

INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

ISSUE 25 - 2005



Feed the passion

INTERNATIONAL FALCONER

Editor: Seth Anthony
NEW address seth@intfalconer.com

News Editor: Nick Kester
NEW address news@intfalconer.net

Design &
Production: Terry Anthony

Advertising &
Subscriptions: Terry Anthony
NEW address terry@intfalconer.net

Donna Vorce (N.America)
rosebud@galaxycable.net
Tel: 402-364-2470

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Cover photo: Adult female Finnish goshawk
Photo: Seth Anthony

EDITORIAL

It was a huge shock to hear of the recent passing of Ron Hartley. Few falconers have ever had such a positive influence on the sport and few ever will. He truly was a falconry giant. We would have liked to have paid tribute to Ron in this issue but it's been difficult to gather the necessary information in time. We're working on it and hope to be able to put together an in-depth tribute for the next issue. In the meantime our deepest condolences go out to his family and friends.

Many of you will have had trouble accessing the *IF* website recently as well as sending e-mails. We've had huge problems with our provider, so much so that we've had to resort to changing the address. Please take note of the new details at the bottom of the Contents page. Apologies for all the inconvenience – things should run smoothly from now on.

In such a small world as falconry, once the jungle drums start beating, rumours travel quickly. It's come to our attention over the last few months, that there are various stories flying around about the ownership of *International Falconer* (and the Editor's falcon breeding business Langley Mews). We've been linked to everything from Arab sheikhs to a high-profile falconry personality here in the UK. I'd like to make it quite clear that *International Falconer* (and Langley Mews) are and always have been 100 per cent independent, family-run and owned businesses and not answerable to anyone else.....however, if someone were to come up with a good offer, who knows!!

Finally, a little snippet of interesting information relevant to the last issue. The word 'spermaceti' as mentioned in Nick Kester's review of *A Short Discourse of Hawking in the Field* is actually a substance taken from the brain of the sperm whale and used to make candles and ointments. Subscriber Imogen Mann came across this quite by accident while reading a book by Patrick O'Brian. Thanks Imogen and well spotted.

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 **A treasured tradition**

A report from Abu Dhabi's Environmental Research and Wildlife Development Agency (ERWDA) on this year's successful release of falconry birds back to the wild as part of the annual Falcon Release Programme.

8 **One of the grand old men**

Nick Kester visits Roger Upton at his home on the rolling Wiltshire downland and gains an insight to a truly remarkable 50 years of falconry experienced by one of the sport's "grand old men".

14 **Winter pheasant hawking**

Some fantastic pheasant hawking can be had in the very depths of winter.....if you can stand the cold. *Mike McDermott* braves the elements and sets about finding a warm meal for a goshawk.

18 **In focus – 5 days in Idaho**

For the second leg of his 2004 North American trip *Seth Anthony* visits Charles and Marty Schwartz at their hunting base in the wilds of Idaho for an action-packed 5 days of hawking.

28 **Perlins re-loaded**

With several years' experience flying perlins, *Pete Smith* discusses the conditioning programme that he's developed which aims to get the best out of this high-performance hybrid.

34 **Pheasant hawking – a Japanese tradition**

Morimoto Teruo gives an account of the 4th Nagoya Field Meet held recently in Japan.

38 **Why I hunt grouse**

From an early age it was grouse hawking that captivated the interest of *Dale Guthormsen* and he explains what makes hawking the North American species of grouse so special.

49 **Reviews**

Training the Short-winged Hawk
(An Elizabethan Perspective)
Reviewed by *Nick Kester*

INTERNATIONAL FALCONER



Photo: Terry Anthony

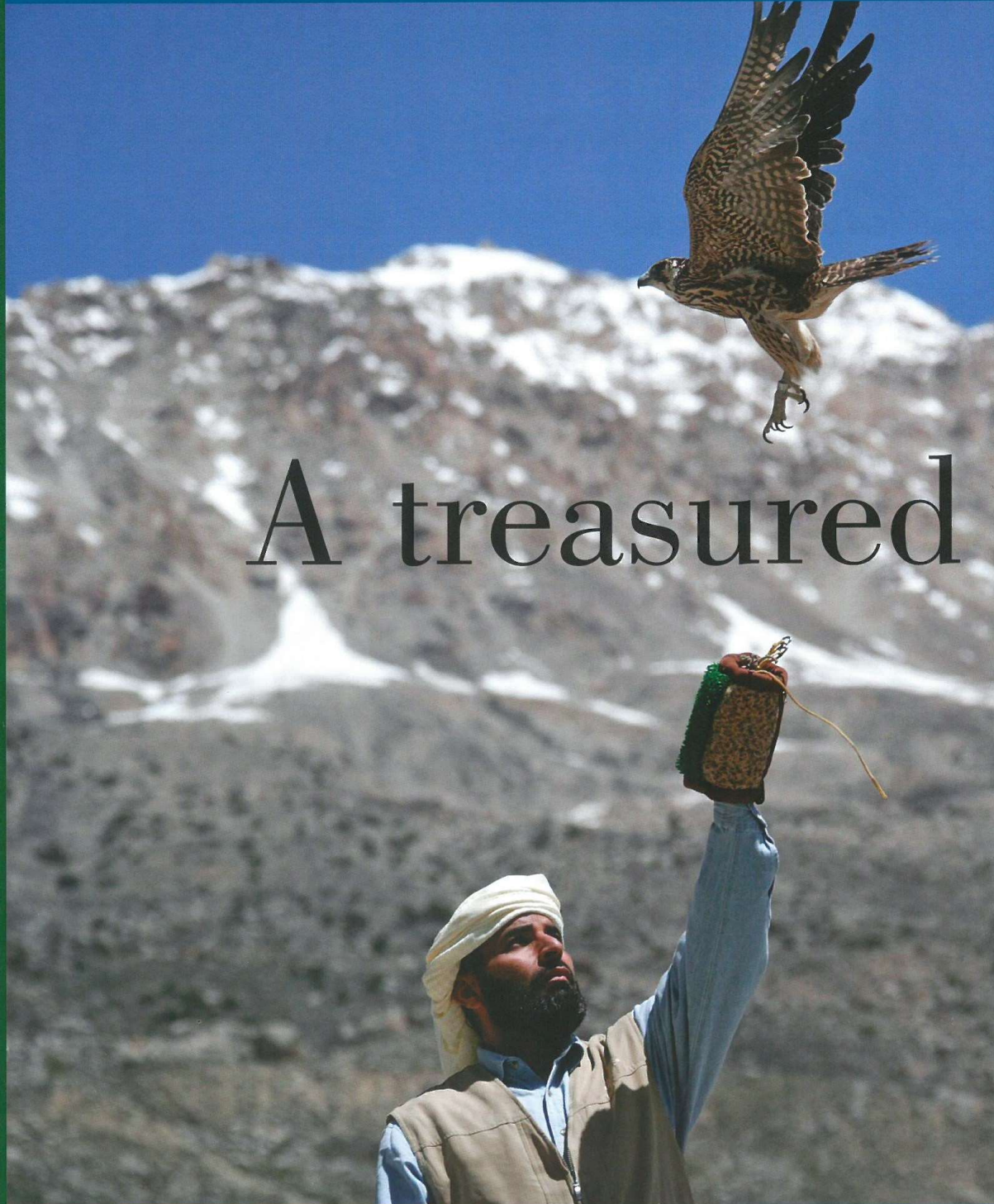


Photo: courtesy of Morimoto Teruo



Photo: Seth Anthony

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A treasured



tradition

The skies over Chitral, Pakistan, near the Afghani border, were this year's choice for the 11th annual release of falcons back into the wild under the Falcon Release Programme initiated by the late President of the UAE, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan. It is conducted in the hopes that the birds will rejoin the wild population and contribute to its growth and conservation. ▶



tradition

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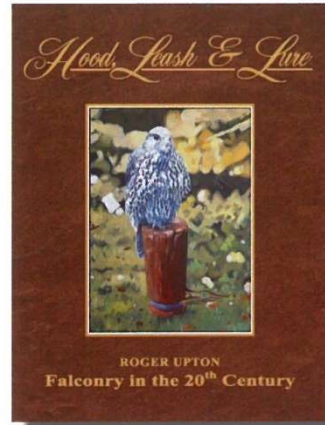
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ROGER UPTON



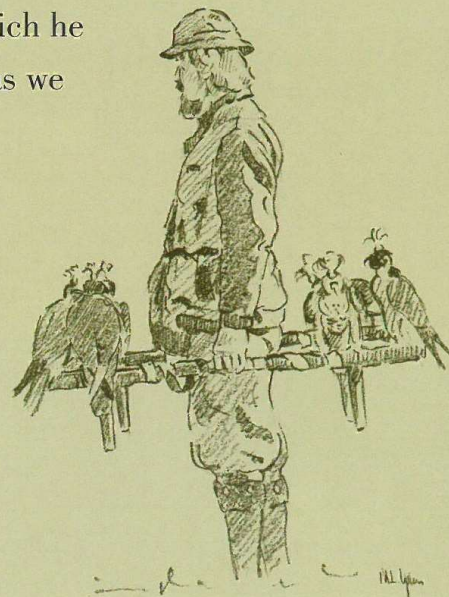
ONE OF THE GRAND OLD MEN

By Nick Kester



Photo: Terry Anthony

To visit Roger Upton's elegant Queen Anne house in Marlborough is akin to entering an Aladdin's cave of field sports, with falconry holding centre stage. Always perfectly dressed for the occasion, he greeted us at the gate in Panama hat and with watch chain draped across a somewhat old fashioned, but no less appropriate, waistcoat. In his hand he held a camel stick which he raised in salute as we pulled up. ▶



Leading us into his world, surrounded by the rolling downs, you quickly realise how important the countryside is to Upton and his family. He has lived here for forty years and not one has passed without there being falcons in the mews. Nearly 200 pictures crowd the walls; many by his son Mark whose subjects range from Arabian falconry to English horseracing. But like all good English homes it is to the downstairs lavatory that one goes to see the most varied and unusual including the wonderful Spy cartoon of Lascelles.

At 68, is Roger a grand old man of falconry? "Well one of the grand old men," he replies. "Being an identical twin, we are always the grand old men. But I am seven minutes older which is quite important when things are handed down in the family!" A tongue in cheek reference to primogeniture (the oldest shall inherit). Indeed so identical are the two Uptons, that when he produces a picture of them both in military service, the only distinguishing feature is Roger's moustache, and by the time they were photographed for an international fashion magazine, stylishly lounging in tweed, both sported identical beards making the confusion even greater.



All photographs courtesy of Roger Upton

Top: Roger with Stephen Frank.

Above: Roger on the moor with friends.

Left: Roger and Jack Mavrogordato.

Right and main picture: The lodge at Lochdhu.

ROGER UPTON - ONE OF THE GRAND OLD MEN

He first became a part of falconry aged 12 when he sought out his long term friend and mentor, Stephen Frank, whose farming family lived not far away. With advice and guidance he trained a male goshawk using Bert's treatise correctly, unlike T H White. But falcons are and remain central to

and cart, Jack Mavrogordato and others carried on where the Old Hawking Club had left off. Everyone will tell you that rooks are cunning, clever birds and in a bid to outwit them Mavro, as our generation call him, although Upton, as a friend and contemporary refers to him as Jack,

At last to Scotland and Caithness where Geoffrey Pollard was hawking from the lodge at Lochdhu, which at the time was a hotel. Pollard became the second most influential man in Upton's life. Stephen Frank, he describes as all energy and excitement, whereas Geoffrey is icily calm and carefully considered who, although he may be in turmoil inside, shares little; but is without doubt a great falconer.

These were the glory days, time spent on hills unencumbered by the dreaded Sitka spruce plantations that have ruined much of Scotland and destroyed Lochdhu. The old photographs show a faux (like many lodges it is Victorian) gothic tower rising out of a sea of heather where today the whole is enclosed by pine forest. The hawking was exceptional, although Upton points out a number of influencing factors: the grouse populations were peaking; the adjacent moors were heavily kept; shooting was for a select few, not a corporate many; and finally, I suspect, the passing of time tints memory. Not so, he counters. You could not make the film *Falcon Gentle* on today's falconry moors. But then and with the most primitive of camera equipment it was possible. Mind you, they were young and hawked the hill hard. The young must be permitted the hunting instinct. I reflected on this energy of youth after the interview and realise that that which in the past was channelled into provision for the table is now often dedicated to the achievement of success, mainly in business. I am reminded of the French proverb which translates as: 'if the young only knew, if the old only could'. How well it applies to falconry.

A succession of moors followed, some better than others, like the wild-taken falcons they flew. The company was equally varied – Italians (who



his life; and being a traditionalist this means peregrines and not hybrids.

"Stephen, believing that people should learn the proper way, and not dive in at the head of the game, suggested I should train a merlin, before a peregrine." Nevertheless, it was the peregrine and the lure of grouse hawking that set the stage for nearly 50 years of falconry. They first set off for Derbyshire where they received an invitation to the Peak District by Tim Bowles, one time editor of the British Falconers' Club Journal. They didn't do so well on grouse but had a great deal of fun on snipe. Scotland was yet to come.

Locally rook hawking was very much a feature of Salisbury Plain, where, with the exception of a horse

drove an old army landrover. It being the height of the Cold War, the Plain was regularly used for military manoeuvres with a red flag signalling the 'no go' areas. Arriving one day they heard considerable firing and paused to debate the situation. "Can you see the flags?" asked Mavro. No they couldn't, but still questioned the safety of setting off. "No red flags, so we go," said Mavro starting the car, which being of reduced stature he could barely see over the wheel of. Cresting the rise they found themselves in the midst of what Roger Upton describes as a major battle. "No red flags," echoes Mavro with a grin and drives through the middle of the action. "The man had a terrific sense of humour," remembers Upton fondly.



ROGER UPTON - ONE OF THE GRAND OLD MEN

arrived in a Porsche with falcons, kept who knows where), French and Germans. The leading light at the time was James Robertson Justice, better known for his portrayal of the acerbic surgeon in the 'Doctor' films.

The stories flow easily. A much cursed boiler in the lodge which exploded once and blew out most of the windows caused much laughter until Upton remembered his son was sleeping in the room above. "I thought he must have been blown into the attic. But he was fine." They summoned a fire engine from Wick (miles away) but by the time it arrived they had used the ancient fire extinguishers to save the day. The generator they couldn't turn over, let

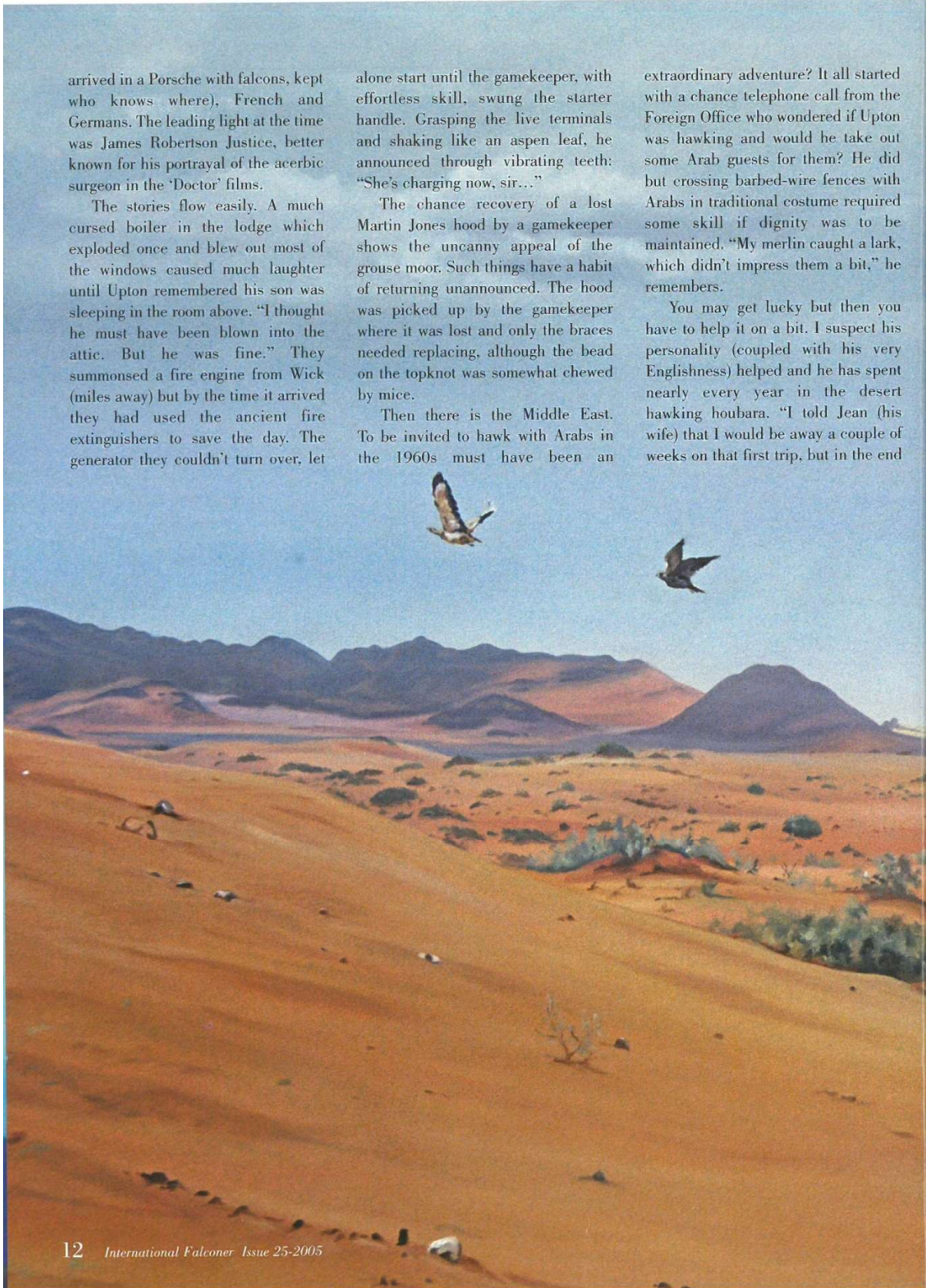
alone start until the gamekeeper, with effortless skill, swung the starter handle. Grasping the live terminals and shaking like an aspen leaf, he announced through vibrating teeth: "She's charging now, sir..."

The chance recovery of a lost Martin Jones hood by a gamekeeper shows the uncanny appeal of the grouse moor. Such things have a habit of returning unannounced. The hood was picked up by the gamekeeper where it was lost and only the braces needed replacing, although the bead on the topknot was somewhat chewed by mice.

Then there is the Middle East. To be invited to hawk with Arabs in the 1960s must have been an

extraordinary adventure? It all started with a chance telephone call from the Foreign Office who wondered if Upton was hawking and would he take out some Arab guests for them? He did but crossing barbed-wire fences with Arabs in traditional costume required some skill if dignity was to be maintained. "My merlin caught a lark, which didn't impress them a bit," he remembers.

You may get lucky but then you have to help it on a bit. I suspect his personality (coupled with his very Englishness) helped and he has spent nearly every year in the desert hawking houbara. "I told Jean (his wife) that I would be away a couple of weeks on that first trip, but in the end



returned after nine.”

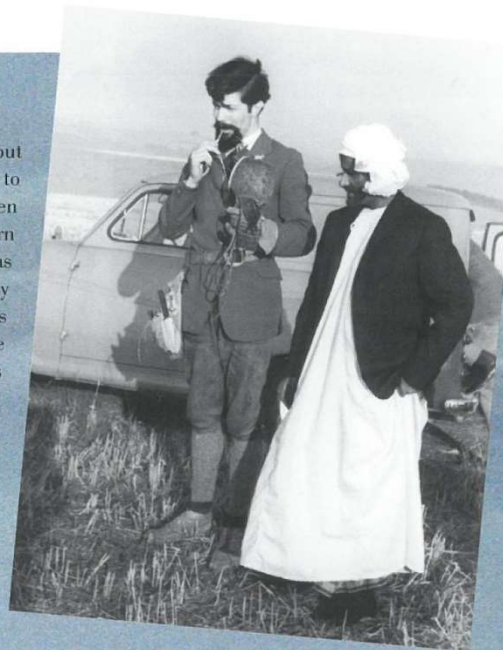
He has travelled all over the houbara range with his Arab hosts to whom falconry is not just a hobby but a passion. Often, having written about it, Upton has been asked by film companies if he can engineer an invite, for it would make terrific television. He has always refused for two reasons. Firstly, it is not within his gift and would be an insult to his friends and secondly, he says: “would you invite the television cameras onto your holiday?” Of course they would not, although in these days of willing participants in reality television many producers would be surprised to be refused.

It pays to respond to these invitations fairly promptly. Once, receiving a call to visit, he dallied for a week before leaving. When he landed at Abu Dhabi he was hustled off the plane with luggage express cleared and straight onto a private flight where everyone was assembled with their falcons ready for the off. He was effusive in his apologies, hoping they had not been sitting on the tarmac for that time.

Arabia has changed but Roger Upton was privileged to enjoy its nascent years, when it became available to western travellers. In falconry, he has enjoyed the company of many good friends, but he pays particular tribute to the late Sheik Zayed. “We shall miss him.” And he can say that for he knew him well, both before and after he became the luminary ruler of the United Arab Emirates.

Looking round his sitting room, stuffed with an eclectic mix of European and Arabic influences, one wonders what happens next? He has hunted foxes, hare, coursed greyhounds, stalked wildfowl from a punt, and, of course, become one of our grand old men. With several books to his name, I wonder if there will be another?

“I started jotting down some early memories and started to giggle. Then I wondered if others would laugh if they read them?” Seems to me like a very good reason to write another book.



Above: Roger with Sheikh Salim bin Ham on the Wiltshire Downs.

Main picture: Following the high flight – an Arab hawking scene by Mark Upton.

I hope I will not have to wait long; otherwise I will have to return to Marlborough and interview him again. ■



Winter Pheasant Hawking

By Mike McDermott

Pheasant hawking happens where you find them. At times this has been in various industrial parks, weedy railroad tracks, vast grasslands, tiny subdivision fields and unkempt farms. Pheasants behave so differently in each of these various habitats as to be nearly impossible to generalise. One thing always remains true – none want to become a hawk's warm meal!

The cold is almost a thing unto itself, sharp and biting like an angry spirit swirling about abrading at any exposed skin. Fingers feel flinty hard and almost useless if one is foolish enough to let them touch the brittle air. And yet here we plod through the cold with dead legs, hunched shoulders and anxious gazes following the sweep of the pointer's cast. The Vizsla's orange coat stands out starkly against the crisp white world that was once a field. The harvested wheat spikes are studded with crusted snow and are ankle-tall sharp lances that give a sense of depth in an otherwise white world of snow and cold. The dogs seem oblivious to everything and run like the champions that they were bred to be. The falconers are – to a man, miserable. I've always felt this intense lust of sport, this hunting drive to be just who I was and what I've always done. In ▶



Photo: Mike McDermott



this sport we call falconry I've found a handful of comrades to share these special experiences of the hunt. Facing harsh conditions does make the wine all the sweeter and the hearth all the warmer.

Rosy, the grey-muzzled nine-year-old vizsla has found birds and is locked up hard. Her breath puffs out in sharp, billowy clouds of steam that crystallize on everything it touches. Her legs are drawn tight and a front paw raised in as classic a pose as you can imagine. The falconer crunches into the frozen mix with the goshawk held high "shushing" her to a tense edge of explosion...

Naturally the pheasant has snuck off leaving the dog looking like a fool and the falconer deflated and cursing the dog. I think the exact term was "wooden-nosed bitch". Not a real flattering comment. Cursing falconers' dogs is dangerous business, sure you can tell someone that it hurts to look at their wife or that they've got ugly kids; but, a falconer's pointer is another matter altogether. More than one friendship has disintegrated over a falconer's canine companion.

One of the younger pups has smartly snapped on point about another fifty yards away. She generally ranges at middle distances and we are surprised to see her lithely-built frame pointing so close by. But of course logic tells us it must be the scaly-feathered rat we call a pheasant that had slunk off from the older dog just a few minutes ago. As we converge with the goshawk we see that her slender snout is buried in a brushpile. (The experienced reader already knows what follows.) Of course it is a rabbit that bolts a brief twenty yards before being sucked up by this very experienced goshawk. She was in her fifth season and had about eight hundred and something catches to her credit. To say rabbits are easy is an understatement for this hawk; she is simply murderous. The falconer robs her for a trivial tiny piece of meat and is ready for another flight within moments.

But alas, the older dog has another point. This time she's the "sweet lady" who is always there when needed. Friends can be fickle indeed! A goshawk toting falconer walking in pheasant country who's hard up for a solid dog point is about as fickle as they come. Any port in a storm as they say. This turns out to be the real deal with a hen pheasant shooting up and out through a frozen crust of snowdrift just a few feet away. She pumps hard with the fast upland game wingbeat that turns on goshawks and falconers alike. The gos pushes off and starts her own deep pumping wingbeats that row her forward at an amazing clip. The pair flash over a cut cornfield and disappear into a fence row covered with criss-crossing vines. The gos has marked her quarry well standing "on point" in the covert as Bert might have accurately described so long ago. The principle remains the same - find it quick and flush it! In charge the three golden vizslas. A lovely point and reflush would have been great, but the "luck of the day" simply doesn't cooperate. The hawk pounces down like a common redtail and seizes the pheasant while she tries to slither out on the ground. That's just what they do sometimes. She is again easily robbed with a small tidbit artfully tied to the lure.

With high spirits we simply float through the snowdrifts as our dogs cast about searching for more pheasants. Suddenly the goshawk goes from head bobbing to tight anticipation and is away. She pumps deep and purposefully gaining ground on something...the blurred brown form turns out to be yet another rabbit. This is unfortunate because our hawk is simply not challenged by furred quarry; her falconer is quite serious about pheasant hawking and really feels that rabbits just get in the way. (Me, I like catching rabbits - but I can relate to a certain amount of frustration) Four more rabbits later we get a good pheasant point. The older dog has made the point with a pool cue tail sticking straight up. She is

standing tall and hard like a piece of bright orange stone. The two pups are there as well. The middling dog is honouring but the pup is steadily creeping in to "steal" the point. And to top it off, her trainer is encouraging it! As you might imagine there is a sharp reprimand, more cursing and some fine belly laughs for everyone not involved. All the while our falconer with the goshawk is steadily making his way forward, sure he's griping the whole way but he's getting closer as well.

This time the flush goes off without a hitch. A rooster cackles just as he clears the crusted snow cover. The hawk closes but can't quite seem to get close enough for a bind. She powers off on a long tail chase. For some time she loses ground rapidly but then things begin to change. Her powerful rowing wings propel her forward until she's a mere dot in the distance. Both disappear into a fence row choked with brush. After a long breath-sucking run we arrive at the spot to hear...nothing. It takes telemetry to find them another thirty yards away. Irrespective of the pheasant's desires, it has ended up as a warm meal for the goshawk.

Like many falconers the world over we have largely forgotten about the cold and the wind. Familiar aches and pains only exist to remind us of what life is really about. I guess I'm very fortunate to be familiar with this mystery, as my rapidly-freezing toes keep reminding me of its answer. ■



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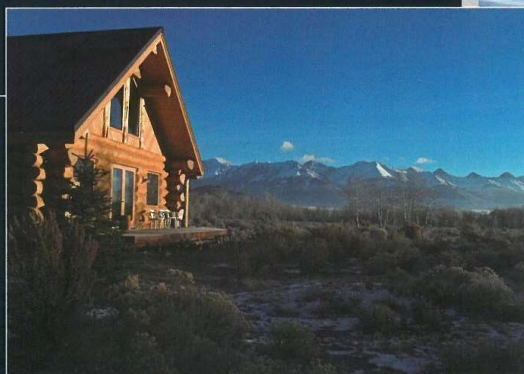
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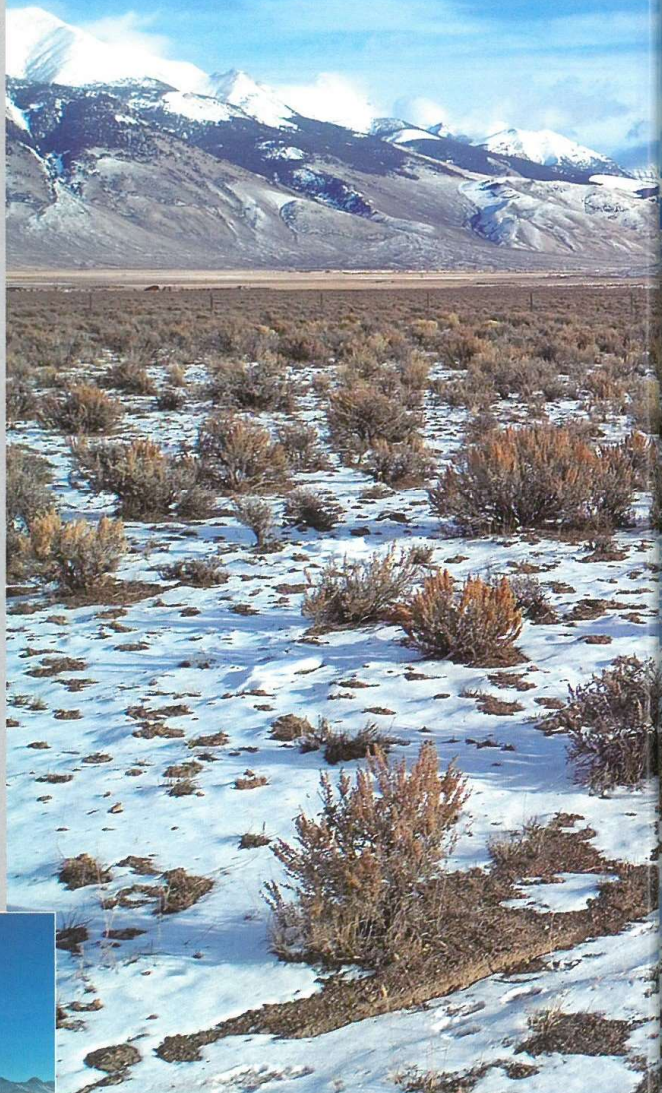


PHOTOS BY SETH ANTHONY

After attending the NAFA Field Meeting in Garden City, Kansas it was time to head a few hundred miles northwest to the spectacular intermountain west state of Idaho and take up the generous offer from Charles and Marty Schwartz to spend a few days with them and their team of imprint gyrs and bird dogs at their hunting cabin situated right in the middle of prime sage grouse country.



BIG COUNTRY. 5 DAYS IN IDAHO.



Left: Base for 5 days – Charles and Marty’s incredible hawking cabin. A more spectacular setting is hard to imagine.

Main picture: Mile upon mile of sage grouse country awaits.

Top inset: Silver imprint female gyr.

BIG FALCONS.



IN FOCUS BIG COUNTRY. BIG FALCONS.



Above: Getting close – fresh grouse tracks in a light dusting of snow.



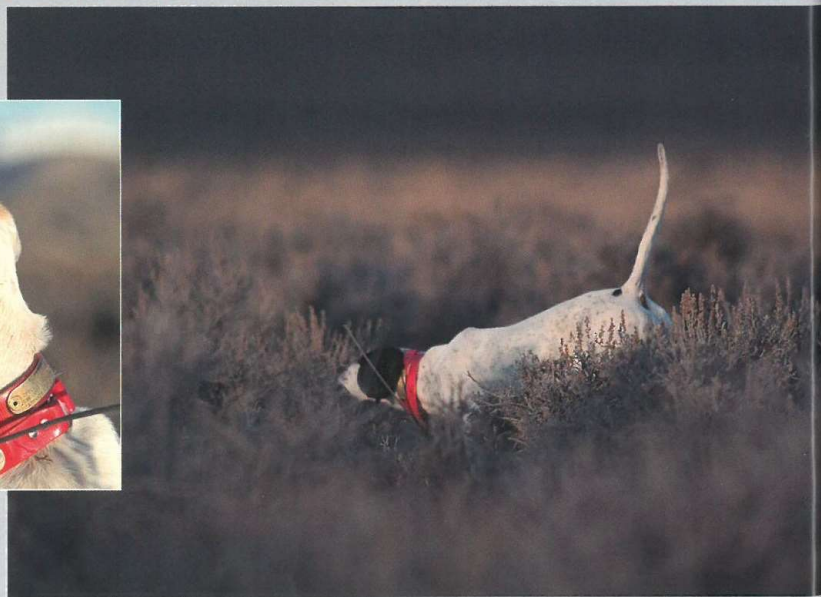
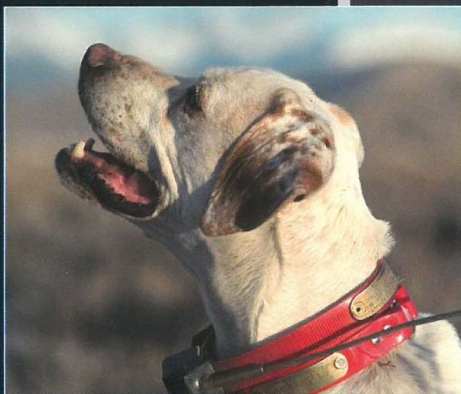
Top right: A small flock of fleeing sage grouse.

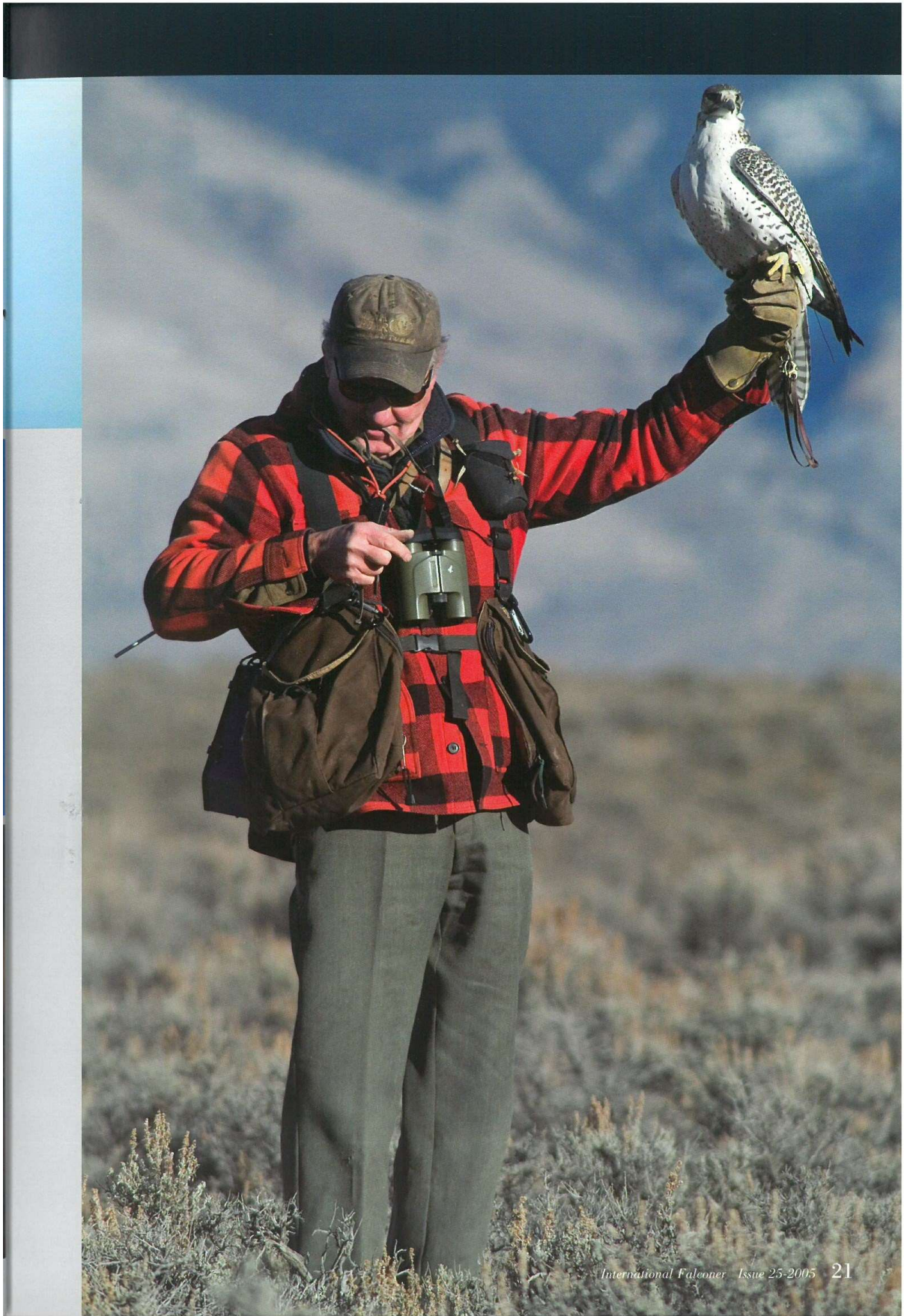
Right: Quickly mounting to her perch through the cold, crisp air.



Below: Big-running dogs are a must for this type of hawking – the distances covered are vast. Pointers Spook (left) and Jess did some sterling work. A long white tail comes in very handy – it's often the only thing alerting you to a point in the dense, high sagebrush.

Far right: With a dog firmly on point Charles unhoods the falcon and holds her aloft.





IN FOCUS BIG COUNTRY. BIG FALCONS.

Right: Folded up into a near vertical stoop and closing.

Middle: Levelled out at the bottom of her stoop and locked on.

Bottom: A very concerned sage grouse.

Far left and right: This wily grouse evades the stoop, switches on "turbo boost" and powers away.



Far bottom right: Sitting triumphantly on her grouse taken after a pounding stoop and a brief tussle on the ground.





IN FOCUS BIG COUNTRY. BIG FALCONS.

Charles had arranged for me to meet two other gyr specialists also residing in Idaho, Jack Oar and Hubert Quade.

Right: Jack Oar lives on a ranch in the next valley again with prime grouse hawking on his doorstep. On the day of our visit he flew this beautiful passage gyr.

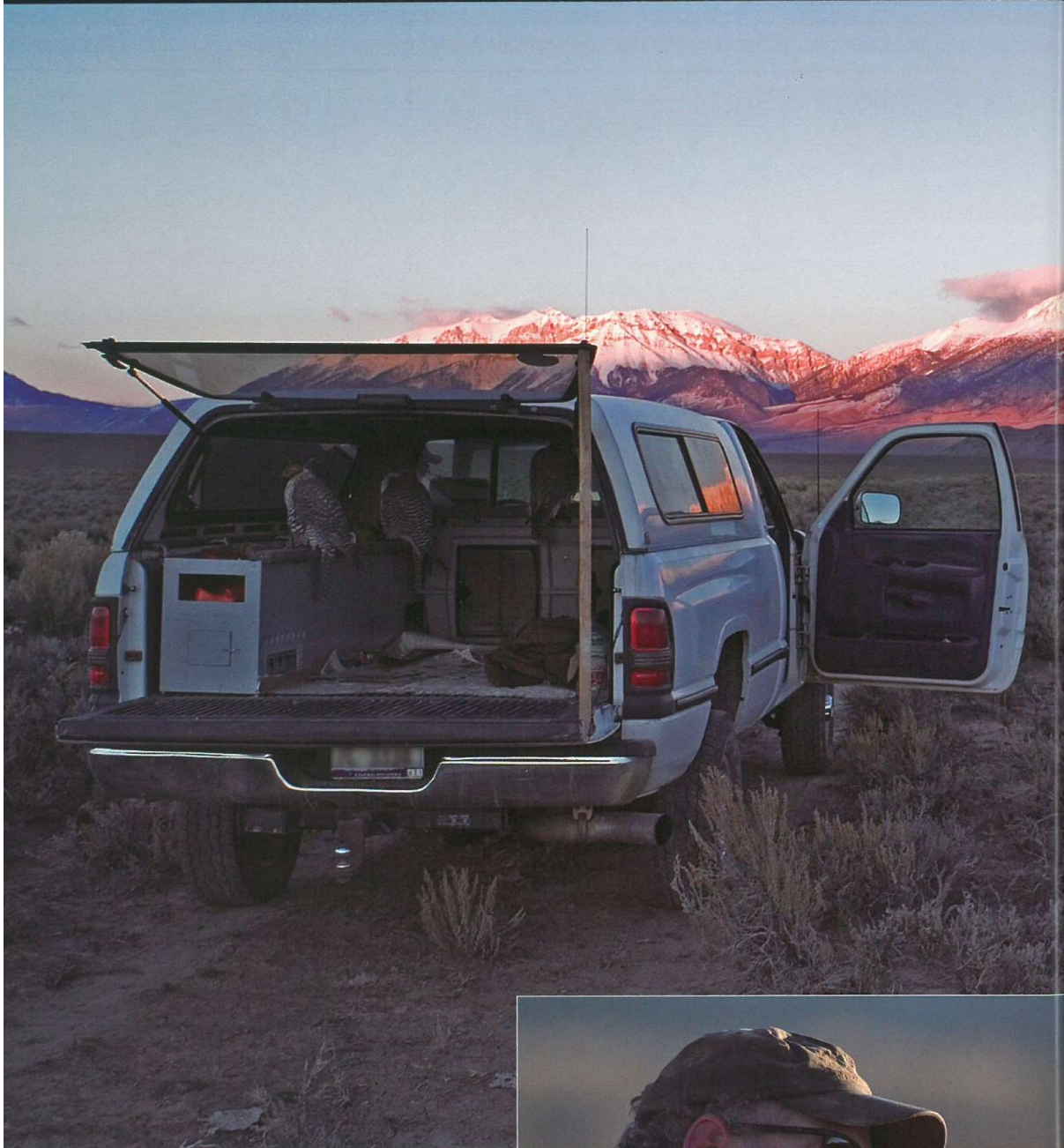




Above: Hubert Quade is a couple of hours east in Idaho Falls. Hubert only flies passage falcons and he's pictured here with an old, experienced female gyr. As well as sage grouse he has access to a lot of ducks and alternates between the two. Rather than going for vertical stoops Hubert prefers to flush when his gyrs are very wide of him. The stoops are long, slanting and very deadly.

Left: The same passage gyr on her mallard.

IN FOCUS BIG COUNTRY. BIG FALCONS.

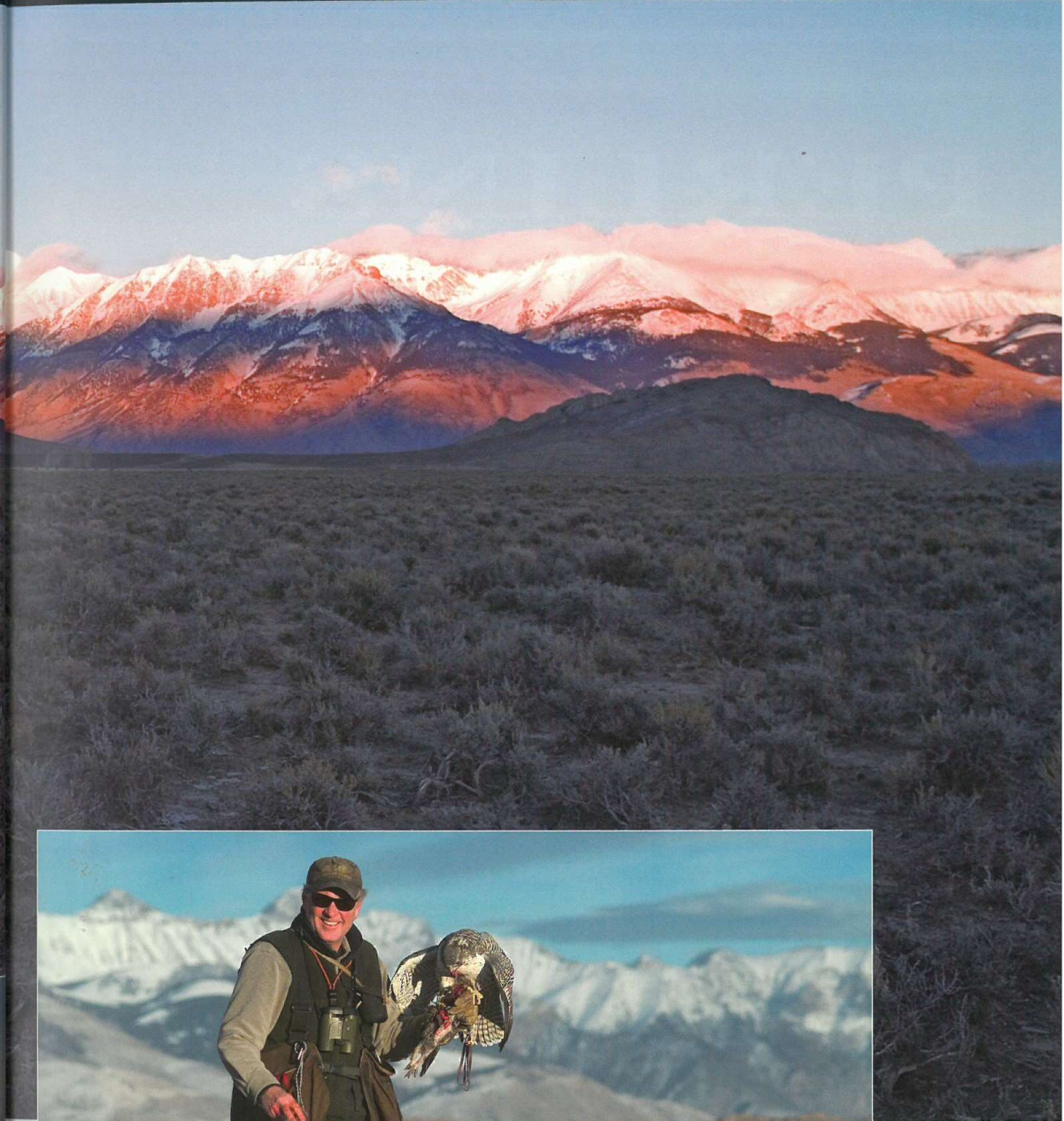


Far right: Charles feeds up after a successful flight.

Right: Charles hoods up.

Main picture: With falcons safely back and loaded up at the end of a full and exciting day there's just time to enjoy the fading evening light painting a wonderful display of colours on the surrounding mountains.





PERLINS RE-LOADED

By Pete Smith

Perlins Re-loaded. So what's that all about? Basically recognition that things never stay the same....if you want to be successful there's no long-term comfort zone, just steady evolution. A very apt Chinese proverb regarding change says, "When the winds of change blow, some people build walls and others build windmills". The following describes the evolution of extracting more performance from this small hybrid.



As of writing, the older half of my parent-raised original cast was lost in Wales, and the younger male was sold recently.

However successful your previous hawk or falcon I firmly believe once you decide it's time to change, or move on it's important to do just that, don't hang on to a hawk or falcon that will be used infrequently, flown below its previous potential, or used as a crutch if your new bird isn't working out. Hence the reason for the article.

During the past 5 seasons my previous cast of parent-raised male perlins has provided an insight into their potential and a foundation for the next stage of the perlin programme – a cast of imprint female perlins.

I've flown parent-raised and imprinted versions of large and small accipiters (an imprinted female perlin last season) and in each case the imprinted version has out-performed, or shown greater potential than its parent-raised version of the same

species over a similar time period.

Regarding falcons, many would question the merit of imprinting a merlin, or merlin hybrid on the basis that they are tame enough – however the reason for imprinting should be considered a “multi-role” activity, not as insurance for producing a tame hawk, or avoiding inherent nervous behaviour.

The target of imprinting should be to add potential and confidence, above and beyond what would be considered typical for a parent-raised individual of the same species. So this was the target for last year’s imprint female.

So you now know why I favour imprints; let’s now consider how to get the best from one. In any activity you generally only get out what you put in, and of the successful falconers I know in the UK, US and South Africa the individuals who consistently deliver are dedicated....and smart!

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

You won’t necessarily achieve all that you set out to do, but without objectives and targets it’s easy to waste a season for no good reason, not knowing where you went wrong, or why!

However, if you plan in advance what it is you want to achieve, also assigning approximate milestones for when each stage should be completed, it will become clear if you have problems, or need to make a “step change” to your programme.

If we consider last year’s female, my requirements (wish-list) were as follows:

1. Minimum noise
2. No aggression
3. No carrying
4. Very tame
5. Takes a pitch twice that of the male perlins (500-600ft)
6. Persistent
7. Can be flown in cast
8. Will take a diverse range of quarry
9. Stoop-control

Of the 9 criteria, if I were to score each on a scale of A to E (A being best), I would grade her first season as follows:

1.(B), 2.(B), 3.(C), 4.(A), 5.(B), 6.(A+), 7.(E), 8.(A) 9.(D)

So although she didn’t achieve straight ‘A’s the foundations were good, with only cast flying (which wasn’t attempted), achieving zero progress. This activity will be introduced in the 2005 season. Each of the above will be discussed in the following text.

CONDITIONING

The conditioning programme encompassing points 1 to 9 progressed without any major issues, mirroring key aspects used in the imprinting of previous goshawks etc.

Noise – was minimised through a major amount of non-food associated socialisation.

Aggression – Controlled weight reduction in a temperature-stable environment via an accurate gram scale reduced aggression to an

acceptable level.

Carrying – although not perfect, was a major improvement over the previous males. Exchanging food items regularly from an early age helped minimise the perlin’s natural desire to carry kills. Also, all feeding was conducted on a small bright-red rubber mat and this was used later in the field to create a secure “familiar feeding environment”.

Very tame – all the above, plus massive exposure to people, dogs etc. helped ensure a dog-tame falcon.

Pitch – doubling of the previous males’ natural pitch was achieved through the use of kites. The set-up below uses a converted cylinder mower to accurately control the kite up and down. No additional ballast, or ground pegs are required, its own weight is sufficient.

This setup will retrieve a kite from up to 1,000ft in less than 3 minutes; you could go faster, but risk snapping the braid, or damaging the kite. (No pulling the kite down by hand first).

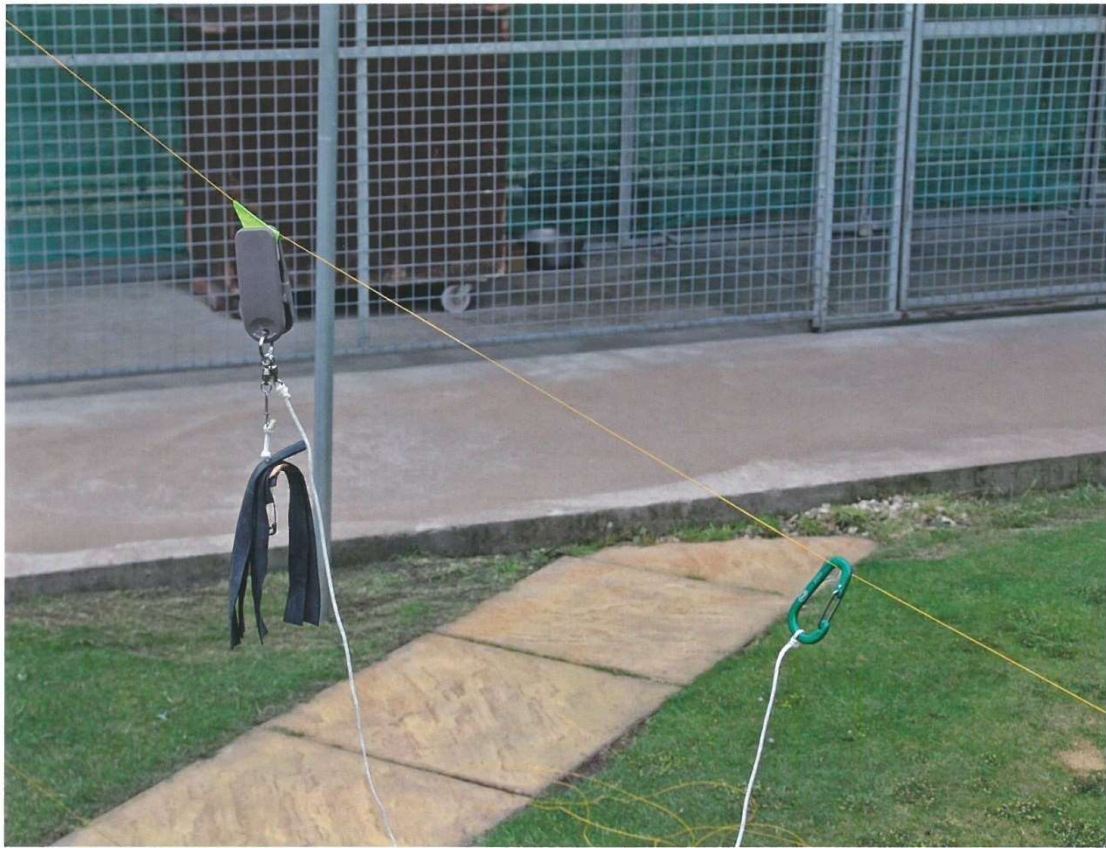
The drive assembly has been ▶

Left: Author with ‘Thin-Lizzy’ first-year intermewed imprint female perlin.

Below: Mower kite winch.



PERLINS RE-LOADED



Kite multiple lure attachment setup.

modified to enable a hand crank to be attached to winch by hand if you run out of fuel or cannot start the engine.

The kite's multiple down-line rig allows several falcons to be flown in succession without the need for a remote controlled release system.

Persistent – a clear understanding of potential quarry species was assisted through the regular feeding of a diverse range of carcasses, and early exposure to the young of the year.

Fitness – is not discussed as a separate issue, as it increased in direct proportion to the confidence and hunting efforts of the falcon.

Cast flying – will not be attempted until the second season, when a degree of maturity is attained by the young bird.

Diverse quarry – first season

kills ranged from larks, and magpies to full-grown pheasants.

One point worth considering here is weight reduction with imprinted falcons. Of the individuals I know who are flying imprinted falcons most don't recommend any significant weight reduction in the first season to help maintain the falcon's manners. This is fine if you want to waste a season with an "unfocused" bird, unfortunately hunger provides the motivation for a learning bird of prey.

You also only get one shot at building the foundations.....don't get caught playing catch-up! The perlin described in this article had a pre-penned weight of 387grams, her optimum flying weight was 340g (12 per cent weight reduction) this was the same percentage reduction as the parent-raised male perlins, and imprinted goshawks I have flown.

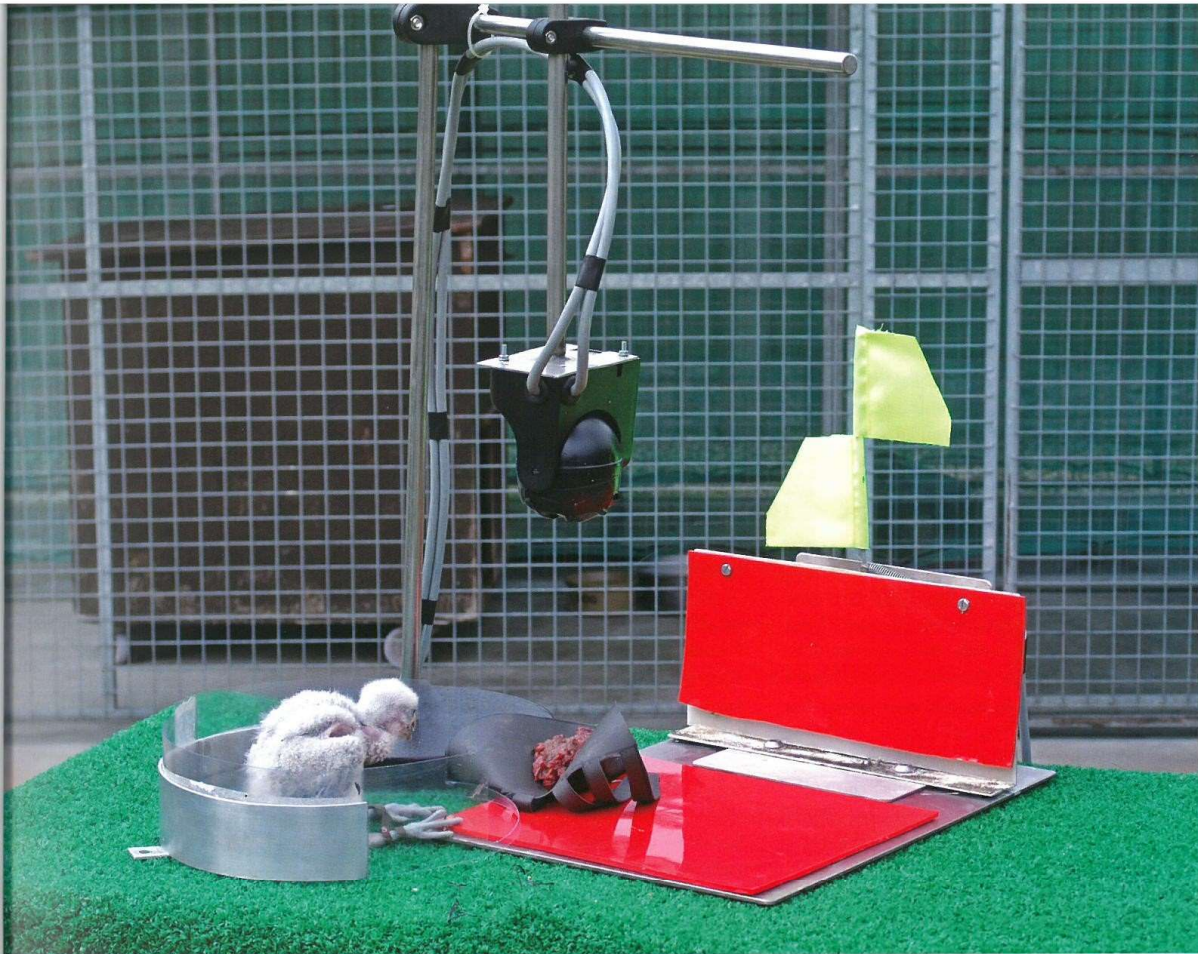
Stoop control – now to the

interesting part. Ever encountered the following scenario?; falcon overhead at its optimum pitch, as the quarry flushes a hard stoop follows only to have the quarry pile back into thick cover/water before the falcon gets anywhere near.

Whether it's teal, magpies, or blackbirds, the frustration is always the same! Some falcons over time learn not to stoop until the quarry is exposed, and vulnerable, but there are no guarantees. Wouldn't it be neat to be able to call in the stoop when you want it....to be able to exercise control over when your falcon stoops.

The following describes an experiment I conducted last season with the female perlin and the results and side effects following this programme.

The conditioning process started at 10 days old, (As soon as the eyass could feed itself from the food dish).



Above: Flag conditioning rig.
Right: Advanced flag / food association training.

The initial conditioning programme was designed around a rig that was placed within the imprint tank. A modified passive infra-red sensor was suspended on an adjustable frame above the hawk's food dish, the sensor indirectly activated a motor with a short arm with a bright yellow flag attached.

Any time the hawk came over to the food dish to feed the sensor would change state and the flag would start waving....thus the first stage of association between food and flag was made. (Doing this manually just isn't an option, as you would need to be watching the bird all the time.)

The next stage of the process was introduced when the falcon was able ▶



to get about on the floor. The flag was now hand held, with lessons conducted in the garden at its twice daily feeding sessions. This stage of the process was to teach the eyass that food is only accessible when the flag is waving.

This was achieved through placing the lure or carcass under a transparent plastic tank 350mm diameter x 350mm high. The falcon would initially be placed close to the tank containing the food item and permitted to see and bump into it.

After bumping into the tank the flag would be waved and the tank removed permitting the falcon to feed. This process was then extended to cover greater distances and different venues, with the falconer providing the signal at different positions relative to the falcon and food item.

Later in this programme the tanks were eliminated, with the lure being hidden if the falcon responded without first seeing the signal.

Initially the response was poor, requiring lots of repetition, however the penny started to drop as the bird was close to hard-penning, as the distance was increased it would eventually wait before flying over. (Also at this stage the flag-waving signal had been transferred to a loud whistle).

This was the easy part, the flights were at low level (not waiting-on yet), and as such the temptation to self-hunt was minimal. Once kite training was underway the system was modified slightly to provide

motivation for the falcon to climb to the lure suspended under the kite.

Unfortunately over the next few months the early gains were gradually eroded – the large quantities of wild pigeons and other smaller birds provided too great a distraction, which saw a gradual reduction in the system's effectiveness. In hindsight this could have been improved by flying later in the evening when most birds were going to roost, also ensuring venues less populated with potential food would be an advantage. (Not easy in the UK).

One positive side-effect of the whole programme has been the falcon's response when the whistle (ex flag) is blown, even when pursuing quarry, as long as it's audible the falcon will break off instantly and return (You gos boys listening!). The rig used to condition the growing eyass could also be employed during the moult to encourage a bond between hawk/falcon, food, and flag. This is free-of-charge, no effort conditioning that can be exploited in a similar manner to the proceeding chapters, when re-claiming the hawk/falcon from the moult.

The female perlin I imprint during the 2005 season will follow a similar programme, with some modifications to help eliminate problems encountered with the 2004 falcon.

Hunting during the 2004 season was an eye-opener! Quarry taken included larks, snipe, magpies, pheasants and numerous pigeons. Some of the flights at pigeons were

staggering. One early season flight comes to mind while mounting up to her pitch (or so we thought?) instead of levelling out at 500 or 600ft she just kept on going...which was a first, until we spotted a flock of ferals (just visible) I wouldn't like to guess how high. Anyway, she proceeded to climb up to, and then pursue the flock at high speed across the sky at high altitude until one broke off from the flock, (Big mistake!) this was then coursed relentlessly for what seemed an age (probably seconds) until taken among some industrial units.

This was an early indication of her confidence, and persistence. Most of her early season memorable flights, were, to be honest, mistakes such as the flight above.

Another one for the record was at a common snipe that flushed as she left the fist. This was pursued flat out at a steep angle (as snipe do) no further than 40 to 50ft behind it until it disappeared from sight and telemetry range (Have never seen that before....ever!). Took a while to get her back, fortunately minus the snipe. (Don't want to reinforce this behaviour).

Although the above flights are truly memorable, they represent, possibly an over-confident/immature falcon. Had I encouraged this behaviour I have no doubt it would have resulted in a lost or killed hawk.

So how did she finish up? Well she's still in one piece; the last few weeks of the season saw a much more consistent, and polished performance.

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A pitch of 500 to 600ft was regularly achieved, she has a tendency to occasionally "wait-off" out of position but this is recoverable. 2005 will be an interesting season, the problems that were encountered with her will be pre-empted and minimised with the new bird.

As for the existing bird with mature feathers and attitude – can't wait to see what nature will bring!

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED & POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Flying at check – this will be avoided (reduced) by flying as late as possible, for the first half of the season (both falcons).

Waiting off – I feel this activity was borne out of my inability to get down wind of her when kite training. The fields used for this activity in 2004 were not big enough! At approx

1,000ft vertical it was impossible to get downwind of her when throwing a reward out. In basic terms you could consider the position of the kite to you, as a 3-4-5 triangle, so if you have a vertical height of 900ft, hypotenuse of 1,500ft, the kite will be 1,200ft away.

Carrying – to further assist in reducing any tendency to carry quarry, the new falcon will not be permitted to feed up on kills, the day's ration being substituted on the lure as an alternative.

If you're flying a hawk or falcon at larger quarry species you may think this is going over the top, but you need to consider that approximately 70 per cent of the quarry she will be pursuing is easily "packed" and once they get the habit there are no quick fixes. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure".

CONCLUSION

The one aspect of the described conditioning programme that I will be trying to refine and determine limitations to is the "stoop control" section. This may ultimately be unattainable, however for those of you who have been to the San Diego Zoo and have seen the level of control achieved by the trainers on the various birds and animals you must agree that it would seem possible.

To save boring everyone there are many details of this system that have been omitted, with just the bare essentials being provided, so if anyone out there can offer a way forward/improvements....let's hear about it. ■

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PHEASANT HAW



A JAPANESE TRADITION

**Above: Approaching pheasants in bush
(by Kusumi Morikage, 17th Century)**

Right: Falconers in the field at Nagoya.



KING

Words by Morimoto Teruo
Photos by Fujii Tomoyuki

With hawk on fist and meat basket on waist an austringer flushes a flock of pheasants from a bush beaten by a stick – this, a typical Japanese hawking scene enjoyed formerly by nobilities and upper samurai is being continued by active austringers in modern-day Japan. On 11th and 12th February, 2005, about 30 falconers from various clubs participated in the 4th Nagoya Field Meet co-hosted by *Yoshida-ryuu* falconers and the WFC, a nationwide falconry club. *Yoshida-ryuu* is a traditional falconry school from the 16th century, a derivative of classic *Nedzu-ryuu*. Niwa Arie (1902-1993) learned this school of art under an imperial falconer and tutored many apprentices, who have gone on to form several clubs and organisations in areas around Nagoya. In Japan, the pheasant has always been the

mainstay quarry for hawking, and full of ambition the field meet participants set out to bring the green coloured male to the game bag.

SIBERIAN GOSHAWKS

Although several falcons and Harris' hawks were present, the majority of hawks flown were male goshawks, a favourite of the modern Japanese austringer. Eight of these were Siberian (*A.g.albidus*): four in white morph and four in grey morph. The use of the Siberian goshawk as a gamehawk is an uninterrupted tradition in Japan, which, in the author's view, dates back to the first legendary hawking by King Ohsazaki (officially 313-399; sometimes regarded as ruling during the 5th century). He hunted pheasants with a ▶



PHEASANT HAWKING - A JAPANESE TRADITION

mysterious bird called *kuchi*. The event was dated in 355 AD. *Kuchi* is now generally regarded as the common goshawk, but later poets referred to it as a pure white or white-banded hawk, suggesting *kuchi* could have been Siberian. Siberian goshawks have long been a theme for poems from ancient through to medieval nobilities and a subject of paintings for the samurai.

While some Japanese falconers dare not fly their white birds, all the participating Siberians were gamehawks and chased the formidable quarry in the field at Nagoya. On the first afternoon, after several slips, I found a narrow strip of cover and waded into it expecting pheasants. Bingo! A great metallic-

FUJII'S AMBITION

Fujii Tomoyuki, a WFC member and the Secretary General of the National Conference for Japanese Falconry, came to Nagoya, bearing an iron resolve to catch pheasants in mid-air. He had caught 3 pheasants this season, which is a remarkable score under the field conditions in Japan, but all were caught putting-in to cover, not the splendid "flush and grasp". So Fujii committed himself to make his hawk Jugemu, take at least one pheasant in this manner during this hawking expedition.

Jugemu is an intermewed male goshawk from Ukraine. He had suffered from syngamus worms in his first year and miraculously recovered



Above: Fujita with Gene.

green cannonball flushed. I slipped Koma, a male grey morph, and he grabbed the pheasant's tail. The male pheasant flicked off Koma in the air and escaped his pursuer. On the next day, a fellow white Siberian caught a pheasant but released it while battling on the ground. Although these Siberian goshawks never brought game to book this time, many good flights satisfied their owners.

through dedicated care and tube feeding by Fujii. Fujii named him Jugemu, which means "unlimited life and health". Despite all his past suffering from the disease, Jugemu has never lost his keenness at quarry, and his speed, persistent and long-range chasing has not betrayed his partner and has won much admiration from spectators.

On the first day, Fujii, as usual, rushed ahead of the party, along with Sasakawa, his tutor. One pheasant after another flushed and the party



soon divided, each owner following their respective hawks. Sasakawa, got the day's first head of game with Lalihoo, his 3-year-old Russian goshawk. Fujii was inspired. Fujii and Jugemu waded through some tall bushes running alongside a creek. A pheasant flushed and Fujii cast Jugemu like a javelin, and almost instantly, Jugemu bound to and brought down the pheasant, in front of Sasakawa, myself and my wife. Fujii, bursting with joy, rushed in and helped Jugemu. It was the perfect "flush and grasp" flight. Fujii confessed he had repeatedly dreamt of the event last night.



FALCONS AT PHEASANTS

Fujita Yukihiro of WFC and Ishikawa Kazuya of Atelier Falconoid have another ambition. They are trying to revive hawking with falcons in Japan. Good land is scarce for shortwings in Japan, and all the more so for longwings. The open fields around Nagoya seemed ideal for their falcons. *Yoshida-ryuu* falconers had flown their falcons at pheasants there. On the first day, the falcons' pitches proved to be too high, giving the pheasants time to reach cover. On the second day, Fujita, after taking a

pheasant with Yoshitsune, a juvenile male Finnish goshawk, switched to Gene, a 2-year-old female peregrine. Listening to the advice given by *Yoshida-ryuu* falconers, he arranged fellow beaters around a target field. Gene was unhooded, and began to rise. Reaching a height of 80m, beaters dashed in and the pheasants flushed. Gene missed a chance at these first birds, but, never giving up, kept waiting-on until the beaters reached another bush. A pheasant dashed out, and Gene stooped! She nearly succeeded, but once again a small bush prevented her from making contact.

Fujita with Suzaku (left) and Sasakawa with Lalihoo (right).

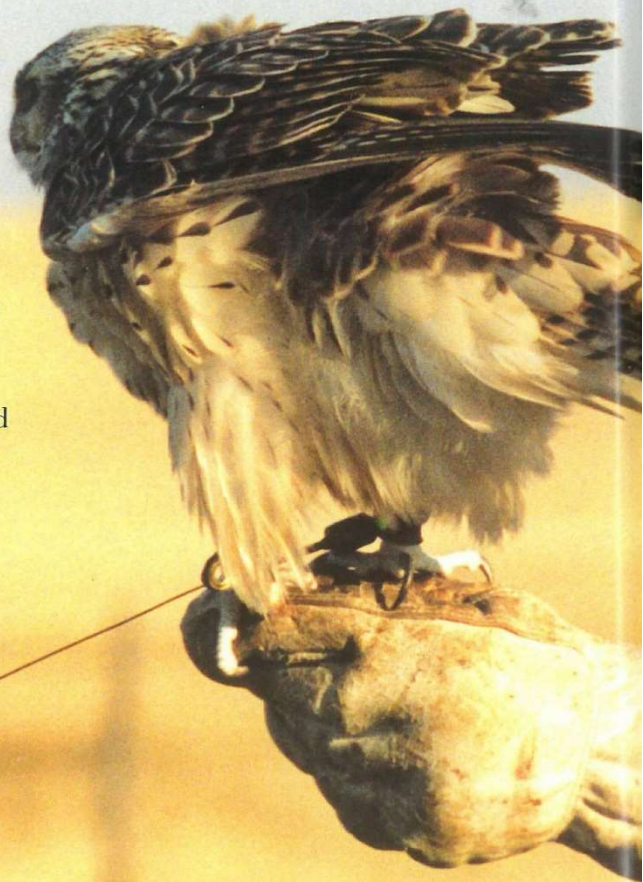
The field meet at Nagoya was a great success, leaving participants with much-valued memories and friendships. The tradition once followed by Japan's legendary kings is alive and well.

Many thanks to: Yoshid-ryuu Hawking Association, WFC, Sasakawa Takashi, Fujita Yukihiro, Fujii Tomoyuki, all other participants, and Morimoto Yoshie. ■

Why I hunt

By Dale Guthormsen

It was 41 years ago when I envisioned myself grouse hawking. At the time the vision had no dogs and was not even on the North American continent. As I sat in my English class and was supposed to be reading Milton's works, I would drift off. The countryside was slightly rugged, but the grouse grounds were heather covered and more or less flat. I would put my peregrine on the wing and wander across the moors until a grouse flushed. As the grouse flushed and raced away the falcon would come whistling down out of the blue and make a clean bind and then rode the grouse to the ground. That was the end of the vision as old Mrs Snyder would bap me on the back of the head and say, "Get to work Dale". I had collected quite a few books, as I often spent Saturday mornings working for Betty Vasin of Alphabooks. I used my wages to buy falconry books, and Betty would always scrounge one up for me. Of everything I read, it was always the grouse hawking that captivated my interest. ▶



grouse

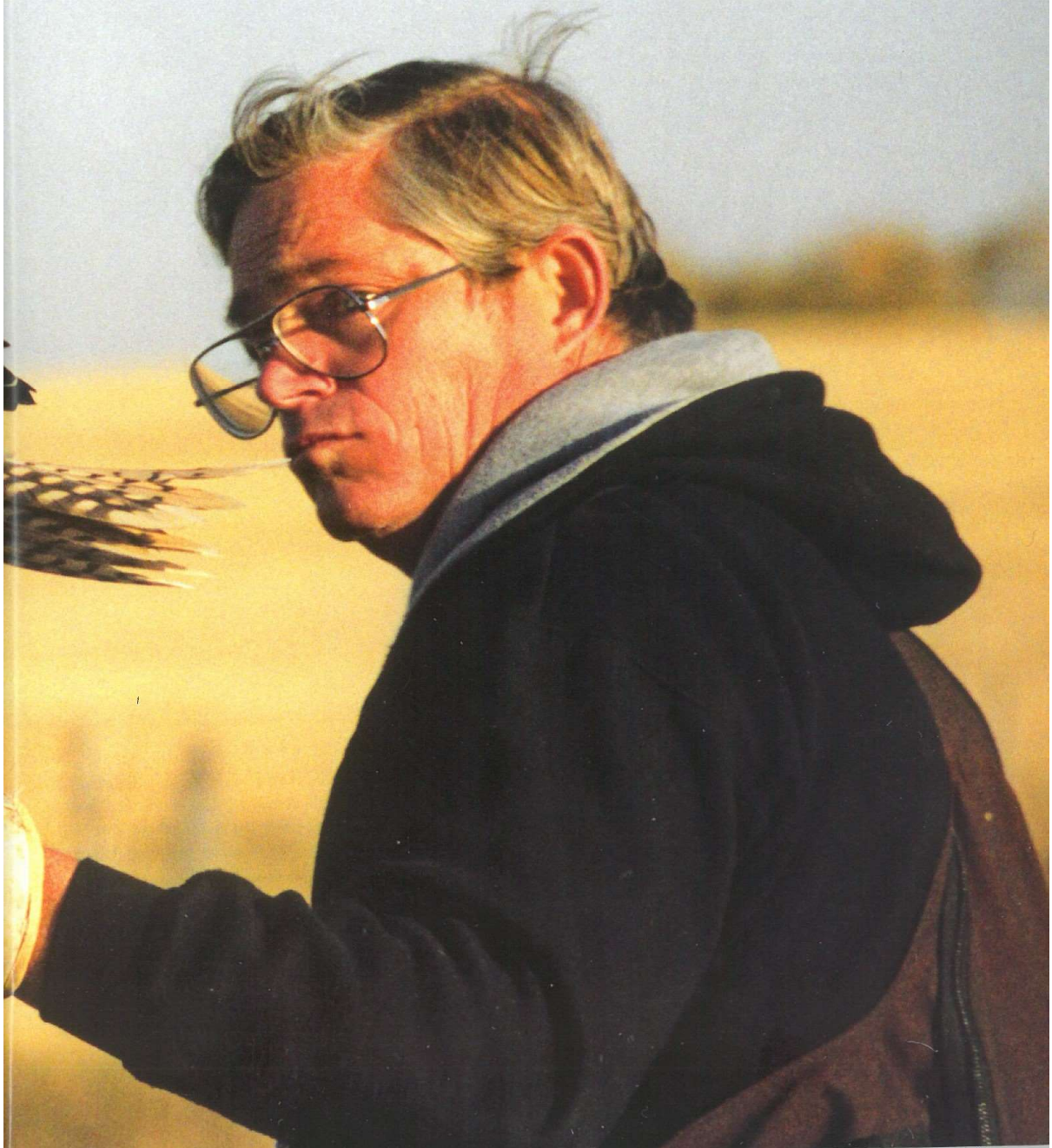




Photo: courtesy of Dale Guthormsen

Like many people my age, the Vietnam war got in the way for a couple years. When I came home I started flying falcons, but the peregrine was difficult to get, and while managing to fly a few of them it was the prairie falcon that got the bulk of my attention. While flying prairies at ducks I made my first efforts to find sharp-tailed grouse in Idaho. Our hunt was unsuccessful, of course.

While living in southern New

Mexico, I found out about lesser prairie-chickens. A few of my field trial friends spent a fair amount of time up north after greater sage-grouse and sharp-tailed grouse and laid off the lesser prairie-chickens. They always said, "There is just so much more game up north!" After living in New Mexico for a couple of years hunting ducks, doves and quail it was time to move onward. About this time I read a cute little statement

in a *Hawk Chalk* (newsletter of the North American Falconers' Association), "If you think you have a good bird, try them on sharp-tailed grouse." I believe Jim Weaver made this suggestion after one of his early sorties to the West. Well, that was all it took to make me start looking at the bigger picture of where I really wanted to live and what profession I might want to follow that could help me get there. To live where I could grouse



Above: Jack with grouse in frozen slough.

hunt I needed a job that could land me there. I had one degree already so I went back to school and got a degree in Industrial Education.

While I was going to university we had our first glimpses of real grouse hawking. I watched Bob Rafuse's prairie falcon named Sage bash grouse after grouse and saw them just fly away into the ozone. Yes, here I felt

I'd found the ultimate challenge. Our first attempts at grouse were with a tiercel prairie falcon named Quick. I took an imprinted prairie falcon the next spring and named her Faith. Faith turned into a 21-ounce male named Floyd. That Fall, Quick caught a big cock grouse and rode it to the ground where a huge battle occurred, ending with the grouse vaporising into

WHY I HUNT GROUSE

the ozone and Quick wondering what had happened to him. From that day onward he would not stoop at any grouse. Quick became my partridge hawk and Floyd was flown at grouse in the nearby sandhills. He was always game and pounded dozens of them quite hard, although never to have one go to the ground hard enough to allow the tiercel a chance to close. It was obvious that we needed a bigger gun. I definitely knew I had found the Quest. I had promised my wife, Sheila, "If I wasn't catching grouse in double digits in five years we would move back South."

That spring I took June, my imprinted female prairie. She was a lovely falcon that flew at 30.5 to 32 ounces. I started her up on ducks as I do all my falcons. She had caught a dozen by late September and I switched to grouse. I would put her up and she would fly directly to the nearest pond and wait-on. We regrouped and flew pigeons for a week and then again went after grouse. By fluke I bumped some grouse that put in near a big pond. June took a fine pitch and she had her first flush. Ahhh, what a move, a side roll and then climbed into the sky to the vanishing point. "WOW!" I was getting hooked.

Later that season we pounded down a grouse about six times before the dog picked up the grouse and brought it to me. Yes, I counted it as our first real grouse kill. We continued to hunt Hungarian partridge often. If we were beaten by grouse three times in a row I would spend a few flights on partridge, effect a kill, and move back to the grouse. The more I flew these wonderful birds the more I wanted to fly them! Yes, it was becoming an obsession.

It was the 1979/80 season when we actually put things together. I had finished my pointer Jane to field trial excellence; I had a couple more grouse spots located. That season June murdered the ducks relentlessly ▶

WHY I HUNT GROUSE

until freeze-up; June was flying strongly and reasonably high. Our first perfect grouse kill was to come quickly. The grouse spot was so good you could count on the grouse being there every day. Much like my visions of 16 years before, I put the falcon up (a prairie rather than a peregrine), walked the flat weedy stubble field (not the flat heather covered moors), and let the dog roam the fields, and in minutes she had a point. It was late October, cold and invigorating with no wind at all. June was as high as she would ever need to be to catch any form of quarry. The flush was good and the stoop long and vertical. June had learned to cut the angles as "swoop and scoop" meant no grouse in hand as a rule. June went right through the grouse's upper shoulders and neck as if she never intended to stop. This time the throw-up turned into a short whip-over and June had her first grouse in the fashion she would learn to use for the remainder of her ten-year career, and to my wife's

dismay June was to go into the double digits on grouse for the rest of her life.

Much of the aforementioned is what led me to hunt and fly my falcons at grouse. However there are other attributes of this sport of grouse hawking that are spellbinding. First and foremost is that grouse encourage all falcons to fly at a relatively high pitch. This is ideal for me, as I truly love to watch high flying falcons. The most outrageous and fabulous flights I have ever seen by any falcons anywhere and anytime have been on the sharp-tailed grouse. The sharp-tailed grouse has an incredible variety of escape tactics. The most classic of all is the side roll. On one occasion, my son Russell and I were flying our old jerkin, Danny. Danny was coming down vertical and fast and was going to try the "swoop and scoop". Just before high impact, the grouse made his move. Russell, yelled, "did you see that the grouse did two complete rolls?" I had seen it and just stood there with my jaw ajar, what a

Below: Jack in first season with three cock sharp-tails taken in three flights.



Photo: courtesy of Dale Guthormsen



Photo: courtesy of Dale Guthomsen

fantastic grouse.

Sharp-tailed grouse can take a hit like no other game bird I have seen. I always enjoy introducing falconers to their first flights at grouse with their own falcons. I have watched numerous falcons hit their selected grouse with determination, but the grouse just keep flying with little if any apparent harm done. One of the best comments I ever heard was a falconer who after a number of flights said something to the effect of, "this is definitely some next-level shit!"

Many different quarries require more or less effort. Flying coots off small ponds is not as hard as flying ducks off the same water. Ducks are the bread and butter for most falconers (I love duck hawking too). Many well-made duck hawks, which are superlative falcons, when flown at grouse, cannot master the grouse so readily. Of course if the falconers were to move and relocate where they could fly grouse daily some of these falcons would assuredly sort things out and become proficient. The point is that

the grouse requires the falcon's best efforts or they become disappointed and quit flying the quarry. Not all falcons will become competent grouse hawks. Because the falcon is required to, "up the ante" so to speak, it will show you performances you will never see with most other quarries. Flying grouse is one of the best ways for a falcon to learn to take a high pitch. After a winter of grouse hawking the competent grouse hawk demonstrates an aura of confidence that you seldom see in other falcons. ▶

WHY I HUNT GROUSE

The grouse is a lek bird, and I find this one of their most interesting aspects. The few dominant cocks at the lek breed with all the females and some of the peripheral cocks will move off and set up a small satellite lek within half a mile of the primary lek. I do not fly leks even though grouse can be found at them on any fine day during the hunting season. I prefer to hunt them in their feeding zones. It has been my experience with the larger flocks of grouse (30 to 70 birds) that, if you have your dog steady to wing/flush as it should be, when you flush in front of the dog well over 80 per cent of the time the cocks flush first. If one thinks about that, it makes perfect sense in the nature of the species. If the cocks take the brunt of the predation then the species has a much better chance of survival, as they only need a handful of cocks to perpetuate the breed. Since I have discovered this, I make an effort to fly

the original grouse if at all feasible. Generally speaking, you do not get a majority of kills from the first stoop, particularly in a falcon's first season or two. If you just stand still and wait for the falcon to return high and flush fresh grouse your chances of killing hens becomes greater. If I had a choice I would always fly cocks for the obvious reasons.

While I prefer to fly grouse in their feeding zones or along the native prairie edges, there is absolutely nothing more emotionally moving than flying winter grouse in their native prairie habitat. Being out in God's country is spiritually uplifting. As the falcon takes to the orange-swept sky climbing relentlessly, one is simply spellbound. The dog is released and as we do "the prairie stroll," the dog works hard and locks up on the grouse. Finding the little speck in the sky may be hard and if we can't find it, we walk around to the

front and flush in the direction of the setting sun. As the grouse rise into the sky rocking back and forth and giving their laughing chuckle, I glance up to the darkening violet sky and listen. The grouse are quite some distance off and I hear the loud rush of air as Jack, my current tiercel, comes rocketing down. The sound helps me locate the last third of the accelerating stoop. Jack usually makes contact with his grouse raking through it. In a split second, their two silhouettes merge into one black mass. By the time I hear the low "thud" the two are separated, the grouse going to the ground and Jack does a very tight barrel-roll and whips into his grouse on the ground as it makes its last ditch effort to get away. Being much like his jerkin father, Jack flies straight up and then speeds the wounded grouse to nearest cover where the theatre of life draws to a close for the grouse. ■

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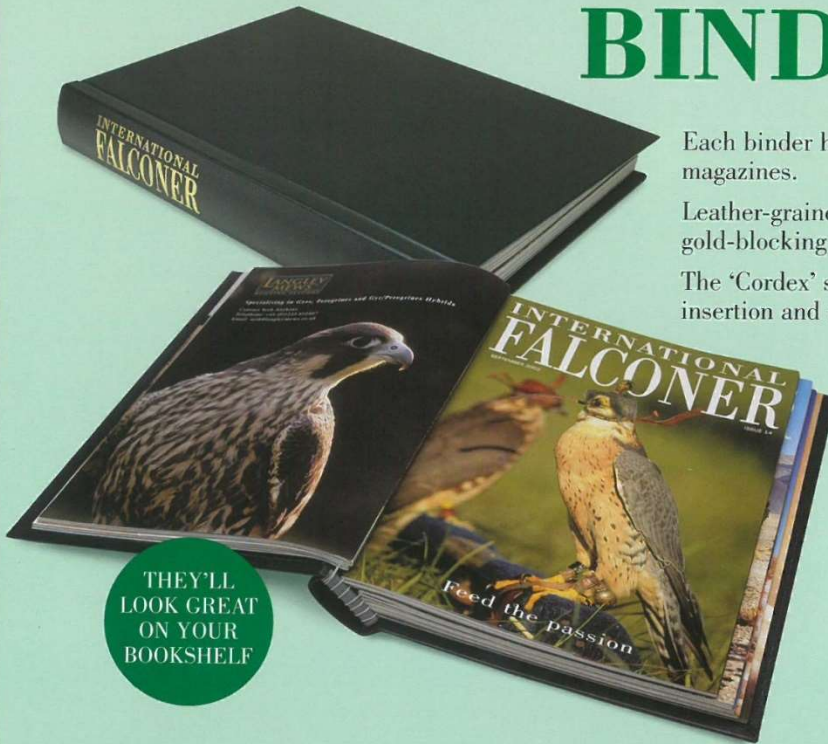
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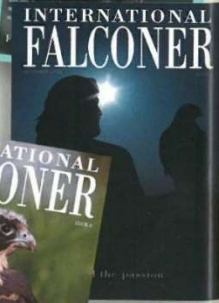
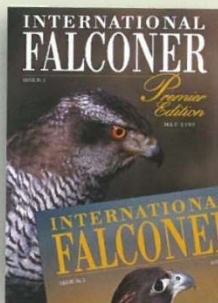
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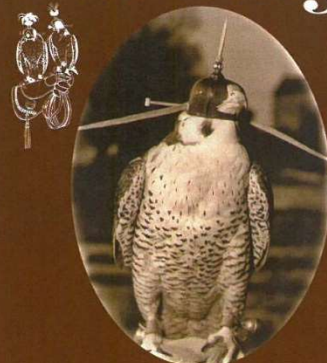
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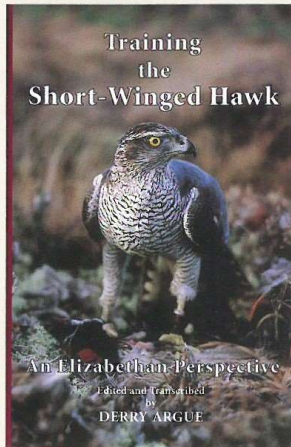
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BOOK REVIEW

by Nick Kester



Training the Short-Winged Hawk (An Elizabethan Perspective)

Edited and Transcribed by
Derry Argue.
Published by Firth Productions
Miller's Place, Fendom,
Tain IV19 1PE, UK
Tel: +44 (0)1862 893856
£24.95

Edmund Bert published his *Approved Treatise of Hawks and Hawking* in 1610 but most austringers came upon it when reading T H White's *The Goshawk*, for it was Bert that White used as a training manual. Most falconers will agree that White made a total foul-up of the job but it is unlikely they would have been able to check out the original for it is written in archaic English with the frustrating and strange use of the 'f' as an occasional 's'; it is also a rare title in even the most avid falconry book collector's library. Now it is available for us all thanks to Derry Argue's painstaking editing and transcription into readable, but not wholly modern English. And here is the rub (as the Elizabethans might say), T H White was a scholar and schoolmaster and perfectly capable of transcribing the work, which itself explains perfectly how to select and train the author's preferred choice, a rammish (immature) goshawk; so one must conclude that White was not a good falconer.

Both Bert and the second short anonymous treatise on sparrowhawks were written at a time when keeping and training hawks and falcons was as

normal as your ability to drive a car or turn on the television. So used to the process was the common man that it is exceptional to find one who writes it down. His skill is a lesson to us all, especially those in countries where trapped hawks are still permitted. Bert claims to be able to read his hawk at all times, although I do not recommend you make the promise that he did to his lady that if your goshawk mutes when you bring her into the living room you will lick it up.

The second part is *A Perfect Booke for Keepinge of Sparhawkes or Goshawkes* is short (twenty pages) but no less packed with information on training, feeding, treating and reclaiming a shortwing. Although much quoted, here again is this Elizabethan's 'Brief Rule':

Tiring after feeding
Water and weather at her needing
After every gorge fasting
With twice a week casting
Makes her sound and long lasting

After reading this book T H White should never have failed in his training, and now, neither should you.

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Roger Upton	7
The Falconers Calendar	7
Great Western Referrals	17
China Prairie Company	17
Michael McDermott	17
Raptor Originals	32
Honeybrook Animal Foods	33
Frameworks Designs	44
Langley Mews Hunting Falcons	45
Aluphcourt Hungarian Vizslas	47
Falconry Originals	48
Martin Jones Falconry Equipment	48
Kiezebrink UK Ltd	48
Martin Jones Falcons & Hunting Hawks	48
Lechner Falcons	48
John Chitty	48
Exotic Direct	48
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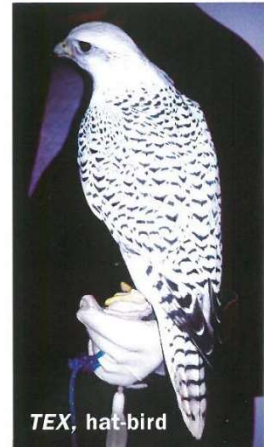


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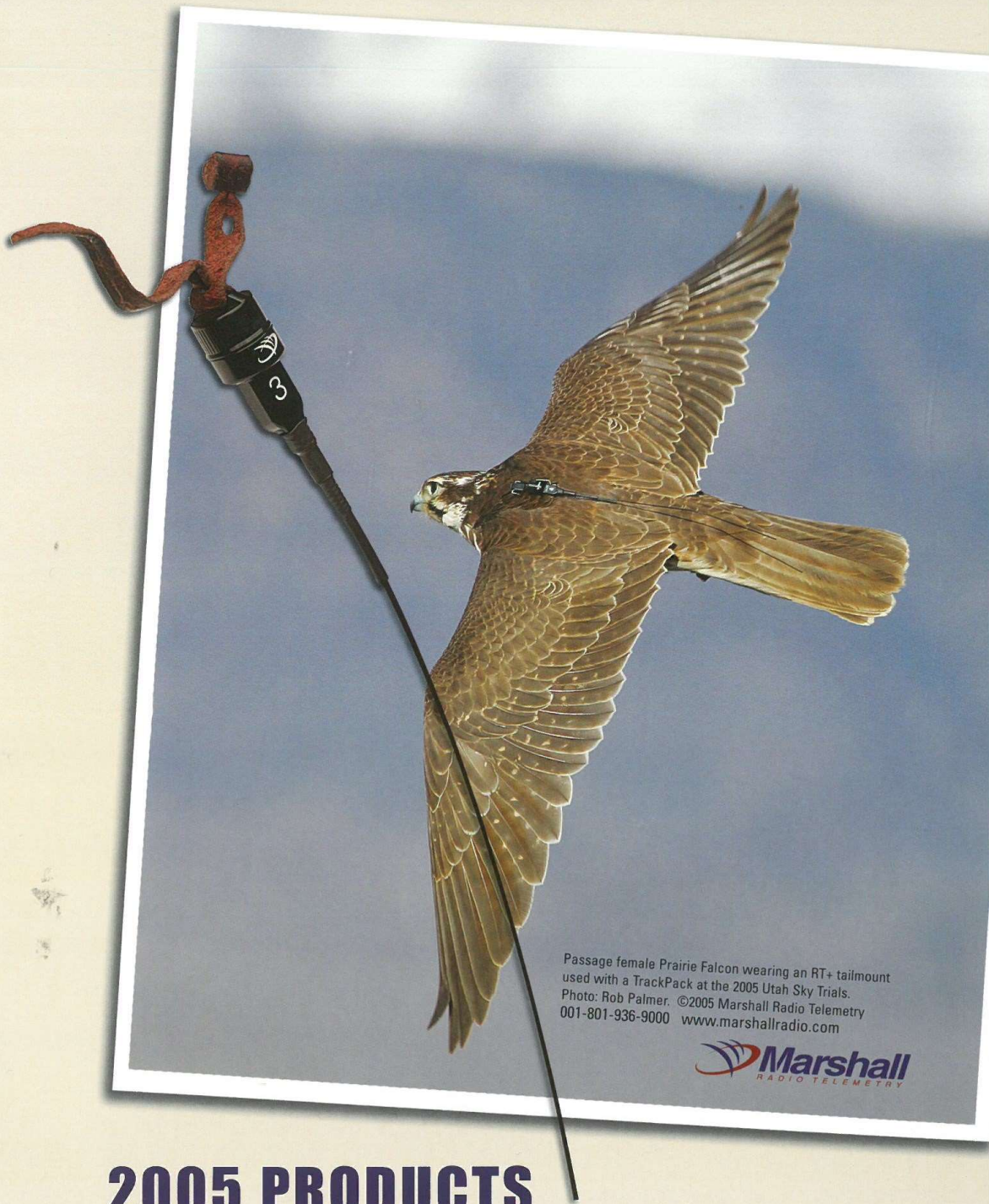
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