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Jan 2011  
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# The World of Falconry

Edition 5  
January 2011



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## Editorial

How quickly time passes, here we are at issue five already which means a whole year has passed since the launch of the magazine. Our subscribers and readership list is growing nicely and we are getting lots of very positive feedback from falconers all around the world, for which we are grateful. We are extremely happy that our readership is so very positive and pro-active which is demonstrated by their willingness to contribute articles and photographs. Keep them coming.

Neil Forbes is back in the harness again and don't forget you can ask Neil specific raptor health related questions through the offices of the editor. Just e-mail your query in and rest assured it will be passed on to Neil.

We have another mixture of articles for you in this issue with contributions from several of our readers as well as a report on the Belgian International Field meet which I attended recently. By the time this issue is arriving through your letter boxes I shall be in sunnier climes (I hope) enjoying the Texas Hawking Association annual field meet in Abilene, a report of which will be in the next edition.

As always, good hawking.

The Editor

## Contents

- 4 The Falconers Fair - Ragley Hall

---

- 5 Wing Tip Oedema and Dry Gangrene in Birds of Prey  
by Neil A Forbes DipECZM(avian) FRCVS

---

- 9 The Micro-Buzzard  
by Chuck Redding

---

- 14 1st International Field Meet  
by Bob Dalton

---

- 23 Dogs. Who Needs Them?  
by Diana Durman-Walters

---

- 27 Croatian Falconry Club Field Meet  
by Melinda Terleske

---

- 32 KAI, Hawking in Britain with a Red Tail by Tim Borrill

---

- 33 Saints or Sinners, Heroes or Villains  
by Tiercel

---

- 36 Passage Falcons (continued)  
by Bob Dalton

Front Cover Photograph: Bob Dalton

# The Falconers Fair - Ragley Hall May Bank Holiday 2011

Kiezebrink UK Ltd has announced that they have organised a couple of practical demonstrations at this year's British Falconry and Raptor Fair of which they are the principal sponsors. Jemima Parry-Jones and Bob Dalton will be working together to give to two separate demonstra-

tions each day, one of imping and the other will feature coping beaks and talons. The demonstrations will take place within the confines and area immediately adjacent to the Kiezebrink stand. Times of the demonstrations will be announced nearer the time.

Don't forget the fair has a new venue this year and is being held at Ragley Hall, Alcester, Warwickshire. For full details contact the show office on 01588-672708.



Jemima Parry-Jones



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# Wing Tip Oedema and Dry Gangrene in Birds of Prey

Neil A Forbes DipECZM(avian) FRCVS

Wing tip oedema and dry gangrene syndrome, has been well reported in the literature, falconry magazines and in falconry training courses since 1991. This information was first published at the Raptor Research Foundation Conference in 1992. The disease first became a significant clinical problem in 1988. Despite this clinical cases still occur and are regularly presented to vets, despite the fact that this is almost exclusively a 'preventable disease'.

Wing tip oedema and dry gangrene syndrome is an inflammatory condition affecting the tips of the wings of falconiform birds. Birds present with an abducted or drooped wing, loss of flight performance, swollen cold wing tips or sudden loss of one or both wing tips. The condition occurs during the winter months, and it appears to be often precipitated by a period of cold or freezing weather.

The author conducted an epidemiological survey during the period 1991-93, when a total of 45 trained birds of prey, of nine species Lanner (16), Luggar (2), Harris hawk (10), Hobby (1), Buzzard (1), European Kestrel (1), Bengal Eagle Owl (1), Tawny Eagle (1), Black Kite (4), were examined and treated by the author. A questionnaire concerning husbandry and clinical progression was circulated to the bird's keeper at the time of each incident.

## Clinical Signs and Findings

Veterinary observations showed that characteristic clinical signs were a cold, grossly swollen, wing tip, with severe pitting oedema (i.e. fluid swell-



ing which when you press your finger into it, the depression caused remains there for several minutes). All lesions started from the wing tip and progressed proximally. Most cases demonstrated a sudden onset, severe swelling, (although some showed only very mild swelling initially, with progression to severe pitting oedema after 7 - 10 days).

Owner questionnaire returns showed that eighty five percent of birds were

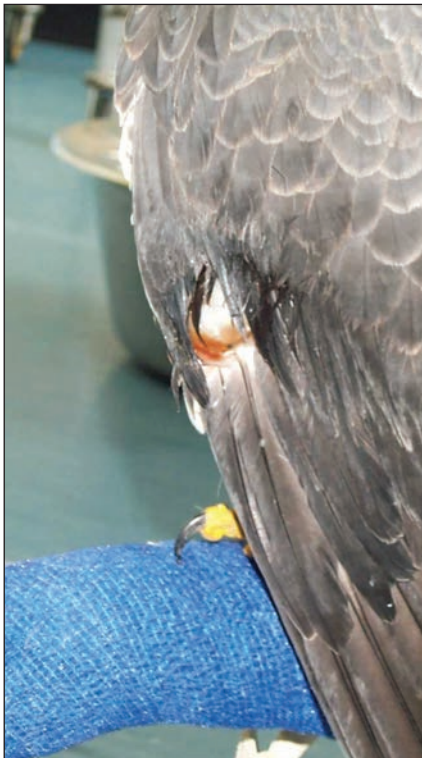
affected on both wings, typically to the level of the insertion of the fourth primary feather. Extensive fluid-filled vesicles were evident on top and bottom aspects of the wings. In eight cases the fluid blisters were sampled to test for any infection – non was found. The clinical signs resemble those seen in 'blue wing disease in broilers', where a necrotic dermatitis may affect the metacarpal area (Reece, 1991).



Serum samples from four affected birds were tested by fluorescent antibody test for the causative agent of blue wing disease (Chick Anaemia Agent); all were negative. Three of the thirty eight cases (8%), also had skin lesions on the toes or top of the feet, which were consistent with frost damage.

## Treatment

Immediate therapy at consisted of gently warming the bird, then maintaining it at normal room temperature (15-20oC) for three weeks. Keepers of those birds' with minor signs (10.5%), still capable of flight; were advised to fly their birds. Regular gentle exercise was considered helpful in maintaining or re-establishing circulation to, and drainage from, the affected areas. Thirteen cases (34%) with severe vesicle formation



had these drained in an aseptic manner three times daily, until they failed to refill (7 - 10 days). Some birds developed a concurrent enteritis and for this reason a course of broad spectrum antibiotics is recommended in all cases. Preparation H was applied topically to the swollen wing

tips in 18 of the cases, which appeared anecdotally to be beneficial, although the numbers involved and the variability of onset of therapy and severity of lesions, prevented any statistical analysis.

Two mild cases, willing to self-exercise, were released into aviaries. In other more severe cases, movement of the wings was encouraged by dropping or rolling the hand whilst the bird was perched on the fist.

Peripheral blood circulation was stimulated by the use of either isoxoprine (Navilox) or propentophylline (Vivotonin).

Wing tip swelling was evident for an average of 3.5 weeks. Soon after this time, if the metacarpus was to be lost, the tissue could be observed to thin and become dark, eventually becoming hard and dry, breaking off and leaving a clean, healed junction. This end stage was attributable to dry gangrene.

In some cases (8%), the owner was unaware of any clinical disease until the wing tip did drop off.

## Pathology

No infection was found in the wingtip of any cases. In fresh cases, the wing tip tissue was not initially necrotic, and the patency of small blood vessels was demonstrable. These pathological findings are consistent with tissue chilling as pathological changes may be non-specific and mild. In severe cases of chilling (frost bite), blood loss in the superficial tissues can lead to gangrene and tissue sloughing, as was seen in many of these cases. The histopathological findings are not consistent with ergot poisoning or allergic reactions.

## Epidemiology

**Age :** The condition primarily affected young birds during their first flying season (86%).

Such birds may not be fully fit, and hence may have smaller muscle mass, with a less well developed arterial supply, than older birds who have previously reached full fitness. In some raptors first year plumage is

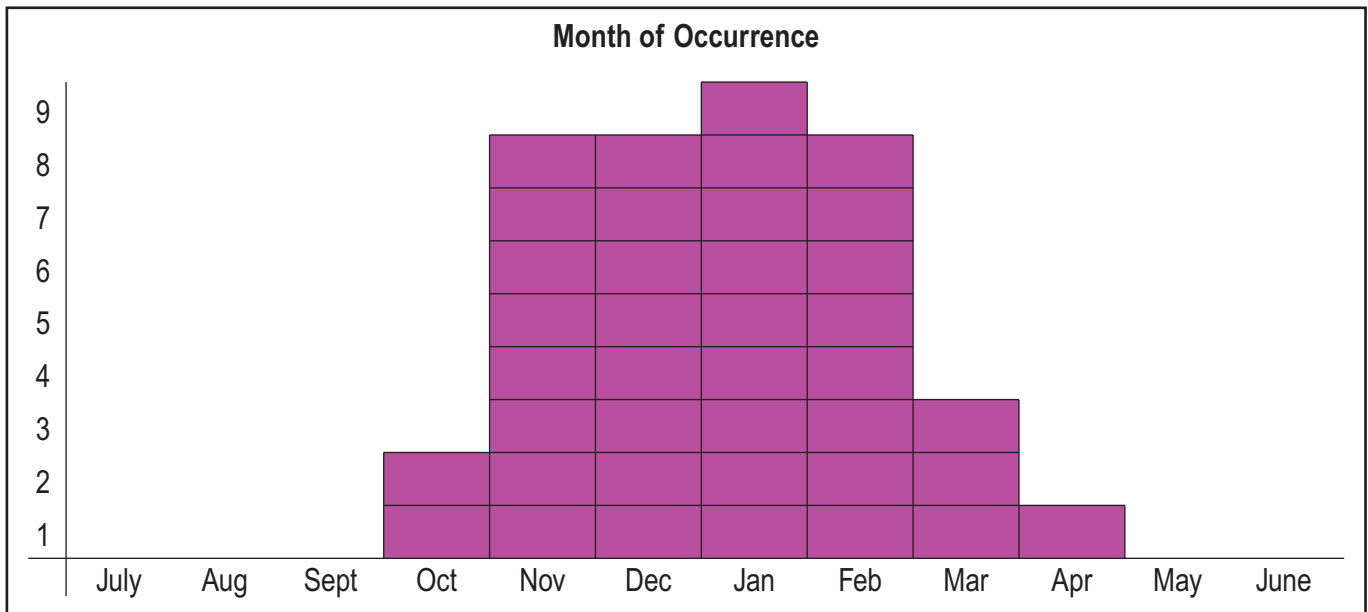
Cast outcome				
Died/Euth	lost 4 primaries	lost 2 primaries	lost 1 primary	No Loss
5	7	17	1	8

Only eight (21%) of cases, which had been diagnosed early and treated thoroughly, made a complete and full recovery. Of the birds which suffered metacarpal loss, 75% sloughed tissue on both wings. The lost tissue never re-grew. The average time between onset of signs and wing tissue loss was seven weeks, although the outcome was typically apparent by 5.5 weeks.

softer, more brittle and less durable than adult plumage; this may be of significance in the higher incidence which is seen in first year birds.

**Seasonality :** Cases occurred between October and April (see next page), presenting in a normal distribution, the median being in early January. Cases were presented from most regions of the United Kingdom.

Flight Loss as Determined by the Owner										
0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	100%	Died/Euth
8	6	3	-	3	1	3	-	5	4	5



**Sex Distribution :** Twenty six cases occurred in females, only twelve in males, (although this may be because more female birds were being flown).

Ninety percent of birds were being flown at the time and hence were at flying weight, the remaining birds had only just been grounded. Birds of prey at flying weight, are typically below their optimal body weights, they

have reduced or no body fat and may be in negative nitrogen balance which may affect their physiological mechanism for energy conservation. The majority of birds were affected prior to their first moult, others had recently moulted. It is concluded that the incidence is not related to the stage of the moult.

**Husbandry :** All affected birds had been tethered within 45 cm of the

ground, during either the night, or very cold days, immediately prior to the development of clinical signs. This is believed by the authors to be a major factor in the pathogenesis of the condition.

**Environmental factors :** Information regarding : the substrate under birds, proximity to vegetation, types of vegetation, over head power cables, industrial sites, proximity to the sea, altitude and terrain were all shown to be no significance. The positioning of aviaries, the degree of protection from prevailing winds and wind chill were of no significance amongst affected birds.

**Weather conditions :** No significant changes from the normal national climate, were noted over the period of the survey. In all cases weather conditions had been near or below freezing immediately prior to the incident. There was a significant incidence in birds put away wet, during cold weather after hunting. Such a practice is contrary to good husbandry and should be discouraged. The survey demonstrated that it was **low ground temperatures** and not a wind chill factor which was significant in the aetiology of the condition. Birds kept inside (e.g. in a garage) were affected, due to ground chill.



Owners had often kept the same ages and species of birds in the same accommodation for many years in the absence of any clinical disease. Considering the increased national incidence in the period 1988-91 together with the above findings it is postulated that the disease is not caused by the effects of cold or inclement weather alone.

**Nutrition** : An analysis of the affected birds dietary source, additives and constituents was made covering a three month period prior to the incident. No significant correlation was evident.

## Discussion

The condition must be differentiated from 'Blaine' (a warm swelling around the carpal / wrist joint), spindle cell tumour (hard normal temperature swelling of the wing tip) and septic arthritis (warm painful swelling of the joints – typically elbow or wrist).

Wing tip oedema and dry gangrene syndrome of birds remains a signifi-

cant cause of disease in captive raptors in the United Kingdom (UK). The condition is also seen in USA and Europe. Husbandry methods have not changed significantly in the UK during or immediately prior to the period in question, nor have the populations of susceptible species changed markedly in the same period. Various hypotheses have been put forward, but a virus, nutrition or toxin induced restriction of peripheral blood supply, rendering the bird more susceptible to the effects of frost is most likely.

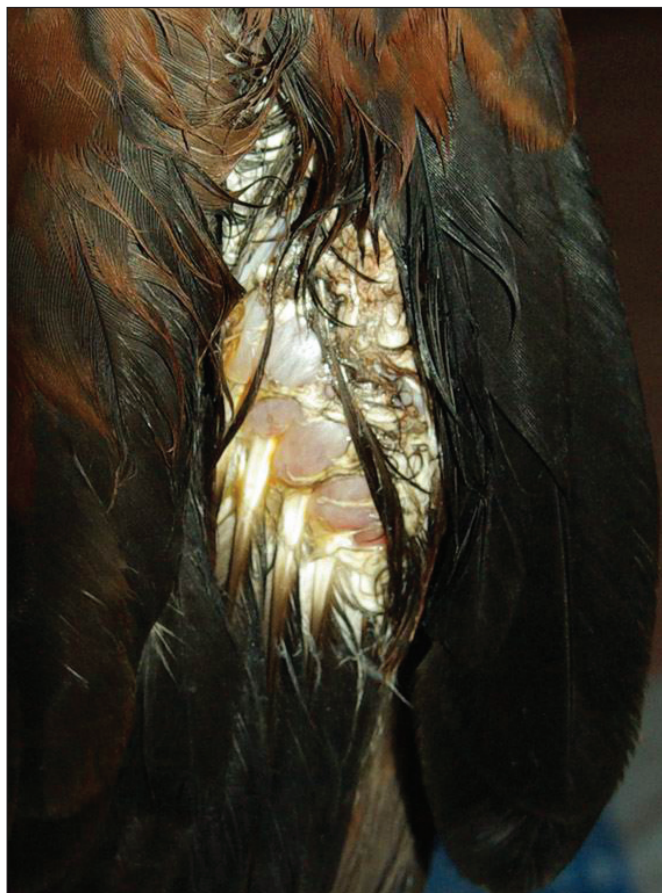
Several collections, in which similar species and ages of birds have been kept in the same accommodation for many years, have suffered outbreaks of disease since 1988, where a number of clinical cases have occurred over a period of 6 - 8 weeks.

## Prevention

**This condition is almost totally preventable**, and if recognised in the early stage treatment is likely to be effective. Where birds are still los-

ing wing tips, this is as a result of either the owner or the clinician failing to recognise and correctly treat the condition. It is believed that widespread education of falconers by the authors has resulted in a fifty percent reduction in incidence from the peak of 1988 - 90.

No bird of prey (especially first year birds) should be kept tethered within 18 inches of the ground, (unless heat is supplied), ever at night or during cold days, during the months of October - April. **During the months October – April, birds should instead be free lofted or kept inside in heated accommodation.** No bird should be left outside (tethered or free lofted), if it is wet (after bathing or flying), as it gets dark on any day. Bathing should be prevented after noon, in the winter months. Low wattage oil filled bar heaters, or heat lamps can be positioned near birds, connected to a 'frost stat', i.e. a switch which kicks in when the temperature drops below say 4oC.



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# The Micro-Buzzard (Adventures with a Rehab/Brancher Red-Shouldered Hawk)

Chuck Redding



This June, Charli (Charlotte) Rohack, called to ask me if I knew of a falconer who would like to train a red-shouldered hawk. She said that she had a nice one, recovered by a road in College Station, ill and nearly starving to death. Perhaps the bird was flapping around the nest and got blown out by the wind, or maybe just had bad luck on her first flight. Charli was treating the bird, which in addition to starvation had a touch of aspergillosis. My immediate response to Charli, a licensed raptor rehabber, was that I would think about it, but that I had no one in mind. I personally did not need or want a second hawk, having given away an excellent tiercel Harris' hawk last fall. This was to be a summer of sailing in

my new boat, while the red-tail moulted. A couple of hours later, I called her to tell her I would take the bird.

I never had any particular interest in red-shoulders. My usual exposure to them is their harassing my red-tail while he hunts squirrels. A season or two back, a red-shoulder knocked my hawk, Cisco, off a branch as my hawk was focusing on a squirrel hiding in the brush on the ground below. Cisco kept his composure, regained the perch, and caught the squirrel within ten seconds. But on other occasions, the presence of red-shoulders in the woods has been a major distraction and nuisance.

Most of what I heard about red-shoulders as falconry birds, espe-

cially from folks whom I respect, was negative. It was said that they were difficult to train, slow to learn, excessively noisy, badly mannered, and tend to fly off. Jim Ince's former apprentice, Cody Birdwell, is a terrific young falconer, who had previously trained two red-tailed hawks. His second bird was possibly the best red-tail that Jim and I have ever seen. Cody trapped and trained a red-shouldered hawk in the fall of 2009. The bird was last seen soaring off on a balmy afternoon. Another young falconer, a tyro, lost his red-shoulder this past summer.

Against this background, the prospects of success with a red-shouldered hawk seemed dim. After sev-



*Chuck with Elbert*

eral weeks of intense veterinary treatment, the bird's weight increased from around 245 grams, to nearly 600 the day I took her. I decided to do my best with training the bird, and planned a release in September if I could get her hunting successfully. I picked her up on July 3. I called her Elbert, named after the tallest mountain in Colorado.

I trained the bird over the next month, treating her as I would any other hawk. I manned her, got her flying to the fist and T-pole, and had her attacking the lure. She was remarkably easy, definitely not what I was expecting. She is a little charmer. Her plumage is beautifully patterned, especially for an immature bird. She is curious with an entertaining personality. For example, I once left my telemetry box open, sitting right by her perch. I walked out of the room for a minute, and came back to find her digging through my transmitters, batteries, and bewits, just checking things out. I had to laugh. In the field she once grabbed a small block of wood, wrestled with it on the ground and carried it back to the T-pole. When bored she rips up everything in sight, like a puppy. She eats plants.

Every aspect of her training was effortless. She manned quickly, and

flew across the room the day after she first hopped to the fist. Many falconers observe a change in a bird when the hawk is first taken outdoors. Indoors the bird is completely calm, and appears manned. Carry the same hawk outdoors, and she becomes wild again, bating and nervous. I will sometimes make the transition carrying the hawk before dawn as the outside light builds up gradually. I was expecting the negative reaction with this hawk, but one afternoon I took her out the front door of my house. She was unruffled, no pun intended. Completely relaxed, she sat on my fist showing acute interest in birds flying by.

On the creance I expected her to make reasonable progress. I initially spooled out a length of line that I thought would be ample for the first day. Again she exceeded my expectations when I realized that she would have flown 50 to 70 feet. The next day I gave her all the line she needed. Because she is a woodland hawk, I set the training perch next to the trees and allowed her to fly to the open field on the creance. This is backward from the way I have trained RT's and my HH. With those birds I set the perch in the middle of the field and let them fly from there. Setting up for the RSH took a little extra effort, so that she would have the security of the trees without any chance of getting entangled by flying to them.

Everything else associated with her training was similarly easy. Since I prefer hunting all my hawks from a T-pole, I decided to see how she would respond to it. I planned to put tidbits on the T-perch to induce her to fly to it. As I tied her to the training perch, she spotted the T-pole and immediately hopped to it. Minutes later she was flying across the field to the T-pole.

As of this writing (10/21/2020), she is now hunting consistently, typically



*Success*



*Elbert on T perch*

flying at about 520 grams. In parking lots she has attacked and caught a good number of starlings and other nuisance birds from the car window. Once she plucked a starling from the ground and flew to a tree. I was concerned, as it was very late in the day, and I had to go to work in the morning. I garnished the glove, whistled, and she immediately flew out the tree carrying a live bird to my fist. She is definitely bird-focused, and has not taken a single furred animal. One night she attacked a mouse behind a machine shop, diligently tracking it in the grass, but it escaped. Typically, I hunt her from a T-pole in the field. From the T-pole, during rail season, she caught a rail and has taken a house sparrow and another bird. There are not many game birds in the fields yet, so she catches an abundance of very large flying grasshoppers, along with a few katydids, and dragonflies. The hawk's field response is good, and she often brings her catches back to the T-pole. Another pleasant surprise with this hawk is her willingness to hunt in the

open. I had planned to hunt adjacent to woods so that she wouldn't be uneasy. RSH's are woodland hawks, generally avoiding open country. She has no problem riding the T-pole in an open field, far from a tree-line.

About the only failing with this hawk, and it is probably mine, is her difficulty in hooding. Right away, she was difficult to hood; when I realized that it was eroding my relationship with the hawk, I quit hooding her. I will hood her if necessary, but otherwise I use the hawk box. It has not been an issue, though a hood-trained hawk is always advantageous. I had her in a field once when a group of burros approached; she bated in panic. At that time I wished that I could have hooded her. I have a red-tail that I hood every time I take to the field; un-hooded his exuberance to hunt and escape the hawk box results in broken primaries.

These days telemetry should be used with every hawk flown. Installing telemetry on her is easy. The hawk never wiggles and turns so I don't have to chase the transmitter mount around. It is especially easy in front of a mirror, while she's distracted by her own reflection. Initially I used a L.L. XLF 3V transmitter with

a plectrum tail-mount. Unfortunately, she cracked both deck feathers because of the plectrum, and the feathers had to be impeded. I now put the transmitter on a leg bewit. At some point I may install a Marshall backpack.

Red-shoulders are vocal, as anyone who has walked in the woods knows. Why these relatively small hawks living among great-horned owls would be so noisy is beyond me. Red-shouldered hawks are vocal in captivity also. I tell folks that this hawk screams, but is not a screamer. On the way to a hunting field, she will call while riding in the hawk box (it's loud). Sometimes she calls when weathering out, or when she hears someone in the next room or outside. It is that classic "keer-keer-keer" sound. But she does not typically sit and scream. It is intermittent, and often she is quiet. Unlike my Harris' hawk she does not scream when returning from the field. That is when this red-shoulder is most quiet. If she's noisy and you pick her up, she will generally get quiet when sitting on your fist. She also twitters and makes various small sounds, often when flying back to the fist or T pole. She is louder than I would prefer sometimes, but I have had a lot worse.



*Elbert, Chuck and friends*

I am definitely sold on red-shouldered hawks, at least this one. She is a lot of fun, and I have no idea why this bird has been so easy. Charli Rohack surmised that the hawk is grateful. It may be that flying a brancher is the way to go with a RSH, but I have no other experience with them, so I can't say. I liked this bird enough that within a month of getting her, I officially put her on my permit. With the new regulations, I had 180 days that I could have legally kept her with impunity.

This hawk may be different than most RSH's. Both Matthew Mullenix and Jonathan Millican trained them in the past, and neither was overly impressed. Matt's best RSH caught six birds and a rabbit, car-hawking. Wrote Matt, "She didn't carry, but she did scream and became very aggressive. I released her without continuing to hunt because she was so unpleasant and loud. I'm sure she would have continued to catch and

*maybe would have gotten over her bad behavior in time, but there didn't seem much point, and my neighbors were complaining."* Jonathan Millican has trained a couple, spending an entire season concentrating on his last one. That hawk caught one grackle. On the other hand, Barry Davidson, of Davidson's Falconry in Pennsylvania, loves RSH's. He mostly hunts pigeons with them. His warning: keep them away from chipmunks. Once they get a taste for chipmunks, they lose interest in birds. Barry's erstwhile sponsor initially pooh-poohed red-shoulders until he saw Barry's bird in action. He had success also, but the last I heard from Barry was, "My sponsor's RS is really bad with mantling and breaks all the primaries all the time."

In the wild, red-shouldered hawks catch a range of quarry, mostly small mammals, reptiles, insects, amphibians, and birds. Red-shoulders are

observed catching gray squirrels, which are a very tough, both to catch in the trees, and to handle when captured. Squirrels have crippled the much bigger and stronger red-tailed and Harris' hawks, so this is no mean accomplishment. For a falconer, the most commonly hunted game will be small rabbits, sparrows, starlings, pigeons, and cotton rats. I would hunt squirrels with extreme caution.

It appears to me that red-shouldered hawks have evolved into accipitrine birds. For a Buteo, this hawk has a fast wing beat, a long tail (striped like a Cooper's), and her eyes are placed slightly differently than a Harris' or RT. Her eyes are just slightly less binocular. Accipiters have kind of a bug-eyed look, and so does this hawk. I wonder if this is an adaptation for defense in a forest environment that open country raptors don't need. Perhaps their eye position enables the hawk to better see enemies in the trees.



*Elbert weathering*



*Hawking with Elbert*



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# 1st International Field Meet, Belgium November 2010

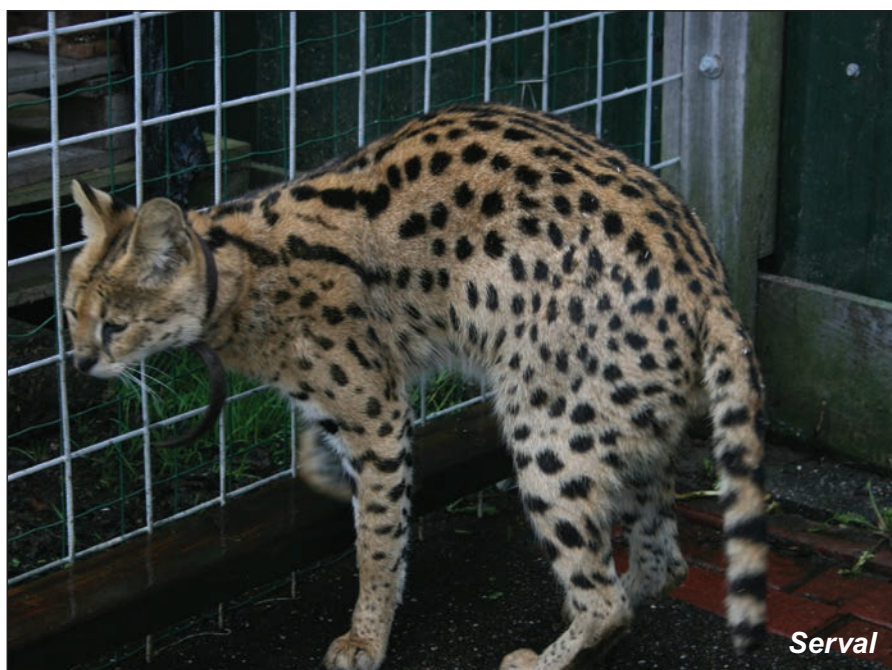
Bob Dalton

I recently had the extremely good fortune to receive an invitation to attend the first ever International Falconry meet to be held in Belgium. The organisation behind the event was one that I was not familiar with and this turned out to be hardly surprising as it had been formed especially to put on the event. Five falcon-

five days in total, one for registration, three for hawking and a final day with breakfast being taken together and then departures.

I wanted to visit my good friend Jan Wooning at Falconiformes, not far from Rotterdam, in Holland around that time so combined the two things and put together a timetable that

would allow plenty of time for both occasions. My good friend Diana Durman-Walters had always wanted to see the collection of Gyrs at Falconiformes and was quite keen to attend the field meet and she duly accompanied me on my travels. The visit with Jan, as with any visit I make to his premises, tends to centre on the magnificent collection of breeding pairs of Gyrs that he has. Plus there is more or less guaranteed to be something unusual at Falconiformes and this time was no exception. As we came back out of the Gyr complex I looked into one of the kennel and run complexes that normally holds a pair of extremely intimidating guard dogs and saw something quite different instead. Calmly sitting there cleaning itself just like a domestic cat, or rather a much larger version of one, was an adult male Serval. This turned out to be a bottle raised Serval that was being housed temporarily whilst his owner was having a new housing complex constructed for it.



ers had got together a year previously with the intention of holding a well organised falconry event. All five had been on other International field meets and what they tried to do was take the ideas that worked well and try and eliminate a few of the inevitable wrinkles that occur when organising such a large scale event. Invitations were duly dispensed far and wide and for my part I knew quite a number of Dutch and Belgian falconers that would be attending so decided to make the short trip across the channel and stay for the duration of the meet which was



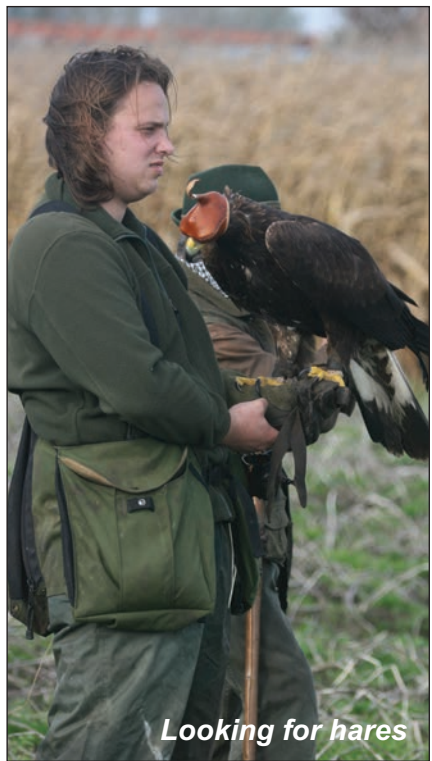


*Lots of talking before hawking*

Having thoroughly enjoyed a social visit with Jan it was time to head back down the motorway for an hour or so and find the base that was going to serve as headquarters for the meet. Fortunately for me the organisers had sent me superb instructions as to how to reach the venue from the motorway, which was just as well as my Sat Nav suddenly decided it was thoroughly British and was not going to work anywhere else. Having reached the venue Diana and I went to register and were delighted to find that the registration fee had been waived for us. Despite protestations by ourselves our generous hosts would simply not allow us to pay to attend the meet and throughout the next few days did everything they could to ensure that our stay, and that of other foreign guests, was a thoroughly enjoyable one. In fact the organisation of the event was simply superb and probably the best I have ever come across.

The fee for attending the meet was in fact 250 Euros. On the face of it and at first glance that might seem a little expensive for what is technically three days hawking. But once made familiar with the facilities and services that were encompassed in that

fee it became clear that it was very good value for money. The base for the meet had barrack style accommodation, with relevant showers and toilets, for around sixty and falconers were free to take advantage of that. Outside there was a secure weathering area for the hawks and this was under supervision day and night. Dogs were also catered for and there was even a fresh daily supply of hawk feed which consisted of chicks or pigeons.



*Looking for hares*

Catering, which was of a very high class, was provided throughout the duration of the meet in that there was a dinner on the registration evening. From then until the end of the meet all meals, including the final night banquet, were included in the registration fee. Also included were breakfasts for four days and also a generous supply of food and foil to allow those that would be out all day to make themselves a packed lunch. Wine and water was also allocated to each group on departure to the hawking rounds. There really had been such an amazing amount of thought applied to the smooth running of the event. Each night the evening meal would feature game taken by falconers just before and during the event. The first night featured Venison, the second Duck, third Pheasant but for the final night falconers had to give way to hunters with Wild Boar being on the menu.

After the evening meal there would be film shows for those that wanted them or just general socialising. On the final evening there would be a raffle and many, including myself, had donated falconry related prizes.



*William Speekaert*



*Goyakla – 12 year old female Golden Eagle*



There would also be the Golden raffle which certainly seemed very popular with the participants that were flying hawks at the meet. When registering a falconer who intended to hunt was given a golden ticket. On the final evening the conventional raffle was held and then just one dip in the box to draw a Golden raffle ticket. The lucky winner of this particular draw got their 250 Euros registration fee returned to them.

Day one proper of the meet dawned bright but somewhat breezy. As the morning progressed the winds got stronger and stronger until it really was on the edge of whether to fly or not. I am by no means a fair weather falconer and would have had serious doubts about flying my Harris Hawk in such conditions. Falcons would have revelled in it but for hawks and eagles it seemed just too strong to do any meaningful hawking. I was with one of the two eagle groups for the first day and as their flying ground was over an hour and a half away it was decided to drive there and see what conditions were like locally.

On arrival at the flying grounds our numbers had thinned somewhat and we were left with two eagles hoping to get some sport at Hares. The first was a twelve year old female Golden Eagle called "Goyakla" being flown by William Speeckaert and the other a first year female Golden Eagle called "eagle" flown by Adriaan Van den Eyden. Rather unusually for a field meet, particularly an international one, the young eagle had not yet been entered and this could possibly be why Adriaan had been put in such experienced company as William and that the group had been kept deliberately small. Despite the strength of the wind it was decided to give hawking a chance and we duly set off in the company of the local gamekeeper and hunting association agent as well as myself, Diana and





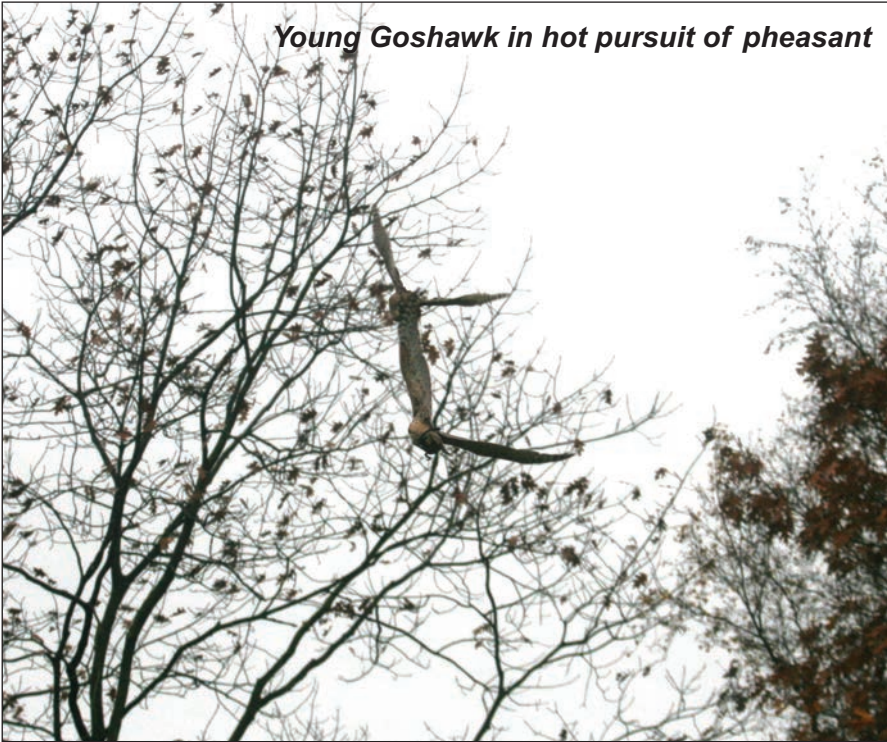
one other spectator. We started off by walking across extremely large freshly ploughed fields which held considerable quantities of water. Apparently the week leading up to the meet had been an extremely wet one and the amount of standing water didn't inspire much confidence in seeing large numbers of Hares.

However almost immediately a Hare got up some thirty yards in front of us and the young eagle "eagle" was instantly off in pursuit. The Hare was running across the wind and the eagle could make good progress in closing the gap. However when the eagle was almost upon the Hare the wily old creature turned directly into the wind, tuned up the wick and ran for all it was worth. The eagle was left sitting on the ground contemplating what might have been. Despite the difficult conditions the eagle had given everything to the pursuit and had come within inches of being successful. But for an unentered eagle it certainly meant business and was determined to try and catch its first Hare.

After walking across several more fields of fresh plough we finally got to some pastureland and almost immediately a Hare got up and "Goyakla" was after it. The Hare went under a fence as the eagle closed and we all feared the worst, but the experienced eagle flared her wings and went over the fence but lost a couple of precious seconds in her pursuit. The



*Young Goshawk in hot pursuit of pheasant*



*Drying off a Bonnellis Eagle on third morning*

Hare took full advantage of this and drive directly into the wind to make good its escape. But the eagle hadn't given up and swung upwards and then drove down into the wind in an attempt to catch the Hare. Despite her sterling efforts the Hare made the safety of a ditch and was away free.

Another hour of walking produced a one more flight for each eagle but in circumstances that were definitely loaded in favour of the Hares. We had effectively walked in a large circle and were back at our starting point which was the lunch hut of the shoot whose land we were on that day. The gamekeeper and hunting agent suggested we stop for a short break and have a hot drink to help warm us through. The eagles were put out on perches and the human element of the party took a short break. The wind was getting ever stronger and it was feared that we might not be able to resume flying at all. Accordingly we settled down to an early lunch break instead of just a quick coffee stop. Belgian hospitality came to the fore via the gamekeeper and hunting agent and liberal amounts of bread, ham, cheese,

chocolate, coffee and schnapps appeared on the table. We all enjoyed an excellent lunch and towards the end of it we noted that the wind had decreased somewhat in strength. So lunch things were quickly tidied away and it was back out into the field.

We went out onto some more freshly ploughed fields and very quickly we found and flushed four hares one after the other and the eagles tried

hard to put one of them in the bag. But the day belonged to the hares and although the young eagle came very close nothing was actually caught. Next we moved on to a very large area of pastureland although, somewhat irritatingly, this was broken up into small parcels by the very liberal use of barbed wire. This sort of ground was far more like it and the number of hares we found reflected this. However in the meantime the



*Two Peregrines placed in the hearth to dry*

wind had got back up to full strength again and was also gusting quite dangerously. Both eagles tried a couple of more times each but really didn't have much of a realistic chance at all. Also with the proliferation of barbed wire and the sudden gusting of the winds it seemed that if we carried on an accident would be almost inevitable. So it was reluctantly decided to call it a day and try again tomorrow. Although the eagles had failed to make a kill we had enjoyed some good flying and some excellent company. On getting back to the field meet base we discovered the other eagle party had also had a blank day although they too had enjoyed some good sport and seen plenty of hares.

The start of day two saw the wind down to a mere murmur; however without the wind to keep it off the rains had returned to our part of Belgium with a vengeance. Today Diana and I would be accompanying a Goshawk group and the main quarry for the day would be pheasant. The hunting grounds were a mere ten minutes from the meet headquarters and so a far more leisurely breakfast, complete with second cup of coffee, could be enjoyed. Our group was to consist of four female Goshawks, two adult and two juveniles and also a juvenile male Goshawk. There would also be a German Wire Haired Pointer belonging to one of the falconers and apparently one of the landowners who would be accompanying us was bringing a French pointer. I had never seen one of this breed before and when I saw it was pleasantly surprised. It looked to all intents and purposes like a very slight and slender built German Short Haired Pointer. The bitch was extremely attractive looking and was supposedly an excellent worker. The landowners consisted of two brothers who owned a considerable tract of land locally and one of their friends who also had



*Adult female Goshawk on pheasant*

the sporting rights over a large tract that butted up to their ground.

Because of the worsening rain conditions it was decided to hunt some wooded areas and we duly set off in eager anticipation. The landowners assured us that the first three pieces of woodland that we would work that morning held plenty of pheasants. They were certainly accurate in their predictions and we saw pheasant after pheasant. However the first to be brought to bag was done so by the Wire Hair and not a hawk. The dog had come on staunch point and then when the falconer was getting into position for the flight had decided that pheasant might be nice to eat

and had lunged forward and grabbed it. In the subsequent melee three more pheasants broke around us and made good their unpressured escape.

Even in the cover of the woods the rain was still driving in and hawks and falconers were getting wet. Several more pheasants flushed and various hawks chased them without bringing one to bag. The best flight of the morning was when a hen pheasant jumped up at the feet of one of the falconers and with a female goshawk hot on its tail dived into a rhododendron bush for sanctuary. As the goshawk tried to land in the top of the shrub the pheasant ran





out the other side and took to the air again. The goshawk was unsuspected at first and the pheasant managed to open up a considerable gap. However once the goshawk caught sight of the fleeing pheasant again it was off after it for all it was worth. The flight was quite a long one by goshawk standards and but for a small patch of cover around a cattle water trough would have ended in success for the hawk. By now both humans and hawks were thoroughly soaked and only the two dogs seemed indifferent to the conditions. The landowners suggested we adjourn to their hunting lodge for lunch and the idea was greeted with universal approval. The lodge turned out to be an absolute delight, a glorified wood cabin set back in amongst a stand of trees. However within this wood cabin were simply superb things to eat and drink. The land owner brothers were serious hunters but did believe in wasting anything that they had hunted and killed. Accordingly to accompany the wild mushroom omelette that was served for lunch was fresh homemade bread, smoked wild boar, smoked goose breast all of which was washed down with homemade beer and sloe gin. To be perfectly honest it was a long time before anybody noticed the rain had stopped and we could go hawking again.

The afternoon saw several good flights and three pheasants were taken in good style. The juvenile goshawk that was in our party was in fact unentered and accordingly a couple of us left the main group and in the company of one of the landowners went to a small wood to see if we could ferret some rabbits and give the goshawk an easy chance. No sooner had we decided on this course of action when the rains decided they would return with a vengeance. In no time at all the goshawk

was soaked and it was plain to see from the dark colouration of its tail and primaries that a good flight was an unrealistic prospect. So again it was decided to end the day early due to the awful weather conditions. You could not help but feel sorry for the organisers who had put so much time and effort into arranging a simply superb meet only to have their efforts clash with just about the worst weather imaginable. But spirits were still high and there was always tomorrow.

On returning to the meet headquarters for an excellent evening meal we discovered it certainly was a case of high spirits for the Dutch falconer Adriaan Van den Eyden. His Golden eagle had at last managed to get a foot to a Hare and had made very short work of despatching it. Awaiting me was a very pleasant surprise as a Dutch couple had made the journey to the meet in order to present me with a rather special cake that depicted a Golden Eagle catching a Hare iced onto the top of it. Spirits were not so high with several of the longwingers who were attending





from other countries and apparently they decided that they would not stay for the third and final day of hunting and made their plans to depart the following morning. Most were good mannered enough to thank their hosts and say their goodbyes but a very small element, two in fact, just departed without a word to anyone. All I can say it was very much a mistake on their part as the following day dawned clear and bright with the sun making a very welcome appearance.

Because the longwing group that was meant to go to a particularly good spot that day had departed a different Goshawk group went there instead so as not to disappoint the land owners. The ground itself was ideal for running pointing dogs and flying game hawks and proved to be very well stocked with pheasant. All in all the third and final day was excellent with all the Goshawks getting plenty of flights and a good number of pheasants being put in the bag. Hunting for the day finished very promptly mid afternoon as the laying out and honouring the game taken at the meet and the farewell banquet would be taking place that evening.

The tradition of honouring the game and the sport it as provided is very much a part of European field meets and on this occasion was very nicely done. A pair of horn blowers paid individual respect to each quarry spe-

cies taken and then to the sport enjoyed overall. All this was done set against a very evocative tableau of the game laid neatly out in rows surrounded by pine branches and lit purely by the light of burning logs. Just as the ritual was about to begin the organisers caught me somewhat off guard by asking if I would say a few words on behalf of the foreign guests during the ceremony itself. This I was happy to do and expressed my gratitude for the welcoming manner in which we had all been treated and the excellent sport and sense of camaraderie we had all enjoyed. I felt honour bound to make a passing apology for those that had merely drifted off and made sure that our hosts realised this behaviour did not in any way reflect the feelings of those of us that had stayed. I was rewarded for my short speech with a very warm round of applause.

The evening saw the superb banquet dinner were the main course consisted of spit roasted wild boar, this was accompanied by a raffle of all manner of falconry goods donated by various people and to round the evening off a blues band played well into the small hours. The following morning saw those that had stayed overnight enjoy one last breakfast together and then it was time for everyone to say their goodbyes. Other than those that had decided to leave a day early the meet had been an outstanding success and the organisers cannot be praised too highly for the effort and trouble they had gone to, thereby ensuring a truly superb meeting. It was the successful culmination of a year of planning and hard work but the quality of the sport and enjoyment of those that attended was surely its own reward.



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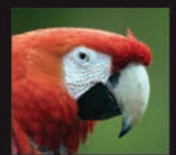
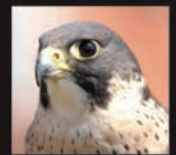
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# Dogs. Who Needs Them?

Diana Durman-Walters

Falconry is a feint heartbeat without good dogs. There are many falconers who feel that the partnership of a dog is one that can only lead to the hawking day being spoiled. How much easier that would be if a dog who understood the partnership had been trained from the start to be the asset that so many of us enjoy each time we go hawking,

A dog usually enters into the equation when the hawk is already purchased and in the mews. It doesn't take long before a hawking day might seem a better prospect if there was a dog around to locate game and what quickly follows is the decision to get either a puppy or a trained dog, from one of the many gundog breeds available.

Careful planning needs to be done. In exactly the same way the decision

to get a hawk will involve building and specialist housing with management and time spent on hawking, then the same applies to a dog. Not a case of just getting them and putting them outside until you need them for hawking.

Falcons if flown only on upland quarry will be best served with either pointers or setters. In this category there is already an understanding from the falconer on the need for good supportive dog work and how this will be married together with the falcon. It can be tackled in a variety of ways. With a falcon already capable of taking a pitch through its training programme, it needs to be served to give it the experience to tackle quarry. This can best be achieved by using a steady pointer. It may well be that there just are not the hours in the day to train a dog, or quite simply

the training would be beyond the falconer. Trained dogs are available from many professional kennels and may well be able to fit into the niche as a falconer's dog, once they have become accustomed to working with a falcon. This is an expensive outlay but could be the perfect solution to getting the best out of your flights with a longwing.

However the cost involved with this style of instant dog power is not what most people had in mind and training a young pup to work with the hawk or falcon has far more appeal. Once the decision has been made to get a pup it is all down to personal taste as to what breed you really want. If its looks that are the deciding factor then you would need to do your homework, as many of the gundogs available would not make ideal hawking companions.



*Gamefinders are worth their weight in gold*

*Let someone else fly while you handle the dog*



So which dog might you choose? It would need to take into consideration the terrain and type of land that you have to work the hawk. If it is mixed ground with plenty of cover then you might well consider an HPR or an English springer spaniel or cocker. If the ground is wide open and partridge, pheasant, or grouse will be your option on game, then a pointer or a setter may well suit you far better.

Although our traditional longwing dogs still play a very big part in today's falconry, especially in Red grouse hawking, it is with increasing regularity that falconers will be seen out in the field with a Hunt Point and Retrieve breeds. Thirteen different breeds are currently to be seen in the shooting or hawking field with another three unusual breeds The Logotto Romagnola the Kooikerhondje the Spanish Water Dog our most recent imports.

Inevitably the dogs that have had the longest period of time here in the UK have the better track records and it tends to be that in the hawking field you will most commonly see the German Wirehaired and Shorthaired

Prior to the docking ban on Hunt Point & Retrieve breeds, many breeders often laid claim to the fact that their dogs were dual purpose. This meant that show dogs were included as working dogs as indeed if you wanted to show them you could also work them. With many years of experience watching such dogs, it was noticeable that the working kennels in HPR's that specialise in producing dogs that have generations of successful work ancestry which may

also include Field trial dogs as well as Working Test winners amongst them, will provide the very best options for a good working pup.

The tails of working HPR's are still legally docked and the pups are micro-chipped as well as certificated by their vets. This allows HPR's to remain with docked tails reflecting the fact that they will be working dogs. Scottish law did not make any allowances and does not consent to any tail docking of working dogs.



*Puppies can be pleasant time wasters*





*Red and white Setter puppy*

eventually it will begin to ignore some, or all of these commands, including ones from you.

Pups learn very quickly when they come face to face with your hawk or falcon to leave well alone. They do not have their drive or hunting inclination developed well enough to see the hawk as anything other than something they should not go near. Older dogs (or imports, which I specialise in) have to go through a training programme that teaches them to see the hawk or falcon as a hunting companion. This approach gets the dog to focus not on the hawk in front of him as perhaps something you might want him to retrieve, but as something entirely different. In the past 30 yrs of dog training and handling pups to adults, I have not experienced one dog that couldn't be trusted with the hawk or falcon.

The falconer's dog has to be steady with a very good grasp of the basic commands of sit, stay, down, heel and come here. These do not involve

pointer, The Hungarian Vizsla's smooth and wirehaired, Large Munsterlander and Brittany.

The arrival of a puppy is usually something of a novelty as this young impressionable animal becomes an endearing and entertaining addition to the household. When you make a decision to purchase a new pup you would be very wise to check that the parents have received all health checks applicable to their breed. To know what these are you can go onto the Kennel Club website. Here you will be able to assess all health issues with all breeds and to know what health checks the sire and dam should have had done before a litter is produced. There is much greater emphasis on breeders to act responsibly when producing a litter. A healthy pup that is free of expensive vet bills throughout its life has to be paramount, and a healthy pup is one that can be of benefit to the breed when and if you decide you too might like to take a litter from your bitch or maybe use your dog at stud.

A new pup in the house is a great novelty and indeed you can find yourself involved in a lot of time wasting as you pleasantly spend time just

watching their antics or playing with them. As they begin to accustom themselves to being part of the human pack there has to be a decision as to who is going to give the orders and commands that the pup will respect. It is very easy to have everyone telling the pup what to do and



*They learn to see the falcon as a hunting companion*

being round the hawk whilst being taught as these are the back bone lessons of all gundogs and the level of control that you will require from them in the field.

Whilst many dogs are prepared to co-operate in a situation that's not really demanding i.e. in the fields playing, or maybe hunting ground that doesn't hold much in the way of quarry, the situation changes in a nano second once game is on the scene. What you don't want is the inexperienced dog to 'turn a deaf ear' to the trainer and go in to self hunt mode. This is a falconry crossroads. Has the young dog been trained well in the basic 5 commands so that when the command for sit or down is given, quarry that has flushed will not be chased or retrieved?

Verbal commands are all very well at close quarter but the fact is that the dog working cover can be virtually oblivious to the human voice and needs to have all verbal commands transferred to whistle control. This allows commands to be heard over a greater distance as well as being audible to the dog's ear.

During the early training process with young dogs it can be a good idea to reward prompt response with a small food item. This could be some of your dog's dry food which they enjoy, and can be put to good use as positive reinforcement. As your dog gets older and progresses, then your voice (as in "good dog") will be suffi-



cient stimulus to know that things are going well.

When you are confident that your young dog knows the commands then it is time to venture into the field to see whether you have control. Initially you will have. The dog is the centre of concentration and you will be close at hand to guide and give command. It is at this point that most errors are made. The next step is to go immediately in to the field with young dog and hawk in the vain attempt to get a good point, flush and slip for the hawk or falcon. A young inexperienced dog will quickly become aware that you cannot control all situations before you with dog and hawk and it will be the young dog that runs amok. In the early stages of putting the dog into the field with the hawk it would be far better if you handled your dog whilst someone else flies their hawk for a while, or

you have someone handle your dog whilst you are flying.

There are no easy fixes at this point in time and a bit of careful thought as to who is handling the dog will pay dividends a thousand times in helping to make him/her a really steady falconers dog..

Dogs that create openings for your hawk or find difficult gamebirds on open or upland terrain are worth their weight in gold. These dogs understand that they are in a partnership and they soon begin to quest and seek quarry for the falcon or hawk knowing that this is their primary role, whilst remaining obedient.

Many falconers think at the end of the day that this a tough call and they can't get to this level so accept that their dog will be pretty much doing as it likes when out with the hawk. It is to most falconers credit when they set their stall out to train their hawk or falcon and go to great lengths to get as near perfection from them when they are hawking...with just a little more care and attention to dog training in the early stages the falconers dog can be an equally amazing asset and will provide more game and opportunity, than the falconer who chooses to amble round the fields hoping to put something up for the hawk.



# Croatian Falconry Club Field Meet, Zelendvor

Melinda Terleske



My fourth trip to Croatia was at the end of October 2010 and this was to be something extra special. Not only was I visiting my dear friend Biff Norman at the Raptor Rehab Centre in Dubrava, on the outskirts of Sibenik, but we had both been invited by the Croatian Falconry Club to the north of the country to attend the well known Croatian Field Meet at Zelendvor.

I had heard much about this Field Meet during my previous trips and felt hugely honoured to be invited. Zelendvor is just about as far north in Croatia as you can go before you fall over the Hungarian border. It's relatively flat compared to the more mountainous central and southern parts of the country with arable land that is put over mostly to grazing and

corn fields. Perfect land for flying hawks at hare, rabbit and pheasant. There are large areas of forestation in which may be found deer, wolves, bears and numerous species of precious indigenous birds, mammals and wild plants.

Driving north from Dubrava, through the cavernous tunnels that have been bored through the central mountains of the Velebit Massif range, we passed wild horses. They make their way south every winter to spend the colder months where there is more shelter and food. The proud stallions are accompanied their herds of mares and young foals, nonchalantly grazing in the fields beside the road. Buzzards are everywhere, sitting on fence posts, waiting to pounce on unsuspecting rodents, reptiles and am-

phibians that make their homes in the ditches either side of the road. We saw mostly juveniles, who seem to have realised the easy pickings that can be made here. At one point there was an enormous raptor soaring - too large to be a buzzard. Apparently this is excellent eagle country! And just as in other parts of the world, kestrels sat on telegraph poles.

We met an old friend of Biff's, Dado Kontrec, just outside Cakovec who took us to his home to meet his family and gave us the most undeniably delicious North Croatian meal of pork escalope's, succulent duck and pasta. His family were delightful and all obviously very fond of his relatively newly acquired female Harris Hawk, Viktoria. Dado is also the

proud owner of a handsome six month old German Wired Haired pointer called Falko. I have never met such a well behaved and content puppy. He sat quietly on his bed while we ate and chatted and it was obvious there was already a good bond between him, Dado and Viktoria.

The Meet was to be held at a renowned shooting lodge where rights to hunt have to be purchased. The landowners are the breeders of countless thousands of pheasant and partridge that are not only sold to other parts of Croatia but are laid down to stock all the land around for the hunting pleasures of shooters and falconers alike.

Biff and I arrived in the morning to find some of the Falconers already there, weathering their hawks outside the main lodge area. Sadly, as with everywhere else in the world, recession has hit hard in Croatia and not as many falconers attended as had been anticipated and the Meet was to be for one day only rather than the whole weekend. I had hoped to see not only Broadwings and Shortwings fly but was eagerly wanting to see some Longwings hunting. Unfortunately it would appear that no long wingers were able to attend - either due to work commitments or the fact that their hawks were not long out of aviaries and considered unfit to attend this meet. One thing I did manage to establish is that there are no hybrids being flown here - the two main species being used for hunting are Sakers and Peregrines. Croatia is a country that has very strict legislation on the import/export of any animals, Raptors included. Biff had the most unbelievable red tape and restrictions to overcome for months before she could finally get her own breeding birds into Croatia from the UK several years ago.

The hawks out weathering included just one juvenile female Harris Hawk



(bred this year by Biff), a European Sparrow hawk and several Goshawks of various ages. The youngest gos present had only been in training for 2 weeks and not yet entered. It would be interesting to see how it got on.

After the customary stirrup cups and coffee, gossip and admiration of all the hawks, helping equip with telemetry and giving the dogs a chance to stretch their legs and burn off excess exuberance, we set off.

It would seem that in North Croatia, providing there isn't a fence, you can pretty much drive off road (at your own peril) wherever you like. The land in North Croatia doesn't seem to have the same landmine risk as in



*Zlatko with Intermewed Sparrowhawk*



the south where there are warning signs posted every few metres to keep you away. We drove down a partially made track and on to fields before the convoy stopped.

By now the men's hunting urge had kicked in and everyone was desperate to get going. But as this was supposed to be an organised affair, the Field Master (Viktor Segrt) declared the meet open with a small speech and then proceeded to lay down the rules of the day. Lots were cast from his cap for order of slips (all hawks were to be clipped or tied to the fist if it was not their slip) before we set off on foot, dogs eagerly ground and air scenting the land around them.

We had been walking less than 5 minutes when a shout went out from Viktor. His three year old German Shorthaired Pointer named Ori, had marked and flushed a large cock pheasant. Boy, did it go! This pheasant was certainly turbo charged as Viktor let his 2009 imprinted, imported Austrian female Gos, Marina, give

chase. We all held our breath as all the time it seemed the pheasant would escape for another day. Then quite unbelievably, Marina put on a turn of speed and clipped the cock bird sending it tumbling into the corn. She braked hard and flipped over going straight down on to it. Silence. We all waited for Viktor to get to his hawk and confirm Marina's success before a huge cheer of congratulations went out. It's not often I get to see the slip, flight and contact with quarry as the area where I hunt with my Harris Hawk in the UK is heavily wooded. If this was to be the only kill of the day, I was more than made up with what I had just seen. We estimated the distance flown from fist to kill had to be more than 300 meters. That Gos sure was fit! Viktor apparently has a 'special' fitness regime for all his hawks but wouldn't give any trade secrets away!

Having had such a promising start to the day, I was expecting much more to come. It was the turn of the Sparrow Hawk next which was eighteen month old imported imprint and belonged to Zlatko Habus. We went to an area of scrub land where it was believed we might find coveys of partridge. Zlatko also hunts with a two year old female Goshawk named Bigy and female Harris Hawk as well

as having a couple of Falcons in his collection. He had brought this little Shortwing along to the meet to give it an opportunity to fly at pheasant and more particularly the partridge. His black and white Epagneul Breton (Brittany Spaniel) worked voraciously through the short cover and it wasn't long before she was on point. We weren't sure what she had scented and on command she went in to flush. Wow - not only a large covey of partridge but also three pheasant went up vertically. The poor Spar seemed confused - initially flying at one of the flushed pheasant hens before veering off to give chase to the partridge. She flew low and fast, just managing to place a foot on the slowest of the chased birds before giving up and landing. She knew when she was beat and so the partridge escaped within a whisker (or should I say feather!) of its life. Whilst Zlatko retrieved his hawk we made tracks in the opposite direction. It was now Dragutin (Dado) Kontec's chance with his five month old Female Harris Hawk, Viktoria. She had been entered only three days before on pheasant so knew what the game was. Unfortunately she was struggling to settle down with the various dogs charging about. As I mentioned previously, Dado has a young Ger-



*Dado and Viktoria*



man Wirehaired Pointer, but the two have yet to work together in the field to understand the symbiotic relationship required for a satisfying hunting partnership. She watched the dogs working and when Viktor's dog was on point was prepared to be slipped. Unfortunately as the dog went in on the flush and pushed out a cock pheasant, Viktoria had other things on her mind and went in the opposite direction, leaving Dado a long walk to retrieve her. Never mind. We commiserated with Dado, but we have all been in a similar position and agreed that although a failure this time, it made for a good learning curve for the young hawk. The dogs continued to work tirelessly and although several more coveys of partridge and pheasant were flushed, and Gosses slipped according to turn, none made contact. We decided to break for lunch.

The chef from the Hunting lodge had prepared a delicious thick broth made with smoked sausages and beans to be eaten with freshly baked bread. There was the Croatian version of prosciutto ham, cheese and pickles along with a large tub of chocolates I had brought from the UK. Naturally, alcohol was liberally imbibed. Several of us had taken our special homebrews to be shared. Isn't it interesting how mixing beverages on a field meet never seems to give rise to intoxication?

By now, the sun was high in the sky and it was getting very warm with a strong gusty wind which was making scenting for the dogs quite hard. We had moved to another part of the area, where the ground cover was so high above our heads we could barely see the person in front of us let alone the dogs working at our feet. What birds were found flew high and over to the corn fields we had covered in the morning. We searched for more suitable ground to no avail and decided to go back to the area we had worked in the morning, hoping we had not disturbed all the quarry and might find some of those pheasant we had pushed in that direction from our aborted attempts in the high cover.

By now the dogs were tired and keeping close to heel. We saw many pheasant that somehow eluded flushing - very frustrating. Maroje Tihole was flying a three year old small male gos called Ero and working his English Setter Messi. The Setter had some good points but nothing was to be found on the command to flush. How do they manage that seemingly disappearing act? Messi was only fifteen months old and this was her first trip away from home to be worked at a field meet. Maroje lives near Dubrovnik and had come to Zelendvor for the week to have an opportunity to fly at alternative quarry from his mountain quail and to train his dog to





other scents. Although, unsuccessful at the meet, he was over the moon that his dog had shown promise and his Gos did get a couple of opportunities to fly at the larger quarry of pheasant, making contact on one occasion and bringing a cock bird to ground but failing to hang on. Maroje found him in almost impenetrable brambles, looking very disgruntled with a clenched foot of pheasant feathers.

We had started to make our way back to the cars when suddenly a pheasant broke cover. Now was the chance for the juvenile Goshawk. As I mentioned before this had only been in training with Nino Dukic for two weeks and it was being flown by Bous Bezaog this day. It was quickly slipped and I have to be honest, didn't think it stood any chance of catching up with its quarry. Where it got its turn of speed from God knows, but from being well over 200 metres behind it caught up with this pheasant, grabbing it after a further hundred or more metres flight and taking it to ground. Out of nowhere, as we all ran to catch up with it, a wild Gos came in and harried it off its quarry. The wild Gos took off as we made in but by now the juvenile had taken cover in the dense corn crop. Thank goodness for telemetry. Viktor handed me his beautiful Marina to assist in tracking. I was so made up. Having

never held a Goshawk before and being honoured to be asked to hold his beloved bird made me feel so privileged. Eventually the juvenile was found and with having had a close call with nature, the end of the day was called. And, we had a second bird in the bag as well! That young juvenile is going to be one hell of a fine Gos as it gets older.

The light was beginning to fail as the sun slipped over the horizon. Biff and I needed to go back to our hotel to change for the evening and we agreed to meet up with the guys at the Lodge House for seven.

There are few legible road signs to be found out in the rural areas of Croatia and Biff's Sat Nav is not to be trusted as we soon found out when we tried to make our way back to the Lodge. Naturally, we were late having got seriously lost in the middle

of a corn field and I'm sorry to say I missed the award ceremony of prizes and cup giving. The tables were adorned with cups of achievement for almost anything by the time we arrived! Viktor had gathered a large collection from being awarded the Best flight of the day to last prize for the most obedient dog in the field! Nobody was forgotten. Even Biff and I were given commemorative medals for attending, which was both very kind and touching. We were also honoured to be awarded honorary membership of the Croatian Falconry Club and Dado donated his unique fleece jacket to me for coming all the way from England to attend for the day.


Croatia anticipates becoming a member of the European Community by 2012 and this should ease the pressures and difficulties of importing hawks to enable dedicated falconers the opportunity to participate in captive breeding programmes. It will also mean that people like myself will be able to attend these wonderful field meets with our own hawks and so extend the true friendship that exists between all of us and our love of our sport. I would strongly encourage anyone to attend a field meet in Croatia when invited. The generous hospitality and kindness shown to both Biff and myself was overwhelming and I hope that one day I will be able to reciprocate that to my new found Croatian friends.



# KAI, Hawking in Britain with a Red Tail by Tim Borrill


Published by Pembertons Publishing £17 245 pages

**KAI**



Tim Borrill

*'not just a great book on falconry - it's a great book'*  
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Each year the number of falconry and falconry related books released onto the market seems to grow ever larger. The vast majority of these books tend to be of the "how to do it" variety and they range in content and information from the extremely good to the absolutely abysmal. In fact the last such book I was sent to review I had to decline as it had so many mistakes and inaccuracies in it as to make it dangerous to the beginner as opposed to helpful. In fact one recommendation in the book was deemed borderline illegal by two police wildlife liaison officers. The fact that such a book could have ever got to actually be in print still baffles me.

Having been sent a copy of Kai to read and review I must admit to opening the pages with a serious sense of trepidation. However, what I considered was going to be somewhat of a chore within minutes turned out to be a real and very genuine pleasure. This is not a "how to do it" book but rather one that deals with one falconer and his enjoyment and experience of flying one particular species of hawk, brought to the reader through his relationship with the aforementioned Kai. Before getting on to the meat

and drink of the book, the manning, training and then hunting with Kai the author shares with us to his thoughts on general falconry matters. The art of falconry, falconer or austringer, furniture, quarry, parabuteo or buteo are all discussed in a lucid style and never profess to be anything other than the author's own opinion. What a refreshing change it is though not just to be reading a re-hash of what has gone before several hundred times.

Then we do move on to the heart of the matter, Kai herself. Manning and training will bring back memories to most of us that have ever trained a hawk and for those that haven't it will prove a fascinating insight, probably more to the mind of the falconer than the hawk. Hawking follows and the descriptions of actual flights are a sheer joy to read. The written word conveys vivid pictures to the mind and you feel yourself willing the hawk on in places, such is the quality of the writing.

Tim Borrill is constantly aware of what his hawk, dog and quarry are up to and the symbiotic relationship they enjoy, but more importantly he conveys this interaction clearly to the reader. There are moments when perhaps some of the passages regarding the probably thought process of Kai and his hawking companion, Harris the Spaniel, seemed on the verge of fanciful. For those that have hawked longer than we probably care to remember then these passages bring out involuntary nods of the head and an inward smile. Although not a falconry manual the book does have a great many prized nuggets of information for those that care to absorb what is laid out before them. No falconer ever stops learning nor should they ever not be prepared to take advantage of lessons learnt the hard way by others.

I would whole heartedly recommend this book to one and all interested in country sports of any description. For those that fly falcons I would say don't turn away from this book because it focuses on a Red Tailed Hawk, that would be a mistake. There is pleasure and knowledge to be gained from this book for all those that fly hawks, no matter what the species.

Finally the author writes in a style that I personally find very similar to that of Ronald Stevens, which in my mind, is just about the highest praise I personally would attribute to another author.



# Saints or Sinners, Heroes or Villains

Tiercel



Falconry has undergone something of an explosion in popularity over the last two or three decades with what, at times, seems like the world and his wife wanting to fly or at least own hawks. The businesses related to the sport used to be almost cottage industry in both its scale and level of professionalism. Those days have long since passed however and the proliferation of raptor related businesses and services has to be seen to be believed. The very fact that there is the very real need for the IBR directory merely serves to underline this fact. Hawks themselves have never been easier to obtain and as a result there are many that would say that this is very far from a good thing.

As someone who has been involved with falconry for a considerable time let me just briefly set down how

things were for an aspiring falconer some forty years ago. For my example I shall be using the circumstances as they pertained to Britain in the nineteen sixties. The public exposure of falconry was absolutely minimal with the annual CLA Game Fair being its only real outing. The British Falconers Club would organise a weathering and flying display on a relatively small scale and, as would be expected, their demonstration revolved around the sport of falconry as opposed to bird of prey flying displays loaded with tricks and gimmicks. Any would be falconer may well have been fired up by seeing hawks on a weathering and then being flown in the main arena but any subsequent enquiry would have their enthusiasm, quite rightly, tempered with a degree of realisation when it was explained just what was required to train and fly a hawk.

Unlike now there was only the one Falconry Centre, opened by Phillip Glasier in Newent, Gloucestershire. It was very much a Falconry Centre as opposed to a bird of prey collection and despite being run on commercial lines as a business that needed to make money to survive, Falconry was the very heartbeat of the place. Nowadays Falconry centres are ten a penny and it would appear that no

self respecting Garden Centre would be without one, no matter how woefully inadequate or poorly run some of them undoubtedly are. Hawks themselves were far from easy to obtain and there were always more would be purchasers than there were hawks on the market. Those that were available tended to be eyass and passage Goshawks from Germany and the Nordic countries and falcons, nearly all of which were passagers, came from India, Asia and North Africa. Peregrines were very thin on the ground and Gyrs almost unknown to the average falconer. In fact I remember turning up at a small falconry meet with a grey Gyr and being told, not asked but told, that I had a decent sized Saker Falcon. When I said it was a Gyr the remark was treated with derision as, apparently, no one had Gyrs except the very rich.

Equipment could be brought from a number of very limited sources but a great deal of it was exceptionally poor quality and very hit and miss when it came to fit and reliability. Apart from swivels which tended to be purchased from deep sea fishing sources and adapted scales of some description or another most equip-



*Lanner Falcon*

ment, out of necessity was made by the falconers themselves. For those wishing to learn about the sport and perhaps get a hawk themselves there were basically three options. The most straightforward on paper, but somewhat more difficult in actuality, was to find a falconer and see if they would mind schooling a new comer. Problem was that because the sport itself was so very limited in numbers at the time finding a falconer in itself was difficult enough. The second was to go to the only person running any form of courses what so ever and that was Philip Glasier at his centre in Newent. The third option and obviously the least desirable meant getting a book and learning as you went along. Problem was that any mistakes you made you tended to jeopardise the safety of the hawk as a result.

Because most of the hawks that came onto the market had to be imported they tended to often be in very poor feather and had undoubtedly undergone a great deal of stress. No

hawk trapper in India is going to send, for example, a freshly caught passage Saker Falcon over immediately it is caught. He will seal its eyes and send it over when he has eventually caught several more to send with it and thereby make the whole transaction for him a very satisfactory one. In the worst case scenarios the hawk the falconer here ended up with may well have been in captivity, without being manned in anyway, for up to a month. Bearing in mind we are talking about passage falcons here which when compared to eyasses are highly strung and very prone to stress related illnesses unless handled with the utmost care. Not the sort of start any falconer would ever want to subject his hawk to, but such were the times that it tended to be this or nothing. Having finally obtained a hawk of some description it was now time to progress and train it. For the already experienced falconer a passage hawk or falcon was not a particularly daunting task but never the less a task to be handled with care and a light touch if the best was to be obtained from his or her charge. Eyass hawks were by their very nature, a great deal easier to train and get entered. For the complete novice, who stood alone without a mentor, then to train a passage hawk and

end up with a worthwhile hunting companion was a very daunting task.

It really is no wonder that so many hawks and falcons were lost in the relatively early days of actual hawking. Not only were inexperienced falconers flying passage hawks which had spent several months successfully hunting for themselves but they were flying them without the aid of telemetry. Just think how often in your own falconry career, flying domestically produced falcons or hawks, have you blessed the fact that you hawk was fitted with a transmitter.

The other major factor that played a part in falconry at the time was that a great many falconers were more or less reduced to flying what they could get in terms of a hawk, falcon or eagle. By this I mean if access to land, quarry and time suggested that these circumstances combined to make partridge hawking with a tiercel the obvious way ahead this just might not be possible due to the difficulty in obtaining a tiercel. Plans may well have to have been adjusted and a passage lanner Falcon of Sakret substituted for not to be found tiercel. What I refer to as quality hawks were thin on the ground. Lanners, Lug-



*Peregrine Falcon*



*Red Headed Merlin*

gers, Sakers, Red Headed Merlins, Goshawks and Indian Shikra hawks were the mainstay of falconry with the few Peregrines, Merlins and passage Sparrowhawks that were available being snapped up almost instantly. This is one of the reasons why if you look at one or two falconry works from the late nineteen sixties early nineteen seventies you see falconers with some weird and wonderful variations on the raptor theme. Imperial, Steppes and Tawny Eagles were available when Golden Eagles were practically impossible to obtain. Even Hawk Eagles were relatively easy to obtain back then, at least Changeable Hawk Eagles certainly were. Whether they entirely suitable for the person that ended up with them was another matter.

Then four things happened in the falconry world which, certainly here in

Europe, changed its face forever. There are very strong arguments for and against two of these changes as to whether they are beneficial at all in the long run, but for two of the changes they are universally welcome and have done much to enhance modern falconry and certainly contribute to ensuring its future. The two changes that I don't think anybody would argue are nothing but good are introduction and refinement of practical telemetry systems and the domestic propagation of raptors. If we take telemetry first what self respecting falconer would fly his hawks or falcons without employing a system of some description or another? There are several systems on the market and all have their avid fans and, in certain cases, their equally avid detractors. But almost everybody uses a system of some sort or another; it would be madness not to. If we look back at the systems that were available some thirty to thirty five years ago we think them relatively crude and certainly quite cumbersome. However for those of us who went from no means of tracking a hawk or falcon to one of these systems they were worth their weight in gold and very highly prized. Nowadays both receivers and transmitters have become ever smaller, lighter, more robust, practical and above all else reliable. Generally speaking if you get a hawk back once by the use of telemetry then the set has paid for itself.

Now we move on to the two changes to modern falconry that have their admirers and detractors with very few falconers seeming to take the middle path on either thing. What two things can possibly be the cause of so much consternation, heated debate and general strife in the world of falconry? What else could it be other than Harris Hawks and Hybrid Falcons.

**To be continued**



*Saker Falcon*

# Passage Falcons (continued)

Bob Dalton

With extremely limited numbers of Passage Falcons being taken under licence once again in The States for the purposes of falconry, a whole raft of interest has surfaced amongst falconers new and old regarding them. Up until approximately forty years or so then certainly the flying of a passage falcon, as opposed to an eyass, would have been a far more likely prospect for a European falconer. With the dramatic drop in wild populations of raptors across the globe then sensibly legislation came in to severely restrict access to wild populations and the focus, certainly for the majority of the falconry community across the globe, shifted to the domestic production of raptors. As methods and techniques became honed and success was gradually brought about the legislative powers decided that in many countries falconry could be self sustaining in terms of its supply of hawks for sport. Therefore the passage falcon gradually became something modern falconers tended to read about as opposed to something they actually handled and flew.

Just to make things perfectly clear lets firstly deal with exactly what is a passage falcon? Just as older falconers and falconry works bestow the name falcon in its unexpanded state purely to the Peregrine Falcon then the same is true of passage falcons. The passenger is only the Peregrine Falcon taken on its first passage, that is its first migration. So any conversation referring to a passage falcon automatically refers to the female peregrine, any other species needs to be quantified for clarity, ie passage Saker Falcon, passage Gyr Falcon.



*Passage Tundra Peregrine on the beach*

Passage falcons had always been held in very high esteem by falconers throughout the world and in European falconry of the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth century they were considered the essential basic material for quality sport. As is very well documented elsewhere a whole community in Holland more or less revolved around the trapping and in some cases the training of passage falcons. Don't for one minute think that this trade helped the community to muddle through by providing an additional income. The revenue brought into the community

from falconry and its related trades made the community itself one of the healthiest, in financial terms, in the whole of Northern Europe. I am of course referring to Valkenswaard, the small town that is close to Eindhoven in the Brabant region of Holland.

Whenever Valkenswaard is mentioned the Mollen family name springs to mind. For several generations this family was at the forefront in the trapping of passage falcons, making falconry equipment and supplying falconers to the royal courts when required. But several other families

*Intermewed Passage Tundra Peregrine on the first, Mexico*



from Valkenswaard were equally active in the same field with the Pells and the Botts being principal amongst them. What finally killed off Valkenswaard and its reliance on falconry was the Great War of 1914 to 1918. Although it would be fair to say trade related to falconry had been in decline for quite a number of years. As large hawking establishments closed and royal courts sought their sport in other directions falconry waned somewhat in its popularity and accordingly the demand for passage falcons in absolutely perfect condition declined. In fact for the last few years of its direct association with falconry it was The Old Hawking Club that kept the trade alive with its annual order of eight or so passage falcons plus the occasional tiercel and another three or four falcons ordered on behalf of private gentlemen.

How the falcons were actually trapped at Valkenswaard was indeed a very complicated and drawn out process and has been described adequately in many books over the years. But for those with an interest in the method and the history surrounding the connection between Valkenswaard and European falconry then I would suggest you pay a visit to the museum of culture in

Valkenswaard which will more than repay the effort involved. It is a simply fascinating place to any falconer and filled with relics and artefacts relating to the various families that took part in the trade and also falconry equipment from a bygone era.

As was stated many of the falcons taken at Valkenswaard were delivered into the hands of the Old Hawking Club and its club falconer of the time. Many of these passage hawks went on to become quite famous on their own merit, falcons such as Sultan, De Ruyter, Bull Dog, Elsa and many others. Sultan and De Ruyter were originally taken for The Loo Hawking Club but quite quickly

passed into the possession of Mr. Edward Newcombe of Feltwell Norfolk, one of the most gifted falconers of the nineteenth century. He flew these two passage falcons in a cast and was very successful with them at the exceedingly demanding flight at Heron. In fact in eighteen forty-three this cast took fifty-four Herons and in the following year took fifty-seven Herons. Before the start of each Heron hawking season the two falcons would be flown separately at rooks to get them fit. Unfortunately the cast was eventually broken up when De Ruyter was lost flying rooks at Feltwell.

Another passage falcon taken in the nets at Valkenswaard in eighteen forty-three was Bulldog an exceptional falcon that flew Herons on her own and was noted for rarely taking more than three stoops to bring any Heron to the ground.

Elsa was a passage falcon that came into the hands of The Old Hawking Club and was entered to rooks in eighteen eighty-six and killed the highest score that season and for the next two when compared to any other hawk in the team. She was also entered to and flown at grouse in the autumn as was eventually lost flying them in Caithness in eighteen ninety-one.

*Bob Dalton with Intermewed Passage Tiercel Anatom, Mexico*



Modern falconers have also flown passage falcons and shown tremendous sport with them. Two passage falcons that would probably spring to the mind of many falconers would be The Pro, flown by Britain's Geoffrey Pollard and Godzilla flown by Martin Guzman in Mexico. The Pro was originally taken in Pakistan and through the offices of Jeffrey Anderson was flown to Britain in nineteen sixty as a present for Mike Woodford. At the time Mike didn't have the right facilities to fly the falcon concerned and passed her onto Geoffrey Pollard. In the hands of this highly accomplished falconer The Pro went on to become an excellent grouse hawk and took one hundred and forty one grouse over the next six seasons. Unfortunately she was eventually lost up on the moors of Caithness in nineteen sixty-six.

Godzilla was a passage anatum Peregrine taken in the region of Aguascalientes, Mexico. She was entered to duck and spent the next twelve seasons single handedly trying to eradicate the migrating duck popula-

tion that over wintered in Central Mexico. I have had the privilege of seeing this falcon fly many times over several seasons and on almost a daily basis have seen her knock down two ducks out of a single flush. She would knock one to the ground stone dead with the initial stoop and then throw up, wheel over and either knock down or bind to a second duck. On more than one occasion I have seen her take three ducks out of a single flush. She will knock down two in the manner already mentioned and then if any ducks try and return to the body of water they were flushed from she will throw up for a second time and stoop again as a raft of ducks heads back for the water. She is happy taking all species of duck which will range from the smaller Cinnamon and Blue winged Teal through to large and challenging Pintails and Mexican Corn ducks.

Being flown over stock ponds on cattle ranches in the heat of the Mexican sun Godzilla would reach incredible heights when waiting on. Although she would pump up to get

into position she would also use the thermals to her advantage and frequently speck out to the naked eye. However in her thirteenth season a characteristic within Godzilla suddenly changed and she started to fly at check. Not occasionally but quite literally every time she was flown. She would leave the fist and start to mount nicely over the pond and then all of a sudden put in a long shallow stoop and would eventually be picked up a mile or two away on a crow or raven. To try and combat this, the ducks were flushed earlier and earlier in an attempt to re-focus her on them, but this strategy was to no avail. Accordingly one day when she had been tracked down on yet another raven she had her telemetry and anklets removed as she filled her crop and was left to finish her meal and then go her own way.

To train a passage falcon takes a different path and mind set to that required to train an eyass. In a future edition of the magazine we will go into the training of a passage falcon in detail.



*Sultan stuffed at the museum in Valkenswaard*



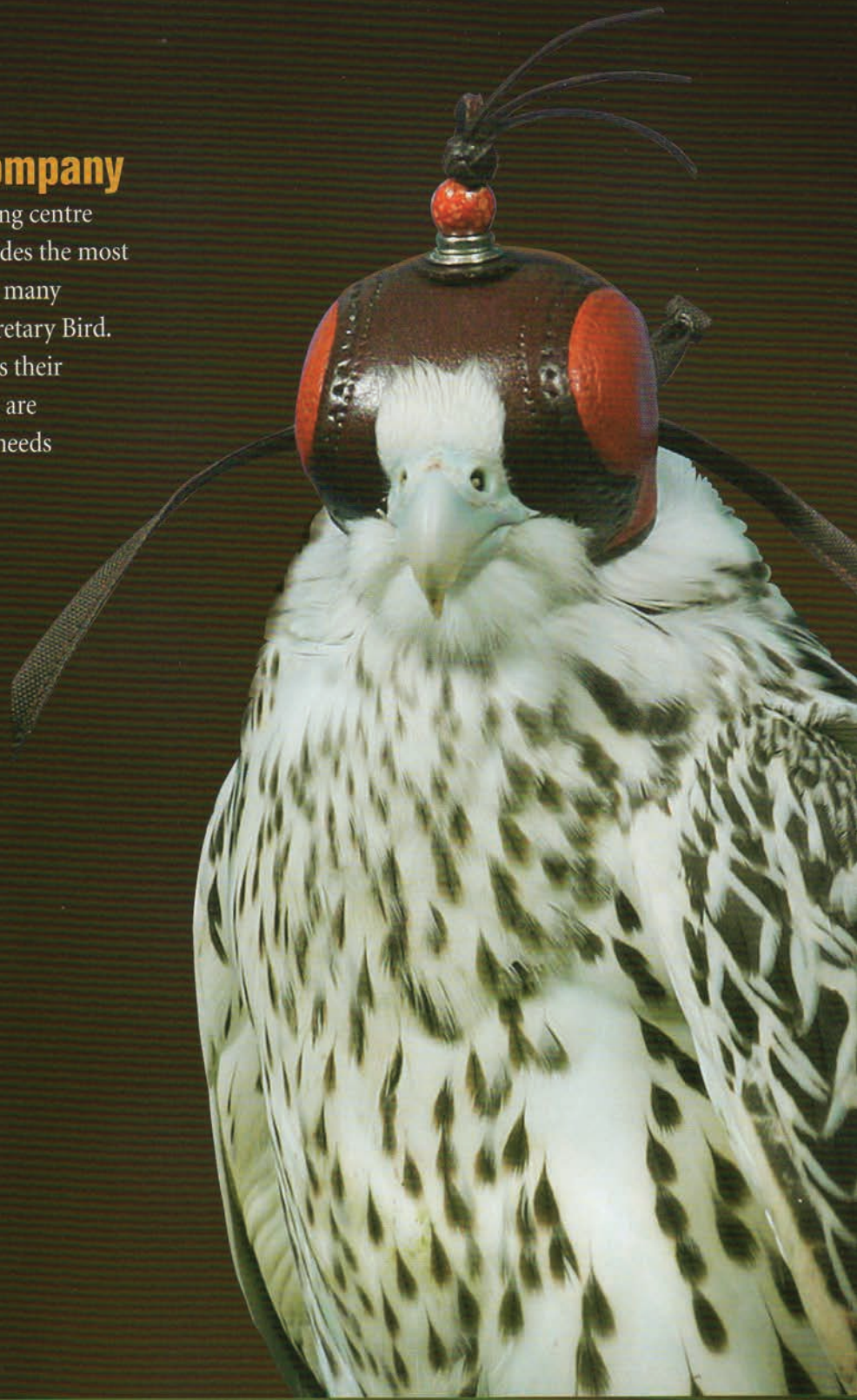
*Black Prince Jerkin stuffed at the museum in Valkenswaard*

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