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# The *Falconers*

& Raptor Conservation Magazine



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It's that time of year when falconers' raptors are starting their moult and the breeders are in full swing. I hope you all have had a good season and that it has been as stress free as possible.

It is also that time of year when we look forward to meeting up with other like minded people at The British Falconers Fair, The CLA Game Fair and this year, The 2nd International Festival of Falconry.

Talking of the CLA Game Fair (July 24-26) I have to warn everyone who has booked accommodation for the event. For the second year running, my wife and I have been let down by B&B owners who do not honour our booking. Last year we even paid a deposit for three nights' stay and then were told by the owner that he was only taking bookings for people staying four nights. The person concerned even told another B&B owner . . . "we have got to make as much money out of these people as possible". This year, a friend of ours made a verbal booking over a year ago for four of us. On checking the booking recently, the owner of the B&B denied all knowledge of the conversation and had booked other people instead. These days, a verbal agreement means nothing. Be on your guard. It's well worth checking that bookings made some time ago are still valid.

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](mailto:peter.eldrett@tiscali.co.uk)



## Silent bell Frank Lyman Beebe

(1914 - 2008)

**F**rank Beebe was a prominent falconer, writer and wildlife illustrator from Canada. In 1961, Mr. Beebe, along with Hal Webster and other prominent falconers of the day, founded the North American Falconers Association (NAFA).

Frank would eventually write a number of books about his life-long passion. The most notable amongst them is *North American Falconry and Hunting Hawks*, written with his friend, Hal Webster. This book is considered by many to be the bible of the art-sport, and has guided half a century of novice and

general falconers since first published in 1962. Frank also contributed the illustrations for this first edition, which was first penned in 1955, on a trip taken with Hal Webster and his wife and Pete Asborno.

Frank flew falcons nearly every day of his life for more than six decades. Even into his early 90's, he would be out there in the Canadian winters, hunting with his falcon. In 2007, Frank began having a series of strokes which kept him from the field. He passed on peacefully on November 15, 2008, at 5:30 pm. True to his style, he required that he be cremated and that no services be held.

One of the largely undocumented turmoils was NAFA's relation with its founders. In 1971, Frank Beebe was removed from the very organisation which he began. The Kellogg brothers, Brian and Clifford, spearheaded the righting of this injustice. Clifford Kellogg attempted to get Frank reinstated many times during his ten year tenure as North Pacific (NP) NAFA Director but was not successful. However, Brian Kellogg succeeded in reinstating Frank during his term as NP director at the urging of the North Pacific and Canadian NAFA members. In 1997 Frank was reinstated to the association, which remains the largest falconry organisation in the world, with full members in Canada, the United States, and

Mexico, and associate members all over the planet.

Although Frank was most known for his passion for the art-sport, for writing *North American Falconry and Hunting Hawks*, and for co-founding NAFA, Frank Beebe's rich wildlife illustrations featuring raptors in flight have graced many books. In a time when most such illustrations were made by observing a dead specimen, Frank brought them to life, by seeing them vibrant, from that singular perspective only falconers ever know. He was an avid outdoors man, and wrote of all manner of wildlife in his beloved Pacific Northwest, including titles on fishing, edible plants, and birds in general. Frank was also a forerunner in raptor propagation, and a researcher on the Peale's Peregrine and Gyr falcons as well as coastal marine and plant life.

It's fair to say that the world of raptors and falconry would be a very different place without Frank Beebe. His willingness to push the envelope, to attempt new training techniques, these have left falconers that much richer. Always striving to improve and enhance the sport, much would never have been endeavoured without all of these chronicled efforts, and the many others which may never be told.

## CFF fundraising dinner

**T**he dinner and auction was held on 27 February at Westminster Kingsway College and was organised by college lecturer and falconer, José Suto with his wife Charlotte and he father, John Hill. The auction was presided over by well known actor Bernard Cribbens. Five items were up for grabs between each course of the dinner – 20 items altogether. These included a sculptured kestrel by Bill Prickett, an Andrew Ellis print and a wildfowling day with Terry Large. Nick Havermann-Mart also gave a day's hawking on his grouse moor in Scotland.

A special presentation of an engraved decanter and glasses was made to Nick Havermann-Mart for services to falconry. A number of clubs contributed toward the cost of the gift and everyone at the dinner gave Nick a standing ovation, which was well deserved.

The dinner itself was a veritable feast of Michelin star standard and the service was equally good. All the catering students involved were called into the dining hall and were given a round of applause after the meal.

The auction, raffle and dinner raised over £7,000 for The Campaign for Falconry and everyone had a very enjoyable time. Many thanks to the organisers and the college for putting on the event.



Nick receiving his award with Charlotte Suto and Lynn Havermann-Mart



## German Eagle

Fritz Loges

Master falconer

By Martin Hollinshead

Reviewed by Paul Manning

**G**erman Eagle is the second of Martin Hollinshead's books to focus on Pioneers in European Eagle Hawking.

The book centres on Germany and is essentially a biography of Fritz Loges (1898 – 1955), Master Falconer and the man the author acclaims as the first falconer to successfully hunt with Golden Eagles on German soil.

His interest and "compulsion" to work with Golden Eagles developed when employed with another falconer in 1937 to run the newly established "Reichsfalkenhof", an impressive purpose built Falconry Centre constructed as a gift to Goring, by Nazi party officials in order to curry favour with senior figures in government.

Much of the book examines this period at the Reichsfalkenhof, and the function of the centre during this momentous period in history; their patronage by individuals in the Nazi Party, and the fortunes of the centre during WW2, and after Germany's defeat in 1945.

The centre was primarily set up as a base for important hunting events, offering the perfect setting for entertaining influential guests. Therefore, a major part of Loges job was preparing set piece hunting days for high-ranking government (Nazi) Officials.

The description of these is a little depressing. Using primarily planted "bagged quarry" to entertain a largely static group of dignitaries, it highlights what falconry and falconers become when reduced to entertainment, desperate to amuse their public and paymasters.

This book is very different to the authors last offering "The last Wolf Hawker". Whilst also a biography; that of Friedrich Remmler another pioneer in European Eagle Hawking. The Last Wolf Hawker concentrated on his training methods, his love for, and

skill in handling his Eagles and in the planning and outcome of his hunting strategies.

This book is primarily about people. At a time when man's sense of self importance and un-chequed ego's brought Europe and much of the world misery and suffering on an industrial scale, falconry is played out as yet another means to display that ego and self importance. Funded by sycophancy and practiced for status and fleeting entertainment.

The author hints at the prestige that would be afforded the German falconer that could fly the symbol of Nazi Germany. Whether Loges was influenced by this or had a genuine fascination with Eagle Falconry is unclear. But certainly, being the first to parade with a hunting Golden Eagle would guarantee this attention.

Whichever was the case the undertone, intended or otherwise, is of personal ambition and a desire to shine in others eyes. The author refers on a number of occasions to the falconry scene at the time, implying a sense of ones place in a judgmental hierarchy of people, looking for public acclaim and ones masters approval. This is very different from the individual pursuit of excellence, for the pure satisfaction, and the sheer pleasure of sharing a life with these magnificent top predators, which shone from the pages of the *Last Wolf Hawker*.

This tells us more about falconry for entertainment; falconry on demand; personal hubris; the desire to shine at various public displays and to put oneself and falconry on the map.

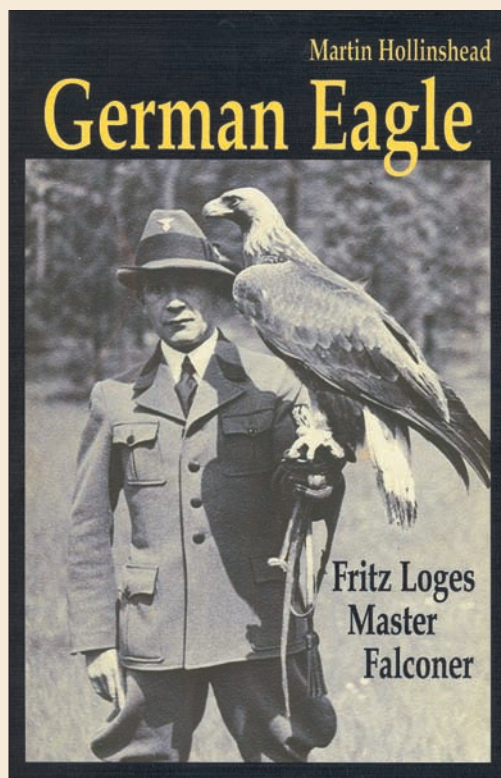
The last page titled "End of an Era" contains part of a description of Loges written by a close friend following his death in 1955.

"In Germany his old friend Dr Walter Schluter painted a man obsessed with falconry and one who met all Fredrick 11's requirements for the ideal falconer.

Unfortunately, little of this pure passion for falconry is conveyed through the book. Perhaps the period that it covers and the people he served are too large for us to see the man and we only see him in relation to them.

The book runs to 125 pages which includes lots of very interesting pictures taken at the time. It is unlikely to add to ones knowledge regarding Eagles or falconry. However, as always with Martin Hollinshead, it is a very engaging and interesting read. The period it covers, obviously merits recording and this book would make a good addition to anyone's collection.

125pp. £30.00 + £2.50 P&P



## A new falconer born

**B**aby Luis John Antonio Souto Hill was hatched on the 17th March & weighed in at 8lb 10 oz. Charlotte unfortunately had a 3 day labour, with a few false starts. He ended coming into the world by pliers, sorry forceps, because he was facing the wrong way round. He was well worth the wait. Charlotte & Jose have fallen into being natural parents with a healthy baby, especially his lungs. Jose's parents have made the journey from Spain to see their first grandchild even though Jose's father is very ill. They are so pleased they made the trip.





# news & products

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

## Hills – but no Hawks!

This whole idea was started back in January by our events organiser Hilary Burgess who is always coming up with new and different ways for us to socialise. It was decided to raise funds for the Yorkshire Air Ambulance, a local and valued charity, and one which may come in useful if any of us get in a spot of bother whilst out on the hills with our birds. The Challenge – the three peaks of Yorkshire. We spend a lot of time flying our birds in and around North Yorkshire and it would also make a nice change to go out 'en mass' rather than in the usual groups of two or three. No birds to carry, ferrets, spades, telemetry, or game bags – should make a nice change!

After a series of practise walks were planned by John Cobb one of our members who has some mountain leader experience, we met at 7.30am at the café at Horton in Ribblesdale on 19 July for the walk proper. Nineteen people in total started the walk with two back up teams comprising of Hilary and Barry, Diane Cannadine and myself. What better support could we give but wave them off, wish them luck - and have another cuppa! All around us were dark clouds and it was impossible to see the tops of the surrounding hills!

The rain that had been falling for the previous two days made the ascent of Pen-y-ghent heavy going and very slippery. Andrew Eames who runs our Web Site, slipped near the top and took a nasty fall on his back. However, he soldiered onwards. The 'boggy bit' at the bottom of Pen-y-ghent was unavoidable and it was purely a case of negotiating the easiest way through. Phil Hickling, the landlord of the Pub where we hold our meetings (and also a falconer), turned into a regular 'Pied Piper' and made sure every one made it through. With one peak under the belt the trudge across the valley to Whernside was on. Some of the younger members of the club, Arron, Bridget, Kieran and Sam, were picked up at this point and taken back to dry off and recover whilst the others refilled with water, took on board more chocolate and continued onwards. Again the weather at the bottom was okay but Whernside – the biggest of the three – was

masked in a eerie grey shroud! Mark Burgess became the second victim of the day and twisted his knee on the decent. However, just like Andrew he was undeterred and continued onwards.

Two hills under the belt with 'just' Ingleborough to go. It was here that young Johnathan Cannadine decided that two peaks and 17 miles was enough for him and was going to return back to the café. However they couldn't see us in the second support car – we'd had to park a little further up the road and we were not in our usual car so they didn't recognise us! His dad told him, "well lad – you've got to do it now."

So, they were all through and we returned to the café to count them back in. Chris Hogan our Chairman was the first back followed closely by John Cobb. J.P. Whitfield and Jason Cannadine. Next came Keith, Rory, John and Johnathon Batty. Hot on their heels were Paul and Johnathan Cannadine – at 14 the youngest to complete all three. Despite the nasty fall suffered by Andrew on Pen-y-ghent he returned, along with Dad David but the pain he was suffering was obvious to all – well done Andrew. Ian Trotter, Mark Burgess, (now sporting a walking stick), and finally Phil from the pub. Despite it being the last push and all three hills behind them, everyone agreed the slog back to the café was the hardest bit – so near and yet so far!

The 15 people that attempted all three peaks completed them easily within the 12 hour limit. Our younger members all did us proud too. Even our youngest member Henry aged 6 completed all three peaks on the practice walks but didn't walk on the day itself due to it being up against the clock. I really felt for Sam Burgess who's 12. He's always out hawking with his dad, and he'd put in a lot of effort. He was there for every practice walk and was up for attempting all three but unfortunately fell ill on the day. Saying that, he still managed to get another one in. It was a fantastic effort by everyone involved and all in all we raised a total of 1642.01 for the Yorkshire Air Ambulance.

As strenuous as it was, everyone agreed it'd been a 'good crack' and really enjoyed the challenge. Also, as our resident photographer Ian Trotter commented, it was all good training for the forthcoming season. It's just the small matter of getting our birds as fit as us now! Yes, somehow I think the steep sides of Starbotton and Kettlewell are not going to seem quite as daunting to us as they did last year!

If you are interested in finding out more about our club please visit our website at [www.yorkshirefalconry.org.uk](http://www.yorkshirefalconry.org.uk)







# askchitty

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

**I understand that frounce is a disease of the mouth and nostrils. Can you explain what the symptoms are and what would be the best course of treatment.**

Frounce is an infection of the mouth and crop caused by a protozoan, *Trichomonas gallinae*. In scientific literature it is referred to as “Trichomoniasis” and in pigeon-keeping as “canker”. In recent years it has also been seen as a cause of sinusitis and upper respiratory infection. It usually presents as white masses/ plaques in the back of the mouth: the bird is usually having some difficulty eating and may be flicking food, shaking the head and even regurgitating.

It can be contracted in several ways:

- From eating infected pigeon. Many pigeons (especially feral doves) carry this organism as part of their normal gut organisms without showing clinical signs. Therefore simple inspection will not screen out this disease risk. Freezing the carcass will reduce the risk however it will not eliminate the other disease-causing organisms frequently carried by wild pigeons. Therefore feeding of wild pigeon is simply not recommended for captive raptors – yes, wild raptors do eat pigeon and, yes, they do get frounce in the wild!
- Once in a collection frounce can be highly contagious. Although the organism does not survive long out of the body, especially in dry conditions, it does pass readily on equipment – gloves, dishes, etc. Therefore clinical cases should be isolated and equipment used only for that bird. Affected birds should be treated and fed last of all the birds in order to reduce risk of spread.

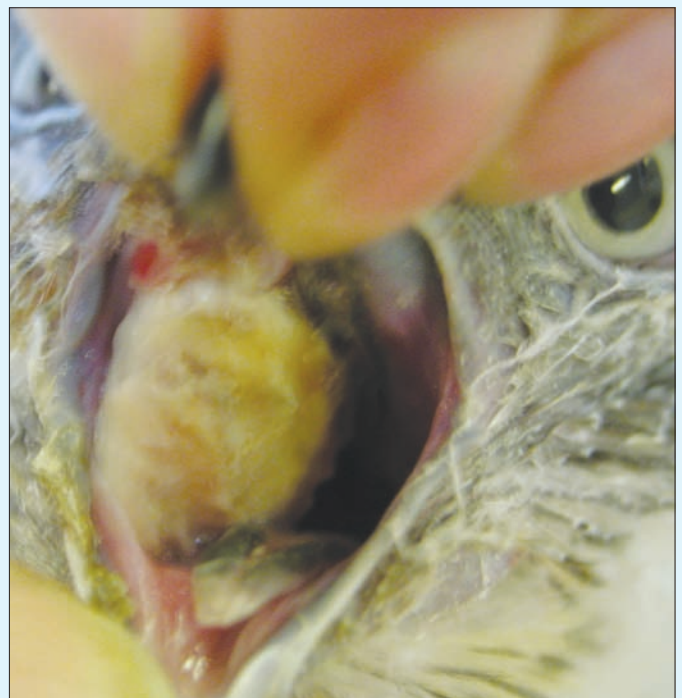
Fortunately the disease is easy to treat – *Trichomonas* is easily killed by drugs such as Metronidazole (“Flagyl”) and

carnidazole (“Spartrix”). However, there are some notes of caution:

- These drugs can be toxic in overdosage, so all dosing must be done on an accurate basis. They are inappropriate drugs for prophylactic/preventative use due to risks of overdosing.
- The clinical signs of frounce are not unique to that disease – ie you cannot just look at the bird and say “yes, that’s frounce”. White spots/ plaques caused by bacterial or yeast infections (often following trauma to the mouth – rook pecks most commonly in my experience!); abscesses due to *Capillaria* worm infections; or micro-spots due to herpes or pox virus infections can all look very similar. Another complication is that not all frounce infections show these lesions – some just have thickened and reddened mucous membranes. Therefore it is important to examine these birds and take samples – a simple scraping of lesions or crop wash should readily reveal the protozoa under a microscope. Importantly samples should be examined immediately after taking: the organism dies quickly and it is much easier to find while it is still moving!
- Adult birds without damage to the mouth

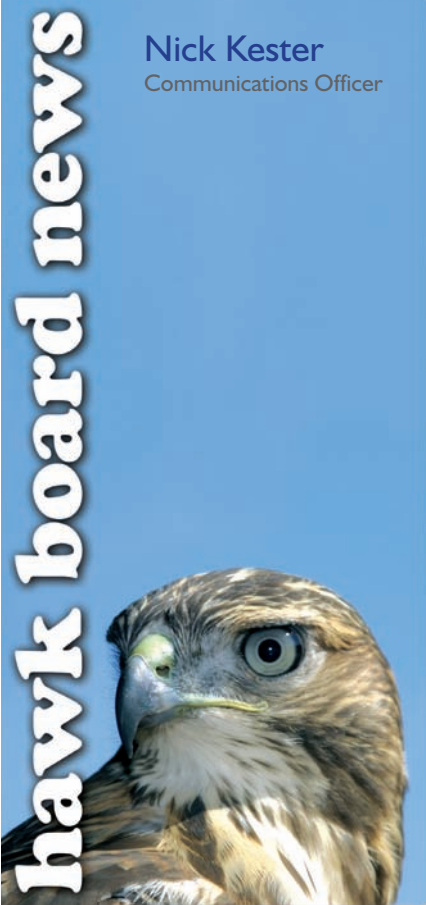
membranes are usually pretty immune to this infection unless presented with overwhelming numbers of protozoa. This is why we see it most commonly in wild birds brought in for rehabilitation. Therefore it is always important to consider and examine the whole bird – not just the bit that is directly affected- as there may be an important underlying disease that needs to be treated too.

Fortunately most falconers understand the risk of frounce and it is now much less common in falconry birds. However, it is still common in prey species so vigilance should not be reduced – once in a collection, it can be hard to shift.



Frounce in a sparrowhawk. Previously published in the BSAVA Manual of Raptors Pigeons and Passerine Birds (Eds Chitty & Lierz)





**Nick Kester**  
Communications Officer

**N**ow that the season is well and truly behind us, the show season begins. The Campaign for Falconry attends as many events as possible, and our thanks must go out to those who help so enthusiastically. If they had more support perhaps they could take the message to a wider audience. Falconry is their life and they give a great deal back in time and money, sacrificing a lot of family life to be on hand to talk to the public all over the country. Please if you think you can help, just manning a stand for an hour gives people a valuable break, then contact Terry Large or Malcolm and Doreen Page through the HB website. I know they will say yes with enthusiasm and make you a cuppa in return.

### **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 been 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 your Hawk Board representative, or Mike Clowes HB co-ordinator via the website [www.hawkboard-cff.org.uk](http://www.hawkboard-cff.org.uk), with your recommendations.

### **Defra and deregistration**

We now know that Wales and Scotland intend to follow England in implementing deregistration. Wales takes effect on 21 April, with Scotland beating them to it on 1 April (no joke).

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 loath 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. 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 in some countries can corrupt 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 2010.

### **Cites Fees**

For those breeding and exporting falcons, the new, substantially increased fees will take effect on 6 April. Any application received before that date will be at the

old rate. By the time you read this you are probably too late for breeders semi-complete Article 10s free of charge! There is a continuing debate about what constitutes an application for Cites permits. Is a hybrid a separate species so can they all be lumped together on an export application? Do we need to apply for several A10s for artificially inseminated falcons, or can we, as before, list the putative fathers? All this is still being thrashed out. Too late some would argue, but we continue to monitor the process.

### **Open General Licences**

Scotland has already agreed changes with the Scottish Hawk Board, chaired by Andrew Knowles-Brown, providing valuable input. Without this falconry would have been lost as a permitted method. See how close we have to watch the process. Wales will be consulting later this year. England's consultation closed on 13 March. This is not a re-write of all the old rules, but rather some tinkering round the edges. Some species are to be added (parakeets being the most unusual) and some may be removed, except for special circumstances (herring and greater black backed gulls being a case in point). There is also a quite absurd requirement to record the sale of Eagle Owls as an invasive non-native species. What do they think Article 10s are for? We are attempting to get falconry as a blanket acceptable method, perhaps for only Hawk Board member clubs (a good reason to join a club). Don't hold your breath on that one, but, it is always worth a try.

Finally, 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.

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**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](mailto:nk.quattro@zetnet.co.uk).**





# Ben Long

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# The 2<sup>nd</sup> International Festival of Falconry



**F**ollowing the success of the 1st Festival of Falconry in 2007 preparations are at an advanced stage to repeat the event in 2009. The date for your diaries will be Saturday 11th & Sunday 12th July.

Thanks to the generosity of Sir Richard Benyon and his family we are able to use the same venue as before. Hawk Board chairman and joint event organiser, Mr. Jim Chick, acknowledged this generosity on behalf of all involved with this year's event. The Englefield Estate, Theale, Nr. Reading, Berkshire. RG7 5DU. is just minutes off the M4 motorway and less than an hour from Heathrow airport.

Once again falconers from all over the world will join together in a celebration of one of our oldest fieldsports. In 2007 members of the public were enthralled at the diversity of tradition and costume on show. Falconers from as far as Central Asia, the Middle East and the New World

gave an unprecedented display in the grounds of this wonderful stately home.

The organisers hope this year to open for an extra half day on Friday 10th July from 10.00am. This will exclusively accommodate local parties of school children and youth groups. It is hoped that 500 in total will be able to attend.

This year's programme of events is being finalised at this moment in time. The main show arena will once again host many thrilling flying displays as well as showcasing the varied cultural elements of world falconry.

The following contributions are just a taste of what's in store:

Medieval UK Falconry, Central Asian Falconry, Arabian Falconry, The South East Falconry group, Dutch/UK Falconry from 1850 to the present day, Austrian Falconry demonstrated by Josef Hiebler from a historic perspective.

At the end of each day the Festival will close with a grand parade of all

participants in the show arena. This spectacle in 2007 brought together some thirty five nations. Each nation in traditional costume with their Eagles, Hawks and Falcons in a breathtaking display of common purpose and love of our sport.

In addition to the daily events there will be workshops and side demonstrations throughout the entire showground. A substantial area has been established to accommodate numerous trade stands and a welcome catering/food arena.

The evenings, after the show has concluded, will include a Medieval Banquet and music from all around the world. A chance to relax and absorb the contribution made by each nation to this event. The Arabian Village, Central Asian "yurts" and many other national villages becoming a major focal point for all.

Invitations are being sent to the UNESCO Committee responsible for the Intangible Cultural Heritage Programme.

The United Arab Emirates are making a submission to this committee on behalf of Arabian falconry and other selected falconry nations.

Falconry clubs in the UK have all been contacted and are working hard on their own exhibitions. Following recent meetings with the clubs we anticipate an amazing UK village.

Those clubs currently involved are:-

British Falconers Club  
Home Counties Hawking Club  
Northern England Hawking Club  
Northampton Raptor Club  
British Hawking Association  
Yorkshire Falconry Club  
South East Raptor Association  
Scottish Hawking Club  
Central Falconry & Raptor Club  
South East Falconry Group  
Yorkshire Hawking Club  
Wessex Falconry & Hampshire  
Hawking Club  
Welsh Hawking Club

Any club that is not already involved is welcome to join in the UK village. Please contact [festivalbookings@falconryfestival.com](mailto:festivalbookings@falconryfestival.com) for more information. Their are still

spaces available.

This year's event will have a bandstand outside the UK village hosting entertainment throughout the day. Hopefully we will be joined by the Welsh Male Voice Choir, Austrian Horns and the Basingclog Morris Men & Ladies.

In addition their will be a display by the UK Mounted Archery Team. This should be very competitive with our "Steppes" visitors.

The weathering ground will make a truly marvelous spectacle with Eagles,

Hawks & Falcons from all over the world. A new mini arena will be allocated for talks and displays on all related subjects to Falconry, Dogs, Ferrets, etc.

We are looking for volunteers to help with the initial setting up of the show and the clearance at the end of events. Should you have any free time between the 7th & 14th July please contact [festivalbookings@falconryfestival.com](mailto:festivalbookings@falconryfestival.com)

Our festival website is available for more details as we approach the event. [www.falconryfestival.com](http://www.falconryfestival.com)



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# BRITISH FALCONER'S CLUB

International field meeting  
6-10 January 2009



The weathering lawn

**T**he British Falconers' Club (BFC) held their first international field meet earlier in the year which had its base at the Norton Park Hotel, Sutton Scotney, Hampshire. This was a five day event, Tuesday to Saturday and what a success it was. It seems that some people were very sceptical about holding the event at that time of year but were proved wrong. There were many falconers who attended the meet, not only from Britain but also from Ireland, Spain, Germany and Holland. So it truly was an international event.

I travelled up on the Friday so as I could attend on the Saturday which was the final day. I was met by Fergus Beeley, BFC press officer at the hotel before going out with a group of long-wingers which consisted of nine falconers. In this group were three artists – Dave Scott, Anthony Rhodes and Andrew Ellis. When we arrived at the farm they were to fly which was not far from Warminster, all three got out their cameras and started to take photos of the area which was covered in a very, very heavy frost. We had been experiencing very cold weather for some time and I have to say that the flying ground looked a picture.

Steve Williams was field master and he very soon had the group organised. Ken McDougall, who was my driver for most of the day at the venue, listed in order who and at what time the falconers





Coco after a successful flight

wanted to put their falcons up. Most of the falcons in the group were pure peregrines with a few exceptions.

The first falcon to fly made a low pitch and a pheasant was flushed by some of the other falconers and spectators but the falcon unfortunately did not see it and the pheasant made its escape. Next up was my driver, Ken and he also used his dog, a Working Cocker to flush some game. This time the falcon did make a higher pitch and saw the flushed game but after a brief chase, could not make up the distance and the pheasant put down into some scrub to see another day. Perhaps the falcons were not quite ready as it was early in the day for them – the first bird was put up at about noon.

After this, we moved to another part of the farmland and next up was Chris Southern with his Peregrine falcon, Coco. There was a strip of un-cut corn which we hoped would hold some game and when Coco made a good pitch, Chris told the others to move forward in the hope of getting something up. Some of us were in a line near a barbed-wire fence and were asked to wave our arms and shout if any quarry were to come our way to prevent Coco hitting the fence.

A pheasant was flushed and it did

come our way with the falcon in pursuit. We all started jumping around shouting and waving our arms. The Peregrine hit its quarry just the other side of the fence and so that was the first game in the bag. Out came the cameras to record the event with Chris having a big grin on his face. It was then decided to move to another part of the farmland and by now it was the middle of the afternoon and some of the falcons did come into

their own. More flushes were made and several were successful in their bid to catch a pheasant or partridge.

The day was called to an end at around 4.30pm and we then had the journey back to hotel to get cleaned up ready for the evening's dinner and auction. After proceeding from the bar to the dining hall the evening was opened by Roger Upton, president of the BFC who was very enthusiastic about holding such a fieldmeet in January and thanked both the organising committee and the land owners for their generosity. The auction was presided over by John Callaghan who made a very good job of keeping the evening flowing. The lots in the auction were varied – from paintings, to hunting days in Ireland and premier football tickets.

Also present was Steve Chindgren from America who gave a very interesting talk on Sage Grouse hawking in his home land and he also showed us a short film that he made comparing the styles of hawking in both USA and Scotland.

All in all the event was well received by everyone who attended and it is hoped that another fieldmeet will be held next year at the same time but in the north of England. If this year was anything to go by, any member of the BFC should not hesitate to book their place for next year.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the BFC for inviting me to attend this event and for the hospitality shown to me during my stay.



In the field



# Neo's perfect moment



Neo

In a previous article I described my first season training a waiting-on game falcon, a male gyr/peregrine called Neo. Through his second season and into the next Neo and I continued to climb up the learning curve and by the middle of his third season Neo had started to reliably make a respectable 400ft to 500ft pitch in most conditions and at times he has gone higher when conditions were right.

The biggest change came the day that I realised with clarity that EVERY time I slipped Neo I had to be 99% sure that I was going to flush something for him. This meant that mostly I had to ignore pheasants as they were just too unreliable to flush single handed and without a dog, being the masters of disappearing from apparently isolated cover. It also meant that I had to learn to forgo those 'chancy' set ups at partridge, it being better to head home with the falcon unflown on those occasions when a good set up couldn't be found however long I had searched and however frustrating it was not to have been able to fly the bird. So far in his third season on only a single occasion had I failed to serve Neo properly. He now trusted me to deliver the goods and so was willing to put in the effort to climb high as he expected it to be worth it, he expected to be served. Then on one cold November day he showed just how strong the trust we have built together had grown.

## A perfect set-up

The day had started with a very strong 40mph+ freezing northerly wind and bitter rain with the temperature just above freezing. I watched the weather on the BBC news channel and then checked it out on the internet. By all accounts, whilst the rain was forecast to stop by the end of the morning, the strong wind that was howling around the house was

forecast to continue all day. The chance of flying therefore was looking very grim and I contemplated feeding Neo up and giving my family my undivided attention for the rest of the day. I weighed Neo and at exactly 1lb 11oz he was dead on his top optimum weight and so, ever the optimist, I left Neo in his mews out of the worst of the weather and cracked on with the DIY chores that my wife had listed for me to get done.

My optimism was rewarded when just before mid-day not only the rain stopped but the wind also subsided. The sky had cleared and was bright, and the wind had reduced down to a flyable strength although a few lower clouds were skudding past indicating that the wind strength was still a little brisk up there, but not so strong that my falcon would not be able to cope.

I loaded Neo into the back of the 4x4 and drove to the large 'top fields' of the farm. As I drove along the main path that ran along the edge of one of the large fields I spotted what looked to be a covey of grey partridge up against the hedge on the opposite side of the field. As I drove along I stopped a couple of times to spot them and convince myself that they really were partridge and not just a few rabbits sitting out from the warren that I knew to be right next to where they were. The view through my binoculars confirmed that there was no mistaking what I was looking at. The sun was catching the partridge just right making them look almost orange, a beautiful sight sitting out amongst the sprouting beans on this bitter November day. I just needed to pinch myself to check that I wasn't dreaming that I had so quickly stumbled upon such a great set up for a flight. Not only was it a good sized covey but they were resting next to a big bramble bush that would provide the perfect cover to approach right up to them, unseen until the final moment. Beyond them was a wide open field and, other than the bramble, the hedge along the field edge where they were resting was thin and gave me hope of flushing the partridge out across the open field.

I parked up at the end of the field, amongst some trees and bushes that shielded me from the covey that were still over 250 yards away upwind of me. I readied Neo as I walked out into the field on the other side of the hedge to the partridge. Hood off, I held him up and

after a look around, a rouse and a quick lightening of the load he pushed off. He instantly went off a little down wind to look for some initial lift from the nearby wood. Then once he started to climb he just pumped and pumped up into the clear sky. No circling, no pausing, just facing into the wind and climbing hard whilst keeping about 100yds down wind of me all the time. As I walked forward I could barely believe what was going on. A perfect set up at grey partridge and my falcon climbing right up into the heavens, this was all too good to be true. I felt a knot tighten in my stomach and I didn't dare take my eyes off Neo. Whilst bright, the sky was not hazy and his white feathers were catching the sun and glinting with each flick of his wings as he climbed higher and higher making it surprisingly easy to spot this pale falcon against the bright blue sky. Higher and higher, pumping, pumping, pumping, he never stopped climbing. He was already high, but he was still going for it, staying with me, pointing into the wind, pump, pump, pump, up, up, up. I am not going to attempt to judge how high he was when he finally set his wings, but he was tiny to my view, his pitch was truly massive. This was the sort of flight that

had been haunting my dreams but now the falcon so small and so menacing and as high as I had ever dreamt of was very real. Was it all about to come together?

### The flush

I was now stumbling across the ploughed ground looking straight up, not daring to take my eyes off Neo. The height he was at it would be difficult to relocate if I lost sight of him and I was afraid that at the last minute he would disappear, drawn down by check or the covey flushing early (too much flying at more 'flighty' red legged partridge had definitely ruined my psyche!). I paused as I got near the bramble and waited for Neo to come directly overhead. Soon he was perfectly positioned just slightly upwind, but otherwise directly above me, his tiny shape towering above in the bright blue cavernous winter sky. I looked down to check my footing, looked back up to locate Neo in the heavens and then walked through the hedge next to the bramble and into the field right where I had spotted the partridge to be. Nothing happened. For a second I thought that the partridge had been in my imagination, or had already moved. Head crooked back, still looking skywards, I took one



The author with Neo



step to my left and then I heard it, the joyful whirr of a covey of partridge bursting forth from right at my feet.

For a moment I wondered if Neo had seen them as his tiny form hadn't moved. Then I realised that this was because he was coming straight down, right on top of me, accelerating the start of his stoop with a few strokes of his wings, before shrinking into a full tuck position. Down and down, bigger and bigger, faster than my mind could fathom. All those years, days and hours of effort had come to this. The strain that my passion and obsession for falconry has put on my marriage and my job, all those dreams, all that learning, all the hard work, all of it came to together right there – a moment of pure ecstasy as my beautiful falcon came absolutely vertically down like a missile from a massive pitch right above me.

### An awesome experience

After a period of time, that was probably seconds but to my eye was both a fleeting moment and an age, he started to pull out of his vertical stoop. Then I heard that noise. I have heard a stooping falcon many times coming down from a respectable pitch, but this was something beyond this sound. Turner in his book 'Gamehawk' describes it as like the sound of ripping canvas and he is almost right, just mix a little bit of low flying fighter jet in there and you have it. If you have never heard it, take it from me, its awesome!

The falcon was simply ripping the air apart at huge speed. The ground came into view and then there they were, the fleeing partridge. I had heard them flush to my left but they were now heading back towards the hedgerow to my right some distance away. I can only assume that they had flown in a big arc out into the field around me and now with the falcon bearing down on them they were heading as fast as their wings could carry them back towards the safety of the hedgerow.

They were still 30 yds short of reaching cover when the falcon missile levelled out and shot through them catching one partridge a terrible blow that brought the tearing of the sky to an end with a "thwak". I have seen partridge struck by Neo on numerous occasions, many of which got back up, but by the way this one crumpled into the ground, by the way it lost all control in that fraction of a second that the falcon impacted it, I knew that it was dead. Neo did a wing over that was incredibly short

given his phenomenal speed and was straight onto his stricken quarry.

This is the most truly awesome spectacle that I have ever experienced in the field. Only in my dreams did I ever imagine that I would be able to partake in what had just occurred in front of my eyes. I phoned my wife and tried to tell her what I had just seen, but words failed me and she tells me that I just came across in an incoherent excitable ramble. For the next few hours there was nothing else going on in my head other than re-living those precious seconds of the flight and the stoop over and over in my mind, committing every detail that I could recall to my memory. I was on a high that only this very special passion called falconry could take me to.

There had already been times before when Neo had shown potential to reach

the kind of huge pitch reached on this particular day but always something had spoiled the flight or acted to limit Neo's pitch from going into the heavens, be it the partridge flushing too soon, adverse weather, Neo dropping pitch in expectation of the flush, me flushing before he'd reached his ceiling and too often him raking off to take on red legged partridge on the ground somewhere else (the early season abundance of red-legged partridge due to a local shoot releasing them on one of my permissions has been as much of a problem as a help).

On this day the combination of grey partridge in a perfect set up, brilliant flying weather, Neo being right on the button and the lack of 'Murphy's law' occurring to spoil the flight all combined to finally bring it all together in a moment of pure perfection.



Preparing to fly

# The Falconers

& Raptor Conservation Magazine



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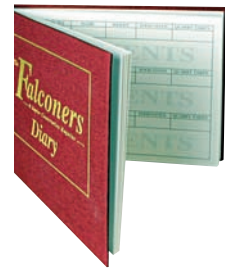
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# The Hawk Board Election

## 31st August, 2009

Applications are invited for candidates to contest the forthcoming Hawk Board Election for three specialist members who will serve on the Board for a period not exceeding four years. Candidates must be proposed and seconded by members of a Club or other Association affiliated to the Hawk Board although the candidates themselves need not be members of an affiliated Club.

A nomination paper may be obtained from Mike Clowes, at the address shown below, for completion or can be requested by e-mail at: [mijules13@orange.fr](mailto:mijules13@orange.fr)

Each candidate must provide a CV of not more than 100 words to cover his/her background and to outline why he/she would be an asset to the Hawk Board. CVs will be circulated with the voting papers.

Candidates will be expected to have an understanding of National and International legislation, policy from DERFA & Animal Health, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), relating to birds of prey, and an awareness of the threats against falconry and hawk keeping."

Candidates must not be subject to nor have been convicted of any criminal charge in any country for offences concerning birds of prey.

Completed nomination forms and CVs should be sent as soon as possible to:-

**Mike Clowes,  
The Hawk Board,  
Le Moulin de l'Age,  
86390 Lathus St Remy,  
France**

**CLOSING DATE 20th JUNE, 2009.**  
Forms received after this date will not be accepted.



# On brotherhood and boxes

In the last issue I wrote about hunting alone being best... well, usually. However, there are times when joining up with others beats solitude hands down. I am talking about field meets (meets not meetings, please). A good meet is hard to beat. Not for the size of the bag nor for the frequency of slips, but for the brotherhood of falconry.

In January the British Falconers' Club (BFC) held such a meet in Hampshire and it was one for my journal. The back end of the season is notoriously difficult to get on good flying ground. Shoot owners are counting down the days and game will be fit and flush like a guided missile. So it is of particular credit to the organising team that they managed to pull off such fantastic venues.

The other factor that goes into January like a hand in a glove is the fitness of the assembled hawks and falcons – well most. More of that later. So the hunter and hunted are well matched and some of the best sport can be guaranteed. There is a risk; the weather can be dire. So the gods



Baldrick

must have smiled because the week was hard frosts and, despite some persistent fog which scuppered the longwings, relatively clear for austringers.

The hotel was overlarge and hosted some other groups of weekending business meetings, but in the main suited us well. The other BFC field meet at Woodhall Spa wins hands down on the hotel stakes as the club has total occupancy. Critically, the weathering lawn was sheltered and the breakfasts were copious. Dinner was a bit lean, and the prices in the bar more London than Lincolnshire!

## Some good sport

My goshawk was far from fit. I got him out too late in the autumn and then had to lay him up for a month whilst I dashed to and from Wales to Surrey to sort out family business. But no matter, I was there to meet friends and learn. Yes, to learn. For it is at field meets run by the larger clubs that you have a chance to see many other hawks fly and to understand why they do so well, when you might have been less successful.

A well-run meet chops and changes the groups over its three or four days. Thus you meet more and witness variety. Good field masters are the icing on the cake. They know when to demur to the host over the permitted quarry, when to stop before he gets fidgety and how to fix the rota of slips so that all get the best chances.

The first day afforded some amusement. Baldrick, my tiercel goshawk, took a premature slip at a cock pheasant which failed to properly clear cover before dumping back in. As he flew out over a 100 acre field the dog did its job and with a 'ho!' I turned the hawk. This set the two on a collision course; something hawks dislike as it looks to them as if they are being attacked, which is not in the rule book

of primary predators. Baldrick jinked and the pheasant made a good escape. With a presence of mind that I rarely have, I shouted again and he swung round over the heads of the field and plopped back on the fist. A slip more worthy of Jemima Parry-Jones in the main arena of the Game Fair than a hunting goshawk, commented one of the other falconers.

I will not name the falconers who flew well because this was not a competition, but fit goshawks are a joy to see. One took flight of over one 100 yards and bound to in the air; another was held back as the pheasant gained some 60 yards before being released and still nailed the cock.

These were fit hawks that had scored well over a long season. They were in good feather, had perfect manners and were a credit to their keepers. When I was starting out on this wonderful sport, my mentor told me: "You have two eyes and two ears and only one mouth. Use them in proportion and you will learn much. Those who quietly get on with falconry have probably forgotten more than you will ever learn". Good advice then and now and something we should all remember.

One evening a friend came back to the bar looking sheepish and confessed to an unusual kill. After much prodding and a second pint, he produced his camera and we were all stunned to see a goshawk seated on a fox. "Not a word, to anyone", said John. We were sworn to silence as foxes are not on falconers' quarry lists. John is one of the most moral falconers I know so his actions were a surprise. The following day we were on the same land and walking down a hedgerow, when the keeper pointed out John's fox on which the rifle entry and exit wounds were plain to see. We took some return pints off him that night.

Two fields on and I was retrieving Baldrick from under a hedge when an

unfamiliar sound made me look over my right shoulder to find I was face to face with a rather belligerent looking Kune Kune sow – and to my left coming down the same hedge were her 10 piglets. You do not get between such mothers and their young, and luckily the hedge was not of foxhunter proportions. Nevertheless, discretion was definitely the better part of valour, despite the scratches.

Unfortunately, time goes fast when you are having fun and after a great dinner, auction of falconry art and promises and a fascinating talk about sage grouse hawking by American legend, Steve Chindgren, it was time to head home. The week dealt me only one unkind blow – not counting the streaming cold from transitioning in and out of overheated hotels and freezing countryside.

Baldrick's final flight gave him a brutally bruised foot and forced an early retirement with over two weeks of the season still to go. He must have struck into the rock hard ground as he nailed a hen pheasant. No matter, there is always next year.

### Christmas present

Every Christmas my family search for something to give me. As you get older you want less, which frustrates them. This year, I remembered seeing a custom built hawk box at the Falconry Fair and then forgetting to buy it.

I mentioned this to my daughter who used the Internet to great effect and Falcon Fabrications were as good as their word. The box was delivered in time for Christmas day.

Frustratingly, it was a medium and I wanted a large. But no matter, excellent customer service was demonstrated and, despite a factory fire, they were good as their word and last weekend the replacement box arrived.

There are several such hawk box manufacturers, but I cannot fail to recommend Falcon Fabrications for good service and a quality product (Google them for their website).

For 30 years I have made my own boxes, and now I have the easy-to-clean model, without the warped doors and crud encrusted corners. Buy one, you will not regret it.



Going hawking

The reward





# Austria 2008

I was invited to the Austrian Falconers Club four-day annual field meet in October. My last visit to Austria was in 2005 when I attended one of the club's two-day field meets which was superb, so I looked forward to this larger international invite meeting. My host was Wolfram Wurzinger the clubs secretary and he explained that his club was not so high profile as some of the other Austrian clubs but they were dedicated hunters. They have field meets almost every weekend throughout their short season which finishes in December.

The field meet was based around Neudorf near Staats in lower Austria close to the borders of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Typically the days were traditionally organised of a number of groups walking in line through long narrow fields of short crops or stubble, they flushed hare, pheasant and the odd roe deer. Each group had mainly goshawks with a few harris's, redtails, eagles and falcons. This was a truly international meeting with visitors from, Slovakia, Germany, Belgium, Italy and myself from the UK and the Austrians. Most of the visitors seemed to be

regulars coming to this four-day meet each year, mainly I was told due to the high numbers of game available in this area. All the visitors that came flew birds, game was plentiful especially hares and all hawks had plenty of slips, some even flying themselves out before the end of the day. Copious quantities of beer, food and schnapps were always available and it is surprising that any falconers survive out there without contracting liver failure. In fact I needed at least a month to dry out but on my return my own club's AGM a week later did nothing to ease my liver's distress. So not much difference amongst the international falconry community then. I was very honoured to have been loaned a very nice '08 male golden eagle to fly and although he had only caught two hares prior to the meet he was fit and put in many good flights. By the end of the four days he had increased his tally by a further three hares. His manners on a kill were impeccable although his incessant yelping made my ears bleed by the end of the four days.

## Local Goshawks

It was noticeable, as is in most non UK European meets, that the goshawks

flown were mostly of the local variety and all took on hares, some taking them consistently in fine style. It may well be that with them not having the luxury of rabbits in abundance the only ground quarry available has to be hare. Although I must comment that the number of hares in this part of Austria was phenomenal so it would be a poor falconer who could not take hares with their bird. It was fortunate that with the hares sitting relatively tight when they were spotted or pointed some decisions could be made as to who would fly; the big hares for the eagles, smaller hares for the hawks. Of the goshawks flown there was the normal range of good, bad and indifferent birds. All of which was mainly down to falconer experience and competence but some birds shone out above the rest and they put in some stunningly good flights which you would expect of a goshawk. The most outstanding bird for me was a stunning female German goshawk who took on huge flights. Sometimes she would take on a hare that flushed a 100m away, she could take three or four attempts at catching it which resulted in a 400 or 500m jog for the falconers to retrieve his bird. On two of the three days I saw her fly the falconer stopped flying by mid afternoon due to catching six hares with her, she was a credit to him. Another bird to mention was an outstanding 13 year old male redtail, it was unfortunate that he was kicked off many hares but he continued to put in good flights and was able to hang on to a couple of hares long enough for his handler to help him subdue his quarry.

## One Bonellis and seven Golden

Obviously for me the highlights were the eagles, not a huge number in attendance, about eight in total. One was a female Bonellis with the rest being golden eagles. The most outstanding birds were a Slovakian falconer with his female golden and a German falconer with his female. Both these birds were mature and knew exactly what to do. All flushes were taken with the eagle well back and they both being fit birds just flew down



Ready for the slip



One of the Golden Eagles

the hares, not many got away from these two. The only roe deer taken was by the Slovakian bird, a 400 metre flush out of crops and then across stubble. We were all in a good position to see the flight with the bird handling her large quarry with confidence until the falconer arrived to help. The third outstanding bird was the female Bonellis, this was a three-year old bird flying at about five and half pounds. I must admit to having a soft spot for this


species and having flown a few I know well their potential, this bird lived up to that taking many hares over the weekend in very good style.

The falcons were flown when pockets of pheasants were found in the crops. The moment the first bird flushed everyone stopped and retreated so as not to disturb any others. A falcon was loosed and given time to gain height and then we moved forward to flush more pheasants.

Not what we would call traditional game hawkling but it was effective and game was put in the bag. Stoops were not from a huge height but those birds who were experienced and knew the score put in some good flights.

There was one eagle owl flown on the last day, which was a surprise. I must admit to not expecting much but was impressed with the speed this bird flew. I was only able to see one good flight from a distance but although it didn't catch its hare it was quickly on it and made at least three attempts to get hold of it. This bird apparently is very good at taking hares but had been a little uneasy with all the people around which is why it was felt it didn't catch.

So my advice is if you get a chance to go to one of the European meetings it's well worth the visit. Don't expect huge differences to what we do here in the UK but the quality and the competence of some falconers is worth the trek, also there is the tradition and hospitality. A must do experience.



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# When Doris stole the ferret – nearly!

**C**hris and I were very excited when some good friends, Lorraine and Martin, we had met originally on a hawking holiday in Scotland asked could they come up for a day or two with their two Harris Hawks, Tiny and Doris with Hungarian Vizsla, Ben.

The answer was a resounding YES although we didn't know how our thug of a male Brittany, Kevin, would take to being invaded by a ginger foreigner. He'd proved himself to be totally racist on more than one occasion when his chosen target had ended up at the vets. When Kevin is working he could be surrounded by any number of dogs, foreign or otherwise and he totally ignores them. He and Ben had worked well on a moor together in Scotland, so we had high hopes.

Since moving to a very beautiful part of Wales we had got pretty sick of all the wry comments about the weather – it actually doesn't rain any more in Wales than anywhere else. To get our stunning views, green rolling hills and fast flowing river valleys you just have to have some of the wet stuff, but as luck would have it, Lorraine and Martin arrived halfway through a beautiful blue-skied sunny day.

Kevin immediately started pulling silly faces at Ben who read the signals and did his best to keep the peace by turning his back and taking up residence on his mattress in the utility room – for such a huge dog we were all surprised at how small he could make himself.

After a good feast during which the talk was non-stop, it was a real treat to be able to renew a friendship formed originally through a united passion for falconry. Their Harris' were settled in their mews and Ben was relieved when he was taken upstairs for a good night's sleep. The following morning the Harris' and my Goshawk were put out to weather whilst we partook of huge

quantities of porridge and tea and we all played canny tricks to keep the two dogs apart.

## To the hills, to the hills

On one of the most sparkling sunny autumn days we've had, we loaded up and headed out. I'd told Martin and Lorraine to pack plenty of warm clothes as the hills have their own weather systems as we'd found out to our cost on many an occasion - a couple of times we'd left here in the sun to find a foot or more of snow on the hills driven by biting East winds.

It was obvious on arrival that our heaps of hats, coats and gloves were not needed – it was very warm indeed and the hills welcomed and beckoned to us. We new that myxy was rife in this area but as Kevin and Ben worked, both now strangely united in a common goal, it was obvious that many a healthy rabbit lurked both above and below ground.

We've hunted at this particular site on many occasions and there certainly weren't as many rabbits as usual but it wasn't long before Ben found one in some reeds and, backed by Kevin, the female Harris' Doris was released as the hard-pressed rabbit broke cover. Doris' fairly lacklustre flight was not surprising as her weight was a tad high due to her having been in her box all the previous day, but it was a long flight and she was obedient back to Martin's glove.

The next flight was taken by Lorraine's brilliant male, Tiny. Both dogs were marking a tight raft of reeds on the side of a bare hill – the sort of point that dreams are made of. We'd obviously been tardy on our approach as the wind had given us away and both dogs were on a 'hot' scent – on flushing, nothing moved – but Tiny had seen the fleeing rabbit as it went over the horizon and decided to take it on, promptly disappearing over the brow of the hill.

Chris (my long suffering husband)

laden with ferret box, ferret finder, leads and everything that no one else wanted to carry made it to the top first, closely followed by Lorraine and Martin and then me, bringing up the rear as usual. We gazed around at an empty scene – well, not entirely empty – plenty of sheep and gorse, but no Tiny. Lorraine called and whistled but to no avail. Now, Chris has the knack of working out exactly where the bird would be, he's very logical and takes into account all sorts of things. This normally brings about plenty of ribbing, but he's generally right.

After 10 minutes with no sightings Chris divested himself of all his paraphernalia and went stomping off to do his magic tricks.

## Martin had forgotten his receiver

It wasn't until Martin decided to bring his receiver into play that we realised he had left it in the car. As the crow flies, the car was about a mile back and as it was Lorraine's bird she bravely set off under a scorching sun. After 10 minutes, Martin's conscience got the better of him - Lorraine (like me) has no sense of direction and he reckoned she could get well and truly lost.

Now, our Doris doesn't take kindly to strangers so, wisely we thought at the time, we tied her to the handle of the ferret box with two hawking bags attached as extra ballast and off he went to find Lorraine. I didn't mind, all I had to do was look after the dogs and Doris and sit and enjoy the scenery, so I settled down on the edge of a very steep, gorse clad gully to wait.

Now, as I watched Doris out of the corner of my eye, it was plain she'd had enough, and without further ado she lifted skyward – yikes – the ferret box and hawking bags were swiftly headed towards some very high evergreens on the far side of the gully. I'd never moved so fast as I plunged off the edge and

hurled myself through the air – as I left the ground the long carrying strap on the ferret box snagged in the gorse but as I threw out my hand to grab everything, Doris took it personally and decided to take my hand in both her feet. It only took her a split second to neatly tap into a vein on the back of my left hand.

I had left the gauntlets at the top of the gully and I struggled to get everything in good order back to the top. Heaven knows what was going through the ferrets mind. I staunched the bleeding as best I could and was just about to don a glove and get Doris back under control when she made another lunge for the evergreens and the whole thing kicked off again, but I was ready for her this time and she didn't get very far.

Carrying on the wind I heard a faint cry "I can see him, but he won't let me near him". It was Chris calling. I shouted back somewhat huffily as blood still dripped from my hand "hang on, I'll be there" but he obviously didn't hear as his next shout had a more urgent sound to it. Regardless of the state of my hand I donned Martin's glove and got the recalcitrant Doris under control and went off to see what the birdtracker had come up with.

There, sat on the ground was Tiny not 20ft away. As it happens I know this bird very well and it was obvious he was pleased to see me. I handed Doris to Chris and picked Tiny up who immediately 'chirped at me'. Bless.

Just as we came in sight of the dogs, Martin and Lorraine turned up with the now redundant receiver. They were mighty pleased to see Tiny and my adventures with Doris and the ferret box caused great hilarity. Martin didn't even mind the amount of blood I'd deposited in his now sticky gauntlet. I opened the ferret box to check the inmate – no problem – she was curled up asleep. Jolly good, we could carry on hawking.

Several excellent slips ensued but no quarry had been secured, so when Kevin marked a bury we all went into hunting mode and silently moved into beneficial positions. Martin made it more challenging for Doris by standing well back from the point. As we all know, a ferretted rabbit leaves it's home at the speed of light and this rabbit made a supercharged bid for freedom and a stonking flight ensued. Doris had by now burnt off her excess weight and went for



The crafty ferret

it, securing her rabbit under a gorsebush.

The next slip was Lorraine and Tiny's and it wasn't long before another mark had us positioning ourselves to best effect and after a long, determined bit of manoeuvring Tiny clasped his prize. Doris and Tiny are new to one another so their owners are wisely biding their time until they feel sure that they will fly happily as a cast.

The dogs were completely out of it in the heat, so we decided to call it a day and so I fed the Goshawk up to a good weight for the following day.

Tuesday morning looked a bit misty – but mild, and it wasn't long before we were all loaded up and making our way to a good bit of local land. The Harris' were first to go again and some very good flights were taken – but rabbits round here undergo continuous bombardments from the local Buzzards and definitely know a thing or two about confusing the enemy and sidestepped the Harris' time and time again. Martin and Lorraine were chuffed to bits with their birds who'd had some very long slips so we wished the rabbits well and moved on.

### Two old birds together

We moved to a neighbouring farm and it was the Goshawk's chance. An old bird (I know the feeling!) she certainly knows the crack so when both dogs took more

than a passing interest in a bramble patch so did she. We moved out onto a clear ride between the two pieces of woodland and she was soon off the glove but missed as the rabbit swung back into cover so she put on her afterburners and shot up to the top of a larch, turned, and head down, pointed the briars. Chris, Lorraine and Martin waded in thigh deep and then it all happened. The rabbit bolted in front of me, through the fence and straight up through the larch wood but it's number was up and after a 500 yard chase, the Goshawk had it fair and square.

I was more than happy to leave it at that – the sun had come out again and we noticed the dogs tiring – but as luck would have it Kevin and Ben pointed again and as the rabbit was persuaded to show itself, after twisting and turning through tight woodland this Duracell powered rabbit bit the dust.

We had had two amazing days in excellent company and all polished off with a few drinks and a good meal at the local hostelry. What more could one ask. Many thanks go to Martin, Lorraine, Ben, Tiny and good old Doris. By the way, the minute Kevin got back in the car, he had the cheek to growl at Ben. They'd worked side by side for two days. Would you believe it!





A very young Tweaky

**B**reeding birds, amongst other matters, means having the time, inclination and space and a host of other parameters but it is something that I have wanted to achieve with my Harris Hawks for several years. Despite having a pair together for the last couple of years nothing has come of these efforts even though nests were being built and all manner of other frustrating positive indicators.

My female, Bud, is a 1999 seclusion aviary bred and reared bird and in fact was in the aviary for two years before she was ever introduced to the first of her several owners. To say she has been a handful is to play down some of the difficulties I and her previous owners have had with her. It took until she was five before she was behaving and becoming a joy to handle (even so, I still don't trust her an inch) but when she is on form she is a cracking hunting bird if a little on the light side for some falconers, flying at around 2lb.

During 2008 a friend of mine ended up going through a sticky divorce and I had his two Harris Hawks and his dog on long term loan while he got himself sorted out. William the male was a mature proven breeding bird who I had been flying my birds with for several years.

The possibility of breeding once again came to the fore. The down side was that it was by now mid spring and perhaps getting a bit late in the season, but on the 29 March 2008 Bud and William were placed into an aviary having been bowed down together over the previous few weeks when the male had been observed picking up twigs and laying out his leash and the signs looked promising.

Two days later the pair were seen mating by my wife Jacqui, followed that same afternoon with William on the

proposed nest site, laying down and aligning material with his body and calling to Bud. The nest site was a 24 inch square box with 5 inch high sides fitted high up in the enclosed area of the aviary.

1 April 2008 – pair seen mating mid afternoon, William again pulling and taking supplied nesting material to the nest site. Both birds were being fed a good and varied diet and despite being well above flying weight both birds were coming to the fist to take food through the aviary netting.

5 April – much as above, both birds coming to hand for food, William however becoming increasingly vocal and aggressive taking any opportunity to strike out and hit me given half the chance. He has always been one of the easiest birds to handle and fly, having spent most of his ten years as a display bird at a falconry centre where he was considered to be bomb proof. Both birds constantly flying at any “crows” that landed within sight around their flight. Pair seen mating by Jacqui on three occasions during the day.

6 April – pair seen mating again several times during the day, not as raucous noise-wise as in previous days.

9 April – pair still mating. Nest appears to be well constructed using grasses and thin twigs.

11 April – pair seen mating in the morning.

17 April – pair seen mating in the afternoon.

18 April – Bud not in ready view, nest checked in the afternoon and first egg visible – appears pure white ~ both birds



A few weeks old



Tweaky getting her bearings

very vocal and skittish. Up until now the weather had been very settled and pleasantly spring like, it then changed to gales and heavy rain one day to frost the next and so it went on (did we actually get a summer in 2008?)

20 April – Bud on nest, William scolding anyone he sees but coming readily to the wire to take food, more settled not snatching as he was.

It wasn't until the 25 April that egg number two was laid, I had been seriously considering pulling the first egg in an effort to see if the birds would recycle and produce a second clutch.

The hen then began to brood the eggs standing over them and spending most of her time on the nest and on the 28 April the male was seen to be carrying food to Bud on the nest.

30 April – nest checked and three eggs visible, Bud sitting well but coming out for food.

12 May – nest checked, all three eggs present, Bud still coming out for food and occasionally defence either having a go at me or any crow daft enough to pitch in on the flight, but still sitting tight. William occasionally taking food to nest and on one occasion seen standing over the eggs. The male actually started to share the incubation during the third week usually in the afternoon.

26 May – first chick hatched. (Egg number 2)

27 May – chick number 2 hatched (Egg number 3)

Then what had been reason for great celebration went sour on the 28 May when there was no sign of chick number two. To this day I don't know what happened to it, but the surviving chick could be seen lifting its head. The first egg to have been laid was still evident and was clearly not going to hatch so it was removed, the parents being none-too-keen on my presence in the aviary and trust me, entering a breeding raptor aviary is not for the faint hearted or unprepared.

7 June – saw me close ringing the chick and recording the event on film for prosperity, only just got the ring on, another day would have been too late (at 11 days).

From the size of its legs and feet I guessed that the chick, known as Tweaky, was a female. No problem in ringing it other than the parents. The ring was screened with a layer of masking tape to ensure that it remained discreet, I did not want to risk the parents picking up the ring and chucking it from the nest with the chick attached.

The growth rate was really remarkable but with hindsight as there was only

the one chick it had every reason to grow and thrive without having to be concerned about sibling pressure and on the 14 June the chick was peeping out from nest. The other thing that I noticed was that the chick was markedly non vocal, occasionally it made a low piping call when being fed but that was about it and I guess that may also be down to the lack of other sibling nest mates to compete against for food.

17 June – general up date, chick standing well in nest, feather quills just beginning to show, healthy looking chick. Both parents taking food to nest, male in particular feeding. Food is pulled from the “prey item” and held in the beak to be taken by the chick. The female normally broods chick during the afternoons with male taking spells. I have been surprised how often the chick is left un-brooded although the hen remains close by.

Both adult birds really very aggressive to any intrusion or even approach to the point of being aggressive towards anyone in the garden full stop. The neighbours must have been wondering what on earth was being bred and reared. Trying to photograph the chick and record her development without trying to cause any undue disturbance was a difficult balance and the few shots I took were somewhat hurried and I quickly developed eyes in the back of my head to avoid having my head knocked off by the parents, the assault usually being led by the male.

6 July – saw the chick perched on the side of the nest platform, pretty much fully feathered just waiting on its tail to grow in length.

14 July – chick almost certainly a female has been out of the nest and onto the entrance step over the last few days, entered the aviary properly on the 12 July but returned inside due to wet weather, today fully out in the flight (photo'd) returned to the nest platform during the evening.

Initially the chick was a bit on the scruffy side but after taking a number of clearly welcomed showers in the on going inclement weather she soon turned the corner into a very nice looking hawk.

With the chick venturing out into the aviary the parents were out to drive off any intruders of any description, shouting and very hostile, the male footing me as often as he could reach me but still they took food – in fact all the food supplied through the breeding period was from





**Tweaky In flight**

my hand. Most of the feeding being undertaken by the male who would carry food back to the nest.

That Harris Hawks are switched on creatures soon showed itself with the chick who began to sit on the post where I supplied the food and before no time she was allowing me to touch her feet and stroke her with a finger tip occasionally nibbling my fingers without any sign of aggression. I was soon calling her and feeding her by hand, much to the annoyance of the male who took great umbrage at me taking such liberties with his chick.

On the 15 July the chick was stood on a perch at the front of the flight against the weld mesh so I took the opportunity and played with her feet, quite calm, if looking a bit put out. Spent most of the day in and out of the nest and under shelter during the very hot day time, came out in the evening when it was cooler.

21 July – chick well developed and has been out in the flight for over a

week. Tends to avoid the heat of the day sheltering in the nest, mostly fed by the male usually at the nest.

22 July – chick pottering around the flight picking up food for itself.

24 July – birds viewed with male's owner, chick clearly as big if not bigger than William, legs and feet clearly so, chick looking good.

13 August – (after two weeks away in France) chick doing well, fully out and about, started coming to me for food and letting me touch her body and feet without issue, nibbling my fingers through the aviary weld mesh.

2 Sept – Tweaky to fist in aviary short hop, following day to fist short hop more hesitant than previous day but was well fed.

5 Sept – to fist in aviary short hop, still not sure and clearly not certain but once on fist was fine, steps up without issue.

7 Sept – to fist in aviary over 8ft, still not overly confident but sits on fist without issue.

8 Sept – to fist to take rat getting more

confident.

10 Sept – confidence coming on in leaps and bounds, initially coming to fist and then jumping up onto and walking backwards and forwards across my shoulders, happily coming to fist. The next stage will be to remove her and start her introduction to falconry, a learning curve for me as I introduce the first hawk that I have bred to my knowledge of falconry.

12 Sept – from aviary and fitted with "kit" including bewitt to leg with bell and tail mount. Feeding from fingers and helping her pull chick apart. Bird totally relaxed and confident – no aggression. Weighing in at just over 2lb 4oz.

13 Sept – posting on creance in garden to approx 14ft. No problems, no aggression can feed and fly by hand and I mean by hand.

The bird is so used to me touching and playing with her with a bare hand she is not used to the gauntlet, so now begins the manning proper and getting her used to the glove.



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## Raptors in

# Mexico

Part 2

Releasing trapped passage falcon

**W**e would be heading north east from Monterrey to get to the particular beach where my biologist friends would be carrying out their trapping. On the way we passed through some superb countryside and were rewarded with the sighting of a great many Harris Hawks and also a fair number of Grey Hawks and White Tailed Hawks. But one sighting we felt extremely fortunate to observe was of an adult Osprey fishing in what, at first at least, seemed a highly inappropriate place.

### Circling Osprey

We were travelling along a highway when we spotted a large bird circling a long way off into the distance. On inspection through binoculars this turned out to be an Osprey. But the area it was repeatedly circling appeared to consist of nothing more than scrub vegetation and cactus with the occasional clump of mesquite trees scattered across the landscape. We drove off road to investigate and took great care not to run over any ground spreading cactus with our tyres. Cactus are generally underestimated by visitors and their ability to penetrate the soles of

even good quality walking boots and the tyres of a four wheel drive vehicle has to be seen to be believed.

Eventually we crested a small rise to find our friend the Osprey was in fact circling a naturally occurring pond of around an acre in area. Although we stayed for around twenty minutes or so and saw the Osprey make four or five attempts at fishing we were not fortunate enough to see it actually catch a fish. After his failed attempts the Osprey took off and headed into the distance and we started to carefully make our way back to the highway. As we did so another rather attractive Mexican resident crossed our path in the form of a medium sized Rattle Snake. Apparently these were very common in the area and falconers that hunt with dogs have to take special precautions against them. The most common method employed by either falconers or shooters who take to the field where Rattle Snakes are likely to occur is a fairly straight forward but highly effective one.

This involves catching a young live Rattle Snake and taking it somewhere where it can be easily spotted by the dog but without too much cover for the snake to hide in. The dog is then fitted

with an electric collar and every time it approaches the snake it receives a shock. This is repeated until the dog actually backs off the minute it comes across a snake. The bite of a Rattle Snake is not to be taken lightly and none of the antics as seen in the average John Wayne western will be of any use. Although not always fatal to humans, providing the correct serum can be taken within a reasonable time of receiving the bite, for dogs the outlook is always considerably gloomier. I have several friends in Mexico who have lost their dogs to Rattle Snake bites. Apparently the death from such a bite can also be long and drawn out as well as exceedingly painful.

### Birds of a feather

The last hour or so of the journey to the coast took us through a landscape that had changed from scrub country to flat green arable areas where large numbers of ducks and egrets were to be found. Also large flocks of American Blackbirds were fairly common. These flocks consisted of anything up to two or three thousand birds in each one. Obviously any such concentration of a food species will attract the attention of the appropriate raptor. Accordingly we were

not surprised to see a couple of Prairie Tercels in attendance. One raptor we saw that gave me particular pleasure was an immature Aplomado Falcon. We were lucky enough to see her make two sorties into the large flock of potential dinners but unfortunately neither was successful and then as quickly as she had come she was gone. One of the Prairie Tercels made an attack right in front of us and he fared better than the Aplomado. He put in a very short shallow stoop at a group of around twenty straggling blackbirds and managed to snatch one as he passed. With hardly any effort at all he glided up onto a telegraph pole and sat contentedly plucking his meal.

### Migration time

We reached the beach mid afternoon and spent a couple of hours just taking a look and seeing if the migration of Peregrines was taking place as it should. This may sound a blatantly obvious thing to say but a few years previously I had gone down to Vera Cruz to watch the Accipiter migration at what should have been its peak and saw very few raptors at all. The weather in the north had been somewhat milder than usual and accordingly the migration had been slightly late starting. Needless to say it was much too late to be able to alter things when you have to book air tickets, hotels etc this end and weeks in advance. Fortunately for us on this occasion in the first hour on the beach we saw six Peregrines, five passage falcons and a haggard.

Our luck was well and truly in as we also saw a passage Merlin chasing some small shore birds. It was a classic Merlin style attack with a very fast initial run in and then it chased a Sandpiper along the shore following every move the Sandpiper made until eventually the Merlin managed to grab it. The Merlin alighted on top of a dune to plume and eat its prize but was disturbed in the process by the unwanted attentions of an adult male White Hawk. Fortunately for the Merlin the White Tail did not continue for too long in its efforts to obtain a free meal and lazily drifted off.

### Trapping on the beach

The following morning and indeed for several mornings after that we were on the beach quite literally at first light so as to start trapping before the heat of the day got up. The method of trapping is with harnessed pigeons and as I make no apology for stressing this method is legal



Freshly trapped haggard falcon

in Mexico and also considered the most efficient method and the least stressful on the Peregrines themselves. Because all such methods are illegal here I will not dwell on the mechanics of them and accordingly will skip any fine detail relating to trapping. The beach we were trapping on is some forty eight kilometres long and varies between one and four kilometres in width. Where the public can access the beach there are all the normal sort of drinking and eating establishments you would expect but these are in a relatively small cluster and are soon left behind. In total there are also three small gatherings of fishermen's huts along the entire length of the beach. So even at weekends the beach itself is relatively free of people but during the week it is virtually deserted.

Spotting passage Tundra Peregrines on a deserted beach is not quite as simple

as first may be imagined. They tend to sit on larger pieces of driftwood or on the edge of sand dunes. It is all too easy to suddenly spot one at the last minute and spook it before getting the opportunity to trap it. Accordingly we generally sweep a large area very carefully with binoculars and if nothing is spotted then move on a half mile or so. This process is repeated until a peregrine is eventually spotted. Then it is a case of working out the best way to present the trap to the falcon and then get into position to do so. With the trap deployed we drive off some five hundred yards or so and turn the vehicle round and wait for the drama to unfold. If the Peregrine is hungry the reaction to the pigeon is almost instantaneous. Very often the Peregrine is attacking the pigeon before we have travelled a hundred yards and as often as not by the time we turn





importance and it is a mad dash to get to the falcon and get her secured before she can do herself any damage at all.

Once the falcon has been reached it is literally just a matter of seconds before she is safely and securely held and the harness removed from her feet. Then she is rung, photographed and given a quick check over. The final job before releasing her is to put a splash of paint on her chest so that other ringers will be able to easily spot from a distance that she has already been rung. If those doing the trapping know their job well the falcon is on its way again in a surprisingly short time. What would come as a surprise to those that have never been fortunate enough to witness this operation for themselves before is the fact that once released the Peregrines do not normally fly off in a

straight line as far and as fast as possible. They normally circle and as a matter of course we always throw out the dead pigeon for them so that they do get a decent meal in exchange for their brief inconvenience.

Despite the fact that we were there to trap and ring passage falcons very occasionally an unexpected visitor will pay attention to the harnessed pigeon.

We caught a haggard falcon on this trip which drove off the passage falcon we were trying to trap and then proceeded to take the pigeon herself. It is interesting to note that the passage falcons nearly always come straight into the pigeon and try and grab it on the initial run in. Seldom do they make passes and put in any short stoops at the pigeon. Haggards on the other hand rarely come straight in and will put in a series of short stoops at the pigeon just pulling up at the last minute.

They seem to be confused by the fact that the pigeon does not take to the air and this seems to make the Haggards nervous. Sometimes they will put in a number of attacks and then pull away altogether and go and look for something that seems to behave more naturally to them. But the majority will eventually bind

#### Typical high nesting site for Aplomado falcons

the vehicle round the falcon is on the pigeon and pluming it. This is the moment that requires restraint on the part of the trappers and also the moment that never fails to stimulate me. The falcon may well have taken the pigeon and be in the process of pluming it but this does not by any means signify that the falcon is caught.

#### Engrossed Peregrine

The thing that needs to be done is to wait until the Peregrine is well and truly engrossed in the unexpected meal and then very slowly start to ease forward in the vehicle. The Peregrine will become aware of the approaching vehicle and sooner or later will feel uneasy because of it. When this stage is reached it will be in a quandary as to whether to stay or to leave its meal behind. Sooner or later it will make to step off the pigeon. If it can clearly do so and daylight can be seen between the feet of the falcon and the pigeon carcase then it is not trapped. However if the falcon goes to step off and the pigeon is dragged with it then it is truly snared. Now speed is of the utmost



Superb passage Tundra

to the pigeon and end up being taken.

### A special day

Very occasionally a day will stand out because something very special indeed happened and you know full well that the memory of it is going to live with you for a very long time. On this trip it was watching five passage peregrine Falcons attacking a lone Cattle Egret at the same time and subsequently catching three of them at one go. Our attention was drawn to two young falcons putting in a series of shallow stoops at an Egret that was flying along the shore line but at some thirty yards or so out to sea. The Egret was less than a couple of feet above the water and occasionally its wing tips could be seen to be brushing the surf. The peregrines were stooping at the Egret but pulling up short because of the sea. It became obvious that all the time the Egret remained in the proximity of the surf it would be safe but as soon as it turned over land again it was most certainly doomed. The attentions of the two young falcons soon attracted the attentions of others and eventually there were five passage falcons all stooping at the poor Egret. It has to be said though that it didn't panic and remained steadfast in its progress along the surf.

We only had two harnesses with us and both were ready to be deployed. This we did and instantly all five Peregrines broke off and attacked our pigeons. There followed a few minutes of pandemonium and when the dust finally settled we had two Peregrines on our pigeons. Because of the proximity of the other falcons we broke our own rules and sprinted immediately to the falcons. If they weren't trapped then we would surely get an opportunity at one of the others – it was a risk worth taking. But as we ran in a third falcon came in and started to squabble with one that had a pigeon in her foot. The end result was that three peregrines were taken and the other two circled above us watching what was going on. We rang the three as quickly as possible and then put out five pigeon carcasses so that each falcon would get a meal.

Our special day wasn't over in that just as we had finished putting out the pigeons for the five Peregrines and were watching them calmly eat their meal an army lorry full of heavily armed troops pitched up and wanted to know what we were doing. Having checked our paperwork for the trapping and also our passports they informed us that several kidnappings had taken place in the area recently and they

would advise that we didn't linger after the sun started to go down. We took their advice and headed off back to the hotel for the evening. As we drove along the sands we spotted some Coyotes making a meal of a dead Dolphin that had been washed up by the tide.

After several more days of trapping peregrines it was time to head back to Monterrey and do some serious hawking with Aplomado Falcons and a young female Harris Hawk. The journey was a long hot one and was on the point of tedium when we spotted what looked like a large number of vultures ringing up in the distance. We drove towards the spiralling mass and it turned out to be quite literally several thousand Swainsons Hawks on migration. I have only ever seen around a dozen of this particular species in the wild before and that is in the course of some forty years. But here in front of me were literally thousands of them.

There were some Red Tails and some Turkey Vultures mixed in but these were very few in number. We watched them spiral up and then drift across the sky at what seemed quite a high speed. Almost as quickly as they had come into view they were gone. A truly incredible and unforgettable sight.



Getting ready to go hawking



# A morning's Quail hunt

In December in eastern Oregon the mornings are cold and clear, in the low 30's (F), it heats up to the mid 40's by afternoon, and with very little wind the conditions are perfect for hawking. This morning was no exception, what I call "fresh". With just a few clouds in the sky I could not have asked for a better morning.

Over the years I have flown my female perlin, Tinkerbelle, at many different kinds of quarry. Valley quail, however, were never in the mix mainly because they could not be found away from cover and, being the masters at dumping into thick cover never to be seen again, a refush was rare if not impossible. Back in California where Tinkerbelle has done the vast majority of her hunting, valley quail are never far from blackberry bushes which seem to be taking over the state. I think one would have to set the bushes on fire before a quail would leave the very thick impenetrable mass that blackberry bushes grow in. And that probably would not go over well.... me running around the state setting things on fire for my perlin. Consequently, valley quail never entered into the picture.



Part of the flying ground

This all changed when my wife and I relocated to a ranch in the high desert of eastern Oregon. One of the first things I noticed was the large number of valley quail. They are everywhere and in big numbers. It is not uncommon to see flocks of 100 or more birds and, guess what, there are no blackberries up here. There is plenty of other cover but, sadly, blackberries can't handle the cold. Finding valley quail in flyable situations was now not only possible but doable and this changed the entire picture.

## Fluctuating weight

Tinkerbelle flies at 12.5 oz -13.5 oz. I try to keep her weight fluctuating up and down as I don't think keeping hunting raptors at the same weight all the time is wise. I would find the higher range of what they fly best at and go from there. I keep raising their weight until the performance in the field starts to suffer and then start going back down, and as long as the bird is hunting and catching game this works well.

Perlins are flown in all manner of flights, off the fist like a short wing, coursing flights where the falcon is released and follows along, and from the waiting on style of hunting. I prefer the waiting on flight with the perlin overhead looking for the flush off a point from my dogs. For me this is the most exciting way to see a perlin fly. Waiting on gives you a real insight as to just how fast perlins are, particularly in the stoop. To me the big question was not whether Tinkerbelle was fast enough to overtake the speedy valley quail (that was never in doubt), but would the quail stay in the air long enough. Valley quail are famous for dumping, like I already said, and as soon as they see a falcon coming in they fold up and drop into cover. Ahhh, seeing a falcon coming, that is the key. When a perlin stoops they just about become invisible. I have witnessed this many times in the field and this led me to think . . . if I can't see them while simply standing

still watching, how could a quail keep an eye on one while flying. So my plan was simple: find a flock of valley quail and, with Tinkerbelle overhead, go in hard and fast with the dogs in an effort to create enough confusion that the quail lose track of the real danger, Tinkerbelle.

The alarm went off at 8:00am; not so early to go out hawking but if I went any earlier I wouldn't find any quail. For whatever reason quail cannot be found before 8:30 or 9:00am, they just don't come out. My working theory is that they do not want to leave the thicker cover because of hungry hunting goshawks that are now moving through this area and I can't say I blame them. After weighing Tinkerbelle, who tipped the scale at a whopping 12.8 oz, I loaded up my two dogs and headed out. Her weight was just about where I figured it would be and, truth be known, I didn't really have to put her on the scale because I'd fly her anyway, regardless. I like to have my perlins ready and on my fist as I drive. This insures that when a slip is located all I have to do is lower the driver's side window, stick my arm out, and off she goes.

## Local knowledge

I have a number of areas where game can be found, doves and valley quail being the primary targets that offer the best flights for Tinkerbelle. We have a large dirt canal that cuts directly across our ranch which provides irrigation water for our alfalfa hay fields during the growing season and is dry in the off season and, unlike many ranches, we do not spray the weeds and grasses that grow on the sides of this canal, preferring to keep it for wildlife habitat. Valley quail and pheasants thrive because of this and the falconry's not bad either. So I turned left on the canal road and slowly drove along looking for any movement or sign of quail. They will dart in and out of the grass, running back and forth across the dry canal bed. Unlike just about any other quarry I have hunted,



Tinkerbelle

quail can be encouraged to move into a more flyable situation, the term is called bumping. As an example, if I see some quail running in front of my truck I have on many occasions just eased my way up to them and moved them along in front of the truck until they are in a better place. But on this morning I did not see any quail until I was almost at the end of the canal road. In fact, I just about passed them by without seeing them. It was one of those times that we all have where you start to relax thinking about the next place you're

going to hunt and, all of a sudden, oh \*\*\*\*, there they are directly across from you, you didn't see a bird until you were almost on top of them.

So I was driving along the canal road and there they were, 15-20 valley quail bunched up under some tallish weeds, about waist high. I drove past, rolled down the truck window and unhooded Tinkerbelle. She has a preflight routine she goes through each time. It starts with a look around, she fans her tail, scratches her head, rouses, and finally

launches. She was somewhere in her preflight countdown between tail fan and head scratch when she saw the quail. She aborted the rest of the preflight launch sequence, bless her heart, and left the fist! I was moving like a ninja warrior, gliding out the door to the back of the truck, slipping on my hawking vest and placing Tinkerbelle's hood in the hood saver as I moved! Again, moving with great skill, I opened the truck tail gate, released the dogs, and started to take control of the flight. Well, okay, I managed to get my vest on, not drop the hood, and get the two dogs out without making too much racket, hoping not to blow the slip. Perlins take very little time to mount up. Tinkerbelle was in position in just seconds, the dogs were on point and I was sending them in for the flush. I had taken maybe ten steps when I noticed a rooster pheasant throwing himself up against an old wire fence that was mostly hidden by the tall grass.

### Preferred quarry

Tinkerbelle has it in her mind that she can take pheasants and more than one slip has been blown because she was off flying down a pheasant while the quail all left. She can fly down pheasants, speed is not the issue, but the catch is the size difference, somewhat like a fly on a pigeon, it's not going to happen. So I see the pheasant find his way through the fence and flush up and out right under Tinkerbelle. (Now you realize that if it was my *gyr*/peregrine in the air this would not have happened. The pheasant would have turned invisible, never to be seen again.) So the pheasant launches and I see Tinkerbelle in a tear drop, stooping at the rooster pheasant! I'm thinking, "Great, there goes the quail slip" when suddenly a quail goes zooming right past my head like a huge bumble bee, heading for cover somewhere. In a mere heartbeat I hear Tinkerbelle zoom past and see her bind to the quail! How she got there I don't know. The last time I had seen her she was locked on a rooster pheasant going the other way. Absolutely amazing! I walked over to find her holding a full adult male valley quail – what a beautiful sight.



# The British Falconry and Raptor Fair

**T**he May Bank Holiday weekend of Sunday the 3<sup>rd</sup> and Monday the 4<sup>th</sup> will see The British Falconry and Raptor Fair take

place once again in the superb setting of Chetwynd Park, near Newport in Shropshire. Affectionately known amongst participants and visitors alike as the Falconers' Fair, the event will be reaching a rather significant milestone itself this year, being as it is the twentieth consecutive staging of the event. The event has grown beyond all recognition from its first tentative outing at Stoneleigh Agricultural Show Ground all those years ago. The overall success of the Fair can be attributed to many different factions and a large number of individuals have contributed towards its ever growing popularity by their selfless commitment and enthusiasm. But the real motivational driving force behind the event has been the organisational team of Ron and Cheryl Morris. Theirs is the foresight and hard work that have built the event into the prestigious world recognised affair it has quite rightly become. Over the years they have built on the early success and have also been prepared to try a new initiative or move in a different direction when required.

This year the basic format of the weekend will follow the tried and tested route with some superb flying displays, a weathering that is second to none, quality arena events and plenty of trade stands of all descriptions. Coupled to all this will be the usual outstanding collection of falconry and wildlife artists displaying their highly individual work.

The Falconers' Fair is many different things to many different people but at its hub are the birds of prey themselves and these can be seen either in the main arena displays or on the weathering. The main display givers in the arena this year will again be Jemima Parry-Jones,

surely the backbone of the public face of birds of prey in Britain, and Jonathon Marshall who was seen at the fair for the first time last year. Jemima needs no introduction to most people interested in falconry and birds of prey and was sorely missed whilst away from these shores. Fortunately now, she is back here in Britain and it is rather nice to see that she is also firmly back in residence at her old home in Newent. Jemima will be giving two displays each day in the main arena and they are bound to be of her normal superb quality and accompanied by a commentary that is always amusing as well as educational.

The weathering ground will be up to its normal very high standard and will give falconers and public alike the opportunity to see an extremely varied display of trained raptors that are used in falconry. It would not be possible to put on such a display without the co-operation of a great many individuals who bring along their hawks, falcons and eagles and of course the volunteers that willingly look after the logistics of such an undertaking. Fortunately for the fair the Central Falconry and Raptor club will once again be undertaking these duties and the organisers would like to express their gratitude to the club and its members for their continued support. Without them it would be difficult to mount such a superb display and over the two days of the fair club members will be on hand to assist with photographs and questions wherever possible.

A face that will be new to the Falconers Fair but not the game fair scene in general will be that of Graham Watkins the renowned working dog trainer. Although not a falconer himself Graham has trained many dogs for falconers and is completely au fait with their special requirements. Each day Graham and friends will be in the main arena giving a display of dog and ferret work as it

applies to falconry and they will also be on hand at their own stand to answer queries regarding the training of working dogs in general.

The other canine events to take place in the arena each day will be the ever entertaining simulated coursing and of course the opportunity to meet the various local hound packs. The simulated coursing has grown in popularity each year and has now established itself as a firm favourite and starts off the main arena activities each day. Open to dogs of all sizes and origins this event always proves to be extremely popular. Equally a hit with the crowds is the presence of the hounds, and these will be introduced as normal by Michael Sagar from Hounds magazine.

Away from the main arena there will be plenty to see and do as well as eat and drink. Trade stands of all descriptions will be present and falconers will be able to view and purchase, if so inclined, just about anything to do with the sport of falconry and its practice. The fair is the largest yearly gathering of equipment suppliers and these come not only from Britain, but also Holland, France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Czech Republic, Japan and the United States. For the falconer it is a unique opportunity to see the quality of the equipment from individual suppliers first hand and to be able to make direct comparisons. As well as all the furniture worn by not only the hawks but also the falconers themselves there are also manufacturers of brooders and incubators exhibiting along will suppliers of vitamins and food supplements for hawks. In fact just about anything the falconer or raptor enthusiast could ever require will be on show at the fair.

As well as the practical side of falconry being catered for the aesthetic side is far from forgotten. Various artists will be exhibiting their work and amongst these

will be established and highly respected faces such as Martyn Brook and Carl Bass. Joining them for the first time this year will be Jack Bishop a sixteen year old with a talent that is already blossoming. Jack is the son of popular and respected falconer Dave Bishop and so has been around birds of prey all his life. He is a falconer himself and his love and feel for his subject is reflected in the work that he is starting to produce. Make an effort and have look at his pictures, you will not be disappointed.

Books on the sport of falconry and raptors in general will also be for sale and indeed my own new book Hunting with Aplomado Falcons will be launched at the fair. This book is limited to 500 and each copy will be numbered. All the art work for the book has been produced by Martyn Brook and three limited edition prints of Aplomado Falcons, signed by both the artist and the author of the book, will also be on sale.

Along with all the specialised falconry stands there will also be all the normal stands associated with a prestigious

game fair such as outdoor clothing, pet accessories, sporting optics, shooting etc. The Stick makers will have a significant presence and the arts and crafts marquee will also be packed with exhibits new and old once again.

All in all there really is something for

everyone and with admission at just £10 again this year and car parking free of charge it's not going to break the bank to attend. If any further details on the event are required then the show office can be contacted on 01588-672708.



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# Club Directory



## The Welsh Hawking Club



[www.thewelshhawkingclub.com](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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

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

Join and  
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## The South East Falconry Group

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

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

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

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

For further information or an application form please contact -

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

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



## Yorkshire Falconry Club

Meetings held at The Milton Arms,  
Elsecard, Barnsley.

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

*Membership includes;*

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- Affiliation to the Hawk Board



For further information please visit our web-site

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

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**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](http://www.seraonline.co.uk)  
or telephone Brian for information on: **01732 463218**





# Independent Bird Register

Telephone 0870 608 8500

## IBR Lost, Found, Reunited & Stolen birds of prey from 24th December to 21st March 2009

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 7

BREF	RING NUMBER	SPECIES	34643	??9801??	PEREGRINE FALCON	66682	??2584??	GYR/PEREGRINE HYBRID
			34937	??1152??	HARRIS HAWK	66685	CM15 9	HARRIS HAWK
13382	IBR13469W	HARRIS HAWK	39353	??6403??	HARRIS HAWK	66690	??2338BEC0??	BARN OWL
24949	IBR59610W	HARRIS HAWK	40160	??WHC9??	SAKER FALCON	66694	??WHC0??	GYR/PEREGRINE/LANNER
30256	IBR29158W	HARRIS HAWK	41003	??7387??	HARRIS HAWK	66695	14347V / 20039W	PEREGRINE/SAKER
53934	IBR53113W	HARRIS HAWK	41552	??9473??	HARRIS HAWK	HYBRID		
54019	IBR53157W	HARRIS HAWK	43524	??9692??	KESTREL	66696	??RPR??	SPARROWHAWK
63714	IBR62173R	SPARROWHAWK	43906	??2654??	HARRIS HAWK	66793	??2668??	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
67358	17641DOEW	PEREGRINE / SAKER	47474	??7315??	HARRIS HAWK	66925	??2226??	GYR/SAKER HYBRID
32664	4.01926772172	KESTREL	48094	??8282??	GYR/SAKER FALCON	66936	L33 4	HARRIS HAWK

### REUNITED x 98

BARN OWL		11	50322	??7773??	KESTREL	66942	??132BC0??	BARN OWL
COMMON BUZZARD		5	51066	??0201??	KESTREL	66943	??A182??	PEREGRINE FALCON
EURASIAN EAGLE OWL		3	51171	??0991??	HARRIS HAWK	66954	CV2 3	HARRIS HAWK
GOSHAWK		1	51583	??8442??	LITTLE OWL	66955	FK15 9	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
GREAT HORNED OWL		1	54906	??3042??	KOOKABURRA	67004	??3376??	GYR/SAKER FALCON
GYR HYBRIDS		9	55448	??5591??	HARRIS HAWK	67006	??7090??	GYR/SAKERXSAKER
HARRIS HAWK		39	55586	??4452??	BARN OWL	67055	??207??	SAKER FALCON
KESTREL		4	56254	??5872??	HARRIS HAWK	67193	??3179??	GOSHAWK
LANNER FALCON		2	59478	??0596??	GYR/PEREGRINE HYBRID	67780	??4906??	PEREGRINE/LANNER HYBRID
LITTLE OWL		1	60584	??5042??	WHITE-FACED SCOPES OWL			
PEREGRINE FALCON		3	62925	??118??	PEREGRINEXGYR/SAKER/SAKER			
PEREGRINE HYBRIDS		11	64634	??1532??	BARN OWL			
RED-TAILED HAWK		6	65634	??3154??	HARRIS HAWK			
SNOWY OWL		1	66115	??8530??	GYR/SAKER HYBRID			
URAL OWL		1	66305	??8637??	AMERICAN KESTREL			
			66345	??6017??	GYR/SAKER HYBRID			
			66371	WF10 4	HARRIS HAWK			
			66388	??7945??	GYR/PEREGRINE HYBRID			

### LOST x 122

BREF	RING NUMBER	SPECIES	66392	IP22 4	HARRIS HAWK	66486	??BK0??	HARRIS HAWK
5463	??3617??	RED-TAILED HAWK	66401	??5542??	PEREGRINE X GYR/SAKER	66680	??749??	BARN OWL
11161	??0423??	SAKER FALCON	66402	??5321??	PEREGRINE/BARBARY HYBRID	66681	??474??	BARN OWL
17153	??7371??	HARRIS HAWK	66550	??600??	SPARROWHAWK	66687	??797??	HARRIS HAWK
19389	PE26 2LE	HARRIS HAWK	66557	??6074??	PEREGRINE/SAKER X PEREGRINE	66689	??749??	BARN OWL
20283	??8900??	BARN OWL	66575	28852W	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID	66780	??550BC??	TAWNY OWL
23336	??1271??	COMMON BUZZARD	66586	??YOONEEK0??	HARRIS HAWK	67837	??WHC0??	GYR HYBRID
25015	??3391??	BARBARY/SHAHEEN	66587	??4775??	HARRIS HAWK			
29655	??6696??	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID	66668	??0241??	GYR/PEREGRINE HYBRID			

### FOUND x 14

BREF	RING NUMBER	SPECIES
7285	??310A9??	BARN OWL
13897	??2288??	BARN OWL
29044	??0190??	EURASIAN EAGLE OWL
43703	??258??	HARRIS HAWK
62009	??056??	BARN OWL
66463	??KM9??	RED-TAILED HAWK
66486	??BK0??	HARRIS HAWK
66680	??749??	BARN OWL
66681	??474??	BARN OWL
66687	??797??	HARRIS HAWK
66689	??749??	BARN OWL
66780	??550BC??	TAWNY OWL
67837	??WHC0??	GYR HYBRID



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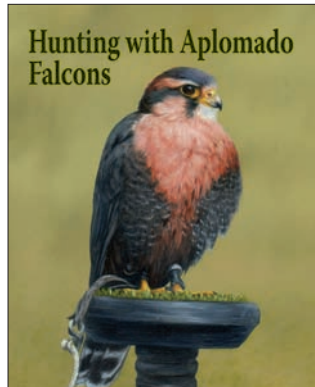


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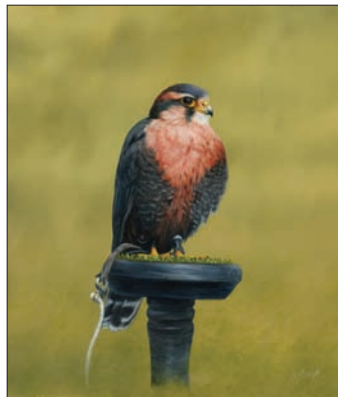
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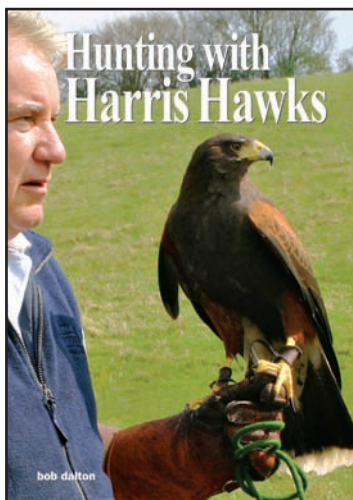
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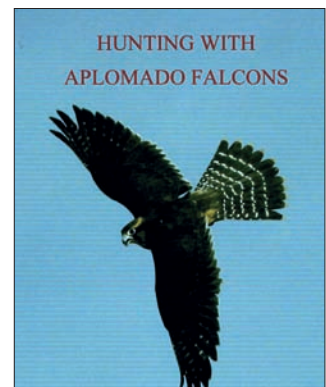
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