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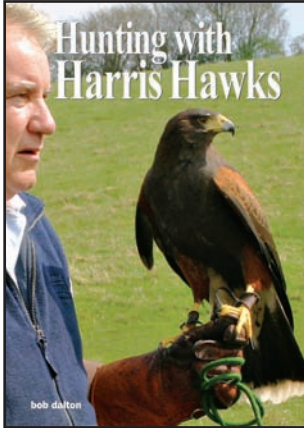


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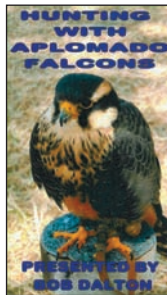
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30 years of this well known charity

There was a bit of an "oops" in the last issue of *The Falconers Magazine*. The 'Ask Chitty' article on Aspergillosis was not published correctly and as editor, I hold my hands up to the error that occurred. So, in this edition not only is there an article on first aid in the field, but also the full Aspergillosis article that should have been published in issue 73.

Many people who are new to our sport will by now have obtained their first birds and I hope everything is going to plan and that they are looking after their charges correctly. If any of you have any stories to tell about your early days in falconry, I am always pleased to hear from you with a view to publishing them in a future issue.

I would like to point everyone to the LANTRA article on page 28. This is one assessor's view on falconry in the UK, not just for now but in the course of time to come and I think this is an important issue for all falconers to consider.

Lastly, do look at the article concerning the training of Golden Eagles. The article is written by an experienced falconer (Dr. David Glynne Fox) and I wouldn't advocate anyone rushing out to buy a species of this type. You really need to know what you are doing with these birds and even an experienced austringer like David can get things wrong sometimes. I hope you enjoy the article.

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

East Anglian Falconry & Country Fair

The 6th and 7th of September will see this ever popular fair being held at the Mid Suffolk Showground at Stonham Barns in Suffolk. The Fair has been growing at a steady pace and has become a great family day out. There will be a selection of the finest Falconry furniture makers, telemetry, incubators and Hawking clubs, including the Welsh Hawking Club and the South East Falconry Group.

Main arena events include three flying demonstrations from Suffolk Owl Sanctuary and the South East Falconry Group who will be bringing along a great

selection of Eagles, Falcons and Hawks. There will be a gundog parade, heavy horses and a sheepdog demonstration which not only includes sheep but also turkeys, which is something to see!

There will also be ferret racing and chainsaw sculpturing demonstrations at intervals during the day and the chance to practise your air rifle and shotgun skills with laser clays and an air rifle range.

There will be a Food Hall for those who like good local produce and not forgetting the beer tent for refreshments. There will be the opportunity to look around the Arts and Crafts area for those who may want to

purchase a gift or two.

Country clothing and shooting accessories will be on offer for those stocking up at the beginning of the Hawking and Shooting season. For the children there will be an activity area which includes inflatables, trampolines and kids' quads.

The Fair will be sponsored for the third year running by NBC Bird and Pest Solutions who will have a large hospitality marquee for their employees and franchises and those who may be looking at a change in career, so go over for a chat.

Charlotte and José get married

Charlotte Hill and José Souto were married at Orton Hall, Peterborough on 11th April 2008. Charlotte has been professionally involved with birds of prey since she left college in 1997. She has worked in many countries with the birds and has many friends in the falconry world who she has met on her travels.

José has practised the art of falconry over many years and until recently, was chairman of the British Hawking Association. He is also a chef lecturer at Westminster Kingsway College and is in the process of publishing a book on various aspects of Game Cooking.

The day went off without a hitch with the weather being kind and the family of seven dogs turned up for the photo shoot. The menu was hand picked by José with venison as the main course, knowing José, it wasn't a surprise.

The evening entertainment was taken up with "Abba Revival" as the main attraction after Charlotte and José's first dance. Many people from the falconry fraternity and the culinary world came along to help celebrate the wedding of Charlotte and José Souto.



Publisher has a son

Congratulations go to Beatriz Garcia and Arjen Hartman on the birth of their son, Ayden. He was born on 4 April and weighed 8lb 2oz.

Some of you know Beatriz as the owner of the independent publishers, Yarak Publishing. It was Beatriz and Arjen who published the excellent books *Ars Accipitraria* and *The Red-tailed Hawk – the great unknown*.



Winner

Congratulations to Mr. R Kelly of Bristol for winning our prize draw held at this year's Falconry Fair. Mr. Kelly wins a copy of *Hunting with Harris Hawks*, by Bob Dalton.

YFC do the 3 Peaks

On Saturday 19 of July, 15 members of The Yorkshire Falconry Club attempt the 3 Peak Challenge in aid of The Yorkshire Air Ambulance. The walk takes in the summits of Pen-y-ghent, Wherside and Ingleborough in a 24 mile circuit. The YFC have been out practising, pounding the hills over the past few months – which proved testing enough themselves. Members suffered at the hands of the elements, experiencing amongst other things, snow, sun burn and a thorough drenching!

However, morale is high, knowing they are raising money for a good cause and at the same time looking forward to the challenge. The club hopes that the elements will be a little more sympathetic to their cause than they have been on dress rehearsals!

I hope to have a full report in the next issue – Ed.



Members of YFC 2007

Book Review

FALCONRY AND HUNTING IN ARABIA

By Faris Al-Timimi

Published by Gulfosaker Canada Inc.
ISBN: 978-0-9738853-0-9 Price: £70

Reviewed by Paul Manning

The author of this work is a very long serving and distinguished avian vet. In 1981 with the support of Sheikh Khalid bin Ali bin Abdullah Al-Thani, he was established as one of the first vets in the Gulf to specialise in treating hunting falcons in the region.

Based in Qatar he slowly gained the trust and respect of what emerges from this book, a very traditional, stubborn and at times ignorant falconry community. The book takes us through these early years, the resistance he encountered and the amount of research and knowledge he was able to conduct and acquire in the course of this struggle.

The book then goes on to explore the importance of falconry in the history, economy and culture of the region. The attitudes past and present regarding wild caught and now captive bred falcons and the species/types and behavioural traits that falconers from the region look for when buying a hunting partner.

Through this book we get a very complete picture of the Arab falconer. The birds they most prize, and the type of hunting they seek, together with the lengths they will go to in order to be able to enjoy these. There are also chapters outlining their training methods, and the varying attitudes they have towards their birds health and welfare, ending with a detailed section devoted to falcon diseases and their treatment.

The book is truly beautiful and is completely packed with hundreds of glossy pictures. Every type of Saker falcon is displayed and their differences in colouration and regions of origin explored in detail. There are many interesting pictures of

hunting trips, the terrain in which they take place, and of Arab falconers practising their art, all of which make this book visually stunning.

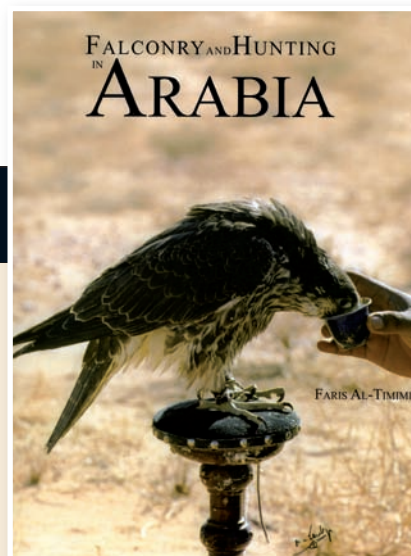
However, much of the prose and much of the flow of the book I found quite frustrating. With long passages that lacked a specific focus or an intended destination. In fairness this may well be the result of translation or cultural differences in presentation.

One unavoidable criticism I have is that on many occasions in the book, the author conveys considerable unhappiness with aspects of his chosen profession, especially the falconers to whom he practises. Again this may be a cultural and language difference however to a UK falconer it does dampen ones enthusiasm for reading on. The tone of the book is really set from the start, in the final paragraph of the author's preface.

Quote

"At last, all I can say in this respect and after all these years of working with falconers is that I was probably the wrong person to work with them. I accepted every word they claimed which in return was far too stressful for myself due to the unfriendly behaviour they tended to exhibit in many cases. When the time comes for retirement good and beautiful memories will be very scarce compared to the mountains of bitter memories which one never enjoys recalling"

I feel that this book is more of a personal catharsis for the author and whilst nice to have in your collection visually, it may not be the uplifting and inspiring experience that some falconry books can be.





askchitty

EMERGENCY KIT FOR RAPTORS

I understand that you can obtain first-aid kits for birds when in the field. Can you tell us what the kits contain and how we can use them if our bird gets injured whilst out flying? How can we administer first aid before taking our charges to our vet for expert treatment?

All falconers should carry an emergency kit while in the field. While no kit can contain something for every possible eventuality, there are certain common problems that will be considerably helped by prompt action in the field.

However, the most important thing the falconer can carry is a mobile phone and the telephone numbers of his usual raptor vet and (if flying birds a long way from home) the numbers of the nearest avian practice.

It is extremely common for falconers to make first contact with an avian vet only when an emergency has just occurred – this is likely to result in further delay in getting medical assistance, not to mention being much more stressful to all concerned. Please register with an avian practice as soon as you have a bird! Apart from the benefits of regular health checks it does mean you know who to contact in an emergency which, as we all know, will often happen out of normal office hours.

These days it is probably also worth checking where out-of-hours care will be carried out by your chosen vet. Many clinics now use a different clinic for their out-of-hours work. While this is fine for dogs and cats, not all emergency clinics are set up for birds – therefore when registering with an avian clinic check if they do their on-call there and, if not, whether the emergency clinic is proficient in avian medicine.

Another benefit of having a good working relationship with your vet is that they can set you up with an emergency kit



Passing a plastic crop tube. Note the tube is being passed to the right side of the mouth to reduce the chances of entering the windpipe (in the midline) and to ease passage into the oesophagus (on the right side of the neck)

for those real crisis moments in the field. As with most things, many vets have their own “take” on what is important. The following is what we supply to falconers. **Stomach/Crop Tube** – many medications and fluids need to be given directly into the crop. Don't forget to get your vet or an experienced falconer to show you how to use a tube. Tubing a bird for the first time in a crisis is not a good way!

“LifeAid” – (a version of “Lectade”). We use this neat for fitting due to low blood glucose and it can also be diluted with water for use in dehydration. Make sure you know how much it should be diluted by (this is important) and the volumes at which it should be given. Also make sure you are always carrying a bottle of clean fresh water! Not just for this use, but also for cleaning and flushing wounds, etc.



Finger splint applied to a fractured tarsometatarsus. Note how the joints above and below the fracture have been included thus increasing the stability of the fracture

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

Syringes - for use with the crop tube
"Vetrap" - can be used to apply splints or as Figure-of-Eight bandage for wing injuries BELOW the elbow

Wooden Tongue Depressors - apply to leg to stabilise fracture. INCLUDE both the joint above and below the fracture. Apply a layer of Vetrap, then place wooden strips on either side of the leg and apply a second layer of Vetrap. Sadly "finger splint" no longer seems to be available. This is aluminium with padding over it - more flexible than tongue depressors and much better, so if you have some don't lose it!
"Melolin" padding to cover wounds

Wound Powder - antiseptic for wounds. However, if the wound is into flesh please do not put powder on it - this will dry out damaged muscle and reduce healing. Only use powder for wounds on scaled skin
"Hibiscrub" for cleaning wounds. Can be used neat or dilute

Bubble Wrap use to wrap an injured/ very sick bird to prevent hypothermia in shock
Cotton Wool can be for cleaning or padding a Ball Bandage.

Importantly, keep your kit clean, dry and in-date. Regular checks are essential or you may find your kit useless at the very time you need it!



Figure-of-eight bandage on a peregrine. Note that this should only be used for fractures or injuries BELOW the elbow

Unfortunately, due to a production error in the last issue of The Falconers Magazine (No. 73), the latter part of John Chitty's article on Aspergillosis was missing. I can only apologise for the frustration this caused readers and we are reprinting here the complete text.

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.

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.

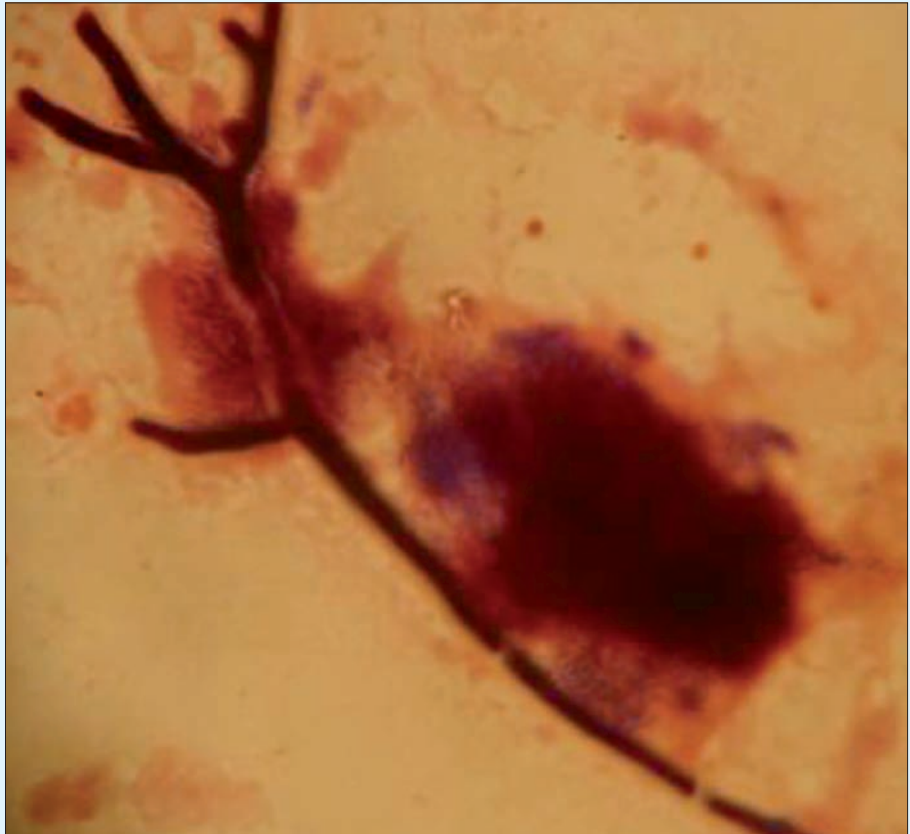
1. Overwhelming exposure. This will happen if rotting organic matter (housing growing fungus) is given to birds as nesting materials. It will also occur when batches of contaminated or rotting wood or bark chip are used in the floor

- 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 there is little fungus in cold climates. When stressed they are very likely to develop disease which is why it may be worth giving prophylactic drugs (e.g. itraconazole) during the manning period
 - b. Age – young birds have little immunity which is why it is so important to provide good quality nesting materials
 - c. Stress or concurrent disease, i.e. There are usually other disease processes or issues with underlying immunity – this does not help therapy which may be receiving no help at all from the bird's immune system!

Treatment generally consists of antifungal drugs given by mouth (eg itraconazole or terbinafine) and nebulised drugs (e.g. F10). Therapy normally takes several months and in some cases it is necessary to operate to remove the large abscesses from within the airsacs or the trachea.

At the end of this (and in spite of a lot of expense!) it is still not always 100% possible to guarantee a fully fit hunting bird...so prevention is definitely the key! Some preventive measures are mentioned above. However, cleanliness is the key. The fungus grows on rotting organic matter and while disinfection or fogging with F10 will help reduce the fungal load, no disinfectant can work in the face of lots of organic debris. Therefore it is vital to clean and remove rotting organic matter then disinfect.

Lesions in the airsacs can be seen on x-ray



Aspergillus fungus





As always your Hawk Board has been kept busy but we also have to play a waiting game, which accounts for the enigmatic opening.

The 'no news' is that the government has still not made up its mind about registration. They have to say something very soon otherwise the intended de-registration will not reach the statute books by 1st October and will be delayed until 1st April next year. Up till now lobbying has been intense with questions in both houses of parliament by RSPB fans. But the minister has stood firm, rebutting all such questions.

Unfortunately, we are uncertain as to how the devolved governments in Scotland and Wales will act. Wales, with whom I have had most contact because I live there, seems concerned about peregrines and merlins that do not have an Article 10. No worry, DEFRA intend to keep registration for such falcons. So if you have either species it is recommended you go out and obtain an A10 asap. Currently these are free, but not for long. With an A10 registration of all but goshawks and golden eagles (and some non-falconry raptors) will hopefully become a thing of the past. And just in case you had forgotten, because it

No news, good news, exciting news!

was years ago, this potential loophole was covered in our original submission. Scotland is not so simple. The Scottish Hawk Board has been in constant contact but there is little news coming out of Edinburgh.

Finally, for now at least, there is the news that there will be full cost recovery on the remaining registerable species on Schedule 4. The Treasury insists on it and although there is a planned consultation there is not much we can say or do.

The 'good news' is hidden inside a bad news story. The alleged theft of peregrines from Beeston Castle in Cheshire made local news and once again the finger was pointed at falconers. But for the first time the RSPB and others put a real price on the falcon; less than £1000. This was endorsed by the local police Wildlife Officer and repeated calmly and rationally in most (but not all – some journalists cannot let the truth get in the way of a good story) media.

There has been a spate of peregrine eggs and chicks being destroyed throughout the West Midlands and the culprits are thought to be pigeon fanciers. The RSPB is offering a reward. It would be good for all if these lunatics were brought to book.

And finally, we come to the 'exciting news'. After its successful launch in 2007, the second Festival of Falconry will take place between 10th and 12th July 2009. Once again falconers from all over the world will join together in celebration of one of the oldest field sports at Englefield Estate, Theale, Near Reading, less than an hour from Heathrow airport. In 2007 the public were amazed at the diversity of costume and tradition on display. Meeting falconers from Central Asia, the Middle East and the New World in the grounds of a stately home was unprecedented – and despite the dreadful weather thousands came through the gate.

"Thanks to the generosity of Sir Richard Benyon and his family we are able to

use the same venue in 2009," said joint organiser and Hawk Board Chairman Jim Chick. "We will open for an extra half day at noon on Friday 10th exclusively for school parties and other youth groups and booking details will be on the website www.falconryfestival.com nearer the time." (A new website is currently under construction.)

The arena will see many thrilling flying displays as well as showcasing the many and varied cultural elements of world falconry. Invitations will be issued to the UNESCO committee responsible for the Intangible Cultural Heritage programme, to which the United Arab Emirates are making a submission on behalf of Arab falconry and other selected falconry nations.

There will be workshops, side demonstrations and a substantial trade area. Falconers may camp on site and there will be a repeat of the evening events that were so popular in 2007. The Arab village and the Central Asian yurts (traditional tents) will be a major focal point along with the many national villages.

Each day the Festival will close with a grand parade, an event that in 2007 brought together some 35 falconry nations in traditional costume, with their hawks, falcons and eagles in a heart-stopping display of common purpose and love of sport.

A press release is on its way to the media and copies will be posted on club websites and falconry chat rooms. More news will follow.

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.



Hawking in Florida

Daryl Mhoon with North American Goshawk

I recently had the good fortune to do some hawking and wild raptor watching under the beautiful sunny skies of Southern Florida – in fact in and around the heart of the Everglades. Joining me were some friends who are also falconers and had not been to The States before. Neal Ottoway from the Florida Hawking Fraternity had arranged for us to meet up with some different falconers around the Southern part of the state and we would get to see a variety of hawks fly as well as get in a little trapping. I have been extremely lucky in that I have trapped raptors for both ringing and falconry purposes many times before. The species I have trapped have ranged from Peregrines, Prairies, Sakers and Lanners through to Harris Hawks, Red Tailed Hawks, Merlins and American Kestrels. But one of our group, Andy King, has been a practising falconer for some seven or eight years now and

has never been trapping hawks of any description before. So, for him at least this would be an enthralling experience.

First day

On the morning of our first full day in Florida, Neal met us at our hotel and had laid on a behind-the-scenes visit for us at the Miami Museum of Science. Attached to the museum is a raptor rehabilitation facility which deals with the vast majority of injured raptors that are picked up in Miami and the surrounding areas. As well as having an extremely healthy local raptor population the area is also on a main raptor migration route and accordingly gets a vast number of migratory hawks each year. The staff at the centre were very welcoming and took a great deal of time and trouble showing us round and answering what to them must have seemed like an endless stream of questions. Funding for the

centre comes from private donations but as with such ventures more money would always be welcome. Among the residents at the time of our visit were Red Shouldered Hawks, Short Tailed Hawks, Screech, Barred and Barn Owls, Bald and Golden Eagles, Black and Turkey Vultures, Caracaras, Ospreys and three Peregrine Falcons. All three were passage falcons of the year, one being an Anatum and the other two were tundra's.

The centre works very much in hand with local falconers who do a lot of the actual rehabilitation work for the centre. Once a hawk has been patched up and is considered to be well and truly on the mend it is given to a responsible falconer in the hopes that it can be put back into the wild as quickly as possible. What I did find worrying at the centre was the amount of birds of prey that were there simply because of malicious actions on the part of humans. Many of the current

batch of inmates at the time of our visit were there because of shotgun or air gun wounds. The vast majority of which, it has to be said, will never have a hope of returning to the wild. The rest of the inmates were there because they had either flown into telephone wires, power lines, glass, or had endured collisions with vehicles or were simply suffering from exhaustion. One of the most common reasons for a hawk to be brought to the centre was the cumulative effect of being a first year predator in migration. Weakness and exhaustion brought about by being inexperienced and undertaking the severe rigours of a long journey account for a very large percentage of first year raptors. It is a well known fact that around seventy per cent of young raptors fail to make it past the first six months of their lives. Nature is an exacting task master.

The centre had excellent facilities and there were a full range of aviaries in varying sizes designed to cope with most raptors that were likely to come their way. As well as aviaries for individuals there was also a very large recovery aviary where raptors that are being assessed for release can be housed. During our visit this was home to an Osprey and three Red Shouldered Hawks which could comfortably fly round and round within the confines of the structure. What did impress me was the roofing material used which deflected such a large percentage of the heat beating down on the establishment. Outside the heat was extremely fierce but all of the aviaries were cool inside.

Personal comment

What I did personally find a little disturbing and I do speak purely for myself here, is the attitude that so often prevails at rescue centres like this one that I have visited before. There does seem to be a 'keep them alive at all costs' thread that runs through the thinking of such centres and I can't help but think that on a number of occasions euthanasia would be a far kinder option. I can only speak as a layman because that is exactly what I am. I have no veterinary knowledge whatsoever and nor do I profess to. But one of the Peregrines at this centre had a severe wing as well as head and scalp wound. The treatment to deal with the injuries had meant the Peregrine had undergone several operations and at the time of our



Removing an American Kestrel from the trap

visit there was still a major problem in getting the skin that covered the scalp to knit and grow back over it again. The treatment had been going on for so long that the falcon had developed bumble foot in both feet and was now having to undergo surgery to try and rectify that situation. The chances of a full recovery were practically zero and should the falcon ever pull through she would very likely end up as an aviary falcon. Tundra Peregrines are not endangered and I can't help feel that it would have been kinder to put her to sleep once the full extent of her original injuries had been accurately assessed. I have nothing but admiration for those that help wild raptors and often wish I could do more in practical terms to assist them other than just donate money and equipment. But I also feel that sometimes the kindest thing to do is be realistic about the individuals' chances of a full recovery and the quality of life to be enjoyed if survival is attained.

The following day we met up with Neal to go hawking with his three year old female passage Red Hailed Hawk. Neal lives and works in central Miami and therefore does what Doug Pineo always used to call 'dumpster hawking'.

We drove around the back of industrial units to see if we could spot Moorhens or Coots on any of the myriad of canals that criss cross the entire city and its outskirts. These canals are neither wide nor deep but you won't get anybody jumping into one for any reason whatsoever. The canals are the recognised highway system for the Alligators that abound in the area. During our trip we met two different falconers who had both lost dogs to Alligators in the canals.

We spent a pleasant afternoon hawking Moorhens and Coots and did eventually manage to catch one seconds before it made the safety of a drainage ditch. Neal had been going to release this particular Red Tail a couple of weeks before we arrived but had decided to delay its departure so that we could see it hunt a few times first. She was a very pleasant hawk and also quite large, flying at just on three pounds.

A couple of days later Neal had arranged for us to go hawking with Daryl Moon who flies a particularly effective female Goshawk. I had never seen a trained North American Goshawk hunting before and was looking forward to seeing one work. On the way to

meeting Daryl we stopped off at the fields where Neal had trapped his Red Tail some three years earlier. After removing all her equipment the Red Tail was held aloft and allowed to follow its own path. At first it merely flew to a fence post some twenty feet away. Having roused a couple of times and given the surrounding area a good look over it eventually flew from the post to the top of a tall tree. Ten minutes or so after that it spread its wings and sailed off down wind. Neal had been flying the hawk as high as he could possibly get away with prior to this day and the night before she had enjoyed a full crop of warm Quail. As we watched the hawk drift slowly into the distance I asked Neal if he felt sad at all. His reply was that he was definitely not. He had taken her from the wild, enjoyed her company for three years, and now she was back where she had come from none the worse for her experience. This sums up quite well I think the attitude of those who are allowed to take hawks from the wild. They know that the hawk will probably eventually go back to the wild either because she chooses to or the falconer decides she should. No harm has been done to the environment or the wild population of raptors and the legal take system all but negates the point of illegally stealing raptors from the wild.

A drive of 40 minutes or so further down the highway saw us meet up with Daryl and his wife. We would be hawking the rough grass that grows on the side of irrigation ditches in vast sugar cane fields. These can normally be relied upon to hold a good number of rabbits and the beauty with these rabbits is that they don't dig burrows. So that meant no ferreting. But Daryl did warn us repeatedly to stay away from the edge of the ditches as Alligators are very common and a duck hunter had been very seriously bitten by one in this area just a few days previously.

An enjoyable afternoon

I have to say we enjoyed a very pleasant afternoon's hawking and the Goshawk was absolute dynamite. Her reactions to movement were electric and she was also one of the most obedient Goshawks I have ever seen. We flushed six rabbits in all and she caught five of them. I could see no difference whatsoever between this species of Goshawk and our own European version other than the plumage. The rabbits were much



Turkey Vulture

smaller than we are used to and far more akin to the ones you find in Mexico as opposed to Britain. The best of them weighed just over a pound and obviously if the Goshawk could catch hold of them at all they were certainly not going to be able to struggle free from her grip. Whilst we were hawking a Coopers and a Sharp Shinned Hawk both came over to investigate us at different times but both beat a hasty retreat when the Goshawk left the fist.

All too soon our afternoon's sport had come to an end and it was time to move on. Neal had arranged for us to meet with other falconers during our visit and these meetings were nicely spaced throughout the duration of our stay in Florida. In between days hawking we investigated the wildlife of the Everglades and enjoyed seeing tremendous numbers of wild birds of prey. These included Turkey and Black Vultures, Bald Eagles, Coopers and Sharp Shinned Hawks, Red Tailed Hawks and Red Shouldered Hawks, Ospreys, Short Tailed Hawks, Harriers and of course American Kestrels. The Everglades is a place I have always wanted to see principally because of the staggering abundance and diversification of bird life there, particularly raptors. A great many people

think of the Everglades as a vast swamp but nothing could be further from the truth. It is in fact a vast slow moving river which just happens to be spread over five million acres and has within it nine different ecosystems. Throughout this vast wilderness there is no point where the landscape reaches a height of more than eight feet above sea level. When you think of the Everglades you naturally think of Alligators and it has to be said they are absolutely everywhere. Before going to Florida I did think that perhaps I wouldn't get to see a truly wild one but merely the farmed version that hover boat tours advertised everywhere offering to take you to see. I need not have worried, the one thing other than sunshine that Florida does have in abundance is Alligators. By the third or fourth day you become positively tired of seeing them.

Our next falconry excursion was to see a Gyr/Barbary hybrid tiercel flown at ducks. This particular tiercel was in his second season and had only ever been flown at ducks so he was pretty switched on to what we were doing. The stretch of water we would be flying was quite large but it did hold quite a few separate rafts of ducks. There wasn't a great deal of cover as we approached the water so the tiercel was put on the wing a

considerable way off from it. As he left the fist he immediately started to mount and once he was up more than three hundred or so feet we slowly started to make our way into position. When he eventually set his wings and indicated to us he had reached his pitch we had managed to get into position to attempt a flush. Because the stretch of water was large and there were only a half dozen of us getting the ducks to actually flush was quite difficult. They would lift as we yelled and hurled stones into the water but the presence overhead of the falcon meant they only moved across the water and put back down again. This was repeated again and again with the falcon starting to stoop and then going back up again at least half a dozen times.

Eventually a group of about eight ducks, Mallards I think, did break but the falcon was slightly out of position. He put in a long shallow stoop and the ducks turned and dropped back into the water at the very last minute. The tiercel immediately started to mount again but this time directly over the water and thereby clamped the ducks down well and truly to the water. After much more yelling and shouting another small group made a break and again the falcon started to stoop. As before though the ducks bottled out and turned back quickly and splashed down into the water. All this action had attracted an extremely unwelcome visitor and the falcon was hurriedly called down to the lure as a female Bald Eagle approached very rapidly. Eagles, particularly Bald Eagles, kill a great many falcons each year and it is amazing how many people underestimate both their speed and their manoeuvrability. Eagles tend to be thought of as slow cumbersome creatures which is very far from the truth. Once airborne an eagle is an extremely deadly predator and should never be taken for granted. With the attention of this Bald Eagle now focused on the area we decided to move on and hawk somewhere else. Better safe than sorry.

Clean flush

The next stretch of water we visited was considerably smaller and much more flushable. The tiercel mounted very nicely once more and this time we did manage a clean flush and seven ducks took to the air and headed off away from the water. The tiercel turned over and put in a superb almost vertical stoop. He closed

rapidly on the lead duck and for just a moment they merged as one. Then the falcon threw up and the duck tumbled over and over towards the earth. The falcon bound to it just before it hit the ground and when we got to him we discovered his prize was a Blue Winged Teal. The falcon had worked hard and the Teal seemed a fitting reward for all his flying that day.

One of the disappointments of the trip for me was not getting to see an Aplomado flown at Grackles. We had arrangements to go out with someone who was flying an Aplomado Falcon but this had fallen ill a few days before the start of our visit and was just starting to fly again. The little falcon looked decidedly under the weather but the owner assured us it looked so much better than it had just a few days previously. Apparently it had picked up a viral infection and had all but died. But the quick intervention of an extremely knowledgeable vet had saved the falcon. Now he was being got back on the wing as soon as possible to help with his recuperation. But it would be a while before he could be flown at quarry in earnest again.

We also visited a couple of times with a falconer that was flying a strikingly handsome Cassinni Peregrine tiercel called 'Pete'. Pete had spent a couple of seasons flying morning doves and was just being muscled up again ready for another season. The tiercel was being flown to the kite to get him ready for the field as quickly as possible and he made getting up to a thousand feet look very easy indeed. On the second time we went to see 'Pete' perform a wild Prairie Falcon thought it would join in the fun and games and chased the tiercel across the sky. Eventually tiring of the game the Prairie peeled off and went about its business and 'Pete' merely continued on his way up to the kite as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened at all.

Without doubt the highlight of the trip for Andy was to get the opportunity to trap a wild hawk for the very first time. One of the falconers we had made friends with had a licence to take an American Kestrel and he was more than happy for us to accompany him and for us to actually put the trap out and remove any Kestrel we may catch from it. The traps we were using were two of the Bal-Chatrri type. One was purely traditional and the other heavily

modified to incorporate a few ideas of our trapping host. I won't go into details here regarding the traps because their use is illegal in the UK and neither will we cover how best to set the trap or what to put in it for exactly the same reason. At the end of the various trapping excursions we made it would be fair to say that both traps that we were using performed equally well and the wild Kestrels did not seem to have a preference. I think they were purely interested as to what was inside the trap. The technique we used is extremely well documented and, I should imagine, well known to most falconers so I shall be brief with its description.

We would try and spot an immature Kestrel sitting on a pole or some wires, although telling whether they are immature or adult is not always easy through binoculars at a fair range. We would then angle our pick up truck between the Kestrel and the area we wanted to place the trap in. The trap would be positioned and we would slowly drive further on for a couple of hundred yards and then turn round and watch the proceedings through binoculars. The Kestrel would hopefully alight on the trap and try and foot the enticement through the wire of the trap's construction. If it looked like the Kestrel had become noosed we would start to slowly drive forward. At our approach the Kestrel would become wary and endeavour to step off of the trap. If he could then we backed off again and gave him another chance to get caught. If he couldn't step off the trap we drove up and got to him as quickly as possible and removed him from the nooses.

We caught quite a number of adult males and females before finally getting the immature male our friend wanted. Andy had the honour of taking the first one out of the trap and I did the same with the last. Trapping can be great fun providing it is done with care and consideration for those that you intend to trap and whatever it is you are using to entice your raptor to your trap. Let me state here categorically that trapping of this sort in the United Kingdom is illegal and quite rightly so.

All too soon our trip came to an end and it was time to get back to Britain. But we had made some good friends on the trip and received many invitations to come back again and do some more hawking. I for one will certainly be returning.

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Reclaiming a Hawk

'Reclaiming' sounds like lost property or a towed away car, but to falconers it means only one thing: the start of a new season. And for the record, I always start about a month too soon.

Baldrick the thrice intermewed goshawk spends the summer fat and content in his moulting chamber. From this he can see the goings on in the farmyard and maintain a semblance of acceptance of people, dogs, tractors, and other strange happenings like the weekly appearance of the lawn mower. By September he is moulted out and stunning in his slate grey plumage. I am tempted but resist the desire until nagged by friends (usually those without hawks) into catching him up in October. Why I don't resist and wait until the back end of the month is a mystery, but it always happens.

In 2007 I blamed foot and mouth which prevented me joining my local pack of hounds in some early morning exercise: for once the horse did not take precedence over the hawk. I also had a new dog – Darcey the German wirehaired pointer - and I wanted her to meet the goshawk as part of her training. So there you have it: excuses!

Catch up at dusk

The best time to catch up a hawk is at dusk but first his weight needs to be reduced and his diet changed. So for at least a fortnight I cut out the quail (very fattening) and replaced it with gutted day old chicks and, even better, rabbit. You can wash it (soak it in cold water) the night before which reduces the nutritional benefit whilst still having bulk. Don't go mad, this is not starvation but controlled feeding. Baldrick flies at 11lb 10oz so three chicks or a rabbit leg does him just fine. All that summer fat is best removed before you start to man him. It makes him keener to feed on the fist and focuses attention on you as provider.

So I opened his chamber door. Well I did eventually, having tried to force it the wrong way (and not a drink taken!).

Ten tips for reclaiming a hawk

- Reduce food whilst still in the moulting chamber
- Catch up at dusk to avoid stress
- Put on new anklets and tail mount
- Weigh
- If still overweight use 'washed' meat
- Walk extensively
- Jump to fist
- Call on creance
- Check telemetry
- Go hunting

Entered and with fine jesses slid them through last year's anklets. In the half dark he was quite steady when I put him in the mews and left him to settle down. The next morning I managed to sit him on the scales and he weighed in at just under 11lb 10½ oz. Not bad but I would take him down a further ounce before training began.

Now it was time for new Aylmeri anklets (falconer Guy Aylmer must always be credited with this revolutionary jess which everyone now takes for granted) and telemetry mount. Tail mounts hold the essential transmitter and a single bell; the smallest I can buy and the only one I use. I am not in favour of burdening a hawk with enough bells to ring a full church peal. The other thing to do when he is caste and restrained in the 'Bird of Prey Casting Jacket' is cope his beak which could well have grown overlong during the summer. This requires some skill and is good reason to have an experienced falconer as a friend until you learn to do this yourself. Leave the talons alone. If your perching is well constructed

they will be the correct length and needle sharp. (I once read that clipping the ends prevented the hawk catching you in the early stages of training! I would like to meet that know-it-all and put him right.)

In the farmhouse

Baldrick is now jessed, belled and ready to man. So he comes indoors! My 18th Century farmhouse has a huge inglenook fireplace and before the need to light the log burning stove, that is his evening place of rest. A tall perch puts him almost at eye level and he spends the time watching the family and the television. During the day he weathers on the lawn, again watching the comings and goings. But that is not enough for he still *chitters* with fear, is tight feathered and crouches forward on the fist in readiness to bate off at the slightest indiscretion on my behalf. So he must be walked. Actually I will do the walking.

Nothing steadies a hawk better. So long walks are the order of the day at every available moment. The more you walk the quieter he becomes. In the early days a piece of tiring is useful. Use rabbit backbone, pheasant necks and wings, and best of all, squirrel, which has the toughest skin imaginable and takes even the strongest goshawk an age to break into. As an aside, I never hawk squirrel which has a bite that can remove a hawk's toe if wrongly footed. The distraction enables you to take him to unexpected places and to meet potential horrors with equanimity. So build up a selection each season, ready for the following year.

In the box

One thing Baldrick has not forgotten is the hawk box. Open the door and he is in it like a flash. And this means you can drive round to your farmer friends to renew the permissions granted, and visit new venues. If you are lucky to have permission to fly over some shoots, now is the time to talk to the 'keeper and shoot captain. They will have fixed their dates and you can make sure you never turn up on the wrong day – 'keepers are

not wild at having you on the land the days before and after a shoot. Be ready to pay for the privilege; many shoots lost game stocks in last year's summer floods and will still be chary of losing even one pheasant or partridge to your hawk. The best deal is to pay the going rate per bird. Falconers don't catch much compared to a days shoot and everyone wins. Frankly, this all-for-free attitude does us no favours.

The last job on the list is to clean out the moulting chamber. Leave it until the end of the hawking season and it will be a chore that is doubly disgusting – you may need it for a sudden trip away when the hawk cannot be left on the lawn. By now the hawk will be reasonably manned and ready for training. Check out the telemetry. Throw away all last season's batteries, including those in the receiver because I can guarantee they will expire at a critical moment in the search for a lost hawk on a Sunday, miles from a suitable shop, and leaving a solid signal unheard and a loved hawk unfound.

Falconers, particularly beginners, train too long. Baldrick was jumping to the fist on day five and flying free on day eight. To be blunt, if he is steady on the fist and comes instantly twenty paces on a creance he will come forty. So fly him free and go hunting.

So why do I regret starting so early? Because the weather is mild, the cover is still thick; the pheasants are too young and fly without real purpose. Roll on November, a much better month for hawking. Still in 2007 I flew him round the farm that first weekend in the hope of ambushing a magpie or a foolish rabbit when disaster struck. My wife had bought a yearling horse which is turned out in my favourite hawking field and as I called Baldrick to the lure, he cantered over for a closer look. Nothing prepares a hawk for such intimate inspection and the goshawk made himself scarce.

A strong signal led me back to the yard where the chickens were in a state of hysteria. Unsurprising really as he had hold of one, which he had dragged into the hen house where another was attempting to lay an egg. Witnessing your friend being devoured is not conducive for laying; neither does it endear you to your long-suffering wife. But worst of all, goshawks remember where there is an easy meal and, as every game keeper knows, will return to the same spot. Time to start travelling further afield.



On your marks



Get ready



Go

Training Gol

I have been a practising falconer since the early 1960's and have flown most of the species regularly flown in the sport with varying degrees of success. However, my deepest interest has always been with the large eagles. When I began using these great birds at the start of my falconry 'career,' I received a certain amount of flack from members of the falconry community. Comments such as: "Using a sledgehammer to crack a walnut," and "The Nottingham Showman," were quite commonplace. I refused to allow such jibes to deter me from my interest, but nevertheless, found them quite hurtful. Few could understand why a small minority of falconers actually desired

to fly large and often belligerent eagles. Indeed, many well-known and highly respected falconry authors considered the big eagles were totally unsuitable for serious falconry on account of them being either far too dangerous towards their owners and dogs etc., or their alleged powers of fasting rendered their training difficult to the point of being almost impossible. This attitude did much harm to eagle falconry in this country, yet despite these often quoted misconceptions, I have yet to own an eagle of any description whose

so-called powers of fasting have caused me the slightest problem, quite the reverse in fact. And whilst I fully accept that some of these powerful birds are certainly capable of inflicting serious damage, I have observed people receiving far more severe wounds from playing cricket and rugby than anything my eagles have dished out to me. This is not to say that I have not been injured by any of my eagles, far from it and have one or two scars to prove it, but generally such wounds are the result of pure carelessness on my part.

Golden history

Golden Eagles have been flown in falconry for hundreds, if not thousands of years, particularly on the Asian steppes, although they have not been flown in Europe for anything like as long. However, in Germany and a few other countries, eagle falconry has been practised for many years, particularly since the latter half of the 20th century, and yet, there is almost nothing in print concerning the training and handling of these great birds. In more recent times, a number of articles concerning the actual hunting with eagles have appeared in the falconry literature, but in almost all cases, very little refers to the actual experience of initial training and handling.

With the current rise in the popularity of the Golden Eagle as a bona-fide falconry bird in the United Kingdom, perhaps it is now timely to put into print a few of the traits that may be experienced by newcomers wishing to try their hand with this fabulous bird. This particular account is not intended to be exhaustive or definitive,



den Eagles

it merely concerns my own personal experiences in this field, which may well differ from others with more expertise and experience than I have had at my disposal. Additionally, every eagle varies from one to another, including siblings, so no two birds are exactly alike either in form or behaviour. This of course applies to most living organisms, but it is as well to remember that a method which works well for one individual, may have a lesser impact on another. I have been totally self taught and learned this the hard way, through practical experience. If nothing else, I hope this article encourages others with more experience to put pen to paper and convey other useful pointers, which I may have missed or not experienced, for the benefit of eagle austringers worldwide, particularly newcomers to eagle flying.

In my considered opinion and from my own personal experience with a number of different eagles, including Steppe, Tawny, Bateleur, Bonelli's, Pallas's Sea, Changeable, Mountain, Blyth's Hawk Eagle, Imperial, and of course Golden Eagles, the actual training methods differ little from that of any other hawk or falcon – there are no great secrets, but here the similarity ends. A Golden Eagle on the fist is a very different situation from that of a Harris or Goshawk for example. One is instantly aware of the awesome power and weight compared with the smaller raptors. Being grabbed by a Goshawk for example, is a painful enough experience, but unless one has been whacked by a Golden Eagle at first hand, it is understandable that the pain threshold scales new heights. As previously mentioned, they can be very aggressive and powerful at times and quite intimidating in unskilled hands. They can also be very heavy to lug about. A day in the field with a big female Golden Eagle can be a very tiring experience. Combine these two facts, plus large

amounts of time required to get these birds fully fit for their role at wild quarry and one can easily deduce that in order to obtain the best results, one really needs to WANT to fly eagles.

The advice I normally give to general enquirers is to leave eagles well alone, for unless one is prepared to accept the foregoing, an unpleasant relationship is likely to ensue with the bird sooner rather than later being handed on rapidly to others. This may sound somewhat trite, but it does appear that eagle falconers tend to be born rather than made. While this is a strange statement to make, most falconers that fly eagles on a regular basis generally hold a life-long love for these great predators and actually prefer them, often to the exclusion of all others. This is certainly the case with me. I know of more than one falconer who has tried his hand with a large eagle, received the fright of his life and, with some relief, rapidly returned to the smaller raptors. If a general enquirer is not put off by my previous statements, I tend to follow up with the warning that if one still wishes to pursue the flying of Golden Eagles then, "It is often not a question of IF you get hurt, but WHEN! Admittedly, not all eagles are aggressive, but they do retain the potential to do a surprising amount of harm in a very short space of time, and if this maxim is always at the forefront of one's mind when handling these birds, then accidents should be kept to a minimum. Having said all this, I may be giving the opinion that the Golden Eagle is nothing other than a feathered nightmare. This is only true when the bird is in the wrong hands, but even with dedicated austringers, things can and do sometimes take a turn for the worse. Some eagles are well known for turning nasty once food has been presented. This article covers some of the aspects to be found in handling Golden Eagles and while certain of these may seem detrimental to man, it has to be said that a lifetime of perfectly safe and excellent falconry can be enjoyed with these great birds.

Eagles may appear rather bulky, like

overgrown buzzards, but one should never be fooled, they are rapid in the extreme, both in flight and especially with their heavily armoured feet. It is these latter weapons that have earned my respect and I always endeavour to keep the unprotected portions of my anatomy out of harms way. An attack can come out of the blue with devastating rapidity and sometimes for no apparent reason. Most get to know their birds' moods and react accordingly but it is not always possible to be prepared for such a moment. We all make mistakes from time to time, unguarded moments are bound to occur and it is during these lapses that we often pay dearly and indeed, this is exactly how I received my odd scars. Whereas most falconers begin by feeding their smaller hawks and falcons at home, this is not the best policy with eagles, or at least, not in the vicinity of where the bird is normally kept. A few of my eagles have become very aggressive at home in the garden, which soon becomes the birds' territory and I have learnt the hard way that feeding them here often results in fierce aggressive tactics which can be very alarming and best avoided from day one. One dark evening, I had returned home later than expected and picked up my female Golden Eagle "Skye" from her bow-perch with the intention of transferring her to the mews. Up to this point, she had shown no aggression towards me whatsoever, and thus I had become complacent. I obviously had not secured one of her jesses properly and suddenly felt as though someone had thrown a brick in my face. She grabbed me full on but fortunately for me it was merely a stabbing blow and thankfully she did not retain her hold as she would when holding quarry. It was pure luck that the injuries sustained were not more serious for she has huge, heavily armed feet with enormous talons, even for a Golden Eagle. I carry a scar on my forehead from this encounter to this very day, and my face looked more of a mess than usual for a time! She didn't like being disturbed on her perch at night and let me know it!

Experience is paramount

I have perhaps painted a rather detrimental view of eagle flying, but I sincerely believe the point has to be pressed home that these birds can be dangerous, especially to those with little or no experience. The joys of eagle flying are unsurpassed in my view but one really does need to be fully aware that there can be a darker side to the game. I should have foreseen Skye's behaviour, particularly as she had grabbed her previous owner in the face on at least two occasions, but it was dark and I was tired. In fact, this is how I came to acquire Skye. Her previous owner had been grabbed just once too often for his liking, and desired to part with the bird somewhat urgently.

Needless to say, I have not made the same mistake since and always ensure her jesses are properly secured. In fact, this is the usual rule with any of the larger eagles. "Don't give them the opportunity," is my motto. Strangely enough, the eagle that is often aggressive at home, may well behave impeccably out in the field, belying the subsurface temperament with which the experienced eagle falconer is well aware. Having stated the foregoing, unless one is REALLY serious about flying an eagle, my advice would be to leave them well alone and get a Harris Hawk. Perhaps this was the thinking behind the aforementioned authors and not so much the ability to take quarry with eagles? Either way, the writings of these authors put back the flying of eagles in the United Kingdom by decades.

How different then is the situation today, when eagles have found popularity all over Europe and where they are flown with great success at wild quarry. In Britain, the Golden Eagle is coming of age, thanks mainly to the writings and good eagle falconry of devoted exponents such as Alan Gates, Martin Hollinshead, Neil Hunter and Andrew Knowles-Brown. We owe a lot to these eagle men for turning round the past archaic viewpoints metered out against eagle falconry and I personally cannot find sufficient words to thank them. These days, at international hawking meets there are normally several Golden Eagles present, sometimes even as many as twenty or thirty, many of which give a good account of themselves. I emphasise Golden Eagles here, because this species is undoubtedly the great favourite amongst eagle falconers, well

tried over centuries by various peoples of the northern hemisphere where this bird rules supreme. Before I pass on into the mews in the sky, I would love the opportunity to fly the African Crowned Eagle, but I have to admit there is something special about a Golden Eagle. It's great feet and talons are a classic indication as to its raptorial qualities as a falconer's bird. That far-away glint in its dark eyes conjures up images of wild mountain fastnesses and those pure white carpal patches of the wings and the white sub-terminal band of the tail of the immature that vary so markedly from individual to individual often enabling one to identify one bird from another at a glance, are appealing characteristics of this wonderful species. Not to mention the beautiful long golden hackles that ripple down the nape, giving the bird its common name. I could go on forever waxing lyrical about the Golden Eagle.

So why did I spend the best part of twenty-four years flying an Imperial Eagle, which for hawking purposes, compared with the Golden Eagle, is basically an inferior species? The reasons are quite simple. I already had "Ajax" the Imperial Eagle and I have generally never been one for farming off birds to others simply because I desire to fly something else, it is not fair on the bird. Also, at the time I acquired Ajax, no Golden Eagles were being bred in captivity, or at least, not in sufficient numbers and few, if any licences were being issued to take the species from the wild. Ever since having "Sable," the Berkut Golden Eagle in the late 1960's, I had nursed an overwhelming desire to fly one again. For the record, it is with great joy that I learned that Sable had produced an eyas, through artificial insemination at the National Birds of Prey Centre in Gloucestershire. Sable lived for over thirty years before she died at the centre. It is heartening to know that her blood now flows through her daughter, Cinnibar, who is being flown by the experienced and respected eagle austringer Neil Hunter.

Life changes

My circumstances have changed considerably since those early years and so has the availability of Golden Eagles. Several breeders in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe annually produce young from their breeding eagles, either by natural pairing or through artificial insemination. Perhaps

the danger here in years to come may be a saturation point regarding young eagles for falconry purposes. I hope not, but it is not inconceivable that the day could possibly arrive where those desiring to fly a Golden Eagle already have one, so great care and thought will be required regarding the disposal of surplus eagles. This will perhaps not happen for some time, but it is a distinct possibility. Many falconers would not wish to own a Golden Eagle at any price, for the reasons I have already stated and this is fair enough, for they are not for everyone. All the eagle breeders known to me personally take the greatest possible care as to whom they pass on their surplus birds, and quite rightly too. All raptor breeders should adhere to this maxim to ensure that their eyasses do not fall into inexperienced hands. This is even more important where Golden Eagles are concerned. As aforementioned, they are heavy to carry about and can be aggressive, especially the larger females. My female, Skye, has a top weight of fourteen pounds (a stone) and carrying her on the fist for prolonged periods can be a bit of a struggle, especially now that I am not so young as I used to be. They are indeed large and powerful birds and in the wrong hands could well pose problems for their owners and indeed, the sport of falconry itself. Falconry is under constant threat from certain anti-everything groups who seem to have nothing better to do than try to curtail everyone's freedom, so an inexperienced falconer trying his or her hand with a large Golden Eagle could well give these pressure groups ammunition for their causes. It is all too easy to imagine someone's Yorkshire Terrier, or any dog for that matter, running up to sniff at a weathering eagle. The eagle naturally resents this and grabs the dog in the face with those murderous feet and talons, for after all a Yorkie is a rabbit to a Golden Eagle. Or just as likely, a soaring trained eagle spots a dog out walking with its owner and makes a bee-line for the canine. It doesn't even bear thinking about, but the newspapers would have a field day. I can imagine the headlines, "Eagle slays Crufts Champion," etc. and falconry would once more come under close scrutiny. As a long-standing practising falconer, I have always put the good name of the sport before my own considerations and am ever mindful not to spoil it for others, or myself, by



malpractice, but unfortunately there are those who do not seem to care. As such, I do worry that as more and more eagles become available and more people wish to fly them, such aforementioned clashes will become more and more inevitable. Indeed, where are the wide-open spaces where these birds can be safely flown? Our country is becoming ever smaller with more and more land going under tarmac, concrete, bricks and mortar. Whilst it is true that Golden Eagles can be flown successfully in a variety of habitats, I believe that even the most ardent eagle devotee would agree that wide open districts with slopes for soaring are habitats which best suit this species and these same habitats also attract hill walkers and their dogs. With this in mind, it may only be a matter of when, rather than if, a trained eagle will come into conflict with other open space users. I sincerely hope not, but too many Golden Eagles on the market, in the wrong hands, could be a recipe for disaster. I hope I do not live to see the day when this remarkable raptor is struck from the list of suitable falconry birds because of unnecessary and stupid behaviour on the part of a few. This is one of the reasons why I usually fly my eagles from the fist in order that the target can be readily identified.

It could perhaps be argued that putting all the foregoing into print can only encourage the latter unwelcome scenario, and there may well be a hint of truth in this. However, my reasoning behind all this is that by highlighting the drawbacks with these birds, anyone with any sense at all will fully appreciate that it takes a highly dedicated, some would even argue masochistic person, to even consider taking on one of these magnificent birds. This is to say nothing of the requirement of the aforementioned large tracts of game-filled land to keep the bird flying and motivated.

Also, there is very little guiding information available on the actual training and flying of these birds and herein perhaps rests the problem. Probably the one volume in the English language coming closest as regards pre-training experiences is "Bird of Jove" written by Sam Barnes under the pseudonym David Bruce. This book is about the relationship with Sam Barnes and a Golden Eagle called Atalanta. Much of this book is a bit of an ego trip to say the least, but the early stages of training Atalanta are of interest and I would recommend this as essential reading for anyone considering taking up the training of a Golden Eagle.

It may well put most off and if it does,

then all well and good. For the record, Atalanta is not the largest eagle to have ever lived and weighed nothing like the twenty-six pounds stated, I know, for I personally handled her and still have her skull. Most books offer only a paragraph or two where eagles are concerned and so the tyro must scan the falconry magazines of recent times for any really useful snippets of information. Even though I am fully aware I have less experience than others, despite many years with eagles, this is why I decided to put pen to paper. I still honestly believe that unless one is prepared to devote one's life to flying an eagle properly, they should be left well alone.

Quarry numbers not a priority

I wholeheartedly agree with most falconers that it is probably easier to catch more quarry with a Goshawk or a Harris than with a Golden Eagle, if the size of the game bag is of major importance. It may seem a strange comment coming from a practising falconer, but slaying ever larger numbers of game has never been high on my list of falconry priorities. I have never been one for the numbers game and really don't care if I have only a few kills per season or many. Provided enough are secured to keep the bird motivated is all I ask for. However, this does not imply that I do not try. Some falconers will no doubt find this attitude puzzling, for after all, birds of prey are built for the kill and falconry is all about flying raptors at wild quarry. I have no argument with this. Indeed, I enter all the birds I train at wild quarry, as is their birthright and this is falconry. Yet I have no interest in top scores, such as taking the most grouse with a Peregrine or hares with a Golden Eagle. I fly birds of prey because they fascinate me. I have a passion for raptors in flight, trained or otherwise, whether they are mouse hunting Barn Owls, Kestrels or a soaring Buzzard, I simply cannot resist watching their amazing flight manoeuvres. If these smaller species are amazing, imagine then watching a magnificent Golden Eagle in the air at close quarters, soaring over the hillsides, hooking into a thermal and riding this on a three hundred and sixty degree circuit, ever gaining height, and then plunging earthwards, as a pear-shaped silhouette at break-neck speed in pursuit of some distant prey. Whether the eagle catches it or not is of minor importance to me, the breathtaking spectacle is there

regardless and the flight is just as fantastic. The size of the eagle and the associated sheer power and grace places these birds on a pedestal above all others as far as I am concerned and for me, these are reasons enough as to why I choose to fly the big eagles.

Most books advise obtaining a male eagle instead of the larger female, and unless one is hunting very large quarry, such as wolf, this is sound advice. Female eagles are renowned for their aggression and because of their larger size and weight, are able to back up their aggression with more considerable force. Males on the other hand, according to the literature anyway, suffer from no such drawbacks, although I am fully aware that is simply untrue. Up until 2007, all my Golden Eagle experiences had been with females, so I fully expected a male to be something of an anti-climax. Not a bit of it, as I hope the following will demonstrate. All of my previous eagles have been either foreign imports or fully feathered parent reared birds from breeding projects. I had never before had the opportunity of acquiring a very young, partially imprinted male Golden Eagle. Enter "Star."

Star, a male Berkut Golden Eagle was produced in England by natural pairing from a pair of Berkut Golden Eagles, which originally hailed from Kazakhstan, where, along with Mongolia, Berkuts, the largest of the geographical races of Golden Eagle, have for centuries been flown at such formidable quarry as wolves and foxes. Star hatched on the seventeenth of April 2007 and I collected him on the seventh of July that same year. He had been taken from his parents and reared by a foster female Golden Eagle whilst his parents re-cycled to produce a second clutch of two eggs. This pair produced four eaglets that year, two males and two females. The breeder constantly went into the flight containing my male to partially imprint him, as I hope to eventually breed from him and Skye in the future. Partially imprinting him will, I hope, give me the two options of natural pairing or artificial insemination. Only time will tell.

Furniture fitted

Star was easily captured and fitted with the usual jesses, swivel and leash. It goes without saying that the choice of leather should be supple but very strong in order to withstand the punishment that these

birds can meter out to their equipment, or furniture to give it its correct title. I always initially cut jess slits in a sheet of leather and then try to rip it as hard as I can. If it gives way, then that particular sheet of leather is discarded. Other than the extra strength required, the equipment remains standard as for any other hawk. I always use larger, heavy-duty swivels and braided nylon leashes and always hood my birds and take them out in travelling boxes. I never put them in the box whilst wearing a hood as the purpose of the box, in this case, is to act like a giant hood. Thus Star was placed, unhooded in the travelling box for the journey home.

I stopped a few times to check on him and he merely lay on the floor of the box, blinking his eyes at me. Before leaving the breeder's premises, Star was placed on the scales, which he tipped at just below eight pounds. His breastbone was prominent and he still had many feathers in blood, including all his primary and tail feathers. In fact his tail was only half way down and he had many down feathers on his almost black back and chest. From his weight and distance to go before becoming fully feathered, I estimated his top weight to be ten pounds, and in due course, this is what it turned out to be. I had a large mews prepared into which I turned him loose. I still keep him loose in the mews at night and weather him daily on the lawn on a bow-perch. He actually ate a small amount before nightfall, but not on the fist, but it was still a good start.

I desired to keep him tame so spent some time every day for the next few weeks, walking him round the garden on the glove. His weight was a great relief after handling Skye, who I had since placed into a flight. My plan was to keep the male bird in full view of Skye to keep him interested in other eagles and also to stimulate each other. By keeping them in view of each other I was hoping for a pair-bond to develop but initially at any rate, I feel that this was a big mistake, for once he became familiar with everything, he looked to Skye as his mother and constantly called to her, especially when she moved around the flight. This was not so bad at first, but it soon became constant and he screamed repeatedly at her all day long, until I had neighbour complaints and had to take drastic action. I fed him up for a while and this reduced the noise level almost completely, but as I

wanted to fly him I had little choice other than to screen him from her as best as I could.

In the meantime, whilst his feathers were still in blood, I fed him as much as he would eat and kept him loose in the mews, only leashing him up to carry him around at feeding times. I always tried to feed him away from his perch area but as male eagles were not supposed to be aggressive, (according to all the books) I confess I was sometimes a bit remiss on this topic. I was to pay for this oversight shortly. Whenever I offered him food, I always blew a blast on a referee's whistle, in order that he should associate the sound with the presence of food. This of course is standard falconry practice. He refused point-blank to use the bow-perch and would bate away and lie flat on the ground like a slaughtered fowl. After three solid weeks of this, I decided to try and use Skye as a make-hawk. I placed her on a bow-perch close to Star and sat back to watch. To be honest, I didn't expect the silly idea to work, but within minutes of seeing Skye use the perch as intended, he jumped up onto it and never looked back. I couldn't believe it. He still occasionally bated off and lay down in the grass for a while but he soon picked himself up and used the perch as nature intended. I used one of the big stainless steel, rubber-topped eagle bow-perches which I purchased from Falconiform, the falconry equipment supplier who manufacture and sell a larger than average range of eagle falconry equipment. Another rather essential piece of equipment I purchased from the same company came in the form of a leather sleeve, which protects the upper arm. For some reason, both my current Golden Eagles insist on slamming their right feet into my upper left arm when returning to the fist. This became a regular habit and as a consequence, my arm became black and blue through bruising. The practice also caused a number of shirts and jumpers to become riddled with talon puncture marks, including my much-loved Campaign For Falconry sweater. The sleeve has eradicated all such injuries, and although it does not prevent either of them from still trying, the sleeve is worth its weight in gold.

From the day Star arrived, I used the hood on him. Gently placing it near his bill, I then popped it over his head, leaving it for a few seconds then

removing it. To begin with, I did not draw the braces, but after a few days, when he accepted the hood without flinching, I then drew the braces. To my surprise, he did not resent this. In fact, he took to the hood extremely well. I made a point of using the hood several times a day and also carried him around whilst still wearing it to get him used to the motion. I cannot understand why some falconers avoid using hoods, often maintaining that the travelling box takes the place of a hood. I am afraid it does nothing of the sort. The hood has many uses, not just for travelling purposes, one of the most important being its use in the field where several trained birds may be present. This prevents the eagle bating at wild quarry intended for another bird and thus avoids frustration. In eagles, this sort of frustration can lead to the bird becoming bad tempered, a situation well worth preventing if at all possible. Additionally, I can fit new anklets, bells, telemetry tail mounts, cope beaks and talons and a whole host of other necessities easily, and without help from anyone, because of the use of the hood. The travelling box is useless in all these instances, yet I still hear falconer's remark that the box has done away with the hood. My advice if one wishes to train eagles is to get them made to the hood as early as possible. There is no better substitute and it saves a lot of hassle on the part of the falconer and reduces stress to a minimum on the bird. I also provide a bath for their use daily. Golden Eagles, coming from a temperate climate, love to bathe and will readily drink from their bath water, hence it needs to be fresh. They will play in water for ages and seem to take great enjoyment in splashing about. In addition to the bath, I also provide toys for their amusement. Golden Eagles are very intelligent and will get bored if left for too long on their perches with no visual stimulation. I discovered this trait quite by accident with Sable, my very first Golden Eagle. She trashed a wooden box that I had left nearby. In no time at all, she had reduced it to match wood, so I gave her another box with the same result. This led to the provision of items, such as rubber balls and the toys that parrots are given to play with. I now provide all my Golden Eagles with such unlikely objects and they play for hours with them. It certainly does no harm and helps to keep them occupied in times of relative inactivity.



Feeding on the fist

It took Star a while to begin feeding on the fist and because many of his feathers were still in blood, I had no desire to weaken these new feathers by withholding food. Although I tried to get him to feed on the fist for many days, he always refused and so I had no choice other than to leave food with him. Eventually though, he gradually became used to me and soon began to feed on the fist. Once this hurdle had been overcome, the rest was soon plain sailing. Like everything with falconry, patience pays dividends. From the start though, he disdained direct eye contact and he would raise his hackles and throw his head backwards if my gaze met his. He is still suspicious of direct eye contact even today. None of my previous eagles has ever shown this trait, however I do my utmost to avoid eye contact because I know it upsets him, especially whilst attempting to feed him on the fist. There are two schools of thought concerning the feeding of Golden Eagles, both having their own merits. One method favours no feeding on the fist. Instead, the food is placed on the ground, tethered initially of course. This can certainly reduce the chance of being grabbed by the bird, for at feeding-times, Golden Eagles can become excitable to say the least. However, I prefer to call my eagles to the glove, simply because I have always done so. Not that this is a good reason for continuing to do so,

but I do enjoy the greater control this method produces and it prevents the feathers becoming waterlogged in wet grass. As soon as the bird flies in to the glove, I always endeavour to secure both jesses as soon as possible, thus preventing any talon damage to any parts of my person. I cannot stress too highly the importance of keeping those feet under control. Some eagle austringers use extra long jesses for this reason and in fact with an aggressive bird, I would certainly choose this option for they are easier to grasp. Unfortunately, if the eagle is flown regularly from trees, these long jesses can wrap around or snag on branches, so some careful thought needs to be exercised here. The beak, or bill, is usually not a problem with Golden Eagles, but was a nightmare with both my Imperial and Pallas's Sea Eagles. Also, when calling an eagle to the glove, I hold my gloved hand very high in the air above my head, so that once on the glove and with both jesses secured, the bird has little chance of shooting out a foot and grabbing me. At chest height, the chances of being footed are more likely. As soon as the eagle is beginning to fly distances to the glove I introduce the ground lure, which then gives me the best of both worlds.

Using ground lures is the best way of getting the bird accustomed to flying at furry objects being dragged along the ground and it is here that the future flying at wild quarry is introduced. Having said that though, I am under no illusions that young Golden Eagles are more than capable of taking wild quarry, whether introduced to a ground lure or not. The requirement to kill is instinctive and provided the bird is keen enough, it will make an attempt at quarry regardless of whether or not it has ever seen a lure. The lure basically helps to keep the bird fit. It is also at this juncture that one can also experience problems. My female eagle, Skye, comes off lures and quarry easily with no fuss. Star on the other hand, is quite the opposite. The first time I introduced him to the lure we had a scene. I fully expected him to step off the lure, which I had covered with my gauntlet, but he had other ideas and refused to let go. Instead, he had a terrific tantrum and attacked me with all the force he could muster. I placed my gloved hand in his way and he struck at this with both feet. His hackles were fully raised, as were all of his mantle feathers

and he thrust his tail and primary feathers into the ground. At such times he is an absolute picture of untamed ferocity. He then grabbed the lure again with one foot and would not relinquish his hold and whenever I attempted to make in to him he constantly turned his back on me with a shuffling motion. He was furious and it has to be said, quite intimidating. So much for males being less aggressive! This was not the alleged placid attitude of the male that I had read so much about. In fact, when he is in yarak, he is as aggressive as any female I have ever handled, particularly whilst at home. Even taking him up on the glove from the perch he slams his feet into the gauntlet with considerable force. I deemed it best for both of us on this occasion to give him time to calm down, which he eventually did and we ended the day still on speaking terms, just!! However, as his weight gradually reduced, he became ever more aggressive. Whenever I went to pick him up on the glove, he always stabbed the gauntlet with one foot, just to let me know that he still thought he was the boss!! It appears that Golden Eagles will usually try and intimidate their handlers and will exploit any sign of weakness by becoming more aggressive. I usually act as though I hadn't noticed anything and carry on nonchalantly doing what I was doing. Some falconers, I believe, actually hit their eagles with something like a rolled up newspaper. I have never considered this an option so I cannot say whether or not it works. I will just add that I personally have so far never had to resort to this tactic and therefore it is not a method that I can recommend. Mind you, after a particularly aggressive assault, the idea does sometimes seem tempting.

Unfortunately for me, most of my falconry friends have now either moved on to pastures new, given up falconry or expired. This has left me to fly and hunt alone, which I quite like, but being alone causes massive problems when introducing an eagle to the ground lure. Three people are the ideal for this juncture, together with some sort of vehicle. One person drives the vehicle, the second holds the lure line out of the rear of the vehicle, and the third person controls the eagle. The most important person here is the one holding the lure line, for it is his responsibility to control the events as they unfurl. Ideally, the vehicle is driven at speeds of up to thirty

miles an hour and the lure man watches the eagle chasing the lure. Once contact with the lure is made, the lure man then gives the lure a few tugs to simulate a struggling animal and then lets go of the line. Timing here is of the essence because releasing the lure too late will give the bird an extremely rough ride and may cause it some injury, so great care is necessary. If the lure is released too early, an unnatural, too easy "kill" is the result and the bird learns little, because real wild quarry, once taken, seldom initially remains still. Now that I generally hawk alone, this type of luring is no longer an option for me. The best that I can now hope for is to initially hood the eagle and place him on a convenient branch or rock and then hide the lure in a patch of undergrowth. Keeping hold of the lure-line, I then return to the bird, pick him up, un-hood him and then cast him off to some dead tree. As he wings his way to the tree I pull the lure from the undergrowth and with a shout, run as fast as possible dragging the lure behind me. If I am lucky, he turns before landing in the tree and cutting a wide arc, makes a rapid attack on the lure. Once he grabs it, I continue running for a few paces and tug left and right on the lure line, ensuring that he has to get a good grip to hold onto the lure. This of course is not the ideal situation, I cannot run anything like thirty miles an hour, but at least it works to a degree and is also another good reason for using the hood, for without it, I would have a hard time hiding the lure without him seeing it and he would try to reach it prematurely. This method though is hard work, time consuming and I am getting no younger.

Flying up a slope

Flying ever increasing distances to the fist follows exactly the same pattern as for any other raptor in training. I make one small, but I believe important deviation. I attempt to fly my eagles up inclines. This only works if one does not rush matters. Most short and broad wings seem to have an aversion to flying up slopes. This is apparent when hawking quarry such as the Blue or Mountain Hare. If the first stoop results in a miss, the hare will always attempt to run uphill. If the hare is successful, the pursuing hawk or eagle soon runs out of steam and generally pitches onto the ground. However, this is not the reason why I choose to fly my eagles uphill. I do this purely to build up

the pectoral muscles and attempt to get the bird fitter. An eagle has to work much harder flying uphill and most are reluctant to even attempt it. Therefore, one has to take things gradually.

If one increases the calling-off distance too soon, the eagle will end up walking to one, or one ends up walking towards the eagle to encourage it to take wing. The end result is that the intelligent eagle soon realises that its handler will give it the reward whether or not it has made a valiant attempt. Who is training whom? I always call the bird short distances and only very gradually increase the slope angle and distance. It also goes without saying that I also fly the bird in flat areas too, but I do find that hill slopes are beneficial to its fitness. Additionally, it must be said that the eagle's talons must be kept sharp. Blunt talons slip off quarry, even with feet as powerful as those of a Golden Eagle. Talons need to be kept sharp to allow deep penetration and a quick kill. Blunt talons can mean lost quarry, for by this time the eagle is on the ground and may not be quick enough to take off for a second chance. Mind you, having said that, if an eagle grabs an unprotected part of one's anatomy, one may wish the talons had remained blunt!!

So now Star was hard penned, made to the hood, flying to the fist and lure and ready to take the field. I still have not cured him of his aggression, but he only demonstrates this irritating tactic at home, out in the field he is sweetness and light, so far!! I am still experimenting with still-hunting, flying him out of trees etc. for as aforementioned, I worry that he can perhaps see too many unintentional targets from such a vantage point, so I mainly fly him from the fist and with his lighter weight, I do not find this such a burden.

This article was never intended to concern itself with the actual flying at quarry, many of these already exist in the learned falconry journals. My intention here as aforementioned was to cover the issue of purely training and handling Golden Eagles. If some of the advice I have given helps just one individual, then my time will have been well spent. If your eagle differs in any great respect from that of my birds, I would welcome your views, for only by sharing information can we proceed more rapidly and wiser. Star's progress in the field and ultimately in the breeding pen will, hopefully, become the subject of future articles.

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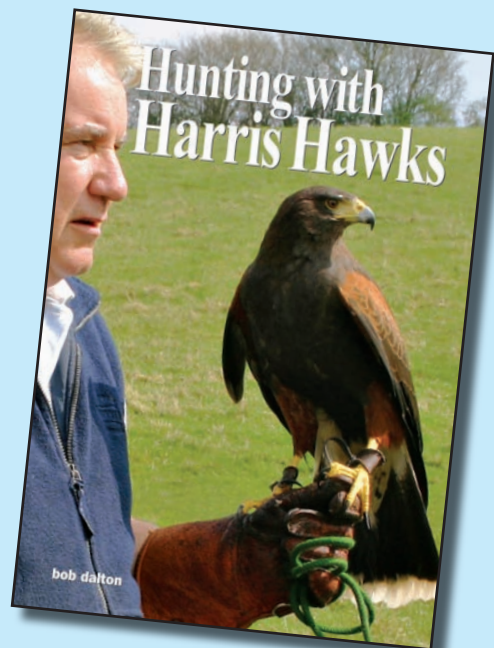
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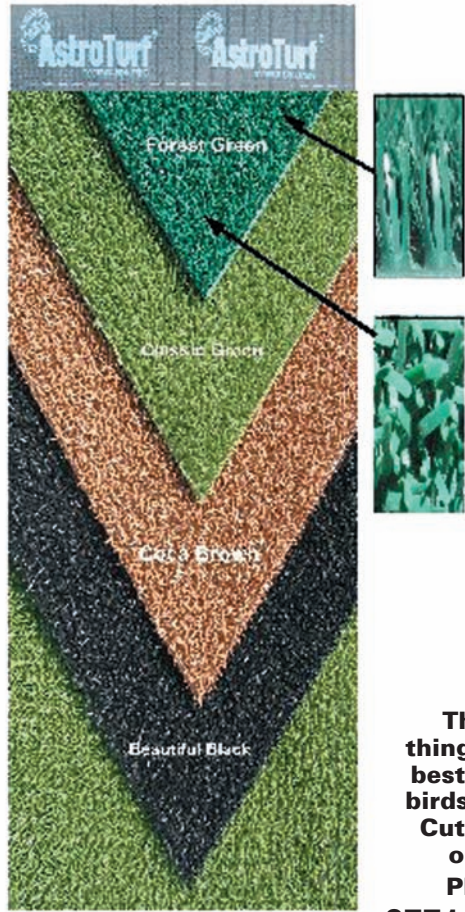






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LANTRA

and the future of falconry in the UK

The LANTRA Award scheme is now well established and continuing to grow in size and importance within our sport. So now seemed an appropriate time to explain why I believe it is a good thing for falconry in the UK and something that we should all continue to support either positively or passively.

To understand why I believe a uniform and universally supported entry point into our sport is so important, we should first look at falconry in the UK today in relation to those entering the sport.

Birds of prey and falconry related displays have become commonplace. Through country shows, fairs, school visits etc. there are probably more opportunities now to see a version of “falconry” than ever before. (Unfortunately, and all too frequently, it can also be found in many totally unsuitable, shabby and degrading places)

This is led by, and also fuels a huge interest from the public in learning more about falconry and birds of prey in general. The result of this is that a growing percentage of these people will seek out a way of getting involved in falconry, and many will go on to acquire a bird. In my experience this momentum is still building, and has now become a runaway train resulting in ever greater numbers each year beginning in “falconry”. Even if we wished to, we can no longer turn back the tide. However with the LANTRA Award scheme, I believe that we can influence its destination and the likely effects this will have on the sport that we all love.

What of those people that do pursue this initial interest in falconry? The evidence of recent years is that many will seek advice from clubs and experienced falconers; they will do at least one course, and read voraciously, seeking out the information they need at every opportunity. They will thoroughly research the needs of the birds, and the responsibility that comes with entering this most complete and fulfilling of sports.

Only then will they either select a species that suits their circumstances, and with a combination of awe and humility

take their first steps on a wonderful journey; or they will responsibly decide that the huge commitment of time and resources necessary are too great, that falconry is rarely conducive to modern living, and that their lifestyle at present, is unsuited to pursuing this most demanding of sports. They remain content, to admire and enjoy the birds from a distance, rather than impose their selfish wants onto a beautiful top predator.

These people try their utmost to start properly and conscientiously, and for them help should always be available. The result is that many go on to enjoy, enhance and support this most fantastic of hobbies (obsessions) for the rest of their lives and Falconry is the richer and safer for their participation. I have met many people like this and do not fear for the future of my sport through their actions.

However, a significant number, through bad luck, laziness or stupidity, do and will continue to enter our sport without sufficient knowledge, understanding or preparation. Birds are now very easy to acquire, and with a little knowledge it seems all too easy to convince breeders that you are competent enough to own a BOP.

If you need any proof of this, take a look at the beginners section in any of the Falconry Forums and read the questions being asked, and advice being given, by a large group of people that have already either acquired a bird or are about to take delivery.

We have all met many people like this, they have started badly and will now struggle for ever to learn enough to be able to adequately house, feed and care for their birds. Without an understanding of “first principles” they are unable to sift through the mountains of information and advice available, they show their ignorance in every sentence they utter, and after a few conversations, where they have been soundly abused (and Falconers love to point out others’ shortcomings) these people stop asking questions and forever bumble along with poor housing, poor healthcare, and bad practice at home and in the field. The only time they raise their heads is

in front of the public and whenever the opportunity arises to talk to newcomers to the sport, to whom they are ever ready to offer encouragement and advice.

Worse still they turn up at shopping centres, outside supermarkets, and in high streets presenting the most magnificent creatures on the planet in the most squalid way for the shabbiest of reasons. With these people I do fear for the perception and long term welfare of Birds of Prey and of my sport.

As a community we appear to take pleasure in pointing the finger and ranting (see above) about other “bird keepers”. So presented with a way of improving the minimum entry standards into our sport shouldn’t we, as a community, wholeheartedly support such a scheme? And in doing so improve the lives of many BOPs and possibly avoid the inevitable bad publicity which could ultimately damage the freedoms that we currently enjoy. I believe that the LANTRA award could be such a scheme.

By now most people involved in falconry will be aware of what the award is. For those reading this whom are either new to Falconry or still unclear regarding its structure and content; in essence it is a customised award developed by LANTRA and the Hawk Board which is designed (through a series of questions and practical demonstrations) to test a person’s competence to keep a hawk or owl in a safe and healthy condition. In itself it is not a course; it is the opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge and ability acquired via a course or for experienced falconers, via many years of experience and practice.

It is broken down into two units which are broken down further into 11 modules.

Unit 1

- Bird of Prey Management and Husbandry
- Housing
- Hygiene
- Feed and Food Preparation
- Health
- Species Suitability
- Purchasing your first bird

Unit 2

- Basic Falconry techniques
- Essential falconry equipment
- Picking up and carrying
- Feeding, manning and initial training techniques
- Weighing and weight management
- Flying to the fist on a creance

These modules can be worked through over an extended period and only presented for assessment when a person feels confident that they have sufficient knowledge and understanding of each section to be able to demonstrate competence to an assessor.

There are other areas pertaining to falconry competence that many courses will cover not contained in the assessment criteria. However, the subjects that are covered in the award must be assessed thoroughly. Just being taught them is not sufficient. The Award is only granted once the Student or Falconer has **proven** that they have the required knowledge and skills to be able to safely start in Falconry. And therefore have the correct foundation from which to build. And that they understand and actively implement that knowledge and skill. Therefore, if someone has achieved the LANTRA “Beginning Falconry” Award, we the wider Falconry community **know** what it is that they know. Not just what they were taught.

Many people offer courses that are very good but are not part of this Award scheme. I would encourage them to approach LANTRA and get involved. But even if they don't want to be involved themselves, their students can still get themselves assessed following the course and therefore achieve the award.

The reason for promoting this addition to our approach is because I believe that the importance of this award goes far beyond the knowledge that it imparts.

Once we have established single uniform criteria for judging the level of knowledge, attitude, aptitude and commitment acceptable for anyone entering our sport we then have shorthand for minimum competence which would quickly impact on those without the necessary commitment and application.

For example:

- Breeders have a minimum criteria, when selling birds to beginners
- Before joining a club you should commit to taking the Award within a specified timescale, again proving commitment and minimum competence.

If someone enquires about how to get into Falconry, advice given should be:-

- Join a club (who should in turn insist on them achieving the LANTRA Award within a set timescale)
- Find an experienced Falconer who is prepared to mentor them
- Providing they work towards achieving the LANTRA Award
- Book themselves on a course working towards achieving the Award.

All of these will further cement the need for the beginner to take Falconry seriously to “start right” and will deter some who underestimate the level of commitment required to enter our sport. Surely as an absolute minimum, our magnificent birds deserve this.

I am not naive enough to believe that the lazy and stupid will ever willingly take a course or offer themselves up for assessment.

But very quickly we will all have a good idea of who they are and avoid them passing themselves off as Falconers to breeders, other beginners, Schools etc and therefore representing our sport badly.

For the experienced Falconer, the LANTRA Award may not appear very appealing. Indeed I have heard a number of reasons not to support it with resistance running along the following lines:-

- It won't add anything to me or my sport so why should I?
- Who is qualified to assess me?
- It's just a money making exercise?
- It has no teeth, we can't make people take it, so it's a waste of time?
- The scope of the Award does not go far enough?

I won't try to answer all of these here with the exception of the money making one which is simply not true, (I lose money on every assessment I do for existing Falconers). However, I am happy to talk to anyone about their reservations one to one – please do call me. For experienced falconers, the reason to support the award has very little to do with any personal short term gain.

That said I have assessed a number of experienced Falconers and they have all found the exercise of completing the workbook a rewarding one. (As did I when I completed and was assessed for my award). Examining the depth of your knowledge, checking and articulating your procedures and general husbandry practice is a healthy thing to do. It usually reaffirms the level of your accumulated knowledge and at times expands that knowledge. There is never any question of being judged by another Falconer, the criteria is set by the Hawk Board (in conjunction with LANTRA, who have years of experience in creating and administering such awards). The assessments are verified independently of the Assessors and the assessors must prove that they have been thorough, fair and totally impartial. My personal likes/dislikes and individual opinions on training etc. are totally irrelevant in the process.

In my opinion the reason for Falconry UK to support the Award is primarily to promote best practice in those thinking about entering the sport that you love. And thereby improving and safeguarding that sport for the future. The best way to do this is to stand up and be counted by taking the Award in spite of your reservations, failing that, promote it to the next generation of Falconers. Use the LANTRA Award in conversations that start “I'm interested in taking up Falconry, how do I go about it” or “What bird would you recommend for a beginner” or “I've heard that Harris Hawks are easy to train, My mate's got one” and the many other questions that imply intent coupled with ignorance.

If we continue to support the intent behind the Award and establish this as the shorthand for minimum competence in UK Falconry, I believe that in a relatively short space of time we could make a significant impact in the direction our sport is taking, reduce the number of times we all see poor “falconry” being practised and on display to the public and **all** be tut-tutting and shaking our heads a lot less in the future... If that's what we really want?

Whilst I am an assessor for the LANTRA “Beginning Falconry” Award, all of the views and sentiments expressed in this article are solely mine, and do not represent the views of either the Hawk Board, LANTRA or any other body to which I am associated.

WuDi

A Chinese Falconer

I am more used to waking up and feeling the planet breathing beneath me. This morning I awoke to the full roar of humanity and I knew I was back in urban China. It is as if every person is hell bent on making as much noise as possible, human noise at this volume is so irritating, and brings the reality of city life in with a bang. I could not be at more extremes, essentially I am a country boy at heart and love waking to the sound of bird song, but something keeps bringing me back to this mad intense environment.

The fascination for me is the exploration of China's falconry tradition by modern participants of the art. The Government is not sympathetic, and in some parts of China, downright hostile to anyone keeping raptors. This makes it extremely difficult for anyone especially a foreigner, to find any information about the practice of falconry in any area of China. It is a long slow process and requires much patience, little can be achieved in just one quick visit.

Each time I return, new avenues are beginning to open up to me as my network of friends grows, and I am welcomed into new areas of Chinese falconry.

Beijing journal

This is my tenth journey into China and as I sit on my bed in the suburbs of Beijing typing my journal of the first two weeks, I confess this has been the most productive journey so far. I feel a real acceptance from falconers and an eager willingness to show me anything I wish to see.

In the first week I spent a few days in the countryside at a village hunting lodge of a city falconer friend of mine. This was a return visit for me as last season I enjoyed a few days with the goshawks hunting hares in the maze cornfields. Now it is earlier in the season and he is training the new season's goshawks. It is the tradition to release their hawks at the end of winter and trap new hawks in the following autumn.

Wild adult haggard and passage birds

are manned and ready for hunting within a few weeks. It was a treat to experience a few days of the process with the added knowledge that I should be able to return to witness these hawks being entered some time in the next week or two.

Dedicated young man

WuDi is my host, a young man so dedicated to falconry he has forsaken family tradition to follow his love of hawks. In China, a young person is expected to earn as good a living as they can to better the family unit. Marriage and children is the next phase of your life, and for the son of the family even more pressure is placed on your shoulders to continue the family line.

WuDi gave up a good job and so far has resisted his parents longing for him to settle down with a nice girl, get married and start a family. For him the love of the goshawk is what makes him happy and once he collects his new season's hawk from the trappers he moves away from the city and into his hunting lodge for the



The team, eight TuHu's

winter hawking.

A Beijing city boy, WuDi saw his first hawk at a bird market when he was nine years old. This vision left him in awe of anything hawk like. At fourteen he could hold this passion at bay no longer and he stole a packet of his father's cigarettes and exchanged them for a Japanese Sparrow Hawk *accipiter gularis*. These are delicate birds and are flown in the spring and early summer months, WuDi had little idea of hawk management and soon the sparrow hawk died.

Devastated by this set back but not deterred he waited and learned as much as he could from the older men in the markets. By the time he was eighteen he had been under the guidance of a Mr. Wangcheng a falconer who taught him to fly a Chinese sparrow hawk at sparrows around the alleyways and back streets of Beijing.

Illegal falconry

As WuDi's falconry ambitions progressed to a goshawk, the problems of falconry being illegal in the Peoples Republic of China had to be taken more seriously. Whereas the authorities would turn a bit of a blind eye to a kid with a sparrow hawk, they were not going to allow a goshawk to be paraded or hunted within the capital city. Undeterred by this irritant he contacted his Auntie who lived in the countryside south of Beijing and asked if he could come and stay for the winter.

Guan county is flat agricultural land that spreads for hundreds of miles. No hedges, few trees and very few ditches, it is made up of strip crops of maze, cotton, tobacco and vegetables. The brown hares are the main and almost only quarry of the trained goshawk. Pheasants are almost unknown in this part of China which is such a shame as they would add some excitement whilst looking for hares. Having found his true element, WuDi would spend every winter at his Auntie's in the countryside. Each winter he would train a newly trapped female goshawk, and hunt with her until the end of January, at which time he would release her back to the wild.

In 2003, WuDi's grandfather passed away but he left him the ownership of his house in the village in Guan county. This is now the famous hunting lodge where WuDi and his friends from Beijing retreat to each winter with their hawks. I have been lucky to spend time at the lodge on a couple of visits and meet experienced



WuDi with TuHu

visiting falconers with their hawks, falcons and shrikes. The enclosed yard houses the hawk accommodation, as well as the dog kennels and pigeon loft. As you enter the lodge you are faced with a low screen perch where the latest hawk being manned is tethered. That is if it is not already on somebody's fist.

With a house full of falconers a hawk never has a minute's peace, as soon as one falconer tethers the hawk to the perch then another one picks it up and takes it for a walk, or just into the group discussion. All this constant handling can man a wild haggard gos within 14 to 20 days to be as tame as any imprint I have seen. Yes, they are waked in the first days but not as we were led to believe by T.H.White, this is not a battle between hawk and man. Instead, the Chinese man the new hawk for about twenty hours, they take it in turns and then let the hawk

rest and sleep for a few hours, then start again. Within days the hawk is calm and relaxed and ready to start flying to the fist.

Being entertained

Last October, WuDi gathered up a Jack Merlin from a friend for some entertainment for me. We borrowed a couple of bicycles from neighbours and set out around the dirt alleyways between the village houses. We were looking for sparrows, and once spotted the Merlin was laid in the palm of the right hand, we then continued our approach until within twenty feet or so of the sparrows. The Merlin was thrown like a javelin at the exploding flock of sparrows. Helped by the thrust, these miniature rockets are so fast it is hard to focus on the action. Needless to say, he rarely missed, and within no time we had four sparrows in the bag.

WuDi's love may be the goshawk

but like many falconers he enjoys both longwings as well as shortwings. He planned to accompany me on a visit to one of his friends in the next county, and so we set off in his battered truck in the early hours one morning.

Mr. Lu was in the construction industry and very successful, he had always loved falcons and these days employs a team of experienced local falconers just to look after his TuHu's.

The TuHu is Chinese for a female Saker falcon and it translates to "Hare Tiger", the male Saker or Sakeret is not used in Chinese falconry.

As the name suggests, the TuHu's primary quarry is the big brown hare. She is flown out of the hood after fleeing hares that usually have a couple of longdogs in hot pursuit and keeping the chase at top speed. Mr. Lu's TuHu's are flown every day, and generally each falcon in the team catches a hare every day and is fed a good crop on the kill. Yet remarkably, and due to the skill of these falconers, they are ready to hunt the next day.

We went out for three days with these TuHu's and enjoyed some excellent flights, a lot of ground was covered to find the quarry but we managed a kill for each falcon in the team on every day. Mr. Lu would join us at some time within the day, locating our position by mobile telephone.

For me the experiences I enjoy with my Chinese falconry friends, enlighten me to the methods I struggled with as a young falconer learning to man passage goshawks, with only the aid of ancient text. I look back and wonder, had I been able to visit China in those early years and learn from this unbroken knowledge.



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Brittany Club of Great Britain

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

01621 817728

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Contact our Falconry rep, Tony Ellis, on:-

01666 510067

or visit the club website www.brittanyclub.co.uk

Northern England Falconry Club

Club meets the first Wednesday of each month at :-

Lane Head Hotel,

2 Brighouse Wood Lane, Brighouse,

West Yorkshire

Contact: Karl on

01924 891179

THE BRITISH HAWKING ASSOCIATION

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Dave - Membership Secretary

THE BRITISH FALCONERS CLUB (F.M.)

01253 859062 (evenings)

The South East Falconry Group

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

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

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

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

For further information or an application form please contact -

Dean White (secretary) on 01489 896504

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



Yorkshire Falconry Club

Meetings held at The Milton Arms,
Elsecard, Barnsley.

We hold our meetings on the
3rd Wednesday on the month at 8pm.

Membership includes;

- Public liability insurance
- Affiliation to the Hawk Board



For further information please 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**





Raptor Rescue

Alive and Well after 30 Years!

Who would have thought back in 1978 that the fledgling organisation set up by a small group of falconers would evolve into the leading specialist Bird of Prey Rehabilitation Charity?

A lot has happened since the formation of Raptor Rescue and over the years several thousands of sick and injured birds of prey and owls have been cared for and successfully released back into the wild.

The organisation created by that initial ten is now internationally recognised and enjoys working relationships with a wide range of organisations, including British Trust for Ornithology, Independent Bird Register, RSPCA, RSPB, Wildlife Centres and Trusts, Police, DEFRA, SEERAD, Scottish SPCA, the Hawk Board etc.

If by now you are wondering what to buy Raptor Rescue for a 30 Year Anniversary gift, relax, we are not looking for pearls – it's not a wedding anniversary after all – but what we would appreciate more than anything else – would be more rehabilitators and more members!

Anyway back to the story . . . That initial small group of concerned individuals has grown steadily and Raptor Rescue has been instrumental in setting up a national Help and Advice Line supported by a dedicated countryside network of rehabilitators and experienced carers, to undertake the demanding task of "Rescue, Rehabilitate and Release"

The Raptor Rescue Helpline receives more than 60 calls on average each month and last year we handled a total of 326 wild birds and 18 captive bred birds as well as 20 Red Kites for relocation. At this point only some 45% of annual returns have been received from our rehabilitators so the total figure is likely to be well in excess of 600 birds. Just under half of the total wild birds were returned to the wild after successful treatment.

The full breakdown of the Annual Survey report for 2006-2007 is available

on the Raptor Rescue website www.raptorrescue.org.uk and shows details of the casualties by species, by injury and by treatment, together with details of where the birds were received from. The majority of raptors were Kestrels, Buzzards and Sparrowhawks, with the vast majority of owls made up of Tawny Owls (more than the joint total for Barn and Little Owls.)

Returning to our Anniversary present wish list, the top two are more members and more rehabilitators. We have a very loyal membership base but we are always seeking new members to support our "Rescue, Rehabilitate and Release" programme. Rehabilitation, inevitably, is an expensive activity in terms of money required for specialist equipment and also expensive in terms of the time required to treat and return a sick or injured bird back to its natural place in the wild.

You do not have to be actively involved with Birds of Prey to become a Member - anyone with an interest will be made more than welcome and will be kept fully informed of our activities.

RAPTOR RESCUE

Registered Charity No. 283733

Raptor Rescue is always looking to recruit additional rehabilitators to extend our current network and to ensure we cover the whole of the UK; we want to make certain that a call to the Helpline results in a quick local response and immediate treatment for the casualty. An increasing number of rehabilitators have attained Approved Rehabilitator status having met the criteria defined in the Raptor Rescue Guidance Notes and Code of Practice for Raptor Rehabilitators.

Approved Rehabilitator Status allows rehabilitators to apply to Raptor Rescue for assistance with specialised items

aimed specifically for rehabilitation and care, e.g. travelling boxes, catch nets, heat pads, hospital units, mobile hacking aviaries as well as First Aid equipment.

Members of the Public can be assured that any injured bird taken into care by a Raptor Rescue Approved Rehabilitator will receive the best attention from a recognised and experienced rehabilitator with suitable facilities to care for the casualty in a proper and lawful manner.

Anyone wishing to join us as a rehabilitator will again be made most welcome and we will provide every encouragement and assistance to attain Approved status.

Raptor Rescue places great emphasis upon conservation, raising public awareness of our native raptor and owl species, and providing a central source of emergency assistance for injured and sick birds. The Guidance Notes and Code of Practice for Raptor Rehabilitators set out minimum standards and working practices, and is in circulation across the world with contacts in Africa, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, India, Italy, Malta, Romania, South Korea, Spain, USA etc.

Similarly, in the UK, copies have been circulated to all major political parties, Government departments and to NGOs and the publication was recognised, following submissions to the UK Animal Welfare Bill consultation process as "the leading set of standards for raptor rehabilitation."

More Information

If you want to find out more or want to join us or if you want to buy us an anniversary present or all three, we will be delighted to hear from you. We can be contacted through the Raptor Rescue Webpage www.raptorrescue.org.uk, via a message on the **Helpline 0870 241 0609**, by visiting our stand and display at shows and fairs or by contacting **Steve Davidson**, our over worked Secretary, at **28 Victoria Road, Great Sankey, Warrington WA5 2ST. Tel 01565 654292.**

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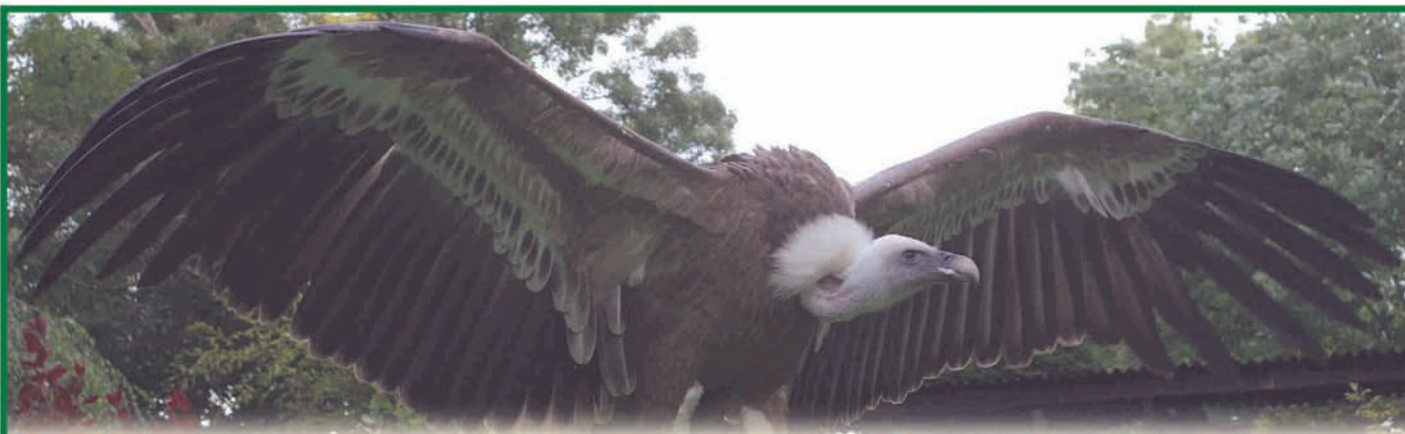
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The Living Heritage Falconry Village

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 VILLAGE SO FAR: *We are halfway through the show season, as the year has progressed so has the Falconry Village. Ideas have been tried, retained or thrown out, it has aroused a certain amount of interest and comment amongst the show visitor and experienced falconer.*

The four resident falconers Chris Miller, John Akerman, Andy Cook, Chris Neal and Veterinary Nurse Helen Harrison ably supported by members of the Hawk Board and Lantra provide the mainstay of the Village. They provide a large static and flying display of a wide range of birds of prey, the forums, question and answer sessions offer advice on all aspects of falconry, flying, welfare and legal. As more falconers have attended the questions and scope of the forums have intensified.

Local falconry and hawking clubs are also lending their support, the village now has one or two clubs attending each show, an important step in attracting the new and inexperienced into falconry. The village is always keen to attract newcomers to falconry, Lantra are on hand to discuss their Introduction to Falcon courses. The Village will continue to develop over the remaining shows this year as more ideas are tried.

A new feature of the village at the Autumn show will be "Wings out of Africa". The featured birds will include an African Fish Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, White Faced Scots Owl, White Headed Vulture and the expected star of the show Oscar, the Cape Vulture. The Cape Vulture is a very rare bird in the UK, with a wingspan of upto 2.5 metres. Oscar will make an impressive sight in the main show arena, he is possibly the only flying Cape Vulture in the country. We hope to attract and welcome an increasing number of falconers to our autumn shows to visit and use the village.

THE COUNTRY FAIR *that hosts the Falconry Village is also well worth a look with two Main Show Arenas of Country Sports & Pursuits including Falconry, Scurry Racing, Gundog & Sheepdog Displays. 'Have a Go' at Clay Shooting, Small Bore Rifles, Archery and a large variety of Dog Events, so don't leave your dog at home. Other attractions include Gundog Clinic, Angling, CCA - Chainsaw Carving Arena, Craft Village, Food Hall, Shopping Arcades.*

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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, Driffield, Yorks.

Sat & Sun, September 13th & 14th
SANDRINGHAM GAME & COUNTRY FAIR
Sandringham, Norfolk

Sat & Sun, October 4th & 5th
BELVOIR CASTLE GAME & COUNTRY FAIR
Belvoir Castle, Belvoir

Sat & Sun, October 11th & 12th
CHESHIRE GAME & COUNTRY FAIR
Cheshire County Showground
Nr. Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 0HV

The Falconry Village is subject to the conditions of the General Licence issued by Defra. In the event of an Avian Flu outbreak please consult our website before travelling

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