

INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

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ISSUE 9



Feed the passion

INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

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Cover painting by Joseph Wolf

EDITORIAL

It has certainly been a very worrying time over the last few weeks and day-to-day life in our rural communities here in the UK has been under tremendous strain. Foot-and-Mouth is by no means over yet but there comes a point when decisions must be made to begin to get things back to normal where at all possible and it's very welcome news to hear that many of this year's countryside events including the British Falconry Fair, will go ahead. *International Falconer* will again be present at the Fair along with our special guest Frank Beebe. It's not only Frank's first visit to this international annual falconry occasion, but also his first visit ever to the UK, so do take this opportunity to come along and meet one of the sport's greats.

This past hawking season has been hard going. The weather in this part of the world has been abysmal, the wettest that I can ever remember and the FMD crisis forced a very sudden end to hawking for many. Still, things can only improve and one can only hope for better things ahead.

International Falconer has now hit the 2-year mark can you believe! Hope you enjoy the cracking selection of articles in this issue and if you are going to the Falconry Fair we look forward to seeing you there!

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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CONTENTS

INTERNATIONAL
FALCONER

4 News

6 Joseph Wolf exhibition

Dick Treleaven previews the British Natural History Museum's Joseph Wolf Exhibition with a profile of the artist, regarded by many as the finest bird painter ever.

12 Magnum hawking

David T. Moran and his longtime hunting partner Dr. Greg Hayes discover a new and challenging quarry for their gyrfalcons - the abundant but very dangerous Canada goose.

22 In the dark

Is the hood a neccessary tool for the management of broadwings or a complication to do without? *Martin Hollinshead* gives some sound arguments as to why he believes it is indispensable.

28 Superfalcon - part 3

In this final part of the series *Frank L. Beebe* discusses the particular conditions which he believes creates one very special kind of jerkin.

34 The 'Full Monty'

Joe Atkinson explains why he thinks the sage grouse is the only North American quarry that can truly test the gyr/peregrine hybrid tiercel.

38 Control

Derry Argue looks at the basic disciplines required to make life with your canine hunting companion an enjoyable and successful experience.

44 Aspergillosis in raptors

Neil Forbes looks at this most feared of respiratory diseases, explaining the clinical signs, diagnosis, treatment and the measures that falconers can take to avoid it.

50 Book review

The Harris hawk - management, training and hunting.
Reviewed by *Nicholas Kester*.



Painting: Joseph Wolf



Dear Editor,

Your magazine reached new highs with the last edition. However, it has raised an issue in my mind that I would like to expand upon.

Neil Forbes in his splendid article states that "Falconers are well versed in the sporting benefits of hybridisation..." Apart from curiosity value, the point of producing hybrids is to load the dice in favour of the falcon i.e. to produce more kills. Is this really a sporting benefit? I think not. Nature has evolved a fine balance between raptors and their quarry and we are all aware of the results of irresponsible introductions of non-indigenous species in the past.

Neil then goes on to outline the research that has taken place to sterilise hybrids. Obviously, most falconers would opt for medical rather than surgical sterilisation but how do we ensure that all hybrids are kept by responsible people and that all hybrids will be sterilised?

There is now an exponential increase in the numbers and types of hybrids being produced and it is only a question of when and not if, lost hybrids breed with wild stock resulting in a massive outcry from various bodies and the general public against these arrogant individuals who feel they can do a better job than a natural evolution. This would be another, if not the final nail in the coffin.

Yours sincerely

Terry l'Anson
Arizona

UK NEWS & UPDATES

THE SHOW GOES ON!

The British Falconry & Raptor Fair
will take place on
Sunday 27 & Monday 28 May
at Offchurch Park, Nr. Leamington Spa



Due to its location and other favourable circumstances the British Falconry Fair has not been affected by the Foot-and-Mouth epidemic and is going ahead. MAFF (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food) have been consulted regarding the event and have given their complete approval. The only precaution taken by the organisers is to request visitors not to bring their dogs. **NO DOGS WILL BE ALLOWED ON SITE.** This will hopefully alleviate any fears some people may have regarding undue risks. See ad on page 43 for full details.

Phillip Glasier Memorial Window

A memorial stained glass window, dedicated to the memory of the late Phillip Glasier is planned for the church where he is buried. The designer, Graham Dowding has already completed a rough draft of the design which will depict birds, birds of prey and a small falconry scene.

A memorial service and dedication of the window will take place during March 2002.

If you would like to make a donation to the fund please send your cheque made out to 'The Memorial Window Fund', to The National Birds of Prey Centre, Newent, Gloucestershire, GL18 1JJ England.



Campaign For Falconry

PROMOTING THE ART • PROTECTING THE FUTURE

The Campaign has been going for just over three years now, and it seems a good time to look back at how we have spent the money raised.

HAWKBOARD CO-ORDINATOR

The Countryside Alliance has funded this part/full-time position on a sliding scale, with no contribution for 2001. The Campaign has helped pay the Co-ordinator's wages – we are the fund-raising arm of the Hawkboard, and it is our duty to do so.

We also made a contribution to the Scottish Hawkboard to assist with their setting-up costs. We made a contribution to Croatian Falconry. The Balkan war set them back – I heard tell that soldiers ate all their Sakers!

We also made a contribution to the International Association of Falconers.

Some of you may ask why do we need a Hawkboard? Firstly, let me tell you we would have lost the right to practise falconry years ago without their efforts. Things got a bit scary only a couple of years ago, but due to the vigilance of the Board, we are still flying our birds and hunting the quarry we want to take.

We must be the envy of Europe. The DETR talks to the Hawkboard and seeks their advice on the endless legislation thrust upon us from Europe. Thanks to the Hawkboard, the silly and unnecessary stuff falls by the wayside. Just look at how many species of birds we are able to fly in the UK. Most of you may not be

aware that the ladies and gentlemen of the Hawkboard do all this for no fee. In fact, most of them are out of pocket each year. Their reward comes from flying their birds and practising the sport they love. For those of you who are in Clubs affiliated to the Hawkboard, don't forget the elections coming up soon. Use your ballot paper to vote. PLEASE DON'T FORGET.

For those of you who still doubt the benefits of the Hawkboard, you have a chance to see them in action. They have an open meeting on 27 October 2001 at the new DETR building in Bristol. I am told they also have some top-notch speakers lined up for the day - don't miss it.

It would be remiss of me not to inform you of the changes in 2001. We have a new Hawkboard Co-ordinator, Mike Clowes. Mike is Secretary of the Welsh Hawking club. He also finds time for his passion, falconry. Not bad for a pensioner!

Some of you will know that ML (Marie Louise Leschallas) resigned as Chairman of the Campaign for Falconry due to an ever-increasing workload. This dynamic lady will be greatly missed. I, for one, enjoyed working with her over the past three years. However, life goes on. Our new Chairman is Terry Large. Terry has a wealth of knowledge in field sports, and falconry in particular. Terry is passionate about his sport, so we have a safe pair of hands at the helm.

So what of the future? Our past success is due to the many

donations we have received of paintings, prints, falconry equipment, and from sponsorship. Please keep up the good work. The anti hunting brigade won't stop. The Campaign has a new badge for this year, a Falcon hood. Please buy one.



Would you like to sponsor the Campaign? Can you donate something we can sell/raffle? If you can help, please contact me. We try to give publicity for those in business who donate.

We can all help in another way. Do you buy your food, birds and equipment from a supplier who sponsors the Campaign, or is involved with the Hawkboard?

Also, please don't forget to visit our stand at the Falconer's Fair, but remember, this year, leave your dogs at home.

Lastly, a big thanks to the Hawkboard, one and all. Our sport is safe in your hands.

Peter de Wit
Fund Raiser, CFF
e-mail:
falcocherrugrinus@hotmail.com

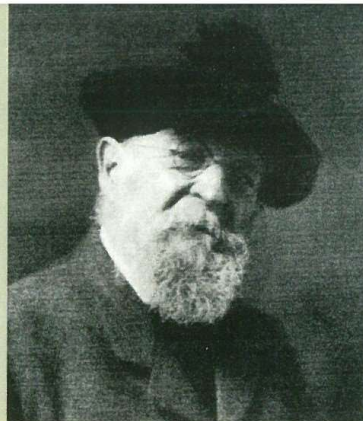
Joseph

Dick Treleaven previews the forthcoming exhibition of Joseph Wolf's work at London's Natural History Museum.



Drawings and paintings reproduced with the kind permission of The Natural History Museum, London.

Wolf



Joseph Wolf
1820 - 1898
ANIMAL PAINTER



Eagle over mountain. Charcoal 1875

Joseph Wolf is the undisputed father of modern wildlife painting. My first acquaintance with his work came in the late forties while sitting in George Lodge's studio at Hawkshouse, Camberley. "What is so special about him?" I asked. Lodge chuckled, "when I called on him as a young man, he always greeted me with a tumbler full of whisky. Naturally I thought he was a fine painter." He then advised me to read Palmer's *Life of Wolf*: A few days later I was lucky enough to find a copy in Rowland Ward's in Piccadilly, it was then that I realised why he was held in such high esteem. This dilapidated volume now stands on my bookshelf alongside Lodge's *Memoirs of an Artist Naturalist* and Dr. Russow's *Appreciation of Bruno Liljefors*.

Archibald Thorburn, George Lodge and the Swede, Bruno Liljefors, were all born in 1860 and went on to become distinguished wildlife artists. Their works show Wolf's ►

influence. Thorburn's paintings of crouched Ptarmigan are almost a direct copy of an earlier one of Wolf's; but they never quite match his sense of drama.

Wolf is best known to falconers, for his illustrations in *Traite de Fauconnerie*. However, the often reproduced painting of two gyrs attacking a kite is equally well known. When it was put on the auctioneers' stand at the sale of Lilford's art works it was described as 'Eagles Fighting' by unknown artist and knocked down for a miserable £9 to a Mr. C.W. Scott from Ladistall. I had the pleasure of sitting next to Mr. Scott at a British Falconers' Club feast in the late fifties and he verified the tale. It was later sold to the Tryon Gallery and thence to America. This will be the first chance for many of us to see the picture in the flesh; a most exciting prospect, for it is a magnum opus. Many older falconers will recall seeing the life-size cartoon of it at Jack Mavrogordato's house in Tilshead. There was yet a third version, a much smaller pencil sketch, which was presented to George Lodge on his goth birthday by the Rowland Ward Gallery.

Joseph Wolf was born in Koblenz, Germany, in 1820. The son of a farmer, he spent much of his boyhood sketching the local wildlife and learning its ways. At the age of sixteen he was apprenticed to a firm of commercial lithographers but soon became unhappy with the repetitive nature of the work. When some of his detailed watercolours were shown to a naturalist in Frankfurt, it led to him being asked by Professor Schlegel to produce life-size pictures of immature and adult goshawks. These were completed in his overtime (1840). He gave in his

notice and started working on the illustrations for *Traite de Fauconnerie*. His work began with the fifth plate; a hooded Greenland Falcon on the fist and is followed by twelve other falcons, depicted on ten plates. They were drawn in the artist's most careful and

collaborate on the plates of George Robert Gray's list of the genera of birds. This brought him to the forefront of British natural history illustration, and he began a long series of drawings in the *Proceeding of the Zoological Society* (1846 to 1869). Whenever



Gyrfalcons striking a kite Oils 1856

conscientious style with all the elaboration of that period in his art (Palmer's *Life of Wolf*). The work was carried out between 1844 and 1853 but the book took nine years to complete and was issued in three parts. After this commission Wolf became an independent artist.

In 1848, after a short stay in the Art College at Antwerp, Belgium, he moved to England where, unable to speak a single word of the language, he had to converse in French. His first commission was to

possible he drew from life, but he also worked from skins brought back from various expeditions. Many came from Africa - including some new to science and he soon became proficient at portraying mammals in lively poses. Also during this period he produced large numbers of plates for a wide variety of books including a new version of *Aesop's Fables*, Elliot's *Monograph of Pheasants*, Dresser's *Birds of Europe* and Freeman & Salvin's *Falconry: its Claims*,

History, and Practice.

Wolf was, above all else, a superb draughtsman, whose plates had a sense of balance about them rarely found in ornithological works. Charcoal was his favourite medium and he was fond of drawing and painting dramatic scenes of birds and animals in various states of distress - a theme which was later exploited by Liljefors.

Although Wolf painted many falcons, he complained that they had unsympathetic hard angular shapes and stiff plumage. He much preferred drawing eagles and buzzards because their feather texture was softer and more suited to his style of working.

He was an unusually honest painter, and in 1862 when he completed 190 woodcuts for John's *British Birds in their Haunts*, he commented that, "some of them I took a liking to, and took pains with, but many I did just for the money."

Palmer goes on to quote an interesting sidelight on the way Wolf worked. "I have often, noticed," he said, "that when I have been sitting downstairs with a friend talking of different things altogether, but always with an eye on the picture on the easel, then all at once I saw something which I had never seen before."

This same advice was passed on to me by George Lodge. "Prop up your painting" he told me, "light up your pipe and look at it out of the corner of your eye and all sorts of improvements will manifest themselves to you." Although I gave up smoking forty years ago his advice still holds good.

One of the more amusing anecdotes Wolf told Lodge was of the trickery employed by John Gould to steal drawings. He would ask Wolf to go up stairs into another room to search for something, then



Peregrine falcon taking mallard. Charcoal and chalk 1850

filch a sketch when he wasn't looking. However he always left a cigar on the table.

Wolf, like Lodge and Liljefors, was a kindly humorous man, but Thorburn was of a different order. He was a perfectionist and it shows in his unbending slavery to technique. When Wolf was asked what he thought of the English aristocracy he said. "They are just like the cock pheasants that they rear. They strut around in fancy waistcoats and speak with a hideous voice." He had a healthy scepticism

for academia and once painted an owl wearing mortarboard and pince-nez glasses holding up an egg entitled 'CA Lecture on Embryology' propounding the question which came first - the owl or the egg. He chided the men of science he met as being 'Drysticks'; men who work with their noses a few inches from their desks. There can be little doubt that Wolf broke the mould of nineteenth century wildlife painting; he infused life into his subjects. Sometimes they were a trifle melodramatic, but always bold

and vigorous in their execution. Edwin Landseer is quoted as saying, "He was, without exception, the greatest wildlife painter that ever lived." Not quite true, perhaps, but he paved the way for others.

This exhibition will be unique. It is the first time in this country that the public will be able to see a comprehensive display of his work, and there is no substitute for seeing the real thing in all its awesome grandeur. The chance to see his painting of the gyrs attacking a kite is alone worth the journey to London; and as one who has not visited the Metropolis for twenty years I shall be making the effort and crossing the Tamar into England. I would strongly urge all falconers to seize this opportunity to see some of the originals from *Traite de Fauconnerie*. Those who fail to do so will rue the day in later years.

From the book *Joseph Wolf* (ISBN 3-925437-57-7) edited by Karl Schulze-Hagen with both English and German text:

All these artists have been surpassed by a young Joseph Wolf, wrote Herman Schlegel (1804-1884) zoologist at Rijkmuseum of Natural History in Leiden, himself a highly skilled bird artist as early as 1849. Growing up in the country and without knowledge of a single precursor to model himself on, he observed as much as he was able to and drew a large number of studies of them and their parts from life. With extraordinary intelligence, dexterity and armed with a large portion of genius, diligence and patience he has a greater gift than any one of his predecessors for capturing, with the greatest exactness, the posture and character of any species, and for correctly depicting the relation of one part of the body to another.



Goshawk and gazelle Charcoal 1852

Herbert Palmer's *A Visit to Wolf's Studio in the 1890's*

'In answer to the tinkle of the bell a tall, broad-chested old gentleman appears, pipe in hand, at a door which is fringed with climbing convolvulus and ivy. Happily there is nothing 'artistic' about him, unless it be a knitted 'Tam o'Shanter' cap... A pair of very large round spectacles rest on his nose which has strong angular bend of the Eagles beak about it... Behind the spectacles are a very kindly, true looking grey eyes, in

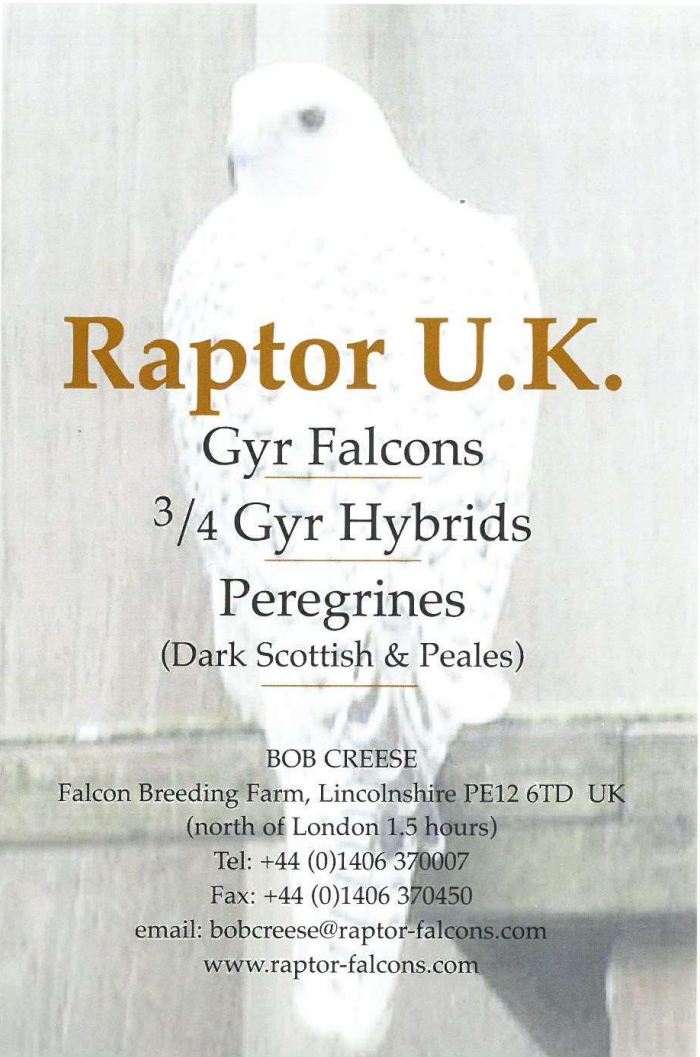
which a merry twinkle is not unknown.' ■

Joseph Wolf Exhibition 'Capturing the Moment'

The Jerwood Gallery,
Natural History Museum,
Cromwell Road, London.

27th MAY - 24th SEPTEMBER 2001

**ADMISSION Adults £9
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MAGNUM

HUNTING CANADA GE



HAWKING WITH GYRFALCONS

by David T. Moran



Gyrfalcons of both sexes are turbocharged game-hawks that are great fun to fly at winged quarry. Dr. Greg Hayes and I – hawking partners over the past quarter-century – have focused much of our attention during the past decade on game-hawking with gyrs. We’ve had many memorable days in the field chasing (and catching) a variety of quarry such as sage grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, prairie chickens, pheasants, mallards, and – let it be whispered – a large rainbow trout. (But that’s another story.)

Like other falconers who go afield with these heavyweight Arctic falcons, we’re continually impressed by how ‘gamy’ they are. Gyrfalcons, which chase everything with amazing gusto, rarely give up. When one considers the forbidding environment in which they evolved, that’s a necessary trait. In the Arctic – where the temperature bottoms out below minus seventy degrees Fahrenheit, the winds roar at fifty-plus miles per hour for days at a time, and there’s precious little light to hunt by in winter – to miss a meal is to die. Consequently, gyrs have developed what we call ‘Arctic desperation’: they pursue game relentlessly ▶

**The author’s 6th year gyrfalcon, ‘Jaws’,
with just-caught Canada goose.**

MAGNUM HAWKING

as if their very lives depend upon it. (Which, of course, they do.) This phenomenon is especially evident in evening flights.

How did our affair with 'Magnum Hawking' begin? Well, two seasons ago, Greg and I were flying my intermewed female gyrfalcon, 'Jaws,' at ducks on a pond. It's more fun to fly falcons with two people involved, for one can focus on the flush while the other watches the flight through binoculars. This time, Greg offered to flush. That allowed me to watch Jaws for the duration of the flight. On this occasion, Jaws mounted to a modest pitch of about 400 feet. (Like many longwings, she'll adjust her pitch to the nature of the flight. Over an open grouse moor, she'll go quite high. When she sees ducks on a pond, however, she'll stay lower and closer to the action.) Greg planned to flush when Jaws was well away from the pond, for the flight quality is higher if one flushes when the gyr is well out of position. That way, the quarry commits itself to flight quickly and becomes a fast-moving, fully-aerobic, harder-to-hit target. Such air-to-air combat is more fun to watch than taking a duck on the rise, for when waterfowl are climbing, they cannot perform aerobic evasive maneuvers.

As I watched Jaws through the Zeiss 7x40 binoculars, her white form glowed with a Shamanic iridescence against the turquoise Colorado sky. Struck by her beauty, I was starting to lose myself in the aesthetics of the moment when Greg charged the pond to flush. Jaws swiveled her head round to sight in on the flock taking to the air below, did a quick wing-over, and rolled out into a long slanting stoop, wings tucked half-way back and rotating like high-pitch propellers. As she accelerated earthward, I expected to

see her form merge in the binoculars' magnified field with that of a duck. Instead, a huge Canada goose hove into view! (Unbeknownst to us, there were two geese hiding in the cat-tails along with the ducks.) Jaws flared out behind the flying behemoth and came in fast and level, punted the goose hard from behind, and pitched up sharply. Her air-strike to the big bird's derriere had all the effect of booting the goose forward like a soccer ball. The goose arced its long neck around, looked at Jaws, honking in outrage.

Canada geese are big, strong, aggressive, and social. The big ones, weighing in at upwards of twelve pounds, can get really nasty on the ground.

The gyrfalcon, puzzled her quarry had not simply fallen out of the air as had others before it, executed a quick wing-over and smacked it in the tail yet another time. Once again, the blow to the gander's rear end simply served to speed him up on his flight to freedom. It was like watching a cartoon where one of the characters will take an enormous amount of abuse, reassemble itself for further punishment, and go on about its business. I could almost see Jaws shrug her shoulders as she pitched up, rolled out, saw the retreating flock of mallards, charged after them, and bound to one.

As Greg and I watched her take her pleasure on the kill, we were of one mind: since Jaws had chosen to stoop at a goose instead of the ducks, she obviously wanted it. Why, then, not fly our gyrs at geese? After all, being Americans, we're

firmly rooted in the belief that Bigger Is Better. Our truck engines are huge. Our handguns can break engine blocks. We spend outrageous sums for tickets to NFL football games where we can watch steroid-laden three hundred-pound linebackers smash into each other at full speed. Why not do some serious 'Magnum Hawking' – fly huge hawks at massive waterfowl? Frederick II would be proud! It's always fun to have a new challenge in falconry... Besides, the big yellow machines are digging up our flying fields and ponds and turning them into housing 'developments' at warp speed, the ducks are getting scarce, and thousands of Canada geese are moving in. For a large falcon, Canada geese have quickly become the most available quarry in our area. And, Canada geese seem to be a natural quarry for gyrs in the wild. Last year, some bird-watchers saw a wild passage female gyrfalcon consistently catch Canada geese around a reservoir in nearby Fort Collins, Colorado.

Although Canada geese are abundant quarry, there's one drawback: they are very dangerous. One's hawk can get hurt flying them. Canada geese are big, strong, aggressive, and social. The big ones, weighing in at upwards of twelve pounds, can get really nasty on the ground. Armed with wing-butts like baseball bats, Canada geese can crack your arm and can easily break your falcon's back with a well-aimed wing-whip. In addition, Canada geese are social, very protective of one another, and will gang up on a falcon engaged in a ground battle with one of their kind. Years ago, Greg flew a prairie falcon that caught a Canada goose and was killed on the ground by its compatriots. Clearly, we'd have to be

careful to minimise the danger to our falcons. We'd need to find a flock we could flush under the gyrfalcon so when it knocked the goose to the ground we could run in, help the falcon with the downed goose, and scare off the rest of the flock, thereby preventing a rugby scrum that could easily wind up with the gyr coming out second best.

Our initial flights at Canada geese were done with Greg's first-year jerkin, 'Einar.' Einar is an exceptionally high-flying bird. It takes two people to fly him. One must watch Einar with binoculars as he mounts and keep the optics trained on him for the duration of the flight, for his white form quickly becomes invisible against the great dome of the sky when he gains an altitude of a thousand feet or more. Once you've lost track of him, you can't visually acquire him again. And it's always nice to know where your falcon is when you flush. One day – when I was out of town – Greg flew Einar by himself on a 'routine' training flight. The eager jerkin mounted quickly and disappeared into the clouds. Unable to locate him, Greg ran to the truck, pulled out the telemetry, and got a signal way off to the south. Scanning the sky with binoculars, he saw no sign of Einar, but did spy a wide 'V' of Canada geese approaching from the south. Suddenly, Greg saw the geese break formation and ball up into a mass of randomly waving wings as a small white form shot through the flock. It was Einar! He was stooping through the flock! Greg watched the air show as it covered a distance of several miles. Einar was trying to cut a goose out of the flock and harry it to the ground. Unfortunately, the flock was too big, was flying at a high altitude, and the geese escaped worried but unscathed. That flight

made one point very clear: Einar, all forty ounces of him, wanted those twelve-pound geese badly!

Given Einar's enthusiasm, we decided to pursue goose-hawking with the plucky jerkin seriously. Hoping for a more controlled flight, we located several medium-sized ponds that held geese, secured permission from the landowner, and put Einar up over one of them. The small group of geese swimming about didn't appear to be upset by the presence of the falcon circling overhead. Although I don't fully understand goose behaviour, it could be that at this latitude, where gyrs

are only occasionally seen, the large Canada geese aren't often preyed upon by falcons. This worked to our advantage, for we were able to flush the flock quite easily. When the geese cleared the water's edge and were flying overland, still accelerating and gaining altitude, Einar folded up his wings, stooped earthward, and flared out behind one of the geese. Watching through binoculars, I saw Einar fly right up its back and grab it, climbing forward until he had it by the neck. He took it down just like a cowboy bulldogging a steer. Goose and falcon tumbled earthward in a ▶



He did it! The gutsy little forty-ounce jerkin had brought down a seven-pound goose!

MAGNUM HAWKING

mass of waving wings and hit the ground hard. Yelling and screaming like a couple of kids at a football game, Greg and I ran in to the struggling pair as fast as we could. When we got there, Einar had the goose – one of the smaller ones in the flock, thank goodness – firmly by the head and neck and seemed in control of the situation. We were elated: He did it! The gutsy little forty-ounce jerkin had brought down a seven-pound goose! Needless to say, Greg let Einar gorge on his catch. That took him up to fifty-five ounces, and it was at least a week before he was ready to chase anything again.

When Einar was back to fighting weight, he took several more Canada geese in fine style in similar situations. He started hitting them in the air very hard – so hard I feared he might knock himself out. In each case, he had the goose on the ground within a quarter-mile of us, enabling Greg to get to Einar to secure his quarry before he got hurt.

Now that Einar was made to geese, we decided to do some 'extreme hawking' at larger flocks of geese out in the wide open spaces. We set out for the sparsely-populated prairies of eastern Colorado where large, open fields surrounding the South Platte river provide feed for huge flocks of geese. As we made our way east on rural roads, dotted by small towns with a hundred or so human inhabitants, we stopped to rest and run our dogs by an historical marker that caught our interest. Set in a place called 'Summit Springs' originally inhabited by the Cheyenne, a bronzed sign bore this inscription: "Tall Bull, Chief of the Cheyenne Renegade Indians, was

shot dead by Major Frank North in the canyon 1/4 mile southeast of this spot in the battle of Summit Springs July 11, 1869."



The sign made me aware that the prairies over which we were about to fly our falcons was occupied by Native Americans only a century and a half ago. They had been hunters, just as we are.

But they galloped across the prairies on horseback, hunting the buffalo and deer with bows and arrows and lances. We were bouncing across the prairies in four-wheel-drive trucks hunting geese with Arctic falcons. I wondered what the Cheyenne would have thought if they'd seen us coming over the hill. Or what we

would think if we could be transported back in time, living amongst the Cheyenne...

After we'd weathered the falcons and gathered up the dogs, we set out to scout the countryside for Canada geese. Our reconnaissance quickly showed most of them to be concentrated on the South Platte River during the day. That was not good, for – as anyone who has tried it will be quick to tell you – rivers are difficult to fly with falcons. Lady Luck was with us, for as sunset approached large rafts of

geese lifted off from the South Platte and flew far out into the agricultural fields to feed. Driving along dirt roads, we followed big Vs of geese for many miles as they made their way across the sky, hoping to see some to land in a 'flyable' situation. Having been blasted at with twelve-bores all season, the geese – wary of humans – must have thought

we were chasing them with the War Wagon. They really didn't want to land with our truck in sight. So we changed tactics; we stayed still. And watched. And waited. Finally, as the sun began to set behind the Rocky Mountains, we saw a big V of geese go into a landing pattern about a mile away. After they'd settled down in an open field, we drove to a spot about a mile upwind of them and pulled the truck off the road. Greg got out, unhooded Einar, and cast him off.* We watched the jerkin

take off and power into the wind, flying hard and gaining altitude fast. As I watched his ascent, I noticed a large flock of geese – different from one we'd marked down – take off in front of the falcon to the west. As they lifted off, Einar picked up the pace, and when he overtook the geese he was quite high above them.

What happened next was quite remarkable. Einar stooped hard at the flock, now about a hundred feet above ground. The geese broke their orderly V and fell into disarray as the small white gyr rocketed through their ranks. As they re-assumed their V formation, Einar threw up to about four hundred feet and stooped at them again, hard. This time, he managed to cut

out two geese from the flock – much as a Border Collie would cut a couple of cows out of the herd – and started worrying it toward the ground. The race was on as the geese, flying hard, tried to gain altitude. (Being away from the flock deprived them of the aerodynamic lift and draft given to their wings and bodies by the V formation, thereby slowing them down). Einar kept swatting at them, trying to drive them to ground. The pair of geese veered off cross-wind to the north, trying to gain airspeed. As the air-to-air combat went on, covering about a quarter of a mile, the main flock of geese swung north on a parallel course. The flock flew down toward the pair of geese being chased by Einar, swept them up at the end of their V formation like a large vacuum cleaner. As the large flock headed north, Einar followed for about a half-mile, looking for an opening but not finding one. I watched him in the binoculars as he became a dot in the distance.

"Where's Einar?", asked Greg anxiously. "Well, he was chasing the whole flock, but now he's turning and coming toward us," I answered. "How high is he?" "Oh, about a thousand feet." "Let's get in the truck and start driving! Maybe he'll follow us to the other flock!", yelled Greg.

We clambered into the truck, fired up the big V-8, and roared down the road as fast as we could go. When we got in the vicinity of the flock we'd originally marked down, we saw them standing in a field about a quarter-mile out from the road, looking pretty nervous.

Greg leaped out of the truck and raced across the ploughed field, yelling and waving his arms.

Tentatively, a few at a time, the geese began to take off. I looked up in the sky: no sign of Einar. If he was there, I couldn't find him. All of a sudden, the geese started to fly erratically as Einar, coming in from above at high speed, made a pass at them. He did a quick throw-up and smacked one of the Canada geese that had just taken off. I put the binoculars on him for a better view. As the goose he'd just hit staggered across the ploughed earth, Einar did a fast wing-over like a check-mark and grabbed it. My heart raced as I saw a blur of big grey wings and small white wings flailing about as the goose, with jerkin attached, rolled around on the ground. Meanwhile, two other geese landed nearby and marched in to join the fray. With wing-butts raised and primaries held down along their sides, their menacing silhouettes looked like the martial eagle images on the shields of Roman soldiers. As the geese started snapping their big

war-club wings at Einar, I feared they'd break his back or a wing in no time. But Einar knew what to do. He hid behind the goose he was holding, using it as a shield against the blows that were raining upon him. Seeing this tactic, one of the geese ran behind the crouching Einar to get a clear shot at him. As the battle raged, Greg was huffing and puffing his way across the ploughed field, trying to get to his falcon to help out. When the geese seemed to be about to get the better of Einar, he shot backward in the air, flew in a tight semicircle at ground level, and grabbed a different goose by the neck! As yet another wrestling match began, more geese rallied and charged in to help their fallen comrade.

By this time,

Greg was within fifty yards of the battle, and was able to scare off the defenders, who took to the air, leaving the jerkin to battle the big Canada goose mano a mano.

When Greg reached Einar, the gyr had control of the situation. He had one foot around the goose's head, one around the base of its neck, and was keeping his head clear of the goose's flogging wings. Greg grabbed the goose, dispatched it swiftly, and took some time to find his breath as Einar happily plucked his catch.

I felt a huge surge of relief as I watched Greg walk across the field with Einar safe on the fist and a goose tucked under his arm. When Greg made it back to the truck, he was exhausted, but ecstatic. So was I! And with good reason; we had just seen a truly remarkable flight, the best of the season. As boys, we'd read about Frederick II and his entourage flying gyrs at cranes ▶

MAGNUM HAWKING

and herons in epic flights that covered miles of sky, and here we'd seen a flight of that scale unfold right in front of us!

We proudly placed Einar in the back of the truck with his goose and let him eat his fill as we started the long drive back to Boulder. As the headlights lit up the road in the dark of night, Greg asked me to recount the battle I'd witnessed through the binoculars over and over, for he had been so intent on setting the world record for the quarter-mile run across a ploughed field that he hadn't seen much of the action. We felt like two Indian warriors in the tipi looking into the fire telling of brave deeds in a mighty battle just won.

Seeing Einar take geese spurred me on to see what my female gyr Jaws could do with these large waterfowl. The next day, while Einar put over his massive gorge, we took Jaws out to the same pond where the jerkin had taken his first goose. Luck was with us, for there were a few geese swimming on the pond. Jaws was at her ideal game-hawking weight: fifty-two ounces. At that weight, she's hungry (but not starving) and very, very strong. We put her up over the pond, flushed the geese, and I was delighted to see her go into a long slanting stoop and smack a goose hard from above. It caused the goose to bobble in flight, but didn't disable it, so Jaws pitched up, hurtled earthward again, and bound to the large Canada goose, grabbing it by the neck and flying with it down into a valley below us. As we ran down to help – she caught it quite a distance from us – I could see wings waving, birds flopping around on the ground, and hoped we could get there before Jaws got beat up. My worries were unfounded, for when we arrived on

the scene, Jaws had the goose completely under control. With one big yellow foot on the head, and the other on the neck, Jaws was standing proudly in the snow with her catch. It's hard to describe the emotions that one feels at such a moment, for they're so extreme – first, there's the awful fear the falcon may be hurt. Then there's the lesser fear the quarry will escape. And then – when all's gone well – there's the elation associated with the catch. We fed Jaws up, repaired back to the Hayes's ranch, 'Prairie Creek,' where we celebrated Jaws's first goose with a glass of single malt Scotch whisky. As we sat by the fire, we hatched a plan for our next 'Magnum Hawking' adventure.

When both falcons were back at flying weight, Greg and I drove east to the sandhills of Nebraska, where we'd planned to take a combined grouse-and-geese-hawking trip. When we arrived in the sandhills, I was glad to see there were not only plenty of prairie chickens and sharp-tailed grouse, but a healthy population of Canada geese as well! Since Jaws had done so well on her first flights at geese, I was eager to watch her in action in this beautiful countryside. Early one morning, as we were looking for a slip, we spied several geese in a marshy area not far from the road. We drove about a half-mile upwind and parked the truck. I got out, unhooded Jaws, and cast her off. She climbed into the wind, circled, and came right over the truck. We hopped in, started the engine, and drove back to where the geese were, Jaws following us and climbing all the way. When we got there, Jaws was at a good pitch. We ran toward the marsh, yelling and screaming. The geese were reluctant to leave. Finally, after considerable persuasion on our part, they ▶





The author and 'Jaws' after another
successful flight at Canada geese.

'Jaws' - 52oz
Goose - 12lbs

MAGNUM HAWKING

splatted across the surface of the wetland and started to lumber into the air. Jaws immediately smacked the largest one into the water, did a quick wing-over, and bound to it. The goose – a big gander – immediately went on the offensive; the white falcon and grey goose started slugging it out in the marsh. First Jaws was on top. Then the goose flipped over and got her down and started pounding at her with its wings. Then Jaws went to the head and got back on top of the goose. All the time, Greg was bravely slogging his way through chest-deep, ice-cold water trying to get on the scene to lend a hand. Just as he got there, the big gander took off in high dudgeon, honking its outrage to the world. Jaws shook some of the water off herself, opened her white wings, and raced off after the retreating goose. She caught up to it, bound to it, and took it down into yet another marsh a football field away. Once again, the gyr and goose went at it like two heavyweights in the ring, neither giving any quarter. When Greg and I reached the scene, the goose broke away once again and limped off downwind. Once again, Jaws chased it, and the two of them disappeared over one of the sandhills. Greg and I – water sloshing out of our pants and shoes – hustled back to the road, got in the truck, and bounced across the sandhills in the direction of the flight. We crested a hill and were greeted by the sight of Jaws standing on a grassy knoll above a large cat-tail-filled wetland. I saw a big streak of blood splashed across her breast. I hoped it wasn't hers.

"Where's that goose?", asked Greg. "In the cat-tails," I said. "Probably stretched out underwater and hiding like a teal. We'll never

find it. Let's call it a day."

"No way," said Dr. Hayes. "Jaws put up one hell of a fight. She deserves this one. I'm goin' in!"

With that, my energetic red-haired friend – wearing only jeans and tennis shoes – ran straight into the swamp and started beating at the reeds. Seeing this, Jaws took off, flew over a particular clump of cat-tails, and started hovering. "There it is!", I cried. "Jaws is telling us where that goose is!"

After Jaws had resumed her perch on the bank, Greg waded over to where Jaws had hovered, started slapping at the reeds. Sure enough, the big gander emerged from the muck and lumbered into the air on wobbly wings, once more trying to make good its escape. After the goose was a hundred yards away, Jaws decided to give it another go. She took off after the goose and chased it out of sight over the sandhills. One more time, we walked back to the truck and drove off in search of the gyr and the goose. We found the goose standing near some trees in a shallow pond with its head down in a submissive posture as if to say, "I'm beat, fellas. Can we stop this now?" Thinking it might be mortally wounded – and with Jaws nowhere in sight – we slowly made into the big gander to assess his condition. Fit enough to fly, the gander lurched into the air and headed east. Not knowing what would happen, I put the binoculars up to my eyes and watched the tired gander flap off across the field. All of a sudden, a white form appeared out of nowhere and smacked the goose to the ground. It was Jaws! Where had she come from? For the third time, we got back into the truck and drove over to where the air-strike had been. This time we

found Jaws standing on the shore of a lake, fuming. The goose was nowhere to be seen. As I started walking along the shore, wondering where the big gander was hiding this time, I heard the 'ching-ching' of bells as Jaws flew over, landed beside me, looked up, and hopped to the fist as if to say, "OK, I've had enough. Can we eat and go home now?"

I reached into the hawking bag, produced a fine lunch for her, and felt very happy to have my falcon back on the fist in one piece. She had taken a tremendous beating. Fortunately, the blood she wore on the breast was goose blood, not gyr blood. Aside from being a bit bruised and battered, my bird seemed sound. She had a special gleam in her eye.

And so did Greg and I. For we'd seen a great flight in which both gyr and goose gave a very good account of themselves. This time, however, the goose carried the day.

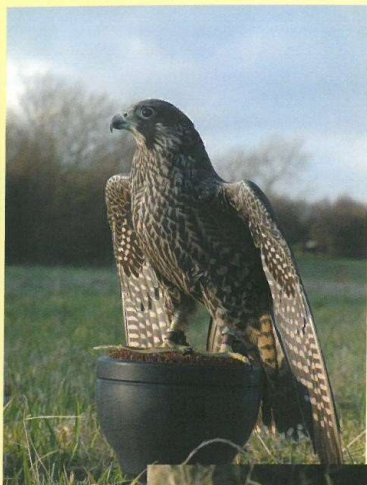
That was this season's final flight at Canada Geese. What will next year's Magnum Hawking season bring?

Stay tuned! ■

FOOTNOTE

*Since Einar follows the truck, climbing all the way, we can put Einar off far away from the quarry, drive close to the flock, get out of the truck, and flush. This has two advantages. First, if we release Einar within sight of the geese, he'll fly straight at them and grab one on the ground, which could be bad for his health. Second, many kinds of quarry will leave when they see the falcon take off. By casting Einar off a mile or so away from the quarry and driving over to flush with the falcon following us, he'll be in position – often several thousand feet high – over the truck, his intimidating presence keeping the geese pinned down when we get out to flush.

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IN THE DARK

by Martin Hollinshead

The use of hoods for broadwings varies enormously from country to country.

In some lands the hood is seen as indispensable, in others, completely superfluous.

In North America, it is widely used with passage redtails, and on the European Continent, its use with golden eagles has swiftly increased over about fifteen years.

In Britain, however, the tendency has been not to use the hood at all, saving it primarily for longwings. ▶

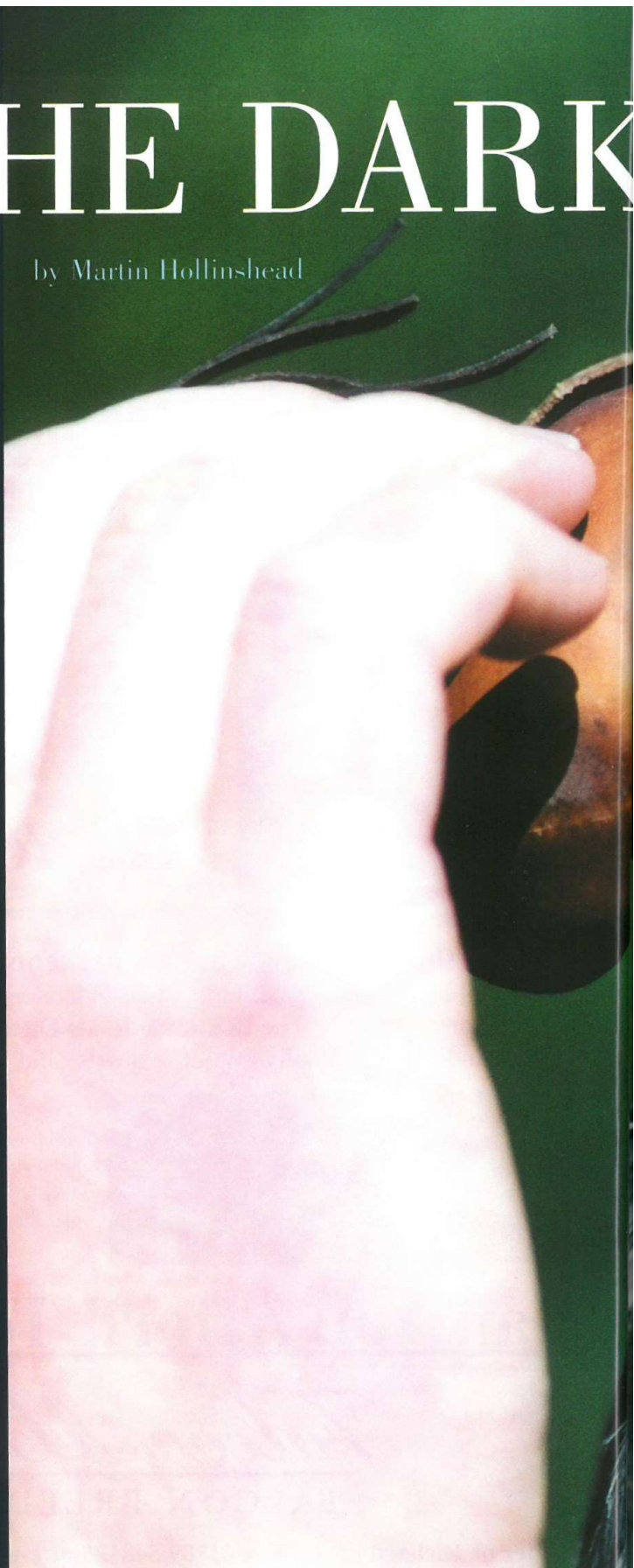




photo: Terry Anthony

Overall, there seems to be a general move towards hooding, and even in Britain, hood makers report increased sales of broadwing hoods. But the battle hasn't been completely won. In many quarters the anti-hood feeling lingers. Some falconers consider hooding totally unnecessary with broadwings and argue that these birds become too tame to warrant it. But of course, not all broadwings are tame. Some, depending on species and background, are far from it. And even with the very tamest bird there are numerous reasons why the hood should be employed. The hood eases training, hunting and basic management. Indeed, there are few areas where it can't be of assistance.

TAMING

My own use of the hood begins with basic taming. In Britain there has been a tendency to bare-head tether a newly acquired broadwing - often in full light - and while this can work, it can also be very hard on plumage and legs; and how many newly acquired Harris' hawks break legs each year? Of course, shock absorbers, either built into the leash or fixed to the perch, do help, but surely the best approach is to prevent bating rather than reduce the damage it does. When dealing with any aviary-fresh bird, my policy is to keep it hooded until it will suffer my approach; the hood is

only removed for feeding and manning periods.

This is a much kinder, less

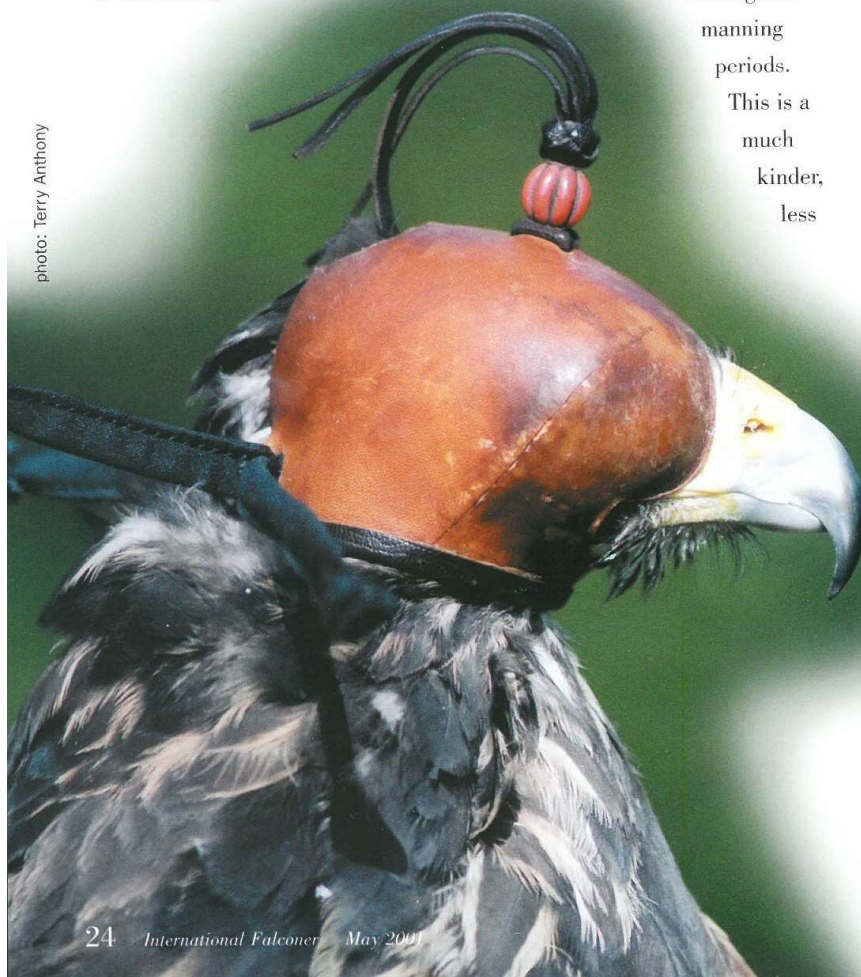
stressful approach. It's a method very familiar to US falconers working with passage redtails and has always been the way for Asian falconers flying passage eagles.

It should be remembered with all of this that bating doesn't make a bird tamer, it makes it wilder. Using the hood, the initial taming period can be sailed through with practically no bating at all. Taming runs smoothly and very swiftly. Not that hooding always works, or is safe. Some birds are very 'odd' when initially hooded and will bate and continue to crash about. Such a bird is obviously not safe to be left with the hood on. For this bird, a darkened room has to be used as an alternative and the hood worked in as training progresses.

As training advances and outings further afield are undertaken, the hood helps to keep sessions as positive as possible; a severe fright and a lot of bating will leave a lasting impression on the pupil. I'm reminded of the old shortwinger's saying: *"The more they see the tamer they will be."*

But terrifying a glove-restrained bird half to death, is not the way to come forwards. There certainly are many things during initial training that the more sensitive broadwing is better off not seeing. But I agree that caution needs to be exercised lest the hood be overused. The bird that is kept from everything is being done no favour

photo: Terry Anthony



IN THE FIELD

The hood has numerous uses in the field. Firstly, as with taming and early training, it allows the falconer to keep his bird from negative experiences. Just getting about the field can be made easier. Busy roads may need to be negotiated, fences and streams jumped, even barbed wire wriggled through, and such activities can be unsettling - even dangerous - for the liable-to-bate bird. Even with the free-flying Harris', the hood helps. The falconer might wish to move to a completely different area, and this move might require the bird to be carried on the fist. Unless hooded, the bird normally given a lot of freedom may do a lot of bating. And what about unexpected happenings? A hot-air balloon preparing to land might upset the tamest bird! The risk of such things didn't worry one Harris' owner: *"If she's scared she flies back to the car."* He obviously didn't hunt far from his car or in very demanding terrain. Some birds will 'home' massive distances back to the falconer's vehicle, but it's not the most practical way to deal with upsets if you want to get the most out of the day.

Free flight leads me to soaring. I do a lot of soaring on high, wind-swept ground and rely on the hood to get up to where the lift is. With the hood, it is possible to carry the bird up the steepest, windiest hill without any restlessness at all. I am reminded of some hill hawkers on a windy moor. One bird was being carried under its owner's arm due to the jess-restraint battering its legs

had taken.

And from free-flight to 'off the glove' and hawking brown hares. The British brown hare is essentially an animal of open, arable landscapes, making soar-hawking difficult, and often removing tree-flights as an option. The hunter of brown hares normally flies from the glove in direct pursuit - and this type of hawking, which might involve a lot of searching before the right hare is found, is much better conducted out of the hood. Under the hood, the bird can be spared the frustration of being held back from quarry flushing at too great a range. And the bird normally allowed free-flight will be especially grateful for the hood. For this bird, the hood keeps tempting, though, for the job at hand, too distant, perches from its gaze.

Even with ferreting the hood can sometimes help. For example, a dangerous warren, perhaps one next to a fence, might need to be worked. The bird can remain hooded until it's clear which way the rabbit is going to run. Even when digging down to a ferret-caught rabbit, the hood can be employed. Harris' hawks especially can become quite fidgety during the dig. But if one member of the team keeps the bird hooded while the other digs, should a rabbit bolt mid-dig (a common occurrence), a flight can still be had; and if no flight, then the bird is saved from seeing the rabbit being extracted. In open, treeless country I might even use the hood to get the bird from warren to warren; again, the bird normally allowed a lot of freedom will not

appreciate being carried unless hooded. Also, the bird out on a group day, will be better off for not constantly having to watch quarry being flown at by other hawks, this does nothing for commitment. And then there are many Harris' hawks that are flown from car windows to corvids. Here again the hood helps.

The hood can assist in the field in a couple of other ways too. Quarry might need to be transferred from the hawking bag to the rucksack. And, to return to ferreting, the locator-less falconer might want to resort to using a dead rabbit to try and lure the ferret from below ground. Then there's the end of the day, the time when the bag is inspected, perhaps dressed out, and the inevitable snap shot taken. And for this the bird should be hooded. I hate to see birds staring at quarry they have previously caught. This, like being held back from flights, can't do anything for commitment.

And then it's back to the car, and again the hood guarantees the well-rewarded bird's last moments in the field are as pleasant as possible. Indeed, at the close of the day, and when the bird has taken a good reward from its final kill, it will be actually looking for the hood and the peace it brings. After being picked up, the seasoned performer will clean its beak on the offered bare hand and then feak again when hooded. This shows real contentment under the hood. Of course, the walk back to the car could be accomplished with the bird feeding on the fist. But this is nothing like as smooth or safe. The glove-food has to last the entire ▶

journey and so has to be very tough or bulky. When the car is reached, it will have to be traded for something easier/speedier to eat, or be removed, or left with the bird to finish. Trading can be tricky, removal, without causing offence, practically impossible, and the last option, very time consuming. And, from a personal point of view, I like the bird to finish the day at the scene of the final kill. The hood guarantees the bird's last thoughts are on that kill.

OTHER USES

The hood can help enormously with lure pursuits. I use lure pursuits a lot; they start during training and continue all through the bird's career. They get youngsters thinking about catching their own meals and keep older birds fit during non hunting periods. Such pursuits are almost impossible to operate smoothly without the hood. Reloading the lure is difficult without the bird seeing, and even just getting sufficient distance between bird and lure-puller is problematic. The anti-hooder might argue that the falconer's body can be used as a shield, or the bird simply restrained, but smooth all of this is not. If the hood is used things run so much better. The bird is hooded, carried into position, unhooded and allowed to fly. At the lure, it is then rehooded and the procedure can be repeated. Sessions run without a single bate. Of course, this type of flying also prepares the ground for that out-of-the-hood work at quarry.

BASIC MANAGEMENT

The realm of basic management is another area where being able to hood any broadwing is a massive advantage. Things like basic coping, imping tail feathers, attaching jesses and bells, even sharpening talons and cleaning feet can all be easily attended to when the hood is employed. All too often, the less experienced falconer sees a bit of manhandling as part and parcel of hawk ownership. But it can, of course, have a disastrous impact on the relationship.

Granted, some birds will tolerate all manner of 'fiddling' while sitting bareheaded, and many jobs can also be achieved while the bird feeds on a lure or kill.

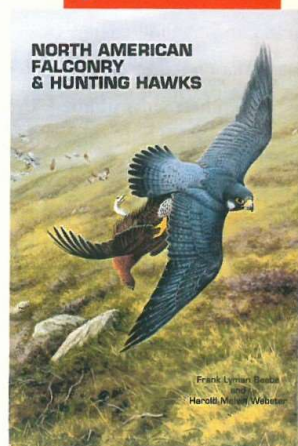
Nevertheless, the hood is a very helpful tool. And then there are trips to the vet. A transport box can be used to get the bird there, but the hood can make a simple examination possible without needing to restrain the bird or frighten it. The list of advantages goes on and on.

CLOSING NOTE

I hope I have offered a sound argument for the use of the hood with all broadwings. The hood doesn't replace sensible training and management, it works hand in hand with it. Nor does it replace the hawk box. It is there as an additional friend. Really, is there any reason for not making broadwings to the hood? The hood makes the overall falconry experience so much better and the falconer who won't try it is simply keeping himself in the dark. ■



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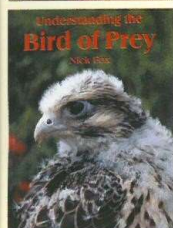


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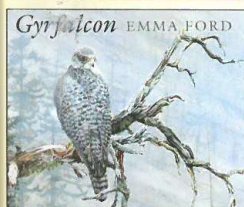


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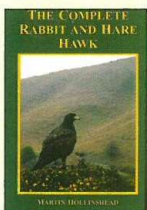
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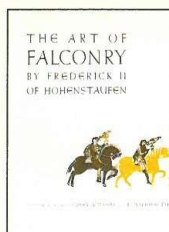
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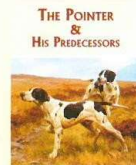
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The third in a series
of three articles by
Frank L. Beebe

SUPER

The total North American experience in the art of gyrfalcon capture is not extensive and most of it, because of well-founded fear of official intolerance, is unrecorded. It dates back only as far as the highly successful McFadden-Turner expedition to Disko Island (west Greenland) in 1951. After which any repeat attempts were apparently terminated by the Danish authorities because a meddlesome white fox (a 'protected' furbearer) was illegally killed to protect the trapped falcons. Or did this occur relative to one of Col. 'Luff' Meredith's expeditions? It was one or the other.

Because of the speed of air transport, almost all of late twentieth-century experience has also been time-parametered to about thirty days centered on the September equinox. On a time-period so centered, for the three successive years that co-incided almost exactly with the secret undercover aspect of the North American 'Operation Falcon' enforcement-publicity scam, there were widespread gyr-trapping expeditions fielded across the mid-Canadian arctic. Each of these, in keeping with the imposed aura of intrigue and smuggling attached to falconry at the time was supposed to be a deep guarded secret from the others. Yet everyone involved

knew of the others, including exactly who, and where, they were.

This made for an unusually wierd and ominous experience. I have journal-records of my part in this, at the arctic seacoast village of Coppermine, right when US undercover-agent Jeff McPartlin was busy setting man-traps at Canadian Spence Bay. What additional records there may be I have no idea. Other than this, except for a few legal, pre-Madison expeditions to northern Quebec and Baffin Island, almost all North American wild gyr-capture has been confined to British Columbia and Alaska. Very recently, in the last half-decade this has been expanded far southward by way of limited permit capture of truly migrant first-year gyrs across the northern tier of the American States.

To the present time, the ratio of gyrs captured to gyrs flying-lure attracted to the sets, is abysmally low. About one taken to six or ten attracted. There are some additional aspects of set-trapping that are worth attention, the most interesting of which shall be left till last.

However strong the attraction of a fake-jerkin may be to first-year gyrs, it draws no attention whatsoever from adults of either sex, being either ignored or the deception discerned and avoided.

Equally so are live pigeons.

Some raptors other than gyrs are differentially attracted to the fixed sets; these relative to the kind of flying lure being utilised. A fake ptarmigan or live pigeon regularly attracts merlins, peregrines, goshawks and occasionally arctic buzzards and hawk-owls. The fake-jerkin attracts the merlins, peregrines and goshawks, the latter usually invisible until fast to one of the ground-baits, but not the buzzards or the hawk-owls. Any one of these three kinds of aerial lures can also bring in aloft, but never directly, golden eagles. These drift over, high up, circling, apparently making a calculated study of everything below, invariably discerning suspicious aspects which they don't trust at all, then drifting away.

Emma Ford, In her 1999 book entitled *Gyrfalcon*, on page 106 and 107 published two photographs of eleven gyrfalcons and one peregrine captured during the 1951 McFadden-Turner expedition to Greenland. All of the gyrfalcons in these photographs are first-year plumaged and none of them are jerkins. The lone peregrine is an adult falcon. All were captured with pigeons.

Heinz Meng of New Paltz, N.Y. also in 1999, published a small booklet entitled *Reminiscences of Assateague Island*, about the

FALCON

PART Three



Beebe with jerkin in 1965

live-trapping of peregrines in the 1950s. On page 24 is a photograph of seven first-year peregrines, all captured on the same day on Assateague. Four are falcons; three are tiercels; all were captured with pigeons. This latter photo, indicating a near balance of the sexes in the captured birds, is what might also be expected when trapping gyrfalcons. As so convincingly portrayed in the Greenland photo, it is not what occurs.

The McFadden-Turner photo of eleven first-year gyrfalcons, and no jerkins, is not an anomaly. It is the rule. By September, at every location where I have erected a trapping set, a sex-imbalance similar to that indicated in the Greenland photograph has been the rule. Six to ten falcons in excess of jerkins, are drawn to the sets. The capture differential is even higher, because so regularly the falcons of any jerkin-accompanied individual or group, will not allow the jerkin to come to grips with the ground-bait.

It is well-recorded that the historic capture of gyrs also ran heavily to falcons, although the recorders regularly explained this by assuming that the trappers released many jerkins to make space available for the more valuable falcons. A convincing explanation at the time, but made at the purchasing end by some educated recorder who had never been anywhere near a gyr-trapping site, and quite incorrect.

So why, and what, exactly, has occurred during the two-month endless day of the arctic summer? Is this September-October overabundance of falcons real? If not, where are all of the missing jerkins? Strange, because this sex-imbalance, so obvious at every late-

summer capture-set, does not trace back to fledging. In the nests at full fledging time, the sex- balance is approximately equal. Further, the jerkins actually full-fledge and fly, with a three or four day time-advantage. So if the September sex imbalance is real, it indicates a singularly high and rapid post-fledging mortality of first-year jerkins. Here then is a condition which, must be of evolutionary importance and unique to this one species, because it implicates, all those suspiciously too-abundant first-year falcons as being the only possible cause.

As previously mentioned, since the 1980s there has been an increasing late autumn capture of migrant gyrs much farther south. These have been mostly licenced captures by American falconers, and is a cross-continental catch, mostly just south of the Canadian-American border. Captured, they are all falcons. Well, if not all, then the sex-imbalance at the mid-latitudes is so high that they might as well be, insofar as a falconer ever catching a jerkin is concerned. Twenty, thirty to one, at least.

Various speculative explanations for this have been made. Such as: The jerkins may be overwintering separately from the falcons, but in comparable numbers, maybe on ptarmigan away north near the sixtieth parallel. Or, (in the western mountains), they may be overwintering separately on white-tailed ptarmigan and rosy finches at high tree-line elevations. Both reasonable speculations, but empty of credibility once it becomes known that the jerkins are only a little more abundant by September, all across the gyr's entire arctic breeding range, regardless of elevation.

To me the evidence is compelling. The sex-imbalance, so obvious by September, is real, annually repeated and extends across the entire range of the species. Also that it must be, a direct result of the first-year falcon shifting their food-dependency from their parent adults, first to sibling jerkins, whenever jerkins are part of a brood, to, later, any first-year jerkin they see. Also with this last shift being imposed quite regardless of whether he is already accompanied by one or more first-year falcons or not.

Now here is a process guaranteed to tilt the sex-ratio in favour of the falcons allright; just by quickly eliminating all but the most capable and efficient jerkins in two ways. First; any jerkin incapable of killing in excess of two or three times his own needs, is quickly starved, simply by having everything he kills or injures, forcibly pre-empted. Second; any jerkin desperate enough to challenge the falcon(s) and attempt to retain his prey would also be eliminated much more directly by any falcon(s) equally motivated.

Yet for an arctic avian predator, the biological end-reward of such a process is obvious. The jerkins, almost from the moment they can fly, are subjected to a relentless efficiency selection that, while it eliminates at least two-thirds of the annual production of jerkins, also prepares the survivors for their future function as super-efficient, tireless and dedicated falcon-providers. Any that fail aren't allowed even to tax the winter-imminent low food-supply, let alone reach reproductive age. Because every adult jerkin, if he and his consort are to reproduce, must be capable of providing continuously

at a rate never below three times his own needs, for a minimum of six weeks at the late-winter start of each breeding season. By the time the first-year falcons are finished with him, he is either dead or equal to the task.

It really is a quite incredible performance. Because every reproductive effort, for gyrs, must be initiated entirely on an increased use of a winter-depleted and steadily further-depleting winter-resident food supply.

There is surely some leveling of the first-year sex-imbalance shortly following the swift onset of the arctic winter. The whiteouts, two or three days, continuous, when nothing but the snow dare move; the cryptic disappearance of the speckled jerkins against abruptly white-and-dark fine-checked backgrounds, the reduced distance-visibility by day and the rapidly shortening periods of daylight: Such changes, in swift succession would conspire to make impossible the continuous visual falcon-surveillance of the jerkins so easily maintained in summer. Inevitably all of these jerkin-attending falcons would find themselves alone, and any that had become entirely jerkin-dependent would not live long. Nearly all of the surviving falcon-trained jerkins, however, on finding themselves free of their relentless taskmasters, would do just fine.

Did the falconers of antiquity really prefer the gyrfalcon proper? Even aside from having somewhere between seven and ten falcons to one jerkin to choose from, they probably did. Except in Arabia the falconry of antiquity was different from contemporary falconry in the kind of quarries that the falconers, not the falcons, selected. The

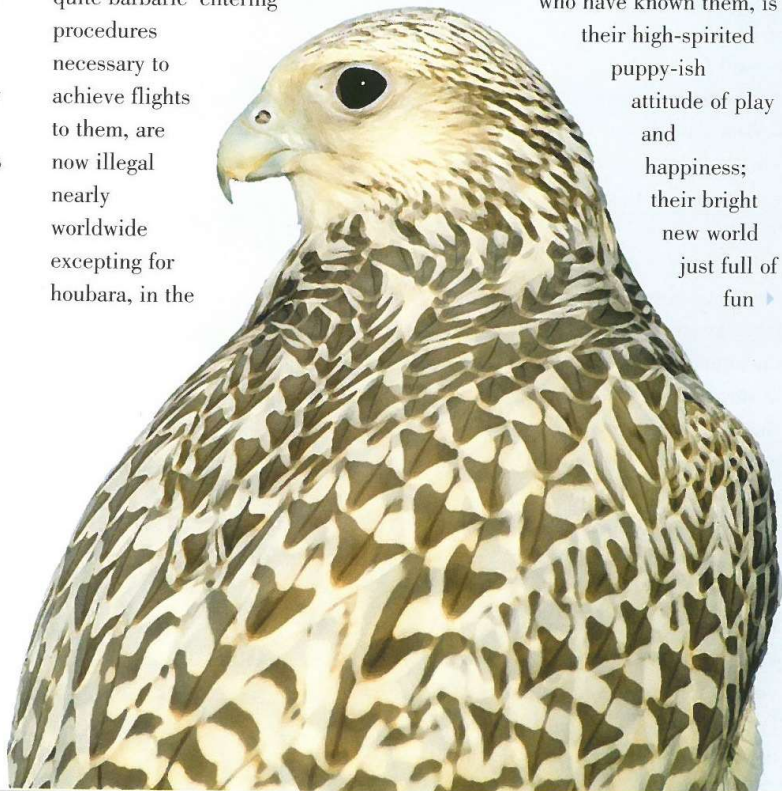
quarries deemed proper for gyrfalcons were very large, big-winged birds. Gyrfalcons are fighters, the defenders of territory. They fear and hate eagles, yet attack them, and sometimes hit them hard enough to break a wing and send them spinning earthward. They react to all large big-winged slow-wingbeat birds; buzzards, kites, herons, cranes, bustards and even to some degree geese and swans, as if they were eagles. In falconry, once they find (by way of specialised 'entering') that they can kill such birds, they attack them with a furious commitment more intense than are their attacks on normal-size food-species. These were the flights beloved by the royalty-retained falconers of antiquity. This human-arranged interspecific fighting they also equated with human warfare, hence their fascination with it. Nearly all of these quarries as well as the quite barbaric 'entering' procedures necessary to achieve flights to them, are now illegal nearly worldwide excepting for houbara, in the

deserts of Arabia, Pakistan and North Africa.

There is nothing in the literature of falconry to indicate either historic or recent understanding of the reasons for the amazing special qualities revealed to its trainer by an occasional, wild-captured jerkin. Yet these occasional superjerkins must have been known to historic falconry; but as long as supply and demand were in class-separated solitudes there was no way of tracing just what the set of conditions were which combined to make an occasional jerkin so special. They look no different, of course, but the behaviour of these late-captured, falcon-trained jerkins is so different from that of domestics, eyasses, or even July wild-captured jerkins, that they could as well be a different species.

The dominant character of all domestic and eyass jerkins, the one most noticed and remarked by all

who have known them, is their high-spirited puppy-ish attitude of play and happiness; their bright new world just full of fun ▶



and games. To the falconer trying to manage them, just as to a dog-trainer trying to train a pup, they are a trying mix of delight and despair.

September-October wild-caught jerkins are completely different. All that puppy behaviour is gone, there is no wandering of attention; every opportunity to maim or kill is taken. Their single purpose in life is to provide for others, and they know it. Accordingly, they are the quickest and easiest to 'train' for natural quarry, contemporary game-bird hunting of any of the birds of falconry. This to a degree that any 'training' by humans, additional to what they have by falcons is scarce worth mentioning. Two weeks of taming, by close, continuous human-presence coupled with a week of lure-training does it. Everything else they already know.

For legal hunting-season game flights to winged quarries of the species and of the size normally hunted for food by the large falcons, these falcon-trained, late-season jerkins are unsurpassed and unsurpassable. They shade all others in speed, maneuverability, recklessness and in the spectacular violence and accuracy of their strikes. No others, not even any of the wild-caught falcons of their own kind, compare, or even come close.

Their successes far outnumber failures; to a degree that it makes them rather easily retained. From a

pitch they hit quarries so hard that most flights end quite near at hand.

When down with quarry they may, if startled or attacked, leave it and fly, but they never attempt to carry. They behave the same at the approach of the falconer. Quarries taken from them are relenquished casually and with no appearance of resentment, quite as if they expected this to occur. This, and their universal mastery of the most devastating overpass knock-down strikes, you will ever see, whether from stoop or tail-chase are no doubt the result of a well-learned fear of the consequences, when

their attending taskmaster was no mere grounded human, but a big aerial falcon coming in full-tilt or following close behind.

Over time I have flown four such matchless jerkins. Two of them were obtained in even trade for falcons. One was bitchy but still spectacular. Otherwise they were as alike as if cloned. All were flown for periods in excess of four years without (before) telemetry.

To capture, 'train'? and fly one is an ultimate experience of contemporary falconry. Perhaps of historic falconry too. ■



Frank Beebe

FALCONER • WRITER • ARTIST

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The 'Full

I have flown falcons for most of my life, in fact, I really can't remember a time when I didn't have some kind of raptor on my fist. I live in northern California, and ducks are the main game. There are some pheasants to be found, however, they are few and far between. For what few birds that are left, there are twice as many gun hunters and falconers chasing them. Ducks offer more peace and quiet, as well as safety, and they are very challenging for the falcons. In the past years I have flown mainly

peregrines, both tiercel and falcons. More recently, I have been flying only gyr/peregrine hybrid tiercel. I believe the hybrid tiercel is probably the perfect game falcon. It has size (my two falcons fly at 28oz., or 790g-800g), and it has speed. In hawking, as you know, nothing is easy, or, for that matter, routine. With that said, the tiercel gyr/peregrine hybrid can take ducks with regularity. So, in order to truly test these falcons one must look to a completely different quarry. ▶

Monty'

by Joe Atkinson



The sage grouse is considered the most difficult game in the world to catch with a falcon. Now, that may sound a little bold, but considering all that must be over-come to even fly a sage grouse, I think not. In talking to falconers that have flown sage grouse you'll get some conflicting view points. Some will say sage grouse are not that hard. They will tell you long, tall tales about grouse hawking, and how their falcon catches sage grouse all the time. Ask them what time of the season they went sage grouse hawking. Odds are they will say September or October. And yes, in those months, the grouse are much easier to catch, because weather, and more specifically, the temperature, is much warmer. Even though the sage grouse is much larger than a pheasant, with the males, or 'boomers', sometimes as large as a small turkey, they are still easier to catch that time of year. They are easier mainly due to the fact that sage grouse will overheat themselves if they fly too far, so they do not fly hard or long. They tend to bag out fairly quickly and the falcons go in and bind to them on the ground. But fly that same grouse in mid November through the end of the season, and things are dramatically different. The grouse actually gain weight during the cold winter season, feeding off the sage brush leaves. That big slow-moving cargo plane turns into what can only be described as a super-bird. That

same grouse that your falcon flew down in September is now stronger and faster; it has put on it's cape. With the onset of snow and below freezing temperatures, and not to mention, hungry golden eagles watching your every move, you, my friend, are in for a very humbling experience. Because you see, the sage grouse thinks nothing of a tail-chase that can last up to and beyond five miles. You know how a flushed pheasant usually will fly low and mainly from point A to point B, and if you do some

With the onset of snow and below freezing temperatures, and not to mention, hungry golden eagles watching your every move, you, my friend, are in for a very humbling experience.



running you can get a reflush, which usually will result in the pheasant being caught. Well, sage grouse are a little different. When they are flushed they fly away, way away, like over the mountain. I mean big mountain mountains that you have to drive a long time to get over. Sage grouse also have this 'thing', that when they are flying, they like to be way up, 100-200 feet up. And in huge flocks, upwards of a 1,000 or more, they look somewhat like smoke ringing up off in the distance.

The thought of actually going after sage grouse was, for years, in the back of my mind. But it seemed that something always stood in the way - little things, like not having the right falcon or the right dog, or even knowing where to go, things like that! You see, sage grouse like wide open spaces. In fact, to say wide open spaces really doesn't give you much of a picture about where they live. Think about countryside that is mostly tabletop flat and goes for as far as the eye can see. You can use binoculars but it still looks the same. Every once in a while there will be a gully wash or small valley. Off in the distance, way off, maybe 50-100 miles, are large mountains. In some areas there are small hills that pop up seemingly out of nowhere, and on each hill there is the resident golden eagle. Golden eagles like to eat sage grouse, and the falcons that hunt them, as I will later to see first hand.

HAWKING JOURNAL ENTRY

November 25, 2000 6:45am

temp. +10 F

wind 10-20 mph

sky clear

location: somewhere in Wyoming (I truly had no clue where I was).

We started running the dog at first light. Golden eagles are less likely to be a threat in the first hour after the sun comes up. There are 6-8 inches of snow on the ground, and we have seen fresh grouse tracks everywhere. As the dog, 'Wendy', courses back and forth, we follow along in the truck. Suddenly Wendy gets birdie, her body language quickly changes from a dog looking for grouse to one that has found grouse! There she is, locked on point. My turn to fly. I quickly pick up my first-year, silver gyr/peregrine, 'Silvery', and with frozen hands prepare him for flight. Hood off, a rouse, and away he goes. It is at this point that I would like to know why the wind always seems to pick up when it's my turn to fly? I hate that. Anyway, Silvery will normally take a big out-run and then come over very high. But this time we cannot see the falcon. I pull out the receiver and the signal says he is near. Actually, straight up. I don't want to flush until I can see him because he is a first-year bird and has never seen a sage grouse before. I want to make sure he is in the perfect position before the flush. I look at Wendy and she is still locked on point. My good friend Steve says "there, I see your bird". I look up to see that Silvery is just a fly speck in the clear blue sky. We move in towards Wendy and from out of nowhere a hen sage grouse explodes into the frozen air. She is climbing fast and is gathering speed with each stroke. I have lost sight of Silvery. My eyes are frantically searching the sky. Even though my eyes cannot see him, my ears tell a different story. I can hear that rush of air, a sound that can only be made by a falcon stooping at a high rate of speed. Then I see him in a full vertical stoop, heading right at the grouse! As time seems to slow down, the falcon and grouse meet, the air is filled with feathers and snow from the impact, as the sage grouse is driven earthward.

END OF ENTRY.

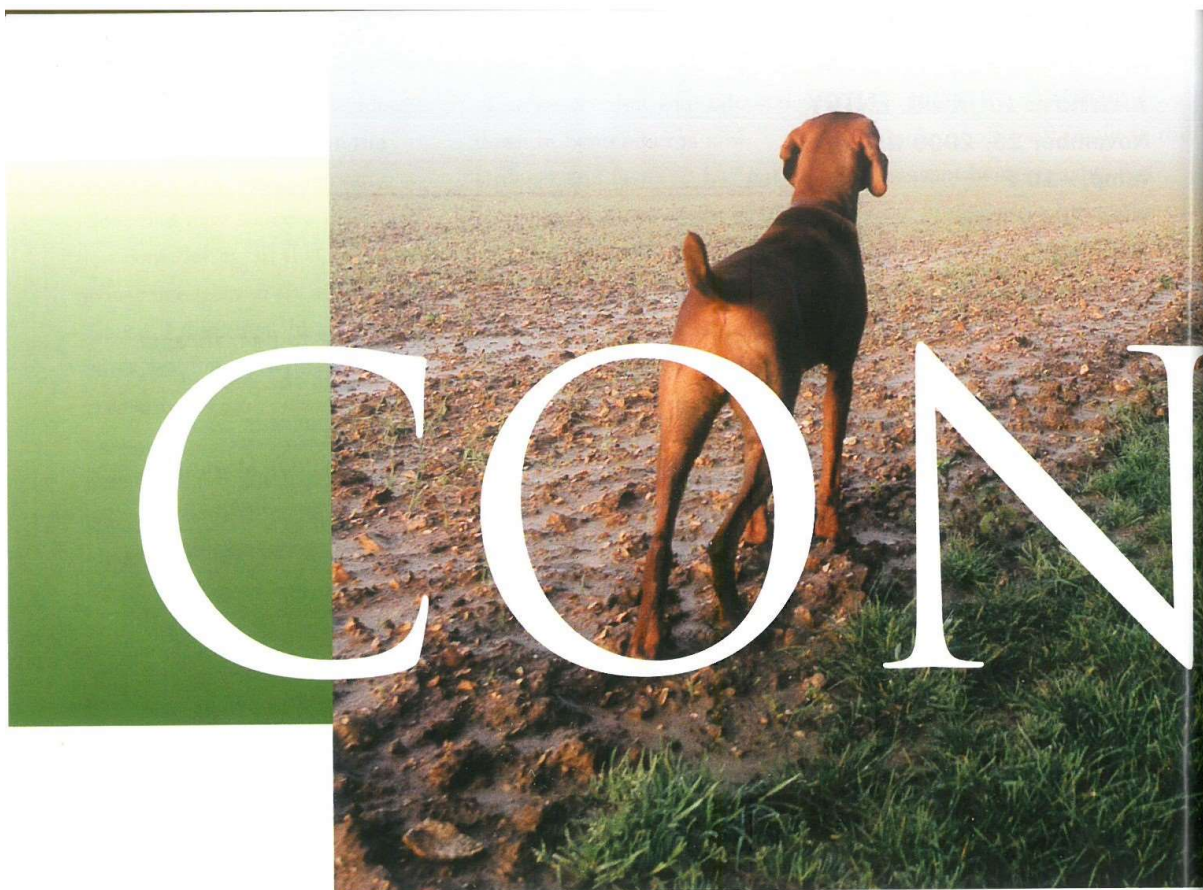
Wow, what a thrill.

I remember standing in the freezing cold watching my first-year falcon enjoying his prize - a winter sage grouse caught on his second flight.

In the two seasons I have flown in Wyoming, I have experienced all sides of sage grouse hawking: from the frustration of seeing my falcons

only pull feathers, in several near miss flights, to the pure joy of seeing a young falcon put the whole picture together and take a grouse. And one can go from joy, to the depths of despair, within minutes. On the very next flight after Silvery's triumph, we witnessed the death of Steve's four-year-old hybrid, 'Rocky', to the talons of an eagle. Well, I'm a

falconer, and I never heard anyone say that falconers, as a group, are overly bright - we can't be if you look at all the things we put ourselves through. No normal person would do the things a falconer does. So even though Wyoming has shown me the 'full Monty'... I'LL BE BACK.



I wonder what readers would vote the greatest advance for falconry in modern times? Captive breeding? Telemetry? My own choice might surprise you. I believe it is the Internet with the free exchange of ideas and information right around the world, the only limitation being language and access to a computer and modem.

It is now possible for someone in England to post a question on a newsgroup and to receive a dozen answers from every corner of the globe within 24 hours. True, none may be the right answer but it is the exchange of views that is important; man is essentially different from other animals in his ability to communicate and store information.

The current Foot-and-Mouth Disease epidemic in the UK has not only banned most dog owners'

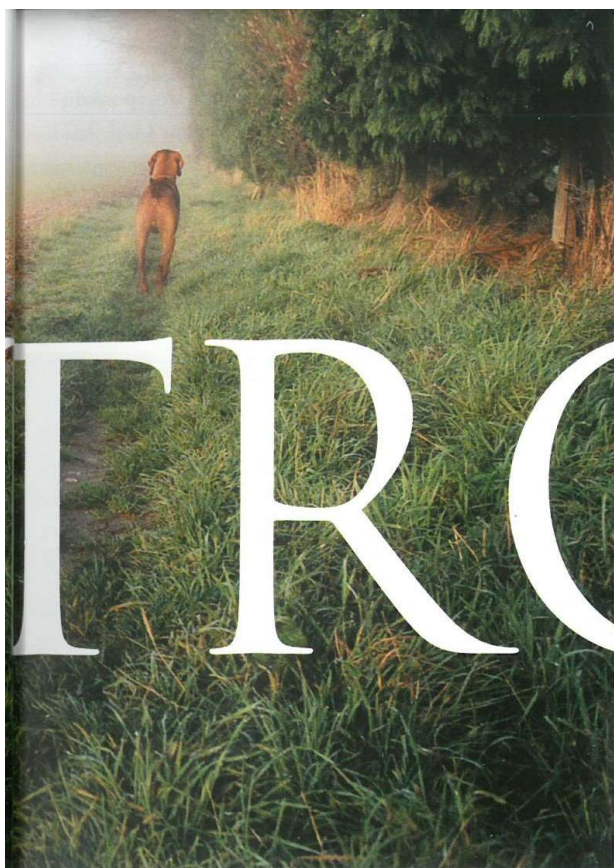
access to the countryside but has brought a number of related restrictions and regulations in its wake. Suddenly, I find I cannot get dogfood without jumping through a number of bureaucratic hoops. I have only managed to negotiate these by agreeing to becoming registered alongside zoos, circuses, fur farms, and factories producing maggots for fishing bait! But it is this prohibition on dog owners going onto farmland that has prompted the most emails to my mail box. Without access to the countryside, how can a dog be trained?

Every cloud has a silver lining and not being able to give a young dog experience of game is no bad thing. Frankly, it shocks me to hear falconers boast that their dog has been working with hawks since the age of a few months. In human

terms, that is tantamount to sending small boys up chimneys (though I don't necessarily disagree with that!). It is certainly contrary to the oft declared belief, on the other end of the scale, that pointers and setters ought not to be trained until they are twelve months old. As usual, the truth probably lies somewhere between the two - anyway, the situation deserves closer examination.

Unless you are one of those who chops and changes dogs every six months in the forlorn hope that sooner or later you will find the perfect canine companion, that dog is probably going to last you until it is ten years old, so it is much wiser to start out on the right foot.

I covered the choice of breed in a previous article. Briefly, this advised avoiding the 'weird and



TROL

by Derry Argue

in wonderful', and those breeds which have been 'improved' by the attentions of The Fancy for the show bench. No one but a fool chooses a working companion from some obscure breed because it takes his fancy rather than the more practical consideration of need and suitability for the purpose. The object of getting a dog for hawking is that it will enhance your sport, not hinder it. The best choice is usually going to be one of the conventional breeds because they are numerically superior and, if widely used by the shooting community, have already been selected for their ease of training and excellence in the hunting field. Unless you are an expert trainer, my advice is not to start by stacking the odds against your success. You will find enough problems without going that route.

Training dogs for hunting requires two disciplines. I used the term 'hunting' in its broad North American context to include shooting and falconry. These two disciplines are broadly what can be termed 'yard training' and 'field training'. Yard training is what many would call obedience training. Field training is simply controlled experience in the field directed at work on wild game.

Never forget that the dog is an opportunist predator. Dogs are remarkably adaptive and because they fit into human society so readily it is easy to assume that they are almost human in outlook. This is dangerous. Sometimes it works but just when think you have things licked, things go haywire. If you consider that your dog is just another predator, like your hawk,

and its responses are on a fairly simple level you will make better progress. Your dog is born with instincts ready to guide it through life. That life has evolved over some 40 million years of which a bare couple of thousand have been in company of man and for only the last few hundred of these have dogs become specialised into the various breeds we know today.

The instinct of young dogs to chase and possibly catch any animal or bird which appears to be vulnerable is well known. Most owners now know the party trick of allowing a puppy to chase a fluttering piece of plastic on the end of a fishing line. Within a few minutes, most puppies of pointing breeds will be chasing, stalking, and pointing the bait as if it were some small live prey. The obvious ►

pleasure a group of pups derive from tearing up some old piece of cloth (invariably my best shirt!) is mirrored by the expertise of older dogs tearing up a piece of meat or a carcass. The apparent chaos is well ordered if frantic, each rapidly but carefully biting into the meat and clearly aware of its companion's teeth and gums on either side of the bite. Indeed, the fact that a group of dogs or puppies behave with such mass hysteria at 'the kill' is the most basic of instincts which prompts them to behave like a pack of their wild canid ancestors. One reason, surely, not to run your young dog in company until it is 100% reliable working on its own or you may unwittingly unleash that latent pack instinct!

So hunting is something dogs do naturally. Given enough birds that will lie to a point, most pointers and setters will also start to point naturally. Edward Laverack, over 100 years ago, boasted that he trained eight dogs in six days by this method. But you are going to need a lot of birds to do it that way! They begin by bumping birds and chasing. Then, as they tire, they realise the connection between scent and the bird. Next comes the realisation that the bird is at the sharp end of that cone of air scent. As stalking, flushing, and chasing is so obviously futile, the pups begin to hesitate to enjoy the heady scent of game. Hesitation becomes the point proper. But for how long? As I said, the proviso is that there are enough birds. Without the birds, the behaviour may become hung up around the bump-chase stage and the trainer has a problem on his hands.

And now that the dog has discovered that there is game out

there, it only has to find more. Once Pandora's box is open, all hell is let loose. Leave a door or window open and your hot trial-bred bird dog pup is gone with the wind. In the absence of game, the 'prey' is just as likely to be chickens or sheep. Such a dog, now out of control, runs totally oblivious of its trainers whistles and shouts, intoxicated with an arousal of the ultimate basic instinct. Quite soon, out on the open grouse moor, this wild behaviour is reinforced by the realisation that the further it is from its handler, the less chance of game being spooked and the less interruption by the attentions of that irritating human!

It is clear then that hunting is not enough. That boast of the pup that is hunting with hawks at six months is now shown to be complete and utter folly. Maybe it works, but the chances are that things will go wrong and the dog and hawk will never reach their true potential, or at worst both risk ruin. The key to success with hawks is to provide a predictable sequence of events. But if the falconer can set the scene and produce game in a predictable and consistent manner, his bird will improve exponentially.

Man has supposed superior intelligence to that of animals and so he can foresee how quarry, hawk and dog should interact to produce that spectacle which we call sport and which we all find so fascinating. In game hawking, the quarry is located and then the falcon is released. In the expectation of being served, the hawk works hard to gain height over the point. When it is at its pitch, the highest elevation it is prepared to fly to, the game is flushed and we experience that breath taking dramatic downwards stoop. Why should that bird work so

hard when it is to be repeatedly disappointed?

Your spaniel flushes a pheasant when it is working too far ahead. Your gos is slipped and the flight is a fruitless tail-chase. The gos takes stand in a tree and considers the position. Almost no energy is expending by sitting there, feathers puffed out and one leg up, and it is certainly a lot less uncomfortable than being rocked around on the falconer's fist which is in constant motion. Instinct tells the goshawk that sitting motionless in a tree is probably more productive than following a dog which flushes pheasants out of range. So we have the almost traditional truculent goshawk stuck in a tree while the falconer rants and raves below. Which is being the most sensible now? Man's superior intelligence ought to be telling him that his canine's predatory instincts are all very well but they would be a lot more use to him if they could be controlled and the pheasant flushed within range.

Every falconer is aware of imprinting in raptors. From the newsgroups on the Internet I have learnt that this is only half the story and there are full imprints, social imprints, crèche reared, seclusion, and a whole lot more I don't yet know about. It is clear that some birds are easier to train within certain specific time limits. These time limits are called Critical Periods. Briefly, these are times in the animal's life when learning is more rapid than normal. I regularly see this in dogs. I concentrate on training the main group of youngsters but one is neglected, perhaps because it has sustained some injury or other and cannot be worked. Later, the pup is now well

and I find it quickly catches up with its sibling and I wonder if it would not have been better to have done nothing with the others which, by rights, should be more advanced! Then perhaps another pup in a different age group gets into trouble,

man who was extremely conscientious about its training. He regularly telephoned for advice and everything seemed to be progressing smoothly. Then he phoned me in an agitated state. He had shot a grouse over the dog's point but the bird was

life, that dog would run in and chase if he saw birds on the ground in front of him. The problem had become 'imprinted' because it was taught to him during a critical period when he was learning fast and the idea had become fixed.



Vizsla pup's first point on caged quail

due to circumstances beyond my control, and catches a bird. That incident, which took perhaps a few seconds, becomes imprinted in the dog's mind and I know the problem will be there for the rest of its life. Another in a different age group does the same - and it makes no difference, the pup becomes a success. There is still so much we do not understand.

I once sold a young pointer to a

only winged. So he let the bird run on a few dozen yards, then took the dog forward to get another point. He repeated this several times and he thought he had the dog pointing staunchly. At this point I interrupted, "*And then the dog ran in and chased the next few birds he found*", I said. "*How did you know that?*", asked the keeper. "*Because you just taught him to do it*", I replied. To the end of his working

It is obvious from the above that most intelligent trainers will want to imprint correct behaviour into their dogs' minds. That is why we follow a schedule of training in a strict sequence. It is going to be an uphill struggle stopping your young dog chasing if it discovers the joys of the pursuit at the age of twelve months. On the other hand, a chase by a pup at the age of three months is not so serious because the bird would ►

need to be on a zimmer frame for the youngster to catch it. And if the pup did catch it, it is doubtful if it would be strong enough to kill it, break in and eat it. If it did, the event would surely create a life long impression. The sequence may not become engrained, but the passion for birds almost certainly will. Behaviour which culminates in success for the dog (i.e. a kill) will certainly be remembered as it will, of course, with a bird of prey. Can you remember your hawk's first kill? I rest my case.

The conclusion is obvious. Put control into your pup while it is still young - six weeks is not too early to start. This can be achieved with a piece of string and a few moments at feeding time, every feeding time. It is in just about every book on gundog training that was ever published. Teach pup to Stop or Sit rather than chase when he sees a moving object. You haven't got a rabbit pen? Then use a tennis ball or an old sock dragged on a string. At this stage, pup is too naïve to know the difference. Later, the pup can be allowed to chase a ball in a game...but he must be taught to stop or Sit immediately he hears that command. It is something called CONTROL. This is not a battle of wits with the human taking on the role of the strict authoritarian but a game similar to Grand Mother's Footsteps we played as children. Watch pups playing. They know the rules of the game and it is us humans who need to learn!

In the opening paragraphs I mentioned the prohibitions on taking your dog onto farmland. You need no more ground to train a pup to Sit than your back garden. Apply any sort of force and the pup will

become inhibited and follow the logical course of doing nothing. Keep everything a game and it is surprising how quickly pups learn.

Most dogs can be taught to follow hand signals, gestures, or words by encouraging them to search for small food rewards hidden around a garden or even your livingroom. I once taught a cocker spaniel to follow my slightest gesture by hiding small pieces of cheese in my house in this way. The scene was the Outer Isles off the Scottish west coast. Living alone and with no TV reception, these games kept myself and a spaniel pup amused in the long dark winter evenings. Use Sit or whoa! to cause the pup to pause and look to you for help. The limits are only bounded by your own imagination.

To my mind, the use of the bob-white quail recall pen is probably the greatest advance in modern gundog training. The bob white quail is now virtually a domesticated bird but selection in North America has been for a strong flyer with an enhanced coveying instinct. The American sportsman wants a bird that flushes quickly and flies fast. In contrast, the Japanese or Costurnix quail has been selectively bred for meat and egg production at the expense of flight and coveying instincts. Young bob-white will be keen to return to the covey, or more correctly to the bevy, almost as soon as they can fly. Even adult quail will home provided only one sex is put out and the opposite sex used as callers. If you put out both sexes, they will hold hands and skip off into the sunset to set up home and family somewhere far from your dogs and recall pen!

You don't need much ground to

work a recall pen. I look out of my car window longingly at those overgrown vacant plots on the outskirts of cities and one year I trained a litter of pups on the few square yards of rough grass around my house. Later, when I took these same dogs to the grouse moor they quartered close. But very soon they realised there were birds 'out there' and they started to range properly. With the Sit and Come Here already installed, they were easily dropped the first time a hare popped up, the novelty causing them to pause long enough for me to take control. Then when they realised birds would be killed to their points, the rest was plain sailing and they lost interest in furry things.

My own pointer pups are now five months old and they are all pointing planted quail. Because of the Foot-and-Mouth restrictions, I use a small area of rough grass approximately 100 metres square on my own land. A quarter that would do. They have reached the stage where, when told it is time to go back into the kennel, they look at me as if to say, "You have got to be kidding!". When they were younger they were quite happy to follow me into the kennel and I could shut the gate behind them. Now they are wiser. Wise enough to start to learn that "kennel" means playtime is over. So they are gently caught, put on a short check cord and firmly led to the kennel. As they suffer this indignity I repeat "kennel" which is the command to go into their kennel. Within days, they will learn that it is easier to do what is required. I haven't even started to teach the Sit yet but when I do, I expect this to take all of five minutes to teach to each in turn. ■



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Proceedings of the V World Conference
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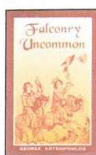
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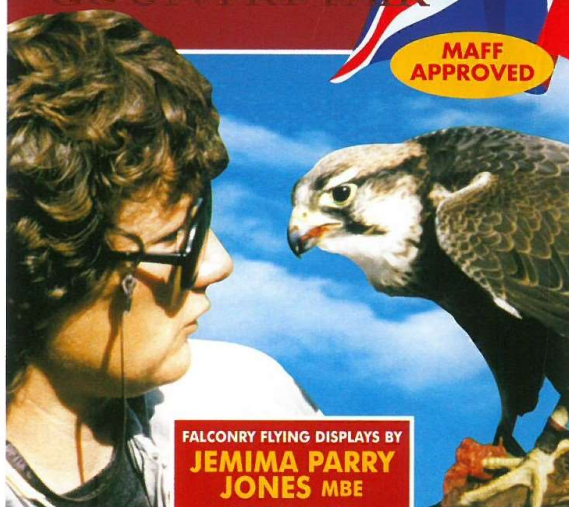
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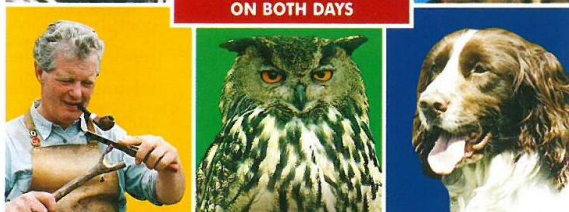
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Aspergillosis

Aspergillosis is a very common and frequently fatal fungal respiratory infection of raptors and certain other groups of birds. In order to understand respiratory infections it is firstly important to have a grasp of the anatomy and physiology of the avian respiratory system.

Inspired air passes into bird via the nares (these are the small openings situated at the top of the upper beak on either side). Air then passes through the nasal chambers being warmed and humidified. Some of the inspired air passes into the sinus system, which comprises a number of blind-ended air-filled compartments, so placed to minimise the weight of the bird's head. Air then passes out of the choana, (the split-like opening in the roof of the mouth). As the bird breathes in the glottis (the lemon shaped opening in the back of the tongue, which constitutes the opening to the windpipe), is pressed against the choana, in order to direct inspired air, down the trachea (windpipe). At the base of the neck, the trachea divides into two primary bronchi. Whilst mammals possess a larynx (voice box), situated under the chin, birds have a syrinx, which is used to produce sound in a similar manner, but is situated at the entrance to the chest at the position where the trachea divides into the two primary bronchi.

These primary bronchi pass

through the lung, with little or no transfer of oxygen occurring. The air passes into the caudal abdominal air sacs (storage vessels which act as bellows for inspired air). No oxygen transfer occurs in the air sacs, they function simply as air storage organs. In the next respiratory cycle air passes back, from the caudal abdominal air sacs, through the lung, at which stage oxygen is taken up from the air (passing into the blood), before the air passes on to the cranial air sacs, and is then expired. This may seem like a very complicated system, however it does render a number of significant advantages for the bird. Most importantly it means that air is passing over the absorptive surface of the lung in a 'one way system' (rather like driving around a round about). This contrasts to the mammalian system, in which air passes down to the bottom of a dead end, and is then sent back out (like driving down a one way street then having to back out again). The result is that oxygen can be absorbed during all of the avian respiratory cycle, rather than just during half of the mammalian cycle. It also enables re-cycling of air within the system, which is particularly useful in diving birds. The result is that birds have a far more (estimated as 10x greater in most species) efficient respiratory system, than is present in mammals, allowing them to absorb a much greater percentage

of the oxygen from inspired air. This system has a number of significant implications for both veterinary surgeons and bird keepers. Firstly for vets, we know that the internal organs of a bird are surrounded by structures (air sacs) which resemble clear plastic bags filled with air. During the process of a diagnostic work-up, or surgical sexing (in monomorphic species), when an endoscope is passed through the flank of a bird, (into the abdominal air sac), the vet is able to fully examine the internal organs. Furthermore when it comes to respiratory infections, there are more separate areas in the avian respiratory system, which may become affected, each leading to a different set of clinical signs. In particular if the air sacs are affected by disease, there are often no respiratory signs as the air sacs are not involved with gaseous exchange.

Aspergillosis is a common and frequently fatal fungal infection which affects birds. Aspergillosis is caused by the fungus *Aspergillus fumigatus*, the latter is described as being ubiquitous (in other words it is found everywhere), although it is found particularly commonly in decaying or rotting vegetable material. So if your birds live, or are kept, in or close to any vegetable material which is or has been mouldy, then you are causing them a significant risk of being affected by this fungus. The fungus is

Aspergillosis in Raptors

by Neil A Forbes

BVetMed CBiol MIBiol Dip ECAMS FRCVS

particularly prevalent in hay, old stables, compost heaps, aviary floor material like non sterilised shredded wood bark or nest material which has not dried out properly. Infection may occur when a bird is exposed to excessive levels of fungal spores. On the other hand, as the organism (*Aspergillus fumigatus*) is ubiquitous, in other words every bird will meet a normal daily level of spores, without this leading to disease in a healthy bird, but in a sick or challenged bird the background level of spores may lead to disease, especially in those species which are particularly prone to disease. In order for disease to occur (in the absence of excessive levels of fungal spores), the bird must be suffering from some immune suppression either of the body as a whole, or of the respiratory lining, which constitutes the first barrier of the body's defence mechanism against respiratory disease. Immune suppression of the body as a whole, occurs when the bird is stressed, or is suffering from some other significant disease elsewhere in the body. Stress may be caused by isolation from other birds whom it normally lives (commonly seen in gyrs if reared as a group and then moved into solitary accommodation) with, separation from an owner, long distance transport, quarantine, training or some other situation which is unnatural for the bird. Interference of the defences of the

respiratory system, is most commonly caused by a chronic (i.e. long standing) Vitamin A deficiency. It has recently been shown that the de-yolking of day-old chicks prior to feeding (a once recommended practice), is reducing the Vitamin A content of chicks to a dangerously low level (from 496 to 363 IU/100g).

So who gets Aspergillosis ?

Although any species of raptor can suffer from aspergillosis, there are certain species which appear very much more susceptible to the disease. Those at the top of the list have to be the gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*), Northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) other susceptible species being the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), black sparrow hawk (*Accipiter melanoleucus*), snowy owl (*Nyctea scandiaca*) and juvenile (first year) redtail (*Buteo jamaicensis*). For these susceptible species they do not appear to need to have been exposed to a particularly spore rich (dusty) environment, but instead simply to have suffered some mild form of stress and hence immune suppression. Conversely other species need to be very heavily stressed, or more commonly exposed to a very mouldy environment before they suffer from the disease.

Signs of disease

There are three main anatomical sites where aspergillosis will occur in a raptor. Taking each site in turn, if the syrinx is affected, the first sign that the owner will be aware of is a loss or change to the nature of the bird's voice. This change occurs suddenly, it is a serious sign, and necessitates urgent attention from your avian vet. Conversely if it is the air sac which is affected, no signs will be evident for some time. In the meantime some of the space, in the air filled 'plastic bags' air sacs which surround the internal organs, is becoming displaced or filled by a growing mass of fungal rubbish. In time the mass will significantly reduce the air space, leading to a shortage of breath, especially evident when the bird is exerted. However with this form of the illness the disease may become very extensive, before there are any clinical signs. Indeed it is not unusual for the bird to show signs consistent with liver failure rather than respiratory disease as a consequence of the effect of a fungal derived toxin on the liver. One may notice a reduced appetite, dark green discolouration of the mutes, weakness or marked weight loss.

Thirdly the infection may affect the lung tissue itself. This is the most serious form of the disease. The normal functioning of lung tissue which is essential, for

oxygen uptake is compromised.

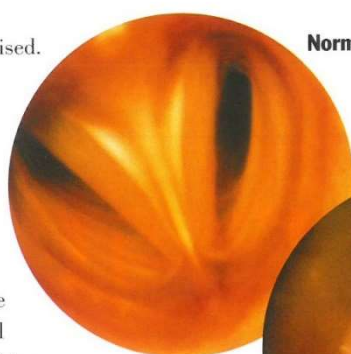
A bird with aspergillosis affecting its lung tissue, becomes very short of breath and distressed by handling or excitement. When handled the colour of the inside of the mouth may become blue or mauve (cyanosis) and the bird will inevitably die in the near future.

So now that we have an understanding of the birds respiratory anatomy, and for aspergillosis, how does it occur, where does it come from, and how can we prevent or control it?

How is aspergillosis diagnosed?

The clinical signs (e.g. loss of voice, extreme weight loss, or difficulty breathing) may in themselves be suggestive of an aspergillosis infection. In the first form, affecting the syrinx (voice box) the first sign apparent to the owner is a loss or change of the birds voice. The diagnosis is confirmed when the vet passes a fine (2.7mm or less) endoscope down the windpipe of the anaesthetised bird. A diagnosis cannot be made without this procedure being performed. In a diseased bird a white mass is seen obstructing the airway and will rapidly become fatal if untreated (see fig. 1 and 2 above). Confirmation of the suspected diagnosis and the delivery of relevant therapy is a matter of great urgency.

If the bird's breathing is severely affected, as a result of a syringeal aspergilloma then a plastic tube may be passed in through the side of the bird just in front of a leg, entering into the abdominal air sacs, so as to



Normal syrinx

Photos:
N Harcourt-Brown



Syringeal aspergilloma



Gross post mortem showing 4 aspergillomata in the abdominal air sacs.

by-pass the trachea, and allow the bird to breath normally. The placement of such a tube will give instant relief and the bird will appear to breath quite normally.

Even if a syringeal aspergilloma is confirmed, it is still important for the vet to check that there are no other lesions in other parts of the respiratory system. The bird should be radiographed in two different views at 90° degrees i.e. from top to bottom and side to side. See figure 3 and 4 below, to check for tell tale signs of air sacculitis or aspergillomata in the air sacs.

If there is any doubt about the diagnosis, following the radiograph, endoscopy of the cranial, and caudal thoracic as well as the abdominal air sacs should be performed. When viewing such lesions they may either

appear as thick-walled discrete lesions or they may be extensive areas with air passing through them with fungal hyphae blowing to and fro as air is inspired and expired again.

Signs supportive of aspergillosis may be evident on blood samples. However in the authors view, many of these other tests are slow to achieve and

How is aspergillosis treated?

Aspergillosis is a very serious disease, and the outcome is frequently the demise of the bird. However if the disease is diagnosed early, if the lesions are small, and particularly if only the syrinx is affected then the disease can often be effectively treated. If only the syrinx is affected, then after the breathing tube is placed into the air sac to enable the bird to breathe normally, the lesion may be removed from the syrinx either by endoscopy

with suction, or by an operation on the trachea at the position where it enters the chest. Such procedures are complicated and should only be performed by experienced avian vets. The bird would then require extensive and long term medical therapy to completely resolve the infection, and to prevent it from reoccurring. In order for medical therapy to be effective, the organism must be sensitive to the drug in question at the concentration which can be achieved at the site of the infection. Often when treating aspergillosis cases this is a real challenge as the spores are often sealed off within a thick caseous envelope. In the author's practice the typical medical treatment would comprise intravenous amphotericin (3x day), itraconazole by mouth (2x day), plus nebulisation (as used by human asthmatics) with amphotericin, enilconazole, clotrimazole or F10 4x a day for 30 minutes each time. Other drugs which may be used include Terbinafine, Clotrimazole and Fluconazole, Ancoban. Ketoconazole and Miconazole are generally no longer recommended as newer 'azole' derivatives are safer and more effective. Aspects of this medication would typically be continued for at least 3 months.

Treatment of 'air sac' aspergillosis, is more complicated, with a graver prognosis. The treatment consists of a combination of intensive medication often followed by some fairly heroic surgery however the outlook is not good. Even after surgery extensive medical therapy and on occasions repeated surgery may be indicated. If the lesions are extensive, the bird should be euthanased. In this author's opinion, if the infection has affected the lung tissue, there is usually no point in even commencing medication, as the outlook is typically hopeless.

So now we know about this deadly disease, what can we do to prevent our birds becoming infected?

PLANNING AND PROPHYLAXIS

- Aviaries, mews, weatherings etc. should never be placed near, or down wind of any decaying vegetable material, in particular 'hay' or an active or old hay barn or store. A bird tethered on a perch, on a lawn 50 yards down wind of a field where the farmer is turning and bailing hay is at real risk. No such vegetable material should ever be placed in the aviary or nest ledge.
- Stress should always be minimised. For example for a bird used to constant company (e.g. an imprint) suddenly to be ignored is very stressful. Conversely for a parent-reared bird, to be forced to sit on your fist and lose weight until such time as it is prepared to eat in your company, is very stressful. Transport, quarantine and moving to a new owner involve changes from normality and hence are stressful. Although many stresses can with some consideration be minimised, others cannot. If stress is likely or unavoidable, then the author would advise prophylactic i.e. preventive medication. We would generally recommend itraconazole (Janssen) at 10mg/kg by mouth 2x day for 1 week before the stressful event, throughout the period of stress and for a further 10 days afterwards. Furthermore one can reduce the spore loading of the air at this risk time, by 'fogging' or 'nebulising' the air around the bird (assuming it is inside) using F10 or enilconazole perhaps 3x a day for 1 hour. At the same time one should maintain good ventilation in the environment at this particular risk period.
- Transport or carrying boxes can form a particular risk to new birds. Typically such boxes were made of wood and for want of space, (bearing in mind they tend to be used infrequently), they are commonly stored in damp garages or sheds. On the occasions they are used, they are placed in a warm house or car. Under these conditions, the rich layer of spores which have been growing on the inside of the box dry out, and with the presence of the bird in the box are stirred up nicely ready for the bird to inhale a fatal dose. Travelling boxes should preferably be made of plastic or metal, they should be kept clean and dry, and cleaned and disinfected prior to use.
- Birds fed on a good quality, varied diet, high in vitamin A (mouse, quail and rat being considerably higher than day-old chicks) will assist in preventing any respiratory infection.
- Maintaining good ventilation in falcon accommodation.
- All new birds should be thoroughly examined and diagnostic tests performed to ensure they are healthy.
- All raptors should undergo an annual health check from an experienced avian vet, in order to detect low-grade under-lying disease or abnormalities. ■



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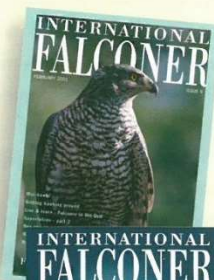
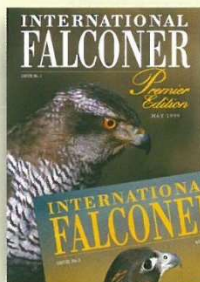
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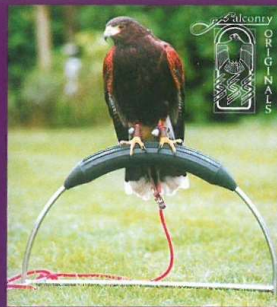
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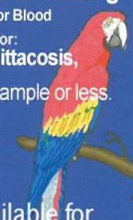
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BOOK REVIEW

The Harris Hawk - management, training and hunting

by Lee William Harris
Swan Hill Press
£22.99

Reviewed by Nick Kester

I really liked this book, but remain unconvinced about Harris Hawks. The irony is whether the author is also quite as committed to the species as he makes out. Having trained the eponymous hawk, he gives it to his girl friend and returns to his goshawk... Make up your own mind on that one.

This is not a manual of falconry. The 'how to' is adequate (no falconry knots or hood making): it should be read in conjunction with a more formal title. But it is an excellent guide to this most misunderstood species and, for the beginner, who may well believe that the Harris has to be for him, there is worthwhile advice, not all of which will be welcome.

Harris hawks get their bad press usually because they are deemed easy and thus good beginners hawks. The author spends a great deal of time laying that particular ghost through a diary of one hawk's training. The asides and references to previous experiences soon make you realise that it is a combination of falconer and hawk that either clicks, or does not. So please, no more blaming the Harris.

This is by no means a perfect work. I do not believe the Harris to be the number one hawk flown in Europe. In Germany they prefer to, and in Holland they may only fly indigenous species, which takes two countries out of the calculation. If you have a hawk that has taken over fifty species in the UK, you are

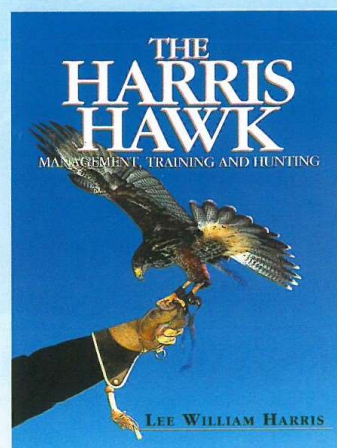
breaking the law unless you have a quarry licence; and small passerines are hardly fair quarry for a Harris.

The colour plates are a disappointment. Why on earth waste a page on the representation of raptors on flags? The colours are garish on the furniture illustrations. The mounted falconer looks terrified, as though rider, hawk and horse are complete novices. (The supporting text is equally lacking.) The hawk closing in on its 'quarry' is a very dead rabbit. Finally, bating hawks hanging upside down do our sport a grave disservice unless the falconer is also shown recovering them to the fist. But to better things.

Within the first chapters, the author sets the first caveat: describing Harris hawks as "stubborn and annoying". He then, and I applaud him for it, points out that novices often hold their hawks back during training. I can understand it - this fear of flying free - but with the Harris it can so easily lead to bad habits, boredom and, worst of all, screaming. As soon as they are ready, free fly and hunt they must. He also is unusual in this world of followed on flights in that he prefers to fly off the fist during the first season for obedience, style and quarry selectivity.

Harris hawks are not expensive - in the UK at least. The advice on vetting breeders and making the purchase will help dampen the 'must have' ardour of the beginner that would be traditionally reduced by a higher price tag. If he only sticks to half of what is recommended he will avoid many pitfalls.

The concept and execution of the 'diary' are good, provided the newcomer doesn't draw comparisons with his new hawk when it behaves totally at odds with what is described. If I have a



particular problem with Harris hawks - let the letters flow - it is their 'cuddle' factor. Too often I have seen people, no let's be honest, women cuddling Harris hawks. The author states that too much personal contact in voice and eye encourages screaming. What he says, in as many words, is: They are not pets. Get on with the training and go out there and catch something. The psychology of getting quickly onto a kill will help the beginner. Harris hawks, like any, quickly learn that they can still get food from their handler. The falconer has to convert and replace that dependence into hunting instinct.

The Harris is often described as the 'weekender's bird', but never in this book. Such limited flying, says Lee Harris, means the falconer will always struggle to achieve any level of fitness and competence. But despite the excellent advice contained in this most readable book, he still admits that next season he is going back to his goshawk as he misses "the speed, excitement, agility, bad temper, consistent bating and inconsistent mood swings"!

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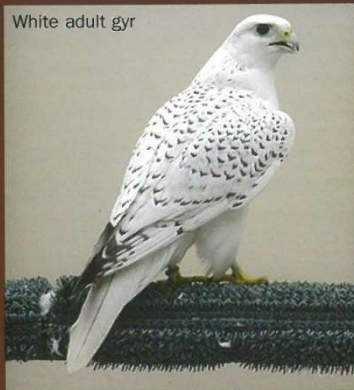
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The Hack Tower



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Black juvenile gyr



Aleutian Peale's peregrine



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