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# The *Falconers*

& Raptor Conservation  
Magazine

**Neo and the  
Novice Game  
Hawker**

**Festival of Falconry**  
The inside story





# FALCON LEISURE

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bob dalton

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**T**he flying season is now in full swing and I hope all of you are having a successful time with your birds. I especially wish all those who are new to our sport a good first season and if you are flying your first bird, I hope that you have a mentor to call upon when needed. Nobody knows everything but if you have someone with a good many years' experience to guide you, all the better.

The show season is now over and this year saw the Festival of Falconry and there are two more articles in this issue concerning the event – one in the form of a letter and the other one by Nick Fox who co-organised the festival. By reading these I hope that they will bring back happy memories for those who attended the event.

Talking of falconry events, by the time you read this, I will have attended the major field meet in the Czech Republic to be held in Opcocno which is organised by the Czech Falconry Club. I hope to bring you a report in the next issue of The Falconers Magazine.

I must also point out to you the Hawk Board News on page 10 which contains an item on an audit conducted by the HB and contains some staggering statistics concerning falconry and bird of prey keepers in this country. The contents of the audit could affect us all in some way or another, so we will have to keep an eye on the various laws and legislation that may be changed in the future.

In the meantime, have a good read.



# editorial

# news & products

## Casting Jacket

**A**quila Products is a name new to the falconry world and is a collaboration between falconer Chris Miller and textile expert David Bostock. They have come up with three new products which have been designed specifically for falconers.

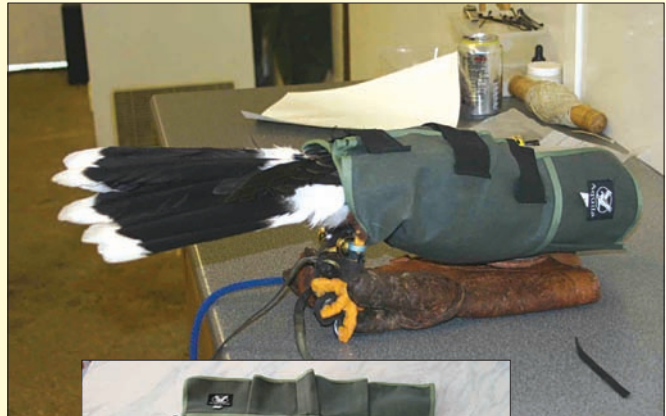
A hood holder that can quickly be attached to the shoulder strap of either a bag or hawking vest will find favour with many, particularly those that fly falcons. All too often a hood is stuffed carelessly into a pocket and either lost or in a very deformed state when retrieved at the end of the day's hawking.

A new style of hawking vest that is a hybrid of a conventional bag on a shoulder strap and a hawking vest is another product in the new range. The vest effectively hangs to the right side of the falconer and means that everything is within easy reach of the free hand. There are plenty of pockets both zipped and with magnetic fastenings which enable fast and easy access when required but with the knowledge that something

placed inside is completely secure.

Last but by no means least in the range of new products, is an advanced design of casting jacket. For those that have never used a casting jacket for either coping their hawk or fitting new equipment then the ease with which these tasks can be accomplished when carried out in conjunction with a jacket

will come as something of a revelation. One can easily re-equip any hawk completely unaided when using one of these superb jackets. The design of the item means it is effectively a straight jacket for the hawk and once fitted the hawk is held completely secure. The fitting of jesses, bells and tail mounts can be carried out single handed



in a very short space of time. This means minimum stress for both the hawk and the

falconer. The elasticated centre panel of the jacket means that it can be adjusted to the individual hawk that is then held firmly and securely but without undue pressure.

All of these new products are currently available from **Falcon Leisure (02380 696921)**. Contact details for Aquila Products should, hopefully, follow shortly.

## Your Chance to Spread Your Wings

**W**e all want to get paid for doing something we absolutely love and some of us are lucky enough to do just that. John Dickson has been a falconer since the age of 13 and in 1993 he noticed a demand in bird control services for the waste management industry. With help from the Prince's Trust he launched NBC Bird and Pest Solutions and hasn't looked back.

NBC has grown from humble beginnings to become the UK's market leader in using falconry and proofing as methods of bird control, in addition to a full complement of pest control services. Winning many prestigious jobs such as Trafalgar Square, The Crown Estate Savill Gardens at Windsor, Honda, BMW and Scottish Widows amongst many others, NBC is on target for an estimated turnover of £2 million this year.

John Dickson launched a franchise opportunity four years ago to recruit Area Managers to cover territories across the UK, giving other falconers a chance to combine their passion for the outdoors with a profitable career. Tim and Karen Lester, Dorset's Area Managers said: "Joining NBC as a franchisee was the best thing we ever did! We enjoy the variety of work and especially the flexibility of being my own boss, but still have the support of a successful, well established company, so we don't feel on our own. We really enjoy the birds of prey and the satisfaction we get from flying them. We would recommend this business to anyone who enjoys the outdoor way of life, is good at relationship building and who has the business head to be their own boss"

If you are interested in this unique business opportunity, then please contact **Kelly Smith: 01953 457979, Kelly.smith@birdsolutions.co.uk** or alternatively find out more by visiting the website at **www.nbcbirdandpest.co.uk**



# Golden Eagle poisoned

**P**olice are appealing for information following the discovery of a poisoned golden eagle in the Scottish Borders.

The discovery of the bird, which was one of the only pair of breeding golden eagles in the area, was followed by a joint investigation by Lothian and Borders Police, RSPB Scotland, the Scottish SPCA and the Scottish Executive.

This investigation resulted in a poisoned bait being found on a grouse moor in the

Borders yesterday (August 12).

The death of the bird and the subsequent discovery of bait has raised significant concerns over the use of poison in the area.

PC Mark Rafferty, Wildlife Officer with Lothian and Borders Police, said: 'Despite the efforts of myself and other wildlife crime officers and our partners, the illegal and indiscriminate use of poisons is still alive and well in the Borders area.

'This incident goes to show that people

are still willing to take this risk, and the result is that one of Scotland's finest birds has now been destroyed.

'This is criminal behaviour, and I'd ask the public and particularly the gamekeeping community to come forward with information on this or any illegal wildlife crime.'

Anyone with any information should contact **Lothian and Borders Police on 0131 311 3131**, or **Crimestoppers** in confidence and complete anonymity on **0800 555 111**.

## Book Review

### ARS ACCIPITRARIA

Beatriz E. Candil García and Arjen E. Hartman

Published by Yarak Publishing

Price: £29.99

Softback, 286 pages

ISBN 978-0-9555607-0-5

**T**he front cover of this publication tells us it is 'An Essential Multilingual Dictionary for the Practice of Falconry and Hawking' and it does exactly what it says. A publication of over 280 pages, it is a full and comprehensive study concerning phrases and terms used in falconry in six different languages – English, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, German and French.

The dictionary, just like any other, is set out in alphabetical order with the main word or term to be described set in English and underneath a brief description of the meaning and then a table with that word or phrase in the five other languages.

After the acknowledgements and authors note, there is a short chapter called 'The Noble Art of Falconry: The Sport of Kings' which lays out a short history of the sport and a sub-section concerning falconry in literature with a quote from Shakespeare (*Taming of the Shrew*): "My falcon now is sharp and passing empty, And till she stoop she must not be full-gorged . . ."

Next comes the main part of the publication. The first and main section of the dictionary is titled 'Falconry terms and abbreviations' and contains the dictionary itself. It is laid out in simple form and is easy on the eye with just enough white space between entries without spacing out the entries just to fill the page.

As an example, Peregrine:- A widely distributed falcon popularly used for the practice of falconry which can achieve great speeds of more than 300 km/.

Then underneath is listed the five foreign descriptions of the main entry: Halcón peregrino (Spanish), Falco pellegrino (Italian),

Slechtvalk (Dutch), Der Wanderfalke (German) and Faucon pèlerin (French).

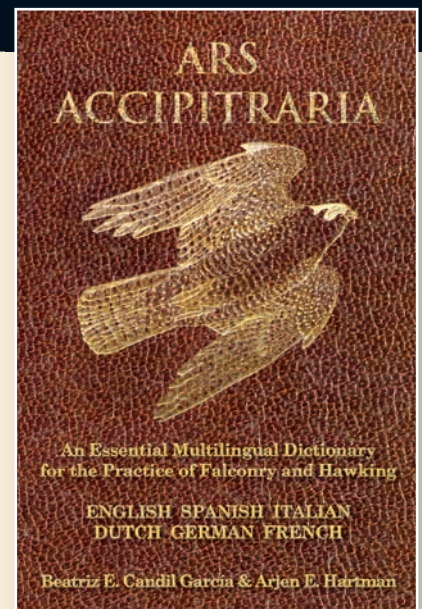
There are so many other falconry related terms listed, from *Aba* to *Yarak* in this book, there are too many to list here and I find it hard to put the book down – trying to soak up the information contained on the pages.

The second section is titled 'Health and wellbeing' and is

intended to be a quick reference for falconers not only on the different parts of a bird, but also the different diseases that a raptor can contract. It does not go into great technical detail but gives a good brief description of each ailment a bird can suffer: Avian Tuberculosis, Bumblefoot, Sour crop, etc. Viruses, Fungi, Parasites and other disorders are also listed.

The last two sections, Diurnal birds of prey and Nocturnal birds of prey list the scientific name of a species followed by the six equivalent translations of the name listed. There are even six indexes depending on which language you prefer.

I have to say that I find this dictionary a real joy to look at. It is simple in format and design and hats off to both authors who obviously have spent so much time compiling this edition. I recommend this book without any hesitation and I cannot understand why nobody has thought of it before.



Book review by Peter Eldrett

## Bird deaths in Northern Ireland

**T**he Police Service Northern Ireland (PSNI), the British Association for Shooting and Conservation and the Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals joined the RSPB in condemnation of the illegal persecution of birds of prey, after a peregrine was found shot and a buzzard poisoned in Northern Ireland.

The peregrine was found in a field with four pellets lodged in its leg, wing and shoulder. The bird was taken to a veterinary clinic, but it died a few days later. The peregrine falcon had been ringed as part of a scientific study and was identified as having hatched in Co Antrim.

In another case, a buzzard was found alive, but suffering from apparent poisoning, in the area of Drumbanagher, near Newry. Despite treatment by a vet, the bird suffered haemorrhaging and died.

It is illegal to kill or injure any wild bird under the Wildlife (NI)

Order 1985 and doing so will incur fines of up to £5,000 or prison sentences of six months. The penalties for anyone convicted of harming specially protected species including peregrines and buzzards, which are listed on Schedule 1 of the Order, are much greater.

These incidents follow the alleged persecution of peregrines in the Mourne Mountains. Bird or wildlife crimes in Northern Ireland should be reported to the PSNI and the Wildlife Officer at the Environment and Heritage Service. The PSNI have appointed a full-time Wildlife Liaison Officer to ensure that the criminals behind these and other attacks are dealt with by the courts. The RSPB welcomes this development as it means the PSNI will be able to invest more resources into investigating wildlife crimes.



## Useful Websites

IBR  
[www.ibr.org.uk](http://www.ibr.org.uk)

DEFRA  
[www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)

Lantra Awards  
[www.lantra-awards.co.uk](http://www.lantra-awards.co.uk)

Hawk Board  
[www.hawkboard-cff.org.uk](http://www.hawkboard-cff.org.uk)

Great Western Referrals  
[www.gwreferrals.com](http://www.gwreferrals.com)

Strathmore Veterinary Clinic  
[www.strathmorevet.com](http://www.strathmorevet.com)

Raptor Rescue  
[www.raptorrescue.org.uk](http://www.raptorrescue.org.uk)

Countryside Alliance  
[www.countryside-alliance.org](http://www.countryside-alliance.org)

The International Association for Falconry  
[www.i-a-f.org](http://www.i-a-f.org)

The Peregrine Fund  
[www.peregrinefund.org](http://www.peregrinefund.org)

## Letters

Got something to say? Write to Peter Eldrett, Knowle View, Kings Lane, Woodlands, Wimborne, Dorset BH21 8LZ or e-mail: [peter.eldrett@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:peter.eldrett@tiscali.co.uk)

**Dear Peter,**

In response to Bob Dalton's letter published in the last edition of The Falconers Magazine, I would like to make three points that relate to my article which I wrote for issue 69 of this publication and his letter on Vizsla's and hawking.

Thanks for such detailed and lengthy commentary regarding my relatively short article. I would like to respond to the three main points raised.

Point one: For a full and detailed account of my time in Texas please refer to Issue 28 of International Falconer, you'll

find all the information you need. You will see that my 'modicum of truth' more or less corresponds to your own ideas regarding Coyotes. It seems you are tangled up in the semantics of what constitutes hunting and predation.

Point two: I spoke to several breeders of Vizsla's, conversed with my mentor, other falconers who run the breed and also have the copy of Gay's book. With regard to the Vizsla's history I am only repeating what I had been told. I was not aware that you had trained, run, bred or owned any Vizsla's in your long and illustrious career.

Either way, I am happy to be wrong, Ellie is turning out to be a fine falconry dog regardless of the breed's 'specific' history.

Point Three: Is a little facetious, but I will take it on face value. I agree, owning a HPR will not 'guarantee' game or quarry of any sort. However, having one on point in thick bracken is a pretty sure fire indication that 'something' is there to be flushed. Rather than, say, an endless pursuit with ferrets in empty burrows as the Harris floats about not being served.

**Regards**  
**Ben Crane**



# askchitty

Do you have any veterinary questions relating to your bird? If so, send them to the editor (see address on page four) and they will be passed on to John Chitty - BVetMed CertZooMed CBiol MIBiol MRCVS

**Recently I have encountered two instances of birds biting/plucking out their feathers. The first is a seasoned Harris Hawk who plucks and bites at the end of her moult. The second is my first year female Redtail who chewed off a wing primary about an inch from the base. I don't know much about the Harris Hawk's set up, however, the Redtail was sprayed with Anti Mite when taken from her aviary so it shouldn't be mite related. Is feather plucking/chewing physical or psychological?**

### **Paul, by E-mail**

Feather plucking and chewing have only recently been described in captive raptors. Nonetheless these appear to be growing problems. As with feather destructive parrots there appear to be many underlying causes – medical and behavioural.

Behavioural aspects appear important as the majority of cases occur in “social” raptors – Harris’ Hawks and (in this author’s experience) kites and American Black Vultures. The vast majority of the cases I have seen have been in singly-kept Harris’ Hawks – as situation far removed from their natural social group.

Hand-rearing may also be an important underlying factor as with parrots where a social bird is imprinted to believe it is part of a human social group and is then left on its own. Many cases appear to occur during training – a particularly stressful period.

Feather pulpitis (inflammation or infection of the feather pulp in the growing feather) also appears to be important as all cases seen by this author have shown this on cytology and responded fully or partly to antibiotics. However, it is not known whether pulpitis is a primary (ie sole cause), secondary (ie not a cause but a consequence of the plucking) or perpetuating factor (ie the initial cause has come and gone leaving behind just the infection which is itchy (“pruritic”) enough to cause the plucking to continue) in these cases. In these cases we would expect the first and last scenarios to resolve with treatment of the pulpitis, whereas the second will respond partially at best.

In one Brahminy Kite, cyclical feather

plucking appeared to be associated with pulpitis and appeared to recur on a seasonal basis prompting concerns of an underlying allergic condition. However, it should also be borne in mind that many husbandry systems are altered on a seasonal basis and allergy is yet to be confirmed as a cause of plucking in raptors.

Chewing of remiges (flight feathers) does appear to be linked to bacterial folliculitis (infection of the follicle around the feather) and in my experience is a primary cause of this sign. In raptors it appears to be a very different situation compared to plucking of body feathers. It is often seen in different species (not just social species) and folliculitis is not the same as pulpitis. Nonetheless, behavioural factors may be involved in this type of activity too. I have not seen evidence of feather or skin mites as a cause of feather destructive disorders.

Some cases of both chewing and plucking have been linked to disease in underlying tissues – eg. an American Black Vulture chewed over its keel to the extent of damaging the skin) due to an underlying aspergilloma. Investigation of these cases should, therefore be comprehensive as we need to look for underlying causes, both medical and behavioural:

### **Full history**

- Signalment, management, rearing, diet
- History of the condition – when started, area originally plucked/ chewed, spread to other areas, when it occurs, vocalisations during plucking, associated with human/bird presence, changes in social group?

### **Clinical examination**

- Including dermatological examination and thorough search for ectoparasites (though I have never seen this, it would be wise not to miss what seems the most obvious cause!)
- Cytological sampling of feather pulp; skin scrapes/ impression smears/ acetates of skin lesions. Skin biopsy (including feather follicle) as necessary
- Blood sampling – full haematological and biochemical profile
- Faecal examination for endoparasites
- Full body radiography
- Endoscopy if deemed necessary following other tests; ie. we regard this as being a “whole bird” condition!

When medical conditions are ruled-out we will look at behavioural causes and therapies. From time-to-time this may involve use of psychoactive drugs but these should only ever be used for short periods (and never when the bird is aviary-kept or is being flown, as there is risk of the drugs reducing co-ordination) and must always be combined with behavioural therapies.

Collars to physically prevent chewing/plucking are rarely, if ever, indicated as they may well cause far greater stress to the bird. However, in extreme situations when the bird is causing excessive damage to itself, modified hoods may be utilised. Again, these should be used only for short periods and only in conjunction with other therapies.

# The National Birds of Prey Trust



Mouth swabbing

**T**he National Birds of Prey Trust (NBPT) was founded in 2001 by Jemima Parry Jones, while she was Director of the National Birds of Prey Centre at Newent in Gloucestershire and she remains the founding Trustee. The official launch was held at the Centre in September 2001, carried out by the Princess Royal, who had kindly agreed to be Patron of the Trust.

The Mission Statement of the Trust is to: Promote the conservation, protection and preservation of all species of raptors through:

- Education
- Training
- Captive breeding
- Re-introduction programmes
- Rehabilitation programmes
- Research

The Trust is a grant making charity, which assists students, researchers and rehabilitators by supporting projects that benefit welfare and assist in the conservation of birds of prey worldwide. In 2002, the Trust was fortunate in receiving a significant legacy, which allows it to support three to five projects each year. The funds come from interest from invested funds and a proportion of the capital sum each year. Since 2003, the Trust has committed over £19,000 to 11 projects. These projects cover many countries and topics, for example the Trust has funded the provision of hospital facilities and support for the treatment of injured birds of prey in England.

Since 2003, the Trust has provided ongoing support to the South Asian vulture recovery programme. This programme is part of many efforts to prevent the extinction of three species of Gyps vulture, which are critically endangered as a result of poisoning by the veterinary drug diclofenac in India, Pakistan and Nepal. The funds have



supported both cage building and the provision of equipment for the breeding centre in Pinjore, India. This centre, which is of critical importance in the overall programme, now consists of three very large colony aviaries, three large aviaries, 16 medical cages and an extended laboratory facility. The centre holds over 100 birds of all three critically endangered *Gyps* species. The first laying and breeding of these birds took place at the 2005/2006 breeding season. This work is a vital part of the programme which could stop the potential extinction of these birds in South Asia. One more breeding centre has been opened in West Bengal and another is planned in Assam.

### More projects

Two other projects are supported in Asia. One (by Ruth Tingay and Michele Clarke from the University of Nottingham) is investigating the ecology, breeding biology and habitat requirements of the *Ichthyophaga* Asian fishing eagles in Cambodia. Much of the work has focussed on the grey-headed fish eagle (*Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*) where the researchers have recorded three species of water snake previously unknown as prey for this species. The second project has only just commenced and concerns the conservation of imperial eagles (*Aquila heliaca*) and white-tailed eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) in Kazakhstan. This project uses molecular techniques to identify birds, which allows questions relating to parentage, adult turnover and juvenile abundance to be answered. Not only will this project examine these aspects but will also look at the role of major histocompatibility complex genes in mate choice and resistance to disease, e.g. bird flu.

The trust supports projects both in the United Kingdom and abroad. Projects based in the UK include a study by the Hawk and Owl Trust on land use by wintering hen harriers, the health status of raptors, mainly buzzards, in Scotland (by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Banchory) and monitoring golden eagle population turnover in Scotland.

This latter project is of particular interest as the UK has the fourth largest golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) population in Europe, with approximately 430 pairs occupying territories of which almost all are in Scotland. Although regular censuses of the population in



Golden Eagle

Scotland are carried out, these do not tell us much about the demographics of the population as individual birds cannot be recognised. This innovative project, run by Natural Research at Banchory, is attempting to use non-invasive genetic sampling to monitor individual eagles over time. The methodology entails collecting moulted adult feathers and mouth-swabbing nestlings for DNA that will allow individual identification. This project will test the feasibility of the methodology which, if successful, will allow information to be collected on site-fidelity of breeding adults, provide more accurate information on adult survival and also on associated external factors. It should also make it possible to aid in the identification of persecution hot spots. The project involves many volunteer collectors from groups in Scotland and Ireland.

### Hawk Board support

The NBPT were delighted when the Hawk Board decided to support them in their work in 2007. In particular the Hawk Board wished to put their contribution towards this important research on a British native species. This golden eagle project was highlighted at the Festival of Falconry at the Englefield Estate in July.

Many forms of pollution threaten birds of prey and in Peru this can come in the form of mercury poisoning from

gold mining. The Trust is supporting Peggy Shrum who is working in Madre de Dios monitoring mercury levels in many different species of birds of prey. High levels of mercury can affect behaviour resulting in impaired hunting ability, nesting effort and reproduction. Birds captured and sampled so far include the lined forest-falcon *Micrarstus gilvicolis* juvenile and the white-browed hawk *Leucopternis kuhli*, which feeds on frogs, snakes and lizards.

The Trust supported another South American project, this time in Ecuador where Ruth Muniz worked on the ecology of harpy eagles, which involved the establishment of a new protected area for the species. In the same area jaguar, otters and tapirs occur.

The Trust is a relatively new charity but is already making a significant difference. Unfortunately, we have to turn down several perfectly sound projects each year due to lack of funds, which has made us more conscious of the need for increased fund-raising and publicity on the work of the Trust. The website [www.nationalbirdsofpreytrust.net](http://www.nationalbirdsofpreytrust.net) contains full details of all supported projects and the work of the Trust and we are happy to be contacted about our work. The website also contains information on how to apply for grants and support the trust. We would love to hear from those interested in the future of these beautiful birds.



**D**id you feel a bit flat after the Festival? We did and we slept for a week. Although why no-one could find a cheetah to augment the Hungarian camp because they had to leave theirs behind is beyond me! Anyway, a million thanks to you all.

So it's back to HB business and some of it is depressing. At the time of writing we have got a new case of foot and mouth and this could restrict our sport. Certainly, if you move across several stock farms in the course of a day's hawking you had better check with the farmers first. Remember, it is their livelihoods you are messing with and if you want to remain in their good books, you must honour their wishes. Field meets must be in doubt, so check with the organisers if you are booked in to one.

On the other hand bird flu seems to have gone away, but a case has been identified in Germany so it hasn't gone far. The breeders and exporters of birds of prey have had a nightmare of a season. Japan was a closed market for months and complex tests had to be undertaken before falcons could be shipped to the Middle East. It seems to have levelled out and most breeders have completed the sales. But the EU has struck once more and new regulations are in the pipeline.

# HB Audit

## Staggering Results!

At present the UK specifies which ports and airports may handle birds of prey but a review is underway. You may ask how this can possibly affect you and in the short term it will not. But every raptor that is imported to enhance bloodlines needs to come through a port of entry, so if you want to get a new strain of Harris hawk or gyrfalcon from the USA then you are affected.

Finally some good news from the Festival of Falconry at which HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, through his representative HH Sheikh Sultan bin Tahnoon al Nahyan, Chairman of Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority, made a donation of £1 million to the Falconry Heritage Trust. The trust aims to provide a secure future for global falconry and falconry artefacts and provide bursaries and study grants to students from around the world. Nick Fox, who received the cheque, said that Arab falconry is an integral part of the Middle East culture and this generous donation demonstrates their commitment to the global preservation of falconry and its heritage. If you want to know more, go to the website [www.falconryheritage.org](http://www.falconryheritage.org)

### Falconry UK – the facts contained in a new report

For the first time falconry's true size and worth has emerged following a comprehensive audit by the Hawk Board, which represents all bird of prey keepers in the United Kingdom. The launch took place at the first Festival of Falconry on 14 and 15 July when thousands of falconers from over 30 countries gathered to celebrate their love of birds of prey and the sport of falconry.

"The results are staggering," says Chairman Jim Chick who helped collect the data with Dr Nick Fox of International Wildlife Consultants. "We had no idea there were some 25,000 bird of prey keepers in the country; that they owned over 70,000 raptors and contributed so comprehensively to the rural community in employment and education."

Also important, is falconers' contribution to conservation, and their role in the return of many species to the British

countryside. However, much of raptor keeping is wrapped up in arcane laws that fail to include birds of prey and their use in falconry.

Nick Fox found that falconry is governed by over 40 items of legislation. Those laws connected with field sports tack falconry onto shooting, if it is ever mentioned. For the man in the street, staying inside the law can be an impossible task. The Hawk Board has long asked for some falconry-friendly revision to existing law.

In addition bird of prey keepers, breeders and exporters are faced with massive increases in fees for owning, breeding and selling raptors. The current review of controls and fees has lasted seven years and shows no sign of reaching a conclusion: the current changes in ministers will have done nothing to assist this. The Hawk Board contends that the proposed increase (in one case from nil to £100) will do nothing to protect wild hawks and falcons; quite the reverse. One falcon breeder said: "It is maddening. Just as we seem to make progress there is a cabinet reshuffle and we have to start all over again."

Millions of the public (from school children to corporate days out) experience birds of prey each year and the report shows that some 3,000 full time equivalent jobs and 300 businesses exist because of falconry, creating an annual turnover between £8.5 and £10 million, largely for the rural economy.

"Falconry is in good heart, growing in popularity, self-sustaining and self-regulated," says Jim Chick. "We have always known this. Now we need others to recognise it and the facts contained in this report provide ample evidence."

An electronic version of the Audit can be found on the Hawk Board website [www.hawkboard/cff.org.uk](http://www.hawkboard/cff.org.uk)

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

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# Traditionalist!

## *What's wrong with*



Hawking in mid-October

**D**uring a recent conversation at the Falconry Festival a chance remark set me off on a trail of thought that has resulted in this article. A fellow falconer and I were discussing the pros and cons of hybrid hawks and falcons and their place in modern falconry. I expressed the view that although I had no desire to see others not being able to acquire and fly hybrids if they so wished, I personally did not like them and had no wish to fly one.

At this point two other people butted into the conversation and asked why on earth I didn't like hybrids and made the remark "Don't tell me you're a purist and a b\*\*\*\*y traditionalist". Despite the fact

that these people had decided to join in a private conversation, I carefully explained why I didn't personally like hybrids and why I had no desire to fly one. My own view is that hybrids, particularly falcons, are easier to hunt with than pure species and that they tip the balance of the hunt very much in favour of the falconer. On further discussion it turned out that those who had decided to join in someone else's conversation wanted to sing the praises of Peri Lanners. I can only assume Peri is some form of derivation of Peregrine and therefore a Peregrine Lanner hybrid was having its virtues extolled. But, as the conversation progressed it transpired that this hybrid falcon was being held in high regard as a

display falcon not a hunter. Flying displays are not falconry and a great many people who give excellent and entertaining flying displays are not falconers nor do they have any desire to be falconers. Some public display givers are falconers of the highest order but the two disciplines do not necessarily go hand-in-hand.

### **A place in modern falconry**

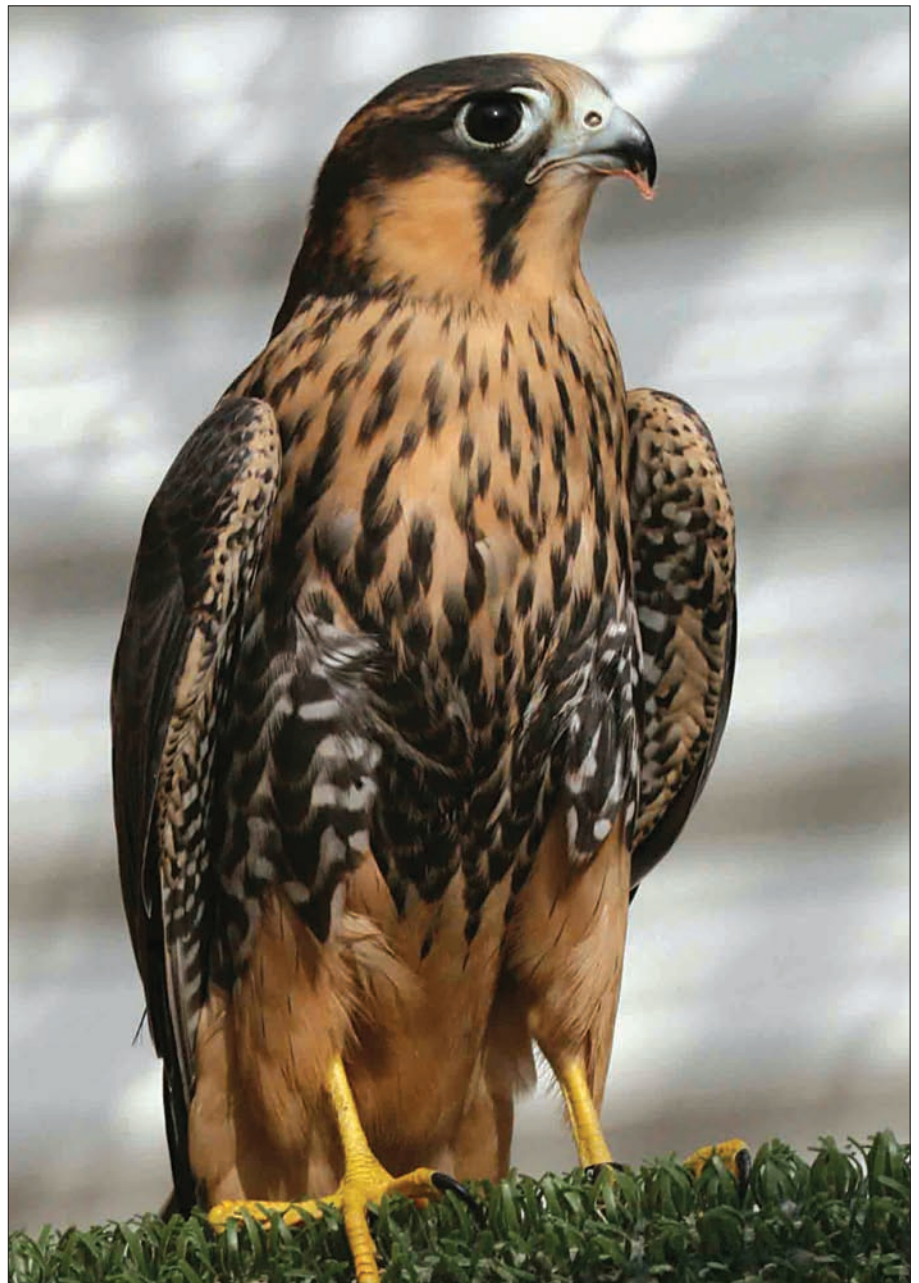
Gyr/Peregrines, Gyr/Sakers and Perlins have found a place in modern falconry and I'm sure they will be around for a great many years to come. Prairie/Peregrines and Saker/Peregrines seem to have fallen out of the group of fashionable hybrids to have and very few are being produced now. The minute

# that?

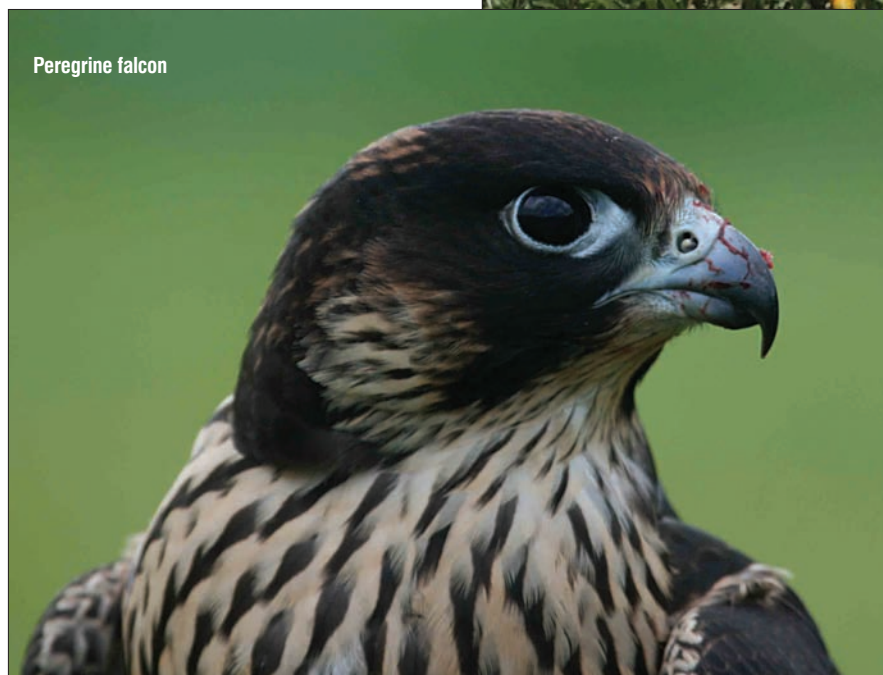
you state that you have no desire to own and fly a hybrid people think that you are automatically against them. I can only speak for myself when I say I have no desire to see them banned or those that wish to fly and hunt with them excommunicated to some form of falconry limbo. It is simply that, I personally would rather fly a bird which nature has honed over centuries of evolution.

The thing that stuck in my mind long after the festival was over was that the words traditionalist and purist had been hurled almost as insults. So, do I consider myself a purist and something of a traditionalist?

I would not say that I am a purist in the strict sense or as the word is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary. But I do care passionately for the history of falconry and that all branches of the sport should carry on as well as new ones being heartily encompassed if they meet the basic requirements of the sport. That is, that the flights are sporting and are between a natural predator and its prey in the natural environment of the prey



Peregrine/Aplomado Hybrid



Peregrine falcon

species. If there is to be any tipping of the balance it should always be in favour of the prey as opposed to the predator. Falconry is and always has been, first and foremost a field sport and the aim of the falconer is to catch quarry with his or her hawk or falcon. But the way in which the quarry is caught should be of great significance to the falconer. Anyone other than a pot hunter wants to see flights of quality where the flying prowess of the hawk or falcon is tested to the full. It is to be hoped that a fit and healthy hawk that

puts in sterling performances in the field will be justly rewarded by catching its fair share of quarry. I can think of a great many flights in my own falconry career, both with hawks and falcons, which have ended with the quarry getting the better of its pursuer. But the flights stick in the mind because they were truly sporting contests and the eventual outcome was of very little significance. Ask any coursing enthusiast about sporting days they have enjoyed. The kill is the least important aspect of the day's proceedings.

Do I consider myself a traditionalist? Yes, I do, despite the fact that I try different branches of the sport where possible and have flown a number of, what would be considered, exotic species in this country. For example, I am a great fan of both Prairie and Aplomado falcons and have flown both of them regularly against quarry here in the UK as well as in their native countries.

There would be those that would argue that to fly, what some consider, an exotic is no different to flying a hybrid. Everyone is entitled to their opinion but I truly believe that in this case the opinion would be an erroneous one. If we take rook hawking as an example then I believe I can illustrate with clarity my personal point of view on the subject. The traditional falcon for this flight has always been the Peregrine with the odd Saker joining its ranks over the course of the last 50 years or so. The Rook and Peregrine are relatively evenly matched when it comes to flying ability and the Rook makes up for what it lacks in power and pace with cunning and guile. The falconer must select his slip with the utmost care if he is to give his falcon a decent chance of catching such a clever adversary. There will be several different considerations to be acted upon in those vital seconds leading up to the removal of the falcon's hood. Wind direction and strength as well as proximity and direction of cover and any natural obstacles that could ruin a good flight.

But with the use of a large powerful hybrid such as a Gyr/Peregrine or Gyr/Saker then wind strength and to some degree direction will not be so important. Nor will the proximity of light cover as hybrids are likely to crash into cover after their prey. Something a Peregrine would simply not do. Hybrid vigour tends to make cross bred falcons more aggressive and determined when pursuing quarry. Some may consider this an admirable



Barbary falcon

trait and will be pleased that the bag will probably grow in size because of it. I like to think that if a Rook has bested my falcon and made what it believes is the safety of cover it should be allowed to go on its way and the falcon taken down to the lure.

### Breaking with tradition

I have broken with tradition, in that I have flown several Prairie Falcons over the years at the sable quarry. But the flight is the same as with a pure Peregrine with the exception that the Prairie does seem capable of stooping a little harder and will do its best to chivy a rook out of light cover should it have been successful in making it to such a haven. It will stoop repeatedly at the cover trying to break the nerve of the rook and make it take to the air again. But this tactic rarely works and normally the Prairie is taken down to the lure just as a Peregrine would be.

When it comes to Aplomado Falcons I mainly fly them off of the fist at magpies and have tremendous sport with them. The Aplomado is not so big as to intimidate the magpie and some superb sport is to be had flying this cleverest of all adversaries. I have been granted a quarry licence this season to fly starlings with my male Aplomado

and am looking forward to the new season with relish. It would be fair comment to say that flying Aplomado Falcons here in the UK can hardly be considered traditional. On the other hand, generations of falconers have tried what have been called exotics and they have slowly been integrated into our everyday falconry. Barbaries and Red Naped Shaheens are two cases in point and it wasn't that long ago that Red Tailed Hawks and Harris Hawks were considered almost as playthings and that their popularity would never catch on here in Britain.

But I am still very much a traditionalist in that I like to see the sport I love carried out with passion and feeling. It gives me great pleasure to see falconers who count the quality of the flight way and above the number of quarry ultimately taken. I have a very deep regard for the history of our sport and am very much aware of the fact that the actions and attitudes of my generation of falconers help to shape the actions of the next.

On reflection, I am happy to be thought of as something of a purist and a traditionalist, which is probably just as well as I am comfortable with my hawking and obtain endless pleasure and satisfaction from the sport I love.

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# The Festival of Falconry

## Dear Editor

Like everyone else who attended, I thought the festival was by far the best falconry event I have ever attended and in my 40-plus years as a practising falconer, I have attended a few. For once, it was all about falconers and falconry and covered virtually every conceivable topic to please all tastes. I attended on the Saturday and I expect some will remember me, I was the odd-ball wandering around with a fox lure half the morning. This was for use by the Kazakh eagle falconers and had been requested by Alan Gates but it took about two hours to find him, hence my wandering around with this unusual appendage. The lure actually belonged to George Mussared, I was merely the courier. I will say this though, a large fox lure is certainly an ice-breaker. I could have sold it several times over and the Martial Eagle on the weathering ground nearly went crackers after it. It watched me intensely all the way round. The lure introduced me to many falconers whom I probably would never have actually met and as a result experienced many interesting conversations, even if some did have to be translated.

The whole atmosphere was so friendly. Everyone was smiling and in their element. The falconers from abroad really made a great difference and I thank them for showing us all so many aspects of a sport that we universally share. The pack of postcards that the Arab falconers gave us all must have cost a fortune to produce but it was such a lovely gesture, I will treasure them.

The George Edward Lodge Trust had a fascinating display of the artist's works. I have been a Lodge admirer for many years and so Brian Bird's exhibit was a real treat for me and I suspect for many others, for raptor art has

long been closely linked with falconry. Many falconers treasure their works by Lodge and so the relaunch of the Trust to promote the life and works of this extraordinary man is a worthwhile and remarkable achievement. Well done and best wishes for its future.

Also, of historical interest, was the exhibit put on by The British Falconers' Club (BFC). I personally was delighted with this and to see original letters written by Major Guy Aylmer and other past hawking personalities was fascinating. The highlight was when I was handed the Goering bronze falcon. This was a privilege, which I am sure many experienced over the weekend. I hope this priceless artefact finds a permanent place where all can view it. I once met Renz Waller who was Field Marshall Hermann Goering's falconer, so handling the bronze added that little extra spice for me. The photographs in the tent of past personalities were also of great interest, this is falconry history at its best. Well done to the BFC for allowing us all this wonderful opportunity.

As an eagle falconer myself, I was naturally biased by the presence of the Kazakh eagle falconers. A full dwelling (yurt) was set up and it reminded me of a tardis. It didn't look all that big from the outside but those who went in, myself included, could not fail to be amazed at the size and plush coverings decorating the entire dwelling. It was fantastic. The colours were unbelievable. For those who didn't venture inside, the treat of a lifetime was missed.

I have only one grouse (pardon the pun) and this has already been mentioned. The shortage of food outlets. My son and I queued for an hour for a venison burger but when it finally came to our turn, the venison was all gone and we had to make do

with guinea fowl burgers. No comment. The stall holders told me that they had sold out of everything and hadn't got a clue what they were going to do on the Sunday, as they had nothing left. Someone suggested a visit to Tesco but this was frowned upon. However, during our wait we befriended three Portuguese falconers (who, incidentally, had the last of the venison) giving us the opportunity to learn all about hawking in Portugal. Shortage of game is an issue there, apparently and they were amazed at the amount of game they had seen in our fields on their way to the festival. I have an invitation to hawk in Portugal as a result. It was great meeting you guys and made the burger wait more bearable. However, an hour taken out of wandering around was something of a waste. More food outlets are a definite must if the festival is to be repeated and I do hope so.

Fortunately, there were no fun fairs and stalls selling anything and everything non falconry or field sports related to mar the atmosphere. This is a failing, which seems to afflict the annual Falconers Fair. I appreciate that this sort of thing is probably to cater for the other halves and the kids, while Dad plays with the real issues but it does detract into something of a Sunday market, which is a shame, as I look forward to the event every year. However, this is a separate issue, I digress.

The displays were of a high quality, despite the intrusion by wild raptors. I was in the burger queue when the training kite had to be taken down due to the falcon being pestered by wild birds. Interesting spectacle though. It was something to see when all the world's falconers, in national costume, paraded around the area. This again, was a first and the Hawk Board and other organisers must be congratulated



on a well thought out programme.

The LANTRA award tent was also an important aspect. I intend to do this myself. Yes, I have been flying hawks since I was a boy, so what. I believe that this is the right step forward. We need to be seen as a responsible body and regulating ourselves, before someone else does it for us! It does not matter how long we have been practising the sport or how good we think we are, there are many out there who would love to see the last of us. If Nick Fox and other stalwarts of our sport can do it, there is no excuse for the rest of us. They are leading by example and this can only be good for falconry as a whole. This is a serious issue and we should all follow their lead. I am not preaching here, we all have a choice but at least think about it, you know it makes sense. I sound like Del Boy now!

I could go on about the individual stalls, such as those from Austria, Germany, China and Japan, The International Falconry Forum, Honeybrook Farm, Coch-Y-Bonddu Books, where I always spend a small fortune, the various art stalls where the

art work sets even higher standards. I was sorry to hear that the well known artist Ron David Digby was taken ill. I called in to his exhibit several times to see him but it was only when Andrew Ellis, another rather well known artist, told me that Ron was ill that I became aware of the fact. I hope you have recovered now, Ron.

No matter what type of hawk you fly, there was enough equipment for sale to satisfy all tastes. I have never seen so many Gyr falcons of all shades in my life. I understand, though, that one of these great birds was stolen on the Sunday. What a shame that there are those amongst us who can stoop (again, pardon the pun) so low.

I wish I could have stayed for both days, as I'm sure I must have missed things but even so, I came away from the festival on a complete high. We even saw a Red Kite over the M4 on our way home. The main memories for me apart from the visual feast was the absolute friendliness of everyone. All those nations with one common interest and we all got on like a house on fire. It can be done and the festival proved it.

Obviously for me, being an eagle fanatic, seeing the Kazakh eagle falconers was something I shall never forget and the trip was worth it for that alone. It was nice to see a number of live Golden Eagles too. I was asked to take mine but my female was still deep in moult with many primary and train featherers in blood so I dare not risk damaging them. I also caught up with some old friends who I have not seen for a great many years and this again was another good aspect of the festival.

In conclusion, for those of you who couldn't make it or thought it was just going to be another Falconers Fair, you could not have been more wrong. Everyone I met was unanimous in their praise for this event and I cannot wait for the next one. I just hope that if the next one is held abroad, which is only fair perhaps, I hope enough of the British contingent attend as those from other shores found the time to attend this one. Again, a big thank you for all the hard work that the organisers obviously endured. Your work was not in vain.

**Dr David Glynne Fox**

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# Neo and the Novice Game Hawker

I sat in the stubble field in a t-shirt, as despite being the middle of October it was incredibly mild. Near me a beautiful pale male gyrfalcon was plucking partridge feathers, flicking them away to gently settle all around and very soon they would be all that was left to show of the spectacular events that had taken place just minutes before. The young falcon's name is Neo and ever since his life had

become entwined in mine (I collected him from the breeder in Wales back in August) our lives had been building to this moment.

Initial manning had required a lot of patience, as although he fed on the fist on the first day of trying, it was over a week before he would sit calmly on the glove, for even a second, without food. Therefore, manning sessions were spent with him picking away at a rabbit

backbone or similar thing. He was soon jumping to the glove a full leash length for food but as soon as the food was gone he would start to bate and although he would regain the glove it would only be to instantly bate again. Then, suddenly one day he simply decided that he would sit on the glove calmly as if in that instant he had decided that he would allow me to be part of his world and let me teach him to be a falconry bird. From that

point on he didn't look back. Sessions on the creance being called off to the lure flashed past and he was soon flying free and building up fitness from being stooped to the lure. Now, he had decided to play ball he had proved to be a fast learner.

### Kite training

The next stage was to train him to the kite. In preparation I had been tying the kite to the washing line in my garden while he was out weathering and he soon paid no attention to it. A couple of meals fed on the lure underneath the kite proved that he had no fear of it and so we moved onto suspending the lure off the ground underneath the kite while it hung in the garden. As soon as he was taking the lure suspended from the kite in the garden without hesitation we moved onto flying the kite properly at the farm. Initially, the kite was flown up to a few hundred feet with the lure attached much further down the line so that it was hanging just feet above the ground. We then progressed in stages rapidly moving the kite and the lure up until the kite was up to 500ft (the maximum allowed on the permit issued to me from the CAA for this venue) with the lure just 15ft below the kite. This hybrid's energy levels were something else and progression up to 500ft took only a week. The only problem starting to show itself was that Neo had, on a couple of occasions, left the glove and gone and sat on a telegraph pole before deciding to head off for the kite.

With everything looking good, with Neo learning and getting fit at an impressive rate, it was now time to get him entered and on the next trip to the farm the kite was left in the van as we set out on foot looking for a good first opportunity. An early season brace of pheasant were spotted as they clamped down near the edge of a ploughed field. A perfect set up for a first flight. Hood off and up he goes. Looking good, gaining a lot of height as he has learned from all those sessions on the kite. But he's not over me and he's drifting off higher and higher and further and further away. Then I see why – he comes down in a stoop two huge fields away and up comes a large flock of wood pigeon and he's now chasing them round the hedge rows. I run across the fields and negotiate several enormous stinging nettle infested ditches to find him sat on the ground exhausted

by his efforts. I take him back to where I'm sure the pheasant have stayed hidden in the furrows. Hood off again but this time he's not ringing to gain height, just straight off back in the direction of where he had fun with the pigeons. When I eventually pick him up I decide that enough is enough for today. With the falcon hooded on the glove we head back to the van past where the pheasant were spotted and sure enough I put up a cock and a hen that fly for hundreds of yards across a large barren field. It would have been a perfect slip had Neo not drifted off like that.

### Frantic lure swinging

The next day, as soon as the hood came off, he shot off the glove in a straight line. Despite my protestations and frantic lure swinging he wouldn't look over his shoulder, he just kept going, focussed on something I couldn't see until the distant haze enveloped him and he was gone. Another great set up wasted. I picked him up two miles away as he was chasing an indignant kestrel around a tree (this old master of mobbing other bigger hawks was in no trouble from my young upstart) and with the falcon back on the glove I slogged it back across ploughed fields and ditches to the van, exhausted and full of thought. I realised that in moving quickly onto the kite after getting the bird free I had actually trained my tyro game hawk to fly out of the hood. As soon as the hood was off he was looking for the lure hanging under the kite. In the absence of the kite he then focussed on anything with wings in sight and off he went.

What then followed was some back to basics lure flying to re-focus his attention onto me and although his recall to the lure was instant he still showed a strong urge to chase check. Most of the attempts to leave him to build up some height were resulting in him raking off to chase pigeons, crows, lapwings or whatever else he could find. Fortunately, he did not succeed in actually catching any of this forbidden fruit. At this point I had to think hard about whether or not I should give up on making a game hawk out of him and concentrate instead of flying him out of the hood at crows, something I was much more familiar with and something I was now sure he would excel at. There were also plenty of crows about so finding good slips would not be difficult. For my own reasons however I desperately wanted to experience

game hawking from a waiting on falcon that I had trained and so I resolved to persevere.

Sensitive lure training recovered some control of my falcon but had done nothing to get back to the pitches achieved on the kite, although this was still used occasionally. What I decided was needed was to get this bird entered on partridge or pheasant asap! What followed was a series of fluffed opportunities, mostly at partridge and ruined largely because of my inexperience causing the birds to flush when the falcon was out of position, not helped by the ever lowering pitch that Neo was taking. Of course, the very best opportunities were ruined by Neo leaving the glove and shooting off in chase of check (he wasn't fully cured of this vice yet) and one time even because of mobbing by a wild tiercel (the first sighting of a peregrine I have had in this part of Hertfordshire). He was showing real determination but most flushes were ending up in protracted tail chases and ultimately failure. Things were getting to a point at which my luck had to change or I'd never do justice in making this amazing bird into the game hawk I'd dreamt of.

### Wednesday 11th

I arranged to 'work from home', a wonderful concept for a falconer as it will mean plenty of flying throughout the season! So, off to Barry's farm. It's not a big farm but is very open with a few large fields and at least two or three resident coveys of grey partridge that are sometimes joined by visiting red legs from the neighbouring shoot. As I got out of the van I could hear a covey of partridge calling not far into the field. I didn't realise quite how close they were and as I took two steps into the field with the falcon still hooded I flushed a covey of about six grey partridge. Not to worry, as not hard pressed they only flew 100yds and settled back into the ploughed earth. Unlikely that greys would move when still in the open (unlike their red legged cousins), and I'd see them if they did. Up goes Neo. He makes some acceptable height for his present behaviour (maybe even up to 200ft) and I run in to where the partridge are. Nothing. Neo continues to circle but his attention starts to wander as I run around wishing I had a dog, these partridge have to be here somewhere! Not wanting to push the falcon's patience (he's already drifting off and losing height) the next time he comes over I get the



Neo on a block perch

lure out and make the best of a bad job. As I bend down to pick up the falcon the partridge make a break for it only 10 yards away from me.

I allow Neo time to relax and regain himself and start looking for another opportunity. Just when I am about to give up a cock pheasant flies out of a nearby copse and into one of the horse paddocks. Perfect, these paddocks are fenced to the ground with sheep fencing and the cock bird is in the long grass on the edge of the paddock - he has nowhere to run (the sheep fencing will not be a risk to the falcon as it is low and the flush will take the pheasant up and away from the paddock). It then gets even better, as I negotiate myself over the fence and electric wire I see the head of a hen pheasant disappear as she tucks down in long grass very near me in the paddock. Up goes Neo, not as high as before and not keeping as close, but as he comes over I run in to flush the hen pheasant, but she's not there. Not to worry, on Neo's next pass overhead I run in to where I had marked down the cock bird, but he has done a 'Houdini' as well.

I can't believe it! I've no idea where the pheasant have disappeared to but they have, so lure out and down comes Neo having learned very little from his day out. As I climb out of the paddock I receive an almighty shock from the electric fence to really top off the day. And then to make things worse I decided to do some lure work. It was a stupid mistake as the bird was fed up and had nothing to show for his efforts so far and just headed off to a telegraph pole and sat for 10 minutes. On the way home I am dejected by my own failure at training this bird and resolve to make the necessary changes. From now on the bird is only going to be flown if I can guarantee a good flush for him.

#### Thursday 13th

It's my birthday and with a whole day off work to indulge myself I'm off to the big farm early in the morning. A quick chat with Matt the farmer and I'm out driving the farm tracks looking for game with my fancy new binoculars (a birthday present from my long suffering wife). Carefully scanning fields that are just showing the early growth of winter wheat with the

powerful optics I can now check out every likely looking area and every mole hill that to the unaided eye looked like a pheasant clamped down to the earth. Today they are all mole hills. After some time searching likely fields, through the binoculars I see what is quite clearly the head of a grey partridge looking back at me only 50 yards away. He is at least another 150 yards from the nearest hedge and offers a great opportunity. Out of the van, using it to shield my activity from the partridge, and sort out Neo's equipment. Check the partridge - he's still there, double check that I know exactly where he is and then put up Neo. His outrun takes him low right over where the partridge is. It stays rock still clamped down into the earth, now I know he will sit and wait to be flushed as he's fully aware of the danger in the sky above. Neo starts to make a bit of height but off to one side now. As he does come back over I start to run in to the partridge when all of a sudden a covey of them get up virtually at my feet (what a fool I was to think that the partridge I'd seen was on its own). Too soon! The falcon is not yet overhead, but he sees the birds rise and coming in at a low angle he is pumping hard and gaining on the partridge rapidly. He is however too far behind to make up the ground before the whole covey reach the hedgerow. Another 10 yards and he would have been amongst them. Lure out and down comes Neo.

#### The farm

This farm is big but not everywhere is ideal as some of it is not really open enough for flying a falcon, and this is compounded by a lot of public access, roads and pylons meaning that many of the fields are not safe to fly or are marginal for the type of flight that is desired. The next covey are found in one of these marginal fields. They are red legs and seem to be youngsters of the year, at least they don't seem to be so easily spooked as older birds and they sit out in the open as I ready the falcon and let him go. Immediately on seeing the falcon the partridge are off, running before Neo has made height and he is completely out of position when the covey takes flight towards the nearby wood. Neo's chase is visibly half hearted, he knew he didn't stand a chance and I knew I should have passed this one by. This lack of success is starting to get worrying and what happens next confirms these fears.

We move onto another large field of sprouting winter wheat that the farmer has told me has a good covey of red legged partridge on it. I get out of the van to look round the edge of a hedgerow and there they are, only 10 yards from me. They see me too and without panic start to walk quickly away further out into the field. This field dips sharply away, and with the partridge now in this dip they will be out of sight of the falcon being released and as he comes over them he will naturally have height above them and they will have some distance to the nearest cover, a great set up! Up he goes and as he heads out over the dip I charge forward. The partridge are there, running and then flying. The falcon is in a great position above them when they get up but he barely dips a wing in the direction of the covey now in full flight. Another refusal, this is not looking good. I call him down to the lure and a disappointed falconer and his despondent charge head home to contemplate.

#### Friday 14th

Back out to the big farm and back to scanning the fields with my new binoculars. Nearly three hours later and not a partridge or pheasant has been seen anywhere, what a difference to yesterday when we were tripping over them. So, off to Barry's farm. Again, nothing can be seen so we head off for a walk around the large field stopping regularly to scan ahead for the sight of an alert head bobbing at us from out of the ploughed ground. Again nothing is to be seen. Then, just as I'm about to give up I'm sure I hear the faint sound of a partridge calling to its covey. I look gingerly round a nearby bush and there against the ditch line in the neighbouring field are about a dozen red legged partridge. I am shielded from the covey by the bush and although they are only 20 yards away they are unaware of our presence.

I release Neo and he makes some height, maybe 100ft or so, although away to the side of us. Copious whistling and glove waving brings him back towards us and as he approaches I run in to flush but in my enthusiasm yet again I am too soon ("stupid, stupid me" I am thinking!) and the covey gets up before he is overhead. But with the height that he does have he comes down in a shallow stoop with enough speed to catch up with the covey before they reach cover and he powers right through them. Despite passing

through the covey he doesn't connect with any of them and now I'm worrying that he wasn't really trying. The covey all put into the field margin and Neo heads off and is gaining height again.

As I walk forward partridge start to bust from all over the place, this was partridge city! So I stand still and watch Neo gain a better pitch than before. As he comes over a lone partridge takes its chance before it's too late to make good its escape. Neo is out of position and doesn't even dip a wing. Was that a refusal? I am now getting worried. He comes over head and I run forward but nothing flushes. As he passes to the side over the large ploughed field I run across the broken soil in case there are more partridge out there and sure enough a covey of about a dozen get up right under the falcon. He's not high now but they are right under him and a short vertical stoop and he passes through the rising covey. Did he miss again? Was he not trying? But as the thought goes through my head he throws up looking over his shoulder. He must have struck one! And sure enough he rolls over and comes to ground to claim his prize.

He had administered the coup de gras before I got to him and I sat and let him take his pleasure and feel the satisfaction in fulfilling his most basic survival instincts. I was elated, at last our luck had come good. I was so very proud of my hunting companion and said a prayer for the life of the partridge that had been given so that we could take this step along our life journey. I was also aware that we still had a lot of work ahead of us to achieve our goals.

#### Saturday 15th

With lunch at my father's planned I didn't have much time so I was up at the big farm at the crack of dawn. Luck was on our side, as the first field I drove to had a covey of grey partridge feeding next to a thin hedge line 100yds from the first place I stopped the van to scan the fields. I put Neo up and he was flying with a more determined wing beat than usual as he headed out over a wood behind us. This wood had pigeons moving about in the canopy and I was concerned that his enthusiasm was due to looking for an opportunity at the pigeons. Whistling and swinging the glove around my head got his attention and he came back towards me at a respectable height (maybe about 250ft). I ran forward and the covey bust

but decided to head back to the hedge line when they saw the incoming falcon. Neo came down in a beautiful almost vertical stoop which intersected with the covey just as they reached cover and it wasn't clear if he'd made contact with one of them or not. He threw up, looking over his shoulder and came down to earth.

When I got to him he was sat on the ground empty footed. Walking forward to pick him up I virtually stepped on a partridge that was hiding on the ground right in front of him. This must have been the bird Neo was looking for, now seeking sanctuary in the bare earth from the stooping demon. At that moment the partridge rocketed off and so did Neo in pursuit but the partridge had a good head start and easily got to the sanctuary of the copse in the middle of the adjacent stubble field. If that partridge had been hit by Neo in his initial stoop it was showing no sign of weakness now. Knowing that the rest of the covey were still in the hedge in front of me I called Neo back over. He wasn't very high but was well placed when I flushed a single partridge that decided to head across the big stubble field. It didn't stand a chance of reaching the copse as Neo was gaining ground pumping down in a shallow stoop. He didn't make contact at the first attempt but he showed his power as he regained his ground and struck the departing bird hard into the stubble, a wingover and it was his.

Neo had been like a different bird today. The speed he showed was awesome, an outward expression of his new found inner identity of the awesome predator that he is. Now he knows what taking game is all about I am very excited about what will happen the next time I manage to get game to flush cleanly underneath him.

So, we have at last had our luck, Neo has shown his ability and I have climbed a long way up the learning curve towards being a flyer of a game falcon but we both still have a long way to go. Now we need to build on our success and concentrate on style. To this end, I need to have the basic principle that Turner teaches more firmly embedded in my head. Every time I release Neo I must have the opportunity to flush quarry for him in such a situation that he has every chance of making contact. Only then will I be able to continue on my quest for watching the stoop of a high flying falcon hunting with true style.

# The Festival –



Falconer from Turkmenistan

**T**he Festival of Falconry happened because a number of factors came together at the same time. In 2005 we formed the

Falconry Heritage Trust and very soon after that, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) resolved to make a submission to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to have its falconry recognised as part of its Intangible (or Living) Cultural Heritage. I was asked to drive that submission and as I write this I'm in another Inter-Governmental Committee Meeting, this time in Tokyo.

Suddenly heritage and culture were attracting attention worldwide. At the same time in Britain, some of us felt a little dissatisfied with the way that falconry was being presented to the public. Also, following the ban on hunting with dogs, it became very clear that falconry would receive no favours from the other fieldsports. If we don't fight our own corner, nobody else will.

British falconry too is coming of age. Some of you will remember the 1960's when we had to make all our own equipment and a few diffident individuals fielded questions at the early Game Fairs. Now, numbers have swollen and people have understood that falconry as an activity is big enough to need an active supply industry run by full-time professionals.

So a few of us got together – Nick and Lyn Havemann-Mart, Jim Chick, Nick Kester, Mark Upton, my wife Barbro and I. I envisaged an event with certain principles – ground rules, if you like. We wanted an event that was for Falconers and by Falconers. Not shooting, not fishing, not another Country Fair.

An event that was open to all – regardless of nationality, age, creed or colour, amateur or professional. An event that would celebrate the international brotherhood of Falconry.

An event that would link us to our past – Falconers who have come before us and left us such a rich heritage and we wanted people to bring their own hawks!

# the inside story

From those outline principles came a succession of decisions – where should it be? So we visited a number of country houses and parks. We were looking for a venue near to the London airports and the links with Europe. This was essential for foreign visitors. Through our contacts we found Englefield. The owners – the Benyon family – and the manager, Ken MacDiarmid, were enthusiastic and we all loved the place – our search was over.

We decided a date by process of elimination. Young hawks are hardly ready before July and some of us go hawking by August. We needed a breathing space of two weeks away from the Game Fair – and that left 14-15 July. Could Englefield do the date – yes, they could!

We particularly wanted the Festival to be designed to bring Falconers together. To get people talking and heal old or imagined wounds and so we wanted the feel of a hunting camp, with fires, food, music and national clothes. So we made up camps as far as possible on a national basis and it worked! Falconers from several countries including Belgium, Germany and Austria found themselves serving drinks to each other and standing side-by-side to represent their countries to the world. They realised that they have more to share than divides them.

Of the 60 or more falconry countries, we aimed to attract about half. But how to do it? Many of the Falconers had no money. The UAE graciously donated a budget to provide assisted travel. Meanwhile, Jevgeni Shergalin spent a frustrating three months in our offices organising all the visas. Kazakhstan came up trumps and their Embassy sent a big yurt and 15 people. Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan were touch and go but the visas came after a lot of increasingly desperate phone calls. Mongolia sadly fell through. Making contact with the Falconers out on the Steppe and arranging passports and visas just proved impossible in the time scale. The same also happened to China but Alan Gates pulled all the stops out and at the last minute our friends could come.

You don't come from China just for the

weekend – most of the overseas visitors came for a week and we had to buy or hire all the tents. Nick at Honeybrook stepped in and soon his lorry and staff were erecting tents and we were erecting yurts. Also, what to feed them? About 10 sheep and 10 deer got re-cycled!

But I'm rushing ahead. First, we had to tell the world about it. Angie Chick set up the Festival website and was soon fielding all manner of questions and bookings – a nightmare job! Nick Kester was busy plying the media and arranging pamphlets and posters. Not easy when it is a first time event – how do you market something that doesn't exist?

We also had to sell the idea to the world Falconry community. First stop, the Hawk Board – would it host the Festival? As many of us are on it, Jim Chick, the Chairman was soon able to say 'motion carried unanimously'. The UAE too was soon on board. As well as sponsoring travel, HE Mohamed Al Bowardi agreed to sponsor the International Association for Falconry (IAF) and to provide a show piece UAE exhibit.

The British Falconers' Club and the IAF were less enthusiastic when I put it to them. Would it be a commercial falconry circus – and anyway – who would pay for it?

Festivals don't come cheap. We didn't expect much change out of £100,000 quite apart from each nation's costs. From the start, Nick and Lyn Havemann-Mart and my wife and I at International Wildlife Consultants (IWC) agreed to underwrite it so that precious Hawk Board funds would not be jeopardised. Getting into the swing of sponsorship, Terry Large and I went to the Welsh Assembly and came away with £2,000 from the Welsh Tourist Board. Enterprising Scottish Falconers via Andrew Knowles-Brown also raised funding. Soon after that the bills were coming in too... Then we faced another problem - no birds! Avian flu had reached France and anyway most overseas falconers could not bring birds. A few back-of-the-envelope calculations soon revealed a taxing shopping list:

'One dozen Golden Eagles...'

Phone calls to eagle people. Half not talking to the other half! Eventually after much agonising Alan Gates and Karl Leadley came up trumps. Eagles and their generous owners appeared and they were magnificent.

'Two dozen Goshawks'. Ever tried prising a beloved Goshawk off someone to lend to a perfect stranger to take into an arena? Are we mad or what? But yes, a few very brave souls lent their birds and it made all the difference.

'Four dozen assorted falcons. Charlotte Hill was ringing around and found some lovely birds – pretty merlins, peregrines for the Dutch and lanner falcons – meanwhile Nick HM, Jim Chick and I emptied our moulting and rearing pens and jessed up another 40 or so. I'm pleased to tell you that after Tomas Kunca collected the last falcon back at the end, not a single feather on any of my falcons was so much as creased.

Now enquiries were coming in thick and fast and David Horobin at the Festival office was flat out. His shopping list of costumes was daunting and soon he was arranging all the arena events. Then, of course, the little matter of VIP invitations – 500 of them. Phone calls to the Middle East and Embassies. Massive spreadsheets of addresses and replies. Jevgeni was handling all the Russian correspondence, Jose Souto helped us with the Spanish, we bummed our way through in schoolboy French or used computer translation software for the more obscure letters. Jo Oliver was answering two phones at the same time whilst writing to half the Ambassadors of Europe and Asia.

'One dozen hawking horses'. My wife Barbro was 'Master of the Horse'. Soon we had some Turkmenian Akal Teke horses courtesy of Lorna Wynn and Lady Marina Bury and saddlery borrowed from the Royal Collection by Bridget Tempest, who was a triumph. We sent five hawking horses who variously had to go side saddle with Marcela Medkova from the Czech Republic with a merlin, to me as a Kazakh roughrider towing an eagle lure.

'Two carriages and pairs'. The Jarmans came with a beautiful Landau, an epitome

of elegance, while my brother-in-law, Jan Andreasson, brought his carriage from Sweden. Wearing a royal uniform and powdered wig supplied by the Austrians and with Lyn Russell from New Zealand as groom, I hardly recognised him.

Then, of course, the camels – none of the horses were used to camels. We couldn't put them into the arena together! But they really helped lend atmosphere to the UAE exhibit.

'A Noah's Ark of all the falconry dog breeds' – give that one to Diana Durman-Walters! Diana spent weeks organising all the dog owners and we saw a variety of handsome hawking dogs. As well as all the animals we wanted special exhibits and some very brave and generous people co-ordinated them. Mark Upton took on the Art Tent and was quickly booked out. Dee Mitchell made a huge effort and ran a very successful Education Exhibit that also showcased the LANTRA Awards. Gordon Mellor stepped in and made the very interesting Conservation Exhibit and Col Kent Carnie, Paul Beecroft and Peter Devers ran the Heritage tent between them. Neil Forbes not only organised the vet tent but also ran the weathering area and Duty Vets as well as his team providing veterinary seminars in the Seminar Tent run by Ben Crane.

I was particularly impressed by the British Clubs. Starting from cold they all in their own individual ways contributed with their own display tents, food and hosting overseas guests. The South East Falconry Group provided a whole arena event. As more British Falconers now realise what the Festival is trying to achieve there is clearly a big reservoir of enthusiasm and goodwill there that bodes well for a future event.

For us on the management team, the Festival was a logistical white water ride. Spreadsheets of arrivals of falconers at various airports. Cars, minibuses, daytrips generously offered by the Hawk Conservancy and Eagle Heights. Full English breakfast for 20 over an open campfire. Jo Oliver taking not only her mobile calls but all the re-directed Festival office calls. Lorries and horse trailers up and down the motorway. Dozens of untrained falcons to feed and house. Water, toilets, electricity. People locked out, people lost, crates of food. Taking Kyrgyz shopping in Sainsburys. Turkmenis discussing how to put up a yurt. The park deer eating all the signs so nobody knew which tent was which. Nobody to man



South Korea was represented at the festival

the entrance. Camping markers invisible and over everything the wettest summer in memory. Horror stories of huge events cancelled or wiped out.

Having non-stop arena events was ambitious. Try doing an unscripted event involving eagles, horses and Kazakhs who speak no English! Behind the scenes it was hectic, getting people sorted out with the right costumes, horses and birds. So much for VIP lunches – half a pork pie was my lunch, tacking up horses while Jim and Terry

kept the arena going!

But the highlight for many people was the Grand Parade of Nations. Seeing so many nations standing shoulder to shoulder, with their flags and their hawks was an emotional moment. It was the spirit of brotherhood that we were hoping to achieve. Afterwards – three days of moving horses and hawks, removing tents, pulling out stuck lorries. We were all shattered.

Was it worth it? Yes! Will we do it again? Watch this space....!



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# So You Want a



**T**his article basically wraps up and consolidates the two previous articles that I have put together for would-be Hawk keepers.

Hopefully, by now you will have realised that as popular as it is because of its clear ability and willingness to bond with its keeper, it is in fact a far more complex bird that needs to be understood. It becomes part of a team and you are part of that team. You need to develop an understanding with your bird – if you fail or cannot measure up to your bird's expectations, it will soon realise that you are not a team player and will relegate you to the side lines.

There are no little tricks or short cuts with the Harris Hawk, you need to have a sound knowledge of what is required and know your bird's background and history. Some authorities claim that a social imprint is the best bird to have, others will say that without doubt the best are parent reared birds taken at 14 /15 weeks. Most agree that the worse case scenario is the fully imprinted, hand reared Harris Hawk, the screaming alone is enough to put most people off the clear aggression that such a bird can display soon reinforces this opinion.

## **How long should a bird take to train?**

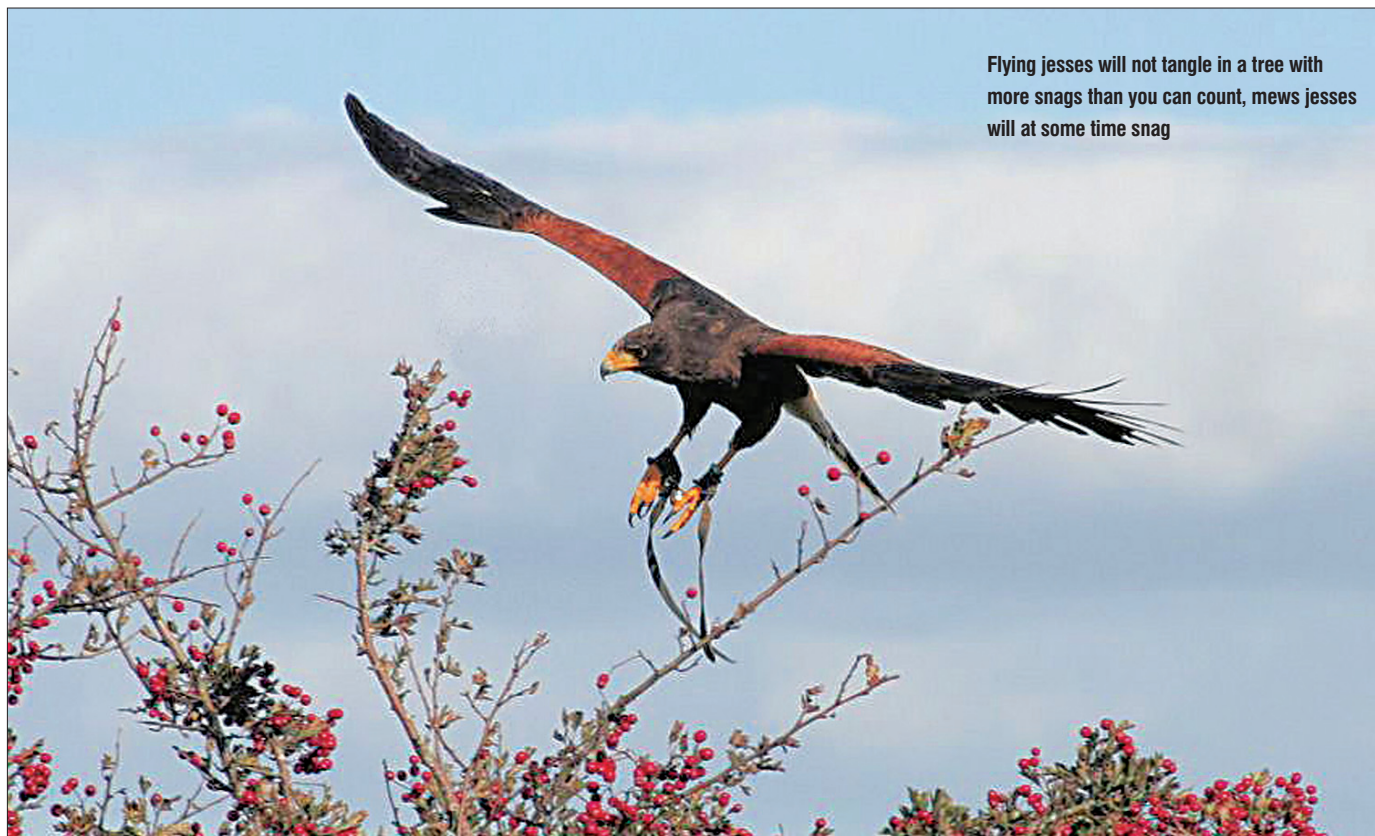
In simple terms, a bird should be flying to you at two weeks but that's only if you have been working with the bird for each day of that two weeks. Having a bird hooked up for the working week and only taking it out at the weekend is no good.

Making a mistake in that early bonding period can result in problems for the future. All sorts of 'things' can spook your hawk so anything new has to be introduced carefully. One of my birds hates my lawn mower – why, I have no idea – but as soon as I bring it out of the shed the bird begins to bait from its bow perch like a thing possessed.

Now lawn mowing is undertaken with the bird's welfare uppermost and has the bird bowed out in locations where it

Good vantage point

# Harris' Hawk? part 3



Flying jesses will not tangle in a tree with more snags than you can count, mews jesses will at some time snag

cannot see the lawn mower. Other birds dislike farm animals and that issue can be overcome by flying your bird on farms where it can see livestock and realise that your average cow, sheep or horse does not pose a threat.

Dogs are another issue all together and all three of my birds hate dogs. Other Harris Hawks revel in the presence of a dog as part of the team. Most Harris Hawks seem to realise that ferrets are part of the team. The use of ferrets is another huge topic and whole books have been written on the subject so I will keep it simple. Ferrets give you and your bird the chance of a flight on quarry that you would not see if you had not used a ferret to flush the rabbits out. Same goes with the dog. Dogs can find quarry in locations that you would bet your last wage packet that nothing was there but it was and using a dog and ferret as part of your team increases the chances of you flushing or bolting something for your bird to show that it too is part of the team.

But before you can hunt you need to have a bird fit and ready for the task ahead and that takes time and more time. If you do not have the time to fly your bird on a regular basis you should perhaps question why you are keeping it.

The bird's welfare should be paramount and it is easy to list the mistakes that you see and hear about. Bored birds will peck at their leashes and more than one Harris has undone its leash and flown off with its jesses and swivel in place just waiting to get snagged, resulting in your bird dangling upside down and condemned to a slow death by starvation.

### Creance Training

Training on a creance should be undertaken on flat open ground. Run the lawn mower over it first if possible because the light creance line will snag every bit of sticky-up grass that there is and that soon upsets the bird and ruins the training session and in those early stages you cannot afford to upset your bird.

I recently heard a story of a falconer flying his bird up into a tree while on a creance line. Such practice is simply asking for trouble as a bird will soon start to work up through the branches of any tree quickly tangling itself up (*check the picture above, the bird has lofted to a good vantage point but look at the snags for a bird trailing a creance line*). Despite all the horror stories some people still go on to make the same mistakes. Someone else and their bird has already made that mistake so why not learn and save you and your bird the grief that goes with the serious accident that is just waiting to happen? All aspects of your bird's training should be well thought out, smooth and trouble free. If something goes wrong stop and finish the session and come out on another day when the bird is more relaxed. Stressed out birds lead to stressed out falconers and the bird knows when you are on edge and that in turn sets off the same response in the bird and before you know it you are caught up in a vicious circle. So despite your intentions,



if something goes wrong call it a day.

Another basic mistake is to fly your birds with their normal jesses in place with gaping holes where the swivel goes. Use flying jesses as they are not likely to snag on a wire fence or in a tree. Each time I fly my birds the mew's jesses come off and get checked over and re-greased to keep them clean and supple.

### Big Issue

Weight is one of those big issues, not an exact science and sometimes difficult to get your head round. My female Harris is on the small side flying on the 2lb mark. I recently went out with a falconer friend who was flying a female of 2lb 6oz, so experience may suggest that you split the difference. At 2lb 3oz my bird would be long gone never to be seen again and at the same weight my friend's birds would be screaming for food, aggressive and not safe to be flown.

You need to know your bird and they should be on the scales on such a regular basis that it is second nature to them. As birds fly they get fitter and as such they put on weight so their flying weight goes up accordingly. A bird may be so responsive at home that it baits towards you when well above its usual flying weight but once you take the bird out of its regular surroundings it simply will not perform, remaining totally unresponsive.

Another bird will fly well at a particular weight but is loathe to hunt at that given weight and often you are only talking of ½ oz but that small amount on a bird weighing between 1lb 8oz and 2lb 6oz is a great deal.

### Weights

So you have a flying weight, a hunting weight and a fat weight and fat doesn't mean that your bird is fat, it's simply a term used for when a bird is above its flying weight. With weight another common mistake is to always keep a bird at its flying weight. To keep a bird fit and healthy it cannot be kept constantly at flying weight. You need to plan ahead – every bird needs to be allowed to gorge and really fill up with good quality food once a week, so plan ahead and if

Two pictures showing the new darker feathering showing through the older faded brown plumage, each bird being part way through the moult

fly on a particular day or for several days feed the bird up on the day prior to the period that you cannot fly and drop the weight back over the next few days so that it is back at flying weight for when you are next ready to fly.

Think about the food that you give a bird. Each time my birds fly their food is mixed with a teaspoon of cod liver oil and sprinkled with a multi vitamin supplement.

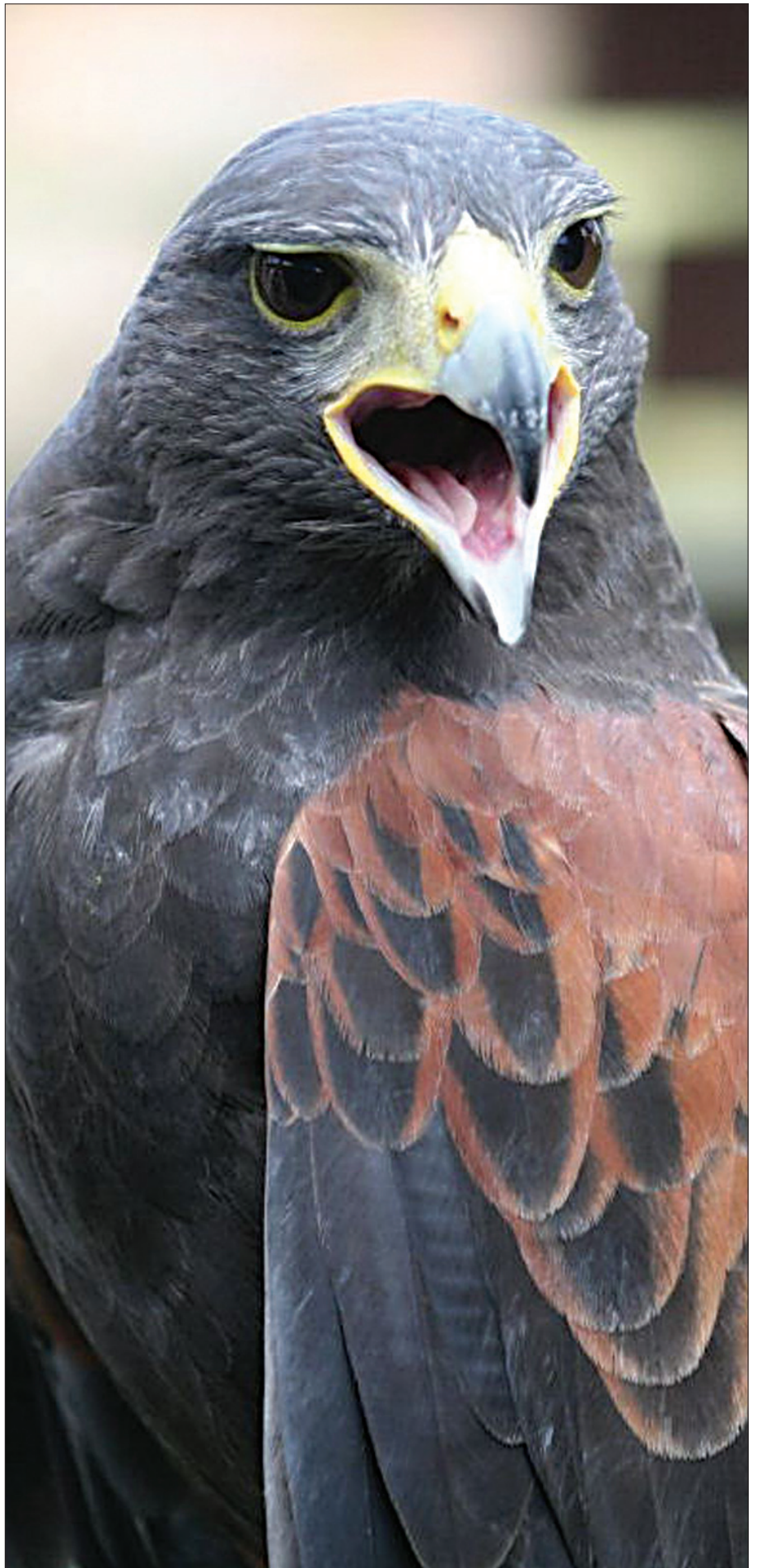
When a pheasant or rabbit is available they are given part of the carcass containing hard bone. As they strip off the meat they are coping their beaks to the correct shape – something that a bird simply fed on a day old chick cannot do.

When it is time for a bird to moult it needs a richer and more varied diet. Moulting takes a lot out of a bird and the finished product is only as good as you make it and it sometimes takes time. I got my first female Harris in 2001 as a two year old bird and had her hunting well in that first season but her feathering was poor and had no resilience against wet weather. It was not until 2005 that she had fully moulted out and acquired a degree of weather proof feathering and a plumage that was really nice to look at.

### Up and Flying

Once your bird is up and flying remember to fly it fitted with bells and a telemetry system. We have all heard that it is impossible to lose a Harris Hawk. If that is the case why do the IBR have dozens of lost and found Harris Hawks on their files? The two fastest ways I know of losing a Harris are to fly it when overweight and secondly to fly it on pheasant. A fit Harris will chase a fleeing pheasant over hundreds of yards through woodland and over hedges and rivers, passing out of your sight within moments. In such circumstances your bird is lost and gone – the only realistic way to get it back is to locate it by using a telemetry system.

So, enjoy the club, read about and discuss falconry and gain information, knowledge and some experience and make your team worth joining from the perspective of any Hawk.



A nicely moulted mature female Harris Hawk

Robert Blockey



Initially, Robert was attached to Number 15 Operational Training Unit in Harwell but this did not last long. On August 19th 1940, he heard the news that he was being posted abroad and it was to be Egypt. The following day he was granted 48 hours leave and most of that was spent with his family. His diary records that he then went to London with his mother and sister Peggy and met up with his brother Paul (also in the RAF). His other sister, Josey, had not been able to make it. They lunched at The Trocadero and then watched two films, *Convoy* which Robert described as 'pretty good but not quite as cheery as I would have liked' and then *The Saints Double Trouble* on which he commented, 'he needn't have troubled at all – I thought it blinking awful, so we left before the end'. Doubtless it was not so much the film being awful but also his thoughts of being parted from his family. His final writings for that day, August 22nd 1940, reflected his thoughts: 'Time was drawing short, so I hastily departed – feeling inevitably rather depressed – if only the family could have come too!!'

On August 30th, Robert left England with his newly formed crew, flying out of Newmarket and landing in Egypt some two days later. His first few days were spent seeing the sights of Cairo and also the Pyramids, which he was very impressed by.

On September 9th his orders came through and together with the rest of the crew he was transferred to 70 Squadron, Bomber Command, flying Wellingtons. His base of operations was El Kabreit. The crew of their Wellington Bomber became known as 'Wells Angels', Wells being

# We

Robert Charles Blockey

1909 - 1944

Part 2

# Falcons were Falconers

the name of the pilot. Their mascot, painted on the side of the fuselage, was The Saint, but with a difference. This Saint was dropping a bomb.

The first days at El Kabreit were again spent sight seeing and bird watching around Valencia, Ismailia and Suez. Robert and three others also invest in the purchase of a car, a 1934 Austin, in fair condition, for the sum of £30.00, as getting around from a desert base is not easy.

At five minutes past midnight on the night of September 18th, 1940 'Wells Angels' took off from El Kabreit and entered the war on their first mission. Their target was the jetties, hangers and buildings around the SE corner of Portolago Bay in Leros, which was held by the Italians. Robert describes the flight to the target as uneventful until they arrive. Robert was not only the Navigator but he was also the Bomb Aimer.

His diary records: "As we were running up, the target was too much to the left, so I used the azimuth bracket – a gadget which shows a red light when I want the pilot to turn to port, and green for starboard – to fetch us around – I was fairly standing on the red button before Wells came around sufficiently. He said afterwards that he didn't want to come round a bit, as I was fetching him right up in the middle of all the 'Ak Ak stuff' (to paraphrase his remark!). There certainly seemed to be plenty of it – much of it light – and coloured – which was rising to about 4,000, it really looked extremely pretty, and we hardly realised its evil intent. It streamed up in rather a fountain like way, apparently making a complete change of direction after some hundreds of feet – most peculiar stuff – mostly red and green, so far as I remember. The big stuff I didn't see until we were well away, as it was all bursting well above us. We were at 7,500. To be honest, I didn't see my bombs burst but we started a most satisfactory fire – probably with the help of the incendiaries – all round the SE corner of the bay, which must have done a hell of a lot of damage".

The following night they took off again bound for Benghazi but half-way there the hydraulics went so they had to turn back. After they had jettisoned their bombs they were able to land. Raids then continued, night after night and included Tobruk.

Daytime was spent relaxing, swimming in the lake and bird watching. Robert records Egyptian Kites, a falcon, which he

thinks is a Lanner, Harriers, Vultures and even a Lammergeyer. Many non raptor species are also mentioned.

On November 8th they are moved to Greece and join up with 2 Blenheim Squadrons, 30 and 84 and are based near Athens. Soon after midnight on the night of November 11/12th 'Wells Angels' again take to the air. Their target, Valona. Robert records, "We found pretty low cloud over Valona, which necessitated a pretty low attack from about 400 feet and we must have been plainly silhouetted against the white clouds above us, because the Ak Ak, tho' not heavy, was coming bloody close – we could hear some of the bursts quite plainly, a thing we've not experienced before. Nothing like the quantity we had at Leros and our first Benghazi trip, tho', or they'd probably have got us!"

The following night just before take off Robert records a surprise visit. "Just before we took off, some half a dozen figures came walking across to us through the fairly wet scrub – one of which turned out to be the A.O.C., and the other the King himself! We were all presented in turn – the whole crew and he shook hands with each of us – pretty good show – nice

handshake too" This was of course King George of Greece.

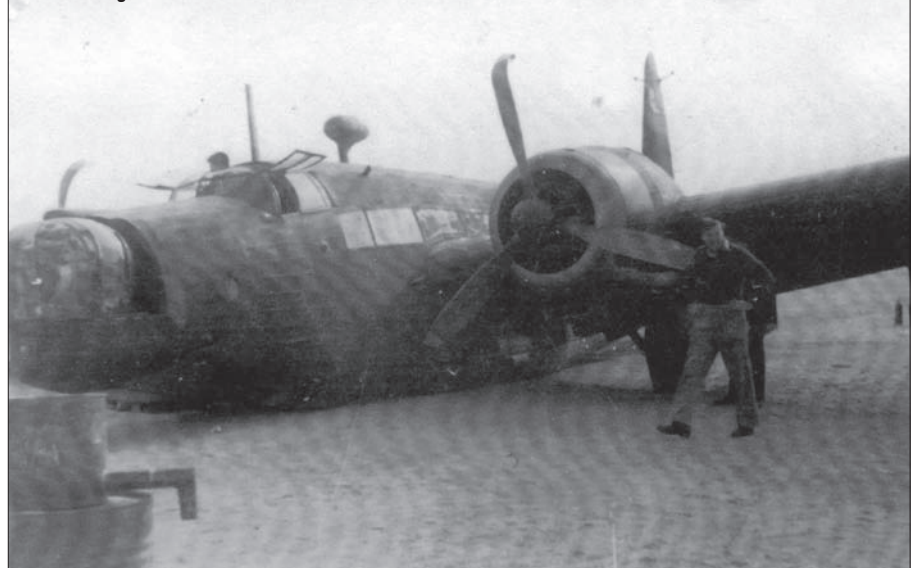
### Back to Egypt

On November 14th they returned to Egypt and are back at El Kabreit. Two days later they were ordered back to Greece but this was not to be. Took off



Blockey at Kabreit Canal Station

### Bell landing



O.K. but just after we'd left the ground (luckily not before) the enormous starboard tyre blew up making it necessary for us to land (there were no spares in Greece, we knew, and it was doubtful if there was one left in the whole of Egypt – we've been terribly short of spares up to date). As our prospective landing was obviously a pretty tricky one, we jettisoned our bombs (9 x 250's and 8 120's – what a waste! God knows what they cost) and almost all our petrol (about 600 gallons!!) over the Bitter Lake, and then – everyone bracing themselves as well as possible – came down, Wells making a damned fine landing, I'm very glad to say. The plane never spun around on the flat tyred wheel at all.

Prior to the landing the crew also had to let the ground staff know what had happened and what they intended to do. Robert records, "We dropped this message tied up in a handkerchief, with an apple to weight it! It was a damned good shot too – nearly hit Sq/Ldr Kerr

TO GROUND CREW  
FROM F/L WELLS T2735  
STARBOARD MAIN TYRE BURST  
INTEND TO LAND SHORTLY

ASK GROUND STATION (F/S  
WOOLLEY) TO INSTRUCT OTHER  
A/C TO PROCEED

Robert had been correct about there not being any spare tyres. It was over a month before they were operational again and they went back to Greece. During the wait, Robert was able to take some leave and he visited places such as Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Jericho and Jordan.

On December 10th, they took off again only to have another lucky escape. After getting two thirds down the runway somebody drove a lorry directly into their path. Wells, however, pulled the aircraft off the ground, banked steeply to the right and they managed to avoid the lorry. They then flew on to Tobruk where they did considerable damage to hangers and ammunition dumps, again flying into heavy flak.

As Christmas 1940 approached it was apparent that it was an emotional time. Robert records, "Christmas! (Don't make me laugh, as Unk would say). About Christmas, as Christmas, there's little I can say. Most of us felt considerably bored and filled with a good sized longing for England and Home"

Christmas Day came and went but



Blockey and his falcon

'Wells Angels' were on high alert for Boxing Day and orders came through at 1350 hours although the Operation was not due for another 12 hours or so. As the day wore on Robert's diary revealed, "we became more and more drowsy and contemplative – feeling how crazy and ridiculous war is, among other things – but eventually out we had to stagger to our respective aircraft . . . We were second off, at 1.20. We watched the first plane get away O.K. and then off we set. It was hellish dark – no moon at all . . . well we whistled off down the flare path and just as we were taking off we hit something on our port side with a hell of a smack!. Thank God we managed to carry on – good old Wells! – tho' our port propeller was bent back quite a bit and our port undercarriage bent back considerably, tho' its as strong as hell. At first the starboard engine seemed to be a bit shaken as well, but we eventually were able to get up to about a thousand feet, when we as quickly as possible dumped our bombs, the incendiaries and the containers

as well in the sea. And blinking glad we were when they'd gone – we'd no real idea of the extent of our damage, of course. Cruised around till 3.45 . . . and then set sail for Kabriet . . . circled around Kabriet till daylight, and then – bracing ourselves as well as possible – in we came for our second landing on the plane's belly – again completely successfully, thank God!

In January 1941, the British attack on Tobruk commenced in earnest and troops supported by the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force successfully penetrated both the outer and inner defences. Tobruk was falling and on the 19 'Wells Angels' do their last bombing raid on Tobruk. Raids however continued in other places. There was little or no let up for 'Wells Angels'.

In February, they moved to Tobruk which has by now fallen. Robert reports how strange it was to fly over during daylight and is able to describe the devastation that their bombing has caused. By February, Benghazi has fallen,



and there is now some time for bird watching and he reports seeing Eagles, Vultures, Buzzards, his first Black Stork and many other species.

Mission followed mission, interspersed with many days of sheer boredom. His diaries recount trips about Egypt, visits to Greece and Palestine, and the occasional leave to refresh his spirit. He had a bit of excitement in May 1941 when both engines of his plane burst into flames shortly after take-off from a sandy landing strip in Greece. His pilot was able to drop the plane back onto the air strip and he and the crew were able to bolt the plane through the escape hatch with no loss of life. He remarks: *"I vaguely remember feeling surprised at finding myself in one piece! I don't mind saying that it looked a pretty awesome sight as the flames gradually leaped higher and higher and some metal started burning with an intense white light."* July 1941 saw him on his 39th bombing run, and he remarks in his journal how much more intense and accurate the flak was getting. At the end of the month his journal mentions a bombing run by the Germans on his air base. The Signals Workshop he had been working in was completely written off, as was his quarters. He was joyful about making it out alive and was thereafter known as "Bomb Happy Blockey" by some of his compatriots.

In September 1941, as Robert was finally given leave to go home for some rest and rehabilitation he received a mention in Despatches by His Majesty, the King for Distinguished Service, something that was well deserved. He went home in style, aboard the RMS *Mauretania* (1938), sailing home around the horn of Africa. The ship berthed for several weeks in South Africa and Robert spent most of his time in natural history explorations around Durban and Cape Town. Pages of his diary record the new birds, amphibians and animals he encountered on his hikes.

Robert's diaries end with his account of sailing up the South American coast, but we know he arrived home safely sometime in late November or early December 1941. He was posted to RAF West Freugh in Scotland where he became an instructor in navigation and it is known that he trained many Polish officers whilst he was there.

During 1942, Robert also met Irene Riley who was serving in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force and on 24 September

of that year they were married at All Saints Church in Grayswood, Surrey. Many of their friends and relatives attended and his best man was his brother Paul who was by this time a Group Captain in the RAF. Some members of Robert's family were not pleased about the union, but Robert was madly in love and revelled in the thought he would spend a lifetime with her.

On September 21st, 1943 their daughter Pamela was born in Dumfries, Scotland. In the midst of the carnage and death enveloping the world this new life gave Robert an even greater focus on what he was fighting for. It is around this time that Robert makes the decision to return to combat duties. Although he is offered promotion and a posting to Cairo he declines knowing that he belongs in the air, in a Bomber, fighting for his country. He is therefore posted to RAF Warboys in Cambridgeshire and becomes part of 156 Squadron, a Squadron of the Pathfinder Force.

On Christmas Day, 1943, the whole family gathered for dinner at Fernhurst near Haslemere, his brother Paul's house. Present were Paul and his wife Ella, their children John, Robin and Peter, Evelyn Blockey, mother of Paul and Robert, their sisters Peggie and Josey, Captain C.W.R. Knight and, of course, Robert's wife Irene and their daughter Pamela. It was a festive occasion with much talk about family matters, future falconry adventures and what all would do after the war was won.

All too soon the Christmas holiday was over and Robert rejoined his Squadron. On New Year's Day 1944 Robert and his crew prepared for take off. Their plane, a Lancaster III Serial number ND380. A total of five Lancasters took off just after midnight on the hazardous run to Berlin. All five aircraft returned successfully after dropping their bombs, ND380 landing back at Warboys at 7.28 on the morning of January 2nd.

### Warming up

At 11.55 pm the same day, ND380 was back on the runway warming up. Commencing on 18 November 1943 through to the middle of March 1944, 16 major attacks were made on Berlin. On this night, a total of 362 Lancasters, 12 Mosquitos and 9 Halifaxes were to raid

the capital in one of the most massive attacks of the war. At four minutes past midnight ND380 took off. Robert's family tells us he was not scheduled to have been on this second foray to Germany but he took the place of an ailing friend and flew east on his last mission.

The 16 raids on Berlin cost Bomber Command more than 500 aircraft, with 2,690 air crew killed and another 1000

becoming prisoners of war. Robert's plane was amongst the 500, and Robert was amongst the 2,690. German records examined after the war state that ND380 crashed at Beisdorf, Berlin on January 3rd. There were no survivors and the crew's bodies were quickly buried in unmarked graves in either Elsberg or Doberitz

cemeteries in Berlin. After the war the British Military Cemetery at Berlin was created and it is presumed Robert's body was moved there, but his remains – as with so many others – were never identified. The only monument to him is his name cut in stone on the War Memorial at Runnymede.

The image of Robert's face in the fire was burned into his young wife's memory forever. A daughter grew up never having really known her father. Fellow falconers lost one of their most esteemed friends.

The world moved on without Robert. Or maybe it moved on because of him and men like him, who gave their all for god, king, and country. Robert Blockey was a falconer and like his peregrines taking their stoop at game, his fall from the sky helped bring home a most important quarry: Peace.



The Saint

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With thanks to:  
Pamela Blockey-O'Brien  
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Dulwich College  
British Falconers' Club  
Haslemere Museum  
Len Smith (Worldwar2extra website)  
Gordon & Dawn (156 Squadron Research)  
David Mills

# Club Directory

Join and support  
your local club today!



## The Welsh Hawking Club



### South Wales Region

2nd Monday of the month at The Rat Trap Hotel.  
Further details from Martin Cox - Tel: 01633 790372

### North Wales Region

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

### Essex Region

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

### South West Region

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

### Yorkshire Region

Meetings take place at The Milton Arms, Barnsley  
Regional Secretary: Frank Pitts - 01709 555538

*For further details about the club, contact the secretary, Mike Clowes, on*

**0033 549 917930**



## Brittany Club of Great Britain

For information and help on all aspects of this  
versatile breed phone Paul Yarrow on

**01621 817728**

or e-mail:- [bonartistbrittany@hotmail.com](mailto:bonartistbrittany@hotmail.com)

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enthusiastic working dog suits everyone's needs.

Contact our Falconry rep, Tony Ellis, on:-

**01666 510067**

or visit the club website [www.brittanyclub.co.uk](http://www.brittanyclub.co.uk)

## THE CHESHIRE HAWKING CLUB

Meetings:- Held 2nd Tuesday of every month at 8pm.

Venue:- Railway Hotel, Mill Lane, Heatley,  
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**[www.thebha.co.uk](http://www.thebha.co.uk)**

or e-mail to [secretary@thebha.co.uk](mailto:secretary@thebha.co.uk)

# BRITISH FALCONERS' CLUB

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North Western, Mid-West, North Eastern, Southern,  
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**Dave - Membership Secretary**

**THE BRITISH FALCONERS CLUB (F.M.)**

**01253 859062** (evenings)

# The South East Falconry Group

AIMS TO SUPPORT FALCONERS IN THE CONTINUATION AND  
PRACTICE OF FALCONRY.

Drawing its membership from around the South and East  
of England, the SEFG provides a forum for falconers  
and would-be falconers to meet, discuss and practice the  
art. Members benefit from having access to a wealth of  
experience and knowledge, good facilities and field meeting  
opportunities throughout the winter months.

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

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

For further information or an application form please contact -

**Dean White (secretary) on 01489 896504**

E-mail us at [enquiry@sefg.org](mailto:enquiry@sefg.org) or  
visit our web site [www.sefg.org](http://www.sefg.org)



## Yorkshire Falconry Club

Meetings held at The Milton Arms, Elsecard,  
Barnsley. We hold our meetings on the 3rd  
Wednesday on the month at 8pm.

Membership includes;

- Public liability insurance
- Affiliation to the Hawk Board

For further information please telephone Dale on

**01709 897084**

or

visit our website



[www.yorkshirefalconry.co.uk](http://www.yorkshirefalconry.co.uk)



# THE SCOTTISH HAWKING CLUB

FOR THE DEDICATED FALCONER

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Board - Scottish Hawk Board - Zimbabwe  
Falconers Club - North American Falconers  
Association - International Association for  
Falconry

Further details from:

**Tommy Bryce**  
**01620 850209**

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

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

Established for some 25 years, and now affiliated to the Hawk Board and holding group membership to the Countryside Alliance, the aims of S.E.R.A. are to further and maintain the standards of falconry in the South-East of England.

With a broad band of knowledge and experience within our club, we extend a warm welcome to new members, whether practising falconers or complete novices. Where practicable, novices will be allocated a mentor. Helpful, honest and friendly advice is always available.

**Our meetings are held at 10.30am on the second Sunday of each month throughout the year at  
The Junction Inn - Groombridge, Kent. (Opposite Groombridge Station)**

Outings, guest speakers, field meets, (at home and away) videos, quizzes and other special events are ever-present features of our club calendar and may be viewed on our website.

Please visit our website at: [www.seraonline.co.uk](http://www.seraonline.co.uk)  
or telephone Brian for information on: **01732 463218**



# Independent Bird Register

Telephone 0870 608 8500

## IBR Lost, Found, Reunited & Stolen birds of prey from 26th June to 10th September 2007

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

If you think one of these birds is yours or you think you may know the owner, - please contact us. If you have reported losing a bird it is **LOGGED** on the database and **REMAINS** on the LOST LIST until WE are told differently.

Part of the ring number has been replaced with an ? for security reasons.

The lost birds with the ring numbers written in **BOLD ITALIC** i.e. **DL9** are birds that were reported lost and either the number was unknown, not given or the bird was not wearing a ring.

|                          |                           |       |                |                      |                   |                |                      |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------------|
| <b>STOLEN x 16</b>       |                           | 5784  | ??444W         | BARBARY FALCON       | 45765             | ??1ND07S       | KESTREL              |
| 4735811WHC07W            | GYR/SAKER FALCON          | 28468 | ??304U         | BARN OWL             | 49213             | ??806S         | KESTREL              |
| 4736617WHC07W            | GYR/SAKER FALCON          | 35505 | ??758U         | BARN OWL             | 6602              | ??02W          | LANNER FALCON        |
| 4761420WHC07W            | GYR/SAKER FALCON          | 47038 | ??995U         | BARN OWL             | 55621             | ??746W         | LANNER FALCON        |
| 4765147WHC07W            | GYR/SAKER FALCON          | 49195 | ??888U         | BARN OWL             | 57475             | ??JWB03V       | LANNER FALCON        |
| 12653IBR13187W           | HARRIS HAWK               | 51072 | ??207U         | BARN OWL             | 57476             | ??JWB01V       | LANNER FALCON        |
| 30461IBR28629W           | HARRIS HAWK               | 56008 | ??5BC03U       | BARN OWL             | 58906             | ??92V          | LANNER FALCON        |
| 31206IBR28883W           | HARRIS HAWK               | 57477 | ??3BC97U       | BARN OWL             | 58947             | ??33V          | LANNER FALCON        |
| 39053IBR35985W           | HARRIS HAWK               | 57478 | ??7BC91U       | BARN OWL             | 59152             | ??43V/ RC3     | LANNER FALCON        |
| 48932ORANGE 5            | HARRIS HAWK               | 2060  | ??62W          | COMMON BUZZARD       | 59153             | ??13W/??41V    | LANNER FALCON        |
| 49169IBR49293W           | HARRIS HAWK               | 50223 | ??545Z         | EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL   | 52817             | ??159R/??83P   | MERLIN               |
| 53912IBR53238W           | HARRIS HAWK               | 53413 | ??20V / ??525W | GOSHAWK              | 40688             | ??639V         | PEREGRINE FALCON     |
| 591766005W               | HARRIS HAWK               | 53902 | ??93V          | GOSHAWK              | 57472             | ??BNADFOG07011 | PEREGRINE FALCON     |
| 4722612WHC07W            | SAKER FALCON              | 59086 | <b>OL12</b>    | GOSHAWK              | 58950             | ??044S         | PEREGRINE FALCON     |
| 4729918WHC07W            | SAKER FALCON              | 53311 | ??29V          | GOSHAWK FINNISH      | 58729             | ??87V/??679W   | PERE / LANNER HYBRID |
| 4730419WHC07W            | SAKER FALCON              | 54334 | ??B95Z         | GREAT HORNED OWL     | 3488              | ??84V          | PERE/SAKER HYBRID    |
| 5342701795470813 3S      |                           | 54784 | ??356          | GYR/PEREGRINE HYBRID | 35034             | ??126W         | PERE/SAKER HYBRID    |
|                          | SOUTHERN WHITE-FACED OWL  | 58303 | ??63X          | GYR/PEREGRINE/SAKER  | 56319             | <b>IP14</b>    | PERE/SAKER HYBRID    |
|                          |                           | 53697 | ??7683         | GYR/SAKER FALCON     | 58378             | ??397W         | PERE/SAKER HYBRID    |
| <b>REUNITED x 115</b>    |                           | 57471 | ??762W         | GYR/SAKER FALCON     | 59100             | ??204W         | PERE/SAKER HYBRID    |
| AMERICAN KESTREL x 1     |                           | 57479 | ??680DOEW      | GYR/SAKER FALCON     | 59102             | ??999V/??703W  | PERE/SAKER HYBRID    |
| BARBARY FALCON x 1       |                           | 58945 | ??906W / ??91X | GYR/SAKER FALCON     | 59223             | ??484V/??191W  | PERE/SAKER HYBRID    |
| BARN OWL x 12            |                           | 59213 | ??261W         | GYR/SAKER FALCON     | 39318             | ??913YA        | RED-TAILED HAWK      |
| BLACK KITE x.1           |                           | 58682 | ??62V / ??167W | GYR/SAKERXSAKER      | 41355             | ??983W         | SAKER FALCON         |
| CHACO OWL x 1            |                           | 2353  | ??96W          | HARRIS HAWK          | 52956             | ??009W         | SAKER FALCON         |
| COMMON BUZZARD x 3       |                           | 4647  | ??305W         | HARRIS HAWK          | 58754             | ??675W         | SAKER FALCON         |
| EURASIAN EAGLE OWL x 5   |                           | 8062  | ??600W         | HARRIS HAWK          | 59087             | ??DA&SUE       | SAKER FALCON         |
| GOSHAWK x 4              |                           | 9275  | ??678W         | HARRIS HAWK          | 59179             | ??DA&SUE       | SAKER FALCON         |
| GREAT HORNED OWL x 1     |                           | 20686 | ??117W         | HARRIS HAWK          | 3383              | ??65R          | SPARROWHAWK          |
| GYR HYBRID FALCON x 12   |                           | 23453 | ??384W         | HARRIS HAWK          | 52562             | ??544R         | SPARROWHAWK          |
| HARRIS HAWK x 24         |                           | 24133 | ??663W         | HARRIS HAWK          | 53303             | ??1BC07P       | SPARROWHAWK          |
| INDIAN EAGLE OWL x 1     |                           | 28170 | ??607W         | HARRIS HAWK          |                   |                |                      |
| KESTREL x 2              |                           | 30759 | ??610W         | HARRIS HAWK          |                   |                |                      |
| LANNER FALCON x 6        |                           | 37932 | ??758W         | HARRIS HAWK          | <b>FOUND x 18</b> |                |                      |
| LITTLE OWL x 1           |                           | 44329 | ??850W         | HARRIS HAWK          | 45922             | ??06 / ??06    | AMERICAN KESTREL     |
| LUGGER FALCON x 1        |                           | 45595 | ??641W         | HARRIS HAWK          | 24741             | ??699U         | BARN OWL             |
| MERLIN x 1               |                           | 46543 | ??088W         | HARRIS HAWK          | 41878             | ??424U         | BARN OWL             |
| PEREGRINE FALCON x 2     |                           | 51403 | ??043W         | HARRIS HAWK          | 57487             | ??0HR 01       | EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL   |
| PEREGRINE HYBRID x 7     |                           | 53950 | ??116W         | HARRIS HAWK          | 57488             | ??6054         | EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL   |
| RED KITE x 1             |                           | 54613 | ??317W         | HARRIS HAWK          | 33430             | ??497W         | HARRIS HAWK          |
| RED-TAILED HAWK x 6      |                           | 55091 | ??621W         | HARRIS HAWK          | 59089             | ??594W         | HARRIS HAWK          |
| SAKER FALCON x 11        |                           | 56389 | ??9BC06W       | HARRIS HAWK          | 38514             | ??841W         | HARRIS HAWK          |
| SAKER HYBRID x 7         |                           | 58377 | ??7WB          | HARRIS HAWK          | 58932             | ??D07S         | KESTREL              |
| SPARROWHAWK x 3          |                           | 58903 | ??21?03        | HARRIS HAWK          | 58962             | ??1/07         | KESTREL              |
| TURKMANIAN EAGLE OWL x 1 |                           | 58905 | <b>SP7</b>     | HARRIS HAWK          | 2249              | ??730W         | LANNER FALCON        |
|                          |                           | 58907 | <b>L36</b>     | HARRIS HAWK          | 50525             | ??801W         | LANNER FALCON        |
|                          |                           | 58980 | ??415          | HARRIS HAWK          | 59182             | <b>L37</b>     | LANNER FALCON        |
| <b>LOST x 86</b>         |                           | 59050 | <b>RG7</b>     | HARRIS HAWK          | 47765             | ??1BC07U       | RAVEN                |
| 58376                    | ??014                     | 59104 | ?? 53X         | HARRIS HAWK          | 4419              | ??74Y          | RED-TAILED HAWK      |
|                          | AFRICAN SPOTTED EAGLE OWL | 59189 | <b>PLI</b>     | HARRIS HAWK          | 58414             | ??AM04         | SAKER FALCON         |
| 58768                    | <b>WV10</b>               | 59222 | ??16W 01582    | HARRIS HAWK          | 54888             | ??2BC07R       | SPARROWHAWK          |
|                          | AFRICAN SPOTTED EAGLE OWL | 24150 | ??679W         | HARRIS SUPERIOR      | 58031             | ??96R          | SPARROWHAWK          |
| 58671                    | <b>PO13</b>               |       |                |                      |                   |                |                      |

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