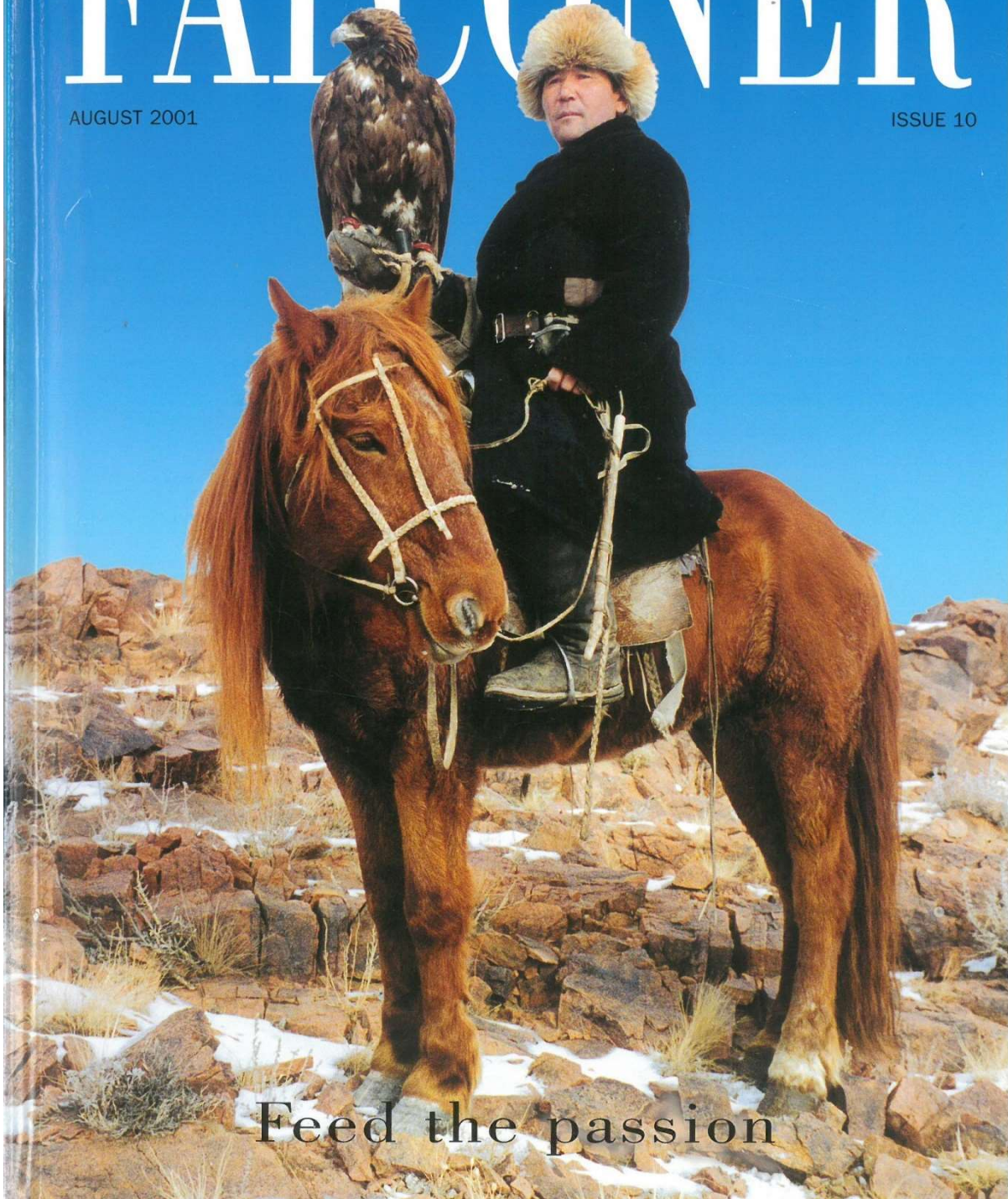


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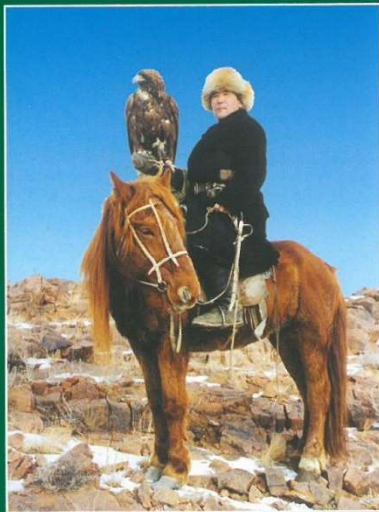


Feed the passion

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Cover photo by Alan Gates

EDITORIAL

This year's Falconry Fair went ahead as planned. Numbers were a little down due to the Foot & Mouth crisis but by all accounts it was still a great success. Unfortunately with young falcons hatching I couldn't make it myself but those who did manage to get there were treated to a very special appearance from Frank Beebe.



Frank Beebe looks in on the Editor during his recent visit to the UK

I know Frank thoroughly enjoyed his first ever trip to the UK and was truly overwhelmed by the welcome he received from falconers at the Fair - he was certainly the highlight of this year's event.

Foot & Mouth is still with us in the UK as strong as ever it seems and there just doesn't appear to be an end to it. Falconry in some areas of the country is effectively banned. Even for those of us not in infected areas it is still a very sensitive time and it's imperative that we liaise closely with the landowners and farmers who so kindly allow us access to their land. The Hawk Board has issued a policy statement which we have printed on page 6, please read this important information.

Hope you enjoy the issue.
Seth

IMPORTANT - NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

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

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

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INTERNATIONAL FALCONER



Photo: Alan Gates

UK NEWS

NEW EVENT ON THE UK FALCONRY CALENDAR A HUGE SUCCESS

Photos: Beth Anthony

August 4th and 5th 2001





Falconers from across the UK as well as Europe and the Middle East turned out for the first falcon sale held by Falcon Mews, one of the country's leading commercial falcon breeding facilities. A large number of falcons were on display including pure barbaries, pure peregrines, pure gyrfalcons and a variety of hybrids. Sales were brisk with many outstanding falcons being snapped-up within the first couple of hours. The event, an original initiative of Peter Gill and Richard Hill was also attended by a good selection of falconry related trade stands. "From our point of view the sale was a major success," says Richard Hill, "not only financially, but also as a great social event."

FOOT & MOUTH AND THE NEW HUNTING SEASON

Policy statement from
The Hawk Board

The Hawk Board, on behalf of falconers in the UK, has taken legal advice on the position regarding the flying of hawks and falcons during the continuing Foot & Mouth crisis.

We offer the following guidelines to falconers for the coming hunting season:

1. First, check the DEFRA Website at www.defra.gov.uk or if you are not on-line then phone the DEFRA help number **0845 0504141** to see if you are in an Infected area or a Controlled area.
2. **All hunting, including Falconry, is banned in Infected areas.**
3. In Controlled areas or free areas, hunting with Hawks/Falcons is permitted. You may also use your dog but we are informed in a letter from DEFRA that it is advisable that the dog be "well trained".
4. Finally, and MOST importantly, even if you are in an area where hawking is permitted, telephone or write to your farmers or land owners to verify that they are happy for you to go on the land. IF they are still worried about Foot & Mouth Disease they may still refuse to allow you access and they have the final word.

If further information is required contact Mike Clowes, Hawk Board Co-ordinator on 01529 240443 or email: mike.clowes@welshhawkingclub.fsnet.co.uk

HAWK BOARD FORUM

Saturday 27th October, 2001
at DEFRA, Temple Quay, Bristol

Following the success of last year's meeting, this year we will be holding another open meeting of the Hawk Board to give falconers an opportunity to see what the Board does. The DEFRA have kindly offered to host the meeting at their new premises close to Temple Meads Station in Bristol.

This year tickets will be available on a first come, first served basis. Numbers are limited to 80, so please make sure you have a place and buy your tickets now.

DRAFT PROGRAMME

10.00	Registration & coffee
10.30	Introduction
10.45	Open session of Hawk Board meeting
12.15	Speaker (to be announced)
13.00	Lunch
14.15	Open session of Hawk Board meeting
15.15	Guest speaker : Bill Heinrich, The Peregrine Fund
16.00	Tea
16.15	Questions
17.30 approx.	Depart

Suggestions for agenda items would be welcomed.

Tickets available from: Mike Clowes at:
10 Birthorpe Road, Billingborough,
Lincs. NG34 0QS. Tel: 01529 240443

THE HAWK BOARD

The Hawk Board represents the political interests of falconers in the UK and is recognised by Government Departments and countryside lobbying groups as the "representative body for falconry in the UK".

Twelve sporting clubs are affiliated to the Hawk Board representing some 1,600 falconers and raptor keepers. The current Chairman is Jemima Parry Jones MBE, owner of the National Birds of Prey Centre in Gloucestershire.

Hunting with hawks and falcons recognises the same quarry seasons as for shooting.

NEW PRODUCT INFORMATION

The world's first
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Biotech International are pleased to announce the arrival of 'Buddy', the first digital egg monitor in the world. There is no heat radiation whatsoever, so Buddy is completely safe. If your egg is fertile then Buddy will tell you by around day three. You simply place your egg in the egg compartment, close the lid and press the "on" button. You will instantly be given information from the onboard screen via a flashing heart, Pulse readout, and three-digit heart rate. (You will be amazed how rapid a chick's heart beats)! If the chick is moving then the Buddy egg monitor will tell you. When the chick settles the readout reverts back to heart rate. If the chick is not alive Buddy will let you know, showing a black still heart, a flat Pulse line and zero heart rate readout. Buddy is mains or battery operated so can be taken out to your aviary to check any eggs, or if your work is in the field of conservation you can take Buddy anywhere you go, even up the tallest of the Rainforest trees! You will wonder how you ever got by in the past without your Buddy!

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Falcon Mews

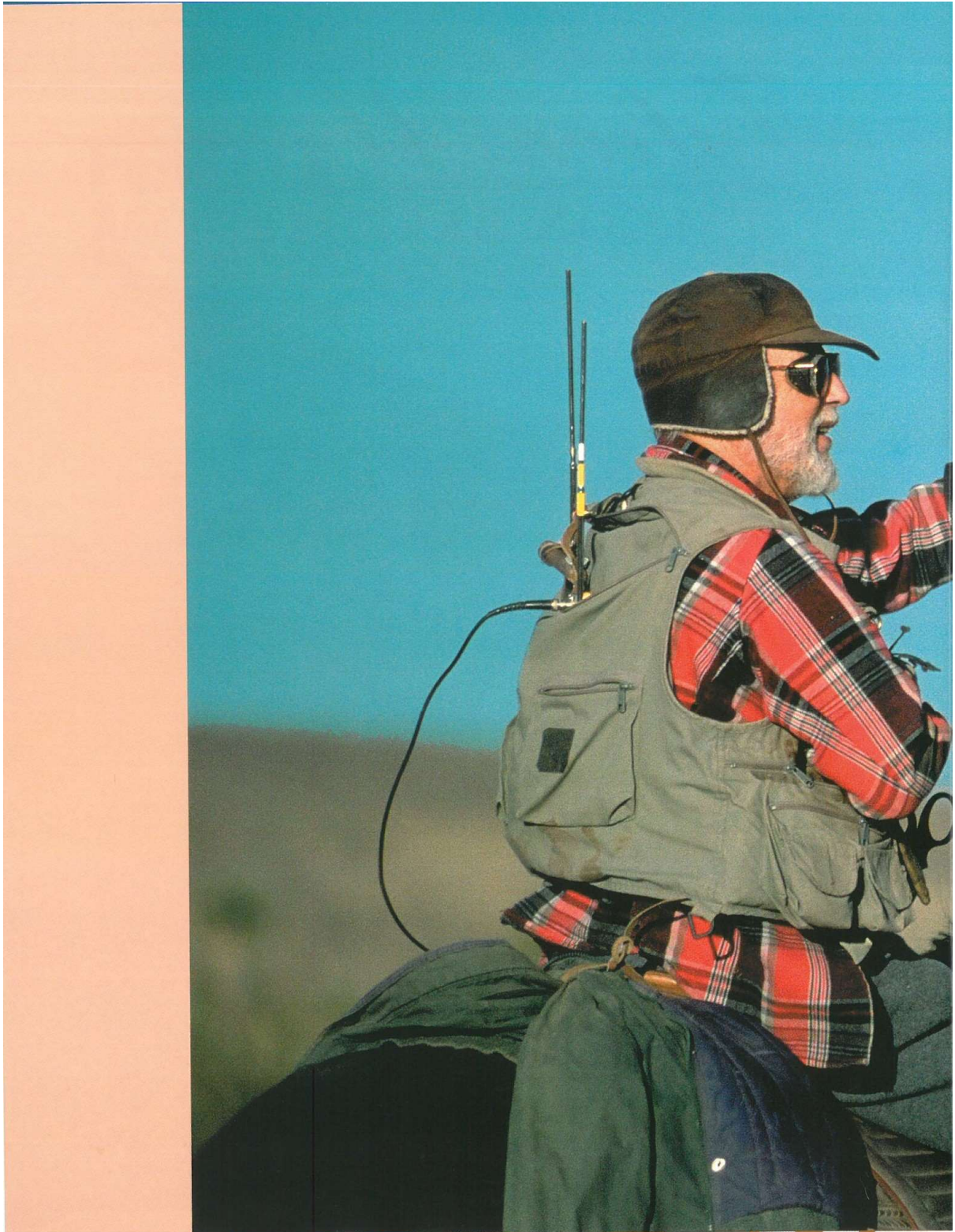
FALCON BREEDERS



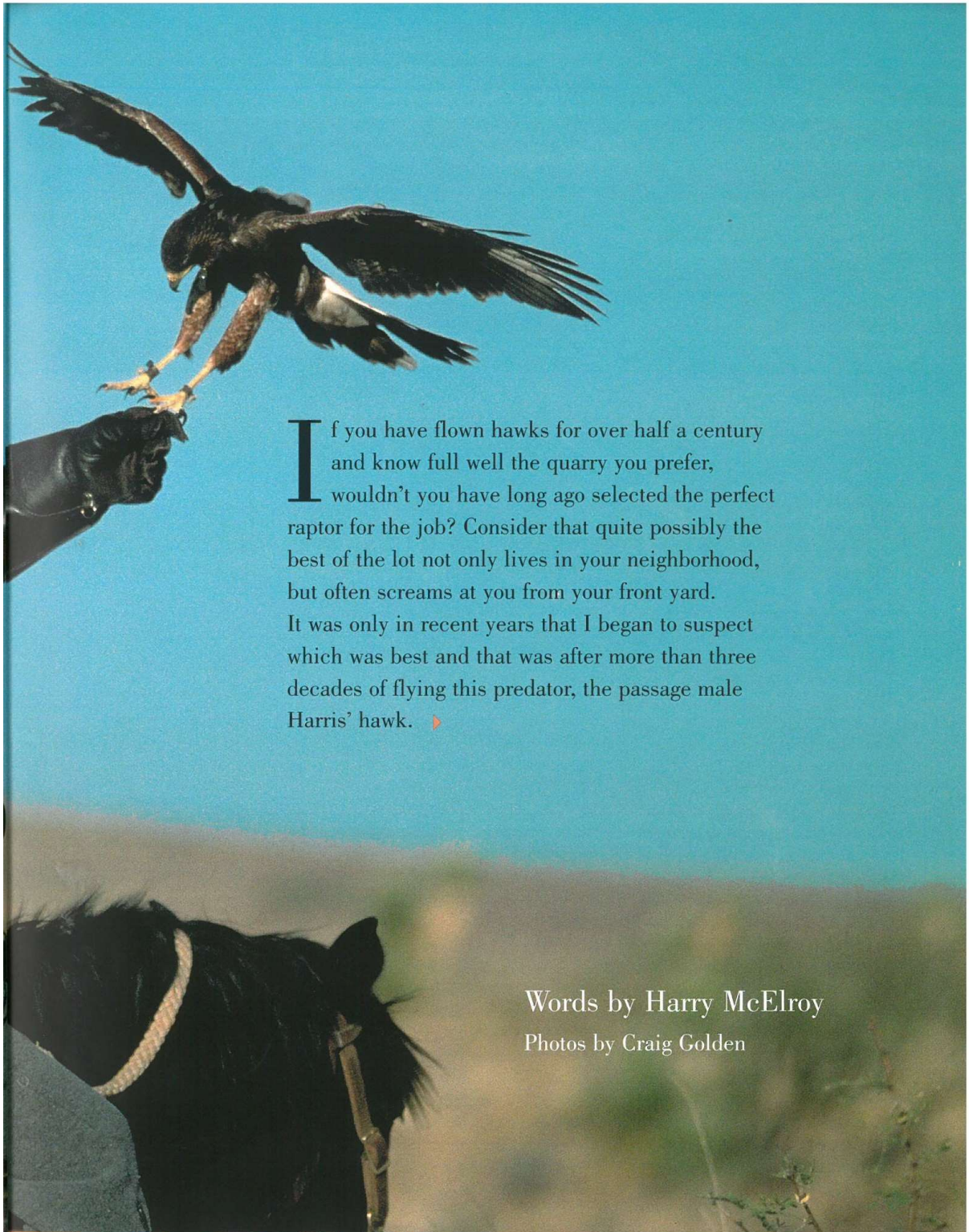
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With an estimated production of over 200 falcons, the choice is yours!

CONTACT PETER GILL OR RICHARD HILL

TEL / FAX 01709 548125 E-MAIL peter@falconmews.u-net.com



I SEE THE



If you have flown hawks for over half a century and know full well the quarry you prefer, wouldn't you have long ago selected the perfect raptor for the job? Consider that quite possibly the best of the lot not only lives in your neighborhood, but often screams at you from your front yard. It was only in recent years that I began to suspect which was best and that was after more than three decades of flying this predator, the passage male Harris' hawk. ▶

Words by Harry McElroy

Photos by Craig Golden

LIGHT.

THE QUARRY

My long-time favourite is the desert quail and I have taken them with a list of hawks. Included is the Cooper's, goshawk, male prairie, male peregrine, lanner, aplomado and a merlin hybrid. Our area has the Gambel's and Scaled quail in about a 50/50 mix. At times coveys of both species are found in the same location.

The Gambel's is fond of the lower desert and ranges into what we call the high desert here at 4,500 feet elevation. Their main escape tactic is a grouse-like flight of several hundred yards where they typically take refuge in a pack rat den, or if the pursuer is particularly fast in acceleration, they may make a series of short flights, bailing out for any cover or open ground. This species is well known for running and until recent years, gunners considered them beyond control by the pointer.

The Scaled quail is found from about 3,500 feet elevation and above. Their escape tactics are varied and they frequent more open grasslands. Even with a dog chasing they will at times run about at you feet refusing to fly. Their flight is typically a series of short curving maneuvers where they plunge into cover to watch the pursuer and reflush unexpectedly. This bird may also fly some distance like the Gambel's. Their tactics include just about anything you might imagine, from running about in Cholla cactus to the canopy of trees. These quail are a delight to pursue with a shortwing, but they may have invented the rat hunt.

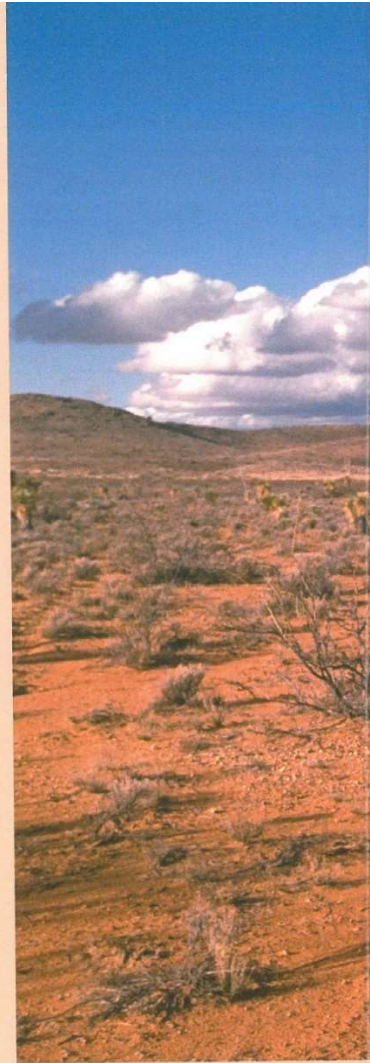
This quail will not take refuge in a hole or rat den until flown several times. Their tactic is to seek some form of cover where they can watch as you search and their blue coloration provides excellent camouflage even on open ground. On many hunts after a flight to cover we have searched the logical spots over and over again only to stumble across them by accident as we depart. In defense of the dogs, our

dry desert air makes scent detection most difficult for some time shortly after a flight. The expression is that their scent is washed away during flight.

THE REFLUSH AND SPORTSMANSHIP

Some hawkers would think little of our game in the desert protesting that to reflush a tired bird is improper. This opinion certainly should be respected, however, to take quail on a regular basis the reflush is a necessity. These desert quail are almost never caught in the air even by the exceptional hawk. Our area is open to semi-open high desert with game scattered since the arrival of the white man and overgrazing by his cow. So, as a result of this openness, slips are often longer than claims in the *Guinness Book of Records*. Come to think of it, I recently broke the world's record in a slip at quail, or so I claim, from the top of one tall hill to the top of the next. We didn't catch that quail, but had several flights at the covey as it ditched us in a jungle of Cholla cactus far below.

There are several factors dictating a reflush based hunt which are necessary for consistent success in this desert. The heat renders the male goshawk impractical even if his speed is most desirable. The long slips would eliminate the male Cooper's with his dramatic acceleration. And of course his lack of consistency or erratic behavior would reduce his effectiveness in this complex match between raptor and prey where cooperation is essential between the team members. The desert falcons are the best bet for up and down sport and yet the bailing tendency of quail and the difficulty of a timed reflush usually keep scores low. Even so both prairie and lanner can take a decent number during a good season. Those flying tiercel peregrines take only a handful of quail per season in our state. This impressive flyer does not usually go into the cover with its



prey which makes relocation difficult. The endangered aplomado falcon can take numbers of quail in the desert, but alas, they are not available at this time nor is the black sparrowhawk.

So after this long and boring process of elimination we have two contenders for the prize: the female Cooper's and the male Harris'.

COOPER'S

The female Coopers is good with the desert temperatures for about two-thirds of the season. She will shut down behind a determined quail in the heat of our early season. She can be excellent in taking long slips; her speed is moderate and clearly suitable for reflush hunting and even a few passagers tame nicely to work with dog, horse and man.

Kim Olson on Dancer, Harry's Peruvian Paso horse, hunting with Ariel, a six times intermewed female passage Harris' hawk (this was her first hunt off horseback with her also taking game that same hunt).



MALE HARRIS'

The other contender available to us is the male Harris'. This hawk is noted for its heat tolerance and in extended flights during our early quail season will fly with an open beak, but will not drop out of the long race. They will run a pointer into the ground on a hot day and my horses as well. Needless to say the well-conditioned Harris' will consistently fly quail down in the heat. In other words their heat tolerance is greater than the quail's. The Harris' will take almost any long slip and from my observation their speed compares with the female Cooper's. They, like the average female Cooper's, will require a reflush to overtake quail. The difference between the two in terms of catching things involves heat tolerance and the stoop.

THE STOOP

The effectiveness of the stoop is not to be taken lightly. During this past year my passage Harris' caught ten quail in a row in a single flight. I saw only a few ending in a stoop, but I have to assume that some form of the stoop was involved in most of these flights. My records of the stoop, spotty at best, imply its use in 8 of every 10 kills. Indeed, it would be easy to assume that the Harris' has evolved for the desert with its specialised plants, the heat, and its use of the stoop. Perhaps pursuit of our desert quail fits into this adaptation.

HAWKING BY COMMITTEE

My hawking is carried out by the committee, and to be honest (just this

one time) I give credit for most catches to some member. I am usually in the background. First off is Refugio, a third-year passage Harris'. He is perhaps slightly above average in speed, but his strong point is consistency. Some way or another he comes up with a quail in his feet. His diversity of pursuit has got to be a part of his effectiveness. Murray Gaskins of Georgia has the perfect name for the male Harris'. He calls them 'roosters'. Second in the committee are the pointers. I call them 'street-sweepers' in honor of the Chicago Mafia. Mozart is an English pointer out of the Dale Guthormsen Kennels of Canada. This young dog is the apple of my eye. He covers vast expanses of desert at his fast easy lope and for some reason unbeknownst to me is still able to ▶

keep a close eye on the hawk, the other dog and of course the horse. When a bird is flown to cover, more than nine chances out of ten, I ride in to find him there and often enough on point. We spend a lot of time watching him because his finds are dramatic. Often the covey is 60 feet or more to the fore. Beethoven, my old pointer, works in close being a hybrid of German wirehair pointer x Brittany. She is stunningly effective at finding birds that have been flown to cover and would cheerfully spend 10-15 years in the search if not called off. The fourth member of the committee is what was formally my horse. I stupidly twisted my wife Beth's arm until she, very reluctantly, agreed to a short ride. This breed, the Peruvian Paso, is well known for demonstrating its high energy and to the uninitiated appears ready to blow up. At the same time they have been selectively bred for cooperation and ease of control. So the result is a horse that has high energy and literally leaps in response to the slightest cue. Now I never get to even put a saddle on him if Beth is about. This Peruvian Paso is likely just another typical member of the breed, but he is smooth riding, fast, easy to handle and will try to go anywhere. No matter where he is pointed he will charge in and for this reason alone he is a dangerous hayburner. Dancer loves the hunt and



begs always to go faster. When he sees the hawk climbing up or hears the falconer's call he bursts forward into the high speed gait. And if you have open country and really want to travel, relax the reins slightly and he goes into the canter - its like being in your granny's rocking chair.

CAN THE HARRIS' CATCH QUAIL?

If the Harris" is a good quail hawk, austringers might ask why it is so

seldom used for this sport? I have no answer for this question, but can only propose that conditioning and entering play major roles. From the hawking that I see, the typical Harris" is flown a few days per week, by busy people, and in a manner that emphasizes rather slow, if thorough, progression through the field. By contrast my quail hunts involve miles per day from a fast horse in a free flight system. The emphasis here is in a long quiet search and the results are

I SEE THE LIGHT

physical conditioning. I feed a high quality whole bird or animal diet and keep my hawks free lofted in a 50 foot flight pen. Frustrational conditioning is employed in near single kill hunts. In Mexico where the Harris' is flown in the desert, the quail is a common prey. These hawks are flown in large groups in safaris that at times include weeks of camping and extended desert hunting. The Mexican austringers are past masters with this hawk.

COMPARISONS

Comparing a female Cooper's with a male Harris' might involve some risk except in terms of game taken. However, mere logic should not stand in the way of writing falconry articles. My only claim is that I have taken more quail with the Harris' than I have with the Cooper's. In my defense, bare in mind that this so called comparison is made in the desert on desert quail with the western Cooper's. Where my better seasons with the Cooper's includes quail into three figures, I have done more with the Harris'. The Cooper's of the eastern United States could be the super fast goshawk beating accipiter that some claim. What would I know, I've only flown the western *cooperii*.

HUNTING STYLE

I fly both the passage Cooper's and the passage Harris' in a free flight style off the horse. Both will follow along and spend some time on the fist because here there are few perches available. The Cooper's will require more tidbitting and encouragement whereas the Harris' tends to follow along because of bonding and in general does more flying. The Harris' ranges more widely. If anything my male Harris' could be described as slightly agitated because they seldom stay in one place for long when the horse is moving. I notice the same wide ranging character in various visitors' Harris'es and Terry l'Anson's passage female Harris' here on jacks (hare).

At the end of a flight the Cooper's usually goes in with the quail whereas the Harris' flies in above to watch for an opportunity to stoop. If the prey is not sighted he will float down to perch. If the quail is sighted from a perch, the Harris' often flies straight up to flip over and stoop under power. After flying a quail to cover, the Cooper's often waits for the reflush whereas the Harris' many times enters into a chase on foot. These tactics offer contrast in flight styles and it would be interesting to read about others who fly western quail with the Harris'.

Both Cooper's and Harris' will become nearly wedded to quail during our years when numbers are high following the blessings of above average winter rain. Either species will fly various other birds to the bush and will respond quickly to the fist if meat is offered to call them off. In the

eating the head. Again this could be because of the flavour, both normally will not abandon the body of a quail but will carry it to the fist from five feet or so. One difficulty in flying the Harris' is its devotion to our small desert cottontail, but fortunately we have few rabbits in this high desert. Almost none of my Cooper's will fly rabbits, perhaps because of maintaining their flight weight within the upper limits of midrange.

In closing this risky business about flight styles, please allow me to state that my intent is not to inflame the accipiter aficionados. I do not suggest that the Harris' is the superior quail hawk in the desert. My intent is to propose that the passage male Harris' is not given its due recognition in the pursuit of quail. If I have seen the light will there be a revelation for others? ■



better years the Harris' will wheel around in mid-flight if called off a sparrow. My guess is that the sparrow offers a taste not as inviting as the pigeon meat on the fist. When sparrows are taken, either species will drop the bird carcass for the fist after

Will globalisation mean further restrictions for falconers?

by Nicholas Kester

What is it about the world? As it gets smaller it gets more restrictive, possibly through globalisation (dread word), which effectively stamps out national characteristics and traditions. Whilst there is a certain comfort in having a McDonalds on every street corner serving the same disgusting pap, there is no pleasure in the realization that this is at the cost of the local restaurant serving local food, grown locally and suiting local tastes. As such one might have certain sympathy with the protesters at the G8 summits, even if one deplores their methodology. The same unification negatives apply with vivid effect in falconry.

The desire, justified or otherwise, sweeping former Eastern Bloc countries to enter the European Union (EU), coming when many long-serving member populations are questioning the validity of membership has a certain irony. Unfortunately there is no irony in the knock-on effects of this desire: a further tightening of the hunting laws. At least that is the case in the Czech Republic where reform is rife and the desire to look 'flavoursome' and 'green' to the senior members of the EU is high on the agenda.

Of course, if you have spent fifty years under communist rule, reform is no bad thing. Without being insulting, the Czechs are now suffering the side effects of having invested substantial power in a new generation of

bureaucrats with little experience of democratic freedoms or traditions. Thus, when a green takes over the relevant government department and deems falconry expendable, what chance for that local minority?

Thankfully, the Czechs are members of the rapidly expanding International Association for Falconry (IAF), which was able to quote positive precedent and provide green credentials for falconry on a global scale. This valuable ammunition the Czech falconers have used to their advantage. More they are not saying. They have battles to win and strategy is something they are keeping tight-lipped about. We will report again when they are able to talk further.

The role of the IAF is the upside of unification and the communication revolution. They had the knowledge to impart and could do so in time-scales previously undreamed of. The cynic would look back and comment that the negative of unification – a desire for uniformity – came before the need to defend falconry, and was therefore a consequence not a cause.

Be that as maybe, there is no doubt that the IAF has made a difference in the Czech Republic and in Germany,

whose falconers are also enjoying less than cordial relations with their government. Hardly surprising when the minister for agriculture is a rabid green ex-social worker with negligible rural experience, and who sees the future of farmers as becoming "guardians of the environment".



So what have they been doing since man first put a spade into the soil?

Professor Doctor Thomas Richter of the German falconers explains in his email to me (more instant, low-cost communication) that a desire for a ban on falconry and substantial changes in the hunting laws are nothing new. However, the environmental lobby believes it has a sympathetic ear at present, so the pressure has been stepped up.

The first target is to reduce the number of quarry species. There is some logic in this as, says Richter, it is still possible to hunt species that no longer even live in Germany such as bear and bison. But such are the German hunting laws that the protection status of quarry species is better than if they were protected under environmental law. (Something that the environmentalists cannot countenance – and envy is a powerful motivator for change.) The next issue is that the 'fun' in hunting must be reduced as far as possible.

Sustainable use of wildlife is not important, so the only reason for hunting is to protect the forest from deer and agriculture from wild pigs. Hunting birds and predators would thus be banned with a very few exemptions. Again, the German falconers are keeping fairly quiet about their strategy, so more on their battle at a later date.

Note the frequency with which I have referred to the IAF, so some small mention should be made of what they do and why?

To the oft-repeated three levels of falconer – inspired genius, averagely competent and absolutely hopeless – must be added a fourth – worker! These are the dedicated ones who desire to ‘put something back’ into a sport that has given them so much pleasure. One only has to think of the Americans whose far-sightedness created the Peregrine Fund and through whose actions, falconry became synonymous with conservation. Falconry is stable in that continent by their actions alone.

But as the battle lines are drawn local groups are often insufficiently armed, which is why we so badly need vibrant international bodies with credible representation and strong agendas. The International Association for Falconry (IAF) is one such organisation.

Earlier this year the IAF newsletter dropped onto my desk. Wrapped in a glossy cover of falconry photo-montage and smiling delegates, twenty-eight pages of dense type somewhat daunted deeper study. But I persevered and was rewarded by an extra-ordinary insight into the machinations of falconry politics and the dedicated team of falconers who protect our interests.

The nationalities of the board, officers and advisory committee are impressive in their own right. From Belgium, UK, Germany, USA, France, Austria, Spain, Portugal, Estonia and Poland the volunteers are called; from Mexico, Serbia and Wales are new member organisations joined. But it is the diversity of subjects that causes

‘In Holland possible new legislation could restrict quarry to five species – removing the partridge and corvids – and permitting only two falconry species to be flown: peregrine and goshawk’

one to pause and think.

Here we find reports on the progress towards down-listing the protected status of the gyrfalcon and the peregrine; the issues – moral and ecological – of hybrids; the legislation surrounding international transport; and the value, or otherwise, of microchips.

But as vice-president, Patrick Morel reports: “One of the most remarkable results... is the acceptance by the World Conservation Union of sustainable use access to wild raptors: there is also the potential to improve CITES for falconry and a major recognition of falconry through IAF.”

Unfortunately the positive always has a downside. In Holland possible new legislation could restrict quarry to five, yes five, species – removing the partridge and corvids – and permitting only two falconry species to be flown: peregrine and goshawk. Think long and hard on that one all you Harris hawkers.

In Denmark they are close to a test period on the lifting of the existing ban on falconry, whilst neighbouring Norway claims keeping indigenous raptors is illegal. In far off Quebec, there is a possibility of a lifting on the prohibition. The Germans remain acutely nervous of the issues surrounding hybrids. Where will it all end?

Equally fascinating is the number of falconers represented. The British

Falconers’ Club is the largest single club with 1005 members, but the North American Falconers’ Association represents more individuals (2719) through its state club structure. Next is Germany with 1,000 then the Czech Republic with 421. Three groups come into the two hundreds (Wales, Slovakia and France), seven in the hundreds, and fourteen in double figures. Worldwide the IAF directly represents 7,318 falconers: indirectly there are thousands more who will benefit despite having no membership and paying no dues.

So let us finish on a positive note. To the editorial question “Is falconry a legitimate activity?” the IAF quotes the following extracts.

1. In its opinion 25th May 1977, the Economic and Social Committee of the EEC stated that falconry is “a legitimate and ancient sport... some provisions should be made to allow the continuation of this.”
2. In 1997, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) resolution 10.20 adopted unanimously by 129 countries describes falconry as “a legitimate purpose”.
3. And finally, the members of the world’s main organisation for nature conservation, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has democratically elected the IAF as a member. Not something it would have considered had there been any doubt as to our sport’s legitimacy.

In his report, Patrick Morel makes the point that the IAF primary goal is to help legalise falconry everywhere. The IAF has been asked to help in at least eleven countries, and by two governments. So when you turn to the back cover of this somewhat intimidating newsletter and cast your eye over the smiling delegates at the IAF AGM in Amarillo, Texas, remind yourself that they are doing more than you to help ensure you can do that which you love. ■

RIDING WITH EAGLE



Words and photos
by Alan Gates

As I disembarked onto the snow packed runway, the chillfactor was immediate and I pulled up the goosedown hood of my jacket to protect my ears. It was good to stretch my legs now I was released from the cramped canvas seats of the MIAT Antonov 24, at this refuelling stop on the first leg of my homeward journey.

Most of my twenty or so fellow passengers headed for the protection of the concrete building that was the airport terminal, I knew it would be as stark inside as it looked from the outside and so I took the time on the ground to exercise my legs and soak up the atmosphere of the surrounding

snow covered Altai Mountains.

I had spent the past week in the province of Bayan Olgii in the far western corner of Mongolia as a guest of Kakiyat, a kazakh eaglehunter and his family. Living in his winter home in the shelter of the mountains near the frozen lake of Acit Nuur we had roamed the high rocky mountains on Mongolian horses tracking and hunting mountain hares and foxes with eagles.

I had long dreamed of such an experience, as a young teenager when I encountered my first golden eagle I aspired to visit and learn from the only people who valued the eagle as a serious hunting companion. ▶

THE KAZAKH HUNTERS





Our home for the week, sheltered from the North by a massive rock

As I stumbled in my attempts to hunt with a golden eagle in the crowded environment of which I lived, the disparaging attitude I received from my peers made me long to sit with the eagle masters of Kirgizia. A few pages from my 1970 reprint of James Edward Harting's *Hints on the Management of Hawks and Practical Falconry* was the only encouragement in a library of cautionary tales of eagle encounters.

My idle daydreams and full Technicolour fantasies of my slumber had me astride a sturdy mountain horse riding along the banks of the lake Issyk-kul in the heavenly mountains of the Tien Shan. These images were built on scraps of information of a people of distant times in a distant place, the desire that I might venture that far from home was fuelled by that infectious character Gerald Durrell for whom I worked. He would regale me with tales of animal collection trips to far flung places of the world and inspire me with a belief that anything was possible.

At that time of my life my world was centred around my own little sphere, and an interest or knowledge of world politics seemed to have little to do with what I was interested in at the time. The fact that Kirgizia had the richest deposits of mineral wealth in the Soviet Union and Kazakhstan was home to the Baikonur Cosmodrome as well as a test site for nuclear weapons meant that the whole of communist central Asia was shut tighter than a steel rat trap to any westerner.

For over two decades I had to be content with nocturnal dreams of what

seemed to be an endangered lifestyle under a communist collectiveness, it was not until the effects of Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* in the early 90s that snippets of information seeped out of practising burcutchi eagle-hunters. First from Kazakhstan then from Xinjiang Uigur region of western China, a few years later reports of travellers in Mongolia seeing eaglehunters was testament to the individuality and determination of the kazakhs to stick to their traditions.

Most of the reports were received with excitement but disappointment soon followed each account, repeatedly they showed methods and practises that belonged to a bygone era. Had we in the west advanced beyond the eagle masters of Central Asia, I clinged to a dream that reality seemed to shatter.

Russian Kazakh entrepreneurs offered me eagle hunting holidays for large sums of American dollars, in fact from them I could have anything I wanted for large sums of American dollars, but the reality of the offers did not equate to the cost requested. I had learned from others the futility of travelling to the other side of the world to watch flights at bagged quarry.

Inspiration came from Andrew Miller Mundy in an article on his experiences with the eaglehunters on the Chinese Kirgiz border, later I received a manuscript from my friend Steve Bodio on his adventures in Mongolia, both these accounts were from first class falconers and dispelled much of my past disappointment.

The opportunity came in the summer of 2000, the Mongolian

members of an American expedition company 'Boojum' were organising a visit in November to the Kazakh region of Mongolia where the eaglehunters live. I took it.

Acquired knowledge from past adventurers told me that November was a good time to visit, hopefully the full depth of winter had not set in, yet it was far enough into the season to insure that the eagles would be flying and fit.

Arriving in Ulaan Baatar the capital of Mongolia I met with the four Americans that made up our party and one of our Mongolian guides Gongor.

We spent a couple of days in Ulaan Baatar to acclimatise to the weather and each other before we were set for our flight to Olgii. Flying with Mongolian Airlines is an experience to be savoured but not for the fainthearted. The Russian built AN-24 turboprop twin-engine aircraft are the backbone of their internal flights, flying at 16,000 feet gave a wonderful view of the Mongolian terrain as we flew from east to west.

Our Kazakh guide Canat Chiryazdaa met us at Olgii airport and after an overnight stay we clambered aboard Canat's Russian built four wheel drive jeep early next morning.

This transportation looked very much like a copy of an old Volkswagen campervan, but with four wheel drive a stiffer suspension and higher ground clearance this workhorse performed admirably over the harsh rocky terrain on our journey to the eaglehunters.

The journey to an adventure became an adventure in itself, I had been travelling for over a week, flown over the largest landmass on the



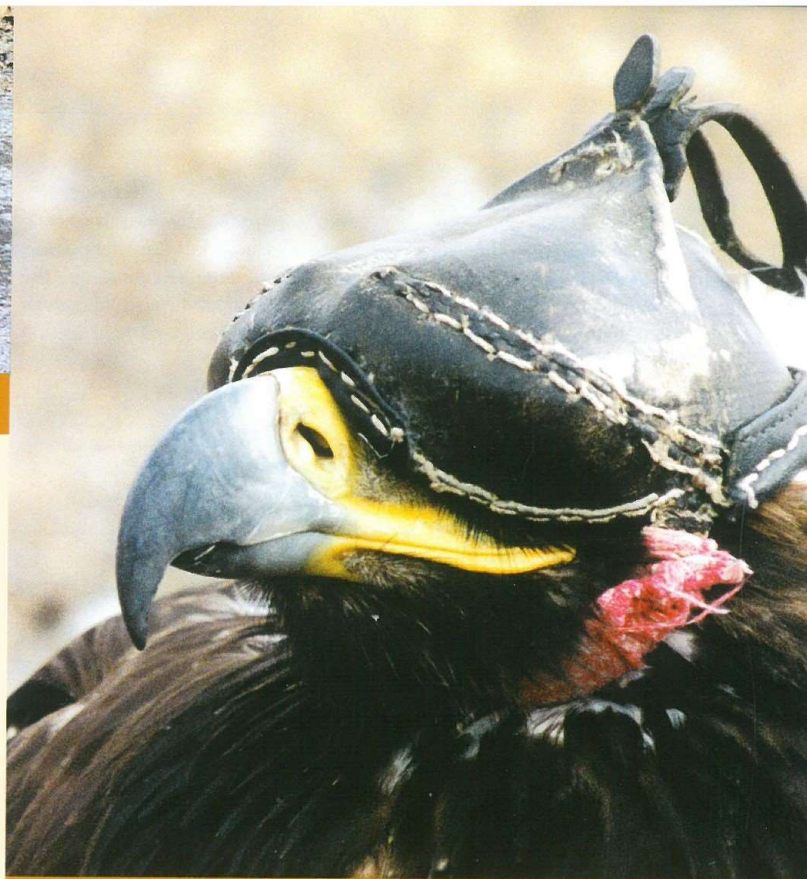
planet, slept in three different locations and now was off-roading in the wilderness in a north-easterly direction towards the Russian Siberian border. The snow was a little deeper here than back in Olgii but it was dry as dust and blew about in small drifts, if you grabbed a handful and squeezed it to make a snowball it just poured out of your hand as dry granules.

Canat told me as soon as we had landed that this recent snow was good for the hunting and the eaglehunter we were visiting had caught fifteen foxes this season, that was very reassuring having travelled so far but looking at the vastness of this rocky landscape it seemed a daunting prospect to find any life at all.

Finally after two hours of bone numbing progress we drove around a mountain side and up to a few small mud and wood adobe type buildings which were our host's 'winter-place'. We all eagerly disembarked to stretch weary limbs and aching muscles, our host Kakiyat and his wife Kulai together with many of their children were there to greet us.

Canat introduced me as the first eaglehunter to visit their province of Olgii from the outside world, Kakiyat took my hand in both of his and with a twinkle from his warm brown eyes and welcoming smile ushered me over to where his eagle sat hooded on her *Tugir* (perch).

Her feather condition was much drier than our eagles, in fact the difference reminded me of desert falcons compared to Scottish peregrines. These eagles did not bathe, looking at the deep dry dust we



One of Manai's eagles

were standing on I could imagine the mess a wet eagle would get into. Kakiyat handed me his *bijalai* (mitten type glove) and gestured that I pick her up. After a lifetime with an eagle on your left arm this right handed mitten gave me a new prospective, surprisingly I was quite comfortable with the weight on an unfamiliar arm but my cack-handed attempts at hooding using my left hand needed some refinement.

Kakiyat's eagle was sharper than I would ever fly an eagle in the UK but she was hard muscled, she also carried some ferocious battle scars. She had a deep groove through her cere and down the upper mandible plus a recent and horrendous canine tooth mark that had taken a 'U' shaped gouge from the underside of her large talon on the inner toe of one foot. Clearly this eagle's quarry did not surrender life without a fight, yet her manners with this stranger was a credit to her handler.

After the customary hospitality of milk tea and some food we were back outside getting the feel of the horses and the unique Kazakh saddles. I was rather pleased that the tradition of brass conical discs inserted into the saddle seat, first introduced by Genghis Khan to ensure his warriors stood in the saddle, was not favoured by the Mongolian Kazakh horsemen. In fact despite the primitive look and construction of these saddles I was to become amazed how comfortable they still felt after many hours riding.

That evening was spent in jovial conversation and many salutations with Russian vodka, through Canat's excellent translation we exchanged many vivid accounts of past eagle flights, manoeuvres and behaviour. The whole family were intrigued by the photographs I had brought of my own hunting eagle rearing her first son at the age of twenty-five. The Kazakhs by tradition release their hunting eagles before they are ten-years-old so ▶

they can breed in the wild.

Before we were to retire for the night Kakiyat brought his eagle into the one-room house. I had watched him prepare the meat from a skinned fox hind leg, dice it into one-inch pieces then pour hot water from a kettle over it whilst placed in a *zhem ayak* (food bowl). He would squeeze the meat in the water then pour off the water and replace with more hot water. This was done a few times, not so much to wash the meat more I think to add moisture. She was unhooded and allowed to feed directly from the *zhem ayak* which still held some warm water. Once finished she was hooded and placed on the *tugir* and positioned in the corner of the room near the door. The family retired to their beds which lined the walls, our party laid out our sleeping bags in a row on the floor. As the embers of burnt camel dung that had fuelled the stove died down, I was becoming well pleased that I had purchased the arctic grade goose down bag especially for this trip.

Nocturnal pit stops outside were ethereal, squatting outside the stone wall of the animal fold I gazed up at the galaxy, unfamiliar by its density of stars. These were hurried interruptions to my slumber dictated by the minus thirty degree temperature, which had me scurrying back to the warmth of my goose down bag.

Our first day's hunting was not the best organised due to the lack of communication, the hunting party was spread out but Canat could not be in all places all of the time. We had travelled on horseback to the shores of Acit Nuur, a frozen lake near the Siberian border, the lake was surrounded by a large dry reed bed and this being the only ground cover seemed to offer a likely place to flush ground quarry. We rode the horses through the reeds slapping our saddles or boots with the lead rein and whooping and hollering in an attempt to scare quarry. We failed to spook

even a sparrow, this vast landscape seemed to hold little in winter. Next we turned our attention to the foothills, Kakiyat headed to a high vantage point whilst we held back a

ground fast and raked the fox just as he made it to ground again. Try as they may they were unable to reflush the fox.

As the sun started its decent we

Kakiyat feeds his eagle on a skinned fox leg



little lower down. We had gathered up two young boys from a neighbour's along the way, they were to act as scare boys and clambered on foot up the rocky foothills yelling and throwing rocks into boulder cover.

A couple of hours later and nothing had stirred, we in the rear guard were becoming a little restless at the lack of action when up went a yell and the eagle was on the wing. We saw her rise and do a wing-over behind the rocks, Mike who was a fox hunter from Virginia was up high with Kakiyat and retold the action when we all regrouped. He was excited at his first experience of eagle hunting and told us the scare boys had flushed a big dog fox, the eagle had covered the

headed back home, I was riding alongside Kakiyat when we came over a slight hill and startled a mountain hare. The eagle was airborne and after it in a flash, she fluffed her footing and was unable to regain lift as the hare jinxed away. A quick and exciting flight she caught up to us as we rode on ahead.

Riding in a line one of the Kazakh boys came alongside smiling and gesturing to me that we quicken the pace, with a flick of the lead rein we were straight into a gallop. We had been in the saddle all day but these Kazakh horses were still frisky and took this racing stuff seriously. My mare was leading by a length and as I looked back this vision is embedded into my memory, the deep orange red sun setting over the snow-capped mountains, light glistening on the frozen lake and a wild looking bunch

of Americans and Kazakhs with Kakiyat's eagle wings stretched feeling the wind all galloping up behind.

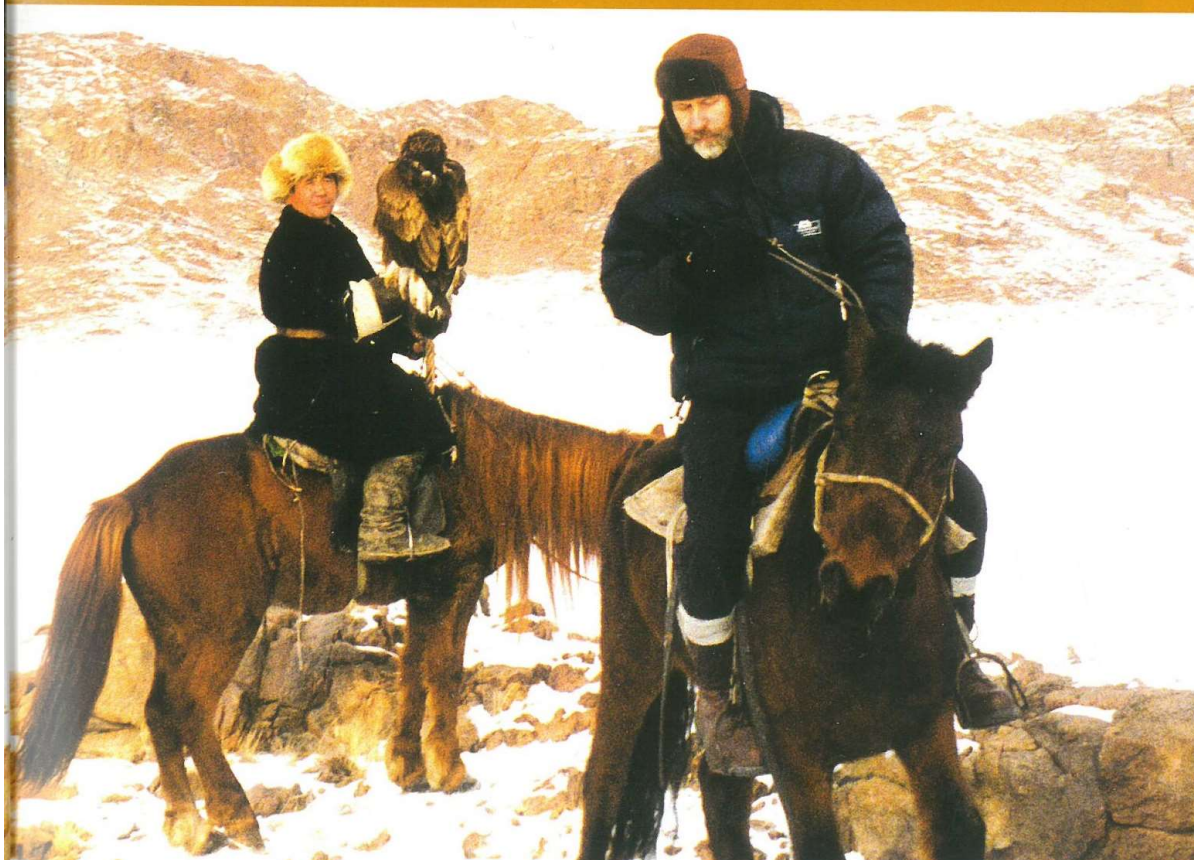
Next morning two of our party were not on top form and desired to remain in camp, Gongor volunteered to stay as interpreter and we set off for the mountains behind Kakiyat's home a much leaner group. This time we all kept together riding high into the mountains, and although I am not an experienced horse rider it was not long before I had total confidence in my steed's ability to take me safely up or down any rock wall that came our way.

Up on the high ground the snow cover was more extensive and we spent a lot of time following fox and hare tracks. The few hares we startled the flights were short and fast, they were able to jinx around, under and through boulder gaps with ease, these

hares were much leaner and seemed more agile than our British mountain hare who is no slouch. We flushed and reflushed a couple of foxes by the ability of following their tracks in the snow. On a couple of occasions I was close enough to see the eagle close in only to have the fleeing fox turn and face the eagle with her jaw open barring teeth. This tactic made the eagle pull out at the last few seconds as the fox bolted in the opposite direction. A tactic they must use on the wild eagles with success and judging by some of the scars this eagle bore its one tactic they learn to respect.

The day finished high in the mountains as my horse stood with her two front feet on the edge of a large cliff drop, I confidently sat in the saddle and gazed out across a landscape of flat snow-covered ▶

Kakiyat and author following fox tracks in the snow



Manai with his eagle

lowland surrounded by range after range of mountains. Kakiyat came up alongside me and gripped my shoulder, I gave him a thumbs up and he beamed a welcoming smile.

The quarry had evaded us but we had hunted hard in this unforgiving terrain, the eagle had worked hard and behaved well, my horse was unbelievably forgiving to my inexperience, so gentle tempered and patient with an agility and stamina you have to see to believe.

I was to enjoy another day hunting with Kakiyat before moving on to visit Manai and his son with their two eagles, but as I sat in the saddle with this vast vista spread out in front of me I knew I was probably in the best place in the world to fly eagles. I was certainly in the company of the warmest and most hospitable people, the Kazakh eaglehunters. ■



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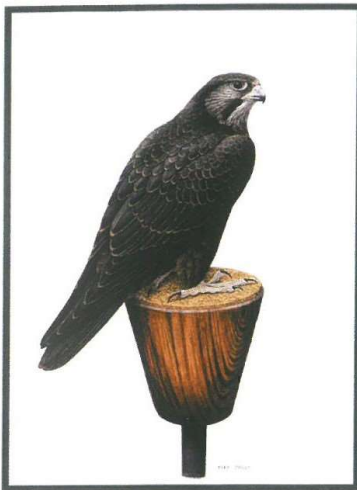
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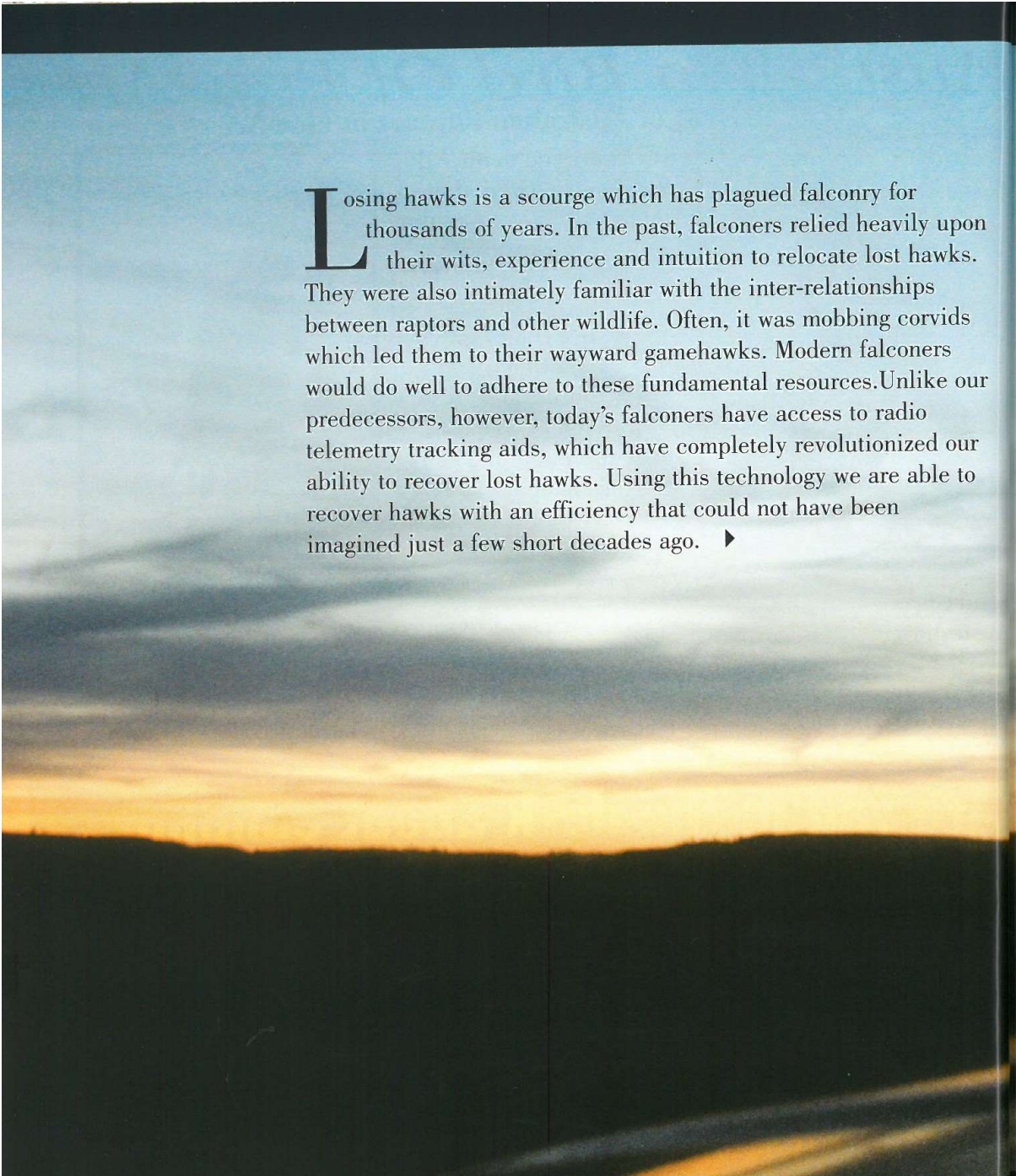
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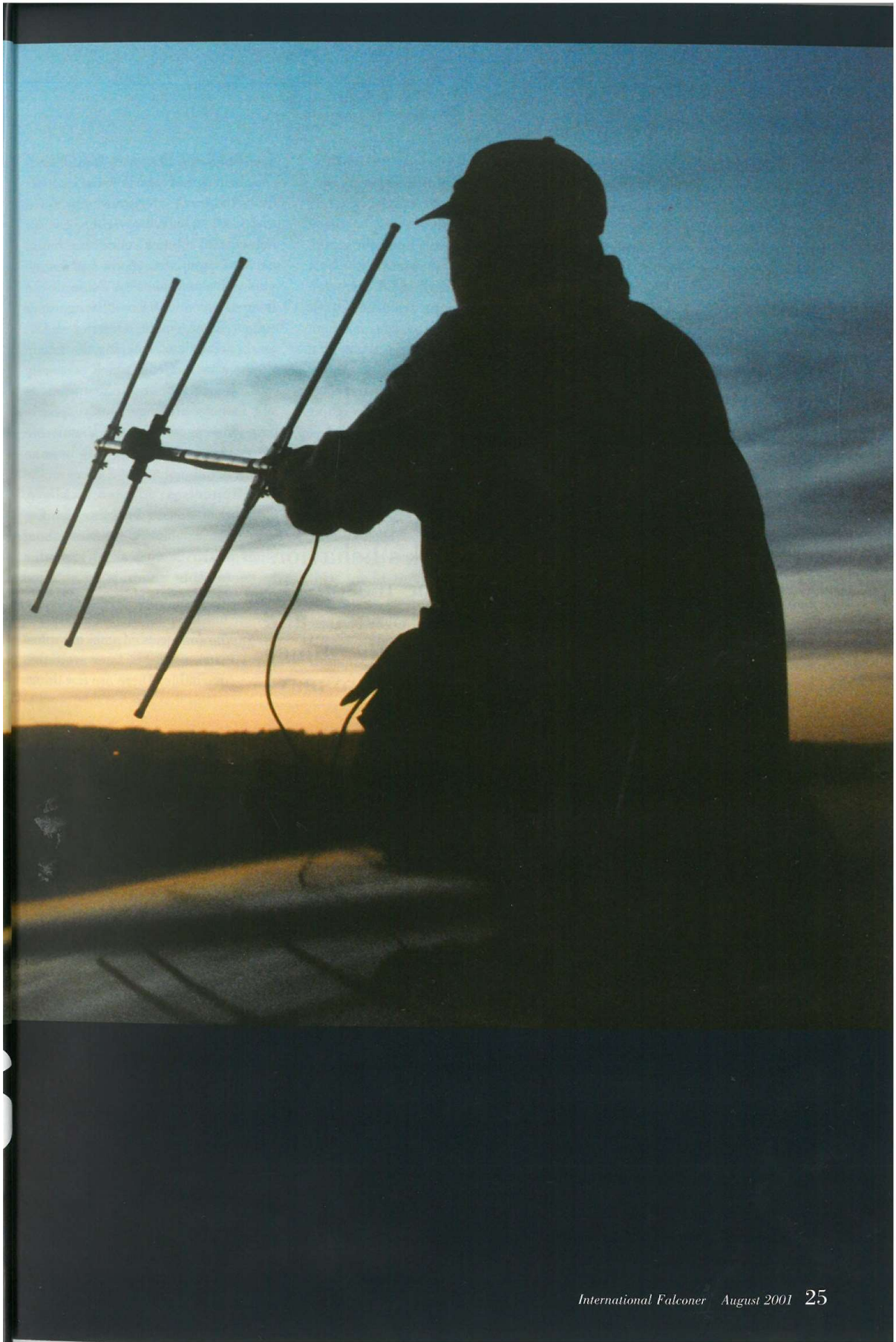
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Losing hawks is a scourge which has plagued falconry for thousands of years. In the past, falconers relied heavily upon their wits, experience and intuition to relocate lost hawks. They were also intimately familiar with the inter-relationships between raptors and other wildlife. Often, it was mobbing corvids which led them to their wayward gamehawks. Modern falconers would do well to adhere to these fundamental resources. Unlike our predecessors, however, today's falconers have access to radio telemetry tracking aids, which have completely revolutionized our ability to recover lost hawks. Using this technology we are able to recover hawks with an efficiency that could not have been imagined just a few short decades ago. ▶

LOST HAWKS

An excerpt from Joe Roy III's forthcoming book.



LOST HAWKS

A common complaint registered by pre-telemetry era falconers cited not only the untimely, permanent loss of gamehawks, but that the hawks lost were virtually always their prodigies. This, of course, isn't surprising since the most dynamic fliers would also tend to be the more accomplished gamehawks and were therefore less dependant upon man as a meal ticket. These types of gamehawks are predators in the purest sense of the word, and will kill with or without input from the falconer. Meanwhile, the hawks which would just as soon eat from the falconers bag as chase quarry, which it probably couldn't, or wouldn't catch anyway, would more than likely hang around for as many moults as the falconer would care to endure. From this perspective, it's clear that radio telemetry doesn't just help to recover lost hawks, it helps to recover our best hawks, thus enabling us to intermew our finest performers year after year. These intermewed gamehawks have been likened to fine wine, they keep getting better with age. There is no doubt that telemetry is largely responsible for the elevated level at which the art of falconry is practiced throughout North America and much of the world today. This is particularly so in the case of waiting on flights which, in some respects, have taken on new dimensions. With the specter of permanent loss almost a thing of the past, many contemporary longwingers are striving to fly falcons from extreme pitches, resulting in extraordinary flights. With so much to offer, flying hawks – particularly large falcons without benefit of telemetry is practically inconceivable. From a financial stand-point, purchasing telemetry equipment can best be described as money well spent. Falconers using a good telemetry

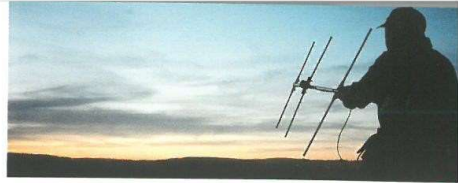
system are very likely to recoup their investment several times over as they successfully recover lost hawks time and again over the course of many years. From a broader perspective, the monetary loss incurred when a cherished gamehawk is lost, pales in comparison to the emotional toll exacted on the distraught falconer, whom will never know the flights that might have been. In my opinion, telemetry has become as essential to serious game-hawking as the weighing

“Deciphering why hawks do the things they do is paramount to positively shaping a hawk’s behavior. Sometimes the reasons a hawk rakes are obvious and clearly defined, other times the hawk’s departure may seem to defy all logic. Whatever the case, an immediate solution need be found because raptors can form bad habits almost instantaneously.”

machine. Bare in mind however, telemetry is no substitute for training nor is it a valid excuse for sheer recklessness. Personally, I like to think of telemetry as an insurance policy, something I hope never to need, but I'm sure glad it's there when I do. I make a point of tracking errant hawks as infrequently as possible, it's way too stressful. When one of my hawks causes me to search, due to aberrant behavior, I try to find the catalyst, the source of the malfunction. Deciphering why hawks do the things they do is paramount to positively shaping a hawks behavior.

Sometimes the reasons a hawk rakes are obvious and clearly defined, other times the hawks departure may seem to defy all logic. Whatever the case, an immediate solution need be found because raptors can form bad habits almost instantaneously. Some of the more common issues involve improper weight management, enticing check, i.e. pigeons etc., keeping the falcon on the wing too long (which is usually synonymous with insufficient amounts of game) and generally poorly managed flights. Unsuitable weather conditions can have an additional adverse effect on the problems listed above. Sometimes a departure signifies the hawk's lack of understanding as to just what her role is in this arena. Find the motive, solve the riddle.

In spite of our best efforts, the prospects of tracking a lost hawk sooner or later are rather inevitable. There are few things in life that are capable of more intensely focusing a falconer than searching for his prized gamehawk. At such times, all energies are directed towards locating the missing hawk as quickly as possible. It's a dangerous world out there for any raptor, the competition which exists amongst predators can easily turn lethal. A lost and wandering gamehawk can elicit extreme aggression as she passes into the occupied territories of other raptors. Younger, inexperienced eyasses naive in the ways of the wild are vulnerable indeed. The hazards which exist in a man-altered environment are plentiful and for a hawk that has little or no fear of man, the danger is ten fold. Just within my circle of acquaintances, I've known of errant gamehawks which were shot, stomped ran over, caged, and extorted for ransom. The horror stories of atrocities committed to tame hawks abound and the evil deeds often occur within the



first hour of the hawk's disappearance. When I'm tracking a lost gamehawk, I can't get there quick enough. Even if she's safely tucked out of sight, plucking a kill, I'd much rather arrive before she completely crops up, thus spoiling not only one days hawking, but an additional day or two as well. When a gamehawk is lost, every effort is made to recover her as quickly as possible. Sometimes however, a little restraint and patience is preferable to a hasty, ill-conceived response. Just because a falcon has gone beyond visual perception, she's not necessarily lost. Some falcons fly out of visual range with regularity. By and large, most people probably underestimate a falcon's ability to orientate itself. They are in fact, quite capable of returning to the point of flight origin after having ranged considerable distances, and never more so than when she's flying in familiar territory. Were it not so,

highly migrant falcons such as the tundra peregrine (*falco peregrinus tundrius*) could hardly be expected to navigate the widths of two continents during their migration between North and South America. The late and great falconer, Ronald Stevens, capitalized on the homing instincts of his falcons, intentionally nurturing this innate ability. Mr. Stevens' technique largely revolved around flying his falcons in one general locale, allowing them time to familiarize themselves with a specific perch site, such as a tree or rock. Once the falcon had established a fondness for a selected site, Ronald would begin to venture farther. In so doing, he was able to engage the homing behavior in his falcons. When his falcons were lost, (figuratively), they would return to their favourite perch and there they would wait to be reunited with Ronald. In his book, *Observations on Modern Falconry*, Ronald reports of an interesting

incident involving a falcon named Leila. The story is fascinating from both homing and sociological standpoints. In an experiment, Leila was intentionally left in a field nearly one hundred miles from 'home'. She was literally given the choice between liberty and resuming her life with Ronald. Leila chose the latter and flew the distance to prove it.

I do virtually all of my training in one location and I too have had falcons 'home' from as far as fifteen miles, returning to the training fields where they have spent so much time. In my case however, I do a great deal of hawking far from home and depend on telemetry to bail me out when things really go awry. Nonetheless, electronics alone are not the solution. Developing a sense for interpreting the hawks actions and intentions will assist in her recovery in a monumental sort of way. When the rapport between hawk and man is such that the

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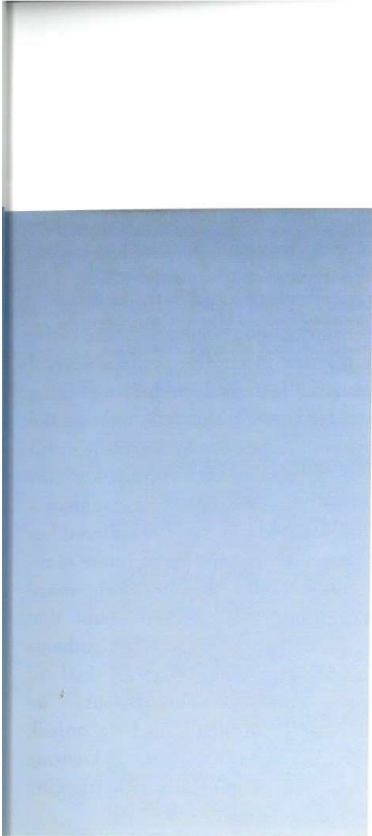
LOST HAWKS



falconer can accurately assess the cause of the hawk's absence and predict her subsequent reactions, he may then speed the recovery, in part by not making critical errors. The term 'lost hawk' can be somewhat of a misnomer. Sometimes a so called lost hawk isn't lost at all. More often than not, a seasoned gamehawk which has gone a.w.o.l. will return to the falconer in short order unless of course she has killed elsewhere. When deciding whether or not a missing hawk warrants tracking, several bits of information need be considered. The signal being emitted by the transmitter will relay important clues regarding direction, distance, and whether the hawk is stationary or on the move, etc. This vital information coupled with an intimate knowledge of a particular hawk's track record, (no pun intended), will partly dictate the falconer's course of action. Location is also an important consideration. Not just the immediate area where the loss occurred, but the surrounding environment as well. Is it a game rich habitat? What's the likelihood of the hawk killing on its own? If there's a

pigeon source nearby, there's a good chance she'll be delayed, and a pigeon pursuit/kill could preclude her return altogether. Metropolitan centres with their ever present pigeon populations attract trained falcons like magnets. There are few things more dangerous to the gamehawk than chasing pigeons through an 'urban jungle'. Pigeons will use any conceivable means of shaking off a pursuing falcon, trying their darndest to kill the falcon in the process by running them into buildings, trees, vehicles, powerlines, fences, and anything else that presents itself. On one such occasion, my falcon chased a feral pigeon which took to flying through backyards at breakneck speeds. This pigeon managed to escape, and the falcon returned. Unfortunately he came back without the transmitter which was subsequently recovered in a backyard, lying in the grass, deck feather and all, directly below the clothesline the pigeon attempted to kill the falcon on. To track or not to track? That is the question. Often the answer boils down to an educated guess, dosed with a heaping of intuition. If the falcon isn't

coming back, the sooner tracking commences, the better the odds of a successful recovery. Once the decision has been made to track, all efforts are directed towards intersecting with the falcon at the nearest possible point. Unless she's extremely close, and preferably stationary, this usually involves a vehicle. Presumably, if the falcon hasn't killed, she should be responsive to the falconer's calls, lures, etc. from a considerable distance. Therefore, if a missing falcon hasn't killed and she isn't responsive, it's likely that she's far enough out to preclude a walk-up recovery. Hopefully her direction avails itself to vehicle travel. Otherwise, while you're fiddling around on foot, she may be travelling farther away at an alarming rate. The ease with which a falcon can distance herself from the falconer will be especially alarming to the tyro accustomed to flying shortwings. Theoretically, tracking hawks is a simple matter. The directional elements of the receiving unit point the way, the falconer follows and the



recovery is made. In reality, it's not always quite so simple for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is accessibility. Falcons can fly in any direction they choose, whether it be over a mountain, across a river, through a marsh, etc. Many such areas may be partially or totally inaccessible to a vehicle, making it difficult or impossible to rendezvous with the falcon in spite of knowing her whereabouts. If the obstruction can't be navigated, the falconer may have little choice but to monitor the signal and hope she eventually gravitates to a more accessible location. If, on the other hand, she stalls or moves further into the abyss and out of telemetry range, some sort of 'hail Mary' operation may need be conceived. As long as a signal is being broadcast and received, the prospects of recovery are excellent. When radio contact is lost, the whole affair takes on a new sense of urgency. With contact broken, the falcon's position becomes an enigma, and desperation can take a toll on the falconer's exposed nerves. Re-establishing radio contact is imperative and may not be

“When radio contact is lost, the whole affair takes on a new sense of urgency.

With contact broken, the falcon's position becomes an enigma, and desperation can take a toll on the falconer's exposed nerves.”

as difficult as imagined if the falconer exercises common sense. Falcons that traverse long distances when 'lost' are usually travelling in a very linear fashion. The direction travelled may be related to terrain i.e., coastline, ridgeline, etc. Prevailing winds are very influential and many falcons will fly directly with, or against the wind. In such instances, if the falconer continues on the same bearing that the falcon had been known to be travelling, he may pick up a signal again further down the road. Obviously, a falcon heading in to a wind will make slower progress than a falcon flying, with a tailwind. In the latter case it may be 'pedal to the metal', just to keep pace with the falcon's progress. When a signal is lost and the falconer has no inkling as to where to look – or if the signal being received is so weak as to make it difficult to determine direction, look for elevation. The best way to extend the reception range or get a more pristine version of the signal is to elevate the receiver. Avoid powerlines, fences, or any other disruptive or reflective objects if possible. Hilltops, ridgelines, freeway overpasses, bridges, and buildings are all possible vantage points, along with just about anything else which can be



scaled without getting yourself killed or arrested in the process. In totally flat terrain, the top of the vehicle is very useful and readily available. In fact, even when I'm already parked on a hill, if I'm not getting a signal, I'll go up on the roof of the truck. Those few extra feet may seem insignificant but in actuality they can easily mean the difference between reception and not. Held at arms length overhead, the antenna is methodically swept across the sky three hundred and sixty degrees, scanning for a signal. Several such revolutions may be made, alternating both pitch and angle of the antenna. The best (perhaps only) chance of receiving a legitimate signal depends not only on pointing the antenna in the right direction, but also in aligning the elements of the receivers antenna on the same axis as that of the transmitter's antenna wire, (polarization). A tail-mounted transmitter will be in a horizontal position when a hawk is flying and vertical when the hawk is standing erect. The transmitter may also be positioned at varying angles depending on body position. Therefore when the falcon's location and position are unknown, all angles should be tried. When a signal is picked up, it's critical to nail down the right direction. Quite often, false signals will be picked up in exact opposing directions. One direction denotes the falcon's actual position while the other, the backlobe, leads to disappointment. Verify the correct signal by it's strength. Follow the strongest signal. Before roaring off down the road however, it's a good idea to make some visual references. Pick a distant landmark towards the horizon; a mountain, a building – whatever, just so long as it's highly visible and is in the general direction of the lost hawk. While you're at it, identify the hawk's direction in terms of north, south, east, or west, relative to your position. This way, no matter how the road you're driving twists and ▶



turns, you'll still know approximately where it is that your trying to get. Additional readings can be taken en route, and by mentally combining readings taken from multiple angles (triangulation), its possible to get a very precise fix on the hawks location. Multiple readings will also clarify whether or not the hawk is moving and its approximate rate of progress. When following a signal, rather than using a roof-mounted omni directional antenna, I prefer to carefully stick the yagi antenna out the window. By periodically, or continually monitoring the signal on the roads, (which rarely coincide with the exact desired direction as it weaves around), triangulation occurs as a natural 'by-product'. There are times when a falcon will be moving quite rapidly and continually remains one step ahead of the tracker. By the time the tracker finds a route to where she was,

she's long gone. So long as the falcon travels in a specific direction, the solution may lie in plotting a course ahead of the falcon and wait there for her arrival. The rendezvous site selected should preferably be as open and elevated as possible. This will not only aid in signal reception, but it will also afford the greatest potential to make the all important visual contact with the wayward falcon. Theoretically, if the tracker can be seen by the falcon, she can then be called in. Whatever method the falconer normally uses to call the hawk in may be employed, but maximum visibility is crucial, as she may be quite a ways out and not necessarily looking for the falconer at this point. I for one, am not opposed to using live lures on such occasions. The truth be known, I always carry a box of homers in the truck when I'm hawking, in part, for these rare occasions. If lures, (live or

otherwise), whistles, and yells fail to attract the attention of the lost falcon, the tracker may consider lofting a fit homer. Upon release in unfamiliar territory, strong homers will take to the air, rising in circles, perhaps several hundred feet overhead before striking out for home. If this fails to bring the falcon around, chances are she's still out of visual range. The tracker may have miscalculated the falcon's trajectory or she may have altered her course. At any tare, he may have to re-evaluate the signal and move accordingly. There's no doubt that tracking can be a grueling, arduous affair, requiring a great deal of perseverance. Through-out an abnormally difficult tracking ordeal, the tracker may find solace in knowing that with night fall, the tracking should get easier.

To be continued



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Lures for

by Martin Hollinshead

Although many broadwing flyers consider the lure essential to their falconry, a surprisingly large number of Harris' hawk owners operate totally without it. Why? I think this neglect probably stems from the lure not being fully understood. In the UK, many Harris' hawks are flown by relatively inexperienced falconers, and thus the lure is often seen in the simplest of terms: a lure is used if the bird won't come to the glove. Because a Harris' always comes to the glove, why bother with a lure?

IN THE FIELD

It is true that the Harris' demonstrates a pretty faultless performance to the glove; it will come far and it will come fast. All my birds are trained to fly to the glove and are freely called to it in the field; ground conditions (saturated crops etc) often dictate this anyway. Nevertheless, there are many situations that are greatly eased by the lure. For example, there are times when the Harris' won't respond to the glove simply because it can't see it! Birds can become hidden behind barriers of trees, hedges or even buildings. They can even be at a truly vast distance; and if the first-time Harris' owner is under the impression that a hunting Harris' doesn't go far, then he's in for a shock! Under such conditions, the simplest lure swung at the end of a line and, if need be, occasionally thrown into the air, will bring a Harris' from the other side of the World!

Head for the hills and the lure gains still more importance. Wild country, wild weather and a bird that's riding a storm at a mile high is a combination that just might call for a bit of extra security. Yes, the *parabuteo* will drop from the heavens straight to the glove, but when things are really being pushed to the limit - when the wind has just ripped the car doors off! - it's comforting to have a backup. I'm not a naturally nervous person, but the thought of a really 'wild' session without a lure is causing my pen to tremble!

Believe me, I've been there - and I've taken the nerve pills. But today, field falconry without a lure just doesn't work. I like to think my birds are well trained and I do expect a good response to the glove, but the lure just

makes the experience more enjoyable. It's a little like telemetry, you don't have to be constantly using it for it to work its magic on your field behaviour. By slightly diluting the effects of worry, the lure makes the search for better falconry easier.

AND WHEN THE HEAT'S ON...

What about the glove's effectiveness when you really run into trouble? The really excited bird - or frightened one - may have very little interest in the glove. Often it's not so much the bird refusing the glove, more a failure to register it. The hunting Harris' is alert and accipiter-like and a quickly tossed out lure immediately snaps the bird into action. It's more the movement than the promise of food. A good example of this is seen with squirrel encounters. There can't be many areas of lowland Britain where encounters with grey squirrels can be ruled out. And there can't be many falconers who don't worry about the fact. Squirrels provide exciting but dangerous sport and most UK falconers would prefer not to risk a valued hawk. The problem is, most encounters aren't deliberate. As always, the free-flying Harris' selects its own targets, and always popular is the bushy-tailed one. Every Harris' I've flown has shown an interest in squirrels. Depending on their experience and number of kills, the level of this interest has varied, but one thing is sure, put a Harris' and squirrel in the same bit of woodland and action is guaranteed. It's with such encounters that the lure really shows its power. Offer the glove to a Harris' engaged in a squirrel hunt - wave half a cow - and it won't even see you. Offer

Harris' Hawks?

the lure, and it responds immediately, especially if the quarry has become momentarily hidden.

TRAINING AND MANAGEMENT

But the lure isn't just a recall device; it has numerous other uses. Very important, for example, is its use as a meal-server. Apart from early manning and training, my Harris' hawks are never fed anything other than the odd field-given titbit on the glove.

All of their bulk food is given (when not being eaten from kills) from the lure, and a lure that is being pulled. I never finish a blank day in the field by feeding the bird on the glove. Why? Let's start with the aggressive Harris'. The thought of an aggressive Harris' might seem strange to those not familiar with the species, but the parabuteo isn't always a puppy dog push-over and each year many novice handlers find themselves being intimidated by birds that insist on getting 'shirty'. The nature of this aggression, why it shows itself, and the birds it touches, is a discussion that would take us too far from the theme, but an aggressive bird is better not fed on the glove, not large meals anyway. Glove-feeding, with the closeness to the falconer it involves, can turn a mildly overconfident bird into a raging tiger.

For the bird that shows no aggression towards its trainer and could be fed without incident on the glove, the lure plays a different role.

With this bird, especially until regular field success is being achieved, lure chasing and lure-feeding helps the bird mature mentally. Glove-feeding does nothing but reinforce trainer-dependency. Of course, it might be argued that because the falconer is providing/ pulling the lure, the bird still sees its trainer as provider. However, in practice it doesn't seem to work out this way. The Harris' clearly sees the lure as something separate, something to catch and 'kill'. Due to the bird's intense focus on the target, even the shortest lure line separates the trainer totally from the 'victim' and food.

LURE PURSUITS - FITNESS AND FUN

Depending on the terrain, frequency of hawking trips and the length of each session, the free-flight mode of hawking can develop great fitness.

However, I like to balance free-flight with direct-pursuit lure training. Hard lure pursuits really put an edge on the bird's off-the-glove performance, and for very

Photo: Craig Golden

swift, open-country quarries such as brown hares, an edge will most definitely be required. I work lure pursuits into my Harris' falconry in several ways. For example, I switch to them when I can't get out hawking. I use them if I am flying a bird through the moult. And, if a bird has been inactive during the summer, I use them to prepare it for initial field trips - I don't like taking 'soft' birds afield, especially if they are going to be meeting some of those swift, and also very tough, hares.

The procedure is pretty straightforward. First of all you need something to pull the lure. In the past I have experimented with all manner of lure-pulling devices, for all manner

“The Harris’ views the lure very seriously and if made to feel cheated or bullied will show great resentment”

lure to attract the bird’s attention and then sets off at his best pace dragging it behind him. Under calm wind conditions, a reasonably fit bird, being called over even terrain, will be capable of very long pursuits. However, throw some wind at the pupil, and the workload increases dramatically. Under such conditions - the type of conditions I deliberately seek out when developing an already reasonably conditioned bird - caution

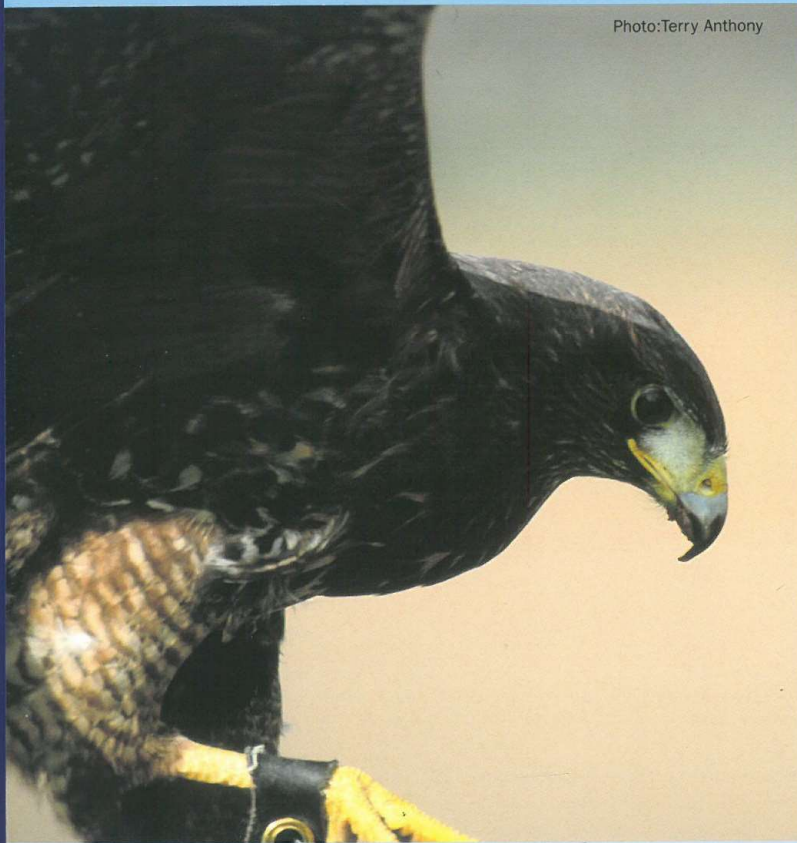
final stage of the flight easier. If need be he should head back towards the bird - anything to avoid defeat. But some sort of motion should be kept up. Allowing the bird to take a motionless lure should never be a consideration. Static lures are easy targets, wild quarry rarely are.

The really best sessions require little imagination. The more thrilling and demanding the pursuits, the more stimulated the bird will be. Putting that edge on performance is also about mentally revving the hunter up. Lures can be pulled into woods, through hedges, be made to disappear around corners, can be - should be - unpredictable and exciting targets. Harris hawks love this type of flying, and the commitment they demonstrate is staggering. Battling against the strongest wind or coming from vast distances, they commit themselves fully to the fitness program.

The hood is a great asset in all of this. Without the hood, positioning and repositioning for each flight is very difficult without some bating. And the same goes for reloading the lure. With the hood, the entire session can run silky smooth, and at the same time prepare the bird for out-of-the-hood flights to quarry.

When removing the bird from the lure, great care needs to be taken and this might be a good opportunity to inject a word of warning about fair use of the lure. For all the help it provides the lure can be a dangerous thing for the less experienced falconer. It is widely accepted that the Harris’ is very sensitive species when it comes to food. Stealing from it on the glove and clumsily removing it from kills has a disastrous effect on the falconer’s partnership. And so it is with lures. The Harris’ that comes from the other side of the World for the lure or chase it like a lunatic across a training field puts in the performance to capture something it really wants. The Harris’ views the lure very seriously and if made to feel cheated or bullied will

Photo:Terry Anthony



of birds; moped the birds outflew, motorcycles, and 4x4s, some with tyres, some hooves. But in reality, the Harris’ owner doesn’t need much more than a fit pair of legs attached to a willing assistant. Now let’s get those legs working! With a good distance between him and the Harris’-holding falconer, the lure-man throws up the

needs to be exercised lest things be overdone. All the time he is running, the lure-man must be checking the bird’s performance. It is vitally important that the bird isn’t pushed to the point where it has to land. If there is even the slightest possibility that this might be about to happen, the lure-man must alter course to make the

show great resentment; the bird must want to give it up, must have completely finished its reward and be ready to come onto the glove for a titbit.

Some Harris' hawks get into the idea of stepping or hopping back to the glove immediately; there are no hitches, things run smoothly from the first attempt. With others it can be a different matter. When dealing with a 'stubborn' bird, timing is everything. If the glove is offered too soon the bird might find itself inadvertently carrying the lure with it to the glove only to drop back down with its prize to become more worked up than ever. A foot placed on the lure line doesn't help much either. This ploy will shorten the distance the lure is carried, but the end result will be the same. When judging when to present the glove, I watch the bird's feet as much as the bird itself. If the feet are still grasping the lure then I wait. If the lure is free of food and sufficiently tough, the bird, no matter how worked up, will eventually realise that the thing cannot be consumed and will be happy to accept the glove.

Lure pursuits give the falconer with limited access to hunting land a chance to enjoy his charge more. And the same applies to the falconer who flies through the moult; his 'season' can be all year long! With summer flying the lure plays a very important role. It could be argued that the bird might just be allowed to do a bit of free-flight following. But for the unfocussed Harris', free-following can so very easily become free-hunting. Of course, some quarries can be legitimately taken during the summer months, but if hunting isn't the intention, or when flying in areas where taboo targets might tempt the bird, then the lure, especially when being flown at out-of-the-hood keeps the bird's mind on training.

And the same focus - no matter what time of year - also keeps the bird's thoughts from wandering to the

dog. Many falconers report problems with trying to work Harris' and dog together and all sorts of reasons and solutions have been put forward. Very often I feel it's a case of the bird not being focussed - not being shown enough quarry and so not understanding what the dog is for. And it's the same with non-hunting periods. The frustrated bird might well find the doing-nothing-useful dog annoying! The lure absorbs the bird's aggression and keeps it from even thinking about taking a swipe at the dog.

The falconer who does a lot of lure-pursuit training gains the additional benefit of the lure's importance being reinforced. Although it's always in his bag, the hunting falconer might not use the lure very much at all, and when he does, it will only be garnished with a small reward. Lure-pursuits allow the occasional large reward to be given and always finish on such a reward. This, coupled with the intensive nature of the business, makes the bird a slave to the lure; it sees it and is powerless to resist.

WHICH LURE?

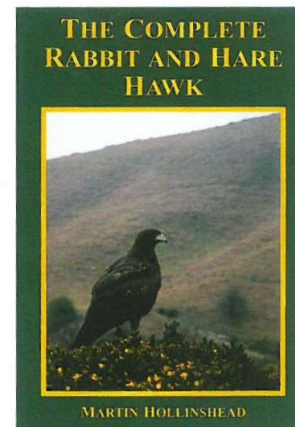
Whether being employed as a recall device or training and management aid, I use exactly the same lure - a plain (no wings, fur) horseshoe-shaped falcon lure. I modify such lures in just one way; the reward attachment ties, normally positioned on both sides of the lure, are removed and just one is attached to the front of the lure. A reward each side of the lure is totally unnecessary and just complicates matters.

The reason I prefer a plain lure to one carrying wings or fur, is that it is less likely to excite the bird once the reward that been eaten; a plain lure doesn't look edible! Also, the plain lure is easier to keep clean and respectable looking, not forgetting that a falcon lure is normally swung through the air, this is dragged along the ground. Fur-covered lures or/and whole carcasses work into training in

quite a different way. They are used to orientate the bird to 'fur'. Their value swings one way or the other depending on the bird and the size of the quarry to be pursued. The average Harris' being flown to rabbits doesn't generally require much, if any, preparation. But with this we are creeping into 'entering' and the need to present the right kind of rabbits.

CONCLUDING NOTE

The lure can make a terrific difference to Harris falconry. Once fully explored it will become an invaluable item of equipment. Like the hood, the lure can't be considered absolutely vital, but when did good falconry ever revolve around just getting by? A full examination of the lure can be found in my book, *The Complete Rabbit and Hare Hawk*. ■



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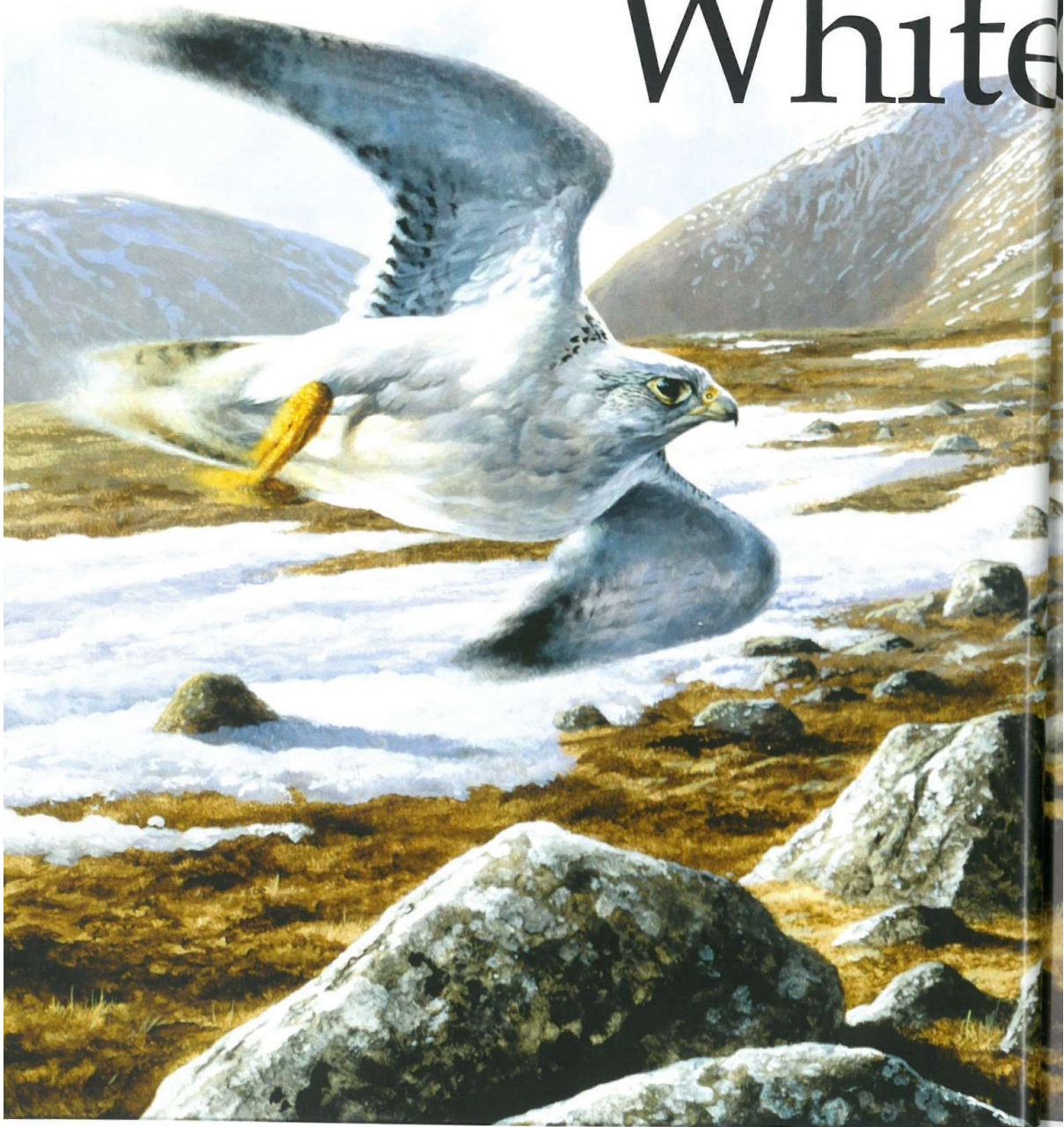
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Climbing out of the small plane, the pilot handed my last bag through the hatch along with one sack of mail and gave a nod goodbye. Closing the door he settled in behind the controls and drew on the throttle. With a blast of frost and whirl of wind, the plane eased forward and rolled down the airstrip. The prop wash accentuated the chill of the arctic breeze. Digging deep into my baggage I pulled out a feather down jacket and pants. I watched the plane roll down the airstrip, lift off, and bank southward, to disappear behind distant ridges.

Alone, on the barren snow-scape, everything was a dazzling white. Standing motionless in an austere sea of snow, I was unsure of where my welcoming committee was. I stood for some very long moments observing my new surroundings - the arctic chill was settling in, I began to dwell on options. The air agent said someone would be waiting for me. It was noon and the frost grew straight out of old wheel tracks of a plane - the sun could not beat back the frost which seemed to rise defiantly as if to mock the weakness of the sun.

At the far end of the airstrip, in a mirage of crystalline snow, I could see a small pick-up truck approach. Rolling to a stop, a very attractive and enchanting Eskimo girl of 20 years stepped out, grabbed the extra mail package lying on the runway and threw it in the bed of the truck. I noticed the frost that grew thick inside the truck's windows, the heater motor churned away in useless desperation. ▶



'Caught Out' Original acrylic by Andrew Ellis

Without introductions and unsure of who she was, I began tossing my belongings into the pick-up and helped myself to the passenger bench seat inside the cab. Warm and seated inside, I began to ask for a ride to the village. She responded with a friendly greeting and said, "this ride is FOR YOU".

On the ride into the village, I explained my story and need for accommodations, Addie Rose told me she might be willing to welcome an unfamiliar guest. She allowed me to stow my bedroll and bags in a small spare bedroom. I explained my needs for transportation and she pointed me to the dog team out back and offered their services for \$500 per week. I balked at the high price. For the Iditarod Race she said they command \$15,000 for two weeks. I explained I was in desperate need of affordable transportation, and she suggested that I check around the village. For several days I walked around the village making the acquaintance of the locals and expressing my need of transportation. A snow machine and sled were made available to me for a nominal fee.

I queried the elders and hunters about winter trail conditions and tried to get a working knowledge of the hard water conditions and presence of overflow.

After gaining a very limited knowledge of the area, I loaded a dozen borrowed gas containers into the sled, along with my camp gear and a rifle. Addie Rose offered to follow. Her long black hair

with amber streaks, framing full lips and an ivory white smile proved irresistible.

An extra day was required getting her gear together. Since she was now part of the adventure, I spent time getting to know her. She was half Cree and half Inupiaq. She laughed telling the story of her lineage... the Indians and the Eskimos hold great contempt for the other. She appeared different than the rest of the villagers... must be something about the hybrid that make for some amazing features.

She threw together a mess of *agutuq* and also packed some dark meat (dry seal). A reindeer brisket and some *kwoq* added more palatable fare to our ready-to-eat rendition. I greatly appreciated her additions to the menu... it was an improvement over my contribution of granola, water and sardines in mustard. I learned that dark meat is less than favourable to my palate - the seal oil is like adding insult to injury. The *kwoq* consists of frozen whitefish and sheefish, sliced thinly when frozen and eaten raw.

She was quick in packing, however I was on the verge of impatience for what was soon to happen. Striking out into the arctic landscape my dreams and fantasies were taking shape... searching for what has often been described by others, and has become known to me, as the 'Holy Grail' of falconry...the elusive white gyr.

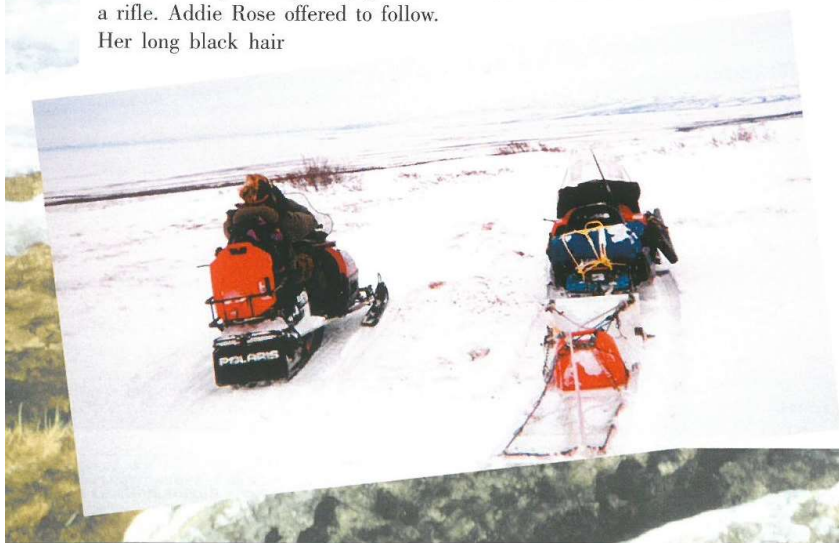
The long spring days and easy travel conditions allowed for excellent recon conditions. In three

weeks we searched 14,000 square miles of snow-covered tundra, frozen river courses, cut banks and cliffs. Early in the nesting season I had found numerous gyr eyries, many with silverish or whitish birds, meaning one in the pair was a bird of colour. I had busied myself with constant searching for a nest in which to find colour.

In the evenings she lead us to remote mining cabins or we parked the 'snogos' side by side and attached tarps for flooring and walls to keep the wind at bay. The third night out we camped in beside a wind breaking willow gulch without tarps. Addie standing in her seal skin booties dropped to one layer shy of skivies and stood in the frigid wind...she was disposing of her dungarees. I was awestruck by her beauty and her courage. I was unsure if this was for my 'benefit' or just something that needed doing. I plopped my head back into my sleeping bag and continued to shiver. Addie, unclad and brushing her teeth, settled into her sleeping bag and began to softly sing. This gal was a bit tougher than I... definitely had thicker blood...the temperature was -24F and there was a slight breeze.

Dinner the first night out was delightful as Addie reheated a pot of reindeer brisket, the smacking of our lips as we plied the ribs for more tender and juicy meat while the water streamed down and froze on our sleeves. The tallow forming in the corners of our mouths made for a pleasant evening. Addie offered to clean the tallow from my face and before I could respond she proceeded to *smugit* (kiss) the tallow from my face... I couldn't complain. The blueberry *agutuq* (over-ripe blueberries mixed with lard and sugar) made for exotic dessert.

On day 23 of our trip, my new friend and I were out and about, scouting the country on our snowgos. I was riding second in line - last is always the best position to sight game. Rounding a bend in the trail, I noticed



a white gyrfalcon dropped off the small cliff. I braked and glassed the cliff. As I watched, a second white gyrfalcon dropped off the cliff and I got a fine mark from whence it came. I entered the GPS co-ordinates and steamed on. I was ecstatic and barely able to contain my emotion.

As I caught up to Addie, I concealed my elation of the white gyrfalcons - Addie was not a falconer, but with a find like this, no-one was to be entrusted.

We had spent several weeks scouting vast areas of snow-laden moonscape. According to the calendar it was time for Addie to head home to catch a plane southward and begin her field work in the warmer Aleutians.

The sun skimming the Northwest horizon signaled our time together had come to an end. For Addie it was time to head south. I stayed on - I had just discovered A PAIR OF WHITE GYRFALCONS. I was enamored, bouncing off the walls and higher than kite.

I glassed and watched the eyrie from a distance, every day, until I had to go away, but I knew I would return at the right time.



I returned to my nest of white gyrfalcons a few years later. It was summer time and the tundra was abuzz with life... mosquitoes and millions of birds. Phalaropes, eiders, curlews, jaegers, tundra peregrines and pintails seemed to be everywhere. On approaching the little riverside bluff, miraculously the white pair was still there!!! I spent a whole day setting up the rope because I would have to do the climb and rappel alone without an observer. Almost all of my life, I have violated the "buddy system rule". I am aware of this, and it constantly gnaws at me, but I can never find anyone to go, and when someone does go, I lose that feel or sense of what path to follow.

The sharp rock on the cliff created numerous dilemmas. If I had flown one white gyrfalcon before this, I would not have rappelled into that nest, but

since I hadn't, I was willing to die trying. I got into the nest on day two. I could not reach the nest ledge because it was under-slung about 10 feet or so and I would have died for certain had I tried swinging on the rope considering all the abrasions. Besides, when I looked into the nest, I was dumbstruck in disappointment... for there sat two brownish coloured baby falcons, with white barbed tongues - white, but not what I was here for. Had I hallucinated about the colour of the adults - had somebody ripped off the eyrie?

I walked to the four-wheeler, drove it back to the skiff, rolled it onboard and motored the borrowed skiff to a friend's house. I asked for assistance. In short, we dressed the rope in anti-abrasive sleeving - on a test swing it frayed my 3/4" rubber sheath. I was sweating bullets on all three rappels and I could not reach a baby bird. I thought of all sorts of gizmos and gadgets to snag one, but the plate-thin protruding shelf and the failure of some of those gizmos when used for work in the banding/capturing of birds down in the states, inclined me to abandon the idea of pulling a bird from this nest. I was in a tail-spin.

So much spent, and time was running out. These birds would be fledged in a week or two. And what were the odds of coming up with another pair of white gyrfalcons?

I checked many of the previously located nests that were on the back burner, all of which I never really considered, after finding the white gyrfalcons. Some of the easy-to-get-to nests I checked enroute to the white gyrfalcons - just for a sense of phenology. I could have hand-snagged without any equipment, half a dozen grey gyrfalcons, but I had seen the white birds...I was severely jaded.

I remembered tagging along on a moose hunting trip with Addie's brother-in-law...on the return in a clear sky ground blizzard, we rode up on a white jerkin feeding on a fresh killed ptarmigan.

I am amazed at the mind's propensity to catalogue a sense of place in the outdoors. After doing reconnaissance on several easy access nests, I had a strange urge to go check out that fleeting sighting of so long before. A nest I wasn't even sure existed, only the fact that I had seen a really white bird there.

Nine miles from the sighting I found a nice little ledge. I walked onward. I glassed it from four miles away and could not see white wash or lichen. I closed to two miles and still could not discern any sign. At about 1 mile out, the rough-legged hawks came out to greet me and voice their displeasure. I figured maybe the falcons would come out to give me a heads up, and let me know they did indeed exist. I was afraid to walk the rest of the way to the ledge because, at this point it was another day burned and I was running out of time in a hurry.


I couldn't risk walking the extra two mile round trip for nothing, and besides the bear dung was increasing as was the low light levels of evening when bears tend to be active...and I was unarmed.

I decided I should just go all the way out and see what I could see... the day was already shot and I might as well be thorough.

At about 100 yards, I detected the faint cry of alarmed juveniles on the wind. It was an active eyrie and they were definitely falcon voices. I was up and happy again.

I could get up close and looked into the eyrie and caught sight of three birds - kind of lightish in colour, but more brown than anything. I studied the eyrie for about three hours, watching the chicks, hoping for some evidence that would make me want to go back and get my gear. Then it came...I saw an alarming flash of white. I looked harder and it was gone. I questioned what I had seen. I watched the eyrie for another hour.

I could not get another glimpse of the mystery white. I decided whatever it was, it was white enough to justify a



hike with the gear. I headed back to camp and reloaded for the following day. I got the four-wheeler, as I was feeling lazy. I struggled to load it into the boat on a muddy mess of a bank, and finally got things underway. I anchored the boat and started the drive up to the nest. The tundra was a rough and lumpy slog. I followed a higher ridge hoping it to be smooth and it was just a never-ending hummocky jolt. I was moving about 1 mile an hour and beating myself and the machine to death, but I was not carrying my pack on my back, so I was still making headway.

When about 3/4 of a mile from the nest I could see what was a BRIGHT WHITE FALCON sitting there. I studied carefully - there was no illusion it was a white bird on the ledge - I could barely make out the siblings. The paranoia set in. I bet it is the adult and it will fly away only to break my heart. I picked up the bins again and the white bird was gone....my heart plummeted...it was an adult.

I approached the ledge from above and threw down my pack. I set and secured the webbing and decided this was going to be it. I threw the rope down over the edge and backed off into space. As I got down to the ledge, all three of the chicks scrambled to a little cave where I could not reach them. My glance strayed back and immediately below me was a bird - pretty white. I looked up and down the ledge trying to see if their was anything whiter...nope!

I dropped down the next 8 feet and landed squarely on my knees on the thin little ledge. The whitish gyr was between my knees. I didn't tie off, and picked the bird up in one hand. I got hold of it and tried to slide him into the improvised bag dangling behind me. The eyass was definitely older than what I wanted, but had I been after downies how many wrong coloured birds might I have pulled. The mouth of the bag opened and I settled the protesting youngster into the bag.

Then the unexpected happened. The little darling climbed right up on out of the bag and fell from the cliff. I stared into a dismay I didn't know I could feel.

The beautiful little white bird tumbled head-over-feet to the base of the cliff. I was in shock.

My disbelief exploded when the innocent bird continued to fall - my heart was falling with it.

Suddenly, the white feathered brick sprouted wings and began a speedy and leveling headlong glide down the hill, gathering speed in a life saving move. I was elated - my heart surged and then I wondered if he was going to keep on... flying away.

Suddenly he sets his wings to air brakes, stopped his flight and plumped into a creekside thicket of alder and willow. I stared intently at the spot for a certain mental mark. Confident on my mark I descended to the ground as if I was unattached to a rope. I burnt my fingers as I took off my ATC. I ran down hill to the spot and slowed, watching for signs.

I neared the exact spot and began crawling around in the mosquito thicket for the next three hours. I covered the entire thicket 150 yards either side of the spot. I crawled on my belly, breaking twigs and branches to mark what paths I had taken so as to be sure of my coverage of the area. I noticed I was so familiar with the ground that I had memorized the land. I then had a suspicion he was overhead clinging in the branches of an alder. I craned my neck skyward and researched the area, and studied the limbs 8 feet overhead.

I cursed my misfortune...all seemed lost. There was a small little creek which I was certain he had landed away from, but my doubts increased. If he had landed in the creek, he would most certainly drown, for the little creek was frigid cold and had cascading tumbles of icy water. My heart began its descent. I walked downstream thigh-deep in the water falling on the slippery rocks expecting every little bend to hold a fragile dead

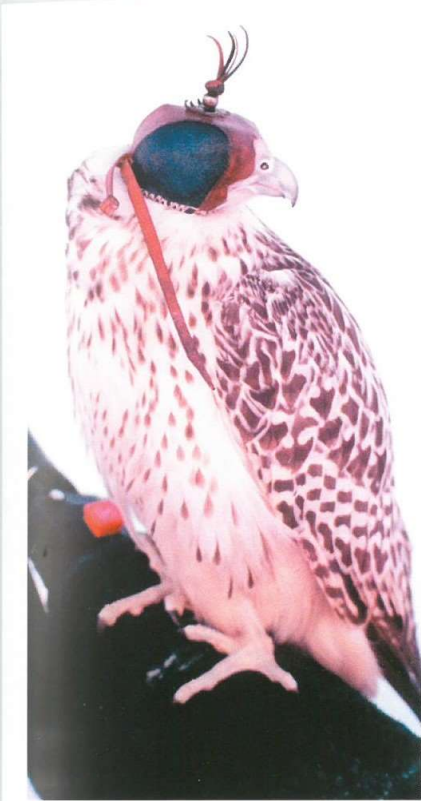
body...how could I revive him. I remembered my failed efforts to save a crippled duck once. It had a broken leg so I brought it into my mother's bath tub in the middle of winter, where it proceeded to drown. I gave him mouth to bill resuscitation - it was useless.

Somehow this was happening again and I felt I could see it all. I inspected every overhang. I gazed into every deep hole looking for that white body.

I don't know how long I was looking, but it was a long while. The light was failing as the sun hung low in the Northern sky. On my umteenth pass, a little contrast of grey at the base of a rock ledge caught my attention, I looked closer. It was something out of place, but it didn't look like a bird. I crossed the creek and approached. As I neared, the hunched form of the falcon became apparent. I got my hands around the baby white gyr and lofted him into the air. He was wet. He had crossed the creek apparently trying to throw his pursuer off the trail. The beautiful bird was in my hands and I was so excited I began to shake. I almost wanted to ditch the rope and just start walking back to camp with my new friend. My twitches of excitement subsided and I began to tire. I knew I was ready to head back to camp, mostly from mental exhaustion and fatigue. I was excited, but hardly able to celebrate what I would have liked, all things considered.

When I got back to camp, the midnight light made sleep impossible as did the drone of mosquitoes. I was proud of what I had done - not because it was a white gyr, but because I had accomplished, one way or another, what I had set out to do. And I was so close to failing the entire time.

I believe that somewhere on the foreboding winds is also a bit of Karma and if you are out in nature long enough, a little bit of it will touch you and reward you in ways you could not have planned or dreamed.....or bought. ■



Kurt with his white gyrfalcon



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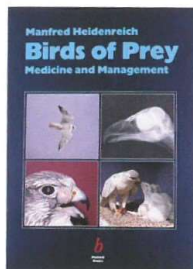
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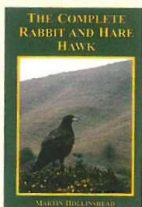


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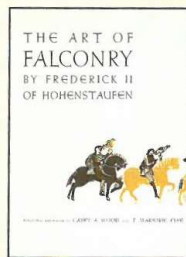
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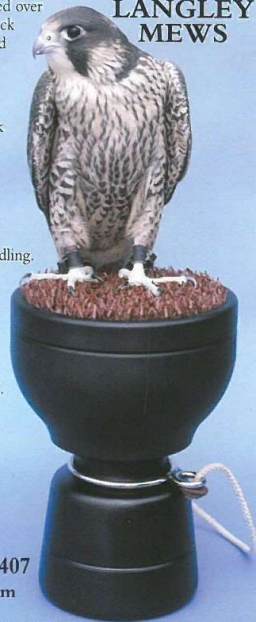
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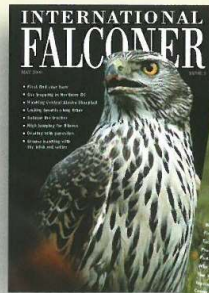
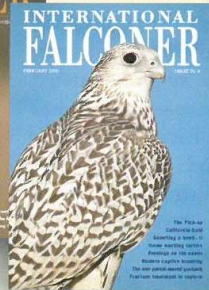
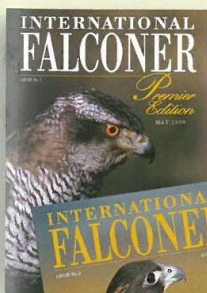
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After 5 years of flying a goshawk I'd decided that another challenge was what I needed. For the last few weeks of the 98/99 season I had accompanied a friend, Steve Knight, flying his peregrine/merlin female at magpies, and it was certainly a lot of fun. It was obvious that a single handed falcon was not conducive to lots of magpies in the bag, but the efforts required to achieve even modest success made for exciting and available hawking.

I considered a barbury tiercel and also a peregrine/merlin during the planning phase, but these did not become reality for several reasons. Steve and I had discussed training our two individuals to fly as a cast in order to maximise our chances at a range of quarries, and I gave this a lot of thought. I'd seen a cast flown in the US at sage grouse and was very impressed with that. I had also read Dan Cover's account of his time with a highly successful cast of tiercel peregrines, Speedy and Tiger, and these facts helped me to reach a decision. I wanted to attempt a cast of my own.

Tiercel peregrines were the obvious choice but, whilst considering breeders and sources of falcons, I remembered a peregrine/prairie hybrid flown by a friend of mine 5 years ago. This tiercel was a terrific little bird. He seemed to want to kill everything yet had very pleasant manners and a good temperament. A call to the breeder proved very worthwhile. He would almost certainly have tiercels available. I placed my order and sat back impatiently.

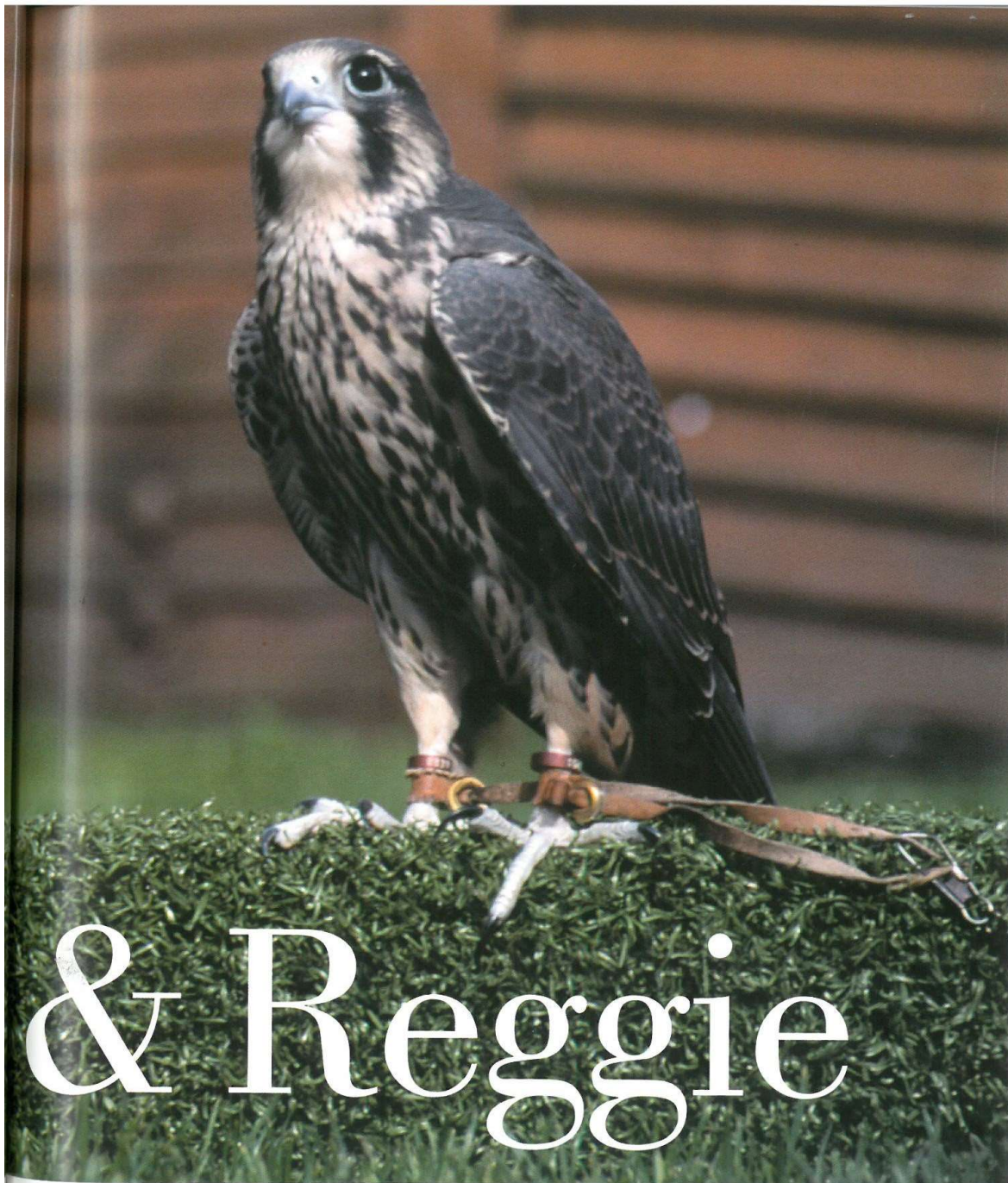
After collecting the young birds at around 3 weeks, I raised them in fairly conventional imprint mode. To avoid any sibling rivalry, especially over feeding time, I made extra sure that they not only had access to food constantly but that they fed together at all times. I reasoned that food jealousy was most likely to manifest



itself if one or both of them were allowed to go hungry, so this was not allowed to develop. They lived in my kitchen and were never separated. When out in the garden for their exercise periods they never strayed more than a few yards from each other, and their feeding was always engineered so as to be together. I fed whole carcasses and took the precaution of weighting these to

prevent carrying, but it was probably not necessary, for they just went about feeding, seemingly oblivious to their partner.

These two young birds had some fire in their bellies, and typical of developing imprints, they showed their resentment of any actions they disagreed with. As they became increasingly active in the garden, it became a problem controlling their



& Reggie

movements. One imprint is manageable but two can be a handful! I had a few confrontations with them, and it was obvious that a serious attitude problem would develop if I allowed it to. I simply tethered them and started to control their activities more carefully, and after a while things evened out. These two, I should add, were brothers hatched three days apart. At this stage of their

lives I decided to name them Ronnie and Reggie after two other well known psychopathic brothers*.

As they grew and began looking more like attempting flight I realised that I'd not given them enough lure work early on. I immediately stepped up the lure work, and over the next few days I had them responding well. I did nearly cause a serious problem to develop while lure training them, and

it crept up without me noticing. Imprinted juvenile hawks and falcons often take a long time to feed on the lure or carcass, and to rush them and try speeding them up can lead to real jealousy problems. This is where the seeds of carrying can be sown with imprints and care must be exercised. With one bird to deal with, problems can be identified quickly and remedial action taken. With two to ▶

Ronnie & Reggie in the kitchen



deal with, and a pick-up routine to be perfected, problems can develop quickly. As soon as each bird was down on its lure (always as close to each other as possible and always in clear view) I would keep away from them until they had settled down and were feeding steadily. Even so, Ronnie in particular was developing into a bit of a mantler on his lure, and had the look of one who wanted to take his lure away from me. I was still feeding them two meals a day at this time and the lure work was carried out at meal times (am) when full crops were given. I knew I had to be watchful of this potential for carrying, for it could spoil all of my plans. Much of my intended quarry base for these two birds was of a size to be easily carried, and I recognised the very real danger of allowing the vice to develop. I started to worry about it.

As soon as the two were reliable on the lure, I took them to the site where I planned to tame hack them. When I unhooded them on that first morning, I confess to being pretty excited. Usually young birds just sit around for a while before wandering around and familiarising themselves with the place. These two looked around for a few seconds and just leaped off the glove, with Ronnie going first. He flew straight out and up. Reggie actually stood for a few seconds longer, then launched himself after his brother. They tangled around with each other, obviously having fun and

revelling in this new and natural element. I found it so exciting and pleasurable to just watch them both playing around so soon after their first free flight.

From day one they were attacking all manner of birds. These attacks looked pretty serious when they started out, but they lacked the final commitment of a real hunting flight. As the days passed they flew stronger and the attacks grew more powerful. One of the most pleasing things was that they were rarely very far apart. Often I lost sight of them, but, having found one in the binoculars I would know that the other was fairly close by. I was rarely wrong. At the end of the two or more hours they were allowed, I would whistle them up and call them in to the lure. They would be allowed to eat all they wanted and taken home. The rest of their day was spent weathering on the lawn.

On day 8 of tame hack, I was accompanied by Steve Knight and we settled down to watch them. After about an hour and a half, Ronnie went hurtling across a field and, as we watched in the binos, he pitched on the ground. He'd landed next to a moorhen and seemed unsure of what to do with it. Within seconds there was a blur and Reggie entered from stage right, with murderous intent. He piled into the hapless moorhen and bundled it up. For a few seconds they both looked around, then took off and flew to a favourite perching place, the

top of a timber warehouse. The moorhen went with them, clutched in Reggie's feet. Recovery proved a simple affair, but although the outcome was good, my fears of carrying grew over this kill.

After this incident I decided to abandon the tame hack and to proceed with waiting-on training. I didn't want to risk the same thing happening again and thought that now was the time to bring more structure into their lives. This was to be where real training began.

I have found in my limited experience of imprint training and tame hacking, that there is a period between the end of the hack and the beginning, of some semblance of required behaviour which I call the transition stage. It is, of course, foolish to expect a young and impressionable falcon to understand that after 3 or 4 weeks of free and unfettered flight it is now expected to behave as the falconer wishes. This period varies depending on many factors. It quickly became apparent that these two brothers had very different characteristics. Ronnie tended to stay reasonably close and attentive, while Reggie loved to explore the distant horizons. Flying them every day, I was able to watch them developing and, as I was lucky enough to have access to good open ground with plenty of young birds around, they had plenty of attacking flights which emanated from me. They were still not fixed above me as I required, and they often drifted away, interested in their own agendas. Their attack flights on small birds looked good but, to the discerning eye it was obvious that they were not fully committed to the final kill.

I had been reducing their weight very gradually, but they were both displaying typical signs of being in too high a condition. This was finally brought to a head on the day of the total eclipse of the sun in 1999. On that fine and sunny late morning, I

Ronnie & Reggie

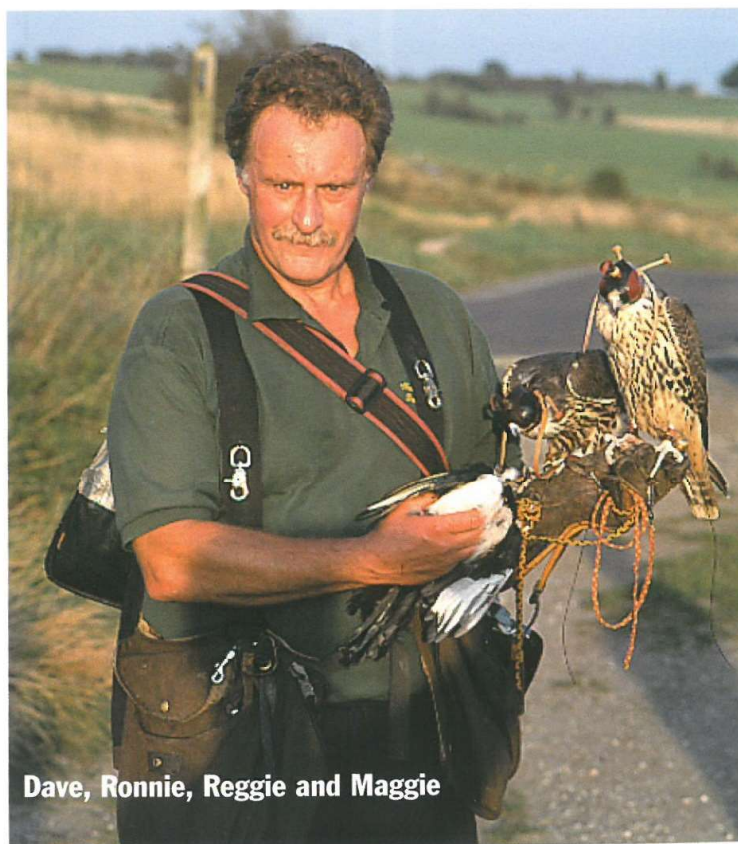
‘Ronnie was the first to get on terms with the lark and he closed with a vengeance. The lark slipped side-ways, easily evading the young tiercel’s initial bid.’

released the two of them on their regular training ground for a short session. In the ideal conditions for soaring, you can guess what these two young tiercels decided to do. It was initially great to see them making good height, but then that drifting, flap-and-glide flight that typifies soaring took over and I watched them casually drift up and away over an obviously powerful thermal. As the binos became useless, the receiver became my only connection with them. Additionally, they were ignoring any efforts I made with the lure, and effectively out of control. As I settled down, (I’d made one or two fruitless car trips to different vantage points) it became obvious that they were drifting around the sky, with the enormous training field as the centre of their operations. Then, one of them came into distant view and returned to the lure. Of course it was Ronnie, and as I fed him on the fist I could just see Reggie way up in the sky, a tiny dot against the blue. Following him with the receiver, I covered a few miles, although the furthest he was from the training field was probably only around 2 miles. Eventually the signal led me right back to where I’d slipped them both and, as I drove up the lane about 200 yards from the spot where I normally parked the van, there was Reggie sitting on the roof of a small house. The householder was fascinated by him and, as I called him to the lure, he asked what I intended to do about the pigeon that was hiding under one of his bushes. It seems that the guy had been in his garden when,

out of the blue, Reggie crashed into the pigeon which had been sitting on the roof, knocking it to the ground in a shower of feathers.

It was this event which led to me to reduce their weight a tad faster, and their attention to lessons began to improve. I now realise that this is the norm with the imprint falcons I’ve worked with. They need the motivation of hunger in order to ‘bring them into line’ with the training regime. The real secret is to watch for the signs of negative behaviour and to react to them and correct them as they begin to creep in. After even such a short hack period, the two young hybrids were in pretty good physical shape and they had learned their powers of flight well. One evening Steve and I were walking some stubble, encouraging Reggie and Ronnie to follow. There had been

many feral pigeons on the field and I was hoping to flush a straggler. A lark jumped at our feet and made off at speed into the wind. I turned to check the reaction of the tiercels, who were some 50 or so yards behind and down wind. They both had an attentive look to them and their wing beats were strong and deep. They were clearly in pursuit. This was to prove most interesting in more than one way. Ronnie was the first to get on terms with the lark and he closed with a vengeance. The lark slipped side-ways, easily evading the young tiercel’s initial bid. The lark towered up, heading to the left, and without warning Reggie, who was a few yards behind, locked on to it. The lark failed to see Reggie closing at speed and made no attempt to avoid the attack. Reggie just scooped it up with ease. Interestingly, Reggie was unsure



Dave, Ronnie, Reggie and Maggie

Ronnie & Reggie

of landing in the stubble and flew around with the lark in his feet until he found some soil to land on a hundred or so yards away. As we made our way up to him, we watched him release and re-catch the bird about five times before he killed it and began to eat. I now realise that this is very typical of the behaviour of young imprints, especially when kept at a relatively high weight. Once he'd eaten it, he just flew over to the fist and settled down to be hooded.

Next evening saw us at another stubble field, the intention being to either find an easy pigeon slip or to continue with waiting-on training using dead lures. As soon as I unhooded them they took wing and it was obvious that they were looking for quarry. They coursed around the field at about 50 feet, never straying too far from me. I had a couple of fresh killed pigeons in my pockets and I was intending to use them for reinforcement. I reasoned that they would hang around me for quite a while longer before I needed to serve them the lures, when up jumped another lark. This was what they were waiting for and they were on to it in a flash. They both pursued the lark hard and it put in about 200 yards away. Typical of young falcons, they pitched on the ground, searching for the escaped lark. After some minutes they took to the air again and centred over me, so I served them the dead pigeons. I was extremely pleased that these two youngsters appeared to be working together, and that they still displayed no jealousy or aggression on the lure. Maybe this cast idea would work.

I seemed to be spending a lot of time trying to get the two of them in the air space above me, ready to attack quarry that came from around me, yet without a great deal of consistency. Usually Ronnie would be waiting faithfully above me, having responded well to a signal, and Reggie would be off doing his own thing. I

‘I was extremely pleased that these two youngsters appeared to be working together, and they still displayed no jealousy or aggression on the lure. Maybe this cast idea would work.’

was getting a bit frustrated with this deal and so studied Roger Upton's description of flying magpie's with a cast, in his book. Next time out, a couple of magpies were spotted with very little available cover nearby. We stalked to within 60 yards using high sedges, and I admit to almost trembling with excitement. I had struck the braces on Ronnie's hood and as we made the last few steps, three magpies took flight. I immediately unhooded Ronnie and he left the fist in pursuit. As he closed with his chosen magpie and put in his first shallow stoop, I could see that the others had left. I unhooded Reggie and he was off in a flash to join his brother. What followed was absolute joy to watch. The magpie used a series of tricks to avoid capture; dumping on the ground, side slipping and jinking in desperation. Ronnie put in a blistering stoop which forced the magpie to ground and, as it leaped up to regain the air, Ronnie bound to it with an audible *thwack*. It was a stellar moment for me and Steve and I just jumped around whooping and yelling. As I calmed down, I saw that Ronnie was standing next to his brother who had the now dead magpie in his feet. I quietly walked over and offered one of the lures to Ronnie and he calmly stepped onto it and began feeding. As both birds fed, I marvelled at the flight, re-living it over and over. I was impressed with the behaviour of these two young tiercels on their food, no jealousy whatsoever, and no carrying. Things

were going well.

As the early part of the season progressed, they steadily increased the number of kills, and never crabbed or acted badly on kill or lure. Unfortunately, things never stay the same, and Murphy is always around the corner. In late November, a few days before leaving for the NAFA meet in the US, I was flying them on England's South Downs. We had a good field of beaters out (essential for this kind of hawking really) and had a couple of Magpies isolated in a thin hedge. Things were working out well when, Reggie raced off down the valley. The flight petered out with him gone, so I waited a few minutes for him to return, as he normally would. Eventually, with no sign of him and with Ronnie hooded on the glove, I took out the receiver. No signal at all made me feel a little concerned, but not really worried. After all, it was a well known make of powerful transmitter, only 4 months old and with a new battery. I never saw Reggie again. Assisted by others and using more than one receiver, we searched and searched for that little guy, but completely without success. He was sighted in the area by others occasionally, but I lost him for good, and was the poorer for it. I was having so much fun and things were going so well, that the loss of this bird brought me to tears more than once. I had planned to keep these two for several seasons, flying them daily at mixed quarry. They had racked up an impressive quarry list in the short time I'd flown them and given me immeasurable fun. Then suddenly, it was all over. I feel bad about it even as I write, a couple of seasons down the road.

After a week or so I decided to fly Ronnie on his own at small quarry, and commenced re-training him for this job. He turned out to be a marvellous performer in his own right as a solo bird, but that is another, and completely different chapter. ■

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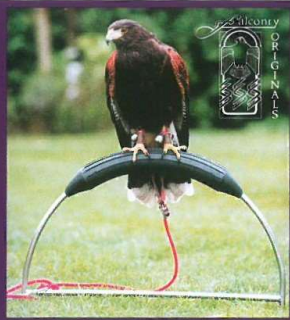
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LETTERS

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Dear Sir,

In the last six weeks we have been seeing a large number of raptors, hawks and falcons, with leg damage caused by ill-fitting equipment.

These generally present as a chronic 'rub' resulting in loss of skin integrity and allowing the entry of bacteria. An abscess results which, if untreated, can cause destruction of tendons and osteomyelitis. Treatment involves antibiotics and surgical debridement of the infected tissue.

It is, therefore, normally an unusual presentation in flying birds as equipment is usually well maintained and birds' legs are closely inspected each day. All the birds seen have had tight-fitting, aged (dry and hard) leather equipment.

It is my feeling that the relatively large number of these cases in birds which I am sure have been inspected regularly may be due to the extremely wet conditions in the early part of the year. This would prematurely age and shrink the leather. Coupled with reduced hawking activity due to the Foot and Mouth Disease crisis, we have the ideal situation for chronic leg damage to develop.

Equipment damage should be avoidable. It is vital that legs and feet are examined on a daily basis. Many of these injuries have been completely obscured until removal of the equipment, so a thorough check is necessary. Veterinary attention should be sought for even the most minor abrasions or red marks. Equipment should be non-chafing and should slide freely over the skin.

Yours faithfully,

J. R. Chitty BVetMed, CertZooMed,
CBiol, MIBiol, MRCVS
Strathmore Veterinary Clinic
Andover UK

Dear Editor

I read with great interest your article in issue 9 by Martin Hollinshead on whether or not to hood broadwings.

Many years ago I was flying a large red-tail called Pricilla and we were returning home from hunting south of Chicago with a dear friend Dick Glasow. I was on the Dan Ryan going into the city and possibly doing a little more than the speed limit allowed. Looking into my rear-view mirror I saw lights flashing and a police car pulling me over which of course I duly did.

Emerging from his car and coming over to my car was a very large black officer. I began to roll the window down with Pricilla sitting next to me on the back of the seat bare headed - she enjoyed the view and even big trucks never intimidated her in the least. As the officer put his face to look into my car he took one look at Pricilla who was also eye balling him as well and yelled "DON'T roll that window down - DON'T roll that window down - and be on your way!"

An un-hooded Pricilla saved me at least a \$50.00 fine and a mark on my driving record.

Sincerely

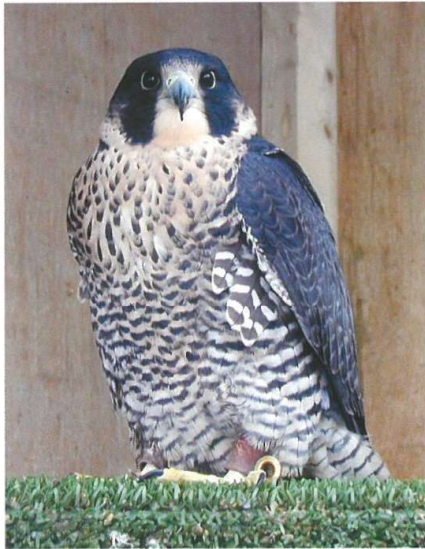
George Kotsiopoulos
Chicago USA

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

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

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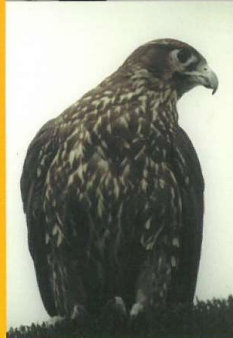
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