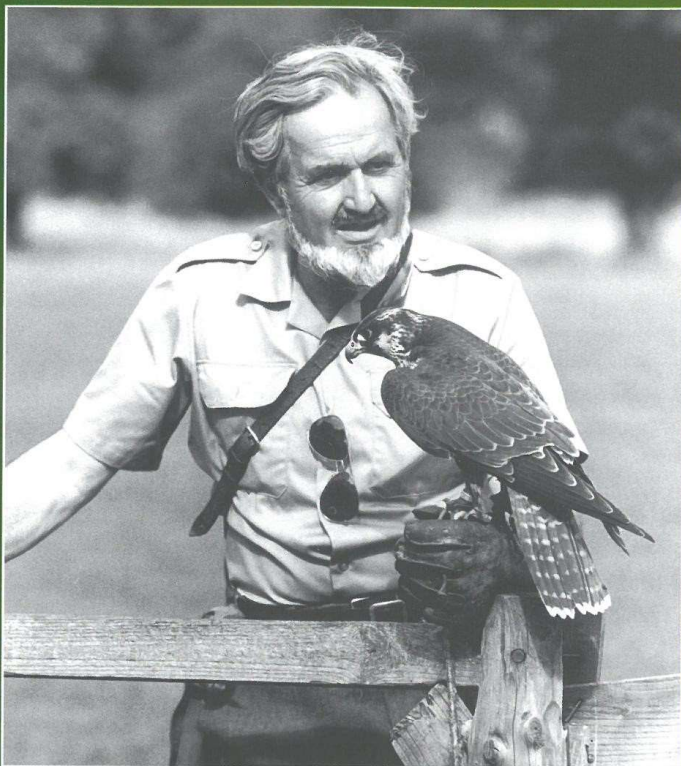
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INTERNATIONAL FALCONER



Photo: Seth Anthony

PHILLIP GLASIER: BORN DECEMBER 22nd 1915, DIED SEPTEMBER 11th 2000



In 1950 it was very difficult to find out how to train a hawk, and when I asked the late George Lodge, the celebrated bird painter for help, he recommended I write to Phillip Glasier and this is how I came to meet him.

Although he had the reputation of a man who did not suffer fools gladly he showed me incredible patience and kindness. I would turn up at his house in Salisbury and we would go hawking together. In those days he had a superb goshawk called Pru, a Cooper's hawk and a peregrine tiercel called Adolf. He would often fly all three the same weekend, largely for my benefit.

Phillip was a first class instructor and he taught me how to train and fly a goshawk, a sparrowhawk and a merlin, but I had to make kills with them before it counted. He would send me pages of closely typed sheets of manuscript paper going into great detail to answer all my queries.

Needless to say I was not his only pupil and he taught us all the value of using a weighing machine and to record weights in a book and draw graphs of our hawk's progress.

Phillip was a very busy man; not only was he a falconer but he was also a professional photographer and pioneered the use of high-speed flash to capture the image of birds in flight. He also supplied hawks, and more importantly falconry expertise for film companies appearing in several pictures with his friend, the actor James Robertson Justice. Latterly he made a number of TV commercials.

On occasion he would mimic his fearsome uncle, Captain Charles Knight of Mr. Ramshaw the eagle fame; this did not always go down well with his contemporaries. Like many falconers he held strong opinions and was inclined to argue vehemently with all those that crossed his path.

He was an accomplished writer and traveller (including a trip to Afghanistan) and wrote at least three successful books, the best known being *As the Falcon her Bells*, which became a Book Society choice. He was frequently invited to fly his hawks in front of celebrities in all walks of life.

His entire life was dedicated to the sport of falconry and he was instrumental in forming the Hawk & Owl Trust; a fact that is often overlooked. In 1967 he opened the Falconry Centre at Newent, Gloucestershire, England, which was yet another land mark in his career. It has now been renamed the National Birds of Prey Centre and flourishes under his daughter Jemima's capable management and is considered to be the finest raptor centre in the UK. He was a forerunner in the use of falcons for airfield clearance with the Royal Navy at Lossiemouth. He had an unrivalled expertise in the art of falconry which he freely passed on so that future generations might benefit. His early pupils owe a lot to him for his forthright, common sense advice.

He was a dynamic driving force in the field of falconry and was one of the first to realise that the weighing machine was an invaluable tool which you disregarded at your peril. He flew his hawks in the days when telemetry and Range Rovers were unheard of, and all that was needed was a hawk, a dog, wellington boots, a stout stick and unstoppable determination to take wild quarry. Phillip possessed all these attributes in full measure. He believed that falconry was about catching prey and not talking about it; but doing it, and he most certainly did just that. Phillip Glasier, falconer and parfait knight.

Phillip Glasier: falconer, author and photographer, (Born December 22nd 1915, died September 11th aged 84)

Dick Treleven Vice-President
British Falconers' Club.



Campaign For Falconry

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The Campaign for Falconry is presently holding its Grand Millenium Draw. Prizes include a life-size merlin in cold cast bronze by Allan Glasby (pictured left) and an original painting by Ron David Digby, along with a host of other items. Tickets are available at 50 pence each and the draw will take place at The British Falconer's Fair 2001. Contact the promoter Peter de-Wit on 01858 432257 for full details.

SORRY

The organisers of the South West Falconers Country Fair apologise for the late cancellation of the event. This was due to circumstances entirely beyond their control.

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PRESS RELEASE : Falcon Herpesvirus in the UK

Falcon herpesvirus is only considered to occur occasionally in the UK, with three published cases in the last 18 years. In this practice despite a large raptor case load, no cases have been experienced until recently. During August and September 2000, two separate unrelated outbreaks were confirmed on histology and virus isolation, there are similarities between the two cases which we believe should be brought to colleagues attention.

Herpes viral hepatitis has been reported in USA in owls (Green and Shillinger, 1935) and falcons (Mare and Graham, 1973), in Europe (Burtscher, 1965) and the UK (Greenwood and Cooper, 1982) and (Gough et al. 1993). The owl and falcon strains respectively, are antigenically similar and are both members of the avian *Herpesviridae*. Naturally occurring falcon herpesvirus has been described in the peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), European kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), merlin (*Falco columbarius*), red-necked falcon (*Falco chicquera*), prairie falcon (*Falco mexicanus*), and American kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) as well as experimental infection in long-eared owl (*Asio otus*), screech owl (*Otus asio*), great horned owl (*Bubo virginianus*) (Mare and Graham, 1973) and a barred owl (*Strix varia*) (Morishita et al. 1994). falcon, owl and eagle herpes viruses do not affect hawks (accipiters). The gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*), is considered to be particularly susceptible (Remple, 1995). Herpesvirus isolates from falcons, pigeons and psittacines have been compared by 'restriction endonuclease analysis' (Aini et al. 1993), finding that falcon and pigeon herpesvirus are similar but distinct from psittacine herpesvirus. Gough (1997) using the same test showed that some, but not all pigeon herpes isolates were similar to falcon herpes isolates. This finding supports the field observations that infection is thought to occur by ingestion, of infected prey species

(Graham, 1978), in particular pigeons (Redig, 1992, Aini et al. 1993, Morishita, 1994, Remple, 1995).

In both of the recent cases investigated by this practice, pigeon had been fed some 5 days prior to clinical signs commencing. In the first case the keeper fed spent racing pigeons. The latter pigeons were frequently transported to and returned from Europe. Lierz (2000) has shown that 35% of wild injured raptors tested in his survey in Germany were sero-positive for falcon herpesvirus. This is a surprising finding, indicating a high prevalence amongst free flying European birds. In view of this it is perhaps not surprising that pigeons flying from Europe might have been exposed to the virus and hence become carriers. In the second case the affected bird had caught and eaten a feral pigeon in the south east of England 5 days prior to the development of clinical signs. The catching and eating of feral pigeons by falcons has been recognised as a significant disease risk (in relation to falcon herpesvirus) in the USA and Middle East for many years, but has not until now been considered a risk in the UK.

The disease in falcons is usually peracute and rapidly fatal, with mortality approaching 100% (Graham, 1978). Clinical signs if seen are non-specific with lethargy, weakness, malaise, lime green staining of the urates and anorexia. A consistent haematological finding is leucopenia. In fatal cases the liver and spleen are grossly swollen, with small punctate lesions on the liver. Calvary inclusions are seen on histopathology.

Histological examination shows acute multi-focal coagulative necrosis in the liver and spleen. Small mainly eosinophilic intranuclear inclusion bodies can usually be observed in degenerate hepatocytes at the periphery of these necrotic lesions. Virus probably enters via the oral route and is subsequently excreted in body discharges. Some birds may become

The authors believe that the ingestion of feral pigeons by falcons in the UK may now present an unacceptable risk and should be discouraged.

carriers and remain latently infected.

Herpesviruses are sensitive to acyclovir (Zovirax. Burroughs Wellcome) (80mg/kg tid po for 5 days) and Baypamun (1ml/kg i/m 3x in 48 hours). In the case described above affecting the gyrfalcon, 5 in-contact falcons (peregrine, peregrine hybrids and merlin) were treated with acyclovir with the hoping of preventing further clinical disease. No clinical disease developed in the in-contact birds.

The authors believe that these two cases indicate that the feeding of spent racing pigeons (especially those flying in central Europe) as well as the ingestion of feral pigeons by falcons in the UK may now present an unacceptable risk and should be discouraged.

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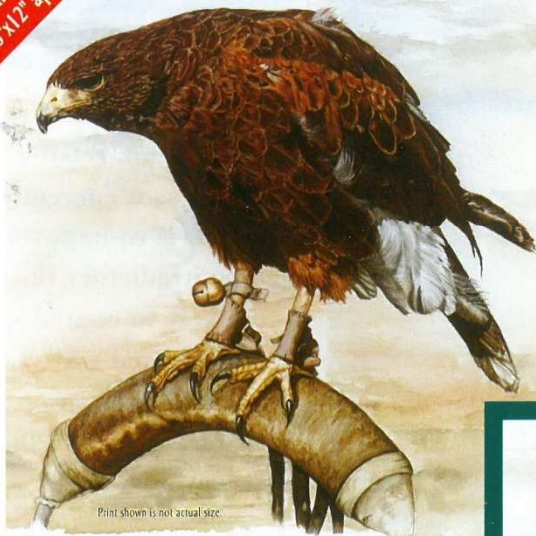
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The first in a series of three
articles by Frank L. Beebe

SUPER



Eventually my theme will really be about catching one special kind of falcon; this combined with suggestions relative to making some of the surplus first-year gyrfalcons of the North American population available to falconers. Before coming to this it is necessary to make the reader aware of the improbable international legal situation relative to falconry as it currently exists. It is so impossible and contradictory that it is unlikely to continue. To understand why requires a 30-year backward glance in the rearview mirror.

FALCON

PART ONE

In late summer of 1969 Hal Webster and I undertook a falcon-capture expedition by way of scheduled aircraft to Clyde River on the northeast coast of Baffin Island. The jurisdiction entered was the eastern sector of the Canadian Northwest Territories. No permit to capture falcons was required, or, subsequently to transport any number to anywhere else in North America.

Eastward of Baffin Island is the Canadian/Greenland border. In 1969 anywhere east of that border, right across Greenland, Iceland, and northern Eurasia, all the way across Siberia to the Soviet/Alaska border, any private capture, possession or shipment of gyrfalcons was illegal.

As of January in the year 2000, the 1969 situation, if not completely reversed, is close to it. In North America, every arctic and subarctic jurisdiction has statutory 'protection' of gyrfalcons. None issue non-resident live-capture permits. Four issue resident permits.

As of January of the year 2000 across all of the Euro-socialist arctic, Danish-Greenland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden there has been no change, but east of the Norway and Finland borders, all the way to Alaska, the historic trade in gyrfalcons and goshawks, including the prized east-Siberian white goshawks, has been resumed. Legally? I do not know for sure, but do know that wild-caught individuals of both species are again in use both as falconers'

Socialist governments, it seems, don't like falconers. Either that, or they consistently go to great lengths to support protectionist organisations that detest falconry.

birds and as breeding stock in Europe, Arabia, and the Islamic countries of Central Asia, just as they did for millenia prior to the creation of the short-lived and falconry-hostile Soviet-socialist empire.

This odd reversal is a legacy of a 20-year (mid 60's to mid 80's) Euro-socialist attempt to add North America and Japan to the (then) joint Euro-socialist/Soviet-socialist raptor 'protection' semicircle. This, had it been accomplished, would have completed, and welded by treaty, a circumpolar, socialist 'protection' ring, making the private capture or private ownership of all raptors illegal, by treaty, right around the entire world, north of approximately the 50th parallel.

The effort failed. In 1987 the attempt to add the North American sector self-destructed; this caused by the method of imposition attempted. 'Operation Falcon,' an undercover Canadian/American enforcement 'sting' had been fielded by misinformed Canadian/American wildlife agencies to destroy a propaganda-created, but non-existent 'organised ring' of North American falconers, alleged to have been smuggling

CITES treaty 'endangered' North American gyrfalcons into Arabia. The agents failed to find any 'ring' or any smuggled falcons, either. It is worth pointing out that The CITES treaty itself, around which the fake treaty-violation vortex was crafted, originated in a Euro-socialist convention in Stockholm. Additionally the gyr 'endangered' was also fake-listing; they looked enough 'alike' to 'endangered' peregrine falcons to debarr from international trade. Two years later, the Soviet-socialist Empire collapsed, destroying with it all legality of the Soviet-socialist 'protected' sector. Of the circumpolar socialist raptor-protection scheme, only the narrow Euro-socialist sector remains.

Yet the millions of public money spent on scientific(?) research, on the programming of wildlife officials, on 20 years of media misinformation, and on the arranging, hosting and orchestrating the conclusions of four raptor-protection international conventions, combined with the devious methods employed, to impose compliance; these have left a worldwide legacy of panic-passed legislations and regulations, coupled with a lingering and nearly universal official suspicion of falconers and anything pertaining to falconry.

This is why, in the year 2000, in most North American jurisdictions, the private ownership of seamless-banded domestic raptors, privately produced, remains stubbornly unrecognised, with the birds so

produced, being Federally or regionally regulated as 'captive wildlife.' This is why Australian falconry must be either deviously concealed in 'rehabilitation' projects, or otherwise kept disguised or secret. This is why, in New Zealand, despite the widespread common occurrence of a first-rate indigenous falcon, only second-rate harrier-hawking of European rabbits is allowed.

This is why British falconers, although having one of the largest natural peregrine populations in the world, have to endure a total dependence on domestic or imported raptors. Finally, and in relation to what I write here, this is also why no non-resident permits for live-capture of either gyrfalcons or goshawks are as yet available from any of the six Canadian arctic/subarctic administrations. This is why - but it is not a good reason why. Neither is it good common-sense administration.

Socialist governments, it seems, don't like falconers. Either that, or they consistently go to great lengths to support protectionist organisations that detest falconry.

Anyway, the legacy of this failed crusade pervades falconry 2000 everywhere. It left behind a tangled foul mess of shredded treaties, failed treaties, and propaganda-spawned prohibitions and regulations, these all panic-passed by surprised, misinformed politicians and frightened bureaucrats, most of them to protect equally false 'endangered' peregrine falcons. But they do clutter and still make legally hazardous, almost everything concerning gyrfalcons too.

By far the most curious and lasting legacy of this effort to protect all raptors from falconers, (which was what the whole thing was really about) and this a legacy that can be neither mitigated or

altered, has been on the future of the most intensely targeted subspecies itself.

Following the Madison conference the eastern half of the North American mid-continental subspecies of peregrine *F.p. anatum*, was officially declared 'endangered' (under the United States Endangered Species Act).

To 'save' this officially endangered subspecies, the entire, worldwide species, *F. peregrinus*, was then debarred from international trade by a 'red' (endangered) 'lookalike' (CITES) listing (and gyrfalcons too)

Then to 'restore' the CITES 'red' listed 'endangered species', the (*anatum*) subspecies was sacrificed. It must, and will, eventually, cease to exist, as originally described.

Puzzling? Ambiguous? Contradictory?

But true. Because of the singularly un-scientific way this fragment of the SPECIES was 'restored', all mid-continental North American peregrines now inherit a defineable legacy from the 'restoration' of the eastern American population.

The legacy is this: No matter how many living individuals of the original named subspecies, *Falco peregrinus anatum*, may still be alive, and these, as of 1999, officially E.S.A. (not CITES,) declared no longer 'endangered', yet the subspecies so named, is ... well 'it', *Falco peregrinus anatum*, singular, symbolic, and sexless, while officially off the American E.S.A. list, it is, nevertheless, doomed. Doomed just by the certainty of the eventual death of all remaining free-living individuals bearing the original unmixed gene-code.

So 'it' - (the entire free-living North American subspecies) faces certain, continuously spreading, genetic contamination or dilution;

whichever of the terms an individual mindset favours. The political solution to the scientific screw-up appears to have been made; an administrative declaration which makes the 'restored' population, a mix of at least 8 intermingled, intercontinental, sub-specific gene-codes) officially *F.p. anatum*, regardless. This as of August, 1999, and that's finished! Which is as good a political solution to the scientific impasse as possible.

So as of the year 2000 then, all North American mid-continental peregrines are quite as irreversibly genetically mixed as all of the Eurasian and Afro-Asian peregrines must have been for centuries. Also because this American mixing was funded, and so implication-approved, by both the American Federal government and the (American) National Audubon Society, well now, private falconry on both sides of the American/Canadian border would appear, from here on, to be a lesser threat to the biological integrity of any other North American species or subspecies, than does government-funded and approved scientific meddling.

So what really did happen here to bring about such an obviously counter-intentional result?

Under American Federal Environmental law, immediately following an E.S.A. 'endangered' listing, the funding of a 'recovery' programme of some kind is mandatory. Now in 1965, in both of the two primary funding agencies, there was a deep and, in its own way, logical, administrative mindset, that surely, if the large falcons could be captive-bred in any substantial numbers, this would have been accomplished centuries, even millenia, back in time, and domestic falcons would be, by now, as common as dogs. So it sure



Chilkat Pass by Frank L. Beebe

couldn't be done.

Supportive to this administrative certainty, and significant, is that during the undercover phase of 'Operation Falcon,' every enforcement agent involved appeared to have been saturation-programmed to this conviction. This error in thinking was so universal that the total failure of any programme based on hypothetical releases of hypothetical domestic-bred falcons, was an administrative certainty.

To fund such a programme, therefore, could not threaten the political agenda. It would serve to divert the interest and energy of falconers and falcon researchers, and could be terminated after a decent interval, at any time deemed appropriate, because it was just a waste of money, anyway. Accordingly it appeared to administrators to pose no threat at all to the politically-precious 'endangered' peregrine.

This supervisory mindset was swiftly proved wrong. The government-subsidised breeders were outstandingly successful in both their breeding and establishment techniques, if not in the purity of their science. This ongoing success was either stubbornly not acknowledged or the implications not realised by the funding agencies until much too late, and of course, in big government agencies such errors must never be admitted.

Here the look back ends. What follows is about catching gyrfalcons, about a fascinating, unstudied aspect of their natural life, and about some falconry-related opportunities concerning them, coming in sight, not far ahead.

There is currently a political-economic situation in Arctic Canada that could become of important and lasting interest to falconers. The vast area north of the

There is currently a political-economic situation in Arctic Canada that could become of important and lasting interest to falconers.

60th parallel, extending from the eastern border of the Yukon Territory to the west coast of Hudson's Bay, and including the entire Canadian high-arctic archipelago, has been politically divided in two. The division became official and the two areas became separately self-governing in 1999. The eastern area, primarily Inuit-inhabited, is now named Nunavut; the administrative centre on Baffin Island, formerly Frobisher, has been re-named Iqaluit. The western area, primarily, native-Indian inhabited, retains the name of Northwest Territories, with Yellowknife as the administrative capital.

The aspect of interest to falconers, is this: Both these areas of climate-limited natural resources have attained full regional political control of their wildlife. In the older, Yellowknife-administered area, there is already an unfinalised use-plan under consideration that includes gyrfalcons and goshawks.

The concept, as outlined to me, is non-commercial and eminently common-sense workable. It simply includes these two raptor-species in the recreational hunting system already in place; excepting that these species, to be legally 'taken' must be captured injury-free, instead of being killed as 'game' or death-trapped as are 'fur-bearers'. Following a transfer-of-ownership 'capture' or 'live-trophy' payment, the licensee will be free to leave the jurisdiction with a designated number of the legally-acquired raptors.

To be feasible, any such capture

fee would require regular adjustment to keep it competitive with (somewhat below) domestic raptor prices for the same species. There appears to be no intention of permitting any immediate falconer-access to nestlings.

Obviously any successful initiation of a programme of this kind in any one of the arctic/subarctic Canadian administrations would be followed by competitive programmes in most of the equally resource-short others, and there are more. In addition to Nunavut and Northwest Territories, there are: Newfoundland-Labrador, Quebec, Manitoba, Yukon, British Columbia and Alaska.

Impractical? Not at all. Look at this: Four of these jurisdictions, all western, also produce grizzly bears. My question, (to them) is this: By what number, does the annual continental production of first-year gyrfalcons exceed the annual continental production of grizzly bears? Gyrfalcons have a continent-wide reproductive range, produce two or three young annually and have a reproductive lifespan easily twice that of the bears. Grizzlies have, at best, a total land-area range less than half that of gyrfalcons, and reproduce, at maximum, one or two young bi-annually.

Administratively, the question is relevant. In 1999 British Columbia alone issued a total of some 1,500 non-resident and resident trophy-hunter permits to kill grizzly bears. Three other western Canadian administrations (Alberta, Northwest Territories, Yukon) also issue grizzly-kill permits in similar numbers. None of these issue any non-resident permits for non-injury live-capture of first-year goshawks or gyrfalcons and most of them don't even permit resident capture. Is there not something uncommonly lacking in common-sense in this

picture?

The historic capture of gyrfalcons, prior to the mid-twentieth century, was an extremely miserable and hazardous occupation; a profession so beset by cold, hardship, mishap and peril as to match any other high-risk occupation of antiquity, short of mercenary soldiering. The rewards were in the extremely high prices received, coupled with the upper-class associations so readily available to anyone who could provide a perishable product so difficult to obtain, and so prestigious to acquire. Yet the Monarchs, Princes and Landed Gentry that could afford such a prize, wanted no part of the hardships and hazards involved in obtaining them. That kind of thing, in the time of Princes and serfs, was deemed as work more properly

assigned to a somewhat lower class.

So the annual outfitting of the northward-bound expeditions to capture gyrfalcons was considered essential, it remains in detail, a sadly ill-recorded, part of historic falconry. Further, in at least one aspect, the Monarchs, Princes and Nobles had missed something; because the actual catching of gyrfalcons is very exciting and great fun. Which exciting aspect, if the high classes knew or guessed of it, was completely overwhelmed by the hardship. This was encountered primarily during the painfully slow months of northward travel to reach the open arctic landscapes of the falcon's breeding and summer range. Somewhere between 700 and 1,000 straight-line miles, one way. All by horse-drawn sleighs convertible to wheeled wagons (for the return), if overland, or if by

water, aboard, tiny, close-confined goat and sheep laden, stinking sailing vessels.

Contemporary travel, whether by air or motor vehicle, is so incomparably different as to make this formerly, utterly miserable wild-capture part of gyr-falconry just a fascinating side-aspect of a larger adventure. There is certainly now no reason why any falconer who considers the capture of his own wild gyr to be an integral part of a complete falconry experience, should not aspire to do so. Providing only that some of these falcon-rich northern administrations can be convinced of the economic benefits they are missing.

TO BE CONTINUED

NO ONE GOES TO THE LENGTHS WE DO

The advertisement features a collage of images. On the left, a falconer in a dark jacket is shown in profile, holding a falcon on his gloved hand. In the center, a close-up of a dog's face is visible. On the right, a man wearing a white thobe and a ghutra is operating a radio. The Marshall Radio Telemetry logo is positioned on the left side of the collage. The background is a light, hazy sky.

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FALCON TRAPPING -



A SPECTATOR SPORT

Story and photos by Mike Ratcliffe

It was 5:30, and sunset and the call to prayer were fast approaching. I'd just arrived at Adil's camp for the weekend. As I began to unload my bedroll, Hazzam pulled up alongside and called for me to jump into the ancient, open-topped, lightweight Landrover. Sweeping aside the cigarettes, pigeon harnesses, binoculars and other contents of a falcon trapper's vehicle, I jumped in.

"Throw it out when I tell you" he said as he handed me a harnessed quail.

I'd known Hazzam for a few months now and knew he didn't suffer fools lightly. This, combined with the fact that I had only just arrived for my very first weekend of falcon trapping, meant that, as the quail nestled in my hand, nervousness accompanied a feeling of anticipation. Reputation is all among the Bedouin and I was beginning to get the feeling that mine was at stake again here.

As I tried to plan trajectory and wind direction, the vehicle created its own tempest as Hazzam headed straight across the flats to a dune headland at a speed Landrover had not intended 20 years ago when the car was new. The hooded barbary on a perch in the back hunched forward to counteract the backward drag.

As we rounded the dune, a large raptor rose from the ground and in response to Hazzam's shout, I threw the quail in its general direction. Hazzam did a smart turn about 100 metres further on and, as our dust was swept aside, we saw the quail land and the raptor wheel with interest. As she made a couple of exploratory passes, I started to calculate her species, size and

"Hazzam was also well known for some of the best leg pulls going but, surely, given my inexperience, I'd be a pretty drab feather in his cap."

value! I knew that the best passage sakers caught last season had raised upwards of \$20,000. This bird was about the right size but . . . it was a buzzard.

Hazzam was also well known for some of the best leg pulls going but, surely, given my inexperience, I'd be a pretty drab feather in his cap.

As the buzzard decided that this indeed was a freebie, and bound to the quail, Hazzam eased the vehicle forward and told me to get the *jebeli* (barbary falcon). I reached back, resigned to being the butt of humour for evermore and found the barbary untethered. She came up onto the glove with practised ease and, as I pulled her to me, I loosened the battered, ill-fitting hood.

After letting the buzzard get comfortable on her kill, Hazzam gunned the vehicle forward to bump her off it. As she rose with the quail snagged to her talons, Hazzam shepherded her away from the dunes and onto the mudflats.

With a confident smile he turned to me and said,

"OK. Unhood her."

The barbary pushed my hand and the hood aside to be on her way. Within 100 metres, she'd overhauled the buzzard and bound to the quail she was carrying.

Within seconds Hazzam was busy disentangling the buzzard from the clutches of the barbary and the harness.

As he walked round to the other side of the Landrover and caste off the buzzard, he pronounced his *jebeli* ready for the falcon trapping season!

The southward migration of raptors and their prey follows preordained paths. One of them crosses the Red Sea coastline of Saudi Arabia between 40 and 180 kms south of Jeddah. This area is well known among Saudi falconers and trappers as Majerma in the south and Shuaiba in the north. For hundreds of years many of the sakers and *calidus* peregrines, traditionally used by Bedouin sheiks on the Arabian Peninsula are trapped here. The area attracts trappers from as far afield as Qassim and Riyadh, but for the most part, trappers these days move out of their houses in Jeddah, Bahrah, Taif and Al Lith to pitch their camps on the low dunes with which the *sabhha* or coastal mudflats are flanked. The area, which is largely the province of a few Bedouin herdsman and their flocks for the rest of the year, becomes a seething mass of companionable humanity for the 6 weeks that span the migration, the last week of September, all of October and the first week of November. It represents so many positive things on the Saudi hunting calendar. It marks the end of the 40+ Centigrade temperatures and the extremely high humidity levels of the summer months. It marks the return of thoughts of hunting and the return to the Bedouin life that hunting represents. It marks the reaffirmation of the traditional web

of affiliations and patronage that gets the finest passage females to their new owners among the hunting elite.

The encampments soon dot the area in densities that often see an encampment every 150 metres. 4X4s, ranging from the stripped down and decrepit to the top of the range Cruisers, are everywhere. Each encampment is home to flocks of domestic pigeons to attract passing raptor attention and sheep to celebrate success. Vehicles are all equipped with binoculars, guns, falcons, harnessed pigeons, doves and quail, held in ingenious boxes designed to enable easy access and undisturbed nylon slip loops. Each vehicle usually starts the 6 weeks looking pretty neat and tidy with everything in its place. By the end of the first week everything has usually found its own place in layers on the floor. Each encampment has at least one *jebeli* or in a few cases a *wakri* (lanner) trained, like Hazzam's, to take its food, from another raptor.

The area becomes a focus for itinerant story tellers, free loaders and tradesmen. Pigeons, *jebelis*, guns, binoculars, harnesses, sheep etc. all become the subject of lengthy and enjoyable negotiation. Wild-trapped desert hares, *kairowan* (stone curlew), sandgrouse, quail and even hyena pups (for some local tribes the hyena is considered a delicacy with promise of a shot in the arm for your sex life!) are brought up to the area from as far afield as Yemen.

Gossip and intrigue form the staple diet of all – absolutely no need for the tabloid press here. Always regarded with suspicion among the Bedouin, privacy, has no place here. There is a constant flow of humanity from encampment to encampment and with it 'news' travels fast. It became a commonplace for me to call in on a friend in an encampment 40 km from the one where I was staying and find that they'd heard all about a leg pull that had taken place in

“Gossip and intrigue form the staple diet of all – absolutely no need for the tabloid press here.”

our camp only the night before and to find that they had heard it 10th or 11th hand!! Money and affiliation are often in conflict. Each would-be trapper has affiliations through patronage, tribe and association with potential falcon 'buyers'. When a falcon is trapped, the patron should be approached first. Only if he doesn't want the bird, is the trapper free to negotiate with any one of a number of 'buyers' who are camped in their midst or dealers in Riyadh or the Gulf States. Decisions have to be taken quickly as mobile phones are everywhere at the scene of a trapping. Decisions taken at these scenes have long term repercussions in Saudi's complex system of patronage. One young trapper from Al Lith who was tempted to sell a passage tiercel *calidus* peregrine without reference to his Jeddah based patron found himself dismissed from the encampment and all patronage cut off including the battered Toyota he was driving. Only representations from myself (who had put in an unsuccessful bid for the bird!), Hazzam and his family over the course of 2 weeks secured his reinstatement to favour. The tiercel had to be retrieved from its new owner and ceremonially offered to the patron who formally assured him he was welcome to keep it.

The routine for the serious trappers is a relentless one. The dawn chorus of desert larks is preceded by 4x4 engines throbbing into life. The trapper begins cruising a favoured area as the sun rises, glassing the area for the ground-roosting falcons. With

breaks for prayers and occasional *chi* and *gahwa* they continue their search until around 11.00, when they return to the encampment in the hope of finding lunch in the making. Sleep follows lunch and then back out there from 14.00 until sunset. Days will be relived by homing in on other people's 'finds' to witness the trapping, failures and triumphs and, if they are really lucky, a sighting and trapping of their own. In 1996 and 1997 only around 30-40 female sakers and peregrines were trapped each year and perhaps a similar number of tiercels. In 1997 I tried to make a count of how many trappers were in the area. Having discounted the 'hangers on' like myself, I stopped counting at 500 in an area of 40 by 15 km! Occasional attempts are made to locate roosting falcons by lamping at night and this is also used as an opportunity to use casting nets to trap groups of ground-roosting sandgrouse and doves. In the past fixed location pit traps were used here as they still are on the Gulf coast. The number of trappers and the decreased number of migrating falcons make them untenable these days. In 1997 an elderly trapper in Ras Tanurah, whom I later got to know, trapped a nice passage *calidus* peregrine using a pit hide and a decoy tiercel *jebeli*. He had sold it within minutes on the mobile for just over \$20,000.

With so many people operating in one area with a single objective, it is essential to have ground rules. Protocols for 'claiming' a falcon, 'seeking assistance' and 'settling disputes' have been established over the centuries and fine tuned for the moment. Elderly, experienced trappers from as wide a range of tribes as possible are recognised as arbitrators in disputes.

My first visits to Majerma had been with the intention of doing a bit of trapping on my own. I soon discovered that nobody does anything on their own and that trapping falcons was a spectator sport. Anyone doing a bit of

trapping must expect to be watched by 30 or 40 experts and judged on each decision he makes. I had neither the expertise nor the nerves of steel required.

In October 1997, I was staying at the encampment of Ghazzi bin Riddin and was out looking for 'the big one' with Khalid in his Landcruiser. It was around 16.00 in the afternoon when we suddenly became aware of cars racing in one direction in the distance. Within minutes, Khalid had the Cruiser up alongside a friend's vehicle and we were getting the news. Mohammed Al Oyun had found a nice passage *shaheen bahri* (*calidus* peregrine). Easing the car down onto the hardtop mudflats we raced along behind 2 or 3 other vehicles all headed in the same direction. As we arrived on the scene we all pulled up and glassed the area.

A cluster of cars with Mohammed's Cruiser out front shimmered in the distance. Between them and us was a perfectly flat expanse of mudflats with shallow standing water covering most of it. Although we couldn't see the falcon, it wasn't difficult to figure out where it was.

Cautiously we skirted the water giving the position of the falcon a wide berth. As we approached the cars from behind we were marshaled into place, forming a line of 15 vehicles, later to grow to 24. All vehicles faced inland with Mohammed's vehicle about 50 metres in front of us. We could just see a falcon like shape distorted in the heat waves rising from the mudflats. She seemed to be sitting in the shallow water but was actually perched right on the water's edge. The spectators were all parked within a metre of each other and discussion centred on events so

far and the best method to proceed raged in rasped whispers up and down the line of vehicles – CBs crackled and mobile phones rang. Other vehicles were approaching from behind the falcon just as we had done, but each immediately stopped to assess the scene and the 'marshal' on the end of our line flashed his headlights once and the left indicator repeatedly to indicate that they should go round to the left.



It seemed that Mohammed had already tried, unsuccessfully, to tempt the peregrine with a harnessed pigeon. He now turned his vehicle very slowly to the right to give his brother-in-law the opportunity to throw out a harnessed dove. The dove flew low over the water and passed within a few metres of the falcon. She gave it a bob or two of interest but didn't intervene as it headed for the distant dunes. A crescendo of

muttered disapproval and I-told-you-sos rippled from car to car. After much more debate and an exchange of opinion between the 'marshal' and Mohammed, they decided that she might be tempted by a quail. Given the lightness of the quail, everyone recognised that the peregrine would be able to carry it a great distance and that to follow in a direct line, Mohammed would have to drive straight across the

extremely treacherous shallows. Only the hard 10 – 20 cm crust of the *subhka* carried the weight of the vehicles. During the summer months it made a near perfect driving surface. Within a few days of an area being covered by water, the surface became treacherous and stories were legion about heavy Cruisers being irretrievably lost in the grey mud beneath the surface. Discussion raged as to whether Mohammed would be more sensible to withdraw and approach the falcon from the landward side. The danger here would be that the bird would take the quail and fly in a big semicircle over the water to land further up or down the coast. If she flew out of glass range, she'd be lost. Another possibility would be to switch to a lighter vehicle that would be less likely to break the surface and bog down. Finally, Mohammed decided that he would

retreat about 25 metres to give him a run up at the water and have a friend serve up the harnessed quail from Mohammed's current position. The cars exchanged place gingerly. The falcon seemed unperturbed as she basked in the setting sun.

A new excitement was now being passed along the 24 vehicles and their occupants. It seemed that a middle-aged Bedu in a battered Toyota pickup positioned next to the 'marshal' was disputing

Mohammed's claim to the falcon.

All discussion stopped as the quail was cast and flew towards the falcon. This time she couldn't resist and with no more than a dozen beats of the wing overhauled and bound to it. Silence reigned, as she settled and, after a casual look round, began to pluck

it. As soon as she began to eat, Mohammed began his run across the flats and into the water straight towards her. As he neared the middle of the water and with only 50 metres to go she lifted into the air and at least 40 pairs of binoculars were focussed on her feet. She had the quail, but were her talons firmly snagged in the nylon loops of the harness. As the car appeared from a storm of water on the otherside, Mohammed's brother-in-law could be seen with a *jebeli*, hooded on his fist. Just as he reached to unhood her, the quail fell to the ground. Mohammed swung the vehicle in an arc away from the fallen quail and all glasses were on the falcon. She circled lazily in the distance before looping up onto the high point of a low dune about 200

metres from the dropped quail. Mohammed drew his vehicle to a halt a similar distance to one side and everyone waited with baited breath. For the next 15 minutes the spectators devoted their time to reaching an irritable consensus as to which actions Mohammed should take next.

Mohammed tried her again with another harnessed dove which she ignored. Finally, with a lazy glide, she covered the intervening distance and resumed her meal. Waiting once again to give ample

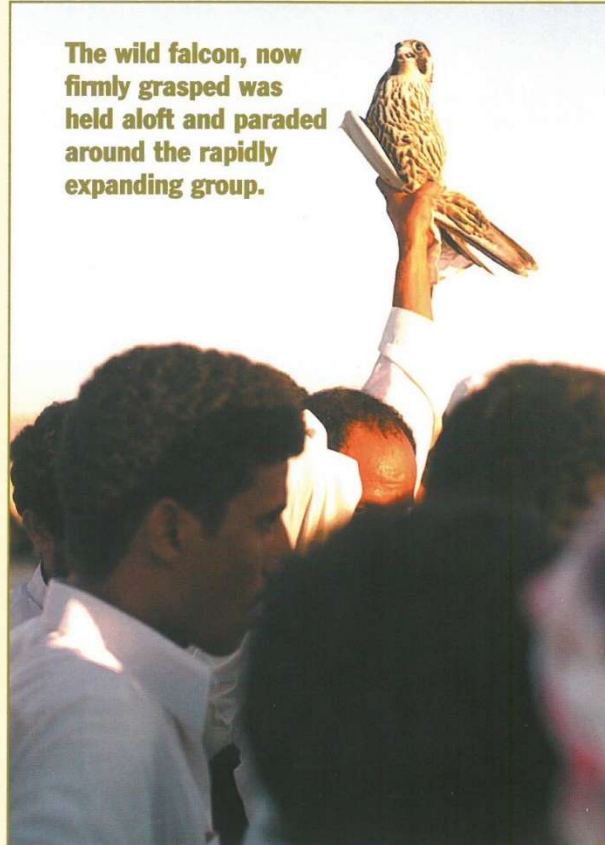
opportunity for her talons to become snagged, Mohammed drove the car in directly towards her. Once again she took wing and once again she carried the quail with her. This time the *jebeli* was slipped with alacrity with us all still guessing whether she was snagged or not.

As we arrived on the scene, we found Mohammed and his brother-in-law on the ground disentangling the mess of falcons. An elderly relative who had been in the back of the car was doing an *Ardha* (Dance of celebration holding a mock sword above his head). Within seconds

they were engulfed in an excited mass of men. The scene looked for all like the pitch invasion at the end of the Cup Final with the wild falcon, now firmly grasped, held aloft and paraded around the rapidly expanding group.

In amongst the excited shouts a discordant, high pitched voice made its mark as the angry rival claim was made. The claimant was engulfed by spectators to hear the claim. It seemed that the claimant had spotted the falcon first in the morning and had staked his claim in the standard way by flashing his headlights as he did a complete 360 degree turn in the vicinity of the spotted falcon. He had made various

The wild falcon, now firmly grasped was held aloft and paraded around the rapidly expanding group.



Cars revved all round us as the *jebeli* made in on a falcon at least twice her weight. As she bound to and dragged the wild falcon to the ground, the braver followers ploughed across the water in Mohammed's wake. (Later, when the excitement had subsided we found that 5 of the 11 vehicles that had taken this route were stuck in the mud. (The last of them was still there when the tide came in and swamped the interior.) This was Khalid's chosen path and we made it!

attempts to ensnare the falcon during the morning, had been unsuccessful, but had continued to track her as she moved around during the course of the day. As he came up with her sitting at the water's edge, he had seen Mohammed staking his claim by flashing his lights. Regardless who actually trapped the falcon, his prior claim should be recognised. The tribes of the two claimants were common knowledge and an elderly trapper of another tribe was persuaded to step forward and act

as arbitrator. He immediately asked for witnesses of the earlier claim. No one stepped forward but the claimant angrily identified two of his fellow tribesmen, who were not present, as witnesses. A young lad was despatched to their tents about 8 kms away to fetch them. In the meantime the claimant ranted at Mohammed who remained quiet and reserved; apparently happy to rely on the decision of his peers. Others questioned the claimant, who was from a small coastal tribe not noted for their falcon trapping, about the methods he had tried to use to trap the falcon. His car was found to be unusually ill equipped for the task. He argued that he was going to ask someone to help him trap the falcon in exchange for a share of the sale value. The discussion raged back and forth with the falcon, still unhooded, still being paraded. Excitement mounted as the vehicle carrying the witnesses was seen in the distance. When they arrived the

“ Mohammed has been coming each year since he was a boy over 40 years ago. Not a year has gone by without him trapping at least one falcon. ”

arbitrator asked them if they had seen their fellow tribesman in the vicinity that morning. They had. Had they seen him circling his car at the same time as flashing the headlights. No they hadn't. With angry words and shamefaced looks the claimant headed for his vehicle and an ignominious defeat.

That night we arrived at Mohammed's encampment early to help slaughter and prepare the sheep. During the course of the

evening it seemed that at least half of the area's trappers joined us on the carpets round the fire. The events of the afternoon were constantly replayed and Mohammed's expertise was the subject of praise all round. Mohammed has been coming each year since he was a boy over 40 years ago. Not a year has gone by without him trapping at least one falcon. This is a singular record indeed. For the spectators though, you are only as good as the last falcon you trapped!

As the banter flashed back and forth across the smoke and the smell of the cooking rice and lamb grew stronger, I admired the crisp sheen of the newly trapped falcon in the firelight. Mohammed's patron in Riyadh had accepted the bird and a driver was already on his way to pick her up.

Every man who arrived that night to congratulate Mohammed and admire his catch exclaimed 'Ma



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sha Allah! It recognises the falcon as a gift to Mohammed Al Oyun from Allah and serves to express admiration without covetousness. Failure to utter the phrase would leave a doubt that you were envious and covetous of Mohammed's good fortune. In pre Islamic times envy and covetousness resulted in the possibility of accident befalling the owner as a result of the 'evil eye' of the envious guest. In the previous year, a man and his father in a neighbouring encampment had had extraordinary luck one evening. He and his father had spotted two female passage sakers in the late evening and had observed them roost for the night on different dunes about 200 metres apart. They each took up position to watch one until the last of the light had gone. They were helped

by it being a moonless night and at 21.00 when they figured that both falcons would be well asleep, they got as close as they could before fixing each bird in turn with a halogen beam, getting in closer behind the beam and finally casting a net over the bird. In 30 minutes they had captured both birds which, an hour later they had sold over the mobile phone for over \$40,000. That night, 60 or 70 men had visited them to view the birds, congratulate them and share the *kebsa* (rice and lamb) that the successful trapper provides for his visitors. The next day whilst out in their open topped Toyota jeep, his young son had tumbled out and fallen on his head. In spite of being rushed to hospital he never regained consciousness and died 3 months later. For the rest of the season in

the trapping grounds there was much discussion as to whom, that night, had viewed the falcons and not said '*Ma sha Allah*' and could therefore be held responsible for the trapper's subsequent misfortune. ■

“ If you are planning on trapping a nice passage falcon in Majerma in October remember, you need good trapping skills, the right equipment, a sociable nature, a thick skin and a good knowledge of trapping customs and etiquette. Above all you need the courage to perform before a large expert audience of your peers. ”



Khalid and proud trapper with a passage *calidus* peregrine caught a few minutes before.

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Tw was the night before Christmas

A winter storm had blown all night, whistling down the chimney and whining at the cracks in the door. At grey dawn, the wind blew harder still, hissing across the fields and burying the kennel gates with snow. A deep drift curled around the lee of the mews. It was not a promising day, but what does a falconer cherish more than daylight in dark December? So I dug out the dogs, weighed the hawk and loaded the truck, determined to make the best of what might come. It was the morning of Christmas Eve, I had the day off and I intended to find a flight for my falcon, 'Jalad'.

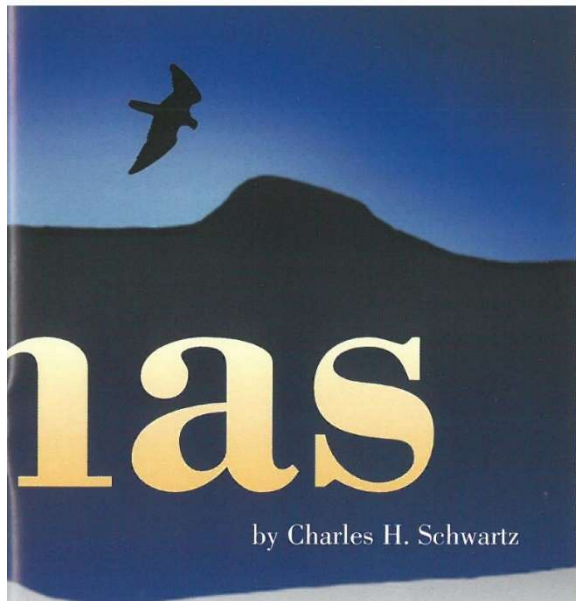
One of the interesting things about southeastern Idaho is that the weather can be simultaneously miserable and perfect, the two extremes being separated by as little as fifty miles. A hardcore falconer can often escape a raw and brutal day by driving for an hour or two. Thirty minutes across the desert I was encouraged by a flag flapping lazily at a roadside rest stop. By the time I reached the mouth of the Little Lost Valley, the sky was a cloudless blue. I drove up to my hawking spot, stepped out of the truck and faced a gentle winter breeze - perfect conditions for a high soaring flight! What an incredible piece of good fortune!

There are times in falconry when the dog, falcon and falconer become so absorbed with the hunt that they seem to act as one. The dog casts and draws to the birds with fluid grace, the falcon mounts quickly in knowing expectation and the falconer flushes with intuitive perfection. Grouse and falcon collide in space at a point where time has ceased to exist. There is the eerie sense that the outcome was known before the stoop began, perhaps before the dog stood. This sort of perfection, or anything resembling it, had utterly eluded me of late; my dogs tripping over birds, the hawk poorly placed and me stumbling from one

sorry decision to the next. We had not caught a winter grouse in two weeks.

But here I was on a calm and sunny day on one of the most beautiful spots in the world. A few inches of powdery snow covered the massive alluvial fan that sloped down from the foot of the mountains above to the valley floor below. A raven swished by in the still air, its harsh croak audible for miles. The day brimmed with promise of changing fortune. I felt no need to rush. I shared my lunch with the dogs and then worked the young pup, 'Spook', for twenty minutes. And I fantasised how the day might unfold: I would let Jalad drift off in a grand soar as my trusty pointer, 'Mac', stood steady a few hundred yards away. I would watch her white wings wink out of sight as I waited, letting the moment grow. Then I would stroll slowly toward my dog, knowing the falcon would cue on my movement and return high overhead. The grouse, a big cock of course, would fly high and far, and die without knowing what hit it. Only falconers torment themselves with thoughts like these!

Mac and I began our hunt by working down the sagebrush-covered fan, the dog casting widely to either side of the truck. A mature pointer, Mac was in splendid condition and knew his business thoroughly. He was out of Steve Frank's 'Lucky' and Martin Jones' 'Becky' and was utterly bottomless in his desire to find sage grouse. With Mac, it was only a matter of time until birds were located. All I had to do was keep up with him and I usually needed my truck and telemetry to do so. That day was spent hunting with a personal intensity that I truly enjoy. The frustration of not having caught a grouse recently was there, along with a touch of guilt at the possibility of being caught out late on Christmas Eve, but Mac and I were hunting together, concentrating on finding Jalad a slip, and our efforts forced such bothersome thoughts away.



mas

by Charles H. Schwartz

The best soaring conditions came and went without a find. I gave Mac a rest and put Spook out for awhile, thinking if she busted any birds in her youthful enthusiasm, I could mark them down, whistle her in and still manage a flight. But despite a fine race on her part, we didn't find a thing. There are days when you put your dogs down with the certainty that they will locate grouse. Other afternoons are empty and hollow from the beginning. Disappointment hangs darkly and the desert seems devoid of life. Your task is hopeless and you know it. I tried to ignore the growing urgency and concentrate on the task at hand.

At 3:30, I pulled Spook in and decided to work a large roadless area on foot with Mac. With a little less swagger in my step I was now prepared to settle for an ordinary flight. Shadows from the Lost River mountains began to stretch across the valley and I knew that as soon as the sun dropped behind their peaks, the temperature would plummet. I walked fast to keep warm and Mac ran gloriously but we didn't cut a single grouse track in three miles. I began to wonder if this grouse hawking was worth the penny. To be sure, it is a grand sport conducted in the most stunning of places, and when it goes well nothing is more sublime. But if your team is in a slump, frustration creeps in and one wonders what the normies are doing all snug before their fires. By the time we returned to the truck, it was growing dark and the cold had us in its grip. The thermometer said 12 degrees.

Fahrenheit. How could this delightful day have deteriorated so quickly? Was this entire afternoon a waste of time? Should I give up this stupid sport?

A few minutes of light remained so I drove quickly to another spot on the fan while Mac wolfed down the last of our lunch. When I put him back out on sloping ground that often held grouse, he ran straight down the middle of the road, clearly too tired

to quarter but unwilling to call it quits.

Was I pushing Mac to his limits just to enter another grouse kill in my journal? Was this only about me? Watching him run, it occurred to me how much we were alike. Neither of us could quit and call it a day – we had to keep on hunting. It was 4:50 PM on Christmas Eve. The sun had been down for twenty minutes. My family was waiting at home, a hundred miles away and I should leave RIGHT NOW. I told myself, "I'll stop at 5:00. By then it will be too dark to fly. I'll just load Mac up and head out. I can invent a new life for myself on the drive back."

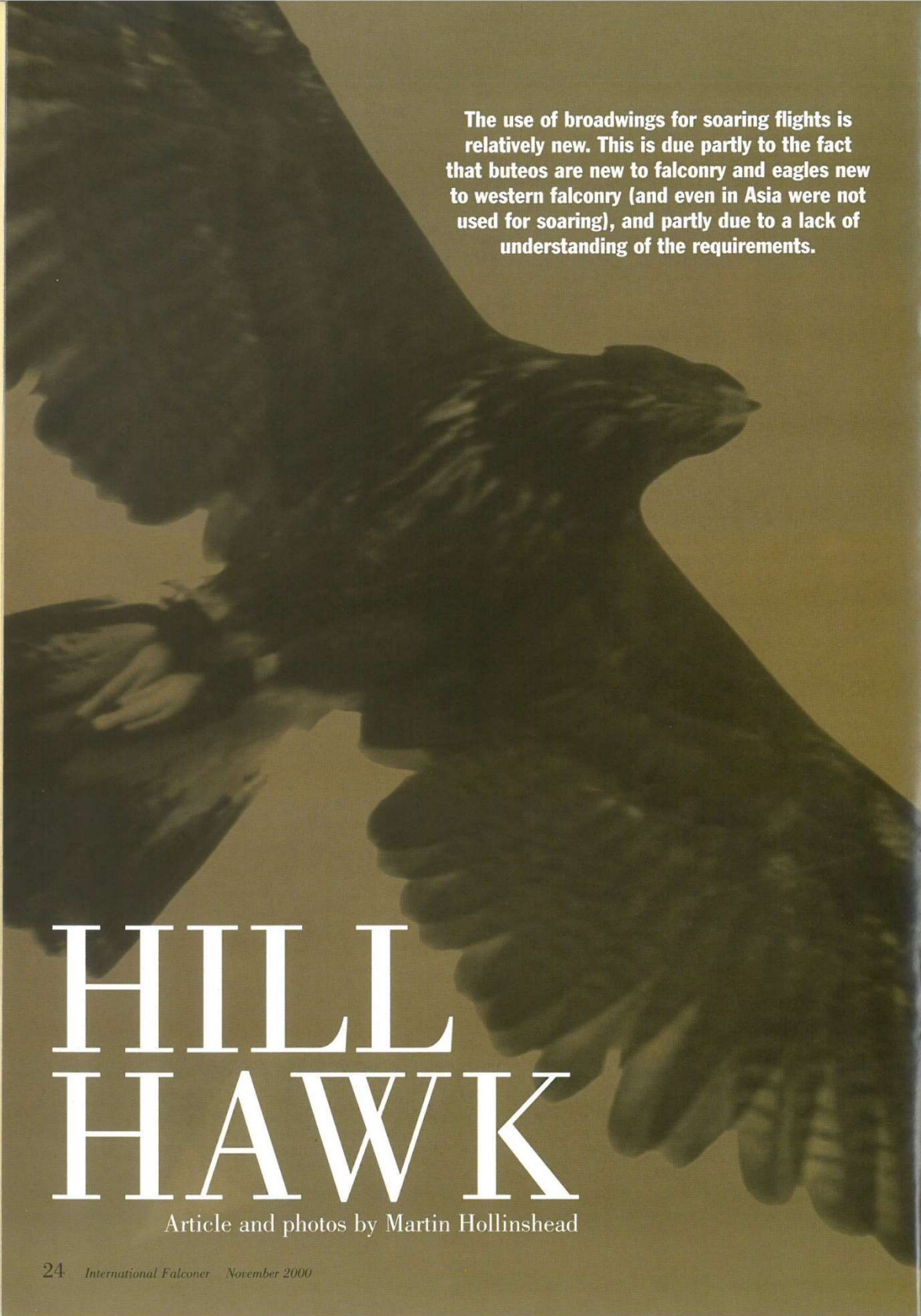
At exactly 5:00 my foot touched the brake. Simultaneously Mac slid into a point. Right in the middle of the road! I couldn't believe it! Was he reading my mind? But successful predators don't pause to analyse opportunities. Jalad was rigged for action and it took but an instant to cast her off. Up and up into the frigid twilight she climbed, taking one of those power pitches that hungry falcons are prone to late in the evening. Things began to happen very fast.

I trotted up to Mac, waited for Jalad to come around, and ran in to flush. Nothing happened! What? A false point? Mac charged up the draw. I saw fresh antelope tracks in the snow at my feet. Oh no! Had Mac pointed antelope? Then I spied a single bird track. We'd run past the grouse. Calm down! Wait for Mac to re-establish! I looked up and could barely see Jalad's flickering wingbeat in the pale light overhead. She seemed very high. Mac came back, snapped into a twisted crouch and this time we made the flush together. For a second Jalad hesitated and I feared she couldn't see the grouse flying in the darkness. But then it was hers and she owned it from the moment her stoop began.

Mac must have thought it nice of Jalad to kill so close to the truck. He leaped into the warm cab without even a congratulatory sniff of her kill and curled up in front of the heater. His job was done and I was left to feed up the falcon in the penetrating cold. As my fingers grew numb in the stiff icy glove, I thought about the frustrations of falconry; how the time, effort and expense are a given that has to be accepted. The long drives, empty bags, cold late dinners and truncated social life are all part of the cost. One has to ask, "Is it worth it?"

That Christmas Eve as I drove down off that high desert fan with a full moon rising over the distant snow-covered hills and Mac snug at my side, I knew that falconry owned me just like Jalad had owned her grouse. Falconry was a gift for me to take...to open...to share...

Merry Christmas everyone!



The use of broadwings for soaring flights is relatively new. This is due partly to the fact that buteos are new to falconry and eagles new to western falconry (and even in Asia were not used for soaring), and partly due to a lack of understanding of the requirements.

HILL HAWK

Article and photos by Martin Hollinshead

The first broadwings to be flown were employed very much like goshawks, the emphasis being put on pursuit-hawking, soaring wasn't really considered an option. Mavrogordato's comments in *A Hawk for the Bush* (1973 edition) highlight the general opinion: "This is in fact my main objection to the use of eagles in falconry: it is normally only possible to fly them from the fist (or from a tree) and so the wonderful powers of flight of an eagle in the wild can never be re-produced for the purposes of sport by a trained eagle".

But even as this edition of Mavrogordato's work went to press, the soaring barrier was being chipped away at. By the 1980's there was no holding broadwing falconers back and they stormed into the 90's showing dramatic flying with all manner of species. In North America the big ferruginous hawk demonstrated an ability that underlined its specialised nature, and the golden eagle, well, it just stopped the show wherever it flew. And of course the good old red-tailed hawk was there. The bird that had first shown what some of the buteo clan could do had no intention of being left out of the action. But throwing the doors wide open was the Harris' hawk. The parabuteo's natural attachment to its trainer made soaring more inviting for even the less experienced falconer and the species' overall popularity resulted in a lot experimentation.

Two Essentials

There are two main ingredients for successful soaring: lift and the *guarantee* of quarry. To address these points in order. To gain and hold height, the wild-living broadwing uses thermals (rising warm air) or wind-lift. Both kinds of soaring are seen in broadwing falconry. Thermals are often encountered on totally flat terrain and on wind-still days, and are obviously more available to the falconer operating in warm regions. Wind-lift, on the other hand, is linked to broken terrain or hill ground and is created when wind hits

the base of hill or ridge and is driven upwards; this is the typical broadwing soaring of cold-winter Britain. Of the two lift aids, wind-lift is considered the safer. By noting the strength of the wind and the feature it is blowing against, it is possible to get a feel for the type of flying that might occur. Thermals can influence the bird both mentally and physically in a less predictable fashion. The worry is that the bird might go too high, abandon hawking and be lost. In North America, where so much hawking is done with wild-taken passage redtails, thermals have long been considered something to fear. Many redtails have been lost to thermals, and many have been non-soaring birds that have simply entered a thermal and 'gone up'. Thermal flying has been used successfully in the US. Most of this flying has been seen with tame, human-bonded falcons, but broadwings have also been employed. Nevertheless, this is still an area where the less experienced falconer needs to be extremely careful.

So the bird's up – now what to do with it? One of the biggest problems for the less experienced broadwing flyer is recognising the importance of being able to serve his high-sailing hawk. While the experienced soar-hawk can demonstrate enormous patience, it's the promise of quarry that holds things together. For the youngster this promise needs to be cast iron. No quarry, or no quarry soon enough, and the bird's commitment to the exercise fades. The disgruntled creature may simply land (something the Harris' is very happy to do) or set about searching for its own victim, and neither is the route to a reliable performance. The principal is the same as that applied in game hawking with longwings; the falcon climbs and waits on, expecting quarry. However, there is one subtle difference and one that makes the broadwing owner's job a more nerve-racking one. The longwinger knows his quarry is there, it has been found and pointed by the dog or spotted and marked down

before his bird has been allowed to take wing. The broadwing owner, usually looking for mammalian quarry, quarry that can start, stop, flush unpredictably and pop down holes, normally allows his bird to gain some height, and then tries to find game."

Under certain conditions it is possible to use the longwinger's method. For example, when rabbit are below ground, a dog can be used to 'point' occupied warrens before the bird is released. The bird then comes above the dog, and the below-ground ferret and waits for the bolt. The same applies when conditions indicate that above-ground-quarry might sit tight and 'hold to a point'; hares in deep cover might oblige. But most soar-hawking is a throw of the dice over carefully chosen ground.

Terrain

Using wind-lift means that the falconer is tied pretty much to uneven landscapes. The popular picture is treeless, high country 'nothingness', the more rugged and elevated the better. But the fact is, really wild terrain – mountain landscapes – are more aesthetically pleasing than practical. Towering high tops broken by deep valleys can result in some fantastic soaring. They can also result in flights that can, in a blink, have the bird kill several hours away! Even relatively gentle hill country can prove problematic. Any set-up that can have the bird locking onto quarry beyond the falconer's reach, or being lost sight of due to some fold in the landscape, is dangerous. The safest soaring is to be had on lone ridges with reasonable flat terrain above and below. Visibility is important but a few trees and bushes are nothing to fear, in fact they can add to the flying as the bird manoeuvres and plunges in from above. Most important is, of course, that wind. It can be coming up the slope or at an angle across it, but it must be present. This single requirement can be very restricting. You've located and acquired permission to fly over a

perfect patch of ground, and you arrive to find the wind blowing downhill! The soar-hawker really needs the go-ahead at several locations; this way, wind and terrain can be matched.

Wind

With wind being vital, the falconer has to identify how much he needs, and how much his bird can deal with. It's fairly clear that a mild breeze coming up a gentle slope is going to produce very little lift. Indeed, under such conditions the tendency is for the bird to be pushed back rather than up. The experienced broadwing, the bird that is desperate to come over its falconer, will work against this, going downwind to climb falcon-like on its approach, but this set-up is a poor one and disastrous for an unskilled flyer.

For the novice to intermediate bird, a fairly stiff wind against a steepish ridge – the type of gradient that has you picking your way rather than running! – is ideal. For the seasoned flyer, nothing is too extreme; a cliff face and a wind so strong you can hardly stand, and the bird's straight up, straight above, and a tightly closed form in the horizontal.

Naturally, the ability to use, or to want to use, the wind varies from species to species, and from bird to bird. Golden eagles are wind masters, begging for gales and any test you can throw at them. The redtail, with its typical *buteo* broad-winged, short-tailed outline also handles the wind well and comes with the bonus of being helium-buoyant. The ferruginous is quite unique. Its relatively narrow wings and heavy wing-loading give it less of the helium effect, but it compensates by being able to power-fly up under poor lift conditions. This big *buteo* loves to be in the air. The Harris', as always, is difficult to place. In stealing some of the accipiters' acceleration, the parabuteo has made sacrifices on the *buteo* side; it isn't perhaps as naturally aerial as some of its

stablemates. But in truth, the Harris' just becomes whatever the job requires, and this includes wind-soaring, and I have to say that I have flown this species under some very demanding conditions.

And in all of this, fitness plays a massive role. Soaring is often thought of as undemanding, but nothing could be further from the truth. Heavy-wind flying will sap the unconditioned bird's strength, and this must be considered when developing a youngster.

Quarry

Suitable quarry comes in all shapes and sizes. Winged targets can certainly be taken by the soaring broadwing and quail, pheasant, duck and even grouse have shown themselves vulnerable. In Britain the ever-present pheasant can certainly be encountered or encouraged into suitable terrain, and the broadwing flyer wanting to put his falcon-owning colleagues under pressure, need look no further. However, it's really to rabbits and hares that most broadwings are flown and these are the quarries that present the most practical sport. Being a liker of hill ground, the European rabbit is the obvious starting point for the British soar-hawker. This quarry also comes with the benefit of being abundant and unloved; rabbit hawking is often available for nothing more than the trouble of a polite enquiry. And it's sport certainly worth having. The rabbit makes a worthy opponent for birds ranging from male Harris' hawks to female eagles. But there is a niggle. Poor weather can keep Mr Rabbit below ground, and when he does decide to venture forth, a lack of cover can make him extremely sensitive. Of course, the ferreting ploy can be used and the falconer keen to test juggling skills should press on, but generally speaking good weather and ground cover makes for the best rabbit-soaring.

With hares it's different. Hares are above ground all the time and when they flush they look to speed and manoeuvrability to save them – there's no popping into holes! The

British falconer has two hares at his disposal, the brown hare and the mountain hare. Both can be quarries for the soaring hawk but the brown hare, being a lover of low lying arable landscapes, can be difficult to find in sufficient numbers in suitable soaring terrain. The mountain hare, as its name suggests, is far more suitable due to its upland haunts.

Although not as tough or athletic as its lowland cousin, the mountain hare offer terrific flying, and when the bird's high over a Scottish moor that rolls away forever, which lowlander wouldn't be in the north?

The North American scene strikes a bold contrast. With his quest for suitable set-ups, the American broadwinger is spoilt rotten! His hawking landscapes have been plucked right out of a travel guide. And as for quarry...With a mouth-watering array of lagomorphs at his disposal, his search takes him from the diminutive desert cottontail to the mighty prairie hare. The crosshairs generally come to rest on the sage hare. This fleet animal of the American west not only inhabits suitable country for soar-hawking, it is of a size that makes it viable for even the smaller broadwings. This quarry has allowed US soar-hawkers to explore just how far this aspect of the sport can be taken.

Varied Action

Soar-hawking can be a sport of low altitude flying over brush-filled hollows and gullies or dot-in-the-sky stuff over wilderness country. Both types of hawking have their appeal, and both have practical value. For many, the really high action captures the popular image of what soaring flights are or should be. The tendency is to imagine that the higher the bird's pitch, the more worthwhile the experience. But as the longwinger knows, height doesn't always equal drama or success. A lot of very exciting rabbit hawking can be had from a fairly modest pitch, and there's little point having a bird almost out of sight in a clear sky, if its quarry is a target dashing for a nearby warren. Of course, different

One stabbing-stoop. And the quarry was hers.



locations can mean different rabbits, and the bolder the rabbits, the further they have to run. Generally, hares fit more comfortably with really high flying.

Flown over familiar ground, the bird gets to know what's required. One guest asked: "how high will she go?" "As high as she has to", I replied. Obviously, the individual falconer's aims and desires will influence the action dramatically. For one broadwinger, soaring might be specialised falconry; he flies his bird in no other way and those high pitches really do count. For another falconer, soaring might form part of a more general picture; his bird is used for all manner of hawking. The latter is certainly an approach that

works well for the British falconer flying over varied terrain.

On The Hill

In recent years much of my own soaring has involved Harris' hawks. The flying swings from high action over open hill slopes, to tighter hunting over small valleys. One bit of hawking might see repeated stooping and climbing to a racing and dodging cover-rabbit, another, the bird locked into position waiting for a ferreted rabbit to bolt. And of course there's dog work too; finding flushing, nosing and pushing, the dog is essential. Perhaps a hunt taken from my book, *The Complete Rabbit and Hare Hawk*, will capture the action.

The location was a bit of high ground undulating in small valleys and complicated on one side by a steep hill, and on the other by falling away to hidden grazing fields. As I approached the area, the landscape and wind direction were against me. I pressed on with the wind at my back, the bird keeping pace with big tree-assisted leaps, and 'Rob' the collie nosing through the sparse bracken. With sufficient distance covered, I turned, and began a downhill, into-the-wind approach that I knew would provide all the lift we needed. My target was a

large mound that dropped down in sheep-track stages through scattered gorse, thorn trees, and bracken. It was a good spot for rabbits, but long before I got there, things started to take their own course. The bird was gaining an uncomfortable amount of height for this difficult spot and was coming forwards far too slowly. I might have targeted the mound, but she had one eye on the adjacent hillside. The height worried me – I didn't want her going over the hill. By the time she was a lark-sized silhouette the dog and I were running forwards in an attempt to draw her over. Deep in my hawking bag a nervous hand was on a lifeline lure. Then she began to lose altitude and a long slanting dive told of a distant rabbit. It wasn't a dangerous pursuit, no view-stealing rises, no out-of-sight finishes, but it was taking her a long way. I watched it unfold, a very small bird set against a bracken-brown hillside skimming in at

an invisible rabbit. A miss! And no follow-up indicated a convenient hole.

A brief pause and she was back on the wing and coming slowly over the mound. Rob and I got to work. A flash from below... a woodcock! High above the valley bottom, it was irresistible and the Harris' gave it her best shot. It was a fascinating scene, the rocketing horizontal flight of the target and the falling form of the Harris'. Had she been a little better placed, more above the quarry, she might have had a chance. As it was, the stoop levelled out into a pursuit and she peeled off to circle back over me. Time to produce the goods.

Things were tricky. The strong wind and the uneven terrain meant that my view of the bird was far from perfect. One second she was directly above, the next lost off to one side or whizzing round the mound to come back over at greater height. The message was clear: 'Do something –

now!'. The dog's behaviour told of rabbits, but they were sticking to the thick stuff. Most of the time all I could see was a white tipped 'periscope' tail. We were trying our best but the bird wasn't convinced. She cruised in and settled atop a stunted tree with a wing-stabilised token landing. Like an airship straining at its mooring, she hovered there, assessing our efforts. Her disappointment made clear, she once again let the wind take her. Straight up, a rocketing circle and she was back in position. Suddenly a gorse-striking stoop and a rebounding climb. More frantic rummaging from Rob. Another stoop and another climb. The bird was ready to explode with excitement. She had the rabbit's position fixed. This was our chance. One more warrior-charge from Rob. One stabbing-stoop. And the quarry was hers. ■

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It needn't be a



pipedream!

Article and photos by Andrew Newman



As a falconry quarry, the grey partridge (*perdix perdix*) is very special indeed. In the UK it is our native lowland gamebird and although once widespread here, it has, over a period of 50 years or so, seen a dramatic decline, to the extent that it is now regarded as rather an exclusive quarry.

However regular flights at them with either longwing or shortwing need not be a pipedream.

With a little work and management on the part of the falconer, released gamefarm-produced grey partridges can provide spectacular sport, without access to vast amounts of land and money.



SUITABLE LAND

It's not quite just a case of obtaining your partridge and dumping them on a bit of land to get on with it, so what requirements should you be looking for?

My own particular area of land, a local farm that I have permission from, is very high-up in relation to the surrounding areas, and so most of it is fairly well drained - an important factor in a region such as the Welsh coast. However, after a heavy spell of rain, the lower lying parts do, nonetheless, get very wet at times. The fact that it is mostly arable land helps enormously, as it is not constantly being trodden on by cattle and sheep. Wet fields really do make it very difficult to get about.

The neighbouring farm across the road is on much lower ground and has been used by friends of mine for releasing pheasants for goshawks. It was fine for pheasant but being constantly prone to water-logging and being mostly used for livestock, it became very difficult at times to get about. It is really not suitable for partridge, and the ones of mine that do go over on it now and then, always come back. Infact, you will find that the grey partridge does tend to explore now and then and so it is vitally important that you make your 'patch' as thoroughly to their liking as possible, so they see it as 'home' - aim for dry land. Don't forget that



pheasant roost off the ground - partridge don't.

So, the release area should ideally be arable land and fairly high up. It also needs to be open, but not necessarily flat. My own area is infact very undulating. The fields are quite large, from 20 acres up to around 40 acres and bordered in most cases by old hedgerows. Some of the hedgerows are up on banks, which enables the birds to get up off ground level a little at times. The hedgerows are hawthorn and cut every year. There are no trees in the hedgerows, an important factor, as partridge do not like potential hunting lookout posts for winged predators. Unfortunately some of the hedges have fencing on one side and occasionally even both sides. This is not too bad for longwing flying, as it

is unlikely to have any effect on the flight, but obviously with a shortwing.....I don't need to state the obvious. Any fence line that has a few bushes, etc., along its length, is also a potential danger as it may attract the fleeing partridge. The site of your release pen and direction of flights therefore, need to be considered. For longwing flying your fields do need to be fairly large and preferably with no real wooded areas on them.

A source of fresh water such as a small stream is a useful feature, as are patches or strips of land that are left to become overgrown, especially along the hedges or in corners where they provide very useful shelter and cover. A 'wild' section in the middle of a 40 acre field full of fresh green shoots would make a safe haven for



There are no trees in the hedgerows, an important factor, as partridge do not like potential hunting lookout posts for winged predators.

partridge - and what a set-up for a flight! Winter turnips provide excellent shelter in bad weather and the partridge love them. They also make an approach and set-up easier, especially if you can flush the partridge from them and across open ground. This particular crop is used for winter sheep grazing and is usually around until January.

THE RELEASE PEN

The pen should only be of a size to house a small number of birds. My own pen takes 8 birds. You can put any number of release pens out depending on the size of the land but bear in mind that if you put them too close together you will end up with one large covey which is not what you want. This tends to be a real problem with grey partridge.

PEN CONSTRUCTION

For my own pens I use 2" x 1" tannalised timber, but also treat it with a dark spirit-based wood preserver so that it blends into the environment. The pen is made of two identical panels, which are then hinged together.

For one panel, cut two 6ft lengths (72") and three 3ft lengths (36"). Lay the two 72" lengths down on a hard flat surface, running parallel in a horizontal position 36" apart. Lay the 36" lengths on top, one at each end,

the other halfway along. Then fix together using screws. Cover this over with 1" x 1/2" 'twiweld' type wire mesh. When this is done, turn over and fix a soft nylon type wind-break mesh, preferably green in colour. This is to prevent the birds from coming into direct contact with the wire mesh when inside the pen. It also allows them to see outside. Make up the other panel. Now you should have the two panels with the soft netting facing upwards. This is the inside. Line them up together and join using a couple of sets of hinges. Try to use all galvanized or zinc plated fittings - build it to last. When this is done, lift them up and put the whole thing standing on the ground and open to form a triangular profile pen. If this sounds confusing, it will become clear as you do it. Next you need to mark out and cut the end pieces using plywood - 1/4" will do. This can be tricky - you need to keep the pen pretty stable, however, it's not precision carpentry. When marked out, cut your two triangular end pieces. You will then need a jigsaw to cut out a door on each end. Make them big enough to be able to get the food and water dishes in. I use 6" - 8" plastic saucers from a garden centre about 2 - 2 1/2" deep. You can make larger doors if you want to use small feed hoppers instead. These doors will

also serve for letting birds out. I use plastic cable ties on the doors instead of hinges. You can use a couple of screw-in eyes and some twist wire to shut the doors. I do not put mesh on the bottom of the pen as it complicates matters.

I usually take the pens to the release site and put the ends on there. It makes it easier to carry and the dimension of this pen fits just about most large estate cars/station wagons. When you have finished with them, take them apart and store in your garage until the next season.

I also cover half the release pen over from side to side with some type of translucent waterproof material. This gives the birds a dry area. The food shelter is done along the same lines - though can be much smaller and doesn't need wire mesh or end pieces - just two panels joined and covered over with waterproof material. You can disguise the pen and food shelter to some extent, using green plastic or camouflage netting. You can also put a little raised platform inside so they can get off the ground when it's very wet. You will obviously make your own modifications as you go along.

RELEASE PEN SITE

This will obviously need discussing with the farmer/landowner. You will need to take into

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WHEN HARRY MET



SALLY.

Article by Dave Moran jr. Photos by Dave Moran sr.



Sally, Dave, Harry and 'Jack'.

Within the patchwork quilt that is my life there are many pictures, colours, stains and textures. The pictures quickly take me back to the surface level experiences and allow me to remember a wide variety of adventures. The colours remind me of the various moods that affected me throughout my journey. The stains, unfortunately, represent the mistakes that I have made. Textures, unlike the other components, are more difficult to define. They represent all the underlying triggers that can instantaneously transport my entire being back to a particular point in time. The textures of one's life are highly personal. What may seem an inconsequential whiff of pine to one person may take another individual back to a magical summer hideaway and fast forward them through a variety of different memories and emotions. These memories and emotions, however, don't simply end. They are linked to other emotions and thought processes which in an infinite manner thread their way through our soul and comprise a large part of who we are.

The inner lining of my quilt has the softest texture and is my favourite part. For snuggled in its soft embrace lies the warm security of childhood innocence. As a child my mind was not clouded and jaded by the realities of life. There were no bills to pay, no jobs to report to, no legal problems, no health issues and no hormones to distract me. Consequently, I was able to concentrate on and absorb all of life's events as they occurred. Because a majority of my childhood was spent around birds of prey, the texture of

my quilt has been woven around falconry, and interwoven in its fabric is the name Harry McElroy.

I was raised in the mountains of Colorado, and the only visible structure from our house was our pigeon loft. It was the only pigeon loft on our side of the mountain and it was a raptor magnet. Consequently, our flock was often savaged by wild owls, goshawks and Cooper's hawks. Although I was sad watching our pigeons being carted off to their deaths, I was thrilled with the flights. Every time I heard the pigeons scatter, I would race up to the highest vantage point and observe the chase. The most memorable moments were the times when my Dad and I watched the flights together. The sheer joy and elation that we shared while watching these amazing flights is difficult to express. It was also one of the few times that I heard my dad curse. "Holy sh*t..look at that son of a bit*h go, Dave! Holy sh*t!" We would then spend the rest of the evening by the fire reliving the flight, making hoods, reading falconry books and trying to figure out ways to get his gos to fly like the wild ones. Dad and I spent many such hours by the fire discussing falconry, and it was during these times that the name Harry McElroy often surfaced.

Desert Hawking and its progeny were the books that Dad used to refer to when he discussed advanced

hunting and training approaches. I listened eagerly for hours as Dad described this mysterious man of the desert, and over time, I formulated my own image of Harry McElroy. To me he was more than just a man. He was a mythical being; a man who tamed the wildest of hawks and hunted them from horseback. Every time Dad and I browsed through Harry's books, his name and image bled deeper into the fabric of my youth and the surreal image continued to spread. Harry was more than just a man...he was a feeling. He was the sensation that surged through me when the blood red eyes of a freshly trapped haggard goshawk flickered in the firelight. He was the impatience that I felt when my father would endlessly hood-train his birds by candlelight. He was the smell of freshly cut hay on early morning hawking expeditions. He was the chill in the air, the sting in my lungs, and the numbness in my toes as I raced on stubby legs to witness my Dad's hawks chase ducks in frozen cow pastures. He was the sorrow I felt as a mallard's crimson life force slowly pulsed through the snow. He was the salty tear freezing on my cheek, the smell of the cork inside Dad's whiskey flask and the burn in my throat from a stolen swig. In short Harry's name embodied all the textures of a magical youth spent in the house of a falconer. Last June, as life's loom was laying down it's



I lived in a small 400 sq.ft duplex in downtown Hermosa Beach with my pregnant wife, our 20lb alley cat, a large iguana and a 60-gallon aquarium. I had no money, no mews, and misguided neighbours who, thinking falconry was barbaric, called the authorities on me.

thirty-third year of fabric, I found myself faced with the long and arduous task of training a late-taken eyas female Cooper's hawk. She was taken at around 32 days of age, not from the nest but actually trapped after she'd fledged, while catching things in people's yards in suburban Torrance, California. Depending on one's definition, she was taken as a late brancher/early passerger, and had a remarkably sweet disposition for such a bird.

Unfortunately, my hawking facilities were far from ideal and training her became a full-time job. I lived in a small 400 sq.ft duplex in downtown Hermosa Beach with my pregnant wife, our 20lb alley cat, a large iguana and a 60-gallon aquarium. I had no money, no mews, and misguided neighbours who, thinking falconry was barbaric, called the authorities on me. Consequently, the authorities often raided my beach hut in their never-ending quest to shut me down. Additionally, the nearest quail fields were a 1½ hour drive away in good traffic, which meant that I had to get up at 04:30 in the morning to make the drive. To make matters worse, I had very little money and was forced to put all of my falconry expenses on a credit card. However, I eventually got the little 'Coops' going, and she turned out to be a tenacious little predator.

By mid November 'Sally' was really rolling, and although she only flew at 329 grams (11 ounces), she would tackle anything that moved. Unfortunately, her favourite quarry was jackrabbits, which regularly carted her for hundreds of yards across the desert. This became quite

frustrating because I wanted to fly quail! There was only one problem. Once I let go of the jesses she was calling the shots. If there were no jacks around, she flew quail with enthusiasm. However, if she was tail-chasing a quail and a jack got up, she would break off the quail and bind to the jack! Once the jack was grabbed, Sally would sail through the air on their backs like a drunken dirt bike rider; getting kicked, scratched, bitten, rammed into bushes and then pounded like a speed bag. Although Sally took sixty or seventy such rides by the end of November, she was only able to bring a couple of jacks to the bag. I was horrified by this situation and was deeply concerned for the safety of my bird. Ultimately, I was forced to fly fields that didn't have as many jacks. The only problem was that these fields harbored feral cats which she bound to with equal zeal. I didn't know what to do. One evening, after she was almost killed by a cat, I fired off a desperate phone call to my father. Certainly, my dear old Dad would have the answer. His response, although logical, was not quite what I expected. He suggested that we take Sally deep into the desert where there were more quail than jacks and suggested that he might know a falconer that could help. This falconer was Harry McElroy. When I heard his name, all the magic from my childhood returned and I became both excited and nervous. Not really believing that flying with Harry was a reality, I told Dad that I would love to set up such a trip and hung up the phone. Thirty minutes later, Dad called back and said that Harry was available and willing to fly with us in

the beginning of December. Eagerly, I accepted and marked the dates in my calendar. December arrived quickly and before I knew it, Dad and I were driving across the desert to meet Harry. Sally was flying very well and, up to that point, had taken thirty cottontails, two jacks, four rock squirrels, six sparrows, and three quail. Almost all of her hunts involved single catches and most of the quarry was released. She had also beefed up to a hunting weight of 354 grams (12 ounces). The road trip with Dad was a blast. We spent hours retelling old falconry tales and getting back in touch with one another. The more we spoke of old times, the more the tattered texture of my youth began to shine, and the more excited I became to meet Harry. When we finally pulled up to Harry's hawking abode, the first thing that I saw was a wild Harris' hawk sitting on a telephone pole. I was intrigued by the Harris', and as I walked up for a better look, a shadowy figure emerged from the dwelling. It was Harry.

As we exchanged the usual pleasantries, my internal loom was re-arranging and connecting a great deal of fabric. At that moment the twisted threads of my youth came rocketing to the surface, and the internal lining of my quilt fused together with the surface level of the present. It was an amazing moment. For here, standing before me, was not a mythical being, but a man. A kind, unassuming man who made me feel completely at peace.

Within thirty minutes of meeting Harry, we were in the field hawking with his Harris'. We kicked around in the desert for about ten minutes

The next morning I was up at the crack of dawn and determined to catch a quail.

and suddenly the Harris' took off and vigorously pumped towards some bushes. When we caught up with the Harris', it was patiently waiting on a large pile of sticks and roots. Harry immediately hefted his flushing stick/hoe and attacked the pile with badger like ferocity. The Harris' just sat there, bobbing and weaving, ducking the flying debris like an eager prize-fighter. Without warning, the Harris' flashed to the ground and started to mantle slightly. I was in the middle of wondering if all the quail flights would be this easy when I noticed something peculiar. The quail had whiskers...beady little eyes...yellow teeth and a long pink tail! The quail was a rat! Harry began to chuckle, cropped up his bird, and called it a day. This was a wonderful thing to see. Harry wasn't into the 'head count' or boasting about the type of quarry that his bird took. He was just enjoying his bird, the desert and his friends. This realisation took a lot of the pressure off of me, and I felt much less nervous about flying my bird.

The next morning it was my turn to fly. Although I was impressed with Harry's indifference towards catching the ever-elusive desert rat, I was not quite as mature as he was and really wanted to catch a quail. After beating the bush for about fifteen minutes, the Coops vaulted from my fist, dropped to the ground, and started pumping towards some shrubs. There was an explosion of feathers and a bird darted out the side of the cover with Sally in high-speed pursuit. She did a quick wingover into another small patch of bushes and I heard a soft squeal. Bracing myself for the beauty of the

desert quail, I ran to her.

Unfortunately, it was the ugliest quail that I had ever seen. It had ratty brown feathers, a sharp little beak, and was about the size of a sparrow. In fact, it was a sparrow. Like Harry, I decided to crop up my bird and call it a day. Even though I was slightly disappointed, Harry and Dad had a great view of the flight, and really seemed to enjoy it.

The next morning I was up at the crack of dawn and determined to catch a quail. There was a thin layer of frost on the ground and Sally was extremely keen. Harry took us out to one of his favourite quail spots, and within a few minutes, Sally and I were out in the chilly desert air looking for quail. I walked in the direction that Harry suggested, and after a few minutes, I saw a scaled quail run into some cover. Sally flew over to the area where the quail put in and waited for me. I picked her up and was just about to go to work with Harry's hoe when a jack got up about a hundred yards away. Sally immediately attacked and before I knew it she was racing across the desert on the jack's back. I eventually lost track of her; however, I caught momentary glimpses of the jack jumping in the distance like a sailfish trying to rid itself of the pesky brown Coops. When I eventually found Sally, she was lying on her side under a large bush with a pile of fur and breast feathers underneath her. The jack obviously pulled the old speed bag routine on her and Sally wasn't looking too good. After a few minutes of staggering around, she hopped back up to the fist, raised her hackles and began to scan the desert. I headed

back to the spot where I saw the quail put in. Unfortunately, before I got there, another jack got up. Once again Sally rocketed across the desert on the jack's back like a drugged bull rider. The struggle soon progressed well out of sight, so I pulled out the lure and began to swing it wildly. My growing fears were soon laid to rest by the distant chime of her bells, and eventually, I spotted her little brown form pumping towards me. She hit the lure hard and began to foot it furiously. I could tell by her demeanor that she was getting very





frustrated and hoped that she would get the opportunity to take out some of her aggression on the local quail population. Quickly I returned to beating the cover, and as I did, I noticed that Sally's disposition had changed. She sat ramrod straight with every feather on her wedge shaped head bristling. Her gaze shifted in quick robotic jerks, and her eyes locked on every movement with laser-like ferocity. I had only seen her in this state a few times and knew that the next thing that got up was going to encounter rage in its purest form. I worked the cover

where I thought the quail were but could flush nothing. Eventually, I turned my attention to the shrubs directly in front of the truck where Dad and Harry sat hoping that some of the quarry had been corralled into this area. When I was directly in front of the truck's hood, there was a crackling of brush and Sally was off like a rocket. It was another damn jack. Sally slammed into it and knocked it off its feet. The ensuing struggle was a brutal fight with Sally stabbing furiously to get a lock on the jack's head. As I closed in, the jack broke free and headed straight

for me. It was obvious that it was going to use my legs for cover in an attempt to confuse the bird. I immediately went into a mutated hook slide and tried to catch that little vermin myself. The jack easily eluded me; however, it was not able to evade the devilish little Coops, still hot on its heels. Sally once again hammered the jack, sending it tumbling through the sage. This time she was able to get a foot on the head and the jack was unable to get to its feet. Together, they flip flopped across the desert like a freshly landed fish. Sally fought with furious

Falconry has a long history of women in the sport. A 14th century manuscript reads; "the ladies not only accompany the gentlemen, but often practice it by themselves, and if we may believe a contemporary writer in the 13th century, they may even excelled the men in knowledge and exercise of the art of falconry" (Strutt). Lady Juliana Berners, prioress of Sopewell Nunnery near St. Albans, authored the renowned and extraordinary treatise on falconry *Boke of St. Albans*. In 1387, William of Wykeham complained about the nuns of Romsey, Wherwell, Winchester, and St Mary's: "some of the sisterhood brought birds, rabbits, hounds, and such frivolous things into chapel with frequent hindrance to their psalmody, and grievous peril to their souls." Queen Elizabeth, Catherine the Great and Mary Queen of Scots were all

notable falconers. Kublai Khan's many wives and ladies of court participated in falconry outings independent of the Khan and his men.

Recognizing the traditional role women have in falconry, we began our own tradition called the Lady Hawkers.

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determination, and by the time I arrived on the scene, she had both feet locked on the jack's head. I quickly secured the jack's hind legs and the struggle was over. The flight happened so quickly that I forgot Dad and Harry were sitting directly behind us. "No!" I thought to myself. What on earth were the grand old men of falconry going to think of my barbaric tactics? Sheepishly, I shifted my gaze up to the cab of the truck. To my surprise Dad and Harry were bouncing around in the truck like a couple of mischievous schoolboys. Their cheers vanquished my feelings of shame and soon I was just as excited as they were. I was even more excited when Dad informed that he videotaped the entire flight!

We spent the remainder of the morning taking pictures, watching the videotape and marveling over the raw determination of the little Coops. I was having so much fun with Dad and Harry that I didn't want the trip to end. Unfortunately, I had to get back to work the next morning, so after a fond farewell, Dad and I began our journey home.

As the highway unfolded before us, a strange feeling began to spread within me. I didn't feel the disparity that had previously existed within myself. Somehow, life's colours, pictures, stains and textures seemed to blend together. I was warm all over and didn't have a worry in the world. I felt like a kid again. Actually, at that moment, I realised that I still was a kid, and knew that when I was sixty, the memories of the hawking trip with Dad and Harry would have the same effect on me that my childhood memories had on me at age thirty-three. This was a very liberating realisation, and I knew that I would never forget that day... when Harry met Sally. ■

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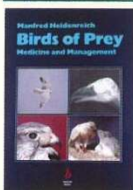
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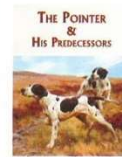
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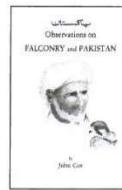
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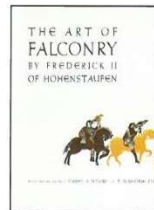
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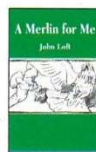
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A sparrowhawk

by Nicholas Kester



This is not an unusual tale. There are many who can recount similar examples of the strange bond between hawk and man that provides us with the genesis for falconry.

'Hacking' has many meanings. For the horseman it is free-reign walking; for the teenager it is typically being 'fed up', another falconry derivative. To the computer buff it means something far stranger, and more likely originated from 'hacking into' something with a sharp instrument.

To the falconer the legend of the increased performance of a hacked falcon persists. Old books contain faded photos of woodland hack boards white with mutes, inquiring eyasses peering down into the 'Box Brownie' lens. Those who still hack are met with incredulity by the ignorant or eager anticipation by the falconer 'on a promise'. And from the myth comes the banal. For the very symbol of the British Falconers' Club, the George Lodge painting of

'Black Jess', was so named, not for her dark satanic personality, but rather for the colour of her jesses whilst at hack. How painful it would be to have to refer to Yellow or Green Jess! But they must have existed. Out at hack is the domain of the falcon, but hacking back and tame hack are universal to all birds of prey.

Chris Ellard is a falconer from Kent, England. Active since 1977, he became the first pupil of Steve and Emma Ford's British School of Falconry - which he went on to manage for them in 1985/86. One spring an eyass sparrowhawk - a brancher to be exact - was handed in following its discovery in a garden fishpond, and Chris, being available and experienced, became her temporary keeper. With Department of the Environment (the UK body responsible for wildlife) approval he was to care for her and, as soon as she was hard-penned, teach her to hunt and then hack her back to the wild.

Initially, the little spar was traumatised by her 'bath', and by a small flesh wound to her shoulder. She refused to eat and Chris had to force feed her. But she soon got the message and, as is so often the case with wild hawks, once she had got through the first couple of days she made a good recovery. Very soon she was feeding happily and steady on the fist. Her wing still drooped but as an early vet inspection had shown no break, it was decided to fly her.

"Although she flew keenly, it was without the typical accipiter zip",

awk's tale.



says Chris. "Most spars, on leaving the fist, drop down a couple of gears and are away, but with her it wasn't quite there."

She did kill, indeed her first was an easy magpie, but Chris was not certain that she was yet ready to cope in the wild with any certainty. So after further correspondence with the authorities, she remained in his charge. She continued to kill for him and her fitness improved. Taking the decision to hack her back, her weight was pushed up and up to see when any reluctance to return to him would occur.

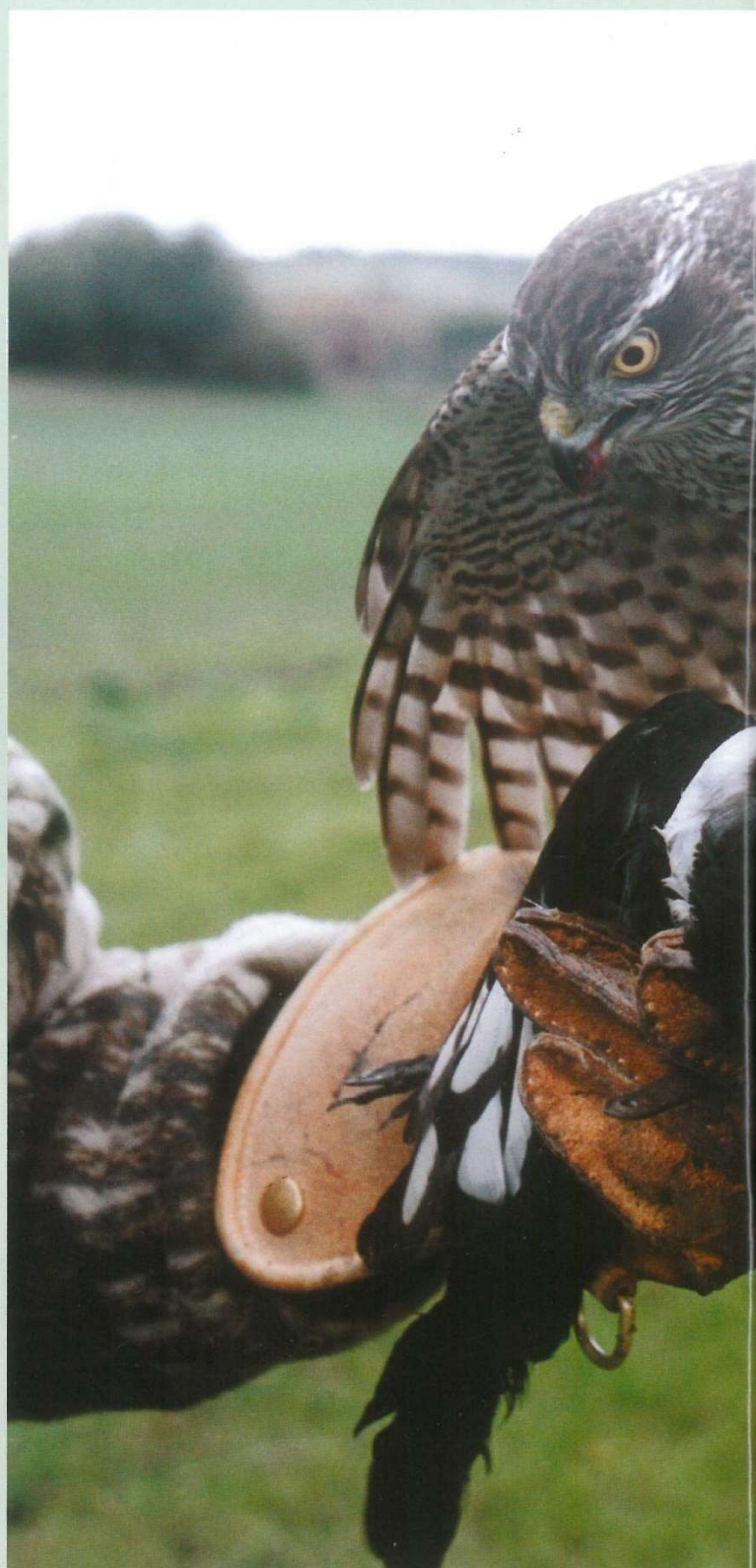
Whilst she must have been imprinted because of what was to follow, she didn't scream, mantle or carry. Yet she was totally confiding and unfazed, even affectionate to his family or friends.

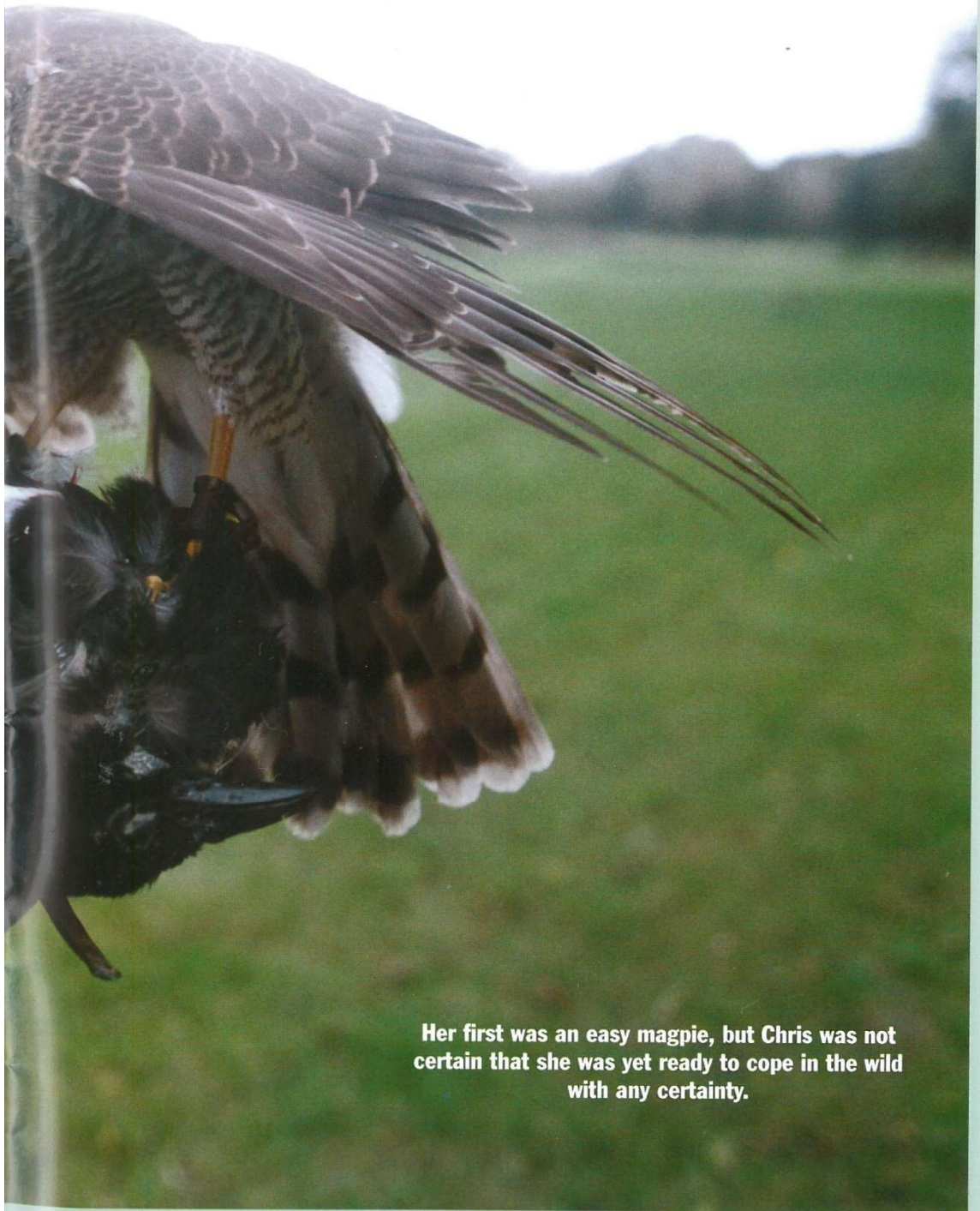
"Without wishing to sound soppy," says Chris, "she was pretty unusual. Special even."

He recalls a day's hawking: "We had had a long day and the spar was soaked. Nothing had been caught but she had flown hard and well. So rather than leave her in a cold car whilst we had a drink, I took her into the house and sat her on my knee. By the end of the evening she was tucked up on my upper thigh, totally at ease, unfazed by the assembled company chattering and passing drinks around. I never gave her a thought until it was time to leave, when it hit me what an exceptional relationship we had."

By November, try as he might, he couldn't lose her. She would follow on, even at top hunting weight, and was instant to the fist. So Chris decided enough was enough. She had killed and was fit. What more to do but cut off the jesses? This he did. He caste her off. Threw a chick into the air, which she caught and without a backward glance she was gone... or so he thought.

After a couple of days without a sighting, he became concerned. Given the fairly small range of spars, some view of her with two distinctive leg





Her first was an easy magpie, but Chris was not certain that she was yet ready to cope in the wild with any certainty.



rings, was expected. Eventually, he was rewarded.

Returning to his hill-top house, it was his wife who first spotted the soaring spar. Chris wasn't convinced. So he walked up the garden, whistled and she called to him from 300 feet up. A wonderful moment in any falconer's life.

Keeping a supply of fresh food against such an eventuality, he raced to fetch it, whistled again and she folded up, stooped down to him and levelled out to sit on the garage next to him. Chris tossed the food onto the roof, where she grabbed it, roused as if to say: "thanks, I'm ok", and flipped off the roof straight into a plate glass window. In the seconds it took to reach her, stunned but with the chick still clenched in her talons, Chris had convinced himself of the worst.

Ghastly as it had looked, after a

night in a box, she was fine and straight back into the wild, where she established a territory and was seen on a regular basis. Often Chris could go into the garden, spot her and call her back to the fist for no reward. Sometimes he would feed her, but mostly not.

And she was certainly hunting, as his neighbour, the owner of a wood yard, would confirm. He saw her kill on numerous occasions for this was the core of her territory, the yard was well stocked with suitable quarry, and it was in his barn that she roosted.

So by the following March, the authorities were informed that this particular spar had been successfully hacked back... but tragedy was to follow. Within days that same neighbour found her on the floor of her roosting spot shot dead. She had been blasted at a distance for the

skin was not punctured, flown back to the safety of the roost, and had died of internal injuries that night – 5 months after first being released into tame hack.

One question remains in Chris's mind as a result of the experience, and which he is keen to validate with future captive bred accipiters. Whether rearing a brancher rather than a downy eyass can achieve a non-screaming, non-mantling imprint. For that is what Chris's spar turned out to be, and despite his best endeavours to the contrary – not that this affected her performance in the wild. Is it a critical moment worth exploiting in the future, or was he just lucky to have the once-in-a-lifetime hawk handed in to him? ■

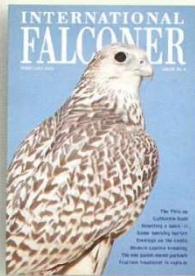
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VIDEO REVIEW

Nutrition is the first 40-minute video in a planned series of 20 titles to be known as *The Bird of Prey Management Series*. A 35-page, A5 size booklet compliments the video. The use of good quality video and easy to follow text is an excellent mixture of media when aimed at education and learning. This series is a massive undertaking and will be produced in several languages.

The presenters will not win any awards but this is to be expected, as they are biologists and not professional TV presenters. However all the information is nonetheless presented in a manner that is easily understood, with a particularly good description of the raptors' digestive system by Dr. Nigel Barton.

Some areas of raptor nutrition are quite contentious between various falconers and propagators, particularly with regard to the use of vitamins and supplements - this video tends to keep to the middle ground of the argument. One disappointment is the lack of new research included, with almost all of the material presented having been previously published, albeit through numerous publications and papers.

Some of the tables in the booklet had me puzzled for a while: in table 1, the fat %DM for pheasant is calculated as 0.0 - I am sure this is biologically impossible.

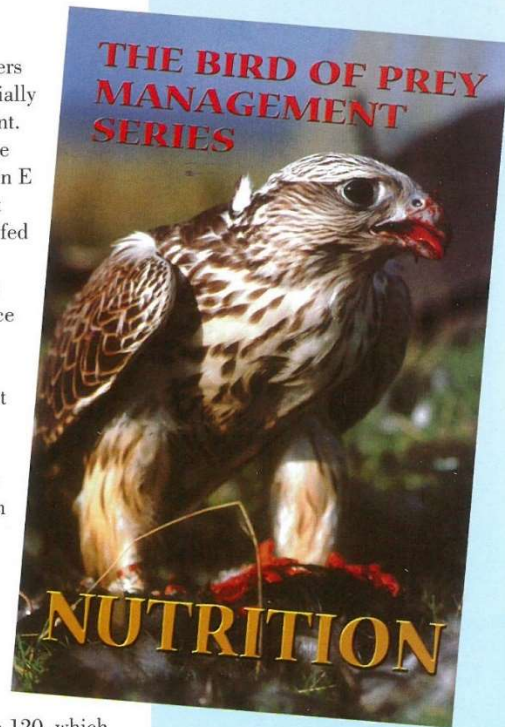
As stated in the text, to compare results from two different sources is a little precarious, particularly as the data given in Table 1, by Forbes and Flint is derived from whole-bodied animals and that by Barton and Houston from muscle meat alone. They also use different coefficients to calculate energy values from protein and fat.

In Table 2, the numbers just don't add up...especially that from Forbes and Flint. They give values of whole day-old chicks as Vitamin E at 40.7 and Vitamin A at 497 - the ratio of E to A fed to commercial breeder flocks of chickens in the UK is 1 to 150-250. Since both vitamin E and vitamin A are absorbed and utilised from the diet with approximately the same efficiency, either the parental stock of the day-old chicks were from hens on a special diet, or, the decimal point is incorrect. If the 40.7 should have been 4.07 then the results would have looked a little more believable - this would give a ratio of 1 to 120, which is more plausible.

In Table 3, either the Calcium (mg/kg) column title should read (g/kg) or the numbers are out by 3 decimal places e.g. quail should read 38,100 not 38.1.

These are small criticisms of an otherwise excellent publication and for that I congratulate Dr. Fox and Co. However, it does illustrate that much more concise research is needed into raptor nutrition. All too often we read that raptors need a good varied, complete diet, but no one has stated (scientifically in detail) what this represents for each species.

The beauty of this series is that the purchaser can choose a video relevant to the particular area of raptor management that he/she requires. I eagerly await the next video in the series, which will cover Anatomy.



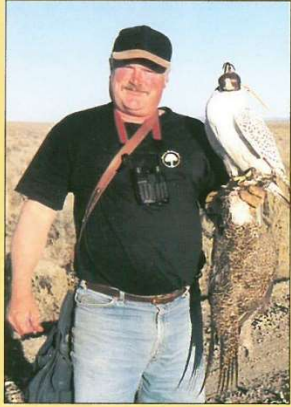
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