

The World of Falconry

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July 2010
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The Magazine for Austringers and Falconers

AVIAN EGG INCUBATION WORKSHOP

NOVEMBER 24—26 2010 HELD AT

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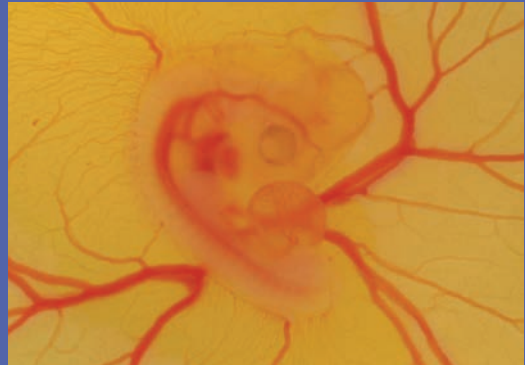


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Who is running the workshop?

Susie Kasielke (Los Angeles Zoo) and Pat Witman (San Diego Zoo) will be leading the workshop with additional support from ICBP's team of staff

Susie has been working with birds at the Los Angeles Zoo for over 30 years and has been Curator of Birds there since 2001. Through her involvement with the California Condor Recovery Program, she worked with the staff at Los Angeles and other facilities to develop and refine propagation, incubation and rearing methods for condors and other species. She has been teaching workshops on avian egg incubation for zoo groups in North America for 18 years.

Pat has been working for San Diego Zoo for almost 30 years with 20 of those years being involved with artificial incubation and hand rearing at the Zoo's Avian Propagation Center (APC). The APC has hatched almost 300 avian species, including the first California Condor. Pat joined forces with Susie Kasielke two years ago to combine their knowledge into the actual workshop format.

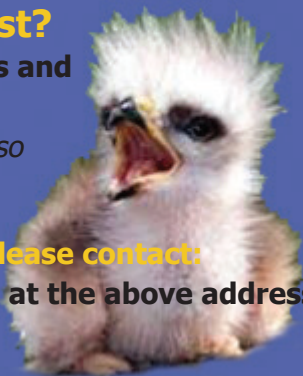
How much will it cost?

Course (including lunches and coffee): £450

Spaces limited to 20 people so book fast to get a place

For further information please contact:

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Editorial

A very exciting time of year is upon us with eyass hawks being taken up for training and intermewed ones nearing the end of their moult. Shortly a new season will be in full flow and we can get on with doing the real thing as opposed to just reading and talking about it.

The World of Falconry would like to extend a very warm welcome to Neil Forbes, of Great Western referrals, who will be contributing regular and topical features. Neil has also very kindly agreed to answer reader's queries, wherever possible, through the pages of the magazine. Any such questions should be sent to Neil via The World of Falconry e-mail which is given across the page.

Once again we have a wide variety of articles for our readership, covering a many facets of falconry, and hope that there is something for everyone. Our thanks go to those that have contributed and we welcome input and suggestions from our readership.

As always good hawking and reading to all.

The editor

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Front Cover Photograph: Bob Dalton

The 2010 Falconry Fair



Our stand at the Falconry Fair

What a pleasure it was to see the Falconers Fair getting back to its roots this year and once again Falconry was fairly and squarely at the centre of the proceedings. Bigger and better weatherings, far more and extremely varied flying in the main arena and plenty of falconry based activities in the mini arena. After a couple of years where the aim and central theme of the event seemed to have strayed a little it was good to see things firmly focused back on falconry and raptors. The whole event took on a renewed energy with several new displays and the return of some old favourites.

Long time supporters of the Falconers Fair, Kiezebrink UK Ltd, have taken over the mantle of principal sponsors and brought with them their unbridled energy and enthusiasm. Their stand was consistently busy for the duration of the two day event and

customers both new and old were made to feel very welcome.

The Fair was opened by "The World of Falconry" editor Bob Dalton in recognition of the twenty one year's support he has given the event. He welcomed one and all to the fair and

hoped that the new revamped format would meet with the approval of the crowd. The organisers of the event presented Bob with an engraved decanter and glasses set as a memento of the occasion.

The flying display were a nice mix-



Bob Dalton being presented with a decanter set by Hanno and Ron Morris



An African Peregrine which flew at the Fair

ture with Jemima being on top form and members of the Yorkshire Hawking Club, under the chairmanship of Dale Johnson, giving an excellent demonstration of simulated rabbit hawking. Making a very welcome return to the main arena were The South east Falconry Group under the chairmanship of Gary Biddis. As always their displays were simply first class and the commentary that accompanied them was relaxed but at the same time extremely informative.

The dog side of falconry was ably illustrated and explained by Allan Hender and his team and two displays were given each day. The first showed the various breeds connected with the sport and explained their role in the hawking field. The second display co-opted Dale Johnson and his team and showed how dog and hawk can co-operate when in the field by enacting a rabbit hawking scenario with the help of a German Short Haired Pointer and a Red Tailed Hawk.

The weathering ground was bigger and better than ever with a wide variety of trained raptors on show under

the ever watchful eye of members of the Central falconry and Raptor Club. The United Kingdom Eagle Falconers Association also had a small weathering at the event with half a dozen or so magnificent eagles on display.

The weather was far from kind on the first day but the sun blessed the event with its presence on the second. Crowds were back to the sort of numbers we have seen in previous years and it is hoped the re-styled revamped event will continue for another twenty one years.



Allan Hender, dog trainer and falconer



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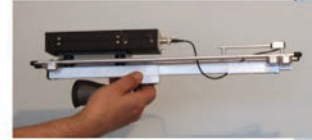
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Perceptions

I have just come back from the Falconers Fair, I like the Falconers Fair, it is generally good to see everyone working together, not too much arguing, and people seemingly enjoying themselves, although I am sure that many of them pull the demonstrations to bits and tell everyone how much better they could have done, which is fine, I never mind that, and indeed they might actually be able to, so good luck to them.

However this year I have been saddened by a number of things that I have seen, now please don't imagine that it is easy to write this, I lay myself open to abuse by those I criticize, but if no one says anything then none of us will learn and the situation will not improve. It has to be said and I guess I am probably the person to do it.

My first worry is that we should and in many cases do know far more about our birds than we did say 30 years ago, we understand their health and needs better, we should understand about stress, but I do not think we are learning to read our birds, I don't think we are looking at them and thinking to ourselves is this bird comfortable, does it look content on its perch or on the fist, what if not is upsetting it, can I do something about it.

To give you an example the guys who were very kindly keeping an eye on my birds, giving me the chance to have a look round do a great job, they really do, they are organised, and their birds all look great. One of my Tawny Eagles was bating in a rather frenzied fashion, and usually it is if the tent is flapping which is why I tend to put him at the front away from the back wall of the tent, however on looking round I realised that one of



Jemima with Tawny Eagle

the guys had a walking stick, which is of course perfectly acceptable, however that particular eagle does not like them, so I moved him to the back of the tent and explained why, because you always should explain, and interestingly they had noticed that the eagle was upset when the gentleman with the stick had walked up that end of the mews, which was good, but as they did not know the bird they did not spot the stick problem. Reading the birds is the most fun thing to do and gives you an insight into them which helps in every aspect of the training.

Three times I spotted people who were holding their birds very close to their bodies and had they been reading their birds they would have seen in the body language that the bird was not comfortable. You know, you have had it done to you, when another human does not understand about personal space and stands too close, it is very uncomfortable. We had a woman visitor years ago who

used to do it and would follow you as you backed away from her, I swear if she ever visits again I will get a chalk line out and tell her not to cross it. I was too young then to say anything, now I probably would and if she listened it would in fact make her life better if she understood it. And the same goes for the birds, they have a personal space and by bringing them in very close to your chest, very often you invade it. Watch the bird, it will not be fluffed up and content, it will be leaning very slightly away to try and get its own space – read the bird.

I went to one stand, and they were nice people, I really hope the Great Grey Owl there was not theirs as that would disappoint me enormously, I bought some stuff there and I should have said something, but I did not see it until I was moving on. The poor unfortunate owl was tethered at the side of the tent right at the front, it was on a lowish perch with no protection from people or more impor-

tantly dogs, it had no water and it should not have been there, it absolutely categorically should not have been there. I would lay money that had it been a goshawk a) it would not have been there anyway and b) many a falconer would have complained, but because it was an owl, no one did, or not that I know of. Great Grey Owls are a northern species and extremely susceptible to stress and aspergillosis. They should not be treated like this. No bird should be put out tethered in a public place without protection.

Worse was the stand at the end of the line on the bank, there was an owl nightmare in my opinion. And again I don't understand why. There is no need to keep them like that, there is no good reason to have that

many birds there and if it is supposedly an owl rescue place, what exactly are they being rescued from, because to subject them to that sort of management points to them needing to be rescued again. If there had been half the birds it would still have been too many, one wonders how they were traveled, I have a large trailer and only can take nine birds. Half as many would have been just as good to raise funds, which is why I imagine she was there, but it was very sad to see. And as for patting owls on the head, for Christ's sake, try it on your own head, it is bloody uncomfortable!!

At Easter this year, we had an Easter egg hunt – bear with me, this is going somewhere. We put up 25 cardboard eggs around the Centre with differ-

ent colours and random numbers, the plan being that the children would have a sheet of paper and mark down the colours and numbers and the highest number would win. About half way through the morning one of the parents with two children came up and asked me if I was aware that some parents were taking down the cardboard eggs after their children had found them and hiding them so that others could not win. I was amazed, I really was, which just goes to show how naive I am about parents!! However not being one to stand still Holly put up all the cardboard eggs again and I spoke to the crowd at the next demonstration. I told them what had happened and asked this – what are those parents telling their children are they saying



Great Grey Owl



Jemima with young Falcon

that it is OK to cheat, that other children don't matter, that their children are the only ones that matter – yes of course they are. It did not happen again!

That is what we are doing if we put out our birds in such a way. We are telling the general public that it is fine to have a whole ton of owls, many of which would naturally in the wild hunt and kill the smaller species of owls, all together in far too small a space within reach of one another, we are saying it is fine to have two barn owls tethered next to one another on a parrot perch, that it is fine to have the birds with no water, we are giving the general public a perception that is all wrong. I am pretty sure that the lady running it will be very annoyed with me, but does she not understand that generally birds of prey including owls do not enjoy being stroked and that it is very bad for their feathers, I watched for a short while and I can read birds, I do it on a daily basis and

have learnt to do it now for five and half decades, over half a century, and the majority of them, like the unfortunate Great Grey Owl were miserable. It was easily readable in its body language.

We have to start to read our birds more and to understand what we are telling those who watch us, what perceptions they will take home. Falconers have over the years done an amazingly good job, falconry is the most acceptable field sport there is and many of the other field sports have said to me that we have brought our sport to the general public in a far better way than any of the other field sports. But we must not go backwards, and it makes no difference to the public if it is an owl or an eagle, they still consider it to be falconry. It is not of course, but nevertheless we all have a responsibility to all our birds, owls, hawks, eagles, falcons, kites, the lot, and we should not abuse them in this way.



Tawny Eagle

Tick Related Disease in Raptors

Neil A Forbes DipECAMS FRCVS

RCVS and European College Recognised Specialist in Avian Medicine and Surgery

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This is the first of a series of articles on common preventable diseases of falconry birds, which all falconers should be aware of.

Avian medicine is a young, challenging and fast developing field. It is a sad reflection that there is very little original research being undertaken in any of the UK veterinary schools into many of the new and emerging

The latter is just the case with 'tick related disease in cage and aviary birds'. This was a condition which the author first became aware of some 15 years ago. Since then we have investigated the condition, it is sad to report, that even after all these years, although we have some, we do not have all of the answers. However we do know it is a series dis-

these birds. Since this some 20 birds have been treated, all of whom have survived.

Ticks are second only to mosquitoes in terms of the numbers of infectious diseases which they are known to spread. Ticks tend to enjoy a three year life cycle, but only feed from their host (take a meal of blood) once a year (for just a week at a time), im-



Tick on European Eagle Owl eyelid

bird diseases. One of the things which makes working as an avian vet genuinely exciting, is the potential to discover new diseases, even if at the time one does not find all the answers.

ease. Half of all birds found with a tick on them, become ill and half of these birds have historically died. Whilst we do not know specifically what infection the ticks transmit, we now know which antibiotic will save

mediately prior to undertaking their next key stage of 'life development'.

During this research study, ticks and diagnostic samples from effected sick or dead birds were collected and subjected to investigations. We soon

discovered that contrary to previous beliefs, that the ticks which cause disease in birds are specific 'bird ticks', namely *Ixodes frontalis*, as opposed to sheep, deer or hedgehog ticks (this is despite looking grossly identical to sheep ticks). So birds do not suffer tick related disease, subsequent to any association with sheep or other mammal. In this study 70 ticks were recovered from birds of 32 different bird species. Half the birds were captive, the remainder being free living birds. 15 of the 70 effected birds were simply found dead. Tick disease is commonest in SW, Central and Western UK, but rare in the North East.

How Does Disease Occur?

Disease is seen most commonly in outside birds, living in aviaries under, or close to trees. So the likely scenario is that other wild birds infected with ticks (most commonly collared

doves, swallows, or raptors), roost in the trees over hanging the aviary. If by chance the ticks have been on these birds for about a week, having become fully engorged, they will be ready to fall off. The ticks land on the ground and take cover about the floor of the aviary. They mind their own business, hoping not to be eaten, going about their daily routine for the whole of the next year. Annual tick activity, (e.g. feeding and breeding), is absolutely dependent on weather conditions. Annual tick activity (including disease in birds), only happens in one season each year. Disease has occurred in every month of the year, although the highest incidence (62%) in the period August to September. 'Tick disease seasons' tend to last for only 7-10 days, across the whole country, although this has been extended to 6-8 weeks in the last 3 years. Is this pure chance, or was this yet another effect of the warming climate. When

disease does occur, numbers of birds are simultaneously affected over much of the country.

Ticks may attempt to attach to any part of a bird, although they would be instantly preened off everywhere the beak can get to, i.e. not the head and neck, so this is where ticks will be found. As soon as the tick has attached, it injects 'anticoagulant' under the bird's skin, so that the surrounding blood does not clot, such that the tick can suck it out. When a tick initially attaches it would be very small, but as it fills with blood it gradually swells, eventually reaching some 4-6mm in length, appearing similar to a 'grey coloured coffee bean'.

Birds may be seen looking poorly, with closing or swollen eyelids, or swelling about the face, but birds are often just found dead. Any bird found suddenly dead in an aviary, should be carefully stud-



Tick on Eagle Owl eyelid

ied. If you find an area of severe bruising (a big purple patch), around the face or neck, then this bird as died of tick related disease, despite the fact that a tick may no longer be present.

What are the clinical signs in birds affected by tick related disease?

- Haemorrhage around the face or neck
- Swollen eye lids, face or neck
- Sudden unexpected death

If you find a bird with a tick on it, get it to your avian vet asap. Veterinary treatment should at least halve the chances of the bird dying.

Is tick related disease Infectious 'bird to bird'?

Absolutely not, **BUT**, if one bird has been effected, you instantly know that you have ticks in your vicinity and that weather conditions are such that ticks are active. As such all other birds in the vicinity are at risk **NOW**. Any sick birds should be presented to an experienced avian vet asap. The author has put together a therapeutic protocol, which tends to be effective in infected birds. In the recent study, 50% of effected untreated birds died, whilst only 25% of birds treated by vets died. In the last 3 years, no birds treated by the author have died.

What action should you take?


Check all your other birds, spraying them with recommended levels of a suitable and effective parasitic spray (frontline spray 3ml/kg bodyweight) Also action should be taken to treat any ticks which might be active on the floor at that time (see your avian vet for details).

I had ticks this year, how can I prevent it in future years?

Once ticks are in your vicinity, you should consider your birds to be at risk in future years. Suitable preventive action is essential.

1. Remove any over hanging trees.
2. If you have your own poultry / quail, which you are certain are healthy, (i.e. have no disease infectious to your raptors), enclose these in aviaries for a couple of weeks. Such birds will quickly eat any ticks, Keep birds in suspended cages, preferably with ground living birds living on the floor of the aviary. It is interesting that in regions where free range poultry have been banned because of
3. One could spray the ground around your aviaries on a prophylactic basis annually prior to the main risk season. Whilst this might be effective, the author would caution keepers against this for fear of causing collateral poisonings, perhaps even effecting your own birds.
4. Birds who are at risk, could be sprayed (Frontline spray 3ml/kg onto the skin) during the main risk period, on a monthly basis. This may well be sensible if you are aware your birds are at risk, but this could conflict with breeding and rearing seasons.

Avian Influenza risks, the incidence of tick related disease has increased dramatically in all species.



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The Chase

Dave Noble



Becky with jack rabbit

The sun sat half submerged on the far horizon like an orange-red beach ball reflecting its colorful glow on low clouds above. Cool light winds licked at the back of my neck and the lush green fall winter wheat cushioned my footfalls with each step. Stretched tall and erect on my left gloved fist stood my Red Tailed Hawk Becky. Every muscle in her body tensed like a coiled spring waiting to be released. Her head bobbed rhythmically as her glistening eyes scanned for any sign of movement. Veteran of three seasons, she knew this game well and appeared to relish it above all things. Moral judgments occupy no place in her thoughts, for her to live, others must die. Her prey lives and breeds aplenty to sustain her. She is in her element here, in hunting mode and I am the fortunate one being allowed

to participate and witness what her kind has done for millennia.

Here we are in pursuit of her most formidable prey, the Jackrabbit. Sometimes exceeding her weight three fold they are not easily subdued after being caught. Many hawks, after a difficult struggle with one, never chase them again. Capable of flat out speeds exceeding 40 miles per hour with instant sharp turns, jinks and with 5 foot leaps straight up into the air thrown in for good measure. Equipped by nature for survival, the top members will evade capture and will live on to pass the superior genes to their offspring each year. We walk slowly, each step taken carefully, occasionally we stop. Jackrabbits remain unseen even in the shortest of cover. Often they will

sit tight in their shallow forms, or “starting blocks” as one Canadian friend puts it, and let you walk by within feet without moving a muscle. When you stop, sometimes it unnerves them and they appear as if from nowhere, invariably quickly sprinting to top speed. Jackrabbits have eyes on the sides of their heads with nearly full three hundred and sixty degree directional view, save for a narrow window behind them, seemingly always aware of nearby danger. Becky has taken them before but rarely since we do not live in an area suitable for them.

We are in the western Kansas prairie, beautiful in its vast flatness and open sky, part way through the first week of a two week adventure. Two Jacks had become part of the circle



Becky on a kill

of life that we call 'the food chain' by her this trip. I keep my eyes moving in a sweep side to side knowing full well that Becky will likely be off in a flash before I see what she's after. Suddenly, a burst of movement ten yards ahead causes Becky to jolt on

my fist like a sudden electric shock has ripped through her, but she hesitates. It's just a sparrow flushing from a clump of grass. She's on hair trigger. We both need to settle. My heart rate is noticeably quickened. I regain myself and am ready again.

If she does bolt from my fist, I can aid her initial speed by judging her split second takeoff and pushing with my arm. Two footsteps later, I sense the electricity as Becky bolts from my fist. I do my part and launch her even though I do not see the object of her intentions. Like a racehorse at the ring of a bell she is racing forward, her powerful wings rapidly scooping chunks of air to propel her. I hesitate for a moment to see what she's after. In the distance eighty yards out I see movement among some scattered tumbleweeds, brown from the fall but not yet dislodged by strong winter winds. It's a Jack! I bolt now as fast as I can run in my feeble human mammal gait toward the possible fray. If she catches it, I may be of use to her in subduing its powerful kicks. If she gets a flank hold she will need to keep a foot free to grab its head. If she can do that, she will be in control and she knows it. She closes on the Jack quickly and it tries to evade her with agile



Becky

sharp turns but she matches them jink for jink and wings over in a short sharp stoop coming to grips with it.

All hell breaks loose as it appears that she's only got a hind end grip. Becky hangs on as the jack flings her about like a dish rag, sometimes spinning circles and sometimes tumbling ass over tea kettle. I'm in all out full sprint mode trying to get there when about ten yards shy the jack breaks loose leaving Becky in a cloud of dust. Now I'm not in the worst shape but this dash has me out of breath. I hesitate briefly then hold up my outstretched gauntlet and Becky fly's up to her favorite vantage point there. "Nice flight girl" I tell her, "Maybe next time". No sooner had those words left my lips when Becky cranked her head to the left and simultaneously exploded from my fist sideways with a jolt. Within that second I see what she's after. It's the same Jack snaking through the tumbleweeds one hundred yards away. Here we go again! I start running immediately doing my best to keep an eye on the flight. When I reach my top speed I trip on a clump of dirt, falling forward onto the ground, landing on my outstretched elbows and skidding forward. In the excitement I don't feel a thing and almost in the same motion am back up and running again. Becky connects with the Jack and the fray starts all over again! "Hold on girl, I'm coming" I'm thinking desperately. If anything, this Jack is more determined than ever. It shook her off once and its confidence is showing! The Jack is causing Becky to do her best 'shaken rag doll' impersonation as I finally near the spinning mass of fur and feather. At this point I see that Becky has her final hold on the jacks butt and is just hanging on for dear life, waiting for me to help out. As I near the Jack it sees me and finds an extra gear. I try helplessly to head it off and it dodges every move I make, twice causing me to

fall to the dirt empty handed. One last leap and I nearly have it but manage to interfere instead, so the Jack breaks free. It's taken a lot out of Becky and she just lies down on the ground, which I've never seen her do. I'm worried about her but I'm also totally exhausted, so I lay down next to her to recover myself. That Jackrabbit's babies will be receiving top notch lineage! After a while, she slowly stood up and I stepped her to my fist. I took out my water bottle and we both got a well deserved drink.

"That's enough for today girl" I told her, and we headed back to the car. Arriving there, we met up with my hawking partner Danny and his Red Tailed Hawk Cactus. They had been triumphant. I told him my story and asked him to borrow his fresh warm Jack. Becky slammed it, taking her frustration out and I gave her supper right then and there. The next day she hammered the first Jack she saw so hard that she bowled it over getting an instant grip on its head. She was back in the chase!



Success

Complimentary Therapy in Croatia (continued)

Melinda Terleske

My first trip to Croatia was in October last year. I was expecting to arrive in glorious sunshine but was somewhat taken aback to find the plane being buffeted about by the most unseasonal winds, rain and thunderstorms. So, no sun or sea bathing for me - I had work to do!

Biff picked me up from Split airport and it was like old friends meeting. Having grabbed a quick cup of coffee on arriving at the Rehab Centre my most pressing need was to meet this poor bird. She was most certainly in a state. Both her feet were twisted with toes curled and talons pointing in towards the soles of her feet. There was no doubt she was in a lot of pain. The strangest thing is though - this bird had never met me before but it was as though she knew I was coming to help. Biff had warned me about some of her more spiteful habits and to take care. I found she had a delightful nature and providing I didn't make any sudden moves towards her, she allowed me to do anything.

My intuition told me not to touch her initially but sit close by and offer her a quick session of Healing. There is nothing extraordinary about this. When I first engage with any strange or unfamiliar animal I allow space between us so that there is no threat of intimidation. I say a prayer and mentally ask permission of the animals spirit to sit close by. Once Mazie was familiar with this I would gently open out my hands in her direction and ask for Healing to be channelled through me to her. On this first occasion, I was surprised to find how settled she was - for often animals are puzzled and anxious when they feel a change in their environment. (Healing energy is felt by the recipient in a variety of ways - healing at a distance like this normally provokes a sensation of pulsating waves. Hands on healing may be felt similarly or as either extreme warmth or cold - it depends on what is generally needed to facilitate the healing process).

I instinctively knew she wanted me to help and found that she was actually

lifting one of her feet up towards me. I very slowly touched this foot and found the most enormous callous over the sole of her foot. It was obvious the other foot was in the same condition and she was unable to hold this foot up for long because of that. However, she had let me touch this raised foot and was now resting it on my hand. I was experiencing the most bizarre sensations at my finger tips - I can only describe it as painless electric shocks emanating from the very tip of my index finger whilst the rest of the hand throbbed. Within a couple of minutes, she had pulled this foot away and I knew from this, that she had had enough for our first meeting. The wonderful thing about Healing is that it has a cumulative effect and that whatever she had taken from me in those few minutes would be the start of a more intimate relationship over the next few days. I used the spray to give her feet a wash down and hopefully cool them - for both were blisteringly hot. Her reward for being so tolerant on this





our first meeting, was her evening meal of skinned chick. Because her feet were so deformed, she was unable to hold her food herself and Biff allowed me to feed her from my fingers. She took her food hungrily, but at no time did she grab out with her feet or make any inadvertent moves to bite me. I couldn't quite believe how gentle this bird was. I genuinely think she was grateful and understood my purpose for being there. I looked forward to visiting again in a few months time to see what, if any help my Healing had offered.

There is an overwhelming need in Croatia to educate about animal welfare and to encourage the protection of the country's diverse flora and fauna. Much of Emilio's and Biffs work entails talking to groups of school children about their work. Their enthusiasm for the future of the indigenous wild life, Birds of Prey in particular, is infectious. Hopefully, in time some of the appalling cruelty (more often misguided rather than deliberate) will become less regularly encountered. Emilio has also undertaken an in depth report and audit of the casualties brought to the Centre, outlining the importance of the work done there and hopefully, obtaining grants from the Government so that the Centre can be expanded and the

news of their good work be spread across Croatia.

The Centre is aimed to be a Rehabilitating Unit for all indigenous wild life (including wolves and maybe in the future bears) but the majority of the casualties are birds of prey. The

country has a very healthy stock of Goshawks and various owls species, European Eagle Owls in particular, and there is never a time when you won't find a number of these species at the centre. The Goshawks get passed in to the centre after trespassing into chicken coops and often arrive with terrible feet and feather injuries due to the fine mesh of chick wire that holds them captive once they've made their mistake. Similar tales befall the Eagle Owls although Biff regales the story of one mountain village considering the local eagle owl to be some kind of Talisman to the village for it kept down the population of rats and feral cats. When this ancient Owl finally passed on, an autopsy was performed to establish why (the locals not believing that it was simply old age) and all the vet could find apart from its obvious age was that it was very well fed on



Adult Goshawk requiring treatment



cat! He almost put 'died from a surfeit of cat' on the post mortem details!

There is a strange habit amongst the locals with any bird they find from the wild and that is to cut off all the tail feathers, primaries and secondaries and in more severe case, even cut of the beak. This was the tale of a handsome male kestrel in residence at the centre. He had arrived two years earlier as a newly hand penned youngster but minus all the above mentioned flight feathers and unable to feed as he couldn't tear his food apart. Alemka, Emilio's wife is a dentist by profession and immediately set about rectifying this poor little falcon's unfortunate beak problem. In her surgery, she designed and manufactured her first ever prosthetic beak. This was glued and stapled on to what remained of the Kestrel's upper mandible and worked like a dream. Unfortunately, due to its previous history this little bird will not be released back to the wild for he has become imprinted on humans and although he has now moulted twice, some of his primary feathers grow twisted - more than likely a legacy of poor nutrition as a fledgling in the hands of misguided but well meaning locals.

Goshawks, Owls and Buzzards arrive on a regular basis following road

traffic accidents and with gunshot wounds - every attempt is made to get these casualties back to where they belong. On arriving they are kept secluded in a large wooden box, to prevent further injury and stabilise as much as possible from shock. The next plan with any bird demonstrating any injury is a full body examination under anaesthetic and X-ray. The vet and Rehabilitators discuss each individual case in detail. When there have been bone fractures or gunshot wounds affecting the integrity of successful healing, or where internal injuries make surgery non-viable the bird is instantly put to sleep with everyone's agreement. However, there are just as many success stories, surgery is successful and after a period of convalescence the feathered patients are returned to the part of Croatia from where they were found. We can only hope that those captured in chicken coops have learnt from their ordeal and the chicken keepers have now made their livestock more secure. In some ways it's an education for them too, as not only their chickens but also their valuable sheep and goats may fall victim to the packs of wild dogs, jackals and wolves.

Sometimes, birds arrive having been picked up just wandering along the highway! Whilst I was there in December last year one such bird arrived. It would appear this pretty little male buzzard was just minding his own business when he got scooped up and brought to the Centre. He was a little thin and covered in lice but otherwise quite fit. Biff joked that the poor devil probably just wanted to walk rather than fly and perhaps he was on his way back from the pub so felt a little bit dizzy too!!

Any way this chap finished up in his five star apartment for the week, got the very best shelter, food and water before he was released. The Centre has a policy to routinely de-louse and worm any bird that comes to them. When I looked in on him just before I left to return to the UK, he had the smuggest look on his face, happily perched on one foot, bathing in the rays of the sun, what a life!

Back to Mazie, my purpose for being in Croatia after all. Biff and I agreed that I should be in overall charge of her nursing care during both my stays there. Being a bit like me, she took a little time to get going in the mornings. Having mopped the floor



and changed her paper (for she stayed inside in the surgery annexe on her block) I would give her breakfast. After a mug of coffee for me I returned for a brief session of healing. Mazie would have her feet sprayed. I felt the prickly astro turf was too uncomfortable for her so placed a small piece of towelling under feet which would absorb the spray and so keep the underneath of her feet cleaner. Sitting the towelling on top of the astro turf still allowed for air to circulate under her feet. Biff and I discussed her pain issues and we both agreed that it would be worth trying some Bach Flower Remedy given orally. Although there is nothing documented about these remedies in Raptors we felt we had nothing to lose and alleviating her pain was our prime goal. I think we both appreciated that the condition of her feet were realistically beyond repair. What I hadn't known before my second trip to the Centre in December last year was that Mazie had already undergone surgery to both feet a few years previously. We were dealing with chronic, recurrent third degree bumble foot that was trying to heal with scar tissue involvement, delaying whatever healing progress might occur. Each evening I would sit quietly with Mazie offering her healing. She would look intently into my face as if exploring me. I was often aware of other entities in the room when I was working and she would look around



at them too. I should say to you here - I don't actually see spirit forms but am acutely aware of their presence when I am channelling Healing energy. Mazie and I would have some delightful quality time together. I believe she knew I was helping her ñ to afford what pain relief I could as well as her passing. She desperately loved the humans around her and I am sure this is what she clung on to. I have encountered this before - in dogs and cats - too frightened to leave this mortal plane for fear of their human counterpart being lonely. I would softly tell Mazie that all would be well, whilst she nibbled gently at my fingers and chattered away almost inaudibly.

I was thrilled when I returned again in December to see a tremendous improvement to the condition of her right foot. The swelling had gone down significantly and only a tiny piece of callous remained - the area now healing well with healthy skin.

Both feet were significantly cooler and she stood appearing much more comfortable. I noticed that she was also now able to perch on one foot - so all in all, I felt she had gained something from my brief interludes with her. There was still an enormous scab over the sole of her left foot however and when this was peeled away it was obvious that she would need more than a miracle to save her. This was peeling away of its own accord and underneath the bones and tendons were clearly visible. I suspect that nerve damage had also occurred for she seemed to feel little discomfort and certainly the tendons and ligaments in both feet had been terminally destroyed. Neither foot could grip and the tone of the three front toes was completely flaccid. She had permanent constricture in both of her hind talons also. She was however able to put both feet flat to the surface of her perch, rather than the crippled, curled stance she had when I first met her.

I knew when I left Croatia just before Christmas last year that I had done what I could for Mazie and Biff was aware of my thoughts. In fact we had discussed her reasons for living and what in fact was the most appropriate thing for her.

I arrived home on Christmas Eve and unpacked with a heavy heart. Mazie was constantly praying on my mind. Biff emailed me a few days later. Mazie had finally passed on.



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Problem Hawk ... Not a Problem! (continued)

The Apprentice



Jameson coming to the fist

With Jameson I found it was important to not let him anticipate things. It got to a point where he'd come to the glove and not be willing to stay there for any length of time purely because, in his mind, he knew that the sooner he got back to the perch the sooner he'd get another piece of food. I simply started keeping hold of his jesses and making him wait for a few moments before I sent him back. When you're confident this is working as you'd like then it's time to repeat the process minus the creance and plus a telemetry transmitter. This can be a bit of a leap of faith, but ultimately satisfying nonetheless, especially if it goes well! When things are going positively replace the T-perch with a good, sturdy tree and try a few flights in and out of that, but

always remember not to overdo it and always quit while you're ahead. When coming out of trees when called has been mastered the next step is to use a line of trees, putting the hawk in one and walking up and down a few times to see if the hawk will follow on. The reaction should be almost instant, especially if you whistle to call him on, obviously this is only really true if you've incorporated whistling as part of the training early on.

I used these stages of training to gauge what my hawk's proper flying weight was. If there was any hesitation then it was clear to me that he needed to be a *touch* lower. At this point I stress that a touch lower in weight means around an eighth of an ounce lower...not a couple of

ounces. It may seem like such a tiny amount to us, but to a hawk it can be the difference between a hawk that sits and takes a leisurely flight at his own convenience and a hawk that is at true hunting weight and totally fired up. It may be more than an eighth of an ounce, perhaps half or even a whole, but slow and steady wins the race. If you screw your hawk down fast and furiously then no one will thank you for it, especially not him, as he'll have no time to adjust his system to his new nutritional intake! When my hawk had reached this stage in his training he was coming to the glove with no hesitation and following on at 11lb 6 ½ oz. It is at this point that I confess to making one almighty mistake. When training any hawk it's always a very good



Jameson in flight

idea to bear in mind that the weight they fly backwards and forwards at isn't necessarily the weight they will hunt at. I unfortunately learned this the hard way when I took Jameson out for his first official hunting excursion. I wasn't banking on him catching anything, as he'd not been in the situation to do so before, but was quite surprised when he took flight after a rabbit that had been bolted from a burrow straight in front of us.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing and looking back to that day I now realise just how half hearted his flight actually was – he showed the same enthusiasm for that rabbit as cats do a cold bath and if I'd have been sharper at spotting that fact at the time then there's no way I would have attempted to fly him. When the rabbit made it to cover my hawk simply stood vertically on his tail and took up residence in the nearest tree. As soon as he'd landed it started to pour with rain and then an afternoon filled with attempts to lure him down and mindless shouting ensued. The people who were ferreting for us even went home and came back later with tea and jammy dodgers in a vote of sympathy! We all agree that after that particular afternoon having spent hour upon hour calling 'Jameson' never have we found a name

more loathsome! Eventually, after five and a half hours of us standing in the cold and rain and shouting at him he decided it was time to nip down for a bite to eat. The fact that he's still alive says a huge amount about the people who were there that day and their astounding levels of tolerance and patience because we all wanted to throttle him. If it hadn't have been for my mentor and all his help I dare say I would have given up and left him there for the night! Determined to never have a repeat run of that day the hawk's weight was gradually lowered until he was around the 1lb 5 ½

oz mark and the difference was astounding. He was that much sharper and that much keener, but still no chases. The next stage would be to get him into a hunting mentality.

As with most things this was easier said than done. Following that first initial, yet half hearted flight nothing happened – month upon month we took him out with the ferrets and waited with bated breath, but to no avail. We tried all the usual tactics of showing him a dummy bunny, letting him feed from a freshly caught and even showing him a lure...still nothing, though more interest was shown towards the lure and I also noticed on one or two occasions that he had shown a fairly keen interest in our resident pair of burrowing owls, whose aviary is fairly near to his bow perch where he is sat out to weather before flying. Things started to look so hopeless that it actually became a running joke amongst friends and soon my hawk was dubbed with the nickname 'Chutney'!

It all came to a head one day when we'd been out at a local golf course with a friend who was kindly ferreting for us. We'd had several rabbits bolt from a large bury and as usual the



Harris with kill



Harris in flight

hawk just sat and watched – one rabbit had even bolted towards us and stopped for several seconds literally three or four feet away before turning and hightailing it in the opposite direction through the woods. I was just about to suggest we give it up as a bad job whilst thinking that this hawk was never going to make the grade as a hunting bird, when all of a sudden one last rabbit bolted. Jameson was off the glove in a flash and pow-

ering after his quarry with such a ferocity and determination that I'd never seen in him before. Weaving in and out of the trees he closed the gap fast and made his grab. Luckily for the rabbit he missed by literally an inch or so and although it ended up getting away it didn't stop him from getting up and having another go.

Who knows what it was about that particular rabbit that finally switched

him on to hunting, but from that day on we've never really looked back. Jameson will pretty much chase anything that he thinks he has a chance at, including partridge, rabbit, ducks, female and even cock pheasants. One of his favourite tricks is to sit high in a tree until he spots a pheasant a few hundred yards off, then he'll gently glide down to it and at the last minute flip over and attempt to grab it. Another favourite is to drop like a stone out of trees if rabbits bolt from underneath him, or if a pheasant is put up and then open his wings at the very last minute and then level out into a ground-hugging chase. Saying this we're not quite at the point to perfecting the art of hunting at the moment. Although Jameson is a mature hawk he's still going through all the rigours of training, just as a young hawk would do and very much behaves like a juvenile. He's not quite grasped the concept of keeping hold of his prey so most of his flights end with him sat on the ground wondering where his quarry has gone. Although



Author with Jameson

the last time I tried a dummy bunny with him wasn't overly successful I'm half thinking that now he's much more set on chasing things it may be worth giving a few sessions with it in another attempt to try to teach him how to grab and keep a better hold of rabbits and pheasants.

This problem is mainly due to his lack of experience, but unfortunately it's beginning to cause him to become frustrated and as a knock on effect of this he sometimes gets frustrated and tends to try his luck by gliding to the floor and following me on foot – all because he thinks that by doing this he may get free food from me. He'll also quite often hang onto the glove as I cast him off, so ends up down by my feet. This is for exactly the same reason and although it's tempting to get him back up to the glove it's something that has to be avoided. If he flops to the ground and I then call him up to the glove for a piece of food I've basically taught him to keep doing it. Much better is to ignore him and carry on walking, as difficult as it may be to do. If a wood is nearby then I head into it because he then he has practically no choice but to take to the trees if he's to stand any chance of following me. Another thing which would help to avoid such situations, as well as the use of ferrets, is to get him used to working with dogs, such as pointers and setters. The amount of flights we've missed because we've put quarry up too early have been countless. A dog would allow for far better and more controlled flights at quarry and hence a far less frustrated hawk at the end of a day's hunting. Though Jameson isn't a great fan of them at the moment getting him accustomed to the presence of dogs and working with them is certainly something I plan on spending some time doing over the summer months as I believe that it'll do him and his confidence in the field the world of good.



As well as doing this I've also been working at making him to the hood. Though a lot of people see no need to hood a hawk I still believe that it's a useful tool to have at one's disposal, especially if out in the field with several other hawks. If one has made a kill and the others haven't been flown then surely it's far kinder to hood them while their comrade feeds up on her reward rather than drive them crackers by making them watch? With making Jameson to the hood, though it's not been too tricky, I've found that he'll voice his disgust at having to wear it quite loudly and recently when I remove it he'll quite often lunge at me and scream. For anyone else who's thinking of making his or her hawk to the hood and experience such behaviour don't be put off. Remember Harris Hawks are social by nature and thus in the wild will have a clear social order within the family group. Such behaviour is simply a sign that the hawk is making an attempt to challenge your dominance. Just don't let him. Continue as if you've not even noticed he's doing it. If Jameson displays in such a way I

simply repeat the exercise with the hood a few times until he stops. If I remove the hood and he doesn't lunge at me I then reward him.

In writing this article I hope that I have made a valid point, which is that the Harris Hawk, though regarded as the easiest of all raptors to train, most certainly comes with challenges of its own and to get around them it's so vital to understand their complex social behaviours. If you are the owner of a Harris Hawk please be proud of it because, in your hands, you have a highly intelligent and highly tuned animal, capable of furious and spectacular aerodynamics and incredible strength, whilst at the same time maintaining complex social networks that show an amazing ability to think and plan ahead – a raised consciousness that is totally unique to this species. Remember also, that it was the Harris Hawk that was responsible for single handedly changing the face of western falconry within only a few decades, which is no mean feat!

Happy Hawking!

Star - A Golden Eagle

Dr. David Glynne Fox



*David Glynne Fox with Star, male Berkut Golden Eagle, Buxton Moors, Derbyshire
© Alex Hyde*

I first saw Star when he was just one day old. He was a feeble, wobbly-headed scrap of down feathers, perambulating in a great stick eyrie in the back garden of well-known eagle breeder, George Mussared. I had been to visit George, whom I had known for a great many years, to view his birds and to place an order for a male Golden Eagle should one prove available. George's breeding pair of Golden Eagles were first generation birds from Kazakhstan, known as Berkuts, the same legendary subspecies that had been flown at wolves and foxes since time immemorial. They are also reputed to be

the largest of all the Golden Eagle geographical races and indeed some of them are bordering on huge and they need to be, in order to be able to tackle such formidable quarry. However, not all Berkuts are of such large dimensions. This aspect has come about purely because the nomads of these remote steppes needed the very largest of the race for the reason already stipulated. I have seen some rather small Berkuts and not all are dark either, as some authors would have us believe. Like all Golden Eagle subspecies, there is enormous variability within each group. Indeed, I have been on several eagle

field meets recently and every Golden Eagle present was conspicuous by its different features from all the others, yet all were obviously Golden Eagles. However, I digress.

Over the years I have flown a number of eagles including Golden Eagles, but all the latter were females, and I still owned one of these, a fourteen-pound female named Skye. However, I had always desired to try my hand with a male, not least because they were less trouble to carry around, being lighter in weight and also alleged to be less aggressive. I say alleged, but to be perfectly honest, there is very little in the literature

concerning this topic and perhaps the most well-known example being Captain Charles Knight, who rejected an aggressive female called Grampian in favour of the smaller male, who later became famous as Mr. Ramshaw. This time I wanted to try out a male for myself, hence my visit to George to discuss the possibility. The problem now of course was whether to have a parent-reared bird or a hand-reared imprint. In the end, I decided to go in-between and elected for a dual-imprint. Hopefully, this would give me the tameness so desired in the full imprint, but also would not exclusively view humans as the only possible partner when the time came to initiate a breeding programme, which was ultimately my long-term goal. A dual imprint would hopefully give me the choice of natu-

ral pairing or the use of artificial insemination. I was unsure if this situation was ideal, but discussed it at length with George and we decided to go down that route. George would now enter the aviary on a regular basis and the bird would be placed under his foster female named Lady whilst its sister which had hatched earlier, would be raised by its Kazakh parents. This pair usually produced two young in the first clutch and two in the second, both eyasses being initially removed to allow for recycling. With this in place, I went home, longing for the day when I could pick up my new eagle.

On the seventh of July 2007, the day had finally arrived when I could collect my new bird. George entered the aviary and caught him up with little

fuss. He was soon jessed and fitted with leash, swivel and hood ready for the journey home. He was placed hooded on a block for an hour or so and only occasionally pulled at his jesses, which was only to be expected. I had already decided to name him Star, hoping to put Star into Skye, as it were! I had taken a travel box with me but removed the perch, as he was still covered with much down and his train and primary feathers were still only half grown, as such, he would still not be all that strong on his feet and to have expected him to sit on a perch for the three hour journey back home would have been asking too much. Instead, I fitted the base of the box with a piece of deep pile carpet so that he could lay down on something soft. This perch was later replaced as I prefer to travel my



Star alighting on glove © Peter Moonlight



Star, comes in low above the stubble © Peter Moonlight

eagles in boxes with a perch installed as their train, or tail feathers tend to become soiled with mutes when allowed to perch on the floor of the box. Whilst at George's house, Star had been placed on the scales, which he tipped at eight pounds. He still had much feather growth to produce and his breastbone was protruding somewhat, indicating that he would weigh a good ten pounds once fully feathered, and this proved to be the case. On arrival back at home I turned him loose in a large mews that I had prepared and removed his swivel and leash to let him settle down. He sat quietly on his perch and actually ate a chick in my presence, which was a good start.

Despite Star's feathers still being "in the blood," I began to handle him the next day and begin the process of making him to the hood. I am a great disciple of the hood and I believe all birds used in falconry benefit from its use. The travel box is not a substitute



Star © Alex Hyde



for the hood; it is merely a travel box, which dispenses with the hood in this particular instance. The hood has multiple uses, not least of which is when the bird attends field meets. A bird that has never worn the hood must become extremely frustrated at being constantly held back because the quarry has arisen in someone else's line of flight. Eagles are unaware of the falconer's code of ethics, it merely sees quarry and wants to be off. Certainly where eagles are concerned, this forced restraint can induce aggression and at the very least, can affect the bird's performance when its turn finally arrives. After being held back for most of the day, small wonder a refusal may be the result, and it is of no use blaming the eagle, the fault lies with the falconer. The hood also removes possible stress when changing anklets, coping beaks and talons and a variety of other previously unforeseen

tasks. The hood should also be as light as possible, especially during early training sessions so as not to unnecessarily alienate the bird to the contraption. But all this lay in the future. My task now was to sit for prolonged periods, placing the hood gently over Stars' head and then off again. During the first few sessions, the hood braces were never drawn but instead the hood gradually remained in place for longer and longer periods. Over the next few weeks, Star learned to accept the hood with no problems and even as I write these lines, he hoods as easily as taking sweets from a baby. Time spent during these early sessions is seldom wasted. If hooding is left for too long, the bird becomes well acquainted with the falconer and his environs and can therefore, when the belated time arrives, spend all its efforts simply avoiding the hood. The result is reminiscent of hooding a

striking snake and soon the bird not only becomes hood-shy, but also hates the sight of the thing and will often bate away at the very production of it. I learnt all this very early in my falconry career and to my ultimate cost, so nowadays, hooding becomes my paramount first goal when training a new bird. In the meantime, I let Star eat as much as possible until the day he became hard penned.

A harder nut to crack was to get him to use the bow-perch. Many eagle hunters use the block perch instead of the bow, but I prefer the latter and believe it is the safest of all eagle perches. However, there are those that disagree with me and we just have to beg to differ on this subject. I simply use the methods that work for me and the bow perch is my ideal, especially the new stainless steel, rubber topped type now in production. These are quite tall and lift the

bird well clear of the damp ground, although many block perches are even taller, which is indeed a factor to consider. Low perches can cause problems when the ground is wet and also the falconer tends to tower over his charge if he is not careful with his approach, which can prove distressing, especially for new birds. The problem I encountered however had little to do with any of this; he simply refused to even use it! He merely bated off time and time again and lay in the grass like a slaughtered fowl. He kept this up for three weeks until in desperation; I brought in Skye to help out.

I tethered Skye nearby and Star watched her use the bow perch as intended, jumping off into the bath and then back again. Within minutes, Star picked himself up off the ground and jumped onto the perch. I was astounded and really did not expect the idea to work. We live and learn.

Soon Star was hard-penned and then it was a question of reducing his weight gradually until he showed signs of wanting to come to the fist. It took several weeks to get Star's weight to a manageable level and this is also when he began to scream. I had made the error of tethering him in view of Skye, hoping to help him understand that he was an eagle and not a human. I still desired him to see Skye as often as possible but hadn't planned on him mistaking her for his foster mother! He was calling to her to bring him food, which really was perhaps only to be expected, but I failed to realise my mistake until it was too late. He may have begun to scream anyway, but Skye's close proximity did not help matters.

To begin with, I walked him around the garden, away from his perch, for eagles do tend to become territorial around their perching area and can become aggressive if fed here too

often. In fact, as soon as I deemed it safe enough, he was always fed well away from his normal environs. I hadn't expected any aggression from Star as males were not supposed to be of this ilk, according to the scant literature, but I soon discovered that males could be equally as aggressive as females. They may not have the bulk of the female, but they are still very large birds and can be equally as intimidating. I first discovered this when I introduced him to a ground lure. He took it well enough, even though he had never seen a dead rabbit before. Once he had hold of it however, he had no intention of relinquishing it, at any price! We had an awful scene as he shuffled around and kept turning his back on me, hiding the lure beneath his great wings and body. I was having none of this infantile behaviour and continued to make in to him as best as I could. He had his back to me and I had my



Star, returning to gauntlet © Peter Moonlight



Star with Hare © Martyn Standley

gloved hand under his tail and over the dead rabbit, hoping he would see the error of his ways and step up onto the gauntlet. The situation was far from ideal and the last thing I wanted was for him to think I was trying to rob him, but equally, I could not allow him to take control, for most young Golden Eagles will test the falconer to the limit. It was at this juncture that he left the rabbit, but instead of grabbing the gauntlet, as intended, he spun around and came at me with all guns blazing. His great yellow feet and black talons were slashing at me in waves, hoping to grab some portion of my unguarded anatomy. He came for my chest and grabbed my hawking jacket, but I managed to thrust my gloved hand into his path and just prevented me from receiving some fearful wounds. He was furious, with hackles raised

and wings and tail spread widely, he thrust his golden head backwards in a threat display that would be difficult to equal, so much for male eagles being of a milder temperament! However, I had no desire to end the day like this, so once I had him under control, I let him have the lure again and sat right next to him. He would either have to eat in my presence or go without, for I had all day at my disposal so a battle of wills thus ensued. Eventually, he grabbed the lure and began to feed. I allowed him half a crop and then made in to him again. This time I managed to take him up with little fuss, although he still raised his hackles at me. At least, he now knew what the lure was all about. He had attempted to carry the lure initially, which was something that I could not allow, for once he became fully trained, he could easily fly off

with a rabbit if he felt so inclined. This was why it was so important that he was never to realise that I was there to rob him, quite the contrary. In fact, I have never taken food from him except when substituting food for a kill. Even then, he must never be allowed to observe the switch, for a robbed eagle will soon become either a carrier, or just plain aggressive. This factor is true with any trained raptor, but with a Golden Eagle we are talking serious armament problems. Being whacked by a Harris or Goshawk is unpleasant enough, but an eagle has the ability to give a new meaning to the word pain.

Star was soon jumping and then flying to the fist, but like Skye, he developed the annoying and painful habit of grabbing me in the upper arm when he came in to the fist. Some



eagle falconers do not fly their birds to the fist, using a lure instead, but I personally prefer fist flights for the simple reason that I can control the eagle more rapidly by grasping for the jesses upon arrival on the fist. It is simply not true that lure flying reduces aggression towards the falconer. I use ground lures a lot and have often experienced young eagles leaving the lure and trying to grab my legs. To

counter the bruising on my upper arm, I purchased a leather sleeve from Falconiforme, which protected me to some degree. I no longer need this as he stopped being aggressive in his third season, but for the first two, the sleeve was an absolute must. I still sometimes use it in the field, especially on meets, where he may wear the hood for prolonged periods and as such, he pulls lumps out of my

glove and hawking jacket. It is a rather annoying habit that he sometimes has and the sleeve is the only way of preventing him from wrecking my hawking gear.

Star's aggression and screaming were something to behold and I believe this is the stage when many would-be eagle hunters decide that they have had enough and pass the bird on. This is almost always detrimental to the bird, when all that is required is some patience and perseverance. Birds that are passed from one person to the next hardly ever make good game hawks and it is not the fault of the bird. Fortunately for me, I have had a lifetime of flying eagles, so knew what to expect and how to counter it. I have never believed in striking an eagle or losing one's temper, whatever the provocation. Even when I have been inadvertently grabbed in some soft portion, I usually try to throw some food on the ground and let the bird fly down to this, so relieving the pressure on me,





The author with Star © Alex Hyde

literally! With perseverance and behaving as though the bird's tantrums are having no effect, they eventually realise that they are making little headway and eventually give up. All that is required is time and patience. Star took two full years before he became the wonderful game hawk that he is today. His screaming was such that he drove every rabbit down its burrow before he ever got anywhere near them. This was frustrating for both of us and indeed, caused a rather unpleasant neighbour complaint. But undaunted, I continued with his training and flying to the point where today, he is silent in the field and only calls to me at home on odd occasions.

Once he was flying free, I fitted him with two radio telemetry transmitters, both mounted on one of his deck feathers. I purchased the latest Field Marshall tracking system and used

an RT Plus and Powermax transmitters. Both operated on 173 Mhz but on different channels. The reason for two transmitters was twofold. Firstly, if one failed, there was always the option of tracking him with the other. Secondly, on field meets, the chances of someone else operation on the same channel is quite possible, but it would be a rare occurrence for someone to be using both channels on the same frequency. Telemetry is probably the greatest advance in modern falconry and anyone flying a hawk without it is a disgrace. Many have said to me that their Harris is so tame that a transmitter is superfluous. My answer to this is for them to take a look at the lost birds section of the Independent Bird Register. There are enough lost Harris Hawks on there, and others, to begin a club! If one cannot be bothered to use telemetry, one should not be flying hawks, end

of story. It is all part of the bird's welfare. In addition to telemetry, I also fit a bell to one ankle. A huge eagle bell is not necessary, for an ordinary Goshawk or Harris Hawk sized bell is sufficient.

I use two methods for getting my eagles fit enough to take the field. The first and best is rope training. This entails using a length of nylon cord, about twenty or thirty feet and of a similar thickness to the leash. This is tethered to the bird's jesses and it is called off as normal. The extra drag that this creates is quite obvious and should not be overdone initially. The other method is to simply engineer uphill flights. Now, eagles are notorious for not favouring uphill jaunts, so these have to be executed gradually on ever increasing and steeper inclines. The effort is well worthwhile.

Star's first two seasons were rather

uneventful, due largely to his aggression and screaming, but his third season proved a revelation. He had given up all his previous bad habits as if by magic. Mind you, I had been handling him during the moult but not feeding him by hand. I always placed his food unseen in the mews and it was there for him when I turned him loose there every evening. This seemed to cut the "parental bond" which the wild eyas experiences during its first winter. With captive produced birds, particularly imprints, this bond is never fully severed, hence the bird still views the falconer as its parent for some considerable time, so steps need to be taken sometimes to eliminate this. A temporary change of ownership may work, or as in my case, handling without feeding throughout the moult period can also prove beneficial. In reality, we are only just beginning to understand the psyche of the Golden Eagle.

In Star's third season, I introduced him to some eagle meets. His first

one was also the first for the British Falconers Club, which I organised on an estate at Bunny, near my home in Nottinghamshire. Four Golden Eagles and twelve beaters were present at this venue, which abounded with hares. The Brown Hare is probably one of the most difficult of all potential quarry that can be found in the United Kingdom. Anyone who has ever flown at hares will know only too well what a level-headed escape artist this fellow can be. Catching up with a fleeing hare is not a problem because a reasonably fit Golden Eagle will soon eat up the distance between them. The problem comes when the bird goes in for the kill. The hare can turn on a sixpence, jink from side to side or jump clean over the head of the pursuing eagle. I have seen all these tactics on numerous occasions and indeed, all were used against our eagles on this particular meet. All four eagles had some stunning flights but only one ended in a kill. This came about when my own

bird took on a hare, which ran in front of the line of beaters and tried to jink at the last minute. It was too late for Star grabbed it in the head and killed it stone dead.

Star performed well at the recently formed United Kingdom Eagle Falconry Association meet at Revesby in Lincolnshire and again at the two day 1st National Eagle Field Meet, held again at Bunny and also at Belvoir Castle, where around twelve eagles were flown over the two days, including a male Bonelli's Eagle and a female Crowned Eagle. On another occasion, in company with some friends, Star took five rabbits in a single morning after they had been bolted by ferrets. Many new friends have been made because of these meets and plans are afoot for many more. I am so pleased that I have lived long enough to see eagle falconry at last take its place as a bona-fide branch of the sport and I hope that it continues to prosper. It has been too long in coming.



The author with Kazakh eagle austringer Abilkhak Turlybaev at the International Falconry Festival, Reading, 2009 © David Glynne Fox

My Imprint Falcon Artemis

Colin Asquith

In May 2009 I took charge of a 12 day old imprint peregrine falcon. I have named her Artemis, which means goddess of the hunt. She was bred at Falcon Mews from a wild disabled Falcon of mine and a 50/50 Peales Peregrine Tiercel of theirs. I have been waiting for this day for quite a few years as the mother has been with a couple of different breeders without much success regards breeding any falcons. We have had a couple of tiercels out though but the mother is a very aggressive falcon and hard to breed from as she needs to be forcibly inseminated. However finally a call came from Peter Gill saying that he had managed to breed a falcon for me. The plan for this particular falcon was that she was to be imprinted and flown at gulls. So from day one so she was taken to work with me and fed four or five times a

day on a mixture of minced rat and chick quite literally having as much as she wanted to eat from both the bowl and from my hands.

I am well aware that some people say you shouldn't feed from your hands when imprinting but I always have done so without any ill effects, although I can see with some species of raptors this could be a problem but it is one I have never experienced with large falcons.

Artemis was in my cabin at work on the bench where she could look out and watch the world go by for about three to four weeks. After this period she was taken up to the place where she was going to be hacked from and allowed to look around and survey her surroundings from there as much as possible ready for the day that she takes to the air. Then after a cou-



Artemis on screen perch

ple more weeks I started feeding her on the lure and at this stage she was able to pull food apart on her own so I started giving her some whole quail



Artemis



Colin with Artemis

and pigeons to pull on but I was still tearing pieces off and feeding her from my fingers. It wasn't long before she started exercising her wings and building muscle and I could tell it wouldn't be long before she would eventually start flying short distances. Throughout this time she was still getting as much food as she wanted to eat.

Once a young falcon like this starts to fly short distances you need to keep a very close eye on things so that they don't get into any trouble, as they may fly and land on things that are not safe and also put themselves in situations where they could be at risk from attacks from other birds and vermin. So you need to watch them all the time and it is during this period that the feeding starts to differ a little from what they have known up until now. What I do is I put her out to tame hack for longer and longer each day but all the feeding is done on the hack site in the day, which in my case is the bonnet of the works jeep. The young falcon will still be fed as much as she wants at home and in the cabin as well, so each day she goes off and does her thing then she will come back, have something to eat from the lure and then maybe sleep for a while. Or sometimes she will eat very little and

go off flying again. The young falcon is allowed to do this as often as possible and will eventually be on the wing for a few hours at a time, which is an absolute pleasure to see once they start to muscle up.

Once the young falcon is at this stage it will either already be chasing everything in sight or will very soon be doing so, this is all part of the learning process they have to go through. Once this happens I start to call them back to the jeep for their food but now start feeding them on the intended quarry, in the case of Artemis this was air rifle shot gulls.

This part of the training and learning process could go on for quite some time but I tend to find that in this way the falcon will make her first kill, on her own whilst out at hack, at around twelve to fourteen weeks of age. All this time of course the falcon is conditioning itself and accordingly will be very fit. The food intake will now drop off somewhat but the young falcon is still allowed to eat as much as it wants, although they will often come back and eat nothing at all.

Once this stage has been reached it's time to start the hunting training but you have to make sure that you don't reduce the weight of the falcon too much as this will result in a screaming imprint, which you most certainly don't want. I made this mistake a few years ago. I had a perfect imprint falcon but had lots of gulls on site and no killing falcon. Although my imprint falcon was play chasing gulls I needed a falcon to move them on so I dropped her weight by about one ounce over a couple of days. The falcon started to scream and I immediately I put the weight straight back on as I didn't want this, but it made no difference at all to her screaming. Even now although she is in an aviary as a breeding bird she



Success

still screams when she sees me at six years old. So be very careful not to make the same mistake that I did.

By now your young falcon should be feeding on gull's carcasses quite readily so now you need to start getting her used to being slipped out of the hood which may require a slight food reduction but not food reduction. If

the falcon, when unhooded, sees a gull carcass on the floor at about three to four feet away, but refuses to jump onto it, I will normally put the falcon away without any food and try her again in an hour's time when. Then she may well be hungrier but hasn't necessarily lost any weight. Keep repeating this until she jumps onto the gull carcass pretty much instantly. Then when she does jump onto it she is allowed to eat as much of the breast as she wants, but the breast only and without any casting. Once she has had her fill she is put away until later on in the afternoon when I will do the same with her



Artemis on adult Greater Black Backed Gull

again in the same way. At this point I stop the tame hacking and concentrate on getting her slipping out of the hood. Do this every day, increasing the distance the falcon is flying to the gull carcass, until you are happy that the falcon will take on a slip at gulls. Do not slip her unless you are convinced she is ready, which is normally after a week or two.

I do this by using a lure machine, the same type as you see at the game fairs for simulated coursing. Place the dead gull about ten foot from you and run a line out around a peg from the lure machine and tie it to the dead gull's neck. When she is taking on the dead gull at say fifty to a hundred yards, and chasing it at full speed, it's time to get her taking one



Artemis chasing gull



in the air. I do this by using a large roach type fishing pole anchored to the floor with a dead gull hanging on a short string from the top. I also use a release clip so that the gull falls to the ground when the falcon grabs it. Again you may have to start from a few feet and work up to a good distance but this won't take very long as by now the falcon will be very keen for the dead gulls. Once the falcon is at the stage where she goes off the fist like a rocket as soon as the hood is removed it is then time to find a nice easy slip for her and this is where working on a landfill sites come in handy. If you have one near you it would be worth going to see them or the falconer on site and see if they would be willing to help you out, if not have a word with your local farmers and see if they will let you slip at gulls when they are ploughing. Be sure to ask them to stop when you cast her off as you don't want them accidentally running over her. Most of the time they will readily agree to this as they are as interested in seeing the flight as you are. If you can't manage to arrange this then you just have to keep trying to find easy slips for her and hopefully she will go from strength to strength. If you feel she is getting a bit disheartened then go back to pulling a dead gull or taking one in the air for a couple of days to build her confidence up again. However a young enthusiastic falcon should soon make its first kill and

when it does allow it to have a good fill, even if you need to miss a day or two. I do this for about the first twenty gulls then after that point you can go for multiple slips. Although you may have to start tweaking the weight here and there, but at this stage you shouldn't get any screaming as long as you do it gently. For example my imprint up to about gull twenty was flying at about thirty four and a half ounces but now as I write she has killed many more gulls and is flying at thirty two ounces dead, but still does not scream at all. I am writing this article in late March 2010 and the falcon will only be flying for a couple of more weeks or so before she is put up for the moult.

I have seen some outstanding flights from this falcon and I am already looking forward to flying her next sea-

son. Although she has killed and missed lots of gulls, by far her best achievement is a seventy two ounce Greater Black Back Gull which she took on her own and killed by herself. The flight went out of sight so unfortunately I can't comment on it but some of the flights I have seen have been breathtaking and have left me in total awe. I have seen her take gulls at heights you would not believe after good hard ringing flights and I have also seen her go straight off the fist and bind to a gull fifty to one hundred yards from me. All the flights are part of her learning curve and I only hope she continues to go from strength to strength. Generally speaking you don't see falcons flying at their best until they reach about three or four years of age. This is an account of how I go about training my gull hawks; it may not work for everyone as I am lucky to be doing it day in and day out, but this is how I have trained my imprints for the last eight years. With the exception of one, which I mentioned earlier, they have all been totally silent because of training them in this way. That is not to say they will all be in everyone else's case as I am lucky to be with my imprints day and night, but hopefully you will enjoy imprinting and flying your falcons as much as I do and enjoy great success. Happy hunting.





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