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Issue 85

£4.25

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ISSN  
0967-2206

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& Raptor Conservation Magazine



**The end  
of another  
great season**

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& Raptor Conservation Magazine

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**Front Cover:**  
Photograph courtesy  
Mark Williams -  
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## Spring 2011 / No. 85

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**Subscriptions:**  
UK & Eire: £16.50  
Europe: £20.00  
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# contents

- 4 News & New Products

---

- 7 Ask Chitty  
What we should look out for in hot weather

---

- 8 Hawk Board News

---

- 10 A Good Day – Despite the Cold  
Mark Williams flying his falcons in Canada

---

- 14 The Chronicles of a Crowned Eagle  
Andrew Knowles-Brown and this magnificent eagle

---

- 18 The British Falconry Fair 2011  
Bob Dalton tells us what to expect at this year's event

---

- 20 SUN  
Informal group set up by Government as explained by Jim Collins

---

- 22 We Were Falconers  
The story of Humphrey ap Evans

---

- 26 2nd UK Eagle fieldmeet  
Dr. David Glynn Fox tells us how the meet went

---

- 31 My Rant  
Peter Eldrett and his thoughts on today's falconry in the UK

---

- 32 The Falcon That Caught a Dragon  
Layla Bennett tells of her time on Dragons Den

---

- 34 Club Directory

---

- 36 IBR Lost & Found

I hope you all had a good and successful flying season and your birds are now well into their moult. I personally shall look back on this season with sadness, as my Harris Hawk, Purbeck, was put to sleep at the beginning of April having suffered from wing top oedema and a broken wing. Hopefully, I shall write an article for the next issue to tell my tale. I know of other falconers whose hawks have suffered the same wing-tip fate after one of the worst winters on record but at the time of writing the sun is out and spring is in the air. and we're looking forward to summer.

Now it's coming up for the falconers fair once again. This year sees a new venue for the event – Ragley Hall in Warwickshire. We have to see if there will be anything different from previous years, or will it be a case of "same meat, different gravy". If you do attend the event, please let me know what you think of the fair by dropping me a line by either letter or e-mail.

Also this year it is Hawk Board election time again. Please see the Hawk Board News on page 8. When you receive your voting paper, don't just moan and throw it in the bin. Candidates give up a lot of their time to represent you, the falconer and bird of prey keeper, so that we can continue to enjoy our sport. A lot of work goes on behind the scenes so please support your specialists and club representatives.

In the meantime, have a good read.

# editorial



# news & products

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

## Buzzards peppered with gunshots

**T**wo buzzards have been fatally wounded in shotgun attacks which have been described as "mindless, pointless and totally irresponsible."

The RSPCA is appealing for information about the incidents in the West Midlands and Cambridge after both birds sustained such serious injuries that they had to be put to sleep. An x-ray revealed that one of the buzzards was literally peppered with gunshot pellets.

It is thought that had the birds of prey not been discovered by members of the public and then rescued by RSPCA they would have suffered slow, painful and lingering deaths.

The first wounded bird was found languishing in a ditch on farmland at Little Wyrley near Walsall on 22 February.

RSPCA inspector Simon Davies was called and took the buzzard to the RSPCA Stapeley Grange Wildlife Centre in Nantwich, where a vet discovered it was peppered with shot and had two fractures in the wing.

Insp Davies, who is also the local wildlife officer in the West region, said: "I am horrified that someone has taken

a pot shot at this beautiful bird, fatally wounding it, and leaving it to suffer and die in a ditch.

"If a caring person had not called us I have no doubt it would have endured a long, painful death as it would have taken some time to die. This case was particularly tragic as other than these injuries this was a really fit and healthy bird."

The second injured buzzard was discovered by a member of the public near a reservoir at Limekiln Road in Cambridge on Thursday 3 March. It was hopping around with an injured wing and was unable to fly.

RSPCA inspector Richard Lythgoe was called and took the bird to a local vet, who confirmed after seeing the x-ray that the bird had been hit twice with a shot gun and would not be able to survive its injuries.

Inspector Lythgoe said: "This is mindless, pointless cruelty at its worst. This poor buzzard must have been in some considerable pain.

"I do not know if this bird was shot for fun, or for some other motive, but people need to be aware that shooting

a bird like this is a criminal offence and we will continue to prosecute anyone who commits crimes such as these."

Anyone with any information about either of these incidents should contact the RSPCA's emergency helpline on 0300 1234 999.



X-ray of Buzzard showing gunshot pellets

## CLA 2011

by Mike Clowes

Since I took over as the Hawk Board co-ordinator in 2001 an important part of my job has been to liaise with the Director of the CLA Game Fair in order to organize the 'Falconry Area'.

This involves planning the lay-out of

the tented area in which will be six British Clubs with one overseas club who provide a colourful and informative display for the public. They also provide a number of hawks for the static display.

That leaves 14 places for CFF supporters and another one for the HB/CFF stand. Ticket allocation has to be worked out and the tickets distributed. I arrive at the start of the week to ensure that the mini arena and

weathering areas are erected and correct, the water and electricity supplies are on and in the right place, and the partitions allowing 5 metres for each stand are erected inside the tent. All this has to be completed by mid afternoon Thursday so that displayers can set up by evening.

This year we have new sponsors in Volkswagen and I look forward to meeting them.

## ***The Taming of Genghis***

By Ronald Stevens ISBN 978-0-88839-700-3

Reviewed by Paul Manning – Amews Falconry

**A**s a falconer you will be asked on numerous occasions what is it about birds of prey that inspires such dedication, some might say even obsession? The simple answer would be to say, read *The taming of Genghis* by Ronald Stevens.

The taming of Genghis records the journey that a wild caught Jerkin takes (in the hands of a dedicated, experienced falconer) from his first kill in his ancestral home in Iceland to a moor in the Welsh marches, flying Grouse in partnership with a Falconer. Written in the mid 50's, following a lifetime of hunting with Peregrines, the author here realises a lifelong dream to trap and train an Icelandic jerkin, at the time a bird with almost legendary status within British Falconry and the ultimate test of his knowledge and skills

The book is relatively short having only 127 pages and has no pictures or illustrations. Nonetheless it is a fabulous read.

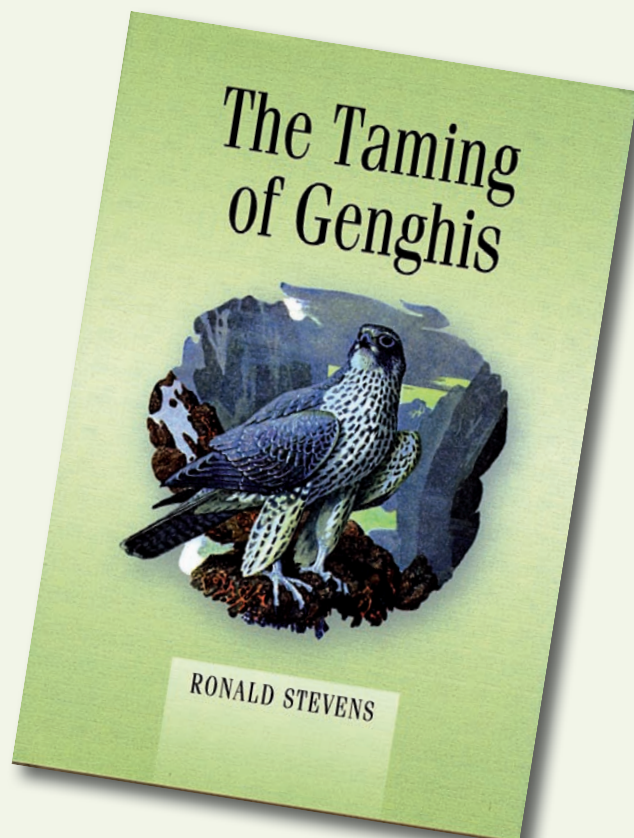
Having travelled to Iceland and found an occupied eyrie, the author then stakes out the site, waiting for the time when his fledgling takes to the air and starts to hunt. He then traps his Jerkin and ships him home, and prepares for the period of turning him from terrified and angry Gyr to biddable and trusting hunting partner.

This process is described in minute detail. While the exact method of training may differ from most today, the emotions invoked, the attention to detail, the level of obsession, tension, care, elation and heartbreak, resonate totally with any falconer reading it today.

The slow process of gaining the bird's trust, the acceleration to flying to a lure, and then to the first flights free, are all described brilliantly. Also, not just the mechanics, as in so many books, but the thoughts and emotions that flood through the falconer as he plans each stage of the training, watches for signs that progress has been made, desperately tries to avoid inevitable set-backs, and assesses when to take the next steps on this most life enhancing of journeys.

Probably the most poignant chapter in the book deals with the day at the end of the journey, when the author loses his falcon. The raw description of his feelings not being able to sleep, the dumbness and despair, the feeling of resignation and awful finality that comes with the realisation that all avenues have now been exhausted.

I won't spoil the end by describing the final outcome of the book, because I hope that you have the opportunity to read it for yourself. Just to say that, as with all of Ronald



Stevens books *The Taming of Genghis* is written with understated elegance and the end is as uplifting as the rest of the book.

Whilst, by highlighting what makes the falconer's relationship with his falcon so special, it could be considered as aspirational, it does not in any way understate the level of knowledge and commitment necessary to pursue falconry successfully. So anyone inspired to take up the sport through reading this book will undoubtedly approach it with a healthy mix of humility and awe that falconry birds deserve.

This publication, therefore, is one of those rare books that I would recommend to everyone; experienced falconers, beginners in the sport and anyone else who would just like to understand what makes falconry such a fantastic way of life.

You can obtain a copy by contacting Coch-y-Bonddu Books **Tel: 01654 702837 [www.falconrybooks.co.uk](http://www.falconrybooks.co.uk)**

## Book Review

# Arab Falconry History of a Way of Life

*Roger Upton*

ISBN 978-0-9565332-0-3

*Reviewed by Peter Eldrett*

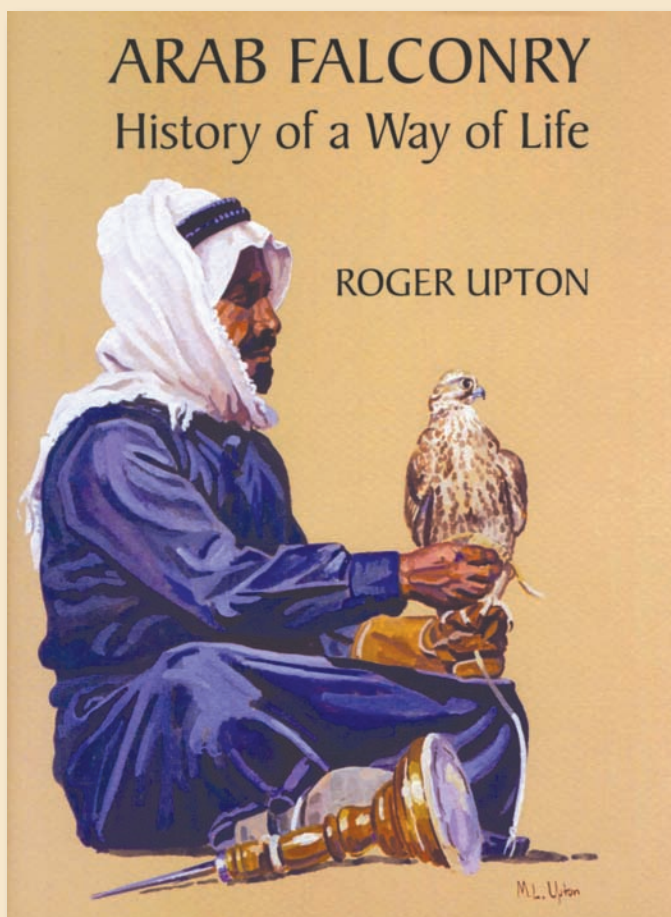
Anybody who has read any of Roger Upton's works knows what a treat is in store in reading this volume. This is an up-dated version of the book first published in 2002 by Hancock House Publishers and Roger's passion for falconry and the history of this noble art comes through in abundance in his writings. He is well known for his chronicles of his life and as a major contributor to falconry, and in this book Arab falconry takes precedence.

The book is laid out in nine chapters – The Arab and Falconry, Hawks, Trapping, Furniture, Training, Quarry, Hawking the Houbara, Hawking other Quarry and At Hunting Camp or Home. The book finishes with a glossary and a short bibliography for anyone who wishes to find out more on falconry in the Middle East. Unfortunately, there is a design fault on the contents page as none of the chapters correspond with the page numbers shown. There are other slight design mistakes in the book, but they should not in any way ruin what is otherwise an excellent read.

Well known artist Mark Upton, the author's son, has contributed to the many illustrations in the book and there are also line drawings by Roger and many photographs used in each chapter. Also, there are extracts from Roger's own diaries to complement the main text and not only do we learn what he has experienced in the past, but also his sense of humour comes to the fore in some of the text. Quotes from other authors and travelers such as Lt. Col. DC Phillott and Wilfred Thesiger are used.

As you would expect from an author of such standing, the text is an easy read and takes the reader on an incredible journey in the comfort of one's armchair. The design of the book overall is easy on the eye and at just about 225 pages in length, you don't feel that you have just 'waded' through an overly hefty piece of work.

This up-to-date volume is very much recommended if you have not already purchased the first edition and



it will sit very well on anyone's bookshelf. As already mentioned, the book has many illustrations but it is Roger Upton's text that is the real winner here.

This edition is published by Medina Publishing Ltd., Newport, Isle of Wight and can be obtained from Coch-y-Bonddu Books (see [www.falconrybooks.co.uk](http://www.falconrybooks.co.uk)). Price : £25.00.



# 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

**In the last issue of this publication John dealt with precautions we should take in extreme cold weather conditions.**

**At the other end of the scale with the on-set of summer, what should we be doing to ensure our hawks do not suffer in extra-hot conditions?**

### **Hawks in hot weather**

Sitting here on a glorious Spring afternoon, it's tempting to feel the cold weather has finally gone and summer is just round the corner.

It's therefore time to start thinking about how to prepare for keeping raptors in hot weather rather than the extreme cold we experienced this winter.

As ever, there are a number of areas that need to be considered.

**Hyperthermia** Birds of prey are often more sensitive to heat than to cold. They therefore should not be tethered in direct sunlight, but should always have access to shade and shelter. The same applies to aviaries, especially when clear plastic has been used in the roofing creating a greenhouse. Just as with dogs, birds can die in hot cars, so boxed birds should similarly be placed in cool shade as well. Birds should have access to water at all times – both for bathing and drinking. This is particularly pertinent for exercising birds which can easily dehydrate during exercise in hot weather. The amount of flying should be tailored to the weather too: even the fittest birds will not be able to do so much on hot days.

**Parasites** These like hot weather too! The major problem is fly numbers. Not just the blowflies that can strike any wound, but also biting flies- midges, gnats and mosquitos. In themselves these cause few problems. However they do spread various diseases including poxvirus and blood parasites, Leucocytozoon and avian malaria. Adult birds can often cope with low numbers of blood parasites.



However, young birds often cannot and these parasites can build to fatal levels. Control is by basic fly control in mews and by avoiding the stagnant water where mosquitos breed. If pools near aviaries/ mews cannot be drained then there are environmentally friendly solutions.

For flying birds visiting heavy mosquito/midge areas, fipronil spray can be applied to the bare skin of the face and legs. Warm wet weather also encourages build up of invertebrates and parasite eggs/coccidial oocysts in soil/turf based aviaries. Regular mute sampling may be useful to check numbers are not building up.

**Food spoilage** Food spoils in hot weather. Frozen foods should therefore be defrosted in a more controlled area than in cold weather. In particular, flies, beetles and rodents should be excluded from defrosting areas as they will introduce disease, eg botulism. Food given in the morning should be watched and removed if it is not eaten in a few hours or it will spoil in the aviary. Species that cache food should be watched very closely as this may be revisited after it has become contaminated – if food caching is

occurring then the amount given must be cut back.

It is especially important to monitor birds on a regular basis. While moulting or breeding birds are placed in aviaries so they are not disturbed, they must not be neglected. As mentioned above even small wounds are more easily infected and even fly struck. Similarly, any illness/ injury becomes more serious if not picked up early enough – disease is much less common in aviary birds than tethered birds, but is almost always more severe when found.

Moulting birds should, therefore, be checked regularly and ideally still fed on the fist to allow daily checking.

Breeding birds are much more difficult as disturbance will affect breeding performance. Nonetheless, as many viewing panels as possible should be placed in any seclusion aviary so birds can be watched and monitored each day. Mute sampling is useful to assess parasite levels and is suitably non-invasive.

Hopefully we'll have another warm dry summer and birds will be well-rested before the next hunting season!

Nick Kester  
Communications Officer



**A**s the breeding season gets underway, falconers will be making decisions about a possible purchase. Of course all the paperwork must be in order when they buy, and Animal Health have made two important changes to the way they run the regulations. First, and most importantly, they are doing away with the 'semi-complete' Article 10 certificate. This means that when breeders use up their existing, pre-issued stocks, no more will be available. Breeders will then have to move fast to obtain A10s before selling hawks for imprinting.

Animal Health will do their utmost to turn around your application in sufficient time but breeders can help by being as efficient as possible. The reason for this change after years of apparent straightforward issuing of 'semi-completes' is that there has been an increase in their fraudulent use – not just for birds of prey. There is always someone who thinks he can buck the system and in so doing wrecks it for us all.

In order to help smooth applications by breeders, Animal Health has placed a 'Word' version on its website. This is not immediately obvious to the casual Internet user, but go to [www.defra.gov.uk/animalhealth/about/formsandfees](http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalhealth/about/formsandfees) and you will find it.

The document code is FED1012 and once completed you are advised to send it by registered mail with the correct money as soon as possible; they will accept an email but must have a hard copy and the money before they can issue, all the email will do is alert them to its arrival and enable them to start the process. Remember, it is illegal to transfer a bird of prey requiring an A10 if you do not have it to hand. Prosecutions have happened and will happen again if we do not comply.

For those species that also need to be registered under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (mostly UK bred goshawks and golden eagles; peregrines and merlins are exempt if bred in the UK with an A10), Animal Health is working towards a form that enables the A10 and the registration to be completed at the



# The Hawk Board Election

**19th August, 2011**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CLOSING DATE

**17th JUNE, 2011.**

Forms received after this date will not be accepted.



same time. This is still in draft format but once agreed should make life easier.

The Hawk Board recognises that most breeders are one-man-bands and that there is a great deal to do at this time of year. However, the law is the law and Animal Health, despite making matters as straightforward as possible, will not accept excuses.

### Election time

Elections to the Hawk Board are here again with Jim Chick, Derek Stotton and Karl Ledley retiring by rote. Elsewhere in this paper you will find details of how to put yourself or others forward. I would just say that those that are

elected as specialists find themselves making a great deal of policy that affects falconry, and bird of prey keeping. So if you think something needs doing there are three ways to go about changing it. You could grumble about it in the pub and hope someone does something; you might contact your club representative or specialist and ask them to represent you; you could get elected and make a difference. Up to you.

As an aside, if you are a grumbler in the pub, you can do something. Why not come to the Falconry Fair (May 1-2 Bank Holiday) or the Game Fair (22-24 July) – two events at which we always have a presence but they may be others

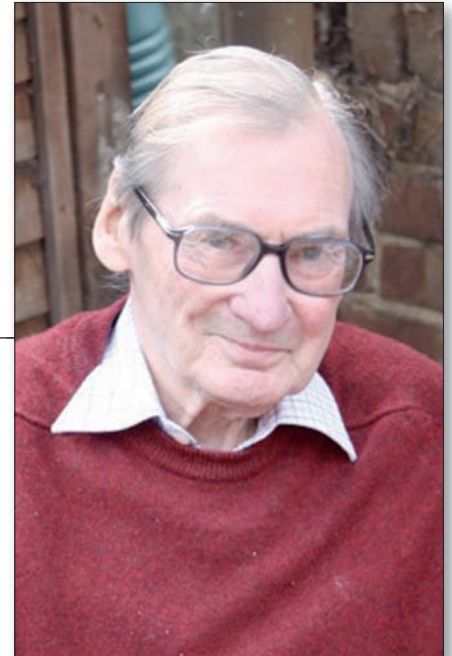
– and talk to the Hawk Board direct? We really want to hear from you. The communication channels never close because ultimately you are the reason for our (the Hawk Board's) existence.

## Derek Starkie

It is with regret to inform readers of the death of Derek Starkie, long standing member and treasurer of the Hawk Board and Campaign for Falconry. Derek died 10 March in the early hours of the morning after a short illness and was liked by everyone who knew him.

He was such a stalwart of the falconry fraternity, without being a falconer himself and also a gentleman. He contributed much to the hawk board meetings and will be sorely missed.

Our thoughts go to his friends and family.



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# A Good Day – Despite the Cold



Hun busting out of the bush

**W**ell contrary to what I thought earlier this week, I did get out today on my day off. Temperatures were a balmy -20c with highs of -18c on this overcast dull day, although there were promises of blowing snow coming later this afternoon.

In spite of 10cm of blowing snow that fell recently I saw lots of huns but most are still above ground due to deep drifted snow which as a result makes them almost impossible to fly in their usual spots since they don't hold to point or even when a bird is put up a long ways off.

It reminds me of winter grouse hawking except if they do bump and cover is not far they will likely dump in the cover instead of flying out of sight like

grouse. If that cover is a “do-able” set up then we still have a flight ...as was the case both times today.

I did see a nice haggard gos, male snowy owl and a juvenile prairie this morning during my drive to find game but fortunately it was a brief day compared to some days this season. I don't think I did more than 60 or 70 miles today and only came close to getting stuck once. The snow drifts are significant in places and when scouring the fields for hun digs, the drifts can come up on you quickly if you don't pay attention to the road. Like white on rice the drifts are somewhat unseen in this flat white light.

### High in weight

First to fly was Wallace and he was much more robust this morning flying at 626 grams, his highest weight yet this season,

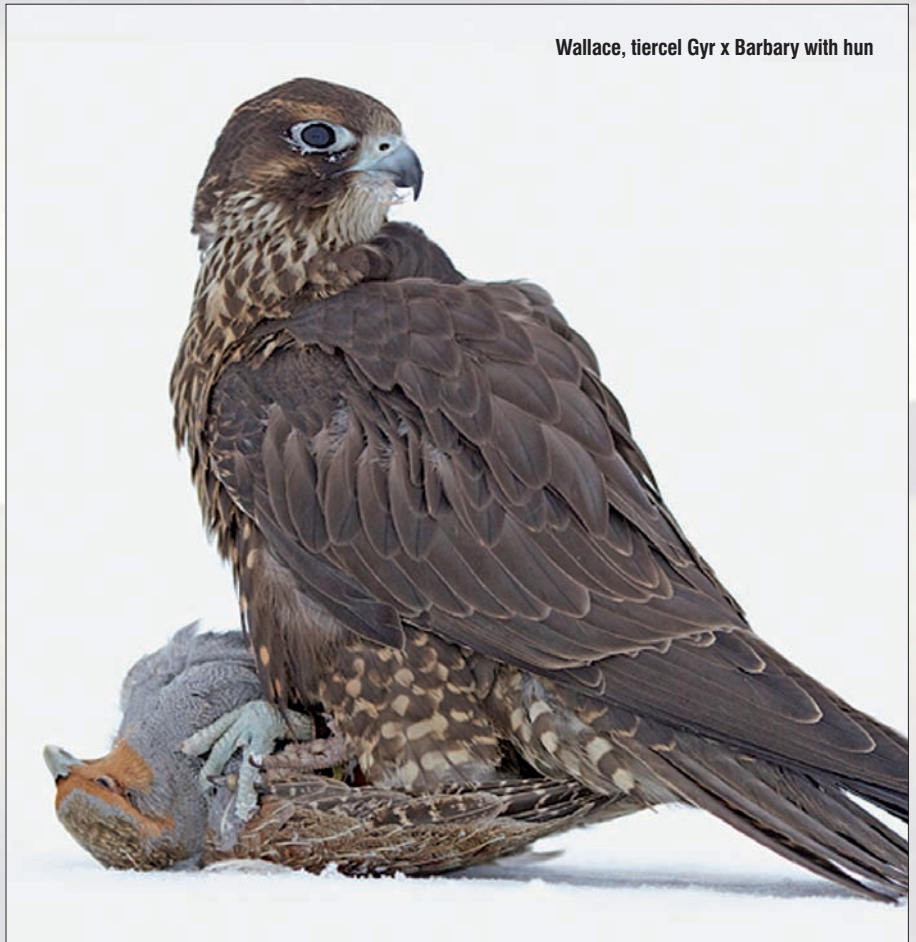
but he still took his usual +/-400-500ft pitch that he does these days in late season although he made no attempt to land right upon take off ... as he has also been inclined to do now and then recently. He is heading out and climbing up nicely and I have a covey of huns up ahead that put into a bush having been previously bumped from their spot out in a field. I walk in casually and hope for the best with dogs close at heel while Wallace appears to be taking an even better pitch upwind ...encouraging. At about 50 yards I send in my dogs and out go the huns across the field as I had hoped and intended. He has a clean shot at them right out in the wide open. A fumbled bind ...or at least it slips out of his feet as he sweeps up and through it at the bottom of his stoop and the chase is on .... right in my direction, since the

Hun flushing over the pointer



only cover is a few scattered bushes along the road. The hun makes it to the sparse cover of a lone bush nearby and Wallace pulls off and remounts. Had he been a bit keener I know he'd have "gos-hawked" it in cover. Meanwhile all three dogs follow up and have the hun pinned in the bush and they are on solid point. I can see the hun on top of the snow deep in the bush and whoa the dogs to hold and decide to go grab my camera to take a picture giving Wallace more time to remount. Wallace is up nice and wide when I get back and send them in to flush. They hold momentarily rigid on point at my command to "get em up" ...before one dog suddenly breaks after much encouragement from me and then all hell lets loose. Out goes the hun as the photo illustrates and again heads right out across open territory in the opposite direction and at right angle to the road and one and only fence. Wallace makes a direct hit and the hun bounces on the hard wind driven snow but rights itself, gets airborne and heads right back at me. I am holding a small 70- 200mm lens but ready myself as if to catch a ball as I can tell the hun's trajectory is making it fly right past me. I manage to get a few shots as it passed by

Wallace, tiercel Gyr x Barbary with hun



Hun heading back to safety of cover



at high speed. These are rare moments when out hawking and the quarry heads right at ... or very near you and you have camera at hand ....but yet I never manage to time it when falcon comes in for the hit and I am tracking the quarry and falcon in the frame. Wallace is right on it's arse as it passes by me flying for it's very life and he cuts the angle and nails it as it runs out of steam just as it reaches the fence. A brave hun that flew well in spite of being hit twice and I'm appreciative of it's supreme sacrifice in this "almost" natural drama. I crop Wallace up after a few hero shots and we head on.

Next is Coal the tiercel peregrine and I am eager to see how he will fly since his last flight two days ago he quit mid-way on his usual high ascent and glided down to my feet and puffed up, sitting on one foot in those bitter -30c temperatures as if to say "I quit". He is 590 grams today and it is 10 degrees warmer this morning and it showed in his flying. He was back to his old self and took off climbing and did not turn to come back for quite some ways in the distance. At one point I thought he was flying at check but nothing is that stupid to be flying

in this weather as even barn pigeons tend to stay indoors. Funny though, just before take off he sits puffed up on the glove and lifts a foot and has "I'm not gonna fly" written all over him. Yet he does fly though and very nicely. I am relieved at his return to his old self from the previous flight two days earlier and I make a mental plan to quit flying past -21c in future. It achieves nothing for me or the bird.

#### Smart Pointer?

He is coming back over at a nice pitch, maybe 700ft or so and still climbing as I walk on and down the one side of a hedge. One dog (Lewis my pointer) is smart (well that's a lie) but is walking down the gravel road parallel to the cover while my wirehairs join me in deep drifted snow on the opposite side. Out go the huns at the other end and head to very distant cover. I keep my eyes on the huns shouting words of encouragement to the dogs to keep up with the flight in my eagerness to keep the huns from turning back to cover. Coal hits one down with an audible whack that carries back to me loud and clear. I see him pitch up and yet

the hun is still up and flying so he chases it to four big steel grain bins sitting out in the middle of no-where. He appears to go in on the hun as it reaches the base of the bins. I run back to the truck, drive up to him and as I arrive at the edge of the road, I see he is not sitting on his prize as first thought. I start to walk out to him but he remounts and climbs up nicely as I wait him out. I know the hun has not gone as he would be stupid to break out in the open. I walk down the opposite side of the bins to the dogs while Coal heads off to get height. I suddenly hear the dogs give voice and run between the bins to see the hun busting out across the open back to cover.

Coal was off to the north when the hun was obviously bumped by the dogs and he got beat to the cover. I call the dogs off and let the hun see another day. He flew well back to cover and should survive his ordeal. I don't want this flight to get ratty. I am pleased if not a little relieved with Coal's effort and flight and called him in to a dead hun.

No flying for a few days now due to work and the weather is still going to be very cold until Monday.

Single Hun put in cover



Hun busting all over



# The Chronicles of a Crowned Eagle



Isis on the look out (Picture by Derek Hutchison)

**O**n the 6 June 2008 the little eaglet forced its way out through the tough shell to what it didn't realise was the alien environment of an incubator, it weighed 75 gms. I secretly wished for it to be a male as all previous crowned chicks bred here had been females and I had earmarked this one to pick up and fly the coming season. A week later the DNA results would come back, a female. Oh well, you can't win them all; a female would be fine to fly. I named her Isis and she was fostered back to a pair of martial eagles when she was 10 days old. It took 16 long weeks before she was hard penned. Her foster parents were attentive and fed her well. I also visited once a day so she could see what a human was. My feelings are that I don't see the point of having a seclusion parent reared eagle; it's stressful enough to go through the normal manning / training period without the bird being afraid of us two-legged predators as well.

In the last couple of weeks before she was removed from her rearing pen, I introduced the glove, which she would step up onto. The hood was rubbed all around her body and head so she was not afraid, and I had fitted false aylmeri anklets. Nylon jesses had not been fitted nor had she been restrained in any way. I hoped this extra pre-manning would help her to ease through the next few weeks. It was into October before I felt she was ready to be picked up and the move into her permanent mews was quite easy. She had her own 8ft x 8ft inside pen where she would be free lofted, so I just did my usual daily visit, I picked her up this time with jesses attached and moved her from one pen to the other. The shock of moving out of her comfort zone for the first time kept her firmly attached to

my glove so before she knew what had happened we were in her new mews.

I increased the daily visits and started weight reduction; although I hadn't weighed her from the feel of her keel she certainly wasn't anorexic. It would take quite a while to get her down to weight and it was at least two weeks later, after gentle introduction to the outside world of dogs, cars, tractors, sheep etc. that I was able to get her onto the scales. She weighed in at 9lb 8oz, quite some way to go yet, bearing in mind that a previous passage female crowned eagle that I had flown, a few years earlier, flew at 6lb 6oz. Isis settled quite quickly, showed her contempt for the dogs but was not afraid of them. One thing she did do, which I have found a lot of African species that I have handled do, is freeze. If something upset her or she didn't like something she would crouch down and not move, to the extent that you could go and pick her up either side of her wings, turn her over, do what you would with her and she wouldn't move. This I took to be a defence mechanism, which I haven't seen in non African species.

### Reduction in weight

I had aimed on a weight loss of about 1/2oz a day, so it took about two months to get her down to anywhere near where she wanted to start jumping to the fist. Once I got her to work her weight loss improved, this was without having to reduce her food intake. It was into the new year of 2009 that Isis was flying confidently to me on the creance, soon after she was flown free without any problems. Next was to try her at quarry, we only have rabbits here on the farm so that would be her first intended target. I had always had my dogs out with us throughout her training so she was happy to have them about; we worked some rough rushy ground that always holds a few bunnies and sure enough a few started bolting out in the distance as the dog worked through. She seemed very disinterested and when a point came close by I hoped things might change. The dog flushed, the rabbit bolted, she sat, I caste her off and she flew in the opposite direction to the rabbit. Hmmm so plan B was instigated, I had earlier rifled a rabbit which was in my bag and with her hooded I attached a line to it and hid it about 10 ft from a



Andrew Knowles-Brown with Isis (Picture by Andrew Knowles-Brown)

handy gate post. I unhooded her on the post, she scanned around quite happily, I walked away about 30 paces pulled the line, the rabbit shot out, she spooked in horror to disappear at high speed. I had made the mistake of assuming that like a golden eagle if it moved she wanted to kill it. She was afraid of this moving fur ball, even though she was fed plenty as she was growing.

### Back to basics

Over the next couple of weeks she was introduced to a pulled rabbit while on her bow perch, she soon learned what a rabbit was all about and learned to 'kill it' whenever one was dragged past her. Back to plan A, same patch of rushes, similar point, flush, and off she goes just about text book style. At this time she's flying at 6lb 15oz, I felt her urgency was not enough so a few more ounces to go yet. She was though taking on flights,

thus improving her fitness all the time. I kept up the same regime and soon she took her first rabbit. I had only just walked about 100 yards out from the house when the dog bumped a rabbit in a small patch of rushes. The bunny ran fast and straight towards a 5 bar metal gate about 200 yards away, Isis was in pursuit mode and gaining rapidly on this slightly downhill slip. The rabbit did as all rabbits do, which is judge to perfection the interception point, the moment both rabbit and eagle would both arrive together was to coincide with the rabbit ducking under the gate. I could see the scenario, the moment of impact and the end result of a shredded eagle. The rabbit did as predicted but jumped through the bottom two bars, Isis was close and focused on her quarry. At the very last moment she tipped a wing and she flipped over the gate and down again to nail her prize. I breathed a sigh of



Isis, the Crowned Eagle (Picture by Derek Hutchison)

relief and let her have her fill. She had one more kill before I fed her up to try and get her moult started.

The 2009/10 season turned out to be pretty poor, in fact disastrous, as we had record breaking rain during the first part of the season and then from December the snow and cold arrived, which stayed until February 2010. Quarry was having a particularly hard time as well so I decided to stop flying mid way through January. My intention for that season was to try and get Isis entered at hares but it was not to be.

Season 2010/11 started early as I had some field meets in September and October to attend so conditioning began in late July. Isis was flying well at home around the 7lb mark but I knew she would have to be sharper to attend away meets. We went down to Lincolnshire in October where she was introduced to brown hares. Although she committed herself to chasing these giant rabbits I could tell she wasn't putting her all into the slips. At the end of the first day one of the other eagles had killed a hare, we pulled this out of a convenient bit of undergrowth for her to latch onto. She was straight onto it and after a small

feed she traded off nicely. Next day she knew what hares were all about and soon took her first brown hare, it tried to duck down into a deep dyke but she did a nice about turn as she overshot her target and took the hare on the banking rolling down into the water. She tried hard over the next couple of days taking many flights, but an inexperienced eagle can be made to look foolish by hares. She had to wait until the end of the last day before she was able to put another hare in the bag.

#### On a Blue Hare Moor

It wasn't to be until the end of December, due to the combination of being away and the first session of Arctic conditions that I was able to get up onto my local moor. When I go to blue hare country, I prefer to take a bird that hasn't been before up in October, this is so they are able to see the hares before they turn white. It helps to get them used to knowing what these animals are in their roany brown livery, rather than wait until later in the year before they see these white apparitions in an alien landscape. But I had no option one week before the end of the year it was to be.

The hares were thin on the ground but the dog worked hard and found them sitting very tight. Isis would burst off the fist when the hare first flushed, but she soon slowed after seeing what she was chasing. I had anticipated this and had a freshly killed hare in my bag and did a 'sleight of hand' / 'roll down the hill' trick to make her think she was chasing a live hare. This ruse worked and she took her quarry with gusto. A small feed and trade off and we were ready for the next flush. The difference was immediate and she took on each hare as I would have expected. It took a couple of days before the right slip came, but when it did she just flew down the hare and took it easily.

It has taken longer than I would normally expect to get Isis entered, but this was due to a number of extenuating circumstances, although the end result has still been attained. She has made mistakes as have I, mainly incorrect weight control, but my aim now is to consolidate on the successes. I will now concentrate on increasing Isis's experience and hunting ability; more time will need to be spent on the moor weather permitting that is . . . it's snowing again.



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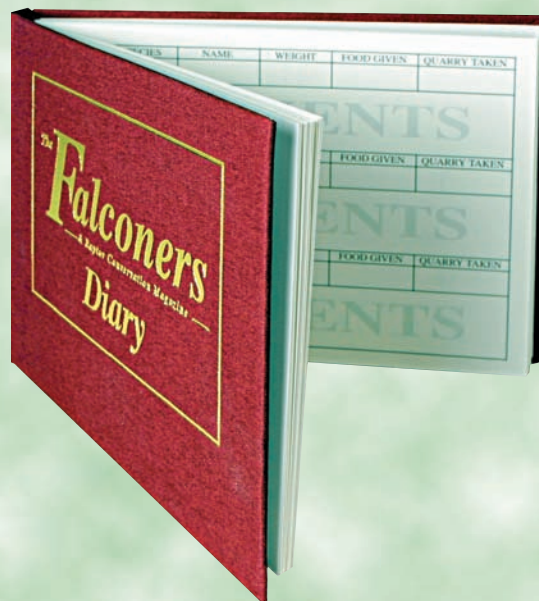
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# The Falconry Fair — 2011



Falconer Bob Dalton

**A**t last the worst kept secret of the falconry year is out with the confirmation that this year's British Falconry and Raptor Fair will be staged in the superb parkland setting of Ragley Hall in Warwickshire. For more than 25 years this setting has been home to the Warwickshire and West Midlands Game Fair and last year played host to the CLA Game Fair. The Falconry Fair was in need of a move and what an excellent one it turned out to be. With the magnificent hall itself acting as backdrop to the proceedings the setting is about as good as it gets. Also, there is no down draft to hinder those involved with the flying displays. This was a common criticism of the former venue for the Fair and I can speak with personal experience when I say no such hindrance to a good display will have to be endured at Ragley. There is plenty of natural lift with there being blocks of woodland and a decent stretch of water. All that is needed is some decent weather.

## Sponsors

The principal sponsors of the event will once again be long time enthusiastic supporters Kiezebrink UK Ltd., and they have laid on a couple of extra activities to celebrate the move of the Fair. Bob Dalton and Jemima Parry-Jones will be giving two demonstrations each day at the Kiezebrink stand, one will feature imping and the other coping birds of prey. Both skills are relatively straight forward and simple enough to carry out once you know exactly what is required. These demonstrations are designed to help more falconers to be able to tackle these basic husbandry items with greater confidence.

Flying displays will be of the usual high quality with The South East Falconry

Group and Jemima both featuring heavily in the proceedings. The South East Group and its membership have long been stalwart supporters of the event and their displays are always extremely enjoyable and informative. Their Chairman, Gary Biddis, a very seasoned and accomplished falconer, gives a first class commentary that is based very much on many years' first hand practical experience. Jemima needs no introduction to falconers or the public alike and her presence at the Fair is always a most welcome one. The displays that Jemima orchestrates tend to revolve more around the capabilities of raptors themselves as opposed to strict falconry related demonstrations. With her vast and unrivalled knowledge of raptors Jemima's displays are always of the very highest calibre and not to be missed. There will be others joining the above illustrious company in the main arena but due to the amount of falconers that want to participate these are still being finalised at the moment. That is one of the points of the falconry fair that it is open to anybody, providing it is agreed in advance. It is not an exclusive set and all involved in the falconry world are welcome.

### Working dogs demonstration

Also, in the main arena will be experienced working dog trainer Graham Watkins of Game Goer Gundogs fame. Graham is an extremely experienced and respected working dog trainer and will be well known to many visitors to the event. He has spent a lifetime training dogs for falconry as well as shooting and his displays are always of a very high quality and a joy to watch. No country sports based fair, no matter what the central theme, would be complete without an opportunity to have the blood stirred by the call of a hunting horn and the singing of hounds. This event will be no exception and Michael Sagar from *Hounds* magazine will be present to introduce some local packs and relate the current situation and status of hunting in general and the featured packs in particular.

The mini arena will be a hive of activity over the course of the two days and the falconry side of things will be under the watchful eye of members of The Yorkshire Hawking Club and their ever enthusiastic Chairman Dale Johnson.

The weathering ground this year will in actual fact be a two part affair with

the main weathering being in its usual configuration with a wide selection of trained hawks and falcons. Once again the area itself will be under the watchful eye of The Central Raptor and Falconry Club who do such a splendid job each year. Always a highly popular feature the weathering area gives both public and falconers alike the opportunity to get up close to a magnificent array of trained hawks and falcons. An added bonus this year will be a separate eagle weathering brought together after a great deal of hard work by Dr. David Glynne Fox. The British Falconers Club has kindly agreed to let the Eagle Group from the club put on a separate weathering area which will be manned by members of the group who will happily answer any queries and help where possible with photographs. The British Falconers Club itself, which is the oldest established falconry club anywhere, will still have its main stand adjacent to the main arena as it always does.

There will be other clubs represented as well and these will be at national, regional and international level. Clubs form the backbone of our sport and give falconers and raptor enthusiasts a common voice and accordingly I would urge all falconers to join a club and give it their support. Even if the social side of any such club is of absolutely no interest at all there will be many other benefits to be obtained such as a common pool of knowledge, field meets, club insurance and other positive points.

### Trade stands to take your money

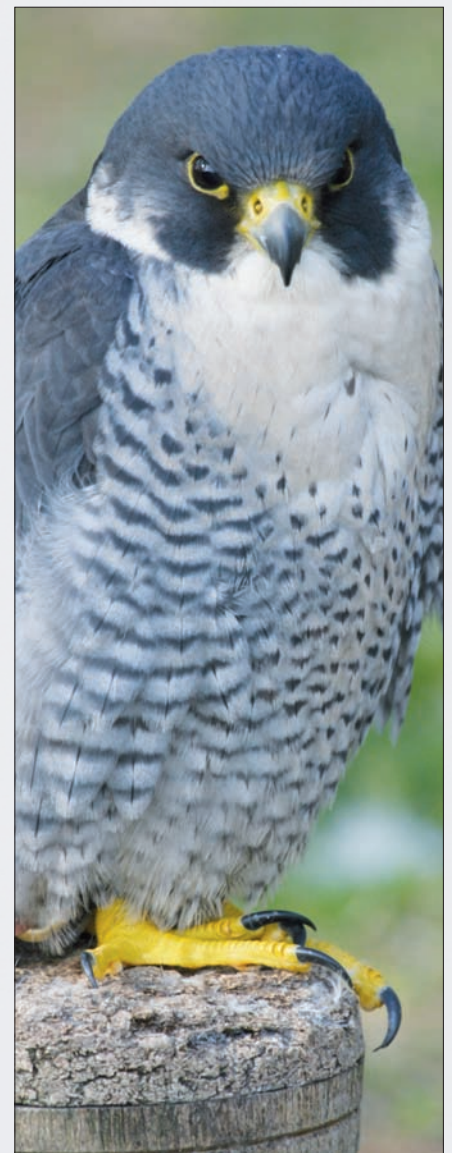
It goes without saying that there will be the normal plethora of trade stands related both directly and indirectly to falconry and raptor breeding side by side. This offers a unique opportunity for any would be purchaser to weigh up and compare price and quality of items before buying as is not the case with mail order. Everything from gloves and bells through to telemetry and incubators will be on sale from all the leading companies. Paul Morgan will have his normal stand, Coch-Y-Bonddu Books, at the event offering the widest selection of falconry and raptor books to be found anywhere at all.

Falconry and wildlife art is not forgotten with the likes of Martyn Brook, Carl Bass and many others

exhibiting their work. Renowned wildlife photographer Steve Magennis will also be exhibiting his stunning photographic images once again.

As well as the falconer being well catered for in terms of equipment and art work the inner man is not forgotten with a wide selection of food and drink outlets. All the normal stands and activities you would normally associate with a game and country fair will be there as well ranging from boot and clothing stalls through to gundog equipment and pet supplies.

It really is going to be a splendid weekend. For more details visit the website [www.countryfairs.info](http://www.countryfairs.info) or call the show office on 01588-672708. Admission each day is £11 for adults and £4 for children with ample free car parking.



Tiercle Peregrine Falcon

# SUN

## Sustainable Users Network

**T**he Sustainable Users Network (SUN) was conceived back in the early 1990's in response to a request from what was then the Department of the Environment (D of E). At the time Government needed to meet and respond to a plethora of separate organizations in respect of animal-keeping, horticultural interests and trade in natural products and live specimens. They faced lobbying from not only organisations supportive of such activities but also many who opposed or had concerns.

Accordingly, Government requested that the two opposing sectors set-up their own respective umbrella organisations that could act as a focus for Government communiqués, organisation of regular meetings to discuss issues, generation of coordinated responses to consultations, etc. Those more opposed to animal-keeping and trade established Wildlife & Countryside Link whilst those engaged in these activities together with horticultural groups and professional growers associations founded the Sustainable Users Network.

From the outset it was agreed that SUN would be kept as informal as possible, without a constitution or excess formalised rules and this is something adhered to ever since. The main reason for pursuing this relaxed and informal approach was to help ensure that the

affiliate organisations maintained primacy and that SUN would remain as the facilitator of dialogue and lobbying with governmental bodies. It is believed that this has worked very well over the past twenty odd years. The one and only requirement for affiliation to SUN is that the organisation must be able to confirm that – in line with the principles of both CITES and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) – it is supportive of the principle of sustainable utilisation of wildlife.

### Extensive list of members

The list of affiliate members of SUN is extensive and very few organisations have ever chosen to leave SUN's umbrella. The Hawk Board was amongst the founding membership and its representatives give an active and extremely valuable contribution to SUN's work. The affiliates vary from very small organisations with less than 100 members through to very large organisations with memberships in the several hundreds of thousands. Likewise, it varies from those representing hobbyist interests to those who breed, grow or import animals and plants commercially. To give an idea, affiliates vary from the Guild of Taxidermy, British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquaria, British Association for Shooting and Conservation, National Association of Private Animal Keepers, Pet Care Trust, Cyclamen Society and

British Orchid Growers Association to Parrot Society, Reptile and Exotic Pet Trade Association, Royal Horticultural Society, Ornamental Aquatic Trade Association, National Council for Aviculture, Timber Trade Association and International Herpetological Society to name but a representative few.

Over the years of activity SUN has been involved in all the revisions of existing legislation and in consultations and lobbying for all proposed new legislation that covers the interests of affiliate members. In regard to the activities of the Hawk Board and its membership it is relevant to note that the SUN Coordinator and Hawk Board representation were the sole lobbyists in meetings with civil servants and politicians (outnumbered at least ten to one in the meeting by protectionist and animal 'rights' interests) when the revision to Schedule 4 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act took place. Likewise, together we led on the written submissions calling for a fundamental deregulation of Schedule 4 on the basis that it had little if any conservation benefit but was an onerous burden on keepers (particularly of birds-of-prey but also of species like Chough, Cirl Bunting, Crested Tit, Fieldfare, Crossbill and Redwing). To our delight (and not a little surprise) the civil servants and lead Minister agreed with our assessments and, much to the chagrin of the protectionists, undertook a near

complete deregulation of Schedule 4.

In a similar vein, SUN was instrumental in helping affiliates offer a unified voice in their responses to the large scale consultations in the lead up to the enactment of the Animal Welfare Act and which was certainly very important in helping to ensure that the views of direct stakeholders received paramount consideration.

**Sensible legislation**

In no small part the input from SUN and its affiliates helped mould the Animal Welfare Act in to a piece of legislation that is generally very sensible and supportive of animal keepers – it could have been very different if the views of the animal welfare and rights groups had prevailed. It was particularly important that procedures such as pinioning and wing-clipping were specifically made allowable under the Animal Welfare Act allowing particularly waterfowl to be kept

in larger enclosures (without roofs) whilst minimizing the possibility of escape to, and establishment in, the wild.

An area that SUN is particularly active in at the present time is the issue of any legislation (domestic or emanating from the EU) regarding invasive or potentially invasive non-native species. The “antis” see this as a major opportunity to restrict the importation, intra-community trade and possession of a great number of species (of course, their arguments are not usually particularly genuine in respect of concern about invasive species but more based on their warped ideological opposition to the keeping of animals in captivity – it being noteworthy that it is usually the self same groups that are most vociferous in attempting to halt eradication programmes for invasive animal species!).

SUN has its Coordinator chosen by the EU as one of the NGO representatives on the working group

looking at establishing a strategy on invasive species across EU Member States which is likely to lead to a new EU Directive. It is expected to be a tough fight to help push the EU in to establishing a proportionate and science-based response to the issue and to minimise the weighting given to the extremist agenda. In particular, SUN will be focusing on ensuring that any bans are based on believable and rigorous risk assessments that lead to focused black lists of species that are controlled with every other species allowable by default (i.e. not white lists where species allowed are listed and everything else is banned by default). This is a very hot topic for falconry, not only because the hunting activity involves intentionally releasing a bird (often non-native) – obviously with the intention of its return – but also because of the potential for hybridisation of some non-native species with species indigenous to the EU.

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# We Humphrey ap Evans were 1922 – 2009 Falconers

Part I



**H**umphrey ap Evans was born in Old Buckenham, Norfolk on 18 September 1922, the son of Major James

John Evans MBE MC DL High Sheriff of Cardiganshire and Viola Muriel Robinson of Old Buckenham. He was referred to as 'Ap' throughout his life, the term 'ap' being Welsh for 'the son or child of'.

A lot of Ap's childhood was spent at the family home in Cardiganshire, now known as Ceredigion, in mid-west Wales. He was particularly proud of his Welsh ancestry. Ap was born an inquisitive naturalist, became an enthusiastic point to point rider, and was hunting with hounds alongside his parents at a very early age.

At the age of 13, in 1935, Ap left Mr. Day's School in Ascot and entered Eton College, following in the footsteps of his father. He was in Mr. Babington-Smith's House at Eton and was a member of the Debating Society for that House.

Ap left Eton in 1940 and went to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he studied the Classics. In 1942, however, studies were put to one side. World War II was entering its third year and at the age of 19 Ap joined the Army. After completing his training he was attached to the 1st Mountain Regiment of the Royal Artillery.

During the winter of 1942/43, Ap was quartered at Muir of Ord, Ross & Cromarty, in Scotland near Inverness. He commanded a troop in 451 Battery and his training continued in the mountains and snows of the Highlands. His Battery

Commander, Major E.W. (Ted) Ruston, remembers a number of instances where Ap's resourcefulness and ingenuity played a role in making a harsh life a bit more comfortable. He recalls the Officers' mess was situated in a local hotel and at the rear of the hotel was a railway line. Fuel for heating was in very short supply due to rationing, but Ap was able to resolve this issue very quickly. Each day a loose engine steamed past the hotel. Noting this, Ap soon struck up a deal with the driver-fireman. Each day several bottles of beer from the hotel bar would be secreted alongside the railway track and in return a good supply of railway coal would be left for Ap or his Batman to collect. This exchange remained in place for the whole of the winter.

It was not until 1944 that the Mountain Regiment fully entered the war. After exchanging their mules for jeeps and after months of training they were ready. In October 1944 they sailed from England to Ostend and then made their way to the Belgian village of Beernem near to Bruges.

On 1 November, 451 Battery, 1st Mountain Regiment assisted in the storming of Walcheren Island in the Scheldt estuary, one of the most heavily defended sections of the Atlantic Wall, and was instrumental in barring the sea route to the Port of Antwerp. The battle for Walcheren lasted eight days and finally finished with the surrender of some 4,000 Germans. Ap came through the battle unscathed.

### Days for rest

After the battle 451 Battery returned to Beernem for a few days rest during which a large amount of beer was consumed and culminated in an inter-battery cross-country race over a four mile course. The following day, games over, they moved across the border into Holland.

On 19 November the Mountain Regiment marched into Bergen-op-Zoom to the sound of cheering crowds and the pipes and drums of the Scottish regiments. For Bergen it was their Liberation Day. The war, though, was far from over and as November drew to a close they moved towards the front knowing there was heavy fighting ahead of them.

In January 1945 Ap and his regiment were on the Dutch-German border

providing artillery fire whilst a Company of the Scottish Infantry withdrew. During this a Platoon Commander was wounded and Ap, in an act of bravery, went forward under heavy fire and rescued him.

Not long afterwards the allied forces entered Germany. The Mountain Regiment crossed the Rhine, the Elbe and the Weser. Following the capture of the town of Lauenburg, after the Elbe crossing, the Regiment used the light flak guns left behind by the German army against the Luftwaffe. Ap scored a direct hit on a Focke-Wulf Fw 190.

### Speaking German

During the following weeks Ap's resourcefulness and ingenuity once again came into play. Ap had a good command of German and knowledge of the immediate locality was of paramount importance to his unit. One morning Ap's Battery Commander noticed a stranger in Ap's OP (Observation Post) team. On approaching the unknown unit member the commander was astounded to find the man spoke no English. It turned out

that he was actually a prisoner of war. When Ap was asked to explain matters he replied, "His home is in Osnabruck and I agreed if he pulled his weight I'd discharge him so he could get early release". After taking Osnabruck he did in fact discharge the man and let him go home.

Not long afterwards, during the crossing of the Weser, it happened that Ap once again thought to utilize the knowledge of a local to help his unit. This time the result was different. General Pip Roberts stopped to speak to a busy member of Ap's OP team only to discover he was a POW. He remonstrated with Ap and concluded with "Get him back to the POW Cage – NOW".

In March, following the crossing of the Rhine, 451 Battery was attached to 45 Royal Marine Commando. On the 24th, after capturing and occupying a factory in the centre of Wesel, the Commandos were subjected to repeated counter attacks. Although his OP became the target of intense enemy bombardment Ap continued to direct supporting



Ap with his parents just prior to a hunt

artillery fire for the Commandos. He broke up each enemy assault, sometimes at company strength and very determined. For this he was awarded the Military Cross.

Ap's citation stated that he moved about in exposed positions oblivious to the enemy fire, and that whatever the odds or the danger he risked everything to protect and assist the Commandos. Seldom, it concluded, has such determination or personal courage been equalled. The Commandos themselves were so impressed with Ap that they made him an honorary member of their Officers Mess.

On the 16th April, Ap was one

of the first officers to enter Belsen Concentration Camp. What he found was totally unexpected and utterly horrifying. Ap and his unit had not known the death camp was there - it was just one of the places on their route - but it became a place whose memory would haunt him forever. Ap rarely spoke about this part of his war. What his unit found that day was best left for others to write about, or talk about, for he found this sign of man's inhumanity too shattering to recount.

On 4 May 1945 German forces in Holland, Denmark and N.W. Germany surrendered and on 7 May Germany surrendered unconditionally.

Ap came very close to never seeing

the surrender take place but on 1 May, someone, somewhere, must have been keeping a watch over him. Whilst travelling in a carrier it ran over a booby-trapped bomb killing the driver and signaller instantly. Ap was wounded but he refused medical assistance and remained on duty. His wounds troubled him for the rest of his life.

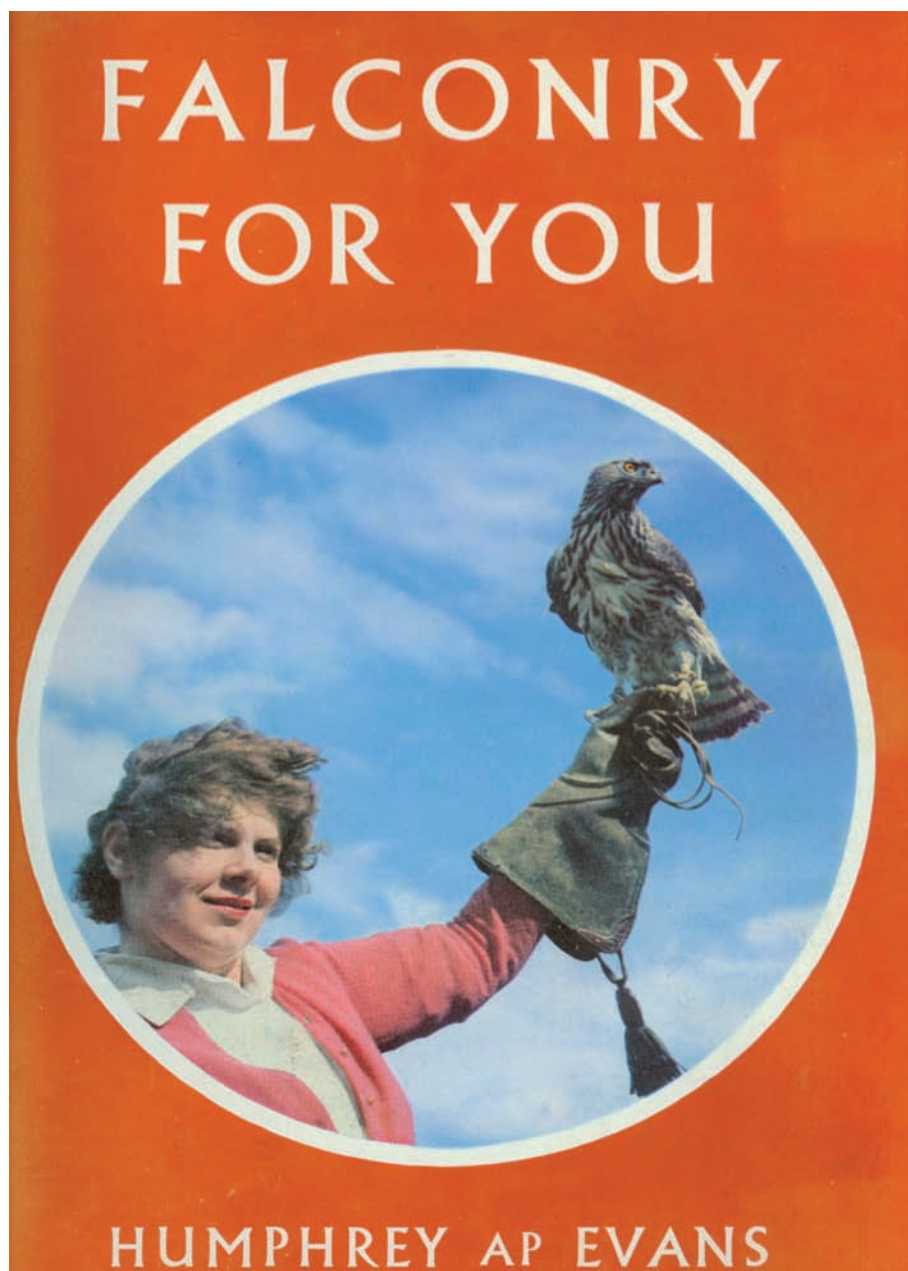
### Final parade

Weeks later Ap paraded with his unit for the final time. The Corps Commander, General Sir Evelyn 'Bubbles' Barker paid them the honours they deserved. The General informed them that they had set new standards in 'Close Support' and in particular praised Ap for his epic leadership, knowing that he had declined hospital treatment at the end to stay with his men. Ap's Battery Commander, recalling the event, said, "The Brigade Commander gave Ap a hell of a write up which made our only Etonian blush. Ap replied with thanks and promised to go into hospital when we were back in the UK". Shortly afterwards, Captain Humphrey ap Evans M.C. returned home to Wales.

Ap's life might have taken a different course after returning from the war, sending him away from his beloved Wales for foreign parts, had it not been for Mr. Gandhi. Shortly after arriving home Ap passed the civil service exam for the Indian Political Service, intending to leave Wales for what had long been a sought after posting for adventurous young men. With Indian independence arriving in 1947, however, he was prevented from taking up a permanent appointment there.

With no foreign adventure in sight Ap became involved instead with the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales. He assisted in the founding of it and was the General Secretary from 1947 to 1953. From 1949 to 1954 he was also the Welsh representative of The National Trust.

Ap was hunting, shooting and fishing again from the moment he set foot on Welsh soil after returning from Germany. His interests were varied but his love of wildlife and the countryside were of paramount importance to him. It is not known exactly when Ap took up falconry, or how he became interested in it, but hawking became a huge part of his life.



Front cover of Ap's book





Robert Heberden Barber with Cassandra

He became a member of the British Falconers' Club in 1947 and was well respected by the falconry community. Ap authored several books, the first of which was *Falconry for You*. Written half a century ago, one paragraph in particular surely summed up his passion for our sport.

“What a thrilling experience to walk out for the very first time with a falcon on your fist or a hawk on your hand – the falcon for the higher flights at game, the hawk for the humbler birds and beasts. Whichever it is, you have trained her yourself, and you have forged an intimate personal link with a proud, swift bird. You are in harmony together.”

### Ap gets married

In 1952 Ap married the vivacious, somewhat eccentric, Jean Cherry Drummond, heiress to the Baronry of Strange in Scotland. Known as Cherry, she was from an old and distinguished Scottish family. About her a correspondent for *The Daily Telegraph* wrote: “Operatically proportioned and wholly unselfconscious, Lady Strange wore her hair pinned up in a loose bun and had a liking for frilly shirts and voluminous, floaty dresses. She bore more than a passing resemblance to Mrs. Tiggywinkle, and was held in great affection in the Upper House for her gifts of flowers, vegetables and bottled fruit from the kitchen garden of her family home, Megginch Castle in Perthshire.”

Fourteen years after his marriage in 1966 Ap acquired, by decree, his wife's name and became known ever after as Humphrey Drummond. Cherry and

Ap began life together living in London where their first son Adam was born in 1953. Shortly after that they moved to Scotland taking with them Adam and their dogs Kirsche, a gold red dachshund, and Rheidol, a blue fawn whippet. Their home was a semi-derelict farmhouse named Kilspindie which had been built with stones from Kilspindie Castle, the home of William Wallace's aunt, where Wallace had lived as a boy more than 600 years ago.

In a very short space of time Ap was soon hunting with Rheidol and rescuing all kinds of birds and animals. Winter was harsh around the Sidlaw Hills and many a creature was kept in the house for warmth and comfort.

In May of 1955 their daughter Charlotte was born.

The following September Ap brought his first bird home to Kilspindie, a passage Goshawk from Norway named Milindwr (Welsh for Honeyed Waters). With assistance from Cherry she was jessed and belled and a swivel and leash were attached. Reminiscent of T.H. White's story in his book *The Goshawk*, Ap spent two nights awake with her in the kitchen with a good supply of candles. On the third day, with manning coming along fairly well, disaster struck when Ap took her to work with him. Milindwr perched quite happily between the filing cabinets until mid morning when Ap put her onto the fist and took her outside into the sunshine. That morning he had received through the post a new swivel from Lahore and decided to change it. As he took off the old swivel, Cherry's mother came into the yard with two greyhounds which raced up to Ap. He instinctively raised his arm to keep Milindwr away from them when she jerked upwards and the jesses slipped through his fingers. She went straight into the wind and was carried away and all too soon was out of sight. Although Ap searched everywhere for her she was never found. It is known that she did survive, however. A gamekeeper friend of Ap's later reported a Goshawk with a bell was leading a very happy poaching life in woods north of Dundee.

With the family motto of 'Marte et arte' which roughly means "By Hook or by Crook", Ap did not give up on falconry and in December he acquired another Goshawk from Bill Rutledge, a friend

and fellow member of the BFC. "Svenna" was another Norwegian Goshawk and was already manned and half trained. By January Ap was hunting with her catching rabbits and even moorhens. One memorable flight occurred in February. The light was starting to fade when Svenna flew a moorhen but quickly vanished from sight. Ap ran in the same direction arriving at a road where he met an old lady who informed him that there was "an eagle on my aspidistra". Ap followed the lady into her house and there was Svenna sitting contentedly on a huge aspidistra. It transpired that the lady had heard what she thought was knocking on her door. On opening it two birds had flown into the house. The moorhen had flown down the passage, avoided Svenna, and had flown out again. Svenna had taken up the first available perch.

### Excellent hunting hawk

Svenna proved to be an excellent hunting bird and Ap enjoyed many months hawking with her and his Broderick pointer called Wond. After having Svenna for two seasons disaster struck once again. Ap had turned Svenna loose in the mews to moult out.

When Ap went away, Cherry would normally look after her but on this occasion they both went away together. Strict instructions were left for her care, especially that fresh food be given to her daily. On his return he found Svenna sitting hunched in a corner, with a low keel and possibly dehydrated. Realising that she was seriously ill he wrapped her in his coat and drove off to the vet. During the journey Svenna had a seizure or fit and died. Evidently his instructions had not been followed to the letter.

The following summer, after returning from a trip to France, Ap received a telephone call from a friend Walter Joynson in Kinlochard. He was going to Ireland and could not take his Goshawk with him and wondered if Ap could take her. Walter informed him that he had been flying her through the moult and that she preferred coming back to the lure rather than the fist.

"Shilloolabeg", as she was called then, came to Kilspindie. Ap soon found out that she didn't really like coming back at all and several times she went off chasing partridges or just sat in a tree completely ignoring him.

# The 2nd UK Eagle Field Meet



L-R: Gary Knight, Alan Walker, Dr. David Glynne Fox, Wesley Murch, Travis, Chris Miller, Mark and Clint Coventry

Following on from the success of the 1st UK Eagle Field Meet, it was decided by Chris Miller and myself to organise a second event along the same lines. Like the first meet, this one would also span two days with a falconers' feast at the terminus of day one. We decided to try a new venue for this event and Chris had made contact with the owners of a large shooting estate in Norfolk, known as Narford Hall.

Just before Christmas 2010, Chris and I visited the estate to check it out as a viable venue for such a meet. Although we only spent a couple of hours or so at Narford Hall, the owner took the opportunity to drive us around the estate to give us some idea as to whether or not the venue would be suitable as a possibility for flights with the mighty Golden Eagle. We didn't possess enough time to actually walk the ground, which is the best way to determine the density

of the hare population, but the land was typical hare country with large undulating arable fields interspersed by areas of open woodland. Deer tracks were everywhere and we did see a few Roe Deer. We knew the land was a regular shoot but the owner was not sure if ground game was ever a target because pheasants were the main species nurtured for the syndicates and we saw many of these during our short visit.

We both agreed that the venue seemed ideal and so we set a date with the landowner for a two day meet on the estate. This date would be Friday 5th and Saturday 6th February 2011. Whilst still at Narford Hall, we asked the landowner about suitable venues for the falconers' feast and he was so kind as to take us four miles to the village of Gayton where we were shown the Crown Inn. This venue could hardly have been improved upon from our point of view, for the dining room was decorated

with many mounted game birds and animals and the walls of the entire inn were covered with hunting pictures and illustrations of wildlife of all types. There was even a print of a falcon on a block by my old friend, the late wildlife artist, John Haywood.

Most importantly, the food was a priority, for at the previous meet we had made something of a mistake. We had not noticed that the meal at that venue was of the nouveau cuisine type, which although well prepared and very tasty, was of the usual minuscule proportions and because many of the eagle lads were big fellows with equal appetites, we felt we had failed them. A lesson was learned and this time there was going to be no mistake. As we walked into the inn, we noticed a full-blown carvery on the go and what is more, one could go up and help oneself as often as deemed desirable. This was more like it. We had literally killed two birds with one stone, for this was exactly



Dr. David Glynne Fox prepares his Golden Eagle, Star

what we were looking for. We went back home to Nottingham on a high note and began to put in plans and invites plus Sat-Nav details of hawking and meal venues to eagle falconers and spectators alike and used the list of falconers that had attended the first meet as a nucleus.

### The meet assembles

The day arrived and yet again I could not believe our bad luck. The second day of the previous meet had been blighted by dense fog, this time it was high, gusting winds. I pulled into a lay-by in Cambridgeshire on the A47 beside a river for a coffee break. The surface of the river was whipped up to a frenzy and several mallard failed to become airborne

as they were blown back into the river, seconds after lifting off. A magpie was flying backwards at a rate of knots and I wondered what effect the weather, thus affecting smaller birds, would have on our Golden Eagles with wingspans of seven feet or so? This did not bode well and had I been out hawking alone, I would have gone back home, but as our eagle army was approaching from distant places such as Cornwall, Kent, Devon, Liverpool and Middlesbrough and with everything being booked, I being the co-meet organiser, had no choice other than continue on to Norfolk, but it has to be said from the start that the high winds ruined what could otherwise have been an excellent meet. Nevertheless, we persevered

and as will be seen, enjoyed some great flights.

I arrived at Narford Hall at 8-30 and was soon joined by Chris and Henry. We thought we were the first to arrive but as we discovered, Alan Walker and Ian Tolley had arrived a while earlier and Alan had placed his new eagle on a bow perch at the rear of the hall, where we soon joined him. Alan's previous eagle, a male named Maximus had died a week after the BFC International Field Meet at Woodhall Spa in Lincolnshire and this bird had only just been flying free for a week. In fact I had been with Alan at the BFC's North East regional field meet at Threepwood in Northumberland, where this new eagle (as yet un-named) had attained its first ever free flight.

Shortly afterwards, our ranks began to fill as others arrived for the meet. Twelve eagle falconers in total were booked for the meet but only 10 turned out in the end as one had jury service and another had falconry centre commitments. Still, 10 eagles, all Golden Eagles, is a respectable number and was certainly something to see. Gary Knight arrived next with his male eagle followed shortly by Clint Coventry (female Golden Eagle), Roy Lupton (male Golden Eagle) and Travis with his male Golden Eagle. Wes Murch (female Golden Eagle), Mark (male Golden Eagle) and Steve Field whose Golden Eagle had recently died from lead poisoning were the next to join the throng. Chris and I had of course taken along our female and male Golden Eagles respectively. Phil Hudson phoned through to say he would be late arriving and it was mid afternoon before he, his partner Nanette and Brian Glace put in an appearance with their male Golden Eagle, Shoshone. The three old faithful falconers from Liverpool duly arrived, namely Mike and Craig Ahmed and their stepfather Tony Farrell followed by Dave Bostock, Andy and Liz from Nottingham, and Phil Bindon and his friend from Cornwall. In total, 24 falconers braved the high winds and made it to Narford Hall.

Refreshments were provided in the beautiful kitchen of the hall, which was lined with trophy heads shot by ancestors of the family. There were magnificent antlered heads of Wapiti, an American species of deer, which is reminiscent of a larger version of our Red Deer, a huge African Buffalo head along with the

long horned heads of Oryx and Eland. A Thompson's Gazelle and rattlesnake skin also adorned the walls of this four hundred year old building, a great way to launch a full-blown eagle field meet. All voiced concerns about the gusting winds but equally, all were game to at least give it a try, so it was back to our vehicles, weathering eagles returned to their respective travel boxes and away across the estate to begin the first drive. I had held a short briefing before we set off, primarily concerning the slipping order, which for this meet was to be by numbers, although it degraded into European rules at times, of which I personally am not in favour, but about more of which later.

### On with the flying

Everyone now had their slipping numbers and by some strange coincidence, I drew number seven, the exact same number that I drew on the BFC's annual general meeting eagle field meet back in November, so I had quite a while to wait before I could put my male Golden Eagle, Star, on the wing. Travis was first to fly and his male eagle soon put in a good flight at the first hare of day one and chased it the full length of the field. The ground was dry, well drained soil full of flints, so the going under foot was no problem. The same could not be said of the wind, which blew Travis's eagle down the field at an alarming rate. We had to fly our eagles using downwind or crosswind slips because anything else would have been impossible for birds with such large and broad sails. Travis's eagle missed and so he ventured forward to retrieve his eagle. Having done so, he remained where he was while the rest of the line continued to sweep towards him. A second flight took place by Wes's female but that also suffered under the wind conditions. We then tried through one of the many woods on the estate but only flushed some Fallow Deer, a Muntjac and one rabbit with no slips taken. Hares were few and far between on this particular section and so after a consultation, we moved to another part of the estate where we decided to beat through large sections of woodland, just to get out of the high winds. Mostly deer were flushed here but we did get one or two flights at hares where the European style of flying was decided

upon and the reason for this was plainly because we were flushing quarry which was more often than not, out of sight of the numbered falconer and many slips were not being taken as a result. I was in favour of this despite still worrying that an eagle may see another on quarry and make a beeline for it. In the event, no quarry was taken in the woods but there were some interesting slips. Many would not believe that such large and powerful birds as Golden Eagles would be of any falconry use in woods, but if the woods are open enough, it is surprising just how agile an eagle can be in such terrain. In this instance though, the wind was strong enough to penetrate the woodlands and cause the eagles some problems.

### A lesson learned

We broke for lunch and then headed for slightly higher ground on the far side of the estate. Again we walked in line through a large wood and although two hares were flushed, no eagles were slipped for none were suitably positioned. At the far end of the wood, we were supposed to switch back to numbered flying again, but something went wrong with the lines of communication. I have thought long and hard about repeating what happened next in print but after much deliberation and heart-searching, have decided to include the following in this narrative because it exactly highlights a point I have been making for some years now and hopefully, lessons will be learnt by those new to eagle falconry. For obvious reasons, neither of the eagle falconers whose birds were involved will be named.

We lined up in the field ready to walk it downwind and it was the turn of one of the male eagles to slip, which it soon did as a hare was put up immediately. The eagle was on the ball and gave a good chase, but as with all the other slips, the hare jinked and ran into the wind, leaving the eagle with no choice other than to pitch on the ground. Split seconds later and down the bottom end of the field, a second eagle came into view chasing after a second hare. This was not supposed to happen and I was nonplussed as to why two eagles had been slipped when we were supposed to be flying by numbers in open country. No time for such thoughts now though and we all watched as the second eagle put in a stoop, missed its

hare and landed behind a hedge well to our front. All well and good so far, but then my worst fears were realised. The first eagle lifted off from higher up the slope and put in a speedy dive at the spot where the other eagle was sat on the ground and swung in towards it. The hedge obscured the view of all, but Roy Lupton very quickly brought his Argo Cat into action, picked up the owner of the first eagle and sped down the hillside at a speed I thought impossible from an Argo-Cat. They quickly reached the spot while the rest of us remained in position, spread out in line across the field. The two eagles were the best part of two hundred yards to our front and nobody on foot could have possibly reached them in time to stop one killing the other. Roy got in and managed to separate them before any serious damage was done. Apparently, although the first had got its feet in first, by the time Roy arrived on the scene the second eagle had turned the tables.

One eagle had blood coming from one nostril and the other looked a bit roughed up, but had it not been for Roy Lupton's quick thinking and his amazing Argo-Cat, we would most certainly have had at least one dead eagle on our hands and the meet ruined, not least for the owner of one of the eagles. This was my worst possible scenario come true and graphically underscored my fears of flying European style. It should also be noted that neither of these two eagles had any quarry to attract the other, which is the main problem if more than one eagle is airborne, one had simply gone for the other, which was very worrying. Despite this incident, some still argue that the European style, whereby one slips at the quarry nearest, is still the best method on the grounds that by numbered slipping, much quarry is missed. Only in certain situations does this hold true, such as the aforementioned woodland flights, but out in the open it is an accident just waiting to happen, and in my view, just once is one time too many. I may be accused of being over careful, but I believe no amount of quarry taken, or missed, on a meet is worth the death of one eagle and this incident, if anything has strongly reinforced my opinion. I have been on a number of meets where European ruling has held sway and have seen as many as three eagles in the air at once

and on every single one of those meets at least two eagles have been airborne simultaneously. The only reason that these eagles returned safely to their owners is purely because none of them had taken quarry.

Had they done so, I am confident the outcome would have been very different. A lesson ought to have been learnt here by all present and in future any meets that I may be involved in organising, all eagles will be flown strictly by the numbers method, with NO exceptions whatsoever. It is the only safe way and I defy anyone to prove otherwise. Incidents such as the foregoing are bad news for eagle falconry, which is precisely why I deliberated over including it in this account, but I strongly feel that newcomers to the sport should be made aware of the very serious consequences of losing their birds unnecessarily by flying European style. I know some disagree with me but the proof of the pudding is in the eating and the above episode is as close as I wish to come to any further such incidents.

This sort of incident simply cannot happen when flying by numbers because all other eagles in the field remain not only hooded but also clipped to their owner's glove, bag or belt by the jesses. Both eagles were very lucky to escape with minor injuries and my personal thanks go to Roy Lupton for his rapid intervention. Let us leave European rules to the Europeans. Here ends the preaching.

### The flights continue

Through more woodland we trudged until we came out onto a large stubble field, which looked ideal for hares, and what is more, it was my turn to fly Star. He had been on my glove all day without a flight and so now I was ready for some action. As we lined up and swept across the field, someone asked me a question and as I turned to answer, a hare was flushed. I had removed Star's hood to give him time to become accustomed to the scenery etc. which is quite normal when flying by numbers and he had seen the hare and wanted to be off, bating towards it, but I held him back as I had not seen the hare. Too late, I released him and although he made a valiant attempt and chased it for some considerable distance, he missed it. He

landed so far away that Roy picked me up in the Argo Cat and drove me along the edge of the field to find him waiting for me on the ground. Roy then returned me to the line. Several hares were flushed in this field with Clint, Travis, and Gary Knight's eagles putting in some great performances, but the wind was just too much. The sky was now darkening with the onset of nightfall and we decided to call it a day and so we were all ferried back to our cars in a variety of vehicles, ranging from the landowner's 4x4 to Roy's Argo Cat and trailer. Eagles were then all fed up and returned to their travel boxes and we made our way to our various guest houses to clean up in preparation for the coming meal. Several of us, including Chris and myself and six of the eagles were staying overnight at the Crown Inn where we were to have our meal.

### Time to reflect

The meal went down very well with everyone and it even included roast pheasant, which was most palatable. The camaraderie at these meets is equally as important as the flying and taking of quarry because a lot of information changes hands freely and much joviality becomes an integral part of the meet. Anyone who feels that the flying is the only worthwhile part of a meet is sadly misguided, for much can be learnt from other like minded aficionados across a dining table. Everyone slept well that night, including Dave Bostock, who for some reason decided to sleep in his Landrover in the Crown Inn car park! A great deal of mirth came about at breakfast when Chris Miller suggested to Dave that he help himself to some sausages that were left over, and when he did so, Chris shouted out loudly, "Someone's nicking the sausages!" I have never seen Dave move so fast out of the door. The eagle boys certainly know how to have fun and Alan Walker was the life and soul of the dining room at the evening meal.

Unfortunately, Alan had to leave after breakfast as an infection had set in on both of the hallux, or hind toes, of his eagle and he had booked in to Harcourt-Brown's veterinary surgery in Harrogate by mobile phone for 2pm later that day. Fortunately, the infection responded to a treatment of Marbocyl. Three other

eagle falconers also left after breakfast including Roy Lupton, Travis and Clint Coventry. So that left us short of four eagles. However, we had a new one in the form of Shoshone, an older brother to my eagle and owned by Phil Hudson. Phil however, had been ill and in hospital of late and all the hard walking and high winds had taken their toll on him.

I wasn't aware that he was feeling under the weather until we were out in line walking across a rape field when he suggested that I take any hare that flushed to his front. He did not look well and stated later that he would not have had the strength left to retrieve his eagle if he slipped him. This was rather sad for it meant that he never had a flight during the whole meet.

### Day two

So now our slightly depleted force left the Crown Inn and returned to Narford Hall, where we then set off almost immediately for the same ground that had proven so productive the evening before. We did not use the same field until later that day but instead headed out across an adjacent and entirely new sector.

Despite the previous day's incident and to my utter surprise, some still wanted to fly European style, so I relented for this last time. In fact I had the first flight as a hare flushed about fifty yards to my immediate front. I made a mistake in shouting "Eagle," after I removed the hood instead of the correct method of shouting the instruction before, but this of course came from the habit of using the far safer method of flying by numbers, whereby I often removed Star's hood when it was his turn to fly to give him time to take stock of the situation. However, I had still retained my grip on the jesses and I had just long enough to check that nobody else had slipped before Star set off in hot pursuit.

He soon caught up with the hare and put in a stoop, missed, threw up into the air and put in a second stoop, at which we all thought he had secured his prize, but the hare obviously used its phenomenal powers of escape to elude him. I called him back and we resumed the hunt. Gary then shouted "Eagle" and released his charge, which gave a sterling chase after another hare, but fared no better than Star. Chris Miller then had a flight at a hare with Skye, my former

female eagle, but she was blown into a tree by the gusting wind, snapping off a branch and ending up on the ground, where she was retrieved unhurt. The weather was utterly impossible, but still we persevered. At times the strength of the wind was so strong it stopped us in our tracks and my own eagle sometimes lay flat across my gauntlet in an effort to avoid the force of the wind.

We beat through some sections of last year's cover crop of maize and through some scrub but saw little suitable quarry, mostly pheasants and partridges. We then headed back into wind to begin another downwind beat and here I had my second and last flight of the day.

A hare ran to my front with Star going like a steam train, but the hare made it to cover and I had a long walk down a valley to retrieve him. I could have called him back, but as soon as he opened his wings he would be blown another few hundred yards downwind. This turned out to be my last flight of the day but several others had good flights.

At one stage we all returned to the

vehicles for refreshments when quarry was spotted in the distance. Wes, Steve Field and Mark set off in their truck to set up a flight and came back later with a hare, taken by Wes's eagle named Oops. This was the only hare taken on the entire meet, so Wes saved the day for us. In fact, it is surprising that we had any flights at all due to the harsh wind conditions so my thanks go out to all who braved the elements and stuck it out.

We had decided to end the day while Wes was still out and so most of us fed up our eagles and many left for their long journey home, but when Wes returned, he and the others wanted to continue as we had a couple of hours of daylight left, so we began by the seven remaining members of the original team of 24 beating the same field that we ended up on the previous day. A hare was flushed almost immediately and Oops gave chase but flew into an area where the wind rushed through and it blew her off course. We walked across several more rape fields and through another wood with a few more flights ensuing, including

one by Mark who originally was going to fly a hare that we had marked down in its form, but Wes was returning from a flight across a large field when he put up two hares that ran diagonally across our front as we were sheltering in the lee of a wood. Mark slipped his eagle at one of the running hares and made a beeline for it, but it was almost a head on flight and the hare could easily see every movement of the eagle. Additionally, the flight took the eagle past the far edge of the wood and into the strong winds yet again, which of course did little to aid the situation and so the hare easily side stepped the attempts of the eagle and loped off to safety somewhere in the wood.

This flight heralded the finale of the 2nd UK Eagle Field Meet 2011. The winds blew on for another two full days before calm weather settled over the UK. It was just our luck to have picked the most un-flyable weather that I can remember in years and so next time I shall ask our government to intervene and sort out these crazy weather conditions!!

## Eagle Road Trip

A DVD by CorJo Wildlife Productions



Anyone who enjoys watching golden eagles flying from the fist at rabbit, including the occasional kills, will enjoy this DVD. It features footage of Joe Atkinson's eagles, Jackhammer and Mini-Me, taking on black tail jack rabbits in Kansas, Oregon and Texas. The viewer is given a rare insight into hunting with golden eagles and the patience that this requires. Expert filming shows just how manoeuvrable a large eagle can be, even at speed.

But this is more than just a film about eagles; it is also a film about Joe and the way he interacts with his birds. Throughout the film he comes across as a man who is confident in his ability as an austringer. He is surprisingly gentle with his birds and is sympathetic to their needs. The action is filmed by Cordi Atkinson and she does a good job of capturing the true excitement of the flights. This is a film which celebrates the bond between one man and his eagles. Over a few field meets, the viewer gets to share in the excitement of flying these magnificent creatures and can only marvel at the dedication and skill required to enable them to do what they do best. If you like golden eagles, this is a DVD for you.

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# My Rant!

Is it me, or is falconry getting too cheap? Equipment and certain species of raptor are affordable by most people these days, so is our sport attracting the wrong person to own and train a bird of prey? By that, I mean that many people don't have any experience of finding out how to keep a bird of prey and what equipment and housing is needed. Neither do they go on a course that is being taken by falconers who are experienced, Lantra or otherwise, to see if the responsibility of owning such a living being is for them.

Now, I'm not suggesting that falconry is only a sport for the rich – far from it – but, in the absence of any other regulation, cost is the only means by which a person can be put off taking up the sport lightly without due consideration of the lifelong commitment required.

I get to hear stories about people who find out where to obtain a bird from a breeder after just seeing a DVD or video and/or reading a book and they think that is all it takes. Unfortunately, there are some breeders out there who are just wanting to make a 'quick buck' and don't ask the correct questions of the prospective purchaser: why they want a bird, how will it be housed, what equipment have they got, which vet they intend to use if anything goes wrong, etc.

## A small price to pay

Many years ago when Harris' Hawks were introduced into this country for the purposes of falconry, a single hawk could cost £1000-£1500. Nowadays, you can pick one up for £100. It won't be long before the market is saturated with Harris' Hawks costing under the £200 mark. Goodness knows what will be happening in 10 years or so. Also, it probably won't be too long before Goshawks go a similar way. I do believe that the cost is going the wrong way and breeders should be asking more.

It is not only these species, either. Falcons are suffering the same fate. You only have to log on to any falconry related web-site on the computer or read certain bird related publications to see how many

birds there are for sale at ridiculously low prices. These attract people who have absolutely no idea of what they are buying or how to house or look after them.

The welfare of any bird or animal should be paramount, but not everyone feels the same. I have heard of birds being kept in rabbit hutches and even in the spare bedroom of their owner's home. This, I find utterly deplorable.

## Easy come, easy go

Some of the adverts state why people are selling their charges. "Job forces sale". "House move forces sale". I know that some of these may be genuine, but really, aren't many of these adverts from people who want a different bird just for the sake of it? Then you get the other side of the coin with people who are new to our sport - "What is the best bird to start falconry with?" Start with? This sounds like someone doesn't intend keeping a raptor for very long.

What can be better than manning, training and flying a hawk and seeing it progress year after year? Some so-called falconers just want a hawk for a couple of years and then sell it on to get a different specie. How many people sell their dog when it has reached an age of about three or four years to buy another one? You don't hear of many people purchasing a springer spaniel and then selling it to buy a pointer, so why sell a hawk or falcon after a short period of time? They say a dog is for life, so why not a hawk or falcon?

Then there are others – thankfully in the minority – who lose their hawk or falcon whilst flying and just turn around and go home to order a replacement, not even bothering to go and look for the lost raptor. How irresponsible is that?

## False economy

Then we come on to equipment. There is so much rubbish out there and so cheap it can put a hawk's welfare, or even life, at risk. Bow and block perches, hoods, gloves and even swivels are attracting perspective purchasers because of the low cost. Why people don't want to pay a bit extra for good quality I don't know. In this country

we are very lucky to have excellent manufacturers of gloves, hoods, perches and other equipment but some falconers are into the false economy syndrome. A good quality glove costing upwards of £60.00 or more, for instance, will give you many years service if looked after properly.

The price of good equipment which will last costs the same as a few pints – which don't last! Good quality equipment benefits hawks, falcons and falconers alike and reflects on our practice of the sport as a whole. We should be proud of our sport and we all have a duty of care to keep the art of falconry going for as long as possible – not just in this country but all over the world. It's not just for us at this moment in time, but think about future generations.

## Looking to the future

Any youngster we know who may be interested in our sport should be encouraged to be part of it with the same passion as the rest of us oldies. It is hoped that the tremendous news of last year from UNESCO may perhaps encourage young people to join clubs or, as in some cases, bird of prey centres who run courses designed to educate school children in most aspects of our sport.

One aspect I have not yet mentioned is the hard work the Hawk Board does for falconers and raptor keepers in this country. There are those who knock the Hawk Board and what it does without finding out the why's and wherefore's before moaning. If it wasn't for the Hawk Board, we wouldn't be enjoying falconry as we do today in the UK. Just think about certain aspects such as the quarry we fly at, the close relationship we have with bodies such as DEFRA, Animal Health and The Countryside Alliance, the de-regulation of certain species, etc. We have a lot to be thankful for and much of it is because of the Hawk Board.

At the end of day, we should support our sport in a responsible manner and enjoy going out with friends or on our own to fly our birds. For just a few hours we can forget all the trials and tribulations that are happening in our lives and just have fun.

That's the end of my rant so, if any falconer out there agrees or disagrees with me get in contact and don't just bleat about it with your mates down the pub – I'd like to publish your views in future issues.

# The Falcon that Caught a Dragon



Lyla Bennett with her Gyr falcon and pointer

I must admit to being thoroughly surprised at receiving a phone call from Peter, editor of the Falconers Magazine - to be honest, once he had introduced himself as such, my first thought was "Uh-oh, my subscription must be very overdue!" So I was pleasantly surprised to hear that actually he was requesting that I wrote an article for the magazine; in hindsight I think it was this initial relief that fuelled my enthusiastic agreement of the task. It was sometime later that it suddenly occurred

to me that, not only am I useless at writing articles, but I'm even worse at writing them about myself!

Well here I am huddling close to the fire of my mobile home in mid Wales. Jack Frost has kindly left pretty patterns for me on the inside of the windows and my field looks a beautiful crisp glistening white - I believe last night was minus 12. Sometimes I look out at it and muse over the paths that have brought me here. Attempting to set up a falconry business with little or no support is no easy task,

but one that I began to work towards ten years ago, full of enthusiasm and inexperience. I never suspected it would carry so many challenges.

## Started with a birdtable

Unlike many of today's businesses, I did not learn my art from my parents (who are in-fact thoroughly disappointed vegetarians!) nor did I begin my career as an evening hobby. My fascination for raptors began when I made a birdtable with my father and watched the songbirds feeding as I waited for the morning school bus. Before long, a Sparrowhawk began to frequent the garden - she darted in a flash of brown leaving a spectacular puff of feathers in her wake where moments before had sat a cute Robin. Here kindled the spark that transformed a would-be twitcher into a falconer. Far from being shocked by this brutality of nature being played out in front of me, it served only to mesmerize me. My love of country sports began sometime later when, as a teenager, I rode with the David Davies hounds. The two came together when I finally discovered falconry at the age of sweet 16. After finishing my school exams, I had taken a job with a local falconer helping out with a few summertime shows - trouble was, after that I didn't find much interest in education and much to the astonishment (and no doubt displeasure!) of my family and friends I never went back to school.

I took any work available to further my falconry, my favourite of which was bird control. In the summer of 2000 I began work at various locations, including landfill and big industrial sites such as chemical plants and hot steel rolling mills. These were the days when Wales still held big industry and Health and Safety was on the to do list! I flew long-wings



from 100ft roofs and climbed silos one handed on rickety ladders balancing a falcon on the glove - all fascinating stuff for a young country girl. Many of the sites only allowed access to those over 18 years and given that I looked about 12 I had to tell a lot of lies! The introduction to this world gave me a love and passion for working raptors which has never left me.

### Hawksdrift begins

From these exciting and daunting beginnings I eventually created Hawksdrift Falconry, my own successful business. Slowly it began to grow and ultimately at the age of 20 I had somehow accumulated enough money (with a big help from HSBC) to buy my own field with the aim of setting up my aviaries and home there.

The seasonal variations in falconry work had been one the biggest challenges. In the first years, I always had to support the business throughout the winter months with a wide variety of jobs, from bar-work to lambing. Slowly I gained all kinds of falconry work, from

displays and experience days to bird control, and must be doing something right as I've now held many of the original contracts for eight years.

In 2009 I received my first business award - I was privileged to accept the honour of Young Entrepreneur for Powys County and some fantastic publicity came with it. This gave Hawksdrift the boost it required to grow towards its potential. The next highlight was in 2010 - the Falcon 500 Time Trials at the Yorkshire Game fair. I entered and my fantastic Gyr / Saker "Monty" won it in a time of 22.8 seconds. Despite the entries being minimal I was very very proud (come on girls and guys - lets have a bigger competition this year).

2010 also found me on the BBC. Whilst working on a contract near Preston, I was relaxing in my touring caravan and looking forward to an early night when my mobile rang. The television show "Dragons Den" were requesting I attended an audition in Manchester for the show! I half wondered if it was a practical joke from one of my (not so funny) friends. However, after the

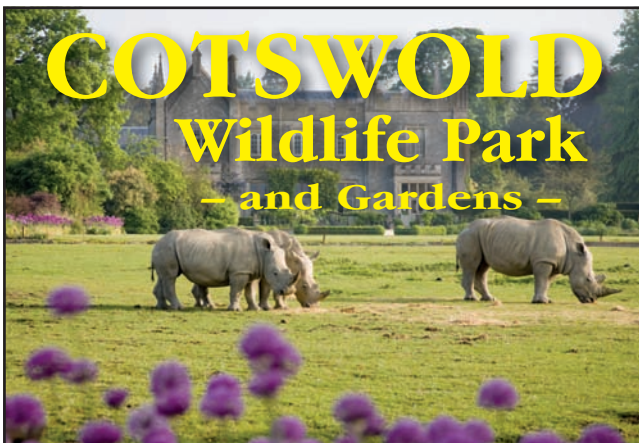
auditions the reality hit home. I was given just two weeks' notice for preparation of filming, which passed faster than that Sparrowhawk in my childhood garden.

Filming was held at Pinewood Studios and I can liken it only to the Pepsi Max rollercoaster - it looked like a good idea, but once I realised there was no way back I panicked. The production crew couldn't have been more pleasant - much like the slaughter house staff as they shove the unsuspecting cattle forwards. Monty and I faced the stairs and began our ascent to the Den.

I was lucky to have a good reception from the Dragons but after a gruelling 1 hour 20 minutes my legs were like jelly. I was only too pleased to leave the den with a fantastic investment from Duncan.

Later that year I received an invitation from the Women of The Year Foundation and was honoured to be recognised as a Woman of Achievement by them at a rather posh lunch in London - an experience which I doubt will ever be bettered.

I can only hope that 2011 will be half as exciting.



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For all general enquiries please contact:

**Jan France on 01993 822906**

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

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BREF	RING	SPECIES
37238	?0900?	GYR/SAKER FALCON
36286	?6124?	HARRIS HAWK

### REUNITED x 112

AMERICAN KESTREL	1
BARN OWL	16
COMMON BUZZARD	1
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL	6
GOSHAWK	2
GYR HYBRID	10
HARRIS HAWK	36
INDIAN EAGLE OWL	5
KESTREL	6
LITTLE OWL	1
PEREGRINE FALCON	6
PEREGRINE HYBRID	8
RED-TAILED HAWK	4
SAKER FALCON	7
SOUTHERN WHITE-FACED OWL	1
TAWNY OWL	2

### LOST x 14

67800	?5699?	BARN OWL
59906	?4408?	BURROWING OWL
82148	?7WHC?	GYR/SAKER FALCON

82265	?145XF?	GYR/SAKER FALCON
22738	?2102?	HARRIS HAWK
39236	?6066?	HARRIS HAWK
60008	?9271?	HARRIS HAWK
66241	?4698?	HARRIS HAWK
68597	?6976?	HARRIS HAWK
69443	?6771?	HARRIS HAWK
12499	?7816?	KESTREL
18313	?18RA?	LANNER FALCON
80683	?4180?	LANNER FALCON
60835	?4912?	TAWNY OWL

### FOUND x 11

62022	?6057?	BARN OWL
82156	?4JTJ?	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
82449	?HCB?	GOSHAWK
31732	?8968?	HARRIS HAWK
60852	?9523?	HARRIS HAWK
75073	?7330?	HARRIS HAWK
82621	?48YL?	HARRIS HAWK
12562	?8821?	KESTREL
82582	?3918?	PEREGRINE/LANNER HYBRID
82383	?8SF?	RED-TAILED HAWK
75437	?0841?	SPARROWHAWK

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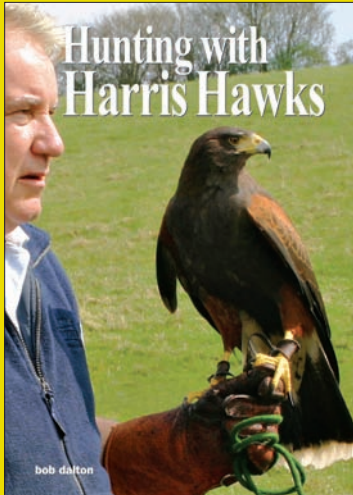
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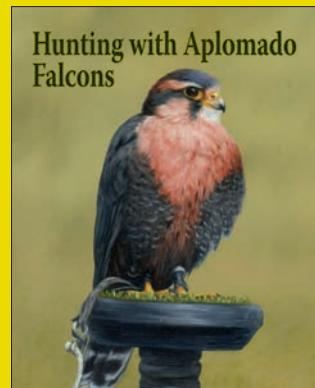
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