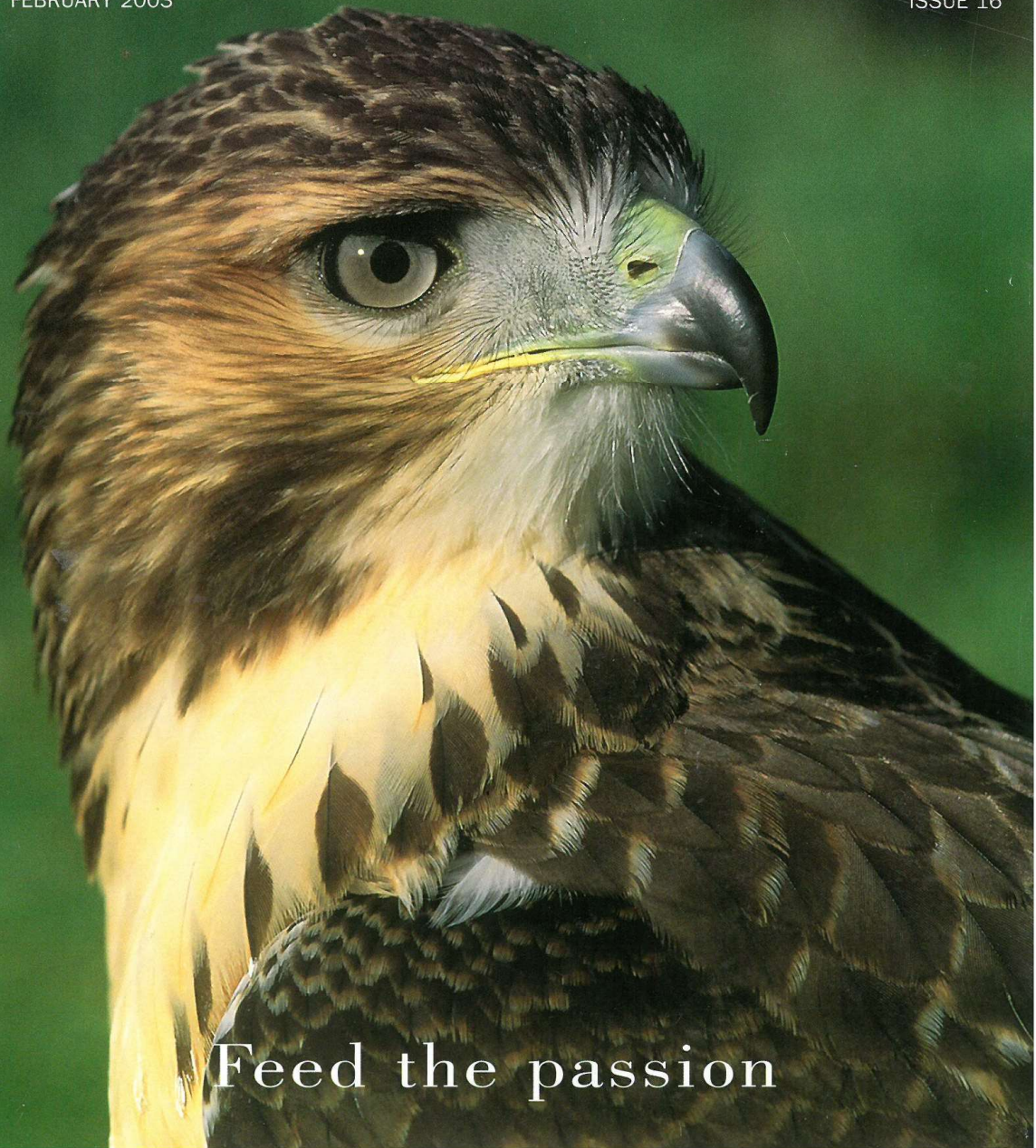


# INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

FEBRUARY 2003

ISSUE 16



Feed the passion

# INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

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Cover photo by Seth Anthony.  
Juvenile redtail.

# EDITORIAL

As another season draws to a close it's time to reflect on the months past. It's hard work this falconry - to keep a hawk going to its best ability takes time and commitment and a lot of juggling of life's other priorities - not an easy thing in this fast-track world of ours. Nevertheless, manage it many do, one way or another, but the close season can often be a welcome break - well for a little while at least!

The call for country correspondents is going very well indeed and I'm delighted to say that we've now got contacts in Italy, USA, Pakistan and Canada willing to keep us posted with any relevant news. We're still looking for more however, so if you think you've got your finger on the pulse within your country and you'd like to contribute, we'd like to hear from you. Don't worry if you've got limited English, we can work around that, the important thing is that we gather every possible piece of news that is of interest to a global readership.

Finally, thanks again this year to the Nad Al Shiba falcon breeding facility in Dubai for supplying another great calendar. Last year's was a huge success and I know from the phone calls that lots of you have been looking forward to another one.

Hope you 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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In the field of wildlife art *Steven Bodio* believes the subject of raptors attracts some of the world's very best talent and profiles two such artists, Tom Quinn and Tony Angell.

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*Alan Gates* has always had a passion for eagles and he takes us back to where and how it all began.

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Reviewed by *Nick Kester*.

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## INTERNATIONAL FALCONER



## Hawk Board appoints Communications Officer

The Hawk Board, the representative body for falconry in the UK, has appointed Nick Kester as its first Communications Officer.

Hawk Board chair, Jemima Parry-Jones MBE, said: We are thrilled that Nick has agreed to take on the post. Over recent years the legislation and politics that affect falconry and raptor keeping have become as unrelenting as waves on a beach, so we have long thought that a constant point of contact for the media was essential. With anti-field sports emotion currently running high, and new Bills coming up, both in the UK and Europe that could affect raptor keeping, this has now become critical.

Nick Kester has been a practising falconer for some twenty seasons, and has been the voluntary press officer for the British Falconers' Club (BFC) for twelve years. He is an elected member of the Hawk Board, a council member of the BFC and past chairman of the old British Field Sports Society falconry committee (now merged with the Hawk Board). He writes regularly on falconry for the specialist press.

Commenting on his appointment, Nick said: I am delighted to be able to work with Jemima and the Board in the promotion and defence of falconry and the keeping of birds of prey. For far too long those outside our sport have had little knowledge of what it entails or the onerous legislation under which we operate. Many would have us banned, and falconers are under no illusions that we are up there in the firing line along with the other field sports.

The Hawk Board enjoys exceptional relations with DEFRA, JNCC, CITES and other influential bodies whose conservation and legislative programmes may impact on falconry. Its sub-committee, the Campaign for Falconry is the principal fund raising body for the protection and promotion of falconry



**Newly appointed Communications Officer - Nick Kester**

and raptor keeping in general, and is a logical first point of reference for many un-affiliated falconers. It works closely with the Board at country fairs and other events at which the public comes into contact with birds of prey.

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## THE BRITISH FALCONRY AND RAPTOR FAIR 4th - 5th May 2003

Falconers and raptor enthusiasts from all over the world will be converging on Chetwynd Park, near Newport in Shropshire. The 4th and 5th of May will see probably the largest ever single gathering of falconers anywhere in the world.

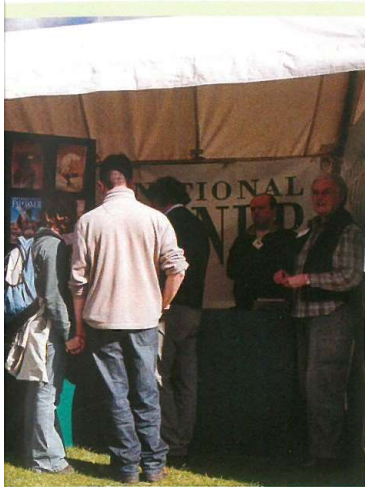
The Fair itself has become synonymous with high standards of display work in the arena and an excellent weathering ground. This year Jemima Parry-Jones will be back

## More charges on the way from DEFRA

The Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), which manages the licences and movements of registerable birds of prey in the UK, has announced a review of its CITES processing methods with further charges on the way for breeders, exporters and falconers. These are separate from domestic charges, already the subject of review and with an announcement due as this publication went to press.

DEFRA spokesman, John Hounslow, told the Hawk Board (the representative body for falconers and raptor keepers in the UK) at a meeting on 22nd January that a consultation document would be circulated in April and would cover such issues as Article 10 certificates and import/export licences.

At the same meeting, Hounslow, told the Board that his Ministry was looking at a less intrusive method of obtaining DNA than blood and hoped that falconers would co-operate with DEFRA in finding alternatives.



giving two displays each day. As well as Jemima's, there will be several other displays over the two days.

A wide selection of eagles, hawks and falcons will be on view in the weathering ground. Members of the Central Falconry Club will be on hand as usual to keep an eye on things and help with any enquiries.

One of the many features of the Fair that is becoming known around the globe is the art marquee put together by Chris Christoforu. Such is the desire of artists, both established and new, to get into the marquee that Chris had settled this year's final line-up almost within a month of last year's event.

Falconry equipment in every conceivable connotation possible will be available, from hoods and bells to blocks and bow perches. The choice and price range will be wide and wonderful.

Clubs at both national and regional level will be present in strength as well as the North American Falconers' Association. For many clubs the Fair has become their unofficial social gathering of the year.

The Falconers Fair, quite rightly, holds the title of the world's premier falconry event. Make sure you are part of it.

See advertisement on page 9.

## NEW PRODUCT

# F10

## THE FRIENDLY DISINFECTANT

Peter Temperley, whose South African company, Health and Hygiene, manufactures F10 believes that new breeders usually experience a 'honeymoon' period that lasts a couple of seasons during which infection builds up and problems can occur. Judicious use of a 'friendly' disinfectant prevents this and that is where F10 comes in.

Approved by the appropriate authorities in Australia, New Zealand, the UK and South Africa (North America is expected to approve in 2003), F10 has a wide range of uses that should be beneficial to raptor breeders and their birds. The product has been extensively tested for personal irritation, good for brooders and incubators; and, of course, for negative impact on the breeding stock itself. It has been found to be exceptionally safe on all counts.

It is broad spectrum (bactericidal, fungicidal and virucidal) and its speed of kill is exceptional (between 15 and 30 seconds in some bacterial applications). It is also fully biodegradable.

"F10 was formulated as a better solution for pharmaceutical clean rooms," says Temperley, "and its performance and safety soon led to animal applications."

Quite how the disinfectant moved

from animals to raptors is a typical mixture of product quality and pure chance. An early use was at an ostrich farm in South Africa run by vet, Dirk Verwoerd, at which there had been major losses in both hatching and chicks. "Turn around was achieved in one season," claims Temperley.

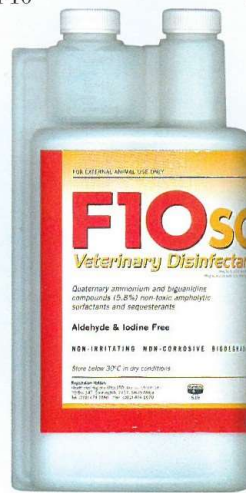
But the irony of this is that Vervoerd is a practising falconer and soon found himself in Dubai where aspergillosis is a constant problem – largely due to hot and humid conditions. Extensive use of F10 in a nebuliser was an effective solution and the product is now much used by falconers throughout the region.

Interestingly, given the recent outbreak of Newcastle Disease in California, it is effective in the eradication of that virus and, although not actively tested for West Nile Virus, vet Verwoerd considers

F10 would be equally efficient in its destruction.

John Temperley is quick to remind users that no disinfectant is a replacement for general cleanliness and that effectiveness in the face of excessive, foul organic material is limited. So clean before you disinfect! However, as a veterinary and animal husbandry disinfectant its safety record is such that UK vet John Chitty is reported as using it to treat a yeast infection on a stick insect.

Health and Hygiene have a website [www.healthandhygiene.net](http://www.healthandhygiene.net) and can be emailed on [formten@icon.co.za](mailto:formten@icon.co.za).



## **END** **A NEW** **THREAT TO** **FALCONRY** **IN THE US**

**As falconers across the American West wrap up another hawking season and prepare for the breeding season and the possible onslaught of West Nile Virus in the summer, another, more insidious enemy threatens the health, safety and security of their birds.**



**Lisa Cherry**  
**US News Correspondent**

Exotic Newcastle Disease (END) is a highly contagious, often fatal viral disease that affects most species of birds. Birds with END may have respiratory, nervous or gastrointestinal signs but some birds die without ever developing any outwardly visible symptoms. Dr. Jeff Jenkins, of the Avian and Exotic Animal Hospital in San Diego, California, indicates that the symptoms of the disease in raptors would be the basic 'sick bird' signs including: head tilt, seizures, lethargy, loss of appetite. The best test for the presence of the disease in a live bird is via a cloacal swab and/or blood sampling. Infection can be spread among birds in many ways: fecal/oral, fecal/inhalation, ingestion. Freezing does not kill the virus. Migratory waterfowl from Mexico and the affected areas could conceivably carry the disease and pass it on to a raptor that consumes an infected bird, but this does not appear to present a significant threat. All evidence indicates that END is not a human public health threat and does not affect the safety of human consumption of poultry or eggs.

In early October of 2002, the exotic strain of Newcastle Disease was diagnosed in a Compton, California backyard flock of poultry. That property was quarantined and the affected flock was destroyed. Since then, as increasing instances of the disease were found in backyard and commercial flocks, all of Southern California, from San Diego to Santa Barbara, has been put under a state mandated quarantine prohibiting all movement of any of the affected species (all poultry including chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese, grouse, partridge, pheasant, quail, guinea fowl, pea fowl, doves, pigeons, swans, ostrich, emus and rheas) and of any eggs, equipment and materials. Subsequent to the state quarantine, on January 17, the federal government (USDA) issued an all-inclusive quarantine of any birds, eggs, materials, etc. to the affected areas of Southern California. Most recently,

cases of END have been discovered in commercial flocks in southern Nevada, resulting in a widening of the USDA quarantine to include all of Southern California and Southern Nevada.

Authorities believe that this outbreak had its inception from fighting cocks smuggled in from Mexico. No one knows for sure. What is known is that since the initial identification and quarantine, 7,000 private premises have been specifically quarantined and 75,000 non-commercial birds have been destroyed. In addition, 1.8 million birds at 6 large-scale commercial poultry operations have been destroyed. Owners are being compensated for the "fair-market value" of the birds destroyed.

Although not specifically identified in the government communications, falconry birds are susceptible to END and are included in the USDA quarantine prohibiting any movement of birds to areas outside of the USDA quarantine area. It is further "strongly recommended" that no birds of any species be gathered, moved into or within the quarantine area. States surrounding California have issued quarantines prohibiting the importation of any birds or bird materials from the affected areas. Heavy fines, up to \$25,000, can be levied for any violation of the state's or federal quarantine orders. If the falconry hunting season were not already over in California, it would be anyway. Unconfirmed reports indicate that Nevada falconers were contacted individually by that state's Department of Fish and Game and were told that all falconry birds were quarantined to their premises.

END is most detrimental to poultry of any kind (chickens being the most susceptible; ducks, the least, of the poultry group). There is an indigenous strain of the disease in the US against which most commercial poultry is vaccinated. The exotic strain, which currently threatens

California's \$236 million per year egg business, is the same one that hit the area in 1971. That earlier outbreak was finally controlled after 3 years, \$56,000,000 in eradication expense and the destruction of 12,000,000 chickens. There is conflicting opinion among experts across America as to the efficacy and availability of any vaccine for the exotic strain. Dr. Jenkins indicates that, to his knowledge, there have been no tests done using the existing chicken-tested vaccine on raptors so he is reluctant to recommend vaccination. Jenkins' best advice to falconers in the affected areas is to stay away from poultry or poultry farms, do not purchase hawk food (fresh or frozen) from the affected areas and limit access to property where falconry birds are kept. In a communiqué issued to all NAFA members, Dr. Pat Redig, Director of the Raptor Center at the University of Minnesota, discusses the availability of a killed, oil-emulsion vaccine but urges falconers to contact their local veterinarians for help with this. Dr. Redig further indicates that information he has gotten from the veterinary task force in the quarantined area is that decisions to destroy birds are not being made on the basis of antibodies in the blood which could occur either from a previous natural infection or vaccination. These decisions are being made based on clinical signs and recovery of virus from cloacal swabs. In closing, Dr. Redig indicates that "vaccination will only protect a bird from serious disease, not infection, so it is not an ironclad measure that would keep a falconry bird from being vulnerable to euthanasia if it developed clinical signs".

Dave Rimlinger, Curator of Birds for the world famous San Diego Zoo, indicates that strict biosecurity measures have been implemented to prevent infection of some of the rare and endangered birds that are housed at the Zoo and its sister park, The San Diego Wild Animal Park. ►

## UNITED ARAB EMIRATES INTRODUCES FALCON PASSPORTS AS CITES LIFTS IMPORT BAN

The ecologically sound trade between western breeders and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was dealt a serious blow in November 2001 when the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) suspended all trade licences, including those for birds of prey. Following intensive lobbying, some changes in local legislation and a falcon registration programme, this ban was lifted in time for the import season in September 2002.

It was the trade in caviar that caused the focus of CITES to fall on the Gulf, which, say falconers, shows how easy it is for seemingly unrelated issues to have a negative impact. In eight months alone, reports *Gulf Times*, the illegal trade in caviar was \$30 million. This had a significant effect on the legitimate trade and the conservation of the endangered sturgeon from which caviar is sourced.

Falconers claim increasing benefit to the wild species by producing captive bred birds thus reducing the demands for a wild harvest. However policing falconers' birds was an issue for CITES who claimed that unless the UAE introduced some better controls, a ban on exports/imports would remain.

A paper presented by the Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency (ERWDA) in July 2002 explains quite how much work is being achieved in the conservation of the saker falcon by this Abu Dhabi based agency, with 22,000 falcons micro-chipped throughout their natural range. However over the years populations have crashed, not

exclusively due to harvesting. In China alone from 20,000 pairs to 300, triggering a call from conservationists for greater protection for the saker. Not surprising when it is revealed that there is an annual demand in the Middle East of over 8,000 individual falcons.

Dr. Nick Fox, Director of Falcon Research and Management for ERWDA argued that to catch up the legitimate sector of the falconry world (captive breeders) in an attempt to prohibit the illegal trade made no sense. Since the ban was lifted last year, falcons in the UAE now have individual passports and may move freely across borders facilitating hunting trips and more that adequately satisfying CITES officials. They must be ringed and have a PIT (Passive Induced Transponder or micro-chip) fitted, as well as stating the more obvious country of origin, owner, age, sex, captive or trapped, etc. More information on falcon passports can be sourced from local falcon hospitals, the Federal Environment Agency in Abu Dhabi and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in Dubai.

In an interview with *Gulf News*, Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Chairman of ERWDA reported that CITES were "extremely impressed by UAE's work." He went on to say that the falcon registration scheme "was a first for the Arabian Peninsula and would improve the reputation of falconers and the UAE abroad... at the same time providing the means to manage the effects of falconry on the population of wild falcons."

A significant number of the world's remaining stock of endangered California condors are kept at each of those facilities. Preventative measures include closure of all walk-through aviaries, footbaths placed at the entrance to all bird exhibits (a disinfectant known to kill END is replenished and refreshed daily), free-roaming pea-fowl have been removed from the zoo grounds and placed in holding, all free-flight bird programmes have been temporarily discontinued, all employees that enter bird exhibits (mostly keepers) are required to change out of uniform at the zoo and have their uniforms laundered by an outside contractor, no uniforms can be taken home, all shoes/boots worn at the zoo must remain on zoo grounds. Poultry competitions and exhibits at fairs are being cancelled throughout the state and bird exhibits, such as the aviaries

at The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens in Palm Desert, California are being temporarily closed to visitors. In some areas of the quarantine, agriculture inspectors are going door-to-door surveying residents as to the presence of ANY birds in the house (including psittacines). Residents are informed of the quarantine and the need to keep their birds isolated from any other birds.

Breeders (raptors and psittacines) in the affected area are concerned that, with the USDA ban on the movement of ANY birds from the quarantine area, they will breed birds in the spring and not be able to ship them, if sold to people outside of the area. The USDA is working to adopt a limited, workable policy of health inspection and certification for non-poultry birds, which might enable shipment of raptors on a case-by-case basis. Nothing is in place at this time

but it is hoped that accommodations can be made within the next several months.

Finally, there appears to be schism between knowledgeable poultry industry vets who favour a strategy of quarantine, limited eradication and increased vaccination and the regulatory veterinarians who favour the 'traditional' game plan of 'search and destroy'.

All involved are evaluating the effectiveness of the fight against two recent animal disease outbreaks, avian influenza in Italy and foot-and-mouth disease in Great Britain, to determine what the future strategies should be for fighting these catastrophic outbreaks. ■






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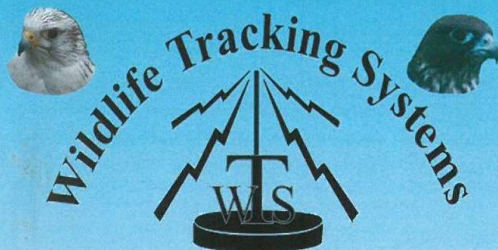
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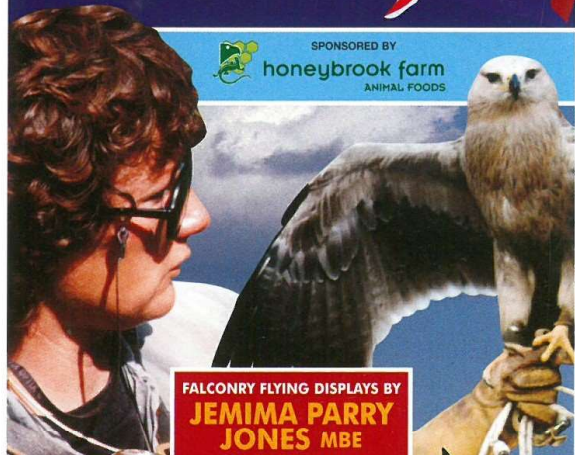
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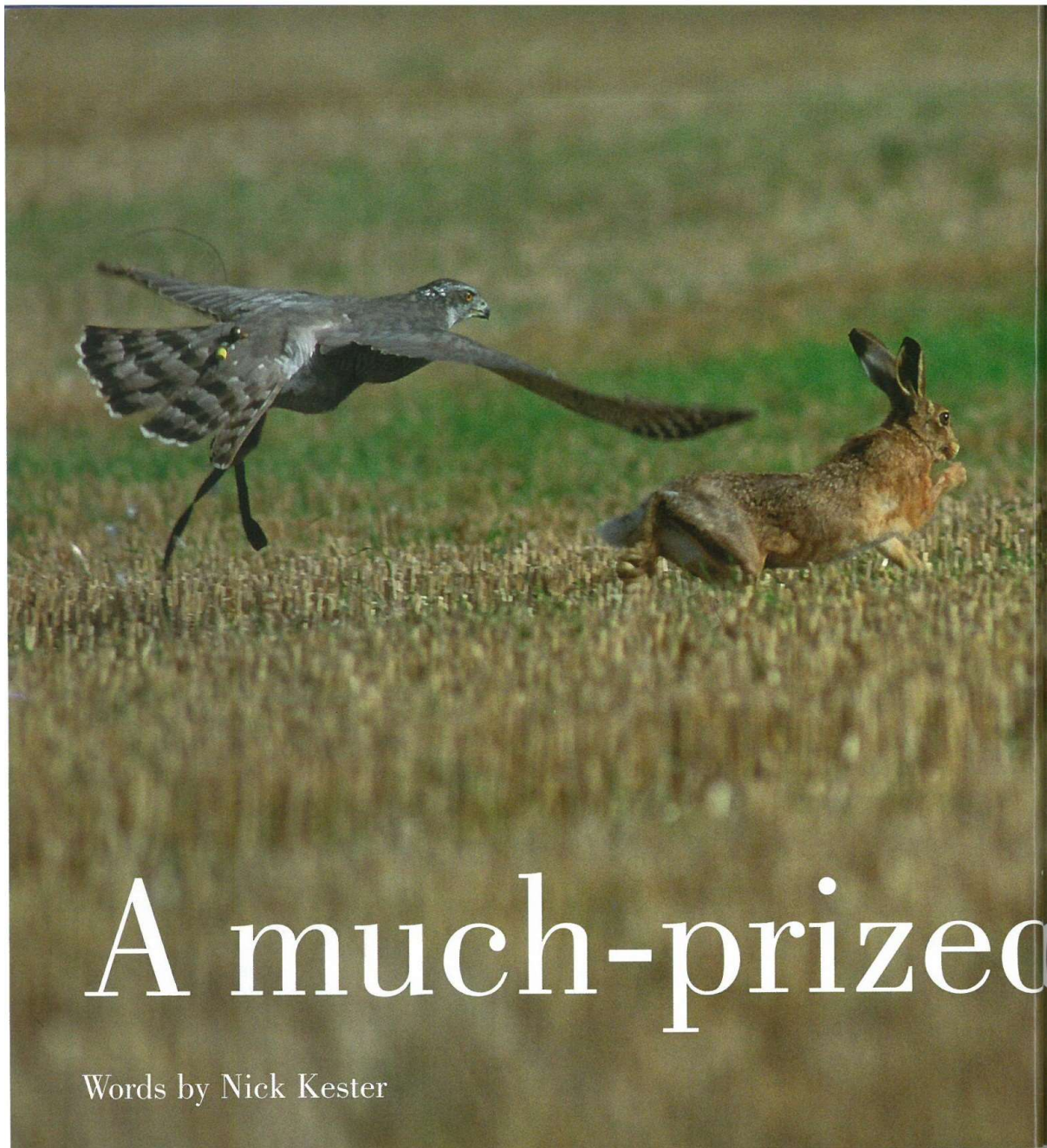
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## Sun 4 & Mon 5 May 2003

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BANK  
HOLIDAY**



# A much-prized

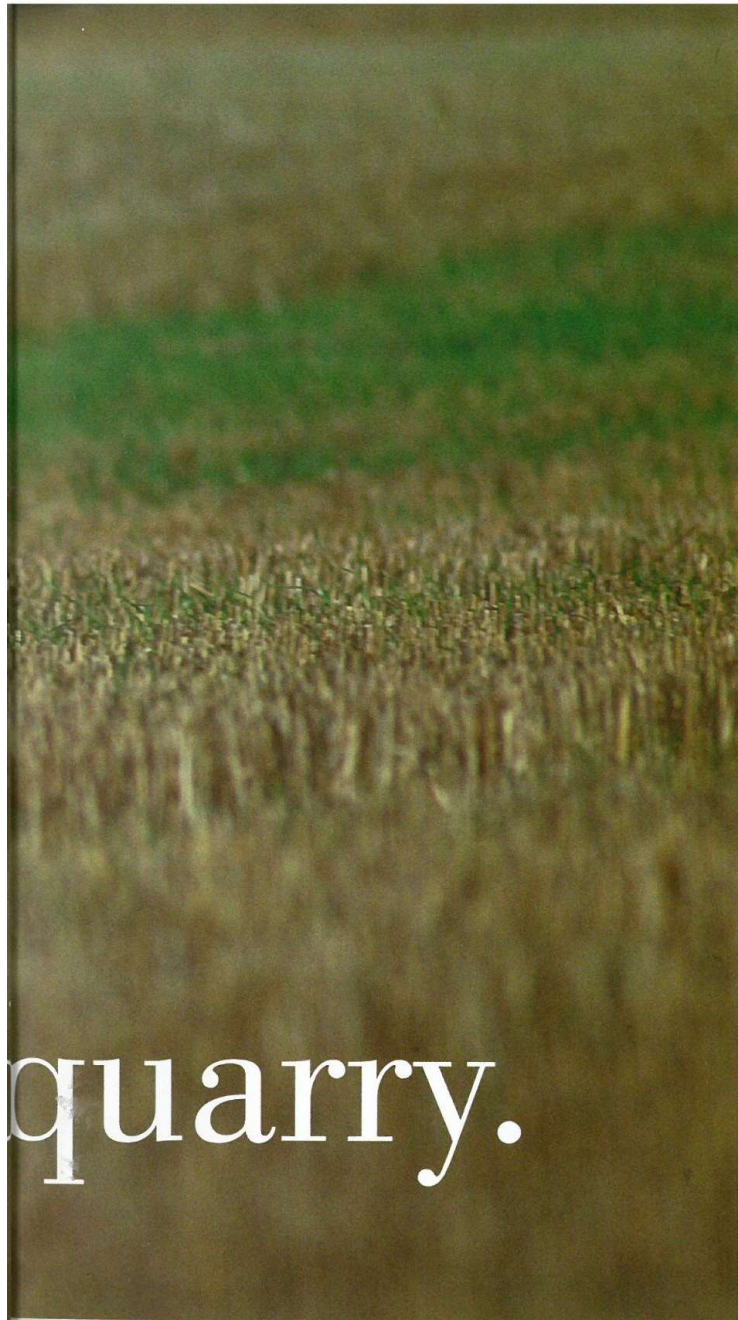
Words by Nick Kester

Photos by Seth Anthony

**T**he European brown hare is an awesome creature. In some cases weighing in at 9lbs, they usually inhabit open farm land where, lying out in young crops or on stubbles and having eyes located high on their heads, they can easily see the approach of predators. Clamped tight in their 'form' (a scrape that seems too small to accommodate such a substantial mammal) it is possible to

walk straight over them before realising what you just did. But when camouflage fails, powerful hind legs drive them away to safety. Their only predators are coursing dogs, packs of hounds, guns and, excluding man-made accidents such as farm instruments, raptors. For the austringer the brown hare is a much-prized quarry.

Morticia is Alistair McEwan's



eleventh-season female goshawk and she is deadly at hare. But it was not always thus. Bred by Alistair and partially crèche reared, the clutch of three females all proved astonishingly good hunters, and two are still in action (the third, belonging to the author, died following a collision with a fence). Her first hare was brought to book in only her fifth week of flying free and she didn't take another until

she was four years old.

Hawks have very strong views about hares. Often they will take off after them with great enthusiasm only to fly along side them with a distinctly undecided air, before raking off. Sometimes they will not even leave the fist. In Morticia's case it was all go until she closed with the racing hare and then raked off. All very frustrating. The usual reason for this is

**“Run,” screamed Alistair when I slipped at my first hare. “Don’t just stand there, run like the wind.”**

those powerful hind legs, which not only propel the hare to freedom but also can deliver a severe kicking to their assailant. However, with only one in the bag, this cannot have been the reason.

Not being a quitter, Alistair persevered. His eventual success is reckoned to be down to lots of manning and, good weight management – her hare weight is ▶

## A MUCH-PRIZED QUARRY

2lb 10oz, two ounces less than that at which she will take other quarry – and sticking with it so that she saw hares on a regular basis. Quite how or why she changed her mindset is locked away in the goshawk's psyche, but change she did and now multiple kills are the order of the day... but only if you are prepared to carry the bag! I once saw Alistair stumbling across a field at the end of the day with three hares (at least 18lbs) in his falconer's vest.

As in all falconry, hunting hares requires both field craft and personal fitness. A good dog is essential. It should be rock steady, for a fleeing hare is a grave temptation, and be able to quarter close in so that the hare is 'unseated' from her 'form' as near to the falconer as possible. A good preliminary is to check the ground with a strong pair of field glasses for experience will teach you their

preferred spots and eventually the lump of earth will be distinguishable from the real thing.

"Run," screamed Alistair when I slipped at my first hare. "Don't just stand there, run like the wind."

And he was right, for there is a terrible temptation to emulate the flight at rabbit or pheasant and stand and admire the flight. It is a fatal mistake, especially in the early days. For you have to be there to help an inexperienced hawk so that she gains confidence for the future. If she has perfect footing ability and always gains a head hold in those vital first moments, then by all means stop and watch, but few of us have that confidence in our hawks. Fitness is everything in hare hawking.

"The ones that get away are always the best flights. This season I had a slip which crossed four fields during which Morticia made contact with the





hare four times. But a good kill is just as rewarding and snow adds a special dimension to the day. Just after Christmas we had a reasonable fall and I had a wonderful flight off a point with the hare sitting up just six feet in front of the dog.”

I know what he means, and I know

where he was. For we are long-time hunting companions on a wonderful estate on the North Downs in the south east corner of England: an estate that is managed for sport and conservation and where the hares do exceptionally well.

It was here on a windy day that I

saw this particular goshawk attempt an impossible slip into a strong wind up a long slope on a field that has to be 100 acres. The hare made a run for a scrappy hedge that dissects one part of the field and which is retained as a wildlife corridor. The hawk goes off the fist hard into the wind and at right

## A MUCH-PRIZED QUARRY



angles to the hare's escape route. On and on she powers until she is about fifty yards out when, judging she has the trajectory right, she turns and using the wind as a turbo charger flashes back towards the fleeing hare. She makes contact just before the hedge, the hare shakes her off and she throws up over the hedge to try again on the other side, where we picked her up.

All this happened inside the time it takes me to write and you to read this: it was instinctive, instantaneous and impressive. On other occasions I have seen her fly into the wind until she is at the point of contact when she uses the head wind to throw up twenty feet and wing over to nail the quarry. At field meets we line up to work a

field with several goshawks and the person who flushes, slips. There is a very special 'buzz' from having a goshawk in full yarak on your fist, and when the quarry is hare it is intensified to an unbearable level. With your stomach in a knot of anticipation and eyes flicking to left and right, you move forward until the flight is on, then you run, run until your lungs are bursting.

All over Europe austringers treat hare as an honourable quarry. They show her enormous respect and whatever hawk they use to catch her with, she is deserving of a place at the top of the game book. ■

**NOTE:**

**All photos are of Alistair McEwan's Morticia, taken on one memorable September afternoon.**



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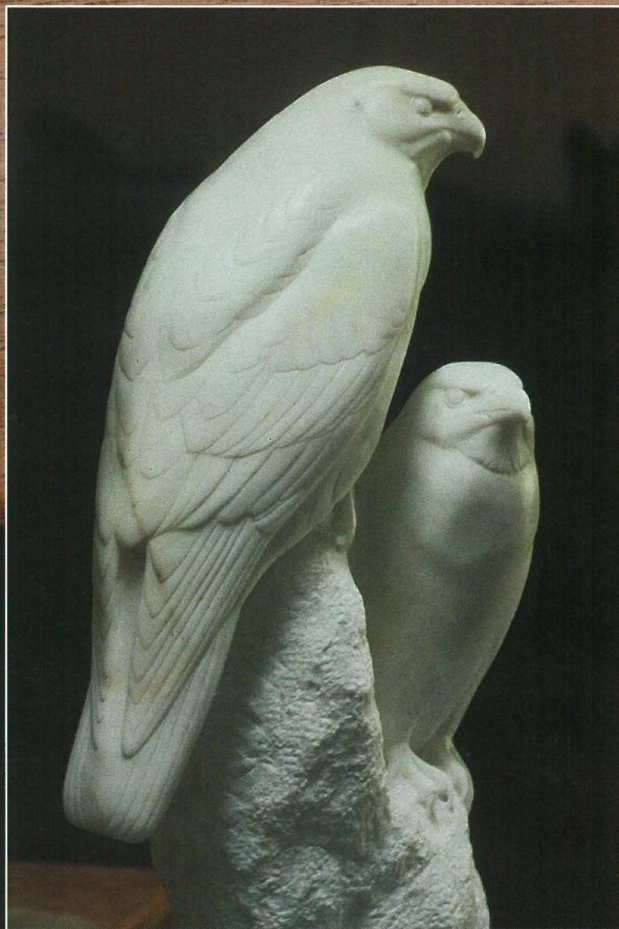
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Thomas Quinn  
1993 ©

# Of hand and eye and feather

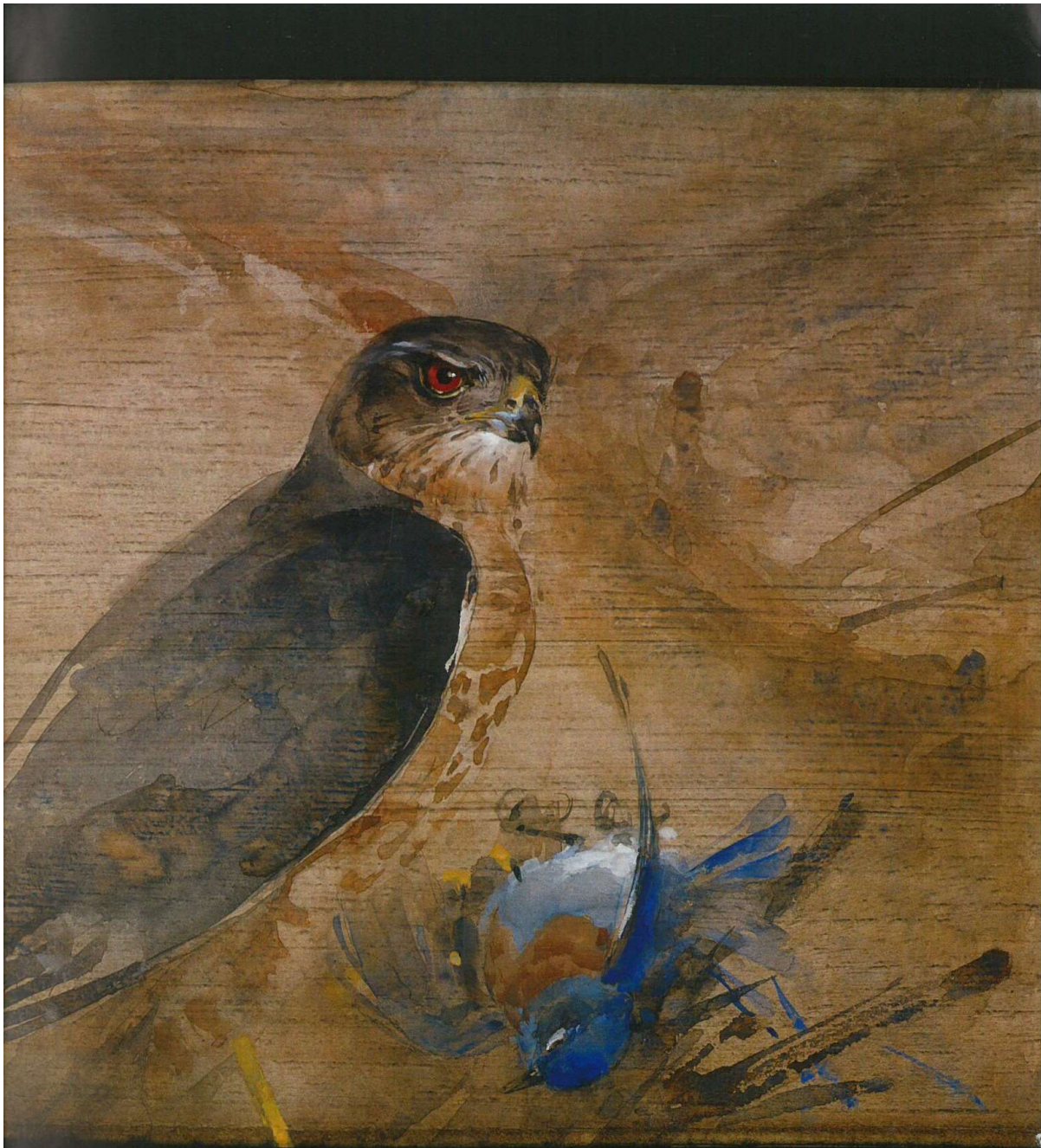
by Stephen Bodie



**ABOVE**  
*Something Blue*  
Sharpshinned hawk  
and western bluebird.

**LEFT**  
*Falcons of the River*  
marble gyrfalcons.



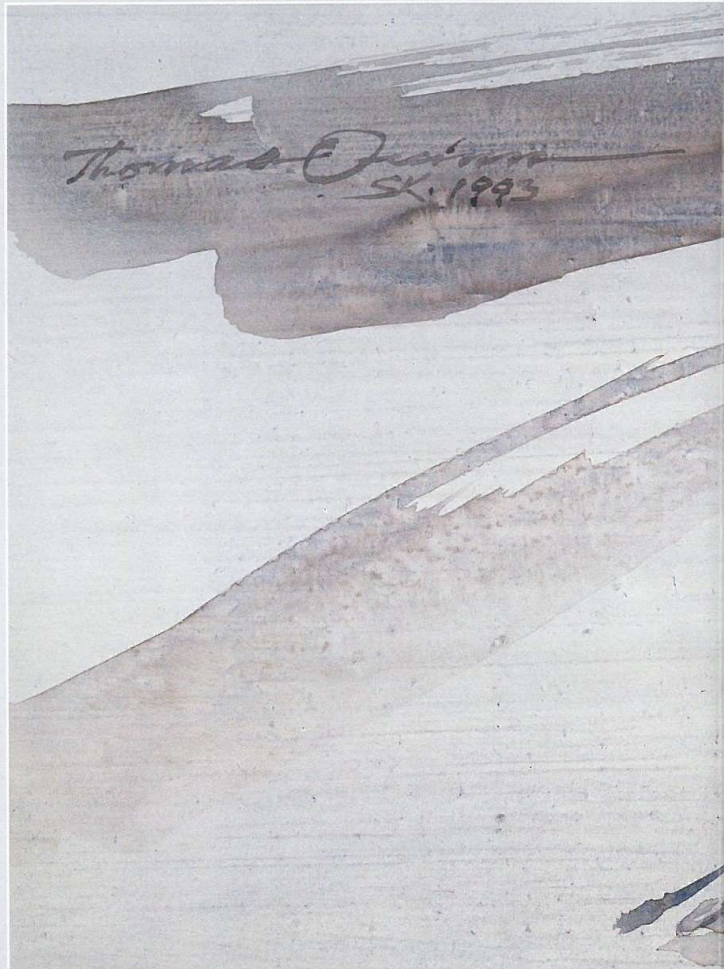


There are thousands of wildlife artists today, painting and sculpting everything from songbirds to elephants. Maybe it's my falconer's prejudice, but I think that raptors attract the best among them, from Vadim Gorbatov (profiled recently here by Martin Hollinshead) to the two artists featured today: Tom Quinn and Tony Angell.

Quinn and Angell are both serious naturalists, as well as artists, born in the same generation on the west coast of the United States. Both of them have won the Master Wildlife Artist of the Year award presented by the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum. They are friends of each other, and incidentally, of Gorbatov's; he worked with both of them in the Artists for Nature programme.

Neither at first glance looks like the stereotypical 'artist'. Tony, strong, stout, balding, and powerful, was described by an art critic as being "as burly as the standing stones awaiting their turn...". Quinn is huge, bearded, often sardonic and always outspoken, with a gravel voice and no tolerance for fools, but wields his delicate brushes like a Japanese miniaturist.

Both grew up in the wilder California of the recent past, in the late Forties and Fifties. Angell roamed the still-wooded hills of the San Fernando Valley, hanging out with people like Yvon Chouinard, founder of Patagonia outdoor clothing, who was then a falconer and still contributes to such organisations as The Peregrine Fund. Quinn was an aficionado of everything that flew,



**ABOVE**  
*Another measure of blue*  
Goshawk

**LEFT**  
Sharpshin with flicker.

walked, or crawled. He brought home reptiles and insects, and hunted waterfowl, snipe, and pheasants in the Sacramento River Delta.

Quinn made a brief foray into commercial art in New York City where he met his New Mexico-born wife Jeri, also a serious artist. They returned to his native California coast where he lives in a converted bakery near one of the finest stretches of wild



coastland left, the Point Reyes National Seashore. Here he can find inspiration everyday. Angell moved north years ago to the environs of Seattle and Puget Sound where he sculpts, illustrates, and writes about the wildlife of the regions. I have never seen his studio, but in Quinn's, the wildlife comes inside. An aviary in his yard contains live duck models, and his freezer holds a cornucopia of

variegated specimens that evokes the surreal combination of species in one of Raymond Ching's odder paintings. In recent years the Quinns have begun to spend part of the winter at a New Mexico house Jeri inherited from her aunt. Quinn also travels most years to Montana where he paints bison, wolves, and sandhill cranes.

Neither Quinn nor Angell is a proponent of the current photo-

realistic 'paint every feather' school. Angell once wrote to me, about an essay on such painters, that the critic had "never taken seriously artists with an appreciation of our historical antecedents and those who work directly from experience and invest emotional elements into their work." Quinn and Angell can work directly with hand and eye. Says Quinn: "If you can draw well, it is a license to go



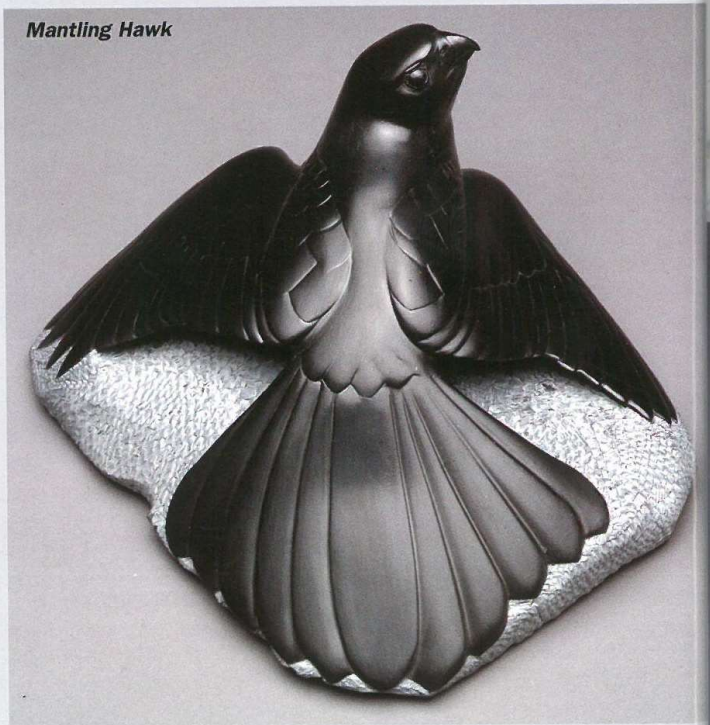
**Gyr Falcon Mirror**

places where you cannot go with a camera. Being able to draw is liberating because you needn't be afraid to alter or rework something until it pleases you."

Tom is a hunter as well, and both artists have handled more live and dead birds than they have photographs. I suspect neither one ever passes up a chance to examine a roadkill! They also study the best of their predecessors and contemporaries; to hang around them is to hear endless talk of Dürer, Liljefors, Hokusai, Turner, Joseph Crawhall, and the anonymous Japanese 17th Century masters of falconry portraiture. Yes, falconry. Both artists, though not practicing falconers, are admirers of the birds and the art – look at these examples of their work.

In Quinn's goshawk portrait the artist's eye, steeped in tradition and honed by hunting, meets the glare of a

**Mantling Hawk**



fellow predator and renders it alive. At the risk of using a word that has been reduced to cliché, it's a perfect 'Zen' painting. The week after he completed it, he sent me a note with a slide, saying "This fell out of my brush last week." It is fierce, but deceptively simple; there is so little paint there! Says Quinn: "I don't believe undeveloped space must be viewed as a disappointment, but perhaps as a place of stillness, a pause that may accompany some surprise of colour, some detailed revelation."

Other paintings seem more constructed but still have a lightness rare in contemporary wildlife painting. In *Gyr Falcon Mirror*, the curves of the feeding hawk, the curlew's bill, and the bush in the background compliment each other and are reflected perfectly in the water below, giving the whole a symmetry and peace unusual in a painting of predation. Maybe only a fellow hunter could appreciate the serenity and completion of a hunting bird after its flight.

The hands-on nature of Quinn's painting is nowhere more apparent than in the lively studies of the little sharpshin. A neighbour brought it to Quinn after it had flown into a window, and he let it fly loose in his studio for a few days before he was sure it could survive. If Quinn's metier could be considered to be water, one dominant element of their native coast, Angell's is the other: stone. While he does wonderful ink drawings in such books as *Ravens, Crows, Magpies, and Jays, Blackbirds of the Americas,* and



**Gyr Falcon**



**Wing Stretching**



**Black Merlin**

*Marine Birds and Mammals of Puget Sound*, his most characteristic art is carved in rock. Some are as massive as the medium implies. His white marble gyrfalcons, of which he has done several, are massive and icy, some of the few representations of the species I have ever seen that do justice to the gyr's power. When I see such birds, or his steatite *Gyrfalcon*, I think of the lines of Robinson Jeffers, the poet of their coast. In *Hawk and Rock*, about a peregrine at Big Sur, Jeffers says: "Life with calm death; the falcon's/Realist eyes and act/ Married to the massive/ Mysticism of Stone."

Stone also gives a certain heavy-shouldered menace to Angell's sculptures of mantling goshawks and Cooper's, like *Forest Hawk*. In that piece a Cooper's stares watchfully from under heavy brows, viewing everything as a possible meal. But Angell also can give stone flight; in his kestrel piece, *Mantling Hawk* he makes a bird as light as air. His black merlin, with its bright hard outline,

**Forest hawk (Cooper's)**



stands somewhere between, as does the merlin itself; small, but edgy and powerful, about to take flight.

Any falconer would be proud to own a piece by either of these artists. Few in the world today understand our fascinations as well as Tom Quinn and Tony Angell. ■

**Stretching Kestrel**



**Merlin study**



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A close-up, sepia-toned photograph of a man with dark, wavy hair looking down at a falcon perched on his shoulder. The man is wearing a light-colored, button-down shirt. The falcon is looking towards the camera. The overall mood is intimate and focused.

# A bond





# with eagles

By Alan Gates

The tall hazel thicket was dense and I was having difficulty making any headway through the saplings. The ground cover of bramble and bracken was doing its best to snag my every footstep, though I doubted I could have fallen over, I would probably just hang from a hazel sapling by my nostrils.

The early morning sun had not penetrated this far down into the valley, the air was sharp and damp, and the overnight hoarfrost was

melting fast, all around me was the sound of running water. I considered this cover had possibility, though lacking the olfactory senses of a good dog I resorted to doing my very best at habitat disturbance.

This Yorkshire moorland valley does lack an abundance of suitable quarry, but the sheer beauty and feeling of freedom that this landscape inspires, keeps me coming back. With even the lightest of breezes she is able to slide through the air high along the

hilltops, playing with the updrafts she follows the valley as it snakes its way through the moorland heather.

Ever watchful of her aerial playtime, I was somewhat disadvantaged in my earthbound stumbling. I caught a glimpse of her high over the far hill ridge, she looked to be immersed in her own fun and I knew this was when something would flush, in polite circles they call it sod's law.

A moment later and my ears



An experienced deer-hunting eagle can kill roe from a high stoop.

## A bond with eagles

picked up her mewing yelp. Straight above me she hung on huge wings looking deep into the cover I was working. It inspired in me a frenzied attack of cover beating which resulted in nothing but noise. With a slight tilt of her tail she turned and disappeared from my view behind the hill high above me.

Finally extracted from the hazel thicket, I moved towards a group of wind-stunted thorn trees, leaning and sculptured into the lee of the hill

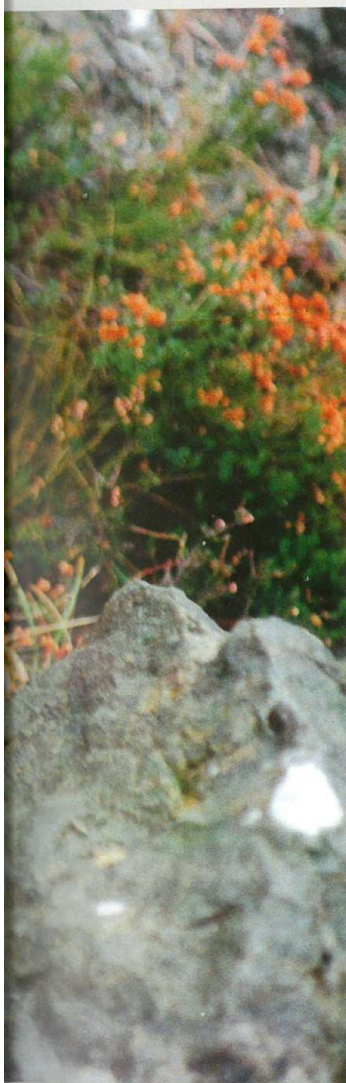
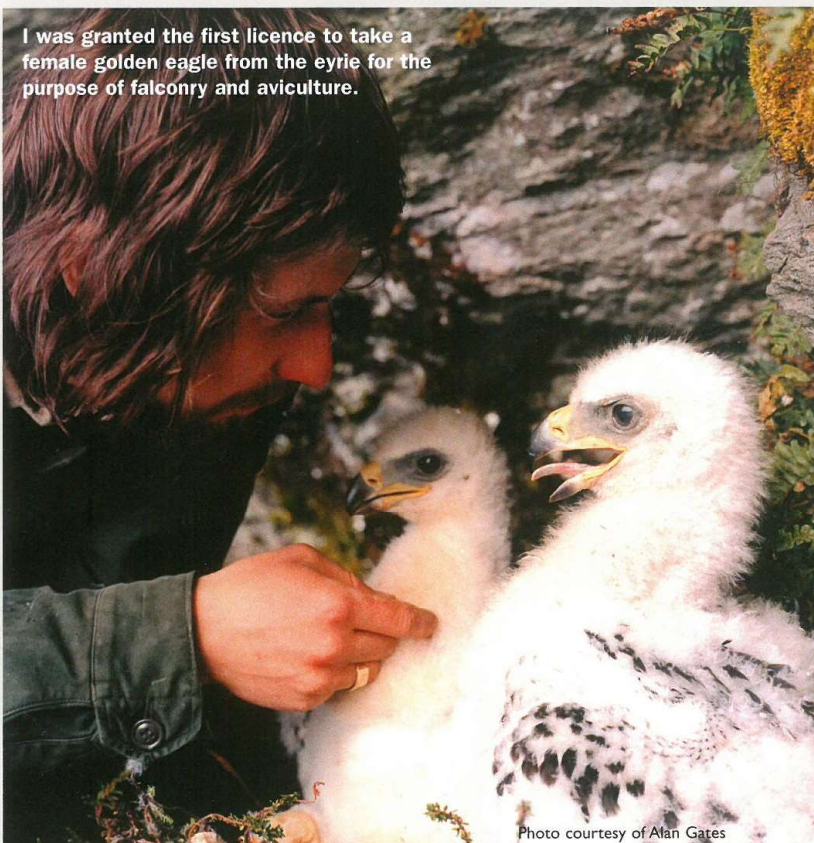


Photo courtesy of Alan Gates

by the blast of air that rips down this valley in violent weather. Underneath the trees the bracken was dead and golden brown but unlike the rest of the hill, here it stood bolt upright where it reached and tangled into the lower hanging thorn branches.

flock of sheep, but then I caught a glimpse of her in the corner of my eye.

She was about a half mile away, the sun gleaming on her back and nape, her wings were tucked in as she cut across the updraft. In a long shallow dive I could see her jess straps



**I was granted the first licence to take a female golden eagle from the eyrie for the purpose of falconry and aviculture.**

Photo courtesy of Alan Gates

I approached thinking this looked as though it could very well be productive cover. Higher up the hill, the top most area of trees was now bathed in sunlight, I was imagining that this might be an attractive place to curl up and catch the warming rays of the morning sun, had I spent the night out on the hill.

My musings were suddenly interrupted by the sounds of rustling and the thump of departing hooves. This activity was much higher up the hill and out of my view, probably a small

rippling in the air stream. She had clearly seen what I had heard, this quickened my senses, and confirmed to me, this was no flock of sheep. I leapt forward and upward only to be humiliated by the steepness of the ascent. Reduced to scrambling on all fours to make any real progress, I glanced skyward in time to see her totally committed as I lost her from view. Half a second later and I heard a series of alarm barks, grabbing handfuls of heather I pulled and slipped my way up this almost vertical ▶

water-sodden hillside.

Just as my lungs felt as though they were in shreds I came upon her. Maria my female golden eagle was sprawled in a most undignified manner for an eagle of her calibre. Her talons, massive as they were, were buried from sight in the neck of a roe deer. The last flickers of life were ebbing from the deer as I took hold of Maria's jesses, the sheer power of her attack had killed the deer. It looked full size, and would probably tip the scale at fifty-plus pounds. As I sat alongside waiting for her to release her grip, the glow in her eyes and the smell of her gentle breath took me back to our first encounter.

It was in the early days of June 1973, and I had just clambered into an awkwardly positioned eyrie in the Scottish Highlands to come face to face with Maria and her brother. My legal presence in this eyrie with these two downy four-week-old eaglets, was the culmination of years of passion and determination. I was now armed with a government licence to take a wild female eaglet for falconry and captive breeding, the first of its kind.

The passion, which had arisen in my heart and my soul came from the relationship with my first golden eagle, an adult male called Ivan. The two of us had come together by chance or fate, whichever way you look at these things, I was young and my falconry career was in its infancy. To say I was not given much encouragement from the establishment that was 'british falconry,' would be an understatement. I was a mere pip-squeak in terms of experience, and was doomed to failure like the other fools of the past who had considered falconry with a golden eagle.

Pigheaded and arrogant as many young men are in their early teens, I was no exception. In fact I excelled, coupled with a determination of a terrier I was also able to devote all my

spare time and most of my waking thoughts to this eagle.

This relationship born through so much contact, developed into a bond that stirred a passion in both of us. It developed into a type of free-style falconry that I found exhilarating. As I hunted the bracken and bramble-covered headlands above the sea cliffs of my island home, Ivan worked the updraft wind. He always seemed to be in position to stoop on a fleeing rabbit and a tight hunting team seemed to develop naturally between us.

In the late 1960s the concept of breeding raptors for falconry was still in its embryonic stage, and I was completely unaware of what was developing in this eagle's mind. He was coming of age, and a pair bond was forming. I was soon brought into the picture when he jumped on my back and attempted to copulate with me. The intense hunting partnership that was developing, was not due to any skill on my part. I was sharing the experience of the relationship that develops between eagles as the pair bond grows and is maintained throughout their lives.

Hunting became very positive with the eagle concentrating on my efforts below, as the bond grew I flew him in any conditions. At times the wind was so strong I had difficulty in standing, buffeted by the enormous updraft from a wind powered across the rough Atlantic sea, it smashed into the cliff base to be blasted vertical.

Ivan played in these violent conditions, and I never feared of losing him, the notion never seemed to enter my head. Even if he cruised down the headland for a 'looksee' or chased a black-backed gull out of sight. I would use the interruption for a breather, he would be back, heck there was nothing I could do anyway, transmitters hadn't been invented, well not for falconry birds. I would rest on my beating stick until he appeared in the sky above me, often he would circle back in the lee of

the wind behind the headland, and fly out over the sea cliff not far from where I was waiting.

Some individuals have an emotion far stronger than affection for an eagle. This type of relationship permeates one's being; one's life is coloured by the eagle. I felt such empathy as I read these words on the dust jacket of *Eagle to the Sky* by Fran Hamerstrom. In this little book, Fran had travelled down the path that I was compelled to follow. Her attempts to breed from her eagles with artificial insemination sounded to some as the stuff from science laboratories, yet to me it was inspirational.

The noose of government regulation was tightening around the freedom that falconry had enjoyed in the British Isles. I had experienced the ease and privilege of obtaining a wild-trapped passage goshawk from continental Europe with the kindness of German, Austrian or Scandinavian fellow falconers. What had taken a couple of days to arrange was now dogged by form filling and months of waiting for acceptance.

Obtaining golden eagles had been difficult before, now with the addition of bureaucrats and my requirement for an adult female, imprint preferred seemed to make the quest for the 'Holy Grail' almost feasible.

In Britain, due to a difficult obtainability and a temperament notoriety, few golden eagles were used in falconry at the time. My quest for a female for Ivan would have to be directed towards the zoological collections and menageries that housed individual specimens.

It was becoming very clear to me that I was at a disadvantage living on an island. To enable me to have any real success in obtaining a female eagle I had to uproot my life and move to mainland Britain.

I came to Yorkshire in northern England in 1972, and located in an area of mixed farmland at the edge of the North York Moors National Park

## A bond with eagles

An additional advantage of relocation was the prospect of hunting brown hares with Ivan. The cliff top headlands of my home island had honed my eagle to a mastery of the sky, the wily rabbit running along bracken and bramble-covered tunnels had made him fleet of foot. Though island habitats have a way of producing species that are indigenous, they can often, by way of their size, enable man through over hunting or by a perceived undesirability, remove some species from that environment. So it was with any eagle quarry above rabbit size on the island. Yorkshire tantalised me with brown hares.

New found fellow falconers invited me all over England and Scotland, few had seen a golden eagle hunting and a lot less had seen one take to the sky like Ivan. During my visits to Scotland I spent

time in Edinburgh cultivating contact with the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland who had a number of golden eagles in their collection. I also explored the possibility of taking a wild-born eaglet from the Highlands of Scotland with those who might administer a licence scheme, once such a proposal came to fruition.

**TO BE CONTINUED....**



# Hawking pheasants

by Stuart Rossell



# with Harris' hawks

The pheasant is a worthwhile quarry for a number of species of hawks, providing worthwhile, testing flights and furthermore good to eat! This article deals with the techniques, attitude and preparation of both hawk and falconer for this challenging quarry when the Harris' hawk is the hawk being flown.

Pheasants have provided flights for goshawks for hundreds of years and many of the older books offer useful snippets of information on how to bring them to bag. Recently Beebe, Glasier, Woodford and others have added to our store of information. Where Harris' hawks are concerned though, not much has been written. This is not to say that pheasants have not been taken by Harris' hawks, far from it. Many have been captured most often while the falconer is out looking for other quarry. Often though, these pheasants have been taken by luck, on the ground before they get airborne or in the bottom of a ditch perhaps. Those which get up before the hawk gets on terms with them are sometimes chased for a while but are not so often brought to bag.

Harris' hawks lack the initial speed of accipiters off the fist and unless a very close slip is given they are not often successful at taking pheasant as they rise, unless they are able to close the gap such as when the pheasant is struggling to break through some sort of cover. For Harris' hawks to take pheasant on more than a 'by chance' basis, certain preparations need to be made in both preparing the hawk for the flight, setting up the flight and managing it once it starts. To catch a pheasant that out fly's the hawk on the initial flush the hawk needs to follow the pheasant and mark

it closely as it puts in. It then needs to wait nearby, preferably up in a tree or on a pole, not poking around on the ground, until the falconer comes and flushes it for her. This is something the hawk needs to learn through experience but must be taught by the falconer.

#### DIARY NOTE

Out with Scruff, a young first-year Harris'. After a couple of rat-hunts at pheasant around the bushes he chased one that went out of the wood. He stuck with it and fortunately it did not go too far. I followed with the dog and we were able to reflush it for him though he was still out flown and this time it went miles!

The ground we have has a number of pheasants but the only ones we really get close to catching are those that get up really close. Scruff will chase any of them but the majority are out flying him and getting away. Unless he learns (or I teach him) to stick with them we are not going to catch many at all and those we do catch will be more by luck than hard work. When quarry starts to become scarce later in the winter we won't get much sport unless we stand some sort of chance of catching any pheasant we find. In the wild he would have his parents as an example of how to catch different quaries but unfortunately he only has me so I'll have to do the best I can.

#### DIARY NOTE

About one year since the above was written. I spent last

season doing a lot of running after any pheasant he flew and sure enough, in time, he learnt to stay with them and that we would come up and reflush them for him. The pheasants as I suspected are a lot easier on the reflush though many still get away. Today, we were in Lincolnshire for the BFC International Field Meet. We drove up this morning from Cirencester then another hour to the field at which we were to fly. There was very little to fly at. I had kept Scruff hooded to allow others to fly first but after watching the only two pheasants we saw in an hour fly off with neither of them being pursued for more than a few yards once they got fully going, I unhooded him for the next one. He flew it hard across the field into a small copse, I think a few people thought I'd lost him! I followed on my own with Cristy and we caught the pheasant on the reflush. It was the only quarry taken by our group that day and proves the value of a hawk that commits 100 per cent to any pheasant it sees and doesn't wait for an easy one to give itself up.

Any hawk needs to be fit to take quarry regularly and pheasant especially. I have not experimented much with vertical jumps, controlled bating or such simply because I feel the best way to get a hawk fit and train it at the same time is to go hawking. Because Harris' hawks adapt so readily to what Harry McElroy calls the 'free-flight' method they tend to be easier to get fit than those hawks that ▶

## Hawking pheasants with Harris' hawks

are flown directly from the fist. It is important however that they be flown as often as possible and there is a huge difference between a hawk given two or more hours of such flying a day and one that can only be flown on weekends. Such hawks learn how to use the wind, select the best branches for landing on, that height converts into speed and many other useful tricks that take the 'weekend hawk' years to develop if they develop them at all. Even among hawks free flown in such a way, there is a natural difference in individual talent but some at least make up in other areas what they lack in flying style. Be wary of flying a hawk too much from a pole. Some hawks still get plenty of exercise but some clamp themselves to the pole and stay there for extended periods while the falconer does all the work getting only himself fit.

It is my practice to hood train all my hawks including Harris' hawks. Once at the field where I intend to fly, the hawk is unhooded and hawking begins. At no time is the hawk restrained from flying. If I am in an area where I cannot, for whatever reason, fly the hawk, she is called back to the fist and hooded until hawking can resume again. It is also paramount that the hawk be in proper flying condition, neither overweight nor under, if she is to give her best in the field, but then this applies to all hawks. One of the problems encountered when flying Harris' hawks however is that it can be difficult to ascertain what their flying weight is. This is because many Harris' hawks will respond at a fairly wide weight range but that is not the same as flying weight. I have noticed in my own Harris' hawks that one quarter of an ounce can affect the effort they put into the more difficult flights while one ounce can almost make it appear they have never been properly entered. I don't think I am alone in such a view and others, notably Martin Hollinshead, Tom and

Jennifer Coulson and Harry McElroy have published similar views.

### DIARY NOTE

Have been experimenting to see how heavy Scruff will fly. It's early in the season (his second) and I'm trying to raise his weight to see how heavy he will fly. This is, I'm ashamed to admit, partly in response to the fact that everyone seems to have a bigger Harris' hawk than me. His weight has gone up 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>oz and his response to the fist is fine. The flights however, while they look good, lack the killer intensity that he was showing. He no longer stays with a pheasant he has put in and waits for us to come and reflush it but quickly goes off on his own self-hunting. It should have been obvious that I was losing control but it often takes something to make a falconer realise he is risking everything. It happened yesterday when I failed to find him after he had put a pheasant in. It wasn't that far but still he didn't wait for us but went off on his own off our ground. I recovered him this morning after a sleepless night still with a bulging crop. It's the first time he's eaten away from me and if I don't get control back I'm going to lose him this way repeatedly. It's then left to luck for me to recover him and that's no good at all.

Two weeks later. Scruff is now back to 1lb 6oz. He may not be the biggest Harris' hawk in the area but he is now, once again, one of the deadliest. I can't believe I let myself get drawn into the 'bigger is better' syndrome like that.

If you take your hawk to areas where pheasants are found, sooner or later you will get your first flight. How you manage this and other flights early

in the hawk's career determine if she will become the sort of hawk that will take on a slip at a pheasant already in flight 100yd away and bring the pheasant to bag. Most Harris' hawks assuming they are in flying condition will chase the first pheasant they see. There seems to be something about the wing beat of game birds that get all hawks excited. Quite often the first thing the falconer sees is a pheasant in flight with his hawk trailing behind. Follow the flight and watch where the pheasant puts in. When the hawk quits, which she probably will continue to where you saw the pheasant land (assuming you did see it land) and she will follow. It is important in this and subsequent flights to get to the spot as quickly as possible. Later on, when the hawk starts to mark the pheasant, they will be reluctant to move with her positioned above. But, before this stage is reached they will run after landing and may well be hundreds of yards away if you don't get there quickly enough and put the hawk into a tree to hold them down. Also, some hawks, in fact probably the majority will, after a period of time, leave the pheasant they put in and go and look for something else. As they progress and grow confident that you will come up and reflush for them, this can diminish but even the best of them won't wait for ever.

### DIARY NOTE

The female flew a cock bird in over a distance of about 300yd. When we got there the dog pointed and then flushed on command a hen right underneath the hawk. She ignored it but pounced on the cock who flushed a few seconds later presumably in response to the hen heading out unmolested. It was pleasing to see her refuse an easier bird to stick with the one she put in and proves her faith in us.



Getting back to the first flights. Do not reward the hawk with food at any time during the flight if possible. She needs to learn that once a pheasant is flushed she should devote all her attention to him. It is a mistake to reward a hawk for what we think is a 'nice flight' when the hawk actually gave up. Hawks don't appreciate what, to us, is aesthetically pleasing and if rewarded for quitting and turning round and coming back, you will soon be left with a hawk that soon gives up whenever a pheasant is flushed that looks like it may require some effort to catch.

#### DIARY NOTE

Took Scruff around the park to see what we could find. Spent the best part of two hours with him following in the treetops as the dog and I tried to find something for him to chase. Eventually we got a flight at a partridge which he chased over a wide ploughed field and put in on the other side about 250yd away. It took me a while to get across the field and when I got there he'd spotted a rabbit and had it in the bottom of a ditch at the head. I killed it for him and fed him up. It occurred to me afterwards that this food was the first he had received the whole day but that's just as it would be in the wild for him.

Note to self. Maybe I need a horse!

It is a very common mistake to continue beating in the area a pheasant flushed from in the hope that the hawk will come back and rejoin the hawking party. The hawk will, normally, do exactly such a thing but in subsequent flights you will notice it flies each pheasant for a shorter distance until in the end you will end up with a hawk that only tries for the very easy ones that flush nearby or ones that look at a disadvantage. When you come to where the pheasant

put in, make an all out effort to find him again. It is here, rather than on the first flush when beaters alone are normally enough to make a pheasant fly, that a dog is so useful as to be almost essential. I prefer a German shorthaired pointer but any dog which points and will go into thick cover will suffice. I guess even a spaniel will suffice but the problem is that quite often either you or the hawk have not marked the pheasant very accurately or the pheasant has moved. In this case a point will give you time to reposition the hawk whereas a spaniel will flush without giving you such a luxury.

#### DIARY NOTE

Took Scruff to Tarlton. Kept him hooded as we walked towards a large wood that I haven't tried in a while. The wood stands on its own like an island surrounded by wide open fields. It has a number of rabbits and pheasants are found there regularly though they tend to get scarce if we hawk it too often. We haven't been here for about ten days so everything should be peaceful. It is tempting, when approaching the wood, to slip the hawk from a distance to see him fly up into the trees but when I've done this in the past I normally miss the first flight, as long before I am close enough he has managed to spot something and gone after it. Impatience got the better of me when I was about 100yd away and he was unhooded and went up into a tree. Sure enough I was still 60yd outside the wood when he took off in a fast flight deep into the wood. I released the dog and followed as fast as I could. Cristy knew what to do and followed the sound of his bells and I trudged along trying to keep up, cursing myself for not waiting before unhooding him just one minute

more, then I might have seen the flight. Deep inside the wood I came upon Cristy on point with Scruff positioned high in a tree above. I waited 30 seconds to catch my breath and then sent the dog in to flush which she did perfectly. The pheasant rose almost straight up but only got about 15ft before Scruff slammed into him and they both hit the ground hard. He lost him in the struggle and the pheasant took off. Scruff was winded but followed. When I found him he was low above a dense tangle of bramble out of which I doubt an army could have moved this pheasant. We tried for a few minutes then left him to find a fresh pheasant. Scruff got no reward and lingered in the area as we moved off but quickly caught up. He knew we'd find something else for him.

If you follow this procedure every time, you will soon have a hawk that will still try very hard on the initial flush but will, if that try is unsuccessful, follow the pheasant until he puts in and wait for you to come up and reflush him. It is now that the score will start to add up. Furthermore, as the season progresses and easy slips become a thing of the past you will still have a pheasant-catching hawk. Such a hawk will think nothing of flying a pheasant that was flushed 100yd away into cover over distances of over one quarter of a mile. This is pheasant hawking with Harris' hawks at its best.

For those who hawk in pheasant rich areas where, sooner or later, the hawk may catch one by luck against a fence or in the bottom of a ditch, it may not be necessary to have a hawk that flies a pheasant in and I have hawked in such areas. But even here much better flights can be obtained by choosing parts of the ground that are not overrun with pheasant or ▶

## Hawking pheasants with Harris' hawks

selectively slipping the hawk out of the hood. Hawking around release pens while exciting is, for me, second rate and brings the best out of neither the pheasant or the hawk. It might be useful for getting the hawk entered but once she knows the job such areas should be avoided. I have caught such pheasants but they may just as well have been chickens running around for all the sport they provided.

### DIARY NOTE

Group of Americans out to see the hawks fly. Took them to an area sure to be crawling with pheasant. Blister took three in about 20 minutes as they ran around near the release pen. The guests loved it. I was bored. I'd rather meet one of those pheasants with this same hawk far away from the pen where he needs to fly rather than run for his life, then we'd really see a flight worth watching.

As a result of the free-flight method, of teaching the hawk that each pheasant (or anything else for that matter) should be given 100 per cent effort and of hooding the hawk when not flying it, you end up with a very intense hawk that will always, if at the right weight, give its best when in the field. Hawks thus treated will try for all sorts of quarry in any situation. It's as though removing the hood is an invitation to the hawk to go out and give of its best. It will be necessary to hood the hawk simply to allow you and the field a breather every now and again. There is a vast difference between a hawk thus flown and one flown only at weekends with little attention paid to weight control and that has not been taught to work hard for its food. Such a Harris' hawk will follow the field closely ever on the lookout for a free morsel of food that it has learnt is repeatedly offered and will only chase those quarry it believes it won't have to expend too

much effort to catch. It is these hawks that have so badly marred the reputation of Harris' hawks, especially to those who regularly fly goshawks but it is the falconer, not the hawk, that is to blame.

### DIARY NOTE

Berkshire downs.

What a beautiful day to end the season. Clear blue sky and no wind but cold enough that running was not a chore. Just as well because the quarry left on this shoot was fit and strong. We hawked the outside areas a long way from the release pens knowing we'd only find the fittest pheasants. This was just what Scruff needed to show his best. A number of guests were out including some falconers who fly goshawks and longwings. We had a mixed bag of hawks out. Scruff was the only male Harris', we had a gos with a reputation, a redtail that knew its stuff and a couple of others which I'd better decline to mention. No fault of the hawks concerned its just that their falconers do not do them justice. Seven hawks in all.

Scruff started by surprising everyone, even me. On unhooding him, he took a look around at the wide open spaces and proceeded to ring up into the air going higher and higher. We tried to flush something for him but when he got to about 400ft my nerve failed me and I called him down to the fist. He responded immediately and came down in a nice stoop to land like a butterfly. He spent the rest of the day flying normally! His first flight was at a partridge across the base of a wide valley. He flew it across the field about 500yd and put it in. When I got there they were both running around inside a huge blackberry bush. It broke when Scruff was well and

truly tangled and it went back the same way it came towards the field. I hooded him up and rejoined the field. They had chased the same partridge with a couple of the other hawks but when it went off in a long flight none of the hawks pursued it. Eventually, after some excellent flying, he got a pheasant from high up in the trees after putting it in. He took it fair and square in a nice stoop from high in a tree in view of those who had kept up and was fed up. He received (or rather I did on his behalf!) a nice compliment from one of the goshawkers.

Note. Scruff has gone up before and waited-on but never as high and normally only when conditions have been right such as a high wind or on a slope. This opens up the possibility of waiting-on flights.

My attempts to organise a waiting on flight on a marked or pointed pheasant have all failed pure because before the flush could be organised, the hawk concerned has spotted something else. Now, when a hawk goes up, such as when we are on a slope or the wind conditions are favourable to such a flight, I simply do my best to flush something. The results have been a number of rabbits, woodpigeons, crows, magpies and other various taken in a stoop, often they tried to put in, but never a pheasant. Never mind, we all have a goal to aim for. ■

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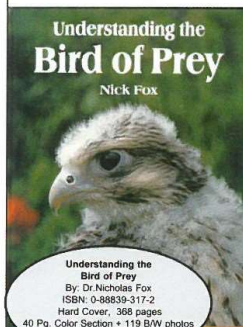
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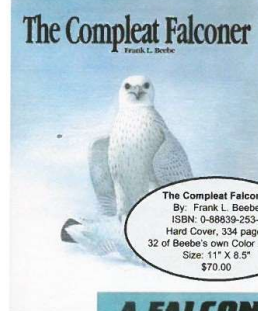
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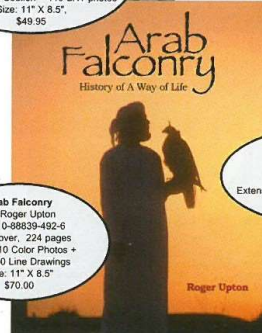
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# RONNIE: THE COM





# CONTINUING STORY

Words by Dave Jackson

Photos by Seth Anthony

Ronnie is a peregrine/prairie hybrid, and as some readers will remember, he started his falconry career as one of a cast with his brother tiercel Reggie. These two little guys were the subject of an article a while ago, and it was impossible to convey in a short magazine account just how much fun it was to fly a cast of tiercels at a variety of game. I still vividly recall some of the flights and maybe one day I will try to replicate the experience. I have a little scheme of how I would carry it out using Ronnie in the process too, but of that maybe later.

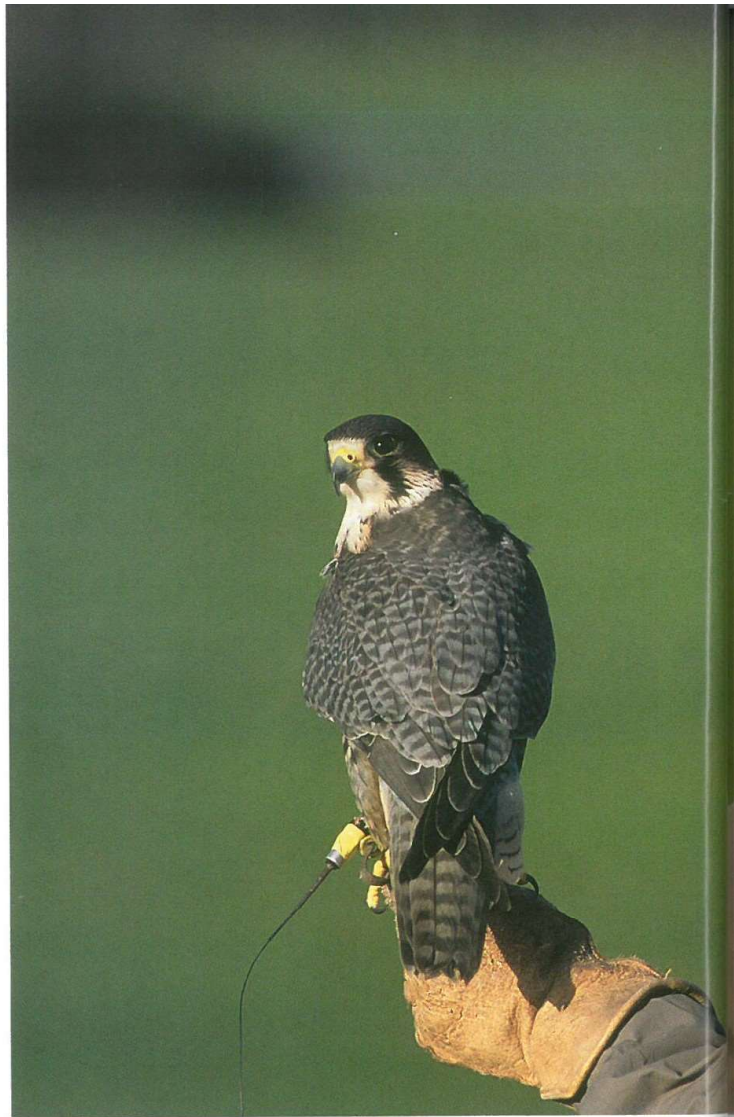
After losing Reggie, I was in the difficult position of what to do with Ronnie. I travelled to the NAFA meet with the loss of this bird still smarting and I tried to decide on a course of action. Should I obtain another tiercel to replace Reggie. Should I try to fly him solo at what was pretty demanding quarry, or should I just quit for the remainder of the season. I spent the time in the US mulling over the problem and, on my return, I'd decided to re-school the little guy to fly solo at magpies.

One of the first things I found when flying him alone was that he was way over ►

weight for what I intended to do with him. On thinking about it, I realised that when flying with his brother, Ronnie was energised and stimulated by the presence of the other bird, and this helped to mask the normal effects of flying an overweight hawk. I actually found that to elicit a proper response from him, I needed to reduce his weight by around  $3/4$  oz, (21g). This need became obvious when I began his re-training and found he either just sat or flew in a lack lustre way indicating high condition. With a steady and gradual weight reduction programme under way, his response and style returned and after around 10-14 days he began to show that he was ready to work with me and was in shape to take on his new role. I'd taken this tiercel from  $21^{1/2}$  oz to  $20^{3/4}$  oz and spent time on his fitness training.

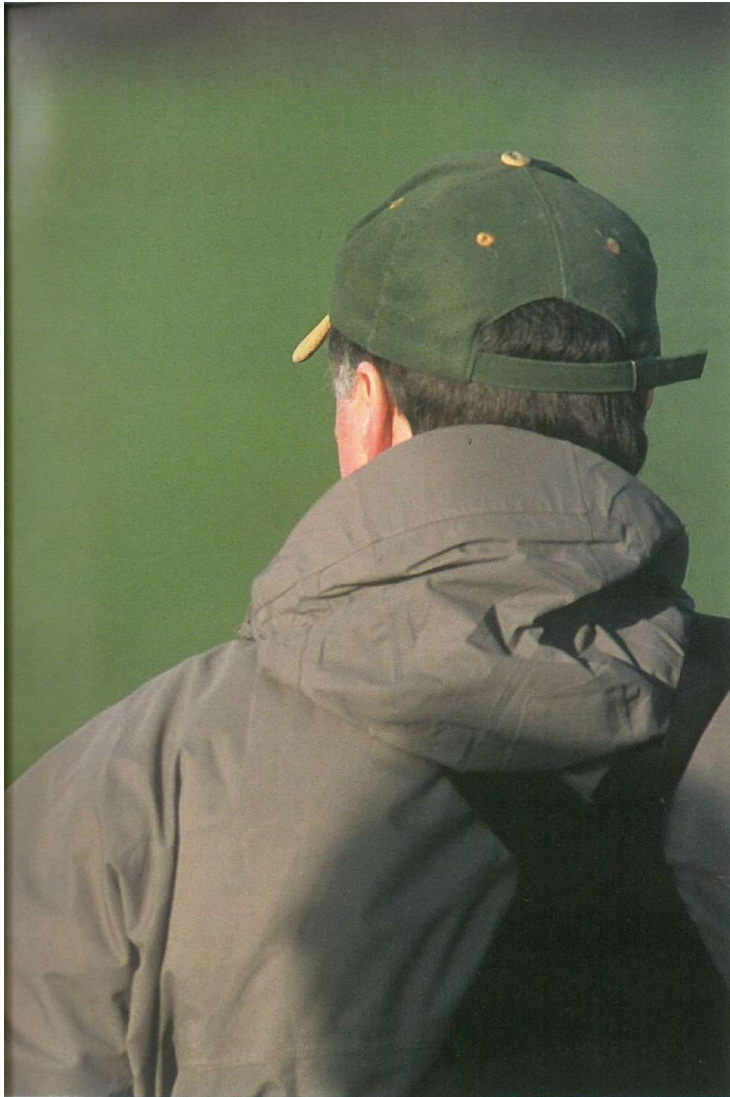
I well remember the first flight at quarry I made with Ronnie. I'd been looking for a slip for a while when I saw a couple of magpies on a favourite hedge, in an ideal position. They fulfilled all of the requirements for a suitable slip (more of that later) and, having considered all the options, I released Ronnie. I have found that there are two main methods of flying this kind of quarry. One is to fly 'out of the hood', allowing the hawk to take the flight on upon visual contact with the magpies, putting the quarry into nearby suitable cover and then waiting-on for the series of re-flushes which will follow. The second method, which I opted for on this occasion, is to get the falcon aloft in conventional waiting-on style and to allow his presence to 'pin' the quarry in the cover in which they already hide.

As he left the fist, Ronnie made a perfect out-run which took him very close to the magpies. I carefully watched them slink down into the thin hawthorn bushes and knew that there was an increasing chance of a good flight, even though Ronnie had yet to see the magpies. As he made some



**As he left the fist, Ronnie made a perfect out-run which took him very close to the magpies. I carefully watched them slink down into the thin hawthorn bushes and knew that there was an increasing chance of a good flight, even though Ronnie had yet to see the magpies.**

height, he drifted somewhat and, to my disappointment, I saw the magpie depart, flying low and almost concealed against a low bank. Running on, I decided to just beat the hedge out and then call Ronnie in to the lure. As I drew nearer to the end of the bushes, which petered out into a vast open field of plough, I suddenly heard the 'chuckle' of a magpie and then saw it skulking half way down a bush. What then followed was a series of flushes (around 10 if I remember correctly) which culminated in a marvellous and audible bind over the plough, as the magpie attempted return to cover. Although exhausted, I was elated, and found myself yelling with relief and delight. What



feeling! I knew that we'd made the transition, what I didn't know was how good it was to get!

Ronnie continued to develop his style on magpies, becoming very proficient at them. Then on one occasion I was flying a magpie and found, not uncommonly, that it had slipped away un-noticed. I continued to beat out the cover and a blackbird (*Turdus merula*) hurtled out of the end of the ditch around 50yd away. Ronnie was on it immediately and actually forced it to bail out into the grass twice before it reached its sanctuary. The walk to the car gave me time to think about the new possibilities and I decided to try flying this new quarry. Now, prior to this I

had been spending a fair bit of time hawking with small falcon aficionado Grant Hagger, and his feeling was that Ronnie would be too big for this highly manoeuvrable kind of aerial contest. I now felt sure that he could do it.

I obtained a quarry licence in January for 15 blackbirds and 5 thrushes, a modest number which I thought would still be almost impossible to fulfil. At the time I was hawking a great deal with Steve Knight, another small falcon specialist, and his presence was to prove invaluable. His knowledge of field craft in this type of hawking was so useful, as was that gleaned from Grant Hagger and Con Taylor too. It was Steve, in fact, who witnessed

Ronnie's first blackbird kill. We'd been beating out a hedge, one on each side, when a female blackbird made a break back along the bushes. Ronnie stooped with real venom from around 100ft and I heard Steve yell "He's hit it Dave," followed by "Blimey, he's only killed it." There was some doubt in Steve that Ronnie could replicate this performance, but this was dispelled a few days later. The image of this flight is indelibly etched in my mind, partly because it was the first time I became aware of what I call 'the kiss'. Again with Steve present, we gently pushed some blackbirds along a hedge until we had them bunched with a flight over open ground as the only option. Ronnie was well positioned at around 150ft and as a cock blackbird attempted his escape, the tiercel made his move. As the blackbird realised the futility of his flight, it turned and attempted to regain the safety of the blackberry bush. Ronnie swept by me in a rush of wind and struck the Blackbird in what appeared to be the merest kiss of a contact, seeming almost to have missed it. As he threw up in a tight turn, the blackbird dumped into the grass, and simply rolled over onto its back. Ronnie had killed it in the stoop, with what appeared to be the lightest of contacts. Both Steve and I were pretty stunned at this outcome, Ronnie having carried out his role with almost clinical efficiency.

By the end of this first season Ronnie had accounted for 15 blackbirds and 2 thrushes, along with 10 magpies and several 'various'. He had also taken partridges, the first of which he took in a gallery performance at a field meet in front of about 15 shortwingers. I was delighted with his transformation from cast member to solo performer.

I feel I should make reference to some of the requirements for this kind of hawking, based on my experiences. Whilst many falconers would view longwinging with small falcons at ▶

small quarry as being a lower class of hawking, experience would show them otherwise. Outlined by Bruce Haak in his excellent *The Hunting Falcon*, not only does this style of hawking require a very high level of skill to condition and maintain small falcons, it requires a knowledge of the quarry and field craft which often surpasses that of other hawking styles.

One major attraction of this kind of hawking is that available ground is often much more accessible, especially when flying pest species such as magpies. Available ground, however, does not mean just any old pile of bushes, and often many apparently ideal locations fail to fulfil the requirements needed for successful flights. The cover needs to be of the right density to be attractive to quarry, yet not so thick as to make it impossible to flush quarry under pressure. One needs to realise that blackbirds and other small quarry become almost impossible to evict from cover when hard pressed by falcons, especially if the hawk has got a foot to it earlier in the flight. I have often almost had to grab the quarry before it will flush again. It is also imperative that there is sufficient space between cover to enable the falcon a clean shot in the stoop.

Beaters are a great asset in this kind of hawking, but they are next to useless if they do not understand their role, and are incapable of keeping their head. Many times I've suffered insults from Grant Hagger and Steve Knight, delivered in the heat of the flight, when flushing with excitement but with the falcon hopelessly out of position. It is only by keeping one's head and having disciplined beaters that one can consistently bring quarry to bag. Hawking alone makes life difficult and this can be offset by the use of a sensible dog, but again, it needs to be under control. Before her untimely demise, I used my old GSP Kacheena as a flushing dog, and would often place her in the drop

**Beaters are a great asset in this kind of hawking, but they are next to useless if they do not understand their role, and are incapable of keeping their head.**

position on the other side of a fence to act as a blocker or stop to prevent birds from sneaking out and away. It certainly helped, but it was never as useful as one or two sensible beaters who knew their job.

Another vital element of this game is a reliable and committed falcon, flying with fitness and courage. Repeated stooping and re-mounting, albeit to moderate pitches of 100 to 200ft, requires a hawk that knows its job and understands that the falconer below is working to provide that good clean shot that it needs. It is said that



size counts, and many people look for the small hybrids that are produced, especially the peregrine/merlin. Whilst the smaller hawks immediately spring to mind for flying small quarry, the larger tiercels such as peregrines and their various hybrids, lanner, prairie etc. should not be overlooked, for they are more than capable of taking small quarry. One hybrid that I've read of is the teita/peregrine, and this mix would appeal to me. For sure, Ronnie has taken a few really small birds as accidental kills, and whilst

being completely unintentional, they demonstrated the incredible footing skills of some of these tiercels.


Ronnie has now just completed his fourth season with me. He only flew for a couple of months due to my other falconry commitments, yet still he carried out his work with honesty and commitment. He is especially good fun in high winds and seems to revel in this kind of wild flying, scudding around and riding the wind with ease. His job is more difficult on windy days, but I fly him nonetheless. A few days after flying him free in October, he killed a teal in really fine style. A few weeks of great fun then followed, along with several other magpies. I plan to keep him for the duration of his life, and I intend taking him to the grouse moor this year in an attempt to add one more species to his growing quarry list. This list includes pheasant, partridge, magpies (of course!) woodcock, blackbirds, thrushes, duck and several accidental 'various'. Given a little more time in the future I am keen to get him on to snipe, a quarry which really would be a challenge for him.

The fun that can be had from flying falcons at small quarry appears to have been missed by a large number of falconers. To demonstrate the level of enjoyment, at the recent British Falconers' International Meet in Woodhall Spa, the group flying peregrine/merlin hybrids was the most heavily attended by spectators, and the tales of their sport resounded around the meet headquarters. I know that I hope to continue enjoying sport with Ronnie for some years to come. ■



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# FERRUGINOUS LETTERS

by Martin Hollinshead

I was in hospital yesterday. It was for one of those examinations where you're shown into a stark room, stripped of everything except shoes and socks – which makes you look and feel ridiculous – and given a flimsy smock that won't close properly. You are then left. You wait in your little room staring at the trays of implements next to you. You look around the room. You lie down. You close your eyes. You sit back up. You wait. And you wait. Finally, the consultant comes in.

My consultant was rude and impatient. I'd already heard him next door giving the Dictaphone some of the rough stuff. Now it was my turn. He tore into me, firing a barrage of questions about previous illnesses. I watched his face. It was obvious my answers were not precise enough. I tried harder. His tone indicated TRY HARDER STILL, and there was a hint of something evil – maybe the surgical glove and marrow-sized finger I was shortly to meet. “Any injuries?” “You mean recently?” “No, ANY.” Now I could be precise – and fill his bloody note pad! I started with surgery to a damaged ankle and was heading towards a frozen chunk of spine, ready to continue to a dislocated shoulder, when I stopped at my scarred right knee. And suddenly his voice was as distant and muffled as it had been with the Dictaphone and I was somewhere else and it was a long time ago...

I could hear another helicopter coming in. That humming, buzzing, chopping drone that's impossible to mimic. Maybe a skier, the place was full of them. I was in a sports injury hospital in Germany. It was my second stay, the knee surgery was going to require a bit more help if I was ever going to use the leg properly again and so a few weeks' work on a special machine – and a daily jab of god knows what – had been prescribed. There was an army of us. The walking wounded: crutches, sticks, and leg braces straight from Cyborg World.

It was a mixed-sex complex, its plush twin-bed rooms giving it a holiday hotel feel. It was Club Med for the lame. You met up, you went to the pool, you got some sun. And if you were my roommate, a male ballet dancer from somewhere in South America, you went the whole single-male holiday hog as often as you could! He was movie star perfect – body and looks – and the girls fell at his feet. I remember just one, a stunningly attractive blonde who introduced herself by sitting opposite me, putting her legs up on the bench and showing me right up the leg of her skimpy but wide shorts. She wore nothing underneath and the view held me just about as long as she intended it to.

In hospital you read a lot. Even if you're not a reader, you read, eventually. I read a lot. And after I'd read a lot, I wrote a lot. The captive can be a dedicated student – just look at the number of highly qualified long-term prison inmates. My topic was the ferruginous hawk. I wanted to know about the ferruginous, and so I wrote a heap of information-seeking letters.

The ferruginous was then, as it really is today, the most baffling bird employed – or not employed – in the sport. It's impossible not to be fascinated. This bird is some weird and wonderful creation made up from bits of other species. There isn't a bird on the planet that looks or behaves remotely like it. It's stolen a falcon's wings – or at least the feathers from them – taken a golden eagle's feathered legs, and decided to hinge its head just behind the eyes to accommodate a steppe eagle car-swallowing mouth. Maybe it got a little confused with its feet – a fraction small. But it decided to put matters right, back with the falcons: forget the feet, it would slay its victims with a biting, tearing falcon beak. Then it dumped raptors altogether and

grabbed the chest of some over-trained pit bull. And while with the pit bull, it decided to borrow a never-say-die, never-give-in attitude. And to go with all of this, it wanted weight: about five pounds seemed to do it. Oh yes, I wanted to know a lot more about this bird.

But I wasn't totally ignorant. I'd flown the species in the UK, where I'd been revved up to a glass-shattering scream by Beebe's assessment of it in *Hawks, Falcons and Falconry*. And I'd seen that Beebe was right, had seen the bird's astonishing powers of flight and drive to hunt. But I'd seen too that the UK-based ferruginous was a very square peg not ready at all to be forced into a concrete-hard and very round English hole. Our quarries were wrong – and often the landscapes too: it

couldn't use its falcon wings on rabbits – they didn't run far enough – and it didn't feel at home with brown hares either (though later, the moors and mountain hares of Scotland would have the bird feeling a bit more at ease). No one really did well with the ferruginous in the UK, or any part of Europe for that matter.

But I didn't want to know the European ferruginous, I wanted to know the real one – the bird of Beebe's writings. And so my letters went to America, and they skipped the entire East Coast with one great jackrabbit bound to land west of the Mississippi in the bird's true homeland. This is where I would find the real ferruginous, and real ferruginous falconers.

Email would have made it all so ▶



Photo courtesy of Craig Culver

## Ferruginous LETTERS

easy, and probably turned my 'heap' into a mountain! Email is fantastic and once you're into it, you correspond – talk – with such fluid informality that friendships develop with a wonderful ease. You chat with email in a way you would never use a pen: the pen is slow, it gives you time to think, reflect, tone down passion, anger and praise. And email is fast – very fast.

Letters are very different. Anticipated, maybe long-awaited, letters arrive, are individual in shape, style and size. They are held, looked at and carefully opened. And with equal care they are stored away; popped into drawers – maybe for days, maybe for years. Maybe for centuries. Letters from overseas are more special still. And the further they travel, the more their value: odd stamps, odd postmarks, and an eager eye becomes the swift detective before busy fingers get to work. Recently I had an unexpected package from Russia. The door opened and the postman handed me a cylinder-shaped parcel wrapped in heavy, dark, slightly wrinkled parchment paper and tied up with what could have easily been dried animal sinews. Ink and handwriting matched it perfectly. It hadn't come from Russia, it had come from another time!

When you're hospital confined, a prison guest, or desert-island abandoned, the arrival of mail is something special. I think it was wildlife writer Mike Tomkies who, living in some cabin in a remote corner of Canada, described the ritual of opening mail, leaving it until the last moment that it might be savoured. And so, still half-captive at home, I waited for my letters and romanticised and fantasised about where they would be coming from.

I've always had an interest in the western US. Maybe it's the space. I like the Gertrude Stein quote Bruce Haak uses in *Pirate of the Plains*: "In the United States there is more space where nobody is than where anybody



is. This is what makes America what it is." But it's not just space, it's the kind of space and what lies in it. My American space is deserts, vast plains, and horizons the European eye just can't adjust to. And it has hares. And it has great big ferruginous hawks to go with them. It's from all of this that my letters would be coming, brushed with just enough desert sand to make them authentic.

The first one was a crushing disappointment: "Sorry Martin, but

you seem to know more about the ferruginous than I do." I scanned along the line – hope. There was a "but...." and another name was offered. Off went another letter. Meanwhile another reply. And another. And the postmarks were bang on: Utah and Idaho. Suddenly, Justin Tanner was telling me about flights to hares from the back of a pick-up crashing through the sage, and Charles Browning was giving me slope soaring with his bird soaring out over

**There was a slim guy striding through tall, suitably foreign-looking vegetation with an enormous light-phase ferruginous.**



Photo courtesy of Craig Culver

sage flats to stoop at targets flushed by his dogs. The praise just rolled from the pages, and slowly I had a bird that was starting to look more like the bird Beebe had insisted was out there.

More letters arrived. Morlan Nelson was telling me about the ferruginous probably being the most capable of the buteos. And there was insight-giving Richard Howard of the Bureau of Land Management. Richard not only turned up the heat about the bird's hare-catching ability, he also

helped me start to get to know the wild ferruginous and its habitat by sending me scientific papers. Now the picture was really coming together and my appreciation of this incredible raptor mushroomed. I could see Beebe nodding: "Told you so."

If there was one niggle, then it had to be that most of those who had so much praise for the ferruginous had moved on to other birds. Nobody was flying one now. Then one day that long forgotten "but..." dropped through the

door. A quick scan: Ramona, California. It was thick – photos? Swift but careful hands ripped it open. Yes, photos! I spread them out – the letter could wait. There was a slim guy striding through tall, suitably foreign-looking vegetation with an enormous light-phase ferruginous. Next shot: no vegetation, vast country, short-coated dog – vizsla? Another: the slim guy again, now on lonely desert road scanning endless sage desert, ferruginous on glove, rump of big hare poking out of game bag. Next: open plain, looks hot, dog working out in front – now definitely a vizsla. Then WHAM! A hare as big as the dog held high in two hands as if being presented, and sitting on it and feeding from a huge crimson gash was that monster hawk again. Quick, the letter – the name? Craig Culver.

I began to read. Now here was someone different, someone still exploring, still questioning, still captivated by the bird; other birds might join it, but the ferruginous obviously held a very special place in this man's heart. There would never be any 'moving on' for this guy.

Craig was primarily hawking the local desert cottontails and sage hares (the rump showing from the game bag). But what about that monster hare? I've always had a passion for hares and hare hawking – have maybe envied the Americans their wider variety – and I immediately recognised that the big hare being presented was a mighty prairie hare. He was hawking prairie hares with a ferruginous!

Prairie hare. You don't need to say any more to an American falconer. The name says it all: size, speed – respect! This is an animal that is talked about in library whispers, with eyes cast down. It's a woolly-coated winter-white Behemoth that, to borrow a line from a NAFA journal, "lopes into view and blots out the sun." It has long shared a relationship with the ferruginous, but more in the realms of ▶

## Ferruginous LETTERS

'should work', and 'the bird looks just right for the task' than in practical being done falconry. Craig was making the 'should' read does – and does very well indeed! And he was so modest about it. He was hawking one of the most impressive hares in the world with one of falconry's most little-known birds – was bringing the mythical partnership to life – and he wanted to do anything but shout about it. Others would have been on the rooftops screaming!

We kept in touch and I badgered him (so much easier in recent years with that wonderful email!) with more questions: more about the birds – male, female, passager, eyass, captive bred – and about the vizsla (the photodog now identified as Velvet). Questions, questions, questions. And always he was ready to give my pestering the consideration it didn't

deserve.

And through all of this, I came to learn more about the man himself. This was someone who has fully immersed himself in the sport, being fascinated with both the past and the present. And he was a traveller – the rest of the Culver clan too. From partridge hawking with goshawks in Pakistan to grouse hawking in Scotland, this guy had been around!

More help followed. He went on to assist me with two book projects, either chewing hard on a few topics or jumping straight in. He flew to my aid with *The Complete Rabbit and Hare*

*Hawk*, his experience with the ferruginous really giving the *regalis* text something special. He rolled back years to take me out to Fiesta Island to pursue an isolated population of sage hares – bagging an albino in the process. And then we left his usual hawking ground on the beaches and deserts to head off on prairie hare expeditions; now I got winter-frozen hawking camps and snow storms. And always there was that modest man from the first letters.

Funny, if it hadn't been for that knackered knee, there would have been no letters and no Craig Culver. ■



Photo courtesy of Craig Culver

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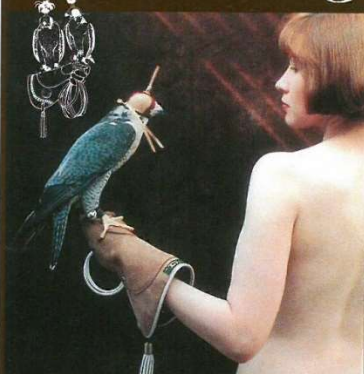


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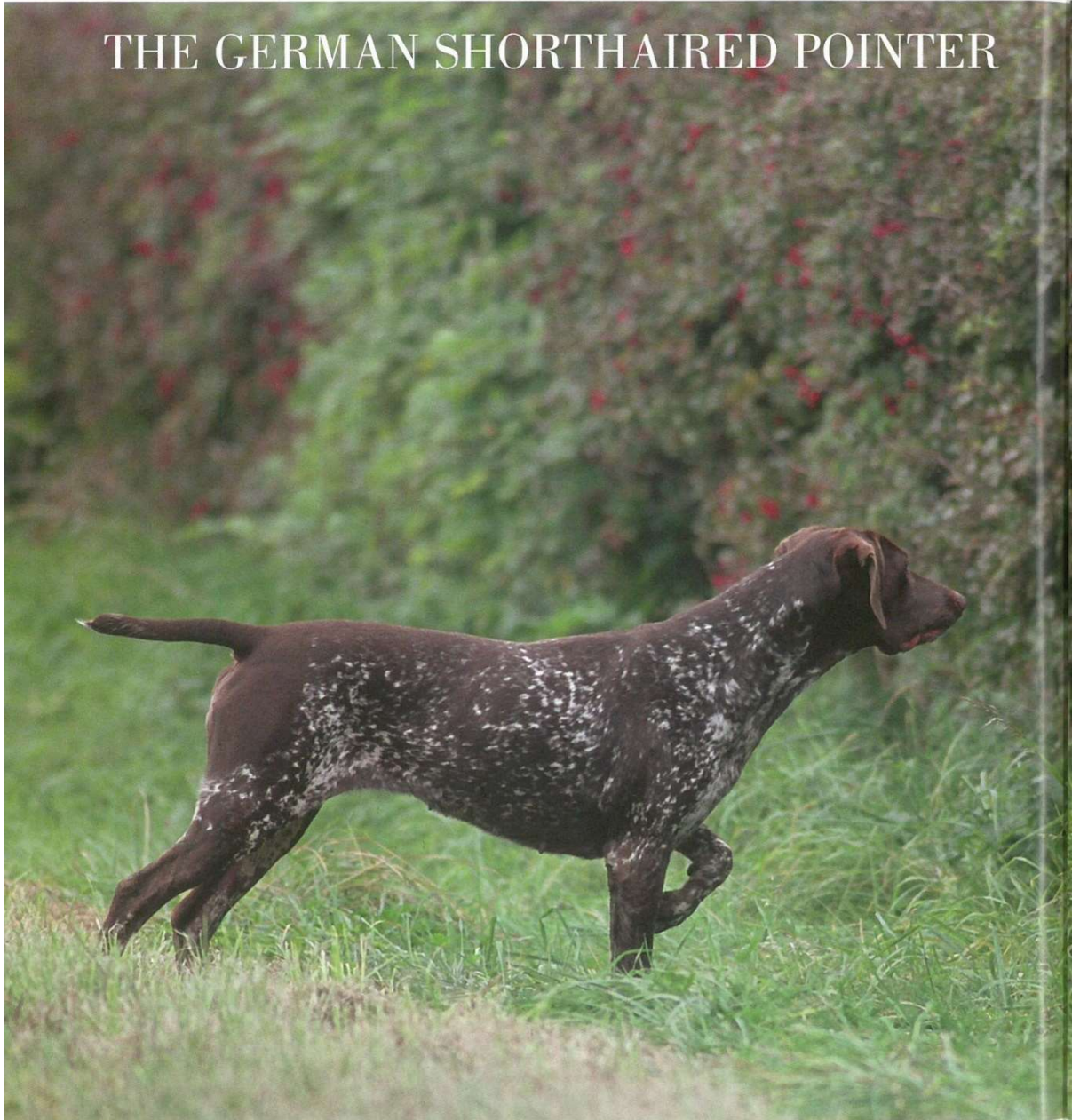
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# FALCONERS'

## THE GERMAN SHORTHAIRED POINTER





# DOGS



**T**he German shorthaired pointer is almost certainly one of the most popular breeds of dog used by modern falconers. It has in its ancestors the Spanish pointer, Old English foxhound, English pointer and the Hanoverian schweisshund. Doubtless other breeds were added to the mixture at some time or other. The GSP was developed at the time when the English were refining their own specialist breeds of pointing, setting and retrieving dogs, to fulfil the role of not just one dog but of three: the pointer, the spaniel and the retriever.

The breed is of a medium size, smooth coated, and can be liver and white, or black and white, or solid black or solid liver. The bi-coloured dogs are either 'ticked' or flecked with 'saddles' of the dominant colour. If the GSP has a disadvantage it possibly lies in its markings, when against certain backgrounds the dog can almost disappear. Try spotting a liver and white GSP on point on grouse moor without a brightly coloured collar to assist in breaking down the disruptive camouflage!

GSPs on the whole are very affectionate and generally love human company. They are boisterous and extremely energetic. The dogs as opposed to the bitches, have a reputation of being quite 'hard' with a greater interest in pleasing themselves rather than their handler.

The GSP's popularity with the modern falconer lies in its ability to adapt to the conditions in which it

finds itself. It is equally at home serving a shortwinger, broadwinger or longwinger. Each discipline makes separate demands on the dog. The austringer with his goshawk flown from the fist will be hunting in different circumstances to the Harris' hawk with his hawk following from tree to tree in cover, to the other extreme of the longwinger hunting game on wide open fields or moorland. The GSP is able to adapt to all of these different styles. When hunting in thick cover they will automatically reduce their pace and range, a hedgerow at the edge of a field of winter wheat will be instinctively hunted from the downwind side. Open stubbles and moorland will be quartered, perhaps not with the same width and depth of an English pointer but the GSP will do the job.

When one buys a dog as well as buying one's own personal dream of canine excellence in the field, it must never be forgotten that you are buying a set of genes. If you really want to understand your GSP you must take into account its breeding and ancestors. In the GSP you have a dog that was bred not only simply for rough shooting, but a dog that was bred to be a deerstalker's companion, to hunt fox and wild boar and to hold the same at bay if required. All these things require something very special in a dog, they are not all needed for falconry but they all conspire to produce what are the GSP's greatest assets – adaptability and flexibility. ■

# VIDEO REVIEW

**Captive Breeding:**  
Two new videos in the  
**Bird of Prey Management Series**  
from Faraway Film Productions.

Reviewed by Nick Kester

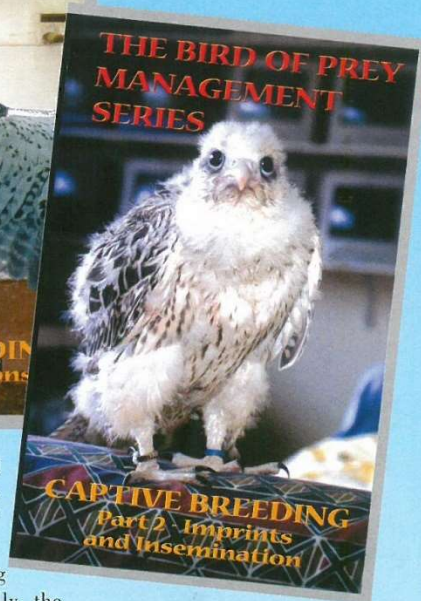
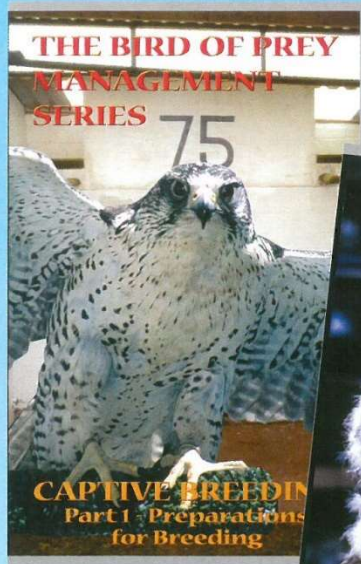
Having already released the first four modules (Nutrition, Basic Training, Anatomy and Health Care), this ambitious project has moved onto Captive Breeding with the first two of four eventual videos and one accompanying book on this complex subject.

The market may be global and the emphasis plainly biased towards falcons but this should not dissuade the backyard breeder. The author, Dr Nick Fox, has accumulated a wealth of knowledge and experience over the years and by building on his text *Understanding the Bird of Prey*, these videos share with us the skill and discipline that all falconers would do well to employ.

Timed to match the key elements in the breeding calendar, the first video covers Preparations for Breeding, whilst the second focuses on Imprints and Insemination. The next two (Incubation and Hatching, and Rearing) will be timed to precede these critical diary dates.

Breeding may be a dry old subject, but Nick Fox and his team have a wry sense of humour. There are good interludes of raptors in their natural environment as far apart as New Zealand and Siberia and, of course, of field falconry. None are 'make weights' to the end product, each having a bearing on the subject matter.

If there is one message that stands out, to the layman at least, it is that on the selection of breeding stock. How often in the early days of captive breeding, did falconers sell or fly the best progeny whilst stuffing the lesser stock back into breeding programmes:



quite the reverse of natural selection. That this did terrible harm to the quality of available hawks was to be found in the UK inbreeding of Harris' hawks. Thankfully the message of fly, hunt and, only if proven, return to breed pens, has been rammed home by responsible aviculturists and the quality of available hawks and falcons improved accordingly.

I am also pleased at the huge reluctance to use forced insemination, unless absolutely necessary. It always strikes me as an appalling piece of avian management and one that should be used with great care, not least because of the risk of doing untold harm to the female. Equally, the stripping of males of semen is also considered only marginally acceptable. And when you see the ease with which imprinted females accept, and males donate semen you will wonder why any other method is used.

The leaps forward in imprinting have meant that captive breeding need be neither stressful for the

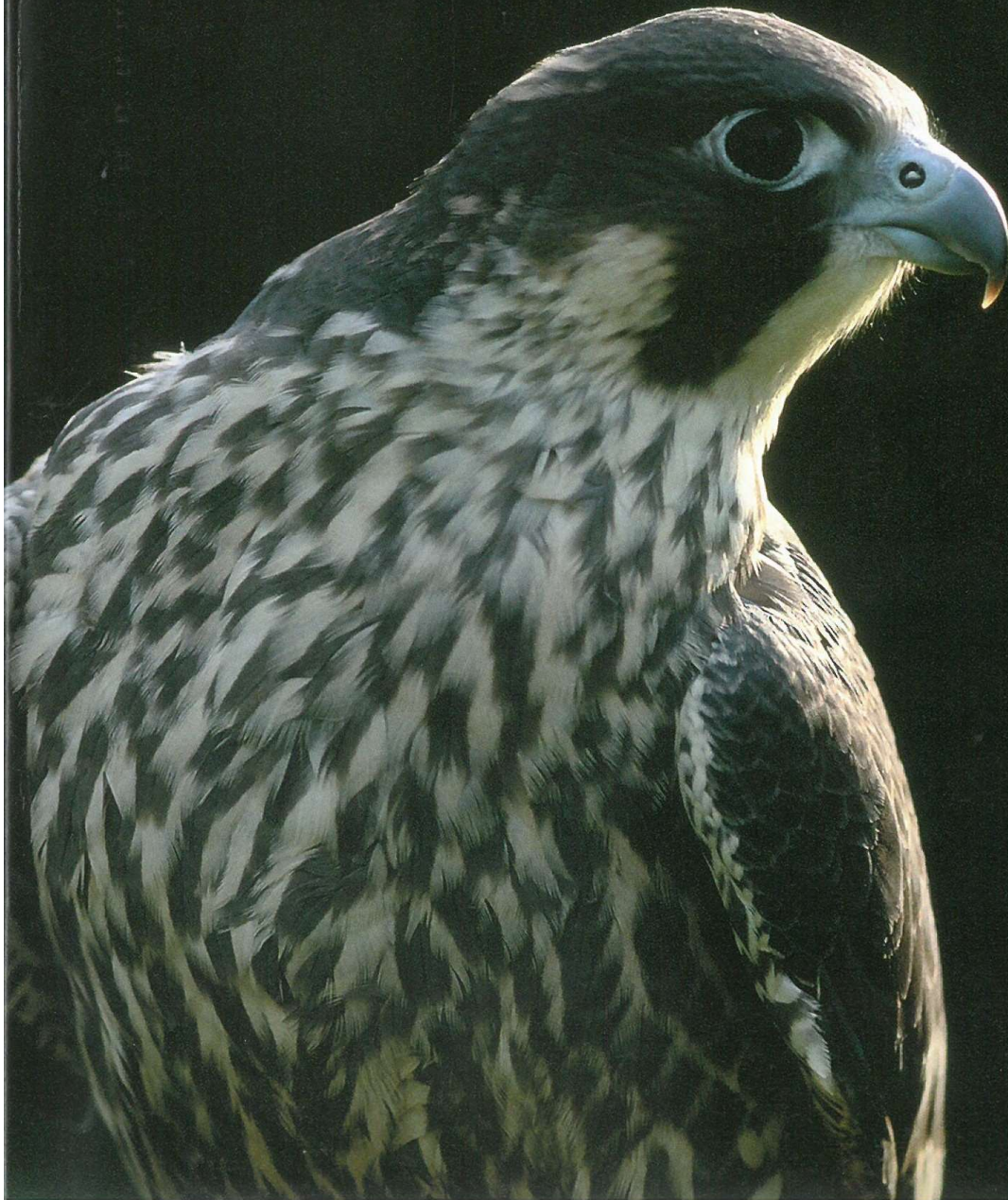
falconer nor his birds and by watching these videos all breeders will ensure production is of the highest standard. But, as the video warns, be very certain you are going into production with your eyes wide open for potential or lack thereof. Over production of a species into a falconry market already saturated is negligent and you cannot turn breeding programmes on and off like a tap. They take years to build.

Information on future releases, as well as how to order, can be found on [www.falcons.co.uk/faraway/ffp/](http://www.falcons.co.uk/faraway/ffp/)

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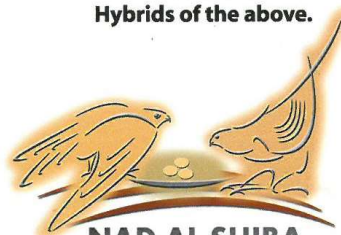
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