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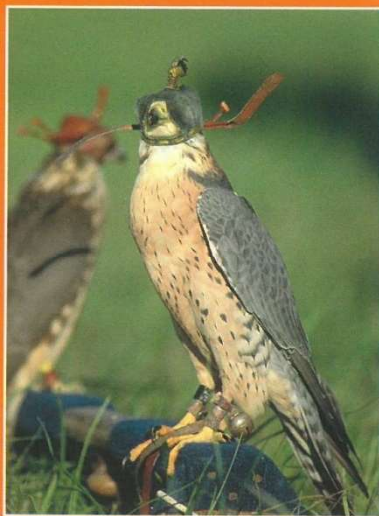
Feed the passion

INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

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Cover photo by Seth Anthony.
Peregrine/merlin hybrid

EDITORIAL

Firstly, apologies for this rather late issue. Your editor has been having a hectic time in finding somewhere to live – moving house is a tricky business at the best of times but with an entire falcon breeding project to re-locate as well as the human inhabitants it becomes a logistical nightmare!

Anyhow we've got it to you at last and in any case you've all probably been so busy getting ready for the new hawking season and training those new eyasses, that you hadn't even noticed!

It really is countdown now for the Countryside Alliance Liberty & Livelihood March on London on September 22nd and all you UK falconers should hopefully have made preparations for being there – if you haven't then please do it now. The March must be massive – it needs to be the biggest demonstration London has ever seen and it needs to show this Government exactly what it is up against in its continued persecution of rural minorities. You can't get much more of a minority than falconers and we're in their firing line so let's put feet on the street and give rural Britain and its heritage our whole-hearted support.

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.

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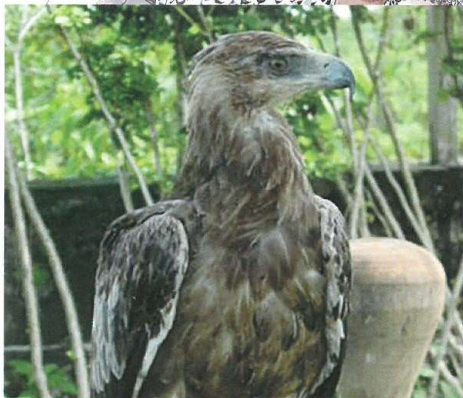
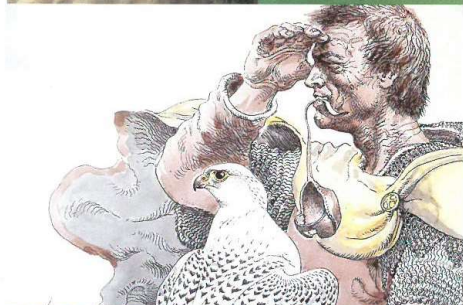
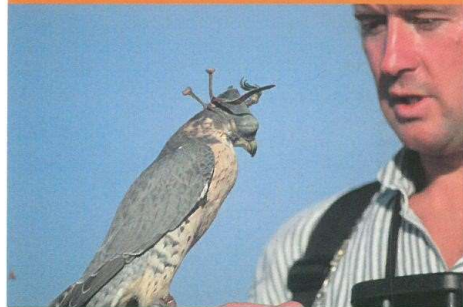
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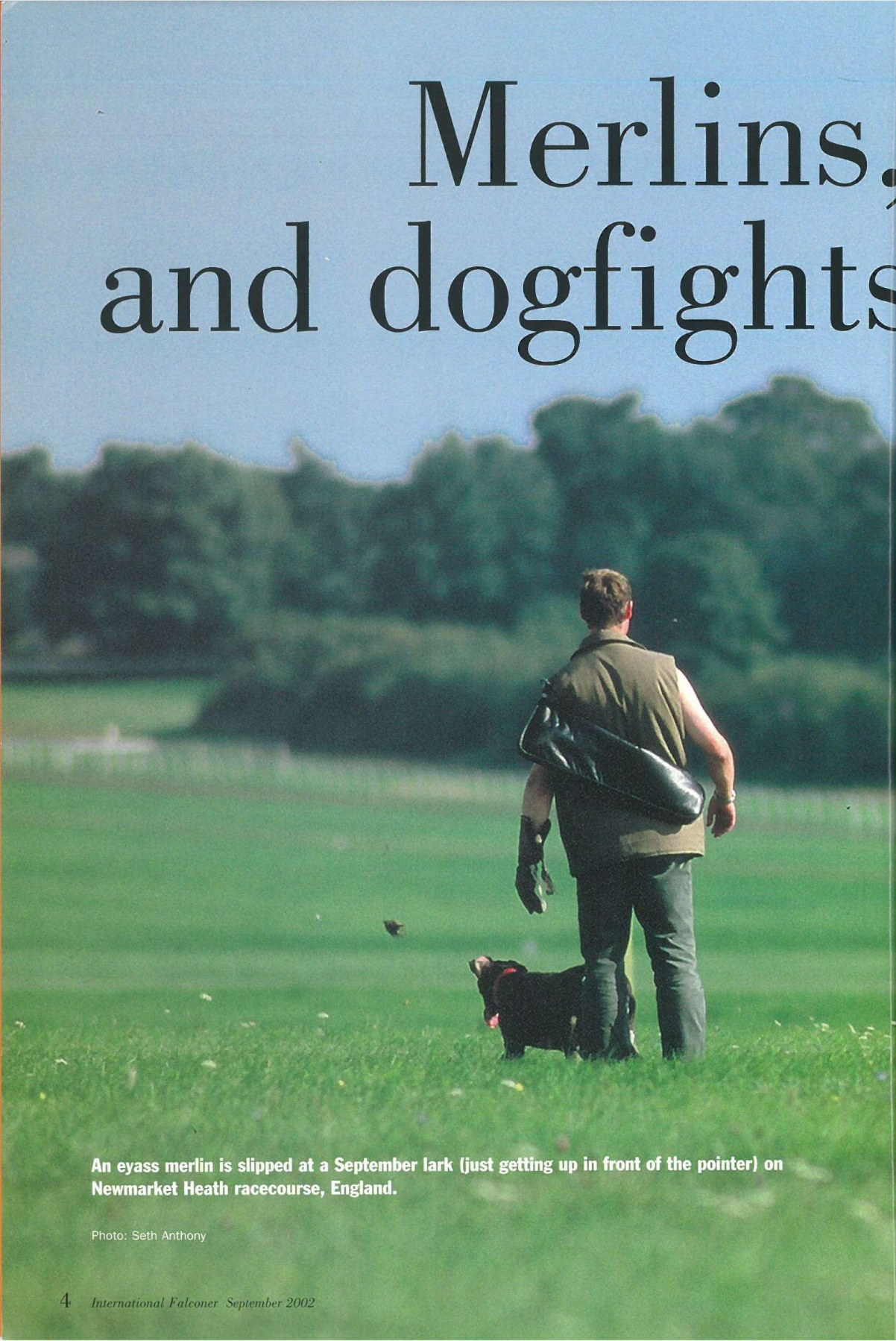
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INTERNATIONAL FALCONER



Merlins, and dogfights



An eyass merlin is slipped at a September lark (just getting up in front of the pointer) on Newmarket Heath racecourse, England.


Photo: Seth Anthony

A photograph of a person standing in a green field, holding a falcon. Another falcon is flying in the sky above. The background shows a line of trees under a clear blue sky.

Merlins in the sky

By Nicholas Kester

There is a branch of falconry that is quintessentially English. Traditionally practised before the so-say serious business of game-hawking, merlins were flown at skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*) in the late summer and early autumn. A time of wheat stubble and the song of the mounting lark. In Roger Upton's book on the old falconers, *A Bird in the Hand*, it is recorded that in 1921, Major Stanley Allen, of his time possibly the authority on the sport, took 162 larks between mid July and September with one merlin, Juno. The following year in twenty-eight days his falcon and two jack merlins accounted for a total of 286 between them: an indecent amount by today's standards. ▶

A photograph of a man with short brown hair, wearing a light blue and white striped shirt and a dark belt, holding a small falcon on his gloved hand. He is looking to the right. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green field.

“People say
larks don’t ring
up in the
winter,” says
Grant “but they
are wrong.”

Photo: Seth Anthony

It was universally acknowledged that by the end of September, larks, by now moulted out, were too strong for even the best merlin. Freeman and Salvin in their book published in 1859 record a friend as having brought a lark to book in winter (month unspecified) with a cast of eyasses. No mean feat says the author. They go on to say that Mr Newcome has also succeeded in winter with haggards but that they were prone to carry.

However, these gentlemen were the exception; thus it became an accepted fact that lark hawking couldn’t continue into the winter. No longer is this the case.

Falconry evolves through the dedication of its practitioners. They find an area of the sport that obsesses them and they vow to knock over the old facts and fictions – but not the records. Today’s lark hawking is the subject of strict quotas administered by the British government under a system of quarry licences endorsed by the European Union. Thus greedy falconers, if not censured by their peers would find themselves restricted by their legislature.

Grant Hagger and Con Taylor are two such devotees determined to redefine lark hawking and to ensure that they obtained the best flights throughout the season, including achieving the ‘impossibility’ of a good January lark.

Grant would be the first to admit this is not easy to achieve. He can understand why the old-timers were put off, even if they might actually have used this as an excuse to get the peregrines out!

He recalls: “I have flown fifteen merlins and only about five of these have shown the promise needed to keep hawking after October. And the best two were un-hacked. Hacking seems to make very little difference to their ability.”

“You must have an understanding of the quarry and how it changes

during the year. In September, when the modern licences and the season start, the larks are still in the moult. You get good flights and can encourage a new hawk. By the second or third week of the month you know whether you have a winter hawk”

For it is in September that migrant larks start to come through. These are stronger than their local cousins and the merlins often refuse them.

“It is very frustrating,” says Grant. “The merlin is bobbing her head, and you think she should be away. But she has become selective almost as though she can recognise these migrants.”

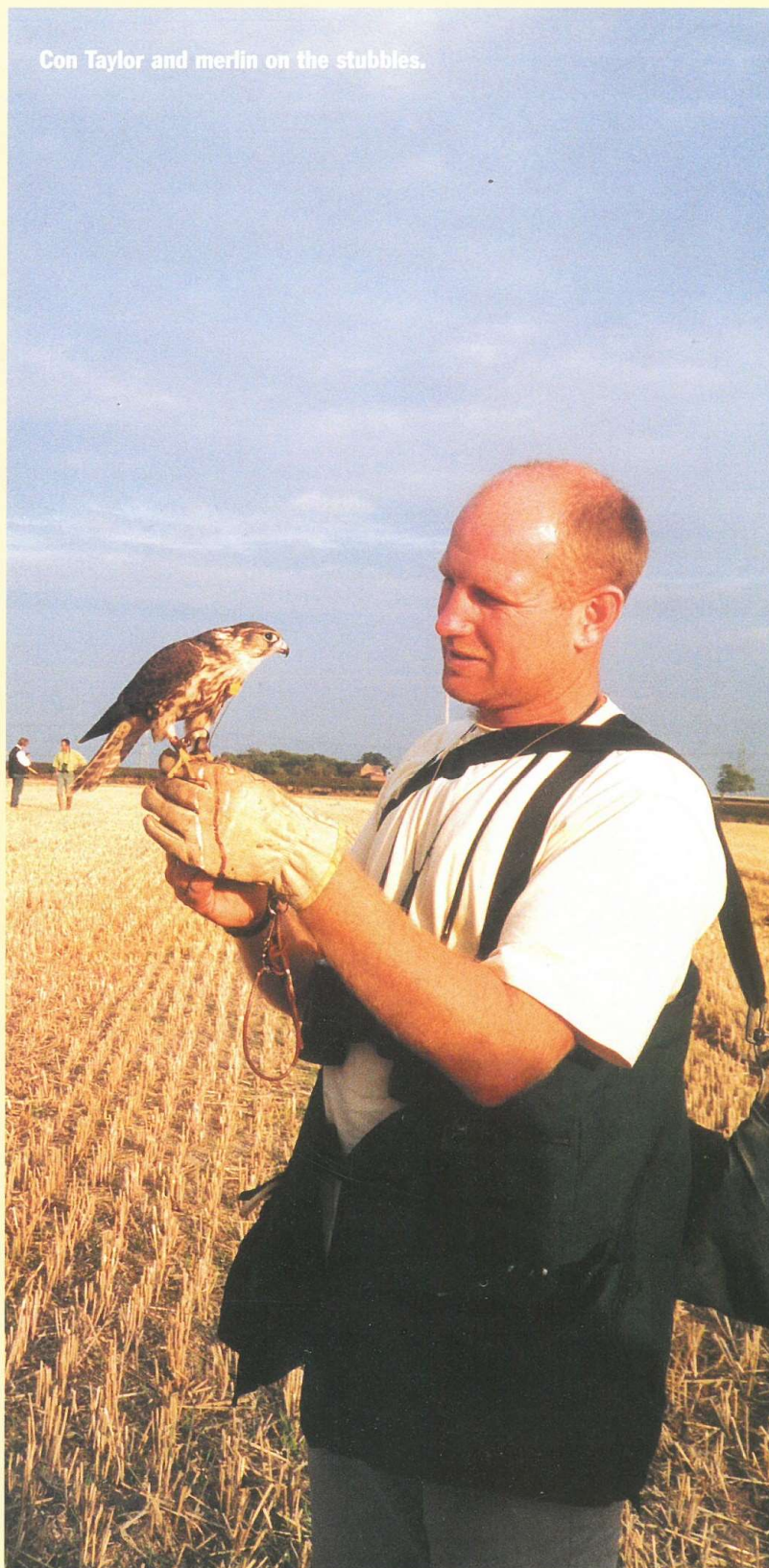
“Then,” says Con “in October the larks start to get very strong. You are not aiming for kills but to reward every time the merlin puts one in. This reinforces the desire to hunt through November, the toughest time.”

Experience changes knowledge. “People say larks don’t ring up in the winter,” says Grant “but they are wrong. What happens in the summer is that once the merlin gets above the lark, it tends to put in immediately.”

“In winter this doesn’t happen and you get fantastic zigzagging flights across the sky. Real dogfights because the larks don’t bale out so easily, believing they can beat the hawk in the air. And because of this they mount even in more enclosed country.”

The pair travel substantial distances for their sport - from Suffolk to Sussex and often to west Wales and of course they have a tale or two to tell. Grant again: “I flew a lark into a housing estate and tracked it as inconspicuously as possible with yagi aerial extended when a chap came to his door and shouted: had I lost a hawk? I told him I had and he took me into his conservatory where his wife appeared. She said that its baby was dead and produced the lark in a shoebox. Apparently the lark had hit the glass and fallen dead onto the grass while the merlin took stand on the fence awaiting its usual feed up for ▶

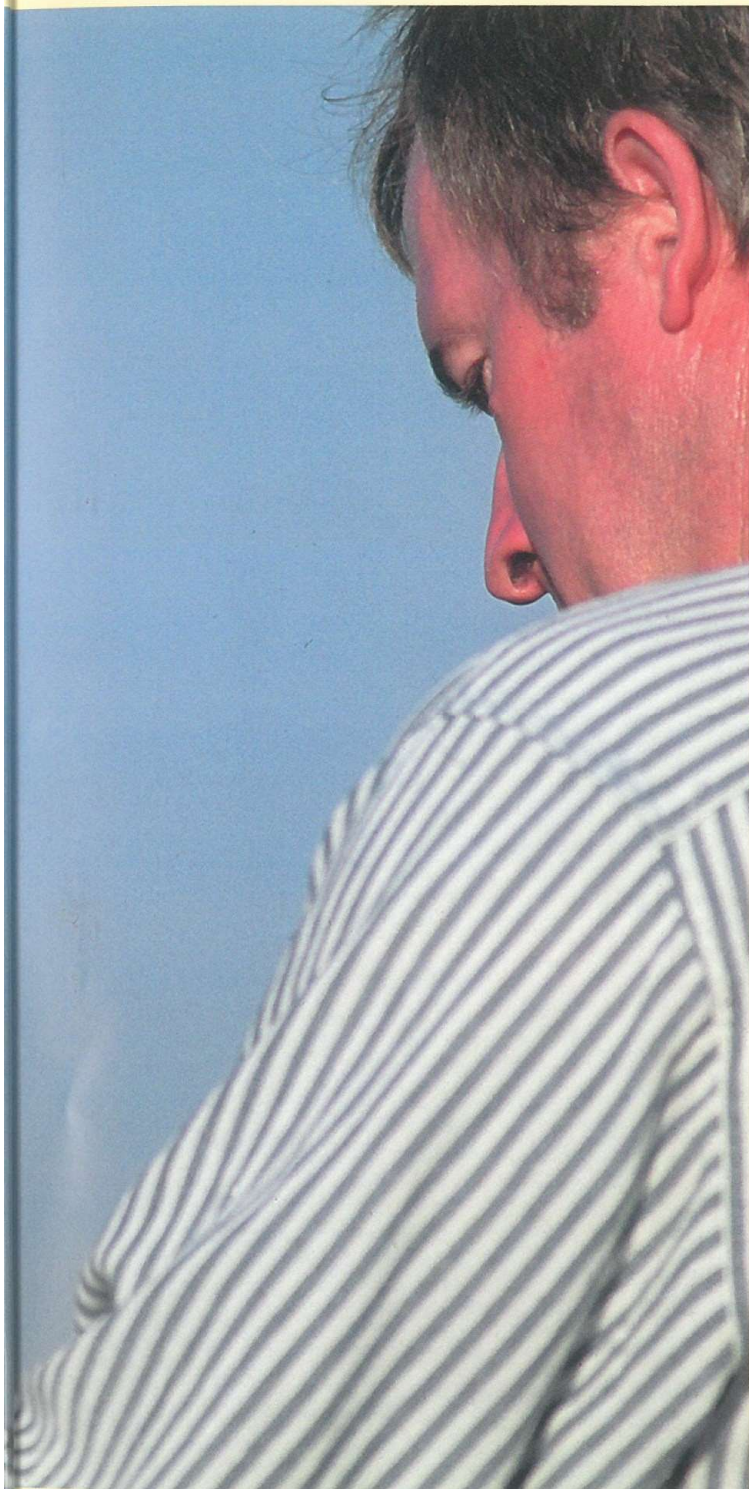
Con Taylor and merlin on the stubbles.





Grant with perlin.

Photo: Seth Anthony



having put the lark in. This had been witnessed by the man who picked up the merlin and took it inside whilst the wife, not wishing the hawk to see its 'baby' had hidden the lark in the box."

"I explained that the lark was in fact its quarry, and that they hunted them in the wild. They were fine about it and quite fascinated," recalls Grant. "But I was a bit nervous explaining something I find quite natural to a perfect stranger."

Con remembers a day when he had been out in north Kent with a group of austringers. As they were returning to the cars they witnessed the very best of ringing flights by a wild merlin, which ended in the hunted lark diving through the gamekeeper's car window and taking refuge in the foot-well to be carefully released after the merlin had moved on. "I commented at the time that this was the best flight of the day and that was mid December," says Con.

By January the hawking is less easy. Not only do the flights go higher, but also in a stiff wind they go even further afield. When lark hawking a good pair of binoculars is essential and Grant and Con have invested substantially in Leica and Zeiss.

"You must keep the glasses on the mounting falcon," says Grant. "You can see her looking over her shoulder at the climbing lark, all the time wondering when she will turn back for it. Then all of a sudden you will see a little blur in the lens: the lark. It is possibly the best part of the sport. The kill is nothing; in fact we are not really interested in kills. We feed up after one good flight and a lark put-in. That is enough."

Perlins (the hybrid of merlin and peregrine) are another passion shared by the pair. Best bred out of a peregrine by a merlin, the result is a little peregrine perfect for a most intriguing flight at blackbird that requires absolute field craft.

Grant was the first to obtain a perlin in the hope of a flight 'off the

Neck-mounted transmitters are preferred.



fist' but the little falcon wanted to wait-on at about 150 feet over the 'field' of beaters and spectators. This came about very much by accident. The tiercel was on loan from a friend and being flown when some crows chased him across a rubbish dump and through the burners that take off the surplus methane gas. With heavily singed feathers, Grant felt unable to return the hawk to its owner so, imping in a new set, a deal was done and the 'waiting on' was subsequently discovered.

Blackbirds (*Turdus merula*) are an exacting quarry, as anyone who has flown their natural predator, the sparrowhawk, will tell. First, the 'field' work a hedgerow checking for quarry. This they do up wind so that if successful, on the return journey they can evict the quarry down wind for the waiting on falcon. Once flushed, blackbirds need to believe they can make the next cover. Too far and they

won't flush, too little and the falcon doesn't stand a chance.

The perlin has hybrid tenacity and can stay up for about fifteen minutes waiting to be served. If he gets tired, he sits down for a moment until rested when he re-establishes his pitch.

"You need at least two people to achieve a flight, one to beat and one to watch the falcon. If the hawk is out of position it is a matter of freezing until he is back over. Any disturbance and the quarry will escape. Some of my friends have been roundly cursed for getting this wrong," says Grant. "They are very long suffering."

Whilst Grant and Con prefer tiercels, some fly falcons. They are stronger and no less committed, taking on wood pigeons (*Columba palumbus*) – a UK falconer's nightmare. The resultant tail chase can go for miles severely testing the telemetry. The preferred quarry is either partridge or magpie but pigeons still seem ▶

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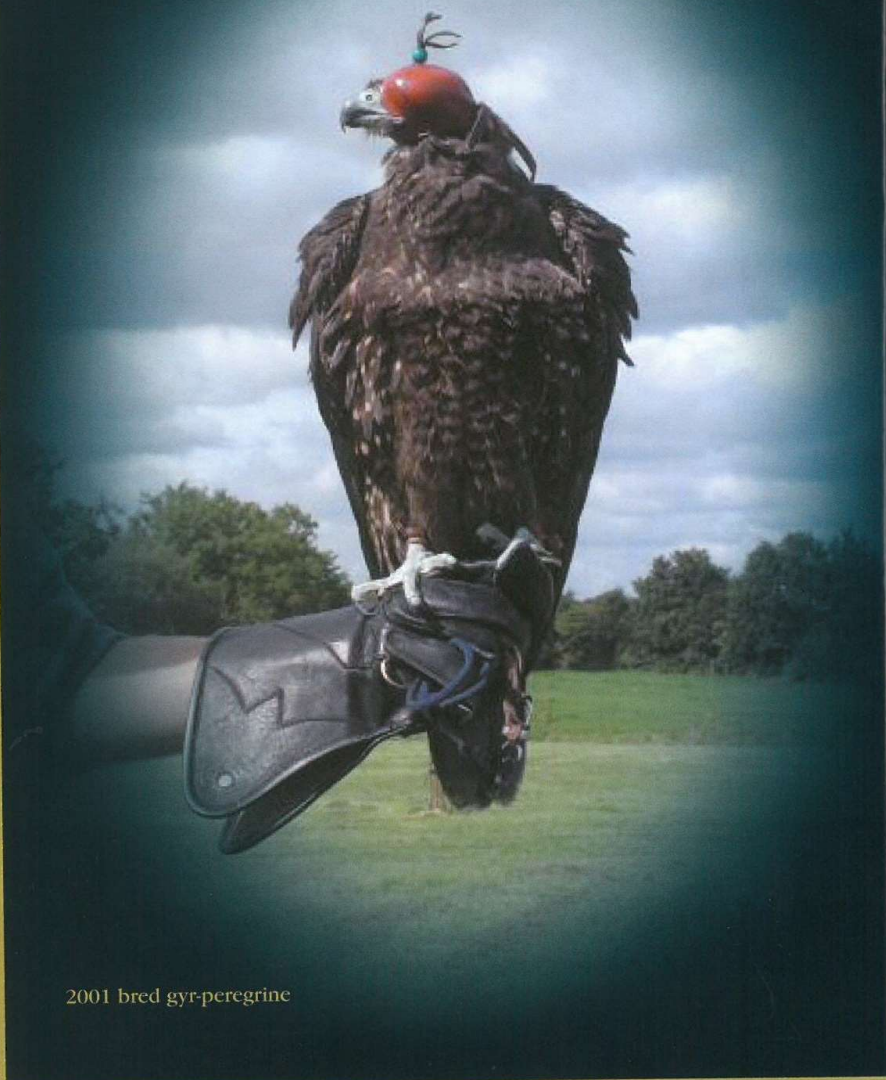
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Photo: Seth Anthony

An eyass merlin of Con's with a December lark.

irresistible.

With so many of us desirous of larger and larger falcons and hawks – the lure of the arctic gyrfalcon, the challenge of the Siberian goshawk – it is a pleasure to find two falconers passionate about a small hawk and the perfect quarry. The match of the one against the other, with or without a kill, is taking falconry, some would say, to an art form all of its own. Con and Grant are not so self-analytical. They love it and want to do it well. That is enough. ■

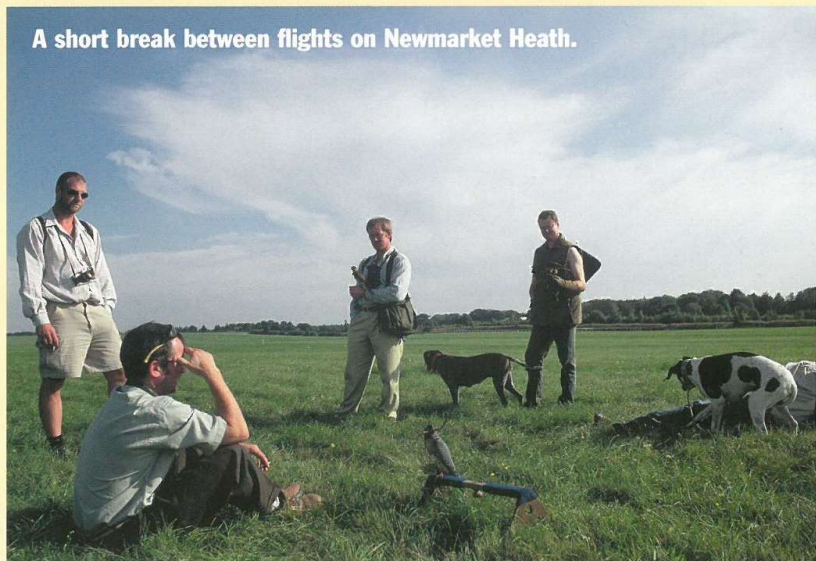


Photo: Seth Anthony

A short break between flights on Newmarket Heath.

EAGLE



HOODS

Words and photos by Alan Gates.

A smug sense of satisfaction is an apt description of my feelings as I deftly slip a snug-fitting hood onto my young male golden eagle. The ease in which this manoeuvre is performed, and the comfortable fit which his posture confirms amplifies my satisfaction in my long quest to reach this point.

Eagles and I have a long history together, hoods to me have always been somewhat elusive. In my early days, hood design for all hunting hawks was adequate at best and pretty appalling in general. Eagle hood design was more often an enlarged falcon hood, and given the fact that an eagle's head is a completely different shape to a falcon's, it is little wonder that most eagles were hood-shy.

My first eagle was a male and my second a female, hunting these two accounted for just under thirty years of my life. A golden eagle takes up a big part of your life, and as with any hawk if not introduced to hoods, dogs, ferrets etc., at an early age, these can become difficult if not impossible to bring into the equation at a later date.

My first eagle was acquired hood-



Alan with his first Eagle wearing a Phillip Glasier blocked hood.

shy though I was determined to try and correct this situation. My first attempt to produce an anglo-indian style hood in a natural coloured leather as opposed to the garish red coloured hood he was shy of, did offer a glimmer of hope. I achieved much greater success when I enlisted the help of Phillip Glasier to make me one of his Falconry Centre style eagle-size hoods.

After months of perseverance my eagle would tolerate the hood whilst being carried on the fist, but his acceptance of the hood was never fully compliant to enable me to leave him unattended on a perch. I acknowledged the progress I had made and accepted the situation that at least I could hood the eagle whilst being carried through busy situations.

In reality I rarely used this hood as

my eagle was so bomb proof, and when I obtained my second eagle, the desire to train her to the hood did not seem a priority.

For the best part of the next twenty-five years this eagle became my sole hunting hawk. Together we hunted the high moorland hills and learnt one another's foibles and strengths, our hunting strategies and bond became instinctive as if somehow we each knew what the other was thinking.

Throughout this relationship there were moments though when I wished I had the ability to hood her. Moments when I was struggling to negotiate an awkward fence on top of a dry stone wall, or a steep sheep path on a cliff edge with a belligerent eagle on my arm. These are the times when things could all go wrong and we could both ►



G'Kar wearing a Frank Lenders hood.

end up in a crumpled heap on the floor.

The desire to be able to slip on a hood and calm the situation had its appeal and I started searching for and collecting eagle-size hoods.

By the time my third golden eagle arrived, I had acquired a good selection of hoods. He was an adult male eagle of seventeen years and had spent his entire life from downy to adulthood in a zoo environment.

He was sent to me to train as a semen donor which would assist me in my attempts to breed from my now egg laying hunting female eagle. The only way I had achieved a bond with my eagles was through hunting, and I obtained permission to train and hunt this eagle from the Zoological Society.

With this eagle the hood was a great advantage, he accepted it with little resistance. I favoured a traditional Hungarian hood beautifully crafted by Ede Zaborszky. Ede's creations are in general a good quality working hood, although he does produce colourful art-painted show hoods. They are blocked hoods

with the most superbly crafted Syrian back I have ever seen, they fit well and the braces slip the back shut with ease.

With the hatching of my first male eaglet, I was presented with the ultimate new start. By now I had found the craftsmanship of Frank Lenders of Falconcraft and his uniquely designed eagle hood. These hoods were a hybrid design of blocked anglo-indian with Kazakh influence.

My young eaglet grew up happily accepting the easy-fitting Lenders hood. Once he was full size and we had had a full year working with this design, I discussed my comments with Frank who set about with a slightly modified design. This was an excellent hood and I was starting to think we had begun to master a style that suited an aquila's head.

A couple of acquaintances of mine travelled to the Central Asian areas of the Kazakh people. I begged and offered financial inducements in an attempt to encourage them to try and acquire a true Kazakh-style eagle hood. The only genuine Kazakh hoods I had seen in this country looked as though they had been made from an old boot, but I had numerous photographs of excellent fitting braceless blocked hoods.

These attempts to obtain a Kazakh hood failed, and I only discovered the true reason when I travelled to Western Mongolia myself.

As the Kazakh eaglehunters only ever hunt one eagle, they generally have only one hood. This hood is fitted to that eagle, if the eagle is killed or they release her back to the wild, they refit the hood for the new eagle. As they only fly females and pick the largest eaglet they can find, the refitting of the hood is only minor, thus the hood lasts for a number of eagles. I was given a number of hoods as gifts, but these were usually old or soft leather versions which were inferior to the ones they used.

I spent a lot of time comparing the

designs of the hoods I saw and explaining in detail to Canat my guide, the merits I saw in each different hood. The evolution of the long discussions we had was that Canat the entrepreneur, would endeavour to have a hood production line set up to send box loads of hoods to the West. I had to temper his ambition without damping his enthusiasm as I was keen to obtain new blocked Kazakh eagle hoods.

True to his word, some months after I returned to the UK, two boxes of hoods arrived in quick succession. These were a selection of sizes, stitching patterns, leathers and silver decorations. One of the smaller sizes fitted my male eagle perfectly. The slick way it slipped on and off without the need to do up and undo braces was a revelation. No longer were my cold cheeks to experience a whip-lashing from the hood braces when the eagle shook his head. No longer would I render a nostril or the corner of my eye onto a stiff hood top knot when I stumbled on the hill.

I was a convert, the Kazakh eagle hood was, in principle, perfection. Though no two hoods were exactly the same, there were also some regional differences. The Kazakh people had trained and hunted with golden eagles for millenniums, and through the countless generations their design and fit of their eagle hoods had been honed to perfection.

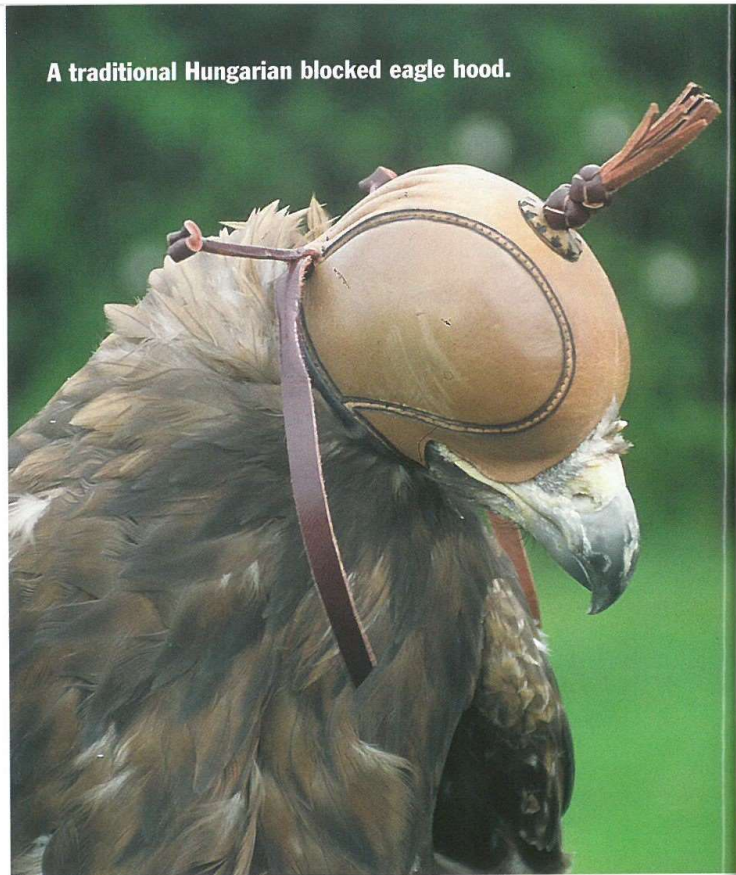
On my second visit to Western Mongolia I wanted to meet Canat's hoodmaker. Khasim Narbek is a young artist who trained in Kazakhstan as a jewellery designer. He invited me into his home and showed me his hood designs and patterns. I was surprised to discover that he was not an eaglehunter, his knowledge was obtained from relatives who were eaglehunters. Given the patterns and the technique, Narbek's gift was in his craftsmanship. The tools and methods of construction were very much as is used by hoodmakers in the West.

Khasim Narbek invited us into his house whilst he was making hoods for the Festival.





A Phillip Glasier blocked hood.



A traditional Hungarian blocked eagle hood.

although some of the older eaglehunters told me of coating the finished hoods in yogurt to harden the leather, though I thought to myself this little gem of knowledge was unlikely to catch on in the West.

Narbek was busy making hoods for the Festival which was also the reason I was in town. Forty odd eaglehunters were to gather together from the countryside to display their eagles and themselves in all their finery. What a unique opportunity this would be to be able to compare the designs and styles of their very best hoods.

Narbek's hood pattern was refined to fit his brother in law Aralbai's eagle and as most of the female eagles flown in the area were of similar size there was little need for a different pattern. Aralbai favoured the wooden peg fitted into the chin strap of his hood. This was used to lessen the vocal sound of a yapping eagle. He had a modification on the style I had previously seen, which enabled him to rotate the peg into position when required. Aralbai's eagle was not that noisy, it's just whilst waiting in the rocks for a fox to be flushed, she would yap a few times. When the peg was slipped against her throat the sound emitted was greatly reduced in volume and pitch, this he told me was

so the fox did not pin-point where he lay in wait with the eagle.

The hood top loop was favoured for its practical application rather than a decorative feature. I had always thought that a mounted Kazakh in hot pursuit of quarry only had his teeth in which to remove the eagle's hood, thus being the reason for the evolution of the braceless hood. In fact in reality, the Kazakhs are such expert horse riders that to remove an eagle's hood with the left hand whilst at full gallop is a simple task. The hood may be clenched in the teeth by the loop once it has been removed, but more often a finger is slipped through the loop until such a time it is either replaced on the eagle's head, or tied to the belt with a lace through the loop.

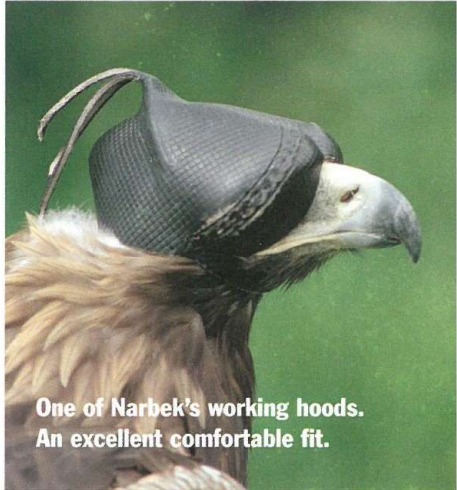
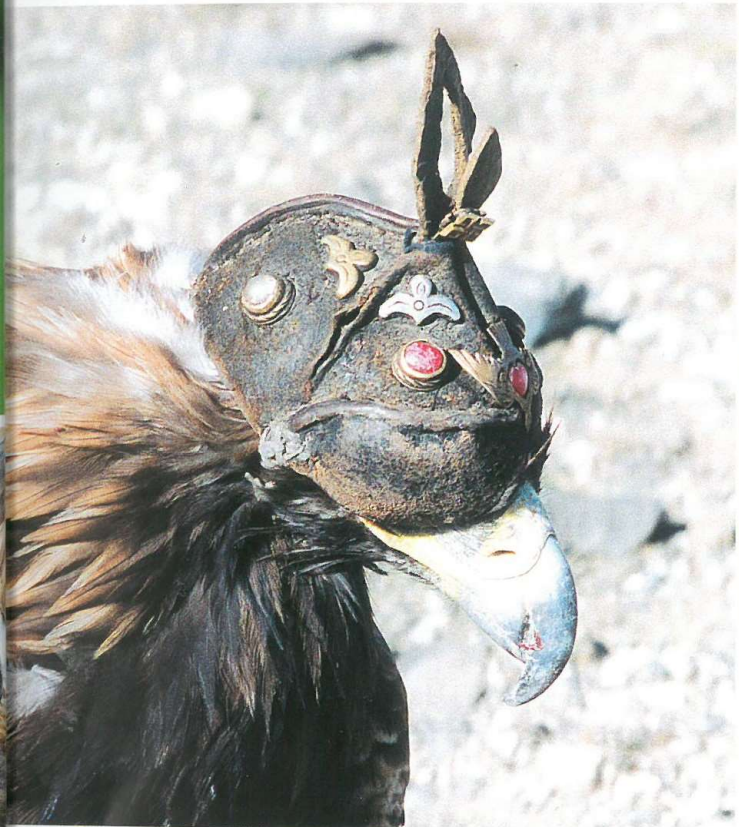
Practicality aside, decoration generally favoured by the Kazakh people is silver and some heavily decorate their eagle's hood with silver and occasional jewelled escutcheons. I was amazed how well the eagles carried the extra weight of these decorated hoods, which can weigh



three times the weight of a normal working hood. Black is overwhelmingly the favoured leather colour, with brown coming a close second. Feathered plumes are never used on hood decoration, this practise is confined to the eagle herself. Eagle owl feathers are sewn onto the eagle's wing coverts as a good luck charm they are feared in Mongolia as they are in the West as a ferocious nocturnal



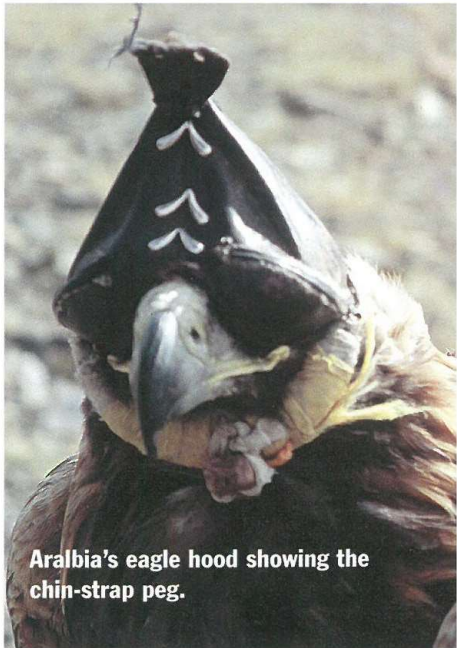
A SELECTION OF
**EAGLE
HOODS**



One of Narbek's working hoods.
An excellent comfortable fit.

predator more than able to kill diurnal raptors, including eagles, as they sleep.

The Festival proved an excellent venue to view a large variety of Kazakh eagle furniture and eagle handling methods mostly unchanged through the centuries. It was as though I had travelled back to the time of the great Khans rather than half-way round the world. It was a wonderful opportunity to learn from the Kazakh eagle masters. ■



Aralbia's eagle hood showing the chin-strap peg.

MY 'ALETHE' FALCON

by Karl G. Kerster



There is a small bit about the “alethe” falcon in old falconry books that, although very brief, has intrigued me since I first read about it at age 12. The old description makes one want the legendary hawk above any other, but lets you wonder about its modern name. A third smaller than a tiercel and colourful, brought to Europe from South America, and chasing down partridge the very first time it sees one. Most points make the educated falconer

think of the South American aplomado falcon, and now I am sure this is correct!

I had been interested from that childhood exposure and around 1990, I became serious about wanting to try flying an aplomado. My friend Doug Alton found a breeder of aplomados in Peru, and they could be imported, as F1s with only six different permits required simultaneously. All this took so long that, though she hatched in November of 1999, I did not get to take her up until February 2001. I named her Pepper, because she has black specks on her chest and I think it is a sweet name for a pretty ladybird. Pepper had moulted out and had never seen wild quarry until I first flew her, and just like the stories of the alethe falcon, Pepper chased vigorously after the very first bird she saw. Unfortunately, Pepper did not score a kill that first time out. That happened our fourth time hunting! I

was on cloud nine with joy over Pepper's success. I had been walking with her in a field making some attempts at miscellaneous birds when we got a foot-slip on a sparrow. The sparrow was fast, but Pepper put so much pressure on him that he put in to the light cover after only a short chase. I gave Pepper several reflushes of this sparrow until he tried to hide right in a deep dry hoofprint where Pepper got him – her first real wild kill.

The next time that I took her out to this same field, there was a haggard male redtail sitting on top of a fence post 200 yards away. I was a bit concerned that the wild redtail might come over to harass her, but was totally unprepared for what happened next. Pepper went straight to the hag and strafed him. Then she see-sawed up and down scraping his head and back to make him move, but that was not good enough for Pepper's ego. She chased him and kept hitting him



MY 'ALETHE' FALCON

without any fear or mercy for more than a quarter of a mile, and then she had him cowering on the ground. I was sure that the redtail would kill her now if she came close to him or hit him again, but she landed on a fence post near him and let him fly away. Pepper only did this risky behavior the one time and I am at some loss to explain what got into her, or what she got out of it. Another one-time chase was that same week when we got a foot-flush of a big jackrabbit and Pepper hit him and chased him with repeated whacks to the head and ears as he ran away, but again she let him run away and never did it again.

PEPPER THE GOSHAWK

I took Pepper to Davis one morning to meet up with two friends. As we started our walk, a pair of Canadian geese led their seven goslings away from a pond and over a rise into the field away from us. We joked about Pepper nailing one of those five-pound goslings and feared how easy it would be for the parents to kill her if she was stupid enough to try it. We hunted around, had a nice walk, and then headed back the way we had come. The goose family had also had their nice walk and was heading back to the pond at the same time we were heading to our cars. We saw them at about the same place as before as they marched in a line. Pepper left my fist with a slow straight flight aimed at the geese, and I shouted at one of my friends to get there to protect Pepper since he was fifty feet closer to the geese. Pepper took the centre gosling; there was chaos in the tall grass as the mamma and papa goose tried to see whom they needed to kill. Fortunately for my friend, I got to the scene before the big geese figured out what to do, and they called the remaining babies to them and went on to the pond. I saw the situation as Pepper having made a great big kill, and I was going to gorge her up on the goose she caught, but my friend was busy the whole time

slipping Pepper off. My friend saved the goose and nestled it in his arms as he brought it to the water close to its parents. I fed up Pepper while the goose family had a safety meeting. My other friend and I wondered aloud about the culinary coup of which he had robbed us all.

SQUIRREL HAWKING

My twelve-year-old daughter, Audrey, was in a horse show and the ranch owner gave me permission to hawk there when I showed her my birds, so I brought Pepper out and set her loose. There was almost no ground cover, so all the quarry was in plain sight, as were we. Pepper left me, hugged the ground for a long way, and tried a little wingover. I could not see what she had but she was kind of dancing over something, as if ants were crawling up her legs. As I started running to her Pepper stepped off of it and ran around it making a few stabs. What I found, when I got there, was a big Beechie ground-squirrel turning around in circles with its eyes pinched shut, and its balance messed up. Pepper stood by as I dispatched the squirrel and then came to me, but she did not want to eat much of the squirrel. I saw that she had blood on her foot, which turned out to be from a bite on the bottom of her footpad. The bite swelled for a few hours, but then healed right up. When I skinned the squirrel, I found lots of pinpricks and haemorrhaging on the head and neck. This was another one-time quarry for Pepper.

At this time I was choosing where to fly Pepper based upon how few cars would be around and how fast the cars would be going, because she tends to land on the ground, and when she lands on the road she does not seem to understand the danger of cars coming at her. Depredating blackbirds became our main quarry at this time and we got one every day for eighteen days running. One of these flights she was working the flock over cattails

while I kept the flock in the air, and a marsh hawk (northern harrier) cruised over. First the wild bird chased Pepper in what I think was an attempt to rob her of the transmitter that looks like a little mouse at the foot, but Pepper out-flew her and came back to work the blackbirds with me. The marsh hawk joined us in working over this now swarming mass of birds, and just when I was hoarse from yelling because we had been at it for more than 20 minutes, I saw the wild marsh hawk snag a bird from the air and Pepper going into cover at the same time. I used the receiver and found her with a nice fat starling in the marsh. It was most amazing to me to see how well the marsh hawk handled her blackbird in the air and how the two hawks had worked together and how when one scored, the other did

“My worst fear showed itself in another minute when I saw an owl in the sky headed right for my baby”

also within seconds.

I was flying Pepper around a pond area at one corner of a four-way stop, where I felt some safety because the cars were going slowly, when a young blackbird flushed and was caught quickly. I had planned a long hunt so I let Pepper eat a brain sandwich and slipped the rest away to go on hawking. She caught another young blackbird, but this one she carried to the top of a large eucalyptus tree and started plucking. It was getting dark and great-horned owls were calling one was right in the tree Pepper was standing on. Fear tightened my stomach in knots as the owl flew out of the tree to start his night with my Peppy-baby out in plain sight. My worst fear showed itself in another minute when I saw an owl in the sky



Pepper on a pheasant.

headed right for my baby. I shouted, and she looked up to see it closing on her. The owl was not at all influenced by my shouting. It grabbed her, and when she dropped her food he let her go and dived after her food. Rather than give it up, though, she stooped and cracked the owl in the head so that it was stunned and it dropped to the ground. I ran to pick up the food before Pepper could carry it again and got her to come in to the lure with a flashlight. On the way back to my vehicle a 3-inch bullfrog hopped by my flashlight beam and Pepper nailed him. She had no interest in eating this frog, but I counted it in my game log.

This whole experience, with the three kills (including the frog), carrying the kill, and standing her

ground with a great-horned owl, all in a two-hour span of time, show a great deal of the characteristics I now expect to see in aplomado falcons. If a kill is on the fist the bird will not mind giving it up and going for another; however, aplomados love to carry. Carrying is more the rule than the exception and I make all efforts to grab hold of kills in order to prevent it. With a deadly owl coming right at her with every intention of killing her, she acted fearless, and even after it had grabbed her she attacked it and nearly brought it to bag rather than fleeing. To top it off, after the whole crazy experience, she was still so hunt-oriented that she took the frog even though it was the first frog she had ever seen and it was just moving so in

her mind it must be for her to chase.

In May of 2001 I took Pepper and my Y2K tiercel *anatum* peregrine, Manfred, to do depredation bird control work at cherry orchards. When I do this work, I fly the birds from dawn to dusk and sleep in the truck with them. It is very hard work for man and birds, and also very intimate. The main pest species is robins, and we have legal blessing to harass or kill any that are there. In the six years I had worked birds at the cherries, I had done a great job of scaring away all the pest birds, but I had never had any falcon catch one...until Pepper. The great value of falconry pest control is that the robins see a falcon, and simply decide to blow-out. The orchard owner loves to see that first ►

MY 'ALETHE' FALCON

big blow-out of the season, followed by the quiet of an orchard devoid of noisy birds. Some pest birds stay, however, and we chase them while maintaining a territorial presence for days at a time. Pepper tried many shots at robins around and in the trees. I loved how well her spirit for chasing them was holding up without getting any in dozens of tries, when it happened. Pepper tried a chase like many others but this time there was screaming. Pepper had been learning about the moves robins use with every getaway, and figured out how to get one. In the rows of trees, the robin will zip to the side, around the base of a tree a half-turn for concealment, and then away faster than you could believe a thrush could fly. Pepper got this one by zipping around the tree after her robin, where before that she had not been ready for the sharp turn. Pepper was not very hungry when she got the robin, but she had no intention of letting me touch her prize. She carried

it whenever I got within ten feet of her. She carried it around the whole orchard with it still screaming, plus her screaming. We got the dramatic effect of driving out every last robin that had been planning to stay. My customer was very happy with me, but I had to deal with the stress of my carrying bird for over three hours.

Three hours for Pepper to eat a bird and let me pick her up was normal at that time and I had to avoid hunting her before work or whenever I had any time-critical commitments. One beautiful Sunday morning I took her out at dawn at about 5:30am to a field that I like because it is pretty and safe from traffic, but low on quarry. I walked with her for over three-and-a-half hours with only a few slips, but I kept at it for her until we found and she caught a bird. I sat down and pulled out my cell phone to call a falconer friend, and I logged over 120 minutes chatting when I suddenly stopped mid-sentence and said,

"Pepper's done. I have to go now." It was another half-hour just to walk back to the truck, so the aplomado falcon at this point was a very time consuming bird to hunt with. I made more of an effort then to show Pepper quarry that she had less chance of catching, like snipe and such, because that way I could end the hunt when ever I decided to. The game book went into a slump then, but the bird and I were happier than ever. The interesting thing was that the fast, tough quarry was causing Pepper to fly much faster, or was bringing out her potential for more speed at any rate. Pepper did still make some kills, but things were more under control. This was to lead to great things. ■

TO BE CONTINUED




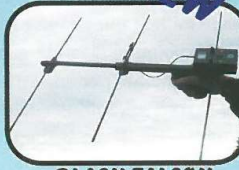
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 **BLACK FALCON**

It always happens at the wrong time (in my case just before Christmas) and no matter how expected, one is always ill prepared. So it was with the old dog.

Sixteen years ago I had agreed with a friend that a new German shorthaired pointer puppy from his anticipated litter would be great. They were not over-priced as the mother was not registered, so the puppies were excluded from the British Kennel Club pedigree scheme. No matter, both parents were working falconer's dogs, and that was sufficient. When the allotted day arrived we made our selection. "Don't take the bitch with the white tip to its tail, it's been sold," said Andy.

The selection process is a tough call – you just have to have them all, at least your wife does. We took the one with the white tip to its tail, and no-one was any the wiser. At least that is what Andy Reeve (yes, the goshawk man) confirmed when, years later, I confessed to my crime. Sofka was a joy to train, even with little more than a Gundog manual and no reference to falconers with dog training experience. She was biddable, steady and only galloped for joy when she knew work was not in the offing. Her only fault was her refusal to walk to heel – which I convinced myself was no bad thing as I did not want her too close in when she worked.

I flew many hawks over her: two redtails, a buzzard, several sparrowhawks, and my first goshawk. She attended field meets and was universally admired. (You can criticise a man, his wife and even his hawk, but never, ever have the temerity to criticise his dog!)

During this time I met Simon Tyers, professional dog trainer and falconer. It was a revelation. Here were really well trained dogs that understood ground and scent a million times better than my dream

hound. What could I do to improve matters? Over the next few years we discussed and wrote an as yet unpublished book on training the falconer's dog. And yes, dog training is really quite simple when approached systematically, at the right time of year, and without an

The Old Dog

By Nick Kester

eyass of any type to distract you.

Just make sure your children don't undo what you have installed into that impressionable puppy mind. Children are a dog trainer's biggest problem. They always want to repeat the new trick (sit, stay, come, stop, etc.) until it is rapidly unlearned.

By her eighth season Sofka was as steady as a rock, by ten she was slowing down. On two occasions she failed to make it over the barbed-wire fence and was eviscerated, the second time seriously. It was time to retire. The new puppy arrived as alert and exciting as always. The training was a new challenge. I still gave the old dog an occasional outing. But if the spirit was willing the flesh was not. Her sight was going but not her nose or hearing. The sound of hawk bells brought her instantly to her feet, the drag of the leash from the hook behind the boot room door had a similar effect. It was a torture to leave her behind.

Soon the rest of her faculties denied her even these moments of pleasure, turning them to disappointment, and eventually to resignation. She would sit in the garden, perfectly happy, as the puppy and I took ourselves off, looking after us for all the world like

the elder statesman she had become – content in the knowledge that our sport continued uninterrupted.

For five years her retirement was a pleasure. Her walks were limited to "on the lead" but were no less energetic, her appetite undiminished – especially for things foul dug up from the flowerbeds after the cats, or retrieved from the dung heap behind the stables. She developed a snore of such monumental proportion that my son, who slept above the dog room, was forced to contemplate earplugs. Soon she could no longer jump into the car, no matter, she could jump out. Then even this became a trial. The car ceased all together.

We had warned ourselves that when the day came, we would not shirk our duty. Suddenly, she stopped eating, slight incontinence set in, her coat lost condition and started to stare, but it was the confusion that triggered the final journey. She simply didn't know where anything was anymore. The day had indeed finally come.

The drive to the vet is never easy, even when the fatal injection is swiftly given, and the slide into unconsciousness as effortless as the pressure of your hand on her head. When it is over and you return to the car with an empty lead it is simply ghastly. But in human terms she was nearly 112. I don't want to live that long and neither did Sofka. We tend to forget our dogs: faithful servants through many long, hardworking winters, and with so many hawks.

The next morning, I collected the goshawk from her mews and, at the sound of bells, there at my heels was the "puppy" (now four years old). The wheel had turned full circle. How many more times would it turn in my hawking life, with how many old dogs, and as many new ones? ■



The dog was a great friend and faithful companion of a hawker in medieval China as well as in the Arabian countries. The Chinese bred slim steppe greyhounds similar to the Kazakh "taza" or Arabian "saluka".

Russian Magic

By Martin Hollinshead

Seventeen years ago a group of falconers took a break from aviary building work under the sun of a hot Bavarian summer to look at a casually unrolled watercolour. All were eagle enthusiasts and the picture of a wolf and eagle doing battle couldn't have more impact had the combatants come fighting and tumbling from the paper. This was my introduction to the work of Russian artist Vadim Gorbatov.



Born in Moscow in 1940, Vadim's career as an artist began with him studying at the Academy of Art, Industrial Design and Applied Art in Moscow. He went on to work as illustrator for Soviet television, gaining the position of head of graphics and illustration. He became a freelance artist in the mid 1980s. His work has appeared in numerous books and periodicals, and he has had exhibitions in The Netherlands, France, the UK, and North America.

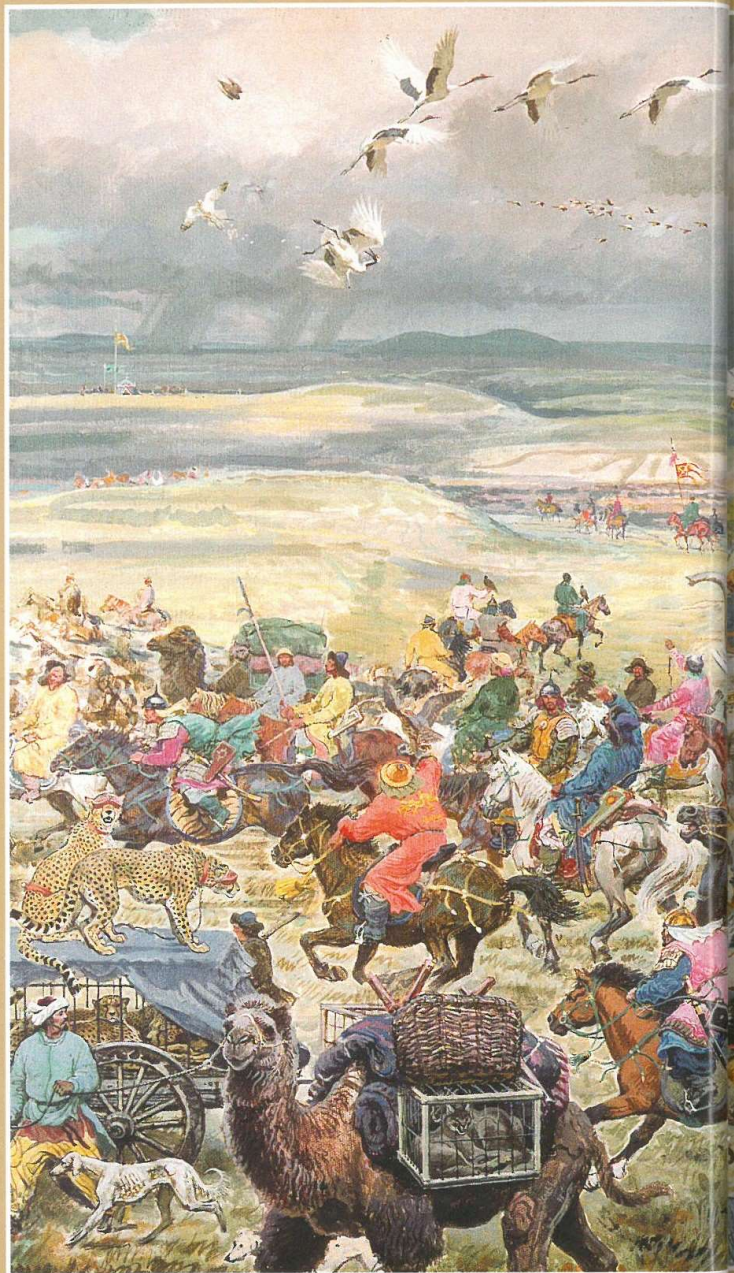
While Vadim's work spans many topics, his fascination for birds of prey ▶

Perhaps his most impressive piece of work is his interpretation of Marco Polo's description of Kubilai Khan's huge hawking excursions. Polo talked of thousands of falconers, countless hawks, falcons and eagles, and of the Great Khan overseeing operations from a mobile camp atop four elephants.

and falconry is obvious. It has its roots in his childhood. As a youngster, he would keenly seek out the raptors within striking distance of his home, avidly following their behaviour. He even kept hawks, but having no experienced hand to guide him, never took the step to true falconry.

This attraction to birds of prey and falconry, and Vadim's practice of painting from life, resulted in much travelling, with expeditions to the far north and right across central Asia. They were trips into a treasure-trove: a secret world of ancient traditions, locked away places and only imagined and dreamt about hawking.

The images that came from these expeditions captured fascinating things: landscapes, training methods, and the different peoples involved. Examine the work, everything is there, every weatherworn face, every gnarled hand and every minutely detailed item of clothing and equipment. It was this detail – only available to someone who had seen it first hand that gave that early work a true feeling of the distant and unknown. It should be remembered that while much of this mystery might now have been lost, reports and features having made Asian falconry quite familiar, at that



time, even an accurate sketch of a pair of Kazakh eagle jesses or a hood, was something for the European falconer to wonder over.

Very noticeable looking at Vadim's pictures, is the strong influence of the traditional. This is a man deeply interested in history – especially that

of his homeland – and this flows over into his creations. His work gives us falconry that is immediately more captivating than any modern mechanised version can ever be. And the birds of his falconry, the historical greats – gos, gyr, saker, peregrine golden eagle – are somehow made to



shine far brighter than any Harris' or hybrid ever could. It makes no difference how spectacular and successful modern falconry is, in Vadim's work, historical falconry wins.

Immediately to mind comes his latest calendar, a piece of art bursting with images from the past. Whether

your eye is drawn by the medieval lady carrying a merlin (and being courted, it seems, by a suitor), or the mounted Asian warrior with gos and sight-hound, the leaves peel back revealing historical scene after historical scene.

Perhaps his most impressive piece

of work is his interpretation of Marco Polo's description of Kubilai Khan's huge hawking excursions. Polo talked of thousands of falconers, countless hawks, falcons and eagles, and of the Great Khan overseeing operations from a mobile camp atop four elephants. Another artist might have ▶

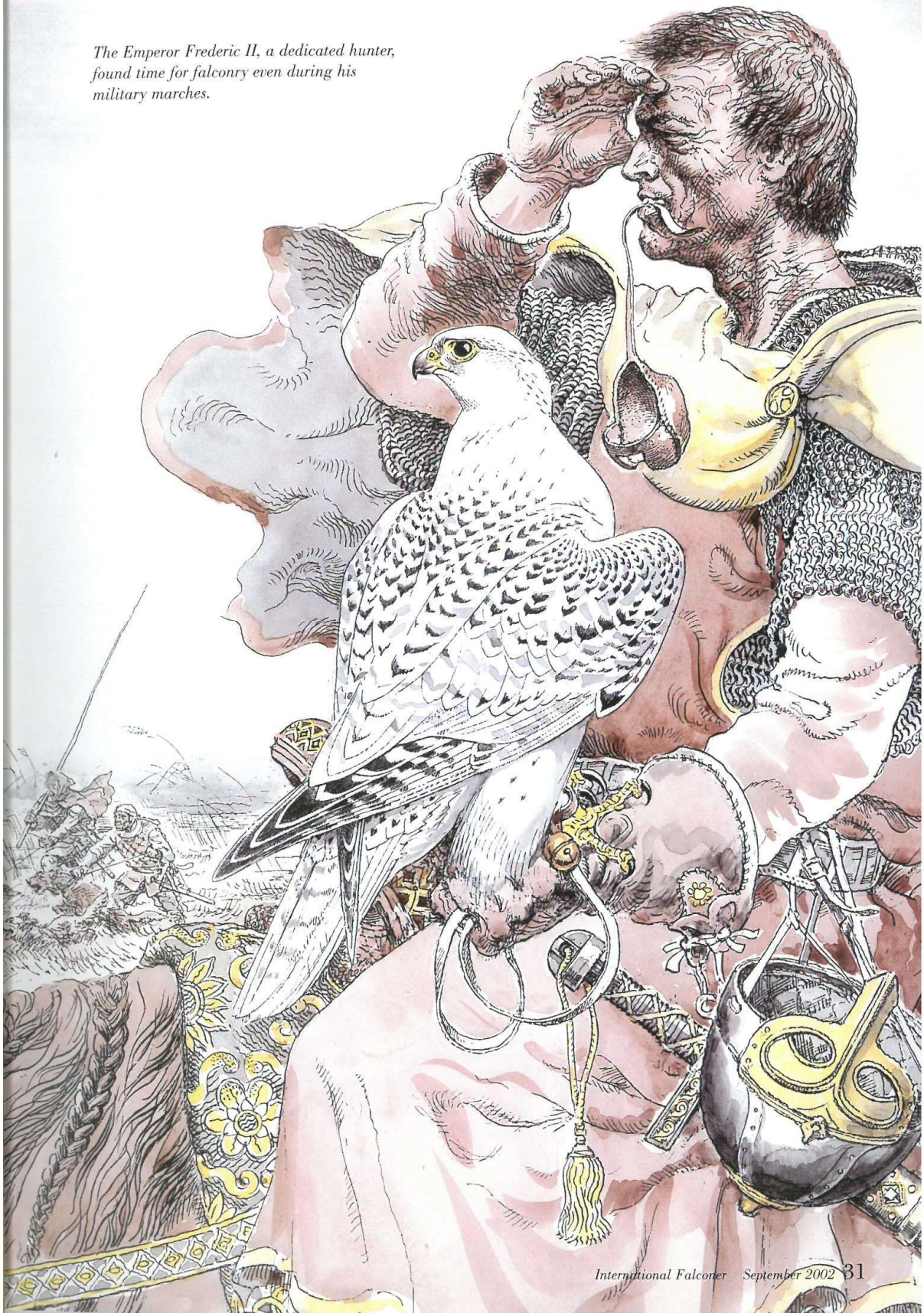
diluted this fantastic scene – brought it almost into the realms of normality – not Vadim. We get the full, incredible, belief-testing version. It's monumental falconry, a gigantic travelling extravaganza. This picture is so crammed with finely depicted activity, you could study it for a week and still not fully discover all its little gifts.

This is Vadim's work at its best, this is his ability to story-tell with a brush really expressing itself. Such paintings are pieces of theatre, are scenes truly happening, and you are transported there. I felt it that hot Bavarian day when I viewed that eagle and wolf picture. Suddenly I was on some snowy waste, could feel the cold and the biting wind, could see the wolf churning up the snow as it fought to free itself from the eagle's deadly grip, and in the corner of my left eye, an eye squinting against the elements from under Balaclava-like head gear, I could see a desperate horseman racing to help, the pounding growing louder and louder as he drew near. Then I blinked and it was all gone – Russian Magic. ■

In medieval Europe, ladies liked to hunt with a merlin.



The Emperor Frederic II, a dedicated hunter, found time for falconry even during his military marches.



Notes from Poland: Words and photos by Bob Dalton



Recently I was invited to an end of season hawking meet in Poland. Being a country I had not witnessed falconry in before, I was eager to take advantage of the opportunity. The pheasant hawking season there extends almost a month beyond our own and the majority of hawking would be at this quarry.

Falconry in Poland was a sport that had been consigned to the past until just over thirty years ago when a man called Czeslaw Sielicki rekindled an interest in it. The growth of the sport has been slow but steady and there are now around eighty practising falconers. Approximately three quarters of them fly goshawks and the other quarter a variety of falcons.

Only hawks and falcons that have been produced in captivity can be trained and flown and these are currently restricted to four species only: The goshawk, peregrine, saker and the lanner. The only exceptions to these are hawks and falcons that are being rehabilitated. Short term licences are granted to allow falconers to help put injured raptors back into the wild using falconry methods.

To be a falconer in Poland it is compulsory to become a member of the state hunting association. The would-be hawker not only has to pass all the normal exams needed by a rifle or shotgun hunter but also an additional exam relating directly to falconry. Once all the exams have been passed a hawk or falcon can be purchased.

The principal quarry species in Poland are pheasants and hares. Fortunately there is an abundance of both species. There are partridges but not in sufficient numbers in most areas for them to be considered a viable proposition for a hawk or falcon. I could not help but notice on

European saker falcon



Notes from Poland:

my visit an abundance of magpies, rooks and crows. But I was reliably informed that no-one flew these species – magpies because they are considered too difficult and rooks and crows because the feeling is that flying them would result in the premature loss of a falcon. Not one single falconer I met during my stay had a telemetry system. The feeling I got was that this was due purely and simply to the cost factor.

Before actually starting hawking on this trip I had the pleasure of visiting the headquarters of the Polish Hunting Association at Czempin. This is an extremely active research station as well as administrative base. Projects currently being worked on are management programmes for various deer species, wild

also the current president of the Polish Falconry Organisation. I was shown round the blocks of extremely impressive aviaries, which housed ten pairs of peregrines, two pairs of goshawks, two pairs golden eagles and a pair each of lanner falcons and buzzards.

There are also a large number of aviaries for the housing of injured raptors. Those that are not able to be returned to the

over a twenty year period just over one hundred young peregrines have been hatched from ten carefully chosen sites. The sites are nearly all in either central or northern Poland. The work of the scheme is paid for mainly by the hunting association with a very small contribution from the Polish government.

From Czempin it was on to Krakow and some pheasant hawking. The party of falconers I went to the field with flew two peregrine falcons, a male and female saker and two female goshawks. A Munsterlander, a German shorthaired pointer and a Czech pointer aided us in our quest.

The Czech pointer was a breed I had not heard of before and looked like a cross between a wirehaired and shorthaired pointer.

I have to say that the standard of dog work left me decidedly nonplussed. I fully realise that it is so easy to be critical but I really did feel that the dogs gave the hawks and falcons very little chance of achieving good success in the field. None of the three dogs actually came on point. They would show obvious signs of having picked up a scent and would then slowly walk forwards towards the source. Not once did any of them actually stop and come on what could be considered a proper point. But to be fair no-one, apparently, expected them to. As the dogs walked slowly forwards, their respective owners would walk in with them.

boar, pine martens and others. The station is also the base for the Polish peregrine falcon re-introduction scheme.

My guide at Czempin was Henryk Maka, who is not only the scientist in charge of the peregrine scheme but

wild are, where possible, paired up in seclusion aviaries in the hopes that they will breed.

The actual re-introduction scheme has been relatively successful and





With the goshawks this sort of approach by the dog did not present too much of a problem. The falconer merely walked in as well and when the pheasant eventually flushed the goshawk was in quite a good position for the start of the flight. We enjoyed many flights at both pheasant and hare in this manner.

But the downfall to this type of dog work came when falcons were being flown. Because the dogs did not come on to a rigid point, falcons were cast off whenever we got to a piece of ground that looked like it might hold a

pheasant or two. Once the falcon was airborne the dog or dogs would be run. It appeared to me that no consideration was given to the height or position of the falcon. Therefore it really was pot luck as to what height the falcon had attained, and indeed where she was in relation to the dog by the time it flushed the pheasant.

If the dog took some time to find a bird then the falcon could well be at a decent pitch and position would not be quite so critical. But if the dog found its bird quickly the falcon would have practically no chance. For someone

that has run pointing dogs for many years and flown all manner of game over them, I found the proceedings very strange indeed. I did think that perhaps this particular group just did not have very good dogs and that during the course of my stay I would see others worked in a manner I was more used to. But it was not to be. What I was seeing was the norm.

Towards the end of my stay I spent some time hawking with a falconer who earns his living by training pointing dogs for shooting. This was going to be more like the dog work I was used to, or so I thought. But no, it was exactly the same as before. The other thing I found strange was that no consideration was given to the wind direction when dogs were being run. If we found ourselves hawking a tract of land and the wind direction was wrong we carried on regardless. No attempt was made to circle the area and then make our way back into the wind. Consequently a great many pheasants were bumped by the dogs, but you could not lay the blame at their door.

After Krakow I went onto Warsaw and then Gdansk to see some more hawking and it all pretty much followed suit as to what I had already seen. I did see some pheasants caught and several of them were from a decent pitch. I saw them caught with peregrine falcons, a lovely dark European saker falcon and a light-coloured sakret. But on the whole pheasant hawking with falcons tended to be a hit and miss affair.

Goshawks on the other hand were extremely efficient and the manner of the dog work did not hinder their performance. A big difference I did note however between how goshawks were flown in Poland and how I have flown them myself, is that they were always recalled to a lure not the fist. I have always made any short or broad

Notes from Poland:

wing to the lure but only tend to use it as a last resort. In Poland I never saw a hawk called back to the fist. Even if the hawk had taken stand in a tree the lure was proffered immediately.

When asked for my thoughts and comments on the hawking I had seen I knew that I was going to have to be extremely careful as to how I phrased my answer. I wanted to be polite and not offend anyone. I gently pointed out that most falconers I knew ran their dogs with consideration to wind direction and expected them to actually come on point and remain still. In this way they could allow their falcons to attain a decent pitch and not flush the game until the falcon was positioned so as to give her the maximum chance.

I rather got the impression that the consensus of opinion was that what I was describing was not possible. Since my return to England I have sent

several copies of the *Falcon Gentle* video. Hopefully this will convey in film what I obviously could not with words.

There is always an exception to every rule and on my trip it came in the form of Mr. Zbigniew Galos and his peregrine falcon Gabi. Aided by a German shorthaired that did actually point and hold same for as long as required, we saw some excellent hawking. Gabi nearly always took a decent pitch and the quarry was not flushed until things were just right. The falcon killed pheasants and killed them in good style. Mr. Galos restored my faith in Polish falconry.

He has kindly invited me to go back to Poland for their club's field meeting later this year and I am hoping he will join me on the moors in Scotland for some grouse hawking. ■



Zbigniew Galos and peregrine falcon Gabi.



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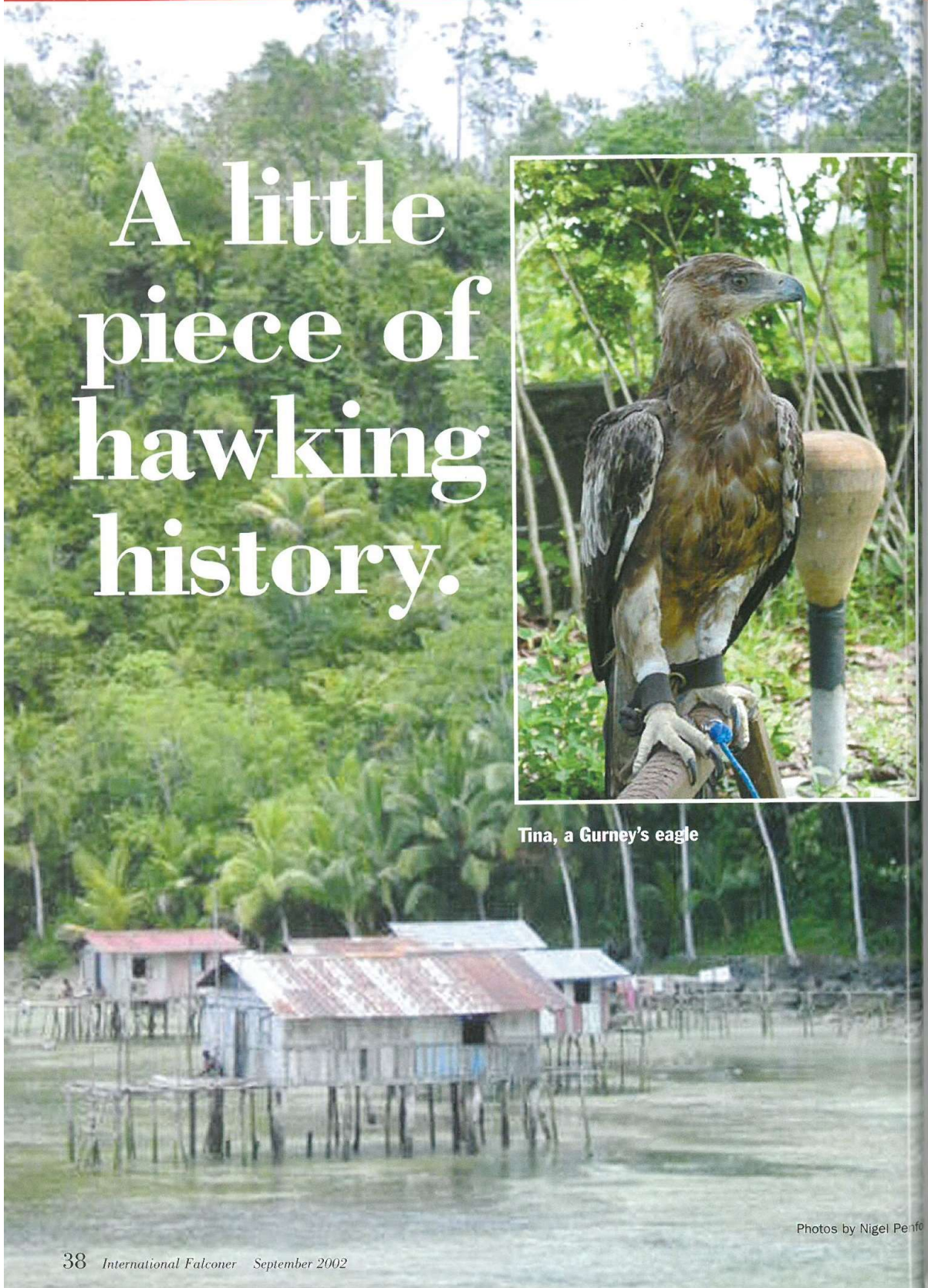
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A little piece of hawking history.



Tina, a Gurney's eagle



Photos by Nigel Penfold

By Nigel Penfold

On October 8th last year, a little bit of hawking history was made. Myself and Phillippe Hoyois who runs the Biak Falconry and Conservation Centre, became the first people ever to hunt with Gurney's eagles (*Aquila gurneyi*). This was in Biak, an island province of Indonesia, 200 kilometres north of Irian Jaya, formerly known as Western Papua New Guinea. Although there are many unique species of raptor in Papua New Guinea, falconry had never been practised here before Phillippe and his associate Kris Grotaert set up their operation in 1999. Together they added the Javan black-eagle (*Ictinaetus malyensis*) and the changeable hawk-eagle (*Spizaetus cirrhatus*) to the list of birds with which man has formed a hunting partnership. The centre is the only place in the world where one can see pairs and immatures of these wonderful hawk-eagles together. These are really beautiful looking birds.

On that memorable day in October, following a couple of weeks helping Phillippe with the final training, he and I were rewarded by seeing Tina, a passage female Gurney's eagle, patiently following us from tree to tree as she scanned the ground beneath looking for prey. We were moving through scrub and manioc fields hoping to disturb the bandicoots and wild pigs that regularly fed in the area. After we had moved a hundred metres or so from her roost, Tina would move on. Usually two or three beats of her metre-long wings would be sufficient to send her gliding to her next perch. Sometimes she would drop to about a metre above the ground and her silent



Above:
Phillipe and Tina



Left and below:
Javan crested hawk-eagles



gliding approach to the fist was an unforgettable sight.

Over the two weeks I had spent with Phillipe and the birds, I had grown used to the size and power of the three Gurney's eagles he was caring for and training. But the sight of those huge eyes fixed on my outstretched arm and the feel of Tina's wing, outstretched over my head like an umbrella as she balanced on the glove, never lost their ability to thrill.

In size and colouration, the Gurney's closely resembles a golden eagle. It is however, slightly smaller (flying weight of 2,400 grams, height 800 cms.) but much swifter thanks to its longer tail and broader wings. The huge and incredibly powerful talons can provide a numbing grip even through a hefty buffalo hide glove. They are bold birds and after you become used to their weight they will

'Trompet' a black hawk-eagle



White-bellied sea-eagle

make surprisingly gentle landings on your fist. But they expect a strong arm, and will react with thrashing wings and a convulsive, vice-like grip if they feel that you are not providing a safe enough perch. Before Biak, I had never considered weight lifting as useful training for hawking.

Biak island is one degree south of the equator. It is always hot, (the average temperature while I was there was 37C) and the humidity means that any outdoor activity during the day soon becomes a sweat-soaked, tiring chore. The local siesta lasts from 1pm to 4pm. In these conditions, for Phillipe to have nursed, trained and exercised the 60 birds in his care is a remarkable achievement. His determination to give the best possible care to the birds is spurred on by the fierce love of his Indonesian wife, Nia, for them. Like him, she is an outsider to Biak, coming originally from South Sumatra. She is something of a rarity among Indonesians, whose appreciation of their numerous, unique and threatened species of wildlife is often non-existent. In Biak, the vast, brooding rain forests are viewed with distrust and apprehension by many of the islanders. Slash-and-burn agriculture, and a casual attitude to rubbish and litter means that the outlook for wildlife and its

environment is not good.

In this hemisphere, there is a long history of falconry south of Burma and so the islanders have never known what it is to work together with the numerous species of raptors including the Long-tailed buzzard, Pacific baz, peregrines, and little eagles that inhabit Biak. Instead, the hawks and eagles are viewed as vermin.

Interestingly, Phillipe and Nia have found that local women are much better than their menfolk at working with and caring for the birds. They were willing to learn from Phillipe and more readily appreciated the value of the bird as a living creature. Many of the local men were scared of interacting closely with the birds and sought to hide this by dealing roughly with them. However, it doesn't take long to realise that you can't bully an eagle, and certainly not when you are within striking range.

Indeed, there are times when apprehension seems a natural and reasonable response to the close presence of such a large and well-equipped hunter. On several occasions I was disconcerted to catch Tina looking at me with her head on one side and what I felt was a calculating look in her eye as she gazed at my face. Maybe she just



Changeable hawk-eagle

didn't like my hat.

Phillipe and Nia hope that their centre will encourage tourism and thereby demonstrate to the islanders that conserving not persecuting the numerous raptors makes commercial sense. But results are slow to come. Political problems resulted in outbreaks of violence a few years ago

and the island never lived up to its tourist potential. Now tourism here is in serious decline. However, Phillipe's time there has not been wasted and his research into the tropical diseases affecting *Spizaetus* and *Accipiter* is likely to be of long-term benefit to veterinary science.

Practical falconry also already

benefited from Phillipe's experience in Biak. The Gurney's eagles take three months to train, with the male being easier than the female. In contrast to this, the black eagle (*Ictinaetus malayensis*) proved surprisingly biddable. Usually quite opportunist in the wild, their flying weight is up to 1,200 grams for the males and 1,700 grams for the females. They are closely related to the genus *Spizaetus* (hawk-eagles). Their courage when trained and ability to take feather and fur up to to the size of a hare means that this stylish-looking raptor could pose a match for many European goshawks. Certainly Trompet, the 2-year-old female that provided my introduction to flying hawk-eagles, was an adaptable, tolerant and keen hunter. According to Phillipe, during her training, she had exhibited none of the behavioural problems that can make goshawks problematic.

Phillipe regularly flew Trompet without jesses, telemetry or bells. On our first expedition together she took a quail and disappeared into the grass wall of the jungle. Finding her in those conditions seemed an impossibility, but, incredibly, she guided us to her with a series of clucks and trills. Had she wanted to, she would have been invisible to us from only a metre away.

Unlike the Gurney's eagles which are almost mute, the black hawk-eagles are very vocal and Trompet in particular was a chatterbox. Her time out with us in training was accompanied by a stream of warbles, clucks and subdued shrieks. These were not the urgent screams of an imprint but something altogether softer and less urgent and when we were out hunting, of course, she was silent. Two other black hawk-eagles that, over a period of three days learned to fly two or three metres to take food from my glove, also exhibited the same vocalisation. It will be interesting to learn whether Trompet's trust and ease of manning ▶



Asian goshawk

was unique when the other black hawk-eagles begin their training.

During my time in Biak we took advantage of the full moon to go night hunting, Trompet with myself and Phil with a changeable hawk-eagle. Two local boys acted as spotters, shining torches on the trees lining the long empty road. The prey was phalangers, nocturnal marsupials known locally as “Kus-kus” and sugar-gliders, a sort of flying squirrel. We had no luck that night as the only phalangers seen were too big for the birds to tackle and the squirrels were too quick for us. The changeable soon decided that the

game was not worth the effort and took only a limited interest in the proceedings. Trompet, however, remained keen and her profile, silhouetted sharply by the moonlight against the lighter mass of the road and the surrounding trees showed her to be full of eager attention.

The centre is run on a shoestring. All the perches, cages, gloves and jesses were made by Phillippe and Kris. They had also had to do most of the carpentry and building work required to renovate the house in which Phillippe, Nia and some of the birds live. The shelters they

constructed for the birds are based on a Belgian design and, perhaps surprisingly, are very well suited to tropical conditions. The steeply pitched roof keeps out the water from the frequent sudden showers in the rainy season and provides shade all year round. The birds can sit under the roof or perch on top as they please.

During my stay we found that getting the birds down to their hunting weight can be tricky. Unlike in colder climates, they do not need to expend energy, and thus burn off food, to keep warm. So a little food can go a long way. In order to ensure a safe and

adequate food supply for the birds. Phillippe breeds quail, rat and pigeon. To feed them he makes food pellets from crushed, dried, fish and various other incredibly smelly ingredients. Food for the human inhabitants of the centre is considerably more palatable. Indonesian food is spicy, varied and filling.

Most of the evenings were spent in Phillippe's study/surgery learning about the symptoms and treatment of the various illnesses and parasites that can affect the birds.

Communication between the centre and the outside world can be slow and frustrating. Medicines sent by courier services from Belgium will reach Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, in one or two days. But it will take another two weeks for them to travel from Indonesia to Biak. Electronic communication is sporadic.

Phillippe is hoping to build upon the centre's success as he has been approached to open a second in the

famous holiday location of Bali. As it is not so far off the beaten track, it is likely that more tourists and falconers will find their way there. In particular it is hoped to recruit people who are serious about studying or hunting with exotic raptors who will work for part of the time in Bali and part in Biak. My name is already top of the list.

However, this is all in the future and will take time to organise. Until then if you want to fly or study raptors which are practically unknown in the West and you are able to travel around Indonesia or Australia, a journey to Biak is a must.

The accommodation at the centre is limited, but it's clean and comfortable. For anyone who wants to learn and experience as much practical hawk care as possible during their time in Biak, I recommend staying at the centre. The veranda outside my bedroom window contained the perches of several Asian goshawks on one side and

overlooked the cages of the snake-eagles on the other. At the foot of the staircase leading to the veranda were the perches for some of the Javan crested and changeable hawk-eagles.

There are good hotels in Biak at various price ranges. Public transport around the island is not good, but taxis can be hired by the day at reasonable rates. Merpati, the Indonesian domestic airline has numerous regular flights to Biak. ■

Anyone interested in visiting Phillippe or helping him in his work, should write or fax to Dr Phillippe Hoyois, Biak Falconry and Raptor Conservation Centre, Sorido, Biak Irian Jaya, Republic of Indonesia. Tel/fax 62/981 25988 or email Nigel Penfold on penfoldnigel@hotmail.com

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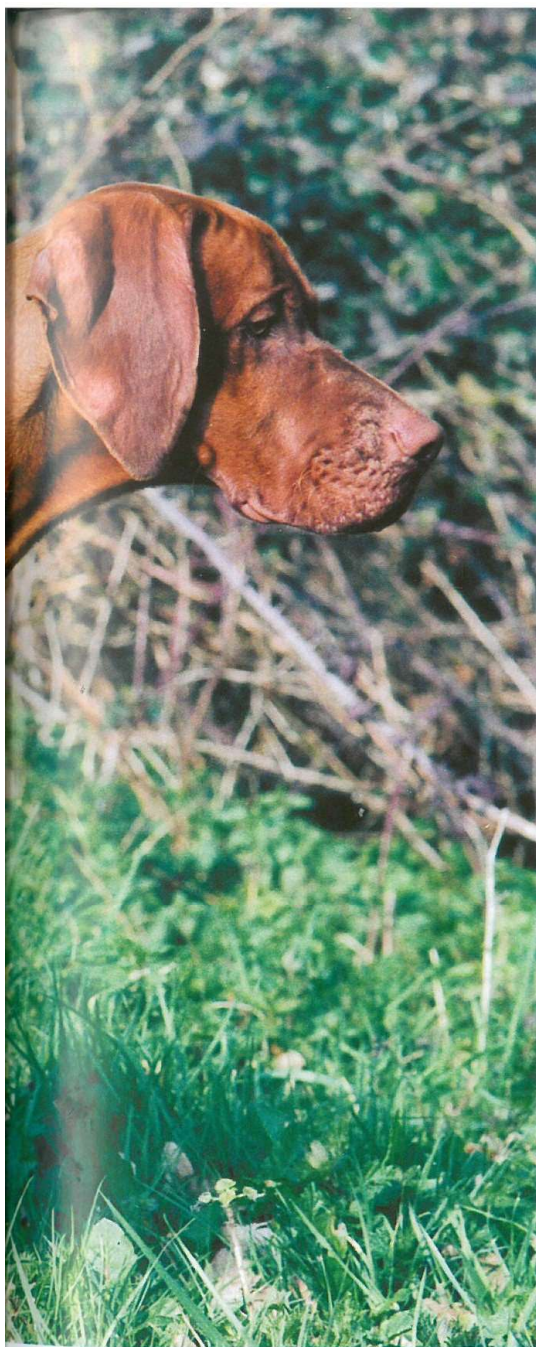
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A few centuries further on, the Turks invaded Hungary and their ‘yellow dog’ was crossed with the Hungarian pointer. By the end of the 16th century this cross was firmly established and the Turks gave the breed the name Vizsla, the Turkish word meaning ‘to seek’.

For centuries up until it became a republic in 1946, Hungary was a feudal state and large areas of countryside were owned by powerful lords and barons. It was in these private estate kennels that the Vizsla was refined by selective breeding to the one we know today. The first and second World Wars were tough times for the breed and but for a few enthusiasts would have vanished. Enough individual dogs of the correct qualities were gathered to form the foundation stock from which all registered Vizslas in Hungary were to come.

As an all-round hawking dog they are hard to beat – indeed for centuries they would have been used for nothing else. It’s even believed that the Vizsla is the only existing breed that was specifically bred for work with hawks and this history certainly shows itself in the modern-day Vizsla – the breed simply thrives on life around them.

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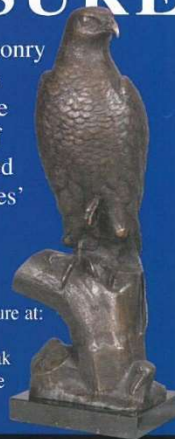
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BOOK REVIEW

Birds of Prey: health and disease

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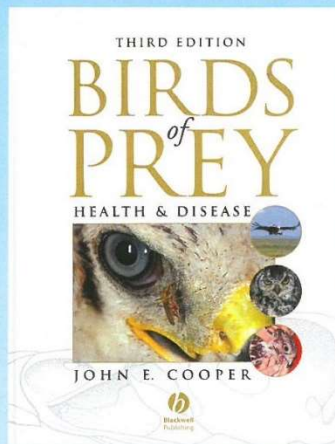
Reviewed by Nicholas Kester

I know, I know. A vet should really review this, but seeing as John Cooper is an acknowledged expert in his field, there were surprisingly few peers around who could do it... and anyhow, my editor was pushing me for copy. But the real reason is that such books are more likely to be read by jobbing falconers and therefore should be reviewed by the majority audience. At least that's my excuse.

For those who do not have a copy, John Cooper first published this work as *Veterinary Aspects of Captive Birds of Prey* way back in 1978. I have it still. Written as it was, in what one reviewer described as a somewhat 'Victorian' style. And they were absolutely correct, for it was an academic treatise made real at a time when only a few chapters were added to falconry manuals to cover sickness – prevention and cure. It was poorly indexed and terrifying to read if you were a layman.

This is a new book for a new millennium and was never more timely. I suspect the expertise of general vets in raptor biology has not kept pace with the increase in raptor keepers, and many falconers will find themselves using this book prior to or during the consultation. But if they are really sensible, they will read it first to avoid the problems in the first place. Cooper has been a falconer, knows the issues and understands the solutions.

Following the traditional, but no less fascinating, preamble, the book



really kicks in with Chapter Two: Nomenclature, which puts falconry terms on a footing with the scientific. This is followed by Anatomy in which we discover that migrating geese cross the Himalayas at a height of over 9,000 metres. In human terms, equivalent to climbing Everest on a bike! But if you really want statistics then note that a Ruppell's griffon vulture was sucked into an aircraft engine at 11,000 metres, a height at which no other mammal would have been able to obtain sufficient air to breathe.

The middle section is the technical bit but eminently readable, well laid out, containing sections on diagnosis and treatment across every aspect of raptor biology. There are strong chapters on breeding, wild raptors (contributed by Ian Newton), anaesthesia and surgery.

When it comes to welfare, the section on handling, including the use of the hood to examine wild rather than falconry species, is vindication of much of falconry art and practice. If there was ever a justification for keeping birds of prey in captivity, scientific study is it. The calm, well-manned falconer's bird is both fit and easy to examine enabling the advance of science to the benefit of the wild

species.

There are some bogeymen out there, which are easily overlooked. Examples include the toxicity of zinc baths made from old dustbin lids (very traditional but now replaced by plastic); the obvious issues of overheating in cars, air pollution and the like; and the rather surprising toxic fumes given off by heated cooking utensils. So watch out for that imprinting goshawk in the kitchen.

But it is the final, and highly worthwhile chapter – Discussions and Conclusions – that is of most interest to the layman. In it, and I quote, Cooper says: "A research project on the welfare of captive raptors was carried out in Britain, at the University of Kent, and some useful recommendations emerged, particularly in respect of management methods. These recommendations, amongst other things, dissuaded the (British) Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) from seeking a ban on falconry, and led, instead, to the development of guidelines to address welfare issues."

What Cooper doesn't say is that the project was commissioned and funded by the RSPCA, conducted by Ruth Cromie and falconer, Mike Nichols with full co-operation by British falconry. John Fairclough (then Director of the British Falconers' Club) invited Cromie onto his grouse moor. The report concluded that falconers take exceptional care of their birds and adopt the highest welfare standards possible. Thankfully with the help of vets like John Cooper and his book, welfare standards will continue to rise and falconry be assured a future. ■



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