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Falconers Fair 2005
Words and pictures





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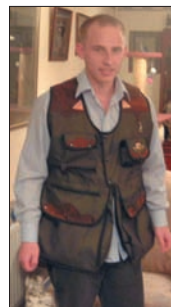
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Front Cover:
 Falconers Fair main arena
 - Peter Eldrett

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editorial



It's been a busy time all round since the last issue of this magazine. The 2005 Falconers Fair has been and gone, the game fair season is in full swing and many of our top professional falconers are busy giving their displays to both public and corporate guests alike. I hope that many of you find time to go and support the events that are on offer as they make a great day out.

I hope that you enjoy the varied articles in this issue, which range from the anecdotal to serious concerns of the plight of certain birds of prey species – among which is the Oriental White Backed Vulture. As you can see on page 38, a fund raising event was held at The Hawk Conservancy Trust to raise funds to continue the conservation programme of this bird. If we don't do anything to save this species soon, it will be wiped out completely in the wild. It is, of course, not the only one. The Asian Fishing Eagle is another and I hope that a story of the project to investigate the decline of this eagle will appear in *The Falconers Magazine* in the future.

I must point you to the Hawk Board News on page 12 as it contains developments concerning all falconers, including the drafting of the Animal Welfare Bill. A big thank you must go to Jim Chick, Martin Jones, Mike Clowes and Nick Kester and the rest of the hawk board for representing the hundreds of falconers in this country.

In the meantime,
have a good read.

Peter Eldrett

Falconers

news and products

Send all your news and product information to peter.eldrett@tiscali.co.uk

The TX9 Falconry Transmitter from Falconry Electronics Ltd

Designed with the short wing/broad wing falconer in mind the TX-9 is the latest addition to the Sterling range of falconry transmitters. The TX-9 includes all the high-end features of the TX-12 and 20, condensed into a micro sized unit. Still utilising the very latest programmable microelectronics to include BSC (battery saving circuit) and optional magnetic tap on, tap off switching. Beautifully engineered from aerospace aluminium with screw cap and short replaceable antenna.

Magnetic Switch: Falconry Electronics realise that some falconers have reservations about any magnetic switch when it comes to transmitters, so they have made this a "supplied as standard" feature that can be omitted if preferred.

How it works: Screw down the lid to switch on, touch and hold the magnetic wand against the Sterling logo, take the wand briskly away and the transmitter will stop (hibernate). The wand has to be held in place because a delay has been programmed into the transmitters control circuit to reduce the risk of false triggering, simply swiping the magnet across the transmitter will not turn it off. To turn on, again touch the Sterling logo. Three short pulses will be heard, this indicates that the transmitter is ready to start its normal pulse routine but only after the magnet is moved away. The magnetic switch used is a solid-state device, this means that there are no moving parts that may fail due to impact. However, in the unlikely event that the device does malfunction the switch will always default to "on". Please note that if left in hibernate mode, some battery drain, although extremely small will occur.

Battery Saving Circuit (BSC): The BSC battery monitor works by manipulating the pulse rate characteristics after a given period of time in order to extend the life of the batteries. When (every time) the transmitter is switched on, the BSC (Battery Saving Circuit) starts to count in real time. When this count reaches 12 hours the BSC comes into play and slows down the pulsed signal interval to a battery saving level. This results in more power for longer and ultimately more tracking time.

Statistics:

Weight: 6g including batteries
Body Size: 28mm x 10mm (11mm cap)
Antenna Length: 215mm (8.5")
Battery Size: Two 393 silver oxide batteries
Operating Life: 6 – 8 days
Range: 24km direct line of sight

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On The Wing

To the edge of the Earth with the Peregrine Falcon

Alan Tennant / Published by Secker & Warburg, ISBN 0436205416

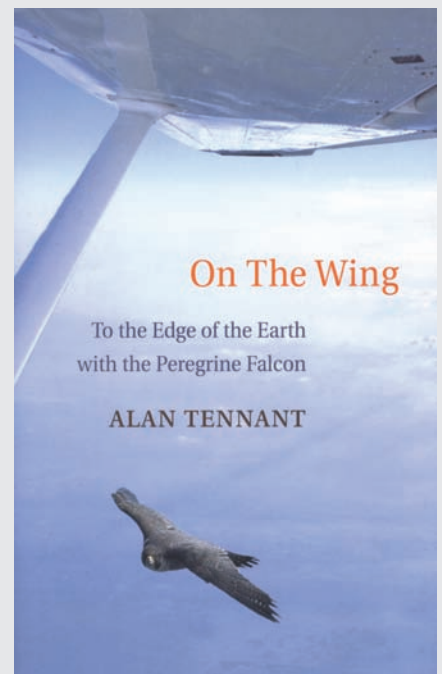
Published by Secker & Warburg (The Random House Group) this book can only be described a blend of the excitement and anticipation that you would expect from a fast moving fiction title with the breathtaking discoveries of a factual saga. And a saga is what this adventure is, as it takes the reader on a transcontinental journey from the flats of Texas to the Arctic, down south to Mexico and into Belize.

Telling the tale of the author Alan Tennant, a passionate student of wildlife and peregrine falcons and George Vose a Second World War vet and stunt pilot as they 'chase' falcons with radio tracking equipment, this book will fuel you with facts, imagery and dreams. Alan's endeavours to radio track a peregrine falcon and then follow it, were at the time of the flight in the mid-eighties, pioneering – no one had ever attempted it. Researches were still trying to understand the transcontinental flight of the peregrine whose chicks are hatched in the Arctic and have barely learnt to fly or kill for food when they make their first flight south on instinct.

As the story unfolds it soon becomes clear that both men hold a fascination for flight and its mysteries and therefore *On The Wing* is as much about friendship as radio tracking falcons.

A true rollercoaster of a read but one that will have you wondering all the way to end, with a narrative that makes you believe you are experiencing the journey yourself. A selection of colour photographs in the centre of the book help to conjure up the images you will have running through your mind. This book will appeal to falconers and non-falconers alike.

On The Wing - To the edge of the Earth with the Peregrine Falcon is published in hardback costing £18.99 and should be available in all good book shops.
Donna Vincent



Owls (their training and management)

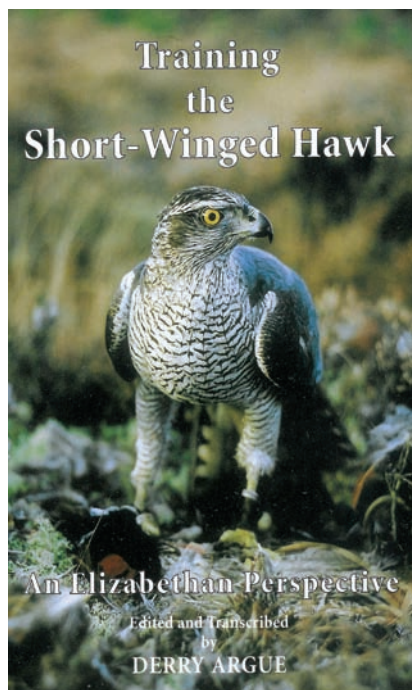
I thought this was a very enjoyable video which would be of particular interest to those people considering obtaining their first owl.

The film opens showing the various species which are available to those who wish to both keep and fly these fascinating birds.

The video, however, is not just entertaining – it is also educational, with Bob Dalton giving informative commentary in his own relaxed style. The film shows housing, imprinting and the stages of training various different breeds of owl. Fitting equipment, working an owl on a creance and flying free are all described in detail.

All in all, I found this video very interesting and would recommend it to anyone interested in owls, particularly the novice owl keeper.

To purchase a copy, priced at £24.95, telephone Falcon Leisure on 02380 696921.



Training The Short-Winged Hawk – An Elizabethan Perspective

Edited and transcribed by Derry Argue / ISBN 0906 924 0801

Most falconers would agree that there are two books that can truly be considered all time classics when it comes to the sport of falconry and the training of hawks or falcons. One is devoted to longwings the other to shortwings in general and the Goshawk in particular.

Symon Latham wrote *Falconry, or the Falcons Lure and Cure* back in 1615. Most

people that fly longwings would agree that, as a work of reference for training Peregrines in particular, it has never been, or is ever likely to be, bettered. This universally respected falconer had an insight into understanding and training Peregrines that we can only marvel at today.

In the case of the Goshawk it was Edmund Bert, who in 1619 wrote *An approved Treatise of Hawkes and Hawking*. Again this falconer was unquestionably a master of his art and his services were much sort after. In fact, three years before publishing his book, Bert sold off his hawks due to ill health. He sold a female and tiercel Goshawk that he had trained to the same gentleman for the sum of one hundred marks. That is the equivalent of £10,000 today. Such was the regard that Bert and his training methods were held.

Bert's book went on to become the absolute bible for those that trained and flew Goshawks and nearly all subsequent authors on the sport quote him liberally. Certainly the likes of Blaine, Mavrogordato, Woodford and Michell make no apology for doing so.

The problem for the modern falconer is that the book was obviously written in Elizabethan English and is therefore an absolute

nightmare to read. But his major stumbling block to the fountain of Goshawk knowledge has been removed by the hard work and diligence of Derry Argue. This well known and respected field sportsman, long associated with Pointers, Setters and Falconry, has painstakingly transcribed the work into modern English. But the modernisation has been achieved whilst remaining strictly faithful to the original. None of the flavour of the original has been lost or any of the pearls of wisdom contained therein.

The book is made up of three Treatises. The first deals with training a freshly taken hawk. Passage hawks were Bert's speciality and first love. The second deals with curing behavioural problems and the third with sickness and remedies. Obviously, the latter Treatise has very little place in the modern world but the first two hold as good for today as when they were written almost 400 years ago.

Whether or not you fly Goshawks this book should be on your bookshelf. It is a classic work from an extremely gifted falconer who imparts knowledge that has been gained from a lifetime of practical experience. Now that it can be read without having to translate as you go everyone can take advantage of the knowledge on offer.

To keep things balanced Derry Argue has also transcribed and added to this volume the short, but never-the-less, very meaningful *A Perfect Booke for Keping of Sparhawkes and Goshawkes*. This is the transcription of a well known manuscript dated 1575 by an unknown author.

This Treatise I find interesting, more as an insight to the way the Elizabethan falconers' minds worked than to the actual methods of training employed. But again it is interesting and extremely fitting that it should be coupled to Bert's work in this volume.

This delightful and highly readable hardback book is available directly from Derry Argue at the reasonable price of £24.95 plus £2 post and packing. The address and telephone number for placing orders are **Firth Productions, Fendom, Tain, Easter Ross, IV19 1PE. Telephone 01862 893856.**

Bob Dalton

Falconry Heritage Trust launched at UK Falconry Fair

The Falconry Heritage Trust (FHT), launched on the opening day of the UK Falconry Fair (1 May 2005), will protect centuries of falconry related heritage for future generations, whilst making it available on the Internet to all of today's falconers and others interested in falconry heritage. British falconer, falcon breeder and author, Nick Fox is one of the founding members of the Trust, which is supported by the International Association for Falconry, which in itself represents some 53 associations from 40 countries where falconry is part of the cultural heritage.

Nick comments, "I conceived the idea while in the bath on a visit to Japan. There I was seeing a falconry heritage that was so different to ours in the West and I thought two things: firstly, that others should be able to access this if only in 'virtual' form; and secondly, that it must be recorded and preserved for future generations."

"It was something of an *eureka* moment and this launch is the

beginning of, what I hope will be, a global initiative to record and protect falconry."

The Trust will enable regional conservation committees to record electronically the diversity of falconry heritage, which covers the written word, artefacts, art, ephemera, photographs, and audio/visual recordings. Items may be gifted to the Trust or retained by owners and their heirs but recorded on the website for global access. Whilst privately held items will remain confidential to those accessing the site, open collections, such as the Archives of American Falconry, will be cross referenced to enable visitors to access them in person.

The Trust will be a registered charity enabling it to collect items and raise funds within the carefully constituted charity legislation of the UK. Although primary access to the website will be free, downloading items will attract a charge. For further information contact: Dr Nick Fox on 01267 233864

Letters

Got something to say? Write to Peter Eldrett, Knowle View, Kings Lane, Woodlands, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 8LZ or e-mail: peter.eldrett@tiscali.co.uk

Dear Sir,

Having visited the Falconers Fair for several years now, I thought I would put pen to paper to express my thoughts. Firstly, I think this year's display of birds of prey in the weathering was without doubt the best I have seen in terms of variety and condition.

The ground condition's were soggy, to say the least, in front of the weathering, but this was beyond any control of the organisers, mother nature calls the shots on that score at any outdoor event. I also thought it a refreshing change to see new faces in the main arena, with the greatest respect to messers Large, Paterson and co., it's nice to hear something a bit different from the usual. People are all too quick to put pen to paper when it comes to ridiculing and nit picking, i.e. only the

best should be in the arena! Well, I think it would be a safe bet that there isn't a waiting list of falconers prepared to put themselves up for scrutiny.

The teams from Kent and Yorkshire with eagles must have felt it quite daunting to enter the arena knowing they were being scrutinised by falconers from far and wide. But, to their credit, I think they did a jolly good job, even when the Steppe Eagle went sight seeing. The falconer kept his cool, didn't rhubarb on and on and he handled the situation very well, I thought.

The fairs' organisers should be pleased to see THE falconers event of the year going from strength-to-strength and I for one will most certainly continue to support it.

Yours sincerely,

Yours faithfully, C. Wilson-Town

Dear Peter,

My husband, John, and I had booked a holiday and wanted somewhere safe for my bird, Briar, to go.

In The Falconers Magazine there has been an advertisement about when you go away who will look after your bird. The company in question is Raptor Care owned by Tony Bryant, who said that he will look after Briar for us.

John and I travelled to Gloucester for a prior look at his

weatherings and we were so impressed by the cleanliness where she would be housed at night that we were immediately satisfied that Briar would be looked after in a most professional way.

Tony weighed Briar every day and we were given an account of her weight when John and I returned from holiday. If the need arises again John and I know that Briar can go to Tony with safety.

Yours sincerely,

John and Marian Aldridge

Dougie was born in South Wales 79 years ago into a large family, of which he was the only son. As he grew he took an interest in country sports, particularly wildfowling. In the early 60's along with a few other local sportsmen, he met Lorant de Bastyai, the famous Hungarian falconer and in a reciprocal agreement Lorant taught the locals falconry and they taught him wildfowling. This was the foundation of the Welsh Hawking Club which was to grow into the second largest club in the UK.

Dougie served on the committee from the beginning and became well known and extremely popular worldwide in the world of falconry, as he visited clubs at their field meetings all over Europe. His natural friendliness combined with his mischievous smile and charming Welsh voice made him many friends. It is fair to say that a number of these were ladies, who were always delighted by Dougie's oft repeated description of himself as "a six foot Welshman with a one inch fuse"!

At the Falconry Fair on 1-2 May, Dougie was to receive a surprise presentation of an engraved tankard from the Campaign for Falconry to commemorate his services to Falconry. Unfortunately, he was taken into hospital a short time before the Fair and after a short illness he passed away peacefully, just before his 80th birthday. The presentation still took place after many tributes were spoken and the tankard was given to his niece. The Fair appeared a quieter place than usual without Dougie there.



Douglas Morgans

1925 – 2005

President
Welsh Hawking Club

First Longwing - ah, the choice

Anyone who picks up a specialist magazine such as this expects to find an array of articles by knowledgeable experts who will recount their field experiences and impart much-needed advice to those less blessed in their chosen sport. This is not such an article. This is the story of how I came to acquire my first longwing. It's a tale of anguish, soul-searching, dubious decision-making and sometimes thoroughly dishonest reasoning. It's the tale of the process of planning, choosing, buying and ultimately training a falcon, by a rank amateur.

The background: I already have a hawk, my male Harris "Batian". As with most Harris' he is an avian version of the all-terrain all-rounder. He is equally at ease in woods, over fields and moors; he is well balanced, apparently impervious to knocks and scrapes and he will perform in most weathers. He is a joy to me.

So why a longwing? Not satisfied with your hawk? Well I suppose it's a bit like owning a Land Rover. I do and I love it because it will go anywhere and do anything. But every now and again it feels a bit on the slow and heavy side and I find myself casting envious glances in the direction of the sleek, sexy lines of a sports car. It's a state of mind that, I suspect, many of us are prone to. And, sadly, it seems to get stronger as the years pass.

The feeling increases in intensity if you go to country fairs during the summer. Go to a show, watch the demonstrations by the experts (even a few at the Falconers' Fair at Chetwynd Park) and you can't help feeling a frisson of excitement at the sight of a stooping longwing. The speed, the grace, the bleep of the telemetry receiver (...but that's for another time...).

It was inevitable. But it was no Damascene revelation. The notion of going up in the world (in so many ways) had been evolving both slowly and subliminally until one day, somewhere near my 50th birthday, it seemed that the time had come. I'm sure that the impending half century also played no small part in influencing the decision, but to admit it would be to acknowledge the onset of old age, which I would never do publicly. But, yes, I thought, there will be a time, not long from now, when I won't be able to chase off over the countryside in pursuit of a longwing with wanderlust. Do it now, I thought, while the body can still at least attempt exercise.

Elementary knowledge

Now my knowledge of flying and hunting longwings was, to say the least, elementary. My preconceptions, however, were positively galactic. You know the sort. Peregrines go up high and descend rather quickly. And you have to



■ Peregrine/Saker, Bess (above & below)



own half of Scotland if you are going to hunt with one. Sakers chase feather or fur and occasionally disappear over the horizon. A gyr would require a second mortgage and I still couldn't afford it. Kestrels and merlins are small, catch nothing worth eating and are easy to kill. Lanners fly to lures and not much else!

But appealing as it was to sit and dream of flying and hunting different kinds of falcon, there were "things to be considered", and I should cover these now lest I incur the wrath of my fellow falconers.

Did I have the time to do justice to two birds? I am, sadly, one of those many unfortunates who are daily subject to the feudal enslavement that rejoices in the name of employment. A nine-to-fiver. But it still might be workable. The thought process went like this:

At the time the male Harris was being

flown every day before work, as well as weekends. He was, frankly, as fit as a butcher's dog. One possible scenario was to reduce his outings to alternate days. He would inevitably lose a bit of his sharpness but three or four sessions a week ought to be enough to keep him in trim and there would be less pressure on the local rabbit population. Another option would be to take them both out every morning, flying Batian for his usual session, or possibly stealing a few minutes from him to allow time for the longwing's session. I remember thinking at the time that a longwing that was flying to the lure would not require a huge commitment of time. Of course, hunting would demand more and this would depend on the style of hunting and the bird I chose. But we wouldn't have to hunt every day and, in any event, we wouldn't see quarry every day. So that would be all right then.

Did I have access to enough land for a longwing? That, of course, would depend on the bird I chose. And in turn that would depend on the quarry we wanted to hunt. Well, what quarry was available? Where I live, on the borders of Dorset and Hampshire, there are pheasant, partridge (usually stocked) and vast numbers of corvids. There are no grouse so I wouldn't have to buy a grouse moor. There are partridge, but none on the land to which I currently have access and most of the land where they hang out tends to be controlled by the ubiquitous shooting syndicates. So it was pheasant or rooks. There are rabbits of course (and we have thousands of rabbits!). Some longwings, I was told, such as Sakers, catch both fur and feather. Well, briefly, this presented itself as a reasonable solution but then it occurred that to use a saker to catch a rabbit was a bit like using a Lamborghini to deliver milk. And I had a Harris that did that quite adequately... catch rabbits, that is. Or I could just forget the hunting bit and fly to the lure every day?

Did I have the skills to fly a longwing safely and to get the best out of it? Not at the time. Of course many of the basic techniques and skills for keeping and flying a hawk are common to all birds of prey. But the specific skills of swinging the lure, general training and obedience, training for hunting and hooding (I don't hood my hawks) would have to be learned. Could they be acquired? A course was the answer, plus some



■ Colin Johnson with Bess

coaching from more experienced friends. There are loads of courses out there.

Did I have the appropriate accommodation? Batian has a weathering. He also has an aviary where he idles away the moult. The same arrangement for a falcon, with different perches, would do just fine. I know a man who builds exceedingly good aviaries. Regrettably, he is aware of this and charges accordingly. Oh dear, this was going to be expensive. I know this is going to sound pompous but I don't think you should compromise on accommodation. The birds deserve that much. So the cost of an aviary was added to the list (and the black gyrfalcon was crossed off).

Now I don't pretend that any of this was a dispassionate analysis. Given the overwhelming desire to do something, logic has a tendency to take a back seat. And so in retrospect, I admit that my arguments and objections were moulded and twisted to present a set of appealing and wholly practicable solutions!

A good friend, who conveniently doubles as falconry mentor, convinced me to take the plunge and, fortified by utterly unmerited words of encouragement, I made my final decision, or so I thought. It only remained to choose a bird to hunt pheasant or rooks or, sin of sins, not to hunt at all but simply fly to the lure. What the process needed at this point was input from the experts.

Pleas for advice

Now falconers will always respond to a plea for advice. But the motives and therefore the responses vary. You know how it goes. Some have 40 years of experience – some have one year of experience repeated 40 times. If I have understood nothing else in my time as a falconer I understand that you never, ever

stop learning about these fascinating creatures whose aerial world we are honoured, albeit vicariously, to share.

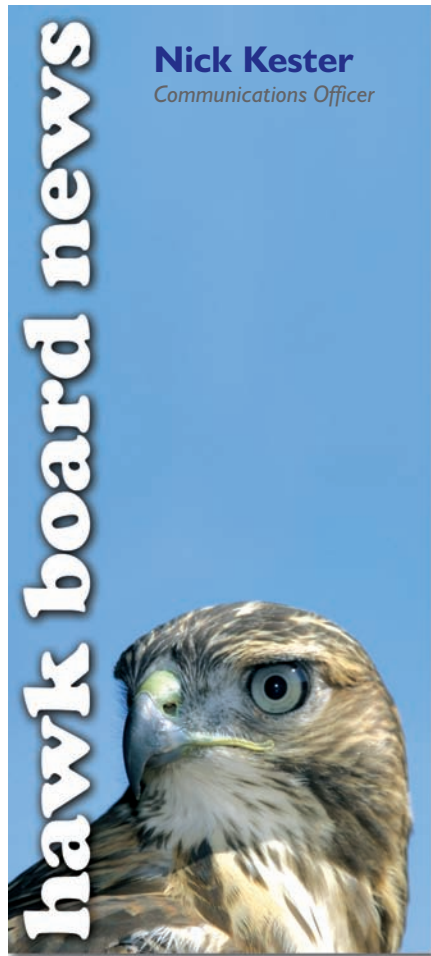
Even for those with 40 years experience the advice you receive varies from one falconer to the next. This isn't a matter of interpretation or nuance. These are differences as to fundamentals.

One person maintained that the falcon must be kept hooded all the time, only removing the hood when it was flying (a small concession, but a necessary one, if you are expected to wait on several hundred feet above mother Earth). When I gently queried this, I was informed, with an air that brooked no contradiction, that "never in a million years" should a falcon be kept unhooded. To be fair, his motives were well intentioned. His point was that to keep a bird unhooded would cause it undue stress. I know, but what about the several million wild birds out there that have no choice but to witness the passing events of this world? Ah, but they don't live so long and probably have therapists.

I described this situation to another falconer. He also has a longwing, which, again, he flies over a pointer. And he never hoods his bird. Ever. And so it was with choosing a bird. I made a list of "names" from various sources such as the IBR directory, some falconry websites and from the people I had watched in the demonstration rings at shows. I confess now that I 'phoned them all. And they were, to a man, eager to help and to give time to advise, particularly those with birds to sell. And it would be wonderful to say that a clear picture and sense of purpose emerged from it all. It would also be completely untrue. It would take far more space than I have here to describe the variety of opinions, reasons, recommendations and frequently blind prejudice that confronted me when I tapped the collective experience of the falconry fraternity. That is may be for another time?

Suffice it to say that I hedged my bets and chose a breed that might, depending on the training, fly at crow out of the hood, wait on over pheasant or, as a last resort, just stoop to a lure. If I asked you, dear reader, to guess, I wonder how many different opinions I would hear.

This will please the purists. I bought a peregrine-saker. Let the games begin . . .



Nick Kester
Communications Officer

The first half of 2005 has been a busy one for the Hawk Board. A successful Falconry Fair saw many visitors to the stand, not all driven in by the occasional showers! The Campaign for Falconry is always active and its job of explaining falconry and bird of prey keeping at the many country fairs is critical to a greater understanding of our sport. If you missed the Falconry Fair, don't forget the CLA Game Fair, held this year at Belvoir Castle, Nr. Grantham, Lincolnshire on 22-24 July.

There has been much concern and speculation amongst falconers following the passing of the Hunting with Dogs Act because it provides a loophole for hunts to continue providing they are flushing a mammal from cover for the purpose of enabling a bird of prey to hunt the wild mammal. This exemption was included to protect falconry and nothing more. We cannot be held responsible for bad drafting but we can ensure it is not acted upon. The Hawk Board, along with the British Falconers' Club, have met with the

Council of Hunting Associations to point out that falconry and hunting are far from compatible and the following statement is being widely circulated:

There has been much speculation about the so-called falconry loophole enabling traditional hunting to continue if birds of prey are present. The Council of Hunting Associations has met with the Hawk Board and both parties strongly recommend against such activity.

If any falconer is contacted by a hunt would they please contact the Hawk Board and advise the hunt to do the same.

HAWK BOARD MEETS DEFRA TO DEVELOP CODES OF CONDUCT

Hawk Board Chairman Jim Chick was joined by board members Martin Jones, Mike Clowes and Nick Kester at, what all agreed was a very constructive meeting on 15 March with the DEFRA team responsible for drafting the Animal Welfare Bill.

Jim Chick said: "We had a number of concerns about the interpretation and policing of the bill when it becomes law. But more importantly, we were there to contribute to the development of suitable codes of conduct, and to ensure that our expertise was taken into account on all issues concerning the welfare of domestic birds of prey.

"No one in the UK has as much experience in the management of birds of prey than the falconers themselves. We would like to see the Hawk Board becoming a prime point of contact before and after this bill has become law," added Chick.

Central to the meeting was the development of acceptable codes of conduct. There were three areas where this was thought necessary:

- 1 Basic management guidelines including equipment, housing, feeding, training and transporting;
- 2 Displays of birds of prey, whether static or free-flying; and
- 3 Rehabilitation, for those who take in and care for injured raptors.

The Hawk Board was able to show DEFRA its guidelines for the first two

items and hoped to work with rehabilitators and vets in developing the third.

Jim Chick made the point that people are often suspicious of increased legislation, but providing traditional falconry and bird of prey keepers were not hampered by the Animal Welfare Bill, they should welcome increased welfare standards. He said the Hawk Board was particularly pleased to see registration and regular inspection of animal sanctuaries, which had lacked control for too long.

HAWK BOARD THANKS LOBBY GROUPS FOR CHANGING DEFRA PEST RULES

The Hawk Board has publicly thanked the organisations responsible for spotting the confusion in the revised 'pest' licences and for ensuring the wording was changed to more accurately reflect the needs of all sportsmen. This has ensured that traditional falconry practices may continue without restriction.

A Hawk Board spokesman said: "Although we were concerned at the wording, it was not until the National Gamekeepers' Organisation, the Country Land and Business Association and the Countryside Alliance examined the issues in greater detail and raised their concerns did we realise what it would have meant to falconers.

Although pigeons are not a prime target quarry (they carry an infection that captive bred falcons are not immune to), falconers do hunt Corvids and gulls. The idea that you had to attempt to use other non-lethal methods of control before slipping your falcon was patently absurd.

We shall be discussing the whole issue of quarry species with DEFRA and the Welsh Assembly Government before the annual licence review and ensuring that, while co-incidentally falconers do carry out pest control, the species themselves are also recognised as an appropriate quarry and thus no different to the pigeon."

For more information contact:
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Nick Kester, Communications Officer
on 01267 281448 or e-mail:
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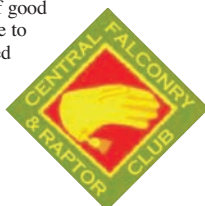
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askchitty

Do you have any veterinary questions relating to your bird? If so, send them to the editor (see address on page four) and they will be passed on to John Chitty - BVetMed CertZooMed CBiol MIBiol MRCVS

Q: My male harris hawk seems very late to start the moult. despite finishing flying in the middle of March last year he didn't start to moult until mid July. and hadn't finished until very late in November. despite being fed quail and pheasant. (he is eating better than me). Is this normal or is there anything I can do to change this?

Laine, Eastleigh

We frequently get enquiries about how and when raptors moult and, in particular, how this can be induced or speeded up to tie in with the closed season.

To understand moulting in birds, we need to consider a few basic questions.

1) **What is moult?** This is the replacement of older feathers with new ones. In most birds all feathers are replaced each year although there are exceptions. The reason for this change is that the grown feather is, essentially, dead. It will be damaged and worn by use and will not be repaired by the body (although preening will re-align barbules). Replacement is therefore the only way to ensure continued ability to fly.

2) **How does moult occur?** Basically new feathers grow from the germinal tissue in the follicle at the base of the feather and push out the old one. Once started this is a controlled process and changes in one feather triggers changes in nearby follicles. This is important: the natural moult is slow – usually spread over several months. It is also a symmetrical event. Both make sense, as loss of many feathers in an uneven manner will make the bird less able to fly and therefore less able to hunt. However, the captive bird's moult needs to be much quicker to tie in with working and there is less worry about loss of many feathers as food is provided, not caught. **THE CAPTIVE MOULT IS NOT EXACTLY AS WOULD HAPPEN IN THE WILD!**

3) **What triggers moult?** This is much more complex. We know that once moult starts each feather will trigger the others around it, which is why we see regular moulting sequences (though these vary

widely between species). However, the initiating factors are very poorly understood. Sex hormones (testosterone in males; progesterone/oestrogen in females) certainly play a part as many female birds will moult when incubating. Thyroid hormones also play a part which is not surprising as they are generalised metabolic stimulants and are heavily involved in coat changes in other species. Both thyroid and sex hormone levels are heavily influenced by external factors (especially daylength) so it is very likely that these play a major role too. The hormones are not exclusive factors though; castrated males will still moult and removal of thyroid glands has very variable effects on this moult. Food is important as feathers and their sheaths are made from protein and need to be manufactured for each moult – this is a major stress on the body reserves and another reason why moult may be slower in wild birds compared to captive ones. Feather synthesis also requires a lot of the essential amino-acids so food quality needs to high as well as plentiful.

So, what can be done to start and accelerate moult? In truth, this is poorly understood and few methods are consistently successful. An excellent review is provided by Van Wettere & Redig (2001).

The following should be considered:

1) **Feed.** A good quantity of good quality food should be provided. This is the reasoning behind the traditional “flush” of feeding to induce moult at the end of the season. Vitamin supplements containing Vitamin A and essential amino-acids may be useful here.

2) **Daylength.** Part of the reason why we have received many calls over the past few years relating to this subject is, I am sure, the weird seasons we have had recently. Whether it is the advent of global warming or simply chance, Britain is becoming less seasonal and this may affect the triggers to moult. Some falconers have artificially manipulated daylength (using different times spent in complete darkness) to stimulate moult with varying degrees of success.

3) **Health.** Moult is very demanding on the body so the bird must be in optimal health. Attention should be paid to parasites (both internal and external) and the ability of the liver to process and make the factors required to grow feathers and sheaths (interestingly the sheath is very rich in amino-acids which is why birds tend to preen and eat the sheath – natural recycling!).

4) **Hormone Therapy.** Various have been tried...

a) Thyroid supplements. These seem a good idea especially as they are reasonably consistent in response. However, they can be too successful! If the moult is too rapid then the body simply can't make feather quickly enough. The result is deformed and/or brittle feathers. Thyroid is a general stimulant so will affect other organs too, including the heart – toxicity is therefore very likely. In short, this is a technique only to be used in desperation.

b) Progesterone. For female birds. This has had some success but responses are not guaranteed and there may be other side-effects.

c) Testosterone. For male birds. This, too, appears to be unreliable.

Basically, in answer to the question, this Harris' Hawk is doing nothing wrong, merely having a natural moult at a time that may not be convenient! The best advice we can give regarding moulting is that it is a natural process, not a disease and patience is required to allow it to progress in synch with the bird's natural metabolism. It should only be manipulated in the rare cases where the feathers become so old and worn that they irritate the bird directly. In these cases, the bird (and its diet!) should be examined, feather/skin and mutes evaluated for parasites, as well as a full investigation of internal disease.

Reference: Van Wettere, A & Redig, PT (2001) A Review of Methods Used to Induce Moulting in Raptors. Hawk Chalk 40 (2); 46-56



■ Killem 'on the rocks' with caught rabbit

Hawking in Wales

After a slow start to the 2004 hunting season, I was determined to make up for lost time and thus got out my four year old intermewed female Harris' and got her ready to go by mid-September. Killem is tremendous fun to work with but has several quirks to her nature that make her quite a handful and difficult to cope with. She would not be the best bird for a novice falconer. But I think the world of her and find her tremendous fun to take out. She is not quite as bad as Alice, the Coopers Hawk, I used to have who would savagely attack my ankles if she missed her quarry but Killem has plenty of tricks that keep me on my toes.

One of the items she would dearly love to add to her menu is a ferret. As ferrets play a key role in our hunting we have to be careful about flying her strictly off the glove. When I'm standing well back from the bury, generally freezing cold and not daring to move, just waiting for the tell-tale sounds from underground, there are generally several Red Kites wheeling in the sky above and I tend to lose concentration. I am totally reliant on the ferret man, my husband, Chris, together with our friend, Liz, to shout the magic word HO, whereupon the bird is released and the hunt commences.

On one hunt day the rabbit that appeared must have known that the hawk was unfit as it started downhill at a hell of a lick and just as the hawk was closing it jinked and did a U-turn that took it uphill and straight back down the bury from whence it came. Fortunately, while this was going on the ferrets had come back to hand and been boxed or we could have had a very long wait indeed.

After a lot of climbing, Kevin, my new Brittany dog, pointed a bury by sitting beside it so I called Killem from the tree where she was sitting to my fist and a ferret was put to ground. After many rumblings and bangs an enormous rabbit hit the ground running and Killem took it right at the bottom of the hill. In my haste to get to her and dispatch the rabbit, I started off at a run (a big mistake). I got faster and faster until I was taking strides of about 15 feet at a time. My legs overtook my body and there was only one way to go. So, I tried to roll into a ball and relax. As I passed the bird about 10 feet off the ground I swear I saw her jaw drop and I was glad when I hit the gorse and came to a juddering stop. I could hear Chris and Liz, laughing from the top of the hill. Well, we got our first rabbit of the season and I only got a couple of bruises – not bad for an OAP!

Dixie, our Brittany bitch, moved the next rabbit out of a reed bed and Killem, who was free, saw the dog stop and point. Dixie wears a pointing collar, which beeps when she is stationary and there it was, a beep-beep-beep sound. At the fourth beep, experience has taught Killem that this is a steady point and she moved out of

a tree and manoeuvred herself to a position about 200ft above the point. Bang. Out it came and a very long twisty chase ensued, which took the rabbit approximately 200 yards in one direction and then a double-back, which brought it right back past us, a jink and lots of jumping through the reed beds. It then went through a hedge into another field, followed by yet another turn and Killlem eventually brought it to book about two feet from where the whole chase started. This was good because I didn't have to go far to sort the whole thing out. A good end to the day. As usual we left a rabbit out for the Red Kites and Buzzards.

Favourite valleys

The following day found us in one of my favourite valleys near the coast. It is a particularly good site as the hill is liberally strewn with many buries with very little cover, which consists mainly of tiny wisps of gorse or mirren grass and sure enough it was at one of these minuscule wisps that Dixie had her first point. Surely, this was not big enough to hide a mouse? But sure enough at the fourth beep of the trusty collar, Dixie moved on command and out shot a rabbit, which Killlem met at the front door of it's warren. We walked up several more rabbits and then Kevin pointed a bury in his strange way of sitting next to it. He is only a pup and has never been wrong about his choice of bury to sit by! We moved him and ourselves way above the bury and Chris put a ferret down. We didn't have long to wait before two rabbits exploded from underground and split left and right. There is the odd bird that can be spoilt for choice in this situation, but Killlem never faltered in her choice and she soon chased the left handed runner to a final conclusion.

As we had had two really sporting rabbits in the bag we decided to call it a day. But the race is never run until it's finished and another rabbit was taken on the way back to the car. As the farmer, Hywel, had made a very polite request for two of his own rabbits for his favourite meal of rabbit pie, I cleaned two and left one out for the local birds. Hywel was very grateful for the rabbits, he's such a gentleman and a generous one and we've always been made most welcome by him.

We are really indebted to him for giving us free rein on his stunning farm.

It was Hywel who, one day, called me aside and very quickly whispered that he'd found a piece of my trousers hanging on his fence. In fact he said that he had found a piece of my trousers hanging on every one of his fences and then brought forth a small brown paper bag, wherein were all the bits he'd found. Now, these Welsh farmers are very thrifty but I thought this was pushing it a bit far. One day, when as usual I was in a tearing (literally!) hurry to get to my bird I'd left a good half of my trousers hanging on the fence and had to spend the rest of the day with my behind hanging out, hoping to



god that we wouldn't meet anyone. We didn't, but by heavens, I was blue by the time we'd finished. Chris then came forth with, "well, it serves you right for tearing around like a blue a.... fly."

On another day at Hywel's, we had severe gale force winds and as I let the flying jesses slip through my fingers, Killlem sailed straight up and stooged about over the dogs as they cast around for a scent. Dixie snapped onto point by a large blade of grass and out popped a rabbit, which ran, then stopped, then ran again in a tacking motion at warp speed. Killlem had tried to follow these tacks but then decided to make a bit of height until it was forced to make it's final move, a sharp left to the mouth of an inviting bury where she met it on it's arrival and it was all over. I

have never seen this manoeuvre done before or since.

On our way back to the car with Killlem following happily I took my gauntlet off and tucked it under my arm to flex my frozen fingers and quick as a dart she flew up, whisked the glove from under my arm and then hiked off with it in her foot and perched on some gorse. I approached talking softly to her but as I neared she flew off further into the gorse with the glove still

clutched firmly in her foot. I hated the thought of tempting her with a garnished hand so I went through all the motions of getting food out of my bag. This got her attention but I didn't want to get mugged so I threw a tempting morsel up and down. Suddenly, she came but let go of the glove and arrived before I could throw the food. So not only did I get a severe footing but I then had to force my way through acres of gorse to find the gauntlet. From then on everything of value in her eye was securely battened down.

During a visit from a friend, Mick, from Newmarket with his female Harris', we decided to clutter off to the same site for a spot of hawking on a very windy day. Bright it may have been but the wind was a corker, even for this part of the world. As

Mick was not too sure about his bird's ability to cope with the wind, we flew Kill'em first. She immediately went up on the soar, at one time joining a group of Red Kites, which were soaring overhead. She has never shown any animosity to the local birds. It wasn't long before we walked up a rabbit and the call HO brought her in fast and furious for her first success of the day. We had several of these very fast flights, not all successful, but we had fun trying.

After a short lunch break, Mick decided he would try his hawk even though she was a little overweight. He

time Kevin was sitting staunchly next to a bury in a line of gorse. We all stood well back as Chris put the sandy jill down. As we heard some exciting thumps the hawk strained her head forward in anticipation and as the rabbit ran I released her. Well, as luck would have it, Murphys Law was about to rear its ugly head because the rabbit only ran a short distance before disappearing down an unnoticed hole and as Kill'em threw up, the jill appeared all innocent from the bury. You all know the sort of thing, like Chad; "what, no rabbits?" There was no way I could stop the

next bury and let her come back out to hand. She was still a bit like a sticky loo brush, but all seemed well with her.

Tolerating other birds

Apart from her attitude to ferrets, Kill'em would not tolerate another bird out with her sat on the glove. During a trip to Scotland she showed this side of her nature only too plainly. One of the party, Kev and his male Goshawk, wanted to join us as we'd found some excellent rabbit land. I did warn him that Kill'em could be most unpleasant but he said he had come across the problem before and the attacker on that occasion had lost interest eventually. Kill'em, unfortunately, rarely loses interest in anything, but at least he had been warned. All seemed fine to start with, the birds were set free and she went on ahead and threw up into a tree as Dixie started to work the gorse and reeds. Suddenly from somewhere in the cover we could hear the steady beeping of the collar. Chris, Kev and I moved up and a rabbit flushed. Kill'em ignored the fleeing rabbit and flew directly at Kev's Goshawk. We called a warning and he swung round just in time to throw her off. Kev decided to hang well back and as we walked on, Kill'em followed quite normally until another rabbit flushed. Again she ignored the quarry and made a beeline for poor Kev. This time, after some very near misses, which left Kev on the ground shielding his bird, he decided to put it back in the car. We got Kill'em under control but she didn't take her eyes off him until the Goshawk was boxed. We continued until Kill'em had been successful and then spent the rest of the day with Kev's brilliant male Gos. Kev was a very sporting person – not a sign of a moan and no hard feelings.

Writing this has brought to mind another occasion when 'Mrs. Nasty' showed her true colours. We were out with a friend, Lindon, and his Jack Russell, Molly. I knew there was going to be trouble when Kill'em saw the dog, she slicked down her feathers and went stiff. She also gave a glare that was as black as the night. Now, to be fair, I did warn Lindon but he was desperate to get Molly rabbiting under a hawk. I did tell him that if we continued his precious dog would be under the hawk – literally. But he said he

I did tell him that if we continued his precious dog would be under the hawk – literally. But he said he would keep her in the hedge bottoms and all would be well. The hawks glare never wavered and I was dreading the outcome

looked at me smiling as his bird stretched her wings and gazed around, he was unsure about whether to release her into the teeth of the gale as we could barely stand up in it and as the bird slipped away it was just like filling a polythene bag with wind and then as he let go she was off at a hell of a lick. Mick smiled again and said, "oh my god, I shouldn't have done that, it isn't until this happens that you realise how huge these hills are, they're ruddy great mountains." He soon picked up a faint signal from the telemetry and we all trooped off to the highest hill. There, she was being harassed by a couple of Buzzards on the far hill. As we had a visual we stayed in touch on our mobiles and the 'left a bit, right a bit' sequence ensued. We lost sight of her as the Buzzards pushed her into a stand of evergreens where she was completely camouflaged but the cries of the Buzzards worked as well as the telemetry and eventually Mick had her safely on his fist. As the wind hadn't abated, he fed her up and put her away.

Off the fist

As we'd already had some soaring flights we went for more flights but off the fist over ferrets and within a short space of

inevitable and soon the blood curdling scream of the ferret was echoing around the hills.

We all made a dive in a very disorderly fashion. Chris grabbed the hawk by her legs and it was then that we noticed that, fortunately, her foot was wrapped around the ferrets neck. Once she had been removed from the equation, I put my hand down and got a ferret attached to the knuckle of my right hand, right down to the bone. A friend of mine, Lindon, who was also with us, managed to prize her jaws open but as she let go of me she transferred her bite to him. She bit him on that bit of web of skin between the thumb and forefinger that ferrets generally go for when they're hacked off. Had I just been a bystander I would have laughed my socks off at the sight of all these people leaping around in the gorse with a stinking ball of fur wreaking havoc and spilling their blood in copious amounts.

We all sat on the hill nursing our wounds and getting ourselves back into some semblance of order. Having removed the ferret from Lindon I checked her thoroughly, not a hole in sight, well not on her at least. We put her away and bound up our wounds as best we could and just to make sure, we popped the jill down the



would keep her in the hedge bottoms and all would be well. The hawk's glare never wavered and I was dreading the outcome.

Molly worked merrily along totally unaware of the arrows piercing her from Killen's eyes. Suddenly there was a shout of HO and Killen went off on the blind side of the hedge. I could see her pumping away and then suddenly a cry from Molly and all hell broke loose. Through the thick hedge all I could see were people rolling around on the ground with poor Molly yipping and yapping. Chris had thrown his coat over the bird and prized her off the dog and by the time I had found a way through the hedge, calm had been restored. I am glad to say Molly only had minor injuries. Out of all the dogs this hawk has worked with over the years from German Wirehaired Pointer's to many Jacks, Molly is the only one to get this sort of treatment. Chris then remarked that I looked like I had been pulled through a hedge backwards – I literally had.

Before the season ended

Just before the season ended we went out on a rainy, miserable, mist shrouded day but we had taken a hawk, dog and ferret as the weather can change in the twinkling of an eye. This was a new location, a farm of about 2000 acres with plenty of rabbits, pheasants and the odd hare. We glassed the cover, lots of bracken and gorse and lots of buries in between. It looked most promising.

We found a track that went up the hillside and Liz said that she had walked this way many times and that it was hard-packed shale, certainly OK for our 4x4. In hindsight, we hadn't taken into account the

amount of mud that had washed down the hill and over the track. We put the Jeep into full 4x4 mode and made slow progress with a bit of slipping and sliding here and there but we managed to keep going.

The drop on the left-hand side got deeper and deeper and I felt very vulnerable. Suddenly, we started to side-slip. On the left were a few straggly trees growing out at right-angles but the roots were covered in slimy moss. The harder we tried to get straight the more we slipped until both offside wheels were now barely ledged on the skimpy roots. Chris got out to assess the situation and as he competes in a lot of off-road competitions, he was quite embarrassed that he had not taken into account not only the fact that we had road tyres but that he had not walked the track to check it out first.

The rain never let up and we got soaked as we heaped up shale under the wheels in a vain attempt to get some grip. Liz and I had made a cowardly withdrawal and stayed outside the vehicle on the pretence of checking progress. But no go. The more Chris tried to get some grip, the more the Jeep made its inexorable way towards the lip of the drop. Unfortunately, my camera was in the car somewhere and a good photo opportunity was lost as nothing on earth would have induced me to retrieve it.

Chris had his mobile phone and a signal (a rarity here) and Liz had Lindon's number, so we called him. The farmers around the area are really great and he put off an imminent trip to market to come to our assistance. On his arrival it was obvious Lindon found our discomfiture to his liking as he couldn't keep the smile off his face. He'd bought a selection of heavy chains and these he put round a tree on the opposite side of the track and hitched onto the Jeep and back to the tractor, the plan being to pull our vehicle sideways and thus back onto the track.

As the tractor took the strain, the tree

around which the chain passed broke and the tractor and Jeep both slid ominously sideways. All the time Lindon had not uttered one word and the smile had not left his face. Moments later his son, Gareth, a giant of a boy of approximately 16 years of age, appeared on a quad with a further load of chains.

This time a different approach was tried and Linden took his tractor further up the track and the quad was placed at the bottom of the drop. Chains were attached to each of the vehicles, the idea being to lower the jeep as gently as possible down the drop once it was completely clear of the tree roots. Liz and I gave verbal encouragement to everyone including ourselves and then stood back to watch.

The Jeep creaked and groaned as it came free and as it cleared the tree roots virtually the whole vehicle hung side-on over the drop. Chris had started the engine so that when it landed he would hopefully have some control. It appeared to be almost entirely hanging in space and balanced just long enough for the slackened chain to the tractor to be removed. As this happened, Gareth accelerated the quad thus ripping the Jeep into space.

The vehicle flew for a second or two and I was almost tempted to reach for my lure before it hit the ground halfway down the 50 foot drop. Chris fought for control as he landed but couldn't miss hitting a fairly stout tree, which broke the windscreen and buckled the door pillar. Also a running board came off and flew dramatically through the air. Well, the idea of gently lowering it hadn't quite come off but it was a pretty good job considering the difficult circumstances. Father and son had worked well as a team and still not one word had been spoken.

Before Lindon and Gareth departed we offered our profuse thanks, which were met with a broad smile from both and then Lindon spoke his first words and we all strained forward to hear this quietly spoken man. "We used to call this area 'The Ram', but it'll now be known as 'Chris's Hill'". With that and a cheery wave they were gone. God bless Welsh farmers, they're brilliant without exception.

We stood around somewhat quiet now that we had the vehicle back on terra firma and tried to assess the damage. It

really wasn't too bad and would not stop our planned trip to Berkshire the following day where we got a new windscreen fitted, but the Jeep still has her buckled door pillar, a testament to our never-to-be-forgotten trip to Chris's Hill.

On our return home we got a crate of boozy bits and dropped them off at the farm for Lindon and his family. The big man came out shyly to accept the crate, the gentle smile still on his face and said he hoped that our experience had not put us off hawking his land and we assured him that it had not and that we would be back.

Since then, many a happy and bountiful trip has been made to Chris's Hill where all signs of our struggle have been erased by the weather.

Never failed to amaze

As the season progressed, Killen never failed to amaze us with her ability and willingness to fly in every conceivable weather condition and by the end of December she had taken 112 rabbits, three crows, two squirrels and several 'various', which I am too ashamed to enter in my day book. All this activity had left her looking a little tatty as she had two centre partings from stooping headlong into woodpiles, two huge squirrel bites on one leg, neither of which had bothered her in the least and now we added a broken hind talon to the list. Had the other one not also shown signs of splitting, I would have mended one with fibreglass or some such material and continued headlong. But enough was enough and sadly I cut off all her equipment and popped her into the moult chamber.

Now what was I going to do? Here I was, retired and living in some of the best rabbit country in Wales and my hawk was broken.

Bored to tears one afternoon I was dabbling around with the computer and eventually found the IBR website and the Bird Mart. I'm a great believer in fate and one of the birds for sale was a first year Finnish male Goshawk. I loved flying these birds and had sorely missed my female Goshawk when she had unfortunately died of the dreaded aspergillosis in 2001. I'm not very fond of buying second hand birds, especially Goshawks, but this bird sounded exactly what I wanted and when

my list of questions had all been answered, I made arrangements for a trip to Bristol the following day.

My fears were unfounded. The bird was stunning and had been selected carefully from a choice of three males and I could see why. He had been manned to perfection by the current owner who was desperately unhappy that work commitments had only left him two days a week when he could fly. He didn't feel that this would do the bird justice so had decided to sell him. What a magical bird he turned out to be.

After a settling in period of two weeks, I popped him on the creance and got an immediate result. After a couple of days of this I let him go free and I literally never looked back. He was a brilliant hunting partner.

We seem to have some extremely large rabbits here, I mean mega-rabbits with rippling muscles and a kick like a kangaroo. So as Dixie put up one of these bunnies one afternoon, I wondered what the Goshawk, Beau, would make of it. Well 'quick work' comes to mind. His

A bird might not cost much to replace, but when you take into account the hours of training that go into making a bird exceptional, is it worth taking a chance?

pursuit and abilities were amazing and after a short tussle the rabbit moved no more. After dispatching the rabbit my next move was to get the tailguard on the hawk. I left him to plume for 10 minutes or so and he stepped off very nicely with no fuss. As I was certain this rabbit was probably the biggest we'd encountered I was not at all surprised that it weighed in at 5lbs, 2ozs. Beau looked so small next to it, but he was no lightweight at just over 1lb, 2ozs.

As the season progressed he became so fit and fast that I ended up standing a good 400 yards from a point or bury to give the quarry a good run. If he missed, which wasn't often, he would go up on the soar, which gave him the advantage of height and many good flights were had. It

was not long before baby rabbits were appearing and the end of the season hung over us and I put young Beau into his moult chamber.

I have a CCTV in Beau's chamber with the monitor in the kitchen where I have been endlessly entertained by his antics. Playing with food remnants has become an Olympic event with a piece of rabbit skin being his favourite toy. Having hurled this item around several times, it eventually landed on his head and he spent a good 15 minutes peering out from underneath it, then a flick and off it went only to be caught and off the whole thing would go again.

Never fly without telemetry

As an afterthought, but something I feel strongly about, is that I never fly a bird without telemetry. My hawks are all fit and get flown at least six days per week. They hunt over enormous distances in hilly country in most weather conditions and can easily get

lost from view either behind a hill or in cover. They mean too much to me to be taken out without telemetry. A bird might not cost much to replace, but when you take into account the hours of training that go into making a bird exceptional, is it worth taking a chance? Someone I overheard at a game fair said, "my birds are so obedient they don't need telemetry." Are they obedient or are they so hungry and unfit they can't go far before running out of energy. Another person said, "telemetry is for wimps." So, is everyone who cares about their bird a wimp? The best one was, "I've been flying birds for ten years and I've only lost three." Oh, really, only three? Clever man. Try to remember that a complete beginner might be hearing those words.

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Everyone involved with falconry knows full well that the sport has a long and very rich heritage. After all the sport itself dates back more than 4000 years. Along with this special heritage comes a unique portion of language that has been used by falconers and austringers for centuries. But sadly it would appear that the language of falconry, along with many other traditional practices associated with the sport, is being allowed to fall by the wayside...



Lost

Languages

It is not that the language is no longer appropriate or that terms have changed. It is merely that the wonderful way that falconers have always had, with regard to expressing themselves about their sport and enjoyment of it, is not being used sufficiently to keep it alive. It would be a tragedy if this particular piece of heritage were allowed to slowly fade away and disappear forever. But I really do fear that is what is happening currently.

In journals and magazines falcons and hawks are routinely referred to as birds. Even the editorial of this magazine is blatantly guilty of that. I was also taught to refer to a specific individual accurately and when generalising refer to hawks. For example the female Harris Hawk I currently hawk with is an **internewed eyass** of 12 seasons. That is she is 12 years old and has gone through 11 moults. Or to be even more accurate she was **disclosed** 12 years ago, for this is the correct term for the hatching of a falcon or hawk egg when the **eyass** is going to become a falconers' hunting companion.

Hawking with Ducks?

I recently had a call from a woman wanting to order some equipment and I assured her it would be sent that same day because the following day I was flying to Mexico for a month of **duck hawking**. The woman was extremely puzzled and wanted to know what on earth I could hawk with ducks! This is obviously an extreme example but it does well to illustrate the lack of knowledge with regard to the true language of falconry.

When it comes to discussing the hawks themselves **passage** and **haggards** are almost a thing of the past except in some cases of rehabilitation. All falconers in the UK use exclusively **eyasses** as near as makes no odds. Because these **eyass** hawks are bred in captivity we do not go out and take them as **ramagers** or **branchers**. A **ramager** was the term for an **eyass** after it had **disclosed** but before it could walk upright. A **brancher** was the next stage and, as its name implies indicates that the hawk or falcon is starting to explore its immediate surroundings of either tree or nest ledge.

Young hawks did not usually begin their



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training until they were **fully summed** or **hard penned** as some people refer to it. Nowadays, with many young hawks or falcons being socially imprinted their training begins whilst they are still **un-summed**. That is they still have blood in their feathers. And what of the feathers and other parts of a hawk. All falconers know what primaries and secondaries are but what about **pendant feathers, sails, train, deck feathers, crines, sarcel, flags, beam feathers and mail**. **Pendants** are the feathers behind a hawk's thigh and **crines** are the bristle like feathers around the eyes. **Sails** are the wings and **train** is the tail with the centre two feathers being the **decks**. Of course if the major flight feathers should get damaged then they can be repaired by the process of **imping**.

Other parts of a hawk are also given their own terminology. **Cere, panel, pounces** and **petty singles** to name but a few. The **cere** is the wax like skin at the base of the beak and the **panel** is the lower stomach. **Pounces** are the claws and **petty singles** the toes. Should the petty singles get overgrown then they can of course be **coped**, that is trimmed.

Many of the actions of a trained hawk also have special words designated to them. For example a falcon that is sitting on its **block** weathering may well **rouse, warble** and then **mantle**. A **rouse** is when a hawk stands all her feathers on end and then gives them a thoroughly good shake. **Warbling** is when a hawk brings both wings together over her back and this is usually followed by a **mantle**, which is when the hawk stretches out one wing and leg and then repeats the process on the other side.

Old Falconry Words

Where some confusion can lie with the old traditional falconry terminology is when several actions are covered by the same word. **Mantle** is an appropriate example of this. As well as stretching it also refers to the action of a hawk when she displays her wings and tails out to dry in the same way that cormorants do. The most common use of mantle is to describe the action of a hawk when it crouches over its food and tries to hide it from view with wings and tail spread out. This is usually the sign of a jealous or greedy hawk and is not

The famous *mews* in London at Charing Cross and Chelsea were originally places where the royal hawks were moulted. In fact, it was only in the time of Henry the Eighth that horses were first put into a *mews*. This was because the royal stables at Bloomsbury had burned down in a fire. From then on they were used as stables and this is why most non-field sports people associate the word *mews* with horses

something a well-mannered hawk would do. In fact a hawk that displayed this type of behaviour may well be considered to be a *mar-hawk*, that is one that has been ruined by bad handling.

Actual hunting with hawks and falcons produces a range of terms that are unique to the sport. A hawk will be flown at *quarry* directly from the fist and is therefore flown *at bolt*. A falcon will either be flown *out of the hood* or *waiting on*. Let's say we have *slipped* a Goshawk from the fist at a pheasant. The Goshawk will fly *at stretch* until it *fetches* its *quarry* or its *quarry puts in*. If this is the case the Goshawk will *mark* the spot and either *make point* or *take stand*. Should the *Austringer* not be able to *serve* the Goshawk quickly she may well *fly at head* and chase something else.

A falcon flown *out of the hood* will *sink the wind* and then *tower up* in an effort to *truss* her *quarry*. If the flight goes wrong then she may well *rake away*. A falcon that is used for *waiting on* flights will *ring up* to attain her *pitch* and then from this lofty height will *stoop* in an effort to *bind* with her *quarry*. She may be unsuccessful and only *ruff* the intended victim. The stoop may have been a direct one or she may have *cancelereed*. Should she not have stooped then she would have *refused* her *quarry*.

The *quarry* also comes in for the attention of our special language. The body of any bird caught by a hawk or falcon is called *the pelt*, but this does not apply to an animal. The carcase of the *quarry* once the hawk has finished being fed on it is *the pelf*. The successful hawk or falcon will normally be fed on the neck of the *quarry* and then taken up so that another flight can

be obtained. The neck of the *quarry* killed by a hawk and used for feeding is the *inke* or *juke*.

The *quarry* our falcon has principally been trained to fly will normally dictate the manner in which we refer to it. That is a falcon used for grouse is known as a *grouse hawk*, one that flies rooks a *rook hawk* and so on. The term hawk on its own is very general and covers a multitude. All a falconer's hunting raptors are known as hawks whether they are in fact hawks or falcons or specialised in that they are duck hawks or partridge hawks. They are all still hawks.

Mis-used Words

When it comes to the word *Falcon* this is probably the most misused word of all closely followed by *Tiercel*. A *Falcon* is only a female peregrine. *Tiercel* should only ever be used to refer to a male Peregrine or a male Goshawk. All other hawks and falcons should be qualified in their title. Therefore we get *Saker Falcon* or *Sakret*, *Merlin* or *Jack*, *Hobby* or *Robin*, *Sparrowhawk* or *Musket*.

When the hunting season draws to a close we put our hawks down to *mew* and to do this we put them in the *mews*. *Mew* comes from the French word *muer*, which means to moult. A *mews* is totally different from a *hawk-house*. Although another common inaccuracy in modern falconry is that falconers refer to where their hawks are kept as their *mews*. A hawk-house is where working hawks are kept and hawks are moulted in specifically designated buildings. The famous *mews* in London at Charing Cross and Chelsea were originally



places where the royal hawks were moulted. In fact, it was only in the time of Henry the Eighth that horses were first put into a *mews*. This was because the royal stables at Bloomsbury had burned down in a fire. From then on they were used as stables and this is why most non-field sports people associate the word *mews* with horses.

So many expressions in everyday use come directly from the sport of Falconry. Most people use them on a regular basis whilst remaining blissfully unaware where they originate from. To *cadge* a lift, be *under the thumb*, to *hoodwink* someone, *mantelpiece*, to come to the *end of your tether*, to *rouse* yourself. The list goes on and on.

Some of the language of falconry is unwieldy and cumbersome but most is neat and precise and it would be dreadful if it were allowed to fade into oblivion through lack of understanding and use.

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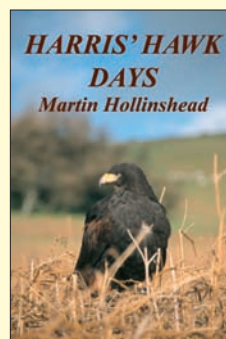
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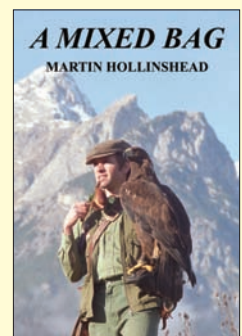
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new centre in South Africa



in place and quickly. Luckily for me I had bought a farm two years previously and was of an ample size to move the centre to, around one hundred hectares. It is only situated about 10 kilometres from the existing site. The farm was the main reason that we were evicted because my landlord knew that we wanted to move the centre there eventually and thought that he would move first so that he could do something with his premises, his plan "A Parrot Park".

Now I am sure some of you in the past have moved house and have quickly had to erect aviaries for your existing bird/birds. Put yourself in my shoes; 109 birds to move including some on eggs and some with youngsters. Then you have to consider that these aviaries have to be pleasing to the eye and permanent, not just temporary affairs bashed together, as members of the public are going to be scrutinising them on a daily basis. These aviaries had to be the business. Then consider the money. Don't remind me of the money. We needed bricks, foundations, netting, etc. for 30 plus aviaries plus a hawk walk, gardens, plants etc. I promise the list goes on and on.

Planning the park

The layout was one of the biggest problems; where to put the aviaries, how to organise the paths, where do the gardens go? I am getting in a panic just thinking about it all over again. Then there are the things you don't even think about initially; toilets, car park, etc. We quickly realised that we were never going to be able to move in 30 days and pleaded with our landlord for more time. This was denied. He told us that any birds that remained on his property one day after his stated move date became his property. Now, you can understand how pleased I was about that and took the advice of a good friend of mine who, luckily for me, is an attorney. After a quick communication from him to the landlord we were granted

Some of you may remember I wrote an article, which was published in issue 55 of this magazine about my new life in South Africa. To enlighten others, I had taken over an existing bird of prey centre in a small village called Dullstroom about one hundred and fifty kilometres from the Kruger National Park and attempted to make it my own. Time has moved on since then and many things have changed so I thought some of you might be interested to read of my progress.

As I stated in my previous article, on arrival here in South Africa I was astounded at the lack of interest shown in a bird of prey centre. I had been lucky enough to volunteer in one of the bigger centres back in the UK and was used to the likes of four hundred to a thousand people coming through the door depending on the time of year and of course depending on how the weather was behaving. Here we are lucky

to have beautiful weather for at least three hundred days of the year and we can stay open all year round, closing only on Christmas Day. Attendance had always been very poor and that is how I came about taking over the centre. The previous owner had just about had enough. It was a huge gamble for me, in retrospect, but something that I have never regretted.

The past six months have seen an amazing change around in our fortunes and people are at last coming to see us. This has also coincided with the centre moving venues and a new business partner getting involved all the way out from the UK, Mark Bett.

Eviction crisis

The centre had to move venues due to the landlord evicting us from the existing site. To our horror he only gave us 30 days notice and so a plan obviously had to be put

one more month but for a price – double the rent.

Now we had to get ourselves into gear and get building. We collected around 20 labourers and builders from the local townships and got down to the business of erecting aviaries.

Foundations were dug, brickwork completed, netting put into place. Every day the landscape of the farm changed quite dramatically. We were also very lucky that we had so many friends who volunteered from the local community to lend a hand. Shopkeepers, hoteliers and pub landlords/landladies, to name just a few. This help was invaluable and it was so touching to have so much support from the villagers.

Pressing time

As the days and time moved on however, the panic and frantic discussion would set in amongst all of us, we never thought that we would make it. The time was too short. The weather, normally the one thing that you always thought you could rely on over here in South Africa let us down on many occasions. Heavy rain and high winds being the main culprits, building days were lost, but still we persevered and slowly but surely progress was made.

As time edged closer towards the move, we made the decision that for the last week before we had to move we would close the existing centre so that I could help out more on site. This was fantastic for me because I had been so frustrated not being able to help other than when the centre closed at 4pm, when I would rush home and help until it got dark. Quite often I got into big trouble because things did not seem as if they had been done right and I let everyone know about it and so as you can imagine I wasn't Mr Popular.

The dreaded day of the move arrived and not all the aviaries were ready. It seemed that the whole village had heard of our plight that the buildings were not complete as they all appeared to have turned out to help us finish and by some kind of miracle of miracles by midday the aviaries were all ready for occupation. We made trip after trip between the old and the new centre armed with boxes and proceeded to collect all the birds, the last birds were collected at around 10.30pm.



■ clockwise, from left: work underway, constructing the aviaries, building with help from the locals, demonstration in progress

New project achieved

We had moved! We couldn't believe it. Obviously there were problems. Parent birds were not going to look after new youngsters in the new aviaries now and so hand rearing and crèche rearing had to take place. Some of the youngsters were farmed out to other falconers whom had birds that could be foster parents and some eggs had to go into incubators.

Two unfortunate instances occurred. Our Lanner falcons hatched their first youngster out on the day we moved and also our African Goshawk female laid her first egg at the same time. Perfect timing.

Open to the public

We opened the new centre on 1 November 2004, 67 days after we received our eviction notice. This, in our eyes, was a major achievement and we feel very proud of ourselves and at the same time we are so grateful to all our friends.

At this point I must point out how lucky I am to have such a wonderful lady in my life. Her name is Marie and she is South African through and through and a grafter of note, though you wouldn't think so looking at her because there is nothing of her. She took on the roles of construction manager, garden manager and site manager, even builder; there were times when we would find her four metres up on top of one of the aviaries hammering in nails.

Marie laid out the plans for the whole

centre, all we had to do was give her the dimensions of the aviaries and she mapped out the whole site.

I couldn't be there most of the time because the existing centre had to remain open and so she had to take charge.

Then comes my business partner Mark Bett. I have known Mark for around 20 years now and fortunately for me 10 months earlier Mark had come out to South Africa to partner me in the bird of prey venture. I had given him part of my farm to build a house on and he had promised to pledge money into the centre, thank goodness that he had, because this was the only way that we could afford to finance the new facility. I have got to be honest, without the two of them I think I would have just ended up in an early grave. As it was halfway through the building process I went down with shingles, not to be recommended I can assure you.

Looking to the future with hope

Since last November we have had fantastic attendances at the centre, the move so far has proved successful. People now see the centre as they approach Dullstroom and we are right on the main road, we couldn't be happier. We are so looking forward to the future and also looking forward to more and more visitors. If you ever get a chance to come to South Africa, please pop in and see us - we would love to see you. For you austringers out there, we might even show you our Black Sparrowhawks!

Wow - Is this guy really talking about us?



Received via e-mail, posted on one of the falconry web rings.

Well just to let you know, I had a transmitter fall off a dodgy mount on Saturday, discovered the fact when I got back to the car. Tracked back 2 1/4 miles over very broken hill terrain, which might not sound very far but this was all gullies and mountains.

I found the tranny straight away in 2ft snow drift. Directional signal like a lazer. This was using a falconry electronics tranny and receiver. I have used most systems in the past including (seven other makes mentioned) etc., but this system rocks!

This is without a doubt the best system I have owned and thoroughly recommend it to anyone. I'm one very, very happy customer.

What a result ! This is what makes our job worthwhile, and yes it is genuine. (The cheque is in the post by the way).

When Peter Eldrett asked me to write an article for the *Falconers Magazine* about telemetry I said "no problem, leave it with me". It was only after I put the phone down I thought what have I let myself in for and what aspect can I write about that hasn't been covered before? Well, I suppose the best place to start is at the beginning with how Falconry Electronics came to be. (Somebody has glazed over already, keep reading it gets better I promise)!

I, along with several other falconers were stood around talking after we had

finished exercising the falcons to the kite, (theirs not mine), when the subject of telemetry raised its head like it often does. One person was complaining about sending a faulty item back to a supplier weeks ago and how he was still waiting for a replacement. "If only we could get a telemetry supplier who gives a prompt good all-round service." It was at this point that the light bulb came on inside my head.

That was a little over four years ago. The company has continued to grow steadily on the back of good service and recommendation by word of mouth. Bob Dalton gave our Merlin range of transmitters a glowing report in the last issue of the *Falconers Magazine*, under the heading "customer satisfaction", many thanks Bob. We also have the high power Sterling range, designed and developed by my friend Roy, who takes care of all our electronic research and development. Sterling transmitters have taken a little over four years to design and develop into the high power units we have today. Roy also looks after the ever-growing repair side of the business too. In fact we are probably the only company who can offer a most makes telemetry repair and re-calibration service.

New developments include additions to our Sterling transmitter range and the design and manufacture of our own short telescopic Yagi antenna. Some of you may have seen the new transmitters at the Falconry fair.

Do's and Don't's

So that is how Falconry Electronics came to be. Now I suppose we need to talk a little about the subject in the shape of a few do's and don'ts and things to consider when buying telemetry.

First of all I must stress that I am not here to rubbish other makes of equipment, after all we get to repair most of them! And at the end of the day they all recover birds to some degree or another. What I will say is, when buying telemetry you can easily get caught out because you can pay a lot of money for very little when it comes to performance.

When people are looking to buy telemetry they don't always ask the right questions. For example, very few people ask about company returns policy. If there is a problem what is the procedure? Does the faulty item have to be returned to the manufacturer in the USA?

We have all heard stories of goods being returned to the US and taking months to come back, sometimes with the result of losing a whole flying season. Will the goods be exchanged or do they have to be repaired? We operate an exchange scheme within the first 12 months on our receivers, for the remaining four years of the warranty we will, only in extreme cases return them to the US. Luckily 99% of the units returned so far have only had flat batteries! So buy a battery tester, one that will put the battery under load so you get an accurate reading. This applies to transmitter batteries too, or better still change them regularly.

Avoid – any Yagi antenna that when unfolded looks way too small for the frequency it is claimed to be. These antenna sizes are specifically calculated to collect the design frequency and anything under size will severely restrict performance.

Avoid – leaving batteries in receivers for extended periods when not in use. Batteries have been known to leak and when they do the result is corrosion to internal parts and in severe circumstances render the unit beyond economical repair.

Always – test transmitters at least once a week from a distance of 100 metres. If the coaxial cable linking the receiver to the Yagi is faulty, it will sound fine when you are sat next to it but over a distance the signal will be vastly reduced and may even disappear altogether. This is because the radio signal from the transmitter will bypass the faulty coaxial cable and go directly into the receiver. It applies to transmitter antennas too, especially if they have a wound coil incorporated.

Avoid – running transmitter batteries right to the end of their useful life. If your transmitter has a working life of say, ten days, run it for three or four and then change them. Throw them away to avoid mixing them up with good stock. If you lost your bird with only two days worth of life left in the batteries you will obviously only have those two days in which to find it. Remember also that a transmitter is like a torch, when the batteries start to fail the light goes dim. The same applies to the transmitted signal so these last two days will also be on reduced power.

Always – use quality brand name batteries and remember to test them (yes new batteries have been known to be faulty). We have just recently sent a customer of ours three new Stirling transmitters. He rang us and said he was not very happy at all, the transmitter we sent him to replace his faulty one did not work either, even with the brand new

batteries he had just bought from his local shop (you know where we are going with this don't you?). Needless to say it caught me out too and also cost me a fair bit in postage.

Avoid – importing your own telemetry. "You would say that wouldn't you", I hear you all say. Yes I would, don't get caught with the sucker punch. Yes you have done a great "deal" and it is only a matter of time before your telemetry is delivered. A knock at the door is answered to the deliveryman, who is now demanding about a hundred pounds to cover the VAT and import duties and he won't hand it over until you pay up. Yes you may still save a little after all this but is it worth it? Reflect on what I said earlier about sending goods back to the USA.

The savings soon pale into insignificance when you have to send the thing back for repair. Not to mention down time. It's not too bad sending goods to them, the sting comes when they send it back to you. You may even have to prove to customs and excise that you have genuinely returned it for repair because they delight in trying to sting you for the tax again. It has happened to me and the stress is not worth it, believe me.

Most important of all – practice! Practice! Practice! I will never forget the day when someone telephoned me and said, "I have lost my bird, how do I use it"? Practice, as obvious as it seems can make the difference between finding your bird quickly and losing it for good. Practice in woodland, in built up areas, in-between buildings and a mix of all three. Practise in bad weather and even after dark. All these scenarios can affect the transmitted signal. Get someone to hide the transmitter somewhere so you can go and find it. Organise a club event, it is quite good fun actually. Some people are quite inventive when it comes to hiding transmitters.

Consider - investing in a mag mount antenna for your car. Especially if your

passion is for longwings. Falcons can soon be out of sight and range. So the ability to jump in the car, connect the omnidirectional antenna and give chase is a must and a real time saver because you don't have to keep stopping and getting out of the car to do a scan. You can drive around in ever increasing circles until you get a signal, then it's just a case of jumping out of the car, re-connecting the Yagi antenna and getting a fix on the direction.

Always – use a back-up transmitter, especially on falcons. These things fail; to say otherwise would be an outright lie. After all you would never buy any other micro electronic goods and never expect them to fail would you?

Always – have your equipment checked over, at least every two or three years. Get it checked during the summer, not with everyone else, three weeks before the season starts!

Well I hope I have written a small but informative guide. If only one person recovers a bird as a result then it has been worthwhile. Don't forget we can advise on most aspects regarding telemetry; even if you are thinking of buying second hand equipment give us a call without obligation. We can hopefully steer you in the right direction. I will leave you with these words of wisdom from our website - www.falconryelectronics.co.uk.

Signal range depends on the environment, equipment capabilities and user expertise. The transmitters power output and the receiver's sensitivity to incoming signals are major factors in determining range. Yagi antennas amplify and direct the incoming signal to the receiver. Blanking circuitry within helps reduce unwanted noise and improves signal reception under poor conditions. Any make of transmitter under adverse conditions, will have a dramatically reduced range and under perfect conditions i.e. line of sight, perform as per manufacturers' claims.



■ from left: Tail mount, Yagi, Receiver

British

Falconry & Raptor Fair 2005

Peter Eldrett

The 15th Falconry Fair was once again held at Chetwynd Park, Shropshire and it was another success for all who attended the event.

Attendance seemed to be on a par with last year's event and all the traders were doing brisk business, particularly on the first day of the show. The weather didn't help. Heavy rain showers on the second day made the fair a bit more interesting with members of the public running in all directions to avoid getting a soaking.

The rain did nothing to upset the demonstrations in the main arena though, which was once again sponsored by Honeybrook Animal Farms. The main arena attractions were slightly different this year, although falconers Brian Paterson and Terry Large gave displays. Brian showed his delta kite display, which went very well. The wind was just right and his birds flew superbly.

Terry gave another excellent display and he also had his duties to do in the main ring as chairman of the Campaign for Falconry; one of which was to present a gift to the niece of Dougie Morgans who sadly died in April this year. Dougie was the president of the Welsh Hawking Club and members of the club were going to celebrate his 80th birthday at the fair.

There was also an excellent show of eagles from Eagle Heights who are based in Kent. This was a new addition to the event and I hope they will make a return visit next year. They gave a good display of their birds, which was a joy to watch.

Another first time showing was the Northumberland Crow Falcons with Dr Nick Fox and his assistants giving a brief insight into the ancient art of flying falcons at crows from horseback. With riders cantering around the ring carrying falcons on their fists, it only made you wonder what it would be like to be in the field observing this spectacle. Only a crow hawking video is available to most of us.

Anybody who attends the fair regularly would have been surprised to see that the mews had changed position. This year it was sited on the plateau and was even bigger than before to accommodate the extra birds

on show. It made a good viewing point overlooking the main arena and the showground as a whole.

There is always one section that is always popular with both falconers and public alike and that is the art marquee. Yet again it was organised by Chris Christoforou in his usual efficient manner. Many regular artists show their work and one can only admire their talent.

The mini arena this year was sponsored by Raptor Rescue and was the venue for many interesting talks and demonstrations. Personally, I hope that Raptor Rescue will support the arena again next year.

With a regimental brass band, packs of dogs and sky divers, there was something for everyone and the time between events in the main ring was kept to a minimum. Also, other events outside the ring such as gundog scurry, agility and clay pigeon shooting, there was always something going on to entertain the crowd.

On the Sunday evening there was a barbeque and hog roast supplied by Honeybrook Animal Farms and a big thank you must go to Lynn and Nick Havemann-Mart and all the helpers who made this food-fest a success. There is a lot of hard work that goes into feeding all us hungry people hot food and with the guests contributing money to the event, more financial support was raised for The Campaign for Falconry.

Another new project was launched at the fair and that was the Heritage Trust. This has been set up as an historical body concerning falconers from the past. These falconers must not be forgotten as they influence how we practise our sport today. The people who were at the launch included Roger Upton, Nick Fox, Gary Timbrell, Bob Dalton, Patrick Morel, Jose Manuel Rodriguex-Villa Matons, Peter Devers, Paul Beecroft and Diana Durman-Waters.

Finally, a mention must go to Ron Morris and his team for the excellent organisation of the fair. Year after year everything seems to run like clockwork. Ron always seems to bend over backwards to accommodate the wishes of all the traders and public alike. All in all, a great success!



Posing at the fair



■ Jose Suoto having a chat



■ Crowds at this year's fair



■ Roger Upton, Kent Carnie and Angela Harrison (the old and the new)



■ Martin Hollinshead and the hard sell



■ Rob Kelly, Andrew Ellis and Bill Tofts enjoying the barbeque



■ Dr Nick Fox giving a demonstration

the Gentle Touch

This article goes to press at a time of year that sees many newcomers to the sport taking possession of their first hawk – probably a Harris’.

They will have been bombarded with advice, *hopefully* read the standard works and gone on a course. If they’ve really planned things correctly, they will have somehow bribed or blackmailed an experienced falconer into being on 24-hour call. They have behind them a hawking bag stuffed with DOs and DON’Ts. At the risk of breaking the shoulder strap let me throw in a few more tips.

Hands Off!

The first of these is: keep your hands off the bird! Any form of physical restraint should be avoided at all costs. The importance of this is never emphasised enough. In fact because the novice falconer enters the sport restraining his new charge so that equipment can be fitted, it’s all too easy for this to be seen as acceptable for future jobs: “Look, he soon got over it. He’ll get over it next time too.” I wonder how many beginners are actually instructed to try and make sure this is the very *last* time the bird suffers this?

Manhandling destroys trust. It can lead to fear, aggression – disgust. And (and this is an often overlooked consideration) every time a hawk is physically restrained, there is a chance of injuring it. Manhandling

is bad, and every effort should be made to avoid it.

A Little Thought

With a little thought, all manner of jobs can be attended to without the bird needing to be restrained at all. The biggest help with

Maybe to see bating for the evil it is, the falconer has to take a step back and look at the issue from an outsider’s perspective: bird is tied by legs and tortured! Why should any bird be made to suffer this?

this is of course the hood. Longwingers have always had this tool but it’s only been in quite recent years that UK falconers flying other raptors have been looking to it. The way in which Harris’ hawkers have taken to the hood is astonishing, and an item that was once a rare request now keeps equipment manufacturers busy into the early hours.

Perhaps the best example of the hood’s usefulness is seen with coping. This is a procedure very difficult to tackle on the unrestrained bird without the hood. With the hood, the bird simply sits on the glove while the tip of the beak is snipped off (I prefer guillotine type dog nail cutters

designed to avoid the nail/beak splitting), followed by a bit of swift file work to tidy it up. This type of coping does of course have its limitations and the results achieved may not suit the perfectionist. However, if the perfect beak – the type fit for a trip down the catwalk – means grabbing the bird then it’s something I’m prepared to pass on. What I do find is that given sufficient tough food (I feed a lot of rabbit heads) the beak slowly brings itself back into shape. Nevertheless, I will confess that I often struggle for good headshots because my Harris’ hawks’ beaks aren’t perfect ‘cover material’. I console myself with their happy faces!

Two other pieces of management the hood can help with are imping and the changing of Aylmeri anklets. Due to the parabuteo’s incredibly durable plumage, most owners are a stranger to imping, and generally a Harris’ in poor plumage is a bird that is being housed and managed very poorly. Nevertheless, the occasional feather will get damaged beyond the saving of hot water (cold often sufficing for the Harris’) and must be repaired. Again, especially if the involved feather is in the tail, the hood allows its imping, even right at the base, without the

bird suffering insult.

An alternative to the hood would be to keep the bird occupied on a tiring. This can work very well and I remember old friend Ernst Lutger putting a complete tail into a goshawk as it pulled eagerly away on some ‘old boot’ tiring in a flat in Bratislava. A lure can work too, the operation is done as the bird feeds from it on the ground. Or better still maybe – a kill. On more than one occasion, I’ve taken jesses and closing tool into the field to enable me to change a bird’s gear on a kill. The beauty of the lure/kill is that whatever job needs doing, it can be tackled alone; the tiring needs a hand to hold it.



- Bird being held: Keep those hands off!
- Hooded bird: The hood can be a great ally.



The Evil Bate

My second piece of advice concerns bating. Like manhandling, bating is bad. It might seem that a bit of bating does no harm – maybe even that it's acceptable, like a dog pulling at its leash, which isn't acceptable either but nothing could be further from the truth. The bating bird is unhappy. And unhappy doesn't work in with a top quality man-bird partnership. Maybe to see bating for the evil it is, the falconer has to take a step back and look at the issue from an outsider's perspective: bird is tied by legs and tortured! Why should any bird be made to suffer this?

Bating can be split into two topics: taming and hawking. For the novice, both can be trouble. Let's look at taming first. Generally, I don't think the average newcomer to the sport is prepared for how wild an aviary-fresh Harris' can be. They have seen nice tame birds flying at game fairs, centres or at club meets and, although they may have been warned, don't expect anything like the bundle of fearfulness and terror they get. Granted, depending on rearing method and/or the

stock they are from (let the novice be aware that Harris' hawks are not the 'clones' so often depicted), the 'bundle' might prove a puppy dog, but so many – typically the long-left parent-reared birds so popular in the UK – fly from those restraining hands into a bating, flapping, won't-stand-up whirlwind that has the beginner totally out of his depth.

Managing such a bird without it suffering mental or physical harm takes the greatest care. This bird is certainly the very worst candidate for the 'tie it down in the garden and let it settle' approach the novice might have in mind, and the distressed bird's behaviour is five thousand light years away from getting its training off to a positive start.

There are two options: a darkened mews, this providing a safe haven for the bird until it has been gradually

introduced to the horrors of its new world; or hooding. With the latter, the bird is hooded when first taken in hand and kept hooded when not being manned with a tiring/food. The hooding is dispensed with as soon as the bird is steady enough to be approached and picked up – with food – in daylight.

With insensitive tethering, it isn't only mental torture that needs to be considered, it's the risk of physical damage. Every year a significant number of young Harris' hawks get their first transport-box trip not to the field, but to the vets for the treatment of a broken leg.

Hawking

The best approach is to go through your management as if using jesses fashioned from a single strand of cotton. If a hard tug from an ant could break them – they're about perfect! With these jesses you have to work as if your bird had no jesses at all. With hawking my aim is to have a session without any bating at all. The bird is hooded in its free-flight mews, carried to its transport box in the car (the hood is removed for travelling), hooded again at

our destination for the walk to wherever we are flying, then unhooded and allowed to go.

If a hood isn't being used the bird might be boxed in the mews or garden and carried to the car. This might not be a consideration when loading in a quiet place, but if you live in the middle of a city and are boxing on a rush-hour street, it can keep things smooth. Once in the field the bird might even be carried boxed to the hawking area. This is something US Harris' flyers Tom and Jennifer Coulson draw attention to in *American Falconry*: "In some of our hunting spots, we are forced to park near a busy road (or some other spot unsafe for the group) and then carry the boxes to a site where the group can be loosed with safety."

In the field bating remains public enemy number one. Many Harris' hawkers employ the free-flight mode of hawking, but what about field meets where the bird must be kept on the glove – possibly near the trees it is normally free to use? Or what about bating after quarry that *belongs* to another hawk. All this can ruin the day for the bird, and as for how it feels about the person doing the holding back.

The return to the car and home is done in the same manner: no bating. Food on the glove can be used – maybe the last chunk of the bird's final kill – but if you're in company this means other hawks – that maybe aren't being fed or are not hooded - having to watch this, which won't endear you to their owners. The hood works best. But hood or food, the aim is to have the bird return home having never been restrained on the glove at all. The sensitive bird in particular will benefit from this kind of courtesy, never feeling the slightest bit annoyed and thus savouring the hunt more and giving a better account of itself.

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The developing of a top-performing Harris' takes time, skill, hawking opportunities and meticulous attention to detail. The 'Gentle Touch' is just one aspect of this, but if the novice slips on those kid gloves from day one he is already on the road to owning that prize of prizes, the *happy* heavy-hunting bird that lives to be in the field with its human partner.



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**List of lost, found,
reunited and
stolen birds from the
IBR between
15 March 2005 to
1 June 2005**

STOLEN x 4

IBR22162Z EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
HARRIS HAWKS x 2
25018W 10656VPEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID

REUNITED x 90

BALD EAGLE
BARN OWLS x 10
INDIAN EAGLE OWL
BLACK KITE
CHILEAN BLUE EAGLE
COMMON BUZZARDS x 3
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWLS x 4
FERRUGINOUS HAWK
GOSHAWKS x 3
GREAT HORNED OWLS x 2
GYR HYBRID FALCONS x 8
HARRIS HAWKS x 21
KESTRELS x 3

LANNER FALCONS x 8
PEREGRINE FALCONS x 3
PEREGRINE HYBRIDS x 5
PERLIN
RED-TAILED HAWKS x 3
SAKER FALCONS x 7
TAWNY OWL
TURKEY VULTURE

FOUND x 16

67797????
0055????
0016????
0264????
62N????
15F????
11A????
2B????
1316????
12048????
4PR????
2SC????
4AL????
6WH????
1130????
1902????

BARN OWL
BARN OWL
BARN OWL
BARN OWL
BARN OWL
INDIAN EAGLE OWL
COMMON BUZZARD
COMMON BUZZARD
COMMON BUZZARD
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
HARRIS HAWK
KESTREL
KESTREL
RED-TAILED HAWK
RED-TAILED HAWK

LOST x 63

BARN OWLS x 4
INDIAN EAGLE OWLS x 2
BLACK KITE
COMMON BUZZARD
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWLS x 4
FERRUGINOUS HAWK
GOSHAWKS x 2
GREAT HORNED OWL
GYR/HYBRIDS x 5
HARRIS HAWKS x 11
KESTRELS x 8
LANNER FALCONS x 6
LITTLE OWL
PEREGRINE FALCONS x 2
PEREGRINE HYBRIDS x 8
RED-TAILED HAWKS x 5
SAKER FALCON

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Fly by Night soars to success

■ Rolf Harris opening the art exhibition



Over the evenings of the 18 and 19 June, The Hawk Conservancy Trust held a unique fund-raising event for its Oriental White Backed Vulture Conservation programme, a species that is critically endangered in the wild. Over 500 guests attended the two nights, which were opened by the Trust's patron, Rolf Harris on the Saturday evening and TV presenter and naturalist, Chris Packham on the Sunday evening.

Both evenings featured an art exhibition by internationally renowned artists including Geoffrey Dashwood, Vivien Mallock and many others. Guests enjoyed champagne and canapés whilst listening to live music. The highlight of the evenings were two flying displays of birds of prey and owls, which were choreographed to music and that can only be described as aerial dressage.

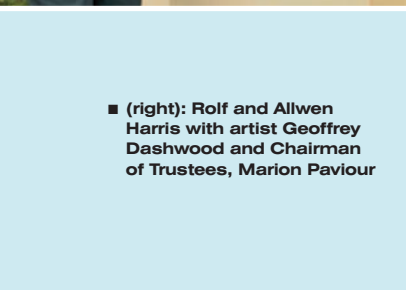
The evenings were a great success and the charity auction and raffle held helped to raise much needed funds.



■ (left): Artist Vivien Mallock with some of her work



■ (right): Trust Chief Executive Officer, Ashley Smith, with local MP Sir George Young



■ (right): Rolf and Allwen Harris with artist Geoffrey Dashwood and Chairman of Trustees, Marion Paviour



■ (below): Chris Packham speaking on the importance of the evening's event



■ (left): Falconer Mike Riley calling in Bald Eagle, Cheyenne, during the evening's flying display



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Exmoor Merlins under surveillance

PC Roger Jolliffe
Wildlife Crime Officer, Avon & Somerset Constabulary

Merlins on Exmoor, which involve as few as two breeding pairs are about to receive extra protection in an attempt to safeguard their nest sites from the threat of human disturbance. Avon & Somerset Constabulary are working closely with the RSPB, National Trust and Exmoor National Park Authority to ensure that the birds breed successfully and bring a halt to a history of past failures which the Police believe have been partly due to human intervention.

Wildlife Crime Officer PC Roger Jolliffe explained more about the background to this current initiative and why they were taking positive action.

“When RSPB investigations officer, Chris Townend, approached me about the plight of the Exmoor Merlins I don't think anyone fully realised the importance of this population in South West England as it was assumed there were other breeding pairs around. The last study of Merlins on Exmoor was in 2000 and it was found that since the 1990s, the number of breeding pairs had fallen from five to just two pairs.

The Exmoor birds do have a historic record of breeding failure but it has only come to light recently that the reasons for this are due in part to deliberate acts of disturbance and nest interference by some individuals. Regular monitoring of the population level and a continuing understanding of the location of the birds will help those involved provide better protection for the birds.

Whoever is responsible for this problem, be it egg collectors or nest disturbers, the situation is now critical and totally unacceptable. Given the fact that Merlins are specially protected by law then such acts amount to serious criminal offences. What makes matters worse is that these individuals may, by their activities, be contributing to the extinction of Merlins as a breeding species in SW England.

We will do everything we can to ensure that the birds are protected and are fortunate that we can call upon a wide range of groups to assist us in doing that – all highly committed to help protect the birds through the breeding season. Anyone who is found to be involved in committing these offences will be arrested and prosecuted, thanks to strengthened laws, offenders can expect to receive maximum penalties in court, now six months imprisonment and a fine of up to £5000.

We are also asking for members of the public to help us, particularly walkers, birdwatchers and horse riders who visit Exmoor regularly. We are keen to encourage them to contact the Police if they see anyone acting in a suspicious manner on the



■ photo credit Steve Magennis

hills. The more eyes we have watching out the better chance the birds have of being successful.

So far the public have been marvellous in their support for this initiative and local people are outraged that the activities of a small number of individuals are threatening the very existence of this wonderful raptor, a bird that belongs on Exmoor and typifies the rich and diverse ecology of the area.

We know that across the UK Merlin numbers are increasing thanks to improved laws and the efforts of conservation groups so it is alarming that here on Exmoor the birds are facing such a precarious future. To lose them would be catastrophic and that is why we will do everything we can to give them the protection they deserve.”

As part of the research into the plight of Merlins on Exmoor the RSPB is carrying out a full survey during the 2005 breeding season thanks to financial support from the Exmoor National Park Authority.

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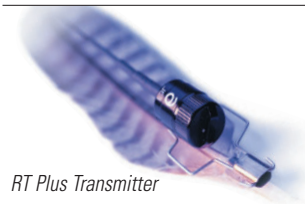
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