

INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

ISSUE 20 - 2004

Feed the passion

INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

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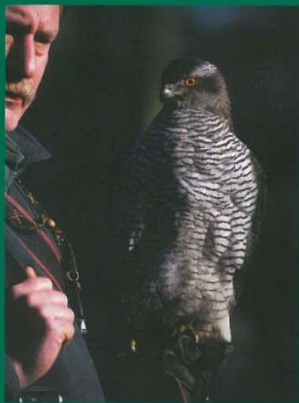
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Cover photo: Goshawk
by Seth Anthony

EDITORIAL

Apologies for the delay in getting this issue out – it was always going to be difficult with the huge upheaval of the move to Wales. I've also got a pile of back-logged emails to work through – again apologies if you're still awaiting reply but I will get there in the end!

The move itself was an experience to say the least and we never intend to do it again with that amount of livestock – truly horrendous! A big thanks must go to two mates Dave Jackson and Warren Earp for helping with boxing-up, transporting hawks and the usual last minute panic of loading the removal van. Dave had a particularly interesting moment involving 16 hawk boxes and a very stropy jerkin on the final roundabout at Carmarthen but handled the situation superbly and thankfully everything arrived safely – though I think it may have put him off gyrs for life!

I'm delighted to welcome on-board Donna Vorce as our new representative for North America. Details for contacting Donna can be found in the news section on page 5 and we're hoping that she can make it over to this year's Falconry and Raptor Fair. Incidentally, this year we'll be on the other side of the arena to link up with Hunting Falcons International's initiative for overseas visitors, details of which can be found on page 6 of the news section.

Finally, this past week or so in the UK has been extremely active on the political front with regard to restrictions on gyrfalcons imported from the USA. We've covered the whole situation as best we can in the news section up until going to press but this will be an on-going story with potentially very worrying implications. This has been a classic case of hawk keepers needing to be right on top of things politically. But for the urgent work done by members of the UK Hawk Board and a number of breeders, peoples' very livelihoods this breeding season would have been under severe threat – and all as a result of a stupid bit of bureaucracy supposedly aiding conservation.

Enjoy the issue

Seth

IMPORTANT - NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

The Editor wishes to point out that *International Falconer* features articles from across the world which inevitably include a variety of management, training and hunting methods. Some practices in one country/state may not be legal in another. It is the responsibility of the falconer to know and strictly adhere to the laws and regulations relevant to the area(s) he/she lives and hawks in. For the good of the sport NEVER do anything that you are not entirely sure is legal.

International Falconer welcomes contributions for articles both written and photographic. Please send for a copy of our Writer's and Photographer's Guidelines before sending material.

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CONTENTS

4 News

8 CITES – setting the record straight?

Is the organisation implemented to control and monitor the trade in endangered species doing its job effectively? *Nick Kester* investigates its role in tracking birds of prey and discovers a worrying trail of inaccurate record keeping.

12 Falconry in Japan

Nick Kester travels to Japan and discovers that despite enormous difficulties, successful hawking is still practised by a dedicated core of falconers.

20 Bog hawking

The cranberry-growing bogs of Massachusetts offer the austringer some exceptional duck hawking as *Darryl Perkins* explains.

26 Disappearing quarry

Continuing the series highlighting the decline of traditional falconry quarries. *Nick Kester* looks at the quarry so important to Arab culture – the houbara bustard.

32 Hare tigers of China

Alan Gates continues his Asian travels and experiences some lively hawking on the vast agricultural plains of Central China.

40 The best hunting partner a man could ever have

David T. Moran continues his adventures of a lifetime with a white female gyrfalcon called Jaws.

44 Falconers' dogs – the pointer

50 Book review

The Sinews of Falconry – Reviewed by *Gordon Mellor*



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North American subscribers and advertisers please note details of our new North American representative on page 5.



OUTRAGED UK BREEDERS HEAD-TO-HEAD WITH DEFRA OVER RESTRICTION ON USA GYRFALCON IMPORTS

UK falcon breeders were up in arms with their government representatives as this magazine went to press. They were demanding an immediate meeting to resolve a problem that they say is not of their making, on which they were not consulted, and which impacts the livelihoods of all. The dispute concerns the import of gyrfalcons from the USA and CITES restrictions imposed which state that the imported birds may only be used **“for breeding and educational display purposes aimed at the conservation of the species”**. The UK government agency, DEFRA now intends to interpret this as an effective ban on the specimen being used to breed hybrids. And as this is subsequent to COTES, the EU implementation of CITES, the ban is pan-European and thus impacts on breeders in many other countries.

Our research has discovered that in the UK this contentious wording seems to have been applied only to birds imported post 1999, but we can also reveal that it has been largely overlooked by the authorities until this breeding season. We know this

because one breeder – the editor of this magazine – produced hybrids in 2003 from a similarly restricted jerkin, and obtained subsequent registration and export papers for its progeny.

Dr Nick Fox of the UK's Hawk Board has examined the export, import, registration (Article 10 certificate) and progeny export papers for a number of gyrs imported into the UK since 1999 and has found alarming inconsistency in the wording of all documents. He says in an open letter to John Hounslow, DEFRA's head of global wildlife, that many of the definitions are either contradictory, poorly worded, or just plain incorrect. Many birds, such as those from premier breeder Dan Konkel, are certificated captive-bred for many generations yet in some cases the paperwork fails to acknowledge this fact. In another case, birds were imported for commercial use despite a second section of the same form declaring them being bred for non-commercial purposes. Gyrs imported from Canada were the subject of none of these restrictions for reasons that are,

as yet, unexplained.

Breeders take issue with the restriction when, says one, these birds are captive-bred from captive-bred stock having no impact on the wild status whatsoever. As Nick Fox points out, these birds are not part of a breed-and-release scheme so whatever happens to the progeny will never have any influence on the status of wild gyrs, especially in the UK where the species is not even resident.

And, as Fox quite bluntly states, any hybrid falcons that might be bred in Europe during 2004 from imports with this restriction will be in limbo. (Always assuming that all of Europe applies this legislation equally, as they should, but which cynics might doubt.) These birds will not be allowed registration and therefore cannot be sold. The only solution will be to kill them. Then where will the finger point? When you are a small falcon breeder who has invested several thousand dollars on a proven semen producing jerkin, often by means of a loan, you do not take such an attack on the chin. No wonder so many are preparing to descend onto the UK government offices to make their case but there is also a knock-on effect on breeders in the USA who may well find their lucrative European market severely reduced as a consequence.

Nick Kester

STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS

Following demands for an urgent meeting by a core of affected breeders, DEFRA and their scientific advisors agreed to discuss the above issue at the government offices on Thursday 4th March, 2004. At the eleventh hour of this magazine going to press, the day before the proposed meeting, we received notice of the following email statement by DEFRA to affected breeders:

3rd March 2004

Following legal advice this morning, DEFRA has agreed the following:

In the short term, DEFRA will **not** take the position that birds with an F source code and a condition allowing only “breeding for purposes aimed at the conservation of the species” means that hybrids cannot be produced.

This means that breeders can breed as planned during the 2004 breeding season and that subsequent Article 10 applications for hybrid offspring will be considered on a case-by-case basis, as would any other application.

In the longer term, DEFRA will develop a policy in conjunction with the UK CITES Scientific Authority (JNCC) and departmental lawyers and consult fully with all interested parties before implementing any changes.

With regard to the US CITES Management Authority's policy on attributing the F source code, our advice is as follows. The EC CITES Scientific Review Group (which is the appropriate body to take the issue forward) has raised this with their US counterparts many times but has been unable to obtain any concessions from them.

The US has made it clear that appeals from the EC will not force or persuade a change in policy.

GERMANY TO BAN HYBRIDS

Draft legislation is being placed in front of the German parliament to ban the breeding, keeping and flying of hybrid falcons. But there is still no certainty that it will be enacted said Walter Bednarek of the German falconry club, the DFO, which is actively promoting the ban. They hope to see it in place by 2005.

The German population of native peregrines has never fully recovered since the 1950s and 60s, and currently stands at about 650 pairs. This does not compare favourably with the UK, which has over 1,400 pairs – well over pre-pesticide levels. With four recorded incidents of hybrid falcons breeding with native pairs, there has been pressure by conservationists and some falconers to prevent any pollution of the remaining gene pool. The issue was worsened by the knowledge that the hybrids were lost or hacked falconry birds.

Bednarek makes the point that whilst hybrid tiercels will breed with wild peregrines there is just as much damage done by hybrid falcons dominating prospective territories and preventing repopulation by pure species.

The law as drafted gives falconers, and especially breeders, some ten years to change their breeding programmes, although it makes a ban on wild hacking immediate. However, the level of trade with countries such as the Middle East, where hybrids are almost essential, makes any cessation of such breeding programmes highly unlikely. Current reports have it that German breeders will move, either into eastern Europe or to Spain, and will utilise the ten year period to re-establish themselves accordingly. They have a reputation for wild-hacked birds, something they are unlikely to give up without a fight. In the meantime, the German government is in something of a

dilemma. On the one hand it is under severe pressure from conservationists to enact the ban; on the other they find themselves at odds with basic civil liberty laws restricting government from preventing individuals conducting legitimate businesses. German breeders are a powerful commercial lobby and have been making their presence felt.

EU ARTICLE 10 CERTIFICATES NULL AND VOID FOR SMUGGLED HAWKS

In 2001 two Germans were successfully prosecuted for laundering red kites, goshawks, peregrines and a golden eagle. These birds were given false papers and some were sold abroad to unsuspecting buyers.

A failure in the legislation that governs European wildlife law (COTES) has now rendered the buyers' Article 10 certificates, essential if the birds are to be bred from, sold or moved, have been rendered null and void. Thus no further A10s can be issued for any offspring, further frustrating the owners.

Roy Pitt from the UK government's Global Wildlife Enforcement Team said that because COTES failed to spot the potential problem of laundered birds they have no powers to seize or confiscate the birds. If they had, then on return to the innocent owners, new A10s could have been issued. In the meantime the hawks remain in commercial limbo.

A review of COTES is currently underway in the UK and this will be one of the subjects under discussion and one option is to establish whether A10s may be issued for offspring of the laundered hawks.



INTERNATIONAL FALCONER NORTH AMERICAN REPRESENTATIVE

All North American subscribers and advertisers now have the option of liaising directly with our new Representative for this region, Donna Vorce.

Born in California, USA, Donna first got involved with falconry in 1994 by accompanying falconers from this region on hawking excursions. Observing their techniques and skills for several years laid down a solid foundation on which to build once she was in a position to take on a hawk of her own. A move to Nebraska in 1997 enabled Donna to take the plunge and since becoming licensed in that same year she has been flying hawks ever since including three red-tails and a Harris' hawk. From 1998 onwards Donna has been the secretary of the Nebraska Falconers' Association and very much enjoys the get-togethers and camaraderie of both her own state club and NAFA but most hunting time is just spent alone with hawk, and says Donna "That's the greatest".

CONTACT DETAILS:

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Simonelli reports from

HYBRID FALCONS IN ITALY

Italy is historically the land of the peregrine and the goshawk, with purists finding little to better the stoop of an Italian peregrine. But time changes, and hybrid falcons, especially the female gyr/peregrine female, have, over the last six years, increased in popularity to the point where only a handful of very 'classic' longwings fly pure peregrines.

The reason for the change is, as everywhere, a growing realisation that hybrids mount fast and high with the very best showing strong gyr tendencies by going straight up like an 'elevator'. In the 2nd Italian Championship of Falconry, among longwings, the first three rankings went to gyr/peregrines.

The Italian national hunting law generally allows the use of 'hawks' without specification. However, two regions have refined this. In Lombardia and Lazio only indigenous hawks may be flown effectively banning hybrids, whilst in Sardegna and Trentino Alto-Adige falconry is totally banned. Generally, there seems to be no focus on the issue of hybrids other than the examples given.

Ron Hartley reports from
Zimbabwe

The political and economic situation is weighing on falconry and of the 23 graded falconers on the register 15 will hunt hawks this season. New hawks have been taken up by several falconers countrywide. In Mashonaland (around Harare) two eyas black sparrowhawks were rescued when their nest tree was about to be chopped down in a commercial timber area. Craig Mirams will continue to run the Peterhouse Falconry Club. Student Luke Lamb has taken up a post at Nick Fox's facility.

At Falcon College we were honoured with a visit by Michael Woodford who had just attended the World Parks Conference in Durban, South Africa. He was being hosted by local falconer and wildlife expert Richard Peek and his wife Bookie. Four students are about to hunt three African goshawks and one black sparrowhawk.

The most significant news of this period was the passing of John Hough in January. John was a pioneer falconer in this country and flew a sore hawk black sparrowhawk and lanner in the late 1940s. He came to this country in 1947 from the UK as a member of the RAF. He flew Spitfires, but his greatest love was raptors, especially the black sparrowhawk. He observed and filmed raptors for 57 years and he was still able to get into his hides at the age of 79 years, some at a height of 70ft above ground in huge eucalyptus trees. Needless to say he was one of the most experienced raptor experts on the continent.

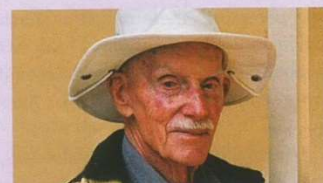
EUROPE BANS ALL IMPORTS OF BIRDS FROM USA

Following an outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in Gonzales County, Texas, USA, the European Commission has issued a blanket import ban on, amongst other items, all USA originated live birds and eggs including raptors. This ban is subject to review in early March (after this magazine went to press) when it might be redefined to Texas state only. However, an official of the UK's animal health agency, DEFRA, warned that should the outbreak spread then the ban will be restated and could last up to six months. Further information can be found on http://www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/int-trde/misc/cins/cin_index.htm where all such movement restriction orders are filed.

NEW MEETING POINT FOR OVERSEAS VISITORS AT FALCONRY FAIR

Nick Fox's Hunting Falcons International stand at the 2004 British Falconry and Raptor Fair, hopes to have a new dimension this year. Overseas visitors will find a place to meet, to sit and talk, and to plan what next to see. This international area is a first at the Falconry Fair and was the result of Fox's recent trip to meet falconers in Japan. "I have travelled all over the world and met many falconers who have all shown me much kindness," said Fox. "But I am painfully aware that when these falconers take the time to come to the UK, especially to the premier falconry gathering in Europe, they have no focal point, so I thought I would provide one – with a Japanese falconry theme."

The *International Falconer* stand will be alongside the Hunting Falcons International stand so that its overseas readers and visitors will not have to move far between the two.



FRANK BEEBE'S 90th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

A celebration of Frank's 90th birthday (May 25th) will be held on May 29th, 2004 at Rathrevor Beach and Campground in Parksville, British Columbia, Canada. All family and friends are invited to the occasion. Please RSVP by May 10th, 2004, to either:

Klara Beebe at 2875 Matthew Road, Nanoose Bay, BC V9P 9B2 Canada. Tel: (250) 468-5320, or by email to Jasmin Van Pelt: Jasmin.Vanpelt@gems7.gov.bc.ca for further information or confirmation of attendance.

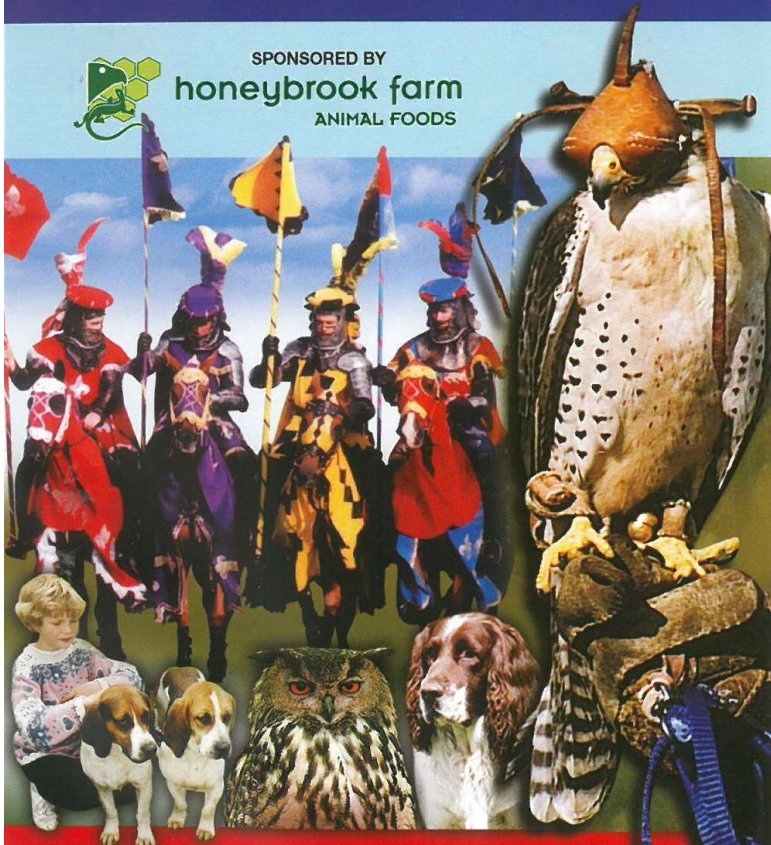
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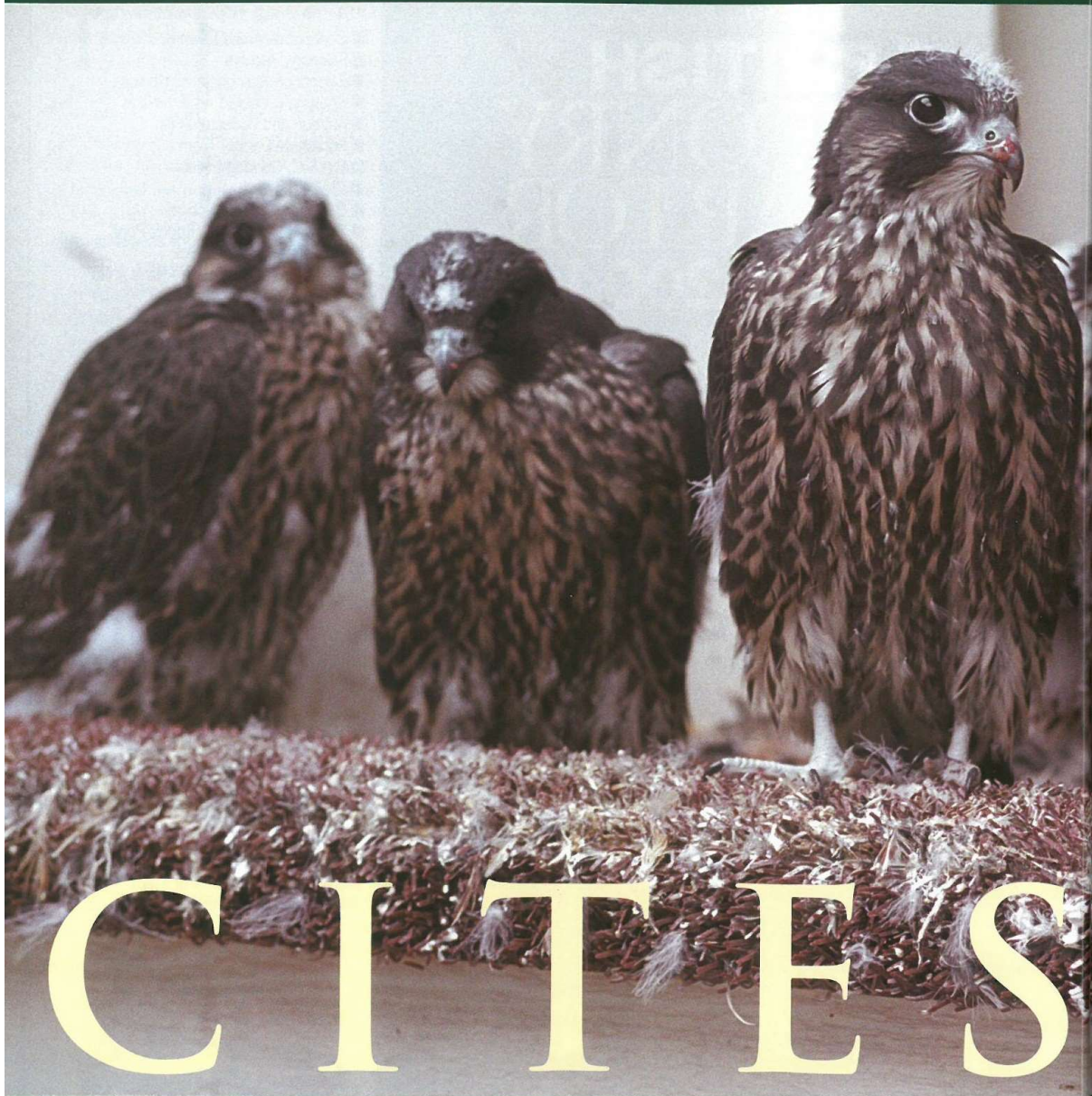
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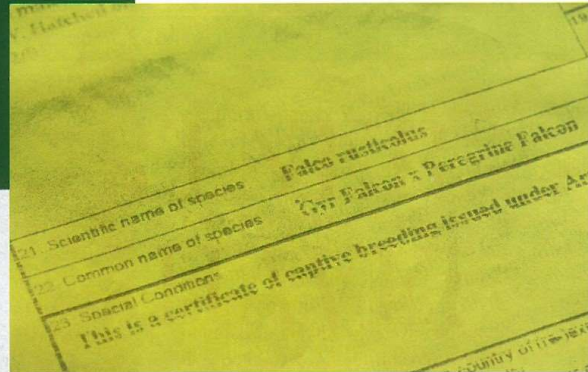


CITES

SETTING THE RECORD

(below) A crop of young gyr/peregrine hybrids destined for the Middle East but their scientific name is recorded by CITES on the export papers (right) as *Falco rusticolus* (pure gyrfalcon) even though the breeder applied for *Falco rusticolus* x *Falco peregrinus*.

Photos: Seth Anthony



Falconry can often be divided into two elements. On the one hand there is the jobbing falconer: one or two birds for hunting, to be replaced when loss or death occurs. Then there is the man to whom he turns for that replacement: the breeder or trapper. Sure they overlap. Breeders produce for their own sporting needs, falconers trap for themselves and others. But by and large they enjoy a mutually discrete co-existence.

All falconers know of the protection afforded to the global populations of birds of prey by way of the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES): they usually have the paperwork as evidence. But few are aware of the scale of the trade in hawks and falcons, the species traded whether captive-bred or wild-taken, and the principal exporting and importing countries. In all this the CITES secretariat in each signatory country is the record keeper, returning data to a central register for analysis. This data demands detailed examination – warts and all.

Records covering the period 1975 to 2001 are available from UNEP-WCMC (United Nations Environment Programme – World Conservation Monitoring Centre) in Cambridge, United Kingdom. Data for 2002 onwards is currently incomplete and has been left off the figures. It is also worth remembering that for some ▶

STRAIGHT?

by Nick Kester

CITES

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT?

countries, such as those within the European Union, no CITES permits are required so any EU cross border movements are not recorded. So the Spaniard buying a UK bred Harris' hawk or the Belgian bringing in a German trapped goshawk does not show up in the analysis.

There is also a severe caveat in the UNEP preamble to the data that states:

"Common departures from these guidelines (those covering the presentation of data) are as follows:

- Many annual reports do not clearly state whether the data were derived from the actual number of specimens traded or from the quantity for which the permits or certificates were issued (often considerably different).
- Information on seized or confiscated specimens is often absent or provided in insufficient detail.
- Information on the source of the material, e.g. wild-caught or bred in captivity, and the purpose of the trade, e.g. for commercial or non-commercial purposes, is sometimes lacking or used in a different way by trading partner countries.
- Non-standard terms are often used to describe the articles/commodities in trade."

In short, they are saying, this data is probably flawed because many signatory countries do not stick to the rules. It is unfortunately logical to assume that it is those countries that fail to observe the rules where both conservation and trade controls are most lacking, and most needed. But this is only partially true.

They go on, rather alarmingly, to state: "...some parties base their reports simply on the permits issued (rather than those used). It is not uncommon for the quantity of specimens traded to be considerably less than the amount specified on the permits, or for the permits not to be

used at all. Thus trade transactions which may never have taken place at all, as well as inaccurately reported volumes of trade will exist in the CITES trade data."

They also state that the net trade often fails to compute due to the purpose of trade being inconsistent from exporter to importer or vice versa. Thus a goshawk imported for one purpose may well be designated differently on the export licence. Taking all of this into account, and therefore accepting reporting generalisations must occur, the figures are no less revealing.

According to CITES some 63,000 birds of prey have crossed borders under licence in the 27 years of record keeping. Until 1980 there were less than 1,000 a year, but in the next couple of years the figure doubled and then fell back to just over the thousand mark before rising steadily from 1985 to 1990 when it peaked again at 2,000. These peaks and troughs, possibly reflecting the rise and fall in demand as birds needed to be replaced, continued until the next high occurred in 1994 when the 3,000 barrier was broken. Once again there was a fall back of similar proportion over the next year but from then on the rise has been inexorable and until the dramatic peak in 2000 when 7,000 birds of prey crossed international boundaries with CITES papers!

So what were the key species, where did they come from and where did they go? How many were captive-bred or wild-taken?

Hybrids top the list with over 9,000 birds. This is followed by 8,300 sakers (*Falco cherrug*), 7,800 peregrines (*Falco peregrinus*), 4,800 gyrs (*Falco rusticolus*) and 4,300 goshawks (*Accipiter gentilis*). And here is the first anomaly – a classification designated Falconiformes spp. (unspecified falcons) 1,700.

Break this down into captive and wild-taken and the results are equally predictable. Top of the wild-taken are

2,800 sakers and 1,300 goshawks. The captive-bred league table is headed by 5,000 peregrines followed by 4,400 hybrids, 3,200 gyrs, 2,200 sakers and 1,000 Harris' hawks. Add the saker figures together (captive and wild-taken) and you will find 5,000 does not match the 8,300 declared in the totals list in the preceding paragraph. Where have the other 3,300 gone? Lost in the database through poor reporting.

Equally confusing is the picture for hybrids: 9,000 on the total but only 4,400 in the captive-bred sub-total. Is someone suggesting that hybrids can be wild-taken? Hardly. Yet between 1994 and 2001 eight show up as being just that – wild-taken.

So where do they go? The United Arab Emirates is the single largest importer of raptors with 13,500 birds over 27 years, followed by Japan at 7,000. The UK and USA are both on 5,000; then Austria and Germany on 3,000; with Spain and Saudi Arabia importing 2,000 each.

The Germans head the exporter list – nearly 10,000 birds over the period. And once again there is an inconsistency. They declare 4,500 captive-bred birds, which leaves 5,500 unaccounted for. If these are wild-taken then they should certainly head that list. But no, that privilege goes to Guinea. And remember we are talking raptors here.

The purpose of CITES is to track the origin of all birds of prey (and other endangered species) so as to ascertain the impact that trade is having on native wild populations. Yet some 56,500 birds were moved around the globe with origin unknown, and more worryingly, nearly 15,000 of these were wild-taken without the country being recorded. So much for it being a conservation tool.

There is worse to come when data for individual species is examined. The UK is shown as having exported a total of 314 hybrids over the period. This is nonsense given that the top

(right) Where have all the sakers gone?

Add the saker figures together (captive and wild-taken) and the amount arrived at doesn't match the number declared in the totals list – 3,300 out!

breeders in the UK probably export twice that number each year – primarily to the Middle East. Germany on the other hand is shown as having exported over 5,000.

Compare this with the gyrfalcon where the UK has apparently bred and exported nearly 1,000, about the same as Germany. Yet the UK is not a major breeder of gyrfalcons in comparison with the USA and Canada who over the same period have exported nearly 1,900, or so the records state.

A possible explanation, although it is really only half an answer, is as follows. When applying for a CITES export permit for a hybrid the breeder will describe the bird as, say, a gyr x saker falcon. This they place in the designated box for the common name. In the Latin or scientific box, they will put *Falco rusticolus* x *Falco cherrug*. But there is no such species. So the returned form is truncated to *Falco rusticolus* and from then on through to data analysis it remains a gyrfalcon.

There is a computer saying 'GIGO' or 'garbage in, garbage out', but don't blame the falconers. Worse still, this data is used as a baseline statistic in the global protection of birds of prey.

Third world countries are cut through with petty rules and regulations, and on occasion, corruption. But they are also the areas where most help is needed. The illegal trade in saker falcons and the negative affect this has on wild populations is



Photo: Seth Anthony

well documented. Conservationists, aided and supported by falconers, will have their work cut out ensuring a future for birds of prey in such regions.

It should be less of an issue to formalise reporting in other countries. If CITES first concentrated on parity of data in North America, the European Union and the Middle East then falconers, conservationists and government would have a true picture of what is taking place. They could then set this as an example for the rest

of the world to mirror. But with the anomalies, inconsistencies and inaccuracy shown by this analysis there is little hope for the future management of this growing trade. ■

Acknowledgements:

Our thanks to Dr Eugene Potapov of International Wildlife Consultants Ltd who took some 17,311 individual records provided in raw form by UNEP – WCMC and produced the data on which this article is based.

日本の放鷹術

Nick Kester travels to Japan and discovers that despite enormous difficulties successful hawking is still practised by a dedicated core of falconers.

Japanese falconry is much as you might expect from a race renowned for its courtesy and culture but it also has its fair share of surprises. A high level of tradition is reflected in a wonderful array of equipment; it has a number of specific schools or styles; and it is struggling nobly and, on balance, successfully against some overwhelming odds.

Falconry arrived in Japan from Korea in 355AD. It flourished as a hunting method endorsed by the imperial family right up to World War II when it fell from favour and any royal sponsorship was dropped. The first falcon master was Korean and the emperor of the time gave him a Japanese wife to encourage him to stay. She learnt to fly hawks and so the first Japanese falconer was actually a woman, whom another woman

succeeded, thereafter passing her art on to a long line of men. Our first host during the visit, Mr Tagomori, is the heir to this succession having been taught by the last imperial falconer of the Suwa School.

There are three other schools – Yoshida, Toda and Omiya – all of which were recognised by the Royal Household Agency until 1943 when they fell into disuse and were not formally revived. That they continue today is a credit to the modern generation of falconers who strive to keep the traditions of the past alive. The difference in each school is primarily one of equipment and methodology: in Yoshida hawks are carried on the flat or bottom of the fist rather than sitting on the top edge as is more traditional in the west, although not in the Middle East. Apprentices ▶

Falconry in

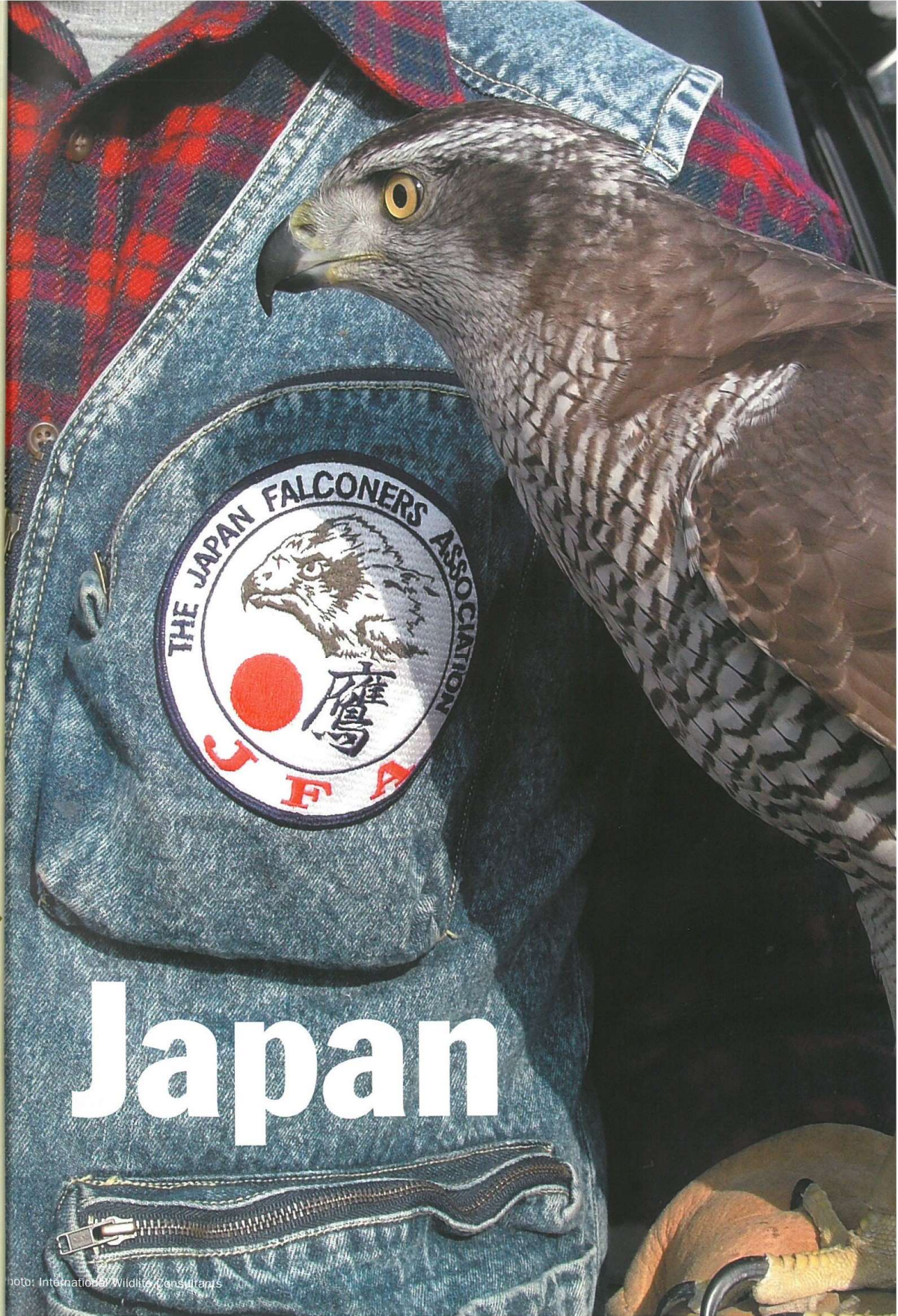


photo: International Wildlife Consultants

日本の放鷹術

Falconry in Japan

Traditional jesses are used (right) – note the additional strap that goes under the hind toe to prevent the jess riding up the leg especially when casting-off.



Photo: International Wildlife Consultants



(left) The small woven bamboo basket or *kuchiekago*, used to hold tiring.

(right) Power lines are everywhere and hawks regularly use them – thankfully everything is fully insulated!

spend many years learning how to make equipment and to care for a hawk: one day is spent with a receptacle of water balanced on the fist to ensure that the hawk is sympathetically carried at all time.

After centuries of self-imposed isolation from the western world, equipment has evolved on strangely, if logically similar lines. Traditional jesses are used (although the *aylmeri* is now popular) but they have a second strap or *igiri* that goes under the hallux (the hind toe) to prevent the jess riding up the leg especially when the hawk is caste off. Jesses are attached to a fantastical long silken leash, usually brilliant red; this sits over the falconer's neck rather

than being attached to his glove. Gloves are of the finest doeskin and fit perfectly being internally stitched so that there are none of the hideous outside seams that make western gloves so clumsy, and which inevitably end up clogged with waste matter. They are fabulously expensive (over £100 GBP) due to the time involved in their making and the lack of good leather, so they need to be looked after.

The Japanese are a meticulously clean people. The receptacles for hawk food reflect this and probably contribute to the longevity of the gloves. Small open-weave bamboo baskets known as *kuchiekago* hold tiring whilst elegant lacquered boxes or *egoushi* contain bechins. A bamboo toggle that loops up and under the belt and is held in place by the body is the usual method of attachment. The *egoushi* is held up when the hawk is being recalled and the lid tapped against the box. Hawks are trained to return to this hollow sound (and to a bamboo whistle) and Mr Tagomori's goshawk did so with alacrity over substantial distances. The hawk takes its reward from this box with delicate enthusiasm and, instead of the often undignified sleight of hand used in the west, the lid is replaced when the falconer judges her to have had a sufficient amount. At the end of the day, she will be offered a drink on the fist from a held cup, and given the bright dry climate she does so willingly.

Creances, which double as lure lines, are wound in reverse in the style of a ball of shop bought string. When needed the stick is removed and the silken thread unravels from inside without so much of a wrinkle, knot or snag! It is suspected that apprentices have to master this art before any other as every falconer rewinds his *okinawa* with a panache that reflects a long training. Having a forty-metre lure line may seem strange to westerners but has a purpose. Hawks and falcons are often flown off the fist at rising duck. In many cases the short flight ends up in water and the long creance doubles as a towrope to recover hawk and prey. Readers of this magazine may well recall a similar arrangement reported by Nick Fox

and industrial development. But there is worse to come. The sky is a cat's cradle of power lines. Not one single power source is underground with pylons marching here, there and everywhere, and the falconers' hawks take stand on them with regularity. Thankfully they are all insulated because the first time the visitors saw this we felt positively faint! And over every view sits the picture postcard image of Mount Fuji, snow bright in the winter sun.

Yet there is hope. On the margins of all this urbanisation there are smallholdings of rice field and other crops. Bone dry in winter, when there is little rain, shelterbelts of bamboo and scrub protect the fields. And in this cover lurks plentiful quarry for the 300 or so falconers. Wild pheasants, Chinese bamboo partridges and a small brown hare are the main targets with the irrigation channels holding a range of duck including teal that erupt off the water in a flicking, flashing, flocking flight more reminiscent of starlings.

Modern Japanese falconry is on the horns of a terrible dilemma, as outlined by Mr Nakajima of the Japan Falconiforme Center. It has been forbidden since 1983 to take any native raptor from the wild. This despite the fact that there are well in excess of 10,000 goshawks, which we saw on the soar frequently during our visit. The peregrine population is about 500-600 and the fabulous mountain hawk eagle



Photo: International Wildlife Consultants

when hawking with sparrowhawks in the streets of Beijing.

Television and film often misrepresent countries. A look at the dynamics of Japan reveals all that conspires to make falconry difficult. Some 70% of the country is mountain and heavily forested. The northern-most island, Hokkaido, is the most rural but in winter is blanketed in thick snow. It is a popular honeymoon destination, but a flight away and contains few falconers. Thus the majority of the 126 million Japanese live on Honshu with 12 million in the Tokyo district – to say it is densely populated is an understatement. A trip on the legendary bullet train, the Shinkansen, from Tokyo to Nagoya is about 400 kilometres and takes just under two hours. During all this time one never sees what passes for countryside in other countries. No fields, no hedges, no open plain, nothing but unremitting urban sprawl

has a base stock of 1,900. In fact it is the golden eagle that is most threatened with only 200 in the wild.

With this ban in mind, Mr Nakajima points out his firm belief that only native species should be used in falconry in Japan and that non-natives, such as Harris' hawks or hybrids, are a pollutant threat to the wild population. He is equally resistant to any imported raptors of the indigenous species. So when asked how a young falconer starts in Japan, his reply has to be that he or she may only use their skill for rehabilitation or conservation. And indeed that is what Mr Nakajima does. Preparing industrial impact studies, breeding from wild disabled or confiscated birds, and helping to protect such species as golden eagles by rebuilding nest sites. But hunting? Not possible, he claims.

Yet there is a core of energetic, committed falconers in Japan to whom such work, though worthy, ►

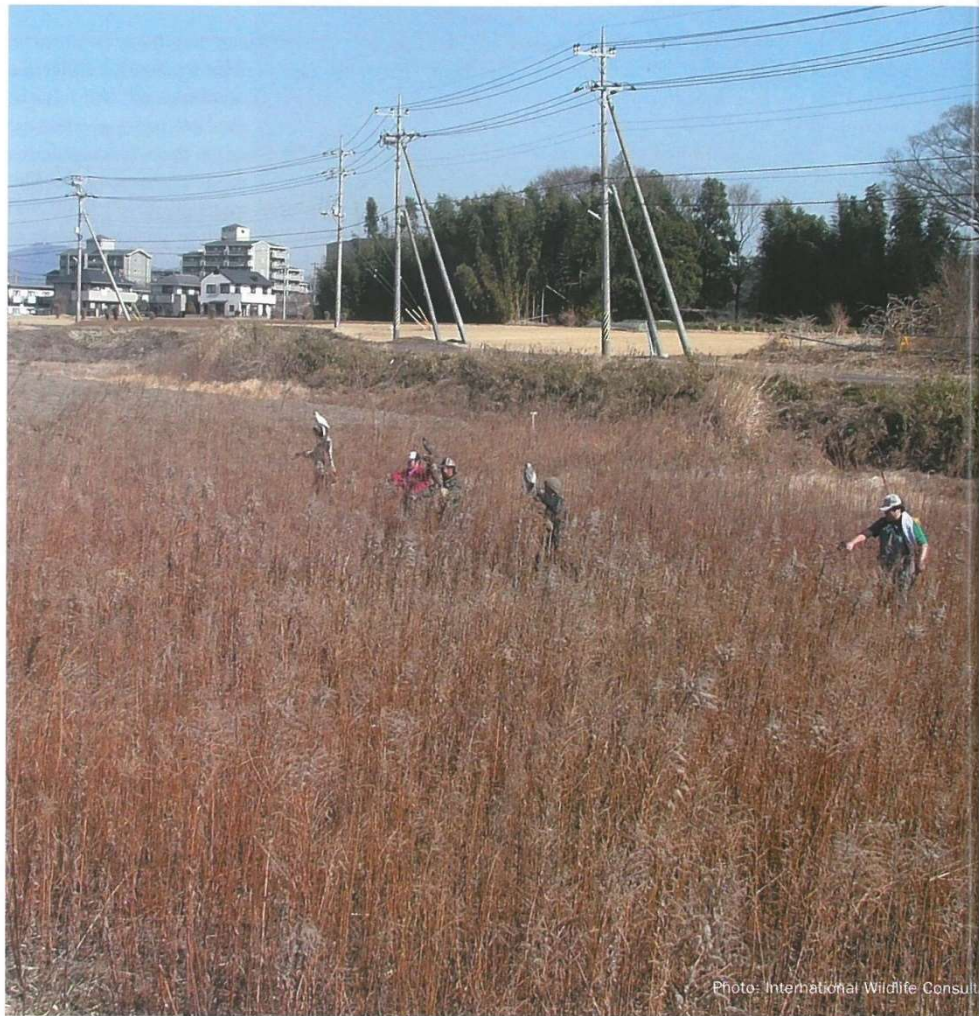


Photo: International Wildlife Consult

Urbanisation has spread everywhere but small pockets of crops, bamboo and scrub hold abundant wild pheasants, Chinese bamboo partridges and small brown hares.

is not for them. For so long as they can import hawks and falcons, members of the six or so falconry clubs will continue to beat the bamboo stands and flush quarry for a range of hawks and falcons.

Mr Fujita and Mr Machida are partners in a falconry enterprise based on what is rather loosely described as a pet shop. In reality their business is based exclusively on birds of prey and thus might more properly be called a commercial mews. They are substantial importers of various raptors, the smaller of which (American kestrels, merlins, hobbies and tiny owls) end up as little more than trophies to be kept and admired much as we in the west keep budgerigars. They are commencing a

breeding programme and keep a range of exotics such as owls and vultures.

Both are young, unconventional and wholly devoted to falconry. They are undeniably the future and when we gathered for a day's hunting we saw the joy of the sport in undisguised action. Much was as it had been during our more personal days with Mr Tagomori. Goshawks were prevalent, all imported from Russia or China. White birds are prized but perform no differently from their grey cousins. Also in the field there were Harris' hawks and a black sparrowhawk, which was successfully entered that morning at bamboo partridge.

The three-month hunting season ends on

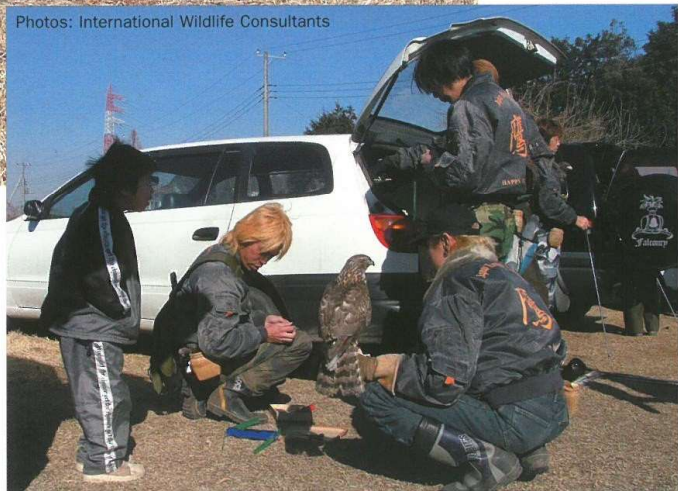


A field meeting at Ibaraki – an energetic core of committed falconers are keeping falconry alive in modern Japan.

February 15th and this was the final week so feather quality was somewhat lacking, not that this inhibited the flights. Under the marshal voice of Mr Fujita, whose instructions, even if you didn't speak the language, were perfectly clear, the beaters lined up armed with cut off golf sticks. Harris' hawks were stationed in power lines, whilst the goshawks remained steady on the fist. Waist high in the scrub the beaters went to work. Up got a pheasant, off went the Harrisses...and four or five goshawks. No one seemed to mind. Certainly not the hawks, which had flown together most of the season and were used to this form of rough and tumble. Wouldn't do in the formal field meets of the west where my turn, your turn is strictly observed. But this was done for fun not formality and everyone mucked in regardless.

A falcon was put up over a reasonable stand of cane but the beating line flushed a hare that was promptly killed by a young falconer's Harris' hawk. Her pleasure at this kill in front of the visiting British was undisguised. Throughout all this the falcon stayed in position until the field was worked and she

Photos: International Wildlife Consultants



was then called down.

In truth falcons do not suit the country, and a flight earlier in the week had nearly resulted in disaster as Mr Tagomori's gyf/saker had drifted off only to be recovered on the last day of our visit. Dogs are little used. Mr Tagomori has a vizsla that worked well, but in the main they are rare. As a result longwings are flown in a somewhat hit and miss way not helped by the ever-present power lines, which must also create interference when radio tracking. Hybrids are only now finding favour as falconers realise that they may better suit the restrictive environment.

The Japanese work ethic affords little time off and that taken is usually unpaid. Companies give few holidays and often demand a six-day week. With such

日本の放鷹術

Falconry in Japan



Goshawks imported from China and Russia are prevalent with several highly-prized white birds being flown.

a high population density housing is limited and many live in very small properties or apartment blocks. None of which is conducive to keeping large animals such as dogs or hawks. Ever innovative, the 'pet shop' doubles as a boarding kennels with falconers being able to collect their hawk for a day's hunting as and when possible, which probably accounts for the level of manning and the steadiness of the goshawks.

Education is very much in the mind of those we met and displays are a developing concept. To encourage this, Nick Fox gave a demonstration of western lure swinging which would form the basis, as it does worldwide, of any good flying display. That it provides falcon and falconer with fun, free flight and exercise was a valuable message. Gary Dyer, who worked with Jemima Parry Jones in the UK, has a contract with a Japanese zoo to provide such displays and joined us on our last day. Being so urbanised the locals crave contact with natural history, and during the peak season Gary expects a daily audience of several thousand.

Japanese hospitality is legendary and having enjoyed the inhibition provided by 'body press' Fujita and his friends we spent our final day in more formal company. Yes, before you ask, Mr Fujita was a wrestler in his formative years and having taken us to a *sumo* restaurant to enjoy the traditional body building stew, *chankonabe*, he demonstrated his training in the hunting field by joyfully 'body pressing' an escaping hare that crossed the road in front of five goshawks. Everyone thought this hugely entertaining, even the owners of the pursuing hawks. Somewhat unconventionally, prey species are given a value. Fox and racoon dog top the list at 50 points, hare come next with 30, then the smaller ducks 20, pheasant 15, partridge 10, all the rest 5. Each member pays in a regular amount throughout the season and the person with the highest score gains the pot, which can amount to \$5,000. Not that Mr Fujita's hare scored, being a 'hawk free' kill!

Mr Sawada, our final host, is another pet shop owner, and the maker of truly beautiful hawking equipment. His gloves and hawk boxes are a special joy, although the latter's design is at odds with the west given that they are oblong in length rather than height, somewhat restricting a goshawk's ability to stand upright. Another journey on the bullet train was to have taken us to Godenba under Mount Fuji. Unfortunately, the presence of gun hunters on the proposed land forced a venue change. Shooting is in marked decline in Japan, being the province of the older male. Many areas are designated 'no shooting', but falconry may still take place. Permission is not

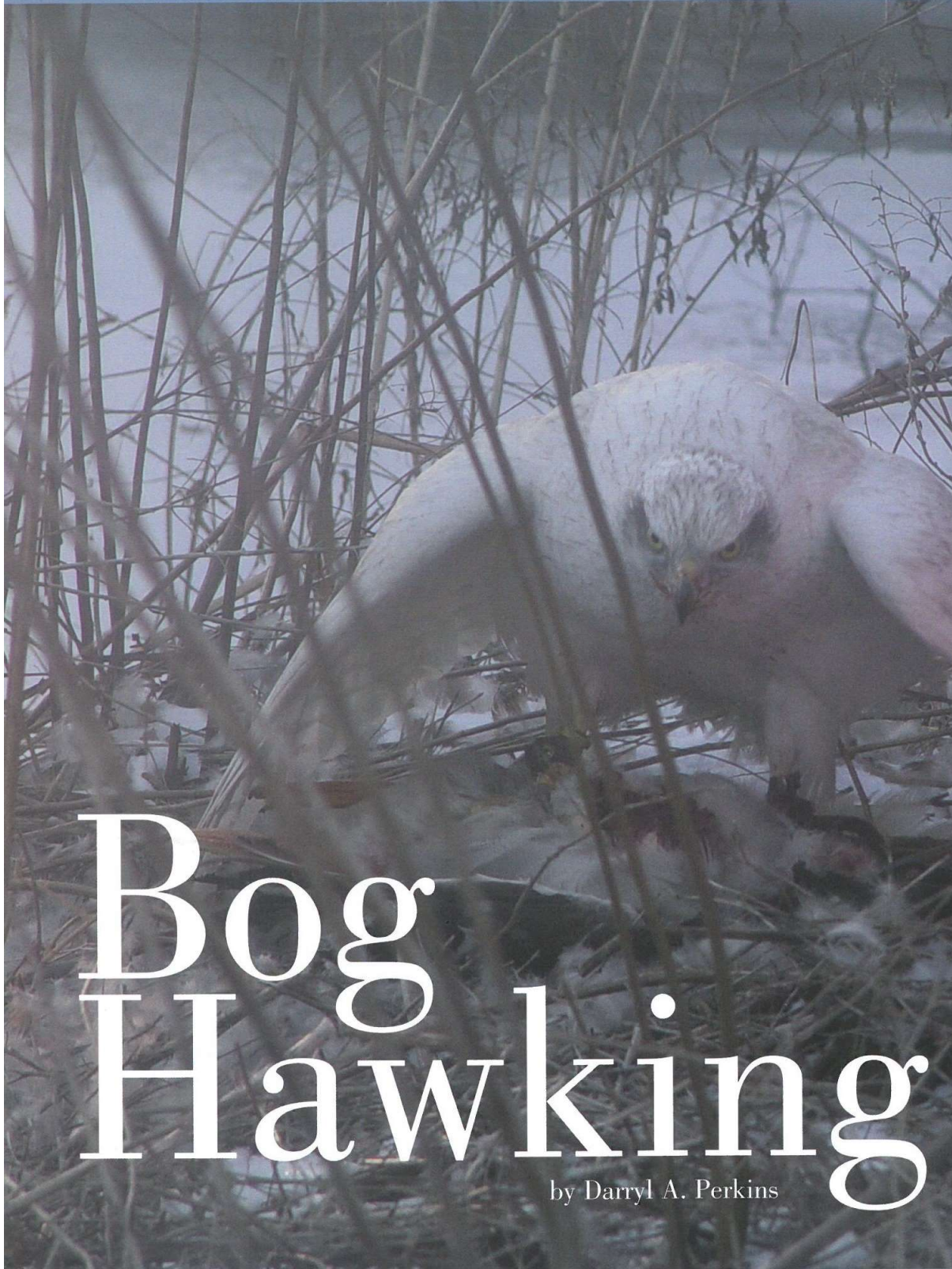


Photo: International Wildlife Consultants

A brown hare, taken as it flushed from a stand of cane.

required, and if the bird watchers think black thoughts their good manners do not allow them to show it. The new venue had possibilities, being more open with fewer roads, buildings or power lines. But game was scarce. Not that spirits were dampened, indeed the appearance of a charming young lady in national dress added a decorative aspect to the day.

As a *grand finale* to our visit we enjoyed a banquet at a traditional inn. The highlight of this was a monster spider crab donated by one of the members who was not able to be present. At this, as at the previous night's dinner given by Mr Fujita and friends, there was much discussion and questioning as to how we visitors viewed a future for falconry on national and international levels. Nick Fox explained how the International Association for Falconry (IAF) supported falconry all over the globe and how many countries had created their own umbrella organisations to present a unified voice to government and pressure groups. He also made it quite clear to his audience that falconry has to be a sport of give and take, and without a commitment to conservation and education the public view of the sport is often jaundiced. ■



Bog Hawking

by Darryl A. Perkins



Photo: Darryl Perkins

While we have no grain yards, stock tanks or prairie potholes here in Massachusetts, we do have a somewhat unique hunting area that offers Massachusetts falconers access to ducks at its centre; bunnies, squirrels and the occasional covey of quail on its perimeter. I'm talking about cranberry bogs! ▶



BOG HAWKING



Photo: Darryl Perkins

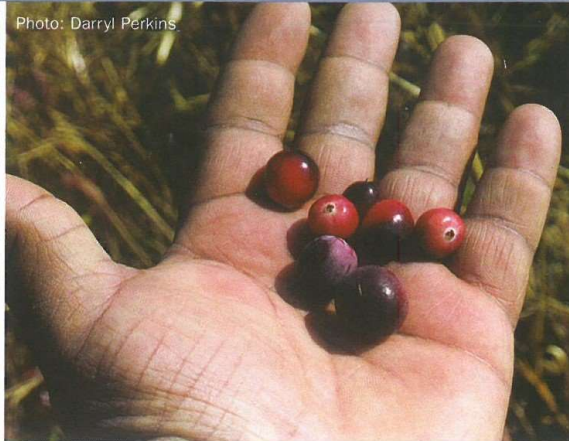


Photo: Darryl Perkins



Photo: Darryl Perkins

The cranberry is a Native American wetland fruit which grows on low-lying vines like strawberries. The name “cranberry” derives from the Pilgrim name for the fruit, “crane berry,” so called because the small, pink blossoms that appear in the spring resemble the head and bill of a sandhill crane. European settlers adopted the Native American uses for the fruit and found the berry a valuable bartering tool.

Cranberries grow best in impermeable beds layered with sand, peat, gravel, and clay. These beds are commonly known as marshes and were originally created by glacial deposits. In Massachusetts, we call the place where cranberries grow a “bog”. In the early 1800s Henry Hall, a veteran of the Revolutionary War who lived in Dennis, Massachusetts noticed that sand blown in from nearby dunes helped vines grow faster. Today, growers spread an inch or two of sand on their bogs every three years. The sand not only helps the vines grow but also slows the growth of weeds and insects. Commercial bogs use a system of wetlands, uplands, ditches, flumes, ponds and other water bodies that provide a natural habitat for a variety of plant and animal life, particularly ducks.

Massachusetts, and in particular Cape Cod, offers the special conditions that cranberries require, including sandy soil; abundant fresh

water and a growing season from May to October. The cranberry season begins in winter when growers flood the bogs with water that freezes and insulates the vines from frost. As the winter snow melts and spring arrives, the bogs are drained. Shortly thereafter blossoms begin to appear. In mid-July, petals fall from the flowers leaving the tiny green nodes that, after weeks of summer sun, become red, ripe cranberries. Cranberries are typically harvested in September and October and can be stored for up to one year under proper conditions.

Each bog is surrounded by a water-filled trench. Criss-crossing the entire bog at separate intervals are other trenches leading to a main trench. The main trench is usually a natural waterway and normally runs through the centre of the bog. In late fall it looks like a magnificent crimson quilt with its patchwork of connected creeks and ditches. Some bogs stretch for a mile or more and offer sport for long and shortwingers alike. In the late Eighties, when I first began hawking ducks with goshawks, it was pure nirvana in the bogs. After the harvest in early October and before the late winter hard freeze, there were ducks in every trench. The Massachusetts Falconry & Hawk Trust would hold field meets on the Cape and every falconer was assured not only of a good slip, but on fresh ducks as well. Ah, for the good old days.



(left) The cranberry season begins in winter when growers flood the bogs with water that freezes and insulates the vines from frost – as winter snow melts, the bogs are drained. (above left) The cranberry – a wetland fruit which grows on low-lying vines like strawberries. (above) A commercial bog – a system of wetlands, uplands, ditches, flumes, ponds and other water bodies are used.

Now due to ATVs, the alarming disrespect for personal property, particularly someone else's as evidenced by the number of old washing machines, couches and trash frequently left abandoned in the bogs; locked gates and 'no trespassing' signs are what greet today's falconers, not to mention the scourge of all bog hawking; the "bog-walker." That happy-go-lucky individual usually accompanied by an obese dog out to become one with nature. And even though old Clarence, or Sissy or Alf has trouble scaling the banks, he still manages to stumble onto the bogs just when the ducks are putting in. As he goes stumbling and bumbling over the bog, usually coughing instead of barking, putting up ducks you haven't even seen yet, his owner declares with the voice that's usually reserved for speaking to infants, and that look of total adoration on his or her face; "He just loves to play with the duckkeys. Yes he does...Don't you Alf?" This is normally followed by a pleading, "Alf! No! Bad Doggie!" It's at this point that I often wonder if the bog-walker realises that old Alf is stone deaf.

But there is hope. I've found the answer. I am no longer a goshawker, a duck hunter, or a killer of all things wild. By putting on my hunting vest, turning my baseball cap around backwards, attaching a couple of film canisters to my vest with velcro, I morph into an artist! A temperamental photographer at peace with his universe. Displaying the moodiness so typical of temperamental photographers, it's clear to all that my best work is done in solitude and absolute silence. All you have to do is glare with distaste at Alf, glance briefly at the bog-walker's feet, and then get spread-eagled, belly down on the bog as if you're a temperamental photographer at peace with your universe, and snap a few shots. Rule number one. Never ever make eye contact with a bog-walker. Not unless you want 45 minutes of questioning. And remember, *National Geographic* doesn't pay you to talk. Maintain your moody demeanor and soon you'll hear the bog-walker whisper, "Let's go Alf, and leave the moody photographer to his work." Works every time. Provided the

goshawk doesn't blow a gasket listening to all the flushing ducks, compliments of old Alf. If that happens expect the bog-walker to scurry out of the bog as quickly as possible but expect a visit shortly thereafter from the local constable. It'll go something like this: "Sorry to bother you sir but we got a complaint of screaming coming from your truck." At this point it's best not to lie. Tell the truth. "Satan's mother," or "A big Siberian babe and she's raring to go," won't win you any brownie points. Just explain what you're doing and be done with it. If you're lucky all you'll get is, "Oh really? I didn't know people did that around here."

The ideal bogs to hawk ducks with a goshawk are the ones that are left to go wild. That is, they aren't re-sanded and worked. During the dead of winter when there is a hard freeze, trucks full of sand are driven out on the ice covering the bogs and the sand spread out. When the thaw comes, the sand seeps down to the vines and stimulates growth and helps keep down weeds and insects. Because the bogs are constructed such that one section is slightly lower than the next, there is always sufficient water flow even to the unused bog. And better yet, there isn't an abundance of cranberries left over from the harvest to announce your approach. On more than one occasion I've snuck up to a ditch only to find that the ducks had heard the crunch of the berries, drifted to the main trench only to turn up one of the side creeks and hide.

Left unattended the bogs will quickly revert to the wild. The fertile soil allows plants and vegetation to spring up, thus offering an abundance of food for the ducks, and cover for your approach. Typically you drive around the bogs and glass the trenches for ducks. On large bogs with many connecting and intersecting trenches, it's best to have a helper who stays on one side of the bogs with binoculars and directs your approach to the

ducks through hand signals. When hawking alone it's best to wait for a slip when they are in a side trench or up against the bank. Unless you have several helpers, an experienced goshawk and a dog, it's almost useless to try taking them from the main trench or river. If mallards are your quarry, they simply fly the contour of the stream only inches above, and bail at the slightest pressure from the gos.

**October 6, 2003.
First day of duck season.**

Kandy was still moulting and hadn't been handled. Sponge Bob was 34 ounces and still living in the house so Gyrlinka, second-year Siberian goshawk got the call. Even though I'd flown her only twice so far, she was at 45 ounces and knew the game. She was hooded and in the truck by 7:00 am. After answering NAFA emails and doing some work, I headed to the Cape at around 8:15. I stopped for gas and a newspaper and still managed to cross the Borne bridge at 9:20 sharp. I first checked the Route 128 bogs. Upon pulling into the bog I saw that one side had been recently harvested and was in fact in the process of being drained. The other side was flooded and the workers were just finishing the harvest.

Flooding the bogs causes the vines to rise. The berries are then knocked loose by this machine that looks like a cross between a paddle boat and old fashioned tri-cycle. The free berries then float to the top of the water where an oil boon is placed around them and they are then herded next to the bank where the pump truck sucks them up cleaning and separating them from the leaves, frogs, etc. at the same time.

I stopped to talk to Peter, one of the managers I've known for years. "How's it across the street?" I asked. "We finished one section yesterday and the other ones wild." "Great," I said, before taking a few pictures for

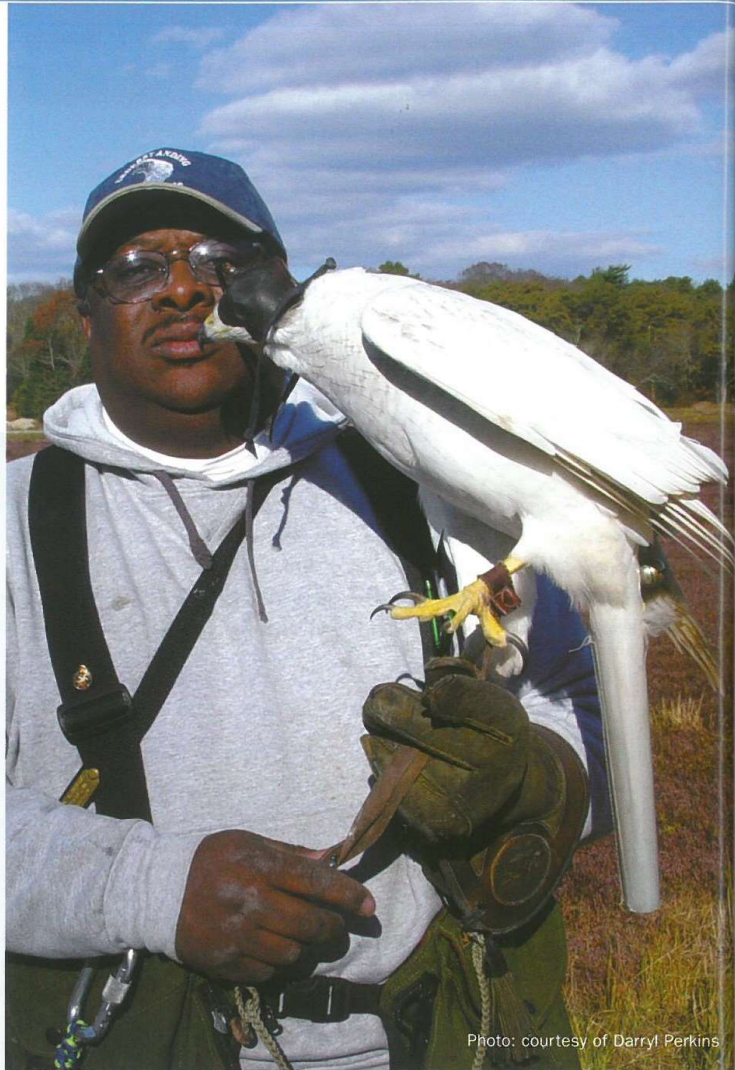


Photo: courtesy of Darryl Perkins

Darryl with Siberian gos Gyrlinka.

this article and getting in the truck. In twenty minutes I had checked the entire bog and not a duck in sight. There were a couple of bog-walkers with fat dogs so the prospects of waiting until some ducks put in wasn't an option. I checked the Sam Turner and John Parker bogs and all were flooded or in the process of being flooded for picking. The Little bog was clean but held no ducks so I headed to Peter's bog. The gate was open so I drove right in. This bog too was flooded and there were several

families of ducks all feeding and swimming and having a good old time. Peter drove up and asked if I had any luck at the other bogs. I told him no. He did tell me that he saw ducks in the wild bogs when they went in to work it. Of course they flew but at least they were there. After asking if some of the workers could see Gyrlinka, he said that kids with ATVs had broken down all the gates last year so more hardy, kid-proof versions were in the process of being installed. There would be no vehicle access to

any of the bogs soon. That is unless you've been a good citizen over the years and not tramped on unharvested cranberries and had gotten written permission from the owners. I headed home but stopped on the way to throw Gyrlinka a pheasant. Might as well get some training in until Wednesday.

Wednesday, October 8, 2003.

Boy, I needed to go hunting bad. Personally, it has been a very, very rough summer for me. Aside from the many and varied personal family trials I've had to endure, every day has seemed a nightmare waiting for the continued bad news from West Nile Virus. And contrary to popular belief, it hadn't ended yet. Cold weather stops the onslaught of producing mosquitoes sure enough, but it doesn't cure infected birds. Hopefully those birds ravaged by the disease who manage to survive will be forever immune. At least that's the hope. And if this wasn't stress enough, today in my capacity as NAFA president I've had the unfortunate task of informing the members of the death of yet another pillar of the falconry community. Former NAFA president, George Kotsiopoulos. I really needed to go hunting today! Being in the company of a beautiful goshawk, in pristine New England cover on a gorgeous autumn day would go a long way to restoring my sanity.

I arrived on the Cape at 10:30 and headed immediately to the wild bog on Route 128. I drove around the bog trying to check the creeks and avoid driving off the bank at the same time. What a contrast. One half of the bog was freshly harvested and all neat, crimson and trim, while the other half, separated by an overgrown trench was green, yellow and blue with grasses, flowers and last year's berries. A complete circle around the bogs showed no ducks but I bet there were some in the hidden creeks. I decided

to walk the ditches in speculation. It was a little windy and after getting Gyrlinka all hooked up with telemetry, I stood on the edge of the bog with her hooded waiting for the wind to die

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down. As I glassed the bog, I saw a drake mallard emerge from one of the hidden trenches in the middle of the bog only to be followed by another drake and five hens. After focusing better, I saw that some of the hens were actually drakes of the year who hadn't as yet attained the brilliant fluorescent green head. I turned my back to hide Gyrlinka and watched as they continued to feed on the cranberries.

After about 10 minutes they ambled back over the trench and disappeared. There were flowers growing along the edge of the creek and I marked the highest stem and stepped off the bank onto the bog. I unhooded Gyrlinka and made a "sishing" sound which gets her on her

tippy toes and starts her head snaking from side to side. It took about 10 minutes for me to ease my way over to the trench. This trench peters out at the curve in the road surrounding the bog with its steep tree lined bank. If they were here, they would have no where to go but up.

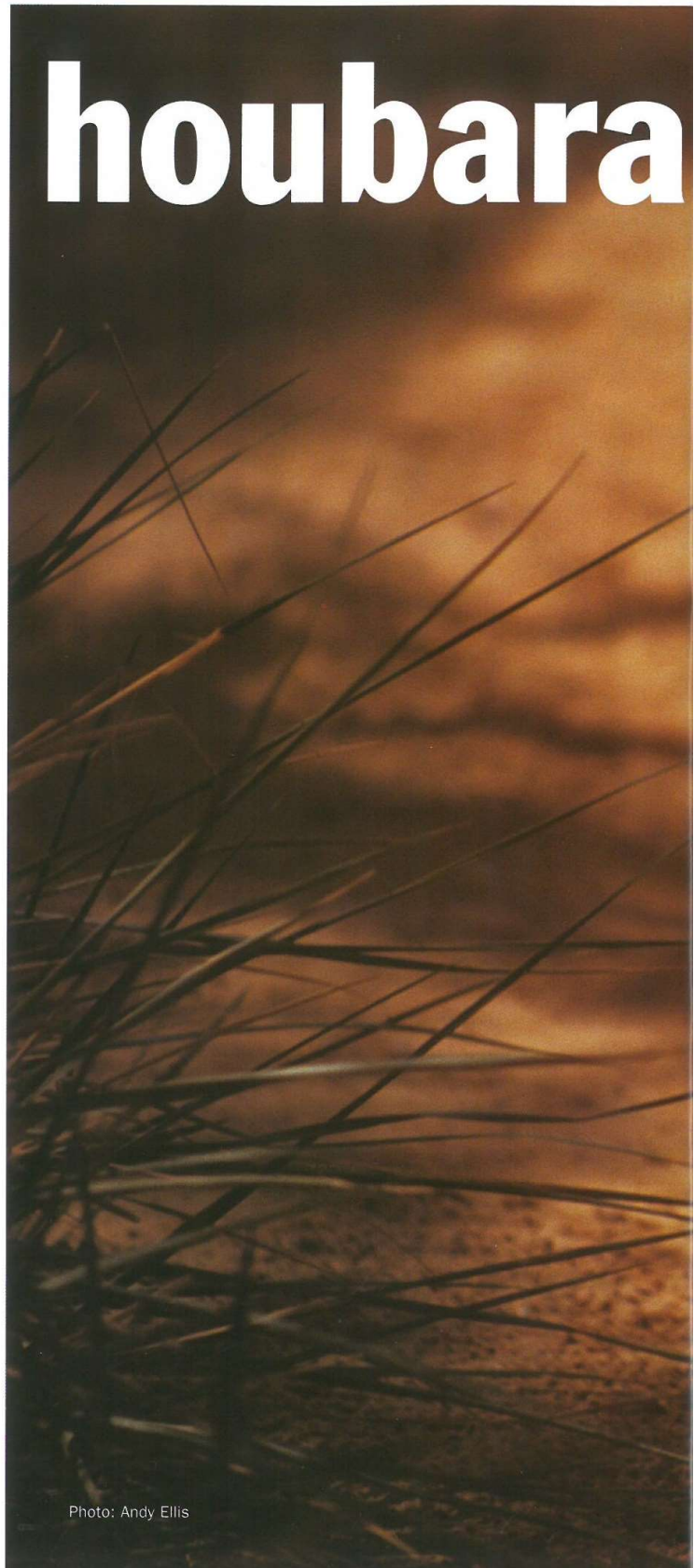
A hen flushed sucking the rest of the flock with her and I gave a blood-curdling yell and watched. Flying straight up and over the trees would be fatal so the ducks curved and headed back over my head. Gyrlinka started straight at them and lost momentum as they changed directions. They were flying in a long climbing curve and she recovered and cut the angle off on them. It was a beautiful sight. The ducks were climbing and curving trying to leave the bog at a point where the tree line was lowest. Gyrlinka was below and slightly to their right with her head cocked to one side keeping an eye on them. Seeing that big white goshawk plastered against a backdrop of crimson is a sight I will never forget. For the last few feet of the flight she was literally flying up-side-down. She hit one of the young drakes from below, rolled and glided down on the wild side of the bog.

As she was well into feeding when I arrived, I dispatched the drake and got out the camera. After taking a few shots, I moved her to the harvested side to take advantage of the contrast in colours. After the rigors of this past summer, this was just what the doctor had ordered. As she fed, I lay down on the bog to take a little nap. Reliving the flight in my mind, I soon drifted off into a most blissful sleep and was actually having pleasant dreams until I heard...."Alf! No!" ■

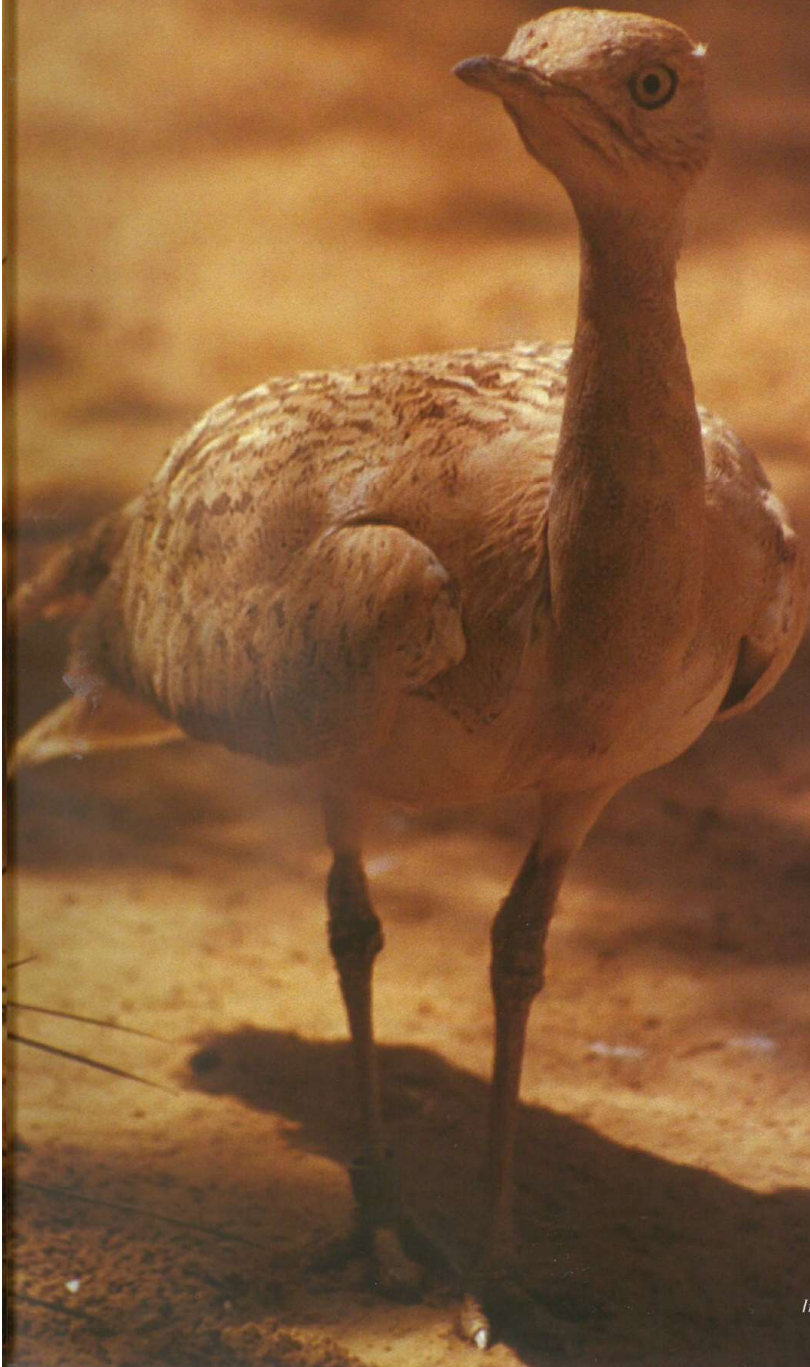
DISAPPEARING QUARRY

The houbara

In the falconry countries of the Middle East houbara and falcons are inextricably linked. There may be other quarry, but none are quite such a part of Arab culture. Ask an Arab, any Arab, what he expects to hunt and he will give you but one answer: quite unlike the falconers of other countries where a range of prey is on the target list. Houbara (*Chlamydotis undulata*) have a vast range with 26 sub-species found as far apart as the Canary Islands and China, so much so that you might imagine little could threaten them. But you would be wrong. ▶



bustard



When Arab falconry relied on camel and horse to reach the hunting grounds, there was always a sustainable population over-wintering in the Arabian peninsular. But mechanisation and wealth empowered more Arabs with the means to hunt and they travelled further and further afield in pursuit of their sport. Iran, Morocco, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, anywhere the birds were spotted the hunting parties followed. Setting up substantial hunting camps with many captive-bred falcons, Arab falconers set forth in custom built off-road vehicles to track down dwindling populations of houbara. The out-of-the-hood flight is fast and furious. A major adrenaline rush as they drive at breakneck speed in pursuit of the hunting falcon. Many an accident has occurred when drivers miss the sudden *wadi* and find themselves dropping several metres into a dried-up riverbed. Like too many hunters before them, little time was spent in contemplation of the resource. Few asked whether or not the population was self-sustaining, or being over harvested; whether over-grazing or habitat loss was a contributing factor to their decline? They merely carried on with the tradition that is Arab falconry.

But one man did start to ask questions and was in a position to make his questions count because His Highness Sheik Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan is both a falconer and the President of the United Arab Emirates. His concern for the sustainable future of both falcon and houbara provides one of the main focus points for the Environment Research and Wildlife Development Agency (ERWDA). Its secretary general, Majid Al Mansouri outlined

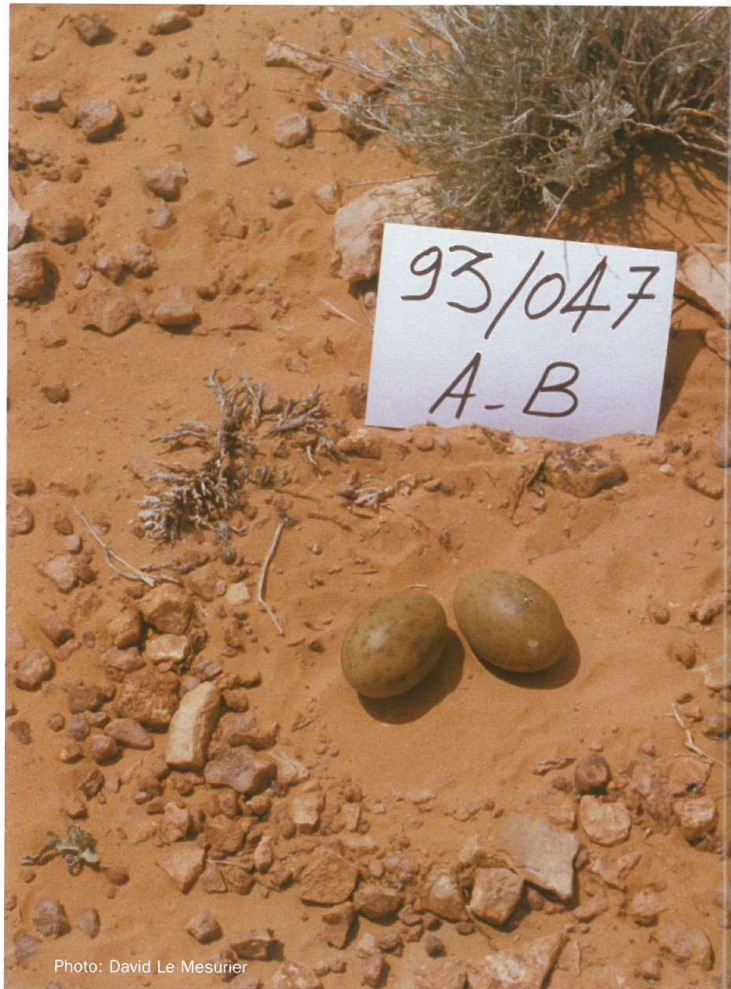


Photo: David Le Mesurier

(above) Monitoring eggs in Morocco.

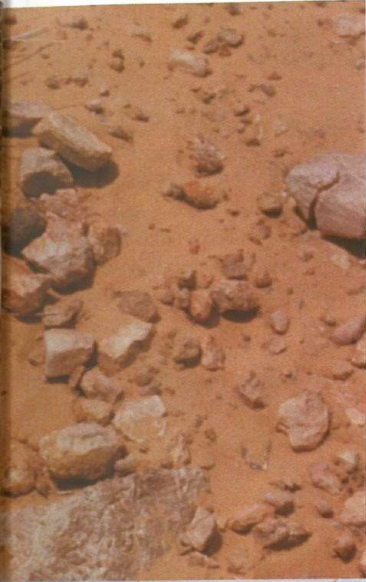
(right) Inside a breeding enclosure at ERWDA's Sweihan project, Abu Dhabi.

what he believes is a turning point for the houbara, but he is not shy of admitting it was almost too late to be effective. The crossover year when the Asian population moves from just sustainable to heading for extinction has been charted at 2020. Far too close for comfort.

Unlike the North American grouse and British grey partridge examined in the previous two issues, Asian houbara are primarily migratory. And

this is where the problem begins, says Al Mansouri. There are so many countries to educate and not all of them benefit directly from the incoming wealth of the hunters so why should they bother themselves with conservation? Birds may breed in China or Mongolia and move some 7,000 km to over-wintering grounds in the Middle East or Pakistan. No small feat for a bird that some rather derogatively describe as 'turkey like'.

DISAPPEARING QUARRY



The journey may take up to two months to complete with much flying time taking place at night. But it is at their final destination that they are hunted and that is where income is derived – in countries such as Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Valuable foreign exchange comes to the range countries not just from the spending power of hunting parties, something Al Mansouri can understand, but also from the illegal trapping of houbara as a training aid, which infuriates him. Enlightened Arab falconers know there is no need

to use trapped houbara to 'make' falcons to quarry. Other more domesticated species serve just as well, but education is a slow process and the fact the houbara are listed on Appendix I of CITES counts for little to trappers with hungry families to feed. A major study area for ERWDA scientists has been Kazakhstan, which holds the majority of the Asian breeding population and is a key stopover for migrating birds. They found that between 1998 and 2003 there has been a population decline of 60%, endorsed by a similar Chinese ▶



Photo: Andy Ellis

DISAPPEARING QUARRY

study showing a local drop of 77% over a similar period.

Trapping and hunting may not be the full picture, loss of habitat is a major negative to the world's fauna and the houbara is no exception, but over 70% of the total birds lost in the study areas are as a direct result of deliberate human predation. Poachers earn good money for houbara; between £300 and £600 GBP a bird if the market is right, although the 'in transit' attrition rate can be as high as 50%, says Al Mansouri. He believes this could be stopped if all other gulf countries implemented CITES with greater energy and commitment, something the UAE is not afraid of doing in order to prevent the estimated 6,000 birds that are illegally trapped each year. In a single year they confiscated some 400.

So what are the solutions, other than sanctions on poaching? Firstly, there are captive breeding programmes, several of which have matured in the last decade. Houbara do not breed easily in captivity but the science is progressing, and if one looks back only a few short years to the early falcon breeding programmes one quickly realises that where there is a will there is a way.

HH Sheik Zayed established one of the largest centres in 1995 in eastern Morocco. Here some 1,000 are bred annually for three purposes: wild release, to be hunted (not all are caught so provide additional birds to the release numbers), and to supplement and enhance the breeding stock. The project manages some 40,000 kms and has a release target of 5,000 a year by 2007.

In Saudi Arabia, the National Wildlife Research Centre near Taif city began a breeding programme as far back as 1986 following the

dramatic decline of the Arab peninsula's few non-migratory populations. Breeding success was slow to start and early release schemes were hampered by, amongst other factors, fox predation. Two projects

Houbara do not breed easily in captivity but the science is progressing, and if one looks back only a few short years to the early falcon breeding programmes one quickly realises that where there is a will there is a way.

also started in Pakistan, one for captive breeding and the other for the rehabilitation of confiscated or injured birds.

ERWDA's own study centre is at Sweihan in Abu Dhabi and hosts a captive breeding population mainly made up of confiscated birds. After many years of research into the ecology of the wild species, they are now just beginning a release programme with a target of 500-600 per year within the next five years.

If enlightened Arabs have stopped using houbara for training purposes, they next need to manage their hunting regimen. Majid Al Mansouri has horrific hearsay of falconers killing up to 300 in one trip alone,

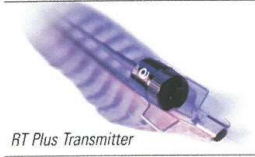
whilst in some countries if the falcon doesn't succeed a gun is used. To persuade falconers from UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain (the main falconry states) that they should let any houbara that outwits the falcon go free without reflashing; that they should limit bag numbers; and respect a disciplined hunting season, is fraught with problems. Broadcast media is not overly concerned with such issues. The houbara has little buying power when it comes to such a competitive and overcrowded medium. The Emirates Falconers' Club has its own magazine, *Al Saggar*, which is widely distributed and which contains much that is useful to falconers on subjects such as health care. Anything on houbara is likely to be read.

At the 2003 Arab Hunting Exhibition HH Sheik Zayed suggested a new target for the interested states. Why not, he opined, set yourselves a goal of 10,000 released houbara a year? As Al Mansouri points out, if the rulers of the Gulf States can agree, and recommend this to their people it will be a valuable start. But to achieve such a complex set of goals takes time, commitment and resource. The houbara does not have much time, even though there is commitment if insufficient resource. Looking west he acknowledges the work done in the USA on conservation and hunting and hopes that any Arab who enjoys the tradition that is falconry will provide, say, 10% of his hunting budget to the protection of the species. That way, he knows, there will be "less greed, more culture, more pleasure and better memories." ■

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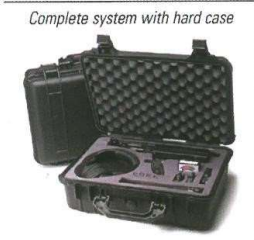


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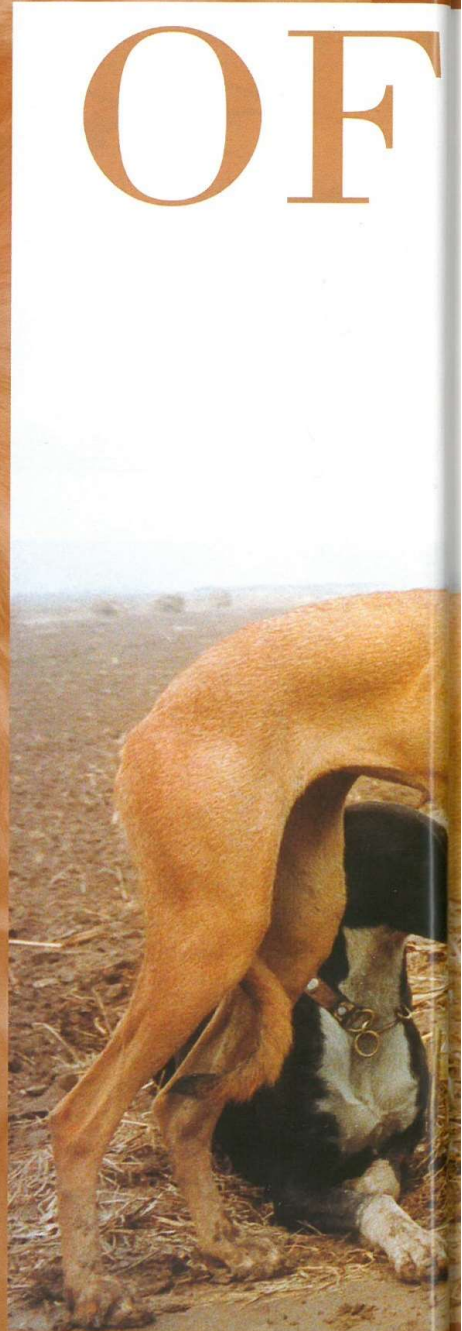
TEX, hat-bird



SOOTY, hat-bird

HARE OF

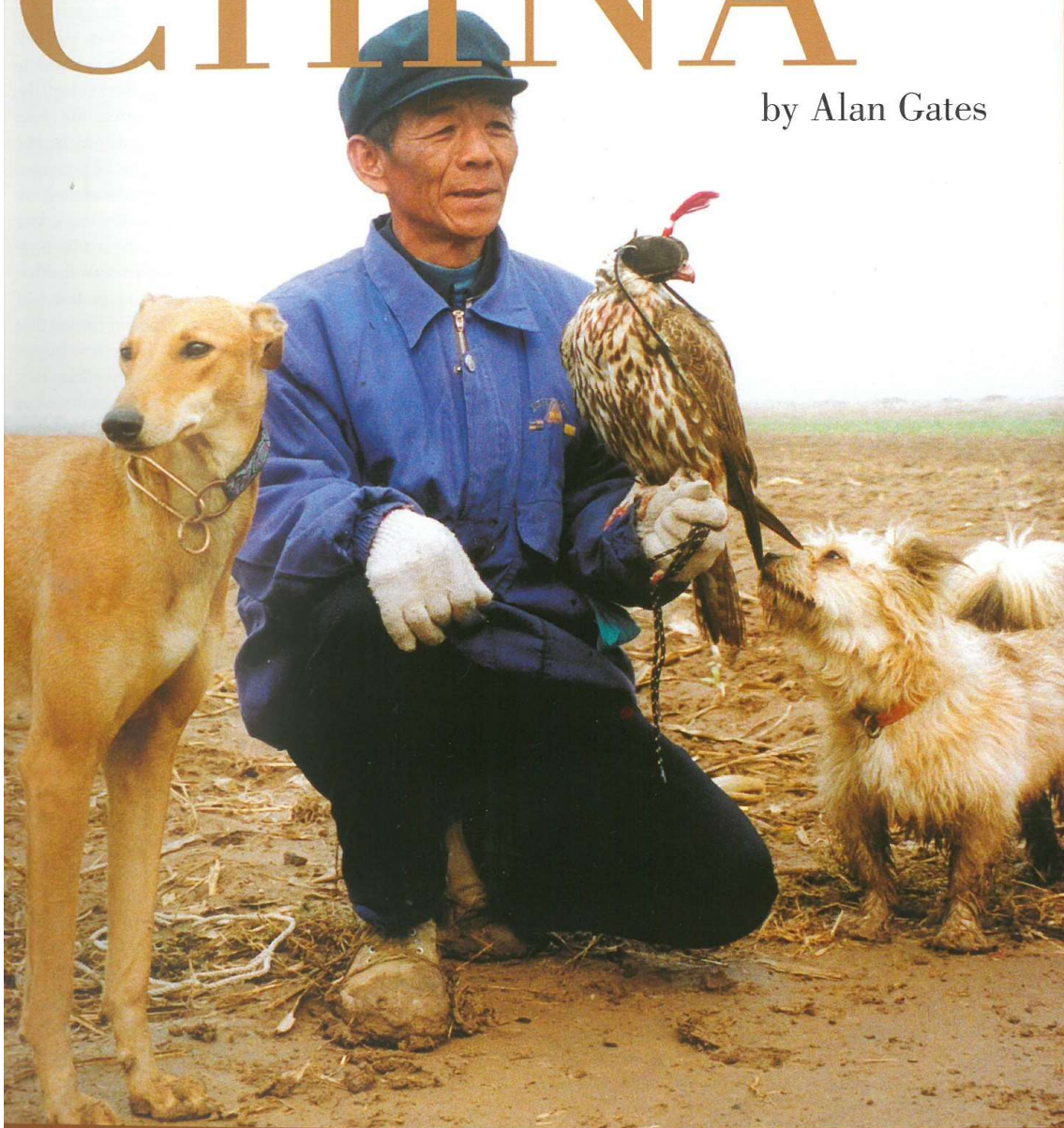
They are highly favoured across Asia and the Middle East, but proved to be as elusive as trying to catch the spirit of the wind. At last I stood on a vast agricultural plain in Central China and I was surrounded by enthusiasts for whom the *TuHu* translated as “Hare Tiger”, was the ultimate hunting partner. I was more familiar with her as a saker falcon, but considering what I had just experienced, the monicker of Hare Tiger was aptly more fitting. ▶



TIGERS

CHINA

by Alan Gates





As always the journey to this point is an adventure in itself, the planning and cajoling is enough to test the patience of a saint, but sainthood is one virtue I can not claim to have qualifications in. Still, charm and enthusiasm can go a long way towards gaining trust and demonstrating one's genuine love of falconry.

In the Peoples' Republic falconry is illegal in all but one province, and the closer you are to the capital Beijing the more nervous its participants are of strangers. My quest took me into the bird markets of the capital, where all manner of birds are offered for sale and the Chinese love of singing birds is dominant. Stall holders shown photographs of trained goshawks would either respond with a shake of the head or point to another stall, nobody named names. A foreign face in this market was rare and a foreigner who showed an interest in one of China's oldest sports was a curiosity. Often large crowds would form to look at the picture book I had brought, a great deal of discussion would ensue with much head shaking. Eventually the crowd would disperse and the odd individual left hanging on would quietly give us the next small lead. Finally I was directed to a small workshop within the market, here a lone gentleman stood behind a machine lathe turning the densest hardwood I have ever seen. He produced neck rings that fitted to "bottle-gourds", the hollowed-out shells of the gourd fruit, which when fitted with a sound grill and lid became the home to a large singing cricket insect. Fascinated as I was in this popular Chinese pastime I was here to talk falconry. Much tea drinking had to pass before I gained the added approval of a couple of colleagues. They had joined in the tea drinking and contributed to fogging up the atmosphere of the small room with cigarette smoke. I seemed to have passed their credibility test as they

were soon on their mobile phone to a Mr Sun. He arrived just after lunch enthusiastically holding a large hawk kite which he had made. Although he had flown hawks from the age of nine, at sixty-two years old he now no longer practised falconry. In 1992 he stopped flying goshawks when he moved into a small apartment, due to the distance they can slice a mute. He continued with smaller hawks and falcons until a few years ago, when he felt the pressure from the authorities took all the fun out of hawking. It was sad to think how intimidation had taken the passion from this man's life and reduced him to flying a kite in the shape of a hawk. Perhaps he got some small satisfaction from standing in Tiananmen Square with his hawk kite flying high above all the edifices of power. I do know that he was thrilled as he looked at all the pictures of trained hawks, falcons and eagles that I had brought with me. He was happy though a little bemused that this foreigner had come so far and was so interested in how he had lived his life.

As the afternoon drew to an end Mr Sun requested that Mr Liu, who had joined this reminiscent discussion on falconry, should take me to visit a practising falconer. This really perked me up, for at last this was proof that I had gained their trust. As darkness fell I stepped into a taxi with Mr. Liu to be whisked across the city towards the suburbs. We changed cabs and boarded the odd bus which completely disorientated me, when we set off on foot I fully expected the next part of the journey to be blindfolded. Eventually after waiting in a side street in a rough looking neighbourhood for about ten minutes, a young man walked up to us. This was Mr Zhucheng who led us to his apartment block and up many flights of dark stairs to be greeted by his mother as she opened the door.

Perched in his bedroom was a handsome saker falcon whose only flaw was the need of some beak

coping. This scene was so typical of a young man of his age with the walls of his room adorned with large posters of heavy metal bands and Harley Davidson motorbikes. Mr Zhucheng was a craftsman, and when he was not hunting rabbits on the outskirts of Beijing with his saker he was carving intricate patterns onto the outside surface of the bottle-gourd cricket boxes. We exchanged falconry jewellery (bells, swivels etc.) as we talked and he told me he had purchased the saker at a Beijing bird market for 800 Rmb. (about £60.00) and this spring he intended to release her back to the wild. He gave me names of two bird markets where passage hawks were sold and another city where falconers could be found. As I left he tied a gift of a small hood made to fit a shrike, to the strap of my shoulder bag.

The following day I headed for the bird markets on a long distance bus, the journey turned out to be fruitless, as the first market was held only once a week and by the time I got to the second town the market was finished. The locals also seemed reticent as to the reality of hawk sales or falconers and so I decided to travel south the following day in search of falconers in the city of Tainjin.

Here the market was held on waste ground and consisted of sellers displaying their wares on the floor or from the back of vehicles. I wandered amongst caged finches and pigeons, crickets and nut sellers but failed to find any raptors. Then I noticed a parked motorcycle with a thin stick jammed between the petrol tank and the seat. Upon it sat a shrike with string jesses tying it to the bike. I asked the owner if I could photograph the bird and as he agreed he noticed the hood tied to my bag. This greatly aroused his interest so I produced some photographs. Within seconds it was hard to breath as the crush of the curious crowd pressed in to obtain a view. Soon, individuals were

confessing to being hawk trappers or falconers, and as the main body of the crowd dispersed I persuaded three individuals to lunch and a more private conversation. A few beers later and our appetites sated we were indulging in group photographs before stepping into a taxi and heading for their home neighbourhood. There, perched on a low stool at a street table I sat drinking green tea from a jam jar. The usual crowd, more interested in the foreign face, surrounded us, then one by one goshawks, adult and passage, buzzards, merlins, kestrels and sakers came through the crowd perched on padded arms.

There, perched on a low stool at a street table I sat drinking green tea from a jam jar. The usual crowd, more interested in the foreign face, surrounded us, then one by one goshawks, adult and passage, buzzards, merlins, kestrels and sakers came through the crowd perched on padded arms.



My host Mr Shi with his running dogs and TuHu.

Most of the hawks were wearing string jesses and were in effect for sale. An old man stopped his shopping bemused by the crowd and told us that he had practised falconry for the past fifty years. On Mr Zhou's invitation we all hopped into a small mini-van taxi

to visit his home and see his falcons and hawks. After climbing six flights of stairs we entered into a sparse apartment to come face to face with two fine hooded sakers and a gos all perched on the same pole. In another room a second gos was perched on a ▶

pole, all the birds were perfectly manned and very calm. Mr Zhou showed me many photographs of his hawking life out in the field with his hawks and dogs and offered to take us out hunting. I was really fascinated and wanted to see sakers hunting hares especially when I was shown that they kept these falcons' talons very blunt. The reason I was told, is so that the falcon does not damage herself by binding to the hare on the first strike. With blunt talons the falcon learns to repeatedly strike the hare until it's dazed enough for her to make the final grab.

It had been a successful day with offers of goshawking, trapping and saker hare-hawking. All fired up I returned to the hotel to await instructions for the following day, which dawned grey and a little hazy, but not a problem for hawking. All day the phone stayed quite and Mr Zhou's mobile was switched off. Bemused by the sudden silence I watched the day gradually deteriorate into sleet. By the next morning a blanket of wet snow covered the city and I decided to leave Tainjin and head south.

Whilst in the south and the central highlands of China I found and hunted with many goshawkers, but it was three days after leaving Tainjin that I received a phone call with a request to join a hawking trip. I made arrangements to return if time allowed as I really wanted to witness the falcons hunt.

Mr Zhou continued to be evasive about exactly when we could go hunting with him. Eventually he gave us a name and phone number of a peasant farmer who also hunted with falcons. On first contact M. Shi seemed very enthusiastic to meet me



Three-wheeled trailer tractors used to transport beaters, falconers and TuHu across the vast fields.

and we arranged to make contact when I returned to the capital Beijing. Mrs Shi took more convincing that there really was an English falconer wanting to meet her husband, my stumbling attempts on the telephone to talk to her in Mandarin convinced her I was no fake.

I relocated to a nearby city and took the long bus journey into the vast agricultural plains of China. The crops of maize, cotton, tobacco, wheat, sunflowers and vegetables were all planted in strip fields and tended by individual families with the minimum use of machinery. Along the journey I passed through numerous farming villages, and it was interesting that the further I travelled from the city the favoured dog changed from a guarding to a running breed. As I entered Mr Shi's house I was first greeted by hard-muscled greyhound type dogs and I knew this man hunted hares.

Getting to know one another lasted most of the day until it was time for me to catch the last bus back to the city. Though I had not seen any falcons I had at least been offered the invitation to return the next day to hunt.

Next morning I was back in the village, but because of the heavy rain a few days earlier the fields were still very sticky. Mr Shi seemed a little reluctant to tramp miles across ploughed fields so suggested that his friends set up a bagged hare. I was far from enthusiastic about this but began to feel this might be the only flight I would see. Finally after a lot of talking Mr Shi disappeared leaving instructions that I should go outside in an hour's time. Puzzled by this I stayed indoors where it was warm and watched Mrs Shi prepare dozens of *Dim Sum* for lunch.

Eventually it was time for me to venture outside where I stood waiting in the lee of a tree trying to shelter from the biting north wind. In the distance I saw a lone figure, it was hard at first to determine if it was approaching, but soon I could make out that it was accompanied by two dogs. As I abandoned the thin bit of shelter of the tree for the open plain confirmation that I had identified Mr Shi correctly came as the distant figure flailed his arms about and let out a noise that encouraged me to

advance at a faster pace.

The closer I got the more he indicated that I hurry, we slipped and slid over the wet clay, ahead I could make out a group of men stood in a semi-circle spaced apart by about 15 metres. Three or four running dogs stood at their owners heel and one man out on his own held a hooded *TuHu* falcon.

One of the men came forward, and as he held me by the shoulder pointed about thirty metres ahead on the plough furrows. I lifted my camera to my eye and aimed in the indicated direction nodding in agreement, though I could see nothing. Then, as if by magic my eyes focused on a camouflaged hare sitting in its seat. Wow, if these guys had set up this baggy what a fantastic job they had done. I had never seen anything so natural, and what was keeping that hare motionless? Seconds later all hell broke loose, the hare was off, the power winder of my camera was firing shots, the dogs were up the tail of the hare and the *TuHu* was stooping like a jack-hammer. I leapt forward with clay-coated feet the size a yeti would be proud of, and raced after the fast disappearing hare.

Clasping my camera I dropped into large ditches and scraped my way out of them again desperately trying to keep the action in view. Thankfully this flight ended within a thousand metres, any further and I would have been unable to lift my clay feet. I was the second person on the scene and the hare was already dispatched and secured, the dogs stood obediently and patiently nearby. The hare's paunch was opened and the vital organs were removed and the *TuHu* was hand fed as the falconer made a



Three *TuHus* from neighbouring collectives.

repetitive gurgling come purring type noise to her. The dogs were given bits of the stomach lining and the hare was slipped into a feed sack. It was now that I was shown the still live intended baggy, our flight had been genuine. The hare had been discovered in the seat, the game was set and Mr Shi was sent to collect me. For once everything worked to plan, a successful flight culminating in my introduction to this farmers' collective. Eight of these peasant farmers owned this *TuHu* and often flew her with two other collectives who owned *TuHus*.

I hired a tractor truck the following morning and *TuHu*, dogs, falconers and beaters all clambered into the open back. The rough ride was cushioned with a deep bed of maize stalks laid on the floor of the truck. The wind had persisted all night and was still driving out of the north, making me thankful that my hat had ▶

HARE TIGERS OF CHINA

earflaps. The discomfort of the cold wind held the consolation that it had removed the stickiness from the clay, hopefully yeti impersonations would be a thing of the past.

After some miles of rough tracks through the fields we came across two other hunting parties each with their *TuHu*, they had already caught a hare each which enthused me for the day ahead.

After a couple of hours tramping the strip fields with nothing to show for our efforts, my enthusiasm for a red letter day was draining fast.

When a shout went up my first image was of a large running dog streaking down the length of a maize field with its nose on the tail of a hare. As the pair of them busted out from the cover of the standing maize stalks the *TuHu* was out of the hood and in pursuit. By now three dogs working as a team were coursing this hare into a circle and the *TuHu* had whacked it

two or three times when all of a sudden the action stopped. The *TuHu* peeled off and the dogs ran about aimlessly. As we approached we discovered what had happened. Laid on the ground was a long concrete electric pole which was tapered and hollow. As the hare passed this it took a split second decision and shot up the inside of this pole. It was now stuck halfway up as fast as a cork in a bottle. Personally I would have left it there, but my Chinese friends were determined to reflush this hare and a near military operation was mounted to push this hare out backwards. An hour passed and still no progress, this hare knew the moment it left its sanctuary it was dead. Unfortunately I needed to return to the capital as the following day my stay in China was at an end.

I departed with the insistent invitations to return and stay in the village to hunt for a much longer

period. Much of my time had been spent in the location of practitioners, building bridges and gaining trust. As I departed company the strong hand shaking, shoulder slapping and occasional hug demonstrated that falconers throughout the world, regardless of language, religion or culture have a common love of the art that bonds them together in a brotherhood. ■

Acknowledgment:

I would like to express my thanks to Jane Yeo of Jane Yeo Tours whose excellent language interpretation skill, made it possible for me to spend hours of friendly communication with many Chinese falconers.

Her excellent organisation arranged flawless travel and hotel accommodation throughout China, saving me considerable expense on this extensive trip.

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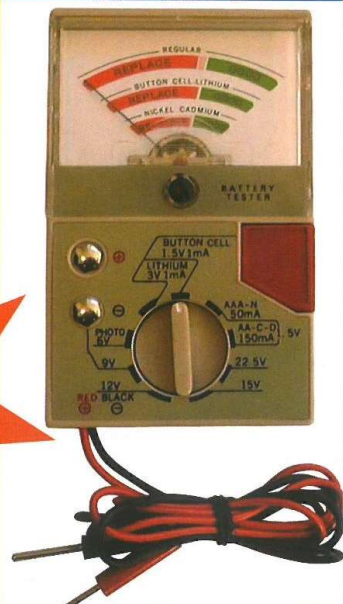
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PART TWO



THE BEST A MAN

by David T. Moran

FROM ISSUE 19

.... I went home, defeated, thinking the worst had happened. My gyr was gone. My life was now empty. Naturally, I had a dinner engagement that evening with some friends, and had to call to tell them I wasn't going to make it. They understood. It wasn't the first time the uncertainty of flying falcons in the field had made me the empty chair at the table.

When I awoke the next morning, having slept fitfully, I was tempted to re-run the reel: To go out with my receiver and drive all over creation looking for a signal. But I knew that would be to no avail. Suddenly, I had a perception into the obvious. Jaws and I had a very special bond, a spiritual connection. What if I got in a quiet state of mind, put aside all anxieties and negative thoughts of impending doom, and let her tell me where she was?

I disconnected the telephone, locked the doors to the house, and walked into my son's room. His room was always a special place. A falconer of the first water himself, Dave Jr. had furnished his room with things sacred to him. A large Bateman print of a golden eagle caught in a slanting stoop adorned the wall near his bed. So I lay down on Dave's bed, closed my eyes, and let myself imagine what it would be like to be Jaws. Wonderful visions started drifting through my head. Suddenly I found myself inside Jaws, merged with her. I was looking out through her eyes. We were sitting on a fence-post next to a lake, looking intently at a flock of ducks swimming about. I had never seen ducks so clearly before. Suddenly I realised that the fence, the landscape, and the lake were familiar. I got back into my ordinary state of consciousness, grabbed the keys to my hawking truck, and drove out to that very spot.

Standing on a hill above the lake I'd seen in my vision, I pulled out the telemetry: No signal. Then I took out the lure, garnished it with a whole

quail, and started swinging it, blowing as hard as I could on my worn Acme Thunderer whistle. At first nothing happened. Then I heard the "ching-ching-ching" of bells! I threw the lure out onto the ground, and in came my beautiful, white gyrfalcon! I got my bird back! I went from being very unhappy to completely happy in a second! Yes, in falconry, perhaps more than any other pursuit, the highs are very high, and the lows are low indeed.

After she'd finished her quail, Jaws looked at me happily, shambled over toward me through the native grasses, and hopped up on the fist. She was very happy, and so was I. I put on the hood, slipped in her jesses, and home we went. I tested her transmitter up close, and it had failed. (The batteries were fine; the transmitter was dead). Fortunately, the ultimate biological and metaphysical transmitter – the spiritual bond between falcon and falconer – had worked beautifully. I made a mental note to trust that ancient bond more often, and put less stock in modern technology.

As time went by, Jaws got better and better. She got tremendously strong, and was able to get very high very fast. Wind was not an issue – she loved it and used it to her advantage. And, her formidable beak for which she was named got even more powerful. Since she got bored easily, I used to keep her amused by giving her jackrabbit heads to eat at the block. She got so she could pick apart and eat an entire jackrabbit head, teeth and all, in less than half an hour. The

HUNTING PARTNER COULD EVER HAVE.

dogs would station themselves anxiously by her block, waiting for her to finish and leave them some bits and pieces, but she rarely did. Eating jackrabbit heads not only gave Jaws tremendous biting power (and provided an outlet for her energy), but enabled her to dispatch quarry in very short order. This was made evident one particular day when she caught an outsized cock sage grouse in the company of a fellow falconer, Larry. He'd never seen a grouse caught firsthand, and was anxious to watch a flight.

Larry, his son and daughter, and I went out grouse-hawking in Wyoming late one winter evening. Winter grouse are tough, and I knew Jaws had her work cut out for her. Fortunately, just before sunset we got a nice point with my 12-year-old English setter, Lark. I unhooded Jaws, removed her jesses, and let her take off into the wind. She immediately climbed to a nice, workable pitch of around 800 feet. By now she was an experienced gamehawk. Grouse sense that immediately – they do not want to be flushed. So Larry, his kids, and I all ran in front of Lark, screaming like maniacs. Finally, a lone cock sage grouse got up and started heading for the hills. Before it got 100 yards Jaws had plummeted down out of the sky, struck it down, pitched up, and bound to it on the ground.

Now, that cock grouse was a big one – a “master cock” weighing in the 6-7 pound range. When Larry ran up, he saw just how much bigger the grouse was than the falcon, and yelled, “Dave, get in there and help her!”

I knew where he was coming from, and had to laugh. “Lawrence, no need to. It’s not even an issue. That grouse doesn’t have a chance!”

“Let me help her!”, shouted Larry. “God, it’s huge!” Apparently he’d seen other falcons have trouble holding large quarry.

“Well, Lawrence, if you want to, you can go in there,” I said, humoring him, “but she’s really got everything completely under control”. Larry made in to ‘help’ and felt for the grouse. It didn’t struggle in his hand.

“My god, it’s dead!” he exclaimed, in disbelief.

“Of course!” I answered, quietly chortling to myself. “How do you think she came by her name?”

One of the most enjoyable aspects of falconry is watching the interactions that take place between the hawk and the quarry. As mentioned above, the prey is very good at sizing up how good the falcon is and plans its escape accordingly. If the prey senses the falcon is young and inexperienced, they act in one way. If they sense the falcon is a seasoned veteran, they act another way. In addition, an experienced falcon is very good at sizing up just how capable the prey is. The result is a very interesting dance to watch – a dance of life and death that has been going on for millions of years, and has been recorded in the DNA of all living organisms. This was illustrated most vividly when, after flying for a few seasons and taking all manner of quarry, I re-visited an old duck pond with Jaws – the same one described earlier where, as a rookie, she had

missed the ducks by a country mile in her first high-speed stoop from a good pitch.

Again, we located a large flock of ducks – at least two dozen this time – on a relatively small pond. I released Jaws about a quarter-mile from the pond. Knowing the game well by this time, she went up about 1,000 feet, took station above the pond, and waited for me to flush. The ducks, sensing her competence, had no desire to leave the water whatsoever. Hurling rocks and human screams had no effect. When my dog leapt into the pond, however, that did the trick. Several dozen ducks splashed upward out of the pond, quacking angrily. I trained the binoculars on Jaws. She looked like a white football, spiraling downward out of the sky. Then, looking with my naked eye so I could take in all that happened, I saw something remarkable: Just as Jaws got within about 50 yards of the ducks, they simply folded up their wings and dropped out of the sky like stones. Jaws, a bit confused, pitched up. The ducks lay motionless on the ground. Then her keen eyes spotted one mallard spread-eagled out on the prairie grass. Jaws folded up, dropped out of the sky, and seized it. I let her gorge on her catch, picked her up in the slanting gold ray of the setting sun, and we went home.

Jaws was so intelligent she learned a lot that day. From that time on, when we went duck hunting, she’d simply mount up above the pond, wait for me or the dog to flush, make a high-speed stoop straight through the flock, watch for one or more to drop out of the air, ▶

and grab it on the ground. Much easier on the feet and talons that way! No fuss, no tail-chase.

Jaws was not only strong, fully aerobic, and intelligent, but fearless. In her fifth season, she took a strong interest in a large quarry that seemed worthy of her – geese. One day, when we were duck-hawking, I ran in to flush and found, much to my surprise, that there was a Canadian goose in amongst the mallards! Jaws singled it out, smacked it a few times, and seemed surprised it didn't drop out of the air. The ducks, seeing Jaws was occupied with the goose, made a run for it. Jaws, seeing the ducks streaking for the horizon, flashed out and grabbed one. But her interest in that goose made me wonder: How would Jaws do on geese?

Our first flight at snow geese, one of the best I've ever seen, has been described in another issue of this magazine. Unfortunately, snow geese aren't abundant in Colorado, but Canada geese are. So Jaws and I went afield to where there were some Canadian geese swimming on a pond. Not knowing what to expect, I put Jaws up over the pond, waited for her to get into position, and flushed. Immediately, Jaws stooped at the goose. But instead of hitting it hard, she flared up behind it, flew over it, grabbed it by the neck with one foot, and, carrying it like a winged suitcase, flew with it for about 50 yards. Watching in the binoculars, I saw a serious donnybrook taking place in the ground. It was a real rugby scrum, looking as if the two birds had been thrown in a blender. Fearing the goose would break one of Jaws' wings, I ran as fast as I could (which, given a game leg, isn't very fast) to the scene of the scrum. When I got there, all was quiet. Jaws was in complete control. She had one large yellow foot wrapped around the goose's beak, one foot around its neck, and was going to work with her bolt-cutter beak.

A full gorge of goose made Jaws to the quarry, and she became a very good goose-hawk. After one long and ▶



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difficult flight in the sand-hills of Nebraska, however, I feared she might be seriously injured if she kept it up. On that day, my hawking companion Greg Hayes and I spotted a lone, large gander standing out in a shallow wetland. We drove a half-mile away, put Jaws up, and let her gain altitude as she followed the truck to where the gander stood. Seeing and fearing Jaws, he put his head forward and lay down in the water. We ran out and attempted to flush the gander. He really didn't want to leave, and had just barely cleared the water when Jaws tackled him. They both went into the water, where the goose had the advantage. Jaws kept jockeying for the superior position, and the goose kept shoving her underwater. Finally, the goose broke free and took off. Jaws surfaced, shook herself off, saw the fleeing form, and took off after the goose. We followed the flight with the truck, and found Jaws glaring at the goose in a clump of cat-tails in the middle of the lake. We flushed the goose again, and, in a series of flights, Jaws kept binding to the goose, the goose kept escaping, and eventually both predator and prey went out of sight.

By now about twenty minutes had passed. I went back to the truck, got a telemetry signal, and followed it back to the point of origin of the flight. Unfortunately, instead of finding my hunting companion, I found...one tail feather, with attached transmitter, under six inches of water. The goose apparently stepped on the antenna and pulled out the feather, transmitter and all. Well, at least I know telemetry works under water! But - where was Jaws?

The sandhills are huge, and the chance of finding a lost bird in them without telemetry is remote. Normally, Jaws would come back to me after an unsuccessful flight and land at my feet. But this time she didn't. Which told me she was still somehow involved with that goose. So Greg and I drove around, looking for the goose. Eventually, we found one very tired, beat-up gander in some reeds, head

down in submissive posture. As we walked toward it, it reluctantly lumbered up into the air. I heard a ching-ching-ching sound and saw a white flash materialise out of nowhere, tackle the goose, and take it down right into the wetlands. This time, the goose stayed underwater. The falcon surfaced, enraged. Greg and I decided it was a draw - the goose would live. After letting Jaws stomp around angrily on the shore for a while, I held out the fist, blew the whistle, and called her in. One very tired gyrfalcon happily wolfed down a whole quail on the fist in record time. I was so happy to have her back on the fist again.

I have felt blessed to have this wonderful gyrfalcon be my hunting partner for eight years. She has been my "animal envoy of the unseen power," teaching me to view the world

through different eyes. Should the Great Spirit take me off to another dimension today, I will leave this world content, for I've shared so many wonderful adventures in the field with the best hunting partner a man could ever have. ■

FURTHER READING:

Moran, D.T.
Life on the Wing
Round Table Press, Boulder, Colorado
www.flyhawks.com

Moran, D.T.
First Flight at Snow Geese.
International Falconer
Issue 6: pages 24-31 (August, 2000)

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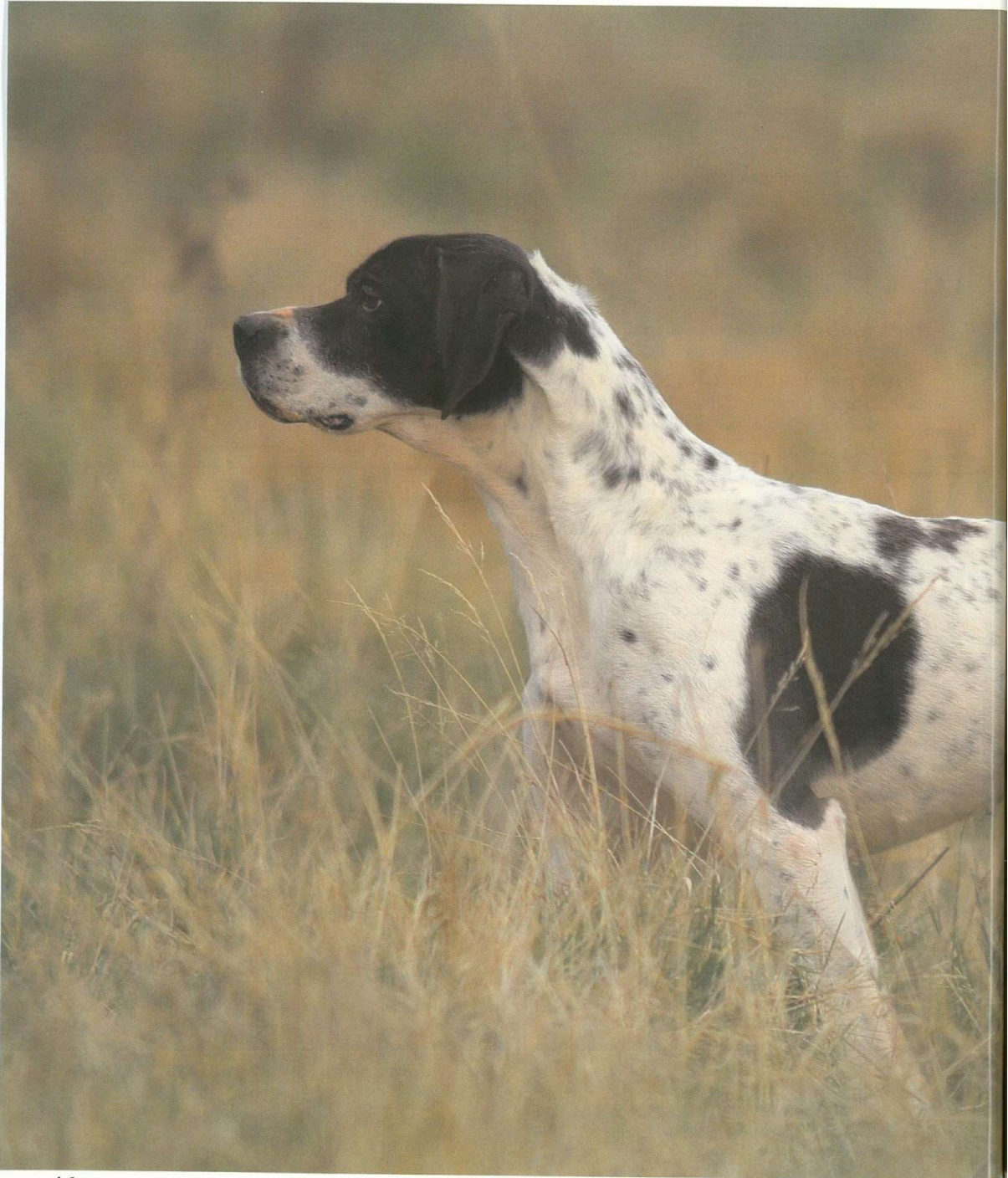
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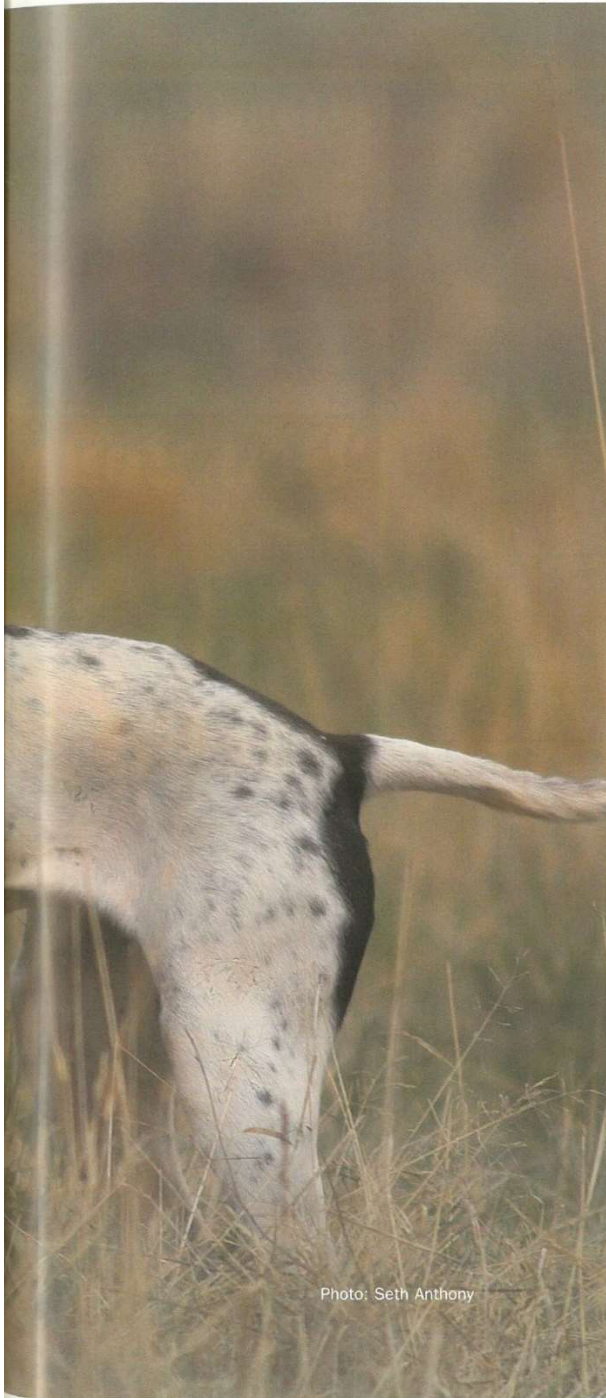


Photo: Seth Anthony

THE POINTER

Opinions vary as to the exact origins of the pointer as we know it today. The most common theory is that the 'Spanish' pointer, probably brought to England in the early 1700s, was the basic foundation but many breed historians beg to differ. The great pointer authority William Arkwright in his classic work *The Pointer and his Predecessors* published 1906 although accepting the presence of the Spanish pointer in Britain, generally casts doubt on the notion.

The question of origin may never be fully answered but what is certain, is that the modern pointer has had hugely diverse genetic input and three breeds accepted as being influential in its early development are greyhound, bloodhound and foxhound. Outstanding British stockmanship can be credited to the breed's development during the 1800s and early 1900s – although initially plagued with problems, careful selective breeding eventually created an elegant, tenacious hunter with a field performance simply unmatched and sought after the world over.

This breed is a specialist – developed for the sole purpose of bird-hunting by air scent on open ground. The acreage that a good pointer can cover in a day's hunting is staggering and has to be seen to be believed. Sadly very few falconers, in modern Britain at least, can now truly justify keeping such a refined performer. Modern farming doesn't lend itself to dogging stubbles anymore and for most, grouse hawking can only ever be a brief late-summer/autumn diversion from normal lowland hawking. However in other parts of the world and North America in particular, things are very different – vast tracts of open land are available to many falconers, and a big-running dog is an absolute necessity for day-to-day hawking – the pointer fits this bill perfectly. ■

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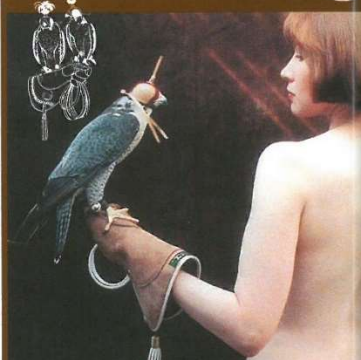
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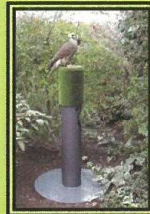
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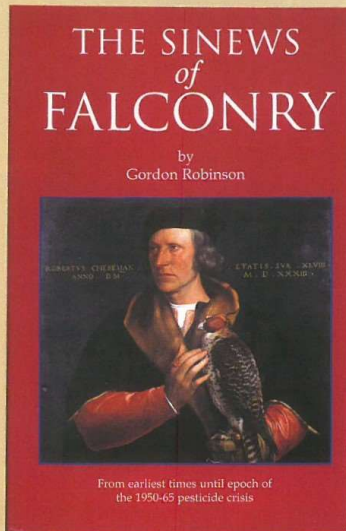
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BOOK REVIEW



The Sinews of Falconry

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Reviewed by Gordon Mellor

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Rumours that Gordon Robinson was going to publish his contribution to the literature on falconry history have circulated for several years now and it was with considerable anticipation that I ordered, received and read my copy. This book is a pleasure: an informed, well written and beautifully researched consideration. Once read, the choice of title is transformed from seeming slightly awkward to being entirely appropriate. This book lays bare the very sinews of our sport in a refreshingly insightful manner.

The foreword, in which the Author traces his early involvement in falconry, sets the tone for the entire work. In Part 1 the tapestry begins with the explicatory necessity of a definitional section. From China and the silk route, the Sumarians and the Hittites, the very genesis of the sport is proposed. Once recognised sources become available in the historical record the author shows considerable scholarship in interpreting them but it is his treatment of the literature at which he excels. Marco Polo, Khublai Khan, Emperor Constantine through to the more widely recognised falconry interests of Bishop Boniface, the Bayeux tapestry, and the British medieval experience frame the development of the sport into the early modern period.

Part 2 revisits falconry history from the 18th Century onward from Col. Thornton and Lord Orford, the early clubs and the revival in the mid-to-late 19th Century, Lord Lilford, Captain Salvin, Gerald Lascelles, and so on. These are previously documented it is true, but I am sure this treatment adds much to our appreciation of this period in our sport and those figures who sustained it. The section concludes with a revisiting of the exotic, and an assessment of short pieces on falconry as written predominantly by Britons

who experienced hawking abroad. These are interesting in their own right but hang together less well than what goes before.

The final section returns to consider the contribution made by some significant figures; Michell, Blaine, Knight and Rutledge amongst others. This work charts us through the first half of the 20th Century and is contributed by numerous authors. The collection contains one or two further articles of much interest. Whilst penned by different hands all well known in falconry circles, these continue in the manner of the earlier sections in being either first hand recollections or excellently researched pieces.

The book contains numerous high quality black & white and colour plates of artwork and photographs. Many will be familiar to falconers with an interest in the history of our sport, others are less well known. These supplement what is a well produced book.

One of the strengths of this text is its slightly eclectic nature. It contains much that has not been published in this type of work previously and many of the more usual falconry subjects are treated in a way that sheds new light upon them. The breadth of consideration and the quality of scholarship are impressive and I would predict that this work will come to be seen as an important addition to the literature on the history of falconry from a British perspective. Gordon Robinson has brought a life-long involvement in falconry, some exhaustive research and considerable intellect to bear on his subject, the result ought to grace the bookshelves of all who value our traditions. ■

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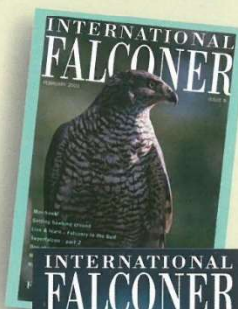
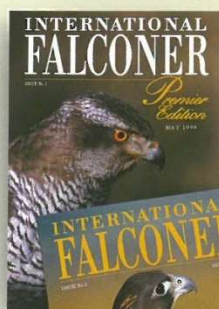
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