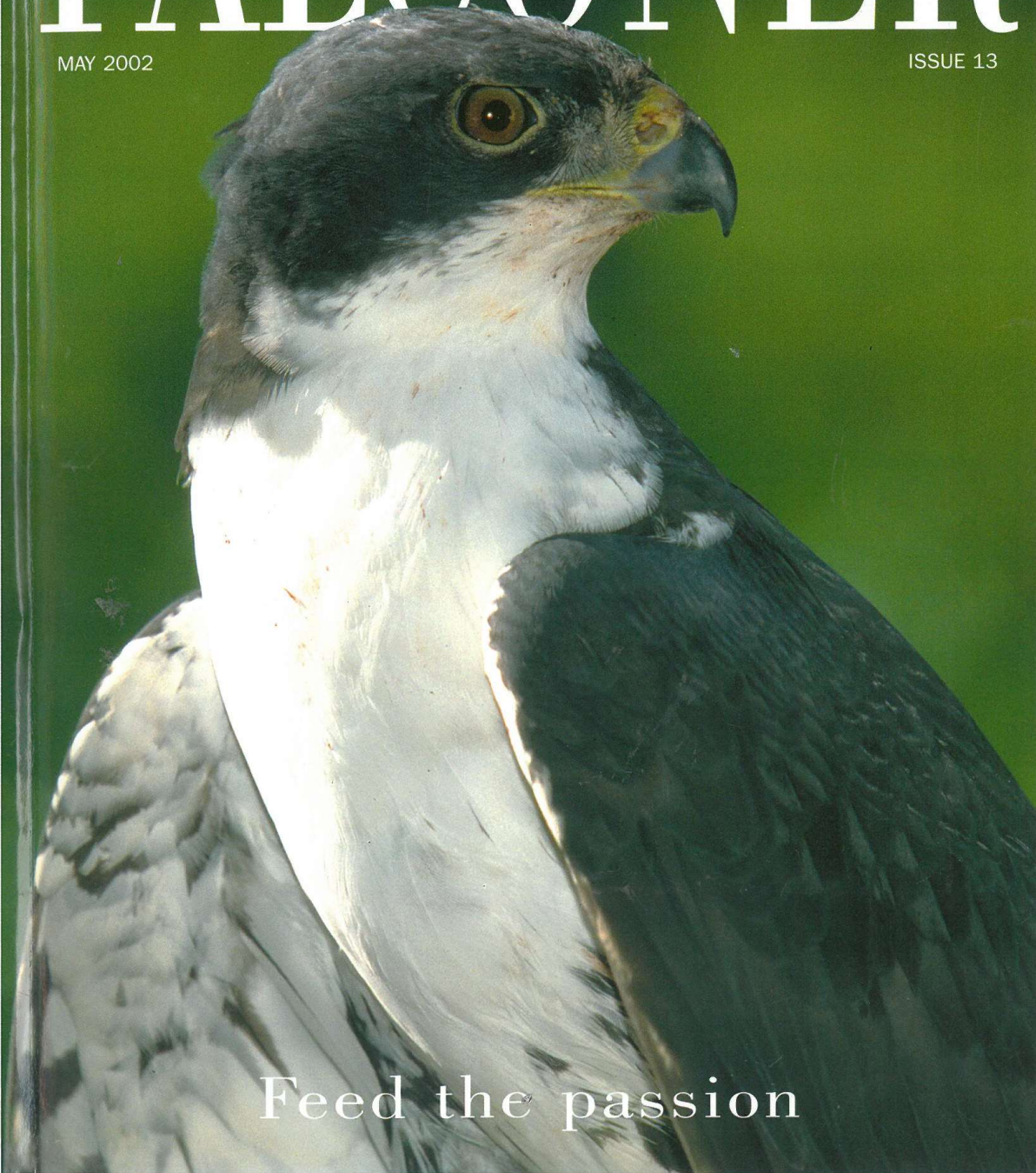


# INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

MAY 2002

ISSUE 13



Feed the passion

# INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

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Assistant Editor: Terry Anthony  
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England

Telephone: +44 (0)1622 664464  
Fax: +44 (0)1622 664465  
Email: info@intfalconer.com  
www.intfalconer.com

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Cover photo by Craig Golden.  
Black sparrowhawk *Accipiter melanoleucus*.

# EDITORIAL

Welcome again to another fine issue of IF! We're out a little earlier this quarter in time for the British Falconry Fair - which don't forget is a new date and new venue, full details of which are in the previous issue. The IF team will again be there in force so please look us up and come and have a chat about your season's exploits - we'd love to hear. Once again I won't be able to make it there myself - unfortunately it's always at a very inconvenient for anyone involved in breeding projects.

UK readers will no doubt have heard the announcement from the Countryside Alliance that last year's postponed march on London will now be going ahead - for those who haven't, the date is set for 22nd September, 2002. The "Liberty and Livelihood March" is not just about the hunting issue but a stand for all the issues facing our rural livelihoods and communities in general. It is going to be a big one and I can't stress enough how important it is for you all to make it there - one day isn't really asking too much for such an important cause.

Things are very, very busy on the political aspects of falconry at the moment internationally - in UK, Continental Europe, the Middle East and North America. Many issues which in one short blow have, or could have, devastating effects on the well-being of our sport. There's never been a more important time for organisations such as the International Association for Falconry and I'm delighted to be able to kick-off this issue with an interview with its President Patrick Morel.

Enjoy the issue,

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







# *Patrick Morel - a falconer and a diplomat.*

By Nick Kester

When a 15-year-old boy discovered a forgotten book on falconry in an attic, he can hardly have dreamed that his emerging passion would lead him nearly four decades later to become a global defender of that sport. For that is what Patrick Morel became when the assembled falconry clubs of the world cast their votes in Amarillo, Texas and he was elected President of the International Association for Falconry and the Conservation of Birds of Prey, the IAF. ▶

International Falconer visits Patrick Morel at his home in Belgium. Photos by Terry Anthony.



*International Falconer* could have talked for hours about hunting to this softly spoken gentleman in his exquisite farmhouse south of Brussels. Talked about his annual trip to Scotland's moors for grouse; or to Spain for partridge; or even about his journeys out of the EU to Switzerland for crow hawking. But that will have to wait for another day. The purpose of this interview was to understand the IAF and the future of falconry. To hear why a falconer in Germany should care about the issues that face another in Pakistan, or a British austringer should worry about the cares and woes of the North American long-winger. What battles do we face, and how is the IAF helping win our victories?

When he took over the Presidency, it was something of a one-man-band, possibly through history, perhaps through default. Whatever, the fact that there was an election certainly focussed the collective mind of the IAF to the issues that face them.

Morel rather ruefully admits these are twofold: "About half our time is spent dealing with outside threats, but, regrettably, the other half is largely wasted – time spent sorting out the internal issues of falconry."

That falconers cannot agree is the stuff of legend. They argue over tradition, over change, over style, over new practices, over 'unacceptable' practices... They cannot agree on the best hawks to be flown or how they should be obtained. Each country has evolved to suit its local needs and

then, quite suddenly in the overall timescale of the sport, falconry becomes the subject of global focus. Why do we disapprove of sky trials, of bagged quarry, of wild-trapped falcons, of hybrids when we do not live in that country or abide by its traditions? IAF has to sit above all these local issues and concentrate on the key areas that ensure the continuation of falconry.

Morel defines the areas that predicate the future of our sport as follows:

- A reliable and sustainable source of suitable falcons and hawks – be they wild-taken or captive-bred. Logically, without hawks there is no falconry.
- The ability to keep those hawks. All very well having a source if you are not permitted to keep them.
- Ensuring a commercial food source. In countries with high numbers of falconers, a reliable food source is essential. So any legislation negatively affecting farmed food (day-old-chick, rats, quail, etc.) must be vigorously defeated.
- The ability to fly hawks. Without the co-operation of the landowners (state body, corporate and private) there would be no falconry.
- The freedom to take quarry. Let us never forget that falconry is hunting.
- A continuing abundance of

suitable quarry at which to fly the hawks and falcons. An obvious point, but well made.

Under all this, there are the 'local' issues. And, I sensed from his body language, that this was a constant, if unavoidable, irritant. But, Patrick Morel is a Belgian: a country as famous for its diplomacy as its chocolate!

The IAF has geared itself up to plan and to react. Morel may be the President, but he is very proud of those who support him. "Now we have committees for many issues, and we have people volunteering to serve on those committees. If I have a job it is merely to sit above the *mélée*."

North America particularly impresses him. (Although, as an aside, if you want a really 'enlightened' falconry environment, he recommends Zimbabwe. Now that is a contradiction in terms.) The USA has a backbone of appropriate legislation that requires falconers to prove their ability before moving further up the falconry ladder. But there is a paradox. Only a few decades ago, the commercial breeders sustained falconry and we were grateful. Today there is a continued opportunity for wild-taken birds, and who might lose out? Those very same breeders. This could so easily bring them into conflict with their own and the legislators who permit this sustainable use. This is something the IAF is looking for a balanced view on, always aware that there are other countries with not dissimilar issues.

In the European Union, there are equal issues and a major success. In an earlier issue of this magazine we highlighted the plight of the Czech falconers who found their emerging government planned to severely restrict, if not ban falconry as a part of a review of the hunting laws and a desire to present a 'green' face for future EU inclusion. In desperation, the falconers turned to the IAF who produced, in a matter of days, a

**“That falconers cannot agree is the stuff of legend. They argue over tradition, over change, over style, over new practices, over ‘unacceptable’ practices... They cannot agree on the best hawks to be flown or how they should be obtained.”**

position statement on EU (and global) falconry that incontrovertibly proved its respectability and legislative approval. So skilful was this document that the Czech government now fully supports falconry, and, more importantly, accepts the Czech club as its sole point of contact for the control and practice of the sport.

Furthermore, this Has been used to equal effect on other emerging East European states finding their legislative feet. It has become a global template for the protection of falconry, and the next step is to produce a similar ‘best-practice’ document for the sport itself. A far harder task that aims to take the best of all worlds and the worst of none.

But Europe has its issues. Morel defines us as having two populations: high (UK and Spain) and low (Germany, France, Italy) density. Too many falconers in a country bring a set of problems unequal to those with too few. In a high-density area there are pressures on the hawks and potentially unscrupulous commercial activities. The appeal of the sport is self-perpetuating and, in the UK especially, not helped by the lack of regulation covering who can practice and where they can learn.

“What does a week’s course teach you?” asks Morel. “How much do you learn about the hawk, the quarry and the countryside? Not enough, and when that same course offers you a Harris’ hawk at the end of the week, what damage is done to the sport?”

Fair points all, and one I suspect the IAF would like someone in the UK to address. But it is not their policy to impose a view, rather to respond to

requests for help.

In low-density areas there are the problems of poor visibility as a pressure group, and a lack of infrastructure. For example, Holland permits only two species to be flown: the peregrine and the goshawk. Why? Because a legislator once asked a falconer (a purist perhaps) what hawks were flown and then enshrined the answer in law. Having once been the cradle of falconry, Holland is the most restrictive country in Europe, perhaps the world. This excludes Denmark, where it is forbidden as a hunting sport, but not for long. Morel hopes to be able to announce a change this year. Another interesting precedent: the lifting of a ban on a field sport within an EU country.

In Germany the issue of hybrids runs riot. There is even an anti-hybrid website endorsed by prominent German falconers (Despite one of the signatories flying a hybrid in Scotland ‘as an experiment’). Yet hybrids are bred commercially on a massive scale and hacked to increase their retail value. On a recent tour, Morel reports seeing ten hack towers within a five kilometres area. In each were twenty hybrids – 200 in total – and that was just one breeder. Morel calculates that up to 2,000 hybrids are hacked each year in Germany, primarily for the Middle East. But banning them is not the solution. For from a ban on hybrids it is a short step to exotics or non-native species and what impact would that have?

Which point led our conversation neatly to the ubiquitous Harris’ hawk and its statistics. According to the IAF some 50 per cent of all birds of prey

flown are Harris’ hawks and in France this rises to a staggering 75 per cent. So when one group affects a dislike to a specific practice they should first consider the ‘knock-on’ effects: from hybrids to Harris’ hawks to some people losing their sport.

For all its successes and its tribulations, the IAF is an effective and unique organisation, but there is more to do. So we ended with a final question: where next? And got a predictable answer:

“The Middle East,” says Morel. “But there is a problem with finding a really representative body. The Arab has a nomadic tradition. He consumes and moves on.”

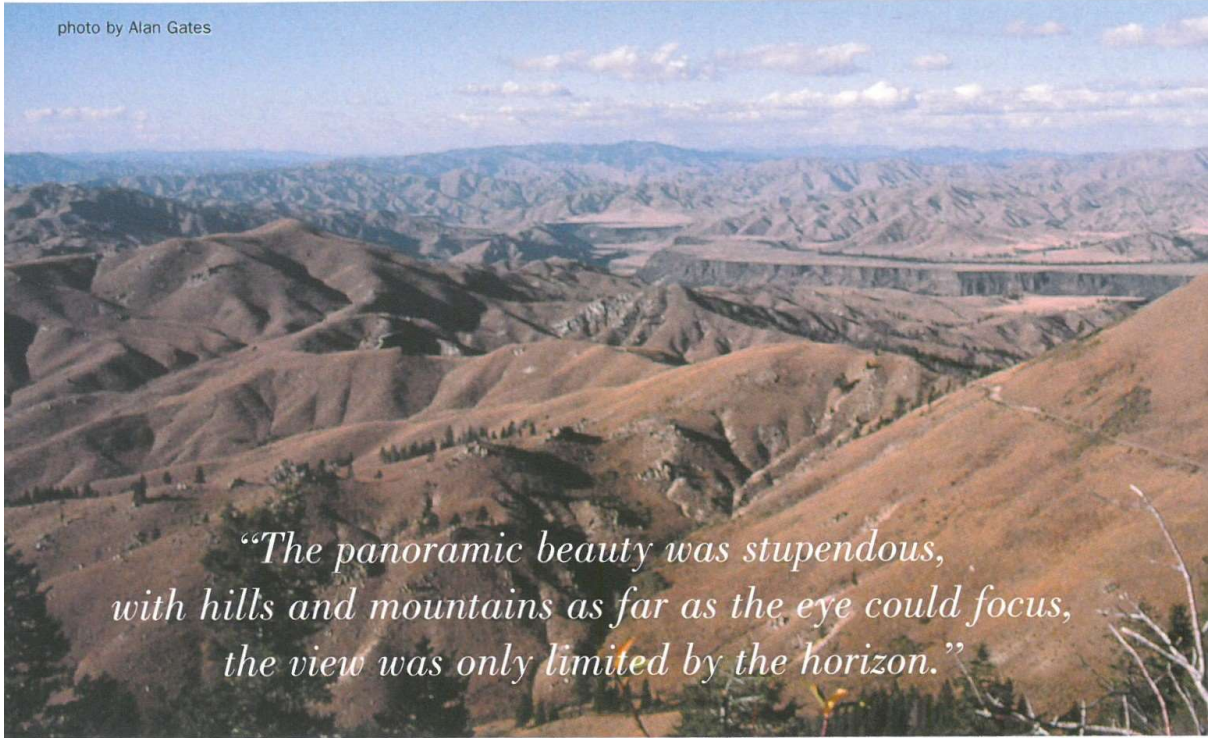
The IAF accepts this was fine in the past, but today Arab falconers are highly mechanised and their consumption of hawks and quarry has increased proportionally. This does not reflect well in the international arena.”

It is to be hoped that constructive groups of Arab falconers do emerge and that they are able to link themselves closely to the many other IAF countries. There is no escaping the fact that the sport is global, that it is being closely observed by conservationists and legislators, and that the IAF is central to the protection of our rights to keep, fly and hunt with our hawks and falcons. ■



QUOD TOTUM PROCEdit EX AMORE

photo by Alan Gates



*“The panoramic beauty was stupendous,  
with hills and mountains as far as the eye could focus,  
the view was only limited by the horizon.”*

# A trapping we will go.

by Alan Gates





**F**or years, powerful computers have been mapping the human gene and compiling what is now known as the 'Book of Life'. As a species, we humans are about to open this 'Pandora's box' of the human genome and let loose all wonders and no doubt a few horrors.

Perhaps one day a gene will be isolated, which by its presence would indicate why some of us still have a strong desire to hunt. Equally the lack of this gene may also indicate why a large proportion of individuals living in the comfortable West do not understand this desire.

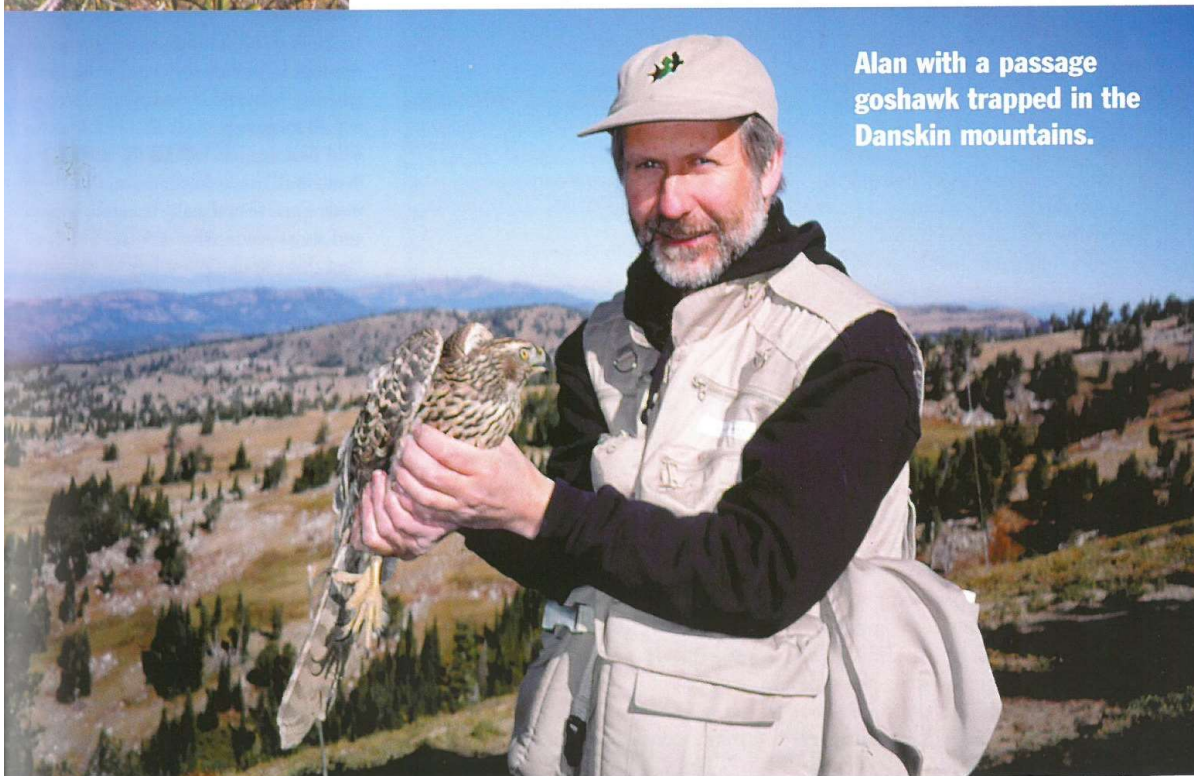
The urge to hunt, for me, is a need to experience the outdoors, the countryside, the wilderness and to pit my instincts and senses, though dulled, through successive generations of so called civilisation, against my chosen quarry in its natural environment.

In fact the desire to hunt is not

always pursued with the intention of killing, often the same satisfaction can be obtained by stalking your quarry with a camera. Here photography takes the place of a weapon or trained animal, the skill is in the tracking, stalking or luring your intended quarry close enough.

As soon as I was old enough to wander the local countryside unaided I was hunting, birds were my fascination, and I hunted their nests for eggs. This proliferated into a formidable schoolboy collection but even at such an early age I was becoming aware that it was wrong to take birds' eggs. From this I progressed to capturing birds' eggs and nests with a camera though I was still driven by a desire to hunt with a gun or bow.

Falconry was my salvation, it encompassed my desire to hunt with my growing admiration for birds of prey. To some extent I could justify to ▶



**Alan with a passage goshawk trapped in the Danskin mountains.**

photo by Bruce Haak

myself that I was no longer pursuing mindless killing, our quarry was food, either for myself or for the hawk.

I entered falconry as a schoolboy with an eyas kestrel I had taken from a sea cliff eyrie, an adventure and expedition in itself. Knowledge came from library books and correspondence with my peers, experience came from trial and error, within a year I was to progress to a wild-trapped passage goshawk.

In my search for knowledge and experience I trekked across Europe to Austria to attend the Second International Falknertreffen of the Austerreichischer Falknerorden. This was held in the market town of Marchegg near the Austrian border with Czechoslovakia in September 1968. It was the first meeting of falconers I had ever attended and what an experience it was rubbing shoulders with some of Europe's finest falconers.

Ivan Marosi and Jiri Makara of Czechoslovakia flew golden eagles, Jacques Renaud of France hunted his Rhodesian crowned eagle at hares whilst his wife flew a saker falcon. Herr Hanns and Frau Erna Brehm were flying excellent goshawks, Lorant de Bastyai was flying a trio of lugger and prairie falcons. The warm generosity and friendship that was afforded to me in the field and during the evening celebrations fused the event into a wonderful experience.

Being able to witness many great falconers capturing a variety of quarry with their eagles, hawks and falcons by day, then to be enthralled in the evenings with stories of past hunting exploits with hawks and dogs, enthused this young teenager.

One evening Don Cacciatore and his wife from Colorado entertained me with adventures of trapping wild prairie falcons from a car on the open highways in Western USA. Don explained to a wide eyed teenager how he would look for prairie falcons sitting on telegraph poles along the



photo by Alan Gates

#### **Bruce Haak with a home-made bal chatri for trapping golden eagles.**

side of a lonely highway. When he spotted a juvenile falcon he would slow the car and open the door, whilst still moving, he would toss a small weighted domed wire cage covered in nooses and baited with sparrows or mice onto the side of the highway. Driving slowly he would pass the falcon on her perch on the pole and continue up the highway for a couple of hundred yards before stopping.

There he waited and watched, if the falcon was hungry she would bob her head and fly down to the cage, footing the wire dome trying to get at the occupants, the nooses would tighten around her toes. Seeing the falcon struggling against the nooses, Don would return at speed to grab the falcon. It all sounded so simple that I was convinced he was spinning me a yarn, it took him days to convince me it was the truth.

Returning home from such an event, I was filled with inspiration and eager to start training a young wild male goshawk which had been left loose in a free flight. I had taken my young kestrel as far as my

inexperience could go, it was now time to move on and train a hawk that would hunt.

I had obtained this goshawk through a falconer friend who had falconry contacts on mainland Europe where they were still allowed to trap wild passage hawks. All the goshawks used in British falconry at the time were Continental wild-trapped hawks and most came from central Europe. Had this population of hawks suffered at the hands of gamekeepers to the same extent as the goshawk had in Britain, or had the European authorities adopted such punitive regulations on trapping, then I doubt falconry in Britain would have flourished.

During this first season my young goshawk was soon entered and at last I began to feel like a real falconer. As the last days of autumn yielded to the shortening days of winter I had been amusing myself with the construction of a domed wire trap or *bal chatri* as they are correctly termed. The only raptor that occupied my island home was the European kestrel and they

were a common sight especially on our Atlantic western coast. Here a long coastal road divided the surf beach from a large area of sand dunes which the kestrels found to be good hunting grounds.

My plan was to follow as close to Don's story as I could remember. With the aid of a sceptical friend who would drive the van we would go in search of perched or hovering kestrels.

To my amazement the first kestrel I threw the trap under hit it so hard he managed to carry it about 20 yards, a failure in my design to add enough weight. Within an hour of leaving home I had an adult male kestrel. By that evening he was jessed and eating on the fist, I was still totally amazed. I flew him for a month, he impressed me with his behaviour and willingness to learn, and then I released him to carry on with his life.

This brief attempt at trapping inspired me but alas due to the strict regulations in the UK it was to be logged into the memory of my youth. Many years later I found myself in Boise, Idaho, on vacation and making new friends amongst the strong falconry community that resides there.

'Kudos for Kudo' an article I had read in the *NAFA journal* of 1988 had inspired me to try and meet the author Bruce Haak. His adventures with his passage prairie falcon 'Kudo' and Brittany 'Nugget' were so eloquently written that I knew we would be friends if ever we met.

That first visit I spent a few happy hours in the company of Bruce and his lovely wife Evelyn, our friendship blossomed and I was invited to return a couple of years later.

Bruce works for the Idaho State Fish and Game Department as a non-game biologist, and part of his job involves banding passage raptors during their migration. Bruce's hospitality on my second vacation to Idaho was for me to experience the thrill of migration trapping as well as a hawking trip across southern Idaho.

THE FOLLOWING IS AN  
EXTRACT FROM MY JOURNAL  
ON MY FIRST TRAPPING  
ESCAPADE WITH BRUCE.

*The exact time of my arrival in Idaho was planned to coincide with the raptor migration. Bruce had filled my mind with exciting accounts of his many trapping adventures. Next best thing to falconry he assured me, I was fascinated, he had rekindled the memories of adrenalin rush I had experienced as a teenager trapping kestrels with a home-made ball chatrri on the island's sand dunes.*

*This was a whole different ball game, a very serious affair, it is every American falconer's fundamental right to be able to trap passage migrant indigenous raptors.*

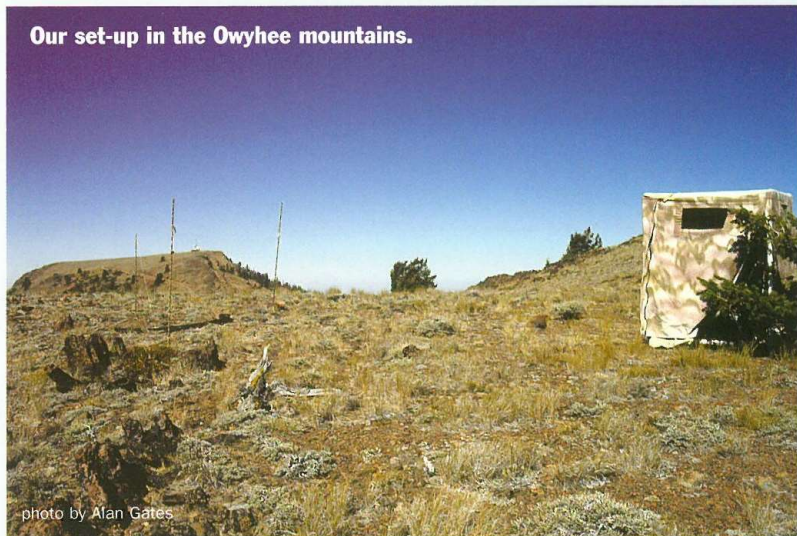
*Many falconers have turned this*

*Fish' depot it started to dawn on me that this was shaping up to be an expedition. The truck was on the large size compared to UK standards and just as well for we soon had it full. Bow-nets, dhogazza, mist-nets, hides (blinds) and camp chairs, planks of timber and numerous poles, not forgetting boxes of paraphernalia reels of line etc.*

*Our journey took us into the Owyhee mountain range in south western Idaho, the hard suspension of the Dodge became more apparent as the track deteriorated. At 6,000 feet we passed Silver City, a famous old mining town of the 1860s, and one of Idaho's most picturesque ghost towns.*

*The track ahead narrowed to barely the width of the Dodge, hewed from the mountain side, the*

**Our set-up in the Owyhee mountains.**



*activity into a speciality and are highly skilled in the field. A few, like Bruce are perfectionists, always on the look-out for the 'honey-pot' track in the sky, where large numbers of raptors funnel through or over the mountain ranges.*

*When we collected the Dodge pick up truck from the 'Wildlife &*

*surface was now made up of loose rock and we were still climbing, slipping, sliding but hopefully still climbing. Finally Bruce acknowledged that the vehicle could go no further and the rest of the journey would have to be on foot.*

*If one was to believe in reincarnation then one species could ▶*

*be ticked off the list, for I now know what a pack-donkey has to endure. The penny finally dropped as to why Bruce was so keen to share the delights of this particular trapping location. With a large load strapped to my back, both hands full he still suggested I might carry something else clenched in my teeth, but the thin mountain air, the steep gradient with loose footing made that impossible, after all I needed to curse as I slipped and struggled upwards. It took three journeys to backpack the contents of the Dodge up the mountain side. Once my muscles had recovered enough to allow me to stand vertical, I could fully appreciate the location, the panoramic beauty was stupendous with hills and mountains as far as the eye could focus, the view was only limited by the horizon.*

*It took a couple of hours to set up the traps and hide and finally get to sit down. Perched side-by-side with more strings in my hands than a professional puppeteer, we sat staring through the gauze viewing port redtails, Cooper's, sharpshins, goshawks, kestrels, any one at any second could flash in on our bait, the tension was draining.*

*A golden eagle, female by the size of the silhouette, cruised over the valley, the adrenalin rush was the equivalent to bungee jumping for me. Bruce, with far more experience at attempting to de-tangle angry eagles from trap nets, was less than ecstatic at the idea and very willing to volunteer that I attempt the task. In the end the eagle just glided on past, showing little interest in our tempting offerings.*

*We spent over 5 hours sat cramped in the small hide with the only visitor to dive into our nets, a plucky little kestrel. Ah well, some days it's like that.*

The weather and more precisely the wind direction has a lot to do with success, about as much preparation goes into the preliminary planning of one of Bruce's trapping trips as NASA puts into a launch date.

On my third trip to Idaho I had been priming Bruce for a possible trip to Hells Canyon for a trapping expedition. Knowing it was America's deepest canyon I thought it would have to be a stupendous location. Once again the weather stuck its oar into our plans, the winds were not funnelling the raptors down the ridges of the canyon and so our trip was postponed.

Bruce being a man of many talents he always has another 'honey-pot' location which might just suit the prevailing weather conditions. We headed north-east to Snowbank Mountains to a precise point on a particular ridge in a vast array of mountains. He managed to get the vehicle almost to the top of the ridge, and the usual sherpa hike of the enormous amount of gear over the ridge to the lofting pole was not of Olympic standards.

Finally we were perched side by side in the 'blind', as our American cousins like to call a hide. This was a hell of a spot, the view went on for ever, the weather was kind and we were sheltered. An important point when you are sitting motionless for the best part of six hours at 8,000 feet.

The action was quiet, but the anticipation of a sudden blast of action is draining. Amusing myself with demolishing the variety and quantity of food we had hiked into the blind, I suddenly spotted a familiar silhouette way down the mountain to the left of our blind. Locating and focusing the image in my binoculars confirmed a beautiful female golden eagle sunning herself. Pleased that my eyes were not playing tricks with me, I watched this eagle until my arms tired and I was forced to return to our lunchbox.

Anxiety forced Bruce to hand over

“Seconds later a sharp-shinned hawk ploughed into the pigeon and a sharp tug enveloped him in the bow-net.

Bruce exploded from the blind and I followed in his wake of tangled aluminium chairs and other detritus in our attempt to get to the net.”

the trap lines to me before I ate and drank his share of our provisions. As I peered through the gauzed window of the blind to the lure pole I caught sight of the huge form of the female eagle. She was pumping high into the sky at a tremendous speed followed feebly behind by her young eaglet, its yelping calls desperately trying to keep in contact. Perched just below the peak of the highest ridge we had a tremendous view as this aerial display unfolded.

The female eagle was out to enjoy herself, her exuberance in the skill of flight she had honed into adulthood, her desire to show off to her eaglet or was it another lesson in pilot training.

She reached her height and rolled over, teardrop shaped she dropped earthwards, approaching the eaglet she flared her tail a little and opened her wings a touch. Passing under the eaglet she pulled out of her dive and climbed. As the momentum from the dive lessened, she opened her wings, fully rolled in a loop, teardrop-shaped and dived again. As clearly as we could hear the yelping calls from the eaglet we could hear the air tearing through the adult female's primaries. What a masterly display of dominance of the sky, as they both flew out of our range of view we were left in awe at the performance we had witnessed.

Seconds later a sharp-shinned hawk ploughed into the pigeon and a

sharp tug enveloped him in the bow-net. Bruce exploded from the blind and I followed in his wake of tangled aluminium chairs and other detritus in our attempt to get to the net.

Secured, weighed, measured, banded and noted this fine little sharpshin was released to continue life and migration.

Two days later Bruce and I were north in the Danskin Mountains, traps set, we peered out over a more forested location. Chipmunks chattered at us from the trees above the blind, ravens circled, checking out this new residence in their territory. Soon the action started with a large raptor which closed up and bore straight out of the sky towards the pigeon right into our sights. It was a big female redbill and she meant business, I felt sorry for the pigeon, but at the last second she 'smelled a rat' and pulled out, swooped over our heads and perched high to our left in a dead pine.

The Chipmunks went nuts, but she ignored them, her attention was on our pigeon, it danced and flapped about but no matter how it tried it couldn't fool this girl. Stalemate for about 30 minutes whilst she intently scrutinised our traps from her lofty perch, once satisfied it was a dodgy deal she went on her way.

Deflated, Bruce and I sat dejected at our feeble attempts to lure in this hawk when....*bamm!* and a juvenile goshawk smacked the pigeon. I swear the bow-net was still completing its arc as Bruce burst out of the blind on his way to clutch his prize.

One look into her wild eyes epitomised all that explosive instinct that is a passage goshawk. As her breast heaved and her heart thumped I was immediately envious of all American falconers who are eligible to trap their own passage hawks.

It truly is a right of passage to trap a wild hawk, man her and then to hunt together as partners in the field. ■

**Alan holding a sharpshin, banded and ready for release in the Snowbank mountains.**

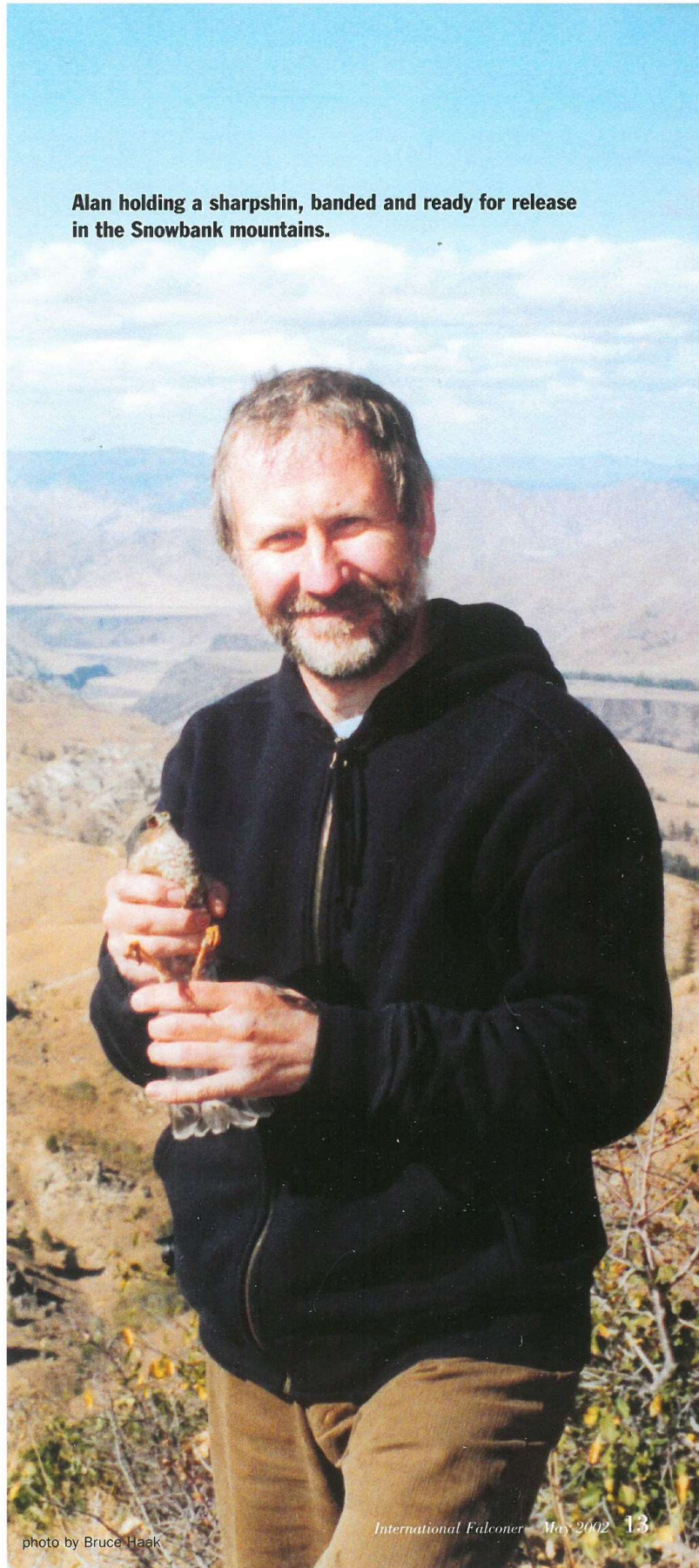


photo by Bruce Haak

# Sometimes things happen for a reason

by Joe Atkinson



Crissy Atkinson and her falcon 'Mojo'

When I made the announcement that I intended to get another falcon, my family said "What, are you nuts? You already have two falcons! How many can you fly?" Hey, I'm a falconer. So, yes, I am nuts. That should go without saying, but I actually had a plan in mind. You see, I was going to put my 3-year-old tiercel in with a female. Therefore, I would need to replace him with a new bird. I have always wanted to fly a 3/4 gyr/peregrine and had the opportunity to do so, which I gladly took. And naturally I committed to the breeder before making my little announcement to the family, which in hindsight probably wasn't the best plan of attack. But I did spend all summer driving the family from horse show to horse show and that's gotta count for something, right?! And believe me after you have seen one horse show you have seen them all. As the day came closer for my new falcon to arrive I realised that we would be attending yet another horse show. What a stroke of luck, I could have my new 3/4 gyr flown into the airport near the show grounds and spend my horse show days manning the new falcon instead of watching horses go in a seemingly endless amount of classes. Now that is my kind of horse show! The manning process went without incident. This new falcon was proving to be very tame. In fact he made the adjustment from breeding chamber and family life to falconry bird quite well. Nothing seemed to upset him,

dogs, cows or horses. In no time at all he was flying and chasing game, but not with the height and desire that I like in a gamehawk. Many falconers told me that 3/4 falcons are just like gyrfalcons in the way they fly and the amount of time they require to grow into a gamehawk. In fact, the popular approach is to give them a full year to mature, and do not expect much the first year. I guess there is some truth to that as I have had falcons that do fly better in their second season. On the other hand, I don't totally buy it, because what do these falcons do in the wild, starve to death? It was becoming clear that this young falcon was not going to scare any game this season.

I have been flying raptors for what seems like forever, and actually it has been forever. And like many hard-core falconers, my flying time is usually spent alone. Over the years my wife and I have spent many hours in the field together and I do have my share of hawking buddies to hook up with, but usually I'm by myself. I'm sure that I'm not the only falconer who has shot an emphatic fist up in the air and let out a loud YES! when my falcon did something unbelievable, only to realise that there was nobody around.

My 15-year-old daughter has shown a keen interest in falcons and the sport of falconry. She flew a kestrel for one summer and did a fine job handling this delicate little falcon. Chrissy has said on many occasions that she wanted to fly another bird, but

truthfully I didn't really take her seriously. But after she repeated the statement a few times I started to think that maybe there was something to it. At the same time I was growing a little discouraged with the 3/4 gyr and his desire to catch game. So one day, while driving her home from school I said "how would you like to fly the gyr?" I still don't know where that idea came from, but there it was, out there for all to hear. "You know if you want to do this it's not a part-time thing, this falcon deserves your complete attention every day". So now not only am I training a young falcon but also a young falconer. One who, after saying good night, says "are we going flying in the morning Dad?" It's interesting that I feel lost now going out alone, because there are so many wonderful things that I want to share with her and want her to see. Things that the average person will never witness, and an understanding of the natural world that comes from the bond formed with a falcon. Bonds formed through trust and patience, leading to flying a falcon at the highest level. A level where falcon, dog, and falconer are a team working together for a common goal. I never realised how fulfilling and gratifying it would become sharing this with my daughter. While out flying today we saw an adult bald eagle come down to take a bath and flew three falcons. What a great day. Sometimes things happen for a reason. ■

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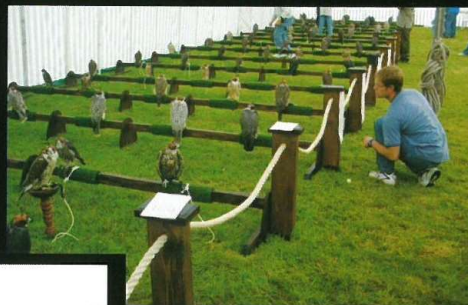
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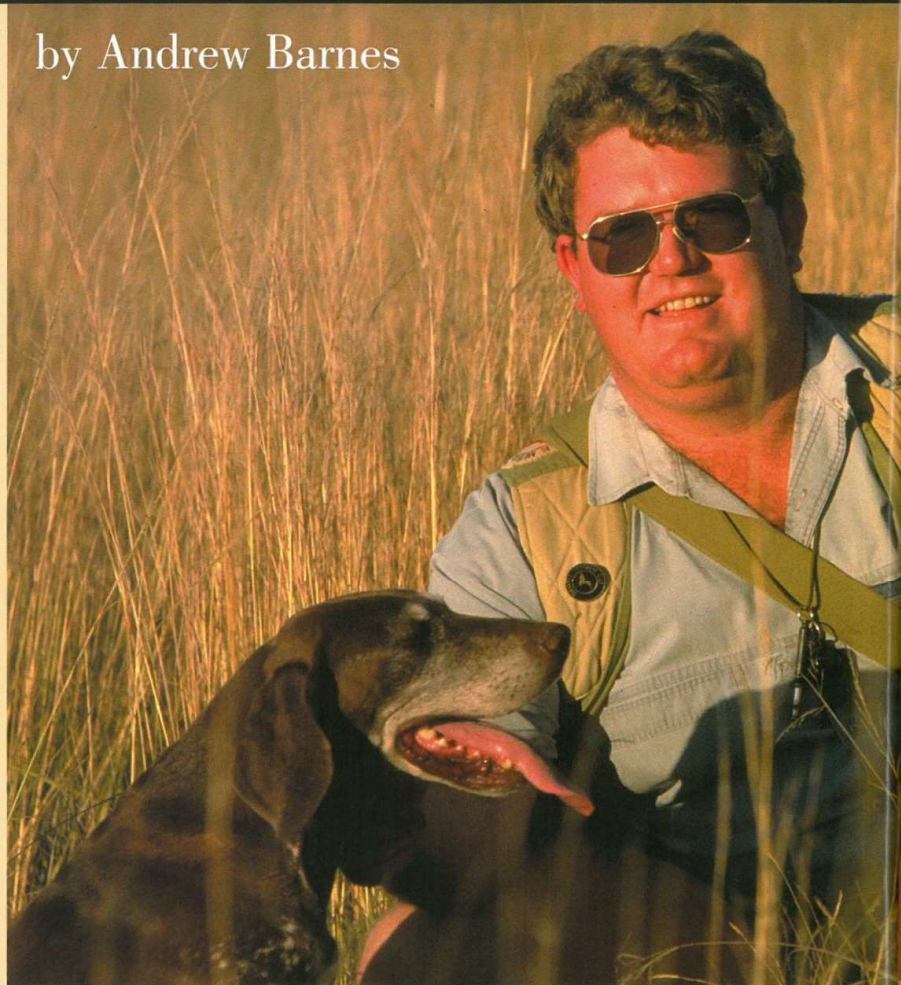
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# The Black Spar

by Andrew Barnes

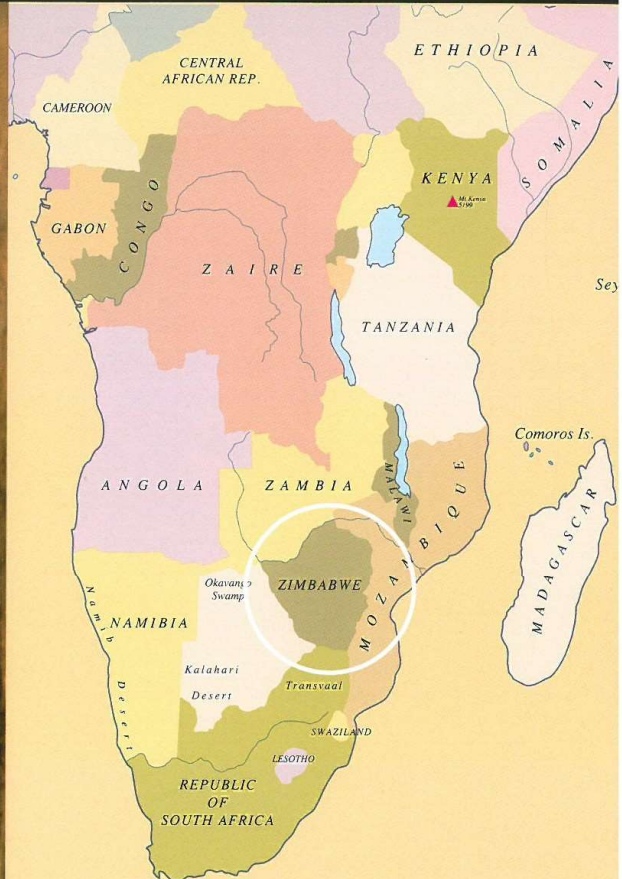


Being a shortwing enthusiast, the ultimate hawk for such an addict in Africa is undoubtedly the black sparrowhawk (*Accipiter melanoleucus*). Without question, this accipiter is the most intense killing machine an austringer can have the pleasure to associate with. Having said this, it is not easy to accept the temperamental behaviour of these birds and the falconer enters into a new experience school when acquiring his first 'black spar' as they are normally referred to in Zimbabwe.



# of Zimbabwe

photos by Craig Golden



The muskets generally weigh between 400 and 600 grams. The average hunting weight for a normal-range musket is between 510 and 540 grams. The females are considerably larger weighing on average between 700 and 900 grams, most of the females hunt in the 720 to 830 gram weight range. The muskets tend to have a slender delicate foot with a long middle toe indicating an almost exclusive avian diet. The females however have a very strong

heavy foot with equally long middle toe to tackle the bigger game birds. Their tails are relatively long and are therefore easily damaged during the unrelenting chases and skirmishes with game in very thick cover. Some of this cover is very inhospitable and often causes more damage to the falconer than the bird's tail!

In Zimbabwe we are fortunate to be able to access wild birds. Eyasses are available from August to October, sore-hawks from October to December

and passagers thereafter. Haggard hawks are not permitted for falconry as they have proved to be unsuitable.

In my experience the best hawk to acquire for falconry is a late sore-hawk. This may be disputed by others, but having hunted both eyasses and sore-hawks the latter seem to turn out the better falconry birds. The fact that early success in hunting is obtained with sore hawks is another point in their favour. I have only had experience with one trapped musket ▶



passage bird. A very competent falconer and friend Geoff Bodington and myself were attempting to trap passage lanners and peregrines at a site not far from my home. We had seen this passage bird the previous day late in the evening. It got our adrenaline high. The next morning we set our *dhoghazza* nets for the longwings and waited in anticipation. At around 9:00 am the musket black spar arrived. For 2 hours he came down to the nets, ran around, went up to the decoy, came out, but would not fly into a net. He moved off and went to sit in a eucalypt plantation a short distance from us. We set a *bal chatri* under him and waited. No longwings and no black sparrowhawk! We sat the entire day with no action. As we were taking down the mist nets, movement was noticed near the *bal chatri* site,

the musket had come down. Several minutes later and a leopard-crawl of some 50 metres later we had a passage musket black spar in our sweaty mits.

The hawk was given to another very competent austringer Pierre Heymans, who through no fault of his found the hawk totally unresponsive. After much consultation and brain storming we concluded that the bird was maybe too old when trapped. He did show signs of the moult starting. Pierre and I released him at the same place he was trapped some 2 months later. The nest site that he came from is literally 200 metres from my back door and I subsequently saw him in the vicinity of the nest several times after his release.

Black sparrowhawks, because of their intense and persistent nature tend to be somewhat temperamental.

Their initial manning, training and conditioning to their falconry environment is therefore of extreme importance. If any of these points are not absolutely perfect when the bird is entered, disaster is sure to strike. Most black spars in this country are gamehawks (although some muskets are not) and it is essential that a pointing dog is employed.

These birds adapt to dogs very readily and all the birds I have hunted have struck a remarkable rapport with my German shorthaired pointers. In some hunts I have literally been a bystander with the dog and hawk setting-up the hunt themselves. May be considered uncontrolled falconry by some! The muskets are hunted a much wider variety of quarry than the females and thus hunting a musket can be more fulfilling. These eager

*“These eager birds will chase anything from a dove, loerie, lark, quail to francolin, teal and even guineafowl.”*

birds will chase anything from a dove, loerie, lark, quail to francolin, teal and even guineafowl. If a musket is entered properly to guineafowl he will soon learn to master them and have great success and confidence when encountering them. The females are almost exclusively gamehawks and having seven species of francolin and the guineafowl to hunt, one is usually not short of quarry. I can remember one season where the country experienced a rat population explosion. I was entering a sore-hawk female and the cover was still very high and thick. We were looking for francolin around the edges of mature corn fields. Her eyesight being keener than mine she was able to detect rats in the lines of corn much easier than I. Not wanting to restrain the bird I would let her go, thinking that it was a

francolin she had spotted deep into the field. After retrieving her from the tenth or so rat, I stopped using this area. We moved to more open cover and because of the rat explosion there was an abundance of grass owls; she did the same with these. Fortunately she never managed to kill any I hope as I released all of them alive. As soon as the cover had subsided and I was able to offer her some good slips on francolin we never looked back. I named her ‘Raker’ and went on to fly her for four seasons. She turned out to be the best black sparrowhawk I have hunted.

If not served consistently with game and hunted on a regular basis, these birds tend to become very frustrated. If they are presented with numerous quality slips, their eagerness and persistence come to the fore and chases of 400 to 500 metres

are the norm. Even if they do miss the bird on the first phase they will have marked very close and a second phase kill is assured. The flights and chases of the muskets can be very dramatic, especially if hunted at the smaller quarry species. I owned a musket that took three snipe one season, probably the most spectacular hunting I have had with a musket. Because of their persistence one is able to slip them many times during a hunting session without fear of the bird becoming disheartened. One can achieve multiple kills in a hunting session as long as the bird is adequately rewarded after each kill. This practice can also have a devastating effect on the gamebird population of an area if not controlled.

One negative of the black spar and particularly sore-hawks is their unacceptance of strange dogs in the





field. Working GSPs which are liver and white, predominantly more liver than white, poses a serious problem when hunting with others who use English type pointers that are more white than anything else. One evening whilst hunting Raker with some visitors from Britain, we were onto a large flock of guineafowl. We had an excellent slip at the flock. The country was somewhat wooded and we were unable to see exactly where she had put in. We tracked with telemetry and eventually got a signal from down an ant-bear hole. This happens when hunting black spars, as guineas and certain francolin species take cover in these large burrows. Being a rather burly character, retrieving my hawk from these holes is somewhat difficult. I laid down and put my arms and head into the hole and was fortunate to hear

a bell and feel a hunting jess. I was able to get hold of this jess and pull. One very angry bird coming out of a hole in reverse. After giving her a tidbit and reorganising her feathers she was somewhat composed again and we continued as I was sure other birds were in the area.

We hadn't covered much ground when a small flock of guineas broke cover. Raker singled one out and again the chase was on. Again due to the terrain it was difficult to follow the chase all the way. Out with the tracking gear again back in the direction we had come from. We were almost back at the camp following the signal while going down the vehicle track that led to the camp. About 30 metres out of the camp on the track, there she sat plucking one very dead guineafowl. As I was letting her break

***“We were about 150 metres from the pond when a duck took off. Raker showed no hesitation and was off. The chase was at least 700 metres. I saw her take the duck at the end of the small river feeding the pond...what a sight.”***



in. Ade Langley and his pointer Georgie arrived, she's liver and white with a long tail, something Raker is totally unfamiliar with. Even with the warm blood filling her mouth it was too much for her to continue feeding and she took off into the nearest Msasa tree and it took me an hour to get her to come down again. A fine example of a black spars' mentality. Strangely, Raker had flown into a diamond mesh fence about three months prior to this outing chasing a guineafowl. This was the first guinea she had encountered after the accident and she showed no hesitation in chasing.

In the last season I hunted Raker we were fortunate to have in one of my usual hunting areas, a resident flock of white-faced ducks. We were walking an area near the small pond that harboured the ducks looking for

francolin. We were about 150 metres from the pond when a duck took off. Raker showed no hesitation and was off. The chase was at least 700 metres. I saw her take the duck at the end of the small river feeding the pond...what a sight. We continued to hunt these ducks and managed to add eight to her bag that season. She only slept out one night in four seasons and that was after a chase on a duck very late in the evening. The chase went the best part of 2 kilometres and by the time I had reached her she had taken up position at the top of a very large eucalypt and it was too dark to call her down. The next morning she showed no hesitation in coming to the glove. Pierre Heymans has also hunted a musket at red-billed teal with very good success and a great spectacle to watch. Unfortunately this outstanding musket died in the pursuit of a teal late one evening, not being able to detect a barbed-wire fence.

Having hunted several black sparrowhawks with varying degrees of success, in my opinion they have to be one of the most versatile and rewarding accipiters available for falconry. They put a different perspective on the art as their temperamental natures do not allow the falconer to be complacent and predict how the hunting session will turn out. I know falconers who have been able to drive through the city centre with their spar unhooded on the passenger seat. Others won't allow a stranger within 20 metres of them. Some falconers, because of their temperament, will not even consider owning one. Admittedly, because of their hunting style and the length of their chases one does not always get to see the end of the chase. One of my preferred hunting methods with black spars is to 'leap-frog' through a tree line, this can be very rewarding and is spectator friendly.

I and the other devoted austringers in Zimbabwe and the other African States where falconry is practiced, are extremely fortunate to have this austere bird available to us for falconry purposes. It is an honour to

have owned and hunted a bird that is revered by so many the globe over. I hope that with the conservation and devotion to this species it deserves, we will continue to have this species available for as long as falconry survives. ■

#### NOTES ON THE GAMEBIRDS HUNTED WITH BLACK SPARROWHAWKS.

**The Helmeted Guineafowl** *Numida meleagris* is a large bird about the size of a domestic chicken. They have an average weight of 1,200 grams. The plumage is a uniform dark slate grey/black with very small white spots. The top of the head has a horny casque. The head, face and neck is bare and is blue and red. They occur in all habitats.

**Swainson's Francolin** *Francolinus swainsonii* is the most common francolin hunted by falconers. The females average 500 grams and the males 700 grams. They frequent cultivated land and all other habitats.

**Red-necked francolin** *francolinus afer* are very similar to Swainson's but tend to occur in more dense riverine habitats.

**Natal francolin** *Francolinus natalensis* are slightly smaller than Swainson's and only occur along watercourses, hillsides and rock outcrops.

**Red-billed francolin** *Francolinus adspersus* is only found in the western lowveld of Zimbabwe. They are about the same size as the Natal francolin and occur in similar habitats.

**Shelley's francolin** *Francolinus shelleyi* are smaller than the afore mentioned species, the males averaging 500 grams and the females 420 grams. They tend to occur in well-grassed areas of the open savanna type.

**Crested francolin** *Francolinus sephaena* are roughly the same size as the Shelley's and are birds of the lowveld areas. They occur near river courses and rock outcrops.

*“How’d the big gos  
do this year?”*

he asked.

*“She did ok,”*

was my reply.

# ‘ANADYR’ - a season in review

by Darryl A. Perkins

When we last left Anadyr, my imprinted West Siberian goshawk, she was a big frolicking colt full of life and vigor, sometimes serious, often not. (See “Anadyr –When East Meets West”, *International Falconer*, November 2001 – Issue 11) At the time of that writing, late October 2001, I was busy preparing for my annual trip out west and Anadyr was busy catching bagged pheasants. The weather was unseasonably warm and at 53 ounces, bagged pheasants were an easy mark for her no matter the distance. Hooding had become a bit ‘iffy’ and she was vocal but otherwise her manners were good and handling her was a pleasure. There is only so much a bird can learn from bagged quarry no matter how difficult or ingenious you make the slips. However, confidence and a decent level of fitness are obtainable goals. Therefore, with a bird that was confident, handled great and in good

shape, I headed west.

The 2001 NAFA meet was in Lamar, Colorado the week of Thanksgiving, November 19 – 23. I had hooked up with Missouri falconers Tom Schultz and Mindy Batsch outside St. Louis and attempted to follow them into Lamar. In keeping with my reputation as a slow traveller, I kept drifting further and further behind and eventually Tom drove off and left me. I spent the night in Garden City, Kansas and pulled into Lamar at noon on Sunday 18. Anadyr was 55 ounces and Marcella; my Finnish chamber-raised goshawk, (See “Mar-hawk!”, *International Falconer*, February 2001 – Issue 6) was 41 ounces. To minimize stress, I generally keep my birds an ounce or two above hunting weight while travelling and stop everyday to allow them to drink and bath. I spent Sunday getting checked in, shooting the breeze around the weathering yard and slipping off to

weather the birds for a couple of hours in peace. Before sundown, I walked a likely looking field with good sign then headed back to the hotel to prepare for tomorrow’s hunt.

The next day after lunch found then Northeast director Dr. John Parks and myself walking the same pasture with Anadyr at 54 ounces. Anadyr had shown little interest in the one huge (12 pounds) bagged rabbit she killed but she was 57.5 ounces at the time. John and I spread out and walked and walked and walked for nearly an hour with no slips. The crest of the hill we had just walked down was about 300 yards away. As soon as we stopped and turned around Anadyr left the fist and following her flight direction, I spotted a ‘Jack’ that had bolted and headed up the hill. Anadyr closed the gap and when she committed, this Jack did the circle the wagon routine, which left her clutching dirt and he continued uphill. She got up and just as he went



over the hill, shot up in the air did a wing-over and pumped down. John and I were both losing ground fast and when I made it to the top I threw him the keys and said go get the truck. The pasture continued downhill for a half-mile with yucca plants scattered here and there. Neither Anadyr nor the Jack were anywhere in sight as I headed towards the yucca and John the truck. While I was catching my breath, John drove up and we headed for the nearest clump of yuccas. Anadyr came side-stepping out of a yucca patch with hackles raised and her feathers ruffled. Once on the fist, John and I started kicking through the yucca when the Jack bolted 30 feet in front of us. Anadyr's effort was anything but genuine so I figured she had been kicked off. I told John we may as well go back to the hotel and wait until she is closer to 50 ounces. Heading back to the truck, another Jack got up about 100 yards out. She blew off the fist and closed the gap but missed. So with the sun setting fast and another 40 minutes of walking proving fruitless, we decided to call it a day.

In the following days with temperatures rising, I was unable to get Anadyr's weight down to the point where she genuinely wanted a Jack. On subsequent slips, her efforts were lacking. By being obsessed with taking Jacks to the point of ignoring pheasant and ducks slips; I did my hawk a huge disservice. For years, I have preached the importance of patience and the need to help young birds gain confidence. Unfortunately, in this case, I was temporarily blinded by selfish pride. It was more important to drag a big Jack back to the weathering yard than the continued development of my hawk. I passed up opportunity after opportunity for my hawk to be successful because I wanted a Jack. Thankfully I saw the error of my ways and despite my many blunderings, Anadyr turned out OK.

**“We swung around and started working the field cross-wind when a Jack bolted at Tim’s feet. Marcella was off the fist in a flash, rolled the Jack before he had gone 30 yards and had him under control when I slid in to assist.”**

Following the NAFA meet I spent a day in Kansas in the company of Tim Kimmel and Pennsylvania falconer Bill McBride. We had about a two-hour window when the winds would be down to get some hawking in. Marcella, the long-neglected marhawk, was 39 ounces so I decided to give her a shot at a Jack. At first, in Lamar with 20 people in the field, she didn't perform well. After I sent the hawking party back to the trucks, she settled down and flew them hard but did not bring one to bag. Tim said that the field he had selected, normally held good numbers of Jacks. I explained that she was a bit nervous so we were to keep our distance between us. I took the lead as we started across the field with Tim slightly behind and 15 yards to my right while Bill was to the right of Tim and nearly even with me. This 'V' formation was designed to roust those Jacks that stayed down as I passed by. Marcella's head bobbed and I saw a Jack about 300 yards away running across the new winter wheat being bombed time and time again by a wild prairie falcon. We swung around and started working the field cross-wind when a Jack bolted at Tim's feet. Marcella was off the fist in a flash, rolled the Jack before he had gone 30 yards and had him under control when I slid in to assist. It was a picture-perfect slip. While this was her first Jack, the marhawk once again proved her mettle and reminded me that she was not to be neglected.

It's mid-January now and although

flown sparingly, Marcella has 8 ducks in the bag. Anadyr is now strong and confident having taken 15 ducks. With her first couple of duck slips she acted as if they were bagged pheasants. She followed to see where they went. After tracking her down a quarter of a mile away, soaking wet with the ducks safe on the lake; I guess she figured she had better catch them quick. Something about the dark bloody meat and rich fat made her all out efforts worthwhile. That was the deal I made with her. You give an all out effort and catch a duck, sister it's yours. This contract I made was the key to her success as she grew to absolutely love ducks. She took them flying out of trees, off the fist and water was no safe haven. If they bailed they had better get themselves completely under water. Three didn't and won't be able to share their experience with their wild kindred.

Today is the last day of duck season and Anadyr weighs 55 ounces. The Massachusetts Falconry & Hawk Trust is holding a field meet on Cape Code so by 6:00 am Anadyr is hooded and loaded in the truck for the one-hour trip to the Cape. A phone call at 6:15 am alerts me to problems at work and my plans for the Cape are canceled. Given the state of the Massachusetts economy after September 11, no call can go unanswered. At least not by a consultant wishing to remain employed. The plan was a quick stop by the nursery with its streams and ponds before heading in to work. The phone rings again at 6:55 am and I say, "what now?" The "what" turns out to be falconer and friend Bill Johnston who tells me that after knocking down a duck at the nursery, his falcon Sugie had taken off and he had just recovered her. He says there must have been 20 to 30 mixed mallard and black ducks on the pond. With the nursery ducks already flown, I abandon the nursery plan and decide to head down to Brockton if I finished



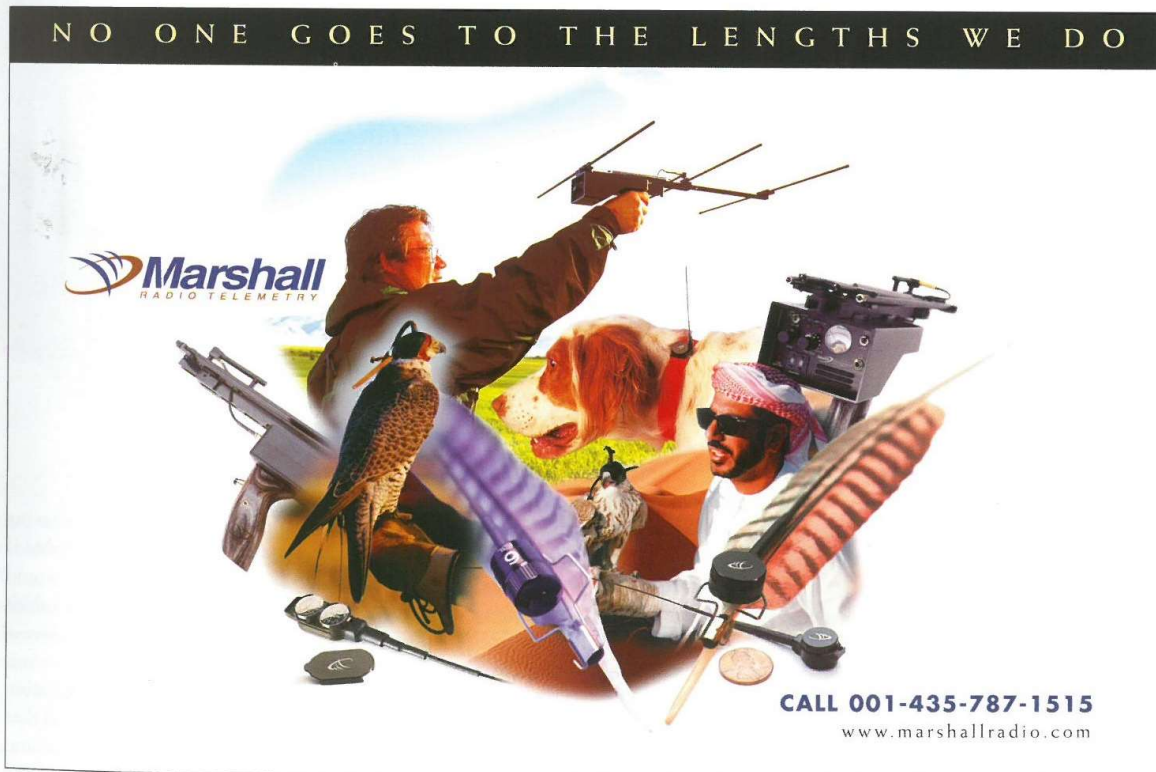
at work in time.

As fate would have it the problem at work takes longer than I had anticipated and I do not leave until 1:15 pm. Too late to head to Brockton I decide to check the nursery just in case and if all else failed; throw her in a tree for a bunny flight. It is a miserable day with a couple of inches of fresh snow on the ground, extremely overcast with a slight mixture of sleet and snow falling. I enter the east end of the nursery and slowly drive by the pond heading to the far stream and possible black ducks. I can barely see for the mist and fog but notice 3 geese standing on the ice at the edge of the pond and about 20 ducks bathing, feeding and having themselves a good old time. I had hooked Anadyr up in the parking lot at work and checked the telemetry so she was all set. I ease the truck down the dirt road to a point just beyond the stream, get Anadyr out

without closing any doors and start my approach. My fresh tire tracks aid my approach and just before I get to within 20 feet of the pond, I kneel down and unhood Anadyr. She bobs her head and stands on here tippy-toes as sounds of the ducks splashing and quacking can be heard coming from the pond. She has been here before. The key to flying pond ducks with a goshawk is to either wait until the ducks clear water before releasing her or have an assistant flush them as you hold the gos back. It's a timing issue. That is unless the gos is a wily old veteran who hugs the water preventing the ducks from bailing. The problem with this pond is the small trees and vegetation growing up around the edge which while making a close slip possible, forces the gos to fly up and over and sometimes allows the ducks to bail. As it turns out I panic and stand up too soon, don't prevent her

from seeing the ducks or the ducks seeing her. This results in her getting on them too quickly and they bail. She takes a few swipes at them on the water but never lands in the trees surrounding the pond. She continues to circle with ducks attempting to leave only to change their minds and bail at the last minute. She is about 30 feet above the pond and at the outer arch of her circle when a group of about 5 can take it no longer. They start their climb and she swings around, turns on the after-burners and takes the drake only inches over my head. What a flight! I take pictures in the failing light and mist knowing they wouldn't turn out too good. "That's OK," I thought. They would represent a good day's hawking with a Western Siberian goshawk. She did OK! Good hawking. ■

NO ONE GOES TO THE LENGTHS WE DO

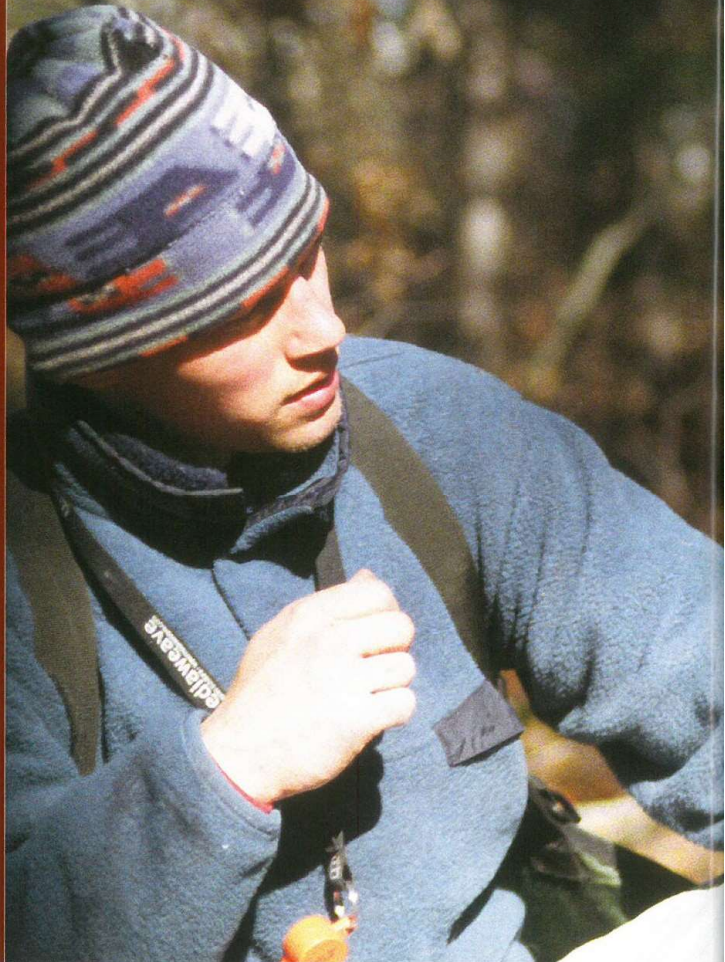


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# Squirreling Rhode Island to

**G**reetings from the US of A!  
And hello from Rhode Island, the best state in North America to hunt squirrel. Well, maybe not the best place to hunt to squirrel, but here in Rhode Island, falconers are enjoying what I believe to be the most exciting form of hawking – squirrel hawking. While the words to describe squirrel hawking become harder to find, what has not waned is my passion for chasing what I believe to be the most challenging prey for a redtail. Though there are many falconers, or hawkers for that matter, who have been chasing squirrels for many years, this facet of hawking is gaining the respect it deserves. This is due to hawkers such as Gary Brewer of Chandler, Texas and other falconers who continued to squirrel hawk through the years when it was unpopular or considered taboo. It is these falconers who have blazed a trail for hawkers such as myself and many others to enjoy squirrel hawking. Thank you.



**I**t wasn't until the last half, of my second year, as an apprentice, that I was introduced to squirreling. Beforehand, it was sort of whispered among the falconers I went hawking with, but it was the risk of a bite that dissuaded many falconers to pursue one of the most exciting styles of hawking available. I had met a

falconer by the name of Steve Aldin from Massachusetts, who was an avid squirrel hawker and one helluva tree climber. All it took was one day of hunting grey squirrel with Steve, and my redtail, and I was hooked. The hunt that took place between hawk and squirrel has had me addicted to squirrel hawking ever since.

While I spent my first year chasing rabbit, 95 per cent of the flights I never saw in their entirety. I would witness the bird key in on the rabbit from a tree, 'bomb' ahead, and give a modified 'stoop' and crash into cover. I would hear the telltale indication that a rabbit had been caught, and that was the flight. Here in Rhode Island

# n the USA be more specific

by Jim Gwiazdzinski



photo by Geoff Dennis

the cover is thick; it's where the rabbits are, and the going is tough. What I wasn't getting was the satisfaction of watching the chase and the capture of quarry. I felt like I was missing something.

Now, at the other end of the spectrum; squirrel hawking is up front and personal. While 95 per cent of

rabbit flights go unseen, squirrel hawking is just the opposite - 95 per cent of the time I am able to watch the entire chase and capture from beginning to the end.

## **A NEW SEASON OF BUSHYTAIL CHASES**

Already it is a new season and

there have been a number of memorable flights. And while one can argue that, they were all good flights – game was put in the bag, some of the chases were standouts. Accompanying these flights was a lot of hollering, cheering, trips and falls, comic relief, laughter, and above all else...fun.

One aspect of squirrel hawking I enjoy a great deal is that everyone can get involved. It can be a group effort by all. The excitement of squirrel hawking is contagious. I've had many falconers and non-falconers come away saying it was one of the best times they had hunting. It is a pleasure watching falconers and hawk walkers go through a transformation when they go squirrel hawking. They start running around like kids at a playground, trying to follow the chase and flight of a hunt. Some of these people are still 'missing-in-action' in squirrel hawking woodlots of Rhode Island.

## **RHODE ISLAND (FAVOURITE HOTSPOT)**

I found a true 'honey-hole'. The place was loaded with squirrel when I gave a walk through during the off-season (a falconer's job is never done). I couldn't wait for the hunting season to get underway.

Hunting day finally came. When I first put the bird up, he froze, he probably thought he had died and gone to heaven. Squirrels were everywhere. It was more of a thorn in my side because he wouldn't work one squirrel long enough, before trying to fly and chase another. After repeated attempts, my bird – 'Bird' – settled into some serious squirrel hawking and the games began.

I climbed a tree (spruce tree), as I sometimes have been known to do, trying to pop a squirrel out of a 'meatball'. I wanted the bird to concentrate on me. The bird flew over and waited from a near-by tree. I got about halfway up, and gave the tree a bear hug and 'pop goes the weasel', uh ▶

sorry, I mean squirrel. The squirrel jumped from spruce tree to spruce tree with the bird shadowing ole' bushytail. The squirrel was closing in on the last spruce tree when the bird flew out of the spruce stand about 30 feet, turned and crashed into the spruce nailing the squirrel. The bird bounced off a few branches on his way down with the squirrel in his clutches.

### **RHODE ISLAND (COMIC RELIEF)**

We were out hawking the same honey-hole some weeks later and experienced a series of events that made for a whole lotta fun. The group consisted of some folks from Connecticut; George Hansel, Jon D'Arpino, being that Connecticut is the only state in the U.S. without falconry regs, they come to Rhody to get their falconry fix. More locally, a Rhode Island falconer named Mike Tomas, my wife and her friend decided to come as well.

Okay, back to the honey-hole; we pushed a squirrel from a large oak tree to a pine tree, directly next to the oak. The squirrel was at the very top taking cover in the thick, condensed branches of the pine. The bird couldn't get a clean shot, so up the tree I went. I didn't get more than halfway up when the squirrel jumped to the next pine tree and went to ground. Bird tried a ground shot but missed as the squirrel ran up another juniper tree. It was easy enough to get the squirrel moving again. Mr. Hansel gave the juniper a shake and out came the squirrel. The squirrel didn't just come out of the tree, it launched itself out of the tree, hitting Mr. Tomas in the chest, dropped to the ground, and ran through his legs. The bird was already in flight and also flew between Mr. Tomas' legs trying to catch Mr. Bushytail. The squirrel got to another juniper, went to the top and would not move. Mr. Hansel shook the tree a little, making the squirrel move enough for the bird to nail it. The bird stooped in, crashed the top of the tree

**"He adjusted, went into a dive, reached Mach 5, primaries caught fire as he raked the squirrel off the side of the tree and parachuted to the ground with squirrel number three."**



photo by Geoff Dennis

and battled it out with the squirrel. Bird had subdued the squirrel but the problem was he was wedged in some branches pretty good. So, up the tree I went, grabbing the squirrel which the bird had a firm grip of, and began my decent. As I made my way down, things fell apart. I was going down the fast way – I was free-falling. Just prior

to going down I gave my wife a look of a deer in headlights. Down I went still holding onto the squirrel with the bird in tow. I hit terra firma gracefully, but might add, wasn't greeted with a helping hand or an: "Are you alright?" Instead there was only laughter. The only damper was the use of smelling salts to bring Mr. Tomas back to reality.



photo by Jim Gwiazdzinski

Squirrel 'Meatball'

### RHODE ISLAND

The incident I am about to describe is something that has never happened before while I have been hunting. Myself, my apprentice Vivian Maxson and some friends were working a squirrel in an oak tree. The bird was trying to get the squirrel at a disadvantage, but the squirrel kept giving him the slip to the other side of the tree. Finally, the bird positioned himself above the squirrel and tucked his wings. The squirrel started running but just as it reached the crotch of the tree the bird was able to get it. There was a scuffle going on up there for a few minutes, and then the bird seemed to give up and flew to another tree leaving the squirrel behind. The bird remained perched while I was trying to figure out what was going on. I had never seen my bird just let go of quarry in that manner. Then...something fell from the tree and landed in a bush under the oak. Mrs. Maxson lifted some branches, when from nowhere, the bird bombed into the bush and grabbed its prize – the squirrel. It was apparent when I made in that the squirrel was already dead. Apparently, a fatal headshot was the cause. Whether waiting out the squirrel was the birds plan all along I'll never know. I'll leave that up to someone

He was sprawled out on the ground mumbling, drooling and twitching. His wife Amy Tomas says he still has nightmares and wakes up screaming something like: "Please Mr. Squirrel don't hurt me". Over and over again. He's still a little shaky while chasing squirrels, and still has that twitch but I'm sure he'll recover by next season.

else to decide. I do know it was the most bizarre kill to date.

### RHODE ISLAND (TRIPLES WITH A LOT OF COMIC RELIEF ADDED):

I was out micro-hawking with Mrs. Maxson, and her husband in a honey-hole of all honey-holes. We began hunting the corner of the woodlot when I heard the voice of Mrs. Maxson cry out: "He's got one! Your bird has one". While I was pleased with my bird's success, I hadn't noticed her drift off from the hawking party. However, I was a bit perturbed because she was off on her own and wasn't pushing squirrel with us. You all know about those 'drifters', they are at every meet. The ones who venture so far away from the hawking group you have to send a search and rescue team to get them back. Or even worse, they get game moving a quarter of a mile away. Perfect.

I was going to say something but declined. I transferred the bird, carried him on the fist, and put the bird up where I wanted to hunt for squirrel number two. Yet again, I hear from afar: "Your bird got another one!" Somehow, Mrs. Maxson dipped below the radar again, and disappeared from sight. This time I had to say something. I transferred the bird and before putting the bird back up, I told Mrs. Maxson she shouldn't stray too far from the hawking group, it makes things a little chaotic. She replied: "I was only trying to relieve myself. Every time I tried to sneak away, your damn bird followed me!"

I stood corrected. Comic relief at its best.

With squirrel number two in the bag we went for squirrel number three. We found a squirrel in a huge oak tree that immediately started running for the top branches. The bird flew over and laddered himself up about 30 feet above the squirrel and a good 80 feet above us. He adjusted, went into a ▶

dive, reached Mach 5, primaries caught fire as he raked the squirrel off the side of the tree and parachuted to the ground with squirrel number three. A day of triples thanks to the weak bladder of my apprentice. Many thanks to Mrs. Maxson.

### **OLE' BUSHYTAIL**

What I have gained from pursuing grey squirrels is an appreciation for the prey. These critters are smart. Most have a Ph.D. on the art of escape and evasion. I'm sure you can relate to this when a squirrel has decided to visit your bird feeder (if you have one), wreak havoc, and solve any obstacle course that you may have tried to dissuade a squirrel from cleaning you out of bird food.

Apply the same intellect of a squirrel to a hunting situation and the hunt becomes a real challenge. Both for the bird and myself. The hunt changes tempo and direction by the second. I can enter a woodlot trying to push a squirrel, when instantaneously I am sprinting to catch up to my bird and the squirrel engaged in the hunt.

One of my favourite get-away tactics from a squirrel is the bail. If I push a squirrel hard enough by climbing the tree, and the squirrel sees the hawk, the squirrel will bail from 50 feet plus, going into a glide Superman would appreciate. The squirrel hits the ground, goes into a sprint that rivals the speed of a cottontail rabbit as if nothing ever happened. Did I say squirrels were tough?

Squirrels know their environment so intimately that I have never seen a squirrel not have a game plan. They just don't have that stumped look leading them to crack under pressure. If a squirrel goes to ground, there is a reason: usually in the form of a hole at the bottom of a tree, a hollow provided by a felled tree, a near-by thicket, or briar patch to put between the squirrel and give the bird the slip. If the squirrel is running full tilt from tree to

tree there is a reason: usually a hole in a tree or a leaf nest waiting down the line for the squirrel to slip into. Squirrel almost always admit this bark just before they go into a hole. I guess it's their way of letting the hawk know, he gave him the slip. I have seen squirrel bury themselves in snow, a pile of leaves or crawl into a tire left in a woodlot. They will seek shelter in anything natural or man made in the woods. When a squirrel is on the move they are intent and deliberate.

Squirrels will hang upside down from a limb, wedge themselves in the crook of a tree, hide behind a tangle of vines growing up the side of a tree, not budging even if the bird is inches away, or making repeated strikes. They have nerves of steel. Put this together with the talents of a redtail and there is a constant ebb and flow of the squirrel and redtail trying to outsmart each other.

A day of hawking can consist of multiples as well. There are plenty of squirrels around. Sometimes one squirrel just doesn't do it. I can go hawking and within 10 minutes, a squirrel is in the bag. This obviously didn't provide enough hunting time for both the bird and myself. One can push the envelope and do triples, sometimes quadruples (bag limit kept in mind) while squirrel hawking. This formula can spell success, really boosting the confidence level of the bird. But, one must tread lightly, taking the bird's attitude and behaviour into account. There is no reason to get greedy and push the bird too much. The results can have the opposite affect on the bird's psyche resulting in a troubled relationship between bird and falconer.

### **TOUGH AS NAILS**

Not only do squirrels have the athleticism of a pro athlete, they are also one tough customer. They have an extremely tough hide that only the sharpest of talons can penetrate. Their sharp teeth are not only effective for

opening nuts, destroying bird feeders, and the attics of homes, but giving a pursuing bird a good nip, convincing the redtail to let go. Those feet are armed with claws that they will use like a cat when they "ball-up" on the redtail, trying to kick the redtail off. Every squirrel in the bag is hard earned.

Thanks to Mr. Brewer, for he has come up with battle armor (squirrel-chaps) that lowers the risk of a bad squirrel bite. His squirrel chaps work, providing the redtail with tarsus and some toe protection. There are some other modified squirrel-chap designs that have been passed onto me and other falconers due to some falconers in Massachusetts.

Squirrel hawking has never been safer, nor has there been a better time to try this method of hawking. For me, the variables add up just right, there are plenty of squirrels to pursue, the hunt is exciting, and I am able to not only witness the test of wits between hawk and squirrel, I am also able to be a direct link to the hunt and success of my bird. Also, with the inevitable development of woodlots and open spaces I think squirrel hawking is becoming more important. Heck, if you really had to, you could go out hawking right in your own backyard. While it may be a difficult task to find and hold onto rabbit cover you can hunt, squirrels can be found very readily.

Certainly squirrels, with our influence on the environment, have adapted very well to our altering of the land. It seems more houses equal more squirrels. Call it micro-hawking call it what you want, but the reality is many falconers, year after year, lose a honey-hole they once had for hunting due to development. Squirrels do need their habitat, but they will feed from a bird feeder, or even a garbage can. Which means a woodlot adjacent to a developed area, can sustain a large squirrel population than a natural woodlot. For instance, while watching



a documentary on birds of prey of New York City, it was stated that Central Park has one of the densest populations of squirrel in America. More people – more squirrels. What do these critters attract? Redtails, and lots of them.

#### **GO FOR IT!**

If you live in an area where squirrels abound, I have to say go for it. Start hunting ole' bushytail, you will not be disappointed. The quality of flights are first rate. And you know what? It's a whole lotta fun, which is the point. Why practice this sport if you can't have fun. One should be rewarded for hours, days, years spent training, manning and flying our birds. Of course there is the privilege of being around our birds, which goes

without saying. But it is the hunting that falconers enjoy. Getting out and chasing quarry. Whether chasing pheasant or rabbit with a goshawk, quail with a Cooper's hawk, gang hawking with a cast of Harris' hawks, or falcon flights in 'Big Sky' country on grouse, it is the hunt that matters, it is the hunt that we prepare for, it is the hunt that we envision when we are not hunting.

For me, the reward is big. I get to go squirrel hawking. I know of a falconer who has been hawking for quite some time. However, he never hawked for squirrels. Recently, he decided to do away with stereotypes and take the plunge. We correspond frequently, with him sharing tales of squirrel chases down south. His very words were: "I wish I started squirrel

hawking a long time ago." I say: at least he has started.

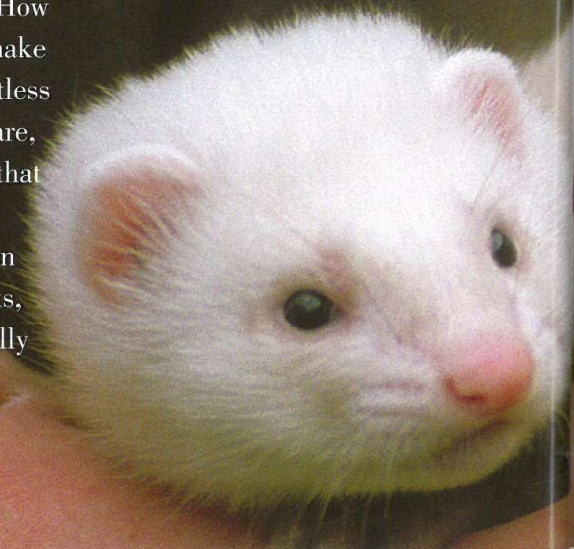
And that's just it, why wait any longer? So, if ever in the United States, or closer to home – Rhode Island, just look me up. We'll do some squirrelin' – Yankee style. ■

*Any complaints, criticisms, rude comments, or insights are appreciated. Please feel free to e-mail me at: [redtailski@earthlink.net](mailto:redtailski@earthlink.net)*

# Taking the

By Martin Hollinshead

I wonder how many rabbit flights were provided by ferrets this past season? How many wet and dismal days did they make bright? And I wonder how many ferretless falconers shuffled about the cover-bare, late-season countryside just praying that somewhere a rabbit was feeling adventurous. At a time of year when thoughts so easily turn to new hawks, maybe it's also time to consider finally looking to ferrets.



**F**erret acquisition is not something to rush into. It truly does deserve all the consideration given to the purchase of that new hawk. There is gender to consider, lines, how the rearing has been conducted, age of acquisition, housing, feeding, the list goes on. Haste can bring a lot of unhappiness – and discomfort. Like many would-be ferreters, I rushed into my first experience. It was many years ago and I had assisted a school friend in convincing his mother to take us to see some ‘good workers’. We ended up in a junk filled back yard, in the kind of area where a flat tyre would have you driving on the rim. Feeling very uncomfortable in our smart school uniforms, we proceeded to play ‘pass the hot potato’ with a ferret that latched onto whoever held it for too long!

First impressions are most important, and no few newcomers are put off by a poor introduction. Many years ago I used to hawk with a friend who loved to fly at the rabbits my ferrets bolted but couldn't bring himself to purchase his own. It transpired that as a child, a bullying farther had taunted him with a supposedly vicious ferret. With my encouragement he finally overcame his phobia but hastily purchased that most dodgy of ferrets, a hand-me-down adult. And yes, it was a crocodile!

## THE FIRST RULE

Good ferreting - the only ferreting - starts with totally tame animals, and trust me such animals are made, not born. Young ferrets have to be handled from very early on if they are to be of any use at all. The neglected

youngster grows up into a horrible creature that gives the anti-ferre falconer all the argument he needs. The backyard ferret in my story wasn't too bad; the fact that we were able to play ‘pass the potato’ proves this – a real biter hits the bone and hangs on. Such a ferret makes the shortest season and the loss of as many flights as you like, very appealing!

Perfection would see youngsters handled from as early as three weeks. And this is early. At three weeks ferrets are little more than blind, squat-bodied Jelly Baby things. But it's at this age that they first start exploring beyond the nest box – or at least attempting to, as their mother will soon collect them back up – and so a little gentle handling can be sneaked in without causing the mother any distress. From this point onwards more and more interaction



# Plunge



photo by Martin Hollinshead

with humans is slowly built into their day. Gradually proper play sessions involving lure chases and games with various other toys can become part of the daily routine. These games really help form the kind of familiarity you want with your ferrets. They become bold and confident with you, are eager at your approach, and ready to play. With age and confidence, youngsters should also be given time in the garden to become accustomed to the smells and sounds of the wider world, and if a dog is to be part of the hawking team, getting to know him. It all takes time and dedication, and thus it's not surprising that many ferrets offered for sale have had nothing like sufficient contact with humans. And those ferrets that do get the time – and the right food – up to their 'ready to go' age of eight to twelve weeks, can never even begin to

balance the books financially. Considering the sport it is capable of providing, the well-reared ferret must have the lowest monetary value of any fieldsports-employed animal.

## WORKING LINES ONLY

When dealing with such a naturally eager hunter as the ferret, it seems odd having to emphasise the need to purchase stock from working lines. But the need is there. Ferrets have become very popular pets – and excellent pets they can be – but the fact is, ferrets from pet lines don't always make good workers. I like my ferrets, I see them as pets, but I'd rather have a worker that can be a pet, than a pet that's going to remain a pet. While a lot of the success involved in ferreting is certainly down to rearing, handling – and patience – you really do have to start off with the right

material. On a bitterly cold day, the last thing you want is a poor worker turning what could have been a fluid "Where's the next warren" operation, into a miserable "What's that bloody ferret doing!" fiasco.

## COLOURS

Ferrets come in all kinds of colours. Often advised for hawking is the albino-type. The argument is that the colour makes it less likely to be taken by the hawk. Over the years I've used every conceivable colour – often mixing light and dark during the day – and find that the hawk soon recognises ferrets as ferrets, regardless of colour. I certainly find the Harris' very perceptive in this respect, being totally safe with the tiniest, darkest and most tempting animal. However, the lighter coloured animals are far superior when ferreting in any kind of ▶

cover due to the fact that they are easily seen. I do a lot of ferreting on hillsides where crumpled late-season bracken easily swallows up the darker, polecat-type ferrets; an albino on such a hillside is a glowing beacon.

### **MALES OR FEMALES?**

I doubt there are many falconers who use male (hob) ferrets by choice. Hobs can be great characters and, with their miniature dachshund size, really do have something about them. Nevertheless, as providers of flights they are far from ideal. They will work – my goodness they will – but their power means that any rabbits not sure about bolting doesn't get a chance to rethink. If a hob comes up on a rabbit it either moves or it's butchered. Hobs have taught me a lot about digging to ferrets! The females (jills) just tend to do a lot more moving and a lot less killing. They will often give that rethink option, scratching away and convincing the rabbit to bolt. Of course they can kill too, or get their quarry trapped in a dead end, but during the course of a season many many rabbits get late-bolted after a bit of convincing – and these are valuable flights.

### **NUMBERS**

Although the wild polecat is of solitary habit, ferrets love company. You only have to watch a group of ferrets playing to realise how important company is to them. Young or old, a really revved up bunch go barmy! Nothing plays like a pod of ferrets. There's mad jumping, scampering around and ambush setting, and often lots of excited chattering. The ferret needs company and should never be kept alone. But how many? I suppose it much depends on the amount of ferreting being done, the accommodation available, and how much the feeding of nonessential animals appeals. I will comment on housing shortly, but let's look at the other two points, in reverse order.

Ferrets can eat a lot of food. Young ferrets can eat a mountain. And it's got to be good, all meat and as natural as possible. This is either going to cost money, or eat (literally!) into the

hawk's larder, or, more distressingly, the household's! I feed a lot of rabbit each year to my hawks and ferrets, but I also very much enjoy rabbit myself. In fact, so much do I enjoy rabbit, rely on it even, as all our meat comes from the field, that the thought of a busy band of nonessential ferrets munching on it has me in a cold sweat. Hawks, dogs, or ferrets, I never keep anything that doesn't at least help support itself.

And so to work. Some ferreters claim to need an army of animals. I've never understood it. I do a lot of ferreting, not only with hawks but also with nets, but I never keep more than four adults at any one time. This number will normally be made up of jills plus a single hob. The hob (normally vasectomized) is kept only to bring the jills out of season (If jill ferrets are unmated they stay in season all through the summer and risk becoming ill). If I didn't need the hob – could rely on borrowing one – and could also count accidents (oddly, this season one jill was injured by a rabbit) and illness out, I could manage the entire season with just two jills. More than two I never take out anyway. With two jills I can alternate on a long day so as to not over-tire either, and used together, tackle the biggest warrens I feel practical. Often, when mixing ferreting with standard hawking, I manage quite happily with a single jill. I would suggest that two jills could easily cover the ferreting done by most falconers.

### **FEEDING**

As noted, I feed quite a lot of rabbit and find this, complemented by unwanted bits of whatever else finds its way into the game bag – pheasant, hare, the odd unlucky moorhen – plus green tripe and a few day-old chicks, seems to keep ferrets glowing with health. I've not yet experimented with the petshop-available all-in-one, but I have occasionally used dry cat food, which the ferrets crunch quite happily on. When feeding the latter, plenty of water should be available as it gives the ferrets a real thirst. Regarding how much to feed, I generally let the ferrets decide. If food is starting to be

stored, then I cut back – and in the summer, when food can quickly go off, it pays to check daily. Obviously, at different times of year there will be fluctuations in appetite. As the weather cools caution is required lest too much winter fat is gained. If not watched, that dachshund hob might become a labrador! Can ferrets be too well fed to hunt? This seems to vary from animal to animal. The real eager beaver might hunt at top weight and even after being fed something before the outing to try make it less likely to kill and stay down. But with flights at risk, it pays to be sensible. A box full of sleepy-headed fatties is hardly the most lethal of weapons. It really is a case of knowing your animals.

### **HOUSING**

Coming up with suitable ferret housing is something the falconer should find easy. If you look at the time energy, thought, and cash, invested in accommodation for hawks, keeping a ferret happy should be no work at all. My advice would be to give the project the free-loft treatment – lots of space. Those playful, ready-to-romp ferrets aren't going to do much cavorting about in the kind of hamster cage they are often allocated. Hutches may be popular, but I guarantee you, nobody could watch a couple of ferrets speeding about spacious accommodation and return to a hutch arrangement. Like most ferreters, I've experimented with all manner of housing arrangements. I've had quite a lot of success with what I can only describe as the mini dog run. This, with its concrete floor and fully wired top and sides, gives fresh air, is easy to keep spotless, and the concrete keeps the ferrets' nails down. Converted garden sheds make good accommodation, and for the last few years this is what I've been using. The biggest advantage the shed has over the dog run is that spending time with the ferrets is more comfortable when the weather is at its worst. A disadvantage is, as with hutches, toenails need more trimming.

Whatever the arrangement, there are certain aspects of ferret housing that require consideration. Location is

important. Ferrets are quite susceptible to heat stroke and so sufficient protection from direct summer sun will need to be calculated for. Consideration should be given to the ease with which the hawk can be exposed to its new ally. Hawks to be worked with ferrets needs to see them – and ignore them! I've never found it essential to have the ferrets continually on display, but some exposure is vital.

A huge concern is security. A ferret always wants to be where it is not. It's a traveller, an explorer, and if its adventures bring it anywhere near a tethered hawk, it's the falconer's worst nightmare. This is where many hutches are to be criticised. Flimsy fronted, they just promise disaster. My advice to the do-it-yourself hutch maker would be to carefully study a bank vault!

Things such as nest boxes and water dispensers require little comment. I've always tended to use free-standing nest boxes (with hay bedding), and also provided the jills

with an additional 'girls box' too small for the hob to enter; this enables them to escape should they be receiving more summertime attention than they want. Water is best provided with a bottle-type dispenser. Bowls just don't work. Put one down and it immediately gets shunted all around the place and quickly emptied. Why do ferrets like to splash water about so much?

While on the topic of things being shunted about, I would certainly recommend lots of toys. Anything will do, an old wellie, feed sack, cardboard box or bit of tubing. And I tend to have backups. New toys are always more interesting than old.

Now to the latrine corner. Ferrets tend to defecate in one spot only and this makes it easy to keeping things clean. A few handfuls of shavings changed daily is as demanding as it gets. However, if the accommodation is wooden floored, then, shavings or not, hygiene – and eventually the floor itself – will be lost unless extra precautions are taken. I tend to make

a slide-in, high-backed triangular corner section to save damage. This is constructed from stirling board and painted with roof seal. I find this works well and can be scaled up or down depending on the size of the housing. This corner section has also shown itself to come with a bonus. While the latrine corner habit is a fairly safe bet, with large accommodation setups I have had problems with youngsters not wanting to venture far from the nest and just going wherever they find themselves. For such unhappy travellers the corner section can be placed as near to them as required, gradually moving it to its proper location. ■

#### FURTHER READING

This article has taken but a brief look at a big topic. Those on the verge of taking the plunge into ferret ownership will find a good deal of valuable information in *The Complete Book of Ferrets* (Porter and Brown), Fred J. Taylor's *Guide to Ferreting* (Taylor), and *Rabbiting* (Smithson). My own book, *The Complete Rabbit and Hare Hawk*, also contains a chapter on ferrets and ferreting to hawks.

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# The Hawk Whisperer

by Dave Moran

Once in a while, we come across a special person that has an uncanny ability to communicate with animals, plants, the world of nature. The relationship between that person and another living being is fascinating to watch, for they interact in magical ways. Animals are attracted to these people, seek them out, and seem to like them, want to be with them, want to share a slice of life with them. In most cases, persons with this ability – the famed horse-whisperer, Monty Roberts, comes to mind – are born with a special gift. They work with animals intuitively, at the level of feeling, and know what it is like to be that animal, to be inside that animal. When you add years of experience working with a particular animal to that god-given gift, a remarkable partnership develops that is heart-warming to witness.

My son, Dave Jr., has that gift. He's had a special way with animals and plants since he was born. Thus it will come as no great surprise when I tell you Dave Jr. is also one of the finest falconers I have ever known. Dave Jr. is so good with hawks it's scary. He can take any hawk, be it an eyass or passage bird, and turn it into a reliable, outstanding gamehawk in very short order. And you can bet she will be feather-perfect at season's end. How does he do it?

First, near as I can tell, Dave

immediately establishes a telepathic communication with his feathered charge. Not only does he, like Dr. Doolittle, talk to the animals – they talk to him! And, he listens, and understands what they communicate. There's a real connection between Dave and all the hawks and falcons, wild and trained, with whom he comes into contact. It's tangible. You can feel it. He is truly a hawk-whisperer.

Before telling you the amazing ways in which this is manifest in his falconry birds, let me recount several incidents in which wild birds have been drawn to Dave in ways that seem magical, mystical, and downright wonderful. It gives me goose bumps to recall them.

## **The Accipiter That Joined the Wedding Party**

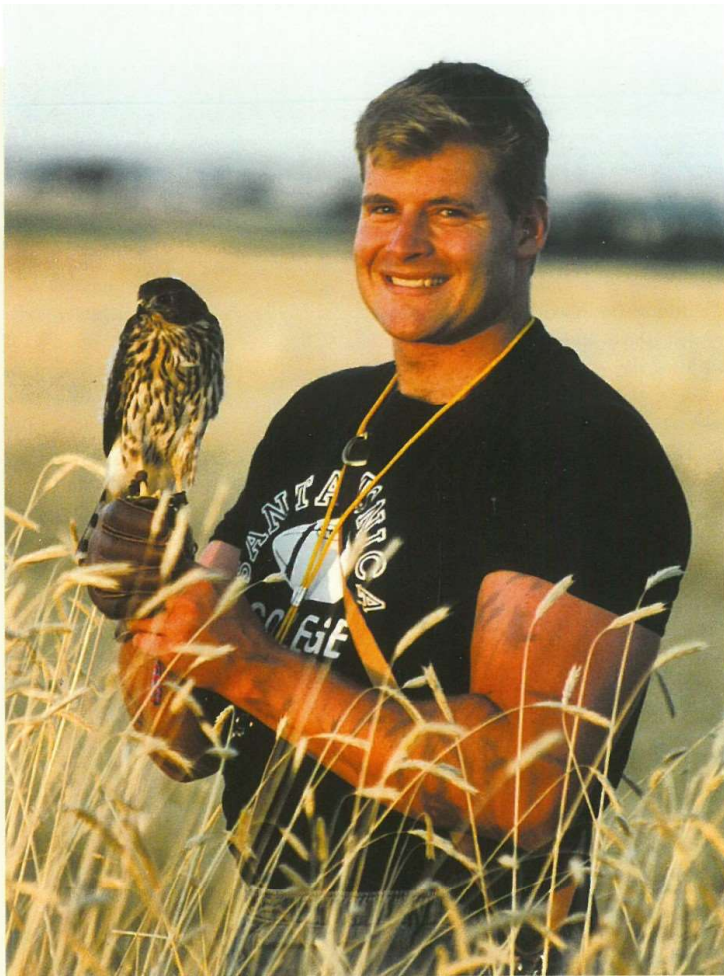
A few years back, I flew down to Mexico to Puerto Vallarta, where Dave and his fiancée, Shannon, were to be married. The setting for the outdoor wedding – a magnificent oceanside villa owned by Shannon's uncle – was spectacular. Nature provided the ultimate cathedral for the ceremony. A large cross, woven of palm fronds, was stuck in the ground where the bride and groom would exchange their rings and vows. Behind the cross was a lush array of tropical jungle trees and shrubs growing upward out of a steep hillside overlooking the sun-sparkled

Pacific ocean.

Just before the ceremony started, I was quietly sipping on a potent Mexican Margarita, reflecting on the beauty of the day, when suddenly I heard a familiar sound – the wing beats of a shortwing in hot pursuit. Looking into the trees, I saw a Mexican goshawk flash out, snatch a songbird out of the air, and light upon a tree-branch directly above the palm-frond cross! I looked over at Dave Jr. He, too, had watched the flight, and was awe-struck. In silent wonder, knowing we had just witnessed something very special, we watched the hawk – not the least bit frightened by the wedding party – proceed to pluck and feed on its quarry. Dave and I glanced at each other, both with tears in our eyes, and he threw his huge arms around me in a warm, knowing bear-hug. This was no accident. This was a good omen!

## **A Gift from a Peregrine**

Fast-forward to an evening three years later. Dave Jr. and Shannon, now living in Hermosa Beach, California, were walking home down the city's lively main street at 10:00 pm. Dave, heavily involved with flying a Cooper's hawk, found himself impaled upon the horns of a dilemma faced by many falconers with a growing family: Should I give up falconry and spend more time at home and on the job, or



**Dave Jr. in the field with 'Boomer,' eyass tiercel Cooper's hawk.**

continue to practice the sport I love? As he walked along main street, wrestling with this decision which weighed heavily upon his soul, Dave detected a form flying directly at him through the darkness like a stealth bomber homing in on its target under the radar. The dark, streamlined form rocketed right down main street, just above the cars and pedestrians, barely lit up by the street-lights. Shannon was afraid the incoming object was going to hit her. Dave, thinking it might be an owl, stood still and watched. The flying form came right toward him, moving very fast, and pitched straight up just before it hit him. As it pitched up, Dave felt something smack his legs. Dave looked up, and directly above his head was a haggard female peregrine falcon! The falcon – so close he could

see the markings on her face – circled several times directly above Dave, and flew off into the darkness. Wondering what had hit him, Dave looked down at his legs, now spattered with fresh blood. There, right at his feet, lay a freshly-killed duck! A diver, a red-head, brought to him, air-mail, by the falcon. Dave was stunned. For one thing, peregrines usually don't fly (or hunt) at night – especially down the main street of a busy city. Furthermore, they usually don't go around dropping ducks on people. What did this mean? The symbolism was apparently not lost on Dave, who said, "Dad, if I had gotten a letter from the President of the United States saying, 'Do Not Give Up Falconry,' it couldn't have meant nearly as much as what that peregrine giving me the duck told me!"

## **The Spiritual Connection Between Man and Animals**

In the two episodes described above, it is clear that something spiritual, something transcendent, was happening. As a down-to-earth friend of mine once remarked, "There's some serious Mojo goin' down here!" How can we explain these events? Should we even try to explain them? Would we learn anything from an explanation?

Fortunately or unfortunately, we live in an age when explanations seem to be of paramount importance. Consequently, people try to find a rational, scientific explanation for everything – including just how horse-whisperers do what they do. The proffered explanations are usually rooted in examining the trainer's use of known major sensory-motor modalities – tone of voice, body language, hand-signals, and their application to operant conditioning. Here, however, two highly significant factors are usually overlooked: 1. There are many senses we and other animals possess that have yet to be defined, that are working all the time although they may not reach the level of conscious awareness; and 2. There exists a very deep spiritual connection between rider and horse, austringer and hawk, falconer and falcon that is readily apparent if one is open to feeling it. What are the sources of these phenomena?

The roots of the horse whisperer run deep. In the cradle of human civilization, we evolved as small, hunter-gatherer bands that had intimate, intuitive knowledge of the plants, animals, stars, sun, sky, other members of the tribe, and the changes the seasons brought. Anthropologists say we had bicameral minds showing little separation between the left brain (the seat of rational thought and language) and right brain (where intuition, art, music reside). Certainly ►

early tribespeople were intuitive, knew there were spirits, and interacted with the Spirits of Nature in order to find guidance to provide the basics of life: food, shelter, health, mates. People especially gifted in communicating with the spirits and working with them to achieve practical results (finding game, making rain, healing the sick) were called Shamans, and were held in high regard by their tribespeople. Shamans were valued and revered members in their societies for around 40,000 years (Harner, 1980). In the last few hundred years, however – since the Iron Age and, more important, the Industrial Revolution – we have come to live in a much more mechanistic, explanation-driven world in which it is generally assumed spirits don't exist, and many scientists believe life came from complex macromolecules generated by thermodynamically predictable biochemical events sparked by lightning striking the primordial soup that was the sea eons ago. Consequently, animal (hence human) behaviour is thought to be explicable at the molecular level. Our faith in explanations is so extreme that often, if you can't explain a phenomenon, its very existence is denied! (This is odd, for the phenomenon always precedes the explanation. Apples did, after all, fall before Newton).

What does this have to do with falconry? Well, the really good falconers and horse-whisperers retain the old ways. Instinctively, they reach back in the depths of their unconscious to link hands with their tribal ancestors hundreds of generations ago who probably all had the intuitive ability to talk to the animals. Modern-day men and women that talk to the animals are simply remembering what so many of us have forgotten: That animals have spirits, that humans have spirits, and we can talk to each other at a level that transcends ordinary reality. After all,

the word *Anima* means Soul in Latin. And words don't happen by accident. There's power in naming things.

And so the Mexican goshawk that visited Dave and Shannon on their wedding day – and the peregrine that brought them a duck that night – weren't there by accident. They were, as Joseph Campbell put it, Animal envoys of the unseen Power...

Which brings up the question: How does all of this affect Dave's interaction with hawks in ordinary reality? Perhaps the following stories will give you a window into his world...

### **Boomer, the Eyass Tiercel Cooper's hawk**

One summer, when Dave was staying with me in Colorado, he decided it was time to obtain and train a hunting hawk. Given the plethora of sparrows and starlings that plagued our area, he elected to train an eyass tiercel Cooper's hawk. Having read all the editions of Harry McElroy's *Desert Hawking* to tatters, we were both fully aware that tiercel Coops are: a) Wonderful, fearless, athletic gamehawks b) very prone to aggression and c) quite difficult to manage. Armed with this information and Dave's boundless enthusiasm, we took a young hawklet from the nest and raised it together in my study. Dave constructed a beautiful nest for it, made a nice lure, hood-trained the micro-tiercel when it was very young, and set the scale and block nearby as convenient perches so, when the time came, Boomer would feel quite at home on the device on which he would be weighed and the block on which he would weather. Neither of us had ever raised or trained an eyass Cooper's hawk, and it was a great experience to share.

In mid-summer, I had to go away on assignment for several weeks. Dave, now the sole manager of Boomer, would faithfully call me each

evening with The Coop Report to apprise me of the spunky little tiercel's progress. (We named him Boomerang because he actually came back when we called him...) I'll always remember the excitement in his voice when Dave called to tell me Boomer had caught his first head of game – a starling on the wing!

When I returned to Colorado, I was delighted to find Boomer had, through Dave's efforts, already become an efficient gamehawk, and was catching wild quarry every day. Furthermore, he showed no aggression toward humans (but lots toward quarry), was dog-tame, came any distance to the lure immediately (even when he had a full gorge), was hood-trained, and was feather-perfect.

Boomer turned out to be one of those remarkable gamehawks that was very fast, extremely athletic, and would chase (and catch) almost anything that moved. Boomer, weighing in at a mighty 8 ounces, caught everything from sparrows to starlings to quail to a chukar partridge twice his weight. Friends remind me of one heroic flight at a sightless vole. And, one day Boomer even caught a toad! Which gave him a nasty eye inflammation. (Boomer had caught it, and, by god, was going to eat it!)

Dave and I had a great summer flying Boomer at a variety of quarry in Colorado. When Dave had to go back home to California in the fall, we drove cross-country and flew Boomer daily en-route. The little Cooper's hawk was completely tame, and felt completely at home cruising about in the motel rooms where we spent the night. He loved to perch on the No Pets sign. One problem: Boomer was highly vocal! This did not sit well not only with the honeymooners in the adjacent suite in the Motel, but also with Dave's neighbours in the densely-packed town of Hermosa Beach. Sadly, we agreed the best thing for Boomer (and Dave) was for me to take the little Coops back to Colorado,

**'Boomer,' eyass tiercel Cooper's hawk.**



which I did. There, I enjoyed flying Boomer so much I neglected my irascible jerkin, Hotspur, who was not pleased...

### **Sally, the Ultimate Gamehawk**

Falconry had become a necessary part of Dave's life, and he felt a strong need to maintain his contact with nature by going afield with a hunting hawk. He missed flying little Boomer. Fortunately, the Universe answered his call, for shortly after I arrived back in Colorado, some of Dave's California falconer friends got wind of a female Cooper's hawk that had fledged from a nest in suburban Torrance, California, and was terrorising all creatures great and small in peoples' backyards. Afraid the much-maligned raptor would be killed by the irate civilized citizenry, a colleague of Dave's trapped the young passage Cooper's and delivered it to him.

Dave called me the night he first got Sally, explaining the somewhat unique circumstances of her capture. "I'm really excited," he said. "But I'm a bit worried about the time commitment."

"Understood," I said, having trained a passage female Cooper's before. They're a real handful. Hypervigilant, hypersensitive, hyperactive, a bird born with all its dials set at fast-forward, the passage Cooper's hawk can try the patience of the most easy-going austringer. "What does she look like, Dave?" I asked.

"Well, she's very long, has an incredibly long tail, is very slender, got a light airframe, big feet, and her eyes are already orange. Weighs about 11 ounces."

"Interesting" I said. "What about her temperament?"

"Hard to say" Dave said, "But I think she's going to be a good one. Like any passage Coops, everything scares her, but she's not afraid, if you know what I mean – just freaks out at strange things." ▶

"How are you going to train her?" I asked.

"It'll be tough" Dave said. "Here in Hermosa, there's no open space, people and cars everywhere, no privacy. I'll train her like a passage, but am just going to fly her to the lure, not the fist, to avoid that aggression. And, I've got to hood-train her. Trying to train her without the hood, she'd break every feather on her body in a couple of days."

"Well, good luck" I said, "And give me a call when she's ready to rock 'n' roll! I'd love to be with both of you when you start game-hawking her."

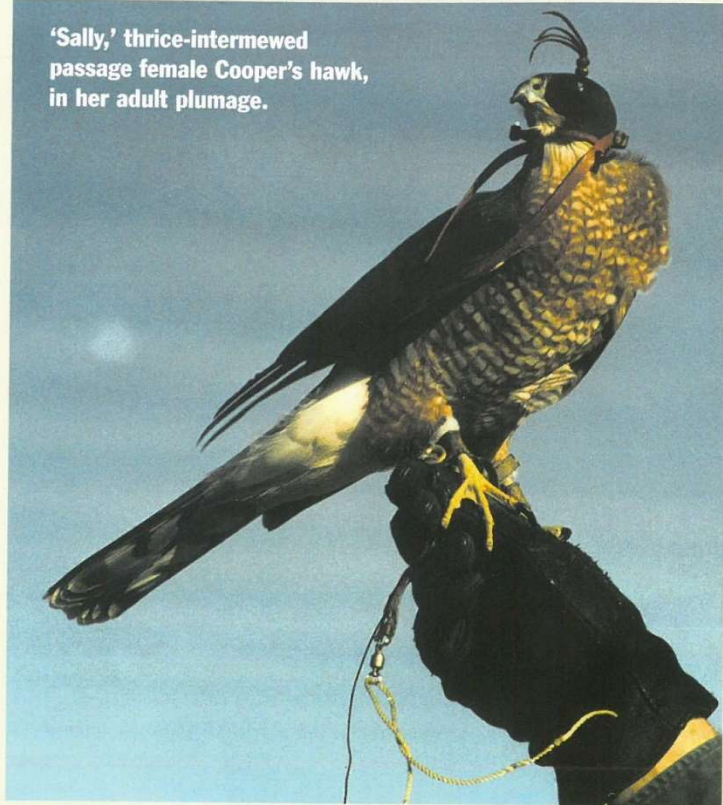
I'll leave the story of her training to Dave to tell you. (Part of the story is given in Dave's article, "When Harry Met Sally", in this publication (Moran, D.T., Jr., 2000). Suffice it to say when Dave called and said Sally was ready to go afield, I immediately flew out to California to be there for the opening event.

Dave's intended quarry was starlings, for they were an abundant, non-native nuisance that displaced other birds, one of the few species Dave – a gentle giant of a man who, deep-down, doesn't like to kill anything – doesn't mind seeing meet The Grim Reaper. So, we arose the next day at dawn, gathered up Sally and our hawking gear, set her on the bench seat of the pickup truck right between us, and headed for starling country – the industrial parks east of Los Angeles that hold squadrons of *Sturnus vulgaris*. Before long, we found a flock of starlings on a freshly-watered roadside lawn outside a software company's warehouse, greedily feeding on worms and grubs and fighting with each other.

"Perfect" said Dave, pulling over to the kerb and picking up Sally. "Let's go over by that building. I'll unhood her, and we'll walk toward those little vermin and see what happens!"

After all these years, I found myself shaking with excitement, for

**'Sally,' thrice-intermewed passage female Cooper's hawk, in her adult plumage.**



Sally was a wild-card – a passage Cooper's hawk on her first hunt with a human. She might do just about anything.

Dave unhooded Sally, and stood stock-still. He slowly moved to where she could see the starlings. Sally was off the fist in a flash! The whole flock took off at once, screaming in panic, flying hell-bent for the horizon. Sally closed the gap fast. I was sure she'd nab one. Then – in an apparent complete act of disorder – a squirrel jumped out of a nearby pine tree and began loping across the lawn. Sally immediately pitched straight up like a merlin, folded up, stooped straight down, and slammed into the squirrel, both feet squarely around its head. I was elated! She caught a full-sized tree squirrel on her first flight!

Dave, however, was not pleased. "Damn!" he said.

"What do you mean?" I said, aghast. "She just caught a squirrel bigger than she is!"

"I wanted feather, not fur!" said Dave. "I want to hawk birds, not some miserable squirrel."

Seeing he was in high dudgeon, I didn't think it would be the time to tell Dave that books are written about how to catch squirrels with large, 4-pound buteos that wear armor on their legs. Squirrels are tough! Especially for an 11-ounce Cooper's hawk!

"Dad, that was so easy, it wasn't fair" said Dave. "I'm really disappointed."

"I know you had feather in mind, Dave" I said. "But it may just be that Sally has different ideas."

After Sally had eaten her fill, we drove back to the house of Bob Harrop, Jr., a good falconer and friend of ours who, much to my delight, shared my astonishment at Sally taking a squirrel. Bob also described a place up north in the Antelope Valley that held quail.

"Want to try a quail with Sally tomorrow, Dad?"





**'Sally' feather-perfect in her fifth season despite having caught quail, jackrabbits, and ducks.**

"You're on, Dave! I haven't seen a quail flight since we caught one with Boomer!"

The next morning, we went out on dawn patrol, drove several hours north to the Antelope Valley, and found some quail scurrying about in a dry-wash, just where Bob had said we would.

"OK, Dad, here goes!" said Dave, shaking with excitement. He parked the car, picked up the hooded hawk, and we snuck toward the quail, using the heavy cover to hide our approach. When we got within about 50 yards of the quail, Dave took off Sally's hood

and stood up to his full 6-foot 5-inch height. Sally was off the fist instantly. Quail sprayed out of the dry riverbed in every direction, headed for cover as fast as their little wings could carry them. Sally had flown into the thick of things so fast we couldn't tell what had happened. We walked along the riverbed in the direction the flight had taken, and before long heard the telltale tinkle of a hawk-bell. Dave edged toward the sound, stopped, looked at the riverbank, and cried, "Dad! Dad! Guess what? She got one!"

I was elated! Sally had caught the first quail she'd ever chased!

We made in to Sally, who hadn't yet broken in. She was poised on the ground, quail in one foot, like a cocked weapon. Suddenly, I heard the whirring of little quail wings nearby. Sally, having heard the sound first, was off like a shot after yet another quail, carrying the one she'd already caught in her foot like a running back carrying a football!

"That" I said, "Is promising. You've got one hell of a gamehawk there, Dave. She'd rather chase stuff than eat!"

I had to return to Colorado the next day, and distance forced me to share Dave's adventures with Sally vicariously. I anxiously awaited the nightly Coop Reports. They were always exciting! Especially when Dave called up to tell me Sally had chased, bound to, and held – a full-grown Jackrabbit (America's equivalent of the European hare) As the season went by, Sally brought a cornucopia of critters to bag; 10 Jackrabbits (one of which weighed in at 10 pounds), over 100 cottontails (most of which Dave released), sparrows, starlings, California quail, tree squirrels, rock squirrels (which are unbelievably vicious and aggressive), and several feral cats. In summary, in Dave's hands, Sally became ... the Ultimate Gamehawk.

I was so afraid that Sally would be killed by Jackrabbits and/or feral cats before the season was done. Happily, that did not happen, and Sally lives to this day. Now in her fifth season, her flying weight has climbed from 11 to 15 ounces. Her speed, raw aggression, athletic ability, and endurance simply have to be seen to be believed. She is 100 per cent reliable, chases game at a broad range of flying weights, catches full-grown winter cock quail in the air in flights that go a quarter-mile, waits-on when the wind currents are right. She's even pulled full-grown ravens out of the sky that had the audacity to harass her! Furthermore, she hoods well, and has finished her ▶

**“Dave gets up at 4:30 am, drives several hours to the field, and goes game-hawking.**

**When his hawking is complete, he changes into his business clothes, puts Sally in the truck, and starts making his sales calls.”**

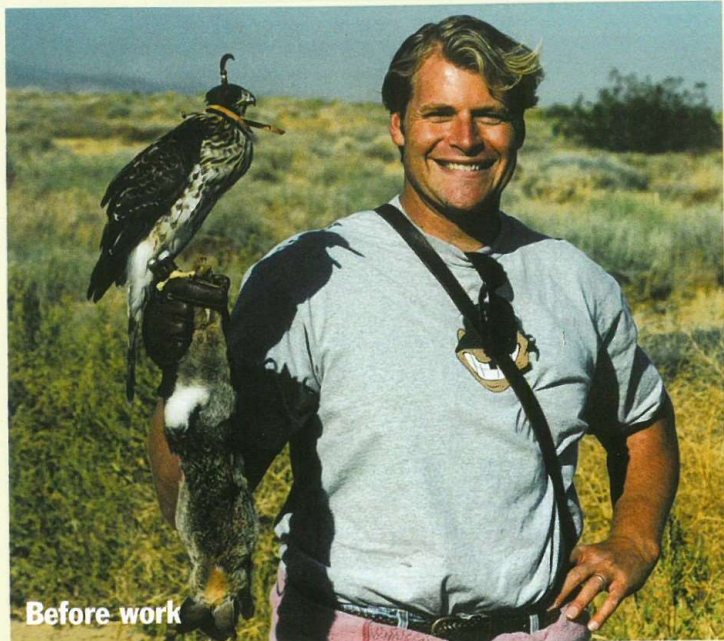
last three moults in perfect plumage – not a nick on a feather. Which, given her penchant for dangerous game, is a miracle. And also a testimony to Dave’s hawk-husbandry.

I must add that Dave accomplished all of this against all odds. First, he lives in the middle of the Los Angeles area, which is so overpopulated it makes game-hawking very difficult. Dave gets up at 4:30am, drives several hours to the field, and goes game-hawking. When his hawking is complete, he changes into his business clothes, puts Sally in the truck, and starts making his sales calls. Second, he is married, has two young children, and likes spending quality time with them. Despite his geographic and sociological constraints, Dave has managed to pull it off – live in a large city, fly a magnificent gamehawk, excel at his job, and have a happy, well-balanced family life! My hat’s off to him.

How does he do it?

Well, Dave’s a hawk-whisperer. He needs that close relationship with the world of nature to be complete. For him, falconry is not an option. It’s a necessary part of his life. I feel truly blessed, for my son is not only one of the best falconers I know – he’s also my best friend.

It doesn’t get any better than this. ■



**Before work**



**Ready for work**

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Half asleep, I reach up and turn off my alarm. Slowly opening one eye to observe the darkness outside I roll over, burying myself again into the covers, reluctant to shake off the last moments of my sleep. My mind begins to drift back to the last images of my dream - 'Solo', my tiercel peregrine, flying high above me in tight circles waiting on from above. It is this thought that causes me to rub the sleep from my eyes, throw back the covers, and expose myself to a room made cold by another Utah winter. I quickly get dressed, thermals first - tops and bottoms. Then my lined Carhart pants, serving in their fourth season of hawking, warm and comfortable yet surprisingly stain and rip free. Next a turtleneck and heavy wool sweater because I know it is cold outside but can only wonder how cold. Slipping my white cotton socks on and then a pair of thick wool ones the colour of earth, I finally pull on the winter boots that I bought when I first began to fly birds. I muse that while necessarily heavy and thick, they also make my feet look several sizes too big for my body. Now fully dressed, I clomp downstairs where Solo is waiting for me - already awake and anxious. As I approach my bird with glove in hand my dog 'Stick' runs down the stairs and watches as I gently place my hand behind the back of Solo's legs. As he steps effortlessly onto my hand, Stick runs upstairs, and I know he is waiting expectantly at the front door. Walking to the scale, I turn it on and wait patiently as it zeros out, beeping when it is ready to weigh. Picking up the bird's right foot and placing it on the scale, he releases his grip with his left foot placing his full weight on the scale. I balance the swivel, leash extender, and jesses precariously in my hand, careful not to include them in the weight as the weight registers 650 grams. He is at weight. I am hopeful that we catch

something today as I look at the numbers on the scale. Lifting Solo again I contemplate our relationship. I hated this bird when I first got him because he pushed all my limits of patience through his mean disposition and his bad habit of jumping off my

the door and back again. Picking up Solo and walking to the front door I slip out, pushing Stick aside and pretending not to notice the confused and disappointed look in his eyes. Sorry boy, today its ducks. Opening the car door to place Solo on the back

# Of Ducks, Lures and

by Shelly Kremer

fist while still hooded. Since then we had come to understand each other, one relying on the other - me mostly relying on him.

Upstairs I place Solo on the back of a chair, pick up my falconry vest and rummage through the pockets doing a mental inventory of all that I will need for a morning of hawking. Food - check. Lure (tied of course to my bag since I already lost one lure this season) - check and double check. Telemetry - check. Zip-ties and electrical tape - check. Going out the back door and into the pigeon coup I grab one pigeon and miss as they begin to flap around noisily. I finally snatch one and quickly tie a weighted string to the pigeon's leg. Pigeons are birds that you love to hate - rats with wings I think, but acknowledging also that it is the one thing that could bring my bird back if he chose to stray. I stuff the pigeon into one of the many pockets of my falconry vest hoping I won't have to use it. Lure pigeon - check. We are ready to go.

I walk back inside trying to ignore Stick, who keeps looking from me to

seat, I use my free hand to lift his tail so as not to hit the seat and damage any feathers. Once on the seat, I reach into my vest and pull out electrical tape and transmitters, deftly placing the batteries in them and wrapping them with the tape. Pulling the leash extender from the jesses and then removing them, I reach in my bag for zip ties and attach a telemetry unit to each ankle snipping the excess away. It has taken almost a month to get this routine down so I don't forget anything or make any blunders in the field. At this point, we are ready to go at a moment's notice.

Upon starting the car I turn the radio off, always driving in silence to my hawking grounds. We back out of the driveway and head towards main street, already knowing the first place I will check for ducks. I glance in the rear view mirror to observe Solo as he casually reaches up and scratches his hood causing his bells to jingle. I am unaware that within a year, while serving with the Peace Corps in Mongolia, it will be that same jingle from the clothing of small children that will serve as a constant reminder

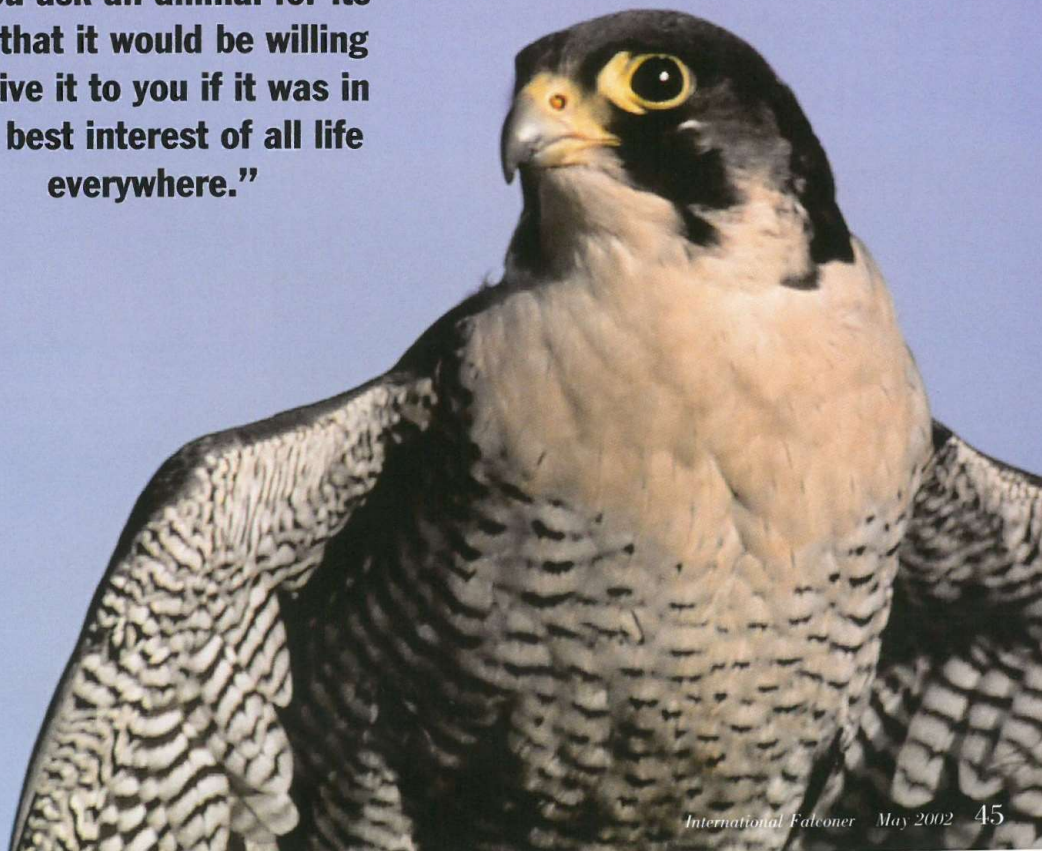
of my birds as I begin mentally gearing-up for the day's hawking. Driving down main street out of Brigham City into Perry, I begin to ask the earth for a duck. I read once that if you ask an animal for its life that it would be willing to give it to you if it was in the best interest of all life everywhere. Believing this, I mentally call out to the ducks as I approach the first spot. Slowing down and looking

carefully but not too obviously, a mixed flock of 20 ducks – teals, mallards and widgeons come into sight. They are feeding in a small stream in the middle of a field. I wish there were fewer ducks and less variety, knowing that each species will take off and fly differently under a falcon. I also look around, making mental notes of fences and power lines while driving past the ducks. Having

watched other falconers' birds stooping from the sky into barbed-wire or power lines and mortally wounding them, I know the dangers they possess. At the end of the road I turn around and park in a place out of view from the ducks I quietly slip out of the car, careful not to close the door too loudly. Ducks are skittish creatures. When I open the back door, Solo is sitting there bolt upright, as all falcons

# Conservation

**“I begin to ask the earth for a duck. I read once that if you ask an animal for its life that it would be willing to give it to you if it was in the best interest of all life everywhere.”**



sit, ready to go. I pick him up and quickly attach a line from his anklet to my vest because my greatest fear is that I will have a bird fly off with its hood on, left to wander the sky unable to see. Stepping away from the car I pull on the braces of his hood with my free hand and teeth, gently removing the hood and detaching him from my vest. As he looks around – blinking, his feathers still flat to his head from the hood, I raise my arm letting him know he is free to go, mentally telling him duck are waiting for us. True to form he is in no rush as his eyes scan the surroundings while completely unconcerned about me. He rouses and produces a small green mute. I sense he is ready when he effortlessly lifts off my glove and starts pumping his wings heading north. He cuts straight out and after gaining altitude cuts back towards me and begins to fly tight circles overhead. I know that the ducks have seen him.

I carefully slip through the barbed-wire fence and pull my hat in closer to my ears feeling cold, but with a heart that is beating like crazy as anticipation finds my knees and they begin to tremble. Keeping one eye on Solo and one eye on the ducks I hunch down and quietly traverse the field

because I don't want the ducks to flush early when my bird would be out of position unable to catch a duck despite his best effort. Finally I crouch behind a berm knowing I can go no further without detection. Solo is mounting nicely over my head in tight circles and I can hear the faint ringing of his bells in the clear blue sky. I wait for him to set his wings letting me know that he is in position and ready. He is high, a good pitch to kill a duck from, but he is beginning to drift too far west. At the last moment I become nervous and run to flush the ducks, yelling and clapping to make as much noise as possible. Puzzled, they look at me and then towards the sky to determine which is the greater threat before they reluctantly take off, each in its own manner. Solo has seen none of this having drifted farther west disappearing from sight. I stand and watch the ducks fly away, alone, as frustration runs up my spine settling in my jaw. Solo and I both young and foolish, the ducks are old and wise.

I begin to search the skies for Solo while quickly pulling the lure from my vest and swinging the leather pouch in circles over my head. Solo glides in silently, hugging the earth. Landing on the lure and looking up at me

expectantly for a meal, I tell him that his meal just flew away.

Solo was my first falcon and that was my most rewarding season to date even though I didn't catch a single head of game that year. It was this season that I began to grapple with the philosophical reason as to why I am a falconer, because it was in this season that I knew I had become one in my heart. Falconry is a study of the land. Every falconer knows they are a part of the land, not separate from it. The circle of life, as some call it. That's why I am a falconer, going home many days with the blood of struggle and death on my hands. I don't just visit the land but rely upon it. Everyday I ask something from it, and in order to ask, I must understand. I must understand not only my own bird, but the quarry we pursue. Falconers know and love the game they pursue as much as they do their birds or their wife and kids for that matter. A falconer who doesn't is rarely successful.

I drive by too often these days to find my old hawking grounds under the pavement of a shopping centre or housing development. I wonder where the pheasants, snipe, meadowlarks, house sparrows, voles, and field mice have all moved. That used to be their home and because they are displaced so am I. I understand not only as a falconer, but as a biologist, what happens when I can no longer find safe open places to fly my bird, when I can no longer find game. I know birds living wild also can no longer find those things either. When I tell people I am a falconer I get mixed reactions, from disdain to amazement. Many who look at me disdainfully tell me they could never kill an animal but looking into their eyes and at their hands, I see blood there all the same. It is those peoples' homes, shopping centres, roads and their never-ending need for more that killed the house sparrow, pheasant, snipe, and meadowlark. The greatest difference then between myself and others is that I can understand and accept responsibility for my part in their deaths, while they do not.



**Shelly with Cooper's hawk.**



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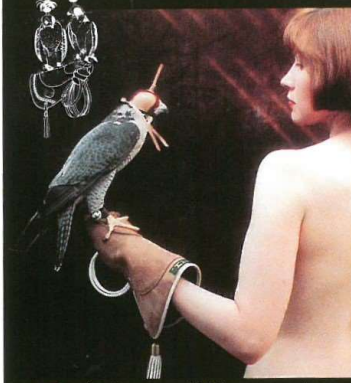
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Greetings Int. Fal.

Just got the latest issue, fantastic. I have been a subscriber since your 2nd issue. they just get better and better. I look forward to your mag much more than any other.

A special thanks for the past couple of articles about the Kazakh's and their eagles. I fly a Bald eagle here in Canada, mainly at Hares, and really enjoy the eagle articles. A big thanks for the stories. Keep them coming. I really enjoy the words of Mr Alan Gates, the articles read well and it is truly a breath of fresh air for us eagle lovers. Enough of long-wings, more on eagles and would love to read more about falconry in Mongolia, and eagle hunters in Europe.

Kudos, International Falconer!

Cheers,  
Ken Hooke  
Canada

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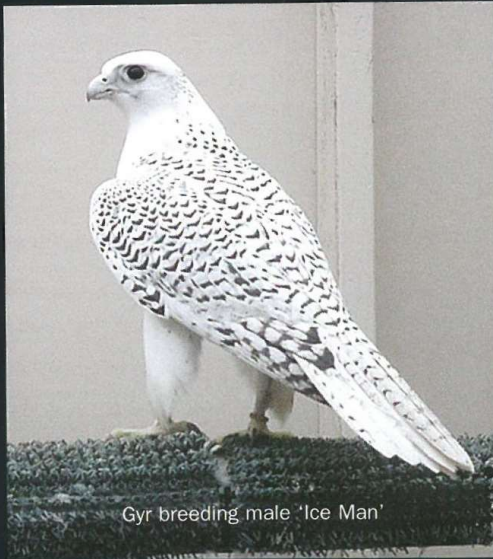
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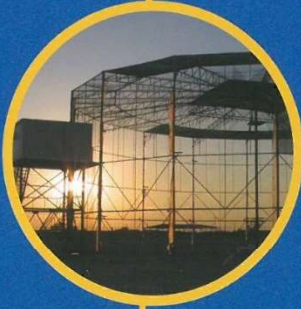
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