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Sometimes it is not always easy to edit a magazine and this issue was particularly difficult as I had to do some of the work from a hospital bed! I could not have produced the issue without the help of my wife, Marian, and colleagues Steve Hunt and Donna Vincent. Many thanks for your help.

We are all looking forward to the season ahead and the excitement we hope it will bring. Many of you will already have your birds flying and others will be in the process of training and eagerly anticipating that first free-flight of the season, especially those who are new to the sport.

Once again I hope that there is something for everyone in this edition and it is nice to see people from overseas submitting articles for your enjoyment. If you have a story to tell, why not send it to me at Knowle View (full address on the left of this page).

In the meantime, have a good read.

editorial



Falconers

news and products

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

Professional falconers meet to develop accredited qualification for beginners

Some 45 providers of bird of prey management and falconry courses met on Tuesday 8 February at LANTRA's offices to start the process of preparing a standardised beginners course in falconry that would lead to a nationally accredited certificate of competence.

Jim Chick, Hawk Board (HB) chairman introduced the meeting by explaining that the future of falconry was in the hands of those who taught the beginners. It was not HB policy to impose standards but to facilitate a way for the industry to ensure that quality teaching was maintained by the falconry community rather than by external bodies who may not truly understand the issues.

LANTRA's Julie Murphy explained that their organisation was licensed by government to develop and award new qualifications in the land-based and environmental sector. As such it was agreed that they were perfectly placed to help the falconry professionals prepare and accredit a course for newcomers.

The meeting listened to presentations from LANTRA, and from Mike Nicholls and Nick Fox, both of whom had either prepared courses or taught them. Mike Nicholls stressed that it was the eventual qualification that was central to this initiative and not the route individuals travelled to reach it. He acknowledged that all courses taught differently but, hopefully, with the same end result: achieving competence in bird of prey keeping.

Nick Fox made the point that any basic qualification would not include field falconry. That could come later. What he and others agreed was important was that when a person purchased a bird of prey he could demonstrate to the seller that he had received sufficient training to ensure its welfare would be maintained. Given that this was likely to become a requirement under the forthcoming COTES (Control of Trade in Endangered Species) regulations this initiative was exceptionally timely.

Lively discussion groups examined the various issues including a demand amongst the students for such a qualification. Many agreed that their students often asked whether one would be made at the end of the course.

Adrian Hallgarth of Perthshire Falconry Services thanked LANTRA and the Hawk Board on behalf of the professional falconers present. He offered to form a working group and hoped that others would join to make this happen, which all agreed was something falconry badly needed.

Swift Binoculars

Swift have been developing optics for over 70 years and they have recently brought out a new line in binoculars. Their latest product are the Ultra Lite binoculars which uses two different types of rubber to improve shock-absorption and durability.

When I first picked up a pair of these binoculars, I was impressed with the way they just felt in my hands. The moulding ensures a good grip in any weather conditions and they are of a good design. The lenses give good clear vision and are easy to adjust to individual requirements.

The pair that I tried were 8 x 42 roof prism binoculars and I can recommend them if you need something to look for quarry, a lost bird or just everyday use.

At a price of around £298 they may not be the cheapest around but if you want quality, this is the price you will have to pay.

For more information visit the web-site www.pyser-sgi.com which shows all the products from this notable company.



Peter Eldrett

Wildlife the winner at Arts Alive

This picture of a redtail buzzard was taken during the summer at an event in Keswick in the Lake District. The event was called 'Arts Alive' and was held at the Cumberland Pencil Company. It ran for two days and its aim was to promote the world famous Derwent pencils, which are made in the factory at Keswick. All the events during Arts Alive involved the use of pencils in some way – there was a boat race with paper boats (decorated using pencils), a 'quick on the draw' competition, mask making and paper folding and other painting and drawing competitions for children.

The redtail and other birds were invited from a local bird of prey centre to perform flying demonstrations. The Cumberland bird of prey centre was

established in 1996 and specialises in providing courses and activities as well as displays and corporate events. In addition to the flying demonstrations

the birds were available for people to photograph and also to draw.

The event was also attended by a local animal sanctuary – Knoxwood. Located not far from Wigton, in Cumbria, injured wild animals are cared for

and nursed back to health. Some of the animals cared for there are an arctic fox, racoons, porcupines and owls. The Arts Alive competitions raised money for the Knoxwood sanctuary, so as well as encouraging people to use coloured pencils, the event was also helping to support local wildlife.



University research programme to uncover the genetic secrets of Asian birds of prey

A research and conservation programme is being launched to uncover the mysteries surrounding a bird of prey that is so secretive that no one can even be sure how many there are still surviving in the wild.

A team of academics and research students from The University of Nottingham will travel to the forests of Cambodia to trap Asian fishing eagles (*Ichthyophaga*) and take measurements and blood samples, before releasing them back into their natural habitat.

The detailed genetic information will give an insight into the ecology of the birds and will help to settle a long-running debate on whether the fishing eagles are separated into two species - the grey headed and the lesser Asian fishing eagles - or whether they are in fact the same bird.

Dr Michele Clarke, in the University's School of Geography, who is leading the project, said: "The Asian fishing eagle is a very secretive bird that lives in relative isolation in forest locations. As such, it is a very difficult bird to study and we are faced with the situation where virtually nothing is known about them, which in today's climate

of extensive research is incredible. We don't even know how many eggs they lay or even how many of the birds there are living in the wild.

"This research is about exploring their basic biology and ecology. The results will be very important because as a 'top of the food chain' animal they will have a huge role to play in their environment. By studying this bird and finding out how healthy they are and whether they are thriving, we can see how healthy the eco-system is and even gauge the impact of habitat destruction."

Asian fishing eagles, which have a wingspan of three to six feet, are a close relative of the osprey and are found in India and Nepal in the west down the Thai Malay peninsula to Indonesia and Indo-China in the East. Although so little is known about them, they are thought to be declining and as such are classified as near threatened. Changes in the way fisheries operate in the region are impacting on the eagles' food source and there are concerns that organic pesticides used by farmers are getting into the birds systems, thinning the shells of their eggs, preventing them from hatching.

The University of Nottingham is collaborating with various Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in India, Nepal and Cambodia to set up the research programme. The aim is to attract students from the region to come to Nottingham where they will be trained in academic and practical skills, before returning to the area to run the research programme, monitor the birds and collect ecological data.

Dr Clarke will travel to Cambodia in November this year to launch the programme and will return with blood samples from the birds that will allow her to study their genetic makeup. Previously, scientists have only been able to study the biology of the birds from dead specimens brought back by imperialist hunters. Dr Clarke will be able to compare the genetic information of the grey headed and lesser fishing eagles to look at whether they are as identical as they appear or are indeed two species of bird.

Support for the programme has come from the International Osprey Foundation, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Natural Research and the National Birds of Prey Trust.

New incubator for Brinsea extends Contaq family

Bird breeders wanting to use Contact Incubation Technology (CIT) to increase the hatch rates of expensive, difficult to hatch or rare eggs, now have the choice of two incubators. Brinsea Products Limited has introduced the Contaq X3, a smaller version of the pioneering Contaq X8.

CIT draws on academic research into incubation to replicate the best features of the natural nest. The bird's brood patch is a plastic skin filled with warm air, which presses on eggs sitting between rollers on a moveable base. Deflating the skin simulates the bird standing and moving the base reproduces the egg movements.

"Last season was the first in which the Contaq X8 was widely available, and we are overwhelmed with the success," said Ian Pearce, MD of Brinsea. "One measure is that we estimate that around 30% of all commercial falcons bred in the UK in 2004 were incubated in the Contaq X8."

The Contaq X3 is designed for the professional breeder or serious amateur who wants to hatch only a smaller number of eggs or does not have the space for a Contaq X8, but it retains all the features that have made the Contaq X8 so successful. The temperature of the air-filled skin, the frequency of inflation and deflation, the time the eggs are left exposed, the amount of movement of the eggs and the humidity of the environment are all under the control of the user, through a simple touch panel.

It has a built in alarm and fault-finding system and a battery can be connected to provide immediate back-up should the mains fail.

The Contaq X3 has about one third the egg capacity of the Contaq X8, holding about 30 hens eggs or equivalent. Designed and built in Britain to ISO 9001:2000 standards the ContaqX3 can be ordered from Brinsea's e-commerce site, at www.brinsea.co.uk or through leading dealers.

Falconers

news and products

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

new products from

Ben Long

Plier-type eyelet tools For all eyelet sizes. Fits anklets with one squeeze of the handles! One plier body allows fitting of interchangeable closing dies for 3 eyelet sizes, medium, large and eagle. Plier body with one set of dies (any size) £22.00

Each extra set of dies £6.00. Small eyelet plier with dies, £9.00

Falconers' Knives With a 3" blade, a stainless steel lock knife which can be opened and shut one-handed! Includes a strong clip to slide onto a pocket for security, and a hole in the handle for attachment to a lanyard. A superb, indispensable item. £8.00

Beak Trimming Clippers Side-cutting nippers for coping. Seriously sharp to avoid cracking beaks. £9.00 per pair.



Hawking and Falconry for Beginners

Reviewed by Donna Vincent

Adrian Hallgarth

Published by Hancock House, ISBN 0-88839-549-3

Are you new to the sport of Falconry? Perhaps you've watched in awe as others fly their magnificent birds, have had your interest aroused into thinking you'd like to actively take part and are now considering buying your first bird? But stop, before you do anything you really should read Adrian Hallgarth's book.

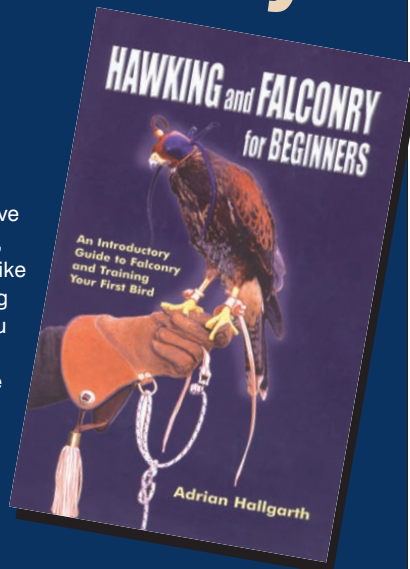
Buying and training your first bird should not be undertaken lightly, as Adrian explains and although your appetite may be well and truly whetted there is much to consider. Remembering at all times that it is a true commitment you are undertaking, which is a message conveyed well through the 200+ page book.

Adrian guides the reader through the sport objectives, getting prepared, selecting and training your bird to care and maintenance. In fact, this comprehensive, easy to read book probably answers all the questions running through a new falconer's mind. Each of the five book parts contains chapters, which build on the previous to give the reader a good all round basic understanding of the commitment of owning a bird.

Illustrated with step-by-step diagrams, where appropriate and photographic examples, *Hawking and Falconry for Beginners* is one publication all newcomers should read. This book provides an insight into the sport and a foundation on which to build.

Hawking and Falconry for Beginners is priced at £19.95 & £2.50 P&P.

This book is available from Choch-y-Bonndu books www.anglebooks.com



Improved incubators from Brinsea

Brinsea Products Limited has upgraded the Octagon 20 and Octagon 40 incubators. The DX series provides improved airflow around the eggs, makes the machines even more reliable and increases thermometer accuracy. Existing Octagon users can buy an upgrade kit to bring their machines up to the DX standard.

"The Octagon 20 is Britain's best selling incubator, and is in use by many bird breeders around the world," said Ian Pearce, the Managing Director of Brinsea. "Since the Octagon family was first introduced in 1989 they have been steadily improved, based on feedback from users. The DX upgrade is the latest step in this programme."

The specific changes include:-

A redesigned clutch mechanism on the automatic turning cradle, to extend the incubator life still further.

Redesigned egg dividers, to improve airflow around the egg and increase hatch rates.

Improved thermometer (Octagon 20 Plus and Pro models).

A new DX model Octagon 20 starts from £159.95 and the upgrade kit is from £19.95.

Octagon incubators are available from the Brinsea e-commerce

site www.brinsea.co.uk

and leading suppliers worldwide.



Customer Satisfaction

Bob Dalton

Whilst hawking in Scotland recently I temporarily misplaced a falcon I was flying. Not too concerned I got out my telemetry receiver and switched it on. A good workable signal was emanating from it and I set off to affect a recovery. I was in the Highlands and was a little worried initially that I would not pick up a decent signal. But for the moment I was getting a good clear one.

So much rubbish is talked about how far a signal can be picked up from and line of sight figures, which are the ones always quoted, are more or less meaningless. Unless you live in the desert no one is ever going to obtain the line of sight potential.

I tracked the signal I was getting and to my amazement ended up the other side of three hills with the falcon sitting on the ground on a kill. He was also shielded from me and my original position by a cottage. But still I had tracked him down with no problem whatsoever.

Once the falcon was safely back on the fist I wondered just how far I had come. So I went back to the spot where I had first got the telemetry receiver out and then backtracked to the spot where I had found the falcon. It was a shade over seven miles. Now that may not sound very far but under the circumstances regarding the cottage and the terrain I thought it was remarkable. Especially as the transmitter involved was a miniature Merlin model with a six and a half inch aerial and weighs only four grams with batteries fitted.

Out of interest the next day I put the transmitter on a fence post and drove the other side of the hills. Again I could get a good clear workable signal at just over seven miles. This I found astonishing. I phoned the supplier and told them how pleased I was and in fact ordered another one there and then.

Let me state categorically that I do not get supplied with free transmitters or even get any discount but I would whole heartedly recommend both the transmitters and the service supplied by Falconry Electronics. This particular miniature transmitter is only £115 and comes with a two-year guarantee. The company can be contacted on 01422-376127.

Whilst on the subject of telemetry a rather unusual incident happened to me at a public display recently. The event took place at a rather imposing country hotel and was a family fun day for a large local company. I had finished the display by flying a Lanner Falcon and was feeding her up on the fist back at the weathering. As is usual on such occasions a crowd had gathered round taking photographs and asking questions. As I chatted to the public and the Lanner unconcernedly ate her meal I changed her flying jesses back to mews jesses and swivel etc. I also removed her telemetry transmitter from her tail and laid it on a small table that was at the front of the weathering.

Once the Lanner had all her equipment back on I went to pick the transmitter up and couldn't find it. I was not too concerned; I just assumed it had dropped off the table onto the ground. I would sort it out once the Lanner was back on her block.

But this was not the case. Once I did start to look for the transmitter I couldn't find it anywhere. After several minutes, and out of desperation I got the receiver out and switched it on. Sure enough I got a signal but the transmitter was not that close to me.

To cut a long story short I tracked down my transmitter and it was in the pocket of a youth who was in the bar of the hotel with some of his friends. A few words soon sorted the situation out and I got my transmitter back. Thank god he hadn't unscrewed the cap and therefore stopped the signal.

The most stupid thing of all was that the lad who had stolen the transmitter had not known what it was or what it did. But as he put it in his own words "I thought it looked valuable". If he had known what it was and how it worked I would never have got it back. I have had some odd things stolen over the years at displays but this was a new one for me. Luckily it had a fortunate ending as far as I was concerned.

Falconry in Literature

Published by Hancock House
ISBN 0-88839-547-7

David Horobin

This books states that it's primary aim is to explore the symbolism of Falconry in English Literature from Chaucer to Marvell.

However, through the pen of the chosen poets, dramatists and falconers of the period and the considerable skill of the author, it becomes far more than an academic study. At times it truly reaches to the heart of what it is to share ones life with a bird of prey.

Every time you have been asked what you love about falconry, and found yourself too inarticulate to really capture your feelings – the answers are to be found in here.

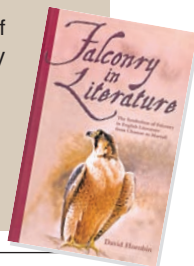
David Horobin's love, knowledge and feel for his passion, gently suffuse this book. The structure and layout of the text leads the reader through the history and use of falconry in literature to symbolise nobility, power, love and man's highest ideals. Whilst linking this to its fluctuating popularity and influence in society and as a sport.

The examples of medieval, Renaissance poetry and prose are well chosen and are at times moving. Here they are brought alive for the modern reader, as much by the author's practical knowledge and experiences as a falconer, as by his understanding of language and contemporary context.

I wish that I had been asked to review this book late last year, as I would have highly recommended that every falconer be bought a copy for Christmas. As the moment has passed, treat yourself to a copy now. This is a truly lovely book by a very gifted writer.

This book is available from
Choch-y-Bonndu books
www.anglebooks.com

Reviewed by Paul Manning



Countryman Fairs - Show Preview

Countryman Fairs' 2005 award-winning game and country shows will include many famous falconry demonstrations for visitors to enjoy. Ray and Wendy Aliker of Ye Olde Redtail Falconry will be bringing their renowned display to the Main Arena, which also features heavy horses, working sheepdogs and terrier racing.

The Falconry Village is a popular feature at all four events, with Bryan Paterson co-ordinating the displays throughout the

show. Children can enjoy the unforgettable experience of flying Harris hawks in Terry Large's falconry classrooms, which have become a favourite feature amongst younger visitors. There are also opportunities for falconry clubs to have information stands within the Falconry Village and anyone wishing to exhibit should contact the Countryman Fairs office on (01889) 563232.

All the shows include a wide range of additional countryside features including clay

shooting and air gun competitions, working dog displays, gundog scurries, terrier and lurcher showing, angling and casting, ferret racing and food and garden feature areas. To book tickets, call 0845 230 5175 or visit www.countrymanfairs.co.uk.

Gamekeeper & Countryman Fair 27 & 28 March
Southern Counties Game Fair 29 & 30 May
Sussex Game Fair 11 & 12 June
Midland Game Fair 17 & 18 September

Fieldsports 2005

An evening of fieldsports will once again be held at Wickham Community Centre, Mill Lane, Wickham, nr Fareham, Hants on Saturday 12 February.

Along with falconry there will also be fly fishing, wildfowling, ferrets, stalking and much more. Together with demonstrations of rod building, stickmaking and woodcarving, this should be an event well worth a visit.

Admission is just £4.00 on the door and starts at 7.00 pm. The show finishes at 10.30 pm.



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,

Very soon it will be time for the "Falconers Fair" to be with us once more. Often referred to as the premier falconry event in the world it is surely to be hoped that this year the flying displays will reflect that. Last year was extremely poor and probably the worst I have ever witnessed in all my years as a visitor to the event.

On the first day the flying opened with a Peregrine Tiercel, who despite what was said in a recent interview in your magazine, obviously did not want to fly. When he eventually did, he flew off. This then meant that a Kestrel due to fly later in the day couldn't because the Tiercel was still absent. Apparently the said Tiercel was recovered the following morning.

We also had the debacle of a Golden Eagle on a creance that, again, was obviously not ready to undertake what was asked of it. What a tremendous advert for the sport and the way falconers care for their hawks to have an errant Eagle pulled to the ground, on more

than one occasion, by the creance to stop it fleeing.

On the second day a Peregrine Falcon went off and again severely curtailed the proceedings for a while.

I fully realise that this event is a commercial venture but it does also serve as a very public shop window for raptor keepers and the sport of falconry. Surely the events that take place in the main arena should be of the highest possible standard. Any bird of prey, just like any person, can have an off day and as a result may play up. But those involved with organising and carrying out the flying displays should strive to make sure the hawks, eagles and falcons destined for the arena are of the highest calibre and up to the job.

I have always been an enthusiastic supporter of the "Falconers Fair" but the standard of its flying displays really do need to either be raised or done away with all together. After all the vast majority of those that attend the event are falconers. Do we really need flying displays?

Yours faithfully, A. Roberts (by e-mail)

Dear Sir,

With regard to the recent Hawk Board elections, I note that out of some seventeen hundred people entitled to vote in the election only some four hundred and fourteen could actually be bothered. I find that absolutely incredible as well as exceedingly disappointing. On speaking to several people regarding this very poor effort it would appear that the apathy towards voting falls into two main categories, or at least this is what I have found.

The first is the old "head in the sand" attitude. That is a feeling that "The Hawk Board and what it does doesn't affect me therefore why should I bother? It may help those that fly Peregrines on grouse moors but not the ordinary man with his Harris Hawk". Obviously nothing could be further from the truth. The work the Board does affects all of us and our sport. Without them falconry would already be a great deal further down the road to draconian legislation. Also certain branches of our sport would already have been lost without their sterling work.

The other attitude I have come across is personality clashes. I hear things like "I don't like Mr. X or can't stand Mr. Y therefore I don't bother with the elections". What a pathetic outlook. Regardless of what a person may think of an individual member of the Board, they are there to help the sport we all love and we should put prejudices aside and give the Hawk Board our wholehearted support.

The Hawk Board may not be perfect, or even come close to it, but

it is all we have at the moment and therefore we should support it fully. What has happened to hunting with hounds should have given every field sportsman or woman a wake up call and made them realise the time for lethargy has gone. I think it will soon be a case of be positive about the Board and support it enthusiastically or simply sit back and await the demise of our sport as we know it.

Perhaps the way people become eligible to vote could be re-structured to encompass more falconers and raptor keepers. Honeybrook Farm Animal Foods have a message regarding the Campaign for Falconry printed on the boxes of food they supply. Perhaps the Board could produce an information flyer and then get other food suppliers and equipment suppliers like myself to distribute it with the catalogues and products we send out. After all everyone with a raptor has to buy food, equipment or both at some time or other. I think more people should be made aware of the Board and a greater number should be able to become eligible for voting at Hawk Board elections.

After all there are supposedly in excess of twenty thousand people with raptors in the UK so a Board voted in place by some four hundred is hardly representative. But should something happen with regard to falconry legislation that the majority of falconers don't like, only four hundred and fourteen will have the right to complain. After all, they cared enough to vote.

Yours truly, Bob Dalton (by e-mail)

The Falcon that flew with man

A film by Leo Dickinson featuring Lloyd Buck Reviewed by Peter Eldrett

For years man has wondered how fast a Peregrine Falcon can fly. In this film, Leo and Lloyd have attempted to prove by scientific measurement the speeds these wonderful birds can gain.

The film starts with the birds getting used to hot air balloons from which the falcons are trained to follow a lure which is thrown to the ground and also to follow skydivers who are wearing birdman suits.

The story goes to Beer Head in Devon and from the top of a 300ft cliff a base jumper hurls himself off the cliff carrying the lure which the bird chases.

Measurements of speed and acceleration are recorded by means of an accelerometer worn on the back of the bird and the data collected is then downloaded onto a computer.

But the ultimate goal of the film is seen when the team travel to the Dolomite mountains in Northern Italy where a 3000ft cliff has been selected and this is where the excitement and expert filmwork come into force.

The scenery is stunning and the film shot by Leo is spectacular to say the least. To see base

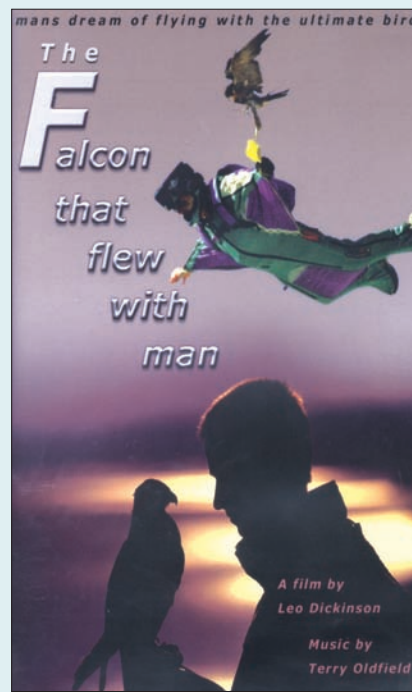
jumpers launching themselves off the cliff is heart-stopping and with the Peregrine starting from Lloyd's fist the results are amazing. (I shan't tell you what speeds were achieved here - you will have to buy the DVD to find out for yourselves.)

At just under one hour long, this is a film every falconer should have in their collection. It is wonderfully put together and Lloyd's commentary adds to the enjoyment of viewing the film.

Leo Dickinson's filmwork is of the very highest quality, which we should expect from this well-known adventure film-maker, having been the first person to film from a balloon going over the summit of Mount Everest.

The music soundtrack is also just right, composed and played by Terry Oldfield, and it does not intrude into the viewing pleasure.

I cannot recommend this DVD highly enough and with extra footage of various other projects undertaken by Leo it is well worth the money at £29.95. You can obtain a copy by visiting the website - www.AdventureArchive.com



Duck Hawking and the Art of Falconry

Joe Roy III

Published by Hancock House ISBN 0-88839-553-1

Duck Hawking and the Art of Falconry is an in depth study of training and flying falcons at the wide variety of duck species to be found in North America.

It begins with a brief observation of which species of falcon make, or are likely to make, good duck hawks. Here he shares with us his views on the "wonders of hybridisation". He goes on to examine weight management, pitch, thermals, orchestration of the hunt/flight, field craft, speculation flying, weather, scouting, entering, slip selection, pond burnout, *coup de grâce*, lost hawks and the future of falconry. There are two other "interesting" sections on Pigeons, catch and release, which are sensibly sited at the two opposite ends of the book.

As you can see, this is a very comprehensive treaty on duck hawking and whilst not the most engaging falconry book ever written it has obviously been compiled by an expert in his field and in many places is very informative. Although at times sounding like a cross between Bob Dylan and Rambo, he displays a real understanding of predator and prey psychology, a deep love of his art and a genuine respect and admiration for his quarry.

Unfortunately for the British falconer, as well as the language ("Omen the head-hunter, slamming and drilling ducks"), the areas of the book which focus on training techniques and from which most falconers would hope to learn, are based almost entirely around bagged game of

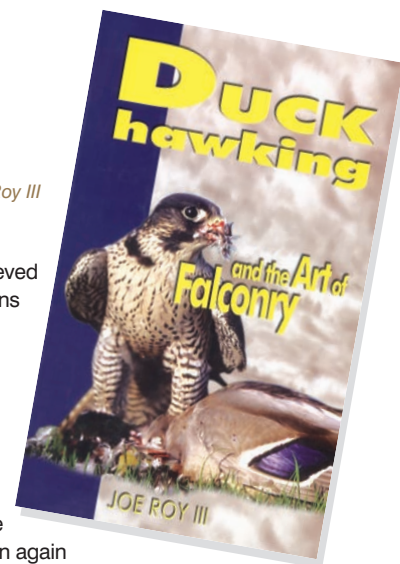
one sort or another. Flight style is achieved primarily with the use of homing Pigeons and as mentioned there is a section devoted to the keeping, training and selection of pigeons. This section is obviously of no use to the British falconer and many will feel uneasy when reading the description of using sight impaired pigeons, etc. for training purposes. This is also the case with the chapter on entering. The falcon again served a variety of bagged quarry.

Strangely at the end of the book there is a chapter on catch and release, which the author recommends for both quarry species management, in a given area and also as a PR exercise with the public. Again interesting reading although slightly at odds with his enthusiasm for Sky trials and the aforementioned chapter on pigeons.

In summary I felt that this was probably a useful addition to the American Falconers library but it may be a little "too American" for the majority of UK Falconers.

This book is available from Choch-y-Bonndu books www.angebooks.com

Reviewed by Paul Manning



On 1 September 2004 the Hawk Conservancy Trust, near Andover, received a telephone call from a river keeper in Salisbury. The keeper said he had found an injured Osprey and that although it had received treatment from his local vet, he wanted it to be returned to the wild and thought we could offer it the specialist treatment it required. We immediately said yes, as we never turn away any injured raptor.



Ossie the Osprey

the highs and lows of rehabilitation

A first for the Conservancy

This was an exciting event for us as, this was the first Osprey we have ever had brought into the Hawk Conservancy in our 25 year history.

On arrival it appeared to be a juvenile male bird, with damage to its left wing. The bird was taken to our vet John Chitty, where it was anaesthetised and an x-ray revealed a fractured coracoid bone. This is one of the three bones that make up the shoulder girdle (along with the clavicle and scapula), and being the largest of the bones bears much of the force of flying.

Studies in the US have shown that these fractures repair better if they are left alone, rather than surgically repaired. The other surprising thing that the x-ray revealed was a round piece of metal, indicating the bird had been shot. It is rare that shot is removed from birds – there is no chance of lead poisoning and little chance of infection – as the heat generated from the passing shot cauterises the wound. However, there is a major chance of causing

further tissue damage by doing an exploratory operation.

John, therefore, decided to leave the bird alone, ordering rest and limiting the amount of space available to the Osprey to minimise its wing movement and allow the bone to heal. The Osprey was returned to the hospital at the Conservancy and placed in one of the recovery bays, but after four days he had still not eaten.

Looking for donations

Rehabilitation assistant Mike Wallis volunteered to tour the local supermarkets and every day came back with a wide choice of fish (including Dover Sole), none of which appeared to interest the bird. By now the Osprey was losing condition, and so a series of E-mails were sent to various rehab centres in the US who have more experience of this species. They all came back indicating this is a common problem with Ospreys and they do not normally do well in rehabilitation centres.

Various suggestions were tried to tempt the bird to eat, including tying a piece of cotton around a dead fish's tail, placing it in a bowl of water and waggling it about for around 45 mins (very boring!), all to no avail. By the fifth day we resorted to artificially feeding him liquid food and placing fish into his crop. This artificial feeding became a daily occurrence and luckily Tim Stockwell from the local Waitrose supermarket arranged for a daily home delivery of fish.

It seemed to become a normal routine for the Osprey who did not appear to worry about being caught up and fed and when he returned to his perch he would call to the person who had fed him. He had now been moved to the outside pre-release aviary, where he could be secluded away from the public, but could see the sky through the aviary's wire roof.

Fishing trip

Then we had a breakthrough. Following a successful fishing trip on the river Test, I returned with a Grayling less than an hour old. The skin was scoured so that blood appeared and it was placed in with the Osprey. Within seconds he had started feeding himself.

Following an arrangement with a local trout farm, fresh fish was made available every day and there was no stopping Ossie, often eating two or three fish a day. His strength and fitness improved and he was beginning to stretch his wings and fly up to the higher perches.

Next physiotherapy began and two or three times a day staff and volunteers, co-ordinated by Mike Wallis, would enter the aviary and make him fly up and down between the perches to improve his muscle tone.

By now Salisbury police had issued a statement about the birds shooting appealing for witnesses and the office's phone line became red hot with media enquiries. There were stories in

the local press, and both Meridian Television and BBC's *South Today* came to film the story, with the BBC providing a live link to their early evening news programme.

Tracking device

A comment regarding the possibility of fitting a satellite transmitter to the bird on its release, led to two well wishers donating the £3,000 cost for the satellite transmitter and a year's tracking.

Through our earlier enquires regarding the birds rehabilitation, we came in contact with Roy Dennis of the Highland Wildlife Foundation. Roy is regarded as the world's expert on Osprey's, having previously worked with the RSPB and been involved in the reintroduction of the Osprey and White Tailed Sea Eagle in Britain. Roy had shown a great interest in the bird and agreed to supply and fit the transmitter.

After flying down from Scotland to fit the satellite, Roy was impressed with the fitness of the bird and its overall condition and he also felt it should be released as soon as possible. Over the next few days frantic arrangements were made to find a suitable release site and inform the media and all those that had been involved with its care.

So early on the morning of the 28 September a convoy of cars left the Trust for a secret location near Romsey in Hampshire. After a quick final check to see all was OK with Ossie, Andy walked out with the bird to the release site. Ossie was placed on the ground and for what seemed an eternity did not move. Then with a final look around at everyone he took off.

Migration flight . . .

It was a wonderful sight to see him flying off so strongly and within minutes he was out of sight. It was a day of mixed emotions, happy that he was on his way, which normally would be the end of our involvement, but also knowing that with the tracking system fitted our concerns would still continue. Would he be capable of sustaining himself and survive in the wild?

We knew his chances of survival were slim, seven out of 10 young Ospreys do not survive their first migration to Africa, but there was nothing more we could do. It was now up to him.

The satellite signal would be received every

four days until the winter and then every 10 days and would be received for over a year. A map had been set up on our website, as well as his story, allowing interested parties to follow his progress.

Anxiously we waited for his first signal, but when it arrived he had not moved very far and it was the same for the second signal. Just when we thought we had better return to Romsey to see if we could track him down, the third signal indicated he had flown to the Isle of Wight.

There was some concern as to whether he would make the migration, but I felt sure that he was just waiting for a break in the weather and I was to be proved right.

. . . into Spain

After our first few days of sunshine in weeks, the next signal came through indicating that in four days he had flown the 1,000 miles over the Bay of Biscay and landed in north west Spain. We were, of course, very delighted, as this is one of the most difficult parts of the migration and he had proved he was fit enough to have made the journey.

Everyone that had been involved was informed and updates were provided on the local media and a further signal indicated he had moved 30 miles across Spain and looked like he was preparing for the next part of his journey.

Unfortunately, our happiness was to be short lived. The day before the next signal was due to be transmitted the Trust received an E-mail stating that the body of a young Osprey had been found in northern Spain and been taken to the Santa Cruz Rehabilitation Centre. From his identifying rings and satellite transmitter he was identified as Ossie.

Apparently his arrival in Spain had coincided with a period of severe weather in that area, with four to five days of constant heavy rain and it was thought that this had hampered his fishing ability and he had been unable to replenish the fat reserves used up on his long journey.

Everyone at the Trust was devastated and deeply saddened by the news and still to come was the phone calls that had to be made to inform all of those involved.

Working with birds tends to make you hardened to this sort of news, not all releases are successful, but for some of the people involved

this was their first experience in having a close link with a bird and the news was a terrible shock.

Even worse news

However, what was to come as an even greater shock. The result of an autopsy we had asked the Spanish authorities to carry out arrived two days later and it revealed that Ossie had in fact been shot again, this time in the foot and at such close range he had lost two of his front talons. He was unfortunate that he had arrived in Spain on the first day of the Spanish hunting season, but who could have believed that he could have been so unlucky as to have been shot a second time?

Hopefully, the data we have gathered with the transmitter and the press coverage of this incident which has been received both locally and nationally, may lead to EEC rules on shooting Birds of Prey being better enforced in the future.

Firstly, we must try to look at this on a positive note. We know that the work of the rehabilitation team was successful, he had recovered from his initial injury and had been given a second chance to continue his migration.

Secondly, the experience we have gained from his stay at the Trust and the friends we have made around the world, will hopefully lead to more successes for the Trust in the field of rehabilitation and reintroduction programmes for raptors in the future.

A big thank you

I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you on the behalf of the Trust to: Mike Trowbridge (the river keeper who found Ossie), John Chitty (our Vet), David Taylor and PC Richard Salter of Wiltshire Constabulary, Mike Wallis, Veronica Gibbes, Tim Stockwell, Roy Dennis, Barry Gelpin (Rutland Water) John Dennis (river keeper) and Paul Davies for their help in the release site and the estate owner for his permission. Antonio Sandoval Rey in Spain, Keith Channing (our web master) and all the staff at the Trust especially Andy Hinton who worked day and night to help get this bird back to the wild. Also thanks to the many friends and members who have written to us. Their wonderful letters of support following the press releases were very encouraging and appreciated.



● In the recovery aviary



● Andy releasing Ossie



● Ossie's X-ray showing his injury

Edward Blair Michell was a remarkable man who lived life to the fullest. An eminent attorney by profession, this man whose life straddled the 19th and 20th centuries was also one of the most renowned sportsmen of his day. He excelled in boxing (winning light-weight, middle-weight, and heavy-weight championships all!); was an avid oarsman; and was a devotee of tennis and croquet who effected the purchase, in 1868, of famed Wimbledon. It was as a falconer, however, that Michell has received lasting fame.

Michell was born in 1842, the son of a minister and a mother descended in the line of the Earls of Cromarty. He attended Exmouth School, Winchester College, and Magdalen College. His interest in the classics, kindled at school, remained with him throughout his life. In his will he directed that a portion of his estate be used to establish a scholarship for students of the French and Latin languages. In 1872 he married Georgina Helena Page, and a son Edward was born to her soon after. For reasons unknown Michell left his wife, after establishing a trust fund for her and the child, and reputedly never had contact with them again.

Michell took up the old sport of hawking sometime

FALCONERS' MEMORIALS

EDWARD BLAIR MICHELL 1842-1926

in the 1870's and from then on devoted himself to the ancient art. His expertise with the Merlin was acknowledged as unsurpassed by many who witnessed his handling and hunting of this small falcon. He endeavoured to train the Hobby as a game hawk but met with frequent frustration and failure. According to James Harting, Michell "was disinclined to endorse the statements of Latham, Blome, and other old writers to the effect that the hobby would repay the trouble of training. He thought the training of this hawk must have become a lost art." He also trained and hunted peregrines and sparrow hawks but the Merlin remained his favourite. Michell made many hunting forays to the Salisbury Plain, principally for lark hawking, and even flew his Merlin in London when in town for business matters. The area around his home, Pomeroy Farm, and the church at which he worshipped were often favoured hunting grounds.

Michell was a frequent contributor to *The Field* and *Country Life* on rural matters, particularly, of course, falconry. In 1900 he published *The Art and Practice of Hawking*, perhaps the most reprinted falconry book of all time. For a generation it

remained the principal text accessible by British and American falconers. He died in 1926 while taking a short nap before the annual "Falconers' Dinner" he gave every winter in London.

E. B. Michell was buried in an unmarked grave in the churchyard at Wyke Champflower, Somerset, across the road from his house. It is fitting he should rest so close to home, under the same skies in which his Merlins flew for so many years. We have no record of what was said about him at his funeral, but perhaps these verses which he penned about himself, in his poem on the old boys of Exmouth School, might have been read:

Amateur champion of the world
That is Thames, Severn, Clyde and Ouse.
To few his scarlet flag he furled
Though very often backed to lose.

With the gloves he was never beat
So quick was he with hands and feet
Though often times with the elite
Of boxing men he would compete.

In boxing at three different dates
He won the Queensberry Challenge Cup
For heavy, light, and middle-weights,
Which with good wine he oft filled up.

Gerald William Lascelles
Lyndhurst, Hampshire



Edward Blair Michell
Wyke Champflower, Somerset
Saturday, May 1, 2004

The Falconers Song

E.B. Mitchell

Ye sporting men of England who hunt the stag or fox,
Or wield the rod or gun or whip, or match your fighting cocks -
How little do you know about the Princes of the Air
Whose education and success is our especial care!
The cheery round of horse and hound, of bugle or of horn,
Are gay enough to make a man rejoice that he was born;
The murmur of the rippling brook, the buzzing of the flies,
The splash of eddying water as the trout or salmon rise,
The rustle of the pheasant as he springs out of the glade:
All these are things to make a man feel proud that he was made.

But give to me, oh! give to us, above all mortal things,
That ancient sport of Falconry, the favourite of kings;
No ruined backers here you'll see by ruthless bookies bled,
By rascal touts and tipsters, or by stable-boys misled;
No squabbles as to who killed what, no jealousies, no lies
As to the weight of baskets filled or the right sorts of flies -
But all the hard-won joys or feats that Falconry alone
Can count among her victories and proudly call her own,
Of all field-sports the most humane, no chance of wounded birds,
To stumble forth in piteous plight among the cut-throat herds
The prey of weasel or of stoat, or the foul carrion-crows,
Or recreant buzzard meditating murder as he goes.
Oh! for a tongue or pen or brush with which to glorify
The swiftest, strongest, and the best of all the birds that fly!
Eyasses, Branchers, Sorhawks, Blue-hawks, Haggards, Lanteners,
These are the noble names beloved by practised falconers,
The man who lives - or vegetates - with eyes and ears so dead
That such delights can send no thrill of joy through heart and head,
Dying goes down to the vile earth from which, poor wight, he sprung,
Unwept, unloved, unhonoured, unlamented and unsung.

Ye falconers of England who, scorning slothful ease,
Train your own hawks to mount and stoop and battle with the breeze,
Good luck to you! Long life to you! Good pupils and fine flights!
Good riddance of the countless foes who fight against your rights!
Your flights at magpie, gull, or rook, at rabbit, hare, or game,
Each in its turn full of fine sport yet no one kind the same -
Each here deserves a chronicler more eloquent than I
To praise them up to - that familiar place of theirs - the sky.

In later life he played a part
In the old sport of falconry,
And wrote a book about that
art,
As critics say, not uselessly.

Those of us who gathered
together to honour Edward
Blair Michell, and indeed all
those who enjoy his writings on
falconry, have much to thank
him for. His book is considered
a classic on the sport, and will
continue to aid and assist
falconers for generations to
come. His life, now properly
marked by a stone at Wyke
Champflower, can only be
considered a class act.

Falconers commenced to
gather at The Church of the
Ever-Blessed Trinity in Wyke
Champflower, Somerset
around 5.00 pm to honour
E.B.Michell. Many had never
met each other before this day
but a common bond had
brought them together. Brian
Bird had brought along a
merlin as a tribute to celebrate
his life. It also gave the
uninitiated members of this
ceremony an opportunity to
see why E.B.M was such an
ardent admirer of this
particular species.

The Rector, Father Stephen
Bould, opened the Ceremony
by welcoming everyone to
Wyke Champflower for the
Ceremony of Michell.

Prayers were then said and
two hymns were sung which
were two of the hymns from
Michell's Funeral in 1926.

Gordon Robinson, falconer
and author, then paid a tribute
to Michell. He spoke of some
of Michell's life showing what
a truly remarkable man he was.
He told us a number of
interesting and often funny
anecdotes such as the time
Michell was travelling in a train
with a hawk. He was alone in
an old fashioned carriage with
seats on each side and no
corridor, when a man who
was drunk got in, squinted at
the hawk and was making
remarks about parrot keepers,

without perhaps
appreciating that he was
addressing a light, middle
and heavyweight boxing
champion. He got Michell's
right fist a crack on the jaw
and collapsed in disorder.
Michell kicked and pushed
him out of sight under the
seat and changed carriages
at the next station. He told
us of Michell being a
Barrister and going to Siam
and defending a murderer
with such success that as a
token of appreciation he was
given, supposedly by the
accused, a splendid jewelled
ring which he was in the
habit of wearing. Whilst
there, he also composed a
Siamese English dictionary.

Father Stephen Bould
then read *The Falconers Song*
by E.B.Michell.

Further prayers were
then said, the final hymn was
sung, and a blessing was then
heard.

The congregation then
adjourned to the ancient
manor house next to the
church. Its owner, Mrs.
Elizabeth Winkley, graciously
offered light refreshments to
those who had come to
honour Michell. Mrs.
Winkley had been very
helpful in our attempts to
locate Michell, and her aid
and hospitality were enjoyed
by all. Attending the ceremony
were the current owners of
Pomeroy Farm, Michell's
home of many years, and they
invited one and all to tour the
house to finish the day.

We falconers who
participated in restoring these
memorials, and who attended
the ceremonies, came away
with a new sense of bonding
with these falconers of the
past. They gave much to the
sport in their day, and through
their writings continue to give
much to the sport today. If you
find yourself driving through
Lyndhurst or near Wyke
Champflower take a moment
to pay a visit to these
sportsmen. They are family.



■ Tying creance to swivel is wrong



taken off are greased up and are then ready for the following week when the same procedure will take place again. If jesses or anklets snap on the weathering lawn the consequences can be bad enough. But if they snap within the hawk-house then a major disaster could possibly take place.

I well remember visiting a small falconry centre where the hawks, falcons and eagles are kept on shelf perches. I walked round one day and noticed that one of the shelf perches was unoccupied but a leash, swivel and bits of jesses were hanging from the tethering ring. But the missing Harris Hawk was nowhere to be seen. On looking next door she was literally sitting on a shelf perch with a male Steppe Eagle. Quite why one had not eaten the other I have no idea. Fortunately, things ended well when the Harris Hawk was unceremoniously grabbed and taken behind the scenes to have some new equipment fitted. But things could well have ended so differently for the Harris Hawk. She was just lucky that the eagle was fat and obviously very laid back.

Equipment Check

Leashes must also be checked regularly. Some hawks will go their whole lives and never ever pick at a leash. Others are a

constant worry by continually picking at them. It takes just a few seconds to look for tell-tale marks and if discovered then the leash can be changed. If the picking is near the top of the leash a few inches can be removed and the end of the leash resealed and a knot and leather wear pad refitted. But leashes cost so little it is probably wiser just to throw the damaged one away.



■ The correct way

Telemetry batteries are another example of where people are reluctant to get rid of something that is still working. Many people keep batteries for far too long and don't change them regularly enough. The batteries themselves are so cheap that changing them costs practically nothing. A good battery tester will remove any doubt as to whether there is a decent life left in the batteries or not. Just making the transmitter live and then checking you are getting a signal is not the way to do things. Far better to check the batteries properly and know you have time to find your hawk or falcon should she become misplaced.

When it comes to jesses it is also vital that they are of the correct length and appropriate to the hawk or falcon and its particular perch. I have known of many falcons that have straddled their blocks because their jesses were far too long. One or two have been lucky and survived the mishap uninjured. Several have had broken feathers and one or two broken wings or legs as a result. One I knew of died because of the damage it did to itself internally while thrashing around and trying to get away from the block it was suddenly straddling.

Rings on perches are another item to check on a regular basis. Most perches nowadays have stainless steel rings and therefore rarely, if ever, give any problems. If they do it will invariably be at the welded joint and will therefore be a manufacturing error as opposed to a material failure. Just looking at the joint every now and again will be all that is required. On some of the older perches that are still around brass rings were occasionally fitted. These can sometimes fail, particularly if there have been fluctuations in temperature, that is hot days and frosty nights. The brass rings can literally snap. I would not have believed it possible had I not seen it for myself at a field meet in Germany several years ago. The weathering yard contained about 15 falcons, some 30 or so Goshawks and four Eagles.

One particular falcon bathed every morning in a very cold bath. In fact the ice had to be broken for her to be able to get in it. Then as the day progressed the sun would warm things up. One morning she jumped down to her bath and the ring just snapped. Fortunately, although the falcon's owner was not around another falconer

was and he gently made in to her and picked her up. But it was a situation that could have ended in disaster.

For exactly the same reason the old fashioned brass swivels, mainly of Indian origin, should never be used. It is very true that they do not often fail but they only need to fail once for a possible tragedy to occur.

Transport Boxes - Life Savers

Carry boxes, or transport boxes if you prefer, have undoubtedly saved many a hawk or falcon's life. The fact that you can travel several hawks together without even the remotest chance of them getting at one another is a major step forward from the days when hawks would be transported hooded on a cadge.

Hawks and falcons on a cadge would often try and strike out or bite if they felt something brush against them. Many a hawk has been ruined by a neighbour grabbing a wing and doing serious damage before it could be got off of its unfortunate victim. Of course there have been many occasions when a hawk or falcon has got its hood off and killed its unsuspecting and totally defenceless neighbour. Even if the hawk or falcon is travelling on its own having got the hood off it could well bate and damage either feathers or bones.

I find it amazing that some falconers rely on the fact that their hawk or falcon is hooded as a means of keeping it safe when in actual fact the hood just does not fit properly. I think you would be surprised just how many hoods do not fit properly. Most people judge the fit of a hood by how it fits around the eyes and the gape and whether it comes together at the nape of the neck. If you take a hawk or falcon on the fist that is hooded with such a hood you will be highly surprised just how many times you can easily slip the hood off.

If you take hold of the hood plume and very gently pull it down towards the hawk's feet very often it will slip off although still completely done up with braces fully closed. Now if you can pull it off in such a gentle way don't you think that a hawk that really wants not to be wearing the hood will have any trouble hooking it off with one of its talons. A hood that does not fit properly is, to all intents and purposes, useless. Other than when the hawk or falcon is on the fist the hood cannot be relied upon. If the falconer

knows the hood does not fit properly he will constantly be worrying if the hawk has managed to get it off and if so what is happening? A hood is one of the falconer's most vital tools but only if it does the job it was designed to do.

I have known of a couple of occasions when falcons have been lost with their hoods on and have actually seen a falcon cast off whilst still wearing the hood. The last scenario was a case of over excitement and fortunately the falcon fluttered to the ground and was recovered immediately. The reaction of a falcon that finds itself free whilst wearing a hood normally follows one of two paths. The first is indeed to flutter to the ground, the second is to fly hard for all it is worth until it drops exhausted, hopefully, to the ground.

An American falconer I once had the dubious pleasure of staying with lost a falcon, which was hooded, in the most stupid way and it was only by sheer good luck that the falcon was not killed. The falconer in question was flying a Prairie/Peregrine hybrid falcon. He had called the hybrid back to the lure after an unsuccessful flight and then picked the falcon up. He had placed the hood on the falcon and then sat her on a fence post whilst he rummaged in his hawking vest for mews jesses, leash and swivel. The falcon suddenly fanned its wings and took off. It flew hard and fast away from us. Fortunately, because we had been out hunting, the falcon was still fitted with a telemetry transmitter.

We jumped into the car and drove as hard as we could to keep track of the falcon and some 43 miles later realised she had stopped. We found her relatively quickly and she was in a treatment bed of a sewage plant and in severe danger of drowning. We managed to retrieve her before she drowned and had to drive back home with the windows open despite the fact it was mid-February. It took a long time to clean the falcon up and rid her of the smell of her experience. The same was true of the car.

The most amazing thing of all is that I was hunting with this man about ten days later and he again put the hooded falcon down whilst he sorted things out in his pocket. Anyone can have an accident or a piece of bad luck but surely they should learn from the experience and endeavour to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Hooded Hawks

When I am out hunting with my Harris Hawk and I am with other Harris Hawks or a mixture of Harris Hawks and Goshawks I hood my hawk up when it is not her turn to be slipped. This achieves two things as far as I am concerned. First, she doesn't waste energy bating at quarry that I am not going to slip her at. Second, whilst hooded she is not restless on the fist and does not present herself as a target to any other hawk currently flying. So many hawks have been grabbed whilst on the falconer's fist by another hawk in the party that has been slipped at quarry. Whether it was laziness or territorial aggression on the part of the attacker or just a reaction to movement no one knows for sure. But remove the movement and you remove the majority of any provocation. I am not into slipping more than one hawk at quarry at the same time so hawks grabbing each other on a kill is not a problem I will ever encounter.

But I did attend a field meet recently of a well-established falconry club and it was a day for Harris Hawks being flown at rabbits. The field captain was extremely clear and precise as to who was to slip and when. But even so on two occasions that day a novice, who was flying a borrowed hawk, slipped when they shouldn't have. The hawk the novice had borrowed was a youngster of the year and on both occasions it was slipped the other hawk was an adult female. Each time a confrontation between the hawks ensued but fortunately nothing more serious than a little posturing and vocalisation. But it could have been a great deal worse. Had the young hawk been hooded up when not its turn to fly then no incidents would have occurred.

The Moul

Putting hawks or falcons up to moult is something that should be done with care. I prefer to moult my falcons at the block and feed them daily on the fist. This way they don't get too full of fat and don't require enseaming at the end of the moult. They also retain their manning and therefore their manners. Hawks, or rather Harris Hawks, I do put in an aviary to moult out. I put my hawks into the aviary with anklets on and permanent flying jesses attached to them. I do not put them in with mews jesses just in case they could possibly get



■ Hooded Harris Hawks

caught up. I take great care to try and ensure that my moulting aviaries do not have protruding nails or any else that a hawk may catch a jess on. But if I fit slit-less flying jesses then I am sure this type of accident cannot happen.

Something that seems almost too silly and obvious to mention should still be checked after an incident I heard of earlier this year. An owl was placed in an aviary that hadn't been used for a season just for a night or two prior to being picked up by its new owner. After the first night in the aviary the person selling the owl went to feed it and could not see the owl no matter how hard he looked. On closer inspection a panel in the aviary had come loose and there was a very small gap between an upright and the roof. The owl was gone. I would have thought anyone would have checked an aviary that hadn't been used for some time before putting a new occupant in it. But apparently I would be wrong. I certainly was in this case.

Horror Outcome

Another very unfortunate incident that was related to me recently seems almost unbelievable and the outcome was truly horrific. A male Harris Hawk had caught a rabbit and the falconer went over to quickly despatch the rabbit, as is the duty of any falconer. He used a knife for the purpose and the hawk grabbed the knife with both feet. As a result of the injuries this action inflicted the hawk bled to death

there and then. Using a knife in this sort of situation is something that obviously must be done with great care. Hawks are always snatchy when they are on a kill, particularly if the quarry is still alive. They are obviously very hyped up and respond to the slightest movement.

Probably the safest way to despatch a rabbit that has a hawk sitting on it, without doubt one of the most efficient, is to simply stretch the neck of the rabbit and thereby break it. I know several people that use other methods such as a screwdriver for example. This is pointed sufficiently to be able to end any suffering of the rabbit quickly and efficiently by pushing it through the skull. I myself stretch the neck and then once the hawk has calmed a little and settled down I use a very short bladed knife, only some two inches, to open up the rabbit and give my hawk the reward it deserves. The whole knife is small enough to fit into the palm of my hand and at no time is it exposed sufficiently for the hawk to be able to grab it. Added to this the knife is only sharp on one side for the first inch. So the risk of an accident similar to the one above is kept to an absolute minimum.

Everybody can have a mishap but a little thought and care will certainly eliminate the vast majority of things that could happen. Prevention is always better than cure and it probably pays to adopt an outlook that says what can go wrong will go wrong so, how can I avoid it.

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: In issue 58 of *The Falconers Magazine* there was an article which the author's bird had wing-tip oedema. What symptoms do I look out for and what can I do to prevent it from happening to my falcon? Is there anything I can do at home to treat the oedema?

John, Lincoln (by e-mail)

A: Oedema refers to a build up of tissue fluid, therefore the description of wing tip oedema (fluid swelling of the wing tip) describes the symptoms perfectly. It stems from a failure of the blood flow in this area. Hence if it is allowed to progress the wing tip will die, go dry and hard and fall off ("necrosis").

How to prevent it depends on a knowledge of the condition. Certainly it mainly occurs in birds from warmer climates (especially Harris Hawks and Lanner Falcons in our experience) and it mainly occurs just after colder spells of weather. However, frostbite doesn't totally explain the situation. Instead we suspect that there may be an underlying condition compromising the blood flow to the extremities (possibly viral, possibly nutritional) and the cold conditions then act as trigger to cause the condition.

Early results on blood samples from these cases in our clinic strongly suggest that there is an underlying inflammatory condition.

At risk species should not be tethered too close to the ground during cold weather or should be provided with heated mews. Also, birds should not be allowed to bathe after noon during winter so they have time to dry off before nightfall.

Treatment, fortunately, is relatively straightforward provided we catch the condition early enough. At home you can keep the bird warm and apply Preparation-H to the affected area. However, you should seek specialist veterinary attention as soon as possible. We can then supply antibiotics (secondary infection is very common) and drugs to stimulate blood flow. Treatment may go on for several weeks.

If you leave the bird without treatment until the swelling goes down then the outlook is often hopeless. Once the tip dries and necroses then it will, inevitably, drop off.

In some cases where we are not sure how advanced the case is we will x-ray the wing tips. The first stage in the death of the wing tip is an erosion of the bone of the second phalanx (finger-bone) and this is visible on x-rays. If seen, we can give a poor outlook for the wing tip. Please seek veterinary attention quickly!

Can this condition be confused with others? Yes it can, especially – A.: Blain. This is generally on one wing (WTO is usually both wings) and centred on the carpal or wrist joint (WTO is centred on the wing tip) – B. Folliculitis, a bacterial inflammation of the feather follicles. This is, naturally, centred on the follicles whereas the swelling in WTO is BETWEEN the follicles.

Q: I understand there are first aid kits available for falconers when in the field flying their birds. How can I obtain one and what do they consist of? Do you run any courses on first aid for birds?

Alan, Derby

A: There are various kits available although they all contain basically the same "ingredients". Your avian vet may make up his/ her own kits for sale.

Essentially they will usually contain the following:

1. Plastic crop tube and syringes for giving oral fluids or drugs
2. "Liquid Lectade". This can be given "neat" by mouth as a source of glucose for birds that collapse and/or fit during or after exercise. It can also be diluted to act as a rehydration fluid.
3. Bubble wrap or foil for use in warming a cold, shocked bird.
4. Wound dressings and splints for emergency bandaging of wounds or injured wings/legs.
5. Cotton wool and disinfectant for cleaning wounds
6. An empty container that you can fill with water. This is an important feature as it can be really hard to find clean water (to dilute rehydration fluid or to clean a wound) when out in the field.
7. Last, but definitely not least, instructions!

This is the basic kit. However, we would certainly recommend that all falconers make sure they know how to use its contents.

Where can you learn? The first port of call should be your own vet who can show you how they like things done (we all have our own "variations on a theme"!). While you may pay a little more for this form of coaching, it is 1:1 tuition and so may be more valuable.

Alternatively you can attend a course on first aid. At our clinic we run these from time to time on request, either for a falconry club or for a group of falconers. If you are interested please contact me at my Clinic.

Similarly, Neil Forbes will also run regular First Aid courses.

The most important thing of all is that you do get taught these essential first aid techniques before it is too late.

The other important piece of equipment to carry is, of course, a mobile phone. While the first aid techniques you have used will buy you some time they probably will not enough without further veterinary intervention.

It is vital to:-

1. Know who in the area is happy to see and treat raptors. It is not a good idea to be ringing around looking for a vet when your bird is dying, so always find who the nearest raptor vet is BEFORE you really need to see him or her.

2. Phone at the first sign of problems. This makes our job a lot easier for a start. If possible try and make contact during the day rather than hang on until the evening (yes, I know most emergencies happen suddenly, at night and over Bank Holiday weekends!). Although some of us have enough avian vets in the clinic to always have one available on a 24/7 basis, in many clinics there may only be one avian vet and even vets have evenings off! So, your bird looks a little seedy in the afternoon phone your vet then rather than wait until later when the bird is really ill and the nearest avian vet is a hundred miles away.

Essentially, be prepared. You can't always be ready for an emergency but having the right preparation, equipment and knowledge will make it less of a crisis and really help your bird.

Canadian Field Meet 2004

Foxes, Skunks, Mule Deer, Elk, Coyotes and even a superb Black Bear. The countryside was awesome and the people extremely friendly. The cost of living was certainly easy on the pocket and filling the very large and powerful car we had hired with petrol did not bring a tear to the eye.

We meandered for five days enjoying being tourists and visited a couple of National Parks as well as a working ranch that was billed as a "living museum". All in all a very enjoyable time and a nice form of relaxation before moving on to the falconry meet.

At the venue

The official registration for the meet was on the evening of Tuesday 12th October but we arrived and settled into the glorious Southgate Motel on the Monday evening. We were to meet up with one of the event organisers, Mark Williams and joined him and some friends for a day's hawking before the official gathering got underway.

On Tuesday morning we set off very early in pursuit of Sharp Tailed Grouse, Partridges and Ducks. We had with us two Gyr/Peregrine hybrid tiercels, a Jerkin and two Peregrine Falcons. We also had two young English Setters, a young and an extremely old German Short Haired Pointer. The two young Setters were just along for the ride and to gain some experience, they were not going to be worked properly yet. The old Short Haired was semi-retired and the young one would be doing the bulk of the work if required.

Unfortunately for me this turned out to be very little in actual fact. The dog work that I witnessed in Canada was, in general, extremely low key and not of a very high standard. Dogs were used almost reluctantly and their primary role was that of flushing. It all seemed very strange to me as the terrain and opportunities for running good dogs were absolutely superb. The normal method of obtaining a flight was to try and spot the quarry visually first, then a falcon would be cast off and allowed to mount. When the falcon was in position the falconer would then walk to where he thought the quarry was and the dog would be allowed to work and try and find the quarry.

But the dog was kept very close to the

The setting for the 2004 National Canadian Falconry meet was Milk River in the Province of Alberta. It was the third time the National meet had taken place there and this was largely due to the combination of abundance of good flying land, a strong population of quarry and local facilities equipped to deal with a relatively large gathering of falconers.

Accommodation is rather limited but there is a good local campsite and one motel in Milk River. The campsite has quite good facilities including power, running water and washing facilities. The Southgate Motel is primarily a truck stop for those taking goods backwards and forwards between the United States and Canada. What may be perfectly acceptable to a Canadian trucker was not my idea of good clean accommodation. Should I ever attend this meet again then I will make the effort to base myself in Lethbridge, a town some 50 miles or so away and drive daily to the meet. The roads are superb and there is very little traffic so it would not be a hardship. Whereas staying in the only motel in Milk River was unpleasant to say the least. Our party arrived in Calgary several days before the meet and our intention was to have a slow meander through Alberta and do some unhurried sight seeing. This we duly did and were fortunate to see some magnificent wildlife. Everything from Prairie Falcons, Red Tails and Golden Eagles through to

falconer at all times. They were not given their heads and allowed to work properly. Consequently several times the quarry was bumped or because the dogs were not allowed to work away from the falconer it was never found. To me, all of this was very strange.

I was told by three different falconers during the course of the meet that the area hunted is too large to allow the dogs to work in the conventional manner and this method was more effective. I am not a Canadian and do not live there but I still find this hard to give real credit to. After all, a falconer knows in what sort of terrain he will find the quarry he is hunting and experience will tell him which are likely spots and which are not. Therefore, surely it would pay to locate such a spot and then run a dog conventionally. In this way a very controlled flush would then result as opposed to some of the chaotic attempts to flush that I witnessed during my stay.

Excellent flights

Later in the week I was having a conversation with Hal Webster, the doyen of American falconry, and he commented to me that I must be very disappointed in the standard of dog work being used to working Pointers and Setters myself in Britain. Unfortunately he was right.

But at least the falconry was of a high standard and we were to witness some excellent flights over the next few days even if we didn't get to see too many kills. But then falconry is not about kills, it is about first class sporting flights. Although it is fair to say that superb flying usually has a tendency to lead to a fair number of kills.

The first flight was at a group of Sharp Tailed Grouse that were on their lek. Again we spotted them visually and then drove off a little way and then readied one of the Gyr/Peregrines and he was put on the wing. This beautiful pale intermewed tiercel obviously knew his job and he rung up nicely directly over the head of the falconer. Very soon it had obtained a decent pitch and was watching every move that was going on below it.

What happened next proved to me beyond doubt, not that I needed much convincing, that game hawking without dogs is doomed to failure nine times out of ten. Having reached the spot where the Sharp Tails were thought to be no amount of running around could put one up. When the falcon had drifted slightly out of position a couple of Grouse got up behind the falconer and barrelled away into the wind. The falcon reacted immediately to them and started to



stoop. But he was a little too far back and slightly to one side. Despite a wonderful stoop the Grouse managed to make good their escape.

As the hybrid tiercel was occupied with stooping at the two Grouse that broke originally another eight or so leisurely got up and made their way over an adjacent hill knowing full well that they were under no threat what so ever.

The hybrid tiercel did not reappear and after a short wait it was out with the telemetry set to see where he was. The big fear, apparently when hawking in this type of countryside, is that a falcon on the ground stands a good chance of getting killed either by a Golden Eagle or a Great Horned Owl. We had seen plenty of both during our stay so far and shared the concern of the falconer that he should recover his falcon as soon as possible.

The tiercel was tracked to a fence line where he happily sat on a post. Despite being shown the lure he continued to sit there. As the falconer walked towards him to take him up onto the fist a partridge broke and disappeared over the brow of a hill with the tiercel in hot pursuit.

The tiercel obviously knew the Partridge was there and was awaiting his opportunity. He failed to catch it, which is not really surprising as it was from a standing start, and was taken down to the lure when he reappeared.

Wild Prairie comes in

We then moved on looking for our next flight opportunity and eventually managed to mark a covey of partridge down in a field. This time an experienced Peregrine Falcon was put on the wing but she simply refused

to fly. She cruised around at head height and kept landing on the ground. She was chased back into the air a couple of times and then a wild Prairie Falcon came in and buzzed her repeatedly. This went on for several minutes until eventually both landed on a straw bale and settled side by side for a rest. The Prairie was almost oblivious to the presence of humans and only took off again when we were within a few feet of it.

Everyone assumed the Prairie was the reason the Peregrine had refused to fly properly and she was put on the wing again but she still had no intention of flying and made her way over to a small splash of water and settled on the bank. This water splash had a few Mallard on it, which swam up and down quite concerned about the newcomer to their territory. But they need not have feared. They took off and flew into the distance without the Peregrine even casting a glance in their direction. Needless to say the Peregrine was taken up hooded and put back in the vehicle. She would be tried again later in the day.

Flight at duck

Next up to fly was an eyass Jerkin in its second season. A falconer that had made the effort to come up from Oregon and join in the meet was flying this falcon. We looked for a duck flight for this bird and eventually after a great deal of driving round, scanning ponds with binoculars, we found a set up that was suitable for a good flight. We withdrew a little so as to be completely out of sight of the ducks and then the Jerkin was unhooded and allowed to take to the air. It started to mount quite well but once it was high enough it spotted the ducks on the pond and made straight for them.

The Jerkin would make low passes over the water and just at the last minute the ducks would dive to safety. This was repeated over and over until in the end the Jerkin was tired and landed on the bank for a breather. The ducks were reluctant to try and make a break for it and just kept swimming round in an agitated fashion. We had reached an impasse. The falconer concerned decided he would put his intermewed Peregrine Falcon on the wing as well and get her to mount up over the pond. This was a little unconventional to say the least but the falconer is a very experienced and accomplished one and has flown this odd cast together on several occasions previously. The Peregrine mounted well and soon had a decent pitch over the pond. Seeing her

brought in to the lure. Once he was safely hooded up and back in the vehicle we set about retrieving the falcon. She was in no mood to come into a lure and kept making her way back to have another look at the pond. In the end we had to throw out the remains of a duck killed the day before by one of the other falcons to get her to come in.

Young bird's turn

Next up to fly was the other Gyr/Peregrine tiercel. This was an eyass of the year and was exceptionally dark. It was supposedly flying very well and had been trained to return to the fist as opposed to the more traditional lure. Being a social imprint this was something that wouldn't have been too

round trying to put the partridge up, but they are canny birds and don't give themselves up easily. Despite the attentions of humans and two dogs they managed to wait their time and jump when the falcon was a little way off and facing the wrong way.

There was a delay of a couple of seconds before the falcon saw the fleeing partridge but this was enough to give them all the advantage they needed. Despite an awesome stoop across the sky by the hybrid tiercel he failed to get on terms with them. He came back overhead very high indeed and everybody quartered the small patch of stubble in the hopes that perhaps there may have been a straggler with which to serve the gallant falcon. But it wasn't to be and the falcon was now going to be

called back to the fist. As the fist was proffered with a pigeon wing and held aloft the falcon was a good half-mile away and up at around eight hundred feet. But its response was instantaneous and it folded its wings and returned promptly to the falconer. I was very impressed.

Peregrine gets another flight

Next to fly was the Peregrine Falcon that had simply refused to fly a few hours earlier. A raft of ducks had been spotted on a pond and the falcon was quickly readied and allowed to take to the air in her own time. This time

it could be seen that she meant business. She mounted rapidly and in very tight circles. Soon she was at a very good pitch and commanded the pond nicely. The pond was small enough that we had no trouble flushing the ducks and making sure they flew away from the pond and not just double back immediately to it. The falcon held station for a moment or two and allowed the ducks to get completely clear of the pond. Then she folded her wings and came down at a spectacular rate. The wind rushing through her wings could clearly be heard. She clouted the lead duck a deadly and decisive blow and it tumbled earthwards. As it bounced on the ground the falcon was upon it. It had been a superb flight and absolutely copybook falconry. Hard to believe this was the same falcon that had simply refused to fly earlier in the day.

We looked for and managed to get another flight for the lighter of the two hybrid tiercels. This time the quarry was partridge. A covey had been marked down in some

They failed to lock onto the partridge accurately, and the falconer was rushing round trying to put the partridge up, but they are canny birds and don't give themselves up easily



● A happy group

on the wing spurred the Jerkin back into action and he restarted his attempts at glorified pond dipping. The rest of our party rushed the waters edge yelling and generally making as much noise as possible but the ducks just simply would not budge. In the end the Jerkin sat on the bank again and the Peregrine drifted off. The ducks chose this moment to make a dash for it and took off into the wind climbing at a really good pace. The Peregrine had seen them and was chasing across the sky to get back on terms with them.

She put in a long shallow stoop and only just failed to connect with one of the ducks. Now her blood was well and truly up and she mounted up very quickly over the pond again and was soon at a really good pitch. She had seen and it has to be said we had not, that a solitary duck was left on the pond and now she really wanted it.

We tried in vain for several minutes to get the duck to flush but it quite simply refused to do so. In the end the Peregrine raked away again and an almost exhausted Jerkin was

difficult to teach, but would certainly prove interesting to watch in action. We drove round looking for a covey of partridge and bumped several of them in the process of doing so. Again I failed to understand why we didn't run a decent dog but kept my thoughts to myself. Eventually we got up a covey that didn't go too far and we watched them settle back down into a relatively small patch of stubble.

The dark hybrid tiercel was put on the wing and allowed to mount, which he did very nicely it must be said. He was soon a speck in the sky although he had drifted a little whilst ringing up. As he started to make his way back overhead the younger of the German Short Haired Pointers was allowed to go into the stubble in search of our quarry. It was obviously having difficulty locating them accurately and the old dog was brought in to help with the situation. Both dogs stopped repeatedly but I had the feeling they were pointing each other.

They failed to lock onto the partridge accurately and the falconer was rushing

rough ground and the tiercel was put on the wing. It mounted quickly and to a decent pitch before setting its wings overhead. When its position was perfect the flush was attempted. Without dogs it became a case of everybody, falconers and spectators, running around trying to flush the game. After what seemed like an age, but in all probability was only a couple of minutes, a couple of partridge were eventually flushed. The falcon made no mistake and stooped almost vertically and clouted one of the partridges a decent whack. The partridge fell dead on the ground and the tiercel whipped round and was on it in a flash.

A really superb piece of flying with an excellent result as far as the tiercel was concerned. But how much simpler and more controlled the whole thing would have been had a dog been used.

End of the day

After such a full and eventful day it was time to head back to the delights of the Southgate Motel and get changed for the official meet registration that was to take place that evening. On going to reception for my key I was informed that a gentleman was looking for me and he could be found in a room a few down from mine. Curiously I went down the hall and knocked on the door, which was opened by Hal Webster. Hal and I have been corresponding since 1969 but have never managed to meet up with each other. Neither of us was aware that the other would be attending this meet.

Over the next few days we were to enjoy each other's company and swap hawkling stories over a number of glasses of whisky and bourbon.

Superb flights

Over the course of the next few days I did see some very good falconry and enjoyed some first class sport. Several of the flights I witnessed stand out in my mind and will long be remembered. Among them was a flight by a passage Jerkin at ducks. Another falconer who had come up from the States, this one from Washington, was flying the Jerkin in question. He had brought along a Peales Tiercel as well as the Jerkin. Both were supposedly excellent hunters and certainly the limited amount of flying I saw with them was of the very highest standard.

I saw two flights with the Jerkin, one at Sharp Tailed Grouse, which it failed to catch. This failure was certainly due to not being able to flush the Grouse at the right moment and the Jerkin had wandered slightly. The second flight was at duck and

was simply stunning. The power and footing of the passage Jerkin were beyond reproach and it almost managed to make the whole thing look too easy.

A raft of ducks had been spotted on a stretch of water and the Jerkin was fitted with transmitters and then allowed to take to the air. It mounted quickly with powerful strokes of its wings and was soon at a very good pitch. The ducks were flushed underneath the Jerkin and they took off into the wind. Instead of instantly stooping the Jerkin followed the ducks whilst remaining several hundred feet above them. After some thirty seconds or so the nerve of the ducks was broken and they turned back so as to try and make their escape downwind.

Now the Jerkin stooped and it was a mightily impressive one. He cut a duck down stone dead without the slightest problem what so ever. By the time we got to him he had broken into his prize. It was an amazing flight with the falcon out thinking as well as out manoeuvring his quarry. I have heard it said many times that passage falcons and hawks are no better than their captive bred counterparts. I can only assume that people who make these statements have never flown passage falcons. It has also been said that those who believe passage hawks are superior are living in the past. Here was a shining example of why passage hawks are better, certainly for the first few years of their lives than captive bred hawks. Having to fend for itself taught this passage falcon the trick of turning the ducks.

Young falconer flies his birds

Another falcon that was very impressive was a Gyr/Barbary Tiercel that was being flown by a young falconer called Steve Schawrtze. Apparently Steve was relatively new to falconry and two years previously had attended the meeting purely as a spectator. At the time he did not have a hawk or a dog and was only about to set out on the road to becoming a falconer. Now just two short years later he was flying this hybrid and a Merlin as well as running a very stylish Pointer. He is certainly a young man who takes his falconry very seriously and is a credit to the sport.

I saw his hybrid make an unsuccessful flight at partridge and also have a failed attempt at catching a Sharp Tailed Grouse. But then third time lucky and it caught a duck in spectacular style.

The hybrid tiercel had been put on the wing with the intention of getting it to wait on over a small pond that held a half dozen or more Mallards. But whilst we moved into position and the falcon was still climbing the



ducks prematurely flushed and made it to the safety of another pond some three quarters of a mile away. The falcon had been so far out of position that he had not even attempted to stoop at the Mallards as they made their escape.

When the Mallards had alighted on the pond that was in the distance we could see through binoculars that they had joined with a great many

others. We all jumped in the vehicles with the idea of driving to the other pond and calling the falcon overhead. As the first vehicle sped off, which happened to be Steve's, we watched in amazement as the

Only successful falcons that have learnt the tricks of their trade and how to use the wind properly get to be passage hawks. The rest fall by the way side in the harsh reality of nature.

I made several friends at the meet and have already made arrangements to go over and hawk with some of them next year. But would I attend the national meet again? Probably not.

hybrid tiercel immediately started to pump after it. By the time Steve arrived at the other stretch of water the hybrid was already overhead and in position for the flush.

We all rushed the stretch of water and the ducks lifted off. The hybrid tiercel turned over, pumped his wings a few times, and then fell like a stone with deadly precision. He cut a large drake mallard out of the flock and it fell to the ground. The falcon threw up, turned over and was on the duck in an

instant. Before we could get over to the falcon he had already administered the *coup de grace* to the duck. An amazing flight and a superb demonstration of understanding between the falcon and falconer.



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Merlin and Prairie

The Merlin that Steve was flying was of the *Richardsons* sub species and was therefore considerably larger than its European counterpart. We saw a couple of flights at Meadow Larks and a couple more at Starlings. Unfortunately the Merlin failed to make a kill whilst we were out with it but it flew well and was the very model of obedience.

Another falcon that I was particularly keen to see fly was a ten year old passage Prairie Falcon. She flew mainly ducks and partridges and had done well so far at the meet. Unfortunately the day we went out with her the weather turned and it started to snow quite heavily. She was put up over a pond with ducks on it but before we could flush the ducks a wild Prairie came in and started to harass the trained falcon very hard. The two falcons covered a great deal of sky settling their dispute and by the time the trained Prairie had returned overhead the ducks had long since departed. Then the snow really

The pleasure of being a spectator

One other falcon that flew superbly every time he left the fist was a ten-year-old Gyr/Peregrine flown by Dale Guthormsen. Dale is a man who has moved house several times purely and simply so that he can better his falconry circumstances. He is a man who takes his hunting very seriously and it shows when he is in the field. He is highly disciplined and motivated and the way his falcons fly reflect that.

"Jack" the ten year old hybrid was flown at partridges and ducks and killed every time he left the fist bar once. The hybrid would mount to a tremendous pitch very quickly and without drifting out of position. When he stooped it was almost vertically and with amazing power. This falcon really was a pleasure to watch fly. The one flight that ended in failure was because a too enthusiastic spectator ran forward when he shouldn't and prematurely flushed the intended quarry. Dale had a few words with him and taught him some new and very colourful words.

All too soon the meet was drawing to a close and it was time to move on and visit more touristy things in the province for a few days before catching the flight home. On reflection I had quite enjoyed the falconry side of the meeting and spending time with Hal Webster had been an absolute pleasure. But it must be said that the evening talks at the meet were not up to much. At least the two out of the possible three that I attended weren't. In fact the first speaker took forty minutes to explain something that could have been wrapped up neatly in one sentence. To say he was deadly boring would be a massive understatement.

I was repeatedly told, on no less than six separate occasions actually, that the Canadian meet is very laid back and not regimented like NAFA meets can be. My interpretation of laid back would in actual fact be poorly organised. The intentions were obviously good and the falconry opportunities were very good for those with the hawks able to take advantage

of them, but as a meeting it was somewhat lacking in organisation.

I made several friends at the meet and have already made arrangements to go over and hawk with some of them next year. But would I attend the national meet again? Probably not.

Bird of Prey Centre visit

One of the places we opted to visit after the conclusion of the meet was "The Alberta Bird of Prey Centre". The timing of our group's trip to Canada meant that the centre was officially closed to the public. But a phone call to the director, Colin Weir, resulted in it being opened especially one afternoon for us. Colin was kind enough to take time out from his busy schedule and give us a personal guided tour of the facility and the raptors there.

The centre is not a conventional falconry centre like we have here but a rehabilitation centre that relies on public funding to be able to carry out its work. The land for the site was donated by the local town council and local residents are enthusiastic about the centre and the work carried out there. Approximately one hundred raptors a year are brought into the centre for help. The vast majority are eventually rehabilitated. The most common species brought in are Golden and Bald Eagles, Red Tails and Ferruginous Hawks and Great Horned Owls.

The pride and joy of the centre is a rotunda aviary that has been constructed so as to allow the injured raptors to rebuild some of their muscle and also to help assess their level of fitness prior to release. The aviary itself is some thirty thousand square feet and is extremely impressive. The whole operation operates on a budget of less than fifty thousand pounds per annum. Quite remarkable.

At the moment a new building is being constructed and this will be a medical suite, a classroom, a new food preparation room and some sleeping quarters for students. Each year the centre takes on raptor students for the summer but at present the students have to be found accommodation off-site. In future they will be able to stay on site in good clean, if somewhat spartan conditions.

I was asked if I would like to return for a few weeks next year and give a hand with training some of the falcons and hawks that need to be got fit before being hacked back. It's a proposition I shall probably take up.

By Nick Kester,
Communications Officer



The Hawk Board has been very active this year fighting for the future of falconry and bird of prey keeping. Here are the key areas:

CITES conference on Saker falcon

In May Jim Chick (chairman) joined DEFRA at this United Arab Emirates sponsored conference on the increasing decline in saker populations. The saker is currently CITES schedule II but the conference (which included CITES authorities from both the range countries and the Arab user states) agreed that it was not in the saker's interest to be upgraded to schedule I. Permitted trade, they concluded, enabled policing to take place whereas the alternative would be to drive trade underground making the authority's job harder. This is good news for trade in other raptor species as the consensus can be universally applied.

Imported gyr falcons

There is an on-going problem with gyr falcons imported from the USA, which, with the exception of a very small number of CITES registered breeders, are classified by the US

authorities as 'wild taken' although they may be several generations captive bred. Strict interpretation of the rules means that breeders may not use them for the production of hybrids. Following extensive Hawk Board lobbying, DEFRA agreed not to impose the rules on gyrs imported pre-2004, but some change is required by the US breeders/authority for the future.

Registration

Following continued uncertainty about the future of registration and strong representation to DEFRA by the principal UK breeders, Nick Fox suggested an amendment to the Wildlife and Countryside Act which divides registerable species on Schedule 4 into:

4a All wild-sourced or non-UK-sourced specimens of all species included in Schedule 4.

And **4b** All captive-bred, close-ringed specimens of the species listed in Schedule 4.

The proposal is that Schedule 4a remains as current, recognising the need for controls on international trade or wild taken birds.

However, Schedule 4b recognises the legitimacy of breeders by providing a lifetime passport for the bird in the form of a joint breeders/Article 10 certificate. This can be applied regardless of species to all breeders and, through a fixed format of closed ring (giving year and breeder number), provides the authorities with the means of tracing origin and, if needed, DNA matching.

DEFRA acknowledged the benefits and believe the solution can be implemented without excessive parliamentary procedure. Further consultation will be provided with complete details of the proposed changes.

Animal welfare bill

The Hawk Board has been grappling with this for at least a year. There has been much talk about controls on keeping animals, welfare codes and excessive powers to be granted to third parties such as the RSPCA.

The HB is aware of all this and for those who are interested the draft bill can be found on the DEFRA website. It is essential that the HB submission gives a strong lead in raptor welfare issues without being so proscriptive as to restrict our activities. Without question, this is the most important bill affecting falconry since the Wildlife and Countryside Act and our input is critical.

If, on looking at the draft bill, falconers have suggestions as to how best to proceed please contact your local club rep. or Mike Clowes, Hawk Board coordinator (e-mail: mike.clowes@halfacre131.fsnet.co.uk). The communications channel works both ways and applies to any issues falconers may feel appropriate.

FALCON BREEDER WINS DAMAGES FROM MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Martin Jones, one of the UK's best known falcon breeders has won damages from the Ministry on Defence (MoD) as a result of low flying Chinook helicopters disturbing his breeding project in April 1998. The noise of the helicopters terrified at least ten falcons who were sitting on eggs at the time. Following the incident a normal hatch rate of 80% was reduced to zero leaving his income for the year at least £80,000 down.

Martin Jones said: "Falconers need absolute quiet in which to breed and the slightest disturbance can cause them to damage eggs or abandon them. I chose my location in Monmouthshire with considerable care so as to breed falcons successfully. Low flying helicopters put paid to all that planning."

According to Mr Jones's solicitor Mr Russ of Clarke Willmott, Taunton, Somerset, the MoD had prevaricated until shortly before the limitation period of six years expired. Mr Russ commissioned an expert's report from Dr Nick Fox which he then presented to the MoD, believing that they had failed to recognise the nature of the complaint and the level of the loss incurred. Clarke Willmott also issued proceedings to preserve the claim.

Martin Jones comments: "As a result of professional legal advice and Nick Fox's report, the MoD settled the case with a payment of £60,000, but half of this has gone in legal costs. It caused many sleepless nights, as injustices often do, but as a friend of mine said "a bad settlement is often better than a good court case", particularly as they had already threatened to appeal any court decision in my favour. The costs would then have been horrendous."

"I hope the MoD helicopter pilots have now marked my location on all their flight charts," he added.

For more information on this release contact: T J Russ Partner, Clarke Willmott Solicitors on 01823 445218 truss@clarkewillmott.com Or Martin Jones on 01600 750300 martin@falconryonline.com

For general falconry issues contact: Nick Kester Communications Officer, Hawk Board on 01267 281448 nk.quattro@zetnet.co.uk

● Ballooning in Spain



An interview

with

Lloyd Buck

part 1

Lloyd Buck, along with his wife Rose, own a team of birds trained exclusively for filmwork. They specialise in tracking and in-flight filming with birds and you may have seen some of their work on BBC television programmes such as **Animal Camera**, **Extreme** and **Ultimate Killers**. His latest project was once again working with his beloved **Peregrine falcons** and with adventure film maker and cameraman, **Leo Dickinson**, whose credentials include filming the first balloon flight over the summit of **Mount Everest** and base jumping in **Norway**. I interviewed **Lloyd** in late 2004 and this is what he had to say:-

You've been working in the film industry for some time – how did you get started?

I've been working with films now for 14 years. I grew up in Essex and then moved to Bristol – that's where the natural history unit is based and who most of our work is for. The first thing I did was hand-raise some magpies for a **Wildlife On One** programme – and that was the sole reason I came to Bristol. Originally it was only meant to be six months work and then if nothing else came up I was going to go back to Essex. But then I imprinted some swans to follow a boat for another programme – and then one thing lead to another and I've been doing it ever since.

Training birds of prey for different television programmes must be difficult, particularly for programmes like "Animal Camera". Can you tell me what process you used to get the birds used to carrying a camera?

It's different for each bird. With **Tilley**, the **Golden Eagle**, we spent six months getting her accustomed to the harness with the camera. Other people have done work with eagles and on-board cameras before - and we've done some stuff previously with another eagle I

used to have (Skye) - unfortunately she had a heart problem and died at four and there was nothing we could do about it. The beauty of what we did with Tilley was that we had two cameras out on arms to each side and we could get a much better shot – we could see the tail, or the wings or whatever we wanted. The cameras were so light – just over 10 ounces including the battery and everything. She could comfortably cope with that with a good up-draft.

I started off by putting just a harness on her on its own and she didn't mind at all. Then I attached to it an empty matchbox covered with black electrical tape. Next I



● Lloyd with Peregrine, "Lucy"

put some weight in there – about one ounce initially with some paper to stop it moving around. And then I gradually increased the weight and size until we got up to a box which was similar to the box of tricks which was the real camera. I then introduced the arms, gradually, over the course of a few weeks. At first she was very interested to get at the arms – to peck at them or pull at them – but after a few weeks of putting them on every time I flew her, she took no notice whatsoever. We decided to have two cameras because then she could be evenly balanced on either side. We didn't always have two cameras operating, but it was just so that she wouldn't be lop-sided. We had to make sure that all the little cables were well protected, because she did have a liking for pulling at those at first. But overall it worked really well and took about six months in all.

To be honest, with the Peregrines it was much simpler. They have never really

taken any notice of the cameras and the harness. As long as they can have their fly and enjoy themselves, they don't seem to mind. I suppose that's because, in my opinion, they're not such an overall intelligent bird of prey. I would say the eagle is much more of a social bird with much more all round intelligence.

The really interesting one was the Goshawk, Ellie. I imprinted her especially for the *Animal Camera* series. In talking with



● Lloyd, Leo, Andy, Lee

Peter Bassett who was the series producer, we discussed putting the camera on different birds. I said that no-one had ever really decently imprinted a Goshawk so that it's really bomb-proof and able to take an on-board camera. So I got Ellie at 10 days of age and socially imprinted her – I just took her everywhere with me – she'd even go fishing with me on my day off! I always joke that the only way to describe Ellie is that she's got a Harris Hawk temperament with Goshawk feathers! Her temperament is very laid back and she's great for filming – she doesn't mind the harness at all because she grew up having it popped on her with the camera – it's second nature. And when we fly her up in the woods, which we do twice a week (the rest of the time we just fly her down on the meadow near where we live), we put the harness on with the telemetry on it. So she wears the harness at least twice a week - it's just part of her flying. She's superb, she's half Finnish and half European and she flies at about 21b 9oz this year – which is quite heavy for a Gos.

The other thing I didn't realise was that a lot of falconers don't actually fly their Goshawks in woodlands but only in open country - that surprised me. I've never been what you would call a falconer, although I've

hunted with the birds many years ago, but for what I do the requirements are a lot different. For instance, with Tilley, she is a very unique eagle in some respects in that when I go up to Scotland with her, or wherever we go with her, I can let her off in really extreme environment and conditions and she'll go way off on the soar. She'll be away soaring, but she always comes back looking for me, because she's got a really strong bond

with me and sees me every single day. It's more of a social relationship that I've got with her as well. When I'm filming with her, it's not just about calling her in for food although, yes, I am calling her in for food, but I'm not encouraging her to go off self-hunting - she's very much more orientated to what we would be feeding.

In the *Animal Camera* series, some of the shots were spectacular. Were you pleased with the finished results?

Yes, we were very pleased. I always think they don't show the best footage actually – some of the soaring shots we got with the on-board camera I thought were better than the ones they used. But it always seems to be about whatever particular shot they want to use to tell their story within the programme. Quite often the shots that I think would be more interesting for people to see don't fit into their story. Like the stuff where she was about 1000 feet above us on the soar and you could see the whole vista around – they only used a little bit of that and I was quite disappointed that they didn't use more.



I was very pleased with the Goshawk shots because I suggested to Peter that we do that for the programme and it just worked fantastically. I don't think anyone has seen footage like that with it going through trees.

I was really flattered last autumn when David Attenborough was doing some lectures and he requested that footage of the Goshawk to show at his lectures because he thought it was some of the most innovative new wildlife footage that had been filmed for many years – that it had a new angle on things. I thought that was a real compliment coming from him, because he was the guy who started it all off all those years ago and he's been my hero.

What I found really interesting with the Goshawk, was when she started to learn to fly in the woodland. It was really interesting seeing the process of her learning to weave through the trees. When she was first on the wing and starting to learn to fly, the first time we took her up to the woods, she was absolutely hopeless – she was always putting her feet out and nearly flying into the trees. But very quickly, within probably a week, she suddenly got it. It was really interesting seeing her learn.

The Peregrines were good in *Animal Camera* too. However, I always think that with the on-board camera on the hawks, you don't really get a sense of the speed because they are obviously quite high above the ground and you haven't got much to relate to unless there's a cliff or something close by. You don't get the sense of speed that you witness at the time of doing it, so it's a bit disappointing.

One of the more well-known projects that you were involved with is the fall from the balloon with Steve Leonard, the TV vet, and your Peregrine, Lady. Can you tell me a bit more about her and that particular programme?

She was five years old when I did that – she was parent reared. I had her from when she was about a year old – I got her from a chap who breeds them in Essex. When I got her she was straight out of an enclosure so I had to go through all the basic principles of training that you do with a bird that's come out of a seclusion aviary. Originally I got her for a programme that Simon King did back in 1996/97 called *Shadow the Peregrine* – one of his animal dramas. He asked if we could train a Peregrine for that particular project, which we did and I obviously kept

her afterwards.

We did other bits of filming with her, like we do with all the birds, and then in 2000 the producer of *Ultimate Killers*, Martin Hughes-James, came to us and said he'd like to do a sequence on Peregrines because of all the ultimate killers they're supposed to be the fastest animal in the world but he wanted us to do something a bit different. The funny thing was, about three months before, I'd been staying up with Steve and Emma Ford at Gleneagles, and Steve had produced his sky-diving magazine from America and showed me this guy in America who was sky-diving with his falcon. He said "You could do that, Lloyd, with Lady." I said that I didn't think anybody would be interested in filming that because they want to see the wild birds. But he was convinced that someone would. So when Martin asked me what could we do that was a bit different, I immediately thought of this.

So it was suggested doing it from a balloon, which we thought was more of a natural method than a Cessna. We have done stuff with a Cessna but it's all a bit rushed and fast - you've got to bundle the bird out and it's not so photogenic and probably not so much fun for the bird. So Martin got in touch with Leo and Mandy Dickinson. Leo has been doing sky-diving camerawork for many years and he's also interested in wildlife. His wife, Mandy, is a very good and respected balloon pilot. So they were the perfect team to get involved in that particular project. Leo had already thought a few years before that it would be possible to have some sort of bird sky-diving with him and the only bird he could come up with was a Peregrine, because he knew they're so very fast. So that was how I met them some four years ago.

It was quite tough filming because of the weather in Spain – which is typical when you want to do some filming – the weather wasn't as good as it should have been. So we were very restricted weatherwise and could only balloon early in the morning or late in the evening, some days we couldn't do anything because it was too windy to put the balloon up.

All in all, I think we did twelve jumps with Lady – we were doing it from 12,000 feet so she was really enjoying it. It was very difficult because, as you can

imagine, everything has to happen within a 30-second window when you're in free-fall. If it doesn't, that's the whole day finished. There was a lot of pressure on me, actually, because I knew that the whole trip was costing an awful lot of money - I think there were about 14 or 15 in the team, which was a lot for a wildlife programme. And it all rested on my shoulders – if I didn't give the right cue for them to jump when I thought Lady was ready, then obviously it would all be a waste of time. To start with it was quite easy to see when she was ready – she might rouse and she might poop and then she'd bob her head at the lure which our sky diver, or Steve, the presenter, had in their hand, and I knew she was locked on and it was "Ready, Steady, Go!"

The trouble was, within about four jumps, she got used to the countdown. During all the six months training, when I got to the word "Steady" all her little feathers would go tight, and she'd lean forward on the fist and you could tell that she was focussed because she knew what was coming up. Then all of a sudden, she just got so blasé about it all that even when I got to the word "Steady" she might be looking round the other way, and I was thinking that she wasn't ready to go and I was saying "No, hold on – reset". But then I figured out what it was - she just knew what was going to happen, and she was just waiting for the word "Go". So I knew that when she'd had a rouse and prepared herself, she was ready most of the time – but it was a bit disconcerting when she went from the stage when I could obviously tell she was ready to when she's sitting there looking around, looking up and looking down and I'm thinking she's not that keen. But she was, she was just thinking "Well I know what's going on - they'll jump in a minute and I'll chase them!"

In the next issue, we'll go on to talk about other projects with which Lloyd has been involved. In the meantime, you can read a review of Lloyd and Leo's latest film, *The Falcon That Flew With Man*, on page 9.



■ The hunting grounds



■ Joe and Jackhammer



■ After a bolting rabbit

attention to oneself, it can mess up the whole thing and once you are told no, then you're done. There have always been plenty of rabbits and fields to fly, so I never felt it was worth the risk. Now all that has changed and I have full permission, as well as the key to the entire place! People who have known me over the years would question the wisdom of the hay farmer's decision to give me a key to the place, but that would be because they're jealous!

Hay crop saved?

So now, nearly three months into my endeavour to save the farmer's hay crop, I have begun to notice that I am having an effect. Just recently I hunted both of the alfalfa hay fields and had only one slip between the two fields where I could previously expect 6-10 slips per field. As I walked the larger of the two fields I could see plenty of rabbit droppings everywhere but no rabbits. I drove to the smaller hay field but, instead of going in, I went to the back of the field planning on hunting the dry areas outside the fenced alfalfa field. With my eagle Jackhammer (JH to his friends) on my fist, I stepped around the hay field fence and stopped dead in my tracks! Coming out of the field were 30-40 black tailed jack rabbits.

The scene looked like a western cattle drive – a whole herd of them running out of the hay field going into the tall weeds and brush that are very difficult to hunt. This dry field is not big at all and just one part is overgrown with thick tall weeds. However, the remaining part is open except for the odd sticker bush here and there. And further on down, the tall weedy things take over once again, offering good cover for the jack rabbits. Having hunted this field many times, JH knows that he has only a small window of opportunity to catch a jack rabbit

out in the open. I walked along at the edge of the tall weeds knowing that my presence would put pressure on the large group of jack rabbits hiding in there and one would panic and make a break for it. It's kind of like a shark circling a coral reef hoping for a fish to make a mistake and bolt for the open water. I could see jack rabbits moving around in the weeds and knew it was only a matter of time before one bolted.

Let's get back to the shark thing, like a great white. Well, JH would be the shark and I'd be one of those pilot fish that hangs on for the ride, which would be a more accurate picture, I think. Jackhammer was watching the rabbits very intently when, suddenly, three jacks broke out into the open and were heading for the next field. JH launched from my fist and was flying hard with full powerful wing strokes. Black tail jack rabbits will flush out fast in a full burn-out, usually with dust being kicked up from behind as they accelerate. Then they go into cruising speed with their very long ears standing tall figuring they are out of danger.

That is what the jack rabbit that JH had singled out did, went into cruising mode. Figuring that it was free and clear, up came the long ears as it went heading for cover. All the while JH was building a ton of speed because, as an experienced game hawk, he could see he had a short window in which to catch this jack. Near as I can figure, this jack rabbit must have taken a peak over his shoulder at what was bearing down on him, because after only three strides in cruising mode, mister jack rabbit immediately went back into a full throttle burn-out, leaving a major dust trail behind him. JH was closing fast on the jack rabbit and, in a last ditch effort to shake off the on-coming eagle, the jack made a sharp turn to the right, followed by a sharp turn to the left. JH flew in with speed and serious intent, made slight

adjustments with each manoeuvre the jack made and just as the rabbit was making cover, JH reached out, snagged the jack rabbit with one foot and that was that.

Drive home

On my drive home I was thinking about what had taken place – finding no rabbits in the hay fields and then seeing all those jacks running out of the fields like Godzilla was chasing them.

Many years ago, before the days of telemetry, I flew my falcons with bells on their legs as many falconers still do. I remember walking up to a duck pond and while unhooding my peregrine falcon, her bells making noise like they always did from her feet shifting with the removal of her hood. The second the bells made a sound the ducks flushed. This began to happen more and more until I realised that the ducks were associating the bell sound with the arrival of my falcon. JH does not wear any bells but he is a vocal eagle, not a screamer, he just talks to me. In fact, it's a good barometer into his brain. As long as he is talking every once in a while, he is good to go; if he is quiet, something is bugging him. He does make enough noise that, I believe, the jack rabbits have realised that that sound means that Godzilla is coming and you better get out of Dodge fast. I cut the bells off my peregrine, solving that problem; however, keeping JH quiet will be a challenge.

A short while ago I was hunting one of the hay fields, the farmer drove by and asked how I was doing. I told him that I was catching 3-4 jacks every time out, and he said, "that's not enough, catch more". He wants me to catch more rabbits – aren't hay farmers great!

Picture credit Chrissy Atkinson

...while flying my eagle

Staff at Great Western Referrals check all the birds flying to America as **Jemima Parry-Jones** leaves the National Bird of Prey Centre.

Great Western Referral Check

The avian vets at Great Western Referrals, Neil Forbes, Petra Zsivanovits, Debbie Monks and Steve Smith, all took part in making sure that every bird being exported to America was healthy and fit to travel.

"The weeks leading up to the flight on the 13 November was very busy", Neil reported. "There was a mountain of paper work that had to be completed to export the 190 or so birds and each had to be examined and bled several times to make sure vaccinations had been effective and the birds were healthy. In all the years I have been involved with the National Bird of Prey Centre this was a fantastic opportunity to see many of the centres birds up close and to help Jemima ensure that her move to America was a success".

On the day of the flight four staff from Great Western Referrals were in attendance to give a final check of each bird and give them fluids and supplements for the flight to America. "It was a great day", Petra said. "There was just such a diversity of birds from Steller's Sea Eagles to Pigmy Owls, we were privileged to have been able to be involved with the move and to handle all of those species on the one day".

Each bird was individually weighed to determine the quantity of fluids and supplements that should be given for the trip before being given a final examination by Petra or Debbie, having its microchip and paperwork checked and finally sealed in a carry box for the duration of the flight.

"It was non stop on the Saturday. We started with the largest birds at day break and had worked through to the smallest by around 4pm" Debbie said. "It was great to handle all the birds and to ensure that they were all fit to travel. Luckily no major problems occurred and all of the birds Jemima wanted to export were fit to travel".

The National Birds Of Prey Centre is now under new administration and many of the birds from the original collection remain on site. Be sure to visit the centre when it reopens in Spring 2005 for all new displays and activities.

If you have any veterinary enquiries for your birds of prey feel free to give Great Western Referrals a call on 01793 603 802.



Clockwise from top: Petra and Owl, Jemima weighing final bird, Debbie and Jemima, Neil Forbes with eagle





■ **Taz half way through 2nd moult**

In April the hind talon was white and there were soft swellings on the leg and toe. By July the hind talon was black and the swellings had disappeared. However, the hind toe near the talon was and still is double the size but hard and bony. Taz didn't moult very well and was still dropping feathers in late autumn and was not fully summed until the end of November. Obviously, the severity of the infection had affected his entire system.

I started hunting again in the autumn and he soon assumed his old style and was even using his disabled toe to hold down his quarry. I started taking several flights with him again and we had some wonderful high flights at our Saturday meetings at Little Budworth. How high? Well a normal pitch of about 300ft, but an unbiased estimate of 600+ft when I had to restrain a member of the field from flushing too soon. Taz just went up and up to descent in a vertical stoop and took his partridge. Well, he is certainly back on form and I am indebted to the expertise of all the staff at the Birch Heath Veterinary Centre.

During all this time my wife, Ann, and I had been training our working Cocker Spaniel, Toby. I had never even owned a dog before, never mind trained one and I expect I made all the mistakes of a novice handler. However, after reading many books, looking at endless videos and taking advice from dog trainers, gamekeepers and falconers, our dog was quartering, stopping

to the whistle and stopping on flush. Much to our relief our dog even stopped on a flush at a field meet when a leading trainer's pointer chased a pheasant across the field.

Poor Month

January was a poor month for longwings as the gales were so strong many days were lost and many of my contemporaries had decided to finish the season early. As luck would have it, the weather changed in the last week and we had a calm, sunny spell of weather. Saturday 29 January was the last day for partridge hawking at Little Budworth and Taz was the only bird to fly. Robin Jeff, the landowner and fellow falconer, said, "Just help yourself. There are plenty of partridges. We have all finished flying for this season and are off to follow the heat."

Saturday was perfect – sunny with a slight breeze, as we drove down the farm track, binoculars raised to try and spot the elusive grey partridge along the hedgerows. We couldn't find any and didn't just want to wander about and disturb a covey, so we decided to go way out into the middle of a large field, cast off Taz and quarter Toby towards some suitable areas which may hold the quarry. Well, Taz went to a magnificent pitch. Whilst Ann quartered Toby, we were communicating with each other on our 'walkie-talkies' so I could let her know when Taz was at the right spot or when she had to stop Toby and let Taz regain position.

Toby was sent to search some hedgerows and kept working and working, when all of a sudden I saw a change in his demeanour. He stopped for a moment, went through the hedge, ran around in a circle to leap in and flushed a partridge. Taz



■ **Mike Coupe with Prairie x Peregrine and working cocker, Toby**



■ **Taz takes a Teal**

descended in a devastating stoop to bind to his partridge. We had done it – a perfect flight – dog, falcon and humans had all worked in harmony to achieve the perfect outcome to all our training.

We went back to the car elated and light of step, although we had covered a considerable distance. Taz had consumed the head and neck of the partridge and one chick, so as it was the last day of the season I decided to give him another flight.

Up went Taz again and Toby was obviously enjoying his role and quartered to perfection. Ann ran Toby right across a large field towards our boundary and along a thick hedgerow. We worked hard but found nothing. We turned along another hedgerow to the left and all that time Taz was a speck in the sky. Then I saw the signs – Toby hesitated, circled an area and then plunged in to flush another partridge, which decided to fly for the opposite side of the field. Taz just closed up and this time knocked his prey to the ground, threw up and landed to secure his already dead partridge. To say we were elated was an understatement – a brace in the most terrific style. What a great day for the end of the 2005 season.

when all goes right!"

Syon Park in London was the setting for a rather unusual show recently. The venue played host to an event that was held to celebrate all that is good in terms of culture, heritage and life style in Saudi Arabia. Titled “Saudi Arabian Days” the event took place over a weekend and was designed to let the public enjoy some of the arts, crafts and sports that are part of modern Arab Life.

There was no admission charge and all activities were completely free to visitors with the exception of the food stands. But even these were subsidised and visitors had the opportunity to sample some superb Saudi cooking for a small nominal fee.

Several massive tents had been erected on the site and these were of traditional design and pattern and were made from Camel hair. The word tent does not do justice to these magnificent structures and they had to be seen to be believed. These huge shelters were used to house various craftsmen and women who gave demonstrations of their skills and were selling their completed wares. Brass, silver, wood and wool were all being worked. Everything from drinking vessels to a saddle for a Camel was being made on the spot.

Several times each day a display of traditional dancing was given and this proved to be both very colourful and extremely popular with the crowds. Just as popular though were the animals that had been gathered together for the event. Camels, Salukis and pure Arab horses were on show. The camels and horses had their own specially built enclosures that allowed the public good viewing access but kept a little distance

between the animals and the public. Arab horses do have a tendency to be highly strung and Camels certainly have been known to bite on occasion. Although the



large weathering lawn had been constructed under the shade of a group of trees and a magnificent display of falcons was on show. Bob Dalton and his friends Mike Hewlett and Andy King had gathered together Sakers, Peregrines, Lanners, Lugger, Barbary, Merlin, Jerkin as well as a

a taste of...

Arabia!

Camels, whilst muzzled, were brought out a couple of times each day and lead round, giving people an opportunity to stroke them and photograph them.

A superb pair of Salukis, the traditional Arab hunting dog, were walked round periodically again giving people the chance for a good close look. Salukis have been used for centuries by Arab hunters as a coursing dog. But they have also been trained to work in harmony with falcons to bring down Gazelle.

What would an event like this be without falcons? A

couple of Gyr/Peregrines. In keeping with the event the falcons were on traditional Arab style blocks as opposed to the normal European style. Twice a day a flying demonstration was given with several falcons being exercised to the lure.

Five creatures are considered holy in the Arab culture and only the Wolf was missing. The other four were present and it has to be said that they were exceedingly fine examples of them as well.

The proceedings were opened by the Saudi Arabian Ambassador HRH Prince Turki Al Faisal ibn Abdulaziz. Not only did his royal highness spend considerable time with the falcons he also spiritedly led the dancing on one occasion.

The weather proved to be very kind and those that attended really seemed to enjoy themselves. All in all the entire event was considered a tremendous success and those involved are looking forward to a repeat performance next year.



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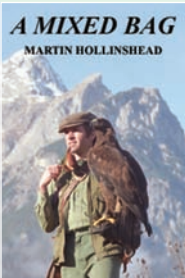
HARRIS' HAWK DAYS Martin Hollinshead



When I wrote *A passion for Harris' Hawks* in 2002, my aim was to explore and praise the parabeuteo in a very personal way by inviting the reader to share my hawking. In *Harris' Hawk Days*, the journey through my falconry continues, highlighting changes, challenges and most of all, the enduring quest to discover all that the Harris' hawk is capable of. Join me once again as I celebrate this incredible raptor.

Martin Hollinshead

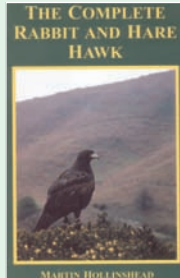
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When Peter Eldrett asked me to write an article on the manufacture of falconry swivels, he said to keep it to around 1500 words. I replied “I don’t know 1500 words Peter”, but it was explained that I could use the same word more than once. So without going into the boring stage of trying to explain the complexities of the numerous grades of stainless steel that are available or different types of polishing wheels or polishing compounds, I have tried to simplify the technique of swivel making.

for the D to be welded in. To make the D, a simple bending jig has to be manufactured, similar to a miniature plumber’s pipe bending machine, again one for each size of swivel. When the Ds have been made they are put into the two outer holes of the body, and then welded underneath. The only method for welding swivels is T.I.G. (tungsten inert gas), tungsten being the needle in the welding torch and the inert gas has to be pure argon which shrouds the point of welding from the atmosphere.

Once the Ds have been welded to the underneath of the body of the swivel, I finish them on a belt sander to remove any excess weld. The next step is to put the pin through the centre hole from the top. This can either be a purpose made pin, turned in a lathe, or

the ring. This is probably the trickiest operation as the welding power setting is critical. Too much power and the ring will melt out of shape; not enough power and the weld will not run. Once the welding procedure is finished and cooled the welds have to be cleaned, as the welded areas turn black, and then, finally, polished using a polishing wheel and compound. Once finished, T.I.G welded stainless steel swivels are immensely strong.

Testing for strength

I employed the services of an independent engineer to test my swivels, from the smallest up to the Eagle swivel. The smallest broke at 400 kg, up to 936 kg for the Eagle.

One point I would like to make people aware of is that of the cheap imports of so-

Swivel Making

Dangerous without knowing how

I have not written this article with the intention that every falconer should rush out to buy all the equipment to make their own swivels. Welding can be hazardous without the correct training due to fumes, eyesight damage due to the intense light given off from the welding arc and, of course, burns.

The method for all sizes of swivels, from Merlin up to Eagle, is exactly the same procedure whichever style of swivel is to be made, i.e. round top or flat, round, rectangular or elliptical shaped body. Some Falconers will only use the flat top type of swivel because they claim to keep the jesses on the top, where as others say if the jesses do slip down they stay down, while with the rounded top if they do slip and the bird bates, the jesses will pull to the top again. But it is all up to personal choice. As for the shape of the swivel body provided it is strong the shape makes little or no difference.

Making the swivel

Firstly, the bodies have to have three holes drilled in them. Using stainless steel, it is necessary to use cobalt or solid carbide drill bits. To drill the body of the swivel, a simple drilling jig has to be made (to ensure that the holes are in the same place for each swivel) with hardened steel bushes in. The holes are drilled – one in the centre for the pin to go through onto which the ring is welded for the leash, and the two outer holes are



Clockwise from left: Cheap swivels, Individual elements, The finished product, Welding tool



alternatively stainless steel dome head rivets can be readily purchased.

Constructing the rings

To make the rings, varying thickness (dependent on the swivel size) of stainless steel wire is wound around a solid round bar, again of different diameters for each size of swivel. So what you finish with is something resembling a coil spring, which then has to be cut lengthways to release the individual rings, after which they have to be twisted to flatten and align the ends. These are now ready to be welded to complete the ring.

The last welding procedure is to attach

called falconry swivels (see photo). These are manufactured from a light alloy and then chromium plated. The late Rob Lippard of RR Products did a test for us on these swivels. They broke on a drop test of just 1 kilo. I am happy to see them used on lure lines, etc., but if you value your bird, put it on one of the purpose made stainless steel swivels, available from all leading equipment suppliers and not something that can be purchased for as little as 20 pence each.

I hope you have enjoyed reading this article and, without any engineering knowledge, it has given you an insight on how the falconer’s swivel is born.

■ Leopard

paints, he executes them in a precise and professional manner to produce a work of quality.

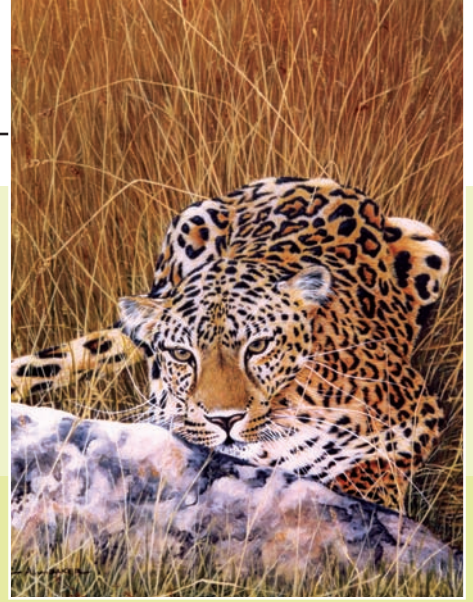
Andrew is a founder member of the Tamworth Society of Artists of which he was a committee member for the first two years.

He has exhibited throughout the UK, including several game fairs of which the Falconry Fair,

Chetwynd Park, Shropshire, is one he has attended for the last four years.

Anyone seeing and buying Andrew's work will appreciate the detail and amount of work involved.

He works in pencils, acrylics and oils and anyone wishing to commission Andrew to paint or draw any subject, can contact him on 01827- 703372.

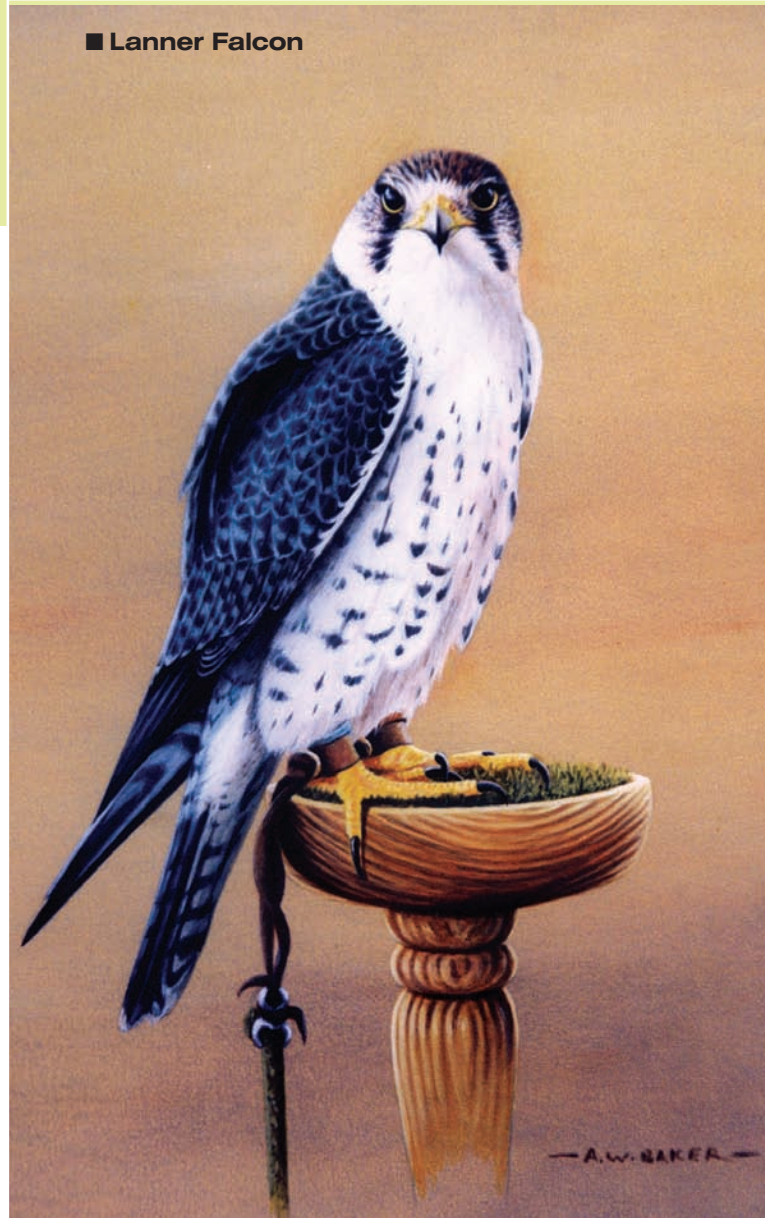


Andrew not only paints and draws raptors and falconry art but also likes to paint countryside scenes with wildlife.

■ Goshawk



■ Lanner Falcon



The subconscious is a wonderful state. Without realising it, I had somehow come to a halt, and a smile had come across my face. So, what is the reason for this apparent state of euphoria? It is simply the delight at watching my dog, out in front of me, busily engrossed in her hunting.

What possesses a dog to run for so long? And to work so hard? Especially, when quarry appears to be so scarce and widespread as it is today.

I do not believe it to be simply down to 'what the dog has been bred to do'. No! A greater part of the reason is attributable to, the fact that the dog must actually be enjoying what it is doing. With my own particular breed, the Wirehaired Vizsla, I would also add, that the breed has a natural desire to simply please, me!

Out of the corner of the dog's eye, she has noticed that I have stopped. She grinds to a halt, looks back to check in, and then knowing that she has my blessing, once again sets about her work.

has so rarely let me down. Even though I simply cannot comprehend, that anything could be laying there.

On my command the dog lunges forward and to my absolute surprise, not one but two rabbits exit at the very same time! I must have almost stood on them, whilst walking around the dog, in my vain attempt to actually see what it was she was pointing.

I am ashamed to admit it, but I did in fact harbour a nagging doubt, that what she was pointing was little more than residual scent. As the old adage goes, 'always trust your dog!'

Unknown breed

It is now almost 10 years since we first went to a field to work a Wirehaired Vizsla with our hawks. At that time, they were in fact the very first of their breed, to be used within the UK for this noble art of ours. As such, they were somewhat of an unknown quantity.

Since then, our own personal Wirehaired Vizslas, have found grouse, partridge and pheasant for peregrines, rabbits for eagles, goshawks, Harris hawks and redtails, and gone hedgerow hunting for Sparrowhawks.

They have worked upon heather, stubble, white ground and plough, the

Wirehaired Vizsla is not!

It is not the easy quick fix, regardless of its biddable nature and eagerness to please, for the person who has little or no time to train a dog, and train it well! It still requires, all the time and patience, which many of the other longer established and more widely utilised breeds need. It does not have the magic ability to make the inadequate look good!

Multi purpose

Without meaning to 'teach granny to suck eggs' or boring you with details you may well already be aware of, it is worth remembering that the Wirehaired Vizsla is a member of the sub group of dogs called HPRs (hunt, point and retrieve). As such, they have been bred to carry out a wide range of tasks, unlike many other breeds, which are specialists.

I personally, do not like to refer to the HPR breeds as 'the jack of all trades', as this, incorrectly infers that they are the masters of none. When in fact they are anything but.

Instead I prefer to describe them as 'multi purpose' or as our American brethren call them 'versatile'.

The tasks asked of the various HPR breeds, by European hunters, and I have witnessed this first hand, has to be seen to

the Wirehaired Vizsla

- a dog for all reasons

A little time afterwards she draws on point. She is pointing into what appears to be nothing more than a small grassy mound.

On approaching her, I decide to leave the hawk hooded and to try and actually see what it is that lays before her.

I scan the ground, for in such sparse cover it almost seems inconceivable that anything could remotely find sufficient refuge to hide.

No matter how slow and carefully I scan the ground, I simply cannot see anything. I have no reason to disbelieve what the dog is telling me. However, for some unknown reason, I am almost in two minds whether to unhood the hawk or not.

I decide to put my faith in the dog, for she

length and breadth of the country and in all weather conditions. They have more than adequately acquitted themselves, opening both eyes and minds, to the suitability of the breed, as a potential Falconer/Austringers dog.

So what does this breed have to offer? What type of a person will get the best out of them? Which branch of our art is it best suited to? And how does it compare to the many other, more established breeds? These are all questions I have been asked on many occasions before.

Let me begin by stating what the

be believed. They expect much more than we do here in the UK, would ever expect from a dog trained for falconry.

This multi purpose nature, therefore ideally lends itself to those of us who fly both long and short wings, at different quarry types, upon different landscapes and at different times of the year. Including, all the differing weather conditions, the great British climate can throw at us!

What this therefore means is that, we have within the one single breed, the means by which we can pursue the

differing forms of our art. Negating the need for two separate, specialised breeds.

Our own season begins in August, when we fly a Tiercel Peregrine, primarily upon white ground and heather for grouse, September for Partridge and October for Pheasant.

By the beginning of November, the Peregrine is free lofted and we then, take up and fly a goshawk, through the winter months, until the end of February. Our principal quarry then is rabbit, and we expect our Wirehaired Vizslas, to hunt for and find them with as much enthusiasm.

Breed characteristics

I shall begin by stating the obvious. The Wirehaired Vizsla is not simply a smooth haired Vizsla in a wirehaired coat! Granted the two breeds do share a number of similarities, such as their sensitive nature and love of human interaction, but here the similarities end.

I feel the Wirehaired Vizsla is somewhat less frenetic than its smooth haired relative. By and large I would admit to the fact that the smooth haired Vizsla generally casts out farer and at greater speeds.

One definite characteristic of the breed is its habit of occasionally checking in with its handler. A true sign of a dog that is co-operatively hunting.

The Wirehaired Vizsla's coat (here lies an article in itself) affords it the necessary protection, dependent upon the individual quality of both the outer and under coat, from both the cold and wet weather, and also from the ravages of sharp dense cover that it maybe sent into, to flush hidden game.

Quite a number people who have come to own a Wirehaired Vizsla, many of whom have previously owned, trained and worked another HPR breeds and in particularly those who have owned a Germanic breed, have initially been astounded by apparent ease with which basic training progresses.

Let me state, that it is a fairly simple affair with a wirehaired vizsla, to have a very well disciplined young dog. But, herein lies a major problem and one that has lead to the mistaken belief that the breed is somewhat of a 'plodder'.

Too much discipline at too early an age in a Wirehaired Vizsla, leads to a somewhat over dependent, suppressed dog, one that will hang around its handler, wanting to please them by fulfilling the next command, rather than looking away from them to hunt.

The breed definitely benefits from early exposure to game and the more hunting

the better, without I must add over pressurising the young pupil.

Working with Falcons

Let us start with the Wirehaired Vizslas suitability for long wings.

I must begin by saying, that if you solely fly a long wing at game, then there can be no finer dogs to use than either a pointer or setter. For these are the specialists in this field, and through hundreds of years of selective breeding, they have been finely tuned to cast far and wide in search of game birds, for both hawk and gun.

For those of you, who like ourselves, only fly a long wing for part of the year, then how will the Wirehaired Vizsla perform?

Firstly, a Wirehaired Vizsla will never cast out as far, or cover its ground at similar speed to a pointer or setter. They have simply



Truly wild game birds behave in a completely different way to reared and released birds. As such, they will not tolerate any indiscretions by a clumsy breed of dog

not been bred to do as such. Originally bred to be a rough shooting/wildfowling person's canine companion, they were meant to range at a distance, which was comfortable enough for the gun, on foot, to reach them in quick time. However, don't let me mislead you into thinking that they are little more than 'ankle huggers!' for they are anything but.

Our wirehaired vizslas are worked for truly wild partridge and pheasant. As such, their respective numbers are far less than reared and released birds. They are also widely scattered, so a big-hearted, good running dog, equipped with a finely tuned nose is required.

Truly wild game birds behave in a completely different way to reared and released birds, and will not tolerate any indiscretions by a clumsy breed of dog.

Our dogs cast out, and alter their range according to the ground upon which they are being worked and the quarry they are hunting for. So, when this means that they are searching for our elusive game birds, they range out farther, than what is required, when in pursuit of rabbits. Once sufficiently experienced, they develop a fine nose for game birds. Their calm, somewhat unexcitable nature, truly lends itself to game hawking.

the Wirehaired Vizsla

Working with hawks

The wirehaired vizsla is quite simply the consummate Austringers dog. I feel qualified to say that after 28 years of rabbit hawking utilising various HPR breeds.

I have personally flown a Wedge tailed Eagle, goshawk, Harris hawk, Ferruginous and red tail over them, all of which owe a greater part of their success at rabbits to the good noses of our wirehaired vizslas. For without them we would not have obtained the amount of quality sport I have been so very fortunate to have experienced.

An Austringers 'lot' is in many ways so similar to that of the rough shooter, that the Wirehaired Vizsla, indeed, any of the HPR breeds, is ideally suited. In fact, unless your preference is for the flushing breeds (spaniels), then I would recommend a HPR breed every time.

Experience has shown us, that for species such as Harris hawks, Ferruginous and red tails, and especially so with a young inexperienced eyas, a pointing breed, such as the Wirehaired Vizsla, ensures a greater degree of success. It obviously stands to reason, that a steady pointing dog allows you the time and luxury to manoeuvre both yourself and hawk into the best possible position, to ensure success.

Goshawks are somewhat of a different proposition, and some Austringers who fly them, prefer the spontaneity that comes from working a spaniel.

Suits you sir?

The wirehaired vizsla is a breed best suited to the type of person who not only wants a fine working companion, but who also requires a loving family companion.



For they do best when involved within the family environment. They are not for the quick tempered, heavy-handed trainer with little or no time to train a dog.

For the non-specialist Falconer/Austringer, who hunts a variety of game, over different landscapes, in all weathers, then the wirehaired vizsla is a dog for all reasons.

For further impartial advice on the breed please telephone 01748 850918, or visit www.gonegoswirehairedvizslas.moonfruit.com.

They are not for the quick tempered, heavy-handed trainer with little or no time to train a dog





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When disaster struck - twice

It all began on 26 November 2002. A bright and sunny autumn day with a brisk westerly wind; this was a good day for flying our female Harris' Hawk, Jess. She was one partner of our breeding pair that we chose to fly during the hunting season. She had successfully reared four young that year and three during 2001. Jess was a magnificent looking hawk and flew a variety of quarry including rabbit, pheasant, duck, moorhen and grey squirrels.

On this particular afternoon, she was responsive and chasing rabbits with great purpose. Her flying weight was 2lb 5oz. She treated us to a fine display of soaring, often flashing past us with the wind before banking steeply and looking back for us.

We had been on a circuit of our flying ground and had covered most of the likely places where we knew the rabbits would be. Despite several near misses, Jess did not make a kill this time and so my wife and I decided to return to where the car was parked. Jess was 11 years old and was well used to free following, in fact, she required no prompting to follow us. As a consequence she became very fit and was a powerful flyer. Being both retired, we were able to fly her every day when the weather permitted.

Power line

By now we were some 40 metres from the car, and so I decided to call Jess down to my fist. She glided down knowingly, flying into the wind. She swallowed my offering and flew off the gauntlet on to a low branch of an oak tree beside my left shoulder. She was no more than a metre from me.

At this point I began to walk to our car thinking that Jess would follow me, as she often did and take stance on a solitary telegraph pole beside it. In that split second she flew past me and climbed very steeply before landing on an overhead power line. She was immediately electrocuted and killed. She fell lifeless, hitting the ground with a dull thud.

My wife and I were completely

traumatised and horrified at what we had witnessed. Nothing could have prepared us for such a devastating end to Jess's life. It was over in a second and she was dead. We had flown her here for 11 years and we had not even noticed or considered the power line as a threat. She had never landed on a powerline before.

I picked her up and cradled her in my arms. We were totally distraught and in a state of complete shock. My wife drove the car the short distance home and I sat with Jess in my arms, unable to say anything.

New bird

I walked into the mews to see and speak to our male Harris Hawk, Jake. In my shock I tried to explain to him that Jess was not coming back. Over the next few days it was as if he knew, because he seemed to become very subdued compared to his usual perky self. The loss of Jess meant that our breeding programme for 2003 was over, and Jake had lost his partner, and we had also lost a member of our family.

Within days I telephoned Jenny Wray at IBR and explained what had happened. She was sympathetic and immediately offered us Chrystie, her six year old female Harris' as she was keen to embark on a breeding programme with her.

We introduced the pair on 8 December 2002, keeping them on bow perches for two weeks. It was obvious from the outset that Jake was delighted and I also felt convinced that Chrystie was pleased with him too. I decided to put the male into the breeding aviary on 20 December, and on 23 December I released Chrystie to join him, ensuring that she was well fattened. It



became clear that we had a very compatible pair with no signs of aggression on her part.

Breeding success

In March 2003, we sighted four eggs in the nest box. Of these only two eggs subsequently hatched but neither chick survived beyond six days. The hawks did not recycle.

During March 2004, the female laid five eggs and in late April five chicks were hatched. Sadly one of these died after three days. The remaining four chicks were reared successfully. To our surprise the parents then recycled and the female laid four more eggs, one of which was to disappear after a few days.

Only two eggs were to hatch on 1/2 August. The third egg was later found to have a dead embryo in the shell.

Between 1 and 8 August we enjoyed a heat wave and we observed both parent birds panting throughout the day, albeit in the shade of the nest box. Both parents were feeding and brooding the two young, sheltering them from the intense sun.

On 9 August, the heat wave was over and the weather was much cooler after torrential overnight rainfall. At 2.00 pm I observed the female Chrystie perched away from the nest box, preening and taking a break from brooding the young. The male was taking his turn to brood. Despite the cooler weather I noticed that the female's beak was open and she was breathing at an accelerated rate. Even from a distance of some four metres I could hear her breathing and my instinct told me something was seriously wrong.

I decided to consult with John Chitty Veterinary Surgeon in Andover and it soon

became clear that we needed to move quickly and get the hawk there as soon as possible. By 5.30 pm Chrystie had been x-rayed and examined internally and the true extent of the problem was known. Sadly she had been suffering a long term illness that had seriously contaminated her lungs. Despite the fact that she looked bright eyed and feather perfect, she was a very sick bird.

Another loss

With huge sadness the decision was taken to euthanase Chrystie. The loss of a second magnificent female Harris' was utterly devastating, the suddenness of it almost impossible to take in. What were we to do with the young chicks, a week old? To our delight, the male, Jake had taken on the female's role and began feeding and brooding the young.

We have witnessed a noticeable change in his temperament. He is calmer, less aggressive and very attentive. Each morning at first light he seems to air his possible frustration at the loss of his partner and he screams a warning call almost as if an intruder is nearby. We have checked this out and have found no stray dogs or foxes near the aviary site. For our part we have ensured that he gets all our support and we keep him supplied with a plentiful supply of varied food for his youngsters.

The young are now three weeks old and seem to be thriving well. We shall continue to keep well away from the front of the aviary whilst observing their progress from an observation hole at the rear of the breeding aviary. Jake remains the hero in this sad and disastrous situation and we are willing him to stay with it and successfully rear his offspring.



The loss of a second magnificent female Harris' was utterly devastating, the suddenness of it almost impossible to take in



As with many things the initial idea seemed clear cut and non complicated. But in reality once the idea is researched and tried reality usually complicates things. So it was with the idea of freezing eagle semen. The original thought of “well I have this semen let’s freeze it for later use when I have a female available” seemed a simple thing to do.

Five years down the line I find “simple” does not seem to exist. What started out as a simple idea has ballooned into much more. If it hadn’t been for Dr Graham Wishart and the

University of Abertay in Dundee then no more than that original thought would have happened. It was Graham who transcribed into reality that original thought and I now have a store of frozen golden eagle semen that I can use whenever I wish for insemination. But it has been a lengthy road that has spawned more questions, but more of that later.

The journey down the road was widely reported two years ago with the hatching of Thor the first eagle in the world bred using frozen semen to AI the female. Thor was a hybrid eagle, the semen was from a golden eagle frozen then defrosted and inseminated into a steppe eagle. After that success we needed to prove that it could be done with frozen golden eagle semen into a female

they are also, to a certain extent, toxic to the female when inseminated. These can act as a form of birth control which prevents fertilization from occurring and can also be toxic towards the sperm. A trade off has to be reached with the percentage of chryoprotectant used being large enough to protect the sperm but not kill it, but low enough to allow fertilization to occur in the female.

We tried the DMSO and found that the toxicity towards sperm was similar to DMA, so a 6% solution was used, but it needed a faster freezing rate of -10° per minute, as opposed to -1° per minute we had used with the DMA to obtain optimum sperm survivability. It was with this formula that in the spring of 2004 the first pure golden eagle

Frozen Sperm Experiment



golden eagle. This proved to be not so easy although the sperm, when defrosted, appeared to be quite motile none of the golden eagle eggs were showing any development of an embryo.

was hatched using frozen sperm.

So what next? Well, storage of the frozen semen has so far been in small vials plunged into liquid nitrogen but there is a lot of wasted space so we are going to work on

Graham Wishart and I had been in contact with a Spanish scientist, Juan Blanco, who had been conducting experiments with eagle semen for some years

Graham Wishart and I had been in contact with a Spanish scientist, Juan Blanco, who had been conducting experiments with eagle semen for some years. We visited him at his center south of Madrid in December 2003 to compare notes.

It seemed Juan had been using a different chryoprotectant or, for want of a better word, an anti freeze solution for the semen. Juan was using dimethylsulphoxide (DMSO) as opposed to dimethylacetamide (DMA) that we were using. These solutions protect the sperm from serious damage when they freeze.

As these chryoprotectants are chemicals

storing the semen in straws, for ease of use. Also throughout the experiments with eagle semen I have been trying to freeze falcon semen, with up until this year none of the samples of sperm surviving the freezing process, but when using the DMSO we got a small percentage (5%) of sperm showing some movement. This is a very low percentage but is probably what we achieved with the eagle sperm when we first started. I would also like to try accipiter semen to see how that reacts, so if anyone has a donating goshawk or sparrowhawk and they would like to send any spare semen for experimentation then please get in touch.