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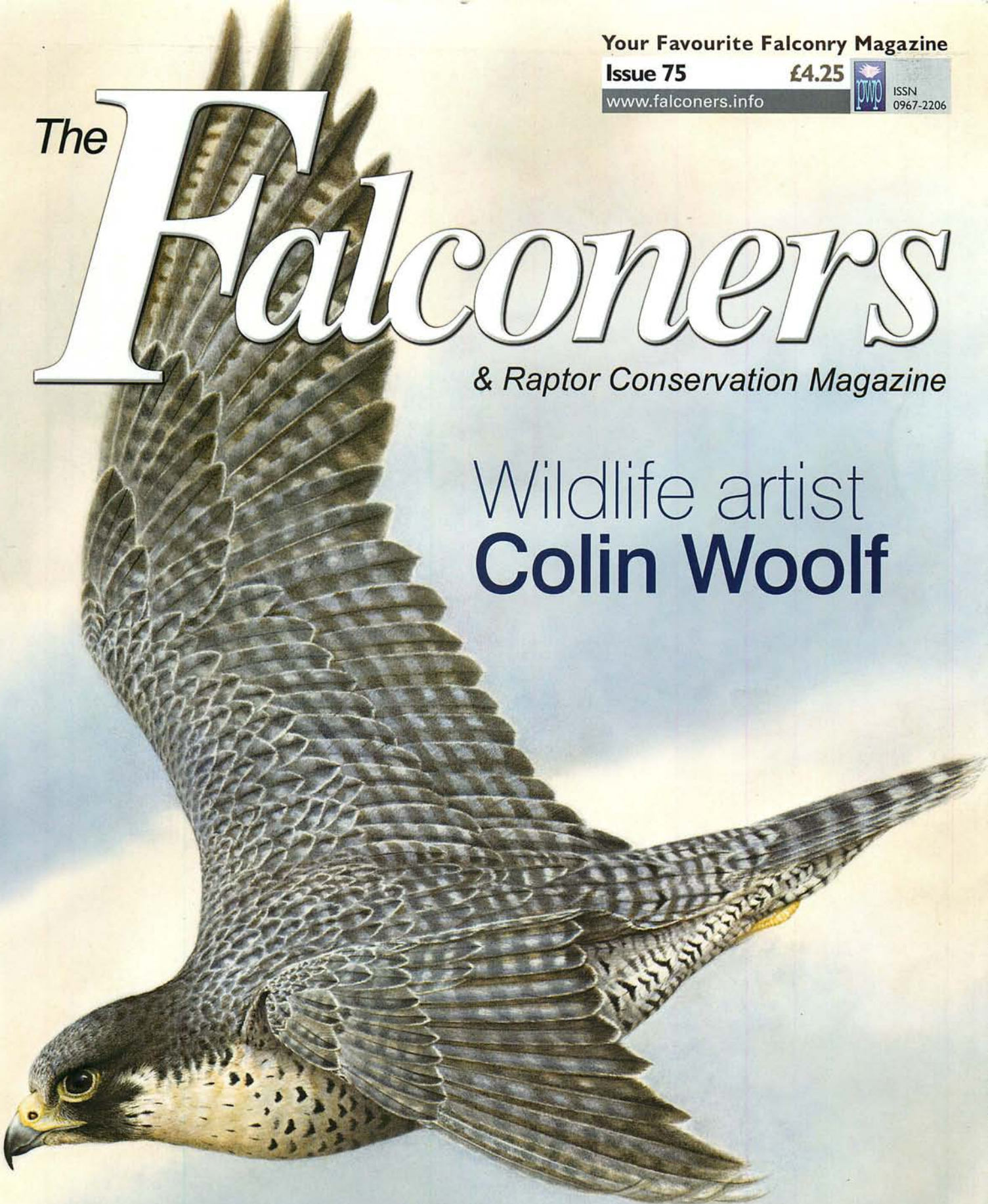
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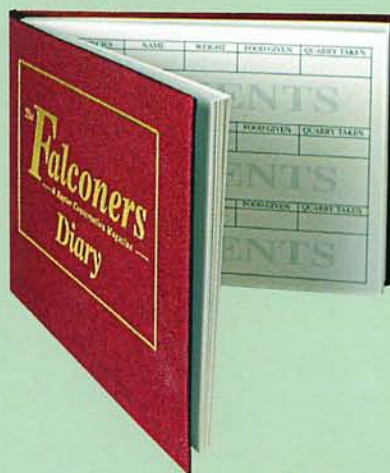


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I don't know about you, but with all this talk of the credit crunch and financial doom and gloom, I can't wait to get back out in the field with my hawks. It may sound a bit cheesy, but 'man and bird at one with nature' has always helped me forget my more mundane worries – if only for a morning. At the time of writing this editorial re-training my hawks is now well under way and hopefully, by the time you read this, I will have embarked on the new hunting season. The picture, I am sure, will be the same for many of you and I wish you well for a successful season.

We have something for everyone in this issue, including an article by young falconer Nancy Langdon. Nancy is going about things the right way by having an experienced mentor and, if all young falconers follow her example, the sport of falconry will be in good hands in years to come.

Also, an important announcement concerning registration of raptors and hybrids in this country can be found on the Hawk Board News page (see page 9). I hope that you all support the HB and the work they do to keep our sport as free from any constraints as is possible.

In the meantime, have a good read.



editorial

news & products

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

British Hawking Association donates to The Archives of Falconry

At this year's Falconry and Raptor Fair at Chetwynd Park, Shropshire The British Hawking Association (BHA) gifted a fine artwork to The Archives of Falconry (TAF). The BHA chairman commented, "The piece is a crystal engraving based on a well known photograph of Major Charles Hawkins Fisher. It was donated to the club by the artist at last year's Falconry Festival, and the clubs committee agreed that the unique engraving should be presented to the Archives to compliment their collection."

The presentation by the BHA Chairman, Brian Morris to the Archives Representative Paul Beecroft took place at the TAF stand at the Falconry Fair on 4 May 2008.

The engraving is the work of David Whyman, well known in his field; David has undertaken commissions for Ronald Reagan, The Queen and members of the Royal Family, The Sultan of Oman, the Amir of Kuwait and the Sultan of Brunei. He has exhibited in Japan, the USA, Hong Kong, Italy and Germany. His work can be seen at; www.a-touchofglass.co.uk

Brian Morris stated at the presentation, "The work TAF is doing to preserve and conserve the history of our sport is very much appreciated by our members and falconers across the world, therefore the club is delighted to be able to make this contribution to the Archive".



Paul Beecroft, left, receiving the crystal engraving from Brian Morris at the Falconers Fair

The Second International Festival of Falconry will be held at Reading on 11 & 12 July 2009

The festival is created by falconers, for falconers and is about falconry. Everyone is invited, regardless of nation, creed, gender, club or commercial. If you are a falconer, the Festival is for YOU.

If you are not a falconer then still visit. Falconry is ancient, diverse and entertaining. Its history goes back to early man. Falconers have a passion that crosses nations so why not join us for a fun, educational, entertaining day out. Share a weekend with people from all over the world, enjoy their culture and lifestyle without needing a passport or an airfare.

The Festival is hosted in the United Kingdom by the Hawk Board, the umbrella body for UK falconers. It is also strongly supported by the Emirates Falconry Club which is kindly sponsoring the attendance by many nations.

July in the UK is high summer. Breeding is finished and the young hawks are starting to fly. Schools are closing for holidays. The old hawks are finishing their moult. Falconers all over the Northern Hemisphere are getting ready for the hawking season. Hawks are being taken on hand for training. Hopes are high for the new season. Take a weekend out to spend time making new friends from all over the world – who knows where it may lead you?

The Festival of Falconry will not be a 'stand and stare' event. There is a lot to do, plenty to enjoy, to learn, to try out and moreover to celebrate. Come and support your country or club and tell us about it. Tell us about your history and how you do things in your country. Bring your hawk if you can (there are rules about this). Bring your family and friends and a big smile!

There will be a meeting for all UK Falconry Clubs on 7 December 2008, for those who would like to promote their club at the Festival. It will be held at 1pm at the Express, Holiday Inn, J10 of the M6, Walsall. For club reps who would like to attend, please call **Charlotte Hill 01733 840597**. The web site for the Festival is now fully up & running. For further information visit: www.falconryfestival.com



Daring to Fly

The wildlife paintings of Colin Woolf

By Joanne Woolf

Reviewed by Marian Eldrett

ISBN 978-0-9556968-0-0

Daring to Fly is about the life and work of Colin Woolf, one of the leading wildlife artists in the U.K. today. Expertly written by his wife, Joanne, this is a truly beautiful book, both in its content and its appearance. Colin's paintings of birds of prey are amongst the best I have seen, but as well as these he portrays wildfowl and other wildlife with equal expertise – over 260 of his images are featured within this book. If you do no more than just flick through its 178 pages, you will surely be impressed by the beauty and variety of Colin's paintings. However, the book is much more than a compilation of his work. When you delve deeper into the text you gain an insight into his development, his motivation and his enthusiasm for his art.

The first section deals with influences on his early life, the choices he made along the way and how he became the artist he is today. Joanne also describes his forays into the world of country fairs and other shows.

In section two we learn the ideas behind each painting and what he hopes to achieve with the finished image. It is simply fascinating to share in his thoughts in such a way and his passion for nature is clear for all to see.

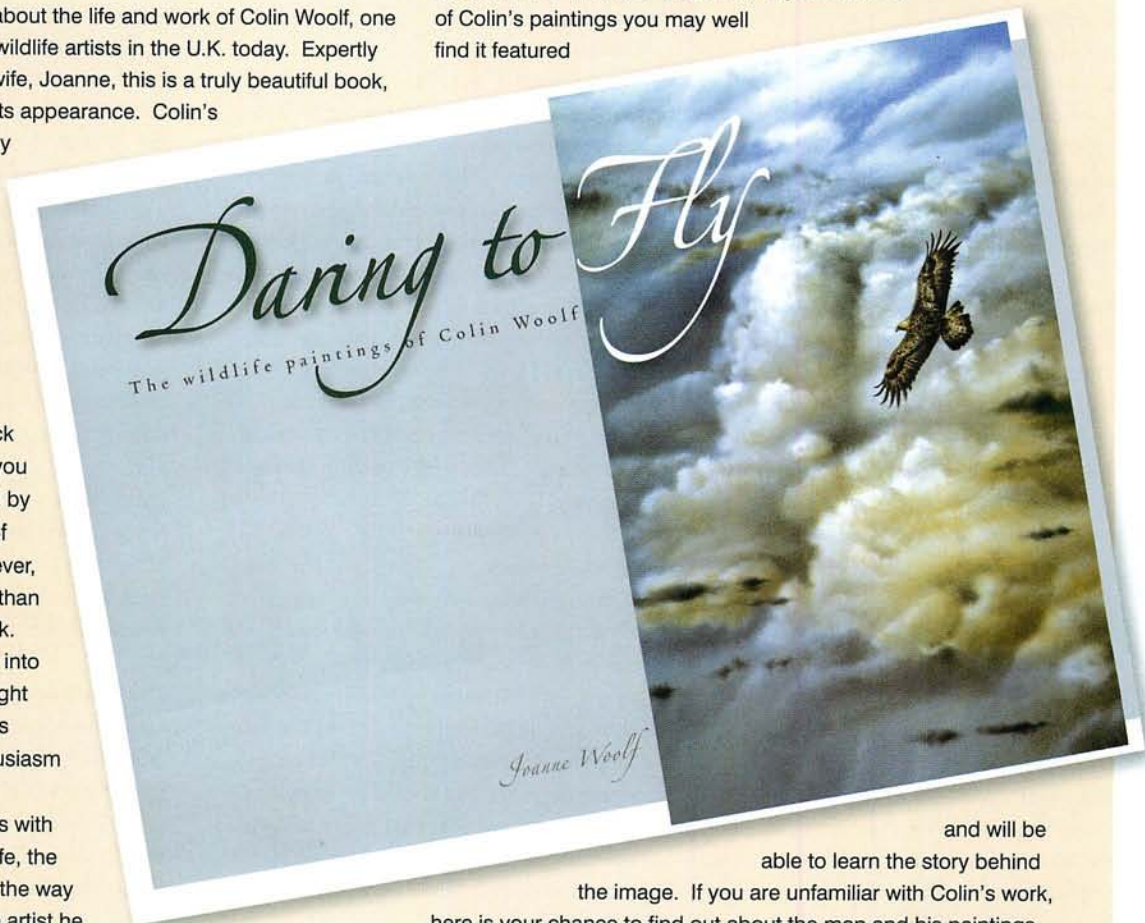
In section three Colin takes over the writing and gives us some tips on watercolour painting and reveals some of the practices that have helped him develop his use of watercolours over the years.

Towards the end of the book there are comments made by Colin's friends and members of his family. I found the latter particularly heart-warming and I can only imagine how proud these must make him feel - and rightly so. He has clearly worked hard to become the accomplished artist he is today, but

unarguably he does possess a natural ability. As Joanne says ".....Colin's art is 10% skill and 90% talent. He has mastered the necessary skills to a degree which most of us would consider unattainable, but his talent comes from within, and cannot be taught."

Throughout the book, Colin's attention to detail is clear as he strives to achieve excellence in all he does. Likewise with this book – the paper, the cover, the colour reproduction and the high production standards all reflect Colin's quest for perfection.

Colin is a regular exhibitor at the British Birdwatching Fair, the Falconers' Fair, the CLA Game Fair and many other country shows. If you have seen him at any of these events and admired his work, you will enjoy this book. If you own one of Colin's paintings you may well find it featured



and will be able to learn the story behind the image. If you are unfamiliar with Colin's work, here is your chance to find out about the man and his paintings.

This is a book that will be appreciated by anyone who admires the beauty of birds of prey. Equally it will appeal to those interested in wildlife art and the dedication and techniques required to produce the finished article. This is one of those "coffee table" books which you are proud to show off to friends and family. As is clear by now, I really enjoyed the book and I thoroughly recommend it.

Daring to Fly (price £45 plus £8 p&p) is available from:

**Madwolf Design,
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askchitty

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

What steps can we take to prevent our birds succumbing to ticks, mites and fleas?

Parasites are perceived as a perennial problem in raptors. They can harbour quite a few – however, the clinical importance of these parasites is quite variable and when taking preventive measures you should always keep this in mind.

Fleas: One species is worthy of mention, *Echidnophaga gallinacea*, the Sticktight Flea. This is common in the Tropics and Sub-Tropics but may be seen on imported birds (mainly poultry/ game but also psittacines, raptors and pigeons). Unlike other flea species which regularly transfer between hosts, this species attaches firmly around the head. In severe cases irritation and anaemia may occur

Mites: There are many mite species but very few are actually clinically relevant in the UK.

Dermanyssus

aka. Red Mite/ Roost Mite
Free-living mite living in housing; breeds off the host and only feeds on blood at night. Clinically very important
Primarily a parasite of poultry (*D. gallinae*) but will feed on any bird. Can cause intense irritation and restlessness as well as anaemia/debility if numbers are large enough. May be fatal to young birds.
Diagnosis: mites are more likely to be active at night. They may get on humans as well as birds. Examine your birds/perches/ etc. at night. A white sheet placed in the aviary at night may attract mites which can then be seen in the morning.
Therapy: see Formulary. Environmental control is essential but it should be realised that this is extremely difficult to achieve. Destruction of the environment, followed by on-bird therapy and moving to a new, clean environment is the only recommended method. Any new bird

entering a flock should be treated for ectoparasites – especially for poultry

Ornithonyssus

aka Northern Fowl Mite – less common than *Dermanyssus* but a growing problem
A poultry parasite (*O. sylviarum*) but also found on many other species. Similar to *Dermanyssus* but completes life-cycle on the host and feeds on blood through the day as well. It is therefore associated with more irritation than red mite. Control is easier as the mite is an obligate parasite.
Diagnosis: Large mites may be found feeding on birds typically around the vent. Mites/ eggs may be found on faecal examinations following ingestion during preening.

Feather mites

In raptors these are rarely of direct clinical importance. In the healthy bird mite numbers are controlled by preening and by the flapping of the wings. Therefore the finding of large numbers of mites tends to suggest a debilitated bird – in these cases, veterinary attention should be sought. Feather mite numbers are easily controlled with ectoparasiticides (see Formulary) though control is rarely needed.

Skin mites

Diseases due to Epidermoptid or Cnemidocoptid mites are rare in raptors. When seen they consist of scaling itchy lesions – often round the head or face. They readily respond to ivermectin (by injection or topically). As these conditions are so unusual, preventive dosing is not appropriate. However, veterinary attention should be sought if the bird starts to scratch.

Flies

Hippoboscids

aka. Flatflies or louseflies
Related to keds. Some species are wingless, others able to fly. Blood-sucking.

These may cause pruritus and in severe cases may cause anaemia (especially in young birds). Their main significance is in the spread of blood parasites (e.g. *Haemoproteus* spp and *Leucocytozoon* spp) and the transfer of mites and lice between individuals.

Anaemia effects are really rare – prevention should be simple by treating adult birds before breeding season and by keeping wild birds away from breeding aviaries.

The vector effects are certainly very important – regular checks of plumage and routine use of ectoparasiticides is definitely in order

Biting flies

Biting insects transmit various diseases:
Mosquitoes – *Haemoproteus* spp, avipox virus, Avian Malaria (*Plasmodium* spp)
Gnats – *Leucocytozoon* spp

These will rarely be seen on the birds.

Control: Avoidance of fly breeding areas when siting aviaries. Application of fipronil spray to areas of bare skin (especially the face). Products available in the UK for sandfly control in dogs are not currently recommended for use on birds

Lice

Wingless insects - these are the most common avian ectoparasites. Only chewing/ biting lice (Mallophaga) occur on birds with vast numbers described. They can move directly between hosts or may “hitch lifts” on hippoboscids flies. Lice are rarely linked to significant pathology. Heavy infestations may cause feather damage and irritation but, more importantly, are a sign of debility/ poor husbandry (as with feather mites). They are easily controlled being susceptible to most ectoparasiticides

Ticks

Hard ticks (Ixodidae) may feed on birds in

the UK. However, soft ticks may be found on newly imported birds.

Large numbers may cause irritation, debility, anaemia and death. Transmit haemoprotozoa (e.g. *Aegyptionella* spp), arboviruses (e.g. Louping Ill (grouse), *Borrelia* spp

These are a major problem in captive birds. The first sign is normally an extremely sick or collapsed bird with extensive haemorrhagic swelling of the face/ head. The tick is normally associated with this swelling. In a recent study the major/sole tick associated with lesions was identified as *Ixodes frontalis*. This study failed to show a link with tick-borne pathogens. It is therefore likely that this syndrome may be associated with a tick saliva toxin or a hypersensitivity reaction (possible as the tick is most commonly associated with Turdidae, not raptors).

Interestingly, the reaction is only associated with tick attachment around the head. In some cases there have also been ticks on the body that have not had an associated reaction. However, it is also possible that these other ticks may have been of another species.

Birds showing tick reactions should be treated as an emergency. Fluids, broad-spectrum antibiotics and short-acting corticosteroids should be administered as quickly as possible.

Therapy: environmental control with "Indorex" spray (Virbac; see below) is very effective. This should be combined with regular fipronil applications and avoid bringing ticks into the aviary areas

Ticks already on the bird should be manually removed and the bird dosed with ivermectin.

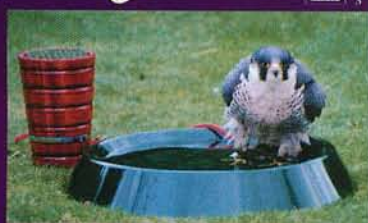
Formulary

DRUG	TRADE NAMES	ACTIVE AGAINST	DOSAGE	NOTES
"On Bird" High cis permethrin	Harker' Louse Powder (Harkers)	Feather/quill mites, lice, fleas, hippoboscid flies	Powder applied through plumage. Repeated every 2-3 weeks	Licensed for pigeons
Piperonyl butoxide/ pyrethrin	Redmite Powder (Johnson)	As above	Apply through plumage. Repeat every 10-21 days	
Piperonal Cedarwood Oil Tea Tree Oil	Blast-Off Powder (Birdcare Co)	As above	Apply through plumage. Repeat fortnightly	Advised to use concurrently with Zodiac + environmental spray to kill repelled mites
Fipronil	Frontline (Merial)	Feather/quill mites, lice, fleas, <i>Dermanyssus/ Ornithonyssus</i> , ticks hippoboscid flies. Prophylaxis against biting flies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Apply spray to cotton wool and then apply to back of head, under wings + base of tail. Repeat every 2-4 weeks ● For biting fly prophylaxis apply to bare areas of skin weekly or (for falconry birds) whenever flown in risk areas. 	Do not soak birds (risk of hypothermia) Use spray, not spot-on
Ivermectin	Topical drops available (eg Ivermectin Drops (0.1%) (Pharmaq) 0.02% spray Xeno200 (Genitrix)	Burrowing mites (<i>Cnemidocoptes</i> spp., "depluming itch"), <i>Dermanyssus/ Ornithonyssus</i> , myiasis	Apply as directed In larger birds use injectable preparations at 200µg/kg i/m or orally	Care-toxicity associated with injection in passerines
Environment				
Malathion	Duramitex (Harkers)	<i>Dermanyssus</i>		Dilute 0.93%. Paint/spray on perches
Permethrin/ pyriproxyfen	Indorex (Virbac)	<i>Dermanyssus</i> , ticks fleas		Spray as necessary. Excellent in outdoor areas.
Methoprene/ Permethrin	Zodiac + (Birdcare Co)	Fleas, bugs, mites		See above re "Blast-Off powder"

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A Falconer in the Making?

I live in West Wales with my family which includes Bessie, our lovely black Labrador dog. I have an interest in all animals and I was really pleased when my Mum became a friend of a lady who keeps and flies birds of prey. Her name is Dianne Spittle who has written a number of articles for this publication in the past.

Dianne asked if I would be interested in learning about the birds and it is obvious that the answer was a resounding YES! I now spend every spare minute with Dianne and her birds, husband and Brittany dogs, Kevin and Dixie. There are also the ferrets – Beano, Kit-Kat, Jack and Creamy.

We have (I say 'we' but they are Dianne's – I just feel like we all belong together) a female Goshawk, a male 5/8th Gyr hybrid who gets flown to the lure in the summer and we have just added Henry, a Little Owl who I have just fallen in love with. I could spend all day with him and I am learning so much about Henry. I'm learning to pick-up, put-down and carry around and have now moved onto free flying . . . it's amazing.

When I attended the Falconers' Fair earlier this year with my Mum, I was introduced to lots of falconers including Jemima Parry-Jones and Bryan Paterson and was very excited to see all the flying displays. Also, I was fortunate enough to hold a male Harris Hawk called Buster which was a real highlight of my day.

At the fair I picked up many leaflets and bumpf on falconry and best of all, I was given my first glove. That was when things changed for me and I went



through the 'gates of falconry' with my head held high – I had earned my glove and felt very proud.

Dianne told me many stories about her birds and gave advice on various aspects of falconry – some of which came in useful when out flying her goshawk. One day it flew off and after a while searching, I came across the bird which was being mobbed by crows. I did hear her bell which I was pleased with because it did show that I had listened and learned from the advice given.

As much as I am sponging up as much information as possible, I am aware it is a life time of learning that

never stops. My advice to anyone wishing to take up this fabulous sport, is to find someone who is willing to teach you. Don't just go out and buy a bird – you could end up in trouble and, what is worse, the bird could suffer from mis-management. I am only 11 years of age and hope that one day I will become a vet, hopefully specialising in birds of prey.

Falconry has opened a whole new world for me. Being with the birds and nature gives me a wonderful feeling and I can't imagine life without it. Thanks Dianne.

If there are any other young falconers out there who wish to submit an article for possible publication, please contact the editor. Details can be found on page three of this issue.

Nick Kester
Communications Officer



The summer is officially over and 22 September marks the autumn equinox and for many the start of the falconry season. But a more critical date for English falconers is 1 October. This is the day on which registration of all hybrids, peregrines and merlins ceases. For those flying goshawks and golden eagles registration remains. But we have come a long way from the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act when even Harris hawks had registration papers.

The first step came in 1994 with the

Registration news and government decisions

removal of several species including the buzzard, sparrowhawk and kestrel. Populations had recovered enough to permit this and now the peregrine and the merlin are sufficiently common for further relaxation. So if you have a UK issued Article 10 certificate for your falcons, you no longer need the blue registration document. Wales and Scotland have yet to formulate their laws but at a meeting with Defra last week, both devolved regions promised to make the change as quickly as possible.

Of course, bodies such as the RSPB are less than excited by the government's decision. So, here is a call to all falconers. If you want to be proud of your sport and imagine further relaxation is appropriate for, say, goshawks, then make sure everyone toes the line. And I give it to you straight, it is your duty to report any that you believe are failing. Do not provide ammunition for an 'own goal'.

Defra (Animal Health) will be writing to all keepers and breeders with guidelines on the new legislation, so I will not pre-empt their letter.

On to Brussels

Now we move to Brussels. On 29 September, I, as your Hawk Board representative, will travel to the heart of the EU legislators to look for further relaxation on the rules and regulations covering domestically bred raptors. Many have been in 'captive' (not a word I like to use) for so many generations that they

are truly domestic. They should not be confused with the wild species and laws should take this into account.

Government consultations are always a thankless task, particularly when they seem to have little purpose or aim. A strange one has recently concluded that attempts to define a decision process when dealing with 'conflicts' (hateful phrase) between wildlife and humans. Almost everyone who read it rolled their eyes up to heaven and suffered severe brain ache. But we had to respond, because you can bet others did, and not all will have been sympathetic.

Festival website

Finally, the Festival of Falconry website is up and running. Further information is being added and we hope it becomes the main communication between the organisers and the thousands who have already said they will be there in July 2009. Check it out www.falconryfestival.com

Finally, from all those on the Hawk Board: Enjoy your sport and keep it safe for the future. Good hawking.

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.

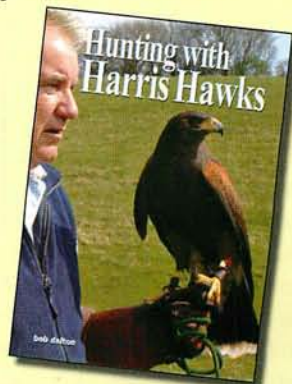
Hunting with Harris Hawks by Bob Dalton

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Taking Flight

A profile of
wildlife artist
Colin Woolf

Watching birds of prey in flight is a breathtaking experience, whether you are knee-deep in the heather of a Scottish moorland, or a spectator at an organised falconry display. Each species possesses its own individual beauty and aerial prowess, and for an artist, each presents a unique set of challenges.

Birds of prey have always held a special fascination for Colin, ever since his childhood in Hampshire and Dorset. From an early age, he was in awe of their speed and agility, their acute eyesight and their finely honed hunting skills. He discovered breeding harriers in the New Forest, and he would bring home owl pellets for dissection, learning much about the birds and their habits in the process.

Kestrel in Flight: Containing little detail and no background, the effect of this painting is almost ethereal, but it evokes the bird in flight with simple accuracy. There is a suggestion of Oriental influences in the flowing lines and simple shapes, and in fact Colin was teaching himself Japanese line-drawing around the same time. Created in 1978, the image was reproduced as one of Colin's first limited edition prints.

Observation

Colin believes that the single most important thing to remember before painting any wildlife subject is to watch it - preferably in its natural habitat - as often as you possibly can. It is not until you know and understand the bird's habits, flight, expression and plumage, its prey and its territory, that you can possibly draw



Pencil sketch: Barn owl



On Silent Wings: A barn owl floats low over snow-covered fields

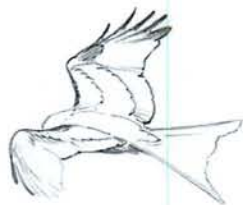
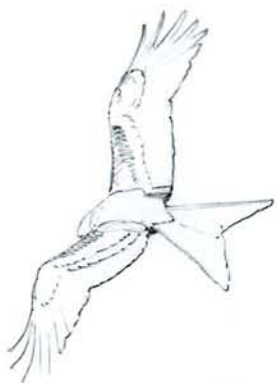
or paint it with any degree of accuracy. He explains: "For a painting to succeed, an artist should be able to draw the bird at almost any angle, and possess a three-dimensional knowledge of the subject. This requires far more than just the ability to copy a two-dimensional image onto a piece of paper."

When elusive species such as golden eagles are your chosen subject, the task gets even harder, because for an artist the views must be long enough and sufficiently detailed to inspire a full-scale painting. In practice this rarely happens, but Colin seems to have built up a 'database' of images in his head, drawn from years of patient watching and waiting. This means that he can sketch the bird in almost any position, just from memory.

The image of a golden eagle soaring



Peregrine chasing a Teal: Inspired by sightings in Norfolk



Red Kite



Golden Eagle

above Ladhar Bheinn, one of Knoydart's remote peaks, was inspired on a damp, drizzly day which did not bode well for eagle-watching. In this instance, the background was just as important as the bird itself, and Colin had travelled to Knoydart specifically to walk the hills and absorb the atmosphere. Halfway to the summit, the clouds suddenly lifted, allowing bright sunlight to illuminate the mountain slopes; then, right on cue, an eagle drifted effortlessly past, riding the strong wind as if it were a summer breeze.

Red kites are slightly more accessible subjects, although when Colin first began painting them the birds were not nearly as abundant as they are today. Working in conjunction with photographer Mike Read, Colin spent many weeks in Mid Wales throughout the seasons, observing their uniquely elegant flight as they dipped and soared in search of carrion. Fortunately, red kite numbers have now increased and their range has expanded, making them a regular sight close to Colin's studio in Snowdonia.

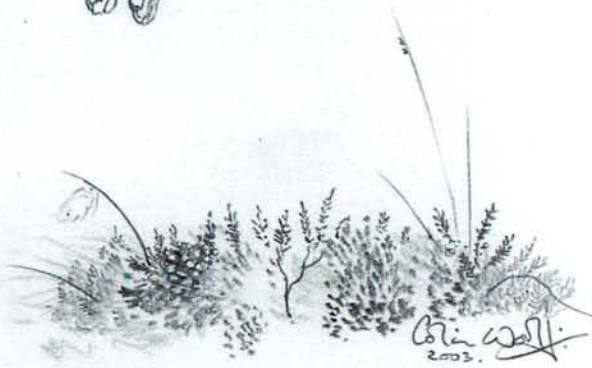
Inspiration

Watching a barn owl hunting in the winter twilight is an altogether different experience. Inspiration for *On Silent Wings* came from an all-too-brief sighting of a barn owl quartering low over snow-bound fields in North Wales one December evening: ghost-like, it vanished just as quickly as it had appeared. The resulting image conveys the owl's delicate, floating flight and beautiful plumage.

Many of Colin's most valuable experiences of raptors have been gained on days walking the moors with professional falconers. 'Within Reach', an early limited



Hen Harrier



edition print, is a composite of several images inspired by such a day; Colin still considers this to be among his most accurate paintings of a peregrine in flight.

Another striking portrayal of a bird's speed is the peregrine pursuing a teal over some Norfolk reedbeds. Colin remembers: "I'd been out early in the morning watching marsh harriers, when a peregrine appeared as if from nowhere, chasing a teal low over the reeds. The glimpse lasted only a couple of seconds, but it was so vivid that the painting almost created itself . . . and images like this one are often the most successful."

No matter where he is, Colin is always on the lookout for anything unusual in the sky. Just recently, having dropped off our younger daughter at Manchester station, the sight of two sparrowhawks being mobbed by magpies and ravens above the car park held him rooted to the spot and gazing skywards, oblivious of all the commuters hurrying past him. Above all things, it is this abiding fascination for his subjects that drives him as an artist.



Red Kite



Within reach

Winter's shadow

Knoydart Eagle

New Forest Project

The New Forest is a very special place. The variety of habitats and wildlife is incredible. Along with this, the local traditions such as grazing wild ponies make the Forest one of the most unique and picturesque areas in the country. This is one of the reasons I feel so fortunate to be able to work in the heart of the Forest at the *Aren't Birds Brilliant! in the New Forest* raptor project. This is a partnership project between the RSPB, the Forestry Commission, the New Forest National Park Authority and Carnyx Films and is based at the Forestry Commission's New Forest Reptile Centre. We aim to enthuse visitors about birds and wildlife by showing them two of the Forest's most remarkable raptors. It has also been a fantastic opportunity to discuss how disturbance of nest sites can contribute to population declines in some of the Forest's ground-nesting birds, such as lapwing and redshank. It was interesting to see how few people were aware of this conservation issue. One visitor was mortified to learn of these vulnerable nest sites, as she had been allowing her dog to roam the heathland sites in the New Forest during ground nesting season, which could have disturbed the parent birds and increased the likelihood of predation of the chicks or eggs. This is a great example of how communication is integral to the future of wildlife conservation, as she left the site with saying she would pass this important information onto other dog-walkers.

Start of the project

We began the project at the end of March by streaming live footage from a goshawk nest into the reptile centre for visitors to see. The goshawk is a large bird of prey, the female almost the size of a buzzard, so visitors were amazed they had never encountered them while walking in the Forest. Despite their size, goshawks are extremely secretive woodland birds, their allusive nature means they are often referred to as 'phantoms of the forest'. The nestcam let us see these amazing birds close-up. Their prey consists mainly of

birds such as pigeons but we did see the occasional rabbit and squirrel kill brought into the nest.

Female goshawks have been known to take prey as big as pheasants, a fact which led to their extinction in the UK during the 19th century, due to persecution by gamekeepers. Since then, the goshawk has re-established a breeding population mainly from falconry escapees, but numbers are still relatively low with only around 400 pairs breeding throughout the UK. The New Forest contains approximately ten nesting pairs, so it was a real privilege to see this year's goshawk pair rear three strong and healthy chicks to boost the local population.

We saw the first two chicks hatch on 11 May and the third on 13 May. The chicks were ringed and sexed, revealing one male and two female young on the nest. As the weather was considerably more settled than last year, plenty of food was brought in. Towards fledging, the chicks became far more aggressive, which led to the female spending very little time on the nest during feeding times for her own safety. We got to witness live all three chicks ripping apart a squirrel, although at this point we were asked to turn the television off by a disapproving child! Although it was gruesome at times, it was a fantastic opportunity for visitors, especially children, to see what actually happens in the secretive world of raptors. We saw all three chicks fledge the nest by 20 June.

Last year's project involved a different pair of goshawks, the female an escaped falconer's bird. The mothering skills were very different between this year's and last year's birds. For example, during unsettled weather conditions this year's female was much more attentive. The inexperience of last year's female, plus the wet, meant only one gutsy chick survived, although it was fascinating to have witnessed a captive bird revert back to its natural instincts.

As goshawks are resident birds and nest early on in the year, we then moved our nest cam to another spectacular bird, the hobby. This species breeds across Europe and Asia. It is a long-distance migrant,

wintering in Africa. Once the hobby arrives in Britain it performs fantastic courtship displays, and nests later in the year than any other raptor.

Hobby site

Hobbies are incredibly fast-flying and agile birds of prey, outflying swifts - one of their favoured prey - at speeds of around 100 mph. In addition to flying fast, males perform spectacular aerial acrobatics displays during courtship. It is even thought the English name 'hobby' is derived from the Old Dutch 'hobben', meaning to move up & down or side to side, possibly due to the bird's aerial acrobatic flight. And did you know the board game Subbuteo derived from the scientific name for hobby (*Falco subbuteo*), as the inventor was a keen bird enthusiast?

When we first switched on the nestcam, we were pleased to see the female hobby incubating three eggs. All three chicks hatched, two on 17 July and the third on 19 July. It was thoroughly entertaining to watch. Mainly, we saw small birds brought into the nest, plus dragonflies, the main part of the adult hobby's diet. The only squirrel on the hobby nest was a visit from an inquisitive local inhabitant!

The chicks were very different in behaviour to the goshawks' young. Any food brought into the hobby nest was fought over with all their might, whereas the goshawks waited patiently as the female tore pieces of the prey apart and fed the meat to each of the chicks. It wasn't long before the parent Hobbies were dropping in the carcasses for the chicks to fight over amongst themselves. Unfortunately, the competition was too much for the younger chick, which died at only one week old. It seemed more likely we would see the two remaining chicks develop and fledge successfully, but to everyone's disappointment another chick died on 6 August. This is likely to have been down to more unsettled weather, which restricted the amount of prey caught by the hobbies.

Although it was very sad to see the second chick die it secured the survival of the remaining chick, which we saw

fledge the nest around 22 August. This is why nest-cams like the one in the New Forest are so important, they give us an understanding of how harsh nature can be, and how incredible birds really are. Now the hobby chick has fledged, the parent and offspring will make their long journey back to Africa, thousands of miles away.

2009 return

The project may have finished, but we will be back next year. And if you can't wait that long, highlights from the nest cams can be viewed at www.newforestgateway.org. Also available is a DVD presented by Chris Packham, which incorporates some fascinating footage from last year's project. By using both nestcam video cameras and natural history footage, this one-hour film shows the trials and tribulations of *Life On The Nest* for three New Forest birds of prey; the goshawk, Montagu's harrier and the hobby. Definitely a must see!

This project has been extremely important in helping people to better understand birds of prey, and the threats they have faced in the past and still face now. It also gave RSPB a fantastic opportunity to inspire people about wildlife and birds, which enabled us to recruit new members to the organisation. Their support will help with crucial projects such as our birds of prey campaign, which aims to stamp out the illegal killing of all raptors. Although the goshawk population is now on the rise in Hampshire, they are still being persecuted in some parts of the country, and we need to do everything we can to protect these astonishing birds. For more information, visit www.rspb.org.uk/birdsofprey



Too cheap, too easy

Well that is the view of many, usually older, falconers. Grumbling into their beer whilst fearing for their sport and fumbling for their teeth, which have deposited themselves inconveniently in the bottom of the pint. And the young look on with amused intolerance and the impatience and energy of their age. Somewhere between the two sits the truth.

We live in a 'now' age. Actually, this started in the late 1970s when galloping inflation put pay to saving. Then came the technology revolution with items being updated before they wore out. Finally, there is built in obsolescence. Where are the television repair men? Now it is into the landfill site and out to the local supermarket for a bigger and better flat screen version.

What has this to do with falconry?

It is a cultural attitude and invades all our lifestyles. But to return to the title, is falconry too cheap? No. We should embrace the technology that wraps it up, and the competitive nature of those that supply us. How many telemetry retailers were at the Falconry Fair? Three, maybe four. This very fact keeps prices down and means they strive for a better product. The same goes for bells and bow perches. Provided we are aware of the rubbish, and only buy from respected, recommended retailers, we are safe from charlatans and carpet baggers. Avoid the guy who sells ferret finders as falconry telemetry, or the man who tells you that cat-collar bells work just as well as the finest produced by Ricardo Valerde.

The price of hawks has also fallen dramatically. In the 1970s I paid nearly £1000 for a redbait, now the price (assuming you can find one) is nearer £100. The same applies to Harris hawks.

Falcons are also cheaper unless you want something large and white suitable for houbara. The only hawk to have held its price is the goshawk, which tells us something about the number of people flying one, and the issues that still surround their breeding.

Is a cheap hawk really such a bad thing? Price should not be a barrier to entry. What should matter, and this is down to all of us long time falconers, is the newcomers' ability to become a falconer; their available time, willingness to sacrifice other activities and most critical, their commitment. Price shouldn't matter, be they lord or labourer. If they do not meet the criteria, we should tell them so regardless of the size of their wallet.

So is it all too easy? Probably, and this is all due to the 'I want it NOW' culture. Those with children will know of the constant pleading, nagging and tantrums



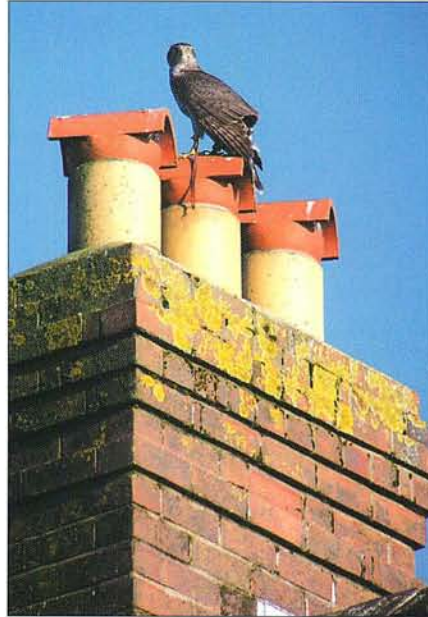
A fit Harris Hawk

that accompany the desire for something denied them. The weaker parent gives in, the better one refuses until they are ready for it, or, if unsuitable, for ever. Since time immemorial there has been what Philip Glasier called Robin Hood falconers. Laden with equipment, they parade with the largest hawk available and within a year it is forgotten. The concern is not for them, but for the hawk they leave behind. We all know how hard a second hand hawk is to shift, particularly one that has been less well trained.

But how to stop him (or her) ruining our sport in the first place? Many consider the American rules work better, others that self-policing is sufficient despite the occasional rotten apple. The Hawk Board, which has no regulatory power, introduced the Lantra Award as a starting point and are delighted that the member clubs have embraced the concept so whole heartedly. But the reality is that this only goes part way. It is the responsibility of every falconer, course and display giver in the country to become the educator of the next generation. For sure some will slip through the net but our (your) efforts will narrow the mesh. Remember, like

all domestically kept animals, there is no mandatory keepers licence.

Let us look at the alternative. The government decides that keeping a hawk needs controlling and proposes the introduction of a licence. The falconry community submits its concept to the consultation process. We think it rational and reasoned. But there are other consultees; those who oppose



the keeping of any so-called 'wild' animal, those who oppose the use of that animal for hunting. They have a powerful voice, they represent millions of votes, they have unlimited funds. The government listens. We are the losers. Don't shrug and tell me that it will never happen here. It has happened in other EU countries. In Denmark, keeping is permitted but hunting is not. In Holland only two species may be flown at game. Talk to anyone who has lived in France or Germany about the exams for hunters, which must be sat by all falconers even though 90% relates to guns. In Sweden falconry is banned altogether. Regulation is no bad thing, provided it is written by falconers for falconers, and there is absolutely no guarantee of this happening. In fact the odds are against it.

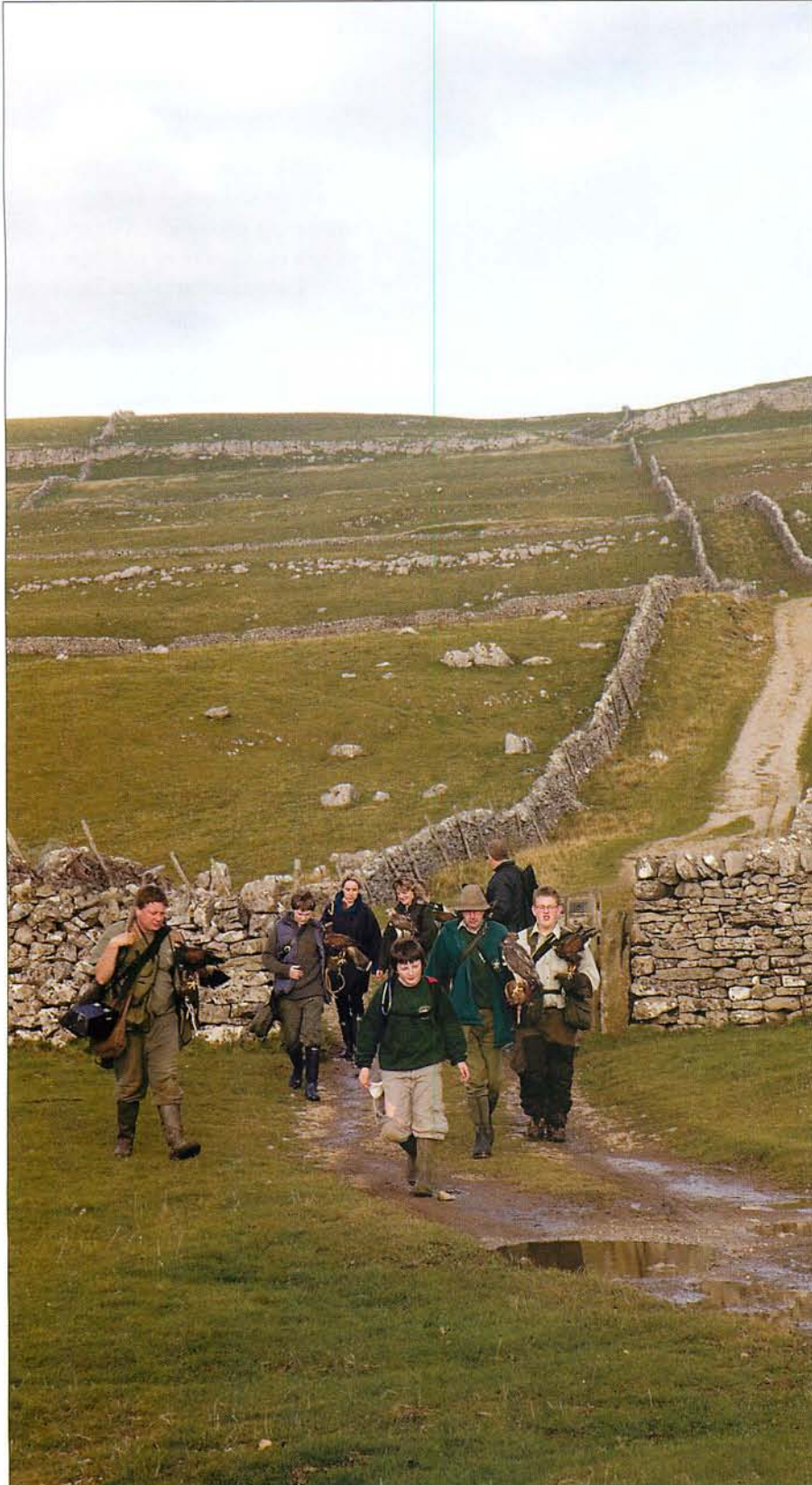
Too cheap? Never. Too easy? Perhaps. But it is down to falconers to ensure it never becomes impossible. Because once a third and less sympathetic party becomes involved that is a one-way street.

A good standpoint



Author with Goshawk, Baldrick

Hawking with the York



Going to the flying ground

Back in the mid 1980's when I was still at school, I first came across birds of prey when a local bird keeper brought some of his birds along to my local library, during the six week school holidays. From then on I was hooked but it would be many years before I actually owned and flew my own birds. My interest turned to wildlife watching and coupled with a passion for photography I began to build up a portfolio of photos with a special interest in buzzards, kestrels and owls, which are quite abundant in my locality.

It was after visits to numerous bird of prey centres to take photos of their birds that I became interested in the possibility of owning my own Hawk. So I rang the Butterfly House at North Anston in South Yorkshire near where I live and spoke to their Falconer, Bev who was very helpful and I booked on one of their falconry experience days. After this I decided that getting my own bird was essential to me and I settled on getting a Harris Hawk after flying them on my falconry day I thought they were fantastic. After a few months of reading every falconry book I could get my hands on and some internet searching I came across the Yorkshire Falconry Club's website, and then I went along to one of their meetings, where I was introduced to one of their members who still had Harris Hawks for sale. I arranged to see his birds and having secured a Female Harris of about 18 weeks of age I built an aviary on my back garden and being a joiner by trade it wasn't too difficult.

Everything is ready

At last I was ready and on a sunny October morning my nephew Kieran and I set off to Kevin's house in Doncaster to collect my bird. On arrival we watched as Kev went into the breeding aviary and caught my bird up. I then helped him cast her and he expertly fitted her anklets, jesses and tail bell and we were on our way. We took her home in a cardboard box on the back seat with

shire Falconry Club

Harris Hawk, Arwen



her leash attached to my glove outside the box as I was terrified of losing her at this stage. On arrival at home I removed this frightened Harris Hawk from the box and immediately she was bating to get away – Arwen the hawk had arrived in my life. Within about 10 minutes she was beginning to settle on the glove and within a few days she was taming down nicely. I had been advised not to glove feed her straight away as she might be prone to screaming so for the first week or so I left food next to her bow perch

under a tea towel with a rope attached and after allowing her to settle on her perch I would pull the rope and reveal her dinner. This did seem to have the desired effect and to this day she's one of the least vocal Harris' Hawks I've come across.

Next was to get her glove feeding. Her aviary weight was 2lb 6oz's and after three days of her refusing my gloved offerings she finally gave in and tentatively ate from the glove – her weight was down to about 2lbs but she'd accepted

me. Soon she was leaping to the glove before I had a chance to get through the door. Creance work followed swiftly and soon she was flying free. I spent the next couple of months flying her on my local patch with her chasing but failing to catch anything as without ferrets there were few rabbits hanging around as we were well into the winter. So I failed to enter her in her first season and I put her down for the moult in about mid February.

The following September armed with a new set of feathers and lots of advice



Aaron and ferret



Chris with his Redtail

from fellow falconers in the Yorkshire falconry club we started flying again. I booked on the club's entering day in early October and having done lots of training with the dummy bunny I hoped we were ready. I set off early to meet at Otley cafe in North Yorkshire along with my nephew Aaron who had now acquired some ferrets and was eager to use them. Rabbits were plentiful in our flying area and some good flights were had that day, but sadly Arwen failed to catch one despite coming fairly close. She was pulling out at the last second without grabbing, so I decided on a strategy of dropping her weight slightly for the following weekend's meeting to in theory get her keener.

Next weekend with her weight down at about 11lb 15oz's we tried again. Debbie a fellow falconer from our club had a brilliant flight on a rabbit with her young male Harris hawk and he managed to hang on to a rabbit while she got there so that was one Harris entered and one to go. Next it was my turn and Arwen took a slip and chased a rabbit but it managed to escape down a set. Then after about three more slips and failed attempts I could see she was becoming tired so we called it a day. Dale and Chris our field meet co-ordinators suggested that I do more dummy bunny with her and get her really grabbing them over the next couple of weeks and we would try again. This I did and two weeks later we arrived back in North Yorkshire ready to go again. This time we had some experienced birds with us so I decided to sit back and allow the others to have a slip and hopefully my bird seeing them catching would click on. So Mark & Andrea (a husband and wife team) who flew their Harris's in a cast caught a rabbit, then Dale caught one with his red tailed hawk and then I had a slip but again she failed to actually grab hold. The others caught again then I had another go but again it was not to be on this day.

A change in tactics

A new strategy was called for. Eddy, one of our experienced falconers, suggested that we could catch one with another bird, with my bird watching then after it was despatched we should give my bird a small feed of it then try her again once we got a bolt. This we did the following Sunday after Paul's female Harris made a kill, I then had a slip with Arwen but although she flew it well she still missed

it. Next we decided that we would fly both birds together at the next one which was a little risky as my bird had never been off with another before, but Paul's bird was very experienced and had flown in casts before. A rabbit bolted out of a set and I released Arwen and Paul released his bird. As the rabbit ran up the hill both birds were gaining on it, then Arwen hit it on the back slowing it to a stop. Then seconds later Paul's bird winged over the top and landed, grabbing the rabbit by the head. It had worked; I think that having another bird off gave Arwen the confidence to hold onto the rabbit this time. We despatched the rabbit then traded Paul's bird off and gave mine a full crop from the rabbit.

Next time out my bird seemed full of confidence and a good day was had in North Yorkshire. With my nephew Aaron now doing most of the ferreting we could concentrate on flying our birds and after everyone in our group had made a kill I gave Arwen a slip. After a short flight she overpowered a rabbit and made her first individual kill. She was now properly entered onto rabbits and over the next few weeks she made more kills but always I fed her up on them as I felt single kills were good for her and I didn't at this stage want to rob her of anything.

It was now late November and we had also booked onto some estate run field meetings where we would have the chance to fly our birds at pheasants and partridges as well as rabbits. So off we went with my Harris hawk now gaining in confidence all the time, however this would prove to be harder than I had imagined. I had not really had the opportunity to fly her in woodland before and although she hunted well she was unlucky not to catch a pheasant on our first trip. However, recall which is normally so good in Yorkshire became a bit of a nightmare with Arwen refusing to come down out of the trees for her normal chick leg and I found I had to use a full rabbit's leg to coax her down when it was someone else's turn. However, I was assured that this was fairly normal behaviour and a weight drop should get some recall back.

We continued to attend field meetings and I was also getting some flying time in midweek as I had been to see an old friend who owned a farm and he had some woodland that I could use to practise following on and recall in, and it was here that Arwen secured her first



pheasant kill. I'd put her up in the trees in a small patch of woodland and then started to walk it through with the bird following on when I saw her shoot off through the trees then fold up her wings, drop to the ground like a stone and grab a large cock pheasant in some ferns. I rushed in and caught it by the back legs as it was struggling somewhat but the Harris had one foot firmly around its neck so there was no escape. I despatched it and allowed her to fully crop up on it.

End of the second season

By the end of our second season she had gone on to catch another two pheasants and we had a good number of quarry in the bag – including a rat. Although it was a fairly modest total I was happy with it as it hadn't been easy getting her entered as a second year bird but by the end of the season she was so fit she was chasing

and catching rabbits on long slips and quite often uphill pursuits in our Yorkshire Dales scenery. She had passed all the tests I'd set her and she would go on to make many more kills in her third season – but that's another story.

I would like to thank all at the Yorkshire Falconry Club for all their help and support over the last few seasons and I would advise anyone thinking of taking up falconry as a hobby to first join a club, as the help and support you receive is absolutely essential if you want to go on and make a good job of your bird which in my view was born to hunt but has virtually no knowledge of what its capable of doing. So many hours are put in practising with creances and dead rabbits being dragged across fields with your bird in pursuit, to finally get them switched on to their capabilities and going on to become successful hunters.

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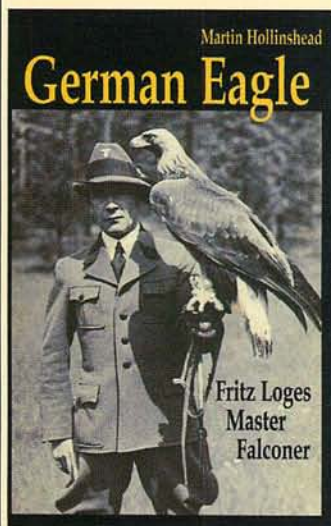
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Wembley pageant



Knight, Mr Ramshaw and Jean



Off to America

The sport of falconry is rich in its collection of spirited characters who have taken up the art for a brief period or a lifetime. There have been illustrious statesmen whose names are known to all. There have been murderers and criminals whose names are known to some. And there have been great hearted individuals whose boisterous and welcoming personalities have popularized the ancient art, attracting to it younger men and women who carry it forward another generation.

In the latter group can be numbered Charles William Robert Knight. M.C. FR.P.S., F.Z.S. known to his many friends, family, and admirers as 'Captain', 'Chas' and 'Unk'.

Born in Sevenoaks, Kent on 25 January 1884, Charles was the third son of Charles and Emily Knight. He was educated at Sevenoaks Grammar School and had such a love for his community that he made it his home for life. Though he traveled to the far corners of the earth his heart was ever in the Kentish countryside.

On leaving school his parents decided that he would go into the family business, Knight Brothers of London that had been started by his father and uncle in 1868 importing Cuban cigars. Knight was informed that he must learn the cigar business from the bottom up and so commenced working as an assistant in

a tobacconist's shop. He hated this job. By this time, he was a keen naturalist, photographer and enjoyed writing. At the age of 18, in 1902, he wrote his first book *Rabbits of the Past* which he illustrated and gave to his sister Winnie. His soul was wedded to the out-of-doors, to the clean air of the countryside, and a shopkeeper's life was not for him.

Falconry career

It was in 1913 that Knight and his brother Hugh first embarked on their falconry careers. Each had a Sparrowhawk and little knowledge of what to do with them. Knight was fortunate that some of the great falconers of the 19th century were yet living. He received much help and guidance from Peter Gibbs, Falconer to Lord Hillingdon and with little shyness Knight wrote letters to J.E.Harting asking for advice on the Sparrowhawks, dashed off missives to E.B. Michell who became a mentor and friend, and even found a friendly soul in the great Gerald Lascelles. Letters were also written to other well known falconers of the day such as Gilbert Blaine, Stanley Allen and Robert Gardner, correspondents who remained Knight's friends for life. Knight also read voraciously, ingesting every tidbit of knowledge he could find regarding falconry, birds of prey, and the natural history of the countryside.

At the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 Knight immediately escaped the

We

Captain C.W.R. Knight

1884-1957

Part 1

Paul Beecroft (U.K.) & Peter Devers (U.S.)

Fal^{were}coners

tobacconist's shop by joining the Army and, within a month, found himself in France with the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment. Knight was a crack shot and was soon selected as a sniper. His accuracy with a rifle quickly earned him the nickname of 'Sniper Knight' which dogged him for many years.

It was in France, whilst hidden in the ruins of an old barn on sniping duty that he found amongst all the carnage a nesting Golden Oriole. The beauty of this fragile creature trying to safely raise her young with death all about her touched his soul. It inspired him to write *Wildlife in the Trenches* published in *Country Life* on 18 December 1915. This article was accompanied with photographs taken whilst being perilously exposed to the enemy in open ground and in trees.

During his time in the trenches Knight went 'over the top' on more than one occasion, seeing action at Ypres, Messines Ridge and the Somme. Knight came close to death in France many times and for his valor was awarded the Military Cross. After being severely gassed his days in the trenches came to an end. In 1917 he was pulled from the battlefield and sent to join the 1st Battalion Honourable Artillery Company in America as an Instructor. He was stationed at Camp Custer near Battle Creek in Michigan. This was to be the first of many visits to America.

When the war ended Knight returned home, left the Army in 1919, and unhappily took up his old job again. However he was not to remain in the family business for long. His article in *Country Life* had been well received and the editor told him he would welcome more of Knight's essays. Gradually Knight started to develop a living from selling photographs and articles on birds with a particular interest in birds of prey. He also purchased a cine camera and started to make films about birds, pioneering the use of tree top hides to capture footage never seen before.

Falconry, much missed during the war, was at the forefront of his interests. In September 1919, with the rest of his family in tow, the Knights embarked on their first proper season flying Merlins in the stubble fields near Bognor. Hand written notes show that the Merlins were Marmaduke (The Duke) and Wyndham (Winnie) who were sometimes flown in a cast. On the first day of October Marmaduke was released back to the wild followed by Wyndham three days later after what appears to be a successful hawking season.

Two months later in December 1919, Knight had a major article printed in *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* with the title *Modern Falconry, - The flight with the Short-Winged Hawks*. This was a discourse on the training of two Sparrowhawks, Melisande and Javert. It earned him plaudits and a following.

In September 1920 Knight joined E.B. Michell, Captain Awdry, Colonel Sandford and Captain St. John at Avebury for the first time. This outing to Avebury was a family affair with Hugh Knight, Lizzie Knight and their daughter Judith Knight joining in. The Lark hawking that took place this year was described by Michell as being the most favourable, in respect of the weather for at least 50 years past and also to the exceptional excellence of the Merlins which had come from three nests in Yorkshire. One of the Merlins flown by the Knight's was Eva who had many flights and taken many quarry.

In December, following the meet at Avebury, Knight's article *Modern Falconry - The Flight with Merlins*, describing the training and flying of The Duke and Winnie the previous year, was published. In the same month a further article *The Merlin, or Lady's Hawk*, also appeared in print. This article centered around the training of two other Merlins, Spook and Eve, where Knight reports that Eve distinguished herself on Salisbury Plain.

In 1921 Knight's first book was published and his first film was premiered. Both had the same title, *Wildlife in the Tree Tops*. His film in particular received incredible reviews. The Film Correspondent for the Daily Newspaper in 1921 wrote, *In a small, private kinema theatre in London yesterday a privileged audience was transported for an hour into tree-tops where herons were feeding their young, kestrel hawks were learning to fly, and a man with a camera was hidden in the branches. Captain Charles Knight, F.R.P.S., was the man, and the remarkable natural history pictures he showed were a great tribute to his skill and perseverance and a delight to the audience. They are probably the best "close up" moving pictures of birds ever shown. The kestrel hawk pictures from the top of an elm tree are just remarkable.* In a short space of time Knight was in demand and he was lecturing all over the country. He was immensely popular. He was larger than life with a gifted speaking voice that entranced his listeners. His fascinating talks were often amusing and always highly entertaining.

Falconry continued with the Merlins

throughout 1921 at Shrewton with Stanley Allen, again with the Allens in 1922 on the Isle of Thanet, and in 1923 the Knight clan were to be found Lark hawking near Eastbourne. It was in Eastbourne that Knight lost one of his Merlins, which was later found by a member of the public and was the subject of a local newspaper article expressing the finder's surprise and delight at finding it.

On Thursday 17 July 1924, Knight married Eva Olive Margaret Bennet at Chevening Parish Church near Sevenoaks. Numerous friends and family attended including members of the Blockey and Glasier families. Robert Blockey, his nephew, fated to die in the next war, was there. Knight had become a father figure to him and had coached him in the art of falconry which he loved. Nine year old Phillip Glasier, was also at the wedding. Glasier too learned falconry and photography from Knight, whom he called 'Unk', later becoming an internationally known falconer in his own right.

The honeymoon, if there was one, must have been spent in London preparing for the *Pageant of the Empire* which was held at Wembley. Knight had been asked to give a Falconry display and he did so in the arena dressed in period Elizabethan costume. He was assisted by his nephew, the actor Esmond Knight, also a falconer. They flew a number of falcons to the lure causing much excitement as many of the audience had never seen anything like it before. Performing in front of thousands of people thrilled Knight as much as his show thrilled the audience.

Greatest living falconer?

Prior to the *Pageant* Knight had given his show considerable thought. He describes being informed that one of the greatest living authorities on falconry was of the opinion that it would be impossible, under such conditions, to give people any idea of a flight or the appearance of a hawk on the wing. Knight knew he would be up against considerable difficulties flying the falcons in such a small space. He decided he would give it a go, hoping to revive something of the enthusiasm with which people of this country regarded the sport in bygone days. He records in one of his books, ". we gave most creditable displays, if I may say so, of real flying and real stooping to the lure. Much the same as one witnesses in the field, only, of course, a leathern lure decorated with feather was substituted for the live quarry. The Hawks were flown loose. We flew them

on every occasion that the Elizabethan and Henry VII episodes were enacted, and we never lost a single Hawk”.

In 1925 two great events occurred for the Knights. Their daughter Jean was born and Knight's second book *Aristocrats of the Air* was published. This work was widely acclaimed by the British public. Much of it was dedicated to birds of prey and it included a whole chapter on the Golden Eagle in the Highlands of Scotland, the bird with which Knight was later to be so closely identified.

The year of 1926 was a busy one for the Knights. Work was continuing on yet another book and a film of the Golden Eagle. A lot of time was spent in Scotland, in hides filming and taking notes of eagle eyries. During the last weeks of filming Knight acquired his first Golden Eagle, Grampian. Grampian and her sibling had been under sentence of death from the local keeper so a decision was made to save them. The two eaglets though were so far advanced that the male was found to have left the nest and although close by it was not possible to catch him. The female, however, with some difficulty, was caught. Knight returned home with Grampian and commenced training her.

In November of the same year tragedy struck the Knight family. On the 19th of that month at their home in Bessels Green, Eva gave birth to a baby boy. Sadly, something went wrong and both Eva and the baby died. Knight was totally shattered and devastated by what happened and Jean was to recall that he hardly ever spoke to her about her mother, finding it too painful to do so.

Knight lost himself in work and the following year saw the publication of *The Book of the Golden Eagle* and the release of *The Filming of the Golden Eagle*. The well reviewed book was dedicated to Eva and the inscription reads, "TO MY WIFE whose sympathy, encouragement, and help contributed so largely towards the successes herein described, but who was fated never to share in the final realization of our hopes." The film premiered at The Polytechnic Theatre in Regent Street, London and was also a huge success. A set of postcards was produced to commemorate the event and nowadays they are very rare.

In November 1927, the British Falconers' club was formed. Although he was not there for the formation he was a member and staunch supporter and attended a number of the Annual Dinners.

In 1928 Knight sailed to America on the first of many lecture tours. In New York City he showed the film of the Golden Eagle in the Scottish Highlands and also lectured on falconry. On this trip, Knight brought with him his Goshawk, Sligo. Most hotels had objections to birds of prey being kept in their rooms and so Knight would often keep them tethered on the hotel's roof. Sometimes not everything went according to plan. Sligo managed to break free and spent the day wandering around Central Park before being captured by two boys. Although the first, it was not to be the last escape during Knight's travels. The great escape garnered him publicity in the newspapers, and that he enjoyed.

Whilst in New York, Knight met with the curator of birds at the Bronx Zoo and managed to man a Golden Eagle, 'Alancia, that had been captured two years previously from the slopes of Mount Versuvius in Italy

By the time Knight returned to England two eaglets were due to hatch in Ben Gruinard, Scotland. A partnership between man and bird was soon to commence which would become world famous, perhaps never to be equaled again.

Knight had spent almost a year with Grampian, but things had not gone too well with her. She had a terrible habit of lashing out with her foot causing him injury. Fearing that she might end up attacking a child Knight eventually returned her to Scotland, releasing her on one of the Duke of Sutherland's estates where Golden Eagles were protected.

In July the eaglets of Ben Gruinard were removed from the nest and transported to London Zoo. Knight was given the opportunity of having one of them and he chose the female, Grampian II. To Knight's dismay she too would lash out with her feet with little provocation. After a few bloody injuries she was exchanged for the other eagle, a male. The naming of the eagle caused some consternation. Originally Knight dubbed it Aquila. Three year old Jean, however, had other ideas. In his book, named after the eagle, Jean is described as saying, "I like you. You look like Mr. Ramshaw". This appears not to be totally true. What she actually said was that the bird looked like 'her'. Jean was actually referring to Mrs. Ramshaw, her nanny. Howsoever the name came to be, Mr. Ramshaw it was forevermore.

Mr. Ramshaw turned out to be a bird with a charming disposition according to Knight. He did not resent being stroked and

he was not bothered about having people around him even when the numbers were great. Children in particular he seemed to like and allowed them to stroke his head. He had an agile mind and in a very short space of time Knight had him flying free. Mr. Ramshaw was soon catching rabbits and hares quite readily, providing the Knight clan with a great deal of sport.

It was not long before Mr. Ramshaw became quite a celebrity, as famous in his day as the fictional Black Beauty, Black Stallion and Lassie. Photographs of him were appearing in newspapers in Great Britain and across the United States including New York and Chicago. A 'talkie' was made of Mr. Ramshaw in action with headlines of 'A Golden Eagle trained for Falconry' and 'Britisher tames a Golden Eagle'. It came as no great surprise to Knight when he was asked to take Mr. Ramshaw to America and lecture in various cities. After some consideration and obtaining permission from the Zoo in Central Park to accommodate Mr. Ramshaw should the need arise he agreed to do it. The incredible adventures were about to start.

On New Years Day, 1929, Knight made the final preparations and readied himself for an early start from his home to Southampton Docks. The following morning Knight was to experience the first of many mishaps that traveling to America with Mr. Ramshaw would entail. On looking out of his bedroom window that morning he was shocked to find that Mr. Ramshaw had disappeared. He had broken his chain and there was no sign of him. Fortunately he was quickly found in a tree consuming a tasty rabbit. All attempts to encourage him down were fruitless. Bribes and entreaties had no effect. Knight ended up bringing his tree climbing sniper skills into operation and successfully managed to get down with him.

Off to America

Knight sailed to America on board the *Mauretania* straight into storms which the ship's master described as continuous and the worst passage he had made in 33 years of crossing the Atlantic. Waves had come over the decks smashing 12 plate glass windows on the upper promenade deck and a second wave which swept over the bridge smashed another three windows in the wheelhouse. Although arriving late in New York, Mr. Ramshaw was none the worse for wear and posed well for photographs as Knight was checked through customs.

Mr Ramshaw made his first public appearance before an American audience at the American Museum of Natural History. He flew across the stage to a perch that had been draped with the Stars and Stripes and overnight he became famous.

Knight spent four months in America on this particular trip, lecturing in various cities around the country, but also spending a considerable amount of time on Gardiner's Island, off Montauk Point, Long Island, New York. Gardiner's Island is 10 miles long by three miles wide and was granted to the Gardiner family in 1639 by Charles I. It is home to a huge Osprey colony. The birds nested in trees, as one would expect, but as Gardiner's Island is virtually predator free they also nested on rocks, buildings and even on the shore itself. Knight estimated that there were between 300 to 400 pairs nesting there. He spent hours taking copious notes and filming the Ospreys, concentrating in particular on one nest containing three eggs. He recorded this entire osprey family event until the chicks fledged. At the time Knight felt that he had truly achieved something, his filming of the Osprey was way ahead of anything else he had done – or anyone else had done – so far.

During Knight's stay on the island Mr. Ramshaw was permitted to have flights over the Gardiner's land and would generally return to the lure when called. However, as was to happen on a few occasions, he got loose and wandered off. This particular time he was missing for two days before he was found and Knight managed to recapture him.

Knight returned home to England in August of 1929 bringing with him four young Ospreys and a Bald Eagle, Miss America.

Knight had a special project in mind for the American Ospreys. The last known breeding pair in Great Britain was nest robbed in 1916 and the adults disappeared from their territory. Ospreys had been persecuted to virtual extinction by game keepers, shooters, and egg collectors and, after 1916, only the odd vagrant was seen from time to time. Ironically the eggs of the last known pair were revealed to have been stolen by an officer who came under Knight's command during the War. The soldier admitted to Knight that he had stolen them for a collector, having swum out to the island where they were located when the estate guards were away just before dawn.

In what was probably the first attempt



Miss America

to reintroduce the Osprey to Scotland, Knight released one pair on the estate of the Duke of Sutherland and the second pair on Lord Cameron's estate where the last known breeding pair had been nesting. Once again, Knight published a set of postcards to commemorate the event and later made a film which starred his nephew Edmond Knight, a well known actor as the egg thief raiding the last Osprey nest.

Miss America, now in full adult plumage, proved to be a challenge. She had been given to Knight by the Director of the Washington Zoo who was somewhat skeptical as to whether she could be tamed. The Director had remarked to Knight, "No one has tamed the American eagle yet, and I don't suppose a Britisher will do it". Knight readily took up the challenge and after some 13 weeks had her flying free. It was not long before both Mr. Ramshaw and Miss America were flying together and enjoying aerial acrobatics.

Knight did not just use his eagles as lecture birds but actively flew them on game at every opportunity. Though Bald Eagles had been kept in captivity for years, one notably being a mascot for a Wisconsin regiment during the American Civil War, Miss America may very well own the title of being the first Bald Eagle trained for falconry purposes. The British Falconer's Club report for the year 1931 records: "*Capt. Knight's Golden Eagle, Mr. Ramshaw, continues to take rabbits in a satisfactory way. It was seldom that he was taken out when he did not kill something. An American white-headed eagle was also trained, which caught one or two rabbits, but it was of very uncertain temper and almost impossible to hood*".

In June 1931 Knight was involved with another pageant. The venue on this occasion was at Rochester Castle and Knight played a nobleman during the re-enactment when Simon de Montfort carried out an unsuccessful attack on the

castle in 1264. In November of the same year, following many requests, Knight returned to America for several months on what he described as his first real cross country tour. He visited many states, including Hawaii, with Mr. Ramshaw. His deep drawling voice and fascinating tales enchanted every audience he met with, winning him more fame and fortune. His trip was again not without mishap. Following a taxi ride in San Francisco he suddenly realized that he had left his falconry glove and Ramshaw's hood behind. Carrying an eagle around without a glove was not an easy thing to do and he had to improvise with a motoring glove. In the process he did end up with numerous punctures and scratches to his left forearm, souvenirs of his American visit he delighted in showing off. On his return from America he brought back a Redtailed Hawk, possibly one of the first to be brought to the U.K. to be used for hawking.

During his lifetime Knight produced a number of films on natural history subjects that were shown in conjunction with his lectures or as newsreel shorts before feature movies. Quite a few other films, however, centered around or featured the sport of falconry. For many people this was their first real look at the ancient art.

In 1933 Knight was approached by London Film Productions to provide some hawks for a falconry sequence in their film *The Private Life of Henry VIII*. Initially he refused on the grounds that it was not easy to find a sufficient number of birds in the numbers that Henry VIII would have had when he went hunting. After some difficulty Knight did manage it, coming up with three falcons, two tiercels, two Merlins and two goshawks. Once again the relations were involved. Nephew Esmond played a leading part in the hawking scene and young Phillip Glasier was the cadger. The film was a huge box office success. The falconry scene, but a small part of it, whetted Knight's desire to see the sport more fully depicted for the screen.

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Recalling to the fist

It was my forty-fifth birthday. The year count isn't important (though for the first time the number attached to the prefix did cause me to reflect that I was edging closer to that rather significant destination – fifty). What is important is that it was the last day of the pheasant season, and my even registering this, let alone eagerly gearing up for a hawking session, said a lot about what the passing of those years had done. Forget the vanishing hair, I'd become a pheasant hawker!

The decline into this sorry state of affairs – and sorry it was when you consider I'd spent my entire falconry career praising rabbits and hares to the heavens and decrying the pheasant at every opportunity – was down to the gradual loss of more and more local rabbit ground. One property had been sold; a wood taken over by the farmer's son and his motorcycle-riding friends; and another patch lost when the owner took up clay pigeon shooting and found himself playing host to a new circle of friends desperate to test their skills on something

other than clays. The final blow was the fall of my sugar beet hawking. Rabbits love sugar beet, and the protection it provides will tempt them far from their warrens – plenty far enough if a Harris' is in a field-side tree. On my main farms I'd been able to beet-hawk right into winter, but a change in policy now saw the beet harvested so early I was racing the tractor just to start the season in it. Slowly I was hanging onto a cliff edge, desperate hands refusing to accept the inevitable. And all the while the pheasant was there, strutting, flirting and begging me to grab the rope. So I did.

Rob, our border collie, was elated. He'd always been keen to get into a bit more feather. Originally acquired for rabbit hawking – more specifically for marking occupied warrens – it soon became clear that nothing gave him more of a buzz than sending rocketing rattling pheasants up and into the blue. There was childlike delight in being the cause of so much panic; and now he could play to his heart's content. The sport's past greats looked on in horror. They'd

forgiven me a bit of rabbiting with a collie – but pheasant hawking!

The Harris', Flair, had taken a bit more convincing. She'd caught plenty of pheasants but the team's commitment to fur made her far from dedicated to the job. To increase motivation I looked to feeding from kills, something I'd always done with rabbits and hares but not worried about with pheasants. She wasn't impressed. Having always been traded off pheasants for a chunk of rabbit – meat she loved above anything – this is what she wanted. And she made her thoughts clear! Pheasant kills were pillow fights, the spoilt Harris' frantically ripping feathers from her opened up victim but refusing point blank to feed and almost leaping from it if my reward hand so much as twitched. But I wasn't going to be beaten. Convinced that warm bloody rewards were the way to greater success, I was insistent. I even resorted to hand feeding!

With Flair slowly learning to suffer her new diet, and more effort put into follow-ups and reflushes (the collie now

by Martin Hollinshead

floating on clouds), we eventually started to look a bit more polished and if not exactly deadly, we were a pretty mean mediocre.

With today's hunt I was geared for brunch and off. Flair was geared for this too. Tonya, Rob and the essential car, all due back from a visit to her folks, were obviously geared for something else. By 12 o'clock I was on a hot simmer. I checked the equipment *again*. I tried the mobile. Off. 12.30 came and went. Now I was pacing, my gaze constantly wandering to the lively thing flitting about the mews. And forget hot simmer – the lid was bouncing off! Then guilt. Maybe there'd been an accident!

The tractor-like rumble of the old diesel Citroen on the drive at 1.15 wiped away the accident worry, and Tonya's calm face spoke before her mouth. 'Late?' No, she wasn't late. I'd misunderstood, got my wires crossed. She wasn't late at all. She was bang on time. And now I was furious and struggling to keep my rage under control. I opened the tailgate to let Rob out. He exited with a growl, and I bit down on a dodgy filling so hard it broke!

I could tell you about having to watch my unperturbed wife now take her lunch and then attend to various other little things before we finally hit the road. But maybe I'll just say that we were eventually in the field with me just about in control of my evil mood but wondering why the hell I hadn't said forget it! And this was just the start. Not far away two carefully programmed pheasants were set to test me still further.

Soon pheasant number one was ready for me. Its programming involved it being scentless, because as far as Rob was concerned it didn't exist. It didn't exist at thirty paces. It didn't exist at ten, or five, or two. It just wasn't there. *But it was!* As far as the high-perched Harris' was concerned, it was very there, partially concealed in a refuge of brambles and brushwood. Yes it was there, as obvious as a glowing beacon. She told us, we told Rob – he wanted to move on.



Harris Hawk waiting in a tree

The *scentless* pheasant was perfect. Right below the Harris', this type of pheasant came to me only in dreams. And this made what happened next – the inevitable – so painful. The time between the Harris' giving her easily recognisable *squeaking*, 'there's someone here do something', and me registering that the dog had gone mad, was short. It was still too long. I should have immediately negotiated the deep ditch that separated me from the hiding pheasant and done my own flushing. But I didn't and with the predictability of day following night, the Harris' took matters into her own hands and dropped from the tree. And with equal predictability, the pheasant – a cock – sidestepped and hit the gas. And now, as all that wonderful explosive energy took our friend rattling away on a staggering exit, the wide-eyed collie finally twigged: *A pheasant!* The Harris' followed, of course, but this pheasant was as safe as he had been from the start. We weren't meant to catch him.

Pheasant number two was ready for us about ten minutes later. It was a long flight. As soon as it began I knew it was going to be. No perfect tree setup, just the Harris' getting close enough to pluck tail feathers and believing with all her heart that this hen bird could be out-flown. And so away they went, soon out

of sight behind a bank of timber. And away I went too, flying straight to my customary loony mode, crashing through a hedge on our own ground to end up on our neighbour's.

I stood and stared. Wow! It had been a long flight. Right over an enormous bare field, the pheasant had set course for a small tangled patch bordering more blank ground. And the Harris' had followed, just as the hen knew she would; she hadn't allowed her to get near those tail feathers for nothing. And this hen knew too that the closely chasing hawk would read her intention to put in and make every effort to take her; this is what hawks did. The evil part of the plan was the hidden strand of rusty wire the pheasant would duck under as she bowled herself into the cover; the hawk would never see it.

I arrived to see Flair sitting atop a fence post overlooking the patch, her face crimson with the blood trickling from a slash in her cere. She was oblivious to it. Mad with rage, the injury was nothing more than an insult, a bloody nose that would carry her to the final bell. That the pheasant was still there was obvious. I'd known this long before arriving by the hawk's fluttering cover-bouncing attempts to flush it. But the last thing I wanted now was another flight which, given the bird's poor position,

would just go deeper into my neighbour's land. I also desperately wanted to inspect that wound. I couldn't get to her without trampling the cover and flushing the target, so I threw out the lure. She refused it. I wasn't surprised. You had to see the anger to appreciate it. In all the years of flying her I'd never seen anything like it. I tried again, this time tempting her with more food and a bit of tugging. She responded, reluctantly.

The cere wasn't pretty, but it wasn't a disaster. I wet my fingers to smooth down a nick of skin that had been lifted, cleaning up the rest of the beak with a pinch of damp grass. I then hooded her, the face still raging and the battle scar giving her a truly evil look.

Had the decision been mine alone, I'd have called a halt there and then. But Flair was having none of it. The wire trap had taken things too far. This was playing dirty. Now she demanded satisfaction, and I knew where she might get it – *The Shit Works!*

The 'shit works' (a name I will blame on a past hawking buddy) was a tiny sewage plant, unmanned and, sitting well into the farm and disguised by trees, a place of hidden identity; even at close inspection it looked like a small circular wood. The reason for its existence was the close-by Second World War airfield; it had been built to cater for the base. When I first came to know the place it was a forgotten never-entered jungle, a wildlife oasis in a sea of orderly fields. In fact so swamped was its crumbled brickwork and concrete, its original purpose eluded me. Waterfowl cruised a suspiciously round 'duck pond', and rabbits and pheasants crept beneath a blanket of wild roses and brambles.

The spot was practically impossible to hawk. The bramble and rose mounds were straight out of a fairytale: a thick-stemmed, razor-barbed confusion to turn back the most determined prince. And just to make sure sleeping beauty stayed put, the whole lot was given a twisted, intertwined support of face-prodding bushes and shrubs. A visitor remarked: 'You actually catch in there?' Only if you were unlucky!

But over the years things had changed. The airfield had slowly gone from being a scarcely used hobby plane depot to a place attracting much more traffic, and along with this growth had come the need to refurbish the place. The result was that the duck pond resumed its



Rob – Border Collie

proper function – complete with wide-spanning water-trickling spider arms – and the entire centre of the jungle was cleared, soil and torn-up shrubs and weeds being bulldozed into mounds on two sides. However, the entire outer circle remained intact: a thick wall of tall deciduous trees overlooking a reduced but still substantial area of the princess's tangle. Understandably, the ducks had gone, but the rabbits and pheasants were still there – and now I could get at them.

So this is where I hoped we might balance matters for Flair. It wasn't far from our present location, a fifteen to twenty minute walk. We were there in twelve flat. Down a little track, through a gate – a gate opened with fingers that moved with criminal care lest a sound give the game away – and then a tiptoe creeping approach bringing us on course for the boundary fence and the final gate, the one carrying the ominous warning DANGER DEEP WATER.

All during this the hooded Harris' had sensed and read our intentions, our secret whispers and the slowing of pace telling all. She knew what was coming, and Rob, now sneaking along like some cartoon cat, knew too.

Before the final gate I let Flair fly. She didn't take the branch I'd singled out, the one I'd have taken, not even my tree, but her position was good with plenty of

height giving her immediate command of the location. Now burglar fingers went to work again, through the gate, Flair moving across the work's bare centre to take stand in an isolated oak that had been spared the bulldozing. It was an odd picture: bird in tree over sewage bed.

Behind the bird lay our target area, a long bramble-covered mound dropping down through brushwood and fallen trees to the little brook that was work's boundary on this side. The plan needed no discussing: dog in the ditch, bird following in the trees. We'd had success on pheasants here before; the setup was good, with tall close-standing trees and a narrow field of operation keeping any *sneaky creeper* moving in one direction. And then it happened. There was no warning, no mark – which in this place you'd have been hard pushed to see anyway – just a crashing branch-breaking commotion and a strong cock pheasant powering up and away. The detail was lost to the trees, but soon one bird became two, falling back to earth on open ground. We waded the brook and I dispatched our prize. Flair's cere was bleeding again. I looked at the pheasant and said it for her: 'We're quits.'

Taken from Martin Hollinshead's highly popular *Harris' Hawk Days*

Thoughts



Jessica – Female
Aplomado two days after
collection. Note: tail is still
taped for protection

Jessica on the lure

Due to the exceedingly wet weather we have had to endure recently, all the signs are that it is going to be an absolute bumper year for ticks. Several people I know who are involved with the breeding of raptors have had to treat some of their hawks for quite heavy infestations of the vile blood sucking creatures. Those flying their hawks at quarry over the next couple of months, particularly those that hunt rabbits, need to keep a watchful eye on things and regularly check their hawks for the presence of unwanted visitors. It goes without saying that if you do find ticks on your hawk you need to be careful as to how you remove them ensuring that the complete animal is removed and not

just the blood bloated body. If you are uncertain as to the correct way of doing this then take the hawk to a vet. As is always the case it is far better to be safe than sorry, even if it does mean a small veterinary bill.

Whilst touching briefly on the subject of vets it still never fails to amaze me just how many people are willing to gamble with the lives of their hawks or falcons in the hopes that early signs of illness will clear up if left alone. I get a great many calls from people over the course of the year seeking help and advice with regard to their hawks or hawking. Wherever I can I am more than happy to help and if it is something I am familiar with or have been through myself I am happy to impart information, but always with the proviso

that this is only my opinion and what may work for me does not necessarily always work for someone else. If it is a subject I am not familiar with then I try, wherever possible, to redirect the enquiry to a more helpful and informative source.

For example I do not train eagles for hunting and have extremely limited knowledge regarding their field management and conditioning. If I receive an enquiry regarding them then I pass it on to one or two friends I have who hunt with eagles on a regular basis year in year out. My practical knowledge of social imprints is also extremely limited and therefore any enquiries regarding them are passed on to those who can give sound practical advice based on firsthand experience rather than guesswork or second or third hand hearsay.

Always consult a vet

One topic that I simply refuse to opine on and always stress the importance of contacting a vet over is issues of health. It is common and basic knowledge that raptors, as with any predator, are programmed to conceal as best as possible any sign of weakness or illness so as to avoid being predated upon themselves. Accordingly by the time a falconer, even the most astute and observant of us, notices that there is something wrong with his or her hawk then whatever the ailment is has usually got a good grip by then. Therefore as little time as possible should be wasted in getting the hawk to a vet and getting an accurate diagnosis and the subsequent appropriate treatment underway. You would be amazed to know just how many times I have received calls from people worried about the condition of their hawks that come out with things like "it has been like this for a few days now" or "for the last week or so the leg has been swollen". I never ever try and second guess what the complaint may or may not be but simply stress that the hawk needs to get to a vet and needs to get there as quickly as possible.

Modern veterinary science has come on leaps and bounds over the last twenty years or so and vets themselves are far more attuned as to the needs and peculiarities of raptors. But they are only vets not miracle workers. If the person with a sick hawk eventually seeks the help of a vet after prevaricating over the

situation for several days then the vet will probably be faced with a hawk that is too far gone to help. Then of course the vet is in the firing line for not being able to save the hawk. Getting attention for any hawk or falcon that is thought to be unwell at an early stage is absolutely vital.

A new hunting season

With a new hunting season almost upon us, other than those who are already up on the grouse moors, it is nice to be making all the appropriate preparations to get back into the swing of things again. I myself have been fortunate in that I have been flying a hawk and falcon already and am in fact just winding down with the hunting of my hawk and starting to get three others going and muscled up again. I have been enjoying tremendous fun with a male African Goshawk, known as The Gaffer, who has a flying weight of just less than nine ounces. He happily tackles birds up to the size of Magpies and is pretty determined when it comes to pursuit. His one major failing from a pure falconry point of view is that he is almost as equally fond of rodents as he is birds. One minute he will be in hot pursuit of feathered quarry and having missed take stand in a tree or fence rail. His concentration will then be directed on the ground and will as often as not end in a sudden drop into light cover or grass. A mouse, shrew or vole will then be greedily devoured before I can get to him and take him up from it. Realistically the day's hawking is then over as even one such rodent, greedily swallowed, is more than enough to take the edge off of his appetite and curtail any serious hunting. It will not be of sufficient quantity to make him disobedient but it will definitely mean that he will not then hunt in earnest other than at a bird that is obviously injured or ailing. With the edge gone from his appetite he will have lost his sharpness and willingness to pursue quarry with vigour and determination.

The reason I am winding down my flying with The Gaffer is that winter is rapidly approaching and I want to put him up in an aviary for the worst of the weather. I do not want to keep him down to his flying weight and tethered to a bow perch with the worst of a British winter ahead of him. Added to the fact that it is only now that he has started to moult and he may as well have the opportunity to moult clean.

My other hunting companion over the

last couple of months has been Jessica an eyass female Aplomado Falcon. She is the largest female Aplomado I have ever flown, including those in Peru, Brazil and Mexico, with a hunting weight of thirteen and a quarter ounces or three hundred and seventy five grams for those who think metrically. Her absolute top fat weight is only three quarters of an ounce above this but then Jessica is really bonded to me and so I can take liberties with her weight that would undoubtedly lead to the loss of any other hawk flown in such high condition. As to what can be flown with a falcon of this size in this particular species then the answer is fairly simple. Anything she thinks she has a reasonable chance of catching.

For those that have not experienced a truly fit Aplomado Falcon hunting in the field any account of their prowess and determination will seem like severe exaggeration. But amongst the entries in the quarry book alongside her name Jessica has two adult rooks and a wood pigeon to her credit. Those that scoff at the idea of such a small falcon being so brave, or is it foolhardy, in tackling such large prey think no differently to how I did myself many years ago when told of the exploits of this species in the hands of falconers. All of Jessica's kills have been witnessed by other falconers or country sportsmen, not that I have ever particularly cared what others think, or may or may not believe. If you exaggerate or guild the Lily the only person you really fool is yourself.

Unlike The Gaffer, I hope to keep Jessica flying for a while longer and hope to continue enjoying some truly amazing sport with her for another couple of months or so yet. What I find so incredible about this little falcon is her determination and outright tenacity when it comes to pursuing quarry. She takes on slips of astonishing length and when I raise my gloved hand with her sitting on it I never know quite what it is she is going to pursue. To illustrate what I mean the two successful flights at rooks were both completely unintentional on my part.

Rook flights

The first I had merely taken Jessica to a field to give her some exercise to the lure. She was allowed to take to the air from the glove in her own time. She made off at a decent rate and climbed gradually until she was around a hundred feet or so and far enough away as to be

just visible to the naked eye. I blew the whistle and she instantly responded and turned to make her way back. When she was all but practically back to me she suddenly veered off and shifting up a gear as regards speed and hugging the ground she set off on what was obviously an attack. The only thing I could see was a small group of four or five rooks in the distance feeding in a stubble field and assumed she had spotted a magpie sitting amongst them. But it soon became evident that it wasn't a magpie she was after, but a far larger prey. At first the rooks ignored the small falcon that was closing on them rapidly and only took to the air when she was getting very close indeed. As the rooks rose the Aplomado swung up underneath them and grabbed the bottom most rook from below. The two of them fell to earth and a frenzied rough and tumble ensued with the rook doing its best to rid itself of the falcon and Jessica hanging on for all she was worth. The falcon and her prey became a whirling mass of feathers as they rolled around the stubble. She had grabbed an adult rook and despite the best efforts of what I assumed were its family and friends she was not going to let go. I managed to get to her before the rooks had managed to rescue their companion and so a member of the sable persuasion joined her quarry list. It was interesting to note that the falcon had one foot around the beak of the rook and the other around its head. This left the feet and wings of the rook free and it was with the aid of these that it had been doing its best to free itself.

The second occasion on which a rook was taken Jessica had chased a magpie and it had evaded her by making the cover of a hedgerow. As she flew backwards and forwards along the hedge watching my failing efforts to dislodge the magpie a trio of rooks came to mob her. She suddenly switched her attention to the rooks instead and gave serious chase. Two rooks made off instantly but the third merely started to leisurely ring up still happily cawing at the little falcon. But Jessica rang up tighter and faster and soon grabbed the rook from underneath. I had a horrible feeling she would end up skewered on the beak of the rook but when they fell to earth she switched her grip and had one foot round his beak, right at the base where it goes into the skull, and with the other she held on to some grass for dear life. The

rook thrashed and struggled but to no avail. Jessica held him till I got there and assisted her. The feet on an Aplomado Falcon are simply huge in relation to their bodies and look decidedly out of proportion to the rest of them. But when it comes to holding birds they are absolutely ideal.

I shall continue to fly this brave little falcon for a while longer yet but when the weather starts to turn then I will stop and put her up till next year. I am fully aware that I tend to harp on about Aplomado's but they really are excellent falcons to hunt with. Entering them is never a problem and they will tackle such a wide variety of quarry and can be flown in relatively enclosed countryside if needs must. Although it has to be said they are at their best in open rolling farmland or pasture land such as the Plains or the Downs. In terms of being evaluated as a truly serious hunting hawk for our climate, terrain and quarry it is still very early days with so few falconers giving the Aplomado a serious try in the field. More and more are currently being imported into the UK from Holland and Spain but so few seem to be being flown. Most are instantly paired up because of their financial value as opposed to their potential prowess in the field. Hopefully when a few more make their way into the hands of serious falconers the true scope of the capability of these gutsy little falcons will be realised.

This winter

The hawks I intend to hunt this winter are Maud my fifteen year old female Harris Hawk and also two falcons. One will be Brabus my twelve year old Gyr/Peregrine hybrid male and "Megan" a Peregrine Falcon. I make no secret of the fact that hybrids are not amongst my favourite hawks but Brabus was given to me by his breeder who was a good friend and the gift was received in the spirit with which it was given. Brabus has hunted well over the years and has taken the transition from grouse hawk to partridge hawk very much in his stride. Being unable to secure the rights to a grouse moor with a sensible stock level for eight to ten weeks each season means that I have more or less given up grouse hawking for the time being. Going up for two or three weeks each season is not doing the sport justice and I thought it better to switch my attention to other quarries to which I do have regular and

sustained access. Hawking pheasants with longwings has never interested me greatly, that I mean to decry in anyway the efforts of those that like to fly them. Partridge, to my mind at least, offer a more stylish and sporting flight. Pursuing them also means I still get to work my setters and pointers with my hawks on a more or less daily basis. I enjoy the dog work almost as much as I enjoy the flying and would loathe to hawk without dogs.

Megan is an eyass Peregrine that was taken illegally from the wild but then fortunately recovered and passed onto



Megan - Eyass Peregrine



Taking Jessica up after a successful flight

me by Raptor Rescue in the hopes of rehabilitating her and putting her back where she belongs, that is in the wild. Unfortunately she had been in human company from an early age, presumably the company of whoever took her from the nest illegally, and was decidedly mal imprinted. I was originally passed Megan and her sister Magda in the hopes of putting them back. But with my already full work load as a professional falconer I passed Magda on to Jemima. At first the constant screaming that Megan issued not only drove me crazy but started to affect some of the other hawks around her. But the more she started to fly and have an interest other than food in her life the more the screaming seemed to

decrease. That is not to say it has ceased or anywhere near it, but lessened in both quantity and volume it most definitely has. I still hope that if I can get her killing on a day to day basis then perhaps there will still be a slight chance of releasing her and getting her to take her rightful place in nature. Rooks will be the quarry of choice for Megan and she has opened her account against them already.

I am looking forward to the new season's hawking and am hoping for some good sport on three different fronts. Let's hope the rabbits, partridges and rooks play their part.

Club Directory

Join and support your local club today!



The Welsh Hawking Club



South Wales Region

2nd Monday of the month at The Rat Trap Hotel.

Further details from Mike Cordell – E-mail: michael@cordellnet.co.uk

North Wales Region

1st Tuesday of every month at The Robin Hood Pub, Helsby.

Regional Secretary: Neil McCann - 0151 929 3402.

Essex Region

2nd Tuesday in each month at The Whalebone Inn, Fingeringhoe, near Colchester.

Regional Secretary: Ray Hooper - 01206 251765

South West Region

3rd Monday of the month at The Ley Arms, Kenn.

Regional Secretary: Kevin Mosedale - 01392 833681

Yorkshire Region

Meetings take place at The Marquess, Stubbin Road, Low Stubbin, Rotherham

Regional Secretary: Steve Lambert – 07736 319347

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

0033 549 917930



Brittany Club of Great Britain

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01621 817728

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Northern England Falconry Club

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Dean White (secretary) on 01489 896504

E-mail us at enquiry@sefg.org or
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Yorkshire Falconry Club

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Further details from:

Jim Coyle

E-mail: info@scottishhawkingclub.co.uk

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

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

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

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

Please visit our website at: www.seraonline.co.uk
or telephone Brian for information on: **01732 463218**



Independent Bird Register

Telephone 0870 608 8500

IBR Lost, Found, Reunited & Stolen birds of prey from 1st June to 31st August 2008

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

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

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

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

REMEMBER! Even if your bird is wearing an IBR ring if you have not got IBR paperwork in your name its **NOT** registered. We offer a service don't abuse it.

STOLEN x 3

Bref	Ring No.	Species
64734	69UD04W	HARRIS HAWK
61432	156JT6W	HARRIS HAWK
54382	IBR53237W	HARRIS HAWK

REUNITED x 115

Bref	Ring No.	Species
AMERICAN KESTREL		
BARBARY/SAKER HYBRID		
BARN OWL	11	
BENGAL EAGLE OWL		
CARA CARA		
COMMON BUZZARD		
EURASIAN EAGLE OWL	5	
GOSHAWK	6	
GYR HYBRIDS	12	
HARRIS HAWK	33	
KESTREL 5		
LANNER FALCON	11	
MERLIN		
PEREGRINE FALCON	2	
PEREGRINE HYBRIDS	7	
RAVEN		
RED-TAILED HAWK	5	
SAKER FALCON	9	
TAWNY OWL	2	

LOST x 82

Bref	Ring No.	Species
57335	??1701P	AMERICAN KESTREL
61523	??1RR07P	AMERICAN KESTREL
65165	??963V	BARBARY FALCON
9233	??999U	BARN OWL
37832	??3912U	BARN OWL
42987	??0621U	BARN OWL
48807	??7959U	BARN OWL
57161	??4711U	BARN OWL
57182	??4747U	BARN OWL
58357	??8206U	BARN OWL
59139	??10U	BARN OWL
60455	??9291U	BARN OWL
60482	??9311U	BARN OWL

61433	P09 2	BARN OWL
61943	??0531U	BARN OWL
64935	??59DNB08U	BARN OWL
65146	??5PSA07U	BARN OWL
65163	??734U	BARN OWL
40436	??1JD01W	COMMON BUZZARD
64403	??2246V	GYR/LANNER FALCON
9909	??7432DOEW	GYR/SAKER FALCON
64033	??CF95V	GYR/SAKER FALCON
65036	??779DOEW	GYR/SAKER FALCON
65162	??77DOEW	GYR/SAKER FALCON
12220	??563DOEX	GYR/SAKERXSAKER
7706	??370W	HARRIS HAWK
12324	??ES99W	HARRIS HAWK
13025	??3260W	HARRIS HAWK
14036	WR3 1	HARRIS HAWK
14293	NE12 8	HARRIS HAWK
24535	??4225W	HARRIS HAWK
24858	??4180W	HARRIS HAWK
28979	??8267W	HARRIS HAWK
31733	??8969W	HARRIS HAWK
32673	??9505W	HARRIS HAWK
41003	??7387W	HARRIS HAWK
42561	??2026W	HARRIS HAWK
44372	??2872W	HARRIS HAWK
45682	??5657W	HARRIS HAWK
51901	??1172W	HARRIS HAWK
54092	??1593W	HARRIS HAWK
54349	??3204W	HARRIS HAWK
56316	??5925W	HARRIS HAWK
58800	??7950W	HARRIS HAWK
60862	??9514W	HARRIS HAWK
62774	??1269W	HARRIS HAWK
64735	WF9 2	HARRIS HAWK
64773	TN35 4	HARRIS HAWK
65254	CH62 8	HARRIS HAWK
65277	DD2 2	HARRIS HAWK
65295	CH67 7	HARRIS HAWK
65345	ST6 5	HARRIS HAWK
51834	??4798S	KESTREL
57888	??2353S	KESTREL
57299	??7742W	LANNER FALCON

59425	8Y0ONEEK??	LANNER FALCON
61470	16Y0ONEEK??	LANNER FALCON
63518	??JEZW	LANNER FALCON
64010	??2632	LANNER FALCON
65344	??NBPCV	LANNER FALCON
63615	??99GCR	LITTLE OWL
65049	??6197R	LITTLE OWL
41045	??7254W	LUGGER FALCON
64286	??9V/28936W	PERE/BARBXPERE(XSAKER)
43956	??3054W	PEREGRINE FALCON
19950	??0316W	PEREGRINE/LANNER HYBRID
54201	??8055W	PEREGRINE/PRAIRIE HYBRID
10906	??0569	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
59040	??1073W	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
63857	??2478W	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
65412	??1998w	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
10815	??RR07	RED-TAILED HAWK
24012	??1618W	SAKER FALCON
52342	??1364W	SAKER FALCON
54489	??KFC06W	SAKER FALCON
63846	??896W	SAKER FALCON
64597	??904W	SAKER FALCON
65247	??W2001	SAKER FALCON
65251	??NLBEC07	SAKER FALCON
20257	??2 00R	SPARROWHAWK
50260	??7622R	SPARROWHAWK
64045	??2202R	SPARROWHAWK

FOUND x 12

Bref	Ring No.	Species
57391	??1713P	AMERICAN KESTREL
6161	??602BCU	BARN OWL
55480	??4411U	BARN OWL
65243	??734BC95U	BARN OWL
65244	??PRS08	BARN OWL
43074	??3826Z	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
33649	??84DOEY	FERRUGINOUS HAWK
43748	??2620W	HARRIS HAWK
29639	??9627S	KESTREL
63593	??77RR95W	SAKER FALCON
13315	??MCGR	SPARROWHAWK
58031	??696R	SPARROWHAWK

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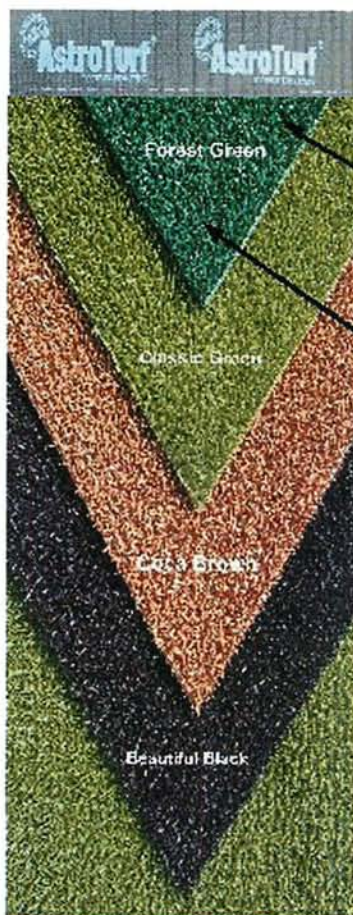
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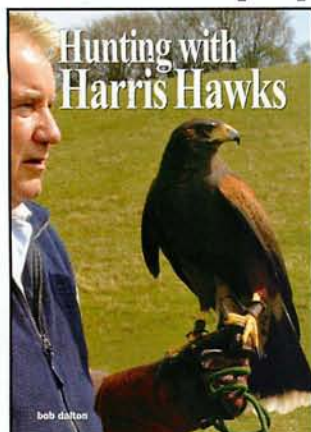
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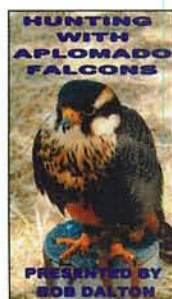
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