

Your Favourite Falconry Magazine

Issue 76

£4.25



ISSN
0967-2206

www.falconers.info

The *Falconers*

& Raptor Conservation Magazine



Raptors in

Mexico

The Second International Festival of Falconry 11-12 July 2009

Adults £15 each
Children (under 16) Free
Weekend Camping
£40 per person

Marvel at aerial displays of the world's fastest birds

Visit the Arab desert camp and eagle hunters' yurts

*Watch the Grand Parade of 45 nations in their national dress
with their hawks, falcons and eagles, dogs, horses and camels*

Talk to raptor conservationists and vets

Experience falconry heritage

See the best in falconry art

Learn how to become a falconer

Taste the food, hear the music



Reading, England

*Join us in a celebration of our global
heritage of falconry*

www.falconryfestival.com



www.falconryfestival.com
Festival of Falconry
PO Box 19
Carmarthen SA33 5YL
Telephone: 01267 233931
info@falconryfestival.com



Front Cover:
Photograph courtesy
of Bob Dalton.

Winter 2009 / No. 76

Editor: Peter Eldrett
Knowle View, Kings Lane, Woodlands,
Wimborne, Dorset, BH21 8LZ
Telephone: (01202) 826181
E-mail: peter.eldrett@tiscali.co.uk

ALL EDITORIAL
INFO TO THIS
ADDRESS

Art Editor: Steve Hunt
Telephone: 0845 803 1979
Fax: 01202 659950
E-mail: steve@pwpublishing.ltd.uk

Advertising and Marketing:

Sales: Roger Hall
0845 803 1979
Production: Peter Eldrett
PW Publishing Ltd., Arrowsmith Court,
Station Approach, Broadstone,
Dorset BH18 8PW
Telephone: 0845 803 1979
Fax: 01202 659950
E-mail: sales@pwpublishing.ltd.uk

ALL
ADVERTISING
INFO TO THIS
ADDRESS

Finance: Alan Burgess
Telephone: 0845 803 1979
Fax: 01202 659950
E-mail: alan@pwpublishing.ltd.uk

Subscriptions:
UK & Eire: £16.50
Europe: £20.00
Airmail: £28.00

Send your details to our Subscriptions Department:

Falconers Magazine,
Subscriptions Dept.,
PO Box 464
Berkhamsted
Herts HP4 2UR
Telephone: (01442) 879097
Fax: (01442) 872279
E-mail: falconers@webscribe.co.uk
Web: www.webscribe.co.uk

Cheque/Postal Order payable to: **PW Publishing Ltd.**

The views expressed in this magazine are the views of the authors. No responsibility for the quality of goods or services offered in this magazine can be accepted by the publishers or the printers, and all advertisements are accepted in good faith.

© PW PUBLISHING LTD. 2009.
Copyright in all drawings, photographs and articles published in The Falconers & Raptor Conservation Magazine is fully protected and reproduction or imitation in whole or in part is expressly forbidden. All reasonable precautions are taken by The Falconers & Raptor Conservation Magazine to ensure that the advice and data given to our readers is reliable. We cannot, however, guarantee it and we cannot accept legal responsibility for it. Prices are those current as we go to press. The Falconers & Raptor Conservation Magazine is published quarterly for £16.50 (UK) per year by PW Publishing Ltd., Arrowsmith Court, Station Approach, Broadstone, Dorset BH18 8PW.
Printed in England by Holbrooks Printers, Portsmouth, Hampshire.

contents

- 4 News & new products

- 6 Hawk Board News

- 8 The Gyr Falcon
Elpidio Gayo Perona and the king of falcons

- 13 Hawking on the Isle of Arran
Scottish Hawking Club fieldmeet

- 14 Biff Norman up-date
Biff in Croatia

- 16 As the season kicks off
Nick Kester in Scotland

- 18 We were falconers
Part 2 of the story of Captain Knight

- 24 The begginging
Young falconer Tom Morth tells his story

- 26 Managing a small team
David Rampling – artist and falconer

- 30 Raptors in Mexico
Bob Dalton enjoying the sun in Mexico

- 34 Club Directory

- 36 IBR lost & found

This edition of The Falconers Magazine has a somewhat international feel about it. It includes an article on the Gyr falcon from one of Spain's top falconers, Elpidio Gayo Perona, an up-date on Biff Norman in Croatia and Bob Dalton on his travels in Mexico.

Please have a look at Hawk Board News (page 6) for more about the Falconry Festival and note that 2009 is election year for specialist members on the board. You will also find there news on deregistration and quarry licences.

We are now in the middle of the flying season and I hope that in these grey times all falconers are enjoying flying their charges without too many mishaps, especially in the cold weather we have been experiencing lately.

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

Fieldsport 2009 "An evening with the experts"

The annual field sport event will be held on 7 February at Wickham Community Centre, Mill Lane, Wickham, Hampshire and will feature experts from the field of angling, falconry, ferrets, fly fishing, shooting, stickmaking and much more. Included in the evening will be an indoor Lurcher show which is an applied for Chatsworth qualifier event. The admission price is £5 and doors open at 6.30pm.

GPS puts vulture travels on the world map

Conservationists have fitted GPS transmitter back packs onto four African White-backed vultures (*Gyps africanus*) in a game reserve in South Africa in an attempt to unravel the mystery surrounding these keystones of the savanna ecosystem – where they go when they're not roosting on a tree or devouring a carcass in the protected grasslands of the park.



Campbell Murn, Chief Scientific Officer at the Hawk Conservancy Trust, explains: "Although there is ring recovery and wing tag information that tells us how far vultures can travel, until we know where it is they are going and the distances they are covering in between times, we don't know the threats and hazards they might be experiencing. Until we know this, we can't start to form effective conservation plans to protect them. They might be travelling across the region, over country borders or possibly even across the whole of the African subcontinent - we just don't know. This is why the new information we'll be securing is so important."

To fill in the missing pieces of the conservation puzzle researchers will be downloading data on a daily basis from the GPS units on the four fledgling vultures, named Alpha, Amur, Angus and Acacia, via the cell phone network. The back packs do not interfere with the birds' natural movements and are expected to last for more than 9 years.

The number of African White-backed vultures in the wild is declining and they are listed as Near Threatened in the Red Data Book. They suffer from a suite of threats including poisoning, where bait has been laid to target other animals, changing land-use that leads to the loss of nesting sites and collision with power lines. And a growing threat is the harvesting of vultures for traditional medicines.

This project is part of a long term research programme being run by the Hawk Conservancy Trust in partnership with BirdLife South Africa and De Beers.

The vultures' travels can be followed online by clicking onto the webpage at: www.hawkconservancy.org

JPJ back at Newent

Jemima Parry-Jones MBE is back at the bird of prey centre in Newent where she started. Now named The International Centre for Birds of Prey, Jemima has been campaigning to save the centre which her father started – then named The National Bird of Prey Centre – and where many bird of prey conservation projects began.

The centre has the generous backing of financiers the Chenevix-Trench family, Jonathan Chenevix-Trench being a hedge fund manager. These are exciting times for Jemima and her team and hopefully JPJ and her backers will have a long working relationship. The site at Eardisland is on the market and JPJ hopes for a quick sale to repay her loan and please her bank manager.

More information can be found on the website www.icbp.org

New animal health website

Animal Health has launched a new website for the Wildlife Licensing and Registration Service (WLRS). www.defra.gov.uk/animalhealth/cites/

This will eventually replace the JNCC site www.ukcites.gov.uk.

You should find it more customer friendly than the ukcites site with interactive application forms and help to identify whether a species is listed.

WLRS would be grateful if you could have a look at the site and send any feedback to:

**Sophie Bird, Quality Advisor,
Wildlife Licensing and Registration
Service**

**1/17 Temple Quay House,
2 The Square,
Temple Quay,
Bristol BS1 6EB.**

Tel: 0117 372 6280

Fax: 0117 372 8206

E-mail: Sophie.bird@animalhealth.gsi.gov.uk

Sky Hunters

The Passion of Falconry

By Hossein Amirsadeghi

Reviewed by Marian Eldrett

This book is described as “..... a treasury of information and a visual feast for falconers and those interested in nature, hunting, birds of prey, art, photography, history, sociology, conservation and, last but not least, human drama.” Quite a claim! Does it live up to it? On the whole, I would say “Yes, it does”.

In the first section, *The Passion for Falconry*, Sir Mark Allen delves into what has driven each and every falconer in the pursuit of the sport, historically and in the present, both at home and abroad.

The next section, *The Sport of Adrenalin* by Roger Upton, takes the uninitiated reader into the sport itself, describing hunting scenarios in the Middle East and in the Western world. His passion for the sport is clear as he says “To practise the grand old sport of falconry well demands dedication to its principles. Done well, it is the finest of field sports and one of the purest.”

Patrick Morel is the author of the following section, entitled (somewhat misleadingly) *The Emperor’s Legacy*. In this section Patrick gives one of the best, no-nonsense descriptions of the practical art of falconry I have ever read. He takes the reader methodically through the sport, explaining falconry terms and practices in a clear and concise manner. Throughout he stresses that the written word is no substitute for experience and practice “As in all other art forms, there is a skill that can only be acquired by putting oneself to the task.” I will freely admit that I learned a lot from this section and I suspect many others will too.

We then have two sections dealing with falconry history; the first by Sir Terence Clark on Asia, followed by S. Kent Carnie on the Americas. Both sections are full of information about the development of falconry throughout the ages. Personally, I have never been excited by history of any kind, but I am sure anyone interested will find both these sections truly fascinating.

The author then takes us through his travels as he strives to find out more about the art of falconry. He describes this section as “..... a fascinating picture of falcons in their settings, with a glimpse into the lives of the people who practise and support the sport across the world.” Along the way he meets several characters who will be familiar to many falconers – it almost becomes a case of “spot the falconry celebrity”. He travels through Europe, to Asia and on to the USA and Canada. It is fascinating to follow him as he joins falconers hunting in these different countries.

So far I have not mentioned the illustrations and photographs throughout the book – I have left the best till last. The photos are arranged by country, corresponding to the author’s travels, and are just brilliant. Many “blink and you miss it” moments have been captured by the



camera and several photos are truly breathtaking. If all you do is simply pick up this book and look at the pictures (there are more than 800 in total) you will not be disappointed. Just by doing that you will get a good idea of what the author is attempting to convey. The saying “a picture equals a thousand words” has never been truer than in these pages.

The book is concluded with a useful glossary of falconry terms, bibliography and list of Latin names of birds.

The book has over 300 pages and is one of those books which, once read, will still be picked up over and over again, if only to admire the photos. It could be viewed as an educational book for the falconer, but it is far more than that. As the author says “This is a book intended for the general public and not a manual on the sport of falconry. Spellbinding in its photographic reach, this is an art-historic, personal-visual journey, a feast for the eyes of initiates and the uninitiated, a traveller’s tale, recounting encounters with people in exotic places, set against backgrounds with hunting birds of prey as the star attraction.” It is definitely a worthwhile addition to anyone’s collection.

**Sky Hunters – The Passion of Falconry is published by
TransGlobe Publishing Limited,
35 Old Queen Street,
London SW1H 9JD.
E-mail: info@tgpublishingltd.com
Price: £45
ISBN: 978-0-9545083-2-6**



Defra and Deregistration

At the time of writing this in December the two devolved governments in Wales and Scotland have yet to implement their relaxation but we have high hopes they will enact the new law before this year's breeding season.

The RSPB announced rather dramatically that "Government gives green light to falcon thieves" (Legal Eagle issue 56). We know this not to be the case, and that any illegally held hawk or falcon can be tested by DNA using the A10 just as efficiently as it would with a registration certificate. However, all raptor keepers are in the spotlight and will remain so for as long as there are idiots and opportunists out there masquerading as falconers. If you suspect that someone is holding a raptor illegally, it is your duty to report them. If you fail to act, you are putting the future of your sport at risk.

Hybrids

Hybrids are always a topic for hot debate. Love or loathe them they are with us. The British Falconers' Club has made the move towards easily identifying them by requiring that hybrids flown by club members carry a pink leg ring.

Defra, Hybrids, the Festival of Falconry and Quarry Licences

However, this will not satisfy BirdLife International which has distributed a position paper suggesting that hybrids be banned throughout the EU. (They are already banned in Germany.) This would be a major retrograde step because the production of hybrids (and domestic purebreds) reduces the reliance on wild caught falcons in those Arab countries that have relied on a substantial wild take harvest each autumn. There remains the on-going problem with Cites and European Article 10 certificates. Hybrids cannot be defined on either of these forms in the key boxes for common and scientific names, which corrupts the data on pure bred falcons. Hawk Board has proposed to the UK management authority (Defra) that this be changed at the next Cites conference that takes place in Qatar in January 2010.

Festival of Falconry 2009

Plans are well advanced. The venue is once again at Englefield Estate, near Reading on the weekend of 12 & 13 July 2009. The new website www.falconryfestival.com is up and running and contains everything you need to book tickets, camping places, and plan this fantastic weekend.

The organisers learnt a great deal from the first Festival in 2007. There will be more facilities (food and lavatories), and a complete re-think on the layout. This will put everything closer together and more accessible. Once again the arena will demonstrate the very best in our culture, heritage and sport. We know the real buzz came in the evening at the many country camps and we are focusing on this for those staying on site.

The UK clubs will be well represented along with the rest of the world and falconers affiliated to clubs or counties should join together to make a group booking for camping pitches, because once allocated they will **not** be altered. So it is no good turning up on the day and wanting to camp next to your best friend who you didn't know was also coming!

Elections

The last Hawk Board elections failed to find two of the vacant posts for specialists. This caused some concern – the work load is not shared and there is insufficient input from experts. As a result the constitution has changed to allow for elections on a rolling basis. So 2009 will see three vacancies for specialists available. Remember anyone can be proposed but votes are restricted to member clubs. So contact Mike Clowes HB coordinator via the website www.hawkboard-cff.org.uk with your recommendations.

Quarry Licences

Natural England (Wales and Scotland remain separate) now administers all licences for so-called 'pest' and other quarry species in England. They are reviewing the whole issue in a consultation document that closes in March 2009. The board will make sure that any changes do not impact on falconry.

However, and you should take note, a Welshman has recently been successfully prosecuted by the police (not by a busy-body NGO) for flying a Harris hawk in urban areas in direct contravention of the open general licences. He did not fulfil the terms of the licence nor did he have permission from the necessary authorities. It is to be recommended that those who consider slipping a hawk from a car in such circumstances change their hawking practice immediately. There is now a legal precedent which could give you a criminal record.

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.

COCH-Y-BONDDU BOOKS

Pentrerhedyn Street, Machynlleth, Powys SY20 8DJ, U.K.

Phone: 0870 300 2004 Fax: 01654-702857

paulmorgan@anglebooks.com www.anglebooks.com

NEW BOOKS ON FALCONRY & RAPTORS

IMPRINT ACCIPITER II. MICHAEL McDERMOTT. Hbk.....	£40.00
GOSHAWK: MEMORIES OF A SPANISH GOSHAWKER. PAREJA-OBREGON. Hbk.....	£50.00
Y2K FALCONRY. PETE SMITH. Hbk.....	£39.95
UNDERSTANDING GOSHAWKS. DARRYL PERKINS. Hbk.....	£55.00
SHAHEEN: A FALCONER'S JOURNEY FROM TURKEY. PAUL HARRIS JONES. Hbk.....	£25.00
HAWKING & FALCONRY FOR BEGINNERS. ADRIAN HALLGARTH. Hbk.....	£19.95
HOOD, LEASH & LURE: FALCONRY IN THE 20TH CENTURY. ROGER UPTON. Hbk.....	£30.00
HAWKING GROUND QUARRY. MARTIN HOLLINSHEAD. Hbk.....	£19.95
A PASSION FOR HARRIS HAWKS. MARTIN HOLLINSHEAD. Hbk.....	£22.95
HARRIS HAWK DAYS. MARTIN HOLLINSHEAD. Hbk.....	£16.95
THE HARRIS HAWK: MANAGEMENT, TRAINING & HUNTING. LEE WILLIAM HARRIS. Hbk.....	£24.95
ARAB FALCONRY. ROGER UPTON. Hbk.....	£60.00
MUSINGS OF AN AFGHAN FALCONER. SIRDAR MOHAMED OSMAN. Hbk. £30.00.....	Pbk. £18.00
HUNTING WITH HARRIS HAWKS. BOB DALTON. Pbk.....	£12.95
THE RED-TAILED HAWK. 4TH EDITION. LIAM McGRANAGHAN. Hbk.....	£35.00
THE RED-TAILED HAWK: THE GREAT UNKNOWN. BEATRIZ E. CANDIL GARCIA. Hbk.....	£39.99
MY SAN DIEGO AND HER FALCONRY. CRAIG CULVER. Hbk.....	£25.00
FALCONRY EQUIPMENT. BRYAN KIMSEY & JIM HODGE. Pbk.....	£25.00

RAPTOR MANAGEMENT & ECOLOGY

UNDERSTANDING THE BIRD OF PREY. DR NICK FOX. Hbk. (£43.50).....	£30.00
ACCIPITRINE BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS: DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT. MICHAEL McDERMOTT. Hbk.....	£50.00
CAPTIVE RAPTOR MANAGEMENT & REHABILITATION. NAISBITT & HOLZ. Hbk.....	£29.95
BIRDS OF PREY: HEALTH & DISEASE. 3RD EDITION. J.E. COOPER. Hbk.....	£79.50
GYRFALCON. EMMA FORD. Hbk.....	£65.00
THE GYRFALCON. POTAPOV & SALE. Hbk.....	£45.00
THE GOSHAWK. ROBERT KENWARD. Hbk.....	£45.00
RAPTORS IN CAPTIVITY: GUIDELINES FOR CARE AND MANAGEMENT. LORI M.S. ARENT. Hbk.....	£29.95
RAPTOR RESEARCH AND MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES. BIRD & OTHERS. Pbk.....	£29.95
CAPTIVE RAPTOR MANAGEMENT & REHABILITATION. NAISBITT & HOLZ. Hbk.....	£29.95
RAPTORS OF THE WORLD: A FIELD GUIDE. FERGUSON-LEES & CHRISTIE. Pbk.....	£24.99

NEW LIMITED EDITION FALCONRY BOOKS

CLASSICAL FALCONRY: A TREATISE ON ROOK & CROW HAWKING. Hbk. NICK FOX.....	£75.00
FALCONRY IN LITERATURE. DAVID HOROBIN. Hbk.....	£29.95
THE LOO FALCONRY. VAN DE WALL. Hbk.....	£60.00
DUCK HAWKING. JOE ROY III. Hbk.....	£29.95
REMINISCENCES OF A FALCONER. MAJOR C.H. FISHER. Hbk.....	£30.00
FALCONRY. GILBERT BLAINE. Hbk.....	£25.00
LAST WOLF HAWKER: THE EAGLE FALCONRY OF FRIEDRICH REMMLER. M. HOLLINSHEAD. Hbk.....	£30.00
GERMAN EAGLE. FRITZ LOGES: MASTER FALCONER. M. HOLLINSHEAD. Hbk.....	£30.00

BARGAIN-PRICED HAWKING BOOKS.

FALCONRY & HAWKING. PHILLIP GLASIER. NEW Hbk. (£35.00).....	£20.00
THE MODERN FALCONER. DIANA DURMAN-WALTERS. Hbk. (£19.95).....	£9.95
JEMIMA PARRY-JONES' FALCONRY: CARE, CAPTIVE BREEDING & CONSERVATION. Pbk. (£12.99).....	£7.95
TRAINING BIRDS OF PREY. JEMIMA PARRY-JONES. Pbk. (£12.99).....	£7.95
UNDERSTANDING OWLS. JEMIMA PARRY-JONES. Pbk. (£12.99).....	£7.95
THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FALCONRY. ADRIAN WALKER. Hbk. (£39.95).....	£19.95
FALCONRY FOR YOU. HUMPHREY DRUMMOND / AP EVANS. Hbk. (£12.95).....	£4.95
A MIXED BAG. MARTIN HOLLINSHEAD. Pbk. (£12.95).....	£5.95

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF JACK MAVROGORDATO.

- A FALCON IN THE FIELD • A HAWK FOR THE BUSH • BEHIND THE SCENES
- 3 volumes. **£110.00**

SEARCHABLE SECURE WEBSITE www.anglebooks.com

WE HAVE THE MOST EXTENSIVE STOCK OF OUT-OF-PRINT & ANTIQUARIAN BOOKS ON FALCONRY AND RAPTORS (AS WELL AS THE LARGEST STOCK OF FISHING AND SPORTING BOOKS IN THE WORLD). IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR A PARTICULAR TITLE JUST PHONE OR E-MAIL. WE ALWAYS WANT TO BUY COLLECTIONS OF SECOND-HAND SPORTING BOOKS.

U.K. postage extra up to a maximum of £5. Overseas postage at cost. MASTERCARD / VISA / SWITCH



Ben Long

The most comprehensive and best quality range of falconry products around - and surprisingly affordable.



We've got just about everything - Including the bells and whistles!

We are very beginner-friendly so please phone for free, impartial advice.

Phone, fax or e-mail for our 20-page, all colour catalogue or visit the website, both of which include information for beginners.

**Ben Long, PO Box 65
Stinchcombe, Dursley GL11 6WZ**

Tel: 0870 609 3069 or 07970 038169

Fax: 01453 519710

e-mail: info@benlongfalconry.com

www.benlongfalconry.com

The Gyr Falcon



Is he the King of the Falcons?

Author with Gyr falcon

To choose – what a curious privilege! Very few times do we think about it, but this incredible gift means that man and the rest of the animals are a world apart. Neither the scorpion, nor the frog, nor the eagle, nor the rabbit, nor the wolf, nor the lamb will ever have the opportunity to choose. Their destiny is fixed from the moment of their birth. However, even though we can, very few of us take a different course than others. This is never so obvious as it is in the world of falconry. In my time as a falconer I have made the “falconer’s cross” many times, but never so many as when I chose to fly a gyr falcon which was not imprinted and with the aim of hunting ducks with waiting-on flights. For this reason I would say that the gyr falcon is the King of the Falcons – the bird that nearly any falconer would wish to fly, but the one that nearly nobody dares to face.

Logic tested

You could say that the training of a bird of prey, of any breed, is like a test of logic where we have a very long list of problems. This, by itself, creates the first problem as the list is not in order. To know in which order we have to solve each problem is the first secret. To pass our exam we have two advantages that no examinee has. The first one is that we don’t have a limit of time, but be careful as the consequences of taking too long in solving one or several of our problems can result in failure. We must never forget that our exam is “alive”. The second advantage is clearly a trap. We can search in all the books we find, and we can ask all the people we know, but to know how to properly select all the information we need is the second secret and, in my opinion, the most important one. Experience has showed me that to make 100% use of this advantage one needs a natural instinct and this instinct is something which cannot be learned. There are a couple of tricks to make up for this lack of talent; they consist of believing only what we can see or what people we trust tell us they have seen, and to pay attention to only those who speak from their own experience – in other words, listen only to those who have already done what we intend to do. We have to discard systematically all the information which comes from those who talk for talking’s sake. In falconry, as in nearly everything else in life, talking is free – but to make good

birds it costs much more. Having all these principles in mind, I am going to try to tell you about the gyr falcon as a hunting bird, about all the myths that are unavoidably linked to it, and which have turned out to be real and which a fallacy – about my first experience of the Giant of the North.

The first thing I had to do before I had the falcon was to try to get as clear an idea as possible of the most important characteristics of the bird that I intended to fly. In Spain, the falconry culture that exists around the gyr falcon is very poor. Most of the people think that a gyr falcon is basically a saker and this opinion has been promoted by people who breed or fly sakers or saker hybrids. If we ask a breeder of gyr falcons or those who fly gyr falcons if there is a similarity with sakers, they will tell us that they are as similar as an egg and a chestnut. As we saw before, this is the problem. However, even the beginner will appreciate two plain differences: the price and the size. With the money that it costs for a male gyr falcon you can buy half a dozen saker males. The flying weight of a female saker is the same or less than the flying weight of a male gyr falcon. If we look at both birds in more detail, we will see that the dimensions of their bodies, both perched or whilst flying, are very different. The best sakers are the ones which are most like the gyr falcons, just as the worst gyr falcons are similar to sakers. Captive breeding of hybrids and the mathematics (e.g. three quarters, seven eighths) have made all this very confusing. If we are not real experts, or we don't completely trust the breeder, it's very easy for us to be cheated. My opinion is that if we have to compare the gyr falcon with any other bird to understand better what we are going to face, then this should not be the saker.

"The gyr falcon is like a giant merlin, with its same homogenous feathers, with its same hollow and prominent chest, with its same feet; not so big but strong, with its incredibly short wings to drive his powerful frame.

THE GYR FALCON IS! THE GYR FALCON!"

Dr. Felix Rodriguez de la Fuente (El arte de cetreria 1964)

My choice to face this personal challenge has been a male gyr falcon who I have called "Jeremy", a name I thought of long before his birth whilst I was dreaming of this challenge. The colour didn't matter to me much – for economical reasons it was

not going to be white or black – any colour in between was OK for me. The two things that were of vital importance to me were these:

To know that my bird was 100% a gyr falcon and didn't have any blood from any other breed. As I said before, to me falconry is a personal challenge in which we have to face ourselves. I have had eight seasons flying a gyrfalcon x peregrine hybrid, "Merlin", who has really lived up to his name in that he has proved to be a real wizard. He has hunted wild quarry with waiting-on flights, with a regularity and style which has been admired by many people. I now wanted to know if I was good enough to withstand the pressure and stress that flying a pure gyr falcon would surely bring. I now know that I underestimated the qualities of my future rival, but we'll talk about this later on. I know that a lot of people think that there are many birds more suited to falconry than the gyr falcon. If we consider what we risk and what we can achieve, without any doubt they are right. But if we look at it like that there are very few activities as fraught with problems as falconry itself. If you want to be purely practical, then you don't do falconry. The second thing, maybe even more important, was the rearing of the chick. It should be totally parent reared. My refusal to handle and fly imprinted birds is definite. It's well-founded, apart from a lot of technical factors about which I'm not going to speak now as this is not the subject in an absolutely personal view of falconry. It's as important to me for my birds not to have any degree of imprint with man as it is for them to have wings.

To make sure that my gyr falcon was going to be exactly as I wanted, I called my good friend, Derek Stotton. Those who think that falconry is mostly a lottery (that is to say, that you depend on whatever bird you acquire) will think that I'm crazy putting everything on just one bird. It is a good job that this is an opinion with which I don't agree. Obviously there are some birds better than others even if, say, one out of a hundred is no good for hunting but what is not possible is that only one out of a hundred is good for hunting. When we know exactly what we want, and we don't accept anything less, everything turns out to be much easier.

A sound falcon

The bird from Derek was both physically and psychologically sound. The bird's future

potential, from the very moment me and my friend Muriel took him out of the box and removed the sheaths protecting his wings and tail, depended solely on me.

To Muriel he appeared to be a very big bird, but that was not a problem. The best thing would have been to put him in an aviary, for 15 days or so, for him to recover from the journey, but I could not do this. So the first thing I wanted was for the bird to eat and to take on liquid in order to be well hydrated. In the box there was a flask of medicine and, when I phoned Derek to tell him that the bird had arrived safely, his advice was :

- minimize any stress
- don't feed him any pigeon
- don't take off the hood until he is eating with it on and he recognises the sound of your voice (if this is removed too soon or in too much light, the bird may become crazy)
- give him the medicine to prevent aspergillosis every day

For the bird to eat as soon as possible, I was to cut food into tiny pieces and place in a cup or on a small plate. I was to feed this to him with tweezers and, whenever he started to eat, I should soak one of the titbits in the medicine and give it to him until it was all gone. I was to vary the order in which I gave him the pieces soaked in the medicine as it would not taste good and if he learned to know it was coming he would refuse to eat it. They are incredibly clever and, sometimes, you do not realise how clever.

With these words Derek ended his gyr falcon's intensive taming course. I was to follow these instructions before going on with the training. Now I am going to talk about the controversial subject of the health of these birds.

You can't talk about the health of the gyr falcon without talking first about captive breeding, which has changed the way we train these birds to fly and to hunt. Long ago, when all the falconry birds were wild-captured, the gyr falcons were of little value as falconry birds as they had so many health issues – they suffered a lot with foot problems and would often die from unknown diseases. The fact that they came from places with extreme climates, and that there was often too much time between capture and arriving in the falconer's hands resulting in them being badly managed and underfed, meant that very few of them survived their first season. Captive breeding has considerably changed this and has made

it possible for us to have access to a gyr falcon chick in the same way as we have access to other birds' chicks. Even so, the gyr falcon has some health issues which are typical to the species and I am going to try to analyse these.

The first one is aspergillosis, a condition to which they have a tendency. Frequently you hear that the climatic conditions of the place where the bird has been bred, particularly the humidity, is the main reason that a bird will suffer from this in its future. This is not entirely true. Obviously aspergillosis develops better in some atmospheres than others, but the climate is not so important. We could say that the problem is, rather, hereditary. In other words, that there are gyr falcons who, even though not suffering from the condition themselves, tend to produce a high number of chicks who are going to suffer from it. The best we can do to avoid the risk is to buy our gyr falcon from a breeder who can show the least number of cases from his birds as possible. The birds that come originally from American gyr falcon bloodlines produce fewer cases than the Europeans. Once we have the bird with us, we must treat him with any of the quality medicines that are now available to prevent it. Once diagnosed, it can't be cured and is fatal.

The second point we must have in mind is the food, especially the question of pigeons. Can the gyr falcon eat these birds or not? When they were captured from the wild and fed pigeons, a lot of them died as the pigeon carry a lot of diseases for which the gyr falcon has no immunity. However, the gyr falcons bred in captivity seem to be more disposed to resist them. Even so, to give frozen pigeon as food, especially to a young pure gyr falcon, is a bit dangerous. To give them recently killed (either by us or them) is safer but it is a risk which I, personally, am reluctant to take when it can be avoided completely by feeding quail instead. Other than quail, my gyr falcon has eaten one-day old chicks, partridges, pheasants, ducks and hens, both frozen and fresh, without any problem at all.

The third and last thing to bear in mind about the health of the gyr falcon is the climate and how this affects its feet. Being honest, I think that the temperature shouldn't be a problem if we are a bit clever. I have had to be no more careful with my gyr falcon than I have with my goshawks and peregrines. Maybe my passion for the northern birds of prey has given me a special insight to prevent

problems, but I have never used methods like air-conditioning. I think that the main problem with the health of the feet of the gyr falcon is a direct consequence of it being in the hands of "falconers" with poor spirit. To acquire one of these beautiful and strong birds only for it to spend all its life in an aviary, or attached to a perch, being fattened up as if it were a small pig, to see if it can make a weight 20 grams more than our neighbour's bird, is probably one of the most unnatural things that we can do. The gyr falcon is one of the three or four birds of prey most evolved for activity, regardless of the weather and over long distances. To deprive him of this activity, particularly in his early years, is to sentence him to suffering, both physical and psychological. The best remedy I can suggest to avoid any health problems associated with overweight, is to get the bird hunting. Gyr falcons that are hunted and have good basic hygiene conditions, including a good perch, and are in the hands of an observant falconer, are generally very healthy and very strong birds.

The first time I put Jeremy on my fist, I discovered the strength and persistence with which these birds try to fly away from the glove on feeling contact with something strange, even with the hood on. It is incomparable and it seems that the bird is not going to give up, even if he loses his life in the process. So, to put Derek's expert advice into practice and minimize stress, I decided to leave the gyr falcon on a perch, with his hood on, and only picked him up twice a day to feed him. I'm not going to talk here about the conditioned reflex as it would take too long, but what you must be clear about when training a bird of prey is that we must communicate with it. It doesn't really matter what we do as long as the bird understands what we are trying to achieve.

Increasing the weight

In this simple way in just a few days I managed to increase Jeremy's weight by nearly 100 grams more than when he arrived. He soon knew his name and the sound which meant he was to be fed. He learned that to be on my fist, to take notice of my contact and listen to my voice were all things that he should welcome. Therefore, I got ready for one of the most magical moments of training: to take off the hood from my young pupil for the first time – one of those moments I really cherish. All was perfect as long as he was feeding. However, as soon as the food was gone and despite the fact that it was in poor

light, he tried to fly away. I encouraged him back on to the fist and put the hood on again – that was easier said than done. To talk about the gyr falcon and the hood would need a chapter to itself. I have the advantage of having quite a lot of "good at hood" goshawks behind me, so I know quite well how and when it should be used. Most people think that having a gyr falcon "good at hood" is nearly impossible, but this is not true. I say this because my bird let himself be hooded as if he were made of porcelain. Even so I recognise that to achieve this is more difficult than to fly, and then to hunt, with some birds. The secret is how to put it on and this is very important. We must bring it near decisively but slowly, as if we do it quickly each time we fail we will hit him and the bird will interpret the hood as being an object with which we attack him and each time it will be worse. It is even more important when we put it on, when we take it off and the length of time it remains on. To analyse all this in detail would require us to talk about the whole training process of the falcon – maybe another time.

The training process, until we start to fly our bird to the lure, is much the same as with any other bird, but we must be extremely skilled and meticulous in the handling of the bird. As early as possible in training, the gyr falcon requires 100% concentration from the falconer. We must think about each step we are going to take and its consequences. The learning capacity of these birds is unbelievable, but I firmly believe that more remarkable than their intelligence is their pride – a pride possessed by only the more powerful and self-sufficient hunters on the planet. For us humans who live in groups and accept a series of rules and a hierarchy in exchange for the protection of the pack, it is difficult to understand the lone hunters who accept their victories and defeats alone. You must be mentally strong to live like this, moreso in some of the most inhospitable places on earth. The gyr falcon has no need of us and he knows it. In his world there are no rules, so the imposition of "by hook or by crook" not only doesn't work with him but makes him acquire bad habits more quickly, and in a more irreversible way, than any other bird I have ever seen. If we are not able to gain his friendship with good manners, we won't get anything positive back. This is what has made falconry the sport it is over hundreds of years and has exalted it to the category of "art". To accept the animal as it is and enter his world to understand him is

the only way we can let him into our world. This is what has fascinated me since I was a child and this is the only falconry I can understand.

Jeremy's training continued until we reached passes at the lure. I know that most people don't do passes at the lure with falcons which are going to be flown at waiting-on flights. I consider this a mistake which can bring serious consequences. The gyr falcon's capacity to make stoops at the lure proved to be surprising. Unlike the peregrine, he is able to continue long after he starts to pant but whereas the peregrine, at this stage of training, will tend to do ring up if we hide the lure, the gyr falcon literally stops over the falconer, at no more than about 12 metres high, and stays there until we show it the lure again. Then I arrived at the moment when I had to start thinking how I was going to get the bird to fly really high. Pigeons, that until now had been my

was, of course, an emphatic "Yes". "Then train him with a kite". Even though I had never flown any bird with a kite before, and no-one had had a good word to say about this method of training, Derek's words convinced me. Some people may think that I am merely "sucking up" to him, but nothing is further from the truth. I have spent many hours speaking with this man and, each time I do, my falconry goes better. I write this here because, if I didn't, I would be lying. I firmly believe that to recognise the merits of others makes us more noble. He offered to send me a kite from England, but I told him not to as I already knew someone from whom I could obtain one.

The first thing I had to do was to get the gyr falcon used to the presence of the kite and for him to fly under it. I thought that now the problems would start, as gyr falcons are afraid of any larger birds flying

it even if it is too high with really strong winds. The flying capacity of these animals is unbelievable and they also love to fly. Jeremy has, in fact, never landed before catching the lure.

Training to the kite

The first bagged game must be given before the bird is going up to the kite at a height of 100 metres. If we wait till the bird has been flying to the kite for too many days, and it goes up too high, it will be impossible for us to attract his attention from below and he won't pay attention to our signals or calls. So, one day when there was no wind at all, myself and Muriel prepared to teach him the lesson. Although the kite was not in the sky, Jeremy started to fly from the fist, wings beating and going up without stopping until a height of about 80 metres. He came over our heads and, at that moment, after waving the glove, I released the partridge that I had ready and gave him a shout. The gyr falcon stooped vertically and, with his wings tightly closed, he hit it and after striking it a couple of more times on the ground, he bound to it. It was the first live prey the bird had ever seen. On the day after next, without the kite, the gyr falcon started to fly and was attacking all the small birds that were there. When there were none left, he went directly to a flock of crows that were passing about one kilometre away. He went out of sight and we also lost the receiver signal. After a while we found him flying around a little poplar grove where the crows were. I took out the lure and the falcon came to me as if nothing had happened. Maybe those who think that gyr falcons are not aggressive birds will change their minds on reading this. Lack of aggression has never been a problem for my bird. Quite the contrary – excessive aggression has been the problem.

After 10 days flying every other day I got Jeremy used to going up to the kite at the maximum height of the line (in theory 300 metres, but in practice not nearly as high as this). Then came the moment when I took the lure off the kite and once he reached this pitch to give him bagged game below it. I had chosen pheasants for this new stage and at last I was going to see Jeremy stoop from a really high pitch. To discuss here whether these birds stoop vertically and at what speed, I think is a waste of time. Most of you will have seen videos, most of them from America, in which the capacity of these birds to stoop is evident. The lesson went perfectly and one of those moments of which I had dreamed happened in front



Elpidio showing off his falcon

way of solving this problem, were discarded because of their diseases. To make a gyr falcon fly high, giving him any other kind of bagged game, like partridge, pheasant or duck, isn't a feasible method. The gyr falcon is, unquestionably, the fastest hawk in a direct pursuit and if we try to encourage him with bagged game, this will ruin him.

At this time of the year, as every other year, Derek came to visit me and he came out with me to fly Jeremy. After the first day of flying he congratulated me on the handling, the training and the performance of the bird over open land. Once again his words made me think. He asked me "Do you want your gyr falcon to be an exceptional wait-on bird?" My answer

over them and seeing this large kite flying over him I thought he would be really afraid – but I was wrong. The first day he saw it he soon realised that he wasn't in danger and he ignored it. For three or four days I continued doing passes at the lure under the kite, using the same lure that he would be taking from the kite in the future. The first time I put the lure on the kite it was at some 30 metres from the ground. I let the bird free and I walked on until I was under the kite. Jeremy seemed to understand the game perfectly and he captured the lure. The first problem which people consider when using the kite is that you need the right air to be able to fly it. This is only half true as the gyr falcon is able to go up to

of my very eyes. The power of the strike and the vision of Jeremy throwing himself up again, whilst the pheasant was bumping along the ground in a cloud of feathers and dust, will stay with me forever. I arranged to repeat the exercise with two good friends of mine; Nacho, who took the photographs in this article, and Juanita. It was the third time that my gyr falcon was going to go up to the kite without the lure on it. The two times before his climb had been very direct, the same as when the lure had been on it, but this time things suddenly changed. Jeremy took off and went far away, his wings beating without stopping. He gained more height far away from us and turned to come back over our heads, passing about 40 metres over the kite. I produced the bagged game which received the same strike as the others had before and looked at my friends who each had the same look of amazement on their faces as I did. I repeated this lesson several times more to fix a good height in his mind, but from then on the kite was nothing to him. With only two bagged game, the intelligence of Jeremy had assimilated the change to the new game. Now came the moment which worries people the most when training their birds with a kite: to take the kite away completely. However, I knew this would not be a problem. As I said before, my bird had been flying for several days as if the kite was not there and, so, when I took it away things went exactly the same.

I have only trained once with a kite and this was to train my gyr falcon. I think that it is certainly the best method to train these birds. For other species, now that I have done waiting-on flights with both pigeons and a kite, I think that a combination of both methods is the best you can do. The kite lets you start presenting bagged pigeons with the falcons already flying at a good pitch. But we should be careful: if we don't know how to handle and motivate our peregrines correctly, we are far from achieving the same as with the hybrids, and light years away from a gyr falcon. The kite, like many other methods of training, works perfectly if we do it right and doesn't work at all if we do it wrong. This is why many people have avoided using it. As always, communication with the bird is really the great secret of falconry.

End of the first season

The first season was nearly at an end and Jeremy had become a spectacular waiting-on falcon, who was 100% committed. To me this was more than enough. I had

far exceeded my best hopes for my first experience with a gyr falcon. This does not mean I am not conscious of what I have left to achieve, i.e. entering at quarry. Until my falcons hunt regularly, and without losing any of their style, then the training has not ended. But I am never in a hurry; I am a long-distance runner.

On the last but one day of the season, Julio Cesar and Muriel came with me. The kite had not been a part of my equipment for many days. I let the gyr falcon go free and he went so far away and so high that we could hardly see him. After some minutes, that to me seemed everlasting, he started to turn to come back over our heads. Julio kept looking overhead with what I imagined were field glasses. When he was overhead, I released a bagged duck and the sound of his stoop silenced everything in the vicinity. While I was letting him feed, Muriel came up to me and said

and the coming down. These two factors, that can be witnessed by no instrument other than the amazed eyes of man, are the ones which make a great distinction between one falcon and another.

The last day of the season had arrived and I always fly alone on this day; it is reserved for just my bird and me. The flight was perfect. When I held the jesses of my falcon in my hand, I felt something indescribable. I sat down by his side as he skinned the duck at his pleasure and I looked to the sky; the sky that seems so immense to our eyes but that had seemed so tiny when contrasted by Jeremy's wings. Then I asked myself "Is this the king of the falcons?" If, like me, what you look for in falconry is excitement, the answer can only be an emphatic "Yes. I was in front of the most beautiful, the biggest, the strongest and the most clever of all falcons – the gyr falcon !



A successful flight

"Julio has calculated a 300 metre vertical stoop". I remember answering "Does Julio have an eagle eye which enables him to calculate a bird's height just by looking at it?" The reply was "No, he has measured it". My amazement must have been clear to see as I had never seen one of those gadgets for measuring height. I am fanatical about height, but not just for itself, but because the higher a falcon goes the more spectacular are the two most important moments of waiting-on flights: the going up

Article dedicated to the memory of O. Carlos Vicente Fernandes – "Thank you"

I have to point out to everyone that bagged game is illegal in this country – Ed

Hawking on the Isle of Arran



The Island of Arran lies off the west coast of Scotland and is frequently referred to as “Scotland in miniature”, with spectacular hills to the north and rolling farmland to the south. Brown Hares are almost a pest species and whilst Grouse numbers are not great, reasonable coveys are to be found providing you have good dogs. This September marked the eighth visit to the Island of the Scottish Hawking Club, for what is now a five-day meet. What began as a one day visit between the first and last boat with three eagles to fly at Hares, has grown into a relaxed and very enjoyable part of my year.

On the first trip we had Tizzi Hodson and Andrew Knowles Brown with their Golden, plus a gent whose name escapes me with his Verreaux. Both Golden caught Hare and the sun shone. This was during September '96, though it was not until '02 that things started to move again. In October, as part of a Joint meet with the British Falconers Club (a friend of mine was a member) the Scottish Club and its members were back on the Island. Andrew had Gorby with him, Dougie Thomson had his Redtail, Ronnie O'Farrel a cast of Harris's Hawks, Jim Burrell, Jenny and Derek Lilley also had Harris. Hares were caught, friendships were formed, insults were exchanged and all wished to return the following year.

During the ensuing years there have been a few changes, sadly Derek is no longer with us, but the Arran meet has gone from strength to strength. Even those years when the weather has been

foul have made little impact. This has been due at least in part to the efforts of Murray Boal to entertain the guests during the evenings. The Isle of Arran has no shortage of friendly bars with roaring fires and even on the worst of days you can take a trip to the Island's distillery in Lochranza, the hill above which is home to one of the island's breeding pairs of Golden Eagles. However, given the Gulf Stream and the frequency of an Indian summer on this island, it's not usually necessary to endure such hardship.

Over the years Andrew has brought over a selection of Eagles including African Crowned, Bonelli's, Golden and this year his incredible Golden/Ornate Hybrid. They have frequently taken hare but always they have provided the WOW! factor.

The range of falcons brought along by club members have included in addition to Peregrine and Saker such a selection of hybrids that I get somewhat confused. There have been Redtails of various hue (I really like Redtails) and an awful lot of Harris's Hawks.

This mix has provided a lot of fun and simple enjoyment – never more so than when one falconer became stuck up to his waist in soft ground. Perhaps with good reason, as he was holding his bird aloft and cursing me for regarding it as a photo opportunity.

This year after the wet July and August and against expectations, we had tremendous weather and were able to spend three glorious days on the heather with five English Pointers and one German Wirehair, enjoying excellent dog work

and superb flying, which included a most breathtaking stoop from Ronnie's Falcon (the grouse lost a few feathers)

Grouse numbers were up on previous years and whilst there was quite a bit of action for the falcons and generally plenty to see, we had nothing in the bag. However, the enjoyment was not diminished by that. I had a great time, what with dogs pointing voles, falcons landing on the long lens of a camera and large expensive 4x4's getting stuck in the mud.

With Grouse conservation work dealt with for another year, we headed for farmland and set off in pursuit of hare, soon having our first in the bag and spectacular it was when we were treated to an impressive rugby tackle by Ronnie as he assisted his hawk.

On occasion the fun was fast and furious as, although no records were broken, we had no shortage of flights at good strong hares, a reasonable number of which found their way into the bag.

On the final day we flew only in the morning and with another hare taken, it was time to think of Cal Mac Ferries and the journey home. Some had to travel as far away as Kent – which to me is the other side of the moon as I hardly ever leave the Island. For me, it was now time to stop neglecting my own birds and dogs and settle down to a golden October on this Arran of the Many Stags .

Should any reader wish to visit the Island please get in touch.

E-mail: struthers@arranames.co.uk
Web: www.arranbirdsofprey.co.uk

Biff Norman - up date



Biff Norman and Kyle

In April of this year my husband Harry, four year old son Kyle and I travelled out to Croatia to visit Biff Norman and see how she has settled into not only a new home but a new country. She is now based at the Sokolarski Centre in Dubrava, near Sibernik, where she supports the team running Croatia's only falconry centre. We travelled directly from Gatwick to Split and had an amazing four days.

Approximately eight years ago I went to the annual Croatian Falconry Meet with Biff, and I was curious to see what, if anything, had changed in this beautiful and rather untamed country – well, what a difference a few years makes. All those years ago evidence of their painful civil war was all around – there were desolated villages; no-go areas due to land mines; and a struggling economy. Now they have an excellent road network in the Dalmatia region, villages have been rebuilt with due deference to their recent past and their economy has certainly picked up with a wide variety of shops, restaurants, bars and hotels. The

beach we visited at Solaris was spotless with beautiful amenities for all visitors but without the overcrowded feel that many tourist destinations have. Nearby is also the wonderful Krka National Park which contains an amazing collection of waterfalls that carry the icy waters from the mountains above down to the lower ground where it supplies power to the area through a hydroelectric dam. A network of wooden walkways take you over the rivers and waterfalls so a pair of sturdy shoes are recommended, along with a long rope if you intend taking a lively and adventurous child with you! Also in the park is a rebuilt watermill museum where cloth was once created, and a rather nice cafe serving amazingly good ice-cream (according to Kyle that is). In fact wherever we went the Croatians spoke excellent English and were both courteous and friendly.

The Sokolarski Centre is home to a collection of owls, hawks and falcons that all have their own tales to tell. None more so than a rather lovely gyr/saker falcon whom I volunteered to move during mews cleaning – a previous owner had become intimidated by her persistent

bating during picking up and so she had developed, in her mind, a perfect way to avoid handling and heaven-forbid, working. All I can say is, we got there in the end, although my appearance was probably just as ruffled as hers!

The centre is also at the forefront of raptor medical care in the area, and has two excellent vets on standby for any emergency or general treatment needed. There is a good-sized surgery within the grounds which also caters for any other local wild or domestic animal if necessary. On the morning of our arrival a box containing an extremely bedraggled mountain buzzard was left at the centre. The buzzard was quite literally crawling with mites (I'm sure most of you are feeling itchy right now!), his tail feathers had been cut off and his general health was very poor. He was placed in a secluded pen and provided with logs and rocks to stand on and a shelter as he was unable, at this point, to fly up to the perching above. After a couple of days of good food, clean water and anti-mite spray he began to look much brighter. Approximately three weeks later when the mites had moved on and he was fit and well, the buzzard's tail was impeded and he was returned to the mountains.

The centre is open for visitors at any time, although booking is advised as Emilio, the director, also travels far and wide to promote the welfare of all Croatia's raptors. The centre has the usual layout of a demonstration area, mews, raised lawns, and cafe linked together with gravelled walkways. Whilst we were there two school parties arrived and it was a pleasure watching Emilio and his display team. I confess I didn't understand a single word of Croatian spoken but the principles of falconry and the education message was very clear.

All three of us had a wonderful time in Croatia – Biff has a great team around her who all share her love of falconry and all things raptor. The countryside is beautiful but still wild; the food and drink is great; the weather is warmer (even the thunderstorms are amazing!); and most of all the pace of life is gentler. We can't wait to go back.

And from Biff

Hi Everyone.

I've been in Croatia for nearly two years now, and I must say every day has been a joy. When I first arrived I thought I would be dealing with birds of prey, but we get such a diverse range brought into the surgery and none of them are turned away. I'd like to say we get aardvarks to zebras, but aardvarks are a bit thin on the ground here, although some days it feels as though we have done the full alphabet.

I was just going over the list since I've been here, so far, Buzzards, red footed kestrel, sea eagle, snake eagle, storks, cuckoo, swallows, Eleanor's falcon, Lord alone knows how many scoops owls and European Eagle Owls, tortoises whose age range from a few weeks to one hundred years, a very rare bat with baby, swans - I could go on but the list would fill a page. However, my all time favourite is a snake, who came in with a dog bite, and stayed. It seems quite common in the villages to keep a house snake, as there is little use of poisons here and rats are kept down with snakes, so Pasquale became my house snake. She lives in my roof and keeps the gerbils in check - I see her from time to time taking the sun on my wall, or drinking from the pool, we smile and wave but since she's four foot long, as thick as my arm and can give you a nasty squeeze, a more intimate relationship is a bit risky.

For me Croatia is not so much a country more a state of mind. The people here are full of fun and are open for most things. This is a story I was told as I was admiring the shiny new highway that runs from Zagreb through the Velabitz mountains to Dubrovnik; it seems there was some trouble trying to get the road over a very steep bit in the mountains and many heads were put together but no solution was reached. A man from a village nearby suggested sending a donkey up to find the route, so that's what they did - up went the donkey followed by a man with poles and every time the donkey turned in went a pole. It's a four



Education at The Sokolarski Centre

lane highway now, but the route was planned by a donkey.

Okay, I know I'm a falconer and this is a falconry magazine, so perhaps I should say something on the subject. There are very few falconers here, less than 40 at the last count. At the moment little is known about Croatia's falconry history but as time goes on more information is coming to light. Croatia has had many years of occupation and war so manuscripts and other written evidence have been lost in the mists of time. However, as the old castles, of which there are many, are being renovated bits of falconry equipment keep turning up; the monasteries open their archives and fifteenth century recipes for curing sick hawks come to the surface, so it's all here, it's just a question of finding it. In Great Britain we are lucky to have absorbed some falconry terms into everyday use and that has kept falconry alive in some part. This isn't the case in Croatia, for example there isn't a word

for hood, so this makes the search more difficult.

As for the centre, we keep going upwards and onwards, and sometimes the dedication of Emilio and Alemka astounds me - a new surgery is being built with up to date diagnostic equipment, which means we will be able to treat and return birds much quicker, and Emilio's education programme for schools has brought the plight of birds of prey to the attention of the public, as well as giving them an insight into the art of falconry. We have two young volunteers, Josep and Ante, sterling lads who have given me a new perspective on flying, I'm getting a bit arthritic so I let the bird go and they fetch it back - no more kneeling on wet ground or crawling through dense undergrowth for me, I can highly recommend it.

So if anybody comes this way and feels the need to do half a day mute shovelling feel free to call me, we can even supply the shovel.

Regards to you all.

Biff, The Krka National Park.

As the season kicks off...



Scotland is a critical date in my calendar. Sometime in September I hope to be travelling northwards to that Mecca for game hawkers: a grouse moor.

After a miserable summer in 2007, grouse numbers may have been in doubt, but where I ended up, just above Perth, this was not the case. Indeed early season counts had put them slightly higher than last season, but there were problems. Firstly, hares. On a grouse moor this noble quarry of the lowland goshawk is viewed as vermin. They carry a heavy load of ticks which are passed to the grouse causing

disease and death. The keeper shoots them in large quantities, nearly 2,000 on this hill, but they persist. In an attempt to rid the hill of ticks, sheep are run to act as blotting paper. On the heather one week and into the dip the next; it is said to help. Secondly, the deer drag in an equal quantity of parasites. So sections of the moor are sealed off with high-powered electric fence so any flights have to take the fence line into account as grouse can use them as refuge with tragic consequences. Many years ago I witnessed a fine jerkin killed by such a line of wire.

This puts enormous strain on the falconer. Dogs find hare scent as appealing

as grouse so a solid point can be deceiving. The falconer puts his falcon up and patiently waits for her to gain pitch then with the energy most reserve for a world cup he shouts "get 'em up". Disaster. Up gets the hare and, worst of all, off it sets with the dog in hot pursuit. "A genuine mistake milord," when hauled in front of the judge for illegal coursing.

This is a real down on the falconer, and the falcon. No one wants to see a peregrine work so hard not to be rewarded. And as the season progresses the dogs seem to get worse. However, good flights were had despite the one frustration keepers can do nothing about. The hen harrier is

Nick Kester remembers the last





a magnificent bird, but on a grouse moor it can have people gnashing their teeth in frustration. One morning we ran the dogs on a promising piece of hill only to see four harriers quartering the moor. You guessed it, not a grouse in sight. Harriers move grouse out of their territories and break up established coveys.

The weather was kind, high clouds and no rain but once again came an issue. All week we were on the edge of a high pressure zone – good weather but constant westerly winds. Falcons need an upwind slope to gain height so the hill is divided into sections by wind direction. One that comes from a fixed quarter

restricts the available areas.

There is a saying in falconry that he who hunts alone, hunts best. More bluntly put, the number of guests out with you increases the foul up (polite phrase) factor by an equal percentage. Of course there are some you cannot refuse: the house guests of the moor owner. One afternoon the request from the big house came, and there might be some children! A sure guarantee we would not see a single grouse, and we didn't.

Children need instant gratification so the lack of action caused disquiet. The five year-old in the party dress was cold and her father had to carry her, wrapped in

his Barbour. Carrying children on heather moorland is not easy and the patch of green that the experienced eye would have avoided was very appealing. The bog was not deep, but deep enough. Stoically he trudged on. I fear he may view falconry in a fairly dim light if the opportunity is ever offered again.

The next day we were alone again. The falcon flew well, the grouse were where we had hoped and we went home happy to tales of the flight and a wee dram. Grouse hawking is not easy and this year presented its very own set of problems but to me and many like me, it is the only way to start a season.



Film – *I Know Where I'm Going*



Knight realized the drawing potential of a movie portraying the romance of falconry and set about producing a film that would be enticing to the paying public, particularly the American audience who had never visited the shores of Britain. The film *Falconry in Old England* was made and showed the thrill and pageantry of English hawking during the time of Henry VIII. A second film, *Sweeper of the Skies*, was later produced further depicting 16th century falconry. Knole House, built in 1486 in Knight's hometown of Sevenoaks, and its extensive parkland were used as the background. Knight considered that he had to attract both audiences that were interested in birds and those that were not and so concocted a melodrama that might have general appeal. The entire Knight family was once again involved. The film centered on the myth of a Golden Eagle carrying off a child. The child in question for the film was Knight's daughter Jean. The 'Jean' carried off by the eagle, (Mr. Ramshaw of course!) was in reality a dummy, very light in weight so as to enable Mr. Ramshaw to bear it away. Young Phillip Glasier raises the alarm and Esmond is the hero poacher who climbs the cliff to the eagle's eyrie and rescues the child. When it was shown some of the audience believed they were watching a real child being carried off, so good was Knight's trickery and Ramshaw's

We

Captain C.W.R. Knight

1884-1957

Part 2

Falco^{were}ners

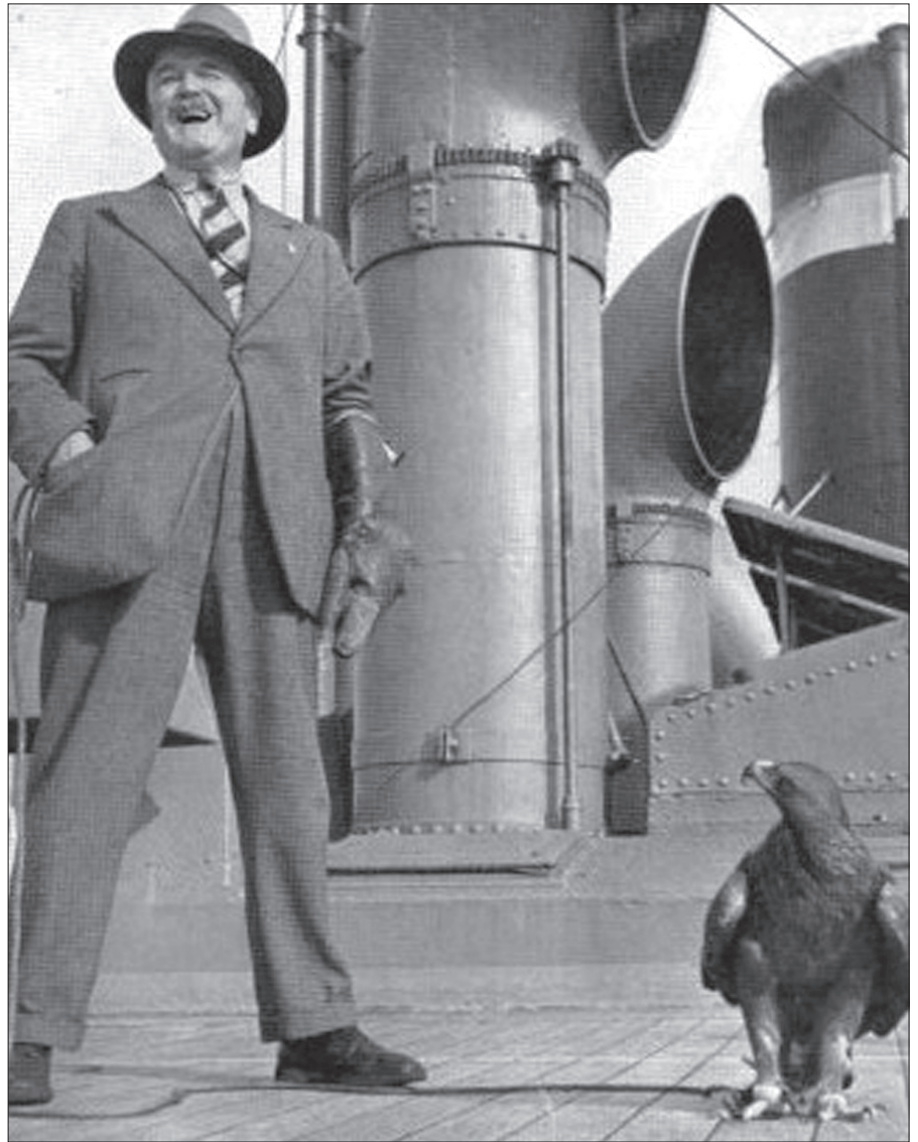
performance. A more serious film, *Monarchs of the Air*, on the natural history of the countryside involving Peregrines, Buzzards and other birds soon followed.

Esmond not only participated in his uncle's movie making adventures but, as a frequent visitor, would often enjoy falconry outings with him. One August afternoon Knight and Esmond went out for a few hours hawking on the marsh near to their home. On this occasion Knight was flying his falcon 'Bess'. The afternoon had not proved too successful but as they walked back across the fields towards home they saw a solitary rook, in the next field, close enough for a flight with Bess. Knight loosened her hood in readiness and they moved closer. Suddenly the rook was away and commenced climbing. Bess's hood was struck and she was away in pursuit. They soon became specks in the distance but Esmond ran after them and as the light faded he finally heard the faint tinkling of bells. As he approached her he saw that she had in fact caught a crow having given up on the rook for an easier kill. As Esmond knelt down beside her to assist in the plucking he was horrified to find that Bess's breast feathers were hanging loose and realized that her crop was almost severed from her body. He picked her up and raced back to Knight who thought she might recover but sadly, by morning she was dead.

In December 1932 Knight put the finishing touches to his next book, *Mr. Ramshaw, My Eagle* which was published the following year. Once again it was a huge success both in the U.K. and the U.S.A.

February 1933 found Knight back in America, on his fifth tour, showing his new film, *Falconry in Old England*. The film had already been running daily for some six months in a London theatre and his American audience found it equally delightful.

Knight's next adventure took him to South Africa for the first time. His daughter Jean had moved there to live with his sister Winnie and Knight thought filming African birdlife would be an interesting departure from his work in Britain. He spent some five months in South Africa filming the usual African wildlife but also took a special interest in the Martial Eagle. Knight acquired an immature Martial Eagle whose parents were under sentence of death due to sheep killing. Knight started training 'James' on the voyage back to Southampton and by the time he arrived James was already flying to the fist.



Knight and Mr Ramshaw returning to America

Return to America

In January 1934 Knight is back in America on what has now become an annual tour. Mr. Ramshaw is of course with him but on this occasion the eagle was refused entry on arrival in New York. Customs suddenly declared that 'nothing with feathers on could be landed in this country without a special permit from Washington'. After a short delay however he was allowed to disembark and the tour went ahead without further delay.

When at home Knight often wrote articles for magazines and letters from him would appear in newspapers in reply to items relating to birds and other wildlife. One interesting letter appeared in *The Times* on 2 April 1935 with the title 'Hawks at Sea'. Knight recounts a story told to him some two years earlier of a Merlin that had been spotted perched in the rigging of a ship sailing from Southampton to New York. The Merlin was kept under

observation and viewers enjoyed seeing it indulge in joy flights about the ship and hunting forays to catch Storm Petrels on which it fed exclusively throughout the voyage. When the ship arrived within sight of Long Island, the Merlin left. The narrator of the story was a W.F. Russell. This of course is William F. Russell, Jr. an American falconer residing in New York and author of *Falconry, A Handbook for Hunters* which was published in 1940. Knight is mentioned in this book.

Knight returned to America in 1935, this time with both Mr. Ramshaw and James the Martial Eagle. One of his lectures at Cornell University inspired the collegians to start their own falconry club. At the time falconry in New York State was illegal but flying to a lure was not. A newspaper article on 21 December reported: "*Wings flap, a hawk stoops, claws strike, and in the revival of an ancient and kingly sport, the students and faculty of Cornell University have just become*

the latest devotees of falconry. Already the new falconers are training bald eagles, goshawks, sparrow hawks and peregrines. But since hunting with falcons is forbidden by the laws of New York State, Cornell's new sport stops short of actual game-killing. Despite this restriction, however, the hawk-masters are getting thrills a-plenty by training their birds to fly to lures".

Knight's 1936 visit to America was a humorous mirror image of the first. He arrived in New York City on New Year's Day, occupying his favorite room at the Hotel Gotham. Mr. Ramshaw was berthed on the roof. On the 18th the nine year old eagle broke away from his tether and went sight-seeing around Manhattan. He landed on the hood of a taxi cab whose startled driver, aided by Patrolman John Timothy, was able to catch him and hold him in a cell at the station house. The Times reports that "at the same time an unidentified woman hysterically called Lieutenant Henry Devlin, in charge of detectives, and informed him that 'an eagle was kidnapping a baby on Madison Avenue.'" She must have seen Knight's movie or had a nip too much. On a happier note, 1936 also saw the publication of Knight's latest book, *The Adventures of Mr. Ramshaw The Eagle*. He delighted in signing them "Eagley yours, Charles Knight" for his many fans.

The year 1937 was a busy one for Knight. His next book, *Knight in Africa*, was published recounting his past visit there and the wildlife he had encountered. A chapter describes James's life in the nest and his eventual capture saving him from certain death. Mr. Ramshaw, perhaps the most traveled eagle in history, had accompanied Knight on this adventure and Knight proudly describes his hunting forays across the African Veldt. The book contains some sixty photographs of African animals and birds and once again it was a huge success. Knight's reputation as Britain's most popular naturalist was cemented with this adventure volume.

Later in 1937 Knight returned to Africa. He had been approached by the National Geographic Society and asked to lead an expedition in search of the Crowned Eagle. The invitation was readily accepted. After several weeks filming various other creatures in South Africa, Knight received a message that Crowned Eagles were nesting in the Zuurberg Mountains and he left to film them immediately. Knight described the filming of these Eagles, known to the locals as 'Leopards of the Air', as being extremely hard work with more moments of despair

than anything else he had ever attempted. It was almost impossible to film them but as luck would have it a second nest was found which was far more accessible. Knight was able to build a comfortable and well camouflaged hide and filming commenced. As can happen many times two chicks hatched but only one survived, the younger being killed by its sibling. It was during filming that Knight was informed that the local farmers were not happy about these Eagles and had made up their minds to shoot the parent birds. The chick by this time was a brancher and the decision was made that in order to save these splendid birds they had to remove the chick. With the assistance of a friend this was done. "Coronation" became Knight's fourth eagle.

Flying eagles

During the summer of 1938, three eagles, Mr. Ramshaw, James and Coronation were flown daily. On occasion all three were flown at the same time but because of the risk of crabbing they normally flew separately. Knight was fascinated by the different hunting methods of the three eagles. Ramshaw would often follow on from tree to tree in the hope something would bolt. Coronation would go straight up, some 40 or 50 feet above the ground and would sit, immovable, watching and waiting. James was totally different. He would climb to vast heights, a dot in the sky and then, with half closed wings, would drop at terrific speed, flatten out, and take prey with the greatest of ease. The film of the Crowned Eagle was released later in the year and was aptly named *Leopard of the Air*.

In December Knight made his annual trip to the U.S. to show his new film. On this occasion he took Coronation with him leaving Ramshaw at home. Knight was severely criticized and was told in no uncertain terms never to come on a lecture tour again without Ramshaw who was, if anything, more of a celebrity than his owner. Knight heeded this advice ever after.

Back home in England Ramshaw once again broke loose and this time spent some two weeks free, taking various quarry when the need arose. He was finally caught but very nearly lost his life. It appears that he may well have killed a sheep as he was found consuming the head. Knight's friend Leslie Hoyle serendipitously turned up amongst a number of farmers and gamekeepers who were deciding which one of them was going to shoot the eagle. On his return Knight had to pay the princely

sum of £3 to the owner of the sheep.

In the summer of 1939, following Knight's return home, Miss America, who had been cared for by a friend during Knight's recent tour was returned and all four eagles were flown at game on a daily basis. They were not all flown at the same time, though Ramshaw and Miss America were often flown as a cast. Although they would fight with quarry one or the other had caught they did not fight each other as a bond had formed between them. At the end of August some more filming took place with the four eagles. Kent was enjoying a long period of beautiful weather and hundreds of feet of film exposed. As Knight turned towards home he spoke of some more filming, hoping for even better results - but they were never obtained. A few days later World War II broke out.

Knight had no vision of what the future held. By now he was in his mid 50's and active service was not an option to him. After careful consideration he decided that he could not keep the four eagles at home. A food shortage was no doubt imminent. Miss America was transferred to London Zoo, James went into the care of a friend at the Scottish Zoological Park and Coronation was cared for by Leslie Hoyle and later by another friend. Mr. Ramshaw, however, remained with Knight. He could not part with him.

The early months of the War had little effect on Sevenoaks, and Knight, not to be put off by hostilities, made his first war-time crossing of the Atlantic, returning to New York with Mr. Ramshaw for yet another lecture tour. Radio shows were all the rage in America and Knight, with Ramshaw, appeared on one of the most popular, comic Fred Allen's program. Ramshaw once again escaped his owner and flew around the studio throughout the program causing no end of humorous havoc. The recording of the radio program is as funny today as it was over sixty five years ago.

On his return to England in early 1940 Knight immediately made plans for a visit to France to entertain the troops with Mr. Ramshaw. Whilst there he was able to return to the battlefields he had fought on in the "war to end all wars". Knight stood on the same spot where he had been 24 years previously and he recalled clearly the darkness, the evil smelling mud, the greasy duck-boards, the scent of H.E. (High Explosive), the roar of gun-fire and the water filled shell holes. Knight remained in France until 10 May. On that morning the enemy commenced the invasion of the Low

Countries and he was evacuated to Britain. By the time he arrived home, Arras, where he had been had fallen to the enemy.

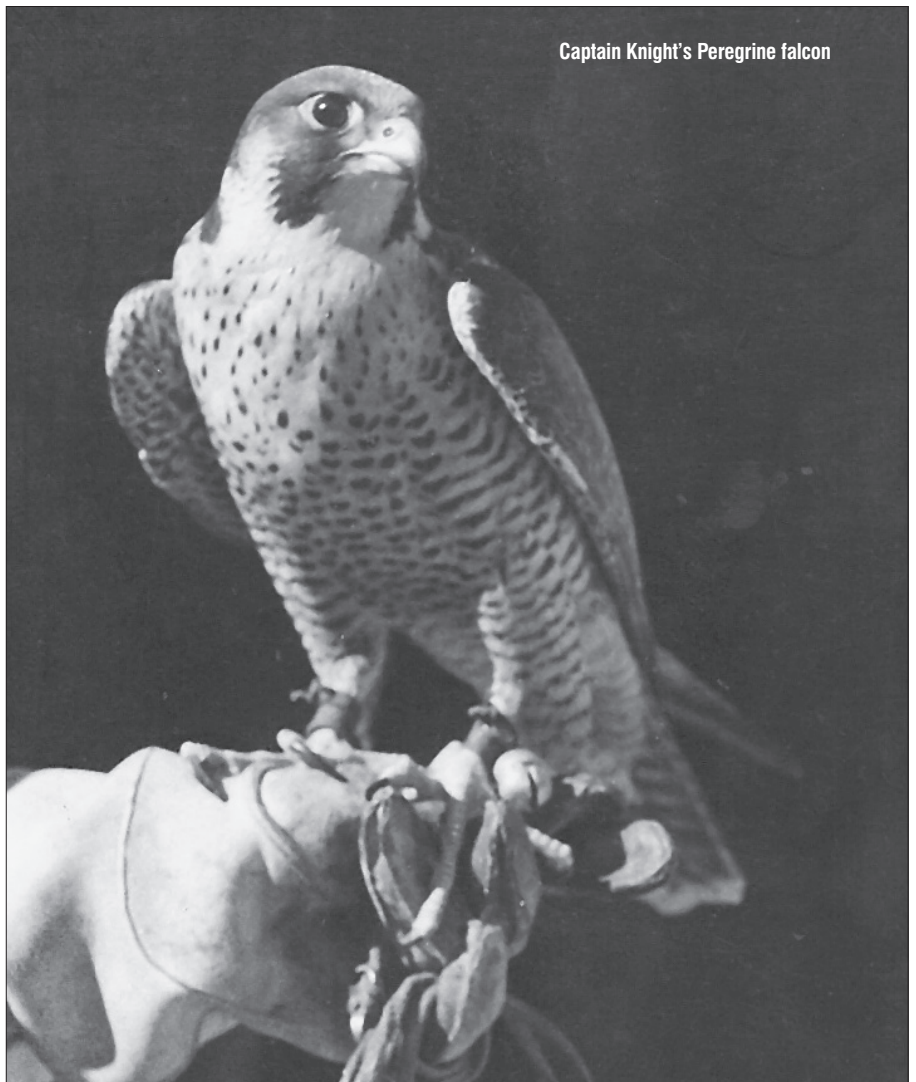
By this time the outlook for Britain was bleak and many people believed that an invasion was imminent. In every hamlet and village old soldiers of the last war organized Local Defense Volunteers (later known as the Home Guard) to help defend their country against the invader. Knight was one of these old soldiers. He worked from morning to night organizing map reading classes, day and night operations, giving instruction in how to get from point A to B without being seen and how and where to shoot someone with rifle or shotgun. Whilst this was going on Knight was also putting together a new film, *Britain Carries On* which, in part, would show Ramshaw carrying on in spite of the war.

In October 1940 Knight boarded the Dutch Liner *Volendam* with Mr. Ramshaw to once again cross the Atlantic for what was to be his seventeenth trip to America. Ramshaw was given his own private quarters in the form of a disused lavatory. On the third night out the ship hit a mine and the order went out to "Abandon Ship". Knight was distraught as he could not get to Ramshaw, horrified at the thought of leaving him to a watery fate. Knight, broken hearted, boarded the lifeboat when ordered. As the lifeboat was being lowered it smashed against the side of the ship and became jammed. The passengers were asked to return to the ship and reboard via rope ladders. This time Knight was able to work his way through the wreckage and quickly rushed to Ramshaw, finding him safe and sound. The lifeboat though was soon back in working order but Knight made the decision to remain onboard and take his chances. He could not leave Ramshaw. Knight wished everyone good luck and watched until the boat reached the water. Some two hours later, with the remaining crew now abandoning ship, he was ordered into the last lifeboat. The crew forced him to abandon Ramshaw. Some three hours later by pure chance their boat was rescued by a British destroyer.

Knight remained on the destroyer for several days until it berthed in Scotland and he then made his way to Glasgow. After many anxious inquiries he was informed that the *Volendam* had sunk. Knight was distressed and in shock at the loss of Ramshaw.

Good news

As he made plans to return home Knight



Captain Knight's Peregrine falcon

received a phone call with the astounding news that the *Volendam* had not sunk and had been safely beached at the mouth of a Scottish river having been towed there by another destroyer. The following day he boarded the ship which was partly submerged. Knight made his way down to Ramshaw's quarters. He recalls, "There was a good deal of water here through which I had to wade and I unlocked the fateful door with considerable misgivings. The hinges creaked dismally as I pushed it open and peered into the semi darkness. The place looked deserted and smelt musty, Ramshaw's crate had parted company with its moorings and was floating forlornly among bits of board and straw bottle-cases and there was no sign of Ramshaw. I was actually looking about for his body when I heard the familiar "toot-toot" of welcome above me. I peered up and there was my old friend perched on the partition, between which and the roof there was just enough room for him as long as he maintained a crouching position. I don't remember – I don't think I ever knew – just what happened at that moment. I imagine that whatever I

did or said was largely sub-conscious, but that I muttered "Hullo, old boy. I am glad to see you," or words to that effect. Again I do not know, but it is just possible that Ramshaw, perhaps for the first time in his life, was pleased to see me too."

Two days later Knight was back in Sevenoaks with Ramshaw who was none the worse following his experience. Knight was not a person to be put off from sailing across the Atlantic just because of one mishap and it was not long before he had booked another passage to America. His ship did not sail on time and during the delay the docks were bombed by enemy aircraft. The ship was not hit and soon Ramshaw and Knight were westward bound. Knight spent the next six months in America lecturing and flying Ramshaw often accompanied by William (Bill) Russell. It was whilst they were in Florida that once again Ramshaw broke free from his chain leash. Luckily he was found and recovered the following day.

Following a further visit to America in 1941 Ramshaw and Coronation were being

flown daily at Sevenoaks but quarry was becoming increasingly short and obtaining food for both birds was becoming a serious problem. Reluctantly Coronation was transferred to a Zoo. Knight continued with his film making. Ramshaw obviously became the main star of the new movie "Ramshaw's Dream of Glory" in which the eagle forms his own Squadron and flies to Scotland to look up some of his pals and get them to join, a spoof film but nonetheless a morale booster for the British public. Once the film was complete Knight commenced a tour of Britain visiting R.A.F. Stations with Ramshaw. His tour continued into 1942 and culminated in Ramshaw being elected the Official Mascot for 209 Squadron.

The following year, 1943, another film was produced by Knight for the British public, *Mr. Ramshaw Battles the Blitz*, which was soon followed by publication of his next book, *All British Eagle*. Virtually the whole of 1943 was dedicated to touring Britain, 'doing his bit, in his unique way, for a great cause'.

As the war entered 1944, Knight learned about the sad loss of his friend and protégé Robert Blockey, shot down over Berlin whilst on a huge bombing raid. The brilliant Bobby Spens, a hawking companion on many Knight outings, had died earlier in the war and Blockey's loss only compounded his sorrow. Knight had fought in the Great War so that no others would ever die in battle again. There was a taste of bitterness in his mouth as the war ground on and more friends and neighbours were added to the toll.

During the remainder of the war Knight continued lecturing across Britain with Ramshaw by his side, giving the British people a morale booster. His touring was exhausting and included forays into Scotland and Ireland. Ramshaw again nearly lost his life when bombs were dropped. He had been housed in an empty garage and during the bombing the plaster ceiling collapsed on top of him. He was found sitting amongst a pile of debris, no worse for wear.

Back to a normal life

At the end of the war, life slowly returned to normal and Knight resumed his trips to America with more films to show and adventurous stories to relate. He was also cast in his friend Michael Powell's acclaimed 1945 film *I Know Where I'm Going*, appearing with Mr. Ramshaw as the best friend of the romantic lead. Knight pretty much played himself, a boisterous welcoming man of large appetites with a



James – Crowned eagle

passion for falconry. There are some fine shots of longwing hawking in the film and Ramshaw gets to relive his sheep poaching episode on camera. A fine ad-lib by Knight was left in the film. Whilst swinging the lure for the camera it became caught in the branches of a shrub. With great disgust Knight blurted out, "There ought to be a law against trees". Spend a few moments with this film and you will know Knight.

In 1949 Knight completed a new film "An Eagle's England" which was made at the request of the National Geographic Society. The film showed British field sports in general and post-war rural life in England. Of course it included a demonstration of falconry! The movie was shown for the first time in London in November for the Royal Geographic Society with Mr. Ramshaw making a personal appearance. Knight then returned to America for the formal premiere in Washington, DC. The film received huge reviews.

On his return home he and his daughter Jean found employment as animal trainers with several major film makers. Although not always credited they assisted with "Gone to Earth" in 1950, "The Wild Heart" in 1952 and in 1955 Mr. Ramshaw had a starring role in the film "Geordie".

In 1955 Knight's health was failing badly. He had first been taken ill onboard a liner in 1953 whilst returning from America and nothing was ever quite right again. For a time Knight continued to live in Sevenoaks with Mr. Ramshaw as his sole companion. Jean had married and was now living in Kenya, so far away.

At age 71 Knight found himself unable

to continue on alone. Time had taken its toll. He made his final public appearance on British Television in 1956 and then reluctantly packed his bags for Kenya to live with Jean. Many of his young falconry protégés, men like Jack Mavrogordato, Geoffrey Pollard and others of the BFC, were dismayed he was forsaking his beloved cottage at Sevenoaks. He had been a great voice for falconry in the UK, and a force championing the beauty and existence of the country's wildlife to the world.

Knight's heart was broken when the Kenyan authorities refused to allow Mr. Ramshaw entry into the country. As a result, a partnership that had lasted nearly 30 years came to an end. Knight sent Mr. Ramshaw to his friend in Detroit at the Zoological Society and then left Sevenoaks forever in November 1956.

Perhaps the separation proved too much for both of them. Mr. Ramshaw died in January of 1957 from what was described as an accumulation of ailments of old age. On the 17 May Knight himself passed away, surviving Mr. Ramshaw by less than four months.

Knight once wrote "There can never be another Mr. Ramshaw. What a personality; what poise; what dignity! And how tremendously alive he is! Nothing seems to escape his crystal-clear eyes or – for that matter – his keen ears. I have only to peep round the door at him, and, at once, that sleek head and those searching eyes will be turned expectantly in my direction".

If Mr. Ramshaw were able to pen his thoughts in return they would surely read: "There can never be another Captain Knight. What a personality; what poise; what dignity! And how tremendously alive he is! He is a man of the countryside, generous to family and friends, ready to share his joie de vivre with all. He saved me from a life of boredom in a cage, and together for thirty years we entertained and educated people the world over. I have only to look over my shoulder, when in trouble or not, and his searching eyes will be turned in my direction. Friend and companion, there can never be another Captain Knight."

Copyright Paul Beecroft & Peter Devers

With thanks to:

Jean Knocker, daughter of C.W.R. Knight

British Falconers' Club

New York Times

The Times

Vassar College

Medway Archives and Local Studies Centre

and the Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture

Kiezebrink UK Ltd

Now covers most of the UK, with Premier Quality Frozen Raptor & Reptile Foods from Europe's largest supplier.

Top quality blast frozen day old chicks, quail, rats, mice, gerbils and hamsters.

We now sell Chicken and Turkey necks and a range of vitamin and mineral supplements.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Sarah
01284 810779

or mobile: **0777 5812602**

Covering: East Anglia, London, Home Counties,
Eastern England, East and North Midlands
and Yorkshire.

Andrew Knowles-Brown on
01864 505245 or

mobile: **07711 952173**

Covering: Northern England & Scotland



A s t r o T u r f

The real
thing, use the
best for your
birds or dogs.
Cut lengths
or rolls.
Phone:
07711 952173

Westweald Falconry
Staying ahead in the field

*Top quality products. Second-to-none service.
Huge stocks carried at all times.
No VAT to pay.
All falconry and ferreting products.
Whenever possible, goods are sent out on same
day as order received.
How many more reasons do you need to shop
with us?*

Shop open to callers but strictly by appointment only.
*Phone, send SAE (A4) or e-mail for our 2009 price list to:
**'Wildcobs' Long Barn Road, Weald, Sevenoaks,
Kent TN14 6NJ, England.**
Tel: /Fax: +44 (0)1732 463218 or 07973 379736 and speak to Brian.
E-mail: info@westwealdfalconry.co.uk
www.westwealdfalconry.co.uk

*Rings of
Distinction*

AVIAN ID
PO Box 107 Truro,
Cornwall. TR1 2YR. England.
Fast friendly service
Call or Fax (+44) 01872-262777
e-mail info@avianid.co.uk
credit/debit cards accepted

**Dead in Shell?
Or is it still alive?
Buddy has the answer.**

From **£161.00**

**Buddy. The worlds *only* digital Egg Monitor.
For peace of mind during incubation.**

Avitronics. PO Box 107, Truro, Cornwall TR1 2YR
Tel / Fax: 01872 262777
Email: abi-uk@btconnect.com www.avitronics.co.uk

Falconry Originals

*Renowned as the best
range of falconry
equipment in the
world*

Send for colour
brochure or visit
our web site

Falconry Originals, 15 Rustic Lane, Blyton, Gainsborough,
Lincolnshire DN21 3LP, England.
Tel: 01427 628511 or 01427 628439 FAX: 01427 628511
E-mail: info@falconryoriginals.co.uk www.falconryoriginals.co.uk

The beginning

A king is how falconry truly makes me feel.



Murray – a male Barbary falcon

Holdenby. A place regarded by many as a home full of history. The golden stone and lush greenery that surround the once massive mansion are as if fit for royalty. Which of course it once was. A prison, even. On the front lawn of the gardens, the house as a backdrop, a barn owl glides silently along the well-cut grass within the bounds of a marked out area. There is an audience there too, with many children at the heels of their parents and guardians. I am there, younger of course, my face in absolute awe of this hunter of the night. Here, it seems, is where such a fascination with the raptor world begins. Five years old and I hold out my arm, covered by a gauntlet – oversized for me at such an age. Even at this innocent time of life, I wanted to delve further into the world of feathers and talons. But given how time flies on days of fun, no pun intended, the steppe eagle, kestrel and eagle owl would have to wait for another day.

Birthday present

Seven years later, I clutch at a card that I got for my birthday and I haven't yet let go it seems. Concealed within an envelope, a green slip of paper lies in wait. The words ICARUS FALCONRY printed in red, then below them in black "Hawk and Owl Encounter" seemed to me to glow and my passion was reignited. The day I booked was one of perfection, the sun high in the clear, blue sky as my grandfather and I arrived at the gates (early of course, rarely ones to be late, either of us) where we were greeted by Ray, one of the centre's experienced falconers and he took the voucher I held so tight. Walking around the place, I saw so many different birds. Owls, vultures, falcons and eagles – later I would find out what each of them were. Out in the fields and on our own with Ray, we did everything with the birds, from just feeding to free flying. This indeed became an annual Christmas or birthday present from my grandparents and I completed

the day about three times over three years. This is what I wanted to do and I yearned even then to have my own bird to train as many people do when they see the display side of birds of prey – “Surely it’s easy, it looks it – like taking a dog for a walk”. As so many falconers will know, it’s not easy and nothing like a dog. Never did I think as many others would. “Of course, the people at Icarus make it look easy – that’s their job.” I can see now how stupid I was and I would be the first to admit it – even to just considering the idea – especially now I can see the devastating consequences on both the bird, the owner and even the world of falconry when some idiot decides he wants a golden eagle or whatever. I still give a sigh of relief each time and I am thankful that I never followed through with plans to just ‘go ahead and do it’ back then.

Mike Hewlett, a falconer whom I now consider as being a fairly large part of my future (though he did still own Icarus Falconry back then) did not come until later when I was 14 after scouring the internet, reading books, namely those of Emma Ford as they were the only ones I had access to, reading magazines and watching any little video clip I could find over and over. I even got myself on a well known falconry forum (which I know to be a scary prospect to many older falconers) on which I could ask any question I liked, when I liked, on any subject within falconry I liked, and could find someone who wanted to answer and could help me to progress. The NRC or Northamptonshire Raptor Club was my reward for such a search for information. A group of people meeting on the last Thursday of each month that knew about falconry and were right there with such a wealth of information and thus being such a welcoming and helpful club (as it still is and maintains this as one of its core ‘non-elitist’ or ‘come one come all’ rules) I could therefore ask without feeling like an idiot which can be a symptom of being on an internet forum. Mike was at that time one of the main members of the committee and so his telephone number was easily accessible. Finding the courage to dial it was the hard part. I finally did whilst clutching Roscow the eagle owl’s feather that Ray had given to me on my experience day. I wanted to know if I could go up and help the Icarus team. Raking over the aviaries, washing the baths – cleaning the gloves, wiping



Icarus – Goshawk

the floors – anything to be just that little bit closer to those beautiful creatures. I still regard Roscow’s feather to be one of luck as the answer to my query was yes.

Some would say that the feeding of a Kestrel is a frustrating job. Taking the tiniest pieces and hours to finish just a half of her meal for the day. This was my first proper contact with a bird beyond the commercial experience days - coincidentally she is one of the birds I now fly on a regular basis and gives me such excitement to do so. Sandy could take as long as she wanted to finish her day old chick that day – in fact, in secret I longed for her to take longer just so I could spend that bit more time with her – just to watch her flick yellow feathers over me was enough.

Progress made

I have progressed so much since that first contact with Sandy. I have become, what I feel to be a valued part of the team at Icarus doing displays, photo shoots with the birds and even the experience days that had so captivated my mind and that have held it ever since. Goodness, I have even found a place on the Icarus falconry leaflet! In fact, along with this idea, it does feel very much as if my falconry life so

far has already gone full circle as my first bird, Saxon, a handsome tiercel Goshawk, who is as I write this in an aviary moulting his juvenile feathers to the iconic black and silver bars, and with whom I hope to have a rabbit and pheasant-filled season when he finally has finished moulting, came from the man that had greeted me on that summers morning. Ray, who has recently finished his breeding of these wonderful birds, sold me the last of his chicks ever to be bred by him. I also now fly a male Barbary falcon that I am having such fun training and should be going free very soon – Murray, he is also very handsome.

All the things I have done could have only been achieved through those who where willing to extend their hand and help and I take this opportunity to thank each of them, though it would be impossible to name them all. Of course, all support from my family has been so invaluable and so I thank them. And yes, at times it can be hard being a young falconer as many disregard you as being a boy who shouldn’t know. But, as I have found, show them that you do and they listen. If they do not, that is their loss and I lose none of the many happy years I have ahead of me partaking in the sport of kings, as in a sentence, a king is how falconry truly makes me feel.

Managing a Small Display Team

Running a centre, even one as small as mine, has its moments! Moments of anxiety, frustration, boredom and occasionally pride and joy, and I still find myself surprised when, every Friday, I actually get paid money to do it!

I took on the management of this centre some eight years ago. I have had a lifetime of training birds and I had worked at other centres, and also had been a self employed display falconer doing the show circuit for some time, and when offered the job I was ready to stop travelling with birds and settle into the daily routine of a centre.

This centre had been very well designed and sited on the top of a hill. It was almost a thousand feet above sea level, and had a thousand seater indoor arena for foul weather displays and housing for just 16 birds. And for me, that was its unique selling point. I had worked at large centres, both in England and Scotland, and disliked having too many birds to care for. At big centres, centres that house lots of birds, you simply cannot fly them all every day, no matter how many falconers work there, as there is only so much sky! And birds tethered for long periods have always made me feel uncomfortable. But at a centre with just 16 birds, well, there one man could fly every bird, every day.

It was situated half a mile from the North Devon coast, next to a large tourist attraction. This small centre is totally surrounded by a seven foot wooden fence in the shape of a fifty pence piece, to keep out four legged predators.

When I first came here the previous falconer had taken all his birds with him. The centre was empty, and I would be starting with a clean slate.

Over the last eight years my team has now been fine tuned, and although, species wise, my birds are fairly 'run of the mill', every bird I have now is an

outstanding performer in the show arena. But it wasn't like that in the beginning; not every bird that I have bought over the years has been suitable – two of the female Harris Hawks that I bought were downright dangerous! A female buzzard was the same, but taking on the centre in February meant that, in the early days at least, nearly all the birds had to be second hand and some had been badly mishandled by previous trainers. But with good handling practices some of these birds came right and behaved well. Unfortunately, in some the bad habits were so well ingrained they would never be totally safe for display work and these birds had to be replaced as time went on.

I have just three owls, all have been hand reared from ten days old. An old Barn Owl, an African Spotted Eagle Owl and a European Eagle Owl. When hand rearing an owl I give a food call from ten days old and all my owls would come running to me at that sound before even being hard penned. All three have grown up meeting the public, they have also grown up being taken in and out of the huge indoor arena and so will fly indoors



David Rampling

or outdoors. My own method of training them involves getting them to come for the food call when they are able to walk once they are old enough to step up onto the fist they are encouraged to do so for their reward. From that moment on they come to the empty fist and then receive a reward once there, and are trained by the time they can fly. Owls, if brainwashed properly, seem to just train themselves and never give a moment's trouble.

I have three Harris Hawks, two males and a female. They fly separately, or together, indoors or out. When doing an indoor show they have learned to return to their individual boxes, apparently on a voice command (though in truth the boxes have been primed with a scrap of food, unseen by the public – this never fails to impress a crowd). In the winter months I hunt with the Harris's as a group along the North Devon cliffs. They soar in formation above me and the dog in the onshore updraughts, and build up an impressive tally of rabbits. They remind me of little jet planes, flying in a gale and folding up from two hundred feet to stoop like a fine falcon into the gorse after a fleeing bunny, often taking it in turns to do so. Heart stirring stuff! We rarely come home empty handed. A winter's hunting bonds us as a team and is the very least they deserve after a summer of display work.

My small team of falcons is reliable too. None have ever hunted, and for my display team it is important that they are well and truly lurebound. I give them daily time at hack. Indeed my most powerful falcon, a 50/50 Gyr Saker, is released at 12.30 pm daily, and turns up, like clockwork, at 2pm to start the show for me. This free flying time means he is very fit and can cope with whatever the British weather can throw at him.

Our local gamekeeper is a falconer, and a friend, and loves to see the falcon fly over his ground almost as much as I do – thankfully this falcon has never yet killed

a pheasant. I had in the past been very unimpressed with other Gyr/ Sakers I had seen flown to a lure in shows, and when I was first given him I had my doubts as to whether he would ever make the grade. But by sticking to a routine, flying him plump, and with plenty of free flying time he now makes the hair stand up on my neck every time he flies. The stronger the wind the better for him. His power and ability to climb almost straight up into the sky really is quite astounding.

I have never gone for a high number of stoops, a bird that does a hundred stoops to the lure does not impress me at all, I would much rather have ten good stoops than a hundred, with each getting progressively weaker, as is so often the case.

My ancient Lannerette, Orbit, is coming to the end of his days, but comes up with the goods day in and day out. I don't really ask him to stoop at all these days, but would rather he zipped in amongst the crowd, showing his manoeuvrability and his ability to sneak up low and fast. Sometimes he can out-think me, zipping between the public and hitting the lure when he is not meant to, he doesn't beat me often, but when he does, he is rewarded, and I am always proud of him. He gets a lot of free flying time and although he might go up to a thousand feet or more, he always keeps the centre in view.

I recently got a young Peregrine Tiercel. Until he really understands the importance of height he will need a good wind to fly well in shows, but pure Peregrines rarely make good demo birds. He is persistent and fast though. He shows great potential and the crowds love him. I believe it will take years before he is up to the standard of some of my other falcons, but he will get there in the end. That's how it is with falcons, some are born amazing, and some take years of work to really thrill you. Peregrines are beautiful of course, and the general public are fascinated by them,



Psycho – European Kestrel

so it is important for me to have one on display. Paintings of him sell fast.

My Gyr/ Prairie is stunning to look at, pure white on the chest, and on a good day he stoops well and is a dream to handle considering his breeding. On a bad day he bites, hangs upside down like a bat and likes to take a bath in the gutters of the farm buildings behind the centre, which is a real pain! He was found five years ago by a member of the public in a local town with a broken caracoid. When I located his owner I was told I could keep him, as he had always been a better lure bird than a hunter. He flies

well considering, and only a slight droop in his left wing after hard exercise shows he was ever damaged at all.

A new Sakrette has just joined the team. He was sold to me in the spring, cheap! He was less than a year old, and every primary and tail feather he had was smashed to the point that flying was impossible. All summer he has been loose in a large pen, fed on quality food, and in return he has changed his feathers and looks stunning at last. He seems like a friendly chap too, taking food from my fingers even at fat weight, and when he flies around his pen he



Author's painting of Gyr/Saker falcon

looks powerful enough. I know nothing about how much flying he has done in his short life, time will tell. But when he sees me flying a falcon in the flying area, through the slatted window in his pen, he does cartwheels on his perch, which is promising!

My female European Kestrel does indoor shows for me, and she does them well. I did have a beautiful male Kestrel for six years, he hovered fantastically well, but he was killed by a wild Buzzard last season, when he bound to a wild Kestrel in the middle of a show, and was so intent on his quarry that he didn't see danger approaching fast from the clouds, a sad loss for me.

And then there is 'Little Jack Sparrow' my imprinted American Kestrel, my pride and joy, so much character, in such a tiny bird! Tame and friendly and stunning, he is a delight, a flying jewel. Everyone loves little Jack. He will chase anything that moves and knows no fear. He is a worry though, as all the other birds want to eat him!

My female Buzzard soars really well, and at the end of my afternoon outdoor show she is allowed to catch a few pieces of food, and then is left out for an hour or two. She can soar if she wants too, or just sit on the buildings or in the woods and watch the world go by, at the end of her allotted time I walk to her pen, I whistle and throw some food into the back and she flies in.

All my birds are free lofted at night and in bad weather, in large, well designed pens, and there isn't as much as a tipped primary amongst them. Hawks and Falcons are tethered on the lawn in good weather. Owls, of course are always free lofted. Diet is varied and rich, and spending nine hours a day with my birds, and sticking to a strict routine and flying in the same place everyday I find I don't use the weighing scales from one month to the next, even on my smallest bird, I don't need to, I just know, and my birds just perform.

Nothing spectacular then. No kites, no vultures, and definitely no Eagles. I don't need them to wow a crowd. I dare say I would if I was a bigger centre, or on a stand alone site, but I am not. I worked

with Eagles for years in Scotland, and the truth is I don't really have the time for one any more, and I am afraid I believe that some of the Eagles out there are just an accident waiting to happen. If I had more time I wouldn't mind a Chilean Blue though!

The public do not handle or touch any of my birds, not ever. But I do have a man that comes in and runs courses from my centre, to a high standard, and with his own birds. I am glad I don't have to do that kind of stuff any more!

A small team, but manageable. And I paint them! I sell the paintings and prints in my workshop/ gallery at the centre. I sell a lot, and every spare moment of time is spent painting one or another of my birds. Us display falconers are not paid much for our hours of work, but my paintings keep me comfortable, keep the diesel in my car and pay the maintenance cheques for my kids every month.

I used to sell the paintings on my website, but it has been a strange year, with another failed marriage behind me. I have moved to the beautiful fairytale village of Clovelly, with its steep cobbled streets, and its half mile walk to the nearest road and carpark. There is no internet access here so I have had to shut down the website. Selling prints online was a bit of a pain anyway, it is quite a trudge to our nearest post office, and to be honest I sell more than enough prints and originals from the centre these days so I don't need it. On the upside, I can see the Porpoises in the bay from my bedroom window, Peregrines patrol the skies around my cottage, and the woods behind me are teaming with pheasants. And of course there is always the distant hope that the next woman that comes into my life realises that a falconer like me isn't like a normal bloke. I seem to be constantly preoccupied with my birds or my latest painting, and I simply don't do holidays, ever, not unless the birds come too.

So should you find yourself in North Devon, pop in. Come and see my birds fly, have a look at my paintings, the kettle is always on for a fellow falconer...

David can be contacted at:-
The North Devon Bird of Prey Centre
The Milky Way Adventure Park
Clovelly
North Devon EX39 5RY
Tel; 07973 148310

Great Western Exotic Vets
Exotic pets need exotic vets



**Do not compromise on the treatment
of quality birds**

A Specialist Bird Veterinary Service 24/7
Staffed by 1 Specialist & 2 Certificate Holders

Neil A Forbes DipECAMS FRCVS

RCVS and European College
Recognised Specialist in
Avian Medicine and Surgery

Marie Kubiak MRCVS
Minh Huynh MRCVS

Full specialized diagnostic,
surgical and hospitalization facilities.

<http://www.gwreferrals.com>

Tel. 01793 603800
exotics@gwreferrals.co.uk

**We're here to make
advertising better.**

**(Not to make better
advertising. Sorry.)**

Here at the Advertising Standards Authority,
we judge ads on whether they're harmful, misleading,
or offensive. Not on whether they're funny, clever or
they look good. Which is just as well, really.

Telephone 020 7492 2222 www.asa.org.uk



Keeping advertising
standards high



2003 Gyr chicks



BAZ, hat-bird



Gyrs - all colours
Gyr x Saker 1/2 to 7/8
Gyr x Peregrines - white and black
Peregrines Peales & Scottish
(Other species & Hybrids available)

Please telephone for full list
(Full Price list is also available at website)

Tel 0044 (0)1795 877707
Fax 0044 (0)1795 871256
Tel (GSM) 07786154349
Fax (GSM) 07786159002
E-mail kfcc2@aol.com
www.kentishfalconry.co.uk

2 Southleas Farm Cottages, Lower Road,
Minster on Sea, Sheerness, Kent ME12 3SW
England



TEX, hat-bird



SOOTY, hat-bird

Raptors in

Mexico

Part 1



Last summer I received an invitation to watch raptors in Mexico and also assist with a little bit of trapping and ringing. Such an offer is one that I would never decline and so last October I found myself heading, once again, for the warmth of the sun that is to be found in Northern Mexico. The migration of Tundra Peregrine Falcons was just about under way and Harris Hawk families would be spreading out from their nesting territories. As well as Peregrines many other raptors would be migrating down from North America along with, quite literally, millions and millions of butterflies.

Having flown out to Monterrey in Northern Mexico I met up with some friends and headed north towards the Montemerrelos region to do some Harris Hawk trapping.

I am fortunate in that I have several falconer and biologist friends in Mexico that are involved in various projects studying and ringing wild raptors. So as well as spending a considerable amount of time hawking in Mexico most years I also get to spend a great deal of time watching wild raptors. Foremost amongst the species I get to watch are Peregrines, both tundra and anatum sub species, as well as Harris Hawks and Red Tails. But

there are many other raptors that are quite common in Mexico and it is not unusual to see between eight and ten different raptor species in a day. This year my own personal best rose from 13 to 14 species in one day out in the field. These included four species of falcon, two species of vultures, one of eagle, one of kite, one of harrier, two of accipiter, two of buteo and of course one para-buteo.

Mexico is a country where the population of any large city or town is crammed very close together and an open area such as a park or even a tree lined avenue is very much something of a rarity. Once out into the country however the complete reverse is true. There are vast sprawling areas where there is very little human habitation and wildlife is abundant. Roads stretch for miles between areas of habitation and the opportunities for watching wildlife in general and raptors in particular are simply superb. Telegraph poles follow the main roads and these of course make ideal observation posts for raptors. The silhouette of a raptor on top of a pole can be seen from a long distance and accordingly species such as Red Tails, White Tailed Hawks, Grey Hawks, American Kestrels and Harris Hawks are quite easily located. Likewise the larger falcon species like to sit on the outmost

point of the upper arms of power pylons and again are quite easily spotted. In open farmland then any tree or water tower offers a vantage point for a sitting raptor and therefore helps with locating them.

Local knowledge

Obviously, having a good knowledge of the locale and the likely prey species and their density is also of great assistance when looking for wild raptors. All too often an area will look like it is perfect for a particular species only to find that there are none in residence. This will as often as not be because there is insufficient food for them.

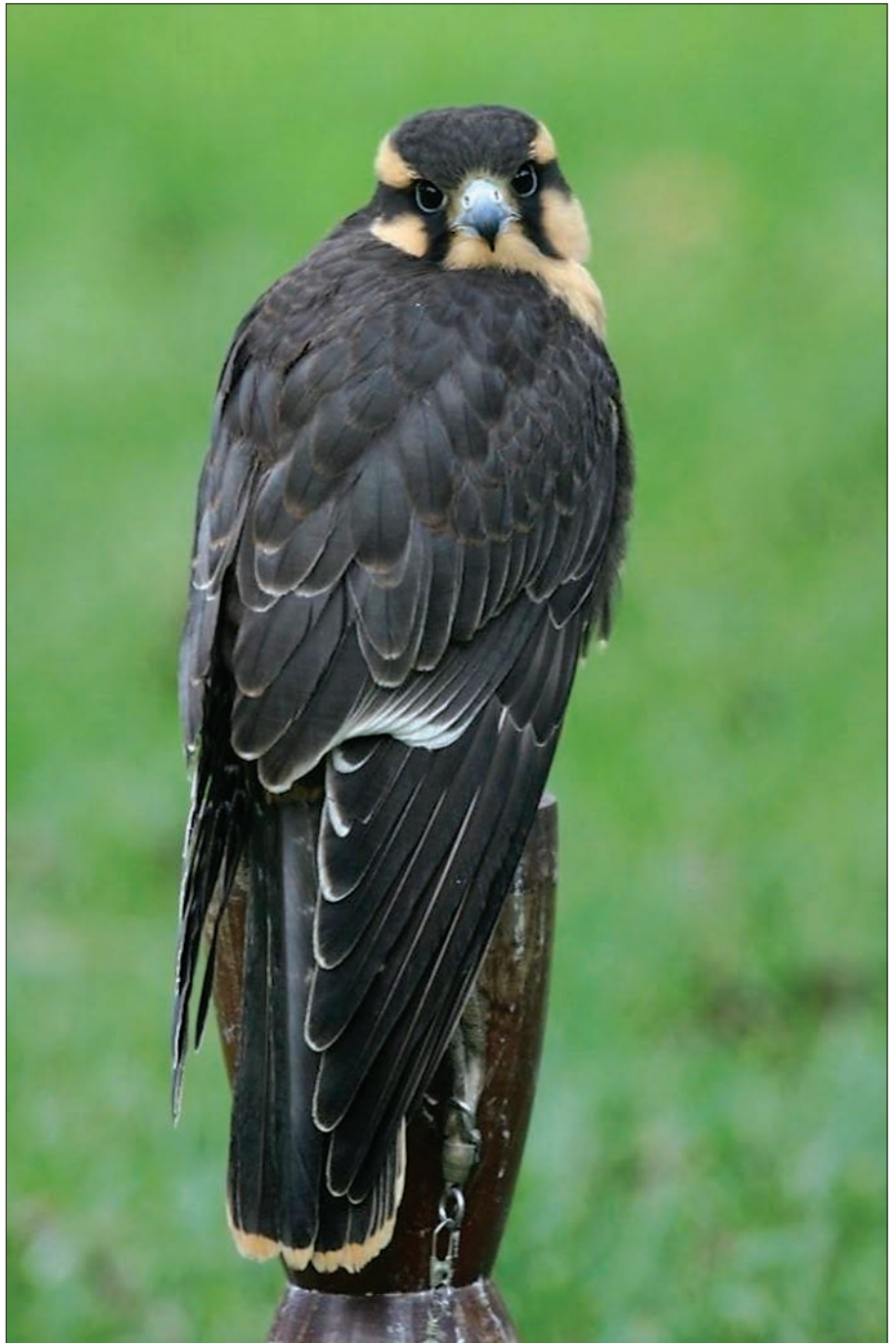
On the way to Montemerrelos we observed plenty of White Tailed Hawks as well as a number of Grey Hawks. This species is very attractive and looks very similar to a Prairie Falcon in immature plumage and not unlike a Pale Chanting Goshawk in adult plumage. Size wise they are similar to African Goshawks and seem to live on the same sort of fare. That is mainly rodents but with small birds an occasional addition to the menu. White Tailed Hawks are stunningly attractive and the size of their much better known cousins, Red Tailed Hawks. It would appear that other than one or two lone individuals in Brazil and Argentina the White Tail is still relatively untried in

High desert Prairie Falcon country



terms of serious falconry. Looking at how it hunts in the wild and the sort of prey species it takes I would have thought it would be a suitable alternative to the Red Tail. I heard a couple of years back that two falconers from Texas were trying to get the Fish and Wildlife service in their State to give them permits to trap a couple of White Tails for falconry, but as far as I know these permits were never granted.

The Grey Hawk has not, at least to my knowledge, been tried for falconry and to be honest, with all the other species that are to be found in the same areas as Greys are to be found in, it is easy to understand why. The only trained Grey Hawk I have seen was in Southern Mexico a few years back and it was trained only in so much as it was very well manned. It was used to act as a lure to photograph other birds of prey particularly Aplomado Falcons and Prairie Falcons. The Grey would be tethered out with some really tough tiring that was going to take an age to eat. Any other falcons in the area would come up in the hopes of robbing it or simply mobbing it. Either way the photographer was able to bring his subjects up nice and close. What had to be taken into consideration however was the proximity of Red Tailed Hawks or Ferruginous Hawks as either of



Eyass Aplomado Falcon

these could come in and make very short work of the Grey Hawk.

We were fortunate in our time spent looking for Harris Hawks that we came across several family groups and three different pairs. The family groups ranged in size from four to six members and as always the female proved a great deal more difficult to trap than the males. The usual problem is of course that in any group the females wait for the males to flush the intended victim and then they pounce. To try and overcome this we put out two and three bal-chatri's at a

time, each one with a rat or quail in. This way there was sufficient abundance for the females to join in the flushing as well. The idea worked and if we were lucky we would catch two or sometimes three hawks from each family group.

Rather unusually we also came across a lone female through the course of our travels and managed to catch her after several attempts. She was a first year hawk and in exceedingly good condition. Being on her own we feared she may have been weak but quite the reverse was true. It is however unusual to find a solitary Harris Hawk and we can only assume something not particularly good had happened to the rest of her family. I



Passage female Grey Hawk

have never seen a dead Harris Hawk by the side of the road in Mexico although they do spend a great deal of time hunting the verges. But other raptors such as Ferruginous Hawks, Red Tails and Golden Eagles undoubtedly take them and of course anybody with a gun will take pot shots at them.

Travelling North

Once we had finished our stint trapping Harris Hawks it was time to head even further north into the high desert and spend a day with a biologist who has been studying Prairie Falcons for a considerable number of years now. As Prairies have always been a particular favourite of mine I was relishing the thought of seeing them truly close up and personal. On the day in question we made a very early start so that we were in the approximate location we hoped to find the Prairie Falcons in as first light broke. As soon as there was sufficient light to make the use of binoculars a viable proposition we started to scan the telegraph poles and pylons for Prairie Falcons. Within twenty minutes we had our first sighting but as we readied our trapping paraphernalia the Prairie took off and attacked a ground squirrel that was emerging from its burrow. The attack was unsuccessful but did manage to draw the unwanted attentions of a Red Tailed Hawk. This hawk dogged the Prairie for the next ten minutes or so until the Prairie eventually had enough and took off travelling fast and far away from us.

Fortunately it didn't take us too long to locate another Prairie Falcon and this time we got ourselves into the correct position for throwing out our harnessed pigeon. Let me just stress here that the methods we were using in Mexico for trapping raptors are perfectly legal there and considered the most efficient and least damaging to any of the



Spot the Harris Hawks

raptor species we were endeavouring to trap. But the methods are highly illegal in the UK which is why I have no intention of going into specifics of the trapping methods in this article. The next Prairie turned out to be a Tiercel and although he made about a dozen passes at our pigeon he never pushed home the attack and eventually moved on. But his careering around the sky had brought our pigeon to the attentions of a Harland Hawk. This came in and was obviously unsure as to what to make of the pigeon as the hawk sat beside it for some considerable while. We didn't want to trap this hawk as it would be us that would have to remove it from the nooses and it would also cost us a pigeon in the



Freshly trapped male Harris Hawk



White Tailed Hawk

process. So much yelling accompanied our running from the truck to recover the pigeon. The commotion was sufficient to send the Harland's on its way although from my point of view it was an excellent first for me as I had never seen a wild Harland's before.

The day turned into a bit of a blank as far as trapping a Prairie Falcon was concerned. We saw three more throughout the course of the morning but only one showed any real interest in our pigeon and she, like the Tiercel, would not commit to the final attack. What we did see though were plenty of real earnest attacks on Prairie Dogs. By the looks of what is in the area, then Prairie Dogs must be the staple diet of the Prairies and the Red Tails they share the area with. Once the sun was up these charming looking rodents were absolutely everywhere. Bird life was scarce with Meadow Larks and Quail being all that I saw apart from raptors.

A break in the day

Once it got towards mid-day then our trapping was over till late afternoon as nothing much moves in the real heat of the day. Once it got past three in the afternoon then there was another flurry of activity for the two and half hours leading up till dark. Again we saw two more Prairies in the afternoon but both were sitting with one foot tucked up displaying their exceedingly full crops. As we drove out of the canyon we had spent the afternoon in a male Golden Eagle crossed our path and was intent on trying to catch a Prairie Dog for himself before the light of the day faded away altogether. It is hard to appreciate the speed of a Golden Eagle when you see them in displays or flying off of a falconer's fist in pursuit of prey such as rabbit or hare. But when you are fortunate enough to see a wild

one hunting as nature intended you can more easily understand and appreciate their speed and beauty as well as their place in the natural order of things. The Eagle was, I am glad to say, successful in his quest and managed to snatch up an unsuspecting Prairie Dog and fly off with it without so much as breaking his wing beat. A fitting end to an interesting day, if not an overly successful one, as far as trapping was concerned.

The rest of my first week in Mexico was spent either trapping Harris Hawks or hunting with Aplomado Falcons. The quarry was Meadow Larks in the main but also we enjoyed a few flights at Quail. These were the Scaled variety and tended only to be found in high desert. They are exceedingly difficult to approach and incredibly fast when they first take off, but like most species of Quail don't tend to fly too far before putting in.

The only diversion from either trapping raptors or hawking was a morning spent Dove shooting. I have to be honest and say this is not really my thing but one of my hosts had gone to

the trouble of laying on the shooting trip for me so it would have been rude not to have taken part. I did quite enjoy it but spent a great deal of the first 40 minutes or so on tenterhooks. We were shooting over a Sisal field and the area was hunted by several American kestrels. In the half light the profile of a kestrel and a dove were very similar and I felt it safer not to shoot until the light improved sufficiently to be able to put recognition beyond any possible question of doubt. I did manage to shoot a few doves but spent far more time trying to photograph the humming birds that were feeding all around me and also the exceedingly large spiders that seemed to be in residence on every large piece of vegetation.

One very special piece of raptor watching had been laid on by one of my friends for me. Bat Falcons have always held a fascination for me and having been involved in flying one in Mexico many years previously I was keen to see some more in the wild. A trip to a cave that is inhabited by thousands of bats was undertaken one afternoon so that we got

to the cave around an hour or so before dusk. Just as the light started to fade bats started to emerge from the cave. At first it was a trickle which gradually turned into a stream. After 10 minutes or so the stream became a torrent and a living, pulsing mass was exiting the cave. Just as I thought the light would soon be too little for a falcon to effectively hunt by a pair of Bat Falcons arrived and within a few short minutes both had captured a bat and made off with their meal. The whole experience had been a tremendous spectacle and on its own had made the flight to Mexico a worthwhile undertaking. I was doubly fortunate that I saw another Bat Falcon hunting a few days later at another location where we had actually gone to look for Prairie Falcons.

Soon it was time to start packing and preparing for the part of my Mexican visit I had been looking forward to the most. Trapping and ringing Tundra Peregrine falcons as they took part in their migration down the eastern seaboard of Mexico.

Hunting with Harris Hawks

by Bob Dalton

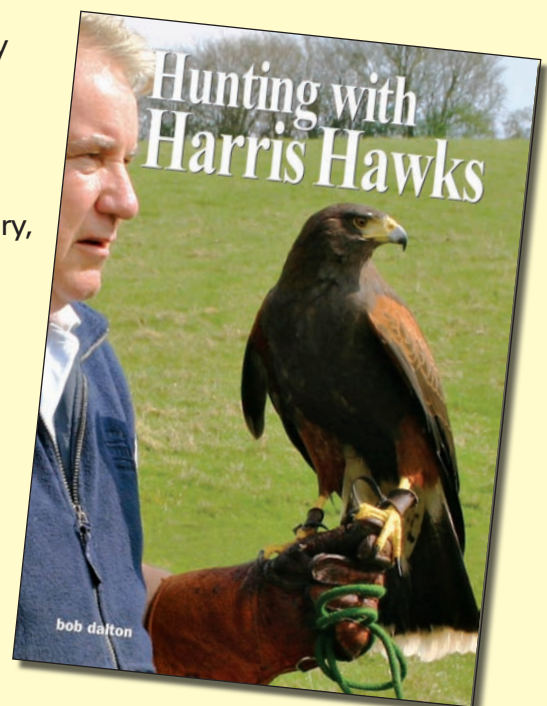
A monograph on the training and hunting of undoubtedly one of the most popular raptor species used in the sport of falconry throughout the world today. Written by an internationally recognised authority on the sport of falconry, this book takes an in-depth look at the place of the truly versatile Harris Hawk in the world of modern falconry.

£12.95 plus £1.75 P&P each.

Telephone

0845 803 1979

to place your order



Club Directory



The Welsh Hawking Club



www.thewelshhawkingclub.com

The Welsh Hawking Club has five regional groups throughout the United Kingdom meeting in:

**South Wales, North Wales, the South West, Essex
and Yorkshire**

For more details please visit our website and click on Regions.

For all general enquiries please contact:

Steven Lambert on 07736 319 347

or

email: secretary@thewelshhawkingclub.com

THE SCOTTISH HAWKING CLUB

FOR THE DEDICATED FALCONER

The largest club in Scotland protecting the needs of falconers.

AFFILIATED TO:- Countryside Alliance - Hawk Board - Scottish Hawk Board - Zimbabwe Falconers Club - North American Falconers Association - International Association for Falconry

Further details from:

Jim Coyle

E-mail: info@scottishhawkingclub.co.uk

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

Northern England Falconry Club

Club meets the first Wednesday of each month at :-

**Lane Head Hotel,
2 Brighouse Wood Lane, Brighouse,
West Yorkshire**

Contact: Karl on

01924 891179

THE BRITISH HAWKING ASSOCIATION

Regional field meetings held regularly. A family association that welcomes both the experienced falconer and the novice.

*The British Hawking Association . . .
showing the way forward.*

CHANGING ATTITUDES TO IMPROVE STANDARDS.

Contact the BHA via its website:-

www.thebha.co.uk

or e-mail to secretary@thebha.co.uk

Join and
support
your local
club today!

The South East Falconry Group

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

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

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

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

For further information or an application form please contact -

Dean White (secretary) on 01489 896504

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



Yorkshire Falconry Club

Meetings held at The Milton Arms,
Elsecard, Barnsley.

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

Membership includes;

- Public liability insurance
- Affiliation to the Hawk Board



For further information please visit our web-site

www.yorkshirefalconry.org.uk

British Falconers' Club

Founded in 1927

**The oldest and largest Hawking Club
in the country.**

Eleven Regional Groups -

Scotland, Yorkshire, Midlands, Cotswolds, Eastern,
North Western, Mid-West, North Eastern, Southern,
Wales and South Western.

Please send A5 SAE + £1.14 stamps to:-

Dave - Membership Secretary

THE BRITISH FALCONERS CLUB (F.M.)

01253 859062 (evenings)

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



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

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

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

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

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



Independent Bird Register

Telephone 0870 608 8500

IBR Lost, Found, Reunited & Stolen birds of prey from 1st September to 23rd December 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 13

Bref	Ring No.	Species	66366	??FDMB0??	BARN OWL	55990	??226??	KESTREL
17206	9FOCX	CHACO OWL	27350	??FC9??	EURASIAN EAGLE OWL	66008	SN15	KESTREL
18570	1FOCX	CHACO OWL	65808	??FOS??	EURASIAN EAGLE OWL	43347	??237??	LANNER FALCON
31814	6655	EURASIAN EAGLE OWL	66012	??CJ0??	EURASIAN EAGLE OWL	66079	??057??	MERLIN
33568	13274V	GOSHAWK	66248	M24	EURASIAN EAGLE OWL	66089	??15??	MERLIN
65951	B80 7PU	GOSHAWK	40284	??329??	GOSHAWK	48311	??066??	PEREGRINE FALCON
25953	9609X	GYR/SAKER FALCON	49797	??E273??	GOSHAWK	65961	??02DK0??	PEREGRINE FALCON
17636	IBR14288W	HARRIS HAWK	55522	??438??	GOSHAWK	66116	??440?? / ??557??	PEREGRINE FALCON
54129	2NICK / IBR53299W	HARRIS HAWK	65684	??0052??	GOSHAWK	50513	??509??	PEREGRINE X GYR/SAKER
61432	156JT6W	HARRIS HAWK SONORAN	65807	??046??	GOSHAWK	66097	??542?? / ??296??	PEREGRINE/BARBARY
32387	1.01926772172	KESTREL	65861	??0055??	GOSHAWK	66136	??673??	PEREGRINE/BARBARY HYBRID
32391	2.01926772172	KESTREL	66232	ST10	GREAT HORNED OWL	66338	??413?? / ??609??	PEREGRINE/BARBARY
32551	3.01926772172	KESTREL	65903	??732??	GYR/PEREGRINE HYBRID	37546	??753??	PEREGRINE/PRAIRIE HYBRID
32664	4.01926772172	KESTREL	65994	??126??	GYR/PEREGRINE HYBRID	27064	??504??	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
			65911	??VHCO??	GYR/PEREGRINE X BARBARY	36382	??386??	PERERINE/SAKER HYBRID
			31584	??370??	GYR/PRAIRIE FALCON	39580	??809?? / ??500??	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
			66063	TS9	GYR/SAKER FALCON	59037	??449??	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
			19661	??392?? / ??329??	GYR/SAKER FALCON	59268	??549?? / ??800??	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
			53803	??961??	GYR/SAKER FALCON	65394	??152??	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
			65833	GU17	GYR/SAKER FALCON	66020	BL2	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
			66030	??628??	GYR/SAKER FALCON	66029	??350??	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
			7	??433??	GYR/SAKER FALCON	66078	??814??	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
			66245	??942?? / ??460??	GYR/SAKER FALCON	66085	??661??	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
			7	??459??	GYR/SAKER FALCON	66301	??358?? / ??040??	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
			66346	??553?? / ??715??	GYR/SAKER FALCON	66319	??640??	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
			65137	??975??	GYR/SAKER x GYR/SAKER	65625	??363??	PEREGRINE X GYR/SAKER
			7	ML3	HARRIS HAWK	66064	TS9	RED-NAPED SHAHEEN
			2	14293	HARRIS HAWK	55510	??570??	RED-TAILED HAWK
			7	14308	HARRIS HAWK	14424	P020	RED-TAILED HAWK
			2	15167	HARRIS HAWK	32287	??628??	RED-TAILED HAWK
			9	18164	HARRIS HAWK	37920	??769??	RED-TAILED HAWK
			11	27538	HARRIS HAWK	66300	??3DB0??	RED-TAILED HAWK
			8	30146	HARRIS HAWK	22687	??108??	SAKER FALCON
			9	35135	HARRIS HAWK	36806	??670??	SAKER FALCON
			6	39430	HARRIS HAWK	43537	??244??	SAKER FALCON
			45727	??566??	HARRIS HAWK	62154	??099??	SAKER FALCON
			45729	??566??	HARRIS HAWK	62155	??099??	SAKER FALCON
			47635	??729??	HARRIS HAWK	65905	??001??	SAKER FALCON
			55096	??562??	HARRIS HAWK	66076	??WDA??	SAKER FALCON
			59286	??333??	HARRIS HAWK	51385	??768??	SPARROWHAWK
			59398	??LORD0?? / ??890??	HARRIS HAWK	57789	??207??	SPARROWHAWK
			60983	??956??	HARRIS HAWK	64799	??227??	SPARROWHAWK
			61803	??087??	HARRIS HAWK			
			62747	??162??	HARRIS HAWK			
			63051	??169??	HARRIS HAWK			
			64213	RM10	HARRIS HAWK			
			65254	CH62	HARRIS HAWK			
			65277	DD2	HARRIS HAWK			
			65292	??304??	HARRIS HAWK			
			65345	ST6	HARRIS HAWK			
			65716	FK8	HARRIS HAWK			
			65841	??34R??	HARRIS HAWK			
			65984	??931??	HARRIS HAWK			
			66023	??387??	HARRIS HAWK			
			66101	WF5	HARRIS HAWK			
			66210	TN17	HARRIS HAWK			
			66242	HD4	HARRIS HAWK			
			65958	BB3	INDIAN EAGLE OWL			
			19542	OX33	KESTREL			

REUNITED x 19

AFRICAN HARRIER HAWK								
AFRICAN SPOTTED EAGLE OWL	4							
BARN OWL	27							
COMMON BUZZARD	4							
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL	7							
FERRUGINOUS HAWK	2							
GOSHAWK	7							
GYR HYBRIDS	17							
HARRIS HAWK	65							
INDIAN EAGLE OWL	7							
KESTREL	2							
LANNER FALCON	7							
MERLIN	2							
PEREGRINE FALCON	9							
PEREGRINE HYBRID	11							
RED-TAILED HAWK	8							
SAKER FALCON	9							
SAKER HYBRIDS	6							
TAWNY OWL	2							

LOST x 122

51495	??933??	AFRICAN SPOTTED EAGLE OWL	55096	??562??	HARRIS HAWK	66076	??WDA??	SAKER FALCON
55416	SP5	AFRICAN SPOTTED EAGLE OWL	59286	??333??	HARRIS HAWK	51385	??768??	SPARROWHAWK
65676	CF83	AMERICAN KESTREL	59398	??LORD0?? / ??890??	HARRIS HAWK	57789	??207??	SPARROWHAWK
65834	??117??	BARBARY FALCON	60983	??956??	HARRIS HAWK	64799	??227??	SPARROWHAWK
15584	??246??	BARN OWL	61803	??087??	HARRIS HAWK			
19729	??MH0??	BARN OWL	62747	??162??	HARRIS HAWK			
43230	??068??	BARN OWL	63051	??169??	HARRIS HAWK			
48261	??803??	BARN OWL	64213	RM10	HARRIS HAWK			
54122	??120??	BARN OWL	65254	CH62	HARRIS HAWK			
54635	??81ST??	BARN OWL	65277	DD2	HARRIS HAWK			
58358	??820??	BARN OWL	65292	??304??	HARRIS HAWK			
59702	??847??	BARN OWL	65345	ST6	HARRIS HAWK			
60937	??035??	BARN OWL	65716	FK8	HARRIS HAWK			
61594	??047??	BARN OWL	65841	??34R??	HARRIS HAWK			
62581	??066??	BARN OWL	65984	??931??	HARRIS HAWK			
64312	??144??	BARN OWL	66023	??387??	HARRIS HAWK			
64645	??503??	BARN OWL	66101	WF5	HARRIS HAWK			
64665	??154??	BARN OWL	66210	TN17	HARRIS HAWK			
65718	??2BC0??	BARN OWL	66242	HD4	HARRIS HAWK			
65809	??6PFA0??	BARN OWL	65958	BB3	INDIAN EAGLE OWL			
66093	??33BC0??	BARN OWL	19542	OX33	KESTREL			

FOUND x 14

1084	??WKJ??	BARN OWL
57323	??478??	BARN OWL
66045	??13BC0??	BARN OWL
66052	??AJB0??	BARN OWL
66374	ST18	EURASIAN EAGLE OWL
66129	B63	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
38677	??581??	HARRIS HAWK
66054	??JOE9??	HARRIS HAWK
66062	OL4	HARRIS HAWK
66381	L23	HARRIS HAWK
42390	??923??	RED-TAILED HAWK
63593	??77RR9??	SAKER FALCON
66321	??01827??	SAKER FALCON
37379	??33??	SAKER/LANNER HYBRID

Strathmore Veterinary Clinic

London Road, Andover
Hants SP10 2PH

John Chitty

BVetMed CertZooMed CBiol MIBiol MRCVS

Tel: (01264) 352323

Mobile:

07775 796432

Fax:

(01264) 336296

E-mail:

xmo32@dial.pipex.com

Avian and Exotic Animal
Medicine and Surgery



VETARK PROFESSIONAL

Veterinary formulated
to be the best



Available from vets,
good retailers, by
mail order or our on
line shopping site:
www.noahs-cupboard.
co.uk

VETARK PROFESSIONAL
POBox 60, Winchester
SO23 9XN
Tel: 01962-844316
Fax: 01962-877412



Honeybrook animal foods

Established ten years - family owned.

RUN FOR FALCONERS by falconers.

Suppliers to major breeders, zoos and collections.

Top QUALITY chicks, quail & rodents.

All our products are carefully selected, packed
and blast frozen by Honeybrook Animal Foods.

Major sponsors of the CAMPAIGN FOR FALCONRY
tirelessly working on behalf of EU falconers and
raptor keepers.

Raptor Return - FREE registration, FREE rings,
FREE I.D. tags, FREEPHONE for lost and found.

FREEPHONE 0800 1971 777



**Honeybrook Animal Foods
for all your raptor's needs**

The Independent Bird Register

THE Proactive approach to Lost & Found birds

- Open from 08:00 to 23:00 7 days a week
- Lost, found & stolen register
- Bird registration
- Breeders rings
- Split telephone rings
- Registration documents
- Captive breeders certificates
- Independent advice
- THE Falconry Directory
- Free transmitter registration for current IBR members
- Daily updated Birdmart on the web
- Over 14,000 members

We also sell the following

- Vitamin support supplements
- Aloe Vera products
- All your basic falconry equipment

0870 60 88 500

www.ibr.org.uk

juliana@ibr.org.uk

Tiercel House, Falcon Close, Scotton,
North Yorkshire. DL9 3RB

Classified

FALCONRY FURNITURE

MARTIN JONES FALCONRY FURNITURE

The name for quality

Breeder of quality falcons and hawks from proven blood lines.

Full range of falconry equipment, books, DVDs and **FULL COLOUR CATALOGUE**. Please ring **01600 750300** or write to:

The Parsonage, Llanrothal, Monmouth NP25 5QJ

E-mail: sales@falconryonline.com

Secure website www.falconryonline.com

Free advisory service and also sponsor of **Campaign For Falconry**

HAND CRAFTED FALCONRY FURNITURE BY

IAN VANCE

Renowned for quality workmanship and practicality, all at an affordable price.

SAE please for catalogue.

**80 Ramsey Drive, Arnold,
Nottingham NG5 6QQ**

Tel: (0115) 9203682.

E-mail: sales@falconryequipment.com

Web site: www.falconryequipment.com

INSURANCE

BIRD INSURANCE

Call 0800-015-4484

or e-mail gvinsurance@aol.com

www.birdinsurance.co.uk

for your free info pack.

Golden Valley Insurance, The Olde Shoppe,
Ewyas Harold, Herefordshire HR2 0ES

VETERINARY SERVICES

C. J. HALL

Veterinary Surgeons

Members of the Association of Avian Veterinary Surgeons and the British Veterinary Zoological Society.

Full hospitalisation and diagnostic facilities, endoscopy and ultrasound.

Full laboratory back-up.

Tel: 020 8876 9696

Fax: 020 8878 6359

15 Temple Sheen Road, London SW14 7PY

MISCELLANEOUS

 **Batteries** 

TELEMETRY BATTERIES ALL MAKES AND SIZES TO FIT ALL SYSTEMS

ie 10 x 392's £5.00 or 100 x 392's £45.00

NO ORDER TOO LARGE OR SMALL
PLUS P&P

CALL PHIL on 01375 672797 or 0777 594 2529

BIRDS



**LARGE & FINNISH GOSHAWKS
& HARRIS HAWKS 01708 222322**

FALCONRY COURSES

LANTRA COURSE

If you are interested in taking the Lantra beginning falconry course, just telephone us on:-

01794 368487

or visit our website: www.amews.com

We also have hunting days, half-day introduction to falconry and photography days.

ADVERTISERS INDEX

Andrew Knowles-Brown	23	Great Western Referrals.....	29
Avian Biotech.....	23	Honeybrook Animal Foods	37
Avian ID	23	IBR.....	37
Ben Long	7	Kentish Falconry.....	29
Coch-Y-Bonddu Books	7	Kiezebrik UK Ltd	23
Falcon Leisure	40	Strathmore Veterinary Clinic ..	37
Falconry Festival	2	Vetark	37
Falconry Originals	23	Westweald Falconry.....	23

The **Falconers**
& Raptor Conservation Magazine

Take out a subscription for just

£16.50



You can subscribe or renew on-line. Just visit our subscription department website:-

www.mysubcare.com

For credit card orders

TEL: 01442 879097 Most credit cards accepted

FAX: 01442 872279 E-mail: falconers@webscribe.co.uk

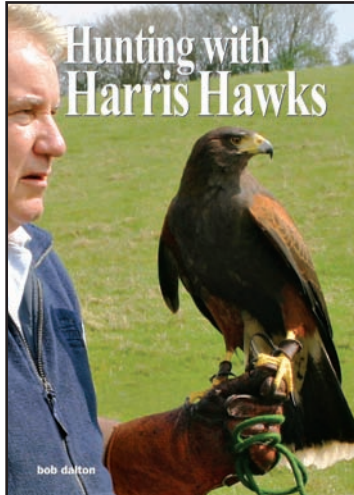
or write to: **The Falconers and Raptor Conservation Magazine, Subscriptions Dept, PO Box 464, Berkhamsted, Herts HP4 2UR.**

Cheques/Postal Orders made payable to PW Publishing Ltd.



FALCON LEISURE

Now in paperback.



At last, a monograph on the training and hunting of undoubtedly one of the most popular raptor species used in the sport of falconry throughout the world today. Thirteen fact-filled chapters guide the reader through all they need to know concerning this fascinating hawk.

£12.95 +£1.75 P&P

Top quality hoods



Excellent selection of lures



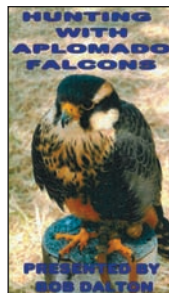
DVDs



£16.50
inc P&P.



£16.50
inc P&P.

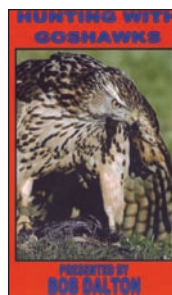


£15.50
inc P&P.

Superb selection of baths, block and bow perches



**WRITE OR
PHONE FOR OUR
CATALOGUE OF
FULL RANGE
OF EQUIPMENT,
BOOKS, DVDs
AND VIDEOS**



£16.50
inc P&P.

FALCON LEISURE

Pointers Rest, 1 Witt Road, Fair Oak, Eastleigh, Hants SO50 7FW

Tel/Fax: 02380 696921 Mobile: 07774 267790

E-mail bobdalton@falconleisure.fsnet.co.uk Web site: www.falconleisure.com

