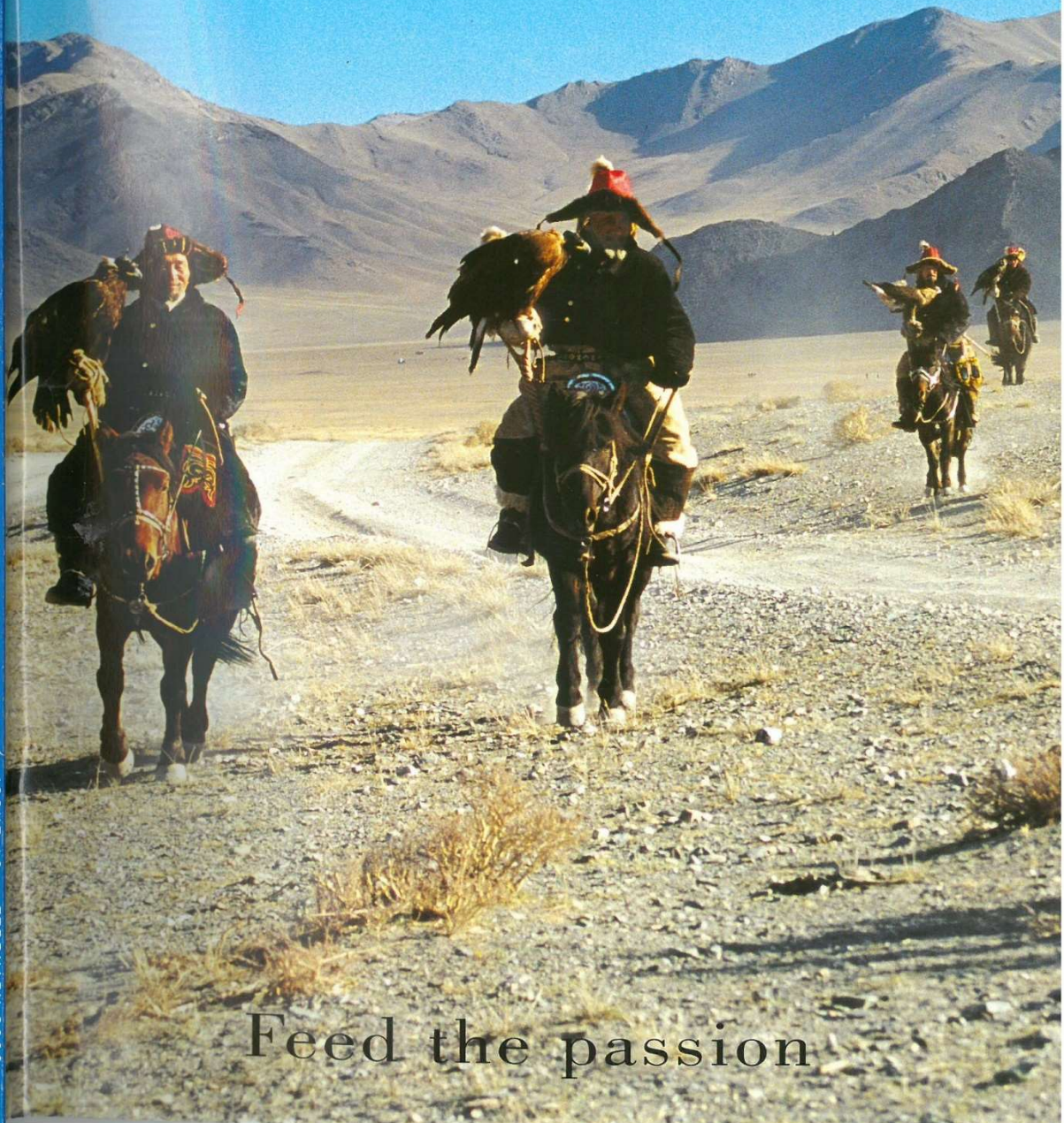


# INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

FEBRUARY 2002

ISSUE 12

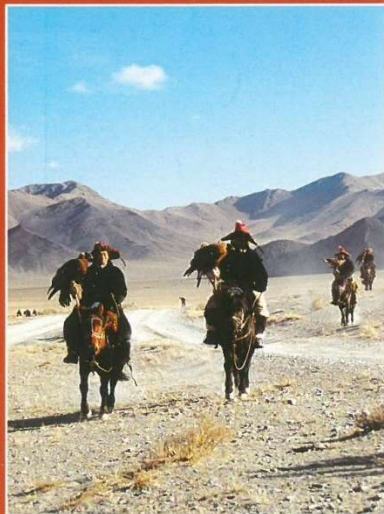


Feed the passion

# INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

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Cover photo by Alan Gates.  
Eaglehunters ride from Olgii to the  
mountain venue for the second and third  
day of the Annual Golden Eagle Festival of  
the Berkut Association.

# EDITORIAL



Welcome to issue number 12 of *International Falconer*, which, incredibly marks our 3-year period and what a great issue it is too. Things really seem to be going from strength to strength and I'd like to just take the opportunity to thank

the contributors, the advertisers and you the reader for making *IF* the established, leading falconry publication that it now is. You'll not fail to notice the calendar included in this edition - a gift to all *IF* subscribers from The Nad Al Shiba Avian Propagation Research Centre in Dubai. Thanks to them for this kind gesture.

As most UK readers will no doubt have heard, Britain is now officially clear of Foot and Mouth. It's a huge relief for everyone here and there couldn't be any better news to start 2002.

The weather conditions here in the UK, but for the last couple of weeks or so, have been generally kind to us, game stocks have fared pretty well and most falconers that I've heard from who have been able to get out without restrictions, have had a great season. Wherever you are in the world I hope you've had the same success.

Looking forward to May, don't forget that the British Falconry Fair has changed venue and been brought forward a couple of weeks this year - see this issue for further details - *IF* will as usual be attending and we look forward to seeing you there.

All the best

Seth

## IMPORTANT - NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

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

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

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## INTERNATIONAL FALCONER



**NEW DATE  
NEW VENUE**

# THE BRITISH FALCONRY FAIR

**W**ith the worst of the winter gloom behind us it is now time to look ahead to a new season. One of the early highlights, at the top of most falconer's calendars, is the Falconry Fair.

The new venue, Chetwynd Park, is very picturesque, with mature woods and a superb lake, and has served as the setting for the Shropshire Game Fair for the last few years. Both visitors and exhibitors have found the park and its facilities to be excellent. The venue is very accessible with superb road connections.

Last year the Fair, as with so many other events, was severely restricted because of the dreadful consequences of the Foot and Mouth disaster, but this year the event is back on track and scheduled to be bigger and better than ever.

Without doubt the British Falconry and Raptor Fair is the number one falconry orientated gathering in the world. The event itself has been running continuously for more than a dozen years and although often imitated it has never been equalled, let alone bettered.

One of the names that has become synonymous with the fair is that of Chris Christoforu. The fabulous art marquee is down to Chris and his endeavours to constantly bring new and exciting talent to the attention of the public. The blend of well-known and fresh talent is always just about right. The display of art in the marquee is of a very high standard and there is plenty of wildlife as well as raptor art to see. Apart from the marquee there are also several independent artists of exceedingly high quality, for example Ron Digby and David Martin.

The flying displays this year will again be given by a selection of falconers. Two displays each day will be given by Jemima Parry-Jones, no doubt in her normal inimitable style. Jemima's displays are very good and are always accompanied by an interesting and amusing commentary. The South East Falconry Group will also be giving their excellent forty-five minutes or so. This spot is always action-packed and a firm favourite. The kestrel that goes to the kite and then stoops at the dropped lure is getting to be almost as famous as the event itself. It is amazing just how many foreign falconers know all about him.

One of the arena events that was sadly missing last year was the falconers' dog parade and basic training sessions with Guy Wallace. These are always extremely entertaining and very well presented. The commentary that Guy gives is packed with tips gained from years of personal experience. Undoubtedly one of country sport's genuine characters, Guy was very much missed last year. But be sure, that this year he's back!

The trade stands will be there in force as usual with some new faces making their first-time appearance. Just about anything a falconer could ever desire in terms of equipment, books, videos, paintings, sculptures, food supplements, periodicals etc. etc. will be catered for; a hundred-and-one ways to spend your money.

Should you require any more information on this year's event then please telephone the Show Office on 01588 672708 during week-day office hours only.

**Bob Dalton**



**5th and 6th May 2002**  
**Chetwynd Park**  
**Newport**  
**near Telford**  
**Shropshire**



Frank Beebe demonstrating his Falcon Lure at last year's show

THE NATIONAL FALCONRY EVENT

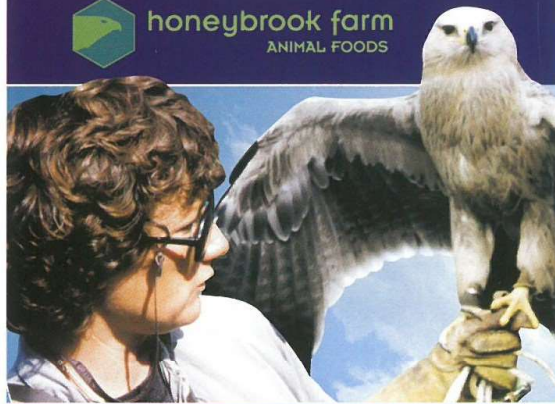


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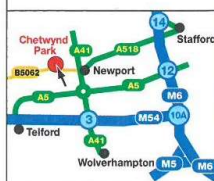
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 ON BOTH DAYS





# Andrew Ellis

artist/falconer  
or falconer/artist?

By Nick Kester

Andy Ellis's rise has been meteoric, and rightly so for his talent has long been acknowledged by his fiercest critics – falconers themselves. Although with less than a decade between first exhibition and current success, perhaps 'long' is something of an exaggeration. So what came first, the falconry or the art? ▶

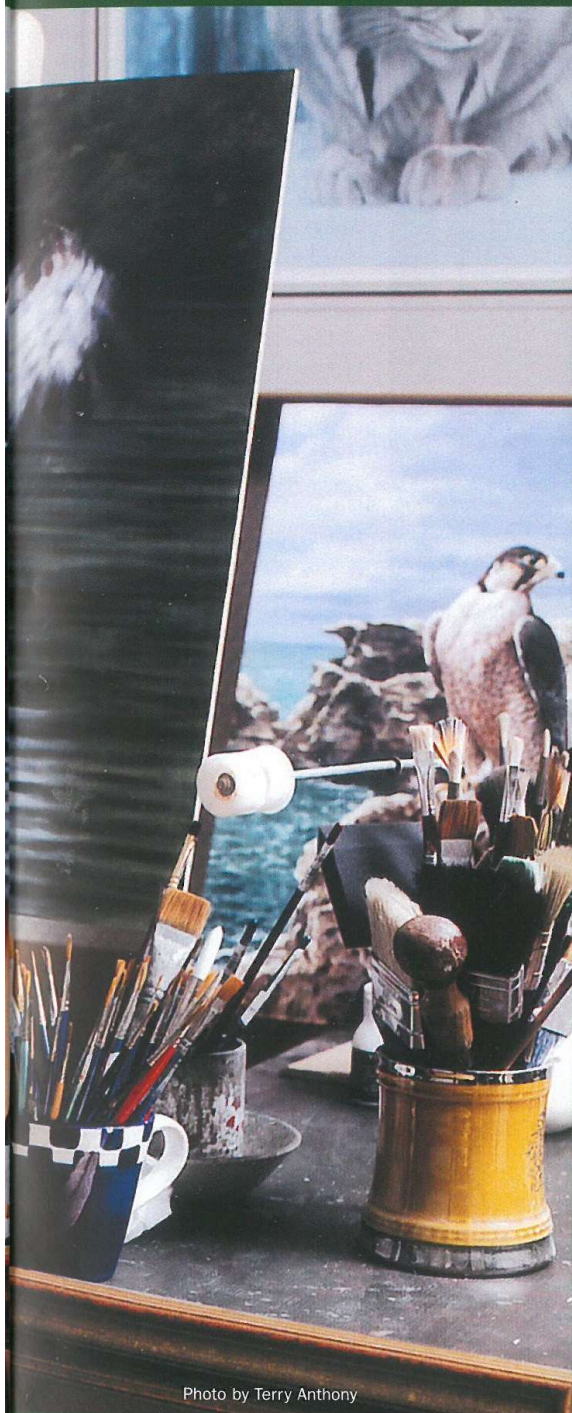


Photo by Terry Anthony

In truth Andy cannot tell you. His mother, as mothers do, claims his first ever drawing was of a bird; all hooked beak and staring eye. His father, who sensibly chilled a youthful ardour for hawk ownership until he was truly able to look after it, was bombarded with questions about every mousing kestrel on every motorway verge. That his eight-year-old school friend had a little owl in an aviary only added fuel to a passion in seemingly permanent denial.

Now thirty, with wife and child, Andy charts the last ten years in awed self-effacement for, like so many artists, he sees nothing unusual in his talent. Raised on the edge of open countryside behind Newton Abbot's (thoroughbred) racecourse in Devon, he had Dartmoor at his fingertips with its wild peregrines, buzzards and merlins, but it was not until twenty-three that he obtained his first falcon. Up till then he had relied on a mentor, professional falconer Geoff Pearson,

whom he had met at twelve and who, in the honourable tradition of the sport had taken the young artist under his wing, and for ten years had taught him the sport without the responsibility.

That first falcon was a lanner. Imprinted and tame hacked, Andy thought he would use it just for lure swinging until its fourth season when he successfully attempted quarry in the form of moorhen and partridge.

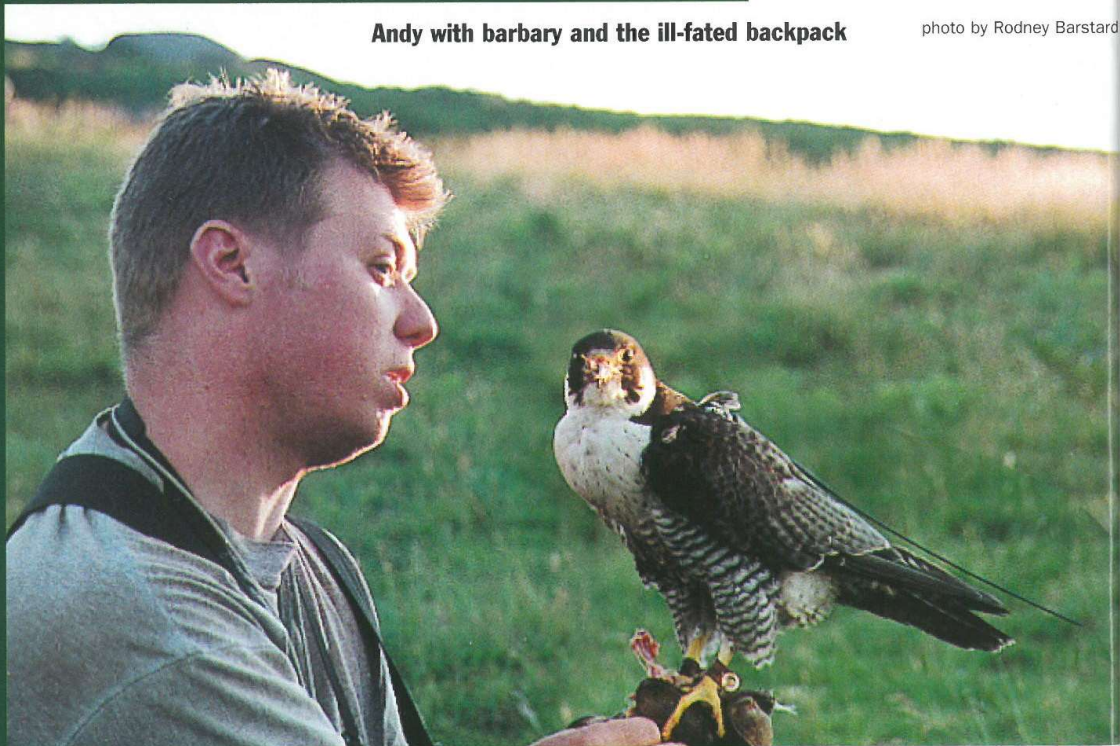
*"It was a bit hit and miss," he admits. "Two head at the end of the season was a cause for celebration, but it fired me up for the real thing, which led to the barbary tiercel and snipe."*

Although the little falcon failed to bring one to book it was not for lack of effort says Andy: *"Being up to my shoulders in a bog (for which Dartmoor is notorious and somewhat perilous) clawing for a purchase with a falcon waiting-on mystified as to my actions, and frustrated by my failure to flush, was more frequent than I care to admit. I am as passionate about snipe as I am*

*about falconry and it is my desire to own a proven snipe hawk."*

Unfortunately the barbary suffered a foot injury that prematurely ended his career, but fate has a habit of showing her hand. In this case Dr Leonard Hurrell, who was hacking back an injured peregrine tiercel picked up as a passenger in poor condition. Returned to health, Leonard was unable to complete the release programme and presented Andy with a perfect opportunity. Fitted with a backpack transmitter by the authorities, the falcon was flown until he was deemed to be able to fend for himself. To achieve this, the season had to be extended and the quarry species broadened so that, when the day came, survival was as certain as was possible. Then fate turned the cards over one further time. The backpack proved his undoing. He was found caught up in a hedge, dead.

So it was time to concentrate on art and career. If the falconry was latent,



**Andy with barbary and the ill-fated backpack**

photo by Rodney Barstard



the painting most certainly wasn't. As a small boy, Andy would reserve *Hawks and Falcons of the World* from the local library, but they wouldn't let him take it out. So he would spend the days copying David Reid-Henry's illustrations until the book had to go back to central store. Shortly afterwards he discovered Tom Cade's book on falcons and Ron Digby's illustrations got the same treatment.

By now he had left school and was doing a foundation course (a general, try everything art course) at the local college throughout which his focus remained steadfastly on wildlife illustration. Andy wryly remembers the course tutor suggesting that he may not make it in wildlife art as the market was too competitive, so he should keep his options open! Needless to say the advice was ignored.

Each painting was taken to his mentor, Geoff Pearson, who was a ruthless critic. Then one day, after not

visiting for some time he arrived with the latest batch. He looked long and hard at each one, and said he couldn't fault them, so why not sell them.

This was just before the second ever UK Falconry Fair and, once again thanks to Geoff, he was put in touch with the late Peter Wainwright. Having no money, Andy persuaded Wainwright to give him a stand.

*"It was a long time ago and I was sworn to secrecy. I was on the end of a row next to another artist, Ken Wood, and I hung my paintings on a self-assembled frame with bailer twine. They were priced between £25 and £100 and I sold the lot."*

*"And this is important," stresses Andy. "It was falconers who bought them. They recognised my talents and have supported me here and in America, and then all over the world."*

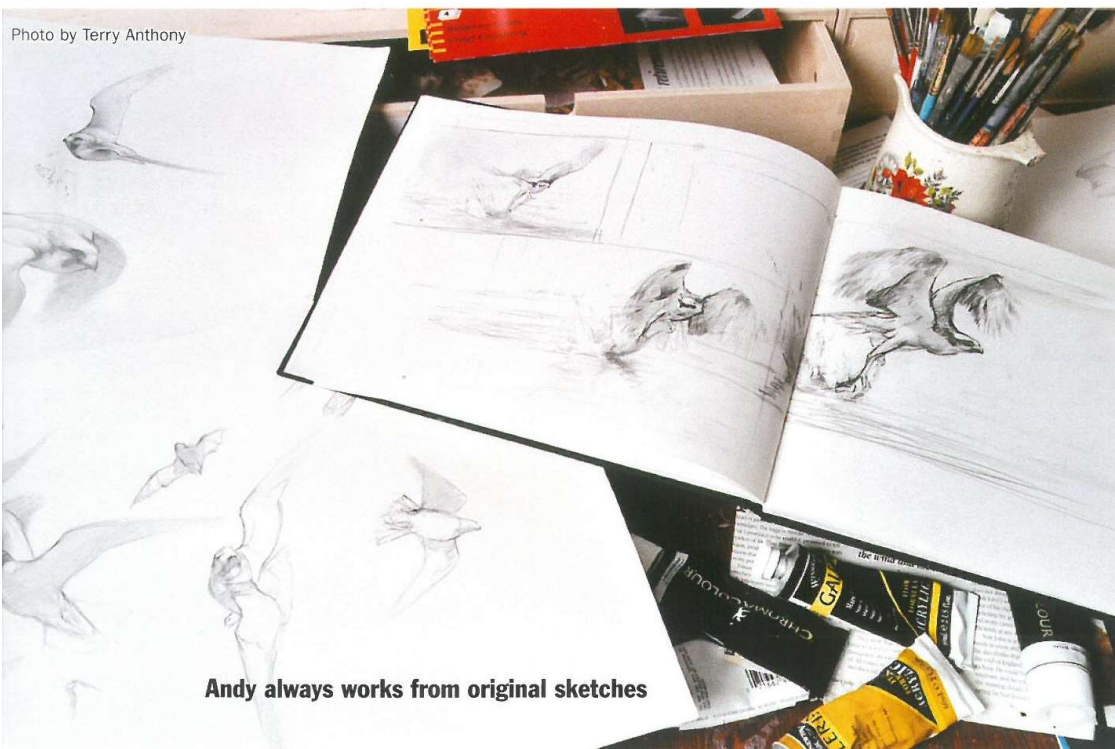
So who are his heroes, and where is he going? To the first, he answers predictably: *"From the past Lodge, Harrison, Thorburn and of course,*

*Reid-Henry, and presently, Alan Hunt and Canadian, Robert Bateman."*

*"Bateman is the man who has changed the face of modern wildlife art, putting animals in context with their environment. He is currently the best there is,"* says Ellis.

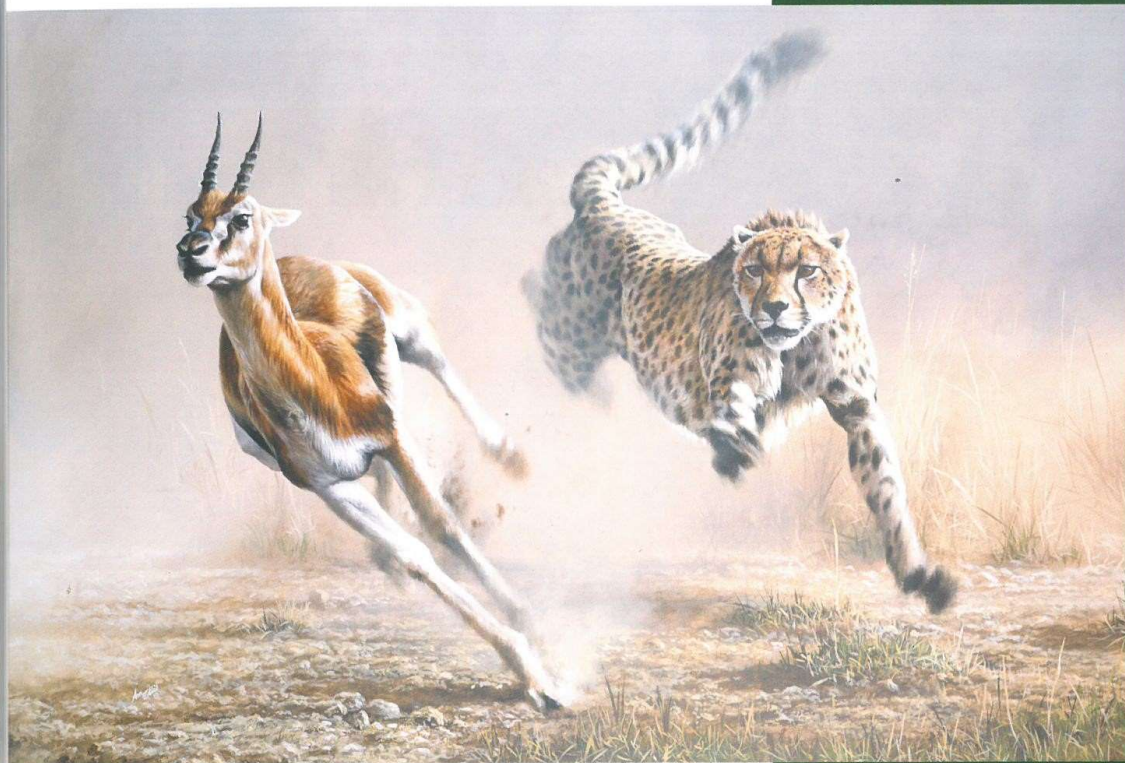
As to where he is going, well the answer is down his own road. He does not want to be seen as someone "in the style of..." but rather to create his own feel and touch. Painting exclusively in acrylics, he loves to capture his subjects in action but disliking the device that adds 'blur' to wingtips, he seeks to achieve this through the whole image. Two examples demonstrate it very well.

An early work for David Frank's *Falconer's Journal* was of an eagle rounding a rock crag in close proximity to fleeing rabbit. The owner of that eagle, Ronnie Moore, believes that no-one has captured the moment better. The eagle is so focused on its quarry that even though every other



**Andy always works from original sketches**





element is perfectly executed, the viewer's eye is instantly drawn into the eagle's fixation on the chase. Roll forward several years to a new piece, this time of a cheetah in full flow at gazelle. Like the eagle, the cat's head is gyroscopic to its body – regardless of the twists and turns of the hunt the eyes are once again locked onto the fleeing antelope. The similarity and impact of the two paintings is instant, even with differing subjects. Perhaps this is the appeal: talk to many falconers and they will often confess to a desire to hunt with these wonderful cats.

Both these paintings would do very well on my wall. But sadly they are out of my league. An Ellis is now fairly highly priced (the cheetah fetched £16,000 which was a record for a large work). As he moves into the gamebird, African wildlife arena, and with regular sales in America and the Middle East, the falconer who bought his early work may have made a sound investment.

But there is regret in Andy's voice when he tells me of his success. Because of his association with the Halcyon Gallery, London, commissions for falconer friends are a thing of the past and unlike Lodge or Munnings (if the comparison is not too invidious) he cannot dash off a work as a thank you for a great weekend's sport or even, as some artists have done, on the back of a menu in lieu of a bar bill. It is all too formal today. So he has more than a twinge of guilt at leaving the falconers of his formative years behind him (financially, at least). But he should be comforted by the great Alfred Munnings when, in maturity, he was challenged on the price of a sitting by a substantially wealthy financier. "*The price you are paying,*" said the undisputed king of equestrian art, "*reflects the years of small rewards and endless rejection.*" Price notwithstanding, the pleasure remains in the art, and I am more than satisfied to have two Andrew Ellis prints on my wall. ■

**Like the eagle on the opposite page, the cat's head is gyroscopic to its body – regardless of the twists and turns of the hunt the eyes are locked onto the fleeing antelope.**

# The Emirates



The highway was runway straight. Nose-to-tail in the slow lane a convoy of heavy trucks shifts the fertile 'sweet' sand from inland that will make the salt-laden coastal gardens bloom. The shade heat was close on 48°C and the tarmac hummed as noon approached. The heat haze created its own mirages as we struggled to keep up with our guide who was setting an alarming pace in his massive 4x4 with its blacked out windows. To the left and right nothing as far as you could walk in a week, always assuming you were insane enough. Suddenly we turned off and headed down a lesser strip, still apparently going nowhere. Then, hidden in a dip in the ground, a collection of modern single story buildings – one of which was the Emirates Falconers' Club. ▶



# Falconers' Club Abu Dhabi

by Nick Kester

photos by Terry Anthony



**M**ansour Al Mansouri, who manages the club, ushered us into the relief of air conditioning and an Aladdin's cave of falconry furniture. In the glass cases under the serving counter we counted over 1,200 hoods from the UK, Pakistan and locally made. Display cabinets held everything from camp beds and sleeping bags to bow-nets and lures. On the walls were kites, gloves, bags and blocks and, most interestingly, shoes. Specially designed to keep the sand out, light to wear and eminently functional: a sort of moccasin with a zip-up front. For the cold of Pakistan or the Arab mountains dense fur jackets, incongruous in the August heat. Telemetry, binoculars and knives of all description were carefully displayed for purchase. But who would buy?

The club, like much in the Middle East, enjoys royal patronage and was due to open in early September 2001 when the first shipment of sixty imported falcons was due from the UK. As we discovered during our visit to the Nad al Shiba facility in Dubai, these falcons were once again specially bred hybrids meeting the exacting demands of the modern Arab falconer.

The club hopes for 1,500 members in its first season. Members will meet at the club, plan hunting trips, and enjoy a substantial discount on goods. But commerciality is not its prime motive. Rather more important is education. There will be training days, leaflets and videos, says Mansour. A magazine is planned. But why is all this necessary? After all the sport is

ingrained in the Arab way of life, sons learn at their father's knee.

This is not 'how to' training, but advice on conservation and management. There is an over-riding desire amongst falconers in the UAE to better understand the ecology of the sport: to re-educate the tradition of wild trapped sakers; to have better veterinary care (the club has a falcon hospital next door); and to encourage sustainable use of the traditional quarry species. This is the mission of the Abu Dhabi Falconers' Club.

We asked Mansour how many falconers he thought there were in the UAE. His reply that there were at least 20,000 should not have surprised us. When you do the sums, you realise why education is vitally important. Many falconers will own more than one falcon: assume two. Then calculate some wastage each year due to loss or death. Factor in the traditional element who still hack back hawks at the end of the season, and you have a very high demand on the native population each autumn. Add in the other Arab countries that

## **There is an over-riding desire amongst falconers in the UAE to better understand the ecology of the sport**

practice falconry such as Saudi Arabia and the pressure on the native saker increases exponentially.

There has been a history of cynicism and envy from the jobbing western falconer as he views his compatriots in the UK and North America breeding or making furniture for these Middle Eastern markets. But when you visit the country, understand the dynamics, and do the sums, you soon realise what a service they provide. The input of European and American falconers, breeders and vets has been a largely unrecorded contribution to the future well-being of Arabian falconry. It is something we should be proud to have developed and promoted through our own love of the sport, and delighted that the Arabs have embraced with such enthusiasm. ■

**The comfortable *majalis* where members can meet and exchange ideas.**





Mansour Al Mansouri and falconer  
in the Club's showrooms



# THE SAGE GROUSE AS TROPHY QUARRY

by Charles H. Schwartz







Photo by Tom Ulrich - Oxford Scientific Films



photo by Kent L. Christopher

As any successful falconer will tell you, there is more to falconry than merely possessing a hawk. There is also the quarry and the country in which it lives. If he thinks about it at all, he will admit that his fondest memories are of hunting difficult quarry in spectacular country. It makes no difference if his stories are set on the gravel plains of Pakistan or the misty moors of Caithness; what is clear is that his most cherished recollections revolve around the pursuit of challenging quarry in an unspoiled environment.

The sage grouse of North America meet these criteria in every way. They are only found in the few remaining expanses of contiguous sagebrush desert in the intermountain west. Hunting them requires the use of wide-ranging pointers or setters that must run far and long, a big plus for any hawking experience. The speed and size of sage grouse, and their ability to withstand or avoid the falcon's blow and keep on flying never fail to impress the falconer and his friends. Their escape tactics range

from out-dancing the falcon on the bare ground to out-flying it in the open sky, and include everything imaginable in between. I spent four years figuring out how to catch a sage grouse with a falcon. By 1979, my peregrine had caught just a few, but they were honest winter grouse and I felt as though I had walked on the moon!

### Why are sage grouse trophy quarry?

#### Let me try to explain...

The most obvious reason is that they are big, very big for an upland game bird. The hens weigh close to three pounds and the cocks can weigh over six: that's twice the weight of a wild mallard and heavier than a houbara. Since most game hawks fly at weights considerably less than three pounds, the physics of the falcon's strike are radically different when the quarry is sage grouse. There isn't much give in these grouse. This isn't a puny teal or partridge you are flushing for your beloved game hawk. This is the burly sage grouse. Even gyrfalcons have killed themselves on 'the flying brick wall'.

I don't have enough information on sage grouse related falcon deaths to draw any meaningful conclusions, although I suspect that such accidents involve young falcons lacking experience with larger quarry. It is not hard to imagine that wonderful game hawk from Texas or California with 100 duck kills to its credit being brought to Idaho or Wyoming, lining up on a sage cock's centre of mass from 1,500 feet and never flying again. But grouse make mistakes too and the wrong move at the wrong time by the quarry could also cause disaster. Even experienced hawks flown routinely at grouse have accidents. By his fourth year, my gyrfalcon had learned to pound sage grouse and became quite successful at knocking them out of the air in fast, vicious stoops. This ►

## THE SAGE GROUSE AS TROPHY QUARRY

tactic was his undoing one cold winter day when I flushed a small group of adult cocks directly beneath him. He struck one very hard, ricocheting directly into the ground. The cock bird went down too, but both recovered and the chase was on. When the gyrfalcon returned, I discovered he had shattered his leg.

### So how big should a falcon be if you want to fly sage grouse?

In the 70s, many of us thought only gyrfalcons and their hybrids could do the job but contemporary American falconers have succeeded in developing grouse hawks out of much smaller falcons than was then believed necessary. Tiercel gyrfalcons, peregrines and even black shaheens and prairie falcons have taken winter sage grouse in grand style. These smaller hawks often develop special techniques to knock down or kill the grouse outright. These tactics include striking the head or neck, breaking a wing, or raking the grouse from beneath. When delivered from a high pitch, these manoeuvres are often dramatic and highly effective.

The successful hawking of such powerful quarry with small falcons speaks highly of the ingenuity and skill of American falconers, but I believe this is primarily a response to the relative unavailability of female gyrs and their hybrids. Captive breeding has made all falcons available, but the Arab market has had a tremendous negative impact on access to the larger falcons – at least for the average falconer. To quote Robert B. Berry in Emma Ford's book, *Gyrfalcon*, "More falcons and hawks are available to falconers worldwide now than at any time in history, but



Jalad with cock sage grouse

ironically the gyrfalcon has once again become the province of the privileged few – the wealthy and the elite."

Cost aside, the question lingers, "How big should a grouse hawk be?" Robert Ruark, the famous novelist and African big game hunter advised, "Use enough gun." He wasn't kidding. There are falconers who believe, and I am among them, that if you are going to hawk sage grouse routinely, throughout the winter, year in and year out, you must "use enough hawk." Training a big falcon such as a gyr or a gyr hybrid to take grouse in a stylish manner may pose even a greater challenge than training the tiercel, but once accomplished, is a joy to behold. One wonders what those same skillful American falconers could have done if they had had access to fifty ounce falcons? Indeed, the few who do possess such birds have created outstanding grouse hawks. Simply put, the risks of injuring your falcon while hawking sage grouse are never completely eliminated, but they may be greatly reduced by using a larger falcon.

In much of the American West, the grouse season for falconry begins in August or the first of September. This allows a falconer to enter a young eyass on small and inexperienced

poult, exactly as happens in the wild. It is hot at this time of year and the hens lead their broods to moist riparian areas and irrigated hayfields for the water, green forbs and protein rich insects that the youngsters need to grow quickly. When flushed, the hens fly short distances to entice predators away from their broods. The young grouse fly poorly. This is not the time or method of choice for training a high-flying game hawk, but for instilling the desire to kill, it will do. By late September, the nights are cooler and the young grouse are almost grown. They are still concentrated around moist areas. They fly much better then and the eyass's hundred-foot pitch may pay off in a few easy kills. Not much to see, but good for a young hawk's morale.

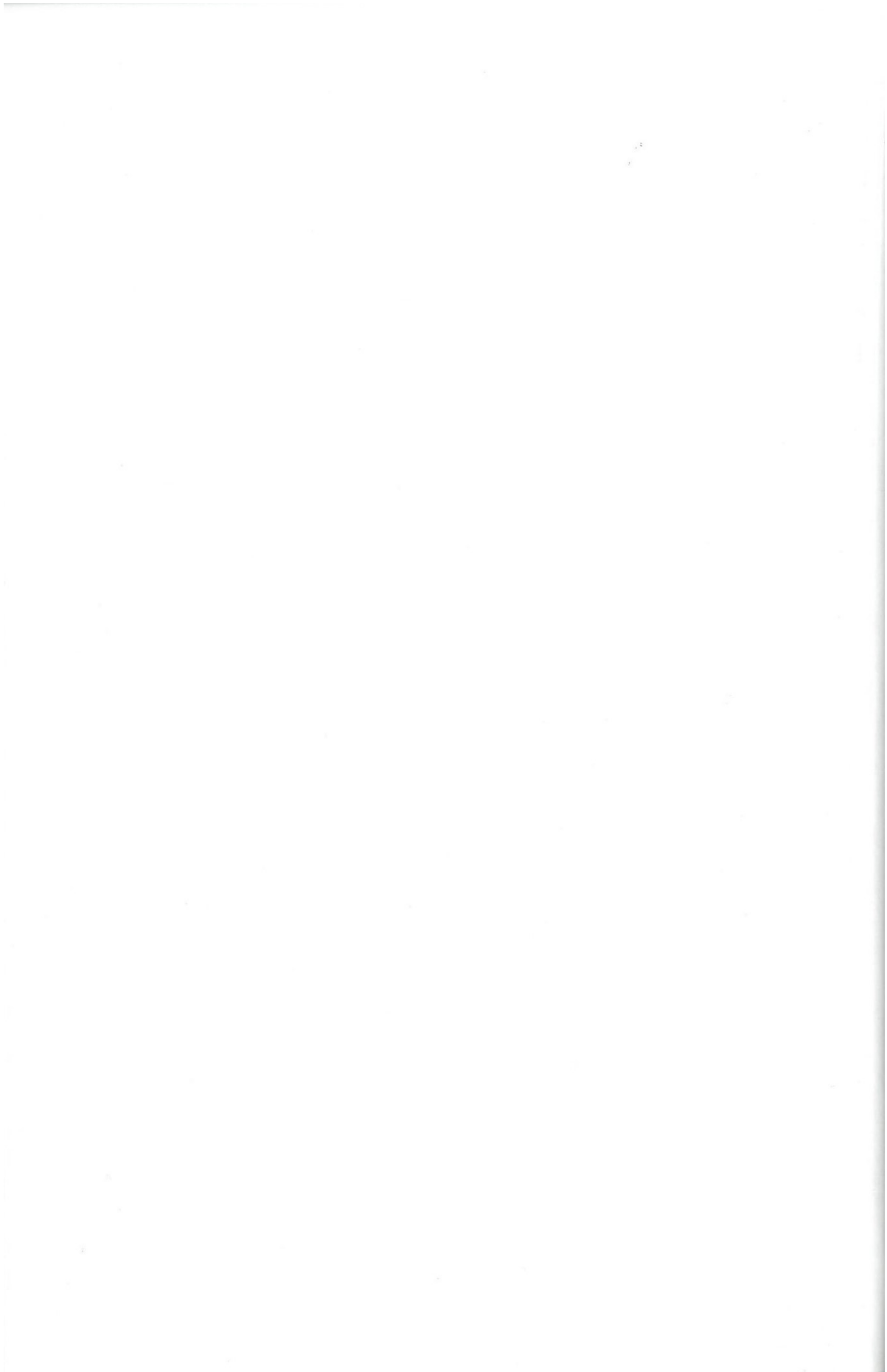
More and more modern falconers are skipping the traditional practice of early entering in favour of conditioning their young hawks using soaring, balloon or kite techniques to build tremendous fitness and pitch. Then in October, when the weather is fine and the grouse are flying strong, they enter their hawks from impressive heights, sometimes taking grouse in the grand style on their very first flights at game. Imagine the sense of accomplishment these



GYR/PEREGRINE ON SAGE GR



ROUSE *by* ANDREW ELLIS



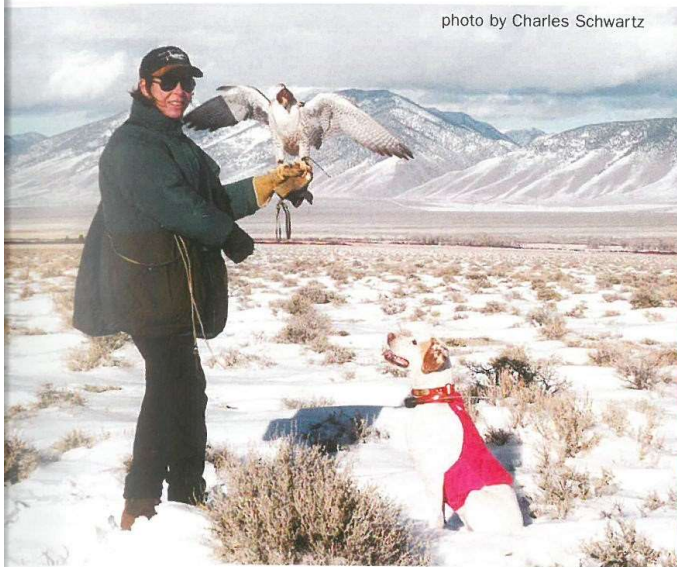


photo by Charles Schwartz

**Marty, Jalad and Spook**

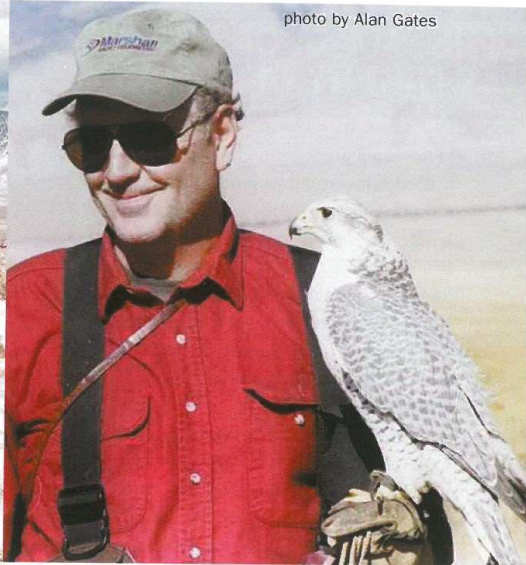


photo by Alan Gates

**Charles with Jalad**

falconers must feel!

Unfortunately, October is also the month of dispersal. Sage grouse move away from their summer brood rearing areas and out onto the desert, switching to their principle food, sagebrush leaves. This paucity of grouse is further aggravated by several weeks of gunning pressure that scatters the birds. Would-be grouse hawkers need to enter their falcons by the end of October at the latest because by mid-November, the sage grouse changes into a truly trophy quarry - the fabled "winter grouse."

Why this change? I believe it is primarily related to temperature but the explanation is probably more complicated than that. Sage grouse are highly adapted to survive in cold, harsh climates. Indeed, their large size may have been shaped by Ice Age environments. Bigger birds have less surface area in relation to their weight than smaller birds, which means it is easier for them to keep warm. Scientific studies have also shown that grouse mortality from all causes is extremely low during the winter months, which support falconers' observations that grouse are tougher to catch in November, December and January than during the warmer months. They fly faster and farther,

and they make cunning use of vegetation, terrain, snow, flock behaviour, and best of all - the open sky.

The sage grouse is adapted in other ways too. The fused bones of its pelvic girdle are as solid as the top of a table. They can withstand enormous blows from the falcon and continue to stay airborne. I have watched peregrines hit them savagely and immediately land, obviously a painful experience. Inexperienced hawks typically try to strike the rear end of a departing grouse and get nothing but a foot full of feathers for their efforts. Grouse must be hit up front for maximum effect. When the falconer begins to notice that his hawk's kills possess complete tails with eighteen feathers, he knows it has learned to hit the forward part of the grouse.

If the grouse are flying close to the ground and are about to be struck, or if the falcon taps one down, they usually fall unharmed and immediately right themselves, ready to outsmart the falcon. I have watched grouse in fully exposed situations such as open stony ground or hard crusted snow, repeatedly evade the falcon's stoops by hiding behind its own flared tail. Does the flash of the tail distract the falcon, or is the falcon

too dumb to figure it out? Perhaps what the falcon recognises as prey, momentarily disappears, confusing it. At any rate, the scenario is always the same: the falcon tires of stooping and attempts to grab the grouse on the ground. The grouse blows out in a blistering flush, leaving the flustered falcon to ponder what went wrong.

A grouse that has been feathered in the stoop and is under pursuit probably has a lot on its mind. Its choice of suitable escape may be a function of its lead over the hawk. Injured grouse stay low looking for a place to bail while unharmed grouse seek the sky and climb rapidly. Immature grouse, even males, will give up sooner than adults. Perhaps the falcon more easily intimidates youngsters? Adult cocks can take a tremendous blow and keep on flying, but they are vulnerable to a bind during their ponderous lift off. Adult hens are probably the most difficult grouse to take, as they are fast, adroit, and cunning. This is as it should be, as they represent the bulk of next spring's production.

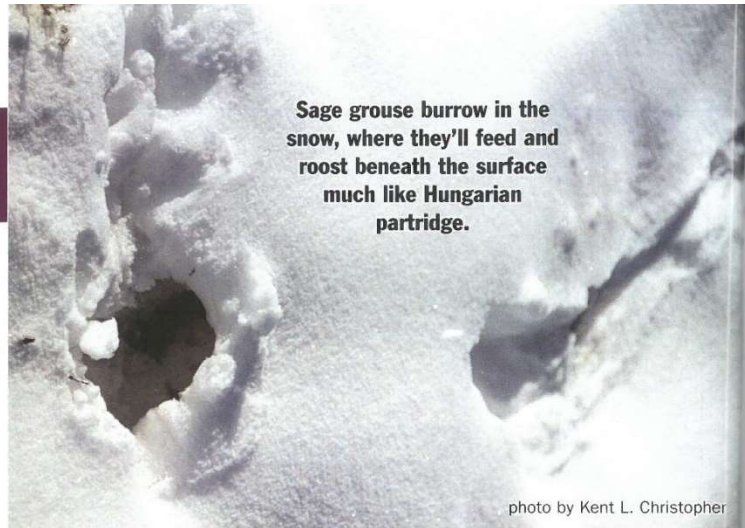
Sage grouse know an entire valley or basin like you and I know our living room. I once watched a flock of thirty-five birds fly the entire length of a basin and turn, only to disappear out ►

## THE SAGE GROUSE AS TROPHY QUARRY

of the binoculars in another direction - last seen over a thousand feet in the sky. The distance they travelled while I watched was at least eight miles. I couldn't have followed them if they hadn't been flying against a background of snow-covered mountains.

Grouse are also intimately aware of the proximity of prime escape cover, even if it is miles away. My falcons have caught three or four grouse in the same twenty square foot patch of wild rose over the years, the only such cover in the area, even when the flights originated a mile away and out of sight of said thicket. I have watched pursued grouse fly past hundreds of yards of broken lava ridges only to drop in full career into a specific fissure. My falcon has killed grouse three times in exactly the same crevasse in a huge lava field. It is similar with thicker clumps of sagebrush, which all look the same to us, but to the grouse, one seems safer than the other. Many flights end in creek bottoms where the grouse escapes by burrowing into the base of a willow thicket. Grouse have even resorted to badger holes when hard pressed!

A few inches of snow improves the falcon's success on knocked down grouse, probably because she can see her quarry better, but once the snow depth reaches ten inches or more, it becomes prime escape cover in its own right. Grouse will burrow in it, feeding and roosting beneath the surface much like Hungarian partridge. My dogs have great difficulty establishing accurate points under these conditions, and needless to say, making a timely flush in deep snow can be exhausting for the falconer. Grouse tend to dump to avoid the stoop, crashing into a soft drift and frustrating the falcon. This can lead to a lower pitch on the next flush, which intimidates the grouse even more, and one is caught up in a



circle of compounding frustration as the grouse refuses to fly fairly and makes the fool of the falcon. A tail-chase is inevitable and pitch deteriorates if this sort of hunting continues. The solution, I think, is to give the falcon a break and fly it at ducks or released racing pigeons for a few days to restore its pitch.

Deep snow and sub-zero (F) temperatures force sage grouse to congregate in huge flocks in areas where the sagebrush is high enough to meet their needs for food and cover. These flocks may consist of several hundred birds or more. Approaching them is difficult because so many eyes are watching. The grouse seem very nervous when bunched like this and dogs are next to worthless, causing more problems than they solve. Unhooding the falcon is not a good idea either, as she will surely spot a grouse and immediately pursue it. One tactic that has worked for me is to simply flush the flock and wait a bit for the scent to clear. Then put the falcon in the air and release the dogs. There are usually a few grouse that have held back and if the dogs can sort through the myriad of odours to find one, you are in business.

Once the snow gets so deep that the dogs can't work at all, much of the excitement goes out of grouse hawking because the dogs always make the day, regardless of the falcon's flight. One can run the dogs down old slots made in the snow on previous trips, but sooner or later, a tough winter

shuts down all travel, even by fully chained four-wheel drive vehicle. Many grouse hawkers quit at this stage, but a few struggle on. One can spot grouse in winter, scanning known wintering areas with high-powered optics, much like searching for big game. Once the birds are located, a flight can be cobbled together, but stout legs and good lungs will be required, not to mention a patient and hard working falcon that will wait-on long and high. A lengthy tail-chase can cure one of this madness forever.

Of all the ploys of the wily grouse, escape to the sky is its most awesome and dramatic tactic. This is common at 6,000 feet and above where the vegetation is short and sparse and escape coverts few and far between. The grouse that live in these areas are constantly preyed upon by golden eagles and are used to flying long distances to avoid them. They will quite literally fly out of the binoculars when flushed. In these situations the grouse seem to know they must "fly or die." A first rate game hawk will get one good shot and perhaps a second if her throw-up is high enough. I have occasionally seen a grouse taken on the third stoop. Generally speaking, if the grouse isn't killed on the first stoop, it will escape.

The subject of long flights needs some discussion. Sage grouse rise in a rocking flight typical to the species and usually take whatever beating the falcon can dish out while rapidly gaining speed and height. They are

not as nimble at evading the blow as other kinds of prairie grouse, but they do jink and dodge and often avoid being hit at some cost in initial acceleration. Many of the peregrines I saw flown in the 70s, and even my own peregrine, would typically strike a grouse and chase it for a quarter-mile before returning at a higher pitch ready for another stoop. Gyrs and gyr hybrids though, particularly the experienced ones, think that any grouse they have touched is theirs and will go the distance with it. Kills usually occur within a half-mile but they may be as much as two miles away. My present falcon once tail-chased a grouse over four miles! These lengthy flights are incredible demonstrations of fitness and determination - both the falcon's and the quarry's - but tail-chases can end in disaster due to the ubiquitous presence of golden eagles in sage grouse country. Better a clean kill nearby or none at all.

A high and commanding pitch is the best solution to tail-chasing and


should be the goal of all who aspire to hawk this quarry successfully. In fact, it is the only safe and sane way to hawk sage grouse. The quarry has more time to reach full speed and rise high enough above the earth for the falcon to dive straight through them, rather than levelling out and striking from behind. The blow is administered up front, where it does the most damage. An experienced falcon that waits-on high and slightly wide can make it look very easy, shooting through the flock and throwing up on the other side as the struck grouse tumbles to the ground. It is a goal worthy of the work it entails.

Late winter weather varies greatly from year to year. Sometimes the low temperatures prevail well into February with clear days of unbearable clarity. If you can still get around, the hawking is superb. Then again, a warm Chinook wind can quickly change the desert roads into impassable ruts of mud and goo. In either case, when the cocks begin to acquire their breeding colour, it is

time to quit. They become much easier to find as they gather around their traditional leks and killing one with a falcon no longer gives the same satisfaction. Somehow it feels like cheating. The season is over.

Sage grouse are only found in vast and lonely landscapes, stunning in their beauty and harsh in their extremes. For the past twelve years, Jalad and I have travelled to these places and hunted these wonderful creatures throughout the winter months. In that span of time we have outlived one brace of pointers and started a second. We have struggled too, for balance between style and success. Along the way, we learned a great deal about sage grouse and the ways in which they live, but what we really discovered is each other. We have developed that comfortable understanding that only comes from a thousand days afield - man, hawk and dogs hunting as one. But in the end it is always the grouse's performance, and we their cheering audience. ■

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# The

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# Festival

The second Annual Golden Eagle Festival of the Berkut Association held by the Community Association for the Preservation of Kazakh Traditions & Conservation of Golden Eagles. October 6, 7, 8th. 2001.

Words and photos by Alan Gates

Aralbai stepped from the warmth of the *ger*, the cool morning air had a sharpness of the coming winter. The sky was bright with the rays of the sun, but its warmth had not reached this small hamlet of gers as they lay in the shadow of the Altai mountains.

His eagle still slept perched on her *tugir* (three-legged wooden perch) a few yards from the ger, her hooded head tucked between the feathers on her back. Armanbek,

Aralbais' son, arrived with their horses, he had been out early on the steppe looking for their herd whose nocturnal grazing could have them wandering up to twenty kilometres from their encampment.

An early start was needed as it was a two-day ride west to Olgii, the capital of the Kazakh's province.

Aralbai had planned to enter his eagle in the Mongolian Eaglehunters' Festival which was to be held in three days time. They would travel

light, food and accommodation could be had from fellow herders along the way, but a bag of ten fox skins was tied to the saddle, these were to be payment for a new saddle Aralbai had commissioned from the maker outside Olgii.

I was trying my best to sleep, the drone of the twin propellers was all pervasive and stifled everything but short conversation, the in-flight movie seemed to be cancelled, but try as I may, all that I could manage ▶



Close-up shows the silver decoration on the eagle's hood and jesses. This eaglehunter on a white horse and in white sheepskin clothing is very effective at hunting in the snow.



One of the smartest turnouts. This was the most intricate *Baldarks* (arm support) I saw at the Festival.

on this four hour flight was a sort of twilight zone.

This was my forth aeroplane flight on a journey that had lasted the best part of a week, Olgii is a hard place to get to.

For me, the attraction to attend this second Eagle Festival of The Mongolian Eaglehunters' Association was compelling, although trying to find out much about its agenda had been elusive. Still, the thought of rubbing shoulders with fifty or so wild Kazakh eaglehunters was what my sort of dreams were made of.

To visit the Kazakh region of western Mongolia had been a life-long dream of mine and one that I had managed to accomplish in November 2000.

It had been an extraordinary trip and a chance to live and hunt with Kakiyat, a nomadic herder/eaglehunter and his family. A once-in-a-lifetime experience, or so at the time I had thought.

Canat Cheryzdaa, my Kazakh guide was to blame, he planted the seeds the first moment we met, though at the time neither of us knew it.

We had hardly left the rough airstrip when he informed me that I should have been there the month before, "well, hell thanks, now you tell me", was my initial reply. Over sixty eaglehunters had gathered together for the first Eaglehunters' Festival, Canat informed me. "Sixty, how many eaglehunters are there in this region?", and yes I was a little peeved to have missed such an event by just a month. Canat thought there was over six hundred eaglehunters in the province, both these figures impressed me as I had no idea that hunting with eagles still had such a strong following in any of the Kazakh regions.

I soon filed this snippet of information into memory and proceeded with the adventure to hand, but back home, reliving countless memories of the trip, those few words

of Canat's kept coming back to me. The two of us kept in contact through e-mail and on occasion I asked him for more details about the festival, and would it be repeated.

Mongolia teaches one the art of patience and e-mailing Canat is no exception, he is a very busy and successful entrepreneur. When he is not involved in guiding clients about the countryside, he is in Russia buying thousands of tons of vegetables and shipping them back to his warehouse in Olgii.

In truth, Canat knew little more about the Festival than he had told me when we first met, it just took me many e-mails and a good few months to figure this out.

Little by little I was being drawn into the picture as I gathered snippets of information from various contacts and friends. Kent Madin from Boojum Expeditions was holed-up in Mongolia and became a central hub in my e-mailing quest. As things started to



move along apace I found myself checking out flight schedules which usually indicated that I was hooked and on the path of no return.

Photographs and enthusiasm from my previous visit to Mongolia had infected both John and Laila Green who are keen falconers living in the South of England. Laila initiated the idea that John would love such a trip. John, immersed in the images, nodded in agreement, yes this was the sort of once-in-a-lifetime adventure he would enjoy and I was to let them know if I ever planned to return.

Now it was time to drop the bombshell, that in fact I planned to return in a few months time, and John was welcome to accompany me. After a few days of financial and vacation juggling, John was ready to confirm that he would journey with me.

I was pleasantly surprised that at such short notice he was up for the adventure. Ahead of us now was a mountain of preparation, the only advantage was, I had done this once before and had a bit of an idea

what to expect.

I mapped out an itinerary with Kent Madin of Boojum in Mongolia who was in close contact with Canat. I wanted to arrive in Olgii a day or so before the Festival, enjoy the three days of the Festival, and then depart with some of the eaglehunters for a few days serious hunting.

Kent was able to discuss this idea of serious hunting with Canat over a few beers, Canat invited us to hunt with one of the best eaglehunters he knew, on a 'long hunt'.

The long hunt meant riding out into the mountain foothills following and hunting foxes. It also involved sleeping on the hill for three to four days. This certainly sounded serious enough for me, and, although not quite knowing the conditions and how low the temperatures would fall at night, I was still game. John impressed me with his willingness to follow with what I suggested to him, and his faith that I could produce an enjoyable lifetime adventure.

It takes a special type of pilot to

land at Olgii's airstrip. MIAT the Mongolian National Airline seemed to employ such guys, unlike the sissy Korean Air pilots we encountered, who dithered about on the tarmac on a beautiful sunny morning, wondering if they dare fly across the Chinese mountain ranges.

As our rapid decent made my ears pop, we hurtled towards the airstrip in the base of this soupbowl area surrounded by mountains. MIAT pilots probably double as the country's fighter pilots if ever called to arms and they were more than likely trained in Mig fighters. Still, they knew their terrain and dropped this Antonov aircraft right in front of the little concrete building that was the terminal.

As we clambered out of the cramped interior we were warmly hugged and greeted by Canat and his wife Ika. This was my second visit in just under a year and I felt at ease in the stark, harsh surroundings of Olgii.

Our baggage was collected from the aircraft and delivered to where we ▶



**Procession in the Stadium.**



**Judging presentation.**

stood in the dusty car parking area on the open back of a Russian truck. Its design seemed to pre-date Second World War, but clearly it was a reliable workhorse as they were a common municipal vehicle throughout the area.

Canat transported us to his town apartment which he had rented to us for our stay in Olgii. Ika busied herself in preparing a meal whilst we made ourselves at home. That afternoon Canat drove John and I out of town into the mountainous countryside. It was an opportunity to get out, stretch our legs, breath some air and photograph the stupendous vistas.

The following day dawned with news from Canat that a few eaglehunters had ridden into town. We hurried breakfast and got out onto the streets heading for the offices of the Eaglehunters' Association. There I met Medeukhan, head of the Association, who was very pleased indeed that two falconers had come from England. He was even more impressed with the copy of *International Falconer* I handed him with the article of my stay with Kakiyat.

Medeukhan was genuinely interested in our eagle falconry in the UK, warmly entertaining and actively encouraged us to offer our ideas and opinions about the Festival throughout the following days. That afternoon Medeukhan visited our apartment with a video tape of the first Festival,

it also had some hunting sequences, filmed by a professional French camera crew, of Khunakhan, who is thought to be the oldest eaglehunter at seventy-eight years and still working an eagle in this province.

Throughout my stay in Olgii I felt a warm affinity between us, at times we communicated through gestures, laughter and facial expressions, frustrated by the thought that if either one of us could communicate in the other's tongue how much stronger our friendship would have developed.

At last, day one dawned, Saturday 6th. October. The official opening, registration, and the first of the three competitions were to be held today in the sports stadium at 10am.

As we walked through town, small groups of mounted eaglehunters were making their way through the traffic. Leaving the hubbub of the centre behind, we walked on through the suburb area, where the houses were small, wooden and adobe type. Each house was surrounded by a mud-plastered adobe wall, enclosing a dusty yard in which I occasionally spied a perched hooded eagle. All the eaglehunters came from the countryside and were staying either with relatives or friends in town. As we approached the entrance to the stadium, mounted groups of eaglehunters were converging on it from all sides.

Aralbai and Armanbek rode through the entrance, their journey had taken two days and they had

hunted along the way. Armanbek carried a live fox, its muzzle tied shut, their eagle had caught it without damaging it seriously and they had kept it for possible use in the Festival.

The Stadium was a walled running track with three concrete terraces, one of them covered. In front of this stadium three musicians were setting up their equipment, although Kazakh, they looked very western and totally out of place in this remnant of Soviet architecture.

My attention focused on one of the terraces where a gathering of children surrounded a number of eaglehunters seated on the concrete steps. Their horses stood patiently in line in front of the terrace, and a number of hooded eagles were perched on the first concrete step whilst the eaglehunters chatted together.

Canat introduced me as the first Western eaglehunter to visit their province. There were a few comments as they looked me up and down, no doubt trying as best they could to imagine how this strange Westerner could fly eagles. I was ushered into the group and shook hands with Khunakhan who was the seventy-eight year-old star of the video Medeukhan had shown us.

As I sat down close to him Canat translated our conversation, another eaglehunter brought a hooded eagle close to me. I instinctively plunged my hand into her breast feathers to feel her keel, she bent her head down and removed a piece of flesh from the back of my hand with her beak. As she bit me for the second time, I rolled my hand to release my skin from her grip. I then gripped one of the eagle's thigh muscles to check her condition. Removing my hand from her feathers one or two of the on-lookers winced a little at the blood flowing from the small wound, but the eaglehunters smiled and gently nodded. Quite unwittingly it seems I had passed some sort of initiation.

The next thing I did cemented my



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friendship with every single eaglehunter at the festival. I always like to enter into some sort of conversation before asking permission to take a photograph of anyone on my travels.

Khunakhan was more than happy to oblige and pose for a photograph, as soon as I had clicked the shutter I quickly repeated the shot with an instant picture camera. Handing the

festival. It gave me a lot of satisfaction to give a small memento of the festival to each and every one of the eaglehunters who attended.

The first day's competition was for presentation, of the eaglehunter's attire, the eagle's furniture, the eagle herself, the Kazakh horse, and the horse's tack.

The Kazakhs' love of silver was very dominant in the decoration of

gave marks by holding aloft a numbered card. The points from each competition would be added together to find the overall winner of the festival.

It was quite chaotic with mounted eaglehunters milling about waiting to be called in front of the judges. Most of the spectators were mixed up amongst the eaglehunters in a melee of horses and eagles. Overpowering



**Berkut eagles perched-up having completed the day's event.**

still emerging picture to Khunakhan the interest from the onlooking eaglehunters was electric. Before I could step back I was besieged by eaglehunters and assembled crowd gesturing for me to take their picture. Thankfully, Canat was able to regain some order and I proceeded to explain that I would first take my own photographs of each pose then follow with an instant picture for the eaglehunter to keep. Their enthusiasm overwhelmed me, I had the full attention of every eaglehunter throughout the three days of the

saddles, harnesses, eagle hoods (*Tomaya*) and jesses (*Ayak-Bau*). Their craftsmanship was evident in the intricately carved and decorated arm supports (*Baldak*) whilst the embroidery skills of their womenfolk showed in the exuberantly coloured stitchwork on the food bags (*jimdorba*).

The four judges were seated in the middle of the stadium and marked each contestant as they came forward to ride past the judges' viewing position from the left, from the right and then straight on. The judges each

the proceedings was the amplified sound from the three-piece group assembled in front of the main terrace. Two guitars and a keyboard bashed out a hybrid sound of country and western, Kazakh style. It gave this first day of the festival a surreal quality, a bizarre soundtrack to such exotic images.

Day two was held out of town, about forty kilometres into the mountains. There are no roads just rough tracks. When we arrived in Canat's 'jip', events were about to start. Today's contest was 'flying to the



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**Manai, winner of the second Mongolian Eaglehunters' Festival.**

fist', which involved an eagle being perched on the rocks marked with a red flag half way up the mountain. The eaglehunter was mounted, and positioned about one hundred yards out from the base of the mountain. When given the signal he would gallop away from the mountain and towards the assembled crowd and judging panel with his arm outstretched and screaming for his eagle with lung bursting volume.

The judges had a stopwatch to help calculate response but style also had a great bearing on the winning of points. Some eagles left their position and maintained their height from the mountain, flew directly over the galloping eaglehunter, closed-up and stooped to the fist, very impressive. Others dropped off the rocks and flew hell-for-leather after the fleeing horseman, sweeping up over the horse's back to land on the hunter's arm. Some never left the starting perch, probably cocking an alula feather to her eaglehunter.

With over forty eagles required to go through this test, the flights were

varied and interesting, the weather was cool, the sky was bright and the backdrop was spectacular. It was a wonderful opportunity to take as many photographs as I could.

Day three was held in the same place, the test for the day was 'flying to the dragged fox lure'. This time, the eagles were flown from the top of the mountain, from my position near the judges the mounted eaglehunters on the skyline looked like toy cavalry soldiers.

Walkie-Talkies kept the proceedings running smoothly, informing each mounted assistant holding an eagle when he could remove that eagle's hood. Far below, her master raced across towards the crowd dragging a fox lure through the dust. Some eagles took to the soar to assess the neighbourhood, once they had a 'looksee' they would swoop down on the lure. Others came over the crowd and some of the hooded perched eagles that had completed this test. This caused quite a bit of excitement as the odd one dived into the perched eagles. This caused little damage other than ruffled feathers, as there was always someone to plunge into the melee and quickly separate eagles.

One eagle came in low as though she was going to take the lure but continued her purposeful flight straight into the crowd. A great rugby type scrum ensued which caused much amusement. I later learnt that the eagle had grabbed a child, though I did not find out if the child thought it was so funny. None of these eagles were trained entertainment birds, all were hardened fox killers.

At the end of the day the judges were deliberating over the total points scored, they wanted to select the top three for the following morning's event. This would involve a flight from the mountain top at a live released fox. I had heard that in the previous year this event had resulted in a great eagle punch-up as a number

of them swooped onto the fox. I was not at all interested in witnessing this event and felt it was the festival's achilles' heel as far as attracting greater numbers of Western falconers to future festivals.

It was not sport as is defined in the West, but this was not the comfortable West and differing cultures had to be respected. Still, I would have to pick my words carefully when asked to give my assessment to the Eaglehunters' Association on my return. As it turned out, sense prevailed, the judges picked the top three as opposed to the top five in the previous year. When the fox was released the first eagle to respond was released the other two were held back.

Mana, distinct throughout the festival mostly for wearing a chestnut horse coat was a clear winner by double the points of the second place. Aralbai came forth but we did not attend the presentations as we needed to travel to Aralbai's ger and arrive before nightfall.

Armanbek rode home with both horses, Aralbai swaddled his eagle and travelled with us in Canats four wheel 'jip'. It was a hard long ride but we would make it before nightfall. We needed a good night's sleep, as the following day we were heading out for four days mounted hunting in the hills on the 'long hunt'. ■

Should anyone wish to experience a Golden Eagle Festival or hunting with the Mongolian Kazakh Eaglehunters useful contacts are:

Canat Cheryazdaa,  
KAZTOUR,  
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Ulgii  
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# CALIFORNIA HAWKING CLUB MEET

BAKERSFIELD, 2001

Report by Dave Jackson

Photos by Terry Anthony

Bob Ambruster

With family circumstances preventing me from attending the 2001 North American Falconers' Association meet in Lamar, Colorado, I decided to get my annual fix of the US at the California Hawking Club meet in Bakersfield. It proved a good decision to make.

For those readers not familiar with NAFA or CHC meets, they're packed with quality exposure to falconry, and they always have first class presentations and workshops in the evenings. The talk given by Mike Jones DVM on his travels to Arabia, was a great start to the meet.

My experiences at previous NAFA meets have taught me to avoid rushing around attempting to cram in as much hawking as possible. Instead, I try to be more selective, and get out with individuals that I know fly their birds to a very high level. Thursday morning saw me walking out across the scrubby landscape with Craig and Kim Golden, three or four other falconers and their team of Harris' hawks. Jackrabbits were the intended



Kim Golden

quarry, and several were brought to bag, although Craig explained that the Jacks were in a down cycle, and were not present in their normal numbers. Nevertheless, the 'whooping' and 'hollering' which accompanied each flight was sufficiently frequently heard to testify to the good sport enjoyed. I spent a good deal of the

time in the company of Andrew Barnes from Zimbabwe, and found him an excellent and informed guy. It was great to hear his tales of flying black sparrowhawks, passage lanners and the various other African raptors that they have at their disposal over there.

As the hunt wound down, Kim



(however, blink and you miss 'em!), but it was also excellent to see Kim's reaction to the kill. She was back inside the car with sharpy and kill in an instant. That lady can move, believe me.- Interestingly, practically nobody saw what we were doing, and those that did, raised not even an eyebrow.

It was a great example of how to keep the accipiter killing regularly, even with limited time.

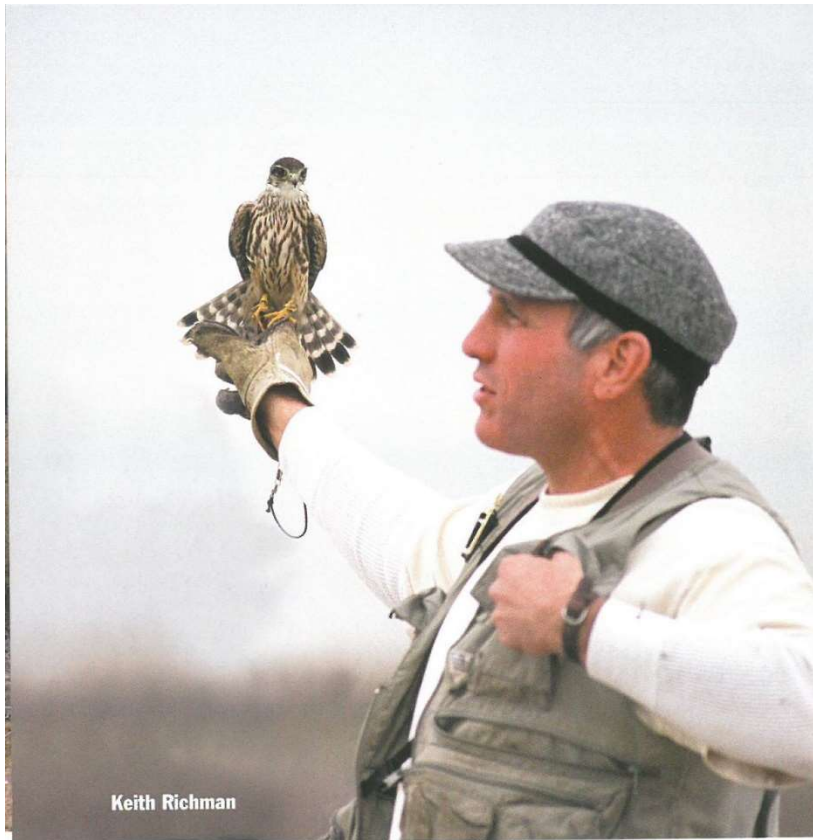
The evening presentation for the 27th was one which I'd been anticipating for some time. Steve



explained that she was taking off alone to find some flights for her female sharp-shinned hawk. Terry and I took the opportunity to join her, the venue for the hawking, the local shopping mall!!!. As we made our way to the mall, Kim explained that the vast car parks surrounding the shopping malls were great habitat for many quarry

birds, and that by effectively using the car as a blind for obtaining slips, several flights could be found for the bird in a reasonable time period. Sure enough, by slowly cruising around the parked cars, several flights were undertaken, and three head of quarry taken in short but dynamic bursts of speed. It was great to watch the flights

Layman was to deliver a talk on 'operant conditioning', and having met Steve in Dodge City, Kansas some years before, and kept in contact with him via e-mail, this was one I was especially keen to attend. Steve did not disappoint and kept the audience enthralled with his knowledge, experience and enthusiasm. Should ▶



Keith Richman

the opportunity present itself, I would encourage anyone connected with falconry to hear Steve give forth his knowledge. In addition to the talk, he continued the next morning with a demonstration of operant conditioning and fitness training, using a female Cooper's hawk. Watching Steve demonstrate, among other things, 'fist drops' and 'restrained pursuits' with this most difficult of raptors was a revelation, and left the audience spell-bound.

A great plus for me when attending the US meets is that I get to see falconry unfettered by the traditional approach carried out in Britain. When I was given the chance to see passage male merlins flown at sparrows in waiting-on style, I jumped at the chance. I was not disappointed! Keith Richman and Chris Allan were joined by around 25 spectators as they demonstrated a level of falconry skill not often seen. To watch these tiny, 142gm (5oz) Jack merlins repeatedly stoop the flushed savannah sparrows was one thing, but to witness them 'caching' their kills and then returning to their pitch for the next flush, as they

had been trained to do, was a revelation. The numbers of spectators in the field, attested to the respect these guys were given, and the way that the flushers threw themselves into the job (literally, as one or two went sprawling in the bushes!) showed how much everyone enjoyed the fun. I was subsequently lucky enough to spend a couple of days with Keith Richman and Deborah in Sonoma after the meet. Naturally falconry was the constant subject, (sorry Deborah) and I saw some more excellent hawking. Let me say, Keith is one excellent falconer and a great guy.

The meet rolled along, although as always much too quickly. I was able to go out with Karl Kersters and watch his Aplomado falcon fly on Friday and what an interesting falcon that is too. With an excellent presentation by Andrew Barnes from Zimbabwe on Friday night, the scene was well set for the famous CHC Sky Trial on Saturday morning.

# THE

## THE SKY TRIAL

The CHC field meet is famous for the Sky Trial which is included in the meet. For those readers unfamiliar with such events, they are conducted under a strictly enforced set of rules, and are judged by a panel of experienced falconers who judge according to carefully laid down rules. The Sky Trial is the result of some inspirational thinking by Gerald Richards from Utah who, in about 1975 decided to stage a contest between fast and highly conditioned pigeons and trained falcons. Staged in the area around Provo, Utah, the contests were originally called Pigeon Derbies. The original idea has been expanded and shaped into the Sky Trials and they are held in several countries worldwide.

**THE RULES** - Contestants draw for the flight order and, once determined, they have 15 minutes to fly their bird. For every minute beyond this time, their score will be deducted one point. The flight time commences when the falconer leaves the judges' table to walk out onto the field. The judges score the following aspects of the flight;

**MOUNTING** - This is the time taken for the bird to reach its pitch, and is expressed in feet per minute. The bird with the fastest rate of mounting is awarded the maximum of 20 points.

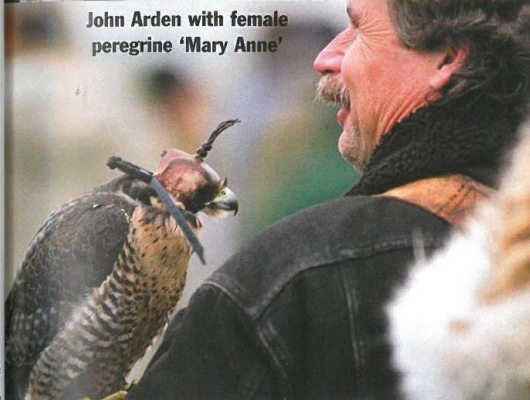
**POSITION** - The bird is judged for its entire flight sequence and for the maximum score of 20 points, the bird will mount in a 'cone' above the falconer. As we know, some birds mount in a rangy manner and this will detract from the score allotted to them.

**PITCH** - In wide open country where fast homer-pigeons show their best skills, the higher the pitch the better.

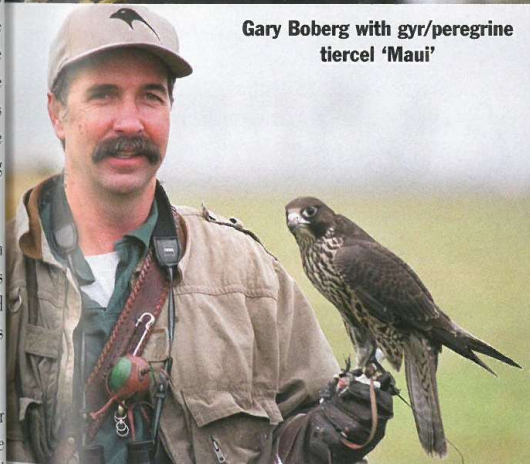
# SKY TRIAL



Dan Monaco with  
3/4 gyr/peregrine 'Onyx'



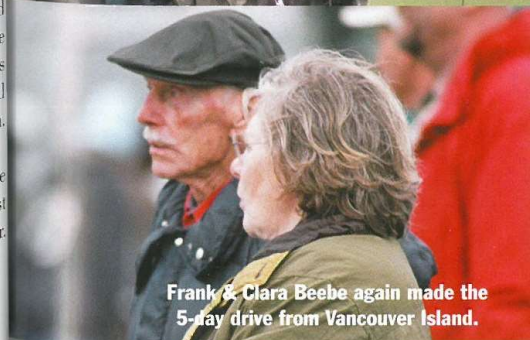
John Arden with female  
peregrine 'Mary Anne'



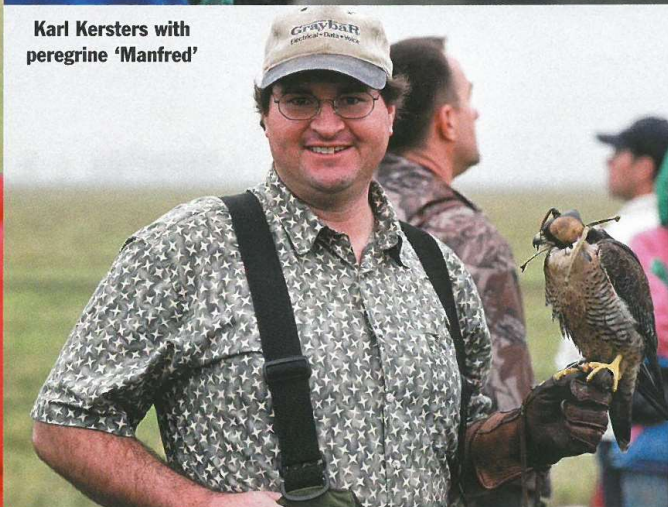
Gary Boberg with gyr/peregrine  
tiercel 'Maui'



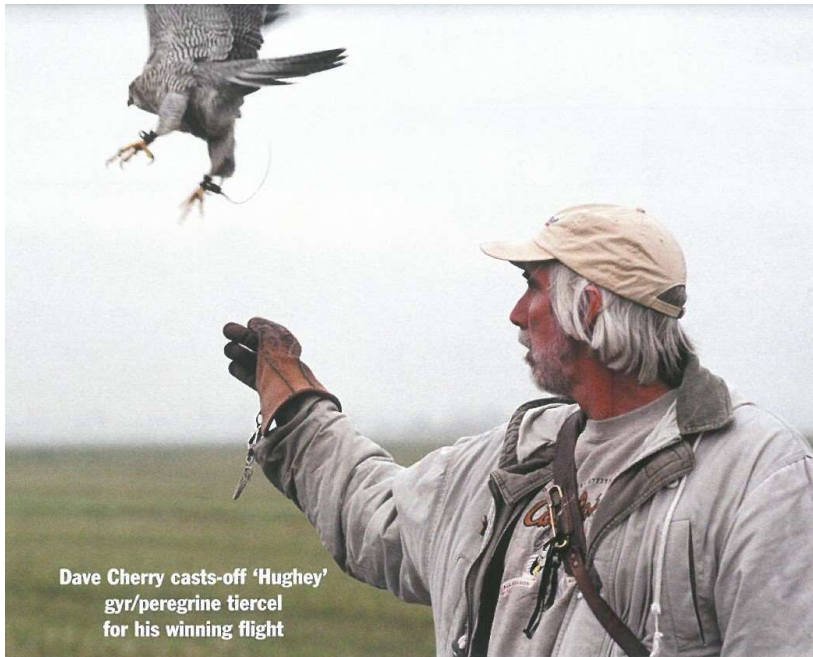
Rick Sharp with gyr/peregrine tiercel 'Elgin'



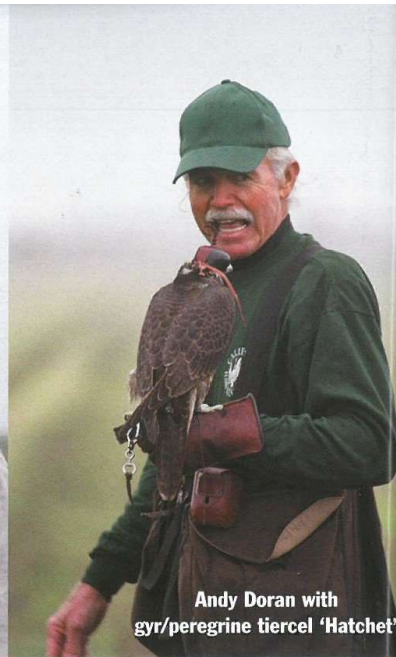
Frank & Clara Beebe again made the  
5-day drive from Vancouver Island.



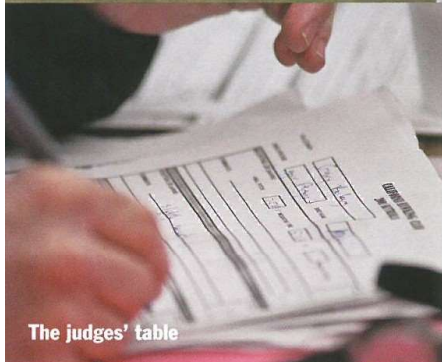
Karl Kersters with  
peregrine 'Manfred'



Dave Cherry casts-off 'Hughey' gyr/peregrine tiercel for his winning flight



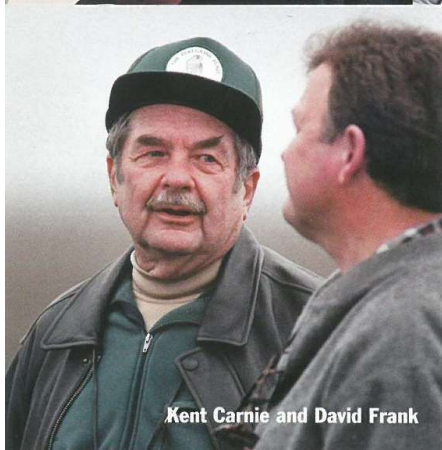
Andy Doran with gyr/peregrine tiercel 'Hatchet'



The judges' table



Keith Richman the entertainer



Kent Carnie and David Frank

Laser range-finders are used to accurately measure height, and any birds which fly beyond the range of the device (around 1,200 feet) are awarded the maximum of 20 points.

**STOOP** - The stoop is scored in two segments, one of which is connected to pitch and the other is subjectively judged as 'technical aspects'. This would require that the falcon cuts through the pigeon at the bottom of the stoop.

**PURSUIT** - Immediately after missing on the original stoop, the falcon is judged on the number of threatening passes it makes at the fleeing pigeon. A kill results in the maximum number of points being awarded. No points are awarded for effort, they have to be threatening passes. A score of 3 points is awarded for 'putting in' the pigeon. This is a not uncommon sight where the pigeon seeks refuge (usually successfully) in amongst the crowd and their assembled vehicles. I should state hear that very few pigeons are ever caught and it is the objective of the club to provide only the best homers that have great experience in flying under falcons. I can state positively that the pigeons I saw flown at this Sky Trial were amazing aerial athletes and easily out-flew the falcons.

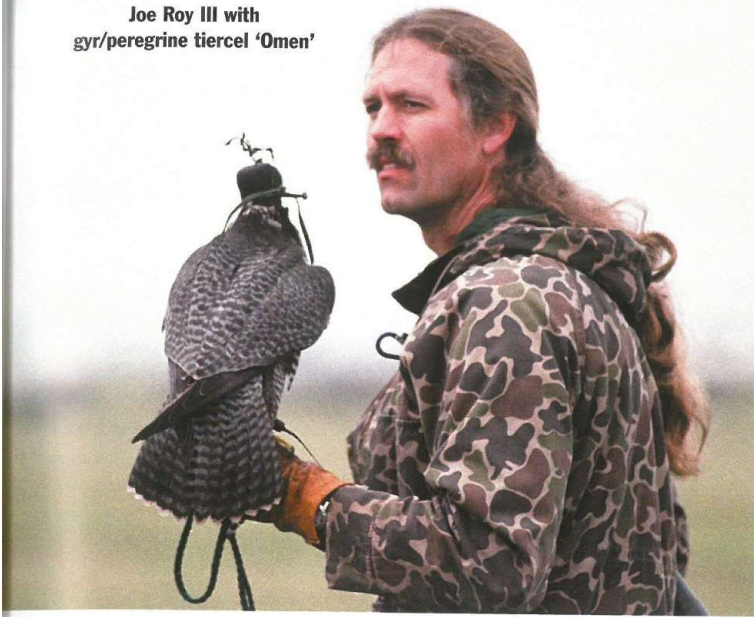
Even the best of falcons require some luck in the trial. This was illustrated by Dave Myers' gyr/peregrine tiercel, one of the first to fly. I'd seen this bird fly in Texas last year and it can really go up. I believe it has won a trial already. Even so, on this occasion, after reaching several hundred feet and looking good, it raked off across the sky and killed a crane way off in the distance. The end of Dave's trial!

The atmosphere was great, and the smells coming from the 'chuck wagon' were delightful. Keith Richman gave us all a virtuoso performance on his guitar, and the flying was excellent. Many of the 'big names' in US longwinging were there, including Dave Cherry, Rick Sharpe (congratulations on the up-coming wedding Rick) Joe Roy III, and many more. The flying came thick and fast, and the standard was extremely high, with most of the falcons a credit to their handlers. Most of the falcons went really high and yet were in constant contact with their handlers.

**TOP 10 ORDER OF JUDGING:**

1. Dave Cherry flying gyr/peregrine tiercel bred by D. Jamieson.
2. John Arden flying peregrine female bred by J. Arden.
3. Dave Kanelis flying gyr/ peregrine tiercel bred by D. Jamieson.

**Joe Roy III with  
gyr/peregrine tiercel 'Omen'**



4. Rick Sharp flying gyr/peregrine tiercel bred by P. Widener.
5. Dan Monaco flying 3/4 gyr /peregrine tiercel bred by S. Baptiste.
6. Jeff Blower flying gyr/peregrine tiercel bred by D. Jamieson.
7. Joe Roy III flying gyr/peregrine tiercel bred by D. Jamieson.

8. Gary Boberg flying gyr/peregrine tiercel bred by D. Jamieson.
9. Mike Orr flying barbury bred by L. Boyd.
10. John Prenosil flying peregrine tiercel bred by D. Cherry.

Saturday evening brought us to the banquet which signalled the end of the

meet. The food and hospitality was excellent, and the friendly atmosphere of this club was evident everywhere. The Chairman, Ron Brown did a marvellous job on the podium and worked late into the evening. The presentation was given by Ken Franklin and covered his sky diving work with peregrines. An absolutely rivetting talk and incredible video work. I understand that it may be shown on TV this year and would be a 'must see' for us falconers.

I must make special mention of the organisers, headed by Rick Holderman. I saw these guys everywhere, helping to smooth things out for everyone, and on the couple of occasions I needed to speak to him about a minor problem Rick handled it smoothly and efficiently. I failed to get the names of his army of assistants, but for sure they guaranteed that the meet was a success. For anyone thinking about a trip to the US to attend a meet, I would highly recommend the California Hawking Club meet. ■



**The weathering yard at meet headquarters**



## *Notes from Mexico* Words and photos by Bob Dalton

**Bartolla, 1st-year intermewed passage peregrine on kill.**



**M**y idea for the perfect antidote to the winter blues here in the UK, is to spend several weeks in glorious sunshine watching passage peregrines being flown at ducks. In November last year I received an invitation to join some friends hawking in Mexico. As it was almost the end of our grouse hawking season, I decided to do exactly that.

Taking either eyas or passage falcons under licence is still legal in Mexico. There are a relatively small number of falconers and a large number of peregrines so the system works well at the moment. Harris' hawks can also be taken under licence but there does appear to be an illegal trade in them.

The landscape around Agascalientes is ideally suited to duck hawking and very little else. There are a few rabbits and jackrabbits for those that fly Harris' hawks, but these are scarce and difficult to find away from cover. For the longwinger the choice of quarry is either quail, of which there are three species, or ducks of which there are abundance in terms of both species and sheer numbers.

Artificial ponds are bulldozed in natural depressions and these collect rainwater in the rainy season. Shrubs and cacti soon establish themselves naturally around the edges of the ponds. The end of the rainy season coincides with the start of the duck migration. Some ducks pass on down from North America through Mexico and into South America. But vast numbers stay in Mexico for around six months. The ponds offer ideal accommodation for the influx of temporary residents.

The weather in the region is consistently good with very little wind. The heat is such that there are always thermals to aid the falcons in getting

height. On the two ranches that I always spend my time hawking on, there are sufficient ponds for the ducks to be flushed from one and take refuge in another close by. Certainly it is rare that they actually get up and travel sufficiently far enough to completely clear the ranches we are on. Therefore even a relatively small number of ducks are capable of providing a number of flights.

The number of duck species normally encountered and hunted is ten. Three different species of teal, wigeon, mallard, Mexican, shoveller, gadwall, bumphead and pintail. The last are considered the hardest to kill.

The method of hunting we use is to drive around the ranch scanning the ponds with binoculars. When a group of ducks are found we move away until the vehicle is out of sight of the ducks. Then the chosen falcon has her telemetry fitted, hood and jesses removed and is allowed to take to the air in her own time. The heat means that they do not have to pump their way up but are aided by the abundant thermals.

The pitches attained tend to be very good. I am no good at guessing heights. But in a clear blue sky the falcon goes up almost out of sight to the naked eye. Whilst the falcon gets to her pitch the ground party get themselves into position around the pond in anticipation of the flush. Two-way radios are very much a part of the standard hawking kit and by their use the flush tends to be a very exact affair.

When the falcon is in position the falconer gives the word to flush and everybody jumps up yelling and generally making as much noise as possible. If only some of the ducks have taken off and cleared the pond then everybody gets back down out of sight again. In this way it may be

possible to get a second flight from the same pond. Because of the height attained by the falcon and the open nature of the terrain the stoop is very spectacular. Many of the ducks hunted are killed in the stoop.

A typical days hunting would be as follows; A relatively early start is made and the vehicle, a VW camper that has been fitted out specifically for hawking, is loaded up with falcons

### **All of a sudden one of them seemed to explode in mid air and before it hit the ground Godzilla was on it.**

and falconers. The one other member of our party, a trusty old Labrador, helps out when the flush does not go to plan or the expanse of water is bigger than the human element of the group can cope with. Also loaded is all the paraphernalia for making a decent campsite meal. Because the terrain is parched dry and firm underfoot, a four-wheel-drive vehicle is just not necessary. The VW can get everywhere we ever need to go.

The first flights are around 9am and we carry on flying till about 4pm. If we have a good day in finding ducks then each falcon is flown twice. If they are not so plentiful, each falcon is flown once. Unless unsuccessful, in which case it is given another chance if at all possible. We do not stop hawking as the heat of the day reaches its zenith but carry on.

Very occasionally we struggle to find ducks on the ponds we want them to be on. What we do then is drive to a large expanse of water that does hold ducks and try and get them to disperse to smaller outlying ponds. In amongst

all the supplies in the VW camper is a box of fireworks. Perhaps fireworks is too grand a title for the home-made rockets stored therein. These rockets are extremely crude but very effective. One is fired up over the water and then we watch the dispersal of the ducks with binoculars. One firework is normally enough to get the job done, which is just as well. The thought of lighting more than one black-powder fuse that leads to a small stick of dynamite tied to a stick does not fill me with joy.

Of the many flights I enjoyed during my last stay, several stick out as being particularly memorable. Twice, one of our falcons was joined, when waiting on, by a wild one. The first time, the wild falcon caught a duck as well as the trained one. On the other occasion we caught the wild falcon.

The first incident happened when a ten-year-old passage falcon called Godzilla was put up over a small pond. The falcon mounted quickly but was lost from sight for a while when she had the sun as a backdrop. When a falcon came back into view, and in the right position, we all assumed it was Godzilla and flushed the ducks. Four cinnamon teal left the water and made off towards another pond about three quarters of a mile away. The falcon stooped and knocked one of the ducks down to the ground. The blow was a hard one as the duck was obviously dead. As the falcon threw up and turned over, it could clearly be seen that it was a haggard prairie falcon.

The three remaining teal changed their minds about their destination and headed back for the original pond. All of a sudden one of them seemed to explode in mid air and before it hit the ground Godzilla was on it. The two falcons sat some twenty yards apart each on their separate prize. ▶

## Notes from Mexico



**Martin Guzman with Golondrina, and Victor Caucedo with passage anatum peregrine.**

Godzilla's owner made into her quickly and quietly and took her up. The prairie, although nervous at our proximity, carried on with her meal. We moved away to a respectable distance to watch her finish her meal with the aid of binoculars.

A male red-tail did land beside her and made a couple of attempts to get the duck away from her. But the prairie was having none of it and eventually saw him off.

The other incident involved a falcon called Golondrina. She is a seven-year-old passage falcon and her name means pintail. She got her name because the first four ducks she killed were all pintails. This flight was at a large group of mixed ducks that were already acting very nervously when we first saw them. We attributed the nervousness to the fact that a coyote was pacing around the edge of the pond. It was eyeing the ducks but was obviously reluctant to go into the water. The ducks knew they were safe in the water but were nonetheless agitated.

As we got closer, and the coyote

could see our party get out of the vehicle, it made off. We were now in a position where we could not see the ducks but we could hear them. It was obvious from the noise they were making that they were still extremely agitated. We put this down to the recently departed coyote.

Golondrina was put on the wing and we got into position as normal. Once the falcon had reached a decent height it was obvious she was not on her own. Another large falcon was up with her. They made no attempt to crab with each other or fight in anyway, but they were close. It was decided to flush the ducks and end any chance of an aerial dispute. Around eighty ducks lifted up and Golondrina put in a superb stoop, pumping most of the way down, and bound to a gadwall. The wild falcon arrived about fifteen seconds later and made several half-hearted stoops at Golondrina whilst she sat on her duck. Even as we approached the wild falcon was reluctant to leave and kept circling.

One of our party was a registered





**Golondrina on kill.**



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## Notes from Mexico

ringer and he dashed back to the vehicle to get his bits and pieces to trap the falcon. Two minutes later she was in our hands. She was a beautiful passage *anatum* falcon. We took photos of her, fitted her ring, checked her over and let her go. The whole process lasted less than five minutes. When we released her she flew to a group of trees some fifty or sixty yards away. As we left we threw out a dead duck for her and she was on it almost immediately.

Towards the end of my stay in Agaus Galientes, Godzilla went AWOL a couple of times. Both occasions resulted in quite long track-downs. Her owner had considered getting a fresh falcon at the beginning of the season and returning Godzilla to the wild. But sentiment had held sway and their partnership had continued. But since my return to the UK, Godzilla has gone off twice more. The second time she was found feeding up on a pintail. Whilst feeding, her telemetry and jesses were removed and she was left to enjoy life on her own. When she had finished feeding she preened herself and then took flight. In the words of her former hunting partner "*she went up so high the sky seemed to swallow her*". A fitting end to a ten-year partnership.

Godzilla killed over one thousand ducks during her falconry career and gave immense pleasure to a great many people. Long may she continue to do what she does best.

As well as the flights with trained falcons we would often deliberately conjure a flight with a wild falcon. This is much easier to do than is at first imagined. The area we hunt in has several expanses of water that are too large to hunt because it is impossible to get the ducks to lift and fly completely away from them in any controlled manner. If you have a falcon overhead they merely lift up, make a circuit, and put back down

again. But where you get ducks concentrating naturally you get peregrines. Therefore several of us would position ourselves around the edge of the water and create a noise. The ducks would move backwards and forwards across the water and each time they went to settle we would move them again.

All the commotion of the ducks going backwards and forwards never failed to bring up a peregrine. In fact on one particular day we brought up three. We would then enjoy the stoop of a wild falcon at the ducks we had flushed for it. On three separate occasions we did this and we witnessed three kills. It might not be true falconry but it was just as exciting to watch.

Mexican people tend to be very warm and friendly and the standard of falconry I saw personally, is very good. I now make at least two trips a year to Mexico to enjoy not just the hawking, but also the abundance of wildlife in general and raptors in particular. To see ten different species of raptor in a day is not unusual and I have seen sixteen. Add to this great white pelicans, coyotes, bobcats, road runners etc. there is always something to see.

Whilst the people are

friendly, except when behind the wheel of a car when they become positively homicidal, the countryside is definitely hostile. A myriad of different cacti await your flesh and fire ants, stinging ants and soldier ants all wait their chance to inflict pain. But, as with so many things in life, it would seem that for a little pleasure there is always a little pain. ■

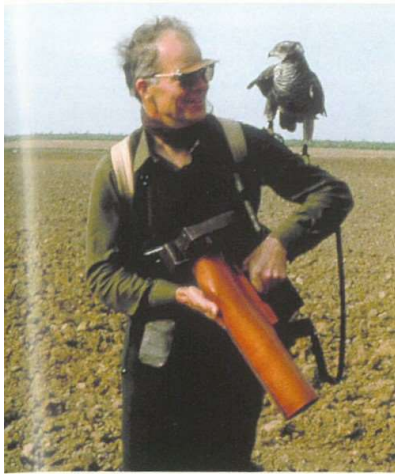


**Passage *anatum* peregrine still in snares.**

# Dieter Kuhn – The Sharp Shooter

By Martin Hollinshead





Falconry has inspired artists throughout history. Some have worked in stone and clay, others have taken up brush or pen, and some, like action photo specialist Dieter Kuhn, have looked to the 35mm camera. Action photography is a dramatic form of art - can capture so wonderfully the interaction between prey and predator - and none have mastered this medium better than Dieter Kuhn. Dieter's work has appeared all over the world and illustrated countless magazines and books. And like all other artists, his work has a unique quality about it, carries an unwritten signature that immediately identifies its creator. This man's passion has captured some of our sport's most spectacular moments. This humble tribute is long overdue.

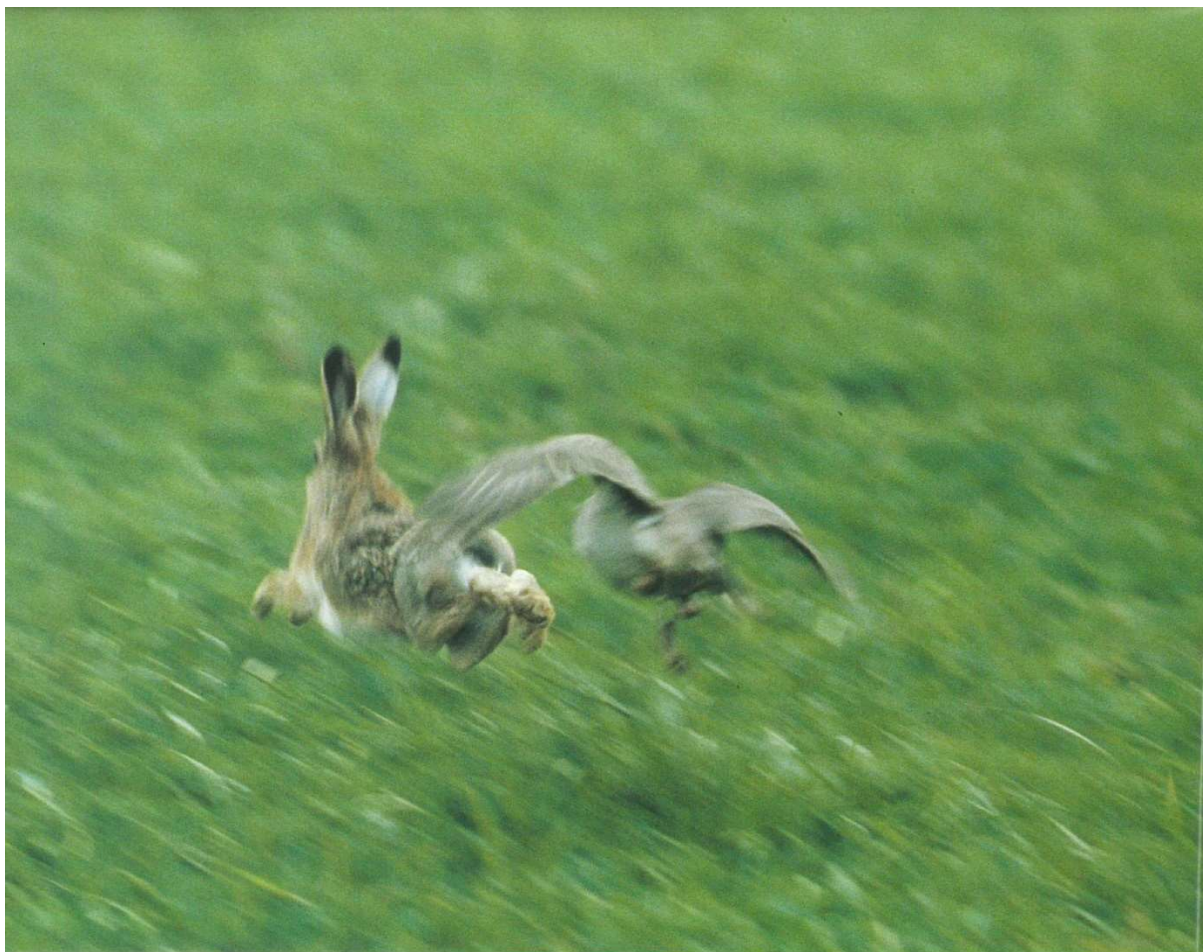
Born in Germany in 1934, Dieter Kuhn's path to the activity he describes as 'photo-chronicler of falconry' began with an early interest in watching wildlife and wanting to record his observations. Hunting also played a part. Both grandfathers were keen hunters and through their influence and perhaps wanting to 'belong', Dieter studied for his hunting licence. But it proved to be little more than a gesture. Although he qualified, he was never really committed to the taking of game and from the very beginning he found it far more rewarding carrying a camera instead of a firearm. For the young camera-hunting Kuhn, trophies came in the form of really good photos as a shutter closed to freeze the moment forever. And of course his 'stalking' had the benefit of never knowing a closed season!

Falconry entered the scene in 1961 when Dieter was invited to watch a game-hawking peregrine flown at quarry. The skill and art involved

made him determined to capture the action through a lens. He accompanied falconer after falconer and went from meeting to meeting. The amount of film he used was staggering, truly a trail of it leading from flight to flight. But the good photographs were few. Anyone who has attempted to take action shots will realise just what our intrepid photo-hunter was up against. Either the hawk's in the frame and the quarry's not, or it's the other way around. Or they are both captured, but out of focus! And remember, Dieter was not blessed with the advanced technology of today; he was working with cameras most of us would struggle to take a static shot with! But he stuck with it, spending much time practising without ammunition and also getting himself into top physical shape, training for fitness and flexibility. Indeed, so serious did he take the challenge and so fascinated was he by the world he found himself in, he eventually took the falconry exam! The understanding that came with this helped him grasp how and where he might see some action. He even took to stowing a glove away with the spare film and on a long day, or when things went wrong, many a falconer was glad of a cameraman who could also jump in as hawking assistant.

Slowly the photos he wanted started to come. And he was recording more than flights - he was truly acting as chronicler - for this was a special time in central and east European falconry, a time that was seeing a new bird and a new kind of hawking gaining ground. This was the era of the hare-catching eagle. The golden eagle flying so many British falconers have crossed the Channel to see in recent years has its origins in this period when falconers like Claus Fentzloff, Hans Brehm and others ▶





began to demonstrate the eagle's ability. It was a time of famous birds, like Fentzloff's 'Leif', and a time for discovering the best landscapes with the strongest hare numbers. And all of this Dieter followed and recorded. And there was much travelling involved. The lands of the former Eastern Block were soon regarded as the ultimate venues for hare hawking and photo trips became expeditions behind the Iron Curtain. There was a feeling of leaving one world and entering another. Dieter spent a lot of time with these hare-hawking groups and soon learned whom best to shadow for guaranteed action. For a falconer, there was no better compliment than to have Dieter at his side and countless friendships were formed as cameraman and eagle flyer trod the plough together.

My own association with Dieter

### **When it came to hawking Dieter could be a bit of a sergeant major**

stretches back something like twenty years. We first met at a castle on the Rhine where I was helping prepare things for a falconry centre. Dieter had been called in to take some promotional photographs of the birds and we immediately struck up a friendship. Before long we were meeting at hawking get-togethers and the praise of that complimentary shadow would sometimes be mine. And along with good flights we shared some amusing experiences too. I remember a small east European

meeting from many years ago that proved a good meeting for hares and provided Dieter with a lot of camera action. But will anybody attending ever forget the communal shower room! I'm not a particularly fussy person and have done my share of roughing it but that 'shower room' with its jagged metal pipes serving water and its mould and slime-thick walls and floor would have tempted only the most desperate of users. Eventually both of us weakened to need. I had a wonderful session with a 20-stone female gos flyer and Dieter soaped himself from head to toe only to have the pipes suddenly refuse him water! And for Dieter things didn't end there. The water never did come and so he was forced to take to the fields soap and all. It was a hot day early in the season and, as we dragged our sweaty bodies across the parched terrain, ▶

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Dieter began to erupt in an uncontrollable flow of shaving-foam lather!

When it came to hawking Dieter could be a bit of a sergeant major. A big hare-hawking group can stretch across quite a bit of country and inevitably the line will occasionally go out of shape. This will cause poor slips and wasted hares. It was never a problem when Dieter was out. I can hear him now 'ordering' a straight line and I can see the startled expression of any guilty troop member! And I can see him too racing along his nice straight line to wherever someone raised a hand to signal a hare had been found lying in its form. For the falconer it was a wonderful flight opportunity (normally any young eagle in such a group will be called over and given a chance) and for Dieter it was of course a good photo opportunity. Form-hares enable a calculated flush and give the falconer time to position himself properly, and so it is for the camera hunter too.

As influential as golden eagle flying has been, it has far from dominated Dieter's work; indeed, a glance at his archives will find topics ranging from captive breeding to waiting-on flights. From the start, the goshawk, as a traditional bird of European falconry, always received a good deal of attention. Over the years he has captured the gos in action against feathered quarries, hares and rabbits. Naturally his east European trips gave him plenty of gos and hare action. The eagles may have stolen the limelight but a 'bog standard' gos pulling down adult brown hares is a feat that truly deserves recording. Closer to home, hare was often replaced with rabbit. German falconers have always been keen rabbit hawkers and for Dieter this meant photo opportunities were easier to secure. Keeping the lens on the action was less easy. Much of the hawking involved tight spots that often delivered half-invisible targets and

bush and branch hidden hawks. By comparison, hare flights were easy! But even under these conditions and with that film really being raced through, Dieter's determination always held fast and he secured his prize. Goshawk days also gave Dieter the chance to record a very special bit of hawking when he was invited out by old friend Ernst Lutger to take some shots of his first white Siberian *albidus* female, 'Kalinka'. Not many photos of this spectacular corvid-catcher still exist but most that do will have Dieter's name on them somewhere.

Sadly, health has not been quite as kind to Dieter as the lens and in recent years he has not quite been the wandering action man he once was. An enormous consolation has been the continuing love and support of his wife of many years, Ursula, and watching their only daughter,

Karin, develop into a falconer respected all over Europe. Dieter reflects amusingly, "At one time I used to take Karin to meets. Now she's told to bring me!" I hope she does drag him out to a few more meets, I've got a feeling there's a few good shots in that camera yet. ■



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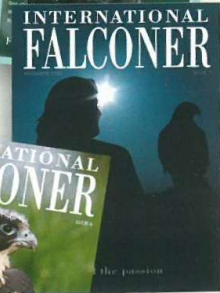
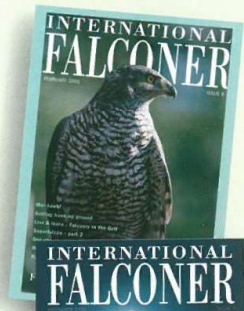
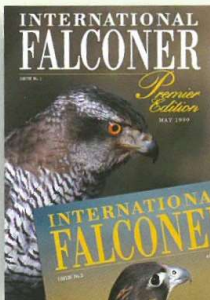
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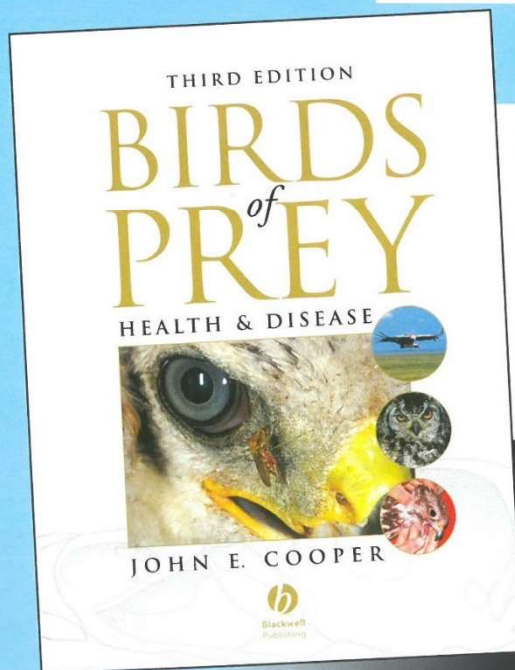
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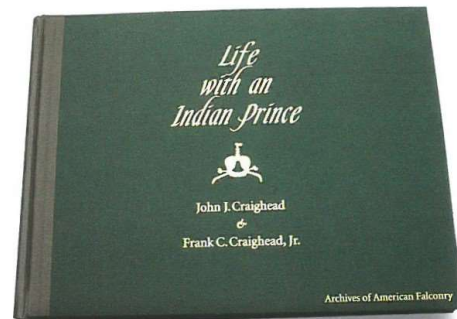
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# BOOK REVIEW

## LIFE WITH AN INDIAN PRINCE

JOHN J. CRAIGHEAD  
& FRANK C. CRAIGHEAD JR.

Archives of American Falconry, Boise, Idaho  
Heritage Publications Series  
Volume 2  
ISBN: 0-9619839-2-2



Reviewed by Dick Treleven

First came across the Craighead twins in 1969 when they published their study of the raptor populations of North America entitled, *Hawks Owls and Wildlife*. It stands on my bookshelf alongside A.C. Bent's earlier classic *Life History of North American Birds of Prey* (1936)

*Life with an Indian Prince* was originally written in diary form and covers the period from August 6, 1940 to April 11, 1941. It was published in 1942 in the February issue of *National Geographic Magazine*, which helped finance the expedition. The indefatigable Kent Carnie resurrected the diary for republication under the auspices of the Archives of American Falconry.

In 1940 when the twins set out for India they were fresh-faced, confident young Americans, bristling with enthusiasm and thirsting for knowledge in a new and mysterious continent. The first thirty pages describe their preparations, fond farewells and the sea journey. When they eventually arrived in India they were greeted in palatial style by their friend Prince Dharmakumarsinhji, one of the Maharajahs of Bhavnagar's sons known to them as Bapa. He, too, lived in Bhavnagar, a hundred-and-fifty miles north west of Bombay, only a short distance from the Gir Forest - the home of the Indian lion.

The twins' introduction to the art of Indian falconry was both swift and rewarding. Raptors and prey existed in unimaginable numbers.

Furthermore, the local population were non-meat-eaters (Gujeratiis). A year later the reviewer travelled through Gujarat and was astonished by the plethora of wildlife that could be observed from the train window.

In the 1940s little thought was given to conservation and many assumed, erroneously, that there was an inexhaustible supply of both prey and predator. It is against this background that the Craigheads were taught some of the basic skills used by Indian falconers.

The area around Bhavnagar was arid and therefore desert hawks were the first option. Bapa's first choice for partridge hawking was a lugger. Luggers have a poor reputation in the UK as being very lack lustre birds like overgrown kestrels. For other game, sakers were used; peregrines were reserved primarily for duck hawking and larger quarry.

One of Bapa's main ambitions was to train falcons to catch quarry that was much larger than that taken by similar species in the wild. He had a burning desire to catch a black ibis to out-rival his brother, Nanabhai, who was also a keen falconer. Hawking competitions were frequently held as each brother strived to outshine the other while their father, the Maharaja, looked on.

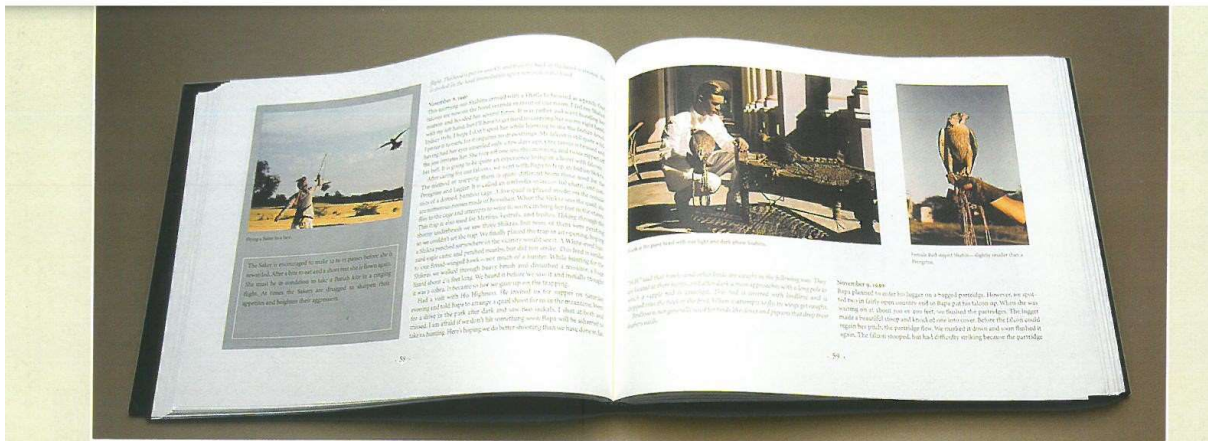
Most of the hawking was devoted to flying falcons: shortwings were sidelined. Goshawks and shikra were flown by lesser mortals and there are interesting accounts of the use of the

*jangoli* or *halsband*. Throwing the hawk off after quarry was common practice, as it was believed to give the hawk an invaluable advantage. Throwing was a highly skilled business and not for the amateur. The late Jack Tamblin used to launch his goshawk with an over-arm bowl; spectacular to watch, but it invariably ended up with the gos staggering drunkenly through the air and then being disinclined to return to the fist. On one occasion the gos was flung straight into the ground to the dismay of the astringer and the amusement of the spectators.

Perhaps the most interesting reading and certainly the least controversial was the habit of administering drugs to hawks that had performed badly in the field. There was immense secrecy in their preparation in order to beat their competitors. According to the authors the drugs were exceedingly effective. But there is no mention of E.B. Michell's arcane 'Mummy', a medication that was said to cure all ills.

Hawk trapping was an exciting and necessary pastime. A wide variety of methods were employed: the *barak*, a ball of feathers with nooses intended to resemble quarry attached to the feet of a raptor, which is then released to lure in and capture another raptor. A similar principle was used for over a hundred years by the Mollen family at Valkensward. The *bal chatri* was a dome shaped cage like trap covered





with nooses. The *phai* trap consisted of over-lapping nooses, usually on a live bird. The *dhogazza* was a system of nets on poles carefully sited and was familiar to most forward thinking falconers not unlike the mist-nets beloved by bird-ringers. The universal bow-net was used for the 'coup de grace' and finally the sparrow-catchers delight, birdlime. All these methods are now illegal in the UK, except under special licence.

However, the devious scheme employed for catching crows takes some beating. Brahmans, who were high cast Hindus and wore white cotton clothes were easily recognisable throughout India. As a dictate of their religion they shared their food with birds and other animals. The house crows, being intelligent birds, quickly recognised Brahmans and knew that they would feed them but not harm them. The wily trapper eschewed his Muslim dress and surreptitiously donned the garb of a Brahman and mumbled pious Brahmany prayers. He entered a village, and when he had gathered about him a sufficient number of crows he led them out into the open, like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, until they reached the pre-set nets where they were promptly dispatched - up to seventy or more crows might be caught on a single outing. The trapper had to make a lightning change of dress to avoid the wrath of the enraged villagers.

The reader is forcibly reminded that the word sport had different connotations for our Indian friends. To allow, and even to encourage a saker to make a series of strikes at the

head of a deer or hare would by modern standards be regarded as unacceptable and utterly barbaric. For the reviewer, the least pleasant aspect of the book is the detailed account of suffering inflicted on defenceless animals and birds without the minutest regard for their welfare, and calling it 'sport'. Beaks were taped, primaries tied together and badly injured birds used as quarry time and time again. Needless to say bagged quarry was flung into the air on innumerable occasions - all living creatures were seen as being highly replaceable and of little value. Seeling of freshly trapped hawks was routine, whether it was cruel or not is debatable; the reader must make up his own mind.

There is much more in this book than mere falconry: a lion hunt, lengthy descriptions of hunting with cheetahs, which surprisingly, are extremely docile creatures when not in pursuit of quarry. Several pages are given over to an account of the festivities at the sumptuous wedding of an Indian Prince in Tripura State at Argatala (in my day it was home to squadrons of American B25 bombers). Tea with the Viceroy was also on the menu. Finally a trip to see the mighty Himalayas, including Everest, had them completely gobsmacked.

The text is, at times, somewhat repetitive; dog bites man is not news, neither is falcon catches partridge. More stringent editing would have improved the narrative flow. The habit of repeating text in italics is both tiresome and confusing, and an index would have been most helpful. Nevertheless it is a magnificent

historical document - a portrait of the fast-disappearing Indian Raj. The countless superb colour plates which decorate each page enhance it still further. Their quality is outstanding, every picture is composed with the eye and dedication of an artist. It is a tribute to the authors' skill, patience and knowledge of the techniques of colour reproduction (which was still in its infancy) and their liaison with Kodak. The illustrations alone would make this volume a priceless possession.

The diary is equally illuminating even if it is a journey back to what some would call the golden days of falconry; or to the more discerning, a trip to the dark ages. It is as well to remember this all happened some sixty years ago. Most of us have moved on since then. The late Bill Ruttledge, a falconer of wide experience, once told me the ultimate aim in falconry was to secure quality flights, when both prey and predator were evenly matched, not a mismatched slaughter. European falconry has little to learn from the East save perhaps the use of drugs for recalcitrant hawks and not for recalcitrant citizens. It is a splendid book at any price and thoroughly recommended. Col Kent Carnie is to be congratulated, perhaps even promoted!

The reviewer served in India & Burma during the Second World War with 16th Punjab Regiment and visited many of the places mentioned in the text. However, the Japanese prevented him from taking part in any hawking activities.



75%Gyr-Peregrine male



Gyr breeding female 'Mi Lady'

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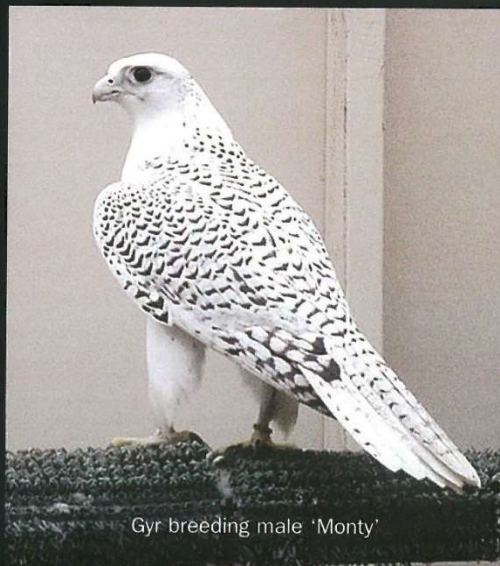
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Peregrine pure Peales  
female 'Eva'



Gyr breeding male 'Monty'



Gyr breeding female  
'Grand Slam'

# EAGLE WORLD

## Denmark



Falconer with white-tailed eagle



Golden eagle with its cub



Gyrfalcon (islandicus)



Peregrine falcon with prey



Golden eagle  
(*Aquila chrysaetos*)

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Frank Wenzel with gyrfalcon

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