

# The *Falconers*

& RAPTOR CONSERVATION MAGAZINE

Winter '91

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Renowned wildlife artist Philip Snow

● THE GLORIOUS TWELFTH AND ALL THAT ●



● THE HOBBY ●

● THE RAREST FALCON IN THE WORLD ●

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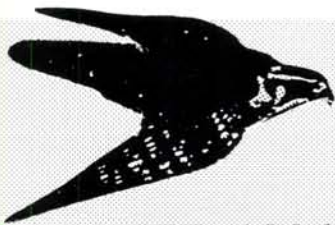
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*The*  
**Falconers**  
& RAPTOR CONSERVATION MAGAZINE

Hello everybody, it's good to be back, albeit a very worrying time. In this issue we have a statement from the Hawk Board explaining the situation we are in and asking for your help and support. Please do as they ask and put pen to paper, write to your M.P.'s and show them that Falconry is important to a lot of people, use the facts provided if you wish, but the most important thing is to write, make a stand against the anti's. The Hawk Board work very hard on your behalf but they cannot do it all alone. We know you are all busy with your birds as it is the hawking season but if the League have their way it will be your 'last season'. Anyway onto less depressing subjects, as you will see we have a nice variety of articles for you again and another superb centre spread by Philip Snow. Also this is the time to wish you all a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year, hope Santa brings you everything you want. Thanks for another great year, happy hunting, See you all in 1992. Ed.

The front cover painting was done by talented young artist, Andrew Ellis. Anybody interested in purchasing any of his work should contact him on 0626 60693 or write to: A Ellis, 33 St Micheals Road, King Teighton, Newton Abbott, S. Devon.

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# THE HOBBY

By  
Mike Everett

I shall never forget my first encounter with Hobbies. It was a warm, windy May day in the Camargue in southern France and newly-arriving Swifts were streaming in from the Mediterranean in their thousands. Every so often, there was a larger bird among them - a migrant Hobby, itself not unlike a large Swift. Since that time, nearly 30 years ago now, I have watched Hobbies in several European countries; this year, I had the unusual experience of having a Hobby and two White-tailed Eagles in the air together - but this was over a marsh in eastern Poland, where both species are fairly common.

Most of my Hobby watching, though, has been done in this country, and most of that from my back garden. I think that the birds are relative newcomers to our area because, until a few years ago, I never saw Hobbies over the village with the same regularity as I do now. This impression is probably correct since there has been an obvious increase in the eastern counties of England in recent years.

As a breeding bird, the Hobby is largely confined to the southern half of England and the eastern fringes of Wales, with only a scattering of pairs further north. Until not so very long ago, it was thought that Hobbies were very much birds of southern heathlands and that they were quite rare: estimates put the breeding population at around 100 pairs. We now know that they are apparently just as much at home in farmland habitats. There seems to have been a genuine increase in numbers, and a spread into parts of East Anglia, but it also seems clear that for many years a significant part of the breeding population was simply overlooked. Actually, using the word "simply" is probably unfair: the Hobby can be a remarkably elusive bird in

the breeding season and is very easily missed. The latest estimates suggest that we have over 500 breeding pairs, but the true figure could easily be very much higher. It makes a pleasant change to be able to say that any bird of prey is not threatened in this country: this is certainly largely true of the Hobby, which is hardly ever the victim of illegal persecution and probably suffers only marginally from habitat changes. The biggest threat could well be posed by egg thieves.

Our Hobbies are true long-distance migrants, probably spending the winter somewhere in the southern third of Africa. I have

safe generalisations are that they feed mainly on high-flying insects and on birds, and that they are among the most magnificent aerial hunters of all. What Hobbies actually catch and eat varies widely according to prey availability, regional considerations and individual preference, so it is a mistake to make hard and fast rules about catching Swifts and martins, dragonflies, or whatever. As a very general rule, breeding birds tend to feed mainly on insects before the eggs hatch, switching to birds (for themselves and their young) afterwards, but there are always exceptions to this rule, which may even operate in

*sometimes a Hobby arrives at a very great height above the village, soars awhile and then comes hurtling down like a falling bomb. It is then that I begin to wonder whether any falcon could possibly outfly a hunting Hobby .....*

seen early arrivals in the last week of April, but in my area it is usually well into May before the first bird appears. I have made no serious attempt to find where our local birds nest, but, in common with the majority of British pairs, they probably use the old nest of a Carrion Crow in a tree somewhere. Hobbies build no nest of their own. From watching their flight-lines into and out of the village, I suspect that our "local" pair actually nest several kilometres away: their visits to the area around my home are hunting forays.

Falconers will know better than most that it is dangerous to make generalisations about raptors. This is certainly the case when it comes to Hobby hunting tactics and prey - the two

reverse!

Fast-flying insects such as dragonflies are taken "in season", but very often slower-moving, high-flying species are involved. I have watched Hobbies cruising up and down over barleyfields, catching and eating big Summer Chafers at a rate of one every few minutes; at other times, I have seen them taking flying ants, feeding quite peacefully among Black-headed Gulls and even Swallows and House Martins. At times like this, the flight is slow and easy, with little darts and twists at the moment of capture all very methodical and efficient, rather than spectacular. It is usually possible to watch the Hobbies eating in mid-air as they drift along, dropping the uneaten wing-

cases or other parts as they go.

A Hobby hunting birds is almost like a different species. There is something about this bird which immediately suggests hidden reserves of speed and agility; even in direct flight, the lean, long-winged shape and the relaxed, elastic wingbeats have a certain menace about them. Our local Starlings certainly think so: a quick alarm call or two, and they totally disappear - there is none of the high-flying, bunched-up flock behaviour we see when there is a Sparrowhawk about. The Swallows and House Martins behave very differently too. Like the Starlings, they virtually ignore Kestrels, but call loudly and constantly mob every passing Sparrowhawk; when there is a Hobby in the sky, the Swallows and Martins use a distinctly different alarm call and clear the area very quickly indeed.

Very often, these calls alert me to the arrival of a Hobby. I usually look upwards first, because our local birds often arrive in direct, flapping flight a few hundred feet up, travelling quite fast. They may fly around like this for some time, actively searching or hoping to flush out a likely victim, or they may patrol by gliding or circling slowly. Attacks are launched from long, slanting dives, sometimes on almost closed wings but very often with the assistance of powerful strokes from the raked-back wings. The speeds achieved in these power-assisted assaults have to be seen to be believed. Even more spectacular are the near vertical stoops which are commonly employed;

A frequently employed tactic is to come racing through the houses and gardens, usually around rooftop height but sometimes much lower. A variation on this is to steam down the long hedge behind my



house, crossing from one side to the other like an ultra-fast Sparrowhawk. I have seen House Sparrows caught during these fast smash-and-grab raids and suspect that these are a major prey species for our local birds. At other times, I have watched Hobbies chase and fly down small birds low over open fields, again with tremendous acceleration and sustained speed.

Many kills are made in

the open sky, where the bird's ability to chase and catch even Swifts is almost legendary. I have yet to see a Swift kill, but I have seen Swallows and martins taken and on these occasions the Hobby's agility and manoeuvrability have been every bit as impressive as its speed. It is the case, though, that many of these aerial birds are inexperienced youngsters; it is no accident that Hobbies traditionally hunt in areas with large House

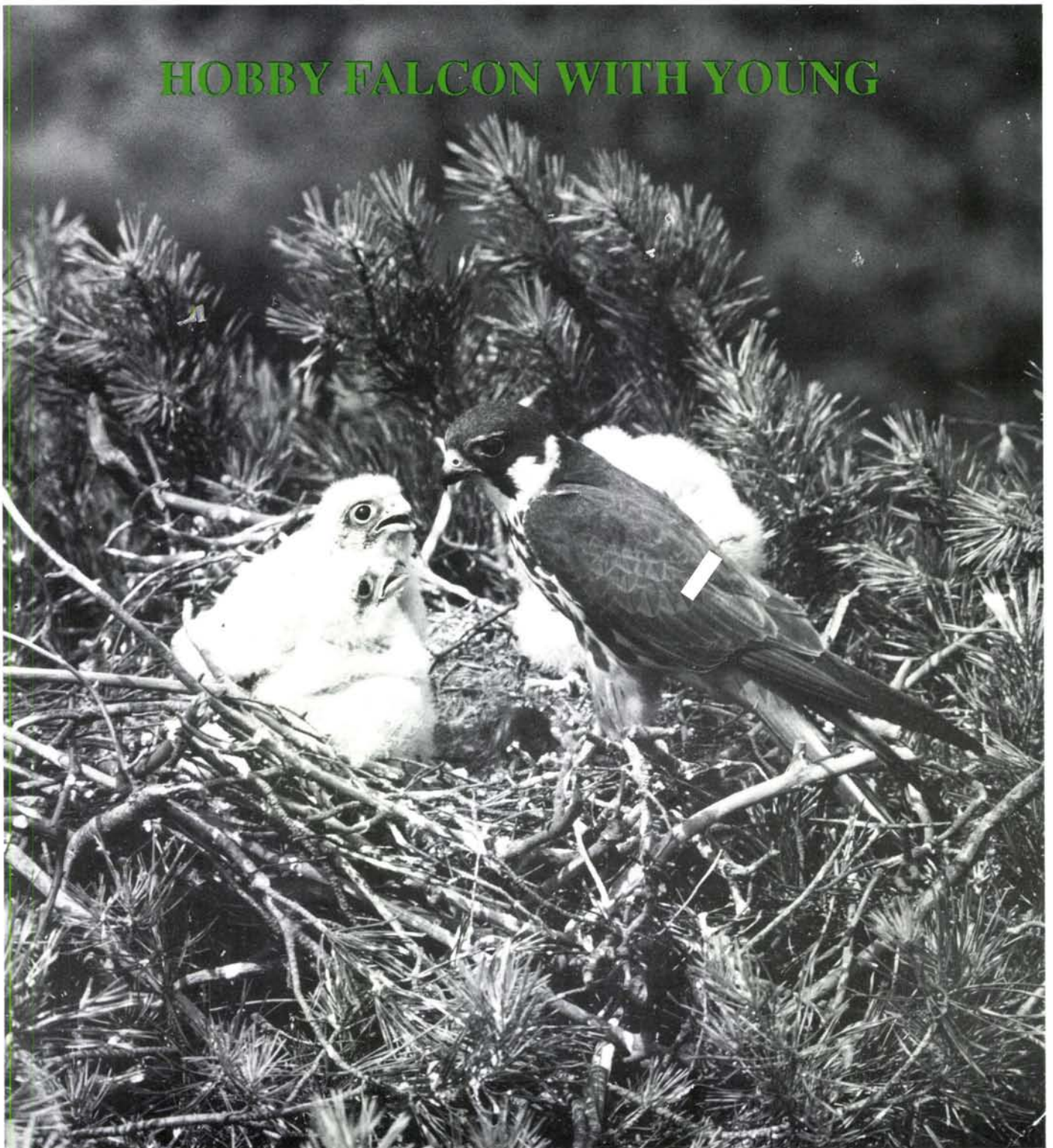
Martin populations, or Sand Martin colonies.

Which birds are killed varies from district to district, but there is a distinct leaning towards open country species. Larks, sparrows and assorted other passerines probably often outnumber the more aerial martins and Swifts. Surprisingly large birds have been recorded as prey, including Hoopoe, Cuckoo and, surprisingly, Woodcock! Near the coast, small waders are just as

likely to feature on the menu as anything else. Bats seem to be taken only occasionally, and ground-living small mammals rather rarely.

I have probably given the impression that I think the Hobby is rather special bird. To me, it is. I saw one passing my house on the very day that I typed up this piece: it could well be the last one for this year - but it won't really be very long before it's time to watch out for the first arrival of a new Spring.....

## HOBBY FALCON WITH YOUNG



Photograph by F.V. Blackburn



# ALICE IN WONDERLAND

By Paul Eaton

Alice is a female Ferruginous Hawk, creche reared, 1986 flying at 3 lbs 9.5 ozs. In my experience Ferruginous Hawks try to be adaptable and are always willing. They seem quick off the fist for their size and tenacious if not wet from the grass. Alice is now in her 5th season of flying starting very slowly, not wanting to perch in trees and showing no interest in game. I flew her for the first two seasons with some success and then lent her to a friend to fly to try and cut down the somewhat vocal side of her nature. In fact it seems that boredom and age have a good deal to do with this problem although the call is not as annoying as other buteo species.



Alice's fourth season was very sedentary with only a few weeks of flying as I flew a female Harris Hawk in this time. The fifth season started slowly but became more and more successful. Alice has taken mainly rabbit but also a cock pheasant and has removed feathers from a partridge, but her main forte is with mammals the rabbits especially. This day was a Sunday and the snow lay thick on the ground, my wife was not at all well and it was up to me to amuse the kids. After a morning tobogganing on a local slope we loaded the car and set off for the South Downs. Loading the car comprised of one Collie and one Springer Spaniel, two children and Alice, in her travelling box.

We set off to find some higher slopes.

The roads were filthy, loads of salt and constant use of the window washers. Approaching Shoreham, I saw on our left three people high up on a hillside flying a large Bird of Prey from the fist, as I slowed the car we saw the bird was some kind of Eagle but could not see what species. We moved on. Reaching Lancing we headed up the small downs track to the car park at the top passing, as we went, people on sledges sliding down the road towards us. At the top the snow was laying in drifts with the high parts of the fields showing the chalky ground under the

use tip, as per all tips crows, rooks and seagulls wheeled around it noisily, squabbling over the rubbish. On our left was a steep hillside leading along like an enormous bank, stretching as far as the eye could see. At the base of this slope were large fields outlined in the snow by single barbed wire fences. Cattle were grazing on one field but the others were left ploughed bare until the spring. As we walked I noted two small dots in one of the fields some two miles along the valley in front of us, I checked with my spy glass to confirm that these specks were in fact two hares moving about in the field. Alice had not seen them and seemed

snow. We drove along the track to where there was a small cut in, and parked the car. I slid into my wellies and the kids and dogs piled out and went racing off to play in the snow, meanwhile, I got ready, bag, belt, leash, stick and spotter glass, which I use to see game a good distance away. Finally I got Alice out of her box and she settled down on my fist with a big rouse and had her first look at the South Downs with snow covering them. We started to move on along the track into the wind, to our left is the Council Ref-

content to sit on the fist and be carried while she surveyed the scene. After a short while I slipped her and let her fly to a fence post close to the track we were walking down. Alice followed from post to post only once bothering to fly a large circle out over the valley and then return to another post near to where we were.

The next move she made was to the ground about 10 yds from me. By now, myself and the children had stopped to admire the view and catch our breath in the icy wind.



Paul with Alice preparing for the hunting season





Alice was looking down into the field some 800 yds from where we were standing, she bobbed her head twice and then sprang into the wind with a very purposeful attitude and flew off down the slope gathering speed as she went, then suddenly she was out of sight over the brow of the bank. A minute later she appeared two or three feet off the ground in what looked, at that distance like a powered stoop, she appeared black against the snow and as she went I suddenly saw 300 yds in front of her a hare get up and start to gallop away, in seconds, Alice made up the ground, the hare jinked but did not escape the speed of the bird she bound to the hare and held it. I told the kids to stay on the track and watch as I ran down into the field where Alice had the hare. I skidded on the rock hard slope and eventually made my way across the field towards Alice who by now had a swarm of black crows and seagulls wheeling and screaming around her. As I approached I saw she had the hare by the back and one hind leg not the best hold in the world but she had no intention of letting go even if she was getting quite some beating. The strength of the Ferruginous Hawk has to be experienced to be believed. I reached the kill and despatched the hare and allowed Alice to feed all she wanted from her prize. After her fill I offered her a leg and she stepped from the hare on to my fist. I slid the hare into my bag and started the long walk back up towards the track where the children and dogs were waiting in the snow.

.....

# RAPTOR E S C U E N E W S

by Mick Robins

My last article was written in a light hearted mood about the rescue of an eagle owl. Unfortunately, much of the work done by Raptor Rescue brings on a much more sombre state of mind. Our own members will know that I regularly include in our newsletter my feelings of anger and frustration in trying to deal with the despicable people who still engage in the use of illegal spring-type traps to take or destroy birds of prey.

I have no way of knowing how great a problem this is in terms of statistics, but I am sure it is still common, despite being outlawed many years ago.

Anyone who has seen the physical effects on birds trapped in this manner will understand my concern.

In the Summer of 1990 I received reliable information that a gamekeeper was using pole traps to protect his pheasant poults from

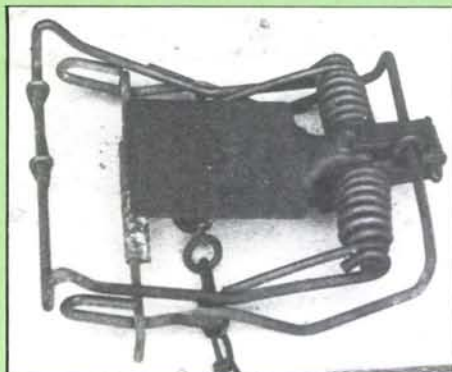
predation by Tawny Owls and Sparrowhawks.

I knew that the likely site for those traps would be at the pheasant release pens, and set out to locate them. This proved extremely difficult, as the original informant had no idea where they were within an area of several square miles.

Many visits were made to try and find them without committing too many trespass offences, but to no avail.

Eventually I resorted to surveillance from a light aircraft to see if that would assist, but again had no success. ( My extreme fear of heights was again severely tested!) I decided to resort to blatant trespassing on the private land and did then manage to find the pheasant pens.

By now, so many weeks had passed since I received the information, that the period when the poults were at risk had passed, and if traps were being used they would



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already have been removed. All efforts therefore came to nothing.

In July this year, I received a call from a landowner who has in the past given me help and encouragement. I was therefore put in an uncomfortable position when he told me he had caught a tawny owl in a "tunnel trap". In his words it was "in a bad way" I went to collect the owl immediately and found that the trap was a fen trap. These are spring traps and are only able to be used legally if set in a tunnel or underground run where stoats or rats might be caught. The owl had been caught by both legs in the jaws of the trap and had



Tawny Owl just prior to release

made determined efforts to escape which had caused severe leg injuries.

I am not a rehabilitator, but anybody could see that the bird had severe lacerations and was in deep shock. I did not waste time discussing how an owl managed to be trapped underground, but took it straight to a vet who is a member of Raptor rescue and is very experienced with birds of prey.

He gave immediate first aid, and operated soon after to repair the damage as best he could.

However the long term prospects were uncertain, as the artery in one leg was severed which left the foot without a blood supply for a considerable time.

I found the whole episode distressing and was pessimistic about the birds future.

I was proved wrong and never more pleased to be so.

After three weeks I visited the vet, to find the owl flying well in a large flight, and more importantly with apparent full use of both feet.

After consultation with my vice-chairman and L.R.K. Mick Cunningham it was decided the owl could be released back to its original territory without being hacked.

This I did the next day, and very rewarding it was too.

I am still trying to decide how best to express my feelings to my "friend" who caused the injuries.



# VICTORIA THE PEREGRINE FALCON

by Vincent Robba

As some of the readers might know, there is now the existence of The Gibraltar Bird Rehabilitation Centre, run by my colleague Mr Saez and myself in conjunction with the Gibraltar Ornithological Society. But this account or story, whatever you may wish to call it, is not going to be about the Centre, its origins or its projects for the future, but the story of one of the birds recently rehabilitated at the centre, the story of Victoria the Peregrine Falcon.

It all began in Spring, May to be exact, the last days of May when the eyasses of our several pairs of breeding Peregrine Falcons (*Falco peregrinus broolei*) have already fledged, and are ready to leave the eyries. At this stage, the adult falcons reduce the food intake given to the young falcons in order to encourage them to leave the eyrie.

Time and time again, the female falcon will perch nearby in full view of the eyasses, with a freshly killed bird in her talons, in hope that the young hungry falcons will go to her and leave the protection of the nest, where they were born. At this stage it has been the male or Tiercel peregrine, which has been doing most of the hunting. The female's role is to feed and keep the eyasses warm, also to keep other predators away from the eyrie. Later on, as the food demands get greater, she too will start hunting.

Another method to induce the eyasses to leave the eyrie, is for the adult falcons to fly close to the eyrie carrying prey. The young falcons, being hungrier than usual, will launch themselves into the air and follow their parents in an attempt to retrieve the prey item that the adult falcon is carrying. From this stage onwards, the adult falcons will teach the eyasses everything a peregrine needs to know to survive in the wild, and to become one of the most formidable Avian predators of the world.

But alas, all does not come so easy for some of the eyass falcons. Some eyasses fall out of the nest too early, or sustain injuries whilst trying to learn how to land successfully. Others injure themselves when in pursuit of prey.

Also unlucky, are the individuals who get tired whilst flying over the sea, or are mobbed by gulls who can see that the young falcons are at a disadvantage. These birds fall into the sea, where they perish. Unless luck is with them and they are rescued.

Something of a similar nature, or one of the many factors mentioned earlier on, must have been the case with Victoria. She was brought to us in a cardboard box, (this seems to be the most available container people can find to put raptors in). I do not

recommend them, since on several occasions the bottoms have opened and raptors have been lost. The gentleman that brought Victoria, knew that she was some kind of raptor. Having heard of the Centre, he decided that the right thing to do with her was to bring her to us.

We examined the falcon here at the centre for any possible injuries, and found that the joint on her left leg was very badly swollen, and arranged for her to be seen by our local vet. The diagnosis was Sceptical Arthritis and due treatment was prescribed. This was in the form of tablets, which were grounded into powder and mixed twice daily with Victoria's meals.

I had found out from the gentleman who had brought Victoria to us that she had been found along Devil's Tower Road. Had she had no injuries, everything would have been very simple indeed. Having been found in that particular area, we assumed that she must be one of the three eyasses which had been reared this year at the North Front Eyrie. We proceeded to check the site and after several days of observation, only two of the three eyasses could be seen.

Our prediction was correct, Victoria was the missing eyass. As I said before, everything would have been very easy if Victoria had not had an injury. We would have



*Victoria fit and ready for release*

released her at the nest site, and her parents would have taken it from there. But alas, with her injury she would not have survived.

After a long period of rest and the tablets, Victoria's leg improved considerably. But by now, her brother and sister had dispersed away from the rock, since young falcons are not allowed by their parents to remain in the same territory that they themselves possess.

By late Summer, all young eyasses have been urged on their way by the adult peregrines. Sometimes, this is done ruthlessly. Once they have learnt from their parents how to survive in the wild, they disperse to find their own territories, and their own mate.

If Victoria would have been released during this time, she would have been treated as an intruder rather than as an offspring. Victoria would have to be taught by us, using traditional falconry methods, the same things she would have learnt from her own parents.

At this stage, I will not go into great detail about Victoria's training. Only to say that Victoria's first feelings towards us, were fear principally, and mistrust. By employing falconry methods a great deal of patience and perseverance, we began to do away with these feelings. Slowly but surely, trust came in, and then dependence. She was now as dependent on us for food as she had once been on her parents.

In the first few weeks of training, she could hardly fly, but as the days went by, she became stronger and stronger. When she became fit with consecutive flying we introduced her to other elements she would have to encounter in the wild. Falcons hunt in all sorts of weather, and to be able to dominate the wind, is very important to a falcon.

At first she had difficulties, being blown out to sea on various occasions. But in the end she prevailed. She harnessed the wind and rode it like only a peregrine falcon can.

How we all enjoyed watching her fly, rising with the wind, turning and stooping over our heads at an incredible speed. Sights that we will never forget. By now she was almost as fit as her wild counterparts. She too obviously sensed this, as, not long after this, she began to hunt on her own.

Her favourite targets were the Feral pigeons nesting along the cliff face, and then one day, it happened. In one of her favourite hunting forays, she managed to strike down a young pigeon, obviously an inexperienced bird. My feelings as she plucked or plumed her quarry, were a mixture of happiness and sadness. Happiness, because, after all the many months of hard work, we had reached our goal, and sadness, because due to this success, Victoria was ready to go back to the wild and I would probably never see her again.

Victoria was released soon afterwards across the border into Spain. Our resident pairs of peregrines, being very territorial, would never have permitted her to stay. At this point, I would like to thank Dr. C. Finlayson for having arranged all necessary formalities

with our Spanish counterparts across the border. To our local vet, and to all those who in one way or another, helped to rehabilitate Victoria.

As I sit here, writing these lines, Victoria has now gone. Some of my spirit will go with her, and certainly some of hers will remain with me. I had taught her how to fly, how to stoop, and how to kill. Things that were within her, and I just had to unlock. I wish her the best of luck. Maybe, one day, as she is brooding her own young, or sitting in a lonely crag, she will remember our encounter and the things we learned from each other. For everything I taught her, she has repaid me tenfold in the ways of the peregrine.



# CONFERENCE A RESOUNDING SUCCESS

The recent Hawk & Owl Trust Conference on "The Biology and Conservation of Small Falcons" hosted by the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology at the University of Kent proved to be of great value. Attended by 160 delegates from around the world, 45 speakers gave papers on a wide range of subjects. In addition, poster demonstrations, films, books and an art exhibition were on show and the general opinion seemed to be that the mood of the conference was "happy", the content informative and the event well worthwhile.

Sessions were grouped under the headings of "Breeding Ecology", "Health & Disease", "Hunting & Foraging", "Management of Wild & Captive Populations" and "Taxonomy & Evolution". Speaking to the Conference shortly before his departure to Tanzania, John Cooper stressed the importance of a "multidisciplinary approach" involving biologists, veterinary surgeons, ornithologists, aviculturists and falconers, in providing valuable information towards our understanding of small falcons generally, both in free-living and captive populations.

On the subject of captive birds in the UK,

Terry l'Anson's paper on the captive breeding of Merlins and Heather Woodland's account on the breeding and release of Hobbies, together with Jemima Parry-Jones' contribution on breeding African Pygmy Falcons in captivity were well received, whilst Nick Garbutt's and Carl Jones' accounts on the Mauritius Kestrel, and Nick Fox's account on the New Zealand Falcon provided delegates with an insight to conservation management further afield.

Equally valuable was the lively "workshop" debate on Merlin Conservation chaired by Jack Orchel, whose study of the Merlin in South West Scotland is soon to be published by the Hawk & Owl Trust.

It is impossible to discuss the many subjects covered in the space available here, but the full Conference Proceedings will be published in 1992 and anyone interested in purchasing a copy should write to Sue Dewar, The Hawk & Owl Trust, c/o Zoological Society of London, Regent's Park, London NW1 4RY.

There are some copies of the limited edition Conference Print remaining (see inset); copies can be obtained by sending £5 + £1.95 p.&p. to Hawk & Owl Trust (Sales) The National Centre

for Owl Conservation, Wolterton Park, Near Aylsham, Norwich, NR11 7BB.

In summarising the Conference, Andrew Village praised the variety and quality of work on different species and from different countries, showing the enormous increase of interest in small falcons over recent years. He felt that the conference had brought together an enthusiastic and committed group of people from wide ranging disciplines with one common interest: that of conservation.

Sue M. Dewar



## Clubs

### Heart of England Raptor Club

Following the dissolution earlier this year of the old Heart of England Raptor Club and its renaming as the Central Raptor and Falconry Club, a group of founder members resigned and have reformed the original club. The aims are to encourage the care, keeping, breeding, flying and hunting with birds of prey; to promote friendship and understanding within the sport and among the public in general. The club operates principally in Warwickshire.

The affairs of H.E.R.C. are conducted by a council of experienced members of proven commitment to the club's aims. It is not a democratic organisation and members, while enjoying the range of activities provided, have no vote in the running of the club.

The club year starts in September with the A.G.M. and for the next four months (Oct-Jan) there is at least one monthly field meeting on a stocked estate, with a "rabbits only" day in February for good measure. March/June sees a guest speaker each month and there is a club barbecue planned for July. After a break in August the years business is rounded off at the A.G.M. and the new year starts.

A broadsheet of information, copied articles, original items and advertisements is produced every other month.

For details contact Steve Wright (0789 298365) daytime or Sheila Dalman (0926 842510).

### New Forest Falconry Club

Dear Sirs,

I am writing in response to your recent article in the Falconer Magazine regarding "Clubs" and set out below details of our club which you may wish to publish in your next issue.

"THE NEW FOREST FALCONRY CLUB was founded in March 1990. This meeting opened very informally with just 5 very enthusiastic falconers. In the past year it has reached an active membership of 63 with many ladies as well. Ages range from 8 to (cough !!!)

The Clubs' primary purpose is to teach and enhance the sport of Falconry. This is being successfully achieved using combinations of lecturettes by visiting and local experts, films, monthly written questionnaires (and do we get some differing answers!!!) and probably most important, when the weather permits at our meetings a "Talons-on-teach-in" for novice and discerning expert alike. These coupled with a social programme of trips, BBQ's and raffles play an important role in the whole club scene.

The Club as a Club has acquired hunting grounds for both long wing and shortwing with a minimum of two meetings per month through the Winter open season.

The Club meets are held on the first Wednesday of every month in Ringwood (Hants) full details available from Frank or Christine on Christchurch (0202 478862)

### Avon & Somerset Raptor Group

The group first met in a small pub room on the outskirts of Bath in December 1990. A name was chosen and a committee "elected." For my sins, I was at the bar at the time, I was elected Chairman.

The committee then put together the aims, a constitution and a code of conduct for all members of the group.

To enable us to achieve the aims we are endeavouring to invite speakers to our monthly meetings. To date we have had talks from Chris Sperring (Hawk and Owl Trust) and Dick Best (Veterinary Surgeon). We are always interested in hearing from anyone who would be willing to talk to us on Raptor subjects, Falconry, Dogs etc.

We hold meetings monthly from September to June and then as social occasions permit. They are normally held on a Tuesday evening at a local hostelry between Frome, Shepton Mallet and Radstock.

We have members from both Bath and Bristol as well as areas local to the meeting place.

From a small beginning, 10 - 15, we now number almost 30 and growing weekly.

Should any reader wish to join or get in touch with us then they are welcome to do so.

They can reach committee members on the following numbers:

Chairman - Derek Smith 0373 812950  
Secretary - Debbie Sutton 0225 837530  
Member - Frank Eschells 0373 72935  
We also have junior members (under 16) and they are most welcome.

**We would like to hear from any clubs that have not yet contacted us.**

#### List of Clubs

**AVON & SOMERSET.**  
Derek Smith. 0373-812950.  
D.Sutton. 0225-837530.

**BRITISH FALCONERS CLUB.**  
John Fairclough. 0543-481737.

**CENTRAL ENGLAND RAPTOR GROUP.**  
Sue Dewar. 0734-969501.

**CHESHIRE HAWKING CLUB.**  
P. Rowland. 0625-22299.

**EAST LONDON FALCONERS CLUB.**  
0708-756015 / 081 517 9362.

**HEART OF ENGLAND.**  
Steve Wright. 0789-298365.  
Sheila Dalman. 0926-842510.

**LONDON HAWKING CLUB.**  
Paul. 071 515 7754. Rusty. 081 980 2373.

**NEW FOREST FALCONRY CLUB.**  
Frank or Christine. 0202-478862.

**NORTHERN ENGLAND FALCONER CLUB.**  
Barry schofield. 0246-825209.

**SOUTH EAST FALCONERS GROUP.**  
Gary Biddiss. 0268-728860.  
Dean White. 0375-671302

**WELSH HAWKING CLUB.**  
Adrian Williams. 0443-206333.





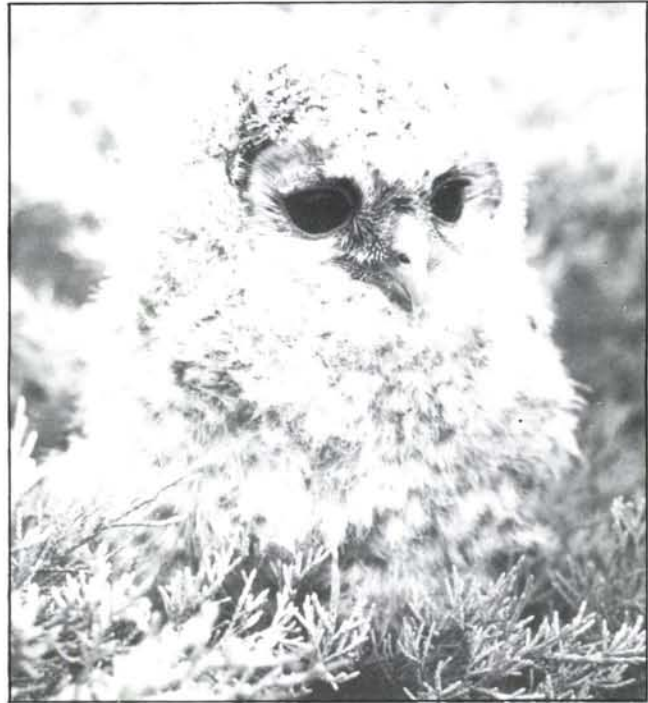
## NEST SITE LEAFLETS

The Hawk & Owl Trust, in conjunction with the BTO, have produced a new set of six leaflets on artificial nest sites for birds of prey. Individual leaflets cover the Barn Owl, Tawny Owl, Little Owl and Kestrel, with a separate one on artificial stick nests and platforms for birds such as the Osprey, Goshawk and hobby, and a further general leaflet on fixings, materials, techniques, habitats and general conservation measures. They have been written by Hawk & Owl Trust Vice-Chairman Dr Phillip Burton and Conservation officer Paul Johnson, together with David Glue from the British Trust for Ornithology.

To obtain copies of the leaflets, please write to The Hawk & Owl Conservation Trust, c/o Zoological Society of London, Regent's Park, London NW1 4RY. The leaflets cost 30p each. Please enclose a large stamped addressed envelope when requesting leaflets.

## THE TAWNY OWL

Although the Tawny Owl does not occur in Ireland, it is the most common owl in England, Scotland and Wales. It favours woodland habitats, but also can be found on farmland and even in city parks. The tawny is known for its hooting call, although it also utters a shrill "kewick". Preying on small mammals and medium sized birds, the Tawny Owl is highly territorial, defending an area of approximately 18-30 ha. depending upon habitat quality. Breeding may start as early as February. No attempt is made to construct a nest, and the eggs are usually laid in a tree cavity, old stick nest or squirrel drey. In areas with few trees the eggs are sometimes laid on the ground. A common site is the hollow end of a broken branch, and the Tube type box shown below has been designed to mimic this natural site. The eggs hatch after 30-33 days incubation, and the young remain in the nest site itself until 20-24 days old. When they leave the site they are only partially feathered, but instinctively climb into the tree canopy where they continue their development. Tawny Owls can be aggressive towards human intruders at the nest and to smaller birds of prey, especially little Owls. Nesting boxes should therefore only be sited with these considerations in mind. Several designs of nesting box have proved to be suitable for Tawny Owls.



Photograph by Maria Gowdy

Young Tawny Owl

### VARIOUS FIXING METHODS FOR TUBE BOXES

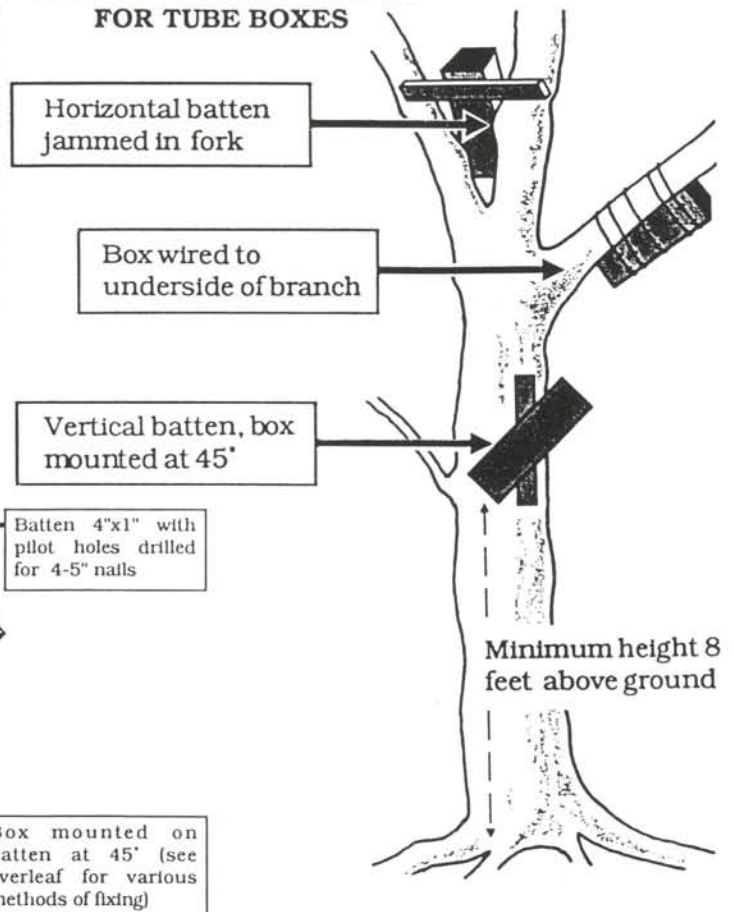
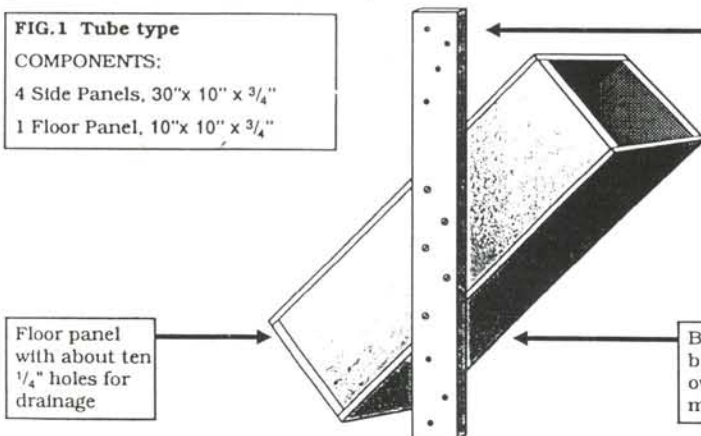


FIG.1 Tube type

#### COMPONENTS:

- 4 Side Panels, 30" x 10" x 3/4"
- 1 Floor Panel, 10" x 10" x 3/4"



The photographs of the Barn Owls in the last issue were taken by Derick Scott



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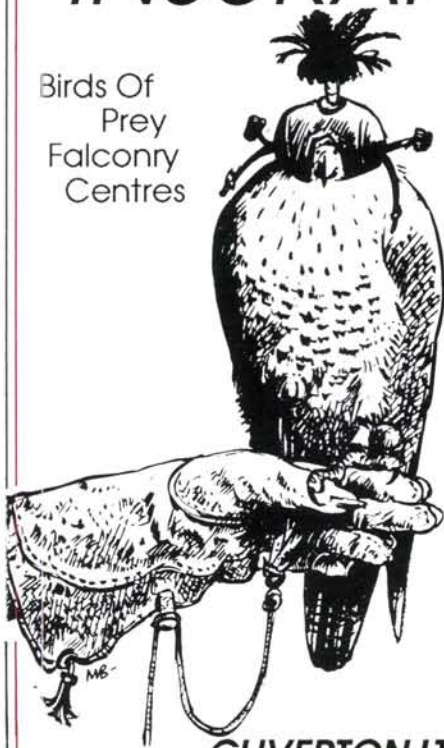
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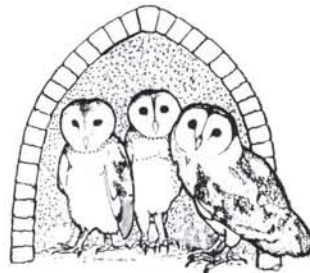
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# THE GLORIOUS TWELFTH AND ALL THAT

By Diana Durman-Walters  
Director of the Scottish Academy  
of Falconry & Related Studies

The glory of a falconer who goes in for game hawking is "a falcon towering in her pride of place" and her place is some hundreds of yards above her masters head. A high pitch is the beauty of the game hawk. The best game hawks go up until they look quite small in the sky. A thousand feet is often attained. When a peregrine is as high as this it matters comparatively little whereabouts the game gets up.

So wrote E.B. Mitchell 'The Art and Practice of Hawking' 1900.

He too knew the thrill and spectacle that lay before the falconer who had a high achieving falcon. He was aware of the ability of passage hawks and also of the latent ability of eyasses. If he were alive today he no doubt would be pleasantly surprised to witness the success of captive bred hawks on this most testing of quarry.

Falconers throughout the ages have through experience stated that grouse as a quarry is a difficult one. Probably more than any other species of game bird they have evolved speed and defensive evasive action to a fine art. It's certainly true to say of fellow falconers that as August begins to loom on the calendar then a restless spirit begins to invade the very soul, as if a sense of urgency prevails. No wonder. For those about to embark on the great trek North this is the moment they've been waiting for.

August grouse are by far and away the easier quarry. Young grouse still fresh in body and mind have not developed the flying skills that are required to evade a persistent falcon. However the same cannot be said of them as September and October approaches, these are the most difficult of quarry in particular upon ground that is steeply contoured. This type of terrain has all the advantage in favour of the grouse who utilise the sharp descent and curves of the ground to fly with devastating skill and nerve outwitting the most eloquent of falcons. During the late autumn and early winter months can be seen the sheer mastery and outstanding speed of our native Red-grouse.

Falcons, often those that have the ability to take high pitch can deliver what might seem to be an almost fatal blow and indeed knock it's quarry to the heather. To the falconer this appears to be a certainty that the grouse is within the falcons grasp, only for it to wait for the falcon to attempt to take it in the heather, and the grouse to depart faster than it descended!

No quarry to my mind demands such great a respect then this one. Those that are brought home to the table are not so much a culinary delight as a testimony to the superb strengths (and weaknesses) of falcon and grouse.

This year has been somewhat indifferent in grouse numbers as many moors have been unlucky with grouse stocks due particularly to a cold wet spring when many grouse chicks succumbed to torrential rain. At their mid development period when too large as a brood to be sheltered by the brooding hen; and consequently with their plumage sodden, with little hope of drying out as the rains continue; their fate is determined. Many moors this year either did not offer the normal number of shooting days or simply only let a small limited number. Moors that offered falconry lets, showed a marked decrease in grouse numbers. But as with everything there are swings and round-a-bouts and providing next spring is more clement then the situation will all being equal resolve itself.

As with every successful falcon, there are many that are not, (sometimes not just for being inadequate grouse catchers). Each year the Scottish Academy of Falconry quarantines falcons from the continent whose falconers have their grouse moors in Scotland. You tend to get very attached to these summer 'migrants'. The handling and attention they receive means that we build up a rapport with the hawks and watch their progress through the grouse season with more than a deal of interest. This year one of the pelei x peregrinus hybrids was killed by a marauding Golden eagle.

In this country such events are shocking as they are extremely rare and little documented. However it must be said that where suitable habitats are now more abundant for all raptors, this such event may well become more common. Both Leonard and I have witnessed this in the United States when we were sage grouse hawking, one of our female gyrfalcons was taken and killed by a pair of Golden eagles hell bent on piracy. This is common in the states. In Scotland the young tiercel 'Caruso' having taken his thirtieth grouse remained on the heather vigorously plucking his trophy. A young Golden eagle which had been seen with its parents earlier on descended unnoticed to the oblivious tiercel. As his falconer came over expecting to retrieve a successful hawk, to his mortal horror he saw the young eagle pick his hawk and grouse up and fly off. Shouting and running towards him caused the eagle to shake the lifeless falcon free who descended to earth as moments before the grouse had done.

As natural an occurrence as this may have been one cannot help but think the good die young.

However, falconers are not only dedicated, they are a resilient group and the thought that next season will be a better one than that which has just passed is the very stimulation that puts us in mind of the next Glorious Twelfth and all that.



Leonard & Diana Durman-Walters watching dog No. 3 working Billy Hosick (famous Irish Setter Field Trialist) holding additional German Wire haired Pointers



Cadge of falcons awaiting the moor



Marauding Golden Eagle ever ready for an easy meal.



# Raptor Rehabilitation In Australia

by Peter McKinney

Australia is home to twenty four raptor species several of which are now found in decreasing numbers due to habitat disturbance e.g the Grey Falcon and the Red Goshawk. In 1990, during a working holiday, I was fortunate to see many species of raptors in the wild and in collections throughout the country.

Falconry is illegal in Australia but many institutions are directly involved in the captive breeding and rehabilitation of injured raptors. Eminent raptor specialists include Jerry and Penny Olsen in Canberra, and Phil Pains based in Western Australia. The Olsens maintain a variety of birds including Brown, Black and Little Falcons. My first sight of a white phase grey goshawk was especially memorable. Almost all of the birds are disabled to some degree, a number have bred successfully. In the rehabilitation programme falconry techniques are used to assess flying and hunting ability before birds are released into the surrounding countryside after which post-release



*Brown Falcon*



*Brown Goshawk*



*Phil Pains with Peregrin Falcon*

monitoring is carried out. Eagle Heritage, another rehabilitation centre is owned and managed by Phil Pains in the scenic area of Margaret River in Western Australia. The centre is open to the public and maintains approximately seventy birds including the impressive wedge-tailed eagles, which were heavily persecuted in the past by Australian farmers. Under government protection these birds are now seen in increasing numbers. During my travels in the Northern Territory, a region made famous by a Mr Crocodile Dundee, I saw many eagles by the roadside feeding on dead kangaroos.

At Eagle Heritage emphasis is placed on rehabilitation of injured raptors and education of the public using informative lectures and simple flying displays. By highlighting the role raptors play in the control of pest species like snakes, rabbits and even parrots, most visitors leave the centre sympathetic to raptor conservation and more aware of the many projects throughout Australia. Veterinarians play a critical role in raptor rehabilitation projects by treating injured birds at minimal cost. The larger Zoological collections e.g. Taronga Zoo in Sydney and Healesville sanctuary in Melbourne, have excellent veterinary facilities and provide a free service for injured wildlife a commendable practice, which also serves as an excellent public relations exercise.

The expertise obtained by raptor specialists and vets is invaluable to research and conservation projects involving the more endangered Australian raptors. With increasing public awareness and concern the survival of these beautiful birds will be secured for the benefit of future generations.



# ANAGRAM COMPETITION



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\_\_\_\_\_ RCEIELT

\_\_\_\_\_ SYSAE

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## HOW TO ENTER

Solve the anagrams, then using the first letter of each word find the mystery word. Write this on a postcard or the back of a sealed envelope and send, along with your name, address and telephone number to: **ANAGRAM COMPETITION**. The Falconers Magazine, 20 Bridle Road, Burton Latimer, Kettering, Northants. NN15 5QP. Closing date: 31st December 1991.

## RESULTS FOR SPRING AND SUMMER COMPETITION

**1st Prize** A pair of Habicht-SLC Mark II. Donated by SWAROVSKI UK LTD. **Won by** Ian Stone - Plymouth

**2nd Prize** A silver paper-knife. Donated by ROBIN HAIGH **Won by** Taff Hinge - Cardiff

**3rd Prize** A made-to-measure glove. Donated by GRAHAM DUDMISH **Won by** John Taylor - Warrington

**4th Prize** A bow perch. Donated by RAY PRIOR **Won by** Paul Crawford - Ipswich

**5th Prize** A falconry bag. Donated by IAN VANCE **Won by** Richard Newton - Peterborough

**6th Prize** A print - GOSHAWK ON FIST - Donated by ANDREW HUTCHINSON **Won by** Michael Wyatt - Romiley

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# Letters

All letters should be addressed to:-  
**THE EDITORS, THE FALCONERS AND  
RAPTOR CONSERVATION MAGAZINE,  
20 BRIDLE ROAD, BURTON LATIMER,  
NR KETTERING, NORTHANTS., NN15 5QP**

Dear Editors,

In reply to Robin Haigh's letter in the last issue, I would like readers to know that myself and many others have been buying imported chicks that have been hatched in Holland for quite some time now and have found them to be very well presented and in a satisfactory condition. At the same also being assured that these same chicks are checked for salmonella at the hatchery, then again before they are brought into this country, which is more than we can say for the chicks that are produced in this country. Therefore may I suggest that Mr Haigh checks his information again, especially as there is only one importer of chicks from Holland in this country.

Yours sincerely  
Reader  
Ros Jenkins.

*All chicks imported into this country have to have a certificate giving them a clean bill of health.*

*Ed.*

## ENGLANDS RAPTORS

Philip Snow has produced another superb centre spread painting exclusively for the Falconers and Raptors Conservation Magazine and is offering the original for sale. If you are interested please contact Philip on

**0248 351223.**

**ARTIST PROFILE**  
In this issue  
**Margaret Parsons**  
has done a profile of  
**Neil Davies.** He accepts commissions and has a number of his own works for sale. For more information phone  
**0282 601561**

Dear David.

I am sorry Mike does not think the truth impresses me. Well it does, but not the truth according to the gospel of the R.S.P.B. Mike says the R.S.P.B. does not normally get involved with the detailed nest recording activities described by me, but also says losses can (if only rarely) be attributed to the R.S.P.B. Now a loss is a loss and if it is caused by R.S.P.B. interference, does this put them on Mike's list of criminals and miscreants. I doubt it. But it does go back to my original question "WHO WATCHES THE WATCHERS?" As to Mike's statement the R.S.P.B. does not erect hides at nests, could he care to comment on the Rishworth Peregrines (a Yorkshire site near the M62 motorway) who failed to rear any young this year, could this have anything to do with the R.S.P.B. erecting a hide and charging the public to use it (advertised locally) or will he lay the blame where the R.S.P.B. always do with anyone but them.

P.S. Does Mike know how many, if any, Ospreys fledged at Loch Garten this year?

I regret that John Abbott does not believe me, but I stand by everything I said before since he mentions a Yorkshire Peregrine site where the R.S.P.B. mounts a public viewing scheme (which is a wholly different thing to erecting a hide at a nest!), I have to tell him that the birds did not fail in 1991 - one youngster was reared successfully. The fact that three eggs failed to hatch has nothing to do with any form of disturbance. Furthermore, this nest has produced young in four of the last five seasons, only failing when a new female appeared on the scene and laid eggs which failed to hatch. The Ospreys at Loch Garten reared two young in 1991. The consistent success at this much-watched site since 1959 speaks for itself

*Mike Everett (RSPB)*

Dear Mike and John

*I Feel we must call a halt to this exchange as it could go on forever. Ed.*

We would like to hear from any ladies interested in forming a ladies Falconry club. Both practising and non-practising falconers welcome.

Please send name, address and telephone number to: The Falconers Magazine, 20 Bridle Road, Burton Latimer, Kettering, Northants NN15 5QP.

but I do display work and it is not always possible to adhere to this rule, so I try to fly my birds as safely as possible.

I have used 1 1/2" wide, black elastic, stretched fairly tightly around the jess and stitched up the side. This can be pulled up/down over the slits and doesn't curl the jesses. I have now designed my own jess with an arrow head at the swivel end and a piece of leather around the jess that slides up and down but is unable to slip off. (The

jess has to be measured and cut to size before making it up). I have used plastic tubes but these eventually slip off and curl the jesses. I hope these suggestions may prevent some other 'emergency', **but there is no substitute for hunting jesses!**

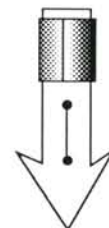
Yours faithfully  
Sylvia S. Powell.

PS. Thank you for producing a great magazine. It's improving with every issue!!

Dear Editors,

In response to the article in the Summer Edition concerning the eagle owl caught by its jesses in a tree, I would like to offer a couple of suggestions. If a bird has to be flown wearing mews jesses. **I do not agree with flying birds using mews jesses and use field jesses when exercising or hunting,**

Elastic stretched around jess and stitched. Leave a very small seam to help pulling up and down.



Leather over-lapped and glued. Snug fit

Dear Falconers

Well the battle plan against us has been laid down by the league against cruel sports and from the comments I have heard from other falconers they are in for an easy victory. "It won't happen, they will get rid of the fox hunters etc first before they start on us, and by that time I'll be dead" with a few variations is the typical response. Well I am sorry but unless we get our act together it can and will happen a lot sooner than we think. We are a very small and I am afraid to say well divided minority (most falconers do not belong to a recognised club) without the political clout of the fox hunters etc, an easy target. Write to your M.P. Let him or her know your views, join a club, register on the Hawk Board, anything, as long as you do something. Don't sit on your backside waiting for others to do it for you. Unite and organise now because if we don't falconry will become a thing of the past as it is in Spain, Denmark etc.

*A VERY WORRIED FALCONER.*



# HAWKBOARD NEWS

**M**ost of you probably know that the Hawk Board has had a busy summer. Just before the Game Fair, the League Against Cruel Sports published a report by Peter Robinson (ex-RSPB) entitled *Falconry in Britain*. Much of the report was a good old snipe at the Wildlife and Countryside Act and the way it is being implemented through the Registration Scheme. Among other things it showed a woeful ignorance of the law as it affects rehabilitation of raptors and went so far as to recommend that no more LRK licences be issued. The RSPB refused to be associated with the report.

The LACS issued a Press Statement which was even more lurid than the report and called for falconry to be banned and all raptors where possible released into the wild.

We got wind of all this and issued our own Press Release on the same day. There followed a series of TV and radio interviews between spokesmen for the Hawk Board and LACS and various newspaper features. We also issued a Facts Sheet of information for hawk-keepers faced by the Press.

One of the issues concentrated on by LACS was the issue of falconers of licences to take larks etc. Of course the figures were stretched as far as possible (this is politics!) and one can argue figures all day. But in the end, falconers do want to have licensed quarry, especially for merlins and sparrowhawks. The argument is that this is against the EC Birds Directive. However, there are precedents in other EC countries for similar activities and the DOE's interpretation and implementation of the Directive is a legally correct one. Biologically too we have an overwhelming argument in our favour. But the LACS are relying on the emotional response of the general public at tabloid level to the image of 'setting hawks on skylarks'.

LACS will pursue their offensive in two ways. In the long-term they will work through Brussels to get the Bird Directive altered to make some or all aspects of falconry illegal. It is too early to predict how this could go. With several Eastern bloc countries trying to join the EC much of the EC legislation will become difficult to implement and the whole EC may need radical restructuring, leaving us - where?

In the short-term LACS will concentrate on raising the profile of 'Bloodsports' to coincide with the General Election which at present looks as if it will be in the spring. Labour's view on countryside 'Wildlife in the Countryside' by Ron Davies MP is a carefully phrased effort to separate hunting and coursing off from other fieldsports and ban them by means of a free vote in parliament. Thus it considers it is acceptable to course rabbits but not hares! (A political example of splitting hairs if ever there was one!). We thus have a major battle in this area.

But that's not all.

The RSPB then published a report called *The International Trade in Wild Birds*. This resulted in a voluntary ban by many major air carriers on transporting wild-caught birds, and in a unanimous vote in the EC parliament calling for legislation to outlaw the imports of wild birds into the EC. This report, although well-intentioned, failed to distinguish

between wild-caught birds and domestic-bred ones. We were able to pick them up on this because we have watertight data on one of the species listed, the New Zealand falcon, and this is resulting in a 'clarification' to be published in *Birds* magazine. More importantly, now that falconry is virtually dependent on domestic bred raptors, we have to fight for recognition of these domestics as a separate category in law and in any future changes to legislation or CITES regulations.

## Is the Hawk Board doing anything else?

**Y**es, we have decided on a campaign strategy which is part general policy and part action. This will filter down to club members through the club representatives so if you are not already in a recognised club you'd better hurry up and join one. One of the things we're concerned about at several levels is the image which hawk-keeping has with the general (voting) public. Aspects such as displays where raptors may be badly handled or stressed by the weather or poor presentation. Or the ways in which raptors are kept at home, sometimes in substandard accommodation or unhygienic conditions. We are assisting the British Fieldsports Falconry Committee in producing a Code of Good Management for hawk-keepers, including not just falconry and breeding but also rehabilitation, transport and all aspects of raptors in captivity or domesticity.

But it is not fair for you to rely on the Hawk Board to carry all the load. With the General Election approaching every single hawk-keeper needs to accept responsibility for the future of his or her sport. Now is the time to write to your MP. Not just your current one but all of your prospective candidates. Politicians regard one letter in your own handwriting as equivalent to the views of 700 non-writing silent majority. So get the pen out! Ask them how they would vote in a parliamentary free vote on fieldsports. Give them some hard facts about hawk-keeping which will make them sit up and think. Tell them that if they, or their party, are against fieldsports they can forget your vote. Where to find these hard facts? The Hawk Board has done your homework for you and checked the information with the DOE and with scientific references where appropriate. It's right here in this issue.





# FACTS ABOUT FALCONRY

**Falconry is the taking of quarry in its wild state using trained birds of prey.**

Fieldsports, which include fishing, shooting, hunting and falconry, are practised by over 5 million people in Britain, most of them voters.

All birds of prey ('raptors') are protected and all, except some owls and vultures, must be registered with the Department of the Environment (DOE) and ringed if held in captivity.

In July 1991 14,152 captive raptors were registered of which 11,004 were domestic captive-bred, 2,256 were from the wild, mainly permanently disabled, and 892 were imported, mainly captive-bred. These birds are owned by 8,039 hawk-keepers whose interests are represented by a nationally-elected panel called 'The Hawk Board'.

No raptors have been taken under licence from the wild in England, Wales or Scotland for falconry since 1988. Falconry is now self-sufficient in producing domestic raptors. Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, hawk-breeders have to be able to prove that their birds are genuinely captive-bred. Using DNA fingerprinting an entire pedigree of 60 falcons was recently successfully reconstructed by scientists at Nottingham University. Gyrfalcons currently bred in UK are DNA fingerprinted. Hawk-keepers are subject to frequent unannounced inspections by the DOE. All domestic raptors wear a closed aluminium DOE leg ring.

**Quarry.** Falconers hunt normal game species in season under a game licence eg. pheasants, partridges, grouse, mallard etc. Also unprotected or non-game species such as crows, rooks, magpies, pigeons, starlings, sparrows, rabbits and hares.

Sparrowhawks and merlins also take common but protected species under licence. In 1990, 64 licences were issued by the DOE on scientific advice from the Nature Conservancy Council and 448 quarry were taken nationwide. These were 133 black-birds from an estimated hatch of 45-50 million, 20 song thrushes from a hatch of 16.9 million, 54 meadow pipits from a hatch of 12.5 million and 239 skylarks from a hatch of 17.5 million. Plus 2 black-headed gulls. This is equivalent to one quarter of the prey taken annually by a single breeding pair of sparrowhawks, of which there are 25,000 pairs in Britain.

The average hawk-keeper takes one common protected bird under licence once every 18 years - a countrywide average annual total of 322.

The average cat-owner takes 16 small birds and mammals, indiscriminately, without a licence, every year - a countrywide

annual total of 90 million. One cat in Dorset took over 400 prey in one year. The average motorist kills 2 wild birds indiscriminately every year - a countrywide annual total of 50 million.

## Cruelty.

Falconry is not cruel. Raptors catch and kill their prey very quickly, sometimes almost instantaneously. Prey which is not caught escapes unharmed without being harassed or becoming exhausted. Prey are physically and mentally adapted for this natural form of predation and are able to use all their naturally evolved skills to escape. Only small numbers are killed; 20-30 head of quarry per season is good going.

## Displays.

Displays of raptors at Game Fairs are obviously not falconry as practised in the field. They are a chance for the public to enjoy seeing birds of prey close-up and in action and to obtain further information. Display-givers at all BFSS shows operate under strict guidelines issued by the BFSS Falconry Committee.

## Conservation.

- 1) In the last 20 years falconers have pioneered the captive-breeding of all raptor species commonly used in falconry and of many others for conservation purposes.
- 2) Falconers successfully re-introduced the goshawk to Britain in the 1970's; possibly the most successful and least publicised re-introduction ever undertaken.
- 3) Falconers and members of the Hawk and Owl Trust are working on Barn Owls, including field surveys, nest box construction and have re-introduced 3000+ Barn Owls per year since 1985.
- 4) Falconers have hatched and reared 33 wild Welsh Red Kites so far, as part of a joint NCC/RSPB release scheme.
- 5) The great majority of management conservation programmes for raptors throughout the world have been developed by falconers.
- 6) Thousands of orphaned or injured raptors and owls each year are tended by hawkkeepers who actually have to pay to register each injured raptor. In 1990 the 230 Licensed Rehabilitation Keepers alone took in 1230 raptors of which 580 (47%) were released successfully back to the wild. No other wildlife or welfare organisations, including the RSPB and the RSPCA, offer this specialised service. Instead they refer the injured raptors to hawk-keepers. Many of these casualties have collided with windows, overhead wires or cars, or have been poisoned, shot or had their nests destroyed. Some have to be put down, some are nursed back to health and are successfully returned to the wild, and some live out a dignified old age in retirement aviaries, many even becoming parents.

## Further information:

**Martin Jones 0452-830629.**  
**Jim Chick 0264-773850 (Office),**  
**0980- 610594 (Evenings).**



**Are you on the electoral roll of the Hawk Board?**  
*If no, why not?*

**IT NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT!!!**

In March-April 1992, you will receive a form, via the D.O.E. which you should fill in and return to the Hawk Board secretary.

You will then be on their electoral roll, this is important because then the Hawk board can fight issues such as the current one knowing it has your full support and more importantly, be able to show it. So please do not forget. **For the sake of your sport**



# RAPTORS IN ENGLAND

Adaptation, conservation and co-operation.

Text and sketches by Philip Snow.



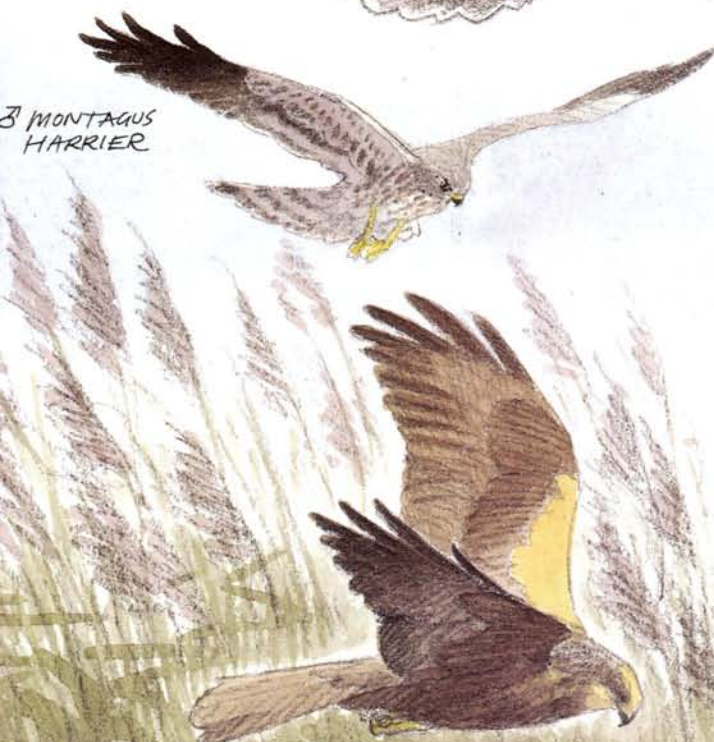
HONEY BUZZARDS  
top: with Buzzard.

ROUGH LEGGED BUZZARDS



Most Buzzards seen on the East coast of England are more liable to be **ROUGH LEGGED BUZZARDS** (*Buteo lagopus*), a regular but erratic winter visitor. Characterised by their rather laboured looking hovering and direct low gliding and flapping flight across open country. Up to 100 of these distinctive birds, confusable only with pale phase Buzzards, can visit us each year.

The recent re-introduction of **RED KITES** (*Milvus milvus*) to a few sites in England and Scotland (joint R.S.P.B. & N.C.C. project) is resulting in more sightings away from their small Welsh stronghold; and one or two **BLACK KITES** (*Milvus migrans*) can also be seen each summer.



♂ MONTAGUS HARRIER

The **MARSH HARRIER** (*Circus aeruginosus*) is happily now increasing in most parts of N. Europe (although declining in Southern and Eastern parts). Once exterminated, it did not breed again in England until the late 30's and now we have about 64 nests with at least 172 young reared in 1989, largely in East Anglia. R.S.P.B. reedbed reserves like Minsmere and Titchwell and co-operative farmers have greatly aided this elegant raptor.

The beautiful sight of sky dancing **MONTAGUS HARRIERS** (*Circus pygargus*) is now far less common over most of the west palearctic with agricultural poisons, land drainage and 'improvement' affecting them. From a high point of about 40 pairs in England and Wales in the 50's they had virtually disappeared by the mid 70's. However, by 1989, there were at least 13 nesting sites of our rarest raptor; largely because of a change to crop nesting (as in Marsh Harriers), rigorous conservation and sympathetic farmers. A summer visitor only, it could just occasionally overlap with the larger resident **HEN HARRIER** (*Circus cyanens*) moving down to the east coast in autumn. These only breed on a few northern moors in England, and are often persecuted by grouse keepers and indirectly by sheep and forestry.

♀ MARSH HARRIER  
Birds not to scale.

**GOSHAWKS** (*Accipiter gentilis*) could not have recolonised Britain without Falconers deliberate and accidental release programme and now, helped by vigorous wardening they have increased to at least 166 pairs by 1989.



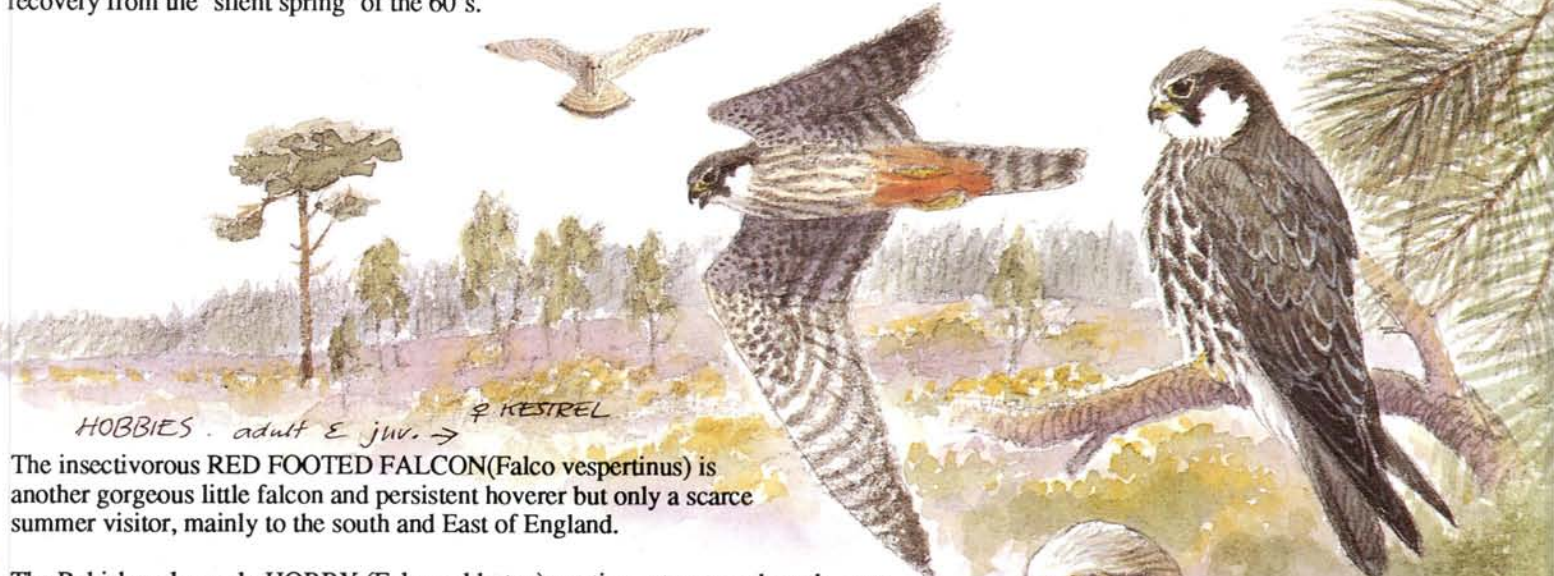


SPARROWHAWKS  
ad. ♂ with BLACKBIRD

England and Wales have the majority of these most persecuted of raptors, still sought by keepers, eggers and some falconers.

The SPARROWHAWKS (*Accipiter nisus*) recovery from the 60's pesticides crash is very impressive, and it is now quite common and increasingly suburban in most of England. However it has still not fully recovered in E Anglia, but commonly haunts passerine roosts in towns (joined by Merlins in Huddersfield), and nests in public parks, as in Bristol.

Persistent rumours tell of OSPREYS (*Pandion haliaetus*) breeding in England and up to three birds displayed in S E England in 1989, but it is by now a common enough sight on passage, especially in eastern parts. GOLDEN EAGLES (*Aquila chrysaetos*) have also pushed southwards, with the now famous lakeland birds being reduced to one pair when one bird died in the 80's. Of the falcons the best known is the resourceful KESTREL (*Falco tinnunculus*), with the bulk of its' 100,000 adaptable pairs (mid 80's) being in England, another good recovery from the 'silent spring' of the 60's.



HOBBIES . adult & juv. → ♀ KESTREL

The insectivorous RED FOOTED FALCON (*Falco vespertinus*) is another gorgeous little falcon and persistent hoverer but only a scarce summer visitor, mainly to the south and East of England.

The Rakish and speedy HOBBY (*Falco subbuteo*) continues to expand north, west and eastwards, away from its traditional and declining heathlands, still mainly in England. With now about 500 pairs (1990). This summer visitor suffers little direct persecution, apart from the persistent and moronic egg-collector, lost in his selfish and anachronistic pursuit. It must be added though that too persistent bird watchers also threaten its success on certain heaths already near ruin from mans building and leisure activities.



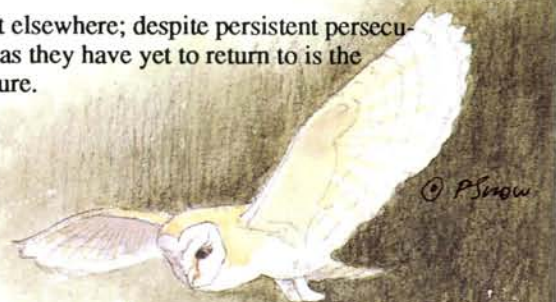
JUV.  
RED FOOTED  
FALCON

ad. PEREGRINE  
BARN  
OWL

Elusive MERLINS (*Falco columbarius*) have suffered more than most from pesticides and habitat loss to sheep and blanket forestry and it breeds in England only on a few northern moors. Joined in winter by more northern visitors, it can be seen throughout most of England but especially on the Lancashire, East Anglian and Solent coasts. Its decline is being monitored closely and only an apparent move to tree nesting and adaptation to forestry/open ground combinations is saving the bird.

PEREGRINE FALCONS (*Falco peregrinus*) are currently well out of danger in Britain, if not elsewhere; despite persistent persecution from some, and their return from the brink is very well documented. One of the few areas they have yet to return to is the white cliffs area of S.E. England, but we shall probably see more town nesting in the near future.

Owls are well represented in England, with the TAWNY OWL (*Strix aluco*) the most successful adapting, like the Kestrel and Fox to leafy suburbia. In Britain LITTLE OWLS (*Athene noctua*) are largely confined to England, showing a dramatic increase to possibly over 14,000 pairs since their introduction over 100 years ago. The charismatic BARN OWL (*Tyto alba*) shows a reverse. Its constant decline this century is now well known, with multiple manmade and climatic factors, but until habitat loss is properly addressed, well meaning captive breeding and release schemes are probably doomed to failure. The superficially similar SHORT EARED OWL (*Asio flammeus*) is also declining. It breeds in only a few areas of Eastern England, but up to 50,000 birds, largely winter visitors can be seen in Britain in exceptional years. LONG EARED OWLS (*Asio otus*) are frequently underrecorded but again continental visitors swell their numbers up to about 35,000 birds in winter



© P Snow



# Training Gundogs For Falconry

by Guy Wallace

## Part Two

### Choosing a Dog

Now that the falconer (or indeed astringer) has decided that he needs a dog and has further decided what breed of dog he requires, his next move is to look at the options open to him as to what sex to get and at what stage to buy it. He can buy a puppy, buy a 9 month old dog (I use the word dog indiscriminately for both sexes unless otherwise stated) ready to start training or buy a trained dog. Taking them in reverse order there are very few ready-trained HPRs (Hunter Pointer Retrievers) or pointers or setters on the market because there are very few professional pointer trainers. Most of the legion of spaniel or retriever trainers will not touch them because they do not understand them. One can occasionally buy a gunshy pointer or an HPR that will not retrieve. Should one become available one can expect to pay from £600 to £1200 for it. Each HPR breed has a rescue home where animals of that breed that for one reason or another do not suit their former owners may be obtained. However the great disadvantage of buying an older HPR particularly one with little



*German Short Haired Pointer*

or no training is that any hawk or Falcon on a bowperch or block (particularly when bating) is merely game to be "retrieved" - usually with fatal consequences (to the hawk!). Pointers and setters are more sensitive and can usually be taught to respect hawks at any age. The third option, and probably the best one for most falconers is to buy an eight week old

puppy. Dog or bitch? Basically whichever you like. A bitch has the disadvantage of coming into season and therefore being out of action for three weeks twice a year. They may be spayed which is permanent or injected against coming into season which MAY prejudice having puppies in the future.

A (male) dog may be used throughout the year but in gen-

eral a bitch works to please her owner and a dog works to please his b\*\*\*\* self and there is an old saying that "a bitch is a nuisance for six weeks in the year and a dog is a nuisance every d\*\*\*\* day".

In general a bitch is easier to train and will suit a sympathetic trainer while a (male) dog will suit a "hard" trainer better. Yer pays your money .....

Now before you rush out and grab the nearest pup, stop and think. A spaniel starts serious training at 6 to 8 months and a pointer or HPR at 10 to 12 months. Most of us have the summer evenings after the hawk has been put down to moult in which to train our pup ready for the coming season, so the dog needs to be that age in about April. Assuming that the pup is two months old when you collect it, work backwards from April and buy one then.

Before you get it work out where you are going to keep it. It may be kept in the house - or part of the house such as the porch or back kitchen - HPRs tend to be destructive if left alone - so by far the best method is to have an outside kennel and run as it's PRIMARY home and have it with you when it suits you. You can make your own or buy a ready-built one through showdog magazines or the sporting press. It may well be



*Springer Spaniels*



# Letters

## Wing Tip Oedema and Dry Gangrene Of Raptors

During the period 1988-1990 there appears to have been a great increase in the incidence of a condition now known as "Wing tip oedema and dry gangrene of Raptors", (FORBES N.A. and HARCOURT-BROWN N.H. 1991).

To date the species that are known to have been affected are:-

Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*)

Lanner (*Falco biarmicus*)

Lugger (*Falco lugger*)

Harris Hawk (*Parabuteo unicinctus*)

The bird is most commonly found in the morning looking slightly fluffed up, holding it's wings slightly out from the body. When examined closely a severe cold fluid filling of the wing tips is discovered. Typically both wings are affected, although often one wing is worse than the other, and on occasions only one wing will be so affected. Many methods of treatment have been employed initially with limited success, although more recently an increasing number of cases have made a full recovery.

There appears to be a definite link with frosty overnight weather, and a main pathogenesis of 'frostbite' has been postulated, however it seems unlikely that this alone is the total cause. In an attempt to elucidate the full cause of this condition the authors are carrying out a survey of all birds which have suffered from the condition.

The authors would be most grateful if any raptor keepers who know of birds which have suffered this condition, would contact them at either address below, so that they can be sent a questionnaire to fill in. It is hoped that the results of the survey will help prevent further cases.

In the meantime the advise to all raptor keepers is that birds should be in sheltered accommodation, and never tethered near the ground, or left exposed to chilling winds at times when overnight temperatures may be near or sub zero. Particular care should be taken in early autumn and late spring when day-time temperatures are high, which can often give a misleading indication of night time conditions which are frequently the opposite.

FORBES N.A. & HARCOURT-BROWN N.H. 1991.

Veterinary Record 128 24, 576

N A Forbes MRCVS  
Clockhouse Veterinary Hospital  
Wallbridge  
Stroud  
Glos GL5 3JD

N H Harcourt-Brown MRCV  
30 Crab Lane  
Bilton  
Harrogate  
N Yorks HG1 3BE

This is a photograph of my 4 month old male Harris Hawk BEN.

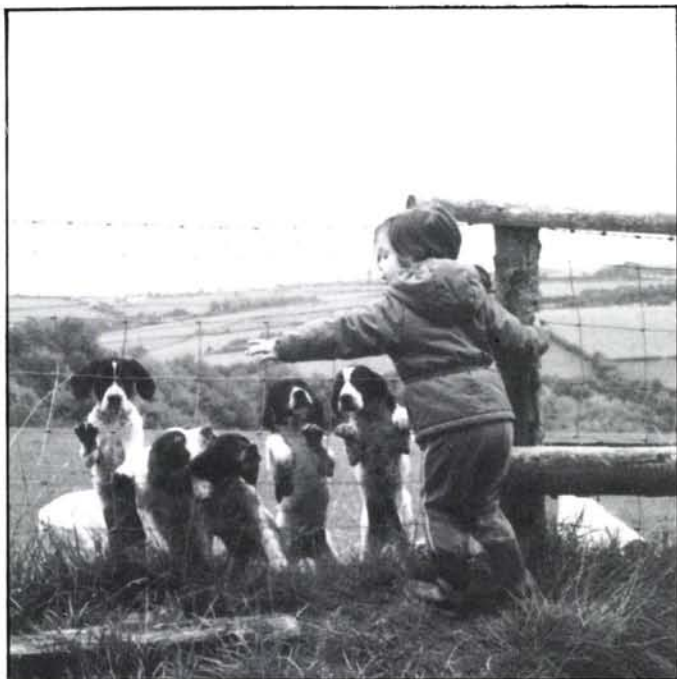
After he has been flown he will stand on my fist for a short time, then lie down, drop his wings and go to sleep. HARD WORK ALL THAT FLYING!

Kim Oakeshot  
Northants.



Dear Readers

I am setting up a project/course involving Bird of Prey/Conservation/Raptors here at Blantyne House and am looking for people to come and give talks about the aforementioned. If anybody is interested could they please write to Mr Mark A. Alderson, W63 H. M. Prison, Blantyne House, Goudhurst, Nr. Cranbrook, Kent TN17 2NH.



"Can I have that one please?"

that the kennel can be incorporated into mews security. A 4' x 4' kennel and 8' x 4' run is adequate for one or two medium sized dogs. The actual kennel needs to be small to retain body heat - a false roof in a tall kennel will help this - raised off the ground, Do damp and draught proof and have access via the roof or door for cleaning out.

If of wooden construction avoid bedding as a wet dog will make the bedding wet and it will stay wet whereas wood will dry off quickly. Have the run on gently sloping concrete or concrete slabs with a 2" gap filled with sand and cement so that urine does not seep between slabs butted together and permanently smell. Staple "2 weldmesh to INSIDE the frame so that the dog's weight is on the frame rather than the staples and it cannot chew a wooden frame.

Roof in the run so that dogs cannot jump out (or in to "hot" bitches) and raise the frame 1/2" on tiles so that water can run out and not rot the frame base. You may be able to incorporate the sleeping compartment into your garage, garden shed or mews. If you make it in panels/sections you can take it with you should you move.

HPRs like company - human or canine - and will vent their feelings if left alone. Consider obtaining a "mutt" of the same size, age and particularly sex from the local dogs home and you may avoid war with your neighbours over a permanently noisy dog. Do not get another gundog or you will end up with two half-trained dogs.

The best source of working-bred puppies is shooting 'Times which is published every Thursday. It is vitally important to get a working-bred pup - virtually every breed of British gundog has working strains i.e. lines with F.T.Ch. (Field Trial Champions) in the pedigree. Avoid show breeding i.e. lines with Ch. or Sh. Ch. (Show Champion) like the plague. The Kennel Club list of breeders makes no distinction between working and showing lines so do not use it. However HPRs are bred simultaneously for work and show although presumably any HPR pups in Shooting Times have working parents.

When you eventually go to see a litter if you do not like what you see politely decline and look elsewhere. There are plenty of other litters about. If you do not like the dam of the pups leave them alone - "like mother, like daughter" applies equally to dogs! The breeder should provide a pedigree, a Kennel Club registration (which may not have come back yet) and you should expect to pay £150 - £250 for an eight week old pup, bitches are usually more expensive than dog puppies. You will have to have the pup inoculated by a vet against the common canine diseases at 12 weeks and again at 14 weeks old (these days ages sometimes vary) and until then it should be kept in the house and garden away from strange dogs.

In the next issue I shall discuss managing the young puppy until training starts.



# REARING RAPTORS THE WELSH

## *Advantages and Disadvantages of the Different*

There are four main ways that baby raptors may be raised, full imprint, creche reared, parent reared behind wire (in full sight of humans) and parent reared in a seclusion aviary. Each of these types has their own advantages and disadvantages and it is up to the breeder to decide which way he wants to go. Whichever way you decide nothing is more certain than it is a mistake to change over from one system to another on the same baby. That is the sure way to end up with a bad mannered nonbreeding bird!

### FULL IMPRINT

This baby is raised from day one with no contact including sight with its parents and siblings. The only contact that it has is with humans. It always has food in front of it so that not for one minute is it allowed to become hungry. Until the chick is about five days old it is fed by hand. As soon as it can pick up food for itself a shallow bowl of freshly prepared food is left in front of it. This bowl must never be allowed to become empty or stale. When the chick can pull at food and stand up the food is tied to a lure and the chick allowed to "find" this lure. If it's a falcon then hooding is started at about 15 days old. If the bird is to be used for flying (ours are allowed to fly when the primaries are about two thirds down), the jesses are put on at about 20 days and the bird carried on the fist, the jesses are never held or the bird tied up till one is certain that it is hard penned. Our babies raised like this never know what a creance is. They have been on the wing for at least six weeks before our parent raised birds. The birds carry neck mounted telemetry, which so far we have never had to use and are free to fly for about ten hours per day until we start to give them hunting discipline.



*Imprint female Peregrine Falcon*

### Advantages

1. Birds are very tame and may be flown at a very high weight approximating to the wild bird.
2. Its resistance to disease and stress are excellent.
3. We have never had a bird raised this way that does not want to copulate voluntarily in an AI situation.
4. Birds raised this way make excellent parents later.

### Disadvantages

1. The baby requires expert handling or a malimprint will result.
2. The amount of time taken is so great that we can only do one baby at a time.
3. The time taken to get the babies entered is longer as the chick is not driven by hunger. This can be a very frustrating time to the conventional falconer whose answer to all problems is drop its weight a little.

### Creche Reared.

In this way the babies are hand fed until they can pick up for themselves, food is then left in front of them in bowls. The babies are all raised in full sight of each other in the brooders. They are then all moved to an aviary. It is quite possible to raise different ages and species together. We have certainly raised American Kestrels, Tawny Eagles and various species of owls together, but be careful the babies never get hungry, or disaster will strike very quickly!!



*Creche reared babies. The more the better.*

### Advantages

1. This is the easiest way so rear the babies as a close watch may be kept on them and they should imprint on each other to stop mantling and screaming

### Disadvantages

1. Not a certain way to stop bad manners.
2. Offspring are not the best breeding prospects as they can be muddled in their thinking as to what they are. This problem seems to be more acute in some species than others.



# HAWKING CENTRE WAY

by Ceri Griffiths.

## *Ways of Raising Baby Raptors.*

### Parent Reared in Seclusion Aviaries.

This is where the babies are naturally hatched and raised or when babies which have come from eggs hatched in an incubator are given back to foster parents at a very early age, certainly no later than when the birds are close rung. All this is done in a conventional seclusion aviary where the babies have no sight of man till they are taken up for training. If you are using foster parents it is important that only the species of the babies be used or this will give a malimprint for later breeding.

### Advantages

1. If not removed from their parents too early there is little chance of these birds becoming screamers.
2. Good prospect of these birds becoming natural breeders when they come of age.

### Disadvantages

1. Bird must be made sharp, often very sharp, during the initial training.
2. Stress factor is always greater on these birds than any other method of raising.
3. Little check can be made on youngsters progress.

### Parent Reared Behind Wire.

This is the same as the foregoing method but the babies are in full sight of humans at all times. In our case the nest ledge is only six foot from the wire and fifty thousand, wirebanging, gorging humans per year!! The parent usually has to be an imprint herself to tolerate this treatment and not alarm call thereby transmitting her fear to the babies.



*Young imprint Tawny Eagle.*

### Advantages

1. All the same as the previous method with none of the disadvantages as the baby while knowing its own parents has no fear of humans.
2. The bird when flown can be flown in nearly as high a state as an imprint.

### Disadvantages

1. The need for thousands of people to constantly walk past the wire!!

To conclude, at The Welsh Hawking Centre we find that the first and last methods are the ones we choose for birds that we wish to keep ourselves for flying and breeding.



*Socialising with imprint Peregrine.*



*Same Falcon with hood in place. Do not tighten braces or leave on long at first.*



# THE RAREST FALCON IN THE WORLD

## A Report on the Mauritius Kestrel

By  
Simon Rumble

In 1974 the Mauritius Kestrel was the rarest bird in the world, reduced to just four remaining known birds. It remained at a critical level until the 1980s, due mainly to (A) the chopping down of the forest on which the Kestrel thrives and (B) pesticides, this beautiful little falcon nearly became extinct. The only sizeable part of Mauritius where pesticides were not used were the Black river gorges and it was here that the very last of the Kestrels made an attempt to survive extinction. However since then the Kestrel has been taken under the wing of such organisations and experts as the World Centre for Birds of Prey, Tom Cade, The Peregrine Fund, plus many more and for a few years now the Jersey Wildlife and Preservation Trust, it is beginning to make a comeback.

Many birds have been released back to the wild now (some figures are given at the end of this article) but it is the method of release which I am going to tell you about.

The kestrel chicks are placed in artificial nest cavities or 'hack boxes' at 30 days old and are fed daily by a fieldworker on mice and chicks. Within a few weeks the birds are trying out their wings, however some fall to the ground where Mongooses are quite common in these 'hacking areas' this is when the Kestrel watchers have to be at their most alert.

Mongoose traps are set out regularly but inevitably some Kestrels do become themselves, prey.

At 45 days old they are flying as well as their parents and beginning to find their own hunting skills the ways by which they will survive as a true predator.

Traditionally, Mauritius Kestrels feed mainly on *Phelsuma* Geckos but will also feed on Grey White eyes (part of the *Zosterop* family) and red whiskered bulbuls as well as large insects such as dragonflies. At 70 days old most of the Kestrels regularly miss feeds, some only returning once or twice a week.

All the birds released by this method are taught to respond to a whistle so they can be called to the site to feed until they become completely independent - this is usually no more than 100 days old.

About threequarters of Kestrels released have become independent. Some birds disappear early and are presumed dead. Fifteen birds that are known to have died of the following - 5 drowned, 4 were killed by Mongooses, 4 disappeared during cyclones, 2 had traumatic injuries, 2 birds were returned to captivity, 1 had a frac-



The Mauritius Kestrel - pulled back from the edge of extinction.

tured lower bill and another was retarded.

Kestrels that were released into areas where there were no existing Kestrels do the best with about 80% or more surviving to a year old. Where the young have to compete with established birds only about 40%-60% last their first year.

In 1960 the Mauritius Kestrel was known to be threatened. 1974 it reached an all-time low. In 1991 there are estimated to be around about 100, maybe a few more or a few less but still one of the rarest birds in the world and the rarest falcon known to exist.

Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust last year took two pairs of Mauritius Kestrels to Jersey Zoo. This is only the second time the kestrels have been allowed out of the country and they are hoping to breed with them. What will be done with the young has not yet been decided.

In total there are 13 types of kestrels ranging in size from the tiny Seychelles Kestrel which is only 8" long (about the same size as a blackbird) to the Greater

Kestrel which is 14" long (slightly larger than the European Kestrel). They have diversities such as the lesser Kestrel which is the only falcon to have white claws, the Greater Kestrel (Fox Kestrel) has a white iris and the banded Kestrel has bars across its body as opposed to vertical stripes. Our own common Kestrel if you really look at him is a pretty little bird - slate grey head and tail and chestnut back, he is also a very specialised hunter. He has learned to use his hovering powers to his advantage. He has not become a victim of mans ways but

has learned to use such things as motorways and high rise flats to feed by and nest on, while his cousin in Mauritius fights for his very survival, but with a lot of help may be back on the rails. The following figures are of birds released back to the wild each season.

1984/85	1
1985/86	4
1986/87	9
1987/88	21
1988/89	26
1989/90	56

The complete restoration of the Kestrel will not be complete for many years but all going well the project should hopefully come to an end by 31st March 1994.

I would like to thank the following people who have provided me with a lot of the information for this article, firstly John Hartley (Jersey Zoo) Gerald Durrells personal assistant, who was my initial contact and supplied me with all contacts and photographs in this article. Secondly Nick Garbutt who is a biologist based on Mauritius and whom without his information this article would not have been completed. I wish all the people/organisations the best of luck with future projects and congratulate them on saving this almost extinct beautiful little falcon. The Kestrel Klub offers free membership to under-16's and is currently building up its membership. For more information:-

**The Kestrel Klub**  
c/o Simon Rumble  
8 Ruskin Road  
CHADWELL-ST-MARY  
Grays  
Essex. RM16 4DX



# CHILHAM CASTLE

This year the grounds of Chilham Castle were once again host to one of the very successful Game fairs organised by County Fairs, where you could spend a good part of your time looking around the numerous trade stands, which had everything to suit your needs.

The main ring attractions started at 11 am keeping you entertained throughout the day with a parade of cars to start with and continuing with all kinds of canine activities, from terriers to lurchers, huskies to sheepdogs and of course a falconry display



Chilham Castle

The other attractions were the beautifully kept ornamental gardens of the Castle and a flying display given by Eddie Hare who has run the



# RAPTOR CENTRE

Raptor Centre, with his wife Diane, at the castle for the last fourteen years. Eddie goes a very interesting and informative display with the help of a peregrine falcon stooping perfectly to the lure, a Barn Owl charming everybody, especially the children, by flying from

fist to fist with the help of some members of the public, and Fuzzball the White Bellied Sea Eagle keeping everybody enthralled, soaring overhead, looking superbly graceful.

Eddie explains the importance of conservation, making the

general public more aware of the need to

preserve the places where the birds live and breed. Eddie also

runs a 24 hour

Rescue Service and

if a bird is unfit to

be returned to the

wild it is, if possible,

paired up

with a suitable

partner for breed

and release.

Young peregrine falcon bred at The Centre and can be seen in the flying displays.

Main Photograph: White bellied Sea Eagle



Lanner falcon bred at The Centre

Young barn owls ready for release in a suitable place in the nearby countryside



Eddie Hare with verreaux eagle fist to fist with the help of some members of the public, and Fuzzball the White Bellied Sea Eagle keeping everybody enthralled, soaring overhead, looking superbly graceful.





# CALL OF THE WILD FOR ARTIST NEIL

**T**he call of the wild and the love of a bird in flight is a bond that ties all falconers together. Here we meet falconer Neil Davies who not only loves the sport but has the enviable talent of being able to transport the wild beauty of the hawk on to canvas.

Neil is a Welshman who has adopted Lancashire as home, and spends his time between his work as an exhibition designer and his birds - both painting them and flying them. Like most of us, Neil progressed from watching birds and field sports to participating himself. Now a member of the British Falconers Club, he flies a male harris and a peregrine. Since flying his first bird, a common buzzard, at 18 Neil has handled all types of falcons from gyrs to merlins and from golden eagles to buzzards. He also has two breeding pairs of barn owls which he keeps for a breed and release scheme.

Fortunately, Neil's work allows him the time to fly his birds and over the years he has been able to further develop his talent to paint and draw wildlife. A large study of a golden eagle in acrylic, a barn owl in pencil and a watercolour of a sparrowhawk, are some of his more recent works.



by Margaret Parsons

with his birds. Other times he travels all over the country to different field meets "wherever I can to fly my birds," he says. A lot of his time is also spent working at the National Birds of Prey Centre (formerly the Falconry Centre) in Newent, Gloucestershire, where he is a keen helper and also likes to find subjects for his paintings.

A good friend of the owner Jemima Parry-Jones, he flies her birds and was commissioned to do the illustrations for her book 'Falconry and Conservation.'

"I like to help at the centre as much as I can because they do such a lot of good work there," he says.

As well as practical work for birds and conservation Neil is a fund-raiser too and last year he and a group of friends staged an enthralling exhibition "The Art of Conservation" which was shown around the country from London to Scotland to help raise money for various organisations including the RSPB and the Hawk Trust.

Neil has also exhibited at the Society of Wildlife Artists annual exhibition in London where he hopes to show again some time in the future.

Educating others, particularly children, in the joys of bird life and conservation is another of Neil's aims and he gives freely of his time to visit schools with his birds to talk to the children, often opening up a whole new world of interest for their young minds.

"I really enjoy going out to schools to talk to the children, they become really enthralled and you feel you are helping them to appreciate wildlife and nature."

With a diploma in wildlife illustration and design, Neil now specialises in watercolours and sketches of native birds and animals and is currently working on paintings of a peregrine and a harris for an exhibition. Painting birds of prey is his



Neil with his 3 year old Sparrowhawk

main interest, although he enjoys drawing any animal and would like to do commissions of any animals.

Neil is perhaps more fortunate than many falconers. Living among the Pennine Hills he has the hills and moors on his doorstep and being self-employed the time to devote to his birds and his painting.

Neil is a man devoted to his subject and a name I think we will be hearing much more of in the future.

Left: Golden Eagle Acrylic on Panel.  
Below: Sparrowhawk in watercolour.  
Far right: Barn Owl in pencil



He has always drawn and painted for pleasure, but people have shown so much interest in his work that he is now looking to sell them and do commissions.

Since moving to East Lancashire and settling in his cottage in Barley a picturesque village nestling at the foot of Pendle, a moody, mysterious hill renowned for its folklore tales of witchcraft, Neil has found a whole new world has opened up and is able to go out most days on Pendleside



# R

## review

# GAMEHAWK.



TURNER AND HASLEN.

This book is one of a kind, dealing exclusively with the flight of the Peregrine at Pheasants, English and French Partridges and Duck.

The author, Ray Turner and his hawking companion, Andrew Haslan (whose original drawings complement the text), have for nearly twenty years concentrated on producing quality waiting-on flights over a rural landscape.

The numerous diary extracts included in this book allow the reader to judge how successful they have been and to share the excitement that the falconers created in the field on those hawking days.

If lowland gamehawking is for you, then this book will both inspire you and help you in your quest for the most spectacular flights.

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*This is an extract taken from the book:*

## THE GAME-HAWKING EXPERIENCE

*"Which when the Falconer sees that scarce one plane they make:  
The gallant'st Birds saith he, that ever flew on wing,  
And swears there is a flight, were worthy of a King."*

Michael Drayton 1622

In the open fields of East Anglia on a clear, cold day in late November, a splendid cock pheasant is seen picking about a few feet from a ditch. The small bare strip on which he is busying himself separates the ditch from an extensive field of rape. In the rape there are, at intervals, many life-like scarecrows which, as it turns out, are to add to the flight in a curious way.

As the Landrover pulls to a halt, the cock for a moment stops his questing to study it from his position about a hundred and fifty yards distant, but, being used to farm vehicles, he soon returns to feeding. As he is far from extensive cover and is ideally situated for an excellent flight, it does not take us many seconds to decide on our plan of action.

As we dismount from the vehicle the cock's previous mild interest in us changes to a nervous distrust of the new situation and he hurries to the thicker cover of the ditch just a yard or so away, where instinct tells him to lie low out of sight.

Meanwhile one of our party runs a semi-circular course that places him a good eighty yards below where the pheasant has just disappeared a minute or so earlier, and he can now remain by the edge of the ditch while he regains his breath. Then he whistles or amuses himself otherwise with a song which also serves to keep the pheasant from running towards him along the ditch and creeping right away, the course which it would certainly take if he were not there, instead of being forced to fly and provide a sporting flight for us to watch in a few minutes' time.

The falcon is now unhooded by the falconer who has remained near the vehicle, close to the ditch, and well above the pheasant. She is a small intermewed falcon of several years' experience and now leaves the fist with strong wingbeats, taking in at a glance the scenario which is so familiar to her and in which she knows her own part completely. There is very little wind as she begins to mount, using a circular route around the party below her. She wastes no time in rousing, nor does she wander from us, but keeps a relentless, powerful wingbeat that is taking her ever higher, spiralling into the clear Autumn sky. After she has made four or five circles, during which time she has not gone unnoticed by the cock, he is rather committed to stay put, for by now her commanding height has made voluntary flight very risky, and he knows it. So, for now, he is under no pressure to leave, and relies on the instincts that nature has given him, and that would serve him well against a wild falcon unaided by a man below.

If our object were solely to kill this pheasant, we are now in a position to do so, for the falcon is still climbing and is approaching five hundred feet above us, where no bird can fly from underneath her before she can come down upon it. But we know from our long association with her and by the steady consistent beat of her wings that she is prepared to go much higher yet. So the excitement rises, not only through marvelling at her willingness to execute such a towering upward path, but also in the certainty of soon seeing a magnificent stoop, to which the kill will be secondary.

Finally, she stops beating and what was seen as a flickering image from the earth below now takes on a motionless form, as she hesitates

thus for a moment before resuming the flickering wingbeat that is just discernible to us. We know, however, that she is at her proper pitch and is ready.

As well as watching the mounting falcon, the hawking-party have advanced slowly towards the pheasant, secure in his bramble, and have drawn within ten yards on either side of him. We are ready for the flush. The guests are told to keep their eyes on the tiny shape of the falcon, for if they watch the pheasant they will miss seeing most of the spectacular vertical stoop. When all eyes are directed upwards the eager black and white springer, who has spent all of her seven years working with hawks as a flushing dog, is sent into the ditch.

With a loud Whirr! the cock is up and rocketing away across the rape. The falcon hears the traditional cry of the falconers, but it is superfluous as she had seen the cock as soon as we had and is already plummeting downward, wings folded against her body and looking like nothing else but a small ball in her headfirst dive.

The pheasant is at full speed and heading for a far-off copse. His straight path takes him towards the scarecrows, which, we assume, he takes for a shooting-party, for his flight goes higher and higher as he approaches them. The falcon, travelling in seconds through hundreds of feet in her downcome, adjusts the angle of her headlong descent by opening her wings a little and is now closing with her quarry like a rocket, from above and behind. She strikes him at full speed, and at such a height, thanks to the scarecrows, that she turns him over and over in the air, throws up abruptly above him, is on her way down again in a split second, and is able to bind to him before he reaches the ground, finishing the flight in an exciting and unusual manner.

For one of our guests this is his first experience of falconry and, quite unable to contain his feelings, he blurts out that this is the most exciting thing he has ever seen in his life.

I am more subdued, but no less thrilled, even now reliving the whole flight in my mind and wondering, not for the first time, in what way even the wild haggard herself could have done better.





# N ews

## HOLDENBY HOUSE COUNTRY PURSUITS FAIR



L TO R. Derick Yates, Jane Hilton, organiser, Kim Oakeshot with Harris Hawk who also drew the competition. Special guest, Lorant - De Bastyai with niece and Gábor Tóth - Hungarian falconer.

Saturday and Sunday the 14th & 15th of September saw Holdenby House, near Northampton open its gates to the general public for its first country pursuits fair. There was something for everyone, archery, gundogs, air-rifle and clay-pigeon shooting, ferret racing and falconry. Also there was a very lifelike re-construction of a village, with women cooking over an open fire and the men building a house using nothing but wood, angling the wood and holding it together with wooden stakes, painstakingly cut to a point by the women. All were dressed in authentic costumes and it made a delightful scene. Holdenby quite often holds open days where a large number of people can be seen dressed in costumes relative to the era of the house. On Sunday, special guest was Lorant De Bastyai and in the evening the Central Raptor Club held their monthly meeting. The Falconry was ably provided by Danny Oakeshot who was helped by Jane Hilton and Eric. Also it was nice to see Falconry Furniture maker, Mike Butterworth with wife Audrey down all the way from Cheshire.

## WARWICKSHIRE & WEST MIDLAND GAME FAIR

The 17th and 18th August saw FALCONER MAGAZINE exhibiting at the Warwickshire West Midland Game Fair at Ragley Hall, near Alcester, the beautiful home of the Marquess of Hertford. This event, in its third year, really is a must for all countryside loving people. The charm of the surroundings and the sheer quality of the whole event creates an atmosphere which is often sadly lacking at a lot of events of this type which are now being staged.

It was good to see falconry being put over so expertly by Bryan Paterson with two very good flying displays each day with informative commentary which also emphasised the true sport of falconry. Falconry, like all other field sports contributes an enormous amount to the conservation of our natural species and landscape far, far more than the general public realises and with the many thousands of visitors to events like this, it is a marvelous opportunity to inform everyone of the contribution that falconers make to the countryside.

Another popular feature of the Warwickshire & West Midland Game Fair is the Working Gundog Centre which is manned by gundog experts Ken Jones and Jack Greenfield. After the very busy two days answering queries and sorting out gundog problems from visitors and their charges, Ken told me that he had been very surprised at the number of falconers visiting the Centre, particularly since the British Falconry & Raptor Fair last May. Is this the result of the Falconer's Dog display at Stoneleigh where, perhaps, some falconers suddenly realised that with the right sort of canine companion, fun and success on a hawking day can be quadrupled.

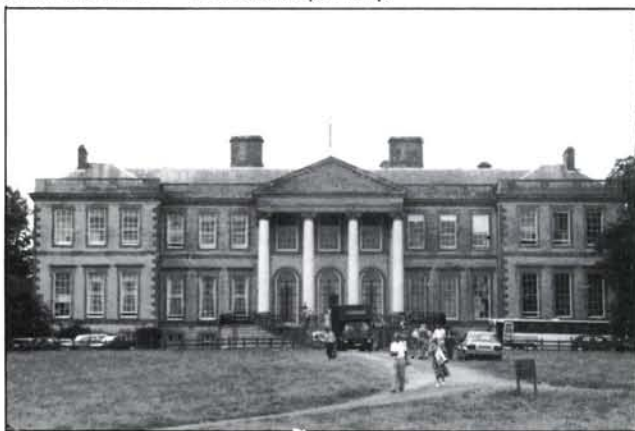
The Arena events were opened each morning with the sound of the Rallye Bonnelles, twelve visiting fox hunters from Normandy. Assembled on the steps of stately Ragley Hall, the Sonneurs played a collection of traditional hunting fanfares still used on hunting days in the forests of Normandy, as has been the practise over the last few centuries as a means of communication. What a very impressive sight the Sonneurs made wearing their long scarlet hunting coats and what ambassadors for all field sports in Europe.

Traditional country pastimes were demonstrated throughout the day again all by experts and personalities in their own particular sport including Hywel Morgan, holder of several world casting titles, the elegant art of side saddle dressage was demonstrated by ex-champion Louise Arnott and her team of equestriennes.

A fascinating half hour was given over to coursing presented by National Coursing Club Chairman Bill Steadman, Waterloo Cup judge Ronnie Mills and slipper Mel Nicholls. A very informative demonstration into the breeds of sight hounds used for coursing and the way a course is run and scored was displayed. One of our oldest field sports, coursing is now more popular in this country than it has been for many, many years and the numbers of participants and supporters are growing continuously. Show me a coursing man and I will show you a practical conservationist.

Two National events now established at Ragley are the Mink Hound Show with entrants from virtually every mink hound pack in the U.K., making the weekend a unique get together for all the very colourful characters involved with this aqua hound sport which helps control the alien wild mink population which creates havoc with our fish stocks and riverside nesting birds.

The National Working Terrier Federation also hold their National Championship Finals here annually and with winners qualifying from throughout the country during the previous 12 months, this is an opportunity to see some of the best working terriers in the world being judged for the championship.



Ragley Hall

With nearly 200 trade stands and exhibitions on display, the many field sports competitions being run over the two days including shooting, archery, gundogs and fishing, co-ordination had to be good and it was from start to finish. Praise must go yet again to organiser Ron Morris, his wife Cheryl, and their colleague Major Peter Wainwright who also organise the British Falconry & Raptor Fair which, incidentally, is on the 15th/16th May, 1992. A request from Ron, if there is any falconry related trade stand who did not exhibit this year and who would like to exhibit next year, please ring the office on 0588 672708 as soon as possible as plans are already being put together.



Barn Owl

## THE NEW FOREST OWL SANCTUARY

Work started on the Sanctuary in 1988 on the site of an old derelict pig breeding unit. The Sanctuary was the brainchild of Bruce Berry who gave up his job as a manager of a country club to champion the cause of the Barn Owl full-time. By visiting shows, fetes, markets and giving talks to various groups, he helped create an enormous interest in the setting-up of the Sanctuary. With effort put in by hardworking volunteers, much appreciated sponsorship, and an overdraft, the Sanctuary began to take shape. It now includes a Lecture Room, Brooder and Incubator Room, Hospital Unit, and 100 aviaries of various sizes. In 1991, a new shop and reception area, including a Koi Carp pond and waterfall was developed inside a 2nd World War hangar, originally purchased from the American air force for £1.00 in 1944. For more information: Crow Lane, Near Ringwood, Hampshire BH24 3EN. Tel: (0425) 476487



# The Hunters Eye



**David Horobin (Age 15)**  
1991

*Circling higher in the sky,  
The hunter's dark and sharp set eye  
detects a movement, far below,  
'midst a cover of fine white snow.*

*The grouse which lives upon the moor,  
Struts unknowing, through the hoar,  
as up above, the dark eyed rover  
folds her wings, and then turns over.*

*O'er the falcon's swept back wings  
the chilly air with vigour sings,  
And through the early morning mist,  
cuts a figure with taloned fist.*

*On the ground, Mother Nature warns  
the grouse of danger, instinct dawns,  
reaction is to fly, survive,  
avoid Diana's arrows dive.*

*The desperate grouse tries to evade  
the hunter's fearsome talons splayed,  
but even though its wings beat fast,  
death's dark shadow rushes past.*

*She drops with a resounding crack?  
kills her prey, throws up, twists back,  
and lands, the grouse then to devour,  
sustaining her for many an hour.*

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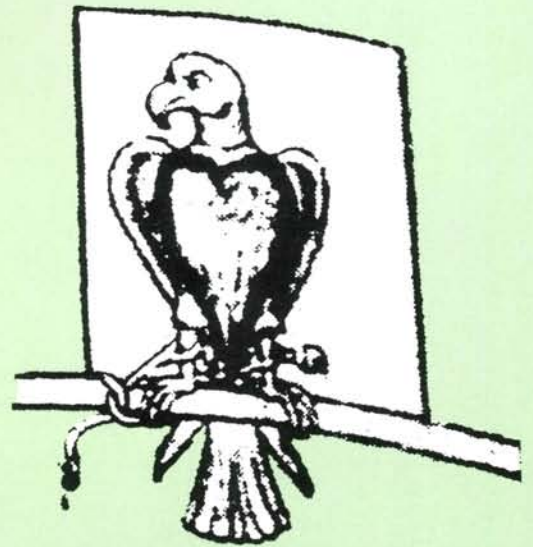
# MEDIEVAL



# LIGHTS

**F**alconry: as much a part of the fairytale image of the medieval court as the hilltop castle, the beautiful princess, the knight in shining armour. It was a sport of kings, a pastime of the nobility, an activity as vital to the aristocratic lifestyle as the tournament, the cult of chivalry and the pursuit of courtly love. Such were its romantic and symbolic associations, even at the time, that the art of hunting with birds became the theme of much imaginative literature in which appropriate birds of prey might represent anything from knightly to imperial qualities. Even the authors of the more down-to-earth treatises on the birds themselves and their care were tempted to revert to this theme occasionally. Eagles, asserts the author of the *Boke of St Albans*, "by ther nature belong to an Em-prowre"; while, by the same token, for a king "ther is a Gerfawken", for an earl "a Fawken peregryne" and for a knight "a Sacre". And for a baron? "Ther is a Bastarde", we are told, "and that hauke is for a Baron".

But even if one knew what sort of bird to get, how did one acquire, train, care for and fly it? Sparrowhawks were often available free for the taking: "he is an hawke for a prest", says the *Boke of St Albans*, perhaps with this in mind. These birds were available in the wild all over Europe, and were generally caught soon after leaving the nest. "After saynt Margaretis day," the same writer informs us, helpfully, "thay will flie fro tre to tre. . . and then it is time for to tak hem." The less energetic would-be falconer, however, who had no serious desire to pursue these "sparehawkes", net in hand, from tree to tree, could acquire his birds of prey in a far more dignified manner. Enterprising merchants constantly brought them to Western Europe from such far-off lands as Scandinavia (recognised as the source for the finest birds), the Baltic and the Middle East.



The main centre for this trade was Bruges, where birds were often purchased by the renowned professional falconers of Brabant, who trained and then resold them to members of the nobility throughout Europe. Prices varied greatly according to the species, the plumage, the number of moults the bird had undergone and the degree to which it had been trained; but the hen birds were always more valuable than the tercelts. James IV of Scotland once paid, according to the accounts of his Lord High Treasurer, three pounds ten shillings "for ane goshalk at the Rede Castell", but only twenty-eight shillings "for ane tersell of ane goshalk bocht in Ros".

Every medieval falconer had his preferred bird of prey, and probably very few complied with the allocation of species advocated by the *Boke of St Albans*! The Emperor Frederick II's favourite was not the eagle but the gersfalcon, of which he ensured a personal supply from the Arctic. Training the gersfalcon to kill cranes was a task which Frederick took extremely seriously: he even required his justiciars in south-eastern Italy to spend time capturing live cranes for the purpose! Instructions for immobilising these unfortunate creatures for the training process are given in Frederick's great work on falconry, the *De arte venandf cum avf bus*. Clearly not designed for the faint-hearted, they describe how the falconer should burn off the tips of the crane's claws, bind its beak and seal its eyes before bending its legs into a sling to weaken them and, finally, mooring the poor thing to a stake with meat tied to its back. Even the least intelligent gersfalcon should be able to kill a crane under these conditions; and once successful it could be encouraged to capture first a walking crane, similarly disabled, and then one flying with a creance, before ultimately facing the real challenge: a fair contest.

The peregrine, too, could be trained to capture cranes, plus other large quarry such as the heron, stork, bustard and





# OF FANCY BY TRACEY DOSSEY



a reasonable chance of surviving the moult and even - if the falconer was a good one - of gaining its new feathers and being ready for flying early.

Being a good falconer was certainly a much-envied art, and one which required both expertise and a great deal of patience - not only during the moult, but also while the hawk was initially

wild goose; and it was less expensive than the gersfalcon. As a result it was a favourite of many medieval falconers (and not exclusively earls!), as were the lanner, hardier than the peregrine and yet capable of taking partridge and heron; the merlin, useful for catching small birds such as the lark, and even partridges; the goshawk, which, though difficult to handle, was superb at capturing ground game and low-flying birds; and the common sparrowhawk. The latter could take small birds and sometimes partridges, woodcock and young pheasants, but it had disadvantages. It was a temperamental bird and difficult to care for successfully: "for the leest mysdyetyng and mysentendyng", comments the author of the *Boke of St Albans* wearily, "sleth her".

Medieval falconers took the feeding of their hawks very seriously, particularly during the critical period of the moult. The addition of adders to the diet at this time was considered especially beneficial. One method was to stew the chopped reptile in an earthen pot and "then cast it out and doo away the bonis, and geder the grece, and put it in a clene vessill" so that the bird's food could be soaked in it. "As oft as ye fede youre hawke", recommends the deviser of this tempting medicinal recipe, "anoynt her meete therin, and let hir ete as moch as she will, and that mete shal mewe her at youre awne will." Perhaps so; but good culinary care had to be supplemented, of course, by appropriate accommodation. It was important that the bird should be housed in a dry, secluded mew, away from noise and smoke. "Sett and dispose youre mew in this maner", advises the same writer, "so that no wesell ner pulcatt ner non other vermynt entre therto, Ner none wynde, ner no grete colde. . . Also that she be not vexed ner greved withe mych noyse, ner with song of men, and that no manner folkes come to hir, but oonly he that fedyth hir."

Cosseted with special food and creature comforts, and spared the horrors of the song of men, the hawk should have

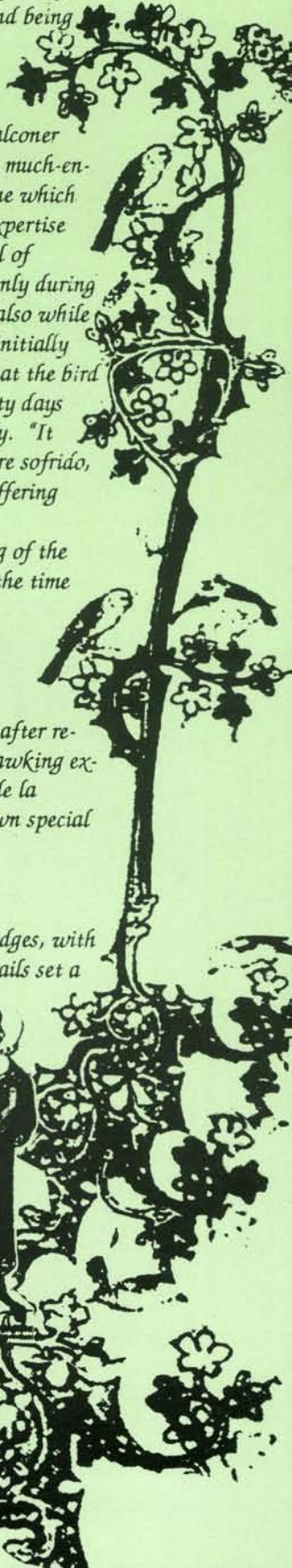
being tamed. At this time it was recommended that the bird should be carried on the fist continually for twenty days and nights, being hooded and unhooded frequently. "It takes", comments one Spanish falconer, "an hombre sofrido, a long-suffering man"; no doubt it took a long-suffering hawk, too!

But it was all worth it in the end, for the flying of the bird was not only a satisfying culmination to all the time involved in its care and training, but also an enjoyable social event for nobility and gentry alike. Participating in this sport of kings was reward enough in itself; but an additional highlight was savouring the delights of the booty after returning home, exhausted yet exhilarant, from a hawking expedition. One fourteenth-century falconer, Cace de la Vigne, a member of the French court, offers his own special recipe for:

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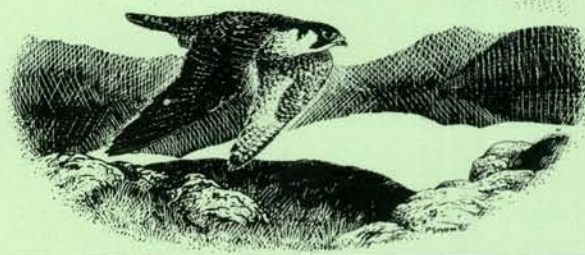
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He has exhibited in many of London's top venues, i.e. THE SOUTH BANK, THE BARBICAN, ASS. OF ILLUSTRATORS, SOCIETY OF WILDLIFE ARTISTS, THE TRYON GALLERY, THE DESIGN CENTRE, OLYMPIA and in the R.A. exhibition of BRITISH ART in Saudi Arabia. He specialises in raptors in landscape, particularly in flight and welcomes commissions.

The illustrations in this issue, of Welsh raptors; are closely based on his own field sketches and own photo's and he has studied birds in many countries. That illustration is for sale; in addition to a selection of limited edition prints of raptors etc. For details, colour samples, enquiries to PHILIP SNOW, GLANABER COTTAGE, PENRHYN PARK, BANGOR, GWYNEDD LL57 3UR Telephone: (0248) 351223

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# Raptor

## Help and Hints

### Some Hints On Choosing A Bird By Robin Haigh

The success of private domestic breeding projects has made birds more affordable and provided a wide range of choice for the falconer.

However the selection of a suitable healthy bird particularly for a beginner is not always straightforward.

The older falconers may give the impression that wild taken imported birds were not only better for the job but also were less of a risk health wise. The former statement we can argue over forever but the latter is definitely not the case.

Imported birds come complete with their fair share of diseases, damaged feathers and parasites and very often the ones that were caught in the traps were the ones most unsuited to hunting for themselves in the wild and only took the bait as an easy option.

It would not even be fair to suggest that a wild caught bird would never scream or become imprinted for that is far from the truth, nor is it reasonable to suppose that a domestically produced bird from another country is going to be any better than one bred in the UK.

In an effort to keep things simple I have tried to pick out the most important criteria to have in mind when you decide to obtain a bird.

Firstly, and this can be done without setting foot outside, picking up the phone or even reading an advert, decide what type and sex of bird is most suitable for you? - In other words-what are you capable of keeping, handling and flying?



*Domestically produced Redtail*



*Captive bred Gyr hybrid*

Which species or more importantly which individual raptor? It is important to realise that all species have different temperaments and each bird has special requirements.

In my opinion and for very different reasons neither a Goshawk, Redtail or Kestrel would make a suitable first bird for the younger novice falconer, whereas a Redtail may make an admirable first choice for someone a few years older. It makes little sense for a small person to choose a very large bird nor for a youngster to attempt one that is likely to be prone to biting or footing.

Next comes the question, is the countryside suitable for flying the bird of your choice? Wide open spaces for longwings, more enclosed country for buzzards and hawks. Having said that, both Lanners and Lugger Falcons do reasonably well in the more enclosed countryside, when hunting they are neither so wide ranging nor as high flying as the Peregrine or Saker.

Of the buzzards the Ferruginous is particularly fond of windy days and rolling moors or downland. While the Redtail and Harris will work well in sparse woodland. The choice of raptor is not black and white, only various shades of grey!

And what about quarry. What do you have to fly the bird at. Not much point in buying a Gos if all you have are moorhens, or a falcon if you only have ground quarry such as rabbits. Yes I am aware that some falcons will take the occasional rabbit but that is not the point.

After deciding on a bird and finding a breeder check the bird for any physical defects. The bateing off test will show up many faults, can the bird bate off and regain the fist and end up sitting comfortably with the correct wing and leg position? Bateing will also give a clue to the birds strength and temperament.

One falconry school suggests that when choosing a bird that the buyer should always view the bird with its parents in the breeding enclosure. This sounds like a good idea but I will wager that there are not many breeders who are foolish enough to allow a complete stranger to breach their security and view the breeding project. Also the fact that a young bird is in with an adult pair does not really mean very much if you really think about it.

The bottom line is that it makes a lot more sense-to buy a bird from a reputable breeder with many years experience than risk purchasing the mistakes of a novice for-the former will definitely prove less expensive in the long run.



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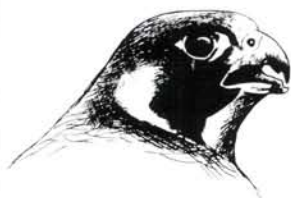
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