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The **Falcons**
& Raptor Conservation Magazine

*The current threats to
Large Birds of Prey*

The **Falconers**

& Raptor Conservation Magazine

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I hope everyone has had a good Spring and is enjoying the Summer. The British Falconers' and Raptor Fair was held at the new venue of Ragley Hall this year and I hope all of you who attended the event enjoyed it as much as I did. I also hope that you are all preparing for the up and coming flying season. I am looking forward to receiving and training a new Harris Hawk and I can't wait to get started.

As you can see in this issue there is a piece on a new event which is being held on 3 and 4 September at the International Bird of Prey Centre in Newent and is being organised by the UK Falconry Group. Please support this new fair by attending if you can, it should be a good event.

A big thank you to all the authors who have contributed articles for this and past issues. I am very grateful to everyone who takes the time and trouble to sit down and pen their thoughts, stories and facts. So go on, why not put your pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard!) and you may well see yourself published in a future edition.

In the meantime, have a good read.

editorial



Mongolian artificial nest project for Saker Falcons

Field teams of biologists have just completed the first survey of 5250 artificial nests set up for birds of prey on the Mongolian steppes. This ambitious project is being implemented by the Wildlife Science and Conservation Center (WSSC, Mongolia) and International Wildlife Consultants (UK) Ltd and is sponsored by the Environment Agency-Abu Dhabi under a 5-year Agreement with its governmental counterpart in Mongolia, the Ministry of Nature, Environment and Tourism. One of the aims of the project is to provide a legal and sustainable resource of Saker Falcons that the Mongolian government can export to falconers in Arabia, whilst the progress of this project is being monitored by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Revenue from the sales of falcons currently goes to the Mongolian government and an additional aim of the project is to also provide benefits for local people living in districts with artificial nests, through the development of schools projects and tourism links. Furthermore, the new population of birds of prey occupying the artificial nests can potentially help control the pest rodents that periodically plague the steppe and strip the grassland.

This is the first season for most of the nest barrels (250 having been established in previous years for preliminary experimental work), which are set out on posts on the open steppe where there are few natural nest sites. Already 201 pairs of Saker Falcons (*Falco cherrug*), 177 Upland Buzzards (*Buteo hemilasius*), 171 Ravens (*Corvus corax*) and 83 Common Kestrels (*Falco tinnunculus*) have been found breeding in the artificial nests this year.

IWC Director, Dr Nick Fox said "This



is a great start. 201 new pairs of Sakers is approaching the equivalent to the entire EU population of this species and we predict that this figure will double over the next few years. Constructive management efforts are much more positive than legal controls that have been unenforceable"

IWC Head of Research, Dr Andrew Dixon is encouraged: "The high occupancy levels indicate that there is a large population of non-breeding Sakers in central Mongolia which had no nest sites and are now able to breed. It is unlikely that many of these birds have relocated from existing nesting sites elsewhere."

Gankhuyag Purev-Ochir, Project Leader of the WSSC Mongolian team commented "local herdsmen are delighted that the birds of prey are

eating the rodents that can destroy grazing lands. We are working closely with district leaders so that they can begin to take ownership of the project and gain local benefits."

The young falcons produced at the artificial nests will be microchipped over the next five years under a Memorandum of Understanding between Mongolia, Abu Dhabi and IWC.

Although the Saker Falcon populations are struggling in most other Central Asian countries, the population in Mongolia is relatively stable and this 'conservation through sustainable use' project is aimed at maintaining this favourable status in spite of numerous threats that come from uncontrolled trapping and trade, electrocution and habitat degradation.

Specialist UK-based avian vet wins inaugural European award

Neil A. Forbes, BVetMed DipECZM(avian) FRCVS, a qualified European Specialist Bird Vet, who runs Great Western Exotics, operating out of the Vets Now Referrals Hospital in Swindon, has become the first ever recipient of the Helga Gerlach Award for Excellence in Avian Veterinary Sciences.

The award, which was presented to Neil at the 11th Conference of the European Committee of the Association of Avian Veterinarians (EAAV) on 28th April, was set up as part of the Helga Gerlach Fund in recognition of the work of Professor Helga Gerlach, who dedicated more than 50 years of her life to avian exotic and poultry medicine.

Neil was nominated and selected as the winner of the award from a selection of European contemporaries, who were required to meet a strict level of requirements, including having practised avian medicine for 15 years, and undertaken extensive teaching, writing, research and clinical performance in this field.

Raptor owners will be familiar with Neil, the specialist 24/7 exotic veterinary services offered at Great Western Exotics in Swindon, as well as his training courses. Neil, grandson of the famous falconer Bill Ruttledge, has spent over 30 years studying, researching, teaching and providing raptor medical care. The facility is the only full time specialist staffed, exotic animal veterinary service in the Southern UK. Neil regularly contributes to articles and periodicals on all aspects of Bird medicine published both in the UK and across Europe.

Commenting on his award Neil says: "To be the first recipient of this award is a great honour, especially knowing that I have been nominated and selected by my contemporaries across Europe. This is an area of veterinary



medicine that I am extremely passionate about and want to encourage more vets to become involved in, so that the level of veterinary care provided to birds can be raised. The Helga Gerlach fund celebrates and recognises the work being done by Specialist Avian vets across Europe and the world, and is an excellent recognition of the vast contribution that Professor Gerlach made to the advancement of Avian medicine."

Berneslai Homes help student fly high

The 'Kes Project' is an eight week course teaching Bird of Prey Management and Husbandry. It was set up to help student Ben Brettoner from Athersley North get back on the straight and narrow after he was involved in Anti Social Behaviour. The project was the idea of Berneslai Homes Housing Management Officer Chris Corker who keeps and shows birds of prey. After meeting Ben he set up the course which is run in conjunction with SMJ Falconry based in Bradford and funded by Carlton Community College.

Chris adds, "Whilst attending a meeting with various agencies and Carlton Community College it was mentioned that Ben was not overly interested in school work. However

at the mention of birds of prey he was extremely enthusiastic and seemed to have a real passion for the subject. It's great to see Ben channel his energies into something he loves and he's even mentioned that he'd like to go into this as a career."

The course has been fitted around Ben's school work and he has been set clear guidelines as to the behaviour expected whilst on the course and also at home and college.

Berneslai Homes and Carlton Community College both believe that by supporting students like Ben, in areas outside the normal college



curriculum, these chances will broaden their horizons. It will also give them a better appreciation of the environment that they live in and show that hard work and good behaviour can get rewards.

Reader's Letter

Dear Peter,

I have never had the privilege of owning my own hawk, (primarily not being able to satisfy my personal requirements for ownership). However, I have a keen interest in falconry particularly the Hawks and Buzzards. This interest has resulted in attending three courses over the last eight years (one two-day and two five-day) which have varied greatly in their standards.

I have outlined my position prior to responding to certain issues raised in your article 'My Rant' in the last edition of *The Falconers Magazine* (issue 85). There were several points that will generate further correspondence but I am concentrating on the issue of 'Beginners birds' such as the Harris Hawk.

The Harris Hawk if correctly treated can be active as a falconry bird for in excess of 20 years, and yet it is treated by many prominent falconers has a bird that can be taken up and dismissed once you gain experience, rather like the low power motorcycle until you pass your test. The impression generated and often reinforced in most falconry books and films regarding this bird is that it is easy to train and once you are experienced you will move on to a 'proper' falconry bird after a couple of years. That leaves a very long time for

a previously trained bird to be around. It is also advocated, quite rightly in most cases, for a novice not to take on a second hand bird since it is harder to correct problems with a poorly trained bird. The potential falconer looks at some of the beginner's books and it makes training seem easy, so a bird is bought and the problems start.

A good example with the Harris Hawk being hooded – so many experienced falconers are dismissive of this essential part of training and state it is not necessary for this species. Similarly telemetry since it is implied that the Harris Hawk will always return. I have read comparisons of the Harris being compared to a dog (following on).

These are the types of remark that make the Harris Hawk in particular vulnerable since the purchaser thinks it is easy to train, mistakes are easily rectified and the bird can be passed on when you become more experienced. The result is a poorly trained miserable bird that is often released due to the bird's failure to meet impossible expectations. I think that the falconry bodies and the hawk board need to improve the kudos of birds such as the Harris Hawk so those that purchase these intelligent birds feel that they have a bird of significant status, and worth properly training.

Peter Hards, by e-mail



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

With the wide variety of food on the market what advice can you give the first time falconer for the feeding of their hawks so that they can get into tip-top flying condition? What are the different nutritional values of food such as quail, rat and day-old-chicks?

We are what we eat . . . and for performance birds, good food is essential. For the beginner, there are some basic rules – no matter how good the food in terms of nutritional quality, all is negated if it is not looked after properly.

- 1 Buy good quality food from a reputable source.
- 2 Do not use wild –sourced food, especially roadkill and shot (even head-shot) game.
- 3 Ensure food is:-
 - a) Stored properly
 - b) Defrosted properly in hygienic conditions with exclusion of flies/wild rodents
 - c) Fed in hygienic conditions
 - d) Fed in appropriate amounts considering the bird's size, needs, exercise levels and weight/ condition
 - e) Fed in a correct balance- ideally as whole carcase to ensure correct nutritional balance. Imbalance can only rarely be made up by supplementation. There is no ideal single supplement- supplementation should be based on specific needs at specific times- e.g. moult or breeding.

Specific Foods

For a thorough review see Forbes, NA & Flint, CG (2000) Raptor Nutrition. Honeybrook Farm Animal Feeds, Evesham, UK. However, as a summary:

Day-old Cockerel (DOC)

Cheap and easily available, these are the

staple of most raptor diets.

In recent years they have had a bad press as it is felt that they are capable of transmitting disease (especially salmonellosis and E. coli) and are too high in fat and low in calcium.

However, good quality DOC have a good protein level, are less fat than commercially-available rodent, contain good levels of fat-soluble vitamins, and an excellent calcium:phosphorus ratio provided they are fed with yolk sac left in. Many falconers remove this yolk sac as it is felt that this will “reduce levels of infection”. This is, of course, false. If the yolk sac appears unsuitable for feeding then the whole chick should be condemned. If several are found with this appearance, then the whole batch should be discarded. It will also remove the main source of calcium and fat-soluble vitamins, resulting in a carcase that is no longer nutritionally balanced. It is also worth checking that chicks have not been defrosted and re-frozen. This is apparent as red legs on the chicks – if evident then the batch of chicks should be discarded.

One potential problem with feeding whole chick is that it is messy. Some

raptors will accumulate material under the talons leading to an erosive dermatitis. This will track in resulting in bone infections and often loss or damage to the flexor tendon and its attachment. Therefore, attention must be paid to cleanliness if feeding the hawk on chicks.

Rat

Very good source of calcium and fat-soluble vitamins as well as being high in protein. They are often high in fat and some raptors find them unappetizing. They are also hard to prepare and reasonably expensive. The fat content can be controlled if rats are bought alive and maintained by the falconer himself to control their feeding.

In case rats are slaughtered and stored frozen it is important to eviscerate (intestine and gut, not liver, kidney, heart) the animal before (even it is not a whole carcase afterwards) as rats take some time to be frosted completely. This time enables bacteria to leave the gut and contaminate the meat.

Sections have been reproduced from the author's chapter on raptor nutrition in the BSAVA *Manual of Raptors, Pigeons and Passerine Birds* (Eds Chitty & Lierz) published by BSAVA in 2008.

Quail	
These have gained popularity as an alternative to day-old-cockerel. However, care must be taken as to which sort of quail are fed .	
Really only quail that has been specifically bred and reared for feeding to raptors should be used.	
Type	Comments
5 week culls	Males. Small and low fat as lacking a yolk sac. However, also low in fat-soluble vitamins.
6-8 week prime birds	Produced specifically as feedstuff. Good quality, well-balanced feedstuff with adequate calcium levels and good Ca:P ratio. However, may be low in Vitamin E.
8 month ex-layers	All female and all with large active ovaries. Very fat and a potential source of pathogens after being in intensive production systems. Care should also be taken with vaccinated birds as live vaccine may adversely affect the raptor.
Vitamin E enhanced prime birds	As prime birds but good Vitamin E levels. These are expensive and may not carry any great advantage over day-old cockerel.

Nick Kester
Communications Officer



Like moulting hawks, nothing happens for months and then feathers drop by the score, so it is with news affecting falconry. Lots to report but because of magazine deadlines some items are ongoing and more will be added to next quarter.

Elections: Because there were only three standing for three seats, no ballot was needed. So Jim Chick, Jemima Parry-Jones and Derek Stotton were duly elected to serve on the board.

John Hounslow: For those in the know, John headed Animal Health's bird registration division for many years. But after this next Hawk Board meeting he retires. The board presented him with a sculpture of a kestrel and a personalised (tongue in cheek) Article 10 certificate in memory of his dealings with the UK's falconers. John was always polite and whenever possible cooperative; it is fair to say he had no hidden agenda. We wish him well and welcome his replacement Caroline Rigg.

UK Falconry Club: In a departure from the norm, the board has welcomed its first online club. The UKFC meets all our traditional criteria, despite being largely online. Its representative is Lee Featherstone (goshawk breeder and falconer) and given that their e-magazine The Chase gets some 150,000 hits a month we can be sure that many more will see the HB news that the UKFC undertakes to publish on our behalf.

Invasive Alien Species: The Hawk Board, through its membership of the Sustainable Users Network (SUN), has been monitoring developments in Brussels to control invasive species. Of course falconers do more than most to ensure that escapees are recovered but given the number of non-natives flown today there are some concerns. EU legislation already states under the Bern Convention that flying a hawk for falconry does not constitute a deliberate release. However, the EU, in its desire to shut doors even when they are not open, is looking at a list of un-desirables. Some countries want a white list created (a list

OUR WORK

Over the last seven years the Hawk Board has been involved in many consultations and lobby projects with government departments. Here are a few of them so that you can understand why our work is vital for all aspects of falconry and bird of prey keeping.

	2008	Deregistration of birds of prey species under the WCA Countryside Alliance Falconry for Schools project Defra consultation on 'sustainable management and conservation of wildlife' Irish Wildlife review EU Wildlife Trade Review Brussels
2004		Animal Welfare Bill. Development of our welfare guidelines. Hunting with hounds ban and the use of the 'bird of prey loophole'
2005		Proposal to ban the keeping of all CITES species Consultation on COTES regulations
2006		Animal transport licences (for commercial gain) introduced Bird Flu and its impact on trade and field meets Docking of working dogs
2007		Falconry in the UK (Hawk Board Audit) published Open general licences consultation (England & Scotland) Schedule 9 of Wildlife and Countryside Act consultation Review and consultation of ports of entry and export
	2009	Open general licences consultation (Wales) Wildlife & Natural Environment Bill consultation (Scotland) Release and recovery of birds of prey consultation with Defra
	2010	Animal imports and exports consultation (Wales) EU survey on Animal Welfare Defra cost efficiency survey/consultation EU biodiversity consultation
	2011	Invasive alien species – EU working group with Sustainable Users Network Wild animals in circuses Cessation of AIOs for wild disabled

... To be continued!

of every native species and everything else is alien).

This is impractical and expensive – you only have to look at the plants in your garden to understand why. The UK government is more minded to have a black list (species that are genuinely alien and invasive). And to reinforce our position, SUN (including HB) met Richard Benyon MP, Defra Minister responsible for this problem. He understands our concerns as do his civil servants (also present) and we were able to put our case. The board has already prepared a briefing paper on this which can be found on our website http://www.hawkboard-cff.org.uk/nm/publish/news_69.html

This was edited to a series of bullet points and a history of the use of non-natives was added, and presented to the Minister. During the meeting, we made sure that we were aware of the issues and that we sought the government's full support to recapture any escapees; there has been an unwanted hybridisation of a buzzard and Harris hawk in Plymouth and trapping has been hindered by not having the support of the local or national agencies. It was also pointed out that

should trapping fail, the board would sanction a more fundamental solution. We are monitoring this EU initiative very closely.

Wild animals in circuses: If, like many, you came to falconry through seeing a display, you may be concerned to read this parliamentary debate which took place on 23rd June, which you can find it at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110623/debtext/110623-0003.htm#11062335000004> Whilst you may think banning lions and tigers in circuses doesn't affect falconry – indeed Mark Pritchard, who proposed the motion, said it wouldn't – there are broader implications. Are captive bred birds of prey domestic and therefore private property such as dogs and cats, or are they wild animals under human care? There are two schools of thought and it needs to be clarified.

The complication arises because, with the exception of hybrids, birds of prey can be both wild native and domestic. So do falconry displays fall under this umbrella?

Although this passed the commons without a vote, and having been wrapped up in a great deal of political manoeuvring, it may not become law. However, there has been some troubling news from Austria that may impact on us. Apparently an anti falconry campaigner has taken out an injunction banning all displays! A similar situation exists in Brussels (but not the rest of Belgium, which is devolved). We have asked the Countryside Alliance for an opinion on this, but its previous Chief Executive, now an MP, was sufficiently concerned to contact the board and alert them to the debate. We are following this up most carefully.

Wild disabled AIOs: Animal Health has withdrawn the issue of AIOs for wild disabled, replacing it with a requirement to obtain authorisation to retain a raptor from the devolved environment agencies (Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage and Countryside Council for Wales). (For those with longer memories, this was originally with JNCC.) Finding the forms online is proving a bit of a problem and we are seeking further clarification at the next meeting.

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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The Current Threats to Large Birds of Prey

As with most big animals, by and large, the bigger the bird of prey i.e. vultures and eagles generally, the more problems are likely to face it in this increasingly over populated planet of ours.

Although often the most threatened species are island races because of their very nature of living on a small and often specialised habitat, the bigger you are the more food you are going to need, the more range you are going to need to inhabit and the more obvious you are to the worse predator of all – humans. And if you happen to affect humans, well then you become a pest species!! It amazes me that various friends of mine tell me there are ‘too many buzzards/red kites/peregrines!!! What do they mean too many?? Unlike human beings wildlife self-levels, once the numbers get beyond what the habitat and food supply can support, the populations drop and stabilise, apart from humans, there is no such thing as too many, there are as many as there is food and breeding space available for them to survive, it’s as simple as that, particularly with birds of prey who are predators. Just remember this, a pyramid cannot stand on its head.

So what are the threats that affect our large birds of prey now, and sadly they are numerous.

Habitat destruction probably remains the highest threat for most species.

Direct persecution is high on the list
Indirect persecution causes untold damage

Electrocution

Wind Turbines

Trade

One off accidental poisoning

Badly thought out legislation



Bonnellis Eagle

All over the world felling trees is huge business, even our own government was recently considering selling off large tracts of the English peoples national forests to make money. I have to say it strikes me as extraordinary that we as supposedly an intelligent animal are happily removing the one thing that for free uses up carbon dioxide, gives us oxygen and cleans up the air of our planet, it really is staggeringly stupid. The knock on effect of felling is not only to make the ozone layer even more vulnerable, but to remove the habitat from huge numbers of species,

some of which we don't even know exist, but could be vital, but certainly the large forest eagles many of them are now on the edge of extinction. We bemoan the loss of the Dodo, what an amazing creature and would it not have been great to see one and have them around, and yet we are doing exactly the same thing over and over again with increasing rapidity.

Vultures have not traditionally been persecuted to the same extent that eagles have been and still are. But nevertheless they have been killed for various reasons.

Probably the most significant in Africa is the wholesale poisoning of vultures for tribal medicine, or worst still for predicting the future. The numbers of vultures killed for this increased when South Africa brought in their national lottery, because people wanted the winning numbers predicted, and so vultures died. Bush meat is another cause of them being killed, but 'muti' stands highest in Africa.

Even in the US vultures are now being killed, humans move into new areas, take the habitat that the vultures traditionally used, then create rubbish dumps which the vultures utilise and so in Florida the government is shooting Turkey and Black Vultures – because they are a 'nuisance' I have to say I know which of the two I would prefer to have around and which is the most of a nuisance!

It was interesting to note that a student shot one of the released and highly endangered Californian Condors just for fun, and many rehabilitation Centres will tell you that Americans frequently shoot their birds of prey including their own national emblem. We are not to be forgotten over here, there are still landowners, particularly in high shooting areas that kill eagles and other birds of prey and many pigeon racing fanciers will consider killing peregrines. Malta probably takes the first prize for shooting though, killing up to five million birds on migration every day, including a huge number of swallows and swifts which is just insanely stupid, and going out in boats to kill the larger birds of prey as they fly towards the island for a rest. Nice people, one can only hope they will all eventually die of lead poisoning.

Speaking of which we know that lead kills birds of prey, we know that it caused the almost extinction of the California Condor, there is a ton of scientific evidence to support it. We also know that humans eating lead in hunted meat is not good, it causes a number of problems in humans and particularly in children. One of the problems is reduced intelligence



Marshall Eagle

which I have to say must be the only reason that they are stupid enough not to stop using lead bullets and shot!

Electrocution is a factor in mortality, particularly with large birds of prey. Because of their wide wingspan, it is far too easy for them to touch two wires and thus get electrocuted, it is very sad to see, and so easy for power companies to stop happening. There are a ton of preventive methods that can be put onto poles to make them safe for wildlife, but there is a cost, however that cost to the power companies is far less than the cost is to wildlife.

Death by wind-farm

Wind-farms can also do untold damage, there is footage on UTube of Vultures being hit and falling still living from the sky only to die on hitting the ground. If only people just thought a little more about the design and where to put them they would do far less damage, the worst culprit is one in Norway, where in 2006 nine white-tailed eagles have been killed on the Smola islands off the Norwegian coast in 10 months, including all of last year's chicks. Chick numbers at the species' former stronghold have

Griffon Vultures are being killed in Spain and on the Californian Coast when the wind farm owners were taxed about having wind farms on migration routes asked why the birds could not move their route!!!! Humans, don't you just love them.

Trade is an increasing feature in putting pressure on wild stocks, particularly eagles and vultures. Since European CITES was stupid enough to change the rules on importing of wild birds of prey, the numbers that have been taken from Africa are very concerning, especially as the reported numbers are only those that made it through alive and only those countries that offered number returns, I suspect you could double the numbers with ease.

Decline in population

These numbers constitute a huge drain on the populations, particularly as many of the birds came through as adult birds, once the mortality rate or in this case the loss of adult breeding stock gets over 5%, there will be a population decline – and that is happening right now.

Probably the most unexpected case of accidental poisoning is the case of the Asian Griffon Vultures, as far as we know at this point, only the Oriental White-backed Vulture, the Long-billed Vulture and the Slender-billed Vulture, all of these have suffered a 99.9% population drop, it is the largest population crash of any



prolific and controlling. We are also the only species that breeds when there is a famine, starts wars and kills our own kind in the most horrific of ways, litters and destroys the only home we have at a rate that is terrifying, and apparently does not have the brain that we all think we have, or we would not be doing it.

Imagine a world with no birds, any kind of birds, it would be a sorry place to live in.

Left: Lappet Faced Vulture

Below: Griffon Vulture

species in such a short period of time – 15 years. The cause is a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug called Diclofenac which was invented for humans in the 1960's and in the late 80's when its patent ran out it was licensed as a veterinary drug in South Asia, Africa and South America. By sheer bad luck it happens to be deadly toxic to Gyps vultures and has caused the death of probably 40 million birds. We do not know if it is toxic to other birds, it seems possible, but testing has not yet been done.

Bad legislation for vultures?

As a final insult to vultures, badly thought out legislation in Europe banned the leaving of animal carcasses out once they had died. In the mountainous areas of Spain these carcasses form a large part of the Eurasian Griffon Vultures food source, so finally a derogation had to be written to allow these carcasses to be left out for the birds. And even now the paperwork is horrific. It just confirms my opinion that the people writing legislation ought to be forced to work in every field that it might affect before they are allowed to write it!

My personal philosophy is that this stunning planet is not ours by some God Given right, we happen to have been the species that evolved to be the most



Knives and the law

by Richard Guy-Gibbens

www.newforestbushcraft/www.handmadebushcraftknives.com

We all at some point have carried a knife in whatever outdoor activity we may choose to participate in. But what happens if you leave the knife in your pocket or on your belt on the way home, or maybe put it in the glove box of the car when you have finished – are you breaking the law?

There are two acts that cover the legality of knives; the Criminal Justice Act (CJA) 1988 and certain types of knife are banned under the Restriction of Offensive Weapons Act (ROWA) 1959. To simplify the understanding of the law I will try and give you a small guide to refer to so you

know you are complying with the law when you carry a knife.

“It is an offence for any person, without lawful authority or good reason, to have with him in a public place, any article which has a blade or is sharply pointed except for a folding pocket-knife which has a cutting edge to its blade not exceeding three inches.”

When the phrase folding pocket knife is used this means a non-locking folding knife; if it has a lock of any sort it is illegal to carry in a public place.

Where the phrase “good reason” is used it is intended to allow for “common sense” possession of knives, so that it is legal to carry a knife if there is a genuine

reason to do so. Examples of reasons which have been accepted include: a knife required for one’s trade (e.g. a chef’s knife or myself as a knife maker), as part of a national costume (e.g. a sgian dubh), or for religious reasons (e.g. a Sikh Kirpan).

A public place is meant as a place that is accessible by any member of the public, for example a campsite where you have booked a pitch is considered a public place as is your car if it is parked anywhere that is accessible to the public. So keeping your knife in the car or glove box is illegal – it must be taken out and put away when you get home. Also, when traveling in the car, it should be in the boot away from easy reach.



The Offensive Weapons Act

The Offensive Weapons Act states the following, “It is an offence for a person to manufacture, sell, hire or offer for sale or hire or expose or have in his possession for the purpose of sale or hire, or lend or give to any person:

A) any knife which has a blade which opens automatically by hand pressure applied to a button, spring or other device in or attached to the handle of the knife, sometimes known as a “flick knife” or “flick gun”; or

B) any knife which has a blade which is released from the handle or sheath thereof by the force of gravity or the application of centrifugal force and which, when released, is locked in place by means of a button, spring, lever, or other device, sometimes known as a “gravity knife”.

Remember, when it comes to knives and the law, it is down to you to prove you had good reason to carry the knife not for the court to prove you did not, so this is a reversal of the normal justice system.

Just be sensible and carry a knife only when you need to. Knives are an important tool and can save lives in extreme situations. As long as you keep within the above guidelines you can carry on using these important tools without worry.

We Humphrey ap Evans were 1922 – 2009 Falconers

Part 2



Adam with Ap hawking

Over the years many falconers have lost Goshawks, especially in the days when telemetry had not even been heard of and weight training was little practised. And so it was that in mid September tragedy struck again. Shilloolabeg chased after a rabbit, lost it, and then flew up into a tree. She refused to come down. Ap stayed out until dark attempting to call her in, and returned to her perch shortly before dawn. As soon as it was light enough to see, however, Shilloolabeg flew off and Ap spent all day chasing her around. This went on for five days with Shilloolabeg always managing to catch something for herself, totally ignoring Ap's entreaties for her to come to the lure. On the fifth day, Ap heard her bells tinkling in the distance. After some five minutes he found her but, to his horror she was laying on the ground dead. He could only conclude that she had collided with a tree.

Walter Joynson had to be informed of Shilloolabeg's demise, of course, and he took the news very well. So well in fact, that he offered Ap a cast of merlins which were readily accepted. Two weeks later though Walter had a disaster of his own and one of the merlins went back to him. The female, Morgan, became part of the Drummond family. She slept in their bedroom and went everywhere with Ap, including trips away from home.

Ap's other great love was hounds, in particular Bassets. One morning he asked Cherry, "How would you like to have a



Vernon – Goshawk

basset hound?” After Cherry counted off the numerous dogs and other animals they already had Ap replied, “A tiny sweet affectionate little dog called Comfort, hardly bigger than Kirsche.... she’s arriving at Perth Station this morning”. Some things never change over the years with falconers! You mention an animal or bird in passing to your spouse, politely asking if she would like it, and then announce it is arriving that morning no matter what she says. When Ap and Cherry arrived at the station to collect the hound they found there were actually two. Ap gave Cherry a sheepish grin. “Comfort”, an Artesian Normand Basset and “Garnish” a Griffon Vendeen then joined the fold and so commenced the start of The Kilspindie Basset Hounds.

Telegram message

Not long after Comfort and Garnish arrived, Cherry received a phone call. It was the operator asking if she would take down a telegram. The message read, ‘Hounds arriving Perth Thursday evening’. Ap, when questioned, replied vaguely, “I don’t know. It’s from Eric Morrison and I suppose he may have said at one time he was sending me another draft of hounds to thicken the pack, I’ve rather forgotten. It’s only a couple”. However, on arriving at the station, they found four hounds. Rambler, Lamport, Grayling and Grecian then completed the pack. In a short space of time Rambler became the pack leader.

After several weeks of exercise the pack were hunting.

In July 1958 Ap was offered two young Kestrels which he readily accepted as Morgan was in moult. They were named Camilla and Clova. Already well manned, most of their further training was carried out by Cherry and Adam, now five years old. In a short space of time both were flying to the lure. Ap decided to release Camilla into the wild. Although she stayed around for a short time she finally flew off but was seen from time to time during that summer. Clova was released later in the year and although she remained in the area much longer than Camilla she too finally left.

In August Ap spent two days with noted falconer and actor James Robertson Justice grouse hawking with his Peregrines. Ap hunted sparrows with Morgan to Justice’s great delight.

The hour soon came when Ap decided it was time to release Morgan. He took her out for her last flight. Morgan was already bobbing her head when he let go of the jesses. She flew straight up nearly colliding with a snipe. They flew up together until the snipe plunged to earth followed by Morgan who then struck the snipe killing it instantly. She was then released after being ringed by Ap. Morgan remained around the orchard for sometime before finally leaving.

In September Ap got another Goshawk, a Norwegian eyass tiercel. He was totally untrained and Ap set about manning him. He was of a different disposition to his previous Goshawks and Ap named him Venom which Cherry thought was totally appropriate. Shortly afterwards a second Goshawk, Hesse, arrived from Germany which Ap was to look after for his friend Walter Joynson. Venom was a splendid hunter, although he had a habit of carrying off prey. He took Moorhens with great zeal which invariably caused him to end up being soaking wet. The following March, whilst Ap was away, Cherry moved Venom from his mews to his perch on the lawn. When she checked on him later she found him fitting and he died shortly afterwards.

Tragedy with Goshawks seemed to follow Ap. He had started hunting with Hesse who was doing very well and at the time turned out to be a much loved hawk. Many Falconers now know the possible dangers of screen perches and in

this day and age they are rarely used. Just two months later Ap went to the mews one morning and found Hesse with a hind claw caught in a loose bit of sacking. She had obviously bated at some stage and she had been unable to regain the perch. Sadly she had got hung up and died.

Ap’s next hawk was totally different from the rest. On the advice of an American falconer he acquired ‘Itza’, a Collared Forest Falcon from Lima, Peru. He had been told that this species would be good for flying at hares but this was simply not to be the case. She turned out to be a very choosy and difficult feeder and was not a suitable falconry bird.

Although success with Goshawks had not been good for Ap he was still not prepared to give up on them. In early 1960 Colonel Lindquist, a falconer in Sweden, sent Ap a Lapland Goshawk. She turned out to be a magnificent bird with a lovely temperament. Ap named her Raguna and hawked with her successfully.

First book published

In 1960 Ap published his first book, *Falconry for You*. It was suitably dedicated to Saint Bavo of Valkenswaard, the patron saint of falconers. The popular press reviews of it were quite favourable, but T.A.M. Jack, writing in the *Journal of the BFC*, held a very mixed opinion of the work. While Jack admits Ap “does know a great deal about grouse hawking” and “makes various observations which show him to be a competent and thoughtful falconer”, he nevertheless disparaged the populist notion trumpeted by Ap that anyone could become a falconer. Jack also took issue with Ap’s ebullient way of writing: “In his first chapters ap Evans is inclined to fall into a racy, jargon-haunted passion which becomes tedious”. This, however, was Ap himself and one of the reasons why the book remains so popular. Ap’s enthusiasm for hawking shines through on every page. The book has gone through many reprintings. Fifty years on *Falconry For You* still remains popular and just about every falconer seems to have a copy.

Ap continued to rescue birds and animals of all descriptions. Following a phone call from a friend he rescued two birds of prey from a London pet shop. Both were in a very bad way with numerous broken feathers having been kept in unsuitable confinement. How

they came to be in a pet shop was never established, and how they came to be in the U.K. was also a mystery, as they turned out to be a Tawny Eagle and a Chanting Goshawk. The Goshawk was seriously ill and died within a week of being rescued. The Tawny Eagle however survived and was given the name of Cronk.

Shortly after Christmas a Merlin, 'Pearly' arrived and she ended up living in their bedroom as the winters in Scotland were harsh.

At the end of February 1961 the family temporarily moved into Megginch Castle to stay with Cherry's parents owing to the imminent arrival of their third child. And so it was, in early March, their son Humphrey was born in a four poster bed with Pearly the Merlin perched on one of the corners and a Basset Hound under it.

Ap loved children and had an amazing rapport with them. Parties were held to entertain the children, many with themes such as "Pirates" and "Robin Hood". The infamous Robin Hood party had been arranged for Adam's 6th birthday. Everyone was in fancy dress, including Ap, and he had gathered his 'Merry Men' of children around him. Suddenly he

shouted "Look, one of the Sheriff's men". All eyes looked up towards the turreted front of Megginch Castle to see a man in a suit of armour. Ap fitted an arrow to his bow and shot it upwards. The arrow connected and the man toppled head first from the roof to the ground with an arrow still stuck in it. 'Robin' and his 'Merry Men' then went off into the woods to meet Friar Tuck. Some weeks later Ap heard that one of the mothers actually thought the armoured man was a real person falling from the battlements and that Ap and Cherry had gone too far this time.

In 1963 their daughter Amelie was born followed by John in 1966 and Catherine in 1967.

The year 1966 saw the family move into the home of Cherry's parents, Megginch Castle. Megginch Castle dates back to around 1460 with a 16th century wing dated 1575 and other additions that were added in 1820 and 1928. In 1664 the castle was sold to the Drummonds and has remained in the family ever since. The castle is also home to an unusual collection of stuffed birds that were created by a member of the Drummond family back in the 1840's.

The castle gardens have a physic garden, a 16th century rose garden, an astrological garden, a long herbaceous border inside a walled garden, topiary and yew trees believed to be 1000 years old.

The castle was also home to an extensive library with many books and manuscripts on falconry. Three years after moving into the castle most of these rare and valuable works were destroyed when fire swept through the 18th and 19th century wings.

Ap was heartbroken over the loss of his books. They were not only reference books which he frequently consulted but were also a link to falconers of the past to whom he felt himself an heir. He soon set about rebuilding his collection and over the next thirty years acquired some of the scarcest books on the sport. In 2001, with his falconry career behind him, Ap decided to sell off the cream of his collection at Bonhams, London. He hoped to give other falconers the same opportunity to delight in acquiring these rare books that he once enjoyed.

Rare book sold at auction

Amongst the books auctioned as "The Property of a Gentleman" was a superb copy of Jean de Franchieres' *La fauconnerie* (1567), which sold for £20,000. This seldom seen work went for two and a half times its high estimate, reflecting the universally lofty prices that most of Ap's books achieved. Douglas Craven Phillott's collection of rare journal offprints on falconry in India met with spirited bidding as very few copies of these ephemeral works have survived. This copy was purchased by the Eyr Press which used it for their handsome reprinting titled "Observations on Eastern Falconry". A 1773 Campbell, a 1596 Frederick II, a 1633 Latham, the impossible to find 1871 Delme-Radcliffe, and a lovely 1611 Turberville were some of the 47 falconry books sent out into the world by Ap. Several of these are slated to become part of the collection of the Archives of Falconry.

Both Ap and Cherry were avid writers. Ap wrote many stories for magazines and was a regular contributor to *The Field*. He published many books, amongst them: *Our Man in Scotland: Ralph Sadlier 1507-1587* (1969); *The Queen's Man, Mary Queen of Scots* and



Drummond with Gossie

the Fourth Earl of Bothwell-Lovers or Villains (1975); The King's Enemy: The life of Francis Stewart 5th Earl of Bothwell; Nazi Gold (1994); and of course his second falconry book titled Falconry, An Illustrated Introduction which was published in 1973. As an author he was so well thought of that between 1975 and 1981 he was the Chairman of the Society of Authors (Scotland).

Ap was well known for his sense of humour and for being a practical joker. One night whilst in Vienna, a friend who was already late for attending an Opera was finishing dressing. Ap delayed him even further by piling up eight huge sofas against the door of the hotel bedroom.

A neighbour of Ap's who also shared his fondness for pranks once received a visit from a BBC producer. When the producer informed him that he was searching for a suitable background for a low intellect comedy he suggested that the producer went and looked at Megginch. He then telephoned Ap to let him know the producer was on his way. Ap who was convinced this was a leg pull dressed himself in dark glasses, a Goldilocks wig and a Count Dracula style cape. The visit by the producer turned out to be very short.

What could possibly be deemed another leg pull appeared in the BFC Journal for December 1968. Under the name of H. Ap Evans he wrote a report on the Scottish Game Fair held at Blair Drummond, Stirling 26-27 July. Ap wrote, "The commentary by Humphrey Drummond, the Club's Scottish representative, was equal to the occasion". One wonders how many BFC Members in 1968 would have realised he was talking about himself.

Ap's other interests included collecting Victorian penny-in-the-slot machines and other antiques. He also enjoyed good wine. On 18 September 1999 was deemed 'Open that bottle night'. People were urged to open the wine that they had been saving for a special occasion. Ap took part in this, or at least was going to. After retrieving a bottle of 1932 Chateau Margaux from the cellar at Megginch he dropped it. He later wrote, "All I could do was to soak as much as I could into my handkerchief and suck away the heavenly juice".

Ap continued hunting with hawks well into the 1980's, primarily with goshawks,

and continued writing articles on various subjects, including falconry. In 1982 he wrote an article that appeared in The BFC Journal on A Russian Game Fair in the late 1800's, intrigued to know what was happening in the Russian falconry world at that time.

Title claimed

In 1986, a dramatic circumstance occurred which greatly affected family life. Cherry proved a claim to the title of Lady Strange. The Strange barony had been created by Charles I in 1627. The Strange forbears, descended from the Earls of Derby, ruled the Isle of Man until 1765. The title then passed to the Dukes of Atholl who the Drummonds were distantly related to. After the death without issue of the 9th Duke the barony went into abeyance but was later claimed by Cherry's father, John Drummond, who was awarded it after a long struggle.

He finally took his seat in the House of Lords as the 15th Baron in 1964. Following his death in 1982 the title again fell into abeyance until Cherry succeeded in proving her claim. In the Lords she became a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union which resulted in much travelling to such places as Bulgaria, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Canada and the Philippines. Ap, with his sense of humour, greatly enjoyed checking into hotels and exchanging knowing looks with the desk clerk when he signed in as "Mr. Drummond and Lady Strange".

Cherry passed away at Megginch Castle on March 11th 2005 aged 76. Her death left a huge gap in Ap's life. He loved her dearly and was devoted to her.

Ap passed away just four years later, aged 86, in April 2009. He is buried beside Cherry in the grounds of Megginch Castle. Prior to his death he made this last request to his sons and daughters:

'I would like a rough coffin of wooden boards with the bark left on, no brass or polished wood, to be buried in the Megginch Chapel ground where the cock pheasants crow, where the occasional fox comes delicately past looking for the game cock or hen roosting in the rhododendrons.

I would like particularly NOT to be taken to some funeral parlour, nor to leave the house until taken to be buried. I could be left, say, in the bird hall. I would like the coffin taken down to the Chapel

in, if possible, a horse drawn farm cart for the service. If anyone comes to my funeral they would gather at Megginch and walk down to the Chapel behind the horse and cart which would be nice. Thank you if this could be done.

At the beginning of the short service, before it actually starts, I would like the song Myfanwy sung on the tape by a Welsh Choir which one of the boys, if they are there, could arrange on a record or disc player of some sort, and then Aled Jones singing Ave Maria at the end.

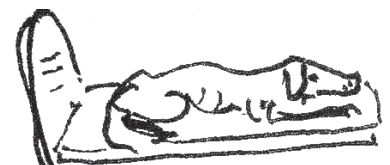
When the coffin is put in the grave, at which please no plastic turf, just the ordinary earth, and no throwing of mud or pebbles rattling onto the coffin. I would like Adam to blow Gone Away, followed by Going Home, on my silver hunting horn. I would like as many DOGS as possible at my funeral, no matter if they growl or bark or escape to go hunting. I attach an order of service as I would like it, quite simple and short.

I would like a headstone made as following, paid for out of my money, if there is any left! Any stone carver could do it quite easily. The stone to consist of a hound lying with his muzzle on his forepaws and on the upright a hooded hawk perched, on one leg, on the top of it.

Wording:

"Here lies Humphrey ap Evans of Lovesgrove, Aberystwyth, later Humphrey Drummond of Megginch, husband of Cherry Drummond of Megginch, 16th Baroness Strange, and father of Adam, Charles, Humphrey, Amelia, John & Catherine. Born Old Buckenham 18 Sept 1922 Died 2009

I have gone back to the hills from whence I came, nor am I alone, for my hawk and my hound are with me."



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With thanks to:
Adam Drummond
British Falconers' Club
Eton College
Geoffrey Tudor, First Mountain Regiment
Vasser College

Tale of an escaped Buzzard

Falconry, the “Sport of Kings”, has I am sorry to say a knave within its ranks. In fact to refer to this individual as a knave is somewhat tame as the individual’s actions and intentions were clearly both deliberate and criminal, not to mention utterly indefensible.

Many years ago I helped out at the falconry centre at a local wildlife park where I met and flew a European Buzzard. I remember this bird well as she was the first bird of prey to talon me and electively “handcuff” me grasping both my hands within her talons – it is something that you tend to remember.

Several years later she went to another falconer who ran a falconry centre at a local attraction and again I had the pleasure of flying her once more. Somewhat more experienced and wiser I kept my hands out of her way, as she has never given up the chance or opportunity to foot an unwary handler.

Life of luxury

In time she passed into private hands and had a life of relative luxury. Unfortunately, as we know, accidents do occur despite your best efforts and on 17 April she escaped while soaking wet having just had a shower under the garden hose. Her frantic owners along with friends and other falconers, seven in total, searched all over for her and simply could not understand why they were unable to locate her. Unbeknown to them the bird had landed in a tree about 200 yards away in the garden of a couple who recognized that she was fitted with falconry equipment and had a bright blue closed ring on one leg.

The couple made some phone calls and a “falconer” duly arrived in response to their call. A chick offered on a gauntlet

soon had the desired effect and the bird was recovered. Having come to the fist, the falconer declared that the blue ring was in fact an IBR ring and as such he should have no problem in identifying the bird’s owner.

However, the IBR simply never received a report to the effect that the bird had been recovered. In the meantime the IBR, local Police, RSPCA, DEFRA, local radio station and a local falconry centre were notified of the bird’s escape. Laminated colour A4 posters were prepared and displayed everywhere (except the local Tesco who were not prepared to help). The news was passed out to local and regional falconers, reported on the IFF and word further spread between falconers via the e-mail and telephone system as we do in an effort to help. The laminated posters and the half page article by the local press, which included a good quality colour picture of the lost bird, resulted (understandably) in a host of false reports, each of which was followed up. Days were spent touring the local area, but all to no avail – the bird had seemingly disappeared off the face of the earth.

On 21 April the owners started to call door to door in the area of the bird’s loss, posting leaflets at each house asking for help in finding the missing bird.

Then the jungle drum messages resulted in a chance conversation with a friend of the people who had found the buzzard in their garden. By this time the finders were away on holiday but it was ascertained that the bird had in fact been recovered by the attending “falconer”. It was now known who had recovered the bird but still the recovery had not been reported by the falconer concerned – it was now 27 April.

The police were notified of the

circumstances but took no positive action pending the return from holiday of the couple who had discovered the bird in their garden. On their return they were visited by the police and the bird’s recovery was related to them, the point being made that the “falconer” had made specific mention of the bird having an IBR closed ring and that it was fitted with anklets and flying jesses.

Police actions

The police, for reasons best known to the attending officer, did not deal with the investigation as well and effectively as perhaps some other officers may have done. On 29 April the officer dealing with it took a written statement from the bird’s owners and then later in the day attended the premises of the recovering falconer who when spoken too agreed and said yes, he had recovered a buzzard from the garden of the reporting couple but that as it had been a wild buzzard that he had simply released it back into the wild. (A wild Buzzard fitted with anklets, flying jesses and two closed rings and coming to the fist to take offered food).

The police officer should, I feel, have arrested our suspect on suspicion of theft and then dealt with the investigation in a vigorous and positive manner in line with the provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (sorry did I fail to mention that I am a recently retired police officer). To say I am dismayed at the officer’s actions is an understatement but that is something for the owners of the bird to take up with the Constabulary. The officer then left and advised the bird’s owners that in due course a written statement would be taken from the witnesses and a report would then be sent to the CPS for a decision on what action if any should be taken against our suspect.

There the story may have ended. I suspect that not one of you would expect the bird to be recovered at this stage, or even harbour the faint hope that it may still be alive.

However, good things do come to those that wait and on 30 April the bird's owners had a phone call from Juliana from the IBR, reporting that they thought that the missing buzzard had been found. The buzzard had no IBR ring but was fitted with black anklets and flying jesses and had a closed ring which had been tampered with, in effect filed away to such an extent that none of the details were readable (the bird's DOE ring).

A frantic trip up to a falconry centre at Bristol united them with their missing buzzard. It transpired that the brother of the person running the centre had contacted him to say that he had seen a Harris Hawk at the side of the road at Lydford on Fosse some 30 miles away. Despite the distance involved the falconer turned out to check out this Harris Hawk and it turned out to be our missing buzzard some considerable distance away

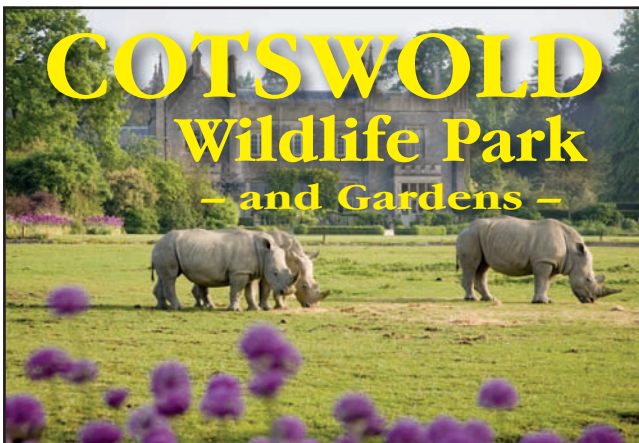


from where it had escaped. Being an honest and responsible falconer the finder reported the recovery to the IBR.

So, it is now down to you, the honest, trustworthy and reliable falconers to make your own judgements in respect of what I have conveyed to you. As I have said describing our subject as a "Knave" hardly describes him accurately. He is a disgrace to the good name of falconry, his actions were a potential death sentence

to the buzzard involved which, at 20 years of age and not an entered hunting bird had very little chance of surviving in a wild state.

The police now have a considerable package of evidence to collate and evaluate. Once that is undertaken I suspect that this investigation will result in the falconer involved being interviewed and asked to account for and explain the circumstances described in this article.



COTSWOLD Wildlife Park - and Gardens -

Diary of events

- | | |
|--|--|
| August, every Wednesday (3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th and 31st) Ice cool animals. | September 5th-30th Wild gardeners walk. |
| August weekends (6/7th, 13/14th, 20/21st, 27/28th) Flying Birds of Prey displays. | October 2nd Grandparents day. |
| August 14th Fairhope sports car specials. | October 3rd-9th Amazing animals week. |
| August everyday A to Z of amazing animals at the park. | November every Sunday (6th, 13th, 20th, 27th) Stinky Sundays. |
| September Friday & Saturday (2/3rd, 9/10th, 16/17th, 23/24th) Wild nights at the park. | December 6/7th Christmas wreath making, seasonal talk and lunch. |
| September 17/18th Talk like a pirate weekend. | December 17th-24th Santa's grotto and real Reindeer* |
| September 24/25th Rhino weekend. | |

*weather permitting.

Track down more information at:
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www.westwealdfalconry.co.uk

The Falconry & Hawking Event

3rd & 4th September 2011

The International Centre for Birds of Prey,
Newent, Gloucestershire

With the advent of the Festival of Falconry in 2007 and then again in 2009, it was clear that a specific falconry event was something the United Kingdom needed. With the festival moved overseas and the date deep inside the UK hawking season, The United Kingdom Falconers Club and The International Centre for Birds of Prey felt the time was right to launch a specific falconry event for all UK falconers.

Based at the spiritual home of UK falconry and organised by falconers for falconers, 'The UK Falconry & Hawking Event' (sponsored by Kiezebrink), aims to be an annual grass roots meeting for all UK clubs, breeders, manufacturers and falconers. 'The Event' will deliver an intimate, low key and unifying celebration of the diverse range of hawking occurring in the UK today.

'The Event' is not about commercial enterprise or profit, but about safeguarding all of our collective futures. It will hopefully provide a place that serious falconers and their families can attend, put factions aside and share and build bridges for the greater good.

As such, the single most important aspect of 'The Event' will be the participation of UK and overseas club members. The members of any club are the backbone of successful falconry; as such each club will be given pride of

place in the special UK Club Marquee. The aim is to encourage communication and discussion between members. The International Club Marquee has been kindly sponsored by Gamehawker and there will be clubs from mainland Europe and North America in attendance.

Sharing knowledge

Being a specific falconry event we have focused on sharing as much knowledge as possible. The range of displays and seminars throughout the day are geared to what the practical everyday falconer requires. The seminars cover a wide ranging series of topics.

Nigel King will be giving his first ever UK talk on Black Spars in South Africa. Nigel's first hand knowledge and enthusiasm will astound those who have a pre-conceived idea about the limitations of these intense accipiters. Slipping distances and flight styles will re-evaluate tired arguments and false information about these hawks.

Lee Featherstone is one of the UK's top Goshawk breeders and having now imported a fresh bloodline from Europe he will be giving an in depth talk on the Artificial Insemination of Goshawks. Lee's talk will be in support of his recently published book on the same topic.

Craig Hendee is a highly regarded falconer from North America. Craig has a vast amount of intricate knowledge regarding the trapping of all species of

raptor; but particularly those from the America's. His talk will be on the various techniques used when Trapping Falcons in North and Latin America.

Ben Crane spent time with the falconers of Sindh Province in Pakistan. With the advent of recent political activities and flooding disaster, it is unlikely that western falconers will be able to hawk in Pakistan for some time. Ben will be giving his first ever talk on Trapping and Hunting Accipiters in Pakistan.

David Fox is a well known and stalwart member of the British Falconers Club's Eagle Falconry contingent. His motivation and knowledge is second to none and David will be giving a talk on how to Train and Fly Eagles in the United Kingdom.

These seminars will be interspersed by informative and educational talks from Neil Forbes, back pack fitting demonstrations by the UKFC's Tommy Miles and other various equipment, LANTRA award and incubation sessions.

Trade stands

There will be ample opportunity before the start of the season to pick up last minute bargains and much needed pieces of furniture and equipment. 'The Event' has a variety of the UK and Europe's best and most reliable falconry equipment and food retailers.

From Gamehawker, UB falconry, Ben Long, Falconry Innovations, Master of

the Mews, Marshall Telemetry, Tiny Loc, Chris Payne, Ian Vance, International Falconers Magazine, The Falconry & Raptor Conservation Magazine, Falconry World, Mac Falconry, The Hawker Press and beyond, any and all falconry equipment, clothing or food can be purchased over the weekend.

In the main arena and throughout the day there will be displays which show falconry in an informative and positive light. Stalwarts of the circuit include Jemima Parry-Jones, Gary Bidiss, Terry Large and Jonathan Marshall. There will also be dog handling and dog display work from first class falconer, Mike Roberts of Miliscer Gundogs. If all goes to plan there will also be a flying display by Dave Whitt of two Merlins to the lure and Pete Smith may also be giving an in depth Kiting demonstration.

For those with a broader interest in falconry related culture there will be an Art Marquee celebrating the work of Carl Bass, David Rampling, Steve Greaves, Martin Hayward Harris, Neil Davies and many more besides. Other attractions

include a hood making competition, children's entertainment, food court and full access to over 300 different species of raptor inside the International Centre for Birds of Prey.

Food and music

Because 'The Event' is about a shared passion that builds bridges, we will be having a free 'open invitation' Bar-B-Q and live music for the evening entertainment. If the weather is good there will be an open air cinema showing falconry related films. A central spot with music, a roaring fire and good food and drink is the best way to share stories and invite fellow falconers along to field meets across Europe and the UK.

Even with the UNESCO intangible cultural heritage bid being successful, the future of UK falconry is not certain. The availability of cheap hawks, the surge in badly run forums and the lack of sensible legislation to guide those new to the sport means we have a collective responsibility to safeguard falconry in the United Kingdom. 'The Event' has been

set up to bring decent falconers together to swap and share ideas, talk, drink, eat and unite the community. UK falconers need to show a united front and provide much needed funds for the Hawk Board and those fighting to keep our sport alive. So if you care, are motivated and you want to make a difference, then we look forward to welcoming you to your event, one which we have called The UK Falconry and Hawking Event.



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Tackling the Tree Rat

Part I

I had been warned about squirrels. They are nasty, vicious, downright dangerous quarry because they bite. And they scratch. And then they bite some more. Other falconers said just don't go where there are squirrels, but this would be very difficult given the type of grounds around me. If you truly want to avoid squirrels, the choices are flying birds off the fist (they are then unlikely to spot them in the tree canopy), or fly in treeless grounds. Acorns are the staple diet of squirrels, and now squirrels seem to be the staple diet of my two female Harris Hawks.

The Ground

The practical falconer hunts the quarry he has access to, sometimes that quarry becoming an unplanned part of the equation which needs resolving. I live on the borders of East Sussex, West Sussex and Kent, and the environment is a mixture of towns, moderate sized farms (arable and mixed livestock) and many small-holdings or equestrian properties. There are a few syndicated game shoots, but also an awful lot of rough shooting, amenity land and areas of woodland owned either by Forestry Commission, National Trust or similar organisations. The land is quite fragmented so one has to try to get adjoining permissions to make an area suitable for a three hour walk. This of course is all criss-crossed by a network of roads, motorways and railway lines.

Once you have permission on a piece of ground, it is then that you really begin to identify the quarry – where it lives, where it bolts to, when it is out, what disturbs it and what else predated it. Here we are unlucky enough to have a few wild mink, along with the usual stoats, weasels and “lost” ferrets. We have permission on several farms and mature woodlands which hold plenty of squirrels. The best



Harris Hawks waiting patiently

type of ground to see the best flights at squirrels is mature open woodland when the leaves are off the trees. Flights will be hindered while leaves are on the trees, and you will not see much anyway. You will get flights in almost any type of woodland where squirrels feed or live, but you may not always see the flight. A grey running away from the hawk and looking for a suitable bolt-hole moves apparently faster than a rabbit and of course is smaller.

The benefits and drawbacks of this quarry

There are very few land-owners that seem to like having the squirrels about

- they damage trees, steal from bird feeders, dig up bulbs, chew cables, get into lofts and houses and so their nickname of tree-rat seems well deserved. They seem to breed at least as well as rabbits, but don't suffer anywhere near the same level of predation or disease. In fact, in urban areas with all the bird feeders in winter, the population seems to grow seasonally. Squirrels do not hibernate. They may spend a few days curled up in their dreys when they are well fed, or the weather is too foul for them to be out – but then neither would we be out in dire conditions. Squirrelling has the added advantage of not needing a dog or a ferret to find them!



Squirrels dreys are lined with dead leaves and show up easily

If a woodland is privately owned and managed you will have an ally in gaining permission to hawk there.

From the birds' perspective, it can be seen as either dangerous (if the bird is inexperienced) or excellent exercise (for those experienced at the quarry). An example of how I went through one such flight illustrates how the level of adrenaline change can be dramatic.

I picked up my first female Harris (Pebbles) in February 1997, not an ideal time of the year I know but she was a second clutch bird and that is when she was ready. Training went well in my field and then came the morning for free flight. I had only intended to fly her round the border of the field in and out of the leafless oak trees. There are rabbit warrens too, but I doubted that bunnies would stay out long enough for her to sight one and make her gliding attack. Once in the tree, she never looked down – she looked up. Up, into the canopy of the trees. Up where the dreys were. At the end of the first line of trees she took a

sudden thrust forward in her flight, closed her wings on the wing-over and went down the trunk of the tree, in pursuit of a squirrel. I stood there watching, thinking that's good exercise for her, she'll never catch it though. Never underestimate these intelligent harvesters. It was only later that I realised she had been watching them all day from her aviary and knew where their holes were, how they moved and therefore how she could react. Up and down a few branches and the tree rat was making for the top of the tree. She followed it up and was beginning to pant. OK, I thought, she'll give up soon and I can reward her. She had other ideas and as the squirrel bailed out of the top of the tree she followed it down and took it in the air. My adrenaline level quadrupled, my mouth went dry and my legs wouldn't move. She was now on the ground, mantling it, but the other side of the tree line and the ditch. First time for everything, so I jumped in the ditch and scrambled out the other side and grabbed her jesses. My worst fear was that she

would carry such small quarry and she'd be out for days on end. She had the squirrel firmly round the nose and I was just able to despatch it with my shaking hands. She was panting a little and her hackles were up making her look very defiant. I walked her back home with a fresh squirrel leg reward, not caring that she would put weight on. She deserved the whole thing!

Equipment

Once you know you are in squirrel country you may need to re-assess your hawking equipment. The first part to look at is the bird itself. Is it wearing really tough well-oiled anklets, or are they narrow, loose and hard worn? I have had squirrels bite clean through the thickest anklets leaving V-shaped holes. They will bite bells (if you are lucky!) too, so inspect them after a tussle. There are several designs for squirrel chaps. Those with "toe-covers" are decorative but not really effective as the leather ends up curling upwards away from the bird's toes



Chaps for the hawks legs

and not protecting anything. The inverted bell shape looks to offer more protection, but may hinder the bird's footing. Another option is to put small studs in the ankle, with the idea of attracting the squirrel to bite the eye-like studs rather than the bird's toes. Additional snap-on squirrel chaps have also been used in the US, where they have fox squirrels weighing in at a few pounds, but I have not seen much use of them in the UK. For me, the bird's experience is the best protection as she will not hold one unless she has a correct grip on it. After all, once you have grabbed stinging nettles you know what to expect the next time!

The most essential tool for the falconer is a really sharp, well pointed knife for quickly despatching the quarry. Squirrels have a tough skin, and a knife that is either blunt or dull will not help the situation at all. Some people carry an awl instead to despatch the kill. Whichever it is, you need to make in quickly without distracting the bird from her grip and securing it. She will possibly be panting from a fast chase or injured, but an experienced bird should have the situation under control and will look justifiably proud of her endeavours. I find that the bird needs a minute or three to recover before you do the exchange or pick up for her reward. This is perhaps

the only time I see my hawks with their neck feathers raised in a "hackle", and when these have settled and the quarry is motionless, then I know I can safely transfer her off the quarry.

I have a Y-headed walking stick which is made of hardened hazel and has a very specific purpose in hawking. It is to pin down quarry, particularly the neck of a squirrel held by my birds. This then restricts and limits the squirrel's ability to damage a hawk as it cannot turn and bite, even if the bird does not have hold of it by the head. I would strongly recommend this as your shield too. My motto is "securing the quarry secures the bird". She cannot drag it, carry it or move it and will therefore not be likely to leave it. You have the situation completely under control and can effect the exchange (reward) without panic or error.

Most falconers would agree that a swung lure is not often used for broadwings. When squirreling though it does come in useful for calling off a bird that is sitting outside a hole where she saw the squirrel enter. This could be a rabbit hole or a tree hole. On one flight, two greys (squirrels) made the safety of a knot hole in an oak tree which was room enough for two squirrels and one tail – because one tail hung outside the hole. Each of the birds pursuing it would

take it in turn to grab the bushy, but apparently slippery tail in its talons but failed to extricate the quarry. The only way to get the Harris away was to use my full-body squirrel lure (...here's one I made earlier...). I have even seen my Harris put a foot into a hole knowing a squirrel to be lurking in it. Now I thought only *Gymnogenes* did that! So when you do get your first squirrel, skin it to make a lure. It works far far better than a winged one and you needn't put food on it either.

Injuries

Of course I carry some essential first aid items too, for the bird and humans. The most common human injury is from barbed wire or rusty bits of metal lying around. However one should be prepared when dealing with squirrels to be extra prepared for people injuries too (thankfully I haven't had one yet).

If your bird does get injured, you will need to assess it very quickly indeed. I carry a tube of Vetzyme antiseptic cream (for cuts and grazes on animals) and for small cuts and abrasions I smear this over to seal the skin. Letting it bleed a little while is a good idea, as this will flush the initial bacterial contact out of the wound. However gushing blood or severe bites need immediate veterinary attention. A mobile phone here helps too – so charge the batteries before hawking and keep the vet's number stored.

Wrap the wound if you can and immediately carry the bird off the field to your car. Even if a bite or scratch looks superficial, it is surprising how much bacteria there is in squirrels' mouths, on the ground, on your glove. So keep the bird under observation for several days.

The good points about squirrel hawking

- You get to see all the flights
- The birds get a nutritious food supply
- You can find quarry most days
- Exhilarating and entertaining flights

The downside about squirrel hawking

- The injuries – yours and the birds (frozen squirrel claws are lethal even in the freezer!)
- Squirrel meat puts weight on a bird like doughnuts and chips on humans
- You also need to find other quarry for less stressful hawking
- Neck ache looking up at the flights

Another Rant!

In issue 85 of this publication I penned my thoughts on various aspects of our sport here in the UK. I have had many readers who supported my views on the way some falconers conduct themselves and the way they treat their hawks. Cheap equipment, cheap hawks, falconers bleating over a pint in the pub, the list goes on. But there are a couple things I didn't mention and I'm not happy with, but I didn't have room for in my last article.

Falconry literature

As the editor of this publication, I'm very lucky that I receive many falconry books for review and I must say most are very enjoyable, educational and deserve to be in the library of falconers everywhere. Unfortunately, some leave me speechless. In the past I have been given books to review that are of such poor quality that I just cannot give them a good review. One particular publication has so many errors and even advises the reader on certain aspects of falconry that are against the law. This book was written by someone who should know better.

Some falconers seem to think that there is a market out there for yet another 'how to do falconry' book and write what can only be described as rubbish. If anyone coming to our sport reads these books and follows their advice, I can only feel sorry for the hawk that they have in their charge.

There are other books which have an historic nature to them and this is all very interesting in its way, but it seems that certain authors have gone out and bought a computer with page make-up software and haven't a clue how to use it. Hyphenations galore, bad headings, different width columns, etc. etc. Images are all over the place - stretched, squashed, placed at an odd angle and even crammed onto the page due to the sheer

number of pictures included.

These authors may have a good reason for producing such a publication, but no real thought has gone into why they think there is a market out there for such rubbish.

Also, some people cannot get a publishing company to publish or market their work so the author goes down the route of going it alone. All very admirable but in some instances the results are of very poor quality.

There are many books to be read on the subject of falconry for both educational and historical reasons and simply for entertainment. I have been asked on many occasions what book should a beginner in our sport obtain and I always say the same three publications for anyone to start off with in their home library – Falconry & Hawking by Philip Glasier, Training Birds of Prey by Jemima Parry Jones and Understanding Birds of Prey by Dr. Nick Fox. You can obtain these and many other good books by logging onto the web-site www.falconrybooks.co.uk which is the book retailer, Coch-Y-Bonddu Books, owned by Paul Morgan.

The law is the law

I don't understand it. Why do falconers and game keepers deem it a good idea to break the law and think that they can get away with it? We see in the press many game keepers being convicted of bird of prey offences mostly concerning the use of poisons, but even shooting birds of prey particularly species such as Hen Harriers, Red Kites, Buzzards and



Peregrine Falcons. The courts, it seems

to me, do very little to deter these criminals, giving them a small fine, a slap on the wrist or just a few hours community service.

A case in point is the position of Jeffrey Lendrum, who was jailed for 30 months after attempting to smuggle 14 peregrine eggs to the Middle East. He has had his sentence cut to 18 months following a hearing at the appeal court. What sort of deterrent is that? His sentence, in my opinion, should have been increased, not decreased.

Some falconers, who should know better, have also been in the headlines for different offences from stealing chicks, passing off wild-taken falcons as captive bred and even 'cooking the paper work' so that the falconer can either keep the hawk or try to make a quick buck.

What sort of people are these? Don't they think of the potential damage these people can do to our sport? It's just greed on their part and when they do get caught by the authorities, they just throw their hands in the air and say "sorry, I didn't know I was doing anything wrong".

I am happy to say that these people are in the minority and that the rest of us simply get on and enjoy our sport within the law and without any hindrance from outside sources. Let's hope this continues for many years to come and that the actions of the few don't harm our sport.

Paula Hodgkinson Fardell – artist



Originally from Staffordshire, I moved to East Anglia in 2001 and held the first of three solo exhibitions. Seven years ago I moved to Nottingham where I married one of the merry men and this is where we now reside.

I have been painting and drawing for as long as I can remember and the subject matter has been as varied as the medium I use. From fantasy paintings executed in oils and watercolours to ink illustrations of buildings, the main feature of all of my work is the attention to detail. The high quality of my animal portraiture soon saw me becoming a member of the Society of Feline Artists, with whom I regularly exhibited in London. Over

the years I have painted hundreds of commissions from cats and dogs to small birds and horses, to buildings and dragons, but up until four years ago I had never been asked if I could paint or draw birds of prey. The falconer who asked the question insisted this subject matter would be the most difficult I would ever have attempted, as the shape of the bird's beak and other proportions are such a crucial element. After he supplied me with some photographs of his own birds, I rose to this fresh and exciting new challenge.

Early days

My first pieces were of a hooded Merlin in pencil and ink, a pencil study of a Peregrine falcon and a watercolour

painting of a Harris Hawk.

After my initial attempts, I feel the best medium for falconry art is watercolour painting as it brings to life the subject matter. I have so far been very pleased with the results and, as of last year, I set up a website to showcase and sell these works of art.

As with the pieces shown on my site, the commissions I have done so far have been more portraiture based. I thoroughly enjoy doing this kind of work as it demands my full attention from initial outline and getting the correct proportions to the finishing brushwork in the feathers and the gleam in the bird's eye. The next big challenge for me will be painting these majestic creatures in flight and hunting.

Harris Hawk



In 2009 I did a presentation for the Northamptonshire Raptor Club at one of their monthly meetings, and have remained in contact with John Tyas a long standing member, who has kindly supplied me with some of the photos I have painted from, which can be seen on my website. He and the other members of the NRC have invited my husband and I out to their next field meeting. Needless to say we are very excited by this fantastic opportunity to see these wonderful creatures in their natural environment doing what they do best. Inspired by this experience, as I no doubt will be, I hope to build upon the skills I

Hooded Falcon



have developed through portraiture and apply them to capture the liquid beauty of a bird of prey in flight.

Work in progress

I am currently working on a painting of a goshawk (from a photograph supplied by Roger Tarry), eager to take flight from fist. This seems very apt to me as it is a natural progression from portrait to motion.

My ultimate goal is to become a career artist specialising in high quality falconry art. I am at present selling originals of which there are no copies except images I keep for my own reference, however in the future I may consider producing limited edition prints of new work.

I understand that falconers are very protective of their birds and the images/photos of them so I guarantee any commission undertaken will be one off, the painting will not be exhibited on my site or reproduced in any way unless prior permission has been given by the client.

To view current pieces for sale and view other works visit

www.artworkspfh.co.uk

Or to discuss commissions, future works, or just to have a chat, telephone: **01 159 680582.**

In Praise of Field Meets

In the summer our meetings in fields tend to be the Falconry Fair, CLA Game Fair and other general get-togethers such as barbecues. But, of course, the real action takes place during the season and because 2010 was the British Falconers' Club Woodhall Spa meet – extensively covered in this magazine – and other BFC events, it seems timely to look at why they are essential for our sport.

Falconry is not a big get-together sport. We all know that 'he who hunts alone, hunts best', and few would disagree. You can take every slip in whatever style you wish and there is no chance, as an austringer, that your goshawk will be hanging off the fist at every flush for other members of the field. Yes, hawking alone is what we all prefer to do, so why do we congregate and to what end?

Early season meets steady up hawks. In October, I arrived at Woodhall Spa with a barely entered, and under manned

goshawk, plonked him on the lawn after a five-hour drive, watched him rouse and bathe. By the time I had been to bar and returned with an essential pint, he was sitting calmly as though the meandering crowds checking out hawks and falcons were the absolute norm. By day two he was steady as a rock and hunting well; the rest of the season was made in just four days hawking at a field meet. Sadly, unless you are an organiser when it is a relief, the BFC only runs this international gathering every four years. But the Welsh Hawking Club holds a similar meet annually, so that is where you will find the goshawk and me in 2011.

Young and keen to learn

When I first took up falconry some 30 odd years ago, my mentor, bird artist and falconer, Ken Wood, suggested we take a day-trip from Surrey to Lincolnshire. Young and very keen, I jumped at the chance even though it meant a long drive and a very late

return. I wanted to experience falconry on a large scale, to understand what the club structure meant and, most importantly, to learn. Ken was big into watching and learning and every one of his acolytes went through a process of study and observation before he would ever recommend their getting a hawk or falcon. His discipline stood me in good stead and although style and technique have moved on, I still find myself asking what Ken would have done?

So it was that we left suburban Reigate before dawn for the enchanting Victorian town of Woodhall Spa – it even possesses a wooden cinema in a wood, the Kinema. I still have photographs of that day. Lawns stuffed with hawks and the British Field Sports Society guests wandering about and wondering in a bemused state whether we actually ever caught anything. How far apart were our separate sports in those distant days? It was here that I met the doughty Josephine Mitchell who said I looked



Goshawk group, Opatowitz fieldmeet, Czech Republic

like I needed a goshawk, which is what I ultimately did. Ken took his lanner, which didn't really do the business, but others did. I remember Lenny Durman-Walters flying a peregrine x prairie falcon, which did what prairies have a habit of doing – flying in a straight line... in the wrong direction, and then killing out of sight. But others did better and I saw my first stoop at game, which was all one could have asked for.

Older and still learning

You are never too old to stop learning. Many will have forgotten more than you will ever know – although this may well be as a result of senility. Being in the field with your fellow falconers is a golden opportunity to observe the good – and the bad! How that man treats his hawk and dog, how he handles the quarry, when he decides enough is enough are all things we should note. It also teaches discipline. The management of time, the sequence of slips, keeping back and quiet when it is not your turn and obeying the field master; all these things are central to a good meet but which a solo falconer need pay less attention to. Once, as field master at a meet, a young falconer was not reading the signs of the gamekeeper who was our guide for the day. As the shadows lengthened and we had all enjoyed great sport, he wanted to carry on. I recognised the 'keeper's anxiety as his pheasants were delayed in getting to roost. Quietly but firmly, I explained why

we were stopping and drew a halt to the day. He may have grumbled but I hope he will have learnt something about our sport and its public face.

Public images are essential to all hunting sports – and falconry field meets are no exception. At these large set pieces you can invite the great and the good – if only to cut the ribbon and make a bit of a speech. Although I well remember overhearing a very senior member of the hunting community making an aside to his colleague after having declared the meet open. Where, he wanted to know, could he get to see real hunting now he had done his duty. Some people never want to learn about what doesn't interest them.

You may be a long-winger, an austringer, or a short-winger and good clubs will cater for this diversity. The BFC always holds a two day field meet round its AGM, which is a good way of ensuring a reasonable attendance – those who slope off without giving time to hear club business are despicable, but they are thankfully few in number. If you are not flying a hawk, you should turn up as a watcher. Go out with one of the other groups if only to confirm why you fly the species you do, or perhaps to find out more about what you might fly in the future.

I have talked about all the reasons why one should go to field meets bar one. Because we are by nature solitary, we are less likely to socialise outside sporting

events. Falconry is no different to any other field sport. It is a great leveller. You cannot put on airs and graces and pretend to be something you are not at a field meet. You will be judged on merit, not the price of your wellies or the cut of your jacket. Again you will learn about your fellow man, which can be quite humbling. So to finish, here's a good example about not being judgemental.

Falconer on strike!

I confess to being thoroughly middle class and politically right of centre; friends tell me my accent is a dead giveaway! One of the falconers I most admire was on strike for over a year thanks to his faith in Arthur Scargill (they were miners, for those too young or with short memories). As a Thatcherite I cannot say I sympathised. Over several drinks, he explained and I began to understand his point of view. That we could meet and talk was because we shared a common passion. If we had not I would have remained prejudiced and ignorant. I may not have agreed with all he supported but I learnt a great deal. I now count him as one of my closest friends. Falconry is a passion that breaks down barriers and is wonderful for its camaraderie. Hawk alone if you want to but I prefer to occasionally enjoy a day with people who share my interests and who will help me to broaden my horizons. Something field meets do and with great success.

Weathering ground, Woodhall Spa



Black Sparrowhawks in Africa

The existence of Black Sparrowhawks came into my life in the 1970's. I can't be exactly sure when in the seventies, as it was such a very long time ago.

I do know however that my first encounter was through the NAFA journals that I used to beg steal or borrow from friends and read from cover to cover.

Ron Hartley used to write articles in these pages all about falconry in Rhodesia as it was then, and I was fascinated. Africa seemed so different from my native England, and the choice of birds of prey there seemed amazing. I wanted to go, but it was just a dream, I was still a naive kid, and after all it was the other side of the world.

In those days I used to fly kestrels and buzzards and then a very old melanistic red tail that really brought my falconry world to life.

My first ever European Goshawk became my hawking partner in 1982, when I was convinced by my very close friend Mark Williams to go for a Welsh Hawking club bird that had become available.

Wow, I was never sorry for that bit of advice. The speed of a goshawk was amazing compared to the other birds that I had flown and hunted, and the nature of the passage bird was nothing like I had imagined, and once tame a joy to be around.

Over the years I flew four goshawks, one special bird "Sinead" for eleven years, my last to date was an imprint



Black Sparrowhawk, Podge

male bred by Harry Gilbert and imprinted by me.

This was unexpectedly a short relationship, because fate had a plan for me.

Apprehension going to South Africa

In 1997, I got the opportunity to fly out to South Africa to attend their annual field meet. I had been invited over the Internet

via a forum. I was fairly apprehensive, as I didn't know anyone in South Africa, not to mention all the negative press we always get about Southern Africa back in the UK, but what the hell, you only live once and I was committed.

On arrival at Johannesburg airport I spotted a guy with a tummy that I would have been proud of, holding up a board with my name on it. His name was Tim Wagner, a well-respected falconer from South African shores, and though I didn't know it then a friendship was born.

Tim is dedicated to falconry and everything that goes with it, and I know only two other guys that come close to the same dedication. I only wish I could be one of them, but I think I run them close.

Over lunch, I told him that I had come over to see Black Sparrowhawks fly, and he told me that he thought I was mad! Flying Lizards, he scoffed, watch the long wings instead.

That evening, I watched two of his birds fly, one a home bred Peregrinus minor, "Witch". This bird was to become legendary in South Africa in the future, not just for her wonderful ability in the falconry world, but because of the offspring that she would produce for South African falconers over the coming years.

The birds flew well in the oppressive heat and after one outstanding stoop and kill and a very spectacular nearly, we relaxed at Tim's place over a very cold beer for me, and an equally cold diet coke for Tim. (he still thinks they help his tummy!).

We obviously talked falconry and I was left with my lower jaw reaching for my ankles as Tim told me tales of how wild Black Sparrowhawks quite often fly down the falconers' falcons. I couldn't imagine such a feat, and I just couldn't wait to see one in action!

The SAFA meet pulled in many falconers from around South Africa. It was held in a tiny place called Dullstroom, a little farming village in the middle of nowhere approximately three hours from the Kruger National Park. If you think Africa is always hot, you should visit this place. I went to Africa with shorts, t-shirts and running shoes – boy was I under prepared!

At night the temperature dropped well below freezing. Where we hawked

the grassland was anything but dry, it was natural wetland as far as the eye could see, and boy did I moan. Now I know where the South African people get the expression, whinging POM! You should have heard me.

To cap it all off for me, there was not one Black Sparrowhawk in sight. It was to be all falcons, not a sign of a bow perch anywhere.

To be fair, this was falcon country, wide-open spaces where you could see for miles. Looking over the veldt, it could have been the borders of Scotland. I should have done my homework, but still, I couldn't hide my disappointment.

That evening, the large amounts of food and beer on offer helped my mood and the great camaraderie of the South African falconers boosted it even further, and the next couple of days produced dogs and falcons of the highest order. The standard of falconry here was far beyond what I had expected, even if it was just long wings.

On the third day I was grinning from ear to ear. An apprentice falconer had turned up with a juvenile Black Sparrowhawk musket. My excitement numbed a little when I saw it, as I was very surprised at its condition. It had broken feathers in its tail and wings, and its cere was damaged. My first Black Sparrowhawk in the flesh so to speak, and it was in quite a sorry state.

When I commented on the bird's condition, it was explained to me that this bird had been lost whilst out hunting early on in the season. All hope of seeing the bird had been lost, when news came that a farmer had found the spar on one of his

chickens, and when it hadn't flown away he had decided to keep it. Unfortunately even though the bird was now safe, its accommodation was appalling, hence the condition of the bird.

The young lad, Mike, had only just got it back a couple of weeks earlier, and was not to be perturbed and he was now here to do his thing as he proudly told me.

Over the next couple of days, the bird tried, but struggled. It had very little fitness, but it had great heart and you really couldn't fault Mike for his commitment to this bird and the hunt. He was so enthusiastic, his flushing skill bordered on foolhardy at times, and he was often unrecognizable back at camp after an afternoon's foray into the veldt, as he was normally caked in mud.

Weeks later, back home in Dorset, England, my trip was soon forgotten. I had ordered my imprint Goshawk and within a couple of months I was out hunting the Dorset countryside with my new-feathered companion.

Keeping in touch

I kept in touch with Tim and a couple of the other guys via email and kept telling them I would come out again one day, hopefully to see some Black Spars. Then out of the blue, I was thrown a surprise when Tim informed me that he was coming over to the UK for a visit.

After a great deal of talking, fate was then to play a major role in my life. In 2000 I went to South Africa to run a new bird of prey centre for Tim, leaving my life in England temporarily behind.

I was to be living in Falcon paradise –



Braken on point



Podge gets her reward

yep back to Dullstroom, Mpumalanga and now a changed village. No longer a sleepy hollow, now a weekend destination for city slickers. It even had a new logo “Dullstroom, a drinking town with a fishing problem”

Once I was settled, and the centre was up and running, Tim got his way and persuaded me to fly an eyass captive bred Peregrine that he very kindly gave me. This bird partnered with a young English pointer dog, Bracken and my willing legs had a hit and miss season. This experience, though educating me to the Dullstroom countryside and game bird population, tainted me, and I was only to delve into the dark side of falcons one more time in my falconry career in South Africa thus far.

I am an austringer. Falcons are not the right partner for me. I simply just enjoy the hustle and bustle of hawking, that surprise of the unexpected flush, multiple flights, and none of the worry that you are not going to get a suitable set up.

My first black spar was a passage female. She came to me via the local vets. She had been found emaciated, hiding in some reeds by a dam (man made lake). She was amazingly enough feather perfect, and the vet had done a wonderful job to get her on the road to recovery with the use of fluids and liquidized quail. My job was just to get her back to full health, and get her hunting.

Her rehabilitation went the same as most emaciated birds we encounter here at the centre. In a weak state, she was an easy patient, just a little timid. As she

got stronger any gratitude that may have been there went right out of the window as she turned into a torrent of feathers as her wildness returned.

D-day then arrived, to coincide with her recovery and new-found attitude. Her health was back and she was now much, much stronger, I fitted all of her furniture including a tail sheath, and commenced with the training.

The first few days went well, well better than I expected anyway. I think the habituation of my home during her treatment back to health helped with some initial tameness. She fed on the fist first day, and she was flying free within two weeks. Don't be fooled into thinking she was an easy bird however. She was anything but. She was fiery, wild and vocal, but she was mine, for a while anyway. This was a dream in the making, my first Black Spar. I didn't name her as she was on loan, I intended releasing her back after the season.

Disappointing flights

Her initial flights on Red Wing Francolin were disappointing. They pulled away from her and she soon gave up. Fitness was the key! I flew her everyday, plus jump ups and with some help from a friend I flew her from glove to glove over long distances.

Though all of this helped, the one thing I knew that I mustn't lose over this period was her confidence and I topped her up with the occasional easy pigeon to let her know she could still catch quarry.

Eventually her fitness picked up

enough for her to put her first Red Wing in the bag. It wasn't a fantastic flight, but it wasn't bad either. She caught it from a nice flushed point over a distance of about 70 yards. This was the flight she needed, and she never looked back. She ended the season with a total of 24 Red Wing Francolin, five Natal Francolin, and numerous various.

Her last kill with me was on 22 June 2003, a beautiful African winter's afternoon.

As she fed hungrily from her pick up piece, I watched in awe as she took her fill. She hadn't been with me for that long, but she had always had my full attention in her presence. She had me hooked! As a species the Black Spar did not leave me with any disappointment.

As she greedily fed she was initially oblivious to me as I unpicked her flying jesses from her anklets, but she actually stopped feeding for a second or two when I reached to take off the tail sheath, and tail bell. She gave me a curious look, an intent stare, it was over in a second though, blink, and you would have missed it, and then her attention was back with her food. She couldn't have known what was in store for her.

As she finished her meal, I took the discarded bones from under her feet and threw them to ground for another one of Mother Nature's creatures to pick clean. She then took a second or two, had a good look around, feaked on my glove, and then gave a characteristic noisy rouse that seemed to shake me with it. I gave a wry smile, and I am sure that I must have taken a deep breath before letting out a sigh as that moment was here, it was time.

I walked towards a plantation of Blue gum, our parting place. To her, at that moment, it must have just seemed like any other day. For me, I knew it was goodbye.

We got about 100metres away from the plantation when she took flight, and accipiter like, she flew vertically, almost to the top of one of the outermost trees. As she alighted, she was gone, out of reach and out of sight, all in the blink of an eye. I gave myself a couple of minutes to take in the moment, and then turned and headed back towards the direction of the truck. Though this was the end of this relationship, I knew that the species and I had only just begun; another chapter was just around the corner.

The British Falconry and Raptor Fair 2011



David Glynne Fox opening the fair

Ragley Hall, Warwickshire, saw the new venue for The British Falconry and Raptor Fair which was held on 1 & 2 May this year.

What a difference from Chetwynd Park, Shropshire, where the event has been held for a number of years.

The event was once again sponsored by Kiezebrink, the Dutch based animal food company and the fair was officially opened by Dr. David Glynne Fox who has written many good articles concerning Golden Eagles for this publication.

There seemed to be a large number of people attending the event on both days and it was good to see them with smiles on their faces and spending money on the traders' stands, which has not been happening over the last few years. The good weather helped, of course, with lots of sunshine and not a rain cloud in sight. It was a bit windy (a slight understatement) on both days and that either helped or

hindered some of the raptors in the flying demonstrations.

The main arena saw Jemima Parry Jones giving her usual excellent displays – I have never seen a Harris Hawk soar in the way that it did which was probably due to the very windy weather. The South East Falconry Group (SEFG) put up their training kite in quick time, which rarely happened in Chetwynd due to the conditions and their Kestrel flew up to it and then stooped in spectacular style. You can always rely on the SEFG to put on some very good and informative displays. Well done to Gary Bidiss and the other members of the club.

Another main arena demonstration was by Graham Watkins of Gamegoer Gundogs with the help of his son, Freddie. Graham works very hard to achieve a high standard training his dogs and it showed in the demonstrations that he put on.

Unfortunately, there were also demonstrations given by Welsh Axemen on each of the two days and in my opinion this was about as interesting as watching paint dry! I did notice that when they were putting on their displays there were not many people watching, preferring to use this time to explore the rest of the fair.

Demonstrations of a different kind were in evidence and it was good to see a return of skills such as coping and food preparation being shown. On the Kiezebrink stand, Bob Dalton and Jemima Parry Jones gave a number of practical coping demonstrations with hawks and falcons over the two days of the event, but unfortunately I couldn't get near enough to have a good look as there was too big a crowd looking on and learning.

In the Hawk Board marquee, Derek Stotton gave a very interesting talk on food preparation for hawks. This is one demo that I did attend and there was a good audience watching with

interest as Derek gave us his many years' experience. Derek showed how to prepare raptor food including quail, rabbit, rat, mice and day-old-chicks and, as with all skilled operators Derek made everything look easy.

All in all, this was a much better fair than in previous years and the number of people going through the gate was a testament to that. Let us hope that next year's event will be even better – weather permitting.



Derek Stotton giving his excellent talk on food preparation

Club Directory



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www.thewelshhawkingclub.com

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

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For further information or an application form please contact -

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STOLEN x 5

BREF	RING	SPECIES
30256	?2915?	HARRIS HAWK
50226	?6548?	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
81756	?9217?	HARRIS HAWK
86800	?4615?	HARRIS HAWK
86803	?8461?	HARRIS HAWK

REUNITED x 129

BALD EAGLE	1
BARN OWL	16
COMMON BUZZARD	3
EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL	7
GREAT HORNED OWL	1
GYR HYBRID 12	
HARRIS HAWK	33
INDIAN EAGLE OWL	3
KESTREL	7
LANNER FALCON	7
LITTLE OWL 1	
PEREGRINE FALCON	9
PEREGRINE HYBRID	11
RED-TAILED HAWK	4
SAKER FALCON	8
SAKER HYBRID	4
SNOWY OWL	1
WHITE-FACED SCOPS OWL	1

LOST x 38

BREF	RING	SPECIES
60845	?9480?	BARN OWL
61797	?2557?	BARN OWL
75087	?2562?	BARN OWL
75284	?2594?	BARN OWL
75386	?2603?	BARN OWL
75775	?2724?	BARN OWL
75828	?3053?	BARN OWL
79003	?4157?	BARN OWL
80520	?6683?	BARN OWL
80667	?6760?	BARN OWL
81189	?6903?	BARN OWL
42654	?3733?	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
81333	?9112?	GYR/SAKER FALCON
6420	?7560?	HARRIS HAWK
6705	?5649?	HARRIS HAWK
16340	?4225?	HARRIS HAWK
47919	?9800?	HARRIS HAWK
55019	?5579?	HARRIS HAWK
57291	?7734?	HARRIS HAWK
61514	?9723?	HARRIS HAWK
67414	?4918?	HARRIS HAWK

72001	?1256?	HARRIS HAWK
73946	?2763?	HARRIS HAWK
74030	?2776?	HARRIS HAWK
74127	?2822?	HARRIS HAWK
75296	?3355?	HARRIS HAWK
82105	?3392?	HARRIS HAWK
83290	?0038?	HARRIS HAWK
50100	?8796?	KESTREL
77243	?1557?	KESTREL
63765	?1889?	LANNER FALCON
53769	?5280?	PERE /BARBARY X PERE /SAKER
19747	?8320?	PEREGRINE/LANNER HYBRID
80169	?7733?	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
81579	?9191?	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
82272	?9763?	PEREGRINE/SAKER HYBRID
74293	?8295?	SPARROWHAWK
79260	?0882?	SPARROWHAWK

FOUND x 24

BREF	RING	SPECIES
67731	?5BC0?	BARN OWL
86318	?8IOA?	BARN OWL
87079	?7768?	COMMON BUZZARD
51751	?9954?	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
6320	?5906?	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
44162	?3860?	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
83665	?29NP?	EUROPEAN EAGLE OWL
73345	?3AK1?	GYR/SAKER FALCON
1519	?795?	HARRIS HAWK
56119	?5986?	HARRIS HAWK
83188	?2608?	HARRIS HAWK
83558	?9FH0?	HARRIS HAWK
84581	?6454?	HARRIS HAWK
85112	?6CN0?	HARRIS HAWK
83687	?1PWY?	INDIAN EAGLE OWL
72835	?7GB09?	KESTREL
22022	?9183?	LANNER FALCON
76558	?6NL30?	LONG-EARED OWL
9476	?5790?	RED-TAILED HAWK
10837	?12SP?	SAKER FALCON
82012	?7KFC0?	SAKER FALCON
84635	?1403?	SAKER FALCON
10776	?0162?	SAKER-ALTAI
58822	?5378?	SPARROWHAWK

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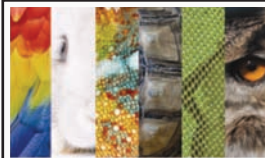
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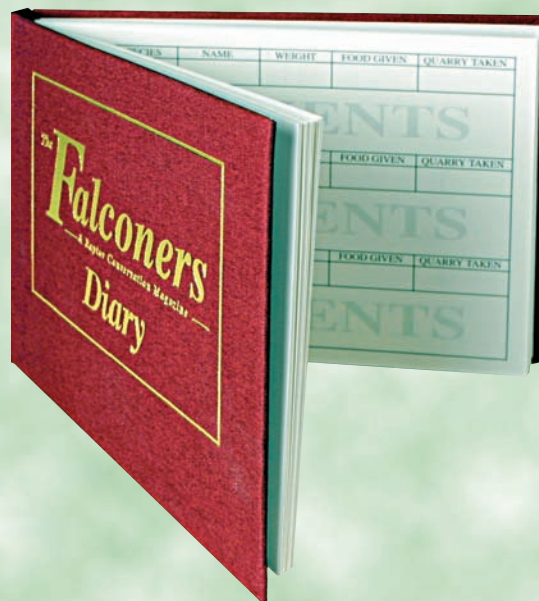
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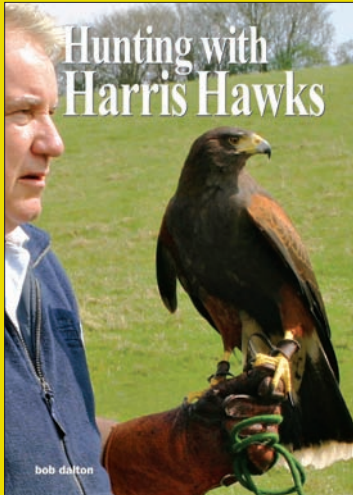
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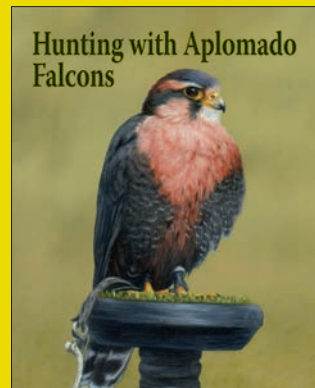
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