

Your Favourite Falconry Magazine

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The *Falconers*

& Raptor Conservation Magazine

Lost Redtail
story

Hawking in
Peru

Free lofting
your bird

Avian Bird Flu
the experts write



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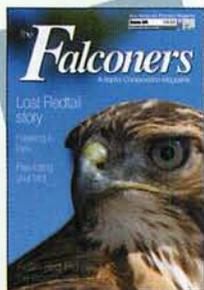
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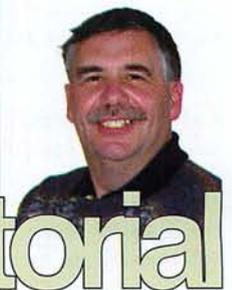
- 4 News and new products
-
- 6 Ask Chitty
John Chitty writes about Bird Flu
-
- 8 Free lofting
Martin Hollinshead tells us the pros and cons of free lofting our birds
-
- 12 Has the native returned?
The European Eagle Owl in Britain
-
- 16 The Emerald Isle
Paul Deeley in Ireland
-
- 18 The day I lost my Redtail
One falconer's anguish on losing his beloved bird
-
- 22 Hen Harrier breeding figures 2005
Monitoring this wonderful raptor
-
- 24 Hawking in Peru
Bob Dalton and his trip to South America
-
- 30 Lessons to be learned
Ben Crane tells us of his exploits and his birds
-
- 33 IBR lost and found birds
-
- 34 Club Directory

Let me start by thanking everyone for their good wishes after my illness, which fell into the production period of the last issue. I have been really touched by all the support I have received. Thankfully, I'm much better now.

We are now fully into the flying season, which has been difficult since the avian bird flu seems to be marching on (Turkey being the latest country to suffer as I write) and the alterations we have all had to make to our field meets. I hope that you will read the article by John Chitty concerning the virus on page six and I urge you to keep up-to-date with the latest news from DEFRA and the Hawk Board websites.

I would like to thank all the contributors to this issue and I hope that you enjoy the varied stories that have been produced not only anecdotal but practical as well. If you have something to share, please don't hesitate to send them to me. Some articles are already in production for the next edition.

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

Evaluation

Incatec 100 Incubator

Ben Hoffman

I was recently asked by Mark Brown from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzberg Campus to evaluate the Incatec 100 incubator. I am the manager of the largest raptor breeding facility in South Africa where I routinely incubate a number of bird of prey eggs, including a number of endangered species. I also incubate parrot eggs for Mr B Boswell, whose large and diverse collection has given me incubation experience on a number of psittacine species.

The Incatec is a small compact unit with a number of features that make it suitable for use by both the small and large scale aviculturists. The robust PVC and glass construction is very easy to clean. The same goes for the humidity system (it has a clever wet and dry thermometer attachment). The large digital temperature readout is accurate. The unit maintains its set temperature at reasonably high ambient temperatures. A problem encountered with some of the large incubators is a tendency to overheat on hot days.

I found that the rollers did not seem to like large owl eggs. For the average breeder incubating up to macaw size eggs there is no problem.

Overall the Incatec performed well and I had the confidence in the unit to incubate Umbrella Cockatoo, Lanner Falcon as well as Pygmy Falcon eggs from fresh laid to hatch. I have no hesitation in recommending the Incatec 100 incubator as a reliable, versatile and robust machine for both the amateur and professional breeder.

Interhatch are the Sole UK importers for this successful incubator.

Interhatch, Whittington Way, Chesterfield S41 9AG

Tel: 01246 264646 F: 01246 269634



"Out of the Desert"

The Uptons: An Artistic Dynasty

At the Mathaf Gallery, London

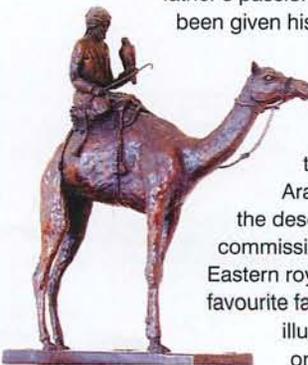
Opened by HE Mohammed Belmahi, Moroccan Ambassador to the UK an exhibition by Roger, Peter and Mark Upton held some of their works at the Mathaf Gallery, London, last year. The gallery were excited about this show as it was the first time that all three have exhibited at the gallery together. The exhibition, a celebration of Arabian desert wildlife, featured paintings of the Arabian horse, falcons, camels, oryx and gazelles and a couple of bronzes.

Peter and his twin brother Roger come from an artistic family, their mother was a painter and their uncle, Charles W Cain, a celebrated dry-point etcher called the 'Etcher of the East'. Roger's son Mark has continued the tradition, having painted for about 15 years. All three artists share a love of Arabian wildlife – in Peter's case the Arabian horse and for Roger and Mark – falconry.

As an International Judge of Arab horses, Peter has a world-wide reputation as an artist and author of books on the Arab horse. He has travelled extensively throughout the Middle East, judging competitions and sketching for future paintings. His works are much sought-after and can be found in private collections, including royal collections, throughout the world.

Roger's speciality is falconry on which he has also written several books. He has been a practising falconer for many years having first been invited to Abu Dhabi in 1965 to hunt houbara bustard with peregrines and saker falcons with the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan. Although less prolific than Peter, his bronzes are quickly snapped up by his patrons in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf.

Roger's son Mark shares his father's passion for falcons, having been given his first hawk, a jack merlin, at the age of nine. Since his teenage years, Mark has regularly gone to the Middle East to join Arab hawking parties in the deserts. He has received commissions from various Middle Eastern royals to paint their favourite falcons and has also illustrated several books on falconry and Arabia.



The added letter R

In the last edition of *The Falconers Magazine* we published an article on an excellent and very talented wildlife artist. Unfortunately, we spelt his name wrong. It should have read Andrew Baker and not Andrew Barker. Our apologies to Andrew.

Competition winner

The winner of our competition in the last issue was Mark Tassell of Bromley, Kent. Congratulations to him and we hope that he enjoys his book prize. Many thanks to all those who took the time to enter.

Great Western Referrals days

Great Western Referrals are holding a series of Raptor Education Days, the next date being February 18th 2006. The subject on this day is Bird of Prey Management for Health and Longevity running from 0900 - 1630, at £35 per head. Please phone 01793 603800 to book a place, or look at the website www.gwreferrals.com for further events.

book reviews

Simply the Best

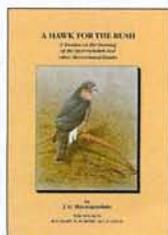
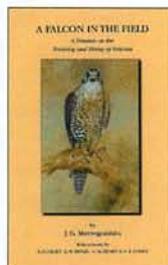
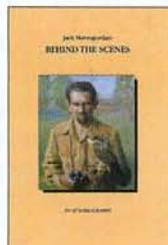
Reviewed by Bob Dalton

There are a great many books on falconry and recent years have seen an explosion of them come into print. Many are written by acknowledged experts; some are by those that would dearly like to be thought of as experts. But if a falconer were to be restricted to just one book on longwings and another on shortwings then surely they need look no further than the works of Jack Mavrogordato. This life long devotee of the sport writes in a common sense style that is based on personal opinion. Where he is lacking knowledge in a particular branch of the sport he brings in other authors to lend their expertise.

A Hawk for the Bush was first printed in 1960 and became an instant classic. It is still considered the bible by most austringers and despite being reprinted in 1973 and again in 1978 it has been exceedingly difficult to obtain. First editions are like hens teeth to get hold of and often change hands for up to £500.00. Even the much lower quality reprint can fetch up to £75.00 in good condition.

Although concentrating on the Sparrowhawk the book covered every aspect of training, housing and hunting accipiters. There were even extracts from Mavro's hawking diaries and a full set of hood patterns. All of this was couple with superb artwork by George Lodge.

For those that preferred to fly longwings a sequel was published in 1966 entitled *A Falcon in the Field*. Nothing like it concerning falcons has been printed before or since. It covered the whole process of hunting with falcons. Right from trapping a passage falcon through to the finer points of hunting with them.



Again the illustrations that accompanied the text were simply superb. Various colour plates by D. M. Henry and George Lodge showed the range of falcons employed in the chase at that time. This particular work has never previously been reprinted and original copies change hands for anything up to £600.00.

In 1982 just five years before his death, Jack Mavrogordato published his autobiography *Behind the Scenes*. This was a slim, but never the less, extremely enjoyable little book that gave an insight into the man as well as the falconer.

Now finally someone has taken the three volumes, updated them where necessary, added some stunning artwork and produced a set of books that are a pleasure to read and a joy to own. *A Hawk for the Bush* has had artwork by Ron Digby and D. M. Henry added as well as notes on hood making by Jim Nelson. *A Falcon in the Field* benefits from additions by Ron Digby and G. M. Henry. If only for the artwork then this alone would justify the price tag of £110.00 for the set of three books.

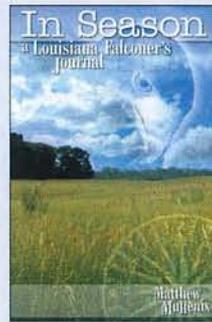
Western Sporting Press has done a superb job in reprinting these truly excellent books. But then you would expect nothing less from David Franks. The two titles concerning hawks and falcons have certainly stood the test of time and are as relevant as the day they were written. They are without doubt true classics and it is my opinion that in time this edition will also become highly sought after. The three books are only available as a set but no serious falconer can afford to be without them.

These books are available from Coch-y-Bonddu Books. Tel: 0870 300 2004.

In Season

By Matthew Mullenix

Reviewed by Martin Hollinshead



Matthew Mullenix is probably best known for his work with the American Kestrel; he has written widely on the topic and his highly successful book, *American Kestrels in Modern Falconry*, is now in its third edition. American Kestrels established Mullenix not only as an authority, but someone who could deliver a detailed and valuable working manual.

With *In Season*, he ploughs into totally fresh country, exposing his talent as a skilful and absorbing writer. Subtitled, *A Louisiana Falconer's Journal*, this book is an invitation into the author's world, a visit that unfolds over one season in the lush, hot and humid south. It's a place of weighty swamp rabbits, snakes 'as big as bike tyres' and jungle-like vegetation. We meet his friends and hawking buddies. The Coulsons are never far away, the author joining them for hunts and a bit of R&R – like the deftly written night out in New Orleans during Decadence Festival Weekend. And we are introduced to Ida the elderly ride-along partner who climbs into the author's truck one day to immediately become part of the book's fabric – not to mention an accomplished and dedicated collector of road kills!

But there is normality too, the job, the kids, the late-for-dinner niggles – just all that juggling that is the family hawk's life. And there's the constant search for hawking ground: no opportunity is passed up, not disused urban lot, not slipping unseen into places where his presence is severely testing the laws of trespass.

Playing the lead in all of this is Charlie, the author's six-year-old male Harris'. And as soon as Mullenix begins to talk about him, you know that he has not only been totally bowled over by the *parabuteo*, but has something very special going on with this particular bird. Their quarry is varied, starting with those big swamp rabbits then sliding down through rails, blackbirds and sparrows all the way to cotton rats, which really don't count, except to Charlie! It's the rat hunting that drives the message home: this isn't about the quarry or the setting, it's about the author wringing his hawking dry in order to honour the partnership.

The text is supported by a generous selection of black and white photos illustrating people, places, hawks and that heat! (I write this in December and the sight of Mullenix in his hawking T-shirt has me reaching for another jumper!). The whole book, 186 pages, soft cover, is well produced and feels, even before you begin to read, good value at £12.95. If you've got any cash left from Christmas, grab a copy.

In Season is published by Western Sporting Publications (www.westernsporting.com) and is available in the UK through Coch-Y-Bonddu Books. ISBN 1-888357-01-0.

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

I asked vet John Chitty to write an article concerning Bird Flu and its implications on our birds and here is what he had to say. Ed

Raptors and Bird Flu

It is always difficult timing an article like this, the situation can change rapidly making any advice obsolete! Hopefully, as this gets to print the situation will be much as it is now – the immediate panic has worn off and we can make realistic plans for disease control without panic. With so much media hype reality is often left behind. Hopefully, I can answer some of the many questions that arise:

What is Bird Flu?

We are referring to a very large viral group known as Avian Influenza A, which consists of 16 separate haemagglutinin (H) subtypes. "Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza" (HPAI) viruses being specific to subtypes (H5 and H7) within this group. "Pathogenic" refers to their ability to cause disease – hence "highly pathogenic" means they are very likely to cause disease in many avian species. There are also "Low Pathogenic" AI viruses (LPAI) that may be hard to distinguish from the other strains without sophisticated diagnostic tests yet cause milder signs. The viruses are further classified according to the antigens (H and N proteins) that they carry – hence the virus causing current concern is H5N1 strain. This is not a unique virus – there will be many bearing this classification. However, this particular virus has been found spreading around the world from its origins in Asia and has caused much bird mortality in the last couple of years.

These influenza viruses are also referred to as "Influenza A". This is the family of viruses to which they belong and they are closely related to mammalian Influenza A viruses.

Signs and Spread

Influenza viruses have been shown to infect a wide range of bird species though it may cause slightly different clinical effects

depending on species and a range of environmental factors. In raptors it will cause a respiratory infection (nasal discharge, tracheal inflammation, pneumonia, diarrhoea, nervous signs (fitting, etc.) and death. In some cases death may occur before many of the major signs have started. The virus is excreted in respiratory discharges and faeces, so infected or carrier birds can easily pass on virus to naïve or susceptible birds or populations.

However, it must be remembered that this is principally a virus of the poultry industry. Here it is responsible for mass mortality and huge production losses. Most of the spread of virus in the current outbreaks can be attributed to movements of poultry around Asia. However, some spread is due to the migration of wild birds, especially waterfowl and these may be the main source of infection to captive raptors.

When designing measures to keep out migratory birds consider that any contact may be dangerous. However, contact with the odd dropping is less likely to cause disease than close or prolonged contact with a sick bird. It is also apparent that wild birds live with avian influenza viruses most of the time. Many studies have shown them to be present in healthy birds and it appears that most live in a "balance" with the virus. The virus, however, keeps evolving and changing so wild bird mortalities will occur until the birds' immune systems catch up.

So, if avian influenza virus is a fact of life with wild birds, why the fuss now? We have had outbreaks of HPAI infections in the UK from time-to-time, the last one in commercial birds in 1991/92, and these are usually rapidly brought under control.

However, we must remember that avian influenza A viruses are closely related to mammalian influenza A viruses. This current H5N1 strain has shown itself to be capable of infecting people (when in VERY close contact with infected birds) and there may have been one case of human to human spread. i.e. it has the potential to evolve just a little bit more and become a serious threat to human health.

So, while it is currently very much a bird disease, it has the potential to become worse and possibly cause a serious infection to the human population.

What Controls are currently in place?

At the moment imports of wild birds from outside the EU have been stopped. Biosecurity in poultry movements have been stepped up. These measures will, hopefully prevent entry of virus to the UK and identification of virus in a quarantine station showed (not only that quarantine set ups need improving!) but also that basically quarantine works.

However, we cannot stop migratory birds. While it is a small risk it is a possible source of infection. The threat for this year may have gone due to the end of the winter migration but will return next Autumn as birds return from Eastern Europe.

Within the UK there is control of meetings of birds. This may seem bizarre as we currently do not have the virus and the threat has receded, so it is hard to say when these controls will be lifted. However, any regulations to prevent this virus from entering and spreading in the UK would be beneficial.

Bizarrely too there are no controls on a single falconer flying his bird at quarry – only if there are two or more falconers!

Nonetheless if you want to organise a meet, the following must be done:

1. Apply to DEFRA for a license. To do this you must contact your local Animal Health Office for an application form. Full details of birds, location and purpose of the meet are required.
2. Obtain the services of a vet! The vet must be willing to take responsibility for the meet and must be available on that day to examine or treat any sick or injured raptors. It is also no use just listing a practice or clinic – it is the individual named vet who must be available. Whether this is on site or just available so birds can be brought to them is unclear. Whatever, speak to the vet first and obtain permission to use their name. It is also useful if we can have a copy of the application and license for our records. *(This was correct at the time of writing but please visit the DEFRA web-site for more information. Ed)*

At the moment there is no requirement to bring all birds under cover and it is not advised to do this anyway – risk of significant contact

with wild birds is small and risks of aspergillosis inside is, for many species, MUCH higher!

Above all, everyone is asked to:

1. Be vigilant. Watch out for large numbers of dead birds in any one place (especially waterfowl). While DEFRA are not interested in single dead birds they may get jumpy if a dozen or more are found. Do not pick up bodies – just contact the DEFRA Helpline (08459 335577). This is also a useful number for license queries, etc
2. Biosecurity. This refers to the prevention of entry of viruses. It involves hygiene and disinfection, as well as physical means of preventing viral entry. Advice on this can be found in some very useful leaflets from DEFRA (contact the local Animal Health Office) or from your vet.
3. If you have more than 50 birds then you must register with DEFRA.

What about Vaccination?

Vaccines against HPAI do exist. There are protocols for use in birds of prey and evidence to show they may be effective. However, they cannot be used within the UK without specific permission from both the European Commission and DEFRA. Why?

Basically in an outbreak birds within a certain distance of diseased premises may be blood tested for exposure to virus. Any found positive are likely to be culled. While there are means to distinguish between vaccinated birds and infected ones, it is unlikely that these tests will be able to be used quickly enough, the whole point of a test and cull policy is speed (hence some of the problems in the last Foot & Mouth Disease outbreak).

Similarly, vaccines do not prevent infection, while they may alleviate symptoms there is a risk that some vaccinated birds may carry and shed the virus both in their faeces and respiratory exudates allowing susceptible birds to succumb to the disease. Nonetheless it is likely in an outbreak that vaccine will be made available in certain cases.

The threat to captive raptors is small at present but may increase. If the virus enters the UK, various disease prevention measures may be enacted. The nature of these will depend on the source and degree of risk and, in such a situation you will be advised by DEFRA and your vet as to the best way of fulfilling these legal obligations. Above all, do not panic but listen to veterinary advice NOT the papers!

Thanks to Ruth Manvell of VLA Weybridge for help in writing this article.

Colchester & District Ferret & Bird of Prey Rescue

Angie Rooney

It all started in 1997. I used to work for the RSPCA and have had an interest for some time in the unusual animals and birds of this world. Cats and dogs never really held any interest for me; birds of prey just happened to be one species that I particularly have a love for.

I wanted to find out as much as possible about birds of prey and so I visited many falconry centres to get as much information as I could. I bored the pants off many falconers at these venues with question after question. After leaving the RSPCA the only course to take was to start my own rescue centre. My partner had some knowledge and experience with cage birds and I had experience with drugs and first aid so we made a good combination. Convincing my partner to start building aviaries was fairly easy, just as well because he is a very good carpenter and he soon had some accommodation erected for birds that, we hoped, would be brought to us.

The first bird that came to us was a Barn Owl who we named Barney. (We have got a bit more original with names since then) and now we were committed. The Colchester and District Ferret and Bird of Prey Rescue was born.

Barney was in a bad way. One wing was especially damaged and so we took him to a local vet who, thankfully, is an avian expert. Poor Barney was smashed up badly, he had to have special plates and pins implanted to hold his wing together. After many weeks of mothering and a lot of tender loving care, Barney made a full recovery and was released back into the wild.

We put a ring on all the birds that are brought in to us so that we can monitor both successes and failures as they are released back into the wild. Barney, thankfully, has been one of our successes and it is good to monitor his movements from time-to-time.

Wild and captive rescued

In 2004 86 birds of prey were rescued, both wild and captive bred. The species varied from Kestrels and Hobbies to anything in-between. To work in rehabilitation you have to be realistic. If the quality of life is poor we do have to use euthanasia, but luckily we have managed to put back around 75% of what comes in. 15% go back disabled and some breeders that we use are asked to hack the birds back but if they are unable to be in a position to do this, we do and 10% of the birds are unfortunately put to sleep, which is something that you never get used to.

For our sins, we take part in bird of prey displays and this helps fund the rescue centre and pays the bills. For example, food, vets bills and drugs all have to be paid for, but luckily our vet is very reasonable and without his help we could not continue our work.

Talking of help, we have some excellent volunteers whom we drag all over the country with us. Two, Scott and Lisa, help make up our display with their own birds and never moan about camping in the rain at shows. We have noticed that most people who are involved with birds of prey all stick together, especially when we ask for help, which we often do. People will catch up a bird many miles away from their home, jump into their car and bring it to us. Dedication is very hard to find these days.

Our phone is always manned, or should I say birdied and we will give help to anyone who needs it. One of our newest ventures is a bird of prey registration service for captive and wild birds and you can find out more of what we do by visiting our website at www.raptorreunited.org.uk

The bow perch shouldn't be totally abandoned



Harris' owners like their birds. All falconers should like their birds, but there is something about the special relationship between human and Harris' that nurtures a deeper, closer bond than is experienced with other raptors.

free lofting

The Harris' wants to be part of your world, and you want to be part of its. And, if away from the hunting field, the lethal assassin sometimes becomes a family pet, then that's okay – who can blame the kids for falling in love. For this bird we really do

want to do our best. So why is it that its most essential housing requirement is often neglected? Why are so many Harris' hawks still tethered?

Free Lofting - The Benefits

The benefits of free lofting are many. Let's start with fitness. Allowing the bird to

move about even a small pen helps maintain fitness; and the degree to which this freedom is utilised will be a big surprise to those who usually tether. Naturally there are long periods of inactivity, but just catch an 'exercise session' and watch back-flip take-offs, full circles and of course ground to high perch straight-up flights. The poor tethered bird looks on longingly.

Next, legs, feet and talons. The parabuteo seems less susceptible to 'bumble foot' than some, but in a free-loft setup where several different perches can be made available, the risk is reduced still further. Legs and talons benefit too. Never suffering the force of a bate, leg scales are safe from damage (and don't imagine for a minute that the so often willing-to-sit-like-stone parabuteo can't suffer such damage), and with no ground contact, talons will be needle sharp.

Sharp talons do of course require toes! Enter frostbite. That the Harris' is cold-sensitive is so well documented that it can't have failed to register with every novice in the land and yet the UK still boast some very good birds that would be better still with their full quota of digits. Nor are wings safe, wingtip oedema being not as uncommon as it should be. To permanently tether a Harris' close to the ground, paying no heed to the crispy conditions underfoot, is begging for an unpleasant discovery. The free-lofted bird, up away from the ground and given protection from wind chill, is much, much safer.

A Few Misconceptions

One of the commonest misconceptions about free lofting is that it requires a lot of space. The reality is that a free-loft pen can be as large or small as you want. In fact, at the economy end of the discussion, it will be found that a Harris' can be accommodated in a pen that requires less space than a correctly built lean-to. For example, with several birds to house, and limited space, I once accommodated a female Harris' in a free-flight pen of just 6 x 7ft (my usual size is 10 x 10ft).

A tethering setup this size would be unsuitable because the tethered bird would be at risk of making contact with the sides or front (presuming an essential safety cage is fitted) during a bate even if tied very short. That many Harris' hawks

survive such set-ups unscathed is largely due to the parabeuteo's uniquely durable plumage! Even if the falconer prefers to test his bird's plumage, a small free-loft pen is still far better than tethering due to all the afore mentioned reasons, and while its occupant might not get the exercise granted the big-pen bird, it can still move about at will and be given different perching surfaces.

A worry people sometimes have about free lofting is that it will make the bird independent – even wild. This just doesn't happen. Harris' hawks vary enormously in temperament but even the most sensitive bird will remain totally manageable in a free-loft setup. Of course, the victim of too much neglect will suffer: a window permitting active scenes and daily handling and removal from the pen for, if not flying then weighing and weathering should be the norm. I find a spell of daily weathering most beneficial, especially with my solid-sided and solid roofed pens; even though the bird has a big window, it's getting nothing like the exposure to activity the bow perch offers. And this kind of weathering continues through the moult, helping maintain tameness and keep boredom at bay. In an open wire-sided pen, weathering might not prove as important, but I would still employ it so that the bird can be fed away from its accommodation (the reasons for this shortly). Tethering also, of course, keeps the bird accustomed to the bow perch which may well be needed when away from home.

Finally, the risk of the bird damaging itself frightens some, with the prospect of cere and plumage upsets making the leash more attractive. It has to be acknowledged that free lofting can be problematic with some species, some birds pushing ingenuity and patience to the limits. But the Harris' is quite different and can often be found living its free-loft life happy and totally unscathed in pens so poorly planned they would leave another bird looking like a feather duster.

Problems

When problems do occur, it is nearly always due to some error on the falconer's part: there is either something wrong with the pen or how its occupant is being managed. Having just painted the parabeuteo as happy and safe in almost any



On the window perch

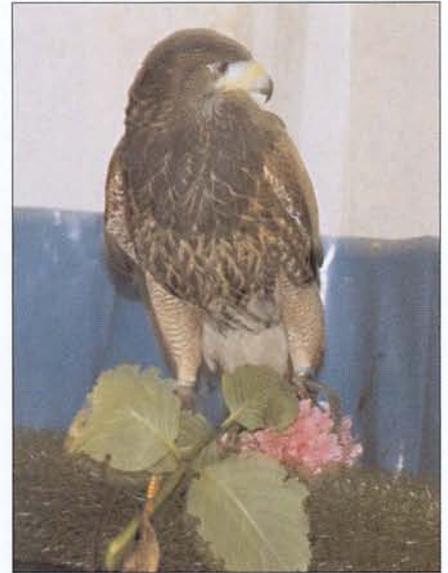
set-up, a little common sense still needs to be applied: if something isn't working – change it!

I recall one chap having problems with his bird flying up to and grabbing the pen's chain-link roof. Instead of switching to a solid roof, he decided to tether her in the pen. Sometimes the slightest thing can cause restlessness. For example, the lack of a perch where the bird wants one for sitting in the sun, or no seclusion spot where it can retreat when it wishes – something I consider a must.

Often just a little thought can make the unhappy bird Miss Contented. A common cause of much unrest is food, or more specifically, feeding. The constant use of food to remove the bird from its free-loft pen is a mistake because it makes the eager bird desperate for what it knows is to come. Except during early training or when dealing with a particularly sensitive bird that might require a titbit to carry it through the door (and won't accept hooding in the pen), I make it a rule to never feed in the pen. Pen feeding has another negative spin off. If large portions of food are fed on the glove, the territorial boldness the pen promotes can trigger threatening aggressive behaviour.

Early Caution

How free lofting needs to be introduced depends very much on the way in which the Harris' involved has been reared and handled by its breeder. Crèche-reared birds that have been allowed contact with humans all through their development



Free to play

and so are tame, can be free lofted from the word go. However, with parent-reared birds, free lofting can of course only be looked to once taming and training is well underway, the bird being initially tethered. To rush into free lofting with the parent-reared bird can result in the pupil regressing. I prefer to leave free lofting until the bird is really settled into routines.

Settling In

When the bird is introduced to its new accommodation - and this applies to the crèche-reared and parent-reared Harris' - it can take it a little while to become used to its new perches. With the pen design I use, the window perch, being quite close to the window bars, can be a little off putting. But I find titbits placed on the perch soon overcome any fear.

Home Sweet Home

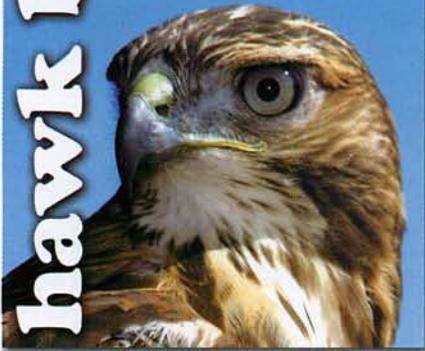
The free-lofted Harris' soon comes to love its accommodation and after a day in the field will show an obvious desire to be turned loose to settle down to roost. And truly there can be few more heart-warming sights than a field-tired and contented bird up on one foot and peeping from its favourite perch over a well-earned crop.

For Further Reference

This article has but touched a very big topic, a full discussion can be found in my book, *The Complete Rabbit and Hare Hawk*.

Nick Kester

Communications Officer



A new year – and best wishes to all falconers – will bring a new set of issues for all of us, which is why you have a Hawk Board to act on your behalf. It is a strange fact that the things that got up a head of steam in the autumn seem to be merely simmering at the year end, but that is no reason to think they have gone away.

Take Avian Flu for example. In October last year, DEFRA banned us all from holding field meets for fear of our spreading the disease, which had yet to arrive at our shores and by December they had relaxed the ruling. There is nothing to say that the Flu will not happen in the UK, but not yet. The Hawk Board will continue to stay very close to the issues and make sure that we are up to speed. Of course you can find out for yourself by logging on to the DEFRA website and checking the latest news. Try the 'what's new' section which you can find at:

www.defra.gov.uk/defranew.htm

Another issue that brought us to boiling point in the Autumn was those fox hunts that exploited the loophole in

the ban by using birds of prey. Although the press talked about 50 packs, the reality was nearer to 20 and many of those seem to have drifted off the idea. Fine for 'Autumn Hunting' but not very practical when you are galloping hell for leather across the fine old turf of the shires. Some hunts will persist, but there is no doubt that the media, government, hunts and even the antis know that the falconry community totally disapproves of the practice.

JOBS FOR THE COMING YEAR

This brings us to the jobs for 2006. As usual legislation is in the forefront of our work, coupled with educating all who will listen and read that falconry is an acceptable field sport and that falconers are conservationists who care deeply for hawks and falcons, the countryside and the quarry we hunt.

DEFRA have announced their intention to charge £20, rising to £25, for the essential Article 10 certificates that must accompany all registerable species, but they have yet to decide how or how much to charge for the registration documents. The new A10 charges have yet to be signed off by government, but it will happen. In early December they decided to finally draft a consultation document on registration fees, so expect it sometime in the first six months of 2006.

QUARRY LISTINGS

Quarry species remain an issue for falconers. After the furore about the general pest licence earlier in the year, remember you can only shoot pigeon to protect crops, remove a health risk, or for the safety of air traffic and not for sport or food! Falconers were uncertain as to where this left some of our quarry species. Starlings and sparrows are now classified as endangered, whilst Canada geese are no longer protected. Should falconers produce a list of quarry and ensure that for the purposes of falconry we may, within reasonable limits and seasons, be less constrained? We have a

working party debating this and we will put our views to you and to the government.

We still await the Animal Welfare Bill, delayed by an election and doubtless other legislation will follow. The issue of a basic bird of prey qualification driven by raptor keepers and not by animal rightists is an essential part of this and we anticipate trialling this during 2006.

GOOD HEART

Falconry and bird of prey keeping is in good heart in the UK. We may sometimes think it is besieged, but we are freer than many. There are no compulsory keeper or hunter exams; for we rely on good codes of conduct and the disapproval of our friends and colleagues to keep us in good order. As a key point of contact with the media it is a pleasure to have to report how few, if any, bad falconry eggs come to the press's attention. Let us keep it that way.

Readers may not wish to join clubs, we are not all social animals, but I would beg you to help protect your sport. So, if you do not contribute to the Hawk Board through a club, please make a donation to the Campaign for Falconry. The Falconry Fair is a good venue to do this. After all, without those to fight our corner we could find ourselves without a sport, which, after more than 2,000 years, would be a tragedy.

The Hawk Board welcomes feedback so, if there are items you feel should be addressed in 2006, please contact me at the address below.

If you have areas of concern about falconry, remember this is your Hawk Board and you can raise issues with us by contacting me or any other member of the board.

My E-mail is:

nk.quattro@zetnet.co.uk

Nick Kester, Communications Officer



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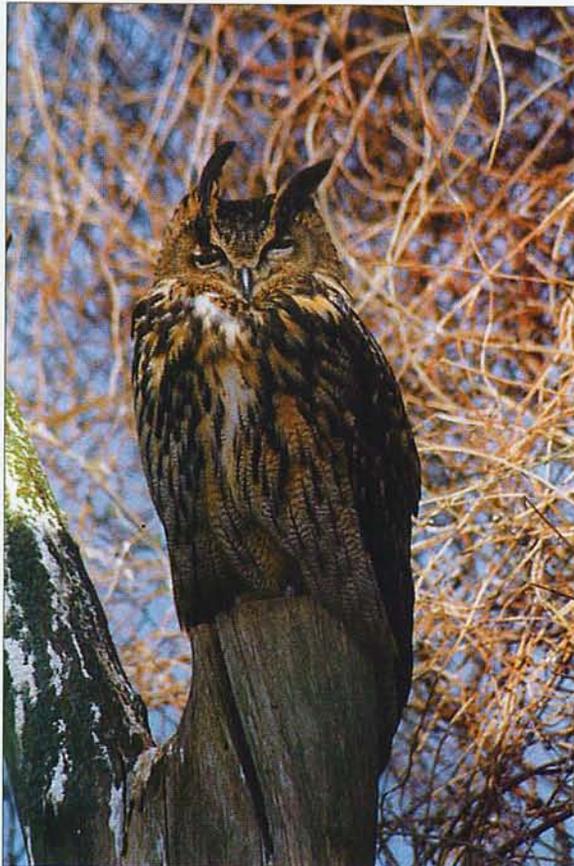
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We continue to hear, with seemingly increasing frequency, reports of sightings and indeed of breeding, in the wild, of European Eagle Owls in the British Isles. Are these birds all escapees? Or worse, do some individuals result from unauthorised releases, representing a further unwanted legacy of the Harry Potter phenomenon?

Alternatively, is it possible that with the recovery of populations on the European Mainland that these magnificent birds are returning to our shores, to assert a right to residence, long since involuntarily renounced at the hands of our ancestors.

Tony Turk, Conservation Co-ordinator of the International Owl Society examines here the history of the eagle owl in the United Kingdom and the potential impact of an expanding population of this most accomplished predator.



European Eagle Owl
by Mark Chester

the eagle owl in britain

Has the Native Returned?

Before addressing recent history, it is pertinent to revisit pre-history and remind ourselves of the fact that archaeological remains of eagle owls have been found and identified at the following locations:-
Swanscomb (Kent).
Hoxnian, Kents Cavern (Devon).
Late Glacial, Ossom's Cave (Derbyshire).
Late Glacial, Cromer Forest Bed (Norfolk).
Pastonian, Tomewton Cave (Devon).
Wolstonian, Merlin's Cave (Herefordshire).

Late Pleistocene, Chelms Combe Rock Shelter (Somerset).
Devensian, Langwith Cave (Derbyshire).
Devensian, Demens Dale (Derbyshire).
Mesolithic, Meare Lake Village (Somerset).
Iron Age, (Dr. D. Yalden pers com.).
Also, Manifold Valley (Stafordshire) Late Glacial. (Bramwell, D. 1959-60)

As Ann Eastham outlined in the very first issue of *Tyto*, (the journal for the International Owl Society) published in the very recent history of April 1996, man's fascination with owls can be traced back at

least 14,000 years. There are many examples from sites in the south and west of France in the form of bone remains from residential deposits and pictorial interpretations on cave walls evidencing this interest.

The images are uncommon; two in caves in Ariège are both thought to depict Snowy Owls (*Bubo scandiaca*). An image discovered as recently as 1994 at Vallon Pont d'Arc in 1994 could be interpreted only as either an Eagle Owl or Long-Eared Owl. The Magdalenien hunters of south-western France and the western Pyrenees collected large numbers of Snowy Owls, although Eagle Owls were also taken. At one Dordogne site recovered bones represented the remains of at least 84 Snowy Owls and out of a total of 1,130 bones 668 were claws or phalanges (Mourer Chauvire 1975). At the rock shelter of Dufaure, Snowy and Eagle Owl phalanges and claws (with very few other parts of the skeleton) were found in quantity and far outnumbered remains from bird species, which would have represented obvious food sources to those communities.

The reasons for killing large owls still remain unclear. These people were nomadic continuing a tradition of following herds of reindeer in their annual migrations moving to higher locations to escape the flies of the summer months. A cultural uniformity may have existed between areas in which the exploitation of owls occurred. Many of the owl bones show evidence of cutting on a systematic basis, whereas birds hunted for food rarely show marks of butchery.

The careful preparation of the bones indicates their use for specific purposes; toggle fastenings and harpoon barbs have been suggested. There remains the question therefore as to why owls and in particular the Snowy Owl, which is known to be distributed more widely into boreal and temperate vegetation zones during glacial times (one bird having been found in Gorham's Cave Gibraltar) (Eastham 1968), were concentrated upon. The logistics of gathering so many birds must also have been considerable. Ritualistic connotations have been contemplated but the detailed significance of the immense importance that these birds held for our ancestors remain to be fully explained. It has not been proved however, that these practices

continued as man moved northward. (Eastham, A. 1996)

Habitat changes are of course a major factor in the modification of fauna and the changes in these islands since the establishment of the Wildwood, after the last ice age, has been enormous. At its prime 8,000 years ago most of Britain was covered by forest. Within 2,000 years Neolithic man was settled, grew crops and had domesticated animals. Within a further similar period vast areas of woodland had been cleared. The Bronze Age brought the use of more efficient tools, and by the Iron Age, 2,500 years before present, half of England had been cleared of woodland. By the time of the Domesday Book in 1086 some 15% of land was wooded and this included open pasture woodland.

It is interesting to contemplate when thinking of our "green and pleasant land" that only 12% remains wooded and that only 1% of the Wildwood is left (Rackham 1986).

As well as coping with habitat changes the resident wildlife was also being hunted for food. Change and extinction came relatively quickly, as shown by the following calendars.

Mammals

Bear-extinct in the 11th century, although baiting with imported animals continued until 1598. Beaver-last records in Wales from the 11th Century but could still be found in Scotland in the 12th Century. (The name Beverley is derived from 'Beaver

Meadow'). Reindeer-still found in Orkney until the 12th Century. Wild Boar-extinct in England in the 14th Century and in Ireland and Scotland in the 16th Century. Wolf-extinct in England by 1509, Scotland 1743 and Ireland 1770. (Harting 1880)

Birds

- Crane Extinct as a breeding bird in the 15th Century.
- Capercaillie Extinct in England and Wales by the 17th Century. Last records Scotland 1785, Ireland 1790.
- Goshawk England mid-18th Century, last found in Scotland in the 1880s.
- White-tailed Eagle England 1794, Ireland 1898. The last breeding attempt in Scotland was in 1916. (Harrison 1988)

It is not surprising that given the immense pressures on our flora and fauna that the Eagle Owl may have become extinct as a breeding bird and it is regretful that there are no breeding records or full recent history available for the Eagle Owl in Britain. It seems likely however, that the surviving birds were driven northwards as they came under pressure as the following would seem to corroborate, see **Table 1**.

Captive Breeding

Given, as will be seen, that captive breeding was taking place in the UK in the

Table 1.

1684	1	Sibbald mentions <i>Bubo maximus</i> of a black and dark colour Orkney Isles
1700	1	Killed (Pennant) Fifeshire
1768	1	Pennant stated that it had once been shot in the county of Yorkshire
1770	1	Seen perched on a gate, near to a large wood, in Spring, Kent
1774		Occurred several times, Shetland
1784	1	Obtained (shot) Herstmonceux, Sussex
1789	1	One was shot and had been preserved (St. John Yates), Kincardineshire, Scotland
1795	1	Obtained in the Island Jan 6 th . Dr A.C. Godfrey, Jersey
1800	2	Seen by Mr. R. B. Evatt, Lough Erne, N. Ireland
1800	1	Described by a man to Charles St. John, Moray, Scotland
1820	1	Seen by Dr. Edward Moore, Honiton, Devon
1824	1	Shot. Thomas Allis quoted Denny's Catalogue of Yorkshire Birds, Horton, Bradford
1828	1	Recorded as Great Horned Owl shot near Shardlow (Whitlock), Derbyshire
1830	1	Obtained mentioned by Baikie and Heddle, Sondey, Orkney
1832	1	Thomas Allis. Taken in a wood in Summer, taken to Yorkshire Museum, Yorks
1863	1	Seen by Robert Nicolson in Autumn, Hardwick, Unst, Shetland
1870		Considered to be permanent resident, Orkney Isles
1866	1	Capture. Mr Robert Gray on the authority of Mr. Angus, Aberdeenshire

The Eagle Owl In Britain

19th century it is entirely possible that some of these later records could relate to escaped captive bred or imported birds.

The fate of the Eagle Owl in Great Britain cannot be looked at in isolation as the diminution of populations in mainland Europe would have dramatically impinged on the potential momentum of individuals dispersing to Britain.

The European Eagle Owl has decreased drastically within Europe and has indeed disappeared from some countries. It has long been regarded as vermin in many parts and in Norway a bounty was paid in the early years of the 20th Century for every Eagle Owl killed. It is particularly detested by gamekeepers given that its catholic diet means that all kinds of game are likely to fall prey to it.

Once found in most parts of Europe and Asia, it became extinct in Belgium Luxembourg and much of France and declined in Italy and Finland. (Halliday 1978).

In looking at mortality statistics for German Eagle Owls:-

1864-1913 505 dead Eagle Owls were recorded nearly all of them trapped or killed by man. 1945-1971 38 were trapped or killed by man, 58 killed by traffic or electric power cables, 34 killed by other causes (Herrlinger 1973).

In Sweden the status of the Eagle Owl population is known from three different surveys, which encompassed the whole country: 1943-1948 455 known territories (Curry-Lindahl 1950). 1964-1965 175 known territories (Olssen 1965). 1974-1975 171 known territories (Olssen 1975).

Until 1925 a bounty was paid for dead Eagle Owls in Sweden. In the last two years of the scheme 201 bounties were paid. In 1935 Eagle Owls became fully protected in the south of Sweden. (Broo 1978). During the 1960s and 70s many European countries, including Sweden developed captive breeding and release schemes for Eagle Owls (Stenman, A. 2001).

Thankfully from the 1970s onwards, many populations recovered, rapid increases being detected in at least nine countries. Numbers more than doubled in Finland, the Czech Republic and Germany. Simultaneously it has expanded its range and has even re-appeared in Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, albeit in small numbers. Its recuperation seems to



European Eagle Owl at the Hawk Conservancy Trust by Andy Brooks

be due to decreasing persecution and exploitation of new food sources. (Jose Donazar & Pertti Kalinainen 1997).

In the context of the European Eagle Owl as a predator of birds of prey Dr. Heimo Mikkola recorded the following:- Snowy Owl-4, Ural Owl-2, Hawk Owl-17, Tawny Owl-62, Long-eared Owl 118, Short-eared Owl-23, Barn Owl-5, Tengmalm's Owl-21, Little Owl-16, Scops Owl-6, Pygmy Owl-1, Goshawk-26, Buzzard-65, Peregrine-19. (Mikkola, H. 1976).

From the above list it can be seen that the species with the highest predation rates are those that favour the same woodland habitat of the Eagle Owl. As has been noted, the European Eagle Owl is extremely flexible with regard to diet and engenders competition with man through its opportunistic choice of poultry, pheasants, partridges, ducks, geese and the odd domestic mammal.

Adult European Eagle Owls have few enemies other than man; but eggs and nestlings are predated by Wolf, Bear, Wild Boar, Wolverine, Lynx, Wild Cat, Fox and Badger.

Whilst recent sightings of the European Eagle Owl in Britain, in all probability, relate to escaped birds and illegal releases it would not be wise to discount the possibility that with recovering populations on the European mainland that visitors have or will in the future travel to these shores. This is perfectly feasible; the European Eagle owl has a wing aspect ratio of 5.9. This is a measure of aerodynamic efficiency and compares with that of 5.7 for a Scops Owl, examples of which have regularly made their way to our shores.

In terms of official status the British Ornithologists' Union has some 20 records in the 19th and 20th Centuries. These are mostly vague and poorly documented, with some at least relating to escapes from captivity.

In the opinion of the B.O.U. Records Committee there has been no satisfactory record of a wild individual since 1883 and the bird is regarded as a B Category species i.e., is a species which has been recorded in an apparently wild state in Britain or Ireland at least once, but not within the last 50 years. The Romans are known to have kept Eagle Owls in captivity. A little more recently, on the 24th June 1888 Lord Lilford in correspondence to Mr. E.G.B. Mead-Waldo wrote:-

Extracts from CITES listed bird species show reported imports into the U.K. of European Eagle Owls as follows:-

1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
73	52	6	53	62	57	77

(CITES 1990)

The 1996 Bird Inventory of the Federation of Zoological Gardens of Great Britain and Northern Ireland shows for *Bubo bubo*

38 Collections held 95 Eagle Owls, 24 were bred, 6 Died, 25% increase in population

Article 10 Certificates Issued by DEFRA for European Eagle Owls

1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
63	356	294	326	280	292	271

Total 1882 over seven years = an average of 268 per year

"I am much obliged to you for your offer of the young Eagle Owls, but I have no room for them. I will try to place for you. I should think the Duke of W... , who encourages eagles and almost all wild birds on his forest, would like to try the experiment of turning out these grand birds". (Trevor-Battye, A. 1903)

So, within five years of the B.O.U.'s final record, there is the prospect of Eagle Owls being released into the wild. The first recording of captive breeding is attributed to a Mr Edward Fountain in 1849.

"On the first of May I communicated to the "Zoologist" the curious fact of a pair of Eagle Owls in the possession of Mr. Fountain of this parish, having produced in confinement three eggs, which were then in the process of incubation. I now have the additional pleasure of stating, that the eggs have been hatched and the young birds safely reared." (J.H.Gurney, 1849)

There is evidence that Eagle Owls had been imported into this country before the above date, probably from Germany and Sweden. See the information panel on the previous page.

Federation Figures

Using the figures from the Federation of Zoos, the normal breeding potential for Eagle Owls averages 2 young per pair per year and the average DEFRA figures for issuing article 10s over the last seven years is 268. This indicates a captive breeding population in the UK of 134 pairs. One must ask, what is happening to 268 Eagle Owls produced each year?

As we are all aware escapes of European Eagle Owls are not uncommon, whilst notified escapes/reported recaptures published by the Independent Bird Register are completely in kilter, this clearly does not take account of illegal releases (including perhaps some unmanageable 6lb monsters bought as £30.00 bundles of fluff to satisfy the whim of a Harry Potter besotted child) into the wild.

Anybody, of course, can keep European Eagle Owls in captivity as long as they comply with legislation pertaining to their welfare.

If breeding takes place the young can be sold provided that they each have an Article 10 Certificate issued by DEFRA. If

they are given away no certificate is needed.

In British law European Eagle Owls may not be released into the wild, (Article 14 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981*). This also means that birds found in the wild can be caught and kept or killed (although this has not been tested in court). This contravenes European law, which the UK is signed up to, that grants the European Eagle Owl absolute protection.

* Article 14 reads:- "Subject to the provision of this Part, if any person releases or allows to escape into the wild any animal which, is of a kind not ordinarily resident in and is not a regular visitor to Great Britain in a wild state. They shall be guilty of an offence."

Additionally, releasing birds may contravene the Abandonment of Animals Act 1960. Is the European Eagle Owl breeding in Britain? Yes, a pair laid eggs in Moray and Nairn in 1984 and again in 1985 when they fledged one chick (Cook 1992). Another pair has been breeding in the north of England since 1996, 13 young had been reared by this pair up until 2003 (British Birds 2003). Both of these pairs are considered to be from captive stock. There are strong rumours of other pairs breeding but, understandably, people keep their discoveries to themselves, the merest suggestion of a breeding pair would bring hoards of "twitchers" into an area, driving these secretive owls away.

The question must be asked, what happens to young bred from the very few breeding pairs in Britain? One only has to look to the history of other birds of prey in the country to find the answer. Hen Harriers are being persecuted almost to extinction on grouse moors. Eagle Owls are powerful and voracious hunters and would be most unwelcome on any game estate. Without considerable protection and the reintroduction of birds from abroad we would not have Ospreys, Red Kites, Goshawks and White-tailed Sea Eagles in the numbers we have today.

So should the European Eagle Owl be in Britain? Well it is already here. Personally, I would suggest we should look at the arrival of this magnificent bird as a challenge and to endeavour to provide quality habitat for a natural mix of predators and prey, as other countries in Europe have. The counter argument is that if a pair Eagle Owls was to set up a

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territory in an area where other sensitive species exist they would quickly remove/consume them. However, as Bill Weber, Editor of *Conservation Biology* wrote this year,

"While we ask Asians to live with tigers, Latin Americans with jaguars, and Africans with a whole host of dangerous and inconvenient species, we have eliminated wolves and other large predators from most of our country and fiercely resist their return". (Weber, B. 2004)

The ability of the European Eagle Owl to regenerate itself in these islands will ultimately depend on the availability of sustainable habitat and its relationship with man, but there seems little doubt as to its ability to survive here. We also clearly need to be cognisant of its potential impact on other local wildlife (as witness the effect on Sparrowhawk populations where Goshawks have returned). However, given proper study and management who are we to deny the "Le Grand-duc" its undoubted right of domicile.

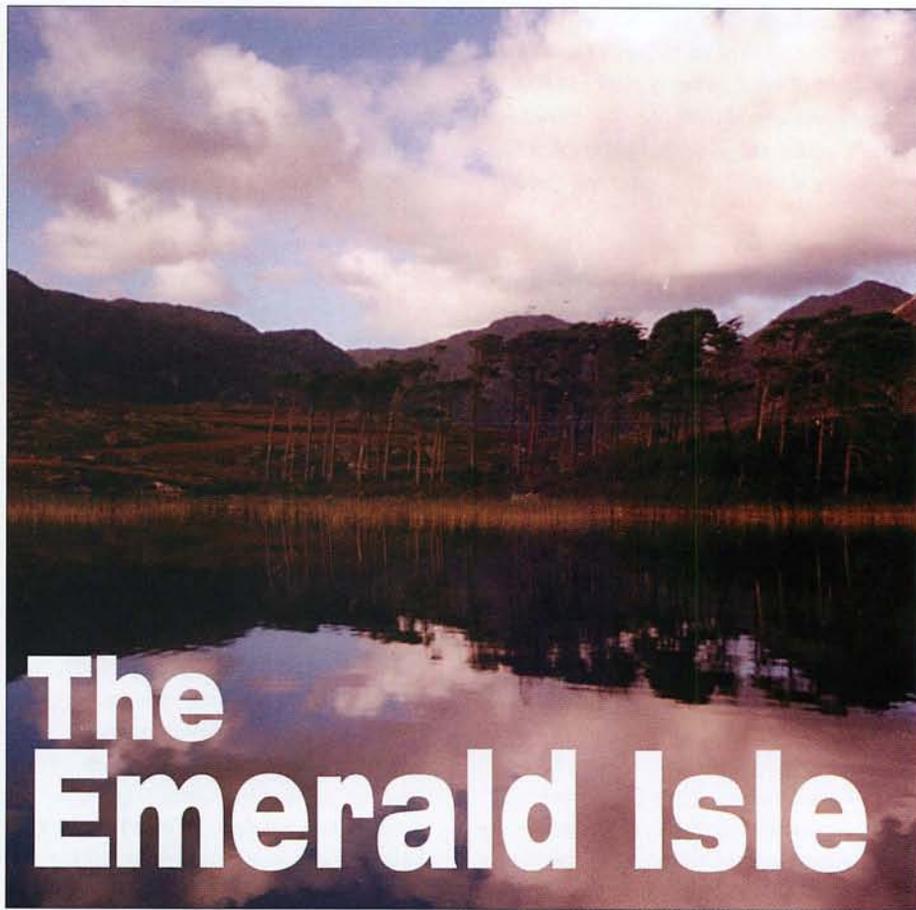
Having had a few enjoyable years working abroad in the pursuit of my obsession with hawks and the sport of falconry, it was time to work a little closer to home.

This time my opportunity took me to Ireland to County Mayo which is situated on the far west coast near the city of Galway. The place I have always yearned to see and explore, having read many books on the west of Ireland, famous for its majestic coastal mountains, wild trout and salmon rivers and of course, famous for its rook hawking parties over the last few centuries.

It was with considerable excitement that I looked forward to the new challenge which awaited me in this beautiful part of Ireland. I was to spend the next 18 months working and teaching people the art of falconry at the falconry school which was set against the majestic backdrop of Ashford castle.

The castle is situated in 350 acres of a wooded estate on the shores of Loch Corrib and to the east of Loch Mask. The original castle dates back to the 13th century. In 1852 the castle became the home of the Guinness family; it has since been restored and transformed into Ireland's finest resort hotel.

The castle is dominated by the



Connemara mountain range which has a wonderful variety of wildlife among which are some of the rarest mammals in Britain and Ireland such as pine martens and river otters. There is a good array of birdlife with species such as Peregrines, Merlins and Hobbies, as well as a good selection of waders.

Ireland as a country seems to have lost about six of its native raptor species including the White Tailed Sea Eagle, Golden Eagle, Red Kite and Osprey. But the good news is there is an ongoing project to reintroduce the Golden Eagle back to Ireland in the north county of Donegal. There were a number of chicks taken under licence from Scotland and introduced into nest sites around Donegal. The project seems to have gone very well to date and we hope to see the eagles start to breed within the next 12 months or so. Fingers crossed.

Looking around Ireland there certainly is the habitat and quarry available to sustain a good healthy population of eagles and possibly the White Tailed Sea Eagle. The once extensive oak forests which covered this part of Ireland were cleared in the mid 17th century. The landscape

today is very different – huge open expanses of peat bogs and open moorland which is, of course, wonderful for longwing hawking.

By 1228, when the castle was originally built, falconry was well established in this part of Ireland and not only among the nobility, but also throughout the native people of Ireland.

The Sparrowhawk and Goshawk were the traditional hawks used and still are to this day. Game hawking is quite rare due to the lack of kept estates. Snipe and Woodcock are the only wild game birds hunted and the occasional small populations of wild Mallard Duck. The principal quarry for longwings is Rooks and Crows, or hoodies as they are known. The Peregrine Falcon is still the most commonly used raptor here and hybrids which are growing in numbers, mainly Gyr/Saker and Peregrine/Sakers. Both of these species are excellent for Rook hawking. I must admit I have never in my life seen such huge populations of Magpies and other corvids and there seems to be a very stable population of Ravens.

Time was drawing close to the

beginning of May when this part of Ireland would be transformed into a tourists' paradise. They come from all over the world but it was the Americans who came here to enjoy the peace and tranquillity of this area.

It wasn't long before I became acquainted with all the birds and the daily working routine of the falconry school to get jobs done ready for the influx of holiday makers and visitors. We had one-hour hands-on flying using Harris Hawks which were also used in the demonstrations and also for hunting. Falcons and eagles were also flown but it was Dingle, the European Eagle Owl which everyone wanted to see. He was a real celebrity at the castle.

Obviously, the birds were flown every day, weather permitting, which sometimes was not easy. Prolonged rainfall put paid to some of the flying but, being brought up in Scotland, you soon got used to the soft days, as the Irish call them.

It didn't take me too long to get attached to the birds, especially the Harris Hawks, which were superb when being handled by the general public. The birds made our lives easier which was extremely rewarding and the feedback from most of the clients was incredible. They always seemed to have had a great

time and went home with a little more knowledge of the birds.

Hunting with the birds is a passion of mine and I was lucky to have had the opportunity to fly an imprinted sparrow. I have some fond memories of the days I have spent with that little hawk. I had spent a lot of time reading about these little devils of the sky, but, in practice, I was overwhelmed by their sheer determination and ability to chase and hunt with such persistence and courage.

I remember one early evening I prepared to go out with my sparrow, Cullin. I weighed her (flying weight of 280 grams) and checked the telemetry to see if it was working alright and then off we went in my vehicle. I remember watching her eyes focused on every little thing and surveying the area, always scanning the fields with such enthusiasm and excitement.

Suddenly I spotted a small flock of jackdaws on an old decaying sheep – though by this time, Cullin had already locked them into her sights. I slowly and very quietly brought the vehicle to a stop and put my arm out of the front window on which Cullin was sitting. She was off in a second, dropping almost to the ground which was her normal mode of attack. She flew past every bird and chose the farthest one away.

Just as the Jackdaw saw her, it took off at great speed and headed for the nearest cover. But the bird didn't get very far and she was on it within seconds, grabbed it in superb style and brought it to the ground. I rushed out of my vehicle and ran to where my bird was and dispatched her quarry.

The secret with these birds is to be super fit and to be able to leap and sprint like a gazelle so you are always there to help the bird. This, of course, gives your bird more confidence with you. I found myself on many occasions tangled up in some old sheep fence which I had not spotted due to the excitement of the whole flight, or lying flat on my face on some remote peat bog with a mouthful of heather and mud, gasping for air and wondering if my day had finally come. It was often embarrassing when you have some old farmer watching you with a big grin on his face whom you didn't see watching the whole procedure unfold in front of his eyes and wondering what the hell I was doing, often in very difficult conditions.

Cullin rarely missed any slips which were given to her but, of course, there were several chases that required some serious aerial stunt flying techniques that were a joy to watch. I finally realised after spending 18 months with this great bird why these accipiters were so successful in the wild and loved and admired throughout the world.

Also, here in this part of Ireland they have very good numbers of mountain hares. It was thought that the Irish hare was one and the same as the mountain hare, but studies have shown that the species is unique to Ireland. It is basically a subspecies of Arctic hare, slightly smaller and stockier than the counterpart Brown hare. Due to a lack of time I never really had the chance to hunt these hares but I think a good Harris or Goshawk would work very well up here. They seemed, so far, to have survived the hunters and raptors over the years due to the inhospitable environment they live in.

Finally, the thing I will remember most about Ireland is James and Debbie Knight's sheer determination and passion they showed towards their birds at the falconry school and their constant struggle to educate the public about falconry and the conservation of birds of prey.



Paul with his Harris Hawk

Red waiting on a post



The day I lost my redbtail

It was Sunday 21 November and another hunting day for the Yorkshire Falconry Club and eight fellow Austringers accompanied us to North Yorkshire for a good days hunting.

I went into the aviary, said “morning” to Red, my three year old male Redtail and picked him up as I normally do, weighed him, his usual 2lb 4oz for open country rabbit, put him in his box with all the other bits and bobs that goes with hawking, then waited for Kev and Alex Cole to arrive at my home. They duly arrived and we set off up to Otley for a breakfast and to meet up with the others.

We met with Chris Hogan, another Redtail fanatic and Chris Johnson. We had breakfast and a chinwag before setting off to our hunting grounds. As we got near to where we were to hunt the wind was picking up. I also met John Lennard from the North East on our way and he accompanied us to the farm.

When we eventually got to the farm, the wind was blowing a gale. We carried on and hoped that when we got into the

valley on foot below us, it would die down. Anyway, we all had telemetry on so there wouldn't be a problem if one of the birds caught the wind we could track it. We walked over the road and down onto the farmland, the wind was still blowing hard. We got into a ravine and were somewhat sheltered so we put the ferret down a burrow, waited, then waited, the ferret popped his head out and off we went again in search of the bunnies.

We decided that due to the wind we should try further down in the valley, which we did. The wind was getting stronger and stronger as we ferreted and we realised that we were not going to have any luck in bolting rabbits in this sort of wind, so decided to head back to the farm for some Bovril. We waited in anticipation for the wind to die down while we had a good chinwag and laugh in the back of my van, eating and drinking merrily listening to stories about nagging wives and all!

We had a chat to the farmer and it appeared that the wind had died down a little. So off we went again on the other side of his land near a moor. We walked in a long line across a field, trying to flush bunnies and hares but not much appeared due to the weather. We then got to the bottom of this field and across a brook and tried ferreting there. I was on slip and the ferret went down. A rabbit bolted and Red went after it, but the rabbit went down the next hole so I called Red back, he banked around to my garnished fist. Another Rabbit bolted and Red took chase.

Red pursued

As Red pursued it he was caught by the wind and ended up on a wall. Then when I tried to retrieve him, he opened his wings and tried to get back to me. Again he was carried up to another wall. I was getting worried about him and so tried to walk up to him, across a road and up towards the moor where he landed on a wall again.

When I was within 50ft of Red, he again tried to get to me but again was blown over the horizon. I rushed up onto the brow of the hill only to find a barren moorland with no walls or posts, just heather for miles around and no sight of Red.

I got my telemetry out and found I didn't have a signal! Oh my god! No signal. Panic set in and I phoned Kev Cole and told him the situation. He came up with his son Alex and also Chris Hogan. They all tried their telemetry but no signal! Off we went in different directions on this moor looking, calling and offering food for Red. No sign after two hours and nightfall was about to descend!

After checking my receiver, we thought that this was at fault due to not picking up no two transmitter from Alex's bird so we decided to give Eddie of Falconry Electronics a ring. He said he had a 1000 channel receiver spare, Yagi and batteries at hand when we got there. I collected this equipment and got a packed lunch including Red's (a rabbit) and sleeping bag from my partner Linda and off I went back up there. I called in at the farm and spoke to the farmer and his wife to let them know what had happened. They got on the phone to Gamekeepers, local police and other neighbouring farms.

I went up to the public car park, close to where I lost Red then went looking with my spotlight in the darkness up on the moor but there was no sign of him. Four hours later, I returned to the van, exhausted and managed to get a few hours

sleep before dawn.

Before it was light I went back up on the moor. When it got dark I went back to the van. I phoned the IBR, RSPB and RSPCA who put this on their records. John Soulsby, chairman of the Yorkshire Falconry Club called a local newspaper and two radio stations to notify the local people to keep an eye out for Red. Due to not having a sighting of Red, I decided to broaden my search to woodland that Red may have seen on top of the moor and was in the direction of where he could have been blown about a mile downwind.

When I got down to this wood, I called on all the farmers within the area and they said they would keep a look out for him, leaving my name and number just in case, Linda was manning the phone at home. I obtained permission to look into this cluster of woodlands and could only work the outer perimeter as it was either too dense or wide for one to search alone. I stumbled across a beach wood that, I was told, had a wild redtail visit. I looked and looked but again nothing.

More eyes needed

I decided that I needed more eyes to keep a look out for him so I visited many farms and houses in the area. Steve Lambert our Secretary, arrived after finishing work. We went out with the lamp searching until 2am. Steve went home having no sightings again. On Wednesday, John Soulsby drove up to help me. We split up and called to other farms that I had not yet visited. After a full day searching, John wished me luck

Dale with Red





The day I lost my redtail

and set off back home.

Thursday, Steve came back up and

we both continued our search in the beech wood and also near to the hunting ground where he was last seen. We scoured the area with our binoculars and tried the telemetry again for a while. We even looked inside the working quarry as there were rabbits running amongst heavy machinery but again no sign. We set off back down and discussed where we were going to search.

I needed to take time out as I was mentally exhausted so I drove home for a good nights sleep. I designed a 'Red Missing' leaflet with a reward and a few photos of him. I asked for help from people on the falconry and Hawking web group. Smokey, from America said he would send me a trap that they use for trapping passage redtails just in case Red would not be responsive. I spoke to DEFRA about a trapping license and was told one was not needed.

On Friday I set off back and met Kev Cole and his son Alex, who had printed the leaflets. Steve also arrived and we all set off posting these anywhere and everywhere. We started to get 'phone calls within a couple of hours of possible sightings! Yes I thought I would soon have him back. But it seemed that these were sightings of buzzards! Every call was followed up and the locals soon got to know my white van as I clocked up 2500 miles!

Sightings

Linda phoned me on a number of occasions to say that there were sightings. Some were 20 or so miles away but had to follow these up. I went home that evening to print more leaflets for the Saturday. When I got up there on Saturday morning I met Steve, Kev, Alex, John Lennard, Chris Hogan and Paul Cuthbert. We all set off in different directions, again looking for Red and posting leaflets.

I had more calls about possible sightings but seemed to be chasing shadows! I was becoming down hearted as I had not even seen him after all the searching. The following week I made many friends up there and one, Denise, offered to put me up in one of their

caravans as up to now I was sleeping rough in the van. I kindly took up this offer. The whole of the week was spent on following 'phone calls up, posting leaflets to pubs, petrol stations etc., from morning till dusk. I looked out across the valley and thought where can he be? Someone has got to hear his bells!

We had many calls that week and were becoming very frustrated at always arriving after he had been spotted. I had been told that Red would not go far from where he was lost as long as there was food around but still had to follow up each call. One was a very positive sighting, a bird of Red's description had a hold of a pheasant in a barn and the farmer separated them and let this bird go only to read the leaflet later! On another occasion Denise phoned me and said to get there as soon as I could as a bird of Red's size spooked a neighbour's chickens but again I was chasing shadows!

Richard, a gamekeeper said that Red had been spotted in his pine wood. I asked if I could get into this wood before daybreak believing Red may be roosting and I would hear his bells when he awoke. This I did and the only thing I saw were hundreds of pheasants looking down on me. I came home on Friday to print yet more leaflets as this had been the most effective tool but this time was laminating them so that we could put them on gateposts and bridleways. I also received the trap from Smokey.

Linda and I spent Saturday pinning leaflets to various posts. We then went back home as I needed to return to work. This I did not want to do but vowed I would return every weekend until I found him. If however, I got a positive sighting I would down tools and go. I returned to work but could not concentrate and every time the 'phone rang, my heart stopped. I did have a few calls but these were not positive sightings. I was starting to think realistically that I might not ever see him again. This was very hard to accept and was hoping that the next call might be the one!

Whilst at work on Friday morning, the 17 December, I got a call from Steve, the farmer next door to the land where I had lost Red. He said, "Dale, I have just got within ten foot of your Red and it is definitely him. I saw his jess's and he was very tame. He let me get so close. My

wife came down the drive in her car and Red flew into a tree nearby where he is now". I downed tools and raced to my van, set off at lightning speed as I had a two hour journey and I was hoping he would still be there. When I got there, the lady of the adjoining farm house said she had seen him this morning flying around the farm. I asked her wereabouts? and as she pointed to cluster of trees she said, "what's that in the conifer tree". I looked through my binoculars and my heart skipped a beat! It was Red!

What should I do?

I set off up towards him and thought what should I do now as I did not want him to fly away? I decided to zig zag and move very cautiously towards him whilst waving chicks. I got closer, watching his reactions! He did not ruffle a feather! I got within 5ft of Red and stopped. At one point he leaned forward as if he was going to come to me but nothing came of it. What should I do I thought? Use the trap and walk away or attempt to climb the tree? I decided to go for the latter. I started to climb the tree, my heart beating faster as I got higher and closer to him.

I reached the branch he was sitting on and offered him the chick and he just looked at it then took a small step away. My heart stopped! I shook the chick to keep him focused whilst I made a lunge for his jesses and took hold. Got him! Yippee. What a Christmas present. I immediately called Linda and everyone else. After weighing him he was 3lb 2ozs! He definitely looked after himself on his three week holiday!

I to this day do not know what happened with the transmitter, maybe a bad connection, maybe the batteries where very low or it just went faulty. As I had tested it the previous day, I did not check it again. A valuable lesson learned and I hope others who read this will make all the necessary checks (batteries under load, good connections from the cap to the battery, etc.).

I would like to convey special thanks to Linda, John Soulsby, Steve Lambert, Kev and Alex Cole, John Lennard, Chris Hogan, Paul Cuthbert, Eddie Alum of Falconry Electronics, Denise and Family of Greenhow Village, Richard the Gamekeeper of Greenhow Village and all who helped in searching for Red.

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Hen Harrier breeding figures 2005

The Hen Harrier is one of England's most spectacular birds of prey and it is an unforgettable sight to watch this bird floating effortlessly over low ground in search of prey. Unfortunately, the opportunity to see the Hen Harrier on its moorland breeding haunts has become all too rare in recent years and following its continued decline, there is now a very real danger that it will be lost as a breeding bird in England. The numbers of birds have declined mainly as the result of persecution. English Nature is committed to restoring the English population and in April 2001, set up a Hen Harrier Recovery Project that aims to:

- a. Monitor the remaining Hen Harrier population in England and its breeding success;
- b. Identify the factors that are currently restricting Hen Harrier numbers;
- c. Raise the profile of the conservation of Hen Harriers in England and secure public interest in protecting their future.

The original project has been replaced this year by a new project which not only continues the detailed programme of monitoring, but will also seek to develop ways to increase the population of Hen Harriers that are compatible with grouse moor management.

English Nature's Hen Harrier Recovery Project has released the 2005 breeding figures for England's most endangered bird of prey. The monitoring shows that 19 breeding attempts resulted in 15 successful Hen Harrier nests, which produced a total of 36 birds. This is the highest number of successful nests and fledglings recorded since the project began monitoring in 2002. However, the English population remains very low.

Unfortunately, English Hen Harriers are still more or less confined to one breeding area, the Bowland Fells in Lancashire, which had 80% of the successful nests. In England, breeding Hen Harriers are restricted to upland heather moorlands. Most of these moorlands are managed as



Young Harriers on the nest

grouse moors for shooting but the moorlands not managed for grouse shooting support more of England's breeding Hen Harriers and they are also more productive, with more young per nest.

In the Bowland Fells, the breeding stronghold of the Hen Harrier in England, the harriers nest on the United Utilities Estate, where they are monitored by the RSPB and on the surrounding grouse moors, notably the Abbeystead Estate. This year three of the four successful grouse moor nests were in the Bowland Fells.

Andy Brown, English Nature's Chief Executive said: "We are very grateful for the co-operation of the Abbeystead Estate and their gamekeepers throughout this project. This estate is the only grouse moor to have breeding Hen Harriers recorded by the project every year.

We owe them a great deal for showing how shooting and raptor conservation can coexist. Although there are still very few Hen Harriers breeding in England, we are

encouraged that they have gradually increased during the four years of our Hen Harrier Recovery Project. We now have a better understanding of why their numbers are so low and will now be working to increase the range and number of Hen Harriers across England. We look forward to working with gamekeepers and other land managers to help us bring this beautiful bird back to much more of our countryside."

Julian Hughes head of RSPB Species Conservation said: "It is encouraging that only one Hen Harrier nest in England failed due to suspected illegal killing, but even that is one too many in a tiny population. It is great news that there was no evidence of persecution in Bowland but we remain concerned that with so few harriers nesting successfully elsewhere they are vulnerable to local changes. It would be wonderful to see the successes in Bowland repeated on other moors in northern England."

Hen Harriers arrive back on their breeding grounds in March and April. They indulge in spectacular, aerobatic displays to attract females. The Hen Harrier has a

Supporting information

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Breeding attempts (1)	17	23	23	22	12	18	13	3+(2)	11	18 (3)	10	19
Successful females	14	12	12	11	9	9	5	3+(2)	7	9	8	15
Young fledged	numbers not known							6	22	29	28	36
Breeding areas	5+	5+	6+	5+	3+	4+	3+	1	5	6	1	5

strong association with heather in England and nests are almost always sited so that the surrounding heather bushes provide cover and protection. A clutch of up to six eggs is laid, in April or May and incubated by the female for about 30 days. The chicks spend a further 30-40 days in the nest before making their first flight.

(1) At least one egg laid.

(2) Foot and mouth restrictions prevented most monitoring work.

The presence of juveniles at Bowland once restrictions were lifted indicated that there were at least three successful nests.

(3) 23 breeding attempts in total: five attempts failed at an early stage before it could be established whether eggs had been laid, and/or private access did not enable nest visits to be made.

2005

Breeding attempts - grouse moors managed for shooting, six; non-grouse moors, 13.

Young - grouse moors managed for shooting, eight; non-grouse moors 28. Bowland Fells had 12 successful nests from 15 attempts.

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Orange
Breasted
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What better antidote to the English winter than a trip to somewhere nice and sunny to enjoy meeting new falconers

and seeing some different hawking. That was precisely my attitude as I left Gatwick on a bitter December morning to make my way, via Houston Texas, to a hot and humid Lima, capital city of Peru.

I had been corresponding for many years with a couple of Peruvian falconers and had spent a lot of time with another, Oscar Beingolea, hawking together in northern Mexico. Oscar is very well known and respected in Central and Southern America and has done a lot of work for the Peregrine Fund. This has ranged from banding Peregrines on migration to finding Orange Breasted Falcon nests for various research teams. He was also involved in the Harpy Eagle breeding project in Panama.

Consequently, when the chance arose to travel to Peru for a couple of weeks and do some serious hawking and hawk watching, it seemed too good an opportunity to miss. The actual journey is extremely long and incredibly tedious but, as it turned out, it's one that's worthwhile in the end. My arrival in Lima was just after midnight and the temperature was in the seventies and the humidity was in the order of 20%. Like all capital cities Lima is wide awake at that hour and the airport and surrounding streets were absolutely buzzing with people.

Hawking in Peru Part 1

Being vigilant

One thing that had been drummed into me before my departure for Peru, was the need for constant vigilance when it came to pickpockets and snatch thieves.

Apparently these abound and it pays to take that little bit of extra care and attention when on the streets, particularly if you are carrying cameras or wearing a decent watch on your wrist.

My principal host during my stay was the almost legendary Phyllis Sears. An American woman who is passionate about falconry and all things relating to hawks and falcons in general. Despite being an octogenarian she is still as consumed with the sport as ever and does all she can to promote it and the welfare of wild raptors in Peru. She had also kindly arranged for me to meet up with several falconers and to go trapping and banding wild Peregrine falcons.

At the airport to meet me was Jose Antonio Otero who runs the only raptor breeding establishment in Peru. He was kind enough to have sorted out an hotel for me and took me there, having first made arrangements to collect me the next morning. This he duly did extremely bright and early next day and then we moved on to visit his facility. This is on the outskirts of Lima at a place called Huachipa. I didn't really know what I was expecting but I certainly wasn't prepared for the sight that did greet me on arrival at Jose's premises.

On walking through double gates I was greeted with the sight of a sheltered lawn absolutely full of hawks, falcons and hawk eagles weathering on their perches. First sight to catch my eye was a line of thirteen Aplomado Falcons on their blocks. Then nine Cassini Peregrines and one Tundra Peregrine sat in a line like soldiers on sentry duty. Across the top of the lawn, furthest away from me, I could make out some large hawks on bows. On closer investigation these turned out to be Tyrannus and Black and White Hawk Eagles as well as a male Harpy Eagle. On a small lawn next to the office complex were an American Kestrel, Orange Breasted Falcon, Aplomado Falcon and a Bi-Coloured Hawk. Through an archway I could see another small lawn which had another six Bi-Coloured Hawks out weathering on their bow perches.

Male Harpy Eagle

A Falcon man

I make no secret of the fact that I have always been a falcon man through and through. Whilst I'm an admirer of hawks and eagles, they never seem to quicken my pulse in the same way that falcons do. But the one exception to this is the Tyrannus Hawk Eagle. These are magnificent creatures and I have long held a desire to fly one. Having seen them in the wild in Mexico and Brazil I have often thought what a useful falconry hawk they would make. Everyone seems to rave about Ornate Hawk Eagles but Tyrannus are slightly heavier and kill much larger prey in their wild state. Granted they are not as striking looking as the Ornates, but then looks aren't everything.

Having spent a considerable time taking in the delights on the weathering lawn it was time to be taken on a guided tour of the facility by Jose Antonio. In total he has some three hundred and fifty birds of prey and these are made up of pairs for commercial breeding and pairs that form part of various re-introduction programmes. In this later group are King Vultures, Andean Condors and The Morph phase of the Harpy Eagle. Also in this

category are five Orange Breasted Falcons, unfortunately they are all female. These beautiful falcons have all been the victims of shooting or road accidents and have subsequently been brought to the facility. But at the moment male birds are seriously lacking. The government has granted a licence for three males to be taken this coming season and so some pairs at least will have the opportunity to breed.

For those that have never seen an Orange Breasted Falcon in the flesh, their size and power to weight ratio are very hard to describe. The falcon is about the size of a large Lanneret but its chest is very broad and its feet are absolutely huge. They look completely out of proportion with the rest of its body. These falcons are incredibly fast in level flight and take all manner of birds including swifts and swallows. They remind me very much of Taita Falcons which I have been fortunate enough to watch hunting in the wild in South Africa.

The King Vultures breed on a regular basis and Jose Antonio has also enjoyed considerable success with Andean Condors. In fact an egg was collected from



American Kestrel



one pair the day I was there and I was also shown a three week old youngster being raised in a brooder within the main facility complex.

Treasure trove

The main aviary complex is split into five wings with each wing holding an absolute treasure trove of delights for any falconer. The falcon species are Cassini Peregrines, American Kestrels, Aplomado Falcons by the score and Bat Falcons. Bat Falcons are another stunningly good looking species although very small and somewhat difficult to keep in good flying condition. But they are amazingly fast and I have watched a pair working together hunting bats on the edge of a large wood in Southern Mexico. Their speed and agility has to be seen to be believed. They are similar in size to a European Merlin.

There are only two species of hawk being bred at the facility. These are Bi-Coloureds and Tiny Hawks. Tiny Hawks are true accipiters and similar in size to European Sparrowhawks. Although I didn't get to see one flown whilst in Peru I did speak to several people that had flown them in the past and it would appear they are a good hunting hawk although a little nervy in the field.

The Hawk Eagle wing of the facility simply couldn't fail to impress any falconer, no matter what their personal preference when it comes to flying and hunting. Some twenty pairs graced the wing and these

consisted of four different species. Ornates, Tyrannus, Black and White as well as Chestnut Bellied Hawk Eagles. The Black and Whites are beautiful to look at in juvenile plumage and are very difficult to tell apart from young Ornates. However, the eyes are the give away. In the Black and Whites the young have yellow eyes whereas the Ornates have blue eyes.

The collection of Eagles was equally impressive. Several pairs of Harpies as well as some Solitary Eagles, Isidors Eagles, Grey Chilean Buzzard Eagles and Morph Harpy Eagles. Eagles are not my thing and I have no desire what so ever to fly one of any description. But Harpy Eagles really are the epitome of power and grace. You cannot help to be excited by them and to have a trained male on my fist was one of the true highlights of my trip.

Having completed the tour of the aviaries it was time to look over the incubation and brooder rooms as well as the hospital room. The breeding season was all but over when I was there and many of the Aplomado and Peregrine pairs had young, as did several pairs of Ornate Hawk Eagles. In the brooder room was the young Condor mentioned earlier and an Ornate Hawk Eagle that had been rejected by its parents. I have to say that the facilities Jose Antonio has put together are second to none and everything is of the highest quality. No expense has been spared in getting things exactly as they should be.

After a delightful lunch in a local eating house where you could eat Chicken cooked in a myriad of ways or nothing at all, it was time to tour the facility again, only this time with camera in hand. I had noticed on several occasions a wild Harris Hawk drifting over the weathering lawn and asked Jose Antonio if they ever gave problems by trying to take tethered hawks off of their blocks. I would have thought small hawks like the Bi-Coloureds and Aplomado Falcons would have been almost irresistible to a passing Harris Hawk. But I was assured that no aggression had ever been shown by the local Harris Hawk pair and in fact they nested some 80 metres from the facility. They themselves had young at that time and there were in actual fact two adult and three young Harris Hawks flying round.

Also nesting within sight of the facility were a pair of Bi-Coloured hawks and a pair of American Kestrels. The only problem the facility had in fact was with the kestrels that would try and rob food from the eagles. The Kestrels could fit through the bars of the aviaries and would sneak in and steal food from their larger cousins.

All too soon my day at the breeding facility drew to a close and it was time to head back into Central Lima and my hotel for the night. The following day was going to be interesting as we would be going out looking for wild hawks.



Breeding facility

Out of Lima

Early the next day we left the city of Lima taking the Pan American Highway South. As we went through the outskirts of the city we saw two Peregrine falcons sitting on advertising hoardings. Both of these turned out to be passage female Tundra Falcons. Once I could get binoculars on them it was possible to see the tell tale white streak around the scull and the pale background to the chest. Every other hoarding and telegraph pole held at least one Black Vulture. They are literally everywhere and in very large numbers. What did seem strange to me was that Turkey Vultures were conspicuous by their absence. Whereas the two species are normally seen together in Peru – I saw very few. In fact the total I saw was probably less than 20 during the entire duration of my trip.

Once clear of Lima we turned down onto the beach and drove for mile after mile on the sand. Every time we came to a rocky outcrop we would scan it with binoculars looking for Peregrines. We saw a good number and tossed pigeons for some. These were good healthy racing pigeons that soon made their way safely home. But the initial fluttering and circling would bring the Peregrines over to investigate. We were fortunate in that we saw three sub-species of Peregrine in the same day. Cassinni, Tundra and Anatum. The Cassinni are resident but the other two are migrants from the North. They



follow the shore birds and the great rafts of ducks as they head south.

We were also lucky enough to see Marsh Harriers, American Kestrels, Bi-Coloured Hawks and Chilean Grey Buzzard Eagles during the course of the day. Later in the week I hoped we would see just as many Peregrines as I would be going out with a falconer who is a licensed ringer. We would be doing our level best to trap every Peregrine we saw that day and ring them.

Instead of going back to Lima that night we continued on down the coast until we reached a town called Paracas. From here the next morning we would be going by boat to circle the Ballestas Islands. I was assured I would see many sea birds and also Sea Wolves. I could not get a clearer indication of what Sea Wolves might be and so had no alternative but to wait until the next day.

Rooming with Cockroaches

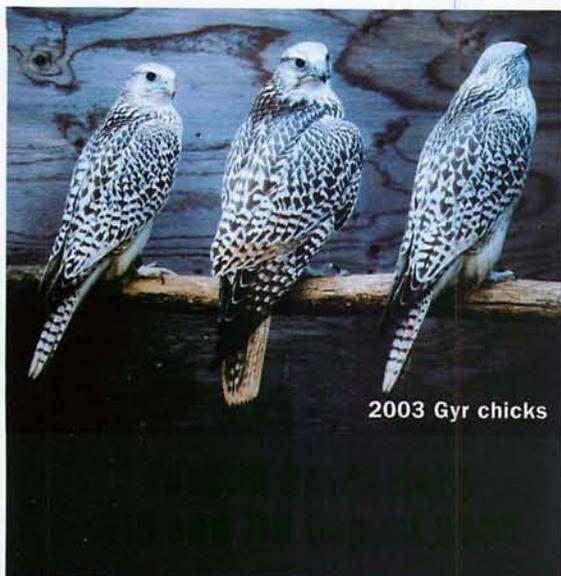
The small hotel we stayed in at Paracas was not my idea of good clean accommodation, although the 30 or so Cockroaches I shared my room with seemed happy enough. The bed linen also seemed to have a great many stains that were better left undisturbed and so I fitfully slept in a chair with my clothes on. But the next day dawned bright enough and it was down to the beach to take a boat to the islands. Jose Antonio had borrowed a boat from a friend who had

decided to come along at the last minute and give us a guided tour of the wildlife.

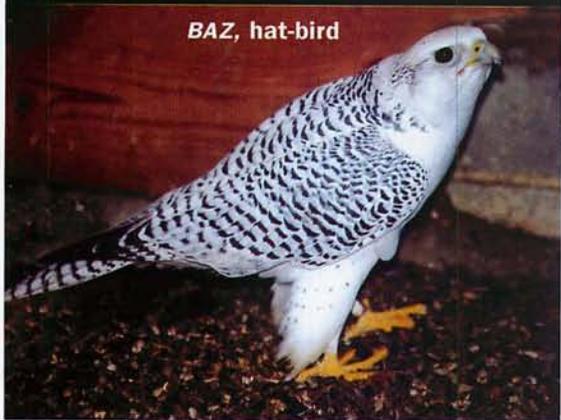
It took some twenty minutes or so to cross to the islands and even from a mile or so out it was possible to see the vast numbers of sea birds that called the area home. As we got close enough to make out individual birds I could see Cormorants, Boobies and Humboldt Penguins all crammed together on the rocky edges. Incredibly enough there was even a large population of Black Vultures present. Somehow I hadn't expected to see them this far off shore, but then of course with the huge number of birds gathered there was bound to be plenty of rich pickings for them. There is such an abundance of bird life on the islands that every five years or so the Guano, that's bird droppings to you and me, are collected and sold as fertilizer.

As we rounded the first island a rocky inlet with a small beach came into view and the mystery of the Sea Wolves was suddenly explained. Sea Lions in large numbers littered every available square inch of beach. We cut the motor on the boat and drifted just off the shore. Many of the Sea Lion cubs and some well grown youngsters swam out to us to take a closer look. This was okay and everybody was happy. But suddenly one of the exceedingly large and very aggressive bulls took to the water in our direction and we decided it would be prudent to move on.





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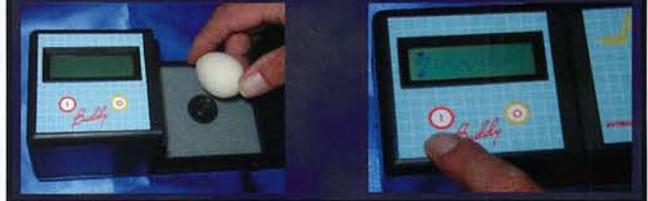
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Lessons to be Learnt

I am one of the many newcomers to the sport of falconry in England this year. Lucy and I joined the ranks in the 2005 season and we have not looked back.

Life owning a hawk is amplified a million times, but it comes at a cost. A small walk in a wood is changed into an expedition. A rustle of leaves becomes the focus of all our attentions. We have become immersed in nature rather than just passing on through it. There is, thankfully, a big difference.

Just like many beginners I prepared fully, attended the correct courses, moved house to provide land for my charge and took time to read extensively. As I said, it comes at a cost. We spent around £3000 and took the best part of two years to reach the point of stepping back and admiring our hard work.

However, no book, article or course can do full justice and explain in enough clarity, the problems that a juvenile Harris Hawk and its greenhorn owner may face in the field. Make no mistake, when the inevitable happens, the learning curve is steep, terrifying and bears no resemblance to any book I have ever read.

A good example is the difficulty in describing the level of anxiety and delightful fear of letting your hawk fly free for the first time. It is even more disconcerting and downright death inducing when at around this delicate time your hawk catches a Grey squirrel. No writer, regardless of their experience has managed to capture this situation adequately enough.

Recently, I have had many conversations with our US counterparts and they in their less than magnanimous and somewhat bravado manner, purposely set out to hunt the 'grey peril' for fun! Of course it goes without saying they use the mighty Red-Tail and its incumbent power to shy these furry mammals squarely away.

Fly Exclusively

However, my little male Harris, Cody, was entered at Rabbit, then Pheasant, and we hoped that he would fly these exclusively. And although we have more or less reached this position, he still has a preference for 'tree rats'. It is important that I point out that under no circumstances would I ever hunt Squirrels on purpose. It is just too dangerous, they are far too tough and of the half dozen encountered and killed,





Cody on rabbit

Cody has received two bites. And as a bite could force amputation this is not a risk worth taking. I never reward him from Squirrel kills and where they are particularly abundant my hand is firmly on the lure at all times. I have also been known to hood him and walk away from any situations that are just too risky, thick Ivy cover and drays being obvious examples.

Our first experience of the fierce survival instinct found in squirrels was on a late evening in December. The light was fading fast and we were just a short step from home. At the back of our cottage is a lake of about six acres. Centuries ago it used to supply Pike and Carp for the table. It has a thick old English wood acting as a protective skirt for Pheasant, Rabbit and of course squirrel. We headed straight for it and I knew we would catch something for tea.

We had done a circuit of the lake and were heading further out towards a hillside covert, when Cody shot back across my path chasing a squirrel round and around the trunk of a large Pine.

The squirrel paused and Cody hit it squarely between two splayed roots. I was stood, glued to the spot not six feet from the action. The speed and ferocity

of the unfolding fight was enough to stun me into a mute silence.

It seemed a perfect head bind, but the 'grey death' struggled loose, turned in a ball and twisted for the cause of freedom. Cody re-footed the Squirrel and then for some reason he once again let go and made a third hit and hold tactic. By the time I pulled myself together and stepped forward towards the maelstrom ball of fur and feather. I could see the Squirrels beady black eyes and yellow teeth looking up at me through the splayed feet of my raptor.

The squirrel was not dead, but Cody's feet were such that it could not turn its head and sink its teeth in either. A frozen five seconds later I attempted to dispatch the prey. I could not reach in to use the normal stretch method; the thickness of my glove would prevent me from getting a firm enough grip. Under no circumstances was I about to use an unprotected hand. And as I did not want to hurt my pal I found a soft spot, faced the cutting edge of the knife towards me and entered it quickly.

The squirrel reacted immediately and with obvious adrenaline strength this arboreal monster began spinning and twisting. Stupidly, and to prevent any further damage, I swung it up by its tail, only for it to twist back and arch towards my exposed hand. Fearfully I dropped it back on the ground and Cody once again caught it on the head. I am certain it was at this point the squirrel exacted revenge by biting Cody on the tarsus.

However, the action was so fast it became difficult to make anything out clearly. But pulling on the squirrels rear from behind Cody, I found another opening and a more certain point of contact. All the while Cody was beeping, moaning and hopping up and down on the squirrel's head. The fear and panic of having a fully grown dog squirrel trapped under your hawk and then the hawk releasing 'odd' sounds, means only one thing in the falconers mind. A bite wound. So using a chick in order to get Cody to spring from the kill I quickly moved the prey into my hunting jacket and took Cody up on the fist.

Because of all the blood it was difficult to see if my team-mate was hurt. However, he hopped up onto a branch away from the scene and was so excited

he was promptly sick! After he re-ate his offering he flew back onto the fist. Cody took the hood and calmed down immediately. Regardless of whether he had a bite or not I was taking him home and checking him out before administering any first aid.

Leg Wash

Once back in the weathering I was able to wash his leg with still spring water and assessed any damage caused. The problem with a squirrel bite is that although they look inconsequential, the incisors are needle sharp and exit the mouth at an odd angle. Any damage done will always be below skin level. I imagine that this is why they can do serious damage if infected. At first glance the wound did not seem too problematic. Cody was pulling at his jesses easily and regularly, seeming comfortable on the glove.

On closer inspection the first wound seemed like a slight lifting of the leg scales, while the other two looked no more than grazes. However, a small trickle of blood was exiting the bottom puncture. No matter, I applied some drops of 'Pervidine' (an Iodine based antiseptic), a few touches of Iodine crystals and then a small covering. I phoned the vet and over the next few days I kept an eye on the hawk and an even closer watch on the wound.

The swelling around the leg began almost immediately, and when I poked it a small droplet of puss emerged. After reapplying the dressing and some more Pervidine the leg returned to normal and after a few brief phone calls to my mentor it was thought that as Cody was not favouring either leg, a trip to the vet was not needed. As a beginner and not an expert, I sat and pondered what had happened and what, if anything, had gone wrong? I asked myself what lessons there were to be learned from this unfortunate incident? After much deliberation I concluded that were several, and ones which should stand any beginner in good stead if they are unfortunate to encounter such problems.

The most basic, is know your first aid kit and the processes of administration. I had practiced using the kit at home, and had read everything provided thoroughly. I had conjured up the worst case

Lessons to be Learnt

scenario and had understood how and why a Harris may get bitten. Secondly, I had trained my hawk to the hood. Many beginners are frightened or do not see the hood as a tool to be used. In this case it is not used for slipping and transport, but also as a calming influence when the unforeseen happens. I had a conversation with another beginner recently, and they expressed the opinion that they "didn't need a hood because their hawk wouldn't get scared". From my position this seems short sighted in the extreme and could perhaps cost them their hawk.

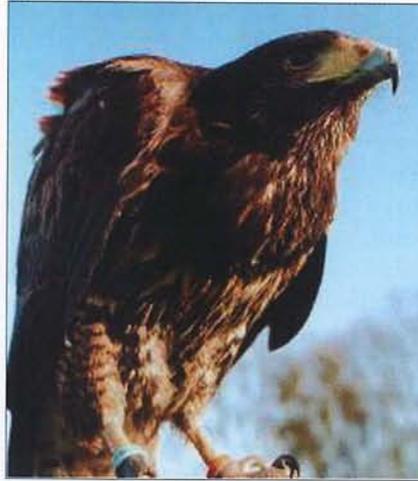
However, the most important lesson that we learnt was that any preparation is never wasted. To that end every beginner needs the phone number of their vet at hand in their mobile, on the wall of their weathering and stuck to the fridge. They would also do well to visit him or her before getting their hawk, just to say hello and introduce themselves. Believe me a learning curve involving your hawk in pain is one that should be avoided at all costs.

Another lesson

Another lesson that came to the fore early on in my falconry career is something every beginner should know more about. I had read and re-read many articles by Martin Hollinshead and his writing on one particular aspect of Harris Hawking fascinated me. That of maintaining motivation levels in your hawk even at relatively high weights.

But what does this mean and how does it translate to the field? It's always a case for someone like myself to try and translate the theory of books into cold hard facts. And if I am honest I am constantly referring back to books, still working it out, and still trying to relate the words on the page to my experiences. But I can guarantee that if you keep a close eye on your hawk certain 'quirks' and 'tells' will begin to emerge. And if you look closely they provide more information than a whole library ever will.

A classic example, the blame of which can be laid squarely at my feet, came after a poor pick-up on one of this year's Rabbits. After which Cody's commitment to nailing prey dropped accordingly. But what do I mean by a



poor pick-up? And how did this really affect Cody's attitude?

Over excitement on my part had meant I had rushed in on Cody split seconds after a particularly protracted flight in deep cover. The rabbit had bobbed out under some bramble and Cody had flown in on a relatively clean angle, getting a good bind on an open area of grass.

Rushing in had caused him to quite correctly mantle over his kill. This had then made it difficult to get in under him and dispatch the quarry. Cody was fussing badly as I cut the rabbit open making it hard to remove a sizable reward. What little liver he did get was gone in one gulp, and a long way before I could 'invisibly' transfer the rabbit into my jacket. In other words I was stealing. I tried to convince myself I wasn't, but in truth I was in the dock!

The piece of chick I then threw down to cover my clumsiness was looked at and taken, but he knew something was missing. In an attempt to further divert attention I began to walk off, but Cody was bobbing his head and desperately searching the ground. Stupidly, I picked him up and walked 200 yards further down the path. Cody was having none of it and flew straight back to the scene of the kill. The failed offering, the stealing, and then rushing from the scene of the kill was to prove problematic.

For the rest of the hunting week there was not an ounce of meat for the table. He was flying at the same weight, in the same conditions and at the same time. Except now he was sluggish, refused to follow on crisply and the flight at any flushed quarry was lame.

Walking with Pheasant

On the Wednesday night he actually walked alongside a Pheasant in full view of two passers by! I spent around four days waiting for him to forgive me for my indiscretion. Thankfully this blank period was to be reversed in quite amazing style, revealing another reason for maintaining fitness by flying on a daily basis.

It was coming to the end of our session in the field, four long and frustrating hours had trickled away behind us. Alternate bouts of sleet, rain and gusty wind had made the slog over the sodden ground hard. And after missing a bolted Rabbit 10 minutes into the trip our situation took a turn for the worse, leading to several rabbits being missed!

At one point I had positioned Cody away from a burrow and then entered the ferret. Only for a hen Pheasant to materialise out of the leaf litter 10 yards in front, cross our paths and take Cody on a diverted chase to the other side of the wood. Just as we returned to the hole (minus the Pheasant) the Rabbit shot out and Cody missed his chance by at least five seconds.

Twenty minutes prior to this, we had found a burrow with five Rabbits in residence; they must have been lined up like marines as one after the other they bolted with about a 30 second delay between each. My hawk missed every single stinking one! The last Rabbit was the icing on a very bitter cake. Cody jumped down off his branch, poked his head in the hole a Rabbit had hopped out of, just as another exited and made good his escape from a pop hole two inches behind the hawk's tail.

By about four o'clock we were more or less beaten, a final hole was selected along a hedgerow surrounding a massive pea field before heading home. The ferret was once again entered and as the Rabbit bolted, the sleet changed direction forcing Cody to drop to the ground. On seeing a raptor not three feet from him, the Rabbit doubled back up through the hedge and kicked up small divots of wet sand as he sped away. Making contact would have been impossible, so for what seemed like the millionth time that day I cursed my hawk, picked him up gently and

begrudgingly saluted our quarry.

Turning back to the ferret box I spied the Rabbit dipping back under the hedge and moving out across the field towards the sanctuary of the wood we had just left. The gap between Cody and the moving brown dot was easily approaching 1000 yards.

Regardless of this colossal distance Cody heaved from the glove and pumped slowly into a strong head wind. For reasons known only to him he was making his way confidently toward the Rabbit. Smiling at his determination I whispered encouragement and took after the both of them. However, I knew there was no chance; the distance was huge, it was the end of four hours constant flying and the Rabbit had seen us. The only possibility would have to involve some sort of divine intervention

Without warning the clouds momentarily broke, the slushy rain

ceased and shafts of sun light hit the red soil and bounced across the green shoots of the pea crop. And as surely as the hand of God hit it, the Rabbit stopped dead in the centre of the field. Cody kept on pumping and pumping, doggedly making progress before landing some 15ft from where the Rabbit had seemingly dissolved into the ground.

Fast sprint

I was now sprinting as fast as I could but had totally lost sight of the quarry. The wind was blowing some leaves across the flight path, and the reflected sun on their surface made them look all the world like small white tails running between the crops. The excitement of seeing all these new 'Rabbits' meant I was distracted long enough to lose focus on where the real Rabbit had taken to ground.

Out of breath and slowing to a trot I

was 20 yards from Cody when the Rabbit suddenly became visible. Clearly panicked and out of breath it moved off far more slowly than before and Cody took flight, lifted slightly on the wind, and powered down across the soil binding quickly to the Rabbit's back. Tap dancing along his kill he rectified the situation, so that by the time I reached them he had firmly clasped the head of the Rabbit.

Calling out a huge thank you I dispatched the quarry and let Cody feast on as much of the paunched kill as he wished. It was clear success was down to a bad mistake by the Rabbit. But more than anything Cody had shown drive and guile beyond my own. He had faith that a chase would result in a kill and even though he paused for a breather, his motivation and fitness surpassed that of a wild animal living entirely on its wits. What more could a new falconer ask for?

The IBR would like to thank all of those people that helped to reunite and look after found birds.

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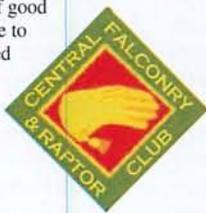
The mission statement of the C.F.R.C. is to offer people the opportunity to embrace all aspects of Falconry in a spirit of good companionship. There will be a warm welcome to people of all ages, whether they are experienced falconers, novices, or families.

For more information e-mail:

cen.falc@ic24.net or phone

John Hill 07973 224609

www.central-falconry.co.uk



The Welsh Hawking Club



South Wales Region 2nd Monday of the month at The Rat Trap Hotel, Usk.
Further details from Dave Dimond Tel: 01179 324845

North Wales Region 1st Tuesday of every month at The Robin Hood Pub, Helsby.
Regional Secretary: Neil McCann - 0151 929 3402.

Bath Region First Wednesday of the month at The Bull Inn, Hinton, Nr. Bath.
Regional Chairman: Bob Martini, Tel: 01934 862446

Central Region 1st Monday of the month at 7.30 at The Plough, The Green, Shustoke, Coleshill. Regional Chairman: Lee Featherstone - 0121 384 6102
Regional Secretary: Mick Wynn - 0121 7481794

Cotswold Region 2nd Tuesday of the month at the Beckford Hotel on the A46 between Evesham and Tewkesbury, approx 3 miles off Junc. 9 on the M5
Regional Chairman and Secretary: Mike Hope - 07944 447517

Essex Region 2nd Tuesday in each month at The Whalebone Inn, Fingeringhoe, near Colchester. Regional Secretary: Ray Hooper - 01206 251765

South West Region 3rd Monday of the month at The Ley Arms, Kenn, nr. Exeter.
Regional Secretary: Kevin Mosedale - 01392 833681

Yorkshire Region Meetings take place at The George & Dragon, 81 Main St, Wentworth, Barnsley Regional Chairman: Glyn Treloar - 01709 326865

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ALL NEWCOMERS WELCOMED.

For more information please telephone:

- Rob Kelly 01275 891813
- Adrian Trepka 0117 902 3637
- C Wale 0117 949 1922

Northern England Falconry Club

Club meets the first Wednesday of each month at :-

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Meetings take place on the last Tuesday of the month at Tilbury in Essex.

For members in our Southern region informal meetings take place nr Winchester, Hants.

For further information or an application form please contact -

Dean White (secretary) on 01489 896504

E-mail us at enquiry@sefg.org or
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Further details from:

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★ We are a D.E.F.R.A. recognised club ★

club directory

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Our programme includes guest speakers and
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Ring Laila on **01945 410150** or
Alan on **01784 250577** after 6.00pm

South Eastern Raptors Association (S.E.R.A.)

Established for some 25 years, and now affiliated to the Hawk Board and holding group membership to the Countryside Alliance, the aims of S.E.R.A. are to further and maintain the standards of falconry in the South-East of England. With a broad band of knowledge and experience within our club, we extend a warm welcome to new members, whether practising falconers or complete novices. Where practicable, novices will be allocated a mentor. Helpful, honest and friendly advice is always available.

**Our meetings are held at 10.30am on the second Sunday of each month throughout the year at
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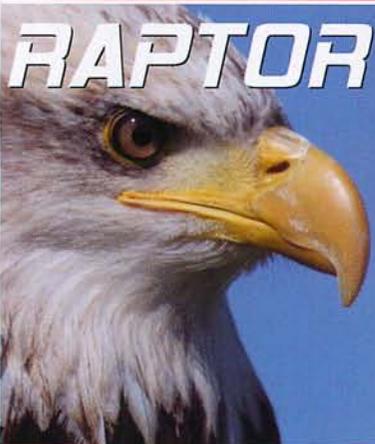


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ADVERTISERS INDEX	
Falconry Electronics.....	21
Falconry Originals.....	37
Fernhill Press.....	37
Acres Wild.....	23
Andrew Knowles-Brown.....	28
Avian Biotech.....	37
Avitronics.....	29
Ben Long.....	21
Biobest.....	21
Carl Church.....	37
Coch-Y-Bonddu Books.....	11
Crown Falconry.....	11
Derek Stotton.....	37
Falcon Leisure.....	40
Falconers Fair.....	2
Great Western Referrals.....	38
Honeybrook Animal Foods.....	37
IBR.....	23
Kentish Falconry.....	28
Kiezebrink UK Ltd.....	28
Raptor Box.....	38
Raptor Care.....	38
Raptor Originals.....	38
Sirathmore Veterinary Clinic.....	29
Vetark Professional.....	29
Westweald Falconry.....	29

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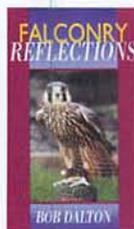
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