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Would you believe it; another year has rushed pass and its time for the Falconers Fair again. Where does the time go? I hope that you have had a great season and now is the time of year when we meet up at various shows around the country and speak to old friends.

In this issue of *The Falconers Magazine* I hope there is something for everyone. Articles from both home and abroad which include what is happening to the new International Centre for Birds of Prey which is being set up by Jemima Parry-Jones. Mima will be the 'star turn' at the Falconers Fair and I understand she will be appearing in the main arena at the CLA Game Fair on July 25, 26, 27. This event is being held at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire.

Once again I must say a big thank you to Nick Kester for supplying the most up-to-date information for the Hawk Board News page. The information given on that page affects us all, whether we are falconers or bird of prey keepers.

In the meantime, have a good read.



editorial

news & products

a review of what's new in our sport Send all your news and product information to peter.eldrett@tiscali.co.uk

“Mozart” and Humans From Six Countries Land in Owl Hall of Fame

Houston, *Minnesota*.—Mozart, a 34-year old Eurasian eagle owl from England who has touched the lives of over a million people, was inducted into the World Owl Hall of Fame on February 29, 2008, in Houston, Minnesota as part of the International Festival of Owls. Six people from as many countries on four continents found their place in the hall of fame alongside Mozart.

Mozart, the Hall of Fame's Lady Gray'l Award winner, was captive bred in Newent in Gloucestershire in England and raised by Jemima Parry-Jones. Since he considers himself to be a human, he thrived on attention during his childhood at the Royal Academy of Music with Jemima (where he acquired his name) and later from his adoring public at the National Birds of Prey Centre. He loved people so much that he even allowed numerous blind people to experience what an owl was by patiently allowing their hands to feel his body. Most owls would not tolerate such touching and indeed he does not like it normally but seems to understand when it is blind people who need to see by touch.

Mozart was the forerunner of trained owls in the United Kingdom and other countries, helping Jemima to develop and refine owl training and care techniques she later published in two books and a video on owls. These experiences also helped Jemima to write the section on care of owls for the Secretary of State's Guidelines for Zoos.

Mozart and Parry-Jones came to South Carolina with plans to join forces with the South Carolina Center for Birds of Prey in 2004, but returned to England in 2007 to create the new International Centre for Birds of Prey instead. While in the U.S., Mozart and Jemima visited the College of Charleston in South Carolina. Mozart “happily provided demonstrations of owl courtship,” says Dr. Melissa Hughes. “My students were always quite pleased when he favored them with an offer of dead rat.”

For her work with Mozart and other owls educating hundreds of thousands of people about owls, expertise in breeding owl, training

owls and their care, owl rehabilitation, and safeguarding the welfare of captive owls through crafting guidelines and conducting inspections, Jemima Parry-Jones herself is also receiving a new Special Achievement Award from the World Owl Hall of Fame.

The World Owl Hall of Fame was hatched in 2006 to bring public recognition to the humans and owls who have dedicated a significant portion of their lives to making this world a better place for owls. The Champion of Owls Award is granted to a human and the Lady Gray'l Award, named for a great gray owl from Winnipeg, Canada, is bestowed upon an owl.

The winner of the prestigious Champion of Owls Award was, coincidentally, the International Festival of Owls' keynote speaker, Dr. C. Stuart Houston from Saskatoon. Houston has banded more than 10,000 owls of 11 species since 1943, published 51 papers on owls, written reviews for six owl books, and inspired multiple generations of ornithologists, despite being a medical doctor himself.

Houston's Champion of Owls Award will join a long list of other awards on his *curriculum vitae*, including awards from the American Ornithologists' Union, Canadian Nature Federation, Raptor Research Foundation, and being named an Officer of the Order of Canada, among others.

Due to the strong suite of nominations for the Champion of Owls Award, the Global Owl Project sponsored a new Special Achievement Award for humans within the hall of fame for the first time this year. “Developing a Special Achievement Award category was not only necessary, it was easy. Just look what the five 2008 award winners have done,” comments David H. Johnson, Director of the Global Owl Project.

The 2008 World Owl Hall of Fame is sponsored by the World Owl Trust, Global Owl Project, Center for Biological Diversity, Owl Research Institute, Raptor Education Group, Inc., Hancock House Publishers, Gray Owl Fund, and owlstuff.com.

Award to WWF

Congratulations go to Nigel Lound of Lincolnshire Police who has been named WWF Wildlife Law Enforcer of the Year.

PC Lound has made it a priority to raise awareness of wildlife crime with both its enforcement and more especially, its prevention. His added work does include giving presentations to local schools, community groups and businesses. Also, he provides training and support to his fellow officers.

Dates for your diary

British Falconry & Raptor Fair

Sunday 4 and Monday 5 May. This event is once again being held at Chetwynd Park, Newport, Nr Telford, Shropshire.

CLA Game Fair

Friday 25 – Sunday 27 July at Blenheim Palace, Woodstock, Oxfordshire.

East Anglian Falconry & Country Fair

Saturday 6 and Sunday 7 September. The venue will be Mid Suffolk Showground, Stonham Barns.



GSP's

Amews Falconry have four German Shorthaired Pointer (GSP) dogs for sale. They were born on 17 March and will be ready to go to a new home on 12 May at the earliest.

The dogs are kennel club registered and have been docked and microchipped. For more information telephone 01794 368487.

Red Kite found shot

A Red Kite which was released in the Wicklow mountains was unfortunately found shot dead in August last year. The Kite, which was set free with 29 other Red Kites, had been hit with shotgun pellets and was found north of Arklow in County Wicklow.

The Golden Eagle Trust (GET) which is managing the release scheme said that this was a major blow. Red Kites were driven to extinction in Ireland from trapping, poisoning and shooting even though they posed no threat to game birds or livestock. The Red Kite is not a powerful predator and feeds mostly on carrion as well as small mammals, worms and insects.

The Red Kite programme is one of three schemes to return previously extinct birds of prey to Ireland. Golden eagles which have been sourced from Scotland have been released in Donegal since 2001 and one pair has successfully bred last year.

Also, in 2007, 15 Norwegian White-tailed Eagles were reintroduced to Kilarney National Park in County Kerry in an five-year project.



Photo: The Hawk Conservancy Trust

Book Review

THE RED-TAILED HAWK – THE GREAT UNKNOWN

By Beatriz E. Candil Garcia
Published by Yarak Publishing
ISBN 978-0-9555607-4-3

One must possess a comprehensive knowledge of a species to devote a whole book to it and there can be few people who have a more in-depth knowledge of the Red-tailed hawk than this author. Her passion for Red-tails is clear on every page and she must be commended for her dedication in compiling such a definitive work. It is a translation from the original Spanish book (*El Gran Desconocido*) published in 2004 and it includes additional information to bring the book fully up-to-date.

Firstly, the author takes the reader through the biology of the Red-tail including diet, reproduction and migration. There is then incredible detail about its many sub-species – apparently there are 15! – and how they are viewed around the world. She goes on to describe what is required to properly care for this bird in captivity including equipment, training and health, and what is needed to keep it in the best hunting condition. Hunting practices around the world are examined and the author puts forward what she considers is the true potential of the Red-tail: being flown using traditional hawking techniques but also for soar hawking, to enable it to catch both fur and feather alike.

The author writes from personal experience and this may attract criticism as the book covers practices which are not legal in the United Kingdom. However, she always stresses the importance of checking and complying with local legislation and I believe it is both interesting and important to learn how falconry is practised in other countries and compare with our own.

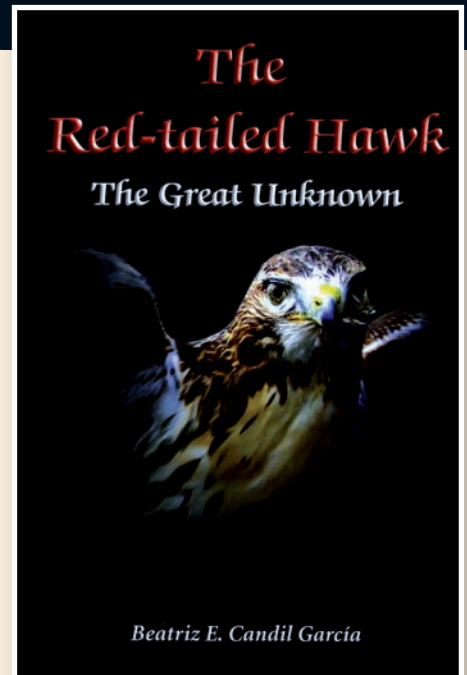
Throughout the book there are contributions from other well-respected falconers, recounting their own experiences of the Red-tail. These include contributions from Ben Long and Paul

Beecroft, both of whom will be well known to regular readers of *The Falconers Magazine*. The book is further balanced by the inclusion of many excellent photographs and illustrations which serve to expand on the broad text.

At the end, the author has included further information on diet and equipment, as well as useful addresses, web sites, falconry terms and books/films which may be of interest to the reader.

There is one criticism which I must make: I was constantly irritated by the odd phraseology, and incorrect/extra words appearing throughout, e.g. the use of “attack” rather than “attach” which, believe me, made a real difference to the meaning! This is undoubtedly due to the translation from the Spanish and it is a shame that these were not picked up before the final work was published.

All in all, this is a truly comprehensive work on the Red-tailed Hawk which should appeal to bird of prey enthusiasts and falconers alike. If you are a lover of Red-tails or are in any way interested in them, this would be a worthwhile addition to your library.



Reviewed by Marian Eldrett

Dear Sir,

In a letter in one of your earlier issues one of your correspondents describes the dreadful condition of a redtail found in the possession of a falconer in his area. It was the usual harrowing account of poor nutrition, inappropriate housing and bodged furniture. I am certain that most falconers of some experience could tell similar tales.

All evidence suggests that, far from being isolated, the sort of ignorance and neglect that produces birds in such appalling condition is increasingly common among falconers. (I use the word "falconers" to describe the people who perpetrate such atrocities out of convenience only, and would be more comfortable with a more colourful description).

It is astonishing how many practising falconers have not the foggiest notion about what constitutes a proper diet for a captive bird of prey. When did you last see a weathering or aviary that even remotely matched the structure, design and dimensions recommended in the many books on the subject? How often have you seen mesh like cheese wire, filthy walls and floor, and dirty water, if any water at all?

And what is the outcome of all this? Cut feet, a damaged cere, broken plumage, sickness and death.

It does not only apply to events at home. Indeed, go to any field meet and you will be greeted by the spectacle of untrained or ill-prepared birds that refuse quarry and fly off to sit in trees. Or the frantic, incompetent fumbblings of inexperienced falconers as they try in vain to despatch quarry. This is intolerable; it is unfair on the birds; it is cruel to and betrays a shameful lack of respect for our quarry; and it makes us look like clowns in the public domain.

If you have any lingering doubts about the pervasive nature of the problem, go onto the internet and browse the threads in the International Falconry Forum. You will be appalled at the dangerous lack of knowledge and expertise of many of the participants.

Falconry, in common with many other areas of life that involve ownership of live animals, has no barriers to entry. Anyone can buy and fly a hawk without the least need to demonstrate even a basic level of proficiency. That is the crux. It is the first cause of all the suffering and disaster that pervades our sport. Any sport that does not properly prepare its participants is destined for mediocrity at best. This is harmless in the context of, for example, football. But in falconry it is indefensible. It is not the sort of pastime where you can just muddle through. Because of its nature you have to take the trouble to be competent at it.

A recent attempt to meet the challenge of low standards is Lantra, where trained assessors certify the competence of falconers, actual or intending, in basic husbandry and handling. It has been around for a while and I have no reason to doubt the ability or good intentions of the assessors. Indeed anyone that attends such a session will, I am certain, come out of it, if not with a certificate, then with a clear idea of where his or her skills need to be improved.

So far, so good. But there are two fundamental flaws with Lantra. Firstly, it has no muscle. It is entirely voluntary.

Secondly, it covers only those aspects of falconry that pertain to the welfare of the bird at home. That is fine, and essential. But it is not falconry in its entirety. I will not insult the readers of this magazine by repeating the definition of

falconry, but suffice to say that falconry takes place out there, in the field. That is where birds are lost. It is where they are hurt. It is where they can cause damage. It is also our "shop window" on the world, i.e. it is where the public sees us. And if we get it wrong, particularly at a time when people are questioning the moral validity of field sports, then we are finished.

There will be people who read this who will think that I'm being unfair because Lantra is all we have got. That is the philosophy of the defeated. Lantra is fine in its narrow scope. But the fact is it doesn't prepare us to be falconers in the round, AND we do not have to do it.

The only solution is regulation. No voluntary code is going to raise the standards of falconry as effectively as an enforceable set of rules. Whether the source of this is statutory or from within the ranks of the falconry fraternity is a point for debate and will ultimately hinge on practicality and the strength and unity of falconers to implement change. But the impetus for change should come from within the sport.

The solution might take the form of a formal licensing system, based on demonstrable competence arising from an American-style apprentice/mentoring regime. That is also a matter for conjecture and discussion. The point is that it should be compulsory.

We cannot afford to stand back while others, who may have different agendas, judge us and decide our fate. It may be painful but we should protect our sport assiduously from those who would, wittingly or otherwise, destroy it. Be under no illusion, if the current trend in deterioration of falconry standards continues, our destruction is assured.

By e-mail

Dear Peter

I would like to make a few comments on the recent contents of your "Letters".

It surprises me that the *Falconers Magazine* is allowing slanging matches on its letters page. Surely we have the International Falconry Forum for all that sort of nonsense.

All I would like to add is, and I will not LIE, Bob Dalton is a good friend of mine, and I can only speak as I find. I have always found him to be helpful when I have had a problem, his advice has been invaluable in helping me turn my lanner falcon into the consistent performer she has become.

I have been lucky enough to watch him

train and fly his Aplomado Falcon, one of only a few in this country.

He has a never ending knowledge on all aspects of falconry and hawking, he travels the world to visit his many friends abroad to watch and fly hawks and falcons, and he shares his experiences in this and many other publications.

I myself was fortunate enough to accompany him to Mexico a couple of years ago. The point I am trying to make is the man knows his stuff, so lets forget about the playground politics and use the letters page for something more constructive.

Dale Fairbrass

This is one of the many letters I have received in response to David Rampling's letter published in issue 72 and is representative of the general feelings expressed by the writers. I, too, consider that Bob Dalton is a falconer who "knows his stuff" and, as such, regularly feature articles by him in this magazine. Nevertheless, the world of falconry has many characters with differing opinions and, as an editor, I acknowledge their rights to express them. However, I do not want The Falconers Magazine to become a vehicle for "in-fighting" and this subject is now closed. I am pleased that so many of you have taken the time to write to me in support of Bob – your letters are always welcome – Ed.



askchitty

Aspergillosis is a disease that can be contracted by all species of birds of prey. How does this infection manifest itself and how do we, as falconers, prevent our birds from contracting it? Is it only captive birds that are susceptible or can it occur in the wild population? Also, is there a cure for such a disease?

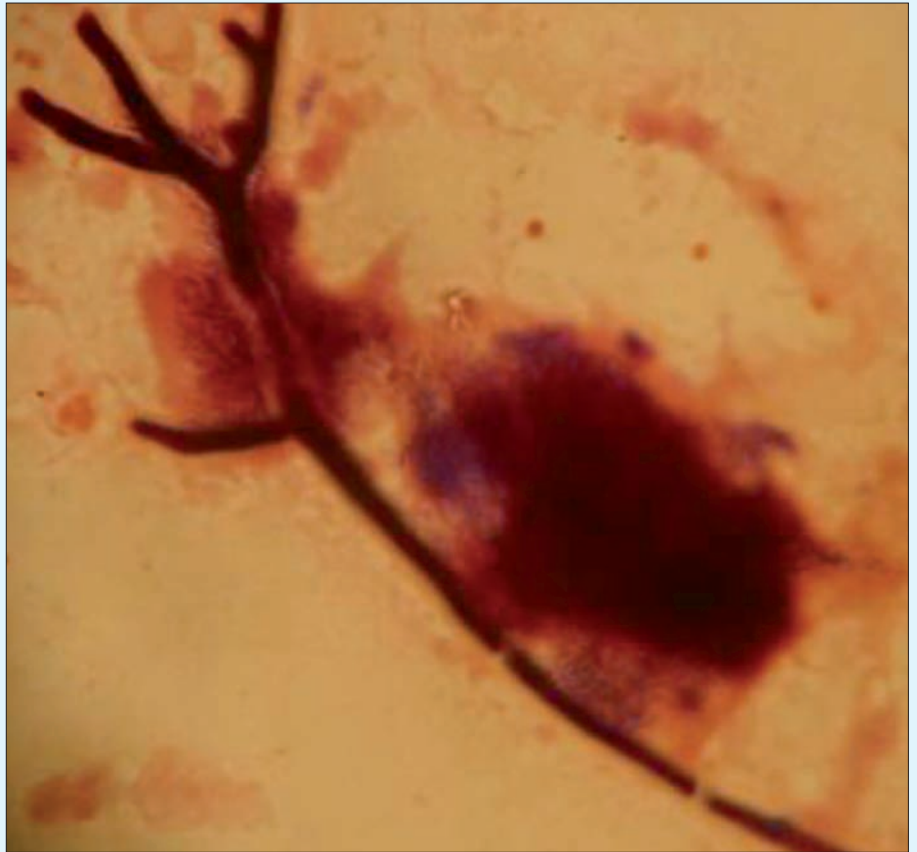
Aspergillosis is a common problem in raptors. Sadly it is also frequently severe and often life-threatening.

It occurs as respiratory infection (though rarely it can cause infection in other organs and occasionally may grow in skin wounds).

In the classic form it grows as an abscess in the trachea where it splits into the two bronchi (the "syrinx"). This is what causes the "loss of voice" sign. It will grow and eventually block the airway at which time the bird presents gasping and in severe distress. Signs are rarely gradual – it all just happens suddenly so it is wise never to ignore any respiratory signs.

The more common form, though, occurs as infection of the lungs and airsacs. Sometimes this will show as breathing problems – breathing hard or rattly breathing. However, it is more common for the bird just not "to do well". It may tire easily or lose weight/ fail to hold weight. Sometimes they will regurgitate. The airsacs are large spaces so by the time signs show, the lesions can be large and a long way progressed.

It can be hard to diagnose – with non-specific signs there's not too many clues. On blood samples you should see an elevated white cell count (particularly with a lot of monocytes) and you may get changes in the inflammatory proteins. However, these are changes that may be seen with any chronic infection. X-rays will show large lesions in the airsacs and these can be quite distinctive. However, early or very small lesions will not be seen on x-rays.



Aspergillus fungus

Endoscopy is extremely useful. Obviously it is the method of choice for seeing fungal abscesses in the trachea. However, laparoscopy (examining the body cavity) is invaluable and more sensitive than x-rays. It also allows you to assess the state of the abscess and responses to therapy and so is the method of choice for monitoring disease. However, it is still possible not to be able to find small lesions or those sited inside organs or in obscure places.

In the US there are specific antibody tests that enable you to assess exposure to the fungus. However, they are not available in the UK yet and tests designed for use in dogs are not applicable to raptors. Even when the tests are available, they may simply highlight one of the big problems with aspergillosis: The fungus is found in the environment! Therefore birds (and us!) are often exposed and usually they cope with the spores that enter the respiratory system. However, disease may result from two main causes:

1. Overwhelming exposure. This will happen if rotting organic matter (housing growing fungus) is given to birds as nesting materials. It will also occur when batches of contaminated or rotting wood or bark chip are used in the floor of aviaries. A major source of spores, though, is the falconer's box! If this is not cleaned regularly then it will start to harbour organic debris which is where fungus grows. Typically most people look at their box only when it is needed, see that it is dirty and give it a quick clean. This is the worst thing possible as the fungus is wetted which encourages it to breed and then the box is drying as the bird is put in which is when the fungus releases its spores. It is far better to clean the box thoroughly AFTER each use so it is clean and ready to use the next time
2. Lowered immunity. This may be due to
 - a. Species effect. Goshawks, Gyrs, mountain eagles and Snowy Owls appear to have little or no immunity to this fungus. This, presumably, is because

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Lesions in the airsacs can be seen on x-rays

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Introduction

It has been an interesting and challenging first quarter for your Hawk Board. I hope many of you will be going to the Falconry Fair at the early May Bank Holiday. We are always happy to talk to falconers and answer your questions. Everyone has an opinion about something to do with falconry, and there has never been so much to talk about, so we look forward to meeting you all.

Schedule 4 and registration

The on-going review of Schedule 4 species is possibly the most important proposed change to falconry since the delisting of sparrowhawks, kestrels and buzzards over a decade ago. Falconers who have been following the debate will know the HB met with DEFRA minister, Joan Ruddock, who listened carefully to our point of view which, unsurprisingly, was not that put forward by the RSPB. We argued that few native birds of prey used in falconry were rare, and that their wild populations were often at an all-time high and growing.

Following which we offered a solution to RSPB which stated that the Article 10 certificate provided control enough for raptors in captivity, most of which are

now bred to four or more generations and therefore can no longer be classified as any part of the wild population. The RSPB was somewhat disingenuous in its reply. However, we know they continue to lobby DEFRA because...

When the proposed list was announced the only falconry species remaining were the goshawk and the golden eagle. Both the peregrine and the merlin were off, as was the gyrfalcon as being non-native: the Wildlife and Countryside Act only deals with native species. Hybrids were also excluded, as they are not a species.

A Westminster adjournment debate took place in January and several parliamentary questions have been tabled, but as yet no decision has been made.

Pressure is still being applied to DEFRA's opposite number in Scotland. Wales has fallen in step with England, but the Scottish Executive is undecided, and it is this vacillation that could affect the whole deregulation. Maintaining a registration system for peregrines and merlins north of the border means increased costs for Scottish owners and breeders; as well as creating considerable confusion for falconers visiting the devolved country.

We are lucky that we have a Minister who assimilates facts not emotion and makes pragmatic statements. But we are not there yet. We must keep the pressure on and hope that Joan Ruddock remains firm in her resolve to deregister.

Quarry licences and Natural England

As yet no re-issue of the consultation has been announced. Given that we are now in the falconry 'closed' season, this should cause no current hardship. But we are still on the case. Scotland have issued new licences and these can be found at: www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Wildlife-Habitats/16330/general-licences

CITES charges

Another DEFRA consultation (closes May 8th). As part of the treasury's 'must recover all costs at all cost' policy, we now have a consultation to see not if but how these costs should be recovered: hardly a consultation, more a tinkering with the methodology.

CITES charges cover import and export permits and Article 10 certificates. So if you fly an Annex A or B specimen you are

affected. As proposed, cost recovery is not too onerous if you are a large breeder because the charges relate to one species, one application, one charge. For example if you breed five goshawks from the same parents the new charge for Article 10s (£25) is in effect £5 a hawk. However, if you only breed one goshawk then the charge remains at £25. Quite an increase from its current 'free' status.

The same applies to import and export permits. Proposed at £59 per application (one species, one destination), the costs for large shipments can be spread. Ten gyrfalcons x peregrines to Dubai are £5.90 a falcon. But one export of one hawk to a non-EU country burdens the buyer with a fee that is six times the current charge.

So here is the rub. Regardless of value, if you import a hawk from outside the EU, then you will have to obtain an A10 and an import permit which collectively costs £84. We contend this is unfair on the small breeder.

Schools initiative

We have been approached by a teacher (and falconer) who hopes to develop a schools programme for falconry. This is similar to the Lantra Award but geared towards the formal curriculum rather than the mature student. The initiative is being supported by the Countryside Alliance and follows on from their very successful angling programme, and if it takes off will not cost the Hawk Board – thank you CA. It is very much in its infancy and there is much to do before it goes on the road.

The Game Fair

After the wash-out in 2007, the CLA Game Fair comes to Blenheim Palace 25-27 July and 2008 is the event's 50th anniversary. So falconry will be putting on its usual displays with strong support from the clubs. There will be an update before then but it is good to be able to put a key event in the diary now.

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.

My E-mail is: nk.quattro@zetnet.co.uk.

Falconry Fair 2008

The 18th staging of this unique annual event will be at Chetwynd Park, near Newport in Shropshire, on the Bank Holiday weekend of May 4 and 5.

The Fair will once again be sponsored by those absolute stalwarts of British Falconry, Honeybrook Animal Foods. Nick and Lynne Havemann-Mart, along with all their team, have been enthusiastic supporters of the fair over a number of years and the organisers are proud that they have chosen to continue to be the principal sponsors of this prestigious falconry event.

The Fair always attracts a very large number of visitors from overseas and this is reflected and acknowledged in the choice of guest who has been invited to open the event this year. For those that hawk on the continent and also the moors of Scotland the name of Dutch falconer Adriaan Koster will be one that is well known and certainly well respected. A practising falconer for some twenty two years Adriaan has been president of the Dutch Club Valkerij Equipage Jacoba Van Beieren for the past five years. He is also very well known as a breeder of top class falcons which have found favour with falconers throughout Europe

The main arena events this year will concentrate far more on falconry and the emphasis will be very much on flying displays which will be given by various people well known in the falconry world. First and foremost it will be an absolute pleasure to see Jemima Parry-Jones make a welcome return to the demonstration arena. Last year Jemima kindly agreed to open the event whilst she was here on a flying visit from the States. But now she is back permanently and is thankfully taking up where she left off when it comes to displays. Jemima will be in the main arena twice each day and her displays are bound to be both entertaining and educational and up to the very high standard always associated with her.



Can it really be that it's time once again for The British Falconry and Raptor Fair?

A new face in the arena this year will be that of Jonathan Marshall and it is to be hoped that he will be bringing something just a little bit different to the display he will give each day. Jonathan often combines his love of flying hawks and eagles with his other love of flying himself in either a micro-light or a hang glider. Although very much dependent on weather conditions on the day it is hoped that whilst one large Gyr hybrid falcon is being stooped to the lure in the arena another large hybrid falcon will come and join it from a micro-light that will pass over head. If all goes well then it should prove to be very spectacular indeed.

Raptor Rescue will also be giving a display each day which will partially demonstrate the method they use to get a raptor fit prior to being released

back into the wild. Raptor Rescue is an organisation that does a great deal to treat injured birds of prey and put as many as possible back into the wild. They are a charitable organisation which could do with your support, both physical and financial to help them with their excellent work.

The days end to the main arena events will follow the well trodden path and will see Terry Large and friends flying a selection of falcons and hawks. I am sure that all of us would like to say how glad we are to see Terry back fit and well again and fully recovered from his illness.

As well as plenty of falconry based action in the arena there will be, as usual, a large extremely varied selection of trained raptors on the weathering ground. It has to be said that the display on the weathering ground is only possible

thanks to the co-operation and unstinting effort of members of The Central Falconry and Raptor Club. It is they who police the weathering ground and do all they can to assist visitors to it. Without their hard work and ever watchful eye it would not be possible to put on such an excellent display.

The non falconry based events that will be in the arena this year are all country sports related and should be of interest to all. The parade of hounds will be hosted by Michael Sagar and is always a very colourful spectacle and one that is appreciated by the crowds. Both mounted and foot packs should be putting in an appearance this year and the culmination of the display with all the various hounds in the ring always goes down a storm, especially with the children.

There will be a display of simulated coursing which is always popular and normally gets the day's proceedings off to a start. Although based on the true sport of coursing, this display is always light hearted and thoroughly good entertainment.

Gus Dermody will also be putting

The Falconry Fair this year looks like being one of the best ever so make sure you don't miss it.

on a display each day with his superbly trained sheepdogs. Gus is the presenter and co-commentator on the BBC's highly successful "One Man and His Dog" series. Indian Runner Ducks and Herdwick sheep will be skilfully shepherded by Gus and his superb team of six working sheepdogs.

The falconry clubs of Great Britain will be well represented, as usual, at both regional and national level. The Hawk Board and the Campaign for Falconry will also have stands and welcome visitors old and new. Added to these will of course be NAFA and one or

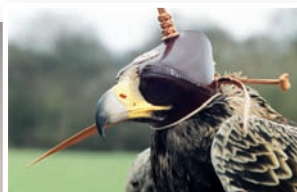
two clubs from the continent. Clubs are at the very grass roots of the sport and it is to be hoped that as many falconers as possible belong to at least one and thereby give the sport and other falconers their support.

Trade stands that relate to just about every aspect of falconry and raptor husbandry will be there along with all the other types of stands normally associated with a game and country fair. Everything from furniture makers and incubation products through to artists and photographers, such as Martyn Brook and Steve Magennis.



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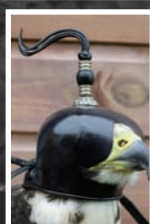
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Of Texas Dirt, Trapping

Ben with American Kestrel



if every falconer were able to trap their own hawk within this context.

However, regardless of the above, trapping is a key activity that completes a direct timeline with the past and our shared heritage. This initial activity, above all else, is the one thing that sets in motion an extended process which hopefully ends with a sporting kill or food for the table.

With the help of several organised trapping organisations, I am beginning to appreciate levels of commitment required to tacitly observe and understand the behaviour of a variety of wild raptors. Some of the more interesting trapping stories are almost too fanciful to believe. I have spoken to one US falconer who hid under a blanket on a beach along the migratory trail of passing falcons. In his left hand he held a pigeon and in his right nothing more than fresh air. It took time and patience but success was undoubtedly his, with pictures to prove it.

Ancient technique

In fact some of the earliest medieval prints from the UK show how this technique was fairly common place; this method was also mentioned in a lecture I attended about hunting Salukis in Oman. After one protracted course, the party stumbled across a falconer hiding in a hole with just his eyes poking over the edge. A crow was attached to a short length of twine and he had been waiting a number of days for a passing falcon to make a mistake and investigate.

As with many things, falconry included, the modern world moves on. The principles and hardware remain but the techniques and context change. No matter how many in-roads are being made into allowing UK falconers access to trap, I am very much resigned to the idea that I will have to travel further afield to adequately educate myself.

With this in mind, I had been in contact with Ed Thomas of the Texas Hawking Association (THA). He graciously invited Anthony Rigby and myself to take some time out, fly down to Southern Texas

There are many ways to try and improve as a falconer in the UK. One can fly a multitude of hawks at a variety of indigenous game, breed, do a little release pen conservation, make equipment and perhaps run a dog. However, there is one contentious issue which the general public and the law of the land prohibit

and that is trapping a wild hawk for the purpose of falconry.

In many respects I can understand why this is so. Unlike other countries worldwide, the UK is comparatively small, over populated, holds a multitude of talented falconers and has no government legislated programme of apprenticeship. One could only imagine what would happen to the natural stocks

and Tequila



and try and trap a raptor in its natural environment. We also planned to join a couple of other members and watch some passage Redtails do what they do best, over the land on which they truly belong.

It was going to be a long hard trip, the plan was to drive up from Corpus Christi, up to Austin and then further still to Fort Worth. We would do this return journey in five days' time. The itinerary would include a days' trapping and a couple of days hunting, followed by long roads, late nights and lots of motel coffee.

After an arduous drive across state, we met Ed and Dustin (Ed's apprentice) in a small gas station just north of Austin and began a quick investigation of the equipment. The traps were a variation of the 'Bal-Chatri'; looking back through some of my historical text, both Berger and Mueller (1959) describe its origins as thus:

"As with most trapping techniques, the device is an adaptation of an ancient idea.

For many years the East Indian falconers have taken hawks in horsehair nooses affixed to the exterior of a cane cage which contained several live lure birds. MacPherson (1897) designates this trap as a "Shikra Trap." Craighead (1942) gives Bal-Chatri ("boy's umbrella") as the Indian name of this trap. The latter has become the accepted name. In our Bal-Chatri we have substituted hardware cloth and monofilament nylon for cane and horsehair and changed the dimensions to enhance portability."

As one would expect Ed and Dustin had substituted cane for small wire mesh and had found that a grey mouse worked exceptionally well. They had somewhere in the region of 100 nooses covering the 12 x 12 x 4 inch cage. The weights on the bottom were long strips of high tensile steel and iron. As the law dictates traps cannot be dropped from a moving vehicle. We adhered to this rule and experienced no problems with the cage falling to right itself or for that matter the

American Kestrel's that we were after being shy and flying off.

Ed and Dustin are locals and as such could more or less pinpoint the exact time and location any hawk or falcon hunted. The base instinct of apex predators must remain the same the world over, this ice cold focus needs no improvement. I have seen three such European Kestrels on my drive home from work, also a Sparrowhawk that has regularly flown at the Blackbirds I have flushed while out with my own Spar. But it still remains you have to know what you're looking for; to be in receipt of this knowledge is profound on many levels.

First trap

Our first trapping opportunity came along a teased road with houses scattered like water droplets over dust. Occasionally farm trucks lumbered into view, but passed slowly enough not to cause too much consternation. A front line cross wind was pushing through hard and a Kestrel wobbled horizontal on the pole.

We swept by and came back round with Dustin in the front seat. The trap was set and we moved away scoping the little falcon at a safe distance.

Almost immediately he dropped down onto the mesh, but just as fast lifted up and hovered over the trap in that inimitable Kestrel manner. He made several lunges only to be bumped by a passing truck. He swung left and above the folding tundra, before steadily drawing back towards the trap. He was working hard for a difficult meal and once again swept over the trap, road and up onto the pole.

Unsure if he could see the mouse in the long swaying grasses, we made in and picked the trap up. This hard little hawk, no more than a few ounces in weight, shifted further back along the poles and let us reset the trap right under him. After a few cursory flights he spooked and began to drift off out into the brush, the last we saw of him was as a small speck on a Mesquite tree.

Over the next hour or so, we criss-crossed the county as the skies thickened fast and the night bumped in. About 20 minutes before total darkness I spotted a dark silhouette centre mark on an overhead cable 100ft from the truck. We passed at a normal pace and swung round and the Kestrel sliced and shuffled a little on the line. About 200ft further down we pulled back again and stopped as Dustin lowered the trap. Slowly surging forward we pulled over at a safe distance, faced the Kestrel and watched. The little falcon popped off his perch and bounced down onto the mouse. He lifted again and became angry, turning and then dropping once more. This time he opened her wings, lifted an inch before crashing over on the trap. He was on and we sprung into action, leaping out the car and running at a speed common only to antelopes.

I cannot add much to the moment other than it was what every falconer imagines trapping a wild hawk should be. I cannot talk of any other species yet; but for this little Kestrel there was a complex fire in the eye. He contained a tangible maelstrom of anger and venom, the iris dark and calm while his little body twisted and spun around in a tiny muscle-tensed struggle. But something more indefinable warmed the feathers; it was not fear as such, more like sheer incredulity at being caught. A confidence and an almost arrogant glare, not unlike the ferocity of a

American Kestrel



wasp trapped in a jar.

On closer inspection he had absolutely perfect plumage. His nape, back and decks outstripped everything I had seen in the most well managed hawk. Maybe it's something in the diet, the weather or genetics; perhaps a combination of all three. Whatever it was what comes directly from the land and is hard wired to the perceptible evolution spiralling through and across the Kestrel's miniature frame. I suppose anything less than perfection in this environment would perish; as if to compound his anger, he bit me hard, before being allowed to fly free.

To pour further scorn on us humans he arched around flying hard into the wind and settled more or less on the self same wire above our heads. He remained there even after the laughter had subsided and we had eased the jeep off down the long and winding road and into a purple bruised sky.

That night, stunned and in thrall Anthony and I managed to celebrate to the tune of 190 dollars worth of Tequila.

So the next day in the heat and concrete suburbs of Austin we wandered lost and very ill. By the following morning we had made the drive north and met up with Brandi and Kylie, two infamous falconers of the Texas Hawking Club.

Brandi and Redtail hawk

As with all apprenticeships, the Redtail hawk is the one we saw flown which had been caught on passage and had now become a full and experienced adult under the careful tutelage of Brandi. She was resplendent in her adult plumage and the sheer size and scale dwarfed any comparable Red's we had seen bred back in the UK. In fact 'Harley' was well known in the THA for managing to lift the trap a fair few feet in the air before escaping, only to be caught at a later date. Now this was a damn fine trap, one that followed a John Graham design and which had secured hundreds of hawks without incident.

As with a lot of 'private' rabbit hawking in the US, we were bordering

a semi-industrial environment. This is in no way similar to the UK as the space the Americans have is far superior. Ours was a strip running alongside a Del Monte factory, measuring about 1000 yards by about 500 yards wide. Because the environment is preternaturally tough in this part of Texas, the flora and fauna is not much different from many of the vast ranches further south. The influx of industrialisation has not, on the face of it, had a detrimental effect on the Cotton-Tail population, or the plethora of small finches, insects and tiny budding desert flowers which were in abundance.

This may make it sound like paradise, but 10 minutes walking through the cover soon changes that. It is extremely hardy, painful and the crackled burst brown earth is swathed in violent roots, grey Mesquite and tangled razor sharp hedge. Without the stubborn, brutal, sheer aggressive nature of a Redtail, this place would prove too difficult to hunt. Many similar sized hawks would simply fail to break through and successfully hold a Cotton Tail. The hawking our group witnessed was therefore a testament to natural evolution and the growing skill of

Brandi as a falconer.

'Harley' was let go and made a slow and deliberate climb onto the main side of the factory. This allowed a perfect vantage to attack any rabbits we flushed in the intense dry heat. In the distance cars shimmered as waves of heat sent the wild Redtails thermalling up on huge soaring journeys. The hunt began to a backdrop of aqua blue sky and giant white and onto our skin.

Almost as soon as we had fanned out and began moving through the brush, Harley glided over our heads and made a slow and calculated drift into place. She folded her wings and shrank her considerable bulk into a blunt dart and thudded into the brush. No matter how many times I have heard it, the force of a Redtail going over full tilt at quarry is impressive. In this case Harley sounded like a lump of concrete being thrown off a bridge. I didn't investigate but I am pretty sure there was a hawk shaped dent left in the ground. Either way she was a little too slow and so Brandi gave her a small reward and cast her back up into position.

A few more minutes and a second Cotton-Tail made good it's escape; the third and final rabbit was not so lucky. Harley had eased into position 50ft above the group and was drunkenly moving on the thermals near a grey brush pile. With alarming violence, Harley folded into a death roll and plummeted down through the shoulder high cover. There was a rushing crash and a hollow thump not dissimilar to a bomb going off underground. Harley had burst through the tangled mess and the inevitable scream went up along with a round of laughter from the UK contingency.

By this time the heat had beaten me fairly and squarely so I had to retire to the cool of the hotel. I was happy to witness the pinnacle of Redtail hawking, namely a passage hawk catching indigenous wild quarry in a stylish and fair flight. Anthony and the others were made of sterner stuff and later the next day regaled me of beer, home cooked chilli, Coopers Hawks and more Cotton-Tails. With more time this could well have become a sprawling American falconry odyssey. As it was, we had achieved our aims and witnessed some spectacular hawking.

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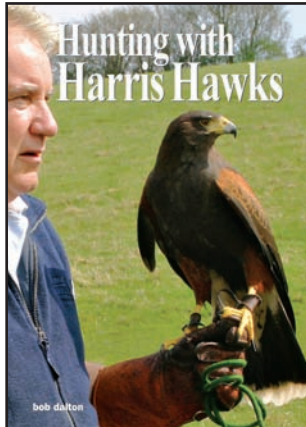
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Memoirs of a professional falconer

I have been an active Falconer since the age of 13, inspired by the book *Kes* by Barry Hines that was part of my English syllabus at School. Funny really, as I found English and School a bore and anyone who has experienced my spelling, will vouch for that. However, the book struck a cord and I guess I identified with the main character, Billy Casper, and was interested by the relationship between him and his Kestrel.

I also read *Falconry in the British Isles* by Salvin and Brodrick and surprisingly this somewhat dated book didn't put me off but further fuelled my initial interest. I was quite aware that hawking Kites in East Anglia was going to be tricky seeing as there weren't any. Just as well then that the only bird I was able to obtain was a Barn Owl.

Then I was introduced to Mike Bignold, who was completely mad and showed contempt to the world but absolute passion – no, more like love – for birds of prey. In the eyes of a teenager, I thought 'This guy was cool' just like Billy in *Kes*. He told me he had some injured Sparrow Hawks which couldn't be returned to the wild and asked if I wanted them for breeding. How could I refuse! Mike became a good friend and there is no doubt he is to blame for my divorce and for me not getting a proper job and if it wasn't for him I would never have had the opportunity to develop my interest.

Flying a Harris' Hawk

He would phone me and say: 'John, got this male Harris, fancy flying it?' In those days Harris Hawks cost over £1000 – I was thrilled. These calls continued and the birds got bigger and bigger, until one day I got the call 'John, I'm looking at these Eagles, fancy a go?'. I was 18 at the time and of course, I did.

Like most would-be Falconers I started with Short-wings, though I never achieved as much as I would have today. I had a Gos Hawk and my lasting memory of the bird is chasing it through woodlands as it self hunted. I chased it for what felt like miles until it finally stopped when I caught up just in time to watch the Gos Hawk preen out the tag



White juvenile Jerkin



What a cute picture!

and it was off again. I did get it back but it was sometime later. Some might suggest that bird signified a turning point in my falconry career, a time when I joined the top flight, however my family see it more like the start of the end.

The Gos Hawk taught me a vital lesson that falconry isn't that easy. It helped me to look more deeply at the art, to focus on the end objective and figure out a set of training procedures which will enable me to instill the behaviour on the bird necessary to achieve it.

I have never practised falconry properly with a Shortwing since, situations and circumstance carried me in the Longwing direction although I have flown many for work or while running the Falconry centre at Banham Zoo. We flew everything at the zoo, though the biggest challenge was training six fully grown Vultures without scales, without tethering them and without the ability to

attach a creance or tag. It was surprisingly easy although we did get it spectacularly wrong once when a Vulture escaped and we ended up making *News at Ten* and six front covers of national papers in three days. Now that was a strange experience, being chased by the paparazzi whilst trying to get a bird back. Not good on the nerves when you have absolutely no idea of how you are going to get it back because it had always flown to and from the aviary with five others. There were no fewer than three satellite news vans and 20 cameramen and reporters. In the end a girl who worked for me got it back in spectacular fashion and ended up on *TVAM*.

Passion for falcons

My passion has always been falcons and I have been fortunate to witness some truly amazing spectacles whether it be out of the hood or waiting on. For me the pleasure is witnessing a Hawk do what God created them to do or the result of millions of years of evolution and natural selection. However you choose to view it, it is still awe-inspiring.

The best way I can sum this up is to tell you of an account told to me by a well known falconer friend. He describes getting up on a very special day over the Christmas period with every intention not to fly his Hawk but on discovering the perfect conditions found himself loading his hawk into the car. After a perfect flight he sat down next to his Hawk as it fed up on its dinner, stroking his dog he looked up at the blue sky and thought how wonderful life was. He returned back to the family who had started lunch without him, frustrated they didn't share his enthusiasm for the morning's flight that caused his delay.

Falconry is all consuming, it has been my life with NBC Bird and Pest Solutions as my living for most of my life, I have experienced much and knowing the sport the way I do I know that I have much more to come. I have met some wonderful people and have shared pain, comedy, heartbreak and exhilaration, sometimes all on the same day. This is falconry and these are special moments which become our memories. Through the next few issues I hope to share some of those with you and celebrate the birds, the sport and the people.

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Opočno 2007



Gathering at the opening ceremony

The annual falconry meeting in Opočno, Czech Republic, was held on 10-13 October last year and was once again organised by The Czech Falconry Club. This year the event was even more special as it was the 40th meeting to be held and what a delight it was. It was a truly international event with people from all over the world including USA, Britain, France, Germany, Hungary, Holland, Austria and Russia.

After travelling to Prague I met up with some friends and we had a good couple of days looking around that wonderful city, eating some great food and drinking cheap beer.

I travelled onward to Opočno by train with two young people from America, Lauren McGough and Chase Delles. The journey was, to say the least, interesting. We could not speak Czech and the people who work for the railway could not speak English but we did eventually arrive at our destination after about three hours travelling and at least three different trains. A long uphill walk of about a mile saw us arrive at the Hotel Opočno to be checked in. (Pre-registration was required by everyone

attending, even if you were only an observer and not attending with a bird.)

We were greeted by Hannah Melcer who had all our details, giving out name badges and a souvenir poster of the event. This was on the Wednesday before the main meeting took place. Earlier that day had been the opening of the exhibition and handing over of awards, before a balloon/kite sky trial took place. Unfortunately we arrived too late in Opočno to attend the trial.

However, I did get time to have a look at the weathering ground which was positioned in the grounds of a local church and what a sight that was. Over 30 Golden Eagles, 12 Goshawks and a number of falcons and Harris Hawks (although these were in the minority). Also, a stunning Bonelli's Eagle which caused a lot of interest.

Opening day

The following day saw the opening ceremony which lasted for about 1½ hours. This was held in the courtyard of the Opočno Château and was a real spectacle. All the falconers with their birds, together with spectators and school children, who probably couldn't

believe their luck to have a couple of hours away from school.

A group of horn players gave us a fanfare to open the ceremony before the speeches of welcome. This being the 40th anniversary of the meet, the opening ceremony was something a bit special. Various dignitaries who arrived by horse and carriage spoke to the assembled people, while television crews filmed the whole event and interviewed some of the falconers present. The event was broadcast in a local news bulletin later that night.

Then, at approximately 11.30am we all departed for the first field meet. Various groups were planned – two eagle groups, goshawk groups, falcon groups and broadwing groups – and we all jumped into the appropriate vehicles for our particular group. I was in an eagle group led by Josef Hiebeler and my chauffeur was Jeff McKnight, whom many of you may know. Josef raced off and the following cars in his group followed but it seemed that Josef could not find the right way out of town. My ears are still burning from Jeff's colourful reaction to his lack of navigational skills!

Eventually we found the village that we



were going to fly from and parked up, but no one was in a hurry to get their birds ready as a most important event had to take place first - lunch.

After lunch it was time to get everything ready. Birds weighed, telemetry in place, boots and coats on. Then we were off to the first field where we all spread out in a long line ready for the first drive of the day. The area we were walking was undulating with very lush short grass. It wasn't long before the first hare was bolted and Josef, who was at the far left-hand side of the line, slipped his Golden Eagle, but the quarry made its escape.

Next, at the other end of the line, a roe deer bolted from the woods which were just in front of us. Unfortunately for it, it bolted in the wrong direction and was soon caught by one of the other Golden Eagles in the group. Then, another deer appeared and it too succumbed to an eagle's vice-like grip.

Next, another hare got up and Jeff McKnight's bird was soon onto it but we did not see the quarry taken outright as it ran over a small rise. But we did see Jeff move at a rapid rate to give aid to his bird.



Jeff McKnight

Over the water

After some more walking and flushing of game we found ourselves in a small hollow where we all took a rest for five minutes before continuing. The landowner re-grouped everyone and we soon came across a small stream with steep sides to its banks.

Everyone stopped to assess the situation as to how to get across without too much damage to both bird and person. Mike Clowes, who was also in the group of spectators, was carrying a long stick and he tested the water for depth. The stream was quite deep, but suddenly Mike decided to leap over the water to the other bank. I would like to say the leap was "gazelle-like", but I can't. He did, however, manage to get across with an effort and, next, it was Josef with his eagle on his fist. A giant



Josef Hiebeler

leap and he landed on the other side – just. He fell onto his front and everyone was concerned about his eagle – that was after we all had a good laugh at his expense! After a while and much frivolity, we all managed to get across without further incident and no-one falling in the water.

We carried on back in the line and more quarry was flushed, with more or less equal success going to birds and quarry. It was quite something to watch these majestic eagles working. A little later on a third deer was caught by a falconer from Belgium and as it turned out it was the bird's first kill. After that the landowner put a stop to hunting any more deer and we concentrated on hare.

Day two

The second day I was once again with a Golden Eagle group. This time my chauffeur was Mike Clowes. In the car was Mike's wife, Julie, and Joe and Cordi Atkinson from America. The area we were walking was very different from the first day. Much of the ground had been ploughed and it was heavy going underfoot. More hares were flushed and I had a better look at the falconers with

their eagles. When the quarry was got up, the falconer did not strike the eagle's hood at once. He waited a second or so before letting his bird go to see if the hare jinked one way or the other.

After one particular flush, the eagle chased after the quarry but instead of taking the hare decided to fly up into a tree and stayed there for about 20 minutes before flying back to the falconer's fist. Of course, no one else could move until the bird was re-united with its owner for fear of flushing more quarry, as that would surely have been an accident waiting to happen.

When the eagle had safely returned, we moved on and witnessed several more exciting flights until, at the end of the day, we returned to base with more quarry in the bag.

Then it was back to the hotel for a shower and relaxation before having a drink before dinner, during dinner, after dinner . . .

The last day

After another short ceremony in the morning, it was into the cars for the final day's hawking. I elected to go with a Goshawk group and this time Harry Wagenaar, from Holland, was my driver. But, before we went to the flying ground, everyone (including most of the town's residents) met up outside Opocno for a

wonderful flying display given by a Czech falconry centre.

The display was held on top of a small hill and although many of the spectators didn't understand the language, it didn't matter because of the quality of the display. Various species were flown including a Red Kite that disappeared over the horizon for quite a while before returning 15 minutes later. The display givers were not at all concerned and put up more birds while the Kite was flying some way off. This delighted the crowd and the whole display lasted for around one hour. I have to say it was one of the most impressive displays that I have ever seen.

Then it was back in the cars for a mad dash trying to pick up the correct group leader to follow to the right location depending on which group you were in. Unfortunately, our leader had car trouble and it was some time before he could get going but we did manage to drive off after a while. We eventually arrived on the site, which was outside a small eating and drinking establishment. Ah, that was well planned! I did discover later that at the day's end we were to sample said food and drink, but before that we had to work up an appetite.

Off we went with the Goshawk group – which consisted of both Czech and Austrian falconers. There were a large

number of followers and the landowner made sure everything went smoothly and correctly. We arrived at the first field of the day with everyone in a long line and the shout went up that we should start to move forward. The ground that we had to cover was huge. Hardly a tree or hedgerow in sight. The land was very claggy underfoot but we did manage to bump up a few hares along the way.

After the first field we crossed a small road where a lot of foot stamping was going on to get the clay off our boots. There was a lot of it and after this short unscheduled stop it was onto the next field where, thank goodness, it was more like a stubble field which made walking a bit easier.

A few more hares were bumped up and one particular Goshawk had slip after slip but to no avail until later in the day. As it turned out, it was the bird's first kill. Another Goshawk had a long slip and finally bound onto the hare. The falconer went running over towards his bird but all of a sudden the hare jumped and ran off leaving the hawk somewhat bemused. The falconer stopped in his tracks, took off his hat and threw it to the ground in frustration. A dramatic gesture but indicative of the falconer's true passion.

After a few more slips the day's hunting ended and, after a short closing ceremony, it was time to sample the local fare. We



Golden Eagle group

crammed into the small restaurant and spoke about the day's events while eating a superb two course dinner. It was a bit strange to see two Goshawks perched on the back of their owners' chairs while they were eating – something you don't get to see too often, especially in this country!

Back to Opcno

At around 7.00pm that day we all assembled once again at the Opcno Château courtyard for the final closing ceremony, called the Strichenlaager. Some of the day's quarry was laid out inside a square made of pine tree branches. No one was allowed into this square except for designated people who laid out the carcasses. This closing ceremony gives thanks to all who attended the meet and more importantly, a prayer is said for the quarry which was caught and laid out.

Later in the evening, a final social meeting for the falconers and spectators was held in the Hotel Holub, before we all dispersed the following day to head home.

This was the first time that I had visited the Opcno meet and I was impressed with the organisation that went into the smooth running of the event.

Many Thanks

Many thanks to all at The Czech Falconry Club for making us all so welcome.



Bohumil Straka – president Czech Falconry Club



Goshawk group

A comparison of styles



Author with Golden Eagle

Flying and hunting golden eagles in the United States has been around for many years. People such as Morley Nelson were flying golden eagles many years ago with great success but only a very few falconers have consistently taken game with a

golden eagle in the US. In the last five or six years, however, eagle falconry has started to gain in popularity as more US falconers are realizing the potential of the golden eagle as a falconry bird. So much so, that we now have our own club, the International Eagle Austringers Association, or IEAA. Nonetheless,

despite the growing popularity of eagle falconry in the US, the hot bed for all things eagles remains in Europe, particularly in Czech Republic and Germany, with one particular eagle falconry meet being held each October in the small town of Opcno in Czech Republic. There, the sport of eagle falconry is steeped in tradition, going back hundreds of years. So for me, a lifelong US eagle falconer, to go to Opcno and see, firsthand, eagles flying at hares and roe deer, was to be a truly amazing adventure.

Bowed out

I think most falconers have seen the photographs from Opcno – the huge lawn with dozens of eagles perched out everywhere with a good, healthy sprinkling of falcons and hawks mixed in and, of course, the beautiful castle in the background. I can recall looking at those pictures in disbelief, seeing so many trained eagles in one location. My eagle falconry experience has been one of flying alone or with a few friends watching, but never, until just recently, had I seen another trained golden eagle hunted in the field. So, for me, going to Opcno was a trip to “wonderland”. To see that many eagles and eagle falconers in one location and to be able to compare equipment, handling, flying and hunting techniques was too good to be true.

Flying golden eagles in the US has been an on-going learning experience for me, even in figuring out all the things that eagles require to get them into the field. Take for example finding an eagle glove. These days you can buy some very nice gloves from the many falconry suppliers out there but trying to find a good eagle glove in 1974 was a different matter . . . it wasn't going to happen . . . and a welder's glove had to do.

As a young man living on a remote cattle ranch with a very aggressive female imprinted golden eagle, just trying to figure out how long the jesses should be was a big challenge. My first thought was that they should be just slightly longer than on my red tail hawk. Wrong. The answer is much longer, up to 14 inches in fact, because you need to be able to control those feet. After all, this is not a Harris Hawk or Red Tail you're holding, it's an eagle! But there was nobody to call for help and consult with. And I wish I had had someone to tell me things such as when your female eagle is a pin dot

way up in the sky, don't stand directly underneath her, calling her straight down to the fist to see if she will come down, because she will and you could die! Or that female goldens can pair bond with you, and don't share well, and will think nothing of flying your wife down and pinning her on the side of a hill. Things like that.

Now, I admit that that female was imprinted completely the wrong way, but nobody told me! Or that eagles, unless properly introduced to dogs, look at them as food, regardless of how big the dogs are. Of course, the more eagles I flew the more I figured things out. However, it was truly trial by fire. If there was a mistake to be made, I made it, sometimes more than once. Unfortunately, there were no masters to learn from.

Flying styles

I have flown eagles in two particular styles, from the soar and off the fist. Watching a golden eagle come from a dot in the sky, stooping at a jack rabbit or, in some cases, ducks and pheasants, is spectacular. However, my favorite method of hunting eagles is off the fist at jack rabbits or hares. I feel that off the fist hunting shows the true power and strength of the golden eagle and forms a stronger bond between eagle and falconer. The eagle figures out that you are hunting just as hard as it is and sees, firsthand, your value to the hunting team; whereas from the soar, you are flushing game but the eagle's sole focus is not on you and it may begin to self-hunt.

Our first day in the field in Opcocno was filled with great excitement, and the first thing I noticed was that eagles are eagles no matter which side of the big pond they are on – they look and act the same. I was pleased to see that much of the equipment was the same as mine and it was interesting that, with no outside help and having to figure out what worked on my own, I had come up with almost the exact same style of equipment. I guess having an eagle that gets a little cranky while coming in to the fist transcends all languages and the need for long jesses and strong cuffs are clear.

Even though the eagles look the same, their backgrounds are completely different. The European eagle is one of two things, either an imprint or parent raised in captivity. In the US our eagles are, for the most part, wild-trapped.



Waiting for the flush

There are one or two imprints around, my four-year-old male being one of them, but they are the exception. We are not allowed to captive breed eagles for falconry in the US and the differences between passage vs. captive raised are significant. The captive raised European eagles, whether parent raised or imprinted, are all socialized, passed around from falconer to falconer so they become very comfortable around lots of people. And just the fact that they are raised in captivity means they have seen people their entire lives – this is a huge advantage for the falconer. In the US, we are dealing with, as I said, wild trapped birds and we are not allowed to have

anyone other than another licensed eagle falconer handle our eagles. In Europe that might not be such a problem but in the US, finding another eagle falconer can be nearly impossible. So the idea of socializing our birds like the European falconers do is not an option at this time.

Socialised eagles

While out in the field in Opcocno, I was struck by the way the falconers handled their eagles on a kill. Moving in and opening up the hare while the eagle was feeding, bare handed offering of food, with no aggression from the eagles. This is a testament to the early training the eagles have received as young birds and

the efforts put into socialising them with people. Passage eagles trapped in the US act completely differently around a kill, the main reason being that they have had to defend their kills from other eagles, coyotes, bobcats and probably a mountain lion or two. So, in the early stages of hunting your new passage eagle, you might not want to make in too fast – the passage golden eagle does not share well. In time they will allow you to go in and open up the animal, but in the beginning, it's not a good idea. A good example of how a passage eagle protects its kill came in the form of a small 6lb male I was flying some years ago. He was quite the jack rabbit catcher but, in the beginning, would not tolerate me coming any closer than 10 feet. I called it his "circle of tolerance".

If I, or anyone for that matter, entered his circle he would leave the kill and fly straight at your face! By standing my ground and therefore not allowing the eagle to gain control of the situation he did get over this rather unpleasant behavior and was a very nice bird to hunt, allowing me to go right in as close as I wanted. It's not hard to see that somewhere out in the wild he had to defend his meals and, being a smallish male, probably was

robbed more than once and had to learn at an early age to defend his kill very aggressively or go hungry.

Hunting in the fields with multiple eagles, like I saw in Opopno, is also something I have never done. There simply are not enough other eagle falconers around, so that part of the Opopno eagle meet I could not relate to. However, it was interesting to see how the whole system worked. A hunting line of spectators with eagle falconers spaced among them was formed and walked through a field designated by the landowner. When game was flushed, the closest eagle to the slip was unhooded and flown. If there were two eagles close to a slip, a prearranged agreement determined who went first and so forth. All went smoothly. Only once did two eagles get released at the same time.

Out of the hood

One question I have been asked is: why do I fly my eagles unhooded? While at the Opopno meet, I turned the question around and asked why their eagles are flown out of the hood. While it is true that some are flown unhooded, far and away, the majority of eagles are flown out of the hood. I was told that this is done

for two reasons:

- 1) safety -- with that many eagles in the field at once, the chances are good that more than one bird will be launched at the same time and that is never a good thing
- 2) to give the rabbits a sporting chance.

Now, the first reason, too many eagles in the field, is obvious and hopefully someday here in the US, we will have to deal with that as well. Reason number two I took special interest in, having caught my fair share of jack rabbits (hares), including the mighty white tail jack rabbit, the mountain black tail jack rabbit and the one I consider the fastest of all the hares or jack rabbits we have, the desert black tail jack rabbit.

Just to clear up one thing, all our jack rabbits are actually hares, not rabbits. We do have rabbits and the cotton tailed rabbit is the most common. Somewhere someone gave our hares the name "jack rabbit" and it stuck and, while I was in Europe, this was a constant point of confusion. I should have used the name black tail hare or white tail hare, that would have been better for all. Having flown thousands of slips on jack rabbits with eagles off the fist, I feel I have a good sense of how fast they run and how quickly eagles get to them. Nothing I saw in Europe can compare to the sheer speed of the desert black tail. They are built to run. They are the smallest of the jacks we have over here and they run and run faster, that's all they know and they go forever.

The first difference I saw between the hares I fly and the ones in Europe is that the brown hare, for example, does not have the long range endurance as our jacks. The brown hare, after being chased for 60 to 100 yards, is winding down, running out of gas, if you will. I saw several brown hares, flushed way at the far end of the hunting line, come running past us just about out of gas and if it were not for thick cover, would have been caught by the eagle. Our jack rabbits have long range endurance and will run out of sight at full speed.

I think the blue hare that we saw in Scotland is the closest to our jack rabbit that I saw in Europe. It will run long distances like our jacks and go up some incredible mountains.

Getting back to the "giving the hare a fair chance" statement; the European hares that we saw hold very tight and on many occasions, can be spotted and the



In flight



falconer waved over for the flush. The falconer would then try to walk around to the back end of the hare, hoping the hare would flush away from the falconer, thus giving a cleaner flush. Any eagle experienced on hares, if flown unhooded, would catch the hare before it was even flushed and that is not very sporting. In just the mere time it takes to unhood the eagle the hare has time to get away and get up to speed. This makes for a much more exciting flight and tests the eagle's abilities. So, safety and giving the hare a sporting chance are the two reasons eagles are flown out of the hood.

I have flown eagles out of the hood but found it very difficult to unhood my bird fast enough to keep the flight within a reasonable distance from me. The desert black tail, the jack rabbit that I am most familiar with, normally will not hold like the European brown hare. It will flush many yards in front of you and is at full speed in seconds. Your eagle must react quickly or the flight can go for a long distance. However, despite the great speed of the desert black tail jack rabbit, a well conditioned golden eagle can make catching them look easy.

Quarry differences

So, in comparison, eagle falconry in Europe and the US are quite similar in regards to the equipment used. I found it interesting that the current eagle glove that I am using is identical to some I saw at the Opcno meet. Comparing quarry,

our hares in the US are faster but what the brown hare lacks in speed it more than makes up for with cunning moves, making it a very challenging quarry and the mountain blue hares that we saw hunted in Scotland act very much like our jack rabbits. Flights on roe deer are exciting and very challenging for the eagles and I would say, for the eagle falconers as well, but in the US we are not allowed to hunt deer with eagles. In some states hunting deer with eagles could be a possibility. However, the deer we have in the US are as much as two or three times bigger than the roe deer and could pose a serious risk to the eagle. Our jack rabbits and the hares in Europe all have the same jump move where they jump straight up at the very last second and the eagle goes flashing under the airborne hare.

From what I saw, the hares in Europe seem to use this escape tactic much more than hares in the US. It is interesting that I have never witnessed any of our cotton tail rabbits, which are a true rabbit and not a hare, do this manoeuvre. The black tails that live in the higher elevations will use the sage brush as a method of escape. They will flush, start to run and the moment the eagle closes, they duck under a sage bush and stop, 10 feet away or a 100, it does not matter, they stop. When the jack rabbit stops, the eagle loses sight of the hare and the flight is over, at least for the trained eagle. Wild eagles will continue to flush and harass the hare by

landing on the sage bush and will continue working the hare until the hare panics, makes a mistake and gets caught. So, for me, unless I can find the mountain black tail jacks in short sage, meaning knee-high or less, flying them is not much fun. They do, however, feed in hay fields and that is great fun . . . speed on speed!

This, then, has been a comparison of eagles flown using much the same techniques and flown at similar quarry but with vastly different backgrounds and flown under different flying conditions. On the one hand, there is the European golden eagle, fully humanized, domestically produced (either parent raised or imprinted), flown in sometimes large hunting parties with many other eagles, where manners from the hunting eagles are a must. Compare that to the wild passage golden eagle flown in the US that is aggressive and not fond of sharing food with anything, let alone another eagle and has grown up in an environment where you protect your kill or go hungry.

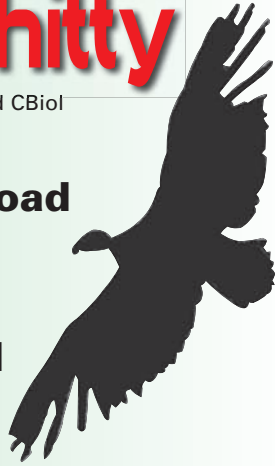
In the US we have so much game, so much land to fly our eagles on and I can only hope that, as eagle falconry grows, we show the same level of respect for the game and the land that is shown by our brothers and sisters in Europe. The European eagle falconers fly their eagles at the highest level. They have been flying eagles at game since the dawn of falconry and we, here in the US, can learn much from them.

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Becoming a Young Falconer

by Ross Sargent (age 14)



As long as I can remember I have loved birds of any kind – not too surprising as both my grandads had aviaries full of budgies. Not quite the same as birds of prey, I know, but nevertheless a good start some would say.

It wasn't until my grandparents took me to a Country Fair near where we live that I found my passion for birds of prey. They had a show and you were allowed to hold the birds. Wow! I was on cloud nine. Then the unthinkable happened: they had told my grandparents they had just set up the first young falconers club in the country. Fantastic. Of course they booked me up for the course. I was seven years old and on top of the world.

We met at the Falconry Centre every third Saturday and learnt everything from how to handle the birds to feeding them. We had vets in to talk to us about different things and went on flying days so we could see how the birds caught their prey.

At the end of the first year we did a demonstration for all family/friends and had a presentation afterwards in which I came second out of 30 children – on that cloud nine again. I spent another

three years there enjoying every minute of it, even in the classroom having lessons. Sadly after four years they said they were concentrating mainly on the younger children that had just started the courses, and I wasn't old enough to help as a volunteer. That's when my parents decided it was time for me to have my own bird.

Lucky for me, a man down the road from us was a falconer and had been for many, many years. He became my mentor and helped me to buy my first bird – Spook, my Harris Hawk. I called him Spook as he was spooked by a cat that had jumped onto his aviary. He stayed at Alan's for a while so my parents had time to sort out an aviary and while he was at Alan's I spent all my time getting to know him. First letting him get used to me going into the aviary, then progressing onto teaching him how to sit on my glove. Then from there going to my local pavilion with permission to train him to fly to my fist. He learnt so quickly – before I knew it we were taking him out to hunt.

Spook was a brilliant bird. He wasn't that great at catching but I think that was because he was still very young (nearly two years old). Alan had a female

Harris and asked if I would like to train her to see if she could catch more. She was a breeding bird and had never been handled before.

I started the process over again, the same as I did with Spook. It was going very, very slowly – one step forwards and ten back. After six months I was still training, but kept trying. Then the unspeakable happened. As usual I would get up every morning and go to see my birds, weigh them, feed them. spend time with them before I would go to catch my bus for school. There was Spook, my life, dead and Paige on him pecking. My parents could hear my screams and cries from upstairs in the house. My world had stopped. I couldn't believe it – the worst day of my life. My dad took him out of the aviary, checked him all over and Alan came and had a look at him. At first I thought it was Paige that had killed him but there were no marks on him anywhere. My dad and I went to our land and buried him, put flowers and his name there. A week later I heard that Spook's brother had died suddenly just like Spook. I'm now wondering if they had something wrong with their hearts.

Feeling still very despondent with what had happened, I tried again training Paige but I was not experienced enough to carry on. Alan took her back for me and she went to a good home.

I'm only 14 years old and I've had a great opportunity to come into the falconry world which I love with a passion and last October I bought another Harris Hawk and started training again. I still need to learn lots and lots more and would love anyone to give me any advice – the more the merrier. I wanted to write this story as I would love younger people to get involved. It's changed my life and I'm hoping to get a career out of it. What an opportunity that would be – getting a job that's your hobby and being paid for it!

A Fresh Start



Jemima with Harris Hawk

Jemima Parry-Jones, or Mima as she is more affectionately known, needs little or no introduction to the British public as the first Lady of British Falconry. The daughter of the renowned falconer Philip Glasier, who himself was a very big influence on modern falconry in Britain, Mima has been surrounded by raptors and various animals of one sort or another for as long as she can remember. For many years she owned and ran the National Bird of Prey Centre at Newent in Gloucestershire and is extremely familiar to those that attended Game and Country fairs in general and the CLA Game Fair in particular. Her flying demonstrations were always of the very highest example and were both educational as well as entertaining. Mima was also very supportive to those that sought genuine

help and could be extremely generous with some of the hawks and falcons she bred. Having said that she has never suffered fools gladly and it became apparent all too soon if she considered you fell into that category.

It was Philip Glasier who established The Falconry Centre at Newent in the 1960's and it really was a first of its kind back then. The Falconry Centre very soon became a meeting place for falconers as well as an opportunity to view a unique collection of raptors with the emphasis very much on falconry. There was even a small exhibition of falconry memorabilia on show which included a scale model of the trapping system employed by the Dutch hawk trappers at Valkenswaard. The fame and appeal of the centre spread far and wide and visiting falconers would, quite literally, come from all over the world.

In the natural course of events Mima took over the centre and it was eventually transformed into The National Bird of Prey Centre. Through the years the collection grew and some of the buildings were modernised and improved upon and new ones were erected. From a falconer's point of view, or someone with an interest in raptors, then Newent was the place to visit on a regular basis. It seemed that the centre would always be there and that Mima was more or less part of the fixtures and fittings.

Consequently it came as something of a shock to a great many people when it was eventually revealed that the Centre was to be sold and that Jemima would be moving, along with most of her collection, to the States. Here she would join forces with the South Carolina Centre for Birds of Prey and the two collections would merge to become a new and special Centre of Excellence for Birds of Prey. Accordingly in 2004 the majority of the collection that had been at Newent was moved to Carolina, along with six Labradors and all of Jemima's belongings. Obviously the move was a massive undertaking in terms of sheer logistics and had to be planned like a military operation. On the whole things worked out well and with only a couple of exceptions everyone and everything eventually turned up more or less where they were supposed to be. The move was even of sufficient interest for the BBC to follow it up with a radio programme.

Unfortunately things did not work out as planned and after eighteen months or so the situation became untenable for Jemima. Probably the nicest way of putting it would be to say that promises were not kept and the merger never became a reality. It became painfully clear that Jemima realistically had two options in front of her. She either gave up and abandoned what she had spent a lifetime building and working for and just come home or go through the entire process of moving the collection and herself back across the Atlantic again. Needless to say the first option was never ever a viable one and so the process to complete the latter was begun.

Before this could take place there was a mountain of red tape to go through and the small matter of finding

a place back here in the UK to house the collection and Jemima. After numerous trips back and forwards across the Atlantic a twenty-one acre fruit farm in Eardisland, Herefordshire was found and purchased. So in June of last year the whole process of transposing everything from Carolina to Herefordshire took place and, it has to be said, took place very successfully. Friends on both sides of the water rallied round and with their help the exercise went as smoothly as it could possibly be hoped for. On arrival in the UK the collection had to clear customs at Heathrow and then go directly into quarantine and this was carried out at specially adapted premises in Hereford.

At Eardisland things are progressing at a pace and the new International Centre for Birds of Prey is taking shape as fast as the relevant planning permission will allow. But until all the new aviaries are up and the new residents installed there is a great deal of travelling backwards and forwards between Hereford and Eardisland. Having been fortunate enough to see the plans and have a glimpse of the future spread before me, well on paper at least, then all I can say is the wait for the new centre to be completed will be a worthwhile one. Whilst with

Jemima recently I took the opportunity of asking her a few questions about things in general and the new centre in particular.

Whilst back briefly in the UK last year you took time out from your schedule to open The Falconry Fair. Were you pleasantly surprised at the warm welcome you received?

JPJ. I found the reception I received delightful and very special.

Things seem to be progressing nicely with the new centre. When do you hope to be open, in part at least, to the public?

JPJ. Things are slowly coming together and never seem to happen as quickly as one would like. But all being well the centre will be open later this season, in the autumn by the very latest.

What are the long term aims and plans for the new centre?

JPJ. The long term plan is to build the definitive bird of prey centre as was the original idea and motivation behind the move to South Carolina in 2004. But now that will be here and when everything is

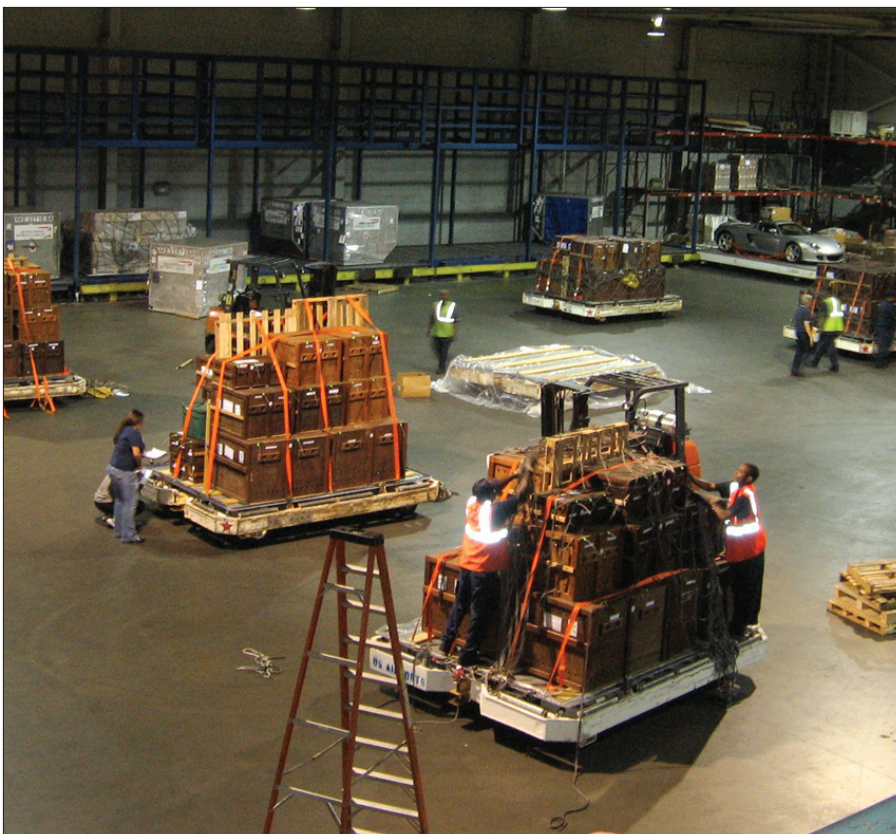
complete the centre should encompass all that is best in raptor welfare and keeping.

You have made provision for an indoor arena. Is this purely for bad weather conditions or are there additional usages for the area in your plans?

JPJ. The huge barn like structure that will eventually become an indoor arena is actually a bit of a luxury building. It was conceived as an area to carry out training and display work of a limited nature when the weather was bad. Initially it has doubled as a temporary area in which to house part of the collection whilst building work continues. Once everything is completed and the collection is settled in their relevant custom built homes then the indoor arena could well be put to use for various special events as well as its original purpose.

It goes without saying that you are just as committed as ever to raptor conservation. What are you currently involved in with regard to that field?

JPJ. Currently I am involved with several projects all related to raptor conservation and also welfare. With regard to the latter I am working with the Hawk Board on formulating welfare guidelines for raptor keeping. I am also involved with a group working on strategy for bird welfare relevant to the Welfare of Animals Act. I am still involved with the Vulture project in India and also assisting with a breeding project in the UAE. So life is just as full and as hectic as ever.



The collection on its way home

I am sure that everyone wishes Jemima well in her endeavour and will be visiting the centre as soon as it is up and running. The centre is looking for volunteers as well as donations and also it is possible to become a member of the International Centre for Birds of Prey. For further details look on the web site which is www.icbp.org. In the meantime Jemima will be back in the public eye again when she headlines the arena displays at this year's Falconers Fair carrying out two displays each day.

The Living Heritage Falconry Village

A major new initiative to promote falconry at our Game & Country fairs to interest both the established falconer and offer an induction to beginners and show visitors.

THE RESIDENT FALCONERS

• **CHRIS NEAL** - Introduced to Falconry through his grandfather, James Warriner, who was a gamekeeper. His first bird was a Kestrel - Progressed to Goshawks and Peregrines over the years and eventually flew a Golden Eagle called Ivan in the 60's/70's. Joined Living Heritage demonstrating Owls, Hawks and Falcons at their Craft & Country Fairs twenty years ago and has been with them ever since. Has strong views on conservation and has worked in Asia and Africa for National Geographic, BBC Wildlife on One and ITV.

• **CHRIS MILLER** - Chris is a relative newcomer to Living Heritage. He has many years experience in flying birds of prey at many venues throughout the country. He is also a LANTRA assessor and runs courses at Derby College and throughout the country. He brings along to the shows his stunning Female Golden Eagle, which is a show stopper.

• **JOHN AKERMAN** - John purchased the Falconry Centre at Hagley in 2004 and has built up an incredible variety of raptors including Golden Eagles, Steppe Eagles, Bald Eagles, a pair of Black Kites, Vultures, Redtails, Lanners, Sakers and a Grasshopper Buzzard to name but a few.

• **ANDY COOK** - Andy is a very experienced Falconer flying Gyr/Saker hybrids, Ferruginous Buzzards and Peregrine hybrids. He entertains the public with a most impressive demonstration of Harris Hawks and Ferrets, including supervised visitor participation and his jovial mannerism is a real bit with the general public who visit the Falconry Village.

• **GUEST FALCONERS** - At each of the events we are looking to include an invited guest falconer. We are looking to develop a schedule of invited guest falconers to compliment our four residents. A listing will be included on our website.

• **HELEN HARRISON (Veterinary Nurse)** - Helen has been working at Living Heritage Events for two years, assisting the Falconers on welfare issues. She qualified as a Veterinary Nurse at the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons in January 2001. She has also completed the Lantra Award 'Beginning Falconry' in December 2006, along with further Veterinary Nursing qualifications in Exotic Species, Avian, Reptiles & Amphibians, Small Mammals and British Wildlife in July 2002. A valued member of our team.

VILLAGE LAYOUT

• **Main Marquees** - House the indoor arena and Forum & Workshop areas.

• **Club Marquees** - Where possible a local club/clubs will be included in the village. Already confirmed are the South Devon & Yorkshire Clubs at the South Western & Wolds events respectively. Updates will be announced on the website.

• **Trade Stands** - A selection of trade stands will be housed within the village.

• **Welfare & Conservation** - Both are an extremely important aspects of Falconry Welfare and regulation matters will be covered by our Veterinary Nurse in talks, demonstrations and question and answer sessions. Conservation will have a similar format covered by our Falconers and welfare organisation.

• **The Hawk Board** - At all the shows there will be the presence of the Hawk Board, Lantra and Campaign for Falconry, giving the opportunity to discuss all aspects of falconry at the various talks and forums.

• **Education** - Living Heritage consider this to be perhaps one of the most important areas, attracting new people to the sport. In 2007, the Young Countryman of the Year Challenge aimed at youngsters between 9 and 16 was launched with an Introduction to Falconry. The overall winner is pictured opposite enjoying his prize; a day out in the Shropshire hills. Whilst this years format has to be finalised, the Young Country scheme will continue this year.

• **Public Participation** - There will be the opportunity for show visitors to experience first hand flying a Hawk on a creance in the indoor arena. Details are available on the website.



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Broadlands, Romsey
- Sat & Sun July 12th & 13th
SOUTH WESTERN GAME & COUNTRY FAIR
Westpoint, Exeter
- Sat & Sun, August 2nd & 3rd
ESSEX GAME & COUNTRY FAIR
Blake Hall Gardens, Ongar
- Sat & Sun, August 9th & 10th
WILTSHIRE GAME & COUNTRY FAIR
Bowood, Calne, Wilts
- Sat, Sun & Mon, August 23rd, 24th & 25th
TATTON PARK COUNTRY FAIR
Tatton, Knutsford
- Sat & Sun, September 6th & 7th
THE WOLDS GAME & COUNTRY FAIR
Sledmere House, Driffild, Yorks.
- Sat & Sun, September 13th & 14th
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'Black Hole of Calcutta' in Essex

An investigation conducted by the RSPCA, RSPB and Essex police has resulted in suspended prison sentences and a life-long ban for keeping birds to a husband and his wife from Harwich, Essex. The judgment was for keeping birds in atrocious conditions.

The offences related to 38 birds of prey, parrots and owls that were found by RSPCA, RSPB and police at a house in the Essex town last year. The birds were found to be living in filthy, cramped conditions and among the species found was a Cassin's Hawk-Eagle. Also found, were a number of Gabar goshawks, Kestrels, Indian Scops owls, Boobook owls and Rufous-thighed owls.

Veterinary Neil Forbes told court authorities that the birds were being kept in "most deplorable" conditions. He went on to say "This aviary is, in my opinion, akin to a bird version of the Black Hole of Calcutta. After 20 years of treating birds of prey, I can say this is the worst, filthiest site I have ever had the misfortune to visit. It is totally unacceptable."

An RSPCA inspector added, "It was horrendous to see these magnificent birds living in these appalling conditions. If people are to keep these wonderful birds then they need to ensure that they have the necessary expertise, facilities, finances and time to look after them properly. These birds were totally neglected and we are pleased that the magistrates have taken into consideration the suffering caused to these birds."

An RSPB officer said, "It was depressing to see a magnificent African raptor like Cassin's-Hawk Eagle, which is very rare in captivity, being kept in such appalling conditions. All the birds had an air of defecation about them. However, the forfeiture of the hawk-eagle by the court is the equivalent of an extra financial penalty."

The husband was given a two month imprisonment, suspended for one year and ordered to do 100 hours community service. The wife had the same sentence placed upon her but was ordered to do 60 hours community service. Both were also ordered to pay £2844.19 costs.

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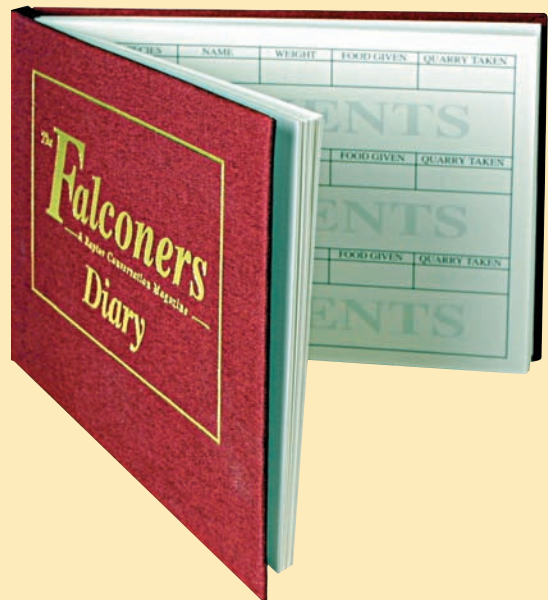
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Fun with a Ferrutail



The redtail/ferruginous hybrid has only been produced by a handful of UK breeders. Until this year, when I was given the one I have now, a female which became known as Gwen, I had never seen one. She was bred by my friend Anthony Haley in Scotland and was the result of a

natural breeding between a female redtail and a male ferruginous. He bred them for the first time last year, and was interested in giving one to me to fly to assess their capabilities.

At first sight Gwen was pretty impressive, being very much the colour of a young redtail, but somewhat larger. Similar to a ferruginous, her head is a few

sizes larger than a redtail, even though a redtail's head couldn't exactly be said to be small. To give an idea, I also have a couple of gyr/saker hybrids flying at 2lb 11oz, a very similar weight to a female redtail. Their hood size is 104, whereas a redtail of the same weight would take a hood sized around 110. Gwen's hood size, although she is only a few ounces

heavier, is 120 which is exactly halfway in size between the redtail and a typical male golden eagle, which would fly at about 7½ lbs! Of course, her mouth is also correspondingly large and leg feathers continue about halfway down her tarsus, instead of finishing at the hock like a redtail. Luckily, she takes after a redtail in her foot size, as those of a ferruginous are notably (some might say ridiculously) small, compared to their body size.

Correct weight

As a hoodmaker, I am often quoted “fat” weights of newly acquired hawks, in order to gauge the hood size. These weights are frequently impossibly high, as the hawks have been weighed straight out of the pen, when they could have eaten a large meal shortly before weighing and probably with a bit added on for luck. Particularly with larger hawks, it is much better to weigh them at least 24 and preferably 48 hours after taking up the bird in order to get a genuine weight to work from. At first weighing, two days after she had last been fed, Gwen was 3lb 4oz and I anticipated a hard slog over some weeks to reduce her weight sufficiently to make her responsive. When I first took her on the fist, although alarmed, she was pretty steady and disinclined to bate and luckily continued to be so during training. At first, I decided to attempt to hood her, but she took an instant dislike to it, although probably more to my hand than the hood. I desisted with the hooding after a couple of days and on reflection felt it would have been better to have got her very used to the touch of a hand over the training period, then introduced the hood afterwards. It isn't the usual way, but could have been a better idea.

It took about three days and some ingenuity to coax her into feeding on the fist for the first time. She eventually decided it was okay to bite and hold the food in my hand, but took a very long time to pluck up the courage to take a piece out of it. Once she did, progress was considerably faster. As she was so steady, manning was a fairly rudimentary affair, entailing not more than 15 minutes' carriage per day. I was able to put her to weather on a bowperch after only a few days, although as usual it took a few more days to work out that the bowperch was for sitting on. It was relatively painless to pick her up, even though it took quite a

while before she would jump readily to the fist.

Flying free

It was, of course, quite hard to reduce her weight and her daily ration had to be only about ½ ounce to make some progress. Once she got below 3lbs, she began to step up to the fist and once she was down to 2lb 12oz she was coming to the fist almost immediately at about 40 yards. I felt this was quite a moderate amount to have to take off for such a large bird. By this time, she would also attack a rabbit lure quite readily, so I flew her loose. This had taken only 3½ weeks from first starting the training and I think if I had been a little more ruthless with the weight reduction she may have been flying free in less than three weeks. Once she was flying, I began to ease her weight up and within about 10 days she was still responsive at very close to 3lbs. She also flew happily to anyone with a glove – even total strangers. She has not so far been free with her feet, although I am sure that in time she will become more possessive with food and will need to be handled more carefully when food or quarry are around.

An attempt was made to train Gwen to the kite, which I hoped would make it easier to get her to soar, and to improve her fitness. She cottoned on very quickly to grabbing a winged lure suspended from my hand, so when I attached the lure to the kite string she had no trouble in taking it in a single straight flight up to a height of 20 feet or so. Unfortunately, she didn't get the hang of circling to gain height, so I abandoned the kite in favour of getting her to take quarry at the earliest opportunity.

Entering Gwen to quarry proved a little more difficult, although not due to any lack of aggression on her part. As soon as she was taken to a place other than her training fields, she was “on tiptoe” waiting for something exciting to happen. Initially, it was hard to find short flights due to the abundance of cover and the quarry being reluctant to disclose themselves. She was taking on long slips in the fashion of a ferruginous, low to the ground and surprisingly fast, but the quarry was dodging into cover just before she arrived. These were mostly rabbits, although her very first slip was at a flock of rooks about 150 yards away. Interestingly, she stood looking intently at them for a while and

as soon as a fight broke out between two rooks she instinctively realised they were temporarily at a slight disadvantage and only then did she take on the slip. Of course, they were all up and away when she was little more than halfway there, but she carried on to sit up in the next hedge and after only a short pause returned 200 yards or so back to the fist.

Building confidence

Lamping was the answer. I personally don't care for the practice very much, but with Gwen it worked well to give her the initial confidence that she needed and in a couple of outings she had caught three rabbits and was fearlessly slamming into heavy cover after her quarry in the manner of the best redtails. I had moved her weight gradually up to 3lb 2oz as her muscle mass increased and she was still flying aggressively.

So, that is the story so far. Gwen is still, at the time of writing, only six months old, and I would expect her to go on developing for the next couple of seasons. As she gets older, she may well turn a bit more “grumpy” as redtails and other broadwings tend to, but we shall see. She has now taken upwards of 50 ground quarry and has also taken a pheasant, although that was something of a surprise attack. ALL the quarry she has taken was by flights FROM THE FIST, not by flopping out of a tree and I hope that she will start to take on proper flights at pheasants. These can be of high quality and successful if there is an appreciable wind up the tail of the pursuer. It certainly works that way with redtails, where the wind in their big wings greatly assists them, and I would say that the ferrutail has the edge over the redtail when it comes to flying speed. Hopefully, it's also possible to get Gwen to soar in due course, which is their natural mode of hunting. We can expect her to have a lifespan of up to 30 years, so it's an ongoing story...

(Note: this is an extract from *The Redtailed Hawk* by Beatriz Candil Garcia, first published in Spanish in 2004. The English version will shortly be available in the UK).

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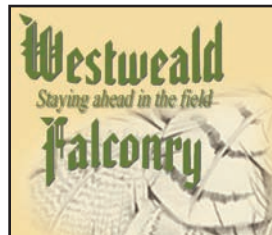
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Dean White (secretary) on 01489 896504

**E-mail us at enquiry@sefg.org or
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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 visit our web-site

www.yorkshirefalconry.org.uk

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Further details from:

Jim Coyle

E-mail: info@scottishhawkingclub.co.uk

★ 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**
or telephone Brian for information on: **01732 463218**



Independent Bird Register

Telephone 0870 608 8500

IBR Lost, Found, Reunited & Stolen birds of prey from 1st January to 14th March 2008.

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.

STOLEN x 8

14695	DOE9075W	IBR18016W	HARRIS HAWK	60514	??03EGP0??	GOSHAWK	49297	??888??	PEREGRINE/LANNER
44874	IBR42631W		SAKER FALCON	60521	??198WD??	GOSHAWK	10196	??842??	PEREGRINE/LUGGER
54132	25925W	IBR53298W	GYR/SAKER	60172	??031??	GYR FALCON	27195	??150??	PEREGRINE/LUGGER
59979	4068X	IBR58177W	HARRIS HAWK	60704	??CC/DO??	GYR FALCON	27110	??590??	PEREGRINE/PRAIRIE
59980	11LBP02W	IBR58178W	HARRIS HAWK	35790	??337??	GYR/LUGGER	46178	??703?? / ??131??	PEREGRINE/PRAIRIE
60157	109	WV12 4	BARN OWL	53673	??034??	GYR/PEREGRINE	14451	??763??	PEREGRINE/SAKER
60309	BS14 9		HARRIS HAWK	60037	??700??	GYR/PEREGRINE	14452	??059??	PEREGRINE/SAKER
60453	LBPC	SOUTHERN WHITE-FACED OWL		34065	??818??	GYR/SAKER FALCON	25320	??491??	PEREGRINE/SAKER
				59130	??650??	GYR/SAKER FALCON	25322	??403??	PEREGRINE/SAKER
				59671	??940??	GYR/SAKER FALCON	27373	??480??	PEREGRINE/SAKER
				60705	??0E/KF??	GYR/SAKER FALCON	40114	??521??	PEREGRINE/SAKER

REUNITED x 108

BALD EAGLE			1	60041	??188??	GYR/SAKER	49295	??316??	PEREGRINE/SAKER
BARN OWL			16	60232	??925??	GYR/SAKERXSAKER	52926	??039??	PEREGRINE/SAKER
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL			5	22003	??917??	HARRIS HAWK	59879	??005??	PEREGRINE/SAKER
FERRUGINOUS HAWK			1	26954	??7TE??	HARRIS HAWK	60518	??306??	PEREGRINE/SAKER
GOLDEN EAGLE			1	27212	??468??	HARRIS HAWK	42831	??176??	RED-TAILED HAWK
GYR FALCON			1	34376	??011-1??	HARRIS HAWK	60467	BT38 8	RED-TAILED HAWK
GYR HYBRID			6	40342	??YOONEEK??	HARRIS HAWK	2317	??AMJ016??	SAKER FALCON
HARRIS HAWK			37	40552	??5709??	HARRIS HAWK	9761	??099??	SAKER FALCON
KESTREL 3				41573	??719??	HARRIS HAWK	10207	??P0181476??	SAKER FALCON
LANNER FALCON			4	46668	??555??	HARRIS HAWK	10809	??679??	SAKER FALCON
PEREGRINE HYBRID			15	51327	??100??	HARRIS HAWK	54975	??KFCC9??	SAKER FALCON
RED BACKED HAWK			1	53672	??156??	HARRIS HAWK	60071	??AMJ??	SAKER FALCON
RED-TAILED HAWK			8	56634	NG16 1	HARRIS HAWK	60414	??811??	SAKER FALCON
SAKER FALCON			9	59476	LL60 6	HARRIS HAWK	60715	??271??	SNOWY OWL

LOST x 90

29100	??71BC9??		BARN OWL	60511	??93SD??	HARRIS HAWK	REF	RING NOS	SPECIES
36926	??414??		BARN OWL	60546	??590D0??	HARRIS HAWK	3662	??758BC9??	BARN OWL
42547	??054??		BARN OWL	60681	??646??	KESTREL	8338	??608??	BARN OWL
42973	??23BC0??		BARN OWL	2092	??145??	LANNER FALCON	23071	??015??	BARN OWL
43099	??064??		BARN OWL	11441	??602?? / ??284??	LANNER FALCON	31481	??52BC0??	BARN OWL
54913	??304??		BARN OWL	10203	??GTA9??	LANNER/SAKER FALCON	36071	??495??	BARN OWL
55083	??309??		BARN OWL	48964	??298??	PEREGRINE FALCON	60516	??FOS??	BARN OWL
60107	??247??		BARN OWL	60085	??9854D0??	PEREGRINE FALCON	11004	??489??	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
60147	WS10 8		BARN OWL	60148	??541??	PEREGRINE FALCON	44382	??1962??	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
60199	??16??		BARN OWL	60544	??187??	PEREGRINE FALCON	60345	??798??	FERRUGINOUS HAWK
60454	??3010??		BARN OWL	48173	??04496??	PEREGRINE/BARBARY	14740	??136??	HARRIS HAWK
60512	??99BC9??		BARN OWL	60509	??324?? / ??100??	PEREGRINE/BARBARY	37732	??667??	HARRIS HAWK
14531	WN4 8	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL		60712	??288??	PEREGRINE/BARBARY	44284	??281??	HARRIS HAWK
14536	??SGB??	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL		9541	??606??	PEREGRINE/LANNER	60393	PR8 6	HARRIS HAWK
28961	?? & S9??	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL		10197	??94?? / ??549??	PEREGRINE/LANNER	60721	??11JB0??	KESTREL
33101	??8TAV2??	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL		10202	??955??	PEREGRINE/LANNER	57464	??51??	PEREGRINE/PRAIRIE
47670	DA13 9	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL		15174	??973??	PEREGRINE/LANNER	47688	??AP9??	SNOWY OWL
50831	??782?? / ??99??		GOSHAWK	15176	??982??	PEREGRINE/LANNER			
60090	??480??		GOSHAWK	19948	??021??	PEREGRINE/LANNER			

FOUND x 16

REF	RING NOS	SPECIES
3662	??758BC9??	BARN OWL
8338	??608??	BARN OWL
23071	??015??	BARN OWL
31481	??52BC0??	BARN OWL
36071	??495??	BARN OWL
60516	??FOS??	BARN OWL
11004	??489??	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
44382	??1962??	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
60345	??798??	FERRUGINOUS HAWK
14740	??136??	HARRIS HAWK
37732	??667??	HARRIS HAWK
44284	??281??	HARRIS HAWK
60393	PR8 6	HARRIS HAWK
60721	??11JB0??	KESTREL
57464	??51??	PEREGRINE/PRAIRIE
47688	??AP9??	SNOWY OWL



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