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The

Falconers

& Raptor Conservation Magazine



**British Falconers' Club Meet
Woodhall Spa 2010**

The

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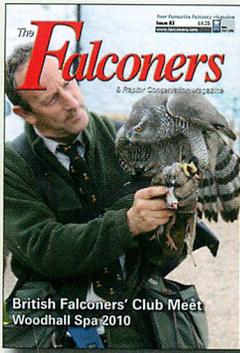
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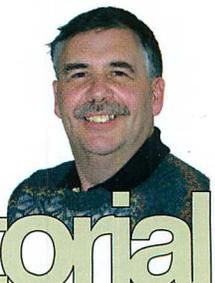
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Well here we are again in another flying season and I hope everyone is enjoying good sport. As you can see in this issue I attended the British Falconers' Club meet at Woodhall Spa for a day and had a very enjoyable time with many fellow falconers. I must say a huge thank you to both Fergus Beeley and Nick Kester for the invitation to attend the meet.

Sometimes there comes along a new, or variation of, a product to help falconers have an easier life and the eagle swivel which is being used and written about by Dr. David Glynne Fox is no exception. I spoke to David recently and he is very enthusiastic about it. He has been using the swivel for some time and has ordered some more. So, if you fly eagles, read the article in this issue to find out more.

In the meantime have a good read.



editorial

news & products

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

Wildlife artist expands thanks to Insignia Creative

A niche business selling wildlife prints has seen a large rise in business, in part due to Torbay based website design and marketing studio, Insignia Creative.

Wildlife painter Andrew Ellis turned to Insignia to help his business expand in the print market, with the result that new lines have been added including a limited edition calendar.

Andrew's business partner, Donna Ellis, explained: "Andrew was a very successful painter with his originals selling in a top London gallery and to prominent clients worldwide, especially the Middle East. The website now enables fans who can't afford the originals to have the chance to buy high quality, limited edition prints.

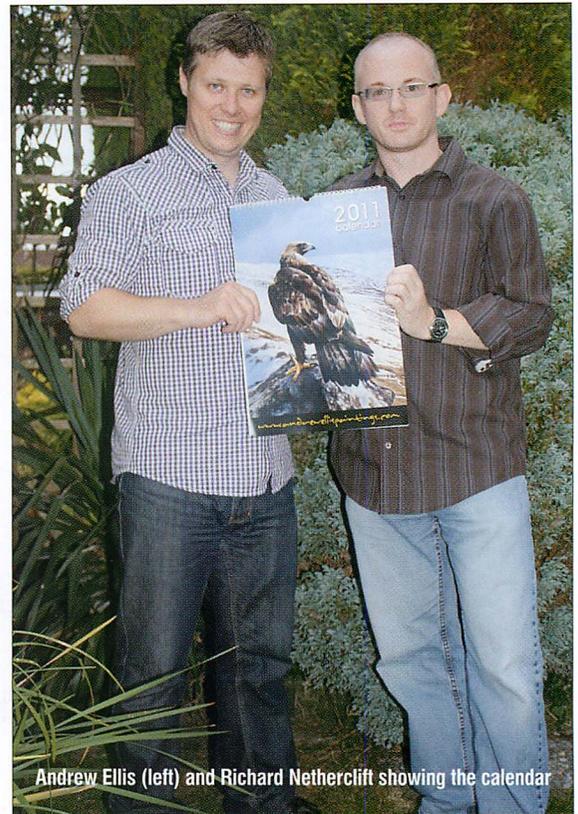
Insignia helped us by setting up a website, something we had been thinking about doing for some time.

We've just had the site redesigned, and had some extremely positive feedback. We've been very careful to keep some resemblance to the old site as we didn't want existing customers to be alienated but have made the navigation easier, added more prints for sale and extra products such as gift vouchers."

She said that the website had made a big difference to sales, especially to the international market which wouldn't happen if it wasn't for the website. Donna praised Richard Netherclift at Insignia in particular for his work helping to market their site, projects which have included designing and producing promotional postcards, leaflets, business cards and the calendars.

"He's designed several batches of print work for us and is always very quick at turning it around. He follows our brief well and we've always been very chuffed," she said. "Richard has helped us to build a distinctive brand and always comes up with good ideas such as the postcards. It's ideal for us as we only need to go to one person who sorts out everything for us."

Further information on Andrew Ellis Limited can be found at www.andrewellispaintings.com and further information on Insignia can be found at www.insigniacreative.co.uk



Andrew Ellis (left) and Richard Netherclift showing the calendar

Bespoke Falconry Gloves

Payne's Bespoke Falconry Gloves is a new company specialising in manufacturing made to order falconry gloves. Chris Payne has been making falconry gloves for over 11 years and is now using his experience and skills to produce only the very highest quality items.

Hand made in the United Kingdom, each glove is individually produced using the best materials available. There are two main styles, the "Classic", or the "Bespoke". Either can be single, double or triple thickness and can be made to the length of your choice.

A popular option is a lambskin lining which can be added to any glove, effectively adding an extra layer, making a single thickness deerskin glove into a double thickness one. Ideal for those cold days in the field during the winter months. The "Bespoke" has been designed with an area on the cuff for artwork, badges, logo's, etc. Whatever you want, we will do our best to accommodate you.

For more information, please visit www.paynes-bfg.co.uk or call +44 (0) 7949 970920.



Book Review

A Life with Birds

By Ronald Stevens

Reviewed by Peter Eldrett

ISBN 978-0-88839-318-0

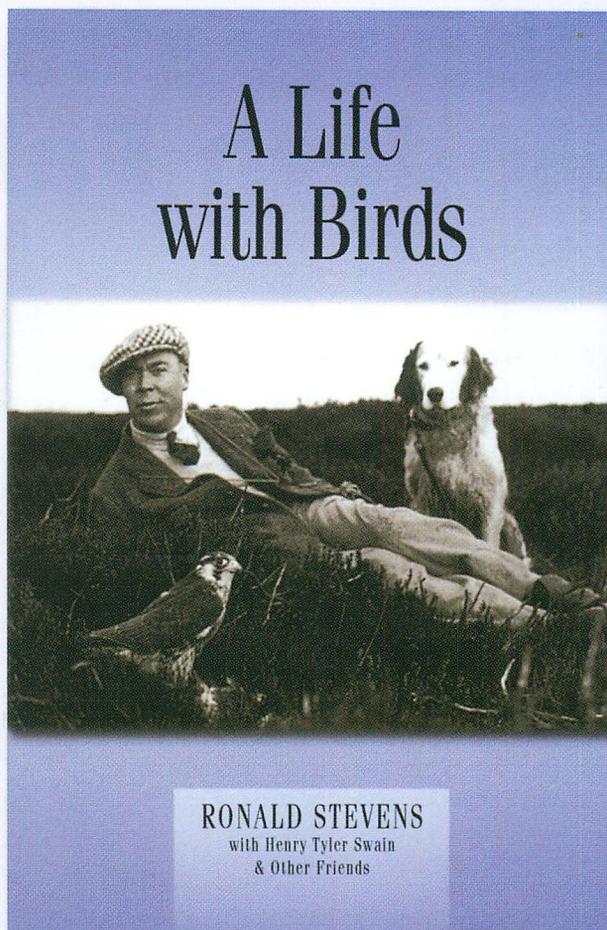
This is an autobiography by well known falconer Ronald Stevens and he tells his story of how, from a young age, he had a life-long passion for birds. He started life interested in finches and then, with his brother Noel, had an envious collection of waterfowl before WWII. They had a successful business in buying such specimens from geese to flamingos, ducks to storks and even going to Africa to add to the collection.

But one day a visitor to the family home when he was young changed his life. Charles Giles who was staying at Ronald's family home had taken up the noble art of falconry with a Merlin and so Ronald's interest started from there – with a Peregrine Falcon. He later regretted having a Peregrine saying "... whereas I, in my ignorance and greed, had gone all out for ownership of a peregrine falcon, which tradition had decreed that only kings and the nobility were privileged to fly."

Stevens' love of the countryside and especially the different homes he has lived in is very evident in his writing. His home in Ireland, which was to prove his last, was much loved. Also, his travels around the UK in pursuit of the art of falconry especially on the Scottish grouse moors made the UK somewhere he enjoyed the most.

A Life with Birds is an easy book to read and is one of four re-prints that have been published by Hancock House Publishers (the other three being, The Taming of Genghis, Laggard and Observations on Modern Falconry). The volume consists of only 156 pages but does contain chapters written by Stevens' friends such as Geoffrey Pollard, Robert McCollum and several by the notable Henry Tyler Swain.

This book is very enjoyable to read and should be on every falconer's book shelf. You can obtain a copy by contacting Coch-Y-Bonddu Books www.falconrybooks.co.uk



CFF items for sale

The Campaign for Falconry still have a number of items for sale which didn't sell at the Festival of Falconry or Falconers' Fair. There are still some items left so if you want to purchase any of the items listed below. Contact Doreen Page on 07710472197 or e-mail doreen.page@btinternet.com

List of merchandise as follows:-

Festival of Falconry Tee Shirts 2007 Medium only..... £3 each
Enamel badges..... £1 each
Tee Shirts 2009 £3 all sizes
Polo Shirts 2009 £5 all sizes
Enamel badges 2009 £2 each

Pewter Badges 2004, 2005,2006 (both designs), 2007 limited stock, 2008 £1 each
2009 enamel badges of both Hawk Board and CFF £2 each
First aid books £2.50
Cloth CFF badges £2 each

P&P will be given on each order



Book Review

Observations on Modern Falconry

By *Ronald Stevens*

Reviewed by *Paul Manning – Amews Falconry*

ISBN 978-0-88839-701-0

As the title suggests, this is one man's approach to Game Hawking – the training of Peregrine Falcons for hunting Grouse.

This is a relatively short book running to only 112 pages, but with no pictures or illustrations everything in the book is dedicated to the author's, views, observations and personal opinions regarding the sport he so obviously loved.

Many of these opinions are very particular to him and the period in which he practised his sport. Because of this I would not recommend the book to anybody who is new to the sport. However, for any experienced falconer this is a really interesting, enjoyable and enlightening read.

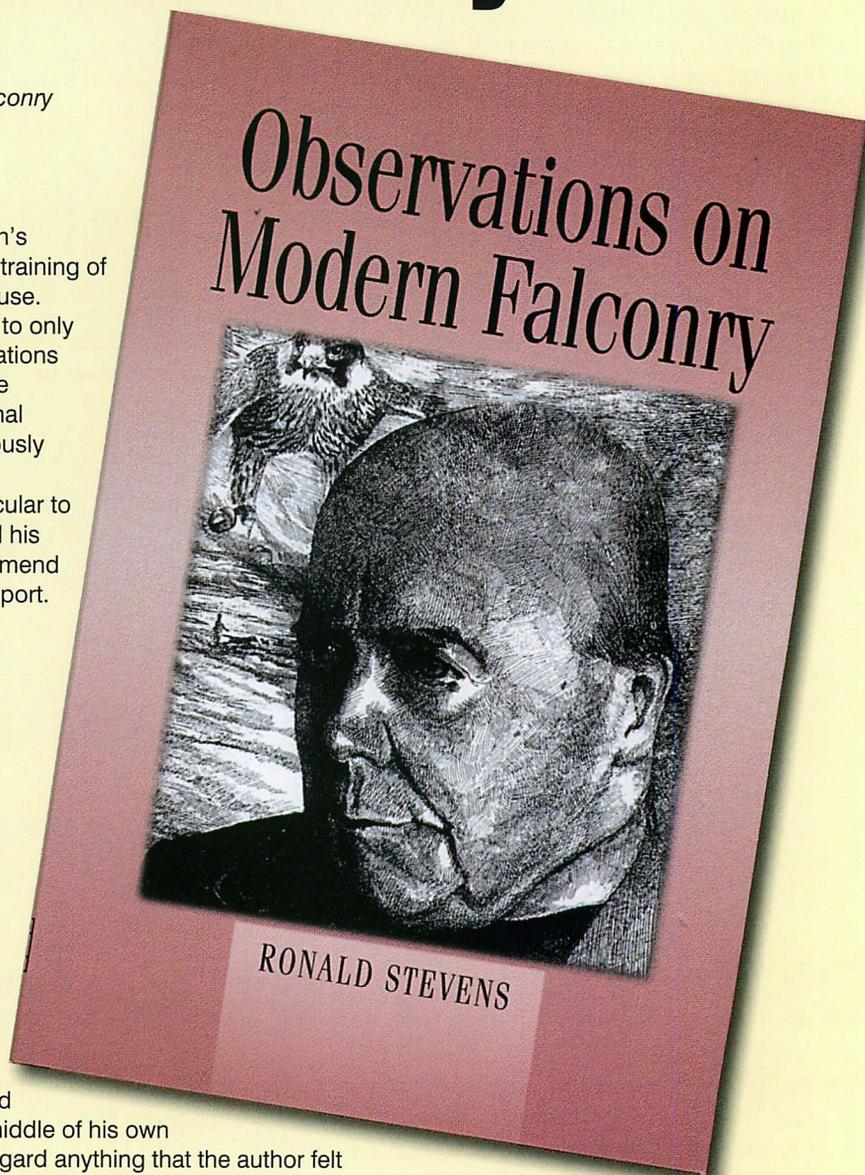
Under chapter headings such as The Mews - Hack Hut - Eyasses Compared to Passagers and Haggards - Hooding and Manning - Homing etc. the author takes the reader through his opinions on the housing, feeding and training of his peregrines, what the merits are of these methods and the detailed arguments for why each conclusion has been reached.

Some of these conclusions would not sit unchallenged today but, given that they had been arrived at through a lifetime of dedication to the sport and from a man that at the time was living and working his birds from a cottage in the middle of his own Grouse Moor, it would be foolish to disregard anything that the author felt important enough to put down in writing.

Whilst some of the chapters are of their time and the interest lies more with contrast and comparison for us today, the chapter on Hawking is timeless and any falconer today would benefit from the knowledge, understanding and observations that they impart.

One of the primary joys of this book is its understated charm. The author's style of writing is easy and elegant and for any aspiring falconer of today this acts as a whispered reminder that at one time to be a falconer was also to be a gentleman. A thoroughly enjoyable read.

You can obtain a copy by contacting Coch-Y-Bonddu Books www.falconrybooks.co.uk





Stolen Peregrines

What happened

supposed worth of the contraband.

When faced with so many eggs the authorities were at a loss as to know what to do. Luckily the investigating officer, Andy McWilliam from the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) knew of a goshawk breeder in Birmingham. Lee Featherstone was quick to help and put the eggs in his incubators. Twelve were fertile and eleven hatched successfully and closed rings were fitted in accordance with Animal Health instructions. But what to do next?

You cannot just raise them and release them at will. If they had continued to be hand-reared they would have become imprinted on Lee and could never have been returned to the wild. The Hawk Board, which represents falconry in the UK, looked at the problem and devised a number of solutions that satisfied both Animal Health and NWCU. Those that could be were taken by the RSPB and placed in nests but time was limited – it takes a matter of days for a young falcon to become imprinted. So others had to be reared by foster parents. Falcon Mews is a CITES registered raptor-breeding centre in Yorkshire and has pairs of peregrines that would do the job. So owners Peter Gill and Richard Hill volunteered. Whilst this was happening further nest sites were found and more young were released. But the remaining four needed to be put back sooner rather than later.

Hacking is a centuries old falconry tradition. Young falcons are placed in man-made nests and fed adlib whilst they learn to fly and eventually hunt. When the watching falconer notes that they have started to feed themselves he would catch them up and train them for his use. In our case that would be the moment when we had done our job and the remaining four falcons would have been 'hacked back' and left to fend for themselves. The chosen hack site was at a secret location known only to a

few falconers and the young peregrines were collected from Falcon Mews by Dale Johnson, Chairman of the Yorkshire Hawking Club, and driven to Scotland.

Without this endless succession of willing volunteers, the authorities would have been looking at fourteen dead-in-shell eggs, but as it happened eleven young peregrines are now in the wild and thriving exactly as they would have done before Lendrum stole them. All the falconers involved can be justly proud of what they have achieved, because no one else could have done it.

Shooting Times also published an article by me on the good relationship falconers have with landowners and gamekeepers. This was intended as a positive precursor to the British Falconers' Club international field meet held every four years in Lincolnshire. But it was somewhat sullied the following week by a letter from a reader who had visited the International Falconry Forum and found some less than favourable postings. An instant response from the falconry community meant four good letters, including one from a moderator of the forum, swiftly rebutted this. I have only one comment. I think it was the nihilist philosopher Nietzsche who commented: "The public vomit their bile and call it a newspaper." To which one must add the word "forum". For despite the efforts of those who run public forums, damaging postings do get included and are effectively a self-destruct button for our sport.

It was my intention to end this report with a very good news story, one to top the efforts by many to return stolen peregrines to the wild. But this is still under wraps and cannot be mentioned until the next issue as it just misses the publisher's deadline. Also just after the deadline, Nick Fox and I are meeting the Welsh Assembly to discuss open general and quarry specific licences. So more on that next time.

Doubtless most falconers will know of the successful prosecution of the Zimbabwean who visited the UK for the sole purpose of stealing peregrines. Although the main man was 'banged up', there must have been others involved, and one day they will get caught.

Unfortunately, as always in such cases, the media was more interested in the value and destination of the stolen peregrines and video footage of Lendrum dangling beneath a helicopter, than they were in the return of the chicks to the wild. Thankfully *Shooting Times* published a full report by me in their 'Have your say' column, and I am sure they will not mind me reproducing it here. It was a really positive effort by the falconry community and one that deserved wider recognition.

When Jeffrey Lendrum was given thirty months in prison for stealing and attempting to smuggle fourteen peregrine falcon eggs from Birmingham to Dubai in May, the falconry community applauded. Such actions are abhorrent to us all. But the fate of these eggs has been only lightly covered by the mainstream media which has focused on the crime and the

A New Season Unfolds



Bob Dalton with English Setter and Grey Jerkin

At long last a new hawking season is upon us and we can get back to what most of us love best, being in the field with our hawk or falcon. I have had an extremely busy year with displays and corporate days as well as a very marked increase in bird control work. All of which is good fun, a nice way to earn a living and it means I handle hawks and falcons every day, but none of it is hunting, which is obviously what real falconry, by its very definition, is. With the hawking season now properly upon us once again it is time to put work on the back burner and concentrate on hawking.

I try and arrange my working life so that as much as possible I keep the hawking season completely free of any commitments and can devote my time purely to getting out with my hawks and dogs. I fully realise that for a great many people this just isn't possible and circumstances won't allow it. Fortunately for me I have very gradually arranged my life so that the six months working, six months hawking system seems to work quite well. My normal hawking season is split between game hawking with falcons over dogs, pheasants and partridge being the quarry with very occasional flights at duck, some spring rook hawking with a falcon and finally rabbit hawking with my trusty old female Harris Hawk.

Grouse moors beyond falconers' means?

Like many others I used to make the pilgrimage to Scotland each year to the Grouse moors in pursuit of what I consider to be the ultimate quarry for a falcon in Britain, the red grouse. Spiralling costs and the ever growing shooting market means that decent moors are getting beyond the financial means of a great many falconers, certainly those



Intermewed Peregrine

who are not fortunate enough to find themselves part of the landed gentry or lottery winners. There are plenty of moors that can be rented for short periods of time, such as a week or two, or some that do have longer lets available. The moors available for the longer lets normally are available because the grouse numbers on them are so very poor. Usually being unkept they are getting encroached upon by bracken and the heather is not being burnt in the four year cycle as it should. Consequently the whole moor is on a downward spiral as far as the grouse themselves are concerned and they generally move to pastures new. I have given up the lets on two moors I used to rent because the grouse numbers were so poor that no consistency in sport could ever be achieved. Both are now being rented by other falconers who take them for short periods. The problem with short periods of hawking the moors, such as for a week or perhaps two is it just isn't sufficient time to get hawks and dogs really attuned to the hunting situation and by the time things are starting to click into place it is time to head back down south again. Hardly conducive to making good game hawks and dogs. I used to rent a grouse moor for eight to 10 weeks and this allowed for consistency in the dog work and serving the falcons.

So now I hawk pheasant and partridge with the latter being my preferred quarry of the two. It seems to be becoming the norm for some of those that hawk partridge to spot them with binoculars and the role of the pointing dog is being relegated to being almost superfluous. To each their own and I certainly do not decry those that want to hawk in this way. However, for me the dog work is a very integral part of game hawking and I certainly don't want to hawk without them. Very little tends to quicken my blood more than seeing a pointer or setter working the ground at full tilt and then to see them suddenly stop on a sixpence and freeze in the classic tell tale stance.

For my game hawking I shall be flying two falcons that are both twice intermewed, a Peregrine Falcon called Megan and a Jerkin called Nathan. In actual fact a Jerkin is probably a case of overkill where pheasants are concerned



Nathan



Gyr x Peregrine Hybrid

but I really enjoy flying him and at the end of the day that is what counts. Megan is an imprint Peregrine or more correctly a mal imprint. Imprints are far from my favourite type of hawk and normally I would never ever have anything to do with one. However Megan was taken from the nest illegally and although recovered by the police and forwarded onto me she was well and truly imprinted on humans as a food source by the time I got her. In the early days her constant screaming drove me to distraction but eventually I got her flying and killing. Then the screaming toned down a great deal and now we only have occasional flare ups of screaming and mantling with behaviour verging on the pleasant for 95 per cent of the time. I never thought I would find myself saying it but I have become almost accustomed to the screaming when she does do it. Both Megan and Nathan have taken game well and should start to develop some real style this season.

For dogs I will have my old English Pointer Freda and my two English Setters Esme and Elgin. I am frequently being told that English Pointers and Setters are far too quick for lowland hawking and their speed makes them prone to overrun scent and as a result bump game.

I never have subscribed to this view and would suggest that any setter or pointer that overruns scent is not really up to its job no matter what breed it may be. Although, all three of the dogs I currently use were originally for grouse hawking only, they managed to make the switch to lowland hawking without any problems. Now that they are in their senior years (a lot like their owner) their pace has lightened to a degree anyway.

Hawking with a friend

My game hawking this season will be in the company of my good friend and fellow falconer Dale Fairbrass. Dale has bred his first ever large falcon this season, a Gyr/Peregrine hybrid and will be flying Maxine at pheasant. She is a big falcon and should be able to handle pheasant without too much trouble.

As the game hawking season draws to a close then the rook hawking season for me begins in earnest. Rook hawking has always been a branch of the sport I have enjoyed and although I have practised it for many years in countryside that really was a little too enclosed I have gradually acquired the rights to land that is far more suitable. This year will again see the stable quarry feature quite highly in my hawking. Let me stress that this will be

with a quarry licence issued by Natural England. As a form of out of the hood hawking I find it very enjoyable and the rook itself is a worthy adversary for a trained falcon. Again Dale and I will be sharing our hawking land and he will be flying an intermewed Gyr/Saker falcon called Money Penny.

Last, but certainly by no means least, I will be hawking rabbits with my old faithful female Harris Hawk Maud. This hawk has been a major part of my hawking life for very close on 20 years now and she becomes more of a pleasure to fly with each season that passes. As time has progressed I have come to learn her little ways and how she prefers to do things which tends to make our hawking expeditions together highly enjoyable. Maud works well with ferrets and particularly well with my old pointer Freda. For the first 12 years of our hawking lives together Emma was the pointer that made up the third member of the team. When she eventually passed on I was given Freda who was more or less the same colouring and very similar in temperament to Emma. Accordingly hawking continued more or less without a hiccup.

I know it is fashionable to denigrate Harris Hawks as a species and quite often those that choose to fly them as well. All I can say is there are good and bad Harris Hawks just as there are good and bad falconers. As far as I am concerned my Harris Hawk is an excellent hunter, shows good sport and has an extremely nice temperament for a serious hunting hawk. She may not have the fire that a Goshawk has, nor come to that the same electric acceleration as a Goshawk but neither does she have the sulky mood swings of a Goshawk or the need for constant attention. Please, don't think that I believe Goshawks are anything other than superb raptors and hunting machines in the right hands. As to those that fly them well I have nothing but admiration but now I find them too frantic for me and I certainly don't want a socially imprinted Goshawk. Again nothing wrong with a correctly raised imprint, just that they are not for me.

As I sit writing this on my lap top it is the day before the start of the Pheasant season and anticipation of a new season is almost a tangible tingle. Let's hope we all have an excellent season's hawking.



askchitty

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

What blood disorders and parasites are prevalent in birds of prey and what symptoms should we look out for?

Also, do birds of prey have different blood groups?

Diseases of the Blood in Birds of prey
Blood is an organ like the liver and the kidneys – it is composed of many different types of cells (red cells, white cells, thrombocytes (that assist clotting) and the cells that produce them) and these are arranged in various tissues – bone marrow, spleen and, of course, the blood itself: not quite what we expect from a red liquid!

As an organ it is, therefore, prone to specific diseases just like the liver, kidneys, etc. Fortunately, these are fairly rare in most species, and certainly in captive raptors.

Apart from rare lymph tumours, the most common disorder we will see is anaemia – this is not a specific disease, but a description of a low red cell count. The causes of this are many and varied (and it is usually part of a condition affecting some or all other organs), but for simplicity's sake we consider anaemia in two categories.

1. Non-regenerative. This is where the blood count is low but there is no sign that the body is responding and producing new red cells. This is the most dangerous category and, fortunately, the rarer of the two. The most common reason is debility of the bone marrow in chronic disease or chronic pain. The next most common reason is malnutrition or gut parasitism where the body is simply not taking in enough iron or vitamins to make haemoglobin (the compound that is contained in red cells and which carries oxygen) or more red cells. Other causes include failure or

death of the bone marrow itself – most commonly due to a tumour or infection that basically squeezes out the bone marrow.

2. Regenerative. This is where a low count is accompanied by a body response to make more red cells. This is generally due to loss of cells following:-
 - a. Bleeding. This can be obvious or “hidden” (eg a gut bleed). Other internal bleeds may occur following ingestion of prey that have eaten rat poison.
 - b. Haemolysis – this is where blood cells break down inside the body. This can occur as an auto-immune disease where the body attacks its own cells, but this is extremely rare. More commonly haemolysis occurs due to:
 - c. Parasites. Some protozoa live in the blood cells and destroy them. This is reasonably common but is normally only seen in young birds (whose immune systems are naive) and at the end of summer when parasite numbers have had a chance to build up in the biting flies that transmit them.

So, what are the signs of anaemia? This is hard to answer as most cases also have other signs due to the diseases producing the anaemia. However, anaemic birds tend to be weak (possibly collapsed) as they cannot transport enough oxygen round the body and the membranes of their mouths/ eyes tend to become pale. Determining anaemia is easy – a blood sample can be taken and a packed cell volume (PCV) assessed in minutes. A blood smear examined under a microscope will quickly tell whether it is regenerative or non-regenerative. Then the hard work starts – determining why the bird is anaemic can be difficult as there are so many causes.

In the meantime the bird may need

stabilising – early or mild cases may not need special stabilisation. However, if the loss of red cells is rapid and/ or the red cell count drops too low then the bird will need extra care to keep the body from shutting down. Basically the bird will need support to maintain oxygen transport round the system –ie it needs more blood. In human medicine this means transfusion and this can also be done in birds of prey. For this a donor is required. This can be simpler than it sounds.

In mammalian medicine it is important that a donor is found with the correct blood group. While it is likely that birds also have blood groups, they do not seem to be as advanced. It is, therefore, possible to use blood even from a different species for transfusion. This is good when dealing with rare species but, where possible, blood should be taken from one of the same species – the blood cells live much longer after donation the closer related the species of donor and recipient.

The main problem is finding a donor that is readily available and healthy enough to give blood and that this blood does not contain any diseases that may affect the already weak recipient. All this may have to be determined very quickly as the recipient may be extremely ill.

Fortunately technology can help. We now have an artificial blood substitute called oxyglobin. This can be used instead of a blood transfusion and appears to work just as well when stabilising anaemic patients. It is expensive, but this is more than outweighed by the ease and convenience of having the product easily to hand and in the vastly reduced risk of introducing disease from another bird.

Anaemia is not rare – but normally as part of an overall disease process. Careful management of anaemic patients is required as well as a full investigation of possible underlying causes.

British Falconers' Club

Woodhall Spa 2010

The British Falconers Club (BFC) once again held their four-yearly get together from 5-9 October at Woodhall Spa in Lincolnshire and the famous Petwood Hotel was the base. The hotel is famous because that is where the 617 Squadron known as the Dam Busters had its officers mess after its use as a military convalescent home after WWI.

The fieldmeet attracted over 130 falconers and spectators from all over the

world including Belgium, Ireland, Spain and America and was run in its usual efficient way. Groups of falconers were posted each day on the notice boards so everyone knew which group they were with and who would be field master for the day — someone who you would need to follow in the vehicles as they were the people who knew the venue of the day's hawking.

In the main there seemed to be more long wings than hawks and eagles — you only had to have a look at the weathering

lawn to see. I have to say that the lawn always looks good with so many hawks, falcons and eagles — it is quite a sight.

Goshawk group

I had an invitation to attend the meet, although I am not a member of the BFC, from communications and press officer Fergus Beeley. He asked me if I had a preference of which group I would like to go out with as I was only at the event for one day so I elected a goshawk group led by Nick Kester. On previous occasions I



The group. L to R: Chris Barber, Mike Lister, Pat Coles and Nick Kester



The flying ground with Jayne Wright (owner of Ash Farm) and Chris Barber

have been with longwingers so I thought a change to hawks was in order.

There were only four members in the group. Nick Kester with his hawk Baldrick, Mike Lister with Poppy, Chris Barber with his male gos Morris (and dog Poppy, a Longhaired Viszla) and lastly Pat Coles with his female hawk Tosca.

We arrived at the venue, Ash Farm, near North Willingham which is owned by a very nice lady called Jayne Wright. Her friendliness and helpfulness was second to none, as was her hospitality. The farm also has a self-catering holiday cottage let and the two couples who were staying there went with us to the flying grounds after Nick told them the ground rules of the do's and don'ts when out in the field.

The birds were got out of their traveling boxes and telemetry attached, checked and double checked. Unfortunately, Pat's telemetry was not working and he had to leave his bird behind in his vehicle but he turned out to be a good beater.

Off we went and Chris let his dog off to see what game could be flushed. She worked the hedgerow to the side of the field which was not exactly as flat as you would expect in such an area of the country. On the contrary, the landscape was very undulating which, by the end of the day, our legs knew about.

The spectators and I held back to let the dog go on ahead and do her work and not much was seen for quite a while, until the austringers ascended a small hill where the slope was covered with bracken and nettles and the top had a strip of maize which, of course, would be where the game was held.

Both Mike and Chris's birds had good flights after partridge and both were

successful. Mike's gos had a fantastic chase and went over to the next field but we could not see the outcome as both goshawk and partridge disappeared over a small hill ending up in a hollow. Mike went through the hedgerow and got out his telemetry and went looking for his gos. A little while later we saw Mike returning with both his bird and quarry and he had a big grin on his face. This had



The chase is on



Chris Barber with his hawk Morris and dog Poppy

to be the best flight of the morning.

Baldrick was next and he chased a flushed pheasant, got hold of his quarry but did not bind on properly and the pheasant re-flushed with the goshawk once again on its tail. Both birds were seen going to a tall hedge line and Nick could not see his bird. Nick called me over to help locate Baldrick but we could not see him but we heard the bells ringing faintly in the distance. The hedgerow separated two fields and it was not an easy task to get through, being covered with nettles and bracken. A small stream ran at the base of the hedge which Nick managed to cross and I could still hear the tinkling of the bells. Nick re-joined me and we kept looking up and along the hedgerow until Nick cried "there he is". On the re-flush, Baldrick had managed to bind onto his quarry but ended up in the stream. Nick climbed in and managed to bring out his gos and the pheasant but then Baldrick decided to give Nick a quick hand shake on his non-gloved hand.

We called everyone together to witness Baldrick feeding up while Nick's blood flowed from his hand and fingers. Luckily he had a plaster with him and I helped administer this to his finger so that he could get on with the rest of the day. Nick decided that was it for Baldrick as he was soaking wet and would not fly for the rest of the day, so it was time to go back to the farm for lunch. As Mike had had a good morning with his gos, he decided to leave Poppy behind but Mike did have a big grin on his face, as he was very pleased with the morning's work with something in the bag.

Jayne put on a splendid spread of home-made soup and sausage rolls, pork pie and garlic bread which everyone enjoyed.

Last flight

After lunch it was decided that there were too many spectators for Pat's gos so we said goodbye to the holiday makers and as Baldrick was not going out, Nick lent Pat his telemetry so that he could give Tosca a flight.

We went back to the flying ground but this time we took a couple of ferrets with us hoping to find some ground quarry. After a long walk to find some rabbit buries, it was found that the holes were 'dead' so it was back to the hill



Pat Coles taking a break with his goshawk Tosca

with maize for some more quarry of the feathered kind. The dog Poppy was put to work once again but this time it was Mike and I doing the beating with Chris hoping for a flush — which he got and the bag was up by one.

Pat, meanwhile, was waiting patiently at the bottom of the slope when we once again flushed more quarry which Tosca flew after. Unfortunately, we did not see the outcome of this flight as we were on the wrong side of the undulating ground, but the outcome was a successful one.

More flushes and flights were to be had during the next hour or so before we decided that it was probably time to head back to the farm. Poppy, the dog, was still working hard and suddenly went on point by the stream. Pat was ready with Tosca and all of a sudden a pheasant was

flushed and Tosca was after it at a rapid pace. She bound onto the quarry and both ended up tumbling over and over on the ground. The trouble was Pat had to get to his bird quickly but the very steep side to the bank of the stream made it very difficult to do so, but Nick found a way over and they both made it across. Nick took off his coat and laid it over a barbed wire fence that was in the way so that Pat could get over to his bird and quarry. By this time it was around 4.00pm and it was decided that Tosca had the last flight of the day. Everything had to be put away quickly so that we could get back to the hotel and put the hawks on the weathering lawn.

I have to say a big thank you to Nick (who drove me to and from the venue), Mike, Chris and Pat for a wonderful and memorable day. Also, once again, I have to thank Fergus for the initial invitation. It was also good to see some old friends again and to be introduced to new ones.



Nick Kester feeding-up his goshawk Baldrick

After School Club



Young man with Harris Hawk

For the first time, this year we decided to run an After School Club during the summer term, for children between the ages of 10-16. We advertised throughout the latter part of the spring term and easter holidays and nine youngsters (eight boys and one girl!) signed up, joining us for their first session once the summer term commenced, towards the end of April.

Assistant curator Jimmy Robinson, falconer Paul Betchley and I (the "Education team") ran the club, which took place every Thursday afternoon from 4.30-6.30pm, excluding half term week, and lasted for 10 weeks. Our first session was an introduction and, although many of the youngsters were already members of or regular visitors to the Trust, this gave them a chance to meet us and one another, also for us to tell the children what we had planned and to find

out a bit about them, their ambitions and what they hoped to gain from attending the club.

We had decided in advance that we would give the youngsters a bit of a 'homework challenge' for the first few weeks and so we chose four of our most popular species of birds at the Trust, and the children drew names out of a hat to see which species they would have to study. We asked that they find out one interesting new fact about their species each week that they could relate to the rest of the group. This was a challenge they all rose to admirably and some of our subsequent activities revolved around their individual species. For instance for one session Paul, who is also our resident artist, gave the youngsters an art workshop, which culminated in them drawing their bird. They also spent a session, in groups, building an enclosure 'Blue Peter-style' for their species, then

each group gave a presentation on their particular enclosure with details of its suitability for the species etc.

Resources available

We were lucky throughout to be able to utilise some of the many resources that are available to us, in the form of various experts in different fields, not only staff but also willing members and volunteers who agreed to give up their time to pass on some of their expertise to the children.

For instance John Harper and Claire Ash, two professional photographers who spend a lot of time at the Trust photographing our birds and the amazing variety of fauna and flora we have, taught them how to take pictures of birds in flight and portrait shots, and the children were able to practice with some of the extremely large SLR cameras that John and Claire brought with them. Everyone discovered that photographing fast moving animals is quite a tricky skill to master!

We also spent time with Jim Fayers, a regular volunteer who is an expert on bees and looks after the hives in our wildflower meadow as well as creating habitats for wild bees to live in around the grounds. Monica Johnson, who is responsible for monitoring invertebrates and flora in the wildflower meadow, gave the youngsters a lesson in identifying and attracting butterflies.

Many other members of staff at the Trust also gave of their time and expertise for the benefit of the children; Kim Kirkbride who is in charge of the bird of prey hospital at the Trust, spent a whole session teaching them about her work and they also had the chance to meet some of the young owls that were being hand reared in the hospital. Scientific Officer Samuel Hunt, who runs our Fund-a-bird nest box project, also gave them a talk and the children were able to assemble some nest boxes for Tawny owls and kestrels, with the assistance of volunteer Terry Verney who builds many of the boxes used for the project. Falconer Gareth Tonen gave the children

a lesson in equipment making for birds of prey and Mike Riley told them all about incubation.

Entering a challenge

With 2010 being designated the International Year of Biodiversity, we decided it would be an ideal opportunity to get our young group involved by entering them into the Young Darwin Prize challenge run by the Natural History Museum in association with Defra. A cameraman who we work with for much of our promotional material, Kevin Babey, rose to this challenge despite a demanding schedule elsewhere, and managed to join us for two of our sessions to film the children (while they also filmed one another) getting involved with creating and talking about some of the habitats we have at the Trust for wild creatures; they built a bug tower and installed its first residents (stag beetle larvae), introduced tadpoles to one of our ponds, erected a butterfly nectar feeding station and watched it being used, found out about bee keeping and the importance of our meadow as a habitat for many species up through the food chain and also learned how to be mini camera people into the bargain!

All the children who came to our



Pupils with Kim Kirkbride

After School Club were extremely enthusiastic, they were a great bunch and I think and hope they enjoyed coming along as much as Paul, Jimmy and I enjoyed having them.

We will miss the weekly fun and laughter but know that we will continue

to see most of them as regular weekend visitors and hope that many of them will join us again for similar activities we have planned for future years. We also owe a debt of thanks to all the people who helped us to make the club what we consider was a resounding success.



The Eagerly Awaited New Eagle Swivel



by e-mail, attaching some photographs of said swivel. At first glance I thought it was an odd shape, one of the loops being of triangular format. I was wondering how this shape could be any different from other swivels when it dawned on me that with the jess section being of this triangular shape, it could aid that age old problem of jesses sliding down the swivel because of the ever widening sloping section, and preventing the latter from doing its job, i.e. swivelling. Mike offered to send one to me for testing and I readily agreed.

Delivery

A few days later, the swivel arrived by FedEx and I eagerly (or should that be eagally) unwrapped the item. The swivel is large, but then, so are the birds, but when I compared it with the swivel I was already using, there was no actual size difference. What was different was the aforementioned shape and weight of the swivel. It was quite a bit lighter than my own despite being three inches in length and was composed of 100% stainless steel. The item was extremely well made and so I took it along to the meeting of the British Falconers Club Midland Group meeting, where four of us fly Golden Eagles. I handed the swivel round and it met with much approval. Many others also took a look as the swivel is made in smaller sizes for smaller raptors. Mike's catalogue was also well thumbed. All I needed to do now was to test it.

As I placed it on the jesses of my male Golden Eagle, "Star," he too gazed at it for ages with great incredulity. These big eagles never miss a trick. I then weathered him on the bow perch for the day as he was moulting. Whilst on the subject of eagle moults, has anyone else noticed how often they trash the large primary and train feathers, yet ignore the rest? But I digress. Upon taking

The last two or three decades have witnessed more innovations into the world of falconry than ever before. Being a traditional sport, old habits die hard, but I have always welcomed new and inspired ideas, especially if they improve aspects of the sport we all place so dear to our hearts. For example, who would ever have thought that we would be transporting our birds in travel boxes? The idea was unthinkable not so long ago. And who would have guessed that radio tracking would not only become commonplace but almost mandatory? These of course are only two of many diversions from our traditional past but there have been others, which are perhaps not so obvious. When I first began falconry in the early

1960's, leather was the only material that was used routinely for leashes, unless one counted the entirely unsuitable chains, braided nylon being totally unheard of, and we all now know how revolutionary that has become. Thus it never ceases to amaze me how many new aids reach the market to help us in our quest for raising the standards of falconry. One such new aid was sent to me recently for testing.

The well-known American eagle falconer, Joe Atkinson, e-mailed me to ask if he could forward my details to an American falconry furniture supplier, Mike Syring of mikesfalconry.com, as he had devised a new type of swivel, one of which was designed for use with large eagles. Always on the look out for new ideas, I wrote to Joe in the affirmative and before long, Mike Syring contacted me

him up later in the day, my thoughts concerning the jesses remaining at the apex of the swivel were confirmed. They were exactly as I had left them with no signs of slipping onto the lower ring whatsoever. The jesses, by the very nature of the triangular shape of the swivel, are prevented from riding down and clogging up the swivel mechanism, which is precisely what I hoped would happen. The swivel worked and is yet another weapon in the ever burgeoning falconry arsenal. In conclusion, my verdict is that the swivel is superior to all that I have tried during the past fifty years and believe me, that is certainly saying something. All my birds will in future be wearing Mike's swivels. He also does a better than average list of eagle based items and he tells me he will be adding more in future. My congratulations go to Mike Syring for allowing me to test the swivel and my thanks to Joe Atkinson for bringing it to my attention. Mike's website can be accessed by visiting www.mikesfalconry.com



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Pyrography – to Draw With Fire

Pyrography is the art of burning a design or pattern onto a natural surface, such as wood, leather, cork, paper or, in my case, birch plywood. Using a heated variable temperature machine, such as a small soldering iron, this produces a variant of shading to create light and dark tones. All my life I have drawn, painted and made things and always had a passion for the British countryside and its wildlife. From an early age I've been fascinated by birds, mainly birds of prey – everything about them from their flight and song to

their plumage.

About ten years ago I took two years out of work and went to university to study woodland, grass and pond management, to learn more about habitats and environments which wildlife live in. The course was for three days a week and I enjoyed every day of it. However, after completing the course I found it difficult to find employment as there are so many volunteers wanting to get involved in wildlife and its conservation.

A few years ago I got into photography, which is a great help with

the pyrography as I can transfer images onto wood. I spent all my holidays on the Isle of Mull as there is no better place to see ospreys at first light at Lochdon and white tailed sea eagles at Loch Na Keal. There are buzzards on almost every telegraph pole, hen harriers, owls, deer and, by no means least, otters.

I have made some good friends through my love of wildlife, including the owners of the Wings Over Mull bird of prey centre (sadly, no longer operating) and I have donated to them several pieces of my pyrography work. I have met the wildlife cameraman, Johnny Kingdom and



his wife and received an invitation to join him on Exmoor to see the deer rut.

I visit bird of prey centres around the country with my camera just to get closer to the subjects to enable me to capture the fine detail in the feathers and feet, etc. so as I can reproduce them in the wood burning process. Being in full time employment I am unable to keep a bird of prey myself – being unable to devote the time, I feel this would be cruel on the bird. However, this gives me more time to study particular birds of prey and how they are used in falconry.

My love of wildlife has developed over the years and I will always be thankful to my father, with whom I shared many frosty, cold early mornings out in the countryside, for passing on to me in my early days his love for all wildlife.

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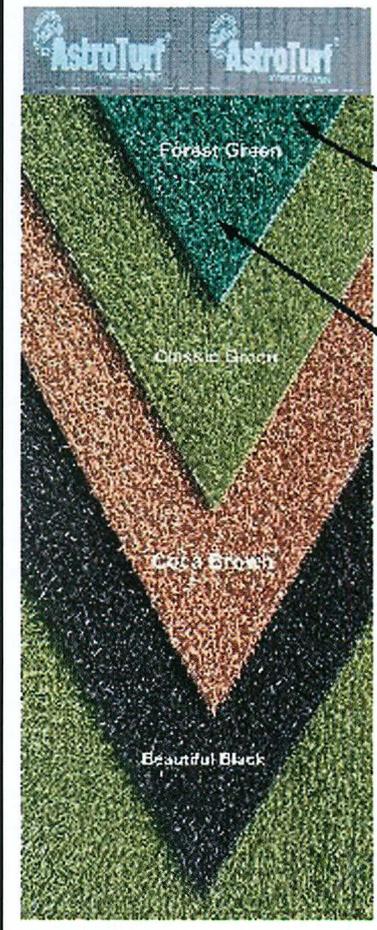
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Falconry Hunting Insights



Zdenek releasing his falcon

Falconry is based on the perfect co-operation of a dog, a bird of prey and their trainer. Come with me as I share my insights and our rituals as I observe this ancient way of hunting.

Low fog is rising while we feel the sun and blue sky above it. We are driving to the morning meeting in the very heart of South Moravia, Czech Republic, where most of the other participants of today's falconry hunt await our arrival in front of a lodge

owned by the local hunting club. Friends from Austria are there also; they had to get up much earlier than ourselves in order to arrive before the opening ceremony with which we begin our hunts. We greet a guide who will lead our hunting groups all over his hunting area for this entire day. But the opening ceremony must not be delayed any longer. He who is late will have to catch us in the fields. Besides, tardy hunters may have to take other falconers' sometimes not-so-kind teasing into account!

Relaxation Under a Hood

Calling hello to one another, hand shaking and like greetings are accompanied by common rituals. Hunting dogs are released from cars to get some fresh air, stretch and relieve themselves. Immediately afterwards we take blocks out of car trunks and our birds of prey are placed on them. All birds traveled "sheltered" which means they had hoods on their heads; they were not able to see and thus remained calm and relaxed during transport.

Birds of prey get used to hoods,



Peregrine Falcon in flight

which have to fit perfectly, from the very beginning of training. Hoods should filter out disturbing influences from the surroundings so that the bird of prey is not distracted before the hunt. An unsheltered raptor may try to fly far away for game, at such a distance that the falconer would have no idea what is being flown after. The hunt would change to chasing or searching for a falcon, which is off hunting on its own!

Hunters and Hunting Observers

Opening parade (formal gathering for instructions) begins at nine. Each falconer takes their bird of prey from the block onto their fist and fits a transmitter to it in case the bird might lose its way during hunting; he calls his dog and goes to the parade. The hunting guide instructs us on course and aim of this hunting day.

Eight birds of prey are in the group today; most are Peregrine Falcons or hybrids of Peregrine and Saker Falcons. However, one falconer who is attending mainly to look at hunting falcons has brought his Golden Eagle. Eagles hunt differently than falcons, so the eagle will be used just for meeting an errant fox or roe deer, or if a hare would jump

out during our movement to a new place. Definitely it will not have as much opportunity as the hunting falcons, but the eagle falconer knew he could not plan on much hunting for his eagle today. After instructions parade, our so-called falcon group sets off on a day of hunting.

Patient Waiting

We move to the central part of the hunting area, which we know very well from past hunts held in this location. We need not take long deciding where to go, we know which places are most suitable for hunting opportunity. The landscape is ideal here: huge fields used for agriculture regularly alternate with long drains and irrigation ditches that are overgrown with reeds and high grass. There are windbreaks and small field-woods at some places. Almost no dangerous pylons, tall metal towers typically made of crisscrossing steel bars that support high-voltage electric cables, can be seen. Not only are there enough pheasants here, the landscape also gives us a perfect overview, which is advantageous from a long-wingers' hunting tactics point of view.

One ditch which we begin hunting along leads far away to the fields. That's

why one of our colleagues waits about 200 meters in front of us: the pheasants will not run through the vegetation entirely out of our range! The other falconers stand at the beginning of the ditch trying to be as silent as possible, not wanting to chase the hidden game away. Of course pheasants know about our presence, but they think we do not know about them and stay in their hides.

The mild breeze blows against us, good for the dogs' work. They are irreplaceable during falconry hunts. Most any hunt with a falcon without a well-trained dog is doomed in advance. Falconers usually use Setters; the most popular among them are English Pointers. Their work lies in finding and pointing game, which means that they have to mark a place where an animal is hidden, but must not flush before it is given the owner's signal.

Dogs must be perfectly trained; they must not give in to their passion. Rivalry can be seen among the dogs, each of them would like to please its master and be the first one that discovers game. Sometimes pointers who have cooperated up to now will change in a group-hunt setting, becoming uncontrolled competitors!



Pointer doing his work

When a Falcon Loses Its Way

All falconers communicate with each other via short-wave radios. This has proven successful not only during the hunt itself, but during searches for birds of prey that fly away, out of the sight of its owner. Certainly each bird still bears not only brightly sounding, tiny bells which can be heard with every movement, but also mini-transmitters that send a constant signal which can be received over distances of 25 kilometers depending on ruggedness of the landscape. However, when a falcon disappears into high vegetation carrying prey, oral instructions of a colleague-falconer who observed the whole action at close range are the best for fastest finding of that bird. Telemetry searches can last many minutes, during which time no other bird of prey can be released; with short-wave radio communication it is often unnecessary to utilize the telemetry. Should two free-flying falcons have a dispute, one of them can easily be wounded or even killed. That is why finding a bird with its prey quickly is best; the other falconers can only do one thing: wait until the lost bird is found.

Escape From Teeth and Talons

Game is in front of us and a pointer is released. It picks its way carefully along the overgrown ditch so as not to flush

pheasants. Suddenly it pauses in the middle of movement: it points. The falconer, whose turn it is, takes the hood off his falcon's head. The bird looks around, shakes its feathers and jumps off the falconry glove into the air. It flies low for several meters, and then begins to flap its wings vigorously and gain height flying in big circles. Climbing flight is tiring. The bird knows from previous training that it must reach at least 150 meters in height, which can take many minutes. The higher its altitude at the beginning of an attack, the better will be its chance to catch up with a flushed pheasant and hunt it.

The laser altimeter shows the falcon has stopped at the height of 178 meters. It does not climb more, it only soars at the same height and observes activities below. Having reached "the position", the bird seems to stand against the wind at almost the same place, prepared to attack its prey which should fly out somewhere below at any moment. Just at that time the falconer issues a command to his dog to rout the game out of its hide. After numerous minutes of stiff pointing, alternating its gaze from where the game is hidden to the falconer to the bird of prey flying above and back, the pointer drives out the pheasant so fiercely that it has no time to think what it should or could do. Instinctively the pheasant flies upwards to apparent safety, out of the dog's reach.

The Prey Has Chance As Well

The waiting on falcon attacks immediately, chasing the flying pheasant. At first wings are flapped strongly to accelerate the stoop. After several flaps the falcon pulls wings to its body. In the shape of a perfect aerodynamic drop it falls to the ground at speed higher than 250 km per hour. Like a bolt of lightning it approaches the pheasant; in the last phase of the attack it tries to fly it down in order to catch it in the air. This male pheasant however is an old hand at this, and it does a sidestepping manoeuvre in the last fraction of a second. The falcon touches him only slightly, pulling out several small feathers. In its high speed it cannot change direction of flight fast enough, and before it can prepare for another attack in the air the quarry is missing in reeds of a neighboring ditch. The attack took only seconds. For today the pheasant won, the falconers will not send their raptors for it a second time. They maintain the ancient hunting rule that states: "The prey which was successful in escaping from the attack is not annoyed more in the same day."

The falcon is recalled to the fist, rewarded with a bit of meat for marvelous flight, and hidden under a hood to rest after strenuous performance. At least once more today it will have another chance. The number of releasings depends on amount of birds of prey in the group, the quantity of game in the hunting area, the success of other hunters, and on many factors that influence the process of hunting.

It is another falconer's turn; his bird of prey is relaxed, the whole process repeats. The results are always uncertain. Even if falcons are excellently fitted to hunt flying prey by nature, nowhere near each attack is successful. More likely the opposite is true, and it is rather the rule than the exception that only several animals are bagged at the end of a daylong hunt.

Rich Benefit From Poor Hunt

As we walk to another chosen location, we observe two roe deer. They cross the road and being now on unknown grounds, they run directly toward us. We stand motionless. At that moment when they notice us, about 50 meters away, they change direction just as the Golden Eagle is released. It performs an attack



A team of falconers

on the weaker of the two deer. Within some tens of meters the eagle has caught up with the animal, bringing it down to the ground and wrestling with it until the falconer comes and kills this roe deer.

What we just saw was an unbelievable coincidence. During the day the eagle was released several times to hunt hares, but they always escaped thanks to any of the hare's many tricks in the last possible moment of escape. Yet just now the eagle showed it is "the hunter par excellence"! All of us congratulate the successful hunter and talk about the event again and again. We are excited from the eagle's performance and success, but we would not exchange our falcons for even ten eagles! Everybody chooses that type of bird of prey that meets his or her requirements, we like its way of hunting.

We finish a half hour before twilight. The closing ceremony follows, lying out our bagged animals to give last respects and honor. In our group of birds of prey with excellent training, after many hot chances and many attacks, we have four pheasants and one roe deer lying on the ground before us. The result of today's hunting is average, but everybody is highly satisfied.

Most hunters cannot understand how we can spend so much effort, energy, free time and money for such poor (from

their point of view) result. But, the hunt with a bird of prey is about something completely other than the amount of bagged animals! It is mainly about all those marvelous experiences during hunting,

when we can observe amazing abilities of birds of prey and admire escape manoeuvres of their quarry all day. *Many thanks go to Elizabeth Schoultz for her help with this article.*



Peregrine falcon leaving the fist

2009

What a Year!

In December we had an incredible amount of snow – it was right up the front of my aviaries where the wind had blown it in and the temperature in my back porch was minus 12. The bolts on the weathering doors had to be opened with a hammer and the wheelbarrow was frozen to the ground. It was very inconvenient but beautiful at the same time. Needless to say that with such low temperatures the snow had set solid which made it hard to move around and it took two hours to dig a path up to the birds.

In the front garden, we found our lodger's car sitting giddily in the middle of the front lawn almost completely encased in snow and rather amusingly, we found several places where he had measured his length whilst getting to the house.

I'm a great believer in omens

I had got my old Goshawk, Isla, out in October (the one of Two Old Birds Together fame, see issue 79) but, the same as last year, she just would not operate in the snow and so I had to put her back temporarily into the moult chamber. I was twiddling my thumbs wondering what to do next when I found an advertisement for some Harris Hawks for sale and upon enquiring found that their breeder lived in a village called Spittle here in Wales. I'm a great one for omens – so trogged off to Spittle and bought a very nice female Harris.

By the end of November Lara, the new bird, was going a treat – she had been such an easy bird to train and was turning into an intelligent and bright companion. Our first hunting trip with Lara was to a farm on the Black Mountains – the entrance to this valley needed all of Chris's cross-country driving skill as after a two mile rutted track one makes a steep and hair-raising descent

into and across a fast running river which is gated – no guess then as to who has to ford the river and open the gate. This delight is followed by a bouldered ascent leaving one feeling quite battered upon arrival. But, I hear you ask, is it worth it? I should say it is.

Lara gets to hunt

This valley is just heaving with quarry and after a decent interval to let the bird settle after the rocky ride, we were all set to go.

Kevin, the Brittany, when released, burst forth upon his stage like he'd been fired from a cannon. This is his usual rampant style after a long break and the keen east wind didn't bother him one jot – within minutes he was marking a stunted gorse bush and so Lara had her first free flight. As Kevin pushed it out she took a lovely slip then threw up into the wind as it made it safely to a bury. He moved several more and she worked over him very confidently chasing plenty but not quite committing. By now, the dog was blown and Chris and I were frozen.

I felt that her overall performance lacked that final 'push' and decided that she needed a tweak to her weight – care had to be taken as the temperatures were still well below freezing.

Two days later the sun blazed onto the snow (which did nothing towards melting it) and with the sky an aching blue we set off on another foray. With the East wind still as sharp as a knife we headed to some woodland that would at least break the wind a tad and it wasn't long before Kevin was marking a bury. Although Lara had always seen the ferrets she had not flown over them yet and so I decided to fly her from the glove.

She watched keenly as the ferret was entered and it was two or three minutes

before we heard banging – she leant forward listening and in anticipation my heart was hitting my ribs. Seconds later the rabbit burst forth and I was a little tardy in releasing her. She stormed off in hot pursuit, but I reckoned that as it had had such a good head start she would be out of luck. How wrong I was. She had taken it in a deep patch of bracken and she was footing her very first head of quarry. I was chuffed to bits, as was she and I left her on it as I went to impart the good news. Well done team!

Then the blizzards started

For three days we suffered some of the worst blizzards ever known in Wales. Howling winds built the snow into impassable drifts and we had to dig our way out on several occasions to check and feed the birds, get wood for the fire and days in front of the log burner became a must.

Eventually, on the fourth day the sun made a re-appearance and the snow eventually softened and had all but disappeared, so off we went again. She had a very good slip on a ferreted rabbit but she unfortunately got it on the backend and as she maneuvered her feet to get a head hold, they headed for and entered, a 12 feet long clay drainage pipe. It's at times like this that I often wonder why I do what I do.

I looked at my options – there weren't many – so, whichever way one looked at it, it definitely required me to lay in a slushy, icy, freezing puddle. It became obvious that she had opened her wings to try to halt the entry into the pipe as she seemed to have her wings swept back over her head. They were about five or six foot into the pipe. I stood up, dripping and whilst mulling over my next move, I kicked the pipe, probably in pure frustration, but it had the desired effect as Lara and the



X-ray showing shattered leg

rabbit burst out into the open.

Now she had the room to make her move onto the head and it stopped dead in its tracks. As I got down to her I noticed that the centre toe of her left foot was pointing up her leg – hopefully only dislocated, but no, it wasn't, it was well and truly broken. She was tired and readily let me swap the rabbit for a lesser morsel and as I gently moved the toe back into position it felt gritty.

A visit to the vet confirmed that the break was just above the centre joint which, according to him, was a 'good' place for a break with a good prognosis – let it heal in its own time and all would be well. So into one of my huge moults

chambers went our Lara and thumb twiddling loomed large.

Beautiful day after beautiful day passed and I amused myself by building a snow man, a snow dog, a snow rabbit, etc. etc. All of which ended up looking rather sad as Kevin cocked his leg all over them - he was as bored as me.

As the snow cleared, out came the Goshawk

Eventually hope loomed as all the snow cleared and it was time to get my snow-shy Goshawk wound up again and back into action. Early starts from now on – none of this lying in bed until all hours (hope springs eternal).

By the middle of January she was doing 40 or so high jumps to get her fit and which was also good for me as I spent hours running up and down ladders. She flew free on the 28 January which ended in a stunning, successful flight – short, but oh so sweet. The following day was a cold but cloudless day which found us walking some very good local land – Chris held back with Kevin as Isla and I made a stealthy approach using gorse as cover – something moved to my right and off the girl went with that explosive power that makes Goshawks such excellent hunting partners – she shot low over the gorse and then threw up and winged over about 150 yards ahead.

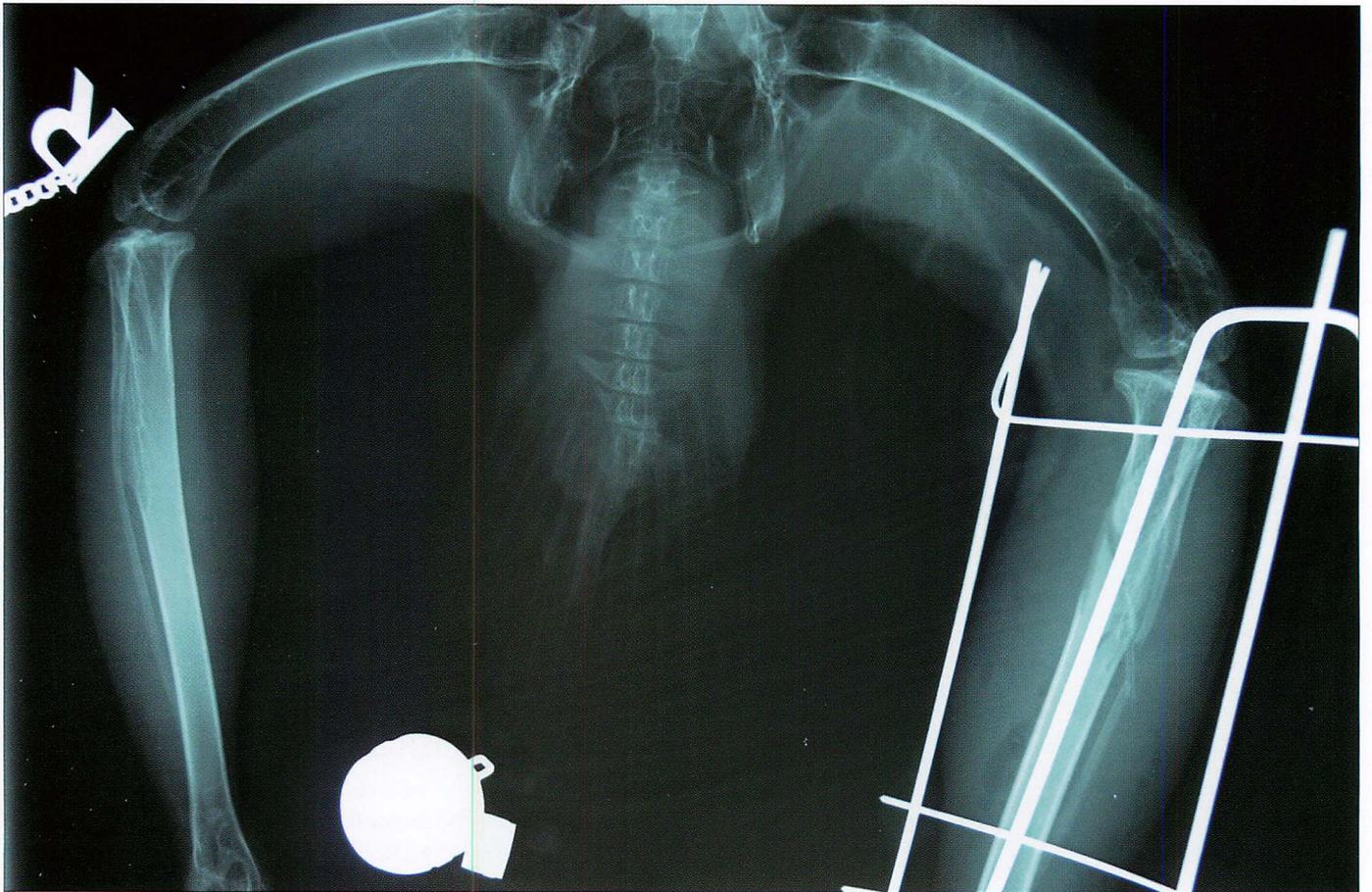
She must have it for sure. I ran 100 yards or so and stopped to listen. Nothing. I then ran again, stopped, listened and still nothing. As I rounded the end of the gorse, I saw her. Just standing in the middle of the field. I whistled and held my glove up – she just stood and looked at me.

Something awful had happened. But what. As I got closer she started to hop towards me dragging one leg. I ran to her and bent down – she hopped awkwardly onto my glove – she was in shock – her eyes unfocused. I, too was in shock.

What happened between then and arriving at the vets in Cardiff is still a blur. I can remember thinking over and over everytime you release a bird there are many things that can go wrong. Collision with a fence, electric cables, hit by a car, kicked or bitten by the quarry. As I wrote in a previous article on Isla, she knocked herself clean out on a fence post hidden in brambles and survived, maybe we would be lucky this time. But I could not really summon one ounce of hope. There was just something 'awful' about this whole episode.

One excellent piece of luck – Valley Vets in Cardiff had two first class avian vets on call – Jordi Colas specialised in avians and had worked specifically with Goshawks for a long time and Rob Harry was an orthopedic surgeon.

I was quite content to leave these two gentlemen in charge of my beloved bird – whatever the outcome I just felt confident that she could not be in better hands. We left her there to be x-rayed the following day and drove silently home to await news.



X-ray after the operation

Each hour of waiting seemed like a day

The call arrived in the morning. The X-rays showed a shattered leg, seven breaks in all with odd pieces of bone here and there. We had two stark choices. Either have her euthanized or go for it and rebuild the leg. I had to have time to think it through. I was fortunate indeed to have Isla in the care of two very highly specialised vets. Her age, 14, was against her for sure, but I knew of Goshawks still hunting at 18 years of age. Would it be fair to her, was I being selfish if I decided to go ahead? The questions just kept going round and round. If the operation was successful, there was every chance she would be good to go in time. As we all know anaesthetics are chancy for any raptor, the more I mulled over this question the more confused I became.

Well, for better or for worse, I decided that we just had to give her a chance. I telephoned and said "go ahead". Then the waiting became unbearable.

From start to finish Jordi, Rob and their team of nurses had given themselves an hour to anaesthetise prepare, open, reconstruct, externally fixate and close.

A tall order and one that would have had me quaking in my boots.

The call, so long awaited arrived at 2pm. I could tell from Jordi's voice that all was not well. They had successfully reconstructed the leg and they had been writing up their notes, quietly pleased with what had been achieved; the X-rays had shown that the leg was good and all being well, would enable her to be flown and hunted again. Suddenly, all went quiet. They all turned as one, but it was too late. She had been just coming round when, maybe, an embolism stopped her heart.

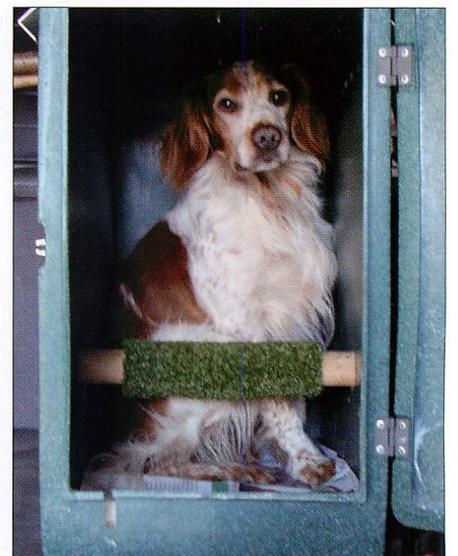
I tried to put myself in their shoes – how horrendous for them – all that work within the allotted time for it all to end like that.

I felt sick at heart and had it all been done for me or for her. I don't know. I couldn't think about it logically anymore and I still can't. I think I would feel better had I known how she did it. But even that wouldn't help of course.

I feel I must say a huge thank you to all the people involved and in particular thanks go to Valley Vets for their permission to reproduce the x-rays.

I am writing this article in September – so just to end on a high note – Lara the Harris hawk now has the full use of her feet, the centre toe has a slightly enlarged joint which doesn't seem to affect her in the slightest and as you can all see, Kevin the Brittany has booked his place in the car for the forthcoming season.

Good luck to all you falconers hovering on the cusp of a new season.



Kevin all ready to go

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Scottish Magic ...

A Rabbit Hawker's Paradise

The humble rabbit needs no introduction to anyone involved with British field sports. It's probably the most sought after quarry for anyone flying hawks or buteos and its demise would surely have a huge impact on British Falconry. It's no surprise that many of us make the annual trip north in search of this more than worthy prize.

Aberdeenshire, Scotland with its stunning scenery and abundant wildlife, is the ideal setting for a hawking holiday. Rabbit numbers are plentiful reaching pest proportion numbers, and a fit

hunting hawk is virtually guaranteed success. The cottage I rent yearly is perfectly set for a tranquil, yet action packed break, hawking the athletic Scottish hill coney's that reside. It really is a hidden gem of a place with stunning views, a local pub and little else!

The holiday begins with the long drive north. With a pre-dawn getaway we usually arrive at the cottage by 2pm giving us time to settle the hawks and dogs. The group consisted of myself, Steve Cross, and father and son team Simon and Peter Stokes. Peter although having never flown hawks, helps out

with the ferreting and general duties in the field, and with a lifetime of field sports under his belt keeps the evening conversation flowing with tales of stalking and puntgunning that's taken up most of his life. The cottage is basic but cosy and after a long day's hawking one can only imagine the evening banter when the drinks inevitably start to flow.

Flight Styles to suit all

Three male Harris hawks were flown, my Brittany and Steve's young Cocker worked the cover, and a team of ferrets worked the highly abundant rabbit holes.



Simon and Peter Stokes after a contented day



Steve Cross awaiting a flush from the Brittany

Almost any type of flight style can be employed in this type of country. The land surrounding the cottage is typically lowland with open burrows set within cattle cropped fields. Nice open bolters coursing their way to cover offer some excellent long hard flights. On the higher ground so typical of hill country, the heather takes over and this is the place where real sport is seen. Cover hawking is confusing at times for most hawks, but the Harris seems to enjoy the challenge and it appears to make them keener. Successful flights were hard earned for this is no easy terrain to work over. Add a little breeze and soaring flights over a good working dog and you will be rewarded with some of the most dramatic hawking there is. To soar a seasoned Harris is surely the epitome of broadwing falconry and on landscapes such as this can't be beaten. The trek up onto higher ground can be testing but the results make it all worthwhile.

This year things were more controlled, with an unknown hawk in the group mishaps can happen so we

played safe. It was decided that cast hawking was a no-go with this trip so a slipping order was agreed on - a pity really as both myself and Simon enjoy cast flying, it adds another dimension to the Harris's almost unique nature and to see them doing what comes naturally makes it more worthwhile. Generally each hawk was slipped until it caught quarry, this way they all returned home well flown and cropped.

Hawking in a group is so different to my solitary forays back home. Rabbits have become scarcer on my permissions and fieldcraft comes more into play. Quietness is essential if success is to be found. A raised voice, a cough or a whining dog can be the difference between a deep dig or a triumphant flight. The nature of a group hawking party means things can become excitable, watching a bolter with an eager hawk hot on it's tail will inevitably raise cheers from within the group - in fact it was a wonder they bolted at all ! But this ancient hill farm is different. Little has changed here and one senses

past lives harvesting this landscape for the fur and meat the coney provided, a cheap and viable addition to the table. In more modern times I doubt these warrens have been touched by a ferreter's hands. Five or six bunnies would sometimes bolt at a time and in a place like this it's almost impossible to fail. Sometimes a bolter would appear from a hole just a few feet away, secretly hidden by the heather, a coney would burst out from nowhere making a split second dash before vanishing again into another labyrinth of unseen holes..... whilst all the time the hawks became more and more switched on.

Hunt, point and flush

The dogs played a major part with this trip. Large rabbit numbers meant the landowner had the ground shot over periodically to keep the numbers down. They're quite shy on approach and walked up sport was minimal, so a hole marking dog or pointing breed letting us know that coney was home made it much easier. My Brittany loved this type

of work, she does it often back home in Shropshire hill country. Moving swiftly from one burrow to another and coming 'on point' with occupied burrows . . . watch her take a moment to weigh things up, we slip in the ferret and enjoy the show.

Simon's hawk is becoming the polished article, to have witnessed him progress over the last couple of years has been rewarding. Nothing much phases him, he will fly in a cast, work with any dog and is totally ferret trustworthy . . . this hawk was just starting his third season, he really does excel as a hunting companion and this year's trip showed him in true form. Juggling a full time job and finding time for hawking can make life difficult, but rigorous fitness training in the weeks prior to the trip ensured he was fully fit for Scotland. Lots of time in the field and evenings spent doing repetitive high jumping made this hawk more than a match for the well muscled hill bunnies. To watch him take on uphill slips was quite breathtaking and during the

week this hawk's bag total and fitness increased steadily. Simon doesn't own his own working dog.... he always relies on my Brittany or his father's Labrador to flush, but secretly he lusted for a 'point and flush' from the Brit as his hawk had never taken quarry this way. Who could blame him ? It's a controlled style of hawking and to watch a working breed suddenly freeze up on point is quite something to see. A moment of tenseness is felt as the dog holds it's point not knowing if the game will hold steady. The Brittany obliged him with a textbook point and Simon eagerly eased forward awaiting the outcome. The bunny was flushed, the hawk took his prize and the smile on Simon's face said it all. I like days such as this, and perhaps it's my age creeping in but to see my own little dog, which I trained myself, working and pleasing another lays testament that I'm capable of getting something nearly right.

Days such as these remain etched on your mind, although in time a memory will fade. Detail is everything and

advances in modern photography enable what was once only affordable to the select few, now to be within the grasp of many. Gone are the days of 35mm film and expensive processing costs. It's a digital age and a good camera is as simple or as difficult as you make it. A camera is a vital part of my kit and much of my field time is spent pursuing that perfect picture.

Scotland offers lots of 'action shot' opportunities and over the last few years I've managed to capture a few prized shots. When the dogs are marking occupied burries it is a dead certainty that something will present itself for the camera. If the dog comes on point then so does the camera. Scenes of a fleeing rabbit or a blurred wingtip in the corner of the frame are of no use to anyone, but out of the hundreds of frames taken, one or two more than made the grade.

To conclude

A week in a place such as this is over too soon, in fact a week just isn't long enough. Consider your travelling times



Simon Stokes rewarding his hawk



Authors 17th season male harris pursuing a rabbit

and two days are wasted, and with the Scottish weather system your remaining days are in the hands of the Gods. I've rebooked again for this coming season only this time for a ten day stay.

The drive home is always a depressing one, and although my hawk is flown almost daily back home, it's easily noticeable his fitness levels drop with the amount of hunting

opportunities I give him – to put it simply, nowhere compares to Scotland! The abundance of quarry is lesser and days hawking in Shropshire are a more laid back and less intense affair.

The secret of success with a holiday of this kind has to be numbers, kept to a select small group of well trusted friends ample sport and opportunities present themselves and everyone's

happy. Trigger happy ego trippers are best left at home. I've tried the commercial type of hawking breaks and after handing over a large sum of money find it disappointing to stand around waiting for little to happen. Arrange your own type of holiday with a small group of friends and costs will be cut – and the sport increased tenfold!



Simons third-season youngster on the chase

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REUNITED x 148

BALD EAGLE.....	1
BARN OWL 12.....	
BLACK KITE.....	1
COMMON BUZZARD.....	4
EURASIAN EAGLE OWL.....	7
FERRUGINOUS HAWK.....	1
GOLDEN STEPPES.....	1
GOSHAWK 9.....	
GYR HYBRID.....	22
HARRIS HAWK.....	42
INDIAN EAGLE OWL.....	6
KESTREL 8.....	
LANNER FALCON.....	4
PEREGRINE FALCON.....	6
PEREGRINE HYBRID.....	14
RED-TAILED HAWK.....	2
SAKER FALCON.....	4
SPARROWHAWK.....	1
TAWNY OWL.....	1
TURKEY VULTURE.....	1
WHITE HEADED VULTURE.....	1

LOST x 48 (this is a list of lost IBR registered birds)

54872	?3031?	BARN OWL
67799	?5698?	BARN OWL
70795	?7308?	BARN OWL
74331	?7248?	BARN OWL
76358	?7317?	BARN OWL
76378	?7321?	BARN OWL
76787	?7322?	BARN OWL
54126	?5342?	EURASIAN EAGLE OWL
75413	?7365?	EURASIAN EAGLE OWL
80663	?7597?	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
81297	?7906?	GOSHAWK
76941	?7458?	GYR/SAKER FALCON
80838	?7863?	GYR/SAKER FALCON
81333	?7911?	GYR/SAKER FALCON
5397	?2467?	HARRIS HAWK
10881	?1031?	HARRIS HAWK
32463	?2933?	HARRIS HAWK
43838	?4276?	HARRIS HAWK
53726	?5264?	HARRIS HAWK
55011	?5557?	HARRIS HAWK
57076	?7327?	HARRIS HAWK
62307	?6114?	HARRIS HAWK
69565	?6777?	HARRIS HAWK

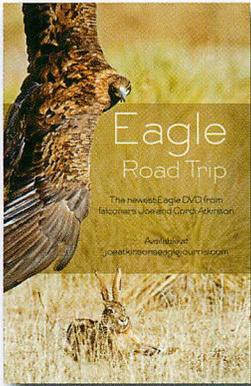
70470	?6951?	HARRIS HAWK
74086	?7281?	HARRIS HAWK
74780	?7300?	HARRIS HAWK
75885	?7348?	HARRIS HAWK
77553	?7545?	HARRIS HAWK
77828	?7556?	HARRIS HAWK
81140	?7873?	HARRIS HAWK
41961	?3993?	HOBBY
14504	?1107?	KESTREL
77238	?7155?	KESTREL
77241	?7155?	KESTREL
75545	?4279?	LANNER FALCON
78849	?6872?	MERLIN
78852	?6872?	MERLIN
68309	?5524?	PEREGRINE FALCON
78619	?7617?	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
81460	?7918?	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
76110	?7427?	PERUVIAN STRIPED OWL
80907	?6987?	RED-TAILED HAWK
40766	?3740?	SAKER FALCON
43348	?4237?	SAKER FALCON
66775	?6480?	SAKER FALCON
80684	?7861?	SAKER FALCON
64054	?6221?	SPARROWHAWK
80976	?7088?	SPARROWHAWK

FOUND x 19

60725	?5940?	BARN OWL
64495	?6149?	BARN OWL
80110	?7657?	BARN OWL
81362	?1825?	BARN OWL
81626	?33MG?	BARN OWL
63939	?6013?	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
80787	?CFC9?	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
51467	?7909?	GYR HYBRID FALCON
40822	?1054?	GYR/PEREGRINE HYBRID
35619	?2999?	HARRIS HAWK
45853	?4569?	HARRIS HAWK
50908	?5092?	HARRIS HAWK
81264	?702?	HARRIS HAWK
81508	?0008?	HARRIS HAWK
81056	?601K?	KESTREL
43015	?4222?	LUGGER X SAKER
81449	?3AS?	NORTHERN WHITE FACED SCOPS
81676	?2782?	PEREGRINE HYBRID
81299	?RPS1?	SPARROWHAWK

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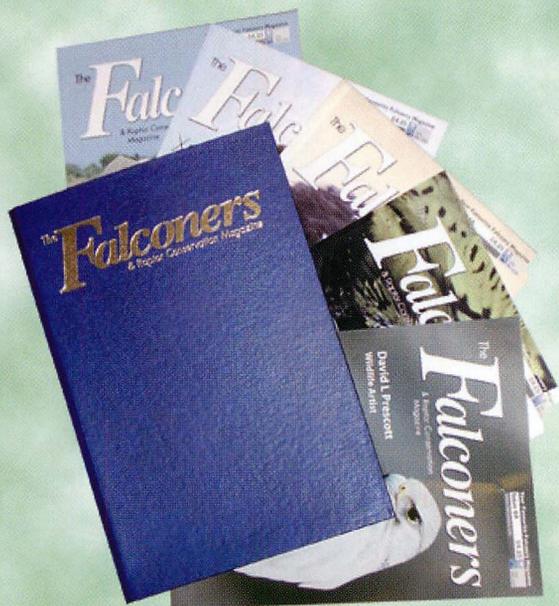
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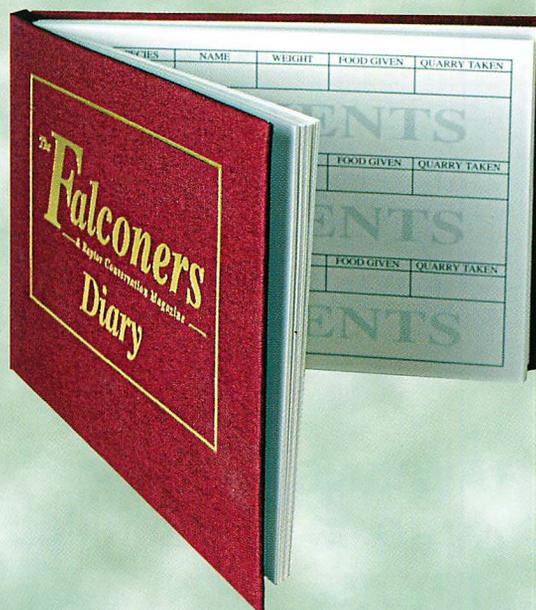
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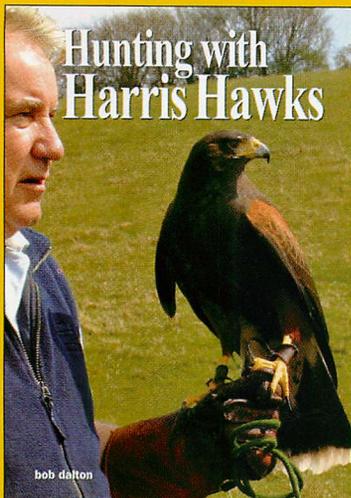
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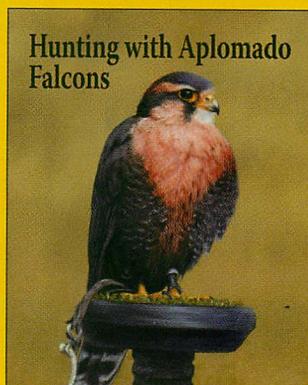
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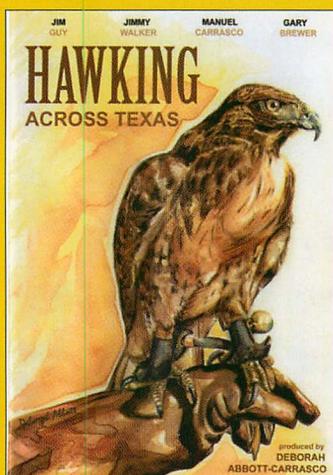
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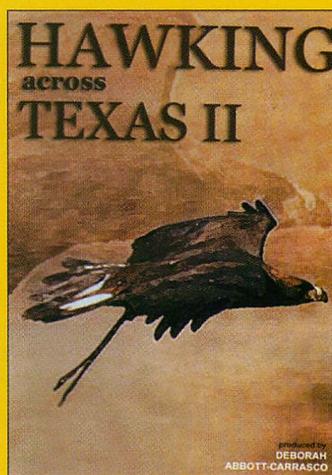
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