

The World of Falconry

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The Magazine for Austringers and Falconers

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Edition 1
January 2010



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Editorial

A very warm welcome to this, the first issue of The World of Falconry Magazine, a quarterly periodical that is put together by falconers for falconers.

Each edition will cover different aspects of modern falconry and raptor training techniques as well as taking the occasional retrospective look at falconry as it was practised in years gone by.

Comments, as well as contributions, from our readership will be most welcome and we will strive to bring to the magazine exactly the sort of articles and photographs that accurately portray real day to day falconry.

The editorial staff sincerely hope you enjoy this launch issue and that you will become subscribers and receive the magazine on a regular basis.

Good hawking to all,

The editor

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Front Cover Photograph: Bob Dalton

A Wide Brief and a Long Journey

Jemima Parry-Jones, MBE

As I sit at my desk, looking out onto the International Centre for Birds of Prey, at least part of it, and the flying field in the moonlight, with black dogs asleep in front of a fire, I think about the journey I am on. One of the joyous things about

as it is non invasive, a collection like this must allow and share with others; research outside the collection, which is endless, fascinating and constantly updating. But probably most importantly conservation work of the species, both

that it has gone far enough and the species don't need or benefit from being split any further, those are the lumpers, and are probably less concerned about having their names in print! I use to love the way that raptors were classified prior to



having worked with birds of prey for as long as I have, and more importantly having a lifelong interest in ALL the aspects of raptors, is that having the International Centre for Birds of Prey and all that it has come to stand for, has given me the opportunity to follow and learn about almost every aspect of the raptor world.

Falconry, which is where my roots are; education which is so vital for the continuance of all we are and do; rehabilitation which is a job in itself and has many facets that have to be dealt with, and from which we have learnt so much; Research within the collection, which as long

insitu (in the country of origin) and exsitu (away from the countries of origin).

Then there are the other aspects of my chosen job which are interesting, but not so well known, such as taxonomy, where each species belongs in the great scheme of things. Should we be lumpers (here my computer thinks I should have written jumper!) or splitters, I should say that generally I am a lumper. All this means is that many DNA scientists want to keep splitting down the species into more and more probably so they have their name in the new scientific description of the bird. Where other scientists think

the arrival of DNA work, now things change with monotonous regularity and the New World Vultures which we were reliably told were actually storks, apparently are not and might even be the foundation of all the raptor species which probably evolved from South America anyway, and falcons belong closer to parrots!! There went half my lectures, talks and signage at the Centre with that little change!

Or film jobs, which can be fun to do, more often are deadly boring and frustrating, but it's always nice to get a job done well, and because we have birds that are used to the public usually we can do a better job than most.

Falconry has changed dramatically in the last fifty years as well, in some ways we have more species than we had in the early days and in others less. Gone are various of the weird and wonderful birds that came in from far off climes, but we are breeding many species and these birds are clean healthy birds of a known age and we are learning so very much about them when we breed them. The advent of good telemetry has made a huge difference to falconry and anyone who flies birds without it is daft, the time and effort saved in being able to go directly to a missing bird not only saves money and the bird, but also is the only responsible way to behave these days.

Apparently I am however not a falconer, because I don't hunt, according to one of the falconry forums full of people who never put their real names!!! What does that tell you about them I wonder? All I can say to that is that I may not have flown a bird in anger in the last five years because I have not had the chance, but who are these people who know what I do in my quiet winter evenings?? Actually I have flown three wonderful Sparrowhawks and had great fun and took 50 head of rabbits with my first Harris Hawk, which was probably long before my detractors even thought they were expert falconers!! Do I shout about it, why would I. Do I boast of high head counts, no I have far more taste than that. Have I hunted with

birds of prey, absolutely yes, will I again, I already am, in my own time, when I have it, and privately! My

falconers have put what they do in front of the public for many years. The flying demonstrations, the fact



father always said that the great thing about falconry is that you can be out with a bird, have some great flights, catch nothing, but still have seen a wild Sparrowhawk chase a bat, or a woodcock zip past your nose, or the first catkins and frogspawn, and he was right. It should be a privilege to be able to walk through this beautiful countryside and appreciate all you see while flying a bird. Not a matter of counting heads.

As responsible falconers we are congratulated as a group by most of the rest of the hunters because

that we go out to schools, we nearly always stop and answer questions when asked if we are out with a bird. We have done a better job than any other field sport and they almost all acknowledge it. And as falconers we should be proud of that, we have done a good job. And it is wonderful to be able to educate people using our birds, although I have to qualify this – the education must be good, sound, up to date and accurate.

Rehabilitation was never something that I had a particular interest in, but when you are open to the public and therefore available, and people put themselves out either by phoning about injured birds, or driving here with them, it would be wrong of us not to accept them. I could wish we got less pigeons, especially those brought in as baby buzzards! But we try to take most birds, and this year we have had a fair number. So many that I have to do something about the hospital room that we have, it is far too small. The thing to remember about rehabilitation is that were it not for the thousands of injured wild raptors that many vets are kind enough to take in and treat, they and we would not have half





the knowledge we do about treating injuries. They have been a resource that without we would be much further back in our knowledge.

I have always felt that it is wrong to have such a collection of raptors without sharing it and that was brought home to me in no uncertain terms when I moved to the US on my extremely unpleasant and

wasted three years and at no point were we open to the public, although that was the whole point of the exercise. Then two years back here with the birds in temporary housing gave me the experience of five years without sharing the birds, and it is not fun. To be able to see people experience all the birds and see the wonder when they see them

fly is just great and makes it all worth while.

Often I am asked to try something out on the birds for various scientists. Perhaps a pit tag on a small falcon to see if it impedes it, or it can get it off, a harness on a bird to see how it sits, and if there are any problems. All these are fairly easy to do and do not harm the birds and its



and am unlikely to have that sort of time for a while, by which time I suspect I will be too old!

One of the most satisfying aspects is the conservation work we do, although much of what I have mentioned above is conservation work, nevertheless its great to be involved in a project such as the South East Asian Vultures, where we are involved in the captive breeding side of it, which may be the saving of the species. That sort of thing is a privilege to be able to get to grips with.

But most of all right now, this very minute, I am so glad to be home again, regardless of my debts, what I have gone through in the last five years, the losses, which are countless, and the closeness of losing everything, I am home, the birds are home, we are where we belong. And all being well we will stay here to carry on the work that I believe we do so very well.



great to use the collection in such a way. Of course I would love to get out into the field and join some of

the researchers looking at some of the stuff they do, but I barely have time to get through a day here now



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The Lessons of the Peregrine

The Apprentice

Falconry has long been practised through many quarters of the world, and although many falconers now fly falcons for hobby and pleasure,

As an apprentice to the sport I have much admiration for the falconers of old as I am fast realising that there is so much more to correctly learning

extremely accomplished falconer of the early 1900's, I now understand just how important learning the absolute subtlety of the sport is to allow oneself to truly master the art of falconry. Falconers of days gone by did not have telemetry or such aids at their disposal and thus had to understand the practice so much more fluently.

As a physical therapist I can attribute many of the quirks of my work to falconry. I have a particular interest in cranial therapy, which is the subtle act of working with the natural rhythms of the cerebrospinal fluid, the myofascial (muscular) system and bones to rid the patient of states of tonic and to promote states of movement, and thus health. Much like cranial therapy, falconry is an art of movement and proprioception. As the therapist palpates the minute movements of the sutures of the skull and the fluid within, the falconer palpates the falcon through the leather of his glove. It is possible to place one's hands on the patient's cranium and detect a state of tonic or dysfunction in the abdomen or even lower limbs. Likewise, it is possible to detect states of tension or ease in the falcon's upper body purely by paying attention to the movement within her feet as she sits upon the fist. Much of this work can be done during the process of manning, which I believe is much of the secret to training a falcon or hawk well.

Learning an art, no matter what it is, is greatly helped and influenced by the teacher. In my case I have been extremely lucky. I have had some of the top therapists in Europe teach me about the art of promoting health, I have had one of the best saxophonists I have ever heard unveil the path to playing some spectacular music and I have had an awesome teacher to guide me in my quest to learning the true



rather than to purely put food on the table (though what better way to eat?) the time-tested methods of training a falcon have remained almost unchanged due to their sheer effectiveness.

and carrying out the practice than is let on at first glance. These days we have tools, such as telemetry, at our disposal and such tools make our lives that much easier. Having read 'Falconry' By Gilbert Blaine, an



art of falconry and all its beauties, and all have become great friends in the process. The one thing that differs in falconry from practically any other art form is that you might not come across just human teachers. I have also been fortunate enough to have encountered another teacher in the form of a 17-year-old tiercel peregrine.

As I have already stated, manning is of the utmost importance. Make a hash job of it and your falcon may be ruined forever. It is also important as the flying weight of a falcon can be roughly measured by how calmly a falcon conducts itself on the fist and how responsive she may be to food. If she jumps straight to the fist from her block then she is near her flying condition, if she bates away then you probably have a few more ounces for her to lose before she is in condition. Reducing her weight gradually is far better and healthier for her than screwing her down fast. If she is screwed down then her system has no time to adjust to the dietary changes you are imposing on her. Athletes build up endurance

and often take themselves for short bursts at high altitude to produce a higher yield of haemoglobin. Your falcon is a highly tuned athlete and needs to be treated as such. Shocking the system can do no good and so take your time with her and be patient, it'll pay off dividends.

Most people who have decided to venture into the world of this sport often purchase a young falcon who has previously been untouched so essentially they are starting from scratch. My situation is rather more different for I have the pick of any 12 or 13 falcons I like as I am learning on an estate that has a private bird of prey collection. Starting fresh with a young hawk has many advantages. She will be unruly and clumsy as she finds her feet and will be much in awe of you. Because she is awestruck the process of making her to the hood will be made easier as her attention will be more focussed on you than it will be the actual hood. Sometimes being thrown in the deep end is much more advantageous than wading in slowly as you must gain confidence more

quickly. A hawk that is nervous and bates requires quick action to return her calmly to the glove and skilful hooding to quieten her effectively. If you are learning on your own then you have no choice but to simply suck it up and get on with proceedings. The more you mess around and procrastinate the more stressed the falcon will be, hence more prone to fits and respiratory problems and in the long run she will be far more badly behaved and more difficult to handle. Therefore, if you have a brand new falcon you really have no choice but to learn the basic handling skills fast! My circumstances were quite different however.

Early on in my training I decided that I wished to fly falcons. I must at this point state that I think all falcons are fabulous right from the almighty Gyr Falcon, to the daring and wayward Saker Falcon to the gutsy little Merlin. It is with great enthusiasm that I hope one day to say that I have successfully flown each and every species that I can get my hands on, but for now it is with great pleasure that I turn my attention purely to the noble Peregrine.

When you sit a Peregrine out on her block amongst other species of falcon, though a spectacular sight altogether, it is she who stands out. She is proud and noble and stands firmly upon her block, her muscular frame compact, stout and powerful, ready to launch at any moment.



She is not restless like the others, instead she sits calm and with a dignity not even a lord or lady could touch. The masked eyes are far gentler too. Gyrfalcons tend to

always seem startled, whereas a Peregrine always manages to look in control and happy to accept her surroundings. There is an air of grace and magic about her, making her almost sage like in her qualities. The Peregrine does indeed seem far gentler and more accepting of her handler and her general situation. I saw a female being flown at Partridge for the very first time recently and at her assistance was a lovely pointer. When she had been called down to the lure the dog was brought over and I was amazed at

I selected the 17-year-old tiercel that I made mention of earlier. Even as Peregrine tiercels go (I have found most tiercels to be kinder in nature than falcons) he is particularly gentle. Upon manning him I was looked at with the same scrutiny and judgement that every Peregrine seems to use when inspecting their handler, but after a while and a few bates he appeared to be quite happy in my presence. There is one sure way of validating this and that is to fly the hawk from the fist of another or a T-perch to a swung lure,

future dealings with falcons. It will be the item that may bring a wayward falcon down from her travels safely and peacefully. Usually a leather pad or a pair of wings tied to a line and garnished with meat. Half of a day old chick on both sides is the normal practice. It is important for both sides to have food on as the falcon needs to be able to see that there is food on the lure from any angle, otherwise why should she chase it? What is in it for her? It may be advisable to practice with the lure before garnishing it for it is a



the falcon's immediate acceptance of her. My Harris hawk certainly doesn't greet the dog with anywhere near as much appreciation. I wondered if this was something purveyed by genetic coding or whether it was simply in this falcon's nature. Time and time again, however, I hear of how willing to greet a dog Peregrines are and how some even allow the dog to lick egg yolk from their feet as they feed, so I am inclined to believe that it may be something that is in the nature of most Peregrines in general.

When it was time for me to learn the ins and outs of flying a falcon

whilst under the safety of a creance. Sounds simple enough doesn't it, but believe me this seemingly simple action can be compared to learning to drive a car. It's fast, complex and can be quite nerve racking. Until you're actually stood with the falcon coming at you and the lure swinging in your hand there is no way of preparing yourself for the shock of it all. Unfortunately you have to be prepared to get it wrong for the first few attempts.

The lure deserves a mention and some explanation at this point as it has a major part to play in all

foreign thing to us all and learning to control it paired with developing the correct hand-eye coordination may take some time. Swinging it isn't so hard, but learning to place it where you want it to land, or be at a certain point is rather more tricky. Target practice using flowerpots or a tennis ball being thrown at you is a good way to master your skills. If you go wrong at this point then at least you will not be endangering the safety or the life of your falcon then you can try it with the falcon once you feel confident. Practise dropping it to the ground and taking it up quickly

as this may also prove to be useful when actually out in the field when your actions certainly need to be smooth and fluid.

is usually seen in displays, rather than out in the field. The purpose of this exercise is to exercise her and keep her fit, to teach her to stoop

she will be more inclined to chase it and hence to stoop it. This is a presentation that is gradually built up to allow the hawk's fitness levels to increase. Once the falcon has taken flight on her first try then get her to do a circuit round you then offer her the lure as per the first method of presentation, by throwing it out to the side where she can see it and allowing her to come in. Repeat this method the next day and increase the amount of circuits daily after that until you can easily achieve between five and ten circuits and remain confident that she will come in when the lure is thrown and the whistle blown. After this attempt a stoop with her. You can prompt her to do this in two ways. The first is to face her and swing the lure at her. This usually does the job. If it doesn't, however, then try throwing the lure on the ground and whipping it away from her just before she comes into it. You need to make sure you keep her attention at all times and that you allow her to think that she has a chance of catching it by keeping



There are two ways to present a lure to a falcon and both are employed for different reasons. The first and by far easiest to get the hang of is flying the falcon in a straight line from a perch over a few hundred yards to a lure that is thrown to the ground. This method is useful in getting the intended game hawk to recognise the lure as an item to fly to and in future flights, when she is free from the creance it will prove invaluable at bringing her down quickly. Blowing a whistle is usually coupled with a lure being offered as it will be recognised by the hawk as part of the same thing. If she is out of sight then the sound of a whistle should be enough to remind her that there is a nice offering of food waiting for her when she comes in to land – the sight of a lure and or the sound of a whistle is her cue to come back to you. With this presentation it is important to remember that the lure must be thrown out to your side and not straight out in front as, if put in this situation, a falcon will almost never come in properly. Whether it's flying at the bulk of you or looking into your face front on, who knows, but needless to say they simply don't like it. The second and far more complicated way to present the lure is to stoop the falcon to it and this

at a moving object that resembles a bird and to thereon encourage her to keep stooping, thus improving her confidence and technique. This is usually employed after the



falcon has learnt the first technique of coming into the lure in a straight line. Once she has recognised that there is a food reward to be had when she has 'caught' the lure then

the passes close. If she hits it then it is very important to swallow your pride and let her have her reward. She's worked for and earned her prize and if you deny her then what

justification will she have to chase it again? Increase the number of passes daily to increase her agility and fitness and reward her efforts well.

One of my worst days with the lure, if the falcon hadn't have been on a creance, may well have proven problematic or even disastrous. The hawk will always fly into the wind so you must position yourself accord-

to happen! I later realised that I had thrown the lure out too late as he had nearly reached me by this point. Not only had I waited too long but I had also thrown it directly in front of me. Falcons will not fly directly at you so it is important to place the lure out to the side, where they can see it. Long grass can make this task tricky, as finding anywhere suitable to place it is difficult. In a panic I attempted to

undoing. As the falcon continued to circle the creance began to get wound around me until I could no longer take the lure up. Eventually the falcon flopped down to the ground nearby and ended up hopping to the lure whilst I untangled myself from the mess. Probably my worst performance, and one I hope never to repeat, but certainly a good lesson learnt. Falcons are notoriously unforgiv-



ingly and allow enough room so that they may take flight properly. The distance, once the first flight has been successfully accomplished, may be gradually increased. This positioning so that the falcon was flying into the wind was achieved without a hitch. My first mistake shortly followed, as the falcon was un-hooded. I was expecting there to be a pause while he roused and went through his 'pre-flight checks' but no sooner had the hood been removed he was on his way, powering towards me. I swung the lure and threw it out for him in a slight panic. He veered off and went to another circuit. Not what was supposed

get the lure back up so that I could swing it and replace it, but instead got it caught in some long grass and then got it tangled round my leg as it recoiled. The hawk at this point was still circling close by at creance length, patiently waiting for me to sort myself out. Every time I tried to place it I misjudged and it either ended up being too late or in grass where he couldn't see it. I don't like the creance one bit, but have accepted that it is a necessary evil and that it's far better to use it rather than risk losing your falcon or hawk. On this particular occasion, however, it proved to be my

ing of bad handling and will hold personal grudges against individuals for such poor practice, but this particular hawk, despite having been so badly messed about, still came straight to me as I made into him and jumped to the fist with no qualms.

Sometimes you can do everything more or less right and the falcon can mess up, but unfortunately as far as the falcon sees it the whole incident was your doing and my god you will be punished! Again in flying this tiercel I have been fortunate, as he seems to, after a short glance of annoyance and 'how very

dare you', shrug it off as a bad job. When he first started flying again (he'd been in a breeding project previously) he had a tendency to come into the lure with great gusto but grab the ground just ahead of him, which sent him flying head over tail into the grass. This was not through incompetence, however, but more due to his keenness. Despite this and after a while he soon got his

the lure, which can just be irritating, or it may cause them to simply 'go', or fly away. There are several key points to making into a falcon successfully. First and foremost always approach the hawk slowly and in front of her so that you are always in view and do not startle or make her feel threatened. I was lucky with the tiercel as he was so laid back that once grounded

This will, in her mind, turn you from the person who may rob her of her prize to the person who will give her food and help her eat her reward. A sure fire way of making friends with a falcon is to do just this. Allow her to finish her whole meal from the lure too. If you rush her then she will begin to carry and behave atrociously, but it will be no one's fault but your own. In her mind, if you try to hurry



full coordination back and was flying superbly and coming into the lure without a glitch. Another time he hit the lure on the floor and used his impetus to climb quickly and steeply. Unfortunately he was on a creance, which became snagged and pulled him to the ground. Luckily he wasn't hurt, only slightly put out. Again he jumped quite happily to the fist. I also started flying him somewhere different where this could not happen again.

The process of making in is just as, if not more important than the flight itself. If you have a nervous falcon then making in badly will either cause them to begin carrying

nothing really spooked him so I was able to take a moment to mentally tick off all the boxes and fumble about whilst finding my feet and familiarising myself with the task. Secondly it is vital that you get down on the floor as low as you can when making into the falcon. With a well-manned hawk that is totally happy in human company this may rarely prove an issue at all, but for a nervous hawk standing over her will undoubtedly make her more nervous and prone to panicking and flying away. Titbits or bechins are a really good idea. Make into her, while she is feeding on the lure, and offer her small pieces of food as you do.

her then you are robbing her of food that is rightfully hers. Always have your glove fully garnished with the rest of her meal. Have it near her in anticipation of her finishing so that when she does she will, hopefully, jump to your glove and begin to feed from there. While she is distracted by her meal you can secure her safely.

When I first began learning these techniques I was slow and cumbersome, but luckily I was gaining a lot of my learning from a tiercel, who was patient and understanding with me. Even when I was making silly and god awful mistakes he would go through the usual motions, but

perhaps take a little more time to deliver his end of the bargain if I hadn't quite got it right. In a way it almost seemed like he was taking it upon himself to guide me into getting it right. His actions were always obvious and purposeful. If I was

very natural method of teaching to be just the ticket. Schisms and nervous breakdowns have never really been an issue and having had this positive form of instruction from such a sturdy and wonderfully serene tiercel my confidence

what it was that I did wrong...and if I don't then my other teacher will soon make sure I do, which I am grateful for. The important thing to always remember is that mistakes are allowed, as part of the learning process, but only try to make a particular mistake once, for a second chance may not be so willingly given! When learning the art of falconry I can do no more than recommend a similar path that I myself have taken, if one should so present itself. With a more experienced hawk mistakes can still be made and learnt from, but the atmosphere in which you learn will be that much calmer and thus the whole manner in which you eventually deliver your handling will be calmer, confident, more purposeful and far better for your feathered companion overall.

It is these early lessons, many of which have been taught to me by the magnificent Peregrine himself that I shall be most happy to recall in years to come and to be ever so honoured to have received. In the Peregrine one shall find magnificence, nobility and such delights that they may forget to breathe with the sheer joy that comes to light in their hearts. I hope you find such joy, as I have done.



taking too long to offer him a pass or throw the lure he'd gesture at landing in a tree, but never actually do it and if I didn't get a pass quite right he'd behave almost like a lazy teenager, only making half bothered attempts at it. When I got it right, however, he'd steam in like a train! I have seen less experienced falcons flown and it seems to me that they are far less forgiving when it comes to errors in handling and lure swinging, perhaps because they are putting their trust in you to teach them or serve them in a competent manner and perhaps this is the only way that they see fit to gaining overall confidence, much like a child does its parents.

is probably far higher than if I had started totally fresh. If anything has ever gone wrong at any point then judgement, on the part of the falcon, has not been too harsh and quite often the swift and sharp look that is glanced my way from his dark eyes will prompt me to realise just

It is these early lessons that I have gained from this older and more accomplished tiercel that I will carry with me through the rest of my falconry career. Instead of having to deal with a chaotic and rather nervous young falcon, or one that ha never been handled previously I have been gently nudged and guided in the right direction. As I am a sensitive being and do tend to take things to heart, whilst at the same time being particularly hard on myself, I have found this gentle and



The Life of a Hawk Trapper

Alan Stephenson



and we try to trap these problem birds for falconry use. A problem bird is usually one that is eating domestic pigeons or terrifying aviary birds and in most cases the owners of such birds would quietly dispatch the culprit even though it is illegal to do so. Years of good public relations amongst racing pigeon keepers and cage bird owners has paid off. When they have a problem they simply phone up and the offending raptor is removed. Many of these problem birds are passage birds without a territory so they can safely be moved away from towns and cities and it will not return. Adult birds are a different story as they usually return to the same area again. Hopefully they will associate the trapping with the place and avoid that particular area. It is my experience that birds and animals associate a place with trapping and not so much as how they were trapped although if you trap the same birds a few times they learn to identify trapping methods as well as the colour of vehicles. The birds that have been trapped a few times become extremely shy and difficult to trap and that's when the challenge begins in trying to outwit them at this game. Very often, after weeks of trying to trap a particular bird things will fall into place and suddenly one morning it's caught very easily. On other days a straightforward trapping goes horribly wrong with the bird increasing its knowledge of hawk trappers immensely and then it becomes a real battle to trap them. By horribly wrong I mean the usual

A hawk trapper is a special breed of person. If he is legal it's not unlike James Bond who has a license to kill, except the hawk trapper has a license to trap. It is the envy of local falconers to be able to trap hawks legally. In most countries trapping birds of prey is strictly controlled by a permit system so I must add that unless you are in possession of a permit it is illegal to trap birds of prey or any other birds for that matter. First check your local laws before attempting any form of trapping. Don't use this article as an excuse if you get caught trapping without the necessary permits!

As mentioned hawk trappers are a special breed and by that I mean probably not your normal person. Who in their right minds would be up before first light, early in the morning, trying to outwit some poor bird, and once trapped to be released. I have been in the fortunate position as a raptor biologist, conservation officer (Shame Ranger) and falconer to be able to trap raptors freely and legally. Very often problem raptors are trapped for release elsewhere, if they are adults or if passage or juveniles they can be passed on to falconers. Passage birds can be used for falconry in South Africa





where one of the locals shows up at the crucial time, wondering what you are up to and asking really stupid questions. After each answer they ponder it carefully for a few minutes and then proceed with the next stupid question while you are trying hard to be polite knowing full well that with each minute the chances of trapping said bird are slipping away. Then of course the most dreaded of all locals, the little old lady with blue hair and a Maltese poodle or some other furry little creature they like to call a dog. The nightmare happens close to or in towns so beware when trapping near human habitation. I can recall one morning with a shudder where I was trying to trap a migrant peregrine falcon (*calidus*) off the local cathedral tower early one morning. This was part of a research project and I had struggled to trap females as they usually just flew away with my pigeons. An hour before first light I had set up a net close to the cathedral in an open park with the usual pigeon waiting patiently. First mistake was the public area used, as I should have known little old ladies bring their dogs for a walk to do their business. While walking across the field in the dark I stepped in a fresh heap of poodle crap and could barely breathe with the stench following me. Little old ladies insist on feeding their dogs with matured delicacies, which when processed

have tremendously powerful scent, unlike pointers fed on dry dog-food. With the net carefully pegged out lightly, taking the wind into consideration and all other details I retired to a large bush to take up my position. Sitting in the cold morning with an overpowering stench of ripe dog manure all around me was not pleasant to say the least. I waited patiently, wondering if it would become light first or if my throat lining would peel off with the acrid fumes. Eventually with eyes watering and my nostrils burning I could just make out the falcon silhouette against the cathedral. I focus the binoculars carefully. The falcon sits still with hardly a movement. The pigeon sitting quietly at the net decides it's hungry, rouses and tries to fly back home. Immediately the falcon bobs its head staring intently.

It also rouses and mutes, waiting and watching to see if the pigeon struggles again. I curse the pigeon and with mental telepathy try and get it to move. The mind, being all powerful, works and the pigeon struggles again. I stare through the binoculars at the falcon, again willing it to fly. It sits there for ages until my eyes start watering and suddenly it launches into the air and with swift wing-beats moves steadily towards me. I can hardly contain myself with all the excitement. My eyes are glued to the falcon and as it gets closer I can make out the dark eyes fastened on something ahead of it. Just when it seems inevitable that the falcon must be stooping into the net it throws up and starts circling around. Frustration, I peer through the bush carefully only to see a little, white, fluffy dog wrapped up in the net and the owner striding out forcefully towards the flapping pigeon. The falcon, excited by the flapping pigeon circles around close by. Horrors! I break cover running over to the net and try and get the poodle out of the net. The poodle, being a brave soul, bless it, starts screaming at the top of its lungs before I have even touched it. I grab it carefully afraid that it will bite but all it does in its defense is hasten its toilet and the same dreadful smell permeates the air again. This one has a slightly different bouquet or maybe being fresh just smells different. The little old lady with blue hair and blue face is screaming something at me but



I am trying to unravel the dog and keep an eye on the falcon. Fortunately she has no handbag to hit me with. Eventually the dog is loose and races off yelping. The lady is in a dilemma, firstly to follow the dog and secondly to do battle with me. The dogs' yelping wins and she follows it promptly, hurling abuse over her shoulder at me as she goes. The net is all caked in dog turd so I hastily run over to the vehicle and pull out a spare net. This is put in place quickly and I retire back to the bush again. In the meanwhile the falcon has returned to its perch on the cathedral and is watching intently. The pigeon having seen the falcon, frightened by the dog and old lady is cast in stone and not moving an inch. I wait a few minutes watching the falcon and keeping a lookout for any other dogs or people. The falcon starts to lose interest so I quickly take a fresh pigeon and replace the now wary pigeon. For a few minutes it sits quietly and then starts to preen. I focus on the pigeon and using the mind again will it to fly home. After

about five minutes of staring at it, it eventually decides to take off for home. It flaps a few times and I look for the falcon. It's gone! Maybe it's on its way to the pigeon but I can't see it anywhere. Suddenly I see it stoop at a passing feral pigeon and catch it easily, returning to its perch on the cathedral. I slowly pack up my nets and pigeons and drive home holding the steering wheel with the tips of my fingers so as not to get the stench of dog manure anywhere. Another fine day trapping.

On another occasion I was trapping hobby falcons in the coastal dune-fields using a net and a stuffed eagle owl. It had started slowly at first light with the odd hobby flying into the net while trying to heckle the owl. In the distance I could see more hobbies approaching as they flew along the dune ridges in their search for insects. Suddenly out of nowhere a local appeared next to the net and was reaching for the owl. I shouted at him to stop and leave the owl alone. He then ignored me and bent down and picked up the owl. I again asked



him to put the owl down to which he replied he had found it first and was now going to eat it. Could only happen in Africa. There was probably not a human living within 50 kilometers from where I was trapping and I have to lure in a passing beachcomber who has been in the sun too long. I patiently explain to him that I am trying to trap birds to put rings on them and show him the fine net and rings which he did not notice. He just stares at me and shakes his head. What do I do when I have caught them and put a ring on them he asks? I then let them go I explain. He shakes his head even more, still clutching the stuffed owl tightly. This argument carries on for half an hour and I can see that there is not going to be any conclusion in my favour. My sense of humour is wearing thin so I grab the owl and a tug of war ensues. Being a carefully stuffed owl, it is not meant to be pulled apart so it naturally comes apart quite easily and suddenly the local realizes that there is not much in the way of food to be had here. With that he walks off mumbling to himself leaving me clutching two pieces of owl. Much muttering from my side as well as I pack up for the long walk across the dunes. Thoughts of dark and evil deeds cross my mind as I slowly walk through the sand.

But like all good hunters there are days when everything goes right and the excitement is worth all the bad days.

My friend Alan Harvey says in falconry one in ten flights goes exactly as planned, maybe not in numerical order but at the end of the day it evens out and as long as you believe that it keeps you going, waiting for that tenth flight.



Hybrids, Breeding the High Flyer

Diana Durman-Walters



A skilled falcon can turn an ordinary day into a dynamic one.

This all depends as to whether the falcon is going to turn the energy levels up full throttle and climb into an impressive, dominating position, of the chosen quarry below.

From a good height or pitch, the falcon will be circling the falconer as if in some imaginary cone, carefully monitoring all the activity below. Invariably if game birds are available then a dog is on point about to make the flush for the waiting on falcon.

Once the gamebirds are flushed from cover, the falcon will respond to an instinctive desire to pursue. The vertical descent from a very high pitch is like no other occurrence. Attention grabbing and spectacular as she folds into a tear drop profile, the falcon's high velocity nose-dive is aimed with unnerving accuracy onto the quarry below. An experienced falcon will already be

manoeuvring her body angles so that the descent is geared to shepherding the chosen bird below into her rapidly approaching path, giving it fewer odds to take evasive action. The strike is swift and disabling as her quarry goes down with the impact. Not wishing to leave things to chance she will speedily follow this through with a short tight turning circle, securing it finally on ground.

To achieve longwing flying at this level takes some considerable skill from the falconer and indeed the falcon. Yet it is the actual breeding of falcons that is the starting point for hawking.

Breeders today are not necessarily falconers. Large breeding establishments find their year is full and time consuming in their commitment to producing young falcons of quality and hunting ability. Consequently the opportunity to devote to personal hawking becomes far more difficult to achieve and allocate time to do the falcon justice.

Big breeder or small breeders are both after the same objectives, that is, to produce eyasses so that others

will have a falcon that is both stylish, and an accomplished performer in the field.

Without doubt the hybrid has given many falconers the ability to achieve both of the above traits in one falcon. Unquestionably the gyr x peregrine reigns supreme when it comes to fulfilling this role, whether it is *Falco peregrinus* hybrid or one of the many peregrine subspecies, in that there is already an inbuilt element of discipline and high mounting ability from the peregrine and speed and power from the gyrfalcon.

As the breeding year begins its long annual season, the pairs of falcons and imprint females and males are already in their newly cleaned aviaries. Feeding routines are now beginning to change, so that they are being fed three times a day to stimulate the evolving courtship display between males and females. In the imprint chambers this is mirrored so that both males and females interact as much as possible with the handler.

Breeding with imprints is the most demanding of the two types as it requires interaction every day,





seven days a week and no alteration to timing. There is a high level of expectation from the single falcon that you will be a constant visitor to his or her nest site and territory and that you are a really good food provider which in return they will reward you with either egg production or in the case of the male, repetitive semen samples.

As eggs begin to appear, then as in most of the large breeding Facilities, these will be taken for artificial incubation. The incubator room may well house a considerable number of these machines which will also need to be monitored very carefully. No longer under the care and attention of the parent falcon they are now being regulated through these specially designed cabinets to mimic the parent birds brooding techniques. They are very advanced compared to what was available just 20 years ago, but as with that notable saying "never put all your eggs in one basket" hence the need to have as many incubators as the Facility can afford to minimise the risk of any form of mechanical failure and loss of eggs.

Eggs that go full term will start to show very clear signs in the last 5-7 days that changes are taking place in the egg indicating the embryo is getting into the correct position to 'pip' the shell. These eggs which have up till now been turned by the machine will need to get be taken off the turners and rested with the side uppermost where the pip will take place. Once the pip occurs the hatching process is slow, deliberately so, as the chick can now make the transition from breathing within the egg to using its lungs for the first time and bring the chick into the final stage where it will cut itself free from the egg.

A young newly hatched chick has expended considerable energy to free itself from the now too small protective eggshell and will need to rest. It will be in a slightly lower temperature as well as being in a hatcher, having removed it from the main incubator.

From here it will then be taken to a brooder where it will remain for approximately 7 days as it is fed and monitored to ensure that its growth

and responses are normal and that it has the best chance of survival in this precarious period. Chicks at this age are surprisingly very strong and robust feeders, yet they are so utterly dependant on the care and maintenance given at this time that they can be vulnerable to any change or especially any bacterial challenge that comes their way.

With many chicks all of the same age and more on the way the life of a falcon breeder now becomes one of intense devotion to these young chicks as well as a time of fewer hours of sleep as each and every step is being monitored. Whether it is checking the incubators and making sure that their temperature is constant, cleaning hatches and brooders between clutches of eggs, sanitising the room the endless cleaning of young chick containers at each feed to ensure they are in clean bacteria free surroundings is a continuous cycle. There is a train of thought that suggest as they don't do all of this in the wild then such attention to detail is somewhat over the top. In this artificial setup we're not the in the wild but a culti-



become unwell once they are in a less than sterile environment in the aviary. Their immune systems will be challenged at this point in time. Strong healthy well raised chicks will be able to fight this challenge and grow on and thrive.

When the young are around their 5th-6th week they are showing signs that they will need to be in a bigger aviary than just sharing with their parents. Many of the large falcon breeders have very large hack pens that are designed to allow the young falcons to exercise hence developing their cardio-vascular requirements. This is another important time for the young falcon as it begins to learn that flying at speed in confined spaces requires many of the principles it will use when it goes hawking. Ability to stop and turn quickly, accurately land onto a small area and use footing to gain perch first time round. Avoid flying into siblings but estimate where they will twist and turn and steer the best course for yourself. These rudimentary skills will be more finely honed

vated environment which by its very nature has bio security issues. There are no natural cleansing processes such as rain to wash everything down, or wind to carry away debris and keep the air constantly changing, or sun to degrade developing bacteria or provide chicks with natural levels of vit D. All of these components have to be supervised by the breeder and the

better that is done the more likely the chicks are going to be superior to those that didn't receive attention to detail.

Once chicks are put back in with their foster parent or true parent then the hard work of feeding will revert to the adult falcon. Even at this time they will need to be kept any eye on, usually with CCTV and visual monitoring as it is still possible they may





once they are out in falconry training and doing this for real.

Having several weeks of flying in hack pens to build up muscle and flying strength it will soon be time to be taken out and begin life as a hunting falcon. At this point everything possible has been done to create a falcon that is in good health, perfect feather and is fit for the purpose.

Whilst the breeder's year continues with rearing, management and maintenance the falconer on the other hand can now begin to channel the new falcon into a dynamic hunting companion.

To achieve this goal requires a falcon that has had attention to detail. Parental stock that had a good track record themselves as hunting falcons. Care and attention in the incubation and rearing process. Good feeding throughout and a period of time in the hack pen to allow the young falcon to develop mentally and physically. When all these factors come together and the falconer can bring their own

expertise into the training, then the odds are in favour for high mounting game hawks, or duck hawks.

When looking at hybrid falcons today, it isn't just the ability of the

falconer that can make a great falcon it is also the case of breeder influence, which can determine truly great falcons.



George Edward Lodge Trust

Brian Bird

The George Edward Lodge Trust was set up in 2007 to further awareness of the life and work of this outstanding artist and naturalist. The Trust will build up a directory of artwork and artefacts of the artist with a view to making it available to those wishing to gain a greater understanding of him and his artwork and techniques. It will build an historical picture of falconry in the 19th and early 20th centuries based particularly upon the artwork, records and diaries of George Edward Lodge, but also expanding to incorporate other sources as these become available.

George Edward Lodge

1860 – 1954



George Lodge in his Camberley studio 1947

George Lodge was born at Horncastle in Lincolnshire. He was an accomplished taxidermist, beginning with his first subject, an owl, at the age of twelve. As a student at the Lincoln School of Art he was awarded fourteen prizes for drawing and later became an expert wood engraver.

As a young man he travelled widely, visiting Ceylon, Japan and the West Indies. A great sportsman, he particularly enjoyed the annual visits to Scotland and to the salmon rivers of Norway, from which countries he gathered much material for his work on raptors. He was a keen falconer and spent the last part of his life in a house at Camberley in Surrey, which he named, appropriately, Hawk House.

Lodge wrote his only book 'Memoirs of an Artist Naturalist' at the age of eighty-five. He was, however, a prolific illustrator, best remembered for his superb illustrations for Dr. Bannerman's twelve volumes of 'The Birds of the British Isles'.

The George Edward Lodge Trust has been recently established to encourage awareness in the life and work of George Lodge. For more information please contact:

www.georgeedwardlodgetrust.co.uk

Trustees

Brian Bird, Chairman and Falconer
Oliver Swann, Proprietor of Tryon Gallery, London
Dick Treleven, M.B.E. George Lodge's Last Pupil.

George Edward Lodge Exhibition

Celebrating George Lodge's Life and Work in 2010, the 150th Anniversary of his birth. On display will be original artwork and memorabilia belonging to him. Of special importance, the Exhibition will include the famous oil painting of 'Black Jess'.



'Black Jess', oil painting by G.E. Lodge.

Intermewed eyass falcon. Trained and flown by the late Kim Muir, 10th Royal Hussars.

Dates and Venues for George Edward Lodge Touring Exhibition are:

10th February to 5th March 2010,
Surrey Heath Museum, Camberley –
www.surreyheath.gov.uk

11th March to 19th March 2010,
Tryon Gallery, London –
www.tryon.co.uk

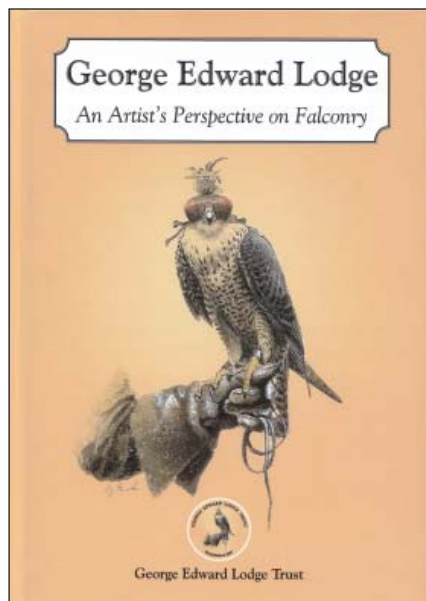
30th March to 9th May 2010,
Nature in Art Museum, Gloucester –
www.nature-in-art.org.uk

George Edward Lodge:

An Artist's Perspective on Falconry

This book is the first to be published by the George Edward Lodge Trust. 'Compiled to educate the non-falconer, and with the falconer in mind...' The book is dedicated to the late Thomas Mann of Hyde Hall, Sawbridgeworth, Hertfordshire – 'with whom George Lodge found falconry and friendship'. The articles and extracts are chosen to illustrate the life and work of the artist George Lodge, and especially his association with falconry. It includes, in full, E.B. Michell's article,

'MODERN FALCONRY', from The English Illustrated Magazine, 1885-1886, which George Lodge illustrated. Also a number of pieces by and about Lodge, some of them previously unpublished.



George Lodge with gyrfalcon, 1936.

ISBN: 9780956294609
Price: £15.00 + £3.00 P&P

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“shoot”, and not only that, but in a suitable country for flying hawks at game, and in the whole length and breadth of the British Isles very few districts are at all suitable, the whole country being much too much enclosed. Wide open spaces with fences and trees few and far between being quite essential for



An illustration by George Lodge for 'The Art and Practice of Hawking', published in 1900.

The Noble Art

From George Lodge's notes

Extract from 'An Artist's Perspective on Falconry'

It is good to know that at this present date, 1935, the noble art (for it is an art as well as a sport) of falconry has by means died out, rather, the reverse is the case; as there are a goodly number of young and enthusiastic devotees of the sport, even among members of some of our Public Schools;

and there has also recently been formed the "British Falconers' Club." Most of the members of which, train and fly their own hawks, as the Club does not attain to the luxury of having a professional falconer attached to it, and many a head of quarry do they annex with their peregrines, goshawks, merlins and sparrowhawks. Rooks and crows are the quarry of the peregrines, as game hawking means renting a

any reasonable success – and for grouse hawking moors that are very fairly flat will be the only chance for a falconer to be able even to keep his hawk in sight during a flight.

Once over a skyline and the chances of a hawk being lost is very great; as not only has the direction of the flight been lost, but if a kill has taken place there is no knowing the distance it may be away, much less the direction and a hawk on its quarry among broken ground and heather is not to be seen unless it has been marked down when the kill takes place, and if it is a mile away – what then?

She takes her pleasure on her quarry, and a long time at that, and afterwards flies off and sits on a stone for perhaps hours while she digests her meal, at such a time taking no notice of lures that she may see swinging a mile away, or anything else, and so another "lost

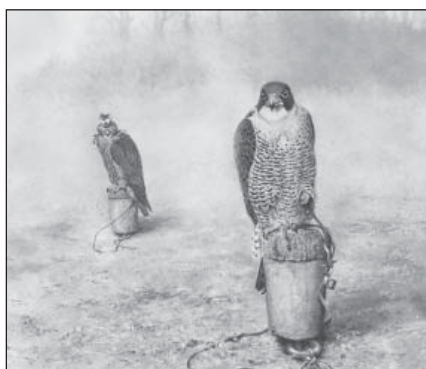
hawk". When a hawk is lost, and left out all night, it is well to be in the neighbourhood at day break the next morning, when she may very likely be taken up, especially if another hawk is flown to the lure, when the lost hawk, if she is anywhere near, will be very liable to join in the flight, and so be taken down again all right.

Peregrines

From George Lodge's notes

Peregrines vary very considerably in colour; some individuals being very dark on upper plumage, and heavily spotted and barred below, while others are light blue grey, and much less heavily marked on lower plumage. But whether dark or light, they are always darker on head and upper part of back on shoulders and towards tip of tail, than elsewhere.

Sometimes the darker coloured birds are much more richly coloured on lower plumage than are the lighter birds, the upper part of breast and sides of breast being a rich salmon colour, and in some extreme cases this colour is extended over the whole of the lower plumage; but as a rule the flank feathers, and leg feathers are much greyer in colour than the rest of the under plumage. In my collection I have one of these richly coloured birds, a falcon, from an eyrie at Horn Head, Co. Donegal, and I have been told that



Peregrines weathering.
Painting by G.E. Lodge.

the Old Hawking Club used to get these richly coloured peregrines from one of the Horn Head Eyries. It would appear that the colour of peregrines is hereditary, as I have

also noticed that all the lundy hawks that I have seen are always very light coloured birds.

Tiercels are not as liable to be very dark in colour, or so heavily spotted below, as falcons, the latter being sometimes heavily marked with black spots and streaks right up to the chin. A dark young bird in its first (red) plumage will moult out into a dark adult (blue) plumage, and vice



Painting by G.E. Lodge.

versa, and this type of plumage will be retained through all subsequent moults.

Hawks vary very much in disposition, and temperament, some being quite gentle and amenable to discipline compared with others. It is probably generally found that a hot tempered impatient hawk seldom turns out a good one, and that the best and highest couraged hawks are also the best tempered.

I take it that one of the most difficult things to cope with in the training of hawks is to be able to appreciate the different temperament of individual hawks, and to diet them accordingly; as some hawks will fly their best only when very hungry, and yet they must be fed sufficiently to prevent them from being weak and light. Other hawks will fly well even when almost fat. But beware of them being too well fed to trouble about hunting; a hawk that hangs about only look-

ing for a lure is no use.

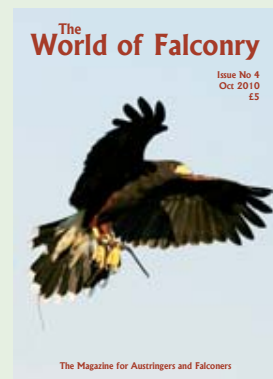
There appears to be in many places a strong prejudice against flying trained hawks over preserved ground, the argument being that the presence of the hawk tends to permanently drive away the existing stock of game, i.e. grouse, and partridges. I think that this must be much more fancy than experience, for from what I have seen, this is far from

being the case. I have seen the same ground used for game hawking with peregrines for weeks at a time, flying the hawks at least three times a week, and sometimes oftener, without any noticeable results in the way of driving away the game.

After all why should such a thing happen. Partridges, and especially grouse, must frequently see their natural enemies, the wild hawks, it does not alarm them unduly, as long as they sit close until the hawk is out of sight. Their homing instinct is much too strongly developed for them to desert their home locality for such a reason. A trained peregrine waiting on at a very high pitch will be seen by every bird over a wide expanse of country, but they will all lie low, and the only birds disturbed will be the individual covey put up under the hawk.

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Surprise ... Surprise !

Dale Fairbrass

Over the last 10 seasons I have flown a female Lanner, and a female Harris Hawk. I have also tried a couple of hybrid falcons without much success I'm afraid to say. With my lanner falcon going into a breeding program I needed a new falcon to fly, she was my star performer, but I needed a new challenge.

I could not believe my luck when a friend phoned me and told me he had an eyass female Gyr/Saker left over at a bargain price. I was powerless to resist. I had vowed never to touch another hybrid with Gyr in it. This was born out of personal experience gained from one particularly wayward male Gyr/Saker that was nothing short of a nightmare to fly. The eyass on offer was in fact only one eighth Gyr and this to all intents and purposes made her nearly all Saker Falcon. Consequently I persuaded myself that this particular hybrid may well be worth a try after all.

Gyr/Saker and even pure Saker seem to have a bit of a reputation. There are some good reports but I must admit the moment I told all my hawking buddies what my new flying companion was going to be, the only response I got was a succession of heavy sighs and raised eyebrows. No one actually said anything out loud, but I think the whispers were that I was wasting my time and that it would only end in tears. You know, the "I told you so's". I picked up Miss Moneypenny at the end of June. I called her Miss Moneypenny because she was inexpensive and partly because it gives me a chance to use my very bad Scottish accent every time I call her name!! (AHH Mr Bond).

JUNE-JULY 2008

After having a couple of weeks to settle into her new home and being fed ad lib so as to give me a true fat weight it was time to com-



mence training. I made a start with Moneypenny Mid July. She tamed easily and good progress was made, she was in fact very nice to work with. Hooding and early lure work all went well and consequently she was soon flying free.

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2008

August was all about fitness training. This is where the hard work really started. I could not have taken things any more carefully, trying to build up her fitness gradually. But getting her to stay airborne and

getting her to stoop at the lure was an absolute nightmare. At this point I raised my own eyebrows, obviously in the style of Roger Moore.

September carried on in the same vein, although I learnt the wind plays a major role in her performance; unfortunately this did lead to her wandering a bit and I had to use the tracking gear much more than I would have liked. Suddenly my ears are burning and I can hear the "I told you so's". But I think this is part and parcel of pursuit hawking.

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2008

This month Moneys' attitude changed completely. I think I now had her weight right and she was chasing rooks. From the moment she was



unhooded, she was tail-chasing, almost playing in a way, and we managed to catch a few. Not over exciting flights but at least she was switching on. In mid October, just as we had turned the corner I hurt my back, so all our good work came to an abrupt end. We got things going again mid November. Money carried on where she had left off, but after a rough and tumble with a rook she unfortunately hurt her wing. A quick trip to the vet revealed Money had a sprained wing, nothing broken or too serious, so now she needed bed rest too. We were having no luck at all at this point.

DECEMBER 08/JANUARY 09

We got back into the swing of things again, but to be honest our stop-start season had not helped either of us. I had the tameness and the manners, but getting her to fly was really hard work.

December was all fitness work again, and in January things improved, and the wandering had stopped, or so I thought!

FRIDAY 16TH JANUARY 2009

If I fly before work, I do an afternoon and evening shift, then I count these as exercise sessions, but today was a day off so I had plenty of time and

was looking forward to flying her.

The day started off on a bad note. I went down the garden in the morning to put the falcons out to weather and noticed I had left Moneys' hood out all night, no doubt due to rushing for work the day before. It had been rained on so I was annoyed about that. Then later in the afternoon, after I had loaded all the gear and Money into the Frontera, I could not understand why the tailgate would not close. The tailgate weighs a tonne in itself and as I slammed it shut it just pinged back open. So I gave it another good slam, but once again it would not close and on closer inspection my recall whistle had become jammed in the jar of the door and I had just smashed it to pieces. These annoyances coupled with the fact it was were blowing a gale made me wonder if I should be flying at all today. Anyway undeterred off we went, as I mentioned before the wind seemed to liven her up.

One of the places where I have permission to hawk is a pig farm set in a small natural valley that is quite

steep sided. The farmer encourages me to hawk there as often as possible as the rook population love to steal the pig nuts which the rightful residents of the farm are fed on. Even if we don't manage to catch one at least we move the rooks on, albeit temporarily.

I decided to slip from one of the hill tops, with the wind blowing up it towards us. I was hoping this would give her some lift and as it turned out this worked well and she floated out over the valley and the pig pens. The rooks were all up to try and make good their escape, but within moments she put in a forty degree angled stoop into the pens and as a result I lost sight of her. Most of the rooks had fled so I was not sure what was going on. It took me five minutes to run down to the spot where I had last seen her, but with no mobbing rooks or distress calls I did not think she had one, so it was out with the telemetry receiver.

This told me straight away that she was much further down the valley than I anticipated. There are more pig pens further down the valley which in turn means more rooks and is has sometimes happened before that she has gone down there looking for them. So at this point I was not unduly worried. I did decide to go back to the jeep and drive down to where I expected her to be, a distance of just over a mile. I could have given a quick blast on my recall whistle but of course did not have one anymore!

On arrival I had a very good signal, I knew I was close so started luring, but there was no sign of her. So I continued with my tracking following the bleeps as they got louder. After about five hundred yards or so I pushed my way through a hedge and there she was. On the main track of the field on a RABBIT, Yes a RABBIT. You could have knocked me down with a feather. I had to dispatch the rabbit but Money penny had the situation fully under control. This was the last thing I expected. I opened the rabbit up and allowed Money to have a good feed. A kill is a

kill and the falcon should be encouraged and rewarded for her work. I was still somewhat in shock. This had to be an opportunistic attack. I cannot believe she even realized this was food; I have never used a dummy bunny with her.

She has looked at the odd chance of a passing pheasant or partridge, and we have one wood pigeon in the bag, again after a long tracking session, but this was completely out of the blue.

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2009

I have read that Sakers will take ground game, and I was thinking should I be looking at finding slips at rabbit. This could be fun.

Unfortunately as January slipped into February Money developed a sore leg, so it was back to the vets and the season was over. There certainly have been more questions than answers, and what we could have achieved if both of us stayed

fit can only be pondered upon. I am looking forward to next season, I am sure she has the makings of a good falcon. I cannot say truthfully that I have proved my hawking friends wrong, but I am going to try. With a new recall whistle there will be no stopping me.



Gathering of Eagles, Kansas 2009

Bob Dalton

Earlier this year I was fortunate enough to meet American eagle expert Joe Atkinson and his wife Cordy whilst they were over in the UK attending the Falconry Festival. During this meeting Joe extended an invitation to join him and various other falconers, who specialise in flying eagles, at a meet he was organising in Kansas mid November. Although I don't fly eagles myself I was still never the less keen

made and airline tickets purchased for a week long eagle adventure.

The trip to Garden City would take me from London Gatwick to Denver, via Charlotte North Carolina, with the final three hundred miles or so to Kansas by car. The start was a good one leaving a cold and wet London and landing in sweltering sunshine in Carolina. The omens were exceptionally good as I watched a Red Tailed Hawk catch

A hotel close to the airport seemed a sensible option and rest for the night with the hope that the worst of the blizzard would blow itself out overnight. The rest was good and exceedingly welcome but eight inches of snow had fallen overnight and it was still snowing somewhat intermittently as the drive to Garden City began.

Conditions on the roads were treacherous and I passed many cars that



to see them in action, particularly as the meet was to take place on the wide open prairies of the mid-western United States. The principle quarry would be Jack Rabbits, the American equivalent of the European Brown Hare. As well as various eagle falconers the meet would also be attended by other falconers flying various hawks and falcons. Accordingly plans were

a rodent in the grass beside the runway as the plane taxied to its allotted place at the airport satellite. After the normal debacle that is known as immigration procedure it was time for a quick meal and then catch the flight onwards to Denver. From the glorious sunshine of Carolina it came as a severe shock to land in the blizzard that engulfed Denver.

had fallen foul of the conditions and left the road altogether. Even the Interstate, the American equivalent of European motorways, was almost impassable. In fact for something like eighty miles I quite literally followed a snow plough along the road at twenty miles an hour otherwise it would have been impossible for me to proceed.



The journey to Garden City from Denver is one that should take around four hours, under the conditions that day it took me just over eight. I was extremely relieved when I eventually reached the hotel that was to be the base for the hawking activities for the next week or so. The snow was nowhere near as bad in Garden City but high winds and driving rain were forecast for the next thirty six hours or so. Hawking was due to start the following morning but those falconers that had already gathered were somewhat dubious that it would be possible, given the expected weather conditions.

The organiser of the event, Joe Atkinson, had been hawking the area for several days before the official start of the event, as had three falconers with Red Tailed Hawks. All had been successful and several Jack Rabbits had been taken. Now for an eagle a Jack Rabbit is relatively easy to overcome once a foot has been put on it but for a Red Tail the quarry is an exceptionally powerful one and requires a great deal of strength and determination to subdue. I have nothing but admiration for female Red Tails that

regularly take Jack Rabbits, considering the prey weighs around three times as much as them. However



one of the falconers at the meet was flying a male Red Tail which he assured me was equally as dead-

ly as any female at them. I would certainly make a point of seeing this particular hawk fly before the meeting was over.

As is so often the case the next day dawned bright and clear, albeit somewhat breezy, and the early morning sun rapidly made inroads into the laying snow. Problem was that some of the falconers had fed their hawks and eagles with a view to getting out into the field in two days and not the following day because of the unfavourable weather forecast.

A gathering of the participants, both falconers and spectators, in the hotel lobby revealed that the numbers of eagles were somewhat low and the spectators outnumbered

the participants quite heavily. As well as the organiser Joe Atkinson with his large male Goldie "Jack Hammer" there was Mark Kilby from Pennsylvania with his eleven year old female Goldie "N a t a s h a". Scott Simpson had come from Wyoming with

his male Goldie "Bubba" and also a female which I never did get to see fly. Joining us at the end of the





first day would be Oscar Pack with another female Golden Eagle. Darryl Perkins was due to arrive sometime during the first day with his female European Goshawk. Also bringing hawks would be Dave Noble, of Noble Bells fame, Danny Denham and Greg Thomas, all of whom would be bringing Red Tailed Hawks. It was also extremely interesting to note that all the spectators bar one had travelled over from Britain, although we were assured the ranks would be swelled by a smattering of Americans and Canadians as the week progressed. This eventually turned out to be one of each which has to be considered a small smattering by any standards. After much discussion, revolving mainly around the weather conditions, it was decided to give one of the eagles a crack at some jack rab-

bits and so a considerable train of vehicles made its way to some arable land approximately thirty miles or so from our base.

The area to be flown was open as far as the eye could see and consisted mainly of areas of short grass and tussocks. Ideal for holding Jack Rabbits with the cover being both short and open enough to allow good flights should we manage to flush one. Marshalling the field took considerable time with one falconer and eagle setting out with an entourage of fourteen spectators. A stiff wind was blowing and getting decent flyable slips was not going to be easy, especially as the non falconers in the field didn't seem to comprehend staying in line and not getting ahead of the falconer.

Fortunately the area appeared to be rich with quarry and within a few minutes of setting out we were getting flights. If the Jack Rabbits



on breaking cover ran into the wind then the eagle struggled to get on terms with them. But if they broke down wind then a really hard chase would ensue. All the flights were off of the fist which is something I was not used to as two of my friends that fly Golden eagles do so in waiting on style. Never the less we enjoyed some good chases and on chase number seven a Jack Rabbit was taken by the eagle. The flight was not an overly exciting one, merely a straight dash from the fist over a distance of twenty yards or so. Needless to say the size and power of the eagle meant that if it managed to get a foot to a Jack

Rabbit then it was exceedingly unlikely that the Jack would get away. The Jacks were despatched by the eagle almost instantaneously as the second they squealed the eagle would tighten its vice like grip and the Jack Rabbit would be dead.

Over the course of the couple of hours we were out with this particular eagle, we witnessed fourteen flights of which three were successful. Purely from a personal point of view I have to say that the flying did nothing to excite the falconer within me. Certainly I enjoyed watching a superbly fit and healthy eagle flying hard and it undoubtedly knew just how to tackle Jack Rabbits in the most effective way. Without doubt the eagle was an absolute



If a strong wind was blowing then the Jack could dump the eagle quite easily by turning either directly into

the wind or across it. Either tactic left the eagle wrong footed and unable to effectively make up lost ground and get on terms again. If the initial footing attempt failed then it tended to be game over as far as the eagle was concerned. Whereas with a Red Tailed Hawk or a Harris Hawk at the same quarry getting a foot to the Jack was only the first stage with the ability to subdue and then despatch following closely on. An eagle weighing around eight pounds has no trouble what so ever subduing a Jack that weighs close on the same whereas a Red Tail or Harris Hawk is tackling something two and half to three times its size.

With the morning sport over it was time to head back to town and get some lunch. Being America the choice of suitable establishments



credit to the skill and knowledge of its trainer and had been brought to the field in excellent condition both mentally and physically. However as a sporting contest eagle against Jack Rabbit was not one that left me overly impressed or excited. My thoughts were that the eagle had only to get on terms with the Jack and then stick a foot out to be successful. Although this is very much a simplification I am sure most falconers will understand exactly what I mean. The whole nub of whether or not the eagle was going to be successful lay with it being able to overtake the Jack before it really got into its stride and also, to a certain degree, wind strength.



was simply overwhelming and I chose one from the eight or so that were within walking distance of the hotel except, of course, being America no one walks. After lunch it was thought that perhaps one of the other male Golden Eagles would be ready to fly although the owner expressed an opinion that he would prefer just a small handful of spectators to accompany him as his eagle was not used to other people in the field. I took this opportunity to ask two of the falconers that were flying female Red Tails if I could tag along with them. They kindly agreed and so I joined Dave Noble from Wisconsin and Danny Denham from Kentucky with their respective Red Tails. Dave was flying a three times intermewed passage hawk called "Becky" and Danny was flying a passage hawk of the year called "Cactus". We drove on to a vast area of Maize stubble which looked ideal Jack Rabbit habitat and so it proved to be. Within a quarter of an hour of leaving the car we had bumped eleven Jacks and had enjoyed four serious chases, two of which resulted in Jacks losing a certain amount of fur but not their lives. With only an hour or so of daylight left we were joined by Greg Thomas, one of America's long established and very well respected falconers. He was flying his four year old intermewed female Red Tail "Tess" who was an old hand at catching Jack Rabbits.



She soon showed her prowess and took a good sized Jack after a long hard chase. Danny and Dave had enjoyed some good sport but their hawks had not quite got a good foothold on any quarry.

The following day it was out with the Red Tails again in the morning and this time we took to the field with four Red Tails. Greg Thomas had also brought along his four year old male Red Tail "Blade" and he was first up to fly in the morning. Third flight of the day he chased a Jack through some Maize stubble and as the Jack tried to double back into some thicker cover "Blade" made his move and slammed into it with tremendous aggression. At thirty four ounces the hawk had to struggle to hold a



seven and a half pound Jack, but hold it he did. This was a very committed hawk that knew exactly how to foot and hold such a large quarry and was a definite credit to his owner. The next flight belonged to "Becky" and after three false starts she finally got her Jack. The fourth flight of the morning for her saw a Jack break out of the Maize stubble about thirty yards in front of us, turn and try and run across wind to a large patch of scrub. But "Becky" was off after him the second he broke and rapidly closed the gap managing to get a foot to him just before he made cover. The Hawk and Jack tumbled through the air together as the Jack did its very best to shake off the attentions of the Red Tail. But it was to no avail and Dave was quickly on hand to put an end to the struggle. "Becky" had man-



aged to catch and hold probably one of the largest Jacks I have ever seen showing amazing tenacity and confidence in her own abilities.

Now it was the turn of Danny Denham and his Red Tail "Cactus" and soon a third Jack was added to the tally for the day. A Jack was flushed close to forty yards in front of us and it broke to our left heading for some scrub and a ditch. "Cactus" took off after it and closed so rapidly that the Jack had to change direction and try and get back into the Maize stubble. This it managed to do but that did not throw off the hawk and suddenly the Red Tail flipped over and crashed in and from the ensuing rough and tumble it could be seen that the hawk had managed to grab the Jack. Apparently though not well enough as the Jack could be seen heading off again with the Red Tail sitting on the floor. Undeterred the hawk got up and chased hard once again. This time as the Jack tried to turn again, in an attempt to throw the hawk off, the hawk crashed in and this time there was no escape for the Jack Rabbit. Danny was there in a matter of seconds to assist his hawk and soon "Cactus" was being rewarded with warm bloody meat from well deserved kill.

Next up was "Tess" who had obviously decided she was going to take the easy option that particular morning. A Jack was flushed which she chased hard but it made thick cover before she had a chance to



get on terms with it. Having missed her intended victim the hawk flew off some distance and sat on a telegraph pole. Greg decided to beat the Maize stubble towards her and after just a couple of minutes the hawk suddenly pitched off of the pole and crashed into some cover. The resultant squealing told us that the hawk had been successful and sure enough when we got to "Tess" she was proudly sitting astride a good sized Jack Rabbit. We had been out barely two hours and all four hawks had managed to get some decent flights and each one had killed. Superb falconry enjoyed in excellent countryside with good company.

Going out to the field that morning and the previous afternoon with these gentlemen and their hawks was an absolute revelation to me. Although I have been flying hawks and falcons for more than forty years my practical field experience with Red Tailed Hawks is extremely limited. I have never personally trained and flown one and have only ever been out hawking with this particular species on a handful of occasions but they have always impressed me with their determina-

tion and aggression towards quarry. I have long felt that they are a much underrated hawk, particularly in Europe where either the Goshawk or the Harris Hawk reign supreme. These gentlemen and their hawks were able to convince me that in a relatively short time, somewhere in my future falconry agenda, a Red Tailed Hawk will feature quite prominently.

After a truly exceptional mornings sport the afternoon was spent in the

company of eagles. Scott Simpson flew "Bubba" and although we enjoyed some truly excellent chases the eagle failed to take any quarry. The same was true of Oscar Pack with his small female Golden Eagle, flying weight a mere nine pounds two ounces. She had seven slips at Jacks but was not truly committed to any of them and gave up relatively easily each time. But then she had spent quite a time on the road getting to the meeting and was a



touch heavy, Oscar was confident she would switch on as the week progressed.

The next day it was out with the eagles again and also Darryl Perkins and his female Goshawk. Unfortunately for Darryl the place allotted to him to fly his hawk held very few Jack Rabbits and also had very large patches of quite dense cover for the Jacks to take refuge in. It was also weird, at least from a European point of view, to set off

Next up were the eagles with "Bubba" going first. This time Scott insisted on a minimalistic field to accompany him as he hawked and I was fortunately lucky enough to be one of the chosen ones. We worked a very large field of stubble and grass and flushed quite a number of jacks. "Bubba" was certainly in the mood and flew each and every opportunity, even though some were only half chances, very hard indeed. Having swept the field in a gradual

abundance of Jacks and they were flushing fast and furiously. Three jacks were taken in relatively quick succession and at least seven more lived to tell their relatives how they outwitted and eagle. A shame the Goshawk couldn't have been given a chance in such a field.

On getting back to the hotel that night we were greeted by the sight of a falconer in reception with a freshly taken Red Tailed Hawk on his fist that he literally trapped a couple of hours previously. It was an exceptionally fine looking passage female and its fresh trapped weight was a whopping fifty-eight ounces. The manning process was beginning right there and then and the hawk even took a little food from the falconer before the evening was out.

I stayed on for one more day of hawking with the Golden Eagles in the morning and the Red Tails in the afternoon and then decided to move on and spend a few days looking at wild birds of prey. My efforts were rewarded with sights of a Golden Eagle, Coopers Hawks, American Kestrels, Red Tailed Hawks, Harlans Hawks, Ferruginous Hawks, a Peregrine Falcon and a number of Prairie Falcons. Prairies have always been a particular favourite of mine and I have a tiercel I am currently flying. Seeing them in the wild is such an enormous pleasure. I also managed to spot the occasional Coyote but the minute a vehicle stops anywhere near them they take to their heels. They are obviously shot at on a regular basis and getting a decent photograph of one is not easy. All in all the meeting had been a rewarding one, if somewhat limited in its scope. But I had met some really nice people and enjoyed some good sport in pleasant company. Pretty soon it was time to head back to Denver and catch the plane home.



hawking with falconer and hawk accompanied by no less than sixteen spectators. The Goshawk behaved itself impeccably, as did Darryl who must have massive tolerance levels. Despite stating clearly and concisely how the field should conduct itself whilst he was hawking the orchestrated order descended into chaos in no time at all. Groups of people were soon milling about, falling behind more intent on chatting than hawking, not watching where the falconer was intending to work. Had it have been me flying the hawk I don't think I would have accepted it quite as stoically as Darryl. The three half chances at Jacks that presented themselves were taken on with one hundred per cent commitment by the Gos. It was such a terrible shame that she was not allowed to fly somewhere where she would have a reasonable chance of success.

arc we were almost at the point of getting back to the cars when a Jack broke about thirty yards to the left of the eagle and made off across wind. "Bubba" left the fist and lifted into the wind to gain a little height and then swept over and let the impetus work in his favour. He closed the gap to the Jack in seconds and in a very neat and precise move grabbed the Jack by the head. Such was the accuracy of his footing and power of his grip that there was practically no struggle at all to speak of. The Jack was despatched almost immediately. An excellent and impressive flight which showed the true power and turn of speed that is possible from an eagle. The end result was an exceptionally good one for the eagle and served to really turn him on to quarry for the rest of the week.

We moved on at it was the turn of Joe Atkinson with "Jack Hammer" to take the slips. This next field held an

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