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Feed the passion

INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

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Cover photo by Nick Fox
Adult male Japanese lesser sparrowhawk -
the 'harpoon hawk'.

EDITORIAL



The amount of bureaucracy that we face on a day-to-day basis just never ceases to amaze me. It has now hit falconers here in the UK in a very direct way. For those of you who referred to the Hawk Board announcement on Foot-and-Mouth in the last issue, please ignore the advise on

using dogs for falconry. It's all very confusing but basically from what I gather, DEFRA mis-informed the Hawk Board as to the effect on falconry of the temporary hunting ban. At the time of writing, the use of dogs for hunting, and that includes flushing ground game for hawks, is prohibited nationally - not just in F&M infected areas. Using dogs for hunting birds is fine - all quite ridiculous I know, but we have no choice but to adhere to this restriction.

Apologies to our overseas readers for droning on about the F&M crisis, you probably wonder at times what on earth it's all about. However, what it does illustrate to falconers all over the world, is that we have to be permanently on-guard for this kind of bureaucracy gone-mad - it's waiting around the corner for all of us.

It's another first-class issue for you with a truly diverse mix of outstanding articles from across the world - where else can you find such an international content!

Until the next issue - take care and good hawking!

Seth

IMPORTANT - NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

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

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

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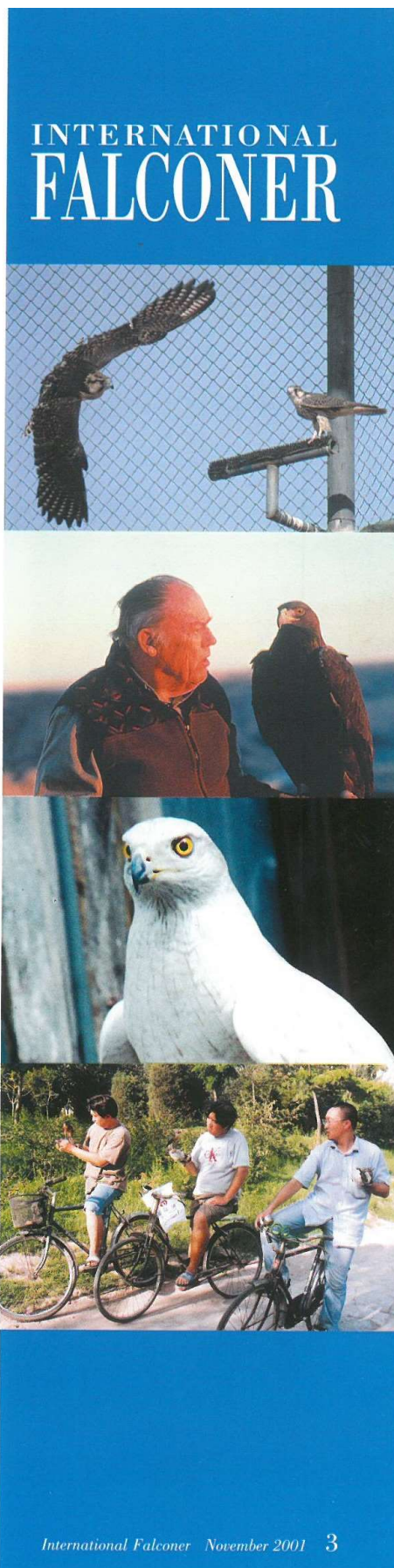
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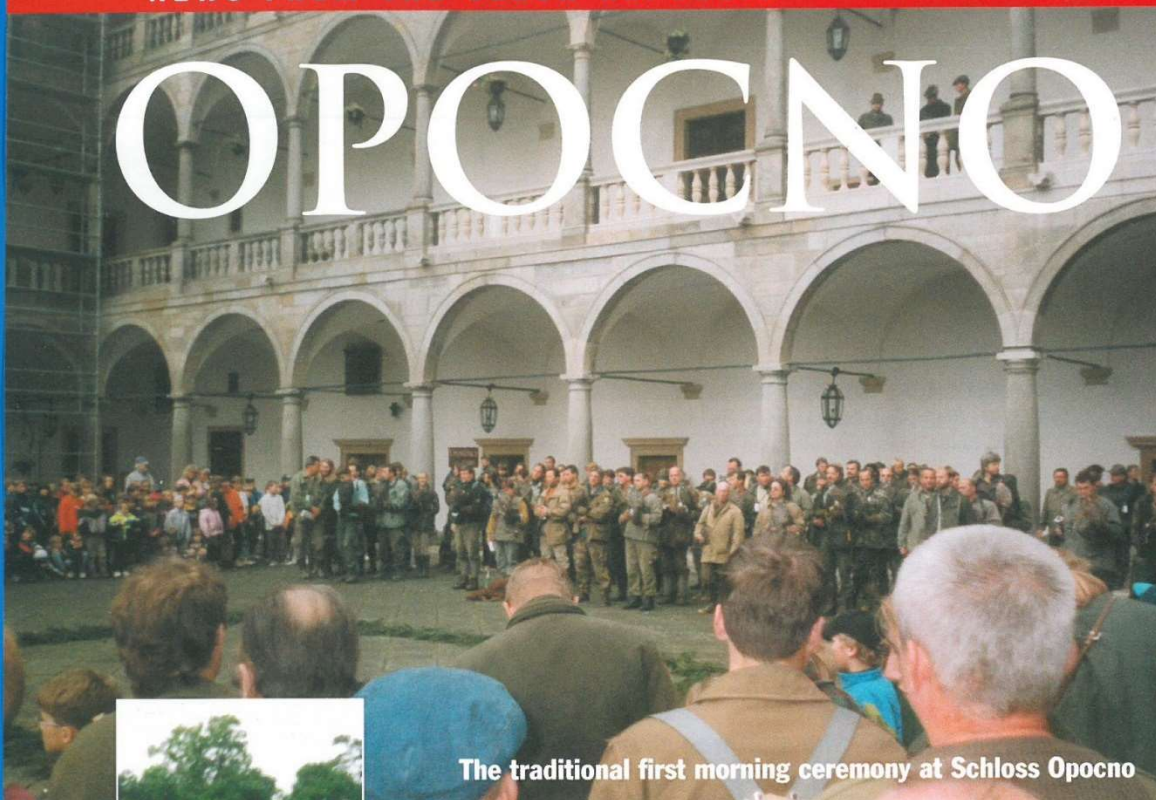
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OPOCNO



The traditional first morning ceremony at Schloss Opočno

photo by Andrew Hulme



photo by Mick Young

On the 10th October, 2001, I joined a small group of Welsh Hawking Club members to attend the 33rd annual Czech Falcon Club three-day field meeting.

We arrived at Prague airport after a short flight and a further three-hour drive took us to the small town of Opočno where the meeting was to be held. On arrival, after signing in and paying our hunting fee we had a chance to visit the town's park, where all the birds attending the meet were being kept for the three days. A variety of birds were there; golden eagles, goshawks, peregrines a couple of gyrs, a few Harrises, sakers and falcon hybrids. The first evening was spent making acquaintances with old friends and also making new ones. Falconers were there from France, Poland, Slovakia, Germany, Austria, Russia and England.

On the following morning all of the falconers gathered with their birds into the main town square for the opening ceremony, watched by the

many visiting falconers and all the town's folk. Hunting horns were blown, speeches were made and we were off for the real business of the day. Everyone dispersed into their hunting groups and departed in lines of cars and 4x4s to the hunting grounds. There was also a 'goshawk-bus' - all the austringers sit with their gosses on the bus and are dropped off in groups. The bus then collects them after the day's hawking. The gosses are the steadiest I've ever seen and are a credit to the Czech austringers who fly them. No tail-guards and all feather perfect.

We chose to go with the golden eagles and try for hares and roe deer and witnessed many spectacular flights. The hares were using every trick in the book to evade the oncoming eagles, sometimes even stopping dead in their tracks to jump over them! Six hares were caught between the seven golden.

On day 2, most of our party went out with the falcons who had taken a

2001

THE CZECH FALCON CLUB'S 33rd ANNUAL FIELD MEET

October 2001
Opocno
The Czech Republic

Report by Andrew Hulme

photo by Andrew Hulme



good head of pheasants on the previous day. The Czech falconers generally fly their falcons in a very different style to the usual game-hawking style that we are used to in the UK. Not many waiting-on flights here at pheasant - just mainly off-the-fist direct pursuit. The main object of falconry in the Czech Republic is to

put meat on the table - the quicker quarry is taken the better.

On the third and final day, the town's folk of Opocno turned out on a large, hilly field on the outskirts of the town to watch a bird of prey demonstration which was a gesture of thanks from the falconers for the town's kind hospitality. For the final



photo by Andrew Hulme



photo by Mick Young

day's hawking our group went out with the eagles to a nearby village. The entire village's inhabitants turned out to see and follow the eagles in the field. Over 100 hares and a good number of roe deer were seen with some spectacular flights at them. Total bag of the day was 12 hares. After each day's hawking everyone gathers back at Schloss Opocno for the traditional 'etricher' lager ceremony where all the quarry taken is laid out as a mark of respect.

The Meeting was rounded-off on the last evening with a dance. Presentations were given by the Czech Falcon Club and old and new friends said their farewells. All that was left after a fabulous few days was the journey back to England. ■

Conservation and commercialisation

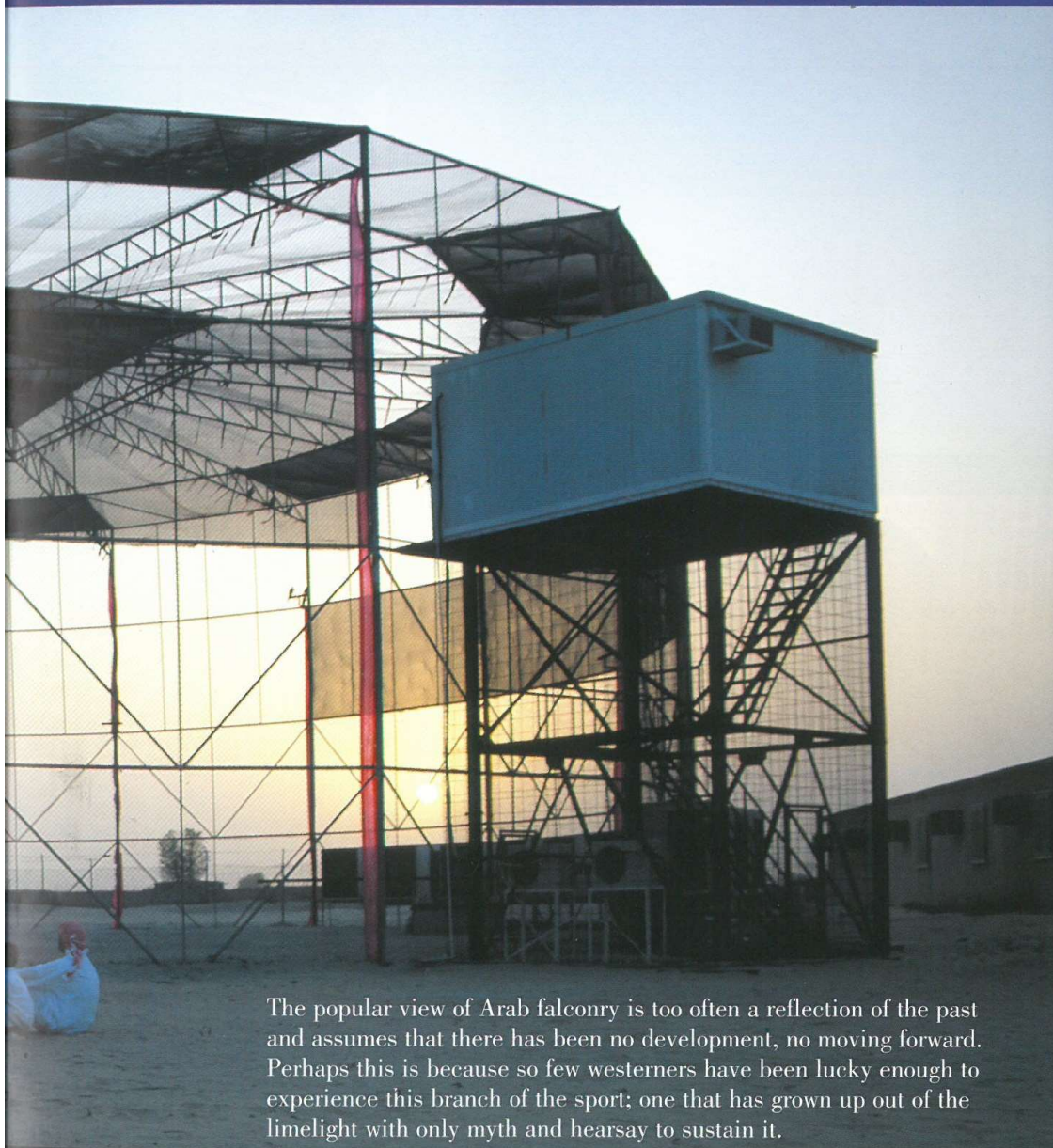
by Nick Kester



Photos by Terry Anthony

NAD AL SHIBA Avian Reproduction Research Centre, Dubai

go hand-in-hand.



The popular view of Arab falconry is too often a reflection of the past and assumes that there has been no development, no moving forward. Perhaps this is because so few westerners have been lucky enough to experience this branch of the sport; one that has grown up out of the limelight with only myth and hearsay to sustain it.

Those in the west who have an involvement are often commercially linked or, like Roger Upton, have a relationship that goes back to the pre-commercial 1960s. So it was with considerable pleasure that *International Falconer* was invited to Dubai to see how Arab falconry has evolved, and to meet some of those who have driven that change. ▶

NAD AL SHIBA

Avian Reproduction Research Centre, Dubai



Inside the flight pen.



David Le Mesurier interacting with an imprinted falcon.



The huge fans that constantly blow water-cooled air into the flight pen.

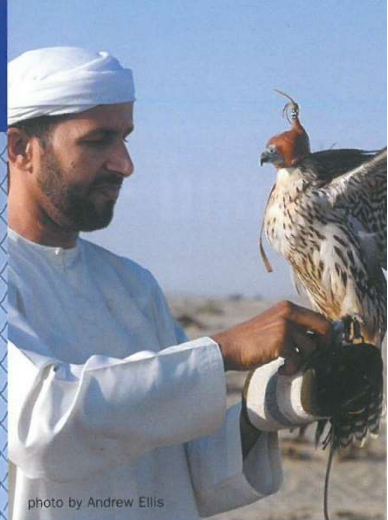
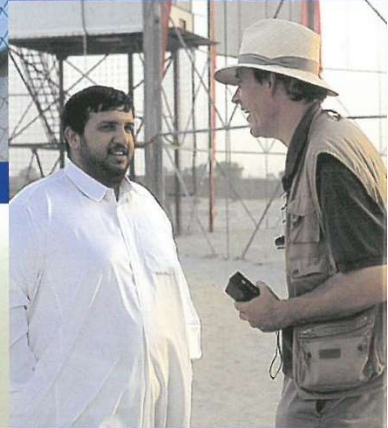


photo by Andrew Ellis

Mohd. Hilal Bin Tarraf.



Suhail Bin Tarraf and Nick Kester.



24 breeding chambers for natural pairs house an impressive selection of gyrfalcons and barbaries.

Mohammed Hilal Bin Tarraf and his brother, Suhail are passionate about falconry. That goes without saying. What seems to set them apart is that they are non-exclusive in their passion. The Nad Al Shiba Avian Reproduction Research Centre is an open facility designed to fulfil a range of functions. Like all businesses it aims for profit, and, when you see the level of investment, that is amply justified. It aspires to enable the ordinary man to satisfy his passion - for the majority of the falcons bred will be for sale. There is even to be an international market at the Centre.

There has been a steady change in the falcons that the UAE falconers fly. Sure, you can still buy trapped sakers and peregrines in the markets. But the new demand is for hybrids and very special hybrids at that. British falconer, David Le Mesurier, who manages the Centre, doubted he could sell a pure-bred European peregrine in Dubai today. What the Arab falconer wants, says Suhail, is a

gyr/peregrine hybrid of the highest quality and of proven hunting bloodlines capable of catching *houbara*. And he is really particular about where it comes from (UK or North America) – and, in the future, if it is home-bred so much the better.

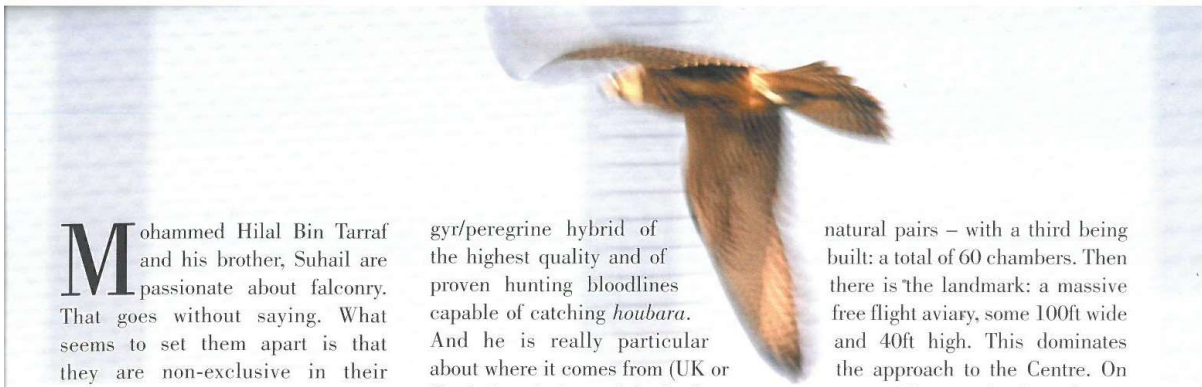
In July 1999 Mohammed met David in England and they conceived their plans for the Nad Al Shiba Centre, which by the time of our visit in August 2001 was virtually complete, even having had its first breeding successes a year earlier than planned.

There are three focal points to the Centre: one a substantial landmark. Hygiene is obsessive with clean air facilities, foot dips and sterile environments that can be turned on and off as conditions require. They even produce their own food – rats and quail. In some areas David insists you turn off your mobile phone (which, for some, must be a real hardship.).

First, there are the breeding blocks – one each for imprints and

natural pairs – with a third being built: a total of 60 chambers. Then there is the landmark: a massive free flight aviary, some 100ft wide and 40ft high. This dominates the approach to the Centre. On one side a bank of air conditioning units provide an as-needed, cool breeze (to assist acclimatisation of imported birds). High up on the other side there are two hack rooms, each sub-divided and able to be closed off as needed. These also have AC (what doesn't in a country that during our visit recorded temperatures of 48°C).

The flight pen held 23 assorted falcons: last year's hunting birds finishing the moult and several imports from the UK and North America. At dawn and dusk the aviary was full of them enjoying the cooler air. Patrolling the upper reaches, passing and re-passing with no sign of competition or bad temper, until, exercised they took stand on one of the many perches before re-launching themselves once more into this avian promenade.



Every breeding chamber has a good selection of perches, plumbed-in bathing facilities, daylight tube lighting and air conditioning.



A pair of breeding barbaries.

NAD AL SHIBA

Avian Reproduction Research Centre, Dubai

When I quizzed Suhail about his ambitions for the Centre he was characteristically frank:

“To produce quality not quantity. Those birds that do not perform to our standards will always be sold on.”

However the brothers recognise that they will be unlikely to satisfy their own and local needs, and that other producers both domestic and foreign would benefit from a reputable market place in Dubai. He intends to provide this through Nad Al Shiba.

With specific quarantine facilities, a *majlis* (Arab reception or meeting room) and self-catering accommodation, breeders can contract to bring their falcons to Nad Al Shiba, meet falconers, and strike whatever deal suits them. There are terms and conditions, not least that the provenance of every hawk and its CITES paperwork must be rock solid. The Centre charges rent and commission on sales for, as David points out, this is the only way that the market becomes non-exclusive and the customer base broadens.

“Otherwise what is a breeder to do? Come and sit in a hotel for a week hoping he meets a suitable falconer, or trust to what is effectively a mail order sale?”

“Sure the sheikhs have their own sources, but these are frequently pre-contracted deals. What we want to do is provide birds to anyone prepared to pay a fair price. To do this we have to bring the best to those people who would otherwise have to rely on locally trapped falcons, and which puts pressure on the wild population.”

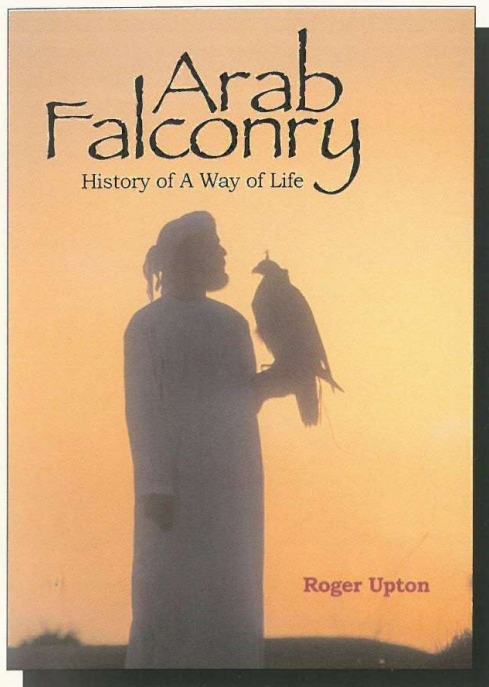
What Nad Al Shiba has achieved is both commitment and ambition. Commitment to provide quality falcons for the available market, and an ambition to secure a domestic breeding facility that satisfies that market. One suspects time will prove them right. ●



Newly arrived imprints acclimatising to their new environment at Nad Al Shiba.



A black shaheen.



Arab Falconry

History of A Way of Life

This title is entirely devoted to Arab Falconry and details the trapping, training and hunting procedures of falconry in Arabia. The title includes not only the author's personal experience as an international falconer (since 1949), but his experiences with the Arabic falconry community. Roger Upton explores his extensive travels and hunting throughout Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and Pakistan, complemented by his personal photography and illustrations.



Arab Falconry

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By Roger Upton

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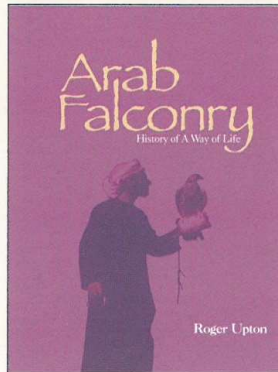
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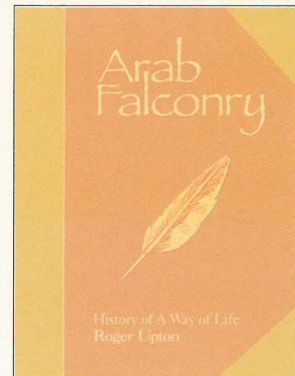
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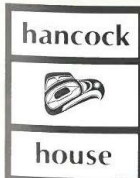


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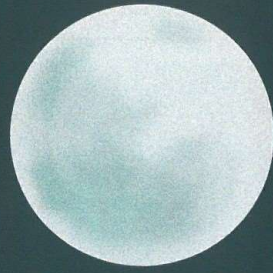
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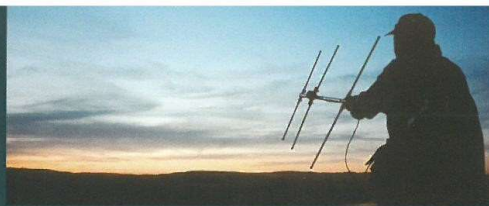
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LOST HAWKS

PART 2

Concluding excerpt from Joe Roy III's forthcoming book.



On a couple of occasions, I've tracked falcons which were still on the wing well after dark, but on both occasions the falcons had somewhere specific they were headed. They were homing to the training field. Ordinarily, a falcon will take up a roost around sunset and once she's finally stationary, she should be a whole lot easier to find. Dusk also brings a couple of bonuses in terms of signal reception. Most raptors will select a reasonably high perch for a roost. My lost falcons have chosen hillsides, trees, and on one occasion, a high tension metallic power 'pole'. After sundown, there are atmospheric changes which occur. Just as the sound of a falcon's bell is amplified after sunset, so too is the transmitter's signal received from greater distances. The combination of a stationary, elevated transmitter and enhanced reception make for better trackability. One afternoon, while tracking a falcon, I lost the signal and had no idea where he'd gone or even which direction to look. After dark when he'd taken up roost on a large power pole, I began to receive the signal again. As it turned out, he was nearly 30 miles away, but with a clear signal he was easily located. ▶



LOST HAWKS

Unfortunately, with darkness, new threats come to life as nocturnal predators start to make their rounds. The great-horned owl, (*Bubo virginianus*), which is common throughout North America, has killed many a gamehawk left out overnight. These formidable predators, which hunt under the cloak of darkness, provide a healthy incentive to retrieve falcons in the dark if at all possible, as opposed to calling off the effort until daybreak. Those who choose to wait may well be collecting their transmitters in the morning and little else. Aside from the threat of predation, leaving a hawk out overnight is risky because they often leave their roost well before sun up. By the time the bleary-eyed falconer arrives in the morning at the place where his falcon had spent the night, she may well be on the wing and out of telemetry range – especially if she’s in foreign territory. For that matter, she may get spooked during the night and take off, panicked in the dark. Let your imagination run wild with the possible calamities this scenario inspires.

Once the falcon has been located in the dark, it becomes a question of how to get her down from her roost. If she can be easily reached, she may be approached slowly, while speaking to her in a soothing voice to help steady her nerves. A flashlight illuminating a lavishly garnished glove doesn’t hurt either. Whereas some hawks may get flighty after being on their own for some time, imprint falcons are usually fairly placid. Nonetheless, they all should be treated with the utmost consideration and deliberance of movement in the dark. If the falcon has chosen to roost in a more precarious location, making an ascent dangerous or impossible, we hope she has had the courtesy to roost in a vehicle accessible location. In that case, she may be called down by

headlight. The tracker, standing in front of the vehicle in clear view of the hawk, is lit up by the high-beams. He then entices the hawk down by any means possible, and by this time I’d imagine there would be few whom would be entirely opposed to using a live lure! Nonetheless, if she’s really hungry she’ll probably come down to just about anything. Regardless of what is used, it helps if it’s got white on it, a pigeon with white or light brown feathers will work nicely. In a pinch, a white sock, hankie, napkin, etc. can be tied to a lure to enhance its illumination. When coercing a falcon to fly in the dark, the falconer is obligated to ensure that the hawk has a safe landing zone. This space encompasses not only where she’ll come down, but the surrounding area as well, namely avoiding power lines and fences which she’ll not see as she butterflies in. If auto headlights can’t be used due to inaccessibility or hazardous surroundings, calling the hawk in by flashlight is a viable alternative.

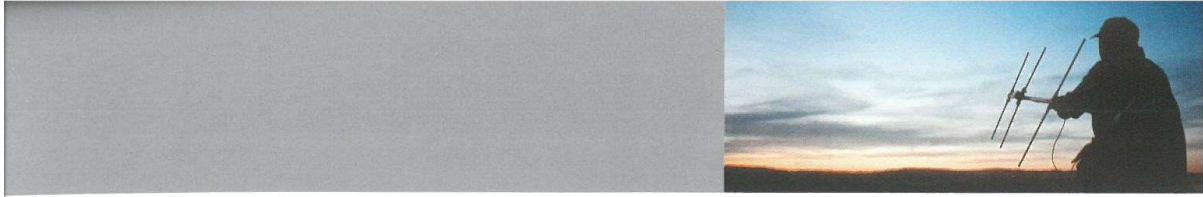
Sometimes falcons are reluctant to come off their roosts in the dark, especially if they’re copped up. If the falconer can’t manually retrieve the falcon, he’ll have little choice but to pick her up in the morning. I’ve heard of falconers spending the night near their roosting falcons, others have left portable radios turned on at the base of the roost to ward off predators. Since I began using telemetry nearly two decades ago, I’ve only had one incident in which my gamehawk spent the night out. I had been hawking sage grouse near dusk. My falcon knocked a grouse down, but it jumped up again and the tailchase was on. The grouse only flew about half a mile before it bailed and was killed by the falcon. As I made my way to the general area where the two had gone down, the falcon plucked and fed on the grouse in the snow. Before I could pinpoint

the transmitter and the falcon’s exact location, the signal stopped abruptly. I flipped on another transmitter to verify that the receiver was working properly, and indeed it was. With no signal to follow, I knew the pointer was my best hope of finding the falcon before dark. I gave the command “go falcon”, and the dog diligently coursed the sage, but neither he, nor I could find the kill site before nightfall.

I spent the night there in the truck, which fortunately, I’d planned anyway. As I woke up periodically throughout the evening, I’d flip the receiver on, just in case. Always with the same result – dead air. At 4:30 a.m. I woke again and dutifully turned on the receiver. This time, the signal was there, clear as a bell. Within a few minutes, I’d located the falcon, not more than 400 yards from where I’d slept. I found Shaman 10ft up, roosting in a juniper. He was covered in grouse blood, still had a crop, and by all appearances, was one happy camper. I could only surmise that the leg-mounted transmitter had ceased functioning in the snow due to the extreme temperature. Then, sometime, during the night or the wee hours of the morning, the falcon pulled that foot up and warmed the transmitter with his body heat, whereupon it began to function once again. Go figure..

Transmitters can and do fail, which is why many people advocate flying with two transmitters at all times. Long range transmitters are highly recommended whenever flying large falcons. Transmitters can be attached to gamehawks via leg, tail, or neck mounts. While I’ve never felt comfortable or compelled to try neck mounts, I have extensive experience with both leg and tail mounts.

Theoretically, the tail mount has much to offer, both functionally and aesthetically. With the transmitter tucked neatly over the top of the tail.



it's well out of the way and can't interfere with the hawk's footing ability. It's also less likely to get fried if the hawk lands on a power pole and it won't attract the attention of other raptors bent on pirating a free meal the way the other mounts can. From an aerodynamic perspective, it would seem that the tail mount would generally create less friction (drag) in flight. Basically, out of sight, the tail mount aesthetically reigns supreme, hands down.

As strong as the case is for tail mounts, they have historically had one huge drawback in that they were very prone to being ripped out of an active, aggressive gamehawk. When a tail mount is ripped out, the problem is two-fold because not only is the transmitter no longer attached to the gamehawk, but neither is the deck feather. A pulled deck feather in the middle of the hawking season isn't the end of the world, but it is a real

bummer. In some cases the raptor will generate a new feather, but even under the best of circumstances, it will be months before the tail has been fully restored. In the meantime, the hawk will fly with no noticeable lack of manoeuvrability but the developing feather will be susceptible to damage whilst it is still 'in the blood'. If a developing feather is damaged, either nutritionally, (underfeeding), or traumatically (impact etc.), it will be pinched out at the base, in which case the regeneration process must start all over again – if you're lucky!

Sometimes feather 'pulls' result in follicle damage. The incidence and severity of follicle damage varies from case to case. And, the likelihood of follicle damage will depend to some extent on the species of raptor involved. Harris' hawks for example are loosely feathered, meaning their feathers are comparatively easily pulled. Which in turn, causes less, or

“My tiercel Sonoran Harris' has had several tail mounts ripped out, all occurring while tackling large Northern California jacks (hares).”

hopefully no follicle damage. While the Harris' is relatively susceptible to 'pulls' when an antenna wire is snagged, they are also more likely to regenerate a well developed replacement. My tiercel Sonoran Harris' has had several tail mounts ripped out, all occurring while tackling large Northern California jacks (hares). My impression is that the jacks are kicking them out with their hind toes. I'm in no way inferring that Harris' hawks shouldn't be tail

LOST HAWKS

mounted. In fact, I'm certain that many (perhaps most?) would fare well with a tail mount, depending on what and how they hunt, but I'm equally confident that my Harris' will never go the season with his tail intact if he's tail-mounted for precisely the same reasons.

Falcons, which are generally more tightly feathered, present a bigger dilemma. Though tightly feathered, falcons are susceptible to feather pulls when their antenna wires are snagged during high-speed pursuits, speed being the operative word. While I have had some falcons replace pulled decks, two falcons received follicle damage severe enough to permanently preclude regeneration. In another instance, a falcon received partial follicle damage, and subsequently developed a replacement deck which was a little short and slightly twisted at the bottom. From then on, after each moult, the deck in question was similarly afflicted.

Once a falcon's tail has been permanently reduced to 11 feathers, tail mounting is no longer a viable option. Were she to lose another, the aerodynamic performance of the tail as a rudder mechanism would be substantially compromised. Furthermore, without the support of the two central deck feathers, the likelihood of additional train (tail feather) damage would be significantly higher.

In light of the possible side effects related to tail mounts, one might think the leg mount an obviously better choice, but the argument is far from over. It has been contended, better to have a tail feather ripped out, than a leg dislocated or worse, in the case of an antenna snag. Personally, I've had no such injuries. On one occasion a hawk was pulled up short when an antenna wrapped around a fence he was flying over. On another, a falcon pursuing a mallard between power

“The receiver is the falconer's lifeline to a lost hawk, and as such, should be handled with care.”

lines was visibly jerked when his antenna wrapped the power line, but in neither case were there injuries to the raptor. I have seen foot bruising on rare occasion which occurred after extremely violent impacts with quarry. Whether or not any of the bruising could be attributed to the transmitter, or whether the bruise was coincidentally on the transmitted leg, I can't say. Even if it were so, however, a small bruise on a rare occasion is an acceptable price, and less problematic than the complications I've suffered in dealing with tail mounts, which is why I eventually adopted a leg mount only policy.

Recently however, innovations in transmitter circuitry and design have prompted me to reconsider my position. Just as the days of flying large falcons without telemetry are long gone, the days of flying with lengthy dangling transmitter wires are likewise coming to an end as these relics become obsolete.

Regardless of which transmitter is used, or means of attachment, unless certain precautionary measures are taken, the telemetry system may let you down at the worst possible moment. When it comes to telemetry (or falconry in general for that matter) it pays to be meticulous and prepared. Every time a gamehawk is loosed, the falconer should be operating under the premise that tracking may become necessary. All components of the telemetry system should be maintained in good working order. Transmitter batteries should be replaced well before they lose their

potency. Battery contact points should be checked periodically and cleaned as necessary. Before each use, transmitters should be visually inspected to ensure that batteries are properly secured and that antenna wires are securely attached. Always verify the signal before the hawk is released. Tuning in the receiver to the transmitter's signal just prior to flight enables tracking to begin immediately, without having to scan the frequency for the proper setting. For precision tuning, the transmitter should be the same temperature as the outside air. Always check to ensure that the transmitter is correctly secured to the hawk. An incorrectly positioned tail clip can easily slip out. In the case of leg mounts, a traditional bewit works very well. Alternatively, falconers sometimes attach transmitters to the aylmeri cuff, usually by means of a cable tie (zip tie). I used to use this method myself, but have long since abandoned it for a couple of reasons. A transmitter hung from an aylmeri will dangle considerably farther down than one bewitted directly to the tarsus above the almeri. Not only will this create an encumbrance when the hawk is footing quarry, but the antenna snag liability is also increased. Furthermore, large falcons can remove cable ties with their powerful beaks. Habituating a falcon early on in her training to wearing a dummy transmitter can alleviate the biting/picking at transmitters which may otherwise occur after the falcon has been lost long enough to get bored and cause the trouble. Nonetheless, cable ties are not recommended. The receiver is the falconers lifeline to a lost hawk, and as such, should be handled with care.

Not surprisingly, the most critical element of any telemetry system is the operator. While I've touched upon many of the skills and techniques



used to track falcons with telemetry. I've by no means exhausted the subject in either technical or practical terms. Tracking falcons is an art in itself. The necessary skills will only be perfected through practice. Don't wait until a hawk is actually lost to figure out how to use the system you've purchased. Place transmitters in various locations and take readings from multiple positions in order to learn how your system responds in a variety of terrain and atmospheric conditions. Have somebody else hide transmitters for you. When you get efficient at finding them, you can 'raise the bar' if you like, by tracking moving targets, such as vehicle. The skill you gain will not only increase your odds of quickly recovering a lost hawk, it will also give you confidence and thus help reduce your stress level while tracking her.

Take comfort in knowing that as

long as a signal is being received, recovery is virtually inevitable. Remember, if a transmitter moves out of range and the signal is no longer received, look for elevation. If the available elevation isn't cutting it and you're truly stumped, aerial surveillance should be considered an option. If you can't pick up a signal from an aircraft, there's probably a malfunction in the telemetry system.

If all else fails and the hawk remains at large, get the word out. Contact the agencies, groups and organisations which are most likely to receive the call when John Doe discovers a tame hawk in his backyard. Spread the word by any means possible, but be prepared to ask pertinent questions about any possible sightings in order to eliminate false leads and save time.

As with so many other aspects of gamehawk management, an ounce of

prevention is worth several pounds of cure. Use good judgement, fly smart and listen to your intuition. Undoubtedly, some slips are better left unflown. Raptors are highly visual animals, meaning they're usually thinking about things they're looking at. Maintaining visual contact, especially with a young eyass or a fresh passage is important; out of sight, out of mind. If, during a flight, a falcon starts to range whether through boredom or something else, do something to draw its attention back to you before it flies over a hill and disappears.

In order to experience the finest that falconry has to offer, a gamehawk needs longevity. She needs to mature. Her potential is as boundless as your imagination and skill. Don't let her slip away through some momentary lapse of reason. For the rewards are coming up around the bend. ■

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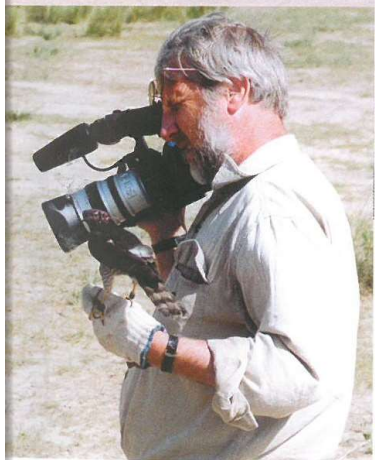
On the prowl in Beijing

Rush hour in some of the seedier Beijing streets. Little red taxis, motor rickshaws, panting tricyclists, people everywhere, blaring horns and noise. Weaving through the chaos and zooming off down dead-end alleys, is a young man on a bicycle carrying a tiny male Japanese sparrowhawk in the palm of his hand.

HAWK



by Nick Fox



Behind him wobbles a grey-haired 'Engrish gent-lemon', knees out (to avoid jamming feet in front wheel), left hand white-knuckled on handlebars, right hand holding up video camera. Careering along street filming sparrowhawk.

They say you never forget how to ride a bike. But one can choose more salubrious circumstances for a



Rewinding after a flight

refresher course. In my case I didn't know where I was, had no cash or papers and didn't know where I was staying, or any Chinese; if I lost sight of the lad in front I would be in the proverbial.

Beijing was hot and humid. In only shirt and shorts in July, I was dripping, a wet patch all down my back. I felt a complete and utter prat. About three dozen stares tracking my progress confirmed preliminary diagnosis.

Suddenly, like a striking snake, the sparrowhawk shot out from the bicycle in front and snatched a sparrow in a flurry in a dusty stunted bush. The hawk's fine line trailed back to the lad, a gossamer umbilical cord. Everything in a brief second.

Use left testicle and shin as brake. Come to collapsing halt, still filming.

"Shit! Must keep hawk in frame!"

"Dammit!" (silently) Must keep soundtrack clean!

The hawk is kneading the sparrow and a white-gloved hand comes into frame. Soon he is back up on the fist and the young man is winding the line back up. About ten of its 25 or so yards has been used. The hawk has a little sip of water from a bottle, the

sparrow is slipped still alive into a ventilated quarry bag in the front basket of the bicycle, and we set off again.

The rutted road brought back sudden 'body memories' of cycling with my hawk-eagle, hare-hawking on frozen stubbles in my mis-spent youth. Ahead loomed large foetid puddles with paper and filth floating like ice floes. Thunder rolled across the city. Six lanes of traffic to get through to cross the street: first the weaving cyclists, then four lanes of blaring cars, and then the cyclists on the far side. I can just see my pilot about 50 yards ahead. Then into a bit of a car park area, piles of rubbish, men mending machinery, screaming kids. A row of giggling girls crouch along the curb with nothing better to do than watch our strange spectacle. Must muster remaining dignity. Not easy with blue polybag caught on toe. Look up from view finder, give them a wink. Shreds 'em!

Narrowly avoid being garrotted on washing line. There goes the hawk again, like a harpoon, over some railings into a small tree. Missed this time. The falconer rides round to the other side and gently pulls the hawk



The Flying Squad

down. He re-winds the line, or *xian*, onto a wooden cylinder or peg (*raoxianban*) made from a type of hollow straight gourd. Then he pushes the peg into a little round springy willow cage, the *zai wazza*, strapped to his wrist. The cage grips the wound ball of line, allowing him to withdraw the peg. This leaves the cage lined with the spool of string, ready to uncoil without resistance. Similar designs are seen in other regions of China, sometimes smaller, with wire rather than willow cages.

The males of the Japanese lesser sparrowhawk or *riben songqueying* (*Accipiter gularis*) are preferred; often two or three years old with deep red eyes. At maybe 70 - 80 grams they are too small for most scales to weigh accurately. They are trapped in April

and take a few days to wake and train, being flown at sparrows throughout the summer. In the autumn they are released again. Sometimes shrikes, such as the Chinese grey shrike or *xiewei bolao* (*Lanius sphenocercus*), are used instead.

The little hawks are hooded using rather poor quality hoods somewhat similar to an Indian hood, usually being cast to do so. Sometimes they are also brailed with cloth brails and carried two or three together in a paper carrier bag on a bicycle to the scene of operations. When ready for action they are grasped bodily by the bare left hand and the feathers smoothed down before being placed carefully in the palm of the cloth-gloved right hand. The legs are placed in the forward position, not held

backwards as shown in Mavrogordato's *A Hawk for the Bush*. We used to hold our European sparrowhawks (*A. nisus*) in the legs back position, but I think it would be quite hard to hold such a big hawk in the legs forward position.

Eventually it was time to surrender my borrowed Beijing ball-breaker and count the bag: 15 sparrows for two hawks in an hour or so. The falconers apologised for the low numbers due to the heat. On a cool day a single hawk can take a hundred. Clearly these lads had a great time zooming round the city on their bikes. Suddenly the smell of horse sweat and the springy turf of Northumberland seemed so, so far away. ■



The International Foundation for Conservation & Development of Wildlife

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The International Foundation for Conservation and Development of Wildlife, based in Morocco, is an organisation primarily involved in the captive breeding and release of the houbara bustard.

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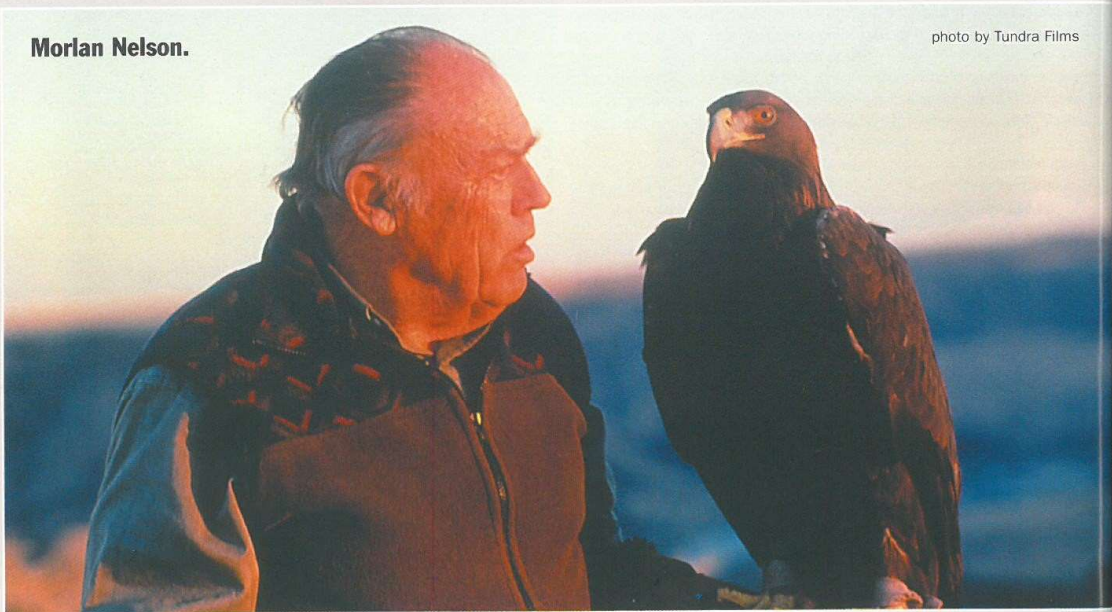
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Morlan Nelson- the man who saved the eagles.

by Alan Gates

Morlan Nelson.

photo by Tundra Films



Growing up on a ranch along the Cheyenne River in North Dakota, the young Morlan W. Nelson developed with an insight and understanding of the natural environment around him.

Morlan was intrigued and amazed by the simple natural wonders that most country boys would take for granted. As he galloped across the family farmland on his old racehorse Slim, he would marvel at the horse's shoulder muscles as they flowed in beautiful coordination, as together they jumped a ditch or gopher hole.

The year was 1928 and the young Morlan, now aged twelve, was to witness one of nature's finest spectacles. It was an event that is rarely observed even by country folk,

but its effect on the young boy was so dramatic that it moulded and directed the course of his life from that moment on.

Early one morning as he watered his horse at a pond on the ranch, a group of teal were startled into flight. Morlan had often marvelled at the ducks' aerial ability. As they exploded into flight, his skywards gaze glimpsed a bullet-shaped bird high in the clouds. The ducks scattered as the stooping falcon plummeted earthwards, the air hissed as the natural assassin levelled out and struck one of the teal. As the falcon put on the brakes the enormous velocity from the stoop sent the bird skywards again. It rolled on its back, once again folded its wings and dived

to snatch the dead teal from the air before it hit the ground and flew straight into the north wind and out of sight.

The young Morlan was riveted to the ground recounting in his mind the events he had just witnessed. Those moments were etched so deeply into his memory that to this day he can recall every second of those images: the sounds of panicking teal, the thump of the falcon hitting the lead duck, and the smell of that fresh morning air.

That inspirational sight began a desire to own such a hawk. The following year he obtained a young redtail hawk from a nest on the ranch and together they chased and caught a few rabbits and gophers. A few years

later a chance meeting with the famous Captain Charles Knight, a British falconer and wildlife filmmaker, who toured Britain and America showing his motion films and flying his trained golden eagle 'Mr. Ramshaw', was to inspire Morlan Nelson with the knowledge of the noble and ancient art of falconry.

The advent of World War II and the events that followed, left Morlan with a basic understanding of the principle 'survival of the fittest', the paramount law that governs all species on this planet. Something that is all too easily forgotten by the civilised cosseted human population of the western world. As an officer in the legendary Tenth Mountain Division, the all-volunteer ski troops, Morlan saw action from the Aleutians to the Battle of Brenner Pass.

He was decorated with the Silver Star and Purple Heart and wounded in the final week of hostility. But languishing in a hospital bed with his leg in a cast was not to stop Morlan from a successful attempt to obtain a young kestrel he had been watching on a nearby cliff. It involved rappelling down a cliff, and he returned to the hospital with the kestrel, a broken cast and some unexplained rope burns on his pyjamas.

After the War, Morlan continued to fly falcons and made 16mm films of them, but so many people stopped to shoot at his falcon if it landed on a power pole, that he started to carry a Colt frontier model six-gun to fire in their direction if they attempted to shoot at his falcon.

This wild west action saved many of his falcons' lives but it nearly started a war in the state of Utah where he lived. So many individuals believed that all 'chicken-hawks', 'bullet-hawks' and 'duck-hawks' should be shot on sight, and this caused many a heated argument which nearly ended in a shoot out. It became clear to Morlan that the way

forward was through education not the bullet.

Walt Disney, having seen Morlan's early 16mm movies of his falcons, brought him to Hollywood as a consultant on early wildlife adventures such as *The Living Desert* and *The Vanishing Prairie*. Morlan flew redtail hawks and prairie falcons, which gave many Americans their first intimate sight of wild birds of prey. The effects of the Disney films and the series *Wild Kingdom* which Morlan worked on, had such a dramatic effect on the American public perception of wild birds of prey, that hardly ever did you hear the words 'chicken-hawk' used.

The remote and desolate Snake River canyon is at first glance like many desert, river and cliff complexes in the North Western United States. It was not until Morlan Nelson moved to live in Boise, Idaho that he discovered the Swan Falls area of the Snake River to be a very unique habitat.

It was through Morlan's work as a

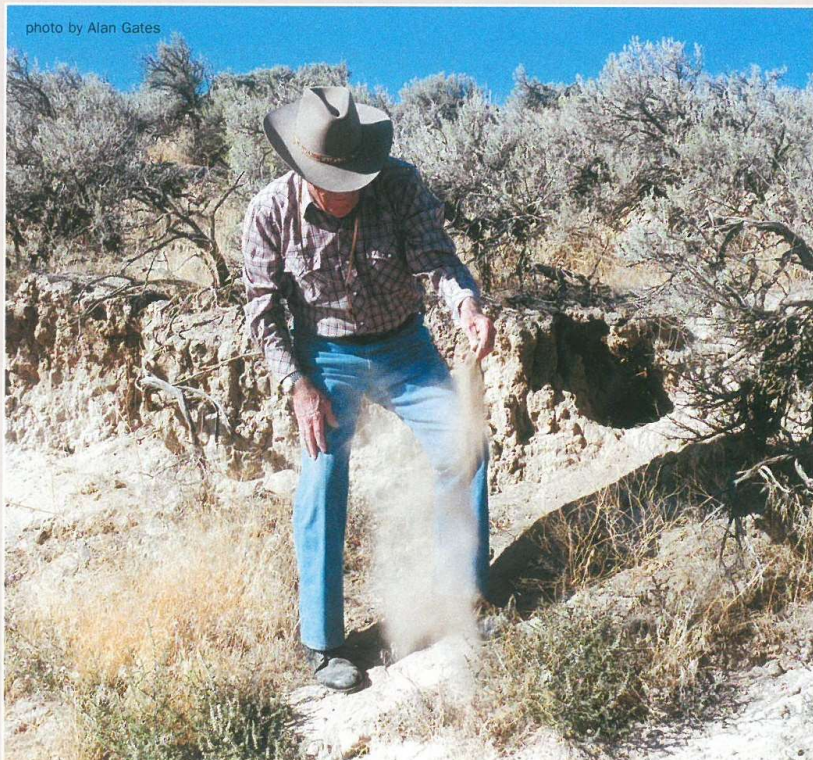
soil scientist and hydrologist, employed by the US Department of Agriculture's Soil Conservation Service, that he discovered the condition of the top-soil surrounding the top of the canyon. This deep, medium-textured soil was perfect for the burrows of the Townsend ground squirrel which multiplied in the area in large numbers.

Morlan also discovered that up to 10% of the nesting prairie falcons in the United States lived in this unique 33-mile stretch of the Snake River Canyon, and that the Townsend ground squirrel made up to 70% of the falcons' diet.

212 pairs of prairie falcons nested in the Swan Falls area, which meant there was a falcon's nest every 300-400 yards in the canyon. Morlan also found that this area of south western Idaho contained 52 golden eagle eyries, probably the largest concentration in North America and possibly the world.

He brought this unique location

Morlan Nelson shows the soft topsoil surrounding the canyon in which the Thompson ground squirrels live.



into the living rooms of millions of Americans through two nationally televised films that he worked on, Disney's *Ida the Off-Beat Eagle* and the Wild Kingdom series, *The Valley of the Eagles*.

Through an enormous amount of lobbying, Morlan brought the uniqueness of this priceless heritage to the attention of the Department of the Interior, and upon the recommendation of the Bureau of Land Management, a protective withdrawal of 26,255 acres of land along the Swan Falls reach of the river was designated a Nature Area, a

unique and exceptional sanctuary for rare birds of prey, now known as the Snake River Birds of Prey Natural Area.

The mid 1960s was a momentous turning point for the wild eagle population of the United States of America through the implementation of a Congressional Act. It spelt the end to the practice of shooting large numbers of eagles from light aircraft and helicopters.

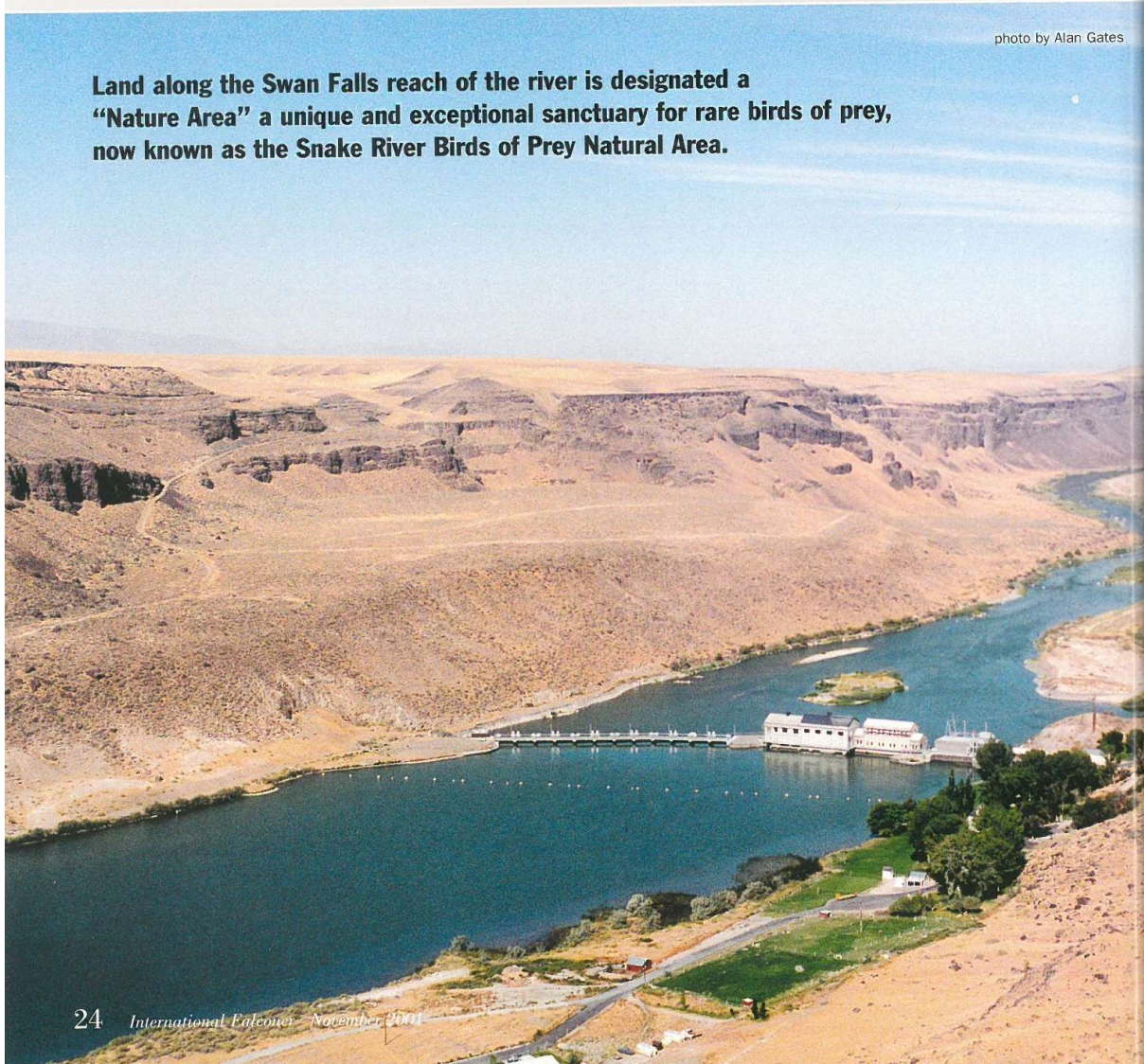
An incident in Wyoming where about 750 eagles were shot from helicopters, created great public sympathy for the birds. Under this

new law, all species of eagle were given protection and the public-at-large demanded enforcement.

In April of 1972, a new effort to increase consideration for eagles was spearheaded by the Idaho Power Company. It had found a problem with eagle electrocutions, the eagles often use power poles as landing sites from which to scan the surrounding terrain for game. A wingspan from six to eight feet makes it easy for a landing eagle to simultaneously touch the two phase conductors (or one phase conductor and a ground wire) on either end of the crossarm.

photo by Alan Gates

Land along the Swan Falls reach of the river is designated a "Nature Area" a unique and exceptional sanctuary for rare birds of prey, now known as the Snake River Birds of Prey Natural Area.



Morlan Nelson - the man who saved the eagles.

More and more eagles were being found under the company's power lines, victims not only of the electricity but of gunshots, poison and starvation. Although the power company was unable to do anything about the last three things, it felt it might be able to prevent the

electrocutions, but it wasn't sure how.

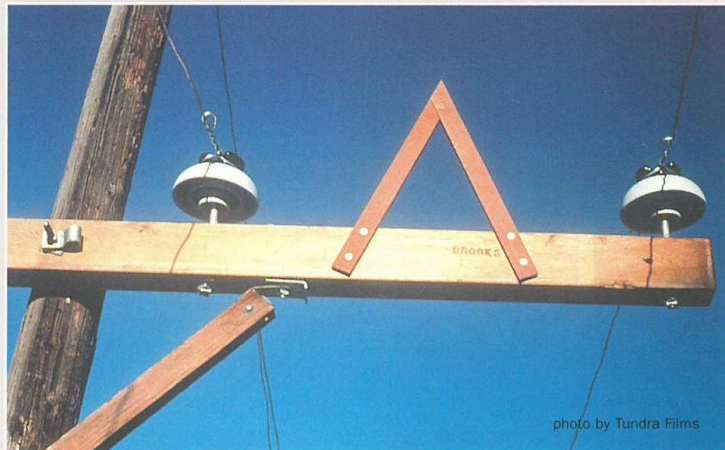
Morlan Nelson now recognised as one of the world's foremost authorities on eagles, hawks and other birds of prey was enlisted to help with Idaho Power engineers and biologists to study the problem of eagles and power lines. Idaho Power line crews built

dramatic proof of an eagle's ability to touch both conductors with its wing tips.

A study of Idaho power pole landing sites determined that 95% of the electrocutions could be prevented by correcting 2% to 15% of the poles. This is due to the eagle's extreme selectivity in choosing a landing site. Prevailing winds, prey density and surrounding topography have to be exactly right.

The corrections made by the Idaho Power Company varied from covering conductors and raising one wire, to building perches on top of the poles. The sometimes fatal attraction of some species of birds of prey to nesting on power structures carrying 69,000 volts, resulted in the Idaho Power

Some of the modifications used to dissuade the eagles from landing and touching the high voltage lines.



mock-ups of various types of poles in Nelson's backyard in the foothills near Boise, so he could study the eagles' behaviour around the poles. Using his skills as a cinematographer, Morlan Nelson spent hundreds of hours filming his trained eagles in 16mm slow motion on the mock-ups. The big birds were tested in a variety of wind conditions and the films provided

Company's cooperation in designing nesting platforms for the larger birds, especially eagles.

The idea for this platform came when Nelson observed a pair of golden eagles nesting on the observation tower from which the Idaho Air National Guard marks bomb hits from fighter planes in training pilots. The tower was an ideal nest, providing

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Morlan Nelson - the man who saved the eagles.

shade, elevation and protection from the wind. The nesting platform is mounted on a power structure, the open or unshaded end must be away from the tower and facing north. This gives the adults and young shelter from the sun and wind, and allows the eagles to land into the wind.

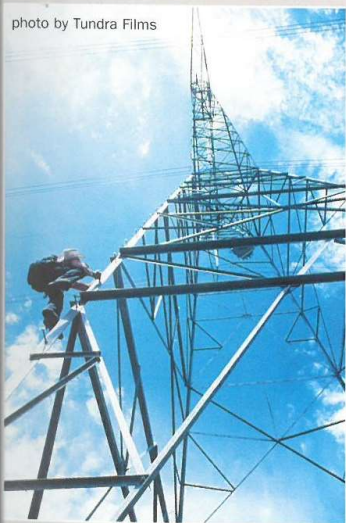
The Company stipulated that these nesting platforms should be constructed of materials impervious to weathering and have a projected lifespan equal to that of the power pole - approximately 100 years. Sturdy, permanent structures would not only minimise maintenance and replacement costs, but would also be of greater advantage to the birds.

The success of these corrective modifications was documented in slow-motion photography. After correction, the poles became positive ecological factors rather than inviting, but lethal killers.

It has been estimated that the work done to the Idaho Power Company's poles following Morlan Nelson's advice, which has been copied by other power companies within the western US, has saved the lives of

Morlan climbs to inspect a nesting platform high above the desert.

photo by Tundra Films



Nelson designed nesting platforms, constructed of marine-ply coated in fibreglass to last 100 years.

around 300 eagles each year.

The work on the power line problem lasted over a decade and Morlan's own film company Tundra Films, filmed and produced the award-winning film *Silver Wires, Golden Wings* which won top honours in four national film festivals.

Nelson's work on the thousands of modified power poles and nest platforms have actually benefited the eagles and other raptors. While there's a solid prey base for raptors in the treeless high deserts of the western United States, high places which can be used for nest building and hunting perches are scarce. The building of these modified power lines across the nation has undoubtedly helped raptors to increase their geographic distribution in America, and also, where adopted, in other countries around the world.

In 1984 the Peregrine Fund relocated its breeding facilities from Cornell University and Fort Collins, Colorado to a new 530 acre site three miles south of Boise airport. Combining these two units into one specially designed facility the new establishment was created as The World Centre for Birds of Prey. The Peregrine Fund was established in 1970 by Professor Tom Cade at

Cornell. After the widespread use of DDT and other chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides, peregrine numbers in the United States plummeted during the 1950s and 60s. By the end of the 60s the peregrine was extinct in the Eastern United States and reduced by 90% in the West. Alarmed by this situation Cade and other eminent falconers developed a method of breeding peregrines in captivity, together with pioneering successful methods for the release of the captive-bred falcons to the wild. This was the most successful breeding and progeny release conservation programme of the 20th century.

To date the Fund has released over 4,000 captive-bred falcons in 28 states. The Peregrine is well and truly saved in the United States and has been down-listed from Endangered. The 530 acre site in Boise was chosen over other locations in eight other states, primarily because of the presence of Morlan Nelson. With a life time dedicated to the promotion of the protection and better understanding of birds of prey, the World Centre for Birds of Prey could not have invited a better advocate for Vice Chairman. Morlan Nelson is 'the man who saved the eagles'. ■



DEEP



Next to the fear of being bitten, the thought of subterranean trouble must surely be the biggest reason so many rabbit hawkers remain ferretless. We all know the rule about feeding ferrets before work so that they don't kill and lie-up. It goes with the rule about periodically changing ferrets over so as not to tire them. And both rules often go along with calling down rabbit holes and circus antics with dead rabbits!

The truth is, all the precautions in the world can't totally rule out problems, problems so serious that the ferret's loss might be the eventual result. If every ferret quickly killed every rabbit it came to grips with, we would be easing close to trouble-free ferreting; the not hungry, not tired animal would just hunt on or return to the surface. But ferrets often don't kill quickly; the quarry might be in such a position that they can't swiftly kill. And then the waiting game begins. Depending on the ferret, it might eventually leave the rabbit, but it might not; it might scratch away at the rabbit for a very long time, giving you ample opportunity to slowly calculate all the flying you are losing. And a rabbit may

not be the problem. The ferret might enter a vertical shaft it can't get out of. This may not be a common occurrence, but as every falconer is educated: 'Prepare for the impossible.'

However, when things do go wrong – and they do for the most skilful operators – it needn't be a disaster. If ferret-locating equipment is being used and warrens are chosen with care, then the ferret's retrieval is but a spot of spadework away. Amazingly, it's not a route chosen by everyone. Some argue that locating equipment just means more kit to carry about the field. Locators mean a spade, ferret collars, the locator itself, and fiddling with batteries and battery checks. Not forgetting there's the hawk's 'locating' ▶

TROUBLE

By Martin Hollinshead

gear as well. I can hear my 'anti-gadgets' mentor Josef Hiebeler: "All this just to catch a rabbit!" But there can be no ifs or buts. Having the necessary equipment to dig down to a ferret must be seen as absolutely vital. You owe it to your ferrets and you owe it to your sport. Each season many ferrets get lost. Some end up – often mistaken for polecats – as road casualties. And many must get themselves into other kind of trouble. The bottom line is, ferrets wandering about the countryside do nobody any good, not the ferrets themselves, not the wildlife, and not falconry. Don't we always insist on telemetry for the very same reasons?

EQUIPMENT

Before electronic help was at hand, the only way of locating a below-ground ferret was to use a line-hob. What a fiasco. A big male ferret, dragging a line behind him, sent to ground to locate a rabbit-occupied jill. Round and round, up and down, away would go the hob reeling off the line, which, although marked off at regular intervals, hardly gave an accurate guide as to how far, or in which direction, he had gone. And then flexible sticks and lots of exploratory digging to track him down. A locator in your Christmas stocking must have been like a bar of gold!

The market has seen several locator kits over the years but the one most familiar to falconer-ferreterers will be the 'Ferret Finder' from Deben Group Industries Ltd. I have been using this system for many years and find it faultless. For those unfamiliar with this bit of kit: the ferret wears a collar onto which a small transmitter is fixed and the signal this emits is picked up by a small hand-held receiver. Two versions are available, the 8ft option or the more powerful 15ft set. Whichever you choose, the hope is that you never see the thing registering a 'find' straight below it at its maximum range! The equipment really is very simple to use and can of course be practised with before testing it 'under fire'. And I should add it draws a lot less attention than practising with telemetry! To run

through the procedure: the range setting/volume control is turned to full and the warren is swept over until a signal is picked up. Obviously the 15 ft set gives you a greater range during this initial search than its less powerful cousin. With a signal (a 'dotting' tone) picked up, the range control is reduced while scanning continues. Eventually, depth and exact location are known.

SUITABLE SITES

No-one can guarantee that a dig isn't going to turn into a drawn out problematic affair. Each warren is individual and the simplest looking set-ups can throw the biggest spanners! However, if precautions are taken to avoid difficult sites, then digging can be a surprisingly speedy business.

When ferreting a well-known patch, you become familiar with problem locations – and learn to avoid them! A good example might be a warren that runs too deep for practical spadework. And always to be avoided are warrens that won't allow digging at all. Warrens in rock piles and old farm machinery scream trouble. As do those located under large trees. Here the root system might require hacking through – and how rabbits seem to know this! Warrens actually located inside trees are still more to the quarry's liking. It's odd to think of rabbits living inside hollow trees but this is a very popular housing arrangement. Obviously, such dens are impregnable fortresses, defying anything short of a chainsaw! It's not always easy to pass them by – especially when the dog is mad to give it a go – but such warrens always hold trouble. I recall a hollow tree warren that the dog begged me to try. It was a real trap – just one small entrance/exit hole – and I was a real fool. In went the ferret, and, after a good deal of bumping and banging, out came a rabbit, which the hawk missed. And soon out came the ferret too, minus her locator collar! There was absolutely no way to retrieve it. Flights don't come much more expensive!

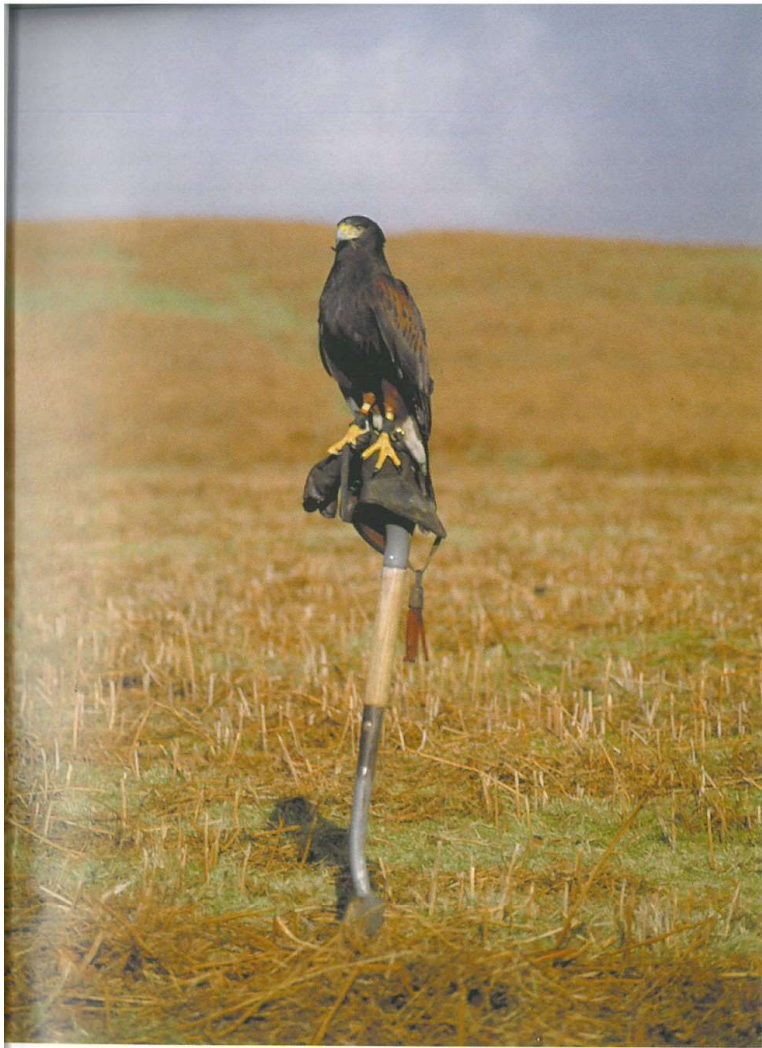
DIG OR WAIT?

Just when to reach for the locator and the spade is a question of how well you know the ferret and thus what it might be up to, and how keen you are for the rabbit. If the ferret has killed or is in the process of killing, then too long a wait might see her move on to bolt another rabbit or return to the surface. For those falconers more interested in flights than rabbit meat, this is preferable to digging. If the meat is required, then digging will tend to be sooner rather than later. As I rely on rabbit meat for both the kitchen and menagerie, I most definitely fall into the second bracket. I don't look to dig – I want the flights – but most of the patches I operate over have suffered some modification.

Of course, even though the decision to dig may have been made, it doesn't mean that digging is automatically going to follow. A scan of the warren might reveal that the ferret is still-hunting, thus sending back a moving or difficult to pinpoint signal. This is a common occurrence and it's surprising just how difficult to locate a ferret can be when it's engaged in a frantic hunt in a big warren. The action can move along at a shocking pace as prey and predator race through the tunnels.

If a signal is proving impossible to locate there may be another, less desirable answer. It might be that the collar has failed, or, more accurately, that you have failed to be aware of its status. It is all too easy for a collar that was working at the car, to become a collar that is not working several warrens later. Collars take quite a battering below ground, are rubbed against roots, become caked in soil, it's certainly not impossible for battery contact to be lost. Occasionally checking your gear is a wise move.

There might be a rock-steady signal, but coming up from a depth that encourages a cold sweat! If I run into really deep trouble, my own approach is to wait, reassuring myself that the last thing on the ferret's mind is food or sleep. If I must, my next move will be to play 'Big-Top' entertainer with the calling at holes and dead rabbit routine. And, of



course, unlike the locator-less ferreter, I can still dig if I have to, but if a great depth is involved, a full re-landscaping job might be on the cards.

Really deep digs create problems in two areas. Firstly, a standard spade, the type most falconers grab from the gardening tools, isn't much help beyond 2.5ft. Even working on your knees, there comes a point where digging and the removal of soil becomes impossible. A special ferreting spade, the sort Bob Smithson refers to in *Rabbiting* (1990 edition) as the Norfolk long spade, will solve this problem but not the next – getting to the bottom of the hole yourself! When I was a child I fell into some workings being dug for drainage. I was stuck fast, one arm pinned to my side, the other above my head. The feeling of helplessness was overwhelming and perhaps accounts for me being

reluctant to lower myself headfirst into deep holes. I have done it, and have been hung onto by others as I groped for ferret and rabbit, but it's not a pleasant feeling knowing you are relying on help to retrieve you when the job is done. Other writers have drawn attention to this problem. Smithson even highlights the risk of a cave in, and it's certainly an aspect of deep digging that can be very unsavoury.

But let's assume a steady signal at an accommodating depth, say 1.5 - 2ft. My first bit of advice would be to pinpoint the ferret's position as accurately as possible; you only have to be a little out and the shaft you dig might miss the rabbit's tunnel. If what should have been a ferret at 1ft, still isn't a ferret at 2ft then this has happened. Checking and re-checking with the locator as you dig will

discover the problem, but better to be precise to begin with. Then, go at it like mad! The longer it takes to dig, the more chance there is of the ferret killing and moving on, and nothing is more aggravating than being almost there and have the signal fade. If I'm going to go to the trouble of digging then I want that rabbit! The act of digging can influence the underground battle significantly. For example, the ferret might be working at a reluctant-to-bolt rabbit that decides to move as it feels the disturbance above it. Such an animal might move along the tunnel – or fly into the open! And a secured rabbit might drag the ferret with it. I've seen some almost pull a small female out of the warren! In reality, while many digs just go straight to ferret and rabbit, it's not unusual to have to dig more than one hole.

Perhaps a word of caution regarding possible injury to the ferret. All that busy digging needs to be conducted with caution as the ferret's position is neared. Trench work should become more archaeological dig as the spade is eased the last little bit. The actual breaking into of the tunnel is normally felt quite clearly as all resistance goes. It doesn't take too much imagination to visualise what might happen if a heavy boot is being employed.

Digging to a ferret is an interesting business in that you never know exactly what you'll find. Sometimes you break into the tunnel to immediately spy the ferret and rabbit. Sometimes you find one or the other, and sometimes neither! The last scenario generally means that ferret and rabbit are just a short way along the tunnel and a bit of groping will locate them, and I need barely add that this is not a game to play with a ferret you are not sure of! Of course, the breaking into of the tunnel can separate ferret and prey; the rabbit is bundled up, its rear to its enemy in a dead end, and the dig brings you directly between them. With the ferret having been interrupted and, typically, staring right up at you, this is a good opportunity to remove it from the scene. But don't dally, while the

rabbit might appear set on staying put, the only thing that was keeping it cornered is now gone. I have not yet had a rabbit do a turn around or indeed, fly from the exit shaft I have provided, but the possibility is there. Frequently, however, the dig culminates with the rabbit and ferret being removed from the hole together. In such a case, the ferret should never be forcibly removed from its victim; it's like robbing a hawk of its kill, it doesn't build a happy relationship. The best policy is to kill the rabbit. The ferret will then lose interest in it. Another option is to lie the rabbit on the ground and, with it motionless, wait for the ferret to alter its hold and, mid-shift, remove it. And, of course, all of this needs to be done without the hawk seeing a thing. Yes, the hawk...

Just what to do with the hawk during a dig will depend on whether you have help, the way in which the hawk is being flown, and, to a degree, the type of hawk it is. Lone ferreting is something I try to avoid at all costs. It

can be done, but operating with a partner makes the whole experience much more pleasurable – and don't forget the carrying of all that gear! A ferreting partner allows the hawk to be kept ready for a flight should a rabbit bolt mid-dig, and so many flights are had this way.

Without help, the hawk will normally have to be secured and, preferably, hooded. With the Harris' I tend to do a lot of ferreting with the hawk loose, normally in trees, sometimes soaring. Under such conditions I have occasionally found it possible to dig and retrieve ferret and rabbit with the hawk left at liberty; it's often possible to kill the rabbit in the spade hole and 'feed' it unseen into a rucksack. However, a Harris' doesn't have to do too much ferreting to grasp what's going on, and even though it may never have seen a rabbit being removed from a hole, it just seems to know. It understands about the spade, and it certainly understands about the sound the locator makes when it hits

the spot. It's a perfect example of just how perceptive the parabeuteo is, and how infuriating it can be! Down comes the want-to-get-in-on-the-act hawk, hopping about like an idiot and raising the temperature. If this does prove a problem, I switch to flying off the glove (only of course possible with help) and may, if the bird is proving restless, even fly out of the hood.

CONCLUDING NOTE

I hope I have offered a sound argument that being able to dig to ferrets is both essential and, the odd 'hiccup' excepted, less daunting than is often imagined. The locator-equipped falconer is the responsible falconer. Newcomers to the sport put a lot of effort into mastering telemetry and have its required status drummed home. Considering how vital the rabbit is to European falconry, and especially to falconry in the UK, ferret-locating equipment should be treated in the same manner. ■

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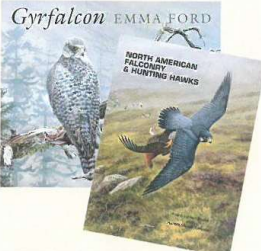
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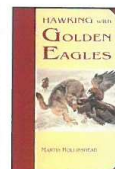
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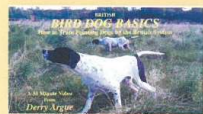
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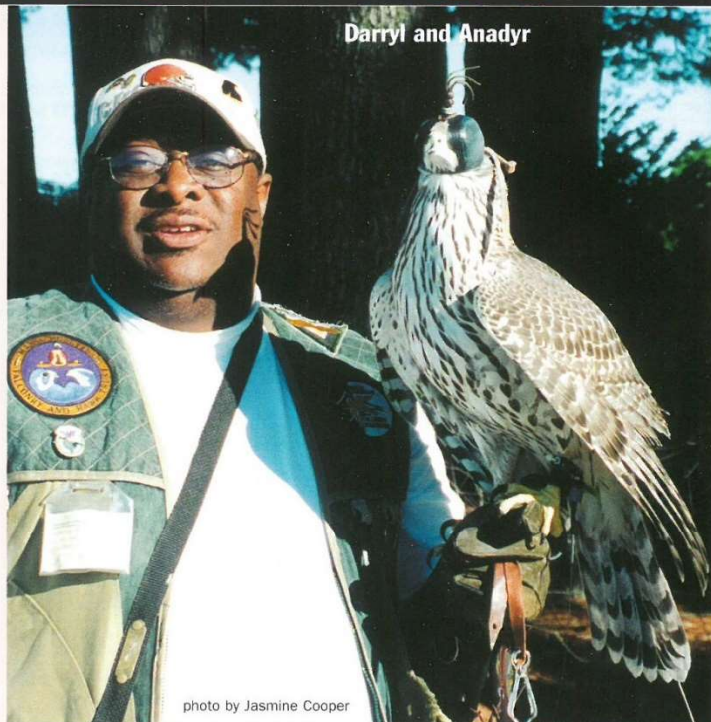
WHEN EAST MEETS WEST

by Darryl A. Perkins

BEGINNINGS

Vladimir emerged from his tent with snowshoes in hand. He paused briefly before stretching and donning his backpack for the long trek to the trapping ridge. In his backpack are food and water for the day and six pigeons in separate paper bags. Like his father before him, he was the son of a falconer and a hawk trapper. Since a sudden storm blew in and ruined yesterday's chances, his thoughts drifted to the trapping attempts made the previous day when the bow-net failed. Hopefully, the big female gos was still in the area. Two days ago, the bow-net had malfunctioned and she enjoyed a fine meal of pigeon as Vlad watched helplessly from the blind. Rather than spook her by bumping her and resetting the trap, he decided to let her feed in hope of keeping her in the area. A pigeon would not hold a large goshawk such as she in this frozen taiga of eastern Siberia. If luck were with him, the storm would limit her hunting and keep her in the general vicinity.

It's a brisk, chilly morning and



Darryl and Anadyr

photo by Jasmine Cooper

having fasted yesterday due to harsh weather, the passage female is hungry but in top condition as she launches from last night's roost, a fir tree along a tributary of the Lena river in eastern Siberia. She gains purchase through the crisp Russian air and with the flap, flap, flap and glide flight pattern so typical of the travelling accipiter, makes her way southward with the

winds. She drifts southward scanning the undergrowth for any signs of movement. Capercaillie, grouse and mountain hare are her staple fare this time of year. Two days ago, she fed on a fat pigeon that made no attempt to escape. This memory influenced her direction as she continued to hunt. A crow, a veteran of many dogfights and harassing sorties flashes down briefly

from above to hurry her along her route. She's familiar with this game and ignores him. If, however, he had made a tactical mistake, shown the slightest sign of injury or weakness, her predacious constitution would rise to the forefront and the crow's life would be in peril. As it were she continued her flight, a top-of-the-food-chain predator full of life and vigor on this, a splendid Siberian day.

As she approaches the site of her previous kill, a flash of wings a half mile east on a distant ridge catches her attention. Her head bobs, searching for movement when suddenly there it is again, a second flash of wings signaling a pigeon in distress. This surprising occurrence causes her to alter course. Instantly she swings eastward and drops lower using trees to mask her approach. Another flash of wings and her primitive reptilian brain, which sometimes can't distinguish between shadows and monsters, quickly processes the information and concludes another easy meal. She affixes her gaze upon the prey, sets her wings and comes in on a long, flat glide. While 50ft away, she starts rocking back and forth. This manoeuvre meant to confuse the prey and force a straightaway climbing flight. With a last second burst, she has the hapless pigeon in her talons. There's a sudden metallic 'click' and she is entangled in netting as a two-legged monster bears down on her. Her attempts to flee are in vain and with eyes blared and beak agape, she settles in to fight but is quickly overpowered and carried into what appears to be a large mound of dirt and leaves.

Back in the blind, Vlad smiles as he weighs his freshly trapped charge - 58 oz. Experience has taught him that after manning, 53 - 54 oz would be her initial flying weight. Her light colouration indicates an eventual powder-blue colour in adult plumage but he couldn't be sure. It was sometimes hard to distinguish the light phase western Siberian goshawk (*A. g. buteoides*) from the eastern birds

(*A. g. albidus*). If she was in fact *buteoides* as he suspected, her second year plumage would be most striking showing dorsal barring on the nape, shoulders and some coverts, that is similar to the underside of adult goshawks. Her subsequent moults would see the barring becoming less apparent until attaining a striking powder-blue. She was a fine specimen and would do well on ducks and hare. Years later, a bird of her lineage would be on a plane headed for Bradley International Airport in Hartford Connecticut.

BACKGROUND

The Siberian goshawk, long the bird of myth, has been the object of fascination for falconers since the beginning of the sport. Except for books and photographs, few western falconers have ever seen this goshawk

of legendary proportions. For years, tales of 50oz-plus behemoths have floated westward to the minds and imaginations of western falconers. While there are several subspecies of goshawk in Siberia (Dementev, 1951), the two that hold the most interest for western falconers are the white goshawks of Kamchatka (*A. g. albidus*) and the large subspecies whose range is west of *albidus* (*A. g. buteoides*) with some overlap in breeding territory. Now, thanks to the efforts of the Northern Plains Breeding Coop, both these excellent falconry birds are available to New World falconers.

White morphs can occur in both subspecies with 50% of *albidus* being white compared to only 10% of *buteoides*. *Albidus* is believed to be the palest of all forms with some white and grey variations. While Kamchatka is the region most

photo by V Hardaswick



Albidus female

associated with white goshawks, *albidus* does breed as far north as the Indigirka, Kolyma and Anadyr rivers (Dementev, 1951). The immature *albidus* that I've seen were an off white colour with faint tan marking along the neck and a whisper of vertical splotches on the chest. The adults range from nearly all white to white with varying degrees of grey on chest and back. Game species that inhabit the frozen taiga forest of eastern

Russia and Finland (Voipo, 1946) and Lapland below 68 - 70° N. latitude. Colouration is considerably lighter than nominate (*gentilis*) form. Adult pale, males dorsally bluish, females greyish; crown light with white preponderant on forehead and nape, back of neck dorsally and forepart back more rarely barred gray brown against white resembling underparts of adult goshawk. (Dementev, 1951). The second year plumage of *buteoides*

The western Siberian goshawk is larger than the nominate form but supposedly smaller than *albidus*. The males weigh between 870 - 1170 grams (approx 31oz - 42oz) and females between 1185 - 1509 grams (approx 42oz - 54oz) (Camp 1980). Again, of the twelve or so specimens I've seen, the *buteoides* subspecies have been larger than *albidus*. In the Indian summer days of October, (60°C) Anadyr is flying at 51.5oz



Siberia include ducks, hare, capercaillie and ptarmigan, all of which find themselves preyed upon by *albidus*. The eastern Siberian goshawk, *A. g. albidus* is considered the largest goshawk in the world with males weighing over 1200 grams (Pallas, 1811). An immature female with still developing wings and tail weighed over 1390 grams (Dementev, 1951). However, the largest goshawk I have ever seen is The Thug, a western Siberian goshawk *A. g. buteoides*.

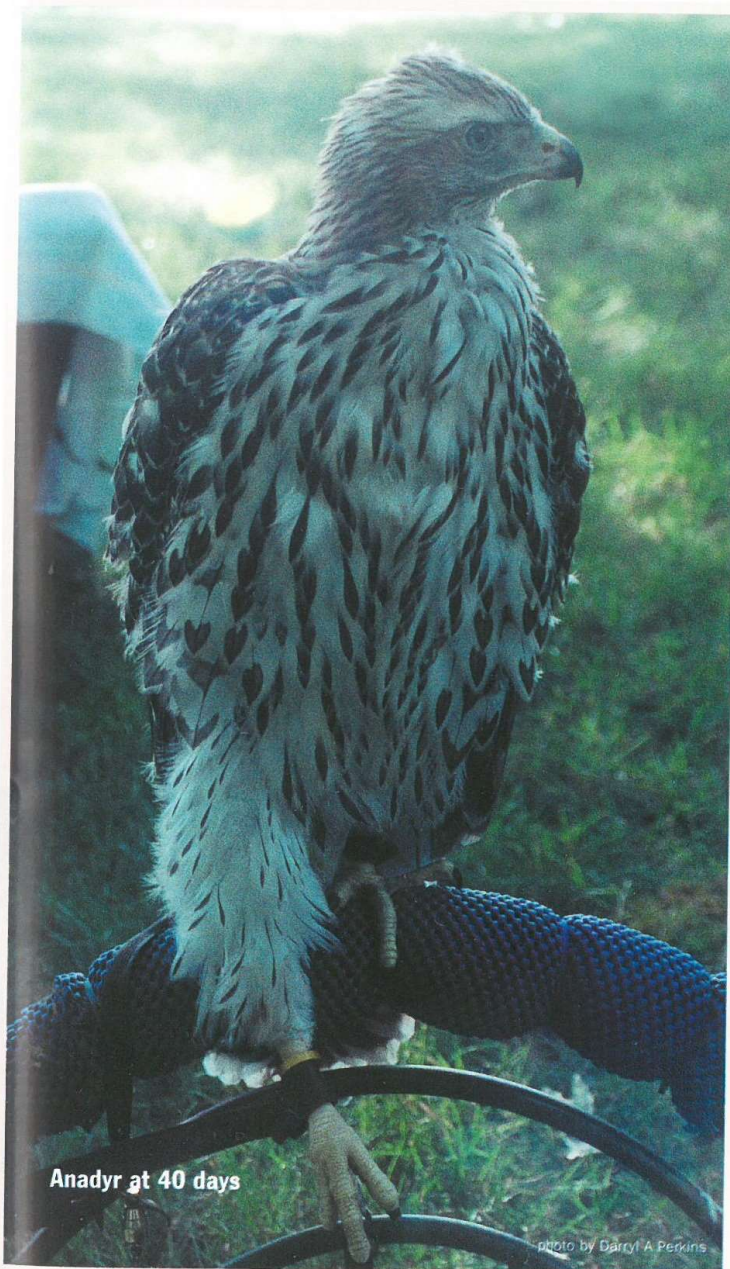
The western Siberian goshawk ranges west of *albidus* occupying the forest zone from Lake Onega in the west to the Lena river basin in the east where there is some overlap with *albidus*. It's found in winter in central

is quite striking. Like Dementev's description, the barring on the nape, shoulders, back and in the case of the ones I've seen, some primaries and coverts, resembles the plumage of a Plymouth Rock chicken. It also appears that the barring, at least in some individuals, is less pronounced in the third year giving way to a more powder-blue plumage. It is my opinion that the powder-blue morph, with or without the heavy barring is the most striking in appearance of all the goshawks. I liken the colour variations in *buteoides*, from white to powder or ice blue, to the range in eye colour of the Siberian Husky, also white to ice blue. Like *albidus* it feeds on woodland species like capercaillie, willow ptarmigan and white hares.

(1445.85 grams). I suspect that in cold weather when she's muscled up she'll fly at around 54oz or (1530.9 grams). Her brother is currently flying at 35oz (992.25 grams). Both are imprints.

OBSERVATIONS

Anadyr is an imprint western Siberian goshawk bred by Victor Hardaswick of the Northern Plains Breeding Coop. Shortly after collecting Anadyr from the cargo bay at Northwest Airlines, I was sitting in the truck admiring her and smiling to myself. After all, she wasn't in any way what I had expected. From the time I learned of her pipping, I had been led to believe (see Hood



Anadyr at 40 days

photo by Darryl A Perkins

Winked... 2001 *NAFA Journal*) that she was a male and a rather small one. Probably fly at 31oz I was told. Well, she was 21 days old now and unless I missed my guess, she had already passed the 31oz mark.

Having flown imprint and passage North American goshawks of both sexes, both sexes of Finnish goshawks, imprint and parent-reared

and a German gos to boot, I was anxious to try a Siberian goshawk. Like other falconers I had read about them and occasionally seen a photo or two and listened intently to the conversations of the few western falconers whose travels abroad had put them in contact with a falconer who had flown Siberian goshawks or knew someone who did. A friend half-

jokingly asked recently, "Is your book ever going to come out?" "Sure," I said. "As soon as I fly a Siberian goshawk." "Never happen," was always his reply. Now he calls twice a week and always ends the conversation with, "You are one lucky SOB." That I am my boy! That I am!

I'm fortunate in that I have the time to raise a goshawk and when doing so I don't have the luxury of vacations, or weekends off or even guests. My children know that when visiting in the summer, they will be sharing the house with 'hawk-chalk', downy dust, quail body parts and the like. When I do make necessary trips to God's country (North Carolina), I take hawk, 'chalk' and everything else with me. Anadyr settled in nicely at 21 days old. She spent most of her day lying on ice blocks covered by plastic tarps with both a fan and air conditioner on. Like all my goshawks, she was raised watching *Sports Centre* on ESPN. The TV is a surrogate parent and fills the bill while I'm out earning hawk food money. Until she was hard-penned and chasing game, her eating habits were more falcon-like than goshawk. She would really attack her food, wolf it down and take huge, huge crops. Dementev states that one bird had 480 grams of meat or the average weight of an eastern Cooper's hawk in her crop. She was twice as vocal, (talking not screaming) as the Finnish birds. She was more curious and would get fixated on an ant or feather and watch it for 30 minutes without moving a muscle. This same behaviour is exhibited on a kill. She will stop feeding and watch a dickey bird or airplane for 30 minutes and remain frozen. Not mantling or hiding the kill, but with her long neck stuck straight up. A strange dog, or hat or shoe would set her off and then 5 minutes later that new monster would become a part of her life to be ignored forever more. She recently caught a pheasant about 20ft from a 'Bobcat' (heavy equipment) operator who was extracting a tree at the nursery. She did glance at it occasionally but

Anadyr today



photo by Darryl A Perkins

otherwise ignored it. Usually when she first catches something she is a 50oz Cooper's hawk. Evil of the highest order. She's mantling and screaming like you wouldn't believe. As soon as the plucking begins, and she plucks every single feather, she tightens up and you would think a nice passage goshawk is feeding. She plucks the wings completely and she plucks the pheasant's head. I'm a bit puzzled by this behaviour as it occurs at all weight ranges. I would think that given her harsh environment,

plucking would be a luxury that she couldn't afford. She breaks bones with her beak like a falcon. In fact her love of wing bones and all bones for that matter leads me to believe or at least theorise, that there is a greater nutritional need for bones or calcium in these birds. If fed at 10:00 am, she casts 12 hours later at 10:00 pm. Her body is so big that the feet have the appearance of being small. Believe me, they are not! While her feet appear to be slightly less heavy than Atlanta (my Finnish imprint), they are

much longer. You couldn't really describe her as having short rounded wings and a long tail. The tail is long but the wings appear to be longer proportionately than either the North American or Finnish subspecies. Her wings are certainly unlike a Ferruginous, but think of a Ferruginous wing compared to a redtail wing and you'll see what I mean. In level flight when she really turns it on, it seems as if only the wing tips are moving which is reminiscent of large falcons. Her tenacity and desire to chase and kill is even more pronounced than the Finnish birds.

Anadyr is certainly different from any other gos I've handled and a good learning experience. I would be interested in corresponding with other falconers who have flown Siberian goshawks, especially imprints. As the temperature drops and she starts chasing hard, wild quarry I'm sure Anadyr will prove to be an excellent game hawk. At the time of writing however, she has not been tested. I'm gearing up for my annual trip and we'll just see how she dances with the Whitetails! ■

Darryl's book, *Understanding Goshawks* should be coming out soon. Visit his website.

<http://everythingblack.websitenow.com/daperkins/index.html> for updates.

You may e-mail him at

UndstndGoshawks@cs.com or

Dapconsult@cs.com

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- Camp Stanley, Chief Editor (1980), *Birds of The Western Palearctic, Vol II*
Dementev, G. P. (1951) *Birds of The Soviet Union Vol I*



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Membership to a falconry club is not necessary, so plan a great get-away and join us in Iowa. We will have a weathering yard, a raffle, a vendor room, a prime rib buffet dinner for \$16 (tickets will be sold by the hotel at the front desk), plus a guest speaker - the world renown falconer Dr. Heinz Meng.

There will be no pre-registration. Registration will be handled by Kevin Suedmeyer in the hotel starting Friday morning (the 18th) and will continue Saturday until noon. Registration fee will be \$20 which includes a Meet print and pin. You can purchase a hunting license for \$69 and hunting guide books in the registration room.

If you can donate a raffle item or wish to display your wares in the vendor room, please contact Mike Beebe at 815-690-8733. Or you can send raffle items to Mike Beebe, c/o George Kotsiopoulos, RR1 Box 64, Crescent City, IL 60928. To make reservations, call the Red Fox Inn at 800-397-5330. If the Red Fox is full, call Amerhost Inn at 800-434-5800. Individuals will only be allowed to make one reservation and you will be asked who you will share a room with. This is to prevent any vacant rooms since it is hoped everyone will be able to stay at the Meet hotel. (Red Fox room rates for the 3rd Annual Central U.S. Falconry Meet are \$58.00 adult and children 17 and under Free with adult). Hope to see you there.

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Adult female *jarudi saker*.

THE SAKER FALCON

its conservation
and use in
Arabic falconry

by Mike Nicholls and Chris Eastham

photos by Nigel Barton

The soft-feathered saker has a long and close relationship with Arabic falconry, and for thousands of years saker falcons have been sustainably harvested from the wild. In the last 50 years, however, central Asia and the Middle East have undergone some radical political, social and economic changes. But to what extent have these changes affected the saker, both in the wild and in Arabic falconry?

In the past, mainly juvenile female sakers were trapped in the Middle East whilst on first migration (or passage), trained and flown for a hunting season, before released back to the wild. As passage females are relatively easier to train than adults (or haggards) and they showed a disregard for danger when hunting,

mainly in Pakistan, but also in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Syria, Iran, and Iraq.

Today, sakers are still bought in the falcon markets. However, due to the increased demand and prices paid for preferred saker types used in Arabic falconry, the acquisition of independence for the central Asia countries, and the fall of soviet communism, falcon trappers have started to harvest both juvenile and adult falcons from the breeding grounds throughout Asia. The removal of adults from the breeding population is considered to have a particularly damaging effect on the population of the species.

Although the production of captive-bred falcons has reduced some of the demand for wild-caught



Adult male 'Altai' saker

permits for a number of sakers to be legally trapped each season. In 1994, 80 falcons were exported, in 1995 a further 80, in 1996, 20 falcons, and in 1997, 150 falcons were exported, mainly to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. However, a proportion of these falcons were adults possibly removed from the breeding population, and in addition to these legally trapped birds an unknown number of illegally trapped sakers were smuggled out of Mongolia. Reports of smuggling have also been noted in Russia, China, Kazakstan, and Kyrgyzstan.

The Arabic classification of the saker and other falcons, such as the peregrine, gyr, and lanner, used in Arabic falconry is based on external morphological traits - size, shape colour and pattern. Although there appears to be some confusion when reviewing relevant literature regarding the various Arabic names given to particular types, possibly originating from regional differences between the various Arabic tribes, there are certain saker types that are favoured by Arab falconers more than others. Preferred types usually display some character of appearance which appeals to the Arab falconer, and are, ▶



they were considered by Arab falconers to be the optimum hunting bird. Some birds were trapped by the falconers themselves whilst others were purchased in the falcon markets

birds, the pressure from trapping has had a negative impact on certain saker populations, i.e. Kyrgyzstan and south-eastern Kazakstan. The Mongolian government has granted



therefore, in greater demand. As a result these preferred types fetch a higher price and are selectively harvested from the wild.

The preferred saker types used in Arabic falconry are considered to be the large pale *ashgar* and *abiyad* types and the large dark *sinjari* and *shunqar* types rather than the small brown *wukra al-harrar*, plain reddish *hurr shami*, and green *aukthar* types. *Jarudi* types with barred backs are also considered more appealing rather than the dorsally uniform types. Indian falconers prefer sakers trapped in November which they call 'mountain' sakers rather than the 'plains' saker trapped earlier in the season. These mountain birds are presumed to have migrated the furthest and originate from the northern ranges. Because of their larger size female sakers or *hurr* are preferred more than males or *garmoosha*; size is necessary when hunting large desert quarry such as the *houbara*.

Are the preferred saker types used in Arabic falconry associated with particular geographic regions? If so, is

it possible to predict which populations may be under threat from the over-trapping? To answer these questions, and help conserve the saker, a research project was established to investigate geographic variation using morphological measurements.

Research showed that, in size, shape and colour, sakers are highly variable, and the greater part of this variation is random between individuals, which may be the result of its migratory behaviour resulting in mixing of birds from neighbouring populations. There was, however, some slight geographic variation in size, plumage colour and pattern, showing a gradual cline between western lowland and eastern upland regions. Due to sakers exhibiting weak clinal geographic variation none of the previously described subspecies, such as *Falco cherrug milvipes*, *F. c. coatsi*, *F. c. cherrug* are now recognised.

Sakers, however, may be broadly divided into two forms: western lowland (smaller sized, dorsally uniform brown and ventrally spotted sakers mainly found in western lowland regions, such as northern and southern Kazakstan, south-west Russia, and eastern Europe) and eastern highland forms (larger sized, dorsally barred russet and ventrally pale sakers found in the eastern highland regions, such as south-east Russia, Mongolia, and China). The dark brown and grey so-called 'Altai falcons' are classified as colour morphs of the eastern highland saker form, which may have retained gyrl-like features from the common ancestor between gyrs and sakers.

Sakers of the eastern highland form are considered under most threat from over-trapping as they possess external appearance, such as large size, barred dorsal plumage (*jarudi* types), and pale ventral plumage (*ashgar* and *abiyad* types), favoured by Arab falconers. In particular the

large dark brown and grey barred sakers (*sinjari* and *shunqar* types, the so-called 'Altai falcon') from the north-eastern ranges, such as Mongolia, northern China, south-east Russia and the Altai and surrounding mountain ranges which overlap these three countries, are considered under greatest pressure. Conservation projects should therefore be directed towards the eastern saker populations.

Other species such as the gyr, which due to their large size, barred plumage, and extreme pale or dark colour variants are also favoured by Arab falconers. Additionally it is estimated that 3,000 peregrines are trapped and used in Arab falconry each season. All these should be monitored to investigate whether populations are being depleted from over-trapping.

To establish whether the current rate of trapping of sakers is having an effect on wild populations, estimates of total breeding population size and the numbers of falcons removed from the wild must be calculated. Cade (1982) estimates a world saker population size of somewhere between 20,000-100,000 nesting pairs, while Baumgart (1991) estimates a population size of 35,000-40,000. However, the exact figure is still unknown as large areas of saker habitat, such as parts of China and Russia, remain unsurveyed. Estimates of numbers of sakers taken from the wild each season vary from 2,000 females to 4,500 and these figures suggest that the harvest is increasing.

If we assume a world population of 30,000 nesting sakers, and that each pair produces approximately 3 young per nest, then 90,000 young will be produced each year. If an estimated 40,000 of the young produced are females and approximately 3,000 of these are harvested for Arab falconry, then this figure represents only 7.5% of the total juvenile female population. When compared to the estimated 78%

mortality rate of juvenile sakers within their first year, it is considered that the 7.5% of trapped juvenile sakers is inconsequential to the population stability of the species, and the current rate of trapping is sustainable. However, there are a number of compounding problems such as:

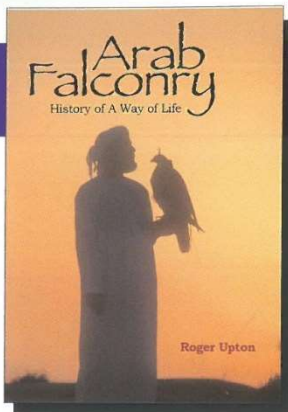
1. Estimates of sakers used in Arab falconry are based upon birds which already belong to Arab falconers or birds passing through the falcon hospitals in the Middle East, and, therefore, as many birds perish before they reach the falcon markets, do not reflect the true total number of sakers taken from the wild.
2. Due to little information concerning the numbers of preferred sakers types used in Arab falconry, and the population sizes from which these types originate from, it is not known whether over-trapping is having a disproportionate effect on certain saker populations.
3. Breeding adult sakers are being harvested and this will have a rapid impact on wild populations.

Research on saker populations continues and in the future the status of the saker will become clearer. It is hoped that recent and on-going war against terrorism in Afghanistan will not adversely affect wild sakers and that Arabic falconry will long continue its traditional practices and values.

Thanks to the National Avian Research Centre of the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency, Abu Dhabi, UAE, for supporting the PhD project on which this article is based. ■



Adult male red shami



BOOK REVIEW

A review by
Nicholas Kester

Arab Falconry

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By Roger Upton

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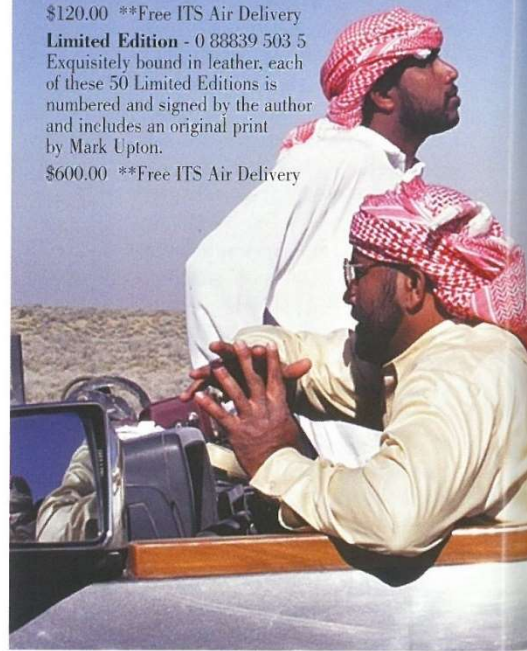
If we deserve to be judged by our peers, then this is the toughest review I have ever written. So few westerners have witnessed Arab falconry that finding Roger Upton's peer is far from easy. So I have written as I have found rather than from what I know. And with that caveat behind me, here is a wonderful book.

I say that with some difficulty having only a black and white proof. However the publishers have an enviable reputation for quality and there should be no doubts about the finished product. I cannot wait, especially as it promises some illustrations by Roger's son Mark, an artist of exceptional talent.

If I have reservations, they are mostly born out of frustration. There is an obvious desire by the author not to replicate Mark Allen's *Falconry in Arabia* (1980); not that this would have mattered to a new generation, the book being out of print. Upton's introduction affords us few insights into how he came to Arabia, how he obtained his first invitation, how the traditions developed in some countries and not in others, and how he views the future. A map would also be useful for many of the places are not commonly known to westerners. Where is Bani Yas Island?

Arab falconers, not having the scientific disciplines of their western counterparts, have developed an amazing range of preconceptions as to the perfect build and colour of a successful falcon. There was even a legend that the first hatch from a lanner's clutch would grow into a peregrine falcon, the last into its tiercel, with those in the middle being lanners. The chapter on hawks used contains much complex nomenclature for falcons with this or that ability, colour and size. In fact, for the humble reader, it all gets a bit much.

And from this stems my only concern with the overall production. Everywhere there are pictures of static hawks – not a person in sight. Indeed there are seven pages exclusively devoted to the variety of hawks flown. This detracts from the atmosphere that



more general shots would introduce. So much did I notice this that I rather unfairly calculated that over half the illustrations are, what is called in the trade, 'shooting gallery'. The general reader looks to be drawn into such a book through the photographs and I would rather have seen more full pages of atmosphere than the attempts to visually endorse this variety. But that is nitpicking and many will applaud such diversity.

It is the anecdotes and the experience that really sets the book alight. Roger Upton first visited Arabia in 1965, which if the number of diary entries is anything to go by was either a bonanza year, or perhaps just youthfully better recorded. By the same token, his main port of call was either Abu Dhabi or Morocco (possibly the preferred hunting grounds of his hosts). There are extensive sections on trapping, ▶

ARAB FALCONRY



BOOK REVIEW

Arab Falconry History of A Way of Life

training, foul medicines, and, of course, hunting. This latter includes the unique use of sakers as 'spotters', and a description of laming hares in 1965 – without much success. Slips at the legendary *houbara* can go huge distances – on one occasion 4 miles.

Too many anecdotes to include.

But I particularly enjoyed the story of the Saudi falconer who imprinted his lanners on campfires, and if ever lost would lure them in to huge fires to which they invariably returned in expectation of food. There is also a warning of the risks of desert 'check' – locusts! Apparently sakers love them, makes a change from pigeons.

There are references to ancient literature, both English and Arabic. The *Baz-Nama-Yi-Nasiri* is a mine of falconry lore. (Why is there no reprint of this work?) "To check the worth of a peregrine, count the scales on her middle toe. She should typically have seventeen or eighteen. If you have find a bird with twenty-one you have a treasure."

Similar books, many privately published, and then frustratingly referred to in the bibliography would also benefit from a wider audience. This includes the correspondence of a Captain Charles Upton in the early 1900s. Any relation?

But this last quote has to be one of the greatest truism in falconry: "Aggressive, wild hawks are usually easier to train than those that sit like statues, doing nothing wrong but equally doing nothing right. An aggressive hawk usually turns out to be a generous one, quick to learn and enthusiastic to quarry." ■



BOOK REVIEW

RAPTORS OF THE WORLD

by James Ferguson-Lees and
David A. Christie
Illustrated by Kim Franklin,
David Mead and Philip Burton.

ISBN: 0 7136 3966 0

Price: £49.00

Published by Christopher Helm,
an imprint of A & C Black
(Publishers) Ltd.

Reviewed by
Dick Treleven

This mighty tome has been awaited for so long that many believed it was a figment of the publisher's fertile imagination, a chimera - always due to appear shortly before Christmas then to disappear without trace. That it was worth waiting for is not in dispute - it is a superb production, well up to Christopher Helm's high standards. It runs to 991 pages and describes and illustrates all 331 of the world's raptors.

Falconers will find much of interest as they scurry through the pages in search of the elusive Altai Falcon. Is it really a gyr or saker? They will be little the wiser, for the authors do not know and suggest that it may be the result of wild hybridisation. It is refreshing to find distinguished ornithologists admitting that there are divergences of opinion. One of the book's great strengths is that it is not wrapped in the mind-boggling jargon that so frequently suffocates modern ornithological writing.

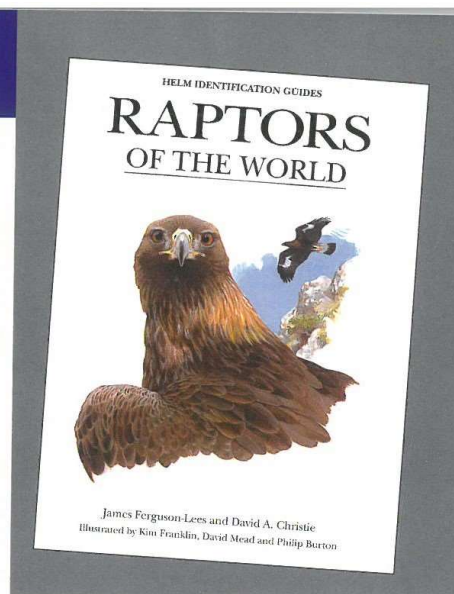
Apart from being a guide to identification, 70 pages are devoted to a review of the current thinking on all aspects of raptor behaviour. Carl Edelstam contributes three highly informative chapters on: - Raptor Moulting Patterns and Age Criteria, Raptor Vision, Hearing and Olfaction and Raptor Plumages and External

Structure. He warns that captive birds should never be used as a source of reference for moult patterns in the wild. Firstly, the lack of normal stimulation in captivity may disrupt the moult process. Secondly, regular access to a surplus of food will accelerate it considerably and suggests that in Sweden, food support for wintering white-tailed fish-eagles may have caused the birds to assume adult plumage earlier than the norm.

The subject of RSD (Reversed Sexual Dimorphism), which has been endlessly debated, is dealt with at length and many hypotheses are discussed. Many years ago J.H.M Pieters, the Dutch goshawk trapper, told me, somewhat wryly, that when one was wedded to a large powerful female (often bad tempered) one needed to be extremely agile to escape her clutches - thus it is with the goshawk. A point with which few would disagree.

The problem of ageing raptors in the wild has never been easy and the authors point out that photographic records are indispensable and much more accurate than the best visual descriptions. On the question of whether peregrine falcons' plumage changes with age, I sought the opinion of the late Jack Mavrogordato, a most experienced falconer. He maintained that they did not show any change at all. However, my own observations in the 'wild' are to the contrary and that the barring on tiercels becomes much neater and in general the white on the chest is more pronounced. The authors bemoan the practice of discarding the eponymous names of birds and say how much more evocative the name Isidor's eagle is than black and chestnut-eagle. It is perhaps not surprising that Archer's buzzard became the auger buzzard.

There is much to digest of great interest before one reaches the species descriptions. Falconers with menagerie tastes will have a field day as they peruse the pages and pages of exotic species and wonder what they would be like to train and fly in the



field. The illustrations are of a very high quality indeed and beautifully printed (in Singapore) and clearly labelled. The paintings are all of equal merit unlike the plates in Brown and Amadon (1968). By some curious mischance Philip Burton has illustrated many of the races of peregrine but had omitted *Fp calidus*, the one race which has turned up from time to time on the North coast of Devon and Cornwall. It is distinguished by its large size, thin moustache and pale plumage.

Rather disappointingly there is very little mention of hunting techniques and success rates and a failure to appreciate, in the case of some falcons, that the first stoop is not intended to be lethal but merely to manoeuvre the prey into a more easily catchable position. Tinbergen's classification of 'peak achievers' is ignored which makes the evaluation of hunting success rates subject to doubt.

One of the big problems in the UK is the number of hybrids which have been lost by falconers and which can only provoke utter confusion to the avid ornithologist.

I thoroughly recommend this book, it is excellent value, compact and concise. However, I would advise prospective buyers to undertake a crash course in weight lifting for it is a hefty volume - worthy of centre stage on anybody's bookshelf. ■

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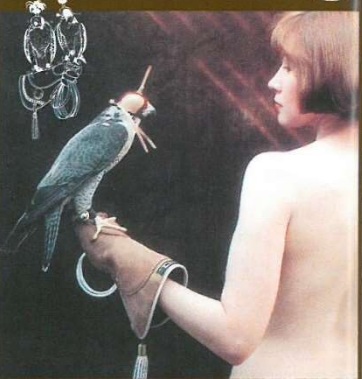
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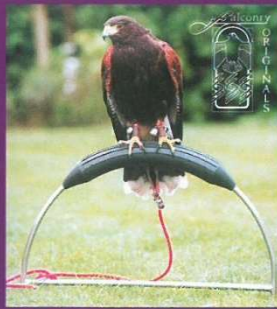
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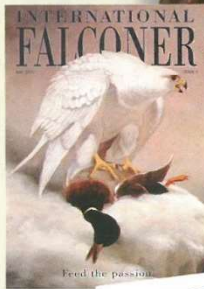
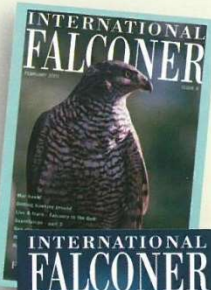
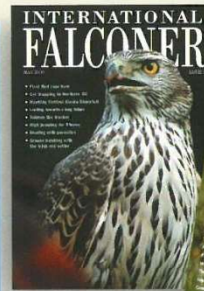
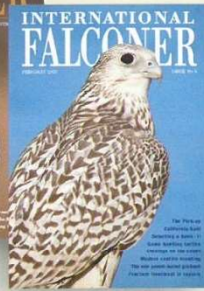
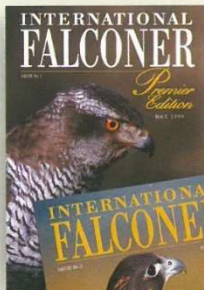
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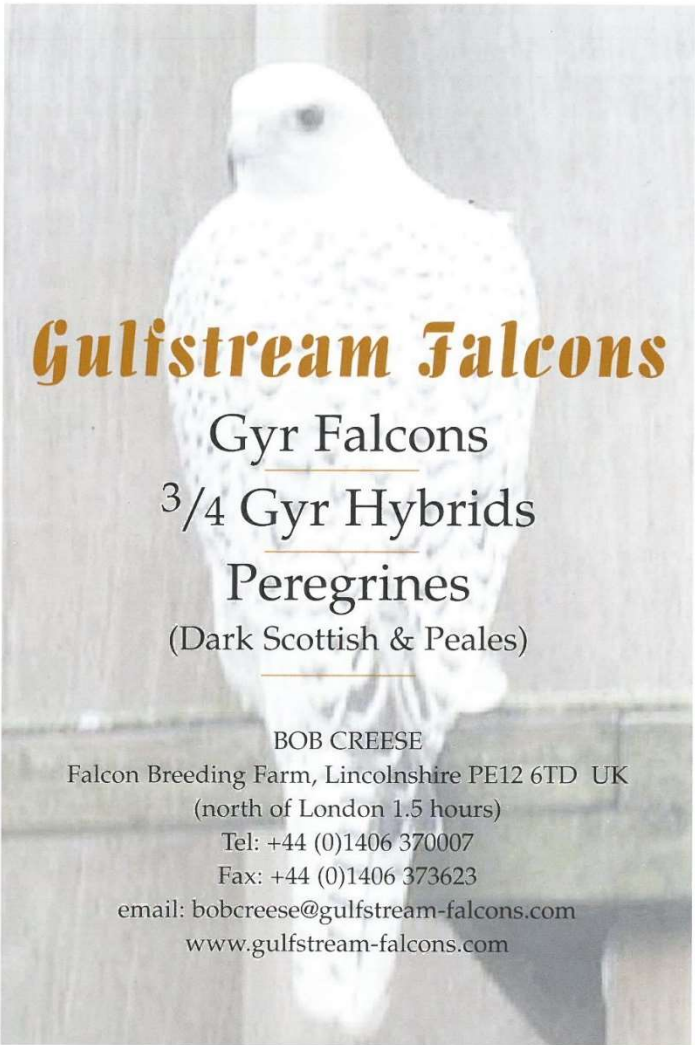
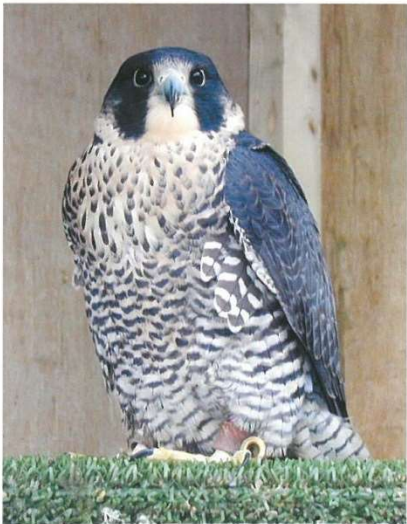
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