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I hope everyone has survived the snow and ice that we have been experiencing recently and that your hawks and falcons have come through it without too much trouble.

There is another mixed bag of articles in this issue including two stories concerning last year's Gathering of Eagles meet in USA – one about the Redtail group and one on the Eagle group. If you have not attended this meet before, I can recommend it.

Also, there is an interesting and important article by Dr. Andrew Dixon on the conservation project in the Far East. It is very interesting to see the lengths to which people will go to help conservation projects around the world.



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)

## New Limited Edition Print by Colin Woolf

### *Power and Grace* - Bald Eagle

**B**ritish wildlife artist Colin Woolf has released a new limited edition print for 2010. This majestic head study of a bald eagle has an immediate appeal - not only for the arresting expression in the bird's eyes, but because of the striking beauty of its plumage and the undeniable strength in its beak.

The study has been painted in pure watercolour, meaning that no white paint was used: the whiteness of the plumage is the watercolour paper, and the deep blue background pigment has been painted around the bird's outline. For this reason, Colin calls his study 'a challenge of technique'!

Ever since childhood, Colin has always been fascinated by birds of prey. Over the years he has produced many paintings and sketches of golden eagles, red kites, hen harriers and peregrines. The bald eagle presented a special challenge with its pure white head feathers and brilliant yellow beak. Colin explains: "Part of the challenge I set myself was to paint around the whole of the bird's outline with the intense indigo hue, without using any masking. The danger here was that the blue would mix with the yellow pigment of the beak, or 'bleed' into the white head feathers, which would have been a disaster. I also wanted to make sure that the eye was just right, as I believe the eyes are the most essential part of any portrait."

Produced on archive-quality paper using light-fast inks, each print is signed and numbered, and is accompanied by a Certificate of Authenticity. Only 50 prints will be produced world-wide, each one carefully colour-matched by Colin to ensure the finest quality of reproduction.

*Power and Grace* is priced at £95 plus post & packing. For additional pencil remarques (original pencil sketches in the white border of the print) the total price is £150 plus post and packing. Orders can be despatched worldwide. If you'd like to see this stunning image on your wall, please contact Colin on 01501 751796, or visit his website, [www.wildart.co.uk](http://www.wildart.co.uk).



## Nancy de Bastyai

It is sad to report that Nancy de Bastyai, widow of well known and respected Hungarian falconer Lorant de Bastyai, died on 29th December, 2009.

Lorant was the founder of the Welsh Hawking Club and became it's President for many years until his death in 1993. As a mark of the love and respect that the Club had for Lorant, Nancy was appointed a Vice President for life.

Her cremation took place on Friday, 15th January at Oakley Wood crematorium, the same place as that of Lorant.

## 2010 Falconry Fair

The organisers of the British Falconry and Raptor Fair are pleased to announce that the well known and respected bird and animal food supplier Kiezebrink UK Ltd have stepped forward to become the principal sponsor of the event for the next three years. The company that has always been very pro-active in supporting British Falconry joins the Falconry Fair at a very exciting time in its development and the 21<sup>st</sup> consecutive running of the event should be one to remember.

The main and mini arena entertainment this year will be return very much to their falconry roots and lots of different events will be staged for visitors to enjoy. As well as the big names one would expect at the world's premier Falconry Fair, such as Jemima Parry-Jones there will also be a great deal of grass roots falconry. For example the Yorkshire hawking Club will be putting on a superb display of simulated rabbit hawking and this is a form of hawking that a great many of the visitors can identify with.

Alan Hender, well respected falconer and dog man, will be giving highly informative and entertaining displays revolving around the dog work involved in hawking and the different breeds and their suitability.

The Falconry Fair this year will be on the Bank Holiday weekend of Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> and Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> of May at Chetwynd Park, Newport, near Telford, Shropshire. For more details contact the show office at [www.countryfairs.info](http://www.countryfairs.info)

## Understanding Goshawks

By Darryl A Perkins

Reviewed by Marian Eldrett

Anyone who buys this book expecting a definitive guide to understanding goshawks will, I believe, be disappointed. This is not what this book is. Rather it describes one man's passion for goshawks and how he has gone about getting the most out of them. As he says at the beginning "The title Understanding Goshawks is an oxymoron. Based on this title one might conclude that a) I have a complete understanding of goshawks and/or b) so too will the reader after reading this book. Neither deduction is true. What I hope to do with this book is to impart to the reader some of 'my' understanding about the goshawk, which, I consider, to be the ultimate bird of the chase." One thing is clear from early on in the book: this is a guy who knows a lot about goshawks.

His methods could be described as unorthodox, e.g. "gut training" where his gos is encouraged to relax, and even sleep, on the author's stomach while he reclines in a chair. He recounts his practices from early training right through until the gos is entered at quarry and, from his many tales of success, one cannot argue that his training methods certainly get results.

The author's dry sense of humour is evident throughout the book and he favours the anecdotal approach as he invites the reader to share in his failures as well as his successes. As we all know "hindsight is a wonderful thing" and Darryl is keen to look at every scenario and experience, examining it to find out how and why it came about, how he could have handled it differently and how he will improve things the next time.

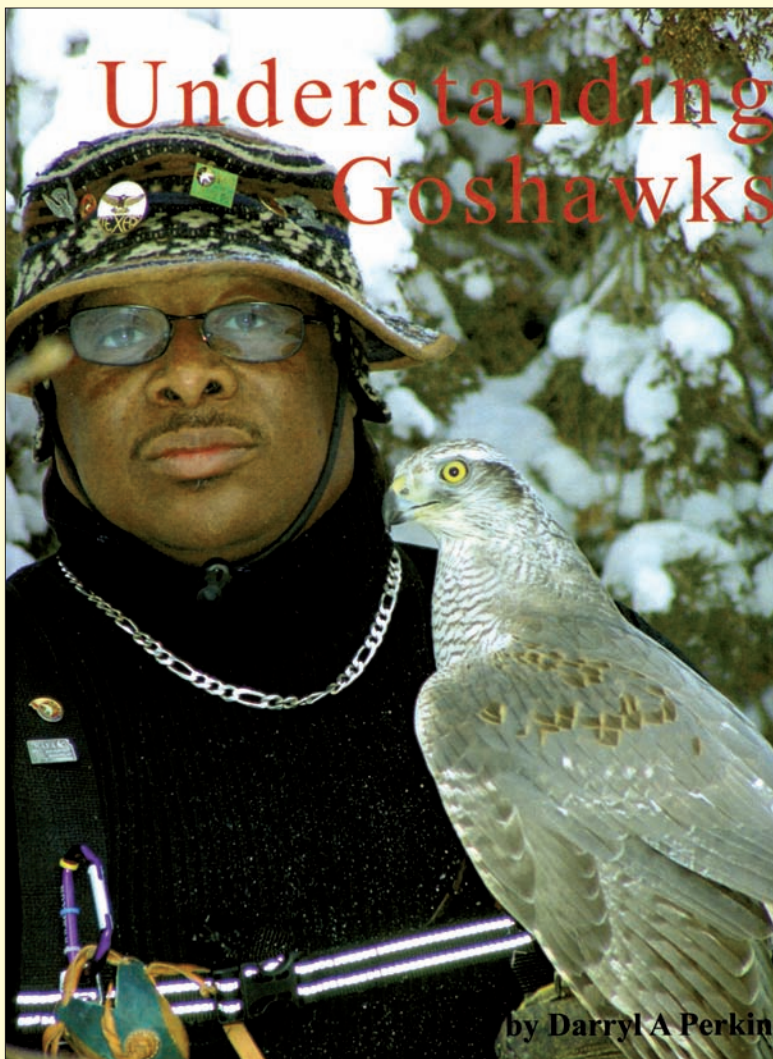
His enthusiasm for his subject is endless – he is clearly passionate about falconry and strives for excellence in his practise of the sport. He is open to new ideas and new methods, whilst at the same time recognising that he has a responsibility – "Those of us who practise the sport have a responsibility to ensure that the gains we've earned over the years are not only maintained, but are enhanced for generations to come."

Unfortunately, the appearance of the book falls short of Darryl's falconry standards. It is poorly laid out and many of the illustrations are of a low quality (although it has to be said that some are very good). At times, the text is difficult to read due to odd column layout and the interruption of sentences by pages of photos. It is also full of "typos" which further detract from its content. To me the book appears to have been put together in an amateur fashion; a more professional production, with better laid out text and high quality photos throughout, would have made the book so much more desirable.

The price tag of £75.00 (due mainly I imagine to a short print run and shipping costs) is way over the top and I suspect this alone will make it a book which many will do without. This is a shame as it is, for the most part, an enjoyable read written by a true falconry enthusiast who is not afraid to be different.

It is available from Coch-y-Bonddu Books.

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**A**s the season has been struck by freezing conditions, with me looking at a fat hawk and the snow falling yet again, I thought it might interest to readers to understand where you, the falconer, is

# Where falconers are represented

represented, and what is achieved by our presence.

After many years on the Hawk Board (HB), some as a volunteer and latterly in its employ, I have come to the conclusion that few people are anti-falconry. Some still believe every stolen peregrine is taken for falconry – not helped by the discovery in December of three dead peregrines in a carrier bag dumped in Carmarthenshire, or the idiot currently serving a spell at Her Majesty's pleasure for trying to launder wild goshawks as captive bred. No, most of the things that impinge on our sport come from an oversight by legislators or wildlife lobbyists trying to do their best for the UK's flora and fauna and not realising that what they seek disadvantages us.

This is why our constant vigilance is critical and by being well known by key groups and government agencies helps our cause. Here are just a few:

**Animal Health (AH):** The delivery agency for Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), AH has a seat on the HB and the agency is a

principal point of contact for falconers. We have known them for many years under differing names, but thankfully the people have remained a constant. Good relations are central to our success. AH is the management authority for CITES in the UK, as well as COTES which enacts EU legislation. They consult with us on everything from fees for registration to changes in the law. It was with their co-operation that we were successful in getting the registerable species list reduced.

## Natural England

Natural England (NE), and their Scottish and Welsh counterparts: NE is primarily a conservation body and as such needs very close attention. HB has recently been an integral part of the consultations and subsequent changes to the Open General Licences – the Welsh have still to report. There is also the broader work being done by these agencies on invasive non-native species, and given that falconers fly free (but with the very firm intention of recovering) some non-natives, we are careful not to find our actions curtailed by any good intention on conservation.

## More agencies

**Hunting, Shooting and Fishing:** There are several bodies here and the first has to be the Countryside Alliance (CA). We are very closely linked to everything they do, and we rely on their better-funded infrastructure for government legislation, public relations, and legal advice. If you are not a member of a falconry club, you should be a CA member, if only for their legal help-line and insurance cover. We work with the British Association for Shooting and Conservation and also with the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust. The Country Land and Business Association provides our space at the annual Game Fair, and this enables us to reach a wider countryside audience. In Europe we have to maintain strong links with the Federation of Associations



for Hunting and Conservation (FACE). Based in Brussels, and coincidentally with a falconer as its CEO, this body is of increasing importance as the UK is swallowed deeper into the bureaucratic mass that is the European Union (now 27 members). And just for good measure, and because it links us to the most threatened field sports, we sit on the Council of Hunting Associations – remember, a repeal of the hated Hunting Act would be a body blow to the antis and take us back to a happier time before 700 hours was wasted debating the future of foxes, deer and hares, than was spent discussing our entry into a war in Iraq.

Sustainable Users Network (SUN): This group is a strong confederation of

associations involved in the trade and use of animals and covers zoos, pets, fish, reptiles, plants and taxidermy. Their chairman sits on the Hawk Board, and we are the recognised falconers on SUN. This body has enough clout to attend the CITES Conference of the Parties (this year in Qatar), and reviews British, European and global issues likely to affect us. As such we also meet with Defra and join in debate – which can be pretty polarised – with some of the more energetic protectionist bodies.

### Hawk Board

Over the years the Hawk Board has achieved some notable successes and the evidence is the number of falconers in the UK today – probably the most in Europe.

But this all costs money, which is why I have left the best to last. The Campaign for Falconry (CfF) is our fundraising arm, and although we levy the member clubs with an annual per capita fee, this doesn't scratch the surface. These clubs represent a paltry tenth of the estimated bird of prey keepers in the UK. And if you have heard it all before, I make no apologies. The CfF does fantastic work but it needs your support, so give generously or be prepared to take up golf!

Good hawking.

If you have areas of concern about falconry, remember this is your Hawk Board and you can raise issues with us by contacting me or any other member of the board.

My E-mail is: [nk.quattro@zetnet.co.uk](mailto:nk.quattro@zetnet.co.uk)

## The Problems with Extreme Weather

Jemima Parry-Jones

**A**lthough very hot weather in the summer can be unpleasant for captive birds, and constant rain can be miserable, there is no doubt that extreme cold, particularly for tethered birds, can be disastrous.

All my enclosures are fully roofed over, and I have to say when we go through a November such as the one at the end of 2009, which, after a glorious autumn in September and October, did not stop raining for weeks, I am so glad they are. I walk round the birds, and although I am drenched I'm probably on my third coat by the end of the day. The dogs are wet, the staff are wet, the house is wet (from the dogs!), BUT the birds are dry, and that makes such a difference to them and their comfort, particularly in this cold rain as opposed to warm summer rain. Now I know that some will say that the birds need to be able to get wet – well they can, all they have to do is sit close to the front of the aviary and they will get wet!

Cold damp birds are not comfortable. Yes, of course, in the wild they have to put up with it, but firstly many of the birds we now use here don't have the sort of weather in the US that we have here. If they do have rain, often it will be in the warmer parts of the year, and the colder parts are dry. And in the wild they have a choice of where they sit, fly, live and roost. In captivity they do not, particularly tethered birds.

But it's the freezing temperatures that we have had in December and January that really do the damage. Anyone who has had to cope with Wingtip Oedema knows how awful it is and particularly as one generally is to blame. It is not as if we don't know about it, and anyone leaving a tethered bird outside in the sort of weather that we have been having this winter is asking for trouble.

Unless you have a thermometer on the perch you really can have no idea what the temperature is by your bird if it is tethered. I don't know what temperature causes it, but I do

know that when we used to tether our birds in the Hawk Walk, under shelter but with a mesh front, we had problems which is why, probably 15 years ago now, I built the Indoor Hawk Walk that we have here. When I left it had heating under the perches, that has been removed, sadly, but the birds seem to have done OK in there. It is warmer than outside.

There is nothing sadder than seeing the wet blisters on your bird's wings, and not knowing, even though you treat them and keep the bird warm and exercise the wings, (and we used to put Preparation H on them daily as well), if within a few months that part of the wing will eventually drop off leaving you with a bird that is really not much use except for breeding and all because you did not keep it warm enough in the winter.

I have heard of two cases already, one of wingtip oedema and one where a Harris Hawk got very wet and died of hypothermia – there is no excuse for that, I am sorry but with what we know on care and husbandry of birds there really is no excuse.

So once this cold spell is over, think before next winter. Is my bird safe in cold weather, is it dry and able to keep warm. We are hoping to design some heated perches like the ones you can get in the US for parrots. I love the design and they are safe and cheap to run and the heat rises up through the bird, could not be better. I swear I am not going to go through another winter lying in a warm bed and worrying about the birds outside.

I have to say though I also do wonder about people who keep their dogs outside in this bleak weather with no heating, I wonder how they would like it if they had to live like that – my house is pretty damn cold and I only heat two of the rooms, and it can get pretty uncomfortable, but nothing like the outside. Put yourself in the shoes of your animals and think again!

# Power and Beauty

I recently attended the same Eagle meet in Kansas as the editor of this publication but spent a great deal of time out hawking with some falconers that were flying Red Tailed Hawks. Whilst being full of admiration for those that flew the eagles and appreciative of their skills in being able to bring these powerful raptors into the field in such excellent mental and physical condition the actual sport provided left me wanting somewhat.

Although it is an obvious thing to say the eagles are just so big and so powerful that flying them off of the fist at Jack Rabbits seemed to me to be a very one sided sporting contest. If the Jack Rabbit could be flushed in the right direction, with regard to cover and wind direction, then it was merely a case of the eagle overhauling the Jack and sticking a foot out at the appropriate moment. Such is the strength and power of the eagle that if it manages to get a foot to a Jack then the contest is over. The Jack Rabbit is not going to be able to struggle free from the grip of such an awesome predator. For me personally seeing such magnificent raptors like Golden Eagles flown directly at ground quarry from the fist left a great deal to be desired. This was particularly so as all the slips that I saw were such close ones and the Jacks were barely up to speed when they were taken. It reminded me of Hare Coursing when the slipper did not allow enough law to the Hare. The flights were all extremely short in duration and, to my eye, did not prove an extensive test of the flying potential of such capable hunters. But that is purely a personal opinion and if we all liked the same thing the world would indeed be a very dull place.

## Red Tail group

Fortunately for me there were a couple of falconers attending the meet that were flying Red Tailed Hawks and they were kind enough to invite Diana Durman-Walters and myself out with them. One was Dave Noble, of Noble bells fame

and the other was Danny Denham from Kentucky. Danny had driven from his home to that of Dave's in Wisconsin, then together they had driven the 14 hours to get to the meet. Also, I knew that an old friend, Greg Thomas would be attending the meet and he would also be bringing two Red Tailed Hawks with him. Greg is a very experienced falconer and has been practising the sport for almost 50 years; he has also just been made director at large for The North American Falconers Association. With three experienced falconers along with four well trained and fit hawks my hopes regarding the sporting prospects for the next few days improved considerably. I have to say my hopes and expectations were fully justified and we enjoyed some first class falconry.

The first afternoon that Diana and I joined the Red Tails it was just Dave and

Danny that were flying. Greg had stopped off to hawk nearby on his way to the meet the previous day and had lost his male Red Tail in the exceptionally high winds that prevailed. Needless to say he spent the night in the closest motel he could find and went back at first light to look for and eventually recover his hawk. Dave was flying Becky a three times intermewed passage female Red Tail and Danny was flying a passage Red Tailed Hawk of the year called Cactus. Both hawks were very experienced all rounder's having taken Squirrel, Cotton Tail Rabbits (the equivalent of the European Rabbit) as well as Jack Rabbits, which can weigh on average seven to eight pounds.

The Red Tails had been allocated a decent hunting area some 20 miles or so away from where the eagles were



Dave Noble with Becky



hunting. We would be flying over vast Maize fields that stretched for almost as far as the eye could see and had been cropped leaving approximately six inches of standing vegetation. The cover itself was sufficient to offer the Jack Rabbits both food and shelter but not tall enough to hide them effectively from the hawks once they had been flushed. The first field we visited certainly held plenty of Jacks for us to hunt. As we got out of the cars to ready ourselves and the hawks we inadvertently flushed several Jacks that were feeding where we had chosen to park. It turned out to be a very promising start to the hawking day. In the first 10 minutes or so we flushed something in the order of a dozen or so Jacks. There seemed to be quite a large concentration in the area we had chosen to walk first and as a hawk took off in pursuit of a flushed Jack we would flush one or two more as we hurried to try and keep up with the flight. This accidental flushing was repeated three or four times until things settled down and returned to normality with just single Jacks being found. At least for the first little while the sport was fast and furious.

### Decent flights

Danny and Dave took alternate slips and by the time we left the high concentration area both hawks had enjoyed several decent flights and had both taken fur from a Jack without actual hanging on, despite their best efforts to do so. This is where flying Jack Rabbits with the Red Tailed Hawks is so very different to flying them with the eagles. If the eagles get a foot to a Jack then it is an extremely rare occurrence for the Jack to be able to break free from their powerful grip. Whereas with the Red Tails getting hold of the Jack is just the first stage in the contest, the next part is to be able to hold and subdue the Jack. In the case of the eagles the raptor itself is the same weight or even slightly more than the quarry they are hunting. Whereas with the Red Tails the prey is two and a half to three times their own weight, quite a remarkable achievement that they ever get to hang to any at all.

After several near misses and half chances a Jack broke about 30 yards in front of us and ran directly away from us which happened to be across wind. It was Dave's turn to slip Becky and the



Greg Thomas with Tess

Red Tail showed no hesitation in setting off in pursuit. The hawk had soon closed the gap between herself and the Jack and as she carried out the characteristic hawk manoeuvre of lifting into the air a few feet before crashing down onto the intended victim the Jack was unsporing enough to suddenly switch back and run off in another direction. The hawk was committed and crashed to the ground with nothing in her feet to show for her efforts other than a Maize husk. But, undeterred, she took wing again and chased the Jack when it just managed to make the safety of some scrub near to a telegraph pole, on top of which the hawk took stand. Once the human element of the field got to the pole we could see the scrub went on for some considerable distance behind the pole and lead back out into the Maize field itself. So the Jack would have obviously made full use of the cover and carefully crept away to hopefully be flown another day.

With an hour or so of daylight left Greg Thomas arrived and everyone was relieved to hear he had recovered his miscreant hawk, Blade a four year old male passage Red Tail. He wanted to fly Tess his passage female of four seasons as

she had missed out completely the day before due to the errant behaviour of the male. So he took the next slip and it was quite a long one with the Jack getting up about eighty yards or so in front of us. Tess is an old hand with a great many Jack Rabbits to her credit and took off after this one with a real determination. The flight was a long one with the Jack twice jinking and trying its very best to dump Tess and so make good its escape. But Tess stuck to her job and after some really exciting flying made her move, powered in and grabbed the Jack. It was obvious from the somersaulting mixture of fur and feather that the hawk had initially grabbed the Jack with one foot by the head. The struggle went on for 15 to 20 seconds and then the dust settled and Tess could be seen sitting astride her prize, with her second foot planted firmly on the rump of her victim. The Jack had fought hard but there was no way the hawk was going to be kicked or shaken off. Greg was quickly on the scene and despatched the Jack quickly and quietly, quite rightly treating it with the respect it deserved. Unfortunately treating the quarry with respect is not something that is always apparent in some, and I stress

the word some, falconers today. There sometimes appears to be too great an emphasis on killing and pure sport seems to be taking something of a back seat.

An interesting point to note was just how well manned and therefore trusting Greg had managed to get his hawks. Both the male and female Red Tail were not the least bit footy on the kill and Greg would put his bare hands on the Jack and start to open it up for his hawks. He would pull the carcass around till eventually he had got the heart and liver and these he would give to his hawks by his bare hand without the slightest fear of getting footed. Not that you would expect passage hawks to be aggressive but still when their blood is up from having just made a kill and being eager to eat you would think they may snatch at a bloodied hand in the hopes of getting the meal a great deal quicker.

All too soon the light had started to fade and it was time to head home, or at least back to the hotel. We had enjoyed some excellent sport and one Jack Rabbit had been taken in fine style, so all in all a pretty good afternoon. The following day it would appear the eagles were going to go out in the afternoon so it was decided the Red Tails would go out in the morning and then after lunch we could all join the eagle party as spectators.

### Monitoring flights

Accordingly the following morning saw our party take to the field bright and early so as to get some serious hawking done before lunchtime. All four Red Tails would be taking the field that morning and judging by yesterday's numbers of Jack Rabbits it should be possible to get decent flights for all of them without too much trouble. Two things that struck me as an English falconer was that no one seemed to use dogs in conjunction with their hawks and also the ever present accompaniment to any hawking by wild Red Tails seemed to be dismissed very lightly as any serious threat to the trained hawks.

Wild Red Tails are truly abundant in the States, particularly in the area we were hawking in at the time. In fact one day I decided to keep a count just to satisfy my curiosity. The total seen for the day was 48. I may well have seen the same Red Tail twice on occasion but even so 40 plus of just one species is still an immense total. Add to this the fact that Red Tails are aggressive in defence of their hunting ground then their sheer numbers seemed to me to be a recipe for disaster. I know when we fly Peregrine Falcons at ducks in Mexico we have to be very aware of the presence of Red Tails and a few years ago a friend had an

Aplomado Falcon killed by one when out hawking. They are a predator not to be taken lightly. In the case of a trained Red Tail then the thinking seemed to be that hawk and falconer are never that far apart and the close presence of the human is sufficient deterrent to stop the wild Red Tail coming in and attacking or trying to rob the trained one. The hawks being flown during my stay were obviously not mine but I still, never the less, felt uneasy about the close proximity of wild Red Tails on more than one occasion.

The morning started with Greg Thomas flying Blade and at the third flight the hawk took on a long slip at a Jack and managed to get on terms with it just a matter of yards before it had made the safety of a ditch that was overgrown with vegetation. I expected quite a prolonged tussle between the male Red Tail and the Jack but the experienced hawk made very short work of getting his quarry under control and had in fact killed it by the time we got there. Quite a feat for a hawk with a flying weight of just 34 ounces. Again the manners of the hawk were impeccable and he actually stepped off of his kill to take the tit bits being offered to him by Greg.

With Blade safely back in the vehicle it was time for Danny and Dave to give their respective female Red Tails a chance. Dave was to fly first and despite several really exciting chases Becky failed to get a foot to a Jack. It was decided to give her a rest for twenty minutes or so and in the meantime Danny would fly Cactus. We came across an area of Maize that had not been cropped but simply left to rot in the field. Consequently the cover was a lot higher and this made things more difficult for hawks and humans to see the Jacks as they made off. But Cactus chased several quite hard but despite crashing in on three of them came up empty footed each time. Then we flushed one near the edge of the ruined crop and it made its way out of the denser cover and across a dirt road into an area of Maize that had been harvested. Now the hawk could clearly see the quarry and chased for all it was worth. After a long flight with several twists and turns to it the hawk made its move and this time was successful. The Jack was a very large specimen and bucked and kicked for all it was worth. Hawk and Jack somersaulted through



Cactus, passage female Red Tail

the air several times and when eventually the dust settled the hawk was astride the Jack. Danny made in and despatched it and then proceeded to reward the hawk with the heart and liver of the Jack.

Becky was tried again and almost immediately a Jack got up some 100 yards or so in front of us but it made off across a field of Alfalfa which was obligingly short. The hawk gradually got on terms with the Jack and eventually made her move which the Jack managed to evade and with the hawk on the ground made off again. But the hawk meant business and got back up and gave chase. For a second time she got to the Jack and this time as it jinked to try and evade the hawk she made her move and took him with both feet on the head. The struggle was a very short one and again the Jack was already dead when we got there.

That just left Greg with Tess to be given the opportunity to enjoy some sport. Tess is an old hand at the game and obviously had decided to use her cunning that morning as opposed to her muscle and strength. On being slipped at the first Jack she chased fairly hard but didn't

seem, at least to this spectators eye, 100 per cent committed. When the Jack made some decent cover the hawk pulled off and flew to a telegraph pole a relatively short distance away. From her vantage point she surveyed the fields spread out before her and eventually some serious head bobbing and shifting position slightly again and again showed us she had spotted something. She eventually took off and glided out across the field. When she had covered about 150 yards she suddenly accelerated, lifted momentarily and then crashed in hard. The resultant squeal told us she had a Jack and when we got to her sure enough she was sat on her quarry.

### Excellent sport

A very fitting end to what had been a really great morning. All four hawks had killed and had been given a decent reward and the human element of the party had seen some good flying in excellent hawking countryside in very sporting and companionable company. What more could we want. There were many more hours of excellent sport with the Red

Tails before it was time to move on and it has to be said we saw some good flying with the eagles. But for me the Red Tails definitely had the sporting edge.

As a postscript to this article Greg, Danny and Dave went on directly from the meeting in Kansas to the NAFA meet in Oklahoma the following week. Here a rather interesting event occurred concerning Greg and his male Red Tail Blade.

The hawk had chased a Jack and then both had suddenly disappeared from view. It transpired after much searching with telemetry that the hawk had latched onto the Jack and got dragged eight feet down a badger hole.

No one had a shovel so someone was sent into town to purchase one and it took just over an hour for them to return with it.

After a great deal of digging the hawk and Jack were eventually reached and the onlookers were astonished to find the Jack dead with the hawk hanging on for grim death . . . but underneath his kill. But at least he was safe and sound and lives to hopefully catch more Jacks.



Feeding up time

# Do You Have the Hunting Gene?

**A**re you a falconer or a bird of prey keeper? Neither is a lesser mortal, but there is a very distinct difference. For despite your passion for all things raptorial, the former will have the hunting gene that will be lacking in the latter. A couple of well-known examples: Jemima Parry-Jones, by her

own admission, does not desire to hunt with hawks; Nick Fox cannot wait for the end of the summer and the start of the crow hawking season. Both are admirable advocates of our sport, bringing it to a wider audience, and are eloquent defenders of the right to go hawking. But there the similarity ends.

## Driven by your gene

The gene that drives you to hunt is a vestige of our hunter/gather ancestors; something that we are meant to have had 'civilised' out of us. What rubbish. Some do not even know they have it. They are the ones that do surprisingly well in reality television shows despite claiming they couldn't crush a grape before being caste away on the desert island. Catch it, kill it, eat it. Yum, yum, they say. Tucking in with gusto, they leave the apparent macho ones looking horrified and hungry. Like courage, you never know you have it until tested.

The hunting gene has nothing whatsoever to do with cruelty. No true hunter has anything but respect for his quarry and is appalled by charges of brutality. But it is an inexplicable paradox. Next time you are out hawking, challenge yourself as though you were facing an abolitionist in a public debate. It is an interesting exercise and fills the minutes whilst you watch your hawk feed up on a kill. There are two reasons why falconry rarely appears on negative radar. One, because the public think what they see at country fairs is falconry, when we know it isn't and secondly, and most importantly, birds of prey do not survive on muesli so what they do is totally natural. The fact that falconers are not greedy and share the bag between hawk and human is equally persuasive. That we engineer a flight by artificial means is interesting. But like gulls following the plough, there is a symbiotic relationship that benefits the other. Captive raptors live longer and are in better health. Finally, nature can be crueller than man. The wild goshawk eating a rabbit shows little concern for a quick kill. The falconer is always fast on the scene and happy to give assistance, for the sake of both the rabbit and the hawk.

The desire to hunt manifests itself in all sorts. It cannot be classified by profession, class or background. I have

Nick Kester and Goshawk ready for the chase



met pros and antis all my life. Years ago I had the doubtful privilege of chairing a pack of foxhounds. The senior master was a vegetarian, but was passionate about his sport; he saw nothing unethical about it, he just didn't like meat. A kinder, more generous man I have yet to meet, but hunting was what he loved more than anything.

Brought up in a distinctly urban environment (just south of the M25 is almost London today), I was hardly the most likely of hunters. My father kept a shotgun but I never saw him use it. He had bought it off the shelf at a laundry in North Wales during the war; the original owner had presented it in lieu of a bill he couldn't pay. I think father was in the Home Guard at the time and felt he should be prepared. At boarding school we had ferrets and several of the more wayward boys kept illicit shotguns, but I have to confess the arts were more of a draw than the damper recesses of the field or brook. The sixties saw me hairy and wayward and if you had asked, I would probably have been an anti, but in those days no-one ever did. Even my first brush with falconry was display based and triggered a desire to better understand why the falcon came back, rather than what it might catch.



Ben Gill and one of John Fairclough's grouse hawks



This Arab boy will understand falcons from the start

The first time I saw a hawk catch a rabbit was the trigger that awoke the gene; and the desire to hunt with hawks and dogs (and ferrets when someone else does the digging) has taken over my life ever since. Guns and rods hold

little allure, I think because they are so mechanical. It is that moment when a pack of hounds find the line and start to speak, or the goshawk kicks off the glove as the pheasant breaks from cover that the gene comes alive. Suddenly I am in contact with nature. It is my belief that to be a successful falconer you have to have the gene. If you go out hawking with only a partial desire to catch something you are leaving it to chance and chance usually leaves you empty handed. But if the adrenalin surges as you weigh your

hawk, if your palms tingle when you step into the field, if you watch every bush and bank for movement . . . if you are excited by the prospect. Then you will be successful and falconry will reward you.

### Everyone needs a mentor

Heavy handed and unsympathetic falconers make me very angry. Usually this is result of ignorance and a lack of good mentoring. Every falconer needs a mentor, someone he respects and who can criticise him without causing offence. You can do as many LANTRA awards into bird of prey management, but if you enter the hunting field without having been taught respect for quarry and the fine balance between hawk and quarry – if you fail to recognise your place in the order of things, then you brutalise my sport. Give it up and go watch a football match.

Does the hunting gene last a lifetime? Undoubtedly. The young have a more energetic take on it. After all, history made them the providers whilst fit and able. The old take a longer, more philosophical view. But those who have it will instinctively turn off the intrusive mobile phone, eschew the vile computer game, leave the watch at home, and go hunting.

Do you have the gene?

# As it should be

**S**ome days are better than others when out hawking. This season has been hard earned due to our partridge numbers declining thanks to a cold spring and late snow during chick hatch period. Today was a day not to be taken for granted but reminded me of previous years, typical hawking days when game was abundant and we could be choosy about our slips. It is always great when the stars all align.

## A day off work

I got out as usual to greet the sunrise although I am on day a off and have all day ahead of me for a change. I reach a favourite spot and no coveys beside the road this time but a nice point in the twilight with Lewis my English pointer. It was such an open set up it just screamed for the gyrkin. I unhood him and he jumps on top of the truck as he has taken to doing lately. He takes a crap

and sits with one foot up. Not a good sign so far and meanwhile Lewis my pointer is holding a staunch point a few hundred yards yonder. For reasons only known to the gyr he decides to leave and heads straight at the dog at it's same height off the ground. This does not look good and I anticipate a smack on the dog's head as imprint gyrs are prone to do. However not this time, he starts to climb up over the dog and does an almost vertical climb pumping all the way into the gentle breeze. I am taken aback at his speed of ascent and in relative close proximity to me. No circling around but just straight up as if on a very steep ascending elevator. He reaches his best typical pitch of about 600ft in moments



A good match

and yet still climbs. I keep watching in the nice crisp -14c air and think it has some influence to his mood this morning. The sun is just breaking and the snow covered mountains in the distance make for a spectacular backdrop. Now he is over a grand and still climbing aggressively and I am waving the glove to turn him but now he is heading further south of me. The dog is rigid and we are all bubbling with excitement. Rarely does he go this high and he ain't stopping yet. "Oh my gawd," I think to myself as he is getting hard to see and I wished I had my bino's on my chest at this point but I dare not take my eyes off him to walk to the truck. Then he saw something and chased it south at such a great height and purpose. I could not turn him and he just disappeared out of sight. I am stood dumfounded wondering what the heck he had seen so high up. Unconcerned I wait as this baby does not fly away. Moments pass and I see a small flock of distant ducks but not as high as he was. It was probably only 10 minutes that passed but it felt a lot longer. I walk back to the truck for the receiver swinging a glove in case he sees me. The signal is strong but all around



Mulligan posing with hun



Lewis patiently holding point

me. Next minute I see him skimming on the ground towards me and “talking” on his approach. Damn it, these imprints you gotta love ‘em and hate ‘em. I put out my glove and call him in and put him away. Lewis is giving me the look of “just how long do I hold this bloody point”?

I put Adam up and he climbs nice but nothing like the gyr and circles me to get his pitch. He seems to be around 400ft and I am content to walk in on the point as he is still flying/climbing. Up get the huns and instead of heading towards me where the cover is behind me they head out further into “no mans land”. Adam puts in a nice stoop slicing through a hun but in his throw up, he turns to another racing away in the opposite direction of the one he hit. Meanwhile the hun he hit is hovering / semi fluttering in the air and falling to the ground. I think it is a gonner but glance back to business in hand as Adam pursues the other hun he selected. He puts it down, throws up but does not have it. I run over there and Lewis has followed the flight and has it nailed on point and Adam is running about in the stubble frantically trying to find it. The hun gets up and so does Adam and a 200 yard tail chase ensues but he nails it as it heads for cover. After I crop Adam up I go to where the first hun was, as extra

hawk food is always good and I waste nothing. To my amazement the dead hun takes off and heads out of the country. I scratch my head as minutes earlier it seemed fatally hit.

### Edge of territory

An hour of driving passes as I head to the southern limits of my hawking territory and I find another flight for the gyrkin. Lewis has a covey nailed but has inadvertently ran right in the middle of them, probably caught offside as he changed the direction of his run. A hun bumps and then another and before you know it they all head out spread in a wide stream of birds. Lewis looks back as if to say “oops”.

Fortunately he holds and does not give chase. I watch two huns put in and ready the gyrkin. This time with the dogs in the field running it encourages him to take off right away. The huns are about 350 yards out and I drive to their proximity while the dogs quarter ahead of me. The gyrkin is following above nice and high but nothing like earlier. He is about 400ft and holding while being buzzed by small escort birds, probably snow buntings. I call in Lewis and Monty my old wirehair is already at my side. “Find the birds” I say as I frantically look for the huns. Up

they get and I head jerk upwards to see the gyrkin’s light body accented by the clear blue sky as he is powering down. A quick survey of direction and proximity of cover or any hazards from where the flight direction is going puts my mind at rest as I see it is all still free and clear. He selects an old cock bird and literally powers into it for a power bind and feathers spray everywhere and they both hit the ground in an uncalculated follow through. Fortunately foot high grass cushioned his blow but he turns and is trying to run down the hun that gets up and heads out. He is up and on it within a flash and it does not make it 60 yards before he nails it. The dogs run up to check all is under control and I walk up allowing him to crop up. His first kill in over a week.

### Challenging season

A sense of bitter sweet success falls over me and I glance at the distant white mountains and smile to myself as the gyrkin plucks. This is as it should be I think to myself, as this season to date has been challenging for both dogs and birds. How quickly I took for granted my recent seasons and how different it is now. Mornings like this puts you in the right frame of mind for anything.

# WING TIP OEDEMA

**W**ing tip oedema and dry gangrene syndrome is an inflammatory condition that affects the end of the wing (metacarpus) of raptors. It has been noticed with increased frequency in the last 20 years. Lanner and Lugger falcons, Peregrines and Harris Hawks are more commonly involved but any bird (typically those from warmer climates) can be affected. The condition occurs during the winter, from October to April, and often appears to be triggered by a period of cold or freezing weather. Disease generally affects first year birds. Such birds may well not be fully trained and hence be at a relatively low weight, and potentially with a less well-developed wing blood supply. In some raptors first year plumage

is softer, with reduced insulation properties than adult plumage and so these younger birds may be more susceptible to cold conditions.

Affected birds may first be identified with wings drooped or held slightly away from the body. The wing tips, where the primary feathers insert, becomes swollen and cold often with an associated loss in flight performance. The swelling is referred to as 'pitting oedema', as if a finger is pressed into the swollen area, the depression or 'pit' left remains there for several minutes. The further up the wing the swelling extends, the more advanced the condition and the less



Typical posture with wings held out and some swelling evident on the wing tip



Swollen wing tip in an affected kestrel

successful treatment will be. Immediate first aid consists of gently warming the bird, but avoiding direct heat on the area, then maintaining it at normal room temperature (15-20°C). It is also beneficial to stimulate wing use by having the bird on the fist and making rolling or vertical drop movements which require the bird to move its wings to balance. Birds with minor signs, still capable of flight, should be flown, as regular gentle exercise is useful in improving circulation to, and drainage from, the affected areas.

Typically the initially swelling remains for a week, and gradually reduces. In most cases the tip of the wing changes from a white colour to pale brown, dark brown then black. This black section develops as the tip of the wing has lost its blood supply and develops dry gangrene. The tissue on the wing tip dies off and will drop or break off at about five to six weeks after initial signs. Some birds are presented by falconers where disease has progressed and the end of the wing tip has dropped off without the initial signs noticed. In a survey (published in





Swelling and blister formation in hybrid falcon

the 1980s by Neil Forbes), it was shown that on average an affected wing lost the tip and three of the primary feathers. It should be stressed that the feathers do not just drop out, but actually the entire tip of the wing, including those feathers, drops off. This cannot re-grow and the bird will not be capable of normal flight. In a first year bird this is a catastrophe.

The likely outcome of the case is dictated by how quickly the falconer recognises the problem, how quickly the bird gets to an experienced avian vet and how far up the wing the swelling has progressed.

Prompt administration of medical therapy has led to a recovery rate of up to 90%. Treatment involves medication to dilate the blood vessels to improve blood flow to affected areas and allow healing before dry gangrene

is established. Vasodilators given by mouth are combined with massage of the affected region. Using Preparation H, which comprises yeast and shark oil, on the skin has been recommended. Antibiotics are required to prevent a concurrent bacterial enteritis, which on occasions accompanies this condition. If large blisters develop they should be surgically drained in a sterile manner three times daily, until they fail to refill (this usually takes 7 - 10 days). Affected birds should be kept at room temperature for at least 3 weeks.

#### Prevention

Wing tip oedema is caused by ground frost rather than wind chill, so even a bird tethered in a garage or sheltered area can be affected. Affected birds are typically at flying weight and have all

been tethered within 18 inches of the ground during nights and cold days. The only exceptions are birds which are free lofted, but have had wet plumage when the temperature dropped at night. This can be due to flying in wet conditions or bathing earlier in the day. Birds should be prevented from bathing after noon in the months of October – April if they are kept outside at night.

Birds being flown in these months should be free lofted, or provided with supplementary heating. This heating can involve a guarded heat lamp, or low wattage oil filled bar heater, which is triggered to come on by a 'frost stat'. The 'frost stat', should be set so that if the temperature drops below 3°C, the heater automatically switches on.

All birds should be checked daily for swelling or discolouration of the wing tips – as early disease can be very subtle close examination is needed.

This is a totally preventable condition, which leads to destruction of the bird's flying career so please make sure your birds are protected and as many falconers as possible are made aware of the problem.



Tip of the wing of Harris' hawk, shortly to fall off

# My Love for Falconry

**M**y love and interest in birds is thanks to my Grandad who used to take my brothers and me on endless walks looking at the wildlife. I remember sitting back and watching the tenacity of the Lapwings fiercely protecting their nest from my Grandad's dogs as they sniffed their way through the meadow by repeatedly dive bombing them. I wouldn't say my Grandad knew a lot about the wildlife in the meadow but he gave me an appreciation for it and the feeling of freedom and excitement during those endless summer holidays. My Grandad also gave me a bird book to read during a short stay in hospital, as he knew how nervous I was about my operation. The book got me through this episode in my life as my nerves disappeared every time I opened its pages and imagined myself sitting in the meadow watching and listening to these birds.

I moved to the village of Goodworth Clatford near Andover from my

hometown of Stockport (South Manchester) in 2002 due to my husband's job relocation. I had to leave my teaching job which at the time was teaching AS, A2 and GCSE Biology and Human Biology at New College, Telford in Shropshire. My love of animals and science is why I studied Biology, achieving a BSc (Hons) degree in Applied Biological Sciences with an emphasis on animal physiology and then a Master of Philosophy degree in fracture healing with the University of Manchester. Before this I worked as a research bioscientist for a large pharmaceutical company.

When we were settled in Hampshire I got a teaching job at the local college, Andover College, teaching numeracy to adults with learning difficulties and disabilities as well as Application of Number to students across the college and it is here I achieved the Level 4 Subject Specialist teaching qualification and became an Advanced Practitioner for Skills for Life.

It was during a Sunday morning trip to

Brambridge Garden Centre in Eastleigh that I met Phil Oldham and his birds of prey. Phil was flying Jake the Harris Hawk at the time and asked if anyone would like to hold Jake. Of course I was in there like a shot. I remember putting my face right up close to Jake (perhaps too close), when he flew over to me landing on the glove, so I could have a good look at him; my husband, Richard, kept telling me not too close but I was fascinated and hooked. A sense of being free and out in the countryside came back to me as everything seemed to go quiet as if there was only me and Jake around. There was a quick look into my eyes from Jake as he took the food and flew away. I immediately picked up a leaflet on the falconry course which was on offer, as I wanted to get to know these wonderful birds and know more about the art of falconry.

## Still with Falconhigh

In October 2005 I attended Phil's falconry course at the University of Winchester and haven't looked back – or should I say Phil hasn't managed to get rid of me yet! I have been so lucky to have had the opportunity to be an apprentice falconer over the last four years with Falconhigh, training and flying so many different birds, taking part in many displays and in many different settings and although I have only just grasped swinging the lure to a falcon, I never thought I would be trying to fly two falcons at once in the displays; how exhilarating and what a privilege. Taking people on falconry experience days and falconry courses is always enjoyable as you get to meet so many different characters but I have to say I love going to visit schools and nursing homes the most. If I had to pick two highlights from my time showing the birds and educating people about them then for me it would be when we visited a nursing home in Petworth. A lady who had been sat in her room and would not come to join in any of the activities for the past year came to see us and her face just lit up with delight when she saw the birds. She told me



Falconry for Schools in action

about her love for wildlife and her life as a little girl growing up on a farm and the birds of prey she would see on the farm.

The other would be when we visited a school and a young boy who was blind came over to touch one of our 'holding' birds. He began to describe the feathers as silk and his description of how he thought the owl looked in such detail from his touch was incredible. Falconry has changed my life and it's all been praise to Phil and his teaching and patience! I have been driving everybody mad with my complete and utter fascination with raptors and the art of falconry. Three years ago I got my first Harris Hawk, Shadow and during the last month I have been training a Gyr/Saker falcon called Ace. Nothing teaches you more about the ups and downs of falconry like owning, training and flying your own bird.

During my teaching I would not be able to switch off from falconry and couldn't wait to get home and relax flying Shadow. I would always be thinking of ways in which I could bring falconry into the classroom and this is where the Falconry for Schools idea evolved and when I read the article in the Countryside Alliance Update magazine about the Fishing for Schools project, that was it! The two-year process of writing and producing resources began, as well as obtaining the Lantra award in falconry with Paul Manning. I was also offered a position of Research Assistant, volunteering full time for six months at the Hawk Conservancy Trust, Weyhill, Andover, helping with the Tawny Owl release project and tracking released rehabilitated Buzzards around the Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset countryside. I was also approached by the Hawk Board this year to attend the Festival of Falconry in the education exhibit but in January 2009, due to personal circumstances, I had to go back to teaching full time and was unable to attend the festival. At this point in my life falconry took a back seat and it broke my heart. However, in August of this year a change in fortune and with Phil's encouragement I decided to take the plunge and take the Falconry for Schools project forward again.

In April last year I met with Robert Gray, Campaigns Director for the Countryside Alliance and 'pitched' the idea of the Falconry for Schools project



Judith 'in the field'

to him and in September we completed a pilot of the project in our first school. The project has been mapped to the National Curriculum for Literacy and Numeracy as well as Key Skills in Application of Number and Communication. The course aims to get children interested in falconry, in birds of prey and other wildlife, help these birds and the environment through conservation and be aware of bird crime and understand the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It would be great to get more children active and out and about, enjoying the countryside. I can see so many benefits in this project not only teaching literacy and numeracy, science and history in an interesting and fun way, but to see the growth in self-confidence in some students and the team building amongst peers has been incredible.

This is what I particularly noticed with the students when we ran the first session with at Lakeside School. Some

of them at the end of the day were talking to the birds with such affection and the bond that was forming with these students for the birds was amazing. Incredible, when you think that some of these kids do not have a particular affinity with animals.

Obviously, holding and flying the birds is a highlight for the students but despite having some difficulties with literacy and numeracy the students were taking part in all the activities and helped each other. The amount of knowledge they retained was fantastic and the growth in their personalities and learning over such a short time was so rewarding.

### Raptors good for therapy

Birds of prey have an awe-inspiring grace about them and they have a strangely calming influence. The technique of animal assisted learning or therapy has been widely documented to: inspire, reduce anxiety and loneliness, learn responsibility, increase confidence and social skills, concentration and attention skills and promote self-awareness. The project is an ideal opportunity to evidence social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) in school through multisensory techniques.

I often get asked what it is I love about falconry that makes me so completely and utterly obsessed with it (just ask my friends and family). It was only the other week at a talk in the local village hall when an elderly lady was watching me and she said I have such patience and a delicate nature with the birds not rushing with them and she liked the way I constantly talked to them. This is because I feel so humbled in their presence and they never cease to amaze me. It's difficult to sum up but I think the falconer and author Tim Gallagher conjures up that feeling when he writes, "I can't say why exactly, but something about falconry completely captured my passion and spirit as a twelve year old and has held me enthralled ever since. The first time I put a falcon on my fist, no other interest ever came close to competing with falconry. The magical, intuitive bond that develops between a falconer and a trained raptor is a great attraction for me and is one of the things that keeps me getting up before dawn, day after day". (*Falcon Fever*, 2008. Houghton Mifflin books).

# Scottish Hawking Club Isle of Arran field meet 2009

**T**he Arran meet is advertised as two days hare hawking but Arran is a multifaceted jewel of an Island and like topsy the meet has grown.

Irrepressible enthusiasts like Dougie Thompson and Ronnie O'Farrel together with Robert (son of Dougie) were first to arrive a mere six days early. They had with them four English Pointers, three



Topaz – Golden/Ornate hybrid

longwings and two Harris's Hawks.

Yet another September had worn its way round to the last week of the month and a low cloud base looked set to stay and it was only Sunday.

## Rain, wind and a near miss

Monday brought with it mist of the kind that made the high ground out of the question so we set off with the Harris's to a more or less clear area to look for hare, and as we wandered about in what was now light rain we put up seven or eight. However, strong Hares and wet Hawks do not tend towards success and the only catch involved a frog.

Tuesday was of almost gale force winds which certainly cleared the mist and we set off for the moors, pointers straining at the leash in that lunging shoulder dislocating way that they do. We had not long left the vehicles when the first covey burst from the heather – 13 birds, almost enough for a spirit of optimism to invade the psyche. The weather conditions worsened. Mist and rain were no longer a problem, gusts of what felt like 60mph kept those away, and those same gusts inevitably provided poor scenting conditions, dogs bumped coveys, grouse were wild and the few flights which we had were as much in hope as in expectation.

Wednesday and Thursday were not much kinder and by then our numbers had grown. My daughter Eilidh having arrived from Manchester, Graham Denning and his son Thomas from Kent, Graham has been making this trip for the last eight years and he never whinges or complains whatever the weather brings.

Friday came as Fridays will and we headed for the high ground. It was dry, winds were reasonable, and all was well until one of the dogs which had false

pointed took off in pursuit of the falcon and damn near caught it. At around this stage the air became just a little blue as the owner urged his son to control the dog. By the time that the dog was caught up the bird had disappeared, which was not really a surprise as it had almost been pegged. When the bird was located the telemetry indicated towards some woodland in the adjoining glen somewhere below Creag nan Iolair (the rock of the eagle) and both Ronnie and Dougie set off with tireless strides to retrieve the tiercel. Grouse conservation was over for another year.

## More visitors arrive

Saturday was of blue sky and sunshine. Andrew Knowles-Brown had arrived with two ladies from the North American Falconers Association. On this occasion as we had visitors from another culture we observed some form of protocol (hand shaking introductions etc), Andrew was kind enough to point out that I probably wasn't smiling and most likely had mild indigestion (which cleared up any possible misunderstanding) and off we set to walk in line or was it serpentine over Clachlands Farm.

The field had now grown to fifteen individuals and it was not long before Les Gibson put the first hare in the bag, things started to move and soon Ronnie's bird had taken a hare which was a first for her. Some of the larger fields seemed devoid of quarry but other more sheltered areas provided good slips.

Spirits were generally high when we returned to the car park for lunch and in spite of one man's attempt to raise the tone Dougie (star that he is) treated us to air guitar as his CD blasted out AC/DC. The ladies loved it, we all did.

The afternoon saw more hares finding

their way into the bag and my daughter got some nice photos of Topaz (Andrew's Golden/Ornate hybrid) of which I hope Peter can publish at least one (thanks Peter). I really enjoyed the day, we didn't get wet and this really is my favourite form of hunting (it's fun).

Due to the conditions prevailing in The Ormidale Hotel that evening it was felt that a half day would suffice for Sunday and only one more hare was taken, however we were treated to some spectacular flying from Dougie's Harris as it made what could only be described as a breath taking stoop.

### Return to normality

It was a pleasure to meet with the two visitors from the USA and to learn more about things stateside. The last American lady brought over by Andrew was a 19 year old Lauren McGough and what a star she is becoming (good luck to her).

Once again it was time to think of Caledonia MacBrayne Ferries and a return to our various concepts of normality.



Topaz's "great plates of meat"

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# Raptors and rodent control in the Mongolian Steppes

**T**he guide books often describe the Mongolian steppes as a pristine wilderness and it certainly is a landscape of wide open spaces “where the grasslands stretch across the horizon to meet clear blue skies”, but spend some time in this place and you will soon realize that the steppe grasslands are a place where Mongolians live and work. Far from being a wilderness, you are never too far from a herdsman’s encampment and the grasslands are heavily grazed by herds of horses, sheep and goats. The steppe grasslands of Mongolia are in fact one great big grazing pasture extending over 117 million ha, covering approximately 75% of the nation’s territory and it’s not



Brandt's vole



Nomad encampment

as ‘pristine’ as it first appears to be.

The Gobi Desert of southern Mongolia is expanding northwards and encroaching on the steppe grasslands of central Mongolia. This process of ‘desertification’ may be indicative of global climate change and the long-term, inexorable expansion of the desert is hastened by short-term weather conditions and biological processes associated with grazing. Herders from southern regions are forced north to use pastures where competition for grazing space is already limited. Incomes from livestock grazing are low and the options for impoverished herders are limited. They can leave the pastures and live in the city, as many have already done - the capital Ulaanbaatar is now home to over one million people. Those that stay in the countryside can increase the size of their herds and switch to producing more valuable livestock, such as goats for the cashmere trade. This has led to significant degradation in the quality of the steppe grasslands. Overgrazing creates conditions that

result in large population increases of rodents such as Brandt’s Vole and Mongolian Gerbil, as well as of insects such as grasshoppers; all of which eat the grass and further exacerbate grassland degradation and hasten the process of desertification.

## Project development

It is against this background of rural poverty and habitat degradation that International Wildlife Consultants (UK) Ltd (IWC) has been developing a project to increase the breeding population of birds of prey in steppe habitats using artificial nests. In the flat and undulating plains of the Mongolian steppe there is an abundance of rodent prey for raptors but a shortage of suitable nesting sites. Some species, such as Upland Buzzards and Steppe Eagles will readily nest on the ground but other predatory birds like Kestrels, Ravens and Saker Falcons require elevated nesting sites (though Sakers will very occasionally nest on the ground). These raptors readily take to



Artificial nest and dust storm

nesting on various human artefacts in the steppes, such as livestock shelters and buildings and power-line poles, so the initial step in this project was to create new elevated platforms where species such as Ravens and Upland Buzzards could build their nests. This initial trial, established by Eugene Potapov and Gombobaatar Sunde, was successful. Ravens and Upland Buzzards built their nests on top of the 2 m high metal tripods that were erected at intervals across the flat steppe and some of these nests were subsequently usurped by Saker Falcons; it was established that simple artificial structures could be purposely constructed to encourage these species to breed.

### Nests out of metal drums

The next step was to refine our design, to maximise the levels of occupancy and to optimise breeding success. In the autumn of 2005 we erected a grid of 100 artificial nests made from old metal drums bolted to a 3 m pole and fixed in the ground with a concrete base. These boxes, placed 2 km apart, all had a lining of gravel so that they were immediately suitable for use by Saker Falcons. We tested four different designs of nesting box, distributing them randomly across our grid. Three designs were open-topped and differed in the degree of shelter afforded to nesting birds; one

had a low rim so that nesting birds could see all around, another had a high rim so that the nests were totally protected from the strong winds that constantly blow across the steppes, and the third design had a high rim on one side only, affording some protection from the wind and some visibility for the incubating bird. The fourth design was a closed-box with a roof and a large side-entrance. Over the following years we monitored occupancy and breeding success of the species using the different box designs. Occupancy levels increased year on year, as breeding birds were recruited annually into this

newly created nesting habitat. There were three main species that used our nests: Upland Buzzards, Ravens and Saker Falcons, though one pair of Golden Eagles also laid an egg that failed to hatch in one of our barrels! The Upland Buzzards showed a strong preference for nesting in any open-topped design but they filled each type with nesting material so that they had full visibility but were exposed to the strong winds. Conversely, Ravens and Saker Falcons exhibited a preference for nesting inside the closed-boxes.

In order to maximise the likelihood of one of these species occupying a nest



Biologists studying rodents



Putting up artificial nest

we modified our nest box design in a new grid of 150 artificial nests, which was completed in 2007. These nests were placed at much closer intervals, only 1 km apart, in six blocks of 25 nests distributed over a wide area where there was an abundant population of Brandt's Voles and Mongolian Gerbils. The nests were all closed-boxes that incorporated a narrow rim on the roof where Upland Buzzards could also build their nests;

now each box was suitable for any of the species that might want to breed there. Working with our Mongolian research partners at the Wildlife Science and Conservation Center (WSCC), we have stepped-up our research effort to examine the potential of using birds of prey to control the numbers of rodent pest species in degraded grasslands. In 2007, Nayambayar Batbayar, Director of WSCC, recruited two Mongolian

graduate students and we funded and co-supervised them through a two-year Masters-level program at the National University of Mongolia. Ganhuyag Purev-Ochir studied the breeding ecology and reproductive success of the birds of prey, whilst Amarsaikhan Saruul undertook a demographic study of the rodent population. To date we have been working with a team of Mongolian students and foreign field assistants to collect prey remains and pellets in order to study the diet of breeding raptors. In 2009 we used GPS satellite telemetry to determine the hunting ranges of Saker Falcons.

### Occupied nests

In 2009, an incredible 95% of these artificial nests were occupied by birds of prey, comprising 27 Upland Buzzards, 16 Saker Falcons and nine Ravens, with the remainder occupied by Common Kestrels. All of these species fed predominantly on rodents, especially Brandt's Voles and Mongolian Gerbils and preliminary analysis indicates that these two species made up 86% of prey items taken by Saker Falcons nesting at our grids. The GPS satellite telemetry has enabled us to plot the hunting ranges of our Saker Falcons, and during the breeding period the tagged birds hunted over small ranges surrounding their nest sites, indicating that these rodents are killed in the vicinity of the artificial nests.

The high density of breeding raptors, all feeding predominantly on the local rodent population demonstrates the potential of using artificial nests to increase raptor predation as a form of biological control of rodents. This approach is directed at the 'symptoms' of grassland degradation rather than the 'causes' (which are multiple and complex), but nevertheless still offers conservation benefits for birds of prey and local herdsmen. We still need to undertake further research to quantify the number of rodents taken by birds of prey and to assess the impact of this level of predation on the rodent population.

This research project is ongoing; our two Masters students have graduated and are now employed full-time on the project whilst the next generation of graduates will be enrolled on Masters level courses in 2010. We are committed to 'capacity building' and training of Mongolian biologists, an essential process if we hope to secure the long-term



Saker in artificial nest



conservation of Mongolian birds of prey. Whilst IWC and WSCC work together to implement this project, the funding comes from falconers in Abu Dhabi, through the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi and the Emirates Falconers Club. Their commitment and support for the work in Mongolia cannot be overstated. The Mongolian government are aware that while many other fixed-term conservation projects are started they soon disappear when the funding stops, having little lasting value or legacy. The continued commitment and long-term investment in conservation research shown by the falconers of Abu Dhabi has not gone unnoticed by the Mongolian government and enables us to enter discussions with policy makers with a degree of credibility and influence. In Mongolia, falconers have sown the seeds and are now seeing the benefits of their commitment to conservation and research work on birds of prey.

Thanks to Andrew Dixon and Nedko Nedyalkov for supplying the photographs.

Artificial est in situ



# Gathering of Eagles 2009



The Eagle boys – Joe Atkinson, Oscar Pack, Mark Kilby and Scott Simpson (knelling)

**G**arden City, Kansas, was once again the venue for the 2009 Gathering of Eagles (GOE) event organised by the International Eagle Austringer Association (IEAA) under the chairmanship of well known austringer Joe Atkinson. It took place from 16 - 21 November and was a very successful and enjoyable event attracting people from all over the world including UK, Canada, France, Germany, Australia and New Zealand.

After a nine-hour flight from London to Denver with fellow travelers Andrew-Knowles Brown

and Alan Norman, we had a five-hour car trip to Garden City through snow storms and icy conditions. Arriving at our hotel at 11.00pm we did manage a well deserved beer or two before retiring to bed and anticipating what the week ahead had in store for us.

Monday saw the first flying day and we set off in convoy to the flying grounds which were about 30 miles from our base. Clear skies and low temperatures meant wrapping up warm before we set off in line to bump up some quarry for the eagles. The intended quarry for the eagles were jack Rabbits which are not too far off our Brown Hares here in the UK, in size and weight.

First up was Oscar Pack and his eagle Mina. We all moved in a line to see what ran and up popped a Jack Rabbit. Mina gave chase but the quarry made its escape. After a while of putting up several quarry, Mina unfortunately didn't catch anything and so it was back to the vehicles for a quick drink before the next eagle was readied. Mina did catch one Jack during the event and Oscar had mixed feelings of how the week had progressed.

Scott Simpson brought along both of his eagles (Bubba and Maggie) and so it was down to Maggie for her first flight of the event. Once again plenty of flights but to no avail and that was

unfortunately the pattern for Maggie all through the week. When Scott put Bubba on the fist he informed us that Bubba didn't like to be too close to a lot of people so when he did fly it was with only a few spectators but he did manage to catch a Jack that week.

Mark Kilby and his eagle were another team who didn't like large groups of people, so he went off on his own and did his own thing, meeting up with the rest of us later in the day.

**What a star**

The star of the week was undoubtedly Joe Atkinson's eagle Jackhammer. Watching this team at work is a wonderful lesson for all aspiring austringers and falconers alike. The way Joe organised the spectators line, giving instructions through a two-way radio with Mike Clowes was both an education and sometimes even entertaining with the banter between the two of them. Although Jackhammer didn't catch the intended quarry every time, a head count of 23 Jack Rabbits, one cotton tail and one pheasant was a good week's work.

On the Wednesday I went with Mike and Julie Clowes and Eddie and



Scott Simpson with Bubba

Heather Alum to visit Dodge City, only 50 miles from Garden City. A visit to the wonderful museum there and a phone call from Boot Hill to my wife at home was the order for the day, together with a steak lunch and then it was time to meet up with

falconer Tommy Call.

Tommy wanted to trap a first-year Redtail Hawk, something which can be done under license in America. Apparently, you can trap as many hawks as you want but can only keep two birds for falconry use. If you





The main group of spectators and falconers

trap a bird that is either too old or maybe you don't like the look of, you let it go back to the wild. (Note: It is illegal to trap birds in the UK).

With Tommy on this trapping party were Julie, Heather, Eddie and myself— or Euros, as we were called. We piled into Tommy's vehicle with Ed in the front passenger seat holding the Bal Chatri trap which contained mice ready to throw onto the ground if we spotted a potential Redtail. A Redtail was spotted on a telegraph pole and we gently moved forward to around 50 yards from the hawk. Ed threw the trap and we immediately reversed to such a distance so that we could view the hawk and not too close to upset the bird. Looking through binoculars we could see the hawk was interested but was very unsure of the trap and flew onto an irrigation system and then back to the pole. We moved nearer and on closer inspection we could now see the hawk's tail – it had a very red tail so had been through a moult and was deemed too old to take.

We went to another area and found another Redtail on a pole and started the whole process again. This time we were in luck. – first year bird. The trap was placed on the ground and we gave the hawk some

distance so as not to scare it away.

After a short while it went down to get to the bait and we moved forward – fast. Tommy leaped out of the car and proceeded to get the hawk out of the trap with the help of Eddie. Tommy is now the proud owner of a healthy female Redtail he has called JEPH (Julie, Eddie, Peter and Heather).

Thursday, Friday and Saturday was back out with the eagles and walking over fields full of tumbleweed which, if like me you don't wear gaiters or

some such protection, is like death by a thousand cuts.

On Saturday night we had a final dinner at a local steak house and a raffle organised by Cordi Atkinson with various prizes including falconry bells, single malt whisky and DVD's and a good time was had by all.

My thanks go to Joe and Cordi for organising the event and it was great to meet up with old friends and make new ones. It just goes to show how international falconry truly is – as if anyone was in any doubt.



Tommy Call with JEPH



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# We Robert Heberden Barber were Falconers

Part I



**T**homas Stanley Baldwin sat hunkered against the bulkhead of the H.M.S. Glenearn's mess deck, glad this day had come.

He was tired of hearing officers tell him how important his job was. He was tired of the months of drilling and training he had endured in Scotland and elsewhere. He was tired of being told he had a sixty percent chance of being killed or wounded this day. He was tired of waiting and waiting and waiting some more. He just wanted to get off the ship and get on with it.

The day was June 6, 1944 –“D-Day”. For the world it was the most momentous date of the twentieth century. Today, Tuesday, the largest armada ever assembled, over five thousand ships, would transport the largest invasion force ever amassed, over 150,000 men, to the coast of Normandy. Facing them would be some of the most elite battle hardened troops of Hitler's Germany lead by General von Rundstedt and the incomparable Erwin Rommel. The outcome of this day's fighting was by no means certain.

Tom was born in Gravesend in 1925. At the age of 14 he left school for a job as a lathe operator at GEC Henleys, and at 17 he left that to join the army. He was trained as a sapper, a soldier-engineer who was taught how to dismantle mines, blow up barricades, dig trenches, make roads. He was part of the 246 Field Company, Royal Engineers, assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the East Yorkshire

Regiment. They were slated to land at Sword Beach, the most easterly landing area of the invasion.

Tom looked around the crowded mess deck, wondering what the other soldiers were thinking. Some were playing cards, others were talking softly, conversations sometimes interrupted by messages over the loud hailer. All were well aware of what this day might bring. He saw Lieutenant Hugh Bone, their signals officer, pacing to and fro, brimming with energy. The man just could not stay still. Bone was a tall rugged chap, at 18 only months older than himself, but he seemed like he had lived three decades, not barely two.

A can of black Palm Olive cream was passed to Tom and he dipped his fingers into it, then wiped the salve across his face. Hopefully, this would prevent a German rifleman from sighting in on him in the early moments of dawn. He passed the can to the soldier beside him and looked up to see his commander, Major Barber, walking around speaking to some of the men. The Major put a hand on the men's shoulders in a friendly gesture as he spoke to them. Tom couldn't hear what he said, but some of the men laughed, and some smiled, and some just heard what he said without reacting at all. Tom wondered if the major would come over, put a hand on his shoulder, and give him a pep talk or say something he thought was important. He hoped not. He was rather tired of pep talks and important statements too.

Major Barber looked around at the men in the mess deck. Most were in his D Company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> East Yorkshire. Over several months in Scotland, training day in and day out, he had gotten to know most of them. He had trained them competently and was confident in their ability to perform well under fire. Barber had applied all that he had learned at the military academy, and all he had experienced fighting abroad, to mould these men into a capable fighting machine.

The Major was a sportsman and he had not only applied the training techniques he learned in the service to educating his men, but also the lessons he had learned with the horses and hawks that occupied a large part of his life. There are some men who get a horse to go with a whip, and others

who use a steady voice and quiet hands. Animals pick up very quickly on the temperament of their masters, and so, in fact, do men. He avoided the 'whip' method and his men were the better for it. He was a falconer, and from working with hawks he knew it was necessary to be simple and precise in everything he wished his bird to do. Flights must be set up thoughtfully to give the hawk the optimum chance at success. And so too with his men – directives must be clearly stated to ensure the success of the task given them, training should be simple but repetitive until the men get it right, and if this routine is followed, a combat unit – just as a hunting hawk - will have been made.

After talking with some of his men the Major turned about and left the stifling mess room, taking the staircase up a flight to the main deck of the ship. It was still dark, and cold, and silent except for the low steady thrum of the engines of a thousand ships. He knew it would not stay that quiet for long.

### Learned from hunting companion

The Major looked northwards, up the waters of the English Channel, to the edge of France hidden in the darkness. Somewhere there, he knew, lay his hunting companion Kim Muir. They had shared a month of hawking together before he started college and he had learned much from this more experienced falconer about the nature and hunting of goshawks. A fellow Sandhurst man, Kim had been killed by a German sniper on the retreat to Dunkirk. It was hard to believe so vital a life had been stilled forever.

With a little hesitancy the Major turned slowly to look in the opposite direction. The black waters of the channel flowed swiftly south, pushing into the Atlantic, to eventually lap loosely against the shores of Africa. His older brother was there, forever there. On this very day, two years before, Colin Browne Barber, his best friend, had been murdered while a prisoner of war. Colin, a Captain in the South Notts Hussars, had been captured after the second battle of Tobruk. An Italian soldier, coveting a gift from their father that Colin owned, shot him in the stomach to steal a battered pair of binoculars. Colin took three agonizing

days to die. This death was an unbearable loss that he felt keenly. Wouldn't it be sublimely ironic, he thought, if he were to be killed this day too? Before sinking too deeply into sad thoughts he pulled himself together turning his thoughts to the forthcoming action.

Major Barber re-crossed the deck and took station by his landing craft. He would be the last one to board the boat and the first one to exit it. He met the eyes of each soldier as they climbed in, his look imparting confidence and calmness to all. He and they knew their business and would get it done. He silently vowed he would carry forward with this work until he could sit in Hitler's chair in the Reich Chancellery.

Young Tom Baldwin was one of those steadied by the bearing of his commander. He was one of the last clambering into the boat, perhaps not realizing that would put him in the frontline of German fire. He looked upwards at the Glenearn's superstructure as the boat was lowered, thinking it the last bit of Britain he might ever see. As their regiment's landing crafts passed H.M.S. Largs, the flagship for the Sword Beach landing, a bugler of the 2<sup>nd</sup> East Yorkshire broke the early morning air by sounding the horn call, the General Salute. Admiral Talbot and Major General Rennie, commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> British Division, looked down and acknowledged this moving gesture as they watched their warriors steal away into the dark.

The boat took a half hour to reach France, and when it had the front ramp was lowered and the Major lead his men forward. Tom, the young sapper, tripped on the edge of the ramp and went down into the cold waves, his heavy pack preventing him from being able to rise. He was a slight boy and panicked as he felt the waters close above him. In training they had been ordered not to look after or aid any fallen, to just get themselves intact onto the beach. Luckily for the drowning Baldwin, however, someone must have missed that instruction day. He felt a strong pull on his pack as someone yanked him off the sea floor. The young sapper lumbered out of the ocean and crouched down on the edge of the beach, shaking at his close call. He could see many other soldiers in a line taking cover as best they could while, up ahead, the flail tanks

that had successfully been driven onto the beach were clearing a path of mines. Machine gun fire, mortar explosions, the sounds of tank engines, the grinding of boats, the thunder of a continuous navel bombardment, and the screams of the wounded made France an ugly noisy place.

Tom found himself beside the Major, who turned to his aide and shouted over the noise that they should move ahead to check things out. Tom started to rise to go with them when the Major pushed his shoulder down, telling him to stay put until ordered forward. Baldwin ducked down and seconds later felt the numbing percussion of an exploding mortar 30 yards in front of him. When he looked up he could no longer see the Major and his aide. He looked again, but they were gone.

The young sapper was stupefied and in shock and stayed frozen in position for several minutes. The sound of Hugh Bone's strident voice, however, soon broke through his reverie. The man ran like a maniac along the beach yelling at D Company and the 246 – even at their dead – to get up and move off the beach. Tom looked around, rose, and ran forward.

The sight of the Major, lying motionless in the sand, stopped him cold. His aide was a few feet away. If it weren't for the Major, he realized, he would be lying there too, dead as they. He weirdly thought there should be music playing. Where was their bugler who had played as they passed the H.M.S. Largs. In all the films when good men die in combat there is music, but this was no movie, and there was nothing here for the Major but the deafening vomiting noise of battle. "I'll remember you" he thought, breathing hard. As German fire from the heights above the beach started to increase he moved quickly forward, eastwards, in the direction of Berlin.

The commander of D Company who lay dead on the beach, Major Robert Heberden Barber, was born in Nottinghamshire on June 3, 1916. He was the son of Walter Browne Barber of Beacon Hill, Hucknall, a provincial solicitor who had built a comfortable law practice over the course of many years. Walter was a keen sportsman who subscribed to the adage "the next best thing to a good day's fishing is a bad day's

fishing". He was also an avid bird watcher. Robin's mother was Violet Thomson of County Galway, Ireland. A relative writes that she was one of "six strong beautiful uneducated penniless girls who grew up there with their brother, torturing a succession of governesses. The photos show them full-figured in white dresses with manes of hair and tiny waists. They found husbands by picking off English fly-fishermen, over for the sea-trout. In my imaginings these men didn't stand a chance, fuddled by fishing and spectacular scenery."

Walter and Violet were the parents of three children in all. The first was Ruth, born in 1911, a vivacious and caring girl by all accounts who adored her youngest brother. The first boy, Colin Browne, arrived in 1913, and the second son, Robert Heberden, followed three years later. Given the multitude of Robert Barbers in the world his family dubbed him "Robin" and he was known by that to one and all throughout his life. Being a "Robin" from Nottinghamshire may have put him in the way of some good natured schoolboy ribbing, but the boy's sense of humor probably enabled him accept it with good grace.

Robin's first bout of schooling was at Seacroft Preparatory School in Lincolnshire. This was a boarding

school and Robin was away from home, ensconced in a dreadful looking building on the edge of the North Sea, from the early age of 8 through 13. Relief from the rigors of education was found often, at home on school breaks, and during the summer holidays. These latter were looked forward to by Robin – indeed the whole family – as it was then the Barbers decamped for longish holidays at Salruck, their country home in Ireland.

### Special place

For Robin, Ireland was a very special place. In the early 1900's it was an adventure just to get there. Firstly there was a long trip by car, train, and ferry across England to the Irish coast, then a jaunt from the east coast of Ireland to the west to the family's home in County Galway. It was a magical place of rugged lofty hills - so beautiful against the ever changing hues of an Irish sky - sloping down to the sea with bright beaches. It was peopled by relatives and welcoming country friends. Salruck was, in short, a boy's paradise. There was great fishing in the bay and streams. Robin caught his first salmon there, 3 pounds 11 ounces, at age 15. There was sailing along the coast, and snipe shooting to be had whilst walking across miles of lovely countryside. There were also the eyries and nests of hawks



Robert with first Cassandra



and falcons to watch, and the dens of wild creatures to examine.

Robin obtained his first hawk, a Kestrel, at Salruck in 1932. He was 16 years old when he was initiated into a sport that would grace the rest of his life. We surmise that Michell's "The Art and Practice of Hawking" was his bible as he writes so highly of it. One year later, in the summer of 1933, he acquired an immature Sea Eagle. Where this bird came from is not recorded, and why he wanted one is not known. Robin wrote to Britain's eagle expert, Captain Charles Knight, to get a hood and advice. Knight, somewhat perplexed why a falconer would want such a species, wrote back:

"I don't think you will do any good with a Sea Eagle. I should think you would be likely to do much better with a male Golden – if you insist on having such a monstrous sort of bird. But IS yours a sea eagle? And is it really a YOUNG one?"

It was a sea eagle, it was an immature, and photos show that Robin flew it free.

### First Goshawk

In 1934 Robin acquired his first goshawk, Cassandra, thereby entering his name in the roll of falconers who have actively gamehawked in Britain for over a thousand years. Cassandra was an immature hawk he trained himself, and photos show him out in the field, dressed in bullet proof tweeds, catching conies. In Ireland, from an eyrie at Hane's Gap in the Mourne Mountains, he took a tiercel peregrine that same year. He named the tiercel 'Mweelrea' after the mountain dominating the view from his family's country house. He sent George Lodge some photos of the cliffs by Salruck and had him paint Mweelrea in flight after quarry in that setting. In 1936 a passage peregrine, Benchoona, was added to the mews.

At the age of 13, in September 1929, Robin entered the Repton School in Derbyshire, a private boarding establishment for boys founded by Sir Robert Foote in 1556. The school has a lovely campus, located in the village of Repton, and Robin was assigned to Orchard House where he spent a happy and productive five years. Knee problems prevented him from playing games but he was on the school's shooting squad and involved himself in natural history pursuits. He wrote home a deliriously

happy letter about being invited to go wildfowling in Norfolk over a Christmas break with his schoolmate Robert Hamond, and outlined a plan to save enough money to purchase a new 16 bore shotgun for the trip. Repton was used as the location for the sentimental 1939 movie Goodbye, Mr. Chips so it is possible for one to see today what Repton was like in the 1930's when Robin was there. It appears his kestrel, and the hawks he acquired just before finishing his last year at Repton, were left at Beacon Hill, not all that far away. Hawking must have been limited to weekends at home and school breaks.

Shortly after leaving Repton, on August 31, 1934, Robin embarked on a career in the army. He entered the Royal Military College at Sandhurst in the company of his Repton schoolmate Michael Hely-Hutchinson.

There were several falconers at Sandhurst, most notably Kim Muir, the owner of the famed Black Jess, with whom he had struck up a friendship the summer before enrolling in the army. Kim was one of those god touched boys who seemed to be perfect in just about everything – great good looks, aristocratic country bloodlines, athletic prowess, unselfconscious confidence, gifted equestrian, excellent falconer, open and warm hearted friend – the list went on. Robin felt a bit shy in the presence of such people but their ready acceptance of him helped to increase his confidence and give him a better sense of self. Country field sports, then as now, serve as a great equalizer when one genuine sportsman recognizes another.

While at Sandhurst Robin went hawkking with Muir, Jack Mavrogordato, Dr. H. O. Blanford who taught at the Academy, and others. His journal records hawkking outings in 1934 where game was taken by his falcon and goshawk. On November 4, hunting at Annerly with his brother Colin, Jack Mavrogordato, and Tony Musters, after a good up-hill flight out of rushes in the oak wood, his gos struck down the rabbit within three feet of the warren. On November 11 Robin writes: "Flew and killed one ferreted rabbit in brambles. Very fine flight and well held. Smashed two outers and lost Palmer's ferret on way back." On December 11, at Hartford Bridge, he had three kills out of four flights: "First

flight upwind, then jink down, Gos rose, stooped, held. Second was longer slip, went back and good kill. Third was longer flight. Cover balked her. Eventually very good kill, back grip then head. Fourth flight held in gorse for a second, broke hold, jinked then dashed across road in traffic. Gos did not follow thank god. Late back to RMC [Sandhurst]. Best afternoon so far with Gos." Cassandra took over 40 rabbits and tagged several hare between November 4 and December 17.

A memorable falconry adventure was had when he inveigled Hely-Hutchinson into bicycling with him into Ireland for some hawkking. Cars were not an option at the time so Robin padded the handlebars of his bicycle with leather, creating perhaps the first two wheeled self propelled cadge ever made. Explanations of what was going on were evidently lost on the Irish custom's officer but they were waived through anyway. Robin engaged in the sport whenever time allowed, and kept up his shooting as well. It is a curious fact that, for some unknown reason, he never joined the British Falconers' Club though he was known to several of its members.

*Part 2 in the next issue*



Major Barber

# Club Directory



## The Welsh Hawking Club



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

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

**South Wales, North Wales, the South West  
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For all general enquiries please contact:

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

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*For further information or an application form please contact -*

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

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**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)  
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# Independent Bird Register

Telephone 0844 700 8500

## IBR Lost, Found, Reunited & Stolen birds of prey from 29<sup>th</sup> September 2009 to 10<sup>th</sup> January 2010

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. Our web site now has rolling 2 month lost IBR registered list and a found list.

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

**REMEMBER!** We offer a service don't abuse it.

### STOLEN x 1 (this is a list of stolen IBR registered birds)

BREF	RING NUMBERS	SPECIES
40457	IBR36844W	HARRIS HAWK

### REUNITED x 152

BARN OWL	17
GOLDEN EAGLE	1
GOSHAWK	10
GYR HYBRID	18
HARRIS HAWK	57
INDIAN EAGLE OWL	3
KESTREL	6
LUGGER FALCON	2
PEREGRINE FALCON	7
PEREGRINE HYBRID	16
RED-TAILED HAWK	3
SAKER FALCON	9
SPARROWHAWK	2
SWAINSON / C.BUZZARD	1

### LOST x 32 (this is a list of lost IBR registered birds)

BREF	RING NUMBERS	SPECIES
48253	?4803?	BARN OWL
49725	?4888?	BARN OWL
57282	?5479?	BARN OWL
66813	?6357?	BARN OWL
67794	?6569?	BARN OWL
73504	?6913?	BARN OWL
47562	?PR9?	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
48684	?1110?	GYR/LUGGER HYBRID
47533	?1902?	GYR/PEREGRINE HYBRID
69999	?6797?	GYR/SAKER FALCON
74131	?3069?	GYR/SAKER FALCON
73757	?0DB00?	GYR/SAKER HYBRID
51166	?2YLJ0?	HARRIS HAWK
53689	?6244?	HARRIS HAWK
56602	?6467?	HARRIS HAWK
56986	?5627?	HARRIS HAWK

58681	?5809?	HARRIS HAWK
61908	?6088?	HARRIS HAWK
65774	?6294?	HARRIS HAWK
66219	?6468?	HARRIS HAWK
71174	?7026?	HARRIS HAWK
64622	?6246?	KESTREL
22983	?3401?	LANNER FALCON
71832	?7057?	LANNER FALCON
11348	?8699?	LITTLE OWL
46495	?1266?	PEREGRINE FALCON
74465	?JL110?	PEREGRINE FALCON
74860	?2509?	PEREGRINE FALCON
74398	?MARRA0?	PEREGRINE/LANNER HYBRID
74840	?38670?	RED-TAILED HAWK
74484	?7KFCC?	SAKER-ALTAI
74293	?4829?	SPARROWHAWK

### FOUND x 18

BREF	RING NUMBERS	SPECIES
1469	?164BC9?	BARN OWL
3662	?758BC9?	BARN OWL
22234	?2073?	HARRIS HAWK
24699	?2418?	LUGGER FALCON
28449	?2635?	BARN OWL
31085	?2872?	HARRIS HAWK
33084	?2734?	BARN OWL
36158	?3578?	HARRIS HAWK
36630	?446BC9?	BARN OWL
55900	?5451?	BARN OWL
60024	?5667?	INDIAN EAGLE OWL
66489	?6236?	SPARROWHAWK
74573	?92BC0?	BARN OWL
74750	?834BC9?	BARN OWL
74881	?302BC0?	BARN OWL
74882	?64BC0?	SPARROWHAWK
74893	?44 & 46?	GYR/SAKER FALCON
74917	?05?	EURASIAN EAGLE OWL



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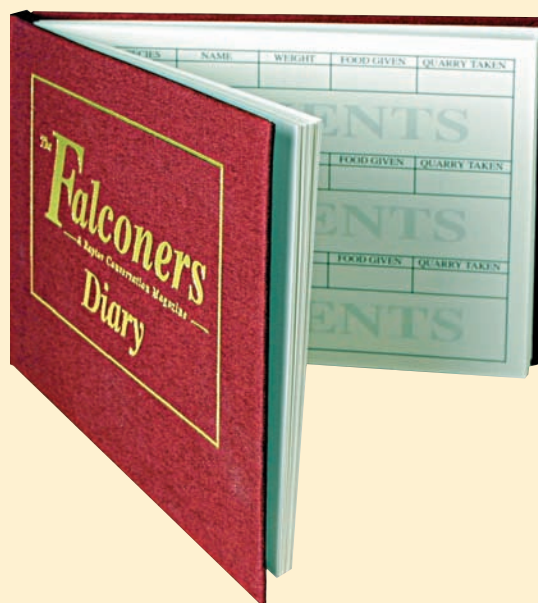
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